



The *Five CORE Practice Areas* of Gender Responsiveness

Alyssa Benedict, MPH

Definition of Gender Responsive

Gender Responsive or Gender-specific programs intentionally allow research and knowledge on female socialization, female psychological development, female strengths, female risk factors for system involvement, females' pathways through systems, female responses to traditional interventions and females' unique program/service needs to affect and guide ALL aspects of the program's design, processes, and services (adapted from Maniglia).

At minimum, this means that each program component integrates, where possible, an understanding of the following **Five Core Practice Areas** at both a conceptual and practice level:

- **A relational approach**
 - **A strengths-based approach**
 - **A trauma-informed approach**
 - **A culturally competent approach**
 - **A holistic approach**
-

The Five CORE Practice Areas

Being gender responsive means uniting and applying five areas of practice at every level of service delivery. Often discussed as separate areas of implementation, **all** of these areas must be considered when enhancing programs and services for females. For example, a program or service cannot be considered gender responsive for females if it is not also trauma-informed. Similarly, a program or service cannot be considered gender responsive if it is not also culturally competent. Females' past experiences, including any trauma they may have survived, as well as their ethnic and cultural identity, are very real parts of who they are.

Effective, gender responsive practice requires that we acknowledge the "whole client." Attending to all Five Practice Areas fosters a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the breadth of gender responsiveness and facilitates successful program and service enhancement. Gender responsive programs integrate all Five Practice Areas at every level of service delivery, from intake, to service planning to

aftercare. Additionally, these Practice Areas are a useful and practical reference point when developing and evaluating any level of service. The Five CORE Practice Areas are briefly defined below.

Relationship-based

Relationship-based programs/services are rooted in relational-cultural theory and relational psychology. They acknowledge the centrality of relationships in females' lives, including the influence connections and disconnections have on females' lives and the critical role that connection can play in females' personal and relational growth and success.

Therefore, relationship-based programs/services:

- Emphasize relational strengths and the development of therapeutic relationships between all members of the service community;
 - Ensure that practitioners foster healthy, mutual and empowering relationships with and among clients;
 - Use relational language; and
 - Weave a relational perspective through all aspects of service delivery.
-

Strengths-based

Strengths-based programs/services adopt an intentional movement away from a deficit approach, and, instead:

- Focus on client strengths, talents and assets;
 - Recast “negative” behaviors as survival behaviors;
 - Teach new skills;
 - Give clients healthy power and control;
 - Use strengths-based language;
 - Allow clients to impact programming; and
 - Weave a strengths-based perspective through all aspects of service delivery.
-

Trauma-informed

Trauma-informed programs/services incorporate knowledge about violence against females and the impact of trauma, thereby increasing their effectiveness (Covington & Bloom, 2000, 2003).

This means that such programs (Harris and Fallot, 2001 in Covington & Bloom, 2000, 2003):

- Take trauma into account;
- Avoid triggering trauma reactions and/or traumatizing the individual;
- Adjust the behavior of staff and the organization to support each individual's coping capacity; and

- Allow survivors to manage their trauma symptoms successfully so that they are able to access, retain, and benefit from services.
-

Culturally Competent

Culturally competent programs/services:

- Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally;
- Ensure that practitioners have the capacity to 1) value diversity, 2) conduct self evaluation, 3) manage the dynamics of difference, 4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and 5) adapt to the diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve; and
- Incorporate the above in all aspects of policy-making administration, practice and service delivery, and systematically involve key stakeholders and communities.

(Adapted from the National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University)

Holistic

Holistic programs/services acknowledge the larger context of females' lives, and, in turn, the larger context of females' thoughts, feelings, behaviors and decision-making. This means that practitioners understand pathways theory as well as the unique causes and correlates of female behavior. Holistic programs are also oriented toward empowerment and advocacy.

It is recommended that practitioners allow the **Five CORE Practice Areas** to help them further define gender responsiveness, thereby strengthening the lens through which they view their services for and approaches with females.