



two spirits

Image retrieved October 31, 2005 from <http://imagyst.com/fine-first-twospirits.html>

# Transgender Experience During Adolescence: Retrospective Survey Research for School Counselors

Markus Bidell (Hunter College researcher),  
Graciela Orozco, Laura Strom, John Blando & Chav Doherty  
(San Francisco State University researchers)

American Counseling Association Poster Presentation, Charlotte, NC, March 2009

### Introduction

Transgender youth face extraordinary psychosocial issues and are at considerable risk for depression, anxiety, suicide and violence. Thirty-three transgender individuals were surveyed in the San Francisco Bay Area. The purpose of the study was to retrospectively examine the experiences of transgender adults in order to learn more about the issues they face during adolescence.

### Methodology

- Anonymous mailed surveys
- Adults recruited at Gay Pride events, snowballing
- Survey approved by IRB Feb. 2007
- Quantitative data analyzed through SPSS
- Qualitative data analyzed for themes

*“Can something which can be cured by surgery be a mental disorder?” asked a transgender client.*

### Sample

- 33 adults identified as
- 7 Male to Female
- 16 Female to Male
- 3 Female
- 5 Male
- 2 F2M & Male
- 58% attended high schools in California

*M2F/Transwoman/  
Woman: a biological  
male who identifies as  
female*



AP / KIRO-TV

### Murdered transgender teen Gwen Araujo

Image retrieved February 20, 2009 from <http://img.photobucket.com/albums/v504/ZendoDeb/misc/AraujoGwen.jpg>

### Ethnicity & Age

Ages ranged from 21-59 with the average age being 40.5 years. Respondent's ethnicities identified as 26 White, 2 African-American, 2 Asian-American, 2 Hispanic and 1 Native American.

### Highest level of education

- 1 AA, 16 Bachelor's, 7 Master's, 3 Doctorate, 2 JD,
- 1 no degree, 3 no response

### Findings

*Of the 33 interviewees, 23 reported having been conflicted with their gender identity as adolescents (69.7%).*

*F2M/Transman/Man: a biological female who identifies as male*



Graphic design by Laura Strom

Native Americans consider gender to be fluid determined by dreams, vision quests, and messages from Two Spirit or ancestors (Feinberg, 1996).



### Jazz at age six

At 15 months Jazz would correct her parents when they said “Good boy” and respond “Good girl!”.

Image retrieved February 22, 2009 from <http://www.fairness.org>

**Image from “You Don’t Know Dick”, A documentary about women who have chosen to change their gender to live as men.**

Image retrieved May 6, 2006 from [http://www.frameline.org/festivals/archive/21st/programs/you\\_dont\\_know\\_dick.html](http://www.frameline.org/festivals/archive/21st/programs/you_dont_know_dick.html)

## Findings: Depressed, Anxious, Suicidal Ideation

Depressed, Anxious,	No	Percent	Yes	Percent
Depressed (N=33)	7	21.2	26	78.8
Anxious (N=33)	7	21.2	26	78.8
Suicidal Ideation (N=33)	14	42.4	19	57.6
Suicide Attempt (N=33)	30	90.9	3	9.1
Drug Use (N=33)	18	54.5	15	45.4

## Findings: Family Conflict, Harassment, Assault

Family Conflict, Harassment,	NO	Percent	YES	Percent
Family Conflict (N=33)	10	30.3	23	69.7
Verbally harassed? (N=33)	8	24.2	25	75.8
Sexually harassed? (N=32)	16	50.0	16	50.5
Physically assaulted? (N=33)	16	48.5	17	51.5
Sexually assaulted? (N=30)	17	56.7	13	43.3



**“Transgender”** a definition from Wikipedia

*People who were assigned a gender, usually at birth and based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of themselves.*

*Queer and trans youth comprise nearly 30% of the estimated 5,000 completed youth suicides annually according to UprisingRadio.org.*

**Q.** Describe what it was like for you when you realized your biology and gender identity were not congruent.

**A.** Respondents experienced feelings of sadness, confusion, aloneness, being overwhelmed, withdrawn, depressed, ashamed and self critical.

Quote from a study participant:

*“I was very young when I first realized that I felt like a girl, but had the body of a boy. I was probably 3 or 4. At that time it was mostly just confusing. I didn’t understand why I wasn’t going to be a girl. As I got older and entered grade school I had a lot of sadness about having to play with boys and identify as male. I would at times stand alone on the playground watching a group of girls playing and I would feel the deepest sadness that I couldn’t be a girl too.” (M2F, age 33)*

According to *Frontiers Online*, the murder rate of transgender persons is **17 times** the national average, the highest rate of any minority group (2005).

Quote from a study participant:

*“I was afraid. I’d always been afraid at “seeing” the hidden truth. Once exposed and shared initially with therapists and close friends, I felt an incredible sense of freedom and joy. I’d finally hit upon the truth. I believe my denial, hiding of this, was at the core of my eating disorder, alcohol abuse and gambling addiction. Also, I felt fear about what this realization “meant” and how it would disrupt my life.” (F2M, age 44)*



**Ranma 1/2, a Japanese trans character, popular Anime**

**Raci, a hard-of-hearing transwoman, from Trans-generations, now married.**

Participants first recognized they were transgender around **nine** years of age, though the responses varied from age 2 to 42.

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- Male
- Female
- ???

**Findings: PTSD Type Symptoms**

PTSD Type Symptoms	No	Percent	Yes	Percent
Recurrent nightmares (N=31)	18	58.1	13	41.9
Often hyper-vigilant (N=31)	13	41.9	18	58.1
Afraid because of trans status (N=31)	18	58.1	13	41.9
Dissociate (N=32)	15	46.9	17	53.1
Difficulty concentrating (N=32)	11	34.4	21	65.6
Often irritable/angry (N=32)	16	50.0	16	50.0

An overwhelming majority (n = 29, 88%) of survey respondents never talked about their gender identity issues with a teacher, school counselor, administrator, coach, social worker, or school psychologist while attending the K-12 schools.

*Only 4 of the 33 respondents (12%) talked to an adult in the schools about being trans or feeling different:*

- ♦ one spoke to the school counselor about having feelings of womanliness
- ♦ another respondent was able to connect with a caring coach,
- ♦ a third respondent came out to a teacher and a small group of students in a supportive class,
- ♦ and a fourth respondent discussed feeling like a girl with a teacher.

ONE WEEK LATER...



ME AND NATHAN WENT TO HIS COUSIN'S WEDDING IN YORBA LINDA, CA... WE WERE BORED INSIDE THE RECEPTION SO WE WENT OUT IN THE GARDEN AND GOOFED AROUND.

**LGBTQ Teens Often Try Suicide**

- ♦ Rates are high due to
- ♦ Lack of positive role models leads to
- ♦ Substance abuse
- ♦ Family may reject if they come out
- ♦ School harassment—national study
- ♦ 55% of T-students report physical attacks at school
- ♦ 25-40% of youth—LGBTQ

**Suicide Assessment (SF Suicide)**

- P = Plan; do they have a plan?
- L = Lethal; is it lethal?
- A = Available; is it right there?
- I = Illness; mental/physical illness?
- D = Depression; are they depressed?
  
- P = Previous attempts; #, when?
- A = Alone; are they isolated?
- L = Loss; have they suffered a loss?
- S = Substance use/abuse

**Recommendations for school counselors:**

- Provide professional development to school personnel that includes sexual orientation and non-discrimination policies.
- Create gay-straight alliances and support groups for LGBTQ youths.
- Incorporate positive images and issues of LGBTQ people across the school curriculum.
- Protect LGBTQ youth from verbal and physical harassment.
- Equip your school library with LGBTQ books and resources.
- Create an atmosphere of acceptance of LGBTQ youth. Homophobic terms have no place in a school.
- Hire faculty, staff and administrators who are openly LGBTQ to serve as role models for all students.