

Sarah Ditung, New Statesman Article

Just yesterday Sarah Ditung wrote an excellent article from a feminist perspective on the transgender debate and male violence in The New Statesmen called, "What's Missing from the transgender debate? Any discussion of male violence" As always I recommend you read the whole thing even though I don't agree with all of it. One further comment and concern about the article: it freely mixes gender/washroom issues with male violence. Many people would see those as two very distinct issues. Here are some excerpts:

One of those things that supposedly never happens, happened. Luke Mallaband was convicted of six voyeurism offences after a female student at the University of East Anglia found his phone hidden in the university library's gender-neutral toilets. The probation report described him as "high risk of posing serious harm to females".

That creepy men would abuse mixed-sex intimate spaces in order to breach women's privacy seems, perhaps, a predictable outcome; but it's not something that the UEA students' union took into account when it recommended installing more gender-neutral toilets.

Not all claims to be a woman deserve the same respect. The inquiry report frequently mentions the deaths by suicide of two transwomen prisoners held in the male estate, and implies that housing them in a women's prison could have been lifesaving. Perhaps it could (although it is worth noting that self-harm and suicide are terrifyingly common among both male and female prisoners), but what's most remarkable here is that the report never acknowledges how vastly unlike the two were.

The first, Vicky Thompson, was held in a category B prison for robbing a teenage girl of a mobile phone and stealing cosmetics. Thompson, who was only 21, had identified as a woman since her teens. The second, Joanne Latham, was being held in a close security centre (CSC, reserved for the most violent and dangerous offenders) for the attempted murder of a female flatmate and two fellow inmates, aged 38, and had only changed name a few months earlier. These are very different cases, with very different needs: Latham had not even made an application to be rehoused, and in any case, CSCs don't exist in women's prisons because women don't commit the same extremes of violence as men.

In a way, it's regrettable that gender is not "something in our heads", as the report suggests it is. If it were, then fixing all the social problems around it would be as easy as identifying everyone for the gender they really are and treating them accordingly. But then, look at some of the examples in this piece of how women are treated: spied on, raped, and then told that any space apart from the class of people who do the spying and raping is illegitimate. That is how gender works, and any legal framework of trans rights needs to recognise that male violence is real, endemic - and the true threat to women and trans people.

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