

Chapter 5: Gender and Sexism

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Defining Gender and Sexism

- Gender is determined by culture
- Sex is assigned at birth
- Counselors must keep in mind that:
 - Not everyone conforms to binary male/female system
 - Gender socialization plays a critical role in development
 - Gender role socialization occurs as early as age 2
 - U.S. culture tends to view sexism as a problem that exists in other countries
 - Gender is not the same as sexuality

Defining Gender and Sexism (cont'd)

- Transgender defined:
 - Individuals whose gender identities and expressions do not conform to societal norms
 - Urgent transgender community needs
- Genderqueer defined:
 - Often embraced by youth; do not identify with traditional gender pronouns
- Intersex defined:
 - Refers to individuals whose reproductive or sexual anatomies do not fit the socially constructed male (XY) or female (XX)

Defining Sexism

- Sexism
 - The oppression of individuals based on gender.
 - Historically exploitation and dominance of women by men.
 - Often intersects with other identities such as race/ethnicity and sexual orientation
- Internalized sexism
 - Women begin to believe negative images
- Male privilege
 - Unearned rights and societal privileges afforded to men based on biological sex

Gender and Counseling Considerations

- Counselors need to:
 - Become aware of personal assumptions, values and biases regarding gender
 - Learn about client's worldview of gender and gender issues.
- Counseling considerations:
 - Client-counselor matching
 - Exploration of racial and cultural differences
 - Communication styles
 - Counselor self-awareness

Counseling Women

- American Psychological Association (2006) provides guidelines for psychological practice for girls and women
 - Diversity, social context and power
 - Professional responsibility
 - Practice applications
- Strides and defeats for women's rights

Counseling Women cont'd

- Costs:
 - Higher risk than men for a variety of mental health issues such as Depression, Anxiety and Eating Disorders
 - Gender role expectations
 - Sexual double standards
 - Role is to accept or reject male advances
 - Lowered socio-economic status
 - Current risk (Roe v. Wade)

Counseling Men

- Western culture socialization
- Double standards (“Men don’t cry,” “Men watch their children”)
- Normative male alexithymia = inability to put feelings into words
- Patterns of parenting
- Code of masculinity

Counseling Men cont'd

- Male gender role conflict
 - Theory of how traditional gender role socialization can result in negative consequences for men who remain rigid in changing circumstances
- Counselors might consider to:
 - Set goals early in counseling
 - Maximize men's socialized preference for overcoming obstacles
 - Manage resistance

Counseling Transgender Clients

- ACA endorses specific competencies for working with this population.
- Counselors need to:
 - Have a strong understanding of the differences between sex and gender
 - Eliminate discrimination in the counseling setting
 - Carefully consider the client's goals, self-definitions and experiences of discrimination
 - Focus of the client's existing resilience

Historical Context of Sexism

- Patriarchy:
 - Originally a system that benefitted both men and women
 - Evolved into an entrenched system that afforded men greater power and restricted women's roles
 - Became a system of ownership
 - Focus of the client's existing resilience
- The Feminist Movement

Cultural Intersections of Gender

- Important to note that more within-group than between-group differences may exist
- Strict gender guidelines in some cultures
- More fluid concept of gender roles in others
- Varies depending on amount of acculturation
- Often a source of tension

Physical Consequences of Sexism

- When women are objectified, they are more likely to be targets of violence
 - Sexual assault/trauma
 - Child sexual abuse
 - Disordered eating
 - Interpersonal violence
 - Intimate Partner Violence

Social Consequences of Sexism

- Undervaluation of females for women of color and narrow definitions of gender roles:
 - Career development
 - Social and Financial opportunities
 - Wage disparities

Addressing Sexism in Counseling

- Counselors should:
 - Be aware of own beliefs
 - Be aware of how own race/ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexual orientation affect the counseling relationship
 - Refrain from assuming client's presenting problems are related to gender identity.
 - Assess for experiences of prejudice or discrimination
 - Integrate advocacy competencies