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CSI continues its long-time practice of defamatory transgender characters.

BY NICK ADAMS DECEMBER 02 2012 12:51 PM ET

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Wednesday night's episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, entitled "Strip Maul," contained the latest in the show's long history of offensive and defamatory portrayals of transgender people.

The episode begins with the police walking up and down the Fremont Street area of Las Vegas, arresting several people all of whom are intended to be seen by the show's viewers as freaks and weirdos. In fact, one of the officers says, "That's why I'm here. You deal with the

whack jobs [emphasis added] and I do the evidence collecting." Another officer says while looking at the people arrested, "Full moon tonight."

One of the people arrested and taken to the police station is obviously a transgender person. The show cast a masculine-appearing male actor, and put him in a sparkly dress and exaggerated make-up, intending to create the stereotypical "man in a dress" version of a transgender woman.

Once all of the "whack jobs" are at the police station, an officer looks at the transgender woman's driver's license. Viewers see a man's picture on the license while the officer says "Josh McClure, Florida license." The transgender woman immediately corrects the officer and says, "It's Joslyn." Joslyn then goes into hysterics about protecting her "unborn child." When an officer asks if she's been drinking, Joslyn violently attacks the police officer and is restrained in a chair. As she is restrained, the officers all refer to her as Joslyn, but one of the officers also calls her "Sir."

In the next scene, Joslyn has been released from the chair, but now she is even more hysterical, claiming that her water has broken and the baby is coming. She again violently attacks everyone in the room, grabs a pair of scissors and repeatedly stabs herself in the stomach. The show lingers on a shot of her bloody body lying on the floor of the station. Immediately after the commercial break one of the detectives says, "Hospital said our pregnant transvestite was D.O.A."

Later, two doctors are conducting an autopsy on Joslyn, with one of the investigators present to

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watch. During this scene, Joslyn is referred to as a "male Caucasian" and everyone in the room refers to her with male pronouns. Male pronouns are used no less than 11 times during a short 1 minute, 13 second scene. The characters also refer to her as "delusional," and it is unclear whether they mean that she was delusional for thinking she was a woman or for thinking she was pregnant. Or both. Shortly thereafter another investigator again refers to her as a "pregnant transvestite."

Ultimately it's revealed that Joslyn was smuggling drugs in her stomach. Some of the packets had burst leading to her desperation to get them out of her body.

Referring to this character repeatedly as a "transvestite" is disrespectful and inaccurate, since the simple fact that she referred to herself as Joslyn suggested she lived as a woman. A glance at GLAAD's *Transgender Reference Guide* would have led the producers to conclude that the word itself is derogatory, and in any event should never be used to refer to someone who lives fulltime as a woman.

But the disrespect shown by the doctors and the investigator during the autopsy scene is particularly revolting. Many transgender people live in fear that during a medical emergency or after death their true identity will not be respected by authorities or even by their families. In 1995, a transgender woman named Tyra Hunter died at the scene of a car accident after paramedics stopped providing life-saving measures and openly denigrated her with epithets after uncovering her genitals.

If this were a one-time occurrence on *CSI*, this episode would still be an exploitative, sensationalistic, defamatory portrayal of a transgender person. However, as GLAAD recently noted in its report about transgender characters on television over the past 10 years, *CSI* has repeatedly foisted these type of portrayals upon the American public.

Since its premiere in 2000, GLAAD has monitored the following *CSI* episodes:

- * A three-episode series culminating in the episode "Identity Crisis," featuring a psychotic female-to-male serial killer named Paul Millander who murders his own mother and then kills himself
- * An episode called "Abra Cadaver" involving a murdered transgender woman left in a golf course sand pit in which one of the show's leads comments on the dead woman's "franks and beans" as he's uncovering her dead body
- * A bloody episode called "Ch-ch-ch-changes" about a transgender woman performing illegal sex reassignment surgeries in a public storage unit, resulting in the death of one transgender woman in a botched surgery and the murder of another transgender woman who was a witness
- * And just last month, a trans character was randomly killed in a shoot-out in a diner, which apparently had nothing to do with her being trans, but was yet another dead transgender woman on this show

This list does not include multiple defamatory portrayals of transgender and intersex murderers and victims on *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York*. Furthermore, all of these episodes air repeatedly in syndication, so their damage is not limited to their original airing.

The timing of the current episode is particularly insulting as it occurs one week after the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance, which commemorates the (at least) 72 transgender people murdered over the past 12 months: 16 killed in the United States and the 56 killed elsewhere in the world. (The number of murdered transgender people is probably higher, because the victim's transgender identity may not always be understood and reported correctly.)

While *CSI* and other police procedurals use lurid, sensationalistic stories to reinforce stereotypes of psychotic transgender "whack jobs" in an effort to get ratings, transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, are dying at an alarming rate.

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs found that, in 2011, 40% of murders against the LGBT community were against transgender women, particularly women of color. Seventy-eight percent of transgender youth reported being harassed in school, 35% physically assaulted, and 12% sexually assaulted, according to a 2011 report from the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Studies have shown that Americans are much less likely to know a transgender person than they

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are to know a gay, lesbian or bisexual person, therefore the role of the media is even more critical in promoting understanding and shining a light on the very real discrimination and violence faced by the transgender community.

The creators of *CSI* need to take a long look at how they've portrayed the transgender community over the years and realize their show has directly contributed to the climate of fear and ignorance that claims the life of one transgender person every month. They have squandered the opportunity to allow their viewers to get to know transgender Americans in a real and meaningful way.

It's possible for police procedurals to tell transgender stories in a way that's fair, accurate and inclusive. In fact, the CBS show *Cold Case* received six GLAAD Media Award nominations, two of them for episodes that included transgender characters, "Boy Crazy" and "Daniela."

We ask *CSI* to use episodes like these as a model going forward, or if they can't do that, just stop using transgender characters in the show. This type of visibility, transgender people don't need. In fact, it's killing us.

NICK ADAMS is GLAAD's Associate Director of Communications.

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Mike Gaudreau · ★ Top Commenter

well said.

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Cherie Macenka · Columbia College

I have to disagree with the author... on this specific episode. There is no indication that the individual in question was Trans. Just because he was dressing in women's clothing doesn't make him transgendered. MtF individuals do not dress in a way as to make themselves stand out as fringe – they become. The evidence that the man was disillusional and his disillusion was being female and pregnant is more appropriate than saying he was trans. The show handled it appropriately.

With that said, is there discrimination – yes, absolutely. To change that will require changing both sides of the road. We as a community demand the right to express our gender as we wish and be accepted in society. The society in question wasn't created on open acceptance. Will it get there? I hope to the goddess to see it in my lifetime, but we have to stop and ask how much are we contributing to how society views us? Society needs to be educated – don't look to television dramas to do that – they can and do help, but if you expect every instance of an LGBTQ individual to be shown as flawless and perfect, then you're not living in reality.

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Gerry Fisher · ★ Top Commenter · Life Coach and Web Designer at Self employed

I think the depiction was unclear and gratuitous. It didn't really add to the plot in any way, really, other than to add to the "freaky" vibe the show was going for. And I think that's one of the messages I'm hearing from the trans community: stop using our depictions to equate "freaky."

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Tammy Twotone · ★ Top Commenter · Stand-up Comedy at Me, Myself & I

Again, it sticks in my craw: because other than laziness, stupidity, hate, and a complete lack of creativity, there is no reason for this to continue.

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Bob Blasy · Sacramento, California

In the recent episode of CSI the transgender was a male and was correctly stated as one.

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Deborah Jules Vilmur · Santa Cruz, California

Not to be a grammar bitch, but the word "transgender" is not a noun, it's an adjective. "the transgender person" rather than "the transgender" is both grammatically correct as well as polite.

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David Walters · ★ Top Commenter · Works at Chamber Music Professional

If someone would start a petition against "CSI", I'd be MORE than happy to sign it!


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G Jak Klinikowski · ★ Top Commenter

Never watched. Never will!

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