

Transsexual Professor at Stern College: Student Perspectives

By Olivia Wiznitzer

Associated Press standards have been followed in referring to people by their gender of choice.

What does the student body of Yeshiva University make of the fact that one of their professors is a transsexual? What of the fact that she has chosen to transition and present as a woman? Would students feel comfortable in her class? Students to whom The Observer put this question responded differently, each of them adding their own unique voice to the mix.

Gilah Kletenik (SCW '09) states, "I think it's unfortunate that Dr. Ladin is only part of the writing center [referring to the fact that Dr. Ladin is not currently teaching classes, but will resume doing so in the spring], as opposed to serving in her former capacity as a professor. Moreover, it's regrettable that transsexuals are not protected by the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act and that only a handful of states have statutes protecting against employment discrimination based on gender identity—New York is not one of these." She further explained that, "The gender identity of Dr. Ladin or any other professor would not prevent me from registering for a class with her. I do not anticipate feeling uncomfortable in such a class."

A Yeshiva College student who requested to remain anonymous believes that "people make too much of a big deal about it. Pointing, staring, whispering, enough's enough. Let Dr. Ladin live in peace." He explains that, "I would certainly take a class with Dr. Ladin. Dr. Ladin is not a sexual predator, simply a transsexual. The choice to change one's gender, in my opinion, is bizarre, but that doesn't make Dr. Ladin a bad or evil person."

A Stern College student who declined to be quoted by name explains that, "I am glad that Dr. Ladin will once again be teaching in the SCW classroom. I very much respect her as a teacher. Since Stern strives for excellence- it is appropriate to accept such a professor for her mind and dedication to students and not be concerned with her sexual orientation. If I had opportunity in my schedule I would certainly take Dr. Ladin's class again."

Another anonymous Yeshiva College student stated that while he feels "that a person's sexuality, no matter the scenario, should not play a role in his or her hiring," he does not believe Dr. Ladin should be the Director of the Writing Center. "If a student wants to take her class, that is a personal preference. But if a student wants to take advantage of the writing center's offerings, she is left with no choice but to deal with Dr. Ladin, and this is something she may not be comfortable with," he noted. He explains that this is not a political statement, but a question of thoughtful hirings. He also notes that he would not feel comfortable in Dr. Ladin's



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class because “her physical history would be a huge distraction, and it honestly creeps me out a little.”

Tzvi Feifel (YC '10) does “not see what the big deal is.” In his opinion, Dr. Ladin is there to teach, and her abilities as a teacher are not affected by her gender. To suggest otherwise “sounds a whole lot like discrimination.” He claims that, “YU has always had a multitude of non-Jewish, non-religious, and even gay professors, so I fail to see why this situation should call for a distinction.”

Alana Ebin (SCW '10) states that she is “so happy for Dr. Ladin. I don’t know her, nor have I taken a class of hers, but from a plainly humanistic view, I am proud and in complete admiration of her. To have the courage, strength and determination that she has shown is remarkable.” In Alana’s view, “to deny a human being, any human being, the basic rights of decency and respect is not only ungodly, it is irreligious.”

Another SCW student who requested to remain anonymous declares, “I have no problems with Dr. Ladin’s presence at YU. I think that as an Orthodox institution, YU would need halakhic backing and the support of a Modern Orthodox Rav that would forbid having a working relationship with a transsexual person in order for anyone to raise concerns.”

A YC student who declined to be quoted by name and takes the middle ground declares, “I do not feel that this is something that should be celebrated or scorned.” The way he sees it, “this was a choice that Dr. Ladin made and [...] I would not want to impose my own religious and moral beliefs on her, whatever they may be.” In his view, if Dr. Ladin is “able to run the writing center efficiently and her decision does not have a negative impact on the tutors that work there or writers that go there , then by all means she should continue.”



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