



Contact: Annalise Ophelian
740A 14th Street Suite 199
San Francisco, CA 94114
415.845.3434 • information@diagnosingdifference.com

© 2009 *floating ophelia* PRODUCTIONS LLC



Adela Vazquez in *Diagnosing Difference*, a film by Annalise Ophelian. © 2009 Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC

Log Line

How does it feel to have your gender identity included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders? Find out when thirteen transgender and genderqueer scholars, artists, and activists explore the impact and implications of the Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis on their lives and communities.

Short Synopsis

How does it feel to have your gender identity included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders? *Diagnosing Difference* is a full-length length documentary featuring interviews with thirteen transgender and genderqueer scholars, artists, and activists as they explore the impact and implications of the Gender Identity Disorder (GID) on their lives and communities.

Historically, non-trans medical and mental health care professionals have positioned themselves as the “experts” on transgender experience, creating standards, guidelines, and diagnoses that inform legal policies and mediate every aspect of life. *Diagnosing Difference* shifts the focus to explore the many complexities of the diagnosis from the perspectives of those it affects most directly and personally, including access to medical care, legal ramifications, social stigma, implications for psychotherapeutic care, treatment trauma, and differences in experience based on factors like race, class, gender orientation, and generation.

Diagnosing Difference humanizes the debate around the GID diagnosis by valuing personal experience as a vital (and often ignored) form of expertise. Rather than trying to create an exhaustive examination of the diagnosis or offer claims of universal representation, *Diagnosing Difference* is purposefully personal, seeking to expand the experience of the audience, provoke thought, and create as many questions as it answers. By focusing on the experiences community leaders, activists, and artists who are past or current residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, this project also captures the intelligence, wit, and creativity that make this area a worldwide beacon for transgender rights.

Using the diagnosis as a departure point, these diverse and articulate participants debunk myths and misconceptions about transgender identities, challenge stereotypical gender expectations, and offer educative insight into the terms and language used to describe transgender lives. This groundbreaking film is the first to explore the impact of the GID diagnosis on people who identify on the trans spectrum in their own words and images.



Shawna Virago in Diagnosing Difference, a film by Annalise Ophelian. © 2009 Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC

One of the issues for me around GID is, like, I don't get any benefit from it. For example, it's not like, you know, I can just call up work one morning and go hi, this is Shawna, I won't be coming in today. I have a little GID. – *Shawna Virago*

The diagnosis misses everything that's great about my experience as a transwoman. It's totally focused on pathology and what's wrong. It totally doesn't get at what's amazing about waking up in the morning and feeling like I'm in the right skin, I'm in the right identity. So it doesn't capture the joy that happens when you become who you are. – *Jeanna Eichenbaum*

The school counselor said well, all we can recommend is that you lock her up. You know, like, that was really the only alternative that was given to them. And at that point, if they wouldn't have locked me up, they would have been seen as bad parents. So I end up going into the hospital, very much against my will, and within a half an hour I'm diagnosed with this gender thing, you know, present since grade three is how it's written down in my chart. And then basically spend my entire high school experience in mental hospitals being treated with, you know, pretty much extreme femininity training. – *Dylan Scholinski*

There's this huge stereotype that trans people all have genital surgery, that we know that someone's really the new gender because they've had genital surgery, and that's one of the biggest misconceptions about trans people. In reality, the vast majority of trans people will never have any surgery, and many trans people have surgeries that aren't genital surgeries. – *Dean Spade*

There has to be a willingness to allow those of us who carry the labels to define ourselves. Let us be who we are, let us tell you who we are. You can help inform who we might become, but we always know who we are. Present tense is us. Future tense you might have something to do with, but present tense is us. So you can't tell me who I am. – *Yoseñio V. Lewis*

I didn't have a problem with my gender identity. I have more of a problem of being a woman living in a world where people were objectifying me. I don't think that everybody suffered from Gender Identity Disorder. I think that the world is suffering from Gender Perception Dysphoria. – *Cecilia Chung*

I think that the GID reform, it would be a good thing if they were going to reform the doctors. It doesn't do any good to put it on paper that it should be this or it should be that or this would help the community, if the doctors aren't going to do the work. – *Miss Major*

Let's make sure that no matter what we have to go through to change this diagnosis, or change the attitude with which it's applied, let's make sure that we're staying rooted in that fundamental truth, that we're whole people, that our gender expression is different than was expected, that that's okay, even if the society needs to change in order to come along with us. – *Renata J. Razza*



Renata J. Razza in Diagnosing Difference, a film by Annalise Ophelian. © 2009 Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC

About the Participants

Ryka Aoki is a writer, performance artist, and professor of English at Santa Monica College.

Cecilia Chung is chair of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, and an activist for HIV and transgender rights.

Jeanna Eichenbaum is a licensed clinical social worker and is the former director of the Transgender Recovery Project at Walden House.

Yoseñio V. Lewis is a health educator, speaker, and performer. He is on the board of directors of the Woodhull Freedom Foundation and Unid@s, the National Latino LGBT rights organization.

Miss Major has been a transgender activist for over 40 years. She was an original Stonewall rioter, and is the Community Organizing Director for the Transgender, Gender-variant, and Intersex Justice Project.

natoyiniinastumiik (Holy Old Man Bull, aka Marcus Arana) is a discrimination investigator, mediator, and trainer with the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, specializing in transgender issues.

Renata J. Razza is a transgender cultural competence trainer and professional coach.

Dylan Scholinski is a visual artist, author, psychiatric survivor, and creator of the Sent(a)Mental project, a memorial to LGBT suicides.

Dean Spade is an assistant professor at Seattle University School of Law and founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.

Susan Stryker is a historian, author, filmmaker, and associate professor of gender studies at Indiana University.

Adela Vazquez is an HIV prevention counselor, community activist, and clinical case manager.

Shawna Virago is a singer/songwriter, a domestic violence counselor, and director of the TrannyFest transgender film festival.

Willy Wilkinson is a writer and public health consultant who conducts LGBT and transgender-specific cultural competency trainings.

Crew

Annalise Ophelian, Producer & Director

Michelle Lawler, Director of Photography

Kaliisa Conlon, Editor

Jennifer D'Urso, Gaffer & Motion Graphics

Seth Lael & Jeff Jumarang, Location Sound

Dan Olmstead, Post-Production Sound & Dialog Editing



Director Annalise Ophelian and natoyiniinastumiik, *Holy Old Man Bull*. San Francisco, May 2009

Director's Statement

I entered the field of clinical psychology with the goal of practicing therapy as a form of social justice and working to right the wrongs the field of psychology has historically committed against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. I suppose I assumed that as a queer woman and a trans ally, I'd be able to stay true to my personal ethics and avoid participating in the field of psychology as an institution of social control. But I quickly found myself facing the complexities and challenges of attempting to effect change from within a system that has the power to marginalize, pathologize, and ultimately diagnose difference.

I felt this most sharply in psychology's response to gender variance, and as I considered my available avenues as a clinician and a qualitative researcher, I quickly became frustrated with my options. Claiming to be an expert on an experience outside of my own seemed like part of the problem, not part of the solution.

I looked to my community for inspiration, and repeatedly came back to three events: The Frameline International Film Festival; the Fresh Meat Festival; and the National Queer Arts Festival, all of which showcased the creative and intellectual expressions of a tremendously broad spectrum of LGBTQQI people. Year after year, I left these events feeling mirrored, validated, informed, and influenced. I believe that one of the best ways to understand human experience is to bear witness to the stories of the people who live that experience.

As I reflected on my participation in these events and considered my role as a psychologist, a researcher, and a community member, documentary film emerged as an ideal medium to highlight the voices of transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, and gender variant people and honor their position as experts on their own experience in their own words and images.

My search for participants was fairly straightforward: I looked for individuals from diverse backgrounds who were skilled at using their personal experience as a teaching tool, without knowing much about their thoughts or feelings about the GID diagnosis before filming began. I created interview questions in consultation with the UCSF Center of Excellence for Transgender HIV Prevention, which I then pilot tested with a small group of participants who provided feedback on the style and content of questions.

One unique aspect of *Diagnosing Difference* is that the structure and flow of the film was driven by what emerged in the interviews themselves, and was not shaped by a pre-conceived outcome or agenda. It's hard to create a film about the impact of the GID diagnosis on trans lives without inadvertently replicating the fallacy that trans people exist primarily in relationship to medicalization or medical status. This film offers insight into some of the personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants. It does not and could not claim to speak for the experiences of all trans-identified people. It is my hope that *Diagnosing Difference* starts conversations rather than finishes them, and that it offers a vivid, humanizing, critical, and moving examination of the GID diagnosis that is both educational and experiential.

Annalise Ophelian, May 2009, San Francisco



Miss Major in Diagnosing Difference, a film by Annalise Ophelian. © 2009 Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC

Technical Specifications

2009, United States, Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC

Aspect Ratio: 1.78 : 1

Available formats: HD-DVD and DigiBeta

World Premiere: Frameline33 International Film Festival, San Francisco, June 2009

For press related queries, screenings, and appearances, contact:

Annalise Ophelian, Producer
Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC
740A 14th Street, Suite 199
San Francisco, CA 94114
415.845.3434
www.diagnosingdifference.com
info@diagnosingdifference.com