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HGED 676: Student Development Theory II
Interviews for Social Identity Presentation on Transgenders

Liz
Interview on February 24, 2005 at 8:00am

Which gender do you identify yourself as? How have you come to identify in this way?

Okay, I am a guy. Physically, I am a male. My wife complains that I think and act like a guy. That said, I have a well developed feminine side. I relate better with females than males, and find most men in friendship to be rather shallow. I guess in gender, I would consider myself to be bi-gendered or blended. I am this way because it is who I am. When I was younger and struggled with who I was, I was very much a dual personality type; one person in guy-mode, another in femme. Now that I have reached a level of complete self-acceptance I have been able to blend both of those personalities into one person, thus becoming the person that I truly am.

Can you describe for me what it means to be Transgender at Iowa State University?

Well, not at ISU. When I was in college, I was completely closeted. I lived in fear of my terrible secret being found out. I felt completely alone. I was aware of the gay and lesbian organization on campus, but the impression I got was that it was a rather small group that would not be the most comfortable place for a lone t-person. I am now involved in a local universities group and find myself wishing that I was still in school. We as a GLBT community have so much we to learn from each other.

Can you explain your personal relationship with your parents growing up and presently? How does your relationship differ from your mother or father or between guardians? How have your parents reacted to your transgender identity?

Growing up my parents and I were not extremely close. They were both career minded people who worked long hours. I was a 'latch key kid' from the time I was in 2nd grade. I have always been closer to my mother, my father was very strict and a traditional guy in many ways. But I have some traditional guy traits that he lacks, in the stereotypical 'guys like to play with power tools' kind of way. My parents found out about my being transgendered when my ex-wife outed me to them. They do not accept who I am, and want nothing to do with it. I do not dress in front of them, nor do I share any of the multitudes of activities and functions that I am involved with within the GLBT community. They are in denial. I wish they would be more accepting, but they are of a different generation, and I can accept that. I think things would be different if I was transsexual and Liz was who I presented as 24/7.

Do you feel that society has preset guidelines for how people of a specific gender are suppose to act in relation to a gender different than their own? Why do you feel this way?

Yes, I do. How often have you heard parents say to small children: “Be a man, boys don’t cry.” Or “Don’t be so competitive, girls are supposed to be more docile” or other similar statements? This reflects that there are some very strict opinions regarding what society views as acceptable behavior for a man or a woman. Being transgendered, one of the most obvious things is clothing. When I speak at schools, I ask the audience a simple question that usually drills home the societal differences and imbalance that we have. “What items of clothing, traditionally associated with a male can a female not wear publicly without being stared at and vice-versa?” In my speaking appearances, the only male item that has come up is a jockstrap. The number of female items would fill the next few pages of text. Is there an imbalance of some kind in our societal standards? You tell me.

What has been the strongest influence on how you carry yourself, handle your emotions or present yourself to your peers?

I’m one of those persons who have been self-aware for a long time. Due to some experiences I had growing up; I have been forced to become extremely independent. I think that the way I carry myself, and deal with who I am publicly and privately is a direct result of that. I cannot look to one person as a role model. I think that I have looked to multiple persons in my life and picked and chosen specific aspects of who they are and incorporated them into who I am today.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you became frustrated with a prescribed societal expectation that conflicted with how you wanted to express yourself? If so, tell me about it and how you handled it.

At times I have. Most of the time it is a result of fear on my part. I get that way in stores a lot, especially when I am shopping for something for Liz and I am presenting as a guy. How will the sales person react? Can I act a bit ‘girly’ when trying on a pair of shoes at the store. When buying something is it for me, or my wife? How do I determine which explanation I will give if an explanation is required? Most of the time I say, screw it, my money is as good as anyone else’s. Additionally, if a person treats me well, I will most likely be back and purchase more from them. As a former retail sales person, commissions can be a very important decider in the way you treat customers. Besides, sometimes it can be fun blowing the mind of a sales person, even if after you have left you know they may very well be laughing at you and telling all the other sales associates.

Is there a person that you consider a role model within your gender classification that has helped you to understand yourself and interact with others? If yes, who and why? If no, how have you come to this recognition on your own?

No, there really isn’t any role model as I mentioned above. Liz is an expression of who I am and what I find attractive in women. She is, to be honest, probably not who she would be if she had been born a genetic woman. She is a man’s interpretation of a woman. Thus, she is rather

shallow and fake in many ways. But I am aware of this, and aware that things that I find are enjoyable for Liz, are many times not enjoyable for real women. Let's face it, not too many women enjoy wearing high heels, whereas for me it is a very important part of who I am as Liz.

I guess the best answer is time, time, time. I have spent countless years reading and reflecting on who I am. I have made peace with it, and am going to enjoy being who I am to the best of my ability as long as it does not harm those around me.

David

Interview on February 24, 2005 at 1:00pm-2:15pm

Which gender do you identify yourself as? How have you come to identify in this way?

Male

Its been a really long road – I think its funny, because using the word gender – I would say – that it took me awhile to identify as male – because it took me awhile to identify as masculine. Depending on age – it may change the way in which we talk about it. I am pretty typical – I was a tomboy as a kid, and I was also pretty typical in my teen years – I did not date and did not get out much. That is how Transsexuals start thinking a bout everything. Sometime going through puberty – I had a flash of awareness that my brain told me that I have a penis. I got rid of that as soon as I could – because I did not want to tell anyone. Until I was 31 years old, it this meantime, I was married to a guy, and then when I got out of the army and came back to school – I became aware that something was different – something was going on – a lot of transsexuals go through the experiences of wow – I am a lesbian. I had a relationship with someone for three years, and she said, have you ever thought you were a male?" and I was taken aback, and I started thinking about it. It is possible to have a sex change, she shared with me. That is what really helped me to think about it. The body distoria existed, and I thought I really had a penis. I love the term that they use for amputees – because it is like I had a ghost penis. That is exactly how I describe it. My brain knows that it is not there, but I always believed it was there. I went to counseling, and I talked a lot about where I am on the gender spectrum. If I am really male – and I am naturally attracted to men, along with sexual identity I needed to figure out sexual orientation, and gender expression. I needed to figure out how butch I am. So, I needed to over exaggerate the stereotypical tendencies, walking like a man, talking low. I figured it out that it was silly, so what I did was I figured it out that I am me – and I want to be who I am. I am male. I am me – male.

Can you describe for me what it means to be Transgender at Iowa State University?

Tiring.

I don't know if Transgenders or cross dressers would experience differently. Because I was transitioning – it was different. I had that one decision in my life where I was able to make a decision. I had a lot of people who were supportive or neutral. The sort of things that I had to endure was because of sexual orientation. Moving through the transition and people thinking if I was Gay or not. Most of my discrimination was because of my sexual orientation. The one time I had experienced it, was when I was a Trans – my last semester here – and a class full of people – were rather hostile – I had a guy who was going to be a monk, and he gave me a slip of paper –

and it talked about this Monk's experience of meeting a different trans and was able to convince them to come back to the church. I am not even Catholic... It was difficult and frustrating because people took it against me and not my work. The professor did not help me out at all. As a Graduate Assistant, the monies for one of our scholarships did not receive any funding because I was a Trans, and Gay. The old transsexual dilemma – if I am not out – than I am ashamed and hiding, but if I am out – I am wanting attention. Than people say – those Gay people, or trans people – it was difficult to walk that line of being out but not being out. Because of the culture in Iowa, it was a very good thing for the first semi-out transitioning transsexual; it seemed better for me, and better for the campus. It is not always the best way for people to get to know you as a person and not what is in the press. I took a lot of heat because of that reason; the most active allies and activists really took offense to this – not everyone.

Can you explain your personal relationship with your parents growing up and presently? How does your relationship differ from your mother or father or between guardians? How have your parents reacted to your transgender identity?

Parents... When I was very young – my family was in a very chaotic state. A lot of screaming and yelling. Mostly very – crazy – family stuff – a lot of arguments for no reason. My mother was very depressed. I did not get to know my mother very well. My oldest sister was a stand-in. I think it helped her because she could take care of me. I did not get to know my mother well until I was eleven or twelve. Our relationship was closer to friendship than closer to mother/child. My father was a workaholic and we scattered when he would get home we would scatter. He was a fairly big guy – so his presence was very dominating. My parents after all these years, has tried to work through a lot of her personal issues, where my father has not at all. I recently found out that my father grew up in a house of alcoholics, and my mother had as well.

Right before I left the army, I started to become aware of my family of origin crap – and I went to adult children of alcoholics and that was very helpful. I found at that time, that separating myself from my parents would help me to become whole. It is just not healthy. My life is better because I do not have a lot of contact. I have not talked to my parents since about 1991. When I came out to my mother, I wrote a letter – before I was going to transition. She wrote a letter back to me – that said that I must have screwed up when you were a kid – you have been deceived by Satan – we pray that you will be enlightened. I never heard from my father. My father claims that nothing ever happened at home – major denial. I do not talk to my older sister any longer either – she said something very religious to me – and has not talked to me ever since – she suddenly went off then end – God told me not to talk to my other brother – so she refuses to even truly recognize that I was transitioning. She would never use my name. Both my mothers are freaking out. Oddly enough, my oldest brother knew a lot of transsexual women, and drag queens - he was not taken a back – he is a conservative Christian. Occasionally we will email back and forth.

It is really funny that my experience is very textbook. Strong mother – weak or absent father. I sometimes joke that I am a textbook Transsexual. My mother was very feminine growing up –

she would do very masculine things. Its funny people say that I did not have good role models – I actually do not agree with them – my mother was a good role model.

Do you feel that society has preset guidelines for how people of a specific gender are suppose to act in relation to a gender different than their own? Why do you feel this way?

There are some generational differences. How gender roles have changed throughout the years. What I have experienced in my life – when women are more dominant – it is wrong. However, when I transitioned – I recognize that men do not interrupt me.

What has been the strongest influence on how you carry yourself, handle your emotions or present yourself to your peers?

This has been a lifelong thing – and not necessarily just having to do with transitioning. I took an atypical road to transitioning. Most people have come to know that they are transsexual before they work through the other issues. Most transsexuals have all that other crap on top of transitioning. Whereas, I progressed to help take care of myself before I transitioned. I am recovering southern Baptist. I really enjoyed being in Sioux City at an Episcopal Church helped me with the spiritual journey. A lot of that helped me to become who I am today. I am still trying to figure out who I am gong to be when I grow up. There has not been any one influence. My Grandfather was a good role model – he was a very kind – very nice man. He died when I was almost five. He was a big guy – 6ft 5” size 14 shoes. He was always very quiet, and did not use his size. He was very quiet, and a strong presence. The other one was an old family friend, and had a fun streak in them. He was a World War II Vet. Both only spoke from their experience, and did not speak for everyone. Only a few women did that for me.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you became frustrated with a prescribed societal expectation that conflicted with how you wanted to express yourself? If so, tell me about it and how you handled it.

Growing up as a woman, and going into the army, I ran into this all the time. I did what I wanted to do all the time. Sometimes, I didn't because I did not want to pound my head into a wall. Two things specifically though – I road a motorcycle in the mid-eighties, because my father would not allow me to drive the family car – and I was 18. My older brother sold me his motorcycle – and it was a lot of chrome. This was not main stream. A lot of women did not do this, and it was not part of it. One night, I spoke to someone after a class at another campus, and I had a helmet on, and was speaking to another woman and her boyfriend came up and was upset at me, until he saw who I was underneath the helmut.

Piercing and tattoos is still kind of funny to me. I think that a certain piercing is interesting to look at, but I do not necessarily hold that against people. In California a little girl said to me that that person must be bad because they have a tattoo.

I always tried to do things that were truly me.

Is there a person that you consider a role model within your gender classification that has helped you to understand yourself and interact with others? If yes, who and why? If no, how have you come to this recognition on your own?

There has not been a whole lot of difference. It has been weird the one or two times that people have flirted with me. This is so transparent. The only difference really is that one evening I was leaving the library late at night, and was sort of apprehensive – because someone would beat up the little queer guy. As I was walking there was a lady in front of me, and she had a HUGE bag of books. She walked to the blue phone to call for help, and I followed her – thinking someone was going to hurt her, and I recognized she thought I was going to hurt her because I was wearing a leather jacket, and looked a little scruffy. When in all actuality I thought she could probably hurt me.

My answer for role model would be those two people growing up. I have not ever had a role model – for who I wanted to be. I just sort of helped my way to settle being me. Trying to do that naturally is important.

I am lucky because I am stereotypically male. No one thinks that I am gay, or that there is much different about me. Perhaps, I have had less of a problem trying to figure things out, and comfortable just being guy.

Jeff

Interview Thursday, February 24, 2005 at 7:00pm – 7:45pm

Which gender do you identify yourself as? How have you come to identify in this way?

I identify as male. I first realized when I was eight that I found myself different as other people. When I was sixteen, I went flip flopped and when I was 26. I explored it with my counselor and found that it was I needed to do. I was with my wife at the time, and had counseling with her – and then met with the counselor individually – and I was able to determine what I needed. I was able to get more comfortable because she wanted to learn more about the experience.

When I was a kid, all my friends were other boys. At some point – kids get divided by boys and girls, and I was no longer accepted into the boy crowd. I didn't like playing with girls. I did not see myself as others saw me. When I was sixteen, I was suicidal – and I went into this big denial. It was a difficult stressful - thing. Growing up I wanted my sister to call me Joe.

Can you describe for me what it means to be Transgender in Iowa?

I have never been anywhere other than Iowa. My name change was pretty easy. I just needed to talk to a judge and pay the court. I think it is great that we have Des Moines. It is a great place for me. I grew up in a small town. I think that it is easier in larger cities. Anonymity is what has been important to me. It is the biggest thing. When you are in the process of changing genders it is SO public. I am pretty private. I found myself having to sit down with people to let them know what I was doing. There is no way to hide it. It has to be done. I have no complaints about my experience in Iowa. It has been a wonderful city for me.

Can you explain your personal relationship with your parents growing up and presently? How does your relationship differ from your mother or father or between guardians? How have your parents reacted to your transgender identity?

It has always been pretty thin basically. I was not very close to my dad. My dad was quiet. My parents were divorced when I was eight. When my dad left, I thought that I could be the man in the house. It became apparent that I did not see myself as others did. I love my dad – I thought he was a great guy. I looked up to him a lot. There was not really a relationship really. There was not a relationship with my mom. I hated her most of my life. We did not get along at all. It is getting better now though. Since I moved to Des Moines. My mom treated me the way I was a kid. I am not taking this, I don't have to. If she needs to treat me like crap mode – I would get up and leave. She has needed to learn as well. My Grandmother gave me unconditional love. I did not know how much she knew, and how much I thought she knew. My Grandmother was very sick very a long time, and out of it. I do not know how much she knew as I was growing up, or how much she was growing up. My Dad and my Grandmother are both deceased. My mother is the only one alive. Both my step-parents are deceased. A lot of my family died young. I miss them all. My Grandmother was just amazing for me. My step parents – I really cared about them. My Dad died when I was 17. Because we did not have a close relationship – I really miss the fact that he is not here... now that I am older and have a better handle on myself – maybe I would have a better relationship with him.

At first my mother and sisters, they thought that I needed another crisis in my life. When I told them I was a Lesbian they thought that was another reason to be dramatic. I went in denial. We did not talk for about a year – and – I did not want to have a relationship with her – if she did not try to understand.

With my family even, I wanted them to talk to me about this – and I wanted them to try and talk with me. There is the big fear of hurting feelings. It is more hurtful to ignore the feelings.

Do you feel that society has preset guidelines for how people of a specific gender are suppose to act in relation to a gender different than their own? Why do you feel this way?

Ummm... Yes, there are all kinds of rules everywhere. That is a really hard question. I do know that when somebody swears in front of me as a girl – they always apologize, but as a man they don't. When I told my manager about my transitioning – the men who you worked with –

thought it was amazing the amount of swearing I did. It was hard as a girl to be friends with guys. It seemed like every time I wanted to be friends with guys, they ended up getting attracted to me which was frustrating to me.

What has been the strongest influence on how you carry yourself, handle your emotions or present yourself to your peers?

As a kid I mimicked my dad a lot. I mimicked guy friends in High School. I thought they were good regular guys – I try to be more like them. When I was transitioning at age 26 – the guys who I worked with at the time – I thought were ideal – a good guy would be like – they spoke their opinions good to their wives, good down to earth people. These are the people I looked to learn to be male. There are a lot of things that people take for granted – people are taught as a girl or a boy – you don't get those same lessons if you are taught as someone else.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you became frustrated with a prescribed societal expectation that conflicted with how you wanted to express yourself? If so, tell me about it and how you handled it.

There are a few that come to my mind pretty quickly. They are more in the ahhh – formal situations in life. Weddings and whenever there is a new baby – and that kind of thing. I have always been – felt – like an outsider in those situations. I did not feel comfortable being asked to all these showers, and occasions. But then again I felt left out when I did not get invited to Bachelor parties. The frustration comes from what other people do. When I was a kid – I could not join the Boy Scouts, play drums – traditionally girls don't do those things – and I did not have a lot of power to do those things. Anything I want to do I just do it.

When I was in high school, a friend of mine was the first female wrestler in Iowa. I wanted to be a wrestler. But, I did not like the idea of getting naked in front of people. That would mean I would need to go into the locker rooms more often.

Is there a person that you consider a role model within your gender classification that has helped you to understand yourself and interact with others? If yes, who and why? If no, how have you come to this recognition on your own?

I think I have answered that question – it is basically – a hodge podge of different people – not just one person. On the other hand, I had all these messages that I could not do all these things as a girl – so I was in the mode of questioning things – and I wanted to know why – I did not listen to these people – it made me frustrated and it sucked. I think that it has also been a great influence on me – in developing my moral grounds and those types of things – because I – I really have had to ask a lot of questions. That I think most people may not have to ask. Part of me is like – in a way – it would have been a lot easier if I was born a male – rather than having to do this. On the other hand, having to do this – I was able to learn the messages that boys and girls are taught. I think if I was born a guy – I would have been a big pig.

One thing that people need to know – is that Transgenders are normal people. Before – when I met other people like me – I thought I was a freak. But as I have met other people like me – to see that they are well rounded and happy grounded people – and that they are not just a bunch of weirdoes looking for attention – it has helped me to feel better about myself. I think that it is really hard to – umm- ahh – express that to other people – who are not in contact with other Transgender people. Unless you know somebody – why would you come in contact with them? The reality is we are normal people – go to work – we do the same stuff. We just have this extra thing to do... It is costly – another one of frustrations is how much it costs.

To have my chest masculinized it would cost \$10000 or more – and insurance does not cover it. Male to Female surgeries have more costs. Males are trapped in their bodies and want to become a Woman.

Female to Male – the main concern is their chest – I think the majority don't concern themselves over the rest. There is not the technology. They just figure out how to deal with it. I think there are a lot of people who try different.

Our group in Des Moines is a mixture of Male to Female and Female to Male. We meet on the second Saturday of each month. And they can contact me through tgcrossroads.org.

HGED 676: Student Development Theory II
Interview for Social Identity
Transgender
Lu

Thursday, February 24, 2005 at 7:45pm-8:35pm

Which gender do you identify yourself as? How have you come to identify in this way?

Umm... I identify with both. Both male and female I should say. It has been a process... wow... I am going to take a minute... ummm... well, I think it was more of ahhh... not knowing as a child, what I – who I was as gender. I do not know if I ever identified as female as a child – because of the underlying funny feelings – I guess you could say. I don't think I started to work that out – until – maybe – Middle School – early middle school. It has just been a process of how I have become comfortable within my shell both outside and inside.

Can you describe for me what it means to be Transgender at University?

Ummmz... I was talking this over with a friend. It was like wow... For the most part – that I don't have a place. That I am – although – the group that I belong to is LGBTQA – there are not many outlets specifically geared towards Trans people. I didn't consider myself an outcast – because they are very welcoming – but they are not doing much for me. There are not specific programs geared towards Trans – maybe one or two in my experience. I feel left out. I feel left out as far as the University. The people are very welcoming and understanding – but – there is

just – there isn't room for us – or they are not making room for us – we are just sort of out there – in name.

Can you explain your personal relationship with your parents growing up and presently? How does your relationship differ from your mother or father or between guardians? How have your parents reacted to your transgender identity?

[Laughter] Oh, that is funny. Wow. Ummm... I don't know if I have a personal relationship with my parents. Meaning that there is not closeness – it is more of – they are my parents and I am their kid and that is about it. I am getting closer to my mother. I don't talk to my Dad at all... based on other stuff when I was growing up. I am not looking to have one with him at this time. As far as my parents and my Trans identity – umm... hmm... they are unaware for the most part. I came out to my Mother as a Lesbian – August 20, 2000. So, she has known for awhile now. She is slowly adjusting – I hope. Over this last year, she has done some research – and I know because of the way that she talks with me is a little more supportive – she would say at the beginning – how do you know that about yourself – how can you say that – I feel that she is more supportive of me now. She has trouble with my clothing. She had that with me as a kid. She is coming around slowly. I don't think she – I don't know if she knows the identity of Trans exists... and I don't know if I want to enlighten her about it at this time... I don't know if I really want to... Ummm... hmmmph... I feel as if I might alienate myself from her – if I bring this extra label to her – the Lesbian identity was thought enough for her to grab – and it has been 5 years. I want her to understand me as an individual – regardless of the label. So – that she can just understand me in the clothes I wear the way I stand – I don't think it is important for her to know right now.

Do you feel that society has preset guidelines for how people of a specific gender are suppose to act in relation to a gender different than their own? Why do you feel this way?

[Sigh] Absolutely. Ummmz... Yeah... Umm... I think society has come up with what is – what it means to be male – and what it means to be female. At least in this country there is no in-between. You have to choose one or the other – and whichever one you choose – for example – male – you have to deal with the opposite of who you are in a certain way – Let me give you an example. Ummz.. Women are supposed to be more polite than Men. Not that it is necessarily true. I think that is something that society enforces this – just by the way we treat each other. It is something that... It is not something we think about it is what happens. I am male so I am suppose to treat Women in this way because they are Women... and there is no reason to deviate from this – that is how I feel society looks at it.

What has been the strongest influence on how you carry yourself, handle your emotions or present yourself to your peers?

The biggest influence to how I present myself to my peers is – how accepting people I am around are... If I feel that I... that it is okay – that it is a safe situation for me to – um – for me to walk

into the Union with a tie and jacket on – and hang out with my friends and eat... I will do that because there are no repercussions – or if I am in a group that people are less accepting – I cater to their needs. It is more about putting me into a safe situation. I know to watch out for myself. I know that the people I hang out with – are great people – if I know that they are homophobic or Transphobic – I will probably not get decked out in my three piece suit. The response would be something that I would not want to deal with... It is about who those peers are and how they respond to my community.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you became frustrated with a prescribed societal expectation that conflicted with how you wanted to express yourself? If so, tell me about it and how you handled it.

Hmmz... ahhs.. okay... ahhs... [pause]. I have a hair issue. Ummmmz... Okay so I am graduating in May... and – I want to go out to the workforce and start a career. Ummm.... But it is very very important to me – that when starting this career that I can be myself – but the issue I have is that... I need to get my foot in the door first and appearance is a big part of this... as a Trans what are my hair options – if I got my hair all permed out and flowing down my back – it is not who I am... I do identify with both – that is who I am.... I really want to shave my head. If I shave my head – and I walk into a job interview – and the person interviewing me looks at my style – they will wonder if I am a Man or a Woman – just because of the way I do my hair – right now I have corn rolls – and I went into an interview today and they did not treat me any differently – The hair issue...

Is there a person that you consider a role model within your gender classification that has helped you to understand yourself and interact with others? If yes, who and why? If no, how have you come to this recognition on your own?

I did not come to it on my own – I would have been lost forever. Ummmmz... My two brothers... Shawn and Coolie – neither of which are biologically related to me – we met in college. And umm.. we were the three Trans kids on this campus – we were each coming into our identities all at different stages – we are still at different stages – they really helped me understand who I was – who I am... and let me know that it was okay – and umm... and made sure I knew that I was comfortable in the shell that I have to feel the way I feel about myself. They were the driving forces in helping me to become okay with myself. They were both born biologically female – one is in the transition process right now – and one for later. The three of us – helping each other find our way – I could not have asked for a better support system. Why I found out – the way I am. I remember many nights going to Shawn's room and talking about women and how much I love women – what is this thing – and Coolie taught me how to tie a tie – and he let me know – how to feel comfortable – carry myself – don't walk around with your head down – whether you see yourself as a Man or a Woman – hold your head high – I was like... wow...

Anything else you want to share with the class?

Wow... wow...hmmz... I will email you if I think about it. I think we have always had to think about what we have to say what we say out of our mouths.