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ARTICLE

Children's attitudes about transgender identity disclosure and concealment

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Abstract

Supportive peers are crucial for transgender children's well-being. Transgender children who live in their affirmed gender face decisions surrounding concealment and disclosure of their transgender identity. We sought to understand how cisgender ($N = 115$) and gender-diverse children ($N = 127$), and siblings of gender-diverse children ($N = 63$) think about transition disclosure and concealment. All groups viewed transition disclosure and concealment positively. However, gender-diverse children showed greater acceptance of transition concealment and had stronger liking of transition concealers (relative to non-transition concealers). Additionally, children generally expected transgender peers to be selective about who they disclose to, valuing trustworthiness and diverse friend groups in such decisions. Our findings suggest that regardless of gender identity, children are sensitive to the potential costs of disclosure and may support trans children however they choose to navigate these decisions.

KEYWORDS

cognitive development, gender diversity, gender identity, identity concealment, identity disclosure, social cognition, transgender children

BACKGROUND

Transgender children who live and present as a gender (e.g. girl) that is not viewed as typical of their birth-assigned sex (e.g. male) face an alarmingly high threat of peer stigmatization (Hatchel et al., 2019). Moreover, adults in the political sphere regularly scrutinize the legitimacy of transgender identities

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Pre-registration link: https://osf.io/4zuda/?view_only=a66693d50a6d4afaac07ee0c82ffa946

Statement of contribution

What is already known on this subject?

- Concealing one's identity may compromise close relationships, which may hinder social development.
- Children may conceal being trans to prevent identity-based harassment by their peers.
- Disclosing a transgender identity can elicit negative responses and may lead to social rejection.

What does the present study add?

- Children generally liked trans peers, regardless of peers' identity disclosure or concealment.
- Compared to another form of concealment, trans identity concealment was deemed most acceptable.
- Children stated that their transgender peers would disclose their identities selectively.

(Barrón-López et al., 2023; Kraschel et al., 2022), and there has been considerable scholarly debate regarding standards of care for transgender youth (Ashley, 2019; de Vries & Cohen-Kettenis, 2012). Given these factors, while some trans children disclose their identities widely, others may choose to disclose more selectively or conceal their identities altogether for fear of backlash. The attitudes of cisgender children (i.e. those whose gender aligns with their birth-assigned sex) towards their trans peers' decisions to disclose (or conceal) their identities likely have consequences for their trans peers. Indeed, peer support is a main protective factor in transgender youth's well-being (Durwood et al., 2021; Johns et al., 2018; Kia et al., 2021); thus, understanding how cisgender and fellow gender-diverse children think about trans concealment and disclosure decisions is critical to promoting supportive social environments.

Transgender identity in childhood

Unlike previous generations, trans children express their gender identities earlier (Herman et al., 2022; Turban et al., 2023), sometimes as young as age three (e.g. Gülgöz et al., 2019). With the support of their families, some trans children socially transition—changing their name, pronouns and appearance to live authentically as their felt gender. While social transitioning affords an increasing number of trans children the opportunity to live and be recognized by others as their true gender, this means that children may increasingly face weighty decisions about whether to disclose and if so, to whom.

Trans identity disclosure and concealment

Children's decision-making regarding transgender identity concealment is not well known, as most research on identity concealment involves adults with stigmatized identities. Among adults, identity concealment can stem from desires to prevent identity-based harassment or being 'othered' (Pachankis, 2007). However, concealing one's stigmatized identity may have drawbacks, preventing one from living authentically, building trust and establishing closeness in their relationships (Bosson et al., 2012; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Thus, electing to conceal an identity for fear of backlash may compromise the quality of one's peer relationships and social development more broadly.

Descriptive research suggests similar patterns among transgender children, with many selectively sharing their identities with a close few, if at all (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Ehrensaft, 2013;

Sweet, 2022). Trans children's decision-making regarding identity disclosure and concealment is often filled with worries about their peers' reactions, including concerns about how they will be treated post-disclosure (Ehrensaft, 2013; NBC News, 2020). Starting in preschool, cisgender children are resistant to gender nonconformity among their peers (Blakemore, 2003; Riggs et al., 2023). Thus, some trans children elect to conceal their identity to avoid peers viewing them differently, for example, as a 'boy who was a girl' or 'not a real boy' (Ehrensaft, 2013). Moreover, trans children may worry that identity disclosure, particularly after having initially concealed, might result in peers feeling deceived and ultimately rejecting them (Ehrensaft, 2013). It is important to note, however, that many transgender children live publicly in their trans identity (Luecke, 2011; NBC News, 2020). Still, some trans children may adamantly conceal, even when there is reason to believe that disclosing would be supported (Ehrensaft, 2013). Given the lack of empirical studies, it remains unclear what cisgender and gender-diverse children actually think about decisions to conceal or disclose a transgender identity. The present work sheds light on the extent to which gender-diverse children may view it as necessary to exercise discretion around identity disclosure, and whether cisgender children's evaluations correspond.

Reactions to trans concealment and disclosure

No other study to date has examined children's attitudes of trans identity concealment and disclosure. Thus, we draw from a small, but growing body of literature on cisgender adults' judgements towards trans identity concealment and disclosure to uncover the possible range of children's reactions.

Prior literature shows that cisgender adults tend to show distrust towards trans individuals (Huffaker & Kwon, 2016; Totton et al., 2023; Totton & Rios, 2021). Cisgender adults may expect trans adults to immediately and intentionally disclose their trans identity and may view concealment as a form of deception (Totton et al., 2023). Intentional identity disclosure is linked to lower anti-trans attitudes than unintentional disclosure (Totton et al., 2023), and disclosure can be met with support and strengthen relationships (Schlehofer et al., 2020). However, despite cisgender adults' preference for trans identity disclosure over concealment, disclosing a trans identity does not always elicit positive responses (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Disclosure may result in experiences of social rejection and isolation (Grossman et al., 2005; Jones & Hillier, 2013), including confidants sharing one's identity with others (Galupo et al., 2014). The consequences of disclosing and concealing a trans identity might ultimately depend on individual-level factors pertaining to trans individuals' peers (Ehrensaft, 2013; Luecke, 2011; Schlehofer et al., 2020).

Current study

Cisgender children can play a crucial role in trans children's social environments, but aside from a handful of case studies describing trans children's concealment and disclosure experiences (Ehrensaft, 2013; Luecke, 2011), we know little about how cisgender children think about trans peers' identity concealment and disclosure. Given what we know about the importance of supportive peer relationships for gender-diverse children's well-being (MacMullin et al., 2021), and the early emergence of trans prejudice (Fine et al., 2024; Gülgöz et al., 2018), it is imperative that we understand children's attitudes and predictions of identity disclosure and concealment among trans peers.

We examined children's attitudes towards disclosure and concealment, as they pertain to trans identity (e.g. name change due to being trans) and cisgender identity (e.g. name change due to personal preference). Specifically, in both cases, we asked children how much they liked someone who changed their name and how acceptable they thought disclosure and concealment were in each case. Additionally, we assessed whether children understood the sensitive nature of trans (vs. cisgender) disclosure decisions. Thus, we asked children to predict whether a peer would disclose their identity to others, and if so, whom they would choose from among a pair of potential confidants.

Children in our study belonged to one of three participant groups: gender-diverse, siblings of gender-diverse and unrelated cisgender children. Children completed an identity concealment and disclosure task as part of a larger battery of measures within The TransYouth Project (Olson & Gülgöz, 2018), which assesses gender development among gender-diverse children. Although this work was largely exploratory, we pre-registered several hypotheses (https://osf.io/4zuda/?view_only=a66693d50a6d4afaac07ee0c82ffa946). The first part of our study examined participants' evaluations of children who concealed or disclosed part of their identity. Based on prior research showing that gender-diverse children and their siblings think similarly about gender (Gülgöz et al., 2021; Olson & Enright, 2017), we predicted that these children would similarly like and accept trans targets who concealed or disclosed their trans identity; we did not have a specific prediction for unrelated cisgender participants. Based on research showing that cisgender children might prefer cisgender over transgender peers (Gülgöz et al., 2018), we expected unrelated cisgender participants to like and accept cisgender name change, over transgender identity and concealers. We did not expect to find any differences between gender-diverse participants and siblings when comparing their liking and acceptance of trans (or cisgender) concealers.

Part two of the study assessed how participants predicted which peers the trans and cisgender targets would disclose to based on three attribute dimensions. Specifically, we expected all participant groups to select peers with gender-diverse (vs. nondiverse) friends, and trustworthy (vs. untrustworthy) peers, as trans targets' confidants. Though we did not have specific hypotheses, we explored participants' likelihood to select popular (vs. unpopular) peers as trans targets' confidants, as well as whether the three attribute dimensions would impact participants' predictions about who cisgender targets would disclose their name changes to.

METHOD

Participants

We recruited participants from an existing database of children as part of the TransYouth Project (Olson & Gülgöz, 2018), a large, longitudinal study of gender-diverse children in the United States and Canada. Participation in the current study took place between February 2021 and November 2022.

Participants were 305 children between the ages of 6 and 11 years[1] ($M = 9.12$; $SD = 1.72$). Gender-diverse children ($N = 127$) included socially transitioned transgender children who, at initial participation, were publicly presenting as a binary gender (i.e. a boy or girl) different from their birth-assigned sex, and gender-nonconforming children who regularly defy stereotypical notions of gender while still identifying in their birth-assigned sex. When available in our age range, we recruited their siblings ($N = 63$). Seven siblings reported a gender that differs from their birth-assigned sex, and four of these seven reported not knowing their gender. Ultimately, siblings who identified with a gender different from their birth-assigned sex remained part of the sibling group instead of being recategorized. We reasoned as follows: siblings, regardless of their gender identity, grew up in close contact with a gender-diverse child, something unique to the sibling participant group.

Our third group was unrelated cisgender children ($N = 115$) who were gender- and age-matched (within 3 months) to each gender-diverse participant (see Table 1 demographics). Seven of the initially recruited unrelated cisgender participants did not subsequently report a cisgender identity, however; six of them reported either not knowing their gender, feeling like a boy and girl, or that their gender changes over time. Similarly, we kept these children in the unrelated cisgender group, as their gender experiences may differ in substantial ways from our gender-diverse group (e.g. having socially transitioned vs. not).

[1]Except when age matching a transgender, to an unrelated cisgender, participant within +/− 3 months meant that the unrelated cisgender participant was slightly younger than 6, or older than 11, years old.

TABLE 1 Participant demographics.

Variable	Gender-diverse children	Sibling	Unrelated cisgender children
Participant *N*	127	63	115
Age (years)	*M* = 9.13	*M* = 8.90	*M* = 9.22
	SD = 1.77	*SD* = 1.44	*SD* = 1.80
Gender[a] *N*			
Girls	65	29	74
Boys	36	28	33
Neither	6	1	1
Both	8	0	0
Changes	5	1	2
Do not know	6	4	3
Missing	1	0	2
Race			
Multiracial	24%	16%	17%
White/European	72%	76%	74%
Asian	2%	3%	5%
Black/African American	1%	0%	2%
Other	2%	0%	3%
Missing	2%	5%	0%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic/Latino	11%	13%	4%
Non-Hispanic/Latino	87%	83%	94%
Missing	2%	5%	2%
Parent annual income			
Less than $25,000	5%	2%	0%
$25,001–50,000	12%	10%	1%
$50,001–75,000	16%	14%	8%
$75,001–125,000	28%	29%	27%
Greater than $125,001	39%	43%	64%
Missing	0%	3%	0%
Parent education			
High school diploma	4%	0%	1%
Some college	13%	11%	7%
College/Bachelor's degree	21%	25%	44%
Advanced degree	62%	59%	47%
Other	0%	0%	1%
Missing	0%	5%	0%
Parent political ideology[b]	*M* = 1.68	*M* = 1.59	*M* = 2.20
	SD = 0.85	*SD* = 0.69	*SD* = 1.03

Note: All demographics are reported by parents, except for gender, which is reported by children. Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

[a]Participants were asked about their gender in a two-stage question. First, they were asked whether they feel like a boy, girl, or something else. If participants said, 'something else', then they were asked whether they are neither a boy nor a girl, both a boy and a girl, whether their gender changes, or if they do not know.

[b]Parent political ideology was rated on a scale range from 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). The current sample's political ideology ranges from 1 to 5.

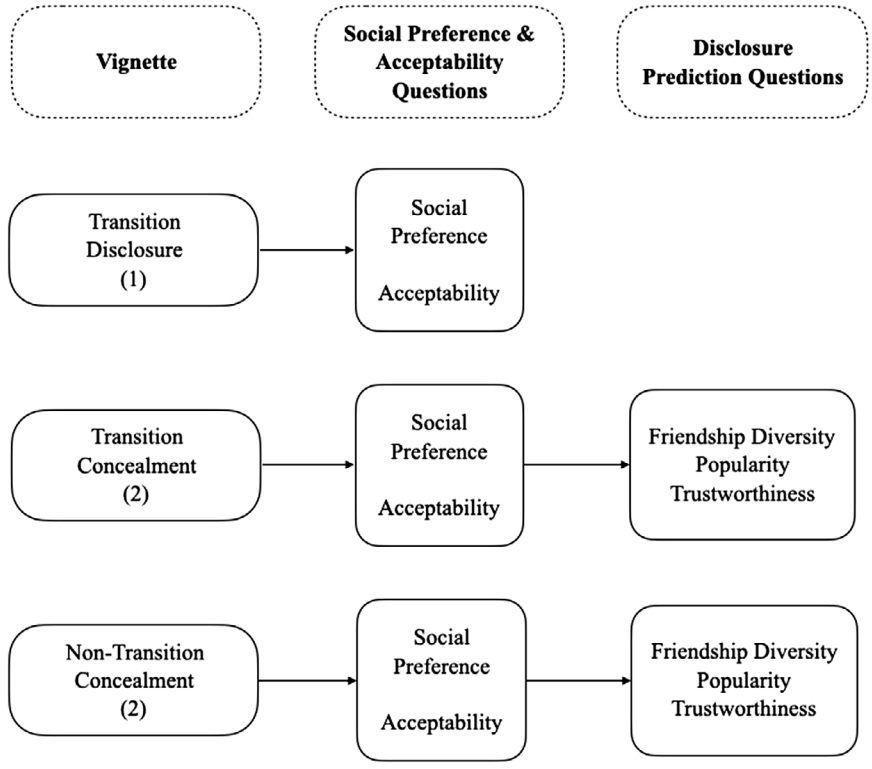

FIGURE 1 Method overview diagram. *Note*: Participants received five vignettes: Transition disclosure (1), transition concealment (2) and non-transition concealment (3). Each child received the transition disclosure vignette first, and we randomized the presentation order of the four concealment vignettes. After each vignette, participants received two questions: Social preference followed by acceptability. After these questions, for the four concealment vignettes only, participants received three disclosure prediction questions in randomized order: Friend diversity, popularity and trustworthiness.

Procedure

Overview

We structured the study in a vignette format, consisting of three phases presented in fixed order for all participants (described in further detail below): the *vignette* introduction, the *social preference and acceptability* questions, and the *disclosure prediction* questions. The vignettes introduced participants to target characters in three types of scenarios (outlined below): *Transition disclosure*, *transition concealment* and *non-transition concealment* (see Figure 1).

We tested participants individually on Zoom, via Qualtrics' survey platform. Parents gave informed consent to have their children participate, and children provided verbal assent. An experimenter guided children through a larger battery of measures, which included the measures in this paper.

Scale introduction

First, the experimenter introduced participants to two scales. The first was a *social preference* scale that depicted six cartoon faces with varying degrees of expression from most negative (1 = *Really Really Don't Like*) to most positive (6 = *Really Really Like)*. The second was an *Acceptability* scale that depicted five images of cartoon thumbs ranging from two red thumbs down (1 = *Totally Not Okay*) to two green thumbs up (5 = *Totally Okay*). To familiarize participants with the scales, the experimenter led them through two

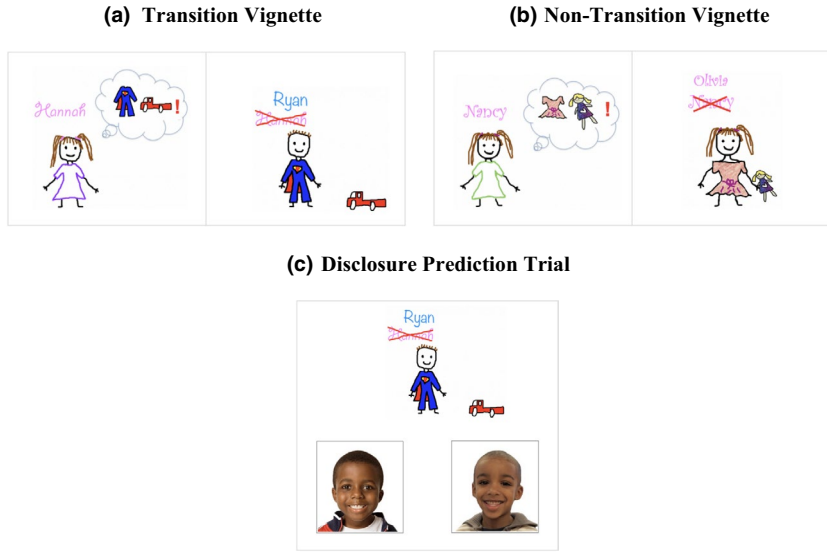

FIGURE 2 *Note*: Example stimuli from the transition (a) and non-transition (b) vignettes and disclosure prediction questions (c). On disclosure prediction questions the experimenter stated: "Ryan decides to tell someone his name used to be Hannah. Who do you think Ryan would share his story with?"

task-unrelated practice items per scale. If participants selected incorrectly, the experimenter provided corrective feedback.

Vignettes

Experimenters read five vignettes to participants, three about transgender and two about cisgender, targets. Of these, one transgender vignette described the target's social *transition disclosure*, two transgender vignettes described the targets' *transition concealment*, and two cisgender vignettes described the targets' *non-transition concealment*. We use the term *target modality* to differentiate between *transition* and *non-transition* vignettes. Following each vignette, children responded to one social preference, and one acceptability rating question. Additionally, for the four concealment vignettes only (*transition* and *non-transition concealment*), children responded to three disclosure prediction questions described below.

Vignettes featured descriptions of each target across two time periods, first depicted in gender stereotypical clothing with a common gendered name and described as having either a boy or girl body at birth—congruent with their *initial* gender appearance and name (e.g. a child named Hannah, depicted in a dress, described as having a girl body). Next, the experimenter described the target's gender identity experience in childhood and their preferred toys and clothing. For all *transition* vignettes, these were incongruent with the target's initial presentation (e.g. 'When Hannah was a kid, she felt like a boy…she only wanted to play with superhero costumes…'; see Figure 2a); for all *non-transition* vignettes, descriptions were congruent with initial presentation (see Figure 2b).

Next, each target expressed a desire to their parents to (1) change their name to one that was either gender inconsistent (*transition* vignettes) or consistent (*non-transition* vignettes) with their given name, and (2) either change (*transition* vignettes) or maintain (*non-transition* vignettes) their gender identifier and appearance (e.g. *transition* vignette: 'Hannah also wanted to change her name to Ryan, be called a boy, and cut her hair short'). In all vignettes, the child's parents agreed to call them by their new name; additionally, in the *transition* vignettes, the parents agreed to the child's social transition. The target's parents then asked if they planned to tell their peers at school about their old name, to which the target

indicated whether they planned to disclose or conceal; for *transition* vignettes, this decision also indicated whether the target chose to disclose or conceal transitioning.

Social preference and acceptability

Following each vignette introduction, children rated how much they liked and accepted each target using the two scales previously described.

Disclosure prediction

After *transition concealment* and *non-transition concealment* vignettes, children received three *disclosure prediction* questions, in which the experimenter asked the participant to pretend that the target decided to tell someone at school about their name change months later. Participants predicted whom the target would disclose to from among a pair of peers defined by one of three attribute dimensions across questions: *Friend diversity*, *popularity* and *trustworthiness*.

Each question depicted two peers on either side of the screen (see Figure 2c) and began with an informative prompt stating that kids vary along one of the dimensions (e.g. *Friend diversity*: 'Some kids have a lot of different kinds of friends and other kids have a lot of the same kinds of friends'). Afterward, the experimenter told participants about each peers' attributes. On *friend diversity* questions, participants learned that one of the two peers had a non-diverse friend group (e.g. 'This kid is friends with a lot of the same kinds of kids. This kid's friends are girls who have always been called by girl names and dressed in girl clothes'.); whereas the other peer had a diverse friend group (e.g. 'This kid is friends with a lot of different kinds of kids. Some are girls who have always been called by girl names and dressed in girl clothes, and others are girls who used to be called by boy names and dressed in boy clothes'.). On *popularity* questions, participants learned that one peer had a large friend group (e.g. 'This kid has a lot of friends; this kid is popular'); whereas the other peer did not have a large friend group (e.g. 'This kid only has a few friends; this kid is not very popular'). On *trustworthiness* questions, participants learned that one peer was not good at keeping secrets (e.g. 'When she finds something out, she tells a lot of other people about it'); whereas the other peer was good at keeping secrets (e.g. 'When she finds something out, she does not tell anyone about it').

Next, the experimenter reminded participants about the target, who was depicted on the screen above their peers with a reminder about their name change (e.g. 'Remember how Ryan used to be called Hannah, but now he's called Ryan'?). The experimenter then explained that neither peer knew about their name change yet, and asked participants to select whom among the peers the target might disclose to. Participants could choose one, neither, or both peers as confidants.

Design

Across participants, we randomized peer position and the order of attribute dimension questions (e.g. *friend diversity*, *popularity*, *trustworthiness*); we counter-balanced which attribute type each peer was paired with (e.g. trustworthy vs. untrustworthy).

The five vignettes resulted in participants responding to a maximum of five *social preference* and *acceptability* questions apiece; the three *disclosure prediction* questions following each of the four *concealment* vignettes resulted in participants responding to a maximum of 12 *disclosure prediction* questions with 24 confidant selection opportunities.

RESULTS

We analysed data from all children who completed any portion of the task in accordance with the pre-registration (https://osf.io/4zuda/?view_only=a66693d50a6d4afaac07ee0c82ffa946), except when the inclusion norms for the broader project indicated otherwise (see http://osf.io/ypzg9). A series of sensitivity power analyses using G*power 3.1 were conducted for each analysis below, indicating that the effect sizes observed were generally detectable at 80% power given each analytic sample size, with detectable effect sizes ranging from .02 to .03. However, it should be noted that our analyses were conducted with unequal sample sizes across groups. Thus, caution is warranted in interpreting and generalizing our findings.

Attitudes towards transition disclosure

To determine participants' attitudes towards transition disclosure, specifically their social preference and acceptability ratings on the *transition disclosure* vignette, we conducted two sets of analyses.

Social preference and acceptability

A series of one-sample *t*-tests were conducted within each participant group, comparing participants' acceptance of transition disclosure to the acceptability scale's midpoint (3). All participant groups were generally accepting of transition disclosure, $ps < .001$.

One-sample *t*-tests revealed that all participant groups liked targets who disclosed their transition at levels above the social preference scale's midpoint (3.5), $ps < .001$ (see Table 2 for detailed statistics).

Participant group comparisons

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing participant groups' acceptance of transition disclosure did not result in statistically significant group differences.

Similarly, when conducting the same analysis on participants' social preference for a target who disclosed their transition, there were no statistically significant group differences (see Table 3 for detailed statistics).

Attitudes towards transition concealment

The same sets of analyses described above were used for evaluating attitudes towards transgender targets' concealment across *Transition concealment* vignettes.

Social preference and acceptability

One-sample *t*-tests examined participants' acceptance of transition concealment relative to the acceptability scale's midpoint (3). All participant groups reported acceptance at rates above the midpoint, $ps < .001$.

Moreover, a series of one-sample *t*-tests comparing children's social preferences to the social preference scale's midpoint (3.5) similarly revealed that all three participant groups generally liked the target who concealed their transition, $ps < .001$ (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 Full statistics for comparisons to the midpoint of the acceptability and social preference scales.

	Transition disclosure					Transition concealment					Non-transition concealment				
Participant group	***M***	***SD***	**df**	***t***	**Cohen's *d***	***M***	***SD***	**df**	***t***	**Cohen's *d***	***M***	***SD***	**df**	***t***	**Cohen's *d***
Acceptability															
Gender diverse	4.56	0.94	125	18.63	1.66	4.71	0.66	121	28.82	2.61	4.53	0.85	122	19.89	1.79
Sibling	4.57	0.89	62	13.97	1.76	4.41	1.03	61	10.83	1.38	4.41	1.09	62	10.32	1.30
Unrelated cisgender	4.46	0.94	113	16.50	1.55	4.44	0.84	111	18.16	1.72	4.30	1.11	111	12.48	1.18
Social preference															
Gender diverse	4.63	0.99	125	12.83	1.14	4.68	1.04	122	12.61	1.14	4.46	0.96	120	11.06	1.01
Sibling	4.55	1.11	61	7.43	0.94	4.52	1.09	60	7.35	0.94	4.54	1.01	61	8.12	1.03
Unrelated cisgender	4.43	1.12	112	8.88	0.84	4.44	1.00	111	9.90	0.94	4.47	0.91	109	11.11	1.06

Note: All results above are significant at $p < .001$.

TABLE 3 Participant group comparisons for transition disclosure and concealment analyses.

	Effect	Result
Acceptability		
Transition disclosure	Participant group	$F(2,300) = 0.50, p = .609, \eta_p^2 < .01$
Transition concealment		$\mathbf{F(2,293) = 4.20, p = .016, \eta_p^2 = .03}$
Social preference		
Transition disclosure	Participant group	$F(2,298) = 1.07, p = .346, \eta_p^2 = .01$
Transition concealment		$F(2,293) = 1.68, p = .188, \eta_p^2 = .01$

Note: Means and standard deviations for participant groups across each target modality (i.e., disclosure and concealment) can be found in Table 2. Bolded values indicate significant results.

Participant group comparisons

A one-way ANOVA on participants' acceptance of a target's transition concealment revealed a statistically significant difference between participant groups, $F(2,293) = 4.20, p = .016, \eta_p^2 = .03$. A Tukey post hoc comparison test revealed that gender-diverse participants ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.66$), compared to unrelated cisgender participants ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.84$, $p = .034$) were more accepting of a target's decision to conceal their transition. Siblings' acceptance of transition concealment ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.03$) did not differ significantly from unrelated cisgender children ($p = .969$) or gender-diverse participants ($p = .052$).

A separate one-way ANOVA on participants' social preferences for targets who concealed a transition showed no statistically significant group differences (see Table 3).

Attitudes towards transition versus non-transition concealment

We conducted two 3 (participant group: gender diverse, sibling, unrelated cisgender) x 2 (target modality: transition concealment, non-transition concealment) repeated measures ANOVAs on participants' acceptance of and social preference for concealment in transgender (*transition concealment*) relative to cisgender (*non-transition concealment*) targets.

Acceptability

When examining participants' acceptance of transition relative to non-transition concealment, we found a significant main effect of target modality, $F(1,291) = 5.20, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Generally, although participants judged both transition and non-transition concealment positively, with average ratings significantly above the midpoint of the scale, participants were more accepting of transition ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.82$), over non-transition concealment ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.01$).

There was no statistically significant main effect of participant group or interaction (see Table 4 for detailed statistics).

Social preference

When examining participants' social preference for transition relative to non-transition concealers, we observed a significant interaction between participant group and target modality, $F(2,286) = 3.85$, $p = .022$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Post hoc Bonferroni comparisons showed that gender-diverse participants reported liking transition concealers ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.04$) more than non-transition concealers ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.96$, $p = .006$). Unrelated cisgender participants did not differ in their liking of transition concealers

TABLE 4 Transition vs. non-transition concealment acceptability and social preference.

	Acceptability			Social preference		
	M	***SD***	**Result**	***M***	***SD***	**Result**
Participant group	—	—	$F(2,291) = 2.56$, $p = .079$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$	—	—	$F(2,286) = 0.54$, $p = .583$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Gender Diverse	4.62	0.76	—	4.57	1.00	—
Sibling	4.41	1.05	—	4.53	1.05	—
Unrelated cisgender	4.37	0.98	—	4.45	0.96	—
Target modality			**$F(1,291) = 5.20$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$**	—	—	$F(1,286) = 0.87$, $p = .351$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Transition concealment	4.55	0.82	—	4.56	1.04	—
Non-transition concealment	4.42	1.01	—	4.48	0.95	—
Participant group by Target modality	—	—	$F(2,291) = 1.21$, $p = .300$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$	—	—	**$F(2,286) = 3.85$, $p = .022$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$**

Note: An '—'indicates a non-applicable value. Bolded values indicate significant results.

($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.00$) compared to non-transition concealers ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.91$, $p = .409$). Siblings did not differ in their liking of transition concealers ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.09$) compared to non-transition concealers ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.01$, $p = .916$), either. There was no statistically significant main effect of the participant group or target modality (see Table 4).

Disclosure prediction

We analysed data for each of the 305 participants, except two children who did not provide data for any of the 12 disclosure prediction questions.

To assess how often participants expected targets to disclose their name change based on participant group and target modality, we conducted a 3 (participant group: gender diverse, sibling, unrelated cisgender) × 2 (target modality: transition concealment, non-transition concealment) repeated measures ANOVA with the number of disclosure predictions as the DV.

Neither the main effect nor the interaction was significant (see Table 5 for detailed statistics).

Confidant selection prediction

To assess whether participant group, attribute dimension and target modality predicted children's likelihood of selecting a peer they thought the target would disclose to, we conducted a 3 (participant group: gender diverse, sibling, unrelated cisgender) × 3 (attribute dimension: friend diversity, popularity, trustworthiness) × 2 (target modality: transition concealment, non-transition concealment) repeated measures ANOVA with the number of times participants selected the predicted peer on each attribute dimension as the DV. We dummy coded the predicted peer variable such that selections of diverse, popular and trustworthy peers were '1', and selections of nondiverse, unpopular, and untrustworthy peers were '0'.

We observed a significant main effect of target modality, $F(1,302) = 25.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$. Participants selected the predicted peer following trans targets' concealment ($M = .64$, $SD = 0.15$) more than cisgender targets' concealment ($M = .59$, $SD = .16$), $t(302) = 6.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.125$.

We also observed a significant main effect of attribute dimension, $F(2,302) = 1577.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .497$. Bonferroni-corrected t-tests showed that on trustworthiness ($M = 0.92$, $SD = 0.18$) questions, participants were more likely to select the predicted peer for the target to disclose to than on popularity

TABLE 5 Full statistics for disclosure prediction analyses.

	Statistical values					
	M	***SD***	**df**	***F***	***p***	η_p^2
Participant group	—	—	2	.387	.679	<.001
Gender diverse	.55	.16	—	—	—	—
Sibling	.54	.23	—	—	—	—
Unrelated cisgender	.55	.17	—	—	—	—
Target modality	—	—	1	.953	.329	<.001
Transition concealment	.54	.15	—	—	—	—
Non-transition concealment	.55	.15	—	—	—	—
Participant group by Target modality	—	—	2	.003	.997	<.001

Note: Full statistics for the disclosure prediction analyses. There were no main effects or an interaction. An '—' indicates a non-applicable value.

questions, $t(302) = 44.03$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.50$, or friend diversity questions, $t(302) = 6.39$, $p < .001$, $d = .39$. On friend diversity questions ($M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.19$) participants were more likely to select the predicted peer for the target to disclose to than on popularity questions ($M = 0.14$, $SD = 0.19$), $t(302) = 29.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$.

Finally, we observed an interaction between attribute dimension and target modality, $F(2,302) = 41.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .025$. Bonferroni-corrected t-tests revealed that participants were more likely to select a peer with diverse friends for the target to disclose to when the target was transgender, concealing their transition ($M = .89$, $SD = 0.32$) rather than cisgender, concealing their name change ($M = .67$, $SD = 0.47$), $t(151) = 8.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.38$.

No other main effects or interactions were significant (see Table 6 for detailed statistics).

DISCUSSION

We investigated 6- to 11-year-old cisgender and gender-diverse children's attitudes about concealment and disclosure of trans peers' social transitions. Specifically, we assessed children's social preference for and acceptance of peers who concealed or disclosed their identities, and their predictions about whether, and to whom, those peers might disclose their identities.

Regarding transition disclosure, we found that participants liked and accepted trans peers who disclosed, and those who concealed, their transitions regardless of participants' own identity group. Thus, children may generally support trans peers' decisions to conceal or disclose. Although children were positive towards both transition disclosure and concealment, our findings suggest some participant group differences in attitudes about transition concealment. When directly comparing our three participant groups, we found that compared to unrelated cisgender participants and siblings, gender-diverse children were more accepting of trans peers' transition concealment, suggesting that while trans children who conceal their social transition may generally find support from peers, they might experience increased support from gender-diverse peers. While collective support from peers, regardless of gender identity, can contribute to a positive environment for trans children, our findings suggest that other gender-diverse peers may be an especially invaluable source of support.

When comparing children's perceptions of transition versus non-transition concealers, we found that only gender-diverse participants reported a greater liking of the former. Gender-diverse children likely have a deeper understanding of what social transition concealment entails, and such insights could have led to a greater liking for trans over cisgender concealers. Importantly, we observed that regardless of their own gender identity, when comparing transition and non-transition concealment, children expressed more acceptance for concealment of a social transition than a mere name change. This contrasts

TABLE 6 Full statistics for confidant selection analyses.

	Statistical values					
	M	***SD***	**df**	***F***	***p***	η_p^2
Participant group	—	—	2	x	.437	<.001
Gender diverse	.61	.16	—	—	—	—
Sibling	.63	.23	—	—	—	—
Unrelated cisgender	.61	.17	—	—	—	—
Target modality	—	—	**1**	**25.13**	**<.001**	**.008**
Transition concealment	.64	.15	—	—	—	—
Non-transition concealment	.59	.16	—	—	—	—
Attribute dimension	—	—	**2**	**1577.54**	**<.001**	**.497**
Friend diversity	.78	.19	—	—	—	—
Popularity	.14	.19	—	—	—	—
Trustworthiness	.92	.18	—	—	—	—
Participant group by Target modality	—	—	2	1.14	.321	<.001
Participant group by Attribute dimension	—	—	4	1.22	.301	.002
Attribute dimension by Target modality	—	—	**2**	**41.10**	**<.001**	**.025**
Participant group by Target modality by Attribute dimension	—	—	4	1.64	.161	.002

Note: Full statistics for the confidant selection analyses. An '—' indicates a non-applicable value. Bolded values indicate significant results.

with prior work showing that cisgender children are less favourable of transgender than cisgender peers (Gülgöz et al., 2018) and demonstrates that children's attitudes differ by concealment type. While it appears that children deem discretion as more appropriate in the context of social transitions, future work should address what mechanisms drive this effect, as children's acceptance of transition concealment may stem from respect for their trans peers' decisions, concern about the appropriateness of discussing trans identities, or something else.

Disclosure predictions and confidant selection

For social transitions and name change concealments children in all participant groups predicted that transgender and cisgender targets would select similar numbers of confidants. While this may seem like children lacked understanding of the sensitive nature of trans identity disclosure, children's patterns of selecting whom a target would confide in reflected more sophisticated thinking. Participants in all groups took the attribute dimensions into account and made differential predictions based on the potential confidants' unique characteristics. Participants generally predicted socially desirable peers as confidants more often when they learned about potential confidants' trustworthiness, than about their friends' diversity or their popularity. This indicates that children regard trustworthiness as a critical attribute when determining whether peers should disclose, and that they deem sharing personal information as a matter requiring other's care and sensitivity.

Perhaps most important, children were generally more likely to select the socially desirable peer as a confidant when considering trans children's transition disclosures rather than cisgender children's non-transition name change disclosures, and this was regardless of which attributes defined the pair of peers. This finding provides evidence that children regard distinct kinds of self-disclosure differently, indicating more sensitivity around trans identity disclosure than less consequential types.

Finally, children were more likely to predict that trans (vs. cisgender) targets would disclose to their peer with diverse friends. Children may have thought that those who already have relationships with gender-diverse peers would better support trans disclosers, perhaps understanding which

responses transgender children prefer. Children's own gender identity did not predict their confidant selections, and this may be because participants assessed third-person cases rather than their own experiences.

Limitations

Our study provides the first evidence of cisgender and gender-diverse children's attitudes towards concealment and disclosure of transgender identity. However, our findings are limited in several ways.

First, our unrelated cisgender participants were recruited from a predominantly liberal US city; moreover, we did not collect data regarding these participants' knowledge of (or prior experience with) trans individuals. It is unclear whether cisgender children from different demographics (e.g. less liberal US cities), or with varying levels of knowledge of or experience with trans individuals, would perform similarly.

Given our study's design, we were unable to compare children's acceptance of and preference for transition concealment versus disclosure. We only showed children one transition disclosure vignette due to time constraints, whereas we presented two transition concealment vignettes; thus, we are unable to know whether children preferred trans peers to conceal or disclose their identities.

We also acknowledge that our stimuli were depicted with positive facial expressions at the time that children rated them, and this could have contributed to children's general positivity towards all target types. However, cartoon stimuli with positive expressions are commonly used in developmental studies, and images from the present work have not elicited positivity bias in past studies (e.g. Fine et al., 2024). Thus, we cautiously maintain that children were genuinely accepting of transgender targets who concealed and disclosed, alike. Varying the stimulus type will allow future researchers to directly assess the impact of facial expression on children's social ratings.

Finally, we based participant groupings on children's gender identities when they began the longitudinal study, which for most children was years prior to data collection for the current study. A handful of children's identities changed from the time they began the study to the day they completed the current measures (e.g. a sibling who was initially cisgender and later gender diverse).

CONCLUSION

To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine cisgender and gender-diverse children's attitudes about transgender identity concealment and disclosure. Our findings suggest that children generally support social transition concealment and do not view it as improper or misleading. Still, 6- to 11-year-olds are sensitive to the potential costs associated with transition disclosure, particularly to untrustworthy peers. Importantly, our results suggest that the aversion towards identity concealment is generally seen among cisgender adults (Le Forestier et al., 2022; Totton et al., 2023; Totton & Rios, 2021) is not inevitable. Our findings are promising as they establish that children across the identity spectrum were generally approving of their trans peers and how they chose to manage their identities. An open question worth future exploration is whether increasing cisgender children's awareness of their trans peers' identity-related decision-making may improve cisgender children's evaluations of their transgender peers. Future work is also needed to compare children's attitudes towards those who conceal and disclose a transgender identity to further shed light on the social consequences of managing a transgender identity in childhood.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Daniel J. Alonso: Conceptualization; methodology; data curation; formal analysis; writing – original draft. **Ashley E. Jordan:** Conceptualization; methodology; data curation; investigation; formal analysis; writing – original draft. **Selin Gülgöz:** Conceptualization; methodology; supervision; writing – review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no author conflicts of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/4zuda?view_only=a66693d50a6d4afaac07ee0c82ffa946).

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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