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LIVE WORLD PREMIERE  
ROCK MUSICAL

# TRANS AM

by Lisa Stephen Friday

featuring the music of  
Lisa Jackson & Girl Friday



there's a  
lot i don't know  
but i know who i am



## Overview: The Intersection of Race and Gender

TRANS AM examines bias, stereotypes, and what the larger society considers "normal." The primary theme of the play focuses gender and its application to an individual as "other."

The play's main character is marginalized and "othered," not because of skin color, but rather societal norms.

The following materials will help you to recognize how society and individuals marginalize others based on our differences.

Remember, **different** doesn't mean **worse or better**, it just means ***different***.

## Key Themes

- What is Gender?
- Normal vs. Strange
- Beautiful and Beauty
- Bias

### What is Gender?

**Gender and Race are both social constructs.**

A social construct is an idea that has been created and accepted by people in a society.

Social constructs reinforce norms and power.

Gender - Gender refers to the characteristics of **women, men, girls and boys** that are socially constructed.

This includes norms, behaviors, legal status, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other.

As a **social construct**, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Gender and the structures of society are so intertwined that objective language can be difficult to find.



## Other Definitions

- **Cisgender** - Cisgender describes a person whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender Identity** is the internal perception of one's gender and how they label themselves based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their gender options to be.
  - **Gender Discrimination** is the result of the social structure that distributes power to certain people and involves inequity.
- **Sex** is a category, most often male or female, assigned at birth based on genitalia and chromosomes.
- **Social Construct** - A concept or perception of something based on the collective views developed and maintained within a society or social group; a social phenomenon or convention originating within and cultivated by society or a particular social group, as opposed to existing inherently or naturally.



## **How do Race and Gender Discrimination Intersect?**

**Racism and sexism operate together to ‘de-gender’ men and women of color.**

**This ‘de-gendering’ is a form of dehumanization.**

- Historical Example: White women were stereotyped as fragile and consigned to the care of children. Black women were forced to do work that was counter to the concept of the ‘ideal woman’ such as work in the fields. After slavery was abolished, white women were expected to be homemakers, while black women were expected (and needed) to work to support their families. Racism and sexism operate together to create the perception of racial and gender anomaly and reinforce social norms.
- Historical Example: Targeted racism against Asian Americans led to the first anti-immigration law in the United States: *the Chinese Exclusion Act*. Chinese men were restricted to jobs doing restaurant and laundry - traditionally “female” jobs thereby perpetuating a stereotype that Asian men are less than masculine - not the ideal, aggressive, wage earning, (white) man. Racism and gender discrimination reinforce each other.

**Current examples include:**

- Cinema - equity in access to roles
- Television - stereotypes in casting
- Media - news stories - systemic issues treated as one-offs
- Disproportionally white professions - ie. lawyers

**Gender non-conformity is stigmatized in the United States resulting in:**

- Extreme pressure to conform to gender expectation and norms
- Harsh discrimination for those who are not cisgender - especially POC
- Exclusion from public spaces and workplaces
- Violence especially against Black transgender women

## **Activity 1: Normal vs. Strange**

### **Quotes from TRANS AM:**

*Sometime around the age of six.....*

*My mother came into the room and she was quite taken back by her little boy sitting on the couch in a skirt, And she says to me, (Lisa Speaking as her mother) "Stephen Mark Friday what are you doing? Little boys do not wear women's clothes." Her tone was not one of anger, but I could tell by the inflections in her voice that my actions were not acceptable and should not be repeated.*

**TRANS AM**

*I spent so many sleepless nights as a teenager struggling with an internal battle of wanting to present as female. It was so foreign to me that I couldn't identify what the struggle was about. I had also gotten very involved with my youth group at the First United Methodist Church and all the info I was receiving there was less than helpful for my situation. had actually become the lead singer of a Christian Rock Band. I wrote this song called "Don't You Cry No More," The first verse starts out:*

*"When you're at home and all alone and Temptation's knocking on your door...."*

*It was a direct reference to me standing in my mother's closet and begging god to remove the degenerate demons from my soul! Yes, the Southern preachers had gotten into my head...*

**TRANS AM**



## **Activity 1: Questions**

- Has there been a time when your identity was disregarded or dismissed? When you were considered “strange”? Did you also feel that you were looked upon as inferior?

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- How did you develop your idea of “normal”? From others, parents, family, religion, etc. Does it serve a purpose? If so, what purpose does it serve to discount people who do not fit in our idea of “normal”?

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- Was there a time when you challenged your idea or perceptions of normal?

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- Whose responsibility is it to teach us about those who differ from the “norm”?

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## **Activity 2: Beauty and Beautiful**

When you realize the word “beautiful” has evoked hundreds of different images throughout the course of history, it becomes easier to see those standards not as some all-powerful truth, but as just one more idea of what beauty can be.

White European standards of beauty have been the “norm” or the standard of beauty for women for many years. (thin, white, blond hair, blue eyes, - unattainable for most women). Because white European standards of beauty are ubiquitous, it can be difficult to see different representations of beauty as acceptable and desirable. And it must be acknowledged that white standards of beauty serve to exclude women of color.

And when we realize that “beauty” is a subjective concept — that there are various ways to define it — it makes room for us to see beauty in diversity; to realize there are just as many ways to be beautiful as there are different people in the world.



## **Activity 2: Questions**

- How do concepts of beauty, gender, and race reinforce each other?

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- How did you develop your idea of beauty and who or what is beautiful?

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- Where do norms of beauty come from? How are they perpetuated?

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- In what ways are notions of beauty social constructs? Have they changed?

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- Beauty norms are another way to exclude people from our “normal” society. Think of traits which are not considered beautiful. Media plays a large part, our society has a basic vision (European white norms) of what beauty is and if we don’t buy into it, we are then the outsider. What is the basic vision of beauty?

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- How do concepts of beauty and gender reinforce each other?

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## Activity 3: Bias & the -isms

**Bias** is a preference in favor of, or against, a person, group of people, or object. These initial human reactions, which are often unconscious, are can be rooted in misinformation and are potentially harmful. Biases are also part of being human.

When we can begin to **recognize** our own patterns of bias we have the power to challenge the negative or harmful biases within ourselves.

### Why are we all biased?

Bias is how our minds streamline thinking so we can quickly make sense of the world. For instance, we may have biases about gender, race, ableism, religion, etc.. Our beliefs may be unfounded and illogical but our brains are biologically designed to perform these quick judgments unconsciously.

In early prehistory, this unconscious, streamlined thinking was a form of protection against threats from the natural world. Over time, this way of processing has persisted between individuals and groups of people. When acknowledging another person or group, the brain intuitively forms an opinion (good, bad, or indifferent) often minimizing the complexity and humanity of others. Although bias is automatic, with practice, we can learn to change our thinking to allow a fuller, more nuanced understanding of others.



## **Activity 3: Questions**

- How does bias and our stereotypes of those who are different than us (better term for strange) in a specific way impact our lives?

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- How are our biases reinforced?

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- How can you challenge your bias?

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