

**SUPPORTING  
AND CARING  
FOR OUR**

**GENDER  
EXPANSIVE YOUTH**

**LESSONS FROM THE  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
CAMPAIGN'S  
YOUTH SURVEY**



**This report is available electronically at**

[\*www.hrc.org/youth-gender\*](http://www.hrc.org/youth-gender)

[\*www.genderspectrum.org/youth\*](http://www.genderspectrum.org/youth)



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
CAMPAIGN  
FOUNDATION™

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBT-inclusive policies and practices. The HRC Foundation builds support for LGBT people among families and friends, co-workers and employers, pastors and parishioners, doctors and teachers, neighbors and the general public. Through an array of programs and projects, the HRC Foundation enhances the lived experiences of LGBT people and their families, as it changes hearts and minds across America and around the globe. The HRC Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.



Gender Spectrum provides education, training and support to help create a gender-sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens. We provide an array of services designed to help families, schools, professionals and organizations understand and address the concepts of gender identity and expression, including how society's current definitions of gender can be detrimental to any young person where they do not fit neatly into these categories. Our collaboration results in the ability to identify and remove obstacles hindering youth, allowing them to be valued as their authentic selves.

# INTRODUCTION

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Over the last decade or so, new conversations around gender have been emerging. From the cover of *TIME* magazine to prominent television coverage with Diane Sawyer and Oprah Winfrey, the increased visibility of children and youth whose gender identities and expressions challenge conventional understandings is teaching us that gender is not as simple as what the doctor declares at birth.

Even as many parents and youth-serving professionals — including educators, healthcare providers and social workers — try to keep pace with the contemporary lives of youth, a gap is growing between generational conceptions and expressions of gender.

As a consequence, many of society's practices, policies and institutions are failing to meet the needs of the young people they intend to serve. Perhaps most disheartening, these shortcomings are revealed in the degree to which many youth — particularly those who do not fit our more conventional ideas about gender — feel marginalized, unsafe and less hopeful.

In 2012, the Human Rights Campaign surveyed more than 10,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in the United States. Participants were asked about their perceived levels of support and acceptance from family, peers and their community, their participation in activities and groups both inside and outside of school and their future ambitions. Their descriptions of growing up LGBT in the United States provide a stark picture of the difficulties they face.

This report examines the experiences of survey respondents whose gender identities or expressions expand our conventional under-

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standing of gender. It is designed to provide adults with a better understanding of these youth and to help adults find ways to communicate with and support all youth in their lives. The report also provides information and suggestions for those seeking to increase their comfort and competency with the evolving landscape of gender identity and expression.

With these goals in mind, the report answers three main questions:

- 1 What are the ways in which young people are defining and describing their own gender?**
- 2 What is the relationship between young people's gender and their personal well-being and experiences at home, in school and in their communities?**
- 3 How can parents, youth-serving professionals and organizations — such as schools, children's hospitals and religious education programs — create more gender-inclusive environments for youth?**

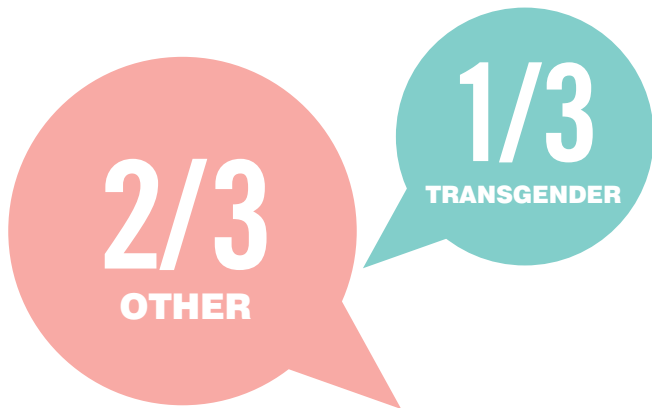
Beyond these questions, one thing is clear: We need a deeper exploration of the many ways in which youth are coming to understand, define and describe their own gender. While some general conclusions can be drawn from the survey findings, many more questions are raised.

In essence, this study illuminates emerging concepts of gender and demonstrates that many of our dominant culture's most common beliefs and practices around gender, and the language used to communicate about them, do not adequately apply to all youth.

# DEFINING GENDER-EXPANSIVE

Among the demographic questions in the Human Rights Campaign’s youth survey, three were specific to gender. These questions are listed in the box to the right. The “gender-expansive” youth discussed in this report were identified through their responses to question 1. (Much can be learned from responses to questions 2 and 3, as well. See the Appendix for more.)

**When asked if they considered themselves “male, female, transgender or other gender,” 925 youth answered “transgender” or the option “I prefer to identify my gender as: \_\_\_\_\_.” We refer to these youth as “gender-expansive” in this report; they compose slightly more than 9 percent of the total sample of LGBT youth.** One-third of these gender-expansive youth indicated “transgender” (n=319, 33 percent) and two-thirds indicated “other” (n=606, 66 percent).



The designation “gender-expansive” is not intended to place these youth into a box or to define a single “gender-expansive narrative.” It is important to recognize two things about this group of 925 gender-expansive youth.

First, the data represent a snapshot in time — a window into how these youth identify and express their gender at the time they responded to the survey. Many are at a stage of their lives when they are exploring and developing their own individual identities. Their gender identities and expressions, over time, will evolve and develop, and will be influenced by the society’s gender roles, the youths’ life circumstances and their internal sense of who they are.

Second, while this report presents the survey responses of these 925 youth as a single cohort, these youth represent 925 distinct gender identities and expressions. For example, among transgender-

## SURVEY QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO GENDER

1. Do you consider yourself male, female, transgender or other gender (e.g., gender-queer or androgynous\*)?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Transgender
  - I prefer to identify my gender as: (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Decline to answer
2. (IF GENDER = TRANSGENDER OR OTHER) Would you say that you transitioned...?
  - From male to female
  - From female to male
  - Neither
  - Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Decline to answer
3. Most people are born either male or female, but often feel or behave in a way that is different from what society believes is male or female behavior. On the scale below, please indicate either how male or female you feel.
 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Male										Female

\*See Gender-Related Terms & Definitions

identified youth, some indicated having transitioned from male to female, others from female to male and still some indicated “neither” or “other” when asked about a transition. Some of these youth expressed a transgender identity that falls within the binary (male or female) gender framework. Others appear to reject the binary terms of male and female and want to use different terms to describe their gender. And others refuse to be defined by gender entirely. The clearest example of the diversity within this group comes from examining the responses submitted by youth who chose to specify their own gender. These youth wrote a wide array of gender identities, the three most often cited being “genderqueer,” “gender fluid” and “androgynous.”

With these two contextual points in mind, we learn a great deal from the data these youth share about their identity and experiences.

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# GENDER-RELATED TERMS & DEFINITIONS

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AS A LAUNCHING POINT FOR DESCRIBING THE EMERGING IDEAS ABOUT GENDER PUT FORTH IN THE SURVEY RESPONSES, SEVERAL KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS ARE PROVIDED BELOW. BY NO MEANS ARE THEY ASSERTED AS THE ONLY OR FINAL DEFINITIONS OF THESE WORDS. RATHER, THEY SERVE TO PROVIDE A FOUNDATION OF COMMON LANGUAGE FOR THIS REPORT.

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## ANDROGYNOUS

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Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

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## CISGENDER

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Cisgender — or cis — is the term used to describe individuals whose gender identity or expression aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

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## GENDER BINARY

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The notion that there exist only two genders, each solidly fixed, biologically based and attached to various expectations for behavior, appearance and feelings. The binary gender system, while predominant in most cultures, is not the only model of gender that exists; more nuanced, non-binary understandings of gender have existed throughout history and across cultures.

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## GENDER-EXPANSIVE

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Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. For the purposes of this

report, the term “gender-expansive youth” is used to identify the 925 survey respondents who identified their gender as transgender or selected the option “I prefer to identify my gender as: \_\_\_\_.”

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## GENDER IDENTITY

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One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither — how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. While most people develop a gender identity aligned with their biological sex, for some gender identity is different from their biological or assigned sex.

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## GENDER EXPRESSION

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Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way — as people assign gender to others because of their appearance, mannerisms and other characteristics based on societal conventions, which are continually shifting and vary across cultures, race and region.

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## GENDER SPECTRUM

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Recognition of gender as a complex aspect of self, influenced by a person’s sex, gender expression and gender identity. Each of these dimensions of gender can be represented as a spectrum, rather than binary. The interaction of these three aspects of one’s authentic self leads to an infinite set of possibilities in how people can understand and express their own gender, and how others experience it as well.

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## GENDER TRANSITION

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The processes by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward manifestations. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as the “other” gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions. It is also important to note that many people are unable or choose not to transition medically.

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## GENDERQUEER

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Blurring the lines around gender identity and sexual orientation, genderqueer individuals typically

reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation.

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## SEX

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The designation made at birth as “male” or “female” based on an individual’s genitalia. Frequently assumed to be the same as gender, a person’s sex is only one of the dimensions that constitute an individual’s gender.

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## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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Describes an individual’s enduring physical, emotional, romantic and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

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## TRANSGENDER

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An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

# FINDINGS

The survey provides a striking picture of the ways in which young people define and describe their own gender, as well as how they are experiencing the world around them.

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## **BUSTING THE BINARY: YOUTH DEFINE AND DESCRIBE THEIR GENDER**

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Results from this study demonstrate that many young people have an understanding of gender that extends beyond the gender binary (male or female) or strictly biological notions.

Of the more than 10,000 youth between the ages of 13 and 17 completing the survey, 925 were gender-expansive — meaning they did not check the male or female box and checked instead transgender or wrote in their response. In other words, nearly 10 percent of the youth did not find the options of male or female adequate for describing their gender.

One-third (33 percent) chose “transgender” and two-thirds (66 percent) chose “other” to identify their gender. These gender-expansive young people are refusing to accept a simplistic binary understanding of gender, instead using an array of terms and phrases to capture this most basic aspect of self.

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Survey respondents were also asked to rate how male or female they feel from 0 (male) to 10 (female). Gender-expansive youth rated themselves all along the continuum from 0 to 10. For many, their ratings concentrated in the middle of the scale, not at either end. Looking beyond the gender-expansive youth, we see a much less rigid understanding of gender than expected among nearly all youth. For example, among the straight cisgender\* respondents, a surprising 28 percent of young men chose a number other than 0 (male) and 43 percent of the young women chose a number other than 10 (female). (See the Appendix for more on these findings.)

From these findings, several themes become evident:

- 1 First, among gender-expansive youth across racial groups; urban, rural, or suburban living areas; and religious backgrounds, there are increasingly diverse understandings of gender that have been unrecognized by adults and the institutions serving these youth.**
- 2 As youth consider their own identities and experiences, they are expanding the possibilities of gender that exist for themselves and their peers.**
- 3 Finally, these findings also demonstrate that the current gender-specific language and terminology many young people encounter in their homes, schools and communities (e.g., religious congregations and doctor’s offices) is not inclusive of them and serves to keep them, at best, invisible and ignored and, at worst, excluded and isolated.**

\* See Gender-Related Terms & Definitions

**GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH USED AN ARRAY OF TERMS AND PHRASES TO DESCRIBE THEIR GENDER:**

**ANDROGYNOUS**

**NON-BINARY FEMALE** **GENDER**  
**NEITHER** **FLUID**  
**GENDERLESS** **QUESTIONING**  
**NEUTRAL BOI**  
**AGENDER**  
**TRANSGENDER**  
**NONGENDER**  
**BOTH GENDERS**  
**HUMAN**  
**TWO SPIRIT** **FEMALE, BUT NOT 100%**  
**BIGENDER**  
**TOMBOY**

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## WHAT YOUTH HAVE TO SAY

**“I WOULD CHANGE MY CURRENT SITUATION WITH MY FAMILY — IF I COULD I WOULD TELL THEM ABOUT MY ACTUAL GENDER IDENTITY AND DO SO WITHOUT THEM JUDGING ME OR REJECTING ME.”**

**“...SINCE I WAS BORN FEMALE I FEEL LIKE I GET LOST IN TRANSLATION. PEOPLE CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY'RE SEEING WHEN THEY SEE ME SO THEY LABEL ME AS SOMETHING I'M NOT AND I HAVE TO KEEP THE LIE ALIVE IN ORDER TO AVOID BEING PERCEIVED IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT.”**

**“REALIZING THAT I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BEING FEMALE AND BEING MALE REALLY SCARES ME AND I AM AFRAID TO TELL EVEN THE PEOPLE I TRUST THE MOST.”**

**“I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO JUDGE ME OR ANYONE. PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT AND THEY NEED TO RESPECT PEOPLE'S INDIVIDUALITY.”**



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## **ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: EXPERIENCES OF GENDER- EXPANSIVE YOUTH**

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After describing their own gender, survey participants were asked questions related to their world, including their level of happiness and the degree to which they fit in; the levels of support and acceptance they feel from their families, peers, schools, religious institutions and communities; their level of participation in activities both inside and outside of school; and their aspiration and future goals.

The responses show that while many young people are articulating increasingly complex understandings about gender in themselves and their peers, they are nonetheless encountering a world around them that is ill-prepared, if not downright hostile, in its response. From their own families, their peers, and the communities and institutions to which they are connected, youth who do not conform to binary gender expectations are facing rejection, harassment and bullying at levels well beyond their peers.

A greater percentage of gender-expansive youth reported being excluded by their peers because they are different, and being verbally harassed or called names at school, than their cisgender peers. At the same time, a much smaller percentage of these youth report being “very” or “pretty” happy and “definitely” or

**“It always felt like he was fighting something. Fighting life. Fighting, fighting, never quite able to fit in. He was bullied, he was rejected, he was marginalized.”**

**— Mother of transgender high school student attending a Gender Spectrum conference**

“somewhat” fitting in. Given these findings, it may not come as a surprise that gender-expansive youth also strongly feel the need to move away from their current communities in order to fully realize their goals and ambitions.

**“LET ME BE HUMAN NOT A GENDER. THIS SOCIETY SEEMS PRETTY MESSED UP TO ME ABOUT THINGS LIKE THIS.”**

# PERSONAL WELL-BEING

## HAPPINESS

Only **4 percent** of the gender-expansive youth reported being “very happy.” Nearly seven times (**27 percent**) as many straight cisgender males reported being very happy.

The percentage of youth reporting being “very unhappy” was low across all respondents, but gender-expansive youth reported the highest percentage (**9 percent**).



**4%**  
GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH



**27%**  
STRAIGHT CISGENDER MALE YOUTH



**9%**  
GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH

## DRUGS & ALCOHOL

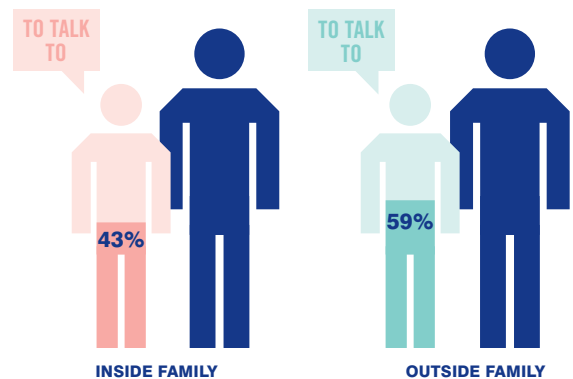
Nearly half of gender-expansive youth (**48 percent**) agreed “strongly” or “some-what” that they have experimented with alcohol and drugs. This is a rate double that of their straight cisgender peers.

**2X**

## CARING ADULTS

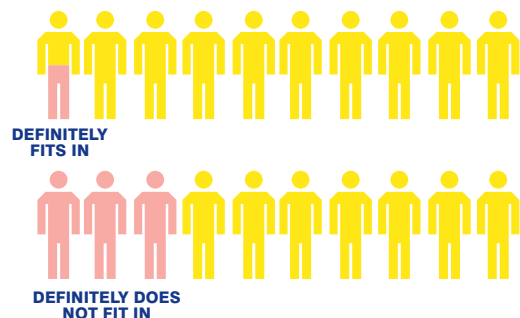
Less than half (**43 percent**) of the gender-expansive youth reported having an adult in their family they could turn to if they felt worried or sad. Looking outside the family, **59 percent** of gender-expansive youth said they have an adult they could turn to.

When compared to their peers, gender-expansive youth reported the smallest percentages of these two resources available to them.



## SENSE OF BELONGING

Gender-expansive youth are much less likely to report “definitely fitting in” in their community. Only **5 percent** of gender-expansive youth reported “definitely fitting in” while **30 percent** reported “definitely not fitting in.” This is in stark contrast to their peers. For example, roughly a third of straight cisgender respondents feel they definitely fit in — six times more than gender-expansive youth.



## LIKELIHOOD OF ACHIEVEMENTS

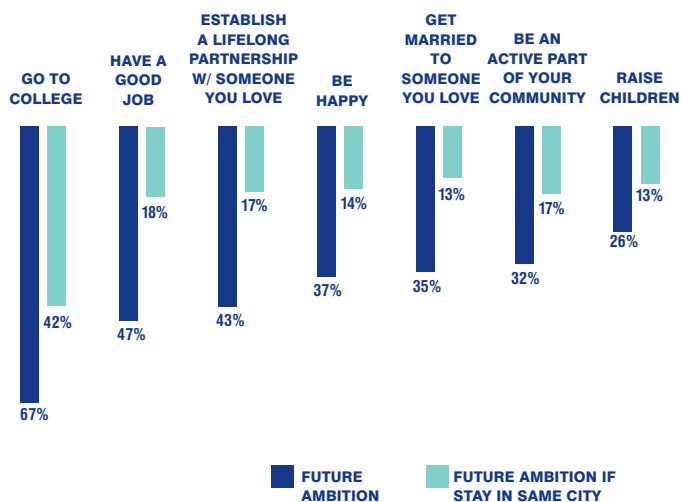
Youth were asked to rate the likelihood of seven ambitions happening to them in their future. When compared to all survey respondents, fewer gender-expansive youth reported their ambitions as very likely to happen, across all seven categories. These categories include going to college, having a good job, establishing a lifelong relationship with someone you love, getting married to someone you love, raising children, being happy and playing an active part of your community.

Approximately two-thirds of gender-expansive youth reported going to college is very likely and only **37 percent** of gender-expansive youth believe it is very likely that they will be happy in the future.

Less than half (**43 percent**) of the gender-expansive youth believe that establishing a lifelong partnership with someone they love is very likely to happen to them in the future.

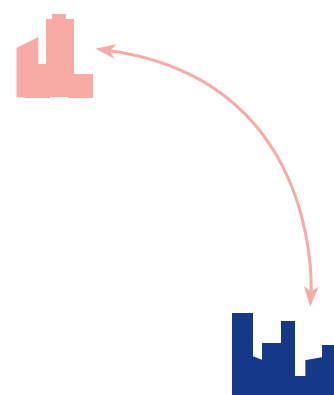
Youth were also asked to rate the likelihood of their ambitions happening *if they stayed in the same city or town they currently lived in*.

### GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH REPORTING AMBITION AS “VERY LIKELY TO HAPPEN”



For all seven ambitions, gender expansive youth reported significant drops in the percentage reporting each ambition was “very likely to happen” if they stayed in the same city or town they currently lived.

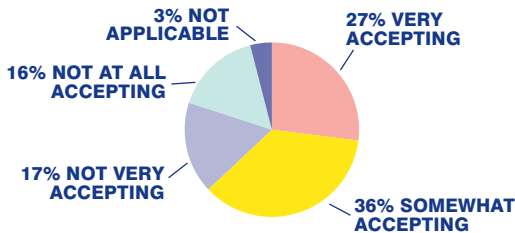
Gender-expansive youth also composed the largest percentage “strongly agreeing” that they will need to move to another city or town to really feel accepted (**44 percent**) and the smallest percentage “strongly agreeing” that they know things will get better (**28 percent**).



**“I NEED TO KNOW THAT I AM LOVED AND ACCEPTED AND BELIEVED IN AND THAT LIFE HAS A POINT AND I WILL FIND IT SOMEDAY. THAT’S JUST GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO BELIEVE.”**

# HOME & FAMILY ACCEPTANCE

Among gender-expansive youth, about a quarter (**27 percent**) reported that their families are very accepting of LGBT people while a little more than one-third (**36 percent**) rated their family as “somewhat accepting.”

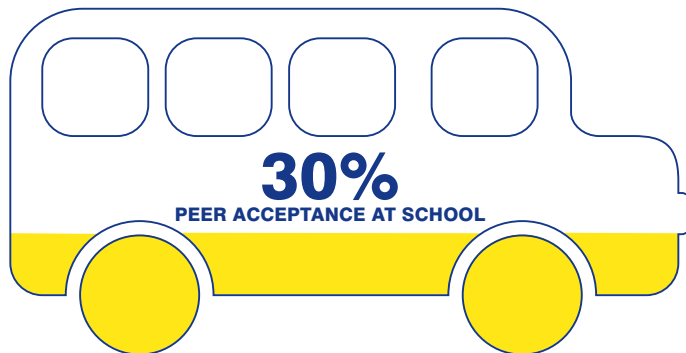


**“SOME PEOPLE HATE ME FOR SOMETHING I CANNOT CHANGE AND I JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND. I’M SMART AND BEAUTIFUL AND HUMAN AND THEY TREAT ME LIKE DIRT.”**

# SCHOOL & PEERS

## ACCEPTANCE

Less than one-third (**30 percent**) of gender-expansive youth reported “strongly agreeing” that most of their peers do not have a problem with their identity as an LGBT person. This is the smallest percentage across all respondents.



## PARTICIPATION

The activities with the highest participation rates for all survey respondents were the after-school activities such as drama, debate, band or academic clubs. More than one-third of the gender-expansive youth reported participating very often in these activities. Additionally, **30 percent** of gender-expansive youth reported participating in a Gay Straight Alliance “very often” and only 12 percent reported participating in sports “very often.”

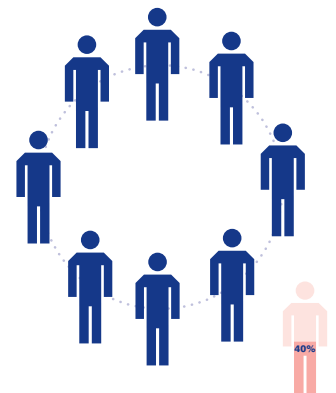
## EXCLUSION AND HARASSMENT

Gender-expansive youth take the brunt of exclusion and verbal harassment both inside and outside of school compared to their peers. For example, when compared to their straight cisgender peers, gender-expansive youth are more than three times more likely to be excluded by their peers because they are different.

**Forty percent** of gender-expansive youth report being excluded “frequently or often” by their peers.

Almost the same percentage of gender-expansive youth reported “frequently or often” being verbally harassed and called names at school (**37 percent**).

Finally, **42 percent** of gender-expansive youth are “frequently or often” called names involving anti-gay slurs.



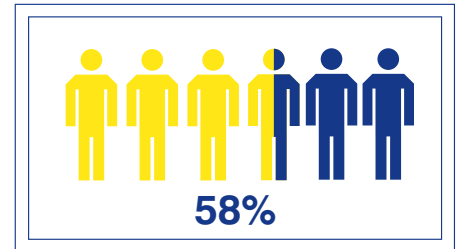
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# LIFE ONLINE

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Gender-expansive youth report higher participation rates in an online LGBT community than their lesbian, gay and bisexual peers who are cisgender. They are also more likely to report being more honest online.

**Fifty-eight percent** of the gender-expansive youth “strongly agreed” that they were more honest about who they are online than in the real world.



**MORE HONEST ONLINE**

**Twenty-five percent** of gender-expansive youth report being verbally harassed online “frequently or often,” compared to **37 percent** reporting being verbally harassed at school.

For peers and schools, a higher percentage of youth rated their acceptance as “somewhat accepting.”

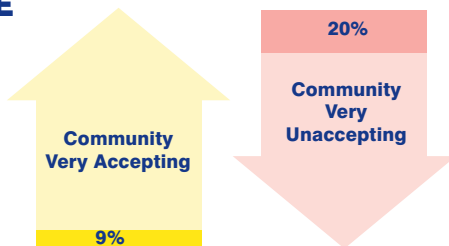
Churches and places of worship received the lowest percentage of gender-expansive youth reporting them “very accepting” (**2 percent**). A slightly higher percentage of gender-expansive youth rated their own church/place of worship as “very accepting” (**8 percent**).

## ACCEPTANCE OF YOUTH’S CHURCH/PLACE OF WORSHIP

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### ACCEPTANCE

Less than 10 percent of gender-expansive youth (**9 percent**) report their community being “very accepting” of LGBT people while **20 percent** reported their community as “very unaccepting.”



Across the board, much larger percentages of youth reported their communities as “somewhat accepting.” This is true for one-third (**33 percent**) of gender-expansive youth.

Generally speaking, among gender-expansive youth, doctors (**23 percent**), peers (**23 percent**), and schools (**20 percent**) received the highest percentages of youth reporting these individuals or organizations in their communities as “very accepting.”



**Thirty-five percent** of the gender-expansive youth rated churches and places of worship as “not at all accepting.” **Twenty-two percent** of gender-expansive youth rated their own church/place of worship as “not at all accepting.”

It is also important to note that large percentages of all youth surveyed reported not knowing how accepting parts of their communities were. For example, more than half of gender-expansive youth reported not knowing whether their own church/place of worship and their doctor were accepting of LGBT people (**53 percent** and **56 percent**, respectively).

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# IN THE COMMUNITY

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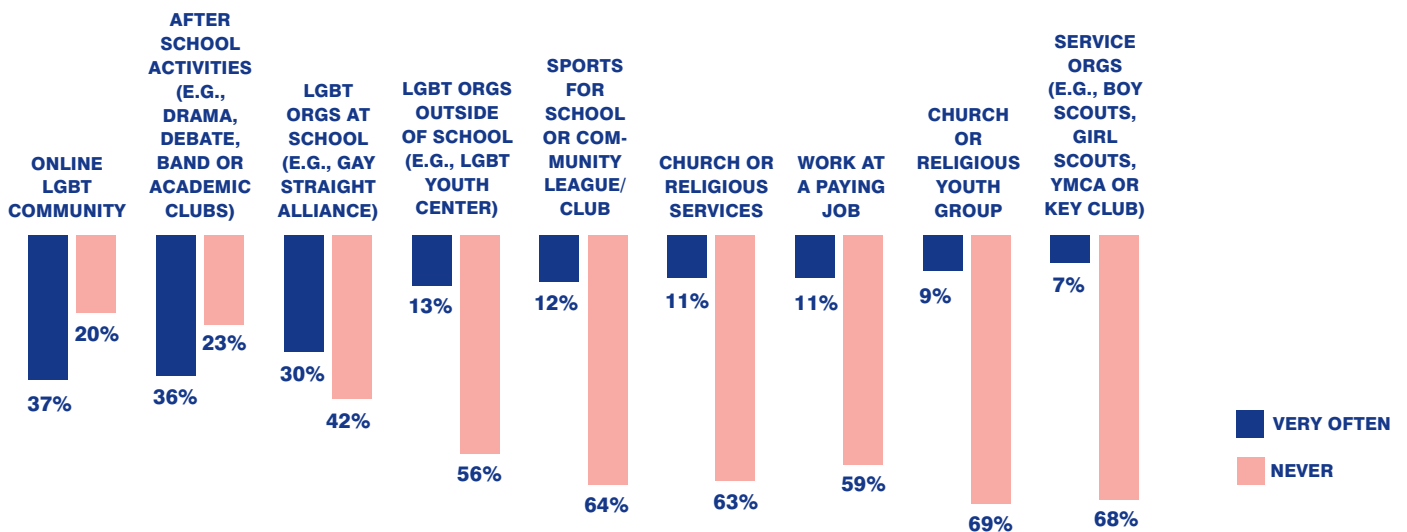
## PARTICIPATION

Youth were asked to rate their participation level in nine activities. Gender-expansive youth reported the highest participation rates across all respondents for after-school activities, online LGBT community and school GSAs. If not for these activities, gender-expansive youth would not be engaged in activities that might build their confidence and social skills. However, only about one in three gender-expansive youth participate in those three activities very often. Far fewer are participating in religious youth groups,

service organizations such as Boy or Girl Scouts, key club or YMCA, or sports — all activities that build confidence and social skills.

In six of the nine activities, more than **50 percent** of gender-expansive youth reported “never participating” in the activity. This included never participating in a religious service (**63 percent**), a church youth group (**69 percent**), a service organization such as Boy Scouts or key club (**68 percent**), community or school sports (**64 percent**), work at a paying job (**59 percent**) or an LGBT organization outside of school (**56 percent**).

### GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION RATES FOR 9 ACTIVITIES



**“IT FEELS LIKE YOU’RE STANDING IN A ROOM AND EVERYBODY CAN SEE YOU — EVERYBODY KNOWS YOU’RE THERE BUT NO ONE WILL SAY ANYTHING TO YOU BECAUSE THEY DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE LIKE YOU’RE SOME SORT OF DIFFERENT SPECIES.”**

# BECOMING AN ALLY

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## WHAT WE ALL CAN DO

The survey findings demonstrate that youth can feel caught between their internal experiences of gender and the conventional binary understanding of their parents/adults, peers, community and society. Absence of a common language and understanding of gender creates a chasm between many youth and the adults around them.

Without a shared understanding of terms, misunderstandings occur with sometimes unanticipated — and harmful — consequences.

As adults charged with the safety and well-being of the young people in our lives, what are the implications of these findings for us? Even as we work to understand shifting gender expressions, how can we help our children and youth thrive?

**The three important principles outlined here underscore the many ways in which we all can respond. To learn more about putting these principles into practice, see the list of resources and organizations at the end of this report.**

the differences between sex and gender, gender expression and gender identity, and sexual orientation and gender. In doing so, you will not only improve your ability to keep up with the youth in your life, but you may also gain insights into your own experiences as well.

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### CREATE SPACE

Create space in which children and youth can safely explore gender identity and expression. By helping young people recognize that gender need not limit them, we open up many possibilities and opportunities that might be denied them otherwise. This is true regardless of whether one's self-concept of gender is conventional or not. As they learn about the various ways gender can be viewed, they will become more accepting of their peers' own perceptions of gender, as well as their own. There are a number of ways

in which young people can be supported given their expanded recognition of gender's complexity. Children and youth need to see themselves reflected in the world around them. Youth-serving organizations such as our schools or places of worship can demonstrate greater inclusivity by modeling recognition of the many ways in which gender is being experienced. This can be done through visual images, shifts in language and modifications to policies and practices. Each of these steps is critical to establishing more gender-inclusive spaces for everyone.

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### ADVOCATE

Advocate for more gender-inclusive environments within your community's schools, medical facilities, religious institutions, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice services and other entities working

with children and youth. Reinforce the idea that gender is infinitely complex and that there is not just one way to be a boy or a girl, and often identities fall outside conventional definitions.

Professionals and caring adults can help families to examine their own beliefs and experiences with gender, as well as provide them with information about the ways that gender expectations are limiting their children. This can have a significant effect on a family's ability to create a more accepting home.

In practice, what does it look like for families and organizations to reflect a more welcoming and affirming approach to the topic of gender? In the following sections are just some of the many ways parents, caregivers and educators have been shown to establish gender-inclusive environments for all children and youth.

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### EDUCATE YOURSELF

Educate yourself about gender's wonderful complexity. Consider your own experiences of gender and how the expectations of others have affected your own path. Learn about the many ways gender norms have shifted from culture to culture and across history. Become more familiar with

**“SENDING MY SON,  
A JOYFUL, GENDER  
CREATIVE CHILD, OFF  
TO SCHOOL THIS YEAR  
FILLED ME WITH  
ANXIETY....WITH A**

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**“GEN**

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**“AS A PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER, I WOULD GIVE OUT  
LOCKS FOR STUDENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH YEAR.  
IN THE PAST I HAVE ALWAYS CALLED UP THE GIRLS AND  
BOYS SEPARATELY. I DECIDED THAT THIS WAS A SIMPLE FIX.  
I CALLED STUDENTS UP WITHOUT  
REGARD TO GENDER AND HANDED  
OUT LOCKS MORE RANDOMLY.  
IT WAS NO HARDER FOR ME AS A TEACHER,  
BUT I JUST MIGHT HAVE MADE LIFE IN MY CLASS  
A BIT EASIER FOR SOME OF MY STUDENTS.”**

**- TEACHER PARTICIPATING IN A WELCOMING SCHOOLS TRAINING**



**HUG AND KISS, I SENT HIM INTO HIS DAY.** AS A PARENT, ONE FEELS VERY ALONE AT A MOMENT LIKE THIS. YOU FEEL LIKE IT IS YOU AND 'THEM': THE OTHER STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS WHO MAY OR MAY NOT ACCEPT YOUR CHILD OR HAVE THE EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE OR WORDS TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD FOR WHO HE IS."

- PARENT FROM A SCHOOL PARTICIPATING IN WELCOMING SCHOOLS

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**DER**

**IS SOMETHING ALL CHILDREN ARE AWARE OF AND FEEL CONSTRICTED BY. EXCELLENT GENDER CLIMATE BUILDING IN CLASSROOMS GIVES ALL STUDENTS ROOM TO BREATHE AND GROW AND EXPLORE THEIR FULL SELVES."**

— TEACHER PARTICIPATING IN A WELCOMING SCHOOLS TRAINING

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## FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

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One of the most powerful ways for parents and caregivers to create more space for their children around gender is to openly demonstrate their own learning processes. Even as they struggle with understanding a child's gender, parents who openly share their evolving notions about gender demonstrate that the challenge rests not with who their child is, but with their own understanding.

For many parents, the challenges can be made even more difficult as they balance fears for their child's safety, cultural beliefs and expectations, and their own discomfort with their child's needs around gender expression or identity. Even as caregivers struggle with their own ideas about gender, it is critical that their children know they are loved and that the adults around them are committed to better understanding their child's experience.

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### SOME SPECIFIC WAYS FOR SUPPORTING A YOUNG PERSON'S GENDER INCLUDE:

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- 1 Read as much as possible about gender, children and youth.** In the Additional Resources section of this report are a number of resources and organizations that explore gender in general, as well as gender specifically related to children and youth.
- 2 Share reflections about how your experiences growing up have affected your current understandings about gender.** How have those understandings shifted over time? Notice and discuss with your child the images and messages about gender that surround us. What expectations are being attached to them? How might a child who does not match them feel?
- 3 Seek spaces for expressing your own feelings about your child's gender** through support groups, online forums, conferences or other resources that connect parents of gender-expansive youth.
- 4 Insist that the people surrounding your child are respectful.** Don't allow others who are uncomfortable with your child's gender to put your child down. Set clear expectations with others about how you want your child to be treated or how they should refer to the child.

**“LISTENING TO OUR DAUGHTER AND HER FRIENDS’ IDEAS ABOUT GENDER, WE HAVE BEEN PUSHED TO EXAMINE OUR OWN BELIEFS AS WELL. IN THE PROCESS, WE HAVE BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE IN HOW SHE DOES AND DOES NOT FIT THE ‘TYPICAL’ GIRL MODE.”**

— FATHER OF 7TH GRADE STUDENT ATTENDING A GENDER SPECTRUM SCHOOL COMMUNITY TRAINING

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## FOR EDUCATORS

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Along with the family, school is one of the most influential institutions in society for socializing young people. Messages about gender at school can either reinforce binary limitations of gender or validate students' own processes of understanding and expressing gender, as well as accepting that process with their peers. Schools that intentionally create gender-inclusive spaces do so in multiple ways, and in the process, ensure that children don't experience the invisibility suggested by Adrienne Rich's quote seen here.

In practice, educators and schools can take a variety of steps to create conditions in which all students are safe to explore this aspect of self without fear of mistreatment by their peers or the adults around them.

### SPECIFIC STEPS THAT SCHOOLS CAN TAKE INCLUDE:

- 1 Use inclusive phrases to address your class as a whole**, such as "Good morning, everyone" or "Good morning, scholars" instead of "Good morning, boys and girls" or "young men and women."
- 2 Group students in ways that do not rely on gender**, such as students whose last names begin with A-H or I-Z, or students who are sitting in a particular part of the room, etc. Avoid situations that force children to make gendered choices, such as boys line up here and girls line up there.

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- 3 Stop hurtful name-calling, harassment and bullying based on gender and other bias.** Interrupt student comments based on gender stereotypes. Engage in discussion with students. Use these times as teachable moments.

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- 4 Use lesson plans designed to expand understanding of gender.** Provide opportunities for students to look at the qualities all youth share. Help them to see the limitations of gender stereotyping.

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- 5 Support all school staff to learn about gender and the ways in which today's students are defining and expressing it.** This includes professional development that builds the language and tools from which adults can draw as they seek to create a more inclusive school environment.

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- 6 Create and articulate strong policies** that protect a student's right to a safe and supportive learning environment, and explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression.

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- 7 Demonstrate openness to the fact that not every student will fit into the gender binary.** For example, modify standardized forms to allow caregivers and students to share important information about their gender, such as preferred names or pronouns, and posting signs or other visuals that recognize gender diversity.

**"WHEN SOMEONE WITH THE AUTHORITY OF A TEACHER DESCRIBES THE WORLD AND YOU ARE NOT IN IT, THERE IS A MOMENT OF PSYCHIC DISEQUILIBRIUM, AS IF YOU LOOKED INTO A MIRROR AND SAW NOTHING."**

**— ADRIENNE RICH, AMERICAN POET**



# LOOKING FORWARD

Even as our institutions and practices continue to adjust and respond to these emerging concepts of gender, there remain many questions and much more to be learned. In light of this report, three important implications stand out.

## **1 Gender expression is the initial, and often primary, source of the harassment, discrimination and violence that confronts many of our youth.**

Quite simply, children and youth perceived to be different in their gender are often targeted by their peers. While lesbian, gay and bisexual youth experience significant levels of harassment and bullying related to their sexual orientation, the levels are even higher for those who defy gender conventions or expectations. Further, some bullying and slurs related to one's sexual orientation are actually harassment related to gender expression, grounded in binary definitions of masculinity and femininity.

## **2 The surprising findings about perceptions of gender have far-reaching implications for all young people.**

Rather than affecting a particular subset of people, limited and binary expectations around gender confront and limit all of us. Numerous programs have been developed to address the bullying experienced

by children and youth seen as “different.” While the motives underlying these are laudable, the objectives of such efforts only take us part of the way in creating safe spaces for all children and youth. Solely focusing on the differences of others can prevent us from looking at and appreciating the uniqueness of all of us. How many children have veered away from their passions or interests simply because someone else told them they didn't line up with standard notions of gender? What amazing discoveries or artistic creations never came to be because a girl was steered away from science or a boy from the arts? Rather than focusing on how to support gender-expansive children and youth, we need to expand the circle and create space for the celebration of the gender diversity in all of us.

## **3 There is a great need for far more exploration.**

This report highlights the gender-related questions in a larger study of LGBT youth. Additional research with more gender-related questions would give us a deeper and broader understanding of gender, its relationship to sexual orientation, gender transitions, access to school and community spaces, and more.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## SUGGESTED BOOKS

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**Gender Born, Gender Made**  
by Diane Erhenshaft  
<http://genderborngendermade.com>

**Raising My Rainbow: Adventures in Raising a Fabulous, Gender Creative Son** by Lori Duron  
<http://raisingmyrainbow.com>

**The Transgender Child** by Stephanie Brill & Rachel Pepper  
<https://www.genderspectrum.org/store>

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## FOR YOUTH

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**It Gets Better**  
[www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)

**Gender Spectrum Lounge**  
[www.genderspectrum.org/join](http://www.genderspectrum.org/join)

**The Trevor Project**  
[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

**Youth Pages**  
[www.safeschoolscoalition.org/youth/index.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/youth/index.html)

**YouthResource by Advocates for Youth**  
[www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)

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## FOR PARENTS & FAMILY MEMBERS

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**Children's National Medical Center Gender and Sexuality Psychosocial Programs**  
[www.childrensnational.org](http://www.childrensnational.org)

**Family Acceptance Project**  
<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>

**Gender Spectrum**  
[www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)

**PFLAG's Transgender Network**  
<http://community.pflag.org/transgender>

**Philadelphia Trans-Health Conference**  
[www.trans-health.org](http://www.trans-health.org)

**TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation**  
[www.transkidspurplerrainbow.org](http://www.transkidspurplerrainbow.org)

**TransYouth Family Allies**  
[www.imatyfa.org](http://www.imatyfa.org)

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## FOR FRIENDS

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**Advocates for Youth**  
[www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)

**It Gets Better**  
[www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)

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## FOR TEACHERS, SCHOOL OFFICIALS & COACHES

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**Gender Spectrum**  
[www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)

**GLSEN**  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

**GSA Network**  
[www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

**HRC's Welcoming Schools**  
[www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org)

**HRC's Youth Well-Being Project and Annual Time to THRIVE Conference**  
[www.timetothrive.org](http://www.timetothrive.org)

**PFLAG's Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All**  
<http://community.pflag.org/safeschools>

**Safe Schools Coalition**  
[www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)

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## FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

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**Call To Action**  
<http://cta-usa.org>

**Dignity USA**  
[www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)

**Fortunate Families**  
[www.fortunatefamilies.com](http://www.fortunatefamilies.com)

**Gender Identity & Our Faith Communities**  
[www.hrc.org/resources/entry/gender-identity-and-our-faith-communities-a-congregational-guide-for-transg](http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/gender-identity-and-our-faith-communities-a-congregational-guide-for-transg)

**Living Openly in Your Place of Worship**  
[www.hrc.org/resources/entry/living-openly-in-your-place-of-worship](http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/living-openly-in-your-place-of-worship)

# APPENDIX:

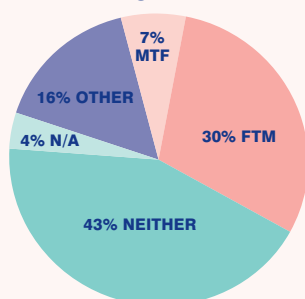
## GENDER QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN YOUTH SURVEY

In 2012, the Human Rights Campaign conducted a survey of 10,030 LGBT-identified youth, ages 13 to 17. The survey included the three questions specific to gender listed here.

The tables displayed here show how the majority of survey respondents (gender-expansive or not) rated their gender from 0 (male) to 10 (female). For all groups, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, it is apparent that the youth's experience of gender is not strictly male or female. For example, when asked to rate how "male" or "female" they feel on a scale from 0 (male) to 10 (female), more than one-quarter of straight cisgender male youth answered a number other than 0; the same is true for more than 40 percent of straight cisgender females.

Note: Youth who identified their gender as "transgender" or "other" (n=925) for the first question were asked if they had transitioned their gender. Seven percent of these youth (n=63) indicated a transition from male to female (MTF), 30 percent (n=278) from female to male (FTM) and 43 percent (n=396) indicated neither MTF or FTM. The remaining either answered "other" (n=146, 16 percent) or did not complete this question (n=42, 6 percent).

### GENDER TRANSITIONS REPORTED



### SURVEY QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO GENDER

1. Do you consider yourself male, female, transgender or other gender (e.g., genderqueer or androgynous\*)?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- I prefer to identify my gender as: (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Decline to answer

2. (IF GENDER = TRANSGENDER OR OTHER) Would you say that you transitioned...?

- From male to female
- From female to male
- Neither
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Decline to answer

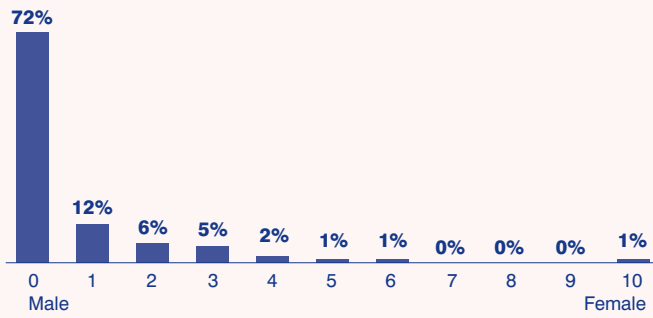
3. Most people are born either male or female, but often feel or behave in a way that is different from what society believes is male or female behavior. On the scale below, please indicate either how male or female you feel.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Male Female

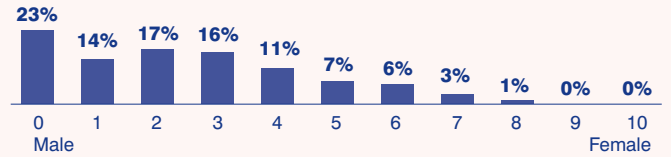
\*See Gender-Related Terms & Definitions



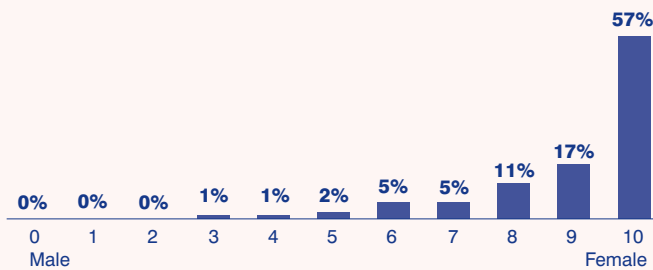
**Gender: Male;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Straight**  
 (n = 161, 5 missing ratings)



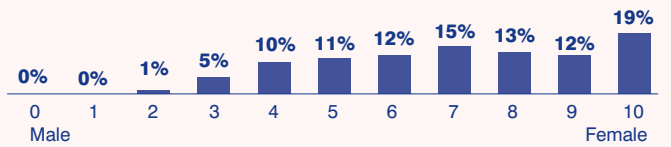
**Gender: Male;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Queer**  
 (n = 3,393, 13 missing ratings)



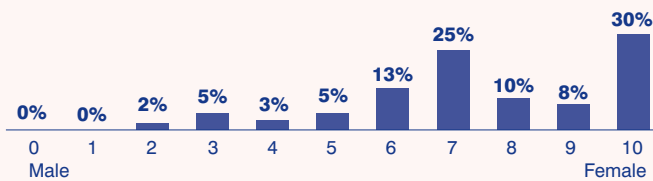
**Gender: Female;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Straight**  
 (n=306, 0 missing ratings)



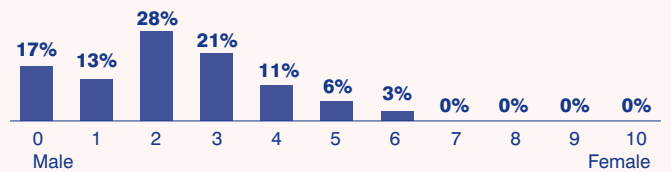
**Gender: Female;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Lesbian, Bisexual or Queer**  
 (n = 5,679, 20 missing ratings)



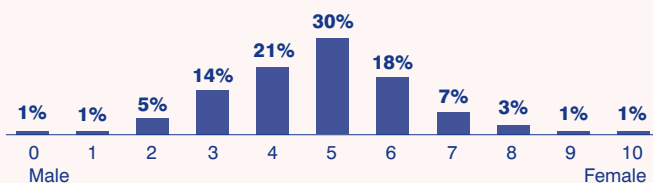
**Gender: Transgender or Other;**  
**Gender Transition: Male to Female;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer or Other**  
 (n=61, 2 missing ratings)



**Gender: Transgender or Other;**  
**Gender Transition: Female to Male;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer or Other**  
 (n=277, 1 missing rating)



**Gender: Transgender or Other;**  
**Gender Transition: Neither;**  
**Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer or Other**  
 (n=395, 1 missing rating)



# METHOD OLOGY

This study includes a review of frequencies and cross-tabulations of raw data from research conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner. That original data included 10,030 LGBT-identified youth and nearly 500 non-LGBT youth. This page gives a full description of the original methodology. Most of the LGBT youth were recruited through the public URL described on this page; the 5 percent of respondents to the Harris Poll Online who identified as LGBT were also included in the sample of LGBT youth.

In a survey question asking respondents to identify their gender, these gender-expansive youth identified their gender as transgender (n= 319) or selected the gender option “I prefer to identify my gender as: \_\_\_\_\_.” (n= 606).

For context and to better understand their experiences, their responses are sometimes compared to the responses of

straight cisgender youth (n=472) from an online panel sample, as well as LGB cisgender youth among the 10,030 LGBT-identified youth (n=9,105).

Anne E. Nicoll, Ph.D., Nicoll Consulting, is responsible for the data analysis and findings presented in this report. If not otherwise indicated, the quotes in this report come from youth respondents. Spelling and some punctuation in direct quotes from youth respondents have been corrected.

## **PUBLIC URL**

Working with the Human Rights Campaign and Harris Interactive Service Bureau, who hosted the survey, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner created a link that allowed participants to take this survey online. Participants invited to the study through this source were screened for (self-identified) LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer) status.

This method was used to collect the overwhelming majority of LGBT interviews in this study. It produced a sample of 10,030 participants ages 13-17 who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. Certain questions in the survey were directed only to self-ascribed LGBT respondents.

During April and May of 2012, the Human Rights Campaign advertised this link through social media and through direct communication with LGBT youth centers across the country. This method of collecting interviews is common in exploring hard-to-reach populations, but it does not represent a truly random opt-in

sample. As a result, traditional measures of margin of error do not apply, and the results here may not be representative of this population as a whole.

## **ONLINE PANEL**

This research also includes 510 interviews among respondents ages 13-17 drawn from the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> (HPOL). These interviews were not screened for LGBT status and compose the “non-LGBT” population in this study. Note, however, that 5 percent of these respondents self-identified as LGBT and were asked questions directed at this population.

**The Human Rights Campaign is thankful to The Trevor Project for its partnership in promoting the 2012 survey, along with dozens of local and statewide LGBT youth-serving organizations.**

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Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> (HPOL) is a multimillion-member panel of cooperative online respondents. Panelists have joined the Harris Poll Online from more than 100 different sources. Diverse methods are leveraged to gain panelists, including co-registration offers on partners' websites, targeted emails sent by online partners to their audiences, graphical and text banner placement on partners' websites (including social media, news, search and community portals), trade show presentations, targeted postal mail invitations, TV advertisements and telephone recruitment of targeted populations.

When respondents are recruited into this panel, it is made very clear that they are joining a market research panel and that they will be asked periodically to participate in online research. They are shown the terms and conditions of panel membership as well as the privacy policy. Panelists must agree to the Terms

of Use, which state that panelists are limited to a single membership and can be removed if they are found in violation of this rule.

All panelists recruited have completed a "confirmed" or "double" opt-in (COI/ DOI) process. This process requires that each registrant confirm his or her desire to join the panel by clicking on a link within an email that is sent to the registrant's email address upon registering. The content of the email specifies that by clicking on the link the registrant is expressly stating his or her desire to take part in the panel. Once they consent to join the panel, members are invited to participate in various surveys through email invitations that include a short description of the research and indicate the approximate survey length.

The research policies for U.S.-based research comply with the legal codes of conduct developed by the Council of American

Survey Research Organizations (CASRO). According to CASRO guidelines, the minimum age to consent to participate in survey research in the United States is 13. Data for this survey were collected by Harris Interactive Service Bureau ("HISB") on behalf of the Human Rights Campaign. HISB was responsible for the data collected and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner was responsible for the survey design, data weighting, data analysis and reporting of any/all methods that apply.

A key issue in interviewing children both responsibly and legally is appropriate parental consent, which is required before conducting research with children under the age of 13. For 8- to

12-year-olds, Harris Interactive obtains consent from parents, who are HPOL panelists themselves, using well-defined parental permission policies. Panelists identified as age 18-plus with an 8- to 12-year-old child living in the household are sent email invitations with a link to the child survey. The invitations specify that the survey is intended for their child and explain the content and approximate length of the survey. If the parent agrees to allow their child to participate in the survey, they are asked to provide the link to their child. This process is also used to supplement the 13- to 17-year-old panel through targeted panelists age 18-plus with a 13- to 17-year-old in the household. To see the survey itself, visit [www.hrc.org/youth](http://www.hrc.org/youth).

**To see the survey itself in its entirety,  
see [www.hrc.org/youth](http://www.hrc.org/youth).**

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[WWW.GENDERSPECTRUM.ORG/YOUTH](http://WWW.GENDERSPECTRUM.ORG/YOUTH)

