

"THE JOURNEY OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE: UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND PARENTAL SUPPORT"

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Abstract

This article explores the journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and social integration for transgender individuals. It examines the distinction between sex and gender, the concept of "living in the closet," and the psychological and social challenges faced during the transition process. The stages of self-acceptance—including self-awareness, disclosure, connection with other transgender individuals, and full self-acceptance—are discussed, along with the critical role of parental understanding and support. The article emphasizes that coming out and achieving self-acceptance is a lifelong process that fosters emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, and reduces the negative impacts of secrecy, stigma, and social isolation.

Keywords: *Transgender, Self-acceptance, Coming out, Gender identity, Parental support, Mental health.*

Introduction

Is it a boy or girl? The answer is almost always dependent on the newborn's anatomy at birth. If the newborn has penis, then it is a boy if not it is a girl. Sex or biological gender is defined as one's bio-physiological make up. Sex is often reduced to genitalia but it is a complex interplay between genetic, hormonal, gonadal, biochemical and anatomical determinants that affect the physiology of the body and sexual differentiation in the brain. Approximately 1.7% of the world's population does not fit into the biological categories.

Transgender population

Transgender is a person whose sex, gender identity or gender expression differs from the one assigned to them at birth. "Trans" can be the shorthand for transgender identities. Transgender people are the most misunderstood group of people in the world. It is not easy for the individuals to admit they are different from others and they would be termed as transgenders. The total transgender population (point estimate) across the 17 states in India was reported to be 62137 with the lower level of the estimate at 53280 and the upper level of estimate at 74297. Around 21% of the overall transgender population was mapped in the rural areas & the rest 79% in the urban areas. The top five states that reported the highest concentration of transgender were Maharashtra (10057), Uttar Pradesh (8001), Odisha (7854), West Bengal (6788) and Andhra Pradesh (5401). Together these 5 states comprise of a total of 38101 transgender & across the 17 states, which is around 61% of the total transgender population.

Every transgender experience a great amount of discomfort and challenges during their transition. The change is frustrating and scary because the transition reason is not known. Understanding the nature of difference can empower and scare the individual at the same time. The transgender may keep their fears and doubts as a secret. The period of secrecy is called "living in the closet" No harm can occur if the trans identity secret is not disturbing the individual emotion. But in reality it is not so, they face several issues such as shame, fear, transphobia, fear of rejection or loss of relationship as a result of sexual discrimination. The above issues can lead to stress which can create hostile, distressing home, work and social environments leading to mental health problems such as depression anxiety and other severe activities (suicidal attempt). So the concealed emotions need to be shared with trust worthy people. Alternative idea is to share it with someone who is expected to respect the feeling of the individual. It

may be a doctor, counsellor or a pastor. Some individuals may rely on the closet. The closet may be safe but it is not healthy. It imposes unnecessary stress which may affect the transgender self esteem. It is always good to come out of the closet.

Behaviour During Closet Period

1. Withdrawal from friends and family members.
2. Lying to hide their activities and behaviours.
3. Concealing items that could offer a hint.
4. Dressing and acting in ways to draw less attention.

Journey to Self acceptance

Self acceptance is vital to the sense of well being. To have a healthy productive life the individual must come out of the internal fear (internal Transphobia). The individual should learn to accept and love his/her own self before he/she love anyone else. Achieving full self acceptance is a life long journey. Each individual has to pass through different stages before attaining self acceptance.

Stages of Self Acceptance

1. Self Awareness
2. Disclosure
3. Attaching with other trans
4. Self acceptance

Self Awareness

Self awareness is a transgenders feelings although the feelings may not be named. Individuals who are outwardly gender non-confirming may experience this stage somewhat differently and more dramatically than individuals who are not. Outwardly gender non -confirming transgender may proceed to the next stage early in the life. Less outwardly non -confirming individual hide their true selves to avoid rejection and discrimination. Individuals are questioning the self to obtain information related to changes and finding out answers for their doubts and questions.

Disclosure: Individuals share their feelings, doubts related to the changes and gender identity to the parents or to a close friend. In this stage rejection may cause return to stage one, but a positive response can lead to higher self esteem and greater self acceptance.

Attaching With Other Trans: Connection with other transgender people who are similar can diminish the feeling of isolation. A positive sense of self is strengthened by education, support and acceptance by other trans.

Self Acceptance

The individual start to accept that he is a transgender. The self acceptance of oneself as transgender marks another beginning. By the time they reached this stage they have gathered enough information and have worked through enough of emotional anxieties. Few reach this stage very quickly, but for others it is much more difficult and lengthy. Whatever the implications may be for the particular individuals, all who reach this stage are confronted with the task of whether to continue the task of transforming themselves, and if so when and how to go about it.

Transgender & parents

Few parents do not accept gender non confirming behavior in their children. The news that their child is a trans can bring a shock to them. They may threaten, scold or even hurt their boy child for behaving

like a girl or girl child like a boy. Parents may take actions like seeking services of quacks, mental health professionals or forced marriage to cure their child. As the children grow as youth sometimes they run away from the family due to the taunts and violence from family or not wanting to bring shame to one's family. Most parents have difficulty in accepting things they don't understand about their children. Parents emotional responses in realizing their child is a transgender vary from parents to parent and family to family. The emotional responses include shock, confusion, anger, fear, shame, guilt, grief and so on. With initial confusion the parents may try to conceal the fact from others before acceptance. At the same time most parents search for information to understand what the child is experiencing and how best to respond to it. Acceptance is a progression. The process of acceptance is slow and it takes time. Acceptance is important for their future relationship with the child. It is easy for those who already value diversity. Those who value conformity, it is much more difficulty to come to true acceptance. However each step towards acceptance is vital and nothing should be undervalued. Parents who are familiar with the idea of gender variance may be able to cope better than others. These parents may focus more on their fear for their child's current and future safety. The following reactions are experienced by parents.

Feeling of Guilt

It is normal for parents to feel angry. They may blame themselves when their child falls outside the gender norms. They may ask themselves is it my fault? What did I do wrong? Mother may be too permissive. Father may be angry & refuse to accept their trans child.

Feeling of Shock: Shock may persist for few minutes to several weeks. It will take some time to realize the fact.

Denial : Parents may become upset, feel sad and cry. Allow them to express their feelings though it is painful to watch. They may think the victim is confused. Don't get upset, remain calm. They may think psychologist or psychiatrist can help.

Decision Making : Decision can be taken in one of the following paths

Supportive : Parents feel health & welfare of their child is more important than any thing else. Such families have an excellent chance of nurturing a healthy attitude among them and also in all family members. These parents are open to learning and they don't mind searching for information on their own.

Conditionally Supportive: Here parents impose restrictions and pressure their child to keep the transgender behavior private. Children are able to spend very little time with their parents. Children of these parents are often afraid of expelled from home and also cut off financial support.

Unsupportive: Parents who do not support the trans make it more difficult for their child to have a healthy life. Parents lose respect from others and they withdraw themselves from other social interactions.

Acceptance: Accepting the child. God created them, loves them completely & honors the beautiful truth of their lives and so do we. Once they accept the child they rather change the society rather than change their child. They won't share the news to every one, but they will no longer hide it. The transgender child will not be a burden to them.

Ten tasks every parent of a transgender child needs to know

Parents Support: Continue to love & support your child for being themselves. Don't get panic. Read some books & educate yourself. Locate therapist who can deal with this problem.



Identifying Transgender: Boys will have female characters in dressing, hairstyle, playing with girls or girls will have boys characters in dressing and in playing with boys & so on. If parents notice a combination of these characters in their child – they might consider consulting with a gender specialist.

Resource Exist To Help Families: Online support groups, organizations to help the individual and family are available. Several national gender conferences are arranged.

Acceptance of Transgender In The Society: Transgender children are no longer feel isolated & afraid. Children are no longer hiding, are able to come out as trans.

Power of parents love : When the parents are able to guide them, they have come out of their fear and shock to acceptance & becoming leaders in their communities. This is the powers of the parents love.

The Most Difficult & Easiest Task : The most difficult task is being able to forget the thought and dream of the child the parent had and begin using a new name and different pronouns. Once the above difficult task are over, things may begin to get easier.

Unconditional love : The greater possible source of love in your life is your children. They see the world upon your love and acceptance of them. Unconditional love can bring you back to the present movement.

Parents Acceptance of Transgender Child: Provide unconditional love as a mean of developing your own self understanding. The change in you will provide a smooth life style for your child.

Parents sharing child's transition with relatives& Others: Parents have to take decisions regarding sharing transition with their relatives while balancing their child privacy, safety & emotional well being. The more you are confident and proud about your child, it is easier for the others to accept your child.

Preparation of transgender child for the path ahead : Spend time with the child to develop coping mechanism. Help them to develop a strong sense of self esteem.

A life long journey: Coming out as transgender does not happen just once. It is a life long process of journey of discovering, accepting and sharing ones gender identity with others. In our society most people assure that every one is heterosexual & living in the gender they were assigned at birth. Transgenders must constantly decide under what circumstances and to whom they will disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Coming out is a important step in self acceptance and fostering emotional, physical and spiritual health. For transgender people coming out helps to end the pain of secrecy and isolation.

Conclusion

The first step of the journey for all the transgender is simply the fact that they have to discover they are not alone, there are others just like them. The birth and growth of the internet has proven to be the linking pin for transgendered people finding one another. The final step is to recognize that the gender issue is a part of their life but not all of it. It is vital to have self acceptance to get through transition and beyond. There are many ways to improve the self acceptance. Think about all the worth while things about you. Some times validation of the therapist, friend, support group may be needed or can do on your won. However get the self esteem firmly implanted. Ultimately the individual feel good. It is all in the hands of the individual. Self acceptance is a life long process and is an important step in fostering emotional, physical, and spiritual health of transgenders. It also helps to end the pain of secrecy and isolation of the trans.



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