



Remembrance into Action: Honoring Trans Women of Color

By Amanda Morgan
November 22, 2008

Transgender Day of Remembrance feels especially sad this year, with Duanna Johnson and Latiesha Green, two black trans women, murdered within a week of each other and another trans woman of color I met just a few weeks ago dead from as yet undisclosed causes. I am often made aware of the vulnerability of our bodies when we are transgender or gender non-conforming and of color, but on this day it feels especially pertinent.

I am lucky -- I have made it through my life thus far having survived attacks that were not fatal or permanently disabling and having only received intimidation or threats based on my gender identity/sexual orientation. But many are not so lucky, 16 trans people have been murdered thus far this year and out of those 16, 11 are identified as people of color; the other six have not been publicly identified as belonging to any racial group. Ariel Herrera of Amnesty International has noted, "The most vulnerable are transgendered individuals of color. They are the most stigmatized in the community and often targeted by police."

Despite this seemingly common knowledge, we are extremely lacking in terms of any real statistical analysis when it comes to the widespread discrimination and violence against trans people in this country. And without numbers, advocating for systemic change and better policies and laws to protect trans folks becomes difficult. It's hard to get people outside the community to pay attention to our voices when our stories remain, from their perspective, merely anecdotal.

This is what motivated the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality to partner in launching a survey on the discrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming people. The survey opened in September, shortly before I began my fellowship at the Task Force. When the Policy Institute staff met to discuss what our roles would be, I already knew what I wanted to do. I volunteered to help administer the survey to people in the community without Internet access and to take the lead on people of color outreach in the New York metropolitan area.

The process of proctoring these surveys has been emotional, as I knew it would be. I have met and spoken to trans folks of color who are survivors of violent attacks, harassment and police intimidation, including false charges.

Every week, I hear the voices and stories of a community with few places to turn. Where do you go when someone in your neighborhood is leaving death threats on your door and you feel that the police can't be counted on to value, let alone protect, your life?

Like I said, I am lucky. When I was pulled over by a police officer who read me as male, all I had to put up with was a long series of condescending "young man's," as the officer handled me like the ignorant young black male he believed me to be, despite the information on my license. I still wonder how much worse that night could have been if he discovered my gender did not match up in the way he thought it should.

In the midst of so much, it is important to take time to grieve over those we have lost as well as for the rights we are repeatedly denied. But as often as I am reminded of how much we have lost and how much further we still have to go, I am also reminded of the hard work of healing being done by the wonderful trans folks that have invited me to their drop-in centers and support groups.

I am reminded of the bravery of each trans and gender con-forming person pursuing the richness of a self-actualized life as opposed to one of self-denial. I think of these things and I am encouraged and I only pause for a second because there is too much to do.

If only there was some way to get this survey to every trans or gender nonconforming person in the country so not a single story would ever be lost again. Knowing this is not possible, I am doing everything I can to get the word out to transgender and gender nonconforming folks of color, because right now, in terms of survey results, our voices are the softest.

And yet, the news of murders within our community, and the subsequent media misrepresentation and degradation of said murder victims, maintains a near omnipresent hum. My wish for this year is that we don't let the headlines have the last word.

The national survey on trans discrimination can be completed online at <https://online.survey.psu.edu/endtransdiscrim>.

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