

Gender Identity and Sexuality in Students with Autism and Other Disabilities

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Who am I?

- Cori Fraser, LSW

Social worker, nonbinary/trans masc (they/them), Autistic, physically disabled (Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and comorbidities).

Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy





Disability Justice

- Learn the way you need to.
 - Listen to your body: lay down, move around, have a snack.
- Let us know if you have access needs we are not meeting.
- Disclosures of disability in the room are confidential.

Learning Objectives

Understand	Understand the vocabulary: gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, romantic orientation, etc.
Learn	Learn the different ways that Autistic LGBTQ people might present.
Internalize	Internalize the urgency and importance of supporting disabled LGBTQ youth.
Build	Build competence in creating welcoming spaces for Autistic and disabled LGBTQ youth.

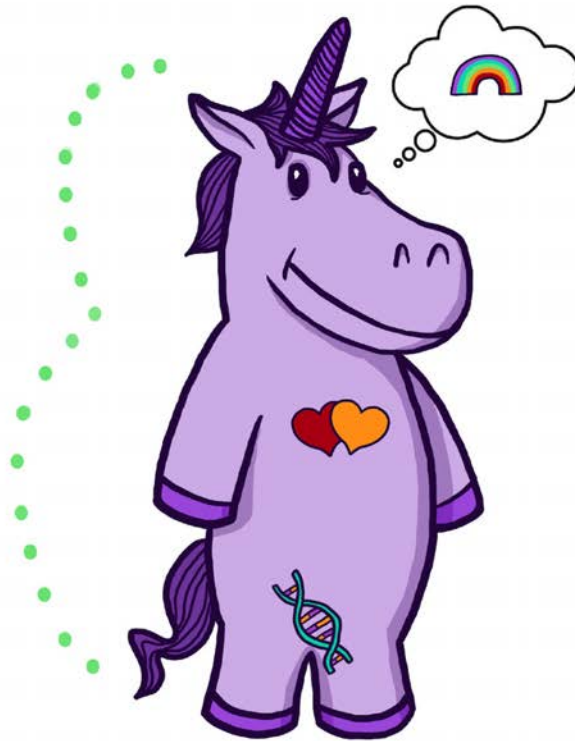
Language

- Identity first vs person-first
- A note on slurs



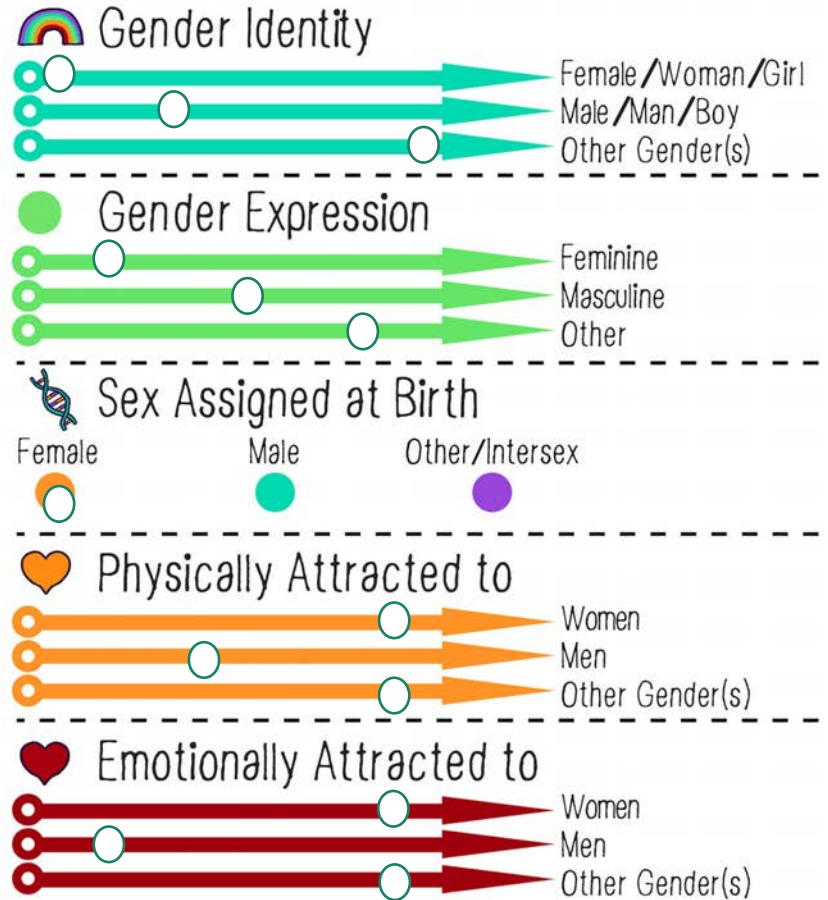
The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



Autism

Autistic people may be more likely to be trans (de Vries et al, 2010)

Autistic people may not conform to gender norms in expected ways, or may conform rigidly

Autistic people **do** have genders, sexualities, and emotions

Breaking myths: extreme male brain

Intellectual Disability

In people with ID, gender dysphoria may present more behaviorally

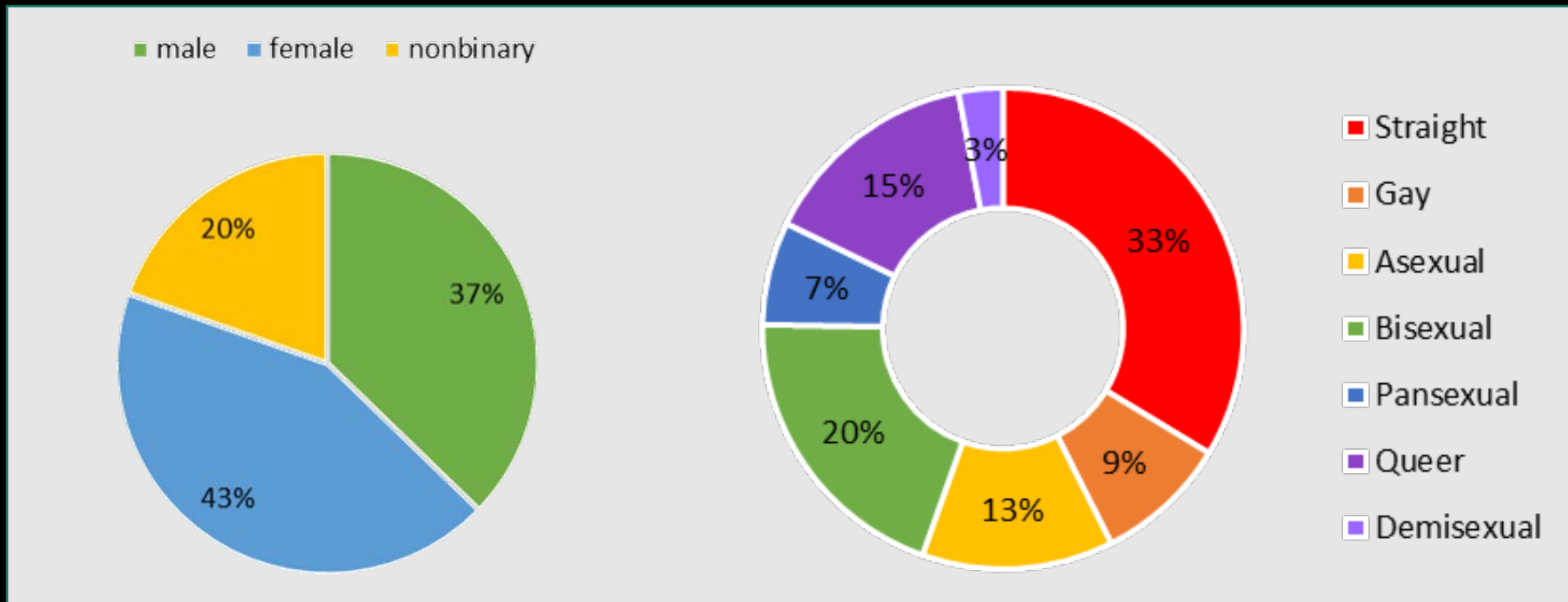
People with ID/DD may express not being gender divergent early in life due to not understanding gender or that they had a gender until later

Shared Decision-Making: making decisions with support

If individual does not have capacity for informed consent, how do we make decisions in the person's best interest?

The Autistic Community is Queer

- 2019 Autistic Needs Survey
 - Respondents identified 15 unique gender identities.
 - 27% identified themselves as transgender.



Autism and LGBTQ Identity

An overwhelming number of studies have found a high prevalence of overlap between LGBTQ identity and autism diagnosis. (Hillier, 2020)

Autistic LGBTQ people report feeling a high degree of isolation from the LGBTQ community due, in part, to inaccurate views of what autism is, increasing isolation.

Autistic LGBTQ people report discrimination and delays in getting gender affirming healthcare.

The Numbers

- **39%** of transgender people report having **one or more disabilities** vs 15% of cisgender people. (NCTE, 2016)
- Disabled transgender individuals are more likely to face **discrimination** when attempting to **access mental health centers (17.3% v. 6.2% of transgender people without disabilities), drug treatment programs (4.7% v. 2.0%), rape crisis centers (7.8% v. 3.3%), and domestic violence shelters (9.9% v. 3.5%).** (Katari et al., 2017)
- **23%** percent of disabled transgender people reported **avoiding seeing a doctor** when needed due to the fear of mistreatment because of their transgender status. (NCTE, 2016)
- Disabled transgender individuals are much **more likely** to earn **less than \$10,000** per year and **rely on public food assistance.** (NCTE, 2015)

Helping Our Youth Survive

LGBTQ youth without affirming families are 3x more likely to report suicide ideation and attempts than youth with very affirming families. (Ryan et al, 2010)

LGBTQ youth reporting having just one affirming adult in their lives are 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the last year. (Trevor Project, 2019)

LGBTQ youth who learned about LGBTQ issues or people at school had a 23% lower odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the last 12 months. (Trevor Project, 2021)



Now what?

Address Gender-Related Needs

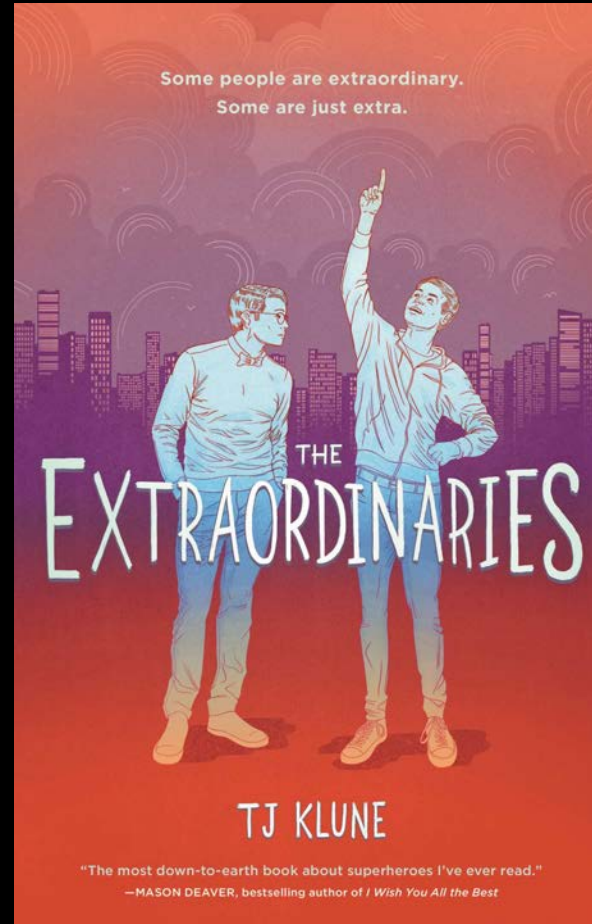
- Using chosen names, pronouns. Making these known in classrooms, databases, etc.
- Welcome experimentation.
- Invite guests whose experiences can help youth imagine a future where they are at home in their bodies. (or read stories!)
- Use LGBTQ inclusive sex education curricula. Understand what gender affirming care is available in your area.
- Intervene in peer harassment and abuse.
- Ask questions. Invite the awkward.

Address Disability Needs

- Address social and executive function skills.
- Work with youth to develop self-awareness and self-management skills.
- Consider the transition to adulthood— what services are trans friendly? What do youth need to be safe as queer young adults?

Facilitate Connection

- Queer community: we have always survived together.
 - Chosen family.
- Create spaces for neurodivergent LGBTQ youth.
- Include representation in the curriculum.



Supporting Parents



- Double Rainbow Parent Groups
- PFLAG
- Trans Wellness Conference
- CH Gender and Sexual Development Programs

Resources

- HRC/ACLU: [Schools in Transition](#) (Gender Support Plan)
- ASAN: [Proud and Supported: Definitions and Beyond](#)
- [Trevor Project](#)
- [Trans Lifeline](#) – (877) 565-8860
- [PFLAG](#)
- [GLSEN](#)
- NCIL: [Sex Ed for People with ID/DD](#)
- PA ASERT: [LGBTQI/Autism Resource Page](#)



Support Trans Youth in Texas

ACLU Texas



EQUALITY

 **Lambda Legal**
making the case for equality

Discussion

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