

Choice Words

Important Survey for Trans Folks!

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The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force recently announced a national survey on discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people.

I've been excited about this survey since Jaime Grant, director of the Task Force Policy Institute, told me about it during Choice USA's first annual Membership Conference. Jaime asked me then to urge everyone I know in the transgender and gender non-conforming community to take this survey when it came out, and I'm doing just that. The survey is so important - results can be used to direct organizing and policy agendas that reflect the needs and desires of our community, but only if as many of us as possible participate.

As Miriam Pérez points out in *Feministing*, we currently lack data about LGBT people on the national level. Why? Because federal surveys refuse to include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity. Without data, we have no way of knowing what the disparities are and no way of asking for funding to address them. Huge problem.

The press release announcing the survey mentions (and I've discussed this topic a bit on this blog) that this has been a particularly horrible year for transgender and gender non-conforming folks as the targets of violence:

To date, in 2008, several young gender non-conforming people of color have been murdered, including California junior high school student Lawrence King, who was shot in public during the school day. King's murder, and the murders of Simmie Williams in South Carolina and Angie Zapata in Greeley, Colo., come in a year in which we are still working to include transgender provisions in a federal bill to protect lesbian, gay and bisexual workers from discrimination in employment.

Hate crimes against transgender people suggest multiple points of vulnerability, which can compound each other: discrimination in employment may lead to unstable housing situations that in turn can leave transgender people at the mercy of public programs and public officials who may not respond respectfully or appropriately to them. These stressors add burdens in a healthcare system that is often unprepared for transgender people's needs. The list goes on. "We know that transgender people face discrimination on multiple fronts," said Mara Keisling, executive director of NCTE. "This data will help us sort out the combination of forces that leave transgender people vulnerable to unemployment, homelessness and violence."

Of interest to readers of this blog, the survey touches somewhat on reproductive health and rights issues, including genital surgery and adoption. However, I do think a more comprehensive reproductive justice analysis could have led to more questions about the reproductive health and rights needs and desires of transgender and gender non-conforming folks. The survey does a great job addressing a variety of forms of discrimination. Still, in the future I'd love to see a focus not just on the hatred we as a community face, but also on what we want.

Clearly, the results of this survey will be a vital tool in fighting discrimination. If you are transgender or gender non-conforming, please take the survey. And tell your friends!