

Does Parental Support for Gender Dysphoria Help Teens?

Let's try a thought experiment. What if your daughter were to believe that she is actually a Na'vi humanoid from the film [Avatar](#)?

You are baffled. The Na'vi are ten feet tall and have blue skin and yellow eyes. Your daughter is five foot six inches tall and has olive skin and brown eyes. You suffer, but your pain is nothing compared to hers. She is self-harming herself and threatening suicide because she cannot find a Na'vi boyfriend and that she has four fingers and a thumb, unlike other Na'vi who have only three fingers?

What are your options? You can have flaming rows with her to bring her to her senses. But you don't want to disturb the family harmony and you know that she won't listen anyway. You can consult a psychiatrist, but she refuses to go.

Or you can encourage her to self-medicate by joining a Na'vi support group on Facebook to reach out to other teenage Na'vi. There she will find like-minded people who imbue her with Na'vi lore, teach her ways to dye her skin and share with her the names of surgeons who will amputate her extra finger. This calms her down and it turns out to be much cheaper than consulting a psychiatrist (although finger surgery might be costly).

But ten years later, even though she is fully immersed in the Na'vi community, she is still depressed and regularly threatens to kill herself.

Is this experience of Na'vi dysphoria really much different from the conundrums that parents of transgender children face?

The results of the largest-ever study of the mental health of

trans and gender diverse young people in Australia show that it is appalling.

According to [the 2017 Trans Pathways study](#), trans young people are at very high risk for poor mental health, self-harming and suicide attempts. About 70 percent reported that they were depressed at the time of the study. Anxiety disorders were 10 to 13 times higher than the average Australian teenager. Four out of five had engaged in self-harm, about eight times higher than average. Forty-eight percent had attempted suicide – 20 times higher.

These are very sick children.

Their ailment is also mysterious. The common understanding of a transman is that he/she is a biological female who thinks that he/she is a male and that a transwoman is a biological male who think that he/she is a female. But the 859 young people who participated in the on-line survey were very confused about their sex, gender and sexuality.

The study reports that “the most common sexualities” were pansexual (30.6%), bisexual (13.9%), asexual (8.8%), heterosexual (7.3%), lesbian (7.3%) and gay (6.8%). There were dozens of other self-defined labels, such as “unsure”, “queer pansexual” and “asexual panromantic”. The survey doesn’t define terms like pansexual or asexual – perhaps because no one, including the participants in the survey, knows what they mean. They are more likely to be the sexual make-believe of a very depressed and anxious young mind. It’s impossible to take them seriously. What does a 14-year-old (biological) girl know about “pansexuality”?

These are very sick children who know almost nothing about the role of sex in the human personality.

The evidence that teenagers with gender dysphoria are suffering from mental illness is overwhelming, according to the study’s own statistics. Yet instead of psychiatric help,

the report recommends acceptance by parents, schools, doctors, universities and government agencies. It encourages the children's peers to respect chosen pronouns and names.

Nothing in the report suggests that "respect" will cure/turn around the frightening mental health statistics. Other than anecdotes gleaned from responses to the survey, it cites no evidence that the depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide will stop when a transphobic society morphs into trans-friendly society.

Instead of proof it publishes the comforting fantasies of young people who know what they want today but don't know who they will be tomorrow.

"I don't feel restricted by the 'binary gender' view. I get the experience of gender euphoria which doesn't seem to exist with cis people!" (a 22-year-old agender respondent).

"We're beautiful people with guts of steel and hearts of gold. We stand up for our people, we take others under our wing, we don't forget our history, and we fight to change it" (a 19-year-old non-binary/androgynous respondent).

"No need to adhere to gendered beauty standards, I can just be ambiguously cute" (18-year-old non-binary respondent).

But pandering to the self-congratulatory assertions of these trans kids won't cure their sickness – any more than painting your daughter's skin blue will turn her into a mature, generous, successful, happy Na'vi warrior. This is just a retread of the self-esteem movement – which was so popular in the 80s and 90s that California established a "self-esteem task force". But [it crashed and burned](#) and trans-affirmation is bound to do the same.

"This is a time when trans rights need to be acknowledged," say the authors of the report. Wrong, absolutely wrong: it is

a time to focus on turning around those dreadful mental health statistics.

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