

JRN Capstone Final on Transgender Discrimination
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Over the past few years, the LGBT community has made significant strides in society. Same-sex marriage is becoming more legal in more places. LGBT individuals are becoming more prominent in media and powerful positions. And it seems that more and more non-LGBT people know LGBT people and are becoming supportive of them.

Of this community, the T in that acronym, meaning transgender, still has the furthest to go since in order to be who they truly are, they have to physically change their bodies. They are some of the most misunderstood people of the LGBT spectrum. They do share the spotlight with other LGBT people, but they're facing more backlash than the other communities.

Since transgender individuals are one of the few groups of people who haven't been fully accepted into society, they're bound to have their day of full acceptance someday. Until then, we must try to understand how they want to live their lives and how they deal with abuse thrown their way.

1. Transgender Group Meetings

On the first Tuesday of the month, the Pride Center of Western New York arranges for transgender individuals to meet at the Spot Coffee on Chippewa. Usually, there are predetermined topics for people to talk about. Today, the group leader, Chev, didn't have any, so the people were free to talk about whatever was happening in their lives. It started with

The first one to talk, an old woman named Gillian, had just gotten her gender reassignment surgery and was going through the rehabilitation process. One of the things required was exercise, so she was looking at possible gyms to work out at. One of them has people walking around the bathroom/changing rooms naked, to which Gillian gave a firm no.

Another person, Skyler, talked about his upcoming trip to Florida. It raised the issue of bathroom use, since North Carolina recently passed their House Bill 2 law. This line of talking went into the state of politicians today and how many of them show transphobic behavior.

Vivian, an artist sporting many piercings, tattoos, and visible scars from cutting herself, talked about how she found a doctor in Vietnam who does reassignment surgeries with local anesthesia for \$5,000. It's the cheapest one she's found so far and would be willing to risk whatever fallacies would come about

Vivian brought in some pictures of a piece she was working on. It's a photograph made up of Barbie and Ken dolls with the heads reversed. Individual pictures were worth \$5, and Vivian sold 3 of them the whole night. It lead into a story about Vivian trying to carry a 50 lb. bag of sand from the Home Depot all the way back to her home. The sand was used in her art piece. Vivian was also the one making the most jokes about being transgender the whole night. Among them included 1001 uses for lube, eventually having someone forced to

The topic of names came up as Barry, nicknamed “Bear” said he was finally getting his name formally changed to Ben Eric. Gillian brought up how when most men change from man to women, they change their names to the feminized form. Because of that assumption, people will think her original name was Julian, when it wasn’t.

People kept filtering in after the meeting started, with one of them, Shantay, who identifies as a transsexual, talking about a recent date she had over the Easter holiday. Her date didn’t understand what transsexual meant as compared to transgender. Shantay did explain it, but she was getting tired of having to explain what transsexual means to every person that comes along.

The last one who filtered in, Amanda, came in with Adina, a caseworker for Erie County Senior Services. She had a long speech on how she’s working on collaborating between with the Pride Center, along with how Medicaid is working to cover reassignment surgeries and help patients through the recuperation process. The attendees had plenty of questions regarding insurance policies. After a few had been answered, Amanda started talking to Vivian about the condition known as “hairy vagina.”

2. A Special Showing

On the third Thursday of the month, the Pride Center usually holds a special event for the transgender community to participate in. In March, that event was a special showing of a new online series called “Her Story.”

“Her Story” strives to be a breakthrough show on how society views transgender people. It was created by two transgender actresses, Jenn Richards and Angelica Ross, and stars and has a crew of a LGBT majority. The story centers around Violet (Richards), a trans woman in an abusive relationship who starts a new relationship with Allie, a lesbian reporter. Violet’s friend Paige (Ross) has a new boyfriend who she’s hesitant to tell she’s trans. The series is currently made up of 6 10-minute episodes available online. Despite the heavy themes, along with some heavy-handedness here and there, the show still had a funny side to it, including one about how Allie said she was freezing her balls off, and Violet acts like she’s offended when she wasn’t.

After the episodes were finished, Richards, Ross, and the show’s producer Catherine Fisher talked about what went into the production of the show and what inspired them. Ross mentioned an experience she had while filming a movie, where the main character found out she was trans by watching her pee over the side of a dock into water. Ross felt that the only way her character would do was if she was drunk. They also shared a story about the first trans character they saw on a soap opera, which started out with normal characteristics. But as time went on, her voice intentionally got deeper. Some casting experiences they’ve heard about had some actors and actresses rejected because they weren’t “trans enough.”

Eventually the floor was open to questions, with Ross taking a microphone to audience members Oprah style. Most of the people in the audience members said how this show speaks to them in a way no other show has. Questions brought up

include a great representation of the trans community. These include races beyond white and black and whether trans men will be featured.

Richards, Ross, and Fisher hope that one of the major networks or streaming services picks up this series. Richards, the main writer for this show, said that she has hundreds of ideas floating around her head.

3. Madison Torres Video

Madison Torres, interviewed in the attached video, has been transitioning since March 2015. She talks about when she realized she was trans, the reactions of her family and co-workers, and the people she met along the way.