

A Transition of Human Rights

Oftentimes, we do not think about entire groups of people in American culture until they directly affect our lives. Believe it or not, transgender discrimination has greatly affected my life. I have a transgender friend who has faced discrimination because he wanted to use men's restrooms and locker rooms. He still faces difficulty getting a job, even in Illinois, which already has transgender anti-discrimination laws in place. As an advocate for LGBT rights, I believe that these hardships are not at all deserved. I can imagine that it would be very difficult to face these kinds of injustices every day, and unfortunately this is nothing new. Transgender people currently do not have the same rights as cisgender people (people who identify with the gender they were born as). Although states have still not reached a consensus on how far transgender rights extend, it is obvious that discrimination has had negative effects on people in the transgender community. Despite these issues, there are many laws that can be made to ensure that transgender people are respected as a gender minority. This is why anti-discrimination laws for those who identify as transgender should be approved in all states.

People of the transgender community have been discriminated against, and their lifestyle has even been outlawed throughout history. Although many cultures have accepted members of the transgender community, other cultures have not. For example, European settlers would attack the leaders of Native American tribes who allowed men to wear women's clothes or who allowed women to assume roles normally assigned to men. Eventually, the transgender community became a bigger part of American culture, but there were still many controversies over the rights of transgender people. Gender reassignment surgeries were outlawed in most places in America during the 1950s. Well into the 1970s, people who identified as transgender were tormented and arrested by police officers, and they were even excluded from LGBT activities such as gay pride parades and protests (Greenblatt). Although circumstances have improved today, transgender people are still discriminated against in the workforce and the housing market. They are also banned from using public restrooms that

match their preferred gender in many states. Allowing this discrimination to continue can have negative effects. Alan Greenblatt, a staff writer at *Governing* magazine, points out, because of the discrimination in employment, transgender people are often fired due to employer issues with their gender identity. On average, transgender Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed as cisgender Americans, leading to poverty. This discrimination can lead to many other negative events as well. Greenblatt states that “transgender people who face discrimination are more likely than the public as a whole to attempt suicide, abuse drugs or engage in other destructive behavior” (Greenblatt). These suicides, although very serious, often go unnoticed by the general public. One such suicide was that of Leelah Alcorn’s. The seventeen-year-old committed suicide by walking into oncoming traffic on the interstate. The teen was said to have committed suicide due to the discrimination she faced about her gender identity (Greenblatt).

Fortunately, there are many laws already put in place to prevent discrimination; getting these same laws passed in every state is what seems to be the issue. According to Greenblatt, eighteen states and the District of Columbia already have laws determining the rights of people who identify as transgender. Such laws protect the transgender community from discrimination in employment, housing, and public areas. Most of the regulations having to do with transgender rights come from preexisting acts. These acts, such as Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, were interpreted to apply to transgender people by certain states. Since people who identify as transgender are not specifically mentioned in any of these laws, it is pretty much up to the states to decide which anti-discrimination laws do and do not apply to transgender people (Greenblatt). Laws such as these can be compared to laws made in the 1960s that ended the segregation of white and black people in America. Today, black people cannot be kept from working, buying a house, or using a public area just because they are black. Many people would agree that the desegregation laws of the 1960s were necessary to prevent discrimination and hate crimes, even though black people were, and still are, a stereotyped minority. If this is the

case, why aren't all states doing the same for the transgender community? As Jamison Green, president of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, believes, "These are not special rights; these are equal rights" (qtd. in Greenblatt).

Some people believe allowing rules that make transgender people equal to cisgender people will cause more problems, but this is not the case. For example, people who did not approve of the law that allowed the transgender community to use the bathroom of the gender they identified with said it could be used as a way for men to be allowed into women's restrooms and violate women. Often, the opposite is true. Many people of the transgender community face harassment and abuse while using the restroom of their preferred gender (Greenblatt). Most transgender people just want to be able to use the restroom without fear or judgement. As Genny Beemyn, head of the University of Massachusetts LGBT center, states, "everyone wants to be able to go to the bathroom and not have to fear being attacked or harassed for doing so" (qtd. in Greenblatt). Additionally, some establishments have taken it upon themselves to build single-stall restrooms that any gender can use. There are many solutions to these issues. Transgender anti-discrimination laws will not create more problems; they will ensure that transgender people are treated equally to cisgender people in the workplace and in public areas. This is the case for most anti-discrimination laws that are already in place.

Now that anti-discrimination laws for transgender people have been explained, it is easy to see why these laws should be necessary in all states. Having laws that prevent discrimination in the transgender community will play a big part in decreasing the poverty and suicide rates of those who identify as transgender. Enforcing these laws will also ensure that transgender people will be treated as equals to cisgender people, as they should be. Since the transgender community is a vital part of our nation's culture, we should respect their basic human rights by treating them as part of the American people.

Work Cited

Greenblatt, Alan. "Transgender Rights." *CQ Researcher*, 11 Dec. 2015, pp. 1033-56,
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