

Creating a Voice: The unique needs of LGBTQ Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Peter Sobota [00:00:01] And intimate partner violence is a fraught experience for people who have supports and occupy a privileged status in our society. What's it like for LGBTQ survivors attempting to be safe, to leave and navigate the legal system and find the support? Almost all survivors find empowering. I really thanks for joining us. And in social work from the university at Buffalo School of Social Work. It's great, as always, to have you along. Today, our guest practitioner and author Caitlin or Katie Gillis talks with us about how IPD is uniquely challenging for LGBTQ survivors as their efforts to leave and be safe and be empowered is complicated by the additional hurdles faced by persons who are already marginalized by institutional and societal aspects of our culture, from threats to out their identities to real fears that include their families, response service providers that may not be so accepting and even disconcerting thoughts that by disclosing IPV survivors will exacerbate already negative opinions of LGBTQ folks. Ms.. Gillis will tell us about these survivors unique needs, how she conceptualize as persons in this experience, and how she addresses these issues in her practice and therapeutic relationships with this population. Caitlin Gillis, Alcaeus S.W., is a New Orleans based social work psychotherapist and writer who works with survivors of relationships and family trauma. She is the author of Invisible Bruises by Katie. Welcome to Social Work.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:01:56] I thank you so much for having me. Very excited.

Peter Sobota [00:01:59] Now the pleasure is ours to get going. I routinely ask our guests how, at least from their point of view, they ended up doing the work that they do. The stories are usually pretty compelling. You know, social workers can be interesting folks at times for sure. And to the to the extent that you're comfortable, you know, don't would you be willing to kind of take a crack at the question and tell this all at the very beginning, you know, how you ended up coming to this work? And let's see if we can get to know you a little bit and how this happened.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:02:33] Yeah, absolutely. So I specialize in working with family trauma and relationship trauma, though, of course, that encompasses intimate partner violence, domestic violence. And so I think a lot of us therapist, you know, we kind of there's like this unspoken thing that most of us specialize in, something that we have experience with. Not always, but you know, it tends to be. So I grew up in a very dysfunctional family and things like that. So now I actually do trainings on family dysfunction and family violence and trauma and things like that. And I love it because it's a way, you know, of empowering other people of like, you know, this is this is a thing. It's real and pure ways to learn about it. Here are ways to recover from it. And I also feel like it's something that many people can relate to because I feel like even if they haven't had a traumatic relationship, they know someone who has. You know, and people would tell me every day, you know, my uncle is dealing with this, my cousin is dealing with this. And, you know, even if they haven't themselves, you know, they know someone who has. And so I have a lot of clients who are children of family trauma or children of domestic violence or survivors of domestic violence and survivors of intimate partner violence. And so that just ended up being something that became my specialty, because there are so few clinicians who who really specialize in it and and understand because it's not just about the aftermath of it and it's not just about, you know, a lot of there's a stereotype in, you know, the community that, you know, once you leave, it's done. And, you know, once once you walk out the door, the abuse is done and it's not like that. And so a lot of clients really gravitate towards providers who understand that sometimes that's when it starts, sometimes it's when it gets worse.

And things like that became a specialty of mine. And I just it's really rewarding working with this community.

Peter Sobota [00:04:29] Yeah. Well, thank you for telling us a little bit about that. And I mean, I think it goes without saying that. Our experiences, yours and now the people who you serve. We all benefit from a little bit of faith and hope that things can get better, right? And we can all move on with our lives. So thank you. Now today we are going to focus a little bit on the you know, we're going to focus a lot on these and the unique needs and challenges of LGBTQ folks related to interpersonal violence. But before we do, before we dove in there, I would bet that both of us know that we probably can't make blanket statements in that acronym. So if you agree with that, I know that's probably a podcast in and of itself, but it is.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:05:22] But I definitely agree with you.

Peter Sobota [00:05:23] Okay, great. You're saying. Okay, that's that's a wrap. Yeah. So if you agree, would you like to make a comment about that or you know, or too. I know that's a tough question because it's really broad, but.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:05:36] So. Yeah, absolutely. I feel like. A lot of times there are blanket statements made about the queer community or the LGBTQ community, and I feel like in some ways. In some ways I get it. And in some ways I agree with it because it is a community. It's a community I'm a part of. And, you know, and I like that there is like that community aspect of, of shared experiences. However, I always like to give the disclaimer that me as, as a queer woman or as you know, you know, a pansexual or bisexual woman is not going to have the same experiences as a gay man, as a trans woman. And it's so and especially in that people who are people of color who might be gay or trans. There's so many experiences and so one is never going to be the same. Like, I can never say, Oh, I know your experience as a black trans man, for example. You know, I can never say that. So while they're lumped together, I always like to give that disclaimer that, of course, you can never apply the same expectations and the same experiences across the board. Absolutely.

Peter Sobota [00:06:42] Yeah. And I'm sure we'll talk more about this along the way, but thank you for taking a shot at that. Let me put this in. What is my specialty really and eloquently? How is interpersonal violence unique? Or as I think you might have been alluding to, in some ways the same. Compared, for example, I guess, to the general population, whatever that means.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:07:08] So I always like to tell people, you know, and in many ways it's the same. And I like to start with the ways it's the same first, because the ways are that it's different. It's probably a longer list, and the ways that it's different is probably more important to understand, if that makes sense. So the reason is the same, and that is that abuses abuse is never excusable from one person to another. It doesn't matter the gender of the perpetrator, the gender of the victim. It's the same in that it's it's wrong and it happens the same way. You know, emotional abuse is emotional abuse. Physical abuse is physical abuse. Stalking is stalking, things like that. The process is the same, like applying for a protection order is the same, having to appear before a judge. Things like that are the same. However, it's the stuff that happens along the way, like in theory, in a perfect world which we know never existed. Of course, in a perfect world it would be the same person. I would go to the clerk's office or whatever. I'm in Louisiana, by the way, and so our laws here are very, very different. I'm from the Northeast. And so I have a knowledge, of course,

of how different it is in other states. But in Louisiana, we we have a very different law system. I think that's another podcast for another day. So if I use words that are different, please, I try. I try to use the ones I'm used to, but like a TRO temporary protection order. So in a perfect world, what would happen is someone would go get the paperwork and fill it out for the judge and they get their protection. However, we know that there are a lot of things that happen on the way. There's a lot of biases that happen from every person you have to interact with. And again, every person's experience is different. Like someone having this experience in southeast Louisiana might not have the experience in Boston. However, we know that biases exist everywhere, and so the laws in the different states and the different regions reflect those biases. For example, in Louisiana, only recently could you even get a protection order against a partner who is not considered an opposite sex and really not considered a man. Like, really? It was really women. Could get protection orders against men if they were married. It was very. I guess traditional. I hate using that word, but it's like traditional.

Peter Sobota [00:09:32] There was no mechanism.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:09:35] It was because when you fill out a protection order, it's it's ridiculous. I get on my soapbox about this. It's like a 12 page document.

Peter Sobota [00:09:42] Yeah, go.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:09:43] On. Yeah. You know, and I mean, I always I have an advanced degree and I'm a social worker and I have trouble navigating this. So what happens to people who are maybe learning English as another language or people who don't have an advanced degree or people who aren't a social worker, how do they navigate that? But I'm going to get to all that because that's that's a huge part of it for me. So a lot of the the paperwork that you fill out, you have to check off, at least in Louisiana, you have to check off, you know how it is that this person is known to you. Is it a former dating partner? So now it says former dating partner. So it's kind of broad, which is good. However, it used to be like ex-husband, ex-boyfriend, something like that. It used to be a lot. Only recently can you know same sex couples. Get protection orders.

Peter Sobota [00:10:35] Don't say that on the floor now.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:10:38] It says now it's more like gender neutral language, I swear, as it used to be when I started social working down here. When I started working down here like ten years ago, it was very much more like gender specific. It was, you know, a woman applying for protection against a man. And it was. So now they've changed a lot of the language. But there are biases along the way. I mean, the clerk who hands you the paperwork might. You know, a thing to say about that. And even if their opinion doesn't have any weight on what happens, it's still like these constant microaggressions that you have to go through, that people have to go through to, you know, get the paperwork they need. Calling the police is like a major traumatic experience for, of course, many people. But I find that when many of my queer clients will call the police and they get a response, it's like, okay, who is it? And then the person will give you a female pronoun. Oh, she is, she is punching me or she has her fist or whatever. And the de nine one operator will say, okay, what's going on? You know, and the second they hear a female pronoun, they will, you know, step back and say, why? And they don't take it as seriously. And I always like to say, of course, it's not across the board. You know, there are many people who take it seriously, no matter the gender of the perpetrator. But we have a lot of our people, you know, who are I don't know, whenever they have their biases, they're older. They're a lot

more you know, they grew up here in Louisiana. They have like their ideas of things and and they get that hesitation of, like, she. And then that hesitation is enough 2 seconds matter when you're calling the police.

Peter Sobota [00:12:34] Yeah.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:12:34] So that's a huge thing.

Peter Sobota [00:12:36] Well, I mean, even those biases, you know, they're baked into society. Mm. Okay.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:12:44] And so the the police when you know, when they do come, that's another experience for my clients, because the police will pull up and they come to wherever the location is, and then they're met with a person and they're saying, okay, so what's going on? Okay, so you're so you're scared of a woman, especially if the person who they're talking to is someone who they feel is a man you know, or presents as a man. They're like, okay, so you're afraid of a woman. And you get like. That like long work.

Peter Sobota [00:13:16] Listeners, it's a great look. You can't see this, she's. Yeah, she's nailing it. Yeah.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:13:23] And so many of my clients will, you know, will say things like, you know, the police will. I've been with clients throwing out police reports and police will say comments like, Oh, I wish I had a stalker. Is she hot? It's just comments like that. And it's just constant, you know, personal opinions of, you know, because you're at the mercy of who's taking the police report. And we like to think that it every person is just going to do their job correctly. However, we know that there's human personalities involved and and humanity. And a lot of you know, a lot of the experiences I've had, you know, the police with clients will say things like, okay, so what do you want us to do about it? But you could go in the very next day and have a completely different officer and they could be like, Oh yes, this is absolutely wrong. Let me start this paperwork. And it could be the exact same scenario. But you happen to get someone who's saying like.

Peter Sobota [00:14:17] Okay, what's the service is actually dependent on the person, not the protocol of the institution. It's yeah.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:14:27] You I would like to think it's depending on the protocol, but we know that the person it's like the protocol can be interpreted differently. Like, for example, I use stalking a lot because it's so prevalent and it's so misinterpreted. You know, people will say, okay, so they're driving by your house, call the police. What do you want us to do or. The police. And to their credit, I think they have a lot of gray area in their job that they don't know. You know, I've worked with a lot of police who will say to me, look, unless I see broken bones or a bloody web, I, I cannot issue a warrant and I cannot intervene.

Peter Sobota [00:15:07] Hmm.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:15:08] So I do think that many of them are limited as to, you know, they can't go serve a warrant for for someone for doing something that isn't violent, for example. And I like to think that's changing, but.

Peter Sobota [00:15:22] I hope so. Now, I am far from an expert in this area, so I may say things that's overly simplistic, but interpersonal violence is is a fraught and complicated

problem. Oh, for sure. And getting services for people who enjoy kind of like a dominant position in society.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:15:44] Yes.

Peter Sobota [00:15:46] And so I when I was thinking about talking with you about today's conversation and you've mentioned some of these differences already for the LGBTQ population, how could you say a little bit more about how these differences create additional hurdles or actually make it even more incredibly complicated for survivors? I would imagine that the decision to call the police. Is extraordinarily difficult for everybody. Mm hmm. And then I'm thinking and feel free to just kind of dismiss this or to or to comment. But when I was thinking about talking with you today, the person who. Maybe LGBTQ is wondering to call or not. Yes. And then has to wrestle with. Will this call result in outing me.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:16:45] Well or be even more unsafe? Yes. Yes. And that's it's it's absolutely all of that. I'm so I'm so glad that you asked that question, because that is something that is so common, because when you know many people, I know that they call the police and then, you know, the police come and it could be potentially dangerous. I mean, I use myself as an example. I mean, I'm a white woman and and I speak English fluently and, you know, and I speak well. There's a lot of stereotypes that come from people who maybe don't present like that. Well, a lot of my clients of color, a lot of my clients I work with, a lot of Latino clients, a lot of Latino clients, and they will say, please come out in a if I'm speaking Spanish to someone else. I mean, I, I get a lot of, you know, looks are a lot of comments and, you know, they ask things like that. And so and then a lot of my clients of color, you know, will say, look, I don't know what's more unsafe. Calling the police. Yeah. Risking that or just dealing with this, like, it's. It's like which one? It's like a gamble of which one's going to be more unsafe for me, which is a reality that I will not deny or challenge them on. I don't have the right to do that. I mean, that's absolutely.

Peter Sobota [00:18:03] Yeah. I almost wonder if a. If a perpetrator can almost use the threat of out, you're saying?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:18:13] Yes, absolutely. I'm so glad you said that.

Peter Sobota [00:18:15] Yeah. Go on the go, go, go.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:18:18] A lot of times what happens? Because, you know, I feel like I'm picking on Louisiana, like but I live in Louisiana and we live in a state that it is not illegal to fire someone for for sexually. Yes, I know. When I when I.

Peter Sobota [00:18:34] A minute by minute. I'm just checking the data. My computer will remind me. 20, 22.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:18:40] Yes. And you remind me. I'm a Northeastern person. I'm from the northeast. Yes, it is. It is not illegal to fire someone now. They're not going to probably come out and say.

Peter Sobota [00:18:53] It.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:18:54] Because while it's not illegal, maybe it's a faux pas. But they. It's not it's not written in like, you know, when you sign the paperwork in the beginning, they'll say, like, oh, we don't discriminate based on race, creed, religion. None of that. Nothing about sexuality. Gender is in there, but it's very specific to cis women. And so a lot of times, I mean, it is not you know, it is a huge threat. A lot of a lot of my clients, a lot of people who I serve and who I know will say if they call my boss and out me now. I like to think and again, this is my you know, I'm straight presenting and that's my. This is my privilege saying this. But I like to think that most bosses don't really care and they're not going to fire someone over that. However, there's no protection for the few that might. A lot of times my clients will say to me, like, what if they call my my boss and out, you know, or what if they call my, my, you know, my faith organization and they call me or they call my family or.

Peter Sobota [00:19:59] My family too? I was thinking about that. I could see I could see concerns about being outed. To my family. Yes. As a reason not to call.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:20:12] Oh, for sure. And that's a reality show.

Peter Sobota [00:20:15] Yeah. Yeah.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:20:16] Everyday people make that decision. It's easier for me to deal with what is happening to me. You know, the abuse that's happening to me than it is to have my family know. What's going on? Or who I'm in a relationship with. Or how I know this person. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Peter Sobota [00:20:35] You know, continuing in this kind of vein of thinking here, in your experience and I know you can't speak for folks, but you're speaking in intimate ways with with folks in this situation. I would imagine that even receiving services I'll get to legal in a minute. But service traditional services and assistance. You got to wonder if where you're going. Is an accepting place.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:21:07] Mm hmm.

Peter Sobota [00:21:07] I mean, it's. It's really another reason. Perhaps not. To even wonder if places out there, are they going to be accepting of me?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:21:18] Mm hmm.

Peter Sobota [00:21:19] And another reason maybe to not go.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:21:22] Mm hmm. And because we have. A couple of the places who serve domestic violence victims. There's a couple in particular that clients have gone to. And I've personally witnessed this, that they have all these Bible verses, right when you walk in and that's that's like a very Southern thing and, you know, and to each their own. But I have many clients that will say to me, you know, I'm a queer body walking inside this building and there's all these Bible verses. And it just makes me wonder, you know, these people love me and care for me. The same, you know, once they see me here, you know. And so that's a very real thing because it. This is what we have for support. And I like to think people think they're doing the right thing. I like to think that people think, okay, I'm trying to bring hope to people. But the reality is so many of my clients are always wondering, you know. Who do I go to kind of judging, you know, when they walk in the

police office? For the the police station, they'll kind of look in. Okay. Should I go to them? Should I go to her? You know, who's going to be the one kind of taking a gamble? Yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:22:36] Well, yeah. And you're that you're referencing the places with the with the Bibles and maybe the vibe that you get when you walk in. And that's not exactly the best example of a trauma informed organization.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:22:51] Absolutely. And it's so refreshing to hear to hear that to hear, you know, people echo the feelings and the things that I say every day. Yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:23:02] Well, okay. Again, just staying in this in this kind of very difficult conversation, in your opinion? And in speaking with the folks that you work with, does the legal system. Respond differentially or differently to the unique needs of this population. I mean, they're a part of society. Mm hmm. The cynic in me wonders if they reflect that broader society and respond differently.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:23:35] From what I have observed it. It's it's a gamble.

Peter Sobota [00:23:42] Is a crash.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:23:43] Many officers, you or many judges, courtroom clerks, you know, people who will say, look, I'm here to do my job. I go home at five and I don't care who you are. You know, it's not my job to judge. That's fine. But then there are other people who you find that your experience of being there asking for help like becomes a political discussion. Yes. Yes. It's like, I need help. Like, I'm not looking for a political discussion. Can I help? You know?

Peter Sobota [00:24:15] Uh huh, yeah. Exactly. And that is not the experience. That the people who occupy like a dominant position in the society are going to going to have to face or even think about.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:24:31] So yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:24:32] The barriers are starting to pile up aren't they.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:24:35] Yeah. And it's interesting because you mentioned like people who occupy a dominant position in society and I actually find I know this podcast on about about men or straight men, of course, but I find that many of my straight male clients can almost relate to working with queer people.

Peter Sobota [00:24:54] I believe that.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:24:55] Because they'll say to me, The police won't take my report because my perpetrator is a woman. The judge won't issue me a protection order because my ex is a woman. And so they can they understand that they they go into the police station and they, you know, they get the comments, really, dude, you're the really dude comments. Like really dude you're scared of a woman are really you know, what's she going to do? How much is this five foot four woman going to do with comments like that?

Peter Sobota [00:25:21] Mm hmm.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:25:22] So I find that many of my male clients would be like, how are they? Can they have some of these shared experiences? Interestingly.

Peter Sobota [00:25:28] Too, so folks in the LGBTQ. The kind of. Discussion that we've been we've been having. We've unfortunately identified a number of extra burdens. Obstacles and outright. Black aids.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:25:52] Mm.

Peter Sobota [00:25:54] I guess. I just wonder. And I almost hate to ask, but. Do issues like race and socioeconomic status pile on in circumstances like this?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:26:09] Absolutely. I absolutely. And. Of course, it's like I you know, I said, you know, earlier about how people will come, you know, the police will come out to to people's homes and they'll hear, okay, I'm hearing them speaking Spanish, for example, or, you know, or I'm hearing them, you know, speaking Italian or something. And. And then many of my clients of color will say to me, you know, I have a very different experience in the court system and I respect that. And so it's a race. Absolutely. It's like we have the minority stress of being, you know, a queer person, you know, in the LGBTQ community. But then you have the minority stress of being a person of color on top of that. And so, you know, you might the person might not be they might not have a bias of you as a person of color, but maybe they have a bias on you of being a lesbian or whatever, or vice versa. You know, it's just so things like that will happen and then socioeconomic status. I always I always when I work with the court system, when I work with the judges, you know, I always say to them, you are not attainable, you are not accessible to people unless they have a car and they can drive too. And they can take off a whole day of work and come and sit and wait for the judge to sign a protection order, then to take off another day of work 10 to 14 days later because you get an initial TRO temporary protection order. And then what happens if you're lucky enough to get that the judge will assign a date to come and stand before the judge with the perpetrator and like kind of plead your case of whether or not you get the full protection order. And I'm doing quotation marks for full because full is never full. It's like six months, eight months, 18 months. Yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:28:01] And so those things in and of themselves are kind of a mixed bag in terms of their effectiveness here. Katie, could we talk about some of the hope in the darkness here? Ashley Before we before we get to the hope in the darkness, I just while you were talking, I wanted to ask you something that I'm just simply curious about. How do people find you? So do you know. I mean. Yeah. Yeah. How do people know you're there? How did they find you?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:28:35] Google me. Yeah. So I have. I have. My website is under my. My full legal name. My my name that my mom uses when I'm in trouble. Caitlin Gillis.

Peter Sobota [00:28:45] Gotcha.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:28:46] I'll see you for a licensed clinical social worker. And then I have a blog on Psychology Today, and it's called Invisible Bruises. And it highlights a lot of. The aspects of nonphysical trauma, nonphysical abuse, things like stalking, things like emotional abuse, psychological abuse, things like that. And I published a book under the same name, Invisible Bruises, and is available on Amazon. And I'm also on Instagram, too. So there's lots of. Ways to find me. I publish a lot of articles on. Working with. Survivors of trauma survivors have family relationship trauma and things like that.

Peter Sobota [00:29:26] So I would imagine that people in, as we alluded to earlier, it's a community, if you will. I would hope that your. Services and the unique skills that you bring. I would hope that that is a part of the discussion perhaps in the community. So people I mean, because we've just build a convincing argument that just not a lot of places for LGBTQ folks to go to. So that was I think what I think was behind my question is. I can imagine that there are a lot of you.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:30:08] There are one. So when I start.

Peter Sobota [00:30:10] Or.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:30:10] Are. Oh, no. So there are not. So when I started working when I started working ten years ago, there were I think I was one of two providers, I maybe one of two providers in New Orleans who specialize in working with LGBTQ people. Since then. There are a lot more people now. So since then, there are a lot more. But there are providers, not necessarily people who specialize in working with intimate partner violence or relationship trauma. I think I'm the only one in New Orleans. I might be wrong. If you're out there, reach out to me. Yeah, I might be wrong, but I think I'm the only one, you know, who specializes in working with intimate partner violence.

Peter Sobota [00:30:57] Mm hmm. Okay. Thanks. Okay. Now, thank you for entertaining those thoughts. Can we go to the hope in the darkness here? Yeah. In your role as a practitioner and also for the rest of us who are listening, can can you speak and you've been doing this along the way, but can you speak practically about, you know, what is it that you. Generally, I hate to say it that way, but you find yourself doing with with survivors and to help them, you know, not only over overcome the struggles, but also to find a way out and to to thrive. I know that was a mouthful, but there's a question in there somewhere.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:31:42] Well, a lot of what I do with survivors is, you know, normalizing their experiences and validating their truth. A lot of people come in and they're like, well, maybe it wasn't that bad. I mean, you know, I mean, she is only a five foot four woman. Like maybe, you know, she didn't do anything that bad. Maybe I shouldn't be scared. And it's a lot of that. Like, it's a lot of the maybe I shouldn't, maybe I'm the one, maybe I'm crazy. It's a lot of that and a lot of cognitive dissonance with clients when they come in and we spend a lot of time going over like, no, you were terrorized, you were abused. This is what happened. This is this is what you know, your reality. Trust yourself. Trust your gut. And and then it's a lot of. Role playing too. We go over what to expect when clients say and it's always their decision to go to the police or the protection order. That's never anything that I push on someone because of all the reasons, you know, we've we've talked about. But when clients come in, they say, I want to get a protection order. I said, okay, this is this is what we do. These are some of the questions you might get, you know, from the judge. And we kind of I call it role play, but it's you know, it's really kind of like preparing of, hey, this is how to answer this. This is what to say, you know, maybe what not to say. And I find that I actually like, you know, work. With the client more than maybe, you know, their own attorney, if they have one, because the attorney will, of course, understand like the legally is, you know, from a legal standpoint. But I go over to the with them, you know, how to present themselves and. How to respond to things a certain way. And almost preparing you're going to get. This is the judge. We know this person. You're going to be probably misgendered, unfortunately. We process that easy for me to say to someone, hey, this is what's going to happen. Easy for me to say, you know? But we process the stuff that's going to come up. So that way it doesn't hit them in the courtroom,

you know, and make it make the judge then have an added bias and stereotype based on their reaction. You know, have have the reaction here with me in session. So you're prepared of what might be the reality when you go into court. We are going to deal with some racism in the court. These are some of the questions you might have. Let's go over this now.

Peter Sobota [00:33:58] So really, I mean, these are my words, an empowering ally for somebody who is going to move through and be thrown. Plenty of curveballs.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:34:08] Yes, I like to think.

Peter Sobota [00:34:13] There was a question I wanted to. This is this is outside of. I should write my questions down. But while you were talking, I had a question that I really and now I've completely lost it. Bear with me, which is Nick. The clock is ticking. I know. So just let me. Let me see if I can remember this. Got it. Oh, wow. I'm glad I gave my so. Here's a somewhat related but different question. Do you have any suggestions about. How? Practitioner. So let's leave it at practitioners out of that. I think there are more players, but how do practitioners of all orientations. Signal. Two potential survivors who may be seeking services for something else. How do we. Signal?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:35:14] Yes.

Peter Sobota [00:35:15] That we are open to these conversations.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:35:18] And that we're safe. Yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:35:21] Or that we're even willing to go there. I mean, I don't want to steal your thunder, but I. You know, I'm thinking as simplistically as, you know, obviously you ask the question or number two, you put up a visible sign or a sticker of support. What do you have? I didn't say, oh.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:35:41] I have a I have a flag behind me. Sometimes you can see it. Sometimes you can see.

Peter Sobota [00:35:46] A visible artifact. Okay, I'm answering my question, and now you go.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:35:51] So I always tell I, I actually I supervise people, too, as part of one of my seven jobs. So when I'm supervising I'm practitioners, I will say to them it is not enough to just be supportive. In the back of your mind. You have to explicitly say it. You know, when when I'm looking for a provider, if the writer doesn't say on their website that they have experience, you know, working with, you know, traumatic relationships or intimate partner violence, and there's different ways to say it. It doesn't have to be specific wording, you know, or family trauma or working with queer LGBTQ people. Then it's like a gamble.

Peter Sobota [00:36:33] Because I mean, it's a gamble under any circumstances, let alone this. Yeah, because.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:36:38] I've been to, you know, medical providers where you have to kind of educate.

Peter Sobota [00:36:43] And then compassion.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:36:44] And it's exhausting. And if it's exhausting here for me, I can't imagine how it is, you know, for and for my clients, of course, for my trans clients. You know, so it's like a constant having to be the educator. And we don't want that when you're.

Peter Sobota [00:36:57] Trying to.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:36:58] Show I will take my invitation.

Peter Sobota [00:36:59] Or maybe even, you know, they're shocked and they even scorn impressions.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:37:03] You don't have.

Peter Sobota [00:37:03] Bad impressions about people like us and how we operate and see us even as less of a trustworthy ally. Yeah. Are there any other best practices that you would like to recommend to our listeners.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:37:18] Too? So two things. Number one, kind of piggybacking on what you said. People come in to assess practitioners because of the relationship trauma. Most of the time, people come in because of insomnia or anxiety or depression, and then it comes out through the sessions that there a relationship trauma or are experiencing relationship trauma. So I always kind of like what you were saying. If someone comes in for a chemical dependency struggle, you know, or they're they're struggling with an eating disorder or whatever, then it might come out that they're. Experiencing intimate partner violence and they don't know how to get out of that. And a lot of times it's you know, you might think you're starting somewhere with a client and then you go somewhere else. And you're absolutely right. We're not expected to be an expert in everything. Don't be afraid to seek consultation. Don't be afraid to say to a colleague, Hey, can I run something by you? I want to know if I'm picking up on this correctly or if I'm from saying something wrong. I've had clients where I'm like, Hey, you know, I'm going to give you some referrals for people who specialize in the things that, you know, just come in. It's okay. We're not expected to be experts in everything. And then the second thing I always want to leave clinicians with is do not ever assume pronouns of perpetrators when clients come in and they, you know, talk about, you know, family trauma or relationship trauma, a lot of times, especially, you know, medical providers, their first instinct is to say, okay, well, you know, what did he do or what did he say? And that's just society, you know, really kind of does that. And so I always some people don't offer up and don't assume any details of any story until you're you're told.

Peter Sobota [00:38:59] I think that's really good advice that I wish I would have taken a lot more when I was a practitioner. So we were all.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:39:07] Learning all the time.

Peter Sobota [00:39:09] Yeah. Yeah. I guess the thing is, try not to make the same mistake twice, right? You learn from it.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:39:14] Like it's okay to always be learning. I think when we stop learning, when we feel like we know everything is usually those of the people who.

Peter Sobota [00:39:23] To run for your life. Yeah. Yeah. So we're getting near the end of our conversation, and I just wanted to see if I could just raise a couple of questions for you and just kind of hear you react and see what you see, what you think. So my question was, again, in regards to this population and their unique needs and the work that you've done. What do you think the pandemic and everything that involved.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:39:53] Oreos.

Peter Sobota [00:39:54] Had in store? How did that. You know, my fear is that it made it even worse because it made it worse for all of us.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:40:02] It made it so much worse just because. I'm not poking fingers or poking fault. I mean, this was something that obviously no one had experienced before in our lifetime. But we didn't have any ways to combat the issues. So what happened is people were calling the cord. I remember mornings where I would sit and just call the courthouse. No one was there. Everyone was working from home. There'd be one person who comes in at noon to check the messages. And and she was like, Well, I don't know, I'm going to pass it on to this person. And they come in on Wednesday and they'll call you back and you know, and then the judge doesn't come until Friday, but he won't see anyone in person, you know. So, you know, you have to go to this back room to fill out the paper. I mean, it was just, you know, and they weren't having any in-person court trials. And the it was this was before we started just doing everything on Zoom. This was like right in the beginning when we thought we were only going to be shutting down for 14 days. And so, you know, the judges just kept, okay, well, we're going to extend the protection order for 14 days, but then 14 days, you can't get a hold of the judge. You can't get a hold of anyone. I mean, it was a complete mess. And there were a lot there was a lot of abuse going on and people weren't being stopped or they weren't arresting perpetrators because of they didn't want COVID in the jails. I mean, it was bad. And in early 2020, it was really bad. Yeah. And that's what my, a lot of my details in my book focus on it.

Peter Sobota [00:41:29] Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Well hopefully we have learned some things. I mean, the pandemic, if anything, did a wonderful job of exposing even further the cracks in our ability to really effectively serve folks. You know, I'm really also kind of given what you just told us, just incredibly, I think, inspired by the resiliency of people who seek services in different kinds of circumstances. When you think of all the things we've been talking about for the last, I don't know, 45 minutes. You know, why people even move on is, I think, a testament to that and.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:42:10] To resiliency and actually forest resiliency almost.

Peter Sobota [00:42:14] So here is my last question. How concerned, if at all? Again, these are the your your population and the work you do. How concerned are you about what might come next from the Supreme Court?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:42:32] Oh, gosh, I am terrified. You know, we talked about earlier, we talked about laws and we talked about biases. And I talked about the gender neutral language in the TRO, the protection orders down here. And I wonder. If they. I hope that this is just fear mongering, but we know that we never know. When they come out and they talk about challenging marriage equality and they talk about, you know, the bodily autonomy of people who have a uterus, I mean, there's so many things that are going on right now that people are like, where is my you know, I have people come in that are like,

is my marriage going to be null and void? I mean, I have people using words like grandfathered, oh, my marriage might be grandfathered in.

Peter Sobota [00:43:13] I heard that the other day.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:43:15] We're career wide, so we're second class citizens now. Like, what do you mean, grandfathered in? Like what world or what? So I wonder, you know, if. It could snowball into a lot of things that terrify me.

Peter Sobota [00:43:31] Well, you have a voice right here. Do you have a call to action for social workers in particular?

Kaytyn Gillis [00:43:37] I just think that it is so important to to get out. A lot of people are writing. To people in power. To political leaders in power. Especially. I know, I know. I took on the South. I've lived here long enough that I we in certain regions need to get out there and need to. To make changes for people who are. To make sure people are safe. Because this could be really scary. And every single one of us so every single person listening, you know, a queer person, you know, a person with a uterus, you know, a person who's affected by this. Even if you think you don't, you do. We need to to make change. Say, no, no, no. This is not it. This is not how we're going to value or devalue this this community and this group of citizens. This group of people in our society.

Peter Sobota [00:44:32] Mm hmm. Yeah. I hope we get the message. Meaning social workers, that. That these are times that call for macro level practice. Yeah. And yes. And and also a time for social workers to knock it off with the reluctance to enter political arenas and policy arenas. Marches are not going to put the race here. Yes, it takes more.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:44:58] I like how you said that, because it's true. We need to get out there and get get into to politics. I always say this when I'm working with health care providers, health care practitioners, you know, especially like my medical colleagues, you know, you all know about the stuff people are debating who have no medical knowledge and no mental health knowledge. Yeah, we need to get out there. And you're right, we used to come from us going out there and and empowering ourselves and showing, you know, our clients like, hey, we're going to make change.

Peter Sobota [00:45:28] We have to be in it for the long haul, performative, short acts, and they're just not going to do it. Katie, thank you so much for talking with us. It was really a pleasure.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:45:42] Thank you so much for having me. I think it's such an important topic.

Peter Sobota [00:45:45] Yeah, exactly. You know, I wanted to give you a last word if you want it.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:45:49] I would just like, I guess, for my my last thing I'd like to say is intimate partner. Violence is effects everyone. Even if people say, well, I've never been abused, I don't know who has been abused. You have. You might just not know because the person hasn't told you. Maybe you aren't. You haven't presented yourself as a safe person to go to, or maybe you just don't know that. But you have people who have experienced it and and it's a trickle down effect to your parents experience and caregiver's experience of the children can be affected. And so something that affects our whole

society financially, economically, socially, all that. So it is affecting all of us. I know it's a very hard topic.

Peter Sobota [00:46:28] Thanks again, Katie.

Kaytyn Gillis [00:46:30] Thank you.

Peter Sobota [00:46:32] The Good People behind the Social Work podcast are Steve Sturman, our director and media guru. Nick Desmet, our multitalented graduate production assistant. Say hi, Nick. Hi, everyone. And I'm Peter Szabo. Have an idea for a topic you'd like us to pursue. Have some feedback or comments on a podcast. Go to our website at [in social work and create a way](#). Come on, we're friendly. Well, most of the time. Thanks for joining us and see you next time, everybody.