Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth and Families

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Conflict of Interest Statement

• No financial conflicts to disclose
Terminology

• **Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD):** Gender identity differs from society's expectations based on sex assigned at birth
  – Binary identities (e.g., trans girl, trans boy)
  – Nonbinary identities (e.g., genderqueer, gender fluid)

• **Cisgender:** Gender identity aligns with society's expectations based on sex assigned at birth
Researcher Positionality

• Relevant identities:
  – Cisgender woman
  – Queer/bisexual
  – White
  – Researcher/advocate
  – Parent (of an assumed cisgender child)
Why TGD Youth and Families?

• Longstanding academic interest in gender, development, and change over time
  – Gender and Women’s Studies training (undergrad and grad school)
  – PhD in Developmental Psychology

• Responsibility as an LGBTQ+ person with relative privilege to center the experiences of marginalized members of our community
Mental Health of TGD Youth

• Compared to cisgender youth, TGD youth have higher rates of mental health concerns and related risk behaviors
  - Depression
  - Suicidality
  - Self-harm
  - Substance use
  - Eating disorders
  - Riskier sexual behaviors

• Trans boys, nonbinary youth assigned female at highest risk for depression, suicidality

Connolly et al., 2016; Eisenberg et al., 2017; Johns et al., 2017; Reisner et al., 2015; Price-Feeney et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2017
Explaining Mental Health of TGD Youth

- Mental health concerns and risk behaviors among TGD youth attributed to:

  - Gender Minority Stress
  - Family Context (Non-Affirming Behaviors, Rejection)

Eisenberg et al., 2017; Meyer, 2003; Reisner et al., 2015; Price-Feeney et al., 2020
Gender Minority Stress in the Family Context

• TGD youth more likely than cisgender youth to experience child maltreatment by parents/caregivers

• Family rejection associated with poor mental health (depression, anxiety, suicidality) among TGD adolescents

Delozier et al., 2020; Pariseau et al., 2019; Reisner et al., 2014
Protective Role of Family

• Strong family relationships support health and well-being of TGD youth
  – Buffer against stress related to stigma associated with TGD identity
  – Minimize health inequities experienced by TGD youth

• TGD youth with higher levels of family support and connectedness report better mental health

Brown et al., 2020; Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Olson et al., 2016; Saewyc et al., 2017; Simons et al., 2013; Veale et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2016
SHARE YOUR STORY

in the Trans Teen and Family Narratives Project
About TTFN

• **Study Aim:** Investigate how the family context affects TGD youths’ health and well-being over time and identify types of support needed for TGD youth and families

• **Study Design and Methods**
  – Community-based approach
  – Longitudinal – 5 waves across 2 years
  – Interviews and surveys with TGD youth, siblings, caregivers
TTFN Sample

- 33 families (96 family members)
- 73-92% White, 40% caregivers had graduate degree

TGD Youth
age 13-17 (n = 33)

- Trans boys
- Trans girls
- Nonbinary

Cisgender Caregivers
age 37-69 (n = 48)

- Women
- Men

Cisgender Siblings
age 14-27 (n = 15)

- Girls
- Boys
TGD Youths’ Mental Health at Wave 1 (Youth Report)

Katz-Wise et al., 2018

N=33
TGD Youths’ Mental Diagnoses at Wave 1 (Caregiver Report)

- Self-injury disorder: 17%
- Depression disorder: 40%
- Anxiety disorder: 48%

Katz-Wise et al., 2018

N=48
Family Functioning and TGD Youths’ Mental Health at Wave 1

• TGD youth who reported better family communication and higher family satisfaction had:
  – Better mental health
  – Higher self-esteem and resiliency

• Caregivers’ and siblings’ reports of family functioning not significantly related to transgender youths’ mental health
  – Transgender youths’ own perceptions of family functioning most relevant for their mental health

Katz-Wise et al., 2018
Implications for Supporting TGD Youth and Families

• TGD youth’s perception of family functioning has the greatest impact on their mental health
  – Involve whole family in supporting TGD youth, but prioritize TGD youth’s perspective

• Different family members have different perceptions of family functioning and support
  – Support for TGD youth, caregivers, siblings should be specific to each type of family member
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• TTFN advisory board, community partners, consultants, research staff
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Thank you!
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