

Supporting Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth at Summer Camp

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: With increasing visibility of the transgender population, and with more people openly identifying as transgender and expressing their gender nonconformity at younger ages, it is inevitable that camp administrators and staff will face the issue of inclusion of transgender campers at some point. Given that transgender and gender nonconforming youth tend to experience profound difficulties during the school year, camp can be a potential setting for positive youth development for these youth. Many professionals in camps and other recreation settings are increasingly aware of this population's varying needs and the potential positive development found within the camp experience, yet could benefit from additional tools to consider using in their camp programs. The purpose of this article is to discuss how camps can provide supports and opportunities for positive youth development for transgender and gender nonconforming youth. By examining research about gender identity formation and transgender youth in other contexts such as school and community agencies, we draw conceptual links between these studies and the summer camp literature, culminating in an overview of recommendations and strategies for people in camps aiming to be inclusive and supportive of transgender and gender nonconforming youth. We provide suggestions for management practices to support inclusion of transgender campers, and list resources for further information. Recommendations for practice include discussion of the areas of camp-level policies, communications, camp staff, and camp operations (e.g., health and programming). Camps have the opportunity and flexibility to support the participation of transgender and gender nonconforming campers by making programming and policy decisions that promote positive development for all youth. In light of increasing awareness of gender-based harassment and abuse and the developmental needs of transgender youth, it is important that camps recognize how they can provide youth a safe place from these pressures and risks as they learn and practice skills to become resilient.

KEYWORDS: *Summer camp, management, transgender, gender, youth, counselors*

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While much research has addressed many areas and outcomes of summer youth camps (e.g., Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Henderson, Bialeschki, & James, 2007; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007), very little attention has been paid to marginalized populations, such as youth who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming. Many people involved with summer camps are increasingly aware of this population's varying needs and their potential positive development found within the camp experience (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Ellin, 2013; Latzko, 2011); however, a synthesis of information about transgender youth is missing from practitioner-oriented recreation journals. This paper brings to light many of the issues involved in supporting transgender and gender nonconforming youth through summer camp. By examining research about transgender youth in other contexts such as school and community agencies, conceptual links are drawn between these studies and the summer camp literature, culminating in an overview of recommendations and strategies for people in camps aiming to be inclusive and supportive of transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

In this paper, "gender nonconformity" is used to refer to an individual's expression, appearance, preferences, and behaviors that run counter to society's expectations and stereotypes based on that individual's sex. The intentional choice is made throughout this paper to refer to both transgender and gender nonconforming youth, in order to signal the broader range of individuals who will benefit from the gender-inclusive efforts proposed. For example, "gender nonconforming youth" would also include an individual who identifies as female and whose assigned sex is female, but whose appearance, expression, and activity preferences sometimes defy gender expectations. For transgender individuals, gender nonconformity is deeply rooted in their gender identity, that internal sense of gender, whether it be male, female, or something not captured by either of these categories (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006).

All of us have a gender identity, but for transgender individuals, that gender identity defies the sex category to which they were assigned at birth. Some transgender individuals experience their gender identity to instead match the "opposite" sex category, such as an individual born male but who comes to realize an internal sense of being female. This individual might at some point in life decide to "transition"—whether socially, surgically, medically, or some combination of these—in order to synchronize the gender identity with the appearance and expression. Other transgender individuals have gender identities that they cannot accurately describe as either male or female and present an ambiguous or fluid gender presentation (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). To further clarify these concepts, it is necessary to distinguish transgender from intersex. The latter refers categorically to individuals whose physiological indicators of sex are in some way ambiguous. For instance, a hormonal condition that causes an individual who is chromosomally male to have female anatomy is an intersex condition. In contrast, transgender individuals (unless they are *also* intersex) do not have ambiguous physiology; their chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy are all consistent with either male or female sex, but their gender identity is not. Certainly, gender identity is complex, fluid, and challenging to understand in both psychological and social contexts (Dietert & Dentice, 2013).

Past Research on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth

Most people develop their gender identity at an early age. For transgender youth, the emerging awareness that one's internal sense of gender does not match their body can be

scary, confusing, and stressful (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997). Society often reacts negatively to gender nonconforming behavior, and transgender individuals can as a result deny their gender identities or suppress gender nonconforming expression due to fear of rejection, isolation, harassment, or even violence. Those youth who do come out as transgender experience many of those things, as evidenced by research findings documenting verbal and physical harassment and abuse of transgender youth by their family members (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006), as well as their classmates and teachers (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Transgender youth also must devote considerable mental energy to navigating perilous social contexts (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2013). All of these factors contribute to the unique vulnerability of transgender youth as a population, which is marked by high rates of suicide and other life-threatening behaviors, truancy and absenteeism from school, lower academic achievement, homelessness, and other dangerous situations (Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Mary Doll, & Harper, 2006; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007).

Although much evidence exists about the negative consequences of sexism and homophobia for transgender and gender nonconforming youth, some research efforts aim to understand youth context factors that support youths' resiliency and positive development. Positive youth development refers to an asset-based approach to development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006), wherein the focus is on the provision of supports and opportunities for youth to transition to fully functioning adulthood, rather than on the prevention of negative behaviors (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Developmental tasks such as striving for balance, learning to cope, questioning, and eventually becoming comfortable with one's gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation are tasks that require resiliency (Stieglitz, 2010), even for youth who are not transgender or gender nonconforming.

The goal of many institutions for youth such as camps is to promote youth development by building these aspects of psychological resilience for all youth. Still, the need to develop resilience is a need not fully met in the everyday lives of most transgender youth. For example, many transgender youth seek to escape school and its related stressors due to lack of agency support, feelings of vulnerability, and experiences with violence (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2009). Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank (2011) examined four aspects of psychological resilience in transgender youth: a sense of personal mastery, self-esteem, perceived social support, and emotion-oriented coping. By helping to build resiliency, people in youth contexts who aim to avoid all stereotypes, use inclusive language and policies, and question assumptions about gender not only support transgender youth, but also support all youth.

Transgender youth have an added developmental task of establishing a non-normative gender identity or expression, a task often taken for granted by non-transgender youth. Pollock and Eyre (2012) suggested three stages involved in developing a transgender identity: a growing sense of gender, recognition of transgender identity, and social adjustment. People in youth contexts like camps and other recreation activities who are aware of these stages and provide nurturing resources are better equipped to support transgender youth as they work through these crucial stages. For example, a sample of transgender youth reported feelings of vulnerability in four health-related areas: the lack of safe environments, poor access to physical health services, inadequate resources to address their mental health concerns, and a lack of continuity of caregiving by their families and communities (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006).

Leisure and recreation settings have long been sites for the development of personal and social identities and skills. For example, staff from community organizations that serve only transgender youth described the centers as places where youth came to understand who they were, had an opportunity to explore their own gender expressions in a safe environment, and gained insight about what it meant to pursue a gender transition (McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010). Much attention and research has focused on formal education settings and policies for transgender youth (e.g., Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010), yet out-of-school-time contexts have not received the same attention. Notable

exceptions include studies of afterschool gay-straight alliances (McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010), community centers (Travers et al., 2010), and extracurricular athletics (Buzuvis, 2011). More focus on out-of-school time settings for positive youth development for transgender youth is warranted.

Potential Role of Summer Camps

Given that transgender and gender nonconforming youth tend to experience profound difficulties at school and during the school year (e.g., GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), the summertime setting of camp is a potential context for positive youth development and respite for transgender youth. The camp setting can be a space for “safe socialization” that is free of fear of stigma while promoting self-expression (Craig, 2011, p. 286). However, some people in camps do not challenge themselves to think about their opportunity to promote protective factors for transgender youth because of their assumptions about the need for separation of sexes, such as those reflected in separate living spaces and activities for boys and girls. Such uncritical approaches to management can further marginalize youth who are transgender or gender nonconforming. While little research about transgender youth and camp exists today, recreation professionals can adapt some strategies of other youth-serving institutions such as school to better support transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Each summer, over 10 million young people attend one or more of 12,000 day and overnight camps in the United States (www.acacamps.org). Camp is an important experience of childhood for many, with a long history of promoting egalitarian ideals (Ramsing, 2007). According to the American Camp Association (2011), camp attendance is most common during late childhood (57% of overnight campers and 88% of day campers are aged 9 through 12) and to a lesser degree, adolescence (36% of overnight campers and 11% of day campers are aged 13 through 17). These camper ages coincide with key developmental stages of identity formation, thus making the experience of camp likely to interact with youth who are in the process of developing their gender identities. Responding to Eliason’s (2011, p. 8) call that “social institutions change” in ways to promote inclusion and reduce stigma for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups and individuals, camp is one social institution of youth development already well-positioned for this change.

Unlike other youth institutions such as school, camps have the potential to meet the diverse and complex needs of youth beyond their academic needs. Camps are typically characterized by their flexibility, adherence to professional accreditation standards, intensive staff training, policies and practices to partner with parents, caring staff, and other assets that provide opportunities for youth to explore their interests and identities (Henderson, Bialeschki, & James, 2007; Henderson, Bialeschki, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker, & Marsh, 2007). Such contexts have potential for positive youth development to occur (Smith & Akiva, 2008; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010).

In the camp system, a major social structure created to support positive experiences of all youth is the American Camp Association (ACA; the leading professional organization for camps), which has an accreditation program of established standards focused on health, safety, and risk management. The purpose of the ACA-accreditation program is to educate camp owners and directors in the administration of key aspects of camp operation, particularly those related to program quality and the health and safety of campers and staff. The standards establish guidelines for needed policies, procedures, and practices. Individual camps, then, are responsible for staff training and ongoing implementation of these policies. Camps typically have specific policies against bullying and verbal and physical abuse, as well as stated reporting mechanisms, which can help to provide a safe space for the many youth who face abuse outside of camp (Grossman et al., 2011). The existence of such oversight functions provides camps with the motivational incentives to be inclusive and to establish structural systems to prevent and address harmful interactions between campers.

Campers who are transgender have been receiving some recent attention from ACA. Since 2008, ACA has increasingly promoted information about transgender campers and staff, especially through practitioner-oriented articles and trainings, indicating that people in camps are requesting more information and resources about transgender issues. ACA's professional and educational resource *Camping Magazine* included articles on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer campers and staff ("Don't Assume I'm Straight," Alexander & Kriesel, 2003), inclusion in camp ("Everybody's In, Nobody's Out!" Ditter, 2009), and transgender children ("Transgender Youth: The Role Camps Might Play," Holder, 2011). Moreover, educational sessions on LGBT campers and staff have been an evolving fixture of ACA's national and regional conferences for several years, in large part because of the impassioned advocacy of camps serving youth and staff known to be LGBT.

On the camp-level, camps are uniquely situated to provide opportunities for positive youth development because of their recreational and educational focus and, in the case of overnight camps, community and close living quarters. However, the sex-segregated nature of camp design could constrain the participation of transgender youth if they are assigned to cabins, activities, etc. according to their natal sex instead of to their gender identity expression. All or nearly all camps provide sex-segregated cabins, showers, and changing areas, which assure privacy from the "opposite sex" but not from other campers. Some transgender campers are likely to wish for access to the space designated for the gender that is consistent with their identity and not the gender associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Such campers might be concerned about privacy in such intimate settings or could fear other campers' (or their parents') objection to their presence. Moreover, transgender youth might not feel the freedom to travel to and participate in recreational and sports programs because of fear of verbal and physical harm, and traditional gender-based recreational programming might not be interesting to them nor meet their needs for self-expression (Grossman, O'Connell, & D'Augelli, 2005).

For the remainder of the article, specific camp areas to consider in determining policies and procedures for inclusion of transgender campers are discussed. These recommendations are based on the authors' experiences with policy creation in a variety of recreational settings, professional experiences in camps, academic literature reviews, and growing knowledge of promising practices in the youth and camp fields. We share ideas, policies, and practices that are most appropriate to those camps dedicated to facilitating and expanding opportunities for the camp experience to transgender and gender nonconforming youth. We recognize that camps have a variety of philosophies, views, missions, and camper populations that can facilitate or hinder inclusion of transgender campers. For example, some camps have policies that prohibit staff from talking with campers about any topics related to gender, gender identity, sex, or sexuality because the camps believe such conversations should only occur at home with campers' families. These recommendations are aimed toward those in camps who are open to inclusion of transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Camp Strategies to Support Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth

With increasing visibility of the transgender population, and with more young people openly identifying as transgender and expressing their gender nonconformity at younger ages, it is inevitable that camp owners and administrators will face the issue of inclusion of transgender campers at some point. Camps should determine their policies regarding transgender campers in a proactive manner (Travers et al., 2010). One reason for proactive policy creation is that the absence of a policy of inclusion could be misperceived as a policy of exclusion and deter transgender campers from seeking to attend camp. Another reason is that attempting to create policy in the context of an individual camper's case could put unwarranted burdens on that camper, such as unwanted publicity or exposure to negative comments and criticism. In contrast, policy formation in advance can promote deliberate

decision-making and allow time for outreach and education of camp staff, campers, parents, and other stakeholders.

Inclusion of transgender campers can be a risky business decision for people in camps worried about changing the status quo and potentially losing income from camper fees from families who do not support inclusive policies. Many camps operate as nonprofits, and even for-profit camps can have small profit margins. The loss of even one camper's registration fee can mean the need to alter or cancel a camp session if the ratio of program expenses (such as staff or food) to campers changes. Additionally, many camps have active stakeholders such as alumni who financially and socially support operations. If a key stakeholder such as a funder or alum is uncomfortable with the gender-inclusive decisions of the camp, the result could be the loss of both social and financial support. Many camps choose to do nothing because of this fear. However, camps can, upon careful consideration of the camp's values and those of camp stakeholders, decide to be purposefully and explicitly inclusive of gender diversity—a decision that has the potential to attract new campers and stakeholders as well.

Camp-Level Policies

Camps should review their mission and strategic plans to assess their approach to the inclusion of transgender campers, taking into account the potential vulnerability and sensitivity that transgender youth might experience throughout the entire camp experience, from viewing promotional materials through after-camp social networking. Groups and individuals within camp can work together in their policy-making to question assumptions about gender in camp and examine personal and structural biases and stereotypes. This review should also encourage camps to assess their philosophies. Most people in camps believe that camp should be a safe place for all campers as they gain skills to help them in their lives. Camps often position themselves as an antidote to the stresses of school, such as from bullying and other forms of aggression and violence faced by many groups of youth. Bullying and harassment based on gender is antithetical for camps that take this stand.

Camps can examine their policy statements to assess whether they adequately prohibit discrimination, including bullying and harassment, based on enumerated categories that include gender identity and expression. For example, a typical, comprehensive anti-discrimination policy might declare, "We do not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or expression." This type of statement is important because research in schools has shown that students feel safer with anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies specifically inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity (Szalacha, 2003). Szalacha (2003) also found that students felt safe in schools with other protective factors such as a gay-straight alliance or other type of support group for LGBT students, and teachers who engaged in professional development regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, all students (not only marginalized students) felt safer than those students in schools that did not implement these safer diversity practices (Szalacha, 2003).

In addition to promoting inclusion, such policies might be warranted by legal considerations. Increasingly, states, counties, and cities are including "gender identity and expression" in nondiscrimination laws that cover public accommodations (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2012). Such statutes currently exist in California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia. Additionally, some courts have found that laws prohibiting discrimination based on sex (which exist in nearly all states) also prohibit discrimination against transgender individuals (Buzuvis, 2011). While these decisions relate mainly to the context of employment and not to public accommodations like camps, the possibility for liability exists that courts could use that expansive interpretation of sex discrimination in a case involving camp. This is something camps should be aware of even if they are not located in one of the thirteen states with laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. Clarifying that the camp adheres to a similar policy can help to ensure that the camp does not run afoul of such laws when they apply.

By including “gender identity and expression” in their nondiscrimination policies, camps formally commit to honoring campers’ self-declarations of their deeply held gender identities. If, for example, a transgender camper who was assigned a male sex at birth presents herself as a girl in other contexts of her life outside of camp, and she registers for camp as a girl with her family’s support, the camp should be encouraged to accept her as a girl. This acceptance means that the camp would assign her to a female cabin, let her dress and participate like other female campers, and treat her as a girl for all purposes, with the possible exception of practices designed to ensure her privacy. To be clear, including “gender identity and expression” as a protected category does not mean that camps have to accept boys into girls’ programs (i.e., cabins or camp sessions) and vice versa. A boy with a male gender identity is not the same as a transgender girl, who despite having been assigned a male sex, experiences a female gender identity. As such, the two need not be treated the same by camps that separate boys and girls for various purposes.

Communications

Camps should consider reviewing their marketing approaches and materials and consider including gender nonconforming youth in promotional images. Camps also must decide protocols for who needs to know about individual transgender campers (e.g., counselors in direct contact, activity staff, health care providers, other campers, other campers’ parents, and other camp stakeholders). Developing protocols for communicating with each of these groups to ensure that the camp’s message is consistent and aligned with its philosophy is necessary for effective implementation of communication policies. Communication protocols can also help to ensure campers’ privacy.

Moreover, camps should consider under what circumstances they will communicate with other campers’ parents and caregivers from the home communities of campers. Consideration of the larger community context is important for deciding whether and how to communicate about transgender campers. For example, one study found that in communities with higher poverty levels, LGBT youth were more likely to be verbally and physically harassed and assaulted, although they were less likely to hear homophobic remarks (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). The authors also found that communities with higher proportions of college graduates had LGBT youth who experienced less hostile school climates, and that LGBT youths in rural areas experienced the most unsafe school environments.

Communication with transgender campers’ parents and caregivers should be imperative from the camp’s viewpoint and can provide resources and education to aid in supporting transgender campers. At ACA conferences and trainings, camps with transgender campers have described the benefits of these conversations with parents and caregivers prior to camp. Conversation topics included appropriate staff training, potential issues for the healthcare staff, thinking through logistics of living arrangements, issues of privacy, and possible strategies for talking with other campers’ parents.

Camp staff should discuss with parents and caregivers how the camper will handle interactions with others who know the camper as having been assigned a different gender. For example, a parent of a transgender girl blogged about enrolling her child at a day camp. In anticipation of possible teasing or bullying from people who knew her as a boy, this parent helped her child role-play her response to people who harassed her by using her old name by saying, “I prefer to be called Alex, thank you,” (GirlyBoyMama, 2011). This blogger also recounted a story in which other campers noted that Alex was using girls’ restrooms and told their parents, who then informed the camp director that Alex was “really a boy.” Fortunately, the camp director and counselors had had prior conversations with the parent in which their guidance and engagement was helpful in their responses to parents. Alex, her family, and camp staff eventually agreed that Alex would use a bathroom for preschool children and waited to change in the girl’s locker room until after all the girls had left the pool changing area. While not an ideal solution, this compromise helped neutralize what could have otherwise been an obstacle to Alex’s overall integration into camp life as a girl.

On another blog, a parent discussed her experience sending her transgender son to an overnight camp (Transparenthood, 2011). This parent worried about what would happen if the bathrooms were not private, someone walked in while he changed his clothes, or someone knew his assigned gender and told other campers. The parent decided to enlist the support of a camp chaperone to see what the camp could do to provide her son with a roommate who would be accepting. After the chaperone played intermediary, contacted a potentially accepting roommate's father, and explained the situation to the father of the other boy, the father wrote a note to the chaperone stating his appreciation for his son's "opportunity to get to know someone who has a different life path." A follow-up letter from the other boy's parent indicated his son enjoyed having fun with his roommate and had no concerns or questions. These examples illustrate the positive opportunities camps can experience when they engage in dialogue with parents and caregivers about their child's needs, as well as talk to the campers themselves.

Camp Staff

People in camps can also discuss how counselors and other staff might communicate with campers about transgender issues, and how to handle any potential conflicts among campers. Exposure to a variety of people is a key element of camp and essential for positive youth development for all children. When that exposure is enhanced by higher quality intergroup contact, including contact over longer periods of time and involving mutual trust and understanding, it has the greatest potential to reduce sexuality- and gender-based stigma, prejudice, and discrimination (Horn & Romeo, 2010). Harmonious integration of transgender campers can provide benefits to all campers and staff that can last beyond the immediate camp experience.

Staff appreciate the support of administrators who provide educational resources for staff and help facilitate conversations about gender, such as from LGBT centers or workshop facilitators. Specific strategies for adult advocates to implement to improve climate for transgender youth include promoting knowledge of issues for transgender youth, identifying transgender advocates and resources within staff, and providing opportunities for advocacy and consultation (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009).

Camp administrators should consider evaluating, and if necessary modifying or supplementing staff hiring, training, and supervision protocols to ensure non-discrimination and inclusivity. Is a supportive approach explicit in the interview questions, camp documents, and trainings? For example, interview questions could include questions about applicants' previous experiences with transgender and gender nonconforming youth, or offer a scenario and ask how the applicant would address the situation. Camps should explore ways to conduct staff trainings that provide staff with opportunities to understand and improve or enhance their own comfort levels with transgender youth. For example, do they have accurate information? Are there opportunities to role-play scenarios, such as how to handle gender-based insults or how to respond to a camper sharing that a relative is transgender? Is there someone or some people with whom to talk about transgender issues? Are there advocates for transgender youth among the staff? Camps may want to consider if they can ascertain potential advocates by examining answers to interview questions or training scenarios such as "What would you do if you found out one of your campers identified as transgender, or as a gender other than what you initially thought of the camper's identity?"

Staff training is a crucial part of supporting transgender campers because staff members are directly responsible for implementing the policies and rules, peer education, planned educational activities, and in-service training that is necessary to create communities inclusive of transgender youth (Grossman et al., 2009). Camp staff training could include topics related to interventions for aggression and name calling, eliminating harassing behaviors, using preferred pronouns, increasing self-awareness, specific tips for language and intervening, sharing evidence-based research, discussing rights of young people to feel safe and the risks they face (Sadowski, 2010), and if possible and appropriate, the inclusion of youth in the training. For example, when introducing oneself to the group, camp

counselors can invite campers to say their name and which pronouns they prefer (i.e., male, female, either, neutral such as “ze,” or neither). Follow-up training and ongoing dialogue and opportunities to revisit the information and think about its application are key elements in ongoing staff support as well (Payne & Smith, 2010). Including questioning of gender stereotypes in camp programming, regardless if transgender or gender nonconforming youth are present, can create a climate in which staff and campers are comfortable handling these issues.

Staff often serve the role of a caring adult, which research suggests functions as a protective factor for transgender youth (McGuire et al., 2010). For example, one study found that being attached to an adult at school was positively related to feelings of safety, and trust was a major part of this attachment. This finding suggests the benefits of a “relational assets approach,” which includes deliberately creating opportunities for transgender youth to form authentic, affirming relationships with peers and adults (Sadowski, Chow, & Scanlon, 2009). Staff members who know how to promote discussions of gender, validate gender nonconformity, and effectively suppress others’ use of slurs and other derogatory or inaccurate language, with the aim of increasing positive attitudes, can nurture these positive youth-adult relationships.

Camp Operations

Health care at camp for transgender campers includes attention to physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Physical health care for some transgender campers might include hormone therapy, use of nonprescribed hormones, and in rare cases, medical needs related to surgeries associated with transitioning genders. Camps should also think about ways to support mental and emotional care (e.g., emotional needs associated with transitioning genders). Although being transgender is viewed less as a disorder and more as an identity (Bockting, 2009), mental health issues can still exist for transgender youth at camp, especially as related to coping with the effects of stigma, harassment, and prejudice (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2009). For example, suicide ideation and life-threatening behaviors related to transgender identity is a major concern (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). Whenever feasible, camps should collaborate with other community service providers who support youth, such as counselors, health care providers, education and enrichment providers, recreation services, and other agencies (Craig, 2011). Transgender youth (along with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth) have reported wanting psychological supports from services including protective and mental health-related supports, and culturally relevant services (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010).

Camps should consider how their physical facilities promote or thwart the ability of transgender campers to fully participate in camp without real or perceived barriers. For example, camps can provide restrooms that are single stall and gender neutral, which could benefit not only transgender campers but any camper whose situation warrants an accommodation of extra privacy (e.g., campers with stigmatized physical disabilities). Camps can follow universal design approaches so that facilities accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities, such as curtains for changing at the pool. Effective supervision can also prevent negative interactions and behaviors among all campers, including transgender campers (Pleak, 2011; Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, & Giambrone, 2011).

Finally, camps should examine their approaches and practices in camp programming and activities. Camps can avoid approaches that force campers into aligning themselves with one “side,” such as boys-versus-girls competitions, or “girls’ night out” makeup sessions that are popular at some camps. Many transgender and gender nonconforming youth are uninterested in “traditional girl-boy activities” because these activities do not meet their needs (Grossman, et al., 2005, p. 22). In contrast, transgender-inclusive activities can be significant in the development of transgender youths’ feelings of physical and emotional safety, and their navigation and negotiation in gendered social worlds (Rooke, 2010). Being intentional about how the program aims to influence youths’ developmental outcomes is a key component to programming for camps. Camps promote positive youth development

when they engage campers in youth-chosen projects that build skills and are meaningful and satisfying, and when they have responsive yet demanding adult involvement. Gender-inclusive programming is valuable for *all* youth, because it allows them the opportunity to step outside rigid gender norms in a wide variety of ways. Not only is this approach to programming an ethical issue, it also provides potential opportunities for all campers to more fully understand their own genders, which is important and useful in the process of identity development.

With the implementation of these strategies come some risks. Potential negative consequences of implementation of these policies and practices could include the loss of campers, families, volunteers, and staff, along with positive community reputation and funding, or even legal action. Conversely, implementation of inclusive policies could attract additional stakeholders of the camp. A deep understanding of a camp's context is crucial for making both large- and small-scale decisions about including transgender campers. Table 1 includes practitioner-friendly resources for camps to gain more knowledge and insight for working with transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Table 1

Selected Resources

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- Transgender-inclusive camps
 - Camp Aranu'tiq: <http://www.campananutiq.org>
 - Camp Lightbulb: <http://www.camplightbulb.org>
 - Camp OUTdoors: <http://outdoorsgaycamp.com>
 - Camp Outright: <http://www.campoutright.org>
 - Camp Ten Oaks: <http://www.camptenoaks.org>
 - Camp Ten Trees: <http://www.camptentrees.org>
 - Books
 - Helping Your Transgender Teen: A Guide for Parents* (2011) by Irwin Krieger
 - The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (2008) by Stephanie A. Brill
 - Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (2012) by Nicholas M. Teich
 - Websites
 - Advocates for Youth: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/>
 - Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): <http://www.glsen.org/>
 - Gender Spectrum: <https://www.genderspectrum.org/>
 - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): <http://community.pflag.org>
 - Transgender Child: <http://www.transgenderchild.net/>
 - Transkids Purple Rainbow: <http://www.transkidspurplerainbow.org/>
 - Trans Youth Family Allies: <http://www.imatyfa.org/>

Conclusion

The camp experience is often the first real experience in which a child has an opportunity to explore new realities. Camps typically operate in nature-based settings away from home and family, include children and adults different from themselves, and

offer exciting, fun, and novel experiences. Children engage in experiences that offer self-discovery, learning, and positive growth under the caring eye of supportive staff. It is an experience that should be available to all children—and that includes transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Moreover, camps have the opportunity and flexibility to support the participation of transgender and other marginalized campers. As a cherished source of childhood memories, camps should focus on making programming and policy decisions to promote positive development for all youth across the gender spectrum. Camps can be contexts for liberation and freedom for transgender and other marginalized youth because of the recognition that camp is often a site for identity exploration and development. Although camps operate in a larger social world of entrenched institutional, cultural, and individual sexism and homophobia, camps can harness the power they do have to provide respite from the consequences of marginalization. In light of increasing awareness of gender-based bullying or harassment and abuse, as well as the developmental needs of transgender youth, it is important that camps recognize their potential to provide all youth a safe place from these pressures and risks as they learn and practice skills to become resilient, caring, and compassionate in their communities.

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