

James Cantor harasses trans speaker

Kyle Scanlon was Trans Programmes Coordinator at 519 Church Street Community Centre in Toronto, a rival to James Cantor's employer CAMH. Cantor was compelled to send a letter of apology to Scanlon following the event, and the letter was to remain in his file for 7 years.

Below is Scanlon's original complaint letter about what happened at CAMH.

To Whom it Concerns:

Let me begin by saying that I was grateful and excited to be invited to present a workshop at the LGBT Staff Caucus event at CAMH. Not only was I thrilled that trans issues were considered important enough to be part of the agenda, I was extremely gratified that the Staff Caucus wanted them addressed not by a GIC expert, but by someone with lived experience as a transsexual who has also had invaluable community service experience with members of the lower income, street-involved trans community. I accepted the offer immediately.

But my elation quickly turned to frustration as I attempted to facilitate my workshop. I would like to register a complaint about what happened.

I was running a workshop that was clearly listed in the program as being "the perspective of a transsexual activist". I did not set myself up as someone who was an expert in gender theory. I was attempting to address the "lived experience" of trans people that might lead them towards needing support from the Addictions Program, or that might affect their chances of receiving treatment.

Almost immediately -while I was still running through definitions of sex, gender, and intersexuality, one gentleman in the audience began aggressively interrupting to offer his "expertise". He spent at least five minutes detailing "specific types of intersexuality" which was not germane to my workshop at all. This gentleman seemed to be trying to demonstrate his authority on this topic. I ultimately had to cut him off in a gentle yet firm manner in order to continue. He did continue to interrupt on a few more occasions, generally "defensively", all in that same manner that he was more of an "authority" on the subject than I was, despite the fact that it's my lived experience. It was extremely rude and honestly unnerving.

Next in the workshop I began addressing my concerns as an activist about "the real life test" and how the GIC is still using the year long life test rather than the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care approved 3 month life test, as well as to address HOW this real life test impacts on the lived experience of transsexuals. I discussed a variety of concrete issues faced by many trans

people as they undergo the Real Life Test - high rates of suicide, low self-esteem, police harassment, street-involvement, inability to access shelters and hostels, being fired from jobs, the inability to find new work, losing key relationships, being kicked out of the family home, and losing access to their children. The audience was extremely empathetic, vocally so. At that point, this man interrupted again, very loudly and aggressively "Before you all JUDGE the GIC...."

At this point - thankfully - he was interrupted by a wonderful member of the audience calling him on his rude behaviour and asking him to identify himself. He replied "I'm Doctor James Cantor with the GIC." A minor skirmish ensued, and I managed to utilize my facilitation skills to bring everyone back to the topic at hand. Again, his behaviour took valuable time away from my workshop. All in all, I think I lost about 15-20 minutes to James Cantor's views, and having to "deal" with him. That's close to one quarter of my total time to present. This was completely unacceptable. Keep in mind my workshop was only 90 minutes long, and since people strolled in late, I was already pressed for time.

I should mention that during the entire workshop, Peter Coleridge was sitting in the room. He was supposedly there to act as "moderator" of the workshop. He did nothing to control Cantor, nor to make any apologies to me. I felt hung out to dry, except for the great support of the members of the audience. It was all extremely confrontational, it took time away from my workshop, it distracted me as a presenter and it disrespected me as a community member who was INVITED to offer my particular experience and opinion. If Cantor was there to defend the GIC practices, then he shouldn't have been there. The purpose of the forum was to air views that are not conventionally heard. He certainly didn't seem to be there to learn or to listen.

His behaviour hindered my workshop, it put me on edge, and it made for an uncomfortable atmosphere for all those who were there to hear my presentation. I believe an invited guest deserves better treatment from CAMH staff. My workshop deserved ALL the time it was allotted and the men and women who attended the workshop deserved to hear the presentation that they specifically chose to attend.

CAMH says it's opening itself up to community input and constructive feedback, but here's an example of what happens to a workshop presenter who tries to offer it.

I was offended, angered, and frustrated by these events. This experience underscored my conviction that CAMH has only been paying lip-service to wanting to address the trans community's concerns about the GIC if this is how they treat an INVITED GUEST.

The one "good" thing that came from all of this... almost everyone in the audience approached me personally later to say "thanks to today, we now have a better understanding of the kind of shit that trans people face trying to access service at the CAMH GIC." So, for that, I do have to thank James Cantor and Peter Coleridge. They provided a look at what really happens inside the GIC doors in a way that my workshop on its own could never have done justice.

Scanlon described the response from CAMH:

I do think there is some gray area here of semantics. I was told that after my claims were investigated it was found that I had experienced harassment, but NOT that Cantor had harassed me. The woman seemed to be saying - in fact I think she did once say - that anytime a person feels it, it's real. But I don't know that anyone ever said "Cantor harassed you." Cantor was made to apologize to me in a letter, but there he was also clever to apologize for my feeling harassed and did not in any way acknowledge he harassed me. Like I said, semantics. I definitely was told this would stay on his file for 7 years. I have no idea where else I would have gotten an idea like that unless it was specifically stated to me.

Cantor subsequently has tried to downplay the incident.