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Chinese Canadian Families with Transgender Youth

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Transgender clients from non-Western backgrounds face unique challenges in the process of transitioning into their affirmed gender, requiring specialized care that takes into account the influence of their cultural/ethnic background. Though this subject presents an infinite range of possibilities, we will focus on the experience of Chinese Canadian families with transgender children and youth. While the topics we highlight are specific to the Chinese population, they may apply to other Asian groups, cultural communities, racial minorities, and immigrant families as well. The makeup of both the Canadian and U.S. populations is quite ethnically and culturally diverse, and the discussions presented in this paper apply to racial minorities and immigrant families that are facing similar issues in both countries. The unique difficulties that affect non-Western transgender clients, including individualistic versus collectivistic worldviews, the one-child policy, acculturation frameworks, and the divide between first- and second-generation immigrants, have received little attention. A clinical vignette will illustrate these issues and provide guidance for professionals working with this population.

Collectivism versus Individualism

Transgender persons are estimated to make up approximately .5% of the Canadian population (Bauer, Zong, Scheim, Hammond, & Thind, 2015), or about 180,000 people. In contrast, there are an estimated 9.5 million transgender persons living in the Asia-Pacific region (Asia Catalyst, 2015). The Chinese are the second-largest foreign-born group living in Canada: 545,535 Chinese persons immigrated there in 2011 alone (Statistics Canada, 2016). Despite these numbers, transgender clients from China and other non-Western backgrounds are rarely seen in clinical practice. Though our office served over 150 transgender children and youth during 2016, only 1 percent were ethnic minorities, even though we are the only publicly funded gender clinic for children and youth in British Columbia.

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