



B9: Gwen Araujo Case Study

Type of Exercise: case study

Level: basic

Length of time: 30 minutes

Resources needed: Handout of case study

Instructions: Hand out the case study to individual participants and lead discussion using the questions below.

Case Study: Gwen Araujo

Gwen Araujo, a 17 year old U.S. teenage transwoman, was murdered in Newark, California. She had come out to her family as transgender at 14 and had been appearing as female since then. In October of 2002, she went to a party, where she was killed by four men, two of whom she had been sexually intimate with, who brutally beat and strangled her after discovering she was transsexual.

Two of the defendants were convicted of second-degree murder, but not convicted on the requested hate crime enhancements. The other two defendants pleaded guilty or no contest to voluntary manslaughter. In at least one of the trials, a trans panic defense - an extension of the gay panic defense - was employed. The defense attorney asserted that Gwen's deception about gender warranted a violent reaction.

The crime received widespread national and international attention and prompted many authors to write about transphobia as the cause for Araujo's murder, along with questioning whether transgender people were being represented fairly and accurately in both mass media and the criminal justice. Reaction to the case was an impetus for law reform movements in several states.

The events, including both criminal trials, have been portrayed in a TV movie, *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*. The murder was regularly compared to the Matthew Shepard case and was a rallying cause for the transgender and ultimately the larger LGBT communities.

Resources:

1. *A Girl Like Me The Gwen Araujo Story* on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jk_lxpW654



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Developed for Lavender Health by
Mickey Eliason and Carla Randall



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2. Matthew Shepard Story: <http://www.matthewshepard.org/our-story/matthews-story>

Discussion Questions

- What do you think the “trans-panic” defense means? Is that an acceptable defense for murder?
- Hate crimes against transgender people are unusually vicious. Why do you think that is?
- If a transgender person was recovering from a hate crime on the unit where you work or intern, how do you think the other staff members might react?



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Mickey Eliason and Carla Randall*