Dynamics and Identity in Families of Gender Non-Conforming Children/Youth: A Longitudinal Phenomenological Exploration

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Definitions

• Gender non-conforming: Umbrella term for behavior that is not consistent with socially expected norms for gender assigned at birth

• Transgender: Cross-gender identification

• Gender dysphoria: Persistent distress due to incongruence between gender identity and assigned gender

• Cisgender: Congruence between gender identity and assigned gender
Gender non-conforming Children: Trajectory

• Behaviors may appear as early as 2 or 3; Not uncommon for role play in early childhood

• May persist or desist in cross-gender expression; Recommendation is to follow the child’s lead

• May experience gender dysphoria

• Most gender non-conforming children do not grow to be gender dysphoric adolescents.

• Puberty blockers may be indicated as child reaches Tanner Stage 2-3
Study: Purpose

Explore the dynamics and evolution of families that include gender non-conforming children and youth
Methodology

• In-depth interviews with parent/guardian
  • Thematic coding
  • Member checks

• Longitudinal
  • Initial
  • 2\textsuperscript{nd}: 6 months after initial
  • 3\textsuperscript{rd}: 12 months after second
  • 4\textsuperscript{th}: 12 months after third
Participants

- Recruited at a conference for families of gender non-conforming children/youth

- To date, parent of:
  - 4 Mtf (Male to Female), ages 6, 7, 8, 18
  - 4 FtM (Female to male), ages 6, 13, 16, 17
  - All identify as White, with exception of one 13 y/o FtM (African-American)
Experiences / Themes

- Initial manifestation/disclosure
  - Role-play
  - Refusal to wear gender-conforming clothing
  - Preference for cross-gender clothing
  - Announcing transgender identity
  - Realization during hospitalization following suicide attempt
Experiences/Themes

• Initial reactions of parents
  • Confusion
  • Negation/denial
"[My husband] and I sort of went along with his preference for boy clothes and wanting his hair short. He has an older brother, so we thought that was his influence. I would often tell him, 'Why do you want to look like a boy all the time? Look at these [girls'] clothes -- let's try them.' I really had no idea what it could mean." (Parent of 13 y/o FtM, speaking of her child's early childhood years)
Experiences/Themes

• Family

• Extended Family/School/Community

• Healthcare
Experiences / Themes

• Family
  • Acceptance / rejection
  • Guilt
  • Sadness / gratitude
  • Safety concerns
"We support her and we love her. But I'm sad, too. Everything in life is going to be harder for her." (Parent of 17 y/o MtF)

"Since transitioning, he is just so much happier. The anger, the tantrums -- they're gone." (Parent of 6 y/o FtM)

"Her younger brother is having a difficult time. He misses his older brother. He asks why his brother had to change. We try to tell him that she is the same person inside. It breaks my heart.” (Parent of 8 y/o MtF)
Experiences / Themes

• Extended Family/School/Community
  • Initial resistance / accommodations
  • Friends
  • Decision-making on disclosure
  • Legal documents

• Church
  • Discrimination
"We sent an email letter to family and close friends. We explained that our [FtM] child identified as male, and that he would be transitioning. We said that though you may not agree with this decision, we expect that you will respect it." (Parent of 13 y/o FtM)

"We struggle. We struggle with guilt that we didn’t realize that she was trans earlier. We struggle with whom to tell. If someone doesn't know, we struggle with pronouns and not slipping up.” (Parent of 7 y/o MtF)
Experiences / Themes

• Healthcare
  • Decision-making
    • Puberty blockers
    • Preservation of fertility
  • Discrimination / support
"She has been on puberty blockers for a couple of years now. With the transition and the blockers, she has blossomed. We are talking with her doctors about hormones now. She will likely start those soon. She's anxious for that. She wants the surgeries* too, but there's just no money for that." (Parent of 17 y/o MtF).

*facial feminization, breast augmentation
Limitations / Ongoing Efforts

• Generally homogenous sample
• Recruited through conference advocating for gender diversity

• Recruit ethnic/racial minorities
• Recruit persons less open to gender diversity
Implications for Healthcare

• Increase education on issues affecting gender-diverse persons

• Cultivate an atmosphere of safety and openness

• Increase familiarity on resources for gender-diverse persons and their families
Contact Information

I welcome any and all questions and comments:

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