

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

Am I even queer?

Speaker 2 ([00:04](#)):

... because I think I want to take testosterone-

Speaker 3 ([00:06](#)):

I mean, I'm wearing men's underwear right now.

Speaker 4 ([00:08](#)):

Is that a boy? Is that a girl?

Speaker 2 ([00:09](#)):

Man, woman, cisgender, transgender, like we're born into language.

Speaker 1 ([00:13](#)):

Butch, femme, t-girl.

Speaker 5 ([00:14](#)):

Decolonized.

Speaker 1 ([00:15](#)):

Queer, trans, BIPOC.

Speaker 5 ([00:17](#)):

Neuro divergence.

Speaker 2 ([00:18](#)):

Cisgender, hetero, patriarchal, capitalist, girl boss.

Speaker 4 ([00:20](#)):

Queer, femme. Lipstick, every day.

Speaker 6 ([00:22](#)):

T for two, like fag boy relationship.

Speaker 2 ([00:25](#)):

Butch.

Speaker 7 ([00:25](#)):

Boyish and like sprightly.

Speaker 1 ([00:27](#)):

The softer, more fake...

Speaker 4 ([00:29](#)):

Oh, but you're so feminine. You're so feminine.

Speaker 8 ([00:31](#)):

Attraction to a hot t-boy.

Speaker 2 ([00:33](#)):

I used sexuality to try to understand my gender.

Speaker 9 ([00:36](#)):

What does it look like for non-binary people to "transition"?

Speaker 3 ([00:40](#)):

I was a boy. If I was looking down at the memory, I was a boy.

Speaker 1 ([00:44](#)):

It's really difficult to look at gender identity, head on.

Speaker 2 ([00:48](#)):

Wait, I think I'm trans.

Ally ([00:59](#)):

Babette, do you want children?

Babette ([01:05](#)):

In the current world that we live in, no.

Ally ([01:08](#)):

Okay. Interesting.

Babette ([01:11](#)):

What? What? Why do you ask?

Ally ([01:14](#)):

Okay. I'm just saying because our guest today is a queer parent, and I just really loved getting to talk to them about all the specifics like, "What does your kid call you? Are you Mapa," you know what I mean? Whenever I hear someone say like, "My nibbling," and it's like the gender-neutral niece or nephew. I'm like, some words really fit. Some don't, necessarily, for me, but yeah, it just feels like parenthood-

Babette ([01:41](#)):

Well, I do have a son.

Ally ([01:41](#)):

Oh, right. Oh, my God.

Babette ([01:41](#)):

I do have a son.

Ally ([01:45](#)):

Of course.

Babette ([01:46](#)):

My son, Baxter. My little dog.

Ally ([01:48](#)):

Yeah, your sweet little Baxter. Yeah, so I guess I meant-

Babette ([01:53](#)):

You have [inaudible 00:01:53].

Ally ([01:53](#)):

... do you want more children? Yeah, yeah. I'm a parent.

Babette ([01:56](#)):

Right? Exactly. Exactly. It's really so tough because I love following queer Black parents on Instagram and stuff. It's so amazing to see, and I'm like... Oh, my God. Yesterday, this little kid was doing such an amazing job of petting my dog, Baxter. My son, Baxter-

Ally ([02:17](#)):

Yeah, your son.

Babette ([02:17](#)):

... and it was so fucking cute. He was giving him love pats and I was like, "You're doing such a good job like good job petting him." I actually think kids are amazing. It just sucks that we live in a fucking hellscape where I don't really think it's ethical to have kids, but they're so fucking cute. And this little Black boy was just doing such a good job petting Baxter. I want to be around kids.

Ally ([02:44](#)):

I'm like, you can be a parent and not birth children. You could adopt.

Babette ([02:49](#)):

Yeah, but I also think adoption is kind of inherently unethical, too.

Ally ([02:51](#)):

What? Wait, why?

Babette ([02:54](#)):

I think too much. Because I think, this is me being really heady, but in many situations, the continuance of people adopting kids, creates a market for it. And that puts pressure on, especially, young single women of color, to give up their kids, when what they actually need is the resources to raise their kids. Or totally, obviously, bodily autonomy, make whatever decision you want, but the act of doing it. And then that kid who's an autonomous human being, doesn't get to consent to where they go. You didn't ask to be adopted by these people.

Ally ([03:32](#)):

Yeah.

Babette ([03:34](#)):

Yeah, it's not a coincidence that it's a lot of poor people that end up... It creates a market for it.

Ally ([03:40](#)):

Interesting. Yeah, there's foster care but there isn't really, with adoption, it feels very like, "Now, you don't have those other parents anymore." Hard cut.

Babette ([03:51](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([03:51](#)):

And so, yeah, there isn't really a model-

Babette ([03:52](#)):

Exactly.

Ally ([03:52](#)):

... for... And maybe, "I'm watching you for a while, and your parents come and get you."

Babette ([03:59](#)):

"And I can give you back." Nobody wants to do that. Exactly. Nobody wants to do that. But now it's like maybe you were in a really hard moment, and you gave up your kid because it would pay your bills. Unfortunately, it's like capitalism ruins everything. I think anything that involves a market and incentive to do that is not good.

Ally ([04:22](#)):

Whoa.

Babette ([04:22](#)):

I think it's the market that's created for it. Capitalism ruins everything.

Ally ([04:25](#)):

Yeah.

Babette ([04:26](#)):

Yeah, if you could just be one big extended family, and maybe right now, I'm not in the place to have this kid, but no, that's what the nuclear family is. It's ownership. It's siphoning off. It's all of these things. I'm being so heady about it.

Ally ([04:40](#)):

No, but yeah-

Babette ([04:40](#)):

I don't know.

Ally ([04:41](#)):

... I do think you were like, "I think too much." So I do think, experientially, you will make a huge impact. It's like do we dismantle the systems, while not helping people who are in free fall, after getting fucked by them? Or do we try to do both at the same time? Do we adopt and also try to change the adoption system?

Babette ([05:02](#)):

Totally. I guess I'm curious what adoption looks like when everybody has what they need.

Ally ([05:07](#)):

Yeah, totally. I'm just curious what a social worker would say to this. Would they be like, "Please adopt a million babies right now."

Babette ([05:15](#)):

Please like don't do this [inaudible 00:05:18]

Ally ([05:17](#)):

There's a whole foster care system. You literally need to get involved.

Babette ([05:23](#)):

Yeah. So to each their own. That's my view of things.

Ally ([05:26](#)):

Yeah, totally.

Babette ([05:27](#)):

What about you, Ally?

Ally ([05:29](#)):

Yeah, I think I want kids. I deeply understand that... There's so many people in my life, who are like, "Why would you have a kid? You're leaving them in a literal burning world." And I'm like, "Yeah, I deeply understand that." But I think that feels very fulfilling for me, and it feels like something coming from within, and not necessarily put on me so I feel confident in that.

Babette ([05:51](#)):

That's amazing.

Ally ([05:53](#)):

Well, our guest today is Asher Pandjiris, who is a non-binary therapist, and had a lot to say about their experience being a parent, outside of the gender binary. And we also get into talking about eating disorders, specifically among masc presenting people, when it seems like a lot of the language around ED is about feminization, and I don't know, trying to be on the cover of Elle Magazine, or I don't know. It just felt like that kind of stuff never really worked for me, and they had a lot to say about that. So just as a disclaimer, there is some talk about eating disorders. We don't get into specifics, but those time stamps are in the show notes. Also, I sound a little bit different because I got a sunburn that week. If my voice is a little higher, it's because I got sunburned.

Babette ([06:44](#)):

Mmm. You were just pinched up a little bit? Everything was just an octave up.

Ally ([06:49](#)):

Exactly, yeah.

Babette ([06:49](#)):

Your skin was tighter.

Ally ([06:50](#)):

Yeah, my skin was a little bit tighter. No, but really we recorded this a year ago, so my voice is different but please enjoy this interview.

Ally ([07:02](#)):

In researching this project, we listened to a bunch of different podcasts. I love yours. Yours is so amazing and-

Asher ([07:09](#)):

Thank you.

Ally (07:10):

Yeah, and I really love the nurturing quality that you bring to it, as a host, and I would assume that some of that is partly from your background, as a therapist. And then, you just said you studied social work. So okay, I'm just obsessed with all of this. So I guess just to start, at the very beginning, after that long preamble, what does masculinity mean to you, personally?

Asher (07:34):

I think it's changed a lot, over time, in the sense that I think I've developed maybe more language for it. I've been really excited about the broadening of the way that you can now identify. My daughter had this project, her own self-initiated project, where she was going around to all of our queer friends, who are mostly in their '40s, some in their '50s, some late '30s. People who've been out for a long time. Queer. People who are pretty secure in gender expression, whatever. And she gave them this sexuality quiz, that sort of she made up, and I don't know, was informed by something she was learning about. She's basically learning, with all of her friends, about terms that I've never heard of. I sound like a really old person. Obviously, like a parent. Just terms around like if you like these kinds of masculine folks, then that means you're this kind of-

Ally (08:39):

Yes.

Asher (08:43):

... omnisexual and I mean, there are a lot of those.

Ally (08:43):

There's demi. There's... Yeah-

Asher (08:48):

Demi [inaudible 00:08:48].

Ally (08:48):

... I'm in your boat-

Asher (08:48):

Yeah.

Ally (08:48):

... for sure.

Asher (08:48):

Yeah, the demi-sexuality... So it was really interesting because it was like she was telling all of these people who they were. She's been around them, her whole life, so she gets it on a cellular level, but she was also like, "This is actually who you are. I just want you to know that."

Ally ([09:02](#)):

Oh, my God.

Asher ([09:05](#)):

And we all loved it because it was new information but I think there's something about that experience and, of course, working with my patients, and some of whom are younger. And I think there's just so much more language and discourse around what is possible to articulate, maybe, about my relationship to something like masculinity. I think if you would have talked to me 10 years ago, I probably would've said, "Well, I don't know if I identify... I feel like a failure when it comes to masculinity," right? That period and full stop. That's it.

Ally ([09:46](#)):

Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

Asher ([09:48](#)):

And just that's my life and so, I don't know. I think that there are a lot of associations I have to that, I guess. One of which is just that when I was younger and coming out, which I kind of didn't do... It was a whole other story. I was raised very religious and so I didn't really even know what was happening until I left home.

Ally ([10:13](#)):

What kind of religious? Are we talking electric guitar Christianity, or are we talking like-

Asher ([10:19](#)):

No like Roman Catholicism. Multiple generations.

Ally ([10:24](#)):

Wow.

Asher ([10:25](#)):

Gender segregated school, throughout my childhood.

Ally ([10:29](#)):

Oh, definitely.

Asher ([10:30](#)):

Never, really honestly, never interacted with people that weren't... I was in a Catholic bubble, in Missouri, so I just didn't know anything else. But when I did start to come out, I knew a lot, that was not right, not going right, but I definitely didn't have a lot of language for it. But I moved to San Francisco, to the Bay Area, in the early 2000s, and my strongest association of this, this is connected to the failure piece, was just arriving there and everyone around me, seeming to exalt in this idea of queerness. And it was so radical and amazing, and yet, it was completely dichotomized as butch femme. It was extreme butch, extreme-



Ally ([11:20](#)):  
Top, bottom...

Asher ([11:21](#)):  
Yeah.

Ally ([11:21](#)):  
Yes, definitely.

Asher ([11:23](#)):  
It was unbelievable. I'd never seen anything like it, and I was kind of like, "Am I even queer? I don't even understand this. Nobody is even noticing me." I don't exist because I didn't really fully exist on that-

Ally ([11:36](#)):  
Illegible.

Asher ([11:37](#)):  
[inaudible 00:11:38]. Yeah, totally. It was only when I met some faggy trans boys, and the people that were existing, in a more nuanced way. More nuanced, I guess, in some ways. More resonant to my experience that I was like I do exist, but I still don't quite understand this. So I guess that's a long way of saying, I do have a relationship to masculinity. I'm still understanding it and I think it's always going to be sort of complicated and some days, I do feel that sort of sense of failure.

Ally ([12:15](#)):  
That's interesting to me when you say masculinity failure, do you feel like a femininity success?

Asher ([12:23](#)):  
No. No, no. I feel like a failure, just across-

Ally ([12:27](#)):  
Me, as well. Yeah, I'm like-

Asher ([12:29](#)):  
Yeah, just like no category, like I don't-

Ally ([12:32](#)):  
Zero, yeah.

Asher ([12:32](#)):  
I don't win, anywhere.

Ally ([12:36](#)):

Yeah. In the early part of your life, did you feel that... I think, definitely, all through grade school, middle school, high school. I think feminine failure is the way that I would categorize that. A consistent feminine failure-

Asher ([12:52](#)):

Failure-

Ally ([12:52](#)):

... with everyone?

Asher ([12:53](#)):

Yeah, but drag or something?

Ally ([12:56](#)):

Yeah. Oh, definitely. Absolute drag. Drag, and then almost like a sci-fi movie or something. Like the spaces that I was allowed to be in, I feel like just sleepovers or locker rooms. I'm like this is way too much for me. That's probably a sexuality component but-

Asher ([13:14](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Ally ([13:15](#)):

But yes, that's really interesting to me, going from coming out and moving to the gay-

Asher ([13:23](#)):

The gay mecca?

Ally ([13:24](#)):

The gay mecca, and then, also feeling not quite a fit there. I guess now, if someone that you like sees a part of you as masculine, what does that look like, or what are those parts?

Asher ([13:39](#)):

Yeah. Well, it feels really good and that kind of clues me in to the fact that it's exciting and resonates. I think a lot of folks that I work with, a lot of patients, and people that I encounter, often are like, "How do I know really who I am?" and I'm just like, "Where it feels good." And I think the question you're asking really is the nice one. It's like, "Yeah, what feels good when people notice things?" I'm tempted to say, "I really feel strongly that it's when people notice the things that I am not." It's sort of a funny experience of dis-identification with femininity, or the biggest example, I guess, that comes to mind is I was pregnant with my child. I chose to do that. That was a complete real-

Ally ([14:33](#)):

Wow.

Asher ([14:33](#)):

... very dysphoric kind of experience, and it wasn't... All sorts of bodies have been having babies, forever, but I didn't know anyone else, really, who was doing things that way, and wasn't sort of embracing the maternal femininity part of it.

Ally ([14:49](#)):

Yes.

Asher ([14:50](#)):

So it was an extremely dysphoric experience for me, but I think that there were ways that my partner, at the time, and other people in my orbit were like, "It's still you." They could still sort of see the essence of me but like, "Funny that your body is changing, in all these ways." It's weird, and kind of like, "What the fuck?" But I still felt kind of the essence of my like, I don't know, tomboyish, I think, mostly. Just have gone through a bunch of different iterations. Probably when I was younger, it was like being an athlete, wearing Umbros, and that's the only way that I felt, at all, comfortable, as a gendered person. And then, in college, I know the way that I really aspired, the masculinity manifestation I aspired to, is like a crusty punk, wearing all black and Carhartts, like activist dude.

Ally ([15:49](#)):

Yes.

Asher ([15:50](#)):

That was kind of me, essentially, but I couldn't quite get there but that was sort of like... And I guess there've been different iterations of my identification with masculinity, aesthetically, and whatever. But I also think that when you asked me a question about my podcast, and told me that I'm very nurturing or warm, that's a huge part of who I am, and that isn't disconnected maybe, from notions of masculinity, but it is pretty typically not considered in the... I guess, my mind goes back to the butch femme dynamics that I was witnessing in the Bay Area, in the early 2000s, where it was like everyone felt like they had to, and I understand this, but really felt like they had to perform their gender category hard like really, really perform it-

Ally ([16:47](#)):

Yes.

Asher ([16:47](#)):

... and so, it was all kinds of nasty, the masculine butch sort of energy. It just didn't resonate for me. I think that the softness and the emotional sensitivity part of me, it's maybe made it more confusing to figure out my gender expression, I guess.

Ally ([17:14](#)):

Yes. Wouldn't it have been so nice if that fit? I feel like I had a similar feeling, where I'm hanging out with more masc lesbians, and it's very like shots of whiskey-

Asher ([17:27](#)):

Totally.

Ally ([17:27](#)):

... or almost it kind of feels like Cosplay or something. And then sometimes, you can get into a dark area of womanizing, or some kind of the underbelly of toxic masculinity.

Asher ([17:40](#)):

Oh, yeah. Big time.

Ally ([17:41](#)):

And even when that's not present, it still feels like it doesn't quite fit. There is something softer about me or it's that combo. Did you ever read the graphic novel, Pregnant Butch?

Asher ([17:58](#)):

Yes, I did but not during. I wish I had that, but yes, totally. It's really... Yeah.

Ally ([18:00](#)):

It really made me think of A.K. Summers. Yeah, it's very, very interesting. That's really cool. I am on testosterone, but that was the big holdout for me, is I was should I wait and carry a child because I would love to experience that and it's not too late. But that was fun to talk to my therapist, and she very gently walked me through. She's like, "So are you close? How long are you going to put off this, to think that you might have a baby or something?" But that seems like a very cool thing to navigate, and find your own equilibrium, because the birth world is so butterfly, and beautiful, and we... Yeah.

Asher ([18:39](#)):

Yeah, and frankly, so is the parenting world, is pretty-

Ally ([18:43](#)):

Wow.

Asher ([18:44](#)):

In some ways, it's ongoing. There's certainly tons, all sorts of parents, and I love that, and it's great, and I feel less and less, every day, like I have to perform something.

Ally ([18:56](#)):

Yeah.

Asher ([18:57](#)):

But there is a kind of, for the most part, my kid, she's gone to school in Brooklyn, and in North Hampton, Massachusetts. These are places that are very gay, and yet, they're still... It's mostly cis couples with kids so there's a lot of expectations around gender assumptions, that people make about me.

Ally ([19:20](#)):

Wow. Yeah.

Asher ([19:21](#)):

Like-

Ally ([19:22](#)):

How do you not think-

Asher ([19:22](#)):

... "You're the mom. You're the mom," right?

Ally ([19:24](#)):

Yeah.

Asher ([19:26](#)):

Because my child's other parent is more masculine presenting, and so it's like, "Oh, you're the mom?"

Ally ([19:32](#)):

"You're the wife?"

Asher ([19:33](#)):

Yeah, "You had the baby? So okay, all right, cool. Interesting."

Ally ([19:37](#)):

Yeah.

Asher ([19:39](#)):

So their pronoun assumptions and all that stuff. I do feel like those are little areas where I get a little lost, and don't feel like I'm really seen. I think the cool part about that though, is that having grown up with non-binary and trans parents, my kid is... She reflects back, a deep knowing of us, and so she chuckles or gives me a look, when she is [inaudible 00:20:05] or we're out in the world and people are like, "Oh, this is your mommy?" and she is like, "Okay. Yeah. That's right." So it's weird.

Ally ([20:16](#)):

I love that so much. That's blowing my mind.

Asher ([20:18](#)):

Yeah. Kids are amazing, these days. They understand a lot.

Ally ([20:22](#)):

Yeah. How do you navigate words like Mommy, Daddy, or what do your kids call you? How do you introduce yourself to teachers or-

Asher ([20:33](#)):

Yeah. I have been okay with being called Mom. I use they, them, pronouns. I mostly feel okay about that, because my kid has been using that, for a long time. It wasn't that long ago that I went from, "Fine, you can call me she, but I prefer they."

Ally ([20:54](#)):

Do you mean the liminal space-

Asher ([20:56](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([20:56](#)):

... where you're kind of like, "She/they. Don't worry, I'm chill." Do-

Asher ([20:58](#)):

I'm totally cool-

Ally ([20:59](#)):

... you like-

Asher ([20:59](#)):

... with whatever.

Ally ([20:59](#)):

... "This feels horrible."

Asher ([21:00](#)):

Right, "But every time you say she, I fucking hate it."

Ally ([21:03](#)):

Yeah.

Asher ([21:05](#)):

Yeah, so when I more publicly switched, and talked to my patients about it, and talked to people in my life that are important to me, there was a question ... That was her first question was, "Do you want me to still call you Mom? I don't have to. I can call you whatever." And I was like, "I don't know." To me it doesn't feel very gendered. It is gendered, but it doesn't feel dissonant because I feel like my kid sees me.

Ally ([21:31](#)):

Wow. I really love that, "My kid sees me," part. That's really beautiful, and that's such a fun team moment, of being able to navigate the world, and you're both just like, "Oh yeah, this is crazy."

Asher ([21:45](#)):

Yeah, totally.

Ally ([21:46](#)):

Were you like a tomboy growing up?

Asher ([21:48](#)):

Yeah, I think I was pretty... I talk about this, probably, at length, at times, on my podcast, but I was really disconnected from my sense of self and my body, growing up, for sure. And many queer people are and many queer religious people are, and trauma-

Ally ([22:12](#)):

Definitely.

Asher ([22:13](#)):

... whatever, all the things. So I was an athlete. I was pretty good at playing sports, so I guess I was kind of a jock, in a lot of ways, but I still was forced into wearing really feminine clothes to school, and I didn't have a lot of choice. So it's hard to know what my deal was. I know I felt envious a bit. I have a younger brother and felt envious of what he could do, and play, and whatever. And probably, if I really felt like it, I could have pushed the envelope more. But I think I felt a lot of pressure to be performing a certain role, and I did have a role, as sort of more of a caretaker, or maternal figure, to my brother. So that kind of compounded a lagging development of, I think, a sense of myself, separate from-

Ally ([23:05](#)):

Totally, covering the bases-

Asher ([23:06](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([23:07](#)):

... for other people's existence and you don't really have time to be like, "Well, what do I want?"

Asher ([23:10](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([23:12](#)):

That's a luxury. Yeah, definitely.

Asher ([23:14](#)):

And now, of course, that's pretty much my job, is being a person who helps other people figure out who they are-

Ally ([23:22](#)):

Wow.

Asher ([23:23](#)):

... and what their preferences are. And what they really care about and how to make sense of their experience. That's my job as a psychotherapist so it just comes from a real place.

Ally ([23:35](#)):

Yeah, definitely, like a lot of practice, a lifetime of practice. Have you noticed a lot of people... I just feel like COVID has been such a time of us sitting in our bodies and we're outside of the kind of pre COVID. I would go to work and I would go to three other things, after work, every day. My life was just thing to thing. And now, it's crazy if I do one thing, in the day. So I just think we've all had time to sit and be like, "Is this working?" Have you been noticing that, on the therapy side of things, like a lot of people are having their reckoning, with their bodies or themselves?

Asher ([24:13](#)):

Yeah. I think it's very confronting and sometimes, confronting and illuminating like, "Okay. These are the things I want to change or shift in my life," but I work with a lot of trans, and non-binary folks. I work with a lot of people who are either in recovery, or still active with their eating disorders, or disordered eating, and other things. And a lot of people who've experienced trauma, and have all sorts of coping skills, some of which they can't fully access right now. So yeah, it's been a very confronting time for folks, and sometimes, again, clarifying, but often, I think, the other side of it is kind of almost a tighter grip on the things that you can control like disordered eating or-

Ally ([25:00](#)):

Food, yeah.

Asher ([25:01](#)):

... exercise, substance, relapses and things like that have been really understandably happening for folks because I think it's really hard to, so profoundly, sit with yourself and your body, and your bodily experience, and your bodily vulnerability. Apparently, we're not so vulnerable anymore but we're pretty vulnerable, with this virus. And I think that's part of it, too, is just a real confrontation with the body. Absolutely.

Ally ([25:30](#)):

Oh, definitely. Yeah. But you saying that it's been very clarifying for people. I think that's really interesting. And like you were saying, not always in a fun way, sometimes in a very jarring, this might ruin everything, but I'm seeing it as a truth.



Asher ([25:46](#)):

Totally.

Ally ([25:47](#)):

What do you talk to people about when they're coming up with these feelings of, "I might be trans but I'm not quite sure what to do, where to go from here?"

Asher ([25:57](#)):

I think, initially, people often seek me out, either in part because I say that I'm queer, non-binary. That I work with queer, trans, non-binary folks, and sometimes, that's what gets people in the door, to working with me. And then, it's sort of like, "I don't want to talk about it." It's really hard to talk about the materiality of transitioning or considering transitioning. Sometimes, there's an imminent medical procedure, or a desire to have some kind of gender-affirming surgeries or care, that either is happening or not happening. We talk about that and those conversations can be really... I'm glad to be a provider, who is not pathologizing of anyone's desire to really access those. I'm not one of the therapists who's like, "Let's talk for eight months about why you might want to do this,"-

Ally ([26:54](#)):

Oh, my God. Yeah.

Asher ([26:55](#)):

... like the gatekeeping model. I don't do that. I do talk about it with people. So we talk about maybe that stuff. I think what mostly I work with is people who have a lot of barriers in their life, or coping strategies, in their life, that have worked in the past, or work less now, but keep them dissociated, from some of the feelings around their transness or non-binary identity. So it's often sort of an indirect route to talking about the concrete identification, but more, "Let's figure out orthorexia, how it's functioning in your life, like the excessive exercise and control of food. How is that functioning? If we start to temper that behavior, what comes up for you?" And it's like all sorts of things about, "What I don't want to happen to my body." "What do you not want to happen to your body?" Well, I don't want to be seen as feminine," or, "I do want to be seen as feminine." So there's-

Ally ([27:58](#)):

Totally.

Asher ([27:59](#)):

It really is hard to, in a therapeutic setting, I think, for a lot of people, especially if you've had invalidating experiences, as a child. If you have a family system where there was a lot of attachment trauma, it's really difficult to look at gender identity, head on. I think a lot of people are like-

Ally ([28:19](#)):

Oh, my gosh.

Asher ([28:21](#)):

... "I'm going to go to my therapist and talk about whether or not I'm trans," and it's like this-

Ally ([28:25](#)):

Yeah, "Yes or no?"

Asher ([28:26](#)):

Yeah, "Yes or no." It usually is multiple years of exploring the different dimensions of that.

Ally ([28:33](#)):

Wow. Yeah, I definitely feel that experientially.

Asher ([28:37](#)):

You can relate to that?

Ally ([28:38](#)):

I really went into therapy being kind of like, "Yes or no," and then, "I can get out of here"-

Asher ([28:42](#)):

Right.

Ally ([28:42](#)):

... and then it was just kind of like, "Now, we're talking about ADHD for four years."

Asher ([28:46](#)):

Totally, yeah.

Ally ([28:48](#)):

Yeah, a lot of these layers, that then you peel back and you get to a new plateau of thinking about your gender, and having the space to do that because you've peeled away these kinds of mechanisms that kept you from having to look at that.

Asher ([29:00](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([29:01](#)):

Yeah.

Asher ([29:01](#)):

Right, and then there's the whole issue of living as or experimenting with living in a particular body, that maybe is more aligned with what you ideally wanted. And then that's cool, but then there's, "Oh, shit. Now I'm dating someone and they're looking at my body," and that's a whole other... You know what I

mean? So there's always something to talk about. There's always something really hard about bodies, dealing with bodies-

Ally ([29:29](#)):

Definitely

Asher ([29:30](#)):

... and the reality of that.

Ally ([29:34](#)):

Yeah. Do you think that when it comes to disordered eating, do you feel like that is talked about enough, in queer spaces? Do you feel like it's a queer issue, yeah?

Asher ([29:44](#)):

It's not talked about enough, at all. It is a hundred percent, a queer issue. It's certainly a trans non-binary kind of issue. I would say it's not talked about, at all, enough. There are people that are really trying to, and a lot of them are people who have lived experience, are trying to really push that, and transform treatment facilities and settings. I used to run a treatment facility for eating disorders in New York, and it was so stuck in a model of femininity. The association with any form of disordered eating was attributed to femininity-

Ally ([30:24](#)):

Wow.

Asher ([30:24](#)):

... and in my experience, it's certainly that, but it is much less talked about and discussed, explicitly, as disordered eating in trans and non-binary communities. And it's sort of like, "This is how I'm getting by," and I respect that. "I can't access hormones. I don't want anyone to know. So this is what I'm doing to my body, essentially." I'm managing disordered eating and I've done a decent amount of presenting at conferences, and writing about that, to try to address, I guess, the different way to expand the discourse so that people who don't self identify as having an eating disorder, can still be helped, or served, or understood as struggling with-

Ally ([31:12](#)):

Find care.

Asher ([31:12](#)):

Yeah, find care or struggling with.... And that's why I often use the word nourishment. Barriers to nourishment. What is getting in the way of you nourishing your body, and can you be nourished, and also tolerate how that impacts the way you are perceived, gender wise? I think it's finding new ways to talk about that-

Ally ([31:31](#)):

Yeah, definitely.

Asher ([31:31](#)):

...is really important.

Ally ([31:33](#)):

Yeah. Also, I would go to Overeaters Anonymous. I also am coming from a disordered eating background, and it would be all women. It would be one man and all women. It was extremely like diet culture, Seventeen magazine, and I just was kind of like, "This isn't what I'm up to. I'm actually not trying to fit into the perfect dress. Something much more complicated is going on here."

Asher ([31:58](#)):

Right.

Ally ([31:59](#)):

You actually have a... Is it like a nine-week cohort... Do you have something coming up, specifically, about this barriers to nourishment?

Asher ([32:08](#)):

Yeah. I do two things with the Living in this Queer Body podcast, associated with that. I run groups that are sort of like group therapy, but for around this idea of barriers to nourishment. And it's typically very much for folks who are gender non-conforming or have a complicated relationship to gender, and who are queer. That kind of happens periodically, and it's always listed on my website or on my Instagram. But I also started this therapist collective with a friend of mine, who's a friend and colleague, also a therapist. And we're going to be essentially training therapists to work, hopefully, more skillfully, around some of these issues, or people who are invested in that. So queer, trans, BIPOC folks, who are mental health providers, who want to be able to talk, and explore embodiment with people who have really traumatic and painful and complicated experiences with their bodies.

Ally ([33:14](#)):

Wow. Yeah, that is very cool. I was looking at that. So that is specifically for therapists?

Asher ([33:19](#)):

It's for therapists and mental health providers-

Ally ([33:22](#)):

Cool.

Asher ([33:23](#)):

... and it's a year long program called the KintSugi Therapist Collective.

Ally ([33:27](#)):

Very cool. As people who are identifying as non-binary, do you feel the pull of both beauty standards, perfectly puzzle piecing together into one nightmare? How do you feel, when navigating your own attractiveness, or how you feel euphoria?

Asher ([33:46](#)):

Hmm. That's a good question. Bear in mind, you're asking this to a former Catholic, who essentially was taught to never celebrate the self, and to make yourself very... I don't know. I have several old friends, who I've known forever, who are basically, "You never know when people have crushes on you. You have no idea because all you do... You have blinders. You cannot see anything about yourself because you're just like, 'So not me. Oh, no. It couldn't possibly be...' It's so deeply ingrained. Can you relate to that?"

Ally ([34:26](#)):

1000%, yes. I just feel so best friend energy.

Asher ([34:31](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([34:31](#)):

Disney Channel original movie. Yeah.

Asher ([34:36](#)):

Yeah. So I've been aware of this for a while, so I've been working on it.

Ally ([34:40](#)):

Cool.

Asher ([34:40](#)):

I've been working on being myself and being in myself. I don't know. I'm reminded of this activist group called Gay Shame, that was really active in the early 2000s, in the Bay Area, and some other places, but in the Bay Area. And they were actually people that I was like, "Oh, this is interesting," and it was essentially a... I'm not going to do it justice, so I'll just want to say that, but it's essentially was like a movement of people who are like, "Could we stop celebrating Budweiser and the Pride floats, and all of this stuff?" And they would do these actions where they would get on a San Francisco bus, and it was just leaning into almost like the absurdity or grotesqueness of potentially being queer. Like having a queer body, like a weird body, like a gross body, a strange body. And it was so theatrical, and so performative, and I loved it. And I think about that sometimes.

Asher ([35:40](#)):

I wouldn't say that's my gender, but I do think along those lines, sometimes when I catch myself feeling pulled to kind of button it up, especially as a psychotherapist, who has a real serious job and stuff, and I have tattoos. I have tattoos on my hands. I really do feel the pull sometimes to organize myself into an acceptable category, and I do that. I fall into that, or I find ways to do that. But I do really like this ethos

of almost celebrating gender failure and finding my own pleasure in being able to feel comfortable in my body, as imperfectly gendered as it is. Do I love every single part of my body? Absolutely not, but do I nourish my body, and accept it, and kind of try to enjoy it? Yeah, I do.

Ira ([36:40](#)):

That was such a sweet and encouraging interview.

Babette ([36:44](#)):

Yeah, it was so good. They sound like such a great therapist.

Ira ([36:47](#)):

I know.

Babette ([36:49](#)):

For real, no.

Ira ([36:49](#)):

Are they available?

Babette ([36:52](#)):

Right.

Ira ([36:52](#)):

Seriously?

Babette ([36:54](#)):

Wait, okay. Ira, you still owe us a story, about your not so great therapist?

Ira ([37:06](#)):

Oh, yeah. I do. I do.

Babette ([37:06](#)):

Dun dun duun.

Ira ([37:06](#)):

Yeah, I'll spill it. So a couple of weeks ago, we talked to my friend Amy, who I met in a support group for trans folks, which was actually started by my individual therapist, at the time. And I wanted to share part of our interview with Amy, where we talked about a really strange and sort of scary experience we had with this therapist. But first, I need to define a term we're going to be using, which is gender exploratory therapy. So this is a new kind of "therapy" that a lot of folks are calling, actually, a new form of conversion therapy. And essentially, therapists who use this method try to attract folks who are questioning their gender, and especially parents of kids and teens, who are maybe questioning their

gender, saying they're providing another method through which to explore this uncertainty surrounding gender identity. Which sounds like a good thing, initially, but the truth is that being trans is never the end goal with these therapists.

Ira ([37:55](#)):

So they use gaslighting and delay tactics to prevent folks, especially younger people, from accessing gender-affirming care and medical intervention. We've included a link to a really great read on all of this, in the show notes, so you can go learn more if you'd like. But here's Amy and I, from a couple of weeks ago, talking about our experience.

Amy ([38:14](#)):

So our therapist, we met as a trans woman, and he would then detransition and essentially, as far as I'm concerned, become an anti-trans activist. And I don't think that he would frame it that way, but that is absolutely what happened, because within a month, I would say, or two months of him detransitioning, he ended the group. But then, a few months later, with a little Googling, he was popping up on these websites of organizations, that ostensibly purported themselves, as to providing a more reasonable approach to diagnosing dysphoria and treating it. In reality, if you even go to these groups, and go one or two Twitter levels away, you have masc off fascists.

Ira ([39:13](#)):

Yes.

Amy ([39:13](#)):

So his name was on this open letter that was signed, essentially saying that, "Young people haven't formed their brains completely, and they're not ready to do this, and they're not ready to do that, and we have to be careful." But if you follow any of these organizations, up to the top level, they're all run by the same boomer English turf lady.

Ira ([39:38](#)):

Yeah.

Amy ([39:38](#)):

All of them are this one person, who runs all of it.

Ira ([39:42](#)):

But it was such a shock so when he ended the group, his reasoning for it was, "As I detransition, all of the stuff we talk about here is sort of too close to home, and I'm having trouble separating my work from my personal bias about it." And I was like, "Fair enough."

Amy ([39:58](#)):

Yeah, very fair.

Ira ([39:58](#)):

Because he was, and it was becoming apparent to us, his feelings were seeping into things he was saying to us, in session, and I happened to be an individual therapy with him at the time, and it was definitely apparent in our individual sessions. None of us, of course, have any problem with anyone detransitioning. That is not the thing at all.

Amy ([40:14](#)):

Of course, it's just as valid as anything.

Ira ([40:15](#)):

Because we've also morphed and changed over time. Of course, we understand someone would change their mind about how they present, or the way they experienced gender, sure, but it's when you take that extra step of, "Because this and this certain thing happened to me," I don't think this is safe for anyone.

Amy ([40:30](#)):

Yeah. And with a little slew thing, there isn't a very good framework or support network for detransition. And I think that it made our therapist vulnerable to influence, from these groups that are specifically seeking out detransitioners, as somebody to be a mouthpiece, because it legitimizes them, to have somebody say, "Well, I was trans and now I'm not." If they can use recent detransitioners, it gives them a lot more clout to people who are observing it, from an outside perspective, and don't really know anything about this.

Ira ([41:15](#)):

Right. Which is why the Fox News of the world will have people on that have detransitioned, who are saying these type of things about trans people, from a personal point of bias. If we were giving equal airtime, equal... If we were listening to everyone equally, these people would be having current identified trans people, on these shows and whatever, as well. And these websites, if they were providing a fair analysis of all perspectives, they would have trans people, as part of the conversation-

Amy ([41:44](#)):

Exactly.

Ira ([41:44](#)):

... which is the biggest red flag of all.

Amy ([41:47](#)):

Right. Yeah. The warning that I feel like we can really give, in talking about this, is to watch out for this very specific phrase, gender exploratory therapy. Because if you just take those words in, sounds great. We all love to explore our gender in therapy, but it is actually positioning itself against gender-affirming therapy, which is the type of therapy that we are all seeking, and those are their sort of warm words to...

Ally ([42:20](#)):



So he just started doing that type of therapy, but maintained his very trans group therapy? He didn't cut ties and then restart, in this new space?

Ira ([42:31](#)):

So this is what we were told is he decided to end the group. He told us that he was detransitioning, wanted to end the group because the things that we were discussing, were too close to home for him, at that point of his life. And then, I remember him telling me, basically, the same thing in individual therapy, and giving me the option of whether I wanted to end therapy with him or not. And he was saying, "Yeah, we talk about gender stuff sometimes, but I feel like there's so much else that we talk about that maybe it's fine if we keep doing therapy." And at the time, I was like, "Okay, I guess that makes sense." We talk about more like anxiety, ADHD, whatever.

Ira ([43:05](#)):

But then as I kept doing therapy with him, I was like, "Oh, I simply know too much about this person, for us to have a healthy therapist client relationship," first of all. And second of all, looking back on the things that he's been saying to me... Gender is a part of every part of my life. It affects everything. There's no way that we could have a differentiation between what we were talking about and my experience as a non-binary trans person.

Ally ([43:30](#)):

Totally because it is the spiral. You come back to the same places so you're going to come back to gender.

Ira ([43:34](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([43:35](#)):

That's so crazy.

Ira ([43:36](#)):

Absolutely.

Ally ([43:37](#)):

And this was in a small town, in a red state, right?

Ira ([43:41](#)):

This person was New York based.

Ally ([43:43](#)):

Oh, this was in New York City?

Ira ([43:45](#)):

That's the thing. Yeah, a New York City therapist. Mm-hmm. This is the person that I found for therapy, when I first moved to the city. I was like, "Finally, I found a trans therapist who works really well for me," and initially, helped me figure out that I wanted to be on low dose T and figure it out that I maybe wanted top surgery, and that I wanted to identify as trans masc. And all of this, was very supportive of it, initially, and then it was just like a flip of a switch. It was crazy.

Ally ([44:12](#)):

So insane.

Babette ([44:13](#)):

This is kind of wild. So I'm doing more research about it or just looking, and it seems like there's been more coverage on gender exploratory therapy, this year, and it just feels very scary because it feels like a tactic, in this way of anti-trans legislation. I mean, yes, you have this individual experience that happened that was really wild, but it also feels like it's part of this greater strategy, to delay trans people from getting care, which is wild. I didn't realize it was that because it's especially targeted towards young people, like youth, and their parents.

Ira ([44:47](#)):

Yeah.

Babette ([44:48](#)):

That's wild. So your therapist is just one of many, and they won him over, I guess.

Ally ([44:55](#)):

Which is nuts.

Ira ([44:56](#)):

Yeah, that's the scary part about it. My therapist and all these folks, on all these websites, are arguing like, "No, we're just trying to open up the conversation. We're not saying that trans people don't exist, trans people shouldn't exist or shouldn't be allowed to have care." But they're, A, in the way that they describe their beliefs, on these sites, it's very clear that that's not the case, and B, they're putting all these stipulations on how they think people should be able to get care. I remember my therapist telling me, "Yeah, I'm really not sure that anyone under 25 should be able to get surgeries or hormones, or anything." Just the brain's not fully developed argument-

Ally ([45:31](#)):

Yeah, totally.

Ira ([45:31](#)):

... which is just nuts to me.

Ally ([45:33](#)):

Totally, yeah, and your point of if they really believed that some people should transition, then they would have those trans people on their staff. But then you look and you're like, "No, it's all people who are either cis or detransition," so it's like, "What are you talking about?"

Ira ([45:49](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

Ally ([45:51](#)):

Wow.

Ira ([45:53](#)):

So just be careful out there. Finding therapy is hard, and I did find another better therapist, who happened to be cis, actually, who was really supportive of all my gender stuff and everything, but I am not even seeing her right now because it was too expensive for me, at the time. Therapy is inaccessible, and it's hard to find a good therapist, and it's hard to be able to afford it.

Ally ([46:13](#)):

It's a second rent. No joke.

Ira ([46:15](#)):

Yeah, literally.

Ally ([46:16](#)):

I'm also kind of thinking about how in the interview with Asher, they're talking about how people seek them out, as a therapist who have burning gender questions, and they're kind of like, "Okay, first step is reaching out to a trans therapist." And it's so interesting to me that you're like, "Yeah, my cis therapist was great," and I feel that way, as well. I'm like, my therapist is a cis woman, and has helped me, unbelievably, with transitioning and navigating that-

Ira ([46:44](#)):

Yeah.

Ally ([46:44](#)):

... so I think you don't need to find a therapist with your exact identity to find good therapy.

Ira ([46:51](#)):

Mm-hmm. My worst experiences in my life have been with therapists that align with my identities, unfortunately, which is such a bummer. I don't know. I don't want to make blanket statements, but I've had a few black women therapists, and maybe, this was at the time when I identified as a black woman. Sometimes maybe it's just a little too close for comfort is what I've learned. Only in the sense that, it sounded like with your therapist, he was like, "Oh, these things are too tough to talk about." For me, personally, I sometimes felt like some of the black women therapists assumed to know me, and therefore were kind of dismissive when I was like, "I'm queer," and I've also had amazing black women

psychiatrists. I think it just hurts so much worse, maybe is what I'm trying to describe, when it's one of your own people. I just had a black woman therapist, who ended up being so homophobic, and I think she assumed to know things about me because we had a shared identity, that when I was like, "I'm queer," she literally was like, "No, you're not."

Ally ([47:47](#)):

Wow. Oh, my God.

Ira ([47:49](#)):

Yeah. So it's like if you have someone who has all the same identities as you, and you feel like that works well for you, I think that's the ideal. I had one amazing black woman psychiatrist but I think, like you said, it doesn't have to be... That you can have great practitioners, that don't necessarily have all your intersecting identities. I think they just actually need to be good therapists, and good at what they do, and good at listening, and good at... I want someone who listens rather than who is supposed to know everything about me just because-

Ally ([48:16](#)):

Yes.

Ira ([48:16](#)):

... we have the same identity.

Ally ([48:17](#)):

Well, definitely.

Ira ([48:18](#)):

Absolutely. That became part of the issue is that this therapist of mine was speaking from his personal experience, and wasn't able to differentiate his trauma from what he was helping me with. To your point, it hurts more, when you realize that someone of your same identity or [inaudible 00:48:36], or whatever, isn't the best therapist. When I ended therapy with this person, it felt like breaking up, in a toxic relationship, or something. I was sobbing on FaceTime.

Ally ([48:45](#)):

Oh, my God.

Ira ([48:46](#)):

It was bad. It was awful. It hurt, so much worse.

Ally ([48:50](#)):

But I think that's also the gray place that we're trying to operate in this podcast is there was actually great care there, for a while, until there wasn't-

Ira ([49:01](#)):

Yeah-

Ally ([49:02](#)):

... and that doesn't-

Ira ([49:02](#)):

... originally.

Ally ([49:03](#)):

... negate-

Ira ([49:03](#)):

Absolutely.

Ally ([49:04](#)):

At least, you still got something nice out of that experience, but it just feels more complicated.

Ira ([49:08](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Ally ([49:09](#)):

I think it's important when you reach out to a therapist to know what you're looking for, and to even, in that email, write in explicit terms like, "These are things that are important to me." I have friends who are in poly relationships and they need to explicitly look for therapists that aren't going to be like, "Maybe this poly thing isn't worth it."

Ira ([49:30](#)):

Yeah.

Babette ([49:30](#)):

Well, this is what really scares me. This is what is really scary about the exploratory gender thing because it kind of borrows some language from psychodynamic style of therapy, which is that you can get to the root of everything. There's something behind everything. That idea, itself, is not inherently evil, but the way that they're spinning it is so evil, and anti-trans so I'm like, "Wait, that's really scary."

Ira ([49:57](#)):

Well, they clearly have a cause like, "We have a thesis. It's that trans people don't exist, and we're also smart enough to kind of like-

Babette ([50:06](#)):

I know with the way they're going... Exactly. They're not just so much idiots, I guess, is what I feel like.

Ira ([50:10](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Babette ([50:10](#)):

I'm just like, they're kind of using language that you would literally see like a psychodynamic therapist or somebody use.

Ally ([50:16](#)):

Yeah.

Ira ([50:16](#)):

Yeah, they're using literal gaslighting and just delay tactics. Especially with trans kids, they're just trying to delay, delay, delay, until they're finally like, "Okay, I guess I'm fine, if I don't get these surgeries or hormones or whatever."

Ally ([50:28](#)):

Yeah. It's just so great that therapists like Asher exist.

Ira ([50:32](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Ally ([50:33](#)):

Queer people doing very gentle... I don't know, there's a lot of care in their work. I can just hear that.

Ira ([50:39](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Babette ([50:39](#)):

Absolutely.

Ira ([50:42](#)):

It's so great that Asher has this program can Kintsugi Therapist Collective, too, where they're training new therapists, to do what they do. That gives me some hope, that maybe in the future, it'll be easier to find great care focused therapists, who are really there to help you, and not to gaslight you, and all of this other stuff.

Ally ([51:01](#)):

Totally.

Ira ([51:01](#)):

Maybe making therapy, in general, more accessible for queer and trans folks.

Ally ([51:04](#)):

Yeah, totally. They're doing amazing work there.

Ira ([51:07](#)):

Also, this conversation is making me think about... Because it's so hard to find a therapist, at least, in my experience. I've just tended to take whatever I can get, and it's making me really think more about what would my most ideal and gender-affirming therapist look like? What do I want? And I think Asher was figuring that out, but it feels like maybe something that everyone needs to figure out for themselves, and try their best to find it, which is obviously no easy feat.

Ally ([51:33](#)):

You should be allowed to Venmo request a bad therapist, for that money, because it's such an-

Ira ([51:38](#)):

Yeah, [inaudible 00:51:39] back?

Ally ([51:38](#)):

... expensive mistake when you're like, "Oh, no, this wasn't a good fit." That's what I think adds to the dire feeling.

Ira ([51:45](#)):

It's so true. Totally. But all of this to say, therapy is very helpful, and important for a lot of folks, and I've obviously had very bad experiences with therapy, but I've had such great experiences, too. It's a daunting task to find someone who is right for you and who puts your needs first and is supportive of your various identities and all of that, but it's worth it when you find someone who works for you, who's affordable for you, who makes your life better. I don't know. It's worth it, so good luck finding one.

Babette ([52:25](#)):

Gender Spiral is an original podcast from Audiation. This episode was mixed by Matt Noble, and music is composed by Chanel Critchlow, with art by Joey Hahn and graphics by Honey Hodges. This show is executive produced by Ireland Meacham, myself, Babette Thomas, my co-host, Ally Beardsley, and Sandy Smolins, with additional story editing from me.

Ally ([52:47](#)):

Thank you so much to our guest, Asher Pandjiris. You can check out their podcast, Living in This Queer Body, and we've also linked their Instagram and website, in the show notes. If you like the show, please head over to [patreon.com/genderspiralpodcast](https://patreon.com/genderspiralpodcast) to support us, for \$2 a month, or subscribe to a higher tier, for bonus content, special monthly postcards, and even, free tote bags.

Babette ([53:11](#)):

You can also check us out at [genderspiralpod.com](https://genderspiralpod.com), where you'll find a link to leave us a voicemail, to ask us questions, tell us who you want to hear from, and what you want to hear about on the show, and



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Ally ([53:33](#)):

Tune in next week to Gender Spiral.

Babette ([53:34](#)):

Where you never have to spiral alone.

Speaker 10 ([53:36](#)):

Audiation...