

Autism & Human Sexuality

Jack Duroc-Danner, MEd CSE LMT CEIM

Objectives

- Describe the intersection of sensory processing, trauma, neuroception, autism, consent, and LGBTQIA2S+
- Articulate the importance of sensory processing when discussing consent and human sexuality
- Provide three strategies of a trauma informed approach to sex education, three ways to create queer inclusive spaces, and three clinical considerations when working with Autistics in particular when working in the area of human sexuality

Land Acknowledgment

Coast Salish land, specifically the unceded territory of the
Duwamish

Who I am

- Queer trans Autistic. (also: ADHD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia)
- AASECT-certified sexuality educator.
- I've been working as a sexuality educator and autism advocate for 6 years.
- I've been working as massage therapist (specializing in pregnancy and pediatric massage) for 8 years.
- I teach from a trauma informed intersectional feminist disability justice perspective.



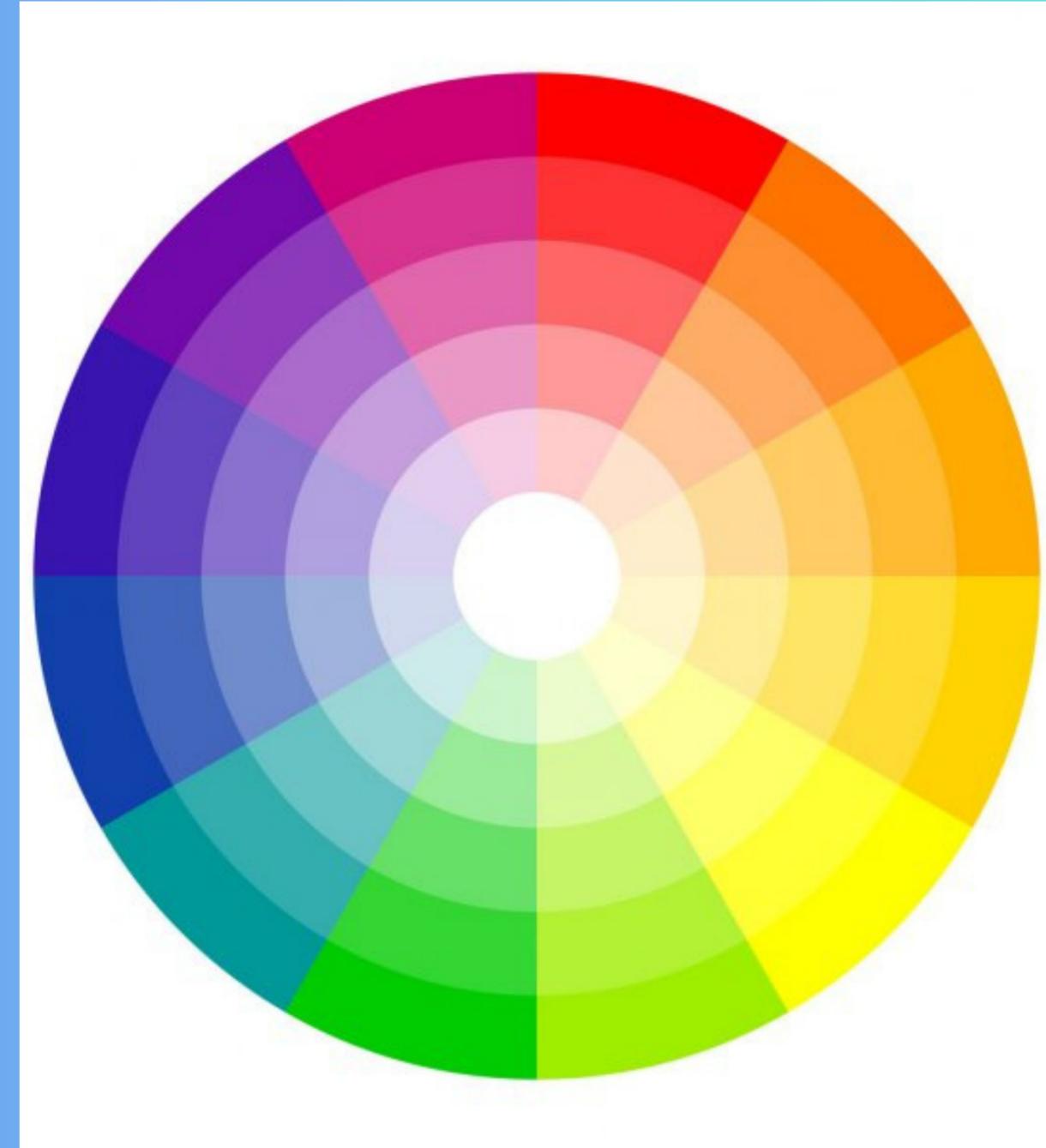
Guidelines of the Space

- For sake of time please hold questions until the check ins.
- I'm here to help understand what is going on inside a person. There are many wonderful resources and curriculum that teach consent, anatomy etc and that come with activities, discussion topics, and developmentally appropriate tools.



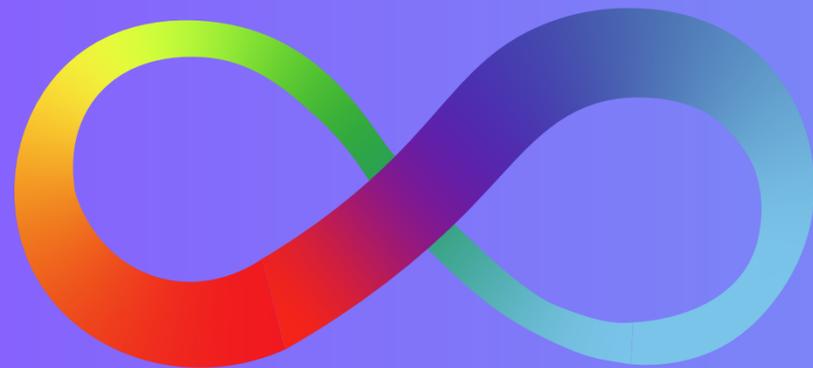
Autism Definition

- Autism is both a neurotype and an example of human variation (neurodiversity). It is also described as a neurodevelopmental disability* that affects how an individual experiences the world around them.
- It is present throughout life.
- Autism is a spectrum.
- Autism is not a recent invention. Autistic individuals have always been with humanity.
- Autism bucket (co-occurring conditions).



Autism Sexuality Summary

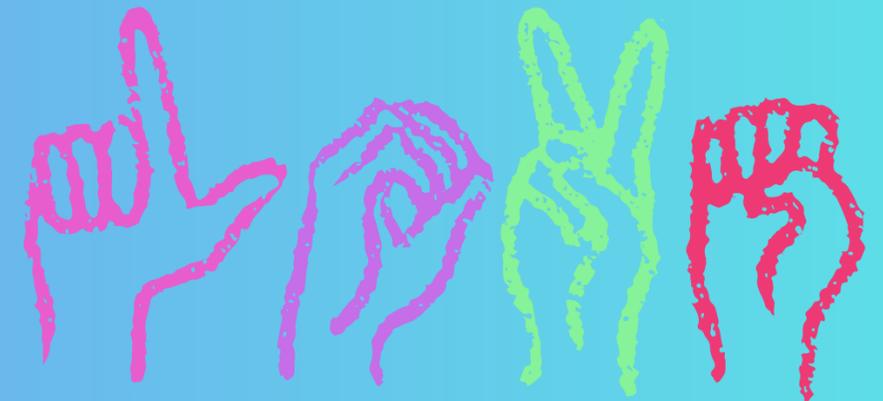
- Autistics need targeted education and support (Hancock et al, 2017 and George & Stokes, 2017) due to a number of overlapping factors in particular language and social-emotional struggles, sensory issues, and trauma (Strang et al, 2018).
- There is a lack of appropriately trained educators, medical and psychiatric providers especially when it comes to working with autism and sexuality.
- Higher rate of gender variance and LGBTQIA2S+ identification (Hancock et al, 2017) (Cooper et al, 2022) (Dattaro, 2020).
- Current theories around LGBTQIA2S+ Autistics not great.





Sexuality Overview

“Language is a form of power. It creates categories that help us interpret the world, and that which is not easily available in language is often ignored in thought itself. A shared vocabulary makes ideas more accessible while a lack of language can render an experience illegible. It can isolate.”
(Chen, 2020, p. 17).



Sexuality Overview (cont.)



Some questions that often need explicit addressing:

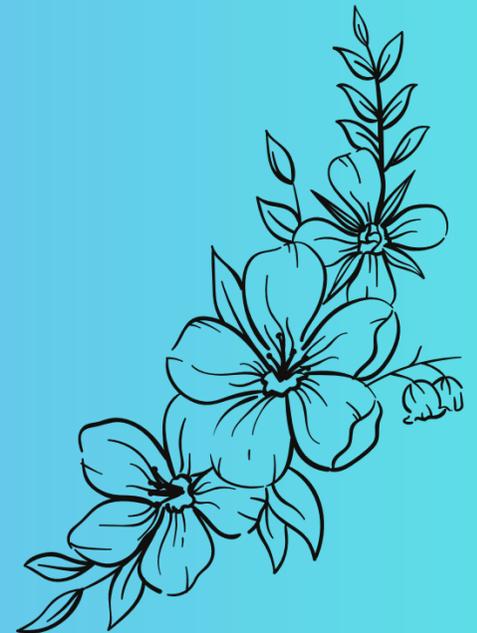
- What is sex?
- Why do people have sex?
- How do I know when somebody wants to have sex with me?
- How do I know when I want to have sex with somebody?
- What is flirting? How do I flirt? How do I know when someone is flirting with me?
- What are my romantic and/or sexual goals (if any)?
- What is gender? What does it mean to be a man/women/trans? Check in with vocabulary what have individuals learned about the bodymind and gender.
- How do I relationship? What sort of relationships do I want? What is dating? What is a healthy relationship? What was I taught about relationships growing up?





Sexuality Overview (cont.)

- Common for individuals to struggle with and need support around learning the difference between what they've been taught to want and what they do want.
- Most have not been taught how to have embodied, present, attuned sex. Sex is often taught/framed through a performative/mechanical lens.
- Most are not taught how to unpack/understand attraction and arousal.



Sexuality Overview (cont.)

- Important that individuals have access to information about their bodies- denying knowledge is a way of denying autonomy, increases likelihood of harm due to lack of information.
- Important to lead with pleasure. The concept of pleasure- that some people enjoy having sex- should be discussed alongside the anatomy and the social skills training.
- Example of both: Masturbation education.

Sexuality Overview (cont.)

- Seek out further education and training. (biases etc)
- Learn about local and national resources re LGBTQIA2S+ and/or disability. Related: Collaboration (individuals and organizations).
- Have referrals on hand.
- Don't make assumptions about what terms a person uses to describe their genitalia or their gender.



Sexuality Overview (cont.)

- Practice gender neutral and gender expansive language.
- Be thoughtful of language around pregnancy, birth, and parenting
 - Pregnant people (along with/instead of pregnant women)
 - Chestfeeding or lactating people (along with/instead of breastfeeding)
- When discussing sexuality (Foster-Lawson, A. (2019)).
 - Include asexuality (ace/ar0) terminology
 - Avoid absolutes like “all people are sexual/romantic”
 - Include and validate a variety of relationships
 - Include and validate a variety of attractions
 - Normalize “if at all” instead of “when”





Sexuality Overview (cont.)



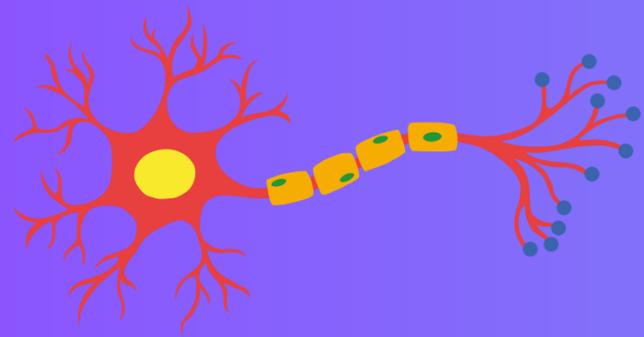
- Depending on context (i.e. who is the population you will be working with and how LGBTQIA2S+ friendly is the larger environment around your work) place visible affirmative symbols.
- Consistent inclusiveness (forms, outreach, resources offered, available books etc.).
- Accessibility (physical space, resources).



Sexuality Overview (cont.)

- Consent education key.
- Important need for sensory vocabulary.





Sensory Processing

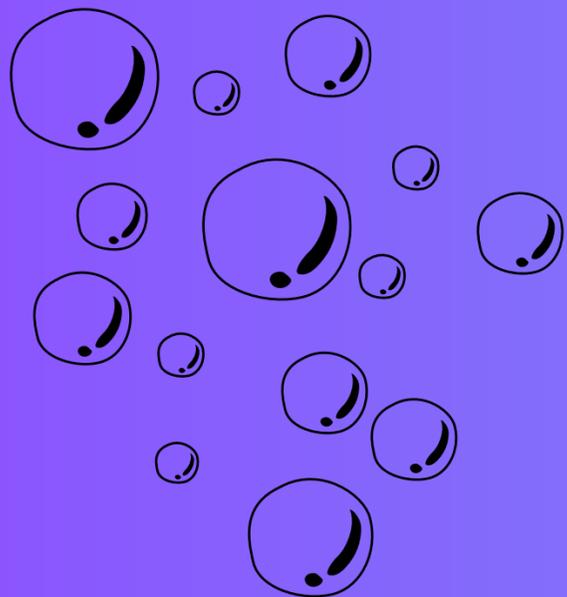


- Sensory processing involves perceiving, organizing and interpreting information received through sensory systems in order to produce an adaptive response. The term “sensory integration” as used by Ayres refers to the ability to produce appropriate motor and behavioral responses to stimuli (Kilroy et al., 2019).
- A Jean Ayres (occupational therapist and educational psychologist) coined the term sensory integration. (Lane et al., 2019)
- Sensory Processing Disorder: Neurophysiologic condition where sensory input either from the environment or within the body is poorly detected, modulated, and/or interpreted.



Sensory Processing (cont.)

- As many as 90%-96% of Autistic individuals have some degree of sensory difference or challenge.
- Barriers to care, hard to find an understanding non-judgmental clinicians, often not taken seriously in adults.
- Very important that we be aware of sensory struggles and awareness of sensory differences needs to be part of everything we do whenever we interact with Autistic individuals in a way that we're hoping to be supportive and helpful.



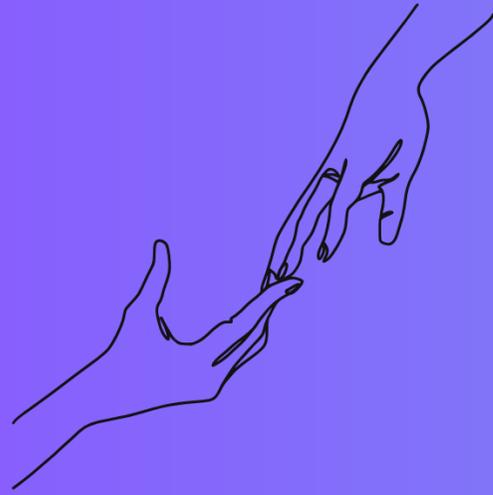
Sensory Processing (cont.)

How many senses do you think humans have?

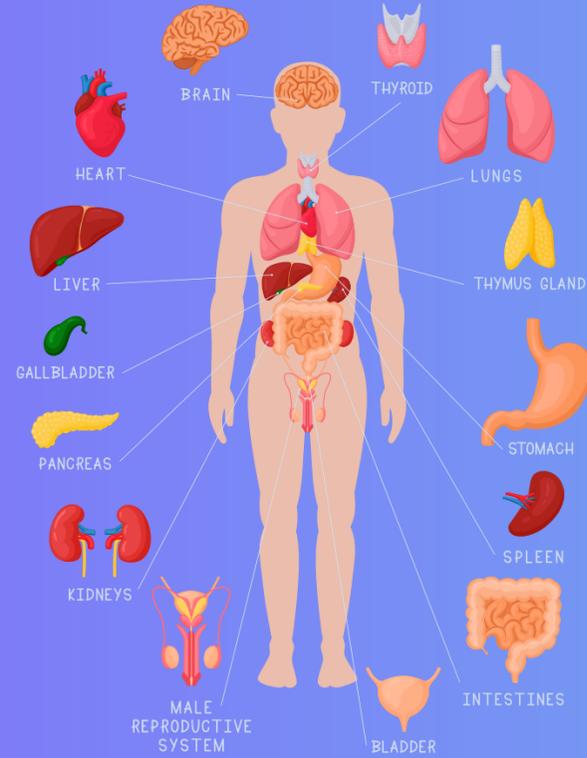


8 Senses

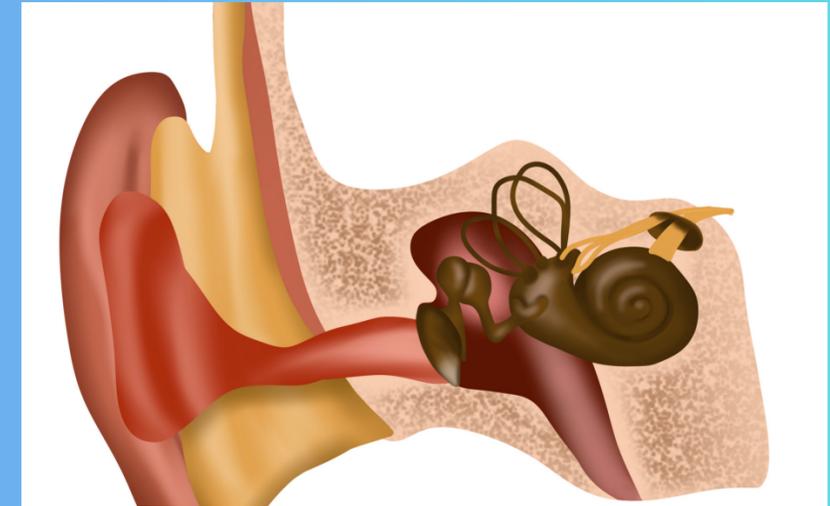
• Tactile



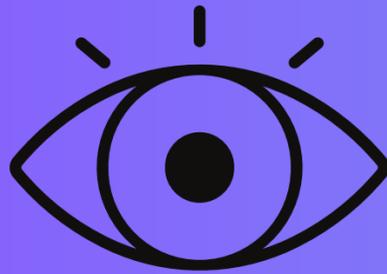
• Interoception



• Auditory



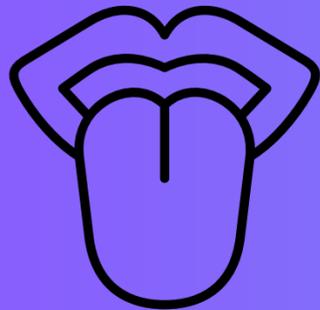
• Vision



• Vestibular



• Taste



• Proprioception

• Smell

