



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

# Body Image, Perception, and Health Beyond the Binary



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Rainbow Recovery, Project HEAL, Walden Behavioral Care

# Our Roots

## Fenway Health

- Independent 501(c)(3) FQHC
- Founded 1971
- Mission: To enhance the wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as people in our neighborhoods and beyond through access to the highest quality health care, education, research, and advocacy
- Integrated primary care model, including HIV and transgender health services

## The Fenway Institute

- Research, Education, Policy



# LGBTQIA+ Education and Training

The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center offers educational programs, resources, and consultation to health care organizations with the goal of providing affirmative, high quality, cost-effective health care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and all sexual and gender minority (LGBTQIA+) people.

- Training and Technical Assistance
- Grand Rounds
- Online Learning
  - Webinars, Learning Modules
  - CE, and HEI Credit
- ECHO Programs
- Resources and Publications

[www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org](http://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org)

[education@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:education@fenwayhealth.org)



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- Alternatively, e-mail us at [education@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:education@fenwayhealth.org) for less urgent questions

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- Choose “I will call in.”
- Dial the phone number and access code

# After the Webinar

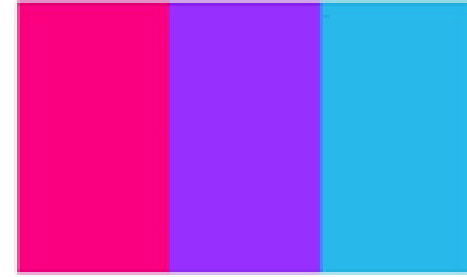
- Close the browser, and an evaluation will automatically open for you to complete
- We very much appreciate receiving feedback from all participants
- Completing the evaluation is required to obtain a CME certificate

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# Learning Objectives



- Learn affirming language and understand the unique healthcare needs of non-binary people
- Analyze the relationship between body image and gender identity development
- Conceptualize affirming health care for people with gender identities beyond the binary
- Gain strategies to create welcoming and affirming environments for all patients



# Program Outline



## Part I

- Understanding Gender
- What is Non-binary & Gender Beyond the Binary?
- Affirming Language & Terminology
- Foundational Concepts of Non-binary Healthcare

## Part II

- Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development
- Understanding the Perception of Healthcare for People Beyond the Binary
- Creating Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

# Part I

## Foundations of Gender Beyond the Binary



# Understanding Gender

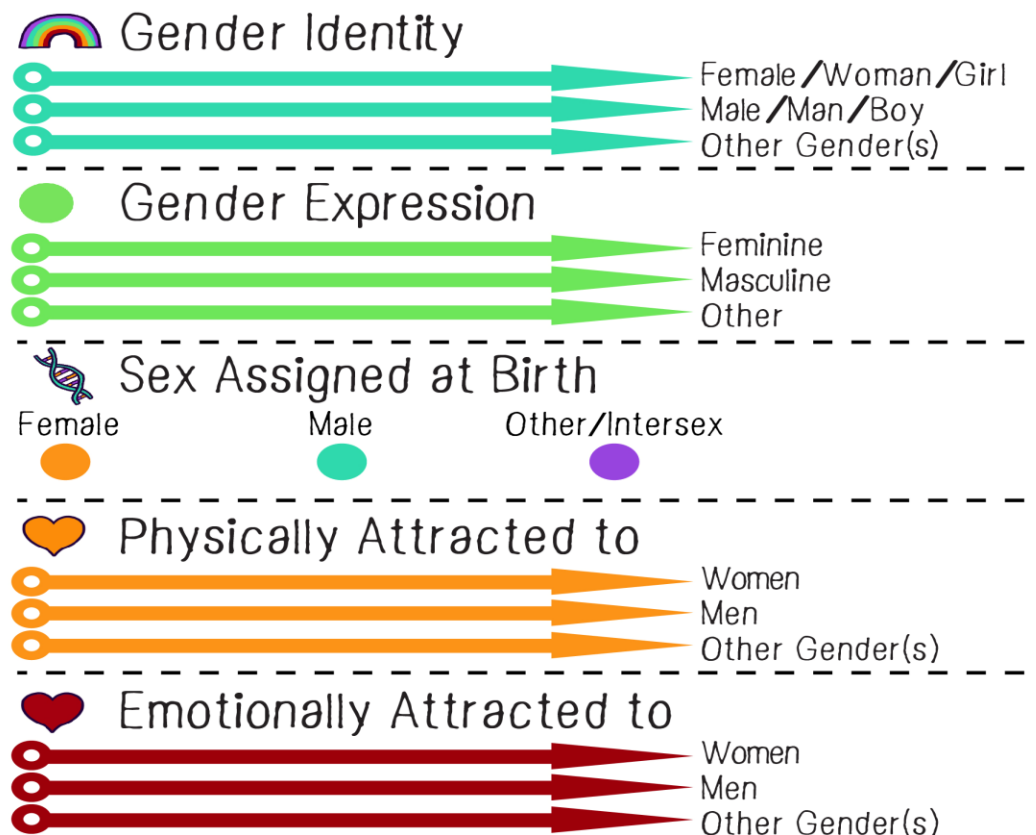
## The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



# How Laws and Society Dictate Sex

- It is important to note that sex and gender are different
- Currently in the United States you can have 3 sex markers on your passport. Some states, like California, allow the non-binary/intersex “X” sex marker on birth certificates, state I.D.s and driver’s licenses
  - M- Male
  - F- Female
  - X - Intersex or Non-binary
- For information on the new passport laws and other identity documentation please visit:
  - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/need-passport/selecting-your-gender-marker.html>
  - <https://www.lgbtmap.org/img/maps/citations-id-birth-certificate.pdf>



# Non-binary Defined

- Non-binary - Someone who identifies as a gender outside of the social norms of “woman and man”
- Non-binary is an umbrella term that includes:
  - Not identifying with a gender
  - Gender identity that changes over time
  - Gender identity that is neither male nor female

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

# What Does It Mean To Be Non-binary?

- Being non-binary is not new, a fad or confusion
- Historically, being non-binary has been documented for thousands of years and it was not only accepted as part of different cultures across the world, but celebrated
- Non-binary people do not need to undergo any kind of medical affirmation process including gender-affirming hormone therapy, top or bottom surgery, or even change basic physical appearance like clothing, hair or make-up

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

# What is Non-binary & Gender Beyond The Binary?

- While not all non-binary people need or want medical gender-affirmation to live a fulfilling life, it's critical and even life-saving for many
- A person is non-binary if they say they are
- While non-binary is sometimes seen as under the transgender umbrella, not all non-binary people are transgender
- Many non-binary people may prefer the term gender non-conforming (GNC) due to the misinformation that transgender means "to transition"

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>



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# Affirming Language & Terminology

- Cisgender - A gender identity that aligns with social expectations based on the sex assigned at birth.
  - The prefix cis- means “on this side of” or “not across from.”
  - It is used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not transgender
- Transgender - An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity does not align with society’s expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.
- Gender Expression - How a person publicly expresses or presents their gender.
  - This can include behavior and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language and voice.
  - A person’s chosen name and pronoun are also common ways of expressing gender. Others perceive a person’s gender through these attributes.

<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/3-gender-identity-and-gender-expression>



# Non-binary & Intersex Identities

- Intersex - A general term used for genetic, hormonal, or anatomical variations in sex development beyond traditional societal notions of female or male bodies.
- Being non-binary is not the same thing as being intersex.
- Intersex people may identify as male, female, no gender or multiple genders—and they may express their gender in different ways.
- Similarly, intersex people, like all people, may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or identify in another way.

<https://interactadvocates.org/faq/>

# Affirming Language: Anatomy

Try	Instead of
Upper body	Breast / Chest
Erogenous or erectile tissue / External genitals / Genitals	Penis
Erogenous or erectile tissue	Clitoris
External genital area	Vulva
Opening of the genitals	Introitus / Opening of the Vagina
Internal genitals / Genitals	Vagina
External gonads	Testes / Testicles
Internal gonads	Ovaries
Internal reproductive organs	Female reproductive organs



# Affirming Language: Speaking with Patients

Try	Example	Instead of
<b>Person with</b> _____ <b>People with</b> _____ <b>Anyone with</b> _____	If a <b>person with</b> <u>a prostate</u> has urinary symptoms, they should speak with their doctor.	man with... males with... male-bodied people...
<b>Person who has</b> _____ <b>People who have</b> _____ <b>Anyone who has</b> _____	We recommend that <b>anyone who has</b> <u>a cervix</u> consider having a pap test according to the recommended guidelines.	woman who has... females who have... female-bodied people...
_____ <b>may occur</b> _____ <b>can begin</b> <b>You may experience</b> _____	<u>Pregnancy</u> <b>may occur</b> without contraception. <u>Hair loss</u> <b>can begin</b> at any age after puberty. <b>You may experience</b> <u>cramps</u> as a side effect.	women may become... male pattern balding... women may experience...

# Affirming Language: Terminology

Try	Instead of
<b>Assigned female / Assigned male</b>	Biological female / Biological male
<b>Cisgender</b>	Not trans / Normal / Real
<b>Phenotypical development</b>	Natural / Normal development
<b>Common</b>	Regular / Correct / Right
<b>Hair loss</b>	Male pattern balding
<b>Sexual health screening / Internal exam / Cervical screening</b>	Pelvic exam / Well woman exam
<b>Looks healthy</b>	Looks normal
<b>Thinning of the internal genitalia tissue</b>	Vaginal atrophy
<b>Monthly bleeding</b>	Period / Menses
<b>Physical arousal / Hardening or stiffening of erectile tissue</b>	Erection
<b>External condom / Internal condom</b>	Male condom / Female condom
<b>Receptive IC / Insertive IC</b> (IC = Intercourse)	Vaginal sex
<b>Pregnant person</b>	Pregnant woman
<b>Parenthood</b>	Motherhood / Fatherhood
<b>Chestfeeding</b> (for non-binary & transmasculine people)	Breastfeeding

# Affirming Language: Nuances in Language

- Personal pronouns are vastly important in creating rapport with patients
- We all have pronouns and they correlate with our gender identity and how we want to be affirmed in discussion
- Statistics show that the misuse of pronouns and names leads to distrust in providers, a lack of validation and possible increased self-injury/self-injurious behavior (SI/SIB)
- Deadnaming - Using a person's name assigned at birth when they have chosen a name that feels more affirming to their identity
- Misgendering - Using pronouns that do not corresponds with a person's gender identity

# Affirming Language: Pronouns

1	2	3	4	5
(f)ae	(f)aer	(f)aer	(f)aers	(f)aerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zie	hir	hir	hirs	hirself



# Foundational Concepts of Non-binary Healthcare: The First Call

- Healthcare starts at the first call, ask for:
  - A patient's personal pronouns
  - Legal name and chosen name
  - Assigned sex at birth and gender identity
  - Sexual orientation
  - Do people in their lives know of their identity?
    - This will allow staff to proceed without accidentally outing someone



# Foundational Concepts of Non-binary Healthcare: Intake

- Upon intake, check that the answers given over the phone are accurate
- During intake it is important to:
  - ask what terminology the patient would like to use for their body parts.
  - ask who in their life is affirming.
  - ask if they, as the patient, have connections to or supports in the LGBTQIA+ community.
  - check in regarding any experiences of public harassment, issues at school, or issues with employment due to their gender identity.
- These are great ways to know what supports your patient needs and what resources to provide.



# Foundational Concepts of Non-binary Healthcare

- Have an open discussion about whether or not the patient wants to medically or socially transition (if they haven't already) and what you can provide to support them
  - Medical transition - A part of transition in which a transgender person undergoes medical treatments so that their sex characteristics better match their gender identity.
  - Social transition - The process by which transgender children or adolescents adopt the name, pronouns, and gender expression, such as clothing and haircuts, that match their gender identity.
- You can do this by:
  - Reminding the patient that non-binary people, transgender people, gender non-conforming people do not NEED to medically transition to be valid.
  - Telling the patient that if they want to transition you can and will support them.
  - Discussing HRT, top & bottom surgery and all medical affirmation options related to the medical process.

<https://www.transgenderservices.org/transition#:~:text=Medical%20transition%20is%20a%20part,better%20match%20their%20gender%20identity>

<https://fenwayhealth.org/study-finds-that-early-social-transition-for-transgender-youth-results-in-good-mental-health-outcomes-but-unaccepting-school-environments-may-lead-to-greater-risk-of-suicidality>



# Part II

## Learning to Support Gender Beyond the Binary



# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- In studies by Boroughs Et al. (2010):
  - There is a clear relationship between body image and gender identity development for youth
  - Body image is a fundamental condition for patients with gender dysphoria
  - Persons with gender dysphoria have a dissonance between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity thus body dissatisfaction can appear

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9831-1>

# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- In studies by Boroughs Et al. (2010):
  - Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and pansexual (2sLGBTQIAP+) youth are 50-70% more likely to experience eating disorders or body dysmorphia compared to their cisgender, heterosexual peers
  - They are also 50% less likely to be assessed and offered treatment compared to their cisgender, heterosexual peers

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9831-1>

# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- Gender diverse individuals have a high risk for developing an eating disorder among many other mental health issues
- Body image poses unique issues for those that are non-binary because media images of non-binary bodies still tend to be:
  - Thin
  - White
  - Androgynous

# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- Weight stigma plays a huge role in body image
- Weight stigma can create internalized and externalized fatphobia that creates a pressure to change weight or shape
- There is also large social pressure to proceed with medical affirmation procedures because of the binary view of transness and gender overall
- Often, the relationship to body image is much more complex than we are used to and can imagine

# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- Many non-binary patients face three conditions in terms of their body image - gender dysphoria, gender euphoria, and body dysmorphia.
- Gender Dysphoria - A concept designated in the DSM-5 as clinically significant distress or impairment related to a strong desire to be of another gender, which may include a desire to change primary and/or secondary sex characteristics.
  - Not all transgender or gender diverse people experience dysphoria.
- Gender Euphoria - A psychological condition which consists of comfort or even joy when thinking about one's true gender identity, often accompanied by a strong desire to change one's sex to better match their identity or to be called the correct gendered language.

DSM-V, 2013 and TransEquality, 2022

# Understanding the Relationship of Body Image and Gender Identity Development

- Body Dysmorphia- Those with body dysmorphia are overly concerned about the way their body looks and it interferes with their ability to function normally
  - People with body dysmorphia may take extreme measures such as repeated cosmetic surgical procedures to correct the perceived flaw
- Body dysmorphic symptoms can be present for people who are non-binary, however it is not body dysmorphia when it is related to gender
- This distinction is vastly important and the treatment is 100% different and it means we miss medically necessary interventions in terms of gender-affirming care

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/body-dysmorphic-disorder>



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# Understanding the Perception of Healthcare for People Beyond the Binary

- Non-binary people face unique barriers to affirmative health care, many of which are not experienced by other transgender people
  - One considerable barrier is medical mistrust. This is caused by a fear of being misgendered or misunderstood
  - Another barrier is accessing gender-affirming medical care is the lack of knowledge providers may have regarding gender diverse identities
- The goal of any medical or surgical gender affirmation is to align a patient's outward presentation with their internal gender identity
- For many non-binary people, appearing either female or male is a matter of safety
- They may face discrimination from larger society and even from the larger transgender community if they do not appear to fit into the gender binary



# Understanding the Perception of Healthcare for People Beyond the Binary

Things that all providers need to know and understand:

- The body mass index (BMI) plays a large role in gatekeeping medical affirmation procedures
  - This can lead to patients developing an eating disorder to access medical affirmation procedures
- Letter writing per insurance standards serves as a gatekeeping tactic to accessing medical affirmation
  - Insurance often requires multiple letters from people with specific credentials
  - This can lead to:
    - the patient changing to a provider that is not the right fit for them.
    - providers functioning from a “power over” model.
    - denying a letter for a patient out of fear of legal ramifications.

# Understanding the Perception of Healthcare for People Beyond the Binary

- Mental health care and the requirements made by certain insurance companies play a large role in gatekeeping medical affirmation - especially when providers with lived experience are unavailable
  - This often leads to patients trying to please mental health and medical providers for fear of withholding access
- Laws and legal practices are put in place to deny access to care for non-binary people
  - These are things that we can advocate against but have zero control over
  - We can however process this with our patients to ensure they are getting what they need in safe ways
- Inform your patients that they are trans enough and they do not need to do or say anything to convince you of their gender identity



# Creating A Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

- It isn't as hard as you might think to be supportive and respectful of non-binary people, even if you have just started to learn about them
- You don't have to understand what it means for someone to be non-binary to respect them
  - Some people haven't heard a lot about non-binary genders or have trouble understanding them, and that's okay
  - Identities that some people don't understand still deserve respect
- Use the name a person asks you to use
  - This is one of the most critical aspects of being respectful of a non-binary person, as the name you may have been using may not reflect their gender identity
  - Don't ask someone what their old name was

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

# Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

- Try not to make any assumptions about people's gender
  - You can't tell if someone is non-binary by looking at them
  - You can't tell if someone is transgender just by how they look
- If you're not sure what pronouns someone uses, ask
  - Different non-binary people may use different pronouns
  - Many non-binary people use "they" while others use "he" or "she," and still others use other pronouns
  - Asking whether someone should be referred to as "he," "she," "they," or another pronoun may feel awkward at first, but is one of the simplest and most important ways to show respect for someone's identity

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

# Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

- Advocate for non-binary friendly policies
  - It's important for non-binary people to be able to live, dress and have their gender respected at work, at school and in public space
  - Recognize that not all non-binary people use the same term, they may also use terms like genderqueer, agender and more, therefore, they should all be included in policies
- Understand that, for many non-binary people, figuring out which bathroom to use can be challenging
  - Using either the women's or the men's room might feel unsafe, because others may verbally harass them or even physically attack them
  - Non-binary people should be supported by being able to use the restroom that they believe they will be safest in

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

# Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

- Talk to non-binary people to learn more about who they are
  - There's no one way to be non-binary
  - The best way to understand what it's like to be non-binary is to talk with non-binary people and listen to their stories
- Create an office environment where:
  - NO assumptions are made about someone's gender
  - Everyone is asked the same questions about their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation (SOGI)
  - Gender-inclusive bathrooms are available
  - Gender-inclusive language is used by all staff members

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>

# Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environments for All Patients

- Create an office environment where:
  - There are signs and symbols that show the environment is safe
    - For example, the pink triangle that is supposed to symbolize a safe environment originated from the triangle Nazi's made LGBTQIA+ people wear during World War II when they were being put in concentration camps
  - All staff members know what the signs and symbols mean

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>



# In Conclusion

- To provide expert, ethical, and empathetic care to non-binary patient we should:
  - Have a basic understanding of sex versus gender and what gender means in our current culture
  - Use affirming language & terminology to create a safe and trauma-informed space so patients can be open to the care we provide
    - This includes understanding language for anatomy, the medical affirmation process, and systemic barriers to gender-affirming care
  - Understand that non-binary people face unique pressures when it comes to body image and personal health
  - Create an affirming and safe environment so our patients feel free to discover who they are, feel connected to the care they need, and safely access the resources we provide

# Questions & Conversation

