

Police mistreatment of transgender man - Brooklyn Bridge Occupy Wall Street Protest Saturday

October 3, 2011 1:39pm

My name is Justin Adkins. I am a transgender man who was arrested at the Occupy Wall Street Protest October 1st on the Brooklyn Bridge. This was my first arrest. This was the second weekend I participated in the Occupy Wall Street protest. I have been coming down on the weekends because I work 2 full-time jobs to make ends meet. One of those jobs is as Assistant Director of the Multicultural Center at Williams College in Massachusetts.

I was toward the front of the march and after being trapped by the police on the bridge and, watching as they arrested people one-by-one I went peacefully when it was clear that it was my turn. My arresting officer, Officer Creer, found out I was born female when I yelled that information to the legal observer on the bridge. My arresting officer asked what I meant when I told the legal observer that I was "transgender" I told him that I was born female. He asked what "I had down there". Since it is a rude and embarrassing question to ask someone about their genitals no matter what the situation, I simply told him again "I was born female". He asked, appropriately, if I wanted a male or female officer to pat me down. I told him it was fine if he patted me down. He then turned and asked a female officer, I believe her name is Officer Verga, to pat me down explaining to her that I was transgender. She patted me down and then proceeded to refer to me as "she" even though I kept correcting her that my preferred pronoun is "he". Luckily she disappeared after about 40 minutes, as we sat cuffed at the apex of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Once we arrived at Precinct 90 in Brooklyn, the male officer taking everyone's belongings asked if it was ok for him to search me, I said "yes" and he proceeded to respectfully empty my pockets. I was arrested with a group of 5 other guys and once they got us to the precinct they initially put me in a cell with the men I was arrested with. They asked if that was ok with me and I said yes. About 5 minutes after they took the cuffs off and shut the cell door an officer came back to the cell to move me. When he opened the door and looked my way I was aware of what was happening. I knew that my transgender status would potentially be an issue once at the jail, which is why I told the legal observer that I was transgender. The officer glanced at me motioning to come out of the cell and then told me to put my hands behind my back as my fellow protestors looked on in wonder.

As we walked out past the other protestors waiting to have their pockets emptied, one woman looked at me with a puzzled look, we had connected on the long drive around Brooklyn as they tried to figure out where to take us. I told her that it looked like transgender people got "special treatment". Within the first 15 minutes of being at precinct 90 I was being segregated and treated differently from the rest of the protestors arrested.

They took me away from the cellblock where they had all of the protestors locked up and brought me to a room with 2 cells and a bathroom. One small cell was empty and the large cell had about 8 men who had been arrested on charges not related to the protest. Unlike me, these men had been arrested for a variety of crimes, some violent. When I

entered the room they had me sit down in a chair on the same portion of the wall as the restroom, and then handcuffed my right wrist to a metal handrail. I thought that this was a temporary arrangement as they tried to find me a separate cell as part of some protocol regarding transgender people, which I later discovered does not exist in New York City. After about an hour I realized that they had no intention of moving me. I remained handcuffed to this bar next to the bathroom for the next 8 hours.

The cells, on the other side of the precinct where they had locked up the other 69 protestors, did not have working toilets so every person who had to use the toilet was brought to the one next to where they had me locked to the railing. This was not only disgusting but also embarrassing. The smell of urine was so strong that I, and the men locked up in the cell in the room that I was in, mentioned the odor on more than one occasion.

Once they started bringing women in to use the bathrooms, a short young female officer, who was in charge of people locked up in the room where I was handcuffed, harshly turned my chair around with my arm still locked to the railing but now pinned behind my back. She said that she knew it hurt but that they were bringing in women to use the restroom and she could not have me watching. I had no interest in watching anyone use the bathroom, and every-time a male had come into use the restroom I had respectfully turned away. This process of people coming in and out to use the restroom went on for the full 8 hours.

I was distinctly treated differently than the other protestors during my entire time at Precinct 90 in Brooklyn. At one point in the night all of the protestors were given a peanut butter sandwich and water. I asked for a sandwich three times but of all of the officers who came in and out of the room where I was handcuffed never acknowledged my request. I think this was because when I asked for a sandwich the men locked up in the room I was in asked for one too. I do not know when or how long those men were being held but I was there for eight hours and had sat on the bridge for about 2 hours and was never once offered water or a sandwich when my fellow protestors received both.

At one point the woman I had spoken with earlier was brought into use the toilet. When she entered the room she looked shocked and asked why I was attached to the railing. I told her again that it was the "transgender special". She clearly understood that I was being discriminated against because of my transgender status. She asked the female officer in the room why I couldn't be given my own cell and the officer said "you don't know why he is locked up here" the woman said that *she did know* and that I should at least be given my own cell if they were not going to house me with the male protestors I was originally arrested with.

Throughout the night it became clear that they wanted my fellow protestors to think that I did something criminally wrong. That I had done something different from them. That I was not just a peaceful protestor exercising my rights on that bridge. That I deserved to be handcuffed to a railing in the side of the precinct with violent criminals. Everyone seemed to wonder why I had been separated. When other officers chatted amongst themselves about why I was separated, one officer suspected aloud that I was a "ringleader". The woman officer stood a few times outside the glass wall with the door open as male officers asked about me. It appeared that she told them that I was transgender as they gawked, giggled and stared at me. This was

embarrassing and humiliating. Only I have the right to out myself as a transgender person. She was using my identity to get a laugh with men who she thought would find me curious and freakish. It felt at these times that I was behind the glass of a freak show where people could come look at the funny transgender guy. I decided that when they looked at me giggling I would just catch them off guard and wave. It at least made the time go by.

At one point in the night a young man who had participated in the earlier NYC Slutwalk march to protest against explaining or excusing rape by referring to a women's clothing, came into use the bathroom wearing a mini-skirt. He was one of the protestors arrested with me on the bridge in the Occupy Wall Street March. The officer escorting him started poking fun at his mini-skirt at which point I explained that he looked good and the skirt was fine. When he sat down to go to the bathroom the officers laughed even more saying that they had "seen everything tonight". The attitude of the officers made me realize that as much as I needed to urinate it would not be a good idea to do so. The space did not feel safe. By the time I was released I had not gone to the bathroom for 11 hours.

I was more than comfortable and safe with the 3 men I was initially put in a cell with. They were nice and we had a lot in common. If the officers concern was about my safety, I perceived I was in much more danger in the accommodations they gave me away from my fellow protestors. Additionally, I was made fun of and treated differently throughout the entire process.

At about 2 am I was released with a desk appearance ticket and charged with disorderly conduct. To my knowledge I was the only one out of 70 processed at Precinct 90 who only received only one ticket. The rest received 2 or 3 tickets mostly including refusing to disperse and blocking a roadway. Why was I treated differently than the other 69 protestors? The only reason that I was treated differently was that I was transgender.

The NYC police department needs to have a protocol and train its officers on how to treat transgender people. No one should experience the blatant discrimination and embarrassment that I did.

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