Transference, Countertransference and the Shifting Landscape of Gender Identities

Lecture given by R. Danielle Egan, Ph.D.
with terminology and language presentation by Jessica Markowirz, LICSW

Abstract: Individuals who experience dissonance between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth face significant structural, physical, and emotional obstacles in today's society. Though the transgender community has made gains in social acceptance and resources in recent years, transgender people remain at higher risk for discrimination and violence than the general population, which, along with the gender dysphoria that often accompanies the internal dissonance, also places transgender individuals at heightened mental health risks. It is therefore crucial that psychotherapists have an understanding of the shifting landscape of gender identities and how we, as analysts, can best support our transgender patients. This presentation will focus on this work to open a dialogue about the unique considerations when working with transgender patients, particularly in the transference and countertransference experienced in the dyad when the therapist does not identify as transgender.

Learning Objectives: After this intermediate/advanced presentation, participants will be able to:
1. Define sex, gender, gender identity, transgender, cisgender, and gender dysphoria, and understand the fluidity of identities.
2. Identify the unique psychological risks transgender and gender nonconforming individuals face, and how that correlates to mental health outcomes.
3. Describe the changing psychoanalytic literature, from a variety of perspectives, on the psychodynamics of transgender individuals.
4. Apply the common themes in the transference and countertransference when doing clinical work with transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.

Biographies:
R. Danielle Egan is the Fuller-Maathai Chair of Gender and Women’s at Connecticut College and a practicing psychoanalyst. She has authored or co-authored four books and over 20 articles and book chapters on the topic of gender and sexuality. She is the co-author and co-director, of the SAFE Grant Project—a grant funded initiative to train and facilitate groups for university faculty, medical staff, clinicians, and secondary school teachers on best practices for working with LGBTQ young people. Dr. Egan earned her second doctoral degree in clinical psychoanalysis from the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis in 2016.

Jessica Markowitz, LICSW is a clinical social worker practicing in Providence, RI and specializing in perinatal mental health. She is a member of the Rhode Island Association of Psychoanalytic Psychologies board as secretary and CE coordinator. She has worked with the LGBTQ population since 2009 both clinically and on the macro level, including community outreach and advocacy for RI's former Marriage Equality Rhode Island, and development and facilitation of a therapy group through Out Boulder in Boulder, CO.

References:
1. Williams Institute, 2016 “What we know about Transgender Health Issues” http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/lgbtstats/
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