

EXPANDING GENDER

Exercise 4: Safety & Support (Monica's Story)

MONICA'S STORY SAFETY & SUPPORT



A. Different Paths

**“Her teacher yelled at her. Her church told her she was going to hell.
Her grandmother beat her. Her family asked her to leave home.”**

Monica attempted to seek out support in numerous places, and didn't find it. As a young trans woman of color without support, she was struggling—depressed, suicidal, and homeless, before finding the Camden Area Health Education Center where she connected with a counselor and a mentor, and The Attic, an LGBTQ youth center. Now Monica is “complete” in her words, which she directly attributes to “having help.”

This documentary tells us a bit about Monica's hard times, including being beaten, and living on the streets, and then for two years in a shelter. But, for the most part, it focuses on how she has persevered, and how today she sees herself as “a very powerful woman.”

Split into two groups and consider if Monica's life had taken one of two different paths...

GROUP 1: What do you think might have happened if Monica **had** found safety at school, at church, or at home?

GROUP 2: What do you think might have happened if Monica hadn't found support at home, AND hadn't had the Camden AHEC or the Attic as local resources?

For both groups, consider the scenario, and answer the following questions:

- Where do you think Monica would be today?
- How would Monica's perception of herself have been impacted?
- Would she still feel “complete” and “a very powerful woman?”

CURRICULUM

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B. Support Near You

Now consider if Monica lived near you.

Where could she go for support? Do you have a local community center? A shelter for LGBTQ youth? An affirming mosque, temple, church or other place of worship?

FIRST, make a chart of the support services in your community that you know of.

SECONDLY, research other local or state establishments that could provide support for Monica and other LGBTQ youth in need.

C. Expanding Your Knowledge

EXPANDED RESEARCH OPTION 1

Upwards of 40% of homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. This means that there are thousands of LGBTQ youth like Monica who have, or are currently experiencing homelessness. Research LGBTQ youth homelessness in your city or state, and make a chart of your findings.

EXPANDED RESEARCH OPTION 2

Like Monica, many transgender women of color (TWOC) are particularly vulnerable members of our communities. For example, 19% of transgender people have been denied housing because they are trans, and 11% of transgender people have been evicted from housing because of their gender.⁹

In what ways are TWOC particularly vulnerable? How might TWOC experiences be different from other trans people? Research the issues faced by transgender women of color, and make a chart of your findings.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

Research option 1 and 2 may leave you wondering what you can do to make a difference. One option is volunteering for organizations in your area that are dedicated to eradicating the issues you just researched. These organizations often depend on help from community members like you.

9. Injustice at Every Turn: http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf

REALITY OF LIFE AS TRANS WOMAN OF COLOR

Trans women of color (TWOC) experience particular types of oppression that are linked to their race and gender, and as such, have specific needs.

Read Lexi Adsit's article "24 Actions you NEED to Take to Help Trans Women of Color Survive" for more information about steps you can take to support TWOC in your community.

<http://www.autostraddle.com/24-actions-you-need-to-take-to-help-trans-women-of-color-survive-300526/>



“Before I was struggling, and I didn’t have that much help...I feel really complete now. I’m not in pain anymore. I’m not upset anymore. I’m very happy...It feels good.” — Monica

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How to Support Trans & Gender Expansive Students in Your School

“Today’s society is recognizing the experiences and needs of transgender people as never before. This trend is most evident in our nation’s schools, where an increasing number of transgender and gender expansive students live openly as their authentic selves. At the same time, parents, students, educators, administrators and other stakeholders are working together to determine the best ways to support these students.” — excerpt from *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Students in K-12 Schools*.

Many teachers, administrators, and parents are encountering their first experiences with out trans and gender expansive individuals via youth in school environments. While this collection of films and curriculum is designed to help to facilitate conversations on these issues, and general resources are on page 33, Frameline & Youth in Motion suggest the following resources for you and your school, if you encounter students and parents who are looking for in-school support regarding their gender identity:

1. Schools In Transition

The American Civil Liberties Union, Gender Spectrum, Human Rights Campaign, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and National Education Association teamed up to create *Schools in Transition*, a comprehensive guide for supporting trans and gender expansive youth in K-12 schools.

<http://www.genderspectrum.org/staging/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Schools-in-Transition-2015.pdf>

2. DC Public Schools Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Policy Guidance

The DCPS Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Policy Guidance is a tool for schools, parents, and students to effectively navigate existing laws, regulations, and policies that support transgender and gender-nonconforming students.

<http://dcps.dc.gov/publication/dcps-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-policy-guidance>

3. Gender Spectrum Customized Programs of Support

Gender Spectrum helps to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. Consultation and training services help professional groups and organizations understand youth’s evolving conceptions of gender identity and the impact this has on current and future practices in their field.

Through collaboration with schools and other organizations, Gender Spectrum is able to create customized programs of support to meet a school or organization’s objectives, including:

- Developing a support plan for transgender and gender-expansive youth
- District policy development to support local, state, or federal legislation/guidance
- Assistance with gender issues as they relate to school climate and bullying programs
- Providing training and education on youth gender identity and development and the implications for your organization

To learn more about how Gender Spectrum can help your school, or organization, please visit www.genderspectrum.org or contact them directly at info@genderspectrum.org.