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since people will be able to tell that they are “non-cis men” but will pretend as if they don’t know and they are interacting with a younger man

- Random yelling, threats, moralising, comments, personal attacks, explanation from strangers about why “your hair is like this”, “like a boy”, “like a girl.”

Groping and sexual assaults

These are written in a race blind, caste and class blind manner. My perspective is directly that of someone with a “middle class” lifestyle in Dhaka with access to multiple “progressive” institutions. While some situations have been more okay than others, I and many others (of course not everyone) live with a lot of anxiety and are treated as perverts. So, when we are “exoticised,” “infantilised,” “fixed” people think they are doing the right thing, because how else would you deal with a pervert?

The mesh of bullying can be even broader. Even in progressive organisations—where one would expect these things to not happen—they will happen. People expect that much of the transphobia comes from “religious fundamentalists” but transphobia is cultural,

not necessarily grounded in religion, as it is assumed.

GNC people are also read within a hierarchy—some GNCs are more acceptable than others—but if they protest too much it might be a problem since it could “complicate” the empowerment narrative. For many, inclusion has meant new kinds of problems—while the stories of inclusion are overshared, mainstream people are under the false impression that enough has been done for “them.”

Trust

Movements like #MeToo are built on trust. That the survivor is telling the truth and, for a change, the survivor is believed. But the question is, who can tell truth and be heard? If all the transwomen who are not middle class (or rising) or have that access wrote about their violence, who would prevent the backlash they would face? If transgender women, Hijras, trans men and GNC people started writing about the violence they face, would they be even more compromised? Would they be outing themselves? Would people think “they are perverts” and so “deserving of the violence?”

I wish I could give you data about the extent of the violence they/we face. But

this need for data, to prove my point, says something about how GNC and mainly transgender and hijra people need to verbalise, explain, rationalise their trauma over and over again in order for people to get a bare understanding of how different their lived realities are from those who don’t deviate from the gender binary.

Not Out – no Data

Globally the demographic with highest suicide rates are transmen (Scutti 2018). Global numbers of transgender murders come at 369 with half taking in Brazil (167), then Mexico (71) and USA (28). One murder was listed under Bangladesh. However, this says less about the violence and more about the categories and methods of data collection. Shouldn’t it be enough to say that things are bad here? Do I need data to convince you?

It is difficult to get numbers for South Asia and Bangladesh. There are a few reasons for there not being data—if someone is not part of a particular Hijra community it is unlikely that their death/murder/suicide will be understood as a Hijra’s death. If the person is isolated or is not “out” and has not visibly changed their presentation, chances are that it will not be read as the death of

a trans person, a Hijra or of someone outside the gender binary.

There are complicated ways in which people are allowed to be seen as survivors and allowed to be seen as victims, which in turn are used to maintain hierarchies of power. It is dehumanising when sexual violence is allowed, when voiced violence is not seen. I want to end on a note that such exclusionary practices don’t just happen in Bangladesh. Globally credit has been stolen away from Tarana Burke, a black woman, who started the MeToo movement as a space for Black women to share their violences and be validated as survivors. Raya Sarkar, a Dalit trans activist, has published a list and faced backlash and has had their character defamed, their list questioned, their account doxxed, and bullied by upper caste South Asian scholars (mostly Indian) including upper caste feminists. Sexual violence needs to be understood as a system of governance that holds power hierarchies in place—patriarchy without the other dynamics will not explain all that.

Dhorjosheel Feminist is a researcher writing under a pseudonym for security purposes.

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I am not an expert on self-care, but I needed to care for myself while also staying updated because it had only been a few weeks since that I had spoken out, but a lot has changed already. Many more survivors have called out their abusers, something which I was not optimistic about, but hoped would eventually happen. Therefore, I would like to share a few strategies that I came across in various social media posts, and some that I have otherwise been doing for years, to deal with difficult situations.

First of all, I think it is important for those choosing to speak out to know that we don’t owe an explanation to everyone we love. I know many people are upset that I did not share my story with them, back when they were close to me. There exists a lack of awareness on trauma, and how it impacts people.

Secondly, and it may sound strange, but for a while, it might be a healthy idea to not be “too active” on social media. I tried to limit my engagement online for a few days, to give myself the space to grow strong and stay strong. The online trolling was a huge blow, because it is not something I am accustomed to. But I wanted to stay updated, so I limited my social media hours. I only became active online after I was done with my thesis submission. Before that, the maximum I would allow myself was 15 minutes a day.

Thirdly, I found keeping a journal and meditation therapeutic. It helped me relax, and reduced my anxiety level which was a combined outcome of academic stress and the emotional stress I experienced due to the trolling and shaming.

Some may also find talking to people

helpful, which is not something I tried immediately—rather, I tried to stay focused on my work and avoided emotional triggers which could be aggravated by talking. But different individuals function differently, and what may work for one may not work for another. No matter how our minds function, we all need to find ways to care for ourselves, to preserve ourselves and there is nothing wrong with it.

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Last but not least, I want to convey my solidarity to all who have survived sexual abuse at any point in their lives. Again, what happened to us does not define us, but the power lies within us to emerge stronger.

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