

New study to focus on understanding challenges of transgender children and their parents

21 March 2014, by Susan Griffith

Amy Przeworski, assistant professor of psychology at Case Western Reserve University, and graduate student Jennifer Birnkrant will lead an online study that captures the experiences of transgender and gender variant children and their parents.

"Very little information exists about how these [children](#) function, and virtually nothing about the [parents](#)," Przeworski said, "and because many families remain silent, we don't know how many children are 'nonconforming.'"

The researchers hope to recruit at least 100 parents and their children (10-17 years old) from about 15 clinics nationally that specialize in the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) patients.

The work is part of a \$1.4 million project funded by the John Templeton Foundation to study spiritual struggles and stress.

"Parents may feel a lot of stress and strain," Przeworski said, "because they want to do what's best for their children. We know so little about how gender nonconforming children do over time so it's hard for parents to know what will bring their children the most happiness."

In Birnkrant's investigation for her thesis proposal, she found that 1 percent of children in the United States identify as "gender nonconforming." Over time, 2.5 percent to 20 percent of the children continue to identify with a gender "inconsistent" with their biological sex into their teen and young-adult years.

For those who do continue a gender transition physically, life can be stressful because of prejudices, discrimination, bullying and violence, Przeworski said.

But the study might also find that kids are actually happier, and their parents don't know it, Przeworski said.

"That's what we hope to find out—what the experience of families of gender non-conforming children look like; the good and the bad. Ultimately, this is the only way to know what other families of gender nonconforming children can expect and to know how to intervene with families who are struggling," she said.

To gather that information, parents and children will be recruited through the clinics for anonymous online surveys. Children and parents will be directed to separate sites to protect their privacy and allow for more open responses.

The hope is to use the responses to better understand the challenges children born as one gender but identify as the other and their parents may face.

Przeworski said parents and children face stresses that can have long-term health and emotional consequences. Also, parents may disagree about how best to support a child.

The researchers hope to use what they learn to create helpful intervention programs. They also hope to share methods some families use to better cope with the challenges. By tapping participation nationally, the researchers hope to provide a breadth of experiences that may differ by clinic or region.

"We are trying to create an intervention based on data—and not our assumptions— about what these children and parents experience," Przeworski said.

More information: Transgender children and

their parents, and those not affiliated with a participating clinic, can participate in the online survey at psychology.case.edu/research/focus_q_participation.html

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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