



10-6-2014

What They Said

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Charles, Beau, "What They Said" (2014). *SURGE*. 176.
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What They Said

Abstract

“Beau, stay after a little, I’d like to talk to you about something.”

Gut-reaction – I’m in trouble.

“What do you want me to do if someone uses the wrong pronouns when referring to you?”[*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, identity, gender, pronouns

Disciplines

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

WHAT THEY SAID

October 6, 2014

“Beau, stay after a little, I’d like to talk to you about something.”

Gut-reaction – I’m in trouble.

“What do you want me to do if someone uses the wrong pronouns when referring to you?”

I got this three times from three separate faculty members in one day. The first time I still had to fight off the idea that I wasn’t in trouble, from being called out, from being Other. The second time, I shrugged. By the third time, I laughed because wow, people really want to know how to make me comfortable. It’s still blowing my mind.

It’s still blowing my mind that I don’t have a response to this question.

I should righteously defend my identity, right? But it’s exhausting, it’s Othering. Sometimes, I just don’t care, and other times someone calling me by the wrong pronoun is like having ice shoved down my pants on a particularly hot day, shocking me cold. I don’t begrudge people misgendering me the first time or so, or in a slip of the tongue as they retrain themselves. I’m patient. It’s cool, but it’s also not cool. But I understand why it happens. Any effort is more than I’m used to anyway. But in most cases, when I correct someone on misgendering me, I’m either met with guilt-ridden apologies that make me feel like I’ve done something wrong or borderline angry defensive excuses. Simply say: “I’m sorry, I’ll do better.” And then do better.

I’m non-binary/agender. It’s a relatively new label for a feeling that has surely existed since the construction of gender. When I realized that I wasn’t a girl, I thought that meant I had to be a boy. But when I tried that out, it didn’t fit either. I’m neither a boy nor a girl, but rather a person who occupies a



nebulous space of my own. I go by the pronouns they/them/their. I use a different name here, one that I picked out in high school and could finally use on the Gettysburg campus. I've received a lot of compliments for that name. Beau. Beauregard. Pretty swanky. People nod their head if I explain my name situation to them and say "yeah, you're totally a Beau."

And when I explain to people that I'm neither a girl nor a boy? That in fact, I'm probably more likened to some sort of hybrid deer-moth mutant offspring that's bumbling around the English department most days? "I actually see that."

This self-made identity I'm able to safely possess on campus strikes everyone I meet as legitimate. As "fitting" me. The biggest hang up is the pronoun situation. They. Them. Their. My endearing lisp prevents me from using the variety of xi/zi pronouns, so they/them/their it must be, even if it makes sticklers for grammar cringe.

I face this routine of having to clarify my identity with each new face I meet. Each new environment. "Beau, sophomore, English major, they/them/their pronouns." I email my professors and advisors before I meet them so we can avoid this, and this year, pronouns have been lumped into the standard introduction for all students so I don't feel isolated. Doesn't help much when I'm still the only one in the room deviating from the majority, but it's absolutely what needs to be done in both formal and informal introductions. As gender education grows alongside legal protections, more people come to identify themselves outside of their assigned gender or even the gender binary: the misconception that gender is made of the two extremes: man and woman. Asking someone's gender should not be offensive, it should be routine.

Once I get out into the "real world," I'm not sure what I'm going to do. Enforcing my gender might risk my status in the workplace. It's certainly not something that I can throw around at family gatherings in my rural cornfield hometown. Even my ex, for the sake of avoiding extensive taxing conversations, would gender me as a woman to make life easier. I'm pretty much guaranteed that this aspect of my life will be a hot mess for the rest of forever unless we make some major leaps forward as a culture. But for now I'm going to figure out what to do in the classroom while safely cushioned by Gettysburg's transgender equality policies.

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