



Client-Centered Approach to Recognizing Gender Identities in Data Collection

RELEASED:
Sept. 2022

UPDATED:
N/A

Purpose of This Document

This document seeks to explore best practices in the provider-client encounter and serve as an educational resource to achieve equity in these encounters.

Foundational Definitions/Key Terms

Below are terms that will be highlighted and referred to through this document. It is important to note that while this is not an exhaustive list of terms one may recognize or identify with when identifying their identity, this list does include common language most often used and referred to when discussing sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more.

Sex assigned at birth: Our society identifies someone socially through their sex assigned at birth which is based on a binary system of being born either male or female; sex assigned at birth should not be considered to be an umbrella for how someone identifies or expresses themselves.

Gender identity: An individual's internal, deeply felt sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or in between.

Gender expression: One's gender expression (e.g., masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc.) is how one embodies gender attributes, presentations, roles, and more.

Prior to Engaging Clients

Level setting with clients of gender diverse identities requires us to ensure there is an element of safety in the physical space, during initial contact, and during the provider-client conversation. This can be affirming verbiage in common areas, asking and using the chosen name if different from the name assigned at birth, and identifying and asking for personal pronouns. This can set the tone for the interaction and start building trust.

Why do we ask for pronouns and racial identity? It shows respect to let individuals self-determine how they would like to be identified, acknowledges the power dynamics of those in the room around race and gender, and ultimately serves as an equity intervention to begin building transparent and trusting relationships by meeting folks where they are.

Understanding that we all have different personal experiences along with unconscious bias can be helpful or hurtful when navigating interactions with persons with whom we are not familiar or don't have competency around culturally-specific identities.

Barriers to Authentic Engagement

It is important to keep in mind that many LGBTQIA+ persons may not always feel comfortable with offering up their identities in spaces where they sense harm or have previously experienced harm. Shelter spaces or coordinated entry sites are often the first spaces people go when in crisis; compounding trauma is a reality that many people who hold multiple identities have to navigate and providers need to understand this.

This may look like clients not naming their gender identity and instead just offering up their sex assigned

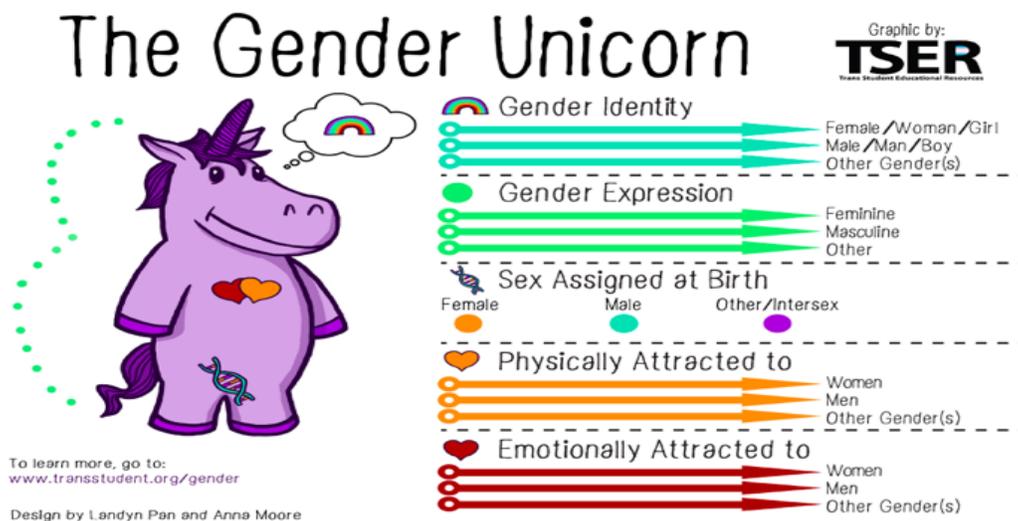
at birth if there's a perceived safety issue around identifying their gender and not being affirmed once disclosing. This may also look like someone utilizing their name on their identification card or drivers license, even though they may have a chosen or preferred name. This could even look like someone using pronouns that they usually would not use or do not prefer. All of this may be for self-preservation or to reduce the possibility of a negative or uncomfortable interaction with service providers.

Providers should understand that reducing barriers to authentic interactions often requires us to act in a way that is flexible enough to provide services and capture data, while also ensuring an equitable encounter. During level setting, providers must offer up in language (verbal and non-verbal) that clients can be comfortable providing their chosen or preferred names, pronouns, and gender identities and that they will be affirmed.

Capturing Gender Identity Data

In many settings of data collection, asking someone for their sex assigned at birth may be required or a part of an intake process; this can be challenging and harmful to many people that identify as LGBTQIA+ due to their sex being separate from their gender. One's gender identity may not reflect the sex they were assigned at birth and their gender expression may also not align with the "traditional" idea of a certain sex.

The preference here would be to capture gender identity and disregard the need for asking for their sex. It is also important to understand that many folks may have a fluid identity (gender fluid) and may offer up over time or at different times identities that may not be aligned with an identity provided previously or recorded in the Homeless Management Information System. This is a part of someone's ongoing journey to be affirmed and feel affirmed and providers should work to understand the uniqueness of gender identity and what that looks like and means for people who are gender expansive.



Gender Unicorn Image: www.transstudent.org/gender - Landyn Pan & Anna Moore.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, it is important to realize that data collection can be a barrier to authentically engaging people in crisis. Being very clear as to why they are being asked personal questions and who can access this information is pivotal to building trust. Additionally, letting clients know that they may choose not to disclose information that they are not comfortable with is also paramount to building trust and creating an equitable encounter between the provider and the client. Equally important is consistency in providers; a client should know that no matter who they are in first contact with when seeking services, they will be affirmed in language and in action.