

Not Your Gay Friend

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This June, I ask for some of your time to consider performative allyship and its role in preventing real change. Pride Month gives us an excellent opportunity to do this as the rainbows fly and the delusion of safety is sold. This is not, and has never been, my reality growing and living in this province nor working at this institution. I respectfully invite anyone who is not 2SLGBTQIA+ to consider earning the right to call yourself an ally before declaring yourself to be so.

Other groups know this performance well – I observe others manage this get-a-statement-on-the-website attitude and push forward unbothered, continuing to guide those invested in growth and applying well-practiced patience to those who show for ten minutes then run off to something more important, believing the task complete. I have not yet earned my badge in patience, so forgive me for the bluntness about to hit quite harshly.

In 2023, a colleague of ours opened my office door to me, poked their head in and announced their presence with “Hey, faggot!”. My door had been closed because I was playing music softly and hadn’t wanted to disturb anyone - the irony was playing loud that day though.

It was not the first time this individual had entered a room in this manner, but this was the first time being alone and I was faced with a quick decision. There had always been other people with whom I could share awkward glances and nervous laughter with.

“You know I am one, right?” The look on their face told me they did not. The nervous laughter started but I did not join. I continued to desperately communicate in a calm, professional manner despite the foul ball I now had to manage, along with the anxiety of just outing myself to this individual, a new item I did not have on my agenda that day. The subject changed as they moved on to whatever was required of me and I obliged, eager to have the interaction over.

I was, in hindsight, angry with myself for not saying something one of the other times I’d been presented with the opportunity. This anger has shifted more appropriately to where it belongs, but there it sits; simmering. The accountability still feels like it lies with me.

My anger did not subside once reported. This seemed rather straightforward but alas, much to

consider apparently. I choose to take this information forward and make the following decisions about my own behaviour, the entirety of which I have control over. Once again, I will adapt to my environment.

I no longer engage socially with those who feel the need to explain why I should find a faggot joke funny. I took more offense to this than you may think – I appreciate and respect the craft of comedy when done well.

I will go elsewhere for letters of support based solely on my performance. I was not aware of the cost up front and am no longer willing to fake laugh at un-funny things.

I will not agree to be your token gay friend. My personal life is not your entertainment, I do not serve to display your open-mindedness nor demonstrate your activism. I am not someone you can ask your inappropriate questions to.

I was outed publicly to students a few years ago, and it is only those students who have ever demonstrated respect and professionalism that met and went beyond my expectations. Please learn from them. I will reciprocate this by not waving a flag for an employer looking to

signal safety to prospective students and employees when that is not what I am faced with on a day-to-day basis.

Your illusion of my safety here is not reality. That flag you wave is tarnished. Clean it.

Consider the frustration that arises when I hear others speak as if living gay today is widely accepted. I confidently claim you are actively contributing to harm if you think this is true. The reality is that literally anyone can be, and are, parents. I point you in the direction of Bill 137 passed in 2023 that prevents children under 16 from changing their preferred name or pronoun at school without the consent of a parent, which endangers Saskatchewan children by outing them¹. Intimate partner and family violence rates here are double the national average and indicate that homes, in general, are not all safe². Included in *Reinventing Our Legacy, The Report of the President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women* at the University of Saskatchewan written in 1993, a stark account: "During a discussion on homosexuality in Lower Place Riel, some students suddenly entered, wearing military gear and carrying mock weapons. They pretended to shoot the speakers and shouted "Kill the fags!"³

We do not exist in a mecca of open-mindedness and operating as such is not helping anyone *except* those performing activism. The purpose of communicating this message is, in part, to explain my hesitance to celebrate – it does not feel like it's for me, it feels more and more like a performance for you.

I have grown accustomed to mak-

ing the adjustments, accommodating the hate and navigating where I know to be safe. I see it and feel it and I assure you it still exists. Support for no change in a changing world is just acceptance of the status quo because it suits you. Status quo is no longer acceptable to me nor the generations coming. Status quo is me being called a slur in my workplace while minding my business. F*@% your status quo. What is being done to earn *my* respect? How should I expect to be compensated for my constant adaptability?

I recall first approaching feminism with curiosity and women easily identifying my naivety; followed with me wondering what I had said to give me away. I am very thankful for the vulnerability required to share with me how difficult it is to watch others live and grow with what you didn't have when the conditions others had to fight very hard for are now expected. This particular type of anger and resentment runs deep, is often misunderstood, and requires its own time and attention. It is heavy to carry. Calluses form that even the most tender intentions cannot pierce. Softness is no longer felt.

Watching young women live independently and plan pregnancies and take parental leaves is breathtaking to see (!) and hard.

Watching your kids grow up in a happier home than you had is the most fulfilling work (!) and hard.

Watching queer students live life with pride is beautiful (!) and hard.

Sometimes we require others to take over the work to take care of ourselves and lighten the load.

None of this is to take away from very real genocides and the experiences of other equity-seeking groups on campus, many of which facing more devastating impacts than what I have withstood. My psychological safety falls short on the list of life-threatening issues demanding our attention and my well-being is honestly better now than it ever has been – those calluses are well-formed and protect me well. I use my voice when I am informed, and I am skilled at making arguments to decision-makers. However, each June I've grown frustrated with folks pretending like this is an area we have won, concluded. The insistence that Canada is "not that bad" has a deep history and distinct purpose of discounting experiences of racialized individuals in this country as outliers. Pretending and claiming progress only benefits the oppressor. I assure you we are not as far along this road as you may think.

I gently continue to insist that my private life, including who I have relationships with, remains private. I haven't had enough therapy yet to convince me it's anyone's business. I balance this with holding the privilege of choosing to live closeted for most of my life. I chose to marry and have children with a man for a portion of it and this allowed me to do just as I have asked you not to - wave the flag when it was and wasn't convenient for me. I know exactly where I am safe and where I am not *because* I have had the ability to disguise who I am when I needed

to, and the double-edged sword has been a significant challenge – I’m an outspoken person, why don’t I advocate for gay causes more? I say this as respectfully as I can today – because I am unable to.

I ask that you take over this month and earn that flag. Support causes wisely and attend entire events, lis-

ten, build relationships, speak up when informed to do so and take an inventory of your own behaviour. If you don’t know what to do yet, I assure you it indicates you’re not done listening. If this is you, continue to pass the microphone to your peers who are informed and sit back. Just like attempting

to answer a research question before completing the literature search, it is not likely that the contribution is helpful unless the background work has been done.

There is much to do. Bonus points if you keep it to yourself.

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1. ““Parents Bill of Rights” Passed and Enshrined in Legislation”, Government of Saskatchewan (October 20, 2023). <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2023/october/20/parents-bill-of-rights-passed-and-enshrined-in-legislation> accessed May 28, 2024.
 2. “Sask. intimate partner, family violence rates till worst among provinces”, Saskatoon StarPhoenix (November 25, 2023). <https://thestarphoenix.com/news/saskatchewan/sask-still-worse-in-canada-for-intimate-partner-family-violence#:~:text=Statistics%20Canada%20data%20released%20on,intimate%20partner%20violence%20in%202022>. Accessed May 28, 2024.
 3. President’s Advisory Committee on the Status of Women. (1993). Reinventing Our Legacy: The Report of the President’s Advisory Committee on the Status of Women. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. C. Specific Chills Which Affect Women. iv. Hostility. Page 27.

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