TRANSGENDER VOICE AND COMMUNICATION THERAPY

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GENDER Identity (WHAT IT IS AND ISN’T)

The Gender Unicorn

TERMINOLOGY

FROM: HTTP://WWW.TRANSEQUALITY.ORG/ISSUES/RESOURCES/TRANSGENDER-TERMINOLOGY

• Terms related to Gender Identity
  • Transgender
    • A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
    • Transgender is a broad term and is used for non-transgender people to use.
    • “Trans” is shorthand for “transgender.”
    • (Note: Transgender should be used as an adjective, not a noun, thus “transgender people” is appropriate but “transgenders” is often viewed as disrespectful.)

TERMINOLOGY

• Terms related to Gender Identity
  • AMAB/AFAB: Assigned Male/Female at Birth
  • True Gender: The true gender is the gender that matches the person’s identity. Genitalia is only one indicator of gender. Most of the time, the sexual anatomy will correspond predictably with the true gender. Sometimes, it does not.
  • Transgender Man: A term for a transgender individual who identifies as a man (previously referred to as “FTM”).
  • Transgender Woman: A term for a transgender individual who identifies as a woman (previously referred to as “MTF”).
  • Cisgender Person: A term for a person whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth

TERMINOLOGY

• Terms related to Gender Identity
  • Queer: A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and, often also transgender, people. Some use queer as an alternative to “gay” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.
  • Genderqueer: A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female (aka, Gender Nonbinary, Gender Fluid)
  • Gender Non-conforming: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.
  • Dead Name: The person’s name associated with the gender assigned at birth.
    • Used by transgender persons who have changed their name to one that matches their true gender.
    • “Dead Naming” may psychologically harm a trans person.

TERMINOLOGY

• Related to Biological Sex (Gender Assigned at Birth)
  • Intersex: A person who has sexual anatomy associated with both males and females.
    • According to Feinberg (2000) the condition of intersex occurs in 1.7% of the population (making it as common as having red hair).
  • Related to Sexual Orientation
    • Sexual Orientation: Innate attraction (sexually and/or romantically). Sexual orientation should not be assumed based on behaviors, interests, gender expression, or relationships. Just because a man is married to a woman, does not mean that he is straight.
    • Gay: A man who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men (exclusively/predominantly).
    • Lesbian: A woman who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women (exclusively/predominantly).
    • Bisexual: A person who is attracted to more than one gender. Note: sexual orientation refers to innate attraction, not relationships. Bisexuals can be in monogamous nonheterosexual relationships or monogamous heterosexual relationships.
THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION THERAPY IN THE TRANSITIONING PROCESS

- Transgender men (Assigned Female at Birth; AFAB)
  - Hormone therapy decreases the mass of the vocal folds, so the voice often matches the outward appearance
- Some transgender men cannot take or choose not to take hormones
- May want help with paralinguistic or linguistic features (style, intonation, articulatory focus, etc.)
- Transgender women (Assigned Male at Birth; AMAB)
  - Hormone therapy does not decrease the mass of the vocal folds, creating a mismatch between the voice and outward appearance
- Voice therapy can improve the psycho-social well-being and may reduce gender dysphoria, suicide, depression, anxiety, improve employability, and social acceptance.

IMPORTANCE OF TRAINED SLPS IN THIS AREA

- Transgender population is a growing area of need for SLPS
- The transgender community in many states has a list of providers of trans-affirming care
- The transgender community needs SLPS knowledgeable in trans-affirming care for all areas of practice, not just voice feminization therapy.
- Example: People diagnosed with autism are 7.76 times more likely to be trans than the general population (Janssen, et al., 2016).
- Example: Trans individuals may be parents of children on SLP caseloads.
- Example: Trans individuals need SLPS if they have strokes, cancer, traumatic brain injuries, etc. SLPS must be trained in trans-affirming care for patients when they are most vulnerable.

TRANSGENDER LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION (TLC) GROUP AT THE UA LITTLE ROCK/UAMS SPEECH AND HEARING CLINIC

- One hour of individual therapy
  - Graduate student clinician
  - Work on individual goals developed between the clinician and the client
- One hour of group therapy
  - Led by a graduate student in the School of Social Work at UA Little Rock
  - Communication goals are targeted during group
  - Clinicians are active participants in the group
  - Example topics of discussion
    - How to deal with stress/micro aggressions/gender dysphoria
    - What do trans people wish that healthcare workers understood about being trans
    - How to be an ally
    - What is the hardest thing you've ever done?

TYPICAL GOALS

- Vocal Hygiene
  - Maximize vocal health
  - Vocal warm-ups
  - Water intake
  - Breath Support
  - Relaxation

TYPICAL GOALS (INDIVIDUAL THERAPY) CONT'D

- Raising Pitch (visual feedback)
  - 107-129 Hz = Cis men
  - 155-187 Hz = Trans women recognized as female
  - 189-224 = Cis women

- Journaling
  - Successes and challenges
  - Resonance
  - Forward (nasal) resonance
  - Increased intonation (pitch swings)
  - Vowel prolongation
  - Tag questions ("That’s wonderful, isn’t it?")
  - Body language, proxemics, gestures, etc.
TYPICAL TOPICS (GROUP THERAPY)

- How to deal with stress/microaggressions/gender dysphoria
- What do trans people wish that healthcare workers understood about being trans
- How to be an ally
- What is the hardest thing you’ve ever done?
- The Drama Triangle (Perpetrator, Victim, and Rescuer)
- Gender-Trends and Vocabulary
- Portrayal of TransPeople in Film/Media
- What does it mean to be “feminine”? “Masculine”? “Androgynous”?

OUTCOMES

- Significantly increased scores in Voice Satisfaction
- Increased vocal pitch
- Increased use of feminine vocal characteristics
- Intonation range
- Prolonged vowels
- Nonverbal communication
- Forward focused articulation
- Increased identification of voice as female by unfamiliar listeners

RESOURCES

- New York Speech and Voice Lab: Christie Block
- Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide
  - Richard Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Jack Pickering
- Girl Talk: The Transgender Guide for Voice and Feminization
  - Lynette Nisbet
- Facebook Group: Gender Spectrum Voice and Communication
- The Transsexual Voice Questionnaire (TVQ)
- Sonetta App from Mintleaf Software (iOS only)
- Voice Analyst App from Speech Tools Limited
  - https://speechtools.co/voice-analyst
- Reimbursement Issues
  - https://www.asha.org/Practice/reimbursement/Reimbursement-of-Voice-Therapy-Services-for-Transgender-People.htm

REFERENCES

- Balsamo D. Conceptualizing gender identity and gender nonconformity. JAACAP Connect. 2016;3:12-14