

# **Voices of Transgender Students**

## **Developed by Brent Bilodeau**

Presented in the context of an adaptation of the D'Augelli Life Span Model

**Process One: Exiting Traditionally Gendered and/or Heterosexual Identity**

**Process Two: Developing a Personal Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Identity Status**

**Process Three: Developing a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Social Identity**

**Process Four: Becoming a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and/or Transgender Offspring**

**Process Five: Developing a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and/or Transgender Intimacy Status**

**Process Six: Entering a Lesbian, Bi, Gay and/or Transgender Community**

For more information on this transgender inclusive application of the D' Augelli model see: Renn K. A & Bilodeau B. (2004). Queer Student Leaders: A Case Study of Identity Development and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Involvement, Manuscript submitted for publication. Contact Kris Renn, Renn@msu.edu

Also see: Bilodeau, B. (2004). Beyond the Gender Binary: New Perspectives on Transgender Student Identity Development, Manuscript submitted for publication. Contact Brent Bilodeau, bilodeau@msu.edu

Original model source: D' Augelli, A R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. 1. Trickett, R. 1. Watts, & D. Birman (Eds.) *Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context* (pp.312- 333). San Francisco: JosseyBass.

## **Process One: Exiting Traditionally Gendered and/or Heterosexual Identity**

1. I was very well aware from the time that I was two or three years old. When we were first being taught about the difference between boys and girls and all that. . . I was convinced that I was a boy and everybody else told me I was a girl. After a few years of that, I got persuaded that I was a girl, so I pushed my male identity to the back of my head." - Jordan

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

2. The next morning, I ponder whether to wear a skirt. I know I can't do it. Yesterday took more energy than writing a 50-page research paper on running a marathon. I don't have the fortitude today. Although I hate passing as a non-transgendered person, I'm not tough enough to be "out" all the time. I open my closet door and slip on some jeans and a T-shirt. The skirt can wait until Friday. -Andrew.

**Source:** Gray, AT. (2000). Wearing the Dress. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

3. "Where do you think you're going?" He had just stepped out of the men's room and was blocking the doorway, leaning toward me with his fists on his hips. Down the hall from the Dean of Students office, in the one building on campus where I felt safe, the bearded and bulky staff member wasn't about to let me pass. My stomach churned, my heart raced. . . and then I got some inspiration: I got mad. Taking another step toward him, I said, "I'm going to use the head." The words came out with authority, quiet but bitten off, as I pointed to the door behind him. I'd assumed an attitude that I'd learned as a sergeant in the army, and the effect was dramatic. The man's sneer became an open mouth, one eyebrow raised, and his hands dropped to his sides. "Rob," I explained, "I'm a guy. I'm transsexual." -Johnny.

**Source:** Rogers, I. (2000) Getting Real at ISU: A Campus Transition. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

4. When I wore a dress instead of a suit to the formal of my improvisational comedy troupe, a couple of members felt I was mocking the event. "Why do you have to do that here?" asked on person, who perhaps thought I was just a comedian taking things too far. But several others came up to me and said that whatever my reasons they admired my courage.

**Source:** Fried, I. (2000) It's a long Journey, so Bring an extra set of clothes In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

5. A big part of my gender identity is dyke. I never identified as lesbian as a sexual

orientation, but I love being a dyke. It feels strong and powerful. At the same time, I do identify as pansexual and transgender in a general sense. It's like queer... all of those words do work...I also identify strongly as a woman...I identify as transgender because I transgress gender and I refuse to be limited by gender. I still really strongly value my identity as a woman and women's spaces. –Nick

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

6. (To describe self) I'd use the word transgender. I'd also use, "non-operational female to male," I'd also use the word, "gender queer". I identified as a feminist before identifying as trans. It was really embedded in me. It played a big part in my decision not to have surgery. I've tried with my identity to not reinforce the gender binary system and options have been limited to the trans community by focusing so much on transexualism. The only option is, if your male to become female, or vice-versa. Transgender Youth have felt that binary gender system is not for them... Transexualism isn't necessary to break gender boundaries. We want to increase the number of genders. --Jordon.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

7. I felt torn between my trans identity and my feminist identity and women's only space. Michigan Women's music festival felt hard. I went to the festival and went in drag to the festival. It was so hard...I felt like at festival I had to be in two spaces at the same time. My expression at festival was male. . . and it was in a women's space...It was horrible. A few people were like, "what the hell is going on? Why is this guy walking around at festival?" I felt torn. I wanted to be who I was. I feel like there are two different realities for me. There are voices in me that tell me that in the world gender is arbitrary. . . I resent being forced to be classified as a woman. Yet, at the same time, I value that. Being a woman. –Nick

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

8. As far as my transition is concerned, changes are expensive, and I'm living on a student's salary, so I haven't made progress with hormones or surgery. But I do plan to have surgery, take hormones, and fully pass as a man before I graduate. I'm taking little steps now. I've changed my name and everyone I know in Seattle is good about using it. - Taran.

**Source:** Rabideau, T (2000). Finding My Place in the World, or Which Bathroom Should I Use Today? In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

9. Do I seem to be having a charmed college transition? There are never any guarantees

that people will react positively or professionally to my situation, and not everyone had. The registrar's office practically laughed me out the door when I requested my name be changed on my records according to common law. I ended up having to file papers for a legal name change with a lawyer in student legal aid.... The stress of continually dealing with these sorts of difficulties, my own issues, and the usual load of course work that students have, caught up with me the end of my second semester of transition. After feeling run down and sick for weeks, I was diagnosed with mononucleosis. My body and soul needed a break. -Johnny.

**Source:** Rogers, I. (2000) Getting Real at ISU: A Campus Transition. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

10. I fought the tide of students pouring through the door as I headed toward the professor who was collecting his overheads and lecture notes. ... "I was too timid to say anything when you took attendance last week," I stammered, "but I'd like to go by a different name than the one on the class list." God, what would he say? I felt as though I were about to step off a cliff. I wasn't just changing my name; I was taking the first step toward living and moving in the world as a whole person, instead of keeping a chunk of myself buried and covering the remainder with a protective facade. I'd been an out lesbian during my first year on campus, but now, in my second year, I was about to transition to living life as a male." -Johnny.

**Source:** Rogers, I. (2000) Getting Real at ISU: A Campus Transition. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

## **Process Two: Developing a Personal Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Identity Status**

11. After class, I went to the front. I wanted to talk to Diana, the transsexual, but I didn't know what I wanted to say or why I needed to talk to her at all. I waited until the crowd around her dispersed. I shyly introduced myself. She was beautiful and had so much dignity and confidence. My mind went blank. "I didn't know what 'transgender' meant until a few weeks ago, and I thought I was a lesbian, but now I don't, and I don't know where I fit in," I stammered. My face was red, my heart pounded in my ears, and I was breathing so fast it was hard to talk. - Taran.

**Source:** Rabideau, T (2000). Finding My Place in the World, or Which Bathroom Should I Use Today? In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

12. It was our way of rationalizing the situation, a little internalized transphobia. Sure we were cross-dressers, but at least we weren't transsexuals. In our minds at that time, transsexual was one step further removed from "normal."-Ian.

**Source:** Fried, F. (2000) In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

13. I also met another female to male identified person who had gone through the surgery

and was living as a male. He really helped me because, at the time, I was still thinking about surgery. He gave me a lot of food for thought. Even though the experience was not a bad one for him, it reinforced my resolve to not have surgery. Specifically it was about the "one year body live in" It's like you have to prove that you "truly are the gender you aspire to be." That, to me, felt like I had to prove to a bunch of surgeons that I'm really a guy, and to do that I'd have to be really masculine. It felt really reinforcing of the gender binary. It felt like I had to get a license to alter my body. It felt very invasive. It felt like I was asking for people's permission again. I don't ever want to have to ask for permission to assign a gender to myself. I hated the way I felt I was being treated like I had a disorder or had something that needed to be fixed. --Jordon.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

### **Process Three: Developing a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Social Identity**

14. I'm not part of a transgender community. No one I know considers themselves transgendered. When I first arrived at UT, I attended a queer organization's meeting and hated the experience. Close to 100 people were there, and everyone seemed to know each other. No one spoke to me. -Andrew.

**Source:** Gray, AT. (2000). Wearing the Dress. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

15. It became a lot more supportive after I was there. They had a trans discussion there. I think I pushed the envelope there. It wasn't like people were running to embrace me, but folks were supportive. I heard a lot of "these people this and these people that...." It was like we were so "other." I did like it when I heard Jay say, "We all transgress gender in some way."-Nick.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

### **Process Four: Becoming a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and/or Transgender Offspring**

16. Every time my mom and I have this argument, she puts me down and puts me down, and then she always says, 'Don't you know you're a girl?' As if I'm going to come to my senses and put on a skirt and high heels. . . .just once I'd like to be able to answer her stupid questions, but I don't know how. I mean, I know I'm a girl, but I don't feel like one. I wish I'd been born a boy. -Taran.

**Source:** Rabideau, T (2000). Finding My Place in the World, or Which Bathroom Should I Use Today? In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

17. My family does not know and will not know for a long period of time. I doubt I will

come out to my family as trans.. My family already found out about my lesbian identity and had huge problems with that. Having to explain the trans part would be very, very difficult... Also, there won't be any altering of my physical appearance-- that would be difficult for them. --Jordon.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research-on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

### **Process Five: Developing a Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and/or Transgender Intimacy Status**

18. I thought maybe it's true that opposites attract. I spent ten days with him in Seattle over winter break and slowly divulged my transgender identity to him. He didn't understand where I was coming from; the more I tried to explain, the more annoyed he became. He wanted a "normal" guy. Why did I have to be so fucked up? Since I left Seattle, he has not contacted me. Sometimes it hurts, mostly it make me yearn for someone who understands what I'm going through. I'm tired of people imagining how hard it must be. I want someone who knows how hard it is. . -Andrew.

**Source:** Gray, AT. (2000). *Wearing the Dress*. In K. Howard, & A Stevens, *Out & About on Campus*. Los Angeles: Alyson

19. When I first started dating him, I thought I might be more a female to male and so I asked him, how would it feel to you if you found out you were dating a man. . . and he said, "then I'd be in love with a man." He was so awesome about it. It was no big deal. My current relationship is the longest I've very had. I've been in it since last April (2002). --Nick.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.

### **Process Six: Entering a Lesbian, Bi, Gay and/or Transgender Community**

20.. .but I do feel like, every day all day, I'm being who I am and people are inevitably challenged by that. My trans identity springs out of societal oppression...I need to be vocal and visible. A lot of my performances and writing and poetry have a social justice focus. I'm going to be performing in the upcoming drag show. Its going to be really political. Whenever I talk about myself I'm talking about trans issues.. . It' s so encouraging to get up in front of 150 people to have them being shocked and stunned and challenged... .My experience at (the Michigan Women's Music Festival) festival was just the best. . . all these people came up to me afterwards and told me about much I had effected them. I love the chance to express myself as strong and powerful. . . I love shocking people, I like pushing them to thinking of something they hadn't before. I like doing things that are totally unexpected given the context. I juxtaposed the context with the presence I bring to it. I want to make people see me when I feel invisible.. . and so I do it. I'm become visible. I love it when people tell me I helped them to feel more

powerful. (Nick). ."-Nick.

**Source:** Bilodeau, B. (2003, October). *Genderqueer: Understanding transgender student identities*. Presented at the AERA Research on Women in Education Annual Conference, Knoxville, TN.