UNPACKING & CONTEXTUALIZING GENDER

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PLAN FOR TODAY

- Brief introduction
- Intro of traditional gender model - belief system
- Introduction of the unpacking gender exercise
- Interview demonstration
- Dyad or triad interviews
- Group exercise
- Moving this into practice
- Questions/Debrief
UNDERSTANDING GENDER
THE PROCESS OF UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING

- Hold onto your seat!

- Starts with understanding yourself and your beliefs about gender
  - Usually requires unlearning and relearning what you know about gender

- Hold onto your seat!
TRADITIONAL BINARY GENDER MODEL

- **Biological Sex:**
  - Male
  - Female
  - Hormones, genitalia
  - secondary sex characteristics

- **Gender Expression**
  - Male: Masculine
  - Female: Feminine
  - Dress, posture, roles, identity

- **Sexual Orientation**
  - Male: Attracted to Women
  - Female: Attracted to Men
Read through the questions on the unpacking gender handout.
  - Take about 5 minutes to jot down some answers.

Need a volunteer to be interviewed

Pick a partner to interview
  - Switch roles after 15 min
Gender development is fluid

- Children do switch their gender after 24 months and are doing fine
- Gender development does not appear to stop at age 6, but goes from birth to death.
- There is fluidity and potential change across the lifespan with no dire outcomes.

- Children are telling adults their gender as young as toddlers
- Gender is focused in the mind and brain, not between the legs
BEING TRANSSEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, OR GENDER NONCONFORMING IS A MATTER OF DIVERSITY, NOT PATHOLOGY

“the expression of gender characteristics, including identities, that are not stereotypically associated with one’s assigned sex at birth is a common and culturally-diverse human phenomenon [that] should not be judged as inherently pathological or negative.”

(WPATH, 2010)
BEYOND A SPECTRUM
MANY CONFIGURATIONS ARE POSSIBLE
IT INCLUDES NATURE, NURTURE, AND CULTURE

- **Biological Sex:**
  *Hormones, genitalia*
  *secondary sex characteristics*
  *Nature*

- **Gender Identity**
  *"I am a...":*

- **Gender Expression**
  *Dress, posture, roles, identity, Culture/context*

- **Sexual Orientation**
  *Attracted to:*
WHERE ARE YOU?

- Place yourself on the Authentic Gender Grid
- Group exercise to discuss potential biases uncovered today
- Explore how biases may impact GNC children and their families
- Questions/de-brief.
NEGATIVE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

- Children who don’t fit in the binary may try to hide their true gender identity.
  This can lead to:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Suicidality (50% will attempt)
  - Substance abuse
  - Self-mutilation
  - Oppositional behavior
  - Risky sexual behavior

- Children who cannot hide experience
  - Harassment at the hands of peers, teachers, parents...
  - All of the above
  - Homelessness
  - Prostitution
IMPACT OF SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

- **Parents**
  - Often are told it is their responsibility to raise their children with appropriate gender roles
  - May resort to abuse, emotional, physical, sexual
  - Parents may be disgusted by their child’s gender presentation
  - Parents may kick older children out of the house
  - Parents who affirm their child’s gender may be criticized, ostracized, and blamed.
WHAT TO DO

- Need to work with an interdisciplinary team Cannot just sit in your office
  - Need to connect with community
  - Need to work with schools

- Always listen to the child or youth

- Be mindful of the parents or caregivers
  - Parents are often blamed for their child’s non-conforming behavior
  - Regional differences are huge
  - Parents may not trust you
  - May feel they have done something wrong or have a wrong child
  - Parents who support their child may be maligned by others

- Watch your own feelings and reactions
WHAT IS NEEDED TO WORK WITH THESE FAMILIES?

- Unlearning and relearning notions about gender
- An understanding of family dynamics, child development, and child psychopathology
- The ability to sit with ambiguity and not knowing
- The ability to listen to the knowledge and wisdom of the children and parents you work with
- The ability to move outside your office to advocate for families and children
- The ability to work with parents with very different views around gender.
  - To hold a space for parents with very negative views around gender non-conformity