

A Strengths-Based Approach to Gender Identity

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The clinical narrative
starts with strengths:

who is this person?

what do they have to offer?

what are their interests, skills, goals?

what do they need?

what are the obstacles?

strengths-based approach

build rapport with client & family

person-centered treatment goals

team model for coordination of care

use strengths of
individual and team to optimize

credibility

autonomy

coping

self-care

safety

and minimize obstacles from

anxiety/depression

isolation

systems

limited resources

Hey Jeff I won the poetry slam

Whoa! 🙌 🙌 🙌

Your first win?

My first attempt.

Awesome. Really.

Thank you

Thanks for letting me hear your work.



Text Me...



Transition is
a creative act
that organizes
and reveals the
authentic Self

So,
what's the
treatment plan
for that?

TREATMENT GOALS

transition

psycho-ed
self-acceptance
coming out
logistics
medical
social
documents
peer/family support

trauma

harm
reduction
self-
awareness
self-care
self-advocacy
self-regulation
anxiety/mood
coping

development

sep. from family
adult identity
second puberty
school/work
housing
finances
sexuality
relationships

trust

self-care

it's about the
relationship

being seen
nourishes the brain

not being seen
and mirrored
is trauma

*Every
she
a
stab*



suppressing the authentic Self is
trauma

it inhibits
development of
self-awareness,
self-advocacy
and a genuine social persona

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship

“Every cell in my body has to step up.”



witness

educator

supporter

case manager

family facilitator

professional capacity builder

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship

witness

be empathic curious introspective

humble

validating can never hurt

start from client's goals

assessment

no assumptions

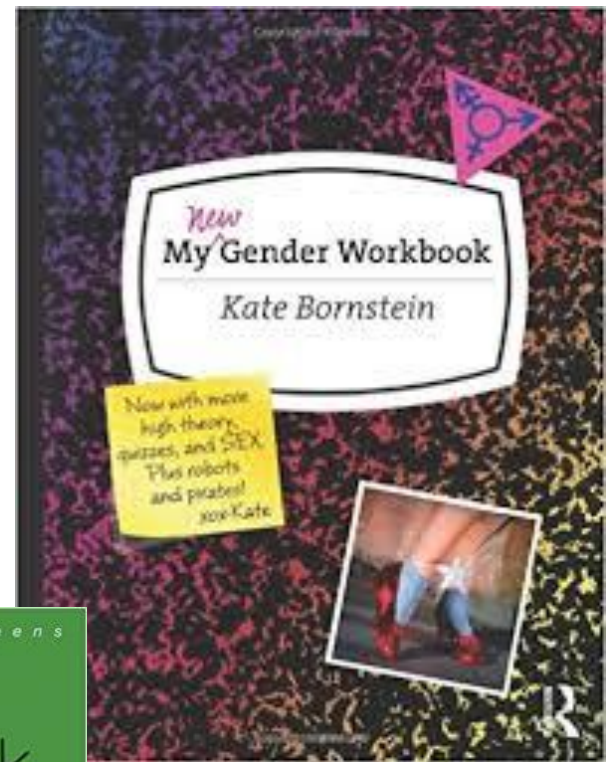
no definitive narrative

YOU AND YOUR
GENDER
IDENTITY
A GUIDE TO DISCOVERY



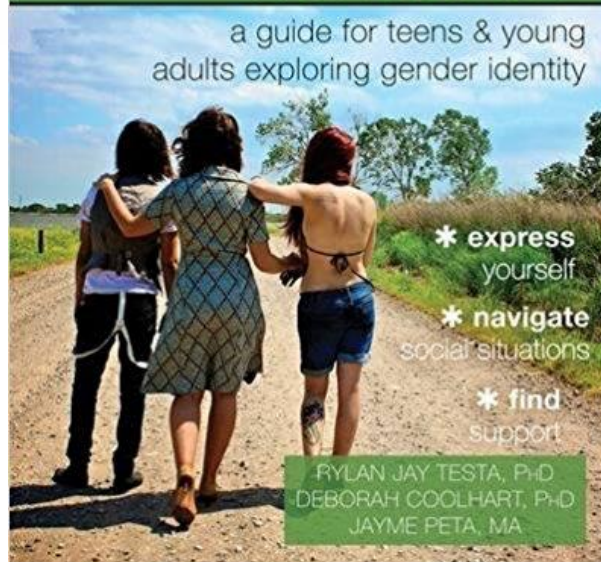
Dara Hoffman-Fox, LPC

With Introductions by Zinnia Jones, Sam Dylan Finch, and Zander Keig



an instant help book for teens
the
gender quest
workbook

a guide for teens & young
adults exploring gender identity



* **express**
yourself

* **navigate**
social situations

* **find**
support

RYLAN JAY TESTA, Ph.D
DEBORAH COOLHART, Ph.D
JAYME PETA, MA

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship

witness

co-occurring conditions

don't overpathologize

trauma-informed approach

anx/depr/somatic/addictions/dissociati

on

neurodiversity/autism/aspergers

minority stress / ACEs

context

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship



educator

training & supervision

cultural competency w trans
communities

psycho-ed, clinical and peer support
resources for client and family

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship



supporter

work from strengths to build coping skills, competency and confidence

advocate: amplify the voice of the unheard/unseen parts of Self

hold the hope, have faith in client's strength and self-awareness

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship

team member

coordination of care

collateral contact & case management

mental health/medical/legal/family/social
safety/housing/education/work

WPATH.org Standards of Care 7 / letters

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship

family facilitator

foster listening and mutual respect

encourage client's self advocacy

give permission to accept

challenge fear-based thinking

What Parents Need to Know

adult acceptance is the best predictor
of good outcome

model self-awareness, calm, and courage

let go of guilt: you didn't cause it, you can't
change it

put grief in context

have faith in child's strength and self-
awareness

read, consult, get support

Shifting Families Towards Acceptance: Gender Timeline

Melissa MacNish, LMHC
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Meet with youth alone to construct a gender timeline

This could take one session or multiple sessions. Have the youth represent a timeline from birth to current age. Ask youth questions regarding gender expression, gender identity development and any sort of gender related memories to help create a gender narrative.

Some sample questions:

- When did you first learn what gender meant?*
- What is your first gender related memory?
- When was the first time you knew you were a boy, girl or other gender?
- How did you express your gender as a young child?*
- At what age did you feel like you were a different gender than the one assigned to you at birth? Describe what that was like for you?*(if applicable)
- Has anyone ever told you that you could not do something because of your gender?
- Describe any experiences you may have had being “discovered” by family members expressing your affirmed gender identity.*(if applicable)
- Who was the first person you told? How did that go?
- When did you first hear the word transgender?
- When did you first meet a transgender person?

Meet with parents and youth to co-create a narrative

Have the youth present the timeline to parents. Instruct parents to listen and not interrupt or ask questions until the youth is finished. When the youth is finished ask the parents if they have anything they would like to add that they remember.

Some sample questions:

- At what age do you first recall noticing that your child’s internal sense of gender differed from the one assigned at birth? Please describe what you noticed at this time. *
- Do you have any memories of cross gender expression or statements from when your child was younger?
- How did your child first tell you? What was that like for you?
- Do you have contact with other families of other transgender children?*
- Have you disclosed your child’s gender identity to other people in your life?*

* Taken from Appendix A Coolhard, D., Cravanor, N., Hager, A., & Wang, M. N. (2008). Recommending transsexual clients for gender transition: A therapeutic tool for assessing readiness. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1(3), 201-224*

Therapist Roles-in-Relationship



professional capacity builder

develop a referral network

be proactive

marginalized populations need safe
options for routine and emergency
medical, mental health and social
services

Thank You

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