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Growing Up Trans: Socialization and the Gender Binary [Abstract]

Michelle Dietert

Dianne Dentice

Stephen F Austin State University, denticede@sfasu.cu

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Growing Up Trans: Socialization and the Gender Binary [Abstract]

Mainstream social constructions of gender tend to demand conformity by adhering to only two choices of gender identity—male or female. Transgender individuals transgress this binary conception of gender by deviating from societal gender norms associated with assigned sex at birth. Using a combination of face-to-face and telephone methodology to collect data, 32 interviews were conducted with transgender individuals ages 18 to 57 from throughout the United States. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Early socialization experiences among the sample of transgendered individuals in this study often demanded conformity along the binary of male and female gender categories. When participants were encouraged by their families and peers to adopt one category of gender or the other, they often challenged traditional gender discourse. Therefore, participants in this study who did not conform to the gender binary when growing up were often confronted with challenges when responding to those closest to them (family and peer groups) and their social surroundings (schools). More specifically, participants recalled reactions from their family and peers concerning their gender variance, that is, their nonconformity to accepted gender norms and presentation based on biological sex. Findings indicate that gender binary arrangements contribute to social inequality for transgender youths who must constantly negotiate their identity while dealing with demands for conformity from both family and peers.