



<http://www.AlterationsMovie.com>

Study Guide Written by Sandra Hamada

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## SECTION 1: Opening notes

My Dear Friends,

Years ago I went to an exhibit of photographs from The Holocaust at the Miami Beach Jewish Museum. To enter the exhibit one had to make a line outside the building. Only two people were allowed to go into a foyer at a time. The foyer led to the exhibition through one of two doors, each with its own instructions. A sign on one door read “Enter here if you are prejudiced.” The sign on the other door read “Enter here if you are not prejudiced.”

Most people, either not believing themselves to be prejudiced; or possibly because their actions were about to be witnessed by another person, would reach for the doorknob of the door labeled “not prejudiced” to enter the gallery; but, in fact, that door was nailed shut. It simply could not be opened. The curator wanted everyone to enter the space with the notion that we all, indeed, have prejudices.

Thank you for your time to read this guide. Prejudice kills. All of us have experienced prejudice first hand at some point in our lives. Some of us think we know enough to not be prejudiced, but in fact, it is impossible. It is possible, however, to overcome it by recognizing prejudice and dismantling its causes.

Fear is one of the basic survival mechanisms for most species. In humans, fear is a feeling. Fear induces metabolic changes in our vital organs and also chemical secretions, ultimately causing a change in behavior. Some may argue that these behaviors may be intended to keep us from harm. Common, basic fears in humans are: fear of losing one's own security (one's empowerment), fear of death, and fear of the unknown. Acknowledging fear is crucial because fear is at the root of prejudice.

Prejudice offers an explanation for all the bad things that have happened to us in our life. Fears offer us a reason to see ourselves as a victim -- and victims are generally thought of as having no blame. Prejudice often seems simple and ready-made. Once established, prejudice is invisible. It becomes a "truth" and remains unquestioned. People's prejudices can be passed down under the guise of wisdom through actions and words. In this way, prejudice can drive a social institution or social norm, and can deny its stereotyped targets full participation, challenge their equality and even exclude them as members of a community or an entire society.

If prejudice is part of our physiognomy, then how can we stop injustice in the world?

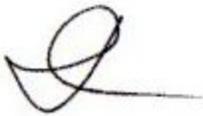
1. Acknowledge our negative feelings. If we can't talk about them, we can't change them.
2. Acknowledge that our past experiences and/or environments have influenced the formation of these ideas. Confront stereotypes that we have learned without guilt or blame. Feeling good about ourselves is important in being able to accept others.
3. Increase our exposure to the people or group towards whom we have learned some prejudicial stereotypes. Look for supportive situations, relationships and friendships to make needed changes. This includes making friends who are our parent's age!
4. Become aware of our own negative thoughts and "self-talk" about other groups of people. It is ok to slip. Correct ourselves out loud to help us stop outmoded habits.
5. Learn how other groups see our identity or age group to open new ways to understand the bigger picture. Develop empathy to increase acceptance don't stop at empathy, aim for solidarity!

6. Develop listening skills and non-confrontational dialogue skills in order to have meaningful exchanges even when we are not ready to agree with the point of view of others. It is OK to “agree to disagree” while we explore things further.

It is my hope that you will be able to use ALTERATIONS and the corresponding educational materials to allow audiences to question their own shifting perceptions of the world around them. My mission is to inspire reflection on how acceptance (and intolerance) have played out in our lives and how we have the power to transform them. Whether it is trans youth, family relations, identity, presenting the gender one identifies with (even if it goes against the status quo), attempting to breach the gap between generations, living with a depressed parent, domestic violence or self acceptance, I hope that this discussion guide will help you get started.

I also hope that male viewers who may be new to thinking about trans issues and women’s issues will be surprised and touched by J. and Mary Jane’s developing relationship in the film as they think of their own mothers and fathers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juan Carlos Zaldívar', with a stylized, looping initial 'J'.

Juan Carlos Zaldívar  
Writer/producer/director, ALTERATIONS

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## SECTION 2: Overview

### ALTERATIONS

By Juan Carlos Zaldivar

<http://zaldivar.info/films/alterations.html>

ALTERATIONS is a short comedy that follows J (an adolescent trans woman previously known as Jesus), as she sets out to reconnect with her amnesic mother presenting as a female for the first time.

### SYNOPSIS

J's manic depressive mother, Mary Jane, had a heart attack when J told her that she wanted to present as a woman. Now J is making a movie to sort things out. When Mary Jane awoke from her coma, she woke up believing that she is someone else. J's brother insists that J patches things up with their amnesic mother and when the two meet again for the first time as women, an innocent, weekend adventure to face each other's fears manages to keep their monsters at bay.

Protected by their new identities, the two women find a best friend in each other. They also find an opportunity to step outside their prescribed roles of mother and son and to evolve into personalities that are closer to their core.

In a tone similar to Chagall's paintings, the film mixes a colorful and seemingly innocent style with a dark, rich palette of emotional character undertones by using non-actors in surreal, little known, Miami settings.

### **JUAN CARLOS ZALDIVAR, Film Director**

Cuban-born, Zaldivar lives and works in the United States. Zaldivar completed both his BFA and a Masters of Fine Arts at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where he has also taught as an adjunct faculty. He tenured as full-time faculty at Miami International University's Institute of Art and Design.

Zaldivar started his film career as a sound editor and designer, his work can be heard in Academy Nominated films such as Ang Lee's "Sense and Sensibility;" "On the ropes" and on HBO's America Undercover, for which he garnered an Emmy nomination.

His film and video art works have screened at many festivals worldwide and broadcast on PBS, ABC, IFC, Showtime and WE. He is the recipient of numerous grants and awards. His directing credits include "90 Miles" (PBS), "The Story of the Red Rose" (Showtime), "Palingenesis" and "Soldiers Pay" (IFC), co-directed with David O. Russell (Three Kings, The Fighter) and Tricia Regan (Autism, the musical); the Virtual Reality short film "A History of Cuban Dance" (associate producer/cinematographer; Sundance 2016; VRSE/WITHIN app) and associate producer of "The Buena Vista Social Club" currently entitled "Buena Vista Social Club: Adiós."

He has served as a Juror for several major film festivals including the Sundance International Film Festival. He is a Sundance Film Institute alumnus. He has recently co-founded the Miami Filmmakers Collective with a generous grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Art Challenge grant and a matching grant from the Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs.

He is presently the Outreach Director for Britdoc Foundation's Good Pitch Miami (2017).

### **SANDRA HAMADA, Study Guide Writer**

Sandra Hamada is currently pursuing a career in screenwriting and directing in Los Angeles. Her background is in community organizing, where she dedicated seven years to serving South Los Angeles at the Community Coalition. As Director of Youth Programs, Sandra led the youth organizing and campaign strategy to effectively win three public policy victories at Los Angeles Unified to support Black and Latinx students. She received her B.A. in sociology from Pomona College in 2009. In her free time, she does freelance photography.

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## SECTION 3: Transgender History in the United States

### TRANSGENDER TIMELINE

#### **1848 — Columbus, Ohio bans crossdressing**

The city bans crossdressing in public and isn't overturned until 1974.

#### **1886 — Denver fines and imprisons people for crossdressing**

Any person who is dressed in clothing "not belonging to their sex," will be fined or sent to jail, according to Denver, Colorado's new law.

#### **1910 — The word "transvestite" is coined**

The word transvestite was coined by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a Jewish German physician and an advocate for gays and transgender people and is used as the title of his book, *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress*.

#### **1919 — Institute of Sexual Research is Founded in Germany**

Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld co-founds the Institute of Sexual Research Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, a private sexology research institute, which had a research library and a large archive and included a marriage and sex counseling office.

### **1933 — Nazi's destroy the Institute of Sexual Research in Germany**

The Nazi's gain control of Germany; they destroy the institute and burned its books.

### **1944 — Detroit passes ordinance against crossdressing**

The law prohibits men in Detroit, Michigan from wearing clothes of the opposite sex in public and private settings.

### **1952 — 1st public sex reassignment**

Christine Jorgensen, a trans woman, becomes the first American to publicize their sex reassignment surgery. She was on the front page of the New York Daily News and became an instant celebrity. Christine became one of the first advocates for trans rights.

### **1966 — Compton Cafeteria Protest**

Many transgender people couldn't go to bars or clubs due to transphobia in the gay and lesbian community. The management of Compton Cafeteria called the police on a group of trans people. Due to the terrible mistreatment of the trans people by the police, a trans woman threw a coffee in the police officer's face. A riot broke out, and the immediately following trans people began a picket outside of Compton Cafeteria.

### **1969 — Stonewall Rebellion**

The Stonewall Rebellion, most popularly known as 'Stonewall Riots' — was a series of uprisings by LGBT people after a police raid on Stonewall Inn in New York. Police routinely raided Stonewall and blackmailed the management and staff to avoid raids. Marsha P. Johnson, a black transwoman and Silvia Rivera a Puerto Rican trans women are recognized as being leaders in starting the riots, which is widely recognized as the birth of the LGBT movement in the United States.

### **1972 — Sweden grants gender reassignment**

Transgender people are allowed to legally change their name in Sweden after sex reassignment surgery and hormone therapy.

### **1976 — New Jersey Validates first trans marriage**

New Jersey Superior Court validates a trans woman's marriage to a man in *M.T. v J.T.* in the first legal case that addresses transgender marriage.

### **1992 — 1st transgender state legislator elected to U.S. Office**

Althea Garrison from Boston, Massachusetts becomes the first trans elected official in the state legislator in American history.

### **1993 — Brandon Teena is murdered in the US**

Brandon Teena is a transgender youth raped and murdered at the age of 21 in Nebraska. Teena's life was depicted in the film *Boys Don't Cry*.

**1993 — Minnesota Bans Discrimination Based on Gender Identity**

Minnesota Human Rights Act adds “gender identity,” as a protected class in the Human Rights Act, banning discrimination in housing, insurance, goods and services, contracts, health benefits, hospital visitation rights, and employment.

**1999 — Transgender Day of Remembrance is established**

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was founded in honor of Rita Hester, an African American transgender woman who was murdered.

**2006 — Transwoman elected to Hawaii State Board of Education**

Kim Coco Iwamoto, a Japanese American trans woman becomes the highest-elected transgender official in the country when elected to Hawaii’s state board of education.

**2009 - International Transgender Day of Visibility is established**

Established by Rachel Crandall, a Michigan-based transgender activist, the International Day of Transgender Visibility is held on March 31 around the world to celebrate the community and raise awareness about the discrimination trans people face in society.

**2012 — Transgender identity no longer classified as a mental illness**

The American Psychological Association removes “gender identity disorder” from its list of mental illnesses after activists organized for its deletion.

**2013 — California become 1st state to protect transgender students**

California passes AB1266: School Success & Opportunity Act which allows students to participate in sex-segregated programs such as athletic teams and competitions, use facilities (such as bathrooms) consistent with the gender identity the student identifies with, irregardless of the gender listed on the student’s record.

**2014 — 1st trans person nominated for an Emmy**

Laverne Cox, an African American actress in *Orange is the New Black* becomes the first openly trans person to be nominated for an Emmy.

**2016 — President Obama releases guidance for transgender students in schools**

President Obama issues guidance to public schools that students should be able to use the restrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity (even if it differs from their student record.) The memo also directs schools to use the student’s preferred name and gender pronouns.

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# SECTION 4: Terminology

*\*Terminology from the Gender & Sexuality Alliance Network*

**Androgynous:** a term for a person who expresses or presents merged socially-defined masculine and feminine characteristics, or mainly neutral characteristics.

**Bisexual:** a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men and women.

**Crossdressing (CD):** dressing as someone from a different gender category; may be done by people from all genders and sexual orientations. Crossdressers sometimes referred to as transvestites (TV).

**Drag:** crossdressing, especially in public or in a performance.

**Feminine:** concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally female in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

**Gay:** a person who identifies as a man who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men.

**Gender Binary System:** a social system that requires everyone to be raised as a boy or girl (depending on what sex you are assigned at birth), which in turn forms the basis for how you are educated, what jobs you can do (or are expected to do), how you are expected to behave, what you are expected to wear, what your gender and gender presentation should be, and who you should be attracted to/love/marry, etc.

**Gender Characteristics:** characteristics that are used by others to attribute gender to an individual, such as facial hair or vocal pitch.

**Gender Expression/Gender Presentation:** the way a person expresses his or her gender through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming.

**Gender Identity:** a person's understanding, definition, or experience of their own gender, regardless of biological sex. **Gender Nonconformity:** not expressing gender or not having gender characteristics or gender identity that conform to

Genderqueer: a term which is used by some people who may or may not fit on the spectrum of trans, or be labeled as trans, but who identify their gender and sexual orientation to be outside of the gender binary system, or culturally prescribed gender roles.

Gender Role: culturally accepted and expected behavior associated with biological sex.

Intersex: refers to a series of medical conditions in which a child's genetic sex (chromosomes) and phenotypic sex (genital appearance) do not match, or are somehow different from the "standard" male or female. About one in 2,000 babies are born visibly intersexed, while some others are detected later. For more information, please visit <http://www.intersexinitiative.org>.

Lesbian: a person who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to women.

Masculine: concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally male in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

Pansexual: a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to folks of all genders.

Passing: crossdressing well enough to be seen as a member of a different sex/gender category.

Sex: one's biological assignment as male, female, or intersexed.

Transgender (TG): a term for designating those who transcend or transgress gender by not looking, acting, being, or identifying as traditionally male or female; can include cross-dressers, transsexuals, intersex people, and other gender nonconformists.

Transsexual (TS): a person who feels that his or her gender identity does not match their biological sex ("I'm a woman in a man's body" etc.); a pre-op (preoperative) transsexual is a TS preparing to have sex reassignment surgery, and a post-op (postoperative) transsexual has already undergone sex reassignment, although not all transsexuals desire surgery; some transsexuals take hormones to make their bodies look more male or female.

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# SECTION 5: Facilitation Guide for the Classroom

## Facilitation Guide:

### **Encourage Participation**

Your role as a facilitator is to encourage participation from students and encourage their participation. In every group, there are students who feel more comfortable and these students often dominate the conversation and speak up more than others. When these students do speak up, you can focus your attention on others in the group.

The following statements can help to diversify participation:

- Let's hear from others in the group who haven't spoken yet.
- I'm going to ask that we ask others who have already spoken today to step back, so that new people can speak.

### **Help Students Make a Personal Connection**

Great facilitators go beyond the facts of the film. They help students build a deeper connection to the material. Encourage students to share similarities and differences with the characters and their own experiences. Guide the discussion to help the students learn about themselves and their peers as they are reviewing the film.

### **Ensure a Safe Space for All Participants**

While we cannot control what people will say and do, it's important to set collective agreements for the group prior to your discussion to set clear expectations. Your job as a facilitator is to be able to have a sense of everyone in the room. Try your best to make sure that people feel they have the chance to be heard. Do not allow any form of hate speech, derogatory language or other insensitive language go unchecked during the discussion.

### **Ask a Question, When You Want to Make a Statement**

As the facilitator, your goal is to build the skills of the group. Asking questions to the group is the best way to spark a dialogue amongst the participants. Instead of saying, "The relationship between the mom and daughter is difficult," say, "How would you describe the relationship between the mom and daughter?" Have faith that the students

in your group are critical answers. Create space in your discussion by only speaking less than 30% of the time in comparison to other students in the group.



### Middle School Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial reactions after seeing “Alterations?” How did it make you feel?
- Was there a particular moment that surprised you in the film?
- Describe your relationship with your parents. How is it similar to J and Mary Jane’s relationship? How is it different?
- Has there ever been a time when you felt misunderstood by your parents? What was the misunderstanding? Did you try to get your parents to understand? Why or why not?
- Imagine your parents’ memory gets erased and they are able to meet you for the first time tomorrow. In the film, a medical condition makes Mary Jane forget her identity when she wakes up from her heart attack. Ironically, her condition allows Mary Jane & J to develop a friendship. What would it be like if you met your parents as friends and they did not know that they were your parents? Do you think you could be friends with them? What types of conversations would you have with them as friends that you maybe couldn’t have as a parent/child? What types of activities would you do for fun?

## High School Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial reactions after seeing “Alterations?” How did it make you feel? Was there a particular moment in the film that surprised you?
  - The film opens with J’s father kicking J’s pet turtle. How do you feel about this? Is this important to the story? Why or why not? What do you learn about the father in the movie?
  - From what you’ve seen in the film, can you imagine what the relationship was like between J and her mother before the film takes place? What were the challenges in their relationship?
  - What type of relationship do you have with your parents and/or guardians?
  - Sometimes it’s difficult to talk to our parents and/or guardians about issues. Why is it difficult for J to reveal to her mother that she is a transwoman? What are the consequences of this reveal?
  - In the film, J says, “I wasn’t allowed to have long hair.” Sometimes parents & guardians make rules for us because they think it’s what is best for us. But sometimes their rules hurt us. Can you relate to J in this situation? Has there ever been a time when an adult made a rule that you felt was unfair? Why was it unfair?
  - Mary Jane says that mothers are “more supportive” and that men “are tougher”. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
  - J asks Mary Jane if she feels that these gender roles are “something one learns,” or whether it is “just the way it is” meaning something people are born with. What is your opinion on this? Discuss why you feel the way you do. How do other people in the room feel about this?
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# SECTION 6: Activities for the Classroom

## I. CROSSING THE LINE— Our Relationships with Our Families

### **Directions:**

Clear the room of furniture. Ask students to stand at one end of the room in a line facing the empty room, shoulder to shoulder. This is a silent activity. Ask students to refrain from asking questions and to just interpret the statements with their walking distance to the best of their ability. There are no right or wrong answers. Students will be asked to cross the room as far the statement is true for them. The more true the statement is for them, the further they will walk across to the other end of the room. The less the statement is true for them, the less they will walk forward across the room. Students can also choose to stay at their original position for any one question. At the end of each question, all students should go back to their original shoulder-to-shoulder line in the back of the room where they started.

### **Start with the following example:**

- “I am afraid to be hit by lightning.”

### **Suggested statements:**

- I feel like I can talk to my parents about anything.
- My parents don't understand me at all.
- Sometimes I feel like my parents want me to act more like a boy or a girl.
- Sometimes it's difficult to talk to my parents about decisions I make.
- Sometimes I worry that parents judge me based on the way that I look.
- I wish I was closer to my parents.
- I wish my parents would listen to me more.
- My parents say I don't listen to them.
- If my parents and I were the same age, we would be friends.
- It's difficult to be a parent.
- It's difficult to be a child.
- I have a member of my family that I can talk to about anything.
- I wish my parents would give me more opportunity to make decisions about my future.
- My parents only want what's best for me.

### **Debrief Instructions:**

Bring the group together in a circle. Debrief the activity as a large group. Ask the students to refrain from pointing out any specific person for crossing/not crossing the room and instead to reflect on the patterns they saw and on their own actions.

- Did you notice any patterns where most everyone crossed the room?
- Were there any statements that surprised you?
- What type of experiences do we have in common?
- What did we learn about being a child based on our experiences during this activity?
- What is it like to be an adult?

Conclude the debrief by summarizing some of the common themes the students discussed. Also acknowledge that we all have different experiences. Thank everyone for participating.

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## II. ROLE PLAYING / SKIT EXERCISES

At the end of *Alterations* when Mary Jane and J are sitting watching the sunset, Mary Jane says to J “You, know, you remind me of my younger son. I don’t know what happened to him...” Earlier in the film, we hear J ask herself “I wonder if my mother would like me as a girl.”

### **Directions:**

Divide the classroom into 4-5 groups and have groups put on a skit on one or several of these ideas:

- SKIT IDEA #1 Imagine that J reveals her identity as Mary Jane’s daughter. What would that scene look and sound like? Each group is assigned to write and perform a skit that finishes the story of “*Alterations*.”
- SKIT IDEA #2 Each group should pick two actors. Each actor should pick a gender identification that is not their own and act if they were a person of that gender in a short skit. [If a student identifies as a genderfluid person then they should choose either male or female.] After the skit is over, students should discuss the choices that they made in their characterization. Why did they arrive at those choices? How do other people feel about the choices that each student made in their skit? Why? Discuss.
- SKIT IDEA #3 In the film J notices that Mary Jane’s house is practically empty. Mary Jane gives J a tour of her house and explains that her house is now a studio where she only works on art projects. During the tour we discover that Mary Jane has moved up to rooftop and now chooses to live out in the elements. Each student group should enact a skit where Mary Jane and J discuss her

choice to live on the roof of her house. Is this a good choice or a poor choice?  
What ideas or feelings may be driving Mary Jane to make her choice?

**Debrief Instructions:**

Conclude the debrief by summarizing some of the reasons that the students discussed, which drive people to their choices. Also acknowledge that we all have different experiences but we all have made good choices and bad choices. Thank everyone for participating.

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**Directions:**

Divide the classroom into 3 writing groups.

- Imagine each group has to write “Alterations 2.” the sequel. What would it be about? Would J and Mary Jane take on a new adventure? Present your story to the group. Discuss your story choices with the class.
- Imagine your job is to create a commercial spot to promote the film. What would your spot sound and look like? Why should people watch this film?
- Put together a movie poster to advertise “Alterations”. Discuss your choices with your peers.

**Debrief Instructions:**

Conclude the debrief by reviewing some of the choices that the students made to summarize the most important elements of the movie in these exercises. Do the creative choices made by the students reflect any moral values? Yes or No? Why or why not?

Explain the definition of “moral value.”

**Moral values** are the standards of good and evil, which govern an individual's behavior and choices. Individual's **morals** may derive from society and government, religion, or self. When **moral values** derive from society and government they may change as the laws and **morals** of the society change.

Ask students to reflect on whether movie advertisements that they see on television and the web project specific moral values of our society. If so, which ones? Discuss.

Thank everyone for participating.

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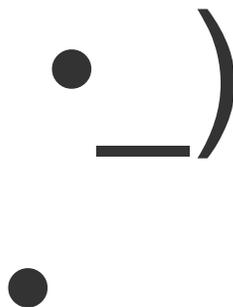
In “Alterations” The character named J is making a movie of her own. In a section of the film we hear her say the following: “No one know how lighting happens. It just does. It appears to follow a path, but in fact it doesn’t. It turns out that our brains are also nonlinear... and so is life; leaving us to make sense of it all. So maybe... we are meant to be like lightning.”

**Directions:**

Present a definition of “nonlinear” [e.g. *adjective*; not denoting, involving, or arranged in a straight line; random; of or denoting a digital process whereby a path is created by a series of independent choices.]

Divide the classroom into small discussion groups. Each group should discuss one of the following topics for a certain amount of time in their breakout sessions. When the time is up, each group should present their findings to the rest of the class.

- Why are J and Mary Jane each so interested in the qualities of lightning? Do they agree or disagree on this? Is lightning a metaphor in the film? Explain why or why not.
- Why is the film called “Alterations”? What things are “different” or “alternative” about this film? Why do you think the filmmaker made those choices?
- J and Mary Jane both have fears. What are they each afraid of? How are their fears similar? How are their fears different?
- Even though Mary Jane is the mother in the film and J is the daughter, it appears that Mary Jane is acting like a child and J is acting like an adult. How does this make you feel? Do we need to act a certain way according to our age? Why or why not? Are adults allowed to make mistakes? Are children allowed to make their own decisions? What makes a decision a good one? What makes a poor decision?



# SECTION 7: How To Be An Ally

*From TRANS@MIT ALLIES TOOLKIT*

- **Listen to trans voices.**

The best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to trans people themselves. They are the experts on their own lives! Talk to trans people in your community. Consult the reading and film lists in [AlterationsMovie.com](http://AlterationsMovie.com) to find out where to learn more about trans lives.

- **Know your own limits as an ally.**

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything! When dealing with a trans person who may have sought you out for support or guidance, be sure to point that person to appropriate resources when you've reached the limit of your knowledge or ability to handle the situation. It is better to admit you don't know something than to provide information that may be incorrect or hurtful.

- **Don't assume you can tell if someone is transgender.**

Transgender and transsexual people don't all look a certain way or come from the same background, and many may not appear "visibly trans." Indeed, many trans people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their trans status.

- **Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" is.**

For some trans people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Respect the name a trans person is currently using.

- **Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.**

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who we're attracted to. Gender identity is about how we know our own gender. Trans people can identify as gay, straight, bisexual, or asexual.

- **Be sensitive about confidentiality, disclosure, and "outing."**

Some trans people feel comfortable disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not. Knowing a trans person's status is personal information and it is up to them to share it with others. Do not casually share this information, or "gossip" about a person you know or think is trans. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it also can have negative consequences in a world that is very intolerant of gender difference—trans

people can lose jobs, housing, friends, and sadly have even been killed upon revelation of their trans status.

Understand the differences between “coming out” as lesbian, bisexual, or gay (LGB) and “coming out” as trans. Unlike “coming out” in a LGB context, where the act of disclosing one’s sexuality reveals a “truth” about that person’s sexual orientation, disclosing one’s trans status often has the opposite effect. That is, when a person “comes out” as trans, the listener often assumes the “truth” about the trans person is that they are somehow more fundamentally a member of their birth sex, rather than the gender/sex they have chosen to live in. In other words, sometimes “coming out” makes it more difficult for a trans person to be fully recognized as the sex/gender they are living in.

- **Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces.**

Consider strategies to best confront anti-trans remarks or jokes in your classroom, lab, office, living group, or organization. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

- **If you don’t know what pronouns to use, ask.**

Be polite and respectful when you ask a person which pronoun they prefer. Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so.

- **Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity.**

A person who is questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what identity and/or gender presentation is best for them. They might, for example, choose a new name or pronoun, and then decide at a later time to change the name or pronoun again. Do your best to be respectful and use the name and/or pronoun requested.

- **Don’t try to tell a person what “category” or “identity” they fit into.**

Do not apply labels or identities to a person that they have not chosen for themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity or path fits them best, give them the time and space to decide for themselves.

- **Don’t assume what path a trans person is on regarding surgery or hormones, and don’t privilege one path over another.**

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones;

some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones, and/or surgery.

- **Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.**

Think about it—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about the appearance or status of their genitalia, so it isn't appropriate to ask a trans person that question either. Likewise, don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery." If a trans person wants to talk to you about such matters, let them bring it up. Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.

Similar to the questions above about genitalia and surgery—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

- **Don't police public restrooms.**

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door—or your expectations! Encourage schools, businesses and agencies to have unisex bathroom options, and offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom, in a "buddy system," so they are less vulnerable.

- **Don't just add the "T" without doing work.**

"LBGT" is now a commonplace acronym that joins lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender under the same umbrella. To be an ally to trans people, gays, lesbians and bisexuals need to examine their own gender stereotypes, their own prejudices and fears about trans people, and be willing to defend and celebrate trans lives.





## SECTION 8: Partners and supporters to date

The Robert Giard Foundation Fellowship for Film  
Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies - CLAGS - at City Universities of New York - CUNY  
Mr. Eric Gottlieb  
Sandra Montenegro Contemporary Art Projects  
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Heineken "Light your night" commission  
Knight Foundation Arts Challenge Grant through the Miami Filmmakers Collective  
Reading Queer Miami  
Miami Foundation  
Fractured Atlas

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