

Dads' Experiences Parenting Gender Diverse Children and Youth in Manitoba:

An Interpretive Description Study

By

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A Thesis submitted to the

Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

of the University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Nursing

College of Nursing

Rady Faculty of Health Science

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Abstract

Background: Understanding the experiences of parenting gender diverse (transgender and nonbinary) children and youth is critical to informing how to best support parents, particularly given that parenting is a key determinant of child wellbeing. In previous parenting research with parents of gender diverse children and youth, dads have been an underrepresented parent group, and therefore an in-depth understanding of their unique parenting experiences is warranted.

Purpose: This study explored dads' experiences of parenting gender diverse children and youth between four to eighteen years of age, who were living within the province of Manitoba.

Research Design: Social constructivism, an ecological model of parenting, and interpretive description methodology, guided the research analysis. Using convenience sampling through social media, nine dads participated and completed one semi-structured research interview.

Research Findings: Four research themes, four key messages, and nine key moments in the trajectory of parenting a gender diverse child/youth were identified. The interpretive description included the following four research themes: 1) pathways to discerning a child's gender diversity pass through awareness and uncertainty; 2) learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender; 3) navigating gender diversity becomes integrated into parenting; and 4) the emotional contours of being a dad to a gender diverse child.

Conclusion: Dads did not expect their child could be gender diverse, which highlights an opportunity to incorporate this expectation as a potential developmental outcome for any child or youth, into nursing areas intersecting with parenting and early childhood development. Dads identified a need for reliable sources of information and support, which offers opportunities to harness the findings to inform the development of parenting resources for dads of gender diverse children and youth. This study provided important information about dad's unique parenting experiences, adding to the body of nursing literature about parenting gender diverse children and youth. The dad participants in this study were eager to share their experiences and were recruited over a short time period, which

should encourage other researchers to engage in future research with dads around their experiences in parenting their gender diverse child/youth.

Keywords: adolescent(s), child(ren), dad(s), father(s), gender diverse, gender expansive, gender fluid, genderqueer, gender minority, nonbinary, non-binary, parent(s), parenting, parenting experiences, teenager(s), transgender, youth

Acknowledgements

Without my wife and family's support and encouragement I would not have begun this study or made it to the finish line. Growing up, I never imagined one day I would have a family, let alone one that would encourage me to merge my lived experience into the realm of my work in nursing through this study. Thank you, Alba, for not only bringing me into this family, but giving me the support and connection that brought me to BLINK, being a camp nurse, and the encouragement to begin this degree. The work that you, Mateo, and Ruby do, supporting community through your years of selfless commitment to community is an aspirational inspiration. Thank you to my sister Kate who led the way with her graduate studies. Thank you to Gael, who provided many needed breaks, through opportunities to watch and coach sports, but also helping me highlight articles and doodle notes on the pages.

Thank you to the 2SLGBTQIA+ graduate student nurse researchers I have met while completing this degree. Adam, Jess, and Ashley, your youthfulness has been inspirational, thank you for the encouragement throughout this experience.

Thank you to my thesis committee, led by my advisor, Dr. Christina West, along with Dr. Vanessa Van Bower and Dr. Deborah McPhail. Thank you for the mentorship, guidance, and insightful questions that inspired deeper analysis.

I would like to thank the Manitoba Centre for Nursing Health Research (MCNHR) for all the research support, as well as the financial support received through the MCNHR Graduate Student Research Grant. I would like to acknowledge the additional financial support received through the University of Manitoba Graduate Students' Association Award for Part-Time Students and Greene Memorial Fellowship. This financial support was integral to the completion of this degree and study.

Finally, thank you to the dads who participated in this study for generously sharing your time and personal stories; and trusting me with your words and experiences.

Dedication

Over the years, meeting children and youth growing up in families who support and affirm their identities, and their parents/guardians who are bringing their children to spaces where they can build connections, and friendship, with people with similar lived experiences, has been a gift. I would like to dedicate this study to the families I have met over the last decade through the family drop-in group BLINK and parent group PFFoTI (Parents, Family, and Friends of Trans Individuals. Thank you for continuing to come together to build connections, learn, and grow to support gender explorations and identities. It has been an honor to watch children grow into youth, and youth grow into adults.

“Fundamentally parenting is parenting... it’s still the same job... not letting your own luggage get in the way... the more support we can show for our kids the better in all the situations.” (Dad Nine)

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List of Abbreviations

2SLGBTQIA+ – Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex,

Asexual or Agender, and “+” to represent all other gender identities and sexualities

ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences

CINAHL – Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature

CNS – Clinical Nurse Specialist

ID – Interpretive Description

IPT – Identity Process Theory

MCNHR – Manitoba Centre for Nursing and Health Research

OECD – Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development

REB1 – University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 1

RN – Registered Nurse

USA – United States of America

Chapter 1: Background

This study sits at the intersection of parenting and gender development. It explored the experiences of dads parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba. Within this study, the term gender diverse represents all expansive gender experiences, including but not limited to, nonbinary, genderfluid, and transgender boy or transgender girl gender identities (Fields, 2023). The initial four chapters describe the background, conceptual framework, review of literature, and methods used for this study which was guided by an Interpretive Description (ID) methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025). The last two chapters describe the study findings and discussion of findings. The findings are described through themes, key messages, and key moments from interviews completed with dads between October to December 2024, while the final chapter delves into the discussion of how the research findings may be useful within the contexts of nursing and other programs working with parents of gender diverse children and youth.

Despite increased visibility of gender diversity across the lifespan, parents can still be surprised by their child's gender diversity and experience challenges adjusting to their child's "new" identity (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Westwater et al., 2019). As a result, some parents find themselves unprepared to support and affirm their gender diverse child or may struggle to believe their child's gender diversity is real (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Warner et al., 2021; Westwater et al., 2019). Peer, community, and medical services that provide support and information are typically accessed after parents have found out about their child's gender diversity (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Warner et al., 2021; Westwater et al., 2019). Having accessible, accurate, and relevant information is important for parents to be able to create home environments that are a supportive determinant of health for gender diverse children and youth (Morgan et al., 2023b; Ulferts, 2020). There continues to be a need for resources to support parents of gender diverse children and youth, as finding immediately available and accessible information can be a challenge (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Morgan et al., 2023b; Warner et al., 2021; Westwater et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Dads are underrepresented in the body of research involving parents raising gender diverse children and youth (de Bres, 2022; Gray et al., 2016; Lorusso & Albanesi, 2021; Morgan et al., 2022, 2023b; Warner et al., 2021). The limited body of research about parental support in the context of gender diversity in childhood has identified dads as less supportive in comparison to mothers (Garcia et al., 2021; Riggs & Due, 2014). As well, only one article was identified that focused exclusively on the experiences of dads, Latinx dads (Teran et al., 2023). This study begins to address this gap, as it provided an opportunity to explore dads' parenting experiences and needs in providing supportive and affirming home environments for their gender diverse child.

Temporal Significance

The current socio-political context is significant as the past few years has seen a profound shift towards increasing public anti-gender diversity narratives, as well as attempts to pass legislation that limit youth's access to gender affirming healthcare and social supports in Canada (Castro-Peraza et al., 2019; deGagne, 2021; Fox, 2023; Jeffrey, 2024; Johnson, 2025; MacLean, 2023; Meadow, 2023). These proposed policies and social narratives impact mental health by exposing gender diverse children and youth to negative messages about who they are and add structural barriers that decrease access to gender affirming health and social services (Paceley et al., 2023).

Research Study Purpose

The aim of this qualitative research thesis was to increase the understanding of dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth. The study had two specific research objectives: 1) to hear dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth, and 2) to identify messages that could be useful to dads parenting gender diverse children and youth that could support parenting.

Research Question

The aims and objectives of this study were addressed by exploring one overarching research question: What are dads' experiences of parenting gender diverse children and youth?

Research Significance to Nursing

The body of existing nursing research focusing on families with gender diverse children and youth is limited (Wagner & Armstrong, 2020). This project is significant to nursing research because it is a study from a nursing perspective and will add to the body of nursing research focused on parenting gender diverse children and youth. Nurses work with families, children, and youth across many different healthcare contexts, such as public health, primary care, mental health, and family nursing. Understanding the needs parents have in supporting the wellbeing of gender diverse children and youth is necessary to build evidence informed nursing practices in each nursing context described above. This study's significance to interdisciplinary research is to add to the understanding of the underrepresented parent group, dads, in this area of research. Findings can be used to inform future healthcare provision, including the development of resources for parents and dads of gender diverse children and youth, and may also have uses outside of the healthcare realm.

Theoretical Forestructure

This section begins to describe the foundational elements upon which this study was built, referred to as scaffolding in ID methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025). Key elements of scaffolding, include the foundational literature review in chapter three, as well as clarifying the theoretical forestructure (Thorne, 2016, 2025). Describing the theoretical forestructure involves connecting my positionality, personal assumptions, disciplinary orientation, and theoretical allegiances (Thorne, 2016, 2025) to this study.

Researcher Positionality

This research project grew from my desire to merge my nursing experience in community and public health with my community work with families of gender diverse children and youth. Much of the public health nursing work I have done has been with families, typically with infants or young children. This work involves compiling information and useful resources related to health prevention or strengthening families and connecting families with what may be valuable to their context. My interest in research with families of gender diverse children and youth began with my volunteer

experience coordinating a drop-in group for families with gender diverse children ages 12 and under. These two elements alongside personal reflections of my own lived experiences with the impact of parenting on a 2SLGBTQIA+ child's life are the foundations that brought me to this research topic. My interest in expanding the understanding of parental needs and experiences grew through my experience working at a medical clinic providing gender affirming care to youth ages 16 and up, and volunteering as camp nurse at a camp for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth ages 14 to 18. In both spaces I witnessed the impact of affirming and non-affirming home environments on 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. I hoped through this thesis to combine my lived, professional, volunteer, and community experiences, as both an insider to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and an outsider to the parenting community.

Researcher Assumptions

Assumptions are based on personal values and beliefs or learned knowledge (McEwen & Wills, 2019) and can be supported with rationale (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). My assumptions entering this research study stemmed from my experience working in healthcare and my community volunteer experiences described in the previous section. As a queer person, nurse, volunteer, and group facilitator working with gender diverse children and youth, I believe that parents do what is within their means based on their knowledge, resources, and what they think is best for their child. I believe that most parents are not intentionally trying to harm their children when they are not supporting and affirming characteristics of personhood like gender. I believe that parents are influenced by the environment they grew up in and live in, and that the knowledge, values, and beliefs gained over a person's lifetime influence their opinions about gender, sex, and sexuality.

In my work as a nurse, a recurring theme across healthcare settings is that people become interested in specific health topics following an illness or injury, once their lives are directly impacted. Many families with gender diverse children and youth I have met through work and volunteering have been surprised by their child's gender diversity and have minimal knowledge or connection

to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community prior to learning about their child's gender diversity. Although I do not assume this is true for all families, this is an observation I explored with dads in this thesis study.

Disciplinary Orientation

This is a nursing research study, steeped in my nursing education and career of the past two decades. The disciplinary orientation I associate with nursing aligns with what is described in the foundational ID literature (Thorne, 2016, 2025). In nursing, we are oriented to look at the parts of a person situated within the whole of that person, while also looking at their surrounding context (CASN 2024; Thorne, 2016, 2025). Within my nursing practice, this has meant following an active practice of not making fixed assumptions about who people are, what they know, or what they value. It has involved balancing listening with asking questions to get the best understanding of a person's context and needs; to then compare what I have heard with what I have observed and know about the topic; and bringing all available information together to find the best actions or suggestions to meet their needs. In working with parents, this involves striving to understand their positionality, personhood, within the context of their family and broader situation to find resources, information, or services that support their needs as individuals, parents, family, and community.

Guiding Philosophical Paradigm

This research study is guided by a social constructivist ontology and epistemology (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Social constructivism argues that everyone has a unique life experience and holds the perspective that knowledge and truth are constructed from their social connections and experiences (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Social constructivism fits with this research topic as parents bring their own values and experiences to their parenting (Ulferts, 2020). Social constructivism acknowledges the complexity of human experiences through studies that hear rich descriptions of people's lives (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). Social constructivism considers how people create their own interpretations of what they are experiencing and acknowledges that multiple truths do and can co-exist within any situation or life experience (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). This thesis study explored the unique experiences of dads, their constructed truth and reality about the topic of parenting

gender diverse children and youth. Social constructivism (McEwen & Wills, 2019) aligns with my personal theoretical allegiances and what I have experienced in my nursing career, where I have observed people sharing understandings built from experiences within their social spheres.

Key Term Definitions

The following descriptions are for term associated with the research topic and provide a consistent understanding of key terms used throughout this thesis.

2SLGBTQIA+

The acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ describes gender and sexual minority identities (Government of Canada, 2023). The words included in this acronym represent a sex, gender, or sexuality, and this specific version of the acronym includes: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual or agender, and the plus symbol represents other identities not included in the acronym or gender identities yet to be described (Government of Canada, 2023).

Dads

Dad is the term used to represent parents who self-identify as dads, fathers, stepfathers, foster fathers, adoptive fathers or other paternal parenting relationships (Li & Tian, 2023; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Dads may or may not have biological or legal guardianship but are parenting (Li & Tian, 2023; Marsiglio et al., 2000) a gender diverse child or youth. Dad was the chosen descriptor as all research participants preferred to be referred to as dads versus fathers.

Gender

Gender is a person's "subjective inner sense of self-belonging to a particular gender" (Lehman et al., 2020, p. 4), including "cultural, behavioral, and psychosocial characteristics that are typically associated with" (p. 3) a specific gender. "Gender identity is among the core features of a person's overall or cohesive self-concept" (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023, p. e450). How a person's assigned sex/gender at birth and gender identity intersect result in the descriptors: cisgender (same) or transgender (differ) (Bourns et al., 2022; Lehman et al., 2020). Gender is a social construct, meaning that expectations of gender evolve over time and vary in different socio-cultural contexts

(Eliason & Chinn, 2018; Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Hall et al., 2021; Lehman et al., 2020). Multiple understandings of gender co-exist which include gender as a concept of identity or something that is not only biology; and gender being considered a strictly biologically binary concept (Hall et al., 2021, p. 1878). Gender, sex, and sexuality have a history of being used interchangeably due to confusion over their unique definitions (Bittner & Goodyear-Grant, 2017; Eliason & Chinn, 2018; Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Lehman et al., 2020). Sex and sexuality are defined below.

Gender Diverse

The term gender diverse includes any gender identity or expression that differs from a person's assigned sex/gender at birth, i.e. not cisgender (Fields, 2023, p. 815). This includes gender identities that are fixed (consistent) or fluid (shift) over time (Fields, 2023; Mehrtens & Addante, 2023). Gender diversity includes nonbinary, transgender (transmasculine/trans boy, transfeminine/trans girl), genderfluid, genderqueer, Two-Spirit, or gender expansive identities to describe where identities fit in the spectrum of gender (Fields, 2023; Mehrtens & Addante, 2023).

Parenting

Parenting is provided by primary caregivers to children and youth. Parenting can include a variety of kinship or legal guardian relationships (Klein Walker, 2021). Parenting consists of behaviors and actions that support child growth and development (Klein Walker, 2021; Ulferts, 2020). Parenting is influenced by a complex web of factors including parents' values, beliefs, resource access, socio-political contexts, and the social determinants of health (Klein Walker, 2021; Ulferts, 2020). These factors can interact in different ways to influence what parents want to and are able to do while parenting their children (Klein Walker, 2021; Ulferts, 2020).

Sex

Sex represents both a physical act and a set of physiological characteristics that include sex chromosomes (XY, XX), hormonal milieu (estrogen, progesterone, testosterone), and reproductive organs (ovaries, testes, uterus) (Bourns et al., 2022; Eliason & Chinn, 2018). Sex is assigned at or prior

to birth on ultrasound, based upon external physiology, or later in life through genetic testing (Bourns et al., 2022; Lehman et al., 2020).

Sexuality or Sexual Orientation

Sexuality or sexual orientation describes romantic and/or sexual attraction and relationships (Eliason & Chinn, 2018; Lehman et al., 2020). Attraction and relationships are described in relation to the genders of the people involved in relationships, and may involve the same genders (gay, lesbian), different genders (heterosexual), multiple/any genders (bisexual/pansexual), or attraction to no one/no desire to have these types of relationships (aromantic/asexual) (Eliason & Chinn, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This first chapter provided an overall introduction to this thesis study. The next two chapters continue to describe the theoretical forestructure (Thorne, 2016, 2025) of the study. The second chapter describes the underlying theoretical framework, while the third chapter offers a summary and critique of the current literature. The literature review includes descriptions of gender diversity within gender identity development, parenting, and parenting gender diverse children and youth. These first three chapters set the stage for the study which will further the understanding of dad's experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks can help to organize or add structure to knowledge by providing a visual or systematic way to conceptualize information (McEwen & Wills, 2019). This chapter discusses a conceptual model that was used to help inform this research inquiry and organize the analysis of data on the experiences of dads parenting gender diverse children and youth, the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020, p. 34). Two additional models are included in this chapter that were relevant to the discussion of findings, and identified following the data analysis, the *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kolhe et al., 2024), and the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammattei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.)

Socio-Ecological Models

Socio-ecological models organize different contexts, settings, or groups into layers, where each consecutive layer of the model or framework represents a progressively larger group or broader context (McEwen & Wills, 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Socio-ecological models can vary in complexity as to the number of socio-ecological factors included within each layer and how relationships between the contextual layers are described in relation to the concept of interest (McEwen & Wills, 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). The *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020, p. 34) is a socio-ecological model describing three contexts which contain factors that can impact parenting, resulting in unique parenting experiences for each parent in a family.

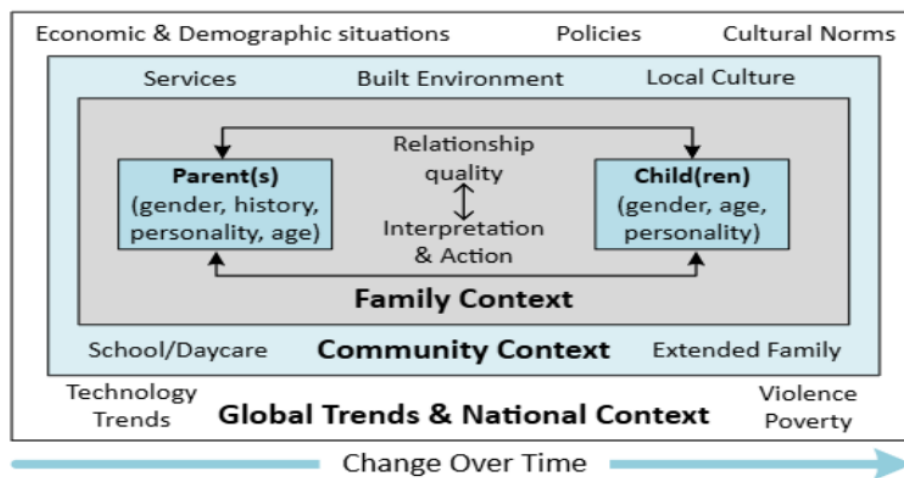
Ecological Model of Parenting

The *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020, p. 34) illustrates factors which impact parenting within family, community, and national or global contexts (Ulferts, 2020). Parenting is a complex concept to describe and understand due to the many social, personal, and economic factors that can impact and influence parenting approaches, making a socio-ecological model well suited to illustrate the multitude of factors and contexts (Ulferts, 2020). Personal beliefs, values, as well as resource access, and community expectations are all factors that can influence parenting (Ulferts,

2020). The *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020, p. 34) (see Figure 1), builds on a previous model (Bray & Dawes, 2016) which illustrated contextual factors that act as facilitators or challenges to parenting practices. Each box in the model represents a different contextual level that can influence parents' beliefs, actions, or abilities to provide a safe and nurturing home environment for their children (Ulferts, 2020).

Figure 1.

Ulfert's (2020) Ecological Model of Parenting



Note: “Ecological Model of Parenting” adapted from Ulferts (2020, p. 34), simplifying the original figure. This is an adaptation of an original work by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its Member countries. Copyright 2020 OECD. Adapted with permission (OECD, 2024).

Model Contexts and Factors

In addition to interacting across contexts, factors within each context level evolve over time (Ulferts, 2020, p. 34). Cultural norms are one factor influencing how people conceptualize their parenting role, while cultural norms also evolve over time (Ulferts, 2020). Within the family unit, child and parent temperaments and personalities interact to create challenging or cohesive relationships (Bray & Dawes, 2016; Ulferts, 2020). Individual characteristics of each parent and child such as age, identity, and personal experiences will also impact their relationships, and evolve as the child

matures and the parent gains parenting experience (Ulferts, 2020). Personal, social, or economic resources impact how and what parents can provide for their children with respect to shelter and food, but also guidance, access to education, knowledge, and nurturing, which all impact a child's growth and development (Paris et al., 2019; Klein Walker, 2021; Ulferts, 2020). Every factor in each family, community, and national or global context, has the potential to influence parenting values and behaviors (Bray & Dawes, 2016; Ulferts, 2020). Whether the factors act as facilitators or barriers determines how they influence family wellbeing, child development, and child wellness (Bray & Dawes, 2016; Ulferts, 2020).

Parenting Approaches, Child and Family Wellbeing

Parenting approaches describe the general characteristics of parenting, including how parents approach decisions, their actions and words, and the likely impact for their child (Ulferts, 2020). Developmental or positive parenting is essential for child wellbeing, prioritizing behaviors that support a child to develop autonomy as they grow physically, emotionally, and mentally (Davids et al., 2017; Newland, 2014, 2015; Seay et al., 2014; Ulferts, 2020). Developmental or positive parenting is encouraging, warm, responsive, authoritative, nurturing, and adjusts to situations and a child's needs (Davids et al., 2017; Newland, 2014, 2015; Ulferts, 2020). Family wellbeing is an essential condition that facilitates developmental parenting as it is intertwined with child wellbeing, child development, and parenting (Newland, 2014, 2015). While socio-ecological factors are moderating variables, either positively or negatively impacting any of these elements (Newland, 2015).

Study Applications of the Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework provides a lens through which parenting can be viewed. The model's value for this study was to contextually situate the parenting experiences dads described in their research interviews. The model provided a guide for considering the variety of factors discussed in the research interviews and informed the concurrent process of data analysis. The interview guide, as one example, was informed by existing studies (Kantor et al., 2023; Rule, 2018; Teodoro et al., 2018), the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020), and the parenting approaches described in

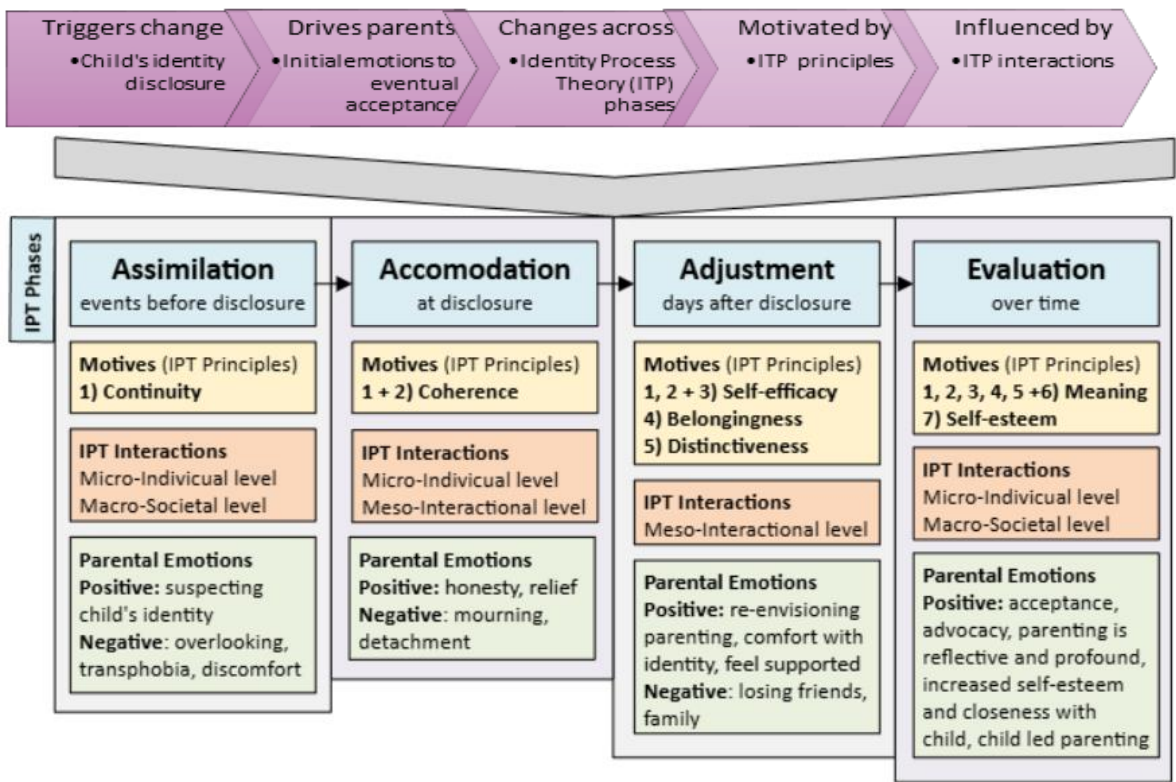
the previous paragraph (Davids et al., 2017; Newland, 2014, 2015).

Gender Diversity and Parenting

The conceptual models of parenting illustrated below describe elements aligned with dads' experiences of parenting a gender diverse child that were not fulsomely described by the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020). These models were identified in literature reviews following the data collection, and offered additional considerations related to the parenting experiences described by dads. Figure 2, the *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kolhe et al., 2024), and Figure 3, the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammattei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) speak to elements of change experienced by parents with a gender diverse or 2SLGBTQIA+ child.

Figure 2.

Kolhe et al.'s (2024) *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model*



Note: “Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model” is adapted from Kolhe et al. (2024) combining a simplified version of the overall model (p. 1) and the phases of change (p. 9). Copyright 2024 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. Adapted with permission under [Creative Commons License CC -BY 4.0](#) (Creative Commons, n.d.).

Both models highlight a process whereby parents learn of their child's gender diversity or 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, have experiences learning and adjusting, which lead to shifts in parenting, understanding, or other personal changes (Giammattei and TransFamily Alliance, n.d.; Kohle et al., 2024). The *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kohle et al., 2024) uses Identity Process Theory (IPT) to map changes in parenting identity from a review of existing studies with parents of 2SLGBTQIA+ children and youth (Figure 2). While the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammattei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) is more specific to the experience parents with a gender diverse child have after learning about their child's identity (Figure 3), focusing on the parenting shifts specifically connected to gender diversity, validated through clinical work by the model authors.

Figure 3.

Giammattei and TransFamily Alliance's (n.d.) Parent Gender Journey Model



Note: “Parent Gender Journey Model” is adapted from Giammattei and TransFamily Alliance’s *Trans Family Gender Journey Map* (n.d., p. 4) with Microsoft stock images. Copyright 2026 Gender Health Training Institute. Adapted with permission (S. Giammattei, personal communication, May 9, 2026).

Chapter Summary

The *Ecological Model of Parenting Model* (Ulferts, 2020) presented in this chapter (Figure 1) provided the conceptual lens that guided the data analysis and informed the interview questions. The *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kohle et al., 2024), and the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammattei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) provided connections to the specific parenting experiences shared by dads during their interviews. The next chapter is the review of literature, the final step in describing the foundations for this study, the forestructure scaffolding of an Interpretive Description (ID) study (Thorne, 2016, 2025).

Chapter 3: Review of Literature

This chapter reviews the current scholarly literature related to parenting gender diverse children and youth. The review includes a consideration of the topics that provide an overview of areas that intersect with parenting, including gender identity development, gender diverse child and youth wellbeing, alongside experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth.

Search Strategy

Multiple search terms (Table 1) were used to cast a wide net as a search strategy to locate literature related to gender identity development, experiences or health of gender diverse children and youth, and experiences of parenting gender diverse children and youth. These specific terms were used in multiple searches using the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Scopus, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar databases, accessed via the University of Manitoba library website. Search results were screened manually for relevance to the topics included in this review of the literature. Searches were completed during coursework between 2021 through 2023, updated while writing the thesis proposal in 2024, and in 2025 while writing this final document in 2025 to early 2026.

Table 1.
Search Terms used to Locate Literature for this Literature Review

Category	Search Terms Used
Gender Diversity	Gender divers*, Gender expansive, Genderqueer, Gender nonconforming, Gender non-conforming, Nonbinary, Non-binary, Transgender*, Two-Spirit
Youth	Adolescent*, Child*, Teen*, Youth
Parents	Mom*, Mother*, Dad*, Father*, Parent*, Paternal, Maternal
Additional Terms	Affirm*, Gender affirm*, Health* Parent* style*, Parent* action*, Parent* beliefs*, Parent* behavio*, Parent* value*, Parent* approach*, Support*, Wellness, Well-being, Wellbeing

Literature Review

The past 10 to 15 years have seen an increasing volume of research studies that explore experiences of parents of gender diverse children and youth (Abreu at al., 2022a, 2022b; Warner et

al., 2021; Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). This literature review begins by describing current understandings of gender development, elements impacting gender diverse children and youth wellbeing, followed by the experiences of parents.

Gender Identity Development

Every person develops a gender identity through a biopsychosocial process starting in early childhood and continuing over their lifetime (Gulgoz et al., 2019; Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Salinas-Quiroz & Sweder, 2023). From infancy, gender roles, expectations, and how to embody specific gender identities are learned through observation, direct and indirect messages about gender from family, friends, and within socio-cultural settings (Bourns et al., 2022; Eliason & Chinn, 2018; Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Lehman et al., 2020; Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Salinas-Quiroz & Sweder, 2023). By age two or three children distinguish different gender identities and start to place themselves within a sociocultural gender label (Bourns et al., 2022; Gulgoz et al., 2019; Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023).

Expansive Gender Development

When a child's developing gender identity does not align with their assigned sex/gender at birth, gender diverse youth describe a dissonance, or gender dysphoria, between their internal sense of gender and their assigned sex/gender (Gulgoz et al., 2019; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020; Speechley et al., 2024). The age at which gender diverse children and youth can understand that what they are feeling is a dissonance between their assigned sex/gender at birth and gender is impacted by their awareness of gender diversity (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020; Speechley et al., 2024; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023). How and when children and youth express their gender diversity to others is also impacted by visibility and awareness (Gulgoz et al., 2019; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020; Speechley et al., 2024). For example, when exposure to expansive gender identities (gender diversity) is limited at home, children and youth may only become aware of gender diversity when they attend school from peers or books (Salinas-Quiroz & Sweder, 2023).

Parent Influences on Gender Development

Parents provide children with the first messages about what is expected and acceptable about gender roles and embodiments within and outside of the family (Dittman et al., 2023; Mesman & Grownveld, 2021). This may be intentional or implicit and often starts even before a child is born, as a child's assigned sex/gender at birth impacts the way many parents speak about their child, or the activities, clothing, and toys they provide for their child (Dittman et al., 2023; Mesman & Grownveld, 2021). These parenting choices then impact their child's toys and activity preferences from as early as two years of age (Dittman et al., 2023).

Gender Diverse Children and Youth Experiences within Families

Parents' responses to their child's cues and needs impact attachment and their developing sense of self (Shuster & Fuentes-Afflick, 2017). This is one way that parenting is a determinant of health for children and youth (Klein Walker, 2021). Parents of gender diverse children and youth create home environments that will either be affirming or prevent a gender diverse child from exploring and expressing their gender diversity (Morgan et al., 2022; Price et al., 2023; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023). Gender diverse children and youth, as with those who are cisgender, benefit from supportive and affirming home environments (Morgan et al., 2022; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023). Gender diverse youth who started living in their authentic gender identities from early childhood recall that their parents provided space for them to explore gender and supported them to embody their gender diversity at an early age (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020). Parents of this group of children had not placed restrictions on their child's gender expression (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020), illustrating responsiveness to their child's cues and needs (Schuster & Fuentes-Afflick, 2017).

Sharing Gender Diversity

Early childhood and puberty are common developmental periods when gender diverse children and youth share their gender diversity with their parents (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Speechley et al., 2024; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023). Depending on their age, children and youth may not have the language awareness to articulate gender identity labels (Mehrtens &

Addante, 2023). Younger children may simply tell their parents they are “not a boy” when their assigned sex/ gender at birth was male, or “not a girl” when their assigned sex/gender at birth was female (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023). Nonbinary or genderfluid younger children may tell their parents they are both a boy and girl, or neither a boy nor a girl (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023). While puberty-related physical changes leading to new or intensifying feelings of gender dysphoria are a common trigger leading to youth disclosures of gender diversity (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023).

Before disclosing gender diversity to families, children and youth go through a process of observing acceptable gender embodiments to decide if it is safe to share with their family (Grishow-Schade et al., 2023). The process can also involve testing the waters and evaluating family’s reactions to hints about their gender diversity (Grishow-Schade et al., 2023). Both aspects impact when and how a child will share their gender diversity with their parents (Grishow-Schade et al., 2023). Parental reactions range from immediate rejection and/or denial to unconditional love and support (Morgan et al., 2023a), but never celebration (Katz-Wise et al., 2022). Even positive responses are often accompanied by some concern, connected with not knowing enough about gender diversity (Morgan et al., 2023a). Gender diverse youth have also shared that they must often provide their parents with emotional support as they adjust to their child’s gender diversity (Morgan et al., 2023a).

Restrictive Parenting and Health Impacts

When parenting enforces that gender equals assigned sex/gender at birth, a child's sense of safety to share their gender diversity is impacted (Dittman et al., 2023) and can lead to a child suppressing their gender diversity for as long as possible (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020). Restricting access to gender affirming medical care, clothing, haircuts, or refusing to use pronouns and names until a certain age or amount of time has passed (Price et al., 2023) are examples of parental actions that oppose or question the validity of a child’s gender diversity (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020). The more discrimination, control, or restrictions parents place over their child’s gender diversity, the greater the negative emotional and behavioral health impacts are for their child (Bosse et al., 2023;

Dittman et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2023a). These restrictive actions lean towards parenting styles that are less supportive of child health and wellbeing as they include characteristics of coercive control, over-protection, neglectful and authoritarian parenting characteristics (Davids et al., 2017; Ulferts, 2020). Parental rejection and discrimination (Bosse et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2023a), as well as high levels of parental control and monitoring (Dittman et al., 2023), are associated with negative mental health experiences including depression, isolation, self-harm, suicidality, or anxiety in gender diverse youth. Internalized transphobia and low identity-pride are also associated with increased anxiety and depression in gender diverse youth (Conn et al., 2023; Haywood et al., 2023).

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Minority Stress

The lived experience of gender diverse children and youth often includes navigating gender-based discrimination that is not experienced by their cisgender peers (Conn et al., 2023; Price et al., 2023; Saewyc et al., 2021; Waite & Ryan, 2020). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are associated with negative mental health impacts (Schnarrs et al., 2023). ACEs at home include rejection or punishment because of gender diversity, or hearing family speak negatively about gender diversity or condoning violence towards gender diverse people (Saewyc et al., 2021; Schnarrs et al., 2023; Waite & Ryan, 2020). Living in homes that reinforce cisgender heterosexual norms increase the likelihood that gender diverse children and youth will have ACEs (Schnarrs et al., 2023). The minority stress of constant worry, uncertainty, and hypervigilance about safety lead to chronic stress which increases inflammation and susceptibility to infections or chronic illnesses over time (Diamond, 2024; Lehman et al., 2020). Stress-based immune responses are interrupted when a person experiences social connection, affirmation, inclusion, and recognition (Diamond, 2024, p. 432). Parenting can begin to address these elements to decrease the gender minority stress that negatively impacts child and youth health and wellbeing (Holt et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2022; Saewyc et al., 2021).

Affirming Parenting

Affirming, supportive adults can mitigate, at least in part, the impacts of ACEs or minority stress that is connected to a child's gender diversity (Kennedy et al., 2022; Price et al., 2023; Saewyc

et al., 2021). When parents create affirming home environments, home is a place of refuge, buffering the impacts of negative experiences and discrimination that gender diverse children and youth face outside of the home (Saewyc et al., 2021). These parenting actions include affirming their child's identity and supporting them to access gender affirming health and social services as needed (Saewyc et al., 2021). Affirmation and support at home helps buffer discrimination and stress by validating identities and supporting children and youth through negative experiences (Saewyc et al., 2021). Family support and affirmation have positive impacts, decreasing anxiety and depression for gender diverse children and youth (Belmont et al., 2023; Holt et al., 2023; Olsavsky et al., 2023). Youth suicidality and self-harm also decrease with support and connection (Saewyc et al., 2021; Taliaferro et al., 2019); there is up to 33% less risk of suicidality when a single affirming adult is present in the life of a gender diverse youth (Price & Green, 2023).

It is clear from this literature that parenting can significantly impact a child's experiences, wellbeing, and ability to share their gender diversity, illustrating how developmental or positive parenting styles that support autonomy, are encouraging, warm, responsive, or nurturing, do support child health and wellbeing (Davids et al., 2017; Ulferts, 2020).

Parent Experiences with Childhood Gender Diversity

When parents of gender diverse children and youth become aware of their child's gender diversity, they begin their own transitional journey (Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). A journey where parents often have to adjust their understanding of who their child is, an experience that is often accompanied by an emotional journey that may include experiencing confusion, loss (ambiguous), fear, or uncertainty (McGuire et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2022, 2023b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2022; Wagner & Armstrong, 2020; Wells et al., 2022). Parents describe needing support, time, and space to grieve the loss of who they thought their child was and to adjust to their child's gender diversity, which comes as a surprise to many parents (Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2022; Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). Parents have described worrying about their child's wellbeing, safety, and the impacts of gender affirming medical care, which they are often unfamiliar

with (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Katz-Wise et al. 2022).

Parents Experiences with Discrimination and Support

Parents have described experiencing discrimination from others due to their child's gender diversity (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Horton, 2023; Kidd et al., 2023). This has included loss of friendships, community relationships, support systems, and relationship conflict with spouses (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Horton, 2023; Kidd et al., 2023). Peer support groups provide spaces for parents to process their experiences while learning about gender diversity and gender affirming health and social services, while simultaneously making new social connections that support their own wellbeing (Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Kidd et al., 2023; Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). Through personal experiences with discrimination (transphobia) and experiences at support or peer groups, parents may begin to see and understand their own biases and discrimination towards gender diversity (Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). Parents who are connected to groups or community resources are more likely to affirm their child's gender diversity (Belmont et al., 2023).

Accessing Information about Gender Diversity

Lack of knowledge about gender diversity, gender affirming care, and what to do as parents are some of the knowledge gaps parents of gender diverse children and youth have shared (Abreu et al., 2022a; Kantor et al., 2023; Kidd et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2023b). A common parenting challenge for any parent is identifying misinformation, especially parents who feel insecure in their parenting abilities (Ulferts, 2020, p. 8, 9). Parents who feel insecure are particularly susceptible to becoming overwhelmed by incorrect information or parenting advice that is either intentionally or unintentionally distorted (Ulferts, 2020, p. 8, 9). Struggling to identify misinformation about parenting gender diverse children exists alongside challenges connecting to informed health care providers (Abreu et al., 2022a; Kantor et al., 2023; Kidd et al., 2023). Efforts to identify accurate information may, in part, lead to parents using their gender diverse child as their main source of information (Morgan et al., 2023a).

Questioning a Child's Certainty in their Gender

Parents may initially question their child's certainty in their gender identity (Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). Challenges understanding gender diversity and supporting their child can stem from deeply rooted socio-cultural or religious beliefs against gender diversity (Kidd et al., 2023). Although parents may not have awareness initially to see that fear and stigma are impacting their ability to support their gender diverse child or youth, their child may be acutely aware of those connections (Morgan et al., 2023a). Parents may initially perceive gender diversity as overwhelmingly complex when becoming aware of the range of gender identities and the shifting nature of identity over time (Morgan et al., 2022; Vandermorris & Metzger, 2023). Easy access to accurate information and social support, along with seeing positive representations of gender diversity, and understanding the detrimental impacts of not affirming their child's gender help resolve most parents' worries and concerns about supporting their child (Morgan et al., 2023a).

Limitations and Critiques of Existing Studies

One critique of the existing research is that it presents gender diversity in a negative or pathologizing way, situating diversity as non-conformity or as being atypical (de Bres, 2022; Sitas et al., 2023). Another critique is that the research is often limited to initial reactions or adjustment periods, highlighting negative emotions or challenges faced by parents during this period (de Bres, 2022). Within research that asks parents to report a child's anxiety or depression, one critique surrounds the accuracy of these reports if they are solely coming from the parents' perception (Belmont et al., 2023).

Demographic Diversity Limitations

Research studies with parents of gender diverse children and youth have additional limitations in demographic diversity (Westwater et al., 2019), with participants being predominantly mothers, White ethnicities, college level education, and household incomes over \$65,000 (Gray et al., 2016, p. 126). Data is not collected that would capture gender diversity or sexuality of parents', although sometimes the parents' sexuality has been collected (Gray et al., 2016; Lorusso & Albanesi,

2021; Riggs & Due, 2014; Westwater et al., 2019). Another demographic limitation is that participants are mainly from urban settings, with limited participants from non-urban settings (Belmont et al., 2023). The lack of inclusion of fathers, siblings, and other family members is key limitation highlighted by many researchers (de Bres, 2022; Gray et al., 2016; Lorusso & Albanesi, 2021; Riggs & Due, 2014). Dads or fathers represent between 11 percent of participants in large samples (Riggs & Due, 2014) and three (Gray et al., 2016) or four percent (Lorusso & Albanesi, 2021) of total participants in smaller samples. In database searches, only one study was identified that focused specifically on the perspectives of dads, in a Latinx cultural setting (Teran et al., 2023), while another study did highlight findings specific to participants who were dads in New Zealand (de Bres & Morrison-Young, 2024).

Men and Gender Diversity

Research with men in the United Kingdom, United States of America (USA), and China have shown that men are more likely to have negative attitudes about gender diversity manifesting as fixed beliefs that gender is only male or female and is always the same as a person's assigned sex/gender (Jones et al., 2023). The more fixed a person in these beliefs, the more negative attitudes they display towards gender diverse people (Jones et al., 2023). For gender diverse youth, childhood rejection by dads was associated with a stronger lifelong suicidality risk (Bosse et al., 2023). Gender diverse youth also described dads as less supportive compared to moms (Garcia et al., 2021; Riggs & Due, 2014). In the 2SLGBTQIA+ population of sexual minority youth, dads were also described as the less supportive parent, increasingly so over recent years (Watson et al., 2019). Gender diverse youth also felt their dad's struggled more with their gender identity, were authoritarian, and more difficult to approach even in households with an affirming mom (Morgan et al., 2023a).

Chapter Summary

This literature review focused on topics at the crossroads of child wellbeing, gender development, and gender diversity in parenting. Gender diversity is a part of the human experience (Eliason & Chinn, 2018), and an expected variation of human growth and development (Mehrtens & Addante, 2023). Families impact children and youths' ability to express their gender diversity

(Westwater et al., 2019), through limitations or restrictions put in place by parents (Dittman et al., 2023) due to parents' lack of knowledge about gender diversity (Salinas-Quiroz & Sweder, 2023). By exploring the unique experiences of the underrepresented parent group, dads or fathers (Gray et al., 2016; Westwater et al., 2019), this study provided an opportunity to expand the understanding of their unique experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth. This review of literature is the final step in describing the forestructure foundations, or scaffolding (Thorne, 2016, 2025) upon which this thesis study was built, as the next chapter describes the research methods used for recruitment, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter 4: Research Methods and Design

This qualitative research study focused on dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth using Interpretive Description (ID) methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025). The study provided an opportunity to explore in detail the unique experiences for dads related to parenting gender diverse children and youth, including but not limited to, nonbinary, genderfluid, transgender boy, or transgender girl gender identities (Fields, 2023). The first three chapters have outlined the research problem, and the complexities of parenting can be seen in the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020) (Figure 1) and literature review. The philosophical and theoretical foundational elements were introduced in the first chapter, and this chapter further describes the underlying research philosophy and the central tenants of ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) methodology, prior to delving into the details the research methods that were used.

Research Philosophy

As introduced in chapter one, social constructivist ontology and epistemology guided this study (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Epistemology describes how we create knowledge and our understanding of truth, while ontology describes what is real for a group, time, or situation (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Social constructivism acknowledges that every person has a unique life experience that is constructed within social settings and social experiences (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Truth and reality are created through what people hear, see, and experience socially; creating narratives of what is true and real by interacting with social surroundings (McEwen & Wills, 2019). These socially created narratives shape how reality is perceived, and what is understood as truth about a situation or topic (McEwen & Wills, 2019). In this way, multiple truths and realities can coexist as individual experiences lead to unique perspectives or interpretation of situations or concepts within groups and communities (McEwen & Wills, 2019). Co-existing multiple truths is demonstrated by Hall et al.'s (2021) research presenting the variety of ways gender is understood and described by participants. Using social constructivism (McEwen & Wills, 2019) as the underlying philosophy of this study involved actively looking for the unique perspectives and understandings of the research participants.

Interpretive Description Research Methodology

ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) is a qualitative methodology developed from a nursing context for social and health sciences to answer practice or clinical related questions (Pringle-Nelson, 2023; Thorne et al., 1997). Since its development, ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) has been used to explore questions across many health and social science settings, including child health studies exploring informational needs of parents or guardians (Archibald et al., 2015; Pringle-Nelson, 2023; Teodoro et al., 2018; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). For example, in Archibald et al. (2015), parental knowledge gaps were identified through data analysis and compared with clinically relevant knowledge to inform the development of an educational tool for parents.

Interpretive Description Philosophical Assumptions

ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) understands knowledge to be flexible as something that continues to evolve and adapt over time. The common assumptions that underpin ID methodology include valuing experiential alongside subjective knowledge; acknowledging multiple realities can co-exist, even if they appear contradictory; acknowledge that human experiences are created socially; and valuing both common and unique individual experiences (Thorne, 2016, p. 82). The philosophical underpinnings of social constructivism (McEwen & Wills, 2019), and the underlying assumptions of ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025), are both grounded in the common understanding that many realities can co-exist, built from individual socially constructed understandings. These elements align with my two decades of nursing practice experience which involved looking at individual experiences while acknowledging people are more than the sum of their parts (CASN, 2024). These foundational underpinnings are also aligned with the conceptual model, the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020), which acknowledges the social and unique individual constructions of parenting that can include common overlapping contextual influences. These foundational elements underpin the methods selected for data collection and data analysis, aimed at hearing the detailed and unique experiences of dads while exploring the elements that can be relevant to other dads, or health and social service providers working with parents and families.

Interpretive Description Methods

ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) methodology does not prescribe specific methods to be used for data collection or analysis (Hung, 2009). Selected methods can vary, provided they meet the study's needs and align with the guiding philosophy (Hung, 2009; Thorne, 2016, 2025). Qualitative research interviews are a common data collection method in ID (Pringle-Nelson, 2023; Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997), allowing for rich descriptions of experiences (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025). The process of data analysis begins with creating codes and organizing the codes into groups and relational patterns (Thorne, 2016, 2025). Contextualizing the findings involves connecting these relational patterns to existing studies and experiential knowledge to outline findings with practical applications (Thorne, 2016, p. 163, 165). Articulating practical applications of the findings for the desired audience that may utilize this information in a practical or clinical setting is the first step of knowledge translation in ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) studies. Further descriptions connecting the methods used to the characteristics of ID (Thorne 2016, 2025) studies are described within the sections below.

Study Setting

This study was conducted with dads who are parenting gender diverse children and youth within the province of Manitoba. The study site was limited to dads in Manitoba as their varied life and parenting experiences would exist under the same provincial political and health system structures. Political, medical, and social service contexts for gender diverse children and youth vary across Canadian provinces (Fox, 2023; Jeffrey, 2024; Johnson, 2025; MacLean, 2023) and evaluating inter-provincial differences was not the focus of this study. Limiting the study site to Manitoba strived to ensure participating dads lived within the same political, medical, and social services context.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The research sample for this study was dads parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba. Dads included anyone who self-identified as a dad or father, which could include being a legal guardian, biological parent, stepparents, adoptive parents, foster parents, or any paternal

parenting role not included in this list (Li & Tian, 2023; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Suwada, 2017). To participate in this study, dad needed to be parenting a gender diverse child between four and 18 years of age. The age range was selected to focus on the years when children and youth are more likely to be living with their families, and when parents are often the legal decision makers for their child, and/or provide consent for medical and legal services, along with facilitating access to these services. Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study.

Table 2.

Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Criteria Detail
Inclusion Criteria	Dad or father (Li & Tian, 2023; Suwada, 2017) of a transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse child or youth Their child's gender is not cisgender and can include any label that describes a diverse gender identity. Specifically, this may include transgender girl or boy; nonbinary or gender fluid gender; and Two-Spirit gender diverse identities (Fields, 2023) A dad who is parenting a gender diverse child or youth who is currently between the ages of four and 18 years of age They live in Manitoba They have access to an electronic device if meeting virtually, or transportation to the agreed upon public location for the confidential in-person semi-structured interview (library meeting rooms) Proficiency in understanding and speaking English for the research interview and consent process
Exclusion Criteria	Dads who are parenting transgender and gender diverse children who are living outside of Manitoba Dads whose child is over 18 years of age Dad's parenting cisgender children and youth

Sampling Procedures and Recruitment

The sampling methods used in this study included convenience and snowball sampling (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021; Thorne, 2016). Convenience sampling can lead to limitations in the diversity of participants' experiences as it relies on volunteers and study recruitment does not target specific demographic characteristics (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). While convenience sampling can also provide "an excellent source of insight for applied qualitative researchers about a phenomenon" (Thorne, 2016, p. 98) and is easily accessible via social media. Recruitment began following the

receipt of the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Human Ethics Research Ethics Board 1 (REB1) ethics approval on October 15, 2024, protocol number HE2024-0242 (Appendix A), with an extension received October 17, 2025 (Appendix B) as the data analysis was ongoing at that time.

The initial recruitment began using the social media platform Instagram, using an account created explicitly for the study (@parenting_gender_diverse_youth) and the approved materials in Appendix C. Convenience sampling also occurred through a local youth mentorship program for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. That program was able to share materials in their newsletter for guardians of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in their mentorship program. The approved letter (Appendix D) and posters (Appendix E) were shared with this organization, although none of the participants shared having connected with this study through that organization. A larger recruitment plan involving an additional site access review with Shared Health Manitoba was planned to access medical clinics, as it was anticipated that social media would not result in the minimum desired sample, however, this was not required due to the rapid recruitment of dads through social media. Dads who participated were invited to share the study information with any other dads they know (snowball sampling), although no dads shared this as the reason they connected with this study.

In total, 10 dads emailed expressing interest in the study. A letter (Appendix F) was emailed to dads for review and to confirm eligibility criteria. Nine dads met the inclusion criteria and scheduled research interviews. The tenth dad had a child outside of the inclusion criteria age range and had not known about his child's gender diversity at those younger ages. It was decided in discussion with my advisor not to alter the inclusion criteria to allow for this dad's participation as this would have shifted the parenting context of the study.

Sample Size

Sample size can vary in ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) studies, and many have used smaller samples, with ranges from five to over 30 participants (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne et al., 1997). Published interview-based qualitative studies with parents of gender diverse children or youth have had sample sizes that have ranged from five to 49 participants (Westwater et al., 2019). The feasible sample size

for this research study was estimated to be from eight to ten participants. Setting this range considered that the study was a graduate research thesis, and my knowledge about the number of dads currently participating in parent groups and drop-in programs for families with gender diverse children and youth within Winnipeg. After completing the ninth interview, no further emails were received expressing interest in participating. The decision about when to end recruitment took into consideration the richness and information power of the data collected (Malterud et al., 2016), and it was decided to not pursue expanding recruitment to additional medical clinics and community centers providing services for gender diverse youth.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured individual interviews (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021) were used for data collection. As the hope was to have participants from across the province, virtual interviews were offered, along with an in-person option within the city of Winnipeg. Virtual interviews used my University of Manitoba Zoom account, following the University of Manitoba's *Virtual Platform Guidelines* (Research Ethics and Compliance, 2022d). In-person interviews were arranged at a mutually agreed upon City of Winnipeg library location private meeting room.

Consent and Demographics

The consent form (Appendix G) contains the requirements as outlined by the University of Manitoba research ethics guidelines (Research Ethics and Compliance, 2023) and was emailed to participants prior to their interviews for review. Prior to the start of each interview, the consent form was read out loud to the participants, by me. Consent forms were signed before interviews started, in-person, or had been returned to me via email prior to virtual interviews. Demographic questions (Appendix H) were created following the University of Manitoba guidelines (Research Ethics and Compliance, 2022b, 2024a), and questions related to child identities were informed by the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Centre's guidelines (2022). A small honorarium, a \$25 gift card, was provided to participants in appreciation of their contributions.

Data Management

Data risk was considered medium as participants may assume they can be identified even though interview transcripts and quotations are de-identified. I had initially planned for quotations to highlight the age and gender identity of dads' children, however due to the small community of parents with gender diverse children in Manitoba and potential risk of identification, the decision was made with my advisor to not include these potential identifiers of the child/youth. This perceived risk was validated by questions from some participants, and the decision was made to further de-identify dads differentiating their quotations using interview numbers. Similarly, for the sample description all Indigenous identities are described as North American Indigenous without further specific community or ancestry information to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality.

Consent Forms and Honorarium Receipts. Consent forms and honorarium receipts will be stored by the Manitoba Centre for Nursing and Health Research (MCNHR) in sealed envelopes until the labelled date of destruction. Prior to storage or shredding, paper copies were stored in a locked drawer, in my home. Electronic data copies of the data were stored for no longer than 72 hours, until they could be printed, in my University of Manitoba email storage which uses a two-step authentication process. Once printed, electronic copies signed by dads were deleted. Once the interviews were completed, and participants had acknowledged receipt of their honoraria, all email communications were deleted, as per the ethics protocol for this study.

Demographics. Demographic information was collected without participant identifiers and shredded after data entry into a password protected file on my University of Manitoba electronic storage which uses a two-step authentication process.

Interview Recordings. Interviews were recorded on an electronic recording device that did not upload to cloud storage. Interviews were transcribed by me, within one week of the interview, and then deleted. During the transcription of the data, all person, place, and activity names were removed.

Data Collection and Analysis Documents. Interview transcripts, field notes, reflexive journals, and analytical notes were stored on my confidential University of Manitoba student drive (two-step authentication process). Only my advisor and I had access to the data from the research study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Building trust is an important step at the onset and throughout the research interview (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix I) included questions, prompts, and follow-up probes (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021; Teodoro et al., 2018). Interviews began with a preamble describing what brought me to this research, followed by an ice breaker question (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). Interview questions were designed to provide dads with opportunities to discuss what their parenting experiences were. Questions were based on the literature review of research with parents of gender diverse children and youth (Kantor et al., 2023; Rule, 2018; Teodoro et al., 2018), an approach which is consistent with ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) methodology. Interviews lasted between 40 to 79 minutes, with a median length of 57 minutes, and an average length of 62 minutes.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is not a linear process; it is described as iterative, creative, and complex (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021, p. 537). ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) methodology builds on this type of data analysis, as a non-linear process, where researchers begin thinking about data analysis during data collection through concurrent and constant comparative analysis (Thorne, 2016, p. 109). Asking what is going on and what is being seen in the data were key questions that were considered throughout the initial data analysis (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016, 2025). Transcribing each interview provided me with an early immersion in the data, through multiple senses (visual and auditory), which is important within qualitative (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021) and ID (Pringle-Nelson, 2023; Thorne et al., 1997). Field notes were completed after each interview, contributing to the data analysis by reflecting on observations of non-verbal communication and reflections on the interview content (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021; Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997).

Organizing the Data

Inductive data analysis meant allowing the information participants shared to lead the development of codes, patterns, and the final interpretive description (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021, p. 535; Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997). Creating codes that were representative of what had been heard in interviews was the first step taken before organizing codes into groups and then relational patterns (Thorne, 2016, 2025) to form the analytical themes, key messages, and key moments. Listening deeply to what was being heard in the data, codes were described which involved words, small pieces of text, or concepts discussed by participants in their interviews (Thorne, 2016, 2025). Initial coding was reviewed with my advisor, who provided feedback prior to my coding of the remaining interviews. Reflexive journaling and analytic notes provided opportunities for analytical reflection on the research questions while simultaneously integrating key interpretive insights and providing a systematic process for challenging the underlying assumptions of the researcher (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016, p. 153, 159; Thorne et al., 1997). Reflexive journaling and analytic notes continued to be a part of sorting codes into groups, as I explored different ways to organize them into categories and patterns (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, 2016, p. 153, 170).

Patterns and Interpretation

Patterns were explored asking “why” and “what” questions about the relationships being outlined from the data, continuing with reflexive journaling and analytic notes for accountability (Hunt, 2009; Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016, p. 174). ID findings can include descriptions of concepts, sequences or patterns, relationships, or by including some or all of these aspects to address the research questions of the ID study (Thorne, 2016, p. 180). For this study, the findings are described through the themes, key messages, and key moments described in the next chapter. The data analysis process was lengthy, extending throughout the entirety of 2025, as codes were organized into patterns and interpretive descriptions completed through many rounds of feedback and consultation with my advisor.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Field notes (Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997), reflexive journals (Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997), and analytic notes (Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997) created during data collection and data analysis provide an audit trail of how decisions were made. These elements, along with discussions and written feedback related to the codes, patterns, themes, key message, and key moments, build credibility as to how the findings were developed analytically (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997). Epistemological integrity, representative credibility, analytic logic, and interpretive authority are the four main criteria used to discuss credibility in an ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) study, and are each discussed below.

Epistemological Integrity

Showing epistemological integrity involves demonstrating alignment between the research question and the assumptions about how knowledge exists in the philosophical underpinnings (Thorne, 2025, p. 209). The theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism (McEwen & Wills, 2019), *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020), underlying assumptions of ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025), my personal assumptions, and disciplinary orientation all intersect at the understanding that people have unique experiences constructed through social settings that lead to their perception of what is true. The research question and methodological choices provided the opportunity for dads to speak about what was important to them, their truth and reality of parenting. Demonstrating epistemological integrity also involves discussing the context supporting decision making during data analysis (Thorne, 2016, p. 233, 234). By supporting the themes and key messages with quotations from various participants, I hope this demonstrates the uniqueness even within commonly constructed descriptions within the themes.

Representative Credibility and Analytic Logic

Representative credibility involves connecting the constructed perception to additional sources (Thorne, 2025, p. 210). Throughout the discussion chapter, the comparisons of similarities and differences with previous literature will contextualize the findings. Showing analytic logic involves

explicitly demonstrating the process behind decisions and how data analysis and presentation of findings occurred (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016, p. 234, 235, 2025, p. 210). Much of the analytic logic is not visible within this final draft but is to my advisor who had the opportunity to see previous drafts and the audit trail of analytic notes. It is my hope that the descriptions of themes, key messages, and key moments show an analytical connection to the quotations of participants, supporting the presentation of findings.

Interpretive Authority

Interpretive authority requires the researcher to ground the findings within their subjective context, using supporting sources to illustrate the rationale for the development of the findings (Thorne, 2016, p. 235). The findings were built from organizing codes, which included words and concepts connected with quotations, into groups and patterns. For example, my initial lists of codes were each connected to a supporting quotation. As narrative descriptions were added, this led to some additional decisions being made. An example is that when describing the third theme, it became apparent that elements were present that needed to be described separately in a fourth theme. Supporting the findings with direct quotations, or referencing the frequency of the experiences described, provides visible support for themes and key messages. Although feedback from participants was not integrated into this master's thesis study design, themes were shared by email with participants who requested a copy. No feedback was received from them, that can be assumed to indicate alignment between the descriptions and their experiences.

Additional topics that can be used to describe credibility in ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) research studies include discussing moral defensibility, disciplinary relevance, pragmatic obligation, contextual awareness, and acknowledging the probable truth. These are described below.

Moral Defensibility

Moral defensibility relates to describing the necessity of having people share the information, particularly vulnerable information (Thorne, 2025, p. 212). There is value in hearing the experiences of other parents (Abreu et al., 2022a), this was shared with dads in the risks and benefits that were

outlined in the study consent form (Appendix G) and is one rationale for undertaking research in this area. As the researcher in this study, I hope that the participants felt respected during the interview and feel respected through the presentation of the findings, as I value and respect their time, openness to share, and the depth of experiences they shared.

Disciplinary Relevance and Pragmatic Obligation

The relevance to the discipline of nursing, and potentially beyond this discipline, has been described in the discussion (see Chapter 6). Specific findings and their disciplinary relevance have been described in connection with studies that support gender affirming nursing practices (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022; Jackman et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2022). Descriptions are also connected with pragmatic obligation, as this is not a large enough sample to be generalizable, but the unique experiences of dads highlight possibilities and relevance for nursing to continue efforts to increase inclusiveness within education, practice, and research. The pragmatic obligation exists because one can never know what child will be gender diverse, and there are potential positive impacts by providing parents with information that may shift their expectations.

Contextual Awareness and Probable Truth

Dads provided a level of detail in their interviews that provided contextual awareness in their unique experiences. Many connected their expectations and worries to past lived experiences, which adds that contextual element. These elements are included in the description of findings to support the experiences participating dads shared. The unique contributions offered in this study's findings showed the value of focusing solely on dads parenting experiences, and there will continue to be value in interviewing new cohorts of dads of different generations or ethnicities to build further awareness and inform nursing practice and resource development for parents in the future. The experiences shared by dads represent the truth and reality of their parenting experiences, and their truths may be relevant, or partially relevant, to other dads.

Ethical Considerations

Research involves actual and perceived risks and benefits for participants (Polit & Tatano

Beck, 2021). Assessing risks provides an opportunity to outline ways to address or reduce their impact on participants (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021). The specific risks and benefits were summarized for participants on the second page of the study consent form (Appendix G).

Potential Benefits

Opportunities to share experiences about parenting gender diverse children and youth can be therapeutic for parents (Abreu et al., 2022a). This research study provided an opportunity for dads to share their experiences, and the hope was that the opportunity to share in a one-on-one setting will also be therapeutic by providing an opportunity to reflect on personal growth as parents of gender diverse children and youth (Abreu et al., 2022a). Satisfaction gained from assisting other families with gender diverse children or youth in their parenting has also been reported by parents participating in peer support groups (Abreu et al., 2022a) and was a potential benefit of participation in this study. During the interviews many of the dads shared they were grateful for the opportunity to share their experiences, and one dad shared that this was the first time he had spoken about his experiences as a parent and felt that it was very fulfilling.

Potential Risks

There was a possibility that some of the interview questions may have prompted discussion about challenging topics, such as their child's mental health, including self-harm and suicidality, or challenges dads had experienced with personal values and beliefs that made it challenging to support their gender diverse child (Abreu et al., 2022a). A list of support resources for parents, including community groups and support contacts, was provided to participants, including crisis support phone numbers (Appendix J). Throughout the research interviews, dads were very open sharing their experiences, which included all of the challenging topics listed. For most dads, these topics involved strong emotional reactions as most of the dads became tearful, with some needing to take breaks. Despite this, every dad wanted to continue their interviews and their challenging experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the research design elements of this study which followed ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) methodology, outlining the planned and actual methods that were followed. The next chapter describes the research findings, including four themes, four key messages, and eight key moments. The final chapter contextualizes the findings in relation to previous literature and considers implications for nursing practice, education, and future research.

Chapter 5: Findings

In this chapter, I outline the key findings of this thesis study which followed an Interpretive Description (ID) methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025). The four themes, four key messages, and eight key moments shared in this chapter provide the response to the study's research question: what are dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth? The first study objective was to understand dad's experiences of parenting their gender diverse children and youth, which are described in the themes. The second study objective was to identify key messages or key moments from what dads shared, and both are described in this chapter.

Dads' rich descriptions of their parenting experiences are reflected through the following four themes: 1) pathways to discerning a child's gender diversity pass through awareness and uncertainty, 2) learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender, 3) navigating gender diversity becomes integrated into parenting, and 4) the emotional contours of being a dad to a gender diverse child. These four themes (Table 3) are presented with their associated subthemes.

Table 3.

Overview of themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subthemes
Pathways to discerning a child's gender diversity pass through awareness and uncertainty	Becoming aware of your child's gender diversity
	Experiencing uncertainty associated with your child's gender diversity
	Understanding gender diversity is a part of your child's personhood
Learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender	Personal connections influenced learning about gender diversity
	Learning about gender diversity from multiple and diverse sources
	Shifting perceptions and understandings of gender
Navigating gender diversity becomes integrated into parenting	A deep desire to protect your child from harm alongside anticipatory work and advocacy.
	Navigating supports, connections, and conversations with your child
	Navigating conversations to affirm your child's identity
The emotional contours of being a dad to a gender diverse child	The spectrum of emotions parenting a gender diverse child
	Ambiguous emotional undercurrents
	Expectations around the emotionality of dads

Note: The themes and subthemes are described in detail below the description of sample.

Description of Sample

This description of the study sample is presented in a narrative format to protect participants' anonymity. The study sample included dads who were between the ages of 42 to 58 years of age; with a median of 49 years of age. One participant described a North American Indigenous ethnicity, with remaining participants identifying as having White European ancestry. Three participants identified their sexuality within 2SLGBTQIA+ identities of gay, bisexual, or pansexual. Two dads reported a strong and current connection to a religious community. Seven dads were coparenting in the same household as their spouse; the remaining two were separated from their original coparent, one living alone, and another living with a spouse. Dad's gender diverse children ranged in age from 11 to 18 years of age at the time of interviews; with a median of 16 years of age. Child ages at the time they had disclosed their gender diversity varied from two years of age to 14 years of age: two at preschool ages; four in elementary school ages; and three in the junior or high school age range. The length of time dads had known about their child's gender diversity, at the time of interviews, ranged from 19 months to 15 years. The children and youth ethnicities were predominantly White European ancestry (n = six), while three children/youth had a North American Indigenous ethnicity. Assigned gender at birth included three girls and six boys, while their gender diverse identities included two transmasculine, four transfeminine, and three nonbinary children/youth.

Theme One: Pathways to Discerning a Child's Gender Diversity Pass Through Awareness and Uncertainty

"I can't think of like one moment that switched things in my brain...[and] it certainly was a journey."

(Dad Two)

None of the dads anticipated they would have a gender diverse child when they became parents. Not anticipating their child could be gender diverse led to each dad travelling along a unique path that ended with discerning (Merriam-Webster, 2026) their child's gender diversity. Dads' journeys brought them to a place of seeing, knowing, and/or understanding (Merriam-Webster, 2026) their child was a person with a diverse and expansive gender identity. Even when dads saw

something unique in their child, or their child had shared their sexual diversity first (n = two; lesbian or pansexual), gender diversity was still not anticipated by dads: “we always knew that they were ...queer in some way... and I never made the assumption that they were trans, but there was always something like you could tell [they weren’t] comfortable in [their] body” (Dad One).

The pathways described throughout this theme included a) becoming aware of your child’s gender diversity; b) experiencing uncertainty associated with your child’s gender diversity; and c) understanding your child’s gender diversity is a part of their personhood.

Becoming Aware of Your Child’s Gender Diversity

For some dads, learning about their child’s gender diversity occurred in a specific moment, while for others, there was a longer process over an extended period. Dads became aware of their child’s gender diversity in different ways as every child and youth shared their gender diversity with their dad and/or family in their own unique way:

My oldest... they’re nonbinary... they left me little notes all throughout our [home]... like a little scavenger hunt, which at the end said, ‘in conclusion, I’m neither a boy nor a girl, I’m just me’... [my younger child] just sent me a text one day: ‘oh, by the way I’m a girl’, and I’m like ok, sweet. (Dad One)

Every dad shared the special approach, message, and timing used by their child to share their gender diversity, through conversations, notes, a personal text, or family group chat.

Dads whose children had nonbinary identities, described the awareness coming over a longer process rather than in a specific moment. They saw changes to their child’s preferences in clothing or hairstyles, prior to asking family members to use they/them pronouns. One dad described the difference in coming to know his daughter’s gender identity compared to his nonbinary child’s:

With my daughter it was ‘oh, I’m a girl, there’s a box that I fit in, it’s not the box that everyone thought I had, but there is a box I fit in’; whereas with my youngest... it’s more... like, I don’t really fit in the box that I’m in, but I don’t really know what box I am in... so it took a little while for us to get there, to nail that down. (Dad Four)

Dads with children who shared their gender diversity at younger ages, such as preschool or early elementary school ages, also described an extended process of becoming aware of their child's gender diversity. With younger children it took consistent assertions over time, as dads initially believed their children were too young to understand, which led to corrections or being dismissive:

At three years old, we're not really paying too much attention to... whenever someone would say you know 'you're handsome', 'no I'm pretty', 'you're a cute boy', 'no I'm a pretty girl'... she was always correcting people about her gender ...to the point where... she would not stand to pee. (Dad Nine)

The examples shared in this subtheme have illustrated the varied ways dads became aware of their child's gender diversity and the uniqueness of each family learning about a child or youth's gender diversity in a moment or over an elongated period.

One dad had a particularly unique experience, as finding out about his child's gender diversity played a special role in understanding his child's mental health struggles: "before she came out... we were ...many times, at the crisis unit... and like couldn't figure out what was going on, and then this is what was going on" (Dad One). This experience was distinct, as his awareness of his child's gender diversity ended his experience with uncertainty, whereas for all other dads learning of their child's gender diversity led to uncertainty described throughout the next theme.

Experiencing Uncertainty Associated with your Child's Gender Diversity

Uncertainty was evident in eight of the dads' descriptions about their initial feelings after becoming aware of their child's gender diversity. Two dads shared the same underlying cause for their uncertainty, they initially felt their child was too young and was copying the gender of the people they spent significant time with:

[T]he immediate family...who surrounded them... was a lot of girls... [and] you act on your environment, and you kind of mimic that, and being that was what she was surrounded by it was within reason that she would ... act the same way. (Dad Eight)

Feeling uncertain about their child's gender diversity being real or true, led to feelings that it was a phase, that would pass:

You think about, are they doing it for ...attention ... trying to find something... other than the fact that they were trans... it felt like accepting... that was such a big leap, that you... wanted to extinguish everything else before you got to it. (Dad Five)

Uncertainty lasted between a few weeks to a few years, often ending with a tipping point where they learned, heard, or saw something that shifted dads' perspectives from uncertainty towards certainty in their child's gender diversity. For one dad, this was the school letting them know their child was consistently standing in the "wrong" bathroom line; while for others, it was witnessing an event that shifted how they saw their child:

[O]ne thing that stuck out, [and] sticks with me to this day it was that we went to... get a jacket...she saw this ...coat ...in the girls' section ...and I said, 'try it on', and her face just lit up... and she went in front of the mirror and spun around and was just so happy. (Dad Eight)

For others, pivotal moments involved learning something about parenting and child wellbeing:

I just wasn't all on board, until someone told me the study that... 80% of trans kids hurt themselves, 40% succeed in committing suicide, and that number almost disappears if they're accepted [becomes teary] so if you're given that stat, I don't know how you could not be onboard. (Dad Five)

Pivotal moments, or tipping points, were a key factor to ending dad's uncertainty about their child's gender diversity. None of the dads described being against their child's gender diversity, however, since these dads had not expected their child could be gender diverse, feeling and resolving this uncertainty were key moments on their journey to seeing their child as a gender diverse person.

Understanding Gender Diversity is a Part of Your Child's Personhood

During the past 19 months to 15 years, dads had been aware of their child's gender diversity, experienced uncertainty towards it, and resolved this uncertainty. These experiences culminated as the dads came to discern, as in to understand or see (Merriam-Webster, 2026), their child's gender

diversity as a core part of who their child is, of their personhood. Seeing their child as a person gender diverse was evident throughout the interviews in dad's congruence when speaking about their child's gender, pronouns, and name; although some dads shared the challenges they experienced in being consistent using the correct name and pronouns for their child early in their journey's.

Five of the dads articulated how their child's gender diversity simply fit with who their child is: "it was like, as soon as they came out, if it's coming out or if it's the rest of us just catching up ...it made sense... everything just clicked" (Dad Five). Reflecting back, memories helped dads accommodate that their child had always been a gender diverse person: "it makes sense now, that, they pretty much stopped getting haircuts at 10, and wanted long, long hair... in grade six they had the graduation from elementary school, and...they were just so sad to wear [a] suit" (Dad Seven). Memories included preferences, as well as their child's personality "she was always a very cautious child growing up, and it kind of made sense, cause ... she wasn't sure of who she was, or if it was ok being who she was" (Dad One). Knowing that their child was gender diverse allowed dads to re-interpret their understanding of previous parenting experiences.

Dads shared reflections, parenting experiences, and described their child in ways which illustrated how they had come to a place of discerning their child as a gender diverse person. Their child's gender diversity came to be understood as one part of the many aspects of their child's personhood. Now that they understood their child was gender diverse, they had other parenting journeys to experience, one of which was learning more about what gender diversity is and what their child's needs were.

Theme Two: Learning, Unlearning, and Reconstructing Understandings of Gender

"I started reading everything and realizing I had no concept of gender... no understanding." (Dad Nine); "It was like a paradigm shift... because growing up ...that language wasn't there, [or] that way to even conceptualize." (Dad Six)

Not anticipating their child could be gender diverse led to a marked shift in dads' parenting context and created a need for them to learn, unlearn, and reconstruct their conceptualizations of gender to support their child. Each dad shared aspects of their unique learning journeys, which were influenced by their life contexts and personal constructions of gender. Dads connected with an array of resources, including books, articles, videos, or social media which shared information, medical perspectives, or the lived experiences of gender diverse individuals or their parents. Some resources were accessed for information, while others were for interpersonal support and included peer led groups (online or at resource centres), existing social groups (friends, coworkers), professional supports (counselling, medical clinics), and their immediate family (spouse, gender diverse child, or older gender diverse sibling).

Personal preferences along with other contextual factors shaped dads unique learning journeys: "my wife educated herself incredibly well, and I was really slow...to take on the task [be]cause I just thought it was just a phase and it'll pass" (Dad Nine). Dads' unique experiences learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender, involved: a) personal connections influenced learning about gender diversity, b) learning about gender diversity from multiple and diverse sources; and c) shifting perceptions and understandings of gender.

Personal Connections Influenced Learning About Gender Diversity

Personal connections had a profound impact on dads' learning about gender diversity, playing a role in accessing information, as well as helping with dads' initial understandings of gender diversity. Two dads shared a similar experience of having a friend who was gender diverse act as their initial guide:

[W]e knew someone that was trans... that person got us ... surrounded by knowledge and good people ...instantly ...it was like cheating... [there was] very little...that we had to navigate through on our own ...it just trickled into other people... [to] talk to who either know a lot about it... or are going through it. (Dad Five)

Friends were themselves a resource, a sounding board: “I was able to talk to him... about his journey and fears... having people in your life that are trans helps people to understand” (Dad Two). For dads (n = two) with two gender diverse children, their older child had provided them a base of knowledge they would not have had otherwise:

I went into it with... basic background familiarity ...there was like less of the... I don't know where to start... It was like, ok, I just need to ...fill in the gaps... like... I knew it was going to be tough to navigate the pronouns stuff, with family ...[so] what does that look like...how do you actually do that kind of stuff. (Dad Four)

While existing personal connections had a positive impact by increasing access to information, the remaining dads (n = four) described the impact of having had no personal connection with someone who is gender diverse as: “having never really known a trans person, in my life, I didn't know where to start with that information” (Dad Seven).

Even for dads who did not have an existing personal connection to a gender diverse person, other existing social connections emerged that facilitated connections to resources:

We've never known anyone who's trans, so ... we had no inclination about it... there was a steep learning curve, and our friend... [a Two-Spirit Elder] referred us to... [a parent group] ... that's how we started to go that route, we just... expanded from there. (Dad Eight)

Coworkers with a gender diverse child were described as someone dads (n = three) could speak with about shared experiences, or learn from:

I had the benefit of the coworker with the transgender kid... although they had a very different...experience because they were very religious and they fought it ...and that led to issues, and ...they spent every moment trying to undo what had been done... for me it was educational... to guide me in what not to do. (Dad Nine)

Two dads shared leveraging their child's knowledge: “[she] was so well informed... she was my sort of go to...any questions I had, she was just there ...with the answers... and ...we bought... lots of literature ...we were...always educating ourselves ...as well” (Dad Six). While other dads (n = two)

expressed deep appreciation for their spouse having facilitated their learning: “I know my wife was much better prepared than I was ...she’s read everything... and [I] really was lucky ... [that she] curate[d] some books that really put it in super simple terms” (Dad Nine).

Personal stories and trust in others’ opinions about resources were key elements that made existing social relationships essential sources of knowledge and information to strengthen parenting, understanding of gender diverse lived experiences, and re-envisioning the construct of gender.

Learning About Gender Diversity from Multiple and Diverse Sources

Each learning journey was unique as dads accessed the resources that met their personal needs and preferences. Learning from lived experiences and stories was elevated as important throughout all phases of learning, unlearning and reconstructing:

[T]he stuff ...I read was helpful, and ... online content creators who were trans... hearing their stories, and ...perspectives... I joined a couple of groups ...a US based... dads of trans kids... that’s been helpful ...like a safe forum... As a couple, we joined that parent support group... when I went, I got a lot out of it. (Dad Seven)

Dads shared many spaces where they connected with stories from other parents, including: “groups where people post about this stuff... that’s ...useful as...passively hearing people talk about their stories, and then being like, I can ...identify some things that are ...helpful in there” (Dad Four). While hearing the experiences of other parents was an important element, preferences for the setting (groups, on-on-one, in-person, virtual, or online) varied. Often in-person groups were not the ideal setting for dads (n = seven): “I would never get to ... a group setting, I’m definitely not comfortable in that setting, but [am] ...comfortable [one on one], if there were...different ways to support ... getting dads to come out more...[and] supporting each other” (Dad Three). Sometimes the setting or topic impacted the appeal of group support, as one dad shared how an American online dad group had many conversations associated with the political landscape, which was not applicable to Manitoba.

A couple of dads shared that knowledgeable health care providers were useful sources of information (n = two). Additionally, two dads shared positive impacts of workplace resources:

I feel very fortunate that I've got lots of resources for the work that I do... it's been extremely helpful for me... to help understand the language... [be]cause this was all very new and making sure that we're saying and doing ...the right things. (Dad Three)

The other workplace experience involved the positive impact a 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion workshop had in shifting that dad's awareness prior to knowing his child was gender diverse. Engaging in community activities was described by other dads (n = three) as useful to build parenting knowledge: "we ...go out and engage with the community ...at protests... and then try and be there for the community at large as well... that's been... important to our understanding, as parents" (Dad Seven). Learning from multiple and diverse sources was important to dads, even when dads did not always articulate what they learned specifically.

Shifting Perceptions and Understandings of Gender

Weaved throughout dads' descriptions of their parenting experiences, were examples showing how they had reconstructed their understandings of the construct of gender. Shifting perception included acknowledging past expectations that had influenced their parenting: "at maybe four or five... there was ...this expectation that [my oldest] was gonna rock out on the drums, and [my youngest] ...with the kitchen set" (Dad Six), but the opposite happened. Every dad shared examples how their child's assigned gender/sex at birth influenced their parenting. Dads shared choosing activities, clothing, and presents, for their child based on their gender/sex at birth; this connection was particularly strong for dads who initially knew their child as a boy. Reflections brought further insight into how they were creating broader understandings of gender:

[A] learning for me, is [the] way that you put all of those expectations on those gender identities... it was really freeing to know that... you don't have to have these rules about... how we put people in these boxes...and it's ...stripped all that away for me, and ...enlightened me. (Dad Six)

Reconstruction involves rebuilding, and dads not only became more aware of how they had parented their child based on their gender in the past, but perspectives shifted more broadly impacting how

they see all people. As each dad shared their unique journey of personal growth related to their previous understanding of gender, descriptions included making fewer assumptions about other people's identities, such as coworkers or strangers.

Two of the three dads whose children have an Indigenous ethnicity shared how their child's gender diversity provided opportunities for them to explore learnings about Two-Spirit identities and histories, opportunities they would not have otherwise had: "that was another thing ... getting into the whole understanding of Two-Spirit ... [I had] never heard of this in my life" (Dad 9). When a shared Indigenous ethnicity with their child existed, a dad's Two-Spirit learning journey still began due to his child's identity. This dad also shared the impact of colonization on access to knowledge: "our histories are so lost and condensed... it's really hard to know ...[if] this information is... really true" (Dad 8).

Reconstructing understandings of gender came as dads learned and un-learned along their journey parenting their gender diverse child from resources that met their unique needs and preferences, through personal reflection, and accommodating new understandings.

Theme Three: Navigating Gender Diversity Becomes Integrated into Parenting

"They're navigating [being gender diverse], and I'm parenting someone navigating it" (Dad Two);

"There's all of that about ...being a parent... the friendship stuff, and the esteem stuff... then you add that other layer on top of whatever else is going on" (Dad Six)

Throughout their interviews, dads shared many examples of how their child's gender diversity had become a consideration in their parenting. Descriptions illustrated processes for approaching inclusion, affirmation, and the wellbeing of their child, through decisions and actions as parents:

[Now] the rubber hits the road... [it's] a crash course of like theory into practice: how do I actually show up for this kid... make sure they're being supported and understand this well enough to ...support them and provide parenting guidance, decision making... [or] navigate... sticky social situations with family ...[or] friends. (Dad four)

Navigating gender diversity included: a) a deep desire to protect your child from harm alongside anticipatory work and advocacy; b) navigating supports, connections and conversations with your child; and c) navigating conversations to affirm your child's identity.

A Deep Desire to Protect Your Child from Harm Alongside Anticipatory Work and Advocacy

Every dad described a deep desire to protect their children from exclusionary, non-affirming, and harmful situations. These situations were connected to other people's reactions or feelings about gender diversity, denying or speaking negatively about gender diversity, or continuing to misgender their child after being corrected. Situations which would have a negative impact on their child's wellbeing, required dads to act to protect their child:

[I]t feels normal... until we leave the house, then it feels less normal... I don't know how to sum it up in a succinct way...it's work, but not in the woe is me type, it's work cause other people make it work... and it's difficult. (Dad One)

Dads took steps, with their parenting partner or spouse, to protect their child from words and actions that were hurtful, non-inclusive, or dangerous through planning and setting boundaries. This included supporting their child's autonomy in boundary setting by talking to explain other people's beliefs: "[I talked] to my gender diverse kids about what these family members support and let them decide... and generally, they don't come" (Dad One).

Anticipatory Work

Much of dads' protective work was anticipatory based on past experiences including those shared by other parents: "you hear these horror stories, about some uncle, or some grandmother... saying something shitty or horrible, or ...cruel" (Dad Four). Every dad described some anticipatory protective parenting, including this very unique action: "we've actually written into our will... provisional guardians... charged with overseeing, the custodial parent to make sure that they respect our children's gender...it was important for us to have that on paper" (Dad Seven). Anticipatory work was often connected to intergenerational, religious, or political contexts as dads described situations where they anticipated they would need to protect their child:

[W]ith, [my] parents being older...there was definitely a generational issue that we thought we'd be facing ...it was quite surprising... my mother who is ...[religious] to the core ...just said yup that's who she is, and ...my spouse's family... again very [religious]... but everybody basically said ... yup... and away we went. (Dad Nine)

Even when situations turned out to be positive, dads and their parenting partner or spouse had still spent time and energy planning for how to address these potentially negative situations.

Political Contexts. This statement resonated with most of the dads (n = eight): “[t]he current political climate is kind of terrifying” (Dad Two). As almost all dads mentioned political contexts and actions they would take to protect their gender diverse child. Dads shared how current socio-political contexts created the need to plan for challenging political landscapes shifting closer to home:

I’m always concerned about her wellbeing, especially within the political climate, in the States, but now that might be here in Canada as well... I’m always watching message boards, You Tube, political commentaries... to see what the growing trend is, and unfortunately, it’s growing very negative... [and] it’s something ...to be aware of. (Dad Eight)

Dads shared how they would move to a different province if the political context became dangerous or harmful for their child in Manitoba. Two dads spoke about the need for extra planning with travel or when a child had hoped to participate in sports tournaments or attend school in the United States, activities which were hindered by the current political landscape.

The Spectrum of Advocacy

Wanting to protect their child led to engaging with advocacy for their child’s inclusion in schools, extra-curricular activities, and within social environments. Conversations with friends, family or strangers was one type of advocacy:

Uncomfortable conversations...that’s how advocacy starts...I’m not changing the world with a Facebook post, I’m changing my social group, maybe one person at a time... at first...I didn’t know how to talk about it... it was uncomfortable...but if you love your kid ...you do uncomfortable things. (Dad Two)

One family was very involved in multiple levels of advocacy in sports which included conversations with parents, providing information to coaches, and reaching out to provincial sports associations when speaking to coaches was not successful:

There's lots of policies out there that say they're inclusive, but there's not a whole lot of... action plan behind that... because I don't think people understand the impact... so that's been our... approach ... helping them [to] understand... so that [our child] continues to... play sport and [be] included. (Dad Three)

Much of the advocacy shared by dads involved respecting names and pronouns, and using non-gendered language when addressing groups, such as cheering on a sports team. While other actions were also shared: "like donations, going to rallies, voting, I think that's like the biggest things we do, trying to get other people to vote positively for those things...it's kind of ...focused on just... making sure your kid was ok" (Dad Five).

Whether they labelled their actions as advocacy or not, each dad had a different level of comfort in how visible their advocacy was and how they approached trying to positively impact their child's inclusion. Protection, anticipatory and advocacy-based work, was unique for dads parenting gender diverse children because it was directly related to how people felt, acted, or spoke about gender diversity personally, through policy, or politics.

Navigating Supports, Connections, and Conversations with Your Child

After dads learned about gender diversity and their child's needs, as they integrated their child's gender diversity into their parenting, each dad wanted their child to feel supported and connected to community. Navigating supports, connections, and conversations with their child were essential parenting experiences shared by dads, within each unique family context.

Social Connections and Supports

Every dad spoke about a desire for their child to have a connection with people of similar age and lived experience, while experiences in terms of what was available, and desired by their child,

varied greatly between families. Some dads spoke of community group connections they had made as a family, although, around half of dads shared challenges engaging youth in this process:

I see other ... younger people that are newly trans... and there's like this hunger for ... actively pursuing community... with other folks that are going through similar stuff as them, and my kids just do not seem to want to do that... It's made it trickier to ...get them supported. (Dad Four)

Dads with this experience also shared that their child's personal preferences, or needs related to neurodivergence, were often a mismatch with drop-in group structure.

Connecting with community was sometimes happenstance, as one dad shared how attending a community event provided the first opportunity for his child to connect with a Two-Spirit Elder, and he "wish[ed] there was more supports when it came to the Two-Spirit aspect of things" (Dad 8).

Another dad shared how an extracurricular group, which they had anticipated would not be gender affirming and inclusive, was both, creating social connections for his child.

Mental Health Supports. When and how to connect with mental health supports were another challenge described by dads (n = five). Preparation was a key driver for wanting to make this connection with mental health supports to: "not just [be] prepared for negative things that happen outside the home, but within ... the person themselves, because...it's been a lot of up and down" (Dad Eight). Timing of when to begin that preparation was one challenge: "at what point...do we preemptively seek therapy...does that make it seem [like]... there's something wrong... as opposed to you know providing another suit of armor to wear, or coping skills... it's always that balancing act" (Dad Nine). Access to needed mental health supports could also be a challenge: "he [had] lots of challenges with friends and ...[crying] tried to commit suicide, a couple weeks into school ...he was also harming himself ... [and] year one was tough... to get ...psychological supports for him, it was very difficult" (Dad Three). Access to the right support could be challenging in additional ways, as another dad shared frequently accessing mental health crisis supports prior to their child sharing

their gender diversity, and although support was received, no identification of the underlying cause (gender dysphoria) had occurred during these interactions.

Support at School. Schools were a frequent topic connected to youth mental health, inclusion, and affirmation. While a key element connected to schools was the impact individuals had on dad's perceptions of working to create a supportive and inclusive school environment. Two dads recalled how one specific staff member stood out for them, by taking the lead in facilitating in-class conversations to create an affirming environment for their child. Three dads shared their child's experiences with bullying or loss of friendships at school. Two experiences with individuals not supporting a child included: "admin and teachers ...say they're affirming or ...support your child, but ...deadname way more often than is just an accident... other parents don't have to like deal with the school in that way" (Dad One). Or, not supporting a child who actively struggling with self-harm: "we spent a lot of time in the school trying to find supports...the teachers were somewhat supportive... but the social worker didn't really feel his issues were as challenging as maybe some other kids" (Dad Three).

Medical Supports. Another area of support that was challenging to navigate was the medical system. Although dads shared positive experiences once they connected with gender affirming health services, access to this care was a challenge:

The medical system...it's very restrictive... could that be avoided if there were... more family doctors... able or willing or both to... look after [our kids] ... that's ...been, eye opening...you don't notice problems... until you encounter them. (Dad Seven)

Challenges in access continue to exist, despite, as one dad noted the medical system having less challenges currently than the system he navigated a few years prior with an older gender diverse child.

Each family had their unique experiences of accessing different types of support, which were impacted by child and youth preferences, and the unique family context.

Challenging Conversations with Children and Youth.

Conversations were something that dads identified as challenging to navigate with their child. Dads who navigated accessing medical care spoke about the challenge of not wanting to be the sole decision makers of their child's medical treatment, while needing to share information in an age-appropriate way:

[T]here's a whole medical side of it... like to hold puberty with Lupron, or not... [they] end up making some grown up decisions... at a young age, fairly quickly... you have to mentally prepare them ...[to] have some conversations ... and make sure that they're educated...so they can make the decisions they need to. (Dad Five)

Including a child in decision making was one challenge, while another challenge was a desire to speak about topics they felt ill-equipped to address.

Conversations related to their child's lived experience also presented challenges and feelings that as dads, they could not have conversations about certain topics. Some dads (n = three) felt their spouse was better at navigating discussions about sexuality, negative feelings (dysphoria) towards their bodies (or specifically genitals), and social experiences:

The conversations I'm curious to have...are about how she's navigating her friendships ... some of her friends know, and some don't know... I'm just curious about how she's feeling ... if she would like to talk more about that with friends... or is she feeling like she can't... that's something I've been maybe avoiding. (Dad Six)

Another dad shared challenges he felt around supporting his child: "how he perceived...our support... it probably wasn't always...what he wanted, or...expected, but...I hope he really feels that we supported him a hundred percent" (Dad Three).

Dads' hopes and desires for their child to have support and connections brought unique challenges in their parenting, whether due to access, timing, interpretations of their actions, or feeling capable of having certain discussions with their child. Dads' interviews showed ways in which they were still actively navigating these challenges in current phase of their parenting journeys.

Navigating Conversations to Affirm Your Child's Identity

Navigating conversations related to their child's gender diversity was another unique parenting experience, intricately connected to the first subtheme of protection. Dads navigated conversations with friends, family, teachers, coaches, coworkers, other parents, and/or strangers, as they strived to support and affirm their child's identity, inclusion, and wellbeing. Navigating conversations could be complex, evolving to include compassion for people's positions and learning who may be open to engage in conversations:

[Y]ou hear people, and... can't be against them, because I used to be that way, but... you quickly find out people who are ok ...talking to you openly, and people that are just closed off... You have to pick your battles... [if] they're religious, I know it's not going anywhere... [only them wanting] to fix it, [and] there's nothing to fix. (Dad Five)

Initially, some dads struggled to have certain conversations: "one of the tough parts... starting out was... people that know us from a long time... I really struggle[d] correcting that... I never like to make people feel uncomfortable" (Dad Three). Over time, confidence to engage in these types of conversations increased: "I just feel very comfortable telling people... 'I don't want to make this awkward for us having lunch, but please ask questions'... we want people to ask us questions... the more we can help people understand the better" (Dad Three). Overall, dads expressed a desire to engage in conversations to share their knowledge hoping to broaden the understanding others have of gender diversity.

Navigating Conversations with Grandparents

Navigating conversations with family was a topic that frequently presented challenges related to intergenerational differences, such as explaining the harms of misgendering: "to stress to them... 'you are harming your grandkids'... and it does matter to them" (Dad Four). Complex family dynamics impacted conversations with family:

My parents are... in their 60's, so it's tough to get around some things you've been taught your whole life ...my mom will switch their gender depending on what time frame they're talking about, and it's tough explaining to them why that's not ok. (Dad One)

Challenges explaining the impact of words on older generations in a way that would shift their understanding and actions required some intricate navigation.

Navigating Who Needs to Know Your Child's Gender Diversity

A specific type of conversation dads needed to navigate focused on sharing their child's identity. After learning of their child's gender diversity these conversations focused on updating their child's name and pronouns with people who knew them:

Initially... I told four or five people ...who needed to know, everybody else didn't need to know... now... occasionally you'll still get a situation where...it's a sleep over, or something like that ...but other than that, it's her story...I don't want to out her to somebody that she's not prepared to be outed to. (Dad Nine)

Over time, dads came to understand that it was important for their child to decide when and with whom to disclose their gender identity:

I was just ...so proud I wanted to ...tell everyone, and then being like oh wait, there would be some people that wouldn't be safe to have this information... you learn a lot about who your kids trust... [it] was surprising... who they didn't want to know" (Dad One).

The nature of each relationship impacted these multi-faceted conversations of protecting their child's privacy, safety, and respecting their right to autonomy over their identity.

Ongoing Learning and Shifts in Parenting Practices

Navigating challenging situations led to insight and growth as parents, and actions to protect or advocate for their child. Dads shared growth through self-reflection and perseverance, as they strove to create supportive affirming environments for their child: "where you're parenting a kid ...going through it and you're trying your best to show up for them... [it] make[s] people better

parents in the long run” (Dad Four). Dad's parenting continued to evolve over time, as they described applying what they had learned, and adjustments made in their parenting practices:

I was far more cognizant of what I was socializing her to do... I found myself ... asking her more...what she wanted to do... she was always a very cautious child growing up... the major change was ...making sure that I... gave her space to tell us what she actually enjoyed, what she actually wanted. (Dad One)

Shifts in their parenting, to following their child's lead, were shared almost word for word by a few dads (n = three): “[I had] a better appreciation for time and space, and... not pushing things maybe the way that I feel that he should be going ...and I've learned to let lots more go and let them make ...their own choices and decisions” (Dad Three).

Dads' descriptions reflected a juxtaposition of positive, surprising, and challenging daily parenting experiences connected to other people's knowledge, understanding, and opinions about gender diversity.

Theme Four: The Emotional Contours of Being a Dad to a Gender Diverse Child

Many of the parenting experiences dads described were articulated with an emotional connection. Dads shared positive emotions seeing their child happy or in conjunction with positive interactions. Dads shared negative emotions connected with their own past actions or worries for their child's wellbeing. In addition to speaking about the emotional nature of their parenting, all but one dad had a physical expression of emotions during the interviews, becoming overcome by tears and sometimes needing to take a moment to pause. Some dads also spoke explicitly about gender role expectations and times where they felt, as men, they could not express vulnerability and were not expected to be an emotional support for their child. Emotions were an important part of dads' experiences as parents and are discussed through the following subthemes: a) the spectrum of emotions parenting a gender diverse child; b) ambiguous emotional undercurrents; and c) the expectations of dads as emotional supports for their child.

The Spectrum of Emotions Parenting a Gender Diverse Child

The spectrum of emotions dads described included positive emotions, such as pride, joy, and happiness seeing their child be themselves, experiencing increased self-confidence, and having positive experiences embodying their gender diverse identities. Pride was connected to seeing their child confidently be themselves: “he’s such [an] introvert...and for him to get up ... in front of the school and to talk about ...his own experience ...the challenges ...over the last three years, was ... a super proud moment” (Dad Three). Happiness and joy accompanied descriptions of seeing their child embody their gender. One example was experiencing a gender affirming moment with their child:

I’m happiest when ...they get moments of joy ...when little kids ...can’t figure out what to call them; and I see them smile... those moments have been really nice to notice, because that makes, me feel like they’re being seen, and they’re feeling comfortable... all I want, [is] for them to be happy. (Dad Seven)

Two of the dads with nonbinary children described this type of joyful experience with their child when other people experienced confusion or ambiguity around their child’s gender, which affirmed their nonbinary identities. Positive emotions were also associated with interactions that were affirming or inquisitive: “I was just pleasantly surprised by a lot of people that were accepting, that I didn’t expect to be...there were some disappointing conversations ...but there absolutely were more encouraging conversations” (Dad Two). Positive emotional experiences extended to times of genuine interest by people to learn: “I was surprised by the number of folks who had very heartfelt...honest questions, like coworkers [asking]... ‘how did you know? ...what does it mean?’ ...and I’m amazed how many people go, well yeah...of course” (Dad Nine).

Dads shared negative or challenging emotions connected with their own past actions and worries for their child’s wellbeing, and the impact people and policy could have on their child’s future. Dads were generous in sharing their personal experiences associated with challenging or negative emotions, often articulating how multiple challenging emotions were intertwined:

I ...had the most difficult time using they/them, and I would often use *she*... especially if I referred to [them] when they were younger... and [when] I was about ...to correct myself ...I would get corrected, and that was ...frustrating... I wish I had been quicker with adjusting... It's something that ...I'm a bit embarrassed about. (Dad Two)

Misgendering while adjusting to pronouns was commonly connected with emotions of: "shame ... feeling guilt... feeling like you were [not] a good parent" (Dad Six).

Dads also shared how reflection led to accommodating past actions and associated emotions: [You] have to realize that you were doing the best with what you had at the time...[I] hung onto some of those things... for a while... like making them put on the dress... putting them into certain activities...there was a... time there where I regretted a lot of stuff. (Dad Five)

Regret, guilt, embarrassment, and shame were shared in connection with introspective self-reflection, while other negative emotions were spoken about in connection to feelings of concern for their child's wellbeing.

Worry and fear were connected to external contexts: "you just worry about different things... which states can you go to... you worry about them fitting in ...[and] is my kid going to be ...socially accepted" (Dad Five). While some dads described worry, others used the word fear to describe what they felt: "I think we've been fearful for her... big fears over ...attacks... or being targeted" (Dad Six). Fear was deepened for some dads by past personal experiences:

I was scared [tearful] ...when I was a kid I went through a lot of self-hatred... about... my queerness... growing up in the 80's and 90's... I saw and heard of extremely violent things being done to queer people, so... I was scared [for my child]. (Dad Two)

Hopelessness was another emotion connected with their child's wellbeing: "some days just felt so helpless because my kid ... took the step of finally telling us they were a girl, but that didn't solve the body dysmorphia... the crises constantly, and the suicide ideation" (Dad One).

While a few dads shared how affirming experiences helped shift their worries over time: "all of the teachers were super supportive... that was helpful ...it was one of the steps, to become less

fearful for my kid's safety" (Dad Two). Throughout the interviews it was clear that complex emotional experiences were a part of dad's parenting experiences.

Ambiguous Emotional Undercurrents

All but one of the dads became overwhelmed by emotions, with tears, at some point in their interview. Despite the depth of emotion experienced, each of these dads wanted to continue their interview and share their parenting experiences. Feelings of ambiguity were shared in connection with the emotions that were surfacing: "sometimes it's tough to talk about, and I don't know why... sometimes it's fine, and sometimes it's not" (Dad Five). Other dads expressed surprise around having an emotional reaction: "I don't know why I'm upset ...I'm proud of him... of... everything that he's done, but it was hard... really hard" (Dad Three).

Speaking about fears and worries was one common time when dads expressed emotion: "fear, of what can happen... [becomes tearful] we see it on the news... it hurts... to know that there are people out there that hate him, for who he is. When he's such a kind, kind boy" (Dad Three). Instances in which dads became tearful also involved recalling deeply challenging times: "[my wife] told me about how upset [our child was] ... [tearful] about her genitals, and how she wanted to cut them off... that really ...impacted [me]... how deep that was for her and how... hard it was for her" (Dad Six). Talking about times when their child struggled with body dysphoria, self-harm, or suicidality were common experiences that led to dads becoming emotional. One dad became tearful when speaking about his coworker's gender diverse child who had passed away: "I even wrote in the condolences book at the funeral, I only met you a few times, but you saved my daughter's life [tearful], because it's true" (Dad 9).

Whether dads were surprised by their emotional reactions, or their emotions surfaced when speaking about their child's wellbeing, being afraid, having regret, or knowing that their child had suffered trying to be themselves, there were complex emotions experienced and expressed by dads.

Expectations Around the Emotionality of Dads

Two-thirds of the dads felt there were specific gender role expectations that created challenges for them. These expectations were connected by dads to masculinity as they shared how dads are not seen as emotional supports for their child, that men needed to be strong for their spouse, and it is not acceptable for men to be emotionally vulnerable. When asked about unique experiences as a dad of a gender diverse child, one participant shared: “a dad isn’t supposed to be ... the emotional support for your child... it’s like the expectations of a dad, along with the gender expectations in general, and it’s all very unique” (Dad One). Despite these constraining gender expectations, for dads parenting gender diverse children and youth, there were times when they wanted to be an emotional support for their child, which created tension and parenting challenges.

Another dad shared how his gender expectations impacted his ability to share his emotions with his spouse: “when [my wife’s] scared...I feel like I have to be the strong one sometimes ...I can’t be scared... then everything will just kind of fall apart... I have to be the one to be the strong male” (Dad Six). For some dads, being vulnerable and supporting their child to express their emotions was challenging:

[T]here’s so many like role models of... what are we supposed to do as a dad, and all these sort of bad role models that we’ve grown up with ... dads are typically not emotional ...I’ve always sort of tried to not be that... even though sometimes ...I fall into those pitfalls of the, the unemotional male. (Dad Six)

Other dads expressed an awareness of the influence of their socialization as boys, men, and dads, yet despite this, they had shifted their approach to parenting beyond these expectations:

[T]hose masculine feelings were like drilled into me as a kid... back in the 80’s... you got called slurs for being too emotional... I was raised in a family that was very much... ‘stop crying, boys don’t cry’; or ‘don’t do that you don’t want to be a girl’... I’ve tried to break that and... for my kids ...it was ...show your emotions, feel everything... grow your hair long... paint your nails... I had to ...make myself change... so that I’m not pushing that on my child. (Dad Seven)

Emotional connections, and sharing emotional expectations, reflected the unique family and personal experiences of each dad.

It was visible through their responses that dads had travelled complex emotional journeys connected to their child's gender diversity. They loved their children, and were proud of their children, but also faced many emotional experiences due to their fears and worries for their child, as well as in seeing their child struggle due to internal and external factors like bullying, or self-harm).

Key Messages and Moments for Dads Parenting Gender Diverse Children and Youth

The second objective of this research study was to identify key messages and key moments that could be useful to dads parenting gender diverse children and youth, and could also be useful to health, social service, and community providers working with dads.

Key Messages for Dads of Gender Diverse Children and Youth

Throughout the interviews, key messages were shared by dads directly when asked about what they felt was important for other dads of gender diverse children and youth to know and were also identified indirectly during the ID (Thorne, 2016, 2025) analysis. The key messages below (Table 4) were directly informed by dad's interview responses.

Table 4.

Key messages for dads parenting gender diverse children and youth.

Key Message	Description
"[Y]our kid is still your kid. The kid that they were yesterday is the kid they are today... your kid didn't change, [they] just told you more about themselves." (Dad Seven)	As dads traveled alongside their child's gender journey, through their learning, reflection, and lived experiences described throughout all four themes, dads came to this shared understanding about their child: "they understand who they are now...even though they did certain things to fit in before...it doesn't mean they changed; this is actually who they are" (Dad Nine). This is a seemingly simple message, but initially learning about their child's gender diversity was such an overwhelming, unanticipated shift in their child's identity that it took many steps until a dad's journey brought them back to this key message.

Key Message	Description
"[I]f you love your child, you accept your child for [who] they are... if that's difficult then there's work you need to do." (Dad Two)	Dads work, through learning and reflection, allowed them to grow and shift how they parented to be able to affirm and support their child. From learning over time about the impact of not being an affirming parent, to seeing their child's joy wearing new clothing, and reflecting upon their own past actions, elements of each theme led to this key message. "If you want to have a kid, and you want to support your kid, you do the work...and it's hard... harder... for some" (Dad Two); this statement acknowledges that there is work that parents must do to be able to support a gender diverse child.
"Find someone to talk to... someone... who's been through it or has been really close to it ...don't try and do it yourself... you can read so much wrong stuff." (Dad Five)	This message reflects the positive experiences dad had connecting with other parents or friends who were guides in their journey's (Theme 2). It offers encouragement for dads to connect with people as resources and supports. Although many of the dads did not find group peer support settings appealing, every dad had positive experiences learning from other people, whether parents or gender diverse individuals, whether in reading or listening to their experiences. "Sometimes you don't know you need it until you do it" (Dad Five).
"[O]nce you accept your child for who they are, your world and their world becomes amazing." (Dad Two)	Having a gender diverse child was described as a transformative experience for dads: "it's been great for all of us, it really has" (Dad Three). Dads transformed their understandings of gender (Theme 2) and shared moments of pride, joy, and happiness seeing their child embodying their gender diverse identity (Theme 3). "So much conflict... Between parent and child, is based on... gender expectations ... let them be kids... you don't have to base how you treat your kid on whether they're a boy or a girl" (Dad One); these words of wisdom encourage dads to follow their child's lead and support them to be themselves.

Note: This table shares messages dads felt were important for other dads to know, supported by additional information or context shared throughout the interviews.

Key Moments in Dads Parenting Journey's

Adjacent to the messages above are the key moments in dad's journeys parenting their gender diverse child (Table 5). There were many key moments within dads' parenting experiences in the context of their child's gender diversity, and specific experiences were unique to each family context.

Table 5.

Key moments for dads parenting gender diverse children and youth.

Key Moments in Dads Parenting Journey's with Gender Diversity
Becoming aware of a child's gender diversity
Tipping points that shifted uncertainty to believing a child's gender diversity is real
Shift in perspective of past memories to see their child has always been the same person
Insights that shift perception of the construct of gender
Making a meaningful interpersonal connection that supported their parenting journey
Shift from navigating identity disclosures to supporting a child's autonomy disclosing their identity
Feeling confident having challenging conversations, setting boundaries, and advocating
Accommodating regrets about past actions, words, and reactions

Note: The key moments listed in this table represent a key experience or time that shifted dads' parenting context.

Chapter Summary

The themes, key messages, and key moments described in this chapter reflect the unique paths that dads experienced to see their child as a gender diverse person. As dads shared, parenting any child is a journey of learning who they are and supporting their individual needs, elements that are reflected within the four themes. The key messages reflect how dads overwhelmingly wanted other dads to love, accept, and affirm their child. While the key moments highlight experiences that impacted dads' journeys with their child's gender diversity. Throughout the next chapter, these themes, key messages, and key moments will be considered in the context of existing studies and conceptual frameworks, prior to describing key applications for practice, future research, and policy.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Parenting is impacted by many factors including expectations, resource access, and other elements that shape parenting approaches (Ulferts, 2020). Parenting has an important role in every child's life and is a determinant of health for children and youth (Klein Walker, 2021). For gender diverse children and youth, parenting can be affirming or non-affirming of gender diversity leading to positive or negative impacts on a child's wellbeing (Belmont et al., 2023; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020). With these elements in mind, this study explored dads' experiences of parenting gender diverse children and youth, as dads are an underrepresented caregiver group in studies exploring this topic (Morgan et al., 2024). The nine dads that participated in this master's level thesis study shared valuable insight into their experiences as dads parenting gender diverse children and youth.

The previous chapter detailed the findings from the research analysis related to the research question guiding this study: what are dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth? Based on an analysis of the research data guided by an Interpretive Description (ID) methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025), four themes (Table 3), four key messages (Table 4), and eight key moments (Table 5) were described within that chapter. The analytical themes are: 1) pathways to discerning a child's gender diversity pass through awareness and uncertainty, 2) learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender, 3) navigating gender diversity becomes integrated into parenting, and 4) the emotional contours of being a dad to a gender diverse child. Four key messages for dads, paraphrased here, include: 1) your kid is still the same kid, you have just learned more about them, 2) if it's hard to accept your child, there is work for you to do, 3) find someone who has been through this to talk to or guide you; and 4) once you accept your child, your worlds' become amazing. Finally, the key moments experienced by dads were associated with becoming aware of their child's gender diversity; a tipping point that shifted uncertainty to certainty; seeing their child has always been the same person; shifting perspectives about the construct of gender; experiencing meaningful interpersonal connections of support; understanding the need for their child to drive

their identity disclosures; becoming confident navigating a variety of challenging situations; and accommodating regrets with past parenting actions.

This chapter discusses these findings in relation to the conceptual frameworks and literature discussed in chapters two and three. One of the key elements of ID methodology (Thorne, 2016, 2025) is to highlight the “so what”, or practical applications, of a study’s findings, in association with the researcher’s field of experience. This chapter includes a discussion of potential applications of the research findings within nursing practice, including how the findings can inform future research or resource development. Findings may also be useful to other healthcare practitioners, community organizations, or community groups whose work intersects with dads and families that may include gender diverse children and youth. The chapter will conclude by articulating the study’s strengths and limitations, knowledge translation strategy, and personal reflections.

Situating Study Findings within the Ecological Model of Parenting

The *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020) illustrates factors that can impact parenting across three contexts (Figure 1): a central family context; a middle community context; and an outer national or global context (Ulferts, 2020). Elements across all three of these contexts impacted dad’s parenting experiences, as they spoke about them directly or indirectly in their interviews. Dads’ personal histories and beliefs are factors from the central family context (Ulferts, 2020) which were reflected in dads’ initial experiences learning about their child’s gender diversity. Dads’ initial reactions of uncertainty stemmed from having parenting expectations their child would be cisgender. Some dads connected this expectation with their personal lack of knowledge about gender diversity. For other dads’, personal beliefs (Ulferts, 2020) about what age a child can understand their identity contributed to initially thinking their child’s gender diversity was a phase. Other elements from the central family context (Ulferts, 2020), such as existing patterns of interpersonal communication, impacted how dads navigated conversations associated with their child’s gender diversity. This impacted what topics dads were comfortable or uncomfortable discussing, such as navigating identity disclosures to friends, or talking about feeling towards certain body parts. Dads’ personal histories

(Ulferts, 2020) were also associated with the expectations dads had for themselves around masculinity, roles of dads, and expressing emotions. Dads shared examples of trying to be a different type of dad than their own fathers had been, intentionally encouraging their children to openly experience and express their emotions, while acknowledging they would sometimes fall into patterns of being stereotypically unemotional dads.

The community context of the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020) highlights factors outside of the immediate family that may influence parenting, such as extended family, local culture, services, schools, and childcare. Connections that facilitated learning, unlearning, and reconstructing understandings of gender were strongly connected to the community context (Ulferts, 2020), as dads shared how learning and support came through connections to people in their social circle, community groups, workplaces, online communities, schools, or medical clinics. Many elements within this community context (Ulferts, 2020) impacted day-to-day parenting, in either a supportive or challenging way. Day-to-day parenting was impacted as dads navigated interactions outside of their home through conversations, advocacy, and boundary settings at schools, work, extracurricular activities, with extended family, or during interactions with strangers.

Connections with the national and global context included trends in policies and broad cultural norms (Ulferts, 2020) that impacted parenting through challenging political landscapes and policies that impacted their children. Dads described planning and making decisions due to factors within and outside of Canada that created exclusion and discrimination towards gender diverse people, especially children and youth. Families' ability to travel, their child's ability to participate in sports, and future implications for their post-secondary education were all factors that were negatively impacted by political landscapes and policies outside of Manitoba or Canada.

Overall, the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020) has been a useful conceptual framework providing a roadmap depicting the variety of factors and contexts that intersected with dads' parenting experiences. There were, however, elements unique to dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth that were not fully described by this framework. This

included the depth of emotional experiences, specific impacts of navigating gender diversity, and ongoing evolution of personal understandings of gender that dads described. Kolhe et al. (2024) harnessed existing studies to build an Identity Process Theory (IPT) framework, the *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Figure 2), to illustrate changes in parents' identity that occur while parenting a 2SLGBTQIA+ child. The *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kolhe et al., 2024) focuses on the early aspects of a parent's journey, describing the intense process of personal change parents experience as they accommodated, adjusted, and assimilated emotions and their understanding of who their child is (Kolhe et al., 2024, p. 9). Dads in this study also described personal changes as they adjusted their understanding of their child's identity. Another model, the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammettei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) illustrates six phases that parents with gender diverse children, of any age, experience after becoming aware of their child's identity. The *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammettei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) describes the journeys from learning about gender diversity to becoming advocates that reflect experiences described by dads in this study.

Becoming informed about gender diversity, reconstructing and reconciling personal understandings of gender are key elements described in the *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kolhe et al., 2024) and *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammettei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.), that were also reflected by dads in this study. Both the *Parent Gender Journey Model* (Giammettei & TransFamily Alliance, n.d.) and *Identity Change in Parents of LGBTQIA+ Children Model* (Kolhe et al., 2024) models frame specific experiences that occur because a child's gender diversity was an unanticipated parenting context involving a need to learn about something unfamiliar. While these two models offer insight specific to the intersection of a child's gender diversity with dads' parenting experiences, the *Ecological Model of Parenting* (Ulferts, 2020) roots dad's parenting experiences within broader socio-ecological contexts, acknowledging the many contexts that impact parenting. The next section continues to build connections with the findings, situating them in relation to existing studies in this area of research.

Situating the Findings in Relation to Existing Studies

Throughout this section, the findings are considered in the context of previous studies, exploring similarities and potentially unique elements to dads' parenting experiences with gender diverse youth highlighted in this thesis research. In this section, unless otherwise noted, the vast majority of participants in the cited studies were mothers.

Unique Aspects within Common Experiences

The first theme describes dad's initial experiences processing their child's gender diversity, travelling through uncertainty, often believing their child was going through a phase, before they came to see their child's gender diversity as true and real. In previous studies, where participants consisted predominantly of mothers, a similar experience was described, where the initial surprise was followed by disbelief, denial (Morgan et al., 2023b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a, 2022), confusion, uncertainty, or ambiguity (Harwan et al., 2025; Warner et al., 2021; Westwater et al., 2019). A unique element of the current study was that in addition to describing pre-school age children as too young to understand, they were also described as simply copying the gender of the adults around them. This description of mirroring the gender of the caregivers with whom they spent most of their time, is a unique addition to the *it's a phase* narrative.

Tipping Points Shifting Perspectives

A frequently described parenting experience in previous studies involved an extended period of emotional adjustment while parents accommodated feelings of loss akin to grieving, prior to accepting their child's gender diversity (Abreu et al., 2019; Gajek, 2025; Kolhe et al., 2024; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a, 2020b; Wells et al., 2022). One dad in the current study shared how someone early on in his journey had provided the framework of grief to describe his initial experiences. While he found it a useful descriptor for the process he experienced, he was the only dad who described his initial experience in conjunction with the concept of grief.

Rather than a prolonged period of emotional adjustment or grieving, most participants in this study described a specific experience that sparked a shift in their perception. The tipping points

described by dads included insights stemming from different scenarios such as learning about the impacts of not supporting their child or witnessing their child in a moment of joy embodying their gender diversity. These new insights tipped dads' perspective from uncertainty to accepting a new reality they needed to support. The elements that were tipping points for dads here have been described in previous studies but with a different impact. Parents have previously described positive changes in a child after social transitions (Morgan et al., 2023b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2022) or learning about the negative impact of unsupportive families (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a), as elements that facilitated ongoing parental support, but not as tipping points that made them believe their child's gender diversity was real or leading to the provision of initial support.

Gender Diversity is an Explanation

In one of the previous research studies reviewed, it was noted that learning about a child's gender diversity could provide parents with an explanation for their child's mental health struggles (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a). Similarly, one dad in this study shared that his child's coming out provided an understanding of what was contributing to his child's increasing mental health crises. Learning about his child's gender diversity did not solve the mental health crises they had been experiencing; rather, their identity disclosure provided a direction to understand what type of support was needed. This specific connection is discussed in the implications section below.

Group Settings and Learning Journeys

Connecting to a variety of resources to learn about gender diversity, based on personal preferences and accessibility, was another common experience shared by dads in the current study and parents in previous studies (Abreu, 2022a, 2022b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a; Westwater et al., 2019). The value of peer led parent groups has been identified by many studies, as an important resource for information and support, with the caveat that groups are not every parent's preference (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a). Similar sentiments were expressed by dads in this study, as groups were a valuable space to learn from other parents for dads who attended them. Previous studies have highlighted various reasons groups may not be easily

accessible, due to schedule, location, or the content on any given day not meeting every person's needs (Abreu et al., 2022a, 2022b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a). Dads in this study strongly highlighted that group settings were not their personal preference, while also emphasizing a desire to have increased connections with other dads, outside of a drop-in group format.

Relationships and Lived Experiences Impact Learning

Learning from the experiences of other parents of gender diverse children and youth, has been highlighted in previous studies as an important part of parenting journeys (Morgan et al., 2024; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a, 2022). Dads in this study shared this experience, accessing the lived experiences of other parents through online and in-person groups, online posts, or books. An additional lived experience that had a strong impact for dads in this study, was hearing the lived experience of gender diverse individuals, whether in books, via online content creators, or existing social connections. The emphasis placed on the role existing social connections had in creating opportunities to have key one-on-one conversations to hear lived experiences and receive guidance towards additional trustworthy resources, is a key element of support described by dads in this study.

The Role of Key Individuals

Key individuals included friends who were gender diverse, coworkers with gender diverse children, or 2SLGBTQIA+ Elders. A unique element in this study was the positive impact that spouses had as the key individual for a few participants. Dads who were coparenting in the same home as their spouse shared how their spouse had facilitated access to reliable information appropriate to their family context, having curated reading that provided clear and useful information to build their knowledge of gender diversity. For dads who did not have a connection to anyone with parenting or personal lived experience with gender diversity, there was an emphasis on not knowing initially where to begin finding reliable information.

The Many External Impacts on Parenting

Many of the parenting experiences described by dads in theme three have been shared in previous studies, where parents have shared experiences navigating challenging social situations

involving exclusion and discrimination across settings including extended family and bullying at schools (Brammer et al., 2024; Hidalgo & Chen, 2019; Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2023b). In this study, dads described how challenging situations brought their protective instincts to the forefront, leading them towards various forms of advocacy, with individuals or organizations. Wanting to protect your child and becoming an advocate has been described in many previous studies (Abreu et al., 2019; Gajek, 2025; Morgan et al., 2023b; Wells et al., 2022). Parents, including dads in this study, describe increasing skill over time, navigating conversations around gender diversity, particularly challenging ones (Brammer et al., 2024; Wells et al., 2022), and setting boundaries with non-affirming individuals (Gajek, 2025).

Anticipatory Planning for Child Safety

Within this study, the frequency with which dads spoke about anticipating and planning for situations that could be non-affirming or exclusionary, felt more pronounced than in other studies. Even when dads were experiencing mainly positive and supportive social situations with extended family or rural communities, they still shared planning for the worst potential situation and being prepared to end relationships or move provinces. Another unique element to this study was that some fears were connected to how 2SLGBTQIA+ people were treated in dad's adolescence and young adulthood, 20-30 years ago. Dads with both heterosexual and 2SLGBTQIA+ sexualities described the violence and discrimination they witnessed, as contributing to fears that their child could also experience this type of discrimination.

Navigating a Child's Needs

The variety of parenting situations and depth of considerations dads shared around considering their child's needs within their parenting was a unique element of this study. Dads shared navigating parenting challenges that included wanting to connect their child with resources and/or community; wanting to have conversations around their child's experience as a gender diverse person. Dads also acknowledged that their child may have interpreted their actions and words at times as non-affirming or unsupportive, when this was not their intention. Each dad wanted their

child to feel supported, build their support networks and personal capacity to manage adversity, and be included in medical decisions, even young children.

Moments of Insight Impact Parenting and Beyond

While an initial lack of knowledge about gender diversity created challenges in knowing how to best support a child, parents have noted that learning has facilitated personal growth, openness, and shifting beliefs about gender (Bramer et al., 2024; Morgan et al., 2023b, 2024; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020a; Wells et al., 2022; Westwater et al., 2019). Within theme two are descriptions of experiences of learning, shifting beliefs about the concept of gender, along with becoming more open, aware, and making less assumptions about people outside of their family. Dads in this study described having empathy for other people who are new to gender diversity, understanding they had the knowledge gap dads had experienced previously. Dads also described surprising experiences with friends or coworkers who had genuine questions and desire to learn from their experiences with gender diversity. Dads developed a new understanding of the need to respect their child's privacy and autonomy over who knows about their gender diversity, a process also described in previous studies (Gajek et al., 2025; Katz-Wise et al., 2022). Initially dads needed to share information with people so they would use the correct name and pronouns for their child. Over time this shifted, often connected to meeting new people who had not known their child previously, to allow their child the autonomy to direct who had knowledge about their gender diversity.

Evolving Gender Norms

Two previous studies spoke about experiences dads shared in their reframing of beliefs about gender norms and expectations, the study exclusively with Latinx dads (Teran et al., 2023), and another that highlighted the perspectives of dad participants from New Zealand (de Bres & Morrison-Young, 2024). Dads in the current study offered insight and reflections about past parenting actions being founded in gender stereotypes, such as dads of boys assigned at birth hoping their child would like the activities they had liked as boys (hockey, skateboarding), and their (fleeting) disappointment when they did not. Every dad shared a similar story about an expectation, or item purchased for their

child based on gender norms associated with their child's assigned sex/gender at birth. Dads also described the depth of personal growth that happened because they had a gender diverse child, as their child showed them different ways of being, and they developed new perspectives as a result.

The Impact of One

A unique finding in this study was the impact one individual had on parenting experiences, as either a facilitator or barrier to their child experiencing gender affirming and inclusive environments. Dads described individuals whose actions or inactions stuck with them over time, and while these individuals were often not the sole facilitator or sole barrier for their child to experience support and inclusion, they had a profound and longstanding impact in dads' memories, showing the impact that a single person can have. Examples of facilitators included a school staff member who navigated bathroom access for a child or facilitated information sharing with the classes in their child's grade to support inclusion and understanding. Examples of barriers included coaches using non-inclusive language, or school staff telling a family their child's challenges with peers was not as serious as what other youth were experiencing, even when their child was engaging in self-harm.

Widespread Impact of Exclusionary Policies and Politics

National political contexts in different provinces, and global (American) political contexts impacted dads significantly and most spoke about planning for scenarios if laws or access to medical care in this province shifted in the future. As seen in previous studies, dads in this study spoke about navigating the damaging impact of discriminatory political contexts on gender diverse children and youth (Katz-Wise et al., 2022) or safety concerns travelling outside of home countries (Hidalgo & Chen, 2019). Exclusionary policies in post-secondary education were also identified (Wagner & Armstrong, 2020), as one dad in this study spoke about concerns for his child being excluded from opportunities in post-secondary sports teams.

Masculinity and Fatherhood Expectations and Shifts

Needing to be *the strong one* in their spousal relationship was described by some dads in the current study. Dads related expectations around masculinity to feeling they could not be vulnerable

at the same time as their spouse, and the dichotomy of wanting to support their spouse but feeling the need to suppress their own emotions of fear and/or worry. Similar sentiments were described in two previous studies highlighting dad's experiences (Coolhart et al., 2018; Teran et al., 2023). In one study, dads shared suppressing their own worries and emotions while prioritizing supporting their spouse (Coolhart et al., 2018). The second study shared the impact of socio-cultural expectations which left Latinx dads feeling the need to exude strength and stoicism over emotional vulnerability (Teran et al., 2023).

Emotionality of Fatherhood

Most dads became overwhelmed by emotions, becoming tearful at some point in their research interview, often while speaking about past challenges or future worries about their child. Some dads expressed surprise at their emotions or did not understand where the emotions were coming from. Although many studies spoke about emotional periods adjusting to parenting gender diverse children and youth (Abreu et al., 2019; Bramer et al., 2024; Kolhe et al., 2024; Morgan et al., 2023b), studies did not speak about parents becoming emotional during research interviews. Dads in this study shared positive feelings associated with being able to share their experiences and feelings.

Dad's parenting experiences reflected many commonalities with existing studies, where most of the participants were moms. Experiences that are unique to the dads in this study have been highlighted throughout this section, while every dad had their own unique journeys parenting their gender diverse child. The next section will explore elements that have the potential to inform nursing practice, research, and education; the development of resources for dads and parents; and how this research should inform future studies.

Potential Implication: The *So What's* of Interpretive Description

Exploring factors influencing specific parenting contexts can be useful when harnessed to build supportive networks and communities for parenting that will support child development and wellbeing (Ulferts, 2020). The specific parenting context of this study is gender diversity in childhood and adolescence. ID studies guide researchers to share findings in a clinically relevant way (Thorne,

2016 & 2025). As this study comes from a nursing lens, connections outlined below tie the findings of this study to potential relevance in nursing practice, education, policy, and research. Although findings from small studies are not typically generalizable, recommendations intersect with other research recommendations for nursing. Nurses work in many different settings that can support child development and wellbeing, however, these potential implications may also be applicable in the context of other health professions and community organizations working with parents or families.

Potential Implications for Nursing Practice, Education, or Policy

There are gaps in gender affirmation and inclusion that continue to be identified by nursing research, including a lack of understanding of gender diversity, stigma and discrimination towards gender diversity, and missed opportunities to integrate gender affirming practices into health services (Jackman et al., 2019; Mikovits, 2022; Velasco et al., 2022). Interactions with nurses were not highlighted in any of the interviews, and dads spoke minimally about healthcare interactions. Despite this, the experiences shared by dads do offer insights that can be used to inform recommendations as increasing affirmation and inclusivity of gender diversity across nursing practice, education, and policy aligns with recommendations from nurse researchers (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022; Jackman et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2022).

One key parenting experience that may be highly relevant to nursing is that dads did not anticipate their child could be gender diverse. Within nursing, the dominant gender discourse has been the gender binary (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022; Eliason, 2017; Saewyc, 2017), and dominant discourses shape how reality is perceived (Zeeman et al., 2013). Taking opportunities to situate gender diversity as a potential developmental expectation for any child, can begin to shift the dominant narrative within nursing and potentially increase parental awareness of gender diversity (Temple Newhook et al., 2018b). Beginning with nursing education, this can be done by embedding this potential child development outcome into curriculum, and building it into practice guidelines, and resources where child development is a topic. Embedding expectations of gender exploration and the possibility that any child could be gender diverse into parenting programs and resources

would begin to address the challenge dads in this study, and parents in existing studies had in finding developmentally appropriate information for younger children (Morgan et al., 2023b); and the assumptions made by dads in this study about their younger children being too young to understand and that they were copying the gender behaviours of those around them. This is an important topic to address, as parenting that is positive towards children's explorations and autonomy facilitates child wellbeing (Newland, 2014, 2015). Practice applications can extend to nurses working in contexts such as pediatrics, public health, primary care, or other areas focused on children and families could harness opportunities in discussions with parents to normalize gender explorations and gender diversity as a potential and expected developmental outcome.

Finding reliable information, especially knowing what online information to trust was noted by dads, and by participants in previous studies (Abreu et al., 2022a; Brammer et al., 2024; Morgan et al., 2023b). Considering that dads were deeply impacted by learning the negative impacts an unsupportive family has on a gender diverse child, alongside the lasting impact that one individual had in creating an affirming or inclusive space for their child, nurses have opportunities to be the trusted individual sharing trusted information about gender diversity. Nurses are a large part of the healthcare workforce and have many opportunities to model gender inclusive and affirming practices in many different settings (Jackman et al., 2019; Mikovits, 2022). As a wide-reaching group, nurses with accurate, evidence-informed would have many opportunities to share information with parents who have questions. Basic knowledge about social transitions, medical gender affirming care, and the impacts of living in an unsupportive environment, would be useful information for all nurses working with children and families to have. This may be particularly relevant to areas where nurses may encounter children and youth presenting with mental health concerns, as parental support is important for the mental health and wellbeing of gender diverse youth and often not received (Taylor et al., 2020; Temple Newhook et al., 2018a). Depression, anxiety, self-harm, are experiences for many gender diverse youth in Canadian contexts (Taylor et al., 2020; Temple Newhook et al., 2018a), and the challenges of navigating mental health services prior to, and shortly after, learning about their

child's gender diversity were noted in this study. Embedding practices that can open discussions to the possibility of gender diversity in the context of child or youth struggles with mental wellbeing can create the opportunity to shift experiences for some families to an earlier understanding of what may be adding to or impacting their child's mental health.

Key messages for nurses working with families and/or families of gender diverse children and youth (Table 6) are built on the experiences shared by dads in this study; these can be used to inform future nursing education, practice, policies, and resources for dads and parents.

Table 6.

Key messages for nurses (or anyone) working with families.

Message Target Audience	Description of Messages
Messages for nurses working with families	Situate gender diversity as a potential developmental outcome for any child
	Validate gender exploration as an expected part of child development
	Have evidence-informed information available for parents about gender development, that includes gender diversity
	Validate parental feelings, including uncertainty, around explorations of gender, and focus on supporting child wellbeing through affirmation during gender exploration
Messages for nurses working with families with gender diverse children and youth	Be aware of local pathways and resources for gender affirming medical care, including community resources or educational resources, or where to access this information
	Create welcoming, inclusive, and affirming environments, including opportunities for children and youth to share their identities with you, including name and pronouns
	When children and youth present with self-harm, depression, suicidality, or other mental health crises, particularly in recurring instances, explore challenges in coming out or child/youth understandings of gender identity as potential underlying sources for their feelings/experiences

Note: These messages add to the key moments and key messages in the previous chapter that can be harnessed in different nursing contexts to support gender diverse children and youth.

Potential Uses in Resource Development

Dads in this study shared a need for trustworthy, locally relevant information, along with resources outlining the potential paths for a child as they age and access gender affirming medical care; that may have been missing or challenging to find. Validating parents' concerns, while

supporting them to appreciate gender diversity as a spectrum, see the value of supporting a child's gender exploration, and mapping out potential pathways for gender journeys are elements that benefit children, youth, and parents (Temple Newhook et al., 2018b). Resources that support parents to understand gender exploration as a part of development, may or may not lead to gender diverse identities, and the benefits of supporting a child in this exploration is valuable for child wellbeing (Temple Newhook et al., 2018a, 2018b). Considering these elements, the messages in Table 6, and additional supporting evidence can be used to create resources or educational materials for nurses.

Potential Impacts of Educators

Nursing educators have opportunities to impact large groups of future nurses by providing awareness, practical applications, and addressing ethical considerations (Mikovits, 2022; Velasco et al., 2022), by shifting away from binary gendered practices within nursing and the broader healthcare landscape (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022). Undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, or workplace education in settings focusing on child development, child, youth, or family health, would provide opportunities in which to integrate this information. Practice models such as Rivera's Gender Affirming Nursing Care Model (Rivera et al., 2022) can guide shifts in practice, policy, education, and research towards a gender inclusive lens with the central goal of holistic patient wellness. Whether nurses are educators, students, or practicing nurses, a gender affirming nursing practice involves personal reflexivity to address implicit bias (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022; Stamps, 2021). Affirming policies that aim to address existing biases (Stamps, 2021) and create person-centred, gender affirming nursing practices requires intentional leadership (Garcia-Acosta et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2022). Educators can harness opportunities to provide information and reflection around biases for learners.

Potential Directions for Future Research

The rapid recruitment for this research study shows that research with dads parenting gender diverse children is not only feasible but critically needed as dads want to share their parenting experiences. The narrow geographic, ethnicity, cultural, and generational representation in this sample leaves open many opportunities for additional research with dads of gender diverse children

and youth. There are also many additional areas for exploration that can be inspired by this current study (see Table 7). Research that focuses on resource development, or other actionable approaches that strengthen families and communities to affirm and support gender diversity is still needed.

Research that explores understanding, experience, and facilitators of inclusion and affirmation can further build positive and supportive environments for gender diverse children and youth. Building on the principles that pride and belonging impact physical and mental wellbeing are the overarching recommendations for future research (Conn et al., 2023).

Table 7

Potential Directions for Future Research.

Topic	Focus
Relationships	Exploring co-parents or spouses' interpersonal relationships: navigating learning about gender diversity, challenges, and impacts on their interpersonal relationships
	Exploring experiences from both child and parent perspectives: intention versus interpretation of parenting actions and words to seek insight into family communication impacts; perceptions of a child being shy or quiet before sharing their identity; supporting mental health
Resources	Developing resources with parents, children, and youth, and the impacts of the resources; including dad-specific resources to support conversations with their child, or connections between dads
	Exploring different age groups' feelings about connecting with types of support or people of similar identity-based lived experience, along with barriers and facilitators making these connections
Applications	Exploring if dads in larger samples have similar tipping point experience, as the key to shifting away from uncertainty to further inform resources developed for dads

Study Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this study is that it demonstrated dad's interest and willingness to participate in research about parenting gender diverse children and youth. At the onset, it was shared that it would likely be difficult to recruit participants, especially through social media. A robust recruitment plan was put in place, assuming that the initial phase of recruitment using social media would not be a success. Recruitment and data collection were, however, the fastest part of this thesis study, as I recruited and completed all interviews within two and a half months following ethics approval. Although there were some limitations in the demographic diversity, another strength was in the

variability of how long dads had been aware of their child's gender diversity, how old their child was when they shared their gender identity, and the specific gender identity experiences. Another strength is the wide range of topics dads shared in connection with their parenting experiences, reflecting the unique elements of each participant's parenting journey.

By utilizing social media, it was hoped there would be a broader geographic and ethnic representation in the participants' demographics. In the future, research using a more targeted approach, specifically recruiting participants from different ethnicities or geographies, could be outlined in the recruitment process or be a focus of the study. These limitations reflect a similar limitation in the existing body of research (Morgan et al., 2024) and highlight the need for more focused recruitment to reach parents of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as different geographic lived experiences. Further, this study did not address other gaps in research that exist such as exploring sibling experiences or extended family experiences (Morgan et al., 2024).

Knowledge Translation Plan

To be able to share the findings with others, it is essential to have a plan to disseminate findings (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2021; Thorne, 2016). Preliminary findings were shared at two events in 2025, an oral presentation at the University of Manitoba College of Nursing's Helen Glass Graduate Research Day, March 2025; and a poster at the Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba's second annual PRIME Conference, January 2025. The thesis proposal defense provided an initial opportunity to share the findings with an audience of over 20 people, which was followed by the publication on MSpace which makes this research available to a larger audience. Opportunities to present findings at applicable conferences, and publication in an appropriate academic journal, will be explored with the advisory committee following the completion of the aforementioned steps. Additional knowledge translation approaches may include a presentation or summary provided in lay language for parents at local support groups, or to 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations.

Reflections of the Process

As an older queer graduate student and novice researcher, this study brought some unexpected positive experiences. It was truly a privilege to hear dads' experiences, their pride in their children, their personal growth, and approach parenting that considered their child's autonomy and wellbeing. As a queer person, who was within the same generation as most of these dads, some of what they shared provided validation of my personal lived experience as a young person. For some dads, this was the first time they had shared their experiences as a parent of a gender diverse child with someone else, and it was an honor to be the person to hear their experiences. The vulnerability and expression of emotions by dads during the interviews was surprising. As a nurse and novice researcher, these moments felt affirming that I created an environment of safety and comfort for dads to be vulnerable and express their emotions openly whether it was within a virtual or in-person interview. These interviews brought me hope for the future, as a queer person who has grown up in the shifting social and political narratives over the past half century, it was reassuring to see how this group of dads had perspectives that evolved, learned, and took on challenges from a place of love and desire to support their children.

Conclusion

Dads who participated in this study reinforced that there was a necessary journey they needed to experience as individuals, to see their child's gender diversity as part of their personhood. Dads needed to learn in this process because gender diversity was not anticipated or expected, and their learning shifted their awareness, perspective, and understanding of the construct of gender. Dads incorporated what they learned into their parenting, leading to the affirmation and support of their gender diverse children. Dads articulated constrained expectations they had for themselves as parents and for their child because of their assigned sex/gender at birth, as well as personal, family and community/societal contexts and socialization. The depth of these experiences can be used to bolster existing resources for parents and can be used as an inspiration for gender-affirming changes within nursing practice, education, and policy.

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Appendix A: University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (REB1) Approval**University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance**

Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry
66 Chancellors Circle
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Effective: October 15, 2024

Expiry: October 14, 2025

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Macmillan Gomez
Advisor(s): Christina West
Protocol Number: HE2024-0242
Protocol Title: *Dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba*

Martha Koch, Acting Chair, REB1

Research Ethics Board 1 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- TCPS 2 (2022)*.

Please note the following important information about your protocol approval:

- i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.
- ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the OHRE **before implementation**.
- iii. Any **deviations** to the research or **adverse events** must be reported to the OHRE immediately through an **REB Event**.
- iv. This approval is valid **for one year only**. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.
- v. A **Protocol Closure** must be submitted to the OHRE when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.
- vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM [*Ethics of Research Involving Humans*](#) policies and procedures.

Appendix B: University of Manitoba REB1 Amendment Approval**University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance**

Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry
66 Chancellors Circle
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

RENEWAL APPROVAL

Effective: October 17, 2025

New Expiry: October 14, 2026

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Macmillan Gomez
Advisor(s): Christina West
Protocol Number: HE2024-0242
Protocol Title: *Dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba*

Martha Koch, Acting Chair, REB1

Research Ethics Board 1 has reviewed and renewed the above research. The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- TCPS 2 (2022)*.

Please note the following important information about your renewal approval:

- i. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the OHRE **before implementation**.
- ii. Any **deviations** to the research or **adverse events** must be reported to the OHRE immediately through an **REB Event**.
- iii. This renewal is valid for **one year only**. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.
- iv. A **Protocol Closure** must be submitted to the OHRE when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

Appendix C: Social Media Recruitment

The following approved images were used on the social media platform Instagram for participant recruitment. For readability both a colour version as well as a black and white version were shared. Below the images is the text that was posted with the images.

Study Recruitment

Recruiting dads with transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse children or youth interested in talking about their parenting experiences.

Eligibility:
You are a dad over 18 years of age living in Manitoba.
Your child is between 4 to 18 years of age and is transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity.
Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers.

Format:
One 30-60 minute virtual or in-person interview
Small honorarium provided for your time

Contact Jennie at [email address] to participate or with any questions
Advisor: Dr. West [email address]

Study approved by the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board (REB1) protocol number HE2024-0242

 University of Manitoba

Study Recruitment

Recruiting dads with transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse children or youth interested in talking about their parenting experiences.

Eligibility:

You are a dad living in Manitoba, you are 18 years of age or older.
Your child is between 4 to 18 years of age and is transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity.
Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers.

Format:

One 30-60 minute virtual or in-person interview
Small honorarium provided for your time

Contact Jennie at [email address]
to participate or with any questions

Advisor: Dr. West [email address]

Study approved by the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus
Research Ethics Board (REB1) protocol number HE2024-0242



Image Description Caption

Are you a dad to a transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or genderqueer child or youth between 4 - 18 years of age? Would you be interested in talking about your parenting experiences?

Eligibility:

- You are a dad living in Manitoba, you are 18 years of age or older.
- Your child is between 4 to 18 years of age and is transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity.
- Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers
- Interviews and consent forms will be completed in English

Study participants will participate in one 30–60-minute interview virtually (via Zoom) or in-person within Winnipeg, and a small honorarium will be provided for your time and expertise. This study has been approved by the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board (REB1) protocol number HE2024-0242.

To participate or for further information please email the principal investigator, graduate student Jennie MacMillan Gomez (she/her) at [email address]

Advisor: Dr. Christina West [email address]

Appendix D: Letter to Organizations

Email Subject Line: University of Manitoba Graduate Student Research Study



College of Nursing
Helen Glass Centre for Nursing
89 Curry Place
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada
[email address]
T: [phone number]
F: [fax number]

Research Project Title: Dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba.

Student Principal Investigator: Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez, RNBN BSc (she/her), Master of Nursing Student, College of Nursing, [email address]

Student Advisor: Christina West, RN PhD (she/her), Adjunct Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Thesis Committee Member: Vanessa Van Bower, RN PhD (she/her), Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Dear [Person, Organization Name],

I am following up on my email from this summer, as you may recall I am a nursing graduate student at the University of Manitoba's College of Nursing, currently completing my master's thesis research study. I am writing today to share information with you about my graduate thesis study and to ask if you can share the attached poster at [organization name], within the practitioner rooms or waiting area. I have included both a color and black and white version.

For my thesis research study, I am looking to hear about the parenting experiences of dads with transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, gender expansive, and gender diverse children or youth between the ages of 4 to 18 years old who live in Manitoba. Dads must be 18 years of age or older, and include anyone who self-identifies as a dad or father to a gender diverse child between the ages of 4-18 years of age.

The title of my thesis research project is **Dads experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba**. The study involves one interview that can be scheduled via Zoom or in-person within the city of Winnipeg. During the interview, dads will share their experiences parenting their gender diverse child. Dads will receive a small honorarium as a thank you for their time. This qualitative study will use an interpretive description methodology to look for themes and patterns related to useful or key moments or messages that were meaningful to them as parents, with the goal of sharing them with community, health, and social services providers. The study protocol has received approval from the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 1 (REB1) under protocol number HE2024-0242.

Thank you in advance for your support. If you have questions or need more information, please let me know. If you would like printed copies of the posters, please let me know.

Regards,

[signature]

Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez, RNBN BSc (she/her)

Masters Student, College of Nursing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba

Graduate Student Affiliate, [Manitoba Centre for Nursing and Health Research](#)

Attachments:

Poster (color)

Poster (black and white)

Appendix E: Recruitment Posters

The following approved recruitment posters were shared with one organization. Both a colour as well as a black and white version were shared.

Study Recruitment

Are you a dad to a transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse child or youth?

Are you interested in talking about your parenting experiences?

Commitment

One 30-60 minute virtual or in-person interview

Eligibility

You are a dad living in Manitoba, you are 18 years of age or older.

Your child is between 4 to 18 years of age and is transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity.

Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers.

Contact Jennie MacMillan Gomez at [email address] to participate or with any questions

Advisor: Dr. Christina West [email address]

Small honorarium available



Study approved by the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus
Research Ethics Board REB1 protocol number HE2024-0242

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Study Recruitment

Are you a dad to a transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse child or youth?

Are you interested in talking about your parenting experiences?

Committment

One 30-60 minute virtual or in-person interview

Eligibility

You are a dad living in Manitoba, and you are 18 years of age or older

Your child is between 4 to 18 years of age and is transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity.

Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers.

Contact Jennie MacMillan Gomez [email address] to participate or with any questions

Advisor Dr. Christina West [email address]

Study approved by the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board REB1 protocol number HE2024-0242



Small honorarium available

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Dads parenting experiences
study email Jennie at
[email address]

Appendix F: Letter to Potential Participants

Email Subject Line: Dads Parenting Experiences Graduate Nursing Student Research Study



College of Nursing
Helen Glass Centre for Nursing
89 Curry Place
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
[email address]
T: [phone number]
F: [fax number]

Research Project Title: Dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba

Student Principal Investigator: Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez, RNBN BSc (she/her), Master of Nursing Student, College of Nursing, [email address]

Student Advisor: Christina West, RN PhD (she/her), Adjunct Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Thesis Committee Member: Vanessa Van Bower, RN PhD (she/her), Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Good [morning/afternoon/evening] [person's name],

Thank you for your interest in my thesis research study. I am a nurse and graduate student at the University of Manitoba. This research study is my graduate thesis for the completion of my master's in nursing degree.

The study involves one interview, approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. The interview can be arranged virtually over Zoom or within Winnipeg in a private meeting room at a City of Winnipeg library location.

I am looking to speak to dads living in Manitoba, who have children between the ages of 4-18 years of age whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. Your child may be transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, genderqueer, or have any other diverse or expansive gender identity. To participate you must live in Manitoba and have access to an electronic device if meeting virtually or be able to meet at the agreed upon location for in-person interviews. Interviews and consent forms will be completed in English. Dads must be 18 years of age or older and include anyone who self-identifies as a dad or father to a gender diverse child between the ages of 4-18 years of age. Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers.

If this is you, and you are interested in sharing your parenting experiences with me, a small honorarium, a \$25 grocery gift card, will be provided as a thank you for your time. Please review the attached consent form and email me any questions that you may have. If you would like to participate, please email your availability, and if you would like to meet virtually using Zoom, or in-person at one of the Winnipeg Public Library locations listed below my signature.

The study protocol has received approval from the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 1 (REB1) under protocol number HE2024-0242.

Thank you for your interest.

[signature]

Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez, RNBN BSc (she/her)
Masters Student, College of Nursing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba
Graduate Student Affiliate, [Manitoba Centre for Nursing and Health Research](#)

Available City of Winnipeg Library locations:

- Bill and Helen Norrie Library (15 Poseidon Bay)
- Henderson Library (1-1050 Henderson Hwy)
- Louis Riel Library (1168 Dakota St.)
- Millennium Library (251 Donald St.)
- Munroe Library (489 London St.)
- Pembina Trail Library (2724 Pembina Hwy.)
- St. John's Library (500 Salter St.)
- Sir William Stephenson Library (765 Keewatin St.)
- Transcona Library (1 Transcona Blvd.)
- Windsor Park Library (365 Jefferson Ave.)

Appendix G: Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Dads' experiences parenting gender diverse children and youth in Manitoba

Student Principal Investigator: Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez, RNBN, BSc (she/her), Master of Nursing Student, College of Nursing, [email address]

Student Advisor: Christina West, RN PhD (she/her), Adjunct Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Thesis Committee Members: Vanessa Van Bower, RN PhD (she/her), Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, [email address]

Conflicts of Interest and Undue Influence: None of the researchers have any conflicts of interest with this research study. Through her community volunteer work and nursing work, the student principal investigator, Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez may have met you, your family members, or your child. Professional and workplace practice standards require registered nurses to protect the privacy of patients. Protecting participant privacy is a part of this research process, and all researchers have completed training and statements committing to protecting participant privacy. Confidentiality is protected by removing names and other details, like unique medical diagnoses, that could identify an individual from interview transcripts. Participation is voluntary, questions are voluntary to answer, and details about withdrawing from the study are provided below.

This consent form, a copy of which you can download or print, or will be given to you if signing in person, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask any of the people named above. Please take the time to read this document and any accompanying information carefully. It is very important that you understand:

- what is being asked of you,
- what the risks and benefits of participation are, and
- how the information you provide will be used and stored

Purpose of this Study

This study is Jennie MacMillan Gomez's master's degree thesis study, under the supervision of Dr. Christina West. The purpose is to learn about the parenting experiences of dads living in Manitoba with children and youth with diverse gender identities. This includes children and youth who have transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or any other diverse or expansive gender identity. Dads were selected specifically because there are no studies that exclusively look at your parenting experiences raising gender diverse children and youth. To participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older, your child must be between 4 to 18 years of age, and you must be living in Manitoba. Dads include all self-identified dads and fathers, stepdads or stepfathers, foster or adoptive dads and fathers. After hearing your parenting experiences, Jennie will look for moments, or messages, that could be useful for other dads parenting gender diverse children and youth, and ways to share these with health and social services providers, community organizations, and parents.

Study Procedures

Your participation in this study will involve one interview, lasting between 30-60 minutes, based on how much you would like to share about your parenting experiences. The total time may be 60-90 minutes to sign and review the consent form, complete demographics questions, and for Jennie to answer any question you may have. The interview can happen via Zoom, or the interview can happen

in Winnipeg. If meeting in person, Jennie will book a private meeting room available at a city of Winnipeg public library locations that is convenient for you. If meeting over Zoom, please sign and return this consent form before the interview starts. If meeting in person, the consent form will be signed before the interview starts. The interview will be recorded using an electronic recording device and will be deleted once Jennie has transcribed the interview. At the start of the interview, you will be asked if you would like to choose a name that will be used when referring to your interview, or a quote from your interview, in the thesis, this name is called a pseudonym.

Study Risks

A potential risk is that questions may bring up thoughts about challenging or emotionally difficult experiences that have occurred because of discrimination, oppression, or physical and mental health challenges you, your child, or another family member has faced. If you need to pause or stop the interview at any time, please let Jennie know. If she sees or suspects that you are upset or distressed, she will ask you if you would like to stop the interview. If the interview is paused, you can choose to continue the interview at another time, to stop the interview there, or withdraw from the study. A resource list has been emailed to you and if we are meeting in person, a paper copy will be available. If abuse or neglect of a minor is suspected based on information disclosed as part of the study the researcher has a legal obligation to report this as outlined in [The Child and Family Services Act](http://www.manitoba.ca/familylaw/safety/protection-of-children.html) (www.manitoba.ca/familylaw/safety/protection-of-children.html)

Study Benefits

There may be no direct personal benefits to participating in this research. Some parents who participated in existing research expressed that sharing stories and parenting experiences allowed them to see personal growth and family strengths, as they reflect on parenting journeys and knowledge of gender diversity. This study provides an opportunity for the researchers to hear the unique parenting experiences of dads, and for you to share your experiences with others.

Compensation

A \$25 grocery gift card will be available for you as a thank you for the time taken to participate. If meeting, via Zoom, the gift card will be emailed to you within 24 hours after the interview ends. If meeting in person, a physical gift card will be provided once the consent form has been signed before starting the interview. If you withdraw from the study the gift card is yours to keep. We will need to collect additional personal information from you to record giving you an honorarium. The researchers will keep this information separate from any research information. This information will be kept in a secure location for 7 years after completion of the last interview, approximately March 2032, in case the University of Manitoba has to account for the money during a financial audit.

Storage and Use of Data

All the information you provide as part of this study is confidential. This means only members of the research team will see your information. For your safety, your research information will be anonymized and kept on a UM-approved secure platform. Research information will be kept separate from your compensation information. We may keep anonymized research information (interview transcripts) indefinitely. We will not be able to link the personal information you share with us for compensation with the research information you share. Consent forms and compensation information will be printed and stored separately, in secure storage at the Manitoba Centre for Nursing Health Research until it is destroyed. We will destroy any information that identifies you by name, email or mailing address, by seven years after the last interview, approximately March 2032. We will do our best to keep your personal information safe. However, it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality. We will only share your personal information if the law requires us to.

The study results will be shared through 1) the publication of a master's thesis, 2) journal publications and presentations in relevant academic fields, 3) a summarized report of the study results for interested participants and community groups, 4) summary or key information shared via online platforms and resources. Information will be presented anonymously and summarized, with demographic information presented in an aggregated table. Direct quotations will be identified with a pseudonym or anonymously.

Withdrawing

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Voluntary means you choose to answer only the questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the study for any reason. You do not have to explain why. You will not be penalized in any way. You may withdraw your interview responses from the study up to two weeks after your interview, which is: _____. After this date, we will start to analyze the information so it may not be possible to withdraw your information. To withdraw, please contact Jennie (Jennifer) MacMillan Gomez at the email on the first page. If you withdraw after the consent form is completed, you may keep the honorarium you received.

Questions or Concerns

A designated University of Manitoba auditor may check that this study is being done safely and properly. To do this, they may visit the study site or review the research records. We will tell you if someone outside the research team will be there while you are participating. If this makes you uncomfortable, please tell the Principal Investigator, who will ask the auditor to return at another time.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Manitoba Human Research Ethics at Fort Garry campus Research Ethics Board 1 (REB1). However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics at [email address] or [phone number].

Consent

By signing this document, I have read the above information and have had the opportunity to ask and have answered any questions I may have.

I understand that:

- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely leave the research activities at any time.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study

Please review the following statement. For each statement, please check if you agree or do not agree.

I agree to participate in this study. ☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this study. ☐ YES ☐ NO

Name of Participant

Participant Signature

Date

Summary of Results:

A summary of results will be available approximately March 2025. Please provide an email address below if you would like to be sent a summary of the study results when they are available.

Email address: _____

The thesis study will be published on the University of Manitoba MSpace website once completed.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

Your personal information is being collected under the authority of *The University of Manitoba Act*. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* or *The Personal Health Information Act*. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information, call [phone number] or email [email address]

Appendix H: Demographic Questions

Preamble: Now that we have completed the consent form, before I start recording, we will start with some demographic questions about you, your child, and your family. This information will be kept separately from the interview transcripts and will not have any personal identifiers connected to it. It will be presented as a table. Let me know if you want to skip or have me repeat any questions.

The first questions are about you:

What is your age? _____ Declined ☐

Are you part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined ☐

Is this because of your gender ☐ sexuality ☐ or both ☐ Declined ☐

How do you describe your ethnicity: _____ Declined ☐

Do you identify as a racialized person? Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined ☐ [Racialized persons is defined as non-Indigenous racialized persons and is used instead of *race* to acknowledge the social impact of racialization in Canada]

Do you identify as North American Indigenous? Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined ☐ If yes – Which of the following groups, do you belong to? First Nations ☐ Metis ☐ Inuk (Inuit) ☐ Declined ☐ Prefer to describe: _____

Are you connected to a religious community? Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined ☐

How would you describe the parenting context of your family: Co-parenting in separate households ☐ Multiple parents (co-parenting) in same household ☐ Single parent household ☐ Declined ☐ Prefer to describe: _____

The following questions are about your child:

What is your child's gender identity: _____ Declined ☐

If prompts needed: (Transgender/trans) girl ☐ (Transgender/trans) boy ☐ Nonbinary, Genderfluid, Genderqueer ☐ Two-Spirit gender diverse ☐ Prefer to describe: _____

What is your child's assigned sex at birth: Girl ☐ Boy ☐ Intersex ☐ Declined ☐

How old is your child currently _____ Declined ☐

How old was your child when you became aware of their gender identity? _____ Declined ☐

How long ago was that _____ Declined ☐

Is your child's ethnicity the same as yours? Yes ☐ No ☐ Declined ☐

If not, what is your child's ethnicity? _____ Declined ☐

Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Date of Interview: _____

Interview # _____

Interview Place/Type: _____

Participant # _____

Introduction: This interview we are about to start is part of my thesis study to complete me masters degree, and the purpose is to explore dads' experiences parenting transgender, nonbinary, Two-Spirit gender diverse, genderfluid children and youth, or children and youth with other non-cisgender identities between the ages of 4 to 18 years of age. The interview will be audio recorded with a digital recorder, with your permission, and will be deleted after I transcribe it into a word document. I will remove any names or place names or other identifiers when I transcribe the interviews, do you have any questions before we start recording?

I will now start recording. *Start recording.*

Introductory Questions: To start with, when I am writing my thesis I may discuss specific experiences or use quotes from interviews, when I do this would you like me to refer to you as a father or dad or other term? Would you like me to use a specific alternate name, a pseudonym, for you or refer to you as a (term selected in previous question)?

To start off can you tell me what it is like being a dad to a child who is [insert gender identity or say gender diverse]?

Are there experiences that you have had as a dad that are unique because of your child's [gender diversity or gender identity]?

What were your experiences learning about your child's gender (diverse) identity?

How did you first feel? How did this impact your parenting?

How do you feel now? How has this impacted your current parenting?

What types of conversations did you have with your child, about gender or identity, before you knew about their gender diversity?

What types of conversations did you have with your child about identity, maybe not gender identity after you found out about their gender diversity?

What have been some key moments for you as a parent of a gender diverse child?

What are your favorite experiences parenting a gender diverse child? In what ways have these experiences impacted your parenting?

What parenting are you most proud of (as a parent of a gender diverse child)?

Have you experienced challenging or fear evoking experiences parenting a gender diverse child? Could you tell me about those? In what ways have these challenges or fears impacted your parenting?

Are there parenting moments you would change if you could? What would you most want to change about those moments?

Would your parenting experience be different if you lived in a (rural/urban) setting rather than the (rural/urban) setting you live in?

What are your experiences with supports for your experience of parenting your child?

What sources of support have you accessed to support your parenting (of your gender diverse child)?

What have your experiences been with these supports?

How did you feel about the information or support you received? Was there anything missing that you would have liked to have received?

What do you hope your child takes away from your parenting/remembers from your parenting?

What do you think is most important for dads to understand about being a parent to transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse child?

What do you think is most important for other dads of gender diverse children to know?

What would you have liked to know when you started your journey with gender diversity?

What advice would you give other parents who are in your position in terms of how to respond to your child coming out as transgender?

Is there anything you want to add to any of your previous answers?

Is there anything I should know?

Are there any other questions I should have asked about parenting that I didn't?

Stop recording. Thank you again for your time. If you think of anything you would like to add in the next few days or weeks, please feel free to email me. If you checked the box to receive a preliminary copy of the data analysis, you will receive that in the next few months. I appreciate you being able to speak with me and thank you again.

Appendix J: Participant Resource List

Resource List

Urgent Resources

Adult Mobile Crisis Services [phone number]

Crisis Response Centre at 817 Bannatyne Ave, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Klinik Crisis Line [phone number] or [phone number]

Manitoba 24-hour Suicide Prevention & Support Line [phone number]

Counselling Services

Rainbow Resource Centre short-term counselling, email intake coordinator for next intake

Klinik Counselling & Trauma Counselling Intake registration by phone [phone number] or email [email address] or drop-in counselling for ages 13+, see website for details
<https://www.klinik.mb.ca>

Aurora Family Therapy Intake [phone number], individual, family and newcomer trauma therapy aurorafamilytherapy.com

Workplace EAP programs may have an urgent or waitlist options depending on the provider

Community Connections and Supports for Parents, Families, or Youth

Klinik/Rainbow Resource Centre parent group PFFoTI meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month at 167 Sherbrook St., email [email address] for details

Rainbow Resource Centre have family (BLiNK) and youth programming monthly, details on their social media accounts or <https://www.rainbowresourcecentre.org>

Manitoba Moon Voices Inc. parent group for Indigenous families meets the 1st Wednesday of the month in-person, see Facebook or visit <https://www.manitobamoonvoices.com>

SERC Brandon offers family and youth programming, see their website for current offerings, <https://serc.mb.ca/serc-brandon>

PFLAG Canada has a chapter that can be contacted via <https://pflagcanada.ca/chapters>, or leaving a message at SERC Brandon (above)

Pembina Valley Pride in Southern Manitoba has community programming shared on their social media or <https://www.pembinavalleypride.ca>

Prism Program offers a big sibling program for gender diverse children and youth, see their website for details: <https://winnipeg.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca/prism/>