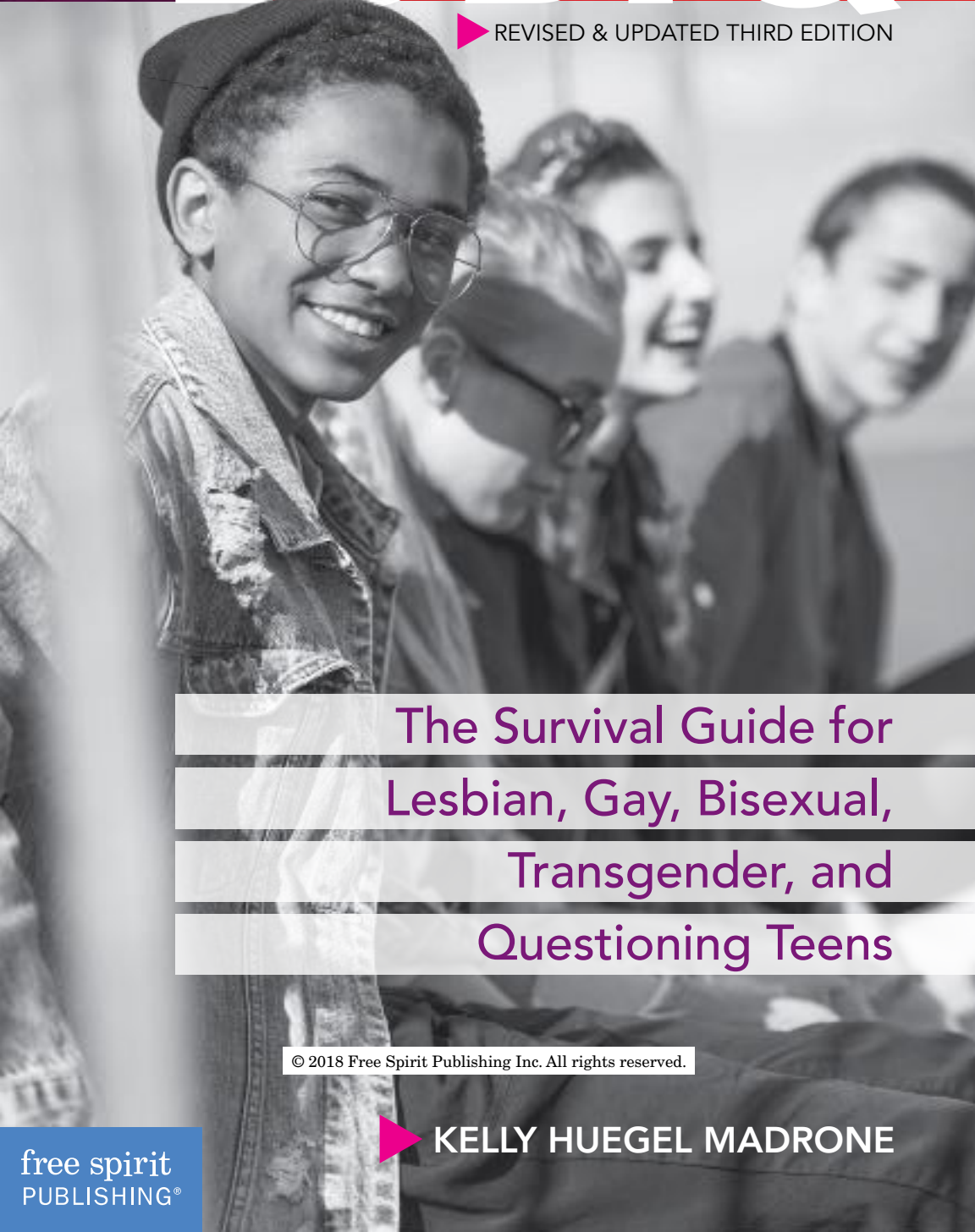




# LGBTQ

▶ REVISED & UPDATED THIRD EDITION



## The Survival Guide for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens

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▶ KELLY HUEGEL MADRONE

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## Dedication

For Mala—my partner in all things—who taught me to love outside of labels.

For our daughters: May you grow as big as you want to be in a world that loves you for who you are.

And for queer kids and young adults everywhere: Keep going. Keep being you to your fullest. Keep pushing the world to grow. You have my full love, respect, and support.

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Thank you to my family, on whose continued support and encouragement I rely. I'm so grateful to be linked to you by blood.

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Thanks to Free Spirit for going out on a limb with this book 15 years ago, for still believing in it, and for being a voice for young people on so many issues.

I wish to thank again all those who contributed to the earlier editions of this book, including the national organizations that provided facts, opinions, and expertise on these varied and sometimes complicated issues. I am just the mouthpiece—you are doing the work.

Finally, thank you to the fearless teens and young adults who lent their voices and their personal stories to this book. You are our future, and that future is very bright indeed.

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# Foreword

by Jillian Weiss

LGBTQ+ people have been around pretty much as long as recorded human history. To give you an idea, we're in the Old Testament of the Bible, and that was written about 3,000 years ago. Societies throughout history and around the world have had many different attitudes toward us—some positive, and some negative. In the United States, dominant attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people were very negative in the 1950s, which pushed more activists to work for LGBTQ+ civil rights in the 1960s. That's where I come in. For more than 20 years, I've worked as a lawyer to help LGBTQ people—particularly trans people—overcome discrimination and achieve equality through the use of US law. I'm one of a small group of trans civil rights lawyers, and it makes me so happy every day to work for greater freedom, acceptance, and respect for trans people and our community. Some days are better, and some days are worse. And I'm glad to know that one day, if society continues on its current path, people will understand being LGBTQ+ as just another way of being, like being left-handed or having green eyes. Reading this book is part of that process, so thank you.

You may not know that there was a time not long ago when lots of people thought there were hardly any lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming people out there. The world was made so hard for us that a lot of us went underground, not telling anyone who we were, like secret agents on a mission. It made me pretty sad when I was young. That's a hard life, and it's not part of any vision of equality that I would like to see. *Everyone* deserves equal protection under the law and equal treatment in the world. That's a vision worth working hard for. It's the work I do as a lawyer for LGBTQ+ people. It's the work *you* are doing right now by reading this book.

In fact, much of the work of equality will be done by people who are young right now, including you. You may be surprised to learn that you are at the forefront of creating change. But young people influence their friends and family just by existing—just by being who they are. Being who you are may not sound like change, but it's more powerful than you might realize. You can see it in history. As more people came out as lesbian, gay, and bisexual in the closing decades of the 20th century, more people started to realize that LGBTQ+ people are human beings, just like them. More people began to see that LGBTQ+ folks deserve to have dignity and civil rights and to be treated as nicely as other folks. That gave even more LGBTQ+ people the courage to say who they were.



Nevertheless, even ten years ago, relatively few people had come out as transgender or nonbinary. Plenty of people didn't know of any trans people except maybe some fictional TV characters, and thought there simply *weren't* many trans-identified people. They didn't know about trans identities such as nonbinary or genderqueer. I myself didn't come out as trans until I was older, because it seemed so incredibly scary to do that. It took me a long time to understand myself, partly because the society around me provided practically no guidance, except to tell me not to be true to myself. Today, people are starting to understand that there are more than just a few of us. For example, there are some well-known celebrities who are trans. Plus, a lot more trans young people are coming out to their parents—and a lot of those parents want to support their trans kids. And this brand-new edition of *LGBTQ* contains a lot more information about being trans than the previous edition did. That's great for lots of reasons, one of which is that it can be hard for young people to find the info they need. I sure wish I'd had this book when I was young. I'm very glad you get to have it.

Still, our work is far from done. Today, most people in the United States say they're just fine with LGBTQ+ people. There are, however, some who don't think that way. They're not bad people, but they have some questionable ideas. Maybe they were raised to believe that being LGBTQ+ is wrong in some way. This is where our work lies. Each of us can work toward helping others understand and accept new ideas—just like you might need someone to help you understand an idea that's new or different, so do they.

It's a beautiful thing to help make the world better. But sometimes it can be difficult, and you might feel like you don't want that responsibility. Some days, it can feel like we'll never be able to finish our work. Just remember: You don't have to finish it. You don't have to convince the whole world—or even your whole family—to see things your way. You can start by just being yourself. That may be all it takes to inspire others to join you in changing the world, little by little.

I wish there were a magic wand to wave to make the world all better right now. But real progress happens one conversation at a time, one person at a time, one idea at a time. I hope that this book will help you understand your world and, in turn, help others understand. That would make me very happy. So thank you, again, for reading. Now let's make the world a better place together.

**Jillian Weiss**

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# Introduction

Dealing with the realization that you are or might be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) can be a real challenge. And I know just how it feels. By the time I was in high school, I was convinced I was somehow different from everyone else—and not in a good way. But LGBTQ people weren't visible where I came from and it was well before the landmark event of Ellen coming out on her TV show, so the idea that there was an option (or *many* options) other than straight hadn't taken shape for me. I figured I just hadn't met the right guy yet—the one who would make me start daydreaming of a perfect wedding like so many of my friends were doing.

When I got to college, I finally met some people who were LGBTQ and out. Looking at them was like looking in a mirror. My feelings started to make sense, as though I'd finally found the missing piece to a big puzzle. At the same time, the thought that *I* might actually be queer frightened me a lot. What would my family and friends say? How could I live “that kind” of life? I felt hopeless. I was afraid to tell anyone what I was going through. I had other stressors in my life as well, and after years of conflict and suffering, I decided at age 20 that the only way to escape the pain was to end my life.

So one night I took an overdose of prescription pills. Then, as I looked at myself in the mirror, something happened. From somewhere deep inside me, I heard a voice telling me that I had to live. That no matter what happened, no matter how hard my life might be, it was a life worth experiencing. I didn't exactly believe it, but I still decided to listen. I told my boyfriend at the time (who was also an old friend) what I'd done and asked him to take me to the hospital.

That night was one of the hardest I've ever endured, but it was almost like the harder it got, the more I decided to fight—to learn how to stand in myself. It was a while before I was comfortable enough to come out to my friends and family, but eventually I did.

The journey from being confused and scared to the out and proud, fulfilled person I am today was a road traveled mostly by many small steps. One big leap, however, came in 2012 when I fell in love with my best friend Mala—a straight woman. Boy, did that

throw me for a loop! Suddenly there were these big feelings between us, but we were also terrified of damaging our friendship. To my amazement, after I told Mala I was willing to give it a shot, she said she was too—even though she'd never been attracted to a woman before.

Two years later, we were married. So much for labels! While Mala no longer assumes a straight identity, she doesn't identify as gay or bisexual either. In fact, she doesn't feel the need to declare herself to be anyone other than "the woman who loves Kelly." Ironically, the intense open-mindedness of a "formerly straight" girl has encouraged me to be more open to who I am. Whereas I used to identify as a lesbian, now I typically don't bother with labels.

### A WORD ABOUT WORDS

This book often uses the word *queer*. This term was once used as a slur to harass or demean LGBTQ people. While some people still use it this way, *queer* is now a word that many LGBTQ people use in a positive way. This book also uses the acronym LGBTQ, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. There are also many other common acronyms to describe the totality of people who identify as "not straight," "not cis" (*cisgender* or *cis* means having a gender identity that matches the sex you were assigned at birth), or "other." Those acronyms include LGBT+ and LGBTQIA (with the *I* for *intersex* and the *A* for *asexual*). LGBTQ is used in this book as a shorthand to represent all of these. For more information on LGBTQ terminology, see chapter 1 on page 10 and the glossary on page 233.

My relationship with Mala has helped me understand that when we as human beings are at our best, most trusting, and most self-aware, we are also most open to finding love—in whatever form it may take. That isn't to say that we're all going to declare ourselves to be pansexual (potentially attracted to any person) or beyond gender. Rather, it means that there are labels that serve us and labels that don't. After all, what label is big enough to encompass the expansiveness and capacity of the human heart?

My personal journey also illustrates two key ideas: First, your life can go places you never imagined. And second, sexuality and gender are evolving concepts. Where you are now is not necessarily where you will be in the future, and that is a beautiful thing. As I've

learned over and over, and in many different ways, life has a lot of incredible learning in store for us if we're open to it.

As for me, life is still challenging at times, but I'm so grateful to have it. When I look at our daughters (yep—Mala and I are moms, another label I never thought I'd have), when my family is laughing together, when I get to experience the exhilaration of helping other people, I think back to that night so many years ago when I wanted to end it all and thank my past self for having faith and holding on.

The more I've come to accept and love myself, the more opportunities I've had to get involved with helping other LGBTQ people and their families learn to love and accept themselves and each other. I've talked to young people terrified about coming out and to parents or other family members who are upset about or frightened for children who have just come out as LGBTQ. It's been amazing to watch these teens and families go from confusion and anger to acceptance and even joy about who they are.

(A quick aside: Without a doubt, households can look many different ways. Young people can be raised by one or more parents, an aunt or uncle, or a grandparent, or they may be in a foster home or some other less traditional situation. In this book, the word *parent* is intended to apply to any caring adult family member or other person who helps raise or otherwise take care of younger folks.)

I've also noticed a shift in the people who reach out to me at book signings and other events, on social media, or through letters or emails. More and more people are realizing at younger ages that they fall into the space of “not straight” or “not cis.” Consistently I see young people pushing the boundaries of what we understand about gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation, and that's awesome. Also, more and more parents tell me they're proud of their newly out kids and just want to know how they can be supportive and what they can do in their communities to help make these places safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ young people.

Still, for an LGBTQ teen, life can sometimes feel pretty lonely. Sure, there's a national LGBTQ rights movement and loads of organizations out there that support you, but day to day, it's easy to feel separated from all that. It's easy to think that no one cares about what you're going through. But people *do* care. All over the world, LGBTQ people and their parents, friends, family members, and others are working to promote understanding and acceptance of those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (and

everything in between and beyond). A lot of these efforts are focused on helping teens specifically. PFLAG has made school safety one of its primary concerns. (PFLAG originally stood for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, but the organization has since broadened its mission to include all family members as well as bisexual and transgender people.) GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) is focused entirely on improving the school environment for LGBTQ students. GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) is fighting for more positive and accurate messages about queer people in the media. Lambda Legal is dedicated to achieving full recognition of LGBTQ people's civil rights. And the list goes on.

Every day, people at other national and local organizations, in conjunction with LGBTQ young people, are making extraordinary progress in fighting for our rights. They're educating school boards, principals, teachers, and other school staff. They're holding in-school workshops and lobbying for better legislation at state capitol buildings and in Washington, D.C. Progress *is* being made—sometimes in small steps, sometimes in leaps and bounds, but always moving forward.

This book's first edition was published in 2003. After the second edition was published in 2011, I figured that might be it as far as big updates went. It seemed possible that we'd simply continue along a positive trajectory of achieving more and more rights for LGBTQ people. Then, in the wake of achievements like marriage equality, the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and presidential support of trans rights, a backlash began. Groups that oppose the recognition of LGBTQ civil rights have started using new legal strategies designed to undermine advances. Anti-LGBTQ hate crimes, especially against trans people, are on the rise. The message is clear: There's still much more work to do.

With all that in mind, this third edition of *LGBTQ: The Survival Guide for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens* has been fully revised to reflect (as much as is possible in a single volume) advances in LGBTQ rights and changes in culture, as well as the latest data on the lives and experiences of queer teens. The sections I was most excited to update, however, are about ideas less tangible than facts and figures. They have to do with the continually evolving attitudes among teens.

Today's queer teens are far more likely to be open-minded and to have a broad view of sexuality and gender expression. Back in my day (I get to say that now that I'm in my 40s), LGBTQ people generally identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans. Now, our understanding of gender and gender expression, and of sexuality and sexual orientation, has broadened exponentially. Today's teens are less likely to identify as one (or only one) of these labels, instead embracing a smorgasbord of identities from agender, ace, and androgyne to pansexual or skoliosexual. (By the way, for definitions of these words and many more, check out the glossary on page 233.)

Perspectives also have changed among straight and cis teens. Overall, they are more accepting and more aware of the issues their LGBTQ peers face (even though it might not always feel like that). The impact of these attitudes on society is exciting to contemplate. Overall, communities are becoming more accepting of all people—LGBTQ and straight/cis alike—due to this expanded awareness and understanding. For some people, challenging gender norms to greater degrees has created a space to explore their beliefs and, in many cases, reshape their understanding of who they are. Some of these people may not have even thought of themselves as LGBTQ in earlier times. When rigid definitions of “male,” “female,” “gay,” “straight,” and so on are lifted, all people get more space to be their phenomenal, unique selves.



#### PRO TIP

Many LGBTQ young people and their allies are coming up with creative ways to introduce queer topics at school and in their communities. Throughout this book, I've sprinkled in some “pro tips” alerting you to topics and activities that could make awesome school projects or GSA (gay-straight alliance) activities.

You might be thinking, “That’s great, but what about right now? What about at *my* school, where things aren’t so awesome?” It’s easy to say that everything will be okay someday or that this is just part of growing up. But those kinds of reassurances only go so far when the harassment or isolation is happening right now.

That's why I originally wrote this book. I remember very clearly what it was like—the worries, insecurities, fears. One moment you might be upset about the grade you got on a quiz; the next you're thinking about big questions like what you want to do with your life. And what if, on top of all that, you suddenly discover you're attracted to someone of the same sex? Or what if you dread changing for gym class because you're in the boys' locker room, but inside you've always felt more like a girl? Or what if you just don't see yourself and how you feel reflected anywhere around you?

Discovering that you might be LGBTQ is a big revelation, and for most, accepting it is a process. One thing that can help in that process is information. This book can't answer all your questions or counter all the misinformation and outright lies you may have heard about being LGBTQ. It does, however, have a lot of facts and advice you might not have found anywhere else yet.

## About This Book

What will you find in *LGBTQ*? For starters, you'll read information from experts in psychology, sociology, and healthcare. These authorities offer a lot of insight on what it means to be queer. You'll also find advice from people who work with national organizations advocating for LGBTQ rights, tips for coming out, ideas for creating a more accepting school environment, and help for a variety of other issues and situations.

This book also features true stories from teens and young adults who've been through situations you might be facing. Some of these stories may be very different from your own; others might seem to come right out of your life. These words from young people can offer support and real-life advice, and so can the loads of books, movies, websites, and other resources suggested throughout the book.

I wrote this book with all LGBTQ teens in mind. It's my hope that you'll find it helpful, whether you're secure with your sexual orientation or gender identity or just starting to explore these ideas. It's important to remember that when it comes to questions about being LGBTQ, there aren't a lot of cut-and-dried answers. Every LGBTQ person is unique, so it's difficult to provide answers that are appropriate for everyone. Even in the LGBTQ community, there isn't always agreement on details surrounding certain issues or even on how we refer to ourselves. This book offers commonly accepted

answers as well as suggestions for how you can find answers to your own questions.

This book is meant to be a guide—use it as you need it. You might read the book from cover to cover, or you might use the contents and index to direct you to sections addressing the specific issues you face. The book is a pressure-free zone. Regardless of where you are in your life, you can read the parts you're ready for. The goal isn't to come up with definitive answers, because answers often lead to other questions. And that's great. It's all part of getting to know yourself.

And if you're questioning or curious right now, that's okay too. You never have to pick a label for yourself if you don't want to. Many people choose to identify as queer or “other,” or to say, “I don't identify. I just am who I am.” The purpose of this book is not to encourage you to choose a label, but to help you get to know yourself and be more comfortable with who you are. That's what really matters. Remember, LGBTQ people come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. We are Black, Latinx, white, Native American, Asian, Arab American, and Indian. We are Catholic, Protestant, atheist, Buddhist, agnostic, Unitarian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim. We can be teachers, lawyers, doctors, construction workers, executives, athletes, artists, writers, politicians, or have any other type of job or career imaginable. And we are parents, friends, partners, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. LGBTQ people are everywhere, and we can be anything we want to be.

Since the previous two editions of this book were published, I've heard from readers, young and old, who have in some way been touched by its contents. Whether you have a question for me or a story of your own to share, I welcome and encourage you to contact me—I always love hearing from and connecting with readers. I can be reached via email ([help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com)) or at the following address:

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May you open to the love that surrounds you.

Lots of love,

**Kelly Huegel Madrone**



P.S. For the latest and greatest on all things LGBTQ, follow me on Twitter @LGBTQguide and on Instagram @lgbtqguide. If you're interested in catching up with me in person (I would love to meet you!), you can track me at [kellymadrone.com/events](http://kellymadrone.com/events).

### IF YOU NEED HELP . . .

While daily life is getting better for LGBTQ people, it can still be incredibly challenging. This can be especially true for young people who are realizing that they're queer. If you're feeling depressed or confused, or if you just want to talk to someone, call the Trevor Lifeline at 1-866-4-U-TREVOR (1-866-488-7386). Trained counselors will listen without judgment and provide advice on LGBTQ issues. The call is free, and it won't appear on your phone bill. You can call 24 hours a day, any day of the year. Additionally, there's the Trans Lifeline, which is a hotline staffed by trans people, for trans people. You can reach them at 1-877-565-8860. And if you don't want to (or can't) make a phone call, you can text the Crisis Text Line at 741741 to reach a trained counselor 24-7.

## CHAPTER 1

# LGBTQ 101



**We are everywhere.**

Maybe you've known for years that you're LGBTQ. Or maybe you are only now beginning to question your sexual orientation or gender identity. Regardless of where you're at, you're not alone.

A 2016 study reported that in a survey of members of Generation Z (people born between about 1996 and 2010), only 48 percent identified themselves as “exclusively heterosexual,” compared with 56 percent of millennials (people born in the 1980s and 1990s). Additionally, 56 percent of Generation Z responders said that they know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns.

However, it's difficult to come up with a standard figure for how many people are *really* LGBTQ. In any case, it's fair to say that there are a lot of us out there, and research shows that the numbers are growing. (This could be due to many factors, such as greater visibility for LGBTQ people and issues, more willingness among LGBTQ

people to self-identify whereas they may have been afraid to do so in the past, and broader definitions of what it means to be queer.)

Think about these statistics the next time you're at the movies or a football game. Whether you're aware of them or not, it's likely that people at your school, in your neighborhood, and in your family are LGBTQ.

### BY THE NUMBERS

The 2010 census was the first to count same-sex couples identifying themselves as spouses. In 2014, the Census Bureau started counting same-sex spouses as "married couples," rather than grouping them with "cohabitating partners." This new designation provides more accurate data on same-sex households, which could influence future legislative and funding decisions.

Yet many people are uncomfortable talking about differences in sexuality, and that can result in ignorance. You've probably grown up hearing some rumors and myths about LGBTQ people (I'll discuss some of the common ones in this book). Even the most well-intentioned people, including some LGBTQ people themselves, can be misinformed about what it means to be queer.

The most powerful response to bias and ignorance is knowledge. This chapter covers the fundamentals of being LGBTQ. Some of what follows might seem like very basic information. However, even if you consider yourself knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, you may be surprised by some of what you read.

## LGBTQ Terminology

One thing that can be confusing about the queer community is its terminology. Sometimes it seems like a whole different language exists. Even among LGBTQ people, there's a lack of consensus about definitions and about which words to use and when. And the language is constantly changing as our understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity evolve. Even the title of this book has changed (from *GLBTQ* to *LGBTQ*) as commonly accepted acronyms have shifted.

A few decades ago, it was common to say simply G&L, meaning gay and lesbian. When the *B* (for *bisexual*) was added, the acronym became GLB or LGB. Then the *T* (for *transgender*) and *Q* (for *questioning*) joined the party. Now you'll commonly see LGBT or LGBTQ

(and sometimes GLBTQ), or even LGBTQIA (*I* for *intersex* and *A* for *asexual*) or LGBT+ (with the + representing all the other identities that are not lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender).

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

The American Psychological Association, which has an entire office dedicated to sexual orientation and gender diversity, describes sexual orientation as an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to men, women, or both sexes (assuming a binary gender system in which all people are *either* male or female). It also refers to a person's sense of identity in relation to who they're attracted to.

According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, gender identity is the internal sense that people have of being female, male, some variation of these, beyond gender altogether, and so on. For many people, biological sex—which is based on chromosomes and sexual anatomy—and gender identity are the same. (The term for this is *cisgender*.) For those who are transgender (and for some who are nonbinary, which means having a gender identity outside the binary male/female system), their biological sexes and gender identities are different. Intersex people have sexual and/or chromosomal characteristics that are not limited to a single biological sex.

In this book, you'll see the consistent use of the acronym LGBTQ. When an issue applies specifically to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people, those specific words will be used. And although you'll read about people being either LGBTQ or straight/cis, remember that not all transgender people are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In fact, many trans people are heterosexual, and others simply don't identify with any of these labels. Referring to trans people as LGBTQ doesn't imply that they are necessarily lesbian, gay, or bisexual in their sexual orientations. But the full acronym LGBTQ is used throughout the book for consistency.

Another word used often in this book is *queer*. This word was once used negatively to describe LGBTQ people (and still is by some people). Now, many LGBTQ people and our allies (supporters) use it very positively. For example, you can find queer studies and queer theory courses at many colleges. People who are nonbinary

sometimes identify as genderqueer. The word *queer* is used in this book in a positive and affirming way. Queer is simply “other than the expected or average,” which in our culture right now is straight/cis. Some people believe the labels lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender are too limiting, so *queer* is also a great word because it frees you from using a specific label if you don’t want to.

### A NOTE ON PRONOUNS

One change throughout this edition of the book is that the pronoun *they* appears instead of *he* or *she*. While use of the singular *they* can set many an English teacher’s teeth on edge, it is a more inclusive pronoun than the binary *he* and *she*, and I’ve used it here for that reason. There’s also precedent for its use in classic works including those by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Byron, and Austen and in the King James Bible. And there is grammatical precedent for its use. In fact, in 2015, the American Dialect Society named singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun as their Word of the Year.

The glossary (page 233) includes a variety of terms used and identities described in this book, along with related words you might come across elsewhere. For now, let’s look at the basics.

**L is for lesbian.** Lesbians are women (cis or trans) who are physically and emotionally attracted to other women, often exclusively. The word *lesbian* has its origins with the Greek poet Sappho, who was born sometime between 630 and 612 BCE. For part of her life, Sappho lived on the island of Lesbos. Many of her poems were about same-sex love between women, and as a result, the island’s name became synonymous with homosexual women. That’s how the term *lesbian* was born.

**G is for gay.** This term often is used to describe both homosexual men and lesbians. As it refers to men, *gay* describes men (cis or trans) who are physically and emotionally attracted to other men. The word *gay* didn’t come into wide use to describe homosexual people in general until around the 1950s.

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

For some, identities such as lesbian or gay are fluid. For example, someone (like me) could identify as mostly lesbian, meaning I'm almost always attracted to women, but not exclusively. Likewise, people can be mostly gay or mostly straight. How does this differ from bisexual? Some might say it's the same thing, but it's really up to the individual to decide what terminology best fits them. So maybe you're attracted exclusively to either girls or guys. Maybe you're usually attracted to boys, but there's something about that girl in your chemistry class that really intrigues you. Maybe who you're attracted to just doesn't seem to correspond to sex or gender in any way, or maybe you feel emotional, but not necessarily physical, attraction toward others. It's all natural!

**B is for bisexual.** Classically, bisexual people are emotionally and physically attracted to people of either sex—male or female. However, this definition links it to the binary gender system. Sometimes people refer to themselves as bisexual as a means of identifying as questioning, or they identify as bisexual first and then later as gay or lesbian. However, many bisexual people are and remain bisexual, period—or they identify as pansexual (potentially attracted to any person, regardless of the person's sex or gender identity).

Unfortunately, people who identify as bisexual (or as any identity that includes attraction to more than one orientation or gender) can face ignorance even from within the gay community. They might be told they “just can't admit they're gay” or “can't make up their minds.” These statements are judgments—regardless of whether they're coming from LGBTQ or straight/cis people—and, as such, aren't helpful. Bisexual and pansexual people—like all people—should be accepted for who they are.

**T is for transgender.** Transgender people generally have feelings of being a different gender than their sex assigned at birth. What it means to be trans can be complicated and is often misunderstood. One misconception is that all transgender people want to have surgery or to take hormones to change their bodies. Some do, but others don't. Another misconception is that all trans people are homosexual. Trans people can be straight, but just like any other person, they can also be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or something else.

Some trans people start out identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and then later realize they are transgender (the reverse can happen as well). Also, some trans people are binary (self-identifying as male or female) while others are not.

Some of the issues and emotions transgender people may face, whether they're straight or queer, are similar to those that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people often experience. Feelings of isolation and the desire to come out, for example, are experiences that all LGBTQ people may have. However, there are other feelings and considerations that can come with identifying as a different gender from the sex you were assigned at birth (or from not identifying as a single gender). Some of these issues are addressed in chapter 2.

**Note:** The words *transgender* and *intersex* are sometimes confused, but they are not the same. *Intersex* is a term for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the stereotypical definition of male or female. You can read more about this in chapter 2.

**Q is for questioning.** People who are questioning are uncertain of their sexual orientations or gender identities, or they may just prefer not to label themselves with any particular orientation. Many teens are starting to embrace identifying themselves as questioning. A lot of things are changing during adolescence, and deciding that you're questioning can remove the pressure of choosing an identity like lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight.

## THE ROOTS OF QUEER LANGUAGE

According to *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past*, by the late 1800s, lesbians who dressed and "passed" as men had developed a more positive language to describe themselves. While others derogatorily used labels such as *inverts* and *he-shes* to identify them, these women began to use the word *dike*. At the time, this term referred to a man who was dressed up, or "diked out," for a night on the town. Today, the word *dyke* (now spelled with a y) is encountered in mixed contexts. Some use it as a derogatory term, while some lesbians embrace the word and self-identify as dykes. For example, a popular contingent at many Pride parades is Dykes on Bikes—a group of lesbians riding motorcycles.

## A Biology Lesson: The Science of LGBTQ

Why are some people LGBTQ and others aren't? At this point, there isn't a definitive answer, and there may never be one. Scientists, philosophers, psychologists, and a host of other thinkers have offered opinions and theories to answer the question, but for now, there isn't a 100 percent proof-positive reason. There has, however, been a lot of research attempting to determine what makes people LGBTQ, including a search for a "gay gene." Thanks to these efforts, scientists, healthcare professionals, and the general public have access to expanded information on sexual orientation and gender identity.

### The Kinsey Report

In the 1940s, a scientist named Dr. Alfred Kinsey and his team of researchers conducted a study of human sexuality in men. Based on this research, Kinsey determined that most men are neither completely gay nor completely straight. Instead, while some are at either end of the spectrum, most fall somewhere in the middle. He developed a six-point scale—the Kinsey scale—to illustrate this spectrum.

The Kinsey scale was revolutionary not only because it looked at queerness as predetermined, but also because it showed a vast gray area between gay and straight. Before Kinsey, many experts thought human sexuality was black and white—straight people were 100 percent straight and queer people 100 percent queer. Many also thought that straight people were "normal" and "well-adjusted," while queer people were "sick" or "deviant." Kinsey's research helped counter this myth and showed that homosexuality and bisexuality were much more common than previously thought.

#### SEXUAL ORIENTATION: THE KINSEY SCALE

- 0 Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 Exclusively homosexual



Kinsey was so intrigued by his research on male sexuality that he expanded his later work to include women, too. His best-known publications were the books *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

Though the statistical methods Kinsey used to conduct his studies don't measure up to the standards used for research today, there is still strong evidence that people fall within a spectrum of gender and sexuality.

If you've never thought of sexuality as a spectrum, the idea can be confusing at first. But if you think about all the complex factors that contribute to making a single human being, it can begin to make more sense. Every human characteristic is on a spectrum. Even within a single quality, there can be great variety. Take eye color, for example. A person with blue eyes can have light-blue eyes, deep-blue eyes, blue-gray eyes, and so on. Being human means being varied. So it makes sense that our sexual orientations, gender identities, and combinations of biologically male and female characteristics would vary as well.

### NEWER MODELS FOR GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Today, Kinsey's model of looking at everyone relative to a linear identity of gay or straight seems very limited. In recent years, several new multidimensional models for examining and explaining gender and sexual orientation have become popular. Some of them are cute, some are clever, but all take a more expansive view of sexual orientation than Kinsey's 0 to 6 scale. Two of the most popular multidimensional models are the Gender Unicorn ([www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)) and the Genderbread Person ([www.genderbread.org](http://www.genderbread.org)). Ideas addressed by these models include gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, and who one is physically and/or emotionally attracted to (if anyone). Some schools have even adopted these tools for use in teaching. One of the most useful things about the Gender Unicorn and the Genderbread Person is that the models acknowledge a full spectrum of being rather than assuming that each person is just *this* or just *that*—just gay or just straight, for example.

**Pro tip:** Examining and presenting different gender and sexuality models could be a really interesting school project or activity for your GSA.

“

## BEEN THERE

“For me, there was a lot of uncertainty in high school. I liked half the guys in my senior class, but I also had a crush on two girls on my block. That’s very confusing at an age when you are changing physically and mentally.” —Enrique, 20

## Why Are People Queer or Straight/Cis?

That’s the million-dollar question. Over the course of your life, you’ll hear a lot of theories about why some people are LGBTQ and others aren’t. There are queer people who believe you can choose to be LGBTQ. There are straight/cis people who believe you can’t. Some say it’s like putting on a suit that you can take off at any time. Others believe that it’s something deep inside you. You might even hear someone talk about how an experience “made” a person gay. Lots of people have their own theories about it, and if you haven’t already, you might develop one of your own. You might also decide you don’t care why.

While some scientists are working to discover a genetic component that makes people queer, most mental health professionals and LGBTQ advocates believe that being LGBTQ is probably the result of a complex interaction of environmental and biological factors. The American Psychiatric Association and advocacy groups like PFLAG don’t believe that being queer is a choice. The American Psychological Association (APA) maintains unequivocally that “human beings cannot choose to be either gay or straight.” In the APA pamphlet *Answers to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality*, it states, “[N]o findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. . . . Most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”