

NIH
Institute of Medicine

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgender Health Issues and
Research Gaps and Opportunities

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Gender Spectrum

Provides education, resources and support to help create a gender sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens

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Gender Spectrum

- Work with families, schools, medical and mental health providers, social service agencies
- Frequently asked questions for which we have no answer for lack of rigorous data

Gender Spectrum Stance

- Gender variance is a benign form of human variation
- Most forms of gender identity and expression have the potential to be healthy ones
- Social ostracism jeopardizes healthy development

Affirmative Research Agenda

- Evolution of research related to sexual minorities
- Understanding pathology--> health and well-being
- Gender variance research remains mostly in clinical contexts
- Psychopathologic perspectives

Recommendations

- Build models of healthy gender (and gender variant) development
- Understand the relationship between stigma and negative outcomes of well-being
- Study the efficacy and risks of gender confirming medical care
- Standardize research methodologies

Models of Gender Development

- Current developmental theory narrowly defined
- Theories typically categorically reject gender variance as an inherently healthy form of development
- Sustained consideration of the multiple pathways to healthy gender identifications that we know exist

Recommendations

- Increasing support for research on the typical pathways to gender variant development
- Identifying best practices of affirmative mental health care
- Improving knowledge about social notions and perceptions of gender

Stigma and Well-being

- Gender variant youth frequently isolated
- Minority stress
- Significant barriers in schools, other social contexts
- Suicidality

Recommendations

- Studies of gender variant youth in their social contexts
- Studies that specifically examine parent development
- More robust social demography

Gender Confirming Medical Care

- Confirming medical care plays a vital role in the development of some transgender children
- Lack of studies on the efficacy of and risks associated with various therapies
- Physicians and families would benefit tremendously from rigorous studies

Recommendations

- Studies of the long-term effects of puberty inhibitors and cross-hormone therapies
- Greater standardization of treatment protocols
- Greater understanding of the ways families access care and their decision-making processes
- Relationship between privatized health care and gender variant youth's access to care.

Research Methodologies

- Sexual and gender minority populations are notoriously difficult to study using conventional research methodologies
- Many ground-breaking studies of sexual minority youth end up with insufficient numbers of gender variant youth

Recommendations

- Fund research that specifically targets gender minority youth
- Create opportunities to expand and improve current methodologies
- Train future LGBT health researchers

Conclusion

- Unprecedented opportunity to impact lives of gender variant children and youth, and their families
- Set a research agenda for years to come
- Effect significant and positive transformation in perceptions of gender in general, and gender variant and transgender children and youth in particular