

Bodies in Transition:

Empowering and Engaging Transgender and Gender
Nonconforming Clients Through Mindful Embodiment Practices



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Disclosure:

The presenters have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program or presentation

What are we talking about and why this?

When we talk about trans + gender nonconforming bodies (TGNC) we tend to only talk about changing them

Go beyond *Trans 101*

Paradox: How do we help our clients become more embodied while acknowledging and validating their (possible) desire to change their bodies?

Disclaimer: not all concepts + theories will apply to all TGNC clients; respect each client's lived experience

Brave space

How do you know you
are in the “right” body?
(Or that you are not?)
That it belongs to you?

There is no objective measure of gender!

There are so many more aspects of gender perceived through organs other than the eyes

Tacit knowing of gender (Sanger, 2017)

- Through subception (perception outside of consciousness)
- Proximal- texture of skin, fat: muscle ratio, way voice feels in throat, particular smell
- Distal- understanding of these sensations/observations as *masculine*

A TNGC client may feel these elements as discordant when they are still incongruent but have no means to articulate it

Gender + tacit knowing as music

Body Image + Dysphoria

Long history of humans' complicated relationships with their body

Embodied self is constructed through an interplay of body image and body schema (Gallagher, 2005)

- Body image: appearance of the body in the visual field and accompanying beliefs and attitudes
- Body schema: we channel and interpret various sensory input and movement, orientation, and kinesthesia, conscious and unconscious.
 - *Interoception*: perception of sensation from all internal sources.

Body Image + Dysphoria

Mirroring

Freud: move through mirror stage by taking an image of the body, acquiring “imaginary mastery” over it

- This is the foundation for the development of the “I” through interactions with the primary caregiver (Lacan, 1988)

Child’s survival depends on being seen, so what happens with TGNC kids?

- Gendered misattunement due to sense of themselves not being reflected back
- Parents interact differently with infants based on perceived gender

Body Image + Dysphoria

Mirroring

Poor mirroring exacerbates the child's difficulty connecting to a body

- Gender in private vs. how vigilant social self-awareness needs to be
- Children begin to consciously or unconsciously manipulate their behavior away from their body schema and to a body image (and expression) that matches others' expectations

A NEED TO CONNECT, ATTUNE, AND EMBODY!

Body Image + Dysphoria

The aftermath for suppressing the self particularly related to childhood rejection, disapproval, or disgust is SHAME

- This is observed in many adults who come to understand their gender later in life
- Process of self-recognition initially is to connect to this false self, to profoundly feel it, in order to connect with the body

Shame + Belonging

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.

~ Brené Brown

Shame + Belonging

- We all have it. Shame is universal and one of the most primitive human emotions that we experience
- We're all afraid to talk about shame
- The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives
 - Shame is the fear of disconnection
 - Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging

Shame + Belonging

Twelve 'shame categories' have emerged from Brené Brown's research:

- Appearance and body image
- Money and work
- Motherhood/fatherhood
- Family
- Parenting
- Mental and physical health
- Addiction
- Sex
- Aging
- Religion
- Surviving trauma
- Being stereotyped or labeled

Negative Effects / Signs of Shame

- Thomas Scheff, a University of California - shame inhibits the expression of all emotions; with the occasional exception of anger.
- If we do not feel / process emotions – they come out sideways
 - Self-harm / Suicidal Ideation
 - Depression / Anxiety
 - Numbing – drugs, alcohol, dangerous behaviors
 - Outward projection of pain and fear onto others – rage, anger, difficult relationships
 - Acceptance of abuse from others, believing they deserve poor treatment – a lifetime of feeling as though we belong no where may lead to accepting any relationship as better than no relationship

Helping TGNC Clients Eradicate Shame

Psychoeducation about shame vs. guilt

- What allows shame to grow:
 - Silence, secrecy and judgment

3 Steps to eradicating shame

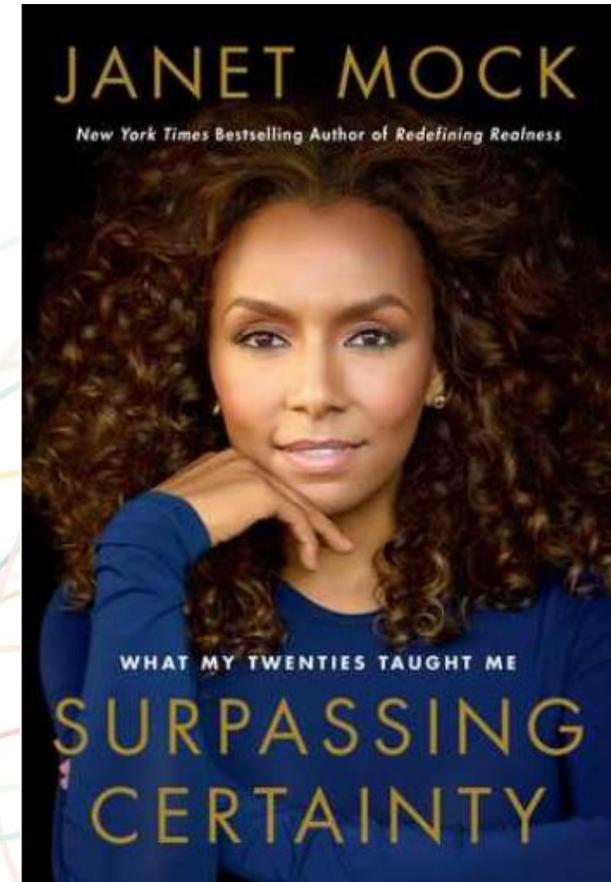
- Shame cannot survive empathy
 - Talk to yourself like you would talk to someone you love - Compassion
 - Reach out to someone you trust – Connection
 - Tell your story – Owning your story

Surpassing Certainty – Internalized Transphobia

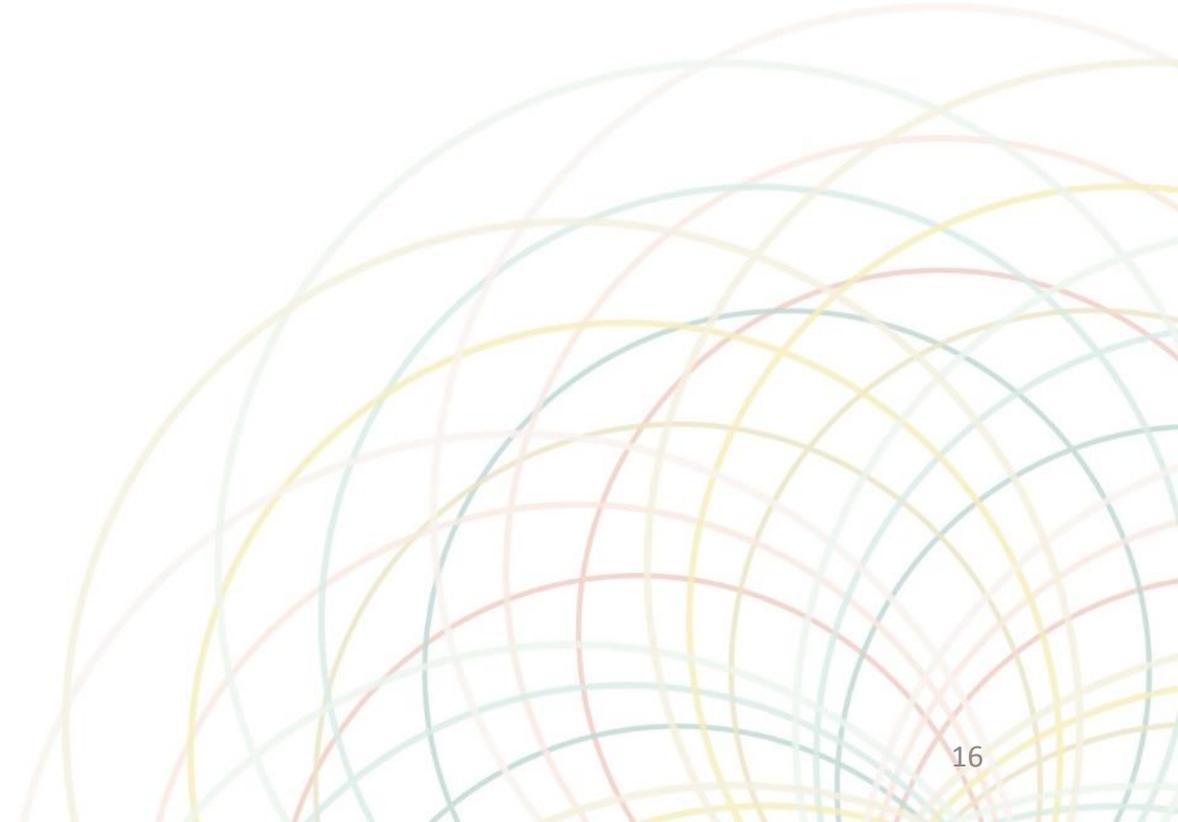
"On the road toward self-revelation, we make little compromises in an effort to appease those we love... those people tend to be our parents. I wanted my mother to be happy, and I believed I could make her happy if I were the kid she'd always wanted, the one that stopped all the girlie stuff that angered my father for years...

Hiding... myself for that period allowed me to operate under a guise of normality that made me feel temporarily secure. For many Trans people, the pretending can last for months, years, even decades; no two people have the same journey, yet a common fear threads us: BEING WHO I REALLY AM WILL LEAD TO REJECTION.

Concealing who you are warps your sense of self and heightens feelings of hopelessness about ever being able to be your true self. A defeatist feeling loomed over me, telling me that no one would ever understand and accept me. I began believing that people, including my family and friends, would be disgusted by me, and these new belief systems anchored in the shame that I internalized from the world around me led to further isolation. It's no surprise that trans people are more likely to struggle with depression, suicidal thoughts and actions, substance abuse, and a wide range of self-harm behaviors that make it much more difficult to live healthy, thriving lives."



Self-Reflection Exercise



Embodiment Practices

- “Decolonizing Yoga”
 - Removing gendered assumptions, expectations, and language.
 - An invitation into an exploration of wellness for a community that for too long focused only on survival, and an opportunity for healing wounds of historical trauma.
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga
 - Make everything an invitation instead of a command.
 - Connect choices explicitly to what can be done with the body right now.
 - Connect choices to interoception.
- Three Major Components
 - Mindfulness
 - Body Awareness
 - Breath

Mindfulness

Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.

John Kabat-Zinn

Body Awareness

The process of knowing the body is a nuanced and rambling path.

S.J. Langer

Breath

The mind controls the body, but the breath controls the mind.

B.K.S. Iyengar

Join us for the monthly TGNC consultation group at
Clintonville Counseling & Wellness

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