

Supporting Worcester's Queer Community

August 8, 2025

Agenda

- 1:30 PM – Introduction
- 1:45 PM – Worcester's Current Landscape
- 2:15 PM – Ethical Considerations of our Work
- 3:15 PM – Break
- 3:30 PM – Resources and Connection Opportunities
- 4:00 PM – Questions & Wrap Up
- 4:45 PM - End

Darling Mental Health & Jeremy

Darling Mental Health is a group private practice that prides itself on supporting and advocating for all providers to decolonize their work and to center the voices of your client, and that of oppressed peoples, in understanding what each community holistically needs for healing.

Jeremy is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Massachusetts, Florida, and Maine (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor) with outpatient experience since 2011. He graduated from Adelphi University in 2010 and Hofstra University in 2008. His academic and professional interests have always focused on gender and the intersection of its expression with sexuality and mental health.

In 2023 he completed all AASECT requirements and was Certified as a Sex Therapist.

He is the owner and Director of Darling Mental Health which provides outpatient therapy to children, adolescents, and adults; is an NBCC & AASECT approved CE provider, and we are expanding services to include group therapy, support, and community advocacy.

Darling Mental Health also publishes WooSex.org a free online resource directory for people to find trans-affirming therapists, education, and resources centered in Worcester.



Introduction

- Please identify your:
 - Name
 - Pronouns
 - Identities you wish to share
 - License or field of work/study/focus
 - Institution (Private Practice, Community Agency, School, etc.)
 - What's your favorite media representation (real or fictional) of gender expansiveness or queerness?

Learning Objectives



1. Understand the needs of the LGBTQIA+ Community in Central Massachusetts and the struggles gender-expansive people experience
2. Learn ethical lensing and contextual factors about intersectionality that play a role in the lived experience of queer folks in Worcester
3. Learn about local resources to help clients connect and feel less isolated

Worcester's Current Landscape

Worcester Demographics and Statistics

- 15% of families opt out of Sex Education in Worcester Public Schools since the inclusion of the 3 R's curriculum
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has ZERO data statistics for the number of LGBTQIA+ students on its website
- 9 Higher Education Institutions- all with established Pride Alliances
 - WPI is a great example of supports and safety
- Worcester Dioceses enacted anti-LGBTQIA+ policies for all faith based educational programs in 2023
- HRC gave Worcester MA a score of 100 for the Municipality Equality Index in 2022- despite complaints of gender based policing and use of excessive force complaints
- Incidents in MA of Hate crimes related to LGBTQIA+ identities were up from 14.5% to 18.9% in 2022
- Equity Audit of WPD Recommendation 20.1: The WPD should elevate the roles of diversity and LGBTQ officers to develop a plan to lead comprehensive diversity and inclusion initiatives across the department.
- Since COVID several support groups have closed or stopped taking members
 - PFLAG
 - Pride Alliances
 - LGBTQ Lunch Bunch



What are Residents Saying about the Trans Sanctuary City Declaration?

- “Yes, I do agree with it. This declaration did not have any legality to it, it was a statement that was made as a representation of Worcester's solidarity with its Queer and GNC community. At the time, Moe Bergman and Donna Colorio flagged the petition as potential cause for reprimanding and/or cuts to city funding or nonprofits. They ended up stalling the vote for a week just because they had not educated themselves on what it means to be declared a sanctuary city.”
- “I agree that Worcester is a trans sanctuary city, but we need to make sure they are actually holding themselves accountable. To me it seems like a Bandaid solution to a greater problem. For example, a councilperson was legit bullied off the council while we were actively in sanctuary city-dom. I will say though I am glad it happened and it makes me hopeful!”

Worcester's Culture of Tolerance Take-away

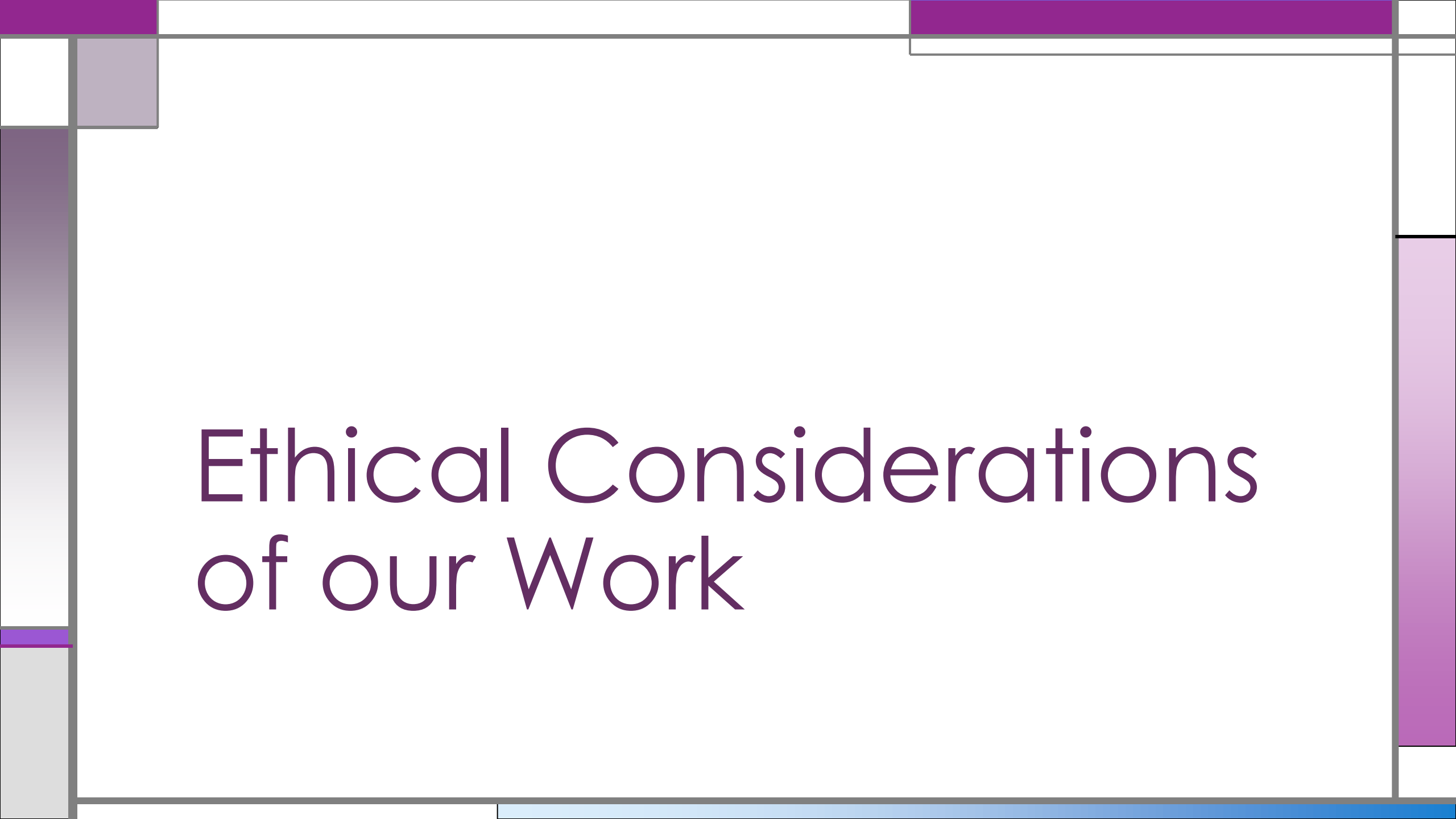
- Much of what is positive and affirming in Worcester feels like virtue signaling more than impactful legal/systemic changes
- Worcester's City Council, like many, struggle to demonstrate transparency regarding multiple issues and are typically defensive and avoidant of topics related to adding more queer representation or protections
- City leadership is unsure of what the value of making such statements are and identify fear/worry about federal sanctions in the discussion
- In 2014 there was a Worcester Council of Human Rights discussion about taking a step to ban conversion therapy that was supported but not specifically ratified – Massachusetts enacted this ban on April 8, 2019
- Police here present on a wide-spectrum of awareness about trans identities, issues, and how to treat the greater queer community with informed respect

What do Residents Want to See?

- A functional coalition of local LGBTQIA+ organizations that clearly communicate how to advocate and move forward with goals
- More intersectionality in consideration of how funds like the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) are being used - \$146 million
 - 9 projects are related to housing – none are queer/trans specific
 - 1 project is earmarked for mental health programs
 - No projects indicate targeted support or protections to queer/trans focused programs
- Stronger divestment from what is seen as our Police dept supporting and facilitating ICE raids
- Demonstrated care to respect trans people in public/official settings
 - Pronouns, inclusive lensing/language in projects/planning, protections from discrimination and/or public disassociation with supremacy language

Reflection

- What have queer and trans cases complained to you about with regards to living in Worcester?
- What answers/resources/solutions do you wish were available or known to help your queer and trans clients here in Worcester?
- What have online therapist groups looked like to you in regards to supporting queer, trans, and other vulnerable populations in face of our current national political climate?
- What about when insurance companies struggle to pay us (GIC)?



Ethical Considerations of our Work

LGBTQ+ patients have reported that using non-inclusive language and misgendering is a form of microaggression that can cause them unfortunate stress and harm

Transgender and nonbinary youth who reported having pronouns respected by all the people they lived with attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected by anyone with whom they lived.

Identifying health resources that use inclusive and neutral language is a crucial first step in developing patient resources.

Fear of discrimination prevents LGBTQ+ individuals from accessing healthcare, which can have serious and deadly consequences

LGBTQIA+/2S youth who had access to spaces that affirmed their sexual orientation and gender identity reported lower of attempting suicide.

Respecting a person's pronouns is one way to provide a protective, inclusive space, promote well-being and reduce their risk of suicide by helping them feel like they belong.

A well-written disclaimer with a clear message shows patients that your organization is an open and understanding space. The goal is to make an effort and show marginalized communities that you care and that you're trying.



Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

Suicide Prevention

***Gender-affirming therapy is suicide prevention ***

- Having one trusted adult validate/see a queer youth reduces suicidality by 50%
- Regions that legally protect marriage equality and provide non-discrimination for LGBTQIA+ persons have lower teen suicide
- Narrative processing is essential to understand your client's individual risks to suicide.



Humanistic

Cultural competency

- Do I understand the client's heritage and cultural environment of origin?
- How do I demonstrate I am open to learn?

Feminism

- Equality and equity
- Gendered assumptions

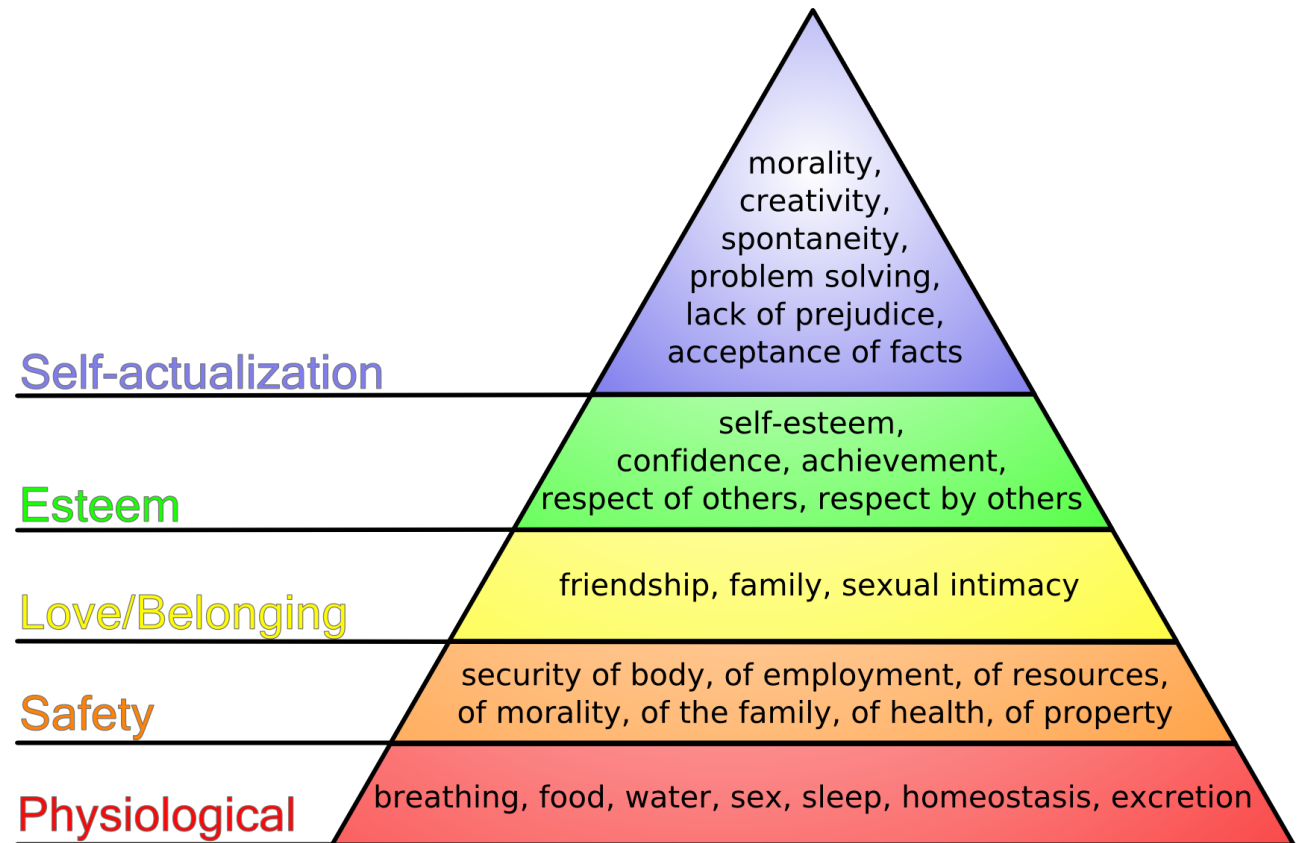
Anti-Racism and De-Colonization

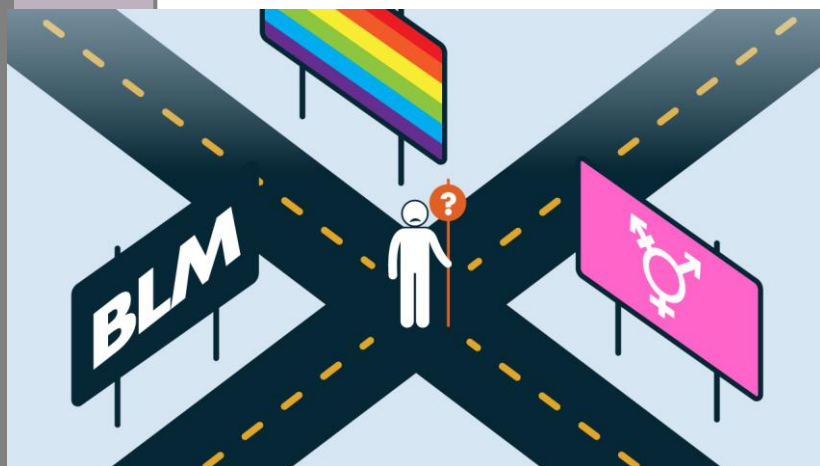
- Bias of the therapist
- Institutional oppression

Person-Centered

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A motivational theory in psychology comprising of a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up





Intersectionality

Influences to...

Community-based expectations

- Race & Ethnicity
- Family structure
- Religion & congregations
- Professional affiliations

Education

Socio-Economic Status

Regional laws, politics,
representatives, etc.

Gender Freedom

Able to shift presentation without comment/criticism?

- Transgender-inclusive language in their community?

Education that goes beyond the binary

- Critical thinking skills

Resources to survive independently

- Transitioning steps cost money

Legal risk

- Are you protected if you are coded as gender diverse, trans, or gender non-conforming?

Queer Theory

- Queer Theory is a field of post-structuralist critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of queer studies and women's studies. It is broadly associated with the study and theorization of gender and sexual practices that exist outside of heterosexuality, and which challenge the notion that heterosexuality is "normal" or the "default."
- Queer theorists study the concepts of sexuality and gender as social and cultural phenomena, analyzing the way in which categories, binaries, and languages dictate, limit, and determine what is "acceptable" expressions of gender and sex.
- The term "Queer" itself intentionally remains loosely defined in order to encompass the difficult-to-categorize spectrum of gender, sexuality and romantic attraction. At its core, queer theory relates to queer people, their lived experience and how their lived experience is culturally or politically perceived, specifically referring to the marginalization of queer people.

Intersex:

when chromosomal sex is inconsistent with phenotypic sex, or for which the phenotypic sex is not easily categorized as male or female.

Historically terminology has been important for this population, and used to declare a "social emergency" to justify surgical intervention

- 1950s John Money coined the term "Optimal Gender Policy" which required parents and professionals to surgically "choose" a gender for all babies born intersex.

- This theory was later widely disproven after the story of David Reimer.*

Current Language:

- Intersexuality is primarily a problem of stigma and trauma, not gender.
- Parent's distress must not be treated by surgery on the child.
- Professional mental health care is essential.
- Honest, complete disclosure is good medicine.
- All children should be assigned as boy or girl, without early surgery.

isna.org

interactadvocates.org



Advocacy

- Everyone deserves access to gender-affirming care
- People know their bodies
- Transitioning is not a fad or new
 - Social transitioners have ALWAYS existed in ALL cultures
- Social contagion is and is not real
- Refer and help with resource gathering when able
- Support clients whose natural supports argue they know them “better”
- Emphasis slow and deliberate discernment process
- Provide letters of support

**Mental Health
Evaluation**

for

**Gender-Affirming
Care**

Gender Dysphoria

Social/Emotional/Mental

Insight

Resources & Supports

Back-up plans

Long-term Planning

In Small Groups

Identify what concerns you have as clinicians in working with this population in 2025

What questions do you struggle to answer when advocating for the health and well-being of gender expansive folks, those who do and don't transition:

Socially?

Medically?

What concerns do you have for transgender folks in public spaces?

15 Min Break

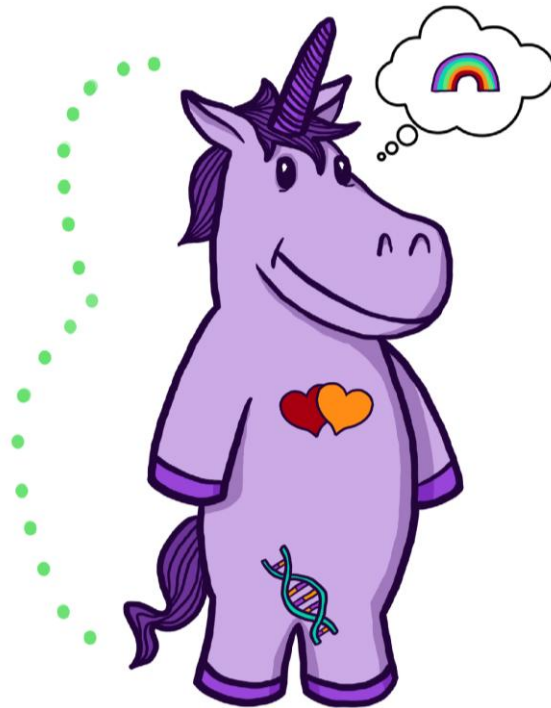
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Resources & Connection Opportunities

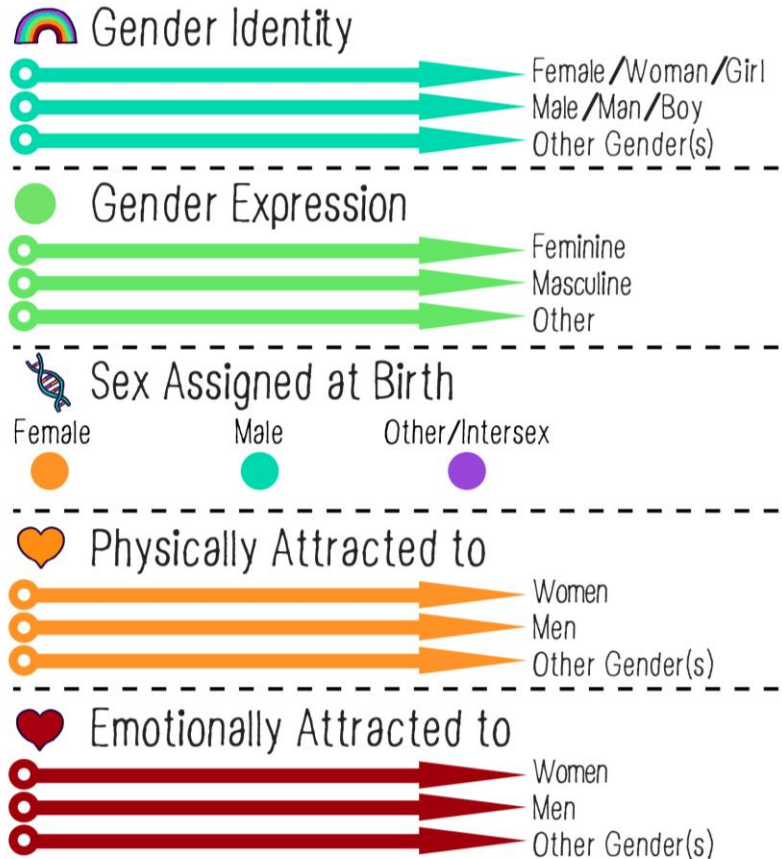
The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



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

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



Mapping your Sexuality

Sexual Configurations Theory (SCT) identifies several different components of one's identity intersect with spectrums of gender/sexuality that are understood, experienced, felt, expressed, and desired in different ways for different people.

- Sexual identity and behavior can be noticeably different in what ways?
- Gender identity and expression are not always congruent. Why is this?
- What new factors of intersection did SCT show you?
- Intersectionality with ethnicity, class, race, religion, age, and disability affect sexuality in what ways?
- Why is “strength of desire” an important factor to add to one's configuration?

Factors to Evaluate

Gender Dysphoria

- Binary, or no?
- Degree of distress
 - Did non-medical steps address distress?
- Clarity of source
 - Body distress “genitalia are not mine”
 - Social distress “I am offended by how I am coded and treated in public and/or my relationships”
 - Mental distress “If I was on hormones I would feel more like myself”

Social, Emotional, & Mental Status

- Social life, friends, transparency in relationships, performativity & authenticity
- Fears, distress, sadness, anxiety, worries, etc. – are they managed?
- What degree is gender identity/expression the primary issue in therapy?
- What would transitioning alleviate?

Resources & Supports

Community-based

- Drop-in programs
- Queer Sports Leagues
- Libraries & Schools
- Volunteer Run Programs
- Online Forums/Servers

Natural

- Family
- Friends
- Financial/Insurance
- Churches/Congregations
- Colleagues, Supervisors, HR

Programs & Resources

- Safe Homes is a program supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) young people, and their straight allies, between the ages of 14 and 23. The group is led by youth peer leaders, professional staff, and volunteers who offer support, resources, and opportunities for socialization in a safe and nurturing environment.
- SWAGLY: Supporters of Worcester Area LGBTQ+ Youth is a social club for LGBTQIA+ youth and allies who are 18 years old and under. Since 1984, SWAGLY programs have helped countless youth in the Greater Worcester area.
- PFLAG Greater Boston is a longstanding group that supports parents and family members of LGBTQ+ youth through support meetings, parent-to-parent conversations, confidential phone help lines, scholarship programs, the safe schools program, and more.
- New England Transgender Healthcare Consortium consists of providers from more than a dozen healthcare facilities in New England who are dedicated to improving access to gender-affirming care.
- Planned Parenthood offers affordable health care and LGBTQ services including HIV and STD testing and Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy.
- The [Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center](https://www.kennedychc.org/) is the LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Leader in Worcester, MA providing care to LGBTQ+ youth and adults, including providing gender affirming hormone therapy and trans health care. – kennedychc.org
- UMass Memorial is also addressing most medical transitioning steps: <https://www.ummhealth.org/services-treatments/lgbtqia-health-services/lgbtqia-specialty-care>
- Worcester Identifies several LGBTQ friendly houses of worship, including Universal Unitarian Church

Queer Social Spaces & Scenes

- Femme Bar – online schedule
- Harley's Funhouse – 3rd Thursday at Ralph's (drag show)
- MB Lounge – Karaoke on Wednesdays at 9 AM
- Electric Haze – Thursdays have Open Wrestling @ 8 PM & Drag Karaoke @ 10 PM
- Pride Bowling – Bowlero in Shrewsbury on 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month
- Queer Scouts – scheduled outdoor events
- OutLoud Sports Worcester / WooPride Sports – Kickball league 9/14-11/23
- WooBears – Facebook organized dinners and meet ups
- Gay Professionals Meet Up – 2nd Wednesday – casual meet up at different venues

Facebook links

- facebook.com/queerthescene
- facebook.com/worcestercitysirens
- Worcester County LGBTQIA+ group - facebook.com/groups/144931232791284
- Worcester Gay Professionals - facebook.com/WorcesterGayPro
- Queer Scouts Worcester - facebook.com/groups/1234106577762618
- OutLoud Sports: Worcester – facebook.com/groups/950842186582508
- Woo Bears - facebook.com/groups/1047854459825605

Worcester's Pride is NOT in JUNE!

- Saturday after Labor Day – September 6th, 2025
- Events are scheduled for a week leading up to it (8/30-9/6)
- Among previously identified organizations and events the New England Botanic Garden is holding a pride night on September 4th – nebg.org
- On Saturday September 6th there will be a March from Femme Bar to the Worcester Commons / City Hall at 2 PM
- Festival entertainment and vendors will be out 2pm-7pm
- Best opportunity to collect info on all the local programs and resources

PrideWorcester.org/events

Darling Mental Health Resources

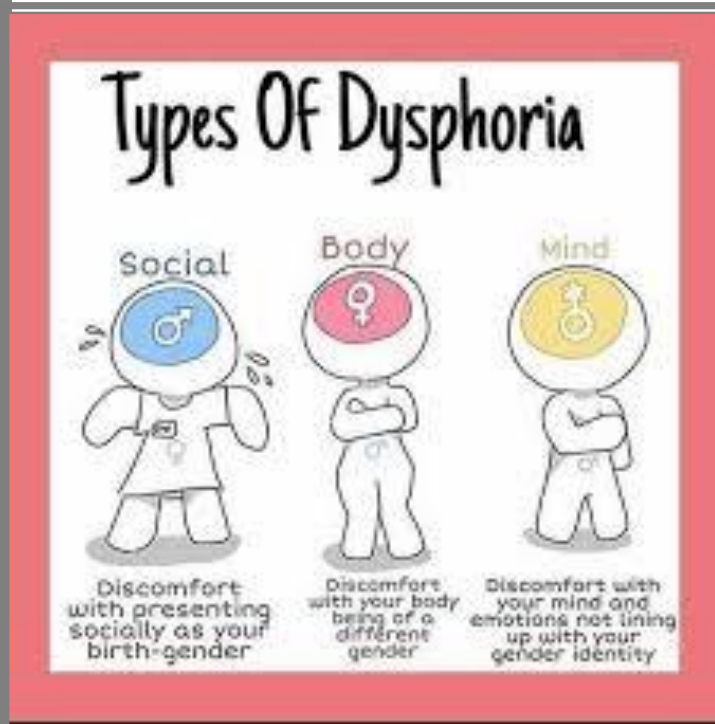
- Monthly Support Groups
 - Parents of trans people on the 1st Wednesday
 - ENM/Polyamory support on the 2nd Thursday
 - Spaces for Aces on the 3rd Wednesday
 - Men's Mental Health on the 3rd Thursday
 - Suggestions? Email: info@darlingmentalhealth.com
- WooSex.org directory with information and therapist network
- Continuing Education
 - “Ethical and Kinky Sex Therapy” on Saturday 8/16 10am-4pm
 - Fall Curriculum in development to be announced by September / Pride

Questions & Wrap Up

Gender Incongruence & the DSM

A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and natal gender of at least 6 months in duration, as manifested by at least two of the following:

- A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one's experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
- A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's designated gender)
- A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's designated gender)
- A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's designated gender)



Documentation

- In providing therapy how important is it to provide a diagnosis of F64 – Gender Incongruence?
 - Valid risks now exist for providing too much information – does another F coded diagnosis cover medical necessity?
- What about Z code 70.8 for “other sex counseling” to track the topic of sex and gender in therapy
- Letters of Support for Gender Affirming care need to pull evidence of dates of service and diagnosis, but you are allowed to write in the letter they qualify for Gender Incongruence without submitting that same code to insurances for claims/billing
- Medicaid / Medicare clients are at highest risk for a potential federal survey of records to create a list of trans folks by use of diagnostic codes billed



Systemic Oppression & Ethical Advocacy

Taking a Trans-affirming stance is to advocate against:

- Restricting access to gender-affirming care
 - Burdensome gatekeeping
 - Blanket laws
- Binary expectations of transitioning
- Limitations of personal success
- Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminism (TERFs)

De-Colonizing the mind requires reflective awareness of the ways in which Colonialism was marketed and taught as a form of salvation from savagery. This paved the way for:

- White supremacy
- Binary systems of judgement: black and white thinking
- Systemic destruction of language and heritage that included gender diversity
- Favoring individualism over community building
- Capitalism and the abandonment of systems of reciprocity

CASE REVIEW

- Where is the client at in their gender identity journey?
- What is being asked of you as a clinician?
- Is this a minor for which there is open-communication with parents/guardians?
 - How can you help create that space?
 - What are your ethical obligations?
 - What are your limits?
- What degree of insight is being demonstrated?
- How do you cultivate insight while ensuring the client's agency directs treatment?

Case Example

- “A” came out as a transwoman a year ago, has been on hormones for a year, and is interested in gender-affirming surgery (vaginoplasty). She is interested in assessment and letters of support needed for surgery, but worries about the wait period and whether she will be able to access surgery if laws change on the state and federal level. She also worries that if she has surgery, but then laws change, that will not be able to continue hormone therapy, she may experience physical changes that increase gender dysphoria. She is considering leaving the country for surgery but does not have money to cover the cost of travel or surgery, nor does she have a support system to help during the recovery process.

The background of the image is a dense, repeating pattern of stylized flowers. The top half of the image features flowers in shades of deep purple and magenta, while the bottom half transitions into flowers in shades of orange, red, and brown. The flowers have a five-petaled, star-like shape with prominent stamens.

WOOSEX.ORG

WOOSEX.ORG

WOOSEX.ORG

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