



香港教育大學

The Education University  
of Hong Kong

# A Cultural Snapshot of Trans Families in Hong Kong

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Gender Odyssey, San Diego

2019 Aug 01

# Cultural & Historic Background (Chinese) ◀

## Cultural / Historic Understanding / Perception of Crossing-gender from Icons or Real Life People

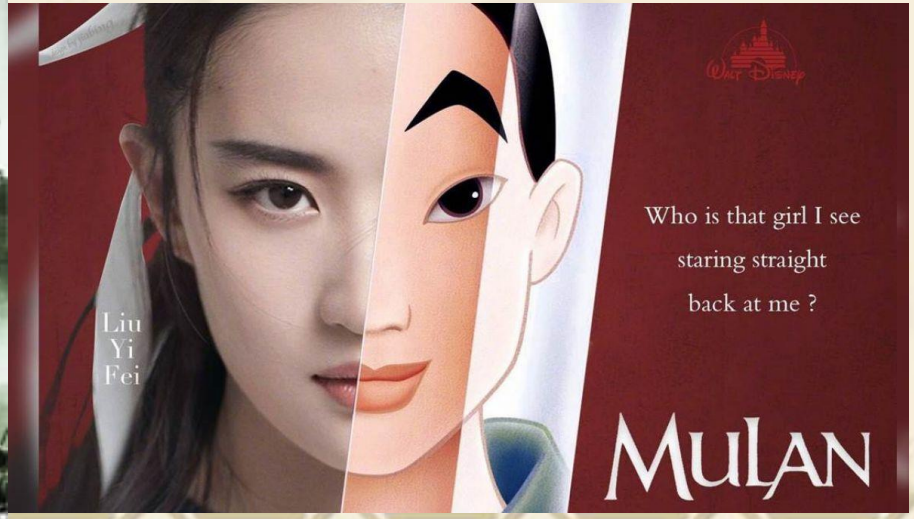
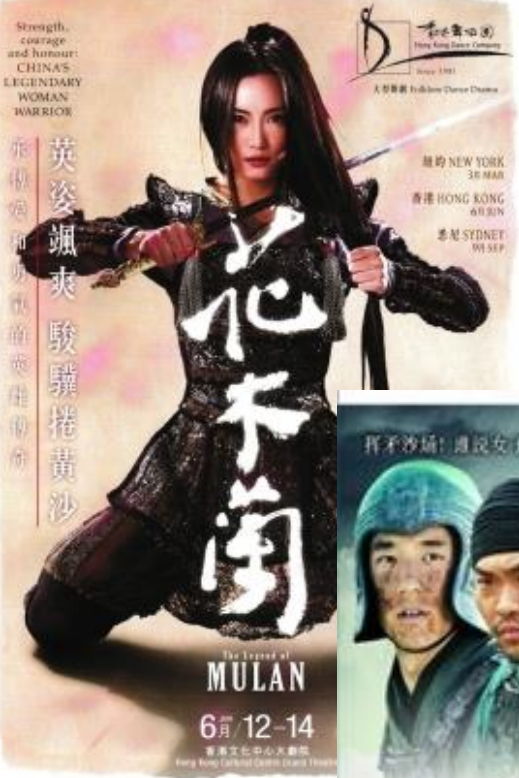
- ❖ Mulan (daughter pretends to be son for military service)
- ❖ A girl pretend to be a boy to study / schooling (Butterfly Lovers)
- ❖ “Dan” performers to perform as female roles in traditional Chinese opera (where only males are allowed to perform)
- ❖ Male favor of the Emperors and the aristocracies
- ❖ Eunuch serving the royal family
- ❖ In some other stories:
  - where a man pretend to be a woman for sexual misconduct
  - where a man suddenly became a woman and had a life experience
  - where a daughter became a son for the good conducts of her parents
  - where a man pretends to be a woman as secret agent (in 1957)

## Language (Chinese – Mandarin / Cantonese)

- ❖ Spoken - Not gendered as the English pronouns, or the French grammar
- ❖ Written - gendered in the past ~100 years, but not strictly follow



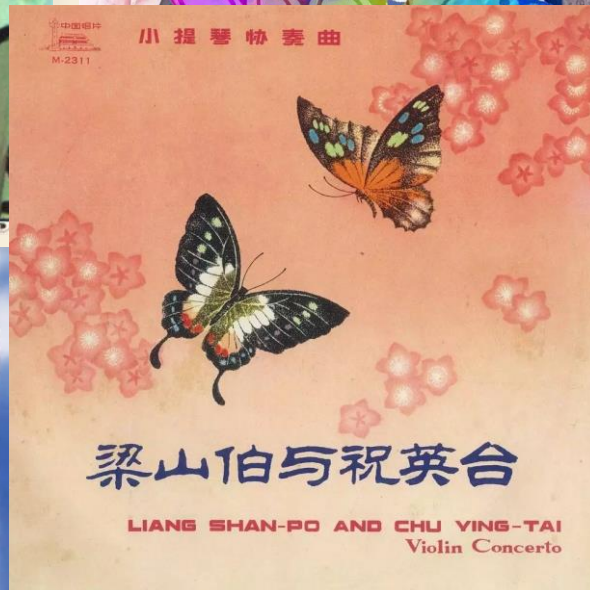
1998



<https://zh.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1172471>, 2009

2020





Butterfly Lovers /  
Liang Shan-Po &  
Chu Ying-Tai





# Film - Farewell my Concubine (1993)



# Leslie Cheung (Portraying "Dan" in Chinese Opera)



# Cultural Values (Chinese) ◀

## - Filial Piety

Mulan - being praised for her sacrifice and service to the family

Passing the family line is important

- the worst un-filial conduct is to have no descendants
- greater pressure on sons, and hence transgender women

## - Importance and privilege to have schooling

For male / son

For the wealthy families

## - Reward for good conducts

Daughter became son (to pass the family line) for the good conducts of her parents / father.

## - Gender roles and status are distinct between:

Male / female

Son / Daughter



# Contemporary Understanding (80s–90s) ◀

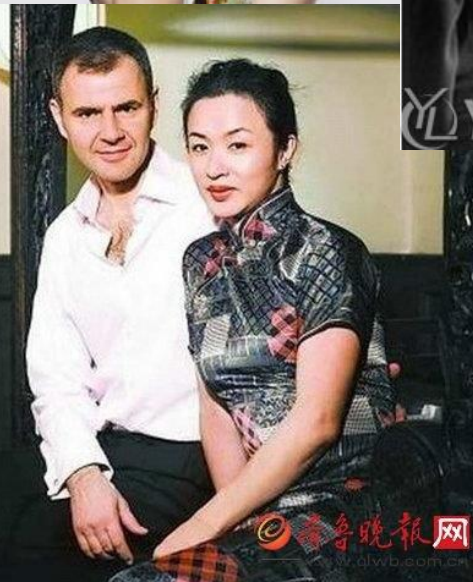
- Transsexual / Cabaret performers in Thailand
- Ladyboy sex workers in Thailand
- Due to blooming of tourism (an activity in set tour)





# Contemporary Understanding (80s-now) ◀

- Transsexual or cross-gender artistes who appear in media such as in social affairs programme (due to emergence of SRS) artistes / celebrities - 金星 (Jin Xing), 李宇春 (Li Yuchun) (Mainland)
  - Anita Mui, Leslie Cheung, 福祿壽 (HK), etc.





# 金枝玉葉



Leslie Cheung

Anita Mui



**TAI SENG**  
Video Marketing  
泰盛影視市場推廣公司

HE'S A WOMAN, SHE'S A MAN

170 South Spruce Ave., Suite 200  
South San Francisco, CA 94080  
Tel: 415.871.8118  
Fax: 415.871.2392

Film – He's a Woman, She's a Man (1994)







Brigitte Lin

Film – The Legend of the Swordsman (1992)





Comedian Portrayal







❖ 藍寶石王子 (1953) (Japan) (Comic)





- ❖ F.Compo / 搞怪家庭 (北条 司) (1996) (Japan) (Comic)
- ❖ <http://www.verycd.com/topics/209022/>





- ❖ 半夢: 金星自傳 (2004) (China) (Book)
- ❖ <http://active.fembooks.com.tw/h25/h25.htm>





- ❖ 從母到友(狄娜)(2008)(香港)(Book)
- ❖ [http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20100402/00176\\_005.html](http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20100402/00176_005.html)





- ❖ 我是男校畢業的女生 (椿姬彩菜) (2009) (Japan) (Book)
- ❖ <http://www.suncolor.com.tw/event/ayana/index.html>
- ❖ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T19DmGN6j9I>





- ❖ Last Friends (2008) (Japan) (TV Drama – 11 Episodes)





- ❖ IS性別不明 (2011) (Japan) (TV Drama – 10 Episodes)
- ❖ About intersex characters
- ❖ <http://www.9tvb.com/vod/42619.html>
- ❖ [http://anstand-mrt.blogspot.hk/2011/09/blog-post\\_2800.html](http://anstand-mrt.blogspot.hk/2011/09/blog-post_2800.html)





- ❖ 當他們認真編織時 (2017) (Japan) (Film)
- ❖ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJkmVzWjgSk>





- ❖ 美麗拳王 (2003) (Thailand) (Based on true story) (Film)
- ❖ <http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/jw!nzG6wyyFHw5ivd2yZA--/article?mid=380>
- ❖ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdGRspj9A7U>





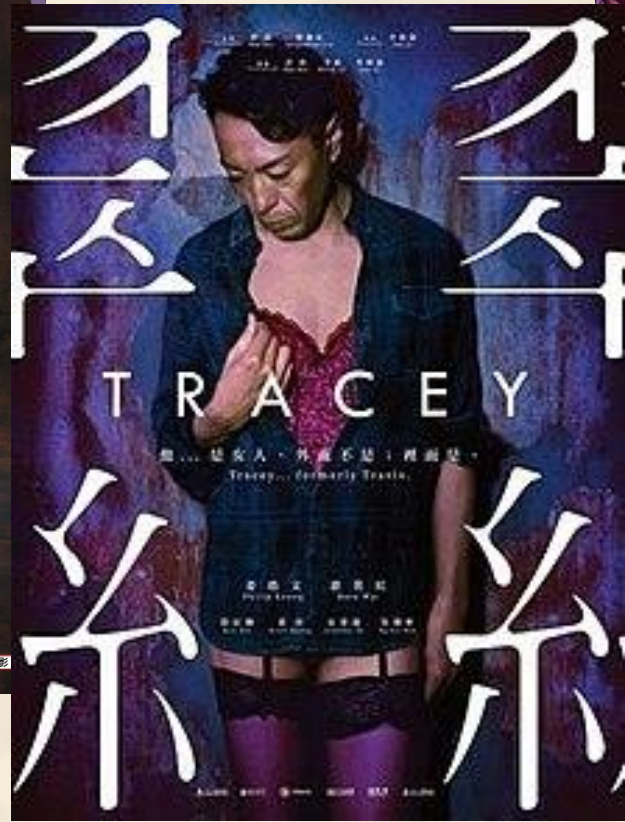
金馬影后惠英紅繼【血觀音】再次挑戰話題之作  
第 55 屆金馬獎最佳男女配角雙料入圍

翠絲  
TRACEY

每個家庭背後都有一個秘密  
不一樣 又怎樣？



姜皓文 惠英紅  
11.16 站在愛這邊



翠絲

TRACEY

《翠絲》再接再厲 獲邀成為  
香港亞洲電影節2018 開幕電影



❖ 翠絲 Tracey (2018) (Hong Kong) (Film)

❖ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rZO01w8vgw>



# Contemporary Understanding (90s-now) ◀

- Influence from West & East Asia (esp. Japan)
  - Cross-dresser (CD) & Cosplay & Lolita
- Influence on different generations of TGNC persons
- Influence on the understanding of different people
  - e.g., scholar vs layman
- Different from South / South East Asia and the Pacific
  - e.g., Hijra, fa'afafine (cultural icon, non-binary)





# Situation for Trans/TGNC Persons in HK ◀

- Medical Support Available from Government Hospital
  - Psychiatry assessment
  - Hormones Replacement Therapy (HRT)
  - Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)
- **NO** anti-discrimination law based on Gender Identity or Expression
- Legal Gender Recognition under consultation
  - Currently only able to change gender on ID card after surgery
  - Not comprehensive
  - Initiated after the landmark court case – W case in 2013
    - > a transsexual woman won her right to marry her boyfriend
- Gender-neutral facilities **NOT** enough
  - E.g. toilet
- **NO** specific social service targeted to the trans community
  - Lack of funding resources
  - Only self-help/ community-based organisations
- **Lack of Related Education**
  - To general public & students at different school levels



# Medical Support ◀

- Multi-discipline support covered by public hospital:

  - Psychiatrist

  - Psychologist

  - Occupational Therapist/ Social Worker

  - Endocrinologist

  - Speech Therapist

  - Surgeon – Urology

    - Plastic Surgery

    - Gynecology

    - Otolaryngology

- Some disciplines available in private sector as well

- Mainly for adults, very limited support to underage

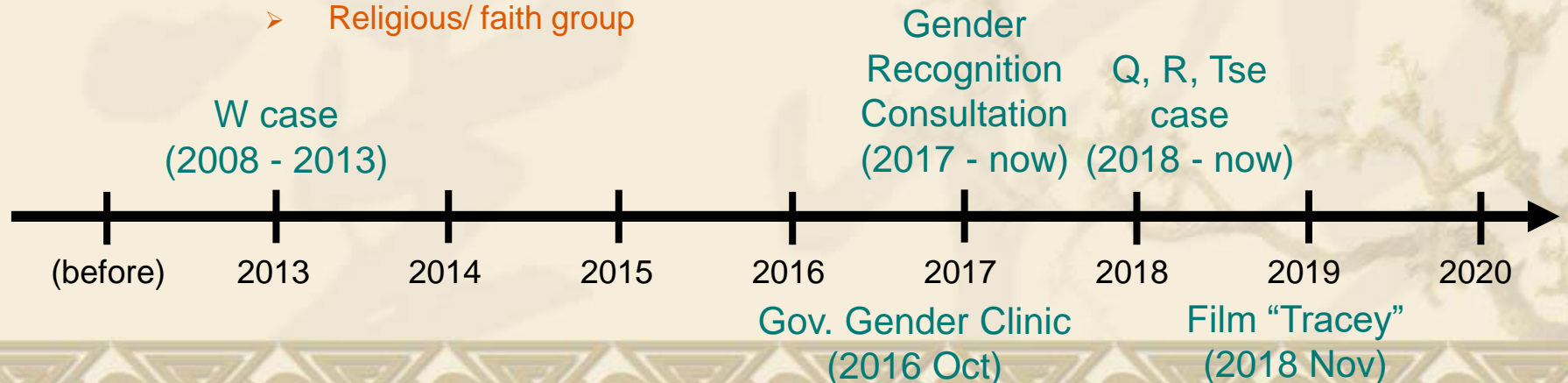
- Going overseas as alternative options

Concern on results and long queue



# Contrast with the US Context ◀

- No insurance coverage
- Lack of legal protection
- Lack of social awareness
  - Mixed with LG
- Lack of role models
- Lack of language and a holistic understanding
  - Outdated and not localised
  - Limited; non-binary just emerging; little people know about the term TGNC
  - Behind close-by areas/countries
- Lack of resources
  - Esp. for underage and non-binary
  - At school & work place
  - Religious/ faith group



# My MPhil Research on Parents of TGNC Persons

## DEFINITION:

- Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) persons “have a different gender identity and/or gender expression than their sex assigned at birth” (Katz-Wise, Budge, Orovecz, et al., p. 26-27)

## RESEARCH CONTEXT:

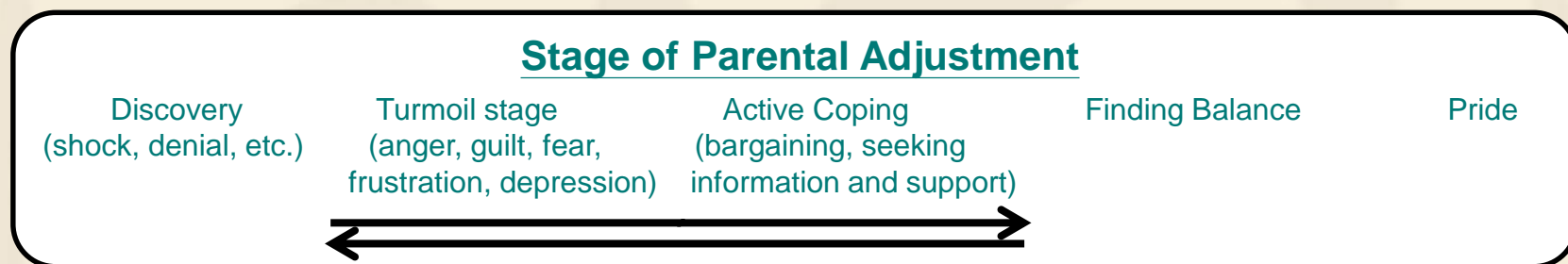
- ❖ The issues of TGNC persons are of emerging concerns and with greater acceptance in Hong Kong:
  - 1) A specialized clinic has been set-up in the public hospital in October 2016, and
  - 2) Preliminary consultation on the legislation of gender recognition has been conducted during July to December 2017 (Chu, 2016; Inter-departmental Working Group on Gender Recognition, 2017; “Wei Yuan Xia Yue”, 2016)

## RESEARCH PROBLEM:

- How do parents cope with the stress related to their TGNC child’s gender transition and how does that affect their parent-child relationship?



# Previous Theoretical Model



## Stage Model

- To represent the emotional and behavioural reactions of parents
- Based on Kubler-Ross' (1969) bereavement model upon losing a loved one who has died
- Not all family members, including parents, would go through all the stages, nor in a particular sequence or duration
- And parents may go back and forth between stages

(see also Ellis & Eriksen, 2002; Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996; Lev, 2004)

# Research Gap

- ❖ Lack specificity in explaining why some parents cope better than the others
  - ❧ How parents' adaptive coping may be achieved
- ❖ Mostly done on parents of TGNC children and adolescents, rarely on parents of TGNC adults
- ❖ Scarce research on family/parents of TGNC persons in Asia, especially in the Chinese context



# Research Questions

- 1) What is the essence of parents' coping experiences or strategies during their TGNC adolescent or adult child's gender transition, in terms of:
  - a) The stages they are at (i.e., emotional, perception of, and accepting or not)?
  - b) The changes emerging from their child's gender transition, such as having a new gender status and how they attend to/cope with it?
  - c) their parent-child relationship and relationship with others?
  - d) The adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies?

# Data Collection - Qualitative

## 1) Interview

- semi-structured interviews, in Cantonese, ~1-2 hrs
- convenient and purposeful sampling of informants
- recruitment: personal contact, TGNC persons, community organisation, helping professionals

Type of Informants (Hong Kong Chinese and local residence)	No. of Informants	Additional Informants	No. of Informants	Approx. no. of interviews
Parents of TGNC persons (their TGNC child >= 13 yrs old)	8	TGNC adult child of recruited parents	1*	9
TGNC persons**				2
Helping Professionals (psychiatrist/ social worker)				3
<b>Total</b>				<b>14</b>

\* interviews were conducted separately

\*\* whose parents could not be interviewed, yet their experience are perceived to be significant  
 - one informant was a trans-woman who has undergone transition in every aspect and whose parents had changed from unaccepting to accepting; another informant was a non-binary identified TGNC person.

## 2) Participant Observation

- ☞ Parents' support group (in a community organisation) – x2 times



# Theoretical Model – based on Relationship-focused Coping

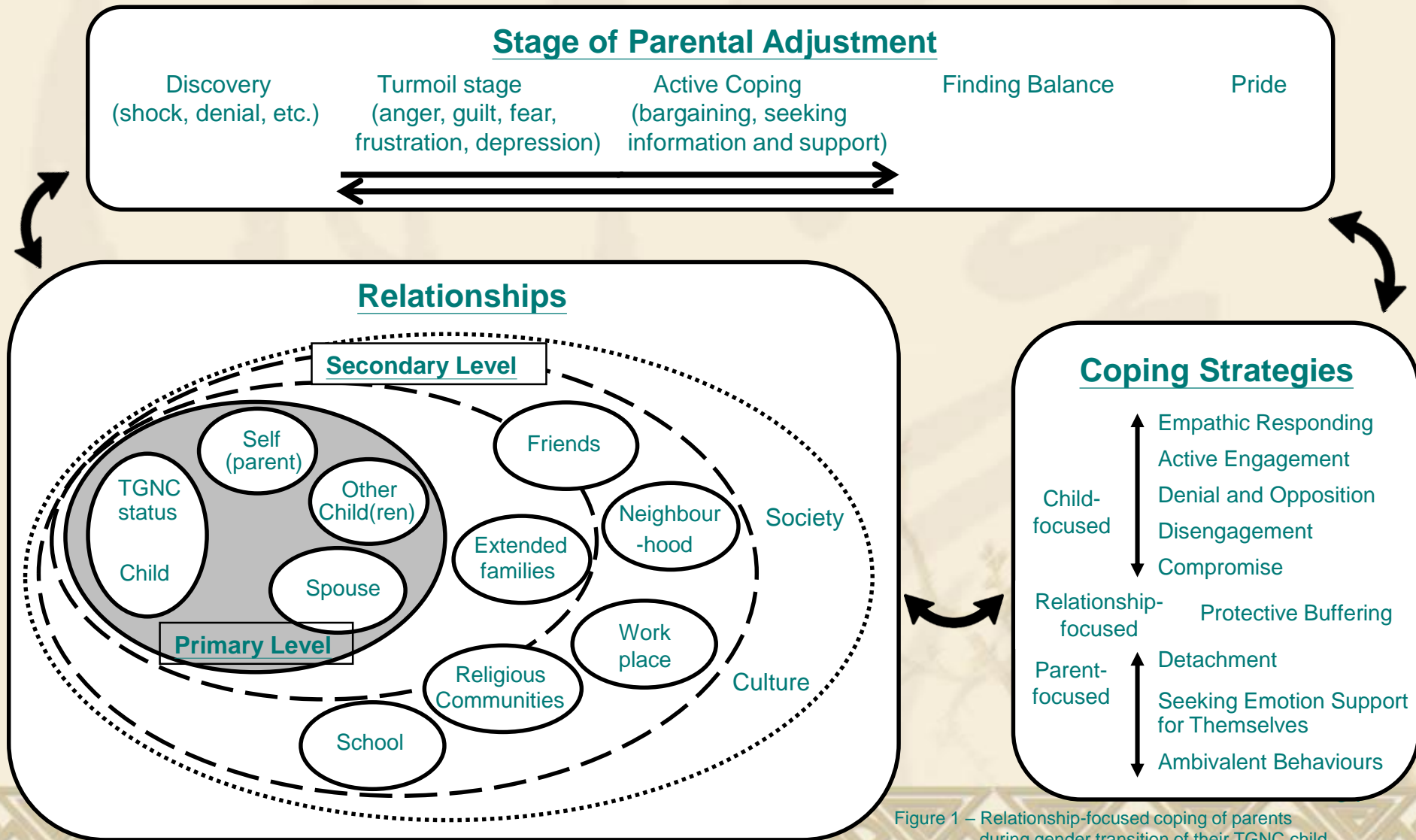
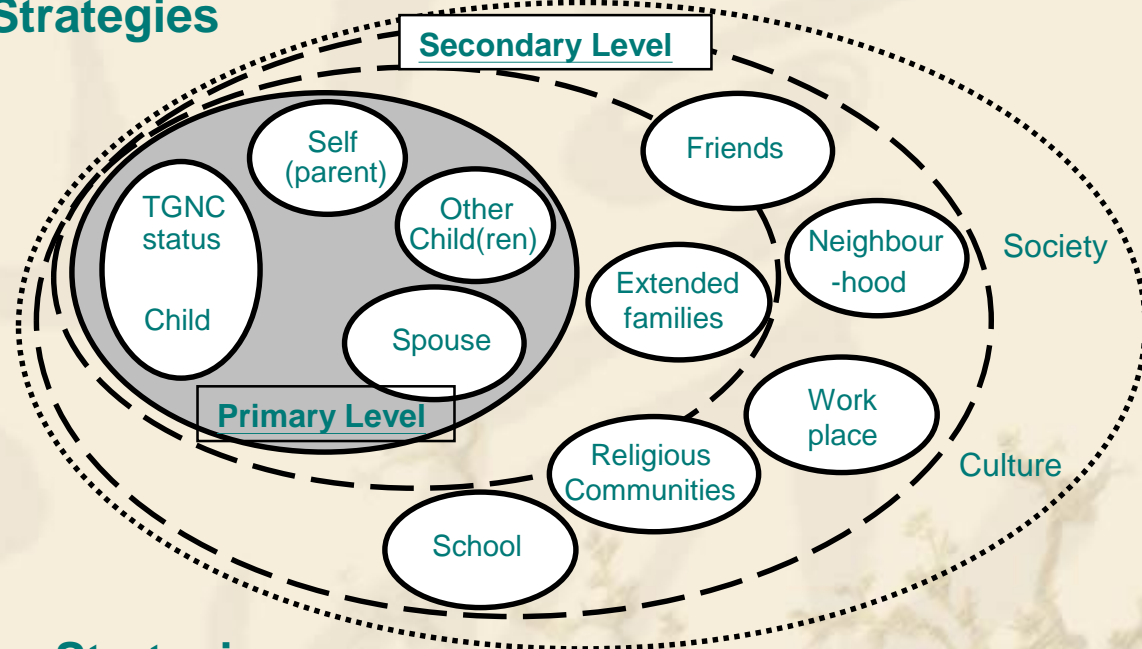


Figure 1 – Relationship-focused coping of parents during gender transition of their TGNC child

# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Primary Level Coping Strategies

- ❧ Empathic Responding
- ❧ Active Engagement
- ❧ Denial and Opposition
- ❧ Disengagement
- ❧ Compromise
- ❧ Protective Buffering
- ❧ Detachment
- ❧ Seeking Emotional Support for Themselves
- ❧ Ambivalent Behaviours



## ❖ Secondary Level Coping Strategies

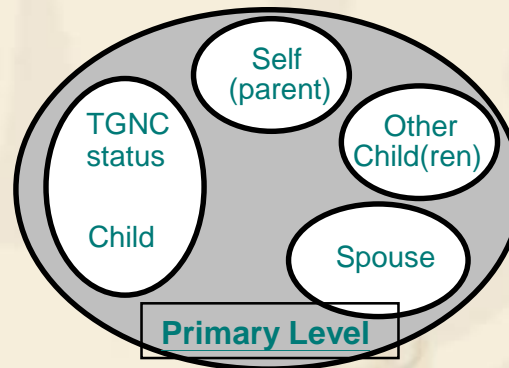
(based on relationship-focused coping, e.g., Coyne & Smith, 1991; DeLongis & O'Brien, 1990; Kramer, 1993, referring to O'Brien & DeLongis, 1991 and Vitaliano et al, 1988-89; Lee-Bagley, Preece & DeLongis, 2005; O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996)



# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Empathic Responding (Child/person-oriented)

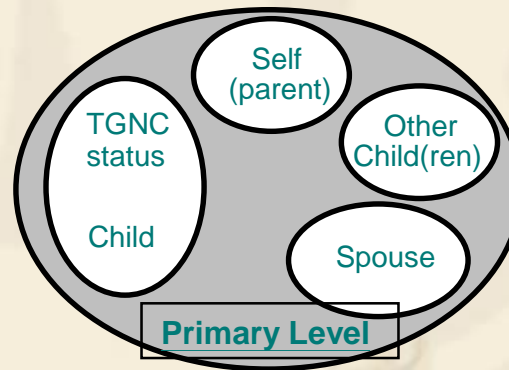
- ☞ Trying to understand child's feelings and concerns
- ☞ Imagining themselves in child's shoes
- ☞ Considering child's limitations
- ☞ Accepting child as they are now or will become
- ☞ Active listening and accompanying
- ☞ Trying to provide comfort to child
- ☞ Feeling painful for child's suffering or afraid of failing child
- ☞ Altruism (成全, "cheng quan" / "sing chyun")



# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Active Engagement (Task-person-oriented)

- ❧ Seeking information, resources and professional help
- ❧ Communicating with child in the problem-solving process
- ❧ Planful problem-solving
- ❧ Attending to new life changes
- ❧ Involving other family members in supporting child

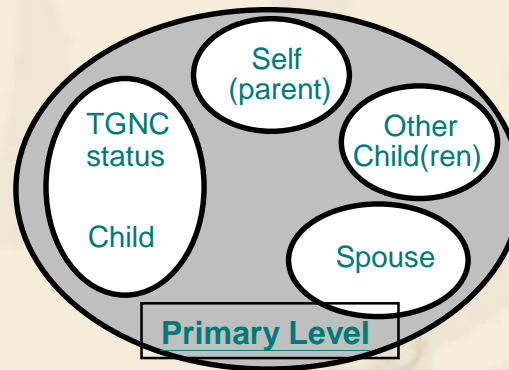




# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Denial and Opposition

- ❧ Finding ways to explain child's TGNC status
  - ❖ Boredom or influence by others
  - ❖ A phase in puberty or being rebellious
  - ❖ Not being trustful
  - ❖ Being too young
  - ❖ Mental health conditions, etc.
- ❧ Going against child's change or transition
  - ❖ Expressing disapproval
  - ❖ Criticising, verbal abuse
  - ❖ Confronting
- ❧ Pressing child to be assigned gender
- ❧ Isolating child
- ❧ Took it out on professionals



# Parental Coping Strategies

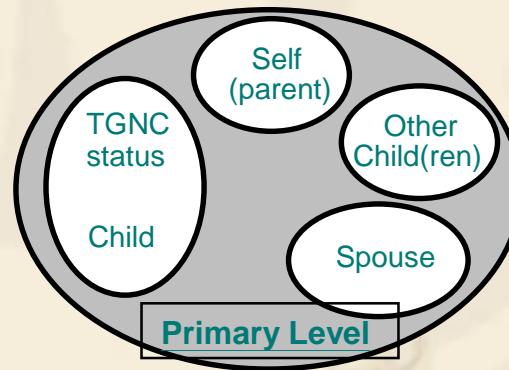
## ❖ Disengagement

❧ Ignoring child's behaviours or status

❧ Wishful thinking

❧ Interpersonal Withdrawal

- ❖ "Don't ask, don't tell"
- ❖ Give space to one another
- ❖ No influence over their child's TGNC status
- ❖ Your problem, your responsibility
- ❖ Division of labour or parental duties
- ❖ Do not care about the child
- ❖ Avoidance between both parent and child





# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ **Compromise**

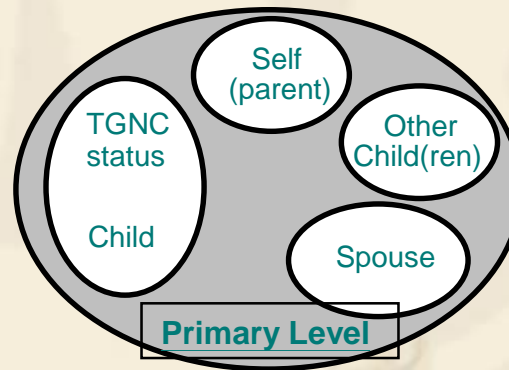
### ❧ **Bargaining**

- ❖ With their child
- ❖ With helping professionals

### ❧ **Tolerating or allowing things to develop**

- ❖ Scared of their child's self-harming behaviour
- ❖ No reason to reject or deny

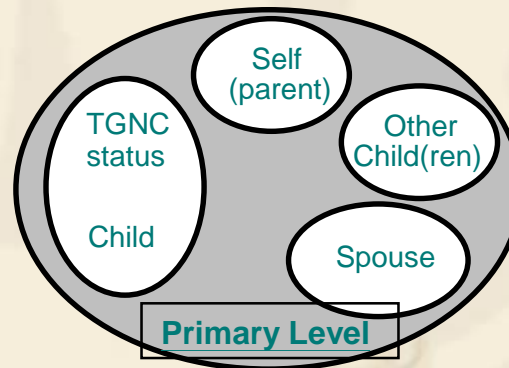
### ❧ **Trying to find a solution that was fair to all involved**



# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Protective Buffering

- ❧ Withholding negative expressions or disapproval
- ❧ Reconstructing Goals toward family relations
- ❧ Initiating Communication again after tension with child
- ❧ Protective buffering at family level

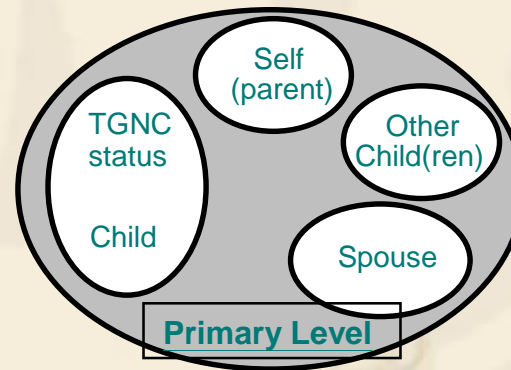




# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Detachment

- ☞ Letting go
- ☞ Going with the flow



# Parental Coping Strategies

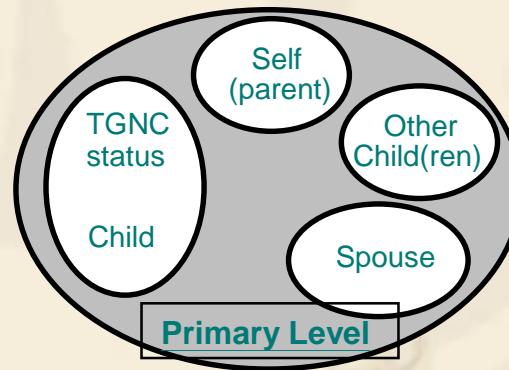
## ❖ Seeking Emotional Support for Themselves

### ☞ Emotions parents have

- ❖ Shock
- ❖ Feeling shame, self-blame and ambivalence
- ❖ Angry and hurt
- ❖ Helplessness
- ❖ Grief or lost
- ❖ Feeling alone
- ❖ Mixed emotions

### ☞ Seeking support from helping professionals and meeting other parents

### ☞ No need for support

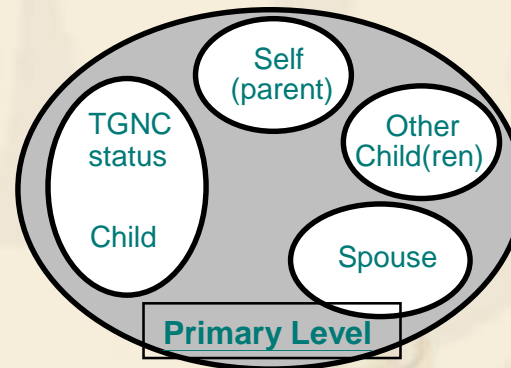




# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Ambivalent Behaviours

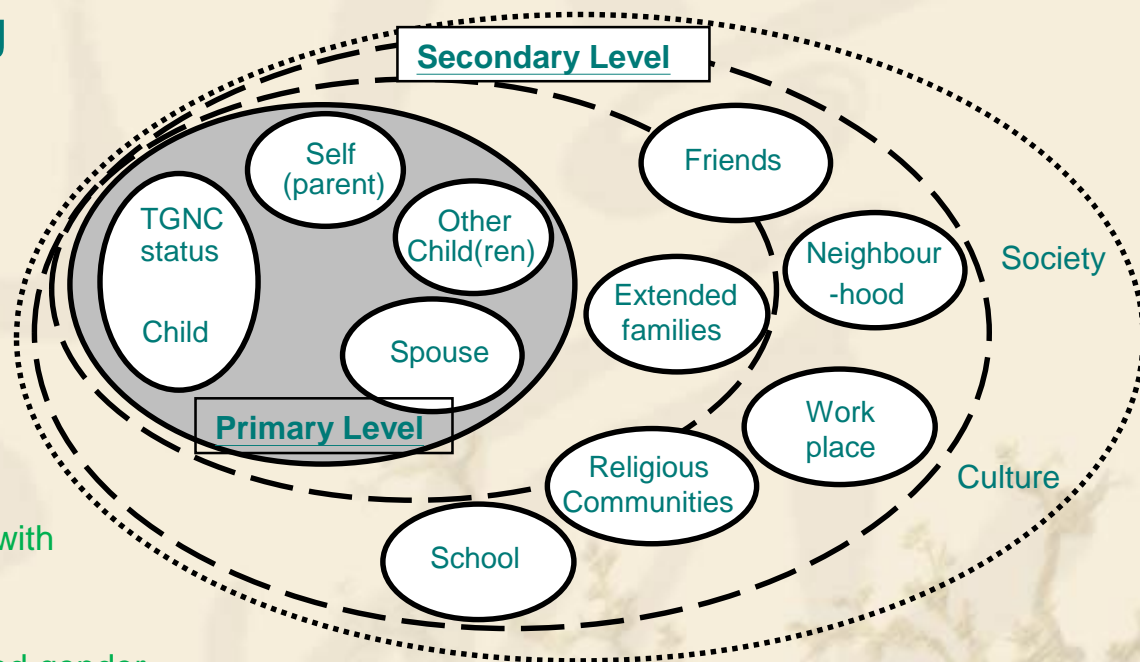
- ↳ In front of others
- ↳ Towards their child



# Parental Coping Strategies

## ❖ Secondary Level Coping Strategies

- ❖ Empathic Responding to other TGNC persons
- ❖ Active Engagement
  - ❖ Planful problem-solving
- ❖ Level of Disclosure
  - ❖ Differentiating between whom to disclose and not to disclose
  - ❖ Opening up to others
  - ❖ Not disclosing or avoiding this topic with some people
  - ❖ Talking around
  - ❖ Still referring to their child as assigned gender in front of others
  - ❖ Cutting out relationship or minimising contact with others
  - ❖ Confronting
  - ❖ Going with the flow





# Theoretical Model – based on Relationship-focused Coping

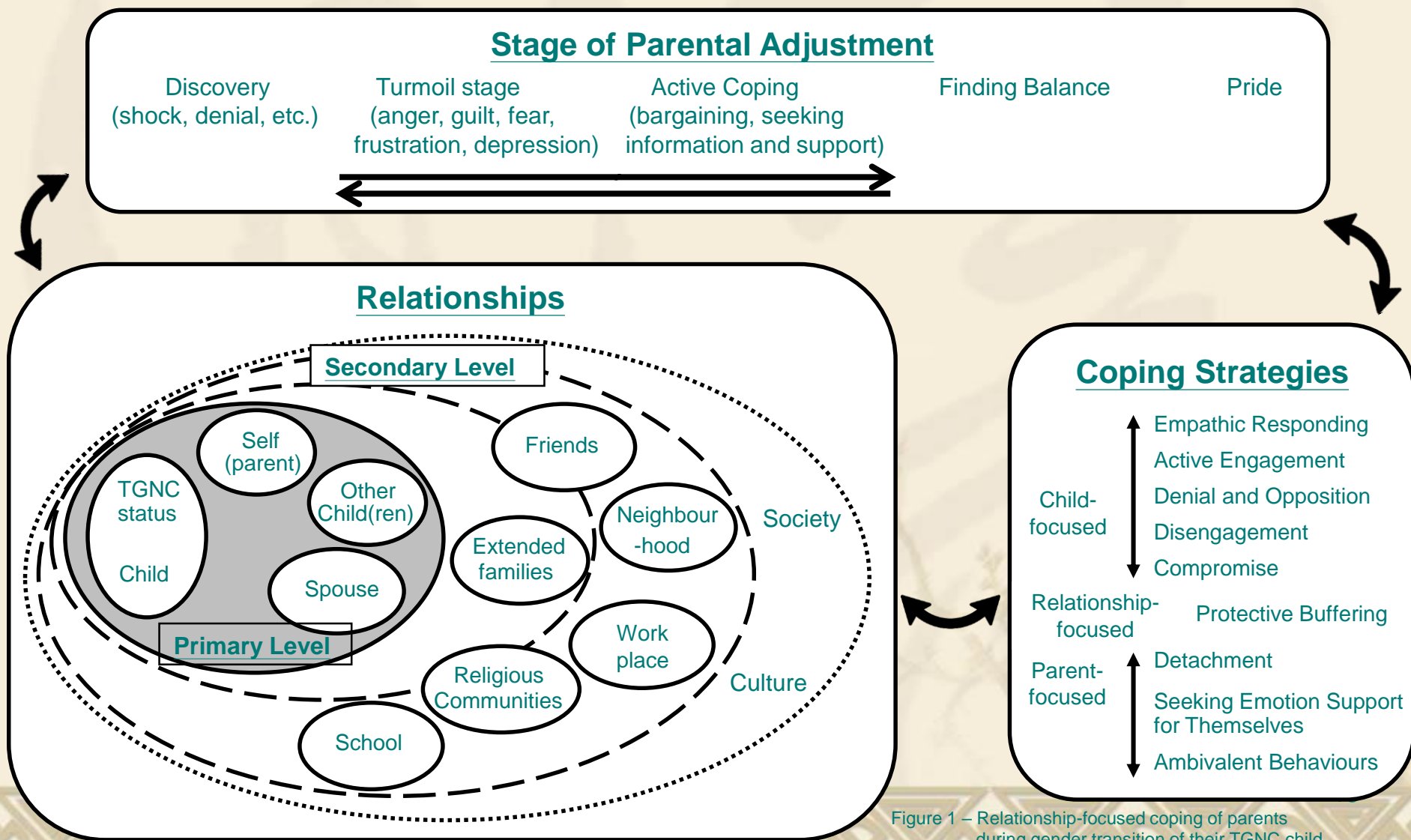


Figure 1 – Relationship-focused coping of parents during gender transition of their TGNC child

# Highlights of Research Findings

- ❖ **Stage of Adjustment vs Coping strategies vs Parent-child Relationship**
  - ❧ One aspect affecting the other two aspects at the same time
- ❖ **The Role of Parent-child Relationship in the Coping and Adjustment Process**
  - ❧ Importance of the parent-child interaction and communication in the process
  - ❧ The parent-child relationship more important than gender of the child
  - ❧ Gender transition is an ongoing process which needs continuous adaptation
- ❖ **Primary Level vs Secondary Level**
  - ❧ A process for parents in finding a balance between these different levels of relationships and mobilising the resources in these levels
  - ❧ Focusing on TGNC status initially, then realise that relationship with child is more important



# Highlights of Research Findings (II)

- ❖ **Parents of TGNC Adolescents vs Parents of TGNC Adults**
  - ☞ Parents of TGNC adolescents tend to take up more responsibilities on behalf of their child whereas parents of TGNC adults tend to be more detached
  - ☞ Also have developmental concerns
- ❖ **Parents' being empathic towards their child**
- ❖ **Loneliness of parents, the lack of social support & the difficulties in seeking support**
  - ☞ Parents' struggle as whether to find support or not -> gesture of acceptance
- ❖ **Parents have emotions at all stages**
- ❖ **Less challenge with gendered pronouns**
- ❖ **Indeterminate of parental acceptance towards non-binary**
- ❖ **Parents' ambivalent behaviours**



Thank you



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