

We Need to Stop Conflating Trans Identities and Criminality

“Christian Jeffers, 48, who identifies as a woman...” - Second sentence of The Daily Mail [Article](#) by Snejana Farberov

“Prosecutors said Jeffers, who identifies as a woman...” - Third sentence in NY Daily News [Article](#) by Thomas Tracy & Molly Crane-Newman

“Biological man who identifies as woman...” - Title of The Post Millennial [Article](#) By Jarryd Jaeger

These are just a small sample size of the many articles that feel the need to mention that Jeffers is a trans woman.

Jeffers is a 48-year-old woman who assaulted a man in the New York City subway. She also happens to be a Black trans woman. The media response has chosen to emphasize this fact, indicating to the reader that the fact that she is a Black trans woman is relevant to the crime she committed.

An assault in the New York City subway is a terrible thing to happen. I am in no way defending these actions but I am critiquing the transphobic rhetoric used in the media response that perpetuates the criminalization of Black trans folk.

An instance like this would normally be circulated through local news and would eventually fade into the slew of other similar events.

This, surprisingly, made national, and even international news, being featured on CNN, The Hill, The Daily Mail, etc. This most likely happened through a mix of a representation of the larger trend of high rates of violent crime in NYC and transphobia.

By now you may be wondering why mentioning that she is trans problematic? And how is it transphobic for larger news sources to report on this? It seems like it could be validating for people to recognize that she is a trans woman.

There are two main issues. Firstly, her identity as a trans woman does not make her any less of a woman compared to a cis woman, so there is no need to actively clarify that she is “trans” rather than just a “woman.”

Secondly, mentioning her as a Black trans woman in association with a violent crime furthers the transphobic and racist stereotype that Black trans women are violent, disrespectful, criminals, etc. This reflects and reinforces the period of intensified transphobia we are currently in.

News today has been reshaped by the internet to be designed to get the most clicks in the least time. Mentioning “Black **trans** woman committed assault” rather than just “Black man/woman committed assault” sensationalizes the piece to get more clicks by fueling the fire of the current period of transphobia through the implication that someone's trans identity is relevant to them committing a crime. It plays into how the emphasis on grouping people together created by modern capitalism is so easily done in media production. Local media's, or less viewed stories on national media's, depictions of race and gender can correspond to a targeted audience, freeing them from being shamed by the public because those targeted support the ideas put forth in these articles.

Almost every article also repeatedly referred to her as “Christian.” While she may still go by this name, it is likely to be her deadname, and thus, as these articles should have done, I have chosen to refer to her just as “Jeffers” in this piece out of common courtesy and caution. Journalists and editors failing to realize that referring to a trans woman as her birth name as a potential issue, or choosing to ignore it, displays no one in the multiple steps it takes to publish an article cared enough about how her humanity as a trans woman whose preferred name might not align with government name to consider finding her preferred name. Yet they I use her trans identity for their personal benefit to sensationalize the piece and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Jeffers is not an innocent woman, but the media response to her crimes is unacceptable. She should not be used as a pawn to further a transphobic and racist narrative that Black trans women are violent. She still deserves to be treated with some level of respect as a fellow human being.

For these stories and any future similar instances you see, contact the editors and demand they treat everyone with respect. It is a simple and easy edit than can be done, but something that would have a major impact on dismantling transphobic narratives. Using a style guide like this one: <https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/> can serve as an effective way to write about trans folk respectfully.

