

Justice Gaines

Pronouns: xe / xem / xyr

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1. What was your first reaction to the Littman article? What are your thoughts now?

“A side-eye and a cackle. The "research" in this article is laughable. It is also deeply dangerous.

Littman's article makes an exceeding number of inappropriate and unsubstantiated assumptions at the onset (no pun intended). First, her methods focus on parents of her target population, rather than the target population itself (supposedly adolescents and young adults experiencing gender dysphoria). She then adds another level of assumption having these parents make their own assumptions about their children, with questions such as "How does your child handle strong emotions?" If Littman's article discussed the reactions and impacts of gender dysphoria on parents of folks experiencing gender dysphoria, it might have provided some genuine insights. Instead, Littman uses these parents' perceptions of gender dysphoria in their children to draw conclusions about gender dysphoria itself. That's simply not how social science (or gender) works.

Her sample is also not representative of trans people or even their parents. None of her respondents identify as transgender themselves. Her sample is overwhelming white, female, and predominantly college-educated. Surveys were distributed to a select few websites that make their "trans critical" biases known on their 'home' and 'about' pages, if not already in their URLs. Furthermore, the concept of "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" that is promulgated on these sites have no academic and medical substantiation, yet Littman uses the observation of this supposed phenomena as a criterion for participation. Imagine a study that concludes alien abductions frequently occur based on surveys from individuals who've heard their partners talking about extraterrestrials. That study would have the same level of academic credibility as Littman's article.

The "study" by Lisa Littman is then either profoundly lazy or outright malicious. My heart hopes for the former. However, being trans I know the latter is all more likely.

A personal note regarding the conclusions of Littman article: Whether my parents saw the signs of my gender dysphoria is completely out of my control, but I know from experience there were some signs they chose to ignore or simply would not have recognized to begin with. Dysphoria is not something easily observable to the outside eye. Frankly, there were signs of my own dysphoria that I couldn't recognize until I came out. I was 19 when I first came out. To my parents, even my 16-year-long (& counting) transition might have looked "rapid" when in actuality it was agonizingly long, painful, contemplative, and almost entirely internal.”

2. What are your thoughts on how Brown responded?

“Brown University's handling of this article is one of concern and cowardice that is not befitting of a top-tier institution. Brown initially promoted this article based on its journal publication in *PLOS ONE*, thus I'd hold the journal itself more accountable for the publication of a piece that blatantly evades academic standards. However, in Brown's follow-up to their initial statement, they defend their decision to stop promoting the article by repeatedly reaffirming their commitment to academic freedom and discounting

any criticism that may be deemed of "politicized" or "controversial" nature. They also reaffirm Littman's right to "research" whatever topics she deems worthy.

Fully supporting Littman in this endeavor whether financially or in principle is an act of institutional transphobia. Academic freedom and support for the trans community may not be mutually exclusive but supporting Littman with this article and supporting trans people absolutely is. Brown cannot have it both ways no matter how good their PR, policies, and wordsmithing might be.

The nature of this article is not simply "politicized" or "controversial", it's lethal for trans people. The delegitimization of trans people's autonomy has been utilized in policy for centuries to limit and persecute trans people. Articles like Littman's provide lawmakers credibility when creating anti-transgender legislation such as "bathroom bills" like North Carolina's HB2 and religiously-justified discrimination bills like the First Amendment Defense Act. Just this month it was reported the Trump administration is looking to eliminate the legal existence of transgender people by defining gender by way of sex as "immutable." The administration has already rolled back a significant number of discrimination protections for trans people set by the Obama administration. Trans people face highly disproportionate levels of violence and discrimination within housing, employment, criminal justice, and healthcare. Articles like Littman's support the codification of legal discrimination against trans people which significantly increases the risk of the violence we face. If Brown were responsible, they would recognize the "politicized" nature of protections for trans people and the detrimental political impacts of an article like Littman's rather than ignoring it.

Brown University is not an apolitical institution, internally or externally. Brown has released public statements on local and national policy issues including the travel ban, tax reform, and healthcare infrastructure. Brown has been a leading advocate in curbing graduate students' rights to organize collectively. Brown regularly works to influence local politics to maintain its own benefits. All to say, on issues unrelated to elections, Brown can and has been more than willing to make its political beliefs known. Which leads to the idea that Human rights are political. Brown has an obligation to uphold them if it's dedicated to the inclusion it promotes. Supporting Littman's research in this article, or any other projects that on trans people, stands in opposition to supporting human rights. Trans people's safety should be prioritize no matter how "controversial" it might be. “

3. What is your response to the call for "academic freedom"?

“I believe the calls for academic freedom are also based on unsubstantiated assumptions. These assumptions being that Littman's article meets academic standards and maintains academic integrity, neither of which it does. Instead, this article threatens the credibility of the academic institutions associated with it. All realities both *PLOS ONE* and Brown University should have noted before publishing and promoting an article that threatens trans people's existence.”