

“I’m a Prius”: A Child Case of a Gender/Ethnic Hybrid

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This article presents the treatment of a young gender nonconforming boy caught in the cross-fire of a gender and cultural warfare between his divorced parents. D.G., of mixed Mexican/American heritage, went through a course of therapy which is presented to illustrate the fluidity of a child’s gender identity and expressions and the need to take a developmental approach that allows for the unfolding of a child’s authentic gender self over time. The paper also emphasizes the importance of taking family effects into account as a child attempts to negotiate his or her authentic gender amidst parental responses and pressures.

KEYWORDS *gender nonconformity, transgender children, gender fluidity, gender development, family influence on gender, culture and gender development*

Increasing numbers of children are coming to the consultation room declaring they are not the gender assigned on their birth certificate or do not want to conform to social or parental expectations of gender behavior. These children do not suffer from any disorder. Rather, they are merely in the process of discovering their authentic gender identity or preferred gender expressions (Brill & Pepper, 2008). One of these young children, then identifying as female, came to see me and announced in high spirits: “I’m a Prius. I’m a hybrid. A boy in the front and a girl in the back.” Indeed, from the front this child looked like a young male basketball player, but from the back her long, swinging, blond braid was, for her, the female part of her Prius. As we so often receive our best training from our patients, I have borrowed this little girl’s notion of gender Prius in my own understandings of the gender nonconforming children who come to me. Indeed, since

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then, I have had the opportunity to meet so many other gender Priuses in my office. In the hopes of illustrating a child's journey of authentic gender identity discovery, this paper presents the ongoing therapy of not this little girl but another young gender Prius, a boy who reported at age six that he was a boy who was also a girl. This little boy was not only a gender Prius but also an ethnic Prius, a boy with a mixed Anglo and Mexican-American identity.

D.G.,¹ then six-and-a-half, was referred to me by a colleague who worked with D.G.'s aunt after D.G., his mother, and his aunt attended the Gender Spectrum Family Conference in Seattle.² This conference is a national weekend in which gender nonconforming children and their families come together for support, education, and recreation. He attended the conference as a girl. This was the first time D.G. had contact with children like himself, that is, gender nonconforming, primarily transgender children, and the first time he had presented in public as a girl. Prior to that his expressions of himself as a girl remained confined within the property lines of his mother's home and, I should add, secretively and literally in his closet at his father's house, where he had a hidden stash of girls' clothes, aided and abetted by his young adult older half-sister. All through the Seattle conference, by mother's report, "He was in heaven!"

D.G. has been dressing in his mother's clothes and interested in frills and chiffon since he was younger than two years old. He particularly liked mom's turquoise and cream-colored sandals. Mother described him as artistic, always having a feminine side. When he turned four he received a baby doll from his mother with a spontaneous squeal of joy and excitement. When D.G.'s father saw the doll, he went ballistic—"What is his mother trying to do to him? Make him into a girl?" D.G. was witness to his father's outburst and expressed upset and anger with his dad. Mom went to a counselor at that time for advice. The counselor advised her to "buy one girl thing, one boy thing, and don't show favoritism for one or the other and we will see what happens because he is young and no one will know how he will turn out."

D.G.'s parents have been divorced since D.G. was three, and D.G. is their only child. The father has a grown daughter from a previous marriage. The mother has primary physical custody, father has visitation rights; parents share legal custody.

The father is from Northern Mexico, devoutly Catholic, raised in a community very binary and traditional in its gender norms and extremely homophobic. He immigrated to the United States as a young man and remains deeply identified with his Latino roots. He is middle class, although his roots in Mexico were working class. He continues to be a practicing Catholic and sees both heterosexuality and male-female binary gender positions as God's will. He is furious at D.G.'s mother for turning his son into a "freak" by allowing, reinforcing, and encouraging D.G. in his female gender expressions.

Interestingly enough, the father has both a brother and a cousin who are openly gay and themselves gender fluid in their presentations. This, of course, creates a cognitive dissonance for the father—these are relatives he loves, but to him they are transgressive in God's eyes. His own compromise formation is to maintain psychological distance, yet have ongoing contact with both his gay brother and cousin. In contrast, he is very close to his older sister, who is staunchly homophobic and transphobic, and it is mother's belief that D.G.'s paternal aunt holds sway over D.G.'s father and reinforces, perhaps even mandates, his vitriolic responses to D.G.'s forays into gender nonconforming expressions and identity.

There are, of course, deeper internal issues that may govern the father's abhorrence of his son's gender nonconformity and his dismissal of his brother's and cousin's homosexuality as against God's will, such as his own sense of genetic culpability in passing on a gay or gender "disordered" gene to his son or the guilt that in leaving his marriage and becoming only a part-time visiting father he left his child in the hands of a gender-perverting parent. However, due to my limited contact with the father, and that only by telephone, I do not feel in a position to analyze the deeper motives or driving forces behind his alarm at his son's transgender leanings. Suffice it to say that he is in many ways no different than many fathers with whom I have worked who love their children very much and are embedded in either a religious, ethnic, or social culture that takes a prohibitive stance against both homosexuality and gender nonconformity and see their sons' gender "transgressions" as a threat to their own masculinities and a danger to their sons' opportunities to grow up to lead healthy, productive lives.

Over the course of my work with D.G., both *The New York Times* (Lacey, 2008) and *The Advocate* (Keeps & Summa, 2009) published articles and photo essays of the *muxes* (pronounced MOO-shays) of Mexico, a window into the more complicated fabric of Mexican society than its oft-reputed strict Catholic repudiation of homosexuality and, by extrapolation, transsexuality. In and around the town of Juchitan, Oaxaca, the local people have sanctioned and welcomed men who consider themselves women and live in a socially sanctioned gender fluid world with a mixed gender identity. These are the *muxes*, or mixed men and women, a third gender. Some take hormones and dress as women. Others favor male clothes. The custom can be traced back to pre-Columbian Mexico as evidenced in accounts of cross-dressing Aztec priests and Mayan gods who were both male and female. A common sentiment toward the *muxes* is, "It is how God sent him" (Lacey, 2008). Yet clearly in mother's reports and in my own contacts with D.G.'s father, none of that cultural acceptance of gender fluidity from his country of origin had filtered into his present abhorrence of his son's cross-gender presentation and mixed gender identity.

D.G.'s mother is one-quarter Mexican, born in the United States, and identifies as Anglo. Her Mexican roots are not at all apparent in her

appearance, which is of an attractive, light haired, pale-skinned woman from the Midwest. While she is quite open in identifying her Mexican heritage, it really has not had much direct influence on her, as her own rearing had been in a predominantly white, middle class household in this country. Her strongest affiliation with that heritage was through her marriage to D.G.'s father, and that affiliation has been severed through the acrimony of the divorce and more recently with what she perceives as D.G.'s father's backward and provincial thinking about gender. The mother identifies with the more progressive elements of U.S. culture and works in a white collar position. Although she enrolled her son in a religious school, she does not have particularly strong religious beliefs. Like D.G.'s father, she is also very close to her older sister, the aunt who attended the Gender Spectrum Conference with her. This sister is the exact antithesis of D.G.'s father's sister. Like D.G.'s mother, D.G.'s maternal aunt is progressive in her thinking, especially about the rights of individuals to their affirmed gender or sexual identities. She works in an academic setting and brings D.G.'s mother the most recent academic publications on gender nonconformity, which is how the mother first learned about me.

When I first met D.G.'s mother, she explained to me that she just wants to do right by D.G. She has done her reading and attended the lectures and workshops at the Gender Spectrum Conference. By her own assessment, to do right is to follow his lead regarding both his gender expressions and his gender identity. Her best hunch is that D.G. is either gay or transgender. She says that D.G. has begged her to talk to his father to make him understand. In the meantime, coached by his mom, D.G. adopts a "don't ask, don't tell" approach at his dad's house.

THE TREATMENT

Upon initial contact with me by phone, D.G.'s mother was eager to meet with me and have me meet D.G. In my usual policy of having all parental figures agree before I will see a child in treatment, particularly in postdivorce families, I contacted D.G.'s father before seeing his son. He refused to come meet with me but authorized the therapy for D.G., saying he would be willing to talk to me on the phone, using work schedule, distance from my office, and his general distrust of psychotherapists as his expressed reasons for limiting our contact to the telephone. He first needed my assurance that my intent was not to turn his boy into a girl, to which I replied, "My intent is never to turn your boy into a girl, but to meet with your son to try to understand who he is and what he might need and share that with you." This assuaged him, and is what allowed him to give permission for the treatment, as long as I was willing to comply with his request to meet by phone, which I did.

D.G.'s mother wanted D.G. to be seen to sort out the gender conundrums and also to attend to his acting out at home, which included colossal behavioral tantrums. These outbursts had been going on for some time, first evidenced after the parents' marital separation and usually erupting after returning from a visit with his father, who forbade him from playing with his favorite doll or with other toys that the father found inappropriate. Since attending the Gender Spectrum Conference and returning home to find out he could no longer publicly present as a girl, the outbursts only intensified, seemingly from holding his mother responsible for the fairy dust wearing off after the euphoria of feeling "free to be me" at the conference. By mother's report, D.G. had now begun to be overtly oppositional to his mother: "I don't have to do what you tell me—ever!" Because of geographic distance and financial constraints, D.G.'s therapy with me was limited to bi-weekly to monthly individual play sessions, collateral sessions with mother, and phone contacts with father.

Here were my initial impressions of D.G.: He loved dressing as a girl—wearing a long black wig, flouncy skirts, and sandals. His favorite colors were pink and rainbow. He was more animated when he was dressed as a girl, but he definitely moved and talked like a boy. When he was dressed as a boy, he was more reserved. D.G. was attending a Catholic school—as a boy in school uniform of khaki pants, white or navy polo shirts, and short cropped hair. Aware that his father was opposed to him presenting as a girl, he explained that for the time being he is both a boy and a girl and is okay going to school as a boy. He described himself as a "girl/girl; that's the same as a tomboy, but for boys." I puzzled over his term "girl/girl" and thought that what he meant was a "boy/girl," as I noticed that at times D.G. would trip over words, particularly if he was anxious, but he explained to me, "No, I meant girl/girl, that's a boy who wants to be like a girl." The logic actually makes sense, as "tomboy" is indeed two male referents for a girl who wants to be like a boy, so he needed two female referents for a boy who wants to be like a girl. Perhaps a more accurate parallel term to tomboy would be something like "janegirl," but we just left it as "girl/girl," leaving me with my own marveling at the gender creativity both in language and action of children who live against the social grain of gender.

D.G. came to our first session presenting as a girl, which his mother, recognizing his frustration with the clampdown of public presentation as a girl after his freedom at the Gender Spectrum Conference, was now allowing him to do in protected situations. He told me that the main problem was that "My dad doesn't understand that I like girl stuff." His three wishes were that: My dad would understand that I like girl stuff; I could grow my hair long; I could move to Sacramento where no one would know I was a girl. Right after stating his third wish, D.G. caught his gender "slip" and quickly corrected himself: "where no one would know I was a boy and I could be a girl all the time."

Regarding the third wish, mom was indeed pursuing the possibility of relocating and enrolling D.G. in a new, more progressive school where D.G. would be free to identify as a girl. Later, when D.G.'s father learned of these plans, he exploded: "What are you talking about? I refuse to allow you to do this to my son. He's just a little kid. He doesn't know what he wants. If I would have known I would have a child who ended up like this, I never would have had a child with you." He threatened to take mother to court and sue for sole custody if she went forward with her plan. Mom consulted an attorney at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, who delivered the sobering news that legal precedent would support the father, potentially granting him a change in custody if mom went forth with her plan to allow D.G. to live as a girl without his permission.³ So Mom told D.G. that since Dad didn't agree that D.G. could start being a girl, he would have to go to school as a boy.

But I am jumping ahead of myself. Returning to the first session, D.G. sat on the floor in a flowered skirt and spaghetti strap top, reaching under it to play with his/her genitals. D.G. had a certain over-the-top cutesy style, bordering on hostile. His favorite toy was his "beach doll," a girl dressed in beach clothes. His favorite set of pajamas was his long pink night shirt and silky pants. He filled his sandtray with a myriad of princesses. D.G. seemed somewhat constricted in his thinking, repeatedly saying, "I don't remember," "The name's too long," and so forth as we conversed about his life. Both in this session and later sessions, D.G. vacillated back and forth between wanting to be a girl and also wanting to be a boy sometimes.

D.G. tells me that at Dad's house, D.G. hides girl things in the closet. When Dad gets mad and yells at D.G. for liking girl stuff, D.G. goes into the closet and puts on girls' clothes to feel better. He wishes his dad's brain could have another spirit put into it. Dad thinks Mom is poisoning D.G.'s mind. Mom thinks D.G. is constricted in his desire to transition to being a girl by Dad's virulent negative reactions. D.G. is fully aware of the conflict between his parents concerning his gender identity: "It's like a big tug of war." Later he reports to me, "Mommies want boys to be able to be girls, but daddies don't. My mommy knows someone at work who wanted to be a girl, but his dad wouldn't let him."

D.G. explains that he has temper outbursts with his mom because he cannot afford to express his feelings with his dad—his dad is scary and he will just yell, but the real target of his anger is his father for not understanding that D.G. wants to be a girl. He thinks his dad gets into his (D.G.'s) brain and makes him be his dad and be mad at his mom. He knows that his dad thinks it is his mom's fault for buying him dolls, forcing him to want to be a girl. He knows because his dad says so, peppering D.G. with questions: "Why do you like pink? Why do you want to play with dolls?" I ask D.G. what he does when his father asks these questions: "I try to keep a smile (he shows me by stretching the corners of his mouth with his fingers into a grotesque

expression), but tears feel like they come to my eyes. And I answer, ‘Because I do.’” To his mom he says: “I want to be a girl now”; “Mommy, how old do you have to be to get your pee-pee cut off?” (this question came up after D.G. saw a TV program about transgender adults).

Mom explained to D.G. that dad did not agree to him presenting as a girl but he could wear girl clothes and play with girl things at her house. During this same period, after observing the post-divorce gender cold war and D.G.’s increasing manic anxiety, I suggested to mom that she slow down the pace of D.G.’s gender transitioning. Subsequently, D.G.’s behavior outbursts died down and he stopped pushing to wear girl clothes as much. He also announced to his mother, “If I get tired of being a young lady, I’ll be a boy.” At the same time, every toy on his Christmas list was “girl, girl, girl,” and he explained to me, “I wish I could get killed and be born a baby again on Valentine’s Day after all the toys are gone.” I started to ask him, “If you were born a baby again . . .” He quickly interrupted to complete the sentence, “I would like to be a girl.” Yet according to dad during this same period, “He looks like a boy, acts like a boy. I don’t notice any girl things.”

Although D.G.’s agitation appeared to abate, Mom was now concerned that he was developing a split personality: when he dressed as a boy he did not like to do any girl stuff; when he dressed as a girl he was all girl. At school, his friends continued to be girls and he continued to draw very “feminine” pictures, including having started his own girls’ fashion book, which he brought to me to see.

In my next session with D.G. after this report from mom, he arrived dressed all in red, as a boy. He looked “all boy.” His mother came in for the first few minutes of the session to discuss their plans to move to Sacramento, where he would have more freedom to express his gender as he wished in a school that welcomed gender fluidity. D.G. was not impressed; he did not want to relocate if he could not do so as a girl. It did not matter that he would be free there to do girl things; he would rather stay where he was with his friends. He did not want to be a girl so much anyway, maybe once a week down from every day.

After mom left the room, D.G. began talking in a silly, baby voice. He then took a little baby figure and announced, “Oh, baby got born. Bye, bye baby.” I had the intuitive feeling that he was saying good-bye to the girl in him, which he identified with his more regressed self. This intuition was supported by where he went next in the session: to “all boy” things. He played foosball and then asked me excitedly, “Where did you get that? I want to get that, too?” I thought to myself, “Exactly what is the ‘that’ that he wants to get?” This time he created a sandtray filled with penguins; not a princess in sight. He then sped off to the Alien Anatomy game (a whimsical but by some observations gruesome game in which a green genderless creature gets organs, body parts, and fantastic objects surgically removed from his/her abdomen and head). This creature is a perfect projective measure—some

children assure me it is male, others assure me it is female, and others look at it quizzically and say, "Well, it's got painted toenails, so that's girl, but it doesn't have boobies, so that's boy, but it's mouth looks girl, and I don't know what it is." D.G. explored the holes in the armpit and loins of this alien creature and was most interested in what he defined as the secret passages. He determined that the alien was a daddy and brought over a baby alien (a clone of the adult alien which I keep on reserve for just such occasions), cradled it in the daddy's arms, and announced that it was the Alien Daddy's baby.

As he said this, my mind went in two directions, in line with D.G.'s status as a gender and ethnic Prius. First, he was aligning with the masculine half of his Prius identity, the father who hitherto felt very much like a resented other ("alien") to D.G. in earlier times; the father who has no room for girlyboy behavior; but also the father who is clearly devoted to his son and wants the best for him. But then there is the other aspect of D.G.'s hybrid identity—Anglo and Latino. In our work together D.G. has made little reference to his own sense of self ethnically or racially. Perhaps that is because he came to me knowing I was a gender specialist and that was to be the focus of our work, or perhaps because the gender conundrums before him were so compelling and confusing and so evident in the postdivorce tug of war that his ethnic identity has been taking a back seat to his gender identity, or perhaps because his primary residence and identification is with his mother in a predominantly Anglo household that does not reference his Mexican heritage and where he feels himself not a hybrid at all.

Nevertheless, as D.G. is growing into middle childhood his skin is darkening and although I have never met the father, given our purely phone relationship, D.G. is increasingly looking like a young Latino boy, perhaps like his father, and very little like his fair skinned Anglo-featured mother. His father speaks very good English but with an accent that identifies him as Spanish speaking. In a country that holds ambivalence at best toward its neighbors to the south, particularly when they establish residence here, D.G.'s father literally holds a status as an "alien" in the United States, even though he has lived here all of his adulthood. Although D.G. makes no direct reference to his father being Mexican, is D.G., as he is growing, now beginning to identify with his father as an ethnic alien who is also a gender alien in that his father's notions of gender order and disorder are so alien to D.G.'s mother's beliefs in gender freedom? If that is so, these are new challenges to D.G. in his attempts to establish his own true gender self as woven together with his ethnic self.

As we played, D.G. explained that he didn't dress as a girl anymore, but when he went to his closet to get dressed, pulled out the drawers that held his clothes and looked at the girl clothes, he started getting confused, and then he heard his dad's voice inside him saying, "NO, Don't!" He followed this self-report by dividing the bright pink Alien Anatomy game pieces from

the black pieces and putting them in separate compartments. I made an interpretation that he was separating boy from girl. He nodded yes, and reminded me that his favorite color was hot pink when he was a girl but turquoise when he was a boy.

At the end of the session, he did not want to leave, and exuberantly, might I say aggressively, ironically began banging on the Zen chimes, a symbol of harmony and synthesis. As I listened to the last faint sounds of the chime, I was left with the thought that D.G. was suppressing his girl side and seemed magnetically repelled from any “girl” toys that day, and that indeed we had gone from princesses to penguins, the latter of which by cultural definition are neither hyper-feminine nor hyper-masculine in their symbolic cultural meaning, but rather waddling little creatures in silly looking tuxedos.⁴ As D.G. cut off the girl side of him to emphasize the masculine and as he expressed identification with his “No, don’t” father, I found him less articulate and more in an old-fashioned cowboy role of “Yep,” “Nope,” “Don’t really know.” I should add that his father runs a ranch and dresses in cowboy boots and hat, and we may be seeing here the beginning of D.G.’s exit from the progressive, verbally expressive doll-loving household of his Anglo mother to the horse-straddling machismo that he might now identify as the psychological milieu of his Mexican father.

Following that session I wrote the following notation: D.G. now knows that his father has given an adamant “no” to him transitioning to be a girl. His compromise formation is to identify with his Mexican cowboy dad, now transformed into the alien, with him as the alien baby, perhaps representing an ethnic and a gender identity that, although claimed, still feels alien to himself.

I also thought, “Where have all the young girls gone?” His initial baby talk was the only glimpse I got of expressions of his girl self, which was dropped within minutes of our session, followed by an ejection of that girl self in his announcement, “Bye Bye Baby.” I fought against the stereotypic psychoanalytic construct that mother = merged regression while father = progression into autonomy and culture, but had to ask myself nonetheless, “Has D.G., who is caught in both a cultural and a gender war between his two parents, come to identify the male side of him as more grown-up, filled with horses and basketball hoops, and the female side of him as more babyish, filled with talk and baby dolls, and does the joining of the alien baby with his alien dad represent a rebirth into boyland?”

Yet another thought came to me later. Perhaps D.G. is protogay rather than transgender.⁵ Many children who go on to become gay first start out exploring and challenging the outer boundaries of gender. Later, their gender becomes consolidated, and some of their cross gender identifications get dropped as they learn that you do not have to become a girl to be loved by or love boys, you can stay a boy. Could we understand D.G.’s latency trajectory into maleness as movement in this protogay development, now

identifying with dad not because he is identifying with the aggressor but because he is identifying with a man he loves, as a boy.

JOURNEY TOWARD "I DON'T KNOW"

In subsequent sessions, D.G. has remained entrenched in his boyness, both in his clothes and his favorite toys, which have switched from Beach Doll to I-Pod and electronic games. His family narrative has changed remarkably: D.G. tells me his father does not come to see me because his dad does not like to drive, not because he is mad at me for thinking it is okay for him to be a girl; his mom and dad used to fight about his "girl stuff," but that was a long time ago, before they were separated.

Mom and D.G. have relocated to Sacramento, where he attends his new gender-sensitive school, with some transgender youth enrolled in the attached high school. He has found a new friend: a little boy who likes to play with both Barbies and trucks. For Halloween, he was a startrooper at school, Hannah Montana at night. A devotee of *High School Musical*, he dreams of himself in a prom dress at his prom.

D.G. is seeing his father less regularly, because of geographic distance after mother's move, and wants to see him more often. Over the summer, he went on a cruise with his mom, and packed only boy clothes. In September he went to his second Gender Spectrum Family Conference and mom reported that he went again as a girl and "had so much fun." Yet that belied my own observations. As a presenter at the conference, I did not see a child who appeared to be having so much fun, but rather a child who looked self-conscious and somewhat awkward in his long black wig and sundress.

Over the past months D.G.'s sandtrays have evolved from princesses to penguins to Pokémon figures. Now approaching nine years old, he no longer wants to discuss gender in his sessions and when I referred back to his previous statements that he wished he could be killed and be reborn a girl, he looked at me blankly, and claimed that he did not remember ever saying that. When I asked him which he would want *right now* if he could be reborn and come to life as either a boy or a girl, he said, "I don't know." The very last thing he did before he left my office in this session was to stop and shoot a basket into the basketball hoop, a game he has been playing for some years now with his father, and used by his father as evidence that D.G. was all-boy, proving to the father that D.G.'s mother did not know what she was talking about when she said otherwise.

TOWARD THE FUTURE

D.G.'s mother is presently dealing with the stresses of the economic downturn, at risk for losing both her home and her job. D.G. has rejected his black

wig as fake and does not want to go out in public as a girl anymore. He lives as a boy at school but peels off his clothes as soon as he gets home and dresses in his girl clothes, maybe putting on three or four different outfits. Mom says he seems to relax and “get less bitchy” as soon as he gets a dress on. Mom now has yet another concern—D.G. is growing quickly, beginning to get body odor—what should she do as he approaches puberty? If he is transgender, she wants to give him the opportunity to take hormone blockers to buy them some time and allow D.G. the chance to have a female puberty, even if it means administering the drugs behind his father’s back (cf. Ehrensaft, 2009). In the meantime, we, like D.G., must remain suspended in a state of not knowing: if D.G. is transgender, gender fluid, protogay, or some combination thereof; if his latency repression, his “I don’t know” stance, and his dynamic of boy-by-day/girl-by-night are a result of being caught in a cultural war between mother’s and father’s worlds; if, consequently, something fetishistic has developed in his cross-dressing, induced by father’s creation of these items as verboten in tension with mother’s celebration of them as self-affirming. As D.G. rings the chimes in my office, so must we be Zen, until D.G. can tell us what he comes to know.

CONCLUSION

D.G. is a little boy caught in the cross-fire of a gender and cultural warfare between his divorced parents. We learn that over the course of his treatment he has developed a double life, fully expressing his gender nonconformity at his Anglo mother’s house, where it was encouraged, and fully suppressing his gender nonconformity at his Mexican father’s house, where it was prohibited. Like D.G., any transgender, gender nonconforming, or protogay child may be deeply in need of a neutral space with a gender-sensitive therapist to develop his or her own gender authenticity apart from external parental pressures yet embedded in the realities of the family. To do this, the therapist, the parents, and the child alike must all remain suspended in a state of “not knowing” in an area, children’s gender status, which has conventionally had “knowing” as its bedrock. They will need to tolerate this state of ambiguity until the child unfolds an authentic gender identity and expression, which could be transgender, gender fluid, proto-gay, Prius-like, or his or her own creative tapestry of gender.

NOTES

1. The name of this child has been changed to protect confidentiality, but it should be noted that this child actually goes by a name that is two initials derived from his given name, a name that cleverly avoids gender assignation.

2. Gender Spectrum is a national organization that provides education, training, and support to help create a gender sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens. Each year, on Labor Day weekend, they hold a national conference to bring families and professionals together for the aforementioned weekend of education and recreation. More information about Gender Spectrum can be found at www.genderspectrum.org.

3. This would be the case of Aurora, in Ohio, in which Aurora was removed from the family home after being allowed to go to school as a girl, Aurora's birth gender being male (Cloud, 2000).

4. It should be noted, on the other hand, that ever since the showing of the movie *The March of the Penguins*, it has become common and intriguing knowledge that male penguins take over maternal functions and become egg-sitters of the baby penguins-to-be.

5. For further discussion of the relationship between gender nonconformity and sexual identity formation, see the 2008 *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* special issue (Volume 12, Nos. 1–2), especially D'Augelli, A. R., Grossman, A. H., & Starks, M. T., Gender atypicality and sexual orientation development among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth: Prevalence, sex differences, and parental responses, pp. 121–143.

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