



Welcoming Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Mental Health Consumers Into Recovery





Who I am

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Club





Who (I think) you are

- Care providers
- Consumers
- Family members





What I hope to do today

- Discuss LGBT identities and issues
- Examine the particular hurdles and challenges that LGBT mental health consumers face
- Offer simple steps you can take to remove barriers to care
- Discuss the spectrum of transgender experience
- Leave time for questions and discussion





- What I am NOT here to do today





- My big goal





Let me tell you a story





What we do at Rainbow Heights Club

- Providing safety, social support, advocacy and peer based services for LGBT people with mental illness since September 2002
- Staff includes psychologists, social workers, peer specialists, student interns and volunteers
- Extensive consumer input on programming, staffing and services
- All services provided free of charge





Our track record over the past eight years

- Nearly 500 members, with 30-50 attending daily
- Greater treatment compliance, enhanced self-esteem and improved social support
- Nearly 90% of our members stay out of the hospital each year





A typical day at Rainbow Heights Club

- Safe space for unstructured socializing
- Internet access and computer tutoring
- Activity and support groups
 - Writing and art workshops
 - Discussions of relationships, spirituality, Double Trouble in Recovery
- Dinner family-style at 4 pm
- Community meeting weekly, consumer advisory board meeting every other month
- Karaoke group or movie group





Meeting the Needs of LGBT People Living with Mental Illness





How many people are we talking about?

- NYC Community Health Survey of 10,000 randomly selected adult New Yorkers
- 10% said they were MSM and 4.7% said they were WSW
- According to the U.S. Surgeon General, 2.6% of adults are experiencing a serious mental illness at any given time
- That means that about **27,300** LGBT adults in New York State, and 11,000 in New York City, are living with a serious mental illness, right now.





Elevated levels of negative mental health outcomes

- In that same Community Mental Health Survey, both MSM and WSW respondents described poorer mental health, more drinking, more drug use, more smoking, and more domestic violence than their heterosexual counterparts
- LGBT people are at elevated risk for depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Fergusson, Horwood & Beautrais, 1999; Cochran, Sullivan & Mays, 2001)





Good news: you don't have to be LGBT...

- to be effective with LGBT clients, either in a mental health, social service or medical treatment context.

You just need some basic information...

- which is what we provide in the PRIDE trainings. We'll talk about simple advice you can use *today* that will help you provide more effective care, and use the wisdom and skills that you already have.





Some Terms

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Transgender





Why is thinking about sexual orientation and gender identity relevant to discussions about recovery?

- “A home, meaningful work, and a date on a Saturday night”
- Consumers self-define their recovery goals, including the kinds of relationships they do or don’t want to have
- People often have internal or external conflicts around their sexual orientation and/or gender identity





According to the American Psychological Association, Sexual Orientation...

- is not a choice
- is determined by many factors, usually at a very early age
- is not an illness or emotional problem
- is different from sexual behavior
- cannot be changed by therapy





So what is it like to have mental illness
(and/or substance abuse
and/or alcoholism
and/or developmental disability)
and be LGBT?





LGBT people with mental illness...

- Are a doubly stigmatized population
- Often don't "fit" in mainstream mental health clinics or hospitals
- Often don't "fit" in the LGBT community either
- Need a place where they don't have to hide





Why hide who you are?

- Homosexuality itself was defined as a mental illness until 1973
- “Reparative therapies” are still practiced even today
- Even today, people seeking treatment in support of a transgender identity must accept being diagnosed as mentally ill
- Pervasive homophobia is a part of our culture
- Clients fear being rejected by care givers
- They are often hypervigilant regarding subtle signals we may not realize we’re sending





Obstacles we face

- Stigma
- Invisibility
- Our care providers and loved ones may not know how to support us
- We may not be sure we know how to support and accept ourselves.
- To keep our recovery, we often have to tell our stories, but in mainstream settings we may not be sure that other people are willing to hear them.





Substance abuse and recovery issues

Sexuality and gender identity can have a great deal to do with a client's...

- Motivation for use
- Context of use
- Impact of use

As can homophobia and transphobia, both external and internalized.





Effective Care with LGBT Clients

- Use inclusive language (“relationships”)
- Be welcoming when people discuss relationships, sexuality and gender (“I’m glad you told me that”)
- Accept the person’s definition of the problem
- Provide a safe and affirming environment
- Empathize with your clients and loved ones





This is a very challenging issue for *everybody*.

- Continuum of mental health and mental illness
- Continuum of sexualities
- Continuum of gender identities
- Stepping out of your comfort zone



Questions and Discussion





A (very) Few Words About Gender Identity and Gender Expression





Unpacking gender identity

- Sex \neq gender
- Sexual orientation \neq gender identity
- Biology \neq destiny





Terms and Definitions

SEX refers to a person's anatomy and biology

- **male, female, intersex**
- **GENDER** is a socially constructed system of classification and subjective understandings
(Example: our founding fathers)
- **man, woman, trans man, trans woman, masculine, feminine**
- Gender is not necessarily defined by sex.





Sexual Orientation vs. Gender Identity

- **Sexual Orientation** =emotional, physical, spiritual attraction to other people.

vs.

- **Gender Identity** =An individual's sense of being a man, or a woman, or something else.
Not always visible to others
- Everyone has both a gender identity and a sexual orientation





“Biology is not destiny”

- **Transgender** is an umbrella term used to describe people who’s gender identity, expression, and behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
- **Transsexuals**=are Transgender people who are born with the biological characteristics of one sex and now identify with another. Female to Male (Transgender man or transman), Male to Female (Transgender woman or transwomen)
- **Transvestites**= Persons dressing in the clothing of another gender for sexual or otherwise pleasurable purposes, in private rather than in public





Questions and Discussion





One final word...

- For the care providers out there





One final word...

- For the consumers and family members out there





Thank you!

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For a 10 minute documentary film:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7hhq28pKII>

