

glaad alert

by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance
Against Defamation

Ally McBeal defames transgender people

Ally McBeal, David E. Kelley's Emmy Award-winning comedy, featured a male-to-female transgender character in a three-part story arc that aired on October 30, November 6 and November 13. Cindy, a transgender woman, hires Ally's law firm to sue her place of employment because she does not want to take a mandatory physical. Cindy has not had sex-reassignment surgery and does not want her transgender identity revealed at work. After winning her lawsuit, Cindy becomes involved with Mark, a lawyer in Ally's firm who does not know that Cindy is transgender.

GLAAD was encouraged by the setup for the third episode of the storyline. Although Mark reacts insensitively after learning that Cindy was not always a woman, he realizes that he loves her and wants to continue the relationship, saying, "I can't see you as anything but a woman." However, the final episode in the storyline was offensive and defamatory. Mark backtracks, saying that he considers Cindy "aberrant," and that he could "never be sexual with her."

Cindy was a well-written, multi-dimensional character. However, she was surrounded by situations and commentary that were so offensive, they completely overwhelmed any positive impact her character might have made. Bigoted comments by every regular character on the show went unchallenged, and every character ended the storyline as transphobic as they began. (Nell hysterically claimed that Mark's relationship was a "circus act" that was "embarrassing for the entire firm." Fish gargled and used mouth spray because a transgender person kissed him. Cage called Cindy "it.")

GLAAD has written a letter to Kelley requesting a meeting to discuss the manner in which *Ally McBeal* portrays lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Contact David E. Kelley and urge him to meet with GLAAD, and to create fair, accurate and inclusive stories about transgender people - instead of simply exploiting them for ratings during sweeps.

[Contact: David E. Kelley, David E. Kelley Productions, 1600 Rosecrans Ave., Building 4B, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266. You may also register your comments and opinions with Fox Television at askfox@foxinc.com. Please note that this comment does not go to David E. Kelley but to Fox Television. The official Ally McBeal website has a message board where the show is discussed. If you wish to participate in the discussion about

the Mark/Cindy storyline, you may go to <http://www.allymbeal.com/unisex/index.htm>.]

Ms. explores intersex issues

"Making the Cut," an article featured in the October/November 2000 issue of *Ms.*, strongly criticizes the common medical practice of performing cosmetic surgery on intersex children to remove or reduce a clitoris which is perceived to be "too large," and therefore "abnormal." Martha Coventry (who was subjected to a clitoridectomy at the age of six) examines the history of genital mutilation in the United States, tracing the evolution of arguments used to advocate the procedure.

In the 19th century, Coventry explains, medical professionals argued that excising the clitoris of any female would stop masturbation, epilepsy and insanity. That theory, which was thoroughly discredited by 1950, was replaced by the notion that children born with "abnormal" clitorises must be "fixed" in order to ensure they would be "normal" heterosexual girls. Today, U.S. surgeons still perform cosmetic surgery on healthy clitorises. On average, five children a day are "conformed" to arbitrary standards of "normal" size and appearance.

The author also points out that homophobia plays a part in the decision to perform these surgeries. Coventry cites a 1994 medical paper advocating genital surgery because "parents will feel reassured when they know that their daughter can develop heterosexually just like other girls."

For the past 50 years, intersex people have been subjected to surgeries which diminish or destroy their capacity for sexual enjoyment and their ability to express their gender identity. Recently, intersex activists have publicly denounced this practice and called on the medical community to stop performing these mutilating surgeries.

Write and thank *Ms.* for increasing public awareness about intersex genital mutilation, and for bringing an intersex person's voice to a mainstream audience.

Contact Gloria Jacobs, Editor; *Ms.*; 20 Exchange Place, 22nd Floor; New York, NY 10005. Fax: 212-509-2407. Email letterstotheeditor@msmagazine.com. ▼

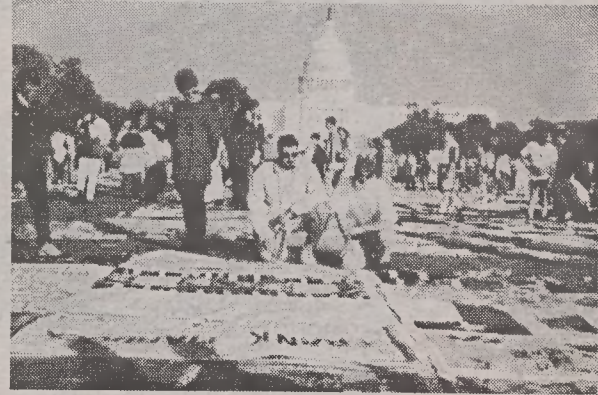
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Correction

In our Nov. 25 issue, the story on New Hanover County Commissioner-elect Julia Boseman did not contain a byline. The story was written by contributing writer Bo Dean of Wilmington. Q-Notes regrets the error.

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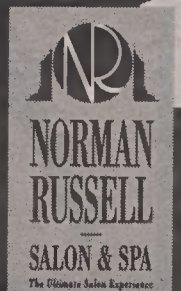
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