Transgender issues have been marginalized in the mental health field, and more specifically, largely ignored within the marriage/couple and family therapy field. Professionals working with this population are in unique positions of power to determine readiness for medical treatments and hold an important role in their transgender clients’ lives regarding their ability to live life in their affirmed gender. Understanding these processes is important due to the lack of necessary training to sensitively treat, serve, and make informed decisions about medical treatments for this population.

Thus, the purpose of this presentation is to (1) better understand the issues facing transgender clients to prepare therapists to work with this population, (2) explore the gatekeeping process for therapists who provide assessments of transgender clients needed to move forward with their transition, and (3) briefly discuss the beginning stages of a research project being conducted in the Ph.D. Couple and Family Therapy Program at the University of Iowa in collaboration with the LGBTQ Specialty Clinic at UI Hospitals and Clinics to which self-identified transgender clients are referred for psychosocial assessments.

All assessments are in accordance with the Standards of Care of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. The CFT clinic’s reports are used to decide on whether to go ahead with hormone replacement therapy or sex reassignment surgery at this time. All students and faculty have completed the Safe Zone Project, which is a commonly used LGBTQ affirmative training program in universities.
Therapists and Psychosocial Assessments with Transgender Individuals

Jenna Benoit, Trae Krum, Candice Maier, Elizabeth Parker, Frank Sories, Taimyr Strachan

The University of Iowa

LGBT Health and Wellness Conference
Saturday, April 12, 2014
Who We Are

- Volker Thomas, PhD, LMFT
  - Director, LGBTQ Clinic
- Jacob Priest, PhD, LMFT
  - Supervisor, LGBTQ Clinic
- Supervised doctoral students
  - Have completed training through University of Iowa LGBTQ Safe Zone Project
What We Do

- Psychosocial assessments
- Ongoing individual and family therapy
- In collaboration with UIHC LGBTQ Clinic
Our Philosophy

- Trans-affirmative
- Clients experts on their own lives
- Intersectionality of identities
Our Goals

- Minimize power imbalance between client and therapist
- Gain understanding of client’s inner world and social context
Basic Assumptions

- Gender identity a continuum, not a binary
- Gender identity is fluid over the course of the lifespan
Gender Identity is **NOT** the same as Sexual Orientation

**The Genderbread Person**

- **Gender Identity**
  - Woman
  - Genderqueer
  - Man

  Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.

- **Gender Expression**
  - Feminine
  - Androgynous
  - Masculine

  Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.

- **Biological Sex**
  - Female
  - Intersex
  - Male

  Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.

- **Sexual Orientation**
  - Heterosexual
  - Bisexual
  - Homosexual

  Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.

**read more**
NON-PATHOLOGIZING

- DSM-IV-TR
  - Gender identity disorder
- DSM-5
  - 302.85 Gender dysphoria in adolescents and adults
    F64.1 (ICD-10-CM)
  - 302.85 Gender dysphoria in children
    F64.1 (ICD-10-CM)
- Progress(?)
Identity Classifications – Another Binary?

- **Cisgender**: People who are cisgender are not transgender; their gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. The vast majority of people are cisgender.

- **Transgender**: Today an umbrella term for many different identities. People who are transgender have a gender identity, sex, and/or gender expression that do not line up with the gender they were labeled with at birth.

  (Teich, 2012)
Various Terms Used
Psychosocial Assessment

- Standardized format
- Questions address a variety of topics
  - Referral source and background
  - Trauma and history of abuse
  - History of domestic violence
  - Substance abuse
Psychosocial Assessment

- Employment history
- Children
- Gender identity
- Sexuality and intimate relationships
- Surgeries and transition stage
- Degree of family acceptance or rejection of gender identity
- Current and anticipated support system
Shifting Role from Gatekeeper to Advocate

- Therapists are placed in unique position of determining readiness for medical treatments
  - Hormone replacement therapy
  - Sex reassignment surgery
- Incorporation of social justice and human rights perspectives
- Engagement in transgender activism and advocacy
Next Steps

- Grant Proposal
- Potential Research Projects
  - Client feedback on assessment process and therapeutic experience
  - Definition of *transition* from trans perspective
- Personal conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity
Resources

- University of Iowa Health Care LGBTQ Clinic [http://www.uihealthcare.org/lgbt/](http://www.uihealthcare.org/lgbt/)
- University of Iowa Safe Zone Project [http://diversity.uiowa.edu/cdo/lgbtq-safe-zone-project](http://diversity.uiowa.edu/cdo/lgbtq-safe-zone-project)
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) [http://www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)
References


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