When Life Hurts: Creating Safe Space for LGBT clients
Primary Counselor, Wayside Wellness Outpatient Treatment Program, St. Paul, MN
Completed Cultural Competency Training for treating Transgender and Gender non-conforming clients
MA in Addiction Studies, Hazelden Graduate School, Center City, MN
Present nationally and regionally on trauma informed care for the LGBTQ population
Focus of today’s talk:

- The use of appropriate language and vocabulary and why it matters
- Respecting and affirming clients
- Understanding the trauma of discrimination
- Sharing the journey
- *Evolution through Innovation* – What can we do?
Language and Vocabulary
Transgender is an umbrella term. The term encompasses an individual who crosses over or changes traditional gender roles and or expression. People whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
**Under the Transgender umbrella**

- **Gender queer** – those whose gender falls outside of the gender binary
- **Gender non-conforming (GNC)** - behavior and/or appearance that does NOT conform to societal expectations for one’s gender
- **Agender** – identifying as genderless, without a gender or gender neutral
- **Two Spirited** – term traditionally used by Native Americans recognizing those who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.
- **Intersex** – sexual anatomy that doesn’t fit with the labels of male or female
The Genderbread Person v2.0

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don’t. Like Inception. Gender isn’t binary. It’s not either/or. In many cases it’s both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for understanding. It’s okay if you’re hungry for more.

Gender Identity
- Nongendered
  - Woman-ness
  - Man-ness

Gender Expression
- Agender
  - Masculine
  - Feminine

Biological Sex
- Asex
  - Female-ness
  - Male-ness

Attracted to
- Nobody
  - (Men/Males/Masculinity)
  - (Women/Females/Femininity)
Back to Basics

- **Gay** – Umbrella term for the LGBT community
- **Lesbian** – a female physically and/or emotionally attracted to other females
- **Gay** – a male physically and/or emotionally attracted to other males
- **Bi-sexual** – an individual emotionally and/or physically attracted to males, females and gender non-conforming people
- **Transgender** – an individual who typically identifies as a gender different than their “assigned gender”
- **Gender queer** – individual who identifies as both or neither gender on the gender binary
More Basics

- **Pansexual** – a person who feels they are sexually/emotionally/spiritually capable of falling in love with any, all or non-gender people.
- **Cisgender** – individual whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. “Cis” from Latin meaning “on this side of.”
- **Asexual** – someone who does not experience sexual attraction
- **Non-binary gender identity** – a person does not identify strictly as male or female – they could identify as both, neither, or as another gender entirely.
- **Agender** – does not identify with any gender.
Recognize that you can make a difference – your response can save a life.

*Evolution through Innovation*…

Re-orient yourself to the growing number of people coming out with a plethora of gender identities.

Here we go…. 
Pronouns: Why are they important?

- Common: She/Her, He/Him, They/Them
- Therapists should use the pronoun that addresses clients according to the gender role they live in.
- Represents a basic respect for the individual
- These words (pronouns) are very important for self-identification.
- If you don’t know how to address someone, ask: “what pronoun would you like me to use when referring to you?”
Working with Trans* and GNC Clients

- Check your personal bias about transgender individuals.
- Use affirming pronouns – these are fluid and may change with time. They are not “preferred.” They are the way the person identifies.
- Assist client with getting resources for legally prescribed hormones, affirming therapists and doctors.
- Develop & discover your own resources.
- Know and understand the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care (WPATH S.O.C.).
Creating Safe & Welcoming Spaces

- Maintain a non-judgmental attitude
- Avoid assumptions. “Are you in a relationship?” vs. “do you have a boyfriend or a husband?”
- Understand client may be “on guard” if they have experienced discrimination or insensitivity.
- Don’t ask unnecessary questions out of curiosity. Ask yourself: *Do I need to know the answer?*
- Advocate for changing standard forms to allow for flexibility in answering “name” “Gender identity” or “pronoun”
- Guide and train front-line staff to say “Your 11:30 is here” or “your next client is here.”
Affirming Environments

- Have signage that indicates non-discrimination policies that are inclusive of gender orientation and expression.
- Educational brochures related to LGBT issues should be available; for example LGBT oriented magazines.
- Include images of same sex couples, rainbow flag stickers etc. in the waiting area.
- If possible, provide gender neutral or single occupancy bathrooms.
Trauma and Discrimination
Addiction in the Trans* Community

- 26% of Trans people report using drugs or alcohol to cope with discrimination
- 96% have had sex under the influence of alcohol
- 75% report regular alcohol use
- 21% binge drink
- 79% Illegal drug use
- 34% Trans women (mtf) engage in drug use by injection.
- 18% Trans men (ftm) engage in drug use by injection
- 55% Trans women (mtf) report they have been in alcohol & drug treatment in their lifetime

2000 study San Francisco, Dr. Clements SF Department of Public Health
Other Trans* statistics

- 60% denied health care or refused by their doctor
- 50% report teaching doctors about trans* care
- 57% rejected by families
- 69% experience homelessness
- 70% have faced housing discrimination.
- 60-70% have experienced physical or sexual harassment by law enforcement officers
- 65% experience physical or sexual harassment at work
- 78% experience physical or sexual harassment in school

From the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention 2014
Research Findings

2016 American Academy of Physician Assistants research reported:

- Gender identity in children can begin as early as 4 years old and is stable by 6 years old.

- 1999 Study in California (Reback and Lombardi) reported that most commonly used drugs by MTF transgender individuals were alcohol, cocaine, crack and methamphetamine.

- Recent studies of trans health risks report similar results with higher rates of substance abuse in general and higher rates of substance abuse with HIV prevalence, especially among trans sex workers.
In 2011, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality conducted a survey to document the injustices that Transgender and Gender non-conforming people face at every turn.

Findings included discrimination for Trans* and GNC’s at work, school, & doctor’s offices. They were fired, evicted, denied medical care, faced poverty and bullied in schools at rates far above the national average.

(Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling, Injustice at Every Turn: A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Washington National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.)
“We hope, however, that one thing stands out for you as it does for us: the remarkable resilience of transgender and gender non-conforming people and their families....”

“a quarter of respondents have endured multiple acts of discrimination, any one of which would seriously impact a person’s life, and combined, would be catastrophic, and yet they persevere.”

“...we present this report with the determination that it will move us forward as a community...”
Evolution through Innovation…

Go back to your work with a “new lens” What would make your environment more affirming?

Integrate greater sensitivity in language you use in your professional settings and your schools.

Become an advocate…the 83% of kids being harassed in schools today are our future. We are capable of creating a world where Trans* and GNC’s are free to live without fear of marginalization and abuse.
Resources

- Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling [www.algbic.org](http://www.algbic.org)
- It Gets Better Project [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)
- National Center for Transgender Equality [www.transeequality.org](http://www.transeequality.org)
- The Trevor Project [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)
- World Professional Assn for Transgender Health [www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)