



# Health Care, Women's Space, Inclusivity

## Overview

Trans women typically face significant barriers to health care access. Yet there are no good medical or political reasons for these barriers. And there are good reasons for tearing them down.

## The biology of trans women

'Trans women' is a term used to describe male-to-female transsexual and transgendered people. Typically, trans women who have not had genital surgery take estrogen and perhaps progesterone, along with drug that suppresses testosterone. After surgery, only estrogen and progesterone are needed, just as for post-menopausal women on hormone replacement therapy.

## Are there good medical reasons for excluding trans women?

While a trans woman does not have a cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes or ovaries, the rest of her physiology is similar to that of a postmenopausal woman, or a woman who has received a hysterectomy. She is subject to a familiar range of ailments -- everything from yeast infections to STIs to osteoporosis, heart disease, and breast cancer. The physiological differences between trans women and cis women are minor --- too minor to justify denying care.

## Are there good political reasons for excluding trans women?

Here are three popular arguments used to exclude trans women from women's spaces<sup>1</sup>:

***"Trans women make other women uncomfortable!"***

This is certainly true. But the women's movement has a proud history of overcoming divisive discomforts. Women's spaces today are open to women of all races, classes, ages, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. It wasn't always this way. Progress was made by embracing the challenge of discomfort.

***"If trans women can enter this space, then men can too!"***

There are currently no reported instances of men using trans-inclusive policies to enter women's-only space. Nowhere, at no time, has this ever been an issue.<sup>1</sup> Most men do not enjoy being perceived as transsexual women. It's a guy thing.

***"Trans women don't have the right life history to be treated like women!"***

Some claim that, because a trans woman spends some of her life as a boy or a man, she hasn't lived the right kind of life. But women come from very diverse backgrounds, so it's hard to say what the 'right' sort of life would be. And why does life experience matter to a health care provider? If a woman has a lump in her breast, does it matter that she got a toy truck for her eighth birthday instead of a doll? That her parents dressed her in blue rather than pink?

That being said, it's true that trans women do have life experiences that differ from the average. While all women experience high rates of assault, discrimination and marginalization, for trans women, the numbers are breathtaking. 97% have experienced workplace mistreatment<sup>3</sup>; the rate of unemployment is double<sup>3</sup>; the poverty rate is double; 68% of trans women report being forced to have sex (which is to say, raped) at some point in their lives<sup>2</sup>. Trans women are among the most vulnerable women. If anything, trans women should receive extra support, rather than less.

## Benefits of trans inclusivity

### Diversity

The benefits of diversity are well-known. Organizations are strengthened, rather than weakened, by integrating people with different skill-sets from different backgrounds.

### Openness

Policing a space against a minority can be demoralizing, especially when some members of the minority in question are all but indistinguishable from the majority. By embracing inclusive policies, a women's organization can free up valuable energy that can be used to improve the circumstances of all women.

## Further Reading

See <http://femininjas.com/pamphlets/inclusivity/>.

This document was produced by the Femininjas, an inclusive potluck circle committed to social justice.

For more information, see <http://femininjas.com>.



[1] Womyn-Born-Womyn Wikipedia entry; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womyn-born-womyn> [2] "Some Statistics on Sexual Assault and Rape"; <http://tinyurl.com/yz9zjha> [3] "National Transgender Discrimination Survey"; <http://tinyurl.com/yfrarvd>