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International Transgender Day of Visibility

Contributors: **Author:** Rachel Crandall-Crocker & Genny Beemyn

Edited by: Abbie E. Goldberg & Genny Beemyn

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The International Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) is held annually on March 31 to celebrate trans people and raise awareness of trans communities worldwide. It was developed, in part, as a reaction to the International Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), which honors trans individuals who have been murdered because of their gender identity. Activists wanted to have a day that would encourage trans pride and call attention to the contributions of trans people to society, rather than the focus being only on the horrific level of violence against trans people. While the TDOV is less well known and less widely commemorated than the TDOR, the number of cities and countries that hold TDOV events continues to grow each year, as communities recognize the importance of having a day that acknowledges the lives of trans people.

The TDOV was created in 2009 by Rachel Crandall-Crocker, a psychotherapist and the executive director of Transgender Michigan in the United States. She began posting about the need for a day to celebrate trans people on Facebook, and the idea was quickly embraced by other trans activists. Crandall-Crocker began contacting trans leaders throughout the United States and internationally to encourage them to support the TDOV, and plans began almost immediately for events to take place in a number of localities. The first TDOV event was held in Royal Oak, Michigan, and consisted of a panel of trans allies discussing how they have supported the trans community. In subsequent years, the event has featured an open mic.

LGBTQIA+ and trans groups in other U.S. cities have organized workshops, films, art projects, ribbon campaigns, coffeehouses, networking activities, and rallies for the TDOV. For example, the TGI Network of Rhode Island sponsors an annual Empowerment Breakfast to honor the occasion; the Long Beach, California, LGBTQ Center runs a “Just Be Trans” Festival; and San Francisco LGBTQIA+ and trans organizations hold a TDOV awards night. The Wells Fargo building in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the One World Trade Center in New York City were lit up in the colors of the trans pride flag to mark the day in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Many national LGBTQIA+ organizations in the United States, including the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG, GLSEN, and Trans Student Educational Resources, now support and help publicize the TDOV.

More than a decade since it began, the TDOV has grown to be celebrated in numerous countries, including Uganda, Vietnam, France, Ireland, Germany, and Russia. For example, the mayors of the Canadian cities of Calgary and Edmonton issued formal proclamations in 2013 to recognize the day. In 2014, Irish trans activists marked the TDOV by holding a demonstration outside the offices of the country’s national broadcaster to protest the negative representations of trans people on its television shows and in other media. The following year, trans people around the world, particularly trans youth, posted selfies on social media sites to raise awareness and help humanize trans people. Posting to social media continues to be a way that many trans youth celebrate the day annually, and for some, it is the first time that they come out publicly.

But not all trans activists have been supportive of the TDOV. A few days before the event in 2019, long-time trans rights activist Miss Major tweeted, “I don’t really understand why we need a Day of Visibility, since for most of us, especially Black girls, we are as visible as we need to be. Our visibility is getting us killed. . . . The people who care about us . . . they’re the people who need to become more visible.” While there can be no denying that trans women of color are disproportionately targeted for violence and harassment because of the intersecting oppressions of racism, misogyny, and the hatred of trans people and that cis allies need to do much more to address the situation, this type of criticism misses the need for a day to celebrate trans people and encourage them to feel greater pride in themselves. At the same time that trans people are being murdered much more than other groups, they are also killing and attempting to kill themselves at a horrendously high rate because of internalized oppression. The TDOV can help build self-esteem and well-being among trans people, as well as educate the larger society about anti-trans discrimination, and thus the event serves important purposes.

For many trans people around the world, the TDOV is the one day a year that they feel recognized by others and encouraged to celebrate themselves. Even if they are not comfortable being out or live in a country where trans people have few rights or are persecuted, they can be heartened that trans people and their experiences are being spotlighted, even if only for a day. Having events like the TDOV can help lead to changes in society, such that trans people can be visible every day without having to face harassment and discrimination.

Rachel Crandall-Crocker and Genny Beemyn

See also [Activism](#); [History](#); [News Media Representations](#); [Representations in Popular Culture](#); [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#)

Further Readings

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