

## Newly Formed Rosen Gender Group: Opening A Community Conversation

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The Rosen Gender Group is a small international group of women (at this point, but not exclusively) who are exploring issues of gender identity (cisgender, transgender, two-spirited, transsexual, binary, and others) and gender expression, inside and outside the context of Rosen Method Bodywork and Movement.

We, as a group, have also been exploring the larger issues of intersectionality (race and gender and class) which are all relevant when we as Rosen practitioners are working with any client. Initially we were an all white group; recently we have become more diverse. We want to let the larger community know about our group and invite your thoughts and experiences into a larger conversation.

I, Gail, have been on a journey. My now 22-year-old grand child transitioned from being my granddaughter to being my grandson over a period of several years. A wonderful person, we have always been close. This journey has been a roller coaster for me involving many ups and downs. Fears and tears, joys and hopes. This journey led me to wonder how issues of gender are held in my professional community.

As a member of the Editorial Board of the Rosen Institute Journal, I initially thought to write an article about this for the journal. As I was unsure of the forum for such an article, I quickly realized a better way forward was to talk to others with similar interests. Several people were suggested who were deeply interested and committed. We began meeting virtually in February of this year. Initially we were myself and Deborah Marks of Berkeley, California; Louise Murray and Elizabeth Smith of New York City, and Sandra Ljubinkovic from the Bosnian School who is living in Amsterdam. Recently Marjorie Huebner of Minneapolis, Minnesota and Regina Wells from Richmond, California have joined us.

As bodyworkers and movement teachers we quickly became aware that the many issues for understanding transgender clients involves myriad complex layers. At the beginning of our inquiry, the most salient question was "What do we assume about our clients?". This is of course important to look at no matter who the client is. But this is especially true with issues of difference: race, body size, class and gender identity.

More specifically, how might a client feel about their body when it does not feel like the right gender body? Perhaps this is a new issue for the client, perhaps it is stirring, but unknown. Perhaps it has been familiar and understood by he/she/they/them for many years. For bodyworkers, is touch safe for this person? For movement teachers, how comfortable is the person amongst those who are cisgender?

As we began to meet together, we identified several ideas about long term goals: an article for the journal, a Yahoo Group posting, a workshop at the Global Congress (at that time we anticipated that would be this November, 2020, now likely November, 2021) and now, recently, we are thinking about a Webinar

presentation on the Rosen Institute website.

Initially we introduced ourselves to each other focusing on our experience and interest relating to transgender issues. We read and discussed articles and books seeking to educate ourselves about transgender concerns.

We identified many issues, some in the group having had experience with transgender clients, relating to how these concerns would arise in Rosen practice. From the very practical questions on intake forms about preferred pronouns, to restroom use in offices or classrooms, and clothing in classrooms or sessions. We have learned that most of all it is important to provide privacy and safety.

We learned that we need to realize how difficult it may be to exist in an in-between identity space. And we learned to really know that transgender oppression and transphobia exist. An initial transitioning concern about “Am I passing?” is also very real. We need sensitivity to not putting the person in the place of having to explain who they are, to having to “come out” again.

We became aware to remember, if we are cisgender, the privilege of knowing and being safely able to use a certain bathroom, which M/F box to check on a form, and knowing that others will assume our gender identity, and they will be right.

With this knowledge and sensitivity, what do we need to know about this other person? Listening and noticing as they reveal their story, while paying close attention to our own internal feelings, thoughts and beliefs is, as always, paramount.

We are learning how much knowledge about the lives of transgender people in general is essential to being sensitive practitioners.

### **Information we are pursuing:**

- General history of a person on a trans journey: When did they know - always from childhood or later in life? We read a chapter on “Transgender” in [Far From the Tree](#) by Andrew Solomon (2012).
- Physical body issues: hormone use, binding, surgery(ies), dress, pressure to conform.
- Relationships and family; lifestyle: gay, straight, bi, and many other identities; pregnancy and parenthood.
- Trauma: Because many people may not understand and accept non-traditional gender identities, or even know or acknowledge that there is the possibility of non-traditional gender identity, the transgender person may have suffered trauma. Very severe physical and sexual trauma has happened to many transgender people.

Two of our group members, Elizabeth and Louise became aware that the Dean of Students at The Swedish Institute College of Health Sciences in New York City, Ericka Clinton, had taught a CE class for massage therapists about working with transgender people. They spoke with Dean Clinton regarding her willingness to provide guidance about how to introduce these issues to the Rosen community. They suggested we invite her to one of our Rosen Gender Group Zoom meetings to have a conversation. She

accepted, and shared a depth of very helpful knowledge. This ranged from her experience of dealing with the issue at her school, to learning about creating safety for all students, to the development of the continuing education course for massage therapists. This was very valuable to us and opened yet another possible door for our bringing this conversation and information to our Rosen community.

In our ongoing meetings, what eventually became very clear was that to move forward as a group, we needed to get to know each other more deeply. Deborah brought us concepts from her Friends Community and specifically from Bryan Stevenson's Just Mercy (2014) book of "getting proximate". This concept involves getting close to the people we care about.

Deborah invited us to speak to the query "What lessons have transgender people taught you about life/living/ changing the narrative/resistance/hope?" and "What have you learned about your own assumptions?" These questions to each of us individually have taken us into more challenging internal inquiries and helped us in getting to know each other.

Over time we have shared from our own personal diverse stories, our identities, our journeys and encounters with many issues: race, gender identity, age and aging, personal relationships, nationality, class, migration and immigration, family dysfunction, poverty, education, wars and religion. And how we all came to find and love Rosen Method!

Each of us is learning in our own way as well. In reading a small, but rich book, called Little Fish (2018) by Casey Plett, I realized I didn't understand how differently a trans woman feels from a cisgender woman like myself. In Trans Allyship Workbook (2017) by Davey Shlasko, I was grateful to find a whole chapter entitled "Getting Pronouns Right and What It Teaches us About Gender".

My experience with my grandson, and with delving into gender with this group, has helped me move beyond a superficial place of thinking I know something, to understanding that I don't, or I know very little. I am left with the deeper awareness (based on a comment from a group member) which I want to bring to all my experiences: "I want to understand you the way you understand yourself."

We continue to meet regularly and look forward to sharing more of our conversation and learning with the larger Rosen community.

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We invite your responses and commentary to Letters to the Editors at the Rosen Journal.