Parenting
Gender Variant Kids

Jan-Marie Chrzanowski, M.C.
Registered Provisional Psychologist
Current Understanding of Gender

- Gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation are distinct.
- Gender as a binary construct is a social construction and does not match the experience of many people.
- A spectrum of gender identities are considered normal human variations.
The Gender Unicorn

Gender Identity
- Female/Woman/Girl
- Male/Man/Boy
- Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
- Feminine
- Masculine
- Other

Sex Assigned at Birth
- Female
- Male
- Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to: www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anne Moore
Controversy over Diagnoses

"Gender Identity Disorder" (1980–2013) pathologized gender variant behaviour or identity

Children’s Mental Health

- Increased risk of depression, anxiety and PTSD.
- Mental health issues continue into adolescence and may escalate to self-harm and suicidality.
- Increased risk of discrimination, abuse, violence (physical, sexual, psychological).
- Survey: 43% of gender variant individuals had attempted suicide in their lifetime.
Harmful Parental Behaviours

- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse, incl harassment and name calling
- Exclusion from family activities
- Restriction of access to LGBTQ friends, activities, resources
- Blaming child for the discrimination they face, for causing the family shame
- Secrecy
- Pressure to conform
- Religious-based condemnation
Challenges Parents FACE

Quite a number of challenges were found to be common experiences amongst parents, even as society is becoming to become more accepting.
Parents Are Blamed

• By professionals, community and family members
• Especially mothers
• Has appeared in literature as recently as 2012 (Zucker, 2012)

Parents do NOT cause their child’s gender variance!

• Not caused by divorce, child abuse, disappointment in sex of child, or overbearing, lenient or absentee parenting!
Parents Face Judgement & Stigma

- Judgement, criticism and rejection of parents for their parenting decisions
- Struggle to create a non-stigmatized, “normal” childhood for their children
- Experiences of secondary stigmatization
Parents Experience Conflict

- Conflict with extended family & friends
- Causes significant stress for parents
- Sometimes results in their isolation and exclusion from events
- Accusations of child abuse
- Conflict between parents - differing views
- Fathers tend to take longer to reach acceptance than mothers.
Parents Struggle with Uncertainty

• “Not knowing” about child’s future (including gender identity & sexual orientation) creates significant anxiety
• Difficulty visualizing their child’s future
• Fears of increased stigma, social harassment and intolerance; worries about safety
• Difficulty entertaining the possibility of a non-binary outcome
• Difficult decisions regarding gender expression in childhood, and medical interventions in adolescence
Parents Experience Grief and Loss

• Loss of the child they thought they had
• Loss of the dreams they had for their child
• The grief process is inevitable, and must not be mistaken for unremitting transphobia
• Disenfranchised type of grief (most people do not understand or recognize it)
• Not a stage-wise progression, often vacillate between grief and states of joy
• Some reframe it as personal growth: “the toughest job I will ever love” (Johnson & Benson, 2014, p. 138)
Parents Have Difficulty Accessing Affirmative Supports

• Negative experiences with professionals (blame, unhelpful advice, agenda)
• Clinic requirements for child to be in distress
• Distance - internet resources helpful
• Professionals’ focus on the child leaves parents feeling forgotten and poorly understood
• Professionals’ lack of knowledge/training -> outdated focus on the child as pathological, or unable to help
• Stigma for specializing in gender identity
CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING
Types of Supports

3 primary therapeutic approaches in use

**Normalizing Approach (conversion/corrective/reparative)**
- Goal to change gender expression or identity, prevent LGBTQ outcomes
- Pathologizes GV
- Declared unethical

**Gender Reassignment Approach**
- Affirms gender identity, facilitates early transitions
- Only 16% of gender variance persists
- Reinforces gender binary

**Affirmative Approach**
- Affirms gender identity and parents’ experiences
- Supports parents to affirm their children
- Allows gender identity to develop in safe environment

Copyright © 2017 JMC Psychological Services - All Rights Reserved.
Parents’ Needs

• Supports that are affirming of their experiences, and respectful of multiple cultural intersectionalities
• Accurate and up-to-date information
• Parenting strategies, especially around boundary and limit setting
• Help developing skills to deal with bullying and other negative reactions to themselves and their child
• Support with advocacy efforts
• Connection (eg. PFlag!)
• Others?
Children’s Needs

• Children need freedom of gender expression, acceptance, respect and unconditional love

• Attunement - pay close attention to not only your children’s words, but also their body language and moods -> will help you determine their needs.

• Positive child mental health outcomes are associated with parents being affirmatively supported
Body of Research - Strengths & Limitations

OVERALL STRENGTHS
- Representative of multiple Western nations
- Representative of diverse gender expressions and identities
- Methods chosen were well-suited to research questions
  - Good mix of approaches

OVERALL LIMITATIONS
- Voices of low-income families are absent
- Lacks diversity in race/ethnicity (mostly White participants)
- Voices of male parents of GV children are not well represented
- Lacks representations of families who have not accessed supports
References


