

# AN ABUNDANT QUEER & TRANS FUTURE: FREE FROM HETEROSEXISM & TRANSPHOBIA

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## What's Left to Prove?

It is a painful exercise to answer the questions “how do heterosexism and transphobia manifest,” and “which laws and systems perpetuate bigotry against queer and trans people.” It is painful because we, the authors of this section of the report, are queer and trans people who, like queer and trans people across the country and the world, are continually forced to justify not only our existence, but also to prove that we face structural and interpersonal bigotry. The discrimination of queer and trans people is a recent, post-colonial phenomenon. In many indigenous societies in the past, trans people were seen as pillars to society and as spiritual beings, but due to the rigid nature of the gender binary and how this has been forced on the world in a non consensual manner, this has subsequently demonized and criminalized queer and trans people.

*“The first one is a stereotype that trans people and gay people at large are pedophiles . . . which is a way to ostracize and defend violence or justify being violent towards trans and queer people. . . . The other stereotype is that trans folks, specifically trans women, are demonic. There is symbology throughout many modern day cultures that ties the physical connection of having boobs and a dick to the devil. The devil is often depicted as having boobs and a dick symbolically, which creates a large culture of seeing those bodies as wrong, demonic and unnatural which ties into the whole religion thing . . . however, in many indigenous cultures, pre-colonial cultures, trans people were actually the pillars of the society . . .” (Participant 137, Conversation Group Participant)*

Millions of authors have written billions of pages and trillions of lines on the impacts of structural and interpersonal bigotry on queer and trans people. And trillions more lines on how to remedy this bigotry and create an abundant and liberatory future for our communities.

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Instead of rehashing these lines and poorly capturing the thoughts of more brilliant minds than ours in the limited space we have here, we have decided to provide a brief overview of the areas of structural and interpersonal bigotry that queer and trans people face, and then move into freedom dreaming.

The question we seek to answer, rather, is what does an abundant queer and trans future look like? One that is free from bigotry, heterosexism, and transphobia and transcends beyond the current systems that are built on these constructs?

Our answers for a better world will likely come from investing in responses like these, versus focusing on the already apparent issues that have plagued our communities for centuries, only to be incrementally less worse each year that comes. We want a world where queer and transgender people are granted dignity, respect and autonomy in society, reflected through policy and systems that dictate our ability to live. But further, we want a new society. A society free from the violent history that contextualizes our present and that has allowed for our suffering. A world where queer and trans people do not need to beg or fight with those in power to get crumbs and still struggling for survival. We will live in abundance.

*“...like Garden of Eden without bars...” (Participant 139, Conversation Group Participant)*

## Overview of Issues:

### 1. Day-to-day violence in all aspects of society

We foresee a world where those who are visibly and non-visibly queer and trans navigate the world without being demonized, fetishized, criminalized or murdered. Queer and trans people experience discrimination in multiple aspects of society as a result of sociocultural factors that ‘other’ queer and trans people and a lack of comprehensive policy that protects our lives and prohibits our mistreatment. Queer and trans people deserve to be treated fairly socially, institutionally, and systemically. For too long we have been disenfranchised by a system that demeans our existence. This lack of respect for our identities has led to the day-to-day violence we experience in public space, in work settings, in healthcare, in school, in sites of religion, and in all aspects of society generally.

### 2. Overtly bigoted laws being passed to deprive access to health care and education

In 2021, hundreds of state and federal bills were introduced attacking health and justice for LGBT people.<sup>4</sup> Arkansas passed a law restricting access to life-saving gender affirming care for trans youth, and ten states passed laws restricting trans youths’ participation in school sports.<sup>5</sup> State-endorsed and interpersonal discrimination lead to poorer health for LGBT people.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>“Legislative Tracker: Anti-Transgender Legislation,” *Freedom for All Americans*, accessed March 27, 2022, <https://freedomforallamericans.org/legislative-tracker/anti-transgender-legislation/>.

<sup>5</sup>“Arkansas’ Equality Profile,” *Freedom for All Americans*, accessed March 27, 2022, [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality\\_maps/profile\\_state/AR](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/AR); “Bans on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports,” *Freedom for All Americans*, accessed March 27, 2022, [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/sports\\_participation\\_bans](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/sports_participation_bans).

<sup>6</sup>Shabab Ahmed Mirza and Caitlin Rooney, “Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ People From Accessing Health Care,” *Center for American Promise*, Jan. 18, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/discrimination-prevents-lgbtq-people-accessing-health-care/>.

*Health Insurance policies and the laws around who gets access to surgery . . . whether or not a trans person needs to get surgery is left up to insurance companies and the policies that are directly linked . . . I know multiple trans people who were denied access to the surgeries that they needed for their transition because they were deemed to be unnecessary or they were deemed to be cosmetic” (Participant 137, Conversation Group Participant)*

### **3. Positive laws that DON’T explicitly include trans / queer people, even if they do impact those communities; AND lack of enforcement / implementation for inclusive laws**

Over the years, many states have passed “good” laws and policies, but not enough has been done to fully put a halt to the discrimination that queer and trans people face on a regular basis. Many places have implemented non-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which has been clarified to include gender identity as well. But despite what is written into legislation, there is still a culture that allows for the discrimination and violence to occur. More needs to be done to prevent discrimination against queer and trans people, and this needs to be done outside of the walls of government that continuously ignore the violence queer and trans people experience. In addition, fights for equity must be linked and cannot happen in silos. For example, abortion narratives continue to neglect the reality that queer and trans people also get pregnant and need to access abortion care<sup>7</sup> and Congress has failed again to pass the Equality Act—the law that would enshrine federal nondiscrimination protections on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity. Maybe these laws are not the solution, and we must think beyond these systems to truly create a world free from bigotry.

*“It’s just so difficult because another policy criminalizes another group of people . . . but like we’re not trying to send people to jail . . .” (Participant 133, Conversation Group Participant)*

Anecdotal, personal, and some empirical<sup>8</sup> evidence tell us that, while legal protections for queer and trans people are increasing, implementation and enforcement of those laws lags behind. And when enforcement relies on carceral frameworks,<sup>9</sup> those laws are wielded against Black people and other people of color, including queer and trans people of color.<sup>10</sup>

*“I was actually just reading about the housing discrimination laws. Because they’re not passed in all states and even the way that states interpret those laws still does not guarantee that someone will [not] be discriminated against based on their gender sexuality and I think what we’re saying is a lot of these laws are blanket*

<sup>7</sup>Alice Miranda Ollstein, Josh Gerstein and Alex Thompson, “Texas ban spotlights Democrats’ generational divide on abortion and trans issues,” *POLITICO*, Sept. 10, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/10/texas-democrats-abortion-trans-issues-511078>; Olivia McCargar et al., “POV: Who Is Forgotten in Our Discussion of Abortion?” *BU Today*, Sept. 11, 2021, <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/pov-nonbinary-people-and-trans-men-need-abortion-care-too/>; Win Reynolds, “Texas abortion ban will likely ‘disproportionately impact trans and marginalized people,’” *Northwestern Now*, Sept. 15, 2021, <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2021/september/texas-abortion-trans-marginalized-people/>; Julie Moreau, “Bills restricting abortion rights, trans rights are ‘inextricably linked,’ advocates say,” *NBC News*, Sept. 15, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/bills-restricting-abortion-rights-trans-rights-are-inextricably-linked-rcna2025>.

<sup>8</sup>Rodrick A. Colvin, “The Rise of Transgender-Inclusive Laws: How Well Are Municipalities Implementing Supportive Nondiscrimination Public Employment Policies?” *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 27, no. 4 (Dec. 1 2007): 351, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bu.edu/10.1177/1077800407301777>.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Bronski, Ann Pellegrini, and Michael Amico, “Hate Crime Laws Don’t Prevent Violence Against LGBT People,” *The Nation*, Oct. 2, 2013, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/hate-crime-laws-dont-prevent-violence-against-lgbt-people/>.

<sup>10</sup>See “Policy Spotlight: Hate Crime Laws,” *Movement Advancement Project* (July 2021): 26, <https://www.lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/2021-report-hate-crimes>.

*solutions. Like oh do not discriminate but people are still discriminated against every day and it doesn't guarantee anyone safety or security which just leads to an endless cycle of violence and harm...so yes, burn it all down" (Participant 132, Conversation Group Participant)*

Additionally, because of the lack of enforcement of these laws, many people do not know that they legally have rights that protect them from discrimination, many times rendering these laws obsolete. For example, while we now have a federal right of action under Title VII if we face employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, most Americans are unaware of the federal laws that protect queer and trans people from discrimination.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Practices of erasure and cultural incompetence

Queer and trans stories are erased from history,<sup>12</sup> pushed out of the dominant narratives,<sup>13</sup> and misunderstood as Western inventions. This erasure and a history lead to pervasive cultural incompetence,<sup>14</sup> compounded by racism, fat-phobia, ableism, colorism, misogyny, etc.

*"There is this type of heteronormative idea that you are queer or you are trans because something bad happened to you, not because I realized something beautiful within myself" (Participant 135, Conversation Group Participant)*

#### 5. Lack of support for trans providers, trans leaders, trans communities

Many of the people doing the work to support queer and trans people, are queer and trans people themselves. For years, community members have housed their own, fed their own, and provided resources when society refused to acknowledge their existence. Governments and large institutions like health care providers continue to provide paltry investment for trans leadership and communities,<sup>15</sup> while Black trans people continue to lead the modern civil rights movement.<sup>16</sup>

*"The resistance I got within a system that is supposed to be saving [my] life . . . they're inconsiderate of what I'm expressing . . . it is blatant disregard for my identity . . . I shouldn't feel horrible coming from the doctor, I shouldn't feel horrible speaking to a healthcare professional." (Conversation Group Participant)*

This is why a world must be created that addresses these core issues, and functions differently than what has been failing queer and trans people.

<sup>11</sup>Maria Caspani, "Americans' perception of LGBTQ rights under federal law largely incorrect," *Reuters*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-stonewall-equality/americans-perception-of-lgbtq-rights-under-federal-law-largely-incorrect-reuters-ipsos-idUSKCNITC120>.

<sup>12</sup>Manuela I. Picq and Josi Tikuna, "Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation," in *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*, eds. Manuela Picq and Caroline Cottet (E-International Relations Publishing, 2019), 57-71, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/08/20/indigenous-sexualities-resisting-conquest-and-translation/>.

<sup>13</sup>Che Gossett, "Žižek's Trans/gender Trouble," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Sept. 13, 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/zizeks-transgender-trouble/#>.

<sup>14</sup>Willy Wilkinson, "Cultural Competency," *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1, no. 1-2 (May 1, 2014): 68-73, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399641>.

<sup>15</sup>Vivek Divan, et al. "Transgender social inclusion and equality: a pivotal path to development," *J. Int. AIDS Soc.*, 19 (July 17, 2016), doi: 10.7448/IAS.19.3.20803.

<sup>16</sup>Raquel Willis, "It's Time to Invest in Black Trans Power," *VOGUE*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.vogue.com/article/black-trans-lives-time-to-invest>.

## What is ABUNDANCE?

a·bun·dance

noun

an extremely plentiful or oversufficient quantity or supply

“Queer and trans people deserve a life of abundance, not scarcity”

It is clear that respectability and incrementalism won't help trans people. If they could have, they would have. We can't expect justice from a system that didn't incorporate us at its founding.

## What Needs to Change?

The whole world needs to not only accept the presence of trans, queer and gender non conforming people but respect our humanity. Acceptance is an action. This action can look like a variety of things. For example, inclusive housing, bathrooms, sport teams and organizations. The physical inclusion of queer and trans folks is a movement towards liberation. We can only be free, once we are accepted and respected for who we are. In addition, there needs to be inclusion of queer and trans folks making these decisions. Trans and queer people not only deserve a seat at the table, but should be seated at the head.

Organizations and businesses need to hire more trans and queer folks to lead the world towards a more equitable society.

We are not free until we are all free; therefore we must talk about the carceral system and its effects on destabilizing social justice. There should always be safety but we can have safety without the presence of police. There should always be justice but there can be justice without carceral systems. We want a world without police, policing and prisons. We want a world where there is no state sanctioned violence. A world where trans and queer people can be free.

Freedom demands acceptance, respect, safety and nutrition. Medical safety for trans and queer folks is necessary. Mental and physical hygiene should be a universal right and it is not. Changing this would extend our life expectancy, increase the ability for families to flourish and for people to live in the bodies that they want to live.

There are a lot of things that need to be changed from a political perspective, but the change that can start today is within us.

*“I don't see things that continue to hinder us like it's a clear path of like people in water and like love and live” (Participant 139, Conversation Group Participant)*

## Who is doing this work now?

1. BYP100
2. Brave Space Alliance
3. Audre Lorde Project
4. The TransLatin@ Coalition

5. Marsha P Johnson Institute

6. TGIJP

7. Transgender District

And many, many, more!