

School cultures and Gender Diverse Children: Parents' and guardians'
perspectives

Culturas escolares e Gênero Crianças Diversas: Perspectivas dos pais e
dos guardiões

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At school

- gender diverse children (GDC), known sometimes as trans (gender), are increasingly visible within the school system in the UK.
- social service professionals, teachers, and administrators of schools are often uncomfortable with GDC (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005)
- many school service providers fail to create a safe and respectful atmosphere for gender diverse youth (Agius, Calleja, Cristiano, Caruana, & Baldacchino, 2015).

($n = ?$)

- Approximately 500 young people present annually at the Gender Identity Clinic for children in England (Carmichael, 2014)
- Gender diverse children and adolescents:
 1. Gender Dysphoria (GD) characterized by a *desire* to be treated as the 'other' gender
 2. a wish to change their sex characteristics
 3. stop their pubertal development
 4. a strong view that they have feelings that are typical of the 'other' gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
- Underpinned by the psychology of gender diverse behaviors and the medicalization of gender non-conformity

To treat or not to treat, that is the question

They also raise the question of whether supporting cross-gender expressions of a child is generally in the child's best interest.

The fluidity of gender expression also invites the question about whether the practice of suppressing the onset of puberty is reasonable medical intervention.

Clinicians and ethicists are leaning towards the experimental – but reversible – treatment of suppressing pubertal changes through puberty ‘blocking’ biotechnologies (Bonifacio & Rosenthal, 2015; Fisher et al., 2014; Giordano, 2008, 2013; Lambrese, 2010).

“gender-affirming” (Bockting, 2016)

This is contrary to the ‘reparative practices’ approach (McHugh, 2015; Zucker, 2008) of pressuring children to perform gender stereotypical behaviors related to their assigned sex at birth

Affirmative practices

- research has found that supportive and gender affirmative responses from parents and guardians towards their gender diverse children contributes to improved mental health and psychosocial resilience (Bockting, 2016; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010; Wyman, Sandler, Wolchik, & Nelson, 2000),

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

- A qualitative interview method
- To learn from parents and guardians, how to appreciate and affirm gender diverse children's membership in (school) culture.
- To understand how children can be freed from the tyranny of gender oppression and stereotypes.
- To explore the UK's educational contexts.
- To look at parents' and guardians' views on the schooling system and the challenges they face in relation to their status of being parents and guardians of gender diverse children.
- To explore parents' and guardians' understanding of good practice and shortcomings in school policies.
- The presentation today will look at 11 interviews as the fieldwork is ongoing.

Methodology

- We have recruited parents with children in the age range of 5-18 Face-to-face, telephone and Skype interviews have been used, in order to reach a wide demographic of parents and guardians across the UK.
- We have interviewed parents of trans boys, trans girls, genderqueer and non-binary children with diverse sexualities, ethnicities, religious denominations and socioeconomic groups to capture a wide set of views and experiences.
- Interviewing parents and guardians will have a better understanding of the school system, how it works, and will be able to provide insights into the various conversations with governors, head teachers and other employees.
- Parents and guardians will be able to articulate better the personal and structural limits that have appeared in relation to their gender diverse child at school.
- This study is interested in the limit situations that impact on parents and guardians supporting their gender diverse children's schooling in a structural sense, such as in policies, rules and social structures rather than the existential aspects of the child's gender variance.

Themes: Other Children at school

- “so he came out to everybody in the March, so he would have been fifteen because his birthday is in [month]. **His friends have been absolutely wonderful at school.** I think the younger generation just take it in their stride” (Ariadne, parent of trans boy)
- “the friends that she got with there, and looking back, some were from the LGBT group at the school, but she didn’t know that at the time. Their friends had come out as bi and things at school and there was, well **the school was very good at picking up on the bullying** and were very supportive because there were some digs really, girls are bitchy” (Corina, parent of genderqueer child).
- “the children were asking [name], whether she would prefer to be called he or she and they both thought that it was curiosity with no judgment but they thought that I should know that they had had that conversation. I said it was ok, that is totally ok well brilliant actually because **the children are trying to be empathetic** to [name]” (Karen, parent of a trans girl).

Reactive not proactive

- “I rang up the vice principle and she a very approachable lady [...I said:] He’s transgender, he’s a boy. [vice principle said:] ‘Right come in then, we don’t know anything about this, we have no directive from the education department, we don’t know how to handle all of this, what the rules are, what the policy is.’ I think we downloaded something from somewhere in Cornwall” (Ariadne, parent of trans boy).

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