

Human Diversity in Education

An Intercultural Approach



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Case Study

I Never Expected Such a Firestorm!

Joanne Thomas, high school health teacher in southern South Dakota, walked briskly into the conference room in the Board of Education building. There was quite a crowd in there: all seven members of the School Board, the Superintendent of Schools, the high school principal, about 10 teachers, perhaps 30 parents, 2 reporters from the local newspaper, and 7 high school students. The meeting was to discuss concerns related to the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) group in the high school, a group that had asked Joanne to be its advisor.

She could feel the tension in the room as she found a seat near the students, all of whom were representing the Alliance.

"What do you people think you're doing?" called out one of the fathers in the room. "I can't believe that you are sanctioning a group for gays and queers!"

"That's my question, too," shouted another father. "Those people defy God's law!"

"I'm afraid my daughter will get wrong ideas from these kids," said one of the mothers, joining in the fray.

"Hold it, everyone, please," said the Board Chair. "We've come to discuss this, not to yell at each other." The room quieted down a bit.

"Now, here's how I'd like to begin. There have been a number of rumors floating around town about this Alliance, and most of them are so over the top as to be outright lies. So, before we open the floor for discussion, which I promise will happen, I'd like to ask Mrs. Thomas to tell us how this whole thing started, to describe the reasons why it got started, and what its mission is. Is that all right, Mrs. Thomas?"

Joanne, as calm as she could be under the circumstances, smiled at the crowd and stood up, moving to the microphone that had been set up in the front of the room. She looked at the Board Chair and said, "Yes, of course, I'd be happy to do that."

The crowd, still restless, was silent.

"It all began about 6 months ago, right after school started. I was getting ready to leave for the day when two students knocked at the door and asked if they could talk with me for a moment. I knew them from one of my classes, and asked them to come in. I sat down in one of the class chairs and asked them to sit down, too, which they did. They looked a bit uncomfortable to me, so I asked them what was up and how I could help them."

Abby is an African American senior, school leader, and quite a social justice advocate. Zach is also a senior, not quite as in-your-face as Abby, but known throughout the school as someone that any student could talk to and find understanding and support if needed. Abby, as usual, took the lead.

"Well," she said, "we need to start a Gay-Straight Alliance in this high school, and we need to do it now! Do you know there are students in this school who are being bullied, taunted, called names, and just about shunned because they are gay, or lesbian, or somehow don't fit into traditional gender categories? And nobody does anything about it! Not even people who don't think it's right! The only person I know here who even talks about gender and sexual diversity is you, and you only do it when you're teaching lessons about it. One of these days, one of these kids is going to commit suicide, and then everyone will be appalled, and say, 'Well, I just didn't realize it was that bad for them here, and then it'll be too late!'"

Joanne continued, "I have to admit I was startled. But I also have to say that I had seen some evidence of the behavior that Abby was talking about, and, to my shame, I didn't do anything about it."

Zach took over in his easy way. "I think maybe Abby is exaggerating just a little bit, Mrs. Thomas. I don't think anyone's ready to kill himself or herself yet. But what she talks about in terms of some other students' behavior toward them is true. I've talked with some of the kids who are being hassled, and they are hurting. They're also getting angry, not only because they're being treated badly with no consequences for the kids who are after them, but because no adults are sticking up for them. And they know that around the country, and around the world for that matter, young people like themselves are rebelling, and asking—even demanding—to be heard."

"So," said Abby, "if we start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), will you be our advisor?"

Joanne looked at her audience of mostly unhappy people. "I was a bit surprised when they asked me to take on starting and advising the group, but the more I thought about it, the more I thought such initiative from these students should be encouraged, so I said "Sure, I think that would be a good idea."

"The students arranged the first brain-storming session, which of course I attended. There were seven students there: Abby and Zach, of course, and one boy who said he was gay, two girls who identified themselves as lesbian, one boy who identified as Questioning, and one girl who said she was trapped in a girl's body but really identified as a boy. I didn't know all of them personally, but they were so eager and so excited—and also so tentative, wondering how I would react to them—that I plunged right in. I had found some resources for starting a GSA, and as I shared them with the students, they began to talk about how they could begin.

"The first thing is to start a GSA the same way you would start any school club or group, by following the rules listed in the students' or school handbook for doing such a thing. And one of those things was talking with the school Principal and getting permission. The next thing was finding an advisor, which they had already done—me." Joanne laughed a little, and got a few smiles from the audience.

"When they had received a go-ahead from the Principal, and made their plans for how the GSA would get off the ground, they spoke with the Principal again, making sure that he knew what was happening all along the way. At the first meeting, which they publicized with flyers and word-of-mouth, 10 students showed up. Some were gay—or, as they informed us—gender non-conforming, and some were straight—most but not all were already friends. All were congenial and spent the meeting time talking about how the group should develop and what it should try to accomplish.

"I told them that Gay-Straight Alliances all over the country had three main missions: social support, education, and advocacy. The *social support mission* was to create a safe space for everyone to find and/or create a support network; the *educational mission* was to provide activities for the group and for all students in the school to raise awareness of the issues; and the *advocacy mission* was to create events that highlight Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) contributions and to promote changes that will better protect LGBTQ students through non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies." They were interested in this trio of missions and spent the rest of the first meeting talking about them and what they could do to put them into action.

"It's taken 5 months to get to this point, and the group is ready to do its first event—a kind of Gay-Straight Alliance Fair, in which a number of booths and exhibits will be set up in the gym from 3:30 to 8:00 on a Wednesday afternoon and evening, staffed by members of the GSA, to improve awareness of issues of discrimination, of language (because there are new terms that are used by LGBTQ youth and their allies to describe the variety of ways in which young people are defining their identities), and a series of posters, made by students in the school who may not even be members of the GSA. Anybody in the school or in the community is welcome to come and see what's going on. And, apparently, there will be food!" And that's where we are at the moment."

Mrs. Thomas sat down.

The room was very quiet for a moment. And then it got very loud. Arguments for and against the GSA being allowed to continue were advanced. Bible quotations were used by both sides—sometimes the same scripture used for both pro and con arguments. Some folks wondered if the public school was the right place for such activity. Others noted that all school districts in South Dakota had versions of the federal Office of Civil Rights non-discrimination policy in effect. Some parents were vociferous in their claim that the subject matter underlying this group was only to be done within the family and the school was the wrong place for it. Defenders retorted that if folks thought sex was not alive and well in the high school already, they'd been out of high school too long. A small group of teachers and other community members pointed out that actions on behalf of students who are sexually diverse is not much

(continued)

different than actions on behalf of African Americans, women and girls, and children with disabilities. It had always been a fight to introduce something that seemed to "attack" the dominant society.

Finally, the high school principal asked to be recognized, and spoke to the crowd. "When Abby and Zach came to me about this idea, I, too, was surprised. I really hadn't been aware that there was a problem—and I was a little ashamed that I hadn't. The students were very organized, very thoughtful, and very committed. They were everything we say we want our students to be. They saw a need and sought to fill it. So, I said 'yes.' I had no idea it would cause such a firestorm. And I'm sorry that it has.

"I can empathize with parents who are shocked and angry. We should have engaged with the community earlier in the planning. But I am hopeful that everyone here would calm down and think a bit more about it. Come to the GSA Fair and learn more about these students and their allies. I would like to meet again with you all after the Fair. And, I would like to propose to the Board that they vote to affirm the establishment of this group in the high school, understanding that we will be doing our best to seek allies among you all as we move forward."

The Principal took his seat. One Board member moved to support the establishment of the group. Another seconded the motion.

How do you think they voted?

Case Analysis

The meeting in the Board building in a school district in South Dakota has been and continues to be repeated in communities all across the country. Despite, or perhaps growing out of the women's movement of the past nearly 60 years, a new advocacy is emerging—directed toward issues revolving around gender expression and sexual diversity. The time when life appeared to be simpler, when sexual "diversity" meant only males and females, men and women, guys and dolls, is over. All over the world, including the United States, a growing generation of young people is insisting on being recognized for who they are, or feel they are, sexually, as well as by race, class, or religion. Such insistence has produced a descriptive language, a series of court cases, and a feeling of solidarity among many of those who, for one reason or another, find themselves as people whose gender identity does not match the sex indicators they were born with.

Should you think that only the gender non-conforming youth are part of this movement, think again: girls and boys whose gender *does* match their birth sex indicators are also members in good standing—many of them, anyway. They are allies and they are fighting in their own right, for recognition as women and men who are changing the definitions of male and female to more adequately and accurately what gender means in this and many other societies.

The students in Mrs. Thomas's Gay-Straight Alliance may identify their gender in many different ways. The most familiar are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Another gender expression is Queer (Q), which in spite of its use as a term of derision, has been taken on by many as a badge of honor and usually is used as an umbrella term for all those who do not identify as male or female, boy/man or girl/woman. So, we have LGBTQ. And still another letter grouping adds (I) Intersexual—those who biologically have some or all of both sex indicators from birth and (2-s) Two-Spirit—those, especially Native American, who have adopted, regardless of how they were born, a special, third gender way of taking roles in the tribe. Historically, they were considered very special, and often became teachers, storytellers, and healers. So, now, students may identify themselves as LGBTQI2-s.

The school, as has often been the case, has become a battleground for some of these issues. The public is at best bewildered and at worst completely hostile both to new gender terminology and to the very reality of students and others who dare to insist on being themselves. The school in South Dakota is fortunate in having a sympathetic and forward-looking Principal. Many are not, or at least would not willingly involve their school in such controversy.

Nationally, there are five aspects of schooling that provide reasons for paying attention to gender and sexual diversity:

1. *Student safety.* Bullying and harassment are common in schools, even though we have recently had a major campaign against bullying. Much of it today is directed toward those children who don't conform to dominant ideas of heterosexual dress, actions, and activities.
2. *Physical and emotional health.* Many students feel isolated and denigrated in school and this has long-term negative effects on them, both physically and emotionally. Finding themselves in a hostile environment, some try to escape by skipping school, or abusing drugs and alcohol, and with the addition of social media bullying, some even commit suicide.
3. *Diversity and Equity.* One of the reasons for public schooling is to educate students to live in a democratic society. As students have become more diverse, in many ways, educators are slowly beginning to realize that they must and can adapt to include voices, experiences, and perspectives of the multicultural society in which we live. It is necessary that all students be able to have the benefits of a "little" democratic society in their high school.
4. *Student engagement and academic success.* It is necessary that educators provide positive school climates for everyone, by developing policies and practices for all school personnel so that they come to know and understand what sexual as well as other types of diversity are all about.
5. In order to increase opportunities for all students to achieve academic success, we have to teach about gender and sexual diversity, an effort that can be done in many kinds of classes, not just health (Meyer, 2010).

These are only some of the ways that schools like the one in South Dakota can provide a healthy environment for all students. There are others, of course, waiting only for school folks and students to think of them. As with any kind of difference, when it is understood, welcomed, and folded into the common human "body" of the school or the society, it enriches everyone.

Rationale for Gender-Inclusive Schools

The rationale for seeing that all schools are gender inclusive is basically the same as it is for making schools inclusive for students representing all other kinds of diversity. First, the students are *there*. Whether it's race, social class, disability, native language, or religion that gives them a little different character, they are there. Whether it's through immigration or migration, they are there. Whether they are 5 years old or 18 years old, whether they've been there from the beginning of kindergarten or moved in last week, they are there. And they cannot be ignored.

Matters of gender have always been part of schooling. In the last century, it was not uncommon for girls and boys to enter the school through different doorways; girls and boys were separated for some subject areas, for example boys took shop and girls took home economics; and certainly, if any sex education classes were in the curriculum, girls and boys were taught separately. Until 1974, pregnant female teachers in many districts were forced to leave their jobs early in their pregnancies and not return until several months after their children were born (*Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur*, 1974). It was not until 1978 that Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PL 95-555), which prohibited discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions as unlawful under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Furthermore, most teachers were women and most principals and superintendents were men (Strober & Tyack, 1980).

While many of these traditions are no longer in place, the history they represent lives on. Remember that schools have two major purposes: to give students knowledge and skills so that they can manage the society when they grow up, and to socialize them into what it means to be a member of that society. The first is fairly straightforward; the second has all kinds of hidden curricula. Schools have an important, though little discussed, function as socializers to societal norms, particularly those associated with the middle class. Because these norms are so much a part of what most people in schools believe is correct, they seem “normal” and “right” and are usually taken very much for granted. That sense of “normality” is probably the most powerful force operating to encourage obedience to norms. However, other factors are involved in encouraging normative thought and behavior as well. In all societies, there are sanctions, or punishments, for deviation from norms. These sanctions operate in schools on a daily basis, and most of them are particularly social sanctions. Consider again, for example, that girls may avoid taking advanced science or math classes because they don’t want boys to think they’re “too smart.” The assumption of some girls is that the boys will “sanction” them socially for appearing to compete with them academically. Or consider the overt social sanctioning of boys who are gay by those boys who are straight, which is perhaps the most intense sanctioning that occurs. A number of lesser normative rules are broken every day in schools, by both males and females, and it appears that as gender roles change (which they are doing, but slowly), the social sanctions are also becoming less severe. Nevertheless, the power of gender role stereotypes is enormous and frequently costly to both males and females.

Finally, it is also the case that the presence of many different backgrounds among the students of a school adds immeasurably to the character and interest of the school community as a whole. While American public schools have been struggling to turn student diversity into opportunities for all students to share their differences, some colleges and universities have gone to court to defend their Affirmative Action plans, arguing that one reason for implementing such plans is that a diverse student body is, by its very existence, a better learning environment (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 439 U.S. 306, 2003). While these cases have been about race, the argument is no less true for sexual and all other diversities.

Characteristics of a Gender Inclusive Classroom

The first, and probably most important, characteristic of a gender-inclusive classroom is that all students feel safe in that space. The first statewide legislation explicitly designed to provide such safety was in Massachusetts and is called the Safe Space

Program for LGBTQ students. The seeds of this program were in a 1993 Report called "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Breaking the Silence in Schools and in Families." The report, written to the Massachusetts Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, was written by Kevin Jennings, founder of GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) who, in 2009 became part of the Obama administration in the U.S. Department of Education.

In 2015, the state of Massachusetts issued *Principles of Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Student*, which can be used as a guide for characteristics of gender-inclusive schools and classrooms. Some of these guidelines include:

- Schools have updated policies which protect LGBTQ students against harassment, violence, and discrimination.
- School personnel must be trained in content about violence and suicide prevention related to LGBTQ students.
- Schools are encouraged to offer school-based groups for LGBTQ and heterosexual students.
- School districts are encouraged to designate a staff member who is proficient in issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Schools, through their curricula, shall encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals, including LGBTQ individuals.
- Schools are encouraged to provide age-appropriate information about LGBTQ issues in school libraries and in student and faculty resource centers.
- Schools are encouraged to have a diverse workforce.
- Schools are encouraged to review academic and non-academic policies and procedures, and available data, to identify issues or patterns that may create barriers to a safe and successful learning experience for LGBTQ students (Principles, 2015).

Pedagogies: Old and New

Teaching in a classroom that is a safe space where multiple perspectives are encouraged does not require a whole new set of pedagogical ideas and practices. It does require, however, that teachers must be explicit about working toward this outcome. Basic expectations for the class should be given early in the semester, or year, and students should be involved in creating these expectations in order to build a classroom community.

Classrooms in which teachers and students construct the small society they are in a given class relies on what is called "constructivist" ideas; it is student-centered. Learning activities try to engage students in discussion, to encourage them to explore both the subject matter and the differences in their understanding of that subject. Small team projects might be part of the approach, but be careful: many students today have been "small-grouped" to death and shy away from any suggestion that they might actually want to work in groups. What is important is that students have the power to seek answers to their own questions on their own. Conversation is an interesting pedagogical tool; it is not lecturing (although sometimes a *little* lecture is useful, when students need background knowledge that is necessary in order to proceed). Such *little* lectures might cover, for instance, the background of a court case, or a brief history of a social



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movement; think about the connections from civil rights to women's rights to the rights of sexually diverse students. Non-traditional assignments might also play a role in the pedagogy of a safe classroom, for example, interviewing people in the community about the evolution of the meaning of gender, or making a short film to portray the actual gendered lives of students in one's high school.

Another approach might be to create a classroom as a forum, encouraging students to talk about their ideas in a democratic or citizenship framework in which students must try hard to find common ground, for example, make decisions about issues such as how their class would be run. Or, even better, involving students in real-life community issues, for example, letter-writing campaigns, attending school board or city council meetings, or even distributing materials during a political campaign.

A third approach might be to engage students in independent or collective research on a subject chosen by the class (which might also be an activity that teaches democratic citizenship!). What the choices might be depends somewhat on what the class is about, but there are many opportunities for research in any subject. Whether the whole class researches one topic, or each student chooses his or her own topic—or a combination—the important part is the ability to choose within a framework of the subject matter and the need to provide room for everyone's participation.

Roles: Old and New

The traditional roles of teacher as teller and student as listener change in a safe classroom. Rather than always being the expert, the teacher often acts as coach, encouraging and assisting students to complete the assigned tasks. Students also serve as coaches for one another and, not infrequently, find themselves acting as experts in particular areas. One of the most obvious examples of this phenomenon is the native Spanish, French, or German speaker in a foreign-language classroom. There are, however, many other ways in which students of all ages can provide expert knowledge and skills to

their fellow students. For instance, the student who is highly tech savvy on all the latest gadgets or one who is proficient in playing a musical instrument can become active as a peer-tutor in these areas.

One of the most important role changes in a gender-inclusive classroom, however, is that of parents. In traditional elementary classrooms, parents ordinarily serve in various “motherly” capacities, such as providing goods for a bake sale, bringing treats on birthdays, and acting as planners for holiday celebrations. Parents also are expected to ensure that homework assignments are completed and to attend open houses and parent-teacher conferences. In traditional middle and high school classrooms, the role of parents is often limited to these latter functions.

In gender-inclusive classrooms, however, parents (and grandparents, and other community members with some interest or expertise) are often central to the instructional program, helping to make and implement curricular and instructional decisions. For example, parents and others may take an important role in normalizing students who are gender non-conforming, for example, demonstrating to other students that their child is loved (and taught and scolded) just like any other child.

To summarize, in gender-inclusive classrooms parents and other community members share with teachers and other school staff the responsibility for educating all children. This partnership model views parents as resources and contributors to the education of their children and helps integrate the school and the community. Oakes and Lipton (2003) suggested that real changes in schools will take place only when the relationships of power begin to change and when the voices and concerns of parents and the community are heard, engaged with, and acted upon.

Place of Content Knowledge: Old and New

In gender-inclusive classrooms where teachers, parents, other school personnel, and students work together, boundaries between academic disciplines tend to become less defined as cooperative teams pool their knowledge in the pursuit of integrated projects. As teachers learn about what other teachers are doing, they begin to see ways of integrating their efforts. In such classrooms, the language arts and social studies may begin to merge, and the arts may be put to use in the service of scientific and geographical knowledge.

It is equally important to note that in gender-inclusive classrooms content about the whole spectrum of gender identity is taught to all students. In elementary schools, this might be part of the study of families that are part of most elementary curricula. Children today live in all kinds of family forms—single-parent families, families with two fathers or two mothers, families headed by grandmothers or grandfathers, families with traditional fathers and mothers. All of these must be made welcome in the classroom and seen as part of a mosaic of families.

Early childhood educator Theresa Bouley said:

In our efforts to provide the best learning environment possible for all children, we must break the silence, bring visibility to all families, and open up the discourse relating to the inclusion of gay/lesbian issues in elementary schools (Bouley, 2007).

In secondary schools, all subjects can and should include attention to gender identity and sexual diversity. This can be done in a wide variety of ways: select literature that has characters who are gay or questioning, or literature that is about being “different” in the world; use LGBTQ demographics, among other examples, when studying

statistics in math; teach the history of the gay liberation movement in social studies; teach gender expression and the male-female binary in biology; and use theatre to explore the experiences of those who are in some way “other”. All of these examples and many others can be integrated into regular course work, right along with more traditional content. The idea is to both impart knowledge of gender expression and to normalize it as one more indicator of what it means to be human.

A good example of this “blurring” of disciplinary boundaries was given by Charles Fowler (1994). He wrote:

If, for example, students are studying the Grand Canyon, and we want to give them a general idea of it without actually going there, we often resort to a verbal description: “The Grand Canyon, the world’s largest gorge, is a spectacle of multicolored layers of rock carved out over the millennia by the Colorado River.” If we want to convey its vastness, we use measurements: “The Grand Canyon is over 1 mile deep, 4 to 18 miles wide, and more than 200 miles long.” Each of these symbolic systems—words and numbers—permits us to reveal important aspects, but a picture or a painting can be equally telling.

The arts—creative writing, dance, music, theater/film, and visual arts—serve as ways that we react to, record, and share our impressions of the world. Students can be asked to set forth their own interpretation of the Grand Canyon, using, say, poetry as the communicative vehicle. While mathematics gives us precise quantitative measures of magnitude, poetry explores our disparate personal reactions. Both views are valid. Both contribute to understanding. Together, they prescribe a larger overall conception of, in this case, one of nature’s masterpieces (pp. 4–5).

In a gender-inclusive classroom, content knowledge not only becomes something to be learned but, more important, becomes something meaningful to students who learn to make connections between areas of knowledge that, after all, blend together in the world outside school.

Assessment: Old and New

Methods of evaluating student performance should be compatible with the types of learning activities that characterize a particular classroom. For example, traditional forms of evaluation such as standardized paper-and-pencil tests, answering questions posed by the teacher in a large group format, and student reports all seek to determine what and how much students “know” about a particular subject such as math or English. Each evaluation assumes that subject matter knowledge can be “given” to students who are then able to “give” such knowledge back as a sign that it has been learned. Perhaps the most efficient form of instruction for transmitting subject matter knowledge is that in which teachers talk and students listen, read, and are evaluated on the degree to which they have retained what they have heard and read.

In gender-inclusive classrooms, however, learning is less dependent on teacher talk and more dependent on group activities (projects, problem-solving situations, study groups) that take place over time. In such classrooms compatible evaluation techniques are those that measure performance over time, such as the creation of artifacts and portfolios and demonstrations of individual and group problem-solving ability. Although all these evaluation techniques will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 13, the point to make here is that these forms of assessment are a good match with instructional methods that emphasize collaborative teaching and learning.

Although there is still some political debate about the wisdom of the Common Core Standards and their attendant, and much different, kinds of assessments, it is likely that many states will begin assessing students in ways that emphasize the ability to *apply* knowledge rather than simply answer multiple choice questions (See Chapter 13). However, most experts in evaluation and assessment suggest that assessment must go beyond standardized tests. Assessments, for example, should: (1) include a variety of techniques; (2) encourage students to go beyond simple recall of data or facts; (3) close the gap between the classroom and the real world; and (4) include opportunities for students to perform tasks and solve problems.

Indeed, as we move further into the 21st century, models of assessment from around the world are increasingly of interest to American educators. Indeed, a number of high-performing countries have done away with the kind of standardized, relatively low-level testing system used in the United States and replaced it with “highly trained teachers and curriculum and assessments focused on problem solving, creativity, independent learning, and student reflection” (Sahlberg and Hargreaves (2011); Lavonen, (2008). As states in America seek to create world-class educational systems, the kind of gender safe classroom described in this chapter may become more the norm than the exception, and both teaching and assessments in those classrooms will change.

New Perspectives on Gender Identity

One of the earliest and most important learning experiences in any society is the development of a sense of self-identity—the knowledge that one is separate from mother, father, and family. This perception begins when an infant is 7 or 8 months old and continues throughout an individual’s life. It is not unusual for a person’s sense of identity to undergo significant changes as new experiences are encountered during the course of that person’s life. An extremely important part of an individual’s identity, and one that begins at least at birth, is gender. It is thought that identification in terms of sex begins at about 18 months of age and by age 3 is clearly internalized. But sexual identity is more complex than simply “knowing” that you are male or female. More important to your sense of self is your identification as a member of a gender group.

Sex and Gender: Different but Related

Although we often use the terms sex and gender interchangeably, they are different—but related. Sex is a biological characteristic and is generally identified at birth by the presence of differentiated genitalia. This is no small thing because a baby’s sex is related to his or her gender in the following way. Based on the knowledge of whether the new baby is a boy or a girl, parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends begin to socialize this baby into his or her **gender role**—what colors to wear, what toys to play with, what games to play, what sports to practice—indeed, what life expectations to have.

Thus, gender is a psychological and social characteristic. *Gender* is what it *means* to be male or female in a particular society. In all culture groups, *gender identity* includes knowledge of a large set of rules and expectations for what males and females should wear, how they should speak and act, what tasks they should perform in the society, and their “place” in the overall social structure. Knowledge of these rules is



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knowledge of one's role as a member of a particular gender group and provides us with the ability to deal with many social situations without having to stop each time to figure out what to do. Gender identity, however, also limits us in terms of our range of choices and, sometimes, the very quality of our lives.

Gender Expression and Gender Identity

There are two problems with this system. First, it does not take into account the very many possible variations that can exist in the bodies of these babies. There are four different sex categories that can be used to understand and describe bodies: male, female, intersex, and transsexual (Meyer, 2010).

Males and females are both relatively straightforward in terms of sex. A person is known as *intersex* when they are born with some characteristics of both sexes. A person is known as *transsexual* when his or her physical characteristics are male or female, but that person's gender identity doesn't align with the biological sex. As adults, these folks often go through extensive hormone treatment and surgery to transform their bodies to match their social identity.

Second, the limitations that gender identity can put on individuals are one reason, in an age when focus on the individual is so important, why young people around the United States and abroad are rebelling against the "convention that when it comes to gender and sexuality, there are only two options for each: male or female, gay or straight" (Steinmetz, 2017). Quite the contrary, many of the young who do not accept these limitations have created a lexicon that seeks to extend the possibilities of sex and gender (Killerman & Bolger, 2016). A few brief examples will give the idea:

- *Cisgender*. A person whose biological sex and gender identity are aligned.
- *Bigender*. A person who identifies with both traditional "man" and "woman" in behavior and expression
- *Gay*. Individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. The term is more commonly used in reference to men, but can be applied to women as well.
- *Gender expression*. The way in which one displays one's gender identity through dress, demeanor, and social behavior, generally along traditional male/man or female/woman dimensions. Gender expression may or may not align with actual biological sex.
- *Gender fluid*. A gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl; those who identify themselves as gender fluid may move between male and female behavior more or less often and to a greater or lesser degree.
- *Lesbian*. A woman who has the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to another woman.
- *Queer*. Used as an umbrella term for those who do not identify as straight. Sometimes used politically in the sense of taking a negative term and turning it into a positive one by embracing it.

- *Questioning*. An individual who is uncertain about or exploring his or her own sexual orientation or identity.
- *Transgender or Trans*. A person who lives (or feels internally that he or she should/must live) as a gender other than the one that corresponds to one's anatomical sex.
- *Two-spirit*. An umbrella term traditionally used among Native American tribes to recognize individuals who have qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.

The Millennials and Beyond

The generation loosely identified as millennials is especially interested or open to some degree of experimentation with and expressing a wide variety of gendered statuses. Indeed, at last count, Facebook offers more than 60 options for gender identity (Steinmetz, 2017) and a GLAAD/Harris poll in 2015 found that among millennials, 20% identify as something other than strictly straight and 27% know or work with someone who is transgender (Gonella, 2017).

Young people pushing for the freedom and opportunity to define their own gender may have a point. A 2015 study from Tel-Aviv University in Israel, for example, looked for differences in the brain between biological males and females along a number of dimensions. Analyzing more than 1,400 brain scans of men and women, researchers stated:

Sex/gender differences in the brain are of high social interest because their presence is typically assumed to prove that humans belong to two distinct categories not only in terms of their genitalia, and thus justify differential treatment of males and females. Here we show that, although there are sex/gender differences in brain and behavior, humans and human brains are comprised of unique "mosaics" of features, some more common in females compared with males, some more common in males compared with females, and some common in both females and males. Our results demonstrate that regardless of the cause of observed sex/gender differences in brain and behavior (nature or nurture), human brains cannot be categorized into two distinct classes: male brain/female brain (Joel, 2015).

Interviewed for an article on the growing number of young people who are living the "mosaic" of sex/gender, a 26-year-old who grew up in Florida felt that he didn't "fit" the then-available options of male or female. He was born female, identifies as *agender*, meaning having no gender at all, identified as a transgender male at age 20, had hormone treatments for 2 years, and now says:

After testosterone I was like O.K., my body is more where I want it to be. People can't really pinpoint me anymore, and that is comforting to me. I really like being neutral. I don't like having to identify with either binary gender. I like being beyond (Steinmetz, 2017).

Gender in a Global Context

In 2016, *National Geographic Magazine* commissioned a survey of 9-year-olds around the world (Conant, 2017). Researchers went into 80 homes on four continents to find out what children in a variety of countries thought about gender and how it affected their lives. A subhead on the resulting article reads: "If you want candid answers about how gender shapes destiny, ask the world's nine-year-olds" (p. 32).

All the children were asked the same questions. Here are a sample of the questions and their answers:

- What is the best thing about being a boy/girl?
 - *For a girl in Canada*: "There isn't anything I can't do because I'm a girl. Everyone is equal. There is always the same amount of opportunities for everyone, but in the olden days everyone wasn't equal." (p. 37).
 - *For a girl in Brazil*: "I like to be a girl because girls take better care of themselves than boys." (p. 40).
 - *For a boy in the West Bank*: "Being a boy, you're stronger, and you can lift things like refrigerators . . . As a girl, you have to comb your hair and put on clothes and make sure you're modest and everything." (p. 45).
- What is the worst thing about being a girl/boy?
 - *For a boy in India*: "The worst thing about being a boy is that they steal stuff and do Eve-teasing [harassing females]." (p. 34).
 - *For a girl in Kenya*: "You are seduced wherever you go. You are chased by men. If you go to fetch water, you are chased; you go to collect firewood, you are chased." (p. 36).
 - *For a girl in China*: "Sometimes I secretly help my older brother [on the farm]. Mom whacks me when she finds out. She says that girls who do these things will grow calluses on their hands; then they will become ugly." (p. 35).
 - *For a girl from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota*: "The worst thing about being a girl is that you just can't do things that boys can do; like, it kind of bothers me how there was not one girl president." (p. 47).
- How might your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy (or a boy instead of a girl)?
 - *For a girl in Kenya*: "The difference between boys and girls is that girls are gentle and boys are rough, and some of them call people names, and they are not kind or self-controlled." (p. 43).
 - *For a girl from India*: "We won't get an education in school, but boys will be educated, and therefore they can travel anywhere but girls can't." (p. 44).
 - *For a boy in the Gaza Strip*: "Boys play with each other. And girls play with each other. They play something different from what we play, and we play different from them." (p. 46).
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
 - *For a boy from the Pine Ridge Reservation in Idaho*: "When I grow up, I want to be in the Navy SEALs to protect my country, because other bad people have killed my people." (p. 41).

Clearly, these children are aware of gender differences and speak forthrightly about their own socialization to gender roles. But they are aware that times are changing, as well. Conant (2017) notes that there is agreement among both boys and girls about some things: "boys get in trouble more often than girls, and girls have to spend a lot of time on their hair" (p. 33). These children are demonstrating the power of gender to offer or withhold opportunities, and the limitations on behavior for boys and girls observed by both. Yet, says, Conant, they are aspirational.

The aspiration mentioned most often, across lines of geography and gender, was summed up by a Kansas City native who, living as a transgender girl since she was four, says that "if the world were hers to change, there would be no bullying. Because that's just bad" (p. 33).

Gender Role Socialization in the United States

The rules associated with a person's gender role may vary by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, and even geographical region. Such socialization takes place in a variety of different ways, many of them small and incremental—simple routines of daily life and language. Early in the study of gender roles, Weitzman (1975) described the process of such learning as having three parts:

1. The child learns to *distinguish* between men and women, and between boys and girls, and to know what kinds of behavior are characteristic of each.
2. The child learns to express appropriate gender role *preferences* for him- or herself.
3. The child learns to *behave* in accordance with gender role standards. (p. 109).

Although this process of internalizing knowledge of and identification with gender role is a part of all children's lives, it has been most studied in the lives of middle-class white children, especially girls. This concentration is significant for at least two reasons. First, it reflects the predominant characteristics of the researchers themselves, many of whom are not only white, middle-class university scholars but also feminists interested in documenting the reality of women's lives. Because the focus has been on girls, the consequences of **gender role socialization** on boys, which are great, often have been minimized.

Second, studies primarily located in the white middle class have reflected the dominant social group in the United States. Because dominance is often equated with universality, norms related to the gender role socialization of middle-class whites are often thought to apply to *all* American girls and boys—indeed, to *all girls* and boys everywhere. Researchers who have looked at gender role socialization in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, and national groups over the last 35 years have discovered significant differences in value and orientation between white, middle-class socialization practices and those of other groups. This finding is important because the role of the school in teaching gender role attitudes and behavior is second only to the role of the family. Schools normally represent the **dominant culture**, and gender role is no exception. Thus schools often unconsciously attempt to "mold" boys and girls into dominant (white, middle-class) gender roles while ignoring or trying to eliminate the different orientations and behaviors regarding gender that students bring with them to school.

Socialization to Gender Role in the Middle Class

Despite changing attitudes and values with respect to gender, in the United States, differences in socialization practices for boys and girls are many and obvious. More than 45 years ago, Howe (1974) described some of them in the following way. See whether you think things have changed all that much:

We throw boy babies up in the air and roughhouse with them. We coo over girl babies and handle them delicately. We choose sex related colors and toys for our

children from their earliest days. We encourage the energy and physical activity of our sons, just as we expect girls to be quieter and more docile. We love both our sons and daughters with equal fervor, we protest, and yet we are disappointed when there is no male child to carry on the family name (p. 27).

Kramer (1988) suggested a number of socialization agents in early childhood that reflect middle-class values, and these, too, have remained relatively constant. The first, of course, is parents. Studies have demonstrated not only that infant boys are handled more roughly than their sisters and that infant girls receive more verbal attention, but also that young boys are given more freedom to explore than are young girls, who are often kept closer to the supervising parent. In addition, girls receive more help on tasks than do boys, who are encouraged to “figure it out for yourself.” Research also shows that parental reaction to the behavior of their children tends to be more favorable when girls and boys are behaving in ways traditionally associated with their gender (Zosuls et al., 2011). Thus parents shape the expectations and abilities of their children not only by overt behavior but also by rewarding them with approval when they behave “appropriately” (McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 1999).

Socialization to Gender Role in Popular Culture, Books, and Toys

In contrast to the usually more traditional socializing influence of the family is another powerful socializing agent—electronic media. Although there is much that is still stereotypical about the images of boys and girls and women and men on television and the Internet—there has been a significant change in the nature of gender role images to be found in cable TV, platforms like Netflix and Amazon, and on YouTube. Not only are traditional gender roles often reversed, but we are learning about non-conforming gender roles as well. In addition, music—popular, country, rock and roll, rap—has its own messages about sex and gender on computers and hand-helds of many kinds.

It is still the case, however, that images of girls and boys on television, in video games, on music videos, and in movies provide strong messages about gender. In May 2007, the National Organization for Women (NOW) surveyed parents, other caregivers, teachers, and, indeed, anyone who cares about children, looking for feedback on the influence of media and pop culture on raising children today (Grunberg, 2007). The survey suggested five major challenges related to the gender socialization of both boys and girls:

1. Media's sexualization of young female performers/celebrities.
2. Marketing of unrealistic beauty standards through fashion magazines and the beauty/diet industry.
3. Video games that promote violence and negative stereotypes.
4. Music lyrics and music videos that promote negative stereotypes and violence.
5. Sex stereotypes in kids' TV programs and movies.

At the very least, we can say that media messages regarding gender are mixed. If young children don't have their very own devices (and many do, from the age of 5 or so), there are always those that belong to Mom or Dad (or both). Used by both boys and girls, this entry into technology adds another layer of media-mediated socialization to gender that is, perhaps, a bit more equitable than much of the media itself. In all cases, popular culture has a lot to say about gender roles.

Another influence on young children's development of gender role identity is children's books. There is good news on this front: many more children's books tell stories of people of many cultures, including books about non-traditional families, as well as contemporary dilemmas of childhood. The classic fairy tales and nursery rhymes are falling into disuse: no more strong princes rescuing helpless (but beautiful) ladies in distress. Instead, the princess is likely to be rescuing the prince!

Still another gender socializer of children is toys. If the inclination of parents and relatives to buy "gender-appropriate" toys is not sufficient to the task, manufacturers provide on their packaging useful clues to the gender of the child expected to use the toy. This influence also extends to the placing of such toys in store aisles. Go to any large toy store and observe the placement of toys (and colors of the signs) for girls and boys. Ordinarily, blocks, cars, trains, manipulative games, chemistry sets, doctor's kits, work tools, building games, and of course, balls of all kinds show boys on the package. Dolls, kitchen or cleaning toys, needlework, craft, or sewing equipment, and nurse's kits show girls on the package. No matter how many Barbie dolls come with briefcases, astronaut helmets, and computers, Barbie is still a *very* well-endowed young lady who is very much into clothes, and who at one time was known to say that "Math is hard!"

Boys' toys are relatively more complex, more varied, and more expensive than girls' toys and frequently have no counterpart for girls. Consider, for example, the range of remote-control cars, boats, and airplanes for sale as well as electronic sports and adventure games that are marketed for boys. Take a look at a store that sells electronic games for boys and girls in the preteen years: there are a wide variety of action-oriented games (jungle adventures, space travel, Power Rangers, Transformers, Captain America) for boys and a good many Barbie dress-designing games, Disney Princess games, Fashion Girls, and, for the Wii, Cooking Mania, and the Just Dance series, plus the occasional Nancy Drew mystery game for girls of the same age. There is no *law* preventing parents and others from buying cross-gender toys, but most people still feel a bit uncomfortable doing so. Even in the 21st century, we buy toy lawn mowers for little boys and toy shopping carts for little girls, and seldom do the reverse.

Other socializing influences of young children may be found in a variety of everyday places and activities. From nursery rhymes we learn that young girls are frightened of spiders and that young boys are nimble and quick. In Bible stories we observe that young boys are brave and able to do away with giants, whereas women have a tendency toward evil actions such as cutting off a man's hair and robbing him of his strength. From familiar proverbs and sayings we become aware that objectionable behavior on the part of boys sometimes must be excused on the grounds that "boys will be boys" (did you ever hear "girls will be girls"?) and that "it's a man's world."

Masculine and Feminine Behavior

If middle-class gender roles seem to limit girls more than boys, it may be only that our society favors the active, the adventurous, and the aggressive and that those traits are largely associated with boys. However, there is a high price to be paid by boys for all their "freedom." First of all, boys are socialized much earlier to what is perceived to be "manly." A girl who participates in boys' activities, plays with boys' toys, is impatient with dresses and ribbons and lace, and in general eschews "girlish" things is called a "tomboy" and is regarded with some tolerance by most adults, at least until adolescence. At that point, according to conventional wisdom, chances are good that she will "grow out of it." At the same time, from age 3 onward, boys who want to play



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with dolls, spend time with their mothers in the kitchen, cry easily, like to stay clean, and avoid contact sports are called “sissies”—a much more negative label. Adults viewing such behavior even in very young boys often become enormously uncomfortable and worried that “he is moving in the wrong direction.” Adult intervention in these “girlish” activities is usually swift, direct, and unmistakable.

Second, boys are punished much more harshly for deviation from the norms of “masculine” behavior. Moreover, such punishment occurs at an age when they are too young to really understand the source of their “problem” or the reasons for adult distress. To make matters more difficult, the desired behavior is rarely defined positively as something the child *should* do; rather, undesirable behavior is indicated negatively as something he should *not* do or be—anything, that is, that the parent or other people regard as “sissy.” Thus very early in life the boy must either stumble on the right path or bear repeated punishment without warning when he accidentally enters the wrong one.

One result of this socialization is that boys very early come to regard anything having to do with girls’ play and behavior as something to be avoided at all costs, and this attitude increases during the elementary school years until most boys would rather “drop dead” than play with girls. Thus little is done to alter practices that lead to separation of the sexes and the masculine disdain for the “feminine,” which often lasts a lifetime.

That such lessons are well learned is without doubt, and little has changed in the responses of a representative group of boys (8 and 10 years old) when asked to describe what boys and girls have to be able to know and do (Hartley, 1974). Boys, they said:

have to be able to fight in case a bully comes along; they have to be athletic; they have to be able to run fast; they must be able to play rough games; they need to know how to play many games—curb-ball, baseball, basketball, football; they need to be smart; they need to be able to take care of themselves; they should know what girls don’t know—how to climb, how to make a fire, how to carry things; they should have more ability than girls . . . they are expected to be noisy; to get dirty; to mess up the house; to be naughty; to be “outside” more than girls are; not to be cry-babies; not to be “softies”; not to be “behind” like girls are; and to get into trouble more than girls do (p. 90).

Thinking about the roles boys must assume, it is hard not to question, with Hartley, “not why boys have difficulty with this role, but why they try as hard as they do to fulfill it” (p. 27).

Gender and the Law for Schools

As with laws and court cases involving issues of race, language, and later, of disability, gender, and sexual diversity has become a legal issue in state governments, Congress, and the courts.

Early Legislation

Inspired by the civil rights movement during the 1960s and early 1970s, members of the women's movement began to pressure Congress to enact legislation that would guarantee equitable educational experience for girls and women. The result was Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. This statute was intended to prohibit discrimination in elementary and secondary schools on the basis of sex; its preamble reads:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Not until 1975, however, were the rules and regulations enforcing Title IX published and sent to state departments of education and to school districts. In the interim, there was heated controversy; several bills were introduced in Congress to take the teeth out of the legislation (all of which were defeated); and many thousands of citizens sent in written comments. The initial government agency responsible for enforcing Title IX was the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

In 1980, the U.S. Department of Education was created, and the responsibility for Title IX was given to them through the Office of Civil Rights. All was not smooth sailing, however. In the now-famous *Grove City v. Bell* (1984) case, Grove City College in Pennsylvania attempted to evade compliance with Title IX (and all other civil rights mandates directed toward schools and colleges receiving federal funds) on the grounds that the college took no money from the federal government (although their students did receive college loans from the federal government). In 1984, the Supreme Court agreed with Grove City College and removed the applicability of Title IX in athletics programs by finding that only those programs or activities that receive *direct* federal assistance can be held accountable to Title IX.

The victory was short-lived because Congress passed the Civil Rights Restoration Act in 1988, overriding President Reagan's veto. This act overrode the decision in *Grove City v. Bell* by establishing that all educational institutions that receive *any* federal funding—direct or indirect—are bound by Title IX legislation. By 1990, the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education had published an investigation manual to aid in enforcement. In 1994, Congress passed the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act, which requires coeducational institutions of higher education to disclose, on an annual basis, information regarding its intercollegiate athletics program.

More Recent Legislation and Court Cases

For the most part, regulation and interpretation of Title IX has affected middle school, high school, and college athletics programs. Lower courts have seen numerous cases involving the participation of girls in athletics, the requirement that expenditures on male and female athletic programs be “substantially” the same, and the canceling of boys’ athletics programs to better balance expenditures on athletics. In most cases, Title IX has been enforced.

Other cases have been brought in the area of sexual harassment—both adult-and-student cases and student-and-student cases. Court decisions have been mixed in this area. For example, in two cases involving sexual harassment by teachers of students, the decisions were opposite. In *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that petitioners may claim punitive damages under Title IX when

intentional action to prevent Title IX compliance is established. In *Alida Star Gebser and Alida Jean McCullough v. Lago Vista Independent School District* (1998), a California court denied compensatory and punitive damages from both the teacher involved and the school district. However, in the first student-on-student sexual harassment case to be decided successfully under Title IX in federal court—*Doe v. Petaluma Unified School District* (1995)—the plaintiff was awarded \$250,000. Clearly, the whole story of unequal educational opportunity for girls has not been written, but progress has been made, particularly in athletics, under Title IX.

In 2005, the liability under Title IX was extended by the Supreme Court, allowing those who report violations of Title IX (usually school personnel) to sue for remedy against retaliation by school districts. In 2006, in an interesting reversal of position, however, the federal government—through the U.S. Department of Education—relaxed the rules governing single-sex education so that public school classes (and sometimes whole public schools) can create and maintain single-sex populations. Title IX has always allowed single-sex education under certain circumstances, but this ruling broadens those circumstances.

In 2010, the Obama administration sent a letter to 15,000 school districts clarifying that Title IX forbids gender-based harassment. Several courts have agreed that the sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX not only includes discrimination for being a girl or a boy, but also includes sexual harassment and discrimination for failing to conform to gender stereotypes. LGBTQ targets of sex discrimination and harassment have successfully relied on Title IX's protections in several court cases involving schools (G-Safe, 2017). While this clarification is, so far, in force, there is some concern that it will eventually be rolled back along with other Obama efforts to strengthen Title IX protections (Misulonas, 2017).

Who Decides, Federal or State?

While both the U.S. Constitution and most state constitutions have “equal protection for all citizens” language under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, it is sometimes quite difficult for LGBTQ students who are being bullied, harassed, and otherwise mistreated to benefit from those protections while their cases make slow progress to the Supreme Court.

Although the federal government has been quite active in school affairs in recent years, responsibility for public schooling has been a state function since 1789, when it became an example of the Tenth Amendment in the Bill of Rights that says “all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution are reserved to the States respectively or to the people.” Thus, states, as well as local school districts have the right to pass legislation protecting any or all students from discrimination because they are in some way gender non-conforming.

Two types of state safe school laws are being promoted by supporters. The first are laws that specifically prohibit bullying and harassment of students based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Eighteen states and the District of Columbia currently have such laws. The second type is non-discrimination laws to protect LGBTQ students in schools from discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Currently, 13 states and the District of Columbia have such laws (GLSEN, 2017).

As the current government moves more and more toward sending power and funds back to the states, it is likely that more states will pass this kind of legislation. Clearly, there is a need for it.

Major Debates at the Local Level

Perhaps the most heated debate with respect to gender and sexual diversity has been the debate about the right of transgender students to use the school restrooms that correspond to their gender identity rather than the sex they were assigned at birth. Currently, there are 13 states with so-called “bathroom bills” pending in their legislatures: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New York, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming have all introduced legislation that would make it illegal to use a public restroom that is not the one that “matches” the sex on one’s birth certificate. Ten of these bills effect only public schools; the other three also apply to all public buildings.

To date, one has passed. The North Carolina law was passed in 2016 and has caused the state to lose a good deal of money with the withdrawal of business offices, sporting events, and entertainment shows. Because of this response, the North Carolina legislature repealed parts of the bill in March 2017. The new law “overturns restrictions on public bathrooms but prohibits local governments from passing non-discrimination laws that affect private employment or public accommodation” (Brabaw, 2017).

Interestingly, the separation of restrooms by sex only began in 1887: Massachusetts passed the first such law and the rest of the states followed. But it wasn’t so much an effort to separate men and women because of physical differences as it was because there was reluctance to fully include women in the workplace. The creation of “women’s reading rooms” in public libraries and special train cars for women are examples of this view. While this attitude is largely gone from society today, the laws on segregated restrooms remain (Rhodan, 2016).

A number of cities in the United States have legislated various solutions to the problem. Gender neutral restrooms and family restrooms, have emerged as alternatives to segregated restrooms, and numbers of churches, schools, airports, and other public buildings are quietly installing these kinds of facilities in new and old buildings.

New Perspectives on Gender and Schooling

One reason why issues of gender in schools are so difficult to solve is that gender roles are **normative**—that is, the ideas about what attitudes, values, and behavior are associated with sex or gender have been coded by the social group into norms or, often, stereotypes. A *norm* is a rule of conduct based on attitudes and values that are usually internalized through socialization until they become “of course” statements.

Schools as Socializing Agents

Schools have an important though little discussed function as socializers to societal norms, particularly those associated with the middle class. Because these norms are so much a part of what most people in schools believe is correct, they seem “normal” and “right” and are usually taken very much for granted. That sense of “normality” is probably the most powerful force operating to encourage obedience to norms. However, other factors are involved in encouraging normative thought and behavior as well. In all societies, there are *sanctions*, or punishments, for deviation from norms.

These sanctions operate in schools on a daily basis, and most of them are particularly *social* sanctions. Consider again, for example, that girls may avoid taking advanced science or math classes because they don't want boys to think they're "too smart." The assumption of some girls is that the boys will "sanction" them socially for appearing to compete with them academically. Or consider the overt social sanctioning of boys who are gay by those boys who are straight, which is perhaps the most intense sanctioning that occurs. A number of lesser normative rules are broken every day in schools, by both males and females, and it appears that as gender roles change the social sanctions are also becoming less severe. Nevertheless, the power of gender role norms is enormous and frequently costly to both males and females.

While the public school, as a socializing agent, is relatively slow to change, the permanent and increasing presence of students from all kinds of places, cultures, abilities and disabilities, and gender identities makes it nearly inevitable that the norms schools teach and enforce will also change. In a discussion of the relation between power and conformity in schools, Saldana (2013) noted:

If the education system seeks to empower rather than constrain it needs to focus on genuine autonomy and it needs to encourage public debate about the nature of democracy and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (p. 232).

This is happening now, more and more, in schools where open and thoughtful teachers and administrators are working to change school cultures and school climates so that, in fact, all will be welcome and all will be able to contribute their unique experiences to the whole.

Rethinking Gender and Sexual Diversity

It is often said that in order to really get rid of a deep-seated bias against a person or a group, one has to get to know that person, work with him or her, play with him or her. Schools are excellent places to do that, if there is some little crack in the defenses that norms create.

Another way to begin is to look at some statistics and ask whether or not they can be denied. Questioning the gender binary (only two sexes—male and female) has become a small but growing theme in reporting and popular culture. Some children as young as 3 years of age are announcing in the strongest terms that they are other than their birth sex, some preteens and teenagers are questioning their gender identity, and all of these young people are at serious risk for bullying, harassment, even assault as they go about their daily lives. For teachers and administrators, these are changes they face often, sometimes on a daily basis. If there is a future that includes rethinking sexual diversity, it probably will begin with people in schools, many of whom are already working on changing the culture of schooling.

Changing the Culture of Schooling

Elizabeth Meyer (2010) offered a number of suggestions for those who are serious about changing the culture of schooling. Addressing the multiple factors (external influences, internal influences, perceptions of behaviors, and responses to behaviors) that affect school cultures, Meyer noted that external influences are the most formal, and consist of "administrative structures, school policies, teacher education, and curriculum and workload demands" (p. 122).

Internal influences “include the accepted norms and values in the school community and are absorbed from superiors (administration), peers (colleagues), students, and families/community members” (p. 122). Internal influences interact with external influences to give shape to the school culture. Generally speaking, school principals are key actors in setting school cultures. Specifically, their administrative style, personal values, professional priorities, and ways of implementing policy can make all the difference in whether the culture of the school is open or closed, humanistic or totally rule-governed, welcoming to only the “best” students or welcoming to all students.



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Teachers, too, can make a difference in the school culture. In Meyer's study of schools in Canada and the United States, however,

teachers reported that every aspect of these external influences communicated to them that sexism, homophobia, and transphobia were accepted and endorsed in their school communities and proactive responses against these forms of bias were not supported” (p. 123).

This is consistent with the response Joanne Thomas received to the idea of forming a Gay-Straight Alliance in her school as presented in the Case Study. As presented in Chapter 1, changing school culture as well as changing classroom climates is not an easy process.

One approach is to begin the process of expanding the way teachers are prepared by including study of the changing ideas of gender and the characteristics of gender-inclusive schools and classrooms. Once young teachers are in schools, they can look for allies among veteran teachers in beginning to engage the whole school community in conversations about all kinds of diversity, including gender and sexual diversity. It will undoubtedly be a long road, but as noted earlier, the children of diversity are in school—and they cannot be ignored.

The Importance of Alliances

When Joanne Thomas was asked to be the advisor of a Gay-Straight Alliance in her high school, she began a journey that many others have traveled and are traveling today. Part of that journey is getting used to constant change—in vocabulary, in titles of organizations, in the focus of social justice. Joanne's group of students began by calling themselves a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA); by the time they were ready for their first activity the national Gay-Straight Alliance Network had changed its name to the Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network. But they are still GSAs and still offer enormous support to GSAs all over the country.

Of all the benefits a GSA provides, perhaps the most important is that it is an **alliance**. It's hard to overestimate the degree to which creating alliances for change will help advocates for a welcoming school culture or classroom come into being. A GSA can be a catalyst for reaching out to all the stakeholders in the school community—creating alliances with community members, businesses, and groups; with teachers and administrators; and with students who have not really been paying attention to the reformation of gender identities.

As an example, an effort called The Research Alliance for New York City Schools wanted to transform the school experience for Black and Latino young men (Klevin & Villavicencio, 2016). Strategies included:

- Developing culturally relevant curriculum.
- Adopting restorative approaches to discipline.
- Promoting strong relationships in schools not only between students but between students and school staff.
- Providing early support for postsecondary goals, including shifting their expectations from high school graduation to college readiness.

Work in these four areas can be applied to students who represent every diverse characteristic found in America's public schools. All require the forming of alliances, formal and informal, aimed at one set of students or all students, started on a very small scale or coming out as a schoolwide initiative. One way or another, it's up to Joanne Thomas, Abby, Zach, all their colleagues and friends, and all of us.

Ethical Issues

Clearly, there are many ethical issues involved in the consideration of gender and sexual diversity in the classroom. One important issue has to do with the degree to which all students, regardless of their beliefs and attitudes, are encouraged to be open, reflective, and critical thinkers. Children and adolescents are all in various stages of physical, intellectual, and moral development. It is unwise and unfair for teachers either to impose their own judgments on students or to differentially favor those students whose beliefs and attitudes are most nearly like their own. Rather, students should be enabled and encouraged to discuss all aspects of these issues in a context of thoughtful inquiry.

A second and related issue is the degree to which such inquiry may place students in direct conflict with the values of their families or the communities in which they live. Teachers should exercise a great deal of judgment in this regard, particularly when the family and community context is fairly rigid. It is quite possible for teachers to insist on an equitable set of language and behaviors while still recognizing and affirming contrary beliefs. To do otherwise is to set up a climate of "political correctness" that usually does more harm than good and does not do anything at all to promote self-reflection or inquiry.

Equity as a value is consistent with democracy, but so is pluralism. In a society as diverse as the one in the United States, it is not possible—nor is it useful—to insist on a single set of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Rather, the role of the school should be to help students negotiate differences, to understand their origins, and to appreciate what is valuable about them. One of the goals of a gender-inclusive classroom is to nurture *both* similarities and differences among people by enabling them to work together in ways that benefit everyone.

Summary

In this chapter, we explained the importance of gender role socialization to a person's identity through discussion of the ways in which children learn to "become" members of a gender group. The part played by the school and by teachers, administrators, and other adults as socialization agents was also discussed, as was the particular *type* of socialization—generally middle class—exercised by the school and the relation of that socialization to mainstream American values.

Traditional gender role stereotypes are both harmful and changing. Indeed, it is the very *change* in the nature of gender roles, as exemplified by Title IX, that is likely to cause some difficulties for students and teachers. In the same way, collaborative classrooms are particularly good vehicles for engendering understanding among both male and female students.

Finally, the issue of sexuality was addressed, in part as a studentwide phenomenon—at least in middle and high schools—and in part in terms of an increasing need to attend to issues raised by students who are gay and lesbian, and to issues created by the relations between homosexual and heterosexual students.

Chapter Review

Go to the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/cushner9e to review important content from the chapter, practice with key terms, take a chapter quiz, and access Active Workbook Exercises.

Key Terms

dominant culture 317
gender role 313

gender role socialization 317
normative 323

Sexual Orientation: A Matter of Experience?

Purpose: To examine potential classroom situations that reflect others' as well as your own responses to issues surrounding sexual orientation.

Instructions: The term sexual orientation refers to the preference one exhibits in terms of sexual partners. There is increasing evidence that one's sexual orientation is genetically based; that is, it may be "hard-wired" into the individual, and therefore resistant, if not impossible, to change. Other beliefs attribute early experience to later sexual preference. Regardless of the explanation you are most comfortable with, in your role as an educator you will encounter situations that will require your action and intervention on behalf of a child, either in making accurate attributions concerning a child's behavior at a given moment, or on behalf of a child who is experiencing strained relationships with her or his peers.

1. How would you explain the following scenarios to the concerned individual?
 - a. Four-year-old Jeremy heads right to the doll corner as soon as he arrives at the day-care center each morning. His father is concerned that this behavior is not appropriate for a little boy. How would you respond to the father?
 - b. Seventeen-year-old Patricia (who prefers to be called Pat) wears her hair cut very short and tends to dress like the boys. You walk by a group of her

female classmates and hear them refer to her as a lesbian. How would you respond to this group of girls?

- c. Five-year-old Suzanne plays with blocks and trucks during most of her free time in kindergarten. Her mother asks you if this is "normal" behavior? How would you respond to the mother?
- d. In addition to his theater performances, 13-year-old Robert takes ballet classes 3 days a week after school. Other boys often ridicule him in class. He comes to you and asks you to intervene. What would you suggest to Robert? What would you say to the other boys in Robert's class?
- e. Fifteen-year-old Shauna, who has few friends, lifts weights and seeks out all the opportunities she can to play typical boys sports. She has also been having conflicting and confusing sexual feelings. She comes to you after school one day, initially to seek your advice about what to do about friends, but soon begins to talk about her confusion and fear of talking to her parents. What advice would you give her?
- f. Sixteen-year-old Joseph's stated goal in life is to become a nurse. You overhear a group of boys teasing him and laughing about his "gay" behavior. You find Joseph sulking in a corner of the room and approach him. What do you say to him?

Reflect on your responses to the above scenarios. Do you notice any patterns in the way you answered the questions? Did you respond differently to the scenarios involving girls than you did for the scenarios involving boys? Did you respond differently to parents than you did to the child? If so, to what do you attribute this?

Classroom Activities

1. Ask elementary school students who their "heroes" are—both male and female. Who do they look up to? What characteristics do these "heroes" have? Do the female "heroes" have different characteristics than the male "heroes"? Do they have some of the same characteristics? Students can then make posters about their "heroes" with a written description of who they are and why they are "heroes," putting the posters up around the classroom as a "Hall of Fame Display."
2. In an elementary school classroom, have students read the language of Title IX: "*No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.*" Discuss with students the implications of Title IX in their school: Should girls and boys both play sports? What other areas of school life could Title IX be applied to? Ask students to write a short essay describing their ideas about gender equity in school.
3. Using two flip charts, in a high school class, ask students to brainstorm characteristics that demonstrate manly behavior and ladylike behavior. On one flip chart, write students' suggestions for "manly" behavior and draw a box around the responses. Write "Manly Characteristics" at the top of the chart. On the other flip chart, write students' suggestions for "ladylike" behavior, again drawing a box around the responses, and writing "Ladylike Characteristics" at the top of the chart. Discuss the two sets of responses in terms of stereotypes and

ask students where they think they learned these ideas, where in society we find these messages, and to what extent they think these “characteristics” reflect reality in their lives.

4. Ask high school students to be “gender detectives,” visiting large local toy stores or big box stores with large toy departments. Students should take notebooks and pencils with them. In the store, or toy department, look for sections that display boys’ and girls’ toys and describe what kinds of toys are in each section. Then look at the packaging around the toys and describe what words and figures are on the packaging. Finally, see if the store (or department) has a section of “gender neutral” toys (e.g., blocks, stuffed animals) and describe what kinds of toys are in that section. Ask students what they conclude about toys as gender socializers.

Reflective Questions

1. If you had witnessed harassment and bullying against gay, lesbian, or gender non-conforming students in your high school, would you have taken any action against it? What kind of action?
2. All people feel that they need to belong. Do you think a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) in your high school would have helped in that regard? If your school had a GSA, did it help students feel part of a community?
3. Some students, and some faculty as well, might have sincere religious beliefs about students who do not conform to the gender binary. What might you say to them as you reached out for allies?
4. Do you think Mrs. Thomas did the right thing in agreeing to be an advisor to a GSA without knowing too much about it? What would you have done?
5. Do you think the school Superintendent handled the meeting of concerned citizens well? Poorly? Would you have handled it differently? How?

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