



Top 10 Issues I Get To Address While Holding A Microphone... That You Might Regret Asking Me

While facilitating a workshop or giving a keynote, I usually provide my cell phone number for participants to text message me questions they may have so that at the end I can answer everyone before they leave the space. I do ask for questions the “old school” way and some folks do raise their hands, but it seems like to get to the really big issues or hard questions, participants rely on a false sense of anonymity via texting. What follows are “hot topic” questions I get asked almost every time I do a presentation. Some I may get more “soap boxy” than others, but below is my truth to these issues in no particular order of importance or frequency. You have been warned.

- 1) Immigration – more specifically “Illegal Immigration”**
- 2) Current President approval rating**
- 3) Affirmative Action**
- 4) How do I make others care?**
- 5) Isn't it all just the white straight guy's fault? What can I do? He has the power. What does a male feminist look like?**
- 6) What is the difference between an ally and an advocate? Diversity and Social Justice?**
- 7) How do I reconcile faith with sexuality?**
- 8) Why do I spend so much time talking about history? Slavery is over.**
- 9) Nature vs. Nurture?**
- 10) I'm not a racist... I have a black friend or I'm not a skin head or I don't go to KKK rallies.**

Immigration – more specifically “Illegal Immigration”

I typically am asked via text, “What do I think or feel about Hispanic/Latino issues today?” I find that with just barely a scratch the real question here is, “How do I think/feel about illegal immigrations?” I have a

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number of thoughts here, all of which are controversial. First, I think the term illegal is pejorative and alien is insensitive at best. The term should be undocumented and most people I know don't regularly carry their social security card, passport, visas, or green cards on their persons at all times. Moreover, there are more undocumented people coming in from the northern border than our southern border every year. It is our racism that doesn't think of "brown" people in Canada and that we need to feel threatened by only non-white people. Lastly, those folks that are immigrating (documented or not) from our southern border are very likely returning to land that their ancestors at one point lived on and cultivated complex cultures that whites should call "civilizations," but then these whites wouldn't have felt justified to steal the land and commit genocide in the first place. Just in case this doesn't cover the question, I would also add that I live in a country based on difference and freedom to express that difference AND is powered and empowers only those with white skin, certain amounts of capital access and education, English speaking, and Protestant faiths. Borders, gates, fences, and laws that are put in place to protect the "American Way" limit freedom to some at the expense to more who never had a chance. This is how American culture remains steeped in racism and a system of white supremacy. As long as anyone says to themselves or others, "I don't want [insert group here] to have what I have because I have earned it and they haven't," is supporting a larger system of oppression and in complicity in that oppression.

Current President approval rating

As a liberal, I get asked a lot about what I think about the President of the United States current work and approval ratings. I will answer now as I would from a stage with my truth that will surprise some and get me kicked out of some of my liberal pot luck meetings. I believe "they" are doing the best they can with what they've got. This includes George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Sarah Palin, John McCain, and Barack Obama. I don't think anyone that is charged with leading the mess that is the United States on a domestic and global platform has a ridiculous job to do and does it while

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being microscopically critiqued by a capitalistic fueled media system. No one would be able to respond to everything perfectly, swiftly, and in the most informed manner. I will never run for President as I am too big of a coward to take that task head on. I have great respect for politicians that yearn to serve their constituencies and learn with integrity and compassion. Side note, I have similar respect for those that volunteer to serve in the military. To choose this line of service to one's country is to take a risk that some, including myself, are not willing to take. It is with appreciation and respect that I question authority, my political representatives, and those charged with defending and colonizing in the name of patriotism or democracy.

Affirmative Action

No, I do not feel that Affirmative Action allows for admission or other such standards to discriminate against whites to advantage non-whites that are less qualified or able. The largest benefactor of Affirmative Action has been white women not women or men of color. By naming and acknowledging that a system is uneven and that there are groups of people being marginalized by the very system, one has two options, 1) create a new system or 2) create a sub system to assist with the leveling off of inequities for those groups. Anyone has the ability to perform at any given level to meet any given standard and that performance is rated through biased lenses that create and support discrimination resulting in many receiving benefits that have not been earned or for which they qualify as well as closing doors of opportunity to many that do meet if not surpass such qualifications. Affirmative Action is a flawed system and we should be able to develop a new system that is even better, but in the meantime, I am willing to fight for Affirmative Action and its attempts to provide equal access to employment, education, housing, and the like. For the record, I don't believe reverse racism can exist. Racism is based on the taking away of power at minimum and the acceptance of inherited or unearned power from others based on socially constructed determinations and characteristics. It is not possible, within this system, for a member of a

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subordinated group to take the power away from the dominant group. There is the possibility, if multiple identities are taken into consideration, for a person with one subordinated identity and another dominant identity to operate from a place of power in that place of dominance, but it will not supplant power in place of that subordinated identity.

How do I make others care?

You can't. It doesn't matter how funny or clever or smart or cute I am, I have learned that I can't make people care or join forces with me or even get energized. I can't make this happen. I can try to energize and mobilize myself and role model for others, but ultimately, the only thing I can control is myself and that is a full time job. What is really cool about making change, is that I have learned that I can attempt to make change in my own life and can make progress in my own life without needing others, financial resources, or theme parties. All I need is just me, my understanding of how I show up, and at least 10% of my attention to make real change in my own behaviors, emotions, and judgments. I just have to make myself care.

Isn't it all just the white straight guy's fault? What can I do? He has the power. What does a male feminist look like?

Ah yes, the poor white straight guy. Usually the questioner here assumes straight (not to mention American, English speaking, able bodied, Christian/Protestant, etc.) but I add it here for emphasis. As a white woman, I understand the knee jerk reaction to point my finger to white men. What is exciting about how oppression works is that if I can focus on men being at fault, then I don't have to acknowledge my complicity as a white person. Oppression is and isn't a blame worthy element of our lives. Most white men (insert other dominant identities here) didn't chose to be any of these identities, they were and are inherited and socially constructed realities. Sure these privileges come with a serious dose of responsibility as do my dominant identities and the privilege benefits that come along with them. It is interesting to me as campuses increase the number of Women's Studies programs and courses that the term "feminist" still conjures up a

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white woman if not a white radical lesbian. How much progress are we making against patriarchy if a male feminist can't ever be pictured? When I get asked about a "man feminist" I respond by asking, "What does a woman dentist look like." Dentists still are male in our collective memory. Instead of fighting for sex or gender equality from our (as women) need to work from our dominant identities (be it cisgendered, or other categories entirely).

What is the difference between an ally and an advocate? Diversity and Social Justice?

I get asked a lot of questions about semantics, and really I want to ask what the person is avoiding taking in by questioning language and words. Words are both tools of oppression and of freedom. Words are how we collectively describe, understand, argue, debate, comfort, and unite as groups. With that being said, there is also a reality of multiple meanings and uses of similar words and then the on going redefining, reclaiming, and creating of words to clarify a group's message. With this all stated... I use the word ally and advocate mostly interchangeably and at times using ally to describe someone outside of the community and advocate inside of the community. Advocate can also be used when being an ally isn't a word that demonstrates the level of tangible action vs. empathy or emotional support that can be used to define ally. Diversity, to me, is about experiencing difference while not spending too much time outside of one's comfort zone (movies with subtitles, new foods or music or articles of clothing, tourism, etc). Social Justice is about focusing of getting uncomfortable and taking the privileges from one's dominant identities to actively work towards equity within communities of privilege. Social Justice work is never done and rarely makes tangible progress that can be measured or reach resolution.

How do I reconcile faith with sexuality?

Personally, I don't. I recognize that there are incongruent pieces of my life that don't fit together and instead of forcing either side to fit the other, I relish in the moment where they rub against one another resulting in

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confusion, discomfort, and newness. I believe in multiple loves, family with many variables, sexual diversity, wide varieties of gender expressions, and a never ending line of things I haven't even thought of yet. I believe that a loud few, or as the political refer to as the "fringe", give all groups that they thread their base from an unrealistic definition and popular representations. I know a lot of healthy families and relationships grounded in faith and many that aren't. I know several dysfunctional families and abusive relationships that use their faith to create violence or lean on their faith to survive. I also have the good fortune of being friends lucky enough to foster relationships with many people some of whom consider themselves persons of faith and others not. To the great dissatisfaction for many, I am agnostic on any bottom line in this way of thinking, in that I believe faith, sexuality, and expression of love is an ever changing, gloriously confusing and complicated journey that we all embark on backwards and blindly being lead by our fears, hopes, best intentions, and desires. Like politicians, I believe we are all doing the best we can with what we got.

Why do I spend so much time talking about history? Slavery is over.

This is a simple answer in that it is all about context. Sometimes we pull from our history to explain and justify our current actions and inform our pending decisions. The memory of history is drawn upon out of convenience and retrofitted to a current need. Much like statistics, historical facts and events can be rewritten to demonstrate what is needed. History is only remembered, retold, and re-explored through a biased lens. There is nothing from history that can even be told in its fullest more accurate form much like our present is full of many perspectives. We must pull from these re-writings to learn from our collective past, to inform our future decisions. I think it is important to mention that history is never over as the full story is never truly known. Moreover, we repeat our patterns of behavior so we just keep doing the same things over and over again that benefit some and lead to real pain for others. The link to these patterns is a sense of responsibility that we all have to chose better, act better, be better people. Lastly, slavery isn't over. There are more people enslaved now than

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ever before in recorded history. Until every person is free to chose a place of employment (or not), be paid a living wage, and have the ability to aspire to grow, develop, and innovate for themselves the life in which they wish to live – slavery will persist to be a reality in many lives. Until each person who is disconnected from this reality realizes the amount of underpaid (if paid at all) labor that goes into creating what other’s use once and toss aside – slavery is real and it is our responsibility to acknowledge the historical responsibility that is the foundation of our collective standard of living.

Nature vs. Nurture?

Who cares? I mean really! By identifying the exact genome or DNA strand that makes us funny, someone would try to synthetically manufacture it for individual use while yet another person may start an initiative to have this element removed to prevent frivolity. Then there would be a movement for those who are funny naturally as compared to those that learn and study or become funny due to their surroundings and life experiences. What matters to me is that people and persons, even myself, are complicated mixtures of known and unknown chemicals, hormones, and characteristics. The choice that people should respect isn’t how one is to be, but the choice to be that true person regardless of the social implications regarding that way of being. If we are looking for genomes or socialization patterns to point our fingers at a reason, let’s focus on where hatred, bias, judgment, and greed come from so that these birth defects can be rectified.

I’m not a racist... I have a black friend or I’m not a skin head or I don’t got to KKK rallies.

I believe that some of these thoughts or feelings are true and that in itself is valid. I also know that the feeling here is supported by oppression itself. Let me explain. If out of 100% of white people let’s say 10% of white people go to KKK meetings, burn crosses, publically use the “n” word, etc., is the socially accepted persona of a racist person then 90% of the population isn’t racist. The problem isn’t that clearly defined though.

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See, I also know white people who have actively worked and continue to do so to work against racism, white supremacy, etc. These folks, me included, recognize that there is racism in our/my thoughts, actions, inactions, and feelings. So, consciously we work to dismantle these truths and work towards racial equity if not larger broader social justice. So let's say that is 10% of the white population. That leaves an unaccounted for 80% of white people. This 80% may have non-white friends, live a very different life than a skin head, nor attend KKK rallies, and (this is a very important and) not realize their individual responsibility and complicity in white supremacy by the vary nature of being white. Not knowing doesn't remove responsibility. I believe all white people are racist and that the definition of racist needs to be more broadly exposed than just the extremities of our lived experience in an unjust world. By virtue of having a black friend, one admits to seeing color, and that this color holds a meaning in society. This meaning changes over time, in different contexts, and even by individual interaction. This in itself is racism.

Bonus Questions!

Do I like the south more than the north?

The very fact that I get asked this question (mostly by people from the south and in southern spaces) tells me that the Civil War is still being fought and we haven't come that far. I live and breathe big Texas skies, bar-b-q from roadside pits, kudzu, and chess pie. I have never felt at home anywhere like I do when I am walking through the streets of Manhattan. I think I am an eclectic mix of both, I like to slow down enough to really listen and watch lightening bugs and I also like the hectic fast paced anonymity of urban environments where anything can express its self at any given time without an eyebrow being raised. I much prefer hate and bias to be spoken to my face and not after I have left as well. Perhaps I have the privilege of traveling and having friends all over the country so I can drive through kudzu, pick up deviled eggs, and then meet up a fancy tapas bars for dinner. Oh, wait, that is my life.

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Who do I currently have a crush on?

This is an interesting question in that to me a crush, in my experience, is usually secretive and unsuccessful. So I have a not so secret crush on Rachel Maddow, I mean who doesn't and it certainly isn't ever going to develop into anything, but a girl can want. My therapist even says that wanting something and not getting it is healthy. I have a deeply passionate crush on Peanut Butter M&Ms as well, but that does happen and usually in secret. I often have an open pack in my pocket for emergency fixes.

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