

In the beginning, there was ... confusion?



Questions can be confusing. They can feel overwhelming and they can feel so numerous that the weight of them all stops us from thinking of anything else. But questions are also powerful. They're the ignition spark; the key in the engine for a journey of self-discovery. Having questions shows you are smart and that you are in tune with yourself. You have not just accepted the cookie-cutter template of "how to be" that society and tradition can sometimes place on us. So that's your first answer – no, you are not alone, it is "normal" to have questions and it is "normal" to be confused. You are not the first person to have questions about how you feel, about your body, about how you identify or who you are.



But let's get to a really big question... Are you queer? Are you lesbian? Trans? Gay? Bisexual? Perhaps none of those, but something else not quite straight?

I don't know. I can't tell you the answer to that.

There's a chance that you might be. If so, firstly ... CONGRATULATIONS! (Caps lock intended, I mean that to be read as though I am shouting my excitement and congratulations to you!)



Welcome to the club, or rather, welcome to the family. I'm queer too, loads of us are. In fact, more and more people than ever are openly identifying as "other than the heterosexual-cisgender norm" (a really academic,

boring phrase which I'll explain in just a moment) and more people are finding themselves somewhere under the rainbow in the LGBTQ+ family – or, queer, for short (that's how I'm going to be using it in this book).

But who and WHAT is the "LGBTQ+ community"?!



Sometimes known simply as LGBT, or LGBT+, LGBTQIA+, queer people or smaller groups, such as the gay community and the trans community – we're a proud, diverse and varied group of people, and all of us (in one way or another) identify as not entirely heterosexual ("straight") or cisgendered (identifying as being of the same gender we were assigned at birth). And together, we stand as a ragtag bunch under our rainbow banner, known as "the pride flag".

The name of the community is ever-changing and evolving as we broaden out our understanding of gender and sexual identities. No one name is right; no one name is wrong. Use what is best for you.

Our acronym frequently evolves, which I think is a great sign of us growing and expanding – not so long ago, we were even known by "GLBT", but after countless lesbian women looked after, campaigned for and acted as nurses for many gay men during the AIDS crisis, the L was moved first as a mark of respect to note their importance in our community.



The “L” to the “+” of the queer alphabet

Lesbian: a woman, who is attracted to other women

Gay: a man, who is attracted to other men

Bisexual: someone of any gender, attracted to both male and female genders

Transgender: people whose gender identity and expression differs from the gender that they were assigned at birth. Note: transgender does not imply anything on attraction, so trans people can identify as any sexuality

Transsexual: a word similar to transgender, but this implies medical changes to one’s gender, such as surgery or hormones. It is best left for someone to identify themselves by this term, if they so choose

Queer: anyone who isn’t either straight or cisgender

Questioning: someone who isn’t yet sure of their sexuality or gender and is taking some time to find themselves

Intersex: people who naturally (not through medical intervention) have biological gender traits that do not match with what is stereotypically understood as being male or female

Asexual: also known as “ace”, this is an umbrella term for people who either don’t experience any or experience little sexual attraction

Allies: people who identify as cisgender and heterosexual, and believe in the total social and legal equality for all queer people. Our most supportive friends and family can often sit here!

So, what about the “+”s?

Pansexual: a.k.a. “Pan” – people who are attracted to others regardless of their sex or gender identity. Is this the same as bisexuality? Some say yes, some say no, some say it specifically includes attraction to people with non-traditional gender expression. What matters is how people who identify as pansexual feel about it – that’s all!

Demisexual: “demi” is when someone can only experience sexual attraction after an emotional bond. Like asexuality, anybody of any sexual orientation can experience this

Sapiosexual: the attraction to intelligence and the mind over gender

Agender: sometimes referred to as “genderless” or “ungendered” – it’s exactly as it sounds! It’s for people who identify as having no gender identity

Gender queer: there are a whole host of non-conforming gender identities and names such as gender queer, gender fluid, pangender, which includes people whose gender feels moveable, flexible and unfixed to them

This list is not definitive. These are not the only ways people do/can/should identify and there are many more identities than those stated here – but that’s one of the wonders of life and the spectrum we live in. With SO many different colours and shades out there, you can choose to colour your life as best suits you.

What is the spectrum?

One of the ways that we can take the pressure off ourselves and make the big, scary questions of “What am I?”, “Am I?” and “How will I know?” all a lot less heavy is by thinking in terms of spectrums rather than binaries. A binary, like in computers, is a choice between two things, such as black and white or one and zero, and traditional (outdated and old-fashioned) thinking would have us believe that we are faced with a binary choice of being either heterosexual or homosexual ... and that’s it. One or the other. Of course, human sexuality and identity is waaaaaaaaay more complicated than that. That’s why we like to think of sexuality and gender as a spectrum. Rather than thinking of it as either black or white, a spectrum would have the brightest shade of white at one end, and the deepest darkest shade of black at the other, with a multitude of shades and variants in the middle.

Don’t worry if this still sounds confusing – that’s precisely what this book is here to help with, and exactly why we’ve started with this chapter on questions.

Years of queers

Did you know that there is evidence of same-sex attraction, desire and marriage from the ancient world? A diary entry of an Ancient Egyptian priestess and small statues of a same-sex couple have shown same-sex unions existed in older civilisations. The skeletons of two men discovered in Italy, believed to be a same-sex couple, known as the Lovers of Modena, were found holding hands and are almost 3,000 years old. There was even an Ancient Roman sort-of gay bar discovered in the ruins of Pompeii, recently identified by the translations of writing at the site which referred to homosexual patrons.

Similarly, trans people have been present in ancient cultures across the world. In the Czech Republic in 2011, the grave of what could well be the oldest example of a trans person was discovered: archaeologists found a 5,000-year-old burial site, where the skeleton had been buried as a woman, with burial gifts and commemorations typically associated with women’s graves, yet the skeleton was genetically male.

We’ve gone by many different names, including sometimes with no names at all, but what we now broadly describe as the LGBTQ+ community has always been here. We’re not new. We’re not going away. And we’re part of a rich, long legacy.