

# THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND GENDER DYSPHORIA



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"Our vision is to further our understanding of sexual identity development and synthesis, and to be a resource to students in training and those in the community who are stakeholders in these discussions"

**Mark Yarhouse**

Director, Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity





We help people navigate the difficult terrain of sexual and gender identity development.



We shed light rather than apply heat.

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## OVERVIEW OF THE MORNING

- Part I: Foundational Considerations
  - Key Terms
  - Biblical and theological considerations;
- Part II: Scientific—biological, psychological and sociocultural considerations;
- Part III: Toward a pastoral response

## FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

### KEY TERMS



## WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY & GENDER DYSPHORIA?

- **Gender identity:** How you experience yourself (or think of yourself) as male or female, including how masculine or feminine you feels.
- **Gender dysphoria:** The experience of distress related to having a psychological and emotional gender identity that does not match one's biological/birth sex.



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**Transgender:** An umbrella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present, express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological/ birth sex.



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**Transsexual:** A person who believes he or she was born in the “wrong” body (of the other sex) and wishes to transition (or has transitioned) through hormonal treatment and sex reassignment surgery. A rare phenomenon.



## KEY TERMS

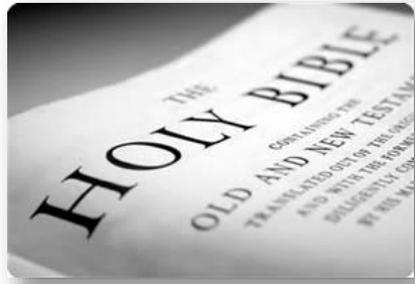
- **Intersex:** a term to describe conditions in which a person is born with sex characteristics or anatomy that does not allow them to be identified clearly as male or female. This can be chromosomal, gonadal, or genital.
- For example, congenital adrenal hyperplasia is a genetic disorder that can cause the adrenal glands in a fetus with XX chromosomes to produce hormones that cause her to be born with an atypically large clitoris.

## FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

### BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## GENESIS 1:27

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”



## I CORINTHIANS 6:9-10

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men<sup>[a]</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

## DEUTERONOMY 23:1 & 22:5

- “No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord.”
- “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.”

## QUOTE

“It is likely that, in keeping with God’s covenantal concern to preserve the holiness of his character reflected within the covenant community of Israel, and to avoid anything which threatened Israel’s existence and harmony, the cross-dressing prohibition was introduced to prevent involvement on the part of the Israelites in contemporary Canaanite religious rituals of the day, which involved swapping of sex roles and cross-dressing.” - EAPC



## ACTS 8:26-40

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him....”

## MATTHEW 19:12

“For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others--and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”



## THE FOUR ACTS OF THE BIBLICAL DRAMA

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Glorification



## CREATION

- Goodness of our physical existence and ourselves as gendered persons
- Different aspects of our sexuality: gender sexuality, erotic sexuality, and genital sexuality



## ASPECTS OF OUR SEXUALITY

- Gender
- Erotic
- Genital



# GENDER SEXUALITY



# EROTIC SEXUALITY



## GENITAL SEXUALITY

Behavior

## THE FALL

How does sin corrupt all of creation, including human sexuality and our experience of our gendered selves?



## WHAT ARE WE TO THINK OF INCONGRUENCE?



Lack of congruence  
between biological/birth  
sex and gender identity

## REDEMPTION

“...abstraction from teleology creates a dangerous misunderstanding of the place of man in the universe. For it supposes that the observing mind encounters an inert creation—not, that is, a creation without movement, but a creation without a point to its movement.” – O’Donovan



## QUOTE

“...maleness and femaleness forever defines an important aspect of the relationship Christ has to all of us, his church. How our individual gender identities will play out in the eschaton is not revealed, but God wants us to forever think of our relationship with Jesus through a monogamous, male/female relational analogy.” - O’Donovan

## CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS

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Integrity	Disability	Diversity

## CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS

Integrity	Disability	Diversity
<p>Identifies gender dysphoria as confusing the sacredness of maleness and femaleness and specific resolutions of gender dysphoria as violations of that integrity.</p>		

## INTEGRITY FRAMEWORK

From the integrity framework: same-sex sexual behavior is sin in part because it does not “merge or join two persons into an integrated sexual whole...”; the “essential maleness” and “essential femaleness” is not brought together as intended from creation. When extended to the discussion of transsexuality and cross-gender identification, the theological concerns rest in the “denial of the integrity of one’s own sex and an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness or femaleness formed by God.”

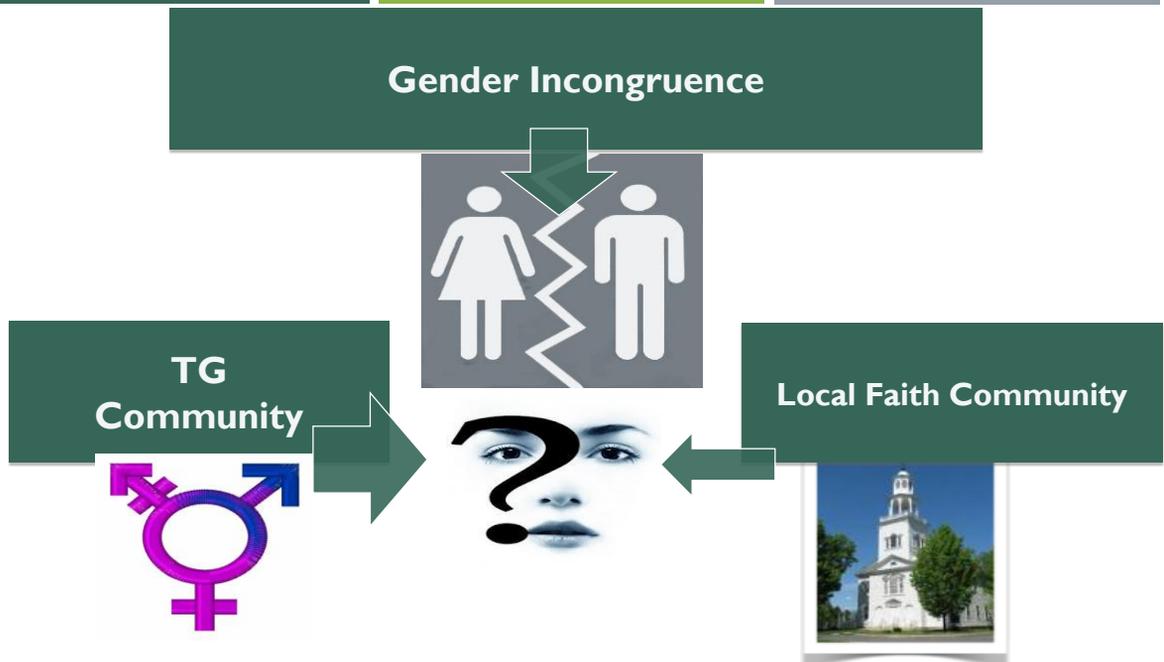
from Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*

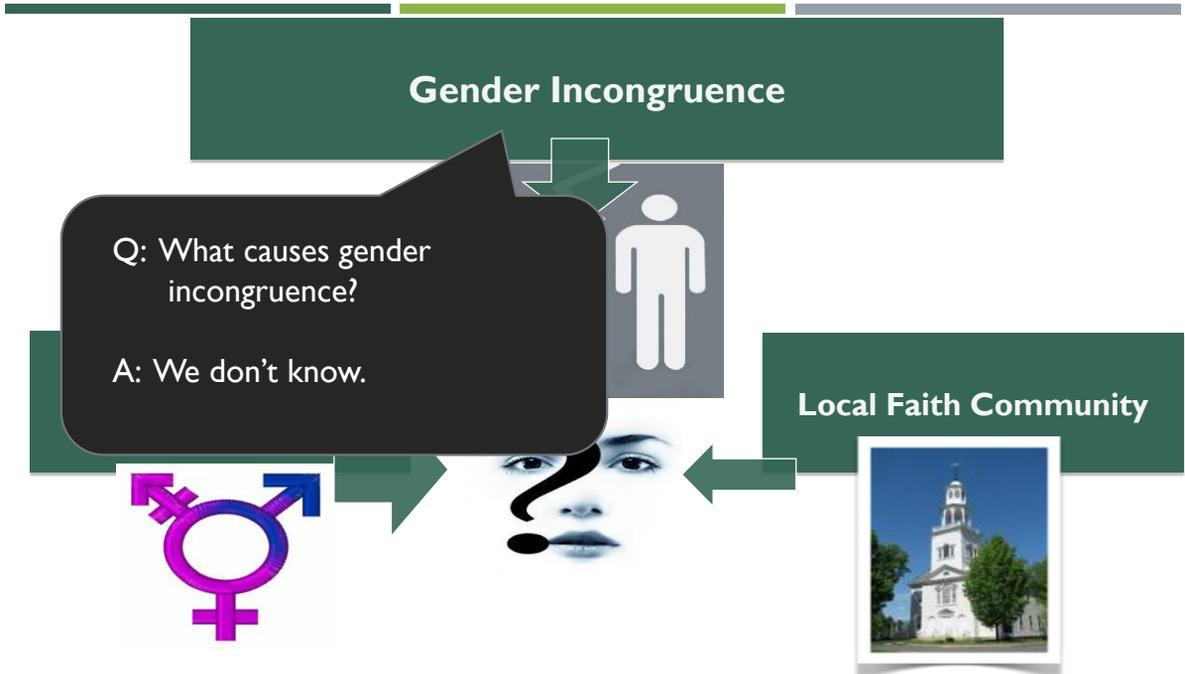
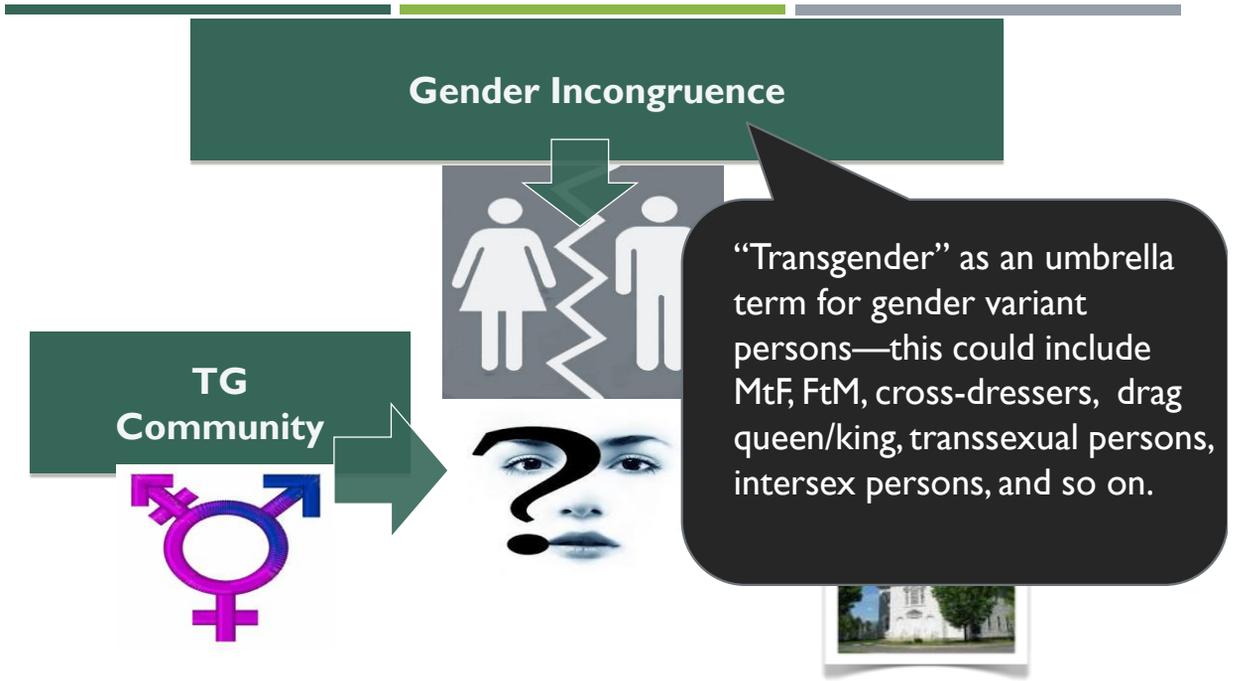
## SUMMARY THOUGHTS



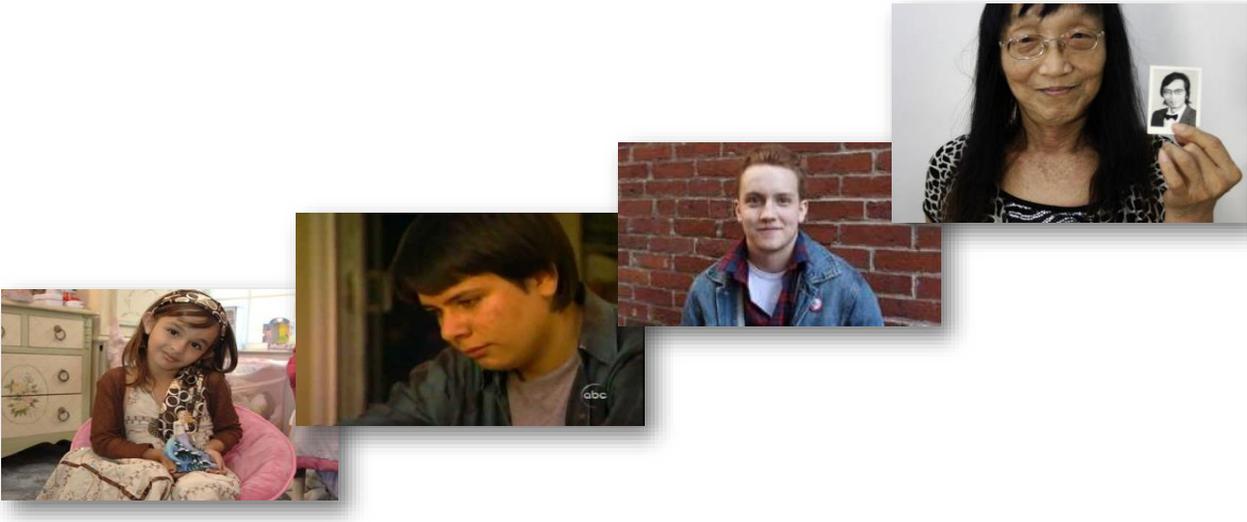
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# SCIENTIFIC—BIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SOCIOCULTURAL, CONSIDERATIONS





# A LIFESPAN/DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

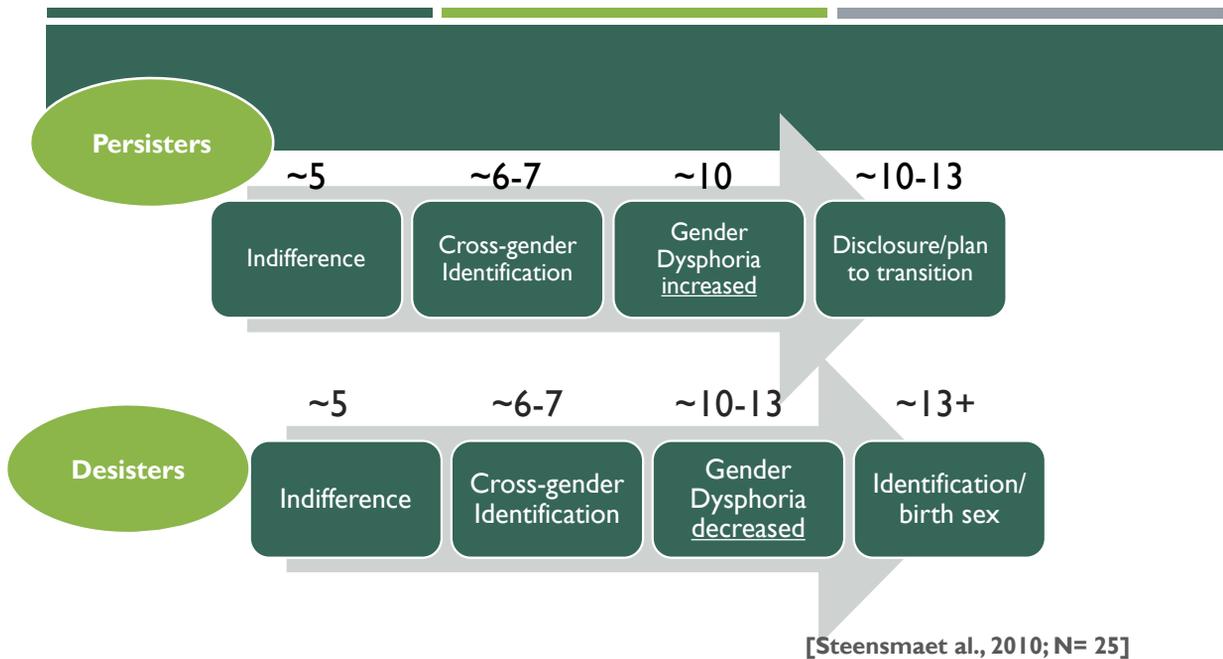


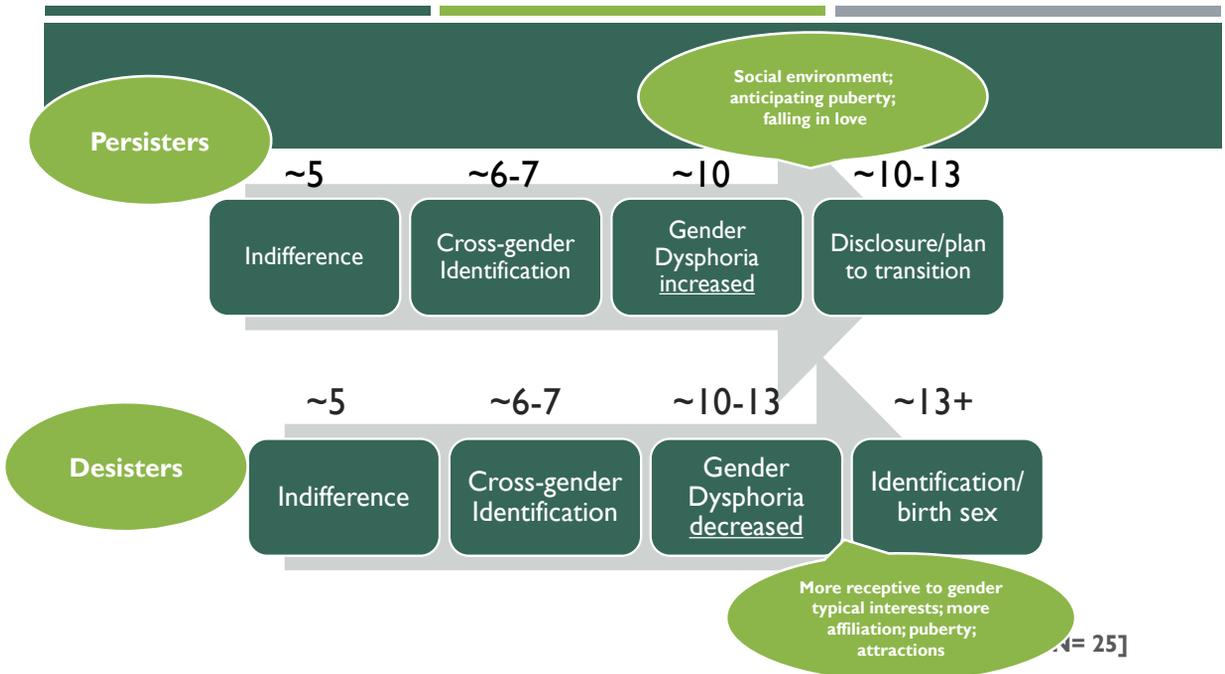
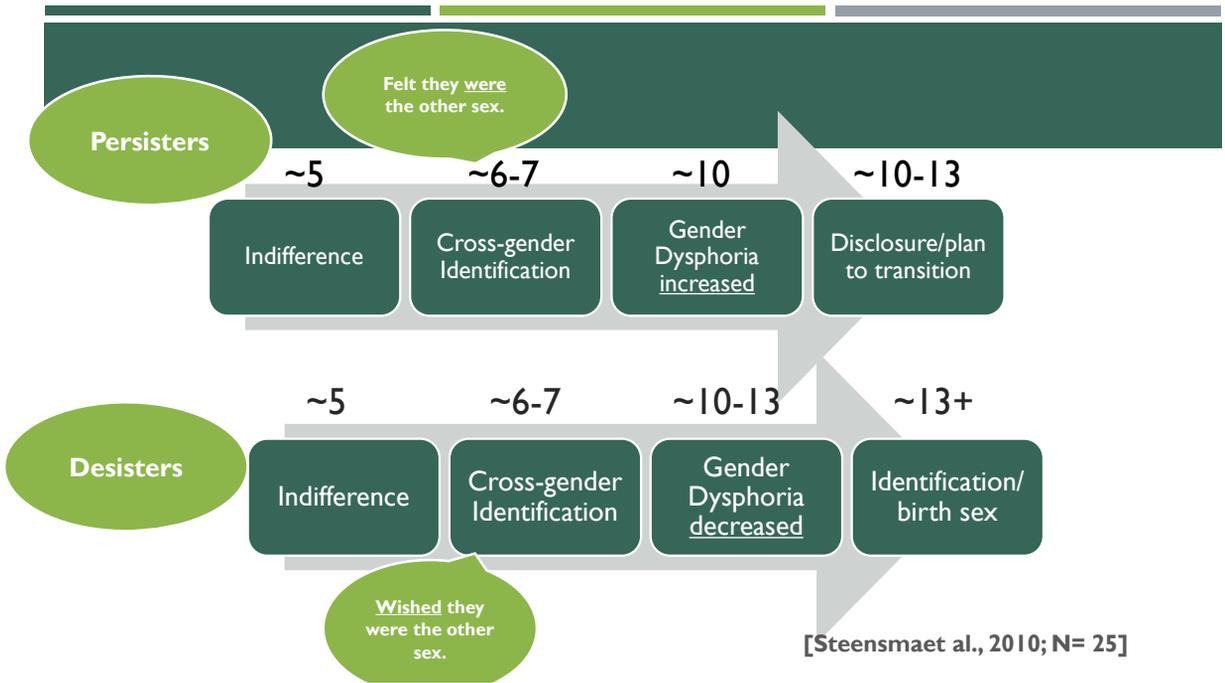
# TAKE A LIFESPAN/DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE



# GENDER DYSPHORIA IN CHILDHOOD

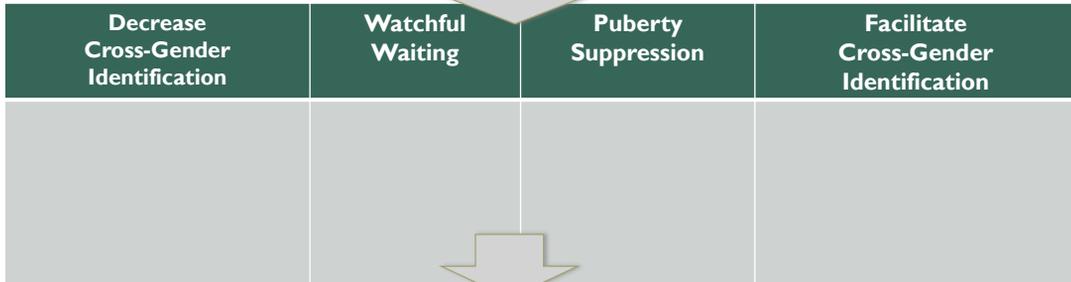
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# GENDER DYSPHORIA IN CHILDHOOD

An estimated 75% of accurately diagnosed cases resolve by adulthood.



Social support, family relationships, personal faith, corporate faith community, coping activities, and so on.

## ON THERAPY WITH MINORS



- Is there evidence that therapy improves likelihood of resolution?
- If not, focus on Identity exploration
- No fixed outcome
- Social support
- Importance of faith community

## TAKE A LIFESPAN/DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

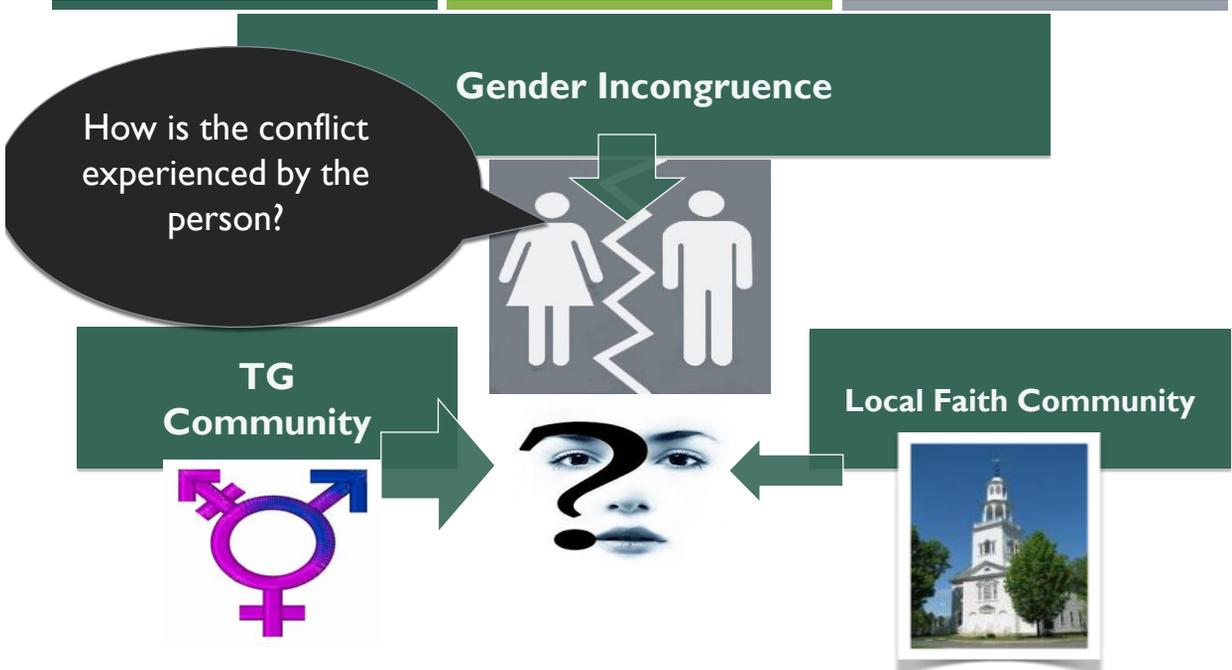
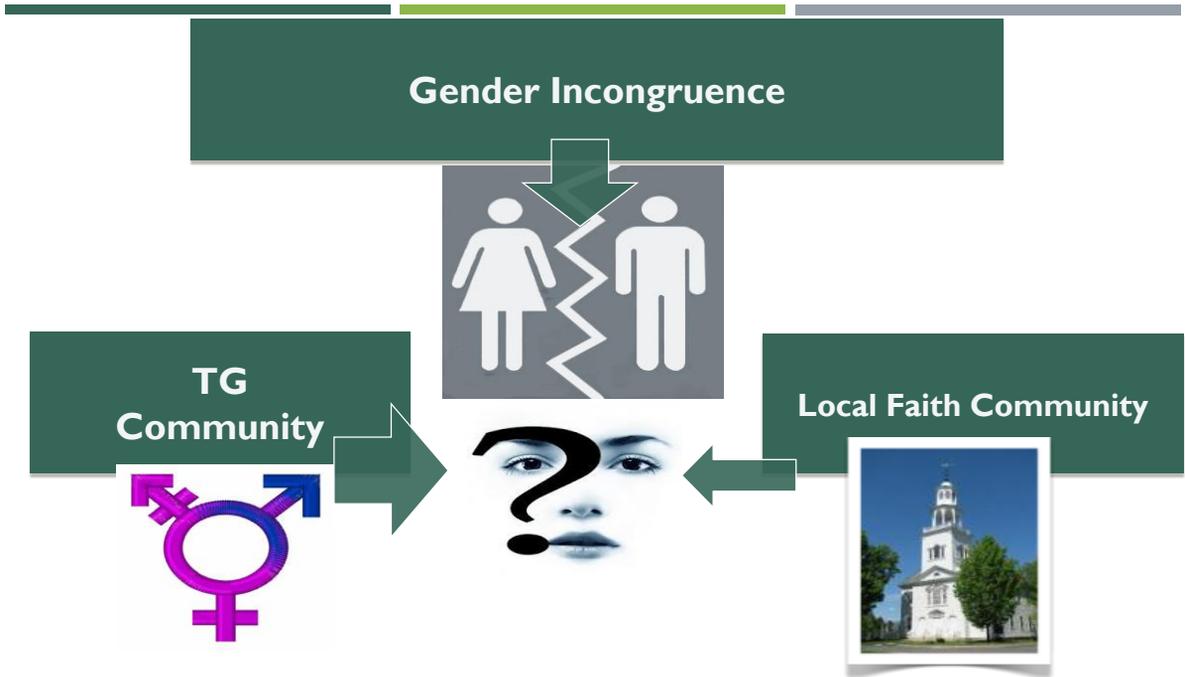


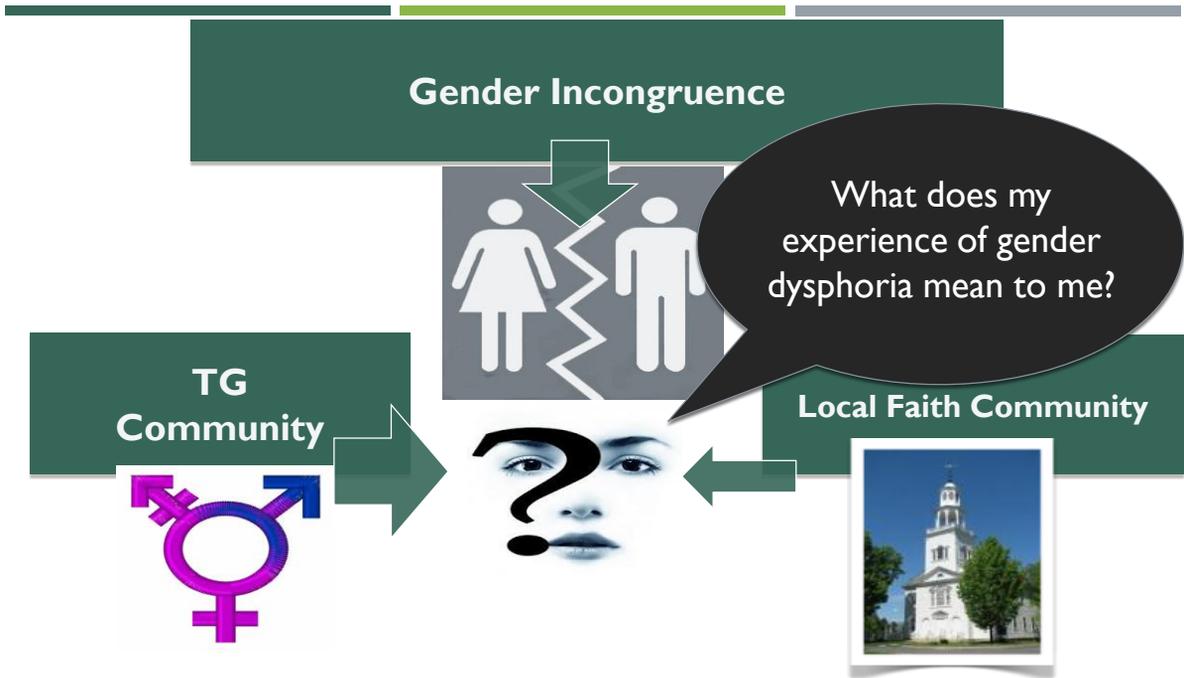
## GENDER DYSPHORIA IN ADULTHOOD

Path 1: An estimated 50% drop out of treatment due to frustration

Path 2	Path 3	Path 4
Resolve in accordance with their biological/ birth/assigned sex	Engage in cross-dressing behavior intermittently (often privately or publicly in other venues or locales)	Adopt cross-gender role, which may include hormonal treatment and sex reassignment surgery

**Social support, family relationships, personal faith, corporate faith community, coping activities, and so on.**

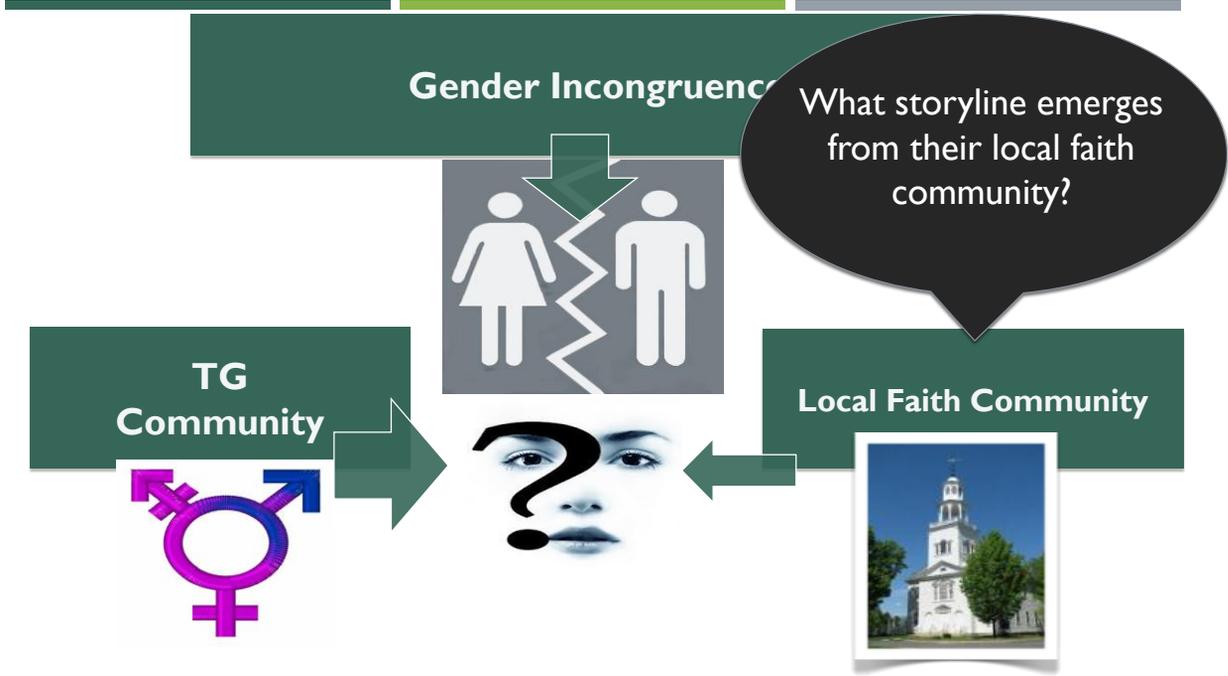
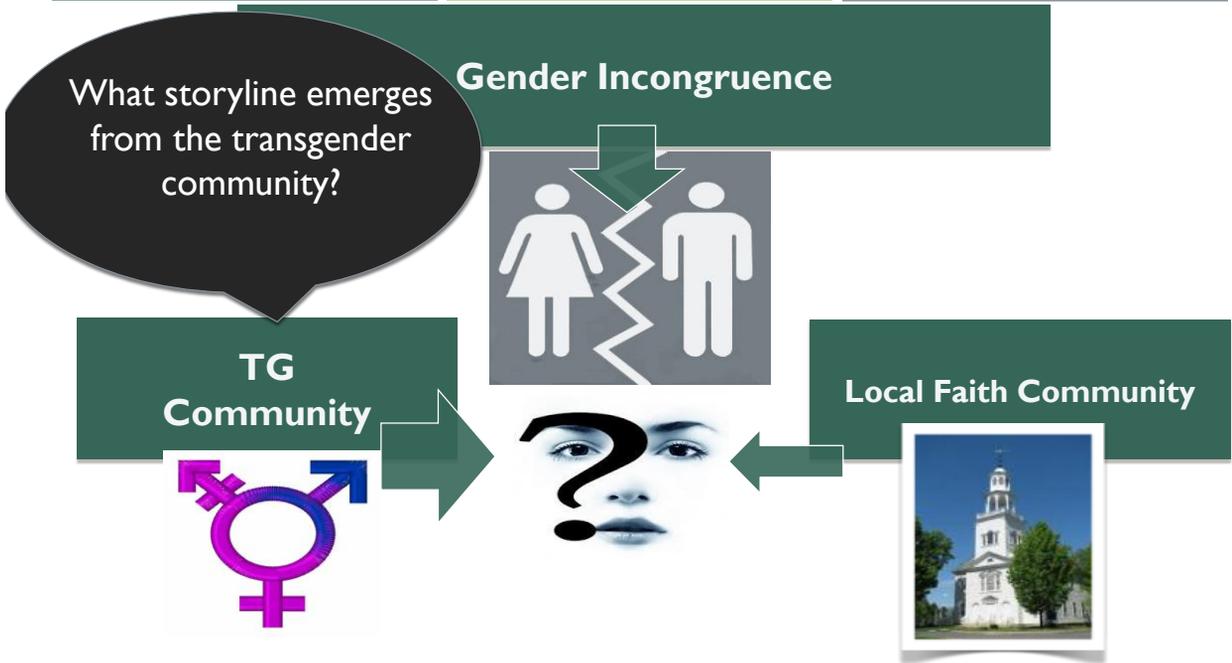




## PURPOSES OF CROSS-DRESSING

- Expression
- Management
- Arousal
- Entertainment





## 32 MALE-TO-FEMALE CHRISTIANS

Milestones	Age	Example
Awareness	6	Cross-dressing behaviors(16); atypical play(7)
Internal Confusion	11	External consequences(6); gender variant behaviors(6); emotional dissonance(5)
Thoughts/Reasoning	18	Something is wrong with me(8); need to do research(6); wanted to be female(5)
Attempts to Address Conflict	27	Sought counseling (9); cross-dressing behaviors (9)
Disclosure	35	Told spouse/significant other (16)
Resolution	47	No resolution (11); assistance from others (9); transitioning(9); acceptance (6)

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**Average age of  
becoming a Christian  
= 23 yrs**

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**“Well, I’ve certainly been through period(s?) of ‘Why Me, God?’ And I’ve been through periods when I’d really liked to have attended worship services en femme. I’ve refrained from doing so, so as not to be disruptive of the spirit of reverence.”**

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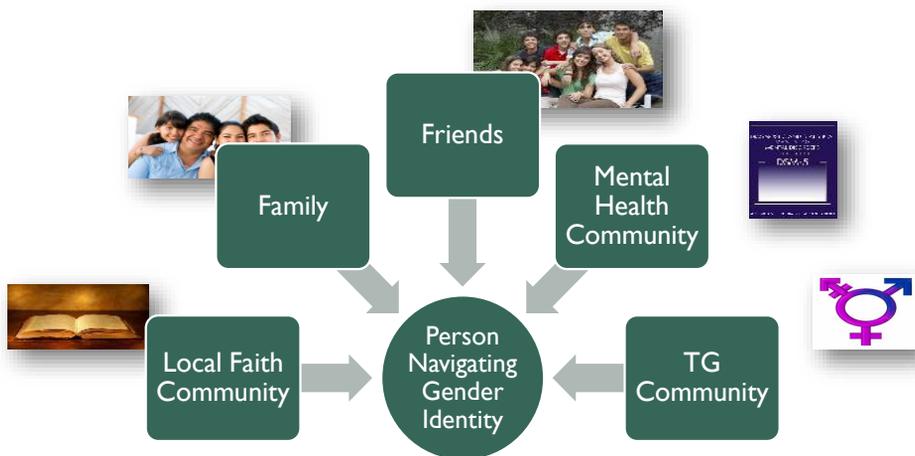
**“There have been times when I’ve prayed that God would take away my cross-dressing inclinations. I’ve finally accepted that the answer was ‘no’.”**

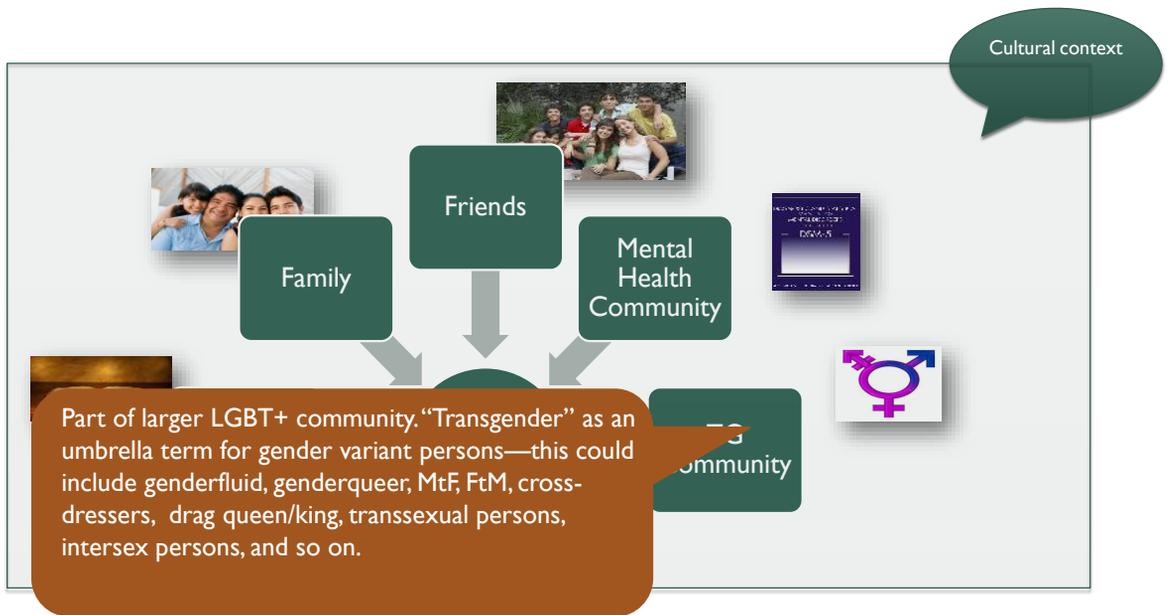
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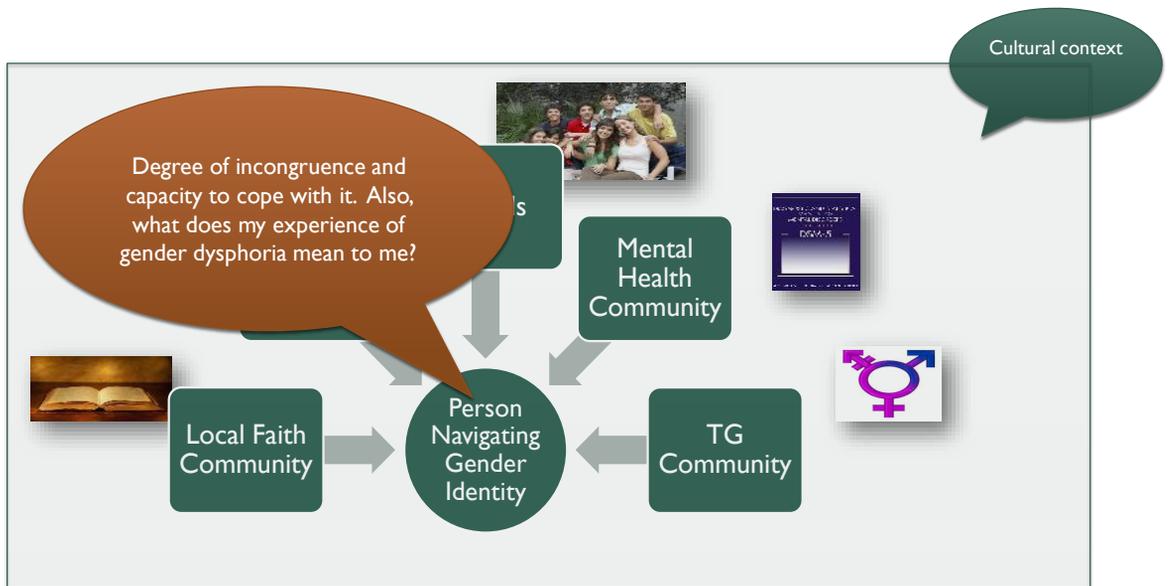
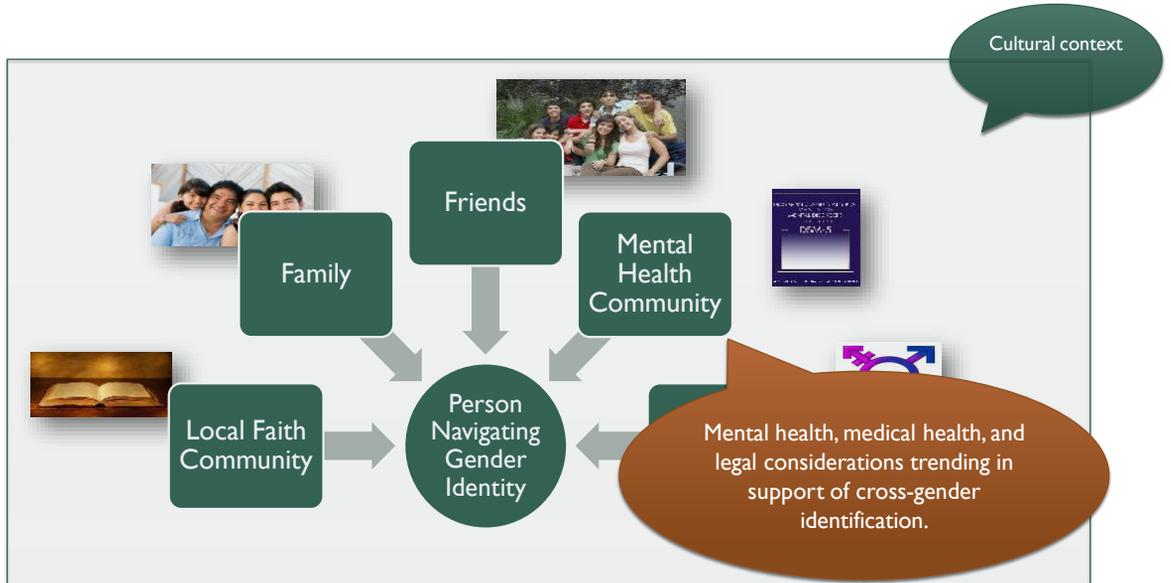
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**“I shall work out my salvation with fear and trembling as I am in the process of being perfected. Either way I believe that God sees me through Christ and my hope is in His righteousness not my own.”**







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## CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS



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### CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS

<b>Integrity</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Diversity</b>

## CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS

Integrity	Disability	Diversity
	<p>Identifies sexual identity issues and gender dysphoria as a reflection of normal variation in nature. For Christians, it is at times likened to a disability, a nonmoral reality to be addressed with compassion.</p>	

## CONTRASTING LENSES

Integrity	Disability	Diversity
		<p><i>Strong form:</i> Deconstruction of sex/gender as oppressive;  <i>Weak form:</i> Highlights sexual identity and gender identity issues as reflecting an identity and culture to be celebrated as an expression of diversity.</p>

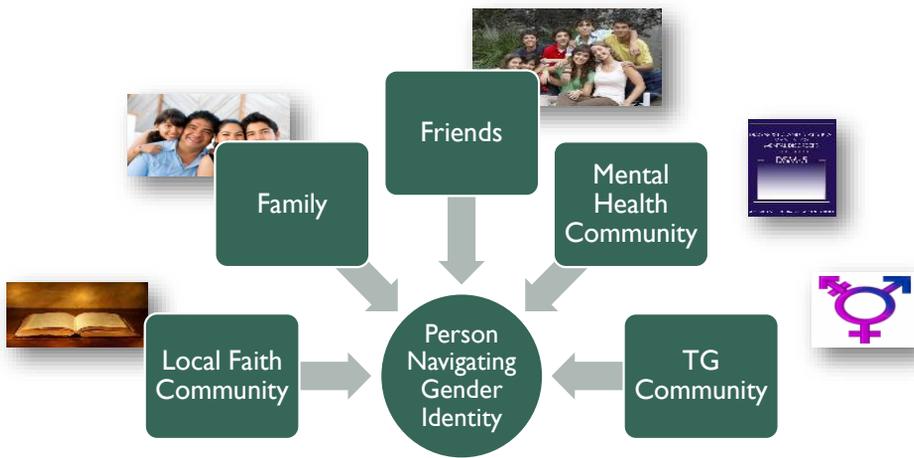
If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

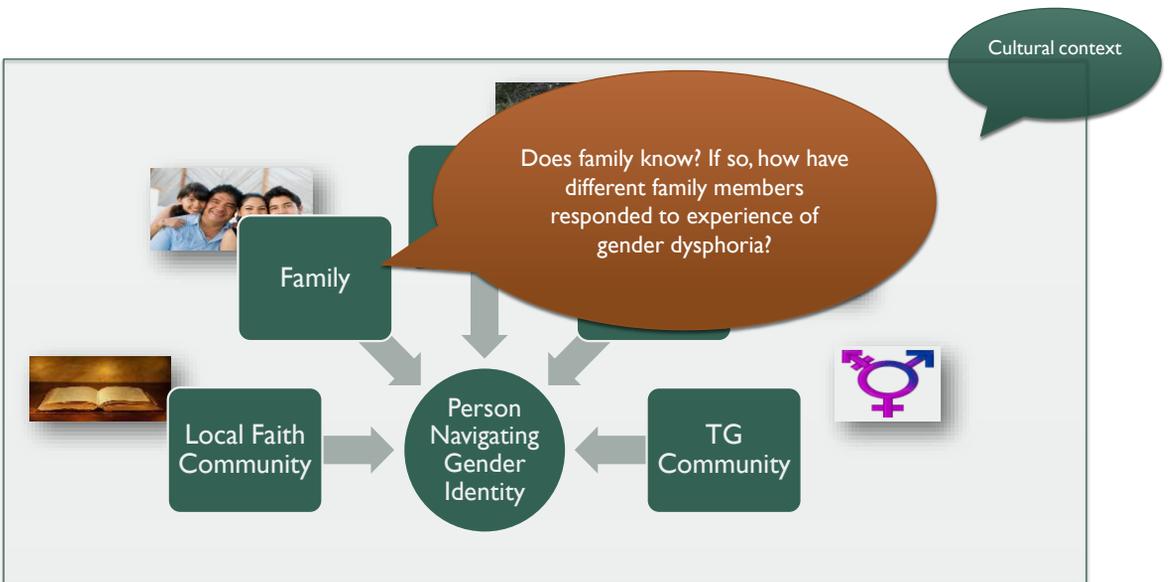
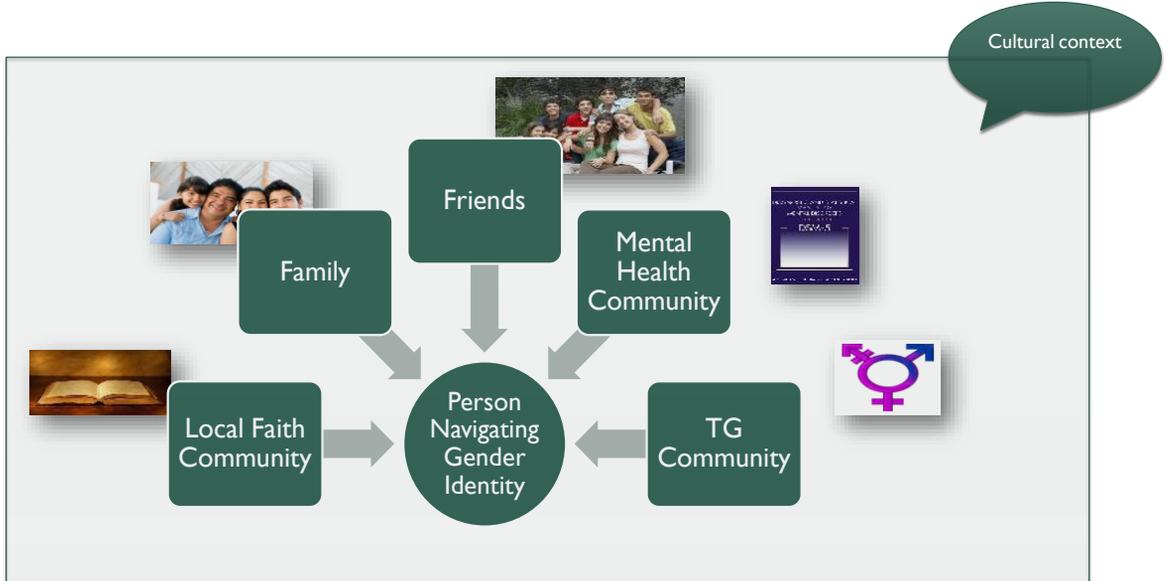
- Judith Butler

## SUMMARY THOUGHTS



# TOWARD A PASTORAL RESPONSE







People of faith who are navigating gender identity issues are “our people.”



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## CONTRASTING LENSES



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## CONTRASTING LENSES

<b>Integrity</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Diversity</b>

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## AN INTEGRATED LENS

TOWARD A DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

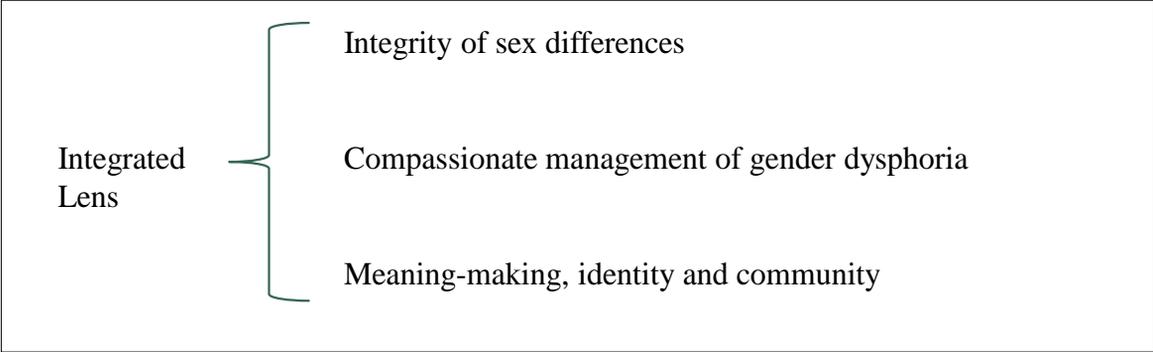


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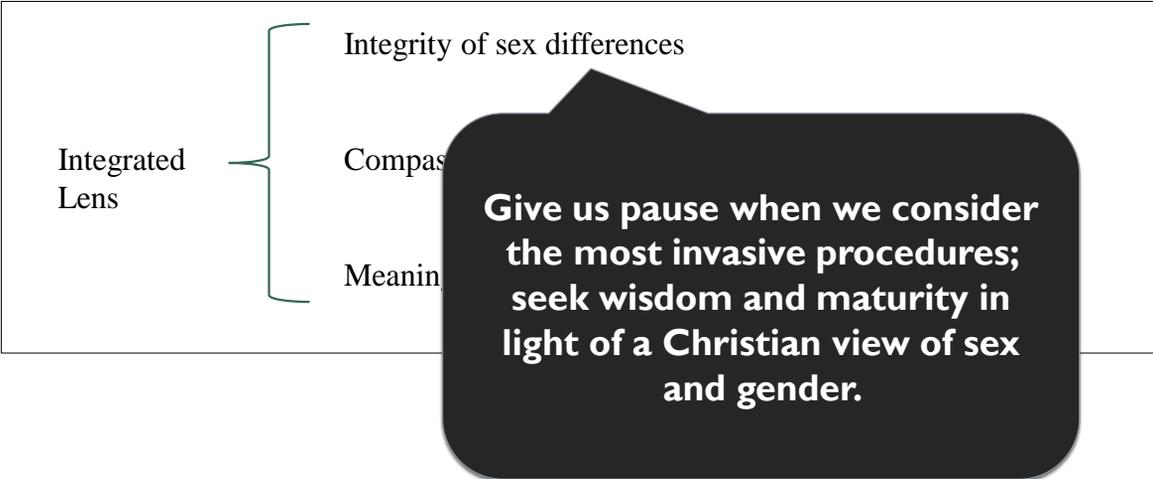
## WHY?

- To avoid speaking past one another
- To facilitate cognitive complexity and perspective-taking
- To draw on the best each framework has to offer
- To offer distinctly Christian resources

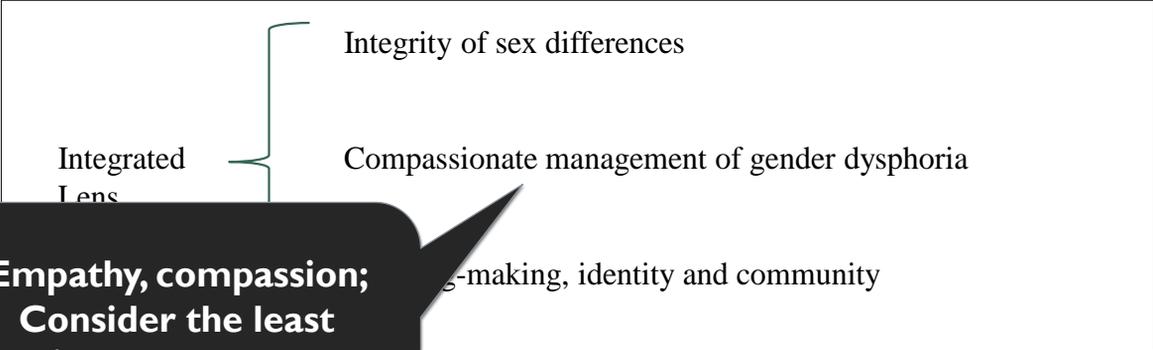
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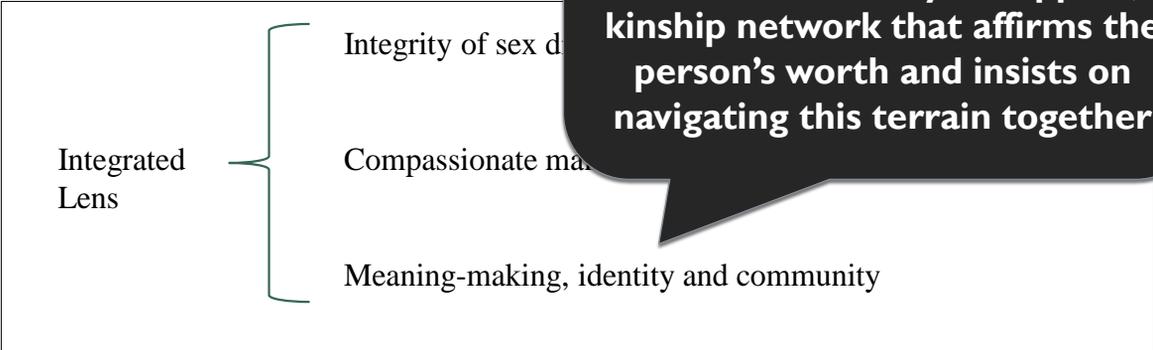


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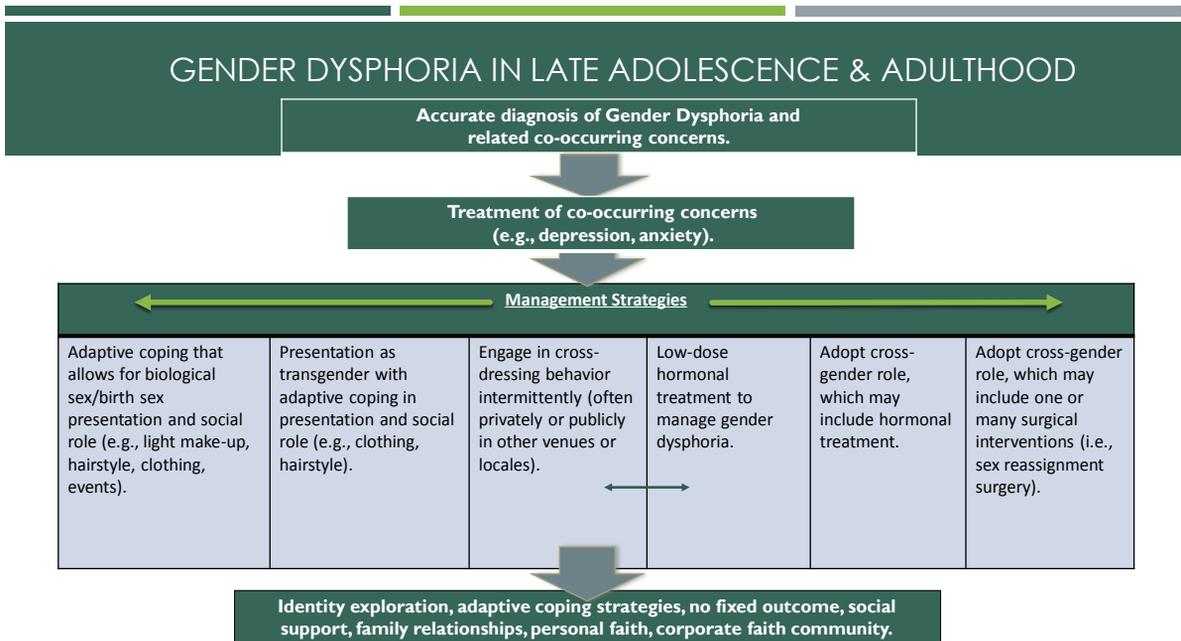
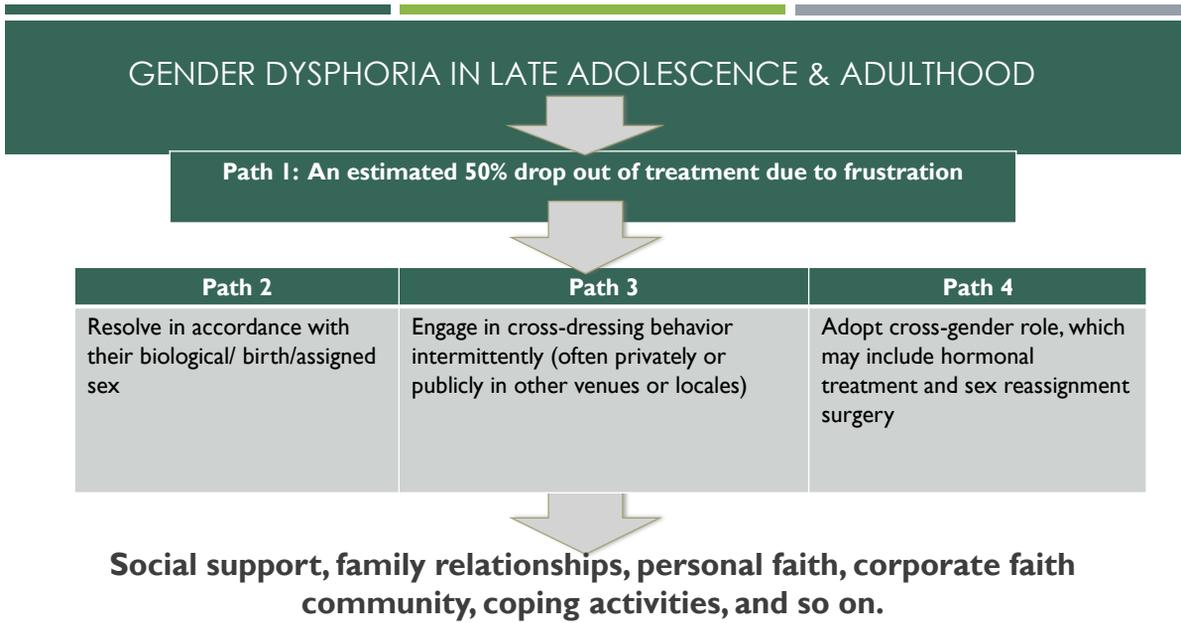


**Empathy, compassion;  
Consider the least  
invasive ways to manage  
dysphoria.**

# INTEGRATED LENS



**Identify meaning-making  
structures that inform identity  
and locates the person within a  
broader community of support, a  
kinship network that affirms the  
person's worth and insists on  
navigating this terrain together**



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“There are very few resources. I’m still dealing with gender dysphoria daily. Transitioning is the main secular response; healing through counseling is the main Christian response. Dealing with it daily is the reality for most of us.”

- Female-to-male transgender Christian

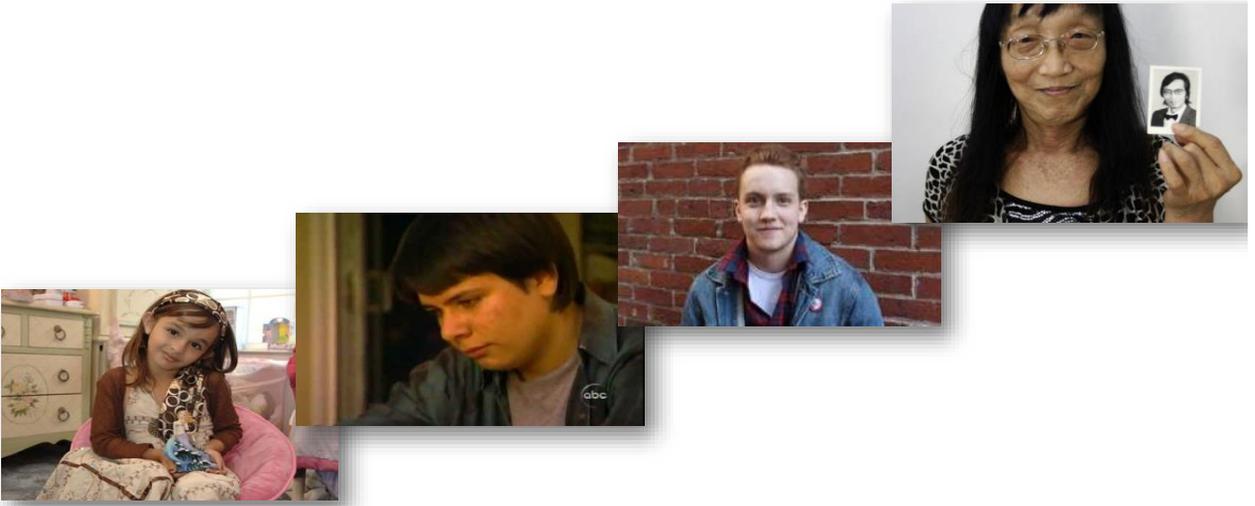
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## Implications

- Do not provide pastoral care out of rigid gender stereotypes, as they will likely exacerbate rather than resolve gender dysphoria.
- Borrow language of “navigating terrain” and facilitate a walk with Christ and a place for them to explore **meaning** and **purpose** and to potentially explore questions of theodicy.
- You may be relating to a multidisciplinary team.

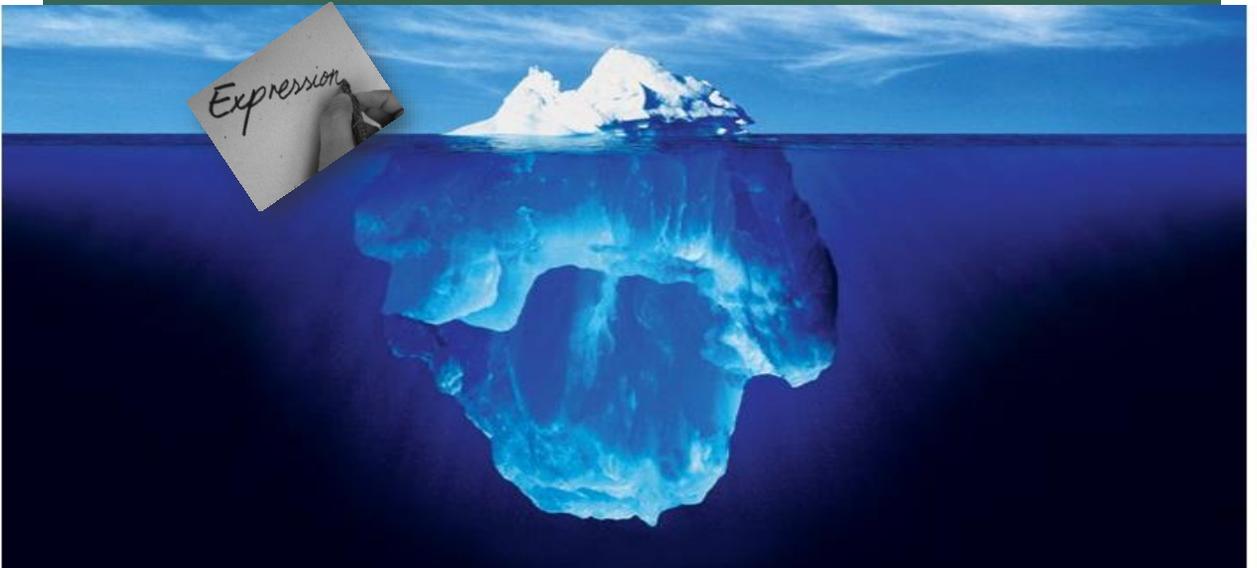
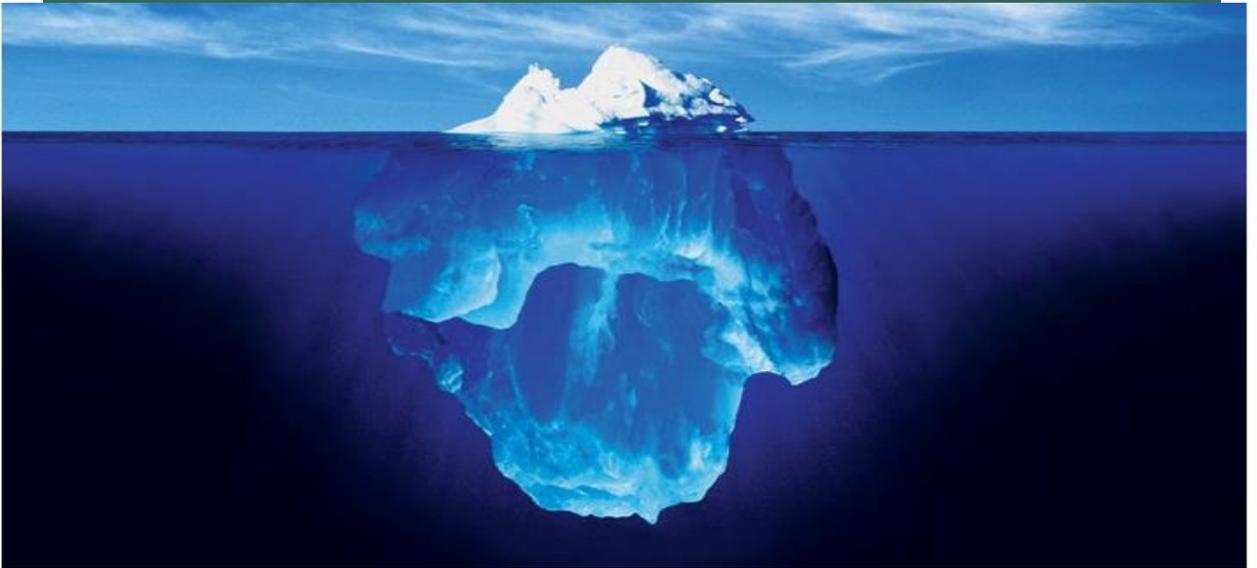


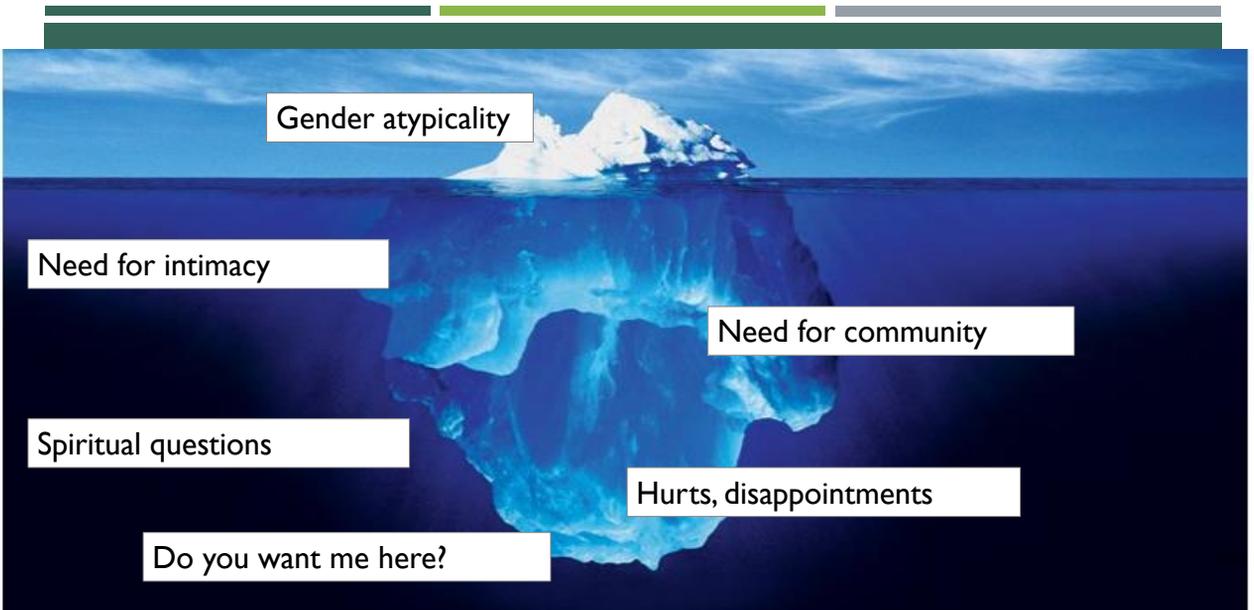
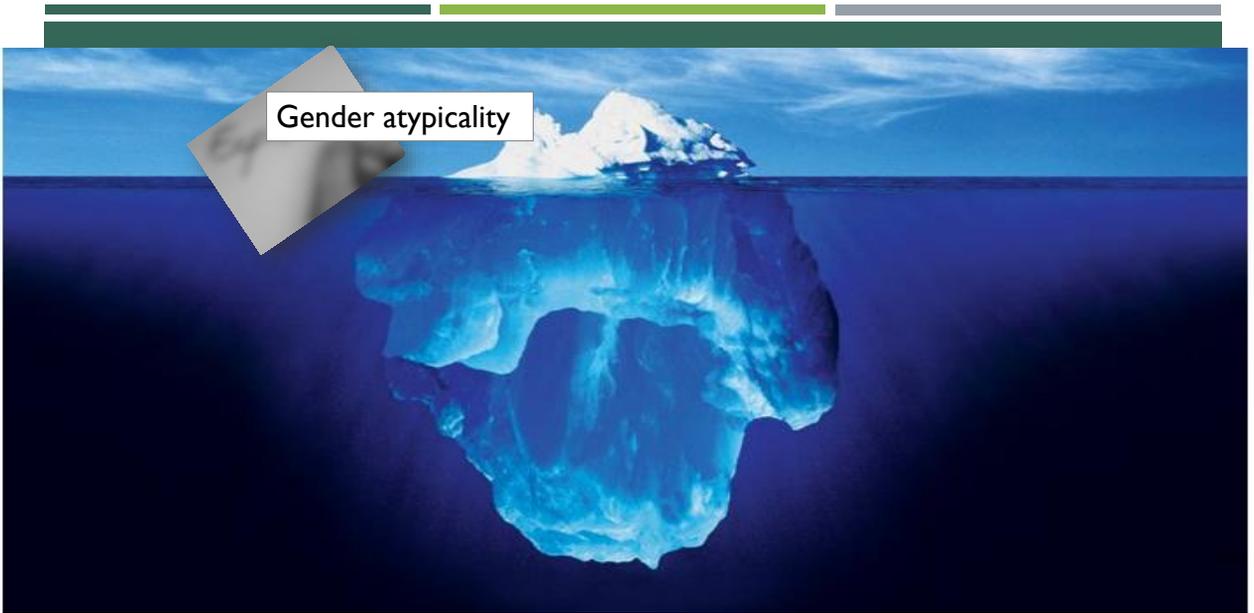
## IMPLICATIONS



## AT THE LEVEL OF THE PERSON

- Take a lifespan/developmental perspective
- Ask about chapters
- Discuss meaning/purpose
- Offer to assist in finding resources to navigate relationships/find support
- Encourage discipleship
- Redemptive meaning





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“Gender dysphoria ... for me is the hiss of an old-time radio—a sound which can be ignored with some effort in order to hear the broadcast, but cannot be extinguished without pulling the plug. It has always been there, long before I understood what was making the noise.”

- Renae Madison Gage

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It's like puzzle pieces that won't fit together. Odd disconnection between body and self-identity. I look around and think, “How is it that it fits together for you?” - Female-to-male transgender Christian

## QUOTES

“I believe myself to be transgendered because my gender identity is complex, dynamic, and difficult to define whereas my biological sex is unambiguously male. Further, I believe myself to be transgendered because my gender identity is a source of existential tension and social anxiety. I have an unshakable feeling that I was not supposed to be this way, that there is/was a possible self who would not experience gender. This possible self is easier to visualize as feminine.”



## QUOTES

“My gender identity does not require a physical sex change to be wholly congruent with my presentation to society. I am between - ‘trans’ - accepted binary genders and need to present in attire congruent to the gender being nurtured.”



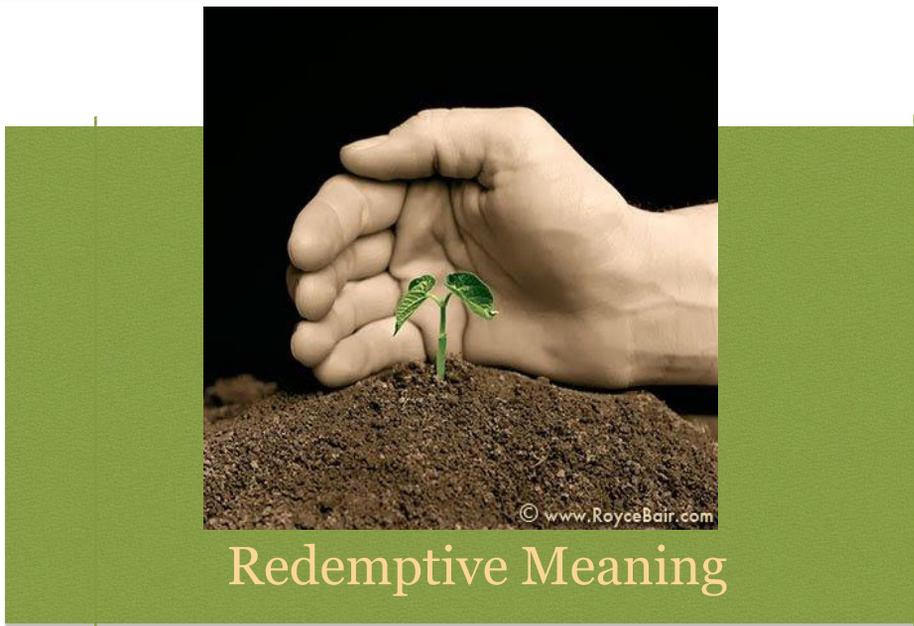
**Q:What kind of support would you have liked from the church?**



**Q:What kind of support would you have liked from the church?**



**A:“...someone to cry with me, rather than just denounce me. Hey, it is scary to see God not rescue someone from cancer or schizophrenia or [Gender Identity Disorder]...but learn to allow your compassion to overcome your fear and repulsion.”**



## QUOTE

... suffering in Christianity is not only not meaningless, it is ultimately one of the most powerful media for the transmission of meaning. We can stand in adoration between the cross, and kneel and kiss the wood that bore the body of our Saviour, because this is the means by which the ugly meaningless atheistic suffering of the world (the problem of evil) was transmuted into the living water, the blood of Christ, the wellspring of Creation. The great paradox here is that the Tree of Death and Suffering is the Tree of Life. This central paradox in Christianity allows us to love our own brokenness precisely because it is through that brokenness that we image the broken body of our God -- and the highest expression of divine love....

## QUOTE (CONT'D)

...That God in some sense wills it to be so seems evident in Gethsemane: Christ prays “Not my will, but thine be done,” and when God's will is done it involves the scourge and the nails. It's also always struck me as particularly fitting and beautiful that when Christ is resurrected His body is not returned to a state of perfection, as the body of Adam in Eden, but rather it still bears the marks of His suffering and death—and indeed that it is precisely through these marks that He is known by Thomas. - Melinda Selmys

## AT THE LEVEL OF THE MINISTRY

- Gender Expression Policies
- What are the organizing influences on your policies? The different postures...
- How do you balance multiple stakeholders?
- How do you position your ministry in a changing cultural context?
- What is your broader cultural witness?

# SUMMARY THOUGHTS



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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