



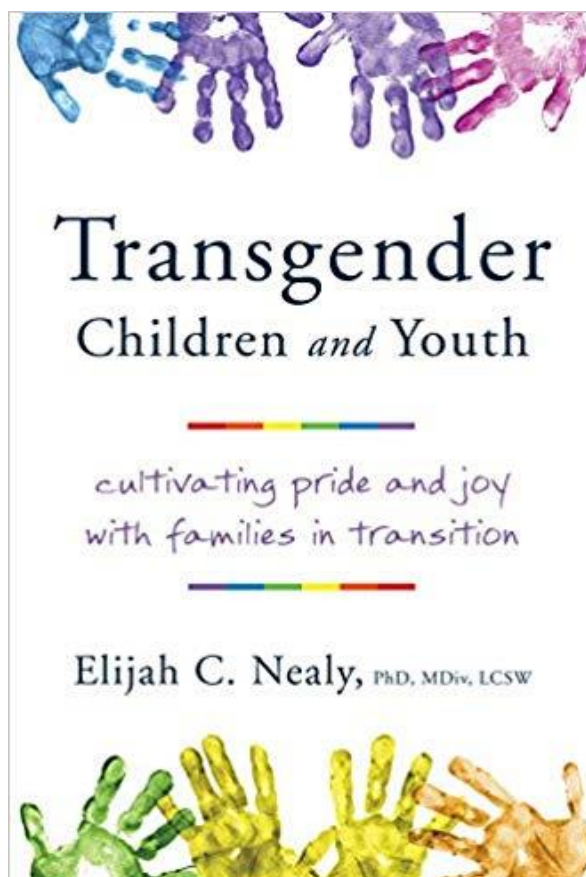
**Nealy, E. C. (2017). *Transgender children and youth: Cultivating pride and joy with families in transition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.**

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In this comprehensive guide for parents, educators, counselors, therapists, and other caregivers and service providers, Elijah Nealy (2017) provides adults the invaluable information and crucial tools that they need to support the transgender and gender-expansive youth in their lives. Children are coming out at younger and younger ages, and in greater numbers than ever before. Unfortunately, many teachers, service providers, and other adults in the community do not receive sufficient, if any, training for how to be responsive to these children in a way that affirms their lives and their gender identities and expressions. The suffering of transgender and gender-expansive students is well documented in the news. Reports pile up of suicide and self-harm by these youth as a result of bullying and institutional oppression within multiple systems, including schools, the healthcare system, the legal system, religious institutions, family units, and society in general. These news stories are backed by numerous studies (Kowsciw et. al., 2017; Ryan et. al., 2018) and underscore the urgent need for a book such as Nealy's.



Throughout the book, Nealy also makes a convincing case for the urgent need for cultivating pride and joy for trans and gender-nonconforming youth and their families who are in the process of gender transition. He provides clear and easy-to-understand tools and strategies that adults can use in partnership with youth to do so. Nealy explains that his intention is fourfold: to impart skills and knowledge that families, schools, and mental health professionals can use to support children and adolescents; to enable parents to take their time processing gender diversity so as not to rush their children toward transition; to teach children and youth how to embrace their gender identities with tools that can help them thrive in both hostile and affirming environments; and to be a partner with youth and their families whose next step is gender transition. He urges the reader to “remember to always hold love as the most important thing” (p. xxii).

*Transgender Children and Youth* is laid out in three parts. Part I provides the foundations for understanding transgender youth. Going beyond the foundational concepts and processes, Part II of the book addresses the challenges trans youth face in the world around them. The third and final part of the book looks specifically at the role of mental health providers and their responsibilities in using life-affirming practices in the lives of transgender and gender-diverse children and adolescents. A highlight is the author’s list of 10 life-affirming practices for adults to use in the lives of trans kids. The organization of the book, from the very basic understandings, terminology, and vocabulary at the beginning, to the very complex nuances and specifics about clinical intervention at the end, means that even people with the most limited experience with, and knowledge of, the trans community can read this book and end up with a thorough knowledge of how to be an excellent ally and advocate.

This volume also provides several helpful appendices at the end. Appendix A offers an overview of legal concerns that can surface in this work. It includes information about changing gender markers on identification documents, as well as legal name changes. There is also a review of the current state of legal rights and relevant precedent. Appendix B is an extensive repertoire of resources for clinicians, service providers, youth, and their families. Appendix C consists of sample mental health letters needed before youth can participate in hormone therapy or surgeries.

Many times, books that are about helping people in underserved communities describe the people being served as problems to be solved, approach the clients from a deficit point of view, and come from an outsider and savior perspective. I appreciated that this author is not only a member of the trans community, and therefore an insider with actual lived experiences to back his work, but that he also underscores repeatedly the importance of listening to youth and partnering *with* them. In addition to being a trans man, his qualifications as a licensed therapist, pastor, former Deputy Director of NYC’s LGBT Community Center, his work as an assistant professor of social work, and his 25 years of working within the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community mean that he is uniquely positioned to write this book. The terminology and resources that Nealy provides are current, timely, and helpful for a wide range of providers – from parents who are just finding out their child is exploring their gender identity to experienced service providers.

Nealy also uses this book to fill a gap by addressing youth who are members of two underserved and intersectional identities: being trans/gender expansive *and* being a person of color. The term intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, underscores the multidimensionality of marginalized subjects’ lived experiences – in other words,

the unique way in which people experience oppression because they each belong to multiple marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 1989). Often, the LGBTQ community is addressed with either the assumption that it is all white, which is not the case, or that the issues of all LGBTQ youth are exactly the same across races and ethnicities, which is also not true given the complexities within all cultures across the United States. This author does not make those assumptions and acknowledges that even though they can be very resilient, LGBTQ youth of color face higher risks of experiencing microaggressions, harassment, sexual exploitation, violence, and even murder. However, the author only very lightly touches on three main ethnic groups: African Americans, the Latinx community, and the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. There is no mention of the Indigenous or First Nations youth, how they have understood gender uniquely for centuries, and how to better serve them.

The author briefly addresses how to work with families from conservative religious traditions. He mentions that there are some evangelical Christian and Judaic leaders who are accepting, but makes no mention of other faith traditions lacking accepting leaders, of which there are many. It would be useful if the

author had another appendix listing the organizations within many faith traditions that exist to affirm LGBTQ people within them. Immigrant or Indigenous family members, or family members who are from other faiths, would not find this book geared specifically toward them, but they will still find many parts of the book extremely helpful.

Throughout *Transgender Children and Youth*, the author provides some vignettes and questions for reflection, which make the content relevant and engaging. He also facilitates deeper and more critical thinking about the issues facing transgender and gender-nonconforming youth. He does not skirt around the fact that this is an area full of nuance, complexity, and uniqueness for each individual person and case. Nealy approaches this work with empathy, compassion, love, practicality, and honesty. He infuses solid scientific grounding with stories of humanity, which increases the readability of the content. While the size of the book is daunting, with more than 400 pages, readers can easily find the information that is pertinent to them. With this book, Nealy makes a controversial issue easy to understand, and inspires readers to be better allies and advocates for the transgender and gender-expansive young people in their lives.

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## About the Reviewer

**Ferial Pearson**, Ed.D., is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and was previously a high school English teacher. Throughout her 18-year career in education, she has been an advocate for LGBTQIA youth in her community and has been recognized nationally for this work, including GLSEN's Educator of the Year Award in 2011, the NEA's Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights in 2012, and the Kennedy Center's Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Award in 2016.



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