



Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) Statement on Gender Affirmation: The Role of Psychology in Providing Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender, Nonbinary, Gender-Diverse, and Intersex People

13 November 2024

In light of recent events that have called the attention of the public to the position of psychologists on gender affirmation and public statements that have maligned transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people, the PAP is releasing this statement for the information of the public on the state of psychological science on the meaning of gender identity and assigned sex at birth. The PAP wishes to correct any misconception or misrepresentation of psychology as a discipline and as a profession and asserts that psychology has long recognized the diversity of sex, gender, and sexuality among people as a normal and natural part of human experience. The PAP wishes to uphold the professional and ethical responsibility of psychologists to provide gender-affirming mental health care. Hence, we wish to mitigate the harm caused by any public statement that has misrepresented psychologists as against gender affirmation. We reiterate that gender affirmation is not a matter of opinion but a matter of scientific knowledge and ethical professional practice.

The PAP affirms transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people, respects their right to humane treatment, values their inherent human dignity, supports their health and well-being, and promotes their access to evidence-based psychological and mental health support.

The PAP reiterates its stand against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) as first issued in its policy statement on the non-discrimination on the basis of SOGIE in 2011¹ and subsequently reissued in 2013 and 2020.

The PAP affirms the scientific consensus that the experience of being and identifying as transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people are a natural and normal part of human experience.

There is nothing innately wrong with people with transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-diverse identities. While there are people whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth, there are also people whose gender identity may not match their assigned sex at birth. Psychological research has shown that assigned sex at birth based on

¹ Psychological Association of the Philippines (2011). Non-Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression.



multiple biological characteristics, may not always match a person's gender identity, or one's psychological sense of self in relation to their gender.² People whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth are referred to as **cisgender**.³ People whose gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth are referred to as **transgender**.⁴

There are many ways of experiencing one's sense of self in relation to gender as part of the normal and natural diversity of gender identity in people, or what is referred to in psychological science as gender variance or the spectrum of gender.⁵ Cisgender men are born in male-assigned bodies while transgender men are born in female-assigned bodies. Cisgender men and transgender men are men. Cisgender women are born in female-assigned bodies whereas transgender women are born in male-assigned bodies. Cisgender women and transgender women are women. People who experience their gender identity as neither man or woman may identify as **nonbinary**.⁶ People who experience their gender identity as fluid or non-existent may identify as **agender**.⁷

While biological sex has long been assumed as having only two categories of male and female, biological science has recognized that people can have sex characteristics that do not follow the sex binary.⁸ People born with mixed biological sex characteristics beyond the two sexes are referred to as **intersex**.⁹ Biological sex is now referred to as **assigned sex at birth** to emphasize that assigning sex at birth, often by a medical professional, is a medical or social practice that has long been based on the two-sex or binary system.¹⁰ There are now movements within the biological sciences to develop the appropriate language to represent the diversity of human beings in terms of biological sex and diverse sex characteristics.

² Morgenroth, T., & Ryan, M. K. (2021). The effects of gender trouble: An integrative theoretical framework of the perpetuation and disruption of the gender/sex binary. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 1113-1142.

³ American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Cisgender. In APA dictionary of psychology. Retrieved June 26, 2024 from <https://dictionary.apa.org/cisgender>

⁴ American Psychological Association. (2023). Transgender. In APA dictionary of psychology. Retrieved June 26, 2024 from <https://dictionary.apa.org/transgender>

⁵ Morgenroth, T., & Ryan, M. K. (2021). The effects of gender trouble: An integrative theoretical framework of the perpetuation and disruption of the gender/sex binary. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 1113-1142.

⁶ Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C., & van Anders, S. M. (2019). The future of sex and gender in psychology: Five challenges to the gender binary. *American Psychologist*, 74(2), 171-193. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000307>.

⁷ Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C., & van Anders, S. M. (2019).

⁸ Polderman, T. J., Kreukels, B. P., Irwig, M. S., Beach, L., Chan, Y. M., Derks, E. M., ... & International Gender Diversity Genomics Consortium. (2018). The biological contributions to gender identity and gender diversity: bringing data to the table. *Behavior Genetics*, 48, 95-108.

⁹ Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). The five sexes, revisited. *Sciences*, July 2000.

¹⁰ Polderman, T. J., Kreukels, B. P., Irwig, M. S., Beach, L., Chan, Y. M., Derks, E. M., ... & International Gender Diversity Genomics Consortium. (2018). The biological contributions to gender identity and gender diversity: bringing data to the table. *Behavior Genetics*, 48, 95-108.



The PAP affirms the existence and lived experiences of transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people and their unique struggles to live lives free from stigma, discrimination, and violence.

While having diverse gender identities does not imply illness or disorder, it is well-established that identifying and expressing oneself as having diverse gender identities puts one at serious risk due to violence, prejudice, and discrimination.¹¹ People around the world face violence and inequality, sometimes torture, execution, and murder, because of their SOGIESC. Abuses worldwide include “torture, killing and executions, arrests under unjust laws, unequal treatment, censorship, medical abuses, discrimination in health and jobs and housing, domestic violence, abuses against children, and denial of family rights and recognition.”¹² Such stories within the Philippines and in Southeast Asia are “marked by stories of stigmatization, violence, and exclusion within the social, economic, and political lives of their communities and nations”, including domestic abuse, school bullying, murders, unlawful arrests, censorship, denial of rights to family, and unjust treatment in private and public services from healthcare.¹³ These forms of discrimination and violence “can have a devastating effect on physical, mental and emotional well-being for those forced to endure it.”¹⁴ More recent national data also found that such experiences of discrimination, specifically non-affirmation of their gender identity such as by the refusal to use their chosen pronouns, had serious negative impacts on transgender persons’ mental health.¹⁵

The unique struggles of transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people are rooted in the sex/gender binary system that becomes the basis for stigma, discrimination, and violence.¹⁶ The sex/gender binary dictates that there are only two sexes, and consequently, only two genders, hence, the binary. In this system, gender identity is assumed and is expected to match one’s assigned sex at birth. Sexual orientation is also assumed to follow the sex/gender binary with assumed heterosexuality. As such, the sex/gender binary has perpetuated cisgender privilege and heteronormativity, consequently marginalizing, minimizing, invisibilizing, and at times even erasing diverse sexes, gender identities, and sexual orientations that do not follow the cisgender and heterosexual norm. While the

¹¹ Cooper, K., Russell, A., Mandy, W., and Butler, C. (2020). The phenomenology of gender dysphoria in adults: A systematic review and meta-synthesis. *Clinical Psychology Review*.

¹² Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). LGBT Rights. <https://www.hrw.org/topic/lgbt-rights>

¹³ ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (2017). The Rainbow in Context: An Overview of the Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) Persons in Southeast Asia.

¹⁴ Amnesty International (n.d.). LGBTI Rights. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/lgbti-rights/>

¹⁵ Reyes, M.E.S, Torre, B.T., Bautista, A.D., Castañeda, J.G.M., Delos Santos, J.J.I., Muyargas, M.M., Taylor, A.B., Eden, T. M., Hobaica, S., Lara, E.A., Jauregui, J.C., Jarrett, B.A., Suffredini, K., & Nath, R. (2024). 2024 Philippines national report on the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people. West Hollywood, California.

¹⁶ Morgenroth, T., Sendén, M. G., Lindqvist, A., Renström, E. A., Ryan, M. K., & Morton, T. A. (2021). Defending the sex/gender binary: The role of gender identification and need for closure. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12(5), 731-740.



sex/gender binary privileges cisgender and heterosexual people, it perpetuates the stigma, discrimination, and violence experienced by transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people.

And yet, the lives of gender-diverse people have been documented since precolonial times in Asia, including Southeast Asia and the Philippines. The *Babaylan*, *Asog*, *Catalonan*, and *Bayoguin* were among the groups of people whose gender identity and gender expression were different from their assigned sex in precolonial Philippines.¹⁷ The *babaylans* were highly venerated in their communities and believed to be shamans, elders, high priests and priestesses, and leaders of societies. Their status were comparable to that of the *Hijras* of South Asia in precolonial times, the *Bissu* of the Bugis tribe in Sulawesi, Indonesia, the *Mahu* of Hawaii, the *Fa'afafine* of the Samoas, and the *Two-Spirit* people of North America.¹⁸ The Spanish colonial years suppressed the visibility and prominence of gender-diverse people, consequently erasing and silencing transgender lives across history, only to be reclaimed later on with the visibility of *transpinays* (trans and *Pinay* or Filipina woman).¹⁹

The PAP affirms the use of gender-affirming mental health practices and health care, as well as the creation of gender-affirming spaces for transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people.

The discrimination and violence that transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse people encounter in their everyday lives can significantly and negatively affect their overall well-being, especially their mental health.²⁰ Numerous studies have shown that these experiences of discrimination and violence can lead to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and even suicidality.²¹ Transgender people experience this distress not because there is something inherently wrong with their identities, but because of how society relates to them as they challenge the idea of the gender binary. This is well documented in research and in the lived experiences of transgender individuals in their daily lives. A recent study of Filipino transgender men showed how they experience an identity crisis as they resist the gender

¹⁷ Brewer, C. (1999). Baylan, asog, transvestism, and sodomy: gender, sexuality, and the sacred in early colonial Philippines. *Intersections: Gender, history and culture in the Asian context*, 2, 1-5.

¹⁸ Alegre, B. R. (2022). From Asog to Bakla to Transpinay. *Alon: Journal for Filipinx American and Diasporic Studies*, 2(1), 51-64.

¹⁹ Alegre, B. R. (2021). Transpinay. *The Sage encyclopedia of trans studies*, 877-878.

²⁰ Newcomb, M. E., Hill, R., Buehler, K., Ryan, D. T., Whitton, S. W., & Mustanski, B. (2020). High burden of mental health problems, substance use, violence, and related psychosocial factors in transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse youth and young adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(2), 645–659

²¹ Fernández-Rouco, N., Carcedo, R. J., & Yeadon-Lee, T. (2020). Transgender identities, pressures, and social policy: A study carried out in Spain. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(5), 620–638.



binary, perform femininity to protect themselves from discrimination, and live in constant navigation of the gender binary as they claim and reclaim their authentic self.²²

The personal struggle of transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-diverse people for gender affirmation, support, and care is embedded inside wider communities and societies. Families have a crucial role in providing the affirmation, validation, care, and support that can help alleviate the psychological distress gender-diverse people experience in the everyday.²³

Psychologists alongside medical professionals and mental health practitioners and advocates can help support the creation of gender-affirming spaces that recognize gender-diverse identities, lives, and existence. This begins with the consistent use of correct pronouns and chosen names, which significantly impacts clients' sense of safety and validation in a therapeutic setting.²⁴ Clinicians can foster supportive spaces by using inclusive language, actively educating themselves on gender diversity, and challenging cisnormative assumptions, which are often ingrained in traditional mental health practices.²⁵ Regular training and exposure to updated research on gender diversity help practitioners stay informed on the evolving terminology and the systemic issues impacting gender-diverse individuals.²⁶ Similarly, depathologizing transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse, and intersex communities by exercising caution on the use of gender dysphoria as a diagnosis and refraining from engaging in sexual orientation change efforts or conversion therapy can help foster a respectful, safe, and affirmative healthcare environment.^{27,28} Further, supervision from a gender-affirmative practitioner may help if practitioners are willing but unprepared to engage in gender-affirming practices.²⁹ Ultimately, the promotion of gender-affirming mental health practices and health care can reduce gender-diverse people's psychological distress, protect them from harm, and

²² Borres, M., & Ofreneo, M. A. (2023). The Dialogical Self and Transgender Identity: How Filipino Transgender Men Navigate Tensions between I-Positions. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 1-22.

²³ Ofreneo, M. A. P., Alegre, B., De Vela, T., & Gamalinda, T. (2024). Navigating LGBTIQ+ Identities in Adolescence: Dialogical Tensions of the Self as Embedded in Familial, Cultural, and Societal Contexts. In *Global Perspectives on Adolescents and Their Families* (pp. 39-69). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

²⁴ Knutson, D., Koch, J. M., & Goldbach, C. (2019). Recommended terminology, pronouns, and documentation for work with transgender and non-binary populations. *Practice Innovations*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000098>

²⁵ Waldron, E., Solonsch, L., & Stone, L. (2022). Dialectics, power dynamics, and undercurrents of meaning: Using psychotherapeutic strategies in primary care with trans and gender-diverse clients. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.1071/py22156>

²⁶ Spencer, K. G., Berg, D. R., Bradford, N. J., Vencill, J. A., Tellawi, G., & Rider, G. N. (2021). The gender-affirmative life span approach: A developmental model for clinical work with transgender and gender-diverse children, adolescents, and adults. *Psychotherapy*, 58(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000363>

²⁷ Oularis, C. (2022). Models of care for gender dysphoria in young persons: How Psychiatry lost and is finding its voice. *Psychiatry Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2022.114923>

²⁸ American Psychological Association (2021). APA resolution on sexual orientation change efforts. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-sexual-orientation-change-efforts.pdf>

²⁹ Rutter, P. A., Leech, N. N., Anderson, M., & Saunders, D. (2010). Couples counseling for a Transgender-Lesbian couple: Student counselors' comfort and discomfort with sexuality counseling topics. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 6(1), 68–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15504280903472816>



support their physical and psychological safety. The PAP encourages the Filipino public to continually carve out safe spaces of support by listening to and amplifying the voices of transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-diverse people.

The PAP affirms the professional and ethical responsibility of psychologists to uphold the rights and wellbeing of all individuals, and to build gender-affirming care within psychology as a discipline and as a profession.

The PAP's Code of Ethics and the aforementioned position papers make clear that Filipino psychologists and mental health practitioners have a responsibility to promote and protect the rights and wellbeing of all persons.³⁰ This means recognizing and respecting the diversity of people's experiences and contexts, and providing evidence-based support and opportunities towards enhanced quality of life. Evidence for how this can be done in practice and policy is continuously being generated, such as in recent statements by other professional psychological organizations, such as the American Psychological Association, as well as allied health professions, such as the Pediatric Endocrine Society.^{31,32} Significant work is currently being done in developing gender-affirming mental health practice and health care for individuals and communities in the Philippines. Psychologists and mental health practitioners play a critical role in creating empathic and evidence-based responses to the needs of transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex people.

Affirming diverse gender identities and gendered lives is essential as we develop our understanding of humanity in all its complexity. The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) remains committed to promoting evidence-based gender-affirming practices that respect and uplift the experiences of transgender, nonbinary, gender-diverse, and intersex individuals. By fostering affirmative spaces and advocating for equitable access to mental health care, we can create a supportive trajectory that addresses the unique challenges faced by these communities. This aligns with our vision and mission statements to serve all members effectively, promoting ethical practice by ensuring that every individual receives the recognition and respect they deserve. Together, let us cultivate a society that not only acknowledges but celebrates gender diversity, ultimately enhancing the well-being of ALL Filipinos.

³⁰ Psychological Association of the Philippines Committee on Ethics and Professional Standards (2022). Code of Ethics for Philippine Psychologists and Psychometricians.

³¹ American Psychological Association (2024). APA Policy Statement on Affirming Evidence-Based Inclusive Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary Individuals, Addressing Misinformation, and the Role of Psychological Practice and Science.

³² Lopez X, Marinkovic M, Eimicke T, Rosenthal SM, Olshan JS; Pediatric Endocrine Society Transgender Health Special Interest Group (2017). Statement on gender-affirmative approach to care from the pediatric endocrine society special interest group on transgender health. *Current Opinions in Pediatrics*, 29(4):475-480.