

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Supporting Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth at Summer Camp

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Summer camp, management, transgender, gender, youth, counsellors

POPULATION GROUP

LGBTQQ

STEPPING UP THEMES

Coordinated & Youth Friendly
Communities; Diversity, Social Inclusion
& Safety; Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

International and Canada

SOURCE

Academic article (peer-reviewed)

“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.”

1. What is the research about?

The development of gender identity is a major task of adolescence. For transgender and gender nonconforming youth, this task can be especially daunting and typically involves a great deal of stress. Institutions seeking to promote positive youth development must provide a safe space for all adolescents to explore their gender expressions. While some research has examined how well this has been achieved in formal education settings, there is a gap in out-of-school context research on this topic.

This article reviews issues transgender and gender nonconforming youth face and how summer camps in particular can support their development. This is due to their flexible and recreational nature. The authors provide recommendations based on their own experiences with policy creation in recreational settings, professional experiences in camps, and the growing body of knowledge on the field. This research has implications for youth workers who operate camps and provides suggestions for providing a safe and inclusive space for all young people.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research was a desk research literature and policy review that examined evidence related to improving services at summer camps for transgender and gender nonconforming youth from Canada, England, and the United States.

3. Who is this research about?

The article discussed the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

4. How was the research done?

This study reviewed literature on transgender youth in contexts such as school and community agencies, and drew links between these studies and the summer camp context in order to suggest a number of strategies for action.

5. What are the key findings?

This study shows the ways in which camps can better accommodate the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming youth. As camps are often an opportunity for youth to be away from home and to explore their identities and experience freedom, it is crucial for camps to be inclusive and supportive so that transgender and gender nonconforming youth can form positive and healthy identities. Camps are encouraged to reflect on their current practices to remove gender stereotypes in their programming,

and to make changes to their operations so that the needs of all youth can be duly met and respected.

Camps are traditionally organized according to a cis-gender binary. For example, the separation of the sexes in different living spaces, activities, and sleeping quarters presents difficulties for transgender and gender nonconforming youth to feel safe to take part in camp activities, and further alienates them from the overall camping experience.

Camps can improve their support of transgender and gender non-conforming youth in four areas: camp policies, communications, staff training, and camp design.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Create an anti-discrimination policy that includes gender fluidity and expression.
2. Review marketing approaches and materials to ensure that gender nonconforming youth are also represented in promotional images.
3. Ensure that the needs of the individual campers are understood and accommodated.
4. Provide specific professional development and educational resources to camp staff.
5. Design camps with inclusion in mind in areas such as physical facilities, camp culture, and camp programming.

The authors additionally recommend that camps work with community service providers to ensure that relevant mental health-related supports and culturally relevant services can be provided.



Gillard, A., Buzuvis, E. E., & Bialeschki, M. D. (2014). Supporting transgender and gender nonconforming youth at summer camp. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 32(3).