

I Once Named A Bar Mister Sister

I've denied it being problematic, I've fought back and I've apologized, all while having something to gain or lose. I want to take the time, with no consideration for any ulterior motives, to share my lesson learned.

I named a bar intended for the entire LGBTQIA community and our supporters something I had heard that I thought was cute and kitschy. MS as I'll refer to it now, does have a specific history of what I intended it for, but it also sounds threatening and weaponized to many people. My ego, defensiveness and my own reaction to feeling less-than at times in my life, blinded me to the authentic feelings of others. I labelled people as overly sensitive and I tried to invalidate their feelings by explaining that my intent was harmless. I've since learned that that's not good enough. I chose to believe that if I capitulated, that I was losing a fight directed toward me by people who just wanted to fight for the sole sake of fighting.

What I have learned through observations in 2020 and through a lot of time spent alone thinking about the past couple of years is that although we may not like the way people fight back, people fight back through any means necessary when they're being marginalized, hated against, oppressed, victimized. I cannot fault them for that, nor can I judge that any action is an overreaction from someone who feels harmed. I can confidently say that I am not a transphobic person and I'm grateful that there are many examples of my actions and behaviors well prior to MS that speak to that, but I was largely and holistically trans insensitive in a destructive way.

It's far too easy to think or say, "what's the big deal" or, "stop overreacting", but that thinking is denigrating and invalidates the significance of ones very real feelings. I can now see that my actions were harmful. If the two words, "mister" and "sister" used together felt like anything other than the intent, it should have been immediately recognized and righted.

To the trans and gender non-conforming community, I'm sorry. I apologize that my actions harmed you and I applaud you for standing up and doing what was necessary to be heard.

I feel grateful to everyone who felt like they were doing the right thing by supporting me at the time. I know in many cases these were people who saw someone in the community who they perceived as being attacked and didn't fully understand the scope of the impact on the trans and gender non-conforming community. I also feel grateful for everyone who supported those who felt harmed by the name. I hope everyone can move forward, aligned, with new understanding and can fight for injustice together.

What I hope most comes from this, is a lesson in making lasting change while not creating additional harm. Bailey from PCVT chose to approach me, with a hug and a no-nonsense reckoning and education that was by far the most impactful. She humanized herself and made me feel her hurt. I would caution gay and straight cis folks to partner with our trans and gender non-conforming brothers and sisters on how to most effectively fight for their rights without

piggybacking our own and sometimes personal agendas onto their fight, as I myself have been working on in supporting Black Lives Matter. We all need one another for any lasting positive change.

Laverne Cox recently had the most poignant interview with Bevy Smith on “Bevelations” regarding how we make change. To paraphrase, Laverne states that disclosure creates conversations that lead to change in the ideology and institutions that perpetuate violence against trans people. This can be done in conjunction with defending the police and the struggle for black lives and toward women of all kinds having equity. She speaks to how disclosure is critically examining how each individual has internalized things and about unlearning them. I strongly encourage every single person in the world to find this on the google machine and listen.

Happy Pride, please support Black Lives Matter, LGBTQIA rights and VOTE!

Craig Derouchie

(To note: Craig McGaughan was a Facebook handle created long before MS, using my mother’s maiden name that the press picked up on and referred to me as).