

A Queer Crash Course for Us All

By Jade Adams (they/them)



Context and Statistics

How familiar are you with the queer community? Yes, the L-G-B-T-Q-I-A-2-S-+ community. We are a lot of people; thus we have a lot of letters. The acronym speaks for itself: we are a huge community of different folks that unite in solidarity as *gender, romantic, and sexual minorities* (another acronym for you: *GRSM*). You may see the beautifully long LGBTQIA2S+ acronym shortened to LGBT or LGBTQ+. For this article, *queer* will be used synonymously with LGBTQIA2S+.

Sexuality and Gender, though different, are united in this acronym due to shared history and experience. We experience, in one way or another, oppression from the dominant culture: cisheteronormativity (the enforcement and privileging of cisgender and heterosexual identities as the norm, as rooted in patriarchy). This long word contains an important term *cis*, which is the inverse of *trans*. While the adjective *trans* means “transitioning from the gender assigned to you at birth”, *cis* denotes “remaining with the gender assigned to you at birth.” Another term *nonbinary* simply describes a place that does not fit in with a *binary* strictly-male and strictly-female world.



(Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag, Image from Them)

In a world that is increasingly more aware of its diversity (and at times increasingly hostile towards it), it is essential that the public, especially schools, understand the queer world. It is not only *likely*, but statistically a *guarantee*, that every school district has queer staff and students. Whether a person is open and out about it is another story.

Take these facts: As of 2022, 7.1% (1 in 14) of people in the United States identify as part of the queer community. 0.7% (1 in 142) are transgender. 20% (1 in 5) under 27 are queer.¹ 5% (1 in 20) under 30 are transgender.² 1% (1 in 100) of all humans have intersex traits.³ And, these are only the people who are willing to “be out” on a survey.

A school in 2023 can expect approximately 7% of their workforce and adult members of the district to be queer-identifying. A school can also expect 20% of their students to be queer-identifying. In a class of 20 students, four students will statistically be queer. As of 2022, 42% of people in the United States personally knew someone who was transgender, genderqueer, or using gender-neutral pronouns.⁴ Research indicates only an increase in the percentage of queer individuals, year after year.

The History in Such Few Words

¹ [LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1% \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com/16111/lgbt-identification-in-u-s-ticks-up-to-7-1.aspx)

² [About 5% of young adults in U.S. are transgender or nonbinary | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/05/10/about-5-of-young-adults-in-u-s-are-transgender-or-nonbinary/)

³ <https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>

⁴ [More in U.S. now know someone transgender or using gender-neutral pronoun | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/05/10/more-in-u-s-now-know-someone-transgender-or-using-gender-neutral-pronoun/)

Despite what the dominant *cis hetero* culture might claim, queer people have always existed throughout human history. I'll say that again: queer people have always existed.

For those who teach and study the ancient world, one need only to scratch the surface to find depictions of same sex relationships among elites, emperors, and pharaohs.⁵ You'll quickly find pantheons of gods who explored multiple sexualities, crossdressed, assumed avatars of multiple genders, and were openly fluid with genders.⁶

For those enraptured with United States history, one of the first settlers in the Colony of Virginia, Thomas(ine) Hall, was an intersex individual harrassed by the colony on account of their nonconformity with gender and their dressing in both traditional "male" and "female" attire.⁷ Through resocialization, Christian Europeans nearly obliterated the queer presence among indigenous nations of the Americas.⁸ The *Two-Spirit* identity is a modern term to describe the genderqueer experience of people with indigenous descent, and it doubles as an act of cultural reclamation.⁹



(Two-Spirit Individual, Image from Forbes)

⁵ <https://www.them.us/story/themstory-ancient-egypt>, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1790/lgbtq-in-the-ancient-world/>

⁶ <https://www.mygwork.com/en/my-g-news/finding-queer-belonging-in-ancient-mythology>

⁷ <https://wams.nyhistory.org/early-encounters/english-colonies/thomas-ine-hall/>

⁸ <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=mcnair>, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/26/687957536/lgbt-navajos-discover-unexpected-champions-their-grandparents>

⁹ <https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/>

The United States' queer community broke out of historical bonds in the mid 20th century and achieved some public recognition. Critical moments at New York's Stonewall Inn in 1969, the streets of 1970s San Francisco, and court houses across the country furthered progress for queer people. State governments in the later 20th century overturned sodomy laws outlawing homosexuality.

It was not until 1980 when New York's *People v. Onofre* ended New York's criminalization of gay relationships.¹⁰ A progressive New York has in the last two decades codified the right of same-sex unions (MEA 2011), as well as protection from harassment in schools, work places, and other public settings (SONDA 2003, DASA 2012, GENDA 2019). 2021's Gender Recognition Act eliminated gate keeping around changing one's name and gender on official documents. In 2022, the 'X' gender-neutral option was added to accommodate genderqueer and nonbinary citizens for use on legal documents.

Despite many social and political gains by the queer community, a community which I remind you has *always been here*, a conservative countermovement in the United States and around the world threatens the lives and wellbeing of queer people.



(Protesting for GENDA, Image from NYCLU)

A Crisis Today

¹⁰ <https://casetext.com/case/people-v-onofre>

The queer community is under real and serious threat by an anti-queer countermovement in the United States, and elsewhere around the world. Measures are continuing to bar queer representation and participation in everyday functions. Violent acts against transgender and nonbinary individuals, fueled by anti-queer bias, result in hundreds of deaths each year - and the incidents escalate each year. The current culture war primarily targets transgender people, though all queer people are vulnerable to harassment.

Trans Respect versus Transphobia (TvT) measures global crime statistics to determine rates of anti-trans violence.¹¹ In 2021, 350 trans people were murdered. In 2022, that total increased to 375. Both PBS¹² and Forbes¹³ commented that these numbers are likely the “tip of the iceberg” considering TvT receives information only from countries with established LGBTQ networks, and anti-queer crimes often go unreported or victims are misidentified with deadnames¹⁴ and incorrect pronouns. For an extreme global perspective, Uganda has recently made international headlines due to a radical anti-queer law.¹⁵ Homosexuality and the promotion of it will be punished with a 20-year prison sentence. Intimacy while HIV-positive will be punishable by death penalty. According to Reuters, Uganda’s President Museveni seeks to “‘rehabilitate’ gay people” and blames Western culture for queer empowerment. Opponents of the bill criticize Uganda’s police for arresting men “acting...gay.”¹⁶

¹¹ <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-tdor-2022/>

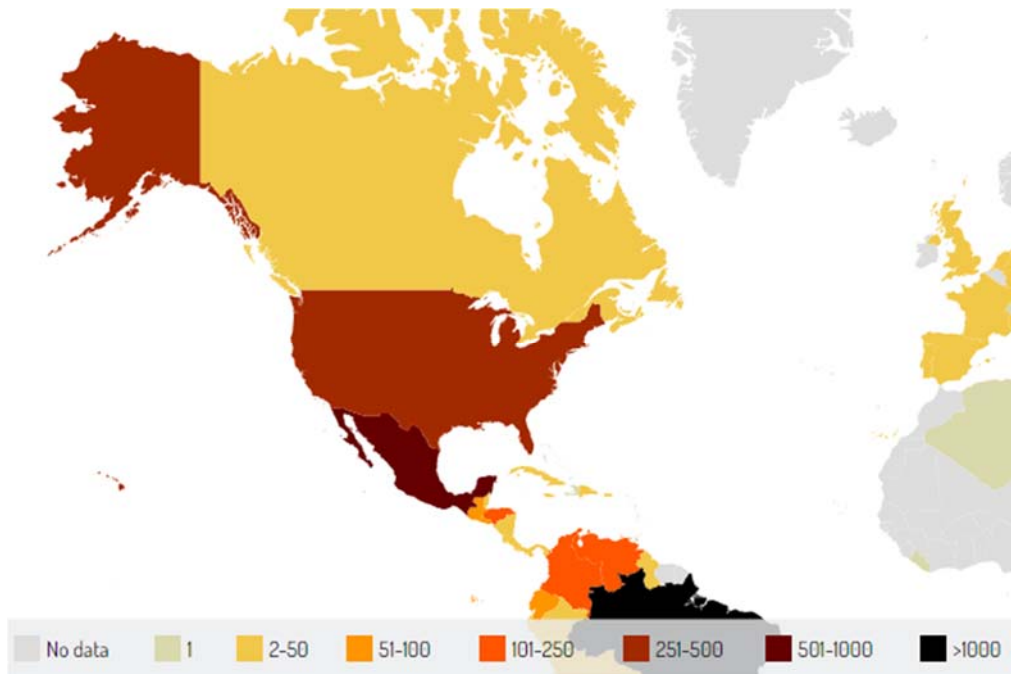
¹² <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/report-says-at-least-32-transgender-people-were-killed-in-the-u-s-in-2022>

¹³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2021/11/11/375-transgender-people-murdered-in-2021-deadliest-year-since-records-began/?sh=343cfff321c>

¹⁴ <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/lgbtq/education/glossary/>

¹⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uganda-parliament-passes-mostly-unchanged-version-anti-lgbtq-bill-2023-05-02/>

¹⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uganda-parliament-passes-mostly-unchanged-version-anti-lgbtq-bill-2023-05-02/>



(Fatalities by Country, Image from Transrespect versus Transphobia)

Reflecting on 2023 fatalities, the Human Rights Campaign states that “fatal violence disproportionately affects transgender women of color -- particularly Black transgender women -- and that the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and unchecked access to guns conspire to deprive them of employment, housing, healthcare and other necessities.”¹⁷ The Federal Bureau of Investigation lists anti-queer violence as a hate crime.

The nationally recognized “fagbug” is a symbol of the regular verbal harassment and hate queer people experience.¹⁸ In 2007, Sage College graduate student Erin Davies found her car (which would later be named “fagbug”) vandalized on Eagle Street in Albany, New York. Davies claimed to be a victim of a hate crime, though the responding officer did not initially take the concern seriously.¹⁹ Davies toured with the fagbug, visiting “over 400 colleges and universities across North America” where she spoke out against anti-queer rhetoric.²⁰

¹⁷ <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-nonbinary-community-in-2023>

¹⁸ [fagbug.com - activism on wheels](http://fagbug.com)

¹⁹ [Metroland Online - Newsfront](http://metrolandonline.com/newsfront)

²⁰ <http://fagbug.com/booking.htm>



(Erin Davies and the Fagbug, Image from Fagbug)

From hostile public environments and uncertainty at home for acceptance, it is no wonder why the U.S. Census Bureau discovered that queer people of all ages struggle the most with mental health crises (anxiety and depression) more than their non-queer counterparts.²¹ According to The Trevor Project, 50% of queer youth 13-17 considered suicide in 2022. 20% of queer youth 13-17 attempted it. 60% of The Trevor Project's total youth surveyed stated that they wanted mental health support but did not receive it due to fear of harm and(or) lack of home support. Youth of color were drastically more pessimistic about medical providers understanding their needs, compared to their white counterparts.²²

Access to public spaces, healthcare, and protection at home are in jeopardy across the United States. [CNN reported](#) by April 3, 2023, "at least 417 anti-lgbtq bills have been introduced in state legislatures across the United States." By May 27, 2023, that number had risen to 491 across 46 states.²³ These bills include anti-trans measures to regulate bathrooms and youth sports teams, anti-queer measures combating marriage rights, denying access to medical interventions for queer patients, and protecting businesses from serving queer clients due to privately-held beliefs.

New Jersey's current anti-trans bill A1630 states "that women's performances at the high level will never match those of men", thus trans female youth athletes are not

²¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/lgbt-adults-report-anxiety-depression-at-all-ages.html>

²² <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

²³ [Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures | American Civil Liberties Union \(aclu.org\)](https://www.aclu.org/mapping-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-in-u.s.-state-legislatures)

allowed to compete on women's teams.²⁴ Bans on trans youth athletes often cite Olympic regulations for elite adult athletes that regulate hormone levels and muscle mass. These same Olympic guidelines have even compromised cisfemale athletes from defending their titles on account of natural testosterone levels that exceed Olympic guidelines. The Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives voted along party lines to pass HR 734 which would nationally bar transfeminine athletes from competing on women's sports teams.²⁵ Though the U.S. Department of Education confirmed that "Title IX protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity," the Biden Administration proposed the opportunity for situational discrimination in 2023 as it pertains to athletics.²⁶



(Trans BMX Olympian Chelsea Wolfe, Image from TheBloomBMX)

Erin Reed, an activist and social media political commentator, hosts ErinInTheMorning.com and tracks hostility towards transgender people in the United States.²⁷ Reed's partner Zoey Zephyr has been in the media as the "first openly transgender woman elected to the Montana Legislature [in 2022]" who was silenced and

²⁴ [1630_I1.PDF \(state.nj.us\)](https://www.state.nj.us/1630_I1.PDF)

²⁵ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-house-votes-on-anti-trans-school-sports-bill>

²⁶ <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-confirms-title-ix-protects-students-discrimination-based-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>

²⁷ <https://www.erininthemorning.com/>

removed from the floor for speaking out against an anti-trans bill that bars transgender youth from gender-affirming care. Conservative members claimed Zephyr threatened their lives and safety after Zephyr commented that supporters of the anti-trans bill would have blood on their hands.²⁸



(Montana State Representative Zoey Zephyr, Image from National Review)

Bills are introduced to restrict queer people from accessing medical care, mental health supports, and other opportunities to thrive in public spaces. Attacks on queer people pose as encroaching trap walls, closing in on us and restricting our space to function. If left alone, this countermovement will erase the queer community from public space.

To learn more about harmful legislation and egomaniacs seeking to erase the queer community, look no further than the 2024 presidential candidate Ron DeSantis, current governor of Florida. In Florida schools, DeSantis has banned queer literature (and pro-equity and antiracist literature), discussion of pronouns, queer representation, trans athletes from participating on their team of choice, and trans access to preferred bathrooms. DeSantis also signed into law SB 254 which bars youth from receiving gender-affirming medical care. The law also creates new obstacles for trans adults to access their medical care.²⁹

DeSantis also continues to fight Disney after Disney publicly disagreed with Florida's infamous "Don't Say Gay" bill (made law in 2022³⁰).³¹ In May 2023, a fifth-

²⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/montana-trans-lawmaker-silenced-zoey-zephyr-d398d442537a595bf96d90be90862772>

²⁹ <https://www.glaad.org/gap/ron-desantis>

³⁰ <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/FL%20Dont%20Say%20Gay%20KYR%20-%20Updated2022.06.pdf>

³¹ <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/08/1085130633/disney-response-florida-bill-dont-say-gay>

grade Florida teacher was brought under investigation after showing Disney's *Strange World* film to her students.³² The protagonist in *Strange World* is gay and is lovingly accepted by his family.

A Political Pattern

The series of attacks on queer rights and opportunities consistently comes from politically conservative spaces. Institutions recognizing gender, romantic and sexuality diversity via the queer community are framed as extremists with a mischievous liberal agenda. PBS states that this wave of anti-queer attacks follows the success of the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*; the attacks ensure that the GOP's evangelical base remains mobilized.³³ The store Target in May 2023 became the latest under fire for supporting the queer community when a disgruntled customer falsely accused the store of pushing gender-affirming clothing onto youth.³⁴

Chic-fil-A, a historically anti-queer restaurant chain has been accused by right-wing groups of being too woke on account of "an executive overseeing its diversity, equity and inclusion policies."³⁵

Both former president Donald Trump and presidential candidate Ron DeSantis compete to speak the most anti-queer messaging,³⁶ and George's Republican representative and far-right conspiracy-theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene tweeted an anti-trans message on the first day of Pride Month (June 1st) claiming there are only two genders.³⁷ This "only-two-genders" quip is a frequently weaponized narrative to invalidate genderqueer individuals and the use of the gender-neutral *they/them/their* pronoun set.

There is stark contrast between attitudes towards queer individuals as it relates to American's political affiliations. In a poll by the Pew Research Center in 2021 asking people in the United States "whether acceptance for trans people is good or bad for society", the majority of Republican-leaning respondents (54%) answered "bad" and the majority of Democrat-leaning respondents (59%) answered "good." Approximately 30% of both groups answered "neither good nor bad". Approximately 15% of Republican-leaning respondents answered "good" and 15% of Democrat-respondents answered "bad".³⁸ The narrative made by both very powerful political parties around the rights and recognition of queer people absolutely matters. Individuals emboldened by political

³² <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/16/1176334055/florida-investigating-teacher-disney-movie-gay-character-desantis>

³³ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/why-is-the-gop-escalating-attacks-on-trans-rights-experts-say-the-goal-is-to-make-sure-evangelicals-vote>

³⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/01/business/pride-month-companies-reaction/index.html>

³⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/02/business/chick-fil-a-fake-controversy/index.html>

³⁶ <https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=954c4808-5e45-450d-b21a-4e00c0450e71>

³⁷ <https://people.com/marjorie-taylor-greene-anti-trans-tweet-pride-month-7507796>

³⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/02/11/deep-partisan-divide-on-whether-greater-acceptance-of-transgender-people-is-good-for-society/>

leaders' hate speech will continue harassing queer individuals unless the environment around them drastically changes.

At the 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), a barrage of intentionally malicious rhetoric mocked queer people. At CPAC, Daily Wire host Michael Knowles stated, "For the good of society ... transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely — the whole preposterous ideology, at every level."³⁹ Let's stop right here and say that "transgenderism" is not even a word.

The Biden Administration has taken several efforts to publicly support the queer community, although Biden in April 2023 proposed a rule change to Title IX that bars sweeping bans on trans athletes, but allows individual trans athletes to be banned if competing was deemed unfair, thus rolling back 2021's progress to protect gender identity under Title IX.⁴⁰

Everyday Experience

As a marginalized group, queer folks face systemic discrimination and social sanctions against them. In a New York school setting, here are some of the obstacles queer staff and students face:

- The Department of Education and classroom management softwares of districts may only register binary gender options (Male and Female), excluding genderqueer and nonbinary individuals from truthful representation.
- Colloquial insults persist using "gay" and other queer terminology as insults and remain stigmatized. Lack of professional intervention around hate-speech leads to complacency and fails queer students.
- Lack of access to gender neutral bathrooms continue to invalidate gender queer individuals.
- Lack of staff training in queer issues and communication results in lack of adult support for students in crisis.
- Lack of queer representation in standardized curriculum results in alienation of queer learners.
- Continued social taboo around queer inclusion, leads to self-doubt, self-devaluing, and instances of self-harm.

³⁹ <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/cpac-speaker-transgender-people-eradicated-1234690924/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/schools-cannot-issue-total-ban-transgender-athletes-under-biden-proposal-2023-04-06/>



(Pride Parade Participants, Image from HRC)

How To Help

If you would like to explore a multimedia presentation on the queer community, please visit CDCSS' [FEATURED](#) page. Here are things you can begin doing or continue to do to help recognize, protect, and empower the queer community:

- 1. Read up on recent legislation.** DASA GENDA and GRA are crucial. Understand that Dignity for All Students Act (2012) has zero tolerance for anti-LGBT bullying, and such harrassment must be reported to your school. Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (2019) “prohibits discrimination [for queer individuals] in employment, housing, credit, places of public accommodation, internships, domestic services, volunteer firefighting, and private, non-sectarian educational institutions”, as stated by the New York Department of Human Rights. 2021’s Gender Recognition Act requires official documents and public entities to immediately recognize and reflect any name or gender changes among a New Yorker’s identity.
- 2. Normalize talk of pronouns.** At the start of the new year, throughout the year, and in your email signature lines, validate the use of pronouns as identifiers. Share your pronouns, and normalize talk around them. You never know which students will find euphoria in those moments. Adopt a line below your name listing your pronouns (he/her/they/ze,etc.). This not only helps genderqueer people feel validated, it helps us reflect on our habits to assume identities for people before we even meet them. Asking for pronouns upon introductions is another way to listen, acknowledge, and not dominate another’s identity with your own bias.

3. **Read up on definitions.** Search the web for an LGBT glossary. Even if you do not commit every sexuality and gender identity to memory, you will at least comprehend the spectrum of diversity that truly exists - and you'll be able to keep up with the students who use these words every day. And, if a student ever confides in you about an identity or related issue they are having, you will be more prepared to connect them with proper support. Their life, as we now know, depends on that.
4. **Incorporate queer figures.** Did you know October is LGBTQ+ History month? Raise visibility of queer figures by sharing short stories, articles, facts, and social issues that include queer authors, characters, and events. There is a place in every social studies unit to integrate queer figures. If feedback asks for it, CDCSS will find those figures to help you. Your students see and share queer information online via TikTok, Reddit, Instagram, Discord, and more every day. I joke that I, a transgender educator, am "so hot right now" because of the rise of queer content creators on social media.
5. **Come out as an ally every day.** You do not need theatrics, a groundbreaking lesson, or a guest speaker to simply tell your students and colleagues: "I'm an ally and support the safety and wellbeing of the queer community." Allies are essential for the normalization of a culture, and we absolutely need allies to stand with us. Be visible, be visible, be visible! Allies play a crucial role in all of this: they help break the ice between a subculture or counterculture and the dominant culture hesitant to embrace it. The world always needs you as an ally. Besides, you totally owe us for appropriating queer slang.⁴¹

The queer community is a rich and vibrant world with a history as old as any other. As educators, we are unfairly placed on a cultural battlefield with experimental pedagogies and every eye on us. Be the reference for an equitable world. Be good to the queer community.

⁴¹ <https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/a23601818/queer-cultural-appropriation-definition/>