

Here's How to Teach Voice and Communication Skills to Transgender Women

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Preface

The manualized Voice and Communication Program for Transgender Women (VC^{MtF} Program) began at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Speech and Hearing Clinic. Despite having a thriving community of transgender women, Northern Nevada still lacked many transitional services, including voice modification. The women in this community were traveling two hours to receive services, but wanted professionals in the Reno/Sparks community. In an effort to fill this gap in services, the UNR Speech and Hearing Clinic Director, Rachel Walden, established UNR's Trans Voice and Communication Clinic in the summer of 2014. The purpose of the clinic was two-fold: 1) to train graduate speech-language pathology students how to deliver voice and communication services to transgender people, and 2) to provide voice and communication training to transgender people in the Reno/Sparks community.

Without any commercially available training programs, it was left to our means to create one. Subsequently, the VC^{MtF} Program was developed to train graduate speech-language pathology students how to deliver voice and communication services during and after graduate school. Driven by the desire to foster diversity and offer quality care to all transgender women, the purpose of this book is to share the empirically supported VC^{MtF} Program with other speech-language pathology professionals who will provide voice and communication services to transgender women.

We relied heavily on previous research in designing the VC^{MtF} Program and are grateful for those who contributed to the literature. This iteration of the VC^{MtF} Program was developed over four years of clinical research at the Trans Voice and Communication Clinic at the University of Nevada, Reno. As we continue to implement the program and conduct clinical research, we are learning ways to make this program even more effective and efficient.

The inaugural Trans Voice and Communication Clinic was in the summer of 2014. Since this treatment period was eight weeks in length, the VC^{MtF} Program was initially designed to fit in that time frame. At the time, we conducted a case series research design. Following seven weeks of sessions, we were excited to find improvements in our participant's fundamental frequency, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and vocal quality of life. Our participants were markedly happier with their voice and novel listeners noticed these changes too. The program worked, but it was not perfect. Results from this study informed us about which parts of the VC^{MtF} Program were helpful to our clients and where improvements could be made. Adjustments were made to the manualization, the length of the program, and the homework. Based on that study, we modified

the VC^{MtF} Program and implemented a more robust research design. Beginning in the summer of 2015, we conducted a single subject multiple-baseline across-participants study. This provided further empirical support that the program resulted in positive effects on desired fundamental frequency, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and vocal quality of life. After the single subject study, we turned our attention to the frequency of VC^{MtF} Program sessions. During the summer of 2016, we conducted a case series study in which we implemented VC^{MtF} Program sessions twice per week as opposed to once. Findings continued to empirically support the effects of the program. Thus, we decided the VC^{MtF} Program could be implemented with the frequency that met the needs of the transgender woman and her clinician, whether that be one or two sessions per week. In 2016, to further improve the benefits for transgender women in different phases of their transition process, we added three sessions that use an acting and character development approach based in theatrical performance to address motivation and expectations.

The timing of creating this book was apropos for multiple reasons. Transgender women in the United States were becoming more public in their transition process and actively seeking transition services. Topics surrounding bathroom access, research findings, school policy, and legislative issues were frequently in the news. Furthermore, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the national organization of speech-language pathologists, stated that providing voice services to transgender people was within the scope of practice for speech-language pathologists.

We are grateful for the transgender women who have placed their trust in us and honored that they have allowed us to be a part of their transition process. We encourage speech-language pathology clinicians to be patient, respectful, mindful, and empathetic with the transgender women you work with as you listen to their experiences. Please remember to exercise flexibility while working through the VC^{MtF} Program, as each transgender woman's transition journey is unique. We hope you find the experience of implementing the VC^{MtF} Program empowering for you and your clients.

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The manualized Voice and Communication Program for Transgender Women (VC^{MtF}) would not have been possible without the courage of University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Speech and Hearing Clinic Director, Rachael Walden, who saw the need for a Trans Voice and Communication Clinic and acted on it. We would like to thank UNR's Speech Pathology and Audiology Department Chair, Tom Watterson, and the UNR's School of Medicine for giving us resources to continue our research within the clinic. We are indebted to Annie Blanton, PhD, CCC-SLP, for her generosity in sharing her experiences and providing our initial training. We extend our gratitude to Kristine Galek, PhD, CCC-SLP, for her expertise in voice and availability for consultations. We would like to acknowledge Brooke Maylath, Transgender Alliance Group Board Director, for her continued support, sensitivity trainings, advice, and openness to answering all of our questions. We are sincerely grateful for the transgender women who participated in the VC^{MtF} Program and trusted us in this process. We would like to extend our appreciation to the UNR clinical supervisors and the graduate student clinicians for implementing the VC^{MtF} Program and providing feedback. Lastly, we would like to recognize both those who pioneered the research in this field, and those who continue to build on it. Thank you for paving the way, and teaching us. Without you, none of this would be possible.

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Introduction

Are you a graduate student clinician or early-career speech-language pathologist who wants to train transgender women how to modify their voice as well as their verbal and nonverbal communication, but does not know where to start? This book will teach you how to implement the manualized Voice and Communication Program for Transgender Women (VC^{MtF} Program), how to tailor the program to meet the needs of individual transgender women, and how to assess fundamental frequency and vocal quality of life.

We created the VC^{MtF} Program because we needed to train our graduate speech-language pathology students to work with transgender women who wanted to modify their voice and communication. In developing the VC^{MtF} Program, we conducted four years of clinical research currently in preparation for publication. The result is the current iteration of the VC^{MtF} Program. The VC^{MtF} Program is unique because it is an easy to use, manualized program that systematically targets voice, verbal communication, and nonverbal communication. In addition, it can be tailored to meet the needs of transgender women who are in different phases of their transition process. While we have only used this program in *live* sessions with transgender women, the program is designed in such a way that it has the potential to be applied via telepractice.

This book provides the tools to be successful when working with transgender women. In it, you will find resources for the clinician, an introduction to the VC^{MtF} Program, methods and materials for assessment, and step-by-step instructions for VC^{MtF} Program sessions.

We have made a conscious effort to create a manualized program rooted in a strong theoretical rationale to train transgender women to modify their voice and communication. However, there is still much to be learned. We believe that there are other approaches that will also benefit transgender women. We created the VC^{MtF} Program based on our clinical research and experience and realize that this iteration of the VC^{MtF} Program is an initial step in training transgender women who wish to modify their voice. We are eager for you to try the VC^{MtF} Program and see the benefits we have witnessed for the transgender women with whom we have worked.

PART



Introductory Materials

CHAPTER

1

Resources for the Clinician

When we first began the Voice and Communication Program for Transgender Women (VC^{MtF} Program), we relied heavily on literature and websites focusing on the transgender population. Additionally, we consulted with clinicians who had experience training transgender women and we collaborated with a local community transgender ally group to provide sensitivity training to faculty, clinical supervisors, and graduate student clinicians. To obtain a foundation for working with transgender women, our professional development focused on the eight major areas described below. Our aim is to share this essential information with you so you too can be prepared for success.

Competencies for Working with Transgender Women

Speech-language pathologists must adhere to the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) Code of Ethics. Although working with transgender women is within the speech-language pathologist's scope of practice, the clinician needs to provide clinical services competently. The clinician should consider one's education, training, and experience to provide quality services and seek additional professional development and mentorship as needed. The VC^{MtF} Program was originally created for graduate student clinicians. We recommend that graduate student clinicians have completed a course on voice and voice disorders, participated in sensitivity training, and are under the supervision of a certified speech-language pathologist that specializes in voice. It is also recommended that early career speech-language pathologists, and others interested in serving transgender women, develop their skills by taking continuing education courses in voice and transgender population, and find a mentor who has served or is currently serving this population.

Terms and Definitions

When working with a new population, it is helpful to understand the terminology used in the literature and in the clinical setting. The following resources provided current terms and definitions.

- Transgender Allies Group (TAG)
 - Website: <http://www.transgenderalliesgroup.org/>
 - Terms: http://www.transgenderalliesgroup.org/pdfs/LGBT_Glossary.pdf
- Transvivor
 - Website: <http://transvivor.com/>
 - Terms: <http://transvivor.com/lgbt-dictionary.html>
 - FAQs: <http://transvivor.com/transgender-faqs.html>

Ally Training

As new professionals working with transgender people, it was important that all supervisors and graduate student clinicians receive sensitivity training. We worked closely with a local organization in our community, Transgender Allies Group (TAG), for ally training and resources. Many universities also have a diversity office that provides ally trainings. We believe local resources are best for ally training because local organizations are aware of local challenges and efforts to make the community a safer place. Please identify which of your local organizations can provide sensitivity training. We listed our local resources to give some ideas.

- Transgender Allies Group (TAG) homepage: <http://www.transgenderalliesgroup.org>
- University of Nevada, Reno Safe Zone Ally Workshop website: <https://www.unr.edu/the-center/programs-and-services/safe-zone>

Overview of Working with the Transgender Population

The University of Nevada, Reno, Trans Voice and Communication Clinic was created to meet the needs of transgender men and women. We found it helpful to learn about specific topics related to this population, and specifically to transgender women, from the following resources:

- Adler, R., Hirsch, S., & Mordaunt, M. (2012). *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client A Comprehensive Clinical Guide-2nd Edition*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing Inc.

- Coleman, E., Bockting, W., Botzer, M., Cohen-Kettenis, P., DeCuypere, G., Feldman, J., . . . Zucker, K. (2012). Standards of care for the health of transexual, transgender, and gender-nonforming people, Version 7. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 13, 165–232. doi: 10.1080/15532739.2011.700873.
- Collins, J., McFadden, C., Rocco, T., and Mathis, M. (2015). The problem of transgender marginalization and exclusion: Critical actions for human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 14(2), 205–226. doi: 10.1177/1534484315581755.
- Erickson-Schroth, L. (2014). *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves, A Resource for the Transgender Community*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gelfer, M. (1999). Voice treatment for the male-to-female transgendered client. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 8, 201–208. Retrieved from: <http://ajslp.pubs.asha.org>
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD): <https://www.glaad.org>
- Transgender Allies Group (TAG) website: <http://www.transgenderalliesgroup.org/transgenderBasics.php>
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) homepage: <http://www.wpath.org/>

Improving Your Skill Set

Although a speech-language pathologist has training in voice, verbal communication, and nonverbal communication, it is helpful to put these skills in the context of working with transgender women. The following resources provided us with additional information in the areas that were targeted in the VC^{MF} Program.

- Adler, R., Hirsch, S., & Mordaunt, M. (2012). *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client A Comprehensive Clinical Guide-2nd Edition*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing Inc.
- Behrman, A., & Haskell, J. (2013). *Exercises for Voice Therapy, 2nd Edition*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing Inc.
- Gelfer, M. (1999). Voice treatment for the male-to-female transgendered client. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 8, 201–208. Retrieved from: <http://ajslp.pubs.asha.org>
- Davies, S., Papp, V., & Antoni, C. (2015). Voice and communication change for gender nonconforming individuals: Giving voice to the person inside. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 16(3), 117–119. doi: 10.1080/15532739.2015.1075931

Counseling Your Client

Although a counseling course is not required in the training of speech-language pathologists, counseling techniques are used with clients to “support decisions and behaviors that optimize quality of life” and to achieve their goals (Holland & Nelson, 2004, p.1). Counseling is an integral part of providing voice modification and communication therapy to transgender women. It would behoove clinicians to obtain additional training in counseling techniques in communication disorders such as active listening, empathizing, clarifying, reflecting, affirming, and disclosing, to better serve transgender women.

There are four overarching steps in counseling clients in the field of communication disorder (Holland & Nelson, 2013). The first step is understanding “how the world looks to the client” (p. 12). To do this, speech-language pathologists must first examine how they see the world and remove bias in order to exhibit unbiased listening with the client. The second step is “encourage their expression” (p. 12). Speech-language pathologists can implement unbiased listening where a safe place is created to encourage clients to express their views. Speech-language pathologists need to recognize and respect any cultural differences between themselves and their clients during these interactions. The third step is advising. They should provide information to the transgender woman they are working with about what to expect in the process of changing her voice and the plans for her voice modification process. The fourth step is “helping individuals to translate information into satisfying and successful actions” (p. 12). This step should be done across the treatment period by equipping the transgender woman with the skills to successfully achieve her “ideal” voice and generalize these skills at home and in her community.

Counseling helps clients learn how to achieve and maintain authentic happiness (Holland & Nelson, 2004) and speech-language pathologists should be ready to provide counseling to a transgender woman at any moment. In our practice, we have had to set apart time during sessions to provide “active” counseling, which we have also interspersed in small moments during a session. However, clinicians need to be able to recognize when they are not counseling in communication disorders and when a referral may be required. If the client indicates symptoms of depression or other mental illnesses, it is the ethical responsibility of clinicians to state their concerns and make an appropriate referral to another professional or other team members whose scope of practice addresses mental health.

Building a Team

The VC^{MtF} Program was created to inform speech-language pathologists of their role within a team of professionals. As you work with transgender women, you will find it helpful to have a network of professionals to support you and your transgender clients. This is especially important because not all professionals work with transgender women. When building your team, you may choose a *multidisciplinary*, *interdisciplinary*, or *transdis-*

ciplinary model, depending on your mission and services (Choi, 2006). Multidisciplinary teams share knowledge from team members' different disciplines, but stay within the boundaries of their own fields. In an interdisciplinary team, team members discover the links between their fields to coordinate a cohesive, singular approach to therapy. In a transdisciplinary team, team members integrate all of their fields and transcend the traditional boundaries of each member's work. Your team should be comprised of professionals in the local community. Establishing these relationships may take time, but they will provide a local network for the transgender women you work with. Ideally, a team would include at least one professional from each category below.

- **Advocacy**
 - Attorney
- **Medical Providers**
 - Physician that specializes or accepts LGBTQIA+ patients
 - Primary health care provider
 - Nurse
 - Nurse Practitioner
 - Surgeon
 - Psychiatrist
 - Otolaryngologist (ENT)
- **Mental Health Provider**
 - Social worker
 - Counselor
- **Transition Services**
 - Speech-language pathologist
 - Physical therapist
 - Occupational therapist
 - Esthetician or cosmetologist

Resources to Build a Team

We have used the following resources to build our team in Northern Nevada.

- TAG Northern Nevada Transgender Resource Guide: <http://transgenderalliesgroup.org/pdfs/2017TRG.pdf>
- Transvivor website <http://transvivor.com/> (Go to Medical Providers tab)

Speech-language pathologists may find the following resources outside the state of Nevada useful.

- **Legal Resources**

- Organization: The National Center for Transgender Equality
- Website homepage: <https://transequality.org/>
- Description: The National Center for Transgender Equality website provides a directory of legal service providers who serve transgender women, organized by state. National and regional resources are also available.
- For provider directory, navigate to ID Documents > Transgender Legal Services Network

- **Medical Resources**

- Organization: The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association
- Website homepage: <http://www.glma.org/>
- Description: The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association website has a directory of medical providers who serve transgender women, organized by state.
- For provider directory, navigate to Resources > For Patients > Find a Provider

- **Mental Health Services**

- Organization: The Association for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling
- Website homepage: <http://www.algbtic.org/>
- Description: The Association for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling website provides a directory of mental health service providers who serve transgender women, organized by state.
- For provider directory, navigate to LGBT Resources > Therapist Resource Listing

- **Speech-Language Pathologists**

- Organization: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Website: <https://www.asha.org/public/>
- Description: The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website has a search tool titled “ASHA ProFind” to find professional speech-language pathologists.
- For “Find a Provider,” navigate to Find a Professional > Find an SLP > type “Transgender” in the search bar.

- **Physical Therapists**

- Organization: American Physical Therapy Association
- Website homepage: <https://www.apta.org/>
- Description: The American Physical Therapy Association website provides a list of physical therapists organized by state. Please contact the providers to find those serving the transgender community so that they can join your client’s multidisciplinary team
- For provider directory, navigate to For the Public > Find a PT > enter city and state

- **Occupational Therapists**
 - Organization: Healthgrades Operating Company
 - Website homepage: <https://www.healthgrades.com/>
 - Description: The Healthgrades Operating Company website provides a list of occupational therapists organized by state. Please contact the providers to find those serving the transgender community so that they can join your client's multidisciplinary team.
 - For provider directory, navigate to Find a Doctor > Find a Doctor by Specialty > See All Specialties > Occupational Therapy > select your city and state
- **Esthetician/Cosmetologist**
 - There are currently no national or international databases of licensed estheticians or cosmetologists who specialize in serving the transgender community. We recommend contacting local estheticians, asking about serving the transgender community, and building a referral list based on the collected information. Local equality centers often keep an unofficial referrals list and may be of assistance in building a team.