

Trans Rights and Justice in a Time of Anti-Trans Attacks – Daye Pope  
Episode 54  
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Shimon Cohen:

Welcome to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change, where we bring you stories of real people working to address real issues. I am your host, Shimon Cohen.

Shimon Cohen:

In this episode, I talk with Daye Pope, Director of Civic Engagement at T.A.K.E. – Trans Advocates Knowledgeable Empowering – located in Birmingham, Alabama, and Pennsylvania. T.A.K.E. was founded by Daroneshia Duncan-Boyd as a peer-support group for trans women of color and has expanded to provide services, advocacy, and organizing. We talk about the current anti-trans legislation sweeping the country and how transphobia is not new, but this current climate is increasingly politically hostile, as the Right uses trans folks as scapegoats and a rallying point for their base. Daye talks about the lack of health care access for transgender people and the multitude of interconnected issues that are barriers to health care, rooted in racism, classism, cisgenderism – white, wealthy, hetero, cisgender, patriarchal normativity. Daye explains how anti-trans legislation is creating multiple issues for trans youth, including targeted harassment, potentially being outed to their parents, and being denied medical care, while health care providers and parents and guardians who support trans youth are being threatened with felonies. Daye explains how puberty blockers work and counters misinformation about hormone therapy and surgery. We also talk about legislation against trans athletes. Daye talks about T.A.K.E.'s civic engagement work, specifically on voting rights for trans folks, especially trans folks of color, and the multiple ways voter suppression occurs. Daye emphasizes the strength and love of the T.A.K.E. community and how they are organizing to provide basic needs yet go beyond by developing leaders who are creating change on multiple levels. Daye speaks to her hope among youth and also shares what her experience was like when she was younger. I hope this conversation inspires you to action.

Shimon Cohen:

Before we get into the interview, I want to let you all know about our episode's sponsor, the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. First off, I want to thank them for sponsoring the podcast. UH has a phenomenal social work program that offers face-to-face master's and doctorate degrees, as well as an online and hybrid MSW. They offer one of the country's only Political Social Work programs and an Abolitionist Focused Learning Opportunity. Located in the heart of Houston, the program is guided by their bold vision to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global. In the classroom and through research, they are committed to challenging systems and reimagining ways to achieve justice and liberation. Go to [www.uh.edu/socialwork](http://www.uh.edu/socialwork) to learn more. And now, the interview.

Shimon Cohen:

Hey Daye. Thanks so much for coming on the podcast. I'm super excited that we connected, want to give props to the Trans Law Center for connecting us. And just to kind of start out, if you could share with us about what you currently do.

Daye Pope:

Absolutely. Thank you for having me. I work with an organization called T.A.K.E., Trans Advocates Knowledgeably Empowering that's based in Birmingham and was started by and led by trans women of color. And at T.A.K.E., we have now expanded to also do some work in Pennsylvania.

Daye Pope:

We do direct service for trans communities, especially of color, to help get healthcare access, to do social groups and social support, to get mental healthcare. We feed them meals, we help get folks access to housing.

Daye Pope:

And we've also expanded into doing more civic engagement work, which is what I'm really tasked with at T.A.K.E., to try to reach our communities and the people who love and support us to make sure that we can know what's at stake, access our right to vote, and get out to use our voice in politics and in the civic world.

Shimon Cohen:

That all sounds amazing. And when I learned about the organization, I just got really excited for this time we were going to have and to really help spread the message about what you're all are doing.

Shimon Cohen:

One thing that I thought was interesting in the story of the organization is how it started as like a support group and for trans women of color and then expanded into other, like into advocacy around the issues you were talking about. Can you share a little bit about how that transition happened and how folks were like, "Hey, we need to start doing these other things too."

Daye Pope:

Yeah. It's a really beautiful evolution that T.A.K.E.'s gone through my amazing boss Daroneshia Duncan-Boyd, is a Black trans woman who born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. And she was recognizing as she was transitioning how many barriers she was facing and how much of a struggle it was for her.

Daye Pope:

And so she started in a fairly informal way at first meeting with other Black trans women in Birmingham and just having dinner and having a social support group to meet and to talk about what they were going through and to provide some kind of community support and really lift each other up, going through all these hard issues.

Daye Pope:

And then she found out, oh, we're all talking about how we're struggling to find housing. Many of us have had experiences with having to do survival sex work. Many of us have been flat out refused service and job opportunities because of who we are. And so it really lit a fire in her to say, we need to do something to provide for our community beyond just meeting with this support group.

Daye Pope:

And so she started actually offering more services and slowly but surely got the kind of nonprofit infrastructure built up that she needed and was able to start bringing in grant money. And now it's built up to an organization that has, I think right now around 15 staff, we've got a number of programs.

Daye Pope:

We are actually renovating a new building to provide short-term transitional housing for Black trans folks in Birmingham who are reentering society after being incarcerated or after being homeless. And so the just amazing way that it's grown, and now people all over the country have started to notice Daronesia's amazing work and to support T.A.K.E. So yeah, I think it's a beautiful story.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. It's really powerful. And a great story about an issue that someone's personally experiencing and then connecting with others and then putting services into place and building that strength in numbers to do the advocacy.

Shimon Cohen:

Some things that I think just for the listeners that could be helpful for maybe folks who don't know much or maybe just know a little bit, because especially in the current political climate, most of us have heard something about trans folks, but usually often in the media right now in a very negative way or from the Right in a very negative way.

Shimon Cohen:

But before we get even into the current political climate, which I know also isn't necessarily new, what are, like as you mentioned, what are some of the issues around healthcare access for trans folks that people experience?

Daye Pope:

Healthcare access is one of the biggest barriers for transgender people. And I think for just poor people in this country, frankly, beyond trans people, but they're unique barriers to accessing healthcare because everything is so interconnected.

Daye Pope:

And so trans folks are dealing with so much employment discrimination and a lot of people in this country get healthcare through their jobs. So a lot of trans folks just never are able to access the type of employment that allows them to have healthcare.

Daye Pope:

A lot of trans folks are dealing with legal issues around updating our name and our gender markers. And so sometimes accessing government services that continuously misgender us or get confused by things like name changes can make it hard to access Medicaid, can make it hard to access other services.

Daye Pope:

A lot of healthcare providers and insurance companies don't cover transition-related care, things like hormone replacement therapy or hormone blockers. And that can be prohibitively expensive. Almost

nowhere in the country does insurance cover any kind of transition related surgeries or gender-affirming care on that level.

Daye Pope:

And oftentimes there's so many layers of gatekeeping where trans folks will need to go through a primary care doctor, a psychiatrist, multiple people that they may not have the money to pay for those visits in order to get approval for any of these other affirming services.

Daye Pope:

But frankly, a lot of our Black trans folks are homeless and dealing with high HIV rates from survival sex work and are unable to even access basic healthcare that they need for any kind of cold or flu or anything that's happening, COVID-19.

Daye Pope:

So there's such a patchwork full of holes to provide services to trans folks that actually meet our healthcare needs. And now we're in a time when we have legislators that are explicitly trying to ban certain types of our healthcare, which is making it even harder to access.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. A lot of what you're talking about, right, are deeply ingrained systemic barriers around racism, classism, heterosexism, transphobia. And then when trans folks can even get in front of these healthcare providers after overcoming or despite everything you're talking about, they still have to face the prejudices and biases that the providers have, right?

Daye Pope:

Yeah. There's not a lot of quality training of healthcare providers to understand how to be affirming and how to work with the trans community. There are the biases that individual healthcare providers and professionals bring to it themselves.

Daye Pope:

And there have even been studies that a lot of trans people put off accessing healthcare, even if they're able to access it for months because of not wanting to be traumatized by going through being misgendered, being called the wrong name, having to go through all of the prejudices that we can face in the health offices.

Daye Pope:

And that actually has sometimes caused people to unfortunately pass away of preventable illness because we're not getting into seeing those providers enough.

Shimon Cohen:

And I'm in Miami, and recently the Department of Health... So I'm a clinical social worker, right? So I get those emails from the department of health. I'm on the list, right, like so many other helping professionals. And they sent out this statement recently, and I'm bringing this up because I know that a lot of social work students are going to listen to this episode.

Shimon Cohen:

So they brought up wanting to clarify, this is in their words, these guidelines released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. So they're citing studies that are really old and that are under scrutiny and that have been, other experts have said, don't hold up.

Shimon Cohen:

But they're talking about, these are their guidelines that got sent to basically every healthcare provider in the state of Florida that anyone are under 18 should not be prescribed puberty blockers or hormone therapy.

Shimon Cohen:

That was one of them. And they have a number of other guidelines. I won't get into all of it, but can you speak to the problem with this and how this is connected to the current political climate and what's happening in Florida, Texas and other states that are really attacking trans youth in particular?

Daye Pope:

Basically, and you mentioned this, there are all these systems that were built for people who aren't trans, there's all these systems that are built to actually exclude trans people and identities and needs and experiences.

Daye Pope:

And so all these structures of society are already not designed for people like us. And if you add on being Black and trans, if you add on being an immigrant, any of these other intersections, it just gets 10 times harder.

Daye Pope:

So in that environment, trans people and those who love us have fought for decades to start to carve out some lanes in these systems. Like with healthcare, working with health experts and doctors to develop really worldwide accepted standards of care that have decades of research behind them that are shown to dramatically increase the well-being of trans people.

Daye Pope:

And now you have a political backlash from folks that are not acting on the science, who are not acting on those decades of well-established health outcomes. And are instead just saying, we culturally don't want trans people around.

Daye Pope:

That threatens our non-scientific sense of what gender is and what we want our society to look like, which is kind of this nostalgic wanting to bring us back to the '50s, in my mind, as kind of this movement that we're in right now, this reactionary movement.

Daye Pope:

And so we have hate groups, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, groups that are actually labeled as hate groups that are funneling money into states like Alabama, like Texas, like Idaho. So many other states. Over 38 states have introduced anti-trans youth legislation in the last two years.

Daye Pope:

We have legislators who are hoping to distract from their failure to address rising costs, COVID-19, many other issues. They're trying to point over at trans kids and say, this is actually the issue that's making our society unsafe. And we think it's a cynical ploy. I think it's a cynical ploy for votes and everything else.

Daye Pope:

But the sad thing is there are real young people that are in the crosshairs. And trans youth, it takes a tremendous amount of courage and self-awareness to come out as trans or queer at a young age and to say to the world, this is who I am. I first came out to my family when I was 13, and this was a few years ago now.

Daye Pope:

And so it was not then a safe environment for me in school. It is now still, I was just talking to a youth group yesterday, an LGBT youth group yesterday in a middle school, and it's still not safe for them. So many of them were bringing up that bullying is a huge problem.

Daye Pope:

But we've started to, as a movement, build out this ability that wasn't there even just a decade ago, to have resources for parents and guardians who are grappling with their child coming out and to help get these trans kids mental health resources and sometimes transition resources.

Daye Pope:

And this has been shown time and again in studies to make the likelihood of that child growing up to be healthy and happy and not self-harm and not commit suicide. This makes their lives so much healthier and it's currently being outlawed for political reasons.

Daye Pope:

And so it's a really frightening time. And I think that we have to grapple with this attack as like a real attack on just trans young people's ability to live in society.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. The way it's worded, like the Florida Department of Health communication, right. They act in their wording, like it's, this is for the benefit of these youth, but we know, those of us who pay attention to this or live this, know that, like you said, this is going to increase potential rates of suicide among trans youth, which are already disproportionately high.

Shimon Cohen:

And I have a teenage daughter and we were talking about this because she cares a lot about all social justice issues. And I've found that her and her friends and even our younger daughter are much more accepting than... For them it's like, "Okay, like pronouns: they, them." They're like, "Okay, cool."

Shimon Cohen:

And she was asking me, she was confused. She's like, "I thought that hormone blockers around puberty, if you're under 18, it can later be reversible if someone wants to and they could still then go through puberty or have those hormones later. Why are they saying this can't happen now?"

Daye Pope:

Yes. There's a lot of misinformation that's being spread to justify these draconian bans. And these bans aren't just, you can't provide this care. These bans are, We're going to actually threaten healthcare providers and guardians, parents with felonies and potentially jail time for providing this care.

Daye Pope:

So any kind of, "Oh, it's for the good of the kids," you're actually trying to throw the kids' parents in jail. So I think we can put that argument to rest. But the misinformation is making it sound like these kids are just walking into a healthcare office and saying like, "Surgery, please."

Daye Pope:

And what's really happening is that over the course of several years, trans kids, kids who are expressing their gender identity are going through layers of mental healthcare counseling. And after a long process, some of them will choose to take hormone blockers, which are completely reversible, like you mentioned.

Daye Pope:

And already in use for some cisgender, some non trans kids, for precocious puberty. If some, especially young girls, are getting puberty at six, at seven, it's coming earlier than would be beneficial for the child, these blockers are already in use for other purposes. So these blockers are safe.

Daye Pope:

If that child continues to go through therapy and decides, actually I would like to continue with just my normally scheduled programming puberty, then they can go off hormone blockers. Or when they reach an appropriate age of consent, then they can start hormone replacement therapy.

Daye Pope:

Then when they're adults, when they're 18 plus they can start to look into accessing surgical intervention gender-affirming care in that way. So there isn't anything happening to kids. Kids are able to take steps with their guardian support that are well established and reversible.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And one of the laws that's been passed, and I'm blanking on the state and hopefully you'll know, but isn't it that in schools, if a teacher knows the student is trans or the student tells the teacher, the teacher is now obligated to inform the parents or maybe the healthcare provider has to tell the parents or something? It's something like that I know has recently happened.

Daye Pope:

They're trying to make that the case in Florida actually. And there's been some language in a few other states where they're trying to make this into a parental rights issue, ironically, as they're trying to take away a parent's right to support their kid and threatening parents with felonies.

Daye Pope:

And this is the other thing that I think gets lost in this conversation. It's already not the most common for trans kids to come out and find their family totally supportive and on board. And so that's already a hurdle for so many of these kids.

Daye Pope:

And so the attempt to out these children to families that might not be supportive can open these kids up to abuse and unsafe environments. But also when legislators and hate groups who are trying to scale back trans care for youth are making this argument, again, they're making it sound like there's an epidemic of trans kids being affirmed.

Daye Pope:

And that's not the case. We're still fighting really hard for every trans kid to have support because many of them, I would say probably at least half are still not feeling safe to come out to their guardians. Not being affirmed, if they do come out to their guardians, and having to try to find support through other means like through school activities, through GSAs, through community centers.

Shimon Cohen:

What do you and other folks who are part of this community, like what's the thoughts around why is this happening more now? I mean, first of all, correct me if I'm wrong, that it's more now than maybe in the past, because I could be wrong about that. But it does seem like, as you were talking about these reactionary movements, right?

Shimon Cohen:

So there's obviously been a reactionary movement of White supremacy, and I don't just mean like KKK. I mean, Trump and just White supremacy that infiltrates so much, which we see historically anytime there's been Black progress. And it's directly connected to the fact that we had a Black president.

Shimon Cohen:

And then there's this anti-trans reactionary movement that's happening at the exact, like they're going together, right? The critical race theory bans and these anti-trans sports bans and then the healthcare and outing trans youth, which I think, I would call an act of violence. Why is all this happening at the same time?

Daye Pope:

That is the million dollar question. I really feel like many of our marginalized communities, trans folks, Black folks, certainly Black trans folks, and there's so many ways in which our communities overlap, have been making progress, making strides to being recognized by the broader mainstream, to having more representation in television and music, to gaining some scattershot legal protections where before we hadn't.

Daye Pope:

So I think that it is a pendulum swing moment where a lot of people who benefit from the old ways of doing things that center White, cis het men are feeling very threatened, are feeling like this isn't what

they wanted to happen. They're maybe losing their grip a little bit on power in our society and are lashing out.

Daye Pope:

I just actually read online that in this recent tragic Buffalo shooting, the White supremacist in his document had mentioned that the LGB community was okay, but that then it got infiltrated by "groomers." And very, very noticeably left off the T. And was kind of echoing recent rhetoric that a lot of Republican legislators have been using, Ron DeSantis has been using this groomer language.

Daye Pope:

And what's interesting is that what's old is new again. These attacks are the exact same thing that have been happening to gay and lesbian people for decades. Back in the '70s, there was this Anita Bryant push to route out any teachers in public schools who were gay or lesbian.

Daye Pope:

And the whole line was trying to conflate gay and lesbian people with pedophiles, making it sound like they were recruiting kids or threatening kids. And they're just resurrecting all these same arguments against the trans community.

Daye Pope:

And I think it's because a lot of these people who have a vested interest in White supremacy, who have a vested interest in patriarchy, are losing their grips on the young people. You just said, which I love, about your children, that to them it's kind of no big thing.

Daye Pope:

And that's true for the younger generations, a lot of them have friends that are trans who've come out, who are non-binary. Certainly many more of them are out as queer than ever before. And I don't think that's because young people are getting more queer.

Daye Pope:

I think it's because they have the internet, they have the ability to connect, and to come out and to understand what they're feeling in a way that a lot of older generations, it took longer for folks to identify, "Oh, this is what it means. This is what I'm feeling. I'm not the only one."

Daye Pope:

A lot of these young people are discovering that at a younger age and feeling connected. And I think that's scaring a lot of these very conservative people who want their children to grow up and do the nuclear family thing and be conservative too, and be straight and be cis, but you can't stop people from being who we are.

Daye Pope:

You can just threaten them with jail time if they dare to live their truth, or try to make it harder to access healthcare. And unfortunately make it more likely that people will self-harm, but they're not going to be able to succeed at keeping people from transitioning or being queer, being trans. And so I'm hoping that this is a last gasp flail for trying to maintain a way of life that was never sustainable.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. I love how you just said that they can't stop people from being who they are. I mean, that's beautiful. That really is. So let's talk about some of the work you do around civic engagement. What does that kind of look like? For someone from the outside looking in, what would that look like?

Daye Pope:

Our civic engagement work at T.A.K.E. is really focused on addressing the fact that, just like there are so many barriers in many other aspects of life, there's so many barriers to trans folks being able to just access our right to vote and get into the ballot box. A lot of our community are in states where there's voter suppression.

Daye Pope:

So in Alabama, there's a voter ID law. If you're a homeless Black trans woman, you may not have a valid form of ID. A lot of states try to make it illegal or confusing to access your right to vote if you've had an incarceration history, and many of the survival skills that trans folks have to employ to get by are criminalized.

Daye Pope:

And so many of us have had an experience with the legal system. Even things like legally changing your name or showing up to a polling place and you don't look the way "that you do on your old ID," or what have you can make barriers for trans folks.

Daye Pope:

So there's a lot of work that we're doing around ballot access, just making sure our communities know our rights and that we can be advocates in those situations so that our folks can access our right to vote. We also do voter registration.

Daye Pope:

A lot of our communities have been not engaged because they've understandably felt like no one was speaking for them, no one was reaching out and asking for their vote, no one was supporting their issues. So we're having conversations.

Daye Pope:

We're getting folks registered to vote. And making sure folks understand what's really at stake in these elections because our rights are on the ballot, especially now with all these anti-trans attacks.

Daye Pope:

And one of the things that I'm so just hype about, about the work that we're doing now, is that we have a lot of clients come into our work because they need housing, because they need prep, because they need a hot meal, all of these basic needs and we're providing those needs.

Daye Pope:

And then we're building a deeper relationship of support and community support with them. And then over time we're actually giving them the trainings, the resources and the encouragement to go beyond

just meeting their basic needs, but to actually become leaders who are voting, who are learning about the issues, who believe in running for office themselves.

Daye Pope:

Who believe in taking part in civic life even outside of formal politics, but starting their own support groups and social groups, starting their own campaigns for change. And so a lot of these clients who are coming to us are coming to us at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs, so to speak.

Daye Pope:

And we're helping them in a very intentional way with all these different ways that they can improve their lives. And then use their voice to make change so that we can shift all of the systems that actually put them at that negative space to begin with.

Shimon Cohen:

I love that. It's beyond social services, right. And it actually reminds me part of how I got into activism when I was younger, very early on, was I, through a series of events, was fortunate to connect with some former Black Panthers. And so I got a lot of my political and social education from them. And that's really how they did programs, right.

Shimon Cohen:

They went out, they had health clinics. They did sickle cell testing when no one was doing it. They did free breakfast programs, which of course are in schools now. They did all these programs, right, that they called survival programs pending revolution.

Shimon Cohen:

But then they organized, like they were like a youth movement, like a Black youth movement really that organized their communities through providing needs, but then building political power. So that's what that reminds me of when you talk about that.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. That's a huge inspiration honestly. And Daronesia is always, our executive director and founder, has always had this broad vision. And it is like, how are you going to talk to this Black trans woman who's at your door about voting when she's like, "I haven't had a meal in three days." You have to meet immediate needs.

Daye Pope:

You have to provide the basics so that people can get back to kind of homeostasis, but then a lot of groups just stop there. And there's no analysis of how did we even get here? There's no urgency to try to shift these systems that created that situation in the first place.

Daye Pope:

And so as T.A.K.E. has been growing, we've really, under Daronesia's vision and leadership, been trying to figure out how do we go full circle with this? How do we heal people's spirits and their hope and their belief in what their life can be as well as just provide their immediate needs?

Daye Pope:

And then how can we work together and protest and vote and do everything in our power to actually make it so the next girl coming up, the next trans youth, doesn't have to deal with the same thing?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. 100%. I love that. So for you, I like to ask people, what do you love about this work? Because obviously we just went over a lot of the challenges, right, in the political climate, these entrenched oppressive systems, but what do you love about the work you get to do every day with T.A.K.E.?

Daye Pope:

I love this question. There's not enough time for us to lift up the joy and the possibility in what we do. I really love when we have a moment where someone so clearly has a click, has a breakthrough. We've hosted in the past a training where we brought in a really amazing Latinx trans woman candidate for public office, Deja Lynn Alvarez.

Daye Pope:

And she spoke to a group of our clients about running for office and about her story, which she's public about, of how she, at one point had been on the stroll, barely surviving, dealing with police, dealing with survival sex work.

Daye Pope:

And we had someone come up to us after and say, "Wow, I didn't really know someone like me could run for office. Now this is just making me think of all kinds of things." And there, I just saw that person's face light up with this sense of possibility.

Daye Pope:

And there's so many moments like that where our communities, when we create these alternative spaces for inspiration and connection, can start to see their life as something that can be bigger and bolder and more beautiful than they thought was possible for them.

Daye Pope:

And there's also moments like with the youth group that I spoke with yesterday of a middle school GSA, there are moments where there's young people who are so far beyond where I was as a kid. And that gives me so much joy and hope because I remember it was such an uphill battle to start our scrappy tiny GSA at my high school when I was coming up.

Daye Pope:

And now there's this GSA in a middle school of 20 kids who were friends and who were hanging out after school and putting on programs. And it's so cool to see like, oh, we are getting somewhere even with all these attacks.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. The youth, like they give me so much hope. Although there's also a lot of horrible stories, not to try to dampen it, but I wish it was that the younger generation was all further along. Because I hear a lot

of stories just from my daughters, especially about just all the stuff they hear and stuff on social media that is really homophobic.

Shimon Cohen:

And that's concerning. And I don't think schools are doing enough to address it. And again, like living in the state I live in, now you can't even talk about it for a certain age, for certain grades without, again, having legal trouble. So just the fact that conversation is being banned is really concerning.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. Talk about censorship and free speech and "cancel culture." This is where it's happening. They don't want you to talk about ideas and history in school.

Shimon Cohen:

What about my choice as a parent? Like talking about parental choice, like you made that great example earlier, it's like it's parental choice for the issues that they want it to be about.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. It is sort of this one step forward, one step back. I feel like there's so much that's breaking through for youth where they have access to information and community and support that I never had, even not that long ago. And certainly folks that are older never had, but bullying is still rampant.

Daye Pope:

And now you have some of these adults and legislators who are trying to essentially mandate bullying with their targeting of trans youth. And I personally dealt with so much bullying growing up as not being gender conforming in school. I think when we talk about bullying, it almost makes it sound cute because we give it the name bullying.

Daye Pope:

It sounds like, "Oh, someone was mean to you on the playground." But what we're talking about is systemic harassment and chronic stress that these young people are going through where every day when they go to school, when I was going to school, this was the case.

Daye Pope:

And some of the young people shared this last night too, every day you're going into school, which is supposed to be a safe environment where you're focused on learning. And maybe you're figuring yourself out because you're 13 or whatever, becomes an environment where you have panic about having to face slurs, having to face people saying cruel things to you.

Daye Pope:

Even locker checking folks or throwing things at you. There's physical assaults happening. And when we say it in that way—there's chronic harassment and assaults in our schools—you perk up more than if you say bullying, which almost trivializes it in my mind, but it is a huge problem.

Daye Pope:

The schools are not doing enough. We really need to address systematically the ways in which these schools don't take these things seriously as incidents of hate crimes. How it has a huge impact on mental health of these young people in the moment, but then also for years to come.

Daye Pope:

How it impacts kids that you might not even be understanding yet, who aren't out, but who feel like they can't come out because they've seen how people treat them. And then what's really sad to me is that instead of meeting all those challenges, you have states actually making it worse by trying to target trans kids even more to not be able to be in sports, to censor LGBTQ books in school libraries.

Daye Pope:

To make it so that teachers can't even answer questions if a kid says, "Oh, we're talking about this historical figure, weren't they gay?" And maybe they were, and now the teachers worried, "I might get fired for just telling the truth about history and I'm a history teacher." So we're not headed in the right direction in a lot of these states.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And the sports one, the wording that they use, like calling it like a fairness, it's never called, let's discriminate against trans girls act, right? It's like, the fairness for girls in sports act. And it's like, it reminds me of Orwellian speech of like, we're going to call it this. We're going to call it the opposite of what it is and confuse people or whatever they're doing.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. It is. It's definitely Orwellian, it's up is down and down is up. And what always strikes me is that in most of these states where there's been this huge multimillion dollar ad campaign and push to ban trans girls from sports, you would think that there's millions of trans girls infiltrating the sports teams.

Daye Pope:

In most of these states, journalists have looked into it, and many of them have had zero trans girls who are trying to compete on varsity women's sports in high school. And some of the states have had one openly trans girl who's on a volleyball team or something. Like this is a solution in search of a problem.

Daye Pope:

This isn't actually something that's threatening women's sports. And I think something that people also misunderstand about the nature of Title IX and the whole long legacy of protecting girls and women's sports has not been because women and girls are not as strong as boys so they need their own special section.

Daye Pope:

Title IX is explicitly that many, many public schools were not putting any funding into girls sports. They were just saying sports aren't important to girls. We don't want them to have the same opportunities because we don't care. That's not feminine, whatever old fashioned notions.

Daye Pope:

So Title IX and the protection of girls sports as a category has never been about saying ugh, boys run too fast. It's been about saying systemically girls sports have not been invested in and we're going to actually make sure legally that schools have to have opportunities athletically for girls and boys.

Daye Pope:

And now this, it's actually a very anti-feminist argument, is being used by a lot of these people that are trying to ban trans girls in sports. Because they're saying like, girls won't get a chance to compete. They're basically saying girls aren't athletic. And not only is that not scientific, trans girls have no advantage that's been measurable in sports.

Daye Pope:

Trans people make up, I think they think we're about 3% of the population now. So the idea that there will be an influx of trans girls winning every category is just not happening. But then also there's this strange way in which all these arguments are reinforcing old-fashioned sexist ideas that girls can't be strong and athletic and rough and tumble because they can.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. That's a really good point. I mean, it's totally a political maneuver to cater to this increasingly overt—because I don't want to say it's new in that way, but it is increasingly overtly racist, sexist and homophobic—base. And really it connects to White Christian nationalism, which that's a whole other conversation, but it does. We can't really talk about it without saying that because that's part of that movement.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. It is. It is very connected. And you see the same types of groups, Proud Boys and what have you, that are so violent and threatened by Black and Brown folks liberation and progress. You see those same groups really honing in on trans folks, and sometimes queer folks, as other targets. And it is tied up in toxic masculinity, patriarchy, all of these things that are connecting.

Daye Pope:

Because even with this fight with Roe v. Wade, there's this sense that there's a retrenchment that women and trans folks broadly and people of color are getting too much of a piece of the pie now. And we need to get back to the "good old days". And the thing is we're barely starting to get enough and not nearly enough, and now there's this huge backlash.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. So for folks listening who want to support your work T.A.K.E. and also who want to do work around trans rights, how can they get involved?

Daye Pope:

It's really important because there's so much happening right now, it's hard to focus, but it's really important to get involved with what's happening at your own state level. Wherever you are, there is a statewide organization who's leading the charge against these anti-trans attacks.

Daye Pope:

And standing with them and figuring out how to help them is really important. We at T.A.K.E. would love anyone's support. If you want to go to [takebhm.org](http://takebhm.org) and donate or learn more about our efforts in Pennsylvania and Alabama.

Daye Pope:

But one of the main things that has happened when Texas passed their anti-trans bill recently, when now in Alabama the anti-trans bill was passed, people from all over donate and send us messages and want to know how to help, and we love that support. Thank you. Please keep supporting us.

Daye Pope:

And sometimes the best fight you can fight is the one in your own backyard. And in, like I said, over 38 states, they're fighting to try to pass these draconian, scary, anti-trans laws. And so if you can connect, a good website to start with is Equality Federation. They have state partners in, I think almost every state.

Daye Pope:

A quick Google search of just trans led organizations in your area. Figure out how you can show up and how you can support. And make it a voting issue, because I think the other side has made it a voting issue. They've really hit hard that this is going to motivate their folks to come to the polls this year.

Daye Pope:

And that's probably a big reason why they're targeting trans folks is to make us into that scapegoat, that wedge issue. And we need to not fall into that and to support candidates that are loud and proud about supporting equality and equity.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And I'll put your website in the show notes and I'll also, Equality Federation, put that there so people can easily access that. So something I wanted to ask you as we're talking is, I mean, folks can't see you, but I can see you and you're White and you are working in a predominantly Black organization.

Shimon Cohen:

And I just wanted to kind of acknowledge that and bring that up because clearly you have to have done some work around your own racism and active anti-racist work to do what you do. And I just thought it was something important to ask you about.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. Definitely. It's interesting because a few years ago I had met Daroneshia and we had started to work together in a different capacity, and I saw how she worked on the ground with community members in Alabama. And I said to her, and I really meant it, "Daroneshia, I would follow you anywhere."

Daye Pope:

I was just so inspired by the way that she shows up and the way that she's the type of person who will jump in her van at midnight to go grab someone who is at the bus station and needs help. And that's

always been who she is. And even now as an executive director of this much larger organization, that's still how she is.

Daye Pope:

And she took me up on it. She really said, "We are trying to build out this civic engagement program. I know that you have been in this role in other organizations and I need your help to make my vision a reality." And over several years I've been learning and really connecting to the idea that a rising tide lifts all boats.

Daye Pope:

That I see a lot of White led, often cis led organizations doing work in the LGBTQ community that are talking about issues that don't relate to a lot of Black trans folks daily lives. A lot of these non-discrimination protections are great, but a lot of these folks have never been able to even get their GED to be eligible for those jobs in the first place because of all the barriers against them.

Daye Pope:

And so it's been a lot of learning from Daroneshia. It's been a lot of being willing to be led and just expressing like, "Tell me how I can be helpful." And it's been a lot of unlearning and connecting myself to the ways that a lot of the advocacy, even that I'd done in the past, was making a lot of assumptions about what resources or what experiences trans people had.

Daye Pope:

And getting back to basics of how racism and anti-immigrant sentiment and the criminal "justice system" and all of these things actually impact trans people, especially of color. And just wanting to make sure we're not really going to have trans justice until all of our community is uplifted.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. I'm so glad I asked you about it. So I thought it was something important to bring up. And I think your critique of White led social justice movements that don't have an anti-racist analysis is such an important message to put out there.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. And I'm always learning too. I think the humility aspect of things is maybe more important than anything else, just knowing that you don't understand and that you don't have the same experiences and trying not to take up too much space, but trying to show up to the work and say, "Let me know how I can be helpful."

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. That's great. I think it would be great if more folks could do that.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. Well, that's another way, I think, a lot of these young people are inspiring me. I think I'm often surprised by their intersectional analysis, even in high school where they're talking about some of these identities and these issues in ways that I definitely couldn't have when I was 14 or what have you.

Shimon Cohen:

Totally. I mean, some of these young folks could be teaching college professors how to talk about this stuff because they totally get it and a lot of the professors don't.

Daye Pope:

Yes. And that really makes me hopeful.

Shimon Cohen:

Before we wrap up, is there anything else you wanted to get out there while you've got the mic?.

Daye Pope:

Yeah. I think it's really hard for a lot of people to understand trans folks. And because they can't understand us, they struggle to empathize with us. And hate groups and legislators and misinformation has taken big advantage of that because in the vacuum of folks not understanding who we are, they can tell lies and make up scary stories about who we are.

Daye Pope:

And I think for each of us and everyone listening, one of the biggest things you can do is try to understand that we're human and connect with us empathetically on that level. We are human and we have civil rights, we're human and we have human rights.

Daye Pope:

You don't have to become an expert in gender-affirming care to know that you support our basic rights to our own bodies, our basic rights to exist safely in the world. If we just bring it back to that really human level, I'm hopeful that more people can understand that even if they don't understand all of the specifics, they share the values of bodily autonomy, of equality, of human rights.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. 100%. And I really appreciate your vulnerability and sharing some of your own personal experiences at 13 and in school and what you just said about people who aren't trans, cisgender folks not understanding trans folks, and bringing it to that human level and just all the knowledge you've communicated in our time together today.

Shimon Cohen:

And I know that people are going to learn from what you've shared and I really hope it gets them to take action on multiple levels, interpersonally and systemically. And so I want to thank you for your time. And I want to thank you, and Daroneshia, share that message with her, for doing the work.

Daye Pope:

Thank you. Thank you so much. I really hope people get something useful out of this and just can, like you said, take action.

Shimon Cohen:

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