

Transgender & Gender Diverse Adolescents & Pets

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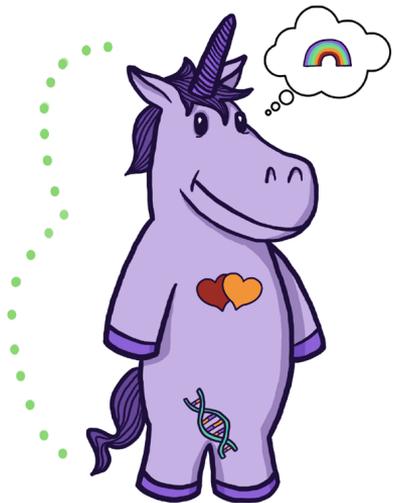
Overview of Diverse Gender Identities



Attraction vs. Gender vs. Sex Assigned at Birth

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources

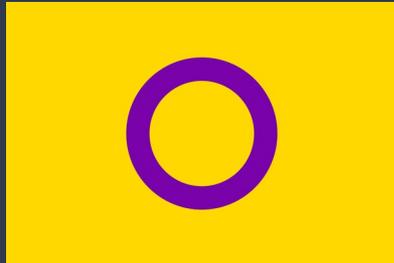


To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

The Sexes

There can be more than 2 sexes.



- Intersex = someone who does not have anatomy that completely aligns with male or female
 - XX in some cells and XY in others
 - XXY chromosomes
 - etc.
- Intersex traits can be discovered at birth or later in a person's life
- In most US states, someone's sex assigned at birth can only be male or female
- Some intersex people consider themselves to be gender diverse, while others may not.



Cisgender vs. Transgender

These are not gender identities. They are adjectives that can describe a person.

Cisgender = identifying as the gender you were assigned at birth

Transgender = identifying as a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth

Gender modality = the alignment between a person's gender and their sex assigned at birth.

Example: Becca is a **transgender woman**.

Adjective



Gender identity

Pronouns

How a person wants others to refer to them or how they refer to themselves.

- Common pronouns:
 - He/him
 - She/her
 - They/them
 - It (only acceptable if the person tells you they/it would like to be referred to as such)
- Neopronouns: new pronouns that are used in place of “he,” “she,” and “they”. For example:
 - Xe/Xem/Xyr
 - Zi/Hir/Hirs
 - Zi/Zir/Zirs
 - Ey/Em/Eir
- Never assume someone’s pronouns. Always ask.
- If you are not certain about someone’s pronouns, you can use a gender neutral pronoun, like they.
- Always refer to someone as their preferred pronoun, even when they can’t hear you.

Trans* Terminology

Always ask the person first!



- Trans* Woman
 - Assigned male at birth (AMAB)
 - Designated male at birth (DMAB)
 - Male to Female (MTF)
 - (typically transitioning only)
- Trans* Man
 - Assigned female at birth (AFAB)
 - Designated female at birth (DFAB)
 - Female to Male (FTM)
 - (typically transitioning only)

Language matters!

Instead of: "When he was a she"

Try: "Before he transitioned"

Instead of: "She's a woman becoming a man."

Try: "Transitioning"

Instead of: "A man trapped in a woman's body."

Try avoiding comments about their body altogether.

Non-Binary

Identifying as any gender that is not exclusively “woman” or “man”.

- Might also be referred to as ‘genderqueer’ or ‘gender non-conforming’
- Can also be used as an umbrella term that includes other identities:
 - Genderfluid = gender varies over time between man, woman, combination of both, or neither
 - Agender = having no gender
 - Bigender / polygender = identifies as two/multiple genders at one time
 - Demi-gender = partially identifying as a gender or multiple genders (e.g., demiboy, demigirl, demi-fluid)
- Nonbinary folks can use a variety of pronouns!



Gender Minority Stress



Minority Stress

- National estimates suggest that **1.3 million** adults and **300,000** youth (13-17 years) identify as TGD in the United States¹
- **Minority Stress Model**^{2,3}: suggests that exposure to identity-based stressors (e.g., discrimination, victimization, rejection) contributes to physical and mental health problems among LGBTQ+ people
 - Also suggests that there are mechanisms (e.g., access to social support or school supports) that can buffer, or disrupt, these harmful relationships
 - Adapted to be applied to TGD populations⁴
- Compared to cisgender people, TGD people experience disproportionately higher rates of physical, economic, and mental health problems. For example...
 - TGD people disproportionately higher rates of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, suicidality, and substance dependence⁵⁻⁹
 - TGD people are more likely to be diagnosed with physical health conditions, like diabetes, cancer and HIV/AIDS¹⁰⁻¹²
 - TGD people experience higher rates of poverty, housing instability, and discrimination in the workplace^{13,14}

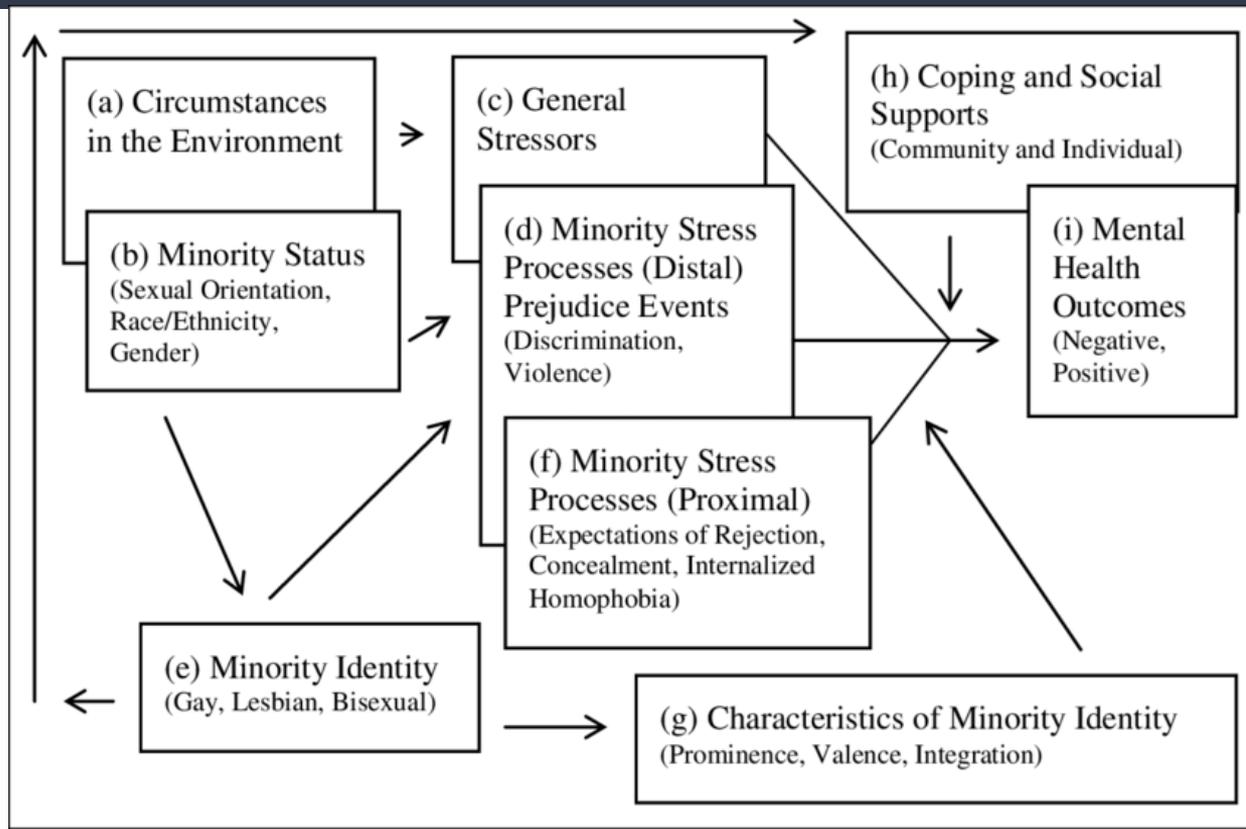
Trans Joy / Resilience

Transgender People On What Trans Joy Means To Them | Cosmopolitan UK



- Majority of research focuses on deficit-based models
 - Important to also remember that TGD youth experience joy and demonstrate resilience
- Balance addressing identity-based stressors that contribute to disparate outcomes with hopes, visions, and wisdom^{15,16}

Minority Stress Model



So where do pets come in?

Pets are a part of TGD people's families and may be an important source of support (protective factor) for TGD adolescents experiencing minority stressors.

Pets may be incorporated into interventions (animal-assisted interventions) used to address disparities caused by minority stress among TGD adolescents.



Very little research...



There is **very little** research specifically looking at the relationships between TGD youth and their pets.

But, we can pull from research on:

- Youth and companion animals
- TGD adults and companion animals
- LGBTQ+ youth/adults and companion animals

What this research tells us is that there are **benefits** and **stressors** to living with a companion animal among these populations.

Potential benefits of living with pets for TGD youth



General Benefits of Pets for Adolescents¹⁷

Cognitive Development

- Promoting early language development¹⁸⁻²¹
- Increasing executive functioning & improving academic performance²²⁻²⁵

Socioemotional Development

- **Emotional support / comfort**²⁶⁻³¹
- Increase empathy³²⁻³⁵
- **Increase self-efficacy, self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth**³⁶⁻⁴⁰
- **Combat loneliness**⁴¹⁻⁴²
- **Improve mental health**^{*43-45}

Physical Health

- **Reduce stress**⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹
- Increased physical activity⁵⁰⁻⁵²
- **Managing medical needs / medication adherence**^{33, 53-54}

Benefits to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶

*Providing emotional
support & comfort*

*Buffering stress
(particularly minority
stress)*

“My family isn’t the most accepting of me being trans... so when I would get into arguments with my parents or when I would have a rough day at school, I would have my dog and she’d be there to comfort me.”

“I’m a very physical person... especially in quarantine when you can’t see anybody - to have a cuddle buddy to watch tv with and somebody to always be there to provide that little touch of reassurance is very comforting.”

“There are points where you just don’t wanna talk about the issue... So my dog being someone that I don’t have to talk to, I can just be with her, and she can just comfort me some, has been very helpful in my journey.”

Benefits to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵

Improving mental health

“She’s helped me be able to get out of the house on a daily basis when I’m depressed, and actually feel like going to school and going shopping, ‘cause I know I need to get things for her, and coincidentally get things for myself. And just feeding her in the morning, feeding her at night reminds me to eat and take my medication.”

“He relies on me so much, like for caregiving, that I felt like if I died there wasn’t going to be anyone left to care for him. And it kept me from actin on my thoughts... I just felt like he needed me so I couldn’t think those thoughts anymore.”

Benefits to LGBTQ+ Youth^{55, 57}

*Increasing self-
efficacy, self-esteem,
and feelings of self-
worth*

“I think I have trouble sometimes seeing myself as a good person, and having an animal in my life where that’s all I am to her is a good person who loves her kind of helps me reframe how I think about myself.”

“She gives me something to take care of, some sense of almost like, not mothering obviously, but caretaking or something. I feel like I’m responsible for her and she relies on me so it makes me feel kind of needed. It’s my job in a nice way. I like having a task to do.”

“I think I was definitely his person. Like, among anyone in the house, he’d always sleep in my bed. And be at my side and stuff. He was like, my ride or die.”

Benefits to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵

Promoting social capital

“Pets tend to be a great way to start conversations with other people who you otherwise might not be able to. Like my current boyfriend, our first conversation was about cats and as someone who was like, newly out and newly in the queer community, having a comfortable topic that isn’t dealing with sexual identity, sexual orientation, or gender identity is very helpful in navigating the community.”

“Pets can sort of be diffusers of tension because they’re neutral and happy. Just oblivious to problems. So, they can defuse tension whether it’s with my roommates, it can be a bonding experience with several people... it can be the same thing with my family.”

Benefits to LGBTQ+ Youth^{56, 58}

Combating Loneliness

“I would see my friends like every day in high school, and then over the summer too, I’d hang out with someone every week, so not having that really made me feel lonely. And so having my pets there with me just every day made me feel so much less lonely.”

“With animals, you can just talk to them just like humans. But animals are so much more supportive to me than humans are, because humans judge. Animals don’t.”

Potential stressors of living with pets for TGD youth



General Stressors of Pets for Adolescents and Young Adults¹⁷

Risk to Physical Wellbeing

- Transmission of diseases (low)^{59, 60}
- Injury due to bites, scratches, etc.^{59, 60}
- Exacerbating allergies⁶¹⁻⁶⁴

Risks to Socioemotional Wellbeing

- **Exposure to animal maltreatment / abuse⁶⁵⁻⁶⁷**

Stressors to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵

Psychological Stress due to Animal- Related Trauma

“The thought of losing him was just really unbearable... I rearranged my whole schedule and my life so that I could take him to the vet immediately. And I had a lot of panic and anxiety over that situation.”

“My dad was abusive and he would sometimes take the anger on the animal, and I was not aware of that until a later age... It terrifies me to know that would be inflicted on an animal. And my animal, specifically.”

Stressors to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁶

Contribution to Economic Insecurity

“Going to the vet wasn’t a priority because it’s expensive.”

“We did have food for about two and a half/three months still when it [COVID pandemic] happened. So, we were able to make it work for as long as we could. And then I think we had to go like a week with us making hamburgers for her and just kind of throwing something together, making sure she could eat.”

Stressors to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵

Barriers to Housing

“I moved in with my sibling and they already had two cats and the landlord didn’t really want more than two and I didn’t want her to go to the bathroom in the new house that had a lot of carpet and furniture that was provided to us. So, I had to get rid of her, and it was a really hard process of trying to rehome her and find someone else who would love her as much as I did.”

Stressors to LGBTQ+ Youth⁵⁵

*Pets as an obstacle
to building
relationships*

“Because a lot of people see how scared [the dogs] are, and then for some reason they start being hostile towards them... And, I realize it’s an insecurity thing for that person, but I’ve literally had friends be like, they haven’t straight out said they don’t come to my house anymore because my dogs don’t like them, but it’s very like, evident that, the fact that my dogs are scared of them, really bothers them.”

“I think I’m just skeptical of anyone who says they’re allergic to cats now. Because I’m allergic to cats, and I have a cat. And so I’m just like, I think you just need to power through it. They’re like, oh I can’t come over... I’m like, everyone in this house is allergic to cats, so I’m gonna need you to take some Claritin.”

Stressors to LGBTQ+ Youth^{68, 69}

*Worsened Mental
Health?*

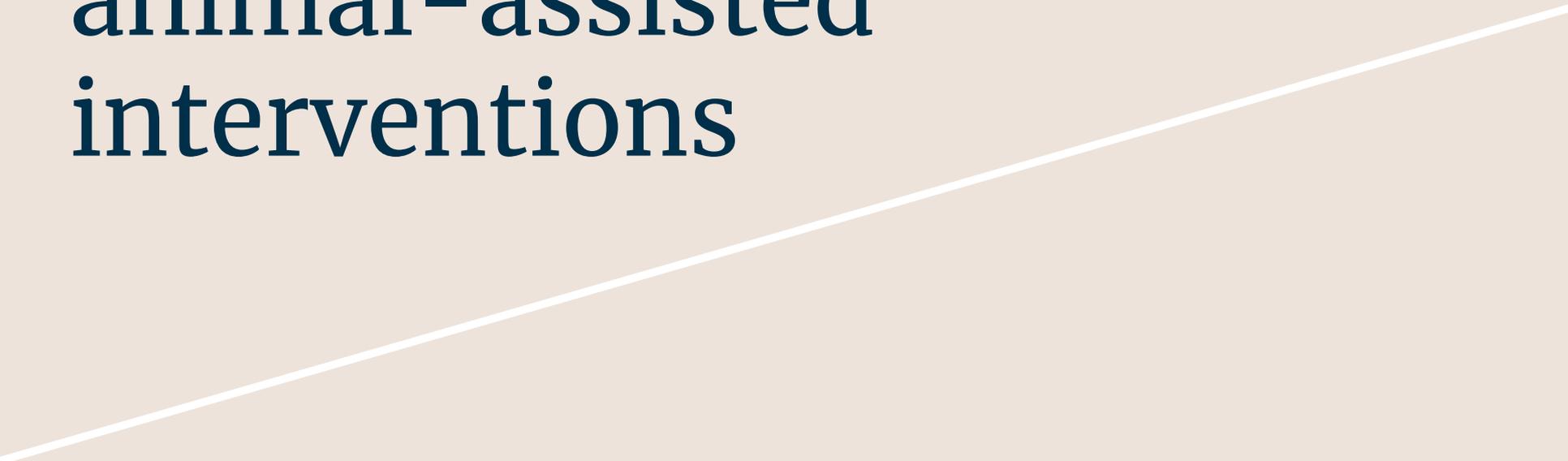
There is some evidence that greater attachment to pets might be linked with HIGHER rates of depressive symptoms and that pets might make the relation between exposure to minority stress and depressive symptoms stronger.



So what's the takeaway?

There are both benefits AND stressors associated with living with a pet for transgender and gender diverse adolescents. It's important to keep both of these things in mind when working with these populations.

Transgender populations & animal-assisted interventions



Animal-Assisted Interventions⁷⁰



Animal-assisted interventions: using animals in diverse manners beneficial to humans (e.g., AAT, AAE, AAA, resident/facility animals)

There is **no** research testing the use of AAI's with TGD adolescents... and only **one** study that has explored how animals may be used in animal-assisted therapies with TGD adults.

Main Takeaways from Wenocur et al. (2022)⁷¹

There are many potential benefits to incorporating animals into mental health interventions for TGD youth, such as...

Calming
presence

Providing
comfort

Promoting
health
behaviors

What else?

How might animals be incorporated into existing mental health interventions that are effective for TGD youth?



Using animals to support “coming out”

TGD youth might practice talking about or exploring their identity with their pet until they feel safe/comfortable enough to do so with the people in their lives

- Two researchers created a protocol for using a pet or therapy animal as a “surrogate” in a therapeutic role-play activity⁷²



Using animals to build human social support networks



We know that having human social support is an important protective factor for TGD youth⁷³⁻⁷⁴, and that animals can be an ice breaker that help facilitate conversations and foster connection between people^{55, 71, 75}

- Using animal-assisted interventions in a **group context**, like at school or in community settings, might build relationships and connection between TGD youth and their peers
- Might even consider the use of animals in **affinity group meetings**

Using animals to facilitate difficult conversations

Similarly, research demonstrates that pets can **diffuse emotional tension and provide comfort** during difficult times⁶ and have been shown to **diffuse family conflict**⁷⁶⁻⁷⁷. Animals might be used to support TGD youth who are having conflict with others in a variety of situations, such as...

- Using the animal in role-play activities to practice having difficult conversations
- Promoting conversation/interaction between family members in conflict

How might we make sure animal-assisted interventions are inclusive for TGD youth?



Promoting inclusivity in AAI can look like...⁷⁸⁻⁸⁰

Displaying
LGBTQ-affirming
imagery (e.g.,
pride flags)

Educating
handlers

Introductions
that include
name &
pronouns

Listing
pronouns
on ID
badges

Asking participants
to share preferred
names & pronouns
(if comfortable)

Access to
gender
neutral
bathrooms

Plan for action
if someone is
not respectful
of TGD
identities

Other considerations for including TGD youth in AAI

- AAI created specifically for TGD youth should be facilitated by handlers and counselors who have expertise with the population
- Attention to maintaining privacy and confidentiality
- Is it safe to obtain parental consent?
- Avoid assumptions that all stress revolves around TGD identities; remember the joy!

Questions??



Thank you!

Scan this QR code or go to tinyurl.com/HAI815 to access the citations and my contact information.

