

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# Book Review: The Transgender Child

## A Handbook for Families and Professionals

Reviewed by Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H.

Article appeared in Polare magazine: April 2009 Last Update: September 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2013



### The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals

by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper  
Published by Wakefield Press, Kent Town (2008)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1573443180

*Most Janets and Johns from suburbia have little concept that people can be all different sex and gender identities and more variant than the colours of the rainbow.*

There are few sensible books around about children with sex and gender diverse circumstances or identities. This book seeks to fill some of that void. Alas, its approach is somewhat limited. The use of the word "transgender" to homogenise the whole of sex and gender variation is a linguistic shot in the foot. What about those children who are variant but do not identify as transsexual or transgender? Gender is an interpretation of sex-social performance but many children who are sex and gender diverse do not have issues with their gender but do have issues with their physical sex, making them sex dysphoric or diverse.

I got a sense from reading this book that the authors had skipped their classes on psycho- and sociolinguistics and the implications and semantic interpretation through nominalisation. But hey, maybe I spent too much time with my head in transformational

grammar.

There is certainly much in this book that could help the families of sex and gender diverse children, particularly around the devastating effects of prejudice from relatives, schools and classmates. As a clinician I often see parents who think sex and gender specialists are out to get them when they are told to encourage their children to explore their identities.

Most Janets and Johns from suburbia have little concept that people can be all different sex and gender identities and more variant than the colours of the rainbow. They often have little idea of the misery they are heaping on their children when they force them into identities that make them unhappy.

That unhappiness then persists into adulthood and may ruin a life that might have been. There are, of course, parents who are very supportive of their children's decision to transition or be sex and gender variant and in the short and long-term those children do tend to become more balanced human beings.

The authors give examples of children who knew intuitively at an early age that they were transsexual or transsexed even though they might not have had a word for it. When Tommy, at seven tells his parents he has always known he is a boy, not a girl, one has to wonder if it is nature speaking through biology, not nurture through social adjustment. When asked how he knows, he deems it such a silly question and has an air of "How can anyone be so short-sighted?" The text covers transition decisions at an early age, how to manage their situation and affect positive parenting, disclosure to others, what to do within the educational system, medical issues, delaying of puberty with hormone blockers, and legal issues. It is certainly empathetic toward children who find they are not fitting into the cardboard cut-outs of Janet and John, well not as Mum and Dad expected anyway. So I will recommend this book but with words of caution that not all children who are sex and gender different should be addressed as "transgender" because that simply replaces one stereotype with another.

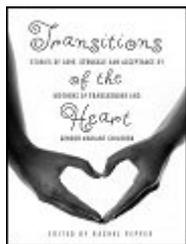
### Books by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals  
Author: Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper  
Publisher: Cleis Press (2008)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1573443180

From Amazon Books:  This comprehensive first of its kind guidebook explores the unique



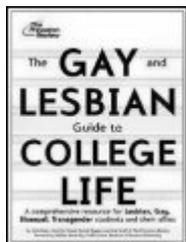
challenges that thousands of families face every day raising their children in every city and state. Through extensive research and interviews, as well as years of experience working in the field, the authors cover gender variance from birth through college. What do you do when your toddler daughter's first sentence is that she's a boy? What will happen when your preschool son insists on wearing a dress to school? Is this ever just a phase? How can you explain this to your neighbours and family? How can parents advocate for their children in elementary schools? What are the current laws on the rights of transgender children? What do doctors specializing in gender variant children recommend? What do the therapists say? What advice do other families who have trans kids have? What about hormone blockers and surgery? What issues should your college-bound trans child be thinking about when selecting a school? How can I best raise my gender variant or transgender child with love and compassion, even when I barely understand the issues ahead of us? And what is gender, anyway? These questions and more are answered in this book offering a deeper understanding of gender variant and transgender children and teens.



**Transitions of the Heart: Stories of Love, Struggle and Acceptance by Mothers of Transgender and Gender Variant Children**  
Author: Rachel Pepper  
Publisher: Cleis Press (2012)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1573447881

**From Amazon Books:**  *Transitions of the Heart* is the first collection to ever invite mothers of transgender and gender variant children of all ages to tell their own stories about their child's gender transition. Often "transitioning" socially and emotionally alongside their child but rarely given a voice in the experience, mothers hold the key to familial and societal understanding of

gender difference. Sharing stories of love, struggle, and acceptance, this collection of mother's voices, representing a diversity of backgrounds and sexual orientations, affirms the experience of those who have raised and are currently raising transgender and gender variant children between the ages of five and fifty. Edited by Rachel Pepper, a gender specialist and co-author of the acclaimed book *The Transgender Child*, *Transitions of the Heart* will prove an invaluable resource for parents coming to terms with a child's gender variance or transition.



**The Gay and Lesbian Guide to College Life: A Comprehensive Resource for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students and Their Allies**  
Author: Rachel Pepper, John C. Baez and Jennifer Howd  
Publisher: Princeton Review (2007)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0375766237

**From Amazon Books:**  Featuring advice from students and administrators at more than seventy of the nation's top colleges, the *Gay and Lesbian Guide to College Life* lets you know how to thrive on campus as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning student.

Including tons of student testimonials and dozens of parent tips, the *Gay and Lesbian Guide to College Life* offers no-nonsense guidance to L.G.B.T. students, their families, and allies on how to make the most of their college experience. Learn how you can find an L.G.B.T.-friendly school; evaluate administrative policies related to L.G.B.T. student life; deal with homo/bi/transphobia on campus; participate in L.G.B.T. student activism; get support for your health and safety needs and fully integrate yourself into the campus community



**The Queer Parent's Primer: A Lesbian and Gay Families' Guide to Navigating the Straight World**  
Author: Stephanie A. Brill  
Publisher: New Harbinger Publications (2001)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1572242265

**From Amazon Books:**  Straight talk for Gay parents - a practical guide to parenting challenges: Includes examples and interactive exercises to help you through conflicts, define and protect your family, and celebrate and nourish a proud and loving household. Covers the practical realities of laying a foundation for healthy parenting, coming out once and for all, finding culturally sensitive schools, and making decisions about spirituality and family celebrations. Also includes a section on

special concerns of single parents, the complications of breaking up, and the legal concerns of protecting your family. The author is both parenting educator and a lesbian mother. Today, more and more gays and lesbians are choosing to reinvent what family means by making up their own minds how they would like to go about having children and raising them. The practical challenges these families face are enormous, including the all-too-familiar consequences of a society-wide disconnect that insists on equating 'family values' with various forms of homophobic intolerance. *The Queer Parent's Primer* is an empathetic guide that offers gay and lesbian parents real-life parenting solutions to the many practical challenges they face.

without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.