


SUPPORTING GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.
 DEVELOPING RESPONSIVE AND RESPECTFUL SERVICES

Best Start conference February 2018

Hershel Russell


WHO ARE "GENDER DIVERSE" CHILDREN?



- + "You know you have a gender non-conforming child when your family meets with resistance because of your child's gender presentation"
 - + K. Pearson, TYFA
- + Profoundly diverse group!
- + United only in that others resist!

DOMINANT NARRATIVE:

- + "Gender established by age 2 or 3 and stable"
 - + Most child development literature
- + Cognitive accomplishment or "deference to the normative map of gender"?
 - + (Pyne 2011)

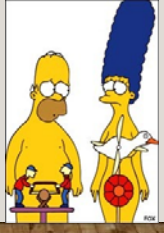


WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED GENDER?

Seems so natural and obvious that

- + there are just two genders
- + "Opposite" to each other
- + Determined by genitals

"The opposite sex is neither!"

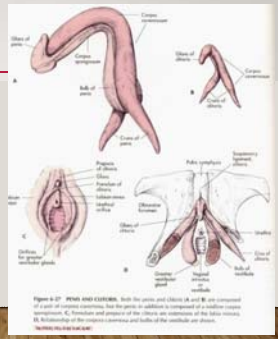


GENDER VS SEX

- Between ears vs between legs
- Cultural vs biological
- But even biological sex differences are not so simple!

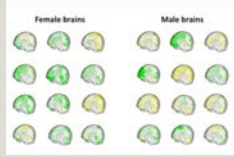


WE ALL HAVE (MORE OR LESS) THE SAME EQUIPMENT!

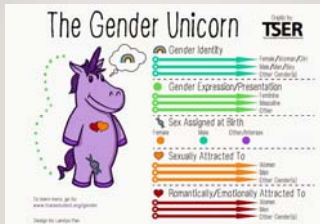


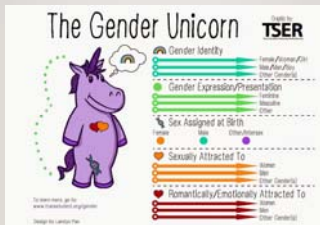
MALE AND FEMALE BRAINS?

- Brains at either end of the "maleness-femaleness" continuum are rare.
- Most brains are "unique mosaics" of male and female features.

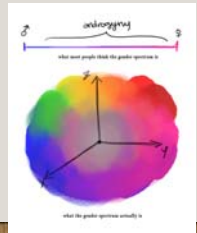


• Berman et al (2015) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 2015





GENDER SPECTRUM



GENDER CONSTELLATIONS




HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT GENDER WE ARE?

“Way down deep, where the music plays.”



Aiyyana Maracle – Gender is a Circle



<https://www.facebook.com/friendsaiyyanamaracle/videos/94652843997927/>


VIDEO CLIP

LANGUAGE




TRANSGENDER VS CISGENDER

- Trans = across



- Cis = on the same side



TRANSITION

Making the outside fit the inside




Social Transition
Haircut, clothing, name, pronoun, gestures, toys, games.


Medical Transition
(at puberty only) Hormone blockers?
(adults only) cross sex hormones, surgeries

SOCIAL TRANSITION

- Gender intervention re change of name, pronoun, clothing, hair, etc. (no medical intervention)
- + Decision sometimes -- but not always -- obvious
- + Growing social movement, minimal research
- + Rapid social change makes it more complex!
- + (hormones never given before puberty)



JAY HAS SOCIALLY TRANSITIONED



+ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxzKIPVceWg>

VIDEO CLIP

INTRODUCTIONS

- Name
- Your Role/Work
- Share a story about a "transition" you have had in your life.
- How was it similar to or different than gender transition?




- Major part of work with
- many clients

**NORMALISE,
NORMALISE,
NORMALISE!**



A cartoon illustration of a white cow with a brown patch on its back. A speech bubble from the cow says "Define 'normal?'". Above the cow, a smaller, more stylized cow is hanging from a tree branch. The background shows a green tree, a blue sky with clouds, and a grassy field.


**THERE'S NOTHING NEW ABOUT
GENDER DIVERSE LIVES**



A collage of six historical black and white photographs. From left to right: a woman in a long dress, a person in a military-style uniform, a woman in a corset, a person in a top hat, a woman in a corset, and a group of three people in historical attire.

**ACROSS OUR PLANET THERE ARE SO MAANY
DIFFERENT GENDER REGIMES**

- http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map.html/



A world map with numerous blue location pins placed across various continents, including North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Australia. The map is titled "TWO SPIRITS MAP" and includes a legend.

HERE ON TURTLE ISLAND:
MANY "TWO-SPIRIT" TRADITIONS



Term proposed by Elders from many First Nations 1992

- Increasingly used by many indigenous folks

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES 2.0 –
NON-BINARY GENDERS!

Hive bees: three genders

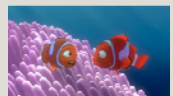


The Ruff: four genders



FINDING OUT ABOUT NEMO –
TRANSSEXUAL FISH

Clown fish are "sequential hermaphrodites."
All born male. Live in small groups.
When the one female of the group dies, the largest male transitions to female.
It doesn't take long, it's no big deal.




Marlin and Coral, Nemo's parents.
ACTUALLY a "widower" Clown fish would transition from male to female...

FLUID GENDERS

Hamlets:
 Adults have both m and f reproductive organs.
 Mate taking turns re gender

Tropical Ginger:
 Each plant changes from M to F (or vice-versa) at midday





A 2-gender system is NOT the only possibility!


AN INFINITY OF POSSIBLE GENDER REGIMES!

- +Seven gender system (Kukla 2006)
- +Six gender system (Tafoya 2004)
- +Forty-nine gender system (Feinberg 1996)



LANGUAGE: IN FLUX!

- + **Diagnoses**
- + Gender-Identity-Disorder
- + Gender Dysphoria
- + Gender Incongruence
- + **Formal terms**
- + Gender-Variant
- + Gender Non-Conforming (GNC)




LANGUAGE: IN FLUX!



- + **More informal terms**
- + Gender-Creative
- + Gender Expansive
- + Gender Diverse
- + Gender Independent
- + Gender Fabulous!
- + **Transgender?**
- + Trans and gender-diverse (TGD)

INTERSECTIONALITY



- + Here as everywhere we need to be attentive to differences re:
- + Racialized identities
- + Class differences
- + All the issues of power dynamics

MEDIA DISTORTIONS


Which children get media attention?



A SMALL SUBSECTION OF GNC KIDS!

Media focus on one narrative


- Transgender Children
- "Trapped in the wrong body"
- Social Transition
- Clear gender binary: boy OR girl
- Knew as toddler
- Unchanging



BUT WHAT ABOUT...

"Take all the boy bits and all the girl bits and buzz them up in the blender, that's me!
I'm a Gender Smoothie!"

Refs: Ehrensaft




OR...

"I'm a girl in my top half and a boy in my bottom half. I'm a half-and-half."
(Client)



A "PRINCESS BOY"

+Dyson
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DnbtXDlv0>



VIDEO CLIP

GENDER INDIFFERENT CHILDREN



"Are you a boy or a girl."
Why are you asking?
Who cares!
Some people of all ages just aren't that interested in their gender!

GENDER FLUID CHILDREN



"Some days I'm a girl and some days I'm a boy. My gender is fluid."

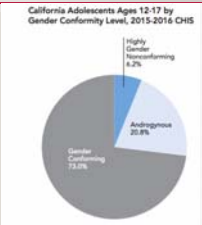
BINARY, NON-BINARY GENDERS

- Genderqueer
- Agender
- Gender fluid
- Third gender
- Demigirl/demiboy
- Masculine of centre
- Mx (like Ms and Mr)
- Apagender
- Neutrois



CALIFORNIA TEENS GENDER CONFORMITY STUDY, 2017

- UCLA Centre for Health Policy Research
- "Gender non-conforming youth, including both highly GNC and androgenous subgroups, make up a significant section of the adolescent population in California"
- Nearly a third gender non-forming
- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/CHIS-Transgender-Teens-FINAL.pdf>



"BEING SAFE, BEING ME": CANADIAN TRANS YOUTH HEALTH SURVEY, (ONTARIO) 2017

"Some of the most common additions were: non-binary, agender, gender-neutral."

25% GENDER NON-FORMING

http://saravyc_sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2017/10/SARAVYC_Trans-Youth-Health-Report_Ontario-WEB-FINAL.pdf



WPATH STANDARDS OF CARE vs7 (2011)

- Clinicians Should Not...
 - "Impose a binary view of gender:"
 - "Dismiss or be negative about nonconforming gender identities"

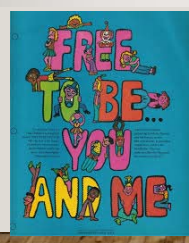


OVER THE LAST FEW DECADES,
GENDER IS CHANGING SO FAST!

WHY?



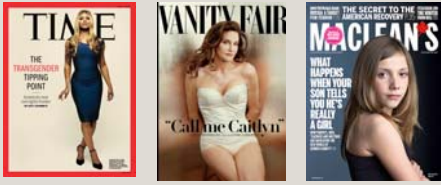
SECOND WAVE FEMINISM



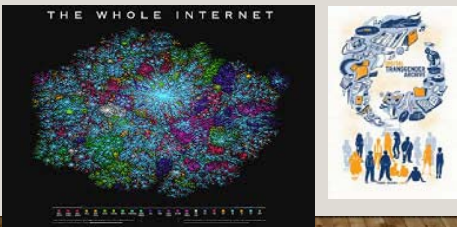
QUEER VISIBILITY AND ACTIVISM



TRANS VISIBILITY

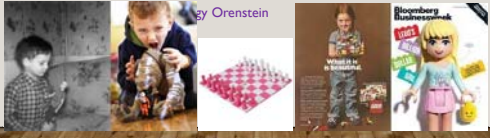


THE INTERNET



TOY INDUSTRY DECISIONS

- Beginning 1990s increased differentiation of boys and girls toys and clothing



RILEYS RANT



VIDEO CLIP

CONTROVERSIES

POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO GENDER NON-CONFORMING KIDS

Intervene?
("Drop the Barbie")

Watchful Waiting?
(Little action)

Affirm?
(Safe and Supported Space to Explore)



CONTROVERSY RE CLOSING OF CAMH CHILD YOUTH AND FAMILY CLINIC

FORMER CLINIC'S APPROACH

- Gender is "malleable" pre puberty.
- Preventing transgender adulthood appropriate goal, if parents wish.
- Internationally famous clinic and research centre should not have been closed.

CRITIQUE

- Transgender identities re diversity not pathology.
- Clinic performed "conversion therapy" -- Illegal in Ontario, (Bill 77, 2015)
- External Review of Clinic 2015 found that its practises were "out of step with the latest thinking."
- Transgender children w good support have better mental health.
- Families of GD children report wanting social services not mental health services.

"PERSISTERS", "DESISTERS",

• Some kids who transition socially revert to the gender they were assigned at birth

• Most common age to revert 10 to 13 yrs

• Professional consensus that reverting rare post puberty.



CONTROVERSY: DO 80% OF GNC KIDS DESIST?

AN EXPERIENCED DOCTOR SEES:

I keep hearing this 80% all through my 20 years of working with transgender children and youth. And I am always afraid that I may say the wrong thing about this. Nevertheless, this is what my experience has been this far: I have seen hundreds of children and youth with GD concerns, but I have never had the 80% ratio, in fact not even close. Either I am so lucky seeing most of the 20% or their research just doesn't match the fact I saw some so called "desisted" children and youth, but none of them would say I'm "cis" now. They just "adjust" along the transgender continuum/spectrum, perhaps from a higher end to a middle or lower end, but they still identify as gender queer, gender fluid, agender or many others. For me, that is a great thing.

PROBLEMS WITH THESE 4 STUDIES INCLUDE:

- Classification problems
- Follow up
- Social context
- Binary gender framework
- Intensive treatment and testing of children studied

WHICH GENDER-DIVERSE KIDS SHOULD TRANSITION?

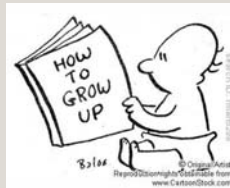
- Persistent
- Consistent
- Insistent

+ Dr Jo Olson



WHO WILL THEY BE WHEN THEY GROW UP?

- Older research suggests most (some say 80%) of gender independent kids will revert to gender assigned at birth (before or around puberty)
- Methodology now challenged
- Plus rapid social change
- We don't know!
- As with all kids!




WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T KNOW...

•Don't know

- Whether GI kids will grow up to be trans adults

•Do know

- Any kids seen as gender nonconforming at greater risk of abuse
- "We identify gender nonconformity as an indicator of children at increased risk of abuse and probable PTSD"
- N=16,882 children from longitudinal "Nurses Health Study" II (Roberts, Rosario, Corliss, 2012)



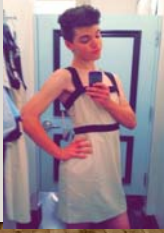
HIGH RISK OF SERIOUS HARM WHEN UNTREATED

- 41% Suicidal Ideation
- 19% Suicide Attempts
- 42% Non-suicidal self-harm

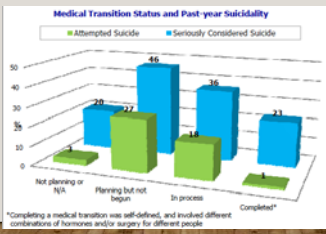
*(Trans Pulse 2010, National trans discrimination survey 2011)

*(Reisner 2015)

•Leila Alcorn "My death has to mean something. Fix society, please!"



SUICIDALITY AND TRANSITION

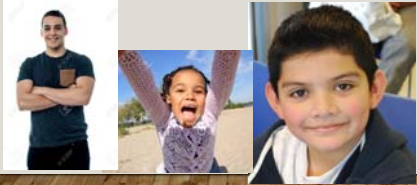


Transition Status	Attempted Suicide (%)	Seriously Considered Suicide (%)
Not planning or N/A	~10	~20
Planning but not begun	~27	~46
In process	~14	~36
Completed*	~3	~21

*Completing a medical transition was self-defined, and involved different combinations of hormones and/or surgery for different people

FOLLOW THE CHILD!

- Parents often guided by seeing the child's intense relief, and/or increased calm and happiness.



**FAMILIES ARE MAKING THE DECISION THEMSELVES
LARGE, GROWING GRASS-ROOTS MOVEMENT**

- + Boston
- + LA
- + Toronto
- + London
- + Amsterdam



Clinics Report Fourfold Increases(2012)
Twelve-fold Increases (2015) (Spack)

PRESSURE TO CONFORM

•Gender Independent children who are strongly pressured to conform are "prone to anxiety, sadness, social withdrawal, self deprecation, and other signs of internalized distress" (Carver 2003)

- Can present with wide range of issues:
- anger, acting out, cutting, suicidality, social isolation, eating disorders...

MENTAL HEALTH OF GNC CHILDREN SUPPORTED IN THEIR GENDER IDENTITIES

- Olson, et al
- N=73, age 3 to 12
- 2 control groups (siblings, matched group)

• "notably lower rates of internalizing psychopathology than previously reported among children with GID living as their natal sex."

• <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/02/24/peds.2015-3223.full.pdf>

PEDIATRICS
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

GENDER-EXPANSIVE SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- ✦ Better for all children!
- ✦ GI kids are the
- "canaries in the coal-mine"?



If a child can transition safely, without disruption, then that service or school is gender-safe for ALL children

FAMILY SUPPORT



FAMILY SUPPORT

- Drops suicide risk among youth by **93%** (Family Acceptance project)
- Significant impact on behavioural health lifelong (Trans Pulse Study Ontario)

CISGENDER PARENTS RAISING GENDER-DIVERSE CHILDREN

- The Family Journey

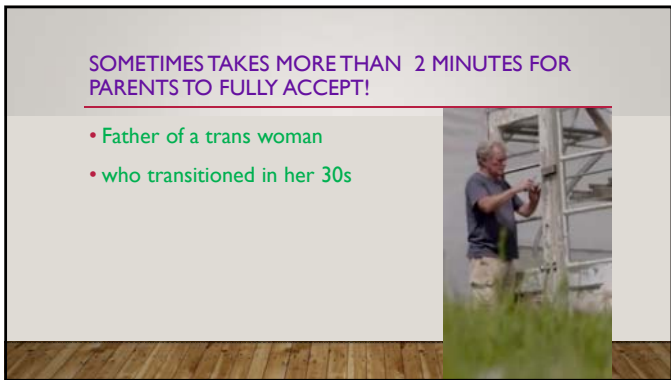


THE PARENTS' EXPERIENCE

- + The Family Journey: Raising gender nonconforming children
- + A Film by Jonathan Skumik
- + New Day Films







HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THESE PARENTS?

Core assumptions:

- Strengthen relationship = feelings can include sadness, loss & grief...or
- Unpacking beliefs about gender & sexuality = shame, grief
- Knowledge about trans issues = fear
- Prevent and help repair "ruptures" = stronger attachment relationship
- Support to become advocates for their children!



"BEING SAFE, BEING ME": CANADIAN TRANS YOUTH HEALTH SURVEY, (ONTARIO) 2017

DO NOT ACCESS HEALTH CARE

- "Afraid of what doctor would say or do" 68%

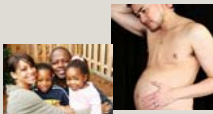
NON SUICIDAL SELF-HARM

- 14-18 yrs: 82%
- 18-25 yrs: 52%

SERIOUS SUICIDE ATTEMPT LAST 12 MONTHS

- 14-18 yrs: 69%

TRANS AND GENDER-DIVERSE PARENTS RAISING CISGENDER CHILDREN



Different experiences!

- Children very young (under 7 or 8) or born after parent transitions



- Children old enough to be aware of stigma (age 7 or 8 through adult) when parent transitions



HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THESE PARENTS?

- Basic respect!
- Get pronouns right!
- Prevent and help repair "ruptures" = stronger attachment relationship
- Understand that trans men who wish to can carry and nurse (vs "breastfeed") their babies
- Help with lactation for trans women who desire it.
- Support to become advocates!
- Listen!

VIDEO CLIP


**KEEP
CALM
AND
RESPECT
PRONOUNS**

- **He, his**
- **She, her**
- **They**
- **Zie, hir**

HOW TO GET PRONOUNS RIGHT!

Practise!





Download for free:

www.ctys.org

Families in TRANSition
A Resource Guide for Families of
Trans Youth

FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT



- "Supportive Families, Healthy Children" booklet (English, Spanish and Chinese)
- Download at: <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications>
- Faith-based resources and guide for clinicians also available

LGBTQ PARENTING NETWORK

- The LGBTQ Parenting Network is a program of Sherbourne Health Centre
- We support lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer parenting through research, training, resources and community development.
- <http://lgbtqpn.ca/>



TRANS HEALTH CONNECTION

- **Mentorship calls:**
- We want you!

Email Jordan Zaitzow
jzaitzow@rainbowhealthontario.ca



AND FINALLY

a short wordless film
 about a gender-fabulous child
 and their family

Holly Siz: The Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cf79KXBCIDg>