

CHAPTER 2

Sexual Orientation Stories and Definitions

Key Questions

1. Considering everything you read about gender identity and gender expression in Chapter 1, what are your ideas about sexual orientation and its relationship to gender identity and gender expression?
2. Think about yourself and where you grew up. How have your cultural surroundings influenced your thoughts and ideas about sexuality and sexual orientation? Have you considered the ways that other cultures might think about sexual orientation?
3. Now, when you think about sexuality and sexual orientation, what words and definitions come to mind?
4. In what situations do you think sexual orientation becomes important?

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 builds on the definitions of and stories about sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression from Chapter 1. In this chapter, you will focus on exploring how sex and gender are related to a person's sexual orientation. You have already learned that gender often is discussed within a binary. In numerous mainstream contemporary cultures, many people also think of sexual orientation within a strict *heterosexual/homosexual binary*. You may have already studied gender and sexual orientation within different historical or cultural contexts, or your personal experiences may have taught you that sexual orientation does not adhere to this binary. The early part of this chapter explores the ways that *heterosexual* and *homosexual* become set against one another and defined (incorrectly) as the only two possibilities for sexual orientation. You will learn how these labels, and the preconceptions that accompany them, become very limiting. Then you will explore numerous sexual orientations and the ways that sexual orientation intersects with other identities, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, and geographic location, in the twenty-first century.

Introduction: Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

What are the differences among sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual preference? In casual conversation, they are often used interchangeably. Each carries different nuances, however, so it is important to explore each term in more detail.

Sexuality encompasses the behaviors you enjoy sexually; it is what gives you erotic or sexual pleasure, so it is very personal. You may experience a fluctuation in your sexuality over time. For example, what you enjoy erotically/sexually when you are nineteen may not give you pleasure when you are forty-two.

Sexuality is often confused with **sexual orientation**, which very broadly defined refers to the persons (if anyone) to whom you are attracted sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally. Sexuality and sexual orientation are experienced as important parts of each person's identity. Like sexuality, sexual orientation can evolve and change over time. This chapter focuses on the intersections of gender identity, sexual orientation, and cultural context.

You have probably noticed that *sexual preference* and *sexual orientation* are often used interchangeably. There is a difference between the two, however, because *preference* implies a choice that can, more or less, be changed *easily*. For example, you may prefer peppermint ice cream, but your favorite ice cream shop is out of it today, so you order chocolate chip instead. Chocolate chip is good, but you still prefer peppermint. For ice cream flavors, preference works well, but for sexual orientation, it does not.

An orientation, as opposed to a preference, is an inherent part of your identity. *Orientation* implies that you turn in a certain direction—like a compass point. It may be fixed and permanent, or it may be experienced as fluid and changing over time, but it is not a simple choice.

The Homosexual/Heterosexual Binary

In February 2014 the government of Uganda passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act (originally titled “Kill the Gays Bill”), which calls for lifetime imprisonment of anyone involved in same-sex relations.¹ Later that same year, Uganda's Constitutional Court annulled the law, although there is a constant threat that the law will be put in place again.² Ugandans fighting against this law included Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), which is based in Uganda and fights for justice and equality, and Amnesty International, which held a Global Day of Action in protest.³ Members of SMUG appeared on global news networks asking for support from other countries around the world.

The following year, in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court also made global headlines when it voted to legalize same-sex marriage in all fifty states. In retaliation against the Supreme Court decision, Kim Davis, a court clerk in Kentucky, refused to marry same-sex couples on moral grounds; she briefly went to jail for her actions.⁴ Just as SMUG members' pleas were seen on the international stage, so, too, was Kim Davis's protest. She even captured the pope's attention.⁵ Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that same-sex marriage in all fifty states is legal, in January 2018 this same court upheld the Mississippi state law that allows businesses to discriminate against gay and lesbian couples.⁶ And, starting with reports in 2017, the world has become aware of the brutal beatings and murders of gay men in Chechnya as that government tries to eradicate homosexuality.⁷ These situations in Uganda, the United States, and Chechnya underscore the perception that, like masculine/feminine, *heterosexual* and *homosexual* exist within a strictly *opposing* binary.

Homosexual refers to someone who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to a person of the same sex.⁸ The prefix *homo-* comes from the Greek *homos*, which means "same."⁹ Before the rise of **sexology**, the scientific study of sexual practices and sexual orientations, the word *homo* was used for all people as a shortened version of *Homo sapiens* (which refers to the human species). Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* refers to all men as "homo," and as late as the mid-nineteenth century, writers often referred to the human race as *homo*. The prefix and the word match each other.

The word *homosexual* is not typically used by people attracted to others of the same sex or gender. Why? Over the past 150 years, the word *homosexual* has been used by doctors and psychiatrists as a diagnosis for a physical and/or mental sickness. (See Chapter 3 for a history of sexology and classifications of sexual orientation and gender identity.) In 1973 the American Psychological Association (APA) removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses published in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*.¹⁰ Even today some psychologists carry out what they call *reparative therapies* that attempt to change a homosexual into a heterosexual.¹¹ There are currently nine U.S. states, along with the District of Columbia, that have banned reparative therapy; in the forty-one states where it is still legal, there are cities and towns that have also banned this practice.¹²

The continued underlying assumption that homosexuality is a sickness is one of the reasons the term *homosexual* is not used within contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) culture. In fact, if you conduct some quick online research, you will find that the word *homosexual* usually comes up

in reference to people who still believe (1) that homosexuality should be classified as an illness, a crime, or a sin, and (2) that people who have same-sex/same-gender partners need to be cured, imprisoned, or sent to church. If a cure, whether medical or religious, is sought, then the underlying goal is to move the person across the perceived binary and make the person heterosexual.

Heterosexual refers to someone who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to a person of the opposite sex.¹³ The prefix *hetero-*, however, does not mean opposite; rather, it signifies *other* or *different*.¹⁴ Take a moment to think about the distinction between something that is opposite and something that is different. For example, the opposite of hot is cold; hot and cold are also different. But hot and warm are *not* opposite temperatures, although they are different.

Words, the feelings and ideas they convey, and the subtle changes in the ways they are used and understood affect all of us on a daily basis, even if we do not stop to think about them constantly. So it is interesting to emphasize here that the prefix *hetero-* in *heterosexual* does not mean opposite but, rather, *different*. “Opposite” as part of the assumed definition of heterosexual depends on a strict gender binary without room for a spectrum of gender identity because homosexual and heterosexual are often understood to be in opposition to each other.

Think again about the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014. Or think of the leaders in Chechnya who have demanded the eradication of gay men. Or think about the fact that businesses in Mississippi can discriminate against gay and lesbian people on religious grounds. Underneath all three of these arguments and pieces of legislation, there is a pro-heterosexual argument. The binary set up here, as is true of the gender binary, is a combative one. Not only are *heterosexual* and *homosexual* opposite, they are at war. Even if many of us do not think in terms of battle, the implication is there.

The homosexual/heterosexual binary differs from the gender binary because, although we have all seen various examples of the “battle of the sexes,” being a cisgender woman is not necessarily seen as abnormal or unnatural, although several countries still have laws that discriminate against cis women simply because they are women. (You can probably think of several ways that cis women might not be treated equally within the gender binary. For example, how long did it take women to be able to vote in various countries? Are there places in the world where women are still treated as men’s property?) The homosexual/heterosexual distinction is different from the gender binary because one pole (heterosexual) is valued to the absolute exclusion of the other pole (homosexual). Alongside this exclusion is the idea that heterosexuality is traditional, normal, and natural, while homosexuality is nontraditional, abnormal, and unnatural.

As you learned in Chapter 1, binaries regarding gender identity can categorize and limit self-expression, but **cultural norms** are fixed ideas and judgments about what is right and normal. Cultural norms result in part from strict social constructions about binaries. The construction of the homosexual/heterosexual binary *depends on the control of a gender binary*. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same, but they are monitored socially and culturally in many of the same ways. For example, in Uganda the heterosexual/homosexual binary is strictly policed, and there are dire legal consequences if someone crosses over the binary from the heterosexual side to the homosexual side. In the United States, the heterosexual/homosexual binary may not mean the difference between life in and out of prison; however, deep cultural stereotypes and assumptions continue to uphold the binary.

Boy Meets Girl: Heterosexual = Normal?

Remember the examples of the ways that people talk about newborns in Chapter 1? Now imagine the possible conversation between the parent of a baby assigned female at birth and the parent of a baby assigned male at birth while they sit on a park bench on a summer afternoon. You might hear them planning out the Saturday afternoon football games featuring the boy as the star quarterback and the Sunday afternoon ballet performances with the girl as the prima donna in *Swan Lake*. Alongside the expectations about their developing masculinity and femininity, we can also listen for another assumption. Imagine these statements: “He’s going to be quite a ladies’ man!” “Wow, she’s going to have all the boys following her around.” You might even hear this comment: “They are so adorable! Don’t you think they will make beautiful babies together?” Keep in mind that these babies are less than three months old. Neither of them is going on a date with anyone anytime soon.

The parents of the newborns are planning the children’s future, which is something most parents do. They are also making specific assumptions about the formation of their baby’s gender identity *and* sexual orientation. Without thinking that either child might wind up identifying as something other than cisgender and heterosexual, the parents are making a cissexist and *heterosexist* assumption. In short, **heterosexism** is the societal idea that heterosexuality is the preferred, normal sexual orientation.¹⁵ Generally speaking, society holds the notion that everyone is heterosexual unless they *come out*—that is, reveal what is not necessarily obvious (in this case, something other than heterosexuality).

The product of heterosexism is the social and cultural pressure embodied in **heteronormativity**, which is the notion that the only normal and natural sexual and romantic relationships are those between cisgender people who are romantically/sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex. Heteronormativity creates the following: (1) the binary construction of sex and gender: there is only female and male, where male equals man and female equals woman; (2) men and women must follow *gender roles*, or expected behaviors and self-presentations; and (3) the norm for sexual behavior sits on one side or the other of a rigid gender binary. But heteronormativity goes well beyond personal relationships to become a cornerstone of many social and cultural institutions, including government, law, religion, medicine, and marriage.

There have been many historic legal debates about the definition of “normal” sexual behavior. For example, until the historic 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence et al. v. Texas*, several states (including Arkansas and Texas) had laws that made certain heterosexual sexual acts between consenting adults, even in the privacy of a person’s own home, illegal. These same states made all homosexual sex acts between consenting adults illegal.¹⁶ Homosexuality is still illegal in over seventy countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Tonga, Ethiopia, and Jamaica. In Russia homosexuality is not technically illegal, but the country’s “anti-homosexual propaganda law” makes it illegal to write or say anything *positive* about homosexuality.¹⁷

We are all presented with examples of heterosexuality as the norm every day, so much so that most of us do not even notice them. Think back to your own childhood, the people in your family, and people out in the community in places such as school, church, and the grocery store. Did the people in your life make assumptions about whom you would fall in love with and marry? If so, how old were you when you started to notice these comments? What was the gender identity of the person they imagined you marrying? If everyone assumed you were heterosexual and would marry someone of the opposite sex, then you have experienced, firsthand, heterosexism and heteronormativity. If you identify *outside* the heterosexual box, what kinds of pressure do heteronormative expectations place on you? If you identify *within* the heterosexual box, what kinds of pressure do heteronormative expectations place on you?

Diverse Heterosexualities

We have already discussed the definition of heterosexual, but let’s go back again and reconsider the prefix *hetero-* as meaning something *other* or *different*. The

word *heterosexual* itself points away from rigid definitions, and yet, culturally and socially, we are often taught that there are very specific ways to be heterosexual: (1) A relationship must consist of one cisgender woman and one cisgender man, usually of the same racial, ethnic, and/or religious background; (2) this couple needs to enter into a monogamous marriage; (3) this marriage needs to create children; (4) this monogamous marriage with children means that everyone lives in one place together. This set of assumptions constitutes what we think of in the United States as the typical nuclear family. Culturally, we stereotype the nuclear family as not only the best type of family structure, but also the *normal* type of family structure. The United States is rich in immigrant history, however, so depending on socioeconomic factors, cultural and familial background, and location (urban or rural), a household might be composed of an extended family living under one roof. This extended family could include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In other countries and cultures, heterosexuality may include polygamous marriages, but the creation of children is still emphasized. Think for a moment about cultural judgments we make about other models of heterosexuality that do not fit this image.

For example, how do we view a married heterosexual couple that chooses not to have children? How do we view an interracial heterosexual married couple? How do we view interfaith heterosexual couples? How do we view heterosexuals within a group like the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who often feel the need to live in isolation because they believe in polygamy? How do we view older kinship family systems like those found in Indigenous communities before European colonization? How do we view people who identify as transgender and heterosexual? As you begin to think about these questions, you can see that heterosexuality is much more diverse and rich than our stereotypes of it.

In the three stories below, you can see expansive and diverse understandings of heterosexuality.



OSABEMIYE identifies himself as a cisgender man: “My name is Osabemiye. I am a married forty-four-year-old African American man of Egyptian descent. I am heterosexual. I work as a personal trainer and group fitness director. I grew up between Birmingham, Alabama, and Morganfield, a small town in Kentucky. I served in the United States Army for nearly twelve years, and I am a parent. I believe that being a heterosexual man lends itself to certain privileges, but I am careful

about not allowing those to become a trap. Because I am heterosexual, it does not mean I am the enemy of anyone who isn't."

KELLY KELLY "I'm sexually attracted to masculine men. Most men I've dated have self-identified as straight, even though they are having sex with me, a non-op trans female."



VERONIKA identifies as an African American trans woman: "I identify as a trans woman, though I am a woman who happens to be trans. I am a heterosexual woman, though I was always open to trying new things if the chemistry was right. I have slept with men, women, and a masculine trans woman. I can still say that I am heterosexual, or maybe just sexual, but I do prefer men."



At the age of forty-four, Osabemiye has just entered into his first marriage. Culturally, he is considered "old" for someone tying the knot for the first time. Also note that Osabemiye describes himself as a parent, which means that he did not follow the script of marriage and then children; rather, he had a child and then much later got married. His being a responsible and loving parent has nothing to do with his being married.

If you recall from her story in Chapter 1, Kelly Kelly identifies as third gender but uses *she* pronouns and dates men. In her description of the men she dates, Kelly Kelly uses the informal term *straight* to mean heterosexual. Kelly Kelly is very open about the fact that she has not had any surgical intervention in her process as a trans woman; she identifies as heterosexual because her gender identity does not hinge on medical intervention, and the people she desires are masculine cisgender men. Veronika, who is a trans woman, makes it clear that she is open to sexual relations with people of different gender identities; she also makes it clear that she prefers cisgender men and identifies as heterosexual. For Veronika, her sexual orientation is heterosexual because that is how she has defined herself; *heterosexual* is her self-determination.

Osabemiye, Kelly Kelly, and Veronika might not fit into a narrow heterosexual model for very different reasons. They do, however, exemplify a spectrum of heterosexuality that goes beyond the definitions of heterosexual found within the traditional binary.

FIGURE 2.1 Alfred Kinsey, by Cameron Rains. Dr. Alfred Kinsey was an American sexologist who, along with Drs. Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin, developed the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, more commonly known as the Kinsey Scale. This scale was first published in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948.



Identities beyond the Homo/Hetero Binary: Bisexual, Pansexual, and Asexual

As you were reading the above descriptions of the homosexual/heterosexual binary, you may have been thinking, “Hey, what if I don’t completely fit one side or the other?” Guess what? If that is how you feel, you are actually in the *majority* of the population!

In 1948 the American scientist and sexologist Alfred Kinsey (figure 2.1), along with his colleagues Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin, created a scale to measure people’s sexual orientation when they realized that many people did not fit neatly onto the homosexual/heterosexual binary.

When the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, more popularly known as the Kinsey Scale, was first administered anonymously in the United States, the results were very surprising. Kinsey’s original scale was broken down along a heterosexual/homosexual binary because his questions asked people to note if they were “predominantly,” “exclusively,” or “equally” heterosexual or homosexual. This scale ranged from 0 (which indicated a person was exclusively heterosexual in thoughts, feelings, and sexual practices) to 6 (which indicated that a person was exclusively homosexual in thoughts, feelings and sexual practices).¹⁸ Guess where the majority of the respondents landed on the scale? If you guessed between the numbers 2 and 4, you are correct. In other words, the majority of respondents fell into a category of not strictly heterosexual or homosexual, but

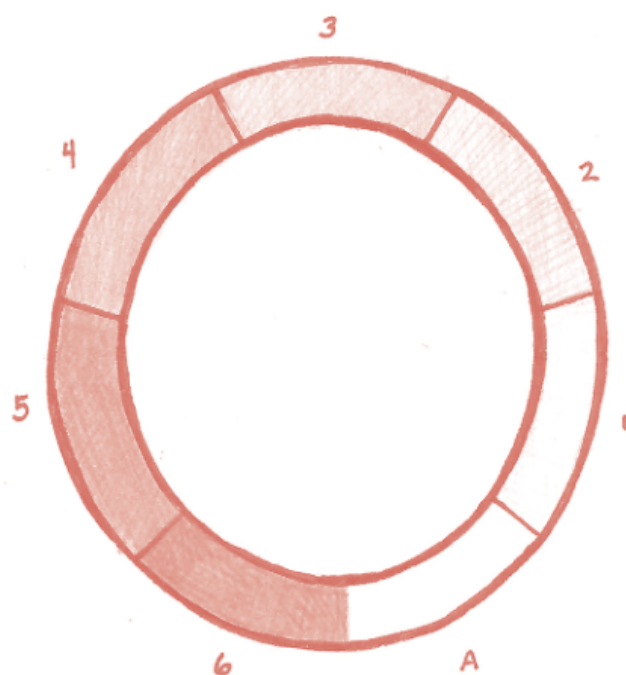


FIGURE 2.2 Circular Kinsey Scale, by Cameron Rains. Though Kinsey envisioned his scale as a linear progression from 1 (completely heterosexual attraction) to 6 (completely homosexual attraction), this version by Cameron Rains depicts the gradations as more continuous and includes categories (such as asexual) that the original Kinsey Scale did not.

rather open to intimacy with either sex (note that in the original study, sex was seen as either male or female). The findings from Kinsey's study helped the term **bisexual** emerge in the popular imagination. In popular culture, sexual orientation was no longer seen as only a heterosexual/homosexual binary.

Take a moment and think about Veronika's story. She defines herself as heterosexual; however, she is also clear that she is open to various possibilities. So, on Kinsey's scale, she might fall into the 2 or 3 category because bisexuality covers the widest range within the scale. Note, though, that the word *bisexual* and the Kinsey Scale both equate sex and gender, and they both assume that there are only two choices (because the prefix *bi-* means just that: two). Also, because even though Veronika would technically be a 2 or 3 on the Kinsey Scale, she clearly does not identify herself as bisexual, but as heterosexual. Also important to remember is that Kinsey's original research did not consider trans people and their sexual orientation, so both Veronika and Kelly Kelly would most likely have been mislabeled, which is often the problem with labels—they are constricting. If you look to Cameron Rains's interpretation of the Kinsey Scale in figure 2.2, you will see that it has been drawn as a circle with gradations between white and black. The circular figure is meant to portray the fluidity of the scale. In the 1800s *bisexual* meant that a single person, plant, or animal had the sex traits of both male and female. In very rare instances, bisexual could also mean *hermaphrodite*, which as you know, is the historic term for people with DSD.¹⁹

Culturally, sexual orientation is often still discussed, inaccurately, in terms of the homosexual/heterosexual binary—even by people who have given a lot of thought to issues concerning gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, let's listen to Deirdre's story about growing up and the ways that she understood sexual orientation.



DEIRDRE "I grew up with gays and lesbians in my life as family friends. I felt that if people were brave enough to love who they wanted to in the face of massive societal pressure to do otherwise, they were living proof that you really could do and be whatever you wanted. I was boy crazy from a very early age and I thought you were either homosexual or heterosexual, so I knew there was no way I could be a lesbian. Then, when I was twelve years old, my best friend told me about bisexuality, and I felt like my head was going to explode. I knew right away, that was what I wanted to be."

When she was a child, Deirdre's family had friends who were gay and lesbian, so she already knew that there was a sexual orientation other than heterosexual; but reread what she says here. Deirdre was boy crazy and thought that she had to be either heterosexual or homosexual until her friend told her about bisexuality.

Historically, it has sometimes been assumed that people go through a bisexual phase but ultimately come out as gay or lesbian. For this reason (and others), bisexual people often feel they do not fit into heterosexual communities and are also rejected within gay and lesbian communities. It is true that some people who identify and exist at an extreme of the homosexual/heterosexual binary are suspicious of bisexuals, and yet, according to the Kinsey Scale, bisexuality truly embraces the majority of people.

The term *bisexual* exists within a binary and often still assumes that everyone is cisgender, so you might be wondering: How do people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of all gender identities identify? **Pansexual** refers to people who are open to relationships with people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. The ancient Greek prefix *pan-* means "all."²⁰ Although the word *pansexual* has been in use since the early twentieth century, it has only recently come into popular use.

Let's look at the rest of Deirdre's story.



DEIRDRE “Nowadays, I will use the term ‘pansexual’ because it resists the gender binary, but I do feel a certain nostalgic loyalty to my old ‘bi’ identity, because it has faced so much political backlash and invisibility over my lifetime.”

For Deirdre, it is not so much that her sexual orientation has changed over time, but rather that the term *pansexual* has come into popular use. Deirdre feels it best describes her sexual and romantic openness to people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. At the same time, she also embraces a *bisexual* identity.

In recent years, a new category has been added to the Kinsey Scale. The category term **asexual** refers to someone who, generally speaking, has very little or no desire to be with anyone sexually. There is some controversy in the social and behavioral sciences about whether asexuality is a sexual orientation at all. Asexual communities, however, argue that asexuality (like homosexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality) is a marginalized sexual orientation that scientists have attempted to study as a *pathology* (disease or problem). This book considers asexuality as a sexual orientation—one that is often misunderstood and marginalized. Figure 2.2 shows asexuality added to the Kinsey Scale and labeled as “A.”

Asexuality, Sexual Abstinence, and Celibacy

Sexual abstinence is the choice not to act on sexual feelings. For example, some people decide to remain sexually abstinent until marriage. Most of the discussion about sexual abstinence makes both cisgender and heterosexual assumptions about marriage. How do you think the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that allows same-sex marriage in all fifty states will affect education about and choices regarding sexual abstinence? What kinds of discussions about sexual abstinence will take place in schools, community groups, churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other public forums?

Sexual abstinence is not the same as asexuality, and neither is **celibacy**, which is sexual abstinence that is typically tied to religious beliefs. Celibacy within religious orders is a global phenomenon that has existed for thousands of years. Buddhist monks and nuns embrace celibacy, as do Catholic nuns and priests, Jainist monks, some Taoist priests, and some schools of Hinduism.

Everyday people who have chosen not to engage in sexual activity sometimes use the word *celibate* to describe themselves. Like sexual abstinence, celibacy is a choice. In contrast, asexuality is a sexual orientation.

Asexual people may date and seek or find romance; some do, some do not. Asexual people can also identify emotionally as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or pansexual. In other words, their personal experiences of attraction and love are just as diverse as those of anyone else. Thus, an asexual person may still fall in love with someone and still bond with people emotionally and physically, but not sexually.

Here is how Cameron D. explains what being asexual means to them.



CAMERON D. identifies as Canadian, Chinese-Irish, and genderqueer. They are also asexual: “I’ve always identified with asexuality, starting when I was eleven. The words, and the particular type of asexuality, didn’t come until I was nineteen. This was in part from the research I did and in my developing understanding of my gender identity. I am panromantic. As a person of color, and as someone made invisible by my ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, I try to spend my time with people who are politically and socially aware and who are supportive of me.”

Cameron uses the word *panromantic*, which means they are open to romance with someone of any gender identity. In other words, being asexual does not necessarily mean living without romance. Note, too, how Cameron’s intersecting identities often create a situation where they may not feel understood, so they are perhaps more cautious in establishing friendships than other people might be.

Alternatives to the Term *Homosexual*

Though many social and behavioral sciences, legal documents, and medical practices still use the term *homosexual*, for most people who identify as a 5 or a 6 on the Kinsey Scale, the word still feels like a bad diagnosis or something illegal. The question, then, is: What respectful and positive terms can we use for people who are homosexual? In the 1980s in Denver, Colorado, there was a gay bookstore named Category Six Books, after Kinsey’s scale. “Category Six” was coded language in that people aware of Kinsey’s scale would understand that it was a gay bookstore. “Category Six” was a great name for a bookstore, but *category*

sixers does not feel like an identity that people would want to embrace. In this section you will learn about the two most commonly used and embraced identities for category 5 and 6 people: the G and the L in LGBTQ+.

Gay

Have you heard the Christmas carol “Deck the Halls”? Here is one of the lines from it: “Don we now our gay apparel.” Have you seen *West Side Story* on film or on the stage? Maria sings, “I Feel Pretty,” which includes the lyrics “I feel pretty and witty and gay!” These lyrics elicit a chuckle from many of us because the way these songs use the word *gay* is not how the word is currently used.

Gay generally refers to men who find other men romantically and/or sexually attractive. That said, many women also use the term *gay* for themselves; in English-speaking countries it is often the most-used word. For example, the London bookshop Gay’s The Word is an all-inclusive bookstore for the entire LGBTQ+ community. If you research its *etymology* (the history of a word), you will learn some interesting information about the word *gay*. Let’s go back to our two songs. “Deck the Halls” was originally written in Wales in the sixteenth century as a song for New Year’s Eve. The Welsh title was “Nos Galan,” and the song was not translated into English until 1862.²¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *gay* meant “bright looking” or “dressed in finery.”²² Because this was a folk holiday song for the new year that is now associated more with the yuletide, we can guess that the people who are putting on their “gay apparel” are dressing up for the festivities.

“I Feel Pretty” is much more recent. In 1957 Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim wrote the musical *West Side Story*. In the song Maria’s singing that she is “gay” means that she is happy and full of joy. Interestingly, by 1957 *gay* was in use as a *euphemism* (a socially and publicly more acceptable word or phrase) for *homosexual*.

In her 1922 short story “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene,” Gertrude Stein, an expatriate American author who lived in Paris with her lifetime woman partner, Alice B. Toklas, uses the word *gay* playfully as a *double entendre*, which is a word or phrase that has a second underlying meaning that is often sexual. It is clear from her repetition of the word *gay* that Stein was playing with the language and playing with the meaning, which she often did in her Modernist writing.²³ Stein was gay, so we can see the ways that the word *gay* begins to be used by people who self-identify as homosexual, but who might reject the negative term *homosexual* and move toward a more empowering term.

By the 1960s the word *gay* specifically meant homosexual. Although it has been used positively (think of “gay pride”), it can also be used negatively. Let’s read what Greg, a college professor and retired police officer, has to say about growing up and the ways the word *gay* felt negative.



GREG “I realized my attraction to other males at a conscious level in seventh grade. The words ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ were both very negative terms—about on the same level as ‘fag.’ Once I realized that I was sexually attracted to men, I kept that part of my identity a deeply hidden secret, so I never had a need or the occasion to use a term to identify my sexual orientation. Throughout my life, I considered and wondered if my attraction to men would change, but as I moved through my twenties, it became very clear to me that I was ‘gay.’ This was the term that I eventually accepted for myself and shared with others at the age of forty. Being gay was a great point of shame for me until I came out at age forty. Both the reality of being attracted to men and the associated label prevented me from sharing this part of my identity with anyone. The identity that I associated with being ‘gay’ for most of my life was that of an effeminate man, who was flamboyant and overly sexual. I never saw myself as having feminine characteristics, so the word didn’t work for me. More so, it was the shame associated with identifying as gay that I had to get over.”

Greg held several stereotypes about gay men being effeminate, which underscores two different issues: misogyny and homophobia. **Misogyny** is a hatred of women, but more broadly, it is a hatred of what is feminine. The stereotype of gay men being effeminate denigrates them as feminine, and so it is misogynous. Greg’s fear also points to his own internal **homophobia**, which is both a fear and a hatred of homosexuality. Homophobia can be the fear of homosexuality within the self, but it is also supported on a cultural level where anything seen as homosexual is denigrated. In contrast, heterosexuality is expected and even mandated, whether through subtle cultural cues or through laws prohibiting homosexuality.

Many people still believe that male police officers need to be very masculine, and that if you are gay, you are automatically not masculine. So you can see why the stereotypes of gay men would get in Greg’s way. You can also see the ways that *gay* and *transgender* might overlap in someone’s mind, too. Because sexual orientation is understood as a binary, in the same way that gender is

understood as a binary, many people assume that if two men are in a relationship, one must be “the woman” and the other must be “the man.” So, even here, homosexuality gets stereotyped as a form of heterosexuality, which is still viewed as the norm.

These views of masculinity, femininity, and being gay permeate our culture. Mia, whose story you read in Chapter 1, writes about her coming out.



MIA “I originally came out as gay because growing up in a small town in Texas if you were assigned male and acted feminine, that meant you were gay.”

Mia’s experience is not unusual. Because of a combination of gender stereotyping, misogyny, and homophobia, people often assume that a little boy acting feminine is a child who is going to be gay. In reality, it could mean many things, but panic that the child could be gay is often the first reaction. In the “Writings from the Community” at the end of this chapter, you will find Austin’s short story, “Deb,” which asks you to consider the ways that worries about sexual orientation and gender identity become intertwined.

Today *gay* is the term most commonly used for men who have romantic and/or sexual attachments to other men, but it can also be used as an *umbrella term* that can encompass numerous ideas and identities. In fact, many cultures that do not use the terms within LGBTQ+ often have one word that covers all sexual orientations that are not heterosexual and all gender identities that are not cisgender. In a recent book, *A Little Gay History* by R. B. Parkinson, the author explores ancient artifacts from around the globe that illuminate the fact that all cultures through time have included people of various sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.²⁴ The book’s title includes the word *gay*, but, as the author uses it, the word refers to people who identify as LGBTQ+. (The Q stands for *queer*, which we discuss later in this chapter.)

Lesbian

You might hear women use the word *gay* to describe themselves and their sexual orientation rather than the term *lesbian*, which sometimes takes on political connotations or is seen as culturally white and not welcoming to women of

color. A **lesbian** is a woman who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women. The word comes from the Greek island Lesbos, or Lesbos, which is located in the northeastern Aegean Sea, very close to the coast of Turkey. You may be wondering how a Greek island's name came to be associated with women who love women. One of the most famous residents of the island was Sappho (610–570 BCE), the famous Greek lyric poet who was known to have romantic and sexual relationships with women. Her love of women lives on in her poetry. Interestingly, she almost surely had relationships with men. History, however, has all but forgotten that she was probably bisexual by today's definition. The word *Sapphist* became associated with Sappho, and this word was and still is used to denote a lesbian. **Sapphic** is also in common parlance as another word for lesbian, but in scholarly circles the term applies to the exact poetic meter used by Sappho in her poems.

How does *lesbian* become a political term if its etymology refers to an ancient Greek island and the poet Sappho? The 1960s and 1970s in the United States were marked by several radical political struggles: the Civil Rights movement, the United Farmworkers' movement, the American Indian Movement, the women's movement (also known as the feminist movement), the peace movement, and the beginning of the LGBTQ+ movement. Many of the participants in these movements worked within more than one of them, and sometimes within all of them. You have probably studied at least one of these political movements. The women's movement, which we also think of as the second wave of feminism (the first wave happened in the early twentieth century in Great Britain and the United States and centered on women's right to vote), included many lesbian activists. The convergence of the feminist movement and the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ movement helped solidify the idea of a lesbian as someone who is political as a feminist and also political as a woman who loves women. Here is Betsy's story of coming out as a lesbian, going back to college in her thirties as a single mother, and living in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the 1980s. Betsy is now in her sixties, and she and her wife have a close relationship with her grown children and are helping raise her grandchildren.



BETSY "Coming out in 1984, in my thirties, after a heterosexual marriage was the hardest thing I've ever done. Was I crazy? Going through a 'phase'? Of course I sought professional help. One therapist suggested I was having a 'delayed adolescence.' My divorce attorney advised me to have no contact with lesbians whatsoever, no phone

calls, nothing. The message was clear: if I wanted to keep my children, I had to keep a secret, deny my very SELF, and go into hiding. But there was no denying my feelings. I felt I was on a runaway train, setting into motion changes in my life for which there was no stopping, and no turning back. I worried constantly about how these changes would affect my children. I briefly thought of suicide, but the impact that would have on my children was unconscionable. I could never leave them with that legacy. Once I cleared myself of the darkness I feared would surely envelop me, there was only one choice: to be a good mother, I had to be a happy woman. And what made me happy, what completed the missing pieces of me, was to be true to myself. I am a lesbian."

Betsy was raised in a strict Catholic environment and did what was expected by her family and by our culture. In her early twenties she married a man, and they had three children. In her thirties she finally came out as a lesbian. Betsy's story shows the difficulty and the triumph of her experience of fully embracing her lesbian identity over the past thirty years. For Betsy's generation, it was difficult to come out of the closet and to live their lives fully. A huge worry for Betsy was the ever-present danger that her children would be taken away from her because she was a lesbian. This would have been completely legal in the 1980s, even in a relatively liberal place like Amherst, Massachusetts. Even now, thirty years after Betsy struggled with coming out, it can still be very difficult for a person to come out of the closet.

Betsy is cisgender and lesbian. Remember, though, that someone who identifies as transgender can also identify as a lesbian. Do you remember Cerridwyn from Chapter 1? She wrote about her experience of being transsexual as feeling stuck in the wrong body. Here she continues to write about her sexual orientation: "I am a lesbian because I am a woman attracted to women." Cerridwyn is a transgender woman who comfortably embraces the term lesbian.

Some genderqueer, trans, transgender, and other gender-nonconforming people, however, have a problem with the perceived gender binary that gay and lesbian identities can appear to uphold. Some cisgender and trans people perceive the terms *gay* and *lesbian* as too white (Anglo-European). For some people who do not live in a Western cultural context, these terms, along with *bisexual* and *transgender*, feel "too American" or "too European." In the next two sections you will examine various alternative terms, the ways they are used, and who tends to use them.

Reclaiming Labels

Imagine that you run into a deli to pick up some lunch. As you wait for your sandwich, you gaze up at the flat-screen television on the wall just in time to see the national news footage of an LGBTQ+ Pride Parade that took place the day before. The words scrolling on the bottom of the screen tell you that the “Dykes on Bikes” opened the festivities. You have your sandwich and are going to get on with your day. Is it okay for you, now that you’ve seen this story on the national news, to use the word **dyke**? The answer to the question is: it depends. If you identify with this label, then, yes, you can use it. If you do not identify with this label, then in most cases, it is not okay for you to use it unless you are referring to the news story and mention that you saw the footage about “Dykes on Bikes.” At this point, you may be confused, so consider this explanation.

In 2014 Brian Taylor, an Australian football (soccer) commentator, referred to a football player as a *poofster*, a British derogatory term for a gay man. Some people were outraged, and others wondered why Taylor’s use of the term was so awful because some gay men use the word *poofster* to refer to themselves. The journalist Nic Holas addressed the issue: “The ‘reclaiming’ of derogatory slurs by minorities is a longstanding coping mechanism. It’s something we do to rid those words of their power, a power that is held over us by anyone who uses them. Every time we take back that word and use it in a positive way to collectively describe ourselves, it waters down the negative effects.”²⁵ Not only does reclaiming a slur help reduce the negative effect, it can actually *empower* or help individuals or a community feel that they are able to take control and make the derogatory word their own.

The words you will explore in this section are just a few of the terms that people within the LGBTQ+ community have, as marginalized people, taken back. As you study these terms, it is important to understand their etymology and why they can still do great harm to someone. A reclaimed word used by someone outside the community can still feel uncomfortable, even if the intention is not to be hurtful. And, of course, these reclaimed words can still be used in purposely hurtful ways as hate speech.

Fairy

Have you seen or read *Peter Pan*? Even if you haven’t, you’re probably familiar with the story of the boy who never wanted to grow up. You probably also remember Tinker Bell, who is a fairy. The oldest definitions of *fairy* referred to people with supernatural or magical powers. By the 1600s Shakespeare was

using *fairy* to denote a woman who is a powerful enchantress. By 1895, though, the *Journal of American Psychology* used *fairy* negatively to mean an effeminate gay man.²⁶ Note that this sudden negative connotation not only took power away from fairies, but also assumed that gay men must be feminine.

The term **fairy** has been reclaimed within part of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically the counterculture group called the Radical Faeries, who have a global network of members; they focus on spirituality and empowerment. Radical Faerie culture was particularly proactive during the first decade of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. The Radical Faeries held support groups and published articles on the need for kindness, love, and compassion for people who were suffering with AIDS.²⁷ Outside the LGBTQ+ community, though, *fairy* is still a hurtful word.

Dyke

Outside the LGBTQ+ community, the word *dyke* is often used as a derogatory term for lesbians or women who are seen as “too masculine”—that is, women who are not following societal rules about femininity. The origins of this meaning of *dyke* are obscure; however, an actual dyke or dike refers to a ditch or a wall.

The LGBTQ+ community has embraced *dyke* in several ways. Alison Bechdel’s cartoon strips following a group of friends entitled *Dykes to Watch Out For* became a huge hit in the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s. In 2003 the San Francisco chapter of Dykes on Bikes, which is famous for starting off the San Francisco Pride Parade, sued a Wisconsin woman who was attempting to trademark the name “Dykes on Bikes” for a new clothing company. The San Francisco–based chapter went to court to trademark the phrase “Dykes on Bikes” so that it can be used only as it was originally created. The lawsuit was a success, and now you will see the phrase trademarked as Dykes on Bikes®. Please note, however, that when someone outside the community shouts “Dyke!” at a person, the word can feel like an attack.²⁸

Beyond Dykes on Bikes®, the word *dyke* has often been reclaimed by women of color, particularly African American women who prefer women romantically and/or sexually. As I mentioned earlier, some people are uncomfortable with the word *lesbian* because it feels too political. For many women of color, *lesbian* also feels too white and *exclusionary* (that is, it makes people feel unwelcome). Even though the early feminist movement was very homophobic, lesbians were still an integral part of the movement, which often excluded women of color and working-class women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. In contrast, *dyke*, when reclaimed, can be a strong, powerful, and empowering word.

Even words or terms that are meant to be inclusive and empowering can be perceived as exclusionary. For example, some people avoid using the Western-centric abbreviation LGBTQ+ because it excludes and underscores long and deep histories of colonial and imperial violence. For example, here is what Valerie Mason-John, a woman of African descent who grew up in England, writes about the word *lesbian*: “I felt repulsed. It was like someone was saying I had a disease. The word looked so clinical. . . . I soon became a dyke—I liked that term. . . . Dyke derived from the American word ‘bulldyke,’ and . . . the word probably came from the African American culture because the word appeared in blues songs of the 1930s.”²⁹

Queer

As we’ve seen, LGBTQ+ people have reclaimed some of the derogatory words that are hurled at them. Meanwhile, other words are so horrible and hurtful that many still feel that they cannot be reclaimed. One reclaimed word that causes great confusion is *queer*. For some people, it is still offensive and hurtful. For others, it feels defiant and empowering. In some places, queer studies is an academic discipline. Despite the reclaiming, the word can still be thrown around in a violent way, so proceed with caution.

Queer in its historic context means “odd” or “weird.” Perhaps in one of your literature courses in high school or college you had to read something from the nineteenth century, and it is very likely that you stumbled on the word *queer*. In that context, it meant something was “different” or “not normal.” For example, a “queer-looking” carriage simply meant that the carriage appeared different or odd compared to other carriages. However, you can probably also see the ways that the word, when used to describe people, evolved into an adjective used to describe homosexuals. *Queer* goes back to the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, where heterosexual equals “normal” and homosexual means “odd,” “different,” or “queer.”

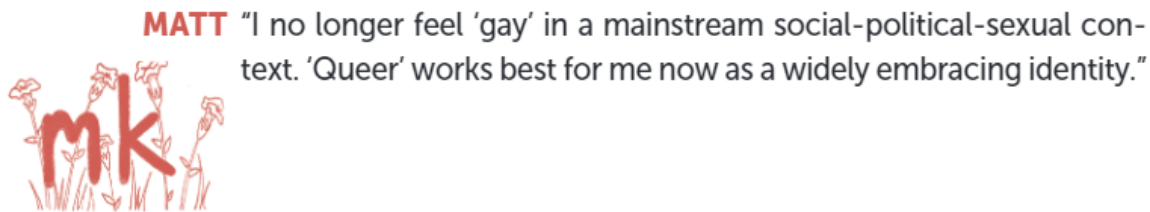
Within the LGBTQ+ community, *queer* elicits strong feelings, and there is ongoing debate within the community about the term. Remember Greg, the retired police officer and college professor? Here is what he says about “queer.”

GREG “‘Queer’ had such a negative connotation when I was young that I’ve never been comfortable with it.”



Greg's sentiment is not unusual, especially for people who were taunted and tortured by bullies who called them queer. Very often the verbal insult was followed by physical violence.

You might hear someone say that the use and acceptability of *queer* depends on the age of the person—that there is a generational difference. This statement, however, is not necessarily true. For example, let's see what Matt, who, like Greg, is also a college professor in his fifties, has to say about it.



Matt and Greg belong to the same generation; in fact, Matt is a few years older than Greg. So they were both tortured by being called queer growing up. Greg and Matt are both gay men. Greg finds the term *gay* comfortable at this point in his life, but Matt finds it too confining and prefers the reclaimed word *queer* for its expansive possibilities.

In 1990 a group of political activists (many of them college students, professors, and activists) got tired of the ways that LGBTQ+ people were treated as second-class citizens throughout much of the United States. During that summer, several unusual protests were staged all over the country by a new group, Queer Nation, which formed out of another political group, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Queer Nation sponsored several *be-ins* where people reclaiming the term *queer* went out in public in groups acting visibly queer. For example, in Los Angeles, a large group went to the Beverly Shopping Center wearing homemade Queer Nation T-shirts and made themselves visible by walking around and holding hands. In other cities, other groups of people, also with homemade T-shirts, had kiss-ins in public spaces. The idea was to become visible, to be queer and loud and proud. The people at the original be-ins probably had no idea about the ways that this form of empowerment would catch on fire.

By 1992 various colleges and universities in Europe and North America began offering classes entitled "Queer Literature" and "Queer Political Movements." One of the big reasons that the word *queer* appealed to so many was that it

could be used as an umbrella term for anyone and everyone who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender, and even for heterosexual allies who did not feel “straight” in a narrow sense. *Queer* pushed beyond the bounds of structural and institutional binaries and became a revolutionary way of theorizing and learning. To this day, particularly in Great Britain, Europe, and parts of North America, queer studies is a respected field of academic inquiry. Numerous scholars and professors who are not gay or lesbian work in the field.

Let’s look at three stories that help exemplify the expansiveness of this reclaimed and empowering term. First, let’s read a bit more about Mia’s identity. She is the trans woman who grew up in the small Texas town where everyone assumed that because she was feminine and because she was assigned male at birth, she must be gay.



MIA “I identify as a queer and trans young white woman. When I went to speak in public comment at City Hall in San Francisco for the first time as a homeless queer and trans youth, I wore a dress, red lipstick, with a dash of facial hair that I left visible to make a statement that people should be respected whatever their gender expression.”

Mia’s queerness is part of her rejection of the gender binary and the homosexual/heterosexual binary. It gave her a source of strength that helped her advocate for herself when she was homeless. At this time, Mia is working on a master’s degree in public health at a small liberal arts college; she was recently awarded a prestigious scholarship that will cover all her schooling. Her being out as a queer trans woman has given her strength to be herself, and her goal is to help other disadvantaged urban youth.

Remember Deirdre? She is in her fifties and discussed her identity as a bisexual woman who now feels the term *pansexual* fits better. For the past twenty years, Deirdre has been in a committed relationship with a man. Here is what she says about being queer.



DEIRDRE “It’s my openness to possibility that I want to wear on my sleeve, not who I actually have sex with. Because even in my current state as a functionally monogamous partner in a heterosexual (but not heteronormative) relationship, I am still queer.”

Mia and Deirdre discuss the term *queer* as one that they each personally embrace; let's examine the ways that Austin explores *queer* both as an individual experience and as a broad unifying identity.



AUSTIN "I originally came out as a gay male in my early teens, but then began identifying as queer in my early twenties. There is no prescribed experience of being queer; however, a lot of the truth about identity lies in the shared experiences of the community. Queerness is about a collective identity that brings together those who don't fall into normative identities or sexual categories. It gains power through togetherness. I have been to too many gay bars that vilify lesbians, women, or trans people; I have been to too many lesbian bars that vilify men or trans people. Under the queer umbrella, rather than approaching a safe space as a zone of exclusion based on differences, we need to understand that we are sharing an overarching experience based on sexual identity in a world that already vilifies us enough."

Austin points to the ways that the word *queer* can be empowering and notes that the use of the term can go beyond binaries and toward community building.

As we move through the twenty-first century, perhaps *queer* will become the truly positive and empowering umbrella term that Austin envisions. At this moment, though, we need to remember that a person's geographic location plays an important role in our understanding of the word *queer*. Just as most of the Queer Nation be-ins in the 1990s were in urban centers, at least in the United States, it still holds true that *queer* is viewed in a very different light in Boise, Idaho, or Lexington, Kentucky, from the way it is in San Francisco or New York. And even in San Francisco and New York there is still a sense of unease with using *queer* as an umbrella term; it is also important to note that many trans people do not feel comfortable with the term *queer*.

Reclaiming Identities: Global Contexts and Problems with LGBTQ+ as Western Eurocentric

In the 1996 Indian film, *Fire*, Sita and Radha, two women married to men in arranged marriages, are thrown together by circumstance. They fall in love with each other. Sita and Radha know they are in love, but they also talk to each

other about the fact that there is no specific word that describes their kind of love.³⁰ As you read this paragraph, you may be thinking that Sita and Radha are bisexual or lesbian. But these words often do not feel comfortable to people outside a Western (Anglo-European and U.S.) context. Yet LGBTQ+ is the global acronym. What is important about global language? What is the problem with it?

We often think of LGBTQIAA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (DSD), Questioning, Asexual, and Ally) as the most universal and all-encompassing way to discuss people whose gender identity and/or expression and/or sexual orientation are in a minority. You might often see this “alphabet soup” simplified to LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+ (the current and most commonly used acronym), particularly in the United States, or LGBTQ2+, particular to Canada and honoring Two-Spirit people.

Have you seen the rainbow flag, which is generally known around the world as a symbol of LGBTQ+ pride? Did you know it was created by a group of people in San Francisco?³¹ While something related to LGBTQ+ pride coming from San Francisco might not be a surprise to you, what you might find remarkable is walking into Gin Gin’s LGBTQ+ bookstore in Taipei and seeing rainbow flags. If you look at the LGBTQ+ groups struggling to make change in Uganda, you will see that they also use the rainbow flag. Truly, the rainbow flag has come to indicate LGBTQ+ safe spaces around the world.

If there is a global symbol or global abbreviation (LGBTQ+), then everyone must be happy with it, right? The answer depends on context. As an example, let’s look at a true story. In February 2014 John Abdallah Wambere (his nickname is Longjones—pronounced “Long Johns”) traveled to the United States as an invited guest to give several talks about healthcare issues in Uganda. Longjones was a cofounder of Spectrum Uganda Initiatives, which is an LGBTQ+ rights group focused on health education. In his beloved home country of Uganda, the umbrella term that people use among themselves is not queer or LGBTQ+ but rather **kuchu**, which encompasses anyone and everyone who is not a cisgender heterosexual person. Uganda has some strict antihomosexuality laws that target LGBTQ+ people; the law may be antihomosexual, but it also includes anti-transgender policies. Family members who are not LGBTQ+ but who do not turn in a loved one who is LGBTQ+ can also be prosecuted under Ugandan law. At home, Longjones uses the word **kuchu**, but on his tour of the United States, he needed to use LGBTQ+ because of his audience. In the United States people may not have known what **kuchu** means. Beyond this issue of ideas that can get “lost in translation,” something else completely unexpected and life-changing happened to Longjones.

One morning in Boston, Longjones woke up and found several text messages from friends and colleagues in Uganda. The message was clear: if he came back to Uganda, he was going to be killed because of his work in the HIV/AIDS-prevention clinics and with Spectrum Uganda. At that moment, Longjones's life forever changed. He needed to seek *asylum* in the United States—that is, he had to ask for permanent refuge in a country that is not his home country because his life would be in danger upon returning home. Longjones's safety depended on his knowing a universal LGBTQ+ language (including the meaning of the symbolic rainbow flag) to help him find immediate legal help and begin the legal process of seeking asylum.

In September 2014 Longjones was granted asylum in the United States. Indeed, one of his close Ugandan friends, David Kato, who had also been active in LGBTQ+ (*kuchu*) rights work, had been murdered because he was *kuchu*.³² Do you think Longjones's story has a happy ending? How will he experience life in the United States as a gay man who is African? How will he cope with the fact that he will never be able to go back home and see his daughter or his friends? In "Writings from the Community" at the end of Chapter 7, you will read the answers in his own words.³³

Why does Uganda have such strict laws that criminalize LGBTQ+ people? You might be wondering if that is "just the way it is," or if intolerance is an innate part of Ugandan culture. It is not; however, a complex and violent history accounts for the Ugandan government's treatment of people who are *kuchu*. **Colonialism** refers to a situation in which a group of people move into a place that is not their country or culture of origin. Instead of moving in and becoming part of the existing culture, though, the colonizers take over the local culture through imperialism. **Imperialism** refers to a policy of extending a country's power and influence through force and sometimes (but rarely) diplomacy. Imperialism ultimately attempts to eradicate the original culture. Under colonialism and imperialism, many of the original inhabitants are killed or imprisoned. Over generations, native cultural practices, religions, laws, and languages are made invisible and often nearly forgotten.

The strict anti-*kuchu* laws in Uganda are not originally African laws or Ugandan laws. Great Britain colonized Uganda and turned it into part of the vast British Empire. Starting in 1862, British explorers became interested in eastern Africa and the area that we know today as Uganda. Officially, the British fully colonized the area from 1888 to 1962.³⁴ Today Uganda is its own country. The British have been successfully kicked out. Interestingly, though, the old British laws that criminalized LGBTQ+ people are still followed in Uganda—even though

modern laws in Great Britain are much more accepting of LGBTQ+ people. But when Great Britain tried to step in and argue against Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, the Ugandan government did not listen because of the country's long history of being violently abused at the hands of the British colonial government. This explanation does not help people like Longjones, David Kato, or anyone else in the *kuchu* community; however, it does provide a historical context. You will have an opportunity to explore these historical global issues surrounding imperialism and colonialism in Chapter 7.

People in other countries that have been victimized by violent imperialism often find that LGBTQ+ still feels too "English" or "American." They are suspicious because the last time they had significant interactions with Western cultures, they lost their own rich cultures, many of which openly embraced people of various sexual orientations and gender identities. At the end of this chapter, you will find a list of words that come from diverse cultures. These words, like *kuchu*, are either newly invented words that are used instead of LGBTQ+ or ancient terms that were used for people outside a gender binary and across the sexual orientation spectrum, including various modes of heterosexuality. In many places the ancient terms are being reclaimed. As you learn about these words, keep in mind that many cultures did not have distinct terms for gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Rather, there was often one umbrella word like *kuchu*. The use of one word can be confusing because it is not clear whether it is being used to denote someone who is transgender or someone who is gay, or someone who is gay and transgender or heterosexual and gender nonconforming.

In Chapter 3 we will turn our focus to the *sexologists*, scientists who wanted to classify everyone and everything. For now, please read on for Andrea Jenkins's poetic take on sexual orientation and gender identity in her poem "Blues for SOGI," and Austin Mantele's short story "Deb," which depicts a creative nine-year-old.

WRITINGS FROM THE COMMUNITY

ANDREA JENKINS

Blues for SOGI³⁵

In 2017 Andrea Jenkins became the first African American transgender woman to be elected to the city council of a major city. She now proudly represents Ward 8 of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Andrea is an artist-activist and award-winning poet and writer. She has been awarded fellowships from the Bush Foundation, Intermedia Arts, and the Playwrights Center and has won writing and performance grants and scholarships from the Givens Foundation, Intermedia Arts, the Loft, the Napa Valley Writers Conference, and Pillsbury House Theater. Andrea is the cocurator of Queer Voices at Intermedia Arts (the longest-running series of its kind in the nation) and, in 2018, completed several years' worth of work collecting oral histories from hundreds of people in the upper Midwest transgender community as an oral historian in the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies.

*Andrea is the author of three chapbooks of poems and a full-length book of poetry, *The "T" Is NOT Silent: New and Selected Poems*. She has been published in several anthologies, including *Gender Outlaws Two: The Next Generation*; *When We Become Weavers: Queer Female Poets on the Midwestern Experience*, edited by Kate Lynn Hibbard; *The Naked I: Wide Open and The Naked I: Inside Out*, edited by 20% Theater; and most recently *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights: A Public Policy Agenda for Uniting a Divided America*, edited by Wallace Swan. She was also a contributor to the widely acclaimed anthology *Blues Vision*, edited by Alexis Pate, Pamela Fletcher, and J. Otis Powell! (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2015), as well as the anthology *A Good Time for the Truth*, edited by Sun Yung Shin (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016). To learn more about her, visit <http://andreajenkins.webs.com>.*

Dear SOGI,

How they mistreated you

In a time that at the time was considered magical

Enlightened even,

But you and I know different

The tired debate
Marriage is between a man and a woman

SOGI, cultural weaver, soul talker
Digital alchemist, always taking the temperature

Looking for the right moment
To strike the iron while it's

Hot, it's always hot SOGI
I love you for that . . .

Make moves, make it happen SOGI
You didn't dare dream this

Forty years ago, darkened windows
At Stonewall, coded movies where you were always the villain

Buggery laws, unveiled threats
Against life and limb,
Shocked by the therapy

What up, Son?
The boys on the block believed you were one of them

You knew different, you knew truth telling
Would become the characteristic you'd

Become closely associated with
But before that it was "be careful who you associate with"

That one dude, went on the road to HOWL³⁶
Him and a couple of other cats

Frank O'Hara³⁷ kept it real cool
Langston³⁸ too, we cried for you yesterday

In a workshop where we discussed identity politics
And Black Feminist Freedom Fighters
Oh Audre³⁹—where did the power come from
Love was never about easy,

But doesn't it supposed to feel good
Entertaining angels after midnight

Now you're wounded, spent up
Perhaps you should have been a legend
A martyr, maybe you should have done more than survived?

AUSTIN MANTELE

Deb

Austin Mantele is a writer living in New York City working on a novel and a television series. After years of scraping rock bottom, he got his act together while working at vintage stores in San Francisco and attending City College of San Francisco. After deciding to pursue his academic interests full-time, he moved to Manhattan to complete his bachelor's degree at Columbia University. He is currently enrolled in their creative writing MFA program and is also teaching undergraduate academic writing.

As a nine-year-old boy, I used to play “Deb”—a fortysomething diner waitress with hairspray-glazed tresses and a scratchy Long Island twang. Deb was sassy, boisterous, tenderly crude. I reveled in her unapologetic candor, her immunity to others’ glares.

Deb’s garments were finely constructed from pastel-colored paper, glitter, and glue. The suburban California classroom was her diner—Your Friend Deb’s Place. Bubble-gum pink countertops, black-and-white tiled floors, mint green booths, and matching jukeboxes replaced the classroom’s beige desks and tables every afternoon during arts and crafts. With a notepad in hand, she asked her valued customers whether they wanted a tuna melt or a vanilla milkshake adorned with a cherry. Some classmates would answer in laughter; most would ignore her. She eventually settled on a simpler name for the diner—Deb’s Joint—after several customers complained that they did not consider Deb a “friend.”

“Ya want fries with that, hon?” Deb asked a classmate with a buzz cut one afternoon. I had spent the morning constructing a new uniform for her shift. A construction paper skirt of bone shapes and spidery threads hung from her waist. Her loose-fitting paper bra was covered in pools of dried glue and streaks of silver glitter. Buzz Cut didn’t answer as she hovered around his seat. He refused to look up at her: a personal pet peeve of Deb’s. She leaned over, tapping her fingers near his box of crayons.

“No,” Buzz Cut muttered, scowling as he resumed coloring. Deb looked down to see a brightly colored drawing of a brawny soldier tearing off another soldier’s arm. “Go away.”

“We don’t have all day,” Deb tapped her fingers faster, imagining the sound of long acrylic nails clacking on the table’s surface. “I’m tryin’ to run a business here, toots.”

Buzz Cut leaned over to another classmate—a boy in a blue baseball cap—and whispered something. They both laughed.

“Can you believe these kids, Sam?” Deb asked her only friend and employee, Samantha. “They come to a diner and don’t know if they want our world-famous fries!”

Samantha was at the opposite side of the craft table, taking orders in a paper uniform almost identical to Deb’s. There were more orders scribbled on her notepad—the customers loved Samantha’s service.

“My dad said you shouldn’t talk to us,” Buzz Cut announced to Deb as he continued to color. She looked down to see blood pouring from his illustrated soldiers. “He told us not to hang out with you.”

“Not like we would anyway,” Ball Cap added.

“I don’t know your Pop,” Deb laughed, pretending to loudly chew gum. “Bet he’s a real charmer.”

The two boys looked up, leering at Deb like a stubborn grease stain that refused to be scrubbed clean from her diner apron. Deb looked around to see customers staring. Pointed conversations quietly erupted around the craft table. Teacher rose from her desk.

“Everyone knows there’s something wrong with you,” Ball Cap blurted out, baring his remaining baby teeth as he spoke. “The parents talk about it after baseball practice.”

“That’s why you’re not allowed to our houses!” Buzz Cut jeered.

Teacher began walking toward Deb.

“Listen to how you talk,” Ball Cap added. “And who plays waitress?”

“Are they giving you trouble again, Deb?” Samantha shouted from across the table.

I stared down at Buzz Cut’s drawing of guns, explosions, mangled soldiers, and bloody entrails as customers began to laugh. My face became flushed, pricked with embarrassment. Laughter ripped across the table as more joined in, pointing at Deb with crayons, chewed pencils, and craft scissors. Buzz Cut grabbed at her skirt. Ball Cap pulled at her bra strap.

“Not in my damn diner!” Deb shouted as she slapped Ball Cap across the face with her notepad.

Teacher asked Deb to stay after school for a conference. Parents were called.

Held captive in her own restaurant, she watched as Teacher wiped the dusty chalkboard, opened the blinds, and rearranged chairs. Deb stared at posters on the wall of determined rock climbers, celebratory track stars, and a terrified cat clinging to a lonely branch. Quotes like “Be Anything You Want!” and “Hang in There, Baby!” accompanied the images. Counselor arrived, instructing Deb to sit down in a plastic blue desk in the center of the room. Parents rushed in. Everyone sat in a circle around my desk. Everyone stared in dismay at the paper scraps exquisitely draped from Deb’s body. Everyone hated Deb.

"We need to talk about Deb," Teacher announced, gripping my shoulder. "Again."

"We've gone over this," Counselor sighed. "Do we need to take away the construction paper?"

"No!" Deb pleaded, staring past the adults and into the eyes of the struggling cat on the branch. "Deb isn't just construction paper. She just happens to look good in it."

"Honey," Mother chimed in. "Remember what we told you last week when you made a bikini?"

"We just want what's best," Counselor interrupted. "Boys don't play 'waitress' or wear bikinis." Deb imagined the branch cracking, splintering from existence under the cat's claws.

"Have you considered football?" Teacher asked both parents. "Or baseball?"

Father took a deep breath. "He's enrolled in both."

Counselor stood up and walked toward the chalkboard. Teacher approached the desk. Deb watched as Teacher opened the desk drawer, removing a pair of scissors. Chalk pierced the blackboard as Counselor drew a thick line down the center.

"We should also talk about . . ." Counselor paused, continuing to drag the white stick down the black surface. "Speech classes."

"We've discussed that." Father took a deep breath. "The kids at baseball give him a hard time about sounding too feminine."

Teacher fondled a pair of scissors. "A speech class before puberty would help."

The parents nodded at Teacher and Counselor, refusing to look at Deb. I felt a searing flush blossom across their faces, a deep burn upon their cheeks. Everyone was ashamed of Deb.

Counselor turned around at the chalkboard, staring through Deb and into me. Teacher circled her finger across the tip of the scissors. Father placed his arm around Mother.

"I'm going to name some things and I want you to tell me what side you think they go on. Everything on the right side is encouraged for a boy your age," Counselor said as she tapped the right side of the chalkboard. "Everything on the left is not."

"Okay," Deb resumed her gravelly East Coast accent. "Sure, hon."

"Stop that!" Mother snapped at Deb. "Please."

"I'm sorry." A dense silence hung in the air.

"Ready?" Counselor continued. "Where do you think construction paper bikinis go?"

Deb watched as Teacher slid her thumb and index finger into the scissor rings, opening and shutting the blades repeatedly. Deb kneaded her bra anxiously.

"Where?" Counselor's tone grew sharper.

"Nowhere," I replied.

Counselor's glance cut deep from across the room. "No," she sighed. "Bikinis—paper or otherwise—always go on the left side." Deb watched as she wrote "bikinis" on the left side of the impenetrable chalk line.

"What about playing 'waitress'?" Teacher asked from her seat. She moved her finger along the scissor's outer blade while scanning the meticulously trimmed lines of Deb's bra. "Which side is that on?"

"I don't know." I fidgeted with Deb's bra. Sweat dripped from my fingers, wilting the straps. The once-vibrant pastel-colored paper dampened into a sickly gray.

"Yes, you do!" Father shouted.

Deb watched as Counselor wrote "waitress" on the left side of the board. She went over the stiff, straight letters repeatedly, the chalk crumbling slowly against the stubborn black surface. A loud snap cut through the room as the chalk broke in two.

"What should we do about him?" Father asked Teacher. "We're at a loss."

"Last month, we bought him roller blades to play hockey," Mother interrupted. "But he ended up playing 'figure skater' with Samantha."

"He was playing figure skater here too," Counselor sighed, returning to her seat in the circle. "In a paper tiara."

"The boys won't spend time with him," Teacher added. "We've tried encouraging them to be a good influence."

"We know," Mother replied.

"Have you taken him to see someone?" Counselor asked. Everyone began speaking as if I wasn't there.

"Yes," Father answered. "But he wasn't on our side."

"Well." Counselor quickly stood up. "What should we do?"

"I know a boarding school that has been known to help cases like his," Teacher announced, lightly tapping the scissors against her chair. "It might be worth considering."

A bead of cold sweat dripped down my forehead. Deb was under siege. The adults fired barbed glances at Deb as they discussed military school and therapy. I imagined Deb as one of Buzz Cut's soldiers—mutilated, torn limb from limb, innards spilling on the diner floor.

"What do you want to do about this?" Father sharply turned his head toward me. A disdainful smile emerged on the adults' faces as they collectively turned to Deb. Teacher's scissors continued to tap faster against the chair like machine gun fire.

Deb's bra flitted through my fingers. My breathing became more hurried, disjointed. Would we have this meeting every year? I asked myself. Every class?

For how long? I pictured foam forming in the corners of the adults' curled mouths, threats seething between their lips.

"Deb!" I envisioned Teacher standing up, pointing her pair of scissors at the beloved waitress. "Get Deb!"

"Get her!" I imagined a chorus of classmates' parents shouting as they stormed the diner. I could hear a mob gather outside. Buzz Cut, Ball Cap, and the other students crowded the window. Eager faces fought to breathe on the glass and write "Kill Deb!" with their fingers.

An image of everyone rising in unison—scissors in hand, fiery eyes, thin strands of saliva hanging from their teeth as they smiled—slowly unfurled through my mind. They approached Deb from each side, gliding their shears across her chest and legs.

"Kill Deb!" everyone chanted—their voices becoming louder, more unified in purpose. "Kill Deb!"

Visions of steel blades cutting through the construction paper, grazing my bare skin underneath ambushed my thoughts. Blades furiously sliced up into Deb's bra straps, sliding back down to her skirt. Inner shears tore through her voice, puncturing her accent. Uneven strands of Deb's hair fell to the ground in jagged clumps. Thumbs and fingers jutted through the scissor eye rings, carving away at Deb's frame. Shreds of her clothes dropped to the diner floor. Classmates swung baseball bats, smashing the diner windows. Streams of gasoline coated the black-and-white tile as everyone began emptying cans inside. Deb's Joint burst into careless conflagration, flames devouring the jukeboxes, booths, tables, and menus.

I began to perspire, gripping the soggy edges of Deb's clothing. I walked backward toward the chalkboard. Mother, Father, and Counselor rose from their chairs in confusion. Teacher soon followed, leaving her scissors on the desk. Everyone approached me—tentatively, as if walking on a blanket of broken diner glass. I continued to step backward until the back of my head hit the chalkboard.

"What's wrong, buddy?" Father asked, cautiously extending his hand. "We're just trying to help."

Counselor nodded, "We're just looking out for you!"

Shards of chalk rolled under my palms as I grasped the ledge of the board. My eyes darted around the room, afraid they would begin dismantling Deb—thread by thread, limb from limb. Visions of Deb retired on a provincial porch somewhere in the woods—voluminous gray hair, uneven lipstick, unshaven legs, frayed glitter bra—materialized when I closed my eyes. I imagined Deb waving good-bye as the surrounding shrubbery consumed her hideaway.

"Honey?" Mother said, reaching for my shoulder. "Talk to us."

Deb's clothing shook between my fingers as I began tugging at the seams. I dug my fingers into Deb's damp bra, tearing the straps from my body. They can't kill Deb, I thought. I won't let them. The sound of torn paper filled the room as I hurled the discarded fragments of her uniform to the floor. I pulled her skirt from my hips, nails sinking into the sodden paper. My hands trembled as I shredded the garment into paltry, unrecognizable pieces. Glitter, glue, food orders, fragments of waistbands, bra straps, necklines floated to the classroom floor. A pile of Deb's remains sat at my feet. I buried my face into my clammy, chalk-covered hands.

I felt Mother's hand caress my shoulders. Father wanted a high five. Counselor cracked a smile. I raised my head to see that I surrendered—sweating, shaking—on the right side of the chalkboard line.

Key Concepts

- asexual (p. 55)
- bisexual (p. 53)
- celibacy (p. 55)
- colonialism (p. 69)
- cultural norms (p. 48)
- dyke (p. 62)
- fairy (p. 63)
- gay (p. 57)
- heteronormativity (p. 49)
- heterosexism (p. 48)
- heterosexual (p. 47)
- homophobia (p. 58)
- homosexual (p. 46)
- imperialism (p. 69)
- kuchu (p. 68)
- lesbian (p. 60)
- misogyny (p. 58)
- pansexual (p. 54)
- queer (p. 64)
- sapphic (p. 60)
- sexology (p. 46)
- sexual abstinence (p. 55)
- sexuality (p. 45)
- sexual orientation (p. 45)

Activities, Discussion Questions, and Observations

1. Both Andrea Jenkins and Austin Mantle use a creative forum to explore the intersection and blending of gender identity and sexual orientation. Andrea refers to several historic moments and people in her poem. Pick something or someone from her poem that you are not familiar with and research their importance in the poem as well as in LGBTQ+ culture.
2. Austin's story ends with "Deb" crossing over the chalkboard line. How do you interpret what happened to the nine-year-old? The parents and the school authorities seem to be quite worried about "Deb." What do you think is at the heart of their concern? Have you witnessed an incident like this in your past? Have you had this happen to you? Have you been like the boys who make fun of "Deb"? Have you been like the one friend who sticks by "Deb"?
3. For this exercise, think about your childhood. Whom did you live with as you were growing up? Whom do you consider your family? Think about any discussions you had concerning sexuality or sexual orientation as you were growing up. Was the subject approached in your home? If so, how was it approached? Were certain assumptions made? Did you ask questions? If so, what kinds of questions did you ask? (This can be a private journal exercise, an in-class writing exercise that is submitted to the instructor, or a small-group discussion.)
4. This is a small-group, in-class presentation. Students are in small groups of three or four. You will either choose a country together or pick one randomly. As a group, you will research the country's laws concerning LGBTQ+ people. Is it illegal or legal to be LGBTQ+ in the country? What legal protections are afforded to LGBTQ+ people? Are LGBTQ people treated differently under the law than trans and/or people with DSD? You will want to consider marriage laws as well as adoption laws in your chosen country. Each group will give a ten-minute presentation to the class at a "Model United Nations."
5. Choose an advertisement from a magazine or a commercial on television. What assumptions about people are being made? Did you see any links being made between sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation?
6. As part of a journal activity, write about a time when you had to come out to friends, family, or loved ones about something that you felt afraid/ashamed/worried/different about. Your experience may have nothing to do with your sexual orientation or your gender identity (or it might), but it should be something you were afraid to tell others because you were afraid of being

judged for it. What did you worry about before telling other people? (This journal activity can also be a class discussion.)

7. Explore at least one of the definitions for people of various sexual orientations that have not been used in more formal or more medical language. Some of the words are more positive while some are negative. If you research the full etymology of the word, you may be surprised where it first came from and how it has evolved over time. Here is a list of words, some of which were covered in this chapter; feel free to come up with others: *AC/DC*, *ace*, *Bilitis*, *bulldagger*, *dyke*, *fag*, *fairy*, *fruit*, *joto/a*, *kathoey*, *kuchu*, *maricón*, *pansy*, *pouf*, *queen*, *Sapphist*, *stud*

Film and Television of Interest

***Against the Law* (2017, U.K., 84 minutes)**

A biography, drama, and history all rolled into one. This film, written by Brian Fillis and Peter Wildeblood, examines a time in the 1950s when Wildeblood was imprisoned for being gay, since homosexuality was illegal in the U.K. at that time. The film includes interviews with elderly gay men in Britain who were arrested under the Criminal Amendment Act (an anti-homosexual law).

***Apricot Groves* (2016, Armenia, 78 minutes)**

This complex and beautifully filmed drama focuses on an Iranian-Armenian young trans man who lives in the United States. He travels to Armenia to propose to his Armenian girlfriend he met in the United States.

***(A)sexual* (2011, U.S., 75 minutes)**

This documentary explores people who are asexual and who face discrimination from other sexual minority communities. The film does an outstanding job of looking at stereotypes about asexual people.

***Better Than Chocolate* (1999, Canada, 101 minutes)**

An entire community of friends composed of lesbians, gay men, heterosexuals, bisexuals, and trans people is the focus of this comedy romance. This Canadian feature film does an outstanding job of looking at a diverse LGBTQ+ community and a parent's acceptance of her daughter's diverse community.

***Big Eden* (2000, U.S., 118 minutes)**

Winner of numerous film-festival awards, *Big Eden* looks at an idyllic world in a small Montana town where the entire community wants the gay protagonist, who has returned

home from New York, to be happy. Stereotypes about rural communities being homophobic are overturned in this heartwarming romance.

***Boy Meets Girl* (2014, U.S., 95 minutes)**

Winner of multiple independent film awards, this romantic comedy takes place in rural Kentucky and focuses on a young trans woman who falls in love with a cisgender woman while she also does not realize that her cisgender male best friend is in love with her. The film beautifully navigates gender identities and sexual orientation from bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual identities.

***Cabaret* (1972, U.S., 124 minutes)**

This iconic film starring Liza Minnelli is a music-filled look at Weimar Berlin, which was a city open to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities before the Nazi Party came to power. *Cabaret* won eight Oscars and three Golden Globes.

***Call Me Kuchu* (2013, Canada, Uganda, 87 minutes)**

This award-winning documentary follows the various iterations of the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda. Featured in the film are scenes with the late LGBTQ+ activist David Kato and the tireless ally for the community Bishop Christopher Senyonjo. Also featured is John Abdallah Wambere (Longjones), who contributed to "Writings from the Community" in Chapter 7 of this book.

***Chavela* (2017, U.S., 90 minutes)**

Chavela Vargas, a renowned singer, was the lover of the iconic *Méxicana* artist Frida Kahlo and collaborated with the famous Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar. This documentary film, which premiered at the 2017 Berlin International Film Festival, looks at her life and her work as a sexual and gender outlaw.

***Coming Out in the 1950s* (2011, U.S., 15 minutes)**

Phil Siegel's first documentary in a series of four explores the lives of people who came out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender in the 1950s. The sexual orientation and/or gender identity of most of the people interviewed in the film was illegal when they first came out of the closet.

***Coming Out in the 1960s* (2013, U.S., 26 minutes)**

This second documentary by Phil Siegel explores the changing times from the 1950s into the 1960s as different people are interviewed about coming out of the closet during the decade of the Civil Rights movement, women's movement, the peace movement, the United Farmworkers' movement, and the beginning of the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

***Coming Out in the 1970s* (2014, U.S., 16 minutes)**

Phil Siegel's third documentary includes him and others who came out of the closet right after the Stonewall Rebellion in New York ushered in the modern-day LGBTQ+ rights movement. The 1970s are seen as a time of fast-paced LGBTQ+ rights, activism, and partying.

***Coming Out in the 1980s* (2015, U.S., 17 minutes)**

Siegel's final documentary in this series includes the author of this textbook. The 1980s were marked by the beginning of the AIDS pandemic and the lack of healthcare and governmental intervention to help those suffering.

***Fire* (1996, Canada, India, 104 minutes)**

Deepa Mehta's groundbreaking lesbian feature film won numerous awards around the world. The film also brought about death threats. *Fire* changed the cinematic landscape for LGBTQ+ film.

***Frida* (2002, U.S., Canada, Mexico, 123 minutes)**

Salma Hayek's Oscar-nominated depiction of the famous bisexual and gender-fluid Mexican artist Frida Kahlo is the subject of this feature-length film. Despite being in constant physical agony after a horrible accident, Frida Kahlo spent her adult life painting. The LGBTQ+ community has embraced her as an icon.

***Gazon Maudit (French Twist)* (1995, France, 104 minutes)**

This French comedy is about a heterosexual couple who invite their neighbor, a lesbian, to move in with them. This film explores stereotypes about rigid definitions of sexual orientation.

***God's Own Country* (2017, U.K., 104 minutes)**

The director Francis Lee delivers a raw and stunning film that takes place in rural England on a sheep farm. The film works on several complex levels as a look at socioeconomics and the struggles of the rural poor who work the land, as well as issues concerning Romanian immigrants. The gay men in the film do not have an urban social life. Rather, they are farmers trying to make ends meet.

***Kinsey* (2004, U.S., Germany, 118 minutes)**

This Oscar-nominated biopic looks at the life of Alfred Kinsey, the sexologist who invented the Kinsey Scale.

***Markova: Comfort Gay* (2000, U.S., Philippines, 97 minutes)**

This film is based on the true story of Walter Dempster Jr., a gay elder who grew up in the Philippines during World War II. This biopic follows Dempster as he grows up with a violent and homophobic brother. Dempster identifies as a gay man, yet he often embraces

a female identity. This is a terrific film that looks at the fluidity of gender and sexual orientation.

***La Mission* (2009, U.S., 117 minutes)**

This feature-length drama explores intersecting identities when a conservative Chicano father in a poor inner-city neighborhood finds out that his son is gay. This film was shot on location in San Francisco's Mission District.

***Orange Is the New Black* (2013–ongoing, television, U.S.)**

This award-winning and popular television show about women in prison features Laverne Cox as an African American trans woman. Film and television often use cisgender actors to play the roles of trans people. *Orange Is the New Black* is important because Laverne Cox is a trans woman and a trans advocate.

***Paris Is Burning* (1990, U.S., 76 minutes)**

Jennie Livingston's iconic and controversial documentary won numerous film awards, including Sundance's Grand Jury Prize and the National Society of Film Critics Award. It appears on most Top 10 LGBTQ+ film lists. The film documents the lives of African American and Latinx drag performers in New York City. Some of the people in the film identify as transgender; all the people in the film embody intersecting identities and identify outside a rigid gender binary. An outstanding film that considers race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity in late twentieth-century America.

***Pride* (2014, U.K., 119 minutes)**

Pride is an uplifting British film that focuses on the 1980s, when a group of gay men and lesbians in London decide to go to Wales and support the miners who are on strike there. At first, the Welsh mining community, which is far more conservative than London, wants nothing to do with the gay men and lesbians. As the film progresses, the connection between socioeconomic oppression and sexual-orientation oppression is made.

***Purple Skies: Voices of Indian Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transmen* (2013, India, 67 minutes)**

While there is a lot of information on Hijras in India (see Chapter 7 of this book), and a growing amount of information on trans women who do not identify as Hijras, there is very little on trans men. This documentary film focuses on the intersections among lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men in a country with laws that continually fluctuate over issues of LGBTQ+ rights.

***Queer as Folk* (1999–2000, television, U.K., 10 episodes)**

This is an unflinching and groundbreaking queer television show. Before the debut of this show, there had never been a television show that depicted LGBTQ+ people with such raw honesty.

***Queer as Folk* (2000–2005, television, U.S., 83 episodes)**

Because the British version of the series was such a huge success, U.S. television decided to create an American version. This series takes place in Pittsburgh and follows a group of LGBTQ+ friends. The U.S. series lasted for five seasons and won numerous awards.

***Sense8* (2015–2018, television, U.S., 24 episodes)**

Written and directed by J. Michael Straczynski, Lana Wachowski, and Lilly Wachowski, this Netflix original series beautifully links intersecting identities in a global science fiction drama. Eight people around the globe are part of one another in their thoughts and actions. The show depicts gender identities and sexual orientations in a full spectrum of diversity. A truly unique and stunning television series.

***Shinjuku Boys* (1995, U.K., Japan, 53 minutes)**

This documentary film follows the lives of Shinjuku Boys—young trans men—who work in a nightclub in Tokyo. The Shinjuku Boys discuss the difficulties of dating the young women who come to the club.

***States of Grace* (2014, U.S., 74 minutes)**

This multiple award-winning documentary follows Dr. Grace, an early AIDS activist, doctor, and Buddhist and her family as they struggle with her nearly debilitating car accident that has left her body broken and paralyzed. The film explores physical differences, race, spirituality, and chosen family.

***Watermelon Woman* (1996, U.S., 90 minutes)**

The African American filmmaker Cheryl Dunye's award-winning drama explores contemporary interracial lesbian dating. Dunye also looks at the history of racism in Hollywood through the mammy figure in old films.

***Welcome to My Queer Bookstore* (2009, Taiwan, 19 minutes)**

Larry Tung's short documentary is beautifully researched and filmed in Gin Gin's bookshop in Taipei, Taiwan. The bookstore serves as a gathering place for a very marginalized LGBTQ+ community. The film includes excellent interviews with the bookstore owner and academics who work to make Taiwan less conservative where LGBTQ+ issues are concerned.

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35. SOGI is an acronym for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.
36. The twentieth-century novelist Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* features figures from the Beat movement, including a character based on the poet Allen Ginsberg, whose

- 1955 poem *Howl* was tried as obscene, in part for its frank depiction of gay sex.
37. Frank O'Hara was a twentieth-century poet and art critic.
 38. Langston Hughes, a twentieth-century poet, columnist, and activist, was one of the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance.
 39. Audre Lorde, a twentieth-century writer and activist, called herself a "Black Woman Poet Lesbian Mother Lover Teacher Friend Warrior."

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