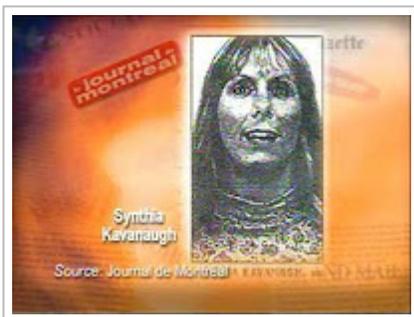




The Transgender Inmate Experience

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2008

Synthia Kavanagh Human Rights Case



Discrimination is nothing new for transgendered inmates. The injustice starts as soon as they are taken into custody. The debate as to where to place transgendered people often leads to them being placed with those of the sex that they don't identify with or in solitary

confinement for their own protection. This is especially an issue when the prisoner is pre-operative. There have been many cases of transgendered prisoners fighting this human rights violation.

One of the most publicized cases in Canada is the Synthia Kavanagh Human Rights Case (<http://www.chrt-tcdp.gc.ca/>). Synthia Kavanagh was born a man but has been living as a woman since the age of 13. She legally changed her name from Ricky at the age of 19. When Synthia was arrested in 1989, she had already begun the process of her transition. When sentenced to life imprisonment for murder, Synthia was taking hormone therapy in preparation for sex reassignment surgery. The judge on her case recommended that she be placed in a female prison; nevertheless Corrections Canada put her in a male institution, and restricted her hormone dosage which started to reverse the physical changes she had already endured. She was repeatedly denied her request for SRS. Distraught Synthia attempted to cut off her penis, and spent years in segregation after being harassed, taunted and sexually assaulted in the general population (<http://www.prisonjustice.ca/>).

Kavanagh filed a complaint with human rights arguing that the Canadian government had an obligation to provide her with adequate medical care, including sex reassignment surgery. As well she filed for the right to be placed in a female prison. She was successful in both her claims. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal agreed that the current policy of housing male to female transgendered prisoners among the male population was discriminatory. They required Corrections Canada to start assessing transgendered inmates and their housing needs individually with an expert doctor in the treatment of gender dysphoria (http://dawn.thot.net/Synthia_Kavanagh.html). Synthia won the right to her SRS and was moved to a female institution.

Though this case was a big leap forward for the rights of transgendered inmates, its ruling is not without flaw. A case by case policy leaves

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We are a group of professional social work students who have been asked by our institution to create a blog on transgender inmates. We will be especially interested in exploring the policies and procedures which are responsible for the creation of a repressive atmosphere for the transgender population. As such, we will be viewing this issue from within an anti-oppressive framework. We invite fellow bloggers who have a curiosity or interest in the experiences of transgender incarceration to participate and contribute.

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each individual at the mercy of the judge, doctor and prison officials they encounter. This perpetuated the ongoing violation of their human rights.

For more examples of transgendered experiences in prison see:

[http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/07/20/state/n165230D88.DTL)

[f=/n/a/2007/07/20/state/n165230D88.DTL](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/07/20/state/n165230D88.DTL)

[http://www.the519.org/programs/trans/resourses/TPIP-](http://www.the519.org/programs/trans/resourses/TPIP-Trans%20people%20in%20the%20prison%20system.pdf)

[Trans people in the prison system.pdf](http://www.the519.org/programs/trans/resourses/TPIP-Trans%20people%20in%20the%20prison%20system.pdf)

Prisoner of Gender by Kathy Johnson

<http://cruelandunusualfilm.com/>

Posted by [Policy Interpretations](#) at 11:00 AM

Reactions: funny (0) interesting (0) cool (0)



7 comments:



[Bill Whatcott](#) April 14, 2011 at 5:57 PM

It appears to me your social work curriculum is confusing you on the topic of gender. There are only two genders "male" and "female." Synthia was born "male" and is still today a 100% male, notwithstanding his genital mutilation and hormone therapy.

The idea of pandering to his gender confusion and putting him into a women's prison was nothing short of sheer madness. The media has revealed that he trashed the Edmonton Prison for Women and with his large (male) body mass he has terrorized the actual females there. The last anyone had heard, Synthia is now in segregation in a women's prison in Ontario.

Pandering to Synthia's and the so-called "experts" gender confusion has been an unnecessary burden to to taxpayer and a major security headache to Corrections Canada.

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Replies

[Anonymous](#) May 11, 2012 at 12:19 PM

Thank you for proving that people still prefer to sit in their ignorance than actually be educated on transgendered issues. Read a book!



[cherie pammett](#) September 29, 2013 at 4:23 PM

synthia has had the procedure to remove her male genitalia and is very much a female,she is not segregated anywhere,she is in general population and has earned her parole to a halfway house,she is doing very well.as for her large male frame.There are many women housed in GVI that r much bigger then her,Iknow her very well as i was

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- Synthia Kavanagh Human Rights Case

once an inmate at GVI and allso know the details of her murder conviction.I would have reacted the same way she did,and give her props for dealing with her sentance the way she does,prison is hard enough nevermind what she has endured

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Anonymous [September 1, 2012 at 2:01 PM](#)

<http://www.trustchristorgotohell.org/2012/01/21/beware-of-synthia-kavanaugh-murderer-transsexual-on-the-loose-bill-whatcotts-letter-to-sun-lifesite-news-free-north-america/>

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Anonymous [May 17, 2013 at 8:43 PM](#)

when I met Synthia she was a female and a good looking one at that, she didn't have a big manly body. You ever meet her??????

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cherie pammett [September 29, 2013 at 4:26 PM](#)

i know her well allso and it pisses me off that these internet warriors feel the need to talk shit about someone they have never met,i like her very much n wish nothing but the best for her

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Prison correctional Facility [June 20, 2013 at 6:54 AM](#)

Hi, I just come across your site browsing on Google as I am seeking some info on how to curing infections. Seems like you have a good site so I have bookmarked your site and I will come back sometime to give it a more indepth read when i have more time.

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