

Pathways to Understanding

An Introduction to Clinical Guidelines for Working with Transgender People

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The nuts and bolts of this session

- We will provide you with an introduction to clinical work with trans populations...
 - We will review general clinical issues
 - We will introduce ways to conduct clinical work with trans people
 - We will conclude with a clinical practice and discussion session

What does behavioral health have to do with transgender needs?

- Clinicians can be the “gateway” to the transition process
- Gender identity and behavioral health issues go “hand-in-hand”
- Therapists can be advocates/sources of support

The Ten Tasks of The Mental Health Professional Working with Transgender Individuals



Diagnostic Criteria for GID, 302.85

- A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex)
- Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex
- The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition
- The disturbance causes significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning

Of interest to note...

- There is a lot of debate surrounding this diagnosis
- Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is the only DSM-IV “mental disorder” that can be successfully treated and even cured by non-psychiatric medical interventions
- Insurance rarely covers hormonal/surgical treatment of GID

Hormonal/Surgical Treatment

- Sought to reduce discrepancy between sense of self and primary/secondary sex characteristics
- Some psychiatric symptoms will resolve as the client begins taking hormones or pursues surgical options
- Readiness does not imply that the client can no longer have any mental health concerns in order to proceed with transition

Source: Bockting, W, Knudson, G & Goldberg, J.M. (2006). Counseling and Mental Health Care of Transgender Adults and Loved Ones. Retrieved: September 18th, 2008 from: <http://www.vch.ca/transhealth/resources/library/tcpdocs/guidelines-entalhealth.pdf>.

What is readiness?

Readiness is that your client has sufficient stability in place to make informed decisions and be adequately prepared to deal with the physical, emotional, and social consequences of the decision they wish to make...

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Clinical Issues

- Transphobia (internal/external)
- Depression, anxiety, suicidality
- Self-harm
- Compulsivity
- Thought Disorders
- Personality Disorders



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Clinical Issues (continued)

- Body Image
- Grief and Loss
- Sexual concerns
- Social Isolation
- Spiritual/religious concerns
- Substance Use
- Violence/Abuse



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Gender Concerns

- Gender issues can arise in a variety of ways in clinical practice
- Meet the client where they are at
- A lot of the work to explore or express transgender identity might occur in psychotherapy



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Gender Expression

- A gender role transition can be undertaken with or without hormones/surgery
- Hormone therapy is not always followed by surgery; surgery is not always followed by hormones
- Contact with peers can help
- Therapist can assist client with process

Trans Developmental Model

- Denial or Unconsciousness
- Confusion
- Pre-Decision
- Epiphany
- Early Transition
- Learning the Boundaries
- “Passing” Point
- Done ?
- Now what?



Source: Vanderbergh, Reid. (2007). *Transition and Beyond: Observations on Gender Identity*. Portland, Oregon: Q Press.

Behavioral health care for trans people...

- ...should be holistic and non-pathologizing
- ...should not theorize about causative factors related to the emergence of a particular transgender identity, but focus on the client's own understanding of their gender identity



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Triaging Mental Health vs Gender Identity Management Needs

- If client has delusions, SI/HI, dissociation, or other emergent behavioral health needs, treat mental health issues and reassess gender component
- If client does not present with the above, proceed with GID Dx and/or otherwise addressing gender identity concerns concurrently with other behavioral health needs

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Gender Assessment Resources

- Transgender Identity: Gender Identity Questionnaire-Docter and Flemming, 2001
- Components of Sexual Identity: Assessment of Sexual Orientation-Bockting, 1997; Coleman, 1987
- Internalized Transphobia: Transgender Identity Survey-Bockting, Miner, Robinson, Rosser, and Coleman, 2005
- Psychosexual Functioning: Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory-Derogatis & Melisaratos 1979

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Areas of Evaluation

- What is the nature of the gender concerns?
- How persistent and severe are the gender concerns?
- Is there a history of attraction to people of the same biological sex combined with internalized homophobia?
- Are there delusions about sex or gender?
- Is there evidence of dissociation?
- Is there evidence of Asperger's Disorder?
- Is there evidence of a personality disorder?

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Trans-Friendly Service Planning

- Utilize correct gender pronouns
- Clients might not need to explore gender identity issues
- If the client is not clinically/medically stable to initiate transition process, record on service plan a clear time-line for re-assessment
- If client is clinically/medically stable and wishes to pursue gender identity options, record on service plan.
- Involve community resources (if clients wishes to access these resources) and document on service plan

Source: Freeman, Katherine & A. Davison. (2008). *Pathways to Understanding: Clinical Practice with Transgender Individuals*. Training for Behavioral Health Clinicians. October 27th, 2008.

Providing Recommendations Regarding Treatment

- If the assessor feels the client to be an appropriate candidate for hormonal/surgical treatment, a letter should be written to medical professionals supporting client transition
- If the assessor feels the client is receiving appropriate behavioral health treatment, but is not yet ready to transition, clearly explain decision rationale and establish a timeline for reassessment
- If the prescribing doctor/surgeon feels the client's health is too fragile, or a client is judged incompetent to make medical decisions, the client should be supported to come to terms with this

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Letters of Recommendation Should Specify:

- The client's identifying characteristics
- Psychiatric diagnoses
- The duration of the professional relationship
- Professional treatment recommendations
- Whether the author of the letter is part of a tx team
- That the sender welcomes follow-up



Implementation of Identity Transition

- Once a person has decided on course of action, therapy focuses on supporting the individual
- Persons are encouraged to “come out” as they are comfortable
- For persons undergoing transition, therapist assists with the adjustment to a new gender identity

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Treatment Across the Lifespan

- Identities continue to evolve; psychosocial challenges arise
- Disclosure issues occur across the lifespan
- Gender identity or expression may “shift”
- Loved ones may also need support
- For those who have surgery, adequate post-surgical care is crucial

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Areas of Strength Enhancing Treatment Success

- Resiliency
- Courage
- Perseverance
- Resourcefulness
- Survival negotiation
- Unique perspective



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