

DEAR TORONTO

It's that time of year again, Pride is here! The city is full of events to celebrate queer and trans communities, with the Pride Parade as the grand finale. It's a time when diversity is celebrated and symbolized by the colours of the rainbow.

But as the complexities of gender diversity and human sexuality become more prevalent, just how accurate is this celebration of diversity? Whose voices are heard and represented?

It's a common misconception that "coming out and transitioning" are the only hurdles trans people must overcome to live their most authentic life. But this couldn't be further from the truth. Not all trans people transition; not all trans people want to. Being authentically trans isn't hinged on socially or physically transitioning. In fact, the trans experience starts and encompasses many aspects of life before transitioning is even considered.

Trans people struggle with employment, basic medical care, accessing things like housing and even public washrooms. Look around. Most of the services offered are categorized by gender, so trans people face constant barriers using them. Exclusion of trans people happens everywhere and it comes from cisgender, heterosexual and queer communities. It's common knowledge in queer communities that trans people, particularly trans women, are often marginalized and excluded.

Trans people of colour also experience racism within queer, trans and cisgender-heterosexual communities. North American society is largely structured to privilege those with European ancestry. There is an unspoken hierarchy based on skin colour, where those with darker skin, who are often Black folks, are located at the bottom. The group Black Lives Matter acknowledged this at last year's Pride Parade when they intervened because imperialist Eurocentrism and institutionalized racism were harming and killing our communities, particularly Black communities. They highlighted that discrimination based on skin colour occurs within LGBTQ communities on both individual and systemic levels. These intersecting oppressions present challenges for young trans people of colour who are looking for an accepting and welcoming community. And it's not only limited to race, gender and gender expression. Age, socioeconomic status, citizenship, ability, knowledge of English language, culture and religious affiliation also directly influence the lives of trans youth of colour.

Similarly, trans women and transfeminine people of colour face discrimination due to sexism and the societal devaluing of women and traditionally feminine characteristics. As a result, young trans women of colour face barriers that white trans people, or cisgender people of colour, may not even realize exist. A Black trans woman is likely to experience transphobia, sexism and anti-Black racism. And since it's impossible to fully separate identities into different categories, the discrimination is magnified (not to mention it leaves her at a higher risk for homelessness). This dehumanization results in social and financial exclusion from society, sometimes leaving trans women of colour to turn to sex work in order to survive.



Many trans women of colour have been instrumental in directly calling for change in the way poor trans people of colour are treated. There are stories of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera at the Stonewall riots, or Jennicet Gutiérrez who interrupted President Obama to call attention to the inhumane treatment of trans women detained for their immigration status. But their messages often go unheard or forgotten. It's time we recognize the contributions of these individuals who, despite the intersecting oppressions they experience, continue to thrive and contribute to society. In a global political climate that seems to be resisting evolution into the 21st century, trans youth of colour need allies who will allow them to express their genuine selves.

When allies understand the unique needs of trans people of colour, together we can knock down barriers. We need health care providers to learn about trans healthcare. We need more gender neutral washrooms. We need shelters to be more inclusive of trans women, trans men and non-binary folks. We need allies to be educated because it's hard for trans people to advocate for themselves while going through our own hardships.

We need your support and effort.

You don't need to understand every single acronym or identity category, just be open to difference. Understand that there are multiple ways of existing. No one person should be left behind based on their gender identity and their gender expression. Trans people have a lot to offer. For centuries we existed among you giving you a perspective on the world outside, and it is time we are supported and embraced again. This is the true definition of what it means to celebrate diversity.

Sincerely,

Community Advisory Committee,
Transgender Youth of Colour in Partnership with Black CAP

