

Stop pushing transgender and gender non-conforming people to the back of the #MeToo Movement

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are at a statistically higher risk than women for sexual violence, and yet they are often disregarded in movements aimed at stopping sexual violence.

By Olivia Augustine

Sexual violence is widely regarded as one of the biggest women's issues on college campuses, and though women are major targets of sexual violence, it seems that the women's issue is not solely a women's issue. Statistics across several studies and surveys, coupled with personal accounts of people who are transgender and gender non-conforming, illustrate how sexual violence has a reach further than many might imagine.

Students at the University of Iowa said that they believed they were less aware of sexual violence in this community due to its lack of presence on social media and in news reporting, but the community is actually screaming to be heard.

Defining LGBTQ Terminology

The definitions surrounding the LGBTQ community can become hazy depending on how an individual identifies and defines what identity means to them. For the purposes of this piece, the term "TGNC" will be used to refer to transgender and gender non-conforming people. This piece will follow definitions set by the [Human Rights Campaign's Glossary of Terms](#).

This defines transgender as, "An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth." It should also be noted that this has no implication regarding a person's sexual orientation.

Non-binary is defined as an adjective to describe someone who may identify as neither a man or a woman, as both, or anywhere in between. As per the HRC's Glossary, "While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid."

Lastly, gender non-conforming is defined as, "A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category." Much like non-binary, some gender non-conforming people may identify as transgender while others do not.

TGNC Students Speak Out

In spring of last year, students from the University of Iowa completed the [Speak Out Iowa 2021 Survey](#), and the results are telling in the discussion of TGNC experiences on the Iowa campus.

When reviewing these percentages, it should be noted that significantly less TGNC people than men and women participated in the survey. 2774 participants identified as cisgender women, 1311 identified as cisgender men, and 148 fell under the TGNC umbrella. 35 chose “prefer not to answer” or did not answer.

TGNC students reported the highest rates of rape and attempted rape, with 17.7% reporting rape and 14.7% reporting attempted rape. This compares to women at 12.4% reporting rape and 11% reporting attempted rape. Women still reported significantly higher than men, with 4.1% reporting rape and 2.4% reporting attempted rape.

Reports of technology-facilitated harassment and stalking were also higher for TGNC students than for male and female students.

TGNC students reported significantly higher rates of [sexual acquiescence](#) – defined as a person’s submission to engage in a sexual act without expressing a verbal agreement to participate – than both men and women in all four categories provided by the survey. These were manual stimulation, oral sex, vaginal sex and anal sex.

The Bathroom Argument

Statistics from the *Speak Out Iowa* Survey illustrate that TGNC people are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence than perpetrators, but many use the fear of transgender women committing acts of sexual violence as an argument to keep them out of public bathrooms aligning with their gender identity.

According to [a timeline of the bathroom debate created by Vox](#), the argument began in Houston, Texas after the city council passed the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) in 2014, which was meant to expand discrimination laws to include the LGBTQ community. However, conservative politicians who were upset by this change in policy were able to add a referendum on HERO to the November 2015 ballot.

Though the referendum at first seemed to have little chance of succeeding, a [survey](#) in the weeks preceding the election showed that the vote would be closer than anticipated.

The conservative argument to trigger the downfall of HERO? The now all-to-common myth that men would disguise themselves as trans women to enter the women’s bathroom, where they would sexually assault women. This scare tactic proved successful when voters rejected HERO.

Later on, when Charlotte, North Carolina aimed to pass a law banning discrimination against LGBTQ people in public places, republicans returned the bathroom argument. In March of 2016, legislation was put into place that denied trans people the right to use bathrooms and locker rooms corresponding with their gender identity in schools and public buildings.

Just one example of the argument being disproved occurred in 2019, interestingly enough in Raleigh, another North Carolina city. [Newsweek](#) reported that two women were charged with sexually assaulting a transgender woman in a bar bathroom.

Both verbal and physical assault ensued, beginning with jokes about the victim's genitalia and advancing into intense unwanted touching. One perpetrator went as far as to pull up the victim's shirt and push her against the wall. This harassment continued back out into the bar, where witnesses said that "they thought that the women were clearly targeting the victim because she was transgender."

Transgender women are constantly under a watchful eye in public areas such as bathrooms and locker rooms because of conservative propaganda that they are bathroom predators with an agenda. However, both statistics and real-world applications display that if anyone should be concerned in entering these public spaces, it is transgender women.

To further diffuse the idea that trans people are sexual predators, 58.4% of TGNC Iowa students who took the *Speak Out Iowa* 2021 Survey said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I always verbally ask for consent before I initiate a sexual encounter," which is significantly more people than both men at 39.5% and women at 47.4%.

Fearing Authority

[Second Rape](#) is a term used to describe negative feedback/backlash a victim may face from friends, family or authority after disclosing their experience regarding sexual misconduct, and it is the reason many TGNC people do not come forward.

Authority figures, such as police, doctors and teachers, have a high influence on how and if TGNC people come forward. They fear that these people in power may belittle their experience, misgender them, disbelieve them, or in some instances sexually assault or harass them a second time.

The [NSVRC](#) reported that 57% of transgender and non-binary people are uncomfortable going to the police, and on top of that, "58% who interacted with law enforcement in the past year experienced mistreatment, such as verbal harassment, repeated misgendering, physical assault, or sexual assault."

"[Trans Women's Responses to Sexual Violence: Vigilance, Resilience, and Need for Support](#)," an in-depth study following the experiences of trans women of color, was published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. The article discusses the negative experiences of many trans women after reporting instances of sexual violence to the police, including feelings of judgment, blame, and a lack of acknowledgement from others.

For privacy purposes, last names were redacted from this piece, but a woman named Jenny reported police telling her, "Don't dress like a faggot and then you wouldn't have copped it," when she was in the process of reporting her rape.

Additionally, a trans woman named Selvi said that she felt mocked and ridiculed throughout her experience with the police, and that the incident was not only transphobic, but homophobic.

Other women reported inadequate police responses, including poor formal response in collecting DNA samples and providing rape kits. Many of these women believed that this response was a direct result of being trans women of color, and that white cisgender women would have had a much different response.

Healthcare settings, which are often regarded as, if not expected to be, a place of safety, can be just as threatening as the police station.

The [Office for Victims of Crime](#) said on their website that, “According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 28 percent of transgender individuals reported being harassed in medical settings, 19 percent reported being refused care outright, 2 percent reported being physically attacked in a doctor's office, 50 percent indicated they had to teach their medical providers about transgender care, and 1 in 10 reported that they had been sexually assaulted in at least one health care setting.”

The Office for Victims of Crime cited one victim who told [FORGE](#) that they had been assaulted by a female doctor while in the emergency room. They assume the doctor had been angered by their outward appearance – that of which did not match the traditional gender norms of the gender listed on their hospital bracelet – and was thus triggered.

The *Speak Out Iowa* 2021 Survey also yields results supporting a TGNC fear of people in positions of power. 54.4% of TGNC students reported experiencing sexist gender harassment by faculty and staff and 25.7% reporting crude gender harassment by faculty and staff. Survey results also showed a low confidence by TGNC students in the university to fairly handle reports of sexual misconduct.

The Exclusivity of the #MeToo Movement

[In 2017](#), Actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” This sent the #MeToo movement into what is arguably the most successful viral social movement to combat sexual violence.

What less people know is that the term “Me Too” was coined almost 10 years earlier by Tarana Burke as a phrase to show solidarity with women and girls of color who are survivors of sexual assault.

Though the #MeToo movement did wonders to push believing women to the front of peoples’ minds, it only did that for white, privileged women. It entirely left out the group it was originally intended for in 2006 – black girls and women. People of color are not singly excluded from the support of #MeToo, TGNC people are also often disregarded in this sense.

Students that participated in a focus group at Iowa reported that they feel they are unable to show as much support for TGNC people in regards to sexual violence because it isn’t talked about enough on social media or in news coverage.

“If we don't know what's happening to them, we can't advocate for them, it's not reported on. Like with women, we see all these women coming out with allegations of sexual assault. So therefore, we see it's such a prevalent issue,” said Emily, an Iowa senior. “But I have personally

not seen as many [public allegations] for the transgender and LGBTQ+ community, so I don't know that it's like a prevalent issue.”

An article written by Meredith Talusan for *them*, an online magazine created to amplify queer voices, contradicts the beliefs of the focus group. The article said that TGNC people are putting themselves out there as much as they can, and they're getting no response.

Jari Jones told *them*, regarding cisgender women at the front of the #MeToo movement, “I think there are cis, able-bodied white women who ... [the work] they're doing I think is amazing, but there are femmes and black trans women out there who are doing it to survive and to live, and some of them are screaming ‘me too’ from the ground that they've just been beaten up on,” she said. “Some of them are screaming ‘me too’ from the hospital that they’re laying in. And some of them can't scream because they’re dead.”

Many TGNC people do attempt to speak out on their experiences on social media. But with movements like #MeToo, that is so focused on a singular group of people, much of the noise is filtered out.

“We are not powerful enough, not important enough, not abundant enough, to spark widespread or viral outrage when our experiences of violence are told or reported on, regardless of how much worse they are compared to famous cis white women,” wrote Talusan. It’s in this way that cis women’s empowerment through #MeToo stands to leave trans and GNC people even more marginalized.”

When regarding TGNC voices dealing with sexual violence, it is not something an individual should wait for to come across their feed. It is topics of these kinds that take dedication and education to make a change.

References

Acquiescence definition. Law Insider. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/acquiescence#:~:text=Acquiescence%20means%20a%20person%27s,express%20physical%20or%20verbal%20objection>

Allen, K. (n.d.). *Transgender woman's murder underscores problem of partner violence plaguing community, advocates say*. ABC News. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://abcnews.go.com/US/transgender-womans-murder-underscores-problem-partner-violence-plaguing/story?id=65203137>

Augustine, O., & Sam. (2022, August 26). *Hawkeye on the Street*. personal.

Augustine, O., Zimmer, E., Winkel, T., & Mann, M. (2022, November 11). *Focus Group*. personal.

Chicago Tribune. (2021, February 4). *#MeToo: A timeline of events*. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html>

FORGE. (2022, March 1). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://forge-forward.org/>

Georgiou, A. (2019, January 9). *Police: Two women sexually assaulted transgender person*. Newsweek. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.newsweek.com/sexual-assault-transgender-lgbtq-raleigh-north-carolina-milk-bar-1284744>

Gyamrah, A. O., Baguso, G., Santiago-Rodriguez, E., Sa'id, A., Arayasirikul, S., Lin, J., Turner, C. M., Taylor, K. D., McFarland, W., Wilson, E. C., & Wesson, P. (2021). Experiences and factors associated with transphobic hate crimes among transgender women in the San Francisco Bay Area: Comparisons across race. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11107-x>

Hawkey, A. J., Ussher, J. M., Liamputtong, P., Marjadi, B., Sekar, J. A., Perz, J., Ryan, S., Schmied, V., Brook, E., & Dune, T. (2021). Trans women's responses to sexual violence: Vigilance, resilience, and need for support. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 50(7), 3201–3222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-01965-2>

HRC Foundation. (n.d.). *Glossary of terms*. Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms?utm_medium=AD&utm_source=GS&utm_content=620437481267&utm_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm_term=lgbtq+meaning&gclid=CjwKCAiAheacBhB8EiwAItVO216KeLG4cHDdQwdoWd-ZuvYJtH6dYrk7Qc8agMA778SpuSdjRGA4lxoCM90QA_vD_BwE

HRC Foundation. (n.d.). *Sexual assault and the LGBTQ community*. Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community>

KPRC Click2Houston. (2015, October 16). *Poll results: Will houston equal rights ordinance pass?* KPRC. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.click2houston.com/news/2015/10/16/poll-results-will-houston-equal-rights-ordinance-pass/>

Lopez, G. (2016, May 5). *Anti-transgender bathroom hysteria, explained*. Vox. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/5/11592908/transgender-bathroom-laws-rights>

Martin-Storey, A., Paquette, G., Bergeron, M., Dion, J., Daigneault, I., Hébert, M., & Ricci, S. (2018). Sexual violence on campus: Differences across gender and sexual minority status. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(6), 701–707. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.12.013>

McBride, S. (2017, October 20). *Why I'm not staying silent about being a trans woman who was sexually assaulted*. BuzzFeed. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.buzzfeed.com/sarahemcbride/why-its-so-hard-for-trans-women-to-talk-about-sexual-assault>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (n.d.). *Sexual violence & transgender/non-binary communities*. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/Transgender_infographic_508_0.pdf

Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). (n.d.). *The numbers*. Sexual Assault: The Numbers | Responding to Transgender Victims of Sexual Assault. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/forge/sexual_numbers.html

Steinmetz, K. (2016, May 2). *Transgender Bathroom: Advocates say 'predator' is myth*. Time. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://time.com/4314896/transgender-bathroom-bill-male-predators-argument/>

Stith, M. (n.d.). *Transgender People & Sexual Violence*. NWA Center for Sexual Assault. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.nwasexualassault.org/transgender-people-sexual-violence>

Stotzer, R. L. (2009). Violence against transgender people: A review of united states data. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14(3), 170–179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.01.006>

Talusan, M. (2018, March 2). Trans Women and Femmes Are Shouting #MeToo — But Are You Listening? *Them*.

Transgender people over four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime. Williams Institute. (2021, March 31). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/ncvs-trans-press-release/>

The University of Iowa. (n.d.). *Speak Out Iowa 2021 Survey*. Speak Out Iowa: Campus Climate Survey. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://speakout.uiowa.edu/>

Violence against trans and non-binary people. VAWnet.org. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://vawnet.org/sc/serving-trans-and-non-binary-survivors-domestic-and-sexual-violence/violence-against-trans-and>

What is Second Rape. IGI Global. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/second-rape/10831>