Sympathy for the … Devil?

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This post by KatieAdsila, originally appeared on The Well Project

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Lea este blog en español

Am I the devil? I feel like I should have horns on my head and bat wings growing from my back considering how I'm treated by my society. I'm a transgender woman living in the South, in a very conservative state, and I live in terror every day because my community, the transgender community, is being demonized and attacked by the government meant to protect us and the Christian community meant to love us.

Legislation attacking transgender people's basic rights has ballooned in the past 10 years on the state and national level. In 2025, 1,022 bills targeting trans people were introduced in 49 states, with 126 bills passed. This year, as of this writing, 689 such bills in 41 states and 110 at the national level are being considered, and four have passed (two bills are currently active in Alabama). For comparison, in 2024 there were 88 anti-LGBTQI bills introduced at the federal level; in 2023 there were 53; in 2022 there were zero. Alabama has joined this national trend, passing bills blocking trans young people's participation in sports and life-saving healthcare; in February 2024, our legislature wrote a biased definition of biological sex into our state's law.

These bills are largely sponsored or supported by radical far-right groups – including known extremist hate groups like Alliance Defending Freedom and Family Research Council, designated as such by the Southern Poverty Law Center. These bills are based on false, hateful misinformation. Their purpose is to remove transgender people from society – not to protect young people or women. According to the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, the US is as much as halfway through the genocide of transgender people.

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Republican politicians and the extreme-right religious movement they cater to have not only made my life difficult but also put me in increased danger. This rise of anti-trans legislation and rhetoric is responsible for escalation in the already alarming rates of violence facing trans communities, which the American Medical Association called an epidemic in 2019. Murders of trans people nearly doubled in the four years between 2017 and 2021. In 2023, over 2,800 hate crimes were reported against LGBTQI people accounting for almost one in four of all hate crimes recorded that year – the worst year to date for anti- LGBTQI hate crimes recorded by the FBI. Nearly 20 percent of these were gender identity motivated. Further, the rate of violent victimization against trans people was 93.7 per 1,000 people as opposed to 21.1 per 1,000 for non- LGBTQI people overall, according to the Williams Institute.

This is personal for me because I have been assaulted, I have been followed home and stalked, and I live in constant fear of it happening again. This seems to be the goal: to make my community live in perpetual fear and in looming danger. With the current US administration advancing hate and harm with its executive orders attempting to erase trans people's existence, this peril will only get worse.

Many states, including Alabama, have passed laws against transgender people in sex-specific spaces such as restrooms. There is no evidence that women or children have been assaulted or harassed by transgender people in restrooms. In reality, violence is regularly perpetrated against transgender people attempting to use restrooms, by cisgender people in and around these spaces – not the other way around.

Politicians have gotten so worked up over trans girls in women's sports, feeding their constituents misinformation and outright lies over an issue that is almost nonexistent: Of the more than 500,000 student-athletes at NCAA colleges, there are believed to be about 10 who are transgender. Now trans women are unable to compete on teams aligned with their gender identity – ignoring scientific evidence showing that young transgender girls who take puberty blockers are physically no different than cisgender girls. Even transgender women who transition later in life experience muscular atrophy (shrinkage of muscle tissue). Contrary to far-right opinion, trans girls do not have a strong advantage over their cis peers in sports. But saying otherwise makes for great fear-mongering – and fear often leads people to violence.

I fear for my safety every time I go anywhere in public. If I get recognized as a trans woman, I could be harassed or viciously assaulted by violent men who have been taught to hate transgender people, want to harm or even kill us, and are given encouragement and permission for such behavior without consequence. In the US, 30 states allow for the "panic defense" (a legal strategy developed to absolve perpetrators of violence against LGBTQI people from accountability by weaponizing the sexual orientation or gender identity of the victims), allowing for reduced charges and sentencing and even acquittal. The message to trans people seems to be that we have no worthy expectation of safety, dignity, or justice in this country because of who we are.

Why?

Because they want us back in the closet, invisible to their world, or dead; and they want future generations to be too afraid to ever come out. The administration has been feverishly working to eradicate the transgender community by striking all mentions of transgender people from government departments and websites. Military bans label transgender people as dishonest and dishonorable to eject them from the military; book bans in schools and public libraries are meant to erase knowledge about our community. West Virginia wanted to label "transgenderism" as a mental illness, and Maryland wanted to punish medical providers with life imprisonment for providing gender-affirming care which has been absolutely proven to save lives, for just two examples (luckily, both of those specific bills failed – but many have passed). All of this is meant to do only one thing: to eradicate transgender people from public life by making it illegal and dangerous to be trans.

I'm not just a transgender woman; I'm a human being with feelings and a life. I have children and a grandchild; I have dreams and aspirations; I have people who look up to me and depend on me.

An unfortunate consequence of transphobia and transmisia (hate and violence against trans people) is that cisgender women are also being targeted, harassed, attacked, and even killed for presenting androgynously or simply not feminine enough. In other words, women are being harmed by people who mistook them for being transgender.

If I couldn't live as my true self, I know I wouldn't be here today – and most trans people feel the same way. In a massive US survey of more than 90,000 trans people, 79 percent of respondents reported feeling "a lot more satisfied" with their lives after transitioning. In fact, in one study of people undergoing gender-affirming surgeries, less than 1 percent reported feeling regret about the procedure. Few surgical procedures enjoy such a low regret rate. Another study looking at people who "detransitioned" (went back to living as the gender aligned with their sex assigned at birth) found that 82.5 percent were basically forced into regret by family and societal pressure, discrimination, and transmisia.

It's extremely rare that people who claim to be trans regret their transition. However, failure to properly treat gender dysphoria (a medical condition - not a mental disorder - recognized by thousands of doctors globally) contributes to tremendous rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts among trans people. Another big contributor to the transgender suicide rate is anti-trans laws themselves. But does it matter, if it's just transgender people dying?

My community is in perpetual danger of not just increasing physical violence, but mental,

emotional, spiritual, and institutional violence as well. Many transgender people are disowned by their families, unwelcome in most churches and shelters, unwanted to employers, housing officials and even some healthcare providers. This is the kind of hate that transgender people have to endure, and it is not new. Transgender people have always been hated by society, discriminated against, ridiculed, erased from history and public life, abandoned by friends and family and assaulted by violent men, and now it's getting even worse. How anyone could think that being transgender is a choice that anyone would prefer is beyond me.

Transgender people are just regular people who want to live our lives in peace, but we find ourselves living in fear and uncertainty in a very hostile society. Transgender hate is currently being disseminated from the top levels of the government and religious institutions down to our public schools. We try to contribute to our larger community, but it is almost as if we are being hunted by people who hate us for being who we are. Politicians have put a big target on our backs, so people can harm or discriminate against us and face no consequences. Because we're such a small minority, no one seems to care.

That feels like open season to me. I feel like my life has no more value than an animal to much of my society.

I can't understand why, nor can I understand how good Christian people can justify their hatred and actions towards the trans community. They may say they only hate the "sin," but it feels very much like hate towards me, and that doesn't show me God's love; that makes me feel like God hates me too and drives me away. Even if I were "living in sin," shouldn't that be between me and my god? Is it the place of the church to legislatively twist my arms to force me into submission?

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I can't change who I am. Being transgender is a part of me, like being left-handed or red-headed would be. If it were a choice, I could live without the pain and suffering of discrimination and hate; but alas, it's not. I know many people don't believe a person is born LGBTQI, but the church also didn't believe that the Earth was round and nearly killed Galileo for saying that it was. Sometimes even the church can be wrong.

I write this to my fellow Alabamians who may have been pushed by their pastors or politicians into hatred and hostility to ask you to reevaluate your perspective and feelings towards me and my community.

I'm not just a transgender woman; I'm a human being with feelings and a life. I have children and a grandchild; I have dreams and aspirations; I have people who look up to me and depend on me. Shouldn't I have the right and freedom to live and express myself as I see fit? Don't you get to

have that freedom of choice for your life? Why can’t I?

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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