Module 10: What are pronouns and why do they matter?

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Creating Safe and Inclusive Space

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What Is A Pronoun?

- Pronouns are how you refer to someone if you are not using their name. Pronouns are connected to gender expression. According to LGBTQI+ Education organization GLAAD, gender expression is the *"external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics."*

- The pronouns you want people to use are your preferred pronouns. Or, better stated, **your pronouns**. Saying "preferred" makes it seem like using someone's pronouns is optional when, in reality, using a person's pronouns is the most basic need they have to feel safe and to exist in public spaces.

Why Are Pronouns Important?

- Often, people make assumptions about the gender of another person based on the person's appearance or name. These assumptions aren't always correct, and the act of assuming (even if correct) sends a potentially harmful message: that people must look a certain way to demonstrate the gender that they are or are not.

- Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (often all of the above.)

Here's a simple guide:

Pronouns:	In a sentence:
she/her/hers	She wants you to use her pronouns.
he/him/his	He wants you to use his pronouns.
ze/hir	Ze wants you to use hir pronouns.
they/ them/ theirs	They want you to use their pronouns.
co/cos	Co wants you to use cos pronouns.
No pronoun/name (use the person's name instead of a pronoun)	_____(name) wants you to use _____(name) pronouns.
xe/xem/xyr	Xe wants you to use xyr pronouns.
hy/hym/hys	Hy wants you to use hys pronouns.

Using Inclusive Language Matters

- Social workers strive to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, regardless of the type of population we serve. By using a more inclusive vocabulary, especially regarding sexual and gender identities, we can better foster a safe and therapeutic environment for all individuals. This is also true in supervision with student interns. But what kind of an impact is our current vocabulary having on the clients we serve? On our assigned interns? On co-workers?

- For instance, take the intake form. The language we use may be more limiting than we realize. Does the form incorrectly ask for gender when it is referring to sex? Does the form assume that there are only two sexes? How many gender options are included on the form? When asking about relationship status, does the form use the term "married" or "partnered" (a more inclusive term that would include anyone in a committed romantic relationship)? When asking about sexual abuse, is the wording of the question "victim of abuse" or "survivor of abuse" (a more empowering reframing)?

Using Inclusive Language Matters (Cont.)

- As social workers, we need to have an awareness of what kind of messages our language is sending not only to clients, but to co-workers, colleagues, friends and students. Looking at all of these questions may seem overwhelming but implementing a few small changes now may have a very positive impact moving forward.

Simple Guide re: Sex and Gender

- **Sex:** is assigned at birth and is based on anatomy
- **Gender:** Internal sense of being male, female, or ANOTHER IDENTITY
- **Gender expression:** External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.
- **Sexual orientation:** An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.

- **<u>Gender Identities</u>**
  - Female
  - Male
  - Gender Nonconforming
  - Genderqueer
  - Agender
  - Nonbinary
  - And more…

Simple Guide re: Transgender and Cisgender

- **Transgender:** A term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth

- **Cisgender:** A term for people whose gender identity is aligned with their assigned sex at birth

- **Gender transition:** The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions

10 Tips About Using & Understanding Non-Binary or Genderqueer Pronouns:

1. Normalize Pronouns: A great way to do this is including your pronouns in email signatures. This helps to normalize the idea that people shouldn't just assume they can tell someone's pronoun based on a the traditional gendering of a name.

2. Ask: Ask everyone their pronouns, not just the person you think might be trans or non-binary. Make asking pronouns as natural as asking what someone's name is when you meet.

3. Effort: The only way to get better at using non-binary pronouns is to step outside of your comfort zones. Forget what you think you know about grammar, and make an effort to respect everyone's identities by using non-binary pronouns.

4. Practice: The only way to not get flustered using non-binary pronouns is to practice, practice, practice!

5. Don't assume: You can't tell a person's gender identity or pronouns based on how they look. Gender presentation isn't the same as gender identity, and neither presentation nor identity are a indicator of what pronouns someone uses. The only way to know what someone's pronouns are is to ask. Also, don't assume that someone's pronouns are fixed. Gender is fluid, and their pronouns may (or may not) change over time.

10 Tips About Using & Understanding Non-Binary or Genderqueer Pronouns (Cont.):

6. Include pronouns: Include Gender Pronoun in your ice breakers/go-arounds when you start a meeting, groups, student orientation, etc. Include a place for pronouns on your name tags/badges. You can even buy pre-made pronoun stickers

7. Apologize: Mistakes happen. When you misgender someone say you are sorry and fix your language moving forward. Don't make a huge deal about your mistake and force the trans/non-binary/genderqueer person spend a lot of time and energy consoling you for misgendering them. The best apology is not doing it again.

8. Non-binary greetings: Instead of saying "ladies" or "guys" to a group of people try to incorporate language that isn't gendered like "folks," "y'all," "friends" etc. into your vocabulary

9. Correct: When you hear someone use the wrong pronouns for a mutual friend, client or colleague correct them. Part of being a good ally to non-binary, genderqueer, and trans people in your community is helping other people get pronouns right.

10. One size doesn't fit all: As people become more comfortable and familiar with using the non-binary pronoun "they" the tendency is that people will use it as a default pronoun for <u>ALL</u> non-binary people. "They" is an awesome pronoun, but it may not be the personal pronoun used by everyone.   Being mindful and respectful to ask what is a person's personal pronoun demonstrates our capacity to learn and grow.

Creating Inclusion and Safety

- **Understand Diversity and Fluidity of Expression:** Be aware that there are a wide range of sexual and gender identities and expressions, and these can change over time. Some people do not have a fixed gender identity, and present as different genders on different days. People who want to avoid discrimination from their families, friends, or coworkers may call themselves heterosexual, even when they have same-sex partners.

Creating Inclusion and Safety (Cont.)

- **Maintaining a Non-Judgmental Attitude:** Ensuring that staff, students and clients alike feel safe and accepted also means keeping an open mind about different behaviors, identities, and expressions. It is important to avoid showing disapproval or surprise. Check your body language and facial expressions to make sure you're not sending unintended messages. Are you shaking your head "no"? Are you wrinkling your nose? Are you maintaining eye contact?

Creating Inclusion and Safety (Cont.)

- **Practicing Making LGBTQI+ People Comfortable:** Making changes in how you greet and interact with staff, students and clients can be challenging at first. For example, most of us have learned to use gender terms like "ma'am" and "sir," in order to be polite. However, with practice, you will find it becomes easier to ask others for their pronouns, to greet a group in inclusive terms (Welcome All vs. Welcome ladies and gentlemen)

Creating Inclusion and Safety (Cont.)

- **Create an Environment of Accountability:** Don't be afraid to politely correct your colleagues, students and event clients if they use the wrong names and pronouns, or if they make insensitive comments. Creating an environment of accountability and respect requires everyone to work together.

- **We All Make Mistakes, So...** It is not always possible to avoid making errors, and simple apologies can go a long way. If you do slip, you can say something like: "I apologize for using the wrong pronoun/name/terms. I did not mean to disrespect you."

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Language Do's and Don'ts

Avoid Stating…	Say Instead…	Why?	Example
Homosexual	Gay	Homosexual" often connotes a medical diagnosis, or a discomfort with gay/lesbian people.	We want to do a better job of being inclusive of our gay employees.
Born female or Born male	Assigned female/ male at birth"	"Assigned" language accurately depicts the situation of what happens at birth	Max was assigned female at birth, then he transitioned in high school.
"A gay" or "a transgender"	A gay or transgender person	Gay and transgender are adjectives that describe a person/group	We had a transgender parent in our parenting support group
Transgender people and normal people	Transgender people and cisgender people	Saying "normal" implies "abnormal," which is a stigmatizing way to refer to a person.	This group is open to both transgender and cisgender people.

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Language Do's and Don'ts

Avoid Sating…	Say Instead…	Why?	Example
Both genders or Opposite sexes	All genders	Both implies there are only two; Opposite reinforces antagonism amongst genders	Video games aren't just a boy thing -- kids of all genders play them.
Ladies and gentlemen	Everyone, folks, Honored guests, etc.	Moving away from binary language is more inclusive of people of all genders	Good morning, everyone, welcome to our community fund raiser
Mailman, fireman, policeman, etc.	Mail clerk, Firefighter, Police officer, etc.	People of all genders do these jobs	The police officer will be accompanying the social worker to the home visit.
"It" when referring to someone (e.g., when pronouns are unknown)	They	"It" is for referring to things, not people.	You know, I am not sure how they identify.

References and Helpful Websites

- Grant JM, Mottet LA, Tanis J, et al. Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011. www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf

- https://thesafezoneproject.com/

- https://askanonbinary.tumblr.com/pronouns

- The following link is a YouTube video that explains gender identity in Spanish https://youtu.be/nskYKGNupIQ