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Steinem: We Must Put Rights of Transgender Community First



By Shaya Tayefe Mohajer | Takepart.com October 2, 2013 5:31 PM
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After years of criticism [for comments](#) she made about transgender people, feminist activist Gloria Steinem wants to set the record straight.

In an essay in [The Advocate](#), Steinem updates pieces she wrote decades ago, explaining that she's been quoted out of context since a 1977 essay that asked "if the shoe doesn't fit, must we change the foot?"

That question has been called transphobic by many in the years since she asked it, but Steinem said Wednesday that the Internet has been misquoting and browbeating her wrongly. Steinem now explains that she wrote that question in response to stories she'd heard about gays and lesbians undergoing sex changes to respond to society's bias against their sexual orientation—not the deep sense of belonging trans people feel in the gender they weren't born into.

In other words, Steinem was defending homosexuals who weren't transexuals, but who underwent surgery to avoid hostility.

The "foot" analogy may have stepped all over itself in years since, but Steinem says now that she wrote it as a critique of an unbending society that wouldn't accept homosexuals.

Once and for all, Steinem wants it known:

So now I want to be unequivocal in my words: I believe that transgender people, including those who have transitioned, are living out real, authentic lives. Those lives should be celebrated, not questioned. Their health care decisions should be theirs and theirs alone to make. And what I wrote decades ago does not reflect what we know today as we move away from only the binary boxes of "masculine" or "feminine" and begin to live along the full human continuum of identity and expression.

Why now? Steinem says the [challenges transgender people face](#) today aren't so different from those women have faced—from discrimination in health care to harrassment in the work place.

It's also stunning that 90 percent of transgender employees have faced discrimination or harrassment at work and no federal law protects them from that, Steinem said.

Despite the celebrations surrounding the Supreme Court's marriage rulings, "there is so much work to do to reach full LGBT equality—and ensuring that transgender people also have equality under the law has been the most left out and should become foremost on that list," she said.

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