



LGBTQ+: The Breakdown

What is LGBTQ+?

Many youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning) or are trying to figure out what gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality fits them. Trying to understand your SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression) may leave you with some unanswered questions. Here's a guide to help you understand the acronym and what it stands for, to navigate your SOGIE, and to answer any questions you may have in the process.



Section 1

[What is LGBTQ+? What do the letters mean?](#)

The letters in the acronym LGBTQ+ stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning. Click the link to take a further look at what those words mean.

Section 2

[What is the difference between sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression? Aren't they all one in the same?](#)

Nope! It's easy to lump all three together, but they are not all one in the same and in fact are very different parts of how you can identify. They are all individual pieces of a larger puzzle that make us the masterpieces we are. Click the link to take a look at the differences.



NEED TO KNOW SERIES

LGBTQ+: The Breakdown

Section 3

[What are pronouns? Can I use more than one set of pronouns? Does everyone use pronouns? How do I ask someone what their pronouns are without being offensive?](#)

We use pronouns a lot when we speak. Pronouns are used when we're referring to either the people talking, so "I" or "you", or when someone/something's being talked about, using "she", "him", "they", "them", etc. Pronouns are a part of someone's gender identity and should be used as a form of respect when it comes to communication. Pronouns shouldn't be considered "preferred," because they are how the individual identifies and you want to respect the person you're speaking with. However, that doesn't mean you won't make mistakes. Click the link for more information about how to navigate the ins and outs of pronouns.

Section 4

[What resources are available to me? How can I get connected to my local community?](#)

There are many resources available to you if you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. One of the best ways to check out resources in your area is by connecting with your local PRIDE center. Click here for a list of online resources to get you started!

Section 5

[How can I find LGBTQ+ friendly healthcare services? How do I find safe spaces in my area?](#)

Finding safe spaces in your area may be challenging, but looking for subtle cues like PRIDE flags, rainbows, or stickers can make the process a bit easier. A lot of organizations will use these as an indicator that they are a safe space. Click here for information on how to find safe spaces and LGBTQ+ friendly providers.





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Section 6

[What are my rights as an LGBTQ+ person in foster care and outside of it?](#)

All youth in care have a right to a safe, respectful, and discrimination-free environment. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services is committed to respecting the dignity of all youth, and keeping them safe and secure, regardless of individual differences. NYS does have laws and procedures in place that protect LGBTQ+ citizens.

Section 7

[How can I be an ally? What does allyship look like?](#)

There are many ways to be an ally! As an ally, you can partner to promote change. Here's some information on how you can show your allyship to the LGBTQ+ community.

Section 8

[PRIDE Month: Why do we celebrate and how can I celebrate? What about historical figures and activists?](#)

PRIDE Month is currently celebrated each year in the month of June to honor the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan. The Stonewall Uprising was a major turning point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the U.S. There are plenty of ways to celebrate PRIDE! Here's some ideas to think about for June.





What's LGBTQ+? What do the letters mean?



The letters in the acronym LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning. The “+” is used to represent members of the community who identify in a way that is not described within the letters LGBTQ.

You may also see LGBTQIA+ used to include other members of the community. LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual.

Here's is a glossary to help you understand some basic terminology.

- **Ally:** A term used to describe someone who is an active supporter of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other.
- **Asexual:** Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.
- **Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.
- **Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.



- **Coming Out:** The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.
- **Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.
- **Gender binary:** A social system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.
- **Gender-expansive:** A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.
- **Gender expression:** External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.
- **Gender-fluid:** A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.
- **Gender identity:** The way that an individual perceives and expresses themselves on a spectrum between male, female or neither. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender non-conforming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.
- **Genderqueer:** Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.





- **Intersex:** Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of differences among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.
- **Non-binary:** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.
- **Outing:** Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety, or religious or family situations.
- **Pansexual:** Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.
- **Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.
 - * Although Queer has been reclaimed by many people within the community, it hasn't been reclaimed by everyone and still serves as a slur/derogatory term for some. Try to be mindful of that when discussing the term.
- **Questioning:** A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Sex assigned at birth:** The sex, male, female, or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.





- **Sexual orientation:** An emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.
- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.
- **Transitioning:** A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all, or none of these processes.



Source: Sexual orientation and gender identity definitions. Human Rights Campaign. (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2023, from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>



What is the difference between sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression? Aren't they all one in the same?

Nope! It's easy to lump all three together, but they are not all one in the same and in fact, are very different parts of how you can identify. They are all individual pieces of a larger puzzle that make us the masterpieces we are. Let's take a look at the differences!

Gender Identity vs. Expression: What is the difference?

Identity does not equal expression.

Gender expression can be expressed through things like your hair, clothing, makeup, hobbies, interests, and other aspects of how you externally present yourself. When you think about your gender identity, think about how you see yourself. It's a very personal experience and is based on how you internally see yourself. Gender identity helps define who we are and how we want the world to perceive us. It's how we experience our own gender.

Here's a guide that provides you with terminology surrounding both: <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/gender-identity-vs-gender-expression/>





What about my sexuality?

Sexual orientation can include different forms of attraction, behaviors, and identities. Sexual, physical, romantic, and emotional attraction are four common ways that people often use to interpret their sexual orientation. It's normal to question your sexual orientation/sexuality because despite what we're taught, sexuality is unique and different to everyone.

- **Sexual Attraction:** this type of attraction is characterized by the desire to be sexually intimate with other people. Physical attraction is often considered a piece of sexual attraction. It can be described as who you find physically attractive.
- **Romantic Attraction:** is often described as the desire for romantic intimacy or romantic relationships with others.
- **Emotional Attraction:** is characterized by the desire to connect with others on a deep emotional level.

Here is a resource for understanding your sexuality and other terminology: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-to-do-when-youre-questioning-your-sexuality-5112793>

Coming out or choosing to stay in?

It's a personal choice whether or not you want to come out, only you know what's best for you. Choosing to stay in doesn't make you, your gender identity, gender expression, or sexuality any less valid! If or when you decide to come out is your choice, do what feels best for you!





What are pronouns?
Can I use more than one set of pronouns?
Does everyone use pronouns? How do I ask someone what their pronouns are without being offensive?



We use pronouns a lot when we speak. Pronouns are used when we're referring to either the people talking, so "I" or "you", or when someone/something's being talked about by using "she", "him", "they", "them", etc.

Pronouns are a part of someone's gender expression and should be used as a form of respect when it comes to communication. Pronouns shouldn't be considered "preferred," because they are how the individual identifies and you want to respect the person you're speaking with. However, that doesn't mean you won't make mistakes. Here's some information on how to navigate the ins and outs of pronouns.

Pronoun Guide: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): <https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen>

You can absolutely use more than one set of pronouns. There are no rules or regulations surrounding how many pronouns you can use or what specific pronouns you can go by. Pronouns can be as versatile as you like, changing and flowing with what feels like the best fit for you.



Example 1: Alex uses he/him/they/them pronouns interchangeably. This means Alex likes to be addressed with either or both of these pronouns.

Example 2: Ren uses she/her/they/them and he/him pronouns. Ren lets others know that it's always appreciated to ask about pronoun usage since their pronouns can change frequently.

Example 3: Zayne recently came out as non-binary/transmasculine. Zayne is only out to a few of his friends and is not out to any family members. Zayne uses he/him pronouns when he is with his friends but does not feel safe enough to use these pronouns around his family members. Although he still goes by his previous pronouns with family, Zayne's friends respect his identity and only refer to Zayne using his respected pronouns.

- Note: the link provided will allow you to insert different LGBTQ+ related terms such as transmasculine, non-binary trans, AFAB, AMAB, A-spec, demisexual, etc., and you'll be provided with all possible definitions:
<https://pflag.org/glossary>





What resources are available to me? How can I get connected to my local community?

There are many resources available to you if you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. One of the best ways to check out resources in your area is by connecting with your local PRIDE center.

Here's a list of online resources to get you started!

Direct Online/Phone Resources:

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/direct-online-and-phone-support-services-for-lgbtq-youth>

Statewide:

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/LGBTQ>

PRIDE centers throughout New York State:

- Albany, NY
<https://www.capitalpridecenter.org>
- Buffalo, NY
<http://www.pridecenterwny.org>
- NYC
<https://gaycenter.org>
- Rochester, NY
<https://outalliance.org>
- Syracuse, NY
<https://www.acrhealth.org/youth-programs>
- Westchester, NY
<https://www.loftgaycenter.org>





How can I find LGBTQ+ friendly healthcare services? How do I find safe spaces in my area?



Finding safe spaces in your area can be tricky, but looking for subtle cues like PRIDE flags, rainbows, or stickers can make the process a bit easier. A lot of organizations will use these as an indicator that they are a safe space.

Here's some information on how to find safe spaces and LGBTQ+ friendly providers.

- <https://www.self.com/story/find-lgbtq-ally-doctor>
- <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/LGBTQ>
- <https://gaycenter.org/advocacy/lgbt-health-network>

Tips to find safe spaces:

- Check out your local organization's social media accounts. Who do they follow? Do they follow any LGBTQ+ related accounts? What's their content like? Have they ever posted anything for PRIDE?
- Read reviews of places before you visit. What are the staff in the establishment like? Are they friendly and welcoming? Are there gender-neutral bathrooms? What's the accessibility of the location? Can you get out easily if a problem arises or are uncomfortable?
- Are there PRIDE flags? Safe Zone stickers? Pins?
- Ask an ally to scope out a place before you visit, that way they can get a feel of the environment and whether or not it's a safe space.



Online tools to help you find a provider:

- <https://www.outcarehealth.org/outlist>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/find-lgbtq-ally-health-provider#Online-resources-to-help-you-find-an-LGBTQIA-friendly-provider>



What are my rights as an LGBTQ+ person in foster care and outside of it?



All youth in care have a right to a safe, respectful, and discrimination-free environment. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services is committed to respecting the dignity of all youth, and keeping them safe and secure, regardless of individual differences. NYS does have laws and procedures in place that protect LGBTQ+ citizens.

You have many rights while you are in care, including the right to be treated equally, to be yourself, and to be open or private about your sexual orientation—regardless of your SOGIE.

- ALL youth have a right to a safe, respectful, and discrimination-free environment.
- The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is committed to respecting the dignity of all youth and keeping them safe and secure regardless of individual differences.
- The adult professionals in your life have a duty to support you and protect you from harassment and mistreatment.
- The adults in your life should accept you for who you are, and not try to change your sexual orientation or gender identity.

For more info about protections in New York State:

- <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/SEI-2017-NewYork.pdf>
- https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/ocfs_2021/INF/21-OCFS-INF-06.pdf
- <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/2023/adm/23-OCFS-ADM-15.pdf>



How can I be an ally?
What does allyship
look like?

There are tons of ways to be an ally! As an ally, you have one of the most powerful and influential voices to promote change. Here's some information on how you can show your allyship to the LGBTQ+ community.

What can I do to show my support?

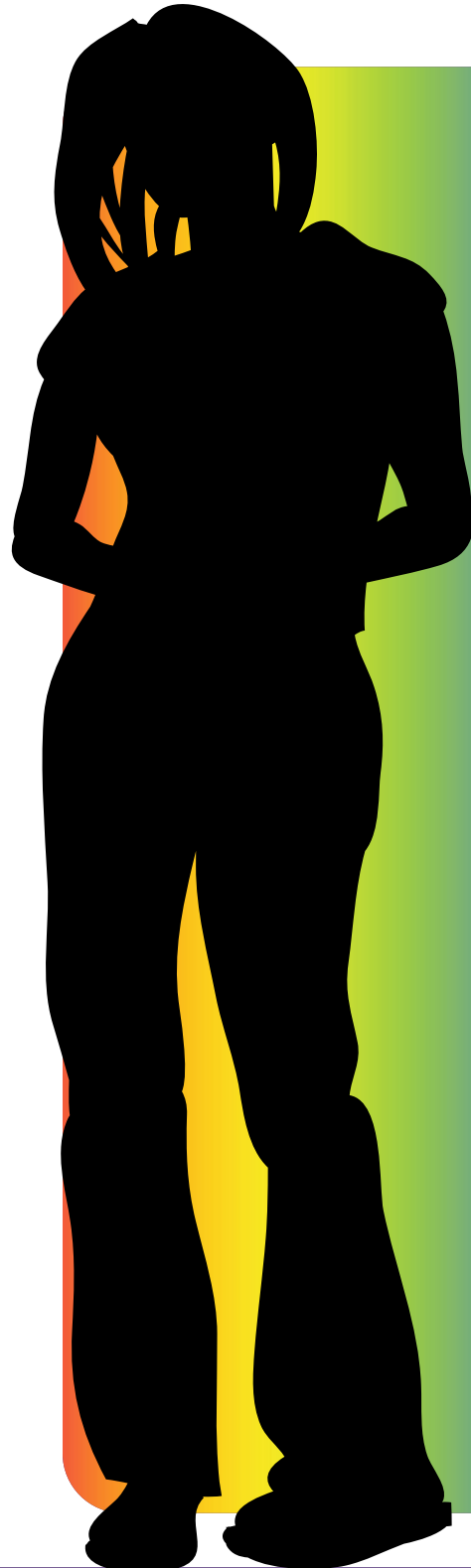
- Don't assume someone's gender, sexuality, expression, identity, or LGBTQ+ status. If an LGBTQ+ identified person wants you to know their LGBTQ+, they'll tell you in their own time, if they are comfortable.
- Be loud and proud! Letting those around you know that you're an ally opens a door for conversation. You may have people in your life who are LGBTQ+ identified, but they haven't come out to you or anyone else because they feel unsafe. There's a lot of hesitation and distrust when it comes to coming out, because coming out can be scary. By informing those you know that you're an ally, you're breaking down that fear and allowing room for those people to open up to you, if they so choose to.
- You can show your support by wearing a PRIDE t-shirt, sticking an equality sticker on your folders/notebooks, wearing a rainbow ribbon, or even making a social media post showing your support. These "little" things serve as clues and signs that you're a safe person.





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- Know your history and be open to learning! Familiarize yourself with why we celebrate PRIDE and terminology commonly used in and throughout the community. LGBTQ+ glossary and terms: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>
- Acknowledge the importance of pronouns! Pronouns can be a signifier of someone's gender identity, but not always. Pronouns can change for anyone at any time. It's important that you don't assume someone's pronouns based on gender presentation or expression. If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, you can ask kindly, "Hey, what are your pronouns?". You can even start with sharing your own to normalize sharing your pronouns.
 - Pronoun examples:
 - Pronouns 101: <https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen>
 - She/her/hers
 - He/him/his
 - They/them/theirs
 - Ze/hir
 - Some people use only their name
- Attend a PRIDE Event and show your support





PRIDE Month: Why do we celebrate and how can I celebrate? What about historical figures and activists?



PRIDE Month is currently celebrated each year in the month of June to honor the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan. The Stonewall Uprising was a major turning point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the U.S.

How can I celebrate?

There are plenty of ways to celebrate PRIDE! Celebrating PRIDE month looks different for everyone. [Check out the 2020 PRIDE toolkit \(https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/LGBTQ/assets/docs/What-is-Pride-2020.pdf\)](https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/LGBTQ/assets/docs/What-is-Pride-2020.pdf). There's really no wrong way to celebrate but some common ways you could celebrate are through PRIDE parades, picnics, drag shows, memorials, live performances, concerts, and marching. Here's some more ideas to think about for June.

- Attend your local PRIDE Parade/Festival
- Gather with other members of the community and uplift one another in safe spaces whether it's a coffee shop, a library, at school, etc.
- Support local LGBTQ+ operated and owned businesses
- Choose a topic within the community that you're not aware and would like to learn more about during the month of June
- Research/learn about past liberation movements
- Wear any colors that help you feel empowered in your SOGIE
- Remember that celebrating PRIDE doesn't need to look one way, and that it's different for each and every single person who celebrates. Any way you celebrate is valid!



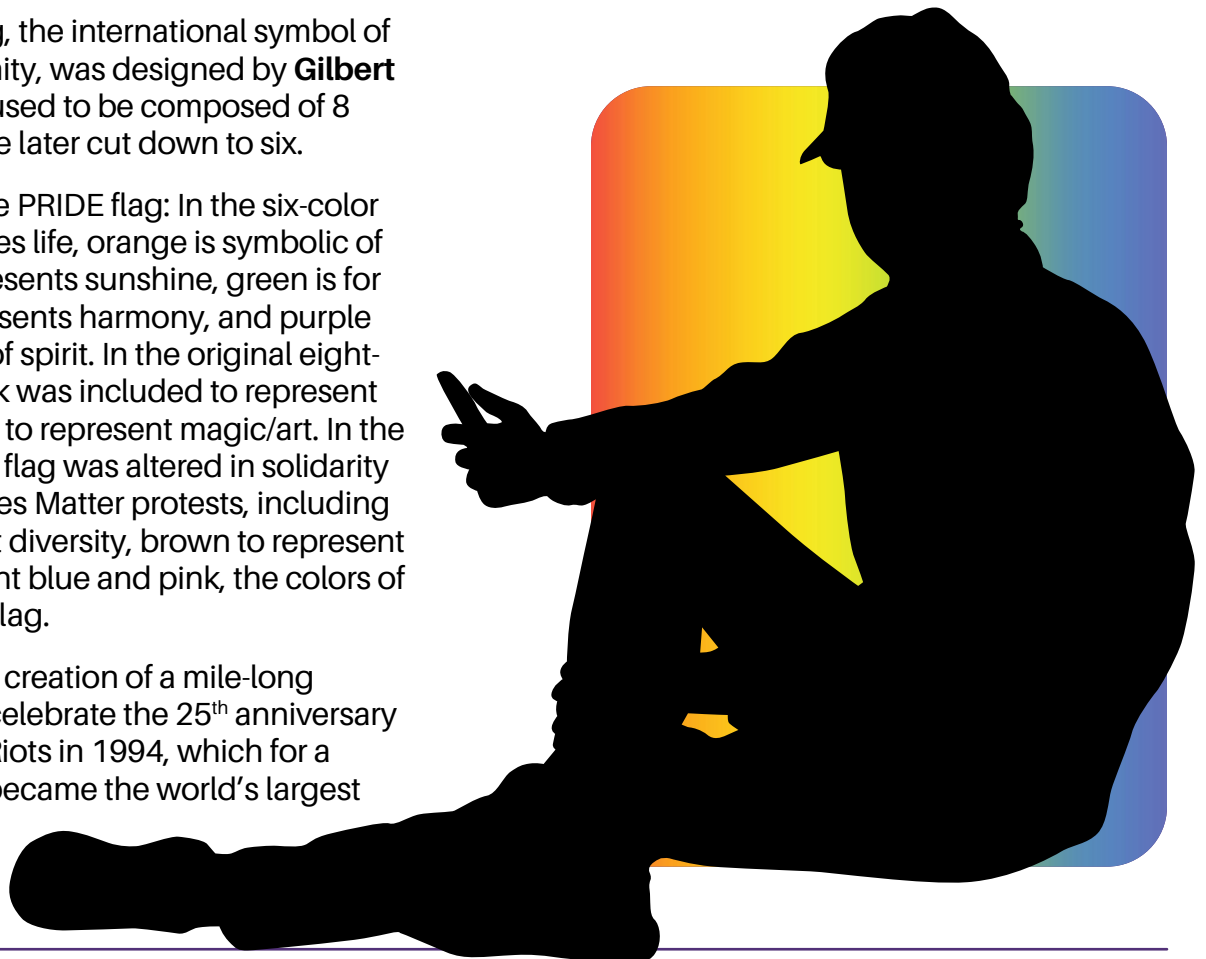
Additional reasons we celebrate:

- To publicly honor, remember, and acknowledge those who have had to hide their LGBTQ+ identity
- Celebrate who you are
- To uplift LGBTQ+ voices, celebrate and embrace LGBTQ+ culture, and support LGBTQ+ rights
- To fight for justice, equity, and opportunity for the LGBTQ+ community

LGBTQ+ PRIDE facts:

- One in six Gen Z's identify as LGBTQ+.
- The Rainbow Flag, the international symbol of LGBTQ+ community, was designed by **Gilbert Baker** in 1978. It used to be composed of 8 colors, which were later cut down to six.
- Significance of the PRIDE flag: In the six-color flag, red symbolizes life, orange is symbolic of spirit, yellow represents sunshine, green is for nature, blue represents harmony, and purple is representative of spirit. In the original eight-color flag, hot pink was included to represent sex and turquoise to represent magic/art. In the last few years, the flag was altered in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protests, including black to represent diversity, brown to represent inclusivity and light blue and pink, the colors of the Trans PRIDE Flag.
- Baker also led the creation of a mile-long Rainbow Flag to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in 1994, which for a number of years became the world's largest flag.

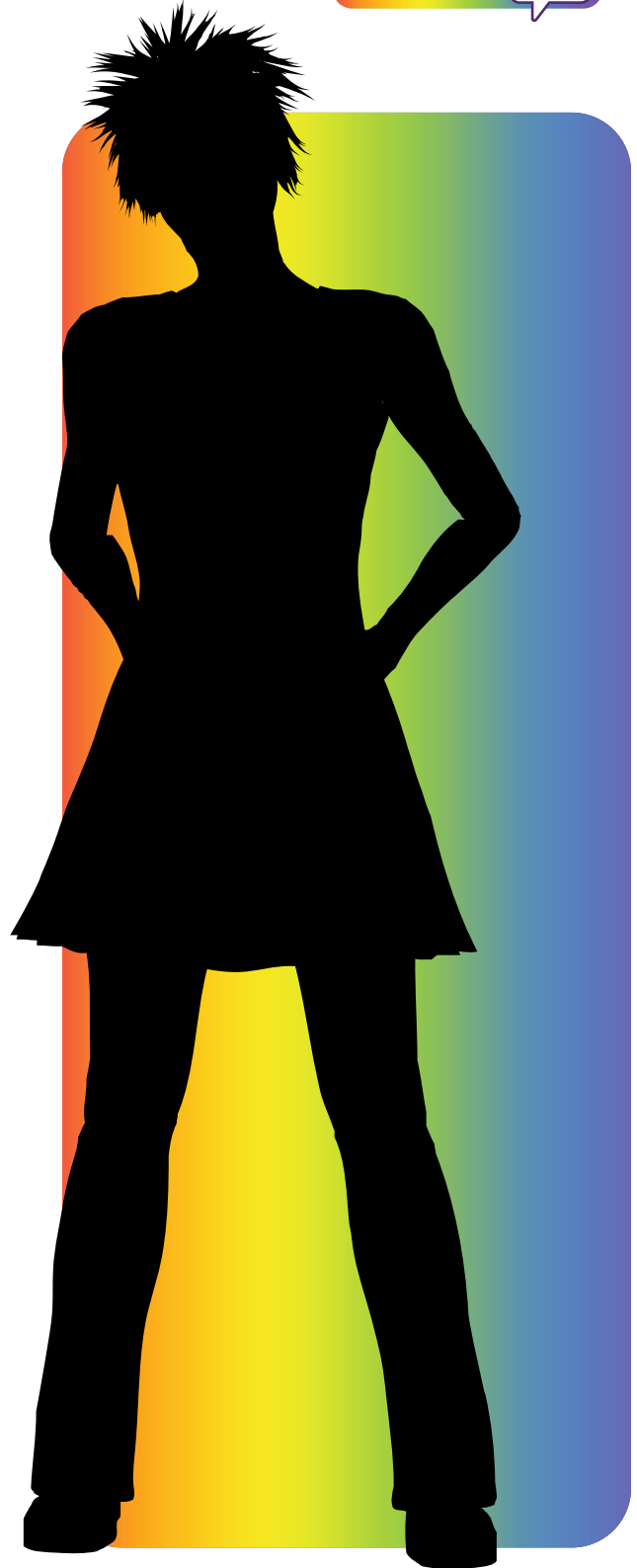
- Bisexual rights activist **Brenda Howard** is considered the "Mother of PRIDE" as she first coordinated the Liberation March on Christopher Street on June 28th, 1970, exactly a year after the riot incident. She came up with the idea of a week-long PRIDE Festival with parades, rallies, and dance parties, which has been kept since.
- Throughout the years, the PRIDE name has changed from the initial Gay Liberation March to Gay Freedom March and with the cultural shift in the 80's, these events started to adopt the name Gay PRIDE, now often just "PRIDE".





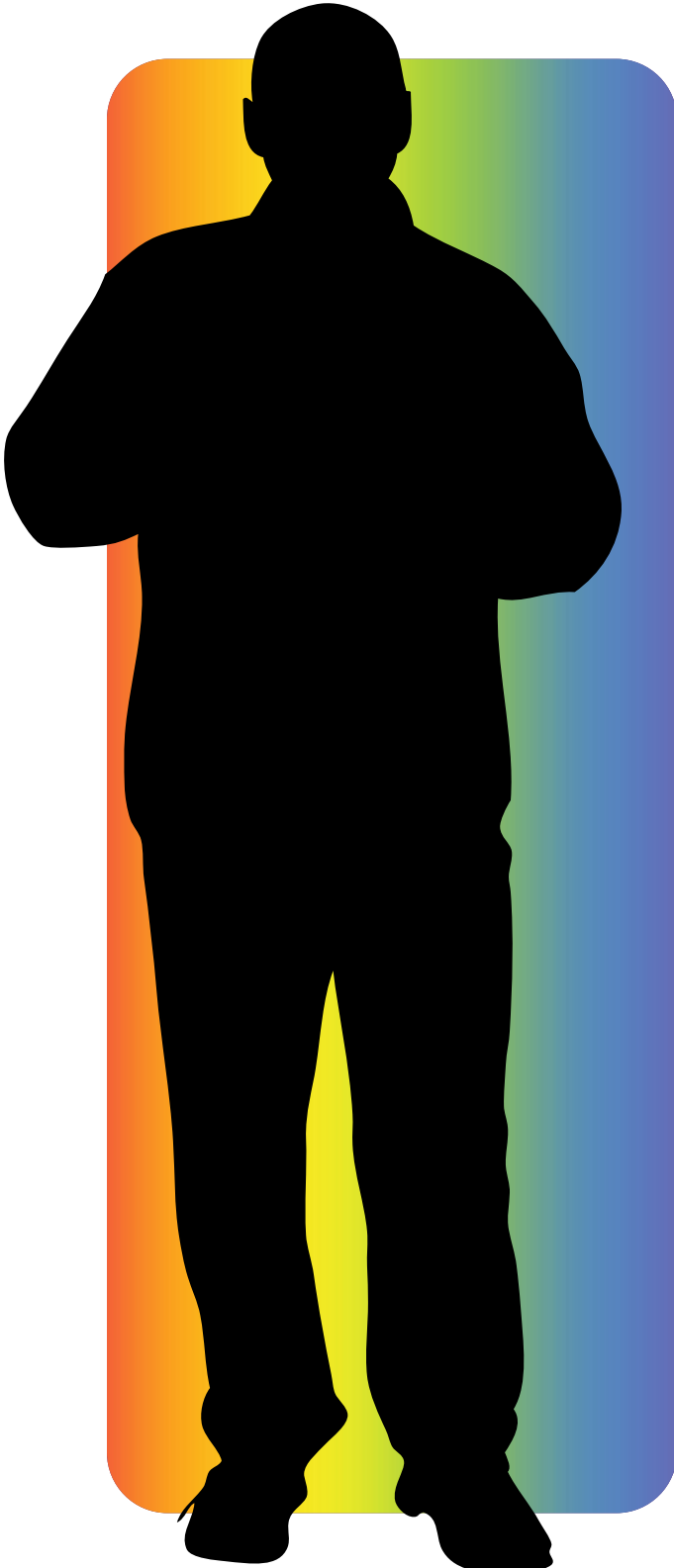
LGBTQ+ historical figures and activists:

- **Marsha P. Johnson** was an African American transgender woman and revolutionary LGBTQ+ rights activist. She is rumored to have thrown the first brick that ignited the Stonewall riots of 1969, which later led to the first PRIDE Parade on its one-year anniversary. Marsha was an outspoken advocate for trans women of color, and she co-founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) alongside her friend Sylvia Rivera. STAR provided services and shelter to homeless LGBTQ+ people throughout NYC, Chicago, California, and England in the early 1970's. Marsha's major contributions were often overlooked as the movement started shifting toward the leadership of white cisgender men and women, but it's important to recognize just how influential and incredible Marsha's activism was. We wouldn't be where we are today without her. Source: <https://www.biography.com/activist/marsha-p-johnson>
- **Laverne Cox** is a trans woman who is a strong advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. Laverne has spoken out about both the discrimination trans people face in America and around Supreme Court decisions regarding the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Rachel Levine** is the first openly transgender person to be confirmed to a federal office by the US Senate. Rachel serves as an Assistant Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services under the Biden Administration.
- **Elliot Page** is the first trans man to appear on the cover of Time Magazine.





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- **Harvey Milk** was an American politician and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California, as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.
- **Audre Lorde** was an American writer and poet who identified strongly as a Black feminist lesbian, referring to herself as a “Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet.” Audre paved a trail of Black female empowerment.
- **James Baldwin** was a Black gay man who helped raise public awareness of racial and sexual oppression.
- **Bayard Rustin** refused to be closeted in the LGBT-oppressive 1940s and '50s. Bayard was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, at which Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.
- **Harry Hay** founded the Mattachine Society in 1950, one of the modern world’s first organizations for gay men. Additionally, Hay founded the Los Angeles Chapter of the Gay Liberation Front, as well as the Radical Faeries with his longtime partner, **John Burnside**.
- **Laurance Michael Dillion** was the first transgender man to undergo gender-affirming surgery.
- **Virginia Woolf** was a bisexual woman known best for her contributions to literature and advocacy for women’s rights.
- **Greta Garbo** was a silent film actress, four-time Academy Award Nominee, and cinematic legend who dated both women and men throughout her lifetime.



- **Billie Holiday** was an iconic jazz singer who was known to be openly bisexual throughout her lifetime.
- **Alfred Kinsey** who created the Kinsey Scale (the introduction of a more fluid spectrum of sexuality) placed himself right in the middle of the scale he himself created.

For more LGBTQ+ figures throughout history:

- <https://www.pride.com/activism/2021/3/08/10-queer-women-who-changed-history>
- <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/stories/lgbtq-activists-you-should-know>
- <https://www.advocate.com/world/2016/7/08/20-lgbt-people-who-changed-world#media-gallery-media-16>
- <https://medium.com/@rachaellawrites/10-famous-bisexual-people-from-throughout-history-a57eb036d3fc>
- <https://www.sbs.com.au/voices/article/13-historical-figures-who-are-bisexual-icons/y7kfo8cp>
- <https://www.usatoday.com/web-stories/famous-transgender-rights-activists>

