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## **“I Was Hoping It Would Be a Phase”: The Challenges Parents Face Raising a Gender Nonconforming Child**

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Parents expecting a child these days may already know the physical sex of their infant-to-be. This knowledge grants them the opportunity to make preparations for the much-anticipated birth, plans that will vary depending on whether the child is identified as a boy or as a girl. Research shows that girls are presumed to be “warm, neat and clean, helpful, and gentle,” whereas boys are expected to engage “in rough play and [be] active” (Martin, 1995, p. 739). In short, parents apply a gendered perspective to many aspects of a child without any awareness of the child’s internally experienced gender. The cultural and social prediction that gender corresponds to sex amounts to an infiltration of pressure intending to cement the expected gender roles, preferences, and future pathways (Blumer, Ansara, & Watson, 2013). Research on the prevalence of gender nonconformity in high school students indicates that many more families than previously thought are raising children with differences in gender identity and gender nonconforming behavior (Clark et al., 2014). This chapter addresses the challenges parents face when they realize that their understanding of their child’s gender is different from their child’s reality.

In the last ten years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of families recognizing gender identity concerns in their children (de Vries & Cohen-Kettenis, 2012; Wood et al., 2013). More professionals than ever before are now being faced with the fact that a child’s physical sex and biology do not always match their internal gender identity or expression (Meyer, 2012; Telfer, Tollit, & Feldman, 2015). Terms like *gender creativity* (Erhenshaft, 2011) and *gender independence* (Pyne, 2014) have entered the lexicon. Every school needs to take seriously the fact that it may have more than a few transgender children in its cohort. Clark and colleagues (2014) sampled over 8,000 New Zealand high school students and showed that 1.2% reported being transgender and another 2.5% reported being unsure about their gender. These statistics highlight the

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