



BOY I AM

Screening & Discussion Guide

For updates go to:

www.boyiam.com

Dir. Sam Feder & Julie Hollar

Contact: www.samfeder.com

Why we made this guide & a message to the audience:

As filmmakers, we believe it is our ethical responsibility to encourage and engage in discussion and critique of any work we produce. This guide is meant to provide a foundation for conversation around the issues of trans visibility in our society and in the media and encouraging viewers to think critically about their own views and the views presented in the film.

We are invested in and committed to creating and supporting a feminist, anti-racist, anti-classist society through media. We encourage you to question us and anyone producing media which you consume. We will gladly dialogue with you at any time. We hope this guide helps in furthering the discussion and creating change.

CONTENTS:

Synopsis and Subjects	Page 2
Pre-Viewing Questions	Page 4
Post-Viewing Questions	Pages 4-6

SYNOPSIS

While female-to-male transgender visibility has recently exploded in this country, conversations about trans issues in the lesbian community often run into resistance from the many queer women who view transitioning as a "trend" or as an anti-feminist act that taps into male privilege. *Boy I Am* is a feature-length documentary that begins to break down that barrier and promote dialogue about trans issues through a look at the experiences of three young transitioning FTMs in New York City—Nicco, Norie and Keegan—as they go through major junctures in their transitions, as well as through the voices of lesbians, activists, and theorists who raise and address the questions that many people have but few openly discuss: Is transitioning a trend? Is it healthy? Is it anti-feminist? What does it mean for a young person in the lesbian community to become male, both for themselves and for the community? And how are these questions affected by race and class?

The film's historical framework insists on a coherent, patient, and inclusive discussion that concentrates on a range of gendered experience. Situating these struggles and stories as inextricably linked to queer and feminist struggles, *Boy I Am* presents an empowering chronicle of queer resistance that challenges all viewers to rethink their concepts of activism and identity.

SUBJECTS

Nicco, 30, identifies as a queer trans male. Nicco was raised by Jewish immigrant parents in housing projects of New Jersey and has been working odd jobs since graduating from high school. He began taking hormones five years ago and fully passes as male. The film follows Nicco as he struggles to raise and save money for chest surgery. After losing his job at a bar, he has to postpone the surgery and wonders how he'll come up with the remaining money.

Norie, 22, identifies as a straight trans male. Raised by his evangelical Haitian mother in Queens, he began to identify as trans in the spring of 2004 after moving out and starting college. The film follows Norie as he begins hormones, deals with coming out at work and at home, and gets

surgery with the help of his girlfriend, who expresses her own struggles with and support for Norie's transition.

Keegan, 23, identifies as a straight trans male. Keegan grew up in a white, middle-class suburb of Connecticut in a tight-knit Irish Catholic family. He began to identify as trans in the fall of 2002 and when we first encounter him in the film, he is about to leave for top surgery in San Francisco. The film follows Keegan's own experience with transitioning and his volatile thoughts on whether to take testosterone as a part of that transition.

Judith "Jack" Halberstam is a leading gender theorist, professor of English and Director of The Center for Feminist Research at USC. Halberstam is the author of *Female Masculinity*, *The Drag King Book* and *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*.

Dean Spade is the founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, a nonprofit organization in New York City fighting discrimination against transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming people, with a focus on people of color and poor people.

Carmen Vazquez is the Deputy Executive Director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, a New York state LGBT civil rights and advocacy organization. She also serves on the board of GenderPAC, a group working to end discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes.

Imani Henry is an activist, writer and performer in New York City. He wrote and performs the multi-media play *B4T*, which explores race, sexuality and gender expression, and works as a staff organizer at the International Action Center (IAC), with a focus on national organizing of communities of color and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement toward broader social justice campaigns.

Elizabeth Cline is a journalist whose work focuses on gender and feminism and has appeared in such outlets as *New York* magazine and the *Village Voice*.

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS:

- I. What do you know about the topic you are about to watch?
- II. Some of the questions that are presented in BOY I AM are listed below. What are your thoughts on these issues?
 - What is transgender? Do you have to take hormones to be trans? Do you have to have surgery to be trans?
 - Is transitioning from female to male a trend? Do people do it because of peer pressure or to be cool? Is it something primarily visible in certain race or class contexts?
 - What questions or resistance might feminists have about transitioning from female to male?
 - Do transmen always come from the queer community? Do they stay in the queer community?

POST VIEWING QUESTIONS:

I. Initial Reactions

- Did you learn anything new from watching this film?
- Did anything offend you?
- Were any stereotypes perpetuated?
- In your community or circle of friends, is there resistance to or distrust of transmen? If so, have the concerns voiced been similar to those raised in the film?
- How has the identity of trans evolved in comparison to what is seen in the film? What implications does this have for the ideas presented in the film?
- Have the issues presented in BIA changed or been resolved?
- Did the film raise any new questions for you?

II. In-Depth Discussion

TREND

- Did watching Nicco's surgery and his struggles with raising money for it affect your thoughts on whether trans is a trend? Were there other scenes or stories that shed light on that question?
- Have you witnessed or experienced the "pressure" to be trans that some non-trans people mentioned?
- If you agree with Dean Spade's analysis that this is not a trend, what might be some other explanations for the increase of trans visibility?

FEMINISM

- Do you identify as a feminist? What does "feminism" mean to you? How does your reading of feminism affect your perception of transitioning?
- What do you think of the quote by Hanne Blank from the film, "Feminism has been fighting for generations against the notion that biology equals destiny. Do we really believe it?"
- How about the quote from Margaret Sanger, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body" ?
- Is fighting for trans rights a feminist issue?
- Can transmen still be feminists if they don't want to be women? Do men (trans or non-trans) benefit from feminism? If so, how?

YOUTH ACCESS TO HORMONES

- What are the possible negative consequences of providing access to youth at any age? What are the possible negative consequences of not providing access?
- Who should have the power to make decisions about people's access to hormones and surgery not only for youth but for all transpeople? What role, if any, should non-trans people play in discussions or making decisions around transitioning?
- Do you agree with Dean Spade's argument that this issue is similar to the question of who should have the power to make decisions about women's access to abortion?
- Should there be an age limit on access to hormones?

RACE AND CLASS

- How can factors like race and class affect transitioning? How might one's experiences affected by race and class be different before and after they transition?
- Do you agree with Jack and Carmen that communities' views on being trans differ depending on whether they're white, of color, working class or middle/upper class? Can you think of examples of

this, or have you had personal experience of it?

- What issues about race and class as related to trans weren't explored in the film?

MASCULINITY/LESBIAN COMMUNITY

- What do you think about Judith/Jack Halberstam's statement that masculinity is always accompanied by misogyny? Would that apply to transmen who don't identify with a strong sense of masculinity? Would it apply to butch women? Is there any escape?
- Is the composition of the lesbian/queer/dyke community changing? Are there fewer butches?
- Is it easier to transition to be a man than to be a masculine woman?

DEFINING AND DISCUSSING "TRANS"

- Keegan cautions against seeing surgery as a necessary condition for being trans; what are some of the dangers of doing so? Do the same dangers apply to seeing hormones as a necessary condition for being trans? Why do definitions of trans matter? What are the differences between transgender and transexuality?
- Discuss Pat Califia's quote used in the film: "To be differently gendered is to live within a discourse where other people are always investigating you, describing you and speaking for you." What are the dangers of non-trans people investigating or telling the story of trans people? Are there dangers if the investigating or telling is done by white trans people, or trans people with class privilege, for example?
- How can non-trans people educate themselves and move the issues forward productively in light of these dangers? How can media producers be responsible to their subjects and to their audience?
- Do before-and-after images of trans people's bodies or images of them undergoing surgery help tell a story about trans people, or are they merely sensationalistic? What dangers are there in showing these images? What benefits might there be?
- Is there value to airing and discussing transphobic views, as in the film, or does this simply give currency to those views and reinforce the idea that trans people are to be analyzed and their rights debated? What are your thoughts on giving screen time to non-trans people who criticize transmen? For example, the woman who asks, "Why can't transmen just be a different kind of woman?"
- What limitations do media that present work "frozen in time," like

films or books, run up against? How can producers work to mitigate those limitations? What implications do those limitations have for media consumers?