

# Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation Among Students



## INFORMATIONAL GUIDE



# About this Series

This resource is part of a series of informational guides from Division 16 (School Psychology) and Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues) of the American Psychological Association. This series, "Promoting Resiliency for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority Students in Schools," sets out best practices for educators, school counselors, administrators and personnel, based on the latest research on the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender diverse, questioning and intersex students. The series includes topics such as gender diversity among students, helping to support families with LGBT children and youth, risk factors and resiliency factors within schools around health and wellbeing of LGBT youth, and basic facts about gender diversity and sexual orientation among children and youth.

## SERIES INCLUDES:

### ● Pamphlet 01

How Educators Can Support Families With Gender Diverse And Sexual Minority Children and Youth

### ● Pamphlet 04

School-Based Risk and Protective Factors for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority Children and Youth: Improving School Climate

### ● Pamphlet 02

Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools: Key Recommendations for School Health Personnel

### ● Pamphlet 05

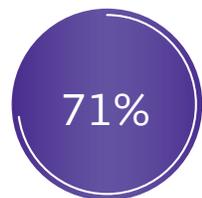
Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation among Students

### ● Pamphlet 03

Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools: Key Recommendations for School Administrators

## Sobering Statistics

A national survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) finds that gender diverse and sexual minority youth:



Hear peers make negative remarks about sexual orientation (71%) and gender expression (61%)



Hear teachers make negative remarks about sexual orientation (57%) and gender expression (57%)



Are verbally harassed because of sexual orientation (82%) or gender expression (64%)



Are physically harassed because of sexual orientation (38%) or gender expression (27%)

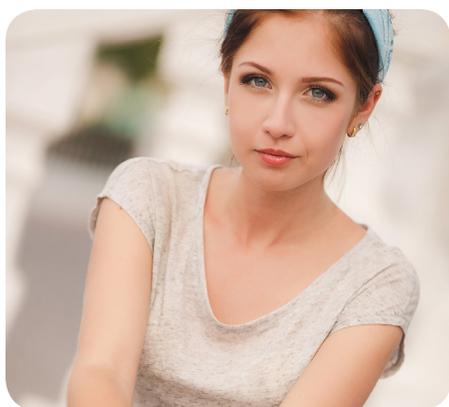
64% of students feel unsafe at school because of sexual orientation prejudice, and 44% feel unsafe at school because of gender expression. When gender diverse and sexual minority youth experienced harassment or assault, over 60% did not report the incident to school staff, often because they believed that little action would be taken or that the situation would be made worse by reporting (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

# Definitions and Limitations of Language

The language around gender and sexuality continues to evolve rapidly, even as this resolution was being written. Words and their definitions change or become refined as our understanding of complex constructs related to sexuality and gender evolves. We recognize that learning which words or phrases are most accurate, respectful and useful is an important goal in adopting this resolution.

Given how rapidly terminology changes, we recognize that even this list of terms and definitions might undergo significant change in the future. Therefore, it is important to explicitly and consciously articulate our current understanding of the following terms that appear in this resolution and in its supporting documents:

## Key Recommendations



**Asexual** refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction or has little interest in sexual activity.

**Bullying** is unwanted, repetitive, and aggressive behavior marked by an imbalance of power. It can take on multiple forms, including physical (e.g., hitting), verbal (e.g., name calling or making threats), relational (e.g., spreading rumors), and electronic (e.g., texting, social networking). (Rossen & Cowan, 2012).

**Cisgender** replaces the terms “nontransgender” or “bio man/bio woman” to refer to individuals who have a match between the sex they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their gender identity. (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

**DSD** refers to “disorders of sex development”, a term that is used to discuss intersex and variations in sex development by some medical professionals and community members. See entry for Intersex.

**Gender** refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity. (APA guidelines)

**Gender Expression** An individual’s presentation, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behavior that communicates aspects of gender or gender role. Gender expression may or may not conform to a person’s gender identity.

**Gender Identity** A person’s deeply-felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender non-conforming, boygirl, ladyboi) which may or may not correspond to a person’s sex assigned at birth or to a person’s primary or secondary sex characteristics. Since gender identity is internal, a person’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others. ‘Affirmed gender identity’ refers to a person’s gender identify after coming out as transgender or gender non-conforming or undergoing a social and/or medical transition process.

**Gender Diversity** refers to the extent to which a person’s gender identity, role, or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex. This term is becoming more popular as a way to describe people without reference to a particular cultural norm, in a manner that is more affirming and potentially less stigmatizing than gender nonconformity. (Gender Spectrum, 2013; <https://www.genderspectrum.org/understanding-gender>).

**Gender Dysphoria** refers to discomfort or distress that is associated with a discrepancy between a person’s gender identity and that person’s sex assigned at birth (and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics) (Fisk, 1974; Knudson, De Cuypere, & Bockting, 2010b). Only some gender-nonconforming people experience gender dysphoria at some point in their lives. (Coleman, et al. 2011)

**Gender Identity** refers to one's sense of oneself as male, female, or something else (American Psychological Association, 2006). When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify along the transgender spectrum (cf. Gainor, 2000; APA guidelines).

***Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation are Different Constructs***

Transgender people, like cisgender people, may be sexually oriented toward men, women, both sexes, or neither sex, and like most people, usually experience their gender identity (who they feel themselves to be) and their sexual orientation (whom they are attracted to) as separate phenomena (Bockting & Gray, 2004; Chivers & Bailey, 2000; Coleman, Bockting, & Gooren, 1993; Docter & Fleming, 2001; Docter & Prince, 1997). Many transgender people experience a shift in their sexual attractions at some point (Daskalos, 1998; Meier, Pardo, Labuski, & Babcock, 2013), indicating that sexual orientation may be more dynamic than previously thought.

**Gender Non-Conforming** is an adjective and umbrella term to describe individuals whose gender expression, gender identity, or gender role differs from gender norms associated with their assigned birth sex. Subpopulations of the TGNC community can develop specialized language to represent their experience and culture, such as the term “masculine of center” that is used in communities of color to describe a GNC identity.

**Gender Role** refers to a pattern of appearance, personality, and behavior that, in a given culture, is associated with being a boy/man/male or being a girl/woman/female.. A person's gender role may or may not conform to what is expected based on a person's sex assigned at birth. Gender role may also refer to the social role one is living in (e.g., as a woman, a man, or another gender), with some role characteristics conforming and others not conforming to what is associated with girls/women or boys/men in a given culture and time.

**Genderqueer** refers to a person whose gender identity falls outside of the gender binary (i.e. identifies with neither or both genders). Genderqueers may also use the term “gender fluid” as an identifier but typically reject the term “transgender” because it implies a change from one gender category to another.

**Intersex** refers to a range of conditions associated with atypical development of physical sex characteristics (American Psychological Association [APA], 2006). Intersex individuals may be born with chromosomes, genitals, and/or gonads that do not fit typical female or male presentations (OII-USA, 2013). Some examples of these conditions include ambiguous external genitals, inability of the body to respond typically to sex-related hormones, and inconsistency between external genitals and internal reproductive organs (APA, 2006). Since 2006, the medical and research community has used the term Disorders of Sex Development. This term refers to congenital conditions characterized by atypical development of chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical sex (Houk, Hughes, Ahmed, Lee, & Writing Committee for the International Intersex Consensus Conference Participants, 2006). An alternate term – Differences of Sex Development – has been recommended to prevent a view of these conditions as diseased or pathological (Wisemann, Udo-Koeller, Sinnecker, & Thyen, 2010). In order to be inclusive of various terminology preferences, this document will use intersex/DSD when referring to individuals who are part of this community.

**Pansexual** “is most commonly used in the world outside academia as a sexual identity [and sexual orientation] term similar to ‘bisexuality,’ but more inclusive of trans people. It also shows an awareness of the implied gender binary in the term ‘bisexual.’” (Elizabeth, 2013, p. 333)

**Pushout:** a student who leaves school before graduation due to the encouragement of school personnel, often to enable the school to achieve a performance goal or to lower disruption within the school or because the school views the student as too much trouble. This term is in contrast to “drop out” to highlight the institutional influence on individual behavior. (retrieved from <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth>)





**Queer** is an umbrella term that individuals may use to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. Historically, it has been considered a derogatory or pejorative term and the term may continue to be used by some individuals with negative intentions. Still, many LGBT individuals today embrace the label in a neutral or positive manner (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010). Some youth may adopt 'queer' as an identity term to avoid limiting themselves to the gender binaries of male and female or to the perceived restrictions imposed by lesbian, gay, and bisexual sexual orientations (Rivers, 2010).

**Questioning** is an identity label for a person who is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity, and is in a state of moratorium in terms of identity formation.

**Sex** refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia. (APA guidelines).

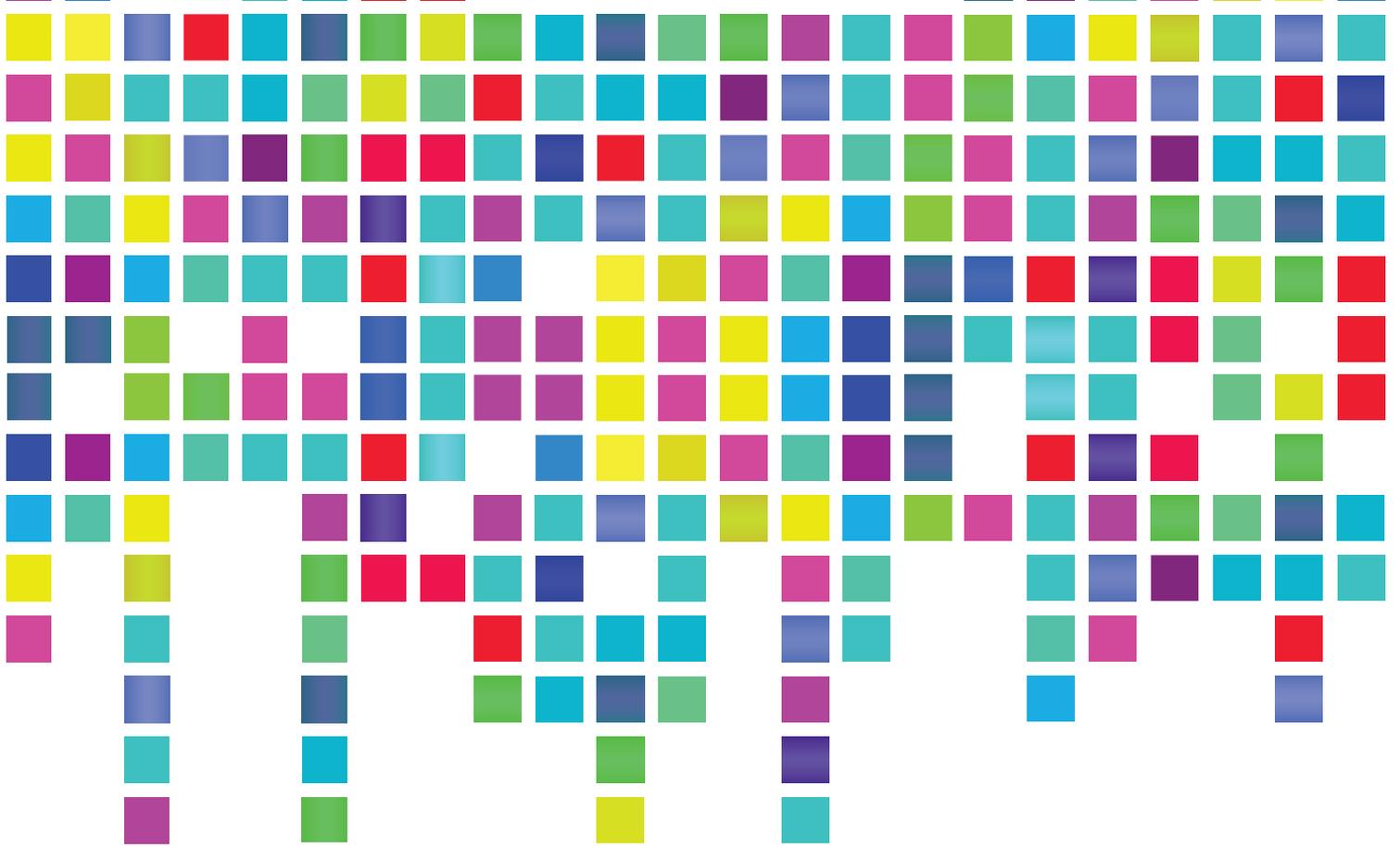
**Sex assignment** is the initial categorization of an infant as male or female.

**Sexual orientation** refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals). Some people identify as pansexual or queer in terms of their sexual orientation, which means they define their sexual orientation outside of the gender binary of "male" and "female" only. While these categories continue to be widely used, research has suggested that sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and instead occurs on a continuum (e.g., Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Klein, 1993; Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolff, 1985; Shiveley & DeCecco, 1977). In addition, some research indicates that sexual orientation is fluid for some people; this may be especially true for women (e.g., Diamond, 2007; Golden, 1987; Peplau & Garnets, 2000).

**Sexual Orientation** A component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior that may result from this attraction. An individual's sexual orientation may be lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual. A person may be attracted to men, women, both, neither, genderqueer, androgynous or have other gender identities. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity, gender role and gender expression.

**Transgender** is an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity wherein one's assigned biological sex doesn't match their felt identity. This umbrella term includes persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment (Meier & Labuski, 2013).





A publication of the American  
Psychological Association,  
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