

"BYE GIRL, OR BYE BOY, OR WHATEVER YOU ARE!"

A Latinx Transgender Man's Experience with Queer Battle Fatigue in Texas

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I am a Latinx man of transgender experience, assigned female-at-birth, from a small, rural town on the Texas-México border.¹ Though I knew I was different growing up, the thought of transitioning never crossed my mind, mostly because I was never exposed to other transgender people, and in particular, transgender people of color. I often write and speak about my upbringing because it leads me to the purpose of this essay. Boni Wozolek, Ross Varndell, and Taylor Speer (2015) introduced the notion of Queer Battle Fatigue (QBF) as a way to better understand the frustration that queer people face in a heteronormative society. They write that "the framework of Queer Battle Fatigue is intentionally fluid and is not presented with a set of tenets or ideals to anchor the theory. This is because we wish to center the discussion on lived experiences rather than tenets that in some fashion validate what it might mean to be queer and fatigued through battling every day commonplace aggressions" (6). However, Wozolek, Varndell, and Speer do make three points when referring to QBF. First, micro-aggressions often result from whatever situation affects the queer person. Second, the act of feeling fatigued leaves the affected with a sense of battle negotiation. Third, a sense of resistance or resilience may result from these encounters. While I try to remain as visible as possible as a transgender person, I revert back to my ability to "pass" as a cisgender man, especially when I do not feel safe. I am already a person of color to begin with in a predominantly white institution.² Adding my transgender identity to the mix adds a layer to complexity that keeps me feeling anxious at times. Trans people of color have a higher incidence of suicidal ideations, attempted suicides, along with many negative outcomes like homelessness, violent attacks, and so on (James et al. 2016). The purpose of this piece is to provide a snippet of the situations that I deal with weekly (sometimes daily), as illustrated through a QBF framework. It is my hope that through this example, the reader may have a picture of what it means to be brown and trans in the South.³

Backhanded Comments

Growing up in a Mexican household meant that my family expected me to show respect for everyone, even if I did not agree with them. Therefore, it is common for me to see someone in the hallway or around campus and smile and greet them as a way to acknowledge their presence. I came into the office one afternoon my first year as a doctoral student, and some peers were meeting in the conference room. Even though I was out as a transgender man to the faculty (I wrote it in my application essay), I was not “out” to my peers because I was still trying to gauge their comfort level with trans people. Not wanting to appear rude, I greeted my peers and made small talk. The chat was cordial. Most of it addressed class, what we were working on, and I told them I would let them go so they could get back to their meeting and work. As I left, I said, “Goodbye, y’all!” It was then that one of my peers, considerably older than me, said, “Bye girl, or bye boy, or whatever you are!” That one comment left me in a little bit of a haze for a couple of days after. This particular individual had been at the university longer than most doctoral students, as they were completing all their degrees at the same university and taught courses there. The faculty knew that I was a transgender man, and since this person taught as well, they must have heard about it at one of the faculty meetings. Now, I have very thick skin. I have endured many hardships throughout my life as a result of my transition. Too many to count. However, that comment hit me like a ton of bricks. I froze for a split second and said nothing, then left the room pretending like I had not heard it. The frustrating part is that that comment was not an isolated incident. That comment has remained ingrained in my mind up to this day with thoughts that run through my head. Am I perceived as trans? Am I perceived as cis?

Concluding Thoughts

Though not always exactly the same, I often find myself in situations such as this one. While I have the unique experience of dealing with my color and gender identity, my experience as a transgender person is not alone (Keenan 2017). I am often left wondering whether I am overreacting or whether I am “too sensitive.” While I may take one comment in isolated instances and brush it off, the fact that these happen more often than not slowly carve at my confidence and my ability to be me. I am proud of who I am and where I come from. I try to be visible for those who are unable to, especially as a person of color, though I remain between what seems like two different worlds, shape-shifting to meet the needs of a specific situation

(Anzaldúa 2015). I owe it to my trans siblings of color who have been murdered or have died at the hands of hatred. While I may be afraid to always be “out” and visible, I long for the day when I do not have to negotiate between this fatigue and being myself.

Notes

1. I use the term *Latinx* as a rejection of the Latino/a or Latino/Latina binary, as it encompasses nonbinary identities and gender nonconformity. Though in the past I have used *Latino/a* and *Latin@*, I have come to understand the heteronormative, cis-normative nature of language. That said, every once in a while, I still use *Latino/a* precisely because of Queer Battle Fatigue. Sadly, I have learned to pick my battles and understand that those outside a particular academic discussion might not understand what *Latinx* means.
2. I make a conscious effort to not capitalize *white* in my work. After speaking to several friends whose research focuses on decolonization, I try to decenter whiteness because after capitalizing it as early as the first time I learned how to write and spell, our experiences as people of color have taken a backseat to the colonizer’s experiences.
3. I use *trans* and *transgender* interchangeably.

References

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