

## **Ilona Abramovich - Young, Mad, Queer and Homeless in Toronto**

From the moment we are born we are placed into confining and harmful categories that are meant to identify us (e.g. female or male, homosexual or heterosexual, etc). If we deviate from the norm and do not conform to the identity categories that are set up for us, we are most likely to be labeled and pathologized. An alarmingly high proportion of street youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). LGBTQ homeless youth are continuously subjected to and forced into psychiatric institutions. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) labeled homosexuality as a “mental illness” up until 1980, when it was replaced with “Gender Identity Disorder (GID)”. Today the medical model continues to pathologize individuals for not fitting into either the female or male category in institutions such as the Clarke Institute located in Toronto, one of the largest GID institutes in North America. Countless LGBTQ homeless youth are labeled by their social workers, outreach workers, and housing workers as having “mental health problems” for varying reasons such as not fitting into the female or male category or for showing anger due to lack of sleep and exhaustion. My presentation focused on artistic and creative resistance against psychiatry and the power of the arts to break free and fight back. I used examples of video activism and photography to exemplify strategies for resistance.