

The Trans Military Ban: Why Psychologists Can't Turn a Blind Eye

By Jaidelynn K. Rogers

Research suggests that nearly 0.6% of the US population, or [1 million people](#), identify as transgender. Every day, transgender people face societal stressors, called [minority stress](#), that can be detrimental to their mental and physical health. In 2018 alone, [29 transgender identified people were murdered](#) either as a direct result of transphobia or as an indirect result of societal bias and stigma. As a society, we should be working to decrease this statistic by dismantling prejudice ideas and increasing access to affirmative resources for transgender people. Instead, [the trans military ban](#) was recently deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court, and as a result, transgender identifying people will [no longer be allowed to serve](#) in the US military as of January 22nd, 2019. With few exceptions, this means that the near [9,000 transgender people](#) currently serving in the military will no longer be allowed to serve.

The American Psychological Association's (2018) [multicultural guidelines](#) state that a multicultural psychologist does "...aspire to recognize and understand historical and contemporary experiences with power, privilege and oppression. As such, they seek to address institutional barriers..." The guidelines call psychologists to become aware of systematic barriers that affect our clients, and invites us to take action to reduce those barriers and challenge those oppressive systems.

In opposition to the trans military ban, the APA released a [statement](#) acknowledging the negative effects that this ban may have on transgender individuals, and reinforced the idea that, according to psychological research, [gender dysphoria](#) is not a mental health condition that infringes a person's ability to serve in uniform. As psychologists and social justice advocates who understand the [detrimental effects](#) of prejudice on mental and physical health, it is important that we not only speak up against this act of discrimination, but that we do something about it.

Here are some suggestions about what we as psychologist-activists can do to help fight against the trans military ban, discrimination, and transphobia:

1. **Get involved.** Participate in [lobbying efforts](#) that are happening in your local communities. [Call or write](#) your local governors, senators, and mayors to let them know that you oppose this Supreme Court decision. Sign up for [Resistbot](#), a free service that sends text messages notifications about political organizing, helps construct messages to send directly to politicians, and identifies the nearest polling location during elections. Text "congress" to 50409 to sign up.
2. **Conduct research.** Historically, the diagnosis of gender dysphoria and cost of gender reassignment surgery have been used as tools against transgender people, claiming that those individuals who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria are not fit to serve in the military and that gender reassignment surgery is unnecessary. If we can conduct research that acknowledges the resiliency and strength of transgender individuals and confirms that gender reassignment surgery is infact a necessary component of mental and

physical health for trans people, we can provide the courts with empirical evidence against their decision.

3. **Protest.** Attend pro-LGBTQ rallies and events. Show up to marches. Go to your community [PRIDE parade](#) and show your support. It is not enough to be verbally present in person or on social media. It is necessary that we physically show up to support. As [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) once said, “We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts.”
4. **Donate.** In a money conscious society, sometimes we forget how imperative money is for those who are trying to make change. Non-For-Profit organizations such as [the Trevor Project](#) or [The National Center for Transgender Equality](#) use donated money to [provide support services](#) to trans folx and to [lobby against bills](#) that deny trans people rights.
5. **Speak up.** If you can’t donate, attend a rally, call your local politician, or conduct research, I encourage you to speak up in any way you can. Post about it on Facebook. Tweet about it on Twitter. Tell the mailperson. Talk about it with your students. Acknowledge it with your trans clients. We cannot create change in a bubble. It is so important that we start talking about the things that matter, educating others, and refusing to stay silent in the face of oppression.

The decision to ignore this ban is unjust and dehumanizing. As psychologists, it is not enough for us to disagree with these court actions (or lack of action), we must also make waves and fight back. We can only do so much to help our clients when oppressing systems have already stigmatized them. We are doing a disservice to our clients if we only put a band-aid on the problems that they face in society. It is our job as multiculturally competent psychologists to take part in activism, and by doing so, standing up to try to fix these systems, rulings- injustices- so that we can get at the root of the problem instead of dealing with the consequences.

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