

Running Head: *TRANSFIGURATIONS*

Transfigurations: A Vehicle for Change

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A project presented to the Arts & Administration Program
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Arts Management

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Date

Approved: _____
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Acknowledgements

Although my acknowledgments encompass individuals who were not directly involved in my research project, as a 52 year old working mother, a musician, and a domestic partner, I could never have taken the time to do this without having the enthusiastic support of the people around me. As a student returning to school after almost 20 years away, perhaps one of the most valuable gifts has been encouragement. I am grateful for the unfailing support of my research adviser, Dr. Janice Rutherford, who helped me find a way to put this important project into a meaningful academic context. Because of her encouragement and kindness, this project has been a joy to write. I am indebted to my partner, Carol Horne Dennis, and my son, Max Lunch, who were kind and understanding with my lack of time and attention for them during this long academic journey. Alice Parman, PhD, and Carol Philips gave me real-world opportunities to use the arts as a vehicle for change, and reminded me that my ideas were important. Karm Hagedorn, Amy Picard, Lisa Hellemn and Dani Sinjem have patiently dealt with my late arrivals at band practice and have always made room for my school schedule. Thanks especially to Karm for giving me the nudge to go to grad school, and for appearing to have no doubt that I'd finish. My friend and classmate Reed Davaz McGowan helped me keep my perspective, inspired me to do my best, and cheered me on. She also designed the beautiful look of the *Transfigurations* website. My dear friend Jesse Davis offered distractions, funny emails, and scooter rides, and provided the kindest words of encouragement when I wasn't sure I could finish.

Dedication

For J.T and C.H.: I'd do it all twice over if it would make the world safer for you.

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Abstract

This research provides first-hand evidence that many gender-variant individuals have unmet basic needs, that they suffer from discrimination and violence, and that education about transgender issues is needed to remove barriers to understanding for transgendered individuals. This Master of Arts project consists of a website which will provide access to a reproducible copy of a theater piece entitled *Transfigurations* and supportive materials for post-reading educational talkback sessions. Access to the website will be offered to local chapters of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) and other interested groups and individuals. *Transfigurations* (1998, Roaring Springs & Ferguson) is a dramatic theater piece about the lives of transgendered individuals designed to have a positive affect on the attitudes of audience members toward transgender issues. Using primary and secondary sources, a user-friendly discussion group curriculum was created to accompany the play, so that community groups wishing to educate themselves about the lives of transgendered people can perform the play and hold an informative discussion session afterward. It is hoped that the use of theater coupled with discussion will provide some understanding about transgender issues in communities where resources and information about gender-variance are limited.

Key words: Gender-variant, transgender, transsexual

Chapter I: Introduction

Robert Eads could be alive. Ovarian cancer is deadly; in fact, many estimates show only a one-third chance of survival. But he had enough time to visit over two dozen doctors to seek early treatment. All refused to treat him (Wilchins, 2002, p.1).

On Christmas Day 1993, [Brandon] Teena was beaten and raped by two male acquaintances. Teena reported the rape, despite the fact that his attackers had threatened to kill him if he went to the authorities. The sheriff's department failed to provide protection and informed the rapists of the complaint against them. One week after they had attacked Teena, the two men murdered him and two of his friends. (Moulton, 2005, p. 23).

Intersexuality is a psychiatric emergency on the part of doctors and parents, who treat it by cutting into the body of the infant, even though the adults – as the ones in distress—are the real patients (Cheryl Chase, in Wilchins, 2004, p. 73).

I walked across a vast field. Women and children stood on the edges of the field looking at me, smiling and nodding. I headed toward a small round hut near the edge of the woods. I had a feeling I had been in this place before. There were people who were different like me inside. We could all see our reflections in the faces of those who sat in this circle. I looked around. It was hard to say who was a woman, who was a man. Their faces radiated a different kind of beauty than I'd grown up seeing celebrated on television or in magazines. It's a beauty one isn't born with, but must fight to construct at great sacrifice. I felt proud to sit among them. I was proud to be one of them (Feinberg, 1993, p. 300).

*"Tolerance is not enough" –Fish, from Transfigurations
(Roaring Springs & Ferguson, 1998, p. 17).*

One way to understand another is through identification. Identification of common struggles, understanding another's humanity, and placing oneself in another's shoes are methods with great potential to remove barriers. This project attempts to use theater as a tool to remove barriers to understanding by presenting characters with problems most of us share. The project will consist of a website with two main components: a downloadable copy of a play called *Transfigurations* and an easy to use curriculum for a post-play discussion session. It is hoped that

the use of theater coupled with discussion will provide some understanding about transgender issues in communities where resources and information about gender-variance are limited.

Problem Statement

The number of gender-variant individuals in society is difficult to determine with accuracy. Statistics on male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals estimate that between one-in-250 to one-in-500 (Conway, 2002) seek surgery. Because transsexuals are a subset of the transgender population, these numbers do not reflect individuals who do not choose (or cannot afford) surgery, female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals, intersexed people (individuals with ambiguous genitalia that are not completely consistent with “binary-gender normative” genitalia), or individuals who do not fit neatly into discrete gender categories such as transvestites, masculine (butch) females, or feminine males. Some transpeople do not use the term “transgendered,” preferring either a more individual term or preferring to call themselves by the gender with which they most identify.

Serena Nanda (2000), in *Gender diversity: Crosscultural variations*, states, “relatively speaking, gender variance has not been as severely sanctioned in some other cultures as it has been in many Western societies” (p. 4). The western view that biological sex determines gender does not hold true in all ages or cultures.

The ethnographic record makes it clear that there is no simple, universal, inevitable, or ‘correct’ correspondence between sex and gender and that the Euro-American privileging of biological sex (anatomy) is not universal. Many cultures do not make the distinction between the natural and cultural or between sex and gender; for many cultures, and anatomical sex is not the dominant factor in constructing gender roles and gender identity (Nanda, 2000, p. 2)

In a qualitative analysis of gender variance in India, Thailand, the Philippines, Polynesia, Brazil, Native America, and Euro-America, Nanda discovered that tolerance for variations in human sex and gender are far more common than a Westerner might expect. In some societies, gender variant individuals are assigned special roles. In India, for example, individuals who are not male or female are ‘hijras’ and are called upon to bless babies and ensure fertility at weddings. In Brazil, mixed-gender individuals called ‘bicha’ are sometimes associated with Afro-Brazilian spiritual trance work. In the Philippines and in Polynesia, contemporary gender variants do not have a specific ceremonial role, but, “represent the spontaneous and the unruly in contrast to the norms of restraint” (Nanda, 2000, pp. 105-106). Nanda cautions against assuming that every society that acknowledges the existence of more than two genders endows the gender-variant with special roles.

Idealization distorts the ethnographic record, however, when it assumes, inaccurately that sex/gender variation in non-Western or non-industrialized societies is always highly valued and that gender non-conformists are not marginalized, stigmatized, or discriminated against. Idealization obscures the reality that in most contemporary societies, attitudes toward gender diversity are ambivalent and complicated (Nanda, 2000, p. 4).

Violence is an important factor that makes a cultural attitude shift toward transgendered people critical. In a 2003 study done on United States college campuses, 71% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) students had witnessed or experienced harassment of transgender students (Rankin, 2003). According to a 2001 study by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), “89.5% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe based on

their gender expression” (Plotner, 2002, p.11). A 2005 study by Gretchen Kenagy on transgender health, corroborated previous studies:

About one third (30.1%) had attempted suicide, more than half had been forced to have sex, 56.3% had experienced violence in their homes, and 51.3% had been physically abused. 26% had been denied medical care because they were transgender (Kenagy, 2005, p. 5).

Although there are no official numbers available for suicide attempts, the American Association of Suicidology (2004) estimates that there are 25 attempted suicides for each completed suicide, which means that an estimated .02% of the population attempts suicide in the United States each year. Thus, Kenagy’s finding of 30% indicates that the transgender population has staggering suicide rates. Previous studies, such as the Washington transgender needs assessment survey, corroborated Kenagy’s findings, showing a suicide contemplation rate of 35% and an attempt rate of 16% (Wilkerson, n.d).

Awareness and education are needed to change the climate so that transgendered individuals are safe and are afforded equal treatment. The gay and lesbian population has benefited greatly from an increase in understanding about the range of differences in affectional orientation. Even so, social science research on LGBT populations is in its infancy, with the first important studies on gays and lesbians appearing less than 50 years ago. Until 1994, when the *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Social Services* appeared, no specialized academic journal addressing the social issues of the lesbian and gay community existed (*Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 1994). With the stigma attached to gender variance far exceeding that attached to homosexuality, transgendered individuals cannot depend on the growing acceptance of the lesbian and gay community by the general population as evidence that they are accepted as well.

In fact, transpeople are frequently misunderstood or mistreated by members of the LGB community. Pat Califia, author and transgender activist writes:

Sadly, the efforts of transgendered activists to gain basic civil liberties protection for themselves and their community have encountered an obstacle where they should have found allies. In June of 1994, HRC, a venerable gay rights organization formerly known as the Human Rights Campaign Fund, have declined to include transsexual people as a protected class in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a job discrimination bill it was promoting to congress to protect lesbians and gay men from being fired for their sexual orientation (Califia, 1997, p 240).

It took until March, 2001 for HRC's board of directors to amend the HRC mission statement to include transgender people and until July, 2004 to adopt a policy stating that HRC would, "only support federal legislation banning workplace discrimination if the bill is inclusive of both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression" (HRC, 2007, p.1). The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (Michfest), the largest women's music festival in the United States, has become a battle ground for the lesbian community because of their policy of admitting only "womyn-born womyn." Transactivists and allies have set up an alternative camp across the road from the entrance to Michfest in protest of this policy which excludes transwomen, intersexed women and individuals who identify as transgender. In response, the organizers have set up a forum bulletin board to focus discussion and protests to a manageable area of their website (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, 2007). While many new trans-allies have emerged among lesbians, gays and bisexuals, transgender individuals cannot assume that support from this community will come without a fight.

Gender is a basic construct of society. The first question asked upon the birth of a baby is, “Is it a boy or girl?” For the majority of families, this is a simple question, but when parents do not know how to answer, as in the case of ambiguously gendered or intersexed children, or if the answer is not quite accurate, as in transsexual or transgendered children, the question becomes a predictor of difficulties to come. Transgendered or gender-variant individuals do not conform to societal constructs for gender presentation and/or behavior and therefore face discrimination, ridicule, and violence. While great progress is being made by trans-activists, basic issues like access to public restrooms and the right to health care are still routinely denied to transgendered Americans.

In addition, with no consistent protection against unfair treatment at the state or federal level, gender variant people and their families face struggles with marriage, parenting, and other legal issues. “Because each jurisdiction is free to define sex as it chooses, a trans person’s sex can, in effect, change as she crosses state borders” (Currah et al., 2006, p.33). Transsexuals, having a diagnosable condition, can be, in some states, “cured” through hormones, therapy, and surgery. But current laws regarding marriage and family leave transsexuals in a legal tangle which Currah, et al. (2006) call *unmaking* families.

Michael Katreras was legally married for ten years and had two children, one he adopted from his wife’s first marriage as a step parent, and one he and his wife conceived using Michael’s brother as a donor. When the couple divorced, his wife argued in court that because Michael was born female, he had no legal right to his children because theirs had been a lesbian relationship. Long before they were married, Michael had undergone sex reassignment and had been living as a man for many years – a fact that his wife was aware of when they married. The Florida courts invalidated Michael’s marriage, prohibited his right to marry again, and left open

the possibility that his legal rights to his children could be voided in the future. “Transgender family law decisions reflect society’s almost fetishistic attitude toward trans individuals, evident in the courts’ reductionist tendency to replace substantive analysis (whether Michael is a good parent) with a relentless focus on sexual anatomy (whether Michael has a penis)” (Currah et al., 2006, p.33). Once a person’s sex has been legally “established” by a judge, even if there has been previous documentation, reassignment surgery, or certification by doctors and the state Department of Motor Vehicles, a transperson is vulnerable to being left in a legal quagmire where his or her identification and gender never match.

A trans woman, for instance, who is declared to be legally male may not be able to change identifying information (such as a birth certificate, driver’s license or passport) to reflect her identified sex, an outcome that exposes her to potential discrimination, harassment, and violence in the countless transactions that make up our daily lives. What should be a simple task of purchasing an item with a credit card (where identification may be required) can become a night mare: a transperson risks humiliation, refusal to be served, and possible harm by onlookers who—now aware of her gender variance because of the reaction of the store clerk – may follow her out of the store (Currah et al., 2006, p. 36-37).

Not only are simple public transactions a risk, but inconsistent documentation can also lead to a loss of rights at every level.

Her marriage may be invalidated, a speeding ticket or an international vacation may put her at risk. She may be denied a loan, refused service at a bank or land the job of her dreams only to be fired as soon as she presents identifying documentation on her first day (Currah et al., 2006, p. 37).

When the courts “invalidate” a marriage, the legal standing of the couple is quite different than that of a divorced couple. A divorce ends a marriage: the marriage existed, but is legally over. *Invalidating* a marriage means that the marriage never existed, no matter how long the couple was married or how many children or grandchildren they have. In the vast majority of states this leaves the trans partner unable to marry again (Currah et al., 2006).

When transpeople face discrimination by medical personnel like those who refused to treat Robert Eads for ovarian cancer for example, the results can be exposure, humiliation, and death. Mildred Brown and Chloe Rounsley (1996), authors of True selves: Understanding transsexualism, tell the story of a transsexual woman

. . .who was involved in an auto accident and was denied lifesaving treatment by fire department rescue workers when they discovered her male genitalia. She died at the accident scene and onlookers reported that in the last minutes of her life, she was laughed at and humiliated by the rescue workers (Brown & Rounsley, 1996, p.144).

Historically, crimes against transgendered people have not been well-documented by authorities, and many transgendered individuals are denied the safety of police protection and assurance that perpetrators will be prosecuted.

Hate violence against transgender people appears to be epidemic, with hardly a month going by without another story of a transgender person who was beaten up, raped or killed. Furthermore, there is no way to know for certain how many hate crimes are committed against transgender people because statistics are not collected on these incidents of violence. Crimes against transgender people are under-investigated and under-prosecuted by local, state and federal law enforcement officials. This seems to be

particularly true for especially marginalized transgender people, such as those who are poor, young, immigrants or people of color (Moulton, 2005, p. 21).

Efforts by trans-activists to educate law enforcement officials and social service agencies have resulted in increased awareness and documentation of hate crimes against the transgender population. Statistics compiled in 1998 showed that the problem was prevalent at that time:

While transgendered people have always been victims of hate crimes, it is only recently that any agencies have begun to acknowledge or document those crimes. As a result of those efforts, more transgendered people are beginning to report these incidents. Between 1997 and 1998, there was a 49% increase in the number of transgender hate crime victims coming forward to report incidents to anti-violence programs (Currah & Minter, 2000, p. 65).

Reporting systems in large cities like New York and San Francisco have improved measurably. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) has started publishing annual reports on violence against LGBT community members and demographic information on their perpetrators when available. Made up of professionals in organizations working directly with victims of LGBT violence and police departments, the Coalition's annual report for 2005 drew a connection between the political climate in areas where anti-marriage equality measures were on the ballot and an increase in violence toward LGBT community members. In some areas where anti-marriage equality was not on the ballot, the incidence of violence either stayed constant or decreased. The 2005 report, while optimistic about the effectiveness of reporting systems, cautions against assuming that violence against LGBT community members is on the decline.

While 2005 appeared to provide somewhat of a respite from the extraordinary rates of anti-LGBT violence in 2003 and 2004, most NCAVP members do not believe that this

year's declines are part of a long-term trend, particularly given the political and cultural stakes in the upcoming elections in the fall of 2006 – some members are already reporting increased reports of anti-LGBT violence in their programs (Patton, 2006, p.4).

Again, it is difficult to draw accurate conclusions about the rate of violence against transgender people as a separate population when most readily available studies focus on the LGBT community as a whole. Although the NCAVP does track transgender victims as a separate category, their conclusions are primarily about the wider category of LGBT violence. Early AIDs statistics focused on the entire population of people with AIDs, a population that was mostly male, and made the opportunity to find solutions that were specific to the unique needs women with AIDs difficult until women were tracked as a separate, unique group. (AVERT, 2006). Similarly, until detailed studies on issues unique to the transgendered are as prevalent as those of other marginalized groups, assumptions about transpeople based on studies of other marginalized groups must be made with the caveat that the only verifiable characteristic they share is their marginality.

This gap in knowledge about transgender-specific statistics indicates an opportunity for education about the importance of tracking transgender data separately. The severity of violence experienced by transgender victims reported by the few agencies that do keep separate statistics suggests that the cost of ignoring this problem is high. Transgender service organizations that keep records specific to the transgender population report that while only 2-4% of LGBT hate crimes are perpetrated against victims who identify as transgender, they account for 20% of the murder victims and 40% of the victims of police-initiated violence (Currah & Minter, 2000).

Transgendered people may experience greater disparities than any other group in being the victims of violence. And transgendered people have been excluded from almost every

hate crime bill, whether at the Federal, State or local level. Only four states have included transgendered people in their hate crimes laws—Minnesota (1993), California (1998), Vermont (2000), and Missouri (2000). The first major study on violence and discrimination against transgendered people in the United States found that 60 percent experienced some form of harassment and/or violence sometime during their lives, and 37 percent experienced some form of economic discrimination (Wilkerson, n.d. p.3).

Another sobering report from the field shows that violence experienced by transpeople can be especially brutal. According to Vernita Gray, Hate Crimes Specialist with the Cook County [Illinois] State Attorney's Office, "Some of the most violent hate crimes are carried out against transgender victims" (Plotner, 2002, p.10). The concept of overkill, where an extreme amount of force, far beyond what is necessary to kill a target, is often seen in the murders of transpeople. More often than not, the victim is a male-to-female (MTF) transsexual.

Hate violence against transgendered people tends to be particularly violent and brutal, and is disproportionately (though by no means exclusively) directed at MTFs. Despite the seriousness of this problem, transgendered people are excluded from any protection under the vast majority of state hate crimes statutes and violence against transgendered people is often neither investigated nor prosecuted (Currah & Minter, 2000, p.10).

These reports show that there is an obvious need for a societal and cultural change in attitude toward people who are transgendered .

Purpose of Project

Attitudes toward other marginalized populations, such as AIDs victims, lesbians, and gay men have been influenced by theater and film. Plays like *Angels in America* (Kushner, 2003) and *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 1999) and films like *Philadelphia* (Demme,1993) provide

sympathetic characters that are human and struggling against ignorance and narrow-mindedness. A 1999 study found that “. . . respondents who had seen the movie *Philadelphia* were significantly more likely to hold positive attitudes towards gays and lesbians and to behave in more accepting ways” (Anderson, Fakhfakh & Kondylis, 1999, pp. 4-5).

In these films and plays, the protagonists are seen as part of an identifiable group (people with AIDs, gay men, etc.) rather than outcasts or psychologically unsound individuals. Sympathetic transgendered characters, however, are frequently shown as individuals attempting to survive, isolated from others like them. The movie *Boys Don't Cry* (Vachon, 1999) showed a flawed but sympathetic transgendered youth being beaten and murdered after being discovered as transgendered. *Normal*, a made-for-television program about a married transsexual who comes out and makes a transition from male to female in middle age, provided a positive model for how family and close friends can gain understanding and acceptance of a transgendered woman (Busch, 2003). The small number of out transgendered individuals makes geographic transgendered communities almost impossible in real-life, so that accurate portrayals of transpeople may generate sympathy for the individual but not for transpeople as a group.

Acceptance comes through understanding of and contact with many individuals in a marginalized group. Having one transgendered friend or acquaintance is not enough to counteract the assumption that gender-variance is unique to that individual. In two UC Davis studies on heterosexuals' attitudes toward gays and lesbians, Gregory Herek discovered that there was a correlation between a heterosexual's supportive attitude toward gays and lesbians, and having contact with two or more gay or lesbian friends (Herek, 2006). The sheer lack of transgendered individuals in the general population who have come out makes it difficult for

people who want to understand gender-variance to find enough transpeople to identify a trans community “norm.”

If a lack of real-life sympathetic stories hampers understanding about a marginalized group, theater can provide that understanding. “Theater has the potential to model the world we want to live in” (Uno, 2001, p.72). *Transfigurations* (Roaring Springs & Ferguson, 1998) portrays a group of transgendered characters, all struggling with the constraints of a society built on belief in an immutable binary gender system and each with a different perspective. The play takes place during a crisis in the life of the main character, Dana, and portrays a fictional support group of other transpeople who come to Dana’s aid. Theater’s unique ability to allow the audience to observe the life of an individual from a safe distance allows an audience the opportunity to gain familiarity and a level of comfort with gender-variance.

Using primary and secondary sources, a user-friendly discussion group curriculum was created to accompany the play, so that the issues and feelings brought up by the play can be placed in context for the audience. The curriculum includes statistics, resources, and discussion questions designed to allow audience members time to discuss feelings or ask questions in a supportive environment. It is hoped that the use of theater coupled with discussion will provide some understanding about transgender issues in communities where resources and information about gender-variance are limited.

Significance of the Project

It is hoped that the creation of the website and its subsequent use by PFLAG and other community groups will engender in those who use it understanding and a sympathetic response toward transgender issues. The unique forum of theater provides an opportunity for an audience to experience a community of transgendered characters, creating familiarity and understanding.

Use of the website easily allows for those with questions to find sources for further information, and the second act “talkback” session with a facilitator provides an opportunity for face-to-face discussion.

Chapter II: Methodological Paradigm

Although considerably influenced by the Critical¹ and Feminist² approaches to research, the primary paradigm out of which I operate is the Interpretivist approach. My desire is to increase understanding about the worth and humanity of transgendered people. Interpretivist ontology supposes that there are multiple realities, and that reality is a social construct. Interpretivist research is validated by the participants and reality is understood through human interaction. One important subgoal is that individuals who are not seen as gender-variant will come to support equal and respectful treatment for the transgendered and will act to make the world a safer place. In order to adequately understand life for a transgendered person, using the interpretivist paradigm, the research method must resonate with those being studied. The Interpretivist sees the values of those being studied as an integral part of social life where “no group’s values are wrong, only different” (Neuman, 2003, p. 91). Transgendered individuals must therefore be involved in the process of meaningful definition and description of their own experiences, and terminology and research methods must respect the inherent worth and dignity of subjects and their values. Literature should be reviewed for indications that the author views the experiences or worth of transgendered individuals as less than those portrayed as gender-normative.

Role of the researcher

As a researcher, I assume that gender is not binary, but a continuum and that genitalia and/or chromosomes are only part of a person’s gender. I recognize the importance of gender as defined

¹ Critical approaches to research assume that there are multiple realities, but that there are inequalities in society that dominate those realities. Its purpose is liberation through removing inequities. (Schubert, 1986, p. 181)

² Feminist approaches seek to equalize power through sharing of knowledge and deconstruction of social roles. (Schubert, 1986, p. 181)

by the individual, not by the observer, and affirm that individuals have the right to change their gender presentation or not, based on their personal circumstances or beliefs. I assume that gender-variance is a normal part of human society and that intolerance of it lies in society's belief in a binary system of gender rather than with gender-variance itself. As a female-born female, I have had the privilege of living in a world where my gender is never questioned, and therefore my understanding of trans experience is limited. As the former significant other of a transsexual man and the wife of a transgendered butch,³ I have some understanding from the perspective of a domestic partner, friend, and family member.

Questions Guiding the Research

I will review sources on the status of transgendered individuals in our society within the framework of the following research questions:

- What information is needed to support community groups wanting to use *Transfigurations* as a tool for understanding?
- What do transgendered individuals want others to know about them?
- What do non-transgendered people want to know about gender-variance?
- What information will best remove barriers to understanding the lives of transgendered individuals?

Limitations

Although the term, “transgender” is sometimes used by gender-variant people to self-identify, many transgender individuals self-identify using different terminology, or simply refuse to acknowledge their birth-assigned gender (Valentine, 2003; Witten & Eyler, 1999). Reluctance to be identified as someone transgressing a gender boundary or feeling that the word

³. Butch: a lesbian with masculine characteristics (Rubin, 1992, quoting Rodgers, 1972, in Stryker & Whittle, 2006, 479). See *Limitations* section for further discussion of naming issues.

“transgender” does not adequately describe the complexities of an individual’s non-standard experience of gender makes the process of naming difficult. In addition, fear of discovery keeps many transgendered people from participating in research. Witten & Eyler (1999) stated that, “population estimates are difficult to obtain and verify, due principally to the greatly stigmatized nature of transsexual, transgender and cross-dressing identifications and behavior”(p. 462). They call this phenomenon “epidemiologic invisibility” (p. 462).

An additional difficulty arises with the frequent use of the umbrella term “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender” or “LGBT” (alternatively, GLBT) to group transgendered individuals, or “transpeople,” with non- heterosexual individuals. This categorization may help transgendered individuals by providing some measure of support from a larger community; but because gender and affectional orientation are very personal and complex issues, the categorization hinders understanding. Transgendered individuals cannot be assumed to be homosexual, (although some are). The confusion of affectional orientation with gender presentation creates the assumption among transgendered people that erroneous conclusions will be drawn about one’s identity based on inclusion in an umbrella group. As Ungar (2000) states,

The question of identity is problematic for any lgbt movement. Like other social and political movements, the lgbt movement rotates around formation of and changes in identity, which flow into the movement’s strategies. It continually struggles with and develops its identity, always questioning but never fully deciding who it does and does not cover (p. 73).

Definitions

In lieu of a more universally appropriate term for the sake of this review, the broad category of

“transgender” offered by Tarynn M. Witten and A. Evan Eyler of the International Longitudinal Transsexual and Transgender Aging Research Project will be used:

This population includes “cross-dressers (men and women who take on the appearance of the other gender, usually on a social or part-time basis), “transgenders” (people whose psychological self-identification is as the other sex and who alter behavior and appearance to conform with this internal perception) and “transsexuals,” both male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM), who undertake hormonal and (usually) surgical sex reassignment (SRS) therapies. This definition allows us to include those individuals who would be termed “transvestites” as well as those who fall outside of the traditional Western dichotomous gender definition (Native American dual spirits, Taiwa Indians, and so forth) (Witten, T. & Eyler, A., 1999, p.461).

Chapter III: Literature Review

In the United States, the 1960s and 1970s produced many theater groups that were actively engaged in using plays as a vehicle for social change. As cultural development consultant and author Arlene Goldbard writes,

The idea that art can make society more just, equitable, and democratic is hardly an artifact of the sixties (though I admit I am). The impulse to instruct—to take note, to rebuke, to celebrate—was probably part of the first story ever told. . . With my own eyes, I've seen theater mobilize a community, alter the self-image of its members, peel back layers of disinformation to expose galvanizing truths (Goldbard, 2001, p.127).

American progressive theater groups in the 1960s and 1970s tackled opposition to war, the roles of women, the oppression of people of color, class issues, and the lives of gay people. *The Boys in the Band*, written by Mart Crowley, opened in 1968 and was the first gay-themed play to open off-Broadway. While its characters were tragic rather than triumphant, it was the first time gay people saw themselves in a major play. The Stonewall Riots soon followed in 1969, and the gay rights movement was born. In 1975, Ntozake Shange wrote *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* to raise awareness about the hegemonic forces affecting women. Giving the characters colors instead of names (the Lady in Brown, The Lady in Blue, etc) allowed the audience to see the characters as defined by color rather than by name (Lester, 1995). One year later, in 1976, Jane Chambers wrote *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* to, "open the door for lesbian characters," who, Chambers says, have been depicted as bizarre (*The Killing of Sister George*), suicidal (*The Children's Hour*) or simply nonexistent. She goes on to say, "*The Boys in the Band*, was negative; the characters didn't like themselves. . . None of the women in this play apologize for being lesbians. They accept it and go on to lead productive

lives. I don't know why that should be a threat to people” (Klein, 1981, p. 2-3). Chambers sees *Bluefish Cove* as a vehicle to show that lesbians are normal and that the issues they deal with are important,

We are bonding together to gain a kind of strength that will enable us to move out into society and be who we are, so everyone knows, and there'll be no problem. As we become more comfortable with ourselves, the rest of the world will become comfortable with us. We've got a big battle to face in a way that no other minority group does. . .except women (Klein, 1981, p.3).

Theater as an Effective Tool

Recent studies show that the use of theater as a tool for social change is still an effective one. A 2004 study on the arts by the RAND corporation showed that the arts hold intrinsic benefits to an individual's ability to “perceive, feel and interpret the world.” As a “result of recurrent experiences, these benefits spill over into the public realm in the form of individuals who are more empathetic and more discriminating in their judgments of the world around them” (McCarthy, 2004, p. xvii). The report cited four specific methods whereby the arts provide social benefit: an increased capacity for empathy; cognitive growth; social bonding; and expression of communal meaning (McCarthy, 2004).

While the report focused on arts experiences as a whole, many activists still see theater as an especially powerful tool for providing these benefits. By seeing the world through characters on stage, audience members can understand the experiences of those who are unlike them. Dorinne Kondo, an anthropologist and dramaturge who worked with Anna Deveare Smith on *Twilight: Los Angeles: 1992*, sees the mere *appearance* of characters out of the mainstream as an act of social change: “Indeed, the simple presence of different kinds of bodies onstage remains a

significant intervention” (Kondo, 2001, p. 78). This intervention can be a powerful tool. Tim Miller, a performance artist who tours with *Glory Box*, a show designed to promote understanding about gay marriage and immigration, says:

I believe the empathy and openness that come through the seductive strategies of live performance—compelling narrative, the performer’s charisma. . .the group dynamic that comes with a live audience—create the ideal conditions for conversion, the channeling of the audience’s psychic and political energies into a fight for social justice (Miller, 2001, p. 89).

Miller’s goal is to get every audience member to sign a petition in support of an anti-discrimination bill by the end of the show. He has a growing database of individuals who, as a result of his performance, have “spent at least one night of their lives thinking about this issue” (Miller, 2001, p.89).

Theater Supports Cognitive Growth

Because the meaning of a theater piece is not always explicitly stated, but is coded or embedded in the story, theater encourages a change in perspective that supports cognitive growth. Caron Atlas, a consultant in community arts, policymaking and social change, sees the advantage of this growth, “I believe it is theater’s power to embrace multiple meanings and to resist, reframe, and reconfigure that furthers our ability to engage in the critical and visionary thinking needed to imagine the world differently” (Atlas, 2001, p.76).

Sharing a theatrical experience with a group of people creates a bond in a liminal space and allows individuals in the audience to envision a social order that includes new ideas. Atlas continues, “I believe that culture and creativity can be key components of a vibrant democracy—both to form commonly held values and to give voice and shape to alternative visions” (Atlas,

2001, p.76).

Theater as a Method of Expressing Communal Meaning

In addition, theater allows for the expression of communal meaning when audiences experience the voices of those not usually heard, or hear the stories that are significant to a group's identity.

Theater can provide a creative opportunity for dialogue and collaboration. It can respond to fear and violence by a willingness to tell the stories that aren't heard in the mass media and to humanize those who have been demonized (Atlas, 2001, p.77).

Theater provides social benefit through expression of communal meaning by serving as a lifeline for some communities as well. Lani Guinier, in a conversation with playwright and actor Anna Deveare Smith, said that the theater, "can be a place where people connect in ways that are otherwise improbable or impossible" (Guinier, 2001, p.32). Filmmaker and Executive Director of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Graciela Sanchez, sees this storytelling as a lifeline:

We are the survivors. Our stories are the ones we never see, hear, remember, share with one another. But telling about our joys and fears, how we survive, whom we love, how we deal with the attacks toward our lives, how we celebrate—*todos estos cuentos*— are the secret of our survival as a people (2001, Sanchez, p. 85).

Theater's Role in Defining History

There are other benefits, not measured specifically by the 2004 RAND report, that are also important for theater in the service of social change. Theater can right wrongs. "Setting the record straight" can be an empowering act for both the actors and the audience. Luis Valdez, playwright and founder of El Teatro Campesino, talks about theater's ability to represent untold or erroneously told stories from history:

As a theater company, we are consciously and deliberately trying to provide certain kinds of images. When you talk about what California really is, the truth can be so penetrating that it changes perceptions of history. When you view the Anglo-Hispanic crux of this country, you are talking about two different views of people, especially in terms of racial culture. La Raza, if you look at the whole of Latin America, integrated all the races of mankind, it mixed everyone really—Blacks, Anglos, Asians, Indians, everyone (Heyward, 2002, p.2).

Representing Marginalized Individuals & Providing Community

Another important contribution theater makes to social change is the creation of sympathetic characters that are out of the mainstream. Theater can show marginalized or invisible communities and groups in a positive light; for individuals who are isolated and different, a lack of validation can be alienating. The validation of identity as an individual is a powerful affirmation. Audience members seeing and understanding someone different from themselves is one experience, but audience members seeing *themselves* on the stage is another. Valdez sees theater as an opportunity to make meaning out of the difficulties inherent in life as a marginalized individual:

I know that our work reaches into the streets. We attract young people, people who are confronted with rather stark realities. They have to hope for something, man. If they don't have the arts telling them about the essence and meaning of life, offering some kind of exploration of the positive and negative aspects of life, then there is no hope (Heyward, 2002, p.3).

The realization that there are others with the same struggles, others that understand and have survived those struggles can be an affirming and empowering experience. Leslie Feinberg,

transgender activist and author, writes about the empowerment inherent in the discovery that all cultures do not marginalize their transgender citizens,

What makes me transgendered is [that] my birth sex – which is female – appears to be in social contradiction to my gender expression – which is read as masculine. . . it’s true that in this society, at this point in time, being a masculine female seems as though it is a contradiction, and so I am forced to try to find language to explain myself. But in ancient cooperative societies all over the world, someone whose gender was similar to mine would be respected. Knowing that historical truth helps me hold my head up high (Feinberg, 1998, p.70).

For some, theater can provide the recognition of another like oneself which Feinberg describes as, “a dream come true to those of us who grew up in a cold sweat of terror because we feared we were the only person in the world who was different” (Feinberg, 1998, p.71). While the internet’s arrival provided a tool for connecting formerly isolated individuals in a virtual sense, the power of being in the room with someone is far more validating than words on a screen. But theater, like other arts, faces ongoing financial struggles, limiting the risks theaters are willing to assume. This, in turn, limits their willingness to take on new works and endangers even the survival of theaters engaged in providing that validation.

Crisis in American Theater

Even as the social benefit of an arts experience continues to be affirmed by researchers, as in the 2004 RAND report, the arts in America are in a political and financial crisis, which, many arts leaders say, threatens to render socially provocative theater unfundable. Linda Frye Burnham, author and founder of Community Arts Network, says now that arts organizations involved in social change are immersed in “two streams of social intensity: artists galvanized

toward political action and a near-fatal political blow to art funding” (Burnham, 2001, p. 64).

She describes the history that preceded this situation:

The truth is, American artists had been working for social change for many decades, whether the issue was labor, civil rights, poverty, disarmament, women’s rights, gay/lesbian liberation, homelessness, AIDS, cultural diversity, or commercial globalization. By the late 1980s, artists from many different perspectives and generations were working together, and “art for social change” had become a key topic for the activist avant-garde. Meanwhile, in a drive for political power, conservatives in Congress were identifying the arts as the soft underbelly of liberalism. If the arts were to be publicly funded, they said, let that money go to programs that could be proven to strengthen and benefit America’s communities. It was not long before this mandate spread throughout the arts-funding world, and it began to retool (Burnham, 2001, p.64).

Rather than an increasing focus on content, a for-profit model has created fear among arts leaders that some types of programming are too risky for a small company to afford. Cherbo & Wyszomirski (2000), in *The Public Life of the Arts in America*, write that, “there is a seemingly inexorable demand that the arts carry their own weight rather than rely on public subsidy to pursue art for art’s sake. This cultural Darwinism is most pronounced in the United States, where public subsidy is limited and publicly supported arts are expected to demonstrate a public benefit” (p. 167). The belief that the arts must pay their way through ticket sales and business sponsorships with little public subsidy has had a profound effect on theaters all over the country, especially those companies committed to social change.

Some companies collapsed under the weight of marketing experts’ advice to get with the Reagan-era program, trying to replace subsidy with box-office earnings; after the major

funding cuts of the early 1980s, some companies simply starved, their members leaving to seek paying work elsewhere (Goldbard, 2001, p. 128).

Fear of Risk and Effect on Creativity

In a 2006 symposium in New York convened for the purpose of "seeking solutions to the past decade's radical reduction in the national touring of new American plays," Dudley Cocke, Director of Roadside Theater, and 17 touring artists, managers, performing arts presenters, and foundation leaders met to discuss solutions to the past decade's radical reduction in national touring for new American plays. In *Where has all the Grassroots Touring Gone?*, the transcript from that symposium, these 18 leaders identified the changes they saw as responsible for the paucity of new American plays. Although the focus of the symposium was specifically on touring, participants expressed the view that the limitations of touring are, in many ways, tied to the content of the plays; and with fewer avenues for funding, risky subject matter is harder to attempt. Participants summarized some of the barriers as:

- Risk-taking is a major issue for the field now, especially with work that crosses boundaries or genres, or is not in traditional formats. It is more difficult to get funding commitments for such work.
- Some resident theaters present their own shows, but are counting on these works as a "moneymakers" so theaters are limited to one-person shows, or well-known commercial pieces.
- Smaller cities and towns offering limited access to theater cannot afford high budget works, so works on tour need to be small and affordable.
- Risk aversion is also an issue. Some presenters underestimate their audience's ability to handle controversial issues and fear repercussions.
- There is a lack of grant funding available to present new plays (Cocke, 2006 p?).

In addition, the reliance on a for-profit model has stratified audiences and put theater experiences out of reach of most of America. Participants in the symposium see this as a direct result of the

weakening of the National Endowment for the Arts by Congress in the 1980s. “Without strong NEA leadership, the line between the not-for-profit and commercial arts sectors has blurred; now the not-for-profit and commercial theater audience is for all practical purposes identical: 81% white and 84% from the top 15% economically” (Cocke, 2006, p.2). Some artists see this process as a natural outgrowth of the hegemonic forces inherent in American culture. For others, elimination of cultural diversity implies “a more coercive strategy of exclusion, cleansing, and oppression” (Kurin, 1997, p. 341).

Some organizations are remaking themselves in the image of for profit corporations by limiting risk and avoiding touring companies with new works. Other companies are scaling back, and some are folding. John O’Neal, founder of Free Southern Theater and founder and Director of Junebug Productions remarks:

The most dramatic example is the Crossroads Theater of New Brunswick, New Jersey. In 1998 and 1999, Crossroads had two Broadway hits and won a special Tony as the best regional theater in the country. This year they had to cancel their season before it started. Jomandi Theater, one of Atlanta’s flagship organizations, canceled their season too. . . . These are just a few of the black arts companies caught in this insidious undertow (O’Neal, 2001, pp.69-70).

However, few theater administrators believe that a for-profit strategy for arts organizations involved in social change is a sustainable one. Some theaters are getting by with programming safer bets such as musicals and tried-and-true classics, or by forming strategic alliances that give business and patrons more control over programming. Practically speaking, progressive funding sources, as O’Neal says, “find more value in art that offers immediate short-term benefits: fundraising opportunities, entertainment at a rally, etc.” (O’Neal, 2001, p.70). For works that

question the growth of corporate influence in American society, or for ideas too far from the mainstream to be marketable, there may be no room in the season. Some companies must rely on the artists themselves to make a greater contribution for controversial works.

Even at full capacity, the money that comes from the sales of tickets and products falls far short of what is needed. Most of us come nowhere near full capacity. To make up the shortfall the biggest contribution comes from the artists themselves, who give their time and talents. . . but without substantial support by individual contributors who believe in the value of the work, not-for-profit arts organizations cannot survive (O’Neal, 2001, p.70).

Rather than provide a breeding ground for progressive ideas, theaters have been forced to quantify benefits, demonstrate measurable outcomes, and identify the number of beneficiaries to survive. The constant creation of new programs to satisfy the goals of funding sources exhausts some organizations, leaving no support for day-to-day operations and even less for risky ventures. The constant hustle for funds to keep the lights on while reinventing the organization based on the needs of each funding source has refocused attention from creating art to creative fundraising.

As a result, artists have become controlled by funder-driven theory. Every major foundation initiative is now built on a “theory of change” (a term borrowed from academia), articulating exactly what the funder expects for its money. In what sounds like a cross between social science and venture capitalism, funders are now demanding community partnership principles, change theory, outcome measures, and projected impacts (Burnham, 2001, p.64).

Crisis, Adaptation and Opportunity for Change

With the ever-expanding agenda of requirements for staying afloat, some artists have given up on progressive programming. However, as Anna Deveare Smith says in her conversation with Lani Guinier, it is essential that the relationship between theater and social change survive, because its survival is a key element in a democratic society. “In some ways it’s our last hope for creating or at least reviving our democracy, because without those opportunities for this multidimensional kind of public engagement and interaction, people simply retreat into the private sphere of entertainment and spectacle” (Guinier, 2001, p.39).

While changes in the funding and political landscape have caused theaters to fold, scale back, or change focus, there are still some theaters that survive and push for change. The key, according to Roberta Uno, founder and former artistic director of the New WORLD Theater and the Program Officer for arts and culture at the Ford Foundation, is to redefine what constitutes social change. Unlike the far-reaching goals of the theaters of the 1960s & 1970s, when artists strove to change the world, eliminate racism, or gain equal rights for women, some theaters currently doing social change are looking for smaller successes locally.

My theater has never approached social change in terms of the “big issues,” although certainly a number of works have addressed specific pressing issues in the society—racism, homophobia, environmental (in)justice, poverty and homelessness, sexism, AIDS, domestic violence, class divides. We have seen social change less in terms of theater in service to an issue or cause, and more in terms of changing the community we live in (Uno, 2001, p.71).

Linda Frye Burnham sees this crisis as an opportunity for a renaissance. She sees an opportunity for artists to become better collaborators in their communities and to develop expertise in project

management. Like Uno, she believes that this crisis, “. . . does not mean that artists need to find an end to racism or a cure for AIDS. A healthy outcome can also arise from an artist-community partnership that brings people together across barriers that divide them, or one in which creativity is experienced by people who have never known it before” (Burnham, 2001, p.64).

Scaling down expectations and refocusing on a local scale returns many theater groups involved in social change to their beginnings . Started from the ground, without funding or infrastructure, they were unfettered and owned by no one in their early years. As such, they were free to critique the social order without fear of reprisals. With no salaries to pay, no benefits, and very few overhead expenses, creativity was plentiful. There are obvious drawbacks to this course, however, if artists expect to make a living. Perhaps the simplest course of action is to empower communities to use theater as a tool for social change.

Empowering Communities

The Vagina Monologues, by Eve Ensler, is a downloadable readers theater piece used by women’s centers all over the United States. Groups perform the play, charge admission, and raise money and awareness to fight violence against women. Although the performances are rarely done as part of an established theater season, they are successful nonetheless. As Ensler says,

I did not realize the full potential and viability of the theater when I began *The Vagina Monologues*. I had certainly experienced the magic and the power before, but I had yet to understand its truly sacred nature, its ability to explode trauma, create public discourse, empower people on the deepest political and spiritual levels and ultimately move them to action (Ensler, 2007, p.1).

Theater has the power to move both an audience and the actors on stage. However, some of the

most impressive personal growth comes from plays performed by non-actors or those staged in less formal settings like the community productions of *The Vagina Monologues*. Some groups have local women add their own stories.

I wrote a testimonial for *The Vagina Monologues* when they came to my college. I have never felt more free than the night it was read. Never felt more empowered, more alive.

The little seven year old inside of me was rejoicing, for her story had been HEARD. And the present me sat in the audience, with my loving and supportive friends surrounding me and listening to my story, crying tears of both pain and triumph (Anonymous, 2003, p.1).

Theater works best as a tool for social change when it inspires transformation on a personal level. By creatively engaging the mind with the heart, theater makes a deeper connection between the playwright and the audience. Caron Atlas writes that, “by engaging the imagination [theater] can transform cynicism into action, despair into hope. The deepest change happens when those who have the most at stake—often the poor and excluded—are active participants in the process” (Atlas, 2001, p.77).

By having community members read *The Vagina Monologues*, boundaries can be traversed simply because a relationship with the reader has already been established in the community. One mother wrote a poem after seeing her daughter onstage:

. . .shhh..listen quietly and really listen for just a moment

Listen to what the room is saying

What you are saying

What the women in your life are saying

Make this personal

Know that *I* know its personal

And take that strength of courage

And squeeze the hand of the warrior next to you

We are all on this stage together (Anonymous, 2004, p.9).

Discussion as Catalyst

A planned discussion following the performance of a controversial play can provide an opportunity for community members to discuss what may be difficult or unfamiliar feelings that arise in the course of the play. Another young woman in the audience at a showing of *The Vagina Monologues* shares this:

I have never known what it feels like to not be loved. While some may think that because of my lack of experience I may not identify with the stories that Eve spoke of, and that they might not effect me as much as a rape survivor. However as Eve shared the stories of Vagina Warriors all over the world I was almost moved to tears because I can not imagine living in that kind of fear and daily terror (Anonymous, 2003, p. 2).

The Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC) sponsors a downloadable play and supporting website similar to the V-day Project's *The Vagina Monologues* on quite another topic. BORDC uses *Guantánamo: Honor Bound for Freedom*, a readers theater piece constructed from letters and memoirs of detainees at the United States prison at Guantánamo Bay, to raise awareness about the conditions of the detainees. Included in the website is a set of links to publicity materials, a "how to" guide for hosting a reading, director's notes, a discussion guide, and educational materials for audience members to take home. The website serves as a clearinghouse for political action on the issue, offering news stories about other productions, successes, challenges, and extensive background information in downloadable format that can be shared with anyone interested. The site provides all the tools an individual or group might need

to change minds and take action. Tim Miller, a performance artist who tours with *Glory Box*, a show designed to promote understanding about gay marriage and immigration, sees the post-play moment as a critical time for moving audiences from understanding to action:

I use that crucial, empathic moment at the end of *Glory Box*, which is a very raw and emotional piece, to challenge the audience to do something so that this cruelty toward lesbian and gay lives can stop. The many hundreds of people who see the show wherever I do it are absolutely crucial agents for change who must be activated around the issue (Miller, 2001, p. 90).

Guantánamo is designed to use that important moment for action, as well. The Discussion Guide suggests asking actors/readers to talk about how it felt to read their respective roles, encouraging the audience to add comments. Audience members are also asked to share what they learned that they did not know when they came in, and how the reading affected their opinion about the guilt or innocence of the detainees at Guantánamo Bay Prison. It finishes with information sharing about the torture and interrogation of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, compares it to atrocities at Abu Ghraib, and asks what the audience thinks of the United States' use of torture and the inhumane treatment of detainees. Participants discuss ideas for action, and there are materials suggested for an Action Table with kits for participants to take home and resources for action on the issue (Bill of Rights Defense Committee, 2007). Similar to works used by El Teatro Campesino to organize farm workers for better treatment, *Guantánamo: Honor Bound for Freedom*, talks about injustice, creates an opportunity for discussion and further understanding, and provides a set of resources for action. In the case of El Teatro Campesino, the resource is a union card. For Tim Miller's *Glory Box*, it is a petition, and Ensler encourages producers of *The Vagina Monologues* to offer information about local resources for women in the lobby.

The use of a discussion to better understand a work of theater sometimes arises from the audience, rather than as a planned event by the author. *The Laramie Project*, a play by Moises Kaufman (2000) of Tectonic Theater Project, began as a series of interviews with residents of Laramie, Wyoming, where a young gay man named Matthew Shepherd was beaten to death. It sought to create awareness and understanding about violence against gay people (Tectonic Theater Project, 2007). Although not a pre-planned component of the reading, many of the 2000 communities that have presented *The Laramie Project* have organized panel discussions or group discussions to encourage understanding and action after the play. *The Laramie Project* has since become a film and its producer, HBO films, has created a study guide for teachers to use in their classrooms when showing the film. In Maryland, a group of college students inspired by the post-film discussion decided to interview local people who had experienced discrimination. Their collected conversations became a theater production entitled *Voices*. The process was very moving for some residents, “People were weeping, talking about their own encounters with discrimination,” said Carol Burbank, who taught the class (Johnson, 2003, p.2). Another educator involved in the project noted, “UMCP’s [University of Maryland University College] use of the Laramie Project was incredibly successful at raising awareness not only of LGBT issues, but also about the use of violence against people who are perceived as different” (Johnson, 2003, pp.2-3).

The combination of a theater experience and discussion group immediately following appears to be an effective tool for mobilization of an audience. The strong feelings elicited when audience members are able to see the world through the eyes of someone different has been, and will continue to be, a useful tool for transformation. The use of theater paired with discussion

groups and clearly outlined ideas for action, is a powerful impetus for turning sympathetic audience members into agents for change.

Theater demands that we truly be where we are. By being there together, we are able to confront the seemingly impossible, we are able to feel that which we fear might destroy us – and we are educated and transformed by that act. Theater is sacred because it allows us, it encourages us, as a community of strangers, to go some place together and face the issues and realities we simply cannot face alone. Alone, we are powerless, translating our suffering and struggle into our own private narcissistic injuries. As a group, these issues become social or political concerns, responsibilities, a reason for being here together (Ensler, 2007, p.1).

Chapter IV: Outcomes

The intention of this project is to use a theater piece as a vehicle for small-scale social change. The desired change is the removal of obstacles to greater understanding of individuals who do not conform to binary gender norms.

The Website

A website format was chosen to allow for simple, free distribution to any group with access to a computer. Costs of printing and supplies for scripts are minimal and carried by the groups using the play. As a result, there are no postage or shipping costs. A readers theater format for the play itself was chosen because it requires no scenery, few props, and can be done in a living room or any room large enough to hold the intended audience. Readers theater is designed to be read rather than acted. Performers sit in a row or circle of chairs, holding their scripts and reading their parts. The readers theater version of *Transfigurations* is written so that non-actors can read the parts with a minimum of direction.

The website, the product that has emerged from this research project, consists of three major sections and a home page directory. The *Home Page* has quick links to the three sections and a navigation bar with drop-down subheadings. The *Download* page includes short quotes from the play and a link to a full copy of the play in pdf format. Users complete a short registration form containing consent information on how the play may be used. Users must register and their agreement to the terms of use is provided by downloading the play. As of May 31, 2007, the domain that will host Transfigurations, <http://trans-allies.org>, has been purchased and funding for site hosting is being secured. The target date for the site to be operational is July 15, 2007.

A *contact* link and a *donate* link on the home page provide quick access for site users

with questions. The contact link creates a free-form email message. The *donate* link takes users to the *Transfigurations* PayPal account. Users downloading the play may do so without cost, although a royalty donation is requested by the authors for the use of the informal readers theater version of the play⁴. Donations to support *Transfigurations* website hosting costs may also be made through this account. Groups are encouraged to ask participants and audience members for a token donation to the sponsoring organization to offset cost of room rental, copies or refreshments. Groups who do not need reimbursement of production costs are asked to donate to their local PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter.

The home page also provides a link to a *Director's Notes* document, in pdf format as well, with suggestions for directing a simple but successful reading of the play. The decision to use pdf format ensures that the play will be readable by any computer with Adobe Acrobat Reader. A link to the *Adobe.com* site is on the *Download* page, so that anyone without Acrobat Reader can easily navigate to the Adobe site and install the free reader. A list of props, suggestions for locations, technical needs, and ideas for publicity are included.

The second section consists of a *History* page with information about the authors, Deltra Ferguson and Eliza Roaring Springs, and their comments on the play. A listing of past productions is also on this page, and a section entitled, "Post Your Reactions" which links to a log-in page where visitors can register and post a blog entry with their reactions to the play. Logged-in visitors may also read other posters' reactions to the play. The log-in feature provides a deterrent against abuse by anonymous posters. Blogs are regularly monitored and inappropriate or abusive posts are removed. Similar to *The Vagina Monologues* website, blog entries are a way for individuals and groups to offer suggestions to others considering using the play, and for

⁴ Groups wishing to mount full productions with cast and crew are directed to contact the authors by email, via a link on the website at <http://www.trans-allies.org>

individuals to share with others the ways that the play affected their perceptions of transgender individuals.

The *Discussion Resources* section has a link to a list of suggested opening topics and a guide for leading a successful discussion. The focus of the guide is on simplicity and communication, and discussion leaders are encouraged to allow the discussion to evolve naturally, rather than trying to cover all the discussion topics. Materials are intended to allow non-professional group facilitators to encourage meaningful discussion and information sharing.

The *Printouts* subsection is designed to be used as a menu of links to pdf files, so groups can download and print out supporting information to have on hand before and after the reading. Printouts include suggestions for how individuals and groups can work for trans equality, how to be a trans-ally, and information for parents of children with gender-variant behaviors. Copies of all *Transfigurations* website resources and printouts are included in the appendix of this document. A *Links* section contains a list of websites with information on gender variance. Books, conferences and organizations are listed in the *Other Resources* subsection.

The Play

Transfigurations is a theater piece for ten readers. Some readers play additional characters (a clerk, a professor, a dancer, etc). Each of the ten named characters expresses gender differently and each describes a journey in a way that is both respectful and educational. The play opens with *Dana*, the main character, ready to commit suicide. *Dana* is intersexed and like many intersexed individuals, has been subjected to surgical gender assignment as a child. Another character, *Charlene*, is a male to female transsexual and former veteran, and works as a nurse at the VA hospital. *Kris* is a butch lesbian character who is comfortable with her masculinity. *Jackie* is also a MTF transsexual, but is younger than *Charlene*, is middle class and

goes to beauty school. *Patti* appears dressed in women's clothes throughout the play, and is also known as Ed when she's not dressing as *Patti*. She has a wife who loves both *Patti* and Ed.

The characters talk about milestones in their lives – finding a friend, taking a name, dressing in clothes that feel right, getting the right haircut, having surgery – and about how the idea of gender has played out in their lives. Like the gender variant population, some of the characters identify with words like “intersexed,” “butch,” or “transsexual.” Others do not use labels at all. The playwrights describe Travis and Billie, for example, by their attributes:

Travis: is soft and handsome and around 25 years old. She calls herself a fella. She likes to wear trousers, button-down shirts and wingtips. She is reflective and thoughtful and fairly well-educated.

Billie: is probably an old hippie in his/her mid-50s. His/her dress is very casual and he/she tends to dress quite androgynously, except for his/her shoes which are always flats or pumps. His/her ears are pierced and he/she might wear a hat. He/she might wear light make-up. Billie is muscular and somewhat rugged looking. He/she lives in his/her house at the coast with his/her wife of 30 years (Roaring Springs, 1998, pp.2-3).

Although the reader has no label to attach to these two characters, the picture created is vivid and understandable. The process of understanding the character list and the variations presented is an opportunity for removing barriers to understanding, even before the characters start to speak.

The characters reflect a range of experiences and gender expressions that viewers or readers may encounter in getting to know gender variant people in their own community. Anne Fausto-Sterling calculates that one in every 2000 children are born intersexed (like *Dana*) and 1000 are surgically altered every year (Fausto-Sterling, in Wilchins, 2006, p. 72-74). *Jackie* tells a

story about getting her driver's license – a milestone for many transsexuals. *Charlene*, a male to female transsexual and former veteran, recounts her experience in the military:

Military training is a popular choice for both male and female transsexuals because it gives them not only a place to belong but also a strong sense of group affiliation. For transgendered females, it is one setting in which they are not only allowed to express a tougher, more masculine side of their nature but *expected* to do so. Many transgendered males [also] join the military because they think it might make them more masculine (Brown & Rounsley, 1996, p.66).

Trans-activist Leslie Feinberg writing about life as a butch says, “We are not trying to be ‘real men.’ We are fighting to survive as masculine females. We face experiences that are differently complicated than those of women or men who are not transgendered” a sentiment echoed by the characters *Travis* and *Kris* (Feinberg, 1998, p. 60).

Conclusion

The idea that gender is confined to two discrete choices has caused tremendous pain and suffering for those whose experience of gender is much more complex. Our assumptions about gender are so deep and unquestioned that it is difficult to understand why they could be wrong. Our laws, our medical system, our social graces, and even our system of what is right and wrong support the assumption that there are only two genders. People who do not fit our ideas of gender are forced to lie, to hide, and to live in fear. They face discrimination, unfair treatment, and emotional and physical harm due to a lack of understanding about the normal gender variances in the human population. Barriers to understanding can be removed when others see gender variant people as human and sympathetic and when they have multiple opportunities for contact. The small number of visibly gender-variant people in the general population makes it difficult, if not

impossible, to create enough contact for such understanding. By presenting a varied, realistic group of transpeople telling their stories, theater has the potential to remove barriers that real life may take years to provide. *Transfigurations* does this with gentleness, honesty, and humor. Allowing participants and audience members to discuss their reactions immediately following the reading, and providing factual information and resources for further study, creates opportunities for family members, friends, and others to become allies. With a simple internet distribution process and complete information on how to use the play, this project has the potential to provide some support for parents, families, and friends of transpersons and to help them understand more about gender variant people. It may also encourage change in the communities that take advantage of it.

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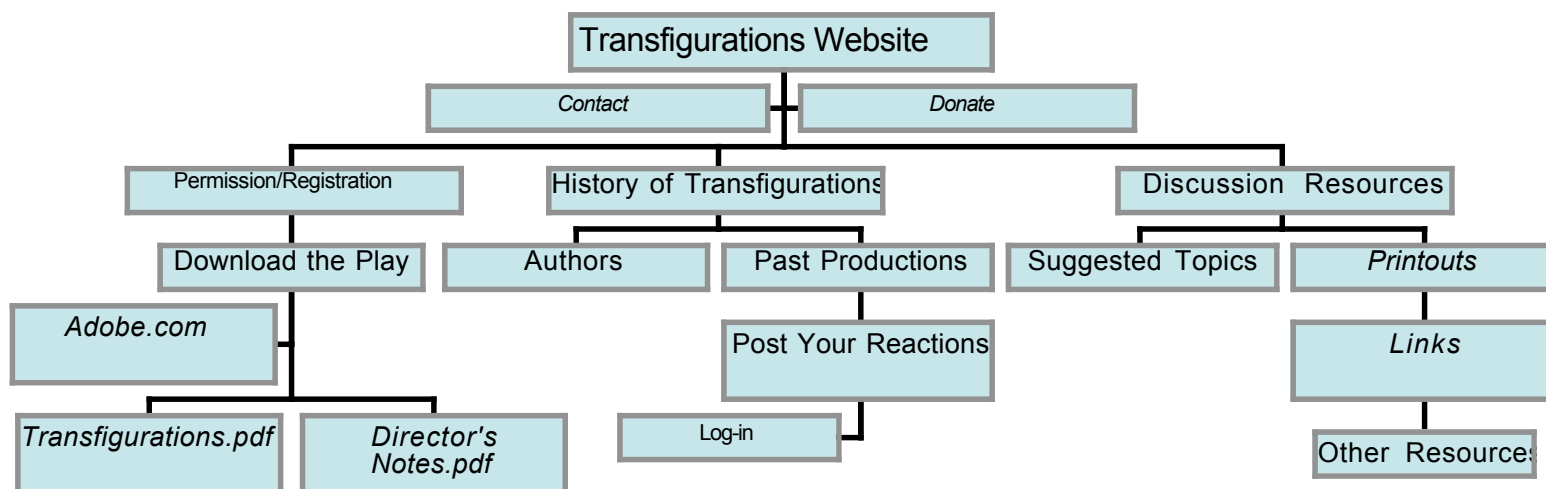
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Appendix A: Schematic of *Transfigurations* website:
<http://www.trans-allies.org> (will be operational 8/1/07)



Appendix B: Director's Notes

Transfigurations – Director's Notes

By Carol Horne

In the five times that *Transfigurations* has been produced, it proved important to keep the play from becoming a “bitch” session, filled with self-pitying characters angry about their lives. Instead, the play works best when the characters are reflecting on their lives as survivors rather than victims. Even Dana, who is at the desperate crossroads of choosing between life and death, is not self-pitying, but rather matter-of-fact about the details of her dilemma.

Not explicit in the play, yet serving as an important motivation to help the actors find the right voice, is the following back-story for the characters and their relationships to We-Wha:

Each character in the play was, at one time in their life, at the same crossroads that Dana is facing at the beginning of the play. In that moment of decision, We-Wha has brought the stories of other transgendered people to help them through and show that they are not alone. The only thing We-Wha asks in return is that once in their lives, We-Wha will invite each of them to tell their story to someone else. For the characters in the play, this is their time. They are each proud to tell their story, to prove that life as a gender-variant person, though hard at times, can also be joyful and healthy.

Regarding casting:

It was found that great care needs to be taken in the decision to cast or not cast transgendered people to play the roles. Many experienced actors (trans or not) have expressed how difficult it is to play a character whose life is very close to their own. Some actors can do it, others can't, and less experienced actors or non-actors may have even more trouble finding the character's authentic self if doing so exposes too much of their own lives. As a result, the play has been performed primarily using non-trans actors, each of whom found the experience very enlightening – a bit of a “Tootsie” moment. The one time that a PFLAG group performed a reading of the play, it was the parents who played the roles, giving them an opportunity to step into their children's shoes.

Regarding staging:

A simple set, even a bare stage, with chairs or stools and a trunk for props and costume pieces works best. A Google search for **We'wha** (1849-96, a Zuni berdache), will yield many photographs that might be turned into slides as a backdrop for the play. Some photos may require a fee to be used. The Zuni Sunrise song can also be found on the internet and can be used to transition from the different sections of the play.

Appendix C: History of *Transfigurations*

By Alice Parman, PhD

Transfigurations, by Deltra Ferguson and Eliza Roaring Springs, focuses on the challenges and dilemmas faced by transgendered people. Ferguson and Roaring Springs interviewed a dozen transgendered people of varied ages and backgrounds, drawing on a rich archive of true stories to create a riveting hour-long drama. The play explores the wide range of experiences of people who define themselves as transgendered. Two focal characters link these diverse stories.

Wh'Wha, an historic personage, a Zuni lhamana, or man/woman, was well-known and respected figure ca 1900. Dana is contemporary, an intersexed person (a person born with ambiguous genitalia) who contemplates suicide throughout the play, making her decision in the drama's final moments.

Transfigurations was first presented during the 1998 Gay Pride Day in Eugene, Oregon. After the performance, the audience sat in stunned silence for nearly 20 minutes. The torrent of feelings and questions that followed pointed to the need for a facilitated discussion format to follow the performance. The facilitators added to the subsequent readings were the playwrights, directors and researchers involved with the project.

Subsequent staged readings were presented at the annual conference of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment in October 1998, a University of Oregon conference featuring transgender activist and writer Susan Striker in November 1998, the May 1999 Gay Pride Celebration at Oregon State University, and a staged reading by the members of the Eugene PFLAG chapter.

In the words of a counselor who supports and works with transgendered youth: "I've seen two staged readings of the play, directed by Carol Horne. It was clear from the audience reaction--facial expressions, laughter, tears, discussions with the actors, and ongoing discussion with each other in the lobby (and out into the parking lot!)--how meaningful people found the play. Unmistakably, multiple aims were reached: people left the show with new information, with new ways to think about that information, and with new feelings to go with that information. The play is truly transformative for the audience, and, I believe, has by itself helped greatly to further understanding and support regarding transgender issues in our local community."--Laura Philips, M.S.W.

The initial play written by Deltra Ferguson and Eliza Roaring Springs was shaped for reader's theater presentation in consultation with Carol Horne, a professional director and stage manager, longtime member of Actor's Equity, and former director of an independent production company, Little Apple Productions. The resulting reader's theater script of *Transfigurations* has been performance-tested with local, receptive audiences and found to be not only "a hit," but an educational tool with exceptional potential.

Appendix D: Key Personnel

Carol Horne (Producer/Director) was the Founding Artistic Director for Little Apple Productions, 1994-2000. Ms. Horne writes, directs, and produces educational videos. Past experience includes event coordination (e.g. LA Olympics Opening Ceremonies, Disneyland's 30th Anniversary) and professional stage management in New York, Los Angeles, and for national touring companies.

Deltra Ferguson (Writer) earned a Masters in Performance Studies from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in Theater from the University of Oregon. She is the author of one-woman performances based on the lives of author Radclyffe Hall and song writer/activist Malvina Reynolds, and co-author of *Transfigurations*, with Eliza Roaring Springs. In addition Dr Ferguson has created a video about women and breast cancer and edited an anthology of performance works by the Young Women's Theater Collective of Eugene. Dr. Ferguson is Director of the Women's Center at Southern Oregon University.

Eliza Roaring Springs (Writer) was Founder and Director of Encore Theatre, a seniors' theater company whose members transformed stories from their own lives into musical theater for youth. Encore Theatre performances bridge the generation gap, building self-esteem and a sense of connection among elementary, middle, and high school students. Encore Theatre has also conducted month-long residencies at a juvenile detention center, with spectacular results that have drawn national attention and increasing levels of foundation and corporate support.

Amber Lunch Dennis (Project Coordinator) saw Little Apple's production of *Transfigurations* in 1998 and was profoundly moved by the experience. Years later, when her best friend came out as transsexual, she was able to serve as an ally throughout his transition because of the understanding she gained through seeing *Transfigurations*. She earned a BA in English and a Masters in Arts Administration at the University of Oregon, using *Transfigurations* as the basis for her Project. She plays in a working rock band and works as an event planner and grant writer.

Appendix E:

Guidelines for leading a discussion¹

Leading a discussion after a showing of Transfigurations can be a wonderful experience. Choose someone who has read the resources section of the site to lead a post-reading discussion. If you have people in your community who are knowledgeable about trans issues, invite them to attend or lead the discussion.

Avoid the urge to have one person speak at length. Try instead to facilitate discussion and an exchange of ideas.

Keep an eye on the clock, and limit people's speaking time if necessary to stay on schedule and to allow time at the end to discuss options for action.

1. Break the ice by asking a few of the actors how it felt to play their roles.
2. Ask the audience members what they learned that they didn't know when they came in.
3. Ask, "How did attending this reading affect your opinion about transgender people?"
4. Group leaders can read some statistics on hate crimes against and unequal treatment of transgender people. Ask the audience what ideas they have about changing this situation. Talk about local, regional or national efforts by transgender people to gain equal treatment.
5. Ask audience members to share one thing they might do to support the transgender community. (Ideas: Join local PFLAG chapter; ask your city council to start a Human Rights Commission if they don't already have one. You can also use things on the Action Table entitled "52 Things You Can do for Trans Equality" and "Action Steps for Being a Trans Ally.")
6. Before you adjourn, let the audience know about resources you've collected for your Action Table.

¹ Adapted from Bill of Rights Defense Committee's Guantánamo Reading Project website: http://www.bordc.org/grp/readings/discussion_guide.php

Appendix F:

Steps to hosting a reading of *Transfigurations* in your community¹

By producing a public reading of *Transfigurations* in your community, you're taking the first step toward making the world safer for people who are gender variant.

Steps to Host Your Local Reading:

1. Get a location and choose a time. This reading can be on any scale:

- * Living room with friends
- * Community center, library, church hall
- * Local cafe
- * Steps of city hall or town hall
- * Theater (Mondays are often “dark night”)
- * Auditorium or gymnasium...

2. Pick a charity to benefit. Donations can fund a local group involved in this issue, local or national PFLAG, the *Transfigurations* project, or another charity of your choice.

3. Download the play. The playwrights Eliza Roaring Springs and Deltra Ferguson have generously given their permission for amateur readings royalty-free. If your group would like to do a full production of the play, payment of royalties are required. Please use the “contact” link on the Transfigurations website (<http://www.trans-allies.com>).

4 Who: Choose a Coordinator to help keep the project on track. The Coordinator makes sure there's a place to hold the reading, sees that publicity is getting done, and checks with others working on the project to keep things going.

5. Find a Director. You may find someone at a nearby college or University theater department, or ask at a community theater. While it's not essential to have someone with experience as a Director, having someone to help coordinate rehearsals will give your readers more support. Read the “Director's Notes” on the website for important ways to help make your production more successful.

6. Cast the roles. Cast your friends. Cast local celebrities or elected officials. Cast people who would love the opportunity. Or maybe a national celebrity grew up in your home town -- invite them back to read a role. Or have them send a letter to be read at the event. While *Transfigurations* is meant to be performed with a minimum of rehearsals, having at least two read-throughs with your Director will make a big difference in everyone's understanding.

7. Get help! In addition to your cast, send an email around asking for volunteers to help you. Keep an email address book of everyone who writes you with interest. Coordinate with your local PFLAG group, or start one! Doing a reading of *Transfigurations* is a great way to form new relationships and work together for the common good. Remember to be inclusive: Find a way for everyone who offers to get involved.

8. Make the project visible. Send out press releases, post fliers, do radio interviews, wear sandwich boards... Get creative with your cast, friends, and volunteers to promote this benefit event so that your voice is heard. What will make the press show up? Even if your publicity efforts are minimal or non-existent, your participation in this event is vital to the project.

9. Include discussion and action. Set up an Action Table with literature and action materials. End the evening with a discussion and the audience's questions. Send us the details about your reading and we will list it on our website. We are always interested in how *Transfigurations* is working in communities, so please send us information on how your reading went and your community's response to it.

Thank you for making a difference!

¹ Adapted from Bill of Rights Defense Committee's Guantánamo Reading Project website:
http://www.bordc.org/grp/readings/discussion_guide.php

Appendix G: *Transfigurations*, the Play

Please note: The attached version of *Transfigurations* is a working copy and should not be used for a production of the play. Visit the website at <http://trans-allies.org> after August 1, 2007 for the final version. Inquiries may also be made by email to: transallies@rockergirl.net.

Appendix H: Sample of Collected Resources for Website (permission pending)

Attached pdfs entitled:

TF_GenVar_4parents.pdf

TF_TG_laws_map_from_TLPI.pdf

TF_52 things you can do 4 trans eq.pdf

Samuel Lurie | Resources | Action Steps for Being a Trans Ally.pdf

Resources on Bathroom Equity from “Toilet Training” – from

Sylvia Rivera Law Project at: <http://www.srlp.org/>

TF_TT_talking_points_gender_seg.pdf

TF_TT_talking_points_bathroom.pdf

TF_TT_discussion_questions.pdf

TF_TT_resources.pdf

Transfigurations

by

Deltra Ferguson and

Eliza Roaring Springs

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Deltra Ferguson and Eliza Roaring Springs

Transfigurations

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Transfigurations was first produced through Little Apple Productions as a readers theater production for the Eugene, Oregon Pride celebration on June 28, 1998 and again, as part of the annual conference of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment on September 17, 1998. Little Apple Productions' Artistic Director, Carol Horne Dennis created the voice of the narrator for this script.

Production Notes

The staging for this readers theatre production of Transfigurations should be simple – an empty stage with ten chairs or stools set in a semi circle works well. It is helpful to put Dana at one end of the line and the Narrator at the other end, each slightly separate from the others actors.

This performance piece is lyrical and therefore formal considerations, such as smooth transitions and tempo, deserve attention. When a player is not involved in telling or “playing” a story, s/he can be watching the other actors or following along in the script. This watching can help direct and redirect the audience’s focus.

The opening letter about WE’WHA from anthropologist Matilda Coxe Stevenson is fictitious though it contains fragments of WE’WHA’s actual history. (See The Zuni Man-Woman, by Will Rosco, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 19910)

The performance begins with the Narrator describing the cast of characters. It works nicely to have each character enter and take their place as they are being introduced. It is very effective to project a slide of WE’WHA as s/he is being introduced and when the narrator speaks of her.

As the play begins, we meet DANA at a crossroads in life contemplating the choice between suicide and staying in this world, in this body. WE’WHA brings stories of others who, like DANA, have been at this crossroads and have found a way to choose life. With this understanding, it is very important that all the stories are told from a place of hope.

NARRATOR

The Cast of Characters:

WE'WHA:

WE'WHA (1849-1896) is here in spirit. WE'WHA was a Zuni Indian lhamana, [*pronounced Yamana*] the Zuni word for man and woman combined, or Berdache, the term used by Europeans and new Americans referring to Indians who dressed and behaved contrary to their biological sex.

Throughout the play, WE'WHA is a benevolent spirit and playful trickster. WE'WHA is silent and all-powerful.

DANA: played by _____

identifies as intersexed. She also describes herself as a butch lesbian. She is 26 years old, small and stocky, and on edge.

CHARLENE Morris:

played by _____

is a tall, sturdy, transsexual in her 50's. She has been taking hormones and clearly has breasts. She wears conservative, pastel, tailored women's suits. She also likes to wear denim as casual wear. She wears simple accessories; a scarf perhaps. She obviously pays attention to her hairstyle and nails. CHARLENE is a veteran. She works as a nurse in the VA Hospital.

TRAVIS: played by _____

is soft and handsome and around 25 years old. She calls herself a fella. She likes to wear trousers, button down shirts and wingtips or simple black shoes. She is reflective and thoughtful and fairly well educated.

FISH: played by _____

is 47 years old, and has transitioned from female to male. He is active in the transsexual community and very outspoken regarding transsexual rights. He wears a t-shirt and jeans, sometimes with a flannel shirt over the top. He always wears tennis shoes.

JACKIE Miller:

played by _____

is the "girl next door". She is a transsexual in her 30's. Jackie is shy and reserved but has inner courage and a knack for standing up for herself. She likes to wear cutoffs and sandals, maybe a casual, fitted blouse, perhaps a vest. She is middle class and currently going to beauty school.

PATTI & (Ed):

played by _____

is shy and sweet. She wears country style clothes, and loves those square dancing skirts. She also likes to wear pumps and a big curly red wig. PATTI is a lady in her 40's. Ed does not appear in the play, but he exists just as surely as PATTI does. PATTI & Ed are both heterosexual.

DAUGHTER:

played by _____

is a tough, rural, big, sassy woman. She wears dresses and identifies as straight or heterosexual. She portrays the daughter of a number of the characters throughout the play and has a story of her own to tell.

BILLIE: played by _____

is an old hippie in his/her mid-50's. His/her dress is very casual and he/she tends to dress quite androgynously, except for his/her shoes, which are always flats or pumps. His/her ears are pierced and he/she might wear a hat. He/she sometimes wears light make-up. BILLIE is muscular and somewhat rugged looking. He/she lives in his/her house on the hill at the coast with his/her wife of 30 years.

KRIS: played by _____

identifies as a butch lesbian. She is 43 years old and is rough and masculine and wears jeans, T-shirts, and boots or tennis shoes. KRIS is working-class.

I'm _____ and I'll be reading the stage directions– what's happening on stage during the play. The story takes place in the few moments during which DANA is deciding whether or not to kill herself.

ACT I

Prologue

NARRATOR:

The voice of anthropologist Matilda Cox Stevenson:

The following is a recorded voice: [Slide of WHE'WHA]

Death is always a difficult and disorienting experience, and a reminder of the value of this fragile gift that we call life. We are born and then we die, and all that we really know and have is what is in-between birth and death. This morning I returned from a funeral for a dear and rather extraordinary friend whose very being epitomized that precious state of in-between-ness that we all inhabit.

Hundreds of her people, among them priests and other leaders of the pueblo, gathered around my friend We'wha to express their anguish and sadness. Her tall-outstretched body, adorned in a graceful Zuni dress with handsome trousers and moccasins, lay peacefully on a splendidly woven ceremonial blanket.

I have wired President Cleveland and his wife with the sad news. Very recently, Mrs. Cleveland mentioned to me her continued fondness for the beautiful pottery presented to her and her husband when We'wha had visited the capitol nearly ten years ago. I can still recall the look on Mrs. Cleveland's face when I casually mentioned We'wha's true sex. What a curious mixture of confusion and distress, and then finally a recognition of congruence.

I know there are many dignitaries in Washington and members of the Smithsonian who will remember We'wha's brilliant pottery making and weaving, as well as her impressive strength and stature. The Zuni of New Mexico have lost a beloved member of their community and I have had to say farewell to a dear friend, who revealed through her life and death the blendedness of all things.

Matilda Coxe Stevenson, 1896

Ocean sound is heard as the lights comes up on DANA. If a slide is used, fade it out here.

NARRATOR:

DANA sits on a stump on a deserted beach. She is dressed in men's clothing. She has a gun.

DANA

I went over to the coast. I took my revolver and I walked down the beach. Found a stump on a deserted section of the beach. Loaded the gun and sat there. And I watched the sun set. I was just letting everything go blank out of my mind. I was content. And I had a feeling of just – well, being about what I was getting ready to do. And then I started getting intrusive thoughts coming into my mind.

The Zuni Sunrise Song begins playing on a flute.

I'd push them back and they'd just shove forward. They weren't my thoughts. I mean they were coming from somewhere. It turned into a beautiful sunset. The sun shone through the clouds over the ocean.

And I'm on this empty beach, except for this stump and me. Several times I have the gun in my mouth. And as I try to put the pressure down on the trigger, I can't. I mean, I am dead serious; I'm going to do it. And something is stopping me.

NARRATOR

As Dana sits in silence, WE'WHA quietly offers cornmeal to the six directions; north, south, east, west, the sky, and the earth.

Scene 1

The *Sunrise Song* fades out as the players begin to sing *Happy Birthday*. All of the players suddenly begin to sing along with great vigor but find they cannot seem to figure out what to interject after dear....

THE PLAYERS

Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear...(pause) hmmmm... (all, with some embarrassment) Oh well, Whatever, Who cares, Uhhhh..., Happy birthday to you!

CHARLENE

...And I began living at least part time as a female five years ago. When I called my endocrinologist he set up the appointment. And I got my prescription for hormones ironically on my father's birthday. Oddly enough, I consider that my birthday--on my father's birthday, of all days! There's got to be something there.

TRAVIS

Freud rolls over in his grave.

FISH

About three times!

CHARLENE

We're talkin' cartwheels!

(The players all laugh and hoot.)

JACKIE

My father wanted to name me after Eisenhower--being the dyed in the wool conservative that he was. But my mother couldn't handle the idea of having a son named Dwight. So they hung me with Jack Miller. In actuality it is very odd because Jackie was the name that I was taunted with so much when I was younger. As my feminine tendencies came out as a child, I was teased by my two older brothers who would call me Jackie. And I find it rather ironic that now I'm using it and glad to be using it, considering it was once such a source of pain.

CHARLENE

I'm known throughout the community as Charlene Morris. Those that know a little more about me know that I am a nurse, they know I'm a veteran. That's the way I'm identified in this town. I work with the veterans over here at the VA Hospital and they all think it's great that I'm a woman and I'm a combat veteran as well.

PATTI

In school I was not a popular child--I did not follow the crowd. Anyway, there was this one girl in school and her name was Patty and she was a very nice girl. And she always treated me very respectfully. So years later, I took the name Patty, but I changed it to Patti with an i.

TRAVIS

I was hangin' out with my friend CJ in Portland and we went to the grocery store. She calls me Travis. I think we bought booze or something so I had to use my ID. Then I went to the Greyhound station to buy a ticket and I gave a totally fake name. Then some guy started chattin' me up and so I gave him another name. So in the space of about an hour I had used 5 different names, and CJ said "oooo, you're like a criminal.." and I said "You do what you gotta do."

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

NARRATOR:

WE'WHA opens a trunk, revealing an array of wonderful choices. She/he takes out a doll and hands it to CHARLENE, and offers a baseball glove to DAUGHTER.

CHARLENE, DAUGHTER

Growing up!

JACKIE

Nancy and Peggy and I, we'd do the fashion show thing for each other. See Nancy and I were the same age and Peggy was a little bit older and we would occasionally come home and their mom would be at the store or something, and we would be at the house by ourselves for a couple of hours anyway... dressing up.

JACKIE (to the audience)

So one day their mom discovered us doing a fashion show and I think that's when she figured me out... I of course was totally embarrassed.

mom/BILLIE

You don't need to be embarrassed. It doesn't bother me. And if you and Peggy and Nancy are playing, well, that's just fine.

JACKIE (to the audience)

As I adjusted to this unexpected acceptance which, being 7 or 8 years old probably took me a whole 2 minutes, that's when she probably realized that an entirely different person was emerging--and this person was a lot more comfortable with who they were.

FISH

I was pretty much raised as a boy.

TRAVIS

Me too.

KRIS

Yep.

(The butches all laugh)

KRIS

I was one of five girls, but my dad's boy. I did all the farm chores with him. I liked it. Mom didn't. But he just said, "Let me have Kris."

FISH

I don't think my parents really consciously thought about it at all, that's just how they treated me. When I was a kid I couldn't really fathom the idea of being gay so, I just thought of myself as a boy so I could be with girls. And that's how it all worked out in

my mind. So for a couple of years I thought that explained it. But it didn't really explain it at all. I began to realize that I didn't identify with women at all and I knew that there was something going on with my gender; what I was, wasn't in line with what my body was like.

TRAVIS

My mother's coming around. It's strange. I've been differently gendered all my life but my mother still... like one time -- she lives in Salt lake City, and I flew down to see her, I think after my sophomore year of college, and I got off the plane-- now, we're not an expressive family, she glared at me and said. . .

mom/PATTI

You look like a 16-year-old boy!

TRAVIS

And she just started walking away... But the last time I was there she gave me a haircut, which was really cool, cause I can remember when I was 13, she used to cut our hair. I guess cause it was cheaper. First she'd cut my brother's hair. Snip snip snip

mom/PATTI

What do you want?

young travis/TRAVIS

I want it just like his.

mom/PATTI

Not until you have a penis and testicles!

young travis/TRAVIS

I just want a haircut! Not a sex change!

TRAVIS

So it's really satisfying that she finally gave me...,well the last time I was there, she gave me a crew cut, which wasn't exactly what I wanted, but it was really cool that she would do it. So she goes back and forth. Pretty amazingly supportive or pretty cold. I think she's confused. Why wouldn't she be? So am I.

My grandmother watched some talk show and they had transsexuals on, and my grandmother was like,

grandmother/CHARLENE (to the TV)

Goddamnit, if Jennifer wants a sex change, I'm gonna help her pay for it!

TRAVIS

She was totally like, “Yeah!” But that really makes me suspicious, ‘cause I think it’d be way easier to have a transsexual than a nothing-weirdo-mother-fucker-like-don’t- fit-in-or-ever-plan-to kind of kid, like me.

FISH (to TRAVIS)

My brother is cool. I think he just doesn’t care. He loves me just for whatever I am. But that’s almost a dissatisfying thing, like he can kick back from his comfortable middle class, heterosexual lifestyle and say, “No, I don’t think about it much, I don’t mind.” *(pause)* I think about it everyday. He doesn’t realize that it’s a privilege to sit back and be “I love you whatever you are”.

TRAVIS (to FISH and audience)

I’ve been butch or transgendered ever since I was born. When I came out as a dyke all of a sudden my family started remembering all sorts of stories. Like when I was 6 my mother got me a dress for my birthday and I just bawled, because of course I wanted a baseball mitt. The fact that someone would give me a dress as a special gift was like, shocking.

grandmother/CHARLENE(to audience)

She just howled and howled ‘til they went and got overalls.

TRAVIS (to FISH and audience)

When they exchanged it for overalls I was fine. So I guess I’ve been this way, whatever that way is, my whole life. I don’t know if it is nature or nurture, biology, chromosomes, whatever. But I know it definitely got harder when I got older, ‘cause it stopped being cute.

(FISH nods in agreement)

BILLIE

I remember, I was walking down by the Canal one day. Had on high heels and a wedding dress. I noticed some kids coming from the other direction; kids I was in school with. We didn’t much care for each other to begin with. I looked behind me and there were kids coming that way too. I thought they might fight each other, and I definitely didn’t want to be in the middle of somebody fighting, so I went into the canal. That was the only place. There was a solid wall on one side and a canal on the other. And by going into the water I avoided them. I wasn’t a very good swimmer, but I stayed under water near the bank-- there were cattails and stuff. And an old plastic bag. As long as I didn’t splash, they didn’t notice me. Once they passed, I was okay. I lost one shoe, and didn’t do that dress any good at all.

PATTI (to audience)

Like I say I love my mother dearly and I trusted her and I firmly believe that she never lied to me. She believed that I was going to out grow that--and out grow this. And I gave her words every chance to come true. She'd say...

mom/JACKIE

You're going to out grow this Ed, it'll go away.

PATTI

The older I got the more it was...

dude/KRIS

All you need is a good woman. A good woman will straighten you right out.

PATTI

And I found one too, let me tell you. She's right here (motioning toward herself), and she straightened me right out.

DANA

Something came back to me about a year ago. I remembered myself as a little kid, before the surgery, being able to pee standing up. I remember waking up out of the anesthesia in the waiting room with this irritating, slightly painful itch between my legs, and I want to scratch. And the recovery room nurse comes running over, grabs my hand, "No, no honey you don't want to scratch. You don't want to start bleeding again." And just as I'm going back under the anesthesia it's like, "Bleeding? Why would I start bleeding?"

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

NARRATOR

WE'WHA, holding a pointer and wearing a "professor coat", brings out a large flip chart and an easel with all kinds of classifications that grow more confusing with each page.

On the first page of the flip chart is a continuum with pictures of Clint Eastwood and Marilyn Monroe on opposing ends. The professor tries to draw a chart of gender identities.

The professor scraps the first page and begins again. This time the professor is trying to come up with some sort of algebraic formula for identity.

"Transvestite=gay", "Gay men > men who wear dresses", Lesbians=straight men in dresses" etc.] The professor looks at these, crosses them out and continues writing and editing.

FISH

Transgendered, transgendered Butch, transgendered guy, the list could probably go on... and on. . . Transgendered fag. A lot of what people call me is adjective-man, something-guy. Transgendered-Butch dude, transgendered-dyke. I've never liked the word lesbian, woman, girl; those just didn't fit. To me, lesbian, has a connotation of definitely being a woman, which is definitely not something I am. When I hear it I think white, upper class, woman--which is something I am definitely not.

CHARLENE

That was an issue within the issue. I felt sort of gay. Gay guys did what I did. But the gays that you heard about and saw were the flamboyant drag queens. The only breath of fresh air I had during that time was when the ruckus started over Dr. Renee Richards and the tennis match. She won an amateur tennis match and it hit the fan because everyone found out that she, at one time, had been a he. I identified with *that* more than I did the true stereotypical gay thing. But gay was a lot more common. I mean up 'til that point I had heard of Christine Jorgenson and I had heard about Renee Richards and that was it. Klamath Falls, Oregon, at that time didn't have cable television. You had one channel: K-O-T-I. And so, since there was no other literature, I mean there was no information and the people that I talked to told me I was gay, I assumed I must be gay.

DAUGHTER

Well, once me and my girlfriend went to a drag show. It was amazing. I mean sometimes you just couldn't tell. These women, men, whatever... they were gorgeous! It made me want to buy one of those glittery gowns. You just don't see dresses like that in Eugene. Now this is the really weird part. My friend Jan and I both felt sort of turned on

by these men dressed as women. These gorgeous female males! And I'm straight. Now what's that about?

NARRATOR

The professor draws a series of symbols for gender and sexuality in various relationships to one another. Then, the professor begins adding symbols of all kinds. [stop signs, restroom symbols, numbers, etc.] and occasionally combines them with the gender symbols. The professor is clearly dissatisfied--none of the combinations work.

KRIS

I got into doing male drag about thirteen years ago. I won Mr. Heart of Oregon. I like being Prince Kris. He's royal and he's outgoing and he's more confident. I don't think of myself as trans anything. I just like doing drag.

PATTI

My dad had very strict ideas about what is masculine and what is feminine. Tea is for women, coffee for men. Girls do dishes. Boys bring firewood in. I had my mind made up that I didn't like tea--and I'd never even tasted it. A couple of years ago a lesbian friend invited me over--and I came dressed as Patti. She offered me tea, and the first thing I said was "No, I don't care for tea." Then I thought, "Now wait a minute." and I said, "Yeah, I'll go ahead and have tea." So I had tea, and I liked it.

NARRATOR

The frustrated Professor gives up on the chart and pulls out a pile of books from the trunk: *The Homosexual Matrix*, *Sex Errors of the Human Body*, *Man/Woman, Boy/Girl*, and begins frantically reading.

JACKIE

At about the age of 10 or 11 I started developing. I had small breasts. I'd get picked on about it. Then when I was in the 7th grade and was doing some PE classes, we had to do some rather strenuous activities and I started hurting all the time. It was also at about that time, that I found out I had been born with a birth defect. So I had to go in to have it surgically taken care of. Not only did they correct the birth defect to my male anatomy but I believe they took something away from me. Because after the surgery my breasts quit developing; they quit growing.

CHARLENE

I had three closets--Charlene's, the in-between, and Charlie the soldier. The in-between closet was almost gender neutral. When I was at work I had to maintain a male image because they hired me as a male. Once I got home after work I could go anywhere from being gender neutral to being as feminine as I could be. I had a lot of clothes that you'd look at them and say "Is that a woman's outfit or is that a man's outfit?" They let me just be in-between. Once a month I had to dig in and be strictly male: That was when I was doing my weekend drills.

CHARLENE

I know that when I was being masculine, being a male, I had a temper. Sometimes it would border on being almost violent. I was a very angry person all the time. Once I started taking the hormones things seemed to settle down. Things seemed to come into line. My mom sometimes tells me:

mom/BILLIE (to CHARLENE)

It was easier living with you. When Charlie was around I was scared. But when you relaxed and let Charlene out it was a lot easier. You were a very enjoyable person to be around.

FISH

It was spring break when I was 19. I was in San Francisco visiting someone, and I had the biggest crisis of my life. My body was this and I was that. Not sure if I could live with my body being this. Just all my options hit me at once. What was I going to do about it? Was I going to be a transsexual or just transgendered? Did I want to change my body--hormones, surgery?

KRIS

I got into doing make drag about 13 years ago. I won Mr. Heart of Oregon. I like being Prince Kris. He's royal and he's outgoing, and he's more confident. I don't think of myself as trans-anything. I just like doing drag.

TRAVIS

I think about hormones and surgery daily, but one of the things I'm sure about is I don't want to be a man. I watch men. And I pass as a man. Other people think I'm a man. But I don't want to be a guy: The "white straight guy". I don't want to "move in their culture." And I think of them as "they" not "us". So I'm not a transsexual but I don't think I fit in the category of woman anymore, so what the hell am I? That's where I'm at now.

Look at it this way. It's like, when you have to check the box on a form- My dyke friend says, "I'm like, all of the above," and I realize, I'm 'none of the above.' It makes me feel so alone. I'm nothing. Nobody knows what a fella is.

DANA (speaking matter-of-factly)

In the United States alone 2000 kids a year are being born that are not distinguishable as male or female. We fall into this in-between or intersexed category. What happens is, if it comes down to it, they break out a tape measure and measure the phallus. If it's less than 3/8 of an inch you get to keep it and be a girl, if it's over an inch long you get to keep it and be a boy. If it's anywhere in between there, they cut it off and assign you a female gender.

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

NARRATOR

WE'WHA, wearing a cowboy hat and cow punching boots, strides into center stage and becomes the square dance caller.

[everybody claps and hoots – yee-haw]

PATTI

I go up to Portland, and they have this big gay square dance group. I have a great time. Those guys they get out there and they like to see that skirt come up and the more I get twirled the better I like it! Towards the end of the dance this one guy came by and told me how purdy I looked,

guy/FISH

Would you like to dance?

PATTI

I can't right now, I'm too tired. (to the audience) Then I thought, I better catch him, so I ran back...(to the guy) I don't want to pass up an opportunity, can I dance with you later?

guy/FISH

Oh sure, absolutely.

PATTI

I hope you'll be here next weekend.

guy/FISH

Well, I will, but how 'bout right now good lookin'?

PATTI

Okay, let's go dance. And so we got out there and we did the swing dance, and he turned me everyway but loose. He loved seeing that skirt come up and swingin' me around and twirlin' that skirt. The more he twirled me the more fun I had. It was exciting and I really enjoyed it! And then at the last there, he kissed me on the lips about 3 or 4 times, and I liked that too!

TRAVIS

I was at a TG, as in transgendered, conference last month. They had a dance. I was wearing trousers, and a button-down shirt and wing tips, and this woman came up to me,

woman/BILLIE

I'm really glad you're here. It's really good to see young people here.

TRAVIS (to the audience)

She probably thinks I'm 16.

woman/BILLIE

Oh you should have worn your feminine clothes. You're really safe here.

TRAVIS

Why would I do that?

woman/BILLIE

You know, you can cross-dress here.

TRAVIS

I *am* cross-dressed.

(The woman looks totally mortified. The other players chuckle.)

TRAVIS (to the audience)

She thought I was some nice young man checking out my options for being female.

JACKIE

Well, I had to go to the DMV. I knew I was going to get my picture taken and I wanted to look particularly good, so I picked some colors that I knew complemented my skin tone and I walk up to the counter.

JACKIE (aside to all)

I had a car that I inherited from my father that I had to get changed over into my name, and I had to get my address changed as well because I'd recently moved. (pause) And I had this letter from my therapist. I had called the Director of the DMV in Salem, and they told me just to go in there and take the letter in there with me into the field office,

(Talking on the phone)

director of the dmv/CHARLENE

Now, you're very likely to get somebody who has never done this before. So if they stand there scratching their heads, you tell them to look in Chapter 18-05 of the drivers' license manual.

JACKIE

Okay. So I go up to the counter and here's Joe Stud.

joe/KRIS

Well hey there missy.

JACKIE (to the audience)

You know the kind of attitude--real smiley.

joe/KRIS

What can we do for you today?

JACKIE (smiles pleasantly)

Oh I've got all kinds of things I need to do today. I need to get my address change done but I have this car to register in my name and I'm not sure if that information needs to go on here or if you'll take care of it? And I have all that to do, but first I think we had better take care of this.

(JACKIE mimes putting the letter on the counter in front of joe/KRIS, who mimes handing a paper)

JACKIE (to the audience)

And he's one of these guys that has to move his finger along with the words to read? And he gets to the word 'transsexual' and he kind of stumbles a bit and he looks at me. And he gets down further in the letter to the point where he reads where an approved therapist says that he supports me using the name Jackie and getting my gender changed to female on my identification. And he puts his hand on the counter, he's sittin' in one of those roll around high stools with the backs on them? And Whooooosh!

TRAVIS

He did that "back-away-slowly-gender-thing."

JACKIE

He's looking at this like he just can't hardly believe it. And he's starting to get pissed. I mean you can see it. And I'm sure he's full of mixed emotions because every time he looks at me, I'm lying to him you know? Because he sees me and he wants to respond to what he sees but his mind is telling him otherwise. (to joe/KRIS)

Now, they told me I was very likely to get someone who's never done this before, doesn't know anything about it.

joe/KRIS (scratching his head)

Well, Yeah that's true.

JACKIE

Well they told me, to tell you to look in Chapter 18-05 of the drivers license manual.

JACKIE (to the audience)

You could see the look on his face “There’s a woman telling me what to do” number one. Number two, “She doesn’t even work here. She’s not even my equal much less my superior.” And number three “It isn’t a woman, it’s a goddamn faggot.” There was that inner turmoil.

(A long sad, pensive pause, then...)

PATTI (gently)

So what happened honey?

JACKIE (speaking very calmly, with pride)

He looked it up, and he goes into this office and he brings someone out, and the next thing I know there are two or three other people going, you know “Is that the person over there?”... And I don’t know, maybe it was just because he was so glad to get rid of me, but he took my picture and when it came time he didn’t say, “Mr. Miller,” he didn’t say “Jack” or “John” or anything like that.

joe/KRIS

Jackie. Here you go. Sign it and it’s all yours.

END OF SCENE

Scene 5

(The players all sing, *I've Been Working On the Railroad*)

PATTI

I like Patti better than Ed. If it were not for financial reasons I would prefer to be Patti all the time. By that I mean I work in the male-dominated world. And that's where my skills are, and I can't very well bring Patti into it. I'm a welder-mechanic. So it's a case where Ed goes out and makes the money, and Patti goes out and enjoys the benefits.

TRAVIS

The jobs at the bottom are way more gender-stratified. When I worked as a forest firefighter in Idaho, it was really hard. That was the most fear I've ever lived in. We were in a town of 250 people. Everyone knew who I was, what I was, and where I lived. Kirsten and I were chased home and followed around in cars and it really sucked. And I was thinking if I was like, a software designer or something, I wouldn't have this trouble. I'd show up, wear my little suit with a button-down shirt and tie, and just coast.

BILLIE

If somebody wants you to do a dive job and you come out there in a dress, take off the dress, and start putting on a wetsuit--they could give a darn. They want you down there to work on the boat, they've got a \$4-5,000 day tomorrow--they've gotta get that done. They may not call you back 'cause of that dress--but at that point in time they're not gonna sit there and tell you no.

CHARLENE

I've worked for the VA Hospital as a nurse for ten years now. Well, let's put it this way, Charlie went to work there in '87 and I've been working there since '92. It was really easy to do transition there. I was surprised. My doctor kept saying, "Well, when are you going to transition?" and I hemmed and hawed and beat around the bush about it. 'Til one

appointment he basically said, "Shit or get off the pot, kid!" So I went to our Chief Steward and he researched it and made arrangements to have a meeting with the Chief Nurse and my Nurse Manager. I went in as Charlie, it was the end of my shift, the union rep was there, and it was really hard to come out and tell them.

nurse manager/FISH

Well, what's this meeting about?

charlie/CHARLENE

Well I've got something I need to tell you. There's going to be some very significant changes in my life.(pause) Who you see before you is not who I really am. I am giving up my male self, and I'm going to be living full-time as a woman.

charlie/CHARLENE (wryly to the audience)
My nurse manager loved it--her jaw hit the table.

chief nurse/JACKIE
So that's what's been bothering you these last few months! Well, what's your name?

charlie/CHARLENE
And I told her, and they asked about legalities, and it all just flowed nice and smooth. They required that I take a weeks vacation so that there would be a turnover of the patients. Before I took the vacation I had to have meetings with all my co-workers--all three shifts--and deal with them. Some people backed off and didn't want to deal with me, but I also got wonderful hugs, and people saying they admired me for my strength.

charlie/CHARLENE
Even to this day, occasionally a new nurse finds out that I wasn't always this way, not genetically this way. I look at myself and I still see masculine in there. But when some of these new nurses find out, they say they would have never guessed, I don't know if that's just being nice, or they're really sincere in it.

DANA
It just wasn't discussed. I was brought up in this wonderfully conservative little religious family. Anything dealing with sex, sexuality, sexual orientation--nothing was discussed.

END OF SCENE

Scene 6

(cast hums wedding march)

NARRATOR

WE'WHA, in a bridal veil, turns around and throws a bouquet over her/his head.

KRIS

I had a boyfriend in high school. You had to have one. He was my best friend. We were both different from everyone else, so we were better together. We got married and then after a couple of years, we both came out.

BILLIE

Marriage? Well there's been problems of course. In '94 we went on a vacation for a month, and when we got back the wife said "I don't want to see another shopping mall!" (aside) I *do* like to shop!

BILLIE

You can take a pair of men's shoes today and go back 30 or 40 years and they're the same thing. They've got about five different styles, and it's been that way since before Christ. No imagination at all. My daughter, Angie is a size 22, I'm a 22-24. So she'll often sit there and say,

DAUGHTER

Hey dad, they had this dress on sale!...

BILLIE (to audience and others)

We go up to Portland and shop. It's fun. Only bad side is,

DAUGHTER

Hey dad, my best girl friend's getting married, you got a dress I can borrow?

BILLIE (to the audience and others)

(incredulous) You don't ask that--your mother maybe--but not your dad! She went in to *my* closet and took like six of 'em over to a friend's house and went through 'em, tried 'em on and took one of 'em. Used it for the wedding. (with a shrug) A different life.

CHARLENE

Usually when somebody wants to be my friend, it's a child. There's an 11 year old, and a six year old next door. And to them, I'm just the big lady that was in the army. In fact the girls came over a few times and helped me do yard work, and we sat out there and we

talked. It makes me feel good that I've got a kid around me again, 'cause I love kids. I miss mine.

DAUGHTER

When I was a kid my dad was god, you know. So it didn't matter...As far as I was concerned everything he did was normal. I must have been about 6 years old, we went to the coast and dad was dressed up. I don't know what happened. I think somebody complained 'cause he was in the ladies restroom. Anyway a cop came along and bawled him out and made him cry and dad took off the wig and put a man's shirt on and we drove home. But that's about all I remember about the incident. To me it was just like, "Why would that mean old police officer do that to my daddy?" I didn't understand.

PATTI

I eventually had a talk with my second wife. She was uncertain at first, then she kind of got really curious and interested. We'd go to TOWN and just go shopping, and she'd find something she thought would fit my personality. She helped me build up a decent wardrobe at the time.

And of course she used that against me when it came to our divorce seven months later. That's why I don't see my other two children. She went to court and said that because I was a transvestite and practiced perverted sexual behaviors I was an unfit parent. But I did get visitation rights. I did get to see my kids every other weekend. From 9 in the morning until 8 at night. I could not have them overnight because I might "sexually or physically or mentally abuse them". I mean, if that was in my nature I could do that from 9 in the morning until 8 at night. I'd kill the first person that laid a hand on my kids.

BILLIE

I have a picture of my daughter when she was 18 months old and you can see my red patent double-T strap shoes in the background. When did I come out to her? When she was a baby and I was holding her with a pair of flats on.

TRAVIS

It's really great working with kids. I was helping out at this Montessori school. It was so cool. At first they had a really heated debate about what exactly I was. And now everyone has their own conclusion, but whoever I talk to has a different one. The girls are like, "You're female right?" And I'm like, "Yeah." So they're all right with that. Then there's this boy, Dustin. He calls me "he" all the time, like "Yeah, he's Kirsten's girlfriend."

One day, I was working with this kid, Skylar (he's seven), and he was writing a story and I was helping him.

skylar/FISH

You know what, when you first walked into the classroom I thought you were a boy, then I thought you were a girl and now I know you're both. And you can be both.

TRAVIS

Just the way they mix everything up, it's so great. It's a fruit salad of gender triads. I wish they could hold on to all that. The kids are not freaked out. It is what it is.

END OF SCENE

Scene 7

NARRATOR

WE'WHA, dressed as a janitor, strolls in with two restroom signs; one blue sign labeled MEN, and one pink sign labeled WOMEN. The signs are set at opposite ends of the stage. WE'WHA starts to go toward one and then the other, but hesitates each time – he/she can't figure out which one to use. WE'WHA ends up sitting center stage with arms crossed in agony.

KRIS

People have always told me I was in the wrong bathroom. Used to embarrass my mom to death.

FISH

Before I went through transition, going in the women's bathroom is always a problem. And so people are like, "Why don't you just go in the men's?" Well going in the men's is sometimes okay but it's like, if they think you're a fag, that's not someplace you want to go by yourself. So then it just becomes, is it better to just freak out a bunch of women or potentially get bashed in the bathroom by a bunch of guys? I tend to just freak out a lot of women most of the time.

(The femmes all scream--for fun. Everyone laughs and hoots.)

PATTI

I used to just go out by myself. Like I'd go to a movie theater. And it was a thrill to go to a women's restroom. I wasn't goin' there to look at the ladies, just to be a woman.

FISH

I remember one time. . . B-T (as in 'before transition) when I was transferring planes in San Francisco. There was always the bathroom thing. But I'm like, "Hell I'm in San Francisco. I can be queer here, no problem." So, I've got a big lay over. I was drinking coffee on the plane, I needed to use the facilities. So I go, "Fuck it, I'm not going to worry about it." It's like, I hate using the men's restrooms--cause their dirty. You don't want to sit down on those seats. And I get a little worried because in the men's room I'm either a really little guy, or I'm a fag. If I'm seen as just kind of puny it's usually okay. But if I'm a fag.... So I take my leather jacket off and do all the body prepping I can do to try to look as female as I can and I just go busting into the "ladies" room and take a hard left into the first stall. When I go in, I see out of the corner of my eye that there's this woman by the air blower thing. I notice her. I don't make eye contact with her. I just go in the stall. I'm in there, I close the door, I set the bag down, and hang my coat up and I'm about to sit down. And I hear her start yelling that there's a guy in the bathroom. And I'm like, "Shit. Okay, just pee really fast and leave." So, I pee as fast as I can. I get up. I zip up, I tuck in. As I'm reaching to open the door, I'm also pulling my wallet out of my back pocket so if there's any problem on the way out I can justify myself. As I'm

reaching for the door I see and hear some boots coming towards my stall... And I'm thinking, "This is not going to be a happy day, right?" And I open the door and on the other side of the door is this great big bull dyke, working for San Francisco security. And she's wearing a little nametag, *Gwen*. And we just look at each other and start cracking up. And she turns and looks at the woman and says, "There's no problem here ma'am."

TRAVIS

I feel driven. Just to be here. Our whole society is designed to eliminate people like me. Force us into other categories, or silence us, or kill us. They don't want me to be here. So in a way it's a triumph to walk into one more women's restroom and take up the space and just be there.

NARRATOR

WE'WHA removes the letters WO and the N from the pink WOMEN's sign and the letter N from the blue MEN's sign, leaving the word "ME" on both signs.

END OF SCENE

Scene 8

PATTI

There's been three jobs recently that I've lost because somebody thought I was gay.

CHARLENE

I was beaten once by two deputy sheriffs and during the beating they yelled things at me like "Quit your crying, queer, and take it like a man."

TRAVIS

I feel safe everywhere--and nowhere. Passing for a man makes you really safe in some instances, but if they find out, the penalties are worse. People don't like to be deceived.

When I was 15 I got beat up. My girlfriend and I were at a park, making out in her car. She had a VW Bug. Three guys came up and start rocking the car. I, of course, have to get all pissed off about it and hop out. And as we are like, yelling, they figure out that I am *not*-a-boy. And they're not very happy about this. So this one guy shoves me against the car. I shove him back. And the other two just take off to whaling on me. I finally get smart and just drop and cover 'cause the more I fight the more they are beating the hell out of me.

Fortunately, they were more cowardly assholes than really psycho guys, 'cause if they had been psycho guys I probably wouldn't be here. (pause) I ended up with cracked ribs and bruises. But the really bad part was when I realized that I had to go home. And I'm thinking, "I've gotta find a way to cover up what's going on." As things turned out, my parents actually bought the ridiculous story that I wiped out playing basketball. (pause) Rather hard to believe given what I looked like.

JACKIE

Sometimes I don't feel safe with myself. I've resisted suicide for a long time. Now, most of the time I'm arrogant to a fault and have the biggest ego and have great self-esteem, but about six days a year I get tired--just tired of dealing with people's ignorance and dealing with myself and trying to carve out a place. I just feel like leaving--like you'd leave a bad situation.

CHARLENE

I got to the point in the service where I volunteered for patrol boats on the Mekong Delta. Low life expectancy. Actually, I volunteered for two units there. I volunteered for Navy Seals. Low life expectancy. I volunteered for duty in Vietnam as a hospital corpsman--a field medic. Again, low life expectancy. These are all suicidal things.

KRIS

I have some friends who have approached me from the Christian standpoint "How can you live your life this way? You know this wonderful, beautiful life that God gave you?"

And I tell them “You know, I’ve never stopped praying about this. I’ve prayed that he would change me. Then I prayed that he would fix me. And then I prayed that he would change me again. And one day I woke up, because I heard the joke about the guy in the boat on the lake:

A storm came up.

(Players begin making storm sounds.)

Are you okay? rescue boat captain/DAUGHTER

Yeah, we’ll be fine. guy in the boat/BILLIE

What’s the matter? rescue boat captain/DAUGHTER

Well, the engine broke down. guy in the boat/BILLIE

Well, let us tow you back to shore. rescue boat captain/DAUGHTER

No, no, no, we got it. guy in the boat/BILLIE

KRIS
This was a very faithful man in this boat. Pretty soon a helicopter shows up.

(someone makes the sound of a helicopter)

Are you okay? helicopter pilot/JACKIE (as if using a bullhorn)

Yeah, I’m just fine everything’s okay. guy in the boat/BILLIE

Well a storm’s comin’ up. It’s going to get worse. Sure you don’t want us to lift you outta there? helicopter pilot/JACKIE

No, we’re fine. God’s gonna save us. guy in the boat/BILLIE

(all the sounds stop)

KRIS

The guy drowns. Gets to heaven.

guy in the boat/BILLIE

God, why didn't you save me? I prayed. I asked for your help.

god/FISH

I sent you a boat and I sent you a helicopter! What more do you want?

KRIS

One day I prayed to god to have the strength to help me find the people I needed to be happy, and to help *myself* be happy. And so you see, God answered my prayers.

END OF SCENE

Scene 9

(all the actors, except Dana, as if in a support group)

BILLIE

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I have no fear; 'Cause I'm the toughest son-of-a-bitch in the valley.

(Everyone laughs)

DANA

I remember in November of '95, it had been about six months after I had first made contact with the group, I went down to San Francisco, because they were having every other month support group meetings. Now, I had read a lot of medical literature, and it reminded me of how I had felt growing up,... feeling less than human, the way hermaphrodites are coldly and methodically discussed in medical literature... like some disease. I also had, and at times I still struggle with, very low self-esteem, poor body image--that all comes from being displayed as a child on a medical examining table,... the way a butcher would display a steak in a meat case.

JACKIE (to others in the group)

Katherine has watched me grow and develop as a woman, and she is really pleased to work with me. She's happy that I am a friend. She invited me out to her house for lunch one day. And I took her up on her invitation and I went out there, and I met her mom. She's talked to her mom about me a lot of times. The first doll that was ever given to me, was a gift from Katherine. It holds a very prominent place in my heart.

TRAVIS

I feel safe with Kirsten, my partner. She's been totally amazing. She said "I'll love you whatever you are", and she thinks about it everyday, just like I do. It's love. We've been together three years.

CHARLENE

I have an older brother. He pretty well accepts it. When I told him, I was so scared that he would reject me. I love my brother. And when I told him, he said, "Oh, I've known about that since we were kids." And I said, "Well gee, you should have told me!" He accepts me.

And he's had fun with it at the VA. Occasionally he's an outpatient there, and once they were asking questions about his siblings and when he was growing up, and he said he had a brother and a sister. But when they looked at his paperwork, it says that he's got two

sisters. “Well, so what happened to your brother?” “Oh nothing.” he says, “She works here.”

(everyone laughs)

DAUGHTER

Dad lives at the very end of the street and whenever he leaves he’s got to go by everybody. And he drives a very distinctive car and everybody sees him coming and they know that it’s him. Except for one lady, and she is just the densest woman. My dad’s been living back there for almost 20 years. She says, “Who’s that lady with the big red hair that goes driving by in your dad’s car every once in awhile?” (she chuckles) I just look at her and I say, “That’s my dad.”

(more laughter)

DANA(to the audience)

Anyway, so I walked in to this support group on San Francisco expecting to see another room full of freaks and monsters and just plain weirdoes. And it’s like, I walked in and wait a minute--everybody looks normal... and people are talking about the same things that you’ve gone through... that you’ve kept locked up for 24, 25 years. And it was great...for awhile, while I was there.

END OF SCENE

Scene 10

)One by one each player speaks to the audience)

BILLIE

I am me. Treat me the way I am. Treat me the way I present myself.

DAUGHTER

I'm on the fire department. I've been a security officer. I'm looking at getting on a police department. If I had grown up in a traditional family I would probably be looking at waitressing or teaching or something like that. And that's not me.

FISH

Right now, right here--I feel like I have the best of both worlds because, I can be with dykes and I can be with fags and if I were something else then I probably couldn't.

KRIS

The male part of me gives me a strength, and an awareness of the world that I don't have as a woman. I identify with the male world and say I am a part of it. This is where I belong.

PATTI

As Patti, I can let my emotions go free. As Ed, I hold my emotions back. Last year I went to see a high school production of Oklahoma. And I went as Patti. I enjoyed that play more 'cause I was Patti. This goes back to ideas that my dad put in our heads, that women enjoy music more than men. As Patti, I just flowed with it and it was one of the most wonderful experiences I've ever had.

TRAVIS

I'm happy I was socialized as a woman. I gleaned some good things, but I also picked up some good things about being a man. I watched how my parents treated my brother, and I watched the boys in school. At this point I enjoy being neither cause there are no rules. I get to be nurturing and tough, and work on a fire crew and clean the house. I get to select from the full spectrum.

JACKIE

And what I like about being a woman is just congruence. I'm expressing and appearing on the outside the way I feel on the inside. And if I want to bend down and smell some flowers and comment on how beautiful they are; or compliment someone on how attractive their clothing is or that I like their hairstyle; if I want to greet someone with a hug instead of a handshake--I'm not getting chastised for it.

CHARLENE

I don't tolerate bigotry very much, no matter what it is. I didn't give up twenty-one years of my life defending this country and the constitution to have people telling people they can't have rights. The sticker in my window says it all. "I'm a Veteran Against Discrimination".

FISH

Tolerance is not enough. People like have so much to offer. Other people should revel in us. They should sit at our knees and beg for wisdom. They could learn from us, and integrate it into their own lives. Simple tolerance is patronizing and condescending and insulting and enraging. Tolerance my ass!

END OF SCENE

Scene 11

(the *Sunrise Song* plays)

DANA

When I sat down on that stump the beach was flat and smooth, the big chunk of log was the only thing on the beach. This beautiful green glass float appeared way above the highest point where the waves were breaking. I was below the high tide mark, so when I had done it, the tide would shift and would carry me out. It would just take care of everything. But this float was there. It was just...I was no longer by myself on the beach. And I can't explain who or what was with me, but when this showed up, this arm was put around my shoulder. I unloaded the gun, put the gun in my back pocket, put the bullets in the pocket of my jacket. And I picked up the float, and walked back up the beach.

(As DANA finishes the story, the music fades out)

END

If You Are Concerned About Your Child's Gender Behaviors



A Guide for Parents



Outreach Program for Children with
Gender-Variant Behaviors and their Families

Some children are different in their gender behaviors

By the age of 3 years, most children express an interest in or preference toward activities and behaviors typically associated to their specific gender. We call these behaviors “gender-typical” because the members of one of the sexes favor them. For example, boys enjoy rough-and-tumble play and identify with male heroes, while girls enjoy such activities as playing with dolls and pretending to be a mommy. By age 5-6 years, children have a strong sense of the gender-appropriate behavior that is typical for their social group.

However, some children develop in a different way. Some children have interests more typical of the other sex and sometimes want to look and act like the other sex. For example, a 7-year-old boy plays with Barbie™ dolls and pretends to have long hair and be a princess. A 6-year-old girl is only interested in playing outside with the boys, refuses to wear anything except jeans and t-shirts, and talks about being a boy. We call these gender-variant behaviors and interests.

Gender variance and gender non-conformity refer to interests and behaviors that are outside of typical cultural norms for each of the genders. Children with gender-variant traits have strong and persistent behaviors that are typically associated with the other sex. Sometimes they reject the physical appearance (clothing and hairstyle) typical of the child’s own sex. Gender variance does not apply to children who have a passing interest in trying out the behaviors and typical interests of the other sex for a few days or weeks.

What Are Gender Variant Behaviors?

Patterns of gender-variant behavior are usually first noticed between the ages of two to four years. Children with a gender-variant pattern display many of the following characteristics:

Boys may show an interest in women's clothes, shoes, hair and make-up. They play-act and identify with female characters such as Barbie™, The Little Mermaid™, Snow White or Cinderella. They wish to have or may pretend to have long hair, prefer girls as playmates, and avoid rough-and-tumble play and team sports. Others may describe them as gentle, sensitive, artistic, sweet, cute, and very affectionate. When young, they may express the desire to be a girl or claim that they really are girls.

Girls may insist on wearing boys' clothing and short haircuts and refuse to wear skirts, dresses and female bathing suits. They tend to reject play activities that are associated with being a girl. Instead, they prefer games and toys that are typically considered more appropriate for boys such as GI Joe™, Superman™, and cars and trucks. These girls may identify with male characters and refuse to assume female characters in play-acting. For example, they may want to be the father when playing house. They prefer boys as playmates and are interested in rough-and-tumble play and contact or team sports. These girls may also express the desire to be a boy, announce that they really are boys, and enjoy being mistaken for a boy.

Behaviors that are observed frequently before the child starts school may become less frequent once the child has more contact with peers. A decrease in observed behaviors may indicate that as the child matures and experiences peer criticism, he voluntarily hides or avoids some behaviors in order to blend in.

Why Does Gender Variance Occur?

Gender variance is not new. It has been described throughout history and in many different cultures. Child development specialists used to believe that gender-typical and gender-variant behaviors were the result of the ways in which children were raised. Today, experts believe that the presence or absence of these behaviors is mainly the result of the biological or genetic diversity among individuals. In other words, the genetic propensity for these behaviors is hard-wired in the brain before or soon after birth. Of course, the specific content of male and female roles has to be learned by all children, even though some children seem to be biologically predisposed toward manifesting some of the gender role characteristics of the other sex. Some experts used to believe that gender variance represented *abnormal* development, but today many have come to believe that children with gender-variant behaviors *are normal* children with unique qualities — just as children who develop left-handedness are *normal*.

Although science has yet to pinpoint the causes, we know that gender-variant traits are not typically caused by parenting style or by childhood events, such as divorce, sexual abuse, or other traumatic experiences. Children do not choose to have gender-variant interests anymore than other children choose gender-typical interests. Both types of interests represent what comes naturally to each child. Gender variance is not caused by an emotional disorder. However, because of societal prejudice, children with gender-variant traits may experience ongoing rejection, criticism and bullying causing adjustment difficulties.

What Can I Expect In The Future?

As an adolescent and adult, your child may be emotionally and physically attracted to persons of the opposite sex, the same sex or both sexes. Although these three outcomes are possible, research on boys with gender-variant histories suggests that most of them have a same-sex orientation (i.e., they are gay). These boys may grow up to be masculine and conventional in their appearance. Gender-variant girls are most likely to be conventionally heterosexual or perhaps bisexual in their sexual orientation.

On rare occasions, children continue to develop a strong cross-gender identification as they enter adolescence and adulthood. These persons may be transgendered and experience persistent discomfort with his or her social sex role. Some may eventually seek sex reassignment, so they can more fully and effectively live as the other sex. Some transgender persons do not completely identify with either gender.



How Will My Child View Himself?

Good self-esteem is vital to a child's ability to deal with life's trials effectively. However, generalized social stigma and the hostile behaviors that stem from it can cause emotional distress in children with gender-variant behaviors, making their self-esteem development more challenging than necessary. Without support from parents, the child may believe that this stigma is deserved. Affirming parenting is key to protecting a child from these harmful effects.

Generally speaking, girls with interests or behaviors that traditionally are viewed as masculine-oriented usually have a stronger self-esteem than boys who have traditionally feminine-oriented interests or behaviors. This may be due to greater social acceptance of girls who show masculine interests than of boys who show feminine interests.

Can it be changed?

At the age of 5 or 6 years, children begin to be influenced by social pressure to conform and may adjust their behavior in public to blend in. This does not necessarily mean that the child's core traits have changed. What drives gender-typical or gender-variant traits cannot be changed through the influence of parents, teachers, coaches or therapists. Although a child may alter his or her behavior in response to parental pressure or social pressure, such changes may be skin deep and may not reflect how the child truly feels. Furthermore, pressuring/shaming is likely to undermine the child's self-confidence and esteem. As we explain further below, we strongly oppose parenting approaches or therapies that focus on pressuring children to change and accommodate to a stereotype of how a girl or a boy is "supposed to be."



How Can I Help My Child?

■ Love your child for who she is.

Like all children, your child needs love, acceptance, understanding, and support. Children that have gender-variant traits sometimes need these in a special way. The more that society and their peers may be critical of them, the more important it is for them to have the support and acceptance of their families.

■ Question traditional assumptions.

Do not automatically accept traditional assumptions about social gender roles and sexual orientation. Learn to separate society's judgments from the love you have for your child. Do not let other people's critical opinions of what is right and wrong come between you and your child.

■ **Create a safe space for your child.**

Children are far more resilient and able to cope when they feel that their parent is on their side. Let your child know that you love him, no matter what. Let others know that you love your child unconditionally, and let your child know that you are there to support him. Many children with gender-variant traits experience social isolation or bullying. You and your home may be the child's only place of safety. If this is the case, assure your child that you always will allow and encourage him to be "who he is" in his own home. Create an atmosphere of acceptance, providing a safe place for your child to express his interests.

■ **Seek out socially acceptable activities.**

Encourage your child to find activities that respect her interests, yet help her to fit-in socially. These might include gymnastics, swimming, computers or theater for boys and athletic teams, leadership programs or outdoor adventures for girls. Remember to encourage activities that appeal to the child.

■ **Validate your child.**

Talk with your child about the fact that there is more than one way of being a girl or boy. Encourage individuality, and avoid using statements such as, "only girls play with dolls," and "boys love ball play but girls do not." Instead, explain that although a majority of boys are not interested in dolls, there are some boys that love them and that's OK too! The same goes for girls: not all girls like to play mommy, some girls for example like to pretend to be a daddy or a soldier.

Speak openly and calmly about gender variance. Acknowledge to your child that she is different in positive terms. Talk with your child about what it

feels like to be different. Adults who look back on their own childhood of gender non-conformity often recall feeling *different*, which made them feel ashamed. Help your child realize that although not everyone understands or affirms her, liking different things is nothing to be ashamed of and can lead to special talents and success in adulthood. Most importantly, listen to your child without criticizing. Your child needs to feel that she is understood by you in order to be open with you.

■ **Seek out supportive resources.**

Share books and videos with your child that present the full range of human variation in gender roles and sexual orientation. Have these at your home, and ask that they be made available in the school library (see Useful Books and Videos pg. 15).

If your child is isolated from peers, acknowledge that this is hurtful but not his or her fault. Assure your child that he/she will make friends with others who have similar interests in the future. Seek connections with families who accept and celebrate differences among individuals.

■ **Talk to other significant people.**

Include siblings in as many discussions about gender variance as possible. They may find it difficult to accept a brother or sister with gender-variant behaviors or interests; they may feel embarrassed or become abusive. This is a challenge for them as well, so they may need your help in understanding their feelings. This can also be a challenge for other family members. Talk to members of your extended family, babysitters and family friends. Let them know about your child's needs and what you expect. You may want to have other significant adults read this booklet.

■ **Prepare your child to deal with bullying.**

Explain to your child that he will probably encounter criticism and even bullying, and ask him how this feels. Ask what will make him feel safe, and tell your child to come to you or other adults in authority for help. Let your child know that he does not deserve to be hurt.



From time to time, encourage your child to tell you if he is criticized or bullied. Children who are verbally or physically abused by peers are often afraid or embarrassed to talk about it. It is better if your child talks to you about being bullied; however, do not expect your child to always tell you. Be alert to possible warning signs that indicate your child may be in trouble. These signs can include refusing to go to school or outside, complaining of aches or pains, or crying excessively.

■ **Be your child's advocate.**

You may want to anticipate problems and talk to the school, before you hear about them. Talk to your child's teacher or the school administration or guidance counselor, and solicit their help in

creating an atmosphere where your child will be safe from negative judgments. Insist on a zero-tolerance policy at school with regard to teasing and criticism. Do not assume that the school has an understanding of this issue; you may need to educate school staff. Sometimes the school environment may be such that an alternative school may need to be considered.



What Pitfalls Should I Avoid?

■ **Avoid finding fault.**

Do not blame your child, yourself or your spouse. Your child's gender variance came from within and cannot be turned off at will. It was not caused by anyone else and cannot be changed by anyone else. In fact, if you focus on blame or change, you may miss wonderful things about your child and spoil the rewards of being a parent. Your child needs to express herself as much as other children. If your child is interested in an activity more typical of the opposite sex, it is not an act of defiance. She is simply following her own instincts.

■ **Do not pressure your child to change.**

Avoid all actions designed to pressure your child to change. Some children may hide their interests and feelings from disapproving parents because they want to be loved and accepted by them, but this does not mean that the child's deep-seated interests have changed. In fact, it teaches the child that he has to live a lie in order to be accepted. Do not negatively compare your child to a sibling or another child; this will only hurt both children.

■ **Do not blame the victim.**

Do not try to sweep being bullied under the rug or tell your child it is something she must learn to accept because she is different. Do not make your child responsible for other people's intolerance. Being outside the norm does not give someone else the right to criticize or torment. Bullying is an unacceptable and cowardly act for which only the bully is responsible. Talk about what happened, and help the child understand why it is wrong.



As a Parent, How Do I Deal With My Own Feelings?

- **Examine your feelings and learn to accept your child.**

You and other family members may feel uncomfortable and ashamed of your child's interests and behaviors. This is common early on. Take time to figure out where your feelings are coming from.

You may have to adjust your dreams of how you expected parenting and your family to be. If these changes must occur, you may experience some of the emotions associated with loss, such as shock, denial, anger, and despair. These feelings are all part of the process towards acceptance. You must reach acceptance in order to affirm your child's uniqueness.

■ Look for support.

Learning how to parent in a new way can be challenging. Asking for support is a wise decision for you, your child, and the rest of your family. If you are experiencing too much stress from signs of excessive worrying, loss of sleep, anxiety or irritability, do not hesitate to seek professional support. Sometimes, both parents may disagree on how to raise a child, especially a child with gender-variant traits. If you and the other parent have extremely different views, seek counseling to help mediate your discussions. Counseling will make your communication more productive by providing a safe and neutral space in which to share your feelings and differences.

Unfortunately, many times it is not easy to find support. Keep in mind that you are not alone and neither is your child. However, do not feel discouraged if it is difficult to find other families in similar circumstances in your community. You may consider joining or forming a parent support group in your community or joining the electronic discussion group described below under “Useful Resources: Parent List-Serve.” In spite of initial apprehension, many parents like you have found support groups to be very helpful.



How Do I Know If My Child Needs Professional Help?

Seek professional help if your child becomes anxious, depressed, angry or hyperactive in spite of your efforts to be supportive. If your child shows signs of self-destructive or suicidal behavior, seek professional help immediately. It may be useful to seek out structured approaches that teach children strategies to reduce the impact of bullying and skills to respond more effectively to bullying. Children who are very shy or have difficulty making friends may benefit from training to improve social skills.

■ How do you identify the right professional help?

Therapists who are competent with other childhood issues do not necessarily have the competence to deal with gender variance, so become an informed consumer and select a professional wisely. A red flag should be raised when the therapist seems to focus on the child's behaviors as the problem rather than on helping the child cope with intolerance and social prejudice. In the past, professionals assigned the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder to children. This approach is flawed because it implies that these children suffer from a mental disorder. Along the same lines, therapists used to recommend techniques to change gender-variant behaviors. Such approaches may be harmful and should not be used.

Ask prospective therapists how they approach gender variance. Ask about their previous experience treating children with these issues. Discuss with prospective therapists what you have learned from this booklet. If you seek therapy for your child, make sure that guidance and support for the parents is a major component of the sessions. Be concerned if the sessions only involve the child, do not address your parenting questions, or do not provide you with ideas to help your child and your family.

Useful Resources

Parent List-Serve

The Outreach Program for Children with Gender-Variant Behaviors and Their Families moderates an electronic list-serve for parents. As list-serve members, parents can post and read messages from other parents and moderators. To join, contact the program coordinator, (202) 884-2504 or e-mail pgroup@cnmc.org.

Web Sites

Children's National Medical Center web-site:

www.dcchildrens.com/gendervariance

PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians, Gays of Metropolitan Washington Local Chapter website:

<http://www.pflagdc.org>.

National: **<http://www.pflag.org>**.

GLSEN website: **<http://www.glsen.org>**.

Books for Children

Oliver Button is a Sissy • 1979 Tomie de Paola.

Voyager Books, Harcourt Brace and Company. Reading levels 4-8.

The Sissy Duckling. Fierstein, Harvey
and Henry Cole (Illustrator)

Simon & Schuster, 2002 • Reading levels 4-8.

It's Perfectly Normal • Harris, Robie

Candlewick Press, 1994 • Ages 10 & up.

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives:

A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships

Ruth Bell et al.

Random House: New York, 1998.

Books for parents

Not Like Other Boys • Fanta-Shyer M. and Shyer C.
Houghton Mifflin Co: Boston, 1996.

Homosexuality: The Secret a Child Dare Not Tell
Cantwell M. A. • Rafael Press: Chicago, 1998.

*Sissies & Tomboys: Gender Non-conformity
& Homosexual Childhood*
Rottnek, Matthew, ed.
New York University Press: New York 1999.

Films and Videos

Ma Vie en Rose (My Life in Pink) (Video/DVD) • A film by
Alain Berliner. • Sony Picture Classics • (R)

Oliver Button Is a Star (Video) • Directed by John
Scagliotti and Dan Hunt, with Tomie de Paola and
others. • <http://www.oliverbuttonisastar.com> • (No
audience rating)

The Dress Code (Video/DVD) • a film by Shirley MacLaine
• MGM/UA Studios • (PG13)

Outreach Program for Children with Gender-Variant Behaviors and Their Families

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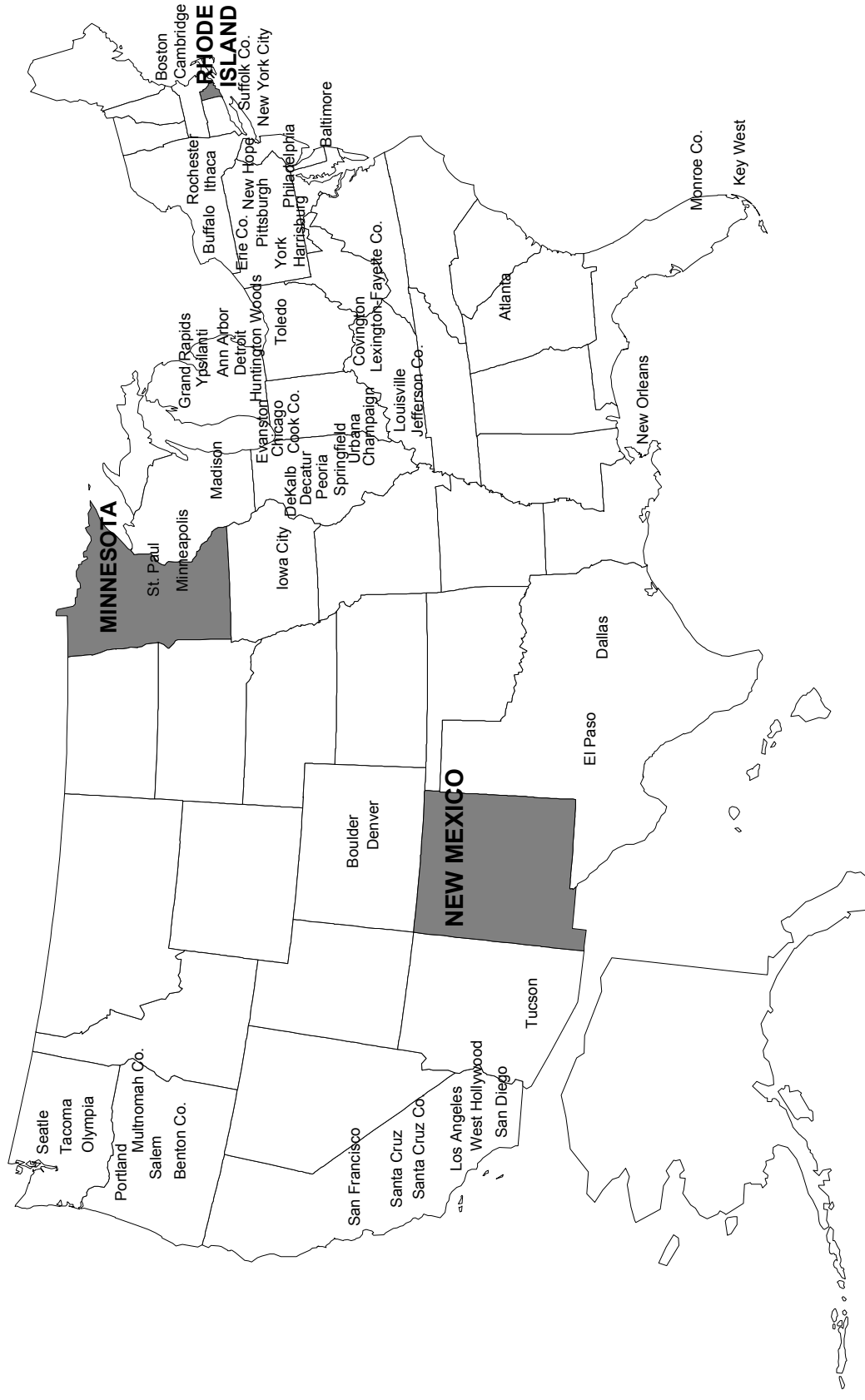
Production of this booklet is supported by a grant from the Child Health Center Board, Children's National Medical Center. We thank Dr. Gregory Lehne and the numerous professionals, parents and volunteers who have generously contributed their assistance. Illustrations by Rebecca Apple.

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Jurisdictions with Transgender-Inclusive Non-Discrimination Laws

Transgender Law and Policy Institute, July 2003

www.transgenderlaw.org



52 *things* YOU can do for TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

#1: Take a trans person to lunch **#2:** Ask your library to carry books that deal positively with trans people **#3:** Attend an anti-racism training and put into practice what you learn **#4:** Run for office **#5:** Invite your mayor or other elected official to address a trans group or town meeting **#6:** Plan an art show of works by trans artists **#7:** Create and publicize a calendar of local events and encourage people to attend them **#8:** Start an online community or a blog that deals with an issue that is important to you **#9:** Change the policy of an organization you belong to **#10:** Donate money to an organization providing direct services for trans people **#11:** Hold a workshop on how to effectively advocate for yourself when seeking medical care or therapy **#12:** Ask your local film festival to show trans-themed movies and then go see them **#13:** Support the Day of Silence **#14:** Preach or speak at a local community of faith, such as a synagogue, church or mosque **#15:** Adopt a highway **#16:** Hold a Trans Pride event in your community **#17:** March as a trans contingent in the Gay Pride parade **#18:** Educate a local homeless shelter about how to be trans-inclusive **#19:** Pass a non-discrimination ordinance in your community **#20:** Visit the offices of your Congressional representative and educate them about trans issues **#21:** Start a local support or education group **#22:** Volunteer with an LGBT advocacy group **#23:** Start a speakers' bureau **#24:** Break a gender rule **#25:** Make a restroom more accessible to trans people **#26:** Compile and share a list of support services **#27:** Collaborate with another group on a community project or social event **#28:** Work to pass a non-discrimination policy at your workplace **#29:** Connect with PFLAG **#30:** Write a regular column for a publication **#31:** Plan to come out on National Coming Out Day **#32:** Register new voters **#33:** Fund scholarships **#34:** Support programs for youth **#35:** Know your rights if you are stopped by the police **#36:** Get involved in the political process—volunteer for a candidate **#37:** Plan and conduct a Day of Remembrance event **#38:** Support or create a radio show or podcast **#39:** Hold a house party for NCTE or another trans organization **#40:** Make jails safer for trans people **#41:** Hold a job fair **#42:** Support a drag community event **#43:** Engage media coverage of trans issues **#44:** Conduct a community needs assessment **#45:** Vote **#46:** Start a discussion group on gender-related books **#47:** Respond to alerts from other organizations **#48:** Collect and share stories of discrimination **#49:** Set up training in a hospital, nursing or medical school **#50:** Write an op-ed **#51:** Help an LGBT organization become more trans-friendly **#52:** Make a New Year's resolution for transgender equality

More information about each of these ideas is available on our web site at www.NCTEquality.org.
National Center for Transgender Equality
1325 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
202-903-0112



Action Steps for Being a Trans Ally

by Samuel Lurie; Transgender Training and Advocacy,
www.tgtrain.org

"Transgender" encompasses many different gender presentations and identities. From Male-to-Female and Female-to-Male to Femme Queen, Boi, Trannyfag, Female-born man, Transwoman, Tomboy, Butch, Crossdresser and many more. Many people who may not identify as "transgender" still face discrimination based on their gender expression and for not conforming to traditional gender presentations.

Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Being gay doesn't mean you're trans and being trans doesn't mean you're gay. Sexual orientation is about who we're attracted to. Gender identity is about how we see ourselves. Trans people can identify as gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual or asexual.

If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask. Politely and respectfully.

Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so also.

Confidentiality, Disclosure and "Outing."

Some trans people "pass" and some do not. Knowing a trans person's status is personal information and up to them to share with others. Gwen Araujo and Brandon Teena were both murdered when others revealed their trans status. Others routinely lose housing, jobs and friends. Do not casually share this information, or "gossip" about a person you know or think is trans.

Don't assume what path a transperson is on regarding surgery or hormones.

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones; some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones and/or surgery.

Don't police public restrooms.

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- [Higher Ed Affiliations](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Testimonials](#)
- [Contact Info](#)
- [Brochure \[PDF\]](#)

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door-or your expectations! Encourage businesses and agencies to have unisex bathrooms, and offer to accompany a trans-person to the bathroom so they are less vulnerable.

Don't just add the "T" without doing work.

"GLBT" is now commonplace to show support for queerness. To be an ally for Transpeople, Gays, Lesbians and Bisexual people need to examine their own gender stereotypes and transphobia and be willing to defend trans people and celebrate trans lives.

Listen to trans voices.

The best way to be an ally is to listen to trans people themselves. Check out the sites and books below. Talk to trans folks in your community. They are the experts on their own lives!

Samuel Lurie, Transgender Training and Advocacy

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Talking Points about Gender-Segregated Facilities

These talking points were drafted by Dean Spade, a member of the committee currently drafting the Compliance Guidelines for New York City's new anti-gender identity discrimination law. These guidelines have not yet been approved, but in preparation for questions regarding sex-segregated facilities, these talking points were drafted. These may be of use in clarifying issues in communities working toward transgender equality.

New York City's Human Rights Law now explicitly protects all New Yorkers from discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression. This means that, no matter who you are, you should be treated equally and with respect for how you understand your own gender. If you are transgender, transsexual, a feminine man or a masculine woman, or if for any reason you are being denied access to services or accommodations you need on the basis of your gender identity or expression, you are now protected by the law.

One source of curiosity around this law is what happens with gender-segregated facilities like bathrooms, homeless shelters, and locker rooms? The new law means that everyone's gender identity should be respected, and we should all be treated on an equal basis with other people who share our gender identity. No one can be forced to use a facility that does not match their gender identity. If you identify as a woman, you should be treated like all other women and allowed access to women's facilities. If you identify as a man, you should similarly be able to access men's facilities on an equal basis with other men.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Does this law mean that we have to let men into women's locker rooms or bathrooms?

No. This law means does not require that men be let into women's facilities, or that women be allowed into men's facilities. Instead, it requires that we respect that some people's gender identity does not perfectly match societal expectations. Some men are more feminine than others, some women are more masculine than others, and some people live in a gender different from what was assigned to them at birth. This law only requires that all people who identify as women be treated as women, and all people who identify as men be treated as men.

2. Will this law endanger women in spaces like locker rooms and bathrooms because it will allow men in who may want to sexually assault women?

No. This law does not invite sexual assault on women in locker rooms and bathrooms. People who enter restrooms or locker rooms with the intent to commit sexual assault are

still subject to criminal penalty. However, the people who have often experienced the discrimination and harassment in gender segregated facilities that this law seeks to address, such as women of transgender experience trying to use women's facilities, masculine women trying to use women's facilities, men of transgender experience trying to use men's facilities, and feminine men trying to use men's facilities, are now explicitly protected from discrimination and exclusion. Any notion that these people are sexual predators is based in ignorance and misunderstanding that this new law seeks to remedy. This law does not change the fact that any person who seeks to enter a bathroom or locker room in order to sexually assault another person is punishable under the criminal laws of NY. There is no evidence that allowing transgender people to have safe access to facilities that concord with their gender identities will increase the incidence of sexual assault, however it is clear that the new law will protect them from the harassment and violence they frequently face when trying to access such facilities.

3. Does this law require that new bathrooms be constructed for transgender people?

No. This law does not require any construction. It simply clarifies that all people should be able to access the bathroom that is appropriate for them based on their gender identity, and should not be forced to use a bathroom that is designated for individuals of another gender identity. The Compliance Guidelines do recommend that, because gender segregated bathrooms are often the site of harassment and discrimination for people whose gender expression transgresses societal norms, any single-stall bathrooms be converted into gender-neutral bathrooms. This recommendation comes from our understanding that many people find gender segregated bathrooms inaccessible, including people with disabilities who require attendance in the bathroom and whose attendant is a different gender than they are, parents with children whose gender is different from their own but who wish to accompany their child to the bathroom, and people whose gender expression transgresses societal norms. The Commission on Human Rights set out this recommendation with the safety and convenience of these people in mind, recognizing that all people should be able to safely access bathroom facilities.

4. What about transgender people who have not had surgery? What facilities will they use?

The new law requires that people be allowed to use facilities that accord with their gender identity, not with any particular body part. Just as non-transgender men and women are not asked to prove what body parts they have before entering gender-segregated facilities, transgender people also should not be. All people, regardless of surgical status, are entitled to use facilities which comport with their gender identities regardless of whether their bodies match traditional expectations. Challenging someone's gender identity and/or asking invasive personal questions about their body parts is a form of harassment.



5. What about facilities where people see each other without clothing?

The Commission recognizes that there are still some facilities without privacy, such as totally open showers. The Commission recommends that in circumstances where nudity is unavoidable, basic steps such as the installation of curtains be taken in order to create the minimal amount of privacy needed to maintain the comfort and safety of all people using facilities. Most importantly, this law requires that no person be forced to use facilities that do not comport with his/her gender identity, so employers, housing provider, schools and others maintaining gender segregated facilities should take the steps necessary to ensure that this requirement is met. Whether by creating private space through curtains, or designating a space as gender neutral, this task should be neither difficult nor expensive. The Commission is available to assist in creating plans to remedy any problems that may arise in the process of making facilities accessible to all people.

Talking Points about Accessible Bathrooms

1. If we had all-gender bathrooms, wouldn't women be less safe?

Many people's first reaction to providing gender non-specific bathrooms is that women's safety will be compromised. However, an analysis of the safety precautions in bathrooms suggests that women are not currently protected by the existence of gender-specific bathrooms. Women's bathrooms do not provide any physical barrier to potential predators, who can just as easily walk through an unlocked door that reads "women" as any other unlocked door. Gender segregation in bathrooms does not prevent sexual assault, and if anything, provides an illusion of safety that is not true. To increase the safety of bathrooms, we would recommend creating single-user bathrooms, providing bathroom doors that go from floor to ceiling without gaps, and eliminating the gender segregation of bathrooms that results in severe access issues for transgender and gender variant people.

2. All-gender bathrooms will make people uncomfortable.

It is true that for people who are used to using gender-specific bathrooms, using gender non-specific bathrooms may feel strange or uncomfortable. Often times, social change that increases access for an excluded group and eliminated discrimination requires a reform of social practices that makes people who have not been negatively affected by the existing arrangements uncomfortable. However, discomfort or modesty, when compared with the inability to engage in basic necessary biological functions at work, school, and in public spaces, cannot be prioritized. As we make changes to increase access and reduce discrimination, we must all commit to adjusting to those changes.

3. The female clients/students/customers at my agency/school/business will not be able to accept using the bathroom with transgender women. Many are survivors of sexual violence, and may be triggered by using the bathroom with someone with masculine body parts.

When we work with populations that have survived violence, it is essential to try to create safe spaces to accommodate their needs. Many of us work with populations that are diverse, with different clients/students/customers having survived different types of oppressions, and sometimes even having misconceptions or biased beliefs about each other. The proper response to a misperception that transwomen are not 'real women' or are sexual predators or a threat to non-trans women is not to exclude transwomen from women's spaces or facilities, but to help educate any women who are concerned about inclusion and dispel myths about trans people. Excluding people because other have biased misconceptions about them only increases oppression and discrimination, and does not work to create safe spaces for all women.



Sample Discussion Questions for the Classroom

The following are some suggestions for guided classroom discussion before and after viewing the video. Feel free to use the questions given or use them as inspiration for your lesson plan.

1. Why are bathrooms segregated by sex?
 - a. What are some potential benefits of having sex-segregated bathrooms?
 - b. What are some drawbacks?
4. Bathrooms are only one type of sex-segregated facility. Name all the sex-segregated facilities you can think of.
 - a. Why are they sex-segregated?
 - b. Is there another way that those aims could be met?
 - c. What might be the effects of those facilities being sex-segregated on transgender and gender different people?
5. The question of women's safety is a very common argument against desegregating bathrooms by sex.
 - a. What do you think about this criticism?
 - b. Do sex-segregated bathrooms increase women's safety?
6. The video shows how social factors in addition to gender affect access to safe bathrooms. How might the following affect safe bathroom access?
 - a. class
 - b. homelessness
 - c. race
 - d. age
7. When you made your list of sex-segregated facilities, did you notice that many are places disproportionately accessed by low-income people? What significance might that have?
8. How might disproportionate police presence in some communities impact using a bathroom?
9. What did you think about the discussion of disability in the video? How do issues of access overlap between communities fighting ableism and communities fighting transphobia?
10. What was effective about this video? What was ineffective?



Toilet Training

COMPANION GUIDE FOR ACTIVISTS AND EDUCATORS

Activity Ideas

1. In a public place (at your job, school, while out running errands, attending a public event) try to locate a non-gendered or unisex bathroom. Did you find one? How long did it take? Did you have to ask someone in order to locate it?
2. Have you ever seen someone in the bathroom you thought might not “belong” there? What did you do? How did you feel? Why did you do what you did?
3. If you generally have no problem using the bathroom typically expected for your sex, spend some time thinking about using the other bathroom. (This is best accomplished in a public place near the bathrooms. Extra credit if you really have to go when you undertake this activity). Hang around for a while.
 - a. What would it take for you to go into the “wrong” bathroom?
 - b. How does the prospect of doing so make you feel?
 - c. Would you feel comfortable walking right in?
 - d. What other thoughts or experiences did you have during this activity?



Resources for Transgender Activism

Apicha Queens Community Center

718-457-9662

HIV/AIDS organizing and education in Asian/Pacific Islander communities

www.apicha.org

Audre Lorde Project

718-596-0342

LGBT people of color organization

www.alp.org

FIERCE!

LGBT youth organizing project, peer education, anti-police brutality activism

email: Thats_FIERCE@hotmail.com

Freedom Trainers

An organization of anti-oppression trainers across the country

email: beyond@freedomtrainers.org

Gender Identity Project of the NYC LGBT Center

212 620 7310

Mental health services, social work services, social events, groups

www.gaycenter.org

Hispanic AIDS Forum

212-741-9797

HIV/AIDS services

www.hafnyc.org

Imani Henry

646-342-9673

Anti-racist and Trans sensitivity training

Imani Henry

Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force

212-818-9639

Immigration law

www.lgirtf.org

Prison Moratorium Project

www.nomoreprisons.org



Resources for Transgender Activism

People of Color in Crisis

718-230-0770

HIV/AIDS services and support

www.pocc.org

People in Search of Safe Restrooms (PISSR)

www.pissr.org

Positive Health Project

212-465-8304

Needle exchange, support groups, good programming for people of color and trans people

www.positivehealthproject.org

SAGE

212-741-2247

LGBT senior organization

www.sageusa.org

Samuel Lurie

802-453-5370

Transgender awareness training for health care providers, medical students, and human service providers

www.tgtrain.org

LEGAL RESOURCES

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project

646 602 5638

Free legal services for low-income people facing gender identity discrimination, policy and public education work focusing on economic justice and gender self-determination

www.srlp.org

The Transgender Law and Policy Institute

Extensive website collecting legal and policy materials, decisions, and news about transgender issues

www.transgenderlaw.org

American Civil Liberties Union Lesbian and Gay Rights Project

www.aclu.org



Resources for Transgender Activism

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund

www.lambdalegal.org

National Center For Lesbian Rights

www.nclrights.org

Transgender Law Center, San Francisco

www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Papers

Currah, Paisley and Shannon Minter, "Unprincipled Exclusions: The Struggle to Achieve Judicial and Legislative Equality for Transgender People," *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, Vol. 7, Issue 1.

Currah, Paisley, Shannon Minter & Jamison Green *Transgender Equality: A Handbook for Activists and Policymakers* - June 19, 2000. the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
[available online @ <http://www.ngltf.org/downloads/transeq.pdf>]

Lee, Alexander, "Nowhere to Go But Out: The Collision Between Transgender & Gender-Variant Prisoners and the Gender Binary in America's Prisons" 2003.
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