Gender Transgression in Books for Children, Teens, and Caring Adults:  
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One way for young people to develop self-esteem is to find representations of self in books. The titles listed below feature characters that range from exploring traditional gender roles, to choosing to live for parts, or all of their lives as the opposite gender, to those who are specifically transgender in the way that we understand that concept today.

Munro Leaf’s well-loved story, The Story of Ferdinand, published in 1936 may very well be the first children’s book which really shows a character transgressing gender norms, and it sets the pattern for most of the other gender-transgressive books to follow: a “child” doesn’t conform to gender stereotypes, a parent worries, and in the case of picture books, the “problem” is resolved with love and acceptance of difference in one way or another. Charlotte Zolotow’s 1972 book, William’s Doll, about a young boy who wants a baby doll to care for, to the dismay of his father and brother; and Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tomie de Paola, published in 1979, followed. Ferdinand showed his “masculinity,” “puffing and snorting, butting and pawing” when he was stung by a bee; William’s problem is resolved by his grandmother, who, assuming, a male heterosexual future for him, explains to the boy’s father that he needs a doll in order to learn how to be a father; and Oliver is allowed to take tap dancing lessons when his father reluctantly decides it is a “form of exercise.”

It’s not until 2002 with the publication of Harvey Fierstein’s, The Sissy Duckling that a children’s picture book truly celebrates a child who delights in everything not intended for his gender.

Each of these titles, not only mirrors a child’s experience of gender-variance, but also that of a worried parent, who in some way or another is able to become more accepting.

The first well-written and illustrated picture book featuring a gender-variant or transgender child, 10,000 Dresses by Marcus Ewert was published in 2008 by Seven Stories Press.

CHILDREN’S FICTION:

Boenke, Mary. Carly, She’s Still My Daddy. Transgender Network of PFLAG, http://pflag.org/TNET_Store.788.0.html. Also distributed by Two Lives Publishing (www.twolives.com). This pamphlet explores the transition of Carl to Carly, from a child’s point of view, explaining the differences between various gender-queer experiences. Age 4 and up.


Ewert, Marcus. 10, 000 Dresses. Illustrated by Rex Ray. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008. This first picture book about a gender variant child is successful on many levels. It accurately portrays a family resistant to a child’s gender variant interests and feelings, it provides that child with outside support through an accepting friendship, and it is simply told with illustrations that are child-friendly and colorful. The only other thing we could ask for is a family who comes around by the end of the story. Age 3 – 9.

Fierstein, Harvey. The Sissy Duckling. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. Elmer the duckling is not like the other boy ducklings, and suffers the derision of his schoolmates and his father, but he proves that a “sissy” can be a real hero. Age 4-7.
Funke, Cornelia. *The Princess Knight.* New York: Chicken House/Scholastic, 2004, 2003. Despite the taunting of her brothers, Princess Violetta becomes a talented knight, and when her father proposes to give her hand in marriage to the knight who wins a tournament, Violetta uses her brains as well as her brawn to outwit him. Age 4-7.


Gruska, Denise. *The Only Boy in Ballet Class.* Gibbs Smith, 2007. People don’t understand how wonderful dancing makes Tucker feel, and he is teased and taunted, until his dance skills lead to a stunning move on the football field. Similar titles include *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie DePaola, and Max by Rachel Isadora. Age 5-8.

Howe, James. *Pinky and Rex and the Bully.* New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996. When the neighborhood bully gets on his case about liking the color pink, and having a female best friend, Pinky begins to doubt himself. With the support of a neighbor, he decides to be true to himself and stand up to the bully. Age 4-8.


Leaf, Munro. *The Story of Ferdinand.* New York: Viking Press, 1936. To his mother’s concern, Ferdinand the bull doesn’t like to romp around and butt heads with the other young bulls, but prefers to sit and smell the flowers. Age 4-7.


Parr, Todd. *It’s Okay to Be Different.* Little, Brown, 2001. While not specifically addressing gender issues, the book enumerates many ways in which it’s okay to be different. Age 3-7.

Pierce, Tamora. *Alanna: The First Adventure.* New York: Atheneum, 1983. In the first of the “Song of the Lioness” series, young Alanna disguises herself as a boy and sets off to become a knight. Age 9-up. (See many other titles by this author).


**CHILDREN’S NON-FICTION:**

Anderson, Hans Christian. *The Ugly Duckling.* Adapted and Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1999. Even the ugly duckling’s mother knew there was something different about him.¹

DePaola, Tomie “26 Fairmount Avenue” (series), G.P. Putnam. Gay author, DePaola, recounts his childhood exploits, including dressing up as Snow White for Halloween, using his mother’s lipstick to dress up as his favorite actress, Mae West, and so forth. Age 5-8.


¹ Thanks to Sharon Garcia, President of TransYouth Family Allies for suggesting the addition of this title.
Hughes, Susan. *No Girls Allowed: Tales of Daring Women Dressed as Men for Love, Freedom and Adventure*. Toronto, ONT; Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press, 2008. Biographies of women who chose to live their lives as men for a variety of reasons, presented in graphic format. The only disappointment is that the illustrations are too similar from story to story. Age 8-12.


**CHILDREN’S / FAMILY INTEREST VIDEOS:**

*No Dumb Questions: a Documentary Film.* by Melissa Regan. New Day Films. www.newday.com. Uncle Bill is becoming a woman, and his three nieces are helped by their parents to understand and accept the transformation into Aunt Barbara. All ages.

*Oliver Button is a Star.* Produced by Dan Hunt. Directed by John Scagliotti. [United States]: Oliver Button Project, c2001. Features a retelling of the book, with interviews of first graders and celebrities about sex roles and following one’s dreams.

**TEEN FICTION:**

In teen fiction, with the exception of the graphic novel series, *Ranma* ½ by Rumiko Takahashi in which the protagonist is turned into a girl every time he comes into contact with cold water, it wasn’t until the mid-to-late 1990s that there were two short stories specifically which featured actual transgender characters: Francesca Lia Block’s “Dragons in Manhattan,” in her 1996 collection *Girl Goddess #9: Nine Stories*. (HarperCollins) and “The Secret of Life According to Aunt Gladys,” by Bruce Coville, in *Dirty Laundry: Stories About Family Secrets*, edited by Lisa Rowe Fraustino, (New York: Viking, 1998).

2002 brought the publication of *What Happened to Lani Garver* by Carol Plum-Ucci, featuring a teen who refuses to be defined by gender. Julie Anne Peters novel, *Luna* (Little, Brown, 2004), features the first unapologetically MTF character in a book for young adults, and in *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger (Simon & Schuster, 2007), we finally have a purely positive book featuring an FTM teenager.

Blacker, Terence. *Boy2Girl*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005. On a dare from his cousin, Sam agrees to attend the first week of his new school dressed as a girl and comes to find that there are things he likes about being Samantha. In the end, he gives up the ruse, but interesting questions about gender and gender identity have been raised for all. For younger teens.


Dunnion, Kristyn. *Mosh Pit*. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Red Deer Press, 2005. In this often depressing story of teens living on the edge, one of protagonist Simone’s more supportive friends is Carlotta, a transgender teen helping to raise her siblings and nephew.

Gardner, James Alan.  *Commitment Hour*.  New York : Avon Eos, 1998.  In Tober Cove, children change gender every year, but at twenty must choose one gender or another, or be banned from the community. Unfortunately while individuals may choose their gender, they are not free to choose to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Gentle, Mary.  *Ilario: The Lion’s Eye, A Story of the First History*.  New York: Eos, [2007], c2006.  Set in an alternate medieval world, the intersexed slave, Ilario flees existence as a King’s toy when his/her mother tries to kill her/him. Hoping to pursue an education in painting, Ilario becomes unexpectedly and dangerously pregnant following a brief encounter, is again enslaved, and flees just one step ahead of his/her assassins. Book two, *Ilario: The Stone Golem* continues the story. For older teens.


Lantz, Francess.  “Standing on the Roof Naked” in  *On the Fringe*.  New York: Dial, 2001.  Jeannie is an androgynous teen who wanted to be a boy for most of her childhood. Now in high school, she doesn’t know who or what she is—girl, boy, gay, straight?


Rosoff, Meg.  *What I Was*.  New York: Viking, 2008.  The narrator, a one hundred year old man named only H, recalls his first love, a teenaged boy named Finn who fends for himself on an island reachable only by boat, or a sand bar at low tide. When Finn becomes ill, H must take action even if it means betraying Finn’s trust. Finn is discovered not to be who or what H has assumed, and his reaching out for help changes the lives of Finn, H, and their respective families, as well as that of a classmate.

Sobol, Rose.  *Woman Chief*.  New York: Dial Press, 1976.  Based on a true story, this is a fictional account of Woman Chief who was recognized as a hunter, warrior, and leader, and who had five wives.


Trujillo, Carla.  *What Night Brings*.  Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2003.  What Marci Cruz prays to God, the Virgin Mary, and Baby Jesus to bring her each night is a change of gender—because she likes girls and the only way to marry one is to be a boy.

TEEN NON-FICTION:


Huegel, Kelly. *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens.* Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2003. Easy to read book about what it means to be GLBTQ in the real world: family, school, relationships, sex and sexual health, etc., with quotes from young people about their own experiences. The chapter on transgender teens is good, with a good list on internet resources, but it’s placement near the end of the book makes it seem like somewhat of an afterthought.


TEEN INTEREST VIDEOS:

*Boy I Am.* Produced by Sam Feder and Judith Hollar. A documentary about three young FTM people undergoing surgery and hormone treatments, and the ways in which young FTMs interact with the lesbian community.

*Just Call Me Kade.* Documentary about sixteen year old Kade, who, with the support of his parents began the transition from female to male.
TEEN ARTICLES:


TEEN / FAMILY WEB SITES:

Advocates for Youth: www.advocatesforyouth.org

Discovery Health: http://health.discovery.com/centers/teen/transgender/transgender.html

Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network: www.glsen.org

*Laura’s Playground: http://www.lauras-playground.com/teens.htm

National Youth Advocacy Coalition: www.nyacyouth.org

Out Proud!: www.outproud.org

Safe School Coalition: www.safeschoolscoalition.org

TransProud: www.transproud.org

Youth Guardian Services: www.youth-guard.org

FOR PARENTS & SUPPORTIVE ADULTS OF GENDER-VARIANT AND TRANSGENDER CHILDREN & YOUTH


Burt, Tracy, et. al. Making Room in the Circle: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Families in Early Childhood Settings. Parent Services Project. PSP Inc. 79 Belvedere St. #101, San Rafael, California 94901, Phone: 415.454.1870, Fax: 415.454.1752, www.parentservices.org


Trans Forming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones. Mary Boenke, editor. Imperial Beach, CA: Walter Trook Pub., 1999. Family members of transgendered individuals talk about their feelings and experiences as they strive to accept the changes in their loved one. Includes a section on raising gender-queer children.

WEB SITES:

Family Acceptance Project: [http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/)


Gender Spectrum Family: [www.genderspectrumfamily.org](http://www.genderspectrumfamily.org)


Safe Schools Coalition: [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gender_nonconforming_trans_youth.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gender_nonconforming_trans_youth.html). This site has lots of good links for families and youth.

Trans Family: [www.transfamily.org](http://www.transfamily.org)

TransProud: [www.transproud.org](http://www.transproud.org)

TransYouth Family Allies: [http://www.imatyfa.org/](http://www.imatyfa.org/)