

INTOLERANCE

Hate: Video of Transgender Woman Attack Forces France to Confront Anti-LGBT Attitudes

Sunday 7 April 2019, by [ZALESKI Erin](#) (Date first published: 5 April 2019).

A video depicting a shocking hate attack against a transgender woman in Paris is serving as a wake-up call for France.



Photo Illustration by The Daily Beast/Twitter

PARIS—Julia was trying to enter a metro station when the violent attack began.

The 31-year-old transgender woman was returning from the Canal St. Martin in Paris's trendy, energetic 10th Arrondissement on Sunday when she ran into a crowd of protesters near Place de la République, who were demonstrating against Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika prior to his resignation. Sporting a striped tunic and a black miniskirt, Julia approached the steps to the station when several men blocked her path.

"You, you're actually a man," one of them told her. "You will not pass."

One of the men then allegedly threw beer on her, while another grabbed her breasts. A third exposed himself and said she should pleasure him.

What happened next was caught on video [\[1\]](#), which has since gone viral and shocked the country.

Julia (who has only given her first name in the press) is seen trying to push her way through the crowd of about a dozen men, several draped in the Algerian flag, who appear to be yelling insults at her.

One man reaches out and ruffles her short blond hair. A fellow protester, a young woman, steps into the frame and appears to try to lead Julia away from the mob. Julia continues to try to push through the group, however, and that is when the violence starts.

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She is grabbed, pushed, and punched in the head. Another man can be seen kicking at her. The attack abruptly ends when the metro police arrive to intervene.

"It's shocking, but it happens often," Julia told French newsmagazine *Le Point* [2]. "I was targeted because I'm a minority. They saw me as a man dressed like a woman and they made me understand clearly that it wasn't normal."

The video of the brazen daylight assault has already been viewed over 2 million times, and has garnered outrage from LGBT activist groups, politicians, and Parisians alike. Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo took to Twitter to condemn the attack saying that those responsible "should be identified and prosecuted."

Julia has also gone public with the attack, appearing on the cover of the left-leaning daily *Libération*, as well as on numerous French television news programs to tell her story.

The widespread media coverage of the incident has served as a troubling wake-up call in a country that is widely viewed as laid-back and welcoming toward the LGBT community.

After all, the French capital is where many gay and lesbian expats sought refuge during the first half of the 20th century, and Paris's Marais neighborhood has been a central LGBT hotspot for roughly four decades.

The city's rollicking annual pride march in June consistently draws an ample and enthusiastic crowd, and Paris's official tourism board includes a "Gay and Lesbian Paris" section on its website [3].

However, Sunday's sickening assault has tarnished the country's LGBT-friendly image and suggests that, despite its longtime reputation as a bastion of hedonism and sexual openness, a current of intolerance runs through City of Light and elsewhere in France, particularly toward transgender people.

Indeed according to a report published by SOS Homophobie last May [4], there were 186 attacks against transgender people in France in 2017—a 54 percent increase over a 12-month period.

Most disturbing, perhaps, is the blasé attitude among certain members of law enforcement, who have reportedly behaved dismissively when confronted with cases involving attacks targeting transgender individuals.

This, Julia reports, was the case on Sunday when the officers who helped her addressed her as "monsieur," and told her she "shouldn't have dressed like that." According to LGBT activist groups, such treatment of transgender people reporting crimes is common.

Lyes Aloune of Stop Homophobie, who helped publicize the video, described the attack against Julia as a "public lynching," and told France Inter that allegations of violence by transgender people are generally not seriously pursued. Sunday's incident had to be widely broadcast in the media, he explained, to "avoid normalizing" this kind of attack.

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In last year's annual report, SOS Homophobie cites several possible reasons for the sudden uptick in violence against the country's transgender community.

According to the report, an anti-LGBT sentiment flourished in certain conservative circles in the lead-up to the 2017 presidential elections. The controversy surrounding same-sex marriage and over whether lesbian couples should be granted access to fertility treatments such as IVF are also believed to have sparked a backlash against the country's LGBT community, and contributed to a countrywide "rise in hate."

"Since the debates surrounding gay marriage, we have seen a return of anti-LGBT rhetoric," Joël Deumier, president of SOS Homophobie said in an interview with the French news site *20 Minutes* [5]. "This rhetoric has made its way back into public debate, especially on the part of certain elected officials. When transphobic discourse makes its way into public debate there are repercussions; it incites certain people to act [on their prejudices]."

SOS Homophobie's other theory is less grim. As the country's LGBT community continues to make advances and are afforded more rights (gay marriage, for instance, was legalized in France in 2013), victims are empowered to come forward and report hate crimes. Hence, it's not that such attacks are increasing, it's that victims are less afraid to go to the police.

Such has been the case with Julia, a self-described "very strong person," who has bravely discussed her ordeal in front of the cameras and refused to back down. "I'm Trans, So What?" read the cover of *Libération* [6].

In the meantime, French prosecutors have opened an investigation into Sunday's assault, which they have described as "violence committed on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity."

Speaking to the French press, Julia said that she is less concerned with punishing the perpetrators and that she just "wants things to move forward and for the way people think to evolve." She also refuses to lay the blame on the city's expat Algerian community, saying "ignorant" people are responsible for the attack.

"I just want to give a message of tolerance and open-mindedness," Julia explained in a video posted on the LGBT news site, *Têtu* [7]. "Be proud of who you are and don't be afraid."

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P.S.

- The Daily Beast. 04.05.19 5:17 PM ET:
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/video-of-transgender-woman-attack-forces-france-to-confront-anti-lgbt-attitudes?ref=scroll>

Footnotes

[1] https://twitter.com/Lyes_Alouane/status/1112964139616555008

[2] https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/julia-transgenre-agressee-a-paris-c-est-choquant-mais-ca-arrive-souvent-03-04-2019-2305677_23.php

[3] <https://en.parisinfo.com/discovering-paris/themed-guides/gay-and-lesbian-paris>

- [4] https://www.sos-homophobie.org/sites/default/files/rapport_annuel_2018_dossier_presse.pdf
- [5] <https://theworldnews.net/fr-news/agression-transphobe-a-paris-les-victimes-franchissent-maintenant-les-portes-des-commissariats-et-brisent-la-loi-du-silence>
- [6] https://www.liberation.fr/direct/element/a-la-une-de-libe-ce-jeudi-je-suis-trans-et-alors_95963/
- [7] <https://tetu.com/2019/04/05/video-agression-transphobe-place-de-la-republique-javance-et-je-massume-pleinement-temoigne-julia/>