

The transgender parent: Experiences and constructions of pregnancy and parenthood for transgender men in Australia

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Research Questions

How do Australian trans men:

- Experience and construct their desire for parenthood
- **Experience and construct gestational pregnancy?**

Trans men and pregnancy

- a qualitative approach -

Research Design

- Qualitative mixed methods design
- Stage One: Online 27-item demographic and open-ended questions survey
- Stage Two: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

Participants

- N = 25
- Ages: 24 – 46 yrs old
- Participants came from rural, regional and metropolitan areas in NSW, Vic, SA, & Qld
- Twenty four participants had one gestational pregnancy, one participant had two pregnancies
- Gestational offspring ranged in age from three- to twelve years old

Pursuing Pregnancy

‘A Functional Sacrifice’

“(My partner’s) endometriosis was really severe...when we started talking about a family I just knew it wasn’t going to be possible for her (to get pregnant) so I decided that I’d do it...It wasn’t an altogether happy decision but I knew it was the right one for us and I feel, actually, very grateful that I could do that for us.” (Sam, 32)

“We’d had some close friends who’d really struggled with not being genetically related to their kids... it really made an impression on me and (my partner)... so we decided we’d take turns having a baby.” (Bill, 31)

“before transitioning took me too far”

“get something positive out of (my) cursed body”

Pursuing Pregnancy

Accessing Reproductive Assistance

-Formal Assistance-

“We were rejected from multiple clinics due to “reasons unknown”. We had a range of appointments and each time the discussion centred almost completely on my gender identity...everyone just seemed so uncomfortable seeing us.” (Justin, 30)

“The doctor we saw was so awkward with us, kept misgendering me and repeatedly asked why my (cisgender) partner wasn’t the one going to have the baby.” (Trent, 36)

“Our treatment at the clinic was the first in many pregnancy related rejections.” (Noel, 46)

“a nightmare process”, “deeply upsetting”, “they cancelled all follow-ups”

Pursuing Pregnancy

Accessing Reproductive Assistance

-Informal Assistance-

“Once we decided to use a known donor... it was really just a matter of approaching them and discussing what we were proposing. It’s tricky because the legal side of it was a bit of grey area at the time and we really just had to keep it to ourselves and hope for the best, to be honest...We were really lucky that (the donor) was keen and shared our feelings about what his relationship would be with (our child).” (Mickie, 33)

Pursuing Pregnancy

Accessing Reproductive Assistance

-Informal Assistance-

“For us, using a (known donor) was so much easier because we could just do everything at home...”(Colin, 46)

“the negotiation process much easier (with a known donor)”

“DIY insemination “more personal,” and “less confronting” than accessing formal facilities.

Pursuing Pregnancy

“Living without T”

“It was really gradual at first...I noticed my body started to change, like my fat started to kind of shift, redistribute, around my body...my hips started coming back...my empty boobs started to really ache and then I got my period. Even though I knew it was going to happen that was still a huge shock. I had a real moment then. Like, I questioned whether I could go through with everything.” (Zak, 29)

“felt like my lifeline was being taken away”, “extremely stressful”

“mood swings”, “really intense lethargy”,

Pursuing Pregnancy

“Living without T”

“We didn’t get pregnant for almost a year, so my body had reverted back to much of its former self. I still had a little fluff on the face but everything else was really soft and round. I hated it so much. I didn’t always ‘pass’ anymore, which was really demoralising... Ultimately, getting pregnant was a huge relief because then I had a timeline to when I could get back to normal (laughs).” (Jonnie, 28)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Inhabiting the pregnant body’

“The happiness at getting that (positive result) was pretty quickly replaced with sense of real dread...the early (pregnancy) hormones made me feel really sick and shaky and I think the enormity of what I was doing really started to sink in and I got scared.” (Bill, 31)

“It was a very stressful time. The changes (to my body) were really frightening” (Tommy, 27)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Inhabiting the pregnant body’

“I felt completely in the wrong body, my flesh, the roundness and bulges, the way it felt and looked, really frightened me, so foreign, like the more pregnant I got the more alien my skin felt. It terrified me...It wasn't the femaleness of it, it was the intense changes, the physical changes...a complete dysphoria of the body (Regan, 37)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Inhabiting the pregnant body’

“As (the pregnancy) kept progressing I got more and more anxious...detaching kind of helped me cope in the short-term...I gave myself permission to do whatever I needed to just get through.” (Tommy, 27)

“In order to cope, I had to detach...I ended up so detached from my (pregnant) body that I sometimes needed to be reminded that I was pregnant.” (Wyn, 42)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Chest Changes’

“it was really stressful feeling my chest grow so much, it made me feel sick.” (Regan, 37)

“they (chest) got huge and it was extremely stressful, I didn’t like to look at them, or touch them.” (Stefan, 41)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Chest Changes’

“(Towards the end of pregnancy) I just stopped leaving the house completely... I felt really unsafe and anxious when I was out and it just wasn’t worth it, in the end...I couldn’t bind and I felt so uncomfortable in my body. I hated being seen. I felt like everyone was staring.” (Noel, 36)

“not being able to bind was a nightmare. My chest was getting so big it was totally impossible to cover...people started misgendering me, a lot, which hurt.” (Jason, 26)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘Chest Changes’

“(My chest) was huge and leaky after I had (my child)... It was so horrible and totally stressed me out... I couldn’t bind because it was way too painful... it was also right in the middle of summer and it was so hot. I couldn’t cover up, I couldn’t bind. I ended up just staying home for months, which sounds simple but it was super isolating” (Sam, 32).

Being a Pregnant Man

‘The Isolation of Exclusion’

“I can’t express how lonely it was to go through a whole pregnancy in hiding. I couldn’t be ‘out’ as a pregnant person and it was really hard. Like, yes my friends and family knew but to the rest of the world I had to hide it to protect my own safety and my mental health from strangers. The loneliness was profound.” (Colin, 46)

Being a Pregnant Man

‘The Isolation of Exclusion’

I just felt so lonely, like “am I the only one?”. There was no one at the Drs or the clinic or in the pregnancy books or anywhere like me. I felt like a complete anomaly (Noel, 36).

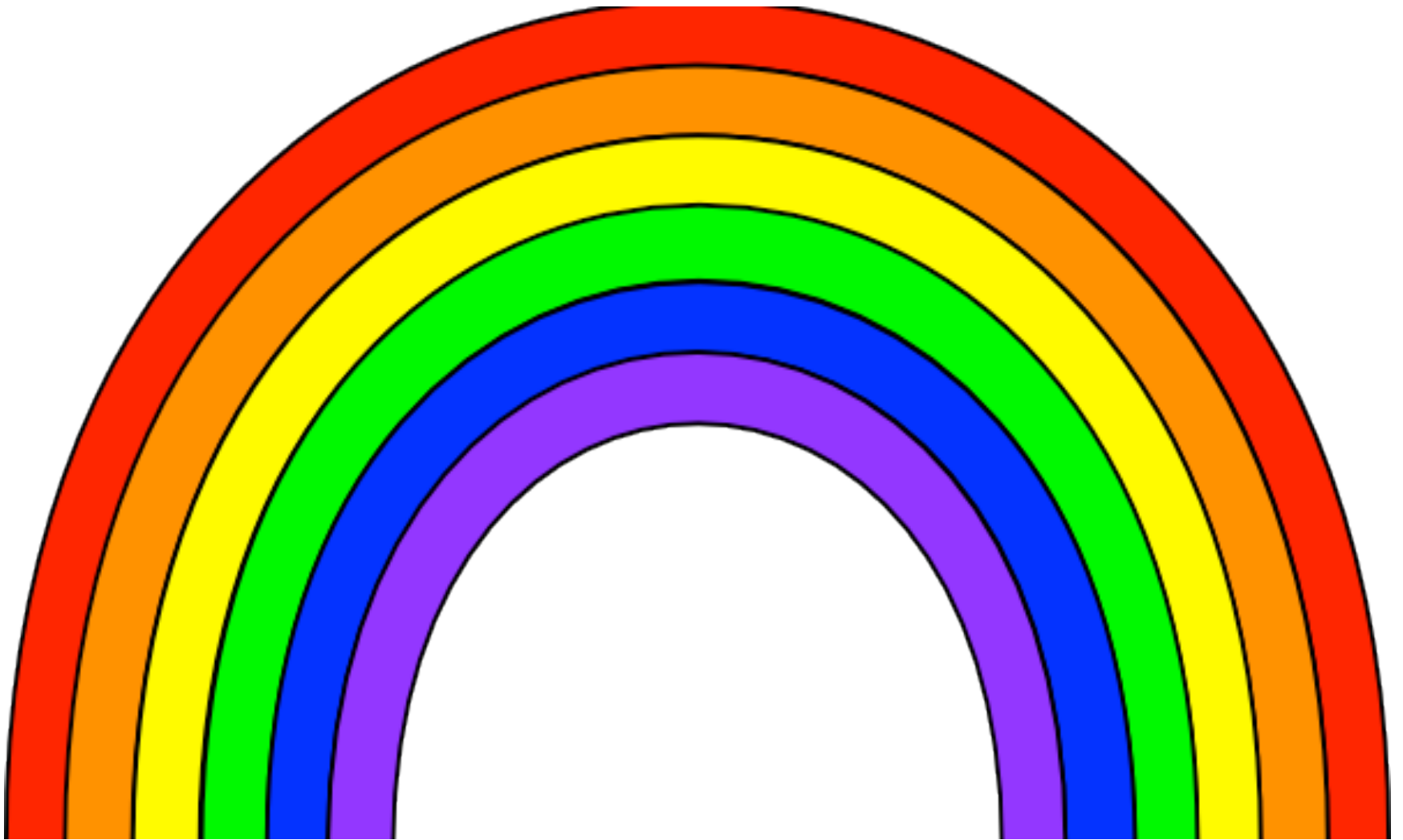
Being a Pregnant Man

‘The Isolation of Exclusion’

“Not seeing yourself (represented) anywhere is so hard. I felt like I was really excluded from the whole thing (of pregnancy) and I didn’t get any enjoyment from it. Reading the books, or looking on the internet for pregnancy advice was so depressing. It felt like it was just a constant barrage of information confirming how wrong I was.” (Zak, 29)

Implications

- Healthcare providers, and associated staff, need to be educated on how to treat trans men who wish to pursue pregnancy.
- Lactation specialists and community nurses need to be trained in supporting trans men and their babies in the postnatal period.
- Trans inclusive pregnancy literature needs to be developed
- Transphobic discrimination in healthcare needs to be addressed



Thank you.