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Information Instruction for Female-to-Male Transsexuals

This paper will outline a three-module, online course aimed at teaching female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) how to use the Internet as an information resource on transitioning. The paper will discuss *who* FTMs are, *what* will be taught, *how* the information will be taught, and *why* these objectives and approaches were chosen.

Who are FTMs?

To start with, a little background will be given on terminology in this subject area. To clarify what is meant by the term *transsexual*, I offer this description from the Gay Lesbian Medical Association:

> "Transsexuals are individuals who desire to live full-time as members of the opposite sex, and who usually seek hormone therapy, cosmetic surgery, and genital surgery in order to approximate more completely the appearance of the gender in which they chose to live" (Dean et al, 2001).

Accordingly, a FTM transsexual is someone who fits the definitions above, and specifically, was born into a female body, desires to change into a male body and a male gender role (or has already done so), and has an internal sense of being male. The acronym *FTM* will be used as a shortened form of *FTM transsexual. Transitioning* is the process of medically (surgery and hormone treatment), legally (name change, gender change, and document change), and socially changing from one gender/sex to another. *Transgender* and *transpeople* will be used in the umbrella sense that encompasses transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, and other gender varying individuals. As implied in the definition given above, for the purposes of this project, surgery is not a requirement to be considered a transsexual, though it will be assumed that FTMs are

interested in having sex reassignment surgery (SRS) or the aftermath of surgery (and thus, SRS is one of the information needs of this group). The project will focus only on English-speaking FTMs in an effort to limit scope, though geographic region is unlimited.

FTMs have a broad range of sexual orientations from exclusively attracted to males, exclusively attracted to females, and the broad range in-between those two poles (Devor, 1997; Cromwell, 1998, Green, n.d.). FTMs may *or may not* have a connection to the lesbian and gay male communities before or after transition. Because FTMs have been a marginalized and stigmatized population, some FTMs have been forced to the outer edges of society and have dropped out of the educational mainstream. As a result, the information literacy skills of some FTMs may be lacking, and sensitivity should be exercised when dealing with this population, as with any marginalized population.

<div align="center">Teaching Objectives – What will be taught</div>

Though virtually no research has been done on the information needs of FTMs, emerging themes from a literature review and Internet search point to medical issues, legal issues, and emotional support as the primary FTM information needs (Devor, 1997; Cromwell, 1998; Cook-Daniels, 2003; FTM International, n.d.; FTMSurgeryInfo, n.d.; Green, n.d., 2000; Hudson, n.d.; The Transitional Male, n.d.; Transster.com, n.d.).

The primary FTM *medical issues* are:

- sex reassignment surgery (types of surgery, costs, surgeons, etc.),
- hormone use for transition (types of hormones, methods of administration, dosing regimes, etc.),
- locating trans-friendly health care providers

Legal issues include:

- legal name change

- document changes (i.e., drivers license, birth certificate, Social Security, passport, contracts, institutional records, etc.)

- discrimination (work, housing, marriage, etc.)

Emotional support includes connecting with others in similar circumstances, such as help dealing with:

- stresses from dealing with being transsexual and/or transitioning

- family issues

- finding support groups

- connections for medical and legal issues

- male presentation tips

Because information for FTMs is not readily available (such as, in the mainstream press or in general education courses), Web searching skills are highly relevant and useful for FTMs. Google and other search engines can be used for locating surgery information, hormone information, and legal information websites. Emotional support can be obtained by locating personal websites of FTMs.

To this end, knowing how to use Google and other search engines, identifying useful search terms, "pearl growing," Boolean operators, and other search strategies, and identifying and locating relevant government, school, and business websites—in essence, general information literacy with a specific focus—can be very helpful for FTMs.

Information literacy skills should also include instruction on determining the credibility of a website or other information source. Though credibility can be difficult to

assess, questions to be considered include (taken from The Harvey Milk Institute Guide to LGBTQ Internet Research; Ellis, Highleyman, Schaub, & White, 2002):

- Is an author listed? Can they be contacted?

- Is it a reliable organization? Do other reliable websites refer to it?

- Does the presented data cite a source?

- Are there links to the data sources?

- Is there a date? Is it current?

- Are content and advertisements clearly separate?

- Is there consensus on the information? Is the same information and viewpoints confirmed on other websites?

Since there is a shortage of information sources for FTMs, as noted above, Yahoo Groups (http://groups.yahoo.com) is another important resource for satisfying FTMs' information needs.[1] Going to the Yahoo groups webpage and searching for the term "FTM" produces over 200 hits, most of which are directly related to FTMs. Besides the emotional support and camaraderie available through group membership, information on medical issues, legal issues, and other pertinent information need for FTMs can often be met. At the very least, tips on how to locate information can often be obtained from the group membership. Most of the groups utilize the Files, Photos, and Links options for the group membership, so instruction on these functions should also be included as they can be a wealth of information. Searching group message archives can offer further information on medical and legal issues.[2]

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[1] A personal review of Google groups showed that they are a poor resource for FTMs.
[2] Most Yahoo Groups are set up so the Files, Photos, Links, and Message Archives are only available to group members, and not to the general public. Instruction on how to join a Yahoo Group should be included in the instruction.

QueerNet (http://www.queernet.org) is a free, queer activist service hosting mailing lists for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) communities Begun in 1991, QueerNet hosted roughly 600 mailing lists with 65,000 subscribers by early 2001 (Ellis et al, 2002). A quick review of QueerNet groups on August 22, 2005 indicated at least a dozen groups for FTMs, and several more aimed at the general transsexual/transgendered community. This service is not as user-friendly as Yahoo Groups, but has the advantage of being by and for the LGBT community, and non-commercial.

Since the Web is still in its youth, many people are still unaware of basic netiquette ("net etiquette"). Teaching FTMs skills in basic netiquette will assist them in getting the most out of email groups, such as on Yahoo Groups and QueerNet. A quick Google search of the term *netiquette* turns up countless resources; one worthwhile site from the search results is the Netiquette Home Page (http://www.albion.com/netiquette).

<p align="center">*How* the Course Will Be Taught</p>

The course will be taught online in three modules with streaming PowerPoint-Producer presentations. A discussion forum to ask questions and offer comments will be provided as part of each module.

Module 1

Module 1 of the course will cover Google and other search engines. Through the use of a streaming PowerPoint presentation, the student will be walked through the most basic of Google searches leading up to much more complicated Google searches. The basic searches will start with two-term searches that will easily provide success, such as "FTM surgery," "FTM hormones," "FTM health," "FTM legal," "FTM personal," and

"FTM support." The module will be designed such that the learner can start and stop the presentation, open another browser window, and practice what is demonstrated, step by step. These terms are chosen to address the primary information needs of FTMs.

Once confidence has been established with the above basic searches, then more advanced searching methods using Google plus other search engines will be introduced, such as Boolean operators and "pearl growing." Search strategies will be introduced to find more complicated subjects, such as male presentation tips for FTMs. A "problem" term will be introduced—*transgender*—with a demonstration of how searching for this term returns hits relating to LGBT, which usually do not relate at all to transgender or transsexual issues (despite the T in the acronym) and strategies offered on how to work around such difficulties (such as avoiding the term *transgender*, or by combining it with other terms such as *FTM*).

Module 2

Module 2 will cover Yahoo Groups and QueerNet groups. How to find these two resources will be demonstrated and then hands-on practice on locating relevant groups will be assigned. Tips on selecting groups based on relevance, membership size, list activity, and privacy concerns will be offered. The learner will be walked through establishing a Yahoo account and profile, selecting a group, joining the group, selecting delivery options, and posting an introduction to the list. For Yahoo Groups, using the Files, Photos, and Links sections will be demonstrated with an opportunity to practice. Searching the message archives will be demonstrated and practiced as well, and related to the Google and search engine skills acquired in Module 1.

To further a rewarding group membership experience, instruction on netiquette will be included in this module. Utilizing humor, bad netiquette and good netiquette alternatives will be demonstrated, along with using Google to locate netiquette tips. Some groups establish list behaviors in the Welcome message or list homepage, and that will be covered, as well. Using Google skills acquired in the first module will reinforce those skills and support experiential learning.

Module 3

Module 3 will offer a pathfinder for FTM related information. Students will be able to notice how many of the resources they located in earlier modules appear on the pathfinder. They will be given an opportunity to explore some of the web resources listed as a basis to develop credibility assessment skills and critical thinking. Special emphasis will be given on credibility assessment since many of the information resources for FTMs are outside of established institutional sources.

<div align="center">*Why* the Course Will be Taught This Way</div>

The course could easily be adapted for in-person trainings, but according to Gwen Smith,[3] "two features that make the Internet especially tantalizing for transgendered people" are the ability to be anonymous and the ability to "try on new identities and 'shop around'" (as quoted in Ellis et al, 2002, p.68). By teaching the course online, these two information needs for transpeople can be obtained. Teaching the course online also overcomes the obstacles of assembling enough FTMs in one spot for a class. By offering the course online via the Web, the greatest numbers of FTMs can be reached.

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[3] "board member of Gender Education and Advocacy, Webmistress for the Gender.org Website, community host of Gay.com's Transgender Gazebo, and columnist for the *Bay Area Reporter*" (Ellis, Highleyman, Schaub, & White, 2002, p. 66).

Each module is designed to draw upon Keller's ARCS model by sparking *attention* through the use of visuals and audio in the presentations, demonstrating *relevance* by showing the FTM information needs that can be met via the Internet, developing *confidence* through successfully retrieving relevant information and showing how to adapt "problem" searching (i.e., the word *transgender*), and providing *satisfaction* through retrieving useful information and by teaching how to locate relevant information on one's own. Like in the story where giving a person some fish will satisfy his hunger for the evening, but teaching them how to fish will address their hunger for life (at least, back in the day when fish were abundant!), teaching FTMs how to use the Internet to satisfy their information needs will prepare them for the mercurial existences of websites, removing a dependence on particular websites and replacing it with the ability to locate information resources "from scratch" as the need arises.

Module 3 is designed to pull together all of the skills developed in Modules 1-3. As students notice the resources which they located on their own listed in the pathfinder, *attention, relevance, confidence,* and *satisfaction* will be further reinforced.

With the variety of teaching methods in each module, including audio lectures, visuals, text, demonstrations/examples, hands-on practice, and the opportunity to discuss, make comments, and ask questions, learners with multiple intelligence and learning styles can be successfully reached. Participants in this course will have exposure to experiential learning through reacting, observing, analyzing, and doing.

Addendum

A basic suggested pathfinder can be located at:

http://students.washington.edu/jotto7/FTM_Pathfinder.html

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