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A Social Worker's Introduction to Working with LGBT+ Adult Clients

Presented by:

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25+ year subject matter expert and author of “The Educator’s
Guide to LGBT+ Inclusion”



Kryss Shane, MS, MSW, LSW, LMSW

Named by The New York Times and many national and international platforms as America's go-to Leading LGBT+ Expert, Kryss Shane (she/her) has 25+ years of experience guiding the world's top leaders in business, education, and community via individual, small group, and full-staff trainings. She is known for making each organization's specific Diversity and Inclusion needs become more manageable, approachable, and actionable. This includes physical spaces, hiring practices, policies/procedures, and more. Kryss has two Master's degrees, two licenses to practice mental healthcare, and she is currently working toward her PhD while shaping the minds of learners as a Lecturer at Columbia University and an Adjunct Professor at Brandman University. She is also the author of "The Educator's Guide to LGBT+ Inclusion," the first book of its kind to guide educators, administrators, and school staff to become able and empowered to make their schools more LGBT++ inclusive.



Disclosures

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Financial disclosures: Kryss Shane received an honorarium for presenting this course. She offers trainings, webinars, keynote speeches, publications, and interviews, and has authored the book “The Educator’s Guide to LGBT+ Inclusion.” Non-financial disclosures: Kryss Shane has no relevant non-financial disclosures.
- **Content Disclosure:** This learning event does not focus exclusively on any specific product or service.
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Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- explain the definitions of the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.
- identify the differences and similarities between sexual minorities and gender minorities.
- recognize how an LGBT++ identity impacts an individual in a variety of aspects in their life.



Before We Begin...

- Sometimes you'll see this population abbreviated as GLBT, sometimes LGBT, sometimes as LGBT+. What's the difference?
- Women's groups argue that GLBT is yet another time when men are placed before women, so it is often considered more correct to place women (lesbian) before men (gay) as in LGBT.
- The plus recognizes that not all people fit into one of the four categories lettered (L, G, B, or T).
- For some, this doesn't matter, but you can't go wrong in sticking with "LGBT+" just in case!



Intersectionality

Just a reminder that LGBT+ people may also be:

- Black people or Brown people or Asian people
- people who are in wheelchairs
- people who have autism
- people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- people who are blind
- people you already know



What Do Professional Sources Say?

- American Medical Association and American Psychological Association both agree that any “disturbances” that occur for LGBT+ people are not because the person is disturbed but because they are living in a society that is often unkind or even cruel to them.
- This means that, the more kind and supportive people exist in an LGBT+ person’s world, the healthier and happier they are most likely to be!



Appropriate Terminology

- Sexual Orientation: Refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction. Almost all people have a sexual orientation. Someone who does not is considered to be asexual. You can be attracted to people of the opposite gender (straight) or people of the same gender (gay or lesbian). You can also be attracted to people of either gender (bisexual). Some identify as being attracted to a person, not to their gender identity so they identify as pansexual.
- Orientation does not equal action – your client may be struggling without having had an experience!



Appropriate Terminology

Gender Identity: Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or somewhere in between. For many people, one's gender identity corresponds with their biological sex (i.e., a person born biologically female identifies as female or a person born biologically male identifies as male), but this is not always the case.



Appropriate Terminology

Gender Expression: Gender expression relates to how a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through clothing, hair, styles, mannerisms, etc. This may be conscious or subconscious. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless permutations that may combine both masculine and feminine expressions.



In Lay Terms

- Sexual Orientation – whom you feel sexually attracted to (what you feel between your legs)
- Gender Identity – what gender you feel you are in your brain, regardless of your genitalia (what you feel between your ears)
- Gender Expression – what clothing/ hairstyle/ mannerisms in your conscious or subconscious mind (how you present yourself to the world)



Appropriate Terminology

- Transgender: A broad term describing the state of a person's gender identity which **does not** necessarily match his/her given gender at birth.
- Cisgender: A person whose gender identity **does** match his/her assigned gender at birth.
- NOTE: Transgender and Cisgender are adjectives, not nouns, just like Black, Asian, Hispanic, short, and tall. There is no such word as transgendered (it's not a verb, it cannot be past tense) and always put the word "person" after "transgender" as this is a word to describe someone, just the way you don't meet a short, you meet a short person.



Appropriate Terminology

- You may see the term “male to female transgender person” or “female to male transgender person.” However, updated terminology has also caused some transgender people to redefine themselves as “assigned female at birth (AFAB)” or “assigned male at birth (AMAB).”
- This is because gender is now seen as a societal construct. This means babies are not born with an idea of what society expects of them but they are given a gender at birth, based on their genitalia.



Appropriate Terminology

- Gender Non-Conforming: This is when a person does not conform to expectations of a male person or a female person.
- Gender Non-Binary: This is a person whose gender identity does not fit into either the “male” category or the “female” category.
- Gender Fluid: This is a person whose gender is not permanently in one gender or another. They may feel more feminine one day, more masculine another.
- REMINDER: When you see an abbreviation of LGBT+, the plus is intended to include these categories as well as the various other categories people may choose to define themselves by.



Appropriate Terminology

- If you aren't sure what name to call someone, ask for their name and they'll tell you. (This is the same for any person whose name you forgot, someone who is named James but goes by Jim, etc.)
- If you are uncertain, ask "what pronouns do you use?" Do not ask "what is your preferred pronoun?" because this is not that they prefer one set of pronouns but you get to decide if you're okay with that, it is a question about who they are, period.
- You may hear someone introduce themselves with their name, followed by the pronouns they use. For example, "Hi, I'm Jim, he/his." This tells you that, when you talk about Jim, you should say "he said... OR this is his." Some prefer not to use a gendered pronoun, so they may say "Hi, I'm Kevin, they/theirs." When you talk about Kevin, you should say "they said... OR this is theirs."



What Are Your Clients Battling?

- **Homophobia:** The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are attracted to members of the same sex.
- **Transphobia:** the fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.
- **Internalized Homophobia/Transphobia:** Self-identification of societal stereotypes by a LGBT+ person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.



Medical Transitioning and Transgender Clients



Something to Know...

- In order for a transgender person to begin to receive any medical transitioning, their medical doctor will require documentation of several months of consistent mental healthcare.
- If you are not in a position to feel prepared to complete that documentation, talk with the client about their transition plan and whether it's best to refer them.
- This way, you don't do what you don't feel comfortable with and you don't hinder their transition timeline!



Medical Options for Trans People

- **Hormone Therapy** – a trans person must be approved for hormone therapy by a mental health care provider before being able to receive this treatment. Because some cannot find an accepting therapist and/or due to costs, some trans people buy hormones on the streets, which puts the person at risk of infection, overdose, etc.

UNLESS YOU ARE TREATING THE PERSON IN A PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY, IT IS NEVER OKAY TO ASK A PERSON TO DISCLOSE WHETHER THEY HAVE CHOSEN THIS FOR THEMSELVES.



What You Might See Clinically

- A client using hormones may begin to show physical changes during a treatment time, which may include weight gain, loss, or redistribution, a change in the sound of their voice.
- They may become less self-conscious if their body begins to change in ways that they enjoy.



Medical Options for Trans People

- **Surgeries** – not all trans people have “bottom surgery” to alter their genitalia and most do not have that surgery until they have been out for many years. Instead, many opt to begin with (or only have) surgery to allow them to be seen by others as their true gender. For example, MTF may have hair removal of their beards or have their adam’s apple shaved. FTM may have their breasts removed.

UNLESS YOU ARE TREATING THE PERSON IN A PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY, IT IS NEVER OKAY TO ASK A PERSON TO DISCLOSE WHETHER THEY HAVE CHOSEN THIS FOR THEMSELVES.



Costs Related to Medical Options

Medical interventions may cost \$20,000-\$200,000+. They may require taking days, weeks, or months off from work or school in order to heal. They require having supportive loved ones to take care of the person during the healing process. They require care-givers be able to take time away from their own work or school or personal lives to provide this support and care.



Special Note...

- A trans person is not more trans or less trans based on how far through the transitioning process the person is.
- Some people choose never to take hormones or have surgery or to only utilize some of the treatment options... this is a personal choice based on what feels right for their own feelings about their bodies and based on financial options available.



Life Impact

- In a national study, 40% of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt. 92% of these individuals reported having attempted suicide before the age of 25.
- LGB people who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection.
- Each episode of LGBT victimization, such as physical or verbal harassment or abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harming behavior by 2.5 times on average.



Life Impact

- In 2020, a law passed making it illegal to discriminate against someone for being LGBT+ identified. However, just as racism has been illegal for decades but still occurs, so does discrimination against LGBT+ people.
- Currently, there is no mandated training for police or medical or mental health professionals specific to the needs of the LGBT+ community.



The Media

- A variety of religious and/or hate groups frequently create websites and social media intended to create hatred of the LGBT+ communities. When searching for research or reading news about the LGBT+ community, always use critical thinking and examine what bias a website or study may have before assuming the information is factual.



The Media

- This means you may see TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) language, meant to convince you that transgender women are not “real women.”
- You may see fake stories claiming transgender people are out to harm children in bathrooms.
- You may hear false claims of gay men trying to recruit children into becoming gay.
- Some of this language is overt, some of it is simply pushing “traditional values,” which are meant to undermine or exclude LGBT+ people.



What Does This Mean?

- It means a client coming into your office needs to feel safe.
- It means that their mental healthcare sessions may be the only safe place for them at any given time.
- It means they are looking for signs and clues that your office is safe... both before they come in and when they are on-site.



Putting Knowledge Into Practice

- How inclusive does your office look?
- What does your website say?
- How often are words like “boys and girls” or “men and women” used?



How You Can Change This

- Review your marketing materials.
- Include an inclusion statement on print and online material that your office and organization welcome “people of all races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations.”
- Include images where the people may be gender ambiguous.



Client Paperwork

- Is your paperwork inclusive?
- How might a client know whether your space is safe for them?
- How can you make it more inclusive?



An Example...

Panel 1 (Left):

Sex ⓘ [+ Add gender information](#)

Male Female

How did you hear about us?

Please select

Next

Tooltip: We require this field because one of the many ways we use this information is in communicating with your insurance provider. Please make sure the sex you provide here is the same as what your insurance provider has on file (usually the same as what your HR has on file). If you would like to tell us more about your gender identity, please click on the "Add gender information" link; that information will not be shared outside One Medical. Our entire team is committed to making sure every member feels safe, welcome, and respected.

Panel 2 (Right):

Date of Birth

Month: [] Day: [DD] Year: [YYYY]

Sex ⓘ [\[-\] Hide gender information](#)

Male Female

Gender Information (Optional)

[]

Preferred Name (Optional) ⓘ

[]

Tooltip: Have a different name you prefer? If so, we'll try to use it when possible.



Another Example...

Gender

Share a word or words that reflect your internal sense of your gender. Examples: woman, man, non-binary

Gender

Check one or more options that reflect your gender.

- woman
- man
- non-binary
- transgender
- intersex
- Two Spirit (see below for more information)
- gender non-conforming
- Other:



The Take-Away...

As a member of this profession, you may be the first or the thirtieth professional an LGBT+ person sees. Being open and accepting allows the patient to get the best care, which is why the person came to you in the first place.

Major medical and psychological associations agree that the “disturbance” isn’t in the person’s identity, it’s the intentional or accidental ignorance of the practitioner. It is your job (and an NASW Code of Ethics mandate) to continue to learn and to be supportive and welcoming of LGBT+ people.



Resources

Shane, K. (2020). *The Educator's Guide to LGBT+ Inclusion: A Practical Resource for K-12 Teachers, Administrators, and School Support Staff*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

For additional resources or questions:

Kryss Shane

To **contact** or **book**: [ThisIsKryss.com](https://thisiskryss.com)



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Cultural Competence

For additional information regarding standards and indicators for cultural competence, please review the NASW resource: *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*

<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7dVckZAYUmk=&portalid=0>

