

# OWS Must Resist Cis-Supremacy and Trans-Misogyny

A bunch of trans women occupiers.

November 18, 2011

As feminists, we enthusiastically support women’s groups and women-designated safer spaces, but as trans women and allies, we oppose (and will categorically block) any group or space that excludes trans women<sup>1</sup>, as well as any standard that functionally asserts authority over our self-determined gender identities<sup>2</sup>. On multiple occasions, we have witnessed the exclusion of trans people from spaces and groups affiliated with Occupations, both here in New York and elsewhere. We have also encountered transphobic hate speech propagated by certain “radical lesbian separatist” individuals within the movement. This must not be allowed to continue.

By denying the existence of cisgender privilege and furthering the disempowerment of trans people, transphobic groups, spaces and individuals violate both the letter and spirit of our Principles of Solidarity<sup>3</sup>. The elimination of systemic oppression against marginalized people is a core goal of the Occupy movement, but self-identified “womyn-born-womyn”<sup>4</sup> and other types of cisgender people do not constitute a marginalized group relative to trans women. Throughout the world, trans people – especially trans women, trans people of color, trans youth, trans sex workers, trans people with disabilities, and gender non-binary/non-conforming people – are among the people most marginalized by systemic oppression. In the U.S., trans women face extreme violence (a 1-in-12 chance of dying from a violent crime), poverty (fifty percent unemployment rate) and criminalization (trans women, especially trans women of color, are routinely subject to police profiling).<sup>5</sup>

To fight this systemic oppression – including transphobia, cis-centrism, cis-supremacy, and trans-misogyny – it is essential we support the self-determination of all people oppressed by coercive, non-consensual gender assignments. Allowing any group or space to define gender by essentialist, cis-centric standards is intrinsically at odds with gender liberation and trans people’s right to autonomous self-determination. It is a fundamental affront to solidarity.

For decades – from the Stonewall Rebellion to **Occupy Wall Street** – trans women have stood at the forefront of social justice movements, often at great personal risk. But even within these movements, trans women have been excluded, silenced, shamed, and abandoned as political liabilities. Since mid-July, trans women have played a critical role in OWS, including the creation and

operation of OccupyWallSt.org, the de facto voice of the global Occupy movement. Nonetheless, we are prepared to leave the New York General Assembly and its empowered Spokes Council *en masse* if trans-excluding groups, spaces, and individuals continue to be tolerated by this body. Over 50 groups have already signed on to a [trans-inclusive safer spaces policy](#) (and any group which has not is encouraged to join!), but for Occupy Wall Street to hold true to its Principles of Solidarity, we must take the additional step of ensuring that trans peoples' identities are respected, and that trans women are safe and welcome in all women's spaces.

**See Also:**

- [Trans People Say: End Economic Inequality, Solidarity with the 99% from the DC Trans Coalition: `http://goo.gl/1sxDY`](#)
- [The Mass. Transgender Political Coalition Endorses Occupy Boston: `http://goo.gl/KA8KF`](#)
- [Intro Trans Liberation Resources: `http://goo.gl/Y1Up6xt`](#)
- [Arguments for Stronger Trans-Inclusion: `http://goo.gl/wIaFs`](#)
- [Statement from and Call to Join in Solidarity with Non-Dominant Communities at OccupyDC/Occupy K St.: `http://goo.gl/ws60C`](#)
- [The 99%: A Community Of Resistance: `http://goo.gl/hDuIH`](#)
- [Participating In A Direct Action: A Guide For Transgender People: `http://goo.gl/vHUSM`](#)

**About This Statement:**

I am a homeless trans woman and sex worker from D.C. who has organized in trans communities for years. I am also a trauma survivor and a person with psychiatric disabilities. Since arriving in New York, I have been elated to find support from other trans women in the movement. Overall, trans people are embraced by the 99% movement. However, we have also been disturbed to see spaces within the occupation – including spaces designed for survivors of assault – that are hostile to or excluding trans women. We have also encountered blatantly transphobic ideas from particular individuals on several occasions. As a feminist and rape survivor, and given the fact that trans women are *more* likely to be victims of sexual assault than cis women, I am shocked to see a culture of transphobia attempting to co-opt OWS. For these reasons, I have partnered with members of the NYCGA queer, womens, and people of color caucuses (as well as trans and trans-allied supporters of the Occupy movement more broadly) to author this statement.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of this document, we use trans women broadly to refer to all male-assigned and intersex, non-male-identified people who feel they have a place in women's spaces. For definitions and background, see this Trans 101 Glossary at The Distant Panic:  
<http://thedistantpanic.com/glossary>
2. This would include any policy that defines gender by individuals coercively-assigned-sex-at-birth, current or former body type, assumed socialization, or adherence to medical standards. Even if such a group or policy were to include certain types of trans people but exclude others based on arbitrary distinctions, it is still transphobic and oppressive. For example, some people – including segments of the trans community itself – allow trans women who have had genital reconstruction surgeries to enter women-only spaces, but continue to endorse the exclusion of trans women who have not had such procedures. Even when supported by a trans woman, such ideologies violate trans peoples' self-determination and are contrary to the goals of trans liberation. Many trans women elect not to have such surgeries, while others simply cannot have them for health reasons. Additionally, the exclusion of non/pre-operative trans women is classist, as such procedures are extremely expensive. Most importantly, a central tenet of feminism asserts that a person should not be defined by their (past, present, or future) biological bodies. Sex and gender are socially-constructed categories; there is nothing inherently male about any type of body, and possessing certain genitalia does not make a person more likely to be violent.  
For more on the myth that trans women experience male socializations see Tobi Hill-Meyers article Language, Reality, and My Trans Girlhood.
3. "Recognizing individuals inherent privilege and the influence it has on all interactions" and "empowering one another against all forms of oppression" are foundational Principles of Solidarity, consensed upon by the Liberty Square General Assembly on September 23rd.  
<http://nycga.net/resources/principles-of-solidarity/>
4. The very idea of womyn-born-womyn spaces is connected to tangible histories of exclusion and transphobic violence. The concept originated during the cis-supremacist witch hunts which sought to systematically remove trans women from feminist organizations during the 1970s. Such policies have resulted in physical violence against trans women and other gender non-conforming people, ranging from the denial of life-saving services and safer spaces for women who are survivors of rape and sexual assault to the physical expulsion of trans women from feminist music festivals. See Trans Women Belong Here (a group of women protesting trans-exclusion at Michigan Womyns Music Festival) and The Curvatures blog post about Vancouver Rape Relief.
5. See the DC Trans Coalitions Reports and Research or Campaigns pages for more facts about trans oppression at <http://dctranscoalition.org/>

