

POV Community Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Things We Dare Not Do
a film by Bruno Santamaría

www.pbs.org/pov



THINGS WE DARE NOT DO

In the small Mexican coastal village of El Roblito, 16-year-old Ñoño lives what seems to be an idyllic existence with his loving family. But he holds a secret. Defying gender norms, Ñoño works up the courage to tell his family he wants to live his life as a woman. Yet when violence interrupts a community celebration, he must face the reality of a country shrouded in machismo and transphobia.

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This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Things We Dare Not Do* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

I had a secret in my life and I wanted to go in search of a place where I could talk about it. I thought that talking about the secrets would make me grow up, become more mature or that maybe it would be the other way around, that maturing and growing up would make me talk about the secrets.

The film just came to be, it wrote itself while making the film. At first, I only knew I wanted to film something that would feel like a process of growing up. I thought that filming with kids in a space where you could get to feel first-hand the violence we live in Mexico would allow me to be close to the transformation process of a coming of age.

I got to Roblito, and after almost four years of being close to those who wake up, work and sleep there, I began to feel and understand that the waves of violence in that town are awful, painful and traumatizing but everyone around is keeping up with their daily random routine.

Ñoño grabbed our attention. She was the oldest of the pack of kids, and I felt particular empathy towards her, maybe because we both rejected the masculinity of the adults from the town. She's the only teenager that hasn't gotten out of that place, the only adolescent that keeps hanging out with the kids.

We developed a friendship, and thanks to that I noticed that she was also keeping a secret: she dresses as a woman when nobody's watching. I think that the fact that we both were keeping a secret from our parents brought us closer despite our different ages and issues. It made us want to listen to each other. I talked to her about the contradiction of not being able to talk publicly about my boyfriend, and she talked to me about his dream of dressing as a woman. That was the beginning of a long journey of talks, moments, and dreams shared between us that got captured by the camera, and therefore, the film.

All the time I had ethical conflicts during the process of making the film. I worked with children and tried to be clear with them and also with their parents, all the time. That was the only way I found myself comfortable doing this movie. To me, it was important not to only be fair as a filmmaker, but also to be fair as a human being. For example, there is a sequence where I am in the middle of an intimate family confession and I was filming at the time. Suddenly the situation became so intimate that I was feeling out of place and I asked the family for permission to go out and leave them alone talking without a camera. It was they who decided for me to stay. Because they know me, they knew my inner conflicts. I was trying to find out how to be brave enough to find acceptance in the authority structure (family in this case). And Ñoño was doing so by asking her parents for permission to dress as a woman. And they knew how important it was for me to not only be there but also to film as well.

Things we dare not do is the outcome of this journey of dreams, accidents, and experiences. It's a film that seeks to make people feel more compassionate towards the complicated process of coming of age.

Bruno Santamaria Razo

This activity is useful as a way to invite participants into a shared space, ground one another in the space of community so everyone can be present during dialogue, and to establish a shared sense of intention.

Before You Begin: Here are some practices you can use to create discussion spaces that are powerful, challenging, safe and respectful.

Community Agreements

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion, or a group that knows each other well, creating a set of community agreements goes a long way to fostering powerful, insightful discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. [Here is a model](#) of Community Agreements you can review. You as the facilitator can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements. However, these steps will help the process:

- Pass around sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.
- Allow time for clarifying questions; make sure all understand the purpose of making a set of agreements and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- Go around in a circle and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- Go around 2-3 times to give participants multiple chances to contribute and to also give a conclusive end to the process.
- Read the list aloud.
- Invite questions or revisions.
- Ask if all are satisfied with the list.
- Ask all participants to sign the list of agreements. Leave it where all can see. As the facilitator, be mindful of the agreements throughout your session, noting if someone speaks or acts in a way that runs counter to them.

Create and Display an Outline

Another practice that builds a powerful foundation for a screening and discussion is creating a structure with clear beginning, middle and end that includes opening and closing activities.

For this screening, I suggest the following:

Opening: A Visualization (~5 minutes)

Note: this can be used to prepare for the following practice, “A Recollection”

Invite participants to close or lower their eyes. Ask them to take a few slow inhales and longer exhales. (2 seconds for the inhale and 4 for the exhale is a manageable count for most people.) Invite them to think back to their younger selves and to go as far back as they can remember. Ask them to try and find a memory before they had a clear sense of themselves as “boy” or “girl”, but simply as themselves. Or perhaps they can find a memory in which being “boy” or “girl” did not matter to the activity or the moment. Once they have chosen the moment, ask them to remember it with as much detail as they can. The sights, sounds, smells. Their age. What they were wearing. Who they were with. How they felt. What they were doing. Talk through the prompts at a slow pace. Allow a minute or so after the prompts for folks to continue remembering in silence. Bring the visualization to a close with another set of inhales and exhales and invite participants to open their eyes/look up and return to the group.

Preparation Activity: Recollection

~Time length depends on size of group; approximate about 5 minutes plus 2 minutes per participant

NOTE: Make sure participants have paper and pen/drawing materials and a comfortable surface to write/draw on

Ask participants to now take that visualization and write or draw it in as much details as they can. Inform them it will be for their eyes only, and that sharing will be optional. Allow five minutes.

When done, round robin style, invite participants to share their recollection. As the facilitator, try to take notes on patterns or themes that emerge in the recollection. Notice what repeats might emerge. When all who choose to share are done, share out the themes and patterns that you heard in the sharing out.

Thank everyone for their participation.

Closing: Affirmation to Younger Self**-Time length depends on size of group; estimate 1 minute per person**

The closing follows the screening and discussion. Ask all participants to think about this question and write the answer of an affirmation to their younger self: “What would you tell your younger self about being in the world, in your particular body, in your particular gender?” Share aloud around the circle.

Display: It can be helpful for people to have a sense of the order and timing of an event. Also, make sure everyone knows where they can access water, bathrooms, or any other bio needs.

Here is sample text for a display; either printed on sheets and passed out, or written on a large piece of paper and displayed. Make sure to read the outline aloud at the start of the activity so as to be accessible to all.

- Welcome to the screening & discussion of *Things We Dare Not Do*.
 - Bathrooms and Water can be found “...”
- Opening (2- 5 minutes)
- Setting Community Agreements (10-15 minutes)
- Opening Activity: Recollection (approximate time, and write here)
- Film Screening: *Things We Dare Not Do* (1 hour and 15 minutes)
- Discussion (20 minutes)
- Closing: Share out (approximate time, and write here)



THE FILM: KEY PARTICIPANTS

Dayanara: - The protagonist of the film; a transgender youth who viewers first meet before she begins to live publicly as a woman. We'll refer to her pre-transition as "Ñoño." She is nineteen years old, the oldest of a "pack" of kids in Roblito. She emerges as the teacher, leader, and often caregiver of the town's youth. She is the first in Roblito to come out as transgender and does so without precedent or model. She knew no other transgender people and does not have access to the internet. Dayanara says of her journey, that she did not have a label for herself, did not know she was undertaking a "coming out" process. She felt her way towards a language and mode of living that was true to who she knew herself to be.

The kids: We meet a pack of kids, ranging in age from about four to nineteen. We do not get to know any one of these children in depth; in turn one or the other emerges: the child who does not want their hair brushed, the child who already feels in charge-shouting to her mother not to gossip about her. We see these young people in play and in school, formally dressed for a town ceremony, entranced by a free movie screening in the town square. We get to know the life of the town through the mood and experiences of these youth.

Roblito: The town of Roblito is a tiny, remote fishing village. Our story of Dayanara is set entirely in this town; we witness her and her transition almost entirely in its small grid of streets and homes. We understand there is no anonymity to her process; all that she experiences will be experienced in tandem with Roblito.



Things We Dare Not Do is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Gender Identity
- Gender Roles
- Gender Norms
- Transgender Experiences in Mexico
- LGBTQIA Experiences in Rural Communities
- Social, Cultural, and Political Violence



HELPFUL CONCEPTS, DEFINITION, AND LANGUAGE FOR FRAMING

NOTE: Understanding that participants in your conversation will arrive with differing degrees of knowledge and experience with regards to the topics Things We Dare Not Do invites you to explore, it is helpful to review common concepts and arrive at a shared understanding ahead of your discussion. This will help ensure the safety of all participants and work to support the community agreements you have established.

Gender: The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.

Gender binary: A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender Identity: A person's private sense of and experience with being a boy or man, girl or woman; a blend of both or neither; or a gender that may or may not correspond to the individual's biological sex. Gender identity is personal and is not visible to others and can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Normative: Behaviors, representations, and ways of being that are compatible with, or aligned to, an established cultural expectation of gender identities

Gender Nonconformity: A term referring to people whose behaviors, representations, and ways of being that are incompatible with, or reject, traditional social and cultural expectations of gender identities. Essentially, this term refers to people whose gender expression does not fit neatly into rigid categories of what gender is supposed to mean and what is expected from people of different genders.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Sex: The public classification of people as "male or female" at birth, based on bodily/anatomical characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia.

Gender Performance/Gender Expression: External manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine and feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expressions align with their gender identities, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender Non-conforming: This is a term used to describe people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender, nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming.

HELPFUL CONCEPTS, DEFINITION, AND LANGUAGE FOR FRAMING

Cisgender: A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. “Cis-” is a Latin prefix meaning “on the same side as,” and is therefore an antonym of “trans-.” A more widely understood way to describe people who are not transgender is simply to say non-transgender people.

Non-binary: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Queer: A term often used to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that do not abide by traditional or mainstream expectations of gender and sexuality.

Sex assigned at birth: The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy

Sexual Orientation: Describes an individual’s enduring, inherent, and immutable physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would identify as a straight woman. (Note: an individuals’ sexual orientation exists independently from their gender identity.)

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms—including transgender. Some of those terms are defined below. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identities. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.

Transitioning: A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.

Tools for Understanding:

As you review these concepts and definitions, these two graphics from TSER, the Trans Student Educational Resources) can support your community in understanding and learning:

[The Gender Unicorn](#)
[Gender Pronouns](#)

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Gender Identity/Gender Roles

Tip for Facilitators: This section includes two graphics. Facilitators are encouraged to share these graphics with participants. Though it's a lot of paper, printing and distributing these as handouts helps to encourage participants to keep and take home for their own further study and consideration, even to share with family and friends. This is a useful practice because many may come to discussions about gender with differing degrees of knowledge and experience which may lead to hesitation and disengagement.

Many of us have been raised within a binary framework that defines gender as “male” or “female.” From the moment we are born, this binary of male/female (or man/woman) is designated to us at birth when we are defined as “Boy” or “Girl” based on the appearance of our bodies. Even before birth, gender is commonly assigned and celebrated at gender “reveal” parties based on in utero screening results. These gender assignments are often accompanied by first lessons in how to perform gender as well. Though subtle, these lessons are consistent and can be seen, for instance, in the social determination of blue as a color for “boys” and pink as the color associated with “girls.”

However, there are (and have always been) people whose fundamental sense of themselves, who they know themselves to be, is a gender other than what was assigned to them when they were born. This experience is common for **transgender** people. A person who was labeled a boy at birth, but knows themselves to be a girl is transgender. As an adult, this person is a transwoman. Likewise, a person labeled a girl at birth, but knows themselves to be a boy is transgender - a transboy and later a transman. In contrast, someone who is labeled a girl at birth and continues to identify as a girl or woman, is cisgender, or a “ciswoman” for short. (Likewise for men; “cismen”).¹ Regardless of the genders we are ascribed, our **gender identity** is the gender we know ourselves to be. It is self-assigned and comes to us from whatever source our markers of self come to us.

Gender expression is how we present our gender to the world; how we perform and convey our gender. Everyone has ways of expressing gender, regardless of whether they are cisgender or transgender.

¹ Understanding Transpeople: The Basics. National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016. www.transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-transgender-people-the-basics. Accessed 4 Oct. 2021.

The Gender Unicorn. Trans Student Educational Resources. www.transstudent.org/gender/. Accessed 4 Oct. 2021.

Gender Pronouns. Trans Student Educational Resources. www.transstudent.org/graphics/pronouns101/. Accessed 4 Oct. 2021.

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Put simply, our gender expression is commonly visible to others: it can be reflected by the clothes we wear, how we style our hair, or the makeup or jewelry we do or do not wear. On a more intimate level, it can be a part of our language, how we move our bodies, our hobbies, interests, and/or how we carry ourselves as gendered people in the world. Our gender expression can change by the day or the hour, and can be fluid - disregarding the binary of male/female. It is both intimate and public; our inner sense of self expressed outwardly, in public to the people around us.

While the **gender binary** is an established Western norm from which transpeople must break, many indigenous cultures around the world have always had multiple gender identities woven into their sense of selves and language. For such communities, the notion of two rigidly defined genders breaks with their understanding and definitions of gender.¹ Some indigenous scholars argue that fluid definitions of gender are fundamentally indigenous.² For example, in Mexico, the muxe of the Zapotec (centered in the state of Oaxaca) are one of the most well known “third gender” communities.³

Like most remnants of colonization, gender expression exists as a dominant set of rules we were born into, and has established a prescribed code for how we “should” present ourselves and how to determine the gender of the people around us.⁴ Depending on our country, age, culture, and community there are likely specific clothing items and modes of adornment that are marked as masculine or feminine. These have also always evolved.

At present however, for many of us, the choices we make in how to dress, walk, talk, and look are some of the most fundamental we make in how we are perceived, and by extension - treated - by the people around us. *To speak of gender, therefore, is also to speak of an intricate and inflexible set of rules of behavior and presentation.* One might argue that these rules themselves are violent, in that to step outside of them is to become vulnerable to threats of all kinds, including physical.⁵

1 Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. Emma Talks: “decolonial love: building resurgent communities of connection,” April 8, 2015. Vancouver, BC.

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Throughout History (graphic). GLAAD.

www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/styles/1200px/public/images/2015-05/may%2017%20because.png?i-tok=e6veUa20. Accessed 6 Oct. 2021.

2 Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake.

3 Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Beyond Gender: Indigenous Perspectives, Muxe. www.nhm.org/stories/beyond-gender-indigenous-perspectives-muxe.

4 Feliciano, Ivette. PBS Newshour. When Enforcing Gender Norms Turns Violent.

www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/enforcing-gender-destroys-individual-identity-todays-youth. 31 May, 2015.

5 Shraya, Vivek. Emma Talks: “I’m Afraid of Men,” October, 1, 2018 Vancouver BC

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And yet, to follow them at the expense of one's own sense of self, is to suffer an attack on one's own capacity to live a life in true alignment with oneself. Such is the quiet ferocity of gender norms: these rules govern all of us, no matter our gender identity or expression.

LGBTQIA+ IDENTITY IN MEXICO & RURAL COMMUNITIES

Historically, LGBTQIA+ communities have thrived in urban centers. New York, San Francisco, & Mexico City have all been centers of queer community. Cities often reflect more progressive politics than rural spaces, thereby creating safe conditions for LGBTQIA+ people to live and thrive. This, in turn, contributes to stronger systems of medical care, legal support, and the solidarity of a more expansive social network. However, queer people have always also chosen to make home in rural communities and continue to do so in increasing numbers today. Recent surveys and scholarship have suggested that the lack of structural support in smaller, more rural towns can be countered by the intimacy of being known, by being part of a community in which you may be a minority, but in which the fact of being an integral part of that space, forges (perhaps) unexpected acceptance.¹ And finally, many gay and transpeople of color have long challenged the notion of gay enclaves as welcoming havens, citing their own experiences of being excluded from such spaces for their racial and ethnic identities.²

Discussion of LGBTQIA+ life in Mexico also tends to be focused on the cities. This is especially true of representation and discussion of trans people. A 2020 survey by the Williams Institute (out of UCLA) set out to create the most comprehensive to date examination of Mexican beliefs and attitudes towards trans people. However, the authors of the study simultaneously acknowledged that though it tried to correct its findings accordingly, its reach did not extend into the *campo*, the huge swaths of Mexican culture that exist in the mountains, jungle, the coasts, far from metropolitan centers.

The Williams Study also highlighted the contrasts between laws, attitudes, and the lived experience of trans people in Mexico. According to the survey, attitudes towards transgender people in Mexico is largely accepting.³ And on paper, since early the early 2000's Mexico has been steadily advancing in its legal recognition of gay and trans rights. Same sex marriage is legal, discrimination based on sexual orientation is illegal, transpeople have the right to change their name and gender on their legal documents.

1 Movement Advancement Project. Where We Call Home: LGBT People in Rural America. April 2019. p 49, Stellino, Sarah. Interview with Shoshana in Queering Rural Spaces (photos & interviews). www.sarahstellinophoto.com/queering-rural-spaces. 2021

2 Moore, Darnell L. The Gentrification of Queerness, The Nation. www.thenation.com/article/archive/stonewall-christopher-street-gentrification/. 25 June, 2019.

3 Williams Institute of UCLA School of Law. Public Opinion of Transgender Rights in Mexico. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/opinion-trans-rights-mexico/>. December 2020.

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And yet, in 2019 Mexico had the second highest murder rate of transwomen in the world (second to Brasil)¹ and in 2020 violence against LGBTQ+ individuals continued to surge.² The rate of violence is a painful reminder that laws do not govern attitudes and ideas. One compelling observation from the Williams Survey was that when a respondent cited knowing a trans person, all of that respondent's answers skewed towards greater acceptance and embracing of trans rights. This correlation speaks to what many queer folks in rural communities have named anecdotally; that the smallness of their towns means there is a familiarity that in turn creates acceptance.

In any consideration of trans identity and experience, we have to be mindful of moments of erasure. A so-called “lack of visibility” of trans people is - in reality - a refusal of others to see and recognize trans life around them. This erasure, or refusal to recognize transpeople, is evidenced in how difficult it can be to find articles, books, movies, lectures on any element of translife in Mexico other than the violence faced by transwomen in Mexico City and the enclave of muxe life of the Zapotec in Oaxaca. While a spectrum of experience is real, these representations only account for one side of a spectrum, and leave little space to witness, celebrate, and learn from the lived, daily experiences of people like Dayanara.

LIVING WITH DANGER AND VIOLENCE

Violence exists in many forms, all around us, all the time. In *Things We Dare Not Do*, we witness both the omnipresent threat of gun violence in Roblito (and Mexico) and the more quiet, though pervasive, violence embedded in the rules that govern gender identity and gender roles.

Importantly, violence always has a context: in 2006, Mexico began its “war on drugs” with encouragement and funding from the United States.³ The lived experience for the citizens of Mexico can be devastating. The homicide rate in Mexico has been rising since 2007, with a small reduction between 2010-2013, and then a steady rise since 2014.⁴

1 The Associated Press. NBC News. Trans women in Mexico fight for justice as murders go unpunished <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trans-women-mexico-fight-justice-murders-go-unpunished-n1051886>. 10 September, 2019.

2 Lopex, Oscar. Thomas Reuters Foundation. Mexico sees deadliest year for LGBT+ people in five years. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-lgbt-murders-trfn-idUSKBN22R37Y>. 15 May, 2020.

3 The United States government funds the Mexican government's assaults on drug cartels. The United States population funds the drug cartels by providing a never-ending pool of customers. The Mexican government is funded by both the US government and the drug cartels on both municipal, state, and national level. One excellent source on this brutal web is the book *The Interior Circuit* by Francisco Goldman. See source list for details.

4 National Institute of Statistics & Geography (INEGI). /en.www.inegi.org.mx/app/indicadores/?ind=6200108948&tm=8#divFV6200108948#D6200108948

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In 2020, the murder rate of 29 people per 100,000 (as opposed to 5 per 100,000 in the US.) However, in the states that border the US, the rates are much higher, an average of 70 per 100,000.¹

People identified as women in Mexico commonly bear the brunt of violence and lead the resistance to the government's failures in dealing with that violence. "Femicide" is the murder of women because of their gender. (The term was coined by Mexican journalists in the 1990's to address the high murder rate of women in the border city of Ciudad de Juarez.) As of 2020, 11 women were murdered every day in Mexico. 57 of those murders were of transwomen. That threat is magnified by the brutal phenomenon of disappeared persons, including children, in the country. Since the early 2000's over 73,000 have gone missing. Usually, it is the mother of each of those people who take on the charge of trying to find their lost loved ones.²

These are devastating statistics. But reliance on these numbers means that violence and suffering are what we are using to frame daily life in Mexico. Within that frame, is just one version of being Mexican in Mexico, but it is where our gaze is directed at the expense of all else that colors life. This is a potent example of how the gaze itself becomes violent, in that it begins to deny other forms of existence. This is also the powerful intervention that *Things We Dare Not Do* offers us: a representation of life that is not centered on violence and statistics.

The violence of normative frames of gender (i.e. the gender binary) is itself a system of framing that can do great harm. For instance, this rigid frame of boy/girl excludes anyone who does not fit neatly into those frames. In effect, the frame itself renders anyone who does not fit within it unrecognizable. This refusal to see a person as they are is another form of assault, one that plays out on both interpersonal and societal levels.

As mentioned in the previous section, the lack of diverse representation centering translife in Mexico contributes to more subtle forms of violation. If, when translife is reported in the news, the majority of those stories focus on the violence, often deadly, directed at trans people, trans women in particular - then we must wonder what narratives of the trans experience are being reflected. On the one hand, it is essential that these assaults are reported and the activism work of countless organizations must be applauded for making sure these numbers and names are known.

1 The Associated Press. Mexico's homicide rate stayed high in 2020 despite pandemic. <https://apnews.com/article/homicide-coronavirus-pandemic-latin-america-mexico-a90c2a172f39ab2546de-465c73a60543>. 20 January, 2021.

2 Beatley, Meaghan. The Nation. Mexico's Women Demand Justice on Gender Violence. <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/women-mexico-rape-protest/>. 16 September, 2020.

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However, when those are the only stories widely reported, it becomes its own form of assault, one that equates the lived experience of trans women with the rates of which they are attacked. When the only experiences deemed worthy of reporting are experiences of threat, what becomes of the everyday joys and mundane facts of life for trans people? What frames are being implemented through which we are able to recognize trans people's lives as simply, *livable lives*?

Bruno Santamaria Razo, the director of *Things We Dare Not Do*, noted that, "After almost four years of being close to those who wake up, work and sleep there, I began to feel and understand that the waves of violence in that town are awful, painful and traumatizing but everyone around is keeping up with their daily random routine." In his work of both memoir and journalism, *The Interior Circuit*, writer Francisco Goldman, observed that to live in Mexico in these years is to live intimately with both loss and trauma and the simultaneous knowledge that there is no reliable governing body to step in and provide answers, retribution, or resolution. Every civilian who experiences a moment of violence knows that they must define for themselves what "justice" might be, what might provide a conclusion to their grieving or trauma. He writes also that many won't ever find that conclusion and must find a path through that uncertain terrain on their own. Many women and transwomen in Mexico are now forging that path through activism, through an intergenerational and growing wave of protests that many are calling a revolution; a demand for an end to the current lived experience of violence through a transformation of the language, attitudes, and treatment of trans and cisgendered women in every aspect of their lives.



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STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

- Close your eyes. What is one image that comes to mind from the film? What mood does that image call up for you?
- What do you think is coming next for Dayanara in her life? Both in the daily reality of work, home, relationships, and in the realm of her emotional life?
- In one sentence, what do you think this movie is about?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENDER IDENTITY

Much of the movie centers on the interactions of the group of children of which Ñoño is often the leader and teacher. Why do you think the children are centered in a film that concludes with Ñoño's "coming" out as transgender?

In what ways were gender norms present in the film? What was communicated to boys about being boys, and to girls about being girls? How were those messages communicated?

Is this film about being transgender? Did you notice if that term was said explicitly in the film?

How did you expect Ñoño's parents to react when she asked their permission to dress as a woman? What stood out to you about the scene?

While once taboo, in many parts of the world girls and women now can wear pants without causing a social stir. Might it be possible that in not so long boys, no matter what their gender identity, can also wear skirts and dresses as simply a choice of fashion or comfort?

LGBTQIA+ IDENTITY IN RURAL CONTEXTS

Do you think Dayanara is accepted in her town? What impressions do you have of her role in the community?

We don't receive much specific information about the town in which this film is set. Did you like being immersed into daily life without external context? Why or why not? Why do you think the filmmaker made that decision?

Do you think Dayanara will continue to live in her town once she begins dressing like a woman publicly? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**LIVING AMONGST DANGER AND VIOLENCE**

Do you think Dayanara feels safe in her community? Why or why not?

How did you feel when the festivities were interrupted by gun violence?

What moments in the film felt charged with threat or danger? What made them feel that way? (Likewise, what moments conveyed security, safety, peace? What made them feel that way?)

The filmmaker does not give much explanation for the shooting. Why do you think they made that choice? What effect does that have on you as the viewer?

What did the children's conversations the next day tell you about their experience of violence?

Do you think Dayanara is "safe" as a transgender woman in her community. Why or why not? How do you define safety for her?

CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF DOCUMENTARY & REPRESENTATION

What sense do you get of the relationship between the filmmaker and the subjects of the film? What gave you that impression?

What effect do you think the filmmaker's presence, with a camera, may have had on the scene in which Ñoño asks her parents for permission to dress as a woman?

The filmmaker spends a great deal of time filming children, including one scene in which a child is bathing. Did you feel that this was an ethical, filming relationship? Why or why not?

In a few moments, there is quiet dialogue between the filmmaker behind the camera and the people they are filming. Did you notice those moments? What did they add, or take away from, the overall film?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CLOSING ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL)

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

What does this film communicate about childhood, and about leaving childhood? By extension, what do we lose and what do we gain when we stop being children and become adults?

AFFIRMATION TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF

Ask all participants to think of an affirmation to their younger self: "What would you tell your younger self about being in the world, in your particular body, in your particular gender?" Share aloud around the circle.

RESOURCES

Here are some resources and organizations you can explore and share with your community for continued learning and connection:

[Asociación Por Las Infancias Transgénero](#)

Focuses on supporting youth and their families they navigate the medical, legal, and social challenges of transitioning gender.

[National Center for Transgender Equality](#)

A national organization founded by trans-activists that focuses on policy as a means to affect change.

[Red de Juventudes Trans](#)

A Mexican trans youth organization focused on creating a network of trans youth activists.

[Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Through History](#). GLAAD.[Trans Student Educational Resources](#)

A youth-led organization dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans and gender non-conforming students through advocacy and empowerment. Founded in 2011, it is the only national organization led by trans youth.

[Understanding Transgender People](#) PDF | National Center for Transgender Equality

JADE SANCHEZ-VENTURA



Jade Sanchez-Ventura is a writer and radical educator. She works in memoir and her personal essays have been published across an array of online literary journals, and in print with Slice Magazine and Seal Press. Her work has been featured on Bitch Media’s Popaganda podcast and been awarded the Slice Literary Conference “Bridging the Gap” award; a Disquiet Literary conference fellowship; and a Hertog fellowship. She is a regular contributor to MUTHA Magazine, which champions a fiery re-imagining of parenting. As an educator, she is very good at being continually wowed by her students and their words on the page. She believes a commitment to racial equity and social justice is essential to the practice of teaching. She has spent the last decade studying and implementing this pedagogical approach to education with the Brooklyn Free School, an urban democratic free school in New York City. Though she has ties to many countries, she has always made her home in Brooklyn, New York. She’s on Instagram posting about radical parenting, teaching, race, writing, and other such matters; find her @jade_m_sv

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