#### Sacramento City USD Board Policy

Transgender And Gender Non-Conforming Students

BP 5145.31

#### Students

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this Board Policy is to set out guidelines to District staff regarding issues related to transgender and gender non-conforming students. The Governing Board is committed to addressing the safety needs of all students, including those needs related to a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Board recognizes that a safe and civil environment is necessary for students to have equal access to all school programs and activities and is integral to student success. The Board acknowledges its role in providing students with an understanding of and respect for differences in the gender identity and gender expression of others.

This policy sets out guidelines for schools to follow in order to address the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming students. This policy sets forth how schools should respond to the needs of these students where questions may arise regarding how to protect the legal rights or safety of such students. This policy does not anticipate every situation that might occur and, therefore, the needs of each student must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, the goal is to ensure the safety, comfort and healthy development of the transgender or gender non-conforming student while maximizing the student's social integration into the school setting and minimizing stigmatization of the student.

- (cf. 0200 Goals for the School District)
- (cf. 1312.3 Uniform Complaint Procedures)
- (cf. 5137 Positive School Climate)
- (cf. 5142 Safety)
- (cf. 5145.3 Nondiscrimination/Harassment/Intimidation/Bullying)
- (cf. 5145.4 Anti-bullying)
- (cf. 5145.7 Sexual Harassment)

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that all educational programs and activities be conducted without discrimination based on race, color, and national origin. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requires that all educational programs and activities be conducted without discrimination based on sex or gender. Additional state and/or federal laws and regulations require that all educational programs and activities be conducted without discrimination based on the above factors as well as

additional factors, including but not limited to religion, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, parental status, or because of an association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. (Education Code 220 et seq.; Government Code 11135, 11138; Penal Code 422.55, 422.6) State law also directs that students shall be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs and activities, including athletic teams and competitions, and use facilities consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the student's records. (Education Code 221.5(f), effective Jan. 1, 2014)

Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall be assured that they need not endure, for any reason, any bullying (including cyber bullying) or harassment which impairs the educational environment or the student's emotional wellbeing in school. Harassment involves unwelcome comments (written or spoken), or conduct which creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment, or which violates an individual's rights.

(cf. 1312.3 - Uniform Complaint Procedures)
(cf. 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination and harassment)
(cf. 5145.4 - Anti-bullying)
(cf. 5145.7 - Sexual Harassment)

#### DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are not intended to label students, but rather to assist in the general understanding of this policy, the legal rights of students and the legal obligations of school/district staff. Although students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves, these definitions can be used as functional descriptors.

Assigned Sex at Birth: the assignment of people as "male" or "female" at birth based upon physical anatomy.

Gender Expression: How individuals express themselves, including characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, dress, grooming, mannerisms, movement, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

Gender Identity: An individual's understanding, outlook, feelings and sense of oneself being masculine, feminine, both or neither, regardless of one's assigned sex at birth.

Gender Marker: The "male" ("M") or "female" ("F") on a student's Infinite Campus profile, cumulative folder, and other documents is called a "gender marker."

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC): An individual who is, or is perceived to have, characteristics or behaviors that do not conform to societal expectations of gender

expression. Gender non-conforming individuals may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (see sexual orientation).

Gender Pronoun: A word that refers to someone who is being talked about in place of their name (e.g., she, he, they, ze).

Sexual Orientation: An individual's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. Individuals may identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or may use other terms.

Transgender: An umbrella term used to describe an individual whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth.

#### DETERMINING A STUDENT'S GENDER IDENTITY

Schools should avoid assuming the role of gatekeeper and should accept a student's asserted gender identity unless there is a credible basis for believing that the student is asserting a particular gender identity for some improper purpose. In such cases, the decision to deny a student's asserted gender identity will be made in consultation with the district's LGBTQ Support Services program.

There is no medical, mental health or legal threshold requirement that any student must meet in order to have their gender identity recognized and respected by a school.

The district will work with transgender and gender non-conforming students to provide protections in the following areas:

#### GENDER TRANSITION SUPPORT

Schools should be prepared to support transgender students who choose to transition while in school. Schools should not discourage transgender students or their families from a public transition simply because it requires additional planning. Regardless of whether a student's transition is public or private, schools should be prepared for a variety of contingencies that could occur. Schools should continue to support students beyond their transition to ensure that the school environment remains a safe and supportive place to learn. Consultation and resources are available within the district (Connect Center - LGBTQ Support Services Program) to assist schools with how to appropriately support transgender students with their transition whether this is done publicly or privately.

#### PRIVACY AND SCHOOL RECORDS/STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Transgender and gender non-conforming students have a right to privacy, including keeping their sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status or gender non-

conforming presentation at school private. School personnel should not discuss information that may disclose a student's transgender or gender non-conforming status to others, including parents/legal guardians and other school personnel, unless legally required to do so or unless the student has authorized such disclosure. Transgender and gender non-conforming students have the right to discuss and express their gender identity and expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much personal information one wants to share about oneself to others.

The Governing Board recognizes the importance of keeping accurate, comprehensive student records as required by law. The District is required to maintain an official, permanent pupil record with the legal name and gender appearing on the student's birth certificate. In addition, the District is required to have procedures for maintaining the confidentiality of student records which shall be consistent with state and federal law. In terms of privacy for transgender and gender non-conforming students, it is important to note the distinction between school records and legal documents, as not all school records are legal documents.

Transgender and gender non-conforming students have the right to have their requested name and/or gender marker and/or gender pronoun(s) reflected on all (non-legal) school physical records and documents (e.g. yearbooks, school IDs, library cards, lunch cards, class rosters, diplomas, other certificates of advancement, etc.) and in after-school programs. Transgender and gender non-conforming students are also able to have their requested name and/or gender marker reflected in the district's electronic Student Information Systems (e.g. Infinite Campus) via the Infinite Campus Name & Gender Update Form. Legal documents (e.g. official transcripts, IEPs, 504s, etc.) must have a student's legal name and gender marker, however, school staff shall use a student's requested name and gender pronoun whenever possible throughout these documents.

#### NAMES/PRONOUNS/GENDER MARKER

Transgender and gender non-conforming students have the right to be addressed by the name(s) and gender pronoun(s) that correspond to their gender identity. Using students' requested name(s) and pronoun(s) promotes the safety and wellbeing of students on campus. Students are not required to change their official school record or obtain a court-ordered name or gender change in order to be addressed at school by the name(s) and pronoun(s) which correspond to their gender identity. Such a request may be made by the student or by the student's parent or guardian. If a transgender or gender non-conforming student obtains a legal name and/or gender change, the student or student's parent/guardian should notify the school and the SCUSD Enrollment Center of the court ordered name and/or gender change, and the student's official school records will be modified as appropriate in accordance with the court order. (83 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 136 (2000)). In lieu of a legal name and/or gender change, students

or their parent/legal guardian may request a change to the student's name and/or gender marker via the Infinite Campus Name & Gender Update Form.

The intentional or persistent refusal to respect a student's gender identity such as by referring to the student by a name or pronoun that does not correspond to the student's gender identity could be considered bullying or a form of discrimination or harassment, and is a violation of this policy.

#### **RESTROOM ACCESS**

Schools may maintain separate restroom facilities for male and female students. (Education Code 231) Transgender and gender non-conforming students should be allowed access to restroom facilities that align with their gender identity. Ensuring access to restroom facilities that match a student's gender identity allows transgender and gender non-conforming students to maintain their right to privacy. Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall not be forced to use the restroom corresponding to their assigned sex at birth. If a transgender or gender non-conforming student or the student's parent/guardian provides notice to school officials of a request for the student to use the restroom that matches the student's gender identity, school officials shall permit the student to use said restroom. (Education Code 221.5(f), effective Jan. 1, 2014)

If a transgender or gender non-conforming student or the student's parent/guardian provides notice to school officials of a reason or desire for increased privacy and/or safety with regard to restroom use, regardless of the underlying reasons, the school shall take steps to provide a reasonable accommodation for the student, including but not limited to, providing the student access to gender neutral restroom facilities or a single stall restroom.

#### LOCKER ROOM ACCESS

Schools may maintain separate locker room facilities for male and female students. (Education Code 231) Transgender and gender non-conforming students should be allowed access to locker room facilities that align with their gender identity. Transgender and gender non-conforming students, however, shall not be forced to use the locker room corresponding to their assigned sex at birth. If a transgender or gender non-conforming student's parent/guardian provides notice to school officials of a request for the student to use the locker room that matches the student's gender identity, school officials shall permit the student to use said locker room. (Education Code 221.5(f), effective Jan. 1, 2014)

If a transgender or gender non-conforming student or the student's parent/guardian provides notice to school officials of a reason or desire for increased privacy and/or safety with regard to locker room use, regardless of the underlying reason, the student

shall be provided access to a reasonable alternative locker room, including but not limited to:

? Use of a private area in the locker room (such as a nearby restroom stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain, a P.E. instructor's office in the locker room, or a nearby gender neutral restroom) and/or

? A separate changing schedule (either utilizing the locker room before or after other students).

#### PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS AND ATHLETICS

Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall be permitted to participate in physical education classes and intramural sports, in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, pursuant to Title IX and the Code of Federal Regulations implementing Title IX and state law. (34 CFR 106.34(c); Education Code 221.5(f)., effective Jan. 1, 2014)

#### INTERSCHOLASTIC COMPETITIVE SPORTS TEAMS

Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall be permitted to participate in interscholastic sports teams in a manner consistent with their gender identity, pursuant to Title IX, and any other applicable laws, rules or bylaws. (Education Code 221.5(f), effective Jan. 1, 2014)

#### DRESS CODE

Transgender and/or gender non-conforming students have the right to dress in accordance with their gender identity and/or gender expression within the requirements of the school's dress code.

(cf. 5132 - Dress and Grooming)

#### YEARBOOKS

Students shall be permitted to dress in accordance with their gender identity and/or gender expression in all yearbook photos, including senior portraits. School may also adopt a standardized, gender neutral picture uniform such as a cap and gown.

Names in Yearbooks: Yearbooks are school records and are not legal documents. As such, transgender and gender non-conforming students are not required to use their legal names in school yearbooks and shall not be forced to do so. School administrators/school staff should honor requests from transgender and gender non-conforming students to confirm how these students' names will appear in the yearbook.

#### TRANSFERRING A STUDENT TO ANOTHER SCHOOL

Schools should strive to keep transgender and gender non-conforming students enrolled in their assigned school site. School sites must ensure that transgender or gender non-conforming students are being provided a safe school environment which allows them equal access to all components of their education. The opportunity to transfer to another school site should not be a school's first response to harassment or bullying of a transgender or gender non-conforming student, and such a transfer should be considered only when requested by a student and or parent/guardian and when necessary for the protection, personal welfare or safety of the transferring student. Schools should not offer or propose a transfer to another school on the assumption that a transgender or gender non-conforming student should expect to be harassed or bullied as a result of being open about their gender identity or gender expression.

#### GENDER SEPARATION IN OTHER ACTIVITIES

As a general rule, in any circumstances where students are separated by gender in school activities (e.g. classroom discussions, overnight field trips, national physical fitness testing, health and physical education classes, school dances and proms, etc.), transgender and gender non-conforming students shall be permitted to participate in accordance with their gender identity and/or gender expression. (Education Code 221.5(f), effective Jan. 1, 2014).

National Physical Fitness Testing (Fitness Gram) - Schools should allow transgender and gender non-conforming students the option to choose to test under the fitness guidelines that align with their assigned sex at birth or to test under the guidelines that align with their gender identity. Schools should inform students prior to making this choice of the differential standards for fitness testing for each gender. Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall not be forced to be assessed under the standard corresponding to their assigned sex at birth.

Overnight field trips - Transgender and gender non-conforming students should be allowed access to sleeping quarters that align with their gender identity. Transgender and gender non-conforming students shall not be forced to use sleeping quarters corresponding to their assigned sex at birth. In these instances, the school has an obligation to maintain the transgender/gender non-conforming student's privacy and cannot disclose or require disclosure of the student's transgender/gender nonconforming status to other students or their parents, regardless of whether the student's roommates know about the student's gender status.

Showering facilities - If showering facilities are communal, the school should find out whether the venue has available a single stall or more private shower facilities that students can use. Recognizing that a number of students may prefer more privacy while

showering, the school should consider creating a schedule to allow those students to use the shower facilities one at a time, with appropriate adult supervision.

Activities that may involve the need for accommodation to address student privacy concerns will be addressed on a case-by-case basis as requested by the student or parent/guardian. In such circumstances, staff shall make a reasonable effort to provide an available and reasonable accommodation for the student that can address any such concerns.

(cf. 4119.23/4219.23/4319.23 - Unauthorized Release of Confidential/Privileged Information) (cf. 5145.1 - Privacy) (cf. 5145.4 - Anti-bullying)

COMPLAINTS

A complaint of bullying based upon a student's transgender or gender non-conforming status, or a student's sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, may be submitted under the district's Anti-Bullying Board Policy 5145.4 and the procedures set forth therein. A student or a student's parent/guardian may also submit a formal written complaint of discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying through the district's Uniform Complaint Procedures pursuant to District policy and regulation 1312.3. A student's actual or perceived characteristics as set forth in Penal Code 422.55 and Education Code sections 220 and 234.1, which includes disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual or perceived characteristics, are protected classes. (5 CCR 4600-4671)

(cf. 1312.3 - Uniform Complaint Procedures)

(cf. 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination and harassment)

(cf. 5145.4 - Anti-bullying)

(cf. 5145.7 - Sexual Harassment)

Legal Reference: EDUCATION CODE 200-262.4 Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex, especially: 212.5 Sexual harassment 212.6 Sexual harassment policy 221.5 Prohibited sex discrimination 221.7 School sponsored athletic programs; prohibited sex discrimination

230 Particular practices prohibited

231 Toilet, locker room, or living facilities

35160 Authority of governing boards 35160.1 Broad authority of school districts 48900 Grounds for suspension or expulsion; bullying 48907 Student exercise of free expression 49602 Confidentiality of pupil information CODE OF CIVIL PROCEDURE 1276 Change of name **GOVERNMENT CODE** 11135 Nondiscrimination in programs or activities funded by state 11138 Rules and regulations HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE 103425 Petition for change of gender PENAL CODE 243.5 Assault or battery on school property 403-420 Crimes against the public peace, especially: 415 Fighting; noise; offensive words 422.55 Definition of hate crime 422.56 Definitions, hate crimes 422.6 Interference with constitutional right or privilege UNITED STATES CODE, TITLE 20 1681-1688 Title IX, 1972 Education Act Amendments **UNITED STATES CODE, TITLE 42** 2000d-2000d-7 Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended CALIFORNIA CODE OF REGULATIONS, TITLE 5 4600-4687 Uniform complaint procedures 4900-4965 Nondiscrimination in elementary and secondary education programs CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS, TITLE 34 106.34 Access to classes and schools ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS 83 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 136 (2000)

Policy SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT adopted: June 7, 2018 Sacramento, California



### What do I say when...?

Proactive ways to prevent negative interactions in schools Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D. California Polytechnic State University

# Workshop Objectives

- 1. To provide educators with the language and skills to effectively and consistently intervene in incidents of sexual, homophobic and transphobic harassment.
- 2. To offer educators short & long-term strategies for improving the climate in their schools in regards to gender and sexual diversity issues.
- 3. To connect educators with information and resources to help them confidently intervene and work to improve their school climate.

### Workshop structure

- 1. Understanding unconscious bias
- 2. Strategies for intervention interactive
- 3. Conclusion & Q&A

# Understanding unconscious bias

Lessons on gender & sexuality surround us

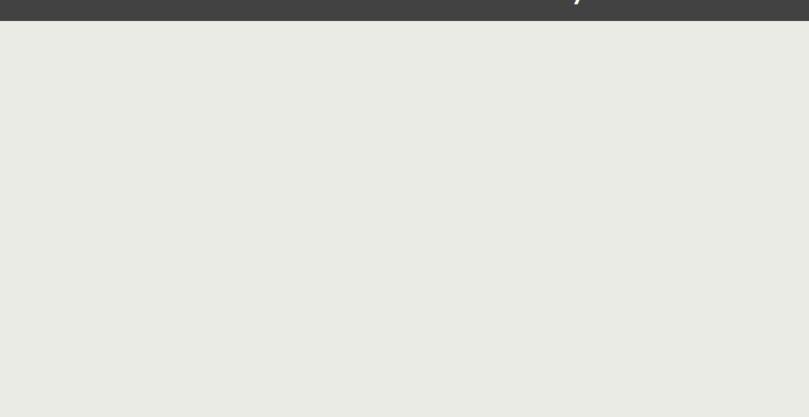
### Foundational concepts

- Binary systems: either/or thinking
- The 'Heterosexual Matrix'
  - Hegemonic Masculinity vs. Emphasized Femininity
  - Heteronormativity& heterosexism
- Patriarchy
- Homophobia
- Transphobia
- Queer pedagogy

#### That's so gay www.thinkb4youspeak.com



### Scenarios: What do I say when?



- You are giving an assignment to your class and one of the students loudly claims, "This homework is so gay!"
  - How often do you hear this statement in your classroom?
  - Is this statement of concern for you and your students? Why or why not?
  - How do you respond?

- After school you are working with a student club and a few girls start talking about a male colleague. "He's so hot. But I heard he's gay. That would be so sad! Do you know if he's dating anyone?"
  - □ Is this statement of concern? Why or why not?
  - How would you respond?

- In between classes you overhear a scuffle in the hallway. You go outside to see what's going on and you see 3 boys teasing another boy and overhear the word "faggot".
  - □ Is this a word you hear often in your school?
  - Do many teachers address is?
  - What would you do?
    - Immediately
    - The next day
    - The rest of the school year

- During your lunch break you notice a girl from your class sitting alone and crying. When you ask her what's wrong she tells you another girl has started a rumour about her being a lesbian and now the girls on her basketball team don't want her in the locker room when they're getting dressed.
  - □ Is this something you would get involved in? Why?
  - What do you do?

A male student in your class is very artistic and is expressive with his emotions and gestures. He tends to linger with teachers after class and you've overheard students calling him "queer" and "art fag". His grades are dropping.

• Could this happen in your school?

■ What would you do?

You are having a class discussion and the subject of same-sex marriage comes up. One student asserts, "homosexuality is a sin and anyone who does that is going to hell."

What would you do?

## Other sticky situations?

#### Interventions – Transforming School <u>Culture</u>

Individuals - Classrooms - Schools - Communities

# Individual changes

#### Watch educational films and documentaries

- Tough Guise
- Straitlaced
- It's Elementary: Talking about Lesbian and Gay Issues in Schools
- **Call me Kade**
- Attend an event sponsored by a local GLBT advocacy organization

Invite a colleague to view/attend with you

### Classroom changes

- Challenge your own assumptions
- Use inclusive language
  - parent or guardian
  - partner or spouse
- Avoid gender-specific language and assumptions in class activities
  - asking girls to help clean and boys to help move heavy things
  - Avoid phrases like: "act like a man," "boys don't cry," or "don't act like a girl"
  - Dividing students up by gender

# Classroom changes Respond to name-calling "Stop & Educate"

# How to confront name-calling

#### Do

- Stop the behavior
- Educate those involved: publicly or privately
- Practice responses to commonly heard insults and comments
- Share ideas with colleagues on how to respond

#### Don't:

- □ Ignore the incident
- Excuse it
- Allow yourself to be immobilized by fear or uncertainty
- Avoid the situation in fear of saying the wrong thing

### Publicly v. Privately

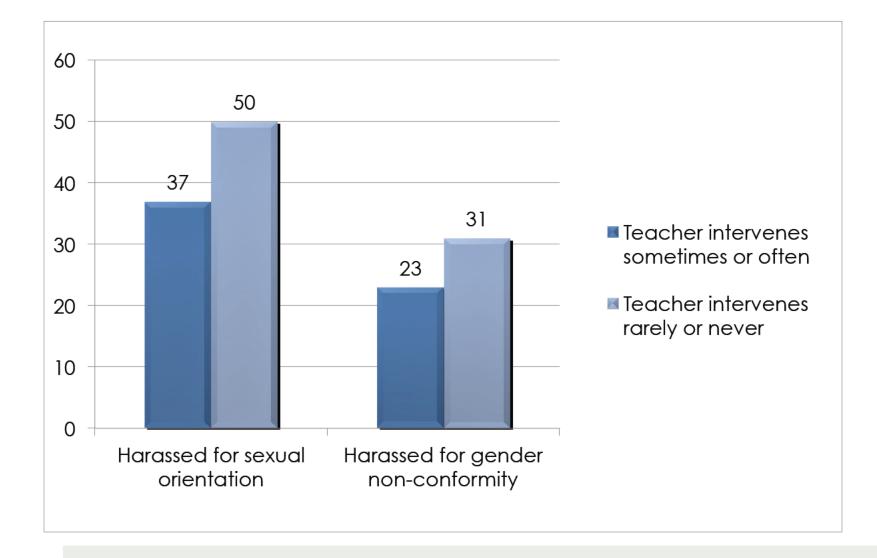
#### Publicly/on the spot

- Provides immediate information & support
- Models taking a stand
- Reassures others that this is a safe space
- Sets a compassionate tone

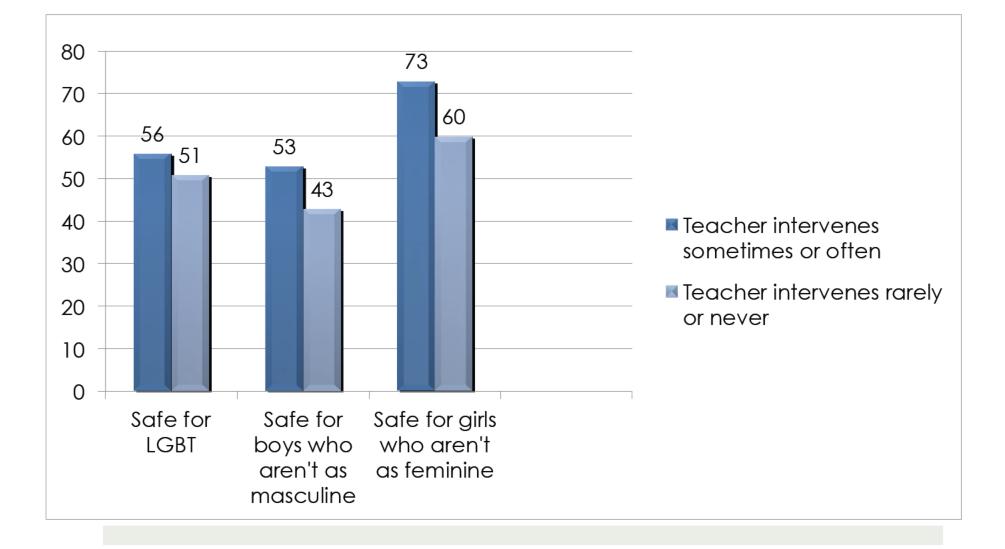
#### Privately

- Allows harasser to "save face"
- Prevents possible embarrassment of target
- Allows you to cool down
- Allows more time to explore & discuss

# Harassment is less common when teachers stop name-calling



# Students feel safer when teachers intervene



### Classroom changes

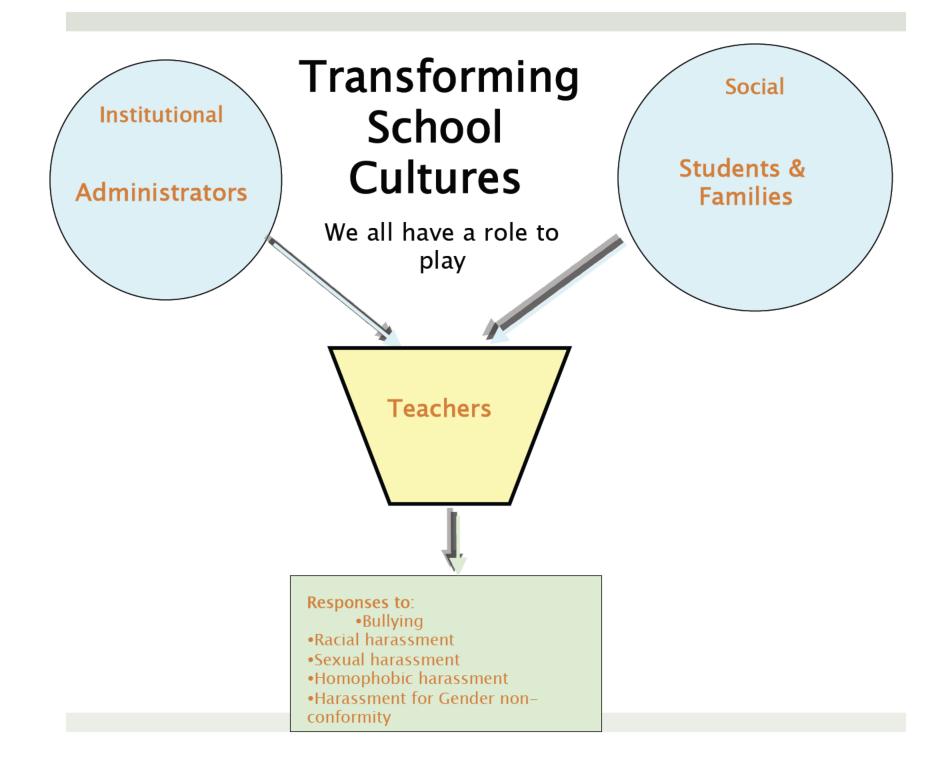
- If you are heterosexual, don't state it. Allow yourself to be an ally while allowing others to be uncertain about your sexual orientation.
- Actively include issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity in your classes.
- Invite GLBT speakers to address your class.
- If you are GLBT, consider coming out to your employer, and if you get their support, your students/school.

### School changes

- "Stop and educate" in <u>public</u> areas (hall, cafeteria, bathrooms, locker rooms, etc.)
- Help students establish a Gay-Straight Alliance or other diversity group in your school.
- Request and/or help organize staff training on issues related to gendered harassment and cyberbullying.
- Build a network of colleagues interested in starting a safety & equity task force at your school.
- Revise and update school policies to address gendered harassment and cyber-bullying.

### School changes

- Work with students to organize a "Day of Silence" (www.dayofsilence.org)
- Work with colleagues to organize a "No Name Calling Week" (www.nonamecallingweek.org)
- Invite parents, religious leaders, and community members to work on a safety and equity task force in your school and community.
- Ask your school librarian to create a display of books and resources on sex, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Encourage colleagues to integrate issues related to sex, gender, and sexual orientation diversity in their curriculum.
- Invite speakers and performance groups that address multiple issues of diversity, including: sex, gender, and sexual orientation.



### Other Resources

- Welcoming Schools <u>www.welcomingschools.org</u>
- Safe Schools Coalition <u>www.safeschoolscoalition.org</u>
- Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
- www.delicious.com/lizimeyer
- http://sites.google.com/site/lizimeyer/
- Contact me: ejmeyer@calpoly.edu

#### Gender, bullying, and harassment



Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D.

- Intro: Why study bullying & harassment?
- Clarifying the terms: bullying vs. harassment
- Why is gender an important factor to address?
- Understanding teacher identity
- Understanding school culture
- California legal & policy context
- Transforming school cultures
- Conclusion & Q&A

# Why study bullying & harassment?



# Clarifying the terms

Bullying Harassment Bias **Bullying:** repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual

•Verbally: threatening, taunting, teasing, and calling names.

•Physically: hits, pushes, kicks, pinches or restrains another

•Psychologically: making faces or dirty gestures, excluding someone, or refusing to comply with another person's wishes (Olweus, 1993, 9). **Bullying:** repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual

•Verbally, physically, psychologically

#### Cyber-bullying:

Using email, IMs, blogs, websites, cell phones & other technology to bully

### Cyberbullying

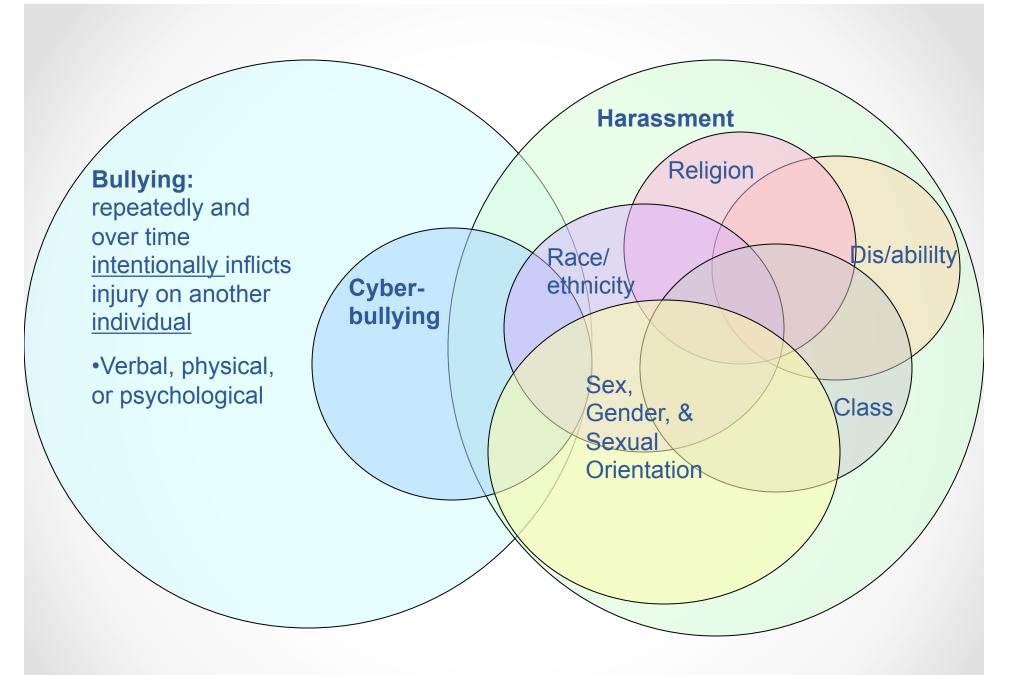
- Tends to reflect similar trends in schoolyard bullying
  - Students who were bullies or victims at school were more likely to be involved in cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2008)
  - Males more likely to be cyberbullies than females (22% v. 12%) (Li 2006)
  - Males and females reported being victimized online at similar rates (25% & 25.6%) (Li 2006)
  - 41% of LGBT students had experienced cyberbullying (GLSEN 2006)
  - Most severe cases reported by students have sexual (41%) or racial (24%) bias (Weidenbrenner, 2012)

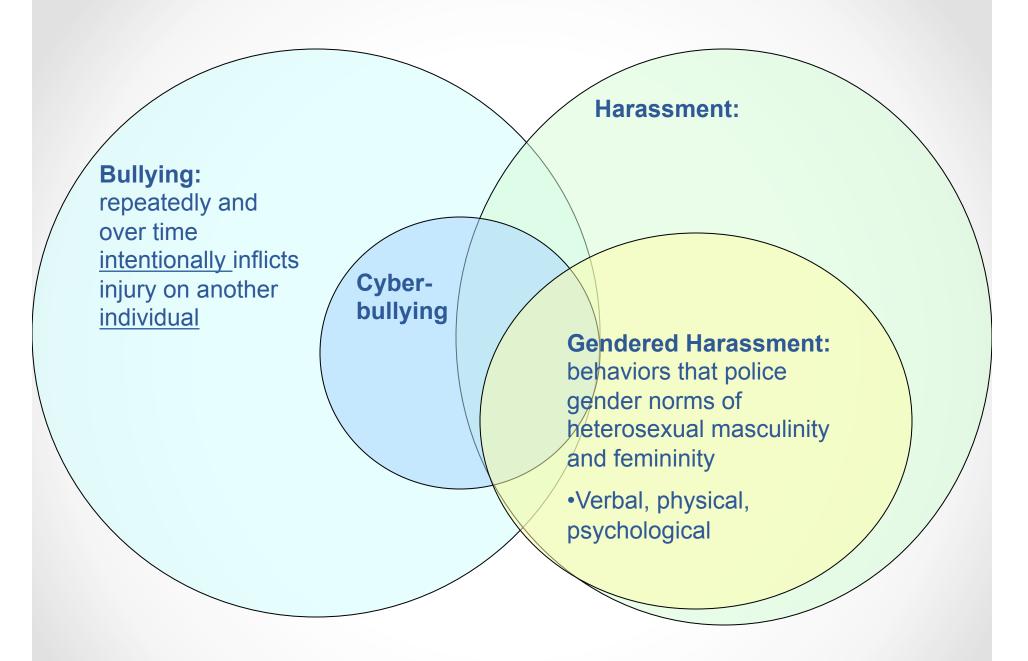
Bullying: repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual

•Verbal, physical, or psychological

Cyberbullying Harassment: Biased behaviors that demean or denigrate an identifiable <u>social group</u>. May be <u>intentional or unintentional</u>, <u>targeted at an individual or</u> <u>no specific targets</u>.

•Verbal, physical, or psychological





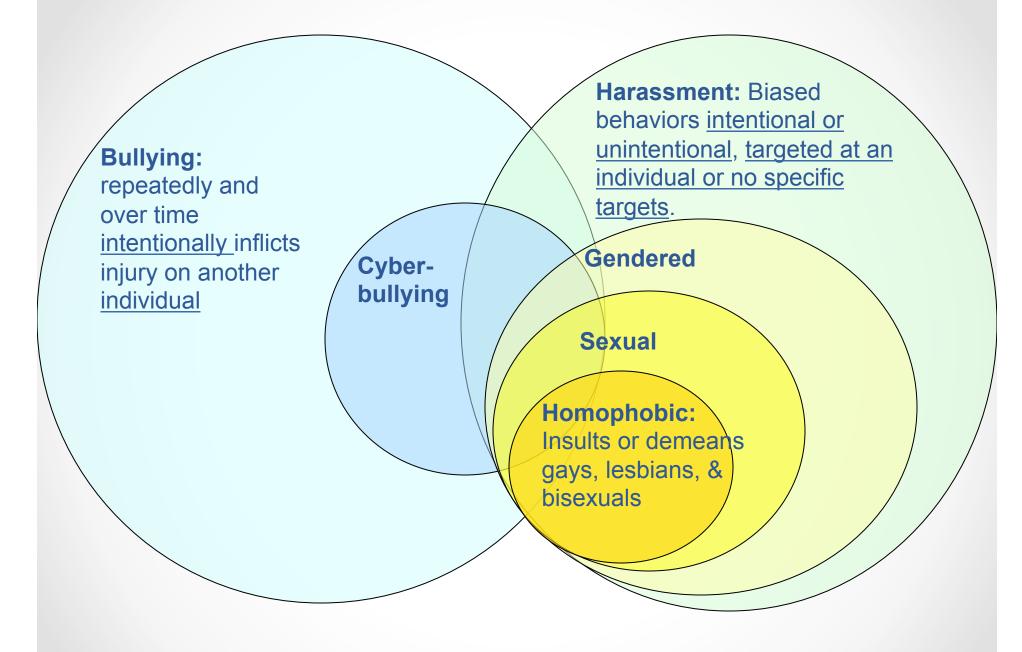


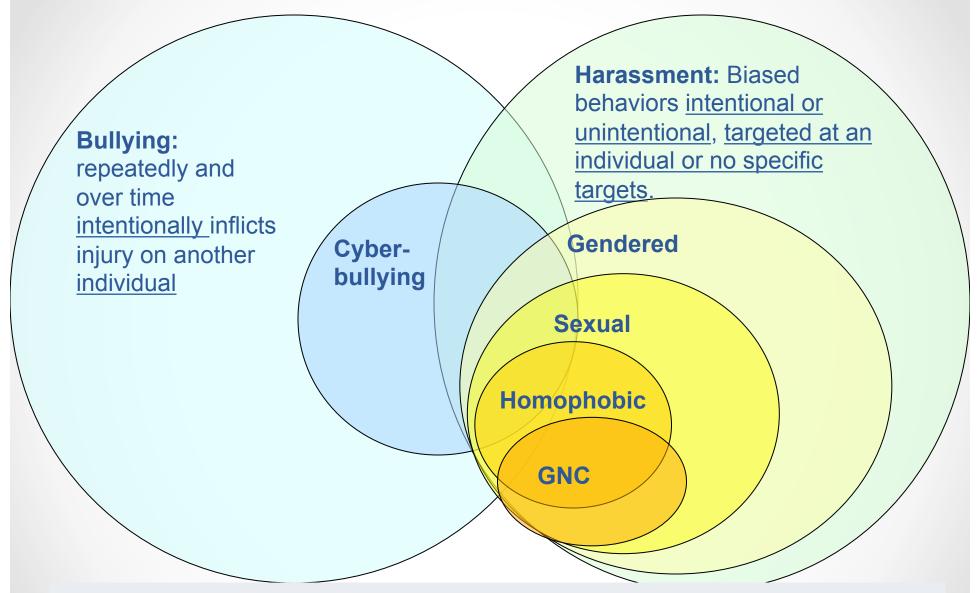
Cyberbullying Harassment: Biased behaviors <u>intentional or</u> <u>unintentional</u>, <u>targeted at an</u> <u>individual or no specific</u> <u>targets</u>.

#### Gendered

**Sexual:** "unwelcome behavior that has a sexual or gender component" (Reed, 1996)

•Quid pro quo & hostile environment

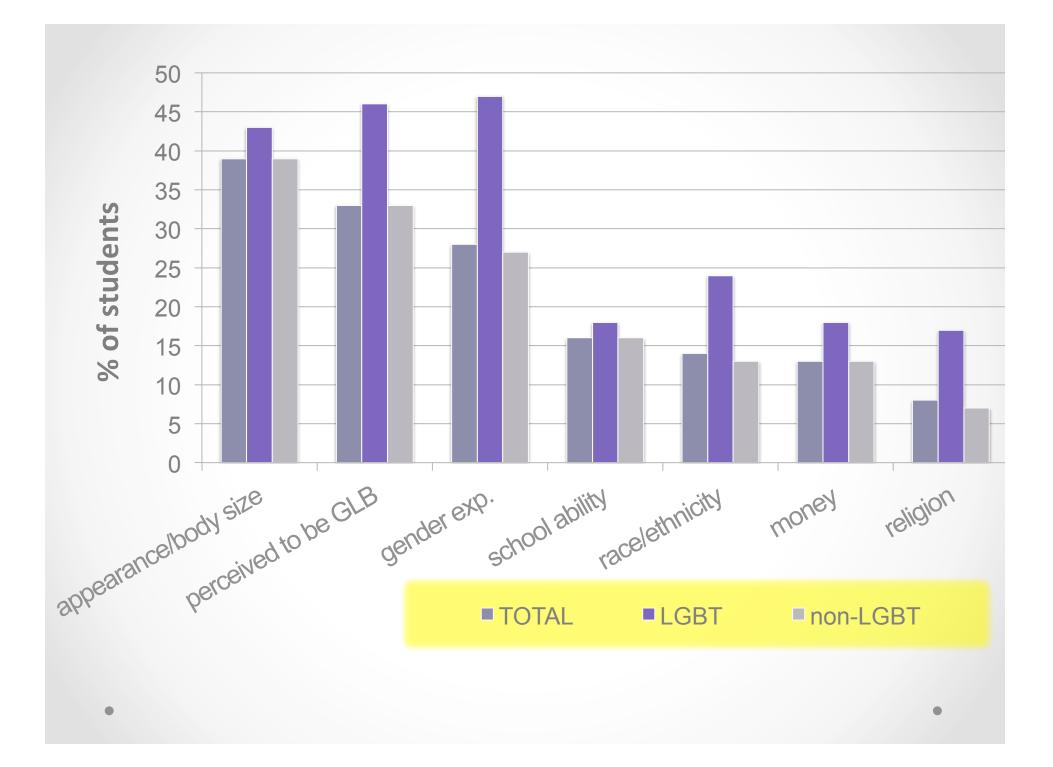


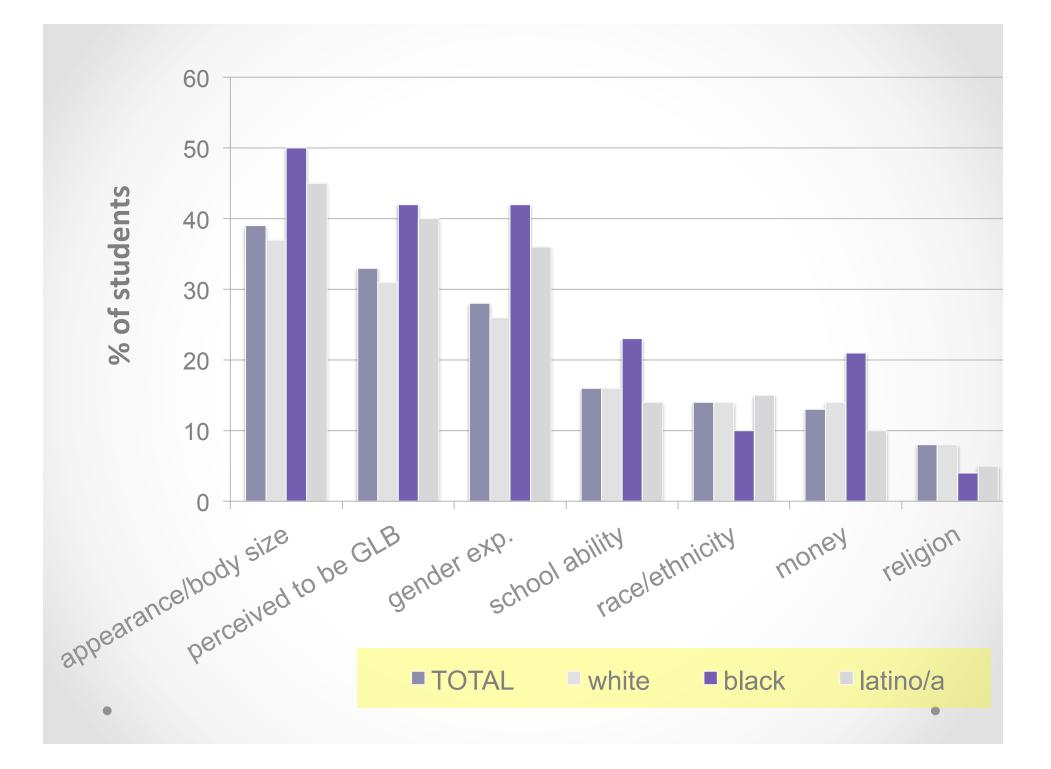


**Harassment for Gender Non-Conformity:** insults or demeans gender identities and expressions that vary from hegemonic masculinity for males and femininity for females. Also related to transphobia.

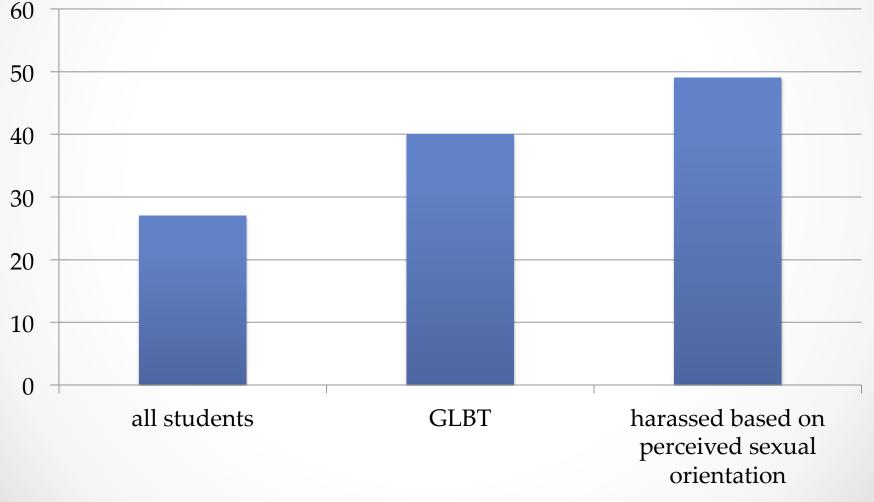
## Research on bullying & harassment

How do kids bully? What words do they use?





### % students reporting harassment based on gender non-conformity (CSSC 2004)



# Transgender students are disproportionately targeted

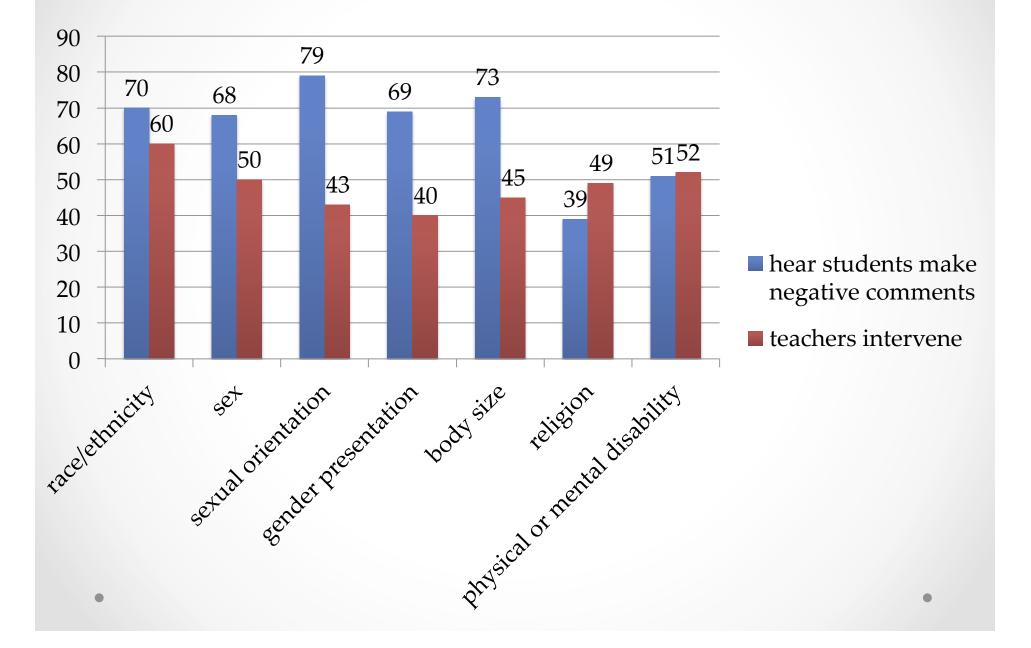
- 89% of transgender students had been verbally harassed (e.g.,called names or threatened) in the past year at school
- 55% of transgender students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year
- 28% of transgender students had been physically assaulted in school in the past year (Greytak et al, 2009)

#### Impacts of bullying & harassment on

#### targeted students:

- Poor academic performance (Sharp 1995, Kosciw 2001, CSSC 2004)
- Chronic absenteeism (Sharp 1995, Kosciw 2001, Coggan 2003, CSSC 2004)
- Emotional problems
  - Depression & anxiety (Slee 1995, Bond 2001)
  - Loneliness (Bond 2001)
  - Low self-esteem (Coggan 2003, Bond 2001)
  - o Suicidal ideation (Slee 1995, Kosciw 2001)
- Poor physical health (Slee 1995)
- Substance abuse (Kosciw 2001, CSSC 2004)

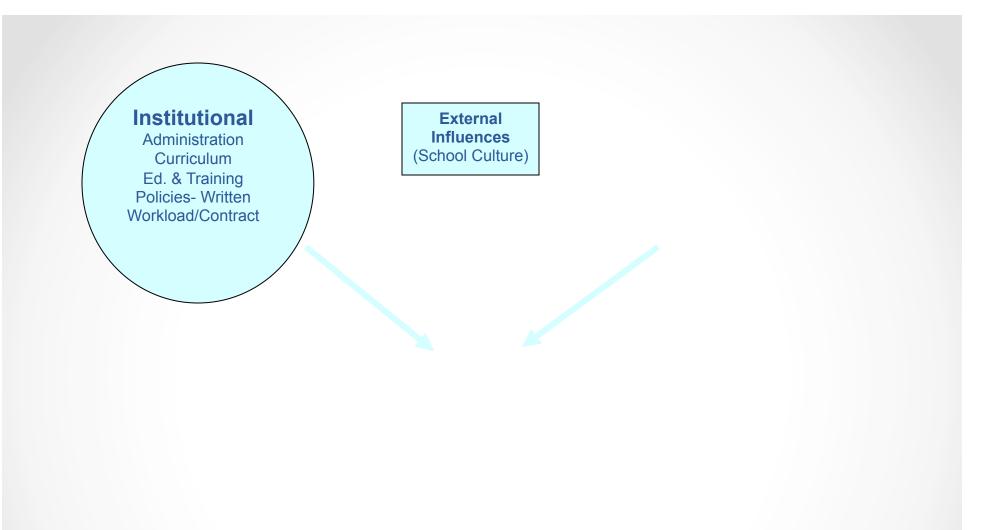
#### Bias-related comments & staff response



# Understanding teachers' non-intervention

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Barriers & Motivators for action



### Administrators

 "As far as discipline, how it's handled, I had to push for action when another kid called a kid 'faggot'. However, I know that in my school a racist comment was certainly not tolerated and it was dealt with immediately." (MT05)

### **Education & Training**

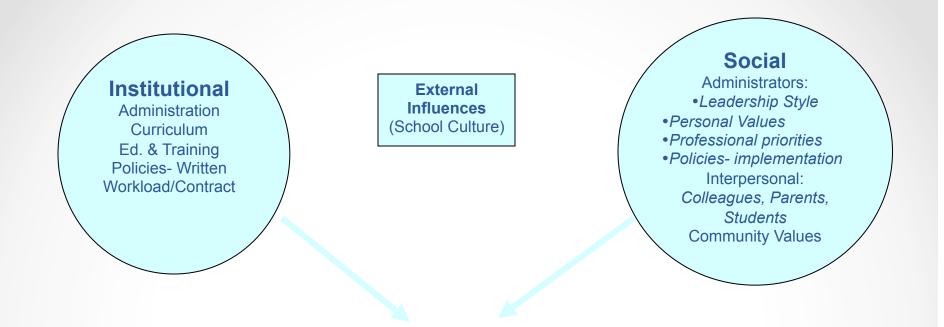
 "[I never got any] training in school [on] bullying. I do not think that we ever studied anything related to that...I don't know if I was really attuned to [sexual harassment] – to be quite honest. Maybe that's why I wasn't so aware that it was going on because as a part of my training it had never really been brought up as an issue to be concerned with." (FT02)

### Policy

 "I just think it's so interesting that I could walk into this [school district] and not be informed of specific things that I need to follow.
 Nothing was verbally gone over with me. I did all the research on my own, the handbooks, all that stuff. I just think it's really unfortunate that there are not specific policies or regulations that we follow when it comes to verbal harassment." (FT03)

### Workload

- "[I don't stop name-calling] if I'm too tired, if there are set things I need to get through in a lesson. I know my lesson is going to take 60 minutes, I've only got 70 minutes to deliver it, I've got 10 minutes to waste. Right now my job is being a teacher and I have to get through the math before the end of the year. It's not on my priority list." (MT01)
- "It just happened so much that to try and police that would take up 50% of my time because it was such a problem." (FT02)



### Administrators - values

• "Our administrator who dealt with disciplinary problems was a real jock and the real 'man's man' ... I feel that the administration didn't want to get involved because they were these [European ethnicity] men and, if they were to come into a staff meeting and say,

'we need to address some of the homophobic attitudes,' I could never hear them talking about something like that. So maybe that's part of the problem; even the administrators had that [European ethnicity] kind of mentality." (FT02)

### Administrators - style

 "I always find that when I' m working with principals and vice principals that its their own morals and their own beliefs that come through and if its something that they don't really think is a big issue, then why are they going to be proactive about it? Or just the gender of the administrator, I think that plays into it as well." (FT03)

### **Policy implementation**

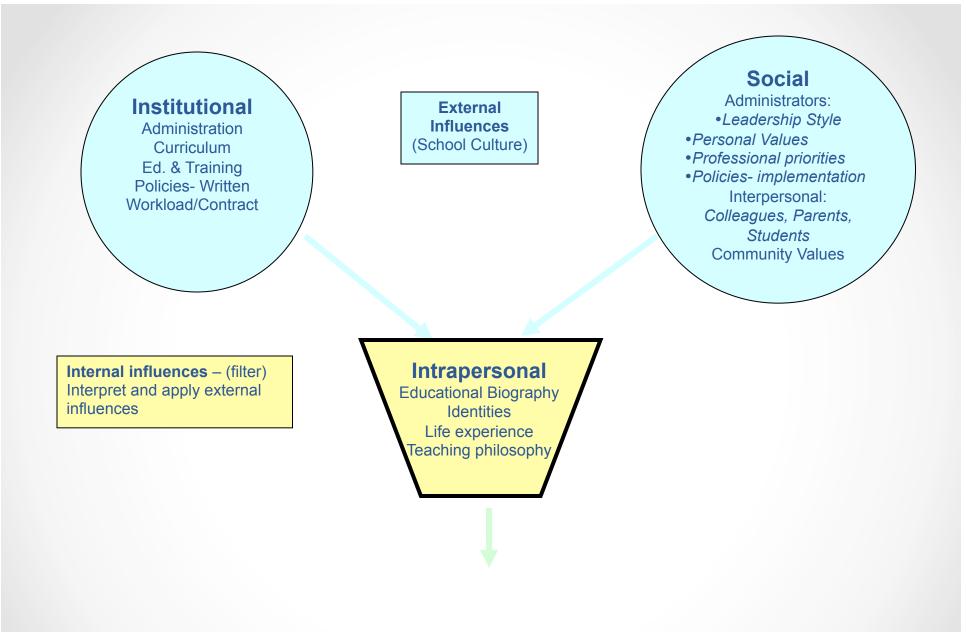
 "In the two high schools I've been it really depends on your Vice Principal. They basically set up according to their beliefs. Their policies reflect a lot about them and how they deal with it." (FT03)

### Interpersonal Relationships

- "Eventually I told [my principal] that I was going to tell the kids [that I'm gay]. She said, 'if you come out to those kids I will not guarantee your safety at this school'. She didn't like me because I was gay. That was clear." (MT05)
- "Teachers are educated the exact same way students are, you're observing everything around you. As the new teachers, that's your job, to keep your eyes and ears open, and usually, what I do, is for the first month, I just do a lot observing, and I do a lot of talking to teachers, and seeing what's acceptable, what's not, and how we deal with things here at that individual school. So, you're learning everything from the environment around, which is what we do everyday. Unfortunately, that's how you pick up bad habits." (FT03)

#### Community values and youth culture

- "I think [the homophobia] must have been coming from the community, from outside the school." (FT02)
- "The culture of the school was homophobic. Its what kids call each other now, 'fag' and 'gay'." (MT05)
- "What I notice a lot is the comment 'fag' being thrown around casually...you know the big thing to push a kid around by saying, 'he's a fag, he's a fag'." (MT06)



#### **Steve Pyre**

You are a role model. Am I more vigilant because I'm gay? Probably, but It's the right thing to do. I'm willing to deal with the backlash.

#### **Jessica Crosby**

I was interested in social change I felt like an outsider. I was a woman. You worry. Until your job is secure.

#### Sam Kaye

Be a role model. have my students be in a safe spot When you yourself are gay, you' re even more scared I'm so sensitive. It pertains to me.

#### Anita Day

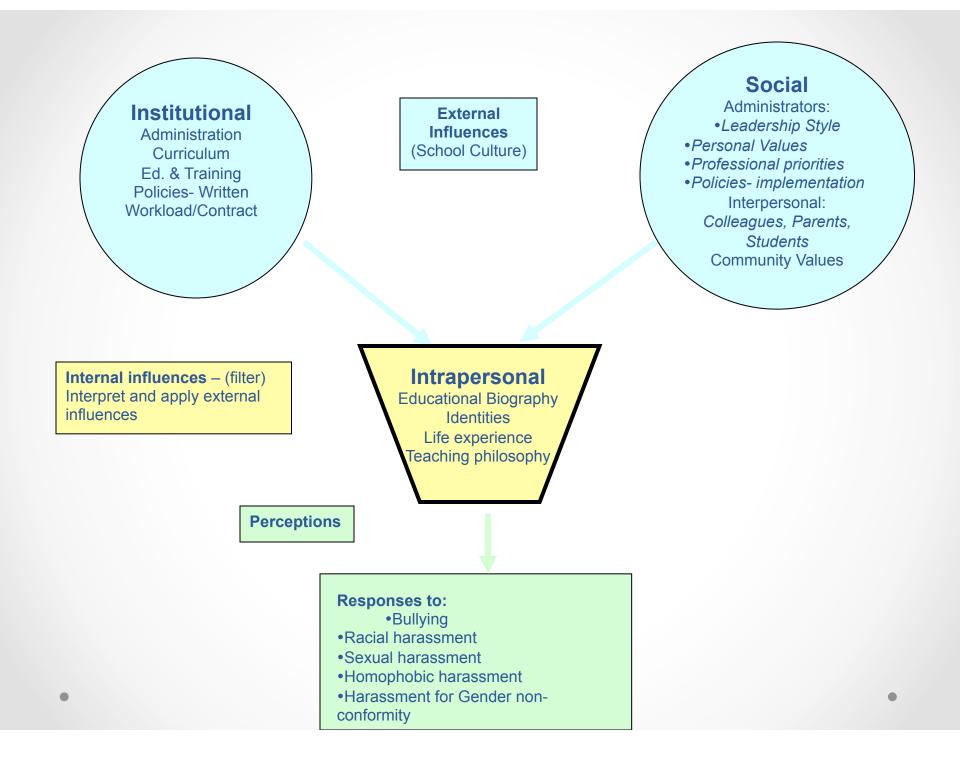
It's tough as a teacher of color. I have very little room to slip up. Is that really about race? Yeah, maybe. You get desensitized. I consciously make an effort. to get at my own prejudice. my dad was outright discriminated against

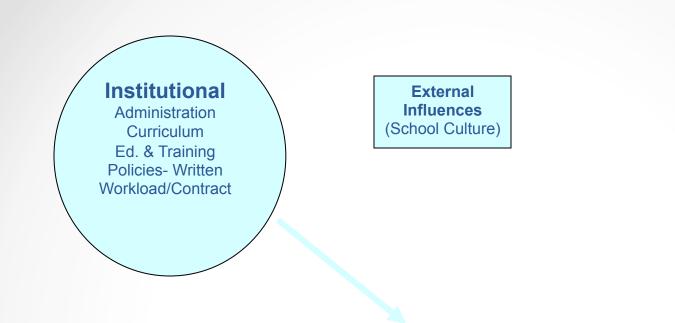
#### **Pierre LeSage**

I got called fag I'm more sensitive. I was always afraid. Being a gay man, having experienced harassment, made me define my role as a teacher.

#### Homer

I want students to feel welcome. We were the only minority group. I got incredibly bullied. I catch myself saying, 'oh that's so gay,' what did I just do? I'm conscious of what I'm doing, I'm trying to correct myself.





# Institutional

- Administration: Discipline by administration is seen as insufficient
- Workload: Pressure to cover the curriculum, large classes, and demanding course loads = ignore certain behaviors

### • Policies:

- o nonexistent or not clearly written
- teachers had a limited awareness of them and their roles in implementing
- them and their roles in implementi them

### Teacher education:

- Did not address incidents of bias and bullying
- Some teachers took initiative to get training in this area
- This was influenced by intrapersonal influences (such as: personal identity and educational biography)

# Social

### Administrators:

- o Issue is not important to them personally
- Policies not implemented/emphasized
- Model sexist, homophobic, & transphobic behaviors

### Other teachers:

- model sexist, homophobic, & transphobic behaviors
- o Don't intervene

### Families and Community:

 values support hegemonic masculinity, sexist, transphobic, and homophobic attitudes

### Students:

 Sexist, homophobic, & transphobic language and behaviors are prevalent in youth culture

# Internal

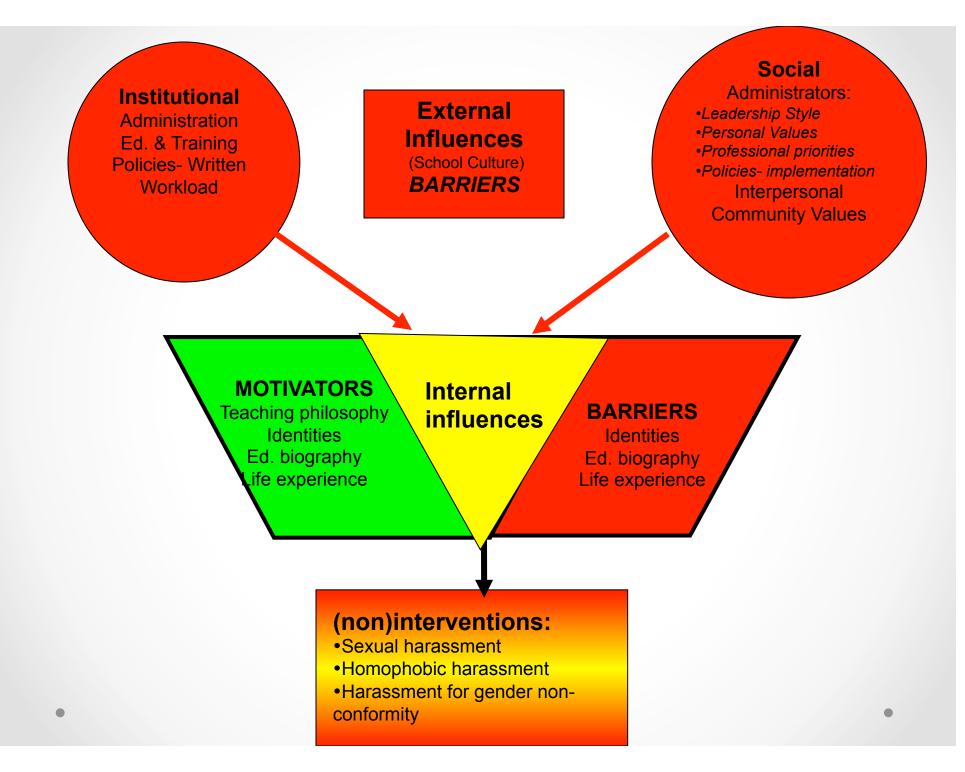
- Identities
  - Person of color
  - o Gay, lesbian, bisexual
  - o Woman
- Teaching philosophy
  - Being a role model
  - Making students feel safe & successful
  - Commitment to social justice and equity

## Internal

- Educational biography & life
   experience
  - Fear of backlash: from parents, colleagues, and administrators
  - o Desensitization
- Identities = Vulnerability
  - o new teacher
  - o gay, lesbian or bisexual
  - o person of color

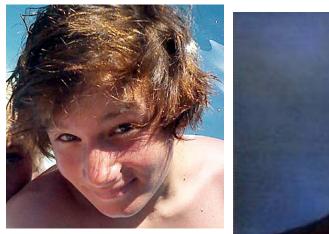
### POTENTIAL BARRIERS (for others)

- Lack of understanding/awareness of gendered harassment
  - Personal/religious values and iden/tity
- Teaching philosophy



# Schools perpetuate gendered harassment

Seth Walsh Tehachapi, CA 2010



Ceara Sturgis Mississippi 2010



11 yr old boy, Milford, OH 2010



Alana Flores, Morgan Hill School District, CA 2003

# California context

- The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act (AB 537, Kuehl), - prohibits discrimination and harassment in schools based on specified categories:
  - sex, ethnic group identification, race, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability
  - 2000: amended the state Education Code by adding <u>actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity</u> to existing sections on discrimination

# Implementation monitoring

- 2007: The Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394, Levine), and the Student Civil Rights Act (SB 777, Kuehl):
- requires the California Department of Education to monitor school districts' creation and publication of anti- harassment <u>policies and complaint procedures</u> and <u>updated the list</u> of prohibited bases of discrimination and harassment.

# Seth's law – AB 9

- 2011: Passed by the Assembly on September 7, 2011 on a 53-26 vote. Signed by Governor Jerry Brown.
- requires each school district to include in its nondiscrimination policy an <u>enumerated list</u> of the bases on which discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are prohibited under existing law:
  - actual or perceived sexual orientation,
  - o gender, gender identity expression,
  - o race or ethnicity,
  - o nationality,
  - o religion,
  - o disability,
  - or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics.

# Seth's Law – in practice

- AB 9 requires schools to include in their complaint procedures:
  - a <u>method</u> for receiving and investigating discrimination and harassment complaints.
  - Schools would be required to act on discrimination and harassment complaints <u>expeditiously</u> so that investigation and resolution may be reached quickly.
  - Faculty and staff working on school campuses would be <u>required to intervene when they</u> <u>witness acts of bullying.</u>

# **Curriculum** inclusion

- Education Code Sections 60040(a) and 60044(a)
- **requires social sciences instruction** of both men and women, black Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, Asians, Pacific Island people, and other ethnic groups to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.
- **prohibits instruction** or school-sponsored activities that reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, sex, color, creed, ability, national origin, or ancestry.
- **prohibits the adoption** of instructional materials that reflect negatively on any person because of their race, sex, color, creed, disability, national origin or ancestry.
- requires schools and governing boards to include only instructional materials that, in their determination, accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society.

## FAIR education act – SB 48

- 2011: Passed by full Assembly on July 6, 2011 on a 49-25 vote. Signed by the Governor on July 14, 2011
- The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act amends the education code to require schools to integrate factual information about social movements, current events and history of:
  - people with disabilities and
  - LGBT people into existing social studies lessons.
  - It also prevents the State Board of Education from adopting instructional materials that discriminate.

### Overt v. Covert lessons in schools – "repetitions of normalcy"

### STATED POLICIES

- Everyone is equal and deserves respect
- We value diversity

• Everyone's contributions are important

### CURRENT PRACTICES

- Only dominant historical and political perspectives are presented in textbooks
- Only dominant cultural & religious traditions are observed at school
- Many schools celebrate athletic teams more publicly than other artistic or intellectual student contributions

# Cultures of power & popularity in schools

Valued	De-valued
Physically strong	F
Competitive	
Dominant	
Tough	
Athletic	
Able-bodied	
White/European	
Heterosexually desirable	
Christian	
Gender conforming	6

### Impacts of the dichotomies of power &

### popularity

'Masculine'	'Feminine'
bullies	victims
Physically strong	Physically weak
Competitive	Collaborative
Aggressive	Accommodating
Tough	Sensitive
Athletic	Academic
Logical	Creative
Dynamic	Quiet
Dominant	Passive
Actively heterosexual	Perceived to be gay or lesbian

# Challenging normalcy and codes of masculinity

- Wear Pink Day
- Day of Silence
- Mix it up at Lunch
- No Name-Calling Week





# Day of Silence April 20, 2012

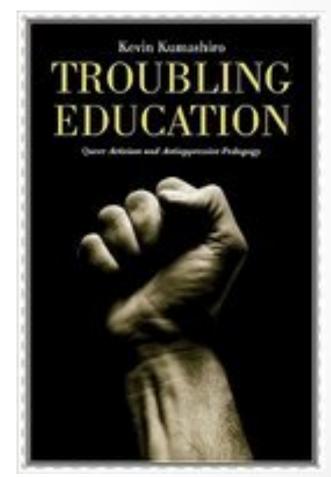


# To transform school cultures we must examine and reshape:

- how educators teach and support gendered practices in schools
- how schools' formal and informal structures mandate and enforce heteronormativity & gender conformity
- how certain identities, cultures and traditions are recognized as more valuable and respected than others

# Anti-oppressive pedagogy

- "learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 43)
- "education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world" (p. 63).





ELIZABETH J. MEYER

### GENDER, BULLYING, and HARASSMENT

STRATEGIES TO END SEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLS



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# YOU AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

# YOU AND YOUR GENDER GENDER IDE TO DISCOVERY

Dara Hoffman-Fox, LPC



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To the hundreds of counseling clients I've worked with since opening my private practice in 2008. Theirs are the faces and stories that inspire me to continue forward on my mission: to support and guide those who are transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse, and to create a welcoming, safe, and supportive world in which these individuals are free to be themselves.

### Table of Contents

Toward a Transformation of the Self, by Zinnia Jones xi Foreword by Sam Dylan Finch xiii Introduction by Zander Keig, LCSW xv

Preface by Dara Hoffman-Fox, LPC xx The Ins and Outs of This Guidebook xiv Self-Care Checklist xxxi

#### Stage One: Preparation 1

Introduction to Stage One: Preparation 3 Chapter 1: Why Do I Need to Find Out the Truth? 5 Chapter 2: The Role of Fear on Your Journey 14 Chapter 3: Feeling the Fear and Doing It Anyway 19 Chapter 4: Building Your Support Team 33

#### Stage Two: Reflection 49

Introduction to Stage Two: Reflection 51 Chapter 5: You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood (Ages 3–11) 53 Chapter 6: You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescence (Ages 12–17) 63 Chapter 7: The Role of Shame and Guilt 72

#### Stage Three: Exploration 87

Introduction to Stage Three: Exploration 89 Wisdom Tips 91 Chapter 8: Keeping in Mind the Big Picture 102 Chapter 9: Deconstructing Gender 123 Chapter 10: Finding Support Through Connecting with Others 143 Chapter 11: Listening to Your Gut 159 Chapter 12: Wrestling with Uncertainty 170 Chapter 13: Actively Exploring Your Gender Identity 192 Chapter 14: Putting It All Together 216

Conclusion: What Now? 237 Parting Thoughts 241 Acknowledgments 242 Contributors 244

"The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." —C. G. Jung

"It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure." —Joseph Campbell

> "How am I not myself?" –Brad Stand, I Heart Huckabees

### Toward a Transformation of the Self

**BY ZINNIA JONES** 

Gender feels fundamental to the self and seems as if it should be the most obvious thing in the world to us. Instead, some of us find this occluded by a dense fog of uncertainty, misconceptions, anxieties, and stereotypes—animated by self-doubt and amplified by harmful cultural messages about what's expected of different genders. For those who find we can't comfortably fit within a given gender assignment, there is a strained relationship between ourselves and the world: we're given so little exposure to the conceptual, metaphorical, and literal language needed to recognize and describe who we are. Who could be expected to look at the crude caricatures and shallow sensationalism that represent the world's understanding of gender variance and see themselves in these depictions? In a very real way, we find ourselves unable to speak. It's this starvation of understanding that continues to deny us such a key element of ourselves—and when we're still so uncertain of who and what we are, how can we find our place in the world?

For me, the distance from myself—from the world—took on an almost physical presence. Straining to hear my own thoughts, I often found nothing but static. It was impossible to visualize my own form or mentally place myself anywhere. Even my skin felt as if its surface were unstable, flickering, somehow ill-fitting, forcing a blurry-edged separation from reality itself. Such an alienation from life exacts a heavy toll on us as we simply try to continue existing in this world.

You're likely reading this book because you have questions about yourself that are significant enough that you're prepared to work at finding the answers. You've been giving serious thought to your experience of gender, its role in your life, and how this may need to change. In terms of value in clarifying such questions and providing meaningful direction toward self-understanding, Dara's book is revolutionary. Most media depictions emphasize the most physically striking outcomes of gender questioning: visuals of applying makeup or shaving, of hospital beds or operating theaters. They offer little in the way of education about the necessary steps that precede this—the introspection and deliberative self-exploration that's far less flashy and photogenic, yet absolutely fundamental to everything that may follow. This book is an ambitious endeavor designed to facilitate achieving a basic realization of one's gender and deciding what should be done with it.

Dara's comprehensive guide presents a detailed walkthrough of the process of more firmly establishing your gender: breaking through the fears that can cloud your self-perception, taking a clear and thorough look around the current landscape of your gender, and determining where to voyage outward from there. It is one of the most complete collections of such advice that has ever been compiled. Techniques for gender exploration have typically been scattered across the Internet, circulated by individuals and communities offering a listening ear and a helping hand. I've personally been contacted by hundreds of gender-questioning people who simply wanted someone to help them clarify their thoughts and hopefully find a new coherence in their selfhood. It's an experience I've been through myself, seeking out other trans people and scraping together as many insights as I could find from those who had worked through this before.

This hard-won awareness and the activation of a new understanding of the self is of the utmost importance to those figuring out their gender. With an impressively detailed toolkit of exercises, Dara's book has the potential to streamline and accelerate this process in an extraordinary fashion. This is the book I wish I had on hand when I felt helpless in the face of my anxiety about my changing body. I wish I had this book when I was struggling to come to grips with the reality that my intimate relationships only ever worked when I could be a woman. And while I've always regretted not having the time and resources to work with everyone who's asked me for help with their gender, I believe this book is exactly the resource all of them deserve to have.

### Foreword

#### BY SAM DYLAN FINCH

When I started my gender journey, no one gave me permission to be uncertain or afraid. And further, no one told me what I should do if I was. I started exploring my gender without a guide, without comfort, and without a clue—and as you can imagine, I felt like a queer fish out of water.

A lot of questions ran through my head. If this is my truth, why am I so unsure? If I'm transgender, why am I so scared? If this is the path I'm supposed to be on, why do I feel so confused?

If this sounds like you, let me be the first to tell you this: everything that you're feeling is not only okay, but it's also completely normal.

Examining your gender—something we're told we should innately know—can be an overwhelming process, especially when you feel like you don't fit the "mold" of what someone who isn't cisgender should feel or look like.

But no matter how sure or unsure you are, I promise, this book is for you.

You can be young or old or anything in between; you can feel like you've been questioning for a long time or have just started wondering about it yesterday; you can have a vast vocabulary for your identity; or you can cling to the only word you know: "questioning."

Whether you feel like you're living a lie and you're ready to embrace your truth, or you're simply unsure of what's been pulling at your heart, this book is for anyone who wants to explore their gender more deeply—regardless of what your gender may be or how far along you are.

You are not required to have any certain experience, any kind of feeling, any particular desires, any sort of history—all you need to begin this book is a little curiosity.

This is important, above all else: all you need is curiosity.

Looking back at the beginning of my gender journey, I wish someone had reminded me to be curious. To be joyful. To remember that exploring who we are doesn't have to be a painful, dramatic, gut-wrenching experience.

### Foreword

Gender is beautiful, mysterious, and even strange, and we'd all be better off by embracing the mystery.

This is your adventure. This is a time to be playful, to ask questions, to open up and peer inside your heart. This is a time to let the possibilities surprise and delight you. This is a time to imagine what could be, to daydream about your own becoming. And while all of this may be, in its own way, scary—it's also beautiful.

If I can give you any advice as you begin this book, it's this: allow yourself this happiness. With every new discovery, celebrate the journey. With every new question, embrace the enigma. Get wrapped up in the puzzles, the surprises, the affirmations, the discoveries. Get lost in everything this book has to offer you—and I promise you, there's a lot.

And remember: if you focus too much on the destination, you'll miss all the amazing stuff in between.

## Introduction

#### BY ZANDER KEIG, LCSW

I wish a book like You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery had been available when I began to question my gender identity back in 1997. Had I been exposed to the concepts found within these pages back then, I might have been spared some of the intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles that ensued. I have been trans identified for nearly twenty years, and medically transitioned for eleven years, yet I was still able to gain more insight into my gender identity and transition process as a result of reading this thought-provoking guidebook.

I first publicly disclosed my trans identity to the world in my essay "Are You a Boy or a Girl?"<sup>1</sup> written in 2000 and published (under my former name Gabriel Hermelin) in the anthology *Inspiration for LGBT Students & Their Allies* in 2002. However, it was in 1997, while attending college in Denver, Colorado, and working as the outreach coordinator in the office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Student Services, that I was introduced to and began using the term "trans" to refer to transgender and transsexual people.

Over the years, I have used many terms to describe my gender identity: tranny, intergender, genderfluid, virago, genderqueer, trans, male, trans male, female-to-male (FTM), trans man, transsexual man, and man. Each term I used matched a particular level of awareness and understanding I possessed about my own trans identity at the time. For instance, early in my social transition, prior to starting testosterone (T), I used the term *intergender* to communicate that my gender was somewhere between conventional notions of female and male. Soon after starting T, I used the term *virago* (mannish woman) and even facilitated a workshop on that identity at Gender Odyssey (2006)<sup>2</sup> in an attempt to distance myself from the stereotypical notion of masculinity and maleness. It was during this time that I realized that being seen as a masculine female vs. a man was an entirely different experience and it was

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Hermelin, "Are You a Boy or a Girl?," In Inspiration for LGBT Students & Their Allies (Easton, PA: Collegiate EmPowerment Company, 2002), 46–7.

<sup>2</sup> Zander Keig, "Masculine Females on T Roundtable," (lecture, Gender Odyssey Conference, Seattle, WA, September 2006).

quite eye-opening. Needless to say, not everyone responded favorably to the ways I chose to self-identify.

As Dara points out in Clearing Up a Damaging Myth (see page xxv), many of us are told there is only one way to be trans and/or to transition. I definitely heard that message from trans men much further along in their transition on a number of occasions when I was pre-transition. As a matter of fact, the first time I spoke with another trans man about the possibility that I was trans, his dismissive response resulted in me delaying my medical transition two years. It also caused me to be reluctant to discuss my thoughts and questions with others out of fear that I would again be dissuaded in my attempt to assert a trans identity. Thankfully, I persisted. I also became involved in the FTM community as a support group facilitator in an attempt to provide a more affirmative perspective to the many attendees questioning their gender identity or early in transition. I remained in that role for three years. It was then that I realized that my own development into a man was unable to progress, as I was entirely focused on being helpful to others and not paying attention to my own needs and wants.

As a licensed clinical social worker, I am very familiar with and attentive to the concept of Self Care (see page xxix) and agree wholeheartedly with Dara that it is not only an essential component to a gender transition, but it is a useful lifelong practice for placing importance on defining for yourself what you want and need in the moment and going forward. Setting boundaries around whom you will and won't spend time with, which activities you will and won't participate in, and steps you will and won't take to live an authentic life is necessary to ensure the path you elect is right for you and not influenced heavily by others' persuasions. In my experience of being dissuaded and persuaded regarding medical transition, it dawned on me that my own ideas about my life, body, and role were so open to challenge from those who either disagreed or agreed strongly with my intentions. I needed to assert my intention to transition in my particular way and become the particular kind of man I was to be. It was a freeing and frightful journey I was to pursue.

In addition to the kinds of repressed fears Dara mentions in Peering into the Trunk (see page 16), I feel the many messages communicated via the media about men being dangerous and testosterone being responsible for men's violence and aggression directly contributed to an eight-year delay in beginning my medical transition. My two primary fears centered on "Would testosterone make me angry and violent?" and "Would I ever actually look and sound like a man?" My first fear was put to rest while attending a workshop presented by a medical doctor with at the time twelve years of experience working with trans patients. It turned out I wasn't the only person in attendance with fears concerning testosterone and violence. The physician assured us all that there was no direct correlation between healthy hormone levels and violence. The second fear would take longer to quell. Because I was nearly forty years old when I started my medical transition, the physical changes happened more slowly. As a matter of fact, I was two and a half years into my medical transition when a "friend" remarked, "You still look like a dyke." I am happy to report that starting from the three-year mark until now, eleven years on testosterone, I am never misgendered.

A year into my transition, I was fortunate to encounter FTM pioneer Jamison Green while attending a community meeting. Like Dara encourages, I had recently begun to think about needing to have a Mentor (Finding a Mentor, see page 33), someone that I could ask questions of and glean some wisdom from. I was happy to encounter Jamison's story in 2000, when I discovered the FTM international web page while doing research for a class on violence prevention and intervention in graduate school. I was writing a paper on trans violence and wanted to learn more about the impact of violence on the lives of trans men. Sometime between 2000 and 2005, I read Jamison's memoir, Becoming a Visible Man,<sup>3</sup> and learned we had similar histories. We were both previously lesbian identified, both had an interest in knowing the history of our communities, and both started our medical transitions at age thirty-nine. Because of that, I felt a connection with him prior to even meeting him. I then met him in person in 2006 at the Compton's Cafeteria Commemoration Committee meeting and mustered up the courage to ask him if I could walk with him to catch public transportation. During that walk I asked him if he was available to be my mentor. Thankfully, his response was "yes" and he told me that he was working on a project to get archival material from FTM internationally organized. He offered that if I came to his house once a month and helped him with the archiving project, I could 1) get a chance to look at and read all of the archival material to learn about the FTM community around the world, and 2) listen to him tell stories about his involvement in the community and the role that trans man pioneer Louis Graydon Sullivan (1951–1991) had in founding an international network of FTM groups. It was enriching so early in transition not only to be exposed to those ideas but to peer into the hearts and minds of the men who came before me and made it possible for me to do what I would end up doing over the course of the last ten years. One of the significant aspects of our time

<sup>3</sup> Jamison Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).

#### Introduction

together was being able to read hand-typed letters from the eighties between Sullivan and other trans men seeking support, friendship, and advice. Reading those letters was the inspiration for my book, *Letters for My Brothers: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect.*<sup>4</sup>

Once others began to see me as a man and treat me like a man, I found myself asking the question, "What kind of man do I want to be?" It was through the wisdom of hands-off mentors that I was able to answer those kinds of questions and delve more deeply into those issues. I was doing a lot of research online, looking for examples of positive masculinity, good men, kind men, generous men, references to a type of maleness that I could relate to, and I discovered that there was a whole field of men's studies and texts written by men about male experiences and perspectives regarding relationships, emotions, trauma, and bonding. In the search for that information, I landed on the blog The Art of Manliness,<sup>5</sup> written by Brett McKay, which is "dedicated to uncovering the lost art of being a man."6 Through this blog I learned about the myth of the "normal" testosterone level and read mini biographies of great men in history such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry David Thoreau. As a social worker working almost entirely with men, I was also very happy to come upon their series "Leashing the Black Dog,"7 all about men and depression. Another hands-off Mentor I find invaluable is Men's Journal.8 This magazine is chock full of stories written by men for men about male experiences, which are vastly different from the stories I was raised on and fed through the media about who men are, what men want, how men love, where men seek refuge, and when men need help. I am forever grateful for the insights I gleaned from the pages of these hands-off mentors.

In an effort to Build My Support Team (see page 33), I reached out to other transgender and transsexual men and women. I was astonished to learn that some individuals thought I did not have the "right" story to be a transsexual. I did not know that there was a "right" story. It turns out that some trans and non-trans people believe that to be a "true transsexual" one must feel compelled to transition, and if unable

xviii

<sup>4</sup> Megan M. Rohrer and Zander Keig, *Letters for My Brothers: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect* (San Francisco, CA: Wilgefortis, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Brett McKay and Kate McKay, *The Art of Manliness*, 2007, http://www.artofmanliness.com/.

<sup>6</sup> Brett McKay and Kate McKay, "About the Art of Manliness," December 31, 2007, http://www.artofmanliness.com/about-2/.

<sup>7</sup> Brett McKay and Kate McKay, "A Realistic, Encouraging, Compassionate, No-Nonsense, Research-Backed, Action-Oriented Guidebook to Managing Your Depression," March 31, 2015, http://www.artofmanliness.com/2015/03/31/managingdepression/.

<sup>8</sup> Men's Journal, (2016), http://www.mensjournal.com/.

to do so feel that suicide is the only alternative. I did not feel my desire to transition was that dire, nor urgent. It turns out that many trans people do feel that way. However, that does not mean that we all do. I discovered that there were other trans men and women who shared with me a similar understanding of being trans, and they soon became my go-to network of friends. From them I learned about the local trans community resources. Through these connections, I was able to meet gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual transsexuals. It never occurred to me that I would be perceived as a straight guy. It made sense, since my partner was female, but I had just never considered the implications of transition on my social life. So much of my attention was focused on the physical changes brought by T. The other straight trans men I met helped me come to terms with and navigate the new ways I was experiencing the world. If you have access to a local in-person trans support group, I highly recommend attending. You may not relate to every person there and/or topic presented, but the friends you make there may be the friends you call on years later. I know I do, and my life is all the richer as a result.

The journey you are about to embark on may or may not be similar to the tale I just told. Dara's book gives you the opportunity to write your story in your own way. In a nutshell, I found Dara's book to be a relevant resource that will support people questioning their gender identity, those who are new to transition, and folks like me: a ways down the road.

# Preface

#### BY DARA HOFFMAN-FOX, LPC

In the spring of 2013, I had what mythologist Joseph Campbell would describe as my Call to Adventure.<sup>9</sup> The Call to Adventure is when the protagonist in a story is offered the chance to embark upon a great journey that will challenge them in epic ways.

You can accept this call, or you can choose to ignore it. You wouldn't be holding this book in your hands if I had ignored mine.

Just before I had my Call to Adventure, I was going on five years of seeing transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and gender questioning clients through my private practice as a mental health counselor. Although I was satisfied with the work I was doing, I knew there was a bigger purpose I was meant for that I had not yet discovered. In fact, I had spent most of my life with this frustrating and unsettling preoccupation of not knowing what bigger purpose I had, wanting desperately to figure out how I could make a lasting and impactful contribution to this world.

My Call to Adventure finally made itself known through a series of events happening in quick succession during the spring of 2013, the most significant coming as a result of an interview I gave to my local newspaper about a transgender six year old named Coy Mathis.<sup>10</sup> In an elementary school just a few miles from my office, Coy was denied access to the girls' restroom, which prompted her parents to file a discrimination complaint with the Civil Rights Division of Colorado. As this local story quickly made its way around the globe, a reporter from Colorado Springs' *The Gazette* wanted to learn more about how it is that someone so young can be aware of their gender. The Colorado Springs Pride Center informed the reporter that I was a reliable source to speak to about this topic.

The day following the interview, I stopped at the convenience store down the street from my office to pick up a copy of the paper. It was

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campbell, "Departure" in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 49–58.

<sup>10</sup> Stephanie Earls, "Experts: Gender Awareness Comes at Early Age," *The Gazette*, February 27, 2013, http://gazette.com/experts-gender-awareness-comes-at-early-age/article/151590.

then that I noticed I was shaking: *Did the reporter write compassionately about Coy and her family?* Would I be quoted in such a way that would increase the readers' understanding of what it means to be transgender?

I was delighted to see the story made front-page news. There was a beautiful picture of Coy and her dad playing in the snow, accompanied by a large headline which proclaimed: "Experts: Gender Awareness Starts at Early Age." I was then astounded to see that the expert they referred to in the first sentence of the article was *me*.

As I teared up in the middle of that convenience store, I experienced something I had only heard about but never believed it would happen to me personally. I was filled with an overwhelming sense of discovery, knowing, and purpose. After so many years of searching for it, my Call to Adventure had finally arrived. The Call said: You must do more.

In November of 2013, while delivering the keynote address at my local Transgender Day of Remembrance event,<sup>11</sup> I made mention of my Call to Adventure, declaring, "Tonight, I find myself giving birth to what was conceived in that store nine months ago. Just as a new parent feels about their newborn child, this public declaration of my commitment to do more for the transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse people of this world is filled with curiosity, trepidation, feistiness, and hope."

I used *you must do more* as my mantra over the next year and a half. I created a website with transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse resources (darahoffmanfox.com), as well as a Facebook page and YouTube channel, both under the name "Conversations with a Gender Therapist."

As my reach grew, I began to receive messages from people across the world thanking me for providing them with information, education, and encouragement. This reassured me that I was on the right track that I was indeed *doing more*.

In December of 2014, I found myself face-to-face with the first Ordeal of my journey. An Ordeal is when the protagonist in a story encounters a challenge which reveals to them their deepest fears; also known as the *hero's crisis*.<sup>12</sup> Although it was gratifying to use my experience as a gender therapist to assist so many people across the world, a certain topic was being brought up with startling frequency, and I found

<sup>11</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, "Keynote: Transgender Day of Remembrance 2013," (address, Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Vogler, "The Ordeal," in *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Studio City, CA: M. Wiese Productions, 1998), 155–73.

myself struggling to come up with the right answers. Each person's story was unique, but they all had a painfully clear theme:

Dara–Please help me figure out my gender identity.

The more I read these pleas, the more I wrestled with how to respond. Providing individualized attention to those who needed guidance unpacking their gender identity was an impossibility. As a therapist in Colorado, I am restricted to only seeing clients who live in the same state in which I practice. Additionally, I can only see a certain number of clients each week, which also imposes limits on the number of people I can effectively help on a one-on-one basis.

The cry for help continued to grow louder and louder until the task seemed insurmountable. I was left in a state of confusion and uncertainty. Hence my Ordeal: *How can I 'do more' for those in need of guidance, relief, and answers to their questions about their gender identity?* 

Eventually the answer began to emerge in the form of advice I heard on several of the online business podcasts I turn to for mentorship and ideas:

Ask your audience what it is that is causing them pain. Figure out how you can help with easing this pain. Then, create something that helps to ease their pain.

I knew what needed to be done: create a guidebook containing practical tools and exercises for gender-questioning individuals to use during their self-discovery journey. I spent the next two years developing that resource, which you have thankfully discovered: You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery.

As you begin to listen for your own Call to Adventure, know that this guidebook is my way of walking beside you as you embark upon this journey.

> -Dara Hoffman-Fox, LPC Colorado Springs, Colorado December 2016

xxii

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972. Print.
- Hoffman-Fox, Dara. "Dara Hoffman-Fox, Licensed Professional Counselor & Gender Therapist." *Dara Hoffman-Fox*. http://darahoffmanfox.com/.
- "Facebook/Conversations with a Gender Therapist." Facebook/ Conversations with a Gender Therapist. Accessed December 03, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc.
- "Dara Hoffman-Fox." YouTube/Conversations with a Gender Therapist. Accessed December 03, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/channel/ UC75HVYVE-wYHGQlc4w3-GGw.
- "@darahoffmanfox | Twitter." @darahoffmanfox | Twitter. Accessed December 3, 2016. https://twitter.com/darahoffmanfox.

# The Ins and Outs of This Guidebook

## WHO IS THIS GUIDEBOOK FOR?

I created this guidebook for anyone who has questions, curiosities, doubts, confusion, struggles, or concerns about their gender and their gender identity and how this contributes to who they are as a whole.

Here's where all of this began: you were assigned a  $sex^{13}$  at birth (male, female, or intersex) based on the appearance of your genitals, which also became the *gender* you were assigned at birth. At some point in your life, you began to realize you were not entirely comfortable with this assigned sex and gender. There are many reasons why this could be the case, which you will explore throughout this guide.

Having questions about your gender identity can confuse and complicate your understanding of who you are as a whole. When gender identity is a missing puzzle piece, every area of your life is strongly impacted. These questions can create stress, painful confusion, uncertainty of your place in the world, interpersonal difficulty, not having a solid sense of self, and many other issues. Thus, taking time to explore these feelings is crucial.

If you have found yourself intrigued by the title of this book and are wondering if it might hold answers to the questions you have about yourself, I suggest you keep reading.

## CAN I PUT THIS OFF? WILL IT MAYBE JUST GO AWAY?

These questions frequently arise for those who are wrestling with their gender identity. It's also common for someone to test this theory out, waiting to see if the confusion surrounding their gender does indeed subside or disappear over time. However, one's instinctual need to be true to oneself will almost always make itself known, one way or another.

<sup>13 &</sup>quot;Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or someone born with intersex traits (that is to say, atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia." (The Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients, adopted by the APA Council of Representatives, February 18–20, 2011).

Choosing to give in to this drive to become your authentic self can be nerve-racking and full of risks. Nonetheless, the suffering that can result from *not* doing it can feel worse than any of the possible consequences that would result from exploring your gender identity.

The rewards of increased self-awareness are often difficult to describe until one has actually achieved this state of being. I asked my Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community what they learned about themselves once they had a better understanding of their gender identity.<sup>14</sup>

"Not knowing who you are is terrible, empty, and cold. You're lost. Knowing now who I am has helped me feel like I'm finally alive-that I exist."

"Realizing this allowed me to better understand myself, express myself, and most importantly accept myself."

"I understand now that what I was asking was not 'Am I transgender?' but 'Is it ok to be me?' And it is."

"It helped to break down the walls of isolation."

"As I reconciled my feelings toward myself of fear, self-loathing, etc., they melted away and comfort took its place."

"Now that I have the words to describe who I am, a world of information is unlocked."

"I now have a better, more truthful sense of identity, as well as clarity."

"The answer helped me find balance in my life."

"It was like hearing a voice that said 'What you feel exists, and you are not alone."

Is this type of self-awareness something you would like to experience as well? Then keep reading.

## CLEARING UP A DAMAGING MYTH

I have heard a disturbingly high number of individuals say they have been taught there is a certain way they must experience their gender identity in

<sup>14</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts.

order to be seen as valid. This belief can be so damaging that it convinces people they shouldn't even bother attempting to explore this any further. Here is what is actually true about your gender identity exploration:

There is what is actually true about your genuer identity explora

- 1. This is *your* discovery process and no one else's.
- 2. Only *you* get to decide how to describe your identity.
- 3. You are allowed to take as long as you need to explore your gender identity.
- 4. Everyone's experience is different and is to be respected.
- 5. You will figure some things out now and others later.

Reread this list as often as you need as a reminder to not let anyone else's opinion about what the right or wrong way is to go about this journey.

## HOW DO I USE THIS GUIDEBOOK?

This guidebook was designed to help you achieve greater clarity regarding your gender identity by undertaking a journey of self-exploration. The stages of this journey are separated into three sections:

## Stage One: Preparation

Preparation is your setup for success. The work you do in this stage will prepare you for the following stages, much like a martial artist must undergo intense training before engaging in their first fight. You'll solidify your motivation for embarking upon this journey, reveal fears that are holding you back, and learn how to build support for yourself during what can be a both a challenging and rewarding time.

## Stage Two: Reflection

This stage will take you into the past to examine hints and clues that may have been present during your formative years. This will help you make sense of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you may not have understood before. This section will also help you become more aware of shame and guilt you may be carrying as a result of what you experienced during this time of your life.

## Stage Three: Exploration

This stage is full of exercises that will help you actively explore your gender identity. The process of discovering one's gender identity is often

xxvi

complicated and overwhelming, so we'll be breaking it down into easierto-digest pieces. You'll examine individual layers that make up one's gender identity and then have the chance to put these together to form the big picture of who you are.

## WORKING THROUGH THIS GUIDE

The guide was created with the assumption that you will be working through it in the order in which it was written. However, if you reach an exercise that you feel you are either not ready for or have already explored, you should then skip it and move on to the next one. It's also okay to leave blanks when you aren't sure what to write, coming back to them once you discover your answers. By all means take time as you work through this guide. You can start and stop as often as you need to, whether it is for weeks, months, or even years.

Although this guidebook has room in which you can write your answers, you can instead choose to use a separate notebook, sketchpad, or Word document for this purpose. Your responses in this guidebook will create a journal of sorts, providing you with a record you can return to for perspective on just how far you have come.

Think of You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery as a compass, map, or navigation system that will act as a guide for however long you need it.

## CHALLENGES IN CREATING A GENDER IDENTITY GUIDEBOOK

The topic of gender identity is very complex. Conversations around it are constantly evolving so writing a book about discovering your gender identity presents its unique challenges. Here are the main ones I encountered:

#### Language/Lexicon

Language and lexicon have to do with which words I chose to use throughout the book to describe gender, gender expression, gender identity, etc. I monitor on a daily basis which terms those who are sensitive and inclusive about this subject are most commonly using. Nonetheless, it's possible I will accidentally offend or leave out someone by certain word choices. You are more than welcome to let me know at darahoffmanfox.com/contact if you come across such verbiage so I can address that in future editions. Additionally, through the duration of the book I use the pronouns *they/them* instead of *he/his* or *she/hers*. This is done to avoid the cumbersome task of having to write *he/she/they* whenever I am referring to a person, and not as a dismissive gesture to those who use female or male pronouns.

#### **International Readers**

I receive a large number of messages from individuals all over the world. Although every attempt has been made for the material in this book to be applied as universally as possible, there will more than likely be instances where something is discussed that persons outside of North America will be unable to identify, relate to, or may even be put at risk by. I welcome your feedback at darahoffmanfox.com/contact as to how I can improve future editions with regard to this concern.

#### Age/Generational Differences

I have received messages from individuals ranging from ages twelve to seventy-two. This brings about the unique challenge of how to create a book that will be relevant to all ages. There is an undeniable difference in how someone who is seventy-two has experienced their gender identity over the duration of their lifetime compared with someone who is thirty. There's also a difference between the experience of those who are thirty compared with those who are currently in their teens.

In just a few short years, the power of the Internet, combined with dynamic cultural shifts occurring around the world, have dramatically changed the face of gender identity exploration. I have endeavored to present the material in this book as inclusively as possible across generations.

A note to those who are in their teens: Many of you, especially if you are in your younger teens, are unable to access needed resources without the involvement of a parent or guardian. You may have concerns that you won't be understood or supported by them, which may be a reasonable fear.

For further assistance, I recommend:

- Rainess, Seth Jamison. *Real Talk for Teens: Jump-Start Guide to Gender Transitioning and Beyond*. Oakland, CA: Transgress Press, 2015.
- Testa, Rylan Jay, Deborah Coolhart, and Jayme Peta. *The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring*

xxviii

#### You and Your Gender Identity

*Gender Identity.* Oakland, CA: Instant Help Books, an imprint of New Harbinger Publications, 2015.

You can also check out the Further Resources at the end of certain chapters for ideas as to how you can approach your parents and get support from others. Remember, *you don't have to go through this alone*.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

This guide will be helpful to you in many ways. As you progress through it, be aware that many unexpected emotions, memories, and realizations are likely to surface.

As I was faced with the question, "How do I make sure my readers are going to be okay on this journey?" I was inspired to create the Self-Care Checklist, which you will find on page xxxi. There you will find ideas as to how you can practice self-care as you work through this guidebook, as well having someplace to list your own self-care techniques.

I also highly recommend you have a mental health practitioner you can turn to as you work through this guidebook. If you are unable find a trans-friendly practitioner in your area and/or cannot afford one, seek out knowledgeable and supportive persons you can turn to for support, advice, and friendship (we will cover how you can do this later in this guide).

## "WHAT'S YOUR GENDER IDENTITY, DARA?"

My audience often asks me about my own gender identity; curious to know more about who it is they are turning to for guidance and advice. I have actually discovered a lot of my answers through writing this book. By the time I reached the end of this writing journey, I concluded I connect the most with term *nonbinary* to describe my gender identity, *androgynous* to describe my gender expression, and *queer* to encompass my gender identity, gender expression, and my sexual orientation.

Although I'm accustomed to she/her pronouns and am experimenting with the use of third gender pronouns, I find that I most prefer the use of my name in place of a pronoun. I've also begun using the suffix Mx. as an expression of my desire to not be gendered as female (this is a gender-neutral alternative to Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr—e.g., Mx. Dara Hoffman-Fox). Being the first student of this guidebook proved to be an unexpected and illuminating experience that I hope its readers are able to experience as well.

## FINAL THOUGHTS BEFORE WE BEGIN

As the subtitle of this book states, this is a *guide to discovery*. The hope is, by the time you reach the end of it, you will be closer to understanding your gender identity, as well as yourself as a whole. But it will be far from the final finish line. Growing in self-awareness will point you in the right direction as to what you might want to do next, which will lead you to the next step, and the next. However, the journey of discovering your authentic self is one you will be on your entire life.

Self-discovery isn't easy. Will others receive what you discover about yourself with compassion, respect, and understanding? Will your relationships with your loved ones change? We live in a time of increasing awareness of what it means to be transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse, but there is still a long way to go. With these realities in mind, I've made sure to include tools throughout this guidebook that you can use to help navigate the waters if they grow choppy.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- Tando, Darlene. *The Conscious Parent's Guide to Gender Identity: A Mindful Approach to Embracing Your Child's Authentic Self.* New York: Adams Media, 2014.
- "Ally Moms." *Call Him Hunter*. 2016. Accessed December 03, 2016. https ://callhimhunter.wordpress.com/ally-moms/comment-page-1/.
- Hoffman-Fox, Dara. "Coming Out to Your Parents as Trans." Ask a Gender Therapist. June 27, 2015. Accessed December 3, 2016. https://youtu .be/3\_eQr6jmmBY.
- "The Trevor Project." *The Trevor Project*. Accessed December 3, 2016. http://www.thetrevorproject.org/.

# Self-Care Checklist

Self-discovery can be a difficult process, so it is crucial to set aside time to take care of yourself as you work through it. Below you'll find examples of what self-care can look like. You'll be given reminders throughout the guidebook as to when it would be a good idea to turn to your Self-Care Checklist.

Later on we will look at how there may be items on your Self-Care Checklist that you do to excess, and thus are more harmful than helpful. For now, feel free to list anything that comes to mind.

## Circle items on the list you already use for self-care and/or that you'd be interested in trying. Use the blank lines to add more self-care ideas as you go along.

xxxii

## Self-Care Checklist

Tarot cards/I Ching Watch or play sports Breathe deeply Make a music mix Write code Listen to comedy Recite affirmations Cry Play Roleplaying games Coloring Religious ceremony Clean your living space Bowling Spend time with children

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Bard, Ellen. "45 Simple Self-Care Practices for a Healthy Mind, Body, and Soul." *Tiny Buddha.* 2016. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://tinybuddha.com /blog/45-simple-self-care-practices-for-a-healthy-mind-body-and-soul/.
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- *TransLifeline: Hotline Service*. Donate Life Organization. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://www.translifeline.org/.

STAGE ONE
Preparation

# Introduction to Stage One: Preparation

There is an approach to life's challenges that many have used in the past, and will continue to use for years to come:

Our life is a story, and it is filled with many journeys along the way.<sup>15</sup>

You can apply this concept to the subject matter you'll be exploring in *Stage One: Preparation*:

The next chapter of your story is unfolding. You are about to go on a journey to discover your authentic gender identity.

Before you can leave home and set forth on this journey, you must put time in at the beginning to plan ahead for what you are about to embark upon. *Stage One: Preparation* is here to help get you ready for this.

The chapters in this stage will help you in your preparation by showing you how to:

- Get confirmation that you should indeed embark upon this gender identity journey
- Gain motivation by looking at why you need to go on this journey
- Name, acknowledge, and own the fears that might come up while you are on this journey
- Gather your Magical Elixirs to help you move forward successfully on this journey

#### Notes

<sup>15</sup> This inspiration comes from the works of Joseph Campbell, as well as C. G. Jung.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Jung, C. G. The Undiscovered Self. Boston: Little, Brown, 1958.

- Jung, C. G., and R. F. C. Hull. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Vogler, Christopher, and Michele Montez. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers.* Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

## Chapter 1

# Why Do I Need to Find Out the Truth?

This book has somehow made its way into your hands. More than likely this means you are filled with a variety of emotions concerning your gender identity.

Whether you are experiencing curiosity or pain or something in between, there's no more time to waste. There's a reason you want to take the next step toward understanding your gender identity, and this chapter will help you figure out what it is.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first step toward Preparation is to be sure that this guidebook is the right tool for you at this particular moment in time. It comes down to one simple question. Answer it quickly, with your first gut instinct. No one else has to see it but you.

Are you uncomfortable with your gender assigned at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES

#### MAYBE

#### NO

In other words, either when you were born or before you were born, certain people examined your external genitalia and saw a penis, a vagina, or a variation of both (for those born intersex). Based on this observation it was declared that your sex was male, female, or intersex. This subsequently resulted in you being perceived and raised as the gender that corresponds with that assignment of sex.

Circle your answer. If you answered YES or MAYBE, keep reading.

## Creating a Logline

In this section, you will be creating your personal logline to help identify the main reasons you want to answer your gender identity questions as soon as you possibly can.

In the film and television world, a logline is a brief summary of the story intended to be catchy and memorable. It's what the movie-preview voiceover person says to grab your attention. The logline usually goes something like this:

The main character's normal, everyday life is [like this]. Then [major event or realization occurs] and the main character is changed forever because of it [in these ways].

Here are a few examples from well-known storylines:

*Star Wars*<sup>16</sup>: Luke Skywalker has a quaint, although fairly boring, and uneventful existence at the beginning of the film. There's no reason for his life to change at all . . . until his family is brutally murdered.

*The Hunger Games*<sup>17</sup>: Sure, life sucks for the people in this postapocalyptic world, including for the eventual hero, Katniss Everdeen. At least she has her mom, her sister, and a cute guy to go hunting with. Katniss has no idea what the future holds as she becomes the face of the revolution against their tyrannical government.

*Orange is the New Black*<sup>18</sup>: Piper Chapman is an attractive, white, upper-middle class gal with a big secret in her past. Just as she's about to start her new life with her fiancé, she's arrested for exactly what she hopes to escape. While in prison, she realizes how much she has been pretending to be someone she isn't, and gains true freedom through reaching new depths of self-awareness.

Think of your favorite film, book, or TV show and see if this same storyline structure can be found in it. What story are you thinking of? How would you describe its logline?

<sup>16</sup> George Lucas, *Star Wars Episode IV - A New Hope*, (United States: Lucasfilm, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1977), film.

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games, (New York: Scholastic, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Jenji Kohan, Orange Is the New Black, (United States: Lionsgate Television, July 11, 2013), television show.

Now let's break the logline down into its parts:

- 1. The main character is dealing with a certain stirring within them. It might be experienced as painful and troublesome. It might also be experienced as mysterious and intriguing. The character could also be unaware (at least consciously) that there is something within them that needs to be expressed and explored.
- 2. Then something happens to reveal just how much is really going on beneath the surface for the main character. It's at this point they realize their life will continue to stay exactly the same unless they do something about it.
- 3. The main character embarks on a quest (which can be internal and/or external) searching for answers to these questions, hoping to create a life that feels more authentic to who they really are.
- 4. The main character's illusions are revealed, helping them see the world through different eyes. As their old selves fall away, they question everything they had previously believed to be true.

You've probably figured out by now that *you* are the main character and this is *your* story that we're talking about. *Your* search for answers about your gender identity is *your* quest. Your personally created logline will become your mission statement, beacon, and guiding light.

## THIS IS YOUR LIFE

The first step toward creating this logline is to take a look at your life as it is right now. There has to be some sort of explanation why you (the main character) are feeling unsettled, perplexed, unhappy, curious, or all of the above.

#### Step 1: The Opening Scenes

Think about yourself and your life as if you were watching it as a movie. What do you see? How would you describe what you see during the opening scenes? Keeping in mind that you are the main character, use the following prompts to help you explore this:

Describe the main character in the third person (using they/them or he/she pronouns). How old are they? What is their perceived gender? What do they

### Preparation

look like? What's their personality like? What are their interests and hobbies? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Describe the physical world of this character. In what country, state, or town do they live? What type of dwelling? What does it look like?

Describe where this character spends time. What are these places/scenarios? How much time do they spend in each (e.g., home, work, school, local bar, the gym, hangouts, friends' or relatives' houses, in the car commuting, in combat, in isolation)?

Describe how the character spends their time. How much do they work? Do they go to school? What's their family life like? What's their social life like? Are they frequently alone?

Describe the other people in the character's life. Who are the important people in their life? What is the character's relationship like with each of them?

8

Describe what the other characters think of the main character. Are they well liked? Are they seen as mysterious and aloof? Are they seen as being challenging or difficult?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very and 10 being very much so, how content do the other people in the story assume this character is with the current state of their life (regardless of how content the character actually feels)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Step 2: Zooming In

Now that you've established what the world of the main character *seems* to be like, let's zoom in to get a closer look at what's *actually* going on. Answering these questions sets up the entire story that's about to unfold for the main character (i.e., for *you*).

What does the character do when no one is watching?

What does this character struggle with that no one else knows about? What takes up the most space in the character's thoughts?

What does this character wish they could do to further explore these thoughts?

9

What steps have they taken so far to accomplish this?

What do they want to try, but haven't yet?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very and 10 being very much so, how content do you think this character actually is with the current state of their life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

#### Step 3: Creating the Logline

Follow these steps to create your logline:

 Create a several-word description of yourself (e.g., "A highly intelligent, charismatic software engineer . . ."). You can use these adjectives and nouns to get you started:

Adjectives	Nouns
Intelligent	College student
Nerdy	Athlete
Music-loving	Military/Former military member
Hardworking	[Your role(s) in your family]
Creative	[Your job or career]
Ambitious	Geek
Socially awkward	Recovering alcoholic/addict
Tattooed	Survivor of
[Your nationality]	Entrepreneur
Tattooed	Survivor of
[Your nationality]	Entrepreneur
[Your culture]	[Political party]
[Your sexual orientation]	[Religious affiliation]

- 2. Create a phrase that describes your current state of existence. Examples:
  - "... is tired of hiding their true self."
  - "... is bursting with newfound self-awareness they are ready to share with the world."
  - "... can no longer stand turning to [fill in addiction] as a way of running from their true self."
  - "... is delighted to be learning things about themselves they had never expected to learn."
- 3. Create a description of what the possible solution(s) might be. You can make this as obvious or as mysterious as you'd like. Examples:
  - "... by facing the truth about their gender identity ..."
  - "... by exploring possibilities about themselves that they never thought existed ..."
  - "... by challenging the assumption that they are a man/a woman ..."
  - "... by no longer hiding the truth from themselves and from others ..."
- Create a phrase describing what the cost might be if you don't do this. Examples:
  - "... a disturbing feeling of never truly becoming themselves ...."
  - "... an existence filled with the same ole same ole ...."
  - "... a lifetime filled with regret over 'what could have been'...."
  - "... the chance at missing out on the peace of being fully selfaware ..."

## Preparation

5. Combine your phrases to create your final logline. Be sure your logline hooks you on an emotional level. You're going to be turning to it throughout your journey as a reminder of what you are doing and why.

Description of yourself + Phrase that describes your current state of being + What the possible solution might be + What the cost might be if you don't do this = Your Logline

## Step 4: Use Your Logline

Come up with ways you can use this logline as a handy companion throughout your journey (note: modify the following ideas if you need to be discreet).

Place a checkmark next to the ideas you would like to try.

## Be Creative:

- □ Use a photo editor to give it a design (such as quotescover.com, picomonkey.com, and a wide variety of free apps which are available).
- □ Make a collage with photos, or cut items out of magazines.
- □ Set it to music. Use an existing song and create your own lyrics . . . or create a new song entirely!

## Put It Where You Can See It:

- $\Box$  Home office corkboard
- □ Bathroom mirror
- $\Box$  In your vehicle
- $\Box$  On your computer or tablet
- $\Box$  In your wallet, purse, or bag
- $\Box$  On your refrigerator
- $\hfill\square$  As the wallpaper for your phone, laptop, or desktop
- □ As your social media profile picture or wallpaper

12

□ Write it on your body (you may want to wait for the tattoo until you're further into your journey)

In the coming days, be sure to return to your logline for motivation and inspiration:

- Go back and read it on the days you are feeling defeated, afraid, or frustrated.
- Memorize it and make it your mantra. Do whatever you must so you can remember it, repeat it, and relive it.
- Send it to a trusted person who will remind you when you need it the most (kind of like a Gender Identity Sponsor).

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

Pearson, Carol S., and Hugh K. Marr. *What Story Are You Living?: A Workbook and Guide to Interpreting Results from the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator*. Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 2007.

## Chapter 2

## The Role of Fear on Your Journey

E mbarking on the journey to discover your gender identity might be Done of the most important challenges you undertake during your lifetime. Understanding why it is so challenging can help it become more manageable, simpler, and less overwhelming.

## Fear: Why Does It Have to Be There?

We all hide (i.e., *repress*, as we psychotherapy types like to call it) essential parts of ourselves that we have been taught to be ashamed and/ or afraid of. Our unconscious takes care of repressing these aspects for us, and it is actually really good at it. That's because our unconscious thinks its main job is to keep us from harm.

When we were children, our unconscious helped us push down anything we believed to be too shameful or wrong about who we really were. We did this by tossing these thoughts, feelings, and memories into a heavily padlocked trunk that resides in our psyche. We then threw it into the deepest ocean we could find. We thought if we got rid of the trunk and everything in it, then somehow our lives would become easier and everyone would like and accept us. Here's the thing: *the ocean that you threw the trunk into is your unconscious*. This means the trunk and all of its contents have been with you all along.

You may or may not remember creating this Trunk of Secrets. You may have begun the process of filling the trunk at a young age, or you may have been older. You might have just a few things in it, or it could be completely stuffed. Regardless of your story, it's very likely there's at least *something* in that trunk that needs to be looked at. It could be causing you anything from confusion and uncertainty to paralyzing fear and distress.

The presence of fear means you are getting closer to discovering something about yourself. This is because we oftentimes fear the unknown, and it is unknown as to what you will dig out of your Trunk of Secrets.

## Calling Out Your Fears

The Trunk Secrets you will uncover through the use of this guidebook are the ones having to do with your gender identity. This doesn't mean other Trunk Secrets won't come spilling out during this process, but it's less overwhelming to focus on one at a time.

In *Stage Two: Reflection* you're going to look at when you first began to feel conflicted about your gender identity, what happened as you became more aware of this, and why you ended up having to put those thoughts and feelings into that trunk. For right now, let's reach into that trunk and nudge that secret—just a little bit.

## STEP 1: PLAN FOR SELF-CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist from the beginning of the book. Find an activity to do *before* you begin to work on this exercise and an activity to do *after* you have finished this exercise.

What will your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity be?

What will your Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity be?

The point of this is to train you to make self-care a regular part of your life. Working through the questions you have about your gender identity can be stressful at times, so it is important you are kind to yourself as you do so.

## STEP 2: PRE-EXERCISE SELF-CARE

Put aside this guide and do your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity. Return when you are finished.

## STEP 3: PEERING INTO THE TRUNK (TAKE ONE)

Find someplace private where you won't be interrupted. You're going to start a dialogue with yourself, so choose a method that works best for you. Examples of this are journaling, visualization, drawing, meditation, doing this exercise while walking, or talking aloud.

Imagine you are slowly lifting open the lid of the trunk. Rummage around the trunk until you find anything having to do with your gender identity. Once you find one of those hidden gems, ask this part of yourself a question:

### "What are you afraid of?"

It's possible you will come up completely blank when you ask yourself this. You also might feel overwhelmed with so many answers you don't know where to start. This is normal. You may not know what it is you are fearful of, but that doesn't mean that the fear isn't there.

This is Take One of the exercise, because just asking the question is a big step in and of itself. Before you move on to Take Two, read through these examples of fears that can come up during this process and see if any of them strike a familiar chord with you:

"What if I don't like/hate/am ashamed of what I learn about myself?"

"What if my family and friends don't like what I discover about myself?"

"What if I hurt my loved ones because of what I discover?"

"What if I think it's true, but then it turns out I was wrong?"

"What will the rest of society think of me?"

"Will I be able to transition socially and/or medically?"19

16

<sup>19</sup> Transitioning socially can include changing your name, pronouns, documents, gender expression, etc. Transitioning medically can include Hormone Replacement Therapy and/or a variety of different gender-confirming surgeries.

"What if I get physically harmed by someone who hates who I am?"

"Who will I lose in my life if I do this?"

"What if I lose my job over this?"

"What if I don't 'pass'?"

"What if I'm not happy, either way?"

Circle any of the above statements that feel or sound familiar to you.

#### STEP 4: PEERING INTO THE TRUNK (TAKE TWO)

Again, the question you're asking yourself is:

"What are you afraid of?"

Without censoring or judging yourself, write down what emerges. Be as specific or general as you want—this is *your* list.

Fear 1:	
Fear 3:	
Fear 4:	
Fear 5:	

#### STEP 5: RANKING YOUR FEAR

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much and 10 being a whole lot, how much fear comes up for you when you think of each item on the list?

Fear 1: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fear 2: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fear 3: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fear 4: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fear 5: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

#### STEP 6: YOUR OVERALL FEAR LEVEL

Add up each number from Step 5 and divide by 5 (or however many fears you ended up listing).

Write down you average here: \_

This number will give you a better idea of how much fear you have overall going into this.

#### SELF-CARE REMINDER

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It's time to set this guide aside and spend some time with your chosen activity.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- Bladon, Lee. "B The Personality, Ego Structures and Holes." *Esoteric Science*. 2006. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://www.esotericscience.org /articleb.htm.
- Bradshaw, John. *Healing the Shame That Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988.

Ford, Debbie. *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers: Reclaiming Your Power, Creativity, Brilliance, and Dreams.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

McGonigal, Jane. *SuperBetter: The Power of Living Gamefully*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 2016.

## Chapter 3

## Feeling the Fear and Doing It Anyway

There's something you need to know from the start of this journey: Your fear is still going to be with you, and may even increase, as you move forward on this journey to discover the truth about you gender identity.

In any good story, the main character usually has reluctance to take on whatever challenge they are being faced with. How many times in *The Lord of the Rings* did Frodo say he wasn't meant for this type of adventure?<sup>20</sup> How many times in *The Hunger Games* series did Katniss throw down her bow and arrow (both literally and figuratively) and try to walk away from her destiny?<sup>21</sup>

Think of your fears as unwanted guests in your home. They aren't leaving anytime soon, so you need to come up with a plan to deal with them. The more you get to know them, the more you'll know what to do about them. By examining the root of your fears you'll shift from feeling as if they are controlling *you* to you feeling more in control of *them*. This mastery comes from having awareness and understanding of your fear and then using this knowledge to break its hold over you.

This chapter will provide you with tools to keep your fears from paralyzing you as you move closer to the truth about your gender identity.

#### Learning to Work Together with Your Fear

What follows is a visualization exercise to help you gain a different perspective on the role of fear in your life. Through this shift you'll learn how to work together *with* this fear, as opposed to letting it overpower and paralyze you.

<sup>20</sup> J. R. R. Tolkein, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965).

<sup>21</sup> Collins, 2009.

#### STEP 1: INTRODUCING: YOUR BODYGUARD

Picture someone you would like to have as your very own personal Bodyguard to have by your side when you are feeling threatened and unsafe. For example, I imagine that my Bodyguard is Samuel L. Jackson's character Jules from *Pulp Fiction*.<sup>22</sup>

What does yours look like? What's their name? They can be human, animal, mythological, whatever you most connect with.

#### STEP 2: WHY DO YOU HAVE A BODYGUARD?

What is the name of your bodyguard? \_\_\_\_\_

Imagine that \_\_\_\_\_\_ has been with you since you were born. It's inevitable that we will encounter threats in our life and this Bodyguard is there as a psychological defense to keep us safe.

As you move through your childhood and adolescence, \_\_\_\_

is highly alert to what it is that makes you feel hurt, sad, or afraid. Therefore, they are going to do whatever it takes to keep you from feeling that way.

In theory, this probably sounds great. Who doesn't want to avoid *those* feelings?

But the problem is \_\_\_\_\_\_ is hypervigilant. They take the job of protecting you very seriously. So, even though \_\_\_\_\_\_

means well, there's a downside to this called over-protection. Anytime someone is over-protected, they risk:

- Being unable to experience life to the fullest
- Stunted growth
- Hiding truths from themselves

For example, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ saw you pry open your Trunk of Secrets (see page 16). Their ears perked up as they heard your hidden thoughts and feelings about your gender identity rustling around in

<sup>22</sup> Quentin Tarantino, Pulp Fiction, (United States: Miramax, 1995), film.

there. They looked up and saw you crouched over the trunk, reaching your hand in and beginning to lift that part of you out.

In the past, \_\_\_\_\_\_ has seen what it's like when you tried to let that part of you out. They didn't like what they saw happen to you—not one bit! So they grabbed that part of you and put it in the trunk, hoping it was for good. Anytime \_\_\_\_\_\_ thought someone (maybe even you?) was getting too close to that trunk for comfort, they would pull out a weapon: a gun, a knife, nun-chucks—whatever they thought might work.

Your Bodyguard's weapon is actually *your fear*. \_\_\_\_\_\_ knows just what to say while holding up that weapon: *anything* that will keep you from getting closer to that trunk. "You know I hate to do this, but I can't allow you to go into that trunk. Don't you remember how you felt before I locked all that stuff up in the trunk? Do you want to be judged? Hurt? To be cast out? Let me remind you what will happen if you take that out of the trunk . . ."

Your Bodyguard is really only trying to protect you and keep you from harm. But your Bodyguard does not know what actually constitutes a *real* threat. This means fear (a.k.a. your Bodyguard, a.k.a. *yourself*) can mislead you into believing things that may not actually be true. Additionally, even if there are actual threats for you and your Bodyguard to reckon with, you have the right to choose self-actualization over continued repression.

#### STEP 3: CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BODYGUARD

It might take a while for you to recognize when your Bodyguard is making their presence known. However, once you are able to do this, you can develop the habit of starting a dialogue with them whenever your fear surfaces.

Here are some ways you can do that:

- Thank them for being there for you all of this time.
- Remind them that you know this is going to be scary, but you can get through this together.
- Ask them to continue to let you know when they think you are in danger because this can help you be more vigilant and cautious.

• Encourage them to understand your point of view, and listen to their point of view as well.

Here's an example of how this can work.

## SCENE: DARA IS HANGING OUT IN HER OFFICE, DEEP IN THOUGHT

- Dara (to self): I think I'm ready to get a big tattoo on my right forearm. It's something that I've always admired on others, and I've imagined it on myself and really like the thought of it.
- Jules (enters the room): Uh, hey Dara, I couldn't help but notice your line of thinking just now, and as your Bodyguard I have to say I'm getting a bit concerned about it.
- Dara: Hey Jules, what's up? What do you mean?
- Jules: Well, I mean, think about it. When you were a kid you would do some, let's say, not-so-feminine things with your friends and most of the time you got made fun of for it.
- Dara: Yeah, I remember that. Like when I'd try to play football at recess with the guys. How I'd want to be Han Solo instead of Princess Leia. How I liked having short hair and wore jeans and T-shirts all the time.
- Jules: Right! Do you remember feeling so awkward, and weird, and isolated? I hated to see you go through that! That's when I told those not-so-feminine feelings of yours to f\*ck off, because I didn't want to see you hurt anymore.
- Dara: So you see me getting this tattoo as being a not-so-feminine thing, huh?
- Jules: Not just *yes* but *hell yes*! I'm not saying I don't think this is a true expression of who you are, or that it wouldn't be cool as sh\*t to have it. But think about the judgment, the looks, the snickering . . . You'd be labeled as being butchy, or a wanna-be guy, you know?
- Dara: I can definitely see why you are worried about this, Jules. But don't forget, I'm forty years old now, not eight. I really do think I'm ready for a step like this. And even if those things happen, I don't know if I really care anymore!
- Jules (swinging his gun around and stomping his feet): Dara, you are killin' me here! I really do hear what you are saying and am *almost* convinced that I might be acting overly protective right now. But it just makes me so nervous, I don't want to see you get hurt, child!

- Dara: You're awesome, Jules. I'm so lucky to have you on my side. Look, let's find a way to do this, nice and slow, so you can feel a little more relaxed about this. I will always need you to be there to watch out for me!
- Jules: Aw . . . [chuckles]. Okay, I'm open to trying that idea out. Now how about we go grab a Big Kahuna Burger? All this serious talk has gotten me starving!

The next time one of your top fears arises, take the time to dialogue with your Bodyguard to learn more about the roots of your fear.

Setting Appointment Times with Your Fears

If you find yourself constantly interrupted by your Fear List (see page 17) then this exercise is for you. Fears often come up without any warning: in the middle of your workday; while you're hanging out with your partner, kids, or pets; or in the middle of a test at school. They can also slowly seep into your mind when you are more relaxed, and therefore more vulnerable: when you're driving, showering, doing yoga, or when you're trying to sleep.

This exercise will help you create a plan for keeping your fears from overwhelming you and interrupting your life. You'll learn to do this by *setting appointment times with your fears*. By doing so, you gain control of your fears instead of letting them control you. When you set boundaries with your fears, you are saying to them, "I'm sorry, but I'm in the middle of something right now. You'll have to make an appointment and I'll get back to you then."

Go ahead, give this a try.

#### Step 1: When Do They Arrive?

*Think about a typical day. Are there certain times of day when your fears come up? Are there certain situations that trigger them?* 

#### Step 2: Where Can You Meet Them?

Now imagine places where you can spend time with these fears. This could be your car, a room in your home, somewhere out in nature, at a café, the gym, and so on.

#### Step 3: How Long Will You Meet with Them?

Decide on a period of time you are going to set aside for these appointments with your fears. Start with a small number, such as five or ten minutes, and increase from there as you get the hang of this.

Number of minutes:

#### Step 4: How Many Times Per Day?

How many times a day will you set these appointments? (Eventually you may even be able to change this to 'How many times per week?')

Number of times per day: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Step 5: Where Will You Keep Track of Your Appointments?

What is your favorite method of keeping track of things? This could be a notebook, or on your phone, or your computer.

#### Step 6: Scheduling Your Appointments

During your day, whenever a fear comes up, if it is not during one of your designated appointment times to spend with your fears, jot it down in the log you identified in Step 5. Give yourself permission to let it go, knowing you will definitely be meeting with it later.

#### Step 7: Self-Care Before Your Appointment

When your next Fear Appointment arrives, go to one of the places you listed under Step 2. Choose an activity from your Self-Care Worksheet

to do at the beginning of the appointment. Do the same activity each time, as this will create a comforting and grounding ritual.

#### Which self-care activity did you choose?

#### Step 8: Start the Clock

Set a timer (e.g., a watch, phone, or computer) for however many minutes you have scheduled the appointment for.

#### Step 9: Let the Appointment Begin

- 1. Take a deep breath and say (aloud or silently), "So, Fear, what brings you in today?"
- 2. Then, totally immerse yourself in the experience.
- 3. During the meeting, you can: dialogue out loud; journal; scream; stomp around; punch the air; dance; laugh in the Fear's face; video or audio record yourself; draw; sing about it.
- 4. Don't stop until your timer goes off.
- 5. Take another deep breath and say, "Well, thanks for coming, Fear. See you at our next appointment."

#### Step 10: Self-Care After Your Appointment

Choose a Post-Appointment Self-Care Activity. This can be the same or different from the one at the beginning. Again, do the same one every time, so as to signify to yourself that this appointment is over and you can return to your life.

Which self-care activity did you choose?

Start paying attention to when your fears make themselves known. Get into the habit of keeping track of them to tend to later, and create a ritual for when you will be spending quality time with these fears. This will reduce the amount of distraction they create in your life and put you in the driver's seat as to when they will be addressed.

#### Take a Positive Approach

If you believe in the power of the mind to change a negative to a positive, then give any or all of the following pointers a try. Think of these as Magic Elixirs you can whip out of your cloak at the first sign of a fear arising and douse it with these tips.

#### 1. REMEMBER WHY YOU ARE DOING THIS

"People don't transition to become less happy."

I heard this at the 2015 TRANSforming Gender Conference in Boulder, Colorado and was struck by its simple yet empowering truth.<sup>23</sup> We all go through transitions over the course of our lifetimes. We go through them hoping to improve our lives even if it's totally nerve-racking while we're going through it. Whether or not you end up literally transitioning with regard to your gender identity, taking a closer look at yourself will more than likely result in a *life* transition for you.

Go back to your logline from page 12 and write it here:

This is your reminder of why it is you are tired of feeling the way you feel and of living the way you live. Although you may have unhappy moments along the way, your goal is to move more toward happy (or content, or peaceful, or balanced—whatever word works for you).

#### 2. FOCUS ON THE POSSIBLE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Sometimes it's hard to know what you will end up enjoying after you go through a life transition. Right now, take a moment to imagine what your life could be like several years after you have embarked upon your gender identity journey. Think about what sorts of positive changes have occurred. Let your mind wander through the possibilities of your new life.

<sup>23</sup> TRANSforming Gender Conference, (Center for Community, Boulder, CO, March 13–14, 2015).

*List at least five positive changes that you can see resulting from making this life transition.* 

What you've written above gives you *hope*. And hope is one of the most powerful elixirs you can use against fear.

#### 3. EXPOSE YOURSELF TO MORE POSITIVE NARRATIVES

Many of you use social media and more than likely read through the feed on your favorite platforms several times a day. More than likely you are friends with or follow people who are transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, or questioning their gender identity. You may follow or subscribe to groups and organizations that share these kinds of stories and experiences.

Next time you are perusing social media, pay attention to the type of messages, videos, and stories you are taking in. Let's look closer at the first ten to twenty posts, tweets, pictures, messages, or videos that you see.

How many of them leave you feeling better? Inspired? Motivated? Excited?

How many of them leave you feeling worse? Worried? Defeated? Depressed?

If your "worse" number is higher than your "better" number, then something needs to change. Go through and remove, hide, un-like, un-follow, or block the people and groups that you need to distance yourself from (even if it's just temporarily) so you can increase the positive number of messages you are receiving and decrease the amount of the negative messages.

Start keeping track of your social media exposure and what it is that makes you feel better and what makes you feel worse. Take this empowering step toward gaining control over the types of messages you are taking in on a daily basis.

#### Be Kind to Yourself

There's a good chance you are unaware of how many negative messages related to gender and gender identity you've taken in over the years. These messages create self-loathing and shame, which fear hungrily feeds upon. Therefore, we need to minimize how much you might be working against yourself during your gender identity exploration. The following are ideas as to how you can do this by being kinder to yourself over the course of your journey.

#### PUT YOUR SELF-CARE CHECKLIST TO WORK

Find at least one activity a day to do for yourself from your checklist. You can certainly do more, as well as doing several at the same time. Continue to add ideas to the checklist as you discover what it is you enjoy in life, what brings you into balance, and what gives you comfort.

If you didn't receive an adequate amount of care during your childhood and/or didn't have self-care modeled for you, this might be difficult to try and can feel initially uncomfortable. Take it slow and allow yourself to adjust to self-care becoming a regular part of your daily life. Your body and mind will eventually begin to ease into it, so keep at it until it becomes as natural to you as breathing.

#### CUT DOWN ON EXCESSIVE ESCAPISM

You may have noticed that you indulge too much and too often in certain activities on your Self-Care Checklist. These activities, if done in excess, can become distractions and escapes that inhibit forward motion.

If reading that caused you to feel even a little uncomfortable, ask yourself, "Is this true for me?" Circle your answer below.

YES MAYBE NO

If you answered YES or MAYBE, then this is no easy step to take. These activities have provided you with comfort over the years, protecting you from whatever it is you have buried about yourself. However, these self-care activities crossed over at some point into an *avoidance technique*.

What activities on your Self-Care Checklist do you think you might use for avoidance and/or excessive escapism?

Let's approach cutting back on avoidance and excessive escapism in your life step-by-step.

Step 1: Cutting back a little at a time

If you're spending, on average, four hours a day playing online games, cut it down to three. If you watch Netflix twelve hours a week, cut it down to ten. If you're on social media three hours a day, cut it down to two-and-a-half. During this downtime, you can:

- Continue to work through more of this guide.
- Explore whatever it is that this guide stirs up or inspires in you.
- Journal about the challenges you encounter, what did and didn't work, and how you are going to stay motivated to keep moving forward.
- Do a different Self-Care Activity that you know is not excessively escapist.

Continue to chip away at the amount of time you are in the excessive zone with any of the Self-Care Activities. You'll know you've reached your sweet spot with these activities when you sense they are helping you *recuperate*, as opposed helping you *avoid*.

What else could you do during the times when you are used to doing this activity?

#### Step 2: Determining the right amount of time

Next time you are over-indulging in one of your Self-Care Activities, listen for that little voice inside that says, "I should probably stop soon," or, "Just one more episode/game/chapter." Think of this voice as an alarm clock inside of you that has a snooze button. The little voice goes off—you hit the snooze. The little voice goes off again fifteen minutes later. "Time to stop," the little voice says. This is when you should close down/shut it/walk away and find something else to do.

At what point during your activity do you usually begin to hear this voice?

Once you get into the habit of catching this voice when it comes up:

- Set an actual timer for fifteen minutes, giving you time to wrap up your activity.
- When the timer goes off, stop what you are doing. *No matter what*.
- Have something else already planned for you to do when you stop.

#### Step 3: Find other things to do

The activity doesn't matter as much as being sure to already have it planned. One trick is to make this something that you *have* to do at the time you are supposed to stop what you are doing:

- Tell someone you'll call them at the time you need to stop your activity.
- Tell a family member or friend you will meet them somewhere/ pick them up at a certain time.
- Have a class, meeting, or gathering you are really motivated to go to.

Turning to activities on your Self-Care Checklist that engage a completely different part of your mind, changing up your environment, and awakening your other senses can also help to break these patterns of behavior. This can include physical activity, meditation, cooking or baking, listening to music, taking a shower, sitting in a park, etc.

What activities can you schedule for yourself ahead of time so you can do them once you stop your excessively escapist activity?

#### CREATE A NURTURER

At the very heart of self-care is the ability to receive nurturing.

What does the word "nurturing" bring up for you? What do you imagine, ideally, that the experience of nurturing would feel like to you?

This answer will be different for everyone. Some people need warm, comforting, and gentle nurturing. Others need nurturing that is wise and mentor-like. Still others enjoy a more playful, enthusiastic, and empowering side of nurturing. There are even those who connect best with the tough love approach of nurturing.

Your Nurturer can also work together with your Bodyguard as a team. The Nurturer can be there to help keep your Bodyguard calm, enabling you to be able to turn to both of them for advice, to complain about life, and lean on for support.

Use the space below to create your very own Nurturer. If you want to picture an animal instead of a person, such as a lioness, or a mythical creature, then by all means do so. The only stipulation is they need to be someone or something that you can easily conjure up in your mind when you are in need of nurturing. Imagine them holding you, preparing you tea or a big lunch, listening to you, giving you advice, or making you laugh. The mind is powerful enough that, if you allow yourself to really sink into these experiences with your Nurturer, you will feel physically better afterwards: a reduction of your blood pressure, a slowing of your breathing, a calming of your mind.

How would you describe your ideal Nurturer?

The next time you are in need of comfort, call upon your Nurturer for help. This will serve as a reminder to you that your self-care must become a priority, and that you deserve to be treated with care, compassion, and love.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- Allan, Patrick. "How to Snap Back to Reality When 'Escapism' Becomes 'Avoidance'." *LifeHacker.com*. August 10, 2015. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://lifehacker.com/how-to-snap-back-to-reality-when-escapismbecomes-av-1723091630.
- Amunrud, Kate. "How to Cut Back on Social Media Clutter." Kory Woodard. May 21, 2015. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://korywoodard. com/2015/05/how-to-cut-back-on-social-media-clutter/.
- Finch, Sam Dylan. "6 Ways to Stand Up to Toxic Media Messages and Love Yourself as a Trans Person." *Everyday Feminism*. February 4, 2015. Accessed November 30, 2016. http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/02 /love-yourself-as-trans-person/.

### Chapter 4

## Building Your Support Team

A lthough it can sometimes come across as cliché, there's a good reason why we often see the main character of a story assemble a team to assist them in fulfilling their quest. This approach to problem solving involves bringing several folks together, each with unique roles and contributions critical to fulfillment of the mission. Assembling such a team is something that can be done in real life as well—you will learn how to do so in this chapter.

#### Finding a Mentor

In many stories, the main character has a *Mentor* who they can turn to for guidance, support, and encouragement. This archetype (a type of character which has appeared frequently over time) has appeared in storytelling for centuries, and can be found in our everyday lives.

All mentors have certain qualities in common and, at the same time, are unique from one another. Take a look at these mentors and how, in personality and practice, they are both similar and different in the ways they assist the main character(s) of a story:

Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda (*Star Wars*)<sup>24</sup> Gandalf and Galadriel (*The Lord of the Rings*)<sup>25</sup> Haymitch (*The Hunger Games*)<sup>26</sup> Mr. Miyagi (*The Karate Kid*)<sup>27</sup> Dumbledore (*Harry Potter*)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Lucas, 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Tolkein, 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> John G. Avildsen, The Karate Kid, (St. Louis, MO: Swank, 1985), film.

<sup>28</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1999).

Professor Charles Xavier and Storm (*X-Men*)<sup>29</sup> Morpheus and the Oracle (*The Matrix*)<sup>30</sup> Rupert Giles (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*)<sup>31</sup> Dr. Miranda Bailey (*Grey's Anatomy*)<sup>32</sup> Tyler Durden (*Fight Club*)<sup>33</sup>

If you are familiar with any of these examples, you'll know that mentors aren't perfect or without their own struggles. However, they do carry about them a certain air of wisdom. They've been on adventures of their own and have returned with advice and knowledge to pass on to others.

There are two different types of mentors you can seek out in real life:

A Hands-On Mentor: This is someone you will interact with on a regular basis.

A Hands-Off Mentor: This is someone you don't know personally, but they have made their wisdom available for you, and others, to acquire.

#### FINDING A HANDS-ON MENTOR

A hands-on Mentor can be someone you meet with in person. Thanks to the Internet, this can also be someone you interact with through email, chat, social media, or a service like Skype.

A hands-on Mentor can help you on your journey by:

- Sharing resources that provide additional support and encouragement.
- Sharing resources related to transitioning (if you end up needing them).
- Sharing stories of challenges they encountered and how they got through them.
- Sharing stories of their successes and what they did to make them happen.
- Sharing their fears and helping to normalize the ones you are having.

<sup>29</sup> Stan Lee, *Uncanny X-Men*, (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 1963).

<sup>30</sup> Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, *The Matrix*, (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros, 1999), film.

<sup>31</sup> Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, (Los Angeles: Mutant Enemy, March 10, 1997), television show.

<sup>32</sup> Shonda Rhimes, *Grey's Anatomy*, (Los Angeles: ShondaLand, March 27, 2005), television show.

<sup>33</sup> Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996).

- Offering advice (when asked for it).
- Challenging you to step out of your comfort zone.

#### How to Find a Hands-On Mentor

Place a checkmark next to any of the following suggestions you can see yourself following up on.

- □ Conduct a search for Pride Centers in your state or country to see if they have resources for support groups where you can find a mentor.
- □ Conduct a search for Gender Identity Centers in your state or country to see if they have support groups where you can find a mentor.
- □ Use your favorite social media outlets to reach out to individuals you admire.
- □ Seek out message boards that relate to your specific gender identity questions and pay attention to who offers advice and guidance on the boards. Reach out to them either individually or on the message board itself.
- □ Seek out blogs that speak to you and send a message to the blogger to see if they'd be interested in mentoring you.
- □ Seek out video blogs that speak to you and send a message to the blogger to see if they'd be interested in mentoring you.
- □ Find a therapist in your area you can work with (try to find one who has experience working with transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and gender questioning individuals). Keep in mind that a therapist will have strict boundaries in place when it comes to the relationship that will limit the type and frequency of interaction you have with them.
- □ Seek out establishments in your area where you have a higher chance of encountering persons who can relate to what you are going through.
- □ Ask around (either in person or online) to see if anyone knows of a person who could provide mentorship to you.

#### How to Approach a Possible Hands-On Mentor

• Be assertive during your search: This will be hard for some of you who have a more reserved disposition. There are always exceptions to the rule, but in most cases a Mentor isn't going to seek you out. You will need to put yourself out there and make your needs known.

- Be clear during your search: Have in mind what it is you hope a Mentor can help you with, and make this clear when you begin to contact potential mentors.
- Be patient in your search: You may get turned down several times before you find the right mentor, but don't give up. Just like any other relationship, it can take time to find one that really works for you.
- Be willing to offer something in return: Although the hope would be you could find someone to offer mentorship at no cost, it's a good idea from the start to offer something in return. In some cases this will be money, but you could also provide compensation in creative ways as well. Offer to take them to coffee or a meal, or to share a service that you are skilled at, such as tech, graphic design, home maintenance, house cleaning, or accounting. Letting them know that you value their time and that you are willing to pay for their service can increase the chances of them saying "Yes."
- Be respectful of their time: If someone is doing this for you at no monetary cost, be sure to have a discussion from the start to set boundaries around how often you will be in communication with each other. Create a contract if need be that you both can sign, even if it's informal. This will prevent your Mentor from burning out and keeps you with a mentor.
- Remember, they are only human: If your Mentor hasn't been trained how to provide mentorship, you'll need to cut them some slack. They might not always have the right answer for you. They might get irritable or impatient at times (see the list of fictional mentors for proof of that) or go through a period where they need to take a break. The more understanding you show, the more likely they'll stick with you for the long haul.

Use this section to keep track of whom you would like to seek out as a hands-on mentor. Take note of when you attempted to contact them as well as your thoughts as to whether or not they are someone you desire to have as your mentor.

#### FINDING A HANDS-OFF MENTOR

A hands-off Mentor is someone you won't be interacting with on an individual or personal basis (unless, of course, you are lucky enough to meet them at a conference or convention).

There are several benefits to finding a hands-off mentor, as opposed to having an in-person one:

- If you are a more independent type of person, studying the ways of others can give you the mentor's wisdom while not actually having to engage with someone.
- Since you are learning from your Mentor through self-study, it's completely on your schedule—you won't have to wait for some-one else to respond to you when you need them.
- If you live in an isolated area where you aren't able to connect with a hands-on Mentor in person, you can always find hands-off mentors through books, blogs, videos, etc.
- For those who are especially uncomfortable with interpersonal communication, it eases you into the world of others who can relate to what you are going through without having to interact with them.
- There's none of the awkwardness or potential letdown that can come from negotiating boundaries, communication mishaps, drama, etc.
- You can have as many hands-off mentors as you want.

#### How to Find a Hands-Off Mentor

#### *Place a checkmark next to any of the following suggestions you can see yourself following up on.*

- □ Find people you can follow on YouTube. Be sure to pick those who update fairly regularly, or at least have posted enough videos for you to get a lot out of if they've stopped posting.
- □ Find persons you can follow on Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, reddit, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.
- □ Listen to podcasts that pertain to what you are experiencing.
- □ Find books that were written by people who have gone through/ are going through what you are experiencing, particularly positive ones you can relate to.
- □ Find bloggers and/or writers to follow.

□ Research well-known persons whose stories you admire and study their gender exploration journeys: musicians, models, filmmakers, politicians, actresses or actors, etc.

#### Making the Best of Having a Hands-Off Mentor

- Try not to get overwhelmed: There's a big world out there with many folks you could potentially use as a hands-off mentor. It's okay to start with a broad search, then continue to fine-tune it as you discover which words and phrases help narrow down your search. Make a list of three to five possible candidates, and then do research on each one. Keep all of them if you want or trim it down to just one—whatever works best for you.
- Make it engaging: You might enjoy having a daily or weekly routine in which you set aside time to learn or seek information from your mentor. What matters is that you feel like they are actually a part of your life to guide and support you with just the right story, quote, or message.
- Engage with them regularly: Since you won't actually be interacting with this person, you'll need to have other ways of keeping them a part of your life. Hang up pictures of them; use Post-its to display their inspiring quotes; listen to their recordings while you drive, while going for a walk, or when you need a pick-me-up; talk to others who admire them (a.k.a. "fans"). As long as you pick someone who will be a healthy influence on you there's nothing wrong with getting excited about having them in your life.

Use this section to keep track of whom you will seek out as hands-off mentors. Take note of what information you have gathered about them, including the work they have done that you connect with. Once you have your final list of hands-off mentors, keep track of what you have learned from them, reflecting upon how they are helping you on your journey.

Hands-on or hands-off mentors (or both) can be great additions to your support system. Take some time to explore both options and see what would be the best fit for you.

#### Filling in the Rest of Your Team

Having either one or several mentors with you on your journey is a key component to your success. However, it's unlikely that one person will have all of the talents, skills, and abilities needed to get tackle this challenge with you. The goal of this exercise is for you to brainstorm who else you can add to your team, and what steps to take to find them.

#### TIPS FOR PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR TEAM

- You can search for all of them at once, or just one at a time. You can also have more than one of each kind of team member. Everyone is different when it comes to the type of team they need, so follow your gut on this.
- You can start a small team now and then add people to it later, or have a bigger team you can make smaller later. Your journey is going to change course over time, so your team will more than likely need to change as well.
- If you are socially and/or geographically isolated, use the concept of having a hands-off Mentor and apply it to the formation of your team.
- If finding in-person team members is unrealistic right now, you can use fictional characters to fill these roles. You can engage with these characters through visualization, writing exercises, and other creative methods (see the conversation with Jules on page 22 for an example of how to do this).

There's no right or wrong way to go about forming your team as long as you keep in mind the main goal: for you to have *companionship* on your journey.

#### FINDING YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

Some of these tips are the same as when you were looking for a mentor, so use those methods again if they worked for you.

*Place a checkmark next to any of the following suggestions you can see yourself following up on.* 

□ Think about family members who could be a part of your team. This includes extended family and chosen family.

- □ Think about those in your friends or acquaintance group who could be a part of your team.
- □ Think about everyone you encounter on a regular basis: teachers, coaches, pastors, bosses, coworkers, local business owners or employees you see regularly, bartenders, etc. Could any of them be a part of your team?
- □ Do a search for Pride, LGBTQ, or Gender Identity Centers in your state or country to see if they have support groups where you can find team members.
- □ Use your favorite social media outlets and reach out to individuals you admire to see if they will respond to you personally.
- □ Seek out message boards that relate to your specific gender identity journey. Reach out to the board in general and then individual members as you get to know them better.
- □ Seek out both written and video blogs which you connect with and send a message to the creator to see if they they'd be interested in being a part of your team.
- □ Find a therapist in your area who you can work with (try to find one who has experience working with transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and gender questioning individuals).
- □ Seek out establishments in your area where you have a higher chance of encountering persons who can relate to what you are experiencing. This could include places that are LGBTQ owned and operated, gatherings that are progressive-leaning, open and affirming churches, or perhaps traveling to a bigger city within your state.
- □ Ask around (either in person or online) to see if anyone knows of persons who could be a part of your team.

#### PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR TEAM

Your team will consist of the following members:

- The Mentor
- The Comic Relief
- The Tough Love Friend
- The Cheerleader
- The Problem Solver
- The Good Listener
- The Sidekick

#### The Mentor

After completing the last exercise, you should have someone in mind for this, or perhaps you have already found someone to fill this spot on the team.

Who is your Mentor (or Mentors)?

#### The Comic Relief

Self-discovery is not for the faint-of-heart. You're going to need someone who will be there for you when you need to laugh and take things not so seriously. This person can point out when you need to take a break, relax, and have some fun.

Do you already know someone who can be your Comic Relief?

If you don't know someone who can be your Comic Relief, where can you go in search of them?

#### The Tough Love Friend

This is the person who will always be direct and honest with you. They have a no-bullcrap policy and won't hesitate to tell you the truth, even though it will be hard for you to hear. The key is they speak from a place of caring—they truly want the best for you. They show you they care by recognizing how hard it must be to have them point out the truth and continuing to patiently stand by you as you work through your challenges. You may leave a conversation with them feeling sore and weary. But, like a deep tissue massage, you know you needed to go through it to become healthier.

Do you already know someone who can be your Tough Love Friend?

If you don't know someone who can be your Tough Love Friend, where can you go in search of them?

#### The Cheerleader

The Cheerleader is someone who will be an uplifting, positive person in your life. They will try to get you to see the bright side of things and remind you of how awesome you are. They will have unwavering faith in you, tell you repeatedly how much they enjoy and appreciate you, and that they can't believe everyone else in the world doesn't feel the same way. They remind you of how you deserve better in your life. They will do this for you even if they are having a bad day, or if they have a lot going on in their life (in fact you might need to keep an eye on this for them, so they don't burn themselves out being your Cheerleader). They love knowing this is the role they play in your life. The Cheerleader can also help provide a balance to the role your Tough Love Friend plays in your life.

Do you already know someone who can be your Cheerleader?

If you don't know someone who can be your Cheerleader, where can you go in search of them?

#### The Problem Solver

This is the team member you turn to when you need someone resourceful, organized, and detail-oriented to help you move toward the next step of your journey. Although this team member is not the best at listening, they are excellent at being put to work. Give them a task to get to the bottom of and they will delight in doing so for you. For example, if you haven't formed your entire team yet, ask your Problem Solver where you can go in search for them and they will come up with a list of websites, clubs, and organizations for you to start with. You may not take every bit of advice from your Problem Solver, but chances are you will end up using enough of it to make this person an essential member of your team. Do you already know someone who can be your Problem Solver?

If you don't know someone who can be your Problem Solver, where can you go in search of them?

#### The Good Listener

The Good Listener does just that—they quietly listen. They won't try to offer advice, or try to fix things for you or tell you what you want to hear, or trash-talk whoever is upsetting you. They share space with you compassionately, attentively, kindly, and without judgment. After talking with them you'll have a feeling of, "Wow, thank you! I feel better being able to let that all off my chest." The Good Listener is of great benefit to someone who enjoys processing things out loud, and can come to their own conclusions by doing so. It's like writing in a journal, or talking to yourself, but with a flesh and blood human there to keep you company while you do.

Do you already know someone who can be your Good Listener?

If you don't know someone who can be your Good Listener, where can you go in search of them?

#### The Sidekick

This team member always has your back, without fail. They have strong opinions about those who hurt you and are unapologetic when it comes to how protective they are of you. Their enthusiasm for your well-being may be overwhelming at times, but their consistent loyalty to you makes it well worth it. Although this unwavering devotion may sound a lot like the Cheerleader, the Sidekick is going to have more of an edge to them. For example, if someone upsets you the Cheerleader might say, "Don't listen to them, they are taking their own crap out on you. You're awesome!" The Sidekick would be more likely to say, "What??? Where are they? I'll kick their butt!" Do you already know someone who can be your Sidekick?

If you don't know someone who can be your Sidekick, where can you go in search of them?

#### MAKING THE BEST OF HAVING A SUPPORT TEAM

- Keep this list handy so you can turn to it easily when in need.
- Be open to listing someone more than once if they are able to take on more than one role.
- Tell the people on this list that they are on your team and which role they represent. Chances are they will feel flattered and will take their responsibility as that team member quite seriously.
- Remember to thank your team members for being a part of your journey.
- Sometimes your team members might need a break or will even ask to be released from the team. Although this may be difficult to hear, it's important to respect their boundaries and give them the time and space they are requesting.
- You are more than likely a team member for someone else in your life or will be at some point in the future. Think about which team member you would be and see that as a unique strength that you have to offer others.

Use this idea of building a support team in such a way that makes the most sense for you and your journey. Be open to changing your team along the way, based upon your needs and the needs of the team.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- "CenterLink." CenterLink Member Gay Lesbian Bisexual & Transgender LGBT Community Centers – Search GLBT. Accessed December 10, 2016. http ://www.lgbtcenters.org/centers/find-a-center.aspx.
- Hoffman-Fox, Dara. "How to Find a Gender Therapist." YouTube, Ask a Gender Therapist. April 17, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRh5Ab87y9Y.
- "Reader Q&A: I'm Transgender & Feel Totally Alone Dara Hoffman-Fox." Dara Hoffman-Fox. April 17, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016. http ://darahoffmanfox.com/transgender-and-alone/.

# Summary of Your Responses for *Stage One: Preparation*

Congratulations, you made it through *Stage One: Preparation*. You've done a lot of work to get this far, so let's reflect on what you have accomplished. This is your chance to look back and consolidate your answers from each chapter. This will give you:

- An overview of what you've worked on so far.
- A chance to revise anything, now that you've had some time to reflect on your answers.
- A quick and easy way to look at your game plan for greater success on this journey.

Remember, your recorded answers from this stage of the journey create a living document of your personal history. This means you can go back and change your responses whenever you want, as well as fill in any exercises you were not ready or able to complete.

#### Chapter 1: Why Do I Need to Find Out the Truth? (Page 5)

Are you uncomfortable with your gender assigned at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

Chapter 2: The Role of Fear on Your Journey (Page 12)

What is your logline?

Chapter 3: Feeling the Fear and Doing It Anyway (Page 17)

What are your fears?

Who is your Bodyguard?

What days/times do you have set aside to meet with your fears?

What are the ways you can take a positive approach to your gender exploration?

In what ways can you be sure you are being kind to yourself throughout your journey?

Who is your Nurturer?

#### Chapter 4: Building Your Support Team (Page 33)

Who is your mentor(s)? (Either hands-on, hands-off, or both)

Who are your team members, and what roles do they play?

## STAGE TWO Reflection

## Introduction to Stage Two: Reflection

The tools you acquired from *Stage One: Preparation* will increase your chances of making it through this journey in one piece. In *Stage Two: Reflection*, it's time to start the digging in process and see what you discover.

In this stage, you will:

- Explore the origins of your understanding of gender, how you expressed your gender, and how others reacted to you when you did this.
- Examine the challenges that arose during your adolescence and how they affected your ability to understand your gender identity.
- Expose any shame or guilt you are carrying with you as a result of the experiences you had during this time period.

At one point in your life, you were YOU. This was the YOU that existed before the influences of society and human nature came in with their rules, fears, and uncertainties. There are parts of YOU that were hidden away during this time. This YOU is still there and has a lot to say. This YOU is hoping you are ready to listen. These exercises will help establish a direct line of communication with YOU, revealing important information that is essential to your journey.

#### TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND DURING STAGE TWO: REFLECTION

- Continue to practice self-care: These exercises might be difficult. Be sure to follow all suggestions for Pre- and Post-Activity Self-Care.
- Make note of any issues that come up: Difficult memories might be stirred up while you're going through these exercises. Make a list of any items you know you will want to revisit with a counselor, a friend, or on your own.
- There are no right responses: This is your story. It is just as valid as the experience of anyone else who is working through *Stage Two: Reflection*.

#### Reflection

- Don't worry about meeting criteria: Today's model for gender identity is far more about discovery, exploration, and affirmation than it has been in the past. There are physicians, surgeons, and therapists with a gender-affirming approach who understand there's no simple checklist that determines someone's gender identity. As you work through this section, stay vigilant to any black-and-white approaches disrupting your discovery process. Let go of labels and diagnoses, at least for now, and give yourself room and freedom to explore.
- Try not to compare yourself to others: You may have encountered individuals who claimed, "You have to have felt certain things in certain ways at certain times in order to truly have an issue with your gender identity." *This is completely untrue*. Comparing yourself to them or anyone else will only bring up unnecessary doubts and confusion.
- Be patient with yourself: Remember your Bodyguard from *Stage One: Preparation?* They are beginning to pace nervously up and down in front that Trunk of Secrets. It's going to take a bit of prodding to convince them to let you open it. Go back to this exercise, as well as your Self-Care Checklist, to remind your Bodyguard why the time is *now* to open the trunk.

### Chapter 5

### You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood (Ages 3–11)

In many ways, you were a blank slate when you arrived into this world. However, immediately after your birth, you began to be influenced by those around you. Were these "good" influences or "bad" influences? For the purpose of this exercise, the answer to this question doesn't matter as much as accepting the fact that you were indeed influenced.

Everyone goes through the experience of being influenced by those around them. In fact, *you* are an influence on the lives of those around you as well. Keeping this in mind will help you focus on the task at hand for *Stage Two: Reflection*: you will discover who you were meant to be before those influences began to take over. This version of YOU goes back to whenever you were old enough to think, communicate, and connect a few dots. You developed self-awareness, and with that came preferences, likes, dislikes, and the ability to make choices.

I conducted a survey of my Facebook community (Conversations with a Gender Therapist), which includes a wide range of persons who identify as transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender diverse. I posed the question, "How old were you when you can first recall having questions about your gender identity?"<sup>34</sup> Take a look at some of the responses:

"It was when I was about eight that I cut off all my hair and tried to act like a totally new person at school named Jake. Of course I fooled no one and it wasn't well received."

"When I was around eight is when I started playing online games and realized I could be whichever gender I wanted, and even have no gender sometimes! Even though I didn't know what it meant at the time, I remember it being really cool to be able to do that."

<sup>34</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, February 26, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts/975289642488915.

"Very first time-three. I vividly remember wondering why I couldn't dress like boys or go to the bathroom standing up. There's even pictures of me sitting on the toilet the 'wrong' way!"

"I was four years old when I knew something didn't match up."

"I remember how much fun it was, when I was young, to be able to dress up for Halloween as whatever or whoever I wanted. Once I hit puberty it seemed like there was more pressure to dress up as 'my gender.'"

"I think I began questioning gender-roles, at the very least, when I was three or four."

"I do remember being seven or eight and praying and asking God to make me a girl by morning when I woke up."

"I definitely remember being in grade school, probably around seven or eight years old and finding myself disagreeing with people when they said I was a boy or when my teachers separated us into girls and boys."

As you can see, these memories can date back to as early as three years old. Although these individuals may not have known what was going on or what to call it, at the very least they knew they felt a certain, curious way.

Now it's time for you to journey back and remember how you felt.

## SUGGESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN LOOKING BACK AT YOUR CHILDHOOD

- Everyone is different when it comes to how far back they can remember childhood, and it's okay if you aren't able to remember these earlier years. Do the best you can—it's possible other memories will resurface later as you look at your teenage years. You can then return to this exercise and fill in any blanks.
- You may have gone through childhood without realizing there was something going on with your gender identity, only to realize it later in life. This is a completely valid experience as well. If you don't connect with the exercises in this chapter, it's okay to skip them.

### PREPARE FOR SELF-CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist (page xxxii) and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter and an activity for afterwards.

Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Now, set aside a few minutes to do your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity. When you are finished, turn the page to begin the first exercise.

## Understanding Your Experience of Gender Identity in Childhood

As a child, you began your self-discovery process *tabula rasa*—a blank slate. You went through life as if nothing else mattered besides just being yourself. You may or may not have been aware of your gender during this time, perhaps even having a gender-less feel to who you were.

Eventually you started to notice there was something beyond just your own *personal* world in which you existed: a bigger world with certain rules, traditions, and beliefs for you to learn and, eventually, adopt. The following exercise will walk you through examples of these rules, traditions, and beliefs for the purpose of pinpointing which ones you were exposed to.

### YOUR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THE BIGGER WORLD

Read through the items listed below. Which of these rules, traditions, and beliefs were you exposed to between the ages of three and eleven? Place a checkmark in the box next to each item that applies to your experience in childhood.

- □ You learned that your society is divided up between boys and girls and that you were supposed to fit into one of those categories.
- □ You were exposed to TV, movies, media, and other means of communication that your society used to let you know how you were "supposed to" behave.
- □ You interacted with other kids (at school, on the playground, siblings and cousins, etc.) and noticed how everyone tended to fall into certain roles, both in real life and during pretend-play.
- □ You were classified and socialized as a certain gender ("This is what girls do, this is what boys do—since you are a \_\_\_\_\_, you need to follow these rules").
- $\Box$  You were rewarded for behaving like your gender assigned at birth.
- □ You were scolded/punished for not behaving like your gender assigned at birth.
- □ The more you tried to express your true self, the more uncomfortable social situations became for you.

- □ No one else talked about feeling the same way as you–therefore you assumed you were the only person in the world who felt the way you did.
- □ You felt like you were acting the way you were supposed to as your gender assigned at birth and hoped you were doing it right.
- □ You felt a sense of shame, embarrassment, and guilt for expressing and experiencing yourself in certain ways. You felt like you had to either stop doing them or had to do them in secret.
- □ You saw other people being put down or bullied for showing signs of being outside the norm.
- □ You knowingly or unknowingly experimented with different gender roles when playing (including clothing, items, and behaviors).

Which of the above items most impacted, influenced, or confused your sense of gender and your ability to express it? Put a star next to those items.

### Your Unique Experience of Gender Identity in Childhood

There is a fallacy that says you must have the *right* answers to *prove* you experienced discomfort with your gender assigned at birth during childhood. The truth is, we all come from different backgrounds and have unique ways in which we experience ourselves. There is no cookie-cutter approach to examining the roots of your gender identity questions. The fact that you are still working through this guide is enough to show you that you are meant to continue on this gender identity journey.

There are many reasons why one person's experience of gender identity in childhood can differ so much from someone else's and all of these reasons are valid. The following exercise presents examples of these variables so you can understand which ones may have affected your experience of your gender identity in childhood.

## INFLUENCES ON YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER IDENTITY IN CHILDHOOD

Read through the items listed below. Which of these scenarios did you experience between the ages of three and eleven? Place a checkmark next to each item that applies to you.

- □ You were raised in an environment in which the gender binary was strictly enforced ("Boys do this and girls do that"), where consequences were imposed when you showed any resistance to your place on the binary. These consequences might have included being teased, scolded, receiving corporal punishment, and/ or being sent to a counselor whose job it was to talk you out of how you were feeling. Therefore, you might have pushed away your true feelings in order to protect yourself from emotional, mental, and/or physical harm.
- □ You were raised in a more gender-neutral environment at home. Your parents may or may not have been aware they had created this type of environment. This kind of upbringing could result in you not being aware there were other beliefs in the bigger world about gender stereotypes, gender roles, and expectations to conform to your gender assigned at birth. You may have been older before you noticed these beliefs existed outside of your home, which would affect how you process and experience your gender identity.
- □ You were raised in a community that was intolerant, fearful, and/ or ignorant when it came to understanding differences between people. This could be due to living in a specific geographic region, growing up during a certain time period, lack of resources and information, less exposure (and therefore more resistance) to progressive changes and ideas, and/or certain cultural traditions (religious upbringing, military and other similar cultures, ethnic traditions). Therefore, you were being raised to believe that what you were experiencing within yourself was wrong or, at the very least, not knowing this was something anyone else in the world experienced. This could result in the repression of your authentic feelings because of pressure from the community and the desire to avoid its negative judgments.
- □ You were raised in a community that was liberal, open-minded, and accepting when it came to understanding differences between people. This could be due to living in certain regions

that embraced more progressive ideas or being surrounded by persons who were different and seeing them treated with kindness and respect. There was ample information available regarding how to embrace differences between people, as well as certain religious, cultural, or ethnic teachings that encouraged self-discovery. You experienced freedom to express your gender however you pleased, and you were encouraged to be creative and expressive. You never knew there was a problem with who you were until you encountered someone or something outside of this environment that said something to the contrary.

- □ You may have a difficult time recalling childhood memories due to experiencing stress and/or trauma during these years. You may have blocked out (i.e. repressed) these memories as a means of protecting yourself emotionally and mentally from the impact of what happened during this time frame.
- □ You didn't have a lot of exposure to anyone outside of your close family unit. This could be due to being homeschooled, parental careers that kept the family mobile, certain ethnic, cultural, or religious customs, isolation due to extreme stress in the home (alcoholism, severe mental illness, abuse), and so on. The impact of this depends on the type of upbringing you received from the primary adults in your life. It could result in the formation of a strong sense of self that is untouched by the ways of the world. It could also result in a sense of self that is based only on what the adults taught you as being the "truth." Either way, until you were exposed to the bigger world, you may not have known there are any other ways of being that exist outside the one you were exposed to.
- □ You had the experience of being raised in an environment where you were exposed to *gaslighting*. This is a type of psychological abuse in which a family member twisted information about themselves (with the intention of gaining power and control in the relationship) to such an extent that it caused you to question your sense of reality. This highly manipulative tactic may have affected your ability to self-reflect, as well as trust your own thoughts and feelings. This can create a lengthy list of issues and may have affected your ability to process any gender identity questions that arise.

### Reflecting on Your Childhood Years

Now it's time to reflect upon your experience of your gender identity during your childhood years. This section is broken up into three age categories: three to five, six to nine, and ten to eleven. If you don't have memories during a particular time frame, it's okay—just move on to the next one. You can always fill it in later if something surfaces. Call upon your feelings, your thoughts, your experiences, your physical sensations, as well as your visual memories.

### Tips to Help You Get Started

- Draw pictures that express how you are feeling and what you are thinking.
- Look back at childhood photos of yourself.
- Listen to music you enjoyed during that time.
- Create a collage.
- Talk to others who knew you during this time (and be selective about who you pick).
- Turn to the examples given earlier in this exercise of how others described their experience for ideas about how to express yours.
- Don't analyze your answers right now. Write whatever comes to mind without second-guessing or judging yourself.
- Later in this chapter we'll take a closer look at the roles guilt and shame played during your growing up years. Be sure to list any examples of the emergence of guilt and/or shame, even those you didn't know at the time but, in retrospect, are aware of now.

### REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 3-5

1. What thoughts can you remember having about your gender between ages three to five?

2.	What feelings can you remember having about your gender be- tween ages three to five?
3.	How do you remember expressing your gender between ages three to five?
4.	What was the reaction from those around when you expressed your gender in this way between ages three to five?

### REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 6-9

- 1. What thoughts can you remember having about your gender between ages six to nine?
- 2. What feelings can you remember having about your gender between ages six to nine?
- 3. How do you remember expressing your gender between ages six to nine?

4. What was the reaction from those around when you expressed your gender in this way between ages six to nine?

### REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS: AGES 10-11

- 1. What thoughts can you remember having about your gender between ages ten to eleven?
- 2. What feelings can you remember having about your gender between ages ten to eleven?
- 3. How do you remember expressing your gender between ages ten to eleven?
- 4. What was the reaction from those around when you expressed your gender in this way between ages ten to eleven?

### SELF-CARE REMINDER

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It's time to set this guide aside and spend time with your chosen activity.

### Chapter 6

### You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescence (Ages 12–17)

A dolescence is often filled with a fair amount of mental and emotional chaos. You are expected to juggle the following when, only months beforehand, you were still considered a child:

- The mental, emotional, and physical changes that occur with the onset of puberty
- Developing a deeper sense of self and a broader awareness of your identity—starting to answer the question, "Who am I?"
- Searching for how you fit into society, this world, and what your contribution might be
- Increasing desire for autonomy and independence while at the same time not feeling ready for it

Imagine that, in addition to these challenges, you were also having feelings of confusion about your gender identity. Having uncertainty about something that is such a core part of who you are could have affected your ability to work through the developmental challenges occurring during this age. If unaddressed, this confusion may have also impacted the way you moved into the next stage of your life.

In the first part of this chapter, we'll look at how the formation of your overall identity from ages twelve to seventeen was affected by gender identity issues. The second part will focus on the impact puberty had in this process.

As you look back at these memories, keep in mind that some of them could be fuzzy, confusing, and even painful to examine. There may have been stressors present that would have rendered gender identity exploration/realization nearly impossible. These stressors include poverty, mental illness (undiagnosed or diagnosed), learning/developmental disabilities, and abuse. Be sure to use your Self-Care Checklist as you move through this chapter and go at a pace that feels right to you.

### PREPARE FOR SELF-CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter and an activity for afterwards.

Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Now, set aside a few minutes to do your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity. When you are finished, continue below to begin the first exercise.

### **Identity Formation**

A person's *gender* identity is only one layer of their *entire* identity. Identity formation begins at a very young age and then kicks into high gear between the ages of twelve and seventeen. Adolescence is when one typically begins to develop a stronger sense of their overall identity through *self-exploration*. This exploration can be done solo, as well as with others, and can be both a conscious and an unconscious process.

There are numerous challenges and obstacles to this self-exploration process that can disrupt someone's progress. I turned again to my Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community and posed this question to the transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse members of my audience: "What were your adolescent/teenage years like?"<sup>35</sup>

Read through their responses below. Can you relate to any of their answers? Place a star next to the ones you feel apply to the way you experienced your adolescence.

"I went gung-ho into anything that proved just how male and macho I was."

"I learned a form of disassociation. I learned to be someone else when I walked out of the door."

"I think I actually missed some of the life lessons and skills I was supposed to get at this time because my energy and attention was so consumed by repressing who I was."

<sup>35</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts.

"Not too bad at all-I would say I was clueless. It wasn't until I was in my early twenties that I realized I had been hiding something from myself without really knowing it."

"I would say it drove me to either isolate myself or to gravitate to social groups where gender roles were less important to social acceptance or the hierarchy."

"I didn't date, join clubs, or attend student functions."

"I always felt isolated and numb. I saw boys doing things I had no interest in and girls looking happy and confident and I so wanted to be one of them."

"I became very sexual very fast-at school I wore short skirts, tight V necks, and pushup bras."

"Overall, this condition negatively affected my education, future romantic relationships (if any), employment, and the role I play in 'society'."

"I could never be close with someone. If I let someone in close, they would be able to see the charade."

"During puberty I was extremely withdrawn, had extreme flashes of anger at home, and was prescribed one depression medication after another to no effect."

"I could not sit through a sex education class because any discussion of male and female anatomy made me violently ill."

"I felt like I didn't fit in with either side of the binary, like a complete alien in the land of 'young women' that I supposedly belonged in, but also an outsider looking in on the land of 'young men.'"

### SELF-EXPLORATION CHALLENGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

Below you will find a list of ways one's self-exploration process can be disrupted during adolescence, with an emphasis on gender identity.

Do any of these apply to you and your experience? Place a checkmark next to each item that applies to your experience of your adolescence. Also, take a guess as to what age(s) you were and write that next to each item.

- $\Box$  You acted like someone you weren't in order to fit in.
- □ The way you carried yourself was met with resistance, discomfort, and/or bullying from others.

- □ You struggled so much with the changes you were going through that you kept yourself separate from others as much as possible.
- □ You found it difficult to trust your own thoughts and feelings about who you were.
- □ You had confusion about your sexual orientation in addition to your gender confusion.
- □ You searched desperately for a group that you could belong to and fit in with.
- □ You were teased/bullied as being gay, lesbian, or were gender-shamed.
- □ You felt pressured to take on a certain role that was untrue to who you really were.
- □ You were taken to see a therapist, counselor, or pastor who tried to convince you that what you were feeling was not true.
- □ You were prescribed medication that you did not need and it made things worse.
- □ You did not see or hear positive examples of people in society, the media, or your community who reflected the experience you were having.
- □ You struggled with depression and/or anxiety due to not knowing the reason why you were feeling so out-of-sorts socially, as well as physically.
- □ You considered the option of ending your life and/or attempted to end your life.
- $\Box$  You didn't explore other aspects of who you were as a person.
- □ You developed social awkwardness due to feeling very selfconscious around others.
- □ You experienced a high level of shame, discomfort, and disdain about your body and/or face.
- You dissociated from your body, consciously or unconsciously (i.e., disconnected your mind from body, so as to not have to feel its presence).
- □ You found dating and intimate relationships to be very confusing and/or scary.
- □ Your first experiences with sex were filled with discomfort, uncertainty, and dissociation.
- □ You turned to alcohol, drugs, and/or self-harm as a means of escape.
- □ You took steps to become as much as possible like the gender you were assigned at birth (a.k.a. hyper-masculinizing or hyper-feminizing).
- $\Box$  You disliked, despised, or hated yourself.

□ You felt so uncertain as to who you were that you became a stranger even to yourself.

### Here Comes Puberty

As awkward as the life stage of puberty can be, the physical changes can result in a teen feeling an empowering sense of moving away from childhood as they develop characteristics of adults. However, if you don't feel aligned with your gender assigned at birth, things can take a difficult turn during what is, for others, an expected rite of passage. That's because puberty causes your body to develop secondary sex characteristics based on the sex hormones present in your body, not based on how you experience your gender (unfortunately, hormones really don't care about that).

I surveyed my Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community and posed this question to the transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse members of my audience: "What was your experience with puberty?"<sup>36</sup>

#### *Read through their responses below. Can you relate to any of their answers? Place a star next to the ones you feel apply to the way you experienced puberty.*

"It was very confusing. Throughout that stage, it felt like I had the wrong hormones. My brain was always telling me to go one direction, but puberty kept pulling me the other direction."

"I knew I wanted to be a boy since the age of three or four, but I was bullied a lot because of it, so when puberty hit I just tried to fit in and started copying the girls."

"Hell. As I grew hair and hit six feet tall, I looked at the other girls around me and wondered why I wasn't growing breasts like they were."

"I didn't have so much of an issue with getting my period as I did with growing large breasts and developing really feminine curves. It felt like an out-of-body experience that I just had to somehow deal with."

"I woke up often from dreams in which my body was developing properly, little breasts forming, my penis no longer there, and I would check under the sheets and only then would I realize that it was just a dream."

<sup>36</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts.

"Mine was fairly normal, except freaking out about growing hair on my body."

"Female puberty was something I knew existed, but didn't believe that it would ever happen to me."

"It was as if two personalities were fighting within myself: he and she."

"I was so disassociated with sexuality and gender, I just thought this was how life was."

"Puberty for myself seemed backwards and strange."

"Physical changes during puberty didn't feel all that uncomfortable, but the social expectations about what it meant to be a boy were downright awful."

"I felt that my body was betraying me. Felt everything was a lie."

You can see these responses range from mild distress, to confusion, to extreme pain. This is yet another reminder of how there are many different levels on which gender identity discomfort can be experienced.

### The Physical Changes Brought on by Puberty

Below you'll find a list of the secondary sex characteristics usually occurring when someone goes through puberty.<sup>37</sup>

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not much at all and 10 being very much, how much discomfort did you experience with each of the secondary sex characteristics listed below when going through puberty? Write your answer in the blank next to each item.<sup>38</sup>

The increase in testosterone can cause:

\_\_\_\_\_ Deepening of the voice/development of an Adam's apple

\_\_\_\_\_ Growth of the penis and testicles

<sup>37</sup> There are chromosomal and hormonal conditions (for example Klinefelter syndrome, Turner syndrome, XXYY syndrome, hirsutism, and intersex conditions) that can result in wide variations of development of secondary sex characteristics. If this is your experience, go ahead and answer these questions in the way most accurate for you, ignoring the separation between the two groups.

<sup>38</sup> In *Stage Three: Exploration* you will explore how you feel present-day about your physical body—the answers in this exercise are specific to adolescence.

\_\_\_\_\_ Increase in amount of hair growth on the face and body

\_\_\_\_\_ Greater than average height

\_\_\_\_\_ Broad/muscular build

\_\_\_\_\_ Increase in size of hands, feet, and shoulders

\_\_\_\_\_ Widening/squaring off of jaw and face

The increase in estrogen (as well as progesterone) can cause:

\_\_\_\_\_ Growing breasts

\_\_\_\_\_ Menstruation

\_\_\_\_\_ Distribution of fat toward the hips

\_\_\_\_\_ Subcutaneous fat padding/softness of the body<sup>39</sup>

Going through puberty, did you wish you were developing any of the secondary sex characteristics listed above? If so, which ones?

Reflecting on Your Adolescence

This section is broken up into two age categories: 12–14 and 15–17. Take another look at your answers in the previous exercises in this chapter. Use these to help you see the full picture of this time in your life. Try to evoke your feelings, thoughts, experiences, physical sensations, and your visual memories.

<sup>39</sup> Henk Asscheman, MD, and Louis J. G. Gooren, MD. "TransGenderCare. com: Medical/Hormonal: Hormone Treatment in Transsexuals." *TransGenderCare. com*. 1992. Accessed December 5, 2016. http://www.transgendercare.com/medical/hormone-tx\_assch\_gooren.htm.

### Tips to Help You Get Started

- Draw pictures to express how you are feeling and what you are thinking.
- Look back at childhood photos of yourself.
- Listen to music you enjoyed during that time.
- Create a collage.
- Talk to others who knew you during this time (but be selective of who you pick).
- Turn to the examples earlier in this chapter of how others described their experience for ideas about how to express yours.
- Don't analyze your answers right now. Write whatever comes to mind without second-guessing or judging yourself.

Later in this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the roles guilt and shame played during your growing up years. Be sure to list any examples of the emergence of guilt and/or shame, even if it's something you didn't know at the time but, in retrospect, are aware of now.

### REFLECTING ON YOUR ADOLESCENCE: AGES 12-14

- 1. What thoughts can you remember having about your gender from ages twelve to fourteen?
- 2. What feelings can you remember having about your gender from ages twelve to fourteen?
- 3. How do you remember expressing your gender from ages twelve to fourteen?

4.	What was the reaction from those around when you expressed your gender in this way from ages twelve to fourteen?
REFLE	ECTING ON YOUR ADOLESCENCE: AGES 15-17
1.	What thoughts can you remember having about your gender from ages fifteen to seventeen?
2.	What feelings can you remember having about your gender from ages fifteen to seventeen?
3.	How do you remember expressing your gender from ages fifteen to seventeen?
4.	What was the reaction from those around when you expressed your gender in this way from ages fifteen to seventeen?

### SELF-CARE REMINDER

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It's time to set this guide aside and spend time with your chosen activity.

### Chapter 7

### The Role of Shame and Guilt

Looking at the impact shame and/or guilt might be having on your gender identity journey is like checking for any leaks in your tires before going on a road trip. If these powerful emotions are not brought to light, they will eventually keep you from moving forward.

*Shame* and *guilt* are words that are often lumped together. Sometimes it makes sense for that to happen—both feelings can come up as a result of something you did, that you think you did, or that you are even thinking of doing.

### DEFINING SHAME AND GUILT

To truly understand how much these feelings might be impacting you, we need to look at them separately.

#### Shame = "I am bad."

This is when you believe that *something is wrong with you*. Other words describing this deeply troubling feeling are:

- Bad
- Flawed
- Insignificant
- Unlovable
- Meaningless
- Unimportant

- Lacking value
- Worthless
- Unwanted
- Damaged
- Sinful
- Undeserving

Shame can arise after you've done something which results in your feeling this way and/or if someone tells you should be ashamed of yourself. Sometimes nothing seems to explain where this feeling originated, as if you came out of the womb with this belief about yourself.

### Guilt = "I did something bad."

This can result from a belief that you have done something wrong to someone else. This can be something that:

- You have actually done to someone, either on purpose or accidentally.
- You are thinking of doing, but feel guilty when you imagine the hurt you might cause to someone as a result of what you are wanting to do.

Additionally, it can be caused by a belief that who you are as a person makes others feel disappointed, uncomfortable, or angry—even if you have done nothing wrong. This feeling of doing something wrong to someone else can also be applied to entities or collectives such as a deity, your culture, your tribe or group, or your society.

Shame + Guilt: When you feel both shame and guilt at the same time, it's usually because you feel guilty for something you have done or are thinking of doing, and then feel shameful about yourself because of that. This painful combination can lead to *self-loathing*.

During this phase of your journey it is essential that you take time to examine whether or not you are wrestling with the presence of shame and/or guilt. If these feelings aren't brought to the surface, examined, and worked through, you could end up making life choices from this place of shame and/or guilt, leading to deeper repression of your authentic self.

In this chapter, you will first look at shame and guilt separately to better understand the roles each one might be playing in your life during your gender identity exploration. Then you will look at the role they might be playing together and, therefore, how much self-loathing you could be struggling with.

### PREPARE FOR SELF-CARE

Take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and find an activity you will do before working on this chapter and an activity for afterwards.

### Which Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Which Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity did you choose?

Now, set aside a few minutes to do your Pre-Exercise Self-Care Activity. When you are finished, turn the page to begin the first exercise.

## How Much Is Shame Controlling Your Gender Identity Exploration?

There are two ways the feeling of shame can originate:

### Shame Around Something You Did or Caused

You did not previously feel there was something wrong or bad about who you were, but then something happened which resulted in these feelings of shame arising.

Typical examples of this type of shame would be if you were to either accidentally or intentionally injure or kill someone, or if you decided to have an affair. However, it can also be the result of doing something that, in and of itself, isn't truly wrong or bad, but on some level you end up believing it is. An example of this is when you discover something surprising about yourself that you had unknowingly repressed for years and when you share this with the people in your life, they get upset.

Following these types of experiences, you might assign meaning to what you've done as being something that only a *bad* person would do, thereby considering *yourself* to be a bad person.

Can you relate to these examples of shame? If so, describe below.

### Shame Around Your Very Existence

Some people feel shameful over their very existence and are unable to remember a time during which they didn't feel that way. It's challenging to pinpoint where this originates, for the answers are unique to each individual. Here are a few theories regarding the possible origins of this type of shame:

- The parent/child bond was somehow disrupted early on. This could be either through the physical absence of a parent(s) due to death, abandonment, or distance, as well as emotional disconnectedness.
- Religious teachings leading a child to believe that who they are as a person goes against their higher power and/or belief system.
- Having an innate sense of self in direct odds with cultural, societal, or community expectations of acceptable behavior.
- Unaddressed mental or emotional challenges (such as mental illness, hormone imbalances, or learning disabilities).
- Having physical/medical and/or behavioral challenges that consumed a great deal of time, energy, and finances.
- Having a personality type that is seen as outside the norm, weird, or weak. For example, being introverted, highly intelligent, intuitive, sensitive, creative, etc.
- Having identity confusion arising from the lack of positive examples from the surrounding world to help support one's inner world.
- Having experienced emotional, verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse at a young age, resulting in a belief that for some reason one deserves such punishment.
- For those who believe in past lives or reincarnation: that you are picking up from where you left off in the last life and are still living with something you did in a previous life.

*Can you relate to any of these examples of origins of shame? If so, describe below.* 

## THE PRESENCE OF SHAME IN YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS (AGES 3–11)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood (starting on page 60). Read through your responses and search for the presence of shame. Remember, shame feels like something is wrong, bad, weird, or flawed about who you are as a person. Even if you didn't know it back then, you will more than likely recognize it now.

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

Did any of the feelings you had between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

### Ranking the Intensity of Your Shame During Childhood

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much and 10 being very much, how would you rank the intensity of the shame that resulted from these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during childhood?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## THE PRESENCE OF SHAME IN YOUR ADOLESCENCE (AGES 12–17)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescence (starting on page 70). In the same manner in which you approached the previous exercise, read through your responses and search for the presence of shame during your adolescence. Did any of the thoughts you had between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

Did any of the feelings you had between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing shame? If so, describe them here.

### Ranking the Intensity of Your Shame During Your Adolescence

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much and 10 being very much, how would you rank the intensity of the shame that resulted from these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during your adolescence?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How Much Is Guilt Controlling Your Gender Identity Exploration?

The feeling of guilt comes from believing you have done something wrong to someone else. The emergence of guilt is a complex and multilayered experience to wrestle with, and here are a few reasons why:

• The definition of what constitutes something being "wrong" differs from person to person (for instance, you did something that upset one parent but not the other).

- The definition of what constitutes something being "wrong" differs from situation to situation (for instance, it was fine if you behaved a certain way in the privacy of your home but not if you behaved that way in public).
- The definition of what constitutes something being "wrong" changes with time (for instance, behaving a certain way when you were younger was okay, but behaving that way when you were older wasn't okay).
- Your own definition of what is "wrong" was determined by feedback you received from others in your lifetime, making it difficult to know what you really believe to be wrong.
- Even thinking about something you'd like to do that could potentially hurt others may result in feeling "wrong."
- If there's something about yourself that you don't see positively reflected in your society, you may experience guilt as a result of feeling "wrong" for making others uncomfortable, angry, or disappointed.

Can you relate to any of these examples? If so, write them here.

## THE PRESENCE OF GUILT IN YOUR CHILDHOOD YEARS (AGES 3–11)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in You and Your Gender Identity: Childhood (starting on page 60). Read through your responses and search for the presence of guilt. Remember, guilt is when you feel like you have done or would end up doing something that would hurt, anger, or disturb someone else. Even if you didn't know it back then, you should be able to recognize it now.

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.

Did any of the feelings you had between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.

*Did any of the ways you behaved between ages three to eleven result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.* 

### Ranking the Intensity of Your Guilt During Childhood

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much and 10 being very much, how would you rank the intensity of the guilt that resulted from these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during childhood?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### THE PRESENCE OF GUILT IN YOUR ADOLESCENCE (AGES 12-17)

Look back on your answers from the exercise in You and Your Gender Identity: Adolescence (starting on page 70). In the same manner in which you approached the previous exercise, read through your responses and search for the presence of guilt during your adolescence.

Did any of the thoughts you had between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.

Did any of the feelings you had between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.

Did any of the ways you behaved between ages twelve to seventeen result in you experiencing guilt? If so describe them here.

### Ranking the Intensity of Your Guilt During Your Adolescence

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much and 10 being very much, how would you rank the intensity of the guilt that resulted from these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during your adolescence?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How Much Are Shame *and* Guilt Controlling Your Gender Identity Exploration?

When you feel as though aspects of who you are (shame) cause only hurt and pain to the people you care about (guilt), it can be an enormously painful burden to bear. You may feel like the only solution is to cast these feelings into the Trunk of Secrets, effectively *repressing* them.

When you live your life under the control of guilt and/or shame, you deny a crucial part of who you are through this line of reasoning: "I am unable to become myself because I am afraid of hurting others."

This painful state of feeling trapped, caged, and powerless often results in turning to unhealthy coping methods as a means of escape. This could manifest in the form of alcohol and/or drug use, emotional outbursts, volatile mood swings, isolation, lying, suicidal ideation, and so on. Ironically, these damaging behaviors end up hurting the very people you hoped to shield in the first place, leading you to feel even more guilt and/or shame than you started with.

## REVEAL THE DEGREE TO WHICH SHAME AND/OR GUILT ARE CONTROLLING YOUR LIFE

Take a look at this formula:

Shame about who you are + Guilt over hurting others = Degree to which shame and guilt are controlling your life

On page 76, what did you rank the intensity of the shame that resulted from the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you had during childhood?

On page 77, what did you rank the intensity of the shame that resulted from the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you had during your adolescence?

What is the total of these two numbers?

This number tells you the grand total that shame is affecting your gender identity exploration.

On page 79, what did you rank the intensity of the guilt that resulted from the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you had during childhood?

On page 80, what did you rank the intensity of the guilt that resulted from the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you had during your adolescence?

What is the total of these two numbers?\_\_\_\_\_

This number tells you the grand total that guilt is affecting your gender identity exploration.

Now add together your total shame score and your total guilt score:

This number tells you the grand total that shame *and* guilt are affecting your gender identity exploration.

*Place a checkmark next to the option that describes your separate shame and guilt scores.* 

- □ Your shame total is higher than your guilt total. This means you have more work to do around how you feel about yourself and less work around how you feel you will impact others.
- □ Your guilt total is higher than your shame total. This means you have more work to do in terms of how you feel about the way you affect others and less around how you feel about yourself.

□ Your shame and guilt totals are the same or very close. This means you have equal amounts of work to do around how you feel about yourself as well as how you affect others.

### Now place a checkmark next to the option that describes your total shame and guilt scores.

- □ 4–13: Shame and/or guilt are controlling your life somewhat and may be mildly impacting your gender identity exploration. Once you get to *Stage Three: Exploration*, you may be able to work through it without having to do a lot of work around your shame and/or guilt. However, if you are caught by surprise by the emergence of more shame and/or guilt than you were expecting, seek out the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey. You can also use the tools listed in the Further Resources section at the end of this chapter.
- □ 14-27: Shame and/or guilt are controlling your life to a moderate degree and may be noticeably impacting your gender identity exploration. Once you get to *Stage Three: Exploration*, you may have difficulty making it through the section without shame and/or guilt interfering. More than likely, you could use the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey. You can also use the tools listed in the Further Resources section at the end of this chapter.
- □ 28-40: Shame and/or guilt are controlling your life to a high degree and are significantly impacting your gender identity exploration. You may find yourself unable to work through *Stage Three: Exploration* without seeking the help of someone who can compassionately support you through your journey as you work through your shame and/or guilt. You can also use the tools listed in the Further Resources section at the end of this chapter.

### SELF-CARE REMINDER

What was the Post-Exercise Self-Care Activity you listed at the beginning of the chapter? It's time to set this guide aside and spend time with your chosen activity.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- Brenner, Gail. "10 Life-Changing Ways to Move Through Shame." Dr. Gail Brenner. July 2014. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://gailbrenner. com/2014/07/10-life-changing-ways-to-move-through-shame/.
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- Casey, Suze. Belief Re-patterning: The Amazing Technique for "Flipping the Switch" to Positive Thoughts. London: Hay House, 2012.
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- Dwoskin, Hale. "3 Lies That Bind Us to Guilt and Shame." The Huffington Post. September 5, 2013. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://www. huffingtonpost.com/hale-dwoskin/guilt-and-shame\_b\_3862489.html.
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- Wells, Jonathan. "How Your Beliefs Create Your Reality Part 1." Advanced Life Skills. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://advancedlifeskills.com/ blog/how-your-beliefs-create-your-reality-part-1/.
- Wright, Mark. "Reinventing Your Life One Belief at a Time." The Integrity Coach. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://www.theintegritycoach.com /articles/reinventing-your-life-one-belief-at-a-time/.
- Zhang, Benny. Belief Changing: Discover the Ultimate Step by Step Guide to Change Belief. September 14, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2016.

# Summary of Your Responses from *Stage Two: Reflection*

We move on, let's pause to look at the big picture of what you've learned about yourself in this section. Specifically, in what ways have your experiences during your childhood and adolescence affected your gender identity journey?

By understanding how and why you ended up where you are you can:

- Recognize how experiences from your past are interfering with your ability to engage in self-exploration.
- Face challenges in your gender identity exploration with a greater understanding as to why this might be difficult for you.
- Be watchful of the presence of shame and guilt as you get closer to discovering your authentic self.

Go back to your answers from each part of this section and consolidate them here.

### CHAPTER 5: CHILDHOOD

What clued you in to the bigger world that you were "supposed to" fit into, and therefore affected the way you began to experience your gender identity from ages three to eleven?

What was the main factor that influenced your own personal, unique way of experiencing yourself and your gender identity?

*Summarize your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (as well as the responses these behaviors) regarding your gender identity between the ages of three and eleven. How does looking back on this time make you feel?* 

### CHAPTER 6: ADOLESCENCE

What were the main ways you experienced disruption of your self-exploration process during these years, specifically concerning your gender identity?

How much discomfort did you experience while going through the changes of puberty (physically, mentally, emotionally)?

Summarize your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (as well as the responses to your behaviors) regarding your gender identity during the ages of twelve to seventeen. How does looking back on this time make you feel?

### CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE OF SHAME AND GUILT

To what degree is shame controlling your life concerning the experience of your gender identity?

To what degree is guilt controlling your life concerning the experience of your gender identity?

How can you address the control that shame and guilt exercise over you when it comes to your gender identity exploration?

STAGE THREE
Exploration

# Introduction to Stage Three: Exploration

A t last, we arrive at *Stage Three: Exploration*. Perhaps it will come as no surprise to find out that, throughout this guidebook, you have taken on the role of the *explorer*. An explorer is someone who finds themselves in an unfamiliar land and has the desire to unearth its secrets and riches, perhaps even establishing a new home in this land. That's just what you'll be doing in this stage, with the "unfamiliar land" being your very own self.

Remember the logline you created in the This is Your Life exercise (page 12)? This is the perfect time to revisit it, as you need your logline much like an explorer needs a compass. It will provide focus and direction to the question, "What is your reason for continuing on the path of self-exploration?" It will give you direction when you feel lost, overwhelmed, defeated, or just want to go exploring.

Write your logline here:

Here is a look at what you will explore in what will prove to be the meatiest part of this guidebook, and, therefore, your journey:

- Wisdom Tips to keep in mind during your exploration
- The big picture of who you are right now and how close or far away you are from discovering your authentic self
- A deconstruction of gender to help clear up many of your questions
- The importance of finding others to whom you can relate and how to go about doing so
- Why listening to your gut is a critical part of this process and how to do this
- The stream of constant questions that may create confusion around your gender identity

- How much discomfort you have with your gender assigned at birth
- Possible explanations why you might feel the way you feel
- How to explore your gender in ways that will bring you more clarity
- Your gender identity options and finding the one(s) that comes closest to describing how you experience your gender identity
- Ideas as to what you can do with what you have discovered about yourself

By the time you complete this portion of the book you will unearth, gather, and digest enough information about yourself to have a deeper understanding of how to define your gender identity (if you choose to define it at all).

To help you come to this place of increased self-awareness you will be prompted at the end of each chapter to pause and check-in. Check-In Time is a short journaling prompt at the end of each exercise that acts as a reminder to process how you are feeling after each discovery. This will allow you to:

- Slow down long enough to notice and retain important information about yourself.
- Gauge your stress levels and adjust your pace accordingly.
- Remind yourself to employ self-care as needed.
- Create a written account of this part of your journey.

As you begin *Stage Three: Exploration*, keep this quote from an unknown source in mind:

"Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that really isn't you so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place."

# Wisdom Tips

The metaphor of the Hero's Journey is perfectly suitable for the exploration phase of your gender identity journey. Also known as the Road of Trials,<sup>40</sup> this stage can be filled with Tests, Allies, and Enemies, the Approach to the Inmost Cave, and Ordeals.<sup>41</sup>

Imagine you decide to seek out the advice of a wizard, medicine woman, or oracle before you begin this portion of your journey. You are sitting before them and are ready to hear what advice they have to offer. They pause dramatically and then speak:

"I know you must be eager to begin your exploration. Nevertheless, you must take the time to gather nutrients from these wisdom tips. They are your food, your fuel, and your water for the next part of your quest. They will be there for you when you encounter the Road of Trials."

As one of the trusted mentors on your journey, I am here to send you off with words of wisdom in preparation for what's ahead. These tips are the result of years of observation, research, and experience. Breathe, focus, and listen to what they have to say. Also, be sure to take notes, as they will be there for you to return to at any point in time. *You will need them*.

## WISDOM TIP 1: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM EXPLORATION

Take a moment to imagine one of your favorite explorers. It can be someone real or a fictional character. If you were to create a montage of the various moments of this explorer's life, what would it look like? I imagine one of my childhood heroes, Indiana Jones.<sup>42</sup> When it's time for him to set off on an adventure I see his life filled with moments of excitement, confusion, discovery, fear ("Snakes!"), humor, pain, mistakes, and victories. This is what you can expect during your exploration montage as well.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Campbell, "Initiation/The Road of Trials," in *The Hero with a Thou*sand Faces, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Vogler, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Spielberg, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures), 1981, film.

Here's what you should keep in mind as you prepare for what lies ahead:

- Have someplace you can keep track of your exploration ideas. We'll take a closer look at how you can do this in the first chapter of this section.
- Exploration will be different for each reader of this book. Your exploration will be influenced by factors such as where you live, your financial situation, your personality, your life experiences, your support system, your relationship status, your age, your resourcefulness, your health, etc. There is no exploration process that is right or better than another. It's about tapping into your own unique strengths and abilities.
- Remind yourself of the steps you have already taken to prepare for this journey. Read through your answers from *Stage One: Preparation* (page 45). You now understand your fears and have a plan for approaching them. You minimized negativity in your life and learned how to take better care of yourself. You established a Mentor and a support team and created an internal Bodyguard and Nurturer. (If you have not yet taken these steps, please pause and do so before continuing. These preparations are crucial for you to be able to take on the full impact of this journey.)
- Be prepared for changes to happen. What will those changes be? There's no way to know for sure. Will some them be incredible and gratifying and others painful and difficult? Probably and probably. This is why exploration is frequently the most courageous step you can take in this journey: you never know where it is going to lead.
- As often as you can, take time to reflect on your exploration process. What's worked? What hasn't worked? What have you learned about yourself so far? Do you need to pause and take time for self-care? Do you need to pick up the pace? Do you need to slow down? Frequent reflection is crucial to your success. That's why every chapter in *Stage Three: Exploration* ends with a Check-In Time for you to reflect on your progress.
- Your plan *will* be thrown off. Your journey will change course with unexpected shortcuts, detours, roadblocks, and U-turns. It's best to expect this from the start. Some of these twists will be pleasant surprises. Others will knock the wind out of you, so much so that you might be tempted to turn around and go back home. In the end you can utilize creative solutions, patience, re-

sourcefulness, and faith in yourself to make it through the more challenging parts of the journey.

• Exploration is a life-long process. You will learn a great deal about yourself during this portion of the book. Most importantly, you will learn that your exploration process never truly ends. Your gender identity is only one facet of who you are, and you will almost certainly unearth more information about yourself than you anticipate. This will continue throughout the course of your life. Even though periods of exploration will fluctuate between intense and calm, new discoveries are always there, waiting to be made. You can use the techniques you have learned in this book for any future journeys you find yourself on.

#### WISDOM TIP 2: USE YOUR SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Hopefully by now, turning to your Self-Care Checklist has become a part of your daily routine. In *Stage Three: Exploration*, there won't be cues before and after exercises for you to do this. Therefore, I encourage you to pause and take the time to:

- Revisit your list. Are there any items you need to add to your list? Which ones have you found to be of greatest use to you? Are there any items you need to remove? (i.e., items you have outgrown, which have become too distracting, overly escapist, etc.)
- Set a reminder for yourself. If you think you might forget to use your Self-Care Activities throughout Stage Three, create a reminder for yourself. You can take time right now to write *Self-Care Activity* throughout this part of the guide. Or, if you are reading this in digital form, use the appropriate tools on hand to create reminder notes.
- Make it really hard to forget. Hang your Self-Care Checklist in places you spend a lot of time. You can also share it with loved ones, so they can offer reminders to you to follow through with items on your list.
- Make it rewarding. When you take the time to use your Self-Care Checklist, the reward comes from how much better you feel when you use it compared to when you don't. Since it can be easy to forget what this feels like, take a few moments to write down how you feel every time you use your checklist. Also write down how it feels when you don't use the checklist. By

comparing how you feel when you use the checklist to when you don't, you will eventually make connections between how much better you feel when you schedule in time for your Self-Care Activities.

# WISDOM TIP 3: LEARN FROM THOSE WHO'VE BEEN THERE

I conducted a survey through my Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community to ask my audience what advice they would have for those who are in search of answers to their questions about their gender identity.<sup>43</sup>

Here are the top responses from those individuals who have already been through this experience:

- Get into therapy/counseling.
- Get support from loved ones.
- Learn (and believe) that being transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse exist as options.
- Work on not judging yourself harshly or negatively.
- Seek out and experience validation of who you are and how you feel.
- Realize that medically and/or socially transitioning to your true gender is possible and something can be done about it.
- Find people around whom you can be yourself.
- Say the words aloud that you are thinking and feeling.
- Realize that concerns about possibly transitioning are often concerns about other people.
- Learn the language that describes your existence.
- Examine what you were taught about gender vs. who you are discovering you actually are.
- Realize that gender dysphoria can be physical, mental, emotional, social, or all of the above.
- Recognize you don't have to experience gender dysphoria to be trans or to want to transition.
- Realize there's no such thing as not being "trans enough."
- Understand there is a gender continuum as opposed to having to choose between one or the other.
- Try things until you it feels right to you, whatever that means.
- Figure out what resources other people use.

<sup>43</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts.

• Talk with people who are like you/going through a similar experience.

If any of these ideas sounded of interest to you, you are in luck. We will go into detail as to how you can follow through on many of the items on this list throughout *Stage Three: Exploration*.

#### WISDOM TIP 4: THE STAGES OF GENDER IDENTITY FORMATION

It might bring comfort to some of you to know there are stages that a significant number of individuals go through as they try to make sense of their gender identity. These stages were first conceived by Aaron H. Devor, PhD (a sociologist, sexologist, and trans man) in 2004 and are summarized below.<sup>44</sup> I've made a few adjustments to his descriptions of gender identity to create consistency with current terminology.

This list is by no means an absolute determinant for how one goes through their gender identity realizations. It merely demonstrates that it is normal and expected to experience confusion, uncertainty, and curiosity throughout this process.

Here are things to keep in mind as you read through Devor's stages:

- These stages are going to be different for everyone.
- Not all of the stages have to be experienced.
- The stages do not have to be experienced in the order listed.
- The length of each stage will vary from person to person.
- Some of the stages may end up being repeated/returned to.
- One might settle at a certain stage and choose to not move past it.

See if you can relate to any of the stages. Return to this list as often as you need to throughout your journey.<sup>45</sup>

# Stage 1: Underlying/Unexplainable Anxiety

Not being sure why you feel the way you feel.

<sup>44</sup> Aaron H. Devor, "Witnessing and Mirroring: A Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 8, no. 1, (2004): 41–67.

<sup>45</sup> Although the word "transgender" is used throughout the stages, I've put it in brackets to remind you that you can fill in any term that makes more sense for your experience (e.g., nonbinary, gender dysphoric, trans, agender, genderfluid, etc.).

# Stage 2: Confusion Around Your Gender Assigned at Birth

Wondering if the gender you were assigned at birth actually matches who you are.

#### Stage 3: Making Comparisons

Seeking out and exploring other gender identities as possibilities while not knowing consciously why you are doing this.

## Stage 4: Discovering the Word [Transgender]

Learning this is something that exists.

Stage 5: Confusion Around Your Identity Related to Being [Transgender] Questioning the authenticity of whether or not your experience matches that of being [transgender].

## Stage 6: Making Comparisons Between Yourself and Those Who Are [Transgender]

Testing and experimenting to see if other gender options are ones you can identify with. Identifying less with your gender assigned at birth.

# Stage 7: Possible Acceptance of Being [Transgender]

Beginning to conclude that you probably are [transgender].

# Stage 8: Delay of Acceptance of Being [Transgender]

Possible fears and challenges arise. Seeking more confirmation of being [transgender].

# Stage 9: Acceptance of Being [Transgender]

Concluding that you are indeed [transgender].

# Stage 10: Delay Before Transition (optional)

Gathering information on how to transition. Considering changes that might occur socially, professionally, etc.

Stage 11: Transition (optional) Undergoing social and/or medical transition.

#### Stage 12: Acceptance of Self, Post-Transition

Establishing self as one's true gender identity, both internally and externally.

#### Stage 13: Integration

Incorporating your gender identity with all aspects of who you are.

#### Stage 14: Pride

Being open and out as [transgender]. Possibly getting involved with advocacy for [transgender] rights.

#### WISDOM TIP 5: SIMPLIFYING THE COMPLICATED

Your gender identity touches and affects nearly every aspect of the way you experience yourself in the world and the way the world experiences you. When all these layers are competing for attention it can make the task of exploring your gender feel overwhelming and complicated. Therefore it is important you learn how to simplify things by examining each layer separately. Once you've done this you can bring all the pieces back together to see your big picture with more clarity and find more accurate answers about your gender identity.

Here are examples of the layers that might be affecting your exploration of your gender identity:

- Sexual orientation questions
- Childhood trauma and/or influences
- Mental illness (diagnosed and undiagnosed)
- The influence of learned gender stereotypes
- Physical discomfort with your gender
- Mental and emotional discomfort with your gender
- Social discomfort with your gender
- A sense of dislike toward certain genders
- A preference for certain genders
- Internalized transphobia and/or homophobia
- Personality traits
- Religious/spiritual influences

In the following chapters, you'll begin the process of peeling back your layers, one by one. Then, once you've completed these chapters, you'll learn how to integrate these various aspects of yourself to form a more complete picture of who you are.

You are a complex, multifaceted being, which can be both amazing and overwhelming to experience. Examining each of these layers individually is the key to getting through this process without being swallowed up by the enormity of it.

#### WISDOM TIP 6: LABEL-FREE GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION

Do you believe having the words to explain your gender identity is of high importance? Do you prefer not to be labeled? Do you think you'll find words to describe how you feel now but could see yourself not using them later?

Regardless of which camp you fall into, many of the exercises in *Stage Three: Exploration* are geared toward exploring gender as thoroughly as possible without having to assign a name to what you discover. Being able to answer questions about yourself without the pressure of a final destination can be very freeing. For example, you could go into this part of the guide wondering, "Am I or am I not transgender?" Or, you could try to approach yourself with curiosity as a whole person and with an open mind.

As you work through the exercises in *Stage Three: Exploration*, keep in mind there is no need for black and white answers to the questions you have about your gender. Gender is complex, multilayered, and very individualized. There are many options and combinations for you to choose from to find what fits you. This is a somewhat new line of thinking that many (though certainly not all) parts of the world are beginning to embrace, and I encourage to you keep that in mind as you progress through this part of the book. Upon completion of *Stage Three: Exploration*, you'll have the opportunity to explore terms and phrases that you may want to use when describing yourself and your gender identity. The goal is to find what works for *you* (which may not be what works for someone else).

You may feel pressure to "prove" that you don't identify as the gender you were assigned at birth and therefore must use certain terms to label yourself and your gender identity. This pressure can come from mental health and medical professionals, your family, your friends, and even from yourself.

It is realistic to keep in mind that we live in a world in which you might need to describe your gender identity to others in such a way that could make you feel uncomfortable. We will take a closer look at that in Chapter 14. In the meantime, try to set aside these pressures as you work through the exercises in this section—this part of the journey is for *you*.

#### WISDOM TIP 7: WHAT IF THIS TURNS OUT TO BE TRUE?

For some of you the question, "What if this turns out to be true?" may already be ringing around in your brain ("this" being the need to do something about the gap you feel between your actual gender identity and your gender assigned at birth).

Ask yourself: *How much is my fear of 'this' keeping me from facing the truth?* 

It's completely understandable if this is the case. There are numerous challenges that can arise if one realizes the answer to the question, "Are you uncomfortable with your gender assigned at birth?" is "Yes."

Here are examples of concerns that can result from having this discovery about oneself:

- "Should I transition medically? If so, how?"
- "Should I transition socially? If so, how?"
- "How do I find a gender therapist?"
- "How should I come out to my family members and friends?"
- "How should I come out at work, school, to my faith community, and in other areas of my life?"
- "What steps do I need to take to legally to change my name and/ or gender marker?"
- "In what ways am I protected or not protected by laws in my state and/or country?"
- "How should I handle possible discrimination, harassment, and other forms of negativity?"
- "Does my health insurance cover the costs of transitioning?"
- "How can I plan to cover the costs of transitioning?"

Keep these tips in mind as you begin the Exploration Exercises in *Stage Three: Exploration* and use them to help you work through any anxiety that may come up as a result of what you discover:

- It is normal to feel overwhelmed by the possibility that this could end up being true.
- Gently check in with yourself as you work through this part of the guide, asking, "Do I really know, deep down, what the answer is? Is my fear of the answer being 'Yes' keeping me from admitting it?"
- All of your aha moments during *Stage Three: Exploration* will help you to move further away from your gender assigned at birth and more toward . . . well, that's what you're trying to figure out. Try to refrain from any predetermined end goal and allow yourself the freedom to see what lies ahead.
- Eventually you'll find your sweet spot when it comes to the unique way you describe and express your gender identity.

# Getting Organized: Keeping Track of Your Exploration Ideas

The further you go into *Stage Three: Exploration*, the more Exploration Ideas you will encounter. It's important to get organized early on and have a way to keep track of all of them. Having someplace to do this will:

- Give you a place to dump them so they don't rattle around in your head.
- Keep them from being forgotten before they've had the chance to be explored.
- Help organize your thoughts during your journey.
- Create something you can share with those who accompany you along this journey.
- Help you assess your progress along the way.
- Enable the creation of a daily ritual to keep track of your exploration ideas.

There are many methods to choose from to keep track of your Exploration Ideas. Find one that suits your personality, your pace of life, your preference for old school or something more techy. There's something out there for everyone. For example, you can use:

- □ Pinterest
- □ Apps such as Evernote, Wunderlist, Pocket, etc.
- □ Bookmarks and folders in your web browser
- $\Box$  A notebook
- $\Box$  A sketchbook
- □ A file on your computer (e.g., Word document, Excel spread-sheet)
- $\Box$  A decorative journal
- $\Box$  Your mobile device (e.g., Notes)

*Place a checkmark next to any of these ideas you can you see yourself using for keeping track of your Exploration Ideas.* 

Here are ways you can use an Exploration Ideas List for keeping track of general ideas:

- Find YouTubers to follow.
- Search for a local support group.
- Get magazines and cut out pictures of hairstyles you might want to try.
- Find a therapist you can talk to.

Here are ways you can use an Exploration Ideas List for keeping track of specific ideas:

- Subscribe to the Neutrois Nonsense blog to learn more about nonbinary identities.
- Go shopping with [name of person] at a thrift store by [set date] to explore new clothing options.
- Journal for twenty minutes every morning about how you are feeling about your gender exploration.
- Purchase *Trans Bodies*, *Trans Selves*.

Think of your Exploration Ideas List as a syllabus of sorts that you are creating for your very own program of study—*the study of yourself*.

# Chapter 8

# Keeping in Mind the Big Picture

Wrestling with questions about your gender identity can be so all-encompassing that it becomes easy to forget it is only one aspect of who you are as a person.

In this chapter, you will be introduced to ways you can keep the *big picture* of who you are in mind. By doing this, you will make your self-discovery process a little less complicated, confusing, and overwhelming. You will be taking a closer look at:

Internalized Transphobia: Something that might be getting in the way of you being able to see the big picture is *internalized transphobia*. You will explore what this is, how it can interfere with the crucial step of self-acceptance, and how much of this you might be experiencing.

You and Your Identities: This chapter serves as a reminder that you have other identities in addition to your gender identity. You will take a big picture look at what it means to have identities, why you need them to better connect with your sense of self, how you share your identities with others, and why it is wise to not get overly-attached to your identities.

The Questionnaire: Through this questionnaire you'll get a better idea of your unique big picture. You'll do this by exploring, in detail and layer by layer, the different ways you are being affected by gender identity confusion.

Becoming Aware of Internalized Transphobia

Gut check! Without hesitation, answer this question:

How much am I resisting the very thought of being transgender or trans?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very much)

Maybe you are transgender or trans, and maybe you're not.<sup>46</sup> To be able to answer this question truthfully and accurately you need to be aware of *how much resistance you have to the very thought of this*.

It is a sad (but true) reality that many of you reading this book feel resistance toward accepting that you might be transgender or trans. The root of this resistance oftentimes comes in the form of what is called *internalized transphobia*. Internalized transphobia can disrupt your ability to see the big picture, usually without you even knowing it. If you are unaware of its presence, you might unconsciously sabotage yourself throughout the course of not only your gender identity journey, but your entire life.

This exercise will help reveal any internalized transphobia that might be inhibiting your self-exploration journey. Bringing it to light will enable you to work through these difficult feelings, giving you control over how much they affect you. Otherwise, if you continue to repress them, they will have control over you.

#### WHAT IS TRANSPHOBIA?

The root of transphobia, whether it's being felt about oneself or about someone else, is *fear*. There is something about straying from what we know to be the expectations of gender that results in anxiety, discomfort, uncertainty, and even anger in certain individuals. The fear at the root of transphobia stems from inaccurate conceptions of gender and gender identity that remain deeply ingrained into many cultures (it's as if The Ways of Old has a Bodyguard who is freaking out at the very notion that there could be such a thing as someone not feeling aligned with their gender assigned at birth).

#### WHAT IS INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA?

Here are examples of what a person's internal dialogue can sound like when it's laced with internalized transphobia:

- "Why can't you just be normal?"
- "You'll look terrible as a [fill in gender]."
- "Nobody will see you as a 'real' [fill in gender]."

<sup>46</sup> The use *transgender* and *trans* in this section is a reflection of the most current definitions that are being used to describe the feeling of discomfort and misalignment between one's gender assigned at birth and one's actual gender. *Trans* tends to speak more of the experience of nonbinary persons and *transgender* to those who have a more binary experience.

- "I'm pretty sure you're just delusional."
- "This is really about how you were [fill in traumatizing childhood event]."
- "This is only a symptom of your [fill in other diagnosis you might have]."
- "You're really only trying to live out a fetish/fantasy."
- "No one will ever want to be in a relationship with you because you're not a 'real' [fill in gender]."
- "You're too young to know this about yourself."
- "You're too old to bother with trying to change anything about this."
- "You will never find a partner who will want to be with you because of this."

Put a star next to any of the examples above that sound familiar in relation to your own internal dialogue. When you reflect on these thoughts, which ones are the most damaging?

This internal dialogue can be followed by feelings of:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Anger
- Depression
- Hatred
- Disappointment
- An urge to self-harm
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Despair
- Panic
- Feeling lost
- Self-loathing
- Disgust
- Hurt
- Fear

Put a star next to any of the examples above that are feelings you have experienced as a result of your own transphobic internal dialogue. When you reflect on these feelings, which ones are the most painful?

These feelings are so painful that the cycle can result in:

- Denial
- Repression
- Talking yourself out of further exploration
- Staying stuck in a place of wishing to be cisgender (i.e., to feel aligned with your gender assigned at birth)
- Increased internalized transphobia toward self
- Increased internalized transphobia toward others
- Checking-out mentally, emotionally, and/or socially
- Trying to find yourself in other identities
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs or other potentially destructive behaviors
- Taking this pain out on others, including those who are transgender or nonbinary

Have you ever found yourself in this stage of this cycle? If so, record examples here.

# DISCOVERING THE PRESENCE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

Now that you have a better idea as to how internalized transphobia reveals itself, let's look more closely at whether or not it is present within you.

# Step 1: Asking the Question

Find a mirror and, looking at your reflection, read the following statement. Pay attention to your internal response.

"There is a chance that I am transgender and/or nonbinary."

# Step 2: Taking Note of Your Thoughts

What are the voices in your head saying? Are these the voices of people who are understanding and supportive or are they the voices of doubters, critics, and haters?

Journal about this now.

# Step 3: Taking Note of Your Feelings

What feelings come up for you during this exercise? What feelings will linger with you for the rest of the day, maybe even longer?

Journal about this now.

# Step 4: Taking Note of How You Cope

What do you usually do to try to cope with these thoughts and feelings? These can be responses you do consciously (i.e., "I know I am drinking/

withdrawing/angry because of this") or unconsciously (i.e., not knowing you were taking your feelings about this out on other people).

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

By working through this exercise, you are already taking one of the most important steps toward challenging internalized transphobia: *to even know if it exists within you*. It's possible you didn't realize this is what you've been experiencing. This is understandable: so many of us go through life unaware of the internal dialogue we constantly have going on in our minds.

Let's look at ways you can learn to recognize when you are engaging with internalized transphobia and what you can do about it.

#### Step 1: Which Voice Are You Hearing?

With enough practice, you'll be able to tell if your self-talk is coming from an Internal Bully or from your Bodyguard. The key is to ask yourself:

- Which words are being used in my self-talk?
- What is the tone and intention of my self-talk?

For example, when you read through the internal dialogue examples at the beginning of the exercise, you may have heard them as having a biting, condescending, shaming tone of a bully. This Internal Bully is trying to change your mind by scaring you into submission, wanting to send you back into the prison within yourself. Conversely, your Bodyguard, while still highly concerned about what might happen to you on your self-discovery journey, wants you to be okay and can learn to work together with you to make that happen.

#### Step 2: Reframing the Self-Talk

Here are examples of how to reframe statements using your Bodyguard as the voice instead of the Internal Bully. Try this out by looking in the mirror as you reframe the original statements:

Internal Bully: "You are such a freak. Why can't you just be 'normal'?" Bodyguard: "It scares me to think of everything you might have to go through if it turns out you are trans/transgender. I know you don't like feeling 'different' but you are not alone. How can we find others who are going through this?" Internal Bully: "This is nonsense, you're too young to know this about yourself."

Bodyguard: "I've heard people say you can't figure this sort of thing out about yourself until you're an adult. I'm not sure if they're right or not. Who do we trust to talk to about this to find out?"

It is important for you to be able to acknowledge your anxiety around the possibility of being trans/transgender. This step teaches you to both recognize and do this from a place of encouragement and understanding instead of a place of anger, fear, and self-loathing.

#### Step 3: Staying Alert to the Presence of Internalized Transphobia

When you utilize the Check-In Time prompt throughout *Stage Three: Exploration*, read through what you have written and pay attention to anything that indicates the presence of internalized transphobia. Whenever this comes up, use this exercise to reframe your self-talk in such a way that reflects comfort and understanding.

#### BEING FREE OF INTERNALIZED TRANSPHOBIA

One of the greatest benefits of being free of internalized transphobia is reaching a point of *self-acceptance*. Self-acceptance doesn't mean you aren't going to experience fear, anger, sadness, and confusion on this journey. What self-acceptance does is replace the negative beliefs you have about yourself with regard to being transgender and/or trans with beliefs that are encouraging, accepting, and compassionate.

Here's how some of the members of my Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community described what it was like for them to finally experience self-acceptance in relation to gender identity:<sup>47</sup>

"Finally loving myself." "Decisions and answers became clearer." "I'm more committed to living." "I have pride in myself." "I can finally be real." "I have a better life." "I'm happy with myself." "I can accept it even if I don't understand it."

<sup>47</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist, Facebook post, May 20, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts/1021174231233789.

"I have a better understanding of myself." "It's like a weight has been lifted." "I nurture myself now." "I see the positives of myself." "I feel at peace."

*Place a star next to the ones you most want to experience. Are there any not listed that you would like to add?* 

There isn't a timeline or formula that predicts when self-acceptance will happen for you, so remember to be patient with yourself through this process. Everyone is different when it comes to what bullying messages they have heard over the course of their life, and how deeply they have internalized them. Being aware of internalized transphobia is a huge step, so continue to monitor where you are with this when you are prompted at the end of each exercise to pause and reflect.

# CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?



# You and Your Identities

As essential as it is to understand your gender identity, it is important to remember you are made up of many other identities as well. In this exercise, we're going to take a look at the big picture of what it means to have identities, why we need them to better connect with our sense of self, how we share our identities with others, and why it is wise to not get overly attached to our identities.

# HOW IDENTITIES HELP TO FORM YOUR SENSE OF SELF

You were first introduced to the concept of having identities in *Stage One: Preparation* when you created a logline in which described yourself as a character on a journey. You also kept it in mind throughout *Stage Two: Reflection* when you learned that your adolescence is a pivotal time during which identity formation takes place.

One of the definitions of the word *identity* is "the condition of being one's self, and not another."<sup>48</sup> It is human nature to seek out explanations for who we are, how we fit into this world, and how we relate (and don't relate) with others.

Discovering who and what it is that you identify with can be useful in several ways:

- Allows you to clarify who you are in relation to yourself, as well as to others.
- Can bring you closer to answering the question, "Who am I?"
- Helps you form a sense of who you are as a whole person.
- Enhances your sense of uniqueness as an individual person.
- Enhances your sense of belonging to a like-minded community/ collective.

# WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT IDENTITIES?

Here are examples of different types of identities a person can have over the course of their lifetime:

- Gender identity
- Political affiliation
- Religious affiliation

<sup>48</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. "identity," http://www.dictionary.com/browse/identity?s=t.

- Nerd/geek
- Kink
- Astrology sign
- Introvert/extravert
- Personality type
- Fandom
- Subculture
- Mental illness diagnosis
- Spiritual beliefs
- Physical descriptions
- Cultural background
- Ethnic background
- Having an addiction to something or someone
- Profession/job
- Educational background
- Things you enjoy (food, beverages, movies, music, TV, and book series)
- Things you do (hobbies, interests)
- Socioeconomic status
- Relationship status
- Age group
- Sexual/romantic orientation
- Lifestyle

Place a star next to the identities you feel are important to use to describe who you are today. Add any others that aren't listed below. Be sure to also list any identities that seem to conflict with one another.

Looking at the list you just made, which ones do you feel relatively certain about and which ones do you feel are currently up for debate? List them here.

# EXAMINING YOUR PAST IDENTITIES

Over the course of your lifetime, you have taken on any number of identities, whether or not you consciously knew it at the time. This is a normal part of the growing and learning process, as it has allowed to you test out these identities to see if they are authentic matches for you. It can be interesting to look back on identities you really thought were who you were at the time and recognize how you outgrew those identities. There are identities that stick with you your entire life and others you move away from but then return to.

Read through the list of identities in the exercise above. Which ones have you used to describe yourself in the past? List them here. You can divide them up into age categories, such as adolescence/teenage years, young adulthood, ages eighteen to twenty-four, etc.

Are there any identities which have remained consistent for you throughout the years? List them here.

Which identities no longer fit, and why? How did you discern that? What was it like when you transitioned away from them and toward something else? List them here.

#### SHARING (AND NOT SHARING) OUR IDENTITIES WITH OTHERS

The realization and formation of our identities can be either a public or private matter, or often a combination of both. For instance, take a look at anyone's social media account (including your own). More than likely you will see examples of a person's identities splashed throughout the page: the profile picture that is chosen, the handle that is used, the information that is shared, the discussions that are brought up. This

is even more apparent on dating/relationship sites, where the ability to succinctly describe who you are is key to attracting people that you would like to be in contact with.

More than likely you won't put every identity of yours out there for everyone to see, keeping some of them to yourself or for only those who know you intimately. This is especially true if you are feeling ambivalent about certain identities you've held for a while and are in the process of re-evaluating them.

When you choose to share your identities with others, this can result in finding others who are like you. You may discover individuals, as well as communities, that embrace and support you. Although this isn't a guarantee in every situation, it is something worth considering if you're in search of likeminded folks to connect with.

As affirming as it can be to reveal your identities (and therefore yourself) to others, this can also result in complications. It's possible others might disagree with how you self-identify and/or decide on their own how they want to identify you. You also might move beyond certain identities while others are still attached to you having those identities, resulting in their resisting the changes you are experiencing. Although this might be disheartening, it is also understandable.

*Have you ever felt this way about an identity change someone else was going through?* 

#### BECOMING OVERLY ATTACHED TO AN IDENTITY

When you become overly attached to an identity, you might fail to realize certain truths about yourself. Examples of this are:

- Using your identities to hide from an identity you aren't ready to face.
- Overemphasizing certain identities and neglecting your other identities.
- Thinking of yourself only as an identity and not as a person having identities.
- Being too invested in identities that no longer serve you, thus becoming blind to discovering other possible identities.

As you continue to learn more about identity formation, you can become aware of the existence of your identities without letting them solely define who you are. Once you have this awareness, you'll be able to better recognize when it is time to move on from identities that are no longer serving a purpose in your life.

# BRINGING GENDER IDENTITY BACK INTO THE PICTURE

Look back at your answers in the exercise Examining Your Past Identities (page 112). Read over your response to the following questions: "Which identities no longer fit you? How do you know this?" You can use the answer to this question as a way to revisit your discovery and evolution process, this time focusing specifically on your gender identity.

How have you realized in the past that a certain identity no longer suited you? How can you apply this to your current questions about your gender identity? Record your answer here.

Keep in mind that gender affects nearly every aspect of who you are. This means the clearer you are about your gender identity, the clearer you'll be about who you are as a whole.

# CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

# The Questionnaire

The last step to keeping the big picture in mind during your gender identity exploration is exploring the different ways, layer by layer, you are being affected by gender identity confusion. This concept was first mentioned in Wisdom Tip 5: Simplifying the Complicated (page 97). Now we're going to put it into practice.

The following questions will help you examine as many layers of yourself as possible, focusing on gender only if it makes sense for you to do so. This way you can discover which attributes of yourself and your life are most affected by gender and which are not. Once you've finished *Stage Three: Exploration*, you'll have the chance to put all of these pieces together so you can see if any patterns have formed. For now, give each question as much individual attention as possible.

## TIPS FOR FILLING OUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- Each question is open-ended. This is to encourage you to use your own words to describe your experience and give you the chance to explore complex questions in more depth.
- The question "How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?" is asked because it is possible not all of the questions will tie back into your gender identity. Results will differ from person to person—there are no wrong or right answers here.
- Fill out what you can. You may not be able to answer all of the questions right now, and/or your answers might change over time. You will have an opportunity to fill this questionnaire out again toward the end of the book once you have worked through *Stage Three: Exploration*.

#### Examples

Q: How do you feel about the name you currently use and are addressed as? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

A: I feel like my first name is gender neutral. This does relate to my gender because if it were a more female-sounding name, I would want to change it to something that would feel more fitting for me.

Q: How do you feel about the amount of body hair that you have (or don't have)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

A: I do not like having body hair. I can't even put into words how wrong it feels to have it and to have to see it on me. I am pretty sure this has to do with my gender, although maybe I just don't like body hair in general?

# THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1. How do you feel about the name you currently use and are addressed as? How much (if at all) is this connected to your genderrelated concerns?
- 2. How do you feel about being addressed by a gendered term that coincides with your gender assigned at birth (e.g., ma'am, sir, ladies, fellas, lad, lass)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 3. How do you feel about being addressed by a gendered term that does not coincide with your gender assigned at birth? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 4. How do you feel about being addressed as your gender assigned at birth pronouns? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

- 5. How do you feel being addressed by gendered adjectives such as *pretty* or *handsome*? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 6. How do you feel about using the public restrooms/changing rooms that you are expected to based on your current gender presentation? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 7. How do you feel about having/not having a menstrual cycle? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 8. How do you feel about being able to/not being able to conceive a child? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 9. How do you feel about the amount of body hair that you have (or don't have)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

- 10. How do you feel about having the amount of facial hair that you have/don't have? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 11. How do you feel about your voice? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 12. How do you feel about tone and pitch in which you speak? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 13. How do you feel about your eyebrows? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 14. How do you feel about your hairstyle? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 15. How do you feel about your current wardrobe? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

16. How do you feel about wearing/not wearing makeup? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns? 17. How do you feel about wearing/not wearing earrings, having/ not having piercings and/or tattoos, and carrying/not carrying certain accessories? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns? 18. How do you feel about your height? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns? 19. How do you feel about your chest? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns? 20. How do you feel about your body shape? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns? 21. How do you feel about the structure of your face? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

- 22. How do you feel about the size of your hands and feet? How much (if at all) is this connected to gender-related concerns?
- 23. How do you feel about having (or not having) an Adam's apple? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 24. How do you feel about your genitals? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 25. How would you describe your sexual orientation? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 26. How do you feel about having partners, concerning physical intimacy? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 27. How do you feel about having partners, concerning emotional intimacy? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

- 28. How do you feel about assumptions others make about you based on their perception of your gender? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 29. How do you feel about the way your family addresses you when not using your name (e.g., son/daughter, niece/nephew, mother /father)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your genderrelated concerns?
- 30. To what extent do you feel your hobbies and interests truly reflect who you are? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 31. How do you feel when you are separated into groups by gender? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

#### SUMMARY OF YOUR RESPONSES

- Read through your answers. Place a star next to the responses that are most problematic to you (e.g., revealed a high level of disconnect, dissatisfaction, discomfort, etc.). These can be questions that do or do not relate to gender.
- Which of these questions and answers that you just listed are related to gender? Place a second star next to those responses.

# CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?



# Chapter 9

# Deconstructing Gender

While filling out the Questionnaire, you examined different aspects of who you are and determined how much gender affects each of them. This was to help you get a more accurate picture of the specific areas of your life you struggle with the most when it comes to the gap you feel between your gender assigned at birth and your gender identity. The next step is to put aside whatever you think you know about gender and approach it with an open mind as we spend this chapter *deconstructing gender*.

You probably have at least a basic idea of what gender is—otherwise you wouldn't be reading a book entitled You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery. This chapter is your chance to fill gaps in your understanding of what gender is, as well as what it means to question your gender assigned at birth.

As we begin this leg of the journey, keep in mind there are multiple ways to define and discuss gender. This is just *my* way. Be sure to continue to seek out and explore other perspectives until you find the one(s) you most deeply resonate with. What matters most is that your answers are right for *you*.

What Gender Identity Is and Isn't

Think back to the question you were asked at the beginning of this guidebook:

Are you uncomfortable with your gender assigned at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES MAYBE NO

Again, this question is phrased as such because you were assigned a gender at birth based on the physical manifestation of your *biological sex*, not based upon your actual *gender identity*.

Biological sex includes physical attributes such as external genitalia, sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, and internal reproductive structures. At birth, it is used to assign sex, that is, to identify individuals as male or female.<sup>49</sup>

Using these criteria alone to identify individuals as male or female, and therefore as boys and girls, presents several problems.

### BIOLOGICAL SEX DOES NOT DETERMINE GENDER IDENTITY

Since an assumption has been made that one's biological sex and gender identity are identical, this means an infant is assigned a gender identity as soon as their biological sex is determined.<sup>50</sup> This assumption of gender is based solely on whether the baby has a penis (assigned male), a vagina (assigned female), or a combination of both (assigned intersex).

However, there is a significant amount of documented instances in which a person's gender identity and assigned biological sex do not align, supporting the conclusion that *biological sex does not determine one's gender identity*. Although far too many infants continue being assigned the wrong gender either before or at birth, this ritual is so deeply embedded into our society that it is difficult to imagine how this practice could be altered. For now, we are taking the step of recognizing this is an issue, as well as encouraging people to talk about their experiences of having been assigned the wrong gender at birth.

#### Your Gender Assigned at Birth

Based on the physical evidence gathered by doctors, your parents, etc., what sex (and therefore what gender) were you assigned at birth? Circle your answer.

#### Male

Female

#### Intersex

On the scale on the next page, where do you think you might fall when it comes to your actual gender? Indicate your answer below. (You can always change your answer later on.)

<sup>49 &</sup>quot;Understanding Gender," Gender Spectrum, https://www.genderspectrum. org/quick-links/understanding-gender/.

<sup>50</sup> With ultrasound technology, this assignment of sex and gender can even happen while the baby is in the womb.

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Even Split \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Nowhere on this scale

Various places on the scale at various times

I'm not sure yet

## WHAT DETERMINES GENDER IDENTITY?

So what *does* determine one's gender and therefore their gender identity? It's a complex question with many answers, depending on whom you ask. Gender identity is typically described as one's internal sense of themselves as male, female, both, or neither. However, the following attributes can also be included in the way a person might describe their gender identity:

- Gender expression (or desired gender expression)
- A combination of masculine and feminine traits
- Biological sex
- Sexual orientation

Additionally, the process of coming to conclusions about your gender identity and how to express it cannot help but be influenced by the social environment in which you exist. You can learn more about this through the study of social identity theory, which was first theorized by Tajfel and Turner in 1986.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not you incorporate all, some, or none of these factors into your definition of gender identity, the idea is that *you* determine your gender identity.

## WHO DOESN'T QUESTION THEIR GENDER IDENTITY?

The above definition of gender identity can come across as confusing to someone whose gender assigned at birth is in alignment with their internal sense of gender (a.k.a. *cisgender*). Someone who is cisgender doesn't spend time or energy questioning their gender identity—by coincidence it happens to match the biological sex they were assigned at birth. This doesn't mean someone cisgender won't have issues with certain gender roles and stereotypes that are placed upon them. However,

<sup>51</sup> Saul McLeod, "Social Identity Theory," Simply Psychology, 2008, http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html.

this is separate from having issues with their *actual* gender identity not matching the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

Individuals whose internal sense of gender does not align with their gender assigned at birth will more than likely spend time and energy over the course of their life trying to determine what's really going on inside of them (see Wisdom Tip 4: The Stages of Gender Identity Formation on page 95).

Gender identity is a core aspect of who we are. Again, those who have never questioned their gender identity may not understand why this is true or what it even means. I encourage these individuals to pay attention to how many times within one day they are:

- Verbally gendered (being addressed or referred to as a specific gender).
- Told to use a gendered space (public bathrooms, changing rooms, clothing departments).
- Expected to abide by rules and expectations based on the gender they are perceived to be.

You will quickly observe that gender is an inescapable part of a person's daily life.

## YOUR OWN GENDER IDENTITY

*Revisit the attributes which can contribute to your description of your gender identity:* 

Your internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither

Gender expression (or desired gender expression)

Combination of masculine and feminine traits

Biological sex

## Sexual orientation

Knowing you can change your answers later, what would the rough draft of this look like for you? Fill in the blanks with your answers (remember, you do not have to fill in each blank—only the ones which feel relevant to your description of your gender identity).

What is your level of comfort with the gender others perceive and assume you to be? Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very uncomfortable and 10 being very comfortable.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

# DEFINING TRANSGENDER, GENDER DIVERSE, NONBINARY, AND GENDER DYSPHORIA

For those searching for answers about their gender identity, it can be helpful to know definitions of the various terms that could be used to describe one's experience. In this section, we're going to look at the terms *transgender*, *gender diverse*, *nonbinary*, and *gender dysphoria*.

## Transgender

Over the past few years, we have seen shifts in how the term *transgender* is used to describe one's experience of their gender identity. Keeping this in mind, what follows are examples of how *transgender* is currently being used. As you read through them, be mindful that:

- You are not limited to connecting with only one of these descriptors.
- You have the freedom to connect with one descriptor now and then realize you connect with another one or a different one at a future date.
- You can feel disconnection between your gender assigned at birth and your gender identity while also not relating to any of these descriptors.

## Transgender as an Umbrella Term (a.k.a. Trans)

This perspective goes with the idea that the word *trans* means *across* or *beyond*. Therefore, *trans*-gender means, in this case, you are going

across or beyond the gender you were assigned at birth, with the destination varying greatly. This is why there are so many options beneath the *transgender umbrella*. Both nonbinary (e.g., agender, genderfluid, genderqueer) and binary (i.e., transman, transwoman) identities can find a home within this definition of transgender.

This term can simplify one's search for answers about their gender identity. The umbrella gives multiple options from which to choose. Knowing there are so many others who feel they fit within the context of that umbrella can help bring someone a feeling of community, belonging, and relief.

However, this term can create confusion by lumping all gender identities and gender expressions into one category. The general population may not understand there are differences between how everyone under the umbrella identifies. It can also frustrate people who have a specific gender identity and don't want to be "lumped in" with other gender identities beneath the umbrella.

### Transgender in Reference to Medical Transition (a.k.a. Transsexual)52

This perspective pertains to those who feel *transgender* describes someone who is (or will be) taking medical steps to align themselves with their gender identity. These medical steps can include hormone therapy, hair removal, and a number of surgeries.

This definition of transgender is what our current mainstream media profiles most frequently; therefore it comes with unique benefits and challenges. The average layperson is being taught that to be transgender is to transition medically and socially from their gender assigned at birth to the other side of the gender binary.

For some this assumption can be useful. If this mainstream description of transgender fits who you are, then it may be easier for others to comprehend what you are going through. However, if you identify as transgender but do not fit the narrative that is being popularized by the media, this could make it more challenging for you to convey your personal experience to others.

#### Transgender as a Descriptor of a Medical Condition

Some prefer to use the term transgender only when describing what they see as a medical condition relating to the discrepancy they feel between their gender assigned at birth and their gender identity. For instance, if

<sup>52</sup> *Transsexual* has developed a negative connotation in many respects and therefore should only be used if it is how a person asks to be identified.

you were assigned male at birth and your gender identity is female, you would use the descriptor of transgender only in the context of working with mental health and medical professionals. Otherwise you refer to yourself as being *female* or *a woman*.

Everyone has the right to identify however they choose—if this is a perspective that you connect with, be sure to look at whether this desire to separate yourself from the term transgender is empowering or if it stems from a place of internalized transphobia (Becoming Aware of Internalized Transphobia, page 102).

Do you connect with any of these descriptors of transgender? Do you feel disconnected from any of them? If so, why?

### Gender Diverse

There are individuals who experience discomfort with their gender assigned at birth but feel the word *transgender* doesn't accurately describe this feeling. *Gender diverse* is one of the options available to those who are seeking a way to describe their experience without having to put themselves into a category they feel doesn't truly fits them.

*Gender diverse* describes an individual who embodies gender roles and/or gender expression that do not match social and cultural expectations. Terms such as *gender nonconforming*, *gender variant*, and *gender creative* can also be used to describe this experience.

Examples of this can be frequently seen in the gender expression of today's youth. There are more children, adolescents, and young adults breaking gender norms (both consciously and without awareness of doing so), especially as more parents are encouraging and supportive. As a result, more youth are having the freedom to gender-bend without being policed, as well as not being prematurely labeled as transgender (although parents are still strongly encouraged to listen for any indications from their child that they may be questioning their gender identity).

Learning there is an option like *gender diverse* can bring individuals who connect with this identity a sense of relief by validating their feelings of discomfort with the norms placed upon them as a result of their perceived gender discomfort.

It is important to note that someone can identify as both transgender *and* gender diverse. This could look like someone who doesn't feel

aligned with their gender assigned at birth in addition to feeling drawn toward bending the rules of gender expectations.

When it comes to your own experience of gender, do you feel any connection to the term gender diverse? If not, why?

### Nonbinary

Like *gender diverse*, the term *nonbinary* carries power to expand gender options. It can be the answer someone is looking for but didn't realize it even existed. We'll be exploring this in depth in the next section, Non-binary Identities (page 132).

### Gender Dysphoria

*Dysphoria*, as related to medicine, is defined as "an emotional state marked by anxiety, depression, and restlessness."<sup>53</sup> When someone experiences these types of feelings in relation to their sense of their gender identity, it is referred to as *gender dysphoria*.

The use of this term has increased over the past several years due to:

- Its inclusion in the 2011 World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7 as "discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics."<sup>54</sup>
- Its inclusion in 2013 in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which replaced the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder.

The term gender dysphoria has been around for several decades. It was coined in 1974 when Dr. Norman Fisk, in an effort to broaden the defi-

<sup>53</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. "dysphoria," http://www.dictionary.com/browse/dysphoria?s=t.

<sup>54</sup> World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People,* (Elgin, IL: World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2012).

nition of what it meant to be *transsexual*, opened a clinic where persons could be diagnosed with "gender dysphoria syndrome" and therefore have a higher chance of being approved for "sex reassignment."<sup>55</sup>

Although the term *gender dysphoria* is used for diagnostic purposes by therapists and medical professionals (which has helped in the fight to have insurance companies cover the costs of transgender health care), it is being used in other contexts as well. Many of my clients use this term as a way to describe the discomfort they are experiencing with their gender assigned at birth (e.g., "I'm feeling very dysphoric today," "That incident brought up so much of my dysphoria"). This feeling of gender-related dysphoria often surfaces as the result of something that happens in a social situation and/or when experiencing a strong feeling of discomfort associated with their physical body that is specifically related to their gender.

It's important to note that someone who identifies as transgender can experience gender dysphoria at different levels and in different ways, or maybe not even at all. However, they may still be asked to use the term with certain mental health and medical professionals for the aforementioned diagnostic purposes, with the goal being medical transition.<sup>56</sup>

From what you just learned about gender dysphoria, does this sound like something you might use as a way to describe your experience?

### CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

<sup>55</sup> Kay Brown, "The More Things Change ...," On the Science of Changing Sex, September 7, 2014, https://sillyolme.wordpress.com/2014/09/07/themore-things-change/.

<sup>56</sup> Ronnie Ritchie, "You Can Still Be Transgender If You Don't Feel Physical Dysphoria–Here's Why," Everyday Feminism, May 5, 2016, http://everydayfeminism .com/2016/05/transgender-without-dysphoria/.

## Nonbinary Identities

To best explain what it means to feel *nonbinary*, we'll first need to define *binary*. The prefix *bi* means *two*. Therefore, concerning gender identity, *binary* refers to identifying as female *or* male, a woman *or* a man, a girl *or* a boy. As a gender identity, *nonbinary* means to feel uncomfortable identifying as either male or female. In other words, "Not feeling aligned with the sex and gender one was assigned at birth while also not feeling aligned with the 'opposite' gender."<sup>57</sup>

It can be difficult for someone to put into words why they feel this way about their gender. They may only know what does and doesn't feel "right" when something happens that reminds them of the discomfort they feel around their perceived gender. These reminders can happen constantly throughout the day, since gendered language is so ingrained into our society.

### NONBINARY IDENTITY OPTIONS

One of the beauties of having a nonbinary sense of one's gender is endless range of ways gender can be experienced, described, and expressed. *Nonbinary* is an umbrella term with a multitude of options beneath it to choose from and explore.

Let's look at a few of the general categories nonbinary identities can be broken into:<sup>58</sup>

- Agender: To feel as though you are without gender. Feeling as though gender is lacking within you, is undefinable, or unknowable. Agender can also be used as a way of stating you have no gender identity and therefore nonbinary may not accurately describe your experience either.
- Androgyne: When your gender feels both masculine and feminine. This does not have to be an even split between masculine and feminine, nor does it have to remain the same combination at all times.
- Demigender: Feeling a partial connection to a gender identity. There are subcategories to choose from such as *demiboy*, *demigirl*, and *demiandrogyne*.

<sup>57</sup> Micah, "Non-Binary Transition," (Neutrois Nonsense, n.d.), https://neu-trois.me/non-binary-transition/.

<sup>58</sup> Nonbinary.org Wiki (Nonbinary.org, n.d.), http://nonbinary.org/wiki/.

- Genderfluid/Genderflux: Variances in your gender over time. Which genders? That is up to the individual. Over how much time? How often? Again, that is up to each individual.
- Genderqueer: Can be used as either an umbrella or specific term. A place for those who feel existing terms fail to truly express their gender (or lack thereof). It is can also be used to describe the intersection of one's gender identity, sexual orientation, and romantic orientation.
- **Bigender:** Feeling as if you are experiencing two gender identities simultaneously, or alternating between the two. These gender identities can be binary or nonbinary.
- Neutrois: To feel that your gender is neutral or *null*. A combination of the French words *neutre* ("neutral") and *trois* ("three").
- Pangender: Feeling that your gender is described by having all genders co-existing within yourself, including genders which have yet to be named, and perhaps will never be named. All of the genders do not have to be experienced at the same time and can be experienced more or less of the time than others.
- Third Gender: When individuals are categorized, either by themselves or a society, as being neither male nor female. Specific terms are used by certain societies that recognize there are three or more genders. Because this term is culturally and societally specific it is strongly advised that one looks into and reflects upon the cultural origins of these terms before identifying as such.

Within each of these categories, there are even more specific terms that can help you narrow down your particular experience with gender. Additionally, you can use as many terms as you want, in whatever combination you want. Nonbinary YouTuber thecharliecharmander suggests to "Think of it as using adjectives to describe your gender identity, instead of nouns."<sup>59</sup>

Although this can sound liberating and full of possibilities, it can also sound a little confusing for some. Chapter 14 will walk you through the steps of choosing from these terms and piecing together your very own description of your gender identity.

<sup>59</sup> Thecharliecharmander, (YouTube, n.d.), https://www.youtube.com/user/the charliecharmander.

### How Do You Know If You Might Be Nonbinary?

Read through the following questions and place a checkmark in any of the boxes to which you would answer "Yes." Keep in mind that answering "Yes" to any of these questions doesn't mean you are undeniably nonbinary. It only means there's something here worth exploring further.

- □ Do you feel uncomfortable being given only male or female as options (e.g., checking either male or female on forms, restrooms, changing rooms, etc.)?
- □ Do you shop in whichever clothes department you want, regardless of how the department is labeled (e.g., men's department/ women's department)?
- □ Do you have difficulty finding clothes that fit properly, due to your body being shaped differently than the way gendered clothing is cut (e.g., trying on a shirt from the men's department that won't fit over your chest; trying on a dress from the women's department that doesn't look flattering on your frame type)?
- □ Do you dislike being addressed as either "sir" or "ma'am," as well as gendered terms such as "ladies" or "fellas"?
- □ Do you wish you could be seen as whatever gender you feel like on any particular day?
- □ Do you wish there was no such thing as gender and would rather have nothing to do with it?
- □ Do you feel fine with whatever gender you are perceived as, maybe even getting a kick out of confusing others with how you are presenting?
- □ Do you have discomfort with being referred to as either "she" or "he"?
- □ Do you have no real attachment to being referred to as either "she" or "he"?
- □ Would you like to have the freedom to use gender-neutral terms to describe yourself, even when your gender is specifically asked for?
- □ Do you have a first name that is very gendered (i.e., very feminine or masculine) and feel it doesn't suit you?
- Do you find it unpleasant to be presented with only two gender options, especially if you are expected to choose one of those based on the gender others assume you are?
- □ With regard to your sexual orientation, do you find it difficult to specify whether you are gay or straight because that means you are saying you are interested only in the "opposite" or "same" gender?

### You and Your Gender Identity

- □ Do you feel there are some aspects of who you are physically, socially, and hormonally that you are fine with and others that you are very uncomfortable with (as it relates to the gender you are perceived as)?
- □ Do you find yourself not wanting to be limited by gender when it comes to what you can be interested in, how you can act, how you dress, etc.?

If this exercise has begun to spark your curiosity, keep on reading. All of the exercises in this book were created keeping in mind the possibility that your gender identity may be nonbinary.

### Possible Challenges with Being Nonbinary

It can be a big relief for someone to realize that they might identify as nonbinary if they had previously only been exposed to binary options of gender identity. On the other hand, societies will frequently show initial resistance to a new perspective about something that has been a long-standing tradition (in this case, the notion that are only two genders: male and female). This resistance can be conveyed as confusion, uncertainty, and discomfort toward the people who are having this experience. It can also result in a refusal to acknowledge their existence, as well as expressions of disrespect and disdain.

Keep in mind it is common, and even necessary, for a society to be introduced to new perspectives and struggle with them for a while. It's as if a society is going through its own Hero's Journey, initially pushing against the Call to Action it is receiving. Hopefully, over time, the society will come to an understanding that this new perspective is valid and therefore learn to embrace it as a genuine expression of the human experience had by many members of the society.

In much of the world, this is where we are concerning the verbalization of nonbinary gender identities. The existence of nonbinary gender identities is something that has only recently been put into words in many societies. This means it's still in its infancy stage of being recognized and incorporated by these populations.

Here are challenges people who identify as nonbinary might come across when they are in the process of exploring and sharing this aspect of themselves:

• Exploring different gender identities over a period of time and having others say you are being confusing/that they don't believe you.

- Not having many role models to choose from, whether in private or public life.
- Not seeing yourself represented in the mainstream.
- Wanting to use gender-neutral pronouns (such as they/them) and having issues with getting others to get to used it.
- Having difficulty finding resources, support, and stories of those who identity as nonbinary.
- Having your gender identity (or lack of gender identity) seen as invalid by those who are binary (i.e., "Pick a side").
- Feeling like you don't qualify as being transgender/trans.
- Not wanting to identify as transgender and/or nonbinary but having others say that you are.
- Encountering resistance if you decide to take medical steps to transition.
- Encountering resistance if you decide not to take medical steps to transition.
- Facing an increase in awareness that societies were often formed with "binary" as the only option.

Remember, if you identify as nonbinary, you are in the early stages of what is seen in many societies as a new perspective. It's going to take time for everyone else to catch up, so be sure to find support and community for yourself along the way.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes

Regardless if someone likes, dislikes, or is indifferent to the existence of gender stereotypes, the fact of the matter is they exist, and more than likely will continue to exist for some time. This section focuses on how you can become more aware of gender stereotypes and, in particular, how gender stereotypes might be confusing your gender identity exploration.

# GENDER STEREOTYPES AND YOUR GENDER IDENTITY EXPLORATION

Gender stereotyping is defined as overgeneralization of characteristics, differences, and attributes of a certain group based on their gender. Gender stereotypes create a widely accepted judgment or bias about certain characteristics or traits that apply to each gender.<sup>60</sup>

Here is an example of what it looks like when someone who is exploring their gender identity accidentally uses gender stereotyping in their self-analysis:

Step 1: The person gives examples of their interests, behaviors, and/ or appearance. They might compare the things they used to do to what they do now, or what they wish they could do.

Step 2: They will then assign these characteristics genders, usually female or male (as well as using terms such as *girly*, *boyish*, *feminine*, *masculine*, etc.).

Step 3: They will then wonder if their gender identity is female or male based on the assigned gender of these characteristics. If they are aware of nonbinary identities they might also question if they are neither gender, both genders, or many genders based on the evidence they have gathered about themselves.

Step 4: Some individuals might also wonder if having the "opposite" characteristics of their gender assigned at birth means they are gay (i.e., someone assigned male at birth having feminine qualities and someone assigned female at birth having masculine qualities).

<sup>60 &</sup>quot;Gender Stereotypes: Definition, Examples and Analysis," No Bullying. com, September 9, 2016, http://nobullying.com/gender-stereotypes/.

It is understandable why someone would take a look at these descriptions of themselves and use them to try to determine their gender identity. However, *your interests, behaviors, physical features, and appearance do not exclusively determine your gender identity*. This can be a tricky concept to grasp and a frustrating one as well. It means you cannot make a list of your interests, behaviors, aspects of physical features, and appearance as a way to define your gender identity. It's possible they will give indications as to what it *might* be, but they are not the only pieces of the puzzle.

## THE ORIGINS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

Discussion has been brewing for some time around the notion that gender roles and stereotypes are socially constructed. This means that every society is different when it comes to how gender is defined, what male and female should look and act like, and if there is any room for discussion for nonbinary gender identities. This is because societies have their own stories as to how their gender stereotypes evolved and to what extent they are adhered to. Religion, politics, agriculture, poverty, wealth, industrialism, war, culture, civil rights movements, the entertainment industry, economics, and the media are just a few of the motivating factors behind how the gender stereotypes in a society can evolve.

Difficulties arise when a rigid association (i.e., a stereotype) is formed as to how a person of a certain gender is expected to behave. This rigid expectation also completely excludes the spectrum of nonbinary gender identities.

Over the years, some societies have relaxed their gender stereotypes, while others remain firmly entrenched in them. You more than likely are aware of what your society's views are on these gender expectations. Depending on your age and/or how many places you have lived, you may have had multiple experiences with this over the course of your lifetime.

What was your experience of gender roles and stereotypes growing up? Have you made changes in your life that reflect a perspective on gender roles and stereotypes that is different from what you experienced in the past?

## REMOVING GENDER FROM THE PICTURE (FOR NOW)

Let's take a look at how you might be caught in the trap of trying to fit yourself into a male or female box based upon gender stereotypes. To do this, you'll need to examine your interests, behaviors, and appearance as being *separate* from your gender identity and, instead, as a part of your *overall* identity.

The intention of this exercise is to make this leg of your gender identity exploration less complicated. Removing gender from the equation will help free you from constraints you may have put upon yourself and allow other aspects of who you are to be revealed.

Let's look at each of these areas individually:

#### Interests

These could be hobbies, tastes in music, entertainment, what you read, what you watch, what you like to study and learn about, what you spend your time thinking about, things you like to do, who you like to spend time with, things you like to talk about, how you like to spend your time, what you like to eat and drink, where you like to spend your time, hobbies, quirks, lifestyles, etc.

Using the table on the next page, answer the following questions:

A: What are you interests? List these in column A. Include anything that comes to mind, even things that you keep hidden from others.

**B**: For each interest listed, write either "Male" or "Female" in column B if you've been taught to believe that your interest is traditionally associated with either of those genders. You can write "Neither" or "Both" as options as well.

C: If you were to look at each of these interests through a genderneutral lens, would you still keep each interest in your life? Write "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" in column C.

D: Leave column D blank for now—you'll be using it for an exercise coming up later in this guide.

### My Interests

A	В	С	D

### Behaviors

Behaviors include the various aspects of the way you present yourself to the world. Behavior includes the way you use your body: the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you gesture. It can be the way you act in certain situations: assertive, passive, anxious, laid back, organized, spontaneous, cocky, humble, extraverted, introverted. It can be a certain role you've taken on: as a caregiver, an intellect, a leader, a free spirit, an adventurer, a mediator, an innovator.

Using the table on the next page, answer the following questions:

A: How would you describe your behaviors? List these in column A. Include anything that comes to mind, even things that you keep hidden from others.

**B:** For each behavior listed, write either "Male" or "Female" in column B if you've been taught to believe that your behavior is traditionally associated with either of those genders. You can write "Neither" or "Both" as options as well.

C: If you were able to remove the gender that is associated with each behavior, would you still want to keep them? Write "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" in column C.

D: Leave column D blank for now—you'll be using it for an exercise coming up later in this guide.

### My Behaviors

Α	В	С	D

### Appearance

This is what you can control and change about your appearance. Think of it as you, head to toe: your hair (its length, how it's cut, color or highlights, is it thinning?), the structure of your face, makeup, your eyebrow shape (tweezed or not?), ear piercings, any other piercings, sunglasses, reading glasses, use of accessories (such as headwear, scarves, rings, bracelets, suspenders, ties, purse/bag), fingernails and toenails (painted or not?), smells (perfume, cologne, scent of shampoo or deodorant), weight, tattoos, types and style of outfits worn (including footwear), undergarments. All of these aspects (the ones you display publicly and the ones you might keep private) come together as a visual picture of how others see you, as well as how you see yourself.

Using the table on the next page, answer the following questions:

A: How would you describe your appearance? List these in column A.

**B:** For each aspect of your appearance listed, write either "Male" or "Female" in column B if you've been taught to believe that this aspect is traditionally associated with either of those genders. You can write "Neither" or "Both" as options as well.

C: If you were able to remove the gender that is associated with each aspect of your appearance, would you still want to keep it? Write "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" in column C.

D: Leave column D blank for now—you'll be using it for an exercise coming up later in this guide.

### My Appearance

A	В	С	D

Based on your answers in this exercise, how close are you to having interests, behaviors, and an appearance that is consistent with who you truly feel you are? Use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very close and 10 being very close.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## Chapter 10

## Finding Support Through Connecting with Others

Look again at Wisdom Tip 3: Learn from Those Who've Been There (page 94). Notice how many of the suggestions can be addressed (both directly and indirectly) by finding people you can identify and connect with:

- Learn (and believe) that being transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender diverse is something that exists.
- Seek out and experience validation of who you are and how you feel.
- Realize that medically and/or socially transitioning to align yourself with your true gender is possible.
- Find people who experience and see you as who you really are.
- Discover what resources other people use.
- Talk with people who are like you and/or are going through a similar experience.

In this chapter, you'll be taking steps to:

Learn from Others' Stories: You'll see how learning from the stories of people you identify and connect with can help reveal important information about yourself and how you can go about finding these types of kindred folks and their stories.

Connect with Others Online: You'll explore the benefits of finding others online, learn how to connect with them, and how to do so while remaining safe and smart.

Connect with Others in Person: We'll look at how easy or difficult it might be for you to connect with others in person, how you can find people to connect with, and what to do if you want to do this but are unable to at this time.

## Learn from Others' Stories

There's something indescribable about how it feels to see, hear, or read the account of someone's story and recognize yourself in it. People will often describe this as an aha moment, an epiphany, or a revelation. This type of connection with a person and their story occurs when it connects with you not only mentally, but emotionally as well.

Here are ways this realization can be experienced:

- Feeling emotional
- Crying
- Getting goosebumps or chills
- Feeling lightheaded
- Feeling elated
- Feeling a sense of calm/peace
- Feeling a rush of adrenaline
- Becoming short of breath
- Being in a state of shock
- Feeling like the world is spinning
- Feeling like the world has stopped
- Having a desire to exclaim something loudly
- Having a strong urge to share what you have just discovered with someone else

These feelings usually don't last for long, but they can be deeply impactful. Something in your brain chemistry changes in that moment, and the world is rarely ever the same afterwards.

In this exercise, we will take a look at where you can find these stories, as well as ideas for how you can use what you learn from them to move further along in your gender identity discovery. This will specifically be focused on people with whom you will likely not be interacting (unless they are in the habit of responding to messages and comments).

## HOW YOU TAKE IN INFORMATION

Think about your preferences and abilities when it comes to finding stories. Place a checkmark next to the items that relate to you:

- $\Box$  Do you prefer to watch videos?
- $\Box$  Do you prefer to read books?
- $\Box$  Do you prefer to listen to audiobooks?

- □ Do you prefer to read blog posts or articles?
- $\Box$  Do you prefer to read news articles?
- □ Do you prefer to listen to podcasts?
- $\Box$  Do you prefer to watch reality TV shows?
- $\Box$  Do you prefer to watch documentaries?

By focusing on the specific media that you are most likely to seek out, you will be able to narrow your search options down more quickly.

#### Finding Stories to Connect with

Finding stories you connect with can take perseverance. On the bright side, the age of the Internet has made it far easier to find what you are looking for. However, it also means it could take a while to find what you are specifically looking for.

Most people will begin by typing what they are looking for into their preferred search engine. Typing in *transgender videos* or *gender confusion* will pull up too many results and will probably be overwhelming. You can make your search more specific by using terms you connect with (if you are uncertain as to what these might be, look ahead to the list of gender identity options in Chapter 14).

Examples of this are:

- Nonbinary testimonials
- Trans women timelines
- Advice from trans men
- Teens who think they are transgender
- *People who feel like they don't have a gender*

Here are a few more tips to keep in mind as you continue your search for stories you can connect with:

- Try to use as many different combinations of words and phrases as you can.
- Include in your search the medium through which you prefer to take in information (videos, books, podcasts, reality TV shows).
- When choosing what to search for, you might have to make educated guesses as to what it is you are experiencing. Don't worry—you can take as many guesses as you need to, especially as you continue to learn more about yourself.
- If at first you don't come across stories you can relate to don't give up, as it might take a while to sift through everything that is out there.

• If you strongly connect to characters in novels/literature, television series, motion picture films, fan fiction, comics, etc. you can also search for fictional stories for inspiration. However, be sure the creators of the work can be trusted to tell the characters' stories with respect, accuracy, and compassion. Doing a search online for opinions others have shared about these fictional pieces of work can give you an idea as to whether or not it is worth exploring.

## Keeping Track of Who You Connect with

When you discover stories you connect with they will grab your attention and leave a huge impression on you. You can use this section to keep a record of the videos, blog posts, books, etc. so you will always remember how and why they impacted you. You will have this to look back on when you encounter doubt and uncertainty, as well as to turn to for inspiration and comfort.

Use the space below to keep track of the stories that have inspired you. Also, don't forget to add these resources to your Master List for easy access. (see Getting Organized, page 100).

Story 1

Whom did you connect with?

Title of what you watched or read:

Where did you find them (include specific link, if needed)?

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations)?

Do you want to follow/subscribe to this person so you can continue to learn from them (if it's an option)?

Story 2 Whom did you connect with?

Title of what you watched or read:

Where did you find them (include specific link, if needed)?

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations)?

Do you want to follow/subscribe to this person so you can continue to learn from them (if it's an option)?

Story 3 Whom did you connect with?

Title of what you watched or read:

Where did you find them (include specific link, if needed)?

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations)?

Do you want to follow/subscribe to this person so you can continue to learn from them (if it's an option)?

Story 4 Whom did you connect with?

Title of what you watched or read:

Where did you find them (include specific link, if needed)?

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations)?

Do you want to follow/subscribe to this person so you can continue to learn from them (if it's an option)?

Story 5 Whom did you connect with?

Title of what you watched or read:

Where did you find them (include specific link, if needed)?

What are key phrases/words they used that connected with you?

In what ways were you able to connect with what they were saying?

How did you feel after you read, heard, or watched their story (include mental, emotional, and reactions/observations)?

Do you want to follow/subscribe to this person so you can continue to learn from them (if it's an option)?

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## Connect with Others Online

Interacting with others online isn't for everyone. It's understandable that someone might feel hesitant to reach out to strangers, especially those they may never meet in person. However, if you are open to trying, this exercise will discuss the benefits of connecting with others online, how to find them, and being safe and smart about it.

## WHY CONNECT WITH OTHERS ONLINE?

There are many advantages to connecting with others online. It can provide the opportunity to:

- Get ideas and support from those having similar experiences.
- Explore more of who you are from the privacy of your home.
- Find validation for the way you are feeling.
- Practice talking with others about yourself before coming out to loved ones.

- Connect with others who can relate to what you are going through.
- Help you see potential and possibilities.
- Find friendship and reduce loneliness/isolation.
- Remind you there are others out there like you.
- Find out what resources other people use.

What are some of the reasons you would want to connect with others online?

Connecting online also offers multiple options for communicating with others. Contact often begins in written form, and it can stay that way if that is what you are most comfortable with. You can also limit the conversations to a public forum or initiate more private, one-on-one conversations. If you decide you are comfortable enough to take the relationship a step further, you can use platforms such as Skype or Face-Time to have video chats. You can also agree to exchange phone numbers so you can call or text each other.

## TIPS FOR FINDING OTHERS ONLINE

Just as it can be both easy and difficult to find stories online, the experience of finding people to connect with is very similar. Chances are there is someone out there who would be the right person (or persons) for you to talk to—the challenge is finding them among all of the noise of the Internet. The best way you can go about doing this are the three Ps: Patience, Personable, and Practice.

Patience: You may have to try several different methods of connecting with others before you find the one that works best for you. You may also attempt to connect with several different people before you find those with whom you click. It's just like when you are trying to make friends in person: it takes time and patience.

**Personable:** Before you jump online seeking others to connect with, keep in mind these are going to be social exchanges. Treat this experience as if you were getting to know someone in person. Introduce yourself, be friendly, ask others about themselves, and don't overshare. Also keep in mind that you may be interacting with people from all over the world,

so be mindful of any cultural or societal differences. As you continue to get to know people, you can relax a bit more into the relationships.

Practice: If you aren't used to talking with others about your gender identity, you'll definitely need some practice. Go easy on yourself—it might take a while to figure out how to talk about what's on your mind. You might also need practice when it comes to how to use the Internet to find others online. Don't give up—with practice, and the resources below, you'll get the hang of it.

## WHERE TO FIND OTHERS ONLINE

The options for connecting with others online are nearly endless. What follows are ideas as to how you can get started. Keep in mind these are general resources—you'll still need to search for those specific terms and phrases we discussed in the previous exercise to help you find the types of people you would like to connect with.

Before we begin, consider this: although you may be ready to connect with others online, you may not be ready to reveal to certain people in your life that you are exploring your gender identity. Therefore, you may want to consider setting up a separate account that is specifically used for reaching out to these new connections so you can continue your exploration in privacy (check with each site to see what their rules are around this). Keep in mind that you may later have to explain to those in your life why you set up this separate account.

### Place a checkmark next to the resources you can see yourself following up on:

- □ YouTube channels: Although you may get lucky enough to find someone who personally answers fans' comments, more than likely it would be in the comments section that you can find folks with whom you might connect.
- □ Forums, chat rooms, support websites: You can improve your chances of connecting with the right websites if you search for those that are specific to what it is you feel you are experiencing.
- □ Facebook groups: Again, if you type in the specific type of group you are looking for, chances are you will be able to find it. Some groups are *open*, others are *closed*, and others are *secret*, so it's up to you if that is an important criterion for you.
- □ Mutual social media friends: Once you begin to connect with others online your network will continue to expand and grow.

Pay attention to who is suggested to you as a potential new connection ("Who to Follow," "You May Also Know . . ."). Be sure to follow the etiquette guidelines of whichever site you are using.

- □ Reddit: Reddit is an online bulletin board system where you can find a wide variety of communities with whom to connect. People post content that others can share and/or comment on. Take time to get to know a certain community by seeing what it is they post and talk about, and then jump in when you feel ready.
- Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter: Each of these sites/apps use hashtags (#) to help users find topics and people whom they want to follow and connect with. Each of these platforms has its own unique way of sharing information, so take a look at each individually to see which ones feel like someplace you'd like to spend time.
- □ Dating/friendship websites or apps: Using a dating/friendship website or app is similar to using social media as a way to connect with others, with the added potential game-changer that it can increase your chances of connecting one-on-one with someone. Be sure to explore this option while being safe and smart.
- □ Start your own blog: Instead of going out in search of others, this option brings others to you. If you decide to create your own blog, you will need to be sure it is listed in such a way so others can find it. You might also want to combine some of the other ideas in this list with your blog (i.e., finding communities and platforms online where you can share your blog/website). You can start a free blog through wordpress.com, wix.com, weebly.com, among others.

### STAYING SAFE AND SMART CONNECTING WITH OTHERS ONLINE

Although the precautions one should take when interacting with others online may seem like common sense, it doesn't hurt for us to review them in the context of this exercise. Meeting someone online that you have a made a real connection with can be exciting, even intoxicating. You may be tempted to go against your better judgment and bend a few of the rules, "just this one time."

As a precaution, revisit these tips as often as you need while you begin to form connections with others online:

• Do not share your personal financial information, such as account numbers, passwords, social security number, etc., with anyone.

- Be cautious of what photos you decide to share of yourself, as well as of your loved ones.
- Wait to meet with someone in person until you have gotten to know them for an extended amount of time.
- If you decide to meet in person with someone, do so in a public place for at least the first encounter. Let someone else know what you are doing, where you are going, and when you expect to return.
- Remember, whatever you put on the Internet, both publicly and privately, can be saved and shared later on.
- Be careful about giving out your phone number—make sure you know the person well enough to feel confident that they will not use it more than you are comfortable with.

As for how you can be smart when connecting with others online, try to follow the same guidelines that apply to any in-person relationships you have experienced:

- Remember they are human, just like you. No one is always at their best all the time; feelings will get hurt, words will be misinterpreted.
- Treat it just like any other relationship. You may go through ups and downs. If this is someone you end up really connecting with, you'll want to ride through the rough patches with patience and understanding.
- In public forums, speak up if you see or hear something that hints at bullying, shaming, or disrespect. If it makes you uncomfortable to do publicly, you can privately contact the person and/or contact the person who was on the receiving end of the comment, as well as the administrator of the group or site.
- Respect each other's time. If you find people you enjoy talking with, remember that everyone has lives offline as well.
- Although you may want to seek out certain people and communities regarding your gender identity exploration, you can broaden your search as well. Are there communities you already belong to that you would feel comfortable being open with? Are there communities you haven't connected with yet that are known for being open-minded, supportive, and understanding toward issues around gender identity? Opening up your mind to other communities will increase your chances of being able to find folks with whom you can make a connection.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## Connect with Others in Person

In reality, connecting with others in person is going to be a challenge for some people. It could be that you aren't ready to meet others in person, that you are limited in your ability to find others to connect with in person, or that you are generally uncomfortable meeting new people.

# ARE YOU READY AND ABLE TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN PERSON?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being not at all and 10 being very much so) how close would you say the following describes your current situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

You live in a city that has an LGBTQ center, a gender center/clinic, or both. You are on a college or university campus that has transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender diverse resources. There is a transgender/gender diverse conference held in the area in which you live. You already have friends, family members, or colleagues who identify as transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender diverse. You have a support group already built in at places you frequent, such as your church, place of employment, etc. You are able to meet people online who live near you and are able to meet them in person without having to travel far.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being not at all and 10 being very much so) how close would you say the following describes your current situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

You have enough freedom in your life to be able to attend support groups and/or meet one-on-one with people you want to spend more time with. You have finances, as well as transportation, that afford you the ability to do this as well. You are able to travel outside of where you live to meet with others, including going to conferences that are transgender and/or nonbinary focused.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being not at all and 10 being very much so) how close would you say the following describes your current situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

You don't mind showing up to support groups alone and are comfortable meeting new people. You are stable mentally and emotionally. You do not have any physical limitations that may inhibit your ability to socialize in person with others.

Based on how you ranked yourself on these questions, place a checkmark next to the statement that seems to best fit your overall current situation:

- □ I should have little to no problem in finding others to connect with in person.
- □ I should be able to find others to connect with, though it might take extra planning and effort to do so.
- □ I will more than likely need to postpone my attempts at connecting with others in person—at least for right now.

## FINDING OTHERS TO CONNECT WITH IN PERSON

If you are ready and able to pursue connecting with others in person, here are ideas that can help move this process along:

Place a checkmark next to the ideas you can see yourself following through on:

- □ Ask LGBTQ centers or gender centers/clinics in your area about support groups and events.
- $\Box$  Ask your/a gender therapist in your area for leads.
- □ Do a thorough Internet search for resources in your area, being sure to extend it out as far as you are able and willing to travel.
- □ Look into national conferences that are transgender-, nonbinary-, and/or gender diverse–oriented.

- □ Look into local and statewide organizations and groups that are transgender-, nonbinary-, and/or gender diverse–affiliated.
- □ After establishing a solid relationship, consider meeting up with people you have met online.

# WHEN IT IS CLOSE TO IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET OTHERS IN PERSON

There are many reasons why it may be difficult to meet others in person, and it's impossible to address each one of them here. Instead, answer the following questions with an open mind and a compassionate heart toward yourself and where you are in life:

Can you improve your circumstance or situation? If so, how?

What can you do now?

What can you plan for later?

*Is it possible you are more capable than you think you are? Have you been led to believe certain things about yourself that might not be true?* 

If at all possible, find a counselor, therapist, or coach with whom you can work to set goals to help get your plan in motion. This person can also work with you on any self-doubts and other issues that may be holding you back.

If you truly are unable to change your circumstances, or at least cannot do so in the foreseeable future, be sure to turn to your online community, as well as anyone you can trust as an ally, for support.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

### FURTHER RESOURCES

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ Gender Spectrum Lounge: http://genderspectrum.org/lounge/ Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ PINKessence: http://pinkessence.com/ Reddit: https://www.reddit.com/ TrevorSpace (LBGTQ teens and young adults): http://trevorspace.org/ Tumblr: https://www.tumblr.com/ Twitter: https://www.twitter.com/ YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/

## Chapter 11

## Listening to Your Gut

Now that you've begun to actively explore your inner and outer worlds concerning your gender identity, chances are your Thinking Self has begun to kick into high gear: debating, analyzing, and questioning everything that is being brought to your attention. This phenomenon occurs because, by opening yourself up to the truth, you are giving your Bodyguard a lot to handle.

Imagine your Bodyguard has, for the past several years, had their feet kicked up, watching Netflix, sipping on a warm beverage, feeling all in all quite relaxed knowing you are playing it safe in what can be a cruel and dangerous world.

All of a sudden, a panic alarm goes off. Your Bodyguard is jarred, as if they are awakened from a deep slumber. Tossing aside their creature comforts, they throw on the appropriate Bodyguard attire and grab their weapon of choice, ready to defend you from the enemy. This happens all because you opened up the first exercise of *Stage Three: Exploration* and began to read it.

Your Bodyguard frantically searches for your Thinking Self and, upon making contact, updates this part of you about what you've been up to. Fueled by your Thinking Self's anxiety, your Bodyguard, in desperation, lashes out with a potent batch of thoughts for you to contend with: "What are you doing? This is a terrible idea! Why would you want to stir the pot, rock the boat, ruffle any feathers!?!"

If your Bodyguard is scared enough, they will use the worries, doubts, and fears that have been brought up by your Thinking Self to say these things with enough intensity and frequency to make them a part of your daily thought process.

More than likely, you have already heard these lines of thinking in the past. Maybe it even stopped you from any exploring you were trying to do before. This time around, I want you to remind your Bodyguard of something: "Not knowing the truth about myself, and not expressing that truth about myself, is much scarier than keeping it a secret."

Because your worries, doubts, and fears might increase during this time, it is important to remember you have other ways of getting closer to your answers besides just your Thinking Self. This chapter will teach you how you can use what is referred to as your "gut" when your Thinking Self has been working overtime and needs to take a wellearned break. You might call your gut something else: your hunch, your sense, your instinct, your "Spidey Sense," your intuition. Regardless of what you call it, it's what will help to keep you grounded during the most tumultuous legs of the gender identity journey.

## Using Your Gut to Discover Your Truth

As I mentioned earlier, if a book called *You and Your Gender Identity:* A Guide to Discovery sounded like something that might help you, you have at least some level of discomfort with your gender assigned at birth. However, as you have also learned through this guide, there doesn't have to be a black-and-white answer to your gender identity questions. Even if you have a suspicion about what is going on with you, you are probably looking for more clarification on it.

You already have information inside of you that will help you get closer to your answers. It's been there all along. It's the baggage from *Stage Two: Reflection* that, in part, has made it difficult for you to access that information. It's not gone—it's in your Trunk of Secrets in your unconscious, and your gut has a direct link to it. This exercise is going to help you use your gut to get some of this information back.

### OPENING A DIALOGUE WITH YOUR CHILD SELF

In *Stage Two: Reflection*, you explored that possibility that, as a child, there were ways you may have expressed a gender identity more aligned with who you really are. This exercise expands upon this by asking some very specific questions about things you did as a child that could bring up even more clues.

Remember, your Child Self holds crucial information for you to access. This was you before puberty, before gender expectations, before you were taught that how you were feeling, thinking, and acting wasn't "right." Let's take a look at ways your gender identity may have been trying to express itself while you were young.<sup>61</sup> Take a moment to quiet your mind and let the memories come up without forcing them. It's okay if it takes multiple tries to do so.

*Place a checkmark next to the examples from this list you recall having done in your youth:* 

- □ Praying that you would wake up and not be your gender assigned at birth.
- □ Telling Santa Claus that for Christmas you wanted to become a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Blowing out your candles on your birthday and wishing you could become a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Seeing a shooting star and wishing you could become a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Asking a Magic 8-Ball questions about your gender.
- □ Imagining that, if you had a genie in a bottle, you would ask the genie to make you into a gender another than the one you were assigned at birth.
- Dressing up/wishing you could dress up in Halloween costumes that were unlike ones your gender assigned at birth was expected to wear.
- □ Pretending to do activities that your gender assigned at birth usually doesn't do.
- □ Seeing one of your parents or siblings do something you wish you could do, and maybe asking if you could too (e.g., shaving your face, painting your nails).
- Playing dress-up and wearing clothes that your gender assigned at birth usually doesn't wear.
- □ Having make-believe friends who treated you like you were a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Having fantasies about being a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Having dreams in which you are a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.

<sup>61</sup> Some of these examples could indicate sexual orientation confusion instead of (or in addition to) gender identity confusion. For instance, if, while growing up, someone didn't realize they were allowed to be attracted to the same gender, they might have a desire to be the opposite gender for this reason. This is a layer we explored further in Chapter 5, in case this is something you are wondering about yourself as well.

#### Exploration

- □ Asking people to call you a name other than the one you were given at birth.
- Trying to make your voice sound lower- or higher-pitched.
- □ Connecting more often with characters in stories who were a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Having a desire to be more like certain people (celebrities, family members, coaches, etc.) who were a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Wondering if you could cut off certain parts of your body with nail clippers, floss, scissors, etc.
- □ Wearing clothing items that hide certain parts of your body that you didn't want others to see and that you didn't want to see.
- □ Choosing to be a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth whenever you played games.
- □ Wishing you could tell someone that you felt like you were a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.
- □ Wishing you could accept the gender you were assigned at birth and be like everyone else.

Are there any other examples you can think of that aren't listed?

To help jog your memory, here are a few I have gathered from the Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook community:<sup>62</sup>

"I used to wish there was a disease I could get and 'sex change surgery' was the only cure for it."

"I used to pretend like I was a boy by putting a toilet paper roll between my legs and would pee standing up."

"I used to get under my covers and pretend I was in my mother's womb, and then pretend I was being born again but this time as a girl."

"Sometimes I would think about that if I died and got reincarnated, that I'd come back as a boy."

<sup>62</sup> Dara Hoffman-Fox, Conversations with a Gender Therapist. Facebook post, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/darahoffmanfoxlpc/posts.

"I learned from my grandpa that if you put salt on a snail that it would shrink and die. I remember pouring a pile of salt on the ground and sitting on it without my pants on, hoping it would make my you-know-what fall off."

"When I learned that they sold hormones at the pharmacy I thought about ways I could break into it and get them."

Something else you can do to get in touch with your Child Self is watch videos or read stories online about present-day children who have told their parents they do not feel aligned with their gender assigned at birth. Many of these kids are being listened to and believed. They are being told, "What you are saying sounds important, and we want to help with this."

You can do a search online for stories about children who are transitioning, as well as find links at the end of this section.

Do you see any hints of yourself in the stories about these kids?

#### GETTING TO THE TRUTHS OF YOUR PRESENT-DAY SELF

You can glean a lot of information from your Child Self. But your Present-Day Self has plenty to offer up as well. It may take a little prodding to get there, but it is worth the effort.

One of the most effective ways to connect more deeply with your Present-Day Self is through creativity. Being creative helps you shift away from your Thinking Self into your more Imaginative Self. Your Imaginative Self can go places your Thinking Self can't get to, doesn't want to get to, or isn't sure how to get to.

What follows are creative prompts that are meant to put your Imaginative Self into the driver's seat for a while. You can answer as few or as many of them as you want.

Place a checkmark next to any of these creative prompts you are open to trying out. Set aside time to pursue them and keep track of what you discover.

- □ "If I knew I was going to die tomorrow . . ." What do you like about how you've lived your life? What would you wish you could have changed?
- □ Do you project jealousy or anger toward people because of their gender? If so, why do you do this?

## Exploration

- □ Do you research gender and gender identity to a point where it has begun to feel like an obsession? If so, why?
- □ If you are "mistaken" for a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth, how does that feel?
- □ What characters do you connect with the most in stories? What are they like? Why do you connect with them?
- □ How is your gender perceived by others? How okay are you with this? Do you wish it could be different?
- □ If you could ask a genie in a bottle to change something concerning your gender, what would that be?
- □ Do you feel like you over-masculinize or over-feminize? If so, why?
- □ If you could leave behind your current life and move somewhere else and start a new life, would you? If so, what would that new life look like?
- □ When you look in the mirror, are there things you see that you feel you can't relate to? If so, what are they?
- □ Do you ever feel like you are wearing a mask or a costume, or that you are acting a certain part? Explain.
- □ If you knew that certain people or attachments you have in your life would be unaffected by any major changes you were to make in your life in regard to your gender, would you make those changes? Explain.
- □ Do you feel the same or different from the gender you are seen as by those closest to you?
- □ How do you feel in gender-segregated spaces?
- □ What areas of your life do you feel are affected by your gender identity confusion?

There are many ways you can creatively explore these questions. For example:

- Through writing: exploring them through journaling; letter writing (to yourself or others); fiction writing; poetry.
- Through video: filming yourself talking about these questions; creating a video montage of images of yourself over the course of your life.
- Through audio: recording yourself talking about these questions; talking out the questions without recording yourself.
- Through photos: creating photo collages or montages, using pictures of yourself and/or pictures from magazines, websites, etc.

#### You and Your Gender Identity

- Through art: using mediums such as painting, pottery, sculpting.
- Through music: playing instruments; singing; writing songs; making music mixes.
- Through nature: being in a natural environment in which you can clear your head and let the answers come to you; spending time with animals.
- Through spiritual means: prayer; meditation; visualization; yoga; retreats.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

Giving Your Thinking Self a Break

At the beginning of this chapter, we touched upon how your Bodyguard, when in a heightened state of alertness, can work in unison with your Thinking Self. Sometimes this works out well, like when your Bodyguard has information they want you to carefully analyze, inspect, and interpret. Other times, such as when your Bodyguard really starts to freak out, they partner with your Thinking Self in ways that can cause suffering and agony.

In this exercise, we will look at how you can recognize when this has happened, as well as ideas for what you can do about it.

## KNOWING WHEN IT'S TIME FOR A BREAK

You can tell when your Thinking Self has reached the point of needing a time out when your thoughts cause you an extreme level distress. You can recognize this by paying attention to when you experience:

- High anxiety
- Obsessive ruminating/deep thinking
- Debilitating fear
- Over-analysis
- The inability to stop your thoughts with other thoughts
- Self-bullying thoughts
- A downward spiral into depression, self-loathing, hopelessness
- Exhausting confusion that leads to paralysis, stopping, turning back

This is then the time to let your Thinking Self take a break and let your gut take over for a while.

## SETTLING DOWN YOUR THINKING SELF

When your Thinking Self kicks into high gear it stirs up powerful emotions as well. Once your emotions get involved, it is far more difficult to detach from those thoughts and you can get stuck in them, as if they were quicksand.

Therefore, before you can turn to your gut, you'll need to give your Thinking Self the chance to gradually wind down, let go, and give up control for a little while. Here is how you can give your Thinking Self this opportunity to rest:

Step 1: Become aware that your Thinking Self has gone to the extreme. If you are able to recognize the symptoms above as they are happening, you can step in and give your Thinking Self permission to take a well-deserved time out.

**Step 2:** Turn to your Self-Care Checklist. Pick an activity from your Self-Care Checklist that can take your mind off things. Remember not to do it to excess; just long enough to take the edge off and to return you to a more centered state.

What are three activities from your Self-Care Checklist that you can use to help your Thinking Self take a break?

Step 3: Recognize when you are in a calmer state of mind. Once you are in this less agitated state, you can gently revisit one of the topics you tend to over-analyze, ruminate on, bully yourself over, etc., and approach it with your gut instead.

## APPROACHING YOUR QUESTIONS FROM YOUR GUT

Let's look at how you can invite your gut into the picture to help you answer the questions your Thinking Self has been working overtime to try to answer.

## 1. Ask an Open-Ended Question

Asking open-ended questions creates an environment in which your gut can feel safe in sharing the truth. Examples of these types of questions are:

"Does \_\_\_\_\_ feel right?"

"Does \_\_\_\_\_\_ help me feel more comfortable?"

"Does \_\_\_\_\_\_ help me feel better?"

"Do I enjoy \_\_\_\_?"

"Am I happier when I \_\_\_\_\_?"

"Do I feel at ease when I \_\_\_\_\_?"

"When I'm not doing \_\_\_\_\_, do I feel uncomfortable?"

"When I'm not feeling \_\_\_\_\_, do I feel worse?"

Fill in the above blanks with what has come up for you over the course of reading this book. You can also include any other experiences you have previously had or that you can imagine happening at some point in the future.

## 2. Pay Attention to Feelings and Sensations

The initial answer will often come as a feeling, a sensation, a physical reaction, or all three at once. Examples of this are peace, calm, serenity, sadness, grief, joy, pleasure, tingling, tightness, shortness of breath, comfort, surprise, fear, clarity, certainty, nervousness, lightheadedness, racing heart, pain, love.

At a later point, this may be followed by a clarifying thought, which will put words to what you are feeling and sensing. However, don't lose sight of the original information your gut was sharing with you—your gut is where your truth is coming from.

#### 3. Be Patient

It may take several attempts to get your gut to respond. A friend once told me that you could imagine your truth as a frightened kitten (or any baby animal of your choice) that doesn't know if it can trust you. Approach this part of yourself as you would this kitten. Don't push it too fast or too hard. Simply let it approach at its own pace.

If you make a practice of turning to your gut for answers, your question, "Is this really what's going on!?" will begin to subside as your truth continues to reveal itself to you.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you attempt to use these methods to minimize your symptoms and they do not subside and/or get worse, consider getting a mental health evaluation to screen for other possible physical, emotional, and/or mental causes.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

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# Chapter 12

# Wrestling with Uncertainty

There are few aspects of the gender identity journey that aren't touched by uncertainty. I've seen the issues covered in this chapter come up with great frequency in my work with those who are questioning and exploring their gender identity. Wrestling with these questions and doubts is an essential part of the self-discovery process. It is the phase in the Hero's Journey where one is faced with tests and enemies, and it determines who their true allies are.

This chapter will teach you ways you can increase your chances of being able to successfully navigate this portion of the journey, namely by returning to the concept of breaking things down layer by layer as a way of taking a nice big breath in the midst of all of the confusion.

Simplifying the process in this way will help you:

- Focus your attention on one thing at a time.
- Gain clarity as you analyze each question on its own.
- Broaden your understanding of yourself as a multi-layered individual.

## The Layers of Your Gender Discomfort

At this point in the journey, it should be clear to you that something feels stressful about the way you experience your gender assigned at birth, both personally and publicly. Now that you've worked through a significant portion of this book, you might even have ideas as to what some of these areas of concern could be.

For some, this sense of something being amiss may feel only mildly disturbing, without resulting in a problematic emotional response. For others, this feeling of discord can reveal itself in a way that is extremely unsettling, becoming so strong that it is difficult for you to function.

In this exercise, we are going to take a closer look at the discomfort you might be experiencing with your gender assigned at birth. Being able to pinpoint when, how often, and how intensely this discomfort is felt can help you discover more specific information about yourself in relation to your gender identity. You'll be doing this by breaking down these possible areas of discomfort with your gender assigned at birth into subcategories and explore them one by one:

Physical Discomfort Social Discomfort Mental Discomfort

#### WHY USE THE TERM DISCOMFORT?

In the exercise What Gender Identity Is and Isn't (page 123), you learned that one of the definitions of gender dysphoria is "discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics."<sup>63</sup>

Although the word *dysphoria* could have been used throughout this exercise instead of *discomfort*, it is important you are able to explore how you are feeling without having the pressure of fitting a possible mental health diagnosis. You may end up being able to use what you learn from this exercise to describe your experience to mental health and/or medical professionals. Put that aside for now. You'll be able to bring it back into the picture in Chapter 14.

In this exercise, we'll be using *discomfort* as a blanket term to summarize the feeling one gets when something feels inaccurate about one's gender identity. Another way of looking at it is that you are feeling *comfortable* and then something happens that results in your feeling *discomfort*. The Questionnaire you filled out on page 116 got you thinking about when those situations come up for you, as well as just how much they end up bothering you. All of this being said, if you feel like the term *discomfort* is one you don't connect with, be sure to choose a term that better suits your individual experience.

Before you begin to examine the levels of discomfort associated with your gender, keep this in mind:

You do not have to experience certain levels of gender discomfort in order to prove to yourself (or others) that you are (or are not) transgender and/or nonbinary.

This section is meant to help gather more information about yourself the way you interpret and use this information is completely up to you.

63 World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 8.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

When you filled out the Questionnaire (page 116), you answered questions addressing your physical self. These items explored how you felt (and currently feel) about your:

- Height
- Bone structure
- Body shape
- Hand and foot size
- Facial structure
- Voice
- Body hair
- Head hair
- Adam's apple
- Genitals
- Chest
- Level of comfort with physical intimacy
- Presence/lack of a menstrual cycle
- Ability (or inability) to conceive a child

Referring back to your answers from the Questionnaire, circle the items above that could possibly be connected with physical discomfort you have been experiencing with your gender assigned at birth. List any particular thoughts and/ or feelings associated with this on the lines below.

Physical discomfort that is gender related could be caused by someone or something externally. It also frequently occurs in private.

Read through the examples below and place a checkmark next to the scenarios in which you think you may have experienced gender-related physical discomfort.

- $\Box$  When you are in the shower
- $\Box$  When you are changing clothes
- $\hfill \Box$  When you look in the bathroom mirror and/or full-length mirror
- $\Box$  When you are using the toilet

- □ When you are masturbating
- $\Box$  When you are having sex
- $\Box$  When you are exercising
- □ When you get an erection (for those assigned male at birth)
- □ When you menstruate (for those assigned female at birth)

Are there certain times, places, and situations where discomfort with your physical self (in relation to your gender) is higher than others? Write about them here:

How often does this happen, on average (e.g., several times a day, once a day, several times a week, every couple of weeks)?

How would you describe the intensity of your physical discomfort in these situations?

*Rank your overall physical discomfort on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being* not intense at all *and 10 being* extremely intense.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT SOCIAL DISCOMFORT

Your social self includes your interactions and relationships with your family, your friends, your acquaintances, your coworkers, and the general public. This includes those you know in person as well as through social media and other online means. It also includes those you talk with on a regular basis and those you rarely spend time with.

Because you are seen, addressed, and interacted with continually, studying your social interactions can be a useful way to reveal discomfort that might be present in relation to your gender. When you filled out the Questionnaire, you also answered questions addressing your social self. These items explored how you felt (and currently feel) about:

- The way you are addressed when your name isn't used (e.g., ma'am, sir, ladies, fellas, lad, lass)
- Your first name
- Being addressed by your assigned-at-birth gender pronouns
- Being addressed by gendered adjectives such as *pretty* or *handsome*
- Using the public restrooms/changing rooms that you are expected to based on your current gender presentation
- Your hairstyle
- Your current wardrobe
- Wearing (or not wearing) makeup
- Wearing (or not wearing) earrings, having (or not having) piercings and/or tattoos, and carrying (or not carrying) certain accessories
- Assumptions others make about you based on their perception of your gender
- The way your family addresses you when not using your name (e.g., son/daughter, niece/nephew, mother/father, etc.)
- When you are separated into groups according to your perceived gender

Referring back to your answers from the Questionnaire, circle the items above that could possibly be connected with social discomfort you have been experiencing with your gender assigned at birth. List any particular thoughts and/ or feelings associated with this on the lines below.

Are there certain times, places, and situations where discomfort with your social self (in relation to your gender) is higher than others? Write about them here: How often does this happen, on average (e.g., several times a day, once a day, several times a week, every couple of weeks)?

How would you describe the intensity of your social discomfort in these situations?

*Rank your overall social discomfort on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being* not intense at all *and 10 being* extremely intense.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## A CLOSER LOOK AT MENTAL DISCOMFORT

Mental discomfort is something that can be present at all times, which is why there weren't specific questions on the Questionnaire asking about its presence in your life. Mental discomfort has to do with the way your individual brain is wired, gender-wise. Conflict can arise when you experience a difference between your physical body and this wiring. It can also come up when others perceive you as your gender assigned at birth and your wiring lets you know that this feels inaccurate.

Mental discomfort can be difficult for someone to pinpoint and describe. That's because:

- It's possible it has been there for so long that, to a certain extent, you have gotten used to it.
- You figure it must be the way you are supposed to be feeling and you just need to live with it.
- You don't know what else to attribute that feeling to.

In her article "That Was Dysphoria? 8 Signs and Symptoms of Indirect Gender Dysphoria," Zinnia Jones states, "Some of us suffer the distress that stems from dysphoria, but without many clues that this is about gender, and its relation to our genders may be obvious only in retrospect."<sup>64</sup> In other words, the actual frequency and intensity of

<sup>64</sup> Zinnia Jones, "That Was Dysphoria? 8 Signs and Symptoms of Indirect Gender Dysphoria," Gender Analysis, n.d., http://genderanalysis.net/articles/that-was-dysphoria-8-signs-and-symptoms-of-indirect-gender-dysphoria/.

## Exploration

your mental discomfort might not reveal itself until after you begin to make changes that help to align your mind and body with your gender identity.

Here are ways I have heard my clients describe the experience of no longer experiencing mental discomfort after taking steps to physically and socially harmonize themselves with their gender identity:

"I had no idea how much irritability/dissatisfaction/stress I was feeling on a regular basis until I . . ."

"I didn't know how depressed/anxious I actually was until I . . ."

"I never knew how much I wasn't 'me' until I . . . "

"I never knew what peace could feel like until I . . ."

"I had no clue how cluttered my mind has been all of my life until I . . ."

"Having to wear 'guy' clothes to work didn't bother me (or at least I didn't think it did) until I  $\ldots$  "

"Being addressed by my birth name used to be fine, but it definitely isn't anymore now that I  $\ldots$  "

"I didn't realize how disconnected I was from my body, myself, my life, until I . . ."

*Circle any of the above statements which sound intriguing to you. Then, take a few moments to describe in more detail what this brings up for you.* 

Are there certain times, places, and situations where discomfort with your mental self (in relation to your gender) is higher than others? Write about them here:

177

How often does this happen, on average (e.g., several times a day, once a day, several times a week, every couple of weeks)?

How would you describe the intensity of your mental discomfort in these situations?

*Rank your overall mental discomfort on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being* not intense at all *and 10 being* extremely intense.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

New information about your gender identity will be revealed to you as you continue to work through this guide. These discoveries will more than likely bring to light mental discomfort you may not have been aware of. You can reassess your answers on this chart, as well as any of the others, at any point on the journey.

Discerning the difference between having mental discomfort around your gender identity and it being something unrelated to gender can be a complicated process. Make a note of these concerns below—we will be exploring this in an exercise called Is It Actually *This*... Or Is It Just *That*? on page 182.

## SUMMARIZING YOUR ANSWERS

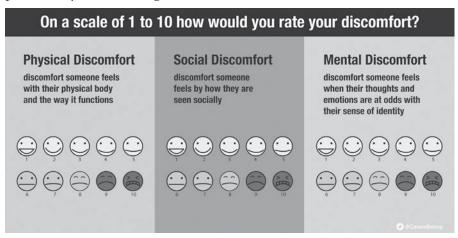
Discovering where you have (and don't have) gender-related discomfort in your life will empower you to address the areas in need of most urgent attention.

 What number did you rank your overall physical discomfort?

 What number did you rank your overall social discomfort?

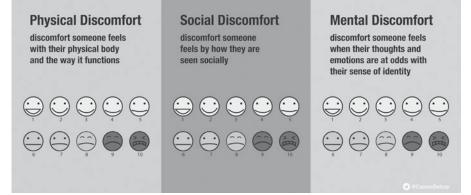
 What number did you rank your overall mental discomfort?

Use the chart below to rank your responses in each of these categories. That way you can see all three categories side by side, giving you the big picture of your current gender discomfort.



You may have learned enough in this exercise to somewhat foreshadow where your thinking is headed on this. For now, take note of these numbers and keep them in mind as you journey onward. Using the blank charts on the following pages, revisit your answers in the coming days to see if your numbers decrease or intensify.

## On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?



# On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?

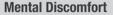
#### Physical Discomfort

discomfort someone feels with their physical body and the way it functions

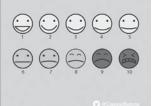


#### Social Discomfort

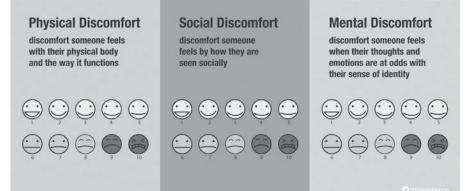
discomfort someone feels by how they are seen socially



discomfort someone feels when their thoughts and emotions are at odds with their sense of identity

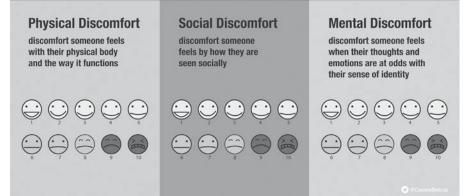


#### On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?



## Exploration

#### On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?



#### On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?

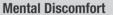
#### **Physical Discomfort**

discomfort someone feels with their physical body and the way it functions

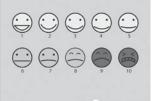


#### **Social Discomfort**

discomfort someone feels by how they are seen socially



discomfort someone feels when their thoughts and emotions are at odds with their sense of identity



#### On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your discomfort?



## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?



## FURTHER RESOURCES

Finch, Sam Dylan, "Not All Transgender People Have Dysphoria–And Here are 6 Reasons Why That Matters." Everyday Feminism, August 13, 2015,) http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/not-all-trans-folks-dysphoria/. Is It Actually This . . . Or Is It Just That?

When it comes to wrestling with uncertainty, one of the most complicated steps on the journey is to work through what I call the "Is it actually *this* . . . or is it just *that*?" layer. If you take the time to examine this highly complex layer, you will be able to prevent what could be months (even years) of your gender identity journey being derailed. These questions create the issues we discussed in Giving Your Thinking Self a Break (page 165). They are what cause your Thinking Self to spinning wildly out of control, leading to a temptation to completely call off your gender identity exploration.

Let's start peeling apart this layer by approaching the question, "Is it actually *this*... or is it just *that*?" in two separate steps.

"IS IT ACTUALLY THIS . . . ?"

"This" can filled in with a variety of statements, and are particular to the person who is asking the question. A few examples are:

- □ "Am I really trans/transgender . . . ?"
- $\square$  "Do I really have gender dysphoria . . . ?"
- □ "Am I really a guy/man/male . . . ?"
- □ "Am I really a girl/woman/female . . . ?"
- $\square$  "Am I really not a male/female . . . ?"
- $\square$  "Am I really nonbinary . . . ?"
- □ "Do I really need to transition socially and/or medically from my gender assigned at birth . . . ?"

Are any of these statements ones you can relate to? If so, place a checkmark next to those. If not, what would you fill in for this part of the question?

"... OR IS IT JUST THAT?"

The options for the second part of the question are limitless. That's because every person who is going through a gender identity journey will

be coming at it from their own unique perspective. Over the years of working with clients who are in search for answers about their gender identity, I have heard many examples of these types of questions, some of which you will find below.

Place a check next to any question you can relate to:

- □ "... is it just a reaction to having experienced trauma during my childhood?"
- □ "... am I really just gay/lesbian?"
- $\square$  "... is it just a fetish?"
- $\square$  "... is this really just an escape from reality?"
- □ "... am I really a cross-dresser?"
- □ "... is it because I want male privilege?"
- $\square$  "... can I just be a drag queen/king?"
- $\Box$  "... is this just a 'phase'?"
- □ "... maybe I'm just androgynous?"
- □ "... am I just delusional or 'crazy'?"
- $\Box$  "... is this just a 'kink'?"
- "... maybe I just have a girl side/guy side that needs to come out?"
- □ "... I'm just tired of the responsibilities and challenges that come from being a [fill in gender assigned at birth]?"
- □ "... is it because I'm jealous of how much easier it seems like it would be to be a [fill in something other than your gender assigned at birth]?"
- □ "... is it really just pent-up sexual energy?"
- □ "... do I just admire [fill in gender] so much that I think I want to be that?"
- $\Box$  "... is this just a general life crisis?"
- □ "... maybe I just need to release pent up feminine/masculine energy?"
- □ "... is it really just a symptom of my [fill in a mental health diagnosis]?"
- □ "... was I taught (and now believe) that there is something negative about the gender I was assigned at birth?"
- □ "... am I just having a midlife crisis?"
- " ... maybe I can just release this feeling in other ways?"
- □ "... can I just let go of some of the stereotypes associated with my gender assigned at birth that I'm uncomfortable with?"
- $\square$  "... am I just looking for a new identity?"
- □ "... is this just the way you're supposed to feel during puberty?"
- $\Box$  "... is this really just autogynephilia?"

#### Exploration

- □ "... am I just desperate to find any answer as to why I feel so depressed/hopeless?"
- □ "... am I just lonely and looking for a community?"
- $\square$  "... am I just wanting to be a rebel?"
- □ "... am I just projecting my wish to be able to have a romantic partner that is the gender I was not assigned at birth?"

Are there any examples not listed that you fill in for the second part of the question?

#### WHY DO SO MANY QUESTIONS COME UP?

"Why can't there just be a test that gives me the answer to this?" The reality is that there isn't a blood test, online test, or brain scan that can give a 100 percent accurate answer to the question, "Is it actually this . . . ?" There are things you can do to try to get as close as possible to your answer, such as working through this guide. However, when it comes down to it, you are the one who has to make the call.

This responsibility can carry a lot of pressure. You may have to self-report your findings to mental health and medical professionals, family, friends, employers, colleagues, and community members. You get to a point where you have to be able to say, to yourself and others, "This is what is going on with me. I have no 'proof,' so you'll just have to take my word for it."

Trying to convince yourself that your experience of your gender identity is valid, real, and true can be an incredible challenge. This is why it is understandable for someone to have an endless supply of questions around the theme, "Is it actually *this*... or is it just *that*?" You want to be sure, as sure as you can be, that this is what's really going on with you. Therefore, you're going to toss around all of the possibilities, over and over, in the hopes of getting closer to the truth.

While there is no guarantee you will be able to answer these questions with 100 percent certainty, there are ways you can simplify the process that can help you work through them.

### TIPS ON HOW TO APPROACH YOUR QUESTIONS

Your questions are going to be unique to you and your experience, which means there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to this. However,

something most everyone has in common is the feeling of constantly debating with one's self about what is going on and looking for ways to find the truth amid all the noise.

The following tips can be used as tools for working through this type of confusion and uncertainty:

Watch for internalized transphobia: When you ask yourself these questions, pay attention to the internal tone of voice in which you hear them. Is it curious, or is it bullying? If you are picking up on a bullying tone, be sure to revisit Becoming Aware of Internalized Transphobia in Chapter 8 (page 102) and stay vigilant for its presence.

Seek out counseling: If it is within your means to do so, talk with a counselor about your questions. This can give you a chance to explore these questions with a neutral party and give clarity as to how much they do or don't pertain to your gender identity. You can also use counseling as a way to address a multitude of issues you may be struggling with: healing from childhood abuse, dealing with loneliness, testing for depression, etc. You may have deeper issues than you are currently aware of. If so, there's a chance they are impairing your ability to accurately interpret what's going on inside of you.

Conduct tests and experiments: You can approach your questions as if they are theories you want to prove or disprove. This involves trying out different things to see if they help you reach a conclusion. We'll be going into a lot more detail as to how you can do this in an exercise in Chapter 13 called Conducting Your Own Tests and Experiments (page 205).

Give it time: As anxious as you might be to get to the bottom of things, be careful not to rush the process. You need time to conduct tests and experiments and to reflect on your results. You might need time to go to counseling to explore some of these questions in greater depth and/ or work through them on your own.

Wait before taking irreversible actions: This does not mean you should wait until you feel 100 percent certain—that day will more than likely never come. Nor does it mean you shouldn't make changes or take risks that can reveal important information about yourself. It means to be cautious if you are thinking of doing something that could result in a significant impact on your life and the lives of those closest to you. It's not to say there won't be a time and a place for that, but make sure you have explored your uncertainties enough to gain as much clarity as you can. Remember to give your Thinking Self a break: Use what you've learned in Giving Your Thinking Self a Break (page 165) whenever you need to do this for yourself. The chaotic, swirling, circling thoughts and feelings that the questions can bring up are just what this exercise was meant to help with. You can always go back to examining your questions when you have returned to a more grounded state.

Stop and reflect: While you continue to work through each of your questions, pay attention as well to what is coming up for you concerning your gender identity. Ask yourself, "How often is this coming up? How intense are these feelings? Over how much time have these been coming up?" Start to keep track of the answers to these questions. Revisit them often as you need to and pay attention to any patterns that are revealed.

Un-become what really isn't you: There was a quote in *Stage Three: Exploration* that gave the advice of focusing on "un-becoming everything that really isn't you so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place." What you are doing in this exercise is figuring out how many of your questions really aren't *you* and, even if some of them are, if there is still room for your questions about your gender identity to have a spot at the table as well.

## BREAKING YOUR QUESTIONS DOWN INTO CLUSTERS

Breaking some of these questions down into clusters will make it easier to give advice as to how to approach them. We'll define these issues layer by layer to help simplify the process.

## 1. The Assumption That You Must Be Either Male or Female

"... maybe I'm just androgynous?"

- "... maybe I just need to release pent up feminine/masculine energy?"
- "... can I just act less stereotypically like my gender assigned at birth?"

If you have these types questions and aren't aware of the existence of nonbinary gender identities, then you are in for a useful surprise. Discovering nonbinary identities can enable you to conduct tests and experiments with this in mind, resulting in the discovery of answers that can make more sense to you. If you think this might be useful for you to explore be sure to go back and read Nonbinary Identities (page 132).

#### 2. Having an Unexpressed Inner Persona

- "... am I really a cross-dresser?"
- "... can I just be a drag queen/king?"
- "... maybe I just have a girl side/guy side that needs to come out?"
- "... maybe I can just release this feeling in other ways?"

The first step to take with this cluster of questions involves asking yourself if you have been repressing any feminine energy (for those assigned male at birth) or masculine energy (for those assigned female at birth). You can bring this energy to light through tests and experiments (which we will look at in Chapter 13).

Accepting and incorporating this energy into who you are as a whole can help to relieve some of your gender identity stress. An example of this is how many present-day assigned-male-at-birth children are expressing their feminine energy through their clothing, interests, behavior, etc. while still feeling comfortable identifying as "boys." You may end up successfully releasing this pent-up energy, and yet a feeling will remain that it still isn't enough. Again, you'll be able to use Chapter 13 as a way to conduct tests and experiments to see where you might fall on this continuum.

#### 3. The Intersection of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

#### "... am I really just gay/lesbian?"

One of the first bits of information taught in "Transgender 101" courses is that sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same. However, it doesn't mean there can't be a blurring of the lines between these two layers of one's self. If someone assigned male at birth senses they have more feminine energy than a stereotypical male, they might come to the conclusion they are gay. The same thing can happen to someone assigned female at birth who embodies more masculine energy than a stereotypical female. When you come to a conclusion about your sexual orientation using your feminine/masculine energy as the main determinant, it means you aren't basing your sexual orientation on what it's actually supposed to be based, which is whom you are or aren't sexually attracted to.

Which brings us to another important key piece of information: Your blend of feminine and masculine energy is not only separate from your gender identity, *but also from your sexual orientation*.

It is fairly common to have questions about your sexual orientation while trying to understand your gender identity. They are both significant parts of who you are as a person. As with the other examples, take time to conduct tests and experiments in regard to this question. Keep in mind this could be a question that will remain unanswered until you are able to fully express your gender identity. The goal for now is to answer the question, "Am I really gay/lesbian?" to see if there is something more to it.

#### 4. The Influence of Trauma and/or Mental Illness

"... is it just a reaction to having experienced trauma during my childhood?" "... is it really just a symptom of my [fill in a mental health diagnosis]?" "... am I just desperate to find any answer as to why I feel so depressed/ hopeless?"

"... is this really just an escape from reality?"

In an article entitled, "Trauma and Transness: Why I Didn't 'Always Know' I Was Transgender," Sam Dylan Finch says about his lifelong struggle with mental illness, "There was no room to consider gender for a long time. It was deemed 'non-essential' by the part of my brain that determined what I could and could not handle."<sup>65</sup>

For you to give gender room to be considered, you need to understand what else might be affecting your overall mental and emotional health. The effects of past traumas and symptoms of any current diagnosed mental illness, as well as undiagnosed mental illness, can all be present at the same time as gender confusion.

Additionally, if there have been times during your life when you have had to focus mainly on your survival, your brain is going to ask something like gender identity confusion to take a back seat until things have stabilized. You may have looked for ways to mentally escape from your traumas, with one of these outlets being daydreaming. Some of these daydreams might have been fueled by the clues you were picking up on about your gender identity. This can result in your accidentally making connections between having gender confusion as a child and thinking you are using it as escapism in adulthood.

It can be overwhelmingly difficult to distinguish between all of these thoughts and feelings (as well as their origins) without help. If you don't have pertinent information about your overall mental and emotional state you might unintentionally negate, minimize, and dismiss the feel-

<sup>65</sup> Sam Dylan Finch, "Trauma and Transness: Why I Didn't 'Always Know' I Was Transgender," Let's Queer Things Up!, January 16, 2016, http://letsqueerthingsup.com/2016/01/16/trauma-and-transness-why-i-didnt-always-know-i-wastransgender/.

ings you are having. Your feelings are completely valid and need to be expressed and explored.

If these are questions you are struggling with, I strongly recommend you begin to work with a trans-friendly therapist and possibly a psychiatrist, to look at the big picture of your mental and emotional health.

#### 5. Doubts around Your Sanity

#### "... am I just delusional or 'crazy'?"

For some, this cluster of questions can be the ultimate distractor that ends up overruling everything else. In other words, you could make plenty of discoveries on your gender identity journey that continue to point you in a direction that feels right to you. You may even notice that the more you move in that direction, the better you feel.

Then it happens—the appearance of that dreaded thought: "Maybe there is actually something wrong with my sanity?" This leads you to a belief that you can't trust what you are thinking and feeling, bringing you back to what you fear is the actual answer: you actually are "crazy."

You may be wondering why this cluster is separate from "the influence of mental illness and trauma" cluster. Far too often, the terms *delusional* and *crazy* are used to describe the confusing state of mind that occurs when someone is trying to determine their gender identity. Other terms that are misused are "I feel bipolar" and "I think I have multiple personalities."

This isn't to say that struggling with or questioning your gender identity doesn't bring about significant mental challenges and confusion. It's normal to have thoughts like "I'm losing my mind!" or "I'm all over the place with my emotions!" *This is different from actually being diagnosed with these conditions*.

The best way to examine this layer is to conduct tests and experiments, which we will discuss in Chapter 13 (page 205). For example, if you truly suspect you might have one of these mental health conditions, get a thorough mental health evaluation from a trans-knowledgeable psychologist or psychiatrist. Otherwise, be very careful about using terms such as *delusional* or *crazy* if they don't actually apply to you, for they create and perpetuate negative connotations for those who actually do suffer from these mental illnesses.

#### 6. Questions around This Being a Fetish or a Kink

"... is it just a fetish?"
"... is this just a 'kink'?"
"... is this really just autogynephilia?"

First, let's be clear that having fetishes or kinks is *not* indicative of having any sort of disorder. The rule of thumb is as long as it is sane, safe, and involves full consent from everyone involved, kinks and fetishes can be a healthy part of a person's life.

Confusion can come into play because the layer of who you are as a *sexual being* is closely intertwined with who you are as an *entire being*, including your gender identity. Therefore it is important to take the time to face the questions you have about your gender identity *and* your sexual self. Explore them separately and then bring them back together to see what results.

Questions you can focus on exploring are:

- "Is it sexually arousing to be *myself*?"
- "Is it easier for me to become sexually aroused when I feel more connected to *myself* . . . more comfortable . . . more 'me'?"
- "How does my gender identity come into play with my kink life? In what ways is it separate?"

Although this cluster of questions can arise in anyone who is exploring their gender identity, I've seen a significant number of individuals struggle with this who were assigned male at birth and are questioning whether or not they are actually female. One of the reasons for this can be traced back to the 1980s with the creation of a dangerous and deceptive model called "autogynephilia."

Created by a sexologist named Ray Blanchard, autogynephilia is defined as "male-to-female (MtF) transsexuals who are not exclusively attracted toward men but are instead sexually oriented toward the thought or image of themselves as a woman."<sup>66</sup> In other words, "misdirected heterosexual sex drive."

Although this theory has been professionally disputed and debunked for being "misleading and stigmatizing"<sup>67</sup> its negative effect and impact

<sup>66</sup> Madeline H. Wyndzen, PhD, "Autogynephilia & Ray Blanchard's Mis-Directed Sex-Drive Model of Transsexuality," Autogynephilia & Ray Blanchard, n.d., 2003, http://www.genderpsychology.org/autogynephilia/ray\_blanchard/.

<sup>67</sup> Julia M. Serano, "The Case Against Autogynephilia," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 12, no. 3 (2010): 176–87.

has caused a tragic degree of confusion, shame, and self-hatred in many individuals who are on their gender identity journey.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?



# Chapter 13

# Actively Exploring Your Gender Identity

Whether you've known it or not, you have been slowly building toward this chapter of *Stage Three: Exploration*. It's been saved for the end because it reflects one of the final stages of the Hero's Journey: the Dark Night of the Soul.<sup>68</sup> Throughout this Dark Night of the Soul, the hero discards old beliefs and illusions about who they are in order to make room for the truth. This process continues through what's known as the Ordeal,<sup>69</sup> during which the hero faces their greatest challenges and fears in the form of adversaries (those who are external as well as those which lie within).

An example of the Ordeal can be seen in one of the final scenes of the film *Inception*.<sup>70</sup> The hero faces a humongous fortress in the middle of an insane blizzard with heavily armed guards surrounding every entrance. He has one goal: to get into the fortress to discover the truth of how his now-deceased father really felt about him. He has come a long way to get here and is stunned by the impossible nature of this final step. You can see the doubt settle in. "Should I keep going? The obstacles are so tremendous! Yet I've come so far already . . . "

This scene actually takes place in the hero's subconscious—*he is in a dream within a dream*. This metaphor depicts the conflict we have within our own subconscious when we get to what feels to be the final stage of a self-discovery journey. There you are, *this close* to finding out the truth, when you suddenly encounter your very own version of fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards.

This stage is not for the faint of heart. This is a time when, as the hero of your own journey, you will be pushing yourself further outside

<sup>68</sup> Vogler, 155–173.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Christopher Nolan, Inception, (Warner Home Video, 2010), film.

your comfort zone than ever. That's why care has been taken throughout this book to prepare you for this.

Don't lose sight of the fact that there is a good reason you are putting yourself through this Hero's Journey: to make it through the Dark Night of the Soul and to Return with the Elixir. The Return with the Elixir is when you come back from your journey with an awareness of self that was previously missing. You are able to live with more freedom after having discovered these missing pieces and can share this more authentic YOU with others. Exploring your gender identity through actual experience will be the catalyst that moves you closer to the Elixir and newfound self-awareness.

In this chapter, you will follow through with this exploration by:

- Creating a list of Exploration Ideas.
- Managing your exploration-related fear and stress.
- Conducting your own tests and experiments.

## Creating a List of Exploration Ideas

Before jumping right into actively exploring your gender identity, you'll need to create a list of Exploration Ideas. An Exploration Idea is something you would consider trying out with the hope that it will give you insight into your gender identity. It can be something you do privately, semi-publicly (with select persons), and/or publicly. It can also be something you explore through internal methods, external methods, or a combination of both.

At the end of this section, there are several blank pages for you to keep track of these Exploration Ideas, as well as any reactions you have as you try out these ideas.

## CREATING CATEGORIES OF EXPLORATION IDEAS

Breaking your Exploration Ideas down into categories can make it easier to decide which ones you are most interested in pursuing. Here are ideas as to how they can be broken down (you can also create your own categories as well).

#### Altering your appearance can help you ...

• Get a sense of how it feels, emotionally, to change how you look.

## Exploration

- Have something visual you can look at (e.g., using mirror, taking selfie pictures).
- Experiment with different ideas about your look.
- See if you experience any physical relief by changing your appearance.
- Notice if you are treated differently by others when you change your appearance.

Interacting with others online (chat rooms, gaming, etc.) can help you . . .

- See how it feels to express sides of yourself you haven't been able to share publicly.
- Experience what it is like to been seen and treated as yourself.
- Explore how you feel before making any changes that others will notice.
- Be selective about who you want to explore your gender identity with.

Using writing, art, music, and other creative methods can help you ...

- Get to know yourself better in private before making any changes that others will notice.
- Open up to aspects of yourself that you hadn't realized were waiting to be discovered.
- Decide how you want to explore outwardly what you have been exploring inwardly.
- Privately play out certain ideas and scenarios so you can see how it feels.

Do any of these categories sound of interest to you? Are there others you would like to include? Record them in the Exploration Ideas section.

## SEEKING OUT EXPLORATION IDEAS

Some of your Exploration Ideas will feel like they have just popped into your head, having a more internal birth. Other times you will see something outside of yourself and will respond with, "Hmm, now that looks like something I'd like to try."

Here are ways you can seek out Exploration Ideas, both internally and externally.

#### 1. Pay attention to what doesn't feel accurate to you.

Sometimes you're going to know what *isn't* you before you know what *is* you. Use this approach to help you use your Exploration Ideas to experience less of what *isn't* you. Eventually this will reveal more of what *is* you.

Using the Exploration Ideas section, start to keep track of when something doesn't feel accurate to you, as well as Exploration Ideas that result from this.

#### 2. Ask yourself, "Who and what am I drawn to?"

Since you are in the process of discovering your gender identity, it makes sense to seek out others who you identify with (this is separate from who you are sexually/romantically attracted to, although the two can overlap).

Take note of when you notice a person (or something about a person) followed by you comparing yourself to them, trying to mimic them, or imagining yourself looking or acting like them. These can be people who are trans, not trans, celebrities, people you know in real life, etc. You may come across them by accident or you may seek them out purposely.

For instance, resources such as Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube are visual mediums where you can find a lot of people you might be drawn to. Pay attention to when your gut says to you, "Yes, I like that, I can connect with that, I want to give that a try."

Using the lines below, start to keep track of when you realize you are drawn to someone in this way. Record any patterns you pick up on (e.g., certain types of people, certain fashions) as well as Exploration Ideas that result from this.

#### 3. Look at pictures of yourself.

This might end up being a really difficult task for some of you, so be sure to think about whether or not you should undertake it. Although it can be helpful and revealing, it can also bring up painful feelings. If you decide to try this out and are aware that it could be challenging, be sure to turn to your Self-Care Checklist afterwards. Looking at pictures across the span of your lifetime can provide you with information such as:

- Recognizing times where you could tell you were expressing your true self (for instance, as a young child) and can then see where that began to change.
- Remembering how you were feeling and what you were thinking during certain times of your life.
- Sorting through current pictures of yourself with the question, "How much does that reflect who I truly am?" and paying attention to your response.

Using the Exploration Ideas section, start keeping track of how it feels to look at pictures of yourself. List any times of your life where you feel you were more you and how you feel when you look at current pictures of yourself, as well as Exploration Ideas that emerge from doing this.

## 4. Tap into ideas that have been inside you all along.

Chances are you have been unconsciously gathering Exploration Ideas for a while. This collection of ideas can be tapped into, with a little bit of prodding. We discussed this in Chapter 11, so revisit the exercises Opening a Dialogue with Your Child Self (page 160) and Getting to the Truths of Your Present-Day Self (page 163) to access these ideas.

Transfer any helpful answers from those exercises to the Exploration Ideas section. Continue to take note of any dreams, fantasies, longings, wishes, etc., and record them as well. See what Exploration Ideas are revealed to you through paying attention to these clues.

## 5. Gather ideas from others you have connected with.

In Chapter 10, you took steps to learn from the stories of others, connect with others online, and connect with others in person. More than likely, you've been exposed to their Exploration Ideas and can now use the ones that sounded interesting to you. If you haven't heard any yet, or can't remember if you have, revisit those stories and/or the persons you have connected with and see what you can learn from them. Remember, this can also include what you learn from fictional characters in novels/ literature, television series, motion picture films, fan fiction, comics, etc.

Using the Exploration Ideas section, start keeping track of ideas you get from others.

## EXAMPLES OF EXPLORATION IDEAS

To get you started, here is a list of Exploration Ideas that can be used to actively explore your gender identity. They are broken up into categories of semi-private exploration, public exploration, and internal exploration to help you better gauge which types of explorations you are ready to move forward with.

As you read through the following list, take note of any Exploration Ideas that appeal to you. Circle the ideas that appeal to you, even if you are not sure if you can follow through with them right away.

#### Semi-Private Exploration (others may or may not notice)

- Undergarments: bra, panties, boxers, boy shorts
- Wearing a sports bra/sports binder/chest binder/girdle
- A low dose of hormone replacement therapy
- Binding your chest
- Using an item (such as a packer) to create a bulge in your pants

#### Public Exploration (others are likely to notice)

Add, subtract, or change:

- Your name
- Your pronouns
- The manner in which you walk/carry yourself
- The manner in which you talk/communicate
- The manner in which you gesture
- The manner in which you sit
- Types of shirts/tops worn
- Types of pants/shorts worn
- Types of coats/jackets worn
- Dresses/skirts
- Your swimwear
- Your active wear
- Your uniform

- Headwear
- Padding your chest, hips, and/or buttocks
- Scarfs
- Pantyhose/stockings
- Bags/purses
- Wallet chains
- Watches
- Sunglasses
- Necklaces/chokers
- Your nails
- Your eyebrows
- Your sleepwear
- The colors you wear
- Ties
- Cosmetics
- Bracelets/wrist wear
- Eyewear

- Earrings
- Other piercings
- Footwear
- Socks
- Tattoos
- Your hair cut, style, color
- Facial hair

- Body hair
- Writing as your true self (under a pseudonym or not) in a blog
- Social media profiles that better reflect who you are

Internal Exploration (usually private, although you can share with others of your choosing)

- Brainstorming/daydreaming/visualization
- Dream interpretation
- Creative writing from the perspective of who you imagine yourself to be
- Expressing yourself through art, music, video, etc.
- Exploring ideas from the semi-private and public lists when you are alone

# A NOTE ABOUT HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT)

Starting Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is an option some will want to include on their list of Exploration Ideas. Others will want to actively explore their gender identity for a while before deciding if they should begin HRT, while others may never want to use HRT. Remember, there is no definitive way you have to go about your gender identity exploration, including whether or not you start HRT and/or at what point you would make that decision.

# CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

198

## Managing Exploration-Related Fear and Stress

"Here are ideas as to how you can actively explore your gender identity ...."

Everyone who reads this phrase will be struck by it differently. On the one hand there's: "This is what I came all this way to do, so let's do this!" On the other hand there's: "You know, I've been thinking about it and . . . I don't think so." There can be constant vacillation between these points (and everywhere in between) on a day-to-day, even moment-to-moment basis. This back and forth can be exhausting and stressful—enough to make someone want to pack up their bags and return home before they've obtained the Elixir.

To refresh your memory as to why this is a predictable element of the Hero's Journey (and therefore *your* journey) let's revisit what you learned about your Bodyguard in *Stage One: Preparation* (page 20).

### WHAT HAS YOUR BODYGUARD BEEN UP TO?

Recall how your Bodyguard has been keeping an eye on you since birth, acting as a psychological defense to help keep you safe. They have your best interest at heart—however, *it is to an extreme*. They are willing to go to great lengths to keep you away from harm, which includes trying to keep you from discovering truths about yourself that the rest of the world may not like. The most common way your Bodyguard does this is *by trying to scare you out of doing it*.

When you reach the Dark Night of the Soul, your Bodyguard realizes you are about to make significant discoveries about yourself that will more than likely change you forever. Therefore, with all of the tough love they can muster, they are going to throw everything they can at you, making one last ditch effort to convince you to, "Pleeeease . . . *don't do it.*"

What fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards will your Bodyguard call upon to try to stop you? For that you can return to the Calling Out Your Fears exercise from *Stage One: Preparation*, where you listed at least five of your biggest fears going into this (page 15).

What fears did you list in this exercise?

2.

1.\_\_\_\_\_

200	Exploration	
3		
4		
5		

Your fears will manifest themselves into people, places, and situations in your everyday life. Even if they don't look like fortresses, blizzards, and armed guards, they will feel just as threatening. In Chapter 3, you learned how you can become more aware of these fears and what you can do to better manage them (page 23). You learned how to:

- Get to know your Bodyguard.
- Set appointment times with fear.
- Take a positive approach.
- Get into the habit of being kind to yourself.
- Find a mentor.
- Build a support team.

These tools, along with the awareness you are gaining from having them, are incredibly useful for you to carry with you as you actively explore your gender identity.

Do you need to revisit any of these exercises? If so, now's the time to do so before you go any further.

# MANAGING THE STRESS OF YOUR BODYGUARD

# (A.K.A. YOURSELF)

Now that you've seen how your Bodyguard may stress out (and therefore try to stress *you* out) during the Exploration stage of your journey, let's look at two ways you can prepare yourself for these potential challenges.

## Stress Reducer: Putting Together a First Aid Toolkit

First aid kits have a useful array of items to help someone with a physical injury: bandages, gauze, little scissors, ointment, medical tape . . . It's so nice to have something prepared and ready to go—that way you don't have to worry about it in the middle of the crisis. In this exercise, you are going to put together your own version of a First Aid Toolkit to have on hand in case you encounter emotional and mental injuries as you actively explore your gender identity and need to tend to your wounds.

When creating your First Aid Toolkit:

- Make it something you can actually hold in your hands (i.e., not just a list of ideas you keep somewhere).
- Organize your toolkit before something happens that wounds you—that way it is ready for you if and when you need it.
- Add to your toolkit as you continue to learn more about what it is that helps you feel better after you've been emotionally and/ or mentally injured.

#### Step 1: What will you use as a toolkit?

See if you already have something in your home. If not, check out thrift stores and garage sales for ideas. Choose a size that makes the most sense, considering what items you will want to store in it.

*Examples: an empty shoebox or cigar box; a plastic bin; a large envelope; a small trunk; an arts and crafts container.* 

#### Step 2: Design the outside of your toolkit

Imagine you are in an emotionally difficult state and you go to reach for your First Aid Toolkit. Design it in such a way that you will automatically feel at least somewhat better as soon as you see it. It's up to you if that means it should make you smile or laugh, help you feel calm, inspired, empowered, etc.

*Examples: stickers; pictures (from magazines, online, personal ones); paint; construction paper; markers; string; fuzzy balls; plastic jewels.* 

#### Step 3: Start with your Self-Care Checklist

To begin, take a look at your Self-Care Checklist and choose your top five favorite items from it. If they are activities, write them down on separate pieces of paper and place them in the kit. If they involve tangible items, place those in the kit as well.

#### Step 4: Find items that require the use of your senses

Actively engaging your senses is a proven grounding technique, and therefore needs to be included in your kit. This can include seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. The stronger you are able to experience the sensation, the better. Also, make sure you choose items that aren't associated with something that will accidentally trigger you (i.e., something with which you have had a negative experience).

*Examples for sight: pictures of things that bring up strong positive emotions (of loved ones, your heroes, nature, baby animals).* 

*Examples for smell: essential oils; scratch and sniff stickers; candles; in-cense; a recipe for something you should cook.* 

Examples for hearing: mix CDs of songs that will evoke strong positive emotions or a reminder to listen to a certain playlist on a tech device; recordings of loved ones saying encouraging words to you; recordings of motivational speakers; audiobooks which inspire you.

Examples of touch: stuffed animals that will fit in your toolkit; cuts of fabrics that you enjoy the feel of; a sleep mask; clothing items such as hats, scarfs, pajamas, blankets.

*Examples of taste: hard candies (especially ones that will shock your taste buds such as hot or sour flavors); gum; breath mints; Tabasco sauce; lemon juice (note: be sure to choose items that won't attract insects).* 

#### Step 5: Have reminders of who you can talk to

When you are in the midst of going through a painful emotional experience, it can be difficult to remember who you can turn to. It's also important to have several options available in case there are people on your list who aren't able to talk with you when you are in need. You can either write their names down or use pictures of them to place in your toolkit.

*Examples: members of your support team; your mentor(s); individuals you have met online or in person; your therapist (if they take after-hours calls); local and national crisis line numbers.* 

#### Step 6: Find someplace to store your First Aid Toolkit

Make sure you store your toolkit in an easily accessible spot that you won't have to work too hard to reach when you find yourself in need of it. However, if your living situation requires you to keep your toolkit away from other members of the household (since you may have very private and personal items in it) then be sure to make the extra effort to store it somewhere that others will not stumble upon it.

#### Stress Reducer: Creating a Personalized Risk Assessment Tool

Your Bodyguard isn't entirely wrong about the existence of risk in actively exploring your gender identity. Your Bodyguard might frequently remind you that this world still has a ways to go before it truly understands what it means to be transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender diverse. The key is to be mindful of the potential challenges you might encounter while actively exploring your gender and to create a realistic plan based on possible risks.

*Risk* = the potential for something to happen that you would consider detrimental to the current state of your life.

You're going to need something to help you do this: your very own Risk Assessment Tool. This tool will be individualized based on you and your life circumstances. Now, although this is a helpful tool to use for brainstorming, organizing, and preparing, it *cannot* be used to predict actual outcomes of your gender identity exploration. These outcomes will remain a mystery for some time to come, regardless of how much you utilize this tool.

Each Risk Assessment Tool consists of:

- 1. An example of something you would like to do from your list of Exploration Ideas (page 193).
- 2. Answering the question, "How noticeable a change will this create?"
- 3. Looking at the areas of your life that might be impacted by your taking this action (both public and private).
- 4. Answering the question, "How much risk is involved in this?"
- 5. Answering the question, "Can I do this in steps to help minimize the potential impact?"
- 6. Ideas as to what you can do to prepare for the possibility of each of these areas from the third column being detrimentally affected.

Exploration Idea	How noticeable a change?	Area possibly impacted	How much risk?	Possible steps	Preparing for risk

#### Step 1: Exploration Idea

In the first column, write down an example of something you would like to try from your list of Exploration Ideas. *Examples:* Get my hair cut shorter; shave my legs; use a different name; wear a binder; buy more feminine clothes; buy boxer shorts; get my ears pierced.

#### Step 2: How noticeable a change?

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being "barely" and 10 being "extremely") how noticeable a change does this create? Write your answer in the second column.

Examples: If you were to cut your hair shorter, how noticeable would that be compared to your current hair length? If you were to shave your legs, how noticeable would this be?

#### Step 3: What areas might be impacted?

What are the areas of your life that might be impacted by your following through with this Exploration Idea? These can be public areas of your life (i.e., your external world involving other people) and/or this can also be private areas of your life (i.e., how this would affect your inner world). Write your answer in the third column.

*Examples:* My relationship with [fill in name of a person]; my career; my physical safety; how comfortable I am socially; my life at school; my self-consciousness.

#### Step 4: How much risk?

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being "extremely low" and 10 being "extremely high") how much risk is involved in following through with this Exploration Idea? Again, this means the potential for something to happen that you would consider being detrimental to the current state of your life. Write your answer in the fourth column.

Examples: If you think by doing \_\_\_\_\_\_ you might lose your job and you depend on it for your main source of income, you would probably rank that as "high risk." Or, if you think by doing \_\_\_\_\_\_ your mother might disapprove but you don't feel particularly bothered by that, you would probably rank that as "low risk."

#### Step 5: Can this be done in stages?

Are there stages you can do this in to help minimize the potential impact? Write your answer in the fifth column.

*Examples:* If you are thinking about cutting your hair shorter, should you do so a little bit at a time? If you are thinking of experimenting with the clothes you wear, should you do so privately at first? If you are thinking of wearing

#### You and Your Gender Identity

different clothing in public, should you have someone go with you? If you are thinking about using a different name, should you start by doing this with people who already know you are exploring your gender identity?

#### Step 6: How can you prepare for possible damage?

What you can do to prepare for the possibility that each of these areas might be detrimentally affected? Write your answer in the sixth column.

Examples: Use items from your Self-Care Checklist and ideas from your First Aid Toolkit. If you are concerned about your job or your career, look into what your company's policies are in regard to gender identity and gender expression. If you are worried that your partner might find out about your exploration before you are ready for them to, look into finding a couples counselor who can help you approach the topic with them sooner than later.

#### Step 7: Repeat as often as needed

Continue to revisit and revise your Risk Assessment Tool as often as you need to throughout the rest of your journey.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

## Conducting Tests and Experiments

We've already discussed how, during this stage of the journey, you are an explorer of the world that is your inner self. You will also be playing another role: *scientist*. As a scientist, you are actively exploring your gender identity through:

- 1. Creating hypotheses.
- 2. Testing these hypotheses through experiments.

- 3. Gathering data by observing your responses (and the responses of others).
- 4. Reaching conclusions.
- 5. Validating your feelings through the results of your tests.

This process is based on the scientific method and can be directly applied to your gender identity journey. By conducting these tests and experiments, you are stripping away what *isn't* you to reveal what *is* you.

## HOW TO RUN YOUR OWN TESTS AND EXPERIMENTS

Let's take a look the steps in more detail so you can begin to run your own experiments. Additionally, if you have already been experimenting (even if you didn't know you've been doing so) you can apply this approach to what you have already learned about yourself so far.

## Step 1: Create your hypotheses

You are curious about something: *your gender identity*. Having questions that you want to find answers to is all that is required for you to complete the first step of the scientific method.

Next, you conducted research that supported your inquisitiveness. The work you've been doing throughout the book has reassured you of the fact that: "Yes, I really do have a good question here." (Otherwise you wouldn't have gotten this far, right?) Now it's time to create specific hypotheses that you can attempt to prove or disprove through actively exploring your gender identity.

Here's how your hypotheses will be broken down:

If [whatever action you will take], then [predicted result].

Your hypotheses need to be written in terms of what you are trying to answer about your gender identity. Use phrases that make sense for you without worrying about how other people may describe their experience.

Here are a few examples:

"If I start wearing a binder around my chest, then I will feel more comfortable."

- "If I change (this) about the way I dress, *then* I will feel more authentic and therefore more at ease."
- "*If* people start using the pronoun 'they' when addressing me, *then* this will feel affirming to me."
- "If I start on a low dose of Hormone Replacement Therapy, *then* my gender dysphoria will be reduced."

206

Other descriptors you might use in your prediction are *relief*, *a reduction* of *discomfort*, *connected*, or *more congruent*.

Don't worry if you don't know if the answers will be true or false, as this is the whole point of testing your hypotheses.

Using items from your list of Exploration Ideas, write three hypotheses below that you want to test. You can always create more later—this is to just get you familiar with the process.

Hypothesis 1: _	 	
Hypothesis 2: _	 	
Hypothesis 3:		

#### Step 2: Test your hypotheses

As you look to your Exploration Ideas and devise ways to test your hypotheses, it's best to come up with experiments that have the following elements:

- Create a test that is clear: This means you change only one factor at a time during the experiment so you will know with clarity what created a certain result. For instance, if you do something different with your hair and your attire at the same time you won't know if it was your hair or your attire that made you feel a certain way. In the beginning stages of experimentation, it's important to test them separately.
- Repeat your experiments: Run the same experiment more than once so you can see if that changes how you feel. You can do it in the same manner each time, but by putting yourself in different settings you can get additional feedback as to how you are feeling. For example you can change the setting, who you are with, what time of day it is, if it's a work/school day or a day off, etc. Be sure to keep the test the same while changing the setting (i.e., if you change the item of clothing you are wearing, it means you are running a new test, and therefore you should document it separately).
- Use your Risk Assessment Tool: Remember, your Risk-Assessment Tool (page 202) is there to help you plan your tests and experiments in such a way that balances the amount of risk you think you are taking with how much risk you are willing to take. It also takes you through the step of breaking down your

tests into stages, as well as preparing you for possible negative consequences.

- Have a combination of private and public experiments: More than likely, you will conduct your initial experiments alone (or already have done so in the past without knowing that's what you were doing). This is a good way to gauge your reaction without the pressure of being around others. When you are ready, you'll also need to run experiments in a public forum (i.e., situations where you can be seen). This is not about how the people around you feel, but about how *you* feel around those people while carrying out your experiment. Note: be sure to run your public tests through your Risk Assessment Tool before moving forward with them.
- Have your First Aid Toolkit ready: Although you can hope for the best when you conduct your experiments, having your First Aid Toolkit at your disposal will help mitigate any injuries that might occur. This can include contacting people ahead of time who you have listed in your kit to let them know you will be running these tests and having any of your Self-Care Checklist items ready for use upon your return home.

Using the space below, write down each of your hypotheses. Then, list the type of experiment you will conduct in order to test each one out. Be as specific as possible: include a time, place, and setting for each one. Also include when you will repeat the test, keeping in mind this can be altered depending on how it went the first time.

#### EXAMPLE:

Hypothesis: "If I start wearing a binder around my chest, then I will feel more comfortable."

1st Experiment: I will wear a binder around the house for the entire weekend, with my roommate present.

2nd Experiment: If this goes well I will wear a binder to school for one day.

2nd Experiment: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Step 3: Gather your data

All good scientists have a log in which they can record the observations and results of any tests they conduct. You'll need to create this for yourself as well. In this log you can keep track of:

- The date and time of your experiment.
- If the experiment was private or public.
- If it was public: the setting, people involved, length of time.
- What you specifically tested (the "if" part of your hypothesis).
- Observations of your experience.
- Observations of others (if this was public).

Try to gather your data from an objective perspective, reporting it as factually as possible. You can record your data for both your private and public experiments, as well as when you repeat experiments at different times.

#### EXAMPLES:

2/3/16: I found a new chat room and introduced myself as male—I was both nervous and excited beforehand—everyone addressed me by my male name and used male pronouns—it felt awesome every time it happened, felt like they were seeing "me."

7/6/16: Local swimming pool with a friend who doesn't know I am exploring my gender—I went with my legs, chest, and arms shaved—I felt selfconscious and nervous at first, which lessened the longer I was there because no one seemed to notice or care!

10/2/16: At home in my room, looking in the mirror—Since my hair is getting a little longer in the front I pushed it forward so it framed my face—I liked how it looked and it felt comforting; I then pushed my hair off of my face and I felt dysphoria come up; then it would go away when I let my hair back down—this was both cool and weird for me.

Keep in mind that additional data may come in when you are not actively experimenting. That's because you will start noticing more often when something doesn't feel comfortable to you. List these types of observations in your log as well (e.g., "I went out in my usual manner today and could tell that I missed how I felt during the experiment yesterday").

Use the log on the following pages using the examples given above or create your own way of organizing this. Have it easily accessible so you can record your data as soon as possible after each experiment.



211

#### Step 4: Reaching your conclusions

Reaching your conclusions means you are taking the step to prove or disprove your hypothesis using the if/then formula. Your method of doing this will be a little different from the approach that scientists take to reach their conclusions. While they may have numbers to crunch, you will have your *observations of yourself* to analyze. This can include emotions, thoughts, sensations, and intuitions—all of which can come up during an experiment.

It can be overwhelming to process all of these observations at the same time. Therefore it's best to handle them as we have with the other steps in your exploration process: separate them out into layers and look at them individually.

After each experiment, you can break the observations of your experience into separate categories. You can use categories such as emotions, thoughts, sensations, and intuitions, or you can use other terms that fit your individual experience.

#### EXAMPLE:

The hypothesis I specifically tested: "If I wear a feminine scarf when I go to the coffee shop, then I will feel more like 'me.""

Observations of my experience:

How I felt beforehand: Scared to death!

How I felt during it: Still scared but did my best to cover it up—I then felt really good after the barista complimented my scarf.

How I felt afterwards about doing this: Proud of myself for taking this step.

How I felt with regard to what I tested: It felt really nice to wear something that felt more "me."

It's at this point you bring back in your if/then hypothesis and fill in the blanks. Using the example above:

"If I wear a feminine scarf when I go to the coffee shop, then I will feel more like 'me."

If you ended up learning something different about yourself than you expected, it's okay to change the second half of your hypothesis. Using the example above, this person may have realized they wanted to use a different phrase to describe the result, such as *I felt more feminine*, *I felt less masculine*, or, *I felt gender completely vanish from me*.

Also remember that if you run your experiment more than once, you can get a more accurate sense as to what happens if any of the conditions change. Using the example above, the experimenter may go out later that week to their favorite coffee shop and gather this data instead:

How I felt beforehand: Less scared than the first time but still fairly nervous. How I felt during it: The coffee shop was way busier than the first time and I kinda freaked out when I walked in. I got my drink as quickly as I could and left.

How I felt afterwards about doing this: Disappointed that I didn't stay longer and let my fear get the best of me, but at least I kept the scarf on!

How I felt in regard to what I tested: Although the experience itself sorta sucked, it still felt really nice to wear it. In fact, I left it on the rest of the day when I was hanging out at home.

Lastly, if you are having trouble getting in touch with how you were feeling during the experiment, revisit Chapter 11 (page 159) for reminders as to how you can do this.

Using the space below, list each of your hypotheses and write in detail your feelings, thoughts, and intuitions about how each experiment went. At the end of each hypothesis, fill in the blanks with your conclusion.

Typothesis 1:
Fest results:
Conclusion:
Typothesis 2:

214	Exploration	
Test results:		
Conclusion:		
Hypothesis 3:		
Test results:		
Conclusion:		

Step 5: Validating your feelings through your test results

After a while, you will develop a list of experiments you have conducted and data you have gathered. At this point, you can come to a broader conclusion that summarizes all of the information from your experiments. This conclusion can be as general or specific as you are comfortable with.

Example of a general conclusion: "It is true that the more I masculinize my appearance, the less uncomfortable I feel, whether alone or around others."

Example of a specific conclusion: "It is true that according to my definition I am 'trans' because the more I moved away from being my gender assigned at birth the better I felt."

When you are ready, use the lines below to write a general and/or specific conclusion as a result of the testing you have conducted.

Regardless of what you decide to do with these conclusions, you can use them as a way to *validate your feelings*. Although there isn't a way to "prove" your gender identity, you can use these test results to reiterate for yourself, "This confirms that I was right—there *is* something of importance going on here."

Return to the Conducting Your Own Tests and Experiments tool as often as you need to throughout your gender identity journey. Chances are you will see changes along the way that you will want to take note of, allowing you to compare and contrast them to experiments you ran earlier on in your journey.

## CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?

# Chapter 14

# Putting It All Together

You've embraced the Call to Adventure, Crossed the Threshold, Met the Mentor, encountered Tests, Allies, and Enemies, wrestled with the Dark Night of the Soul, and withstood Ordeals. Regardless of how far you have come in the course of this guidebook, you are further along than when you began. Your self-awareness has grown as you discovered and integrated pieces of who you are into the entirety of your being. Now it is time for you to Return with the Elixir.

You've spent much of this book getting in touch with what is really going on inside you without having to fit a certain phrase, narrative, or description of experience. Since you have acquired Wisdom of the Elixir, you can begin putting words to the question: "Who am I, concerning my gender identity?" The exercises in this chapter will help you with this task.

Before we begin, let's review what it is you have learned about putting descriptors onto your gender identity:

- 1. You learned that you do not have to conform to a specific definition of gender identity. You discovered that your experience of your gender is unique, as is the way you decide to describe this experience. Find the words that make the most sense to you without trying to fit into any preconceived notion that doesn't feel comfortable.
- 2. You learned that you can use different words to describe your gender identity depending on the social context. Many of you will share what you have discovered about your gender identity with others—be they loved ones, coworkers, peers, teachers, the general public, old friends, new friends, mental health and medical providers . . . the list can end up being quite lengthy. Remember, how you decide to self-identify is what matters most. If/when you choose to share this with others you will want to be careful and wise, as some people will understand where you are coming

from more easily than others. Certain situations will feel easier, safer, and more comfortable than others. You might decide to use certain words now and other words later, depending on where you are at in your discovery journey. Later in this chapter we will look at how you can approach these people, situations, and time frames in ways that empower you with as much control, comfort, and flexibility as possible.

3. You learned that you will continue to discover more about yourself throughout the course of your life. This chapter will help you find words to describe your experience of your gender identity today. You can change your responses tomorrow, in a few weeks, even in a few years. That way you won't inadvertently pressure yourself into the unrealistic assumption that you must have all of the answers right now. Your workbook should be a living, breathing document that you can return to whenever you discover new insights about yourself.

Questions like, "What if I'm wrong? What if I change my mind later?" often arise when figuring out how to describe one's gender identity. Here are some ways you can remain open to growing while also gaining confidence in what direction you would like to go next:

- *Pace yourself*. It is wise to make changes in your life using baby steps to see if what you are doing is creating improvement. It's a positive feedback loop: if what you choose continues to help, you know you are on the right track.
- *Pay attention to what stays consistent*. As you continue to test and experiment, you will see what does and doesn't change, what consistently makes you feel more comfortable, what consistently makes you feel more uncomfortable, and what feelings and thoughts remain with you.
- *Talk it out.* You may one day make decisions that will impact your life in significant ways. When you take the time to talk it out either with a counselor or a trusted friend, they can help you plan for any possible challenges you may encounter. This will also give you the chance to understand the perspectives of others who will end up being affected by these decisions.

# Reviewing the Highlights of Your Journey

Oftentimes an explorer will return from a journey and decide to create an account of their adventure. This can help them see the big picture of what they discovered along the way, the changes they went through, and ideas about where they want to go next.

Ideally the explorer took notes over the course of the journey—so much can happen along the way it can be easy to forget some of the most important discoveries. Luckily, as the explorer in your story, you have been keeping track of these important highlights in this guidebook. Now you can use them to arrive at your conclusions for this part of your gender identity journey.

Before we begin to review your highlights, remember:

- Be open to changing your previous answers—hindsight can lead to new insight.
- You can always leave something blank. Simply answer, "I'm not sure," or change your response later on.
- When in doubt, listen for the answers that come from your gut.

## 1: THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

It's the one you answered both at the very beginning and midway through You and Your Gender Identity: A Guide to Discovery:

Are you uncomfortable with your gender assigned at birth socially, physically, and/or mentally?

YES

#### MAYBE

NO

Go ahead—answer it again. Is your answer the same as or different from when you first began? How about from when you checked in midway through the guide? Write down your observations here.

## 2: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Using the following unmarked copy of the Questionnaire, go through all of the questions and answer them again. For now, don't look at your previous answers.

- 1. How do you feel about the name you currently use and are addressed as? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 2. How do you feel about being addressed by a gendered term that coincides with your gender assigned at birth (e.g., ma'am, sir, ladies, fellas, lad, lass)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 3. How do you feel about being addressed by a gendered term that does not coincide with your gender assigned at birth? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 4. How do you feel about being addressed as your gender assigned at birth pronouns? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 5. How do you feel being addressed by gendered adjectives such as pretty or handsome? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

- 6. How do you feel about using the public restrooms/changing rooms that you are expected to based on your current gender presentation? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 7. How do you feel about having/not having a menstrual cycle? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 8. How do you feel about being able to/not being able to conceive a child? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 9. How do you feel about the amount of body hair that you have (or don't have)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 10. How do you feel about having the amount of facial hair that you have/don't have? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 11. How do you feel about your voice? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

12.	How do you feel about tone and pitch in which you speak? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
13.	How do you feel about your eyebrows? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
14.	How do you feel about your hairstyle? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
15.	How do you feel about your current wardrobe? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
16.	How do you feel about wearing/not wearing makeup? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
17.	How do you feel about wearing/not wearing earrings, having/not having piercings and/or tattoos, and carrying/not carrying certain accessories? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-

- 18. How do you feel about your height? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 19. How do you feel about your chest? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 20. How do you feel about your body shape? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 21. How do you feel about the structure of your face? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 22. How do you feel about the size of your hands and feet? How much (if at all) is this connected to gender-related concerns?
- 23. How do you feel about having (or not having) an Adam's apple? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

24.	How do you feel about your genitals? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
25.	How would you describe your sexual orientation? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
26.	How do you feel about having partners, concerning physical inti- macy? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
27.	How do you feel about having partners, concerning emotional inti- macy? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
28.	How do you feel about assumptions others make about you based on their perception of your gender? How much (if at all) is this con- nected to your gender-related concerns?

29. How do you feel about the way your family addresses you when not using your name (e.g., son/daughter, niece/nephew, mother/father)? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

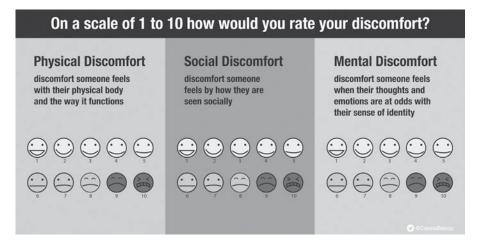
- 30. To what extent do you feel your hobbies and interest truly reflect who you are? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?
- 31. How do you feel when you are separated into groups by gender? How much (if at all) is this connected to your gender-related concerns?

Again, place a star next to the responses that are most problematic to you (e.g., revealed a high level of disconnect, dissatisfaction, discomfort, etc.).

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Compare and contrast these responses to the ones on the original Questionnaire (p. 121). Have they changed? How?

# 3: THE LAYERS OF YOUR GENDER DISCOMFORT



Here, again, is the chart from the exercise The Layers of Your Gender Discomfort (page 178).

Using this unmarked copy of the chart, rate your general discomfort in each category. Then, look at your original responses and compare and contrast them to one another. Have they changed? How?

## YOUR CONCLUSIONS

Read over the responses you gave from these three highlights from your journey, as well as your reflections.

What are your overall conclusions? Take your time, write as little or as much as you need to. Remember you can always come back to this later.

# Your Gender Identity in Your Own Words

Finding the words to describe your gender identity can be as simple or as multilayered as you choose to make it. This exercise will introduce you a variety of approaches to this and help you find the one that best suits you. For now, focus on how you would describe your gender identity if the definitions and opinions of others didn't exist. In the next exercise, we will look at how you can navigate through the rest of the world with your personal description of your gender identity intact.

## THE SIMPLE APPROACH

You may be hoping for a short, simple way to describe your gender identity. It would exclude extraneous factors such as other aspects of your identity, clarifying phrases, explanation of your narrative, etc.

Here are examples of this approach:

- "I am trans/transgender." "I am a woman/I am a man." "I am not a male/not a female." "I am a transgender male." "I am a transsexual woman." "I am not cisgender." "I identify as nonbinary."
- "I have no interest in labeling my gender identity."

As you continue working though this chapter, stay open to this approach to describing gender identity. It may be the right one for you, or you may end up needing a more multi-layered approach.

## THE MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH

A multi-layered approach to describing your gender identity can be useful to those who would rather not be limited in the way they describe their gender identity. This description can include multiple terms, including your other identities, your body, and inference to whether or not you will be transitioning. Here are examples of this multi-layered approach:

- "I am nonbinary, genderfluid, and pansexual."
- "I identify as a female-bodied, masculine-of-center boi."
- "I am a cisgender heterosexual man who enjoys expressing my feminine energy."
- "I am transgender and my gender expression is feminine."
- "I am a gay trans man who chooses not to have gender confirmation surgery."
- "I am a cisgender butch lesbian who will be having top surgery."
- "I am uncertain as to what my actual gender identity is, but I do know that it is not my gender assigned at birth and I will probably take medical and social steps to help reduce my gender dysphoria."
- "Although I was assigned male at birth my brain is that of a female-therefore I am a woman."

As you continue to work through this chapter you will have the chance to explore various ways you can use this multi-layered approach to describing your gender identity.

Do you think you are more interested in a simple or multi-layered approach to describing your gender identity?

## WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR DESCRIPTION

Use the following list as a starting place for describing your gender identity:

- $\Box$  Do you want to use the phrase "I identify as . . . "?
- $\Box$  Do you want to use the phrase "I am . . . "?
- Do you want to use terms like transgender, transsexual, trans, etc.?
- $\Box$  Are there nonbinary terms you want to use?
- □ Do you want to use the term gender dysphoria, as well as the areas in which you experience this?
- □ Do you want to include references to your sexual and/or romantic orientation?
- □ Do you want to include references to social and/or medical transition steps you might take?

- □ Do you want to include references to your blend of feminine and/or masculine energy?
- □ Do you want to include references to how you feel about gender?
- □ Do you want to include references to your gender expression?
- □ Do you want to use a narrative form of description rather than a brief one?

*Place a checkmark next to each of the items you are interested in including as a part of your description.* 

## YOUR GENDER IDENTITY OPTIONS

It may come as a surprise to learn how many options are available to choose from to describe your gender identity. They are evolving out of a growing awareness that gender identity is a far deeper subject than previously thought. We now know that:

- One's gender identity is not always the same as the gender and sex one is assigned at birth.
- Gender identity is not necessarily binary (i.e., female or male).
- Gender identity is an individual, unique experience.
- One's sense of gender identity can be approached holistically, taking into account who someone is in their entirety (i.e., gender expression, femininity/masculinity, sexual/romantic orientation, one's body).

We are going to explore terms that are available to use when you describe your gender identity. A complete list would be impossible to compile—we live in a time during which new terms are being created, tested, and shared at a rapid pace. These descriptions will continue evolving as individuals and communities search for ways to increase recognition and awareness of as many experiences of gender as possible.

Use this list as a way to open your eyes and broaden your perspective about what makes up your gender identity and its relationship to your overall sense of self. You can use all of them, none of them, or a combination of them.

Read through the list on the next page. Circle the terms you would consider using to describe your own gender identity. Place a star next to any term you are unfamiliar with but would like to learn what it means. Look up its definition, and then decide whether you want to keep it on your list. Androgynous Androgyne Tomboy Boyflux Butch Tomboi Boi Masculine-of-center Feminine-of-center Stud A/G Macha Masculine woman Feminine man Feminine Masculine Femme Demiboy Demigirl Demiflux MtF (male-to-female) FtM (female-to-male) Agender Neutrois Gender neutral Gender bending Gender questioning Gender variant Gender nonconforming Genderf\*ck Pangender Polygender Genderfluid

Queer Bigender Intergender Ambigender Genderqueer Nonbinary Female Male Woman Man Boy Girl Trans Transsexual Transsexual man/ male Transsexual woman/ female Transmasculine Transfeminine Transgender Transgender man/ male Transgender woman/ female Trans person AFAB (assigned female at birth) AMAB (assigned male at birth) MtN (male-tononbinary) FtN (female-tononbinary)

Cisgender male Cisgender female Other identities Intersex Cross-dresser Drag queen/Drag king Queer Lesbian Gay Bisexual Pansexual Asexual Gray-sexual Panromantic Aromantic Heteroflexible Homoflexible Polyamorous Kink/BDSM

Culture-specific identities

Third gender Two-spirit Hijra Kathoeys Fa'afafine Māhū

## "MY GENDER IDENTITY IS . . . "

You now have a broader understanding of the available approaches to describing gender identity. The next step is to create your own personalized description of your gender identity.

Step 1: Using the blank chart on the following page, write down your answers from the exercise What to Include in Your Description (page 227) in column A.

Step 2: Using the blank chart on the opposite page, write down your answers from the exercise Your Gender Identity Options (page 228) in column B.

Example 1:

А	В
"I identify as " "I am " Include feminine/masculine energy Include nonbinary terms How I feel about gender	Nonbinary Soft butch Queer

"I identify as nonbinary, soft butch, and queer."

"I am queer."

"I do not fit the gender binary."

Example 2:

Α	В
"I am "	Transgender
Include gender dysphoria	Female/Woman
Refer to my gender expression	MtF

"I am a transgender female with severe social and physical gender dysphoria."

"I am a feminine woman."

"I am MtF."

#### 230

A	В

Step 3: Write out the full description of your gender identity here:

As you look at your answers from the two exercises side by side, you can begin to create your own unique description of your gender identity. If you are uncertain which descriptions you connect with most, you can use the Tests and Experiments exercises as a way to gauge how you feel about each one (page 205).

*Experiment with a few different descriptions by writing them out to see how they look and feel to you.* 

## USING FILL IN THE BLANK TO DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

Use these tips as you experiment with a fill-in-the-blank approach to describing your gender identity:

- Fill in as few or as many blanks as you would like.
- Write as many terms as you want in each blank.
- Keep them all separate from one another or blend them together to form a description of your gender identity.

My internal sense of self is \_\_\_\_\_\_ My gender expression/my desired gender expression is

My physical body is
My blend of masculinity and femininity is
My sexual/romantic orientation is
Other personal identities important to me are
My gender identity is

# How to Describe Your Gender Identity to Others

Hopefully, one of the key takeaways you've gained from this guide is that your gender identity is defined by *you*. In an ideal world, that would be that. However, in the real world you might come across complexities when the time comes for you to share your description of your gender identity with others.

# WHO IS "THE REST OF THE WORLD"?

Let's take a look at the various categories "the rest of the world" can be separated into, so we can approach them one at a time.

## Loved Ones and Others Close to You

This is your *inner circle*. They are the ones with whom you have the closest relationships and depend on for certain needs. This group might include blood relatives, chosen family, friends, roommates, spouses/ partners, parents, children, mentors, pastors, etc. It can include those who are a part of your life in person as well as through online means.

## Acquaintances

These would be people who fall somewhere between being strangers and being in your inner circle. They could be friends, family members, teachers, coaches, coworkers, bosses, employees of places you frequent (restaurants, pubs, clubs, etc.) and so on. This category includes individuals you see in person as well as those online and over the phone.

## The General Public

These are people you will more than likely only interact with briefly and infrequently. It can cover a large range of people who you are around when you leave your home (i.e., strangers who you aren't personally connecting with). They could be people you are walking by on the street, sitting with on a bus, customer service and retail workers, your Uber driver, etc. This category includes individuals you see in person as well as those online and over the phone.

## Information and Resource Providers

This group includes those you encounter as you search for resources, community, insight, and ideas pertaining to your gender identity. For

232

instance, this involves having to think about what words you would type into a search engine or what terms you would use with someone who works at a local LGBTQ center.

#### Mental Health and Medical Care Providers

These are providers whom you have relationships with currently and those you will meet in future. It can include mental health counselors, primary care physicians, psychiatrists, dentists, surgeons, physical therapists, etc. Health insurance companies are included as a part of this category as well.

#### TIMING AND PACING OF SHARING WITH OTHERS

At this point, you probably have at least some idea of how you want to describe your gender identity. However, you may decide to:

- Sit with it a while to see how it feels.
- Tell certain people right away and tell others later.
- Describe it in a certain way at first to help others adjust and then change this the further along they come.
- Describe your gender identity in such a way that those around you grow and adjust with it in time.
- Change the way you describe yourself depending on the situation.

These are all possibilities that may be encountered, so we need to include the idea of timing and pacing as a factor to keep in mind when you are describing your gender identity to others.

#### YOUR LEVELS OF TOLERANCE

As you begin sharing your description of your gender identity, you will notice some people are better than others at understanding the language you are using. Lack of understanding can be due to certain factors:

- Some persons are very willing to learn but need just a bit of time, patience, and practice.
- Others may be resistant at first but, because they value their relationship with you, they will make efforts to try and understand who you are and why this is important to you.
- Others may show intense disinterest and disrespect. This can lead you to feeling emotions ranging from uncomfortable to unsafe.

As you begin to prepare to talk with others about your gender identity, it is important you know which descriptions are best, which are bearable, and which you are definitely not okay with. They can also differ from situation to situation, which we will look at more in the next exercise.

#### YOUR IDEAL DESCRIPTION + THE REST OF THE WORLD

You have worked hard in this chapter to create your description of your gender identity. Let's begin with that description as our starting point in gauging how to approach the rest of the world.

Step 1: Using the chart on the next page, write your description of your gender identity at the top in the blank given (use what feels right for now—remember, you can change this at any point).

Step 2: Bring to mind your loved ones and those closest to you. Using the space in the first column write out your answers in the following questions:

- Present-day, how do you want to describe your gender identity to them?
- How do you want them to describe your gender identity, if they address you or refer to you (with your permission) to others?
- Do you want to describe your gender identity to them a certain way at this time and then, once they have a firm understanding of this, share with them a more multilayered description of yourself?
- What words and phrases would be bearable? Would it be for a short amount of time or for an indefinite amount of time?
- Are there certain words, terms, and/or descriptions you do not want them to ever use?

Step 3: Using the same questions listed in Step 2, write out your answers for the other categories—Acquaintances, the General Public, Information and Resource Providers, and Mental Health and Medical Care Providers.

234

My Gender Identity Is:
Loved Ones
Acquaintances
The General Public
Information and Resource Providers
Mental Health and Medical Care Providers

#### CHECK-IN TIME

Take a few minutes to record how you feel now that you've finished this exercise. What did you learn about yourself? What was challenging about this exercise? What did you gain from this exercise?



#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- "Comprehensive List of LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Definitions." It's Pronounced METROsexual. Accessed December 10, 2016. http ://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2013/01/a-comprehensive-list-of-lgbtqterm-definitions/#sthash.maKBoyhi.dpbs.
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- Herbenick, Debby, PhD, and Aleta Baldwin. "What Each of Facebook's 51 New Gender Options Means." *The Daily Beast.* February 15, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/02/15/thecomplete-glossary-of-facebook-s-51-gender-options.html.
- "Some Genderqueer Identities." Gender Queeries. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://genderqueeries.tumblr.com/identities.

#### Conclusion: What Now?

Here you are, so much further than when you first began this guide. Even if nothing has changed in your external world (yet), your internal world has most certainly gone through a significant transformation.

You began this guide with certain questions in mind. Have those questions been answered? Have they changed? Have new question arisen that you were unaware you had? I'm guessing you experienced at least some, if not all, of the above.

Your answers from this leg of the journey make up the components of the Elixir you now possess: *greater self-awareness*. This increase in how well you know yourself can feel exciting, frightening, liberating, and paralyzing. You may feel like you are ready to take action, make changes in your life, and create a world that makes more sense for the person you have discovered you actually are. You may also feel overwhelmed, uncertain what to do next, and anxious about how any changes might affect your current world.

Trying to figure out "What Now?" can precipitate a whole slew of new questions that need answering. There is one step you can take right now that will prepare you for the next stage of your life. That step is to . . .

#### BREATHE

In fact, take as many moments as you need to breathe. Typically the best thing you can do after an intense journey is to rest for a period of time. Give your mind, body, and soul a chance to rest and let what you learned have a chance to sink in, merge with the rest of your being, and eventually be expressed.

#### BREAKING DOWN THE QUESTION OF "WHAT NOW?"

When you are ready to approach the question of "What Now?" you can break it down the same way you've been doing throughout the course of this guidebook.

#### Put Self-Awareness into Action

Using the paragraph below as an example, merge the self-awareness you gained through this guide with a possible action plan. Change any of the wording as needed to best fit your experience.

I am uncomfortable with the gender I was assigned at birth. I feel [this type of discomfort] in [these types of situations] and the intensity level of this discomfort is \_\_\_\_\_\_. My blend of feminine and masculine energy is \_\_\_\_\_\_. I want to describe my gender identity as

Therefore, here are some of the steps I am thinking of taking to feel more comfortable: \_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. Here is when I would like to accomplish these steps: \_\_\_\_\_\_.

The steps can be general or specific. Examples are:

- To masculinize
- To feminize
- To socially transition
- To medically transition
- To stop doing what doesn't feel "right"
- To start hormone replacement therapy
- To find a gender therapist
- To research what my options are in the area in which I live
- To change the way I dress
- To talk to my spouse about this
- To start using a different name
- To find support before I move forward with any sort of transition
- To look into my workplace's policy regarding transgender inclusivity

Above all else, you need to begin to *gain momentum*. Try not to let yourself become paralyzed by what might feel like an enormous undertaking. You can always go back and reevaluate your steps as well as the timing of them. *Start with something realistic and then do it*.

#### Learn from Others

Although your next steps should be the ones that feel right to you, you can still turn to the examples of others for ideas about what options are available to you. They can be from individuals who are transitioning,

238

professionals who work with people who need to transition, as well as advocacy and support organizations.

As you begin your research, be sure to:

- Diversify your resources to be sure you draw from a multitude of perspectives.
- Learn from the successes and failures of others. Find out what worked well and what could have been done differently.
- Be aware you might encounter outdated information—whenever you can, get a second opinion.
- Find someone you can trust as a main source, especially if you want to learn how to medically and/or socially transition (such as a gender therapist, trans advocate, trans-aware physician, etc.).

#### Additional Resources

Through the process of writing this book, I've been deeply concerned with what would happen when you reached the end of this part of your journey. I wanted to be sure I would not leave you full of self-discovery and yet not knowing what to do next. In other words, you now have your map of self-awareness but you'll still need a compass to carry with you in the coming days.

Here are tools I have created to assist you with this:

- DaraHoffmanFox.com: This is the main hub for the resources I offer the transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and gender questioning community. These include articles, videos, downloadable worksheets, podcast interviews, and announcements about any future projects I'm working on. If you want to be sure to not miss out on any new resources created for my website, you can sign up for my newsletter at darahoffmanfox.com/ newsletter.
- The Conversations with a Gender Therapist YouTube channel: Here you will find videos in which I address questions from people around the world regarding transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and gender questioning topics. This includes subjects such as how to find a gender therapist, coming out as transgender to family and friends, how to get started on hormones, and options for transitioning if you are nonbinary. The channel can be easily found by searching for "Dara Hoffman-Fox" at www. youtube.com.

• The Conversations with a Gender Therapist Facebook page: It's here that I am most active on the Internet. Throughout the day, I share articles, inspiration, and support for the thousands of individuals who follow the page. It has grown, over the years, into a community in which people can turn to one another for ideas, encouragement, and help. The page can be easily found by searching for "Conversations with a Gender Therapist" at www.facebook.com.

#### Parting Thoughts

One day, a book like this won't have to exist. Babies will be born without gender constraints immediately being placed upon them. Children will be free to express their feminine and masculine energy however they choose, and they will be encouraged to do so. As their bodies develop, youth will be able to talk openly with their parents about how their minds, hearts, and souls are telling them they ought to be developing. Teens and young adults will be at liberty to freely experience and enjoy a feeling of wholeness, with gender identity and expression included. Resources will be available and affordable for those who need medical assistance to help align their physical body with their gender identity. Constraints imposed by the current gender binary will be lifted. Nonbinary identities will continue to grow in number as people realize that gender options do indeed exist. Today's gender-specific terminology will evolve into language that celebrates the diversity and uniqueness of individuals on this planet.

In today's world, this book *does* need to exist, and it may be needed for several generations to come.

*Be encouraged*. Know that what you are doing today—what we are *all* doing today—is setting the stage for this vision to become reality.

But an evolution is necessary. Any significant cultural shift occurs only with time, persistence, and sacrifice. It will take blood, sweat, and tears—both figuratively and literally.

You don't have to become a trans activist to be a part of this change. The self-awareness you have gained through the pages of this guide is symbolic of realizations our world is experiencing as well. Every individual experience is contributing to a collective shift that is powerful enough to create significant and lasting change in this world.

There are far too many people who now hunger for the truth. The momentum is there, and there is no stopping it. Remember this if you are ever in doubt as to why you are on this journey, who is with you on it, and what you are here for in this time and place in history.

Take your courage in hand. You are not alone. Your story is meaningful and must be told.

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#### Contributors

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of the 2015 Lambda Literary Transgender Nonfiction Nominee Manning Up: Transsexual Men on Finding Brotherhood, Family & Themselves, coauthor of "Transgender Veterans Are Inadequately Understood by Health Care Providers" (Military Medicine, 2014), and is featured in the 2014 award-winning illustrated documentary Zanderology. Zander's website can be found at zanderkeig.net.

# HOW TO TALK TO QUEER KIDS

Julie Weckstein, LCSW Department of Clinical Social Services University of CA, Davis Medical Center

### Terminology

LGBTQQI Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning Queer Intersex

### Family Acceptance Project Research

- Caitlyn Ryan, 2009
- When families reject youth-
  - Higher rates of suicide
  - Higher rates of serious depression
  - Higher rates of substance abuse
  - Higher rates of STIs and HIV
  - Higher rates of unprotected sex
    - (Ryan C, Huebner D, Diaz R, Sanches J; Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults; Pediatrics 2009)



 African-American
 Heterosexuals

White LGB /

 Latino Heterosexuals

13%

31%

21%

## Imagery Exercise



### CASE EXAMPLE, "Sara"

18 year old female
African American
Sickle Cell Disease
"Dating a girl"
Home-schooled

# Guess What Sara is Feeling?



Isolated/ Alone
Different/ Marginalized
Depressed
Suicide Attempts

### Case Example – "John"

- 15yo white male.
- Found after anoxic brain injury in shower.
- □ "dating a dude".
- Only talks to his boyfriend.
- Lives with single mother, no siblings.

# Guess What John is Feeling?

### John

- Alone/ Isolated
- Sad
- Depressed
- Afraid to tell mother for fear of rejection
- Shower incident suicide?

### The Clinician's Role

Assist in self-acceptance
Make a LGBT safe environment
Open and honest dialogue
Ask non-judgmental questions
Respect confidentiality
Be prepared with resources and referrals

### The Client Interview

- Take history as conversation, not checklist.
- Be sensitive, but not reactive.
- Always interview youth alone, even if with parent first.
- Chief complaint may not be reason for visit.
  - "Do you have any other problems, have any questions, or want to talk about anything else while you are here? Anything bothering you?"

### The Client Interview

#### Language

- They may never actually tell you/ or "come out".
- Let them use their own language.
- Their language may not match their behavior.
- They often reject labels.
- They embrace fluidity/ bisexuality/ pansexuality/ Gender Queer
- May use "woman-centered" or "men-loving".
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.

### The Client Interview

Language
Cultural Considerations
"Two-Spirited" Native American
"Hijras" Transgender, East Indian
"Bakla" Filipino or "Third Gender"

# The Client Interview - with a teenager



What could I have done better?



### Happy and Gay

- "Hana", 16yo.
- First coming out to teacher at age 12, +
- Came out in stages to her mom, +
- Dr. experience, +
- School bullying- teacher experience +
- □ Identifies as "gay".
- □ Started GSA at her high school.

### GOAL = HAPPY AND GAY



# THE QUEER & TRANSGENDER RESILIENCE WORKBOOK

Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression

ANNELIESE SINGH, PHD, LPC Foreword by DIANE EHRENSAFT, PHD "In these times, where queer and trans people are continually the targets of violence, discrimination, and archaic public accommodation policies, it is hopeful and necessary that we focus on power and resilience. *The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook* is a useful and refreshing guide to the possibilities of restoration and transformation for queer and transgender people."

-Holiday Simmons, MSW, social justice advocate, facilitator, public speaker, and healer

"We each have an opportunity to explore ourselves profoundly as we evolve in our lives as queer and trans people, and this workbook provides unique and engaging guidance. Enjoy exploring your resilient self!"

—Danielle Castro, MA, MFT, director of research for the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health at the University of California, San Francisco

## THE QUEER & TRANSGENDER RESILIENCE WORKBOOK

Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression

### ANNELIESE SINGH, PHD, LPC

New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering psychological, financial, legal, or other professional services. If expert assistance or counseling is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

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For Lenny Zenith, Jeanine Grimes, Cherie Schwab, the city of New Orleans, and the country of India—you all taught me everything I needed to know about being resilient and embracing the queer and trans parts of me I was taught by society to hide.

For my beloved, Lauren Lukkarila—each step with you is a sacred unfolding that not only makes me a better person but also helps me be more of who I truly am. I love you with all of me!

For the queer and trans community of Atlanta—may we all continue to manifest the liberation movements rooted in beloved community, equity, and justice.

For all the queer and trans liberation movements around the world—our lives and histories are ancient and beautiful. May we remember our true and deepest liberation within ourselves, and with one another, more and more.

### Contents

	Foreword by Diane Ehrensaft	vii
	Introduction: Why Resilience Is Important for Queer and Trans People	1
1	Getting Real: Defining Your LGBTQ Self in a World That Demands Conformity	7
2	You Are More Than Your Gender and Sexual Orientation	29
3	Further Identifying Negative Messages	53
4	Knowing Your Self-Worth	71
5	Standing Up for Yourself	93
6	Affirming and Enjoying Your Body	109
7	Building Relationships and Creating Community	125
8	Getting Support and Knowing Your Resources	141
9	Getting Inspired	165
10	Making Change and Giving Back	177
11	Growing and Thriving	191
	Acknowledgments	205
	Resources	207
	References	209

## **Foreword** by Diane Ehrensaft

It is afternoon, June 23, 2017. With great pleasure, I am sitting at my computer in Oakland, California, writing the foreword to *The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook*. This day also marks the start of the 45th annual San Francisco Pride celebration, opening with the Trans March later today. And what is the theme of this year's Trans March? "Celebrating Resilience with Love and Resistance"—a title chosen, I'm speculating, without ever having seen Anneliese Singh's inspiring workbook, given that it is not yet in print. My point: resilience is in the air, having been discovered by so many of us as the crux of health, well-being, and transcendence for the LGBTQ community. For so many years, in trying to make a more equitable and accepting world, we have focused on teaching tolerance. Now it is time to teach resilience—the inner strength and centered sense of self and community that is never a given but rather a communal accomplishment.

Allow me to go back in time for a moment. First let me situate myself. I am a cisgender straight woman, pronouns she/her/hers, a dyed-in-the-wool feminist of the 1960s, a mother of a grown-up gay son (once a gender expansive little boy), and the director of mental health of the Child and Adolescent Gender Center. So now let's visit 1967. I was a senior in college and graduating from the honors psych program at University of Michigan. Our faculty advisor called a meeting of all the women in the program. He sat us all down and advised us not to apply to graduate school because we would only take up men's spaces and later drop out to get married and have babies. He showed us a graph of dropout rates of female compared to male graduate students to prove his point. We were stunned, but not one of us stormed out or stormed at him in the face of his egregious sexist macroaggression. Instead, our revenge was to go on to get PhDs—every single one of us. In a way, we exercised our resilience through action, but not in a way that would stop that same faculty advisor from delivering the same outrageous message to the next cohort of women in the honors psych program. If only we'd had resilience building similar to what Singh so expertly offers to the LGBTQ community in the workbook you are about to embark on, it could have been better.

LGBTQ resilience—what's it all about? It's about coming out to yourself and then coming out to others, on your own timeline. It's about recognizing the evolution of gender and sexuality across your lifetime—who you are today may change over time, and that's something to stand up for. It's about finding a positive mirror and using it—a reflection, from allies and loved ones, that who you are is authentic, expansive, and to be celebrated, rather than wrong, diminished, and to be rejected. It's about being mindful of the intersectionality in people's lives and making sure that we don't repeat experiences like what Anneliese Singh reported from her own childhood: "As a South Asian, multiracial, Sikh, queer, genderqueer femme...I struggled with my own resilience growing up. Messages abounded that there was something wrong with me, or that I didn't fit in—and unfortunately, there was no one around to tell me those things were not true and that my resilience to these experiences was important." It's about recognizing that if someone wants to know your gender or sexuality, it is not for them to say but for you to tell, or choose not to tell.

As you progress through the workbook, you will discover the important difference between homophobia and heterosexism, between transphobia and transnegativity, and between phobias, which are based on fear, and the "-ivities" and "-isms" that reflect bad actions. Building resilience requires boots on the ground to confront the bad actions that happen in everyday life. Ideally, breakdown of the phobias will organically follow.

I was trained psychoanalytically, and one of the biggest takeaways was that we all have conscious and unconscious layers, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality. It is no secret that psychoanalysis has not always been a friend to the LGBTQ community, but we can use the tools to our own benefit. Anneliese Singh implicitly does, seamlessly using the workbook to bring the unconscious to the light of day so it can be reworked into a more positive and empowered sense of self. It doesn't take being psychoanalyzed; rather, it takes setting aside time for reflection, metabolizing, and transcending. And that is building resilience.

To strengthen resilience is to enhance your own sense of agency. To fuel that sense of agency is to hope—to hope for yourself, to hope for a better future for everyone. As the workbook guides us to realize, it takes a village—yourself, your intimate others, the larger group around you. It is no longer Dale Evans crooning, "Have faith, hope, and charity, that's the way to live successfully" asking, "How do I know?" in her 1950s hit song, "The Bible Tells Me So." Now it's agency, hope, and resilience—and how do we know? Our LGBTQ community tells us so.

In my own work with gender diverse children and their families, I have conjured up the concepts of gender angels and gender ghosts. Gender angels are the internal messages that allow us to accept, support, and facilitate the growth of our youth in all their rainbows of gender iterations. Gender ghosts are the inner voices that whisper bad messages about people who dare to transgress gender norms or seem gender "different." Our task: to identify those messages and voices and promote victory of our gender angels over our gender ghosts. With *The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook*, Anneliese Singh steps in to show us how to do this, not only with gender, but also with every facet of LGBTQ angels and ghosts. Just by holding this workbook in your hands you are already taking a big step toward shooing away the ghosts to make room for the angels. Now it is time to grab your pen and get to work.

## Introduction Why Resilience Is Important for Queer and Trans People

This book is all about how you can be resilient, grow, and thrive if you are queer and trans. Whether you are just getting to know who you are as an LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer) person or whether you have been out to yourself and others for a long time—or somewhere in the middle—this book is designed to help you explore different aspects of who you are and what is important to you. Because queer and trans people can experience a range of stress, from stereotypes and misunderstandings to hate crimes and violence, it is critical that they understand resilience. In this book, I use "queer," "trans," and "LGBTQ" interchangeably as umbrella terms to capture those of us who are in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer community. And, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, these terms can be woefully inadequate—and can also evolve pretty rapidly. So as you read this book, make sure you think and use the words that best describe *your* gender and sexual orientation identities.

### What Is Resilience?

So, if resilience is so important, what is it? Resilience has been called the "ordinary magic" that you can use to bounce back from hard times (Masten, 2015). The best thing about resilience is that when you know how to tap into it, you can have an unlimited supply to draw from to navigate everyday challenges. Think of your own resilience as:

- Natural
- Something you can develop
- A set of skills you use to cope with adversity
- Developed intrapersonally (within you) and interpersonally (with others)

- Composed of strategies and processes over time
- Multiplied, the more you develop it
- Connected to thriving in the future

Over a decade of research has talked about the range of "minority stress" that queer and trans people experience—from being called names or feeling like you don't fit in to being kicked out of your home or being fired from a job (Meyer, 2003; 2015). This type of stress is incremental and insidious, adding up over time. When unchecked, minority stress can lead to hiding who you are and anticipating that others will hurt or judge you in some way. Even worse, you can internalize experiences of LGBTQ discrimination and anti-LGBTQ social messages, tricking you into believing that you are less worthy or valuable than straight and cisgender people.

Resilience helps you cope through stressful times, which is why resilience is so important. When you challenge internalized negative messages about being LGBTQ, embrace who you are, and remove obstacles from your life, your resilience multiplies and can help you live a more fulfilling and meaningful life. This book draws from resilience research with queer and trans people, making this information accessible and practical to apply in your daily life. It is full of activities—called *resilience practices*—that you can use to explore the unique resilience you have related to your gender and sexual orientation identities, as well as how to navigate life when faced with discrimination.

### **Opportunities to Grow Resilience**

Because resilience is really a collection of coping strategies, you can think of acquiring resilience as a process, not just a onetime event. Let's say you hear someone call you a bad name or make fun of you for being queer or trans. The first time, you may be so shocked you don't say anything. You go home and replay the event over and over in your mind, wishing you had said something. This is not quite resilience. Rather, you risk beating yourself up and internalizing shame for other people's discriminatory acts.

Let's say the next time something like this occurs, you talk it over with an LGBTQ ally someone who really supports you as an LGBTQ person—and you both role-play ways you can hold on to your self-worth in these types of situations. Bingo! That is resilience. As a result, the next time you hear that same person or someone else say anti-LGBTQ things to you, you do something different—like feeling proud of your LGBTQ identity and standing up for yourself. Double bingo! That is all resilience too. So resilience can involve the things you feel and do as an individual to take care of yourself *(intrapersonal* resilience) when bad things happen, and it can involve reaching out to supportive people as sources of strength *(interpersonal* resilience). Resilience develops over time, so you have many opportunities to develop resilience. You can think about resilience as the intrapersonal and interpersonal sources of strength you can draw on to get through those tough times and adapt to change. There is also the resilience you can develop from being part of a collective group who share identities, values, or some other commonality *(community* resilience), such as being part of a community of trans people of color. The greater your awareness of these sources, the more readily you can remember to use them to bounce back to your regular self.

### Resilience Strategies and Skills for Queer and Trans People

Just as I am using "queer," "trans," and "LGBTQ" as umbrella terms for many identities that potentially fall somewhere within them, you can think about resilience as an umbrella term as well for the toolbox of knowledge and strategies crucial to helping you get through hard times as a queer or trans person. In this book, I discuss ten resilience strategies you can develop and grow to increase your overall resilience and well-being. At the core of your own resilience as an LGBTQ person is your ability to define your gender identity and sexual orientation for yourself. I talk about this core resilience strategy in Chapter 1 (*Getting Real: Defining Your LGBTQ Self in a World That Demands Conformity*). In subsequent chapters, you learn how to develop the ten components of this core resilience:

- You Are More Than Your Gender and Sexual Orientation (Chapter 2)—Learn to identify what other identities shape your resilience as queer or trans.
- *Further Identifying Negative Messages* (Chapter 3)—Pinpoint the specific messages you have learned about your sexual orientation, gender, and other important identities (such as race/ethnicity, social class, disability).
- *Knowing Your Self-Worth* (Chapter 4)—Identify how to learn your self-worth and grow your self-esteem.
- Standing Up for Yourself (Chapter 5)—Learn how to speak up for yourself as an LGBTQ person.
- Affirming and Enjoying Your Body (Chapter 6)—Explore how you feel about your body and how to affirm your physical self.

- Building Relationships and Creating Community (Chapter 7)—Develop skills in standing up for yourself and being assertive.
- Getting Support and Knowing Your Resources (Chapter 8)—Learn what helps you be resilient and how to get your needs met.
- *Getting Inspired* (Chapter 9)—Reflect on how feeling hopeful can grow resilience and how to be inspired and learn new and different things about yourself.
- Making Change and Giving Back (Chapter 10)—Think about how your resilience is related to helping others and getting involved in positive social change.
- Growing and Thriving (Chapter 11)—Set resilience goals for practicing self-love, selfgrowth, and self-reflection to thrive in your life as an LGBTQ person.



These eleven resilience strategies build upon one another and multiply the more you develop them. The Queer and Trans Resilience Wheel encompasses the dynamic and evolving nature of these resilience strategies. The core resilience in the wheel is how you define your own LGBTQ self. The starting and ending points of the resilience wheel are flexible: you can jump to any "spoke" at any point and work to further develop that element of your resilience.

Each chapter in this book corresponds to one of these spokes, exploring that resilience strategy in more depth. Therefore, as you move through each chapter, you are developing a facet of your resilience as described on a spoke of the resilience wheel, building on your previous learning and strengthening your overall resilience.

With each chapter's resilience practices you can explore and assess your current levels of resilience in order to identify next steps you want to take to grow your resilience as an LGBTQ person. I encourage you to be as real with yourself as possible in these resilience practices, because these practices are designed specifically for your own exploration. You are worth it! You may choose to share some of what you are learning about yourself and your resilience as you go (like with a supportive friend, family member, or counselor), but the choice is yours. As you get to the end of each chapter, a resilience wrap-up summarizes the chapter's major learning points related to your resilience. It is a time to pause and review your learning. You can also return to read these sections if you decide to go back and review a certain aspect of resilience.

I wrote this workbook because I have spent the last two decades researching queer and trans resilience. As a South Asian, multiracial, Sikh, queer, genderqueer femme (I will talk about some of these words in the next few chapters), I struggled with my own resilience as I was growing up. Messages abounded that there was something wrong with me, or that I didn't fit in—and unfortunately, there was no one around to tell me those things were not true and that my resilience to these experiences was important. I wrote this workbook because, whether through my research findings or by learning things in my personal life, I have found a big bonus in becoming more resilient to discrimination: the more you believe in your value as an LGBTQ person, the more empowered and happy you become! And that is what the world actually needs more of—more happy, empowered, liberated, and affirmed queer and trans people who know they are valuable and loved and are treated with respect and dignity. You are an important part of that world! So now let's get started, in Chapter 1, exploring your resilience related to your own sexual orientation and gender identities.

#### CHAPTER 1

## **Getting Real** Defining Your LGBTQ Self in a World That Demands Conformity

This chapter is an opportunity to take some time to reflect on how much you have learned about being queer and trans from other people, and then sifting through some of those messages to learn more about your own gender and sexual orientation identities. Research suggests that a large part of queer and trans resilience boils down to being able to define these identities for yourself (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014). Let's explore!

### Labels Are for Cereal Boxes: Learning More about Your Sexual Orientation

During his time as lead singer of the band R.E.M., Michael Stipe was constantly asked about his sexual orientation, as people were quite fascinated with him and curious about what he might say. A setting of boundaries with others about his personal experience of his sexuality: "My feeling is that labels are for canned food. I am what I am—and I know what I am."

And truly, there are a tremendous number of labels you can use to describe your sexual orientation and gender identities. Some of these labels, like "gay" and "lesbian," have been around for a long time. Some of these labels have been reclaimed as terms of empowerment, like "queer" and even "fag." Some of these labels may be projected onto you by cisgender and straight people—or even people in the LGBTQ community—and can be frustrating, limiting, or even downright disrespectful. You may have also heard people complain about the changing language the LGBTQ community uses: "What?! Another term I need to know? I can't keep up with the alphabet soup!"

It is perfectly fine to have a lot of feelings about labels—or terms—and to explore them, claim them, challenge them, or implode them. In the introduction, I explained why I use "queer" and "trans" as umbrella terms—just as the term "LGBTQ" can encompass many gender and sexual orientation identities. It may seem weird that all of these terms are lumped together, because there are many differences between them. For instance, the term "sexual orientation" refers to the attractions you have to other people. Lots of people think that sexual orientation refers only to queer folks, and you may even feel uncomfortable sometimes when people talk about your sexual orientation. News alert: straight folks have a sexual orientation too! You may not feel that great talking about your sexual orientation, because you feel singled out to talk about this one part of your identity, when straight folks don't ever have to talk about their sexual orientation, asserting that sexual attraction does not define who you are.

In addition, many folks are not aware that there are all sorts of sexual orientations that don't always seem to fit underneath the LGBTQ umbrella. Sure, words like "lesbian," "bisexual," "gay," and "queer" seem pretty straightforward. Lesbians tend to be attracted to people who identify as women, and gay people tend to be attracted to people who identify as men. Bisexual people tend to be attracted to many genders (some people do not like the term "bisexual" because it implies there are two genders; more on that in a moment). "Queer" truly is an umbrella term for all of these identities, but the key is that "queer" is a term that was previously used as an epithet and has been reclaimed to denote a politicized identity. Queer can denote attractions to one or many genders. Similarly, there are terms that refer to many attractions: "omnisexual" and "pansexual" people tend to be attracted to all genders, whereas "polysexual" people feel attracted to many genders. Contrasting to bisexuality, "monosexual" people tend to be attracted to one gender, and can be straight or queer.

But what about the term "questioning"? Many people might think this term means only that someone is confused about their sexual orientation or that it applies only to people who are just beginning to explore their sexual orientation. But if you think about it, sexual orientation can be quite fluid over the life span. Who and what you are drawn to in life can deepen, change, morph, and shift at any moment. A questioning identity is truly important, as it can also denote and recognize the very human part of you that explores your sexual orientation over your entire life span.

In other words, you can identify as queer *and* questioning. As you consider looking for ways you might not exactly fit into a sexual orientation box, let's consider sexual attraction and sexual behavior. Many people confuse these or think they mean the same thing. To clarify, your sexual attractions are how you *feel*, whereas sexual behavior is what you *do*. For some, at different times, sexual attraction and sexual behavior align—say, a gay man feels attracted to people who identify as men, and those are his sexual partners. For others or at other times, attraction and behavior don't align at all. A lesbian may be attracted to people who are women but occasionally enjoy sex with people who identify as men. Finally, we should

acknowledge people who identify as *asexual*—they tend to not want to engage in sexual behavior, and they may or may not feel strong attractions to others.

Confused? Don't be! Sexual attraction and behavior can be normal and awesome parts of who you are, and your resilience in these areas is linked to how much you let yourself explore them. Again, all of these identities are not only healthy and normal, but also integral to your resilience as you learn more and more about who you are. To explore your sexual orientation further, check out the following resilience practice.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring Your Sexual Orientation

The goal of this practice is to reflect on your sexual orientation and the term or terms you may use to describe yourself, then check off the sexual orientation identities that you feel most apply to you. These include some common terms, like "lesbian" (women who love women), "gay" (men who love men), "bisexual" (people who love more than one gender), "queer" (people who may fit into one of the previous categories, but who are reclaiming a previous epithet as a positive term; also used as an umbrella term), and "questioning" (people who are exploring their sexual orientation). There are some terms that may seem newer to you as well, such as "asexual" (people who do not experience sexual attraction and/or who have romantic relationships only), "monosexual" (people who experience attractions to one gender only; this can refer to straight or queer people), "omnisexual" or "pansexual" ("omni" and "pan" mean "all," so these are people who can experience love with all genders), "polysexual" ("poly" means "many," so these are people who experience love with many genders), and "same gender loving" (a phrase emerging from African American communities, indicating racial/ethnic and sexual orientation pride). (Note: This is just a partial list of the most commonly used terms.) It's OK to check more than one identity. And if you feel that none of the terms resonates with you, you get to be creative and make up your own terms (like "queerly straight") and define them, filling in the blanks.

□ Asexual	□ Pansexual
□ Bisexual	Polysexual
□ Gay	□ Queer
□ Lesbian	□ Questioning
□ Monosexual	□ Same-gender loving
Omnisexual	

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

What was it like for you to complete this exercise? Was there one term that clearly feels good to use to sum up your sexual orientation? Or did you check several terms? You may have learned some new terms that feel good to use to describe your sexual orientation, or the terms offered may have been sorely insufficient and using your own self-generated descriptors feels more true to you. Regardless, naming things is important, and when it comes to sexual orientation pride, using the terms that feel best to you increases your resilience.

Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life, but define yourself.

-Harvey Fierstein, White, Jewish, gay actor

### "I Am My Own Gender": Taking a Closer Look at Your Gender Journey

Next, let's talk about gender. Society gets really hung up on gender. Right from the moment you are born, people applaud: "Yay, it's a boy!" or "Yay, it's a girl!" No one says, "Yay, it's a baby!" And so the gender training begins right from birth. You are taught the things you are supposed to do because you were assigned a certain sex (usually male or female, even though there are way more than just two!) at birth, and you are supposed to behave according to your assigned gender identity as boy or girl and man or woman. Within this sex and gender binary, there is little wiggle room. It's a shame, because many people believe there are as many gender identities as there are all the humans who have ever existed on the earth—essentially, that your own gender identity and how you express that gender is unique to yourself in the world.

However, when you step outside of those assigned-sex and gender boxes, then you get criticized, slammed, or simply encouraged to get back into line with your sex and gender assignment. These experiences can negatively influence how you see yourself and come to know your gender identity. The resilience you have developed to deal with these challenges, in addition to the resilience you can continue to cultivate in managing these experiences, really matters. It is as important for you to identify your gender identity as it is to choose the language *you* want to use to describe your sexual orientation identity. This journey of exploration can lead you through many emotions as well. In many ways, the emotions that come up as you begin to explore your gender identity make sense, as gender training can be very intense at all stages of life, and especially at earlier ages.

When I talk about exploring gender identity, let's be clear: I am not talking about only trans people doing this. Sure, things can get quite intense when you are trans, especially when you are exploring your gender while having to navigate anti-trans messages. And it is important for *everyone* to look deeply into their gender to see what identities, internalized beliefs, and social messages are there, as these can enhance or take away from your resilience. Again, your resilience increases the most when you have the space and supports you need to explore what your gender is, and when you are able to define your gender for yourself.

Part of your gender journey can include not only being able to define your own gender identities for yourself, but also having others value and respect those identities. Cisgender people are those who tend to agree with the sex they were assigned at birth and the gender identity that society says goes along with that sex. For instance, a cisgender man is someone whose assigned sex is male and whose gender identity is male, whereas a trans person may have an assigned sex that she does not agree with, such as a trans woman who was assigned male at birth by society but who identifies as a woman. Some trans people engage in a social transition, in which they want different names or pronouns to be used when referring to them; other trans people also want a medical transition, in which they access different medical interventions like hormones and surgery.

Under the trans umbrella there are also many gender identities, and many of these can range over the life span. For instance, some folks have adopted the term "genderqueer" to express that their gender is neutral, changing, or many genders at once or at different times. Genderqueer people may want some medical interventions, or none at all. Some people feel really strongly about identifying as a transsexual person, as they have typically engaged in some medical interventions—but not necessarily. Culture shapes the use of language as well. For instance, people of color began using terms such as "masculine of center" to designate their gender identity, falling somewhere on the trans spectrum. On the other hand, there are many trans people who want people to call them a man or woman and really do not feel strongly about a "trans" identity.

Although gender identity is different from sexual orientation, there is some overlap. Gender is also pretty fluid throughout one's life. Sure, you may see yourself with a fairly constant gender identity, but you may notice little changes and tweaks over time in terms of your gender expression, gender roles, gender attitudes, and gender beliefs. You may internally feel more "feminine" in terms of your gender identity, but you may feel drawn to express your gender in a more "masculine" manner. I put these words in quotes, as they are very binary and can be insufficient to truly describe the actual range of gender identities and gender expressions. On the other hand, some parts of your gender may be more affirmed by society—say, if you were assigned a male sex at birth and express your gender in a "masculine" way by wearing suits and ties at work, but you actually feel more like *yourself* when you go to work in clothes considered more "feminine." Over the course of my life, I have moved from a more androgynous gender expression (meaning staying away from the gender binary of gender expression) to a more feminine gender expression (like wearing dresses) as my gender identity has become more nonbinary and genderqueer. So really, "genderqueer femme" sums up my gender identity and gender expression perfectly for me.

You can see that gender identity and gender expression can be fluid. Just as with your sexual orientation, you may have many terms that are meaningful to you, or just one term, or no terms. Among the gender identities I'll be mentioning, there may be some terms you recognize that refer to people who were assigned a sex at birth that aligns with the gender they are (cisgender). The rest of the terms refer to people who were assigned a sex at birth with which they do not agree, in terms of their gender (trans and transgender are common "umbrella" terms for this community). Some trans people experience a binary gender—like "man," "woman," or "MTF" (male-to-female), "FTM" (female-to-male), and "transsexual." These last three terms can also indicate trans people who want to access medical services as part of their gender identity and expression, such as hormones and surgery.

There are other terms that specifically denote a rejection of the gender binary and embrace gender fluidity, such as "genderqueer," "nonbinary," "genderfluid," "genderblender," "gender neutral," "gender nonconforming," and "gender variant." "Bigender" also refers to people who experience a collection of multiple genders within their gender identity, "pangender" refers to people who experience all genders within themselves, and "polygender" refers to experiencing many genders. "Two-spirit" refers to trans people who have indigenous, Native American, and/ or First Nations racial/ethnic backgrounds. Some terms specifically denote gender expression, such as "boi," which can be used by cisgender or trans people to describe a more masculine gender expression. "Crossdresser" refers to a person who expresses gender in a way that does not traditionally fit in with social conceptions of the gender binary. "Transmasculine" and "transfeminine" have emerged as terms to move away from some of the gender binary under the trans umbrella to denote gender expression. You can use the next resilience practice to further reflect on your own gender related to these terms.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring Your Gender

The goal of this resilience practice is to explore your own gender identity and gender expression and identify the words that make you feel good. Check off the words that fit who you see yourself as being. If none seems to fit, create and write your own in the blanks!

Bigender	Genderqueer
Boi	Male-to-female (MTF)
Cisgender	Pangender
Crossdresser	Polygender
Female-to-male (FTM)	Trans
Gender neutral	Transfeminine
Gender nonconforming	Transgender
Gender variant	Transmasculine
Genderblender	Transsexual
Genderfluid	Two-spirit

Being able to name your own sexual orientation with words that fit your own identity contributes to resilience, and the same applies to your gender identity and gender expression. No one gets to tell you how you identify your gender—that is up to you. And the way you may identify your gender can be fluid and changeable. As you read through the list and checked off words, you may have seen one clear word or phrase that fit you. Or you may have selected several. Or maybe none of the words fit, and you created your own words. Notice which words make you feel empowered—that is what affirming your gender identity and increasing your resilience is all about. [There is] wonderful news: news that gendered options can continue to explode, that the chefs in the kitchen of gender are creating new and imaginative specials every day. That we, all of us, are the chefs. Hi. Have a whisk.

—S. Bear Bergman, White, Jewish storyteller and gender jammer

# Sharing about Your Gender and Sexual Orientation with Others

You may wear your gender and sexual orientation identities right on your sleeve—loudly and proudly communicating who you are to others. Some folks are open to hearing questions about their identities and enjoy talking about these parts of themselves. For others, these identities are way more private; they like to keep these parts of themselves to themselves. Still others might feel they are constantly intruded upon by other people because of how people perceive their sexual orientation and gender identities, and these intrusions—even if out of good intent and simple curiosity—feel like disrespectful, chronic, and draining experiences that can sap your resilience.

In addition, depending on other cultural identities you may have (I will talk more about these identities in Chapter 2), you may feel differently about communicating with others depending on the place or setting in which you are asked. For instance, you may feel open to talking about your identity in LGBTQ spaces, but less comfortable talking about these parts of you at work or in school. In addition to your feelings changing based on where you are and the people around you, how you communicate to others about your queer and trans identities can change over time. For example, I feel pretty open about my queer identity as a person of color with my family now, but when I first came out as a South Asian, multiracial person, I did not want to talk about these parts of my identities with my family. I was in the beginning of exploring these parts of myself, and it did not feel good to be pressed by them to define myself.

Essentially, fluidity applies not just to how you explore and experience your queer and trans identities. Deciding how you want—or don't want—to express your identities can be fluid and shifting as well. The thing is, having what's called an "elevator speech" about who you really are can be really helpful for when you *want* to communicate to others. Elevator speeches are short blurbs explaining ideas or concepts—basically, what you could communicate to someone else in an elevator in the time it takes to travel from the ground floor to the top floor of a building. My elevator speech about my identities goes like this (you will notice I have multiple identities):

I love being queer, South Asian, multiracial, and nonbinary. Being queer means I have attractions to many genders. "Queer" is an empowering term for me, because it connects me to a vibrant community of fellow queer and trans folks who are working for justice and liberation of all people.

You will notice that your elevator speech can change over time, but it is a good thing to check in with, as it can help you set boundaries and expectations of how you want to be treated. Explore your own elevator speech in the next resilience practice.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Bring Your Elevator Speech to Life!

Try writing your own elevator speech here, and notice which parts feel easy to write about and which feel more difficult. You might want to write about your sexual orientation *and* gender identities, and/or add some other important parts of who you are (like a young person, person with a disability, or working-class background):

Did the words come to you easily? How did it feel to write your elevator speech? Was it easy, rolling right off your tongue? Or did it feel more challenging to get started and communicate?

The key with your elevator speech is to stay connected with who you know yourself to be, and to value who you are so you can communicate that to other people.

Essentially, you want to let folks know how you expect to be treated when you get asked questions, especially when dealing with cisgender and straight folks who may not have ever thought about *their own* sexual orientation and gender identities. Here are some examples of what you might say when you feel empowered and good about sharing your identities with someone else:

- I would love to share about what my [insert your awesome identities here] means to me. [Insert your elevator speech.]
- I am just beginning to explore my [insert your awesome identities], and appreciate your support in asking me about these.
- Sure—happy to share about my [insert your awesome identities]. I would love to hear what your identities mean to you as well.

Of course, there are the times it feels a little weird to get asked certain questions. You will recognize these instances, as your gut will start sounding a mini-alarm and call for you to consider your boundaries of what is comfortable and not comfortable to share. Therefore, it is good to be prepared to communicate to others the boundaries you have about what is OK for them to ask you, as well as what is not OK. In these situations, take time to check in with your feelings and then communicate them to others; for example:

- I hear you asking about my [insert your awesome identities], but please know it's OK to ask \_\_\_\_\_\_ and it's not OK to ask \_\_\_\_\_\_.
- When I hear you asking about my [insert your awesome identities], although I trust your good intentions, I feel uncomfortable talking about this with you because
- I don't feel comfortable answering that/those questions. Let's talk about something else.

Notice that the last example is perfectly fine to share. "No" is a word, a full sentence, and a perfectly awesome response with boundaries. Remember, *you* get to decide what feels good to share and not share. The next resilience practice (which you can download in worksheet form from http://www.newharbinger.com/39461) helps you think about how you can set boundaries with others who might not respect your identities.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Setting Boundaries about Your Identities

The goal of this resilience practice is to explore how you can set boundaries about your own identities with others. Sometimes you experience situations in which you cannot assume someone's good intentions when they ask questions about your identities. For instance, you might feel bullied or harassed, which can really decrease your resilience. You may have experienced so much oppression—or you may have been so conditioned to not stand up for your-self as a queer or trans person—that it is difficult to notice when you feel uncomfortable with

something someone has said to you about your identities. Your gut is like your personal alarm system, signaling you when something may be wrong and you need to pay attention. Here are a few statements you can make in these situations—possible boundary-setting conversations for when your alarm system goes off.

- It is not OK for you to ask me that question. Please do not do that again.
- You used a wrong name and incorrect pronouns to refer to me. I expect you to use my correct name and pronouns.
- You assumed I had a man as a partner, and that is not OK to do.
- Being [insert your awesome identities] is important to me, and I expect you to treat me with respect in that regard.

Take time to think of an instance when you've experienced overt negativity and discrimination related to your gender and sexual orientation identities, when you needed to establish boundaries. Recall where this happened, or the person this has happened with, and remember how you felt. Now think of possible responses to protect yourself and your resilience. Write down a few boundary-setting conversations you could have with that person or in that situation:

How did it feel to write about boundary setting? Was it easy, challenging, or somewhere in between? No matter how it was for you, it is so important to practice these boundary-setting conversations in advance so they come naturally when the situation arises. With more practice and attention to your identities boundaries, your gut will then sound a louder alarm to take action because you are *paying attention* and tuned in to yourself. As I've said, some LGBTQ people and people of various diverse backgrounds and identities experience such consistent and repeated discrimination that they get used to hearing people say such things to them; they become numb to it, or even just laugh it off—"They don't really mean what they said."

It definitely is not fun to have to prepare elevator speeches for these situations. However, the more you practice them, the better you get at it. You feel more empowered—and your resilience increases. Often, you are just living your life when these microaggressions and macroaggressions happen. They can hit you out of the blue and take you from having a fabulous day to feeling despair and hopelessness. In these difficult situations, it is key to not just bounce back from a difficult experience, pushing it behind you. You want to be prepared for the next one. The next resilience practice helps you explore the specific tough situations in which you have needed to be resilient as a queer or trans person.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Understanding Adversity and Resilience as an LGBTQ Person

The goal of this resilience practice is to reflect on some of the hard things in life—adversity that you have had to go through as a queer or trans person and to understand what resilience looks like in your own life. Think back: What is the most recent really hard thing you've gone through as an LGBTQ person? Did family members or friends reject you? Did you feel confused about your gender or sexual orientation? What else did you experience (or are you currently experiencing) as an LGBTQ person that is hard? Write briefly about those experiences:

What you just wrote describes the adversity you have had to bounce back from, showing your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Now think about what helped you get through that hard time and get back to feeling like your usual self again. Was it something you believed about yourself or a person? Describe what helped you here:

18

It may have been painful to write about adversity and tough times as a queer or trans person. Or you may have felt some distance from the experience because it was a long time ago. For now, just notice what you felt in writing about the hard times. Next, reflect on what it was like to write about your resilience in the face of that adversity. Did you feel proud of yourself? Did you feel impressed? Is the situation a current one that is ongoing and still difficult to be resilient to as an LGBTQ person? Again, notice how you feel about starting to understand your own resilience as an LGBTQ person and what actions might express that resilience. When these everyday challenges confront you, especially when no one is around to stand up for you, remember that as a queer and trans person you are worthy of respect, value, support, and love.

### Remembering Your Value: Unearthing Internalized Heterosexism and Transnegativity

A big challenge to your resilience can really come down to the thoughts, messages, and beliefs in your head that you have internalized from the outside world. This process of internalizing not-so-great ideas about your sexual orientation and gender identities is variously referred to as "internalized oppression," "internalized heterosexism," and "internalized transnegativity." Sometimes you will hear the terms "internalized homophobia," "internalized transphobia," "internalized biphobia," and so on. But if you think about it, when people think, do, or say bad things about your gender and sexual orientation identities, it is discrimination—not fear and it is important to identify it as discrimination. Sure, someone may be super oppressive toward us and experience some fear of us, but their oppression is more accurately identified as discrimination. I am using these terms—"heterosexism" and "transnegativity"—intentionally to call out what is *actually* going on in these instances.

Building resilience to internalized oppression entails identifying those messages—and sometimes these can be buried so deep inside of us that we do not even realize we have these negative beliefs. Again, your internalized negative beliefs can shift and change over different contexts and over your life span. Clearly, the more space these negative thoughts take up in your mind, the less room you have to explore who you are and to value your unique identities.

To get a visual of this process, picture your mind as a cup. The more internalized oppression there is in this cup, the less room you have for the positive beliefs, knowledge, and resilience you need to deal with the adversity that might come your way. You want to fill up your cup with lots of good and true thoughts about being LGBTQ to crowd out the more negative messages when they are imposed on you, because then there is simply no room for those messages to take up space in your mind. Before you begin probing your mind to identify those internalized beliefs, let's think about all of the things you love and cherish about your sexual orientation and gender identities. Starting with the positives can be a first step to identify more and more things that are good about queer and trans people. I asked Jamie Roberts, a White queer trans woman, what she loved the most about herself; here's what she said about her identities:

I love being queer and trans because I get to see the world and the people in it in a way I could never have if I were not. Because I had to love my whole self in order to survive and it challenged me to be a better, stronger human being with more empathy and will. Because I have freedom from the constricting confines of conventional gender expression and sexuality. Because I made friends and found family who see me in my entirety and would not abandon me to any difficulty. Because I understand now what is real love.

—Jamie Roberts, White, trans woman, filmmaker and attorney

Jamie's self-description can not only take up space in her mind, filling up her cup, but also be a source of strength for her to come back to when she hears or experiences ideas to the contrary. Complete the next resilience practice to explore how you appreciate your own gender and sexual orientation identities.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Affirming Your Gender and Sexual Orientation

The goal of this exercise is to affirm your own gender and sexual orientation. Take a moment to think about your own gender and sexual orientation identities. What would you say you appreciate about yours? You may have a lot to say—that's great! Keep writing! If you are struggling to get clear on what you like about your identities, that is OK too. Try writing a few words or bullet points, rather than full sentences. No pressure. Sometimes it can help to step outside of yourself. Then you can see things that are amazing about you that you do not even acknowledge. Think about what the people you trust would say. And if there are no people in your life right now whom you trust with your sexual orientation and gender identities, imagine you are your own supportive and awesome parent. From that perspective, what might you say?

Now take a deep breath. How cool is it to spend a little time highlighting what is good and unique about you? Take in those positive messages—and then work on *believing* those messages. (That is really what this entire book is about: the journey to accepting and loving who you are.) And—news flash!—these are the types of messages that queer and trans people *should* be hearing and internalizing from the world. Until that world full of trans- and queer-affirming messages is ever-present, it is your job to make sure you create that supportive world inside of your mind. It's kind of like your mind has been "colonized" with these negative beliefs, and your resilience is very connected to showing them the door and externalizing these beliefs.

Being gay is natural. Hating gay is a lifestyle choice.

—John Fugelsang, White, straight, cigender Christian activist

### Challenging Myths and Stereotypes about Being Queer and Trans

Now that you have a good start on remembering your goodness, let's do another dig, to identify those negative beliefs. In these practices, you are shining a light into the hidden corners of your mind—challenging yourself to look beyond what you assume you know and feel about being queer and trans. To do this, it is helpful to consider all of the myths and stereotypes about being queer and trans that get promoted in the media and bandied about in communities and even within your family. Explore some of these anti-LGBTQ messages in the following resilience practice.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Have You Heard about Being LGBTQ?

The goal of this resilience practice is to identify what you have heard in the way of messages, myths, and just stuff that does not help you feel good about your gender and sexual orientation— and then to challenge those messages. In the following list, you may recognize some messages

you've heard from people you know, or that you've been exposed to over time. Check off the ones that you apply to your life. These messages can vary based on the geographical region you were raised in and the religion or spiritual practices you were raised with, among many other circumstances. Sometimes you can experience a mixture of messages that may *seem* positive but actually are negative—or vice versa. Feel free to use the blanks at the end of the list to fill in messages you may have heard about queer and trans people that you know are just not right:

- □ LGBTQ people are choosing to be LGBTQ, and they can choose not to be.
- $\Box$  There are only two genders.
- □ Being straight or cisgender is normal, and LGBTQ people are abnormal.
- □ People are LGBTQ because they were taught to be.
- □ LGBTQ are that way because they were sexually abused.
- □ Queer and trans people should not be parents because they will harm their children.
- □ Being LGBTQ is a sin and against God.
- □ LGBTQ people cannot develop healthy relationships.
- □ LGBTQ people will always be unhappy.
- □ LGBTQ people are promiscuous.
- □ LGBTQ people are confused and can be cured—they just have not met the right person yet.
- □ LGBTQ people can't know who they are unless they have had sex with the right person.
- LGBTQ issues should not be taught in schools, as children will learn to be LGBTQ.
- □ Being LGBTQ means choosing a hard life.
- □ If you are around an LGBTQ person, they will be interested in having sex with you.
- □ Being LGBTQ is just a phase.

Whew! These myths and stereotypes are hard to read, one right after the other, or to write down from your own experience or internalized beliefs. It's normal to feel some anger, frustration, or fear come up as you read through these. Maybe you checked several you have heard, just a few, or none at all. The point of this exercise is to start examining the messages you have heard and identifying how much space those myths and stereotypes take up in your mind. If you did check a few—or many—of these myths and stereotypes, take some time to write here how those social messages affected you in terms of how you think and feel about your gender and sexual orientation identities:

Just like the elevator speech you explored earlier in the chapter—for which you thought about what you might say in a situation where you feel disrespected, challenged, or judged about your identities—it is important to name the social messages you receive about your sexual orientation and gender identities and then to challenge how you might have internalized those messages. When you hear something about LGBTQ people in general—or about your own identities—you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this something that is *actually* true?
- Is this something I want to believe about myself and/or my community?
- Does this message make me feel better about myself?

These three questions can quickly help you distinguish the messages that are good to take in and nourishing to your resilience from those intended to make you doubt yourself, feel bad, or believe things about yourself that are just not true.

Just to give you an idea of the influences these types of messages can have, and how you can internalize them, read through the list in the next resilience practice (which is also available as a worksheet at http://www.newharbinger.com/39461).

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Internalizing LGBTQ-Affirming Messages

There are many wonderful messages you should have been hearing in relation to being queer and trans. Pay attention to how you feel when you read this list, and place a checkmark next to the messages you have heard and/or believe to be true. At the end of the list, there is space for you to write any further messages from the world you would have loved to hear about LGBTQ communities that are specific to you (like your multiple identities, cultural background, or anything else that is awesome about you as a queer or trans person!).

- □ Being LGBTQ is wonderful.
- □ There are multiple gender and sexual orientation identities—not just a few labels to be assigned by society.
- □ LGBTQ people come to know who they are in many different ways.
- □ LGBTQ people deserve respect, love, and understanding from their families, friends, and communities.
- □ LGBTQ people can create wonderful families of choice.
- □ LGBTQ people can be great parents if they choose to raise children.
- □ LGBTQ people have existed around the world across time and continents.
- □ LGBTQ people can have wonderful and healthy relationships.
- □ Being free to be yourself as an LGBTQ person can make you very happy.
- □ LGBTQ people deserve to have fulfilling and respectful sexual relationships if that is important to them.
- □ Because LGBTQ people have to deal with challenges related to being LGBTQ, they often have strengths and resilience that help them in other areas of their lives.
- □ The important contributions of LGBTQ people and communities should be taught in schools.
- □ LGBTQ people can be deeply religious and/or spiritual with no conflict between their identities, if that is important to them.
- □ LGBTQ people can explore their sexual orientation and gender identities over their lifetimes.

As you completed this resilience practice, you may have felt encouraged because you checked many LGBTQ-affirming messages. Or you may have felt discouraged because you had few checkmarks. However many you checked, keep working on the positive messages you still want to internalize to grow your resilience. Let any feeling of discouragement motivate you to get more support to grow your resilience (you will read more about this in Chapter 8). Just reading this workbook and completing the resilience practices will help you identify new positive messages that support your resilience—and even remind you of the many awesome and unique gifts you bring to the world as a queer or trans person.

In trans women's eyes, I see a wisdom that can only come from having to fight for your right to be recognized as female, a raw strength that only comes from unabashedly asserting your right to be feminine in an inhospitable world.

—Julia Serano, White, trans, feminist woman and author

Doesn't the list in the preceding resilience practice feel better to read than the first one? Social messages and stereotypes are like the air you breathe. You may not notice how polluted the air feels, but LGBTQ people definitely deserve to breathe fresh, healthy air! This means that you can increase your resilience by realizing that the social air you breathe is unclean, but you can put on a resilience mask through which clean oxygen starts flowing because you take control of the messages you have internalized and counter these messages with the real truth about LGBTQ people—that being an LGBTQ person is a beautiful and wonderful thing! Do the next resilience practice to rate the areas in which your resilience is strong—and the areas you need to work on some more.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Shaping the Messages in Your Mind about Being LGBTQ

In this resilience practice, you explore internalized messages about being LGBTQ and how affirming those messages are. Read the following statements that explore how LGBTQ-affirming the messages are that you receive from yourself, others, and the world. For each, write an X or checkmark in the column indicating whether you agree, somewhat agree, or disagree with the statement.

Beliefs about Yourself:	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	
Being LGBTQ is a good thing.				
I am lucky to be LGBTQ.				
I know a lot about myself as an LGBTQ person.				
Messages from Others:				
I deserve to have people in my life who support me as an LGBTQ person.				
I have people in my life who support me as an LGBTQ person.				
I have a community of LGBTQ people I reach out to in challenging times.				
Messages from the World:				
I am exposed to messages in the world that LGBTQ people are a valued and important part of society.				
I am aware of the organizations that are advocating for the rights of LGBTQ people.				
I am connected with media outlets (local, national, international) that are affirming of LGBTQ people.				
Totals:				

Add up the responses in each column. Do you mainly agree, somewhat agree, or disagree with the messages you have internalized related to yourself, others, and the world?

Now think about what you might need to do to internalize more positive messages about yourself as an LGBTQ person, such as reading LGBTQ-affirming literature such as books and blogs, connecting with LGBTQ community, getting support from cisgender and straight people who are LGBTQ-affirming, or meeting with a counselor. In the following space, write about what you need in order to internalize more LGBTQ-affirming messages (which naturally will increase your resilience).

Let's be gentle with ourselves and each other and fierce as we fight oppression.

—Dean Spade, trans activist, founder of Sylvia Rivera Law Review Project

### Resilience Wrap-Up

Queer and trans people can and should define their own gender and sexual orientation identities. These processes not only are a large part of your resilience but also help fill your mind with positive messages about who you are, so the negative messages cannot take up as much space. You can strengthen your resilience as an LGBTQ person through:

- Exploring your gender and sexual orientation identities
- Valuing your gender and sexual orientation identities
- Defining your gender and sexual orientation identities for yourself
- Identifying internalized negative messages about being LGBTQ and where they come from—places like family, school, and general society

- Challenging internalized negative messages through valuing your unique identities as an LGBTQ person
- Connecting with people who are affirming of LGBTQ people and support you in expressing your true self

Now that you have reflected further on your gender and sexual orientation identities, in Chapter 2 you will learn how these identities intersect with so many other parts of yourself like race/ethnicity, class, disability—and with your experiences of resilience related to the intersections of these multiple identities.

### **CHAPTER 2**

# You Are More Than Your Gender and Sexual Orientation

The wild thing about exploring your gender and sexual orientation and defining these identities for yourself is that as you continue to explore these two identities, you realize you are so much more than just these two! There are innumerable combinations, as I shared about my own identities in the introduction. You may identify as a:

- Latinx woman
- Gay man with a physical disability
- Bisexual man with a mental health disability
- Transmasculine person from a working-class background
- Bisexual, bigender, immigrant person raised in poverty, but now middle class
- Lesbian, Muslim, cisgender woman from an upper-class background, who is a U.S. citizen

You can see in just this short list that there are many possible combinations, and these are just a *few* of the huge number of various social identities. In this chapter, you'll build on the resilience that you identified related to being queer and/or trans, as you begin to explore what other social identities shape your resilience.

I remember how being young and black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell.

—Audre Lorde, Black lesbian poet, writer, and activist

# Intersections of Identity: Appreciating All of Who You Are

When you come out as an LGBTQ person, your resilience is challenged, as this typically entails struggling in a heteronormative and gender-binary world to embrace who you are. Similar processes happen with other parts of your identity, like your race or ethnicity, class background, disability, and religion or spirituality, among others. Ideally, all of your social identities would help you be more resilient throughout your life, so you feel good about yourself and have more freedom to pursue your hopes and dreams. But because there are conflicting messages about these social identities, you may be vulnerable to receiving messages that are not supportive of these important parts of who you are.

Socialization is the process people experience growing up of the cultural norms, rules, and guidelines of society. Just as you receive certain messages about being LGBTQ, you absorb a variety of messages about your other social identities. Sometimes these social identities are projected onto you from a very early age. For example, I am a multiracial person who grew up with a White mother and a father from northern India. I have said that I am a "racial Rorschach," because people project onto me what they think I am (and sometimes need me to be) in that moment. The tough thing about this is that I grew up in a distinctly Indian home, with smells of curry, Indian clothing, and the Sikh religion. At home I had a good deal of room and encouragement from my parents to explore my Indian and Sikh identities. However, when I left the house, the messages I received were that I was "half-Indian" and "half-White." My father wore a turban as a part of his religion, so I often was bullied about our family's being "terrorists." There were times I felt resilient to this bullying, but other times I did not feel much resilience at all.

My family was very educated, but also very poor. So, there was no money for new clothes, sports activities, new cars, travel, or other symbols of middle-class life. I received a good deal of bullying and messages from the world that I "wasn't right" in the eyes of the world. In addition, growing up in the Deep South of the United States, I received many messages about how I should act as a person who was assigned female at birth and raised as a girl. These messages included: be quiet, don't speak up too much, and look "pretty." These messages came from both the Western society where I grew up (New Orleans) *and* the Indian immigrant community, which meant I was receiving a *lot* of messages about being a girl.

You have your identity when you find out, not what you can keep your mind on, but what you can't keep your mind off.

-A. R. Ammons, White, cisgender man, poet

I share these messages from my childhood to help you start thinking about the messages you have learned related to your social identities. These messages can be positive, negative, or a combination. A good way to start developing your resilience in this regard is to think about how much you know about your identities besides your LGBTQ identity. The next resilience practice will get you started.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Much Do I Know about My Own Identities?

The aim of this resilience practice is to start to name some of your various social identities. Sexual orientation and gender identity are included on this list so you can get a sense of how much you know about these two identities in relation to some of your other social identities. Write to the left side of the statement whether you "agree" (A), "somewhat agree" (SA), or "disagree" (D) that you know about this identity for you:

\_\_\_\_\_Ability (emotional, physical, developmental)\_\_\_\_\_Age\_\_\_\_\_Geographic region\_\_\_\_\_Gender\_\_\_\_\_National origin\_\_\_\_\_Race or ethnicity\_\_\_\_\_Religion or spirituality, agnosticism, atheism\_\_\_\_\_Sexual orientation\_\_\_\_\_Social class

What did you notice as you went through this list of your social identities? Did you agree that you had more knowledge about some of your identities and not others? Are sexual orientation and gender identity something you know more or less about related to your other identities? Keep in mind the identities you know the least about, because you will be exploring more about each of these identities (except for gender and sexual orientation, which you explored in Chapter 1). Even for the social identities that you agreed you know a good deal about, there may be still more to learn in relation to increasing your resilience.

Before we continue exploring these social identities, let's talk about two words that can really influence your resilience: privilege and oppression. "Privilege" refers to your unearned advantages related to an identity. For instance, society grants cisgender privilege and straight privilege to people who are cisgender or straight. Cisgender people don't have to think about whether or not it is safe to use a bathroom, and straight people don't have to worry about being "out" or not to friends and family. When you have privilege you can be quite oblivious to it, as you have not done anything to earn it.

"Oppression" is the absence of these unearned advantages and the discrimination and denial of prejudice that people who have an oppressed identity experience. In each of the social identity categories listed earlier, there is a group that has privilege and a group that does not have privilege. The next resilience practice will help you explore some of your social identities related to privilege and oppression.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying Your Unique Social Identity Privilege and Oppression Matrix

The goal of this resilience practice is to help you start seeing the intersections of your social identities with your experience of privilege and oppression. Circle or highlight the social identities in the table that apply to you, so you can visualize your individual mix of privilege and oppression social identities.

Social Identity	Privilege Status	Oppression Status
Ability Status	Able-bodied	Developmental/physical/ mental disability
Age	Adults	Children, adolescents, older adults
Education Level	Access to higher ed	High school/GED/ noncompletion
Geographic Region	Urban, suburban	Rural
Gender	Men, cisgender	Women, trans
National Origin	Western Europe, U.S. citizen	Asian, African, Eastern European, Latina/o, Middle Eastern

Race/Ethnicity	White	People of Color
Religion/Spirituality	Judeo-Christian	All others: Muslim, Eastern, Jewish, Pagan, secular, and so on
Sexual Orientation	Straight	LGBTQ, polyamorous
Social Class	Middle to upper class	Poverty to working class

As you circled your various identities, you may have noticed you have more social identities of privilege than you realized. These privileges may protect or buffer you from oppression as a queer and/or trans person, so your resilience may not be as challenged in these areas. For instance, a White, queer, cisgender man can be protected from some of the oppressive experiences associated with disability and sexual orientation, based on his racial/ethnic and gender privilege. On the other hand, you may notice you have many social identities associated with oppression. These identities can make you more vulnerable to decreased resilience, especially if you have many social identities associated with oppression. For example, a Latinx, lesbian, trans woman may experience oppression related to her sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity.

Consider Will Mellman's description of his multiple identities:

For those who don't know anything more than what they see, I am a White man—a husband, father, brother, and son. Being a White man means, regardless of intent, I have access to certain spaces, privileges, and resources that others do not. However, unlike many White men, I recognize the privileges bestowed upon me, because I am also trans and Jewish. As a trans man, I am uniquely situated to understand the role of gender in a social and cultural context, having lived for twenty years as female. Being Jewish, which I claim as a cultural and ethnic identity, has also provided me a unique perspective from which to understand rejection and persecution simply based on one's beliefs. Both of these identities are easily concealable, regardless of my desires to outwardly claim membership in these groups. As a result, when I walk down the street, go to the supermarket, shop in a store, or even go to the doctor, I am a White man. This fact is not lost on me and, on a daily basis, shapes who I am.

-Will Mellman, White, Jewish, trans man, father

The good news is that the more you learn about your social identities—whether related to privilege or to oppression—the more you can build your resilience. You can use your unearned privilege to help yourself and other people who were not granted those privileges. You can be mindful that multiple oppressions can also translate into multiple sources of resilience you can use to challenge and overcome adversity.

Remember that the list of examples in the preceding resilience practice is not comprehensive; other identities, such as your primary language spoken and your immigration status, also come into play and influence your experience of resilience. In addition, as you explore describing these social identities, the examples' placement under the privilege or oppression heading may or may not relate to the experience you had. Let's use geographic region, for instance. You could be Native American and be raised in an urban environment, where there would not necessarily be more access to a Native American community who could support you. As with all things human, these concepts and ideas of privilege and oppression, so simply categorized in a list, are actually very complex and intersectional for your life and your resilience. As you proceed, keep in mind that you are considering these categories individually for now; later you will weave them all back together by the end of the chapter. Keep in mind you are also going in alphabetical order, and not in terms of the importance these identities may have for you.

People with impairments are disabled by their environments; or, to put it differently, impairments aren't disabling; social and architectural barriers are.

—Alison Kafer, professor of queer studies, author of *Feminist*, *Queer*, *Crip* 

### Ability (Emotional, Physical, Developmental)

Ability refers to the presence or absence of emotional, physical, and/or developmental disabilities in a person's life. Many people think of the word "disability" and just think of functional impairment disabilities, like cerebral palsy, deafness, or visual impairment.

When we think about ability, it is important to consider cognitive and mental health disabilities too, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar, and dyslexia. Many of these disabilities are unnoticed and disrespected because they are not easily "seen" by society. This is very oppressive to people with cognitive or mental health disabilities, because they may feel they need to prove that they have the disability. Or they may feel they must hide or conceal this part of their identity because of internalized social stigma common with cognitive or mental health challenges. Queer and trans people, even if they do not have a disability, are often thrown into the disability category without their permission. For instance, mental health disabilities—and the way they are defined—can be really problematic, because as of this writing "gender dysphoria" is listed as a mental health disability in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. I do not like this categorization at all. What is not included in designations of disabilities is also problematic. Think about it. There is no "cisgenderism disorder," "heterosexism disorder," "racism disorder," or "classism disorder," among others, that could warrant a diagnosis! In our society, people tend to diagnose individual people, and not cultures of oppression, and that can be a challenge to our resilience, for sure.

In addition to physical, cognitive, and mental health disabilities, there are also developmental disabilities, which might include challenges with learning, reading, and communicating information. Somewhat like people with mental health challenges, those with developmental disabilities may have to advocate for themselves—or have strong advocates in their life—to help them receive needed services. No matter where you may be on the disability spectrum, you can use your own self-generated words to describe yourself, and these should be respected. For example, some disability rights activists describe themselves as "disabled" because they want their disabled identity to be a valued part of how they are seen in society. Other people dislike the word because they believe it implies that something has been done to them (an ability has been taken from them), rather than their disability being an important part of their identity.

Regardless, you get to decide. Just remember, if you do not *presently* have a physical, cognitive, or mental health disability, you may want to be mindful that this is likely a temporary state. As you age, your body changes as well, and you can move into a disability status. You can think of ability status as fluid, as you may have a permanent or temporary disability. If you do not have a present disability, you can still think about your ability identity and consider how to be an ally to people living with disabilities. Complete the next resilience practice to explore your thinking about your own ability and disability.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring What Disability and Ability Mean

In this resilience practice, reflect on how disability and ability relate to your own identity. Read the following questions, take some time to think about your answers, and then write them down.

- Do you have a mental, cognitive, or physical health disability now?
- Do you know people with mental, cognitive, or physical health disabilities within your family, friends group, school, work, or other settings?

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

• Have you heard messages that being queer or trans is a mental, cognitive, or physical health disability?

How did it feel to respond to these questions? If you do not currently have a mental, cognitive, or physical health disability, did you think about how that might change in the future with age or other circumstances? As you considered others you know who may have a mental, cognitive, or physical health disability, what emotions came up? People who live with disabilities of all sorts constantly are given social messages that they are not normal and experience people feeling sorry for them. Consider what messages this sends to people living with disabilities, and the resilience they must develop to withstand these messages and develop a sense of pride and strength. Think about how society has also denigrated queer and/or trans identities as disabilities. For many people, it is really important to align their identities, both queer *and* disabled, because society responds to both with similar negative messages.

I don't mind being different. Different is special! I think what matters most is what a person is like inside. And inside, I am happy. I am having fun. I am proud!

-Jazz Jennings, multiracial trans youth activist

### Age

Most of us don't think of our age as a social identity, because it is a constant, slowly evolving fact of life. And as with disability, you may underestimate the possibility of experiencing oppression related to your age. But people do experience oppression based on their age, particularly early and late in the life span.

"Adultism" is a term for the oppression that children (up to age eleven) and adolescents and young adults (ages twelve to twenty-five) often experience from adults who have power and control over their lives. Adultism shapes young people's self-image and their ability to freely express their gender and sexual orientation identities. Children who experience gender nonconformity may have adults in their lives who forbid them to play with certain toys or wear certain clothes; adolescents who are awakening to their queer identities may feel it's not safe to share their identities with their family because they are afraid of getting kicked out of their home during high school or losing needed support during college. Adolescence is a very difficult time for many queer and trans people, as many feel they do not have the community, resources, or information they need to affirm their identities, and they may experience bullying, depression, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse.

Older folks (fifty and older) can also experience oppression related to their age, commonly termed "ageism." This ageism can include being viewed by society as having less to contribute, being seen as less attractive, and feeling invisible in a world that places great value on being or staying young. Older people who have spent their lives being out as a queer or trans person can develop disabilities as they age and need to rely on families that may not have been supportive of their being LGBTQ. Older people may also need assisted living and hospice care, where their pronouns and names are not respected—or where they feel like they need to conceal their LGBTQ identities for fear of being discriminated against, harmed, or neglected. Some LGBTQ people come out later in life and may feel they have missed a lot of living openly in their queer or trans identity and want to make up for lost time.

Queer and trans adults (from twenty-six to forty-nine) can be mindful of the privilege they enjoy with regard to age and, from this privileged position, reach out and support younger and older LGBTQ people in becoming more resilient to adultism and ageism challenges. When you help others, you end up helping yourself, too, because you develop a more positive and hopeful approach to life.

In the next resilience practice, you can reflect on your current age as an LGBTQ person and create some of the messages you *should* have been receiving about your life related to ages you have gone through. Every age you move through has its mix of wonderful experiences and challenges an LGBTQ person.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What's Age Got to Do with It?

In this resilience practice, explore what it means to you to be LGBTQ and to be the age that you are.

What thoughts and feelings do you have about being the age you are as an LGBTQ person?

What age-related strengths do you have as an LGBTQ person?

What age-related challenges have you faced as an LGBTQ person?

As you were writing, did you make the connection between your resilience and the age you are now? Do you feel proud of your age? If not, what type of support do you need to feel good about your age, and how can you grow your resilience related to your age right now? Don't wait to grow your age-related resilience; claim your age and all the amazing parts of being whatever age you are.

### Geographic Region

Why bring up geography when talking about queer and trans resilience? Well, your geographic location can really shape your access to LGBTQ-affirming resources and community. If you are raised in rural areas, you might have had a distant queer or trans relative who moved away to the "big city." Suburban areas can have a lot of financial resources for schools, but may not have as many LGBTQ supports, like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or school personnel who are LGBTQ Safe Zone-trained. Urban environments can offer amazing things like a student body that's diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, immigrants, and LGBTQ students, but they often lack adequate funding for education.

Essentially, where you were raised can really influence how much resilience you have in relation to multiple social identities. Plus, you can be raised in one place that is anti-LGBTQ,

and move to another to find more LGBTQ-affirming communities. Or you can be raised in a place that is LGBTQ-affirming, but then your job is relocated to a geographic region that is LGBTQ-negative. Some people must move every year for family, work, or to relieve financial stress, like families experiencing job loss and moving in with grandparents who may or may not understand LGBTQ identities.

To me, the interesting thing about geographic region is that it is often linked to what you consider *home*—whether this place was affirming of queer and trans people or not. The place we consider home can have a lot of meaning for us. You may go "home" for the holidays, then head back into an LGBTQ-negative geographic region, but the people you love and cherish still live in that home place. Where you grew up can have tremendous influence on your resilience; there could be many adversities to test your resilience, or many supportive people to help strengthen it, or a mix of both. Do the following resilience practice to explore where you were raised and what that was like for you.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Where Were You Raised?

In this resilience practice, you'll reflect on where you were raised in terms of geographic region and how that influenced your resilience as an LGBTQ person.

What specific challenges did you face as an LGBTQ person where you grew up?

What specific things nurtured your resilience as an LGBTQ person where you grew up?

Did you move around, or did you stay in the same geographic region? How did that experience affect your resilience as an LGBTQ person?

When you realized you were LGBTQ, did you have a LGBTQ community nearby or did you want to move closer to it? How did that affect your resilience?

I want to go down in history in a chapter marked miscellaneous because the writers could find no other way to categorize me In this world where classification is key I want to erase the straight lines So I can be me

---Staceyann Chin, Jamaican-born, U.S. citizen, queer, cisgender woman, poet and activist

### National Origin

No matter where you live, you have a national origin. This is somewhat related to geographic region, as it refers to the place you were born; national origin also can have a lot to do with race/ethnicity, which we'll explore next. National origin is an important social identity to consider, as LGBTQ people may be born in countries that are extremely anti-LGBTQ, or they may move to countries that are LGBTQ-affirming, in an effort to increase their resilience by being closer to queer and trans communities.

When you speak the language of the country in which you are living and appear to be a native, you may enjoy *national origin privilege*—the unearned advantages granted when people assume you "belong" in the country in which you live. Conversely, *national origin oppression* entails being discriminated against for your social identity when you appear to be from another country. You may be harassed about speaking the language with a nonnative accent or because of the way you look; you may feel you are treated as if you don't belong. The social identity of national origin may be linked in complicated ways to issues of immigration and having refugee or asylee status. In the next resilience practice you can explore these identities.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Reflecting on Your National Origin

The goal of this resilience practice is to get you thinking about your national origin. Consider the following questions and respond:

- Are you treated like you belong in the country in which you live?
- Do people think or assume you are originally from another country?
- Think about your family (however you define this family—family of choice and/or family of origin) and their national origin. How has their privilege in this regard—or their oppression—affected your identity and resilience as an LGBTQ person?

Writing about your national origin may surprise you; the messages can really vary. Certain groups of immigrants to the United States are held in high regard; other immigrant groups are held in disregard and experience tremendous oppression. National origin can vary for different generations, too. For instance, my mom's family (White, Scottish, Irish) has been in the United States for many generations; my dad (Indian) was an immigrant to this country. My mom never experienced anyone thinking she shouldn't be here or didn't belong in this country, whereas my dad was perpetually treated as a foreigner even when he had been in the country for several decades. They had quite different experiences of privilege and oppression related to their national origin.

In other words, it is a privilege to ignore the consequences of race in [the world].

-Tim Wise, White, cisgender male activist

### Race and Ethnicity

Your race or ethnicity is another complicated social identity. People make assumptions, and they'll project onto you the racial/ethnic identity they assume for you, mostly in an effort

to determine what that may mean about who you are as a person. Many people cannot hide their race/ethnicity, whereas they may be able to conceal their gender identity and sexual orientation identities. Because many of us come to know our LGBTQ identity only over time (such as experiencing attraction, expressing gender), our racial/ethnic identity—generally known to us from early childhood—can be a powerful and dominant influence.

Queer and trans people commonly hear questions like "When did you first know you were [insert LGBTQ identity]?" But because race/ethnicity is generally a more visible identity, you rarely hear a question like "When did you first know you were [insert racial/ethnic identity]?"

Because race/ethnicity is so visible, societal responses related to privilege and oppression can be quite intense. For instance, people of color experience racism and learn to anticipate racial microaggressions and macroaggressions, and then potentially shift how they think, look, feel, and communicate so they "fit in" with the dominant group—usually White folks. As people of color must contend with intergenerational experiences of racism as well, they commonly internalize negative messages about their own race/ethnicity. For instance, Asian American/Pacific Islanders might refuse to see physicians who share their own identity, preferring a White physician. Families of color may teach their children internalized racism as well, encouraging their children to meet a White norm of society and missing the opportunity to instill racial/ethnic pride, which is a major factor in resilience for both cisgender and LGBTQ people of color.

On the other side of the coin, just as people of color experience undeserved disadvantages related to race/ethnicity, White people experience unearned advantages. Sure, White people may not be explicitly racist or have participated in racist acts, but covert and embedded racism can sneak into your language and communication, in addition to the places you work, go to school, and play. Thus over time a White, Western "norm" or "majority" way of thinking has been established in our institutions, whereby certain racial groups are valued if they hew to that White norm, and those who do not are judged as resistant, lazy, or not good enough in comparison.

White privilege has its costs, however—not only to society as a whole, but also to White people themselves. Because of the legacy and history of racism, White people may not develop relationships with people of color and be exposed to the dynamic beauty of world cultures in all its variety.

Many people feel intensely uncomfortable talking about privilege and oppression in general, so they avoid it. When it comes to race/ethnicity, the silence can be even more pronounced—and when the issues are unavoidable, the debate can become quite heated. But the thing is, your resilience as a queer or trans person is imperatively linked to knowing yourself—*all* of your identities—and that includes your race/ethnicity. Research has shown that queer and trans people of color can be more resilient when they have *not only LGBTQ pride, but also racial/ethnic pride* (Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Singh, 2013). For LGBTQ people of

color, exploring and digging out of ways they have internalized negative beliefs about themselves related to racism is crucial to strengthening their resilience. White LGBTQ people can be allies and stand up against all forms of racism by realizing that although they may not have created the pervasive structural racism in society, they can certainly be part of the solution by listening to and valuing the perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ people of color. In the next resilience practice, you'll further explore your race/ethnicity as an LGBTQ person.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Reflecting on Your Racial/Ethnic Identity as an LGBTQ Person

The goal of this resilience practice is to get you thinking about your racial/ethnic identity and your associated privilege or oppression experiences. Consider the following questions, then respond:

- Is your race/ethnicity related more to privilege, oppression, or a mix?
- Do you feel a sense of pride in your race/ethnicity? Why or why not?
- What kinds of messages have you received from your predominant racial/ethnic group about being LGBTQ?
- Overall, what does it mean to you to be an LGBTQ person of [insert your own racial/ ethnic heritage or cultural background]?

As you completed this resilience practice, was it easy to write about your race/ethnicity, or challenging? Did you easily feel a sense of racial/ethnic pride, or did experiences of privilege or oppression related to your race/ethnicity make this more complicated? Were the messages you've received from your racial/ethnic group about your LGBTQ identity more positive, negative, some of both, or neutral? How do your answers to these questions influence how you feel about your overall race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation identities? These questions are important, because, again, you increase your resilience when you can experience a sense

of pride in your identities and also understand the complicated intersections of privilege and oppression that come with them.

Catholic guilt. I was raised Catholic. And somehow that whole idea, or that internal chatter, all started to talk to me, and say, "This is what happens. This is God's way of punishing you. You transitioned. You're an abomination. This is God's way of telling you He doesn't approve." It was very hard to bear.

> —Cecilia Chung, Chinese American, HIV/AIDS and trans advocate

### Religion, Spirituality, Agnosticism, and Atheism

Religion and spirituality can be vital social identities for LGBTQ people, as religious and spiritual values can be sources of coping and resilience. For those for whom religion/spirituality are important, it can also feel like a double-edged sword because they can experience so much discrimination based on their gender and sexual orientation identities. Queer and trans people have been rejected from churches, temples, gurdwaras, mosques, and other places of worship just because they are LGBTQ. On the other hand, there are religious/spiritual institutions that openly welcome and support LGBTQ people and become communities they can rely on during important events in life, like marriage, raising children, and death. The supportive religious/spiritual communities can even take the place of families who have rejected LGBTQ people, so it can be very healing for LGBTQ people to also be religious/spiritual.

At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge and support atheist and agnostic identities. These social identities are no less legitimate or valuable than other religious/spiritual identities, and often those who identify as atheist and agnostic feel minimized and invisible in society that is typically quite Judeo-Christian in its institutions and values. Atheist and agnostic people may have a coming-out process similar to what they went through with their LGBTQ identity. They may feel they have to choose carefully whom they disclose their identity to and consider the consequences for their relationships with family, friends, school settings, and workplaces when they come out. It is a different type of "closet"; however, this social rejection can multiply the experiences of isolation for LGBTQ atheist and agnostic people.

As is also true of the general population, there are LGBTQ people who practice less-wellknown and less-accepted religions and spiritual traditions. These people may feel their resilience is challenged in this area by social stigma and ignorance. For instance, LGBTQ Muslims experience Islamophobia, hearing stereotypes and judgments that their religion is "terrorist," when Islam is a very peaceful religion. People who identify as Pagan or Wiccan may also feel their religious/spiritual practices are stereotyped as "evil." Therefore, under the religious/ spiritual umbrella of social identity there is also privilege and oppression to become aware of and consider in terms of your own resilience as an LGBTQ person. The following resilience practice will help you further explore your religious/spiritual social identity.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Do You Have a Religious/Spiritual Identity?

The goal of this resilience practice is for you to discover whether a religious/spiritual identity is important to you and your resilience as an LGBTQ person. You may or may not have thought a lot about your religious/spiritual social identity. Or you may have an entirely different belief system or identity as agnostic or atheist. Answering the following questions should get you thinking about this part of you and its importance.

- Were you raised within a religious/spiritual community?
- Were you forced to go to a place of worship while growing up?
- Have you heard religious/spiritual people say anti-LGBTQ messages?
- Have you internalized anti-LGBTQ messages from religious/spiritual people?
- Have you heard positive messages about being LGBTQ and religious/spiritual?
- When you experience challenging times, do you engage in religious/spiritual practices?

As you read these questions, what came to mind? Write down those thoughts:

Many thoughts may have come to mind for you as an LGBTQ person. You may realize you want to explore religious/spiritual traditions more—or less. You may realize you identify as

atheist or agnostic. Whatever you realize, think about your experiences with and values of religious/spiritual traditions and how they may affect your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Remember, *you* get to decide what you do and do not believe—and those beliefs may change over time.

I was told that trans people do not have a lot of options when it comes to jobs.

-Anonymous

### Social Class

Your access to financial resources has a great influence on your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Social class, also commonly called "socioeconomic status," refers to this access to resources. We just discussed the challenge of talking about race/ethnicity and exploring and valuing this part of yourself—well, the issue of social class can feel just as slippery. You may have grown up living in government-provided housing, but your family may have worked hard to not let this lack of financial resources show. You may have grown up in a family with plenty of financial resources, but your family may have worked hard to not let that abundance show. You may have grown up in a family where everything about social class was on the table and openly discussed, or it may have been reserved for adult conversation, so as a child you never heard people talk about social class.

All LGBTQ people receive messages about social class. And like other identities, social class can be fluid and change over time. A family's financial resources commonly increase and decrease, with periods of relative abundance and scarcity. Even in a family with plenty of financial resources, an adverse event—like divorce, death, a natural disaster, or a medical emergency—can quickly drain these resources. Or it can go the other way—perhaps your family had no financial resources, then all of a sudden you were attending private schools and getting a car for graduation.

However, because social class is such a taboo subject, many of us don't have the words to talk about it. Basically, having *enough* financial resources makes you middle class, *not enough* resources means you're poor or working class, and *more than enough* resources makes you upper class. Your social class, with its level of financial resources, can either buffer you from some of the anti-LGBTQ messages in society (having a computer or smartphone gives you access to positive LGBTQ messages, groups, and media) or make you more vulnerable (like becoming homeless if you're kicked out of your home for being LGBTQ, or struggling to find employment as an LGBTQ person). In the next resilience practice, you'll reflect on your experiences of social class as an LGBTQ person.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Social Class and LGBTQ Identities

The goal of this resilience practice is for you to explore your experiences of social class over time. Consider the following questions:

- What was the predominant social class you were raised in?
- Has your social class changed over your lifetime?
- When you realized you were LGBTQ, how did your social class influence you?

What do your responses to these questions have to do with your resilience as an LGBTQ person? During times of greater social class privilege, were you able to be more protected from oppression as an LGBTQ person, such as having financial resources to seek out information or services, or being able to choose a livelihood in a more progressive and supportive work industry or georgraphic region? Or did it work the other way—where the more social class you had (like your family), the less resilient you felt as an LGBTQ person in terms of expressing your identity? How does your current social class increase or decrease your overall resilience as an LGBTQ person?

Intersectionality, a concept I first heard in the 1990s from feminist women of color, refers to experiencing crosscutting discrimination and violence on the basis of one's different marginalized identities because of underlying conditions. Success for LGBT rights has to be measured not only as compartmentalized rights on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, but in the context of the many common structures of domination that prevent equality.

> —Grace Poore, lesbian, South Asian American, Indian-born filmmaker

## Intersectionality: Further Valuing All of Who You Are

In the introduction, you learned about the importance of resilience in general and how it relates to being queer or trans; in this chapter you will explore a few discrete social identities that also influence your resilience. Although I discuss these identities separately, each of us is an *intersection* of all of these identities. At times it may feel as if some, such as gender and sexual orientation, intersect. Some of these intersections may seem to be in conflict. And some of these social identity intersections feel like they truly cannot be separated from one another. Mick Rehrig describes how he experiences the intersections of his identity related to his personal and professional life, and how these intersections help grow his resilience:

To be queer and trans and to be loved, fully, without apology or scorn; to build intentional and beloved community that witnesses and mirrors my own life, and expands its humanity in its differences (to paraphrase my partner). To work with queer and trans youth allows me to love my community, and subsequently, myself more. They help me to love, nurture, and forgive the kid I used to be, they help minimize and smash my internalized shame: my internalized oppression. They help me remember the privileges I have due to White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (to quote bell hooks) and to be of service in healing through affirmation, support, advocacy, and resistance. To continue to live, to love and allow myself to be loved, and to stand up and fight back.

—Mick Rehrig, White, trans man; parent, partner, and therapist

The next resilience practice will help you gauge your overall resilience across many of your social identities, by rating how important each is to you as a queer or trans person.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Rank Your Social Identities

The goal of this resilience practice is for you to understand how important each of your social identities is to your resilience in dealing with the challenges of being an LGBTQ person in society. Assign a ranking number to each one, with 1 to indicate the most important. You can assign the same ranking number to several identities if they seem to have equal value to you.

\_\_\_\_ Ability (emotional, physical, developmental)

\_\_\_\_\_ Age

 Geographic region
 Gender
 National origin
 Race/ethnicity
 Religion/spirituality/agnosticism/atheism
 Sexual orientation
 Social class

Now read back through your rankings. Which identities are most important to you? Which did you rank lower? What overlaps do you notice among the rankings? Were certain identities tougher to rank? How might these identities relate to your experiences of privilege and oppression? This exercise is important because there may be identities that you have yet to experience pride in that are crucial components of your resilience as an LGBTQ person. There may be experiences of privilege—like race/ethnicity or social class—that can help you combat the effects of LGBTQ oppression, and there may be experiences of oppression that increase the threats to your resilience.

When it comes to my own intersections of identity, I too have trouble knowing how to separate my gender, sexual orientation, racial/ethnic, and religious/spiritual social identities. I just *know* what it feels like to be a queer, multiracial, South Asian, Sikh, nonbinary person. When I pay attention to privilege and oppression, things start to become more clear. For example, I would further describe my identities related to privilege:

I am a queer, multiracial, South Asian, Sikh woman with class, educational, and U.S.born citizen privilege who is temporarily able-bodied.

When I then start to reflect on how my resilience is informed by the intersections of these identities, the description of my identities shifts:

I am a queer, multiracial, South Asian Sikh woman with class, educational, and U.S.born citizen privilege who is temporarily able-bodied. The pride I have as a Sikh helps me bounce back from hard times as an LGBTQ person, because my religious/spiritual values include the importance of truth, justice, and serving community. My connections with multiracial mentors and young people in my life help me remember the beauty in being of mixed racial heritage, and I am embedded with a queer and trans South Asian community with whom I can share my love of South Asian food, dance, and cultural values. My educational privilege has helped me attain more class privilege, and I use these two privileges and my U.S.-born citizen privilege to advocate for others. Advocating for others is also a part of my religious/spiritual heritage and upbringing, so all of these experiences of privilege and oppression are intersectional for me.

The following resilience practice will help you look more deeply into your intersections of identity with privilege, oppression, and overall intersectional resilience.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Your Intersectional Resilience Related to Privilege and Oppression

The aim of this resilience practice is to build on your rankings in the previous resilience practice and connect these important identity intersections to your experiences of privilege and oppression as I just shared in my example. Consider the following questions, then respond:

- What are the important intersections of your identities as an LGBTQ person?
- How do these intersections relate to privilege and oppression?
- How do these intersections make you more resilient as an LGBTQ person?

What did you notice about your intersectional resilience? Were they different from your resilience related to your single identities, like race/ethnicity, disability, and social class? How does your privilege help buffer you from discrimination as a queer or trans person—and how do identities related to oppression influence your resilience when you consider them all together?

## Resilience Wrap-Up

Queer and trans people have so many more social identities that are important to us than just being LGBTQ. Reflecting on which of these social identities are more or less important to you helps you become more resilient to challenges you face as an LGBTQ person, because you have the opportunity to develop pride and confidence in these identities, which in turn increases your resilience. Keep developing your resilience as an LGBTQ person with multiple identities through:

- Learning more about your social identities in addition to being LGBTQ
- Connecting with people (LGBTQ and cisgender) who share a social identity with you
- Exploring what you like and do not like about a social identity
- Identifying positive and negative messages you have heard about your social identities
- Considering how you might have internalized negative messages about certain social identities, and challenging these beliefs
- Realizing that a mixture of privilege and oppression experiences can influence your resilience
- Embracing the intersections of your unique LGBTQ identities with other social identities

Now that you have explored your resilience related to your multiple identities as a queer and trans person, in Chapter 3 you will delve further into identifying how you have internalized negative messages about being LGBTQ and learn how to externalize them.

#### **CHAPTER 3**

# Further Identifying Negative Messages

Resilience is all about bouncing back from adversity, and that means making sure you know what you are bouncing back *from* so you can better take care of yourself. You explored some of these adversities in previous chapters. In this chapter you'll take a internal inventory to pinpoint the specific negative messages you've been given about your sexual orientation, your gender, and other salient aspects of your identity. This deeper look can help you develop skills to name, externalize, and challenge these negative messages.

## Sources of Negative Messages

Before you think about the sources of the negative messages you've received about who you are, I encourage you to revisit the discussion of minority stress in the introduction. Part of this stress is from microaggressions—those everyday insensitive or insulting remarks that queer and trans people experience in their interpersonal relationships within their families, work-places, schools, and other community environments. These indignities may be intended or unintended, but either way, it's hard to know what to say, think, or do in response.

For example, you might be in a school or work setting and hear someone say, "That person acted *so gay*." Bisexual people may hear, "One day, you will meet the *right* person"; trans people may hear, "It must be frustrating to know you will never be a *real* woman." Because microaggressions are everyday indignities, they can happen in many different situations related to common events (such as holidays or weddings), ways of interacting (like attempts at humor or support), and daily living (for example, when taking public transportation or going to the movies). Remember that the discriminatory content in microaggressions can range from overt to covert. Here are some other examples of microagressive statements queer and trans people might hear:

#### From family:

- "Do you have to bring your partner for your visit next month?"
- "Growing up, I always thought you might turn out gay."
- "I knew I should not have let you play with dolls growing up."
- "Jill and Rasheeda can fly from New York to Idaho for the holidays, because they don't have kids."

#### From friends:

- "I am so glad you told me you are trans! You are the first trans person I know!"
- "It must be so hard to be a girl after 5:00 p.m. when your five o'clock shadow starts to show."
- "Are you sure you are not just a butch lesbian?"
- "This is my best friend who is gay."

#### From work or school colleagues:

- "It must be so hard to be gay."
- "I would never have known you were not a woman!"
- "Does being bisexual make your partner worry?"
- "If you and your partners are lesbians, who plays the role of the 'man'?"

#### From public spaces:

- "Who is the woman in your relationship?"
- "I have a friend who is just like you."
- "If you are gay, shouldn't you be in a different locker room?"
- "You must be in the wrong restroom."

As you read this sample list of microaggressive statements, notice how you feel. Were there some that were more subtle, so it was difficult to figure out why the statements or questions were discriminatory? Did you find yourself nodding your head in agreement with some of the statements and questions? Did you notice you had a more intense reaction reading the micro-aggressions in one particular category?

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying My Personal Experiences of Microaggressions

Now it's time to zero in on your personal experience. Take a moment to list some of the specific microaggressive statements you've heard.

From Family:		
Microaggression 1:	 	
Microaggression 2:		
Microaggression 3:		
Microaggression 4:		
From Friends:		
Microaggression 1:		
Microaggression 2:		
Microaggression 3:		
Microaggression 4:		

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

From Work or School Colleagues:	
Microaggression 1:	
Microaggression 2:	
Microaggression 3:	
Microaggression 4:	
From Public Spaces:	
Microaggression 1:	
Microaggression 2:	
Microaggression 3:	
Microaggression 4:	

Now check in with how you felt as you listed these personal experiences of microaggressions. Did your heart start to race? Did you begin to feel sad, fearful, or angry? Or maybe you felt happy or even proud that you know how to respond to some of the microaggressions you hear. Any and all feelings you have are valid.

# Responses to Negative Messages

Now, let's talk about the next step of becoming more resilient to microaggressions: understanding your specific responses. As an LGBTQ person, when you hear these negative messages often you can experience shock. For example, you might think, "Did they *really* just say that to me?" Then it becomes very real that it *was* said and that it was not OK for you to hear. Still, you may experience doubt and confusion, leading to self-questioning; for example:

- Did they maybe not mean what they just said?
- Am I just being a "too sensitive" lesbian right now?
- What am I doing to make it OK for them to say this to me as a gay person?
- They must be trying their best right now to use my pronouns; why should I get angry?
- How can I get them to stop saying those biphobic things to me?
- If I were better at \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank], I could probably respond to them better.
- If I say something, it is going to make it worse.
- Why does this keep happening to me? Maybe I am asking for it.

In the following resilience practice, you can identify your own examples from your experiences responding to microaggressions.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying Your Common Thoughts in Response to Microaggressions

Of course, each person's experience is different. This practice will help you zero in on your own responses. When you read the preceding examples, did other questions or thoughts that come to mind that you have experienced? Write them here:

How did it feel to gain more insight about your common internal reactions to microaggressions? Were you able to identify the self-questioning that microaggressions can provoke within you? This self-questioning makes complete sense, as the shock of experiencing a microaggression makes it hard to digest in the moment what just happened. This shock and self-questioning also stops you from responding to the person in the moment, and then you may beat yourself up afterward thinking about what you should have said. Or you may think you overreacted and that you are at fault for your feelings. Microaggressions are truly *crazy-making* experiences, because you are in fact hearing things that are not OK—and then you question yourself.

Emma Blackwell developed resilience through acknowledging the challenges she faced, and then externalizing anti-trans messages.

Being trans isn't always hard. There are such beautiful and amazing times being trans, but those times when things do seem too tough or even insurmountable, I found a few things that simply made it better for me. I often would reflect on all the times I hid my true self, and there was so much of that, and then I look at all the relief and self-happiness I have found since coming out. It's so hard to beat that sense of overwhelming personal happiness and contentment. For me, it has always been important to stand up and be counted, so I find strength in becoming more and more active and fighting for all of us. It is such an empowering experience, whether I work alone in the fight or, even better, when I join with others for the cause. We are awesome, and I find such strength in working toward a better future.

-Emma Blackwell, White, trans woman, activist

### Being Prepared to Respond to Microaggressions

It's difficult to hold people accountable for microaggressions because they are often interacting with others based on heteronormative attitudes (prioritizing straight and heterosexual people) that are unconsciously embedded into everyday life interactions, like assuming everyone is straight. Still, experiencing ongoing microaggressions and responding to them is an exhausting process. This exhaustion is real, and the hurt can be internalized and build up over time so that you become numb to experiences that should not be happening to you.

This exhaustion and numbness make it clear why it's important to be prepared to respond. Sometimes this response is external—saying or doing something so you do not walk away from the experience feeling bad about your response (or lack of response). Other times the response should be internal, reminding yourself of your worth and value as a queer or trans person. If you have ever received fire safety training, you'll know that firefighters talk a lot about emergency preparedness. Firefighters drive home these emergency preparedness messages to the point that you have internalized the important steps you should take next, such as "Stop, drop, and roll!" You can establish your own three steps to enhance your resilience to microaggressions: "Name, validate, and act!" First, you name what is happening. Second, you validate any feelings you have. Third, you decide whether an action is needed in that moment. Let's break down these three steps a little further.

### Name Microaggressions When They Happen

The first step, naming, could also be called the "I am not crazy—that *did* just happen" step. Naming means that you learn to recognize that a microaggression is happening. Often, microaggressions are so insidious that you get used to them, and you're socialized to ignore them. Naming entails acknowledging to yourself that what you heard or experienced was not in alignment with your self-worth as a queer or trans person—or worse, it was anti-LGBTQ.

Here's an example. Say you identify as a trans woman, and you date women. One day when you're at work, in a group conversation you mention that you went on a date to a movie but you alone enjoyed it, and someone says, "You should let your boyfriend choose the movie next time." Naming means that you as a queer or lesbian trans woman know that a microaggression just happened, because heteronormative assumptions about whom you would date were embedded in this person's question. This step is important because of the everyday nature of microaggressions, and it can create some of the following internal responses, depending on the microaggression:

- I just heard a microaggression.
- I just experienced a microaggression.
- I want to question myself now, but that was indeed a discriminatory remark.
- I was just treated poorly because I am queer or trans.
- That statement was anti-queer and anti-trans.
- This person would not have said this to someone who was cisgender or straight.

Naming a microaggression gives you a chance to acknowledge the situation that you are experiencing, so you can be more resilient and protect yourself.

### Validate Your Feelings

Once you have named that a microaggression has happened, the second step is to validate how you are feeling. Because microaggressions can happen quickly and catch us off guard, the previous step of naming that it happened can help you slow down and ask yourself, "How do I feel about this statement or behavior?" It is natural to have a wide range of emotional responses, from anger to sadness to fear. Numbness, as I have discussed, is also a common reaction, but it is still a feeling that gives you some information on your emotional state. Slowing down to validate your feelings acknowledges that those feelings are legitimate data that help guide your decision-making and actions. Here are some other common feelings that might come up for you within the larger categories of anger, fear, sadness, and numbness:

- Anger: frustrated, aggressive, exasperated, disgusted, enraged
- Fear: embarrassed, nervous, suspicious, frightened, terrified
- Sadness: lonely, ashamed, depressed, hurt, disappointed
- Numbness: disbelieving, withdrawn, shocked, indifferent

When you have identified the feelings you have as a result of the microaggression (naming), you can validate them; for example:

"Because I just experienced	[naming the microaggression], it
makes sense that I would feel	[validating the emotion]."

You may very well have more than one feeling come up in response to a microaggression (like feeling disappointed *and* scared), or you may have one feeling that is quickly replaced by another (like feeling angry and then feeling sad). Make sure you validate *all* of the feelings that come up for you.

### Act

After you have named the microaggression and validated your emotional response, it is time to act. Acting means that you *act* to protect yourself, so acting can entail either an internal action or an external action, or it may include both.

#### INTERNAL ACTIONS

Internal actions include possible thoughts or affirmations that reflect your value as an LGBTQ person; for example:

- Thinking, "I am valuable as a queer or trans person."
- Affirming to yourself, "I do not deserve this treatment as a queer or trans person."

• Acknowledging to yourself, "I deserve to be treated respectfully and with dignity as a queer or trans person."

#### EXTERNAL ACTIONS

An external action might include saying something to the person who committed the microaggression, such as the following.

#### Verbal Actions:

- When you said \_\_\_\_\_\_, that wasn't affirming of who I am as a queer or trans person.
- When you said \_\_\_\_\_\_, you assumed \_\_\_\_\_\_ about me as a queer or trans person.
- When you said \_\_\_\_\_\_, I felt excluded as a queer or trans person.
- When you said \_\_\_\_\_\_, I felt \_\_\_\_\_\_ as a queer or trans person.
- You may not have realized it, but when you said \_\_\_\_\_, you weren't supportive of me as a queer or trans person.
- Please don't say \_\_\_\_\_ to me again.

External action can also include engaging in a short-term or long-term protective behavior in response to the microaggression. Like verbal actions, behavioral actions can entail a variety of responses.

#### **Behavioral Actions:**

- Removing yourself from the situation
- Seeking a safe space
- Connecting with social support
- Engaging in self-care activities, such as practicing mindfulness, reading, or taking a bath
- Journaling or blogging about your experience
- Attending a support group or counseling

### Practice New Responses to Microaggressions

Developing the skills of naming, validating, and acting in response to microaggressions takes some practice. As you learned in the introduction, developing resilience is like building muscle. Working on the discrete aspects of resilience over time, with lots of practice, strengthens that muscle and gives you the strength you need to challenge oppression and embrace your self-worth. Let's read through a few case scenarios to see what the three steps of naming, validating, and acting in response to microaggressions might look like all together.

#### GENDER MICROAGGRESSION

*Scenario One.* A White trans woman, Geena, is taking the subway to work. As she enters the train and sits in the available seat, her fellow passenger says, "You look just like a woman—how long have you been on hormones?"

Naming: Geena says to herself, "That was not an OK thing to say, and I may not be safe here."

Validating: Geena acknowledges her emotions of anger and fear.

Acting: Geena reminds herself internally that her medical chart is private, and that she gets to define her own womanhood for herself. She moves to another seat on the train, and she calls her friend to share what happened.

*Scenario Two.* A Latinx, lesbian woman, Daria, is getting coffee at work. Her coworker friend from a different floor sees her for the first time in a month and exclaims, "You are looking more feminine—I like this look!"

Naming: Daria says to herself, "I just heard a microaggression."

Validating: Daria pauses to check in with her feelings, and she identifies feeling indifferent at first, but then uncomfortable with her coworker.

Acting: Daria tells her coworker, "You may not have realized it, but when you said I looked more 'feminine,' I felt uncomfortable with what you said."

#### SEXUAL ORIENTATION MICROAGGRESSION

Scenario One. A Native American, gay man, Jared, is walking into his daughter's school. Another father is picking up his child, and he says to Jared, "What are you and your wife doing for the weekend?"

**Naming:** Jared says to himself, "He probably doesn't realize it, but he just made a lot of assumptions about who I am—that is a microaggression."

Validating: Jared checks in with his feelings and notices he feels withdrawn, and doesn't feel like "making a fuss" about this father's mistake.

Acting: Jared internally tells himself, "Being a gay father is something to be proud of, and I can decide whether to address this or not with this fellow dad." Jared decides not to address the microaggression, but does speak to the principal about having an LGBTQ training at the next PTA meeting.

Scenario Two. A Filipino-American, bisexual boy, Crisanto, is a junior at his high school. His teacher asks him which girl he wants to ask to the prom.

Naming: Crisanto says to himself, "My teacher just said a microaggression, assuming I am straight."

Validating: Crisanto takes an inventory of his feelings. He feels angry.

Acting: Crisanto internally tells himself, "People do not know a lot about being bisexual. I don't have to come out to this teacher, but I can if I want to." Crisanto decides to tell his teacher, "I appreciate you asking the question, but you assumed I am straight—and that is a big assumption about people. I actually am bisexual, and right now I am dating boys—but I haven't decided whom I will bring."

As you read the case scenarios, did you notice that the people really varied in what they decided to do or not do? The naming and validating steps were consistent across the scenarios (though with varying emotions), but the acting steps resulted in different decisions. Some were motivated by safety, others by current relationships or the setting in which the microaggression occurred. Regardless of the different decision made in the acting step, each action shared the common theme of the queer or trans person deciding for themselves what was in their best interest. See the next resilience practice to further explore microaggressions.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Do Microaggressions Relate to My Life as an LGBTQ Person?

In this practice, you'll write your own case scenarios related to your gender and sexual orientation—or any other identity, such as race/ethnicity or social class—using real-life situations in which you have experienced microaggressions.

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook
Microaggression:
Naming
Naming:
Validating:
Acting:
Microaggression:
Naming:
Validating:
Acting:

Do you feel your resilience muscle growing after writing your own scenarios? The more you prepare for your responses to microaggressions and remind yourself that you get to decide what actions to take, the more the self-questioning related to these negative messages will decrease and the more your resilience muscle develops! At http://www.newharbinger.com/39461, you can download a worksheet version of this exercise to keep your resilience muscle growing.

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.

—Angela Davis, Black, cisgender, professor and activist

## Beyond Microaggressions: Externalizing Anti-LGBTQ Messages

It's important to develop skills to be prepared for microaggressions so you can move through those experiences with minimal impact on your self-esteem and self-confidence as a queer or trans person, further building your resilience. Simultaneously, you can learn to intentionally externalize negative messages you hear about yourself. Some of these messages are connected to myths about queer and trans people, such as that being queer or trans is a choice. Other negative messages have to do with a lack of knowledge, such as about queer and trans historical figures and role models (like Audre Lorde, Bayard Rustin, Christine Jorgensen, Harvey Milk) in our school textbooks and college courses. We have discussed some of these negative messages and myths in previous chapters; now we'll explore the internalization processes.

Internalized oppression refers to negative societal attitudes about a group without privilege in society that a person internalizes and starts to believe about themselves or others in their group. So, internalized oppression is comprised of these negative beliefs you have taken to heart and unintentionally made a part of your own belief system. You may be thinking this is not a problem for you: "Well, my life is not so bad. I know queer and trans people deserve to be treated well. I don't have any negative ideas about my community." But internalization is hard to avoid, given the pervasive oppressive messages and microaggressions in society. And this can be a serious threat to your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Believe me, I am tempted to think about that as well. However, anti-LGBTQ oppression is so pervasive not only as overt oppression, but also more insidiously as covert and overt acts of omission.

Here's how Lauren Lukkarila, a queer, gender-transgressive person, transformed these messages into reminders of her own unique resilience:

"You're different in a different way." Hearing these words from the mouth of an elder family member I loved dearly scared me—even as an adult. But these words also excited me on some level because they acknowledged that I had been seen—really seen—despite the lifetime I spent disciplining myself to "not show myself." My resilience as child and young person was the basic survival kind—know your enemy and be invisible to the best of your ability. I still feel that urge in me even now, but now I know people who have chosen other forms of resilience. I've seen them choose to thrive and not just survive, and I've seen that there's a community of folks—and it's bigger than I would ever have thought—that support thriving.

-Lauren Lukkarila

Even if you reach a place where you believe there is nothing wrong with being queer or trans, your quest for resilience entails asking yourself what you learned that was awesome about being queer or trans. The following resilience practice invites you to explore some of the messages you have heard as an LGBTQ person.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** LGBTQ Messages—What Have You "Heard"?

The purpose of this resilience practice is to really dig in and identify the types of LGBTQaffirming messages you have heard. Consider the following questions and explore them in the space provided:

When you were growing up, what positive messages did you hear about queer and trans people?

What positive stories did you hear from school teachers about queer and trans people?

Who were the queer and trans leaders you heard about, across race/ethnicity, gender, class, disability, and country, among other identities?

What positive messages about your sexuality did you learn in your family, school, religious/ spiritual institutions, and other community centers?

What positive messages did you hear about queer and trans people from cisgender and straight people?

While growing up, what positive queer and trans events were you exposed to or taken to?

While growing up, what sex-positive messages did you hear about queer and trans people?

It is my greatest hope and goal that eventually you will live in a society where these questions become obsolete, in the sense that queer and trans people are valued and integrated into all aspects of society and institutions of all sorts. Until that happens, it is vital that you are intentional in healing wounds related not only to overt anti-LGBTQ oppression, but also to the withholding of your queer and trans histories and positive messages of affirmation across your life span.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Have You Been Taught to Believe?

In this practice, you'll explore the negative messages you've received about being queer or trans. Write the anti-LGBTQ messages you heard growing up:

What do you notice about the anti-LGBTQ messages you learned growing up? Did you receive more overt (obvious) messages or more covert (masked, hidden, "coded") messages?

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Do You Want to Believe about Being Queer or Trans?

Now take some time to consider positive messages about being queer or trans that you wish you had heard or that you think you should have heard while growing up, and write them here:

How did it feel to list positive messages you *should* have received about being queer or trans after assembling the previous list of negative LGBTQ messages? Part of resilience is knowing not only the anti-LGBTQ messages that are bad for your mental health, but also the positive LGBTQ messages that address the gaps in your learning about being LGBTQ. Read this list of positive messages about being LGBTQ and see whether there is any overlap with the list you just made:

- LGBTQ people are important and valuable members of society.
- Queer and trans people have been positive contributors to society throughout history.
- LGBTQ people have existed on every continent and in every culture around the world. In many cultures, queer and trans people were considered sacred and participated in important cultural and spiritual rituals.
- There have been important queer and trans liberation movements across the world, as LGBTQ people have fought for their rights and against discrimination. Cisgender and straight people have supported LGBTQ people in these liberation movements.
- Queer and trans people deserve to be treated well in society.
- LGBTQ people should be treated with respect and dignity at school and work.
- Queer and trans people can be strong leaders.

- LGBTQ people can make important contributions to society.
- Queer and trans rights should be protected in society.

What differences can you see between this LGBTQ-positive list and the list you made about what you should have heard growing up about LGBTQ people? How do you feel noticing these differences?

### Internalizing Positive Messages about LGBTQ People

Now that you have explored how to move through microaggressions and embrace your dignity as a queer or trans person, and you've identified both negative and positive LGBTQ messages, let's talk about specific strategies for internalizing positive messages about queer and trans people.

You can think about this internalization as a personal reeducation. Think about it. What if you were raised by your family, school, and community to believe that the earth is flat? Wouldn't that be a sad and sorry state of affairs, to walk around believing something that is not true? Wouldn't you desperately want to tell someone who believed that the world was flat that it actually was round? Well, that is exactly what this reeducation is about—it is about making sure you know the best of your history as a queer or trans person. It is about taking a journey to learn more about the dynamic brilliance and creativity that has existed within the queer and trans community for hundreds of years, so that you can know more about yourself as a queer or trans person and how your life is a continuation of this legacy.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which [people] deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

-Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and author

There are many ways to learn about queer and trans history—including books, websites, and museum exhibits, as well as directly from those who have lived it. So where do you get started in learning about the history of your community? For instance, did you know that the "architect" of Dr. Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington (where he delivered the famous "I Have a Dream" speech) was Bayard Rustin, a gay African American man? Did you know that Rustin was also the person who introduced Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience to Dr. King? This is a crucial aspect of LGBTQ history you should have been taught in school!

Read through the Resources section at the end of this workbook to find ways to learn more about the history of your queer and trans community.

Learning about queer and trans history can help you not only learn more about the history of your people across cultural groups but also develop pride in the accomplishments of your community and knowledge about how LGBTQ people have stood up against anti-queer and anti-trans oppression over time. As you develop this pride you can also develop strong selfesteem and confidence about being LGBTQ yourself. You will explore self-esteem and pride further in Chapter 4.

## Resilience Wrap-Up

When you, as an LGBTQ person, can recognize oppression when it occurs and can identify negative and positive messages related to being LGBTQ, you can increase your resilience by knowing the steps to take after a microaggression. Knowing your queer and trans history strengthens your LGBTQ pride, as you realize you are the next generation of a vibrant and amazing community. When you need to counter negative LGBTQ messages, remember the following:

- Remember that microaggressions can occur with family and friends, as well as in public spaces.
- Take the three steps to enhance your resilience: name, validate, and act.
- Prepare for situations where you are likely to experience microaggressions by thinking through them in advance.
- Realize that *you* get to decide how you respond to microaggressions: sometimes a response is needed in the moment, other times not.
- Identify areas for healing by reflecting on what you have been taught to believe about yourself as a queer and trans person.
- Strengthen your resilience by identifying positive messages you *should* have heard growing up as an LGBTQ person.
- Get to know LGBTQ history, to contextualize your life as a queer and trans person, learn more about your community, and develop LGBTQ pride.

Being prepared and knowing how to address microaggressions increases your resilience as an LGBTQ person. In Chapter 4, you'll explore how to develop the resilience strategy of knowing your self-worth and valuing yourself.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

# **Knowing Your Self-Worth**

Because schools seldom teach LGBTQ history, much less the value of queer and trans people in society, educating yourself about your own self-worth is an important aspect of building your resilience. Self-worth refers to the degree of value and importance you place on living your life. LGBTQ people have higher rates of depression, suicidality, self-injury, substance abuse, and other mental health challenges than the general population (Institute of Medicine, 2011). Why are queer and trans people subject to these increased risks? Is it because queer and trans people are inherently more flawed than cisgender and straight people? The answer is an emphatic "No!" However, when negative messages about an LGBTQ person's self and community are so prevalent in society, these thoughts can become internalized, as discussed in Chapter 3. Then you start to believe these thoughts and subsequently feel like there is something inherently wrong with you. Although your rational mind may be able to tell you that this is simply not true, you may still *feel* this way.

Building resilience includes assessing your sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In this chapter, you will explore how much you value yourself as a queer or trans person and how you can develop a greater sense of self-worth. In doing so, you will reflect on your self-esteem as an LGBTQ person, and how you can develop assertiveness skills with others and also challenge the voice of your inner critic—which all of us have.

Over the years, I've learned to embrace both my love of lipstick and my facial hair, my affinity for sequins and my broad shoulders.

-Anonymous

### **Understanding Self-Esteem**

When people talk about self-worth, self-esteem is a large part of that construct. Self-worth refers to how much you value yourself, whereas self-esteem can be a practical reflection of your self-worth. Much of the research on self-esteem in the average population examines self-esteem

as confidence in one's own abilities. Self-efficacy is another word for this idea, which refers to your belief in your own ability to do things well. Alberto Perez developed a strong sense of selfesteem and resilience from the support he received from his family:

Before I became a teenager, I realized I was gay. I really didn't experience trauma, because I felt that being gay was an easy thing to accept about myself. I never really felt that I wasn't accepted, because my family was very accepting and loving to one another. It was more difficult as I was coming out and accepting who I truly was when I got older. Even though I had the support of my family, I did still experience some type of fear that I wouldn't be accepted. Today, I accept myself, and I know that the family I was raised in and my work environment were very accepting. I make sure to surround myself with loving people and positive people, and this is a conscious choice for me as a gay man. I know my family laid a loving support for me, and that made all of the difference with my resilience.

-Alberto Perez, Latinx, cisgender, gay man

Each of us has our own journey in finding our self-esteem. This journey can be affected by many factors, such as:

- Negative messages from family, friends, school, work, and other institutions
- Experiences of emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, or other types of abuse
- Unstable home environments, such as lacking financial resources or experiencing divorce in the family
- Negative life events, such as losing a job, moving, or changing schools
- Discrimination

You can see that everything on this list could potentially influence one's self-esteem. I say potentially, because your resilience does help you counter these life experiences. However, if you have experienced multiple factors like these, it may be more challenging to learn to value yourself. Additionally, no matter where you are with your self-esteem related to these factors, the last one—discrimination—can turn your entire life upside down. For instance, you may feel really good about who you are and your ability to engage in various activities. Then an anti-LGBTQ situation arises (such as being called a "fag" or a "sinner"), and you may suddenly feel vulnerable and question yourself. So no matter how your self-esteem has fluctuated in the course of your life, having a plan to build your self-esteem as a queer or trans person will help you be more resilient in all areas of your life. I have had to face a lot of internalized homophobia and ableism. As someone who lives with bipolar, and is queer and a woman, I have often felt crazy and like a nuisance to culture. I didn't feel valuable. It wasn't until I started working within the queer community, and raising the voices of queer disabled women, that I began to challenge the oppression within myself. Through the support of mentors and peers, I became confident enough to challenge my internal oppression—whether sexism, homophobia, or ableism—and build resilience. Knowing my own emotions and identities, and being able to accept them, has helped me feel more in control of myself and feel powerful.

-Nat Truszczynski, White, queer, cisgender woman

To most effectively build your self-esteem, it's helpful to have a sense of the factors that have influenced your current self-esteem. So take some time now to identify those factors with the next resilience practice.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying Factors That Have Influenced Your Self-Esteem

Read through the following items and think about how these may have affected you through the years. Write down your reflections after each one.

Negative messages from family, friends, school, work, and other institutions

Experiences of emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, or other types of abuse

Unstable home environments, like lacking financial resources or experiencing a divorce in the family

Negative life events, such as losing a job, moving, or changing schools

As you completed this practice, did you notice that certain factors had a greater negative influence than others on your self-esteem as a queer or trans person?

Next, let's explore some potential positive influences on your self-esteem. Again, read through them, think how they may have affected you, then write down your reflections.

Positive messages from family, friends, school, work, and other institutions

Experiences of empowerment

Stable home environments

Other positive life events

As you wrote about the negative and positive influences on your self-esteem, which of these do you think had the most impact on you as an LGBTQ person? When you think about your self-esteem as a queer or trans person, have you had more negative influences, more positive influences, or about the same of both negative and positive? Keep these in mind as you complete a more general measure of self-esteem in the next resilience practice.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965): Taking a Pulse of Your General Self-Esteem

Let's assess your general self-esteem before you explore self-esteem specific to being LGBTQ. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) has been used for over fifty years to measure self-esteem; with it, you can easily get an idea of what your current self-esteem is.

Read the following list of statements concerning your general feelings about yourself.

If you strongly agree with the statement, circle SA.

If you agree, circle A.

If you disagree, circle D.

If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

My Feelings about Myself		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	А	D	SD
2.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	А	D	SD
3.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	А	D	SD
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	А	D	SD
5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	А	D	SD
6.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	А	D	SD
7.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	А	D	SD
8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	А	D	SD
9.	I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	А	D	SD
10.	At times I think I am no good at all.	SA	А	D	SD

Score your answers as follows:

#### For items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7:

```
Strongly agree = 3
```

Agree = 2

Disagree = 1

Strongly Disagree = 0

#### For items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 (which are reversed in score):

```
Strongly agree = 0
Agree = 1
Disagree = 2
Strongly Disagree = 3
Your Self-Esteem Score = _____.
```

The scale ranges from 0 to 30. Scores over 25 suggest high self-esteem; scores between 15 and 25 are within the average range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem.

Was your self-esteem score in the low, average, or high range? No matter what your score is, is it a surprise to you? Also, keep in mind that you are scoring yourself on this self-esteem scale to collect some data to begin exploring, with the ultimate goal of *strengthening your self-esteem*.

Next, respond to the following questions to reflect on your self-esteem score further and identify the areas to work on in developing your resilience.

What strengths do you think you have when it comes to your self-esteem?

What would you like to improve when it comes to your self-esteem?

What have you been told about your self-esteem?

What would you like to be able to say about your self-esteem?

As you reflected more deeply on your self-esteem score, was it easy or hard to identify your strengths and areas to improve with your self-esteem? Do you feel pretty good about your self-esteem, or do you want to increase it and maybe do not know how to do so? Hold on to these thoughts as you next explore your self-esteem as a queer or trans person and the different dimensions of self-esteem that you can work on to build your resilience. (If at any point you'd like to complete the assessment again, download the worksheet version of this exercise available at http://www.newharbinger.com/39461.)

### Nurturing Queer and Trans Self-Esteem

What does self-esteem that's specific to queer and trans people look like? This question brings us back to the internalization of negative LGBTQ messages. This internalization can feed that critical inner voice that picks apart everything you do. This internalization can also decrease our motivation to be ourselves. When you don't believe that being LGBTQ is one of the best things about you, then you have a hard time going after your dreams and/or feeling that a happy life is possible for you. As you read through the rest of this chapter, you will learn different aspects of nurturing your self-esteem: challenging your inner critic, identifying thoughts that make you feel good, being assertive, and venturing outside of your comfort zone.

The fact is, I'm gay, always have been, always will be, and I couldn't be any more happy, comfortable with myself, and proud.

-Anderson Cooper, White, cisgender, gay man

### Revising Your Internal Critic

A big self-esteem killer is often your very own self. When you internalize ideas that you are not worthy and begin to believe you have little or no value, you become very skilled at generating thoughts that keep you validating this low self-esteem. We all have an inner critic; it's that voice that pretty much tells you that you are doing everything, most things, or some things wrong. The life factors I discussed earlier in this chapter can affect the degree to which you believe that you are not worthy or capable.

It is helpful to start to get to know this inner critic—and possibly even give him/her/them/ zir a name. Why a name? Recall Chapter 3, where I talked about the three-step process of naming, validating, and acting. Naming is a powerful act. Naming tells you that something is *real*. Therefore, giving your inner critic a name can acknowledge this part of you so you can start to develop a relationship with it.

I have named my inner critic Gertrude. Gertrude has a lot to say about everything I do. She has even been present as I write this workbook. Gertrude, as my innermost and most vociferous critic, tells me, "Well, what's the point of writing this book?" and "Who is going to read it anyway?" You can tell that Gertrude is the enemy of my self-esteem. In fact, her goal is to knock me down and make sure that I do not succeed in life. Here are some things she has to say to me:

- You can't do it.
- Why even try?
- Don't you realize what they will think of you?
- You will do a horrible job.
- You will mess this up.
- Remember the last time you got this wrong?
- You will never be as good as \_\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

Gertrude has some harsh things to say, right? But here is the strange and very important thing about Gertrude. I have made it a point over the years to love and welcome her. She sits on my shoulder and squawks in my ear. Now that I know she exists, I can tell her, "Yeah, yeah. I hear you. And I am so sorry you feel that way." When I acknowledge that my inner critic voice is there, something even stranger happens. Gertrude starts to settle down and move out of my way. I like to think that once I acknowledge her concerns, she heads to the mall to do some shopping. She for sure will be right back and have more to say. But Gertrude no longer has the same sort of power she once had over me.

Everyone has some version of an inner Gertrude—a gremlin voice that wants to tear you down, beat you up, and make sure you fail. Why? Because our inner critic actually is deathly afraid of getting hurt, being rejected, and never being a success, it likes to plays it safe by keeping us "in line." The trouble is, society has already been playing a doozy on us through criticism, shame, betrayal, denigration, disapproval—you get the drift. So, making friends

with your inner gremlin and getting to know how this little critic ticks is an important aspect of growing your self-esteem. To explore your inner critic further, complete the next resilience practice.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Getting to Know Our Inner Critic and Gremlin

Let's explore what your inner critic and gremlin sounds like for you. Consider the following questions and then write your response.

Who is your inner critic and gremlin?

What kinds of things does this part of you say to get in the way of your feeling good about yourself?

Now that you have thought about your inner critic and gremlin, have some fun giving this part of you a name: \_\_\_\_\_\_.

How did it feel to reflect on some of the things your inner critic and gremlin says to you? Think about how regularly these thoughts go through your head. Again, as tempting as it is to give your Gertrude the boot, it can be more helpful to keep them near you so you can keep a close eye on them.

### Identifying Thoughts That Make You Feel Good

Once you have identified these negative messages, spend some time thinking about the positive messages—the ones that motivate you and keep you moving toward your own happiness in life.

Note: Identifying these thoughts that make you feel good is not just about "being positive" or ignoring the rest of your feelings that do not have to do with happiness.

It is important to be intentional about these thoughts that help and motivate you, because once you can identify them you can begin to internalize them. And the more you can do this, the more you crowd out the inner critic and gremlin voices. Here are some examples of thoughts that might make you feel good:

- You can do this.
- You deserve to be happy.
- It's important to believe in yourself.
- It's OK to try something to see whether you like it.
- You are smart enough to do this.
- If you do not succeed, you learn something about what you like and do not like.
- It's most important what you think about yourself.
- It's natural to compare yourself to others, but it can distract you from what you really want to do in life.
- You can get support to do this if you want.
- It's OK to take chances.

Can you see why these thoughts are more encouraging to you as an LGBTQ person than your inner critic's messages? Was there a thought or thoughts that really resonated with you? Regularly using these affirmations can really boost your resilience. Complete the next resilience practice to identify how these affirmations can keep you encouraged and moving in a direction of greater resilience and thriving.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Personal Feel-Good Mantras That Inspire You

After reading the preceding list of suggestions, what other encouragements can you think of that would motivate you to try new things, believe in yourself more, and feel more confident? You can think of this list as go-to personal mantras that keep you headed in a direction of feeling good about who you are and what you can do in the world. Think to yourself, "If I had a personal coach, what would that person say to me that would really make me feel good about myself and my capabilities?" Write your responses here:

Now read through these personal feel-good mantras. How does it feel to read these words of encouragement and affirmation? Write some of these mantras on index cards, or on the work-sheet version of this exercise that's available at http://www.newharbinger.com/39461, and post them in places in your home, work, or school where you can see them regularly.

Read Sonali Sadequee's story of how her resilience is related to her inherent value and selfworth as an LGBTQ person.

How I remember my self-worth [and] value and protect my dignity as a queer person is an ongoing learning and fine-tuning process. I make sure I connect with my queer/trans friends on a regular basis and that I have a strong queer/trans community that I am a part of. I like to make sure that I value and uplift others, queer or not, and subconsciously hope and expect that others will do the same for me. A mind game I have come to embody to help me value myself is that I choose to believe that I am already valued and appreciated by default when I meet people—I like to operate by this "benefit of the doubt" attitude. Sometimes when I fear that my value is being minimized or dismissed, I am training myself to remember faster to speak up and communicate how I prefer to be treated instead—this is very challenging for

me. I think the most powerful thing that has helped me remember my self-worth is my own pride in myself as a queer person, a spiritual person, a Muslim vegan yogi, a brown Bengali immigrant woman, etc. The more proud I am of my various identities, the easier it is to automatically value my worth, I have found. The more proud I have grown over the years of my queerness, the bolder I am in valuing the queer goddess that resides within me, across relationships and spaces.

—Sonali Sadequee, South Asian, queer, cisgender woman

#### Assertiveness Training

Identifying the messages that are truly motivating and encouraging for you is a key building block in developing your self-confidence. That self-confidence is important for all people, and becomes critically important for queer and trans resilience. As mentioned earlier, queer and trans people are at more risk than the average population for various mental health challenges because of the often-frequent microaggressions and macroaggressions that LGBTQ people experience in society.

Research shows that over their life span, queer and trans people are the target of bullying in related to their gender identity and sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2017). This bullying can range from covert and mild to overt and aggressive. Other research suggests that developing confidence and assertiveness skills for queer and trans people can be a protective factor for this type of harassment (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). I want to be clear: I'm not saying that people who are bullied for being LGBTQ are not confident or somehow deserve what they are experiencing. However, it's important to understand that learning to stand up for yourself and knowing what treatment you might expect from others can be a significant factor in building strong resilience.

This type of confidence development is often called assertiveness. There are numerous books, training programs, and online resources that can help you be more assertive. Each of these approaches to developing assertiveness makes a point of defining what assertiveness *is* and is *not*.

#### Assertiveness is:

- A skill that can be learned
- Helpful when communicating with others
- Needed when interacting with family members, friends, work and school peers, and in other interpersonal interactions, like in public spaces

- Useful to help you remember your value
- Helpful to keep you calm in stressful situations

#### Assertiveness is not:

- The same thing as being aggressive
- Ignoring other people's thoughts and feelings
- Being rigid with your expectations
- A onetime event
- Driven by fear

Keeping this in mind, let's read through some case scenarios to see how assertiveness can help you not only increase your self-esteem but also demonstrate that self-esteem when interacting with others.

Addressing use of wrong pronouns. A Latino trans man, Julio, is at a work meeting. One of his coworkers consistently uses the wrong pronouns to refer to Julio. Julio asks the coworker to speak with him after the meeting. Calmly, Julio shares with his coworker what his correct pronouns are and his expectation that his coworker will use them.

Asking for a safe LGBTQ space. A White gay man, Derek, has been at his college for three years. Over that time, he has made several friends in the LGBTQ community. However, there is no student group that is dedicated to queer and trans issues. Derek asks to meet with a student affairs administrator. He explains why the LGBTQ group is needed, as well as some of his own experiences as a gay college student.

**Experiencing mistreatment.** An African American trans woman, Leila, is a computer engineer working on a university campus. Leila is walking across campus for a meeting with another department when the university police stop her and tell her that only students can be on campus. Leila shows her university identification to the university police and asks, "What specific factors led you to think I did not belong on campus as a university personnel or student?" Afterward, she reports the incident to the chief of the university police.

**Expecting to be treated well on a date.** Dawn is a Native American, two-spirit person. They go on a date with Kevin, whom they met at the movies a week ago. When they meet their date at dinner, they have a good connection with Kevin. After dinner, Kevin asks Dawn to go to his place and have sex. Dawn shares they do not have sex with people they date until they get to know them better because their safety is important to them.

These case scenarios are a sampling of different situations where assertiveness can be not only helpful but also important to safety and feeling a sense of belonging and support in your community. As you read each scenario, did you have questions or think you might do things a little differently? If so, that is OK. Complete the next resilience practice to explore selfassertiveness further.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Developing a Personal Definition of Assertiveness

The goal of this resilience practice is to help you define what assertiveness means to you in a variety of settings. Answer the following questions based on different settings in which you might interact with people as a queer or trans person.

What would your assertiveness look like with your family members?

What would your assertiveness look like with your friends?

What would your assertiveness look like in your intimate relationships?

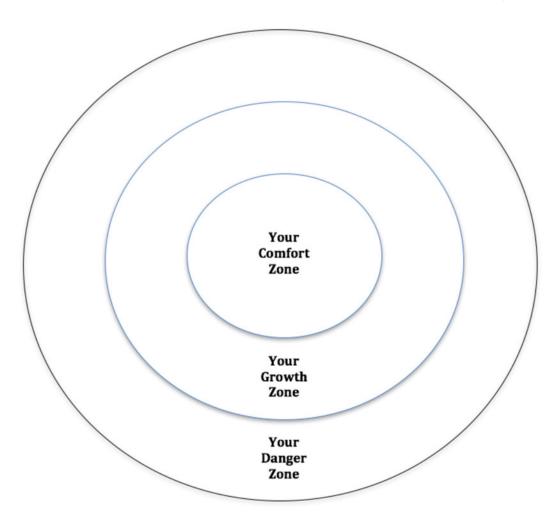
What would your assertiveness look like at work or school?

What would your assertiveness look like in public spaces?

As you answered each question, you might have noticed some repeating themes in terms of your assertiveness—ways in which standing up for yourself is really important. You also might have noticed that there are strengths and growing edges—the skills that you want to develop further—in your assertiveness as an LGBTQ person. The strengths are important to know about, as you can draw on them in challenging situations. The growing edges are also significant, as they are areas you can continue to think about and develop further so you feel more confident and prepared.

### Taking Risks and Expanding Your Comfort Zone

In many ways, the act of growing your self-esteem entails taking risks and expanding your comfort zone. However, it can be helpful to more closely examine how taking calculated risks can enlarge your positive feelings about yourself and grow your self-confidence. Take a look at the figure on the following page for a visual portrayal of your comfort zone and how important it is to your self-esteem.



In the figure, each of the three concentric circles plays an important role in your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Let's talk more about these three zones.

#### COMFORT ZONE

This comfort zone is your home base. You feel safe here, and you like to hang out here. It is a good place to be when you feel tired, scared, angry, or even happy. A comfort zone is good to have, because you know really well what you like and do not like. However, a comfort zone can be stifling sometimes, as no new growth happens inside it. When no new growth happens, then your comfort zone can start to feel stale, rigid, and possibly reflective of an "old" you that has stopped growing. Examples might be hanging out with the same group of friends who do not challenge you to learn more about who you are and what you like. Your comfort zone is a good place to rest and regroup after spending time in the growth zone, so this home base is important for reflection and reassessment of your growth as well.

#### GROWTH ZONE

Your growth zone is where the magic happens! This is where you take some calculated risks to learn more about your world and yourself. For example, you might learn a new hobby, ask for a raise, start to date, move to a different location, or become more assertive and confident. There are endless ways to interact with your growth zone from your comfort zone. You know you are in your growth zone when you feel slightly scared, but not overwhelmed, about new possibilities and learnings. You also know you are in your growth zone when you take a risk and accomplish something and feel excited about future growth. The growth zone is where the magic happens because when you take a risk in the growth zone, you learn more about who you are and what you like and do not like, which thereby expands your comfort zone. Pretty cool, eh?

#### DANGER ZONE

Expanding your comfort zone through taking some risks is really cool. However, beyond the growth zone is the danger zone, which entails too much risk, to the point that it becomes dangerous to you. Just like the comfort and growth zones, each person's danger zone is unique to them. Sometimes things we can't control land us in the danger zone, like the sudden death of someone you love, or a relationship breakup. But you'll know you are in the danger zone when there is no growth happening because you are too overwhelmed and have no capacity to learn anything new about yourself. You may decide to move to a new city for a new job (growth zone), but may reach that city without asking friends and family for any personal or professional connections there (danger zone). Rather than expanding your comfort zone, you risk getting hurt and not looking out for yourself.

Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone.

-Neal Donald Walsh, White, cisgender man, author

## Using Your Understanding of the Three Zones

Understanding how these three zones—comfort zone, growth zone, and danger zone—apply to you as an LGBTQ person can really enhance your resilience in many situations. When you learn to recognize which zone you are in at any given time, you've gained a great assessment tool. First, you can simply ask yourself: "Which zone am I in right now?" Then ask yourself, "Will being in this zone strengthen or weaken my resilience?" For example, you may realize you are in a danger zone where you are physically or emotionally unsafe (like feeling depressed). Strengthening your resilience in this situation means retreating to your growth or comfort zone (such as connecting with other people). Or you may ask yourself the question and realize you are playing it too safe (like staying in a school or job that is not LGBTQ-affirming), and that getting out of your comfort zone and into your growth zone (such as looking for a new LGBTQ-affirming school or job) will increase your resilience.

Sometimes, when it is difficult to answer these two questions, it's helpful to move back into your comfort or growth zones to stabilize yourself. Complete the following resilience practice to apply these three zones to your own life as an LGBTQ person.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring Your Comfort, Growth, and Danger Zones

Think about your own comfort, growth, and danger zones. Which one do you tend to live in most? Are you someone who rarely takes risks, thereby risking little growth? Do you tend to live too much in your danger zone? Do you live most of the time in your growth zone, allowing little time in your comfort zone to recoup, rest, and make meaning of your growth? Across these zones, how does being LGBTQ affect your risk-taking?

How does being LGBTQ affect your comfort zone?

How does being LGBTQ affect your growth zone?

How does being LGBTQ affect your danger zone?

As you reflect on these three zones, you should feel more informed about how being a queer or trans person in this society affects you. Mostly, it is important to understand that LGBTQ stigma often threatens your resilience because you stop learning more about who you are and what you like. Identifying which zone you are in with any action or situation gives you a good indicator of whether it will support your resilience or weaken it. In terms of LGBTQ stigma, you can use this assessment to determine where you need to be in terms of risk-taking and keeping yourself safe. With regard to resilience, use the zone check to figure out where you want to take a risk and grow next.

I know that, as a bisexual, sometimes people who are gay or lesbian look down upon the bisexual community as well and assume that people who are bisexual just don't know what they want.

-Crystal Bowersox, White, cisgender, lesbian woman and singer

## Resilience Wrap-Up

Realizing your self-worth as a queer and trans person is a critical aspect of resilience, because when you increase your self-esteem, you increase your expectation that you will be treated with respect and dignity. Strengthening your self-esteem takes some work, but it's worth it. When you feel more positive about yourself, you can send a message to others that you will not tolerate mistreatment. Remember the following points:

- Self-worth and self-esteem are similar—they both refer to how you feel about yourself and what you believe you are capable of doing.
- It is important to nurture your general self-esteem, as well as your self-worth as an LGBTQ person.

- Naming your inner critic can help you notice when you are being hard on yourself and challenge that gremlin voice.
- Intentionally identifying thoughts that motivate you to live a happy life is a part of resilience.
- Being assertive means being better able to advocate for yourself as an LGBTQ person and knowing what treatment to expect.
- You expand your comfort zone by taking calculated risks in your growth zone, and avoiding your danger zone where no growth can happen.

In Chapter 5, you'll move from the discussion of knowing your self-worth as an LGBTQ person to the resilience strategy of knowing how to stand up for yourself.

#### **CHAPTER 5**

# Standing Up for Yourself

In Chapter 4 you learned a good deal about self-esteem and valuing yourself as key parts of your resilience as an LGBTQ person. The more you feel good about yourself, the easier it is to know what treatment you should expect from others and when you should stand up for yourself and challenge injustice. This chapter continues this discussion, exploring how standing up for yourself, even in tough circumstances, can enhance your resilience. In the previous chapter you explored your inherent worth and dignity as a person; in this chapter you explore how to stand up for yourself as an LGBTQ person. In many ways, standing up for yourself is about developing healthy communication skills and knowing how to take actions that can help you advocate for yourself in a variety of settings.

## Communication, Communication, Communication

In real estate, you will often hear agents talk about "location, location, location" to emphasize that when it comes to assessing a home's market value and determining an asking price, one factor is paramount: people are more drawn to a *place* they want to live—the street and surrounding neighborhood—than to the house itself. When it comes to standing up for yourself, the one paramount factor is communication, and that too is worth repeating! We'll have much more to say about that shortly.

You typically will stand up for yourself when you know that you have value, when you know you are right, and when you know you have backup and support.

Because it bears repeating, these are the three elements necessary to standing up for yourself:

- You believe your perspective has value.
- ou believe your perspective is right.
- You have the support you need.

### Growing More Positive Self-Talk

Given these three necessary elements, the communication you have with yourself is a crucial part of standing up for yourself. However, most people don't get a crash course on how to have healthy communication with others, much less with ourselves! So, you may struggle at a basic level—with how you communicate with yourself (that inner critic/gremlin inside of each of us that I talked about in Chapter 4). That is the first place to start building the resilience you need to stand up for yourself.

If you think about it, you are the person you spend the most time with in any given twentyfour hours. So the relationship you have with yourself is important! The self-talk inside of your head about yourself as an LGBTQ person or about any of your other identities influences your overall resilience. In the next resilience practice you can get a feel for how well you communicate with yourself.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Positive Is My Inner Self-Talk?

The goal of this resilience practice (which is available in worksheet form at http://www.newhar binger.com/39461) is to rate how positively you communicate with yourself. What does that inner voice "sound like" in your head? In the first part of this resilience practice, you'll explore what positive self-talk you already have, as well as areas for your future growth. Then you'll reflect on which people can be models of positive self-talk for you.

#### Intrapersonal

Consider how often you think you use the following actions to get through hard times as an LGBTQ person, then check the column for your response for each.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Reflect on how you feel				
Feel good about yourself				
Use positive self-talk				
Manage your emotions				
Remind yourself of your self-worth				
Remember your strengths				

Feel OK about making mistakes		
Feel hopeful about your life		
Learn from your past		
Adapt to change		
Plan ahead for the future		
Put your plans into action		
Reach out for support		
Communicate how you are feeling		

What do you notice about your use of positive self-talk? What are the places where you are really strong, or need to grow, on the list? Take four different color highlighters to distinguish the items you assigned the four different frequencies. How can you use your strengths in intrapersonal resilience to help grow the actions that you never or rarely take? For example, if you often manage your emotions but rarely communicate how you are feeling, then you could start working on using your emotional management to help you more readily share how you are feeling.

This activity is meant to spark awareness of internal self-talk that you can change. Next, you'll explore your interpersonal resilience when you are communicating with others.

### Models of Self-Talk

List the family, friends, teachers, mentors, online communities, and other people in your life who model positive LGBTQ self-talk to you. It's OK to list people you may not know personally or those you see only in the media.

What are the specific positive self-talk statements you hear these people making?

Did you find it relatively easy or more challenging to identify people who communicate positive self-talk? What specific things do they say about themselves and others? Part of growing your resilience in terms of your self-talk is paying attention to how others communicate positively about themselves. These people can be positive reinforcers and reminders to speak to yourself with kindness, love, and appreciation. And remember, when you have positive selftalk, you are more skilled at standing up for yourself as an LGBTQ person.

Making Your Self-Talk More Resilient

Your resilience in terms of being able to stand up for yourself is not just about remaining positive. Actually, more positive self-talk sometimes does not seem that positive at all. You can think of it like an inner coach. A coach is not going to tell you that you are awesome for no reason. A coach is not going to lie to you, or pretend that there are no areas in which you need to grow and change. A coach is going to *be real with you* and tell you the truth. Not truth as in something to be hard on yourself about, but truth that will encourage you to believe that you are worth having dreams, meeting goals, and—you guessed it—sticking up for yourself. And ultimately, that inner coach is going to stand up for you in all situations—in good times and bad times—and will push you to be the best self you can be.

I once had a lot of negative self-talk about how I dressed. I thought that just because I was genderqueer, I had to wear more masculine clothes or fit into a certain stereotypical image. The more I challenged this underlying belief, the more free and affirmed I felt in my gender identity. And the more I did this, the more I felt like I could stand up for nonbinary identity as a valid and important part of who I am, even if people make lots of incorrect assumptions about my gender.

How do you shift your internal self-talk and develop the best inner coach ever? There are actually some simple steps, though they can seem tough to implement at times. The key is to practice, practice, practice.

### Reframing Negative Thoughts

The first step in challenging our negative thoughts is to master the skill of *reframing*. Again, the point is not to just change a thought, but to recognize that there are some options for other thoughts as well. Why do thoughts matter, and is it really that simple? Well, in some ways, yep, it is. Your brain is pretty predictable. All of us have a lot of mental chatter inside of our heads (and most of it negative). Research has suggested that thoughts drive your feelings, so you can see why in a workbook about increasing your resilience as an LGBTQ person you will need to reflect on your innermost thoughts. These thoughts can drive your beliefs about standing up for yourself.

As a human, you may make some attribution errors about your inner thoughts. Put more simply, you blame your thoughts and feelings on other things. Those other things may be events in your life or things and people you can't control. You might believe that *events* or *people* cause your *feelings*.

Maybe you went to a *family event* and *everyone there made you feel unworthy*. Or, you are *stressed* because you were late to work or school because *the person in front of you* was driving slowly. I could go on and on. The thing is, I am not saying the family event was a great time and you should have just gotten through it the best you could, and I am not saying the person driving in front of you was driving fast enough. I am saying that the research I referenced earlier about thoughts driving your feelings proposes another step in the process of how you *feel* that does not include events or people. That step is your *thoughts*. Check this out:

*Events* happen and *people* do things, and you have *thoughts* about these events and people and their actions, which drive your *feelings*.

Let's review that again. Something happens—an event occurs or a person in your life does something. You go to a family event, and the people there make anti-LGBTQ and racist remarks. You have some thoughts about this event and these people, like "This event is something I *have* to go to" or "These people *hate* me." Then your thoughts drive your feelings, which you are left with after being at the event and interacting with the people, such as feeling rejected or unworthy.

This new equation—that events and people's actions happen and your *thoughts* about them drive your feelings—is the best news in the world for your resilience as an LGBTQ person. Your inner coach can name the truth of what is going on with LGBTQ-negative environments and people and remind you that your thoughts can move you up the empowerment ladder (such as "I know going to this event may make me feel I am unworthy, but actually it is *their* LGBTQ-negative beliefs that they are expressing that are the problem, and I will remember that I think my gender identity and sexual orientation have value") or even help you make better decisions (such as "I will attend the family event for only an hour, because I want to feel good about myself when I leave").

Complete the next resilience practice to test a scenario in your own life with this thoughtscause-feelings equation.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Notice How Your Thoughts Cause Your Feelings

The aim of this resilience practice is for you to explore how to stay grounded in thoughts related to your positive value as an LGBTQ person in a current situation in your life. Consider the following question: What is an example of an event that tends to be heterosexist or a person who tends to be a heterosexist? Write your responses to interactions at this event or with this person.

The event or person is:

What are your typical thoughts about this event or person?

What are your typical feelings as a result of these thoughts?

Did you notice how it is the thoughts you have, and not the events or people, who cause how you feel? What a relief! To be able to know that, in a world that is not always LGBTQ-affirming, you can identify negative thoughts that do not enhance or strengthen your resilience. This is a major key to resilience. And that's part of how you learn you are worth standing up for, more and more.

Now, let's get to the reframing part. Reframing your thoughts helps you be more resilient to hard times and situations, and it is important to remember that there may be a process of "moving up a ladder" of emotions in order to nurture your empowerment as an LGBTQ person. Consider the following example:

*Event:* You are walking down the street, and someone calls out an anti-LGBTQ epithet.

Thought: "What did I do wrong?"

Feeling: Depressed, despondent, sad.

Reframing means focusing on the thoughts as the site of change and action. Consider this reframing of the thought:

*Event:* You are walking down the street, and someone calls out an anti-LGBTQ epithet.

*Thought:* "What did I do wrong?" You catch yourself, and you shift your thought to, "That was a horrible thing this person did, and I did not deserve that treatment."

Feeling: Shift to determined, confident, grounded.

See how that happened? It is natural that you may have some initial self-defeating thoughts. However, the sooner you can catch yourself in the act of having those thoughts, the sooner you can shift your feelings back to those of self-worth, self-validation, and self-love as an LGBTQ person.

You can also dig deeper into the sequence, and notice that the following happens:

*Event:* You are walking down the street, and someone calls out an anti-LGBTQ epithet.

Thought: "What did I do wrong?"

Feeling: Depressed, despondent—on the sad end of the emotional spectrum.

*Thought:* You ask yourself, "What thought can I have that can shift my emotions to be more empowered?" You shift your thought to, "That was a horrible thing this person did, and I did not deserve that treatment."

Feeling: Your feelings shift to: determined, confident, grounded.

Use this resilience practice to apply reframing to another current situation in your life as an LGBTQ person and how you can stand up for yourself.

Now you have the knowledge of how powerful your thoughts are in directing your feelings when it comes to being queer and trans. So if there are anti-LGBTQ messages coming at you from society in so many different areas, it is important to start training your mind to not only notice those thoughts, but also to challenge them. In the next resilience practice, you'll explore how to develop an LGBTQ-affirming inner voice.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Using Reframing to Develop Your Inner Coach

The aim of this resilience practice (which is available in worksheet form at http://www.newhar binger.com/39461) is for you to practice strengthening that voice of your inner coach, who can help you reframe and challenge negative events and people that could decrease your resilience. Select another example of an event or a person's actions that presents an anti-LGBTQ message. Write your responses related to interactions at this event or with this person.

The event or person is: \_\_\_\_\_

What are your typical thoughts about this event or person?

What are your typical feelings as a result of these thoughts?

What thoughts can you use to reframe this situation or interaction with this person and shift your feelings?

Digging deeper, what feelings would you like to have in this situation or in interactions with this person? What thoughts could shift you to these feelings?

In completing this exercise, did you see how powerful it is to shift a negative thought and reframe it so you are more grounded and feeling good about yourself? Did you understand how you can work backward from feelings you know you should have as an LGBTQ person, like feeling empowered, valued, and confident? Did you notice you want to stand up for yourself more in this situation? Was it easier to see why you should stand up for yourself as an LGBTQ person? It takes some practice, but the more you do this, the more resilient you will feel when facing LGBTQ-negative situations and people.

## What Is Healthy Communication with Others?

You can probably already see that the ways you communicate with yourself can influence other interactions, including how you communicate in standing up for yourself with others. Healthy communication means, in essence, interactions with others in which you stay true to yourself, set boundaries, and build your connections with them. The stronger your communication skills with others, the more resilience you'll have to move through difficult times; because you value yourself, you trust that you can communicate your thoughts, feelings, and needs to others.

The core of healthy communication in relationships—whether with your partners, at work, at school, or with family and others—is being able to *listen to others* and to *express your thoughts and needs*. It means knowing the essentials of effective listening and talking.

Let's start with listening. Here are some general tips to show others that you are listening to them:

- Be present and pay attention—no multitasking, such as texting, while you are listening.
- Paraphrase what the talker is saying to show that you "heard" them.
- Demonstrate that you are open to listening to them.
- Show empathy by "stepping into their shoes" to understand what they are experiencing.
- If you are confused, ask questions, but don't interrupt.
- Practice!

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.

-Bryant H. McGill, White, cisgender, author

Just as there are listening skills, so too there are talking skills. The communication in your relationships should have a healthy balance between listening and talking. In Chapter 7, you will more deeply explore healthy communication with regard to your relational identity (for example, monogamous, polyamorous, aromantic). For now, here are some skills that will help you better express what you are feeling:

- Use "I" statements.
- Stay calm.

- Express feelings.
- Focus on solutions.
- Practice!

Communication with others can be more healthy when you already have a solid belief system that you are worth standing up for—whether it is your perspective, thoughts, feelings, ideas, or other things you would like to communicate with others. Standing up for yourself doesn't always include making the person you are communicating with believe your perspective is right. It just means that you value yourself enough to be your real self. Of course, this can get complicated in some situations—like if you feel unsafe in a relationship or haven't disclosed some parts of yourself to another. Standing up for yourself with others is also about making decisions about what is right and not right for you to share about your thoughts, feelings, ideas, and so on with others when interacting with them.

It is obviously difficult to practice listening and talking skills in a workbook—as you read by yourself, there is no chance for live interaction! However, the next resilience practice will help you think about your communication skills as both listener and speaker.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Well Do You Communicate?

The goal of this resilience practice is for you to explore your communication. To the left of each statement, note whether you think you do this activity VW (very well), SW (somewhat well), or NW (not well).

#### **Listening Skills**

 Being present and paying attention to the listener.
 Paraphrasing what the talker is saying (when it's your turn!) to show that you've heard them.
 Demonstrating that you are open to hearing the person speaking.
 Showing empathy by "stepping into their shoes" to understand what they are experiencing.
 Asking questions if you are confused, but avoiding interrupting.

#### Speaking Skills

Using "I" statements.

\_\_\_\_\_ Staying calm.

\_\_\_\_\_ Expressing your feelings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Focusing on solutions.

What did you notice about your listening and speaking strengths and growing edges? Were you surprised by your ratings? What growing edges could you work on developing in order to strengthen your resilience as an LGBTQ person, and what listening or speaking strengths can you rely on in furthering your resilience? Write about your strengths and growing edges in terms of your listening and speaking skills:

Now that you have reflected on both your strengths and your growing edges with healthy communication, you should have a good idea of a few areas you can work on to develop your resilience in this area.

There are lessons in everything—the bad, the good. Our job is to listen, and to continue to learn, so that maybe we get better at life.

-Laverne Cox, Black trans actress and activist

# Decision-Making and Standing Up for Yourself

Up to this point in the chapter, you have learned how important communication is intrapersonally, in terms of your inner coach, and interpersonally, in terms of how you speak and listen to others. These skills help you develop your resilience and feel grounded when you are interacting with yourself and with the world. Healthy communication skills also strengthen your relationships, as you have a solid foundation on which to make decisions as an LGBTQ person. This decision-making skill is a crucial foundation, as LGBTQ people face challenges and threats to their identities in a multitude of settings and relationships. Strong decisionmaking skills help you move through such adversity and determine the best choices for your overall well-being.

Some of these choices can be heartbreaking: as an LGBTQ person, you must prepare yourself to potentially experience discrimination in employment, schools, housing, government, and public settings, as well as your family, social circles, and religious and spiritual institutions. When you face these challenges, you are forced to make decisions—often in the moment, often when you are in shock, and often when you feel unprepared to do so. People make decisions all the time, but you know how challenging these potentially life-changing decisions can be, and how indecision and uncertainty can shift you away from your center. That's why working to develop your decision-making skills can help you stand up for yourself and what you know is right in terms of your own life and how you should be treated.

There is a myth about decision-making: that you just *decide*—and that doing so entails just one step. In actuality, there are multiple steps to making a decision. Here is a decision-making model I like to use when I face tough decisions:

- Identify the decision you need to make.
- Research information that can help you make this decision.
- Assess the possible alternatives.
- Name the pros and cons of these alternatives and the decision at hand.
- Act on the alternative with the most pros and the fewest cons.
- Step back and look at the alternative you selected, assessing whether it was the right one for you.

The next resilience practice helps you apply these decision-making steps to a situation in your current life.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Applying Decision-Making Skills to Your Life

The goal of this resilience practice (which is available in worksheet form at http://www.newhar binger.com/39461) is for you to apply the decision-making skills just listed to some practical

need in your life. Think about the last time you faced a hard decision as an LGBTQ person. With that example in mind, respond to the following questions related to each decision-making step:

What was the decision you needed to make?

What information did you research that helped you make this decision?

How did you assess the possible alternatives to this decision?

What were the pros and cons of these alternatives?

Did you act on the decision with the most pros and the fewest cons?

Did you step back and look at the alternative you selected, assessing whether it was the right one for you?

How did you feel thinking about this decision you made? Did you see different possibilities? Were there steps you did not take, but would take if you had another opportunity to decide? Can you see how a decision can be composed of multiple steps? Practice using these steps to help slow down in situations where you feel pressured to make a decision as an LGBTQ person, or you experience threats to your resilience. This can offer you time to get support and remind yourself that as an LGBTQ person you are a valuable and important part of society and are deserving of a thoughtful decision-making process.

If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.

—Audre Lorde, Black lesbian poet, writer, and activist

# Resilience Wrap-Up

In this chapter, you learned the different components of standing up for yourself as a part of your resilience, including:

- Knowing that communication, communication, communication is key!
- Understanding that communication with your own self is the foundation of standing up for yourself. If you believe you are worthy, you can stand up for yourself more easily.
- Having models of people with strong inner coaches who help reframe negative self-talk.
- Learning that events and people do not cause your feelings; rather, your thoughts cause your feelings.
- Developing strong listening and speaking skills when communicating with others.
- Knowing that decision-making skills entail not just one step, but several.

After reading this chapter, you should have a stronger sense of how to stand up for yourself and express yourself. In Chapter 6, you will spend time reflecting on your relationship with your own body and how to be more resilient through developing body positivity as an LGBTQ person.

#### **CHAPTER 6**

# Affirming and Enjoying Your Body

In the last few chapters, you explored how your resilience increases as you come to know your self-worth as an LGBTQ person, and you strengthened your communication skills. This chapter will guide you to learn how you feel about your body and how these feelings can influence various aspects of your life. From the messages you have picked up about your body to the feelings you *want* to have about your body, you will develop resilience practices to develop body-positive skills. I also talk about sex positivity, and how you may decide whether and when to share your body with others. In doing so, you will think about not only what you may or may not like, but also what you want to learn more about, and what isn't OK for your body when you share it with others. You will also have an opportunity to learn more about the diverse relational structures of LGBTQ people.

## What Being Body Positive Actually Means

So what is body positivity? Some possible words may immediately come to mind. Body positivity consists of affirming thoughts, feelings, and actions about your body. The more body positive you are, the greater your resilience, because you learn to actively value your body and who you decide to share your body with.

Body positivity is especially important for LGBTQ people, as we often internalize negative messages about our community, and these same negative attitudes can then play out in how we think and feel about our body. Here is an example from my life. My ancestors are from northern India and Scotland, and it is in my DNA to have a larger belly. As I was learning more and more about my identity as a queer teenager, I also was experiencing all of these transformations in my body. As I learned that it wasn't safe for me to disclose my queer identity with most people, I also was learning negative attitudes about my body from the world at large. Any time I consumed media, I saw images in the magazines and on television that prized this image of a straight, White, super-feminine, cisgender, thin woman. I didn't have someone whispering in my ear or telling me directly that my body was amazing and important, and that

I should value my body. So it took me years to accept, appreciate, and (now) love my body for all that it can do, be, and look like on any given day. Sound familiar?

Before we go further, it is important to understand that body positivity does not mean that you love your body all of the time, or that you have to be engaging in positive thoughts, feelings, and actions about your body all of the time. Learning to be body positive is a process, not a final fixed outcome. The goal is to learn to appreciate your body, be kind to your body, and be able to identify when you are receiving negative messages about your body from others or yourself. That is what body positivity really means. To get you started, here are some examples of body-positive messages:

- My body is healthy and strong.
- I value my body.
- I love my body.
- I want to treat my body with the highest regard.
- I expect others to treat my body with the highest regard.
- There are lots of different body types, and mine is awesome.
- I own my own body and am in charge of what happens to it.
- A scratch or a scar is proof that I have lived my life and that my body can heal.
- I work out so I can sleep better, take care of myself, and feel good.
- I eat foods that nourish me and that I love.
- I love the body that I am in right now.
- My body changes with each day, but it is always mine to take care of and value.

These are just a few examples of body-positive statements! And it's OK if many of them seemed really familiar to you because you believe them—or if you weren't sure whether you could believe them or trust that you could feel these ways about your body. Either way is completely fine, because taking some time to reflect on your relationship with your body is a big part of your resilience. Complete the next resilience practice to explore your relationship with your own body, which is the first step in body positivity: to be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions toward your body.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Do You Typically Feel about Your Body?

In this resilience practice, you'll explore how body positive you are as a queer or trans person. Remember, body positivity isn't an outcome, or even a thing you can make happen overnight. It's a process. So as you work through the following questions, you'll explore how you generally think, feel, and act in relation to your body. Your answers will create a mini-compass for how to develop more body positivity as an LGBTQ person.

What typical thoughts and feelings do you have about your body?

How do these typical thoughts and feelings influence how you treat your body?

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

Who and what were (or are) the major influences on how you treat your body?

Overall, when it comes to those thoughts, feelings, and actions, do you think you are more body positive or body negative?

As you responded to these questions, how did you feel? Were you surprised by anything that you wrote about the influences on your body? Did you realize you are more body positive, body negative, or some of both? Does that change based on who you are around or messages you receive as an LGBTQ person? In the next section we'll take a closer look at what it means specifically to be body positive as an LGBTQ person.

### LGBTQ Body Positivity

As mentioned earlier, being body positive can be challenging for queer and trans people, because we may already be dealing with negative social attitudes toward us, and on top of that there may not have been a ton of people in our lives teaching us how to be body positive. For these reasons, exploring what it means to be body positive as an LGBTQ person is especially significant.

You can pick up negative messages about your body not just in the outside world, but also within the LGBTQ community. There has been a good deal of research, for instance, examining body image within cisgender gay men's communities, specifically of how a certain body type is prized, which community members are expected to strive for to be considered attractive. Trans people face pervasive media messages about what being a man or woman should look like, and nonbinary and genderqueer people are also influenced by these body-negative messages.

In addition, as you learned in Chapter 2, you have more identities than just gender and sexual orientation. So you can pick up body-negative messages within cultural groups as well. Latinx, cisgender, and trans lesbian women may pick up sexualized messages about their bodies; Asian American–Pacific Islander LGBTQ people may face being called "exotic" and other descriptors. In the following resilience practice, you get to explore body positivity and resilience strategies to counter internalizing these messages.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Being Body Positive as an LGBTQ Person with Multiple Identities

This resilience practice guides you to explore how your body positivity, LGBTQ identity, and other identities all come together. Respond to the following prompts:

As an LGBTQ person, how do you feel about your body?

What specific messages have you received about your body—or bodies in general—from within LGBTQ communities?

What specific messages have you received about your body—or bodies in general—from within a cultural group related to one or more of your other identities, such as race/ethnicity, disability, and social class?

Did it feel different to write about your exploration of messages related to your body within LGBTQ communities and other cultural groups versus those from the larger society? Did you hear some messages in various LGBTQ communities and cultural groups that were affirming, encouraging, and aimed toward body positivity? If so, how can those messages help you foster your resilience related to body positivity? This exploration sets you up to take a deeper dive into specific body-negative thoughts you may have about your body and how to shift them toward body-positive thoughts that increase your resilience.

Growing Your Body Positivity as an LGBTQ Person

In Chapters 3 and 5 you learned about shifting your thoughts in a more positive direction as a way to shift your feelings and increase your resilience. When you seek to grow your body positivity as an LGBTQ person, you can work with your thoughts in a similar manner. In this case the "events" are body-negative messages, such as the following list of examples. These are extremely body-negative messages; I list them so you can consider thoughts you may have had that are similar to or different from these:

- I am too fat.
- I should look like a "real" woman.
- Cisgender gay men like only other cisgender men.

- Lesbian women like only women with certain anatomy.
- I have to work out with weights to be considered attractive.
- I need to lose some weight.
- No one will think my body is attractive.

You get the idea. These are the kinds of thoughts that often run through our heads unconsciously. Let's see what it would be like to intentionally shift these thoughts to be more body positive:

- I appreciate my body and what it can do.
- There are some things I really enjoy about my body.
- I want to share my body with someone who will treat it with respect, dignity, and care.
- I am learning how to be more kind to my body.
- I get support when I get into a bad place with how I feel about my body.

See the difference in the two lists? The first list contains the messages you tend to pick up from society and internalize. The second list contains the messages that you should have been raised hearing or having someone teach you.

In the following resilience practice you'll explore how to increase your body positivity and resilience.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Building Body-Positive Resilience

In this resilience practice, you will identify how to shift body-negative messages you have internalized to intentionally building more body-positive messages as an LGBTQ person. You will list three body-negative thoughts and then identify a body-positive message you would like to begin using as a more affirming alternative.

List one body-negative thought you have as a queer or trans person.

What have been the major influences on this body-negative thought in terms of people, media, or something else?

What is a body-positive thought you would like to develop to replace this body-negative thought?

Who can support you in developing this more affirming body-positive thought?

Now identify a second body-negative thought and answer the same questions:

List one body-negative thought you have as a queer or trans person.

What have been the major influences on this body-negative thought in terms of people, media, or something else?

What is a body-positive thought you would like to develop to replace this body-negative thought?

Who can support you in developing this more affirming body-positive thought?

Identify a third body-negative thought and respond to the following prompts:

List one body-negative thought you have as a queer or trans person.

What have been the major influences on this body-negative thought in terms of people, media, or something else?

What is a body-positive thought you would like to develop to replace this body-negative thought?

Who can support you in developing this more affirming body-positive thought?

Was it hard to shift your body-negative thoughts to be more body positive? When you started to revise those thoughts, did you feel an emotional resistance or a feeling of hopelessness? Or was it relatively straightforward and easy for you to identify new, more affirming thoughts? Lastly, were your body-negative thoughts more related to your LGBTQ identity alone, several of your identities, or something else? These questions, again, are so important to your body positivity, which contributes to your overall resilience. This may seem like a simple activity, but consider what it would be like to really commit to building these new body-positive thoughts.

It takes some practice, for sure, but when you hear those body-negative thoughts in your head and catch them when they happen, be kind to yourself. Simply acknowledge the thoughts, then use some of your energy to say the new thought to yourself, even if you don't believe it now. As you practice this shift over time (perhaps using the worksheet version of this exercise that's available at http://www.newharbinger.com/39461), you will come to feel committed to treating your body well. After a day, week, month, or longer of shifting your thoughts, you can see how your resilience naturally develops over time.

Next, you will explore considerations in sharing your body with others.

## Sex Positivity: Intimacy and Diverse Relational Structures

As you explore your relationship with your body and how to make decisions about whether to share your body with others or not, you may begin to consider dating, intimacy, and other forms of relationships. Each can be both exciting and stressful to think about and pursue. LGBTQ people can experience more stress than straight and cisgender people when it comes to these things, as so many feel pressure to hide who they are and who they have affection for and/or love, so resilience is important to develop in these areas.

To develop resilience in these areas, you can learn more about what relational structures are right for you. No matter the level or focus of your interest in sex or how you define intimate relationships for yourself, there are a variety of diverse relationship possibilities. Monogamy refers to relational structures of two partners who typically partner with only one another over a long time period. When it comes to monogamy, LGBTQ people may face a stereotype that they cannot be faithful in monogamy or don't have lasting monogamous relationships. However, many LGBTQ people, as far back as recorded history can tell us, have engaged in monogamy and have successful long-term relationships.

Polyamory refers to relational structures in which there may be more than two partners in a relationship. Within a polyamorous relationship, there may be two partners who are primary or "anchor" partners but have dating and/or sexual relationships with other people as well. In these primary partner relationships, there can also be freedom to have relationships outside of the anchor partnership that range from short term, like one sexual encounter, to long term, or somewhere in between. These are just a few examples of what polyamorous relationships can look like in real life. Polyamorous folks face myths as well—for example, that there is too much jealousy and that these relational structures don't last. Again, these are just myths. All relationships—whether monogamous or polyamorous, whether dating or engaging in a long-term relationship that may include cohabiting—require healthy communication. In the next resilience practice, you'll explore more about your identity related to diverse relational structures.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Is Your Relational Identity?

In this resilience practice, you reflect on your own relational identity. Write your responses to the following prompts:

What relationship structures did you see growing up?

How would you describe your relational identity—monogamous, polyamorous, or something else?

What does it mean to you to have this relational identity as an LGBTQ person? Are there myths about your relational identity that you need to challenge?

What aspects of your relational identity—such as developing healthy communication skills or how your relational identity is evolving—would you like to explore further?

As you were doing this exercise, did you feel like you knew your responses right away or that you needed to think more about any of the questions in order to describe your relational identity? Relational identities are fluid, just like sexual orientation and gender identity in some ways. So keeping an open mind for learning about yourself and what is important to you emotionally, and possibly sexually, is the real key to being sex positive and increasing your resilience. Your resilience increases as an LGBTQ person when you have some time to explore and challenge any myths or negative attitudes about your relational identity that you may have realized. Then you can make healthier decisions about how to have intimate relationships—and whether you want to.

Doing personal work to affirm your body is a significant contributor to your resilience, and body positivity can help you make decisions about whether you would like to share your body with others. Sex positivity refers to the self-affirming decisions you make about sharing your body with others. For instance, you might be interested in intimate relationships, like dating and having sexual relationships. Or you may identify as asexual or aromantic, and sexual intimacy and relationships may be less of an interest for you.

### Sex Positivity and Healthy Communication

As an overall note on this sex positivity section, depending on your age and your experiences with sex, you may want to get support in exploring sex positivity and healthy communication. It's important to make healthy decisions about whether to engage in intimate relationships, whether you are monogamous, polyamorous, or asexual, or have other sexual orientation identities. Across these relational and sexual orientation identities, communicating about a decision not to have sex is also an important skill. Although this workbook is not focused on sexual health, I touch on this topic because our sexual health does inform our resilience and overall well-being. Depending on your age and your experiences with sex, you may want to explore this topic further through other readings and discussions with supportive people in your life.

Communication and sexual health do go hand and hand, and for LGBTQ people sometimes it is already a huge endeavor to validate yourself and express yourself as an LGBTQ person. By the time you manage to do this, sexual health communication may be the last thing you talk about with supportive people, or it may be challenging to find people you can talk to about this.

So when we speak of sex positivity and communication we don't mean only the communication you have with others you decide to share your body with—or not—in intimate relationships. It is essential that you also get the LGBTQ-affirming information and support you need. I remember when I had no one to talk about sex with as a queer and nonbinary person, I had some amazing friends who were willing to practice communication with me. I was so worried at the time about how I would date; I had no idea what I would say or do—or was expected to say or do—as an LGBTQ person in developing intimate relationships.

With my friends, I was able to play out some scenarios and get important information about safer sex and started to think about what I might like when I decided to share my body with others. Then I felt more empowered. For instance, if you identify as asexual or aromantic, you may have been told "That isn't a real identity" or "You just haven't met the right person." Notice the similarity to what LGBTQ people hear as well! Feeling empowered in your identity can help you externalize these myths and validate your sex positivity and communication skills. Read Marla Stewart's take on her resilience and sex positivity as an LGBTQ person.

As a fierce lover and a Black, queer femme fighting for all marginalized folks, I find it very important to play as hard as I work. Because I'm dedicated to liberation of all kinds, but especially sexual liberation, giving and receiving pleasure is an undeniable act of resilience. Loving my body at every size that I've been and taking naked erotic selfies fill me with the light that I exude. I love being flirty, seducing strangers, and laughing with the people that I adore and love deeply; these are revolutionary acts because they involve a confident vulnerability that allows people to see me and recognize the love they have for themselves. Sex positivity is valuable, my sexual liberation is treasured, and my pleasure takes priority. This is how I stand in the world—bold, balanced, and brilliant.

—Marla Stewart, African American, queer, cisgender, poly woman and activist

If you want to engage in sexual intimacy, it's important to imagine the scenarios that require you to make decisions and communicate what you want and don't want. Let's explore this further in the next resilience practice.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Communicating about Sharing or Not Sharing—Your Body with Others

This resilience practice will guide you to reflect on what is important to you in terms of sexpositively communicating how you want to interact with others in an intimate manner.

When you think about communicating with another person about sharing your body (or not) with them, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?

Have you reflected on what you like and do not like with regard to intimate relationships when it comes to sharing your body (or not) with others?

What would help increase your resilience in terms of communicating to others about your body when you decide to share it (or not) with others?

In situations where you do not want to share your body with another person, what words would you want to use with this person? Think of this as an "elevator speech" and write it here.

As you completed this resilience practice, notice areas of communication in intimate relationships that you want to work on further, as well as areas that feel solid and strong to you. Overall, you want to use your strengths in communicating in a sex-positive way about what you like and don't like when sharing your body with others or not. Then you want to leverage those strengths in working on your growing edges when it comes to these decisions. Your resilience as an LGBTQ person grows when you do this.

# Resilience Wrap-Up

In this chapter you've explored body positivity and sex positivity, two important aspects of enjoying your body, and learned these keys to resilience in this area:

- Developing body positivity is a process, not just an outcome goal.
- Identifying your body-negative thoughts and shifting them in a direction of affirming your body increases your resilience.
- Practicing body positivity messages is not just about loving your body and being positive all of the time; it's also about identifying ways to be more kind to yourself.
- Developing an affirming relationship with your body can help you make decisions about who you want to share your body with in intimate relationships, or whether you want to share your body at all.
- There are many diverse relational structures, as well as myths that LGBTQ people face concerning their relational identity.

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

• Monogamous and polyamorous relationships are most successful when the people involved emphasize healthy communication.

This chapter was all about the resilience you can develop when you pay attention to and learn about your body. In Chapter 7, you build on some of these ideas as you explore the resilience you can grow in building relationships and creating community for yourself as an LGBTQ person.

#### **CHAPTER 7**

# Building Relationships and Creating Community

When you know how to develop relationships and build a community that is supportive to you as a queer or trans person, you build your resilience and ability to move through tough times. In Chapter 5, you learned about healthy communication skills involving listening and speaking. We dive further into this topic in this chapter. Why is this important? Having healthy relationships helps support your resilience as a queer or trans person. You'll explore the skills you need to build strong relationships—like how to develop friendships, establish boundaries, and maintain the important relationships that encourage you.

In addition, you'll explore how you can create community as an LGBTQ person. Beyond reaching out for support and getting to know your community resources, it's important to build community for yourself. Building relationships and community is a very personal endeavor; it includes taking a closer look at your families of origin and possibly building families of choice that can help you be resilient and thrive.

### **Relationships and Well-Being**

A large part of your everyday mental health comes from your relationships. These are a mix of those you may have had no choice about—your family, your school, your neighbors—and those you develop by choice, like your friends, your partners, and your work colleagues.

These relationships can either challenge or support your everyday mental health and overall well-being as an LGBTQ person. It's true: your mental health is as good as the quality of your relationships. That is where it gets complicated when it comes to your resilience as a queer or trans person. You may have experienced a good deal of oppression related to these or other identities in your various relationships, which clearly influences your overall mental health and well-being. Complete the following resilience practice to explore an important current relationship.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring Your Resilience in an Important Relationship

In this resilience practice, think about a current relationship that means a lot to you as an LGBTQ person. This is a person you trust absolutely, who offers you steadfast encouragement. Write your answers to the following prompts.

Why is this particular person important to you as an LGBTQ person?

Is this person a friend, family member, work colleague, school peer, or someone else?

List three ways that this supportive person has helped you be resilient as an LGBTQ person.

What did you notice as you thought about this important relationship? Did you end up selecting a friend, family member, work colleague, school peer, or someone else to write about? Were there any themes in the three ways this person supports you? What could you learn about these themes for your other relationships?

On the other hand, it might have been difficult for you to identify even one person who encourages you as an LGBTQ person. Or you may have been able to think of only one or two ways in which this person supports you. If you currently have little direct support as an LGBTQ person, this chapter is particularly important for helping you begin developing relationships and building community that affirms you. If this resilience practice was pretty easy, that's OK too. You will have some opportunities to review how to maintain healthy relationships.

Whether this resilience practice was simple or challenging, it is important to think about your relationships. Queer and trans people often are just trying to get through the day as they

come to understand their identities. You may have little chance to slow down and think about the *quality* of those relationships and how you develop them, much less the fact that you can choose to end unhealthy relationships. Next, you will learn more about the range of potential relationships and how to develop ones that are healthy for you as an LGBTQ person.

### What Is a Relationship?

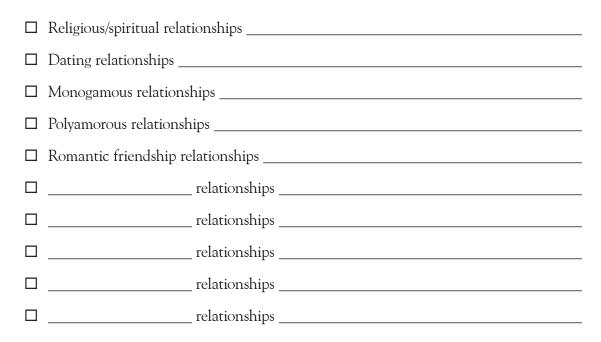
When you hear the word "relationship," like many people you may picture a dating relationship. However, relationships include a wide variety of connections, from friendships and intimate relationships to relationships with family, as well as with work and school peers or in other settings.

Within each of these categories you may feel varying depths of connection with someone. For instance, there are casual, more surface friendships, and those friendships where you feel you can share your deepest thoughts and challenges without judgment. Intimate relationships can range from dating and partnership to monogamy, polyamory, and romantic friendships, among other relational structures (discussed in Chapter 6). Other relationships also range in the level of depth of support you may experience as an LGBTQ person, such as a relationship with a religious/spiritual leader, your work supervisor, or a teacher/professor. In the next resilience practice you'll take an inventory of the wide range of your current relationships.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Take a Relationship Inventory

In this resilience practice (which is available in worksheet form at http://www.newharbinger .com/39461), inventory your current relationships to see the range of relationship types. For each type, place a check on the left and write the name(s) on the right. There are some spaces to add any types of current relationships not listed.

Family relationships
Extended family relationships
Acquaintance relationships
Friendship relationships
School relationships
Work relationships
Sports relationships



In taking this inventory of your relationships, what did you notice? Did you have many or few of the relationship types that were listed? Did you write in additional types of relationships? Did you need additional space, because there were so many? Again note that some relationships have to do with things we can choose, like friendships and dating, while others we may not have choices about, such as family. Still others—at school and work, for example—may fall somewhere in between your having a complete choice whether to develop them or not. How did you feel overall about your inventory? Did you see areas you feel happy about and have worked hard to develop? Were there some gaps or types of relationships you would like to develop? Hold on to those thoughts as you explore how to develop relationships.

### Developing Healthy Relationships

Because relationships are such a big part of your resilience, taking time to learn about how to develop healthy relationships is truly an investment in your overall mental health and wellbeing. Relationships are healthy when the person:

- Affirms your multiple identities as an LGBTQ person
- Supports your growth as a person
- Refrains from judgment

- Seeks to understand your experience
- Provides space to have disagreements and to reconnect
- Offers opportunities to trust one another more deeply
- Offers warmth and encouragement
- Enjoys shared similarities
- Strives to understand differences
- Provides a space of acceptance and positive regard
- Offers a point of view different from your own
- Celebrates accomplishments and triumphs
- Gives support during especially difficult times
- Provides accountability and support for self-care

You get the idea! Healthy relationships remind you of who you are and affirm you, but also challenge you to grow into an even better version of yourself.

## Culturally Embedded Notions of Healthy Relationships

The conception of a healthy relationship can shift depending on the cultural worldview with which you were raised. In my culture, I was taught that family came first, before everything else. So as a queer person I did not reveal my sexual orientation and gender identity exploration to my family. I needed my own privacy and space to explore these parts of me with my chosen friendships. For myself, I realized over time that I appreciated the South Asian and Southern influences on my idea of a healthy relationship, because I value my family relationships greatly. At the same time, I also shifted my values in terms of what was healthy in my relationship with my family. So now I put my family first in some instances—when it enhances my overall well-being and mental health—and think carefully about doing this when that might mean neglecting what I need to be resilient and thrive as an LGBTQ person.

Sometimes the culture (or cultures) we grew up with is harder to identify, but as I noted in Chapter 2, a person's culture may encompass many identities. Complete the following resilience practice to explore how your image of a healthy relationship has been influenced by cultural influences growing up.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** How Do Cultural Values Shape Your Ideas of Healthy Relationships?

This resilience practice will help you explore some possibly unexpected ways that your cultural upbringing has influenced your ideas of what should happen in good relationships. Consider the following questions and respond:

How would you describe your own culture?

What messages did you receive about how you should engage in relationships based on your culture?

Do you think you learned healthy ideas about relationships based on your culture growing up, or did you receive unhealthy ideas about relationships, or a mix of both?

How do these cultural messages influence how you develop relationships as an LGBTQ person?

Was it challenging to describe your culture, or was it relatively easy? Are there cultural messages about relationships that you want to retain, revise, or get rid of altogether? Remember, you get to decide which parts of your culture affirm you as an LGBTQ person, and sometimes this is complicated. For now, you are just assessing the culturally embedded messages about relationships that have influenced you, as well as how these might affect how you develop relationships today.

### Developing Friendships

We took a closer look at intimate relationships in Chapter 6, but now let's dive into starting friendships. Some people call these relationships our "chosen family," depending on the depth of the friendship. Friendships entail all of the healthy qualities we listed in the beginning of the "Developing Healthy Relationships" section. Making friends, however, can seem a bit mysterious. Sometimes it just happens—you feel an instant connection with someone and you want to get to know them better. Other times, you meet people with whom you share interests such as hobbies or sports. Still other times, you may develop some of your closest relationships within the LGBTQ community, another group that shares your identity, or a shared experience, like school or work.

Although you can develop friendships in a variety of ways, most of us learn to rely on just a few approaches. In the next resilience practice, you'll explore the patterns in how you develop friendships.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Taking a Peek at Your Friend-Making Patterns

In this resilience practice, you reflect on the most common ways you tend to develop friendships. Think about how you formed your closest friendship and respond:

How did you first meet this friend? Were you the first to approach your friend, or vice versa?

How long did it take you to form a connection with this person?

When did you realize this would be a close friendship?

How do you think being extroverted, introverted, or somewhere in the middle played into developing this friendship? (You will learn more about introversion and extroversion in the next section.)

When you think of other friendships you have developed in the recent past, what are the similarities and differences in how you made friends with this person?

What patterns did you notice in how you developed your friendship with the person you selected, as well as other friendships? Your exploration of how your personality might have played a role in developing this relationship can be good information for developing relationships in the future. Think about how these typical friendship-making patterns might influence how you develop friendships. This is good information, especially as it relates to the next section, in which you will reflect on your boundaries in friendships.

#### BOUNDARY SETTING

Boundary setting is a crucial step not only in making friends, but also in developing deeper and more connected relationships. What are boundaries? We touched on these briefly in Chapter 1. You can think of boundaries as delineating and protecting your own separate space from others. In your own space, you get to say what is OK and not OK in terms of how you are treated, such as how you are spoken to or interacted with in any relationship. Because LGBTQ people experience a good deal of discrimination, boundaries in the relationships you develop are especially important to express how you value yourself. When you express your boundaries to another in a friendship, it is an opportunity to notice how the other person reacts and whether your overall discussion of your boundaries helps bring you closer together.

How do you know your boundaries are being crossed in a relationship? Typically, you will feel uncomfortable. A part of you may want to ignore it or minimize a boundary intrusion, or you may feel a strong emotion like anger, sadness, or fear that lets you know something is not OK in this interaction with your friend.

Think of a friend you have known for a month and with whom you would like to develop a deeper connection. Now think about these situations with that person. Let's say you feel that a friend is asking questions that are too personal for you, or you feel the friend is somehow taking advantage of you. What do you think your reaction would be? Would you ignore your feelings? Would you ask to talk about how you feel? Would you share your emotions about the interaction with your friend? Most people follow a couple of different patterns in their responses to such boundary-crossing, just as they do in developing a friendship. Complete the next resilience practice to further explore how you express your boundaries.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Expressing Boundaries in Friendship to Deepen the Relationship

In this resilience practice, you will reflect on how you set boundaries through a personal example.

Think of a time you felt a friend had crossed your boundaries, and write about that experience.

How did you react to the boundary-crossing? Did you directly address it with your friend or not, and why did you choose to do so or not?

If you did directly address this boundary-crossing, what was the result? If you did not, what was that like for you afterward?

As you completed this resilience practice, could you feel the emotions you felt at the time of the boundary-crossing? Reflecting back on what you did or did not do, how do you feel? Would you do things differently if you had a chance to address this again? In the future, what might help you express your boundaries with your friends? How can what you learned about yourself in this resilience practice help you think about boundary setting in other relationships?

## Maintaining Friendships

It may be weird to think about, but getting really good at boundary setting will help you not only maintain and deepen your current friendships, but also develop high-quality friendships that support you as an LGBTQ person in the future. Practice does make perfect! Make a habit of noticing when something feels OK, or not OK, to you in your friendships. Take a risk and communicate to your friend about it. Your healthiest friendships will deepen when you do so, because you have a chance to understand one another further through learning more about what is important to you both in your interactions. So having boundaries and setting them helps you increase your resilience. Boundaries are a two-way street—when you get good at setting your own boundaries, you start to look forward to learning more about your friends' boundaries as well. Just as it's important to develop friendships that can support you as an LGBTQ person, it's equally important to develop community as a queer or trans person. You'll learn about this next.

# Building Community as an LGBTQ Person— One Step at a Time

In the LGBTQ world, people often throw around the word "community" quite a bit, but what is it, really? You can think of community as the networks of friendships, acquaintances,

colleagues, peers, and others that share similar values and ways of looking at the world. Having community is more than just having access to resources and networks, although those aspects are important, as we discussed in the last chapter. Being a part of a supportive community is an important component of resilience, as the community can support you when things are rough—like when anti-trans legislation passes or when queer youth experience discrimination in schools. LGBTQ communities are not the only communities you may feel—or want to feel—you are a part of, but there are times it can be particularly important to be part of an LGBTQ-affirming community. In such a community, you are likely connected to people who:

- Share a set of LGBTQ-affirming values
- Attend similar events or frequent similar spaces
- Understand what supports or threatens your resilience as an LGBTQ person
- Connect in a variety of ways, like online or in person
- Seek to understand and support other LGBTQ people
- Advocate for LGBTQ-affirming environments
- Feel there is something larger than their own individual identity as an LGBTQ person

Having community is important for your resilience as an LGBTQ person, whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. Many trans people who are introverts, for example, may connect with other queer and trans community members online. This is where they may feel the most support as they are exploring their identity. Queer and trans people of color who struggle to find support in their own local communities can connect with online LGBTQ communities of color. For others, it is important to connect in person as a community. In Chapter 8, you will think more about both in-person and online support groups and consider which you might prefer; here our discussion is about *having community* as an important part of resilience. Support groups and other supportive spaces can be a part of having community, but in this section you will build on the steps you used to explore your friendship-making patterns to understand how to build a community that increases your resilience. Anushka Aqil credits her community for much of her resilience as a queer person in a university graduate program.

As student who has been in the university for many years, I notice I occupy two main communities—one by default and one chosen with extreme intent. Within my ivory tower community, every day is a struggle to ensure that marginalized voices are heard, that White supremacy is consistently called out, and that work isn't done on communities but with communities. At the end of every day, I am fortunate to have my chosen community to lean upon, learn from, and grow with through critical self-reflection and constant reimagining of what our queer futures can look like. My survival and my work to uplift the voices of the communities is because I have community that holds me accountable and affords me safety—it is only because of them that I can go beyond surviving and begin thriving as a queer and South Asian American person.

—Anushka Aqil, South Asian, queer, cisgender woman, student activist

In the next resilience practice, you'll reflect on what you want in a community that supports your resilience as an LGBTQ person.

### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Making the Best Community for You

In this resilience practice, you get to dream up the community you would like to have. Think about each prompt and respond.

What types of communities are you a part of right now?

As an LGBTQ person, what types of community would you like to have?

What would you need to do to build connection with your community?

Based on the preceding prompt, list three specific next steps you can take to further develop a community that supports your resilience as an LGBTQ person.

What was it like to reflect on the type of community that would encourage and support your resilience? Did you realize you have certain preferences or needs as you develop this community? Take a moment to think about when you can implement your three next steps. Don't rush yourself, but consider when you could take action.

Resilience Wrap-Up

In this chapter you've learned how important relationships and community are to your mental health and well-being as an LGBTQ person. You also explored that neither of these endeavors will happen overnight; rather, you need to engage in steps along the way. Developing relationships and community building is a process. Here are a few things to remember:

• It's important to know that your mental health and well-being are intricately linked to the health of your relationships.

- Experiencing LGBTQ discrimination makes strong relationship skills even more important, so you have meaningful support when you need it most.
- There is a range of different types of relationships, so it's helpful to occasionally take an inventory of the types of relationships in your life; then you'll know which types you would like to develop.
- Our cultural values and upbringing inform how we develop healthy relationships. You get to choose which cultural values increase your resilience as an LGBTQ person, and which values decrease it.
- Developing friendships is a part of building community.
- By knowing your boundaries and communicating your boundaries to others, you can deepen and maintain important friendships.
- It is helpful to consider what type of community you would like to feel a part of, with special consideration of how much this community might add to or subtract from your resilience.

In Chapter 8, you'll move from growing your resilience through developing relationships and building community to how to get LGBTQ support and resources you need to help your resilience grow as a queer or trans person.

#### **CHAPTER 8**

### Getting Support and Knowing Your Resources

In the preceding chapters you have explored resilience based on your gender and sexual orientation and other identities, as well as how to be resilient to negative messages about being LGBTQ and knowing your self-worth as a queer or trans person. Because the lives and achievements of LGBTQ people are not embedded in school curricula or learned about in family and other informal social settings, you may know very little about your own LGBTQ community and may have few LGBTQ-affirming resources. Part of building your resilience as an LGBTQ person is knowing the important practice of getting support and having LGBTQ-affirming resources that you can rely on during tough times.

This important practice includes knowing when you need help and how to ask for it. It also includes being able to sift through resources to determine how LGBTQ-affirming they are. You learn more about when you do and do not need support as a queer or trans person. You also learn more about the type of support you need. It then becomes easier to develop healthy practices of relying on people and other resources you truly need to build your resilience. In this chapter, I'll help you figure out which types of support work best for you, based on your life and your personality, and how LGBTQ community events may be an important part of your resilience.

### The Role of Support in Sustaining Resilience

Think for a moment. When was the last time you really needed support? Were you mildly stressed, or was it a major event that led to your needing support? Did you talk to someone about needing support, or did you decide to go it alone because you thought no one would understand what you were going through? These questions should get you thinking about whether supportive community and resources are an important part of your life, how much you have accessed them, and even how much you have received support that is *actually* 

*supportive*. Many times you may not have had access as an LGBTQ person to the support you really did need, whether in your family, school, work, community, or other settings. Think of both the instances when you needed support and did not receive it, and when you did receive the needed support. The following resilience practice will help you identify your support experiences as you were growing up, as well as the types of support that feel most helpful to you.

Fall seven times, stand up eight.

-Japanese proverb

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Reflecting on What You've Learned about Receiving Support

Your family can be like a mini-schoolhouse of learning, with your parents or caregivers serving as your caregivers, instructors, and authors of the textbooks! Whether you had great, middling, or poor relationships with your parents while growing up, you tend to observe and soak up how they exhibited their need for support, accepted support, refused support, or even pretended they did not need support. Consider these questions and write your responses:

What type of support did you see people receiving when you were growing up?

How do you remember people responding to giving or receiving this support?

#### Did you receive support or not as an LGBTQ person growing up?

If you did receive support as an LGBTQ person growing up, was it helpful, not helpful, or somewhere in between? If you didn't receive support, what was the support you needed?

What did you notice about your answers? Was it easy to think of examples of people receiving support when you were growing up, or was it more tough to remember? Was it easier to remember how people in your family responded to receiving support? Did it get more emotional or difficult to think about the support you needed, but may or may not have received, as a queer or trans person growing up? Your answers do not have to be precise, but you should get a sense for how much your family demonstrated that receiving support was important, and you should be starting to think about how your resilience as an LGBTQ person was affected by the support you did or did not receive.

Read what Sand Chang says about their resilience and how they make sure they are conscious of how to recharge, renew, and keep an eye on how to keep their resilience strong.

Resilience is a practice rather than something that I simply have as a trait or character asset. It's everything I do that fortifies me in a world that does not affirm all my identities all the time. What I need might change from day to day. There are times when a hard workout or doing yoga is what I need the most to ground myself in my body and detox from negativity [of] the external world, and there are times when I just need stillness. It might look like saying "no" to being in environments that I know will create more emotional labor for me. It might mean surrounding myself with supportive, loving people, or it might mean going inward and cultivating connection with myself or my spiritual practices. Around me I see how easy it is to check out, to numb, or dissociate through the trauma of everyday life. I certainly have done my share of that. Today I make every effort to make conscious choices toward long-term solutions rather than instant gratification or the illusion of being able to "fix" myself, others, or the world in a moment. For the most part, resilience is about choice or at least slowing down so that I have choices.

—Sand Chang, Chinese American, genderqueer therapist

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying Which Sources of Support Work Well for You

Now that you have a general impression of how support was treated when you were growing up, let's talk about what support can look like, in a practical sense, and identify which sources of support you find most helpful.

Read through the listed sources of support, then in the left colum rate *how supportive* each seems to you, using a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 is very supportive, 2 is kind of supportive, and 3 is not supportive at all. Don't think about it too much—this is meant as a quick assessment of what you tend to respond to the most:

Rating	Sources of Support	Current Access
	Talking on the phone	
	Videoconferencing (like Skype, FaceTime)	
	Meeting someone in person	
	Spending time alone	
	Spending time with one other person	
	Connecting with a friend	
	Connecting with a family member	

Going to a counselor or therapist	
Receiving a pep talk	
Processing what happened	
Being reminded that you are a good person	
Making a list or plan of what to do next	
Feeling that someone is listening to you	
Journaling	

Read through your list when you are done. As you look back over the list, take three different highlighter colors and use one each to highlight the sources of support you marked 1, 2, or 3. Then look at each of these three groupings and think about how much these are present in your life right now. Place a checkmark in the right column for those that you have access to right now.

This is just an initial assessment of where you are currently with receiving support. When you take time to reflect on this, you can gauge how much access you have to support. Next, we'll talk about the type of support you need related to your personality.

Knowing Your Personality and What Support Works Best for You

So far, you have reflected on how family influences can affect how you receive support, and you have explored the types of support that actually feel helpful to you. Your personality can play a large role in receiving support as well. We each have our own unique personality, but there are some common facets. For example, one major facet of personality is how *introverted* or *extroverted* you are.

Your degree of introversion and extroversion (most of us are somewhere on the continuum) plays a big role in the type of support you prefer. Introverts tend to want to be alone and work things out in their own head before they talk to someone else. Researching websites, reading books, or journaling are activities many introverts find helpful to settle their minds and get support. Being an introvert doesn't mean you don't like people or have difficulty receiving support from others. It just means that you tend to build your energy by being alone or with one other person, and you find this more helpful than hanging out with a lot of people or getting "cheered up."

On the other hand, extroverts tend to process their stress by being with others and may find going to a gathering or party is a helpful source of support (which could be a nightmare for an extreme introvert!). If you are extroverted, you get much of your energy from other people, so being around others is your natural tendency and can feel very supportive.

This isn't black or white; rather, think of extroversion and introversion as two ends of a continuum. You tend to have *preferences* in this facet of your personality, so you gravitate to a part of the continuum that is most comfortable to you. It may be that you find yourself toward the middle: sometimes feeling extroverted, so connecting with others will feel supportive, and other times feeling introverted, so spending time alone will be more helpful in building your internal energy and resources. Take a look at the continuum and think about where you might fall on it:

Extroversion < Middle - Introversion

### Navigating Stress

No matter what type of stress you are facing, it is important to *not force yourself* to receive support that does not work for you. That is why this introversion-extroversion continuum is important. As an LGBTQ person, there is the everyday stress you can feel just from life in general. Then there is the stress that we discussed in the introduction, from having to navigate queer and trans stigma in society. Both types of stress—everyday stress and minority stress—can knock you off your center.

Now, when you are not under immediate stress, is when it can be helpful to attempt to *grow* the ways you can receive help. That is another reason knowing where you fall along this continuum can be important. If you tend toward one side, growing those support resources can help you. Some people think that being in the middle of the continuum is the most healthy position, as then you can more readily access both types of support. Regardless, it can be helpful to strengthen your ways of accessing support that are not your typical go-to's. This is especially important because LGBTQ people experience social stress on top of everyday types of stress, so they need a wider range of support.

### LGBTQ-Specific Stress

As explored in earlier chapters, in the course of their lives queer and trans people experience some common sources of stress. Taking a closer look at some of these sources of stress can help shine a light on resources you can use to move through these experiences and get the support you need. Some instances of LGBTQ-specific stress are more intense than others, so they can require different types of help. Getting verbally harassed as an LGBTQ person is terrible, and if you are alone when it happens it can feel even more scary. Some queer and trans people, especially people of color, may not trust the police as a potential source of help because of the long history of negative experiences LGBTQ communities of color have had with the police. So they may turn to community members for help before they turn to the police. In addition, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse can feel really different to different people. Likewise, reactions to rejection by family and friends—a common experience for queer and trans people—can differ depending on the type of relationship.

In addition to the stress of being different, there are different categories of LGBTQ-specific stress: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional.

#### INTRAPERSONAL STRESS

You may have internalized negative thoughts about being LGBTQ (which we explored in Chapter 3), which may lead to feeling depressed, anxious, or even having suicidal thoughts, self-injuring, or abusing substances to cope with this stress. These internal types of stress fall into the category of *intrapersonal* LGBTQ-specific stress.

#### INTERPERSONAL STRESS

When you experience LGBTQ stigma in relationships with others in your family, social groups, school, work, or other settings, this is *interpersonal* LGBTQ-specific stress. When you experience interpersonal stress as a queer or trans person, you are being negatively targeted in some way about your identities. This targeting can be conscious, such as name-calling, or unconscious, such as someone assuming that you are straight or cisgender. Examples include being called an LGBTQ epithet while you are walking to meet a friend, hearing your supervisor make heterosexist remarks, being told you aren't a "real woman" if you are trans, or being kicked out of your home as an LGBTQ youth.

#### INSTITUTIONAL STRESS

Institutional LGBTQ-specific stress also can occur across a variety of settings and entail interacting with people, but it specifically includes systemic oppression and discrimination experienced when interacting with large systems. Examples include school and university

systems, religious/spiritual institutions, and healthcare systems. Within these systems, there may be an explicit lack of rights for LGBTQ people, such as statutes in certain states allowing discrimination against queer and trans people and denial of services. There are also systems that are designed to serve straight people but not prepared to best serve LGBTQ people. For example, across the United States the laws that govern adopting or fostering children differ from state to state and often allow discrimination against LGBTQ people.

With institutional stress, it may be difficult to identify a single person or even a group of people as the source. The healthcare system, in which trans-related medical services aren't always guaranteed, is a key example of such institutional LGBTQ-specific stress.

The next resilience practice will help you identify the specific support you need when you experience LGBTQ-specific stress in interpersonal relationships or when interacting with institutional systems.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Do You Know What Support You Need When You Experience LGBTQ-Specific Stress?

The goal of this resilience practice is to consider common sources of LGBTQ-specific stress that you may have experienced, or could experience, and see whether you feel prepared in knowing what steps to take in response. The sample list covers the three categories of LGBTQ-specific stress we just discussed: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional. For each item:

- If you have experienced that LGBTQ-specific stress, place a checkmark to the *left*.
- If you know the support and resources you would need to cope with this LGBTQ-specific stress, place a checkmark to the *right*.

For each category there are additional blank lines where you can add any LGBTQ-specific stress experiences not listed.

### Intrapersonal

Have Experienced	LGBTQ-Specific Stress	Have Support and Resources
	Feeling depressed about being LGBTQ	
	Feeling anxious that someone may find out you are LGBTQ	
	Having suicidal thoughts because you are LGBTQ	
	Cutting or injuring yourself because you are LGBTQ	
	Wishing you were not LGBTQ	
	Abusing substances, like alcohol or drugs	
	Engaging in unsafe sex	
	Wishing you were not LGBTQ	

#### Interpersonal

Have Experienced	LGBTQ-Specific Stress	Have Support and Resources
	Being rejected by a family member or friends	
	Being called an LGBTQ epithet	
	Hearing a teacher make a heterosexist remark	
	Not being invited to work events your colleagues attend	
	Hearing from a religious/spiritual leader that you will "go to hell"	
	Experiencing emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual abuse	

Institutional
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Have Experienced	LGBTQ-Specific Stress	Have Support and Resources
	Not being able to access important health care safely	
	Feeling unsafe at school or work	
	Experiencing legal stress	
	Experiencing political stress related to anti-LGBTQ sentiment	
	Feeling scared to use public facilities, like restrooms	
	Not being able to access safe housing	
	Being afraid of being stopped by the police	

**Important note:** If you checked that you are feeling suicidal, it is important to call an LGBTQ-affirmative hotline immediately. A good resource is The Trevor Project (http://www.thetrevor project.org; 1-866-488-7386); you can also visit your local hospital emergency room. Because LGBTQ communities have high rates of suicidality, it is important to get help immediately if you are having thoughts of hurting yourself or have a plan or the means to hurt yourself. Talking about suicide will not make it happen, but *not* talking about suicidal feelings can place you in great danger of isolation and a lack of support.

You have explored some difficult situations in this book, and completing this list may feel very difficult, because some LGBTQ-specific stress, when it is chronic or situational, can also be traumatic over time. In addition, some categories of LGBTQ stress include such harmful experiences that you may begin wanting to hurt yourself in some way. Notice which LGBTQ-specific stresses you checked on the left but not on the right—indicating you experience this stress, but lack resources to deal with it. If you didn't know what might help you to cope with some of the scenarios in this exercise, don't worry; the rest of the chapter is devoted to helping you find those resources. You should end the chapter feeling more confident to check more items on the right. In Chapter 5, you learned about standing up for yourself; in this chapter you are learning about building your own resources and creating community that supports you as a queer or trans person.

### Accessing Stable Structures for LGBTQ Support

Now let's think about more specific types of support, other than family or friends, which can help you manage and heal from LGBTQ-specific stress. Friends and family members who are LGBTQ-affirming, and also colleagues and peers in work and school settings, can be important sources of support. However, sometimes these sources are unstable or difficult to rely on when you need help the most. Other times you may lack access to supportive people in these categories. In the next sections, you will read about additional sources of LGBTQ support that may make sense for you.

Our wounds are often the openings into the best and most beautiful part of us.

-David Richo, White, cisgender, straight, author

### Counseling

Counseling, also called therapy, can be an important way to find support just for you. Even when you have some support as a queer or trans person from people in your community, it can be helpful to have a space and a person solely dedicated to your own healing. Because microaggressions and macroaggressions can add up over time, creating more risk and vulnerability in your life, counseling can be a good way to check in and see how you are doing as an LGBTQ person and what you need to be resilient and thrive. Through counseling you can not only learn more about yourself but also work with your counselor to proactively heal from LGBTQ stigma you may have experienced or internalized.

You may feel that counseling isn't for you. Some research has found that some groups, like people of color or immigrants, may not feel as comfortable as other groups in accessing counseling (Sue & Sue, 2015). (I'll discuss community indigenous sources of support later in this chapter.) Even if you do feel that counseling is right for you in terms of support, it can be difficult to find an LGBTQ-affirming counselor. To ensure that you work with a good counselor, look for one with these qualifications and experience:

- License as a counselor, social worker, school counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or nurse practitioner
- Understanding of LGBTQ concerns, so you do not have to teach them about queer or trans education and competence
- A record of advocacy for LGBTQ and ability to help you move through LGBTQ barriers in society, such as writing a letter for referral to trans medical services
- Empowerment perspective on working with LGBTQ people and, if they are a cisgender or straight person, awareness of their privilege
- Familiarity with queer and trans communities in your city and state
- Completion of continuing education on LGBTQ concerns in mental health, and commitment to ongoing education.

Finding a counselor can be challenging, as some counselors will list LGBTQ concerns as a specialty but actually engage in *conversion therapy*. Conversion therapy is an unethical approach to counseling, wherein the counselor attempts to guide or pressure the person to change their gender or sexual orientation. These approaches are unethical because rather than supporting or improving the client's mental health, they harm it, according to research. Your counselor's professional ethics require that they respect and support you for who you are in terms of your sexual orientation and gender identity—not impose on you their religious and/or societal beliefs that conflict with who you know yourself to be. Other challenges may arise when seeking a counselor, such as whether you have insurance, live in a rural area with limited options, live in an LGBTQ-negative community, or are not employed. If you do not have insurance or are not employed, it is helpful to search for a pro-bono or reduced-fee (sliding scale) counselor. If you are in a rural or LGBTQ-negative environment, look for counselors who work online (called tele-counseling).

### Support and Counseling Groups

Many LGBTQ people find participating in a support group immensely helpful. Support groups can center on queer or trans issues, or may include all LGBTQ identities within one support group. Support group facilitators typically may not have formal mental health training, whereas counseling groups tend to be led by mental health professionals. There are advantages and disadvantages to each, depending on your needs for support at any given time. Some counseling groups run for a certain period (like a six-week, eight-week, or twelve-week group) that you must sign up for and pay for in advance, whereas support groups tend to be free and allow attendees to drop in as they need to for support. Both counseling groups, there is a wide range of leadership and membership possibilities, so just as you need to ask some important questions when seeking a counselor, you need to ask similar questions about group leaders and members:

- What is the purpose of the group—support, counseling, or educational?
- Who leads the group, and what is their background and training?
- Who are the typical members of the group?
- Is there an expected commitment level for group attendance?

These questions can be really important in relation to where LGBTQ group members are with their identity development and self-definition. For instance, trans support groups can vary widely between members who are more focused on accessing medical interventions and supporting one another in this, and those who value gender fluidity and reflect on general experiences in society rather than primarily on medical treatment. Before you join a particular group, talk to current or recent members in person and online—like in email and on social media—about their experiences there. The "current or recent" part is important, as changes in group membership can influence the group's purpose and content.

### Community Resources

Whereas individual counseling, group counseling, and support groups tend to be ongoing, sometimes you might need a different type of support that is not on a regular weekly schedule, such as community resources and events. Community resources can include a range of queer and trans organizations (local, state, regional, national, international) that are either brick-and-mortar organizations, online organizations, or other types of community groups. Many of these spring up as community needs arise. For instance, when anti-LGBTQ legislation is

proposed, often organizations begin working locally to educate voters and work to prevent passage. When anti-trans bathroom laws started appearing in state legislatures across the country, various community groups came together to collaborate and resist this oppressive legislation.

Why do these types of groups matter to all queer and trans people? Because these groups typically have the most up-to-date and current resources related to LGBTQ civil rights. During times that anti-LGBTQ social sentiment is fomented and increases, such a resource can explicitly inform you of your bathroom rights in a school, college campus, or public setting. Knowing your specific rights can become more important at different times in your life. For instance, if your partner is hospitalized or if you are adopting, knowing which organizations work on these areas of LGBTQ civil rights can not only help you be resilient during a tough time, but also increase your resilience through stronger connections to LGBTQ-empowering resources. Complete the next resilience practice to identify LGBTQ community resources you can access when you need them.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Mapping Your LGBTQ Community Resources

In this practice, you'll explore how much you know about your LGBTQ community resources at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels. Check the statements below for which you can affirm that you know how to access the appropriate resources as a queer or trans person that empower you and support your civil rights.

I am aware of organizations that:

- □ Support LGBTQ people of my generation, such as children, adolescents, young adults, adults in midlife, and older adults
- □ Compile information related to LGBTQ health care
- □ Support LGBTQ biological, adoptive, and foster parents
- □ Gather information on LGBTQ legal rights, like marriage and the tax code
- □ Compile information on LGBTQ rights in housing and other neighborhood concerns
- □ Gather information on LGBTQ interactions with the police and other legal enforcement
- □ Track information on legislation impacting LGBTQ people

- □ Compile information on LGBTQ hate crimes
- □ Track information on LGBTQ international concerns

What do you notice? Do you have more information about some sorts of organizational resources than about others? Rounding out your knowledge in any areas where it's lacking will help you not only access support for yourself when you need it, but also support others in your community, whether or not they share similar identities with you.

#### Community Events

In some ways, community events dovetail with community resources. These events can pop up as LGBTQ needs arise, or they may be established traditions to address long-term needs in the queer and trans community. For instance, the Trans Day of Remembrance is a long-standing tradition held around the world on November 20 to honor the lives of trans people who have died related to anti-trans bias. Queer and Trans Pride events are also longstanding events, but these can signal a different tone for communities as a reminder of the unique and important contributions of LGBTQ people that should be celebrated. Here are some other notable queer and trans events:

- Trans Day of Remembrance
- Trans Day of Resilience
- Day of Silence
- Stonewall Riots Anniversary
- Awareness Weeks for individual groups within the LGBTQ community
- World AIDS Day
- National Coming Out Day
- LGBT History Month
- Racial/Ethnic Pride celebrations, such as Black Pride, Latinx Pride

Are these common events in your city or cities nearby? Were there some events you did not know about or recognize? Google the events you were not as familiar with, and know that many LGBTQ events are also held online for those who may not be able to travel to these community occasions. Kirk Surgeon's story speaks to the importance of community connections and events in fostering resilience in his life.

Coming out for me has been an ongoing process of self-realization. The first time I really came out was to myself. Once I came to the realization that I was not straight, I delved into information from the public library, alternative newspapers, and magazines on gay culture (this was the pre-Google era, LOL!). From those sources, I discovered and connected with the Triangle Community Center (TCC) in Norwalk, Connecticut, which was close to where I then lived. I didn't realize, at the time, how fortunate I was to have ready access to a gay community center close by that provided affirming support and services to me on my comingout journey. TCC helped me to see the power of cooperation in empowering the LGBTQI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex] community. There I was able to meet with individuals who were also just coming out as well as those who were well on their own journey. Both groups of individuals provided me with invaluable lessons on how to navigate being gay in Connecticut and New York, as I didn't realize how much I didn't know about gay life. As I learn more about myself I realize the truth in the statement information is power and liberation. The most important lesson I learned was that I was not the only one! I was not the only one who didn't know where to go to meet gay friends. I was not the only one afraid of what my parents would do when I came out to them. I was not the only one who was scared of what being gay would mean to my friends, my career, my extended family. I was not as alone in my feelings and doubts as I had thought. I was not alone, as I was a part of a community that I could embrace and which would embrace me if I would be brave enough to willingly be a part of that community. I'm glad I chose to embrace that part of me and the community that came with being gay, as that community has been one of my greatest supports.

—Kirk Surgeon, African American, gay, cisgender, community organizer

### Religious or Spiritual Support

For many queer and trans people, religious and/or spiritual support is an integral aspect of their lives. For some, it is also a double-edged sword. On the one hand, their religious and/or spiritual beliefs help them move through hard times and are a critical component of resilience. On the other hand, many of these same people have been hurt by religious and/or spiritual groups because of their gender or sexual orientation. Not all people identify religion or spirituality as an important part of their resilience, as some identify as atheist or agnostic. However, even for people in those categories, religious and spiritual traditions can be frightening and sometimes even dangerous, as some leaders in these traditions preach against queer and trans communities. For instance, I identify as a Sikh (a South Asian religion). Even though I did not grow up with a religious concept of being a sinner, I grew up in the very Catholic city of New Orleans, where these were common beliefs and messages that my fellow queer and trans peers were exposed to as they worshipped. My atheist and agnostic friends who were raised in religious or spiritual homes had similar experiences, and these negative self-beliefs were internalized. The next resilience practice will help you see how religious/spiritual belief systems may have been helpful, harmful, or a combination of both for you as a queer or trans person.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Religious and/or Spiritual Resources as Supports, Barriers, or Both

In this practice, you'll explore how religious or spiritual belief systems have influenced how you view yourself as a queer or trans person. Reflect on your life thus far, and answer the following questions. Note: You do not have to subscribe to a certain religious and/or spiritual belief to move through this resilience practice activity.

Was religion and/or spirituality a large part of your upbringing?

Was religion and/or spirituality helpful, harmful, or a combination in learning to affirm your gender and sexual orientation?

Right now, is religion and/or spirituality helpful, harmful, or both as a resource that helps you feel good as a queer or trans person?

If you could go back in time and talk to your younger self about how religious and/or spiritual approaches should support queer and trans communities, what would you say?

If you were asked to talk to religious and/or spiritual leaders about what you think they should do to support queer and trans people in their resilience, what would you say?

La cultura cura. (Culture heals.)

—José Antonio Burciaga, Chicano, cisgender, straight, author

### Indigenous Healing and Support Systems

The word "indigenous" refers to cultural ways of healing that are important resources to many communities. These cultural ways of healing may be integral resources you grew up with or were introduced to along the way. Some, but not all, indigenous models of healing may be related to religious and/or spiritual supports. Growing up, I was introduced to ayurvedic medicine (Indian holistic approaches) as part of my culture. This indigenous healing resource, thought to be thousands of years old, relies on various natural treatments, like food or herbal remedies, to relieve stress and tension. East Asian indigenous approaches such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) have a similar approach, whereby personal experiences of pain are related to imbalances in the individual's energy field. Native American indigenous approaches view an individual's experience of stress as related to nature and the larger world, which can aid in healing.

These are just a few examples of indigenous healing, and in the U.S. culture all are still generally viewed as not mainstream (with a few exceptions, such as acupuncture). However, these healing resources are considered very much mainstream within their cultures of origin. Many queer and trans people find that as they recover their sense of self-worth and validation of their identities, they can begin to also explore and embrace alternatives to mainstream Western healing such as counseling or psychiatric medicine. This is not to say one approach is more helpful than the other, only that it is important to acknowledge multiple modes of healing resources with a long history of use that can help queer and trans people increase their resilience.

### Other Types of Support: Considering Our Multiple Identities

In Chapter 2, you learned the significance of all of our social identities within the queer and trans community, such as racial/ethnic identity or disability identity. This significance can be really important when it comes to the type of support and resources you need to be resilient in the world as an LGBTQ person.

As with some of the other areas of support, our need for these resources may change over time. For example, during one period of my life, I really needed to be connected with a South Asian queer and trans group. Within this supportive space, I could connect with people who grew up with similar traditional foods, holidays, dance, music, and culture. I literally felt at home in these groups, which really increased my resilience. As a reminder, here are *some* examples of different social identities—there are many more, but this is a good start to get you remembering parts of your identity in addition to your gender and sexual orientation:

- Race/ethnicity
- Class
- Disability

- Migration status, such as immigrant, refugee, asylee, undocumented
- Education level, such as high school, college, or graduate school
- Neighborhood setting, such as urban, suburban, or rural
- Political affiliation, such as Democratic, Progressive, Radical, Republican, and Libertarian
- Religious and/or spiritual affiliation

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Other Types of Support: What Did You Need Then, and What Do You Need Now?

This resilience practice will help you explore your current needs for support and resources related to different aspects of your identity. Consider these questions and respond.

When you were growing up, what types of supportive spaces related to your social identities did you need? Were you able to access these spaces?

Currently, what types of supportive spaces related to your social identities do you need? Have you been able to access these spaces?

Are there types of support spaces related to your social identities that you prefer not to access at this time?

Your responses should give you an idea of whether there are specific subgroups within the LGBTQ community that have been—or would be—helpful for you to access as resources. Remember, there is no "right" answer to these questions; there is only what is true for you at this moment. And that truth can change, depending on what is going on in terms of current events, noticing your changing needs, and influences from your community. For example, after 9/11, there was a lot of targeting of the South Asian community in the United States. At that time I reconnected with a South Asian queer and trans group, as well as other more general and broad South Asian—serving organizational supports.

Read how Roan Coughtry builds community as a key component of their resilience, and how building community is an intentional act for them to grow their resilience.

Building community is an important source of resilience, both personally and collectively. For myself, simply being around people who reflect all sorts of gender possibilities—Who see and value my gender without question or confusion—was so healing in my coming-out process and continues to be today. Being able to build family and love with people in queer creative ways validates my desires and longings. On a collective level, building community with one another—through queered relationships, queered families, witnessing each others' magic, and mutual support—quite literally keeps us alive, and it also helps us expand and thrive. So much in society fosters this "divide and conquer" strategy that's meant to keep us apart, keeps us isolated, encourages us to turn on each other and fight our own, rather than noticing the real systems that oppress and exploit. Resilience requires that we work through this and build community in spite of this—both within queer circles and expanding beyond them. Our power is in community, in partnerships, in brilliant collaborations and fierce love.

---Roan Coughtry, White, poly, genderqueer, sex positive community organizer

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Current LGBTQ-Affirming Resources Can You Access?

Now that you've looked at different types of resources you can access, you're in a position to reflect on what sorts of support would be useful for you *right now*. Check off the sources of interpersonal support that you think would be helpful for you to access right now or in the future. There are some extra spaces in case you would like to get more specific about what local LGBTQ-affirming resources would fit your needs for support:

LGBTQ-affirming individual counseling
LGBTQ-affirming counseling group or support group
LGBTQ-affirming community resource or event
LGBTQ-affirming religious or spiritual community
Indigenous healing
Support related to your other identities

What did you notice as you checked off the list? Do these next steps seem doable? And who could help you along the way in accessing these supports? Were the supports you checked off more related to being LGBTQ, or more about your other identities? Your resilience is intrinsically linked to the supports you have in your life, so taking time to reflect on what you need and identifying the very next step is an important way to grow your resilience.

### Resilience Wrap-Up

You build resilience step by step, through learning more about yourself and the world around you. As I have talked about in this chapter, you experienced different types of support growing up; you had needs that either were addressed or went unaddressed. Finding the best support for you as an LGBTQ person is an ongoing process. For example, during some periods of my life, being part of a queer and trans-specific space was important to me as a genderqueer person. In these spaces, I could express my gender exploration as it was happening in the moment without any judgment. At other times, I did not need queer or trans space at all, as I felt more integrated and solid in my identities. Other times, as I shared earlier, I needed other supports related to my racial/ethnic identity. Accessing support, however, can be influenced by a number of factors. Remember these pointers:

- You tend to learn about whether it is acceptable to receive support from your family and those you perceive as models while growing up.
- Your personality—for example, whether you're more introverted or extroverted—can influence the type of support you need.
- LGBTQ-specific stress is common, so it's important to know how and when to access support.
- If you begin feeling suicidal or like you want to self-harm, get help immediately (contact The Trevor Project, http://www.thetrevorproject.org; 1-866-488-7386).
- Supports and resources can come in the form of individual counseling, counseling and support groups, community resources and events, and indigenous healing, and within LGBTQ group spaces.
- Religious and/or spiritual traditions can be important supportive spaces for queer and trans people with those beliefs; those who identify as atheist or agnostic can also find support in those communities. However, there is a long history of people misusing religious and/or spiritual traditions in terms of anti-LGBTQ teachings.

In Chapter 9, you take everything you have learned so far—from knowing your multiple identities as an LGBTQ person, to knowing your self-worth and identifying affirming supports and resources, to exploring the resilience that you can develop when you experience hope about being LGBTQ—and seek and feel inspiration as a queer or trans person.

#### **CHAPTER 9**

# **Getting Inspired**

From reading earlier chapters, you know that resilience is natural. Just as when you break a bone, it heals stronger at the broken places, your resilience can strengthen over time. Getting inspired can take your resilience to an entirely new level. It is essential that you know how to bounce back from hard times as a queer or trans person, and inspiration can be the secret ingredient, reminding you how critical your resilience is to your well-being. In this chapter you will learn to prioritize being inspired, which includes learning new and different things about yourself that you may not have realized previously. From cultivating hope for the future, to the role of mentors, to identifying what you love to do, the resilience practices in this chapter help you explore how to plug into the inspiration that strengthens your resilience.

### Building Hope as an Essential Resilience Resource

You know when you are feeling hopeful, right? Your mood is elevated, and you are filled with anticipation that something good is afoot! The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines hope as "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." Feeling hopeful as a queer or trans person helps quell the threats to your resilience, as you have a strong idea or expectation that not only will something good happen, but you also deserve good things to happen in your life. So hope is connected to the self-worth and self-esteem that you learned about in Chapter 4. In the next resilience practice, you'll take a quick inventory of things you have been hopeful about as a queer or trans person.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** What Does Hope Look Like in Your Life?

Think of some situations in which you have felt hopeful. In response to the questions, write about those experiences.

Describe a recent situation you felt hopeful about.

How did you know you were feeling hopeful? Were there things you felt in your body (such as excitement, nervousness)?

Did you let others know you were feeling hopeful, or did you keep it to yourself? What was it like sharing or not sharing that hopefulness?

As you wrote about this experience of hope, did you notice that you also had some not-sopositive feelings as you experienced hope? For example, did you feel scared to be hopeful? Did you stop yourself from being hopeful? Respond to the following questions, and explore some of these experiences further. What did you need to support your hopeful feelings in this situation?

Did you trust or distrust your hopeful feelings in this situation?

How did your feelings of trust or distrust influence your overall hopeful feelings?

How was it for you, responding to this set of questions? When you feel hope, do you let yourself have that feeling? Or do you start distrusting that feeling? The feeling of hope can come with some nagging questions about whether you can trust in hope, and it may entail a little healthy anxiety, such as "Will I get this job that I want?" It is helpful to know how you typically interact with your feelings of hope because this can influence how resilient you feel in tough situations. Because LGBTQ people experience discrimination, it can be hard to trust when you are feeling hopeful about the future—which I will talk more about next.

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African, cisgender, straight male, human rights activist

### Experiencing Hope as an LGBTQ Person

Hope is a pretty cool feeling, but as you learned in the preceding resilience practice, like every human being, you have your own personal patterns in how and why you let yourself feel hopeful. Hope can get kind of dicey for you as an LGBTQ person, because discrimination is real, and you shouldn't expect yourself or others to just hope your way out of it! Still, because hope has been shown to be a critical aspect of resilience for LGBTQ people (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011), it is important to cultivate it. Cultivating hope in this manner becomes like tending to a garden. There are the weeds (discrimination) growing in the garden of your resilience that need to be identified and plucked out so that your garden (yourself!) can flourish. And still, even as you create the most beautiful garden and use the highest-quality soil and diligent watering to nourish your garden, the wind (society) can still carry weed seeds right back into the middle of your enriched garden. Get the metaphor?

In this regard, as an LGBTQ person, you can think of hope not only as an experience that is an important aspect of your resilience, but also as a verb. Amid the windblown seedlings of anti-LGBTQ discrimination that threaten your own hope and self-growth, strengthening your wishes or hopes for certain things to happen in your life can help keep you on track toward living the life you truly want to live. So, hope as a verb entails that same expectation and positive outlook as when you are feeling hopeful, but it is specifically planted and cultivated.

Paying attention to hope as a verb in your life as a queer or trans person does imply some trust in the world, which can show you that the world will not always be fair. So, let's talk about that for a moment. A few years ago, Dan Savage—a well-known gay, cisgender Seattle journalist—famously began a campaign geared to supporting LGBTQ youth that he called "It Gets Better." His call to LGBTQ youth essentially was aimed at comforting them, asserting that they may have to deal with anti-LGBTQ oppression now, but it would get better as they became adults. Many queer and trans activists of color and White allies balked at this notion for several reasons: first, Savage was not reflecting on the White and male privilege that helped him "get better" as a gay, cisgender adult dealing with LGBTQ oppression; and second, there is an important role all people should play in supporting LGBTQ youth in *making* it better—not just hoping for things to get better.

I bring up this "It Gets Better" campaign specifically in our exploration of cultivating hope as a verb in building your resilience. This cultivation of hope is active—not passive. I do not want you to wait until things get better to grow your hope for your own dreams and thriving in the future. This cultivation of hope is grounded in the intersectionality of your identities that you explored in Chapter 2—issues of privilege and oppression can either support (privilege) or challenge (oppression) your development of hope as an LGBTQ person. It doesn't magically "get better" for everyone in the same ways, so the intersection of your identities really does matter and will shape your experience of growing your hope. This cultivation of hope is also mindful of anti-LGBTQ discrimination—it is important to develop hope despite the messages that you shouldn't feel good about your future at all.

This is a serious issue, actually. It may feel naïve to be hopeful about the world as an LGBTQ person, considering both how bad things can be for your community and the challenges you face individually. However, if you're not clear what this "getting better" should look or feel like (remind you of what you learned about boundary setting and self-worth as an LGBTQ person?), then you are stuck in the muck of "this is just the way it is going to be." That muck is where the LGBTQ community faces depression, anxiety, suicidality, substance abuse, and other serious concerns.

Many times in my own life, under the weight of racism and anti-LGBTQ messages, I just gave up on hope altogether. But what I was missing at the time was the self-worth to notice when I had lost both my hope and the support I needed to nourish my hope so it could grow. I 100 percent didn't need to be forced to feel hopeful or to act as if I was hopeful when I was not. That is not true hope. In short, we are not talking about the type of hope where other people hope things get better with anti-LGBTQ oppression. When you cultivate hope as a verb, you are telling yourself, "I am valuable enough to dream a future that I deserve." Hope then becomes a shield from discrimination and a reminder of the solidity of your expectations and dreams. Let's explore more of that in the next resilience practice.

#### **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Cultivating Hope as a Verb

In this resilience practice, you get to think about why hope, enacted as a verb, could matter to you as an LGBTQ person in a reliable way, to remind you of the value of who you are and your expectations for your life. Write your responses to the following questions:

What are the challenges to cultivating hope as an LGBTQ person?

How do your multiple identities (like race/ethnicity, disability, class) influence how you cultivate hope?

What are the opportunities for cultivating hope as an LGBTQ person?

As an LGBTQ person, how can cultivating hope help you trust your own value more?

As an LGBTQ person, what do you need in order to build hope in your life?

List a few people with whom you can talk about building hope as an LGBTQ person in order to be more resilient.

As you wrote your responses, did you notice common themes? When you explored your multiple identities related to building hope, did those themes change or become more specific? Was it easy to write about your needs for building hope? Sometimes asking for help with feeling hopeful about your life as an LGBTQ person can feel really vulnerable. That's why I recommend having these conversations about hope with the people you trust the most. They can help you have hope-as-a-verb to be more resilient. Next, let's talk about how the link between hope and inspiration can help you increase your resilience as an LGBTQ person.

### Connecting Hope with Inspiration

Inspiration is the motivation you feel mentally and emotionally (and some might say spiritually) to create, innovate, and grow in unique ways. You may be thinking, "Wait; what does inspiration really have to do with resilience?" Well, this isn't the cheesy movie type of inspiration, where the main character overcomes all odds (although those types of movies can be fun to watch). Some people think inspiration is something that artists and other creative types feel every day in their work (which a lot of artists would likely say is rare). However, inspiration is important for you as an LGBTQ person, as you're likely finding new ways to express yourself and do things that are unique to you. Add a dose of LGBTQ discrimination, and you can see why inspiration is far from cheesy movieland. Read what Krista Jones shares about what inspires her resilience.

I draw most of my inspiration from the need for authentic self-expression, experience, and passion. I believe that embracing these deep-rooted needs has contributed to my resilience as both an artist and LGBTQ person. The need for authenticity has driven me to overcome many obstacles, including empowering myself and overcoming conditioned self-destructive behaviors. By persevering through gender and sexual identity challenges, I have gained self-love, compassion, and resilience in many other areas of my life. This has given me a more expansive understanding of my own value and self-worth as a person who identifies outside of society's "norm."

-Krista Jones, White, lesbian, cisgender, artist

Inspiration can also be the lifeblood that gets you excited and motivated to express your unique LGBTQ self in your personal and professional life in ways that feel true to you. I know I am feeling inspired when my heart soars and starts beating a little more quickly; often it is an emotional experience, and I may shed a few tears because I feel hopeful and moved about the world.

So you can see that inspiration and hope are inextricably linked. The more hope you cultivate, the more you can get inspired. The more inspired you are, the more hope you can experience and grow. In the next resilience practice, you'll explore what you think inspiration is.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying the Best Sources of Inspiration for You

The goal of this resilience practice is to give you a quick feel for your take on inspiration. Complete the following sentence stems about inspiration, and as you do, notice the thoughts, feelings, and other reactions you may have. Keep your answers short—you'll come back to these ideas in a later practice and explore them further as they relate to your experience as an LGBTQ person:

Inspiration is
When I hear the word "inspiration," I think of
I feel most inspired when
I feel least inspired when
When I see others feeling inspired, I
When others see me feeling inspired, they

Was it easy for you to come up with a response? Or did you struggle to think of what to write? Are there any similarities in what kindles or deflates your inspiration? What did you notice when exploring how you experience others' inspiration and how others experience *your* inspiration? Some of what you allow yourself to experience with regard to inspiration depends on what you see or experience with others. Ultimately, to increase your resilience, you want to cultivate gratitude when you see others experiencing inspiration, as this reminds you of how nourishing inspiration is. Also, surrounding yourself with people who support you in getting inspired—rather than squelching your enthusiasm and excitement—contributes significantly to your overall resilience and well-being as an LGBTQ person. We'll be delving into that next.

Just don't give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don't think you can go wrong.

—Ella Fitzgerald, African American, cisgender, singer

## Learning What Inspires You as an LGBTQ Person

Now that you know what inspiration is and its connection to hope, the next step is thinking about what inspires you specifically as an LGBTQ person. Inspiration entails feeling motivated to be your unique self and express your own originality, while also potentially trying something new or taking a risk to do something you have always done one way, but tweaking it a bit or changing it altogether. Here are some things that inspire me as an LGBTQ person—see if some of them resonate with you:

- Listening to really good LGBTQ music that moves my soul. HOLYCHILD is my current fave
- Being around a sweet LGBTQ friend with whom I can experience exuberant, gutbusting laughter frequently
- Spending time in deep discussions about everything in the LGBTQ world with my partner
- Learning about LGBTQ cultures around the world and noticing how the United States is similar to or different from these cultures
- Participating in LGBTQ activism, community organizing, and freedom rights movements
- Writing poetry and writing in my journal

So getting inspired is really about identifying the sources of inspiration that motivate you to be curious about yourself and the world—and to potentially be willing to change (which you will explore more in Chapter 10).

Sometimes you need to take a departure from what you do to something that's slightly different in order to get inspiration.

-Tori Amos, cisgender, white, musician

Some of the resilience strategies we talked about in earlier chapters, such as having support (Chapter 8) and models of how to externalize negative LGBTQ messages (Chapter 3), are natural sources of inspiration. And other sources may be particularly important to you as an LGBTQ person. I like to use "who, what, where, when, how, and why" questions to remind me of my sources of inspiration, as used in the next resilience practice.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying Your LGBTQ Sources of Inspiration

The goal of this resilience practice is to get you thinking about your inspirations as a queer or trans person. Respond to the following who, what, where, how, and why questions to identify these sources of inspiration:

Who inspires you to be your unique LGBTQ self?

What inspires you to be your unique LGBTQ self?

Where do you feel inspired to be your unique LGBTQ self?

When are you inspired to be your unique LGBTQ self?

How are you inspired to be your unique LGBTQ self?

Why is it important to be inspired to be your unique LGBTQ self?

As you completed your responses, you should have seen an emerging road map of sorts for not only what inspires you as an LGBTQ person, but also where the bumps in the road—or the potholes—may be in your sources of inspiration. The key to increasing your resilience is to find ways to further integrate the who, what, where, how, and why of your LGBTQ inspiration into your everyday life. This can be as simple as following an inspirational queer or trans person on social media, or posting a quotation that inspires you to be your unique and awesome LGBTQ self on a mirror in your bathroom or someplace you look often. Because you can't control the who, what, where, when, how, and why of anti-LGBTQ messages in society and discrimination, you need to be serious about building the things that inspire you as an LGBTQ person (but that doesn't mean it can't also be fun!).

## Resilience Wrap-Up

In this chapter, you learned how getting inspired entails cultivating hope, and feeling inspiration about your unique self as an LGBTQ person increases your resilience:

- Developing your sense of hope for the future is an active process, not a passive one.
- Feeling hopeful about your life and cultivating your sense of hope does not mean you ignore anti-LGBTQ discrimination in the world. You just know how important your hope is in the face of a world that tries to take away your hope.

- Growing your hopefulness often entails having good support and doing a personal inventory of what expands or contracts your feelings of hope.
- Hope and inspiration are inextricably linked, so getting inspired means you feel more hopeful, and feeling more hopeful often entails being inspired.
- There are sources of general inspiration that can help you be more of your unique self, and there are sources of LGBTQ-specific inspiration that can help you value yourself more as a queer or trans person.
- Who, what, when, where, how, and why questions can help you quickly identify the strong and steady sources of inspiration in your life, and which sources you should cultivate further.

In Chapter 10, you'll move from developing your hope and inspiration personally as an LGBTQ person to learning how your resilience can be connected to making positive change in the world as a queer or trans person and giving back to your LGBTQ community.

## **CHAPTER 10**

# Making Change and Giving Back

Just as getting inspired and feeling hopeful about your life goals and dreams increases your resilience, so does sharing your gifts and talents to help others. In this chapter, you'll explore how making positive social change and giving back to others can be an important part of your own resilience. As you have explored throughout this workbook, LGBTQ people face many life challenges. In the process of learning to be resilient to those challenges, queer and trans people end up learning a lot about themselves and the world. Practices in this chapter help you identify what gifts, talents, and/or skills you might want to share with people and communities of all sorts.

## Helping Others Can Help You Increase Your Own Resilience

In my research on resilience, one interesting finding was consistent across racial/ethnic identity and age: it's all about helping others. This finding is interesting to me, because I don't think most people make this connection, whether they are queer or trans themselves or are strong LGBTQ allies. But when you think about it a little more deeply, it makes sense. Think about the last time you helped someone who was in need. You more than likely felt better about your ability to be helpful, and potentially you were rewarded by a thank-you or some expression of gratitude.

Well, science backs up the ways you can feel good when you help others (a practice commonly called altruism). When you help others, your brain releases endorphins. You feel good! As you feel good, this increases your feelings of gratitude for your ability to help others and for the gifts, talents, and skills you can share. Essentially, as your gratitude for the life you are living increases, when you are helping others you may feel like your problems are far away. In my research, the finding of helping others spanned a wide variety of helping—from working on specific social justice community causes, like efforts against animal cruelty and oppression, to helping out a friend or family member. I like to encourage and affirm others when they doubt themselves (no surprise that I'm writing this book, right?!), and I feel like it comes naturally to me. My South Asian cultural background and the gender socialization I had growing up likely have a lot to do with the ways I tend to help others. The following resilience practice will help you remember ways you have helped others and what it is like for you to be altruistic.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying the Ways You Have Helped Others

The goal of this resilience practice is to help you recognize how you have helped other people and to explore the types of help you tend to give others. Remember, giving help to others does not have to be a grand notion of changing the world. It can be the everyday acts that you like sharing with others.

How do you feel about helping others?

What strengths do you tend to use to help others?

How are these strengths related to your multiple identities and cultural background?

What responses do you tend to get from others when helping?

As you responded to these questions, what did you notice? Were you surprised by how you felt about giving? Did giving to others feel like too much, or are you naturally drawn to helping others? What are the major ways you tend to help others? Did you feel excited, neutral, or unhappy responding to the questions?

No matter what you felt as you completed this resilience practice, there are limits to what you can give. Some people try to give beyond their limits, or have been taken advantage of because they were such ready helpers. Next, you will explore the natural limits to your giving. First, read how Ken Jackson has sought to help others and make positive social justice change in his community.

I work with the Georgia Safe Schools Coalition (GSSC), whose mission is to make schools safe for all students. Specifically, I serve on the board and do trainings throughout the state on supporting queer youth in schools. Also, I do consultations with families, youth, and schools on ways to create equitable environments for all students. As a counselor educator, I work with other educators to include authentic training for future counselors in their preparation programs and courses. As a practicing counselor in a school setting, I work with others to create policies, advocacy/educational opportunities, and counseling support for queer and trans youth and families. My work in this area allows for me to be a part in shaping a better world—even on a small level—and work to make schools better than they were than when I was a student. It gives me hope.

-Ken Jackson, White, cisgender, gay man, school counselor

## Your Resilience Limits When Helping Others

Because LGBTQ people have likely experienced a good deal of oppression in their life, you may feel there are some limits to what you can give. For instance, if you are feeling depressed or anxious, it can be all but impossible to even think about having the energy to give to others.

Or a particularly nasty anti-LGBTQ piece of legislation enacted in your state can reduce the energy you have to give. On the other hand, because altruism can give many people an energy boost and remind them of their gratitude for their own lives, sometimes even if you feel depressed or anxious, giving to others can help you remember the value of your own life. The key is to know the right amount of giving for *you*, based on your overall well-being, and to know when you are overdoing the giving at the expense of taking care of yourself.

In addition to the limited giving capacity you may feel as an LGBTQ person, you may be more introverted and prefer to give in ways that might feel small in the world. I encourage you to remember that no act of giving to others is too small! Again, the key is how that giving makes you feel. If the giving makes you feel drained afterward—or even just neutral—it may be time to reassess how you tend to give, to make sure you are within your boundaries for your overall well-being. Complete the next resilience practice to explore your limits when helping others.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Identifying the Ways You Have Helped Others

In this resilience practice, reflect on not only the ways you tend to give, but also on how you feel afterward.

How do you know you are giving too much when helping others?

What thoughts and feelings do you have in these moments?

What boundaries do you need to set in these instances?

How can you use these boundaries to fine-tune your helping efforts, so you can give to others but preserve enough energy for yourself?

Did you surprise yourself with any of your responses, or were they pretty much what you expected? As you explored your boundaries, did you think you tended to be within them, beyond them, or even unaware of your boundaries related to helping others? Which people in your life might make good accountability partners to check in with about helping others? There's one key question you can use to assess whether you've exceeded your boundaries: after helping others, do you feel more resilient or less resilient?

The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.

—President Barack Obama, African American, multiracial, cisgender, straight male

## How to Make the World a Better and Place: Community Organizing, Social Justice Activism, and Your Resilience

As I explored the research findings about how helping others can increase LGBTQ people's resilience, I found that much of it concerned community organizing and social justice

activism. If you have not already gotten involved, I encourage you to explore this a bit. Even if you don't think community organizing and social justice activism are your cup of tea, it's helpful to look into it, because as queer and trans people we so typically experience anti-LGBTQ threats from the outside world.

What do I mean by community organizing and social justice activism? I think of community organizing as the efforts you can take to get involved in your community to bring about some sort of positive change. For instance, if LGBTQ youth do not have a support group they can attend, community organizing might entail raising some funds to pay a facilitator, or working with a local mental health agency to see what resources could be allocated to running this youth group. Community organizing can entail working with many stakeholders in the community—from lobbying government officials to working with community partner organizations and local residents. Read Suzann Lawry's story of how her resilience grew as she advocated against anti-LGBTQ policies and how her community change efforts were related to her identities as a lesbian and parent living in the South.

[For me] as a lesbian mother, the biggest catalyst for standing up for social justice was to protect my children who needed help navigating the questions that were coming at them on their playgrounds, in their classrooms, and inside their own skins; moreover, this was in 2003 in Georgia; they needed their family protected through equal access to marriage—now! So, I reached for wisdom about what to do from my relationships, because that's what Southern women do, and because the personal really is political. In hindsight, it was certainly an easier task to mobilize to "protect" my loved ones and to fight oppressive policies than it is now to really acknowledge how I continue to benefit [from] and perpetuate oppression on a daily basis. I could feel right, and worse, righteous; I didn't have to feel like a clumsy perpetual beginner. Ultimately, I believe it was inside those early efforts to "protect," studying strategies to effect change, and through those relationships and conversations, that I ended up stumbling upon my own evolving shared liberation. Stand up for social justice for the perfect reason, the imperfect reason, the selfish reason—the important act is to stand, and from there, your view will continue to change.

—Suzann Lawry, White, lesbian, cisgender woman, professor

I see social justice activism as very related to community organizing, but it can also entail more actions, such as street protests, marches, and rallies to call attention to an issue of inequity and injustice. For example, social justice activism might entail a protest at the local or state government office related to anti-LGBTQ legislation or lobbying public and private school officials to make school bathrooms trans-affirming. The combination of community organizing and social justice activism can be particularly powerful. I cofounded the Georgia Safe Schools Coalition to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ youth in schools, and the coalition was involved with many community partner organizations and members who engaged in a variety of activism related to policy change. The following resilience practice helps you reflect on how you feel about community organizing and social justice activism.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Taking Your Pulse about Community Organizing and Social Justice Activism

Community organizing and social justice activism vary widely, from small actions to big ones—from signing online petitions against LGBTQ discrimination and oppression of other sorts to marching in the streets. Think about the place of community organizing and social justice activism in your life.

When you think about community organizing and social justice activism, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?

How have you engaged in community organizing and social justice activism previously?

What motivates you to do community organizing and social justice activism—or deters you from doing it?

Do you think community organizing and social justice activism increase your resilience, decrease your resilience, or both?

Based on your responses, how would you describe your overall attitude toward community organizing and social justice activism? Have you been involved before and know your preferences and the efforts you support, or is this all new to you? Either way, in the next section you can further explore people's different roles in community organizing and social justice activism. We'll also shatter some of the myths about being involved in making social justice change.

What's Your Role in Community Organizing and Social Justice Change?

In the previous resilience practice you may have discovered that you want to get involved in making social justice change, but you feel overwhelmed figuring out where to begin. Or you may have been involved a good deal in helping others and noticed some ways you want to refine how you engage in social justice change efforts. I have found *Four Roles in Social Change: Helpers, Advocates, Organizers, and Rebels* by George Lakey (n.d.; with "thanks to social activist and strategist Bill Moyer") to be really helpful in reflecting on the strengths I have related to social justice change and also how to appreciate the efforts of others and refine my effective-ness when I seek to participate in social justice change efforts. Read through the following descriptions of the four roles, and see which resonate with your own style.

*Helper*—good at helping others in a respectful and affirmative manner; uses education, encouragement, and skill-sharing to foster empowerment and success.

Advocate—enjoys working with government organizations and other stakeholder organizations related to policy changes; uses coalitions and focuses on policy change for successful outcomes.

*Organizer*—works at a grassroots level and encourages leadership development by examining different points of view; uses both short-term and long-term visioning, planning, and training to ensure success.

*Rebel*—feels comfortable with direct actions, such as protests, using these actions to publicize institutional injustice in efforts to hold those in power accountable and bring about social justice change.

Although I have participated in each of these four roles, I am really drawn to the role of being an organizer. I feel like I am most effective in this role; more importantly, my resilience is increased by this role. I might engage in some of the other roles for time-limited activities, but I can always sense when my resilience starts going downhill because I feel overwhelmed and not able to focus.

In the next resilience practice, you'll explore these four life roles a little more.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** The Four Roles in Social Change and Your Resilience Meter

Think of your overall amount of resilience—the reserve of energy you have to bounce back from difficult times as an LGBTQ person—and then think of that resilience energy as a meter. The resilience meter ticks up when you are engaged in social change efforts that increase your resilience, and ticks down when your resilience is decreased. Keep this in mind as you explore your aptitude for the four roles in social change and the likelihood of increasing your resilience when you engage in these roles:

#### Helper

What are your thoughts about the Helper role in relation to social change?

What might be some drawbacks to the Helper role in relation to your resilience?

The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook

#### Advocate

What are your thoughts about the Advocate role in relation to social change?

What might be some drawbacks to the Advocate role in relation to your resilience?

### Organizer

What are your thoughts about the Organizer role in relation to social change?

What might be some drawbacks to the Organizer role in relation to your resilience?

### Rebel

What are your thoughts about the Rebel role in relation to social change?

What might be some drawbacks to the Rebel role in relation to your resilience?

Now that you've reflected on these four roles, which were you drawn to the most—and the least? Are there any you feel pretty neutral about—like you could take it or leave it? Which roles did you rate highest and lowest? Were there overlaps for any role between the ratings you gave for your strengths and for the likelihood it would increase your resilience?

## Targeting Your Involvement in Social Justice Change Efforts

With a clearer idea of what you like and don't like about the four roles and how they relate to your resilience, think about how you might want to not only get involved in social change efforts but also try out one of the four roles when anti-LGBTQ efforts are under way at the local, state, national, or international level. For instance, I work on social justice change related to issues of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation with LGBTQ people. I also work a lot outside of the LGBTQ community on certain issues, such as police brutality and mental health disability. In the next resilience practice, you can explore how you might want to engage in social justice change related to some of the common issues that specifically affect LGBTQ people. Again, it can be important to know how you might react in any one of these scenarios so you have an idea of what might increase or decrease your resilience.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Anticipating Your Resilience in Difficult Sociopolitical Times

In this resilience practice, you get to run through a few scenarios of anti-LGBTQ sociopolitics to see how you might need to anticipate effects on your resilience and build or protect it during these times. This is a quick check of how your resilience might be tested and what you might do in these situations to increase it. For each of the example scenarios, feel free to rephrase or expand to better fit you in terms of your multiple identities; for example, you might add

considerations related to race/ethnicity, class, disability, and other salient identities. Remember that social change acts can range from small to sweeping and everything in between, and they include online change efforts like social media.

#### An anti-trans bathroom law is passed in your state.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

An anti-LGBTQ rights ordinance is passed in your city.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

Police have been targeting members of the LGBTQ community.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

#### A judge denies LGBTQ partners the right to adopt a child.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

#### An LGBTQ elder is abused in an assisted living center.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

#### LGBTQ people are seeking asylum from a country with anti-LGBTQ policies.

What would you do related to social change that would increase your resilience?

What other salient identities would affect you, your resilience, and your actions?

This resilience practice assessed your feelings about potential involvement in social change at the local, state, national, and international levels related to anti-LGBTQ laws, policies, and practices. Often, anti-LGBTQ policies and practices can have even more severe impacts on people of color, people living with disabilities, and people with other marginalized identities. Although it is upsetting to think about the discrimination and inequities that exist in the world, you have the power to make change, in the form of your voice and your vision of how the world should be—and could be. And your vision of that world—influenced by your own life experiences—can be a great compass to use when anticipating how you might want to get involved in social change efforts.

Resilience Wrap-Up

This chapter was all about the resilience you can grow through helping others and giving back to your community. Keep the following in mind to make sure that helping and making social justice change increases your resilience and overall well-being:

• It's OK to feel however you feel about helping others. For some, it comes naturally and is a resilience booster; for others, it can feel draining.

- It's important to keep an eye on how much helping increases or decreases your resilience. People who love helping can overdo it, and people who think they do not like helping may actually be helping others in small but important ways that increase their resilience.
- Setting boundaries for your helping can help you stay on track as you grow your resilience. That nagging feeling that you are getting wiped out or overwhelmed can be a sign you've exceeded your helping capacity.
- There are many ways to effect community and social justice change, and you may fit into one or more of four roles: helper, advocate, organizer, and rebel.
- Each of the four roles calls on different strengths and challenges you to expand your comfort zone. Know your preferences and your dislikes related to these four roles and how your accompanying strengths and growing edges relate to your resilience.
- Knowing how you react—or might react—to anti-LGBTQ laws, policies, and practices can help you grow your resilience, because you are anticipating what you might need and how your multiple identities may play into your reactions and needs.

In Chapter 11, you'll pull together your learning from previous chapters to reflect on how you can keep growing and thriving as an LGBTQ person, as well as the needs and supports you have for this journey.

## CHAPTER 11

# Growing and Thriving

Part of your resilience depends on learning to grow and thrive as a queer and/or trans person, and this chapter explores how practices of self-growth can move you in this direction. Self-growth includes spending time in self-reflection, as well as getting feedback from others you trust who support you in being the best possible *you*. Happily, through these efforts self-growth ultimately moves you toward greater thriving and resilience.

Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.

 James Baldwin, Black, gay, cisgender, author and activist

## What Is Self-Growth?

"Self-growth" is one of those touchy-feely terms that can be hard to define. There are several definitions, but these generally agree that self-growth is a process of looking at your shortcomings or weaknesses (I prefer calling these growing edges) and identifying areas that you could strengthen.

You definitely know when self-growth is happening! You may feel a mixture of excitement, relief, motivation, and other positive emotions as you sense something important under way. When I learn something new about myself, I feel excited because it is an opportunity to be more aware of how this new learning plays out in my life. I also really appreciate learning new things about others and the world, because I think it helps me grow into a better person. That growth naturally strengthens my resilience. The more I can trust in my ability to grow and change, the more I can trust in my ability to bounce back when things are tough.

However, you might also feel some nervousness or pain related to self-growth, as in "Wow, I didn't know I had to grow in that direction." I felt this way the last time my partner said, "Hey, can you put the phone down and listen to me?" When she said this, honestly, I didn't feel a rush of "Yes, of course, sweetie!" I felt more, "Uh-oh, I messed up." Pretty soon afterward,

I used positive self-talk to ask myself how I could grow more in paying attention—and putting down my phone. And I felt really good about this direction in my self-growth. I had a feeling that growing my attention skills would be a benefit in all of my life, from my personal to my professional relationships—and it certainly has made a difference! I remember a time when I might have gotten more defensive about taking in this type of feedback. Now, I may have the initial emotional "oops" reaction, but I have shortened the time between when I notice this feeling and remember that feedback like this is an invitation to grow. And in any situation I get to decide whether I want to grow or not.

You can probably see that when you are queer and trans, self-growth is particularly tricky but particularly important! You want and deserve to live an awesome life, and self-growth and feedback from others can help with that. However, because our community regularly receives anti-LGBTQ messages, it is crucial to know what kinds of messages from others feel good and right for you—and what kinds are designed to bring you down. In the following resilience practice, you'll explore your experiences of self-growth as an LGBTQ person.

## **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Defining Your Own Self-Growth

In this resilience practice, reflect on the times in your life when you've experienced *positive* self-growth that helped (or continues to help) you affirm yourself as an LGBTQ person. Complete the following sentence stems:

I am growing the most as an LGBTQ person when

I am growing the least as an LGBTQ person when

The people who have supported me the most in my self-growth as an LGBTQ person have been

The experiences or situations that have supported me the most in my self-growth as an LGBTQ person have been

The obstacles I still face in my self-growth as an LGBTQ person are

To support my self-growth as an LGBTQ person, I need

As you completed this resilience practice, did any emotions come up? It can be natural to experience a range of emotions—sadness, frustration, happiness, fear—depending on your experiences of supportive people and situations in your life as an LGBTQ person. What insights did you have about the supports and obstacles for your self-growth as an LGBTQ person? Hold on to these insights as you read about making a regular practice of self-growth.

# Making a Regular Practice of Self-Growth to Thrive

Your understanding of self-growth should be clearer now. You know when you are experiencing it—and you can have a variety of emotions as you grow and receive feedback. With a clearer understanding of what your own self-growth is, your resilience can increase as you set aside regular time for what helps you grow. Why set aside time for your self-growth? Well, it's a precious time that is just for you—not for anyone else. This may not seem that revolutionary, but the time you set aside for your own self-actualization (another term for self-growth) ticks your resilience meter up, and then you move into the thriving zone.

What is the thriving zone? Well, thriving means you are not just in a state of bouncing back from hard times. Thriving means you are flourishing and having feelings of success and prosperity. Thriving is not a state where you don't experience any adversity, but one in which the challenges you face (big and small) don't take you off course.

In my culture, we refer to thriving as following your purpose in life or your dharma. You don't have to be in pursuit of a spiritual or religious purpose, although you may be. Your purpose or dharma is the path you create for your life, with each step guided by your inner coach telling you how awesome you are and that you can trust yourself and your visions, goals, and dreams for your life. Sounds pretty cool, eh?

My dharma is certainly about helping others and being in the counseling profession, but during the time I was discovering who I was in terms of my gender, sexual orientation, and other identities, all my energy was devoted to simply surviving; even resilience took a backseat to my need to stay afloat and just make it through the day in school, college, and different work settings. Once I had LGBTQ mentors and people who modeled what my inner coach voice should look like (as you explored in Chapter 4), all of a sudden I had energy and support to reflect on my dharma. Then all the worries I had about not knowing what I should do with my life faded away. I realized not only that I had gifts, talents, and skills (as you explored in yourself earlier in this chapter), but that with these I could create a life path of honor, integrity, passion, and truth. Now, the dharma path can be hard work and require some discipline to follow, but it can also be super fun, as you can connect with similarly minded folks and community along the way. Read Seth Pardo's story of his resilience in finding and defining himself.

Just as with most things in my life, I thrive not because of what I did only for myself, but because of what so many others have done to pave the way for me and because of the support of so many loved ones. Growing up in Miami Beach in the early '80s was not particularly difficult. I lived a life of privilege, free from many forms of discrimination. I was, however, quite different from many of my peers, and I knew that very early. I knew that I wasn't like

most of the other girls I knew—in fact, I was pretty certain I was unlike any of the other girls I knew. I never really came out to my parents as same-sex attracted; they figured it out, but it was never an issue. But when I came out to my parents as trans when I was fifteen, all of us looked at each other in silence for a while, not because of prejudice or judgment, but because nobody knew what to do next. My parents reminded me that they loved me no matter what, and that they weren't sure what was the best thing to do, but that we'd figure it out together. That day I came home from school exhausted from how it all started, and there were three books on my bed: Young, Gay and Proud [an anthology edited by Sasha Alyson and Lynne Yamaguchi Fletcher], Lou Sullivan's book on how to crossdress like an FTM transsexual [Information for the Female-to-Male Cross Dresser and Transsexual], and a book about hormones and how they affect the body when someone pursues a medical transition from female to male. I think my mom had read them all before she gave them to me, which is good because up until that point, I don't think she had even considered what trans was. Many years later, we have more language with which to reflect on and talk about what was happening for me, and she said, "I'm sorry I didn't know what was happening for you." She commented on how hard things must have been and how awful she felt that she wasn't able to help me more then. I appreciated that very much, considering that she and I fought a great deal in my childhood and I just didn't have the language to explain why dresses made me feel so bad. My parents weren't the only sources of support. I had a core group of friends who accepted me for exactly who I was. In those days when trans identities didn't have the visibility they have today, we didn't have language to describe how I felt, but my core friends just got it that I should have been born male, and that was that. They treated me like one of the guys, they loved me like a boyfriend, and all of this contributed to my resilient growth and thriving as a trans person.

In my later adulthood, when I was finally ready to begin my medical transition—once I was sure it wasn't just internalized homonegativity, or a rejection of just being female-bodied and attracted to women—I embraced therapy and developed a solid sense of self, grounded in self-love and appreciation for how hard it was growing up without having the language to talk about my frustration with gender and resentment for being so different. I learned through that self-exploration how to love my uniqueness and to celebrate my membership in community with other trans people.

-Seth Pardo, White, trans man, psychologist

Work through the following resilience practice to explore your dharma further as a way to increase both your resilience and your thriving. This resilience practice demonstrates how setting aside just a tiny amount of time to reflect on your self-growth and needs can increase your resilience and thriving.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Exploring How You Can Thrive as an LGBTQ Person

Think about your life without any constraints as an LGBTQ person. In this world of no restraints, what do you see yourself feeling, thinking, and doing? Respond to the following prompts from this point of view—experiencing complete freedom to manifest your visions, goals, and dreams for your life.

When I think of my purpose in life, I feel

The visions, dreams, and goals for my life include

If someone asked me about what my dharma—or purpose in life—is, I would say the following:

As an LGBTQ person, my purpose in life has been influenced negatively by

As an LGBTQ person, my purpose in life has been influenced positively by

When I imagine realizing my visions, dreams, and goals for my life as an LGBTQ person, I feel

When I imagine bringing to life my visions, dreams, and goals as an LGBTQ person, these additional identities matter to me:

How do you feel after making a little time for your own self-growth and reflection on your dharma? As you wrote about your purpose, was it easy, hard, or somewhere in between? When you explored your purpose in life as an LGBTQ person, did responding feel simple or more difficult? There are no wrong responses, of course, in this or any other resilience practice. And it's certainly understandable, if you haven't thought about your dharma before as an LGBTQ person, that you felt a bit stressed as you completed your responses. With this activity, there is good stress ("Oh wow—I am exploring something that I don't yet know about myself!") and bad stress ("Oh no—I should already know this about myself!")—and you are going for the good stress that can accompany the excitement of learning something new about yourself. It is important, however, to consider how your answers might change if you were to respond again in a week, month, or year. (If you'd like to complete this resilience practice again, you can download the worksheet that's available at http://www.newharbinger.com/39461.) Making it a regular practice to come back to explore your visions, dreams, and goals for your life will help you increase your resilience and your thriving.

Hopefully life is long. Do stuff you will enjoy thinking about and telling stories about for many years to come.

-Rachel Maddow, White, lesbian, cisgender, media person

## Practicing Self-Love to Thrive

In Chapter 4, you explored self-worth and self-esteem, two important components of resilience. Self-love takes that valuing of yourself even deeper. I have a friend who describes it as falling in love with *you*. Self-love is a deep practice of thriving as an LGBTQ person that can help you identify the steps on your thriving dharma path. Self-love is like all the individual parts of the resilience wheel you have learned about so far in this workbook, rolled up together in one big ball of unconditional positive regard for yourself. Here are some of my own favorite self-love activities:

- Taking time to walk outside during the day
- Making time to go hear live music
- Taking long baths and listening to music
- Practicing yoga and meditation each day
- Saying affirmations out loud
- Paying attention to when I need to rest
- Taking naps!
- Challenging the negative gremlin critic in my head
- Traveling and going on new adventures
- Hiking among really tall trees in the mountains

This is just a sample of my self-love practices. They feel really good to do! I hope they may remind you of your own favorite things that bring you into the present moment and make you feel cared for by yourself. Although you feel good when you practice self-love, it can also be complicated. Depending on how much anti-LGBTQ experience you've had—or are currently experiencing—it can feel like you don't have time to practice self-love, even though self-love can be a balm for the soul and help you get through those tough times. It can be hard to remember to do self-love when you are facing a lot of pressures, distractions, or expectations as an LGBTQ person. But, like self-growth, you can learn to love yourself through personal practice, support, and self-reflection. Do the next resilience practice to further explore the possibilities for self-love.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Practicing Self-Love with Depth and Intention

In this resilience practice, you'll reflect on self-love practices that entail self-care, mindfulness, and other ways to feel safe and whole as an LGBTQ person.

What are some of the self-love practices you currently do for yourself?

What are some self-love practices you would like to have more of in your life?

What everyday self-love practices could you add?

What are the barriers to integrating these self-love practices into your everyday life?

Name three brief, doable everyday self-love practices to integrate into your life now.

Name three people you can talk with to keep you accountable for these three everyday self-love practices.

Did you notice there are some self-love practices you already do for yourself? Did you list a lot of self-love practices? Even five minutes a day of being more sweet, kind, and loving to yourself can make a big difference! If it was hard for you to identify any self-love practices, be gentle with yourself and start conversations with others you trust about how they integrate self-love practices into their everyday lives.

# Getting Your Resilience Wheel Turning toward Thriving

Now that you are nearing the end of this workbook, it is time to reflect on your overall resilience by taking a look back at what you have explored before. Taking a moment to review all the components of your resilience as an LGBTQ person will help you stay on track in building your resilience through each spoke in the resilience wheel.

It's pretty cool to look at the resilience wheel again and realize that these spokes are concepts that you can put into action right now. In the introduction, you probably saw the resilience wheel as just a figure based on research findings and best practices. But now that you have personally explored each component of the resilience wheel, isn't it great to realize that you have made it *yours*?



Each of us has our own version of the resilience wheel. Your resilience wheel is unique to you. Your resilience wheel celebrates your uniqueness as an LGBTQ person. Your resilience wheel highlights the important support and needs you have as a queer or trans person. Your resilience wheel reminds you of your self-worth, and the importance of having supportive resources and standing up for yourself when you experience discrimination. Your resilience wheel encourages you to love yourself—your body, mind, and spirit. And along the way to growing your resilience wheel, you get to be inspired and make change within yourself and the world in ways that feel right to you, to give back to others. Most importantly, the components of your own resilience wheel keep you mindful that you can do more than just survive in this world. Your dharma as an LGBTQ person is to thrive. Period. Do this final resilience practice to reflect on the different elements of your resilience wheel and how to continually strengthen it.

# **RESILIENCE PRACTICE:** Putting Your Resilience Wheel into Action

As you respond to this resilience practice, you may want to turn back to earlier chapters in this workbook. On the left, rate each component of your resilience wheel on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) in terms of your current understanding of the concepts and integrating a resilience spoke into your everyday life. After rating a resilience spoke, write down any thoughts you have right now about how to grow your resilience in this area:

 Getting Real: Defining Your LGBTQ Self in a World That Demands Conformity (Chapter 1)
 You Are More Than Your Gender and Sexual Orientation (Chapter 2)
 Further Identifying Negative Messages (Chapter 3)
 Knowing Your Self-Worth (Chapter 4)
 Standing Up for Yourself (Chapter 5)

 Affirming and Enjoying Your Body (Chapter 6)
 Building Relationships and Creating Community (Chapter 7)
 Getting Support and Knowing Your Resources (Chapter 8)
 Getting Inspired (Chapter 9)
 Making Change and Giving Back (Chapter 10)
 Growing and Thriving (this chapter)

How did you feel running through the different components of your resilience wheel? What were the areas you rated higher or lower? Did you notice any themes related to these ratings? It can be helpful to have someone you trust to talk with about your resilience wheel whenever you need to. The most important person who checks in with your resilience wheel, of course, is you. You are in charge of your life as an LGBTQ person, even when life tries to tell you otherwise. Your resilience reminds you of your inherent right to thrive as a queer or trans person on this planet.

## Resilience Wrap-Up

As this workbook closes, I hope that you not only have learned something about resilience, but also have made a deep commitment to yourself to be kind, gentle, compassionate, and loving. For queer and trans people, there is so much in the world that we think and feel is out of our control. And when it comes to queer and trans oppression and discrimination, there's so much you actually can't control. You can, however, promise yourself you'll never take yourself down in the way that it seems the world wants to. That doesn't mean simply being strong, nor just learning how to take things in stride, nor ignoring discrimination. In this workbook, you have learned that intentionally developing each component of your resilience—even one at a time—builds something no one can ever take away from you, no matter what your circumstances are: the recognition and appreciation of your inherent worth as a queer or trans person. My wish for you is to not only remember your own unique beauty and resilience as an LGBTQ person, but also to remind others in our community to shine their lights proudly into this world.

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And to the readers of this workbook: however you have come to pick up this workbook or read it online, it is my greatest hope that you become your most resilient and thriving self while reading it. I also hope you will pass it on to those who may need it most. My favorite author—Arundhati Roy—said it the best: "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing." *You* are that possible world.

## Resources

## Books

Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out by Susan Kulkin (Walker Books, 2016)

The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity by Rylan Jay Testa, Deborah Coolhart, and Jayme Peta (Instant Help, 2015)

Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin by John D'Emilio (University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Mindfulness and Acceptance for Gender and Sexual Minorities by Matthew Skinta, Aisling Curtin, and John Pachankis (New Harbinger, 2016)

A Queer History of the United States by Michael Bronski (Beacon Press, 2012)

Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde (Crossing Press, 2007)

The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up in a Straight Man's World by Alan Downs (HighBridge, 2012)

## Websites

## Audre Lorde Project

www.alp.org

## Gender Spectrum

www.genderspectrum.org

#### GLSEN

www.glsen.org

#### GSA Network

www.gsanetwork.org

#### Lambda Legal

www.lambdalegal.org

#### National Center for Transgender Equality

www.ncte.org

## PFLAG

www.pflag.org

### Safe Schools Coalition

www.safeschoolscoalition.org

## SAGE

www.sageusa.org

#### The Trevor Project

www.thetrevorproject.org

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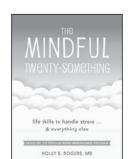
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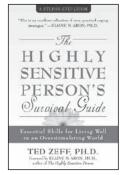
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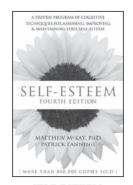
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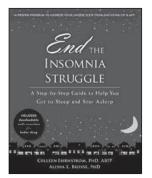
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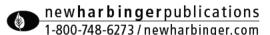
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### BUILD RESILIENCE & BE WHO YOU ARE

You've probably heard of the term *resilience*. But what does it really mean? Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stressful or traumatic events—which for many people include a job loss, losing a loved one, or even living through a natural disaster. But if you're queer or gender non-conforming, stressors can *also* include discrimination, family rejection, physical attacks, and oppression—all of which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. So, how can you build the resilience and confidence you need to thrive?

With this compassionate guide, you'll learn how to identify and challenge internalized negative messages, create a community of support, and embrace your truest self. You'll also discover powerful tools to help you cultivate body positivity, manage stress, foster optimism and growth, and even find the strength to help others. Once you know how to tap into your personal resilience, you'll have an unlimited well you can draw from to navigate daily challenges.

"A useful and refreshing guide to the possibilities of restoration and transformation for queer and transgender people."

-Holiday Simmons, MSW, social justice advocate, facilitator, public speaker, and healer "We each have an opportunity to explore ourselves profoundly as we evolve in our lives as queer and trans people, and this workbook provides unique and engaging guidance."

-Danielle Castro, MA, MFT, director of research for the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health at the University of California, San Francisco

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## RIGHTS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH IN CALIFORNIA



Amy Williams, Managing Attorney

### Who Am I?

- Managing Attorney with LSNC
- Youth Group Facilitator at SGLC for 3 years at SGLC
- Founded and continue to operate the LGBT Legal Clinic at SGLC
- Train on LGBTQ cultural competence and poverty locally, statewide, and nationally
- Provide free legal services at a DV shelter
- Co-authored Publication: LGBT Guide to Public Benefits
- Experienced most of what we are going to talk about today firsthand

Who are you?

# First nameOrganization, if any

### **Ground Rules**

# □No group legal advice

### Story time

- High school student transitions during the school year
- Bathrooms, locker rooms, bullying (teachers and kids)
- LGBTQ kids getting spit on by adults during a day of silence march
- Gender non-conforming foster youth getting harassed and inappropriately housed with boys, facing daily harassment and threats
- Lesbian couple being harassed by neighbors
- Non-citizen transgender woman fleeing persecution

### Getting To Know Your LGBTQ Neighbors

- Myth: Gay Couples Have More Money than Heterosexual Couples
  - Lesbians, especially lesbians of color
- "According to an analysis of Census Bureau data from 2000 by the Williams Institute, the median income for same-sex couples raising children was \$46,200 while for married heterosexual couples raising children it was \$59,600. That's a \$13,400 difference. The gap increases to \$15,507 when the average income for the gay couple (\$59,270) is matched up with that of the straight couple (\$74,777)

### Getting to Know Your LGBTQ Neighbors

Alarming numbers of homeless youth

- Nationally 20% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ
- Almost 60% have experienced sexual abuse
- Disproportionately placed in foster care
- Forced and coerced prostitution (no real numbers)

### Getting To Know Your LGBTQ Neighbors

- Employment and housing discrimination rampant against transgender individuals
   According a TLC study, 70% of the transgender community experiences some sort of employment discrimination related DIRECTLY to their gender identity
- Majority of the calls I receive are about <u>OVERT</u> LGBTQ discrimination in employment

### **Bottom Line**

### □There is no safety net

Legal tools to try to level the playing field

Just because there is a law on the books, doesn't mean that the bad thing won't happen
Example: Eviction

### Housing Protections

- LGBTQ persons in CA are guaranteed protection from discrimination in the sale or rental of housing and in mortgage lending based on their sexual identity or gender identity, or because of the perception of such identities, as per:
  - Civil Rights Housing Act of 2006
  - The Fair Employment and Housing Act 1999-AB 1001
  - AB 96 from 2003 offers further housing protections from discrimination based on gender identity

### **Rights in HUD Housing**

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program regulations. In January 2012, HUD issued regulations explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, or marital status in all federally-funded housing programs. These regulations apply to all public and assisted housing and rental assistance (voucher) programs that receive federal funds (including homeless shelters and other temporary housing), as well as to federally-insured home mortgages.

### WHAT ARE YOUR HOUSING RIGHTS?

- What types of discrimination are covered by the law? It is illegal for a housing provider to do any of the following because you are LGBTQ, or because you are perceived as not conforming to gender/sexual ID stereotypes:
- Refuse to rent or sell you housing
- Refuse to admit you to a homeless shelter
- Tell you housing is unavailable when it is available
- Set different terms, conditions, or privileges for sale or rental of a dwelling
- Provide different housing services or facilities
- Deny you a mortgage loan, or impose different terms or conditions on a mortgage loan
- Deny you property insurance
- Conduct property appraisals in a discriminatory manner
- Harass, coerce, intimidate, or interfere with you exercising your fair housing rights
- □ Ask about your gender or sexual identity

### How this applies to youth

#### Affects youth who:

- Live in LGBTQ households
- Are in any public care, shelter, foster home, transitional facility
- Are old enough to transition to their own independent living spaces that they could rent
- Prepares youth for their futures as adults who must manage their own housing

# Employment Rights: New Federal EEOC guidelines announced this week:

- EEOC has ruled that Title VII protects transgender workers from on-the-job discrimination. In part, the order states that "intentional discrimination against a transgender individual because that person is transgender is, by definition, 'based on ... sex' and such discrimination ... violates" the law.
- There are still no Federal EDNA protections for either sexual identity or gender identity.

### **Employment Rights: California**

- LGBTQ Californians are entitled more protection from discrimination on the job than Federal regulations provide for. These rights are articulated in:
  - Omnibus Labor and Employment Non-Discrimination Act AB 2900
  - Fair Employment and Housing Act AB 1001
  - AB 196 protects from discrimination due to gender ID on the job

### **Employment Rights**

- Right to work free of harassment due to sexual or gender ID
- □ Right to not be asked to prove sexual or gender ID
- Right to use gender segregated facilities (bathrooms, locker rooms) of one's personal choice appropriate with what gender the individual identifies as
- Right to equal treatment in hiring, firing and discipline
- Right to present as one's gender identity

### **Public Benefits**

- What are public benefits?
- The "Modern" family
- Factors to consider: Federal v. State? Relationship recognition?
- □ Concept of HH/AU
- □ Ex. SSI family
- Relationship Quandry to recognize or not to recognize (personal decision)
  - Food Stamps

### Juvenile Justice/Foster Care Sources of Law

AB 458, the Foster Care Non-Discrimination Act, went into effect on January 1, 2004. This law is the first of its kind in the United States to explicitly include protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and adults involved with the foster care system.

SB 518 Fact Sheet: The California Juvenile Justice Safety and Protection Act This bill provides a comprehensive bill of rights to protect youth in California juvenile justice facilities from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender Identity.

### **Public Benefits**

- For more information, See the LGBT Public Benefits Guide at National Center for Lesbian Rights (nclrights.org)
- http://www.nclrights.org/site/DocServer/LGBT\_Pub lic\_benefits\_advocates\_guide.pdf?docID=8741

### Juvenile Justice/Foster Care AB 458

- All foster children and all adults engaged in the provision of care and services to foster children have a right to fair and equal access to all available services, placement, care, treatment and benefits.
- All foster children and all adults engaged in the provision of care and services to foster children have a right not to be subjected to discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Juvenile Justice/Foster Care AB 458

- All group home administrators, foster parents, and department licensing personnel must receive initial and ongoing training on the right of a foster child to have fair and equal access to all available services and to not be subjected to harassment or discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- All community college districts that provide orientation and training to relative caregivers must make available to relative and extended family caregivers orientation and training courses that cover the right of a foster child to have fair and equal access to all available services, placement, care, treatment, and benefits and the right of foster youth not to be subjected to discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity

# What discrimination can look like in foster care

- Failing or refusing to take steps to protect an LGBTQ youth from harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Failing to use the requested name and pronoun that is in accordance with a transgender youth's gender identity;
- Treating displays of affection by same-sex couples differently than displays of affection by different-sex couples;
- Refusing to allow a youth to wear clothing that is consistent with their gender identity;
- □ Not allowing an LGBTQ youth to attend a gay prom;
- □ Confiscating LGBTQ supportive materials.

### **Rights in Juvenile Justice**

#### SB 518 mandates that:

There be a statewide prohibition on harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived race, ethnic group identification, ancestry, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical disability, and HIV status in all California Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities. That means that all DJJ facilities must ensure the safety and dignity of every youth in their care, and must provide care, placement, and services to youth without discriminating on these bases.

### **Rights at School**

- □ Sources of protection at school for California LGBTQ youth:
  - California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act:AB 537 Protects LGBT youth from discrimination in publiclyfunded educational programs and activities.
  - Federal Equal Protection
  - The Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394), and the Student Civil Rights Act (SB 77), were passed in 2007 and required the California Department of Education to monitor school districts' creation and publication of anti-harassment policies and complaint procedures and updated the list of prohibited bases of discrimination and harassment.
  - Seth's Law
  - Fair Education Act

### What are these rights at school?

- For students to be free from harassment and to have administrators intervene in harassment
- Students have a right to not be "outed" by their schools
- The right to express oneself and one's identity as equally as other students are allowed such expression
- The right to form a Gay Straight Alliance student club, specifically via the Equal Access Act
- □ The right to attend prom as a same sex couple

### **Practice Tip**

Students do not need to admit to being LGBTQ to get the protections. The perpetrator perceiving them as such is enough.

Don't ask.

Don't do a good deed and warn other teachers, administrators, etc.

### **Practice Tip**

- If a student presents as a different gender than their sex, allow them to participate fully with their selected gender
- Don't force unisex bathrooms, single stall dressing rooms
- Treat the student the same as other students

### Seth's Law: AB 9

Although California has adopted anti-bullying legislation, LGBT youth are still subject to harassment, intimidation and bullying. Seth's Law tightens anti-bullying policies in California schools by ensuring that all schools have clear and consistent policies and by establishing timelines for investigating claims of bullying. Passed 2011.

### What Seth's Law Requires

Requires each school district to include in its nondiscrimination policy an enumerated list of the bases on which discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are prohibited under existing law—actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity expression, race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics.

### What Seth's Law Requires Cont.

Requires schools to include in their complaint procedures a method for receiving and investigating discrimination and harassment complaints. Schools would be required to act on discrimination and harassment complaints expeditiously so that investigation and resolution may be reached quickly. Further, faculty and staff working on school campuses would be required to intervene when they witness acts of bullying.

### What Seth's Law Requires Cont.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction would be instructed to post and periodically update on the Department of Education website a list of statewide resources, including community-based organizations that provide support to youth who have been subjected to school-based discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying and to the families of these youth.

### Why this is important

# When a school district ignores....

### Example: Anoka-Hennepin School District Bullying Lawsuits (March 2012) – Minnesota (pending)

### **Anoka-Hennepin School District**

The Problem

- Six students endured daily harassment: slurs, threats, etc.
- Teachers told the students to "stay out of the way" when it was reported to them
- One student attempted suicide

### **Anoka-Hennepin School District**

- The settlement DOE and DOJ both intervened on behalf of the six students
- Retain the Great Lakes Equity Center systemic review and recommend revisions to district policies and practices related to sex and sexual-orientation related harassment.
- Fully investigate reports of harassment; escalate remedial efforts through additional measures when students are harassed on a repeated basis; and mitigate the effects of harassment that occurs.
- □ Take proactive measures to address the hostile environment.
- Develop procedures for parental notification while maintaining sensitivity to a student's right of privacy
- □ Hire a district-level, harassment-prevention official

### **Anoka-Hennepin School District**

- Develop improved and effective trainings, consistent with best practices, on harassment for all students and employees who interact with students.
- A mental health professional to be available during school hours for students in need.
- Hire a mental health consultant to review and assess current practices in the district
- □ Strengthen its annual anti-bullying survey.
- Enhance a recently formed harassment-prevention task force to advise the district regarding how to best foster a positive educational climate.
- Work with the Equity Center to identify hot spots in district schools where harassment is most problematic, including outdoor locations and on school buses, and work with the equity consultant to develop corrective actions.

### Fair Education Act SB 48

The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act amends the education code to require schools to integrate factual information about social movements, current events and history of people with disabilities and LGBT people into existing social studies lessons. It also prevents the State Board of Education from adopting instructional materials that discriminate.

□ July 2011

## FAIR Continued, why make these changes?

- Ensure that LGBT people are included in instructional materials, which studies have shown is linked to greater student safety and lower rates of bullying.
- LGBT Americans are included and recognized for their important historical contributions to the economic, political, and social development of California. Specifically, this legislation would add LGBT to the existing list of underrepresented cultural and ethnic groups, which are covered by current law related to inclusion in textbooks and other instructional materials in schools.
- The FAIR Education Act will bring classroom instruction into alignment with non-discrimination laws passed by the California Legislature and adopted by the State Board of Education a decade ago, by prohibiting the adoption of discriminatory instructional materials and textbooks.

### More about FAIR

Climate of respect and keeping our schools safe.

- Accurate depictions of LGBT Americans in classroom materials teach all students to respect each other's differences, thereby increasing students' sense of belonging and ability to learn.
  - By middle school, studies show that students who are bullied based on actual or perceived sexual orientation feel so unsafe that they skip school and their grades suffer compared to their peers.

### What FAIR requires in the classroom

- That all public middle school history and social studies curriculums begin to be LGBTQ inclusive as of January 2012. Some resources to begin with as teachers/administrators:
- This is an affirmative duty that all California public educators are obligated to meet already (went into effect Jan. 1)

### Cyberbullying in CA

- AB 86 from 2008 gives school administrators the authority to discipline students for bullying others offline or online. This law took effect, January 1, 2009.
- This law combined with Seth's Law increases the affirmative duty of public school administrators to address the bullying/harassment of their LGBTQ students regardless of whether the harassment occurs on or off campus.
- AB 746 from 2011 amended to include social networking sites like Facebook

### Local Resources

Gender Health Center
Sacramento Gay & Lesbian Center
WIND Youth Services
Legal Services of Northern California
SCUSD Connect Center

SCUSD Bullying Prevention Specialist

### Research/Resources

National Center for Lesbian Rights
Transgender Law Center
Fair Education Action
Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

### What LSNC Does

- Trains staff on LGBT issues (You never know best)
- Direct services, litigation, policy, education, outreach
- Go to the community
  - SGLC Legal Clinic
  - LGBTQ focused meetings, groups
  - Works with local law schools to develop young LGBTQ attorneys to work in the area

### **Contact Information**

- Legal Services of Northern California
- □ Walk in: 515 12<sup>th</sup> Street
- Call: 916.551.2137
- Connect Center Referral
- □ SGLC on Mondays
- Lsnc.net or health.lsnc.net





### **Training Materials**

### How to Be a Transgender Ally

#### **Glossary of Terms**

#### Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation

#### Sex:

Physical aspects of our body: chromosomes, genitals, hormones, facial hair, etc. Within North America, the dominant cultural perception, reinforced and entrenched by medical/ legal systems, is that one's sex determines one's gender.

#### Gender:

How we perceive ourselves (gender identity) and how we want to demonstrate that to others (gender expression). The most common gender identities are 'man' or 'woman', with many other variations included in the umbrella terms trans or transgender.

#### **Gender Identity:**

One's internal and psychological sense of one's gender. The most common gender identities are 'man' or 'woman', with many other variations included in the umbrella terms trans or transgender.

#### **Gender Expression:**

How we demonstrate our gender to others through our clothing, social roles, and language, and is often described in a polarity of 'feminine' or 'masculine'.

#### **Gender Norms:**

Inherently tied to other cultural norms relating to ethnicity, class, physical ability, age, etc. Whether people perceive you as a man or a woman, masculine or feminine, depends on how your gender expression and physical characteristics "fit" with their perceptions of other attributes you have.

One 's sex or gender does not necessarily determine a person 's sexual orientation or sexual preferences.

#### **Sexual Orientation:**

Our romantic, & erotic attractions to other people. The terms **gay**, **lesbian**, **heterosexual**, **transsenual**, and **bisexual** or **polysexual** are intended to describe attractions to a particular sex/gender, while **queer** or **pansexual** is used by some people to indicate attraction outside the binary norms of sex and gender.

#### Terms & Concepts Relevant To Gender Identity

#### **Biocentrism:**

The assumption that people whose assigned sex at birth matches their gender identity throughout their lives are more "real" and/or more "normal" than are those whose assigned sex at birth is incongruent with their gender identity. It's similar to heterosexism, but focuses on gender rather than sexual orientation.

#### **Cisgender:**

People whose gender identity, gender expression and gender role are considered socially appropriate for people of their sex at birth (cisgender = non-trans).

#### Gender Dysphoria:

The feeling of anguish and anxiety that arise from the mismatch between a trans person's physical sex and their gender identity; and from parental and societal pressure to conform to gender norms.

#### **Questioning:**

People who are exploring their gender identity (and/or sexual orientation)

#### **SOFFA:**

Significant Others (such as spouses or partners), Friends, Families and Allies of transgender.

#### Stealth:

A choice some trans people make, when living full time as members of their self- identified gender, to avoid revealing their past and to avoid outing themselves as trans. This often involves detaching from trans communities and avoiding people who knew them prior to transitioning. People choose to "go stealth" for many reasons, including avoiding harassment and violence and/or because they now see themselves as being their self-identified sex, and no longer identify as trans.

#### **Transphobia:**

The aversion to or prejudice against transsexuality or transgender people, such as the refusal to accept the individual's expression of their gender identity. It can be direct or indirect, and is often seen in the dominant American culture when people are forced to express their gender according to someone else's perception or assumption of their gender.

#### Terms and Concepts Related to Physical/Medical Transition

#### **Transition:**

A change in the way a person presents themselves in their social environment and daily life. Transition usually involves a change in physical appearance, behavior, and /or identification.

#### Gender Identity Disorder (GID):

The diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) which trans people need to receive in order to receive treatment, including surgeries. This, however, is controversial. Some trans people do not believe that being trans is a mental disorder but instead believe that it's a normal part of the range of human experience. There are many other trans people who believe that the whole area of mental illness has been stigmatized unjustly.

#### Pre operative, non-operative, and post-operative:

Terms that generally are used to indicate whether or not a trans person is or is not seeking or has had surgeries to support their transition.

#### Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS):

The generic term for any/ all medical surgeries which are part of the transition process. Some trans people prefer to call these procedures their "sex realignment surgeries," "gender confirmation surgery" or "genital reassignment (or realignment) surgery". MSP currently funds very few of the range of surgeries and procedures that may be sought by trans people. SRS is extremely expensive and not usually covered by insurance, which means very few lower- income trans people are able to afford medical interventions that are not completely funded.

#### Terms & Concepts Relevant to Gender Identity AND Sexual Orientation

#### **Bashing:**

Physical or verbal assault against people who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Sometimes this is called "gay bashing".

#### "Coming out," "out," or "out of the closet"

The more or less public act of declaring oneself trans, or, lesbian, gay, bi, or queer. Sometimes trans people refer to this as "disclosing." It is important to remember that a person may be out in selected circumstances, such as to certain friends, but not family, co-workers or neighbors. Coming out is a process that usually occurs in stages, and is a non-linear, and life-long, process. In America at this point, there tend to be very different implications and consequences to coming out as trans compared to coming out as LGB. Trans people who are also lesbian/gay/bi/queer may choose to be out as being queer, and may simultaneously choose to not widely disclose they are trans, or may choose to be entirely '*stealth*.'

#### "Outing" someone or being "outed":

Revealing someone's gender identity or sexual orientation without their permission (either accidentally or deliberately). This can have serious consequences, which may include potential loss of employment, loss of family support, harassment, and violence.

#### "Closeted" or "in the closet:"

Describes someone who has not disclosed their gender identity or sexual orientation to at least some others, and perhaps has not admitted it to themselves.

#### How to Be a Transgender Ally

#### Family of origin:

The biological family or the family in which one was raised. These individuals may or may not be part of a person's support system.

#### Family of choice:

People forming an individual's social support network and often fulfilling the functions of blood relations. Many trans people and LGB people are rejected when their families of origin learn of their gender identity/sexual orientation or they may remain closeted to their biological relatives. In such cases, a person's partner/significant other and close friends form their social/support system and will be called upon in times of crisis.

#### **Passing:**

People who are not visibly recognizable as trans and/or queer. People who 'pass' usually experience less harassment and discrimination. Some trans and/or queer people make considerable efforts to pass, while others choose to make a political statement through their appearance.

#### Being 'read':

How others have perceived a person's gender (e.g. an FTM may say "I was read as a man" or "oh #!\* - I just got "She'd" - I got read as female again").

#### "Clocked"

A term that denotes other people perceiving a trans person as trans – they have not "passed" as cisgender.

#### **Terms Related to Trans Peoples' Identities**

#### **Trans people:**

Trans people have gender identities that are not as simple as 'man' or 'woman', or express their genders in ways that contravene societal expectations of the range of possibilities for men and women. We use the term "trans" rather than "transgender", because some transsexuals feel that the word "transgender" minimizes or misrepresents their experiences.

#### **Transsensual:**

A term for a person who is primarily attracted to transgender or transsexual people.

#### **Two-spirit:**

A term used by some Aboriginal people to describe themselves in a way that is closer to their cultural construct of sex/gender/sexuality than the dominant Western view. Many of the languages of First Nations of North America include specific terms for gender and sexual diversity; some First Nations people may use both the general term Two-Spirit and the culturally specific term from their nation to describe themselves. The term Two-Spirit can have specific meaning in some First Nations cultures that is not about sexuality or gender, but rather describes the spiritual makeup of a person.

#### 4 Glossary of Terms

#### **Bi-gender people:**

Bi-gender people identify and/or express two genders, much as bilingual people can express themselves in two languages. It should be noted that the two genders expressed by bi-gender people are not necessarily man/woman.

#### **Crossdressers:**

Crossdressers enjoy wearing clothing and possibly hair, makeup, jewelry, etc. that is considered appropriate for the 'opposite' gender. Some prefer to do this privately, while others enjoy publicly presenting as crossdressers. Some crossdressers appreciate being referred to in the gender associated with their outer appearance, while others have a constant identity that remains unchanged by wearing 'opposite' clothing. Formerly "transvestite" was used, but "crossdresser" is now preferred.

#### Drag King/Queen:

People who crossdress in a showy or campy way, often for theatrical purposes and often to caricature famous men or women.

#### 'Drag:'

A term that is often associated with gay or lesbian communities; some people who perform professionally, crossdressed, outside gay/ lesbian communities prefer the term 'female/male impersonator'. While some drag queens and drag kings may self-identify as trans, many do not, as their sense of gender identity is not affected by their performance.

#### FTM (or Transman):

Describes the direction of transition - from female-to-male. Generally used to refer to anyone assigned female at birth who identifies or expresses their gender as male/ masculine/ man part or all of the time. An FTM who identifies as male may describe himself as a transman.

#### Genderqueer:

Describes a very fluid sense of gender identity, as it does not constrain people to absolute or static concepts, but leaves people to relocate themselves on continuums of gender identity. Some genderqueers prefer to go by the conventional binary pronouns "he" or "she", while others prefer gender-neutral pronouns such as "ze", "sie", and "hir" or singular "they" instead of her/his. Some genderqueers prefer to be referred to alternately as he and she (and/or gender neutral pronouns), and some prefer to use only their name and not use pronouns at all.

#### Intersex:

A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. Some intersex people see themselves as part of the trans community, and others make every effort to remain separate from it. Intersex is a term that has replaced "hermaphrodite" or "hermaphroditism."

#### How to Be a Transgender Ally

#### **MTF (or Transwoman):**

Describes the direction of transition from male-to-female. Generally used to refer to anyone assigned male at birth who identifies or expresses their gender as female/feminine/woman part or all of the time. An MTF who identifies as female may describe herself as a transwoman.

#### Pan-gender or multi-gender

These people identify and/or express many shades of gender.

#### **Transsexuals:**

Transsexuals have a gender identity that they feel is not congruent with their birth sex. There is often discomfort with the disparity between the body and sense of self (gender dysphoria), and a desire for hormones and/or surgery to make the body more closely match the gender identity. However, not all pursue hormones and/or surgery for a variety of reasons (see Transition). Most transsexuals want to be perceived as the gender that is congruent with their identity, regardless of what physical changes they have pursued.

#### Definition have been adapted from:

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Wikipedia

#### Ways Service Providers Can Assist People with Gender Concerns

- Normalize gender exploration and gender variance. People need to know that gender exploration is not sick or disgusting. Health providers can be key resources in promoting recognition, acceptance, and removal of secrecy, and also creating a safe environment for a person to talk about and explore their gender identity or the changes in a family member undergoing gender transition.
- Encourage exploration of options. As part of the coming out process, transgender people may turn to hormones and/or surgery as validation of their emerging identity. Transition is necessary for some people but is not right for everyone. You can help people to appreciate that both transitioning and not transitioning are equally valid, and to consider all options as part of making a fully informed decision.
- Be aware of elevated risk of concurrent disorders. As a result of trauma, isolation, abandonment, discrimination, violence, and internalized shame and self-loathing, people with gender concerns are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, suicidality, eating disorders, addictions, self-harm, and high-risk sexual behaviors. Your team may need to consult with specialists to develop an interdisciplinary care plan.
- Identify community resources. Many people struggling with gender questions feel isolated and alone, and are not aware of community resources. Peer support can be a valuable complement to professional assistance. There are specific resources available for MTFs, FI'Ms, crossdressers, children of transgender parents, youth who are questioning their own gender identity, and parents of transgender children (see back cover).
- Make your work environment trans-friendly. Transgender people will not use your services if they do not feel welcome in your office. Ensure that reception staff are cognizant of gender diversity and aware of issues around pronoun use, put signs on washroom doors to indicate that trans people are welcome to use them, include trans-specific materials in your office resources (pamphlets, referral lists, etc.), and actively do outreach to transgender community members to let them know they are welcome.
- Advocate with other service providers. Transgender people experience many barriers to accessing services. When making referral, you may need to phone ahead to find out if the facility is trans-accessible (few residential or gender-specific services will take transgender clients), and also to get a sense of how trans-friendly it is (so you can advocate, search for an alternative, or at minimum prepare your patient for what to expect).
- Create safety plans. People who are visibly gender-variant or out as transgender are often not safe at home, at school, or in public life. You may need to advocate with health or social service providers, teachers, employers, and family members to help create a safe environment. You may also have to work with transgender people to create emergency safety plans around dating violence, hate crimes, washroom/change room use, etc.
- Help coordinate care for a person undergoing gender transition. The changes of gender transition can be very stressful, and the years it takes to traverse the medical system can be particularly frustrating for people who need hormones and surgery as part of gender transition. While it is important that the process be slow enough to allow for consolidation of gender identity, it is also important that people not become so frustrated by the process that they start themselves on illegally purchased hormones, auto-castrate, or suffer unbearable distress from untreated Gender Dysphoria.

#### Action Tips for Allis of Trans People

Adapted from <a href="http://web.mit.edu/trans/-http://web.mit.edu/trans/tipsfortransallies.pdf">http://web.mit.edu/trans/-http://web.mit.edu/trans/</a>

The following are several actions tips that can be used as you move toward becoming a better trans ally. Of course, this list is not exhaustive and cannot include all the "right" things to do or say—because often there is no single, easy, or "right" answer to every situation a person might encounter! Hopefully this list will provide you with food for thought and a starting place as you learn more about trans people, gender identities/presentations, and gender differences.

#### Don't assume you can tell if someone is transgender.

Transgender and transsexual people don't all look a certain way or come from the same background, and many may not appear "visibly trans." Indeed, many trans people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their trans status.

#### Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who we're attracted to. Gender identity is about how we know our own gender. Trans people can identify as gay, straight, bisexual, or asexual.

#### Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure, and "outing."

Some trans people feel comfortable disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not. Knowing a trans person's status is personal information and it is up to them to share it with others. Do not casually share this information, or "gossip" about a person you know or think is trans. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it also can have negative consequences in a world that is very intolerant of gender difference—trans people can lose jobs, housing, friends, and sadly have even been killed upon revelation of their trans status.

#### Understand the differences between "coming out" as lesbian, bisexual, or gay (LBG) and "coming out" as trans.

Unlike "coming out" in a LGB context, where the act of disclosing one's sexuality reveals a "truth" about that person's sexual orientation, disclosing one's trans status often has the opposite effect. That is, when a person "comes out" as trans, the listener often assumes the "truth" about the trans person is that they are somehow more fundamentally a member of their birth sex, rather than the gender/sex they have chosen to live in. In other words, sometimes "coming out" makes it *more difficult* for a trans person to be fully recognized as the sex/gender they are living in.

#### Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces.

Consider strategies to best confront anti-trans remarks or jokes in your classroom, lab, office, living group, or organization. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

#### If you don't know want pronouns to use, ask.

Be polite and respectful when you ask a person which pronoun they prefer. Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so.

#### Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity.

A person who is questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what identity and/or gender presentation is best for them. They might, for example, choose a new name or pronoun, and then decide at a later time to change the name or pronoun again. Do your best to be respectful and use the name and/ or pronoun requested.

#### Don't try to tell a person what "category" or "identity" they fit into.

Do not apply labels or identities to a person that they have not chosen for themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity or path fits them best, give them the time and space to decide for themselves.

#### Don't assume what path a trans person is on regarding surgery or hormones, and don't privilege one path over another.

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones; some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones, and/or surgery.

#### Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" is.

For some trans people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Respect the name a trans person is currently using.

#### Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.

Think about it - it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about the appearance or status of their genitalia, so it isn't appropriate to ask a trans person that question either. Likewise, don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery." If a trans person wants to talk to you about such matters, let them bring it up.

#### Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.

Similar to the questions above about genitalia and surgery-it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

#### **Don't police public restrooms.**

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door- or your expectations! Encourage schools, businesses and agencies to have unisex bathroom options, and offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom, in a "buddy system," so they are less vulnerable.

#### Don't just add the "T" without doing work.

"LGBT" is now a commonplace acronym that joins lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender under the same umbrella. To be an ally to trans people, gays, lesbians and bisexuals need to examine their own gender stereotypes, their own prejudices and fears about trans people, and be willing to defend and celebrate trans lives.

#### How to Be a Transgender Ally

#### Know your own limits as an ally.

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything!

When dealing with a trans person who may have sought you out for support or guidance, be sure to point that person to appropriate resources when you've reached the limit of your knowledge or ability to handle the situation. It is better to admit you don't know something than to provide information that may be incorrect or hurtful.

#### Listen to trans voices.

The best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to trans people themselves. They are the experts on their own lives! Talk to trans people in your community. Consult the reading and film lists to find out where to learn more about trans lives.

#### Transition

Adapted from: Goldberg, J.M. (2003) *Making the Transition: Providing services to trans survivors of violence and abuse: Materials for Participants.* P 12-14.

Transition refers to a change in the way a person presents themselves in their social environment and daily life - for example, from living as a woman to living as a man, or from being unigender. Transition usually involves a change in physical appearance (hairstyle, clothing, jewelry), behavior (mannerisms, language), and identification (name, gender pronoun). It is often preceded or accompanied by the use of hormones and other procedures to change the appearance of secondary sex characteristics and genitals.

While some people may experiment with gender presentation out of curiosity or frustration about social roles, the decision to transition is not a frivolous one. People who decide to transition typically describe an urgent and persistent need to do so; one person described life before transition as "looking in the mirror and seeing the wrong person there – the image reflected is not who you really are."

Not all trans people transition. Among those who do transition, many feel that hormonal and/or surgical interventions are not necessary; others may desire physical changes but do not pursue them for reasons relating to health, finances, family, community, culture, spirituality, or politics. Some trans people choose surgery without the use of hormones, or vice versa.

Intersex people may also seek physical and social changes. Those who have been "assigned" a sex of male or female by surgeons may feel, as youth or adults, that this assignment is incorrect, and may want to change their bodies through hormones and surgery to more closely match their internal sense of gender. Some intersex people describe their sense of dysphoria and need for physical change as a type of transition; others see it not as a personal transition but rather as a correction of a doctor's error.

Depending on the degree of change sought, transition can last for many years. Some people are clear about the level of medical intervention they require, while others need time for themselves or their loved ones to consider the options and adjust to each stage of change. Steps such as legal name change involve time delays for paperwork to be processed. Hormones cause gradual physical changes over the course of 1-5 years. And the process of learning new gender roles and societal expectations takes time as well.

In addition to adjusting to physical and social changes, transition often involves losses of family, partners, friends, social networks, and/or employment. For some people, transition is the first time that family, friends, co-workers, and employers become aware that a person is trans. The surprise and stigma can affect not only the person in transition but also their partners and family members, resulting in a loss of support by those who cannot accept the transition.

#### The Changes of Transition

#### **Physical Appearance**

A number of non-hormonal and non-surgical techniques can be used to assist in transition. Such techniques (e.g., chest binding, prosthetic devices, padded bras) are used by trans people to make it more feasible to cross-live on a part-time or full-time basis.

#### Hormones

Hormones bring about emotional, physical, and/or mental changes. Typically, there are changes in facial and body hair, breast development, body shape, skin texture, and genital size; FTMs often experience changes in voice pitch and balding. Hormones can also influence mood and physical expressions of emotion (such as the ability to cry). People taking hormones as part of transition often describe changes in sexual libido, erectile and ejaculatory function, orgasm intensity and quality, and, in some cases, altered preferences for specific sexual activities or gender of sexual partners. The degree of change and the length of time it takes to effect these changes varies from person to person.

In USA, hormone prescriptions for gender transition require a psychological and physical assessment. Hormones are also sold as a street drug, for those who hope that higher doses will speed up the changes, have not received psychological approval, or don't want to follow the medical system's requirements.

#### Surgeries

Genital surgeries are intended to reshape genitals to more closely match a person's gender identity. FTMs may also seek chest reconstruction or reduction and removal of the uterus/ovaries. MTFs may seek to remove facial and body hair (through electrolysis, laser treatments, or other techniques), as well as undergo surgeries to reduce the Adam's apple, conceal balding, tighten vocal cords, augment breasts, or feminize facial features.

In Canada, the BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) provides minimal financial coverage for FTMs to obtain the first stage of chest surgery and removal of the ovaries/ uterus, and for MTFs to obtain the first stage of genital surgery. The limited health care coverage means that many people in transition cannot afford needed surgeries.

To qualify for BC MSP coverage, applicants must undergo two psychological assessments and complete at least one year of real life experience. During this time, the person seeking surgery must live full-time in the gender they are transitioning to. It is during this time that trans people are most vulnerable to discrimination and violence, as their physical features often don't match their clothing, mannerisms, and behavior.

#### Behavior

Some trans people already have the experience of living in the gender they are transitioning to prior to the physical changes of hormones and surgery. However, for most people in transition, the physical changes in appearance also change how people react to you socially, and with this change comes the need to learn unfamiliar social cues - primarily by trial and error.

#### How to Be a Transgender Ally

Many people who have undergone transition have commented on the remarkable "gendering" of the many small behaviors that shape our social interactions. Social expectations for acts such as greetings, posture, and eye contact while talking are often different for men than for women. This process of exploring gendered behavior and learning new social cues can be both exhilarating and also quite disorienting.

After I had chest surgery, everyone suddenly switched from seeing me as a woman to perceiving me as a man. The first time I took the bus as a man, I made the mistake of looking directly at the woman I was sitting next to, and smiling at her. As a woman that was totally normal, but as a man I realized that was part of flirting. It took me a few times of women being either obviously uncomfortable or overly friendly for me to figure out what was going on.

- Female-to-male (FTM) transman

#### Name and Identification

Many people who transition change their names to better match their gender identity or expression. Bi-gendered people and those who have not fully transitioned may use two names to reflect their multiple forms of gender expression. Those who are "out" in some parts of their lives but not in others may be known by different pronouns and names to different people.

A legal name change is an expensive and labor-intensive process, involving changes to all records and identification. During this process, there may be different pieces of identification with different names. Partial subsidies are available for people with low incomes, but the costs may still be prohibitively expensive.

An additional confusion is the legal designation of sex: the M or F on legal records such as driver's license and birth certificate, and on medical records. Requirements for change of legal sex designation depend on the institution; for example, identification issued by the state of California (e.g., driver's license) can be changed with a letter from a physician confirming the applicant is undergoing gender transition, while surgery is required for change to birth certificate or other documents issued by the federal government. People born outside of the US may or may not be able to change their legal sex designation, depending on the law in their country of origin.

In the past, people who were legally married could not change their legal sex (because samesex marriage was not legal). As same-sex marriage is now legal in some states, this is no longer an issue in those states.

Because changing identification is a complicated and expensive process, many people who have fully transitioned still have a legal sex that does not match their gender identity or appearance. This disparity effectively outs a person every time they show ID or have their medical records accessed.

#### Cisgender Privilege On the Privileges of Being "Properly" Gendered

Evin Taylor (evin.taylor@vch.ca) February 2, 2007

The term "Cisgender" is in contradiction to the term "Transgender". The Latin prefix 'cis', loosely translated means 'on this side', while the prefix 'trans' is generally understood to mean 'change, crossing, or beyond'.

Cisgender people are those whose gender identity, role, or expression are considered to match their assigned gender by societal standards. Transgender people are individuals who change, cross, or live beyond gender.

The following questionnaire checklist is based on Peggy McIntosh's article "Unpacking the Invisible White Knapsack". This list it is intended to give some insight into the privileges of those who are, for the most part, considered to be "properly" gendered. It is certainly not an exhaustive list, nor can it be generalized to people in every social position. Gendered privilege is experienced differently depending on a given situation and the individual people involved. Readers of this article are encouraged to adapt the questions to suit their own positioning and to come up with questions that can be added to the list.

25 items from a list of over 60 have been excerpted for inclusion in this training package:

- 1. Can you be guaranteed to find a public bathroom that is safe for you to use?
- 2. Can you be reasonably sure whether you should check the M or F box on a form?
- 3. Can you be reasonably sure that your choice of checked box on such forms will not subject you to legal prosecution of fraud or misrepresentation of identity?
- 4. Can you expect that others will not try to dehumanize you by jokingly or seriously calling you 'it'?
- 5. Do people often ask for accolades or think they are doing you a favor for using the appropriate pronouns for your gender?
- 6. If you are having a difficult time making new friends, can you be generally sure that it is not because of your gender identity?
- 7. Can you be sure that your gender identity doesn't automatically label you as an outsider, an anomaly, abnormal, or something to be feared?
- 8. Are you able to discuss your childhood without disguising your gender?
- 9. Is your gender considered to be a shame on your family?
- 14 Cisgender Privilege

- 10. Do people assume that your gender identity is simply your sexual orientation to the extreme? (i.e.: he's so gay that he wants to be a woman)
- 11. Are incidental parts of your identity defined as a mental illness?
- 12. Can you expect to find clothes or shoes for sale that are in your size without having to tailor or special order most items?
- 13. Can you undress in a public change room without risk of being assaulted or reported?
- 14. Can you wear a socially acceptable bathing suit?
- 15. Does the state of your genitals cause you to fear violence should they be discovered?
- 16. Does the government require proof of the state of your genitals in order to change information on your personal identification?
- 17. Can you provide government identification without risking ridicule for your name or legal sex status?
- 18. Can you freely use checks or credit cards in a grocery store without being asked for government issued ID or being accused of using stolen finances?
- 19. Can you be reasonably sure that you are explicitly protected by the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution?
- 20. Can you expect to find a landlord willing to rent to someone of your gender?
- 21. Can you expect that your gender identity will not be used against you when applying for employment?
- 22. Can you consider social, political, or professional advancements without having to consider whether or not your gender identity will be called into question as being appropriate for advancement?
- 23. Can you wait at a bus stop at noon without passers-by assuming that you are loitering for sex?
- 24. Do people assume that they can ask and have a right to hear about your intimate medical history or future?
- 25. Are your needs for medical treatments minimized by others who compare them in priority to life saving surgeries?

#### LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care Selected Bibliography and Resource Guide

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