Gender-Affirming Social Work Practice

Chase Powell
Understanding Gender Identity

- Transgender youth identify themselves as trans but also fit the criteria for gender dysphoria.
- Gender non-conforming youth can be any youth that does not fit within the typical gender binary.
- Transgender as an umbrella term may not describe accurately every youth at every stage of development.
- As Seelman (2014) explains, “the term transgender will often be partnered with the phrase gender non-conforming to acknowledge those who do not fit into or agree with gender binaries but who might not use the word transgender to describe themselves (p.619).”
TGNC in Historical Context

- The American Psychiatric Association has diagnosed TGNC individuals using the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual” since the 1980s (Breaux & Thyer, 2021)
- LGBTQ identities have been historically pathologized within mental health spaces. This has resulted in the assumption that all TGNC people are mentally unstable and confused.
- While gender dysphoria is the most current update to the manual, many see having any term that refers to trans people as offensive.
- Transgender as an umbrella term may not describe accurately every youth at every stage of development. The American Psychological Association has different criteria for adults and minors. As Breaux & Thyer (2021) explain, “gender dysphoria is not the same as gender nonconformity”
TGNC in Historical Context

- There is evidence that mental health practitioners were researching how to prevent not just transgenderism but also homosexuality before the American Psychological Association.
- A study in 1961 looked at 11 boys that were displaying feminine traits and interests. The goal was to make recommendations to parents about how to prevent or deter effeminate behavior (Green & Money, 1961). This approach is now called “conversion therapy.”
- The conclusion of the study suggested that parents are ultimately responsible for their child’s lack of masculinity.
- This narrative has caused there to be tension between TGNC children and their parents.
Gender-affirming care vs. Conversion Therapy

- Conversion therapy is still popular today even though there have been banned in some states.
- Conversion therapy has been rebranded in some circles as reparative therapy since it has such a negative connotation (McTavish, & Pacholczyk, 2021).
- Professionals create further stress, bias, and pressure within families when they use conversion therapy as a treatment. Pressure is put on the child to conform while blame is placed on the parents for their child's inability to conform.
- Conversion therapy has already been attempted and proven to have negative consequences for youth. A study with over 27,000 participants found that transgender individuals who underwent conversion therapy were twice as likely to commit suicide compared to peers who had gender-affirming therapists (AAAS, 2019)
Gender-Affirming Care Vs. Conversion Therapy

- Allen & Healy (2019) explain the gender-affirming model, “gender health is defined as the youth’s opportunity to live in the gender that feels most real or comfortable to that child and to express that gender with freedom from restriction, aspersion, or rejection (p.403).

- Even though gender-affirming care has become a more common and acceptable medical intervention for gender dysphoria many people still take issue with youth specifically receiving care.

- That is because they assume youth are “confused” and just uncomfortable with puberty and will eventually grow out of gender dysphoria as they develop toward adulthood (Ashley, 2020).

- The discomfort felt during puberty should not be confused with gender dysphoria.
Gender-affirming approach in Child Welfare

- The child welfare system like many other systems functions within a culture that values the gender binary.
- About 44% of LGBTQ youth in state custody report being removed from the home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and they are more likely than their heterosexual peers to age out of foster care or be placed in congregate (McCormick et al., 2017)
- As a social worker, you may encounter ethical issues and policy barriers when it comes to advocating for TGNC youth and their families. One of the main issues is a lack of consensus and just general disagreement over how gender dysphoria should be approached and treated.
- Therefore while trying to practice the gender-affirming model you may find push-back and a lack of resources.
References


References


THE END