

An Interview with Anne Vitale

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[The following is an interview conducted by the Update Co-Editor, Lin Fraser, EdD with her longtime friend and associate Anne Vitale, PhD. The interview took place by phone on Aug 27, 2010 in San Francisco and Pt. Reyes Station California. Anne's book may be purchased through the following link:

<http://www.lulu.com>]

Anne M. Vitale PhD is a senior clinician and charter member of HBIGDA, now WPATH. She is a founding member of BAGA (Bay Area Gender Associates, the longest ongoing peer consultation group devoted to transgender issues started in 1989 in San Francisco) and web visionary of <http://www.avitale.com> "Notes on Gender Role Transition", one of the earliest websites devoted to transgender issues (started in 1995). She is the author of the recently published book. (2010), "The Gendered Self: Further Commentary on the Transsexual Phenomenon", a compendium of her 30+ years experience working with the transgender community.

Lin Fraser (LF)- Tell us a little bit about your background.

Anne Vitale (AV)- I'm a shoe worker's daughter from back east who ended up with a doctorate in Psychology after art school. I wanted to be a painter

and I still enjoy painting, but I needed to earn a living. After so many years of therapy dealing with my gender identity issues, I decided to go back to school in



Anne Vitale, PhD

psychology and undergo transition at the same time. This was in 1975, and I was 37. I was 42 when I had my surgery on Jan 10, 1980. I had a long transition-5 years, and during that time, I went to school, worked on my dissertation, moved to the Bay Area and started my psychology assistantship at the same psychotherapy practice in San Rafael where I still work. I even joined HBIGDA, in 1979, during my transition at one of the first symposiums HBIGDA ever held in San Diego. I finished my PhD in 1982.

LF- Tell us a little more about your practice.

AV- I've seen approximately 500 people since 1984, people who came to see me to work on their gender issues. As you know, I co-founded BAGA with

you and a few other therapists in 1989 and I also started a website in 1995, "Notes on Gender Role Transition" where I posted information about transgender issues. I also posted my own ideas and writings. The site mushroomed over time, and it's still going strong. Back in the early days of the web there was not much information available in a central location. Hundreds of people have contacted me over the years asking for referrals in their home area and advice after seeing the website.

LF- How has your experience changed you over time?

AV- Well, I'm a different therapist now than I was when I first started. Experience has mattered. I used to be old school, pretty much a dyed-in-the-wool-don't start something if you can't complete it person. I was strict: no hormones, if you're not planning surgery. I believed in the idea of a complete sex change, and if you were going to do it, you needed to do it right. That's all changed now. I've seen people lead good lives without sex reassignment surgery. My job is to help people make their lives work, not to define them according to a particular model. Now I'm just a mellow-old lady who practices in San Rafael California. And I don't really believe that there's such a thing as a sex change. I even stopped using that term in my writings.

“...in a way I have blown the cover of the typical upbeat transgender narrative.”

Anne Vitale, PhD Interview Continued...

LF- Speaking of your writing, tell us about your new book.

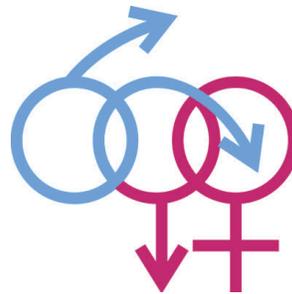
AV- Well, by way of background, I mentioned that in 1995 I started a website on transgender issues which got a lot of attention in the community. It was one of the first sites devoted to transgender issues and it gave me a forum to publish my ideas and get feedback. Even now, when I go to conferences, people surprise me by telling me it made a difference in their lives. That makes me feel very good.

In terms of the book, I had written a lot on the website, and I decided I didn't want to sugarcoat the transgender experience. I even stopped using the term sex change because I learned that transition was only a direction, not an either/or switch that gets turned to one pole or the other. I no longer believe you can turn a woman into a man or vice-versa. I wanted to clarify that only one's gender role changes but it's hard to write a scientific paper on that. I tried to publish in academic journals, but reviewers kicked my ideas back, saying 'this is only your opinion.' So I decided to write a book because that would be a less problematic way to talk about my views based on my years of experiences as both a therapist and a transsexual. Also, and this is quite important, the timing was right because I also had a way to publish a book. I could do it via the web both in paperback and ePub format. That made a huge difference.

LF- How would you describe your book?

AV- It's kind of a collection of my thoughts and notions, but some is evidence-based, especially the parts about the brain. I hadn't seen the science about genderizing the brain in one place, how it can go awry. I wanted to write all that down in one place and I wanted to write it in plain English for the non-science person.

LF- Yes, I particularly appreciated that part of your manuscript. I have read and highly recommend your entire book, but for me, the science was particularly enjoyable because



it was so clear for the layperson. I think you might be selling yourself short by saying your book is not evidence-based. You have many references. But I'm pleased to note that I really can hear your voice throughout the book.

AV- Yes, much is based on my experience. I've seen hundreds of people and I try to describe what I've learned over the years from them. In some ways my book is my continuation of Harry Benjamin's book "The Transsexual Phenomenon". I describe the condition, do a developmental review, describe treatment limits and options and therapeutic interventions, clinical interventions, the reality of the real-life experience without sugarcoating it, because, in my view, transition is extremely hard. I specifically describe early regrets, mid transition land mines and post-transition regrets and

conclude with post transition stories and finish with a summary.

LF- I would say that your book, although cautionary, is ultimately optimistic. Would you agree?

AV- Yes. I wrote the book to tell the truth about what it means to be transsexual, so in a way I have blown the cover of the typical upbeat transgender narrative. This is about the reality of T life. I couldn't say it's going to be hunky-dory. That's been written many times, so I've written something new. I also came up with what I think is a new term, "transpeak", which is the language trans people learn to be able to talk about their past lives truthfully without revealing too many specifics or outing themselves. But going back to your question, I would say my book is essentially trans positive, but I try to tell it like it is.

TG/TS controversy

LF- Along the lines of truth telling, I had heard you talk about your sense of feeling more invisible as a transsexual now that we are using transgender as an umbrella term. This shift in language has created some consternation for some, as you may know. Would you care to comment on this issue?

AV- I do recognize that many young people (and some older ones, too) don't see themselves as transsexual right off the bat, and transgender, as a concept, has worked for many people who do not transition fully, in the "old pattern". The term transgender doesn't mean anything to me personally, but it does to many people, so I'm content with its usage,

Anne Vitale, PhD Interview Continued...

even though I identify more with the term transsexual. It's the medical and psychological aspects of care that require standards, and WPATH provides that for all who need to access care for gender issues, transsexual or not".

Telehealth

LF- Speaking of the Standards, we're thinking of adding Telehealth, or eTherapy to the next version of the SOC. Since you've always been at the forefront of technology, have you tried distance counseling?

AV- Yes, but not a lot yet. What I have done has shown to be very effective. Mostly, I help relatives of children who appear gender dysphoric and the wives of cross dressers who have found my site, or people on Social Security with such modest incomes who live far away and even the cost of travel to the Bay Area is prohibitive. With this latter group, I talk on the phone and get paid by Medicare. I suspect we will be doing more and more work this way as it provides access to qualified clinicians.

LF- Is there anything we missed?

AV- No, I'm just amazed at how much I enjoyed this discussion.

LF- Thank you Anne for such an interesting interview and for all your good work. Even though I've known you for many years, I feel I learned a lot. I especially enjoyed your book and I'm sure our readers will too.

Lin Fraser, EdD is the President-Elect of WPATH, Co-Editor of the Update and is in Private Practice in San Francisco, California (USA)

Notes from the WPATH Board of Directors

Publications

The WPATH Consensus Group articles as well as the Executive Summary and the Response to the APA have been published in Volume 12(1) of the *International Journal of Transgenderism*. We invite comment on these articles through the list serve. The Human Rights paper and the Transvestic Fetishism paper will be published in the subsequent issue Volume, 12(2).

Committee Activities

The Board of Directors, Committee for Advocacy of Incarceration Persons and the Public Policy, Advocacy and Liaison Committee sent a letter to the Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, urging the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to provide medically necessary care for transgender and transsexual individuals who are in ICE custody that conforms to the WPATH Standards of Care.

The Board of Directors and the Public Policy, Advocacy and Liaison Committee are working with contacts in the State Department to try to amend the policy

around who can provide documentation letters changing sex designation on United States passports. The group of specialists specified were too narrow for the paradigm of treatment and care that has been in place for transitioning people for decades

Atlanta Symposium Sept 24-28, 2011

The WPATH Symposium will be taking place at Atlanta's Emory University Conference Centre September 24-28, 2011. Conference Chair, Dr Walter Bockting, and Local Organizing Chair, Dr. Vin Tangpricha, are planning a spectacular meeting, in conjunction with the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) and the Southern Comfort Conference. Dr Jason Schneider will be chairing the WPATH pre-conference that will be held September 24th. The Call for Papers for the Symposium can be found at http://www.wpath.org/events_symposium.cfm



Members of the 2013 Bangkok Symposium Planning Committee

Save the Date: Bangkok Symposium in Autumn 2013

The 2013 WPATH Symposium will take place at the Shangri-la Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. Drs. Lin Fraser and Preecha Tiewtranon, will chair this meeting. Meeting preparations are underway with the Thai delegation (Dr Preecha Tiewtranon, Dr. Apichai Angspatt and Conference Organizer, Pongsakorn Wittayapruachakul) having met with the WPATH delegation (Bean Robinson, Jeffrey Whitman, Vin Tangpricha and Lin Fraser) in Dr Fraser's San Francisco home on September 4,

Barcelona Congress, June 2010

The International Congress on Gender Identity and Human Rights

Two Perspectives: Winter & Winters

Comments by Sam Winter

The Barcelona Congress was billed as the first “global conference with transgender people, by transgender people and for transgender people. It aimed to gather and give voice to a group sparsely represented in society, to hear for the first time, with the participation of members around the world and from all cultures, an overall consideration of their problems, demands and proposed solutions”.

The organisers had two specific aims: (1) adoption of a document (The Barcelona Declaration) regarding legislative policy and human rights protection for transgender and (2) the development of a global gender identity network for monitoring developments, exchanging information, and enhancing practice as regards human rights for transpeople.

The Congress was unprecedented in breadth and scale and had the support of a large number of NGOs, city and state governments (in particular the Spanish Government, currently holding the Presidency of the European Union). It was really two events in one. The first was a pre-conference (1st-3rd June), located at the Frontair Congress Hotel (where most participants were staying). The second was the main conference (4th-6th June), at the Faculty of Law, University of Barcelona. I don't know the numbers at each, but I remember being impressed by the numbers at the pre-conference and being entirely unprepared for the even greater numbers at the main conference.

The pre-conference, extremely well-organised by GATE (Global Action for Trans* Equality), was aimed at capacity building, networking, and connecting groups to funders, as well as helping participants prepare for the main conference. Working groups were given opportunities to draft topic documents for

presentation at the main conference, gain approval, and ultimately form the basis for the Barcelona Declaration.

Before the conference, committed members of the global transgender community worked hard (using Google Groups) to tease out key issues and formulate basic positions. This enabled the working groups to complete draft documents of the five provisional topics for presentation on Saturday, June 5th. These topics were: 1. Violence, criminalization and institutional relations; 2. Gender identity and access to health services; 3. Legal or de facto discrimination in access to social services; 4. Requirements for change of identification papers or legal sex change; and 5. Creating an international transgender network. I felt fortunate to be invited to assist with topic 2: Gender identity and access to health services.

No final Barcelona Declaration has yet been published. There were several reasons for this. First, too few draft documents were sufficiently finalised at presentation. Second, there was a debate over whether those involved in the working groups (and attending the conference) were sufficiently representative of the worldwide trans community to produce and adopt any declaration that could claim global status. Africa, for example, was clearly underrepresented. Finally, there was a dispute over whether a paper on sex work could be presented to attendees. This paper was not presented -- a matter of great disappointment for many, including myself.

So where does that leave the Barcelona Declaration? There is no declaration ---- yet. But a Barcelona process remains alive. Where convenors of working groups felt that their documents had reached final form, those documents are

being disseminated. For example, with



Sam Winter, PhD

Sass Rogando-Sasot's kind permission, I have posted the document for Topic 1 (Violence, Criminalization, and Institutional Relations) on the TransgenderASIA website [<http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/>]. Other groups (for example Topic 2: Gender Identity and Access To Health Services) continue to work on their documents, taking care to expand membership to include a wider representation of transgender stakeholders than was present at Barcelona. In the near future I am hopeful that we will have the full range of documents leading to the final goal: a Barcelona Declaration. This will be a transgender rights declaration in every sense; including, most importantly, healthcare rights, drawn up by large numbers of transgender people working globally as never before, and truly representative of the global transgender community.

Sam Winter PhD, is an Associate Dean (Research) at the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong and a member of the WPATH Board of Directors. (Hong Kong)

Barcelona Conference Continued...

Comments by Kelley Winters

This June 2010, I was honored to attend the first International Congress on Gender Identity and Human Rights in Barcelona and the advocates' pre-conference that accompanied it. This unprecedented gathering of gender diversity from around the globe was a historic first step toward understanding, support, and collaboration among trans communities. For me, the Congress and Pre-conference, the latter sponsored by Global Action for Trans* Equality, provided remarkable opportunities to learn, to share perspectives, to make connections and to build bridges. I gained new friends, allies and memories in Barcelona that will last a lifetime.

For many years, I worked with international partnerships in the private sector, where business was done on the basis of personal trust which could take years to cultivate and earn. I feel that global community advocacy is analogous to this. Relationships are best cultivated in the first person and lay the foundation for subsequent mutual cooperation, strategic planning, and action. In this first meeting, it was not the formal agenda but the

informal ad hoc discussions in the hallways and courtyards that were most valuable to me.

When seeking hidden populations shrouded by closets, undeserved shame, and frequent criminalization, inclusion itself becomes an iterative process. From Indian Hijra to European Genderqueer, many diverse groups were brought together by the Congress as new gaps, such as American First Nation Two Spirit communities, were identified for future forums. Trans Sex Workers, a globally ubiquitous but often overlooked part of the transcommunity, voiced concerns and raised awareness at this gathering as never before. The Barcelona Congress was an essential step toward globally inclusive participation and the stated goal of "a global gender identity network ... for information exchange useful for activists, governments, and international organizations involved in an effective development of human rights."

A second goal of Congress organizers was to draft a Declaration document summarizing transgender human rights and healthcare issues for governments and international organizations. In my view, this goal was unreal-

istic in the time available for a first meeting. However, a good deal of progress was made on several key topics in fostering dialogue, clarifying issues, and moving toward consensus. A number of these efforts remain ongoing over the internet, made possible by the face-to-face interactions and personal relationships from the Congress. A Global Declaration document, like global and cultural inclusion itself, will require an iterative process and an ongoing series of international gatherings.



Kelley Winters, PhD

I believe that history will remember this Congress as a positive first step toward global dialogue on the diverse issues that transpeople face around the world. I hope this gathering will be the first of many.

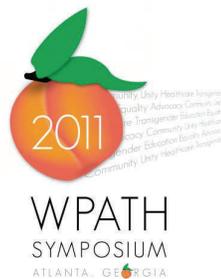
Kelley Winters, Ph.D., is the founder of GID Reform Advocates (gidreform.org) and the author of Gender Madness in American Psychiatry: 2008 Essays From the Struggle for Dignity (USA)

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH)

PRESENTS:

Transgender Beyond Disorder: Identity, Community, and Health

22nd WPATH Biennial Symposium
September 24 - 28, 2011 at the Emory Conference Center Hotel
Atlanta, Georgia (USA)

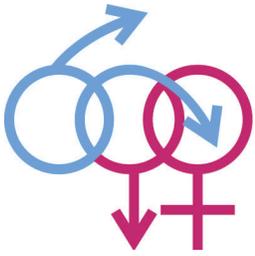


The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH)

1st CALL FOR PAPERS

We are currently accepting papers for presentations, panels, workshops & multi-media. To download an abstract submission form or to find more information. Please visit our website at www.wpath.org

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH)



(Formerly known as the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc.)

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The Update is the official publication of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. Items submitted to the editors for publication will be edited for clarity, readability, syntax, duplication, grammar, spelling as well as gender-biased language. Materials should be formatted as a MS Word attachment and sent to the email below.

Yearly Publication Schedule: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter

WPATH Mission Statement

As an international multidisciplinary professional Association, the mission of The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) is to promote evidence-based care, education, research, advocacy, public policy, and respect in transgender health.

WPATH Vision Statement

The vision of The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) is to bring together diverse professionals dedicated to developing best practices and supportive policies worldwide that promote health, research, education, respect, dignity, and equality for transgender, transsexual, and gender-variant people in all cultural settings.

Notes from the WPATH Office

WPATH's Redesigned Website

After several months of planning, design and implementation, the newly re-designed WPATH website is up and running. We are excited about the new look and feel of the website. Several new features have been added such as, a photo gallery, *Find A Provider Directory*, new committee pages, and Archives pages --- all with increased capabilities. In future editions of *The Update*, we will highlight these and other website features.

Grant funding helped pay for the website re-design. We are in the process of conducting a usability study to test the effectiveness and efficiency of the website. The usability study is being conducted by a former University of Minnesota graduate who is volunteering his time to the Association. The newly formed Member Communica-

tions & Technology Committee will begin a page by page evaluation of current content and edit information as needed to ensure accuracy and enhance our professional looking website.

While improvements and modifications are on-going with every website, we have some new features in the pipeline we plan to roll-out in the coming months. Plans are being made for a separate page dedicated to the Medical Necessity Statement.

We encourage you to log into the site and explore some of the new features at www.wpath.org

WPATH Medical Necessity Statement.

We have identified that internet searches for the Medical Necessity Statement increasing; this new page will

allow for easier indexing of the text of this important document. Other new features will include a RSS news-feed, an enhanced membership profile with picture and biography capability (facebook for WPATH), and additional *Find A Provider Directory* enhancements.

Membership Renewal for 2011 began on October 1, 2010.

The Association is pleased to announce there will be no membership dues increase this year. We are working hard to keep costs under control through careful budgeting, applying for outside grant funding, and keeping overhead costs low. We believe that our cost consciousness is paying off and hope to keep dues stable, for as long as possible.