TRANSFAMILY THEORY

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Interrogate Gender

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Agenda Style

1. My Frame of Reference
2. Transfamily Theory
3. “Crises” in the family
4. Family Stress Theory
My Frame of Reference
Researcher and Mom

Note: If I have said or presented anything that is offensive, it was without intention. Please let me know after the presentation so I may have the opportunity to grow.

• Mother of Transgender/Gender Queer Son

• Led a Parent Support Group through PFLAG, 2014-2016

• Lived in Baltimore, Maryland; Sid attended high school in Toronto

• Graduate student at University of Calgary, 2016-current
Transfamily Theory: How the presence of trans* family members informs gender development in families

*Journal of Family Theory & Review*
8 (March 2016), 60-73.

Jenifer K. McGuire
Family Studies,
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Katherine A. Kuvalanka
Family Science
Miami University

Jory M. Catalpa
Family Science
University of Minnesota

Russell B. Toomey
Family Science
University of Arizona
Five Challenges

Challenge essentialist notions of binaries, social construction of gender, and developmental theories.

- Physical Sex
- Gender Binaries
- Social Construction
- Gender Development
- Family Acceptance
Challenge 1

“Physical sex is not dimorphic”
(McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpa, & Toomey, 2016, p. 62)
Challenge 1: SEX

“Increasing biological evidence reveals, however, that the binary ‘either male or female’ conceptualization of physical sex is incorrect.”

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 62)
Challenge 2

Gender is not inherently binary

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 62)
Challenge 2: GENDER

“Emerging empirical evidence confirms that even in a context of available and free medical support for transition, some individuals delay sex reassignment or choose to maintain a genderqueer or transgender identity status.”

(Steensma & Cohen-Kettenis, 2005 in McGuire et al., 2016, p. 63)
Challenge 3

The development of gender expression and identity may not be purely social

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 63)
On the one hand, trans* children receive these lessons about gender as cisgender children do . . . On the other hand, the existence of trans* identities suggests that individuals—even at a very young age (Riley, Clemson, Sitharthan, & Diamond, 2013)—are resisting these social influences in regard to gender identity.

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 63)
Challenge 4

Gender variance can emerge throughout the life span

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 64)
Nonetheless, the experiences of trans* persons challenge existing developmental notions that gender identity is fixed early in childhood and that any additional identity development centered on gender identity primarily takes place during adolescence.

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 64)
Challenge 5

Family acceptance of a Trans* person depends on family meaning

(McGuire et al., 2016, p. 65)
Challenge 5: FAMILY

Thus, the meanings that family members construct are influenced by competing cultural discourses relating to the origins of trans* identities, as well as moral and religious beliefs about the acceptability of trans* identities.

(Norwood, 2013 in McGuire et al., 2016, p. 63)
Decentering heteronormativity: A model for Family Studies

Here and gone: Competing discourses in the communication of families with a transgender member (2010, doctoral thesis)
The Web of Meaning
K. Norwood, 2010

- SELF
  - Social
  - Sovereign

- TRANS IDENTITY
  - Transsexual
  - Transgender
  - Individualism
  - Community

- GENDER/SEX
  - Community
  - New Biological Essentialism
  - Biological Essentialism

- FAMILY
  - Community

- Individualism
  - Community
  - Family
SELF

Sovereign Self

Social Self
Ambiguous loss differs from ordinary loss in that there is no verification of death or no certainty that the person will come back or return to the way they used to be.

Sub-themes:
Erasure vs. integration
Sudden vs. gradual
Warning vs. no warning
SEX/GENDER

Biological Essentialism

Socio-cultural
TRANS IDENTITY

Transsexual (medical)

Transgender (cultural)
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Individualism

Community
Family Stress and Coping Theory
Reuben Hill (1949)

ABC-X Model
A) the stressor
B) the family’s resources (physical and emotional)
C) the family’s perception or meaning of the event

... to determine ...

X) the degree to which the family remains functional as a unit (Rosino, 2016).
Often parents experience profound feelings of confusion, anxiety and even anger as they grapple with unfamiliar ways of thinking about gender.

Surprisingly few theories have accounted for the complexities of families negotiating gender variances.

My study aims to fill this gap by exploring and documenting the transformative (Mezirow, 1991) experiences parents undergo as they reconcile conventional Western beliefs with emerging conceptualizations about gender identity development.
The Web of Meaning
K. Norwood, 2010
Thank you

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REFERENCES


Norwood, K. (2010). *Here and gone: Competing discourses in the communication of families with a transgender member*. (PhD), The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.


