

The Role of Families in Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Transgender & Gender-Diverse Youth

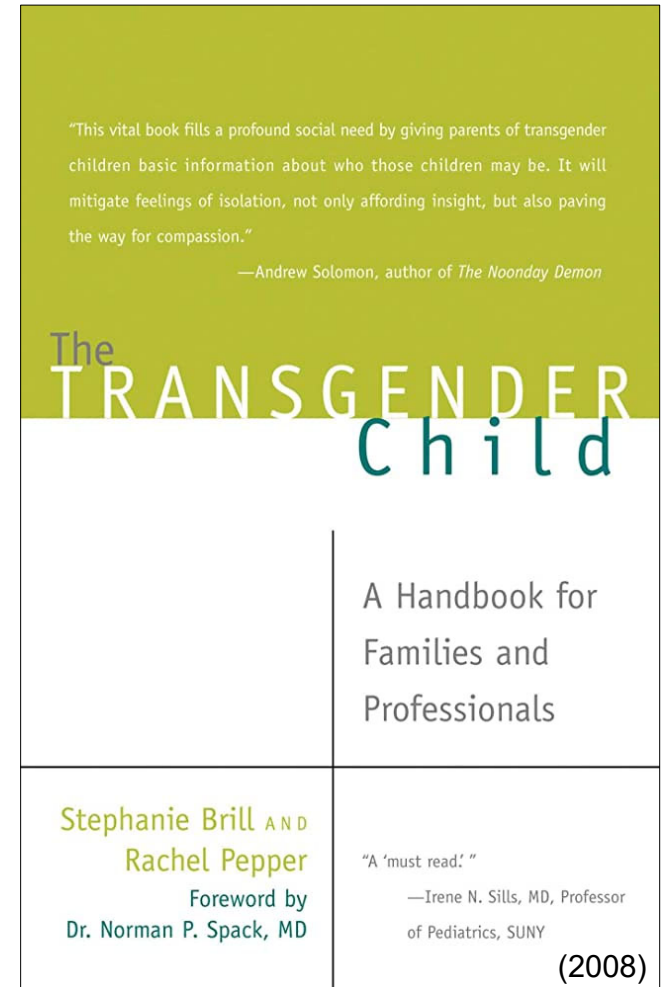
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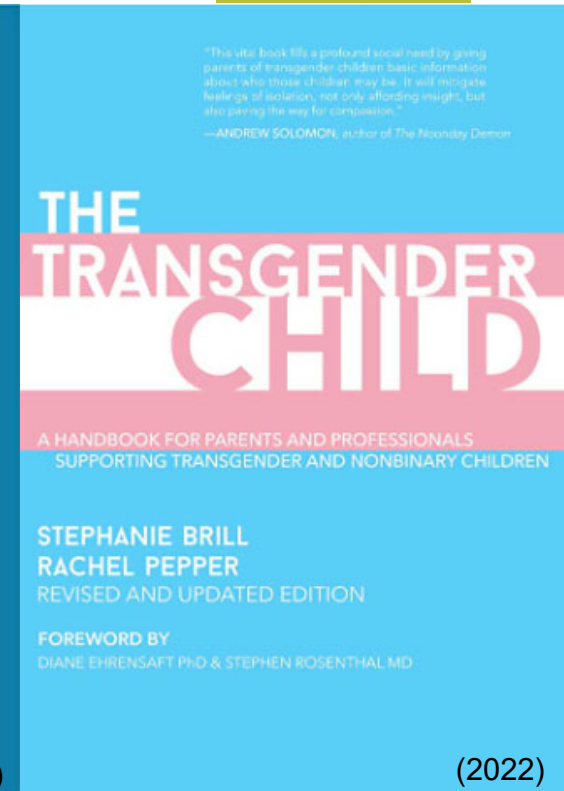
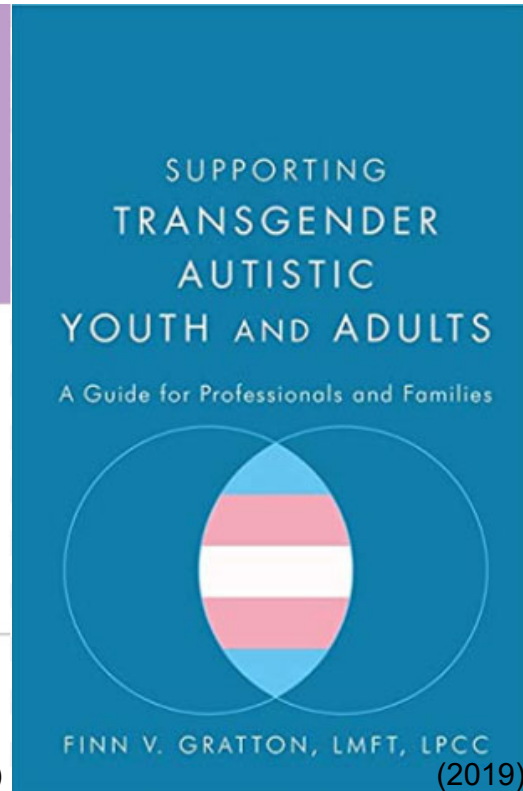
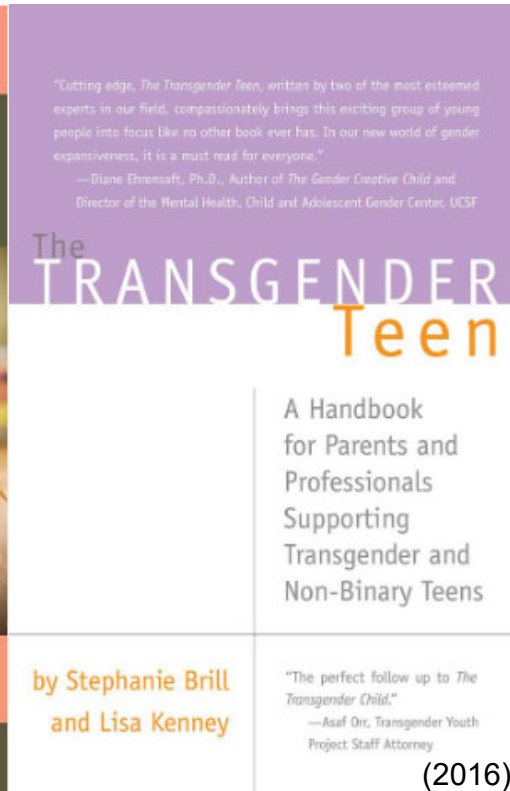
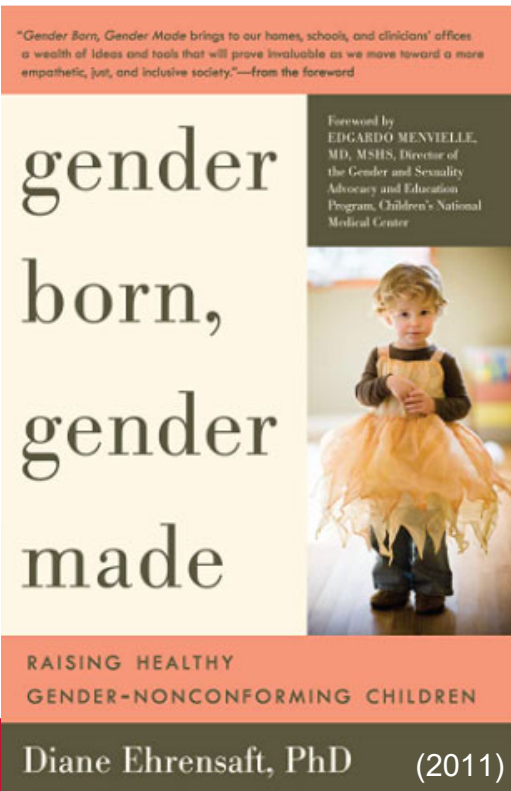
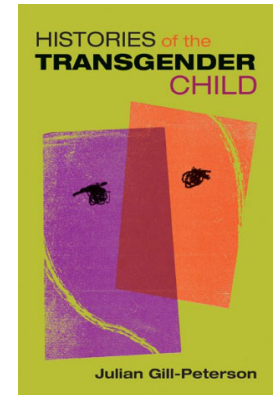
15 years ago...

- Mother of transgender child was looking for researcher to study families like hers—who “knew in their hearts” affirming children’s gender identities and expressions was best for their children’s health and well-being
- Difficult for caregivers of transgender & gender-diverse (TGD) youth to find evidence-based guidance



Gill-Peterson (2018):

- Existence of TGD youth not “new phenomenon”
- Examples of familial & community acceptance not new
- Political and legislative infringements are what’s new



TGD Children & Adolescents

Elevated risk for adverse mental health outcomes

(Aitken et al., 2016; Perez-Brumer et al., 2017)

- Due to gender minority stress (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Toomey, 2021)
 - Depression diagnosis [Reisner et al., 2015; $N = 360$; 50% trans youth ($n = 180$)]
 - Trans youth: 51% Cis youth: 21%
 - Anxiety diagnosis [Reisner et al., 2015; $N = 360$; 50% trans youth ($n = 180$)]
 - Trans youth: 27% Cis youth: 10%
 - Suicide attempts [Toomey et al., 2018; $N = 120,617$; <1% trans youth ($n = 721$)]
 - Trans boys: 51% Cis boys: 10%
 - Nonbinary: 42%
 - Trans girls: 30% Cis girls: 18%



Family as source of rejection

- Many TGD youth experience hostility, rejection (e.g., verbal abuse; physical abuse), and lack of support by family members

(Grossman et al., 2011, 2021; HRC, 2018; Peng et al., 2019)

- Family members' gender-based rejection related to TGD youth's negative health outcomes (e.g., depression; suicide attempts)

(Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Morrow & McGuire, 2023; Yadegarfard et al., 2014)

57% of all
gender-expansive

**youth have been
mocked or taunted by
their families because
of their identities**

(HRC, 2018)



Family as source of support/acceptance

- Chosen family source of care for TGD youth/young adults (Bailey, 2013; Levin et al., 2020; Morrow & McGuire, 2023; Nicolazzo et al., 2017)
- Positive family functioning and relationships serve protective function for TGD youth (Gower et al., 2018; Grossman et al., 2021; Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2013; Veale et al., 2017)
- Family acceptance/affirmation of gender identity & gender expression related to lower adverse psychological outcomes for TGD youth (Durwood et al., 2021; Pariseau et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2010; Turban et al., 2020)
- For young, socially-transitioned TGD youth, who are well-accepted in their gender identities, disparities in mental health outcomes greatly reduced (Durwood et al., 2017; Gibson et al., 2021; Kuvalanka et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016)



Groundbreaking community-based study

(Kristina R. Olson et al., 2016)

- 73 TGD children (age 3-12 yrs; $M = 7.7$ yrs)
- All had **socially transitioned** (i.e., changed names, pronouns, hair, clothes, etc.)
- No elevations in depressive symptoms; marginally higher symptoms of anxiety
- Findings consistent with clinicians' reports that anxiety and distress tend to dissipate after TGD children are supported in their gender identities (e.g., Ehrensaft, 2011, 2012)



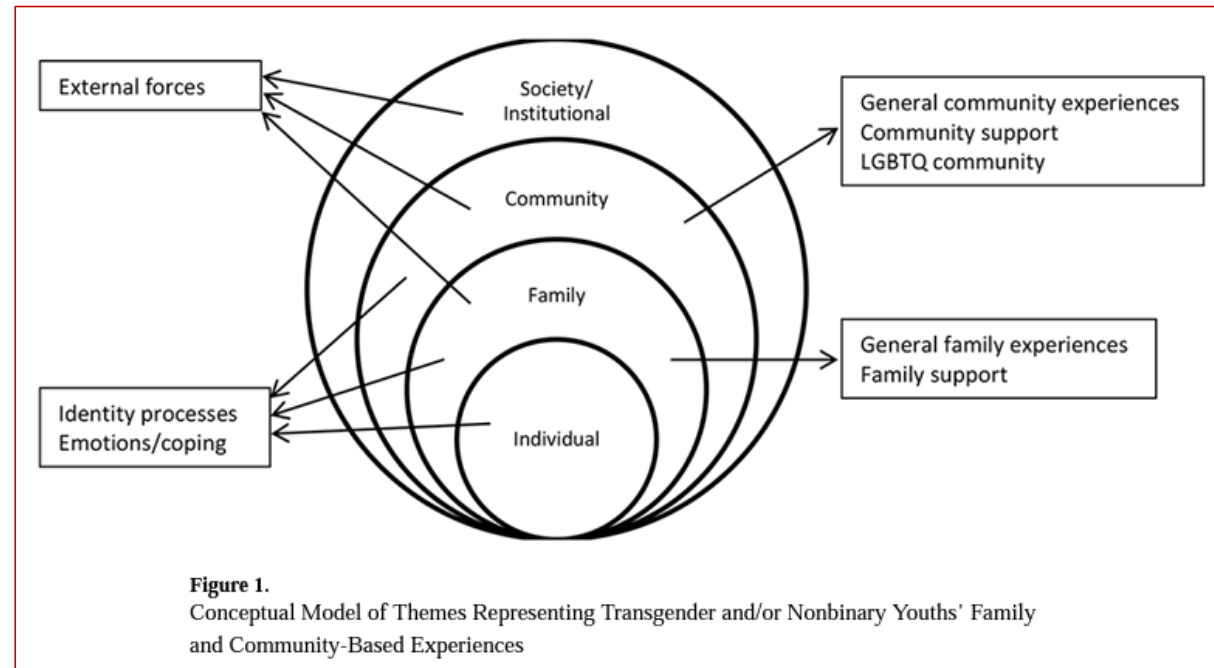
Important considerations of family acceptance...

- “Family acceptance” isn’t binary (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Hidalgo et al., 2017)
 - Families aren’t “accepting” or “not”
 - Families can range from “high” to “low” on acceptance
 - E.g., Family in which (almost) everyone exhibits affirming behaviors, and another family where some do and others don’t
 - Individual family members can exhibit both accepting and rejecting behaviors
 - E.g., Parent may allow child to socially transition but is adamantly against puberty suppression or gender-affirming hormones
- Familial acceptance often improves over time (Bhattacharya et al., 2021)



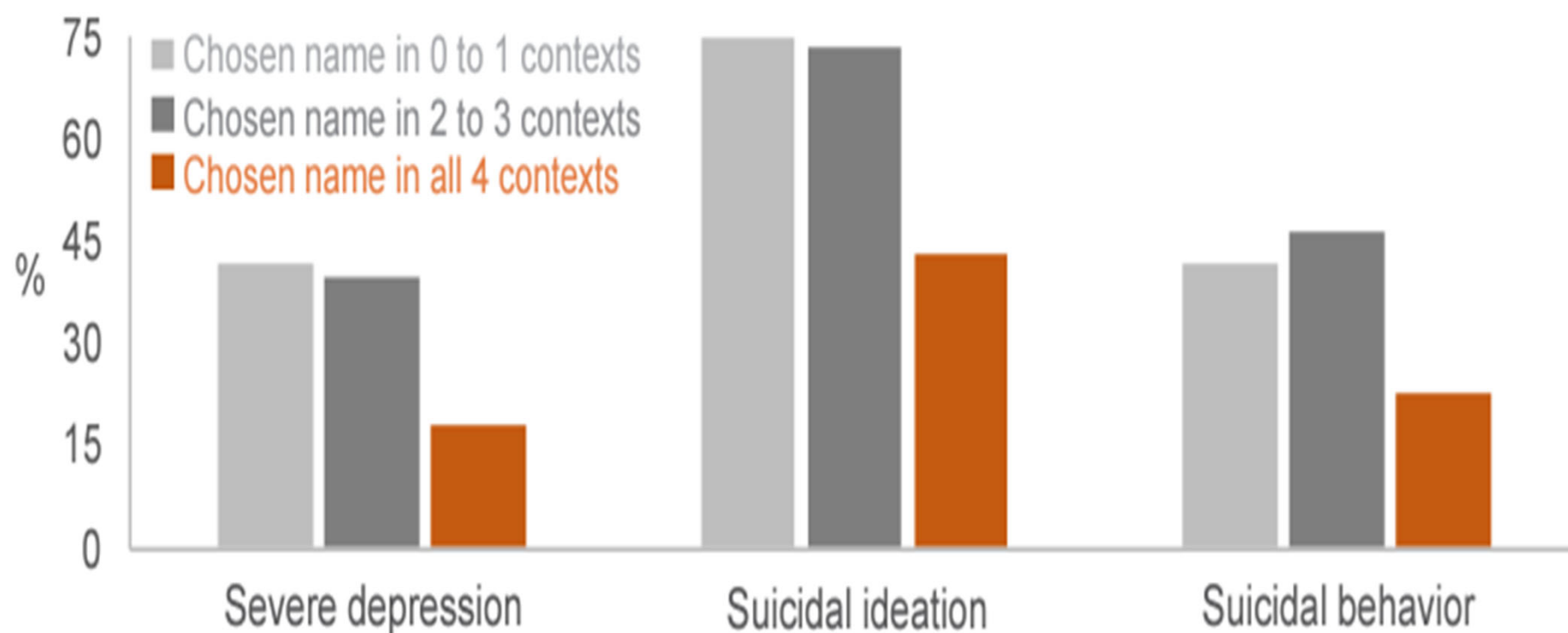
Family Acceptance of TGD Youth in Context

- Ecological approach: TGD youth need to feel safe & nurtured in all settings (Coleman et al., 2022)
 - Address racism, ableism, poverty, etc.
- Community (peer, school, etc.) support and acceptance are also critically important (Durwood et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2018)



"Using Family and Ecological Systems Approaches to Conceptualize Family- and Community-Based Experiences of Transgender and/or Nonbinary Youth From the Trans Teen and Family Narratives Project" (Katz-Wise et al., 2022)

TRANSGENDER YOUTH WHO COULD USE THEIR CHOSEN NAME AT HOME, SCHOOL, WORK, AND WITH FRIENDS HAD THE LOWEST LEVELS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



Russell, Pollitt, & Grossman (2018)

Barriers to Family Acceptance/Affirmation of TGD Youth

- Family members' own lack of understanding, anti-trans bias, and/or fear
- Institutional/systemic barriers
 - Lack of positive, accessible, and affordable TGD-related resources
 - Gender-affirming care
 - Unsupportive schools, religious institutions, family courts
 - Non-affirming laws and policies

“Removing any potential barriers to care—whether financial, geographic, linguistic, and/or cultural— should be a priority in designing...support for all families.”

(Malpas et al., 2022, p. 26)



Facilitators of Family Acceptance/Affirmation

- Educated professionals
 - American Academy of Pediatrics: “Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender Children and Adolescents” (Rafferty et al., 2018)
- Evidence-based resources
 - Family Acceptance Project: <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>
- Community and connection
 - Gender Spectrum: <https://genderspectrum.org/>
 - Raising Unicorns: <https://www.raisingunicorns.org/>
- Reconceptualization of trans childhood: “If...we adults really desire to learn to care for the many transgender children in our midst, we need to learn first...what it means to wish that there *be* trans children, that to grow trans and live a trans childhood is not merely a possibility but a happy and desirable one. And we need to come into this desire *now*, not in the future.” (Gill-Peterson, 2018, p. 207)



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