Introduction

The Importance of Being Heard

> To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act.
>
> —Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*

> Jumping off the gw bridge sorry.
>
> —Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi, eighteen, posted on Facebook the day of his suicide

To grow up lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) in the United States is to be aware of a profound silence in our relationships, our society, and in many cases even ourselves. Despite recent political and social gains such as the legalization of same-sex unions in some states, glimpses of LGBTQ (or at least gay and lesbian) visibility on television and in other media, and the growing support for some LGBTQ rights among segments of the U.S. population, we still live in a culture in which presumed heterosexuality and traditional messages about gender dominate us from birth. Children and adolescents who violate these norms get the message that they need to keep aspects of themselves hidden, or at least alter them, if they want to be accepted across all aspects of their relational world: their families, their peer groups, their schools, their communities, and the larger society.

In early childhood, girls and boys are socialized, sometimes quite forcefully, to wear the clothes, choose the activities, and display the interests "appropriate" to their biological sex. Even when parents make deliberate efforts not to impose gender-based limitations on their children, messages at school, in the media, and elsewhere compensate to reinforce the cultural binary: boys do this, girls do that, and shame on the child who crosses the line or does anything in between. In the waiting area at my auto repair shop recently, I saw a boy of about three years old get excited about a toy truck that

was being advertised on television. He then momentarily—and quite visibly and abruptly—checked his enthusiasm to make sure his father thought his liking the toy was acceptable. After the boy's initial outburst of excitement, he asked in a hushed voice, "That's a boy thing, right?" Of course, the toy truck passed the test, but when children develop interests and proclivities that run counter to the unwritten laws of gender, they learn quickly that silence is the order of things. They learn to conceal aspects of themselves that may expose them as violators, and they learn to expect silence from the adults around them about anything that deviates from what is considered normal gender behavior.

Of course, when children reach adolescence, it is not only gender boundaries but also sexuality that is subject to "policing," as some researchers and theorists have called it (e.g., Pascoe 2007), both by adults and by adolescents themselves. (Evidence suggests that even in the early elementary grades, many peer groups use the language of sexuality to harass and bully each other, but this practice is rampant by the time students reach middle school; see, for example, Poteat and Espelage 2005.) Several of the case studies in this book begin with stories of middle school, with young people experiencing intense gender- or sexuality-based harassment—sometimes even before they are out to others or even to themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer.[1]

1. When discussing the issues that affect people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), language can be a problematic issue. Before the 1990s, most studies about LGBTQ people referred only to gay and lesbian individuals, but researchers have become increasingly aware that bisexual people are a distinct group with specific concerns (Lewis et al. 2009). More recent research also has recognized the special issues that affect transgender youth and adults, those who do not conform to traditional man/woman or boy/girl gender norms in a variety of ways. (Some transgender people also identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while others do not. See note 1 in Chapter 5 for a more detailed definition of transgender.) In addition, some individuals identify as *queer*, a designation that implies a rejection of societal norms and/or labels associated with sexuality and gender. (Again, some individuals who adopt a queer self-designation also self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and others do not.) Finally, the letter Q in LGBTQ is also used to designate "questioning" in many contexts to refer to individuals who are unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but I do not use it as such in this book because it was not a focus in our project's original research design. (See Lipkin 2008 for a more complete discussion of the various self-identifications used by youth with regard to gender and sexuality.) When speaking of the participants in this study, I refer to them using the identifier they used for themselves at the particular time being discussed in the interview (e.g., in Chapter 1 David says he came out as "gay," so I use this word in that context). I use the abbreviation LGBTQ to avoid placing a participant or group of participants in a specific category, especially since many interviewees used multiple self-identifiers at various points.

The Silencing Effects of Hostile School Climates

A recent national survey of more than 7,200 middle and high school students (mostly LGBTQ-identifying) conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) paints an alarming portrait of the many ways school environments and experiences silence many youths' open expression of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identity. GLSEN found that 89 percent of the students they surveyed heard anti-LGBTQ language regularly in their schools and that 85 percent had been direct targets of harassment for reasons associated with their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Kosciw et al. 2010). For the past decade, GLSEN's biennial surveys have found this at-school harassment to be pervasive in middle and high schools, but more recent administrations of the survey have also found that technology, such as the Internet and text messaging, provides a wider forum for school harassers to target LGBTQ students even while they are at home. More than half (53 percent) of students who participated in the GLSEN survey said they'd experienced cyberbullying, defined by GLSEN as "using an electronic medium, such as a mobile phone or Internet connection, to threaten or harm others," in the past year.

For many youth, anti-LGBTQ language and harassment have a dampening effect on their presence and performance in school. Most of the students GLSEN surveyed said they were distressed either "extremely" or "pretty much" by the homophobic language they heard at school. Some skipped certain classes or even entire school days because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable; others said they avoided certain parts of the school (e.g., the locker room, the cafeteria) for similar reasons (Kosciw et al. 2010). For David, profiled in Chapter 1 of this book, the fear of harassment led him to stop raising his hand in class ("I never talked, unless I was called on, pretty much") and discouraged him from joining certain activities he might otherwise have enjoyed: "I never tried out for a play or musical, because I guess I thought if I was onstage, somebody might yell something out from the audience at me."

Contributing to the silencing effect of anti-LGBTQ language and harassment in many schools and peer groups is a complete lack of representation of LGBTQ identity, history, or people in most school curricula. Despite a society in which LGBTQ issues are included more frequently in news reports and public discourse than ever before, the latest GLSEN study found that only 13 percent of the youth surveyed reported that LGBTQ issues were discussed or covered in any of their classes (Kosciw et al. 2010). Clearly little has changed since 2004, when a student at a public forum I cochaired before

the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth testified:

> The gay rights movement is not even mentioned during the civil rights chapter in my American history textbook. I have yet to read a book in English class with anything more than the implication of homosexuality, and in all my classes when we talk about discrimination, we stay to race issues between black and white communities. . . . With all these people in my life ignoring an issue that is a significant part of me, it is easy to feel that I don't matter. (Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth 2004)

I am by no means suggesting that all middle and high schools have a uniformly silencing effect on LGBTQ adolescents. Many teachers and school personnel address anti-LGBTQ language and harassment consistently and effectively, serve as important allies and role models for LGBTQ students, offer open support and communication, and include LGBTQ issues in curricula in thoughtful and creative ways. The work of some of these educators and the difference they have made in individual young people's lives play significant roles in the case studies included in this book. In addition, more and more schools now have gay-straight alliances (GSAs), school-based groups in which LGBTQ students and their "straight allies" support each other, plan events, and discuss LGBTQ issues in a "safe space" where they are free to be themselves. (As this book went to press, more than four thousand GSAs across the country were registered with GLSEN, according to the organization's website.) Still, evidence from national surveys like GLSEN's and other sources suggests that most middle and high schools in the United States *still* do not have GSAs and that most LGBTQ adolescents attend schools where LGBTQ issues are discussed infrequently or not at all, except for the insulting, uncontrolled, and ultimately silencing language and harassment that take place in hallways, cafeterias, and in some cases even classrooms.

In addition to the fear of hostile encounters with peers, many LGBTQ young people have another reason to be silent: they learn that if they "come out" and are targeted for it, adults will not necessarily be there to protect or defend them. The latest GLSEN survey showed that most teachers intervened inconsistently or did not intervene *at all* when homophobic language was used at school (Kosciw et al. 2010). Moreover, 62 percent of students harassed for reasons associated with their sexual or gender identities said they never reported the harassment to school staff, and the reason they cited most frequently was that they believed such reporting would produce no effect.

Strikingly, almost as many (55 percent) never reported these incidents to family members either, underscoring how the silence in which many young people cope with anti-LGBTQ harassment can cut across multiple aspects of their lives.

The Silence at Home

Numerous participants in the study profiled in this book, all of whom were "out" on at least some level to their parents or other family members, nevertheless talked about the silence that pervaded their families about LGBTQ issues. Travis, profiled in Chapter 4, was one of a number of participants who, even though they had come out to family members, were discouraged from talking about it: "Most of my family has been—it's kind of 'don't ask, don't tell,' you know? If we don't talk about [my sexuality], it's better." Jordan, profiled in Chapter 5, felt the need to be silent after coming out as transgender because of the distress that resulted from conversations with family members: "My mom pretty much cries whenever I talk about [being transgender]."

For some young people, the silencing of their LGBTQ identities was more forceful than unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" rules and took the form of verbal abuse. Lindsey, profiled in Chapter 2, says her older sister called her a "fag" and her stepfather insulted her with terms such as "dyke" and "carpet muncher" even before she came out as lesbian. The abuse and shaming Lindsey endured at home magnified what was going on at school and resulted in her not feeling safe coming out in either context. Lindsey ultimately came out to her family and peers after a suicide attempt, and her family relationships improved considerably. For youth who *never* feel safe coming out to family members, the costs of this silence are immeasurable, given the importance of family support and communication in helping young people build resilience to cope with many of the challenges of growing up (Resnick et al. 1997; Scales and Leffert 2004).

A Relational Catch-22

At the heart of the silencing—and self-silencing—of LGBTQ youth is a "Catch-22" of relationships that is analogous to one that feminist psychologists such as Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, and Irene Pierce Stiver have said affects girls and women as they are initiated into a male-dominated society. In their 1997 book *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life*, Miller and Stiver (1997) termed this predicament—which scholars in the field had been writing about for roughly a decade—the

"central relational paradox": the need to sacrifice *relationship* with significant aspects of oneself (feelings, thoughts, knowledge, perhaps even a true sense of one's own identity) in order to maintain *relationships* with others. Without this sacrifice of the self, significant relationships are at risk; but with the sacrifice, they are also at risk—of becoming inauthentic, unfulfilling, and ultimately isolating.

The research of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, led by Gilligan and involving hundreds of girls and women across numerous studies in the 1980s and 1990s, found this paradox to be especially prevalent among girls at the onset of adolescence. To synthesize one of the project's recurrent findings, the researchers consistently found that in early adolescence, when girls were faced with the realization of their subordinate position in a patriarchal society and the accompanying expectation that they be "good girls" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 25), many consciously or unconsciously drove aspects of their true selves "underground" (Brown and Gilligan 1992, 7). This self-silencing was manifested in a variety of ways: the girls stopped raising their hands in class, chose not to speak up when their rights or personal boundaries were violated, and pretended everything was all right when they were in emotional distress. While this sublimation of the self obviously came at great personal cost, it allowed the girls to maintain seemingly harmonious but ultimately inauthentic relationships with others, particularly those whom they were expected to please (e.g., boys, men, parents, teachers, and other authority figures). In her 2005 book *The Disappearing Girl: Learning the Language of Teenage Depression*, psychologist Lisa Machoian drew on her clinical work and research to document the more extreme risks to adolescent girls of relational disconnection and self-silencing, including depression, self-mutilating behaviors (e.g., cutting), and suicide attempts. Without license to express their true thoughts, feelings, and selves in the world, the girls Machoian interviewed found alternative ways to communicate, ultimately placing themselves at tremendous risk.

No major published studies have applied feminist psychological theories about relationships, voice, and silence specifically to research with sexual minority youth, but the parallels between the Harvard Project's findings on women and girls and the issues affecting LGBTQ young people are many. LGBTQ youth are members of a culturally dominated group (and, in many cases, several such groups based on gender, race, sexuality, gender identity, and other factors). Their ability to bring all aspects of themselves authentically into relationships with family members, friends, teachers, and others is compromised by societal homophobia and culturally enforced notions about

appropriate and inappropriate gender and sexual behavior. They are therefore often silenced in these key relationships and, in turn, silence their own voices in order to maintain some semblance of "relationship" with the key people and institutions in their lives. Finally, as in the cases of the adolescent girls Machoian interviewed, this silencing can be associated with serious risks.

The Costs of Silence

Numerous research findings and several recent, high-profile news stories underscore the urgent need to understand more thoroughly the factors that contribute to risk behaviors among LGBTQ youth, particularly those related to suicide. Data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS), which draws on the responses of 2,707 students attending randomly selected high schools around the state, showed that 25 percent of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students responding to the survey had attempted suicide in the previous year. This figure is an improvement over the 40 percent of sexual-minority youth who reported a suicide attempt on the 2003 survey, but it is still more than four times the rate of reported suicide attempts for other adolescents, which in the 2009 survey was 5.6 percent (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2010). Vermont's 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey also found dramatically higher rates of suicide attempts for sexual-minority youth: 24 percent of the students who identified themselves as gay or lesbian said they had attempted suicide in the previous twelve months, eight times the percentage of heterosexual students (Vermont Department of Public Health 2010). Sexual-minority youth in the Massachusetts survey, the Vermont survey, or both were also significantly more likely than their heterosexual peers to be involved in physical fights, skip school because they felt unsafe, abuse alcohol and illegal drugs, and experience depression.[2] While it is obviously difficult for researchers to connect risk

2. Massachusetts and Vermont have some of the country's most thorough and long-standing practices of assessing suicidal behaviors and other risk factors among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth through their Youth Risk Behavior Surveys. As this book goes to press, forty-seven states administer Youth Risk Behavior Surveys under the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (along with a national survey, four territory surveys, two tribal government surveys, and twenty-three local surveys), but only five states (Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont) include survey items asking participants to self-identify their sexual orientation, and just seven states (those listed previously plus Connecticut and Wisconsin) include questions about same-sex sexual activity. Only these states can therefore assess the specific risks of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. No states collect data on suicidal behavior or other risk factors among transgender students, the most understudied population among

factors to any specific causes, several of the accounts profiled in this book suggest associations between relational problems such as isolation, self-silencing, and emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and risks such as severe depression, self-harming behaviors, and suicidal tendencies.

National awareness of the issue of LGBTQ youth suicide reached a peak in September 2010, a month during which as many as nine teenagers around the United States are believed to have committed suicide after being bullied for reasons associated with their actual or perceived sexual orientation. In the most highly publicized of these cases, Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi, eighteen, jumped off the George Washington Bridge after his roommate video-recorded an intimate encounter between Clementi and another man and posted descriptions of it online. Many in the media speculated that the humiliation Clementi experienced played a significant role in his emotional distress and perhaps his decision to take his own life.

Clementi's suicide and those of other youth who had been harassed prompted a new national focus on bullying, new antibullying initiatives in several states, municipalities, and schools, and the online "It Gets Better" campaign, in which celebrities, political figures, and others provide video-recorded messages of hope to LGBTQ youth struggling with harassment and isolation. These initiatives are highly commendable and no doubt make a lifesaving difference to many young people. The accounts presented in the following chapters, however, raise questions about whether approaches focused on protection and encouragement are enough, and they illustrate how a voice-centered approach to nurturing positive LGBTQ youth development may be needed to complement existing efforts.

Hearing the Voices of LGBTQ Youth

The research described in this book began with a project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education led by Lisa Machoian and me that focused on using voice-centered research methods to examine the relational dynamics of LGBTQ youths' lives. Our team was interested in learning how relationships in family, peer group, and school contexts may be associated with both risks among LGBTQ adolescents and their resilience to these challenges.[3] For

all gender- and sexual-minority youth. For the first-ever federal report synthesizing LGB-specific data from these seven states' Youth Risk Behavior Surveys and those of several large school districts, see Kann et al. 2011.

3. Other researchers involved in the data collection and/or analysis were Steve Anderson, Stephen Chow, Constance P. Scanlon, Andrea Sexton, and Travis Wright.

this initial project, which I refer to subsequently as Phase I of the research, we recruited participants at a community-based LGBTQ youth group in a large northeastern U.S. city beginning in 2003 (hereafter called CityYouth), and I repeated the research protocol at a smaller, rural LGBTQ youth group (hereafter called YouthWest) approximately one year later. In all, thirty young people completed questionnaires, and twenty of these participants ages fifteen to twenty-one[4] participated in in-depth, open-ended interviews about their relationships in three contexts: family, peers, and school—as well as a fourth relational "context" our research team called "relationship to the self." Phase I interviews were conducted and analyzed using the Listening Guide, a "voice-centered relational method" developed through the work of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development (Gilligan et al. 2003) that focuses on how participants talk about themselves and the various aspects of their relational worlds. (See Note on the Listening Guide Method at the end of this book for a more thorough explanation of how the methodology was used in this study.)

During Phase I of the research, participants described a wide range of experiences. Youths' relational experiences at home, in school, and among their peers ranged from receiving open and unconditional support and affirmation to severe relational violation, sometimes including emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Despite the fact that questions about voice and silence—or about harassment or other forms of abuse—were not part of the interview protocol, participants described in disturbing detail the ways in which they were silenced in family, school, and other contexts. Many participants directly associated the harassment, rejection, and other relational violations they experienced with their own self-harming behaviors such as cutting, suicide attempts, and dropping out of school.

Another pattern we saw across many of the interviews, however, was that young people seemed to develop more positive "relationships to the

4. While in the legal sense young people are adults upon reaching age eighteen, I use the words *adolescents* and *youth* to define participants up to age twenty-one in this study. (The LGBTQ youth programs from which we recruited participants serve students through age twenty-two, but no twenty-two-year-olds enrolled in the study.) The National Institutes of Health (1999) defines childhood as the period from birth through age twenty-one, since this age range "spans the period when many individuals are still within the education system and are dependent on their families." For example, numerous young people over age eighteen with whom we spoke were being supported by their parents while in college, and a substantial number were still living with their parents or other adult family members when they were interviewed. For the purposes of this book, I generally use the terms *adolescent* and *youth* to refer to young people participating in Phase I of the study; their ages ranged from fifteen to twenty-one. I refer to Phase II participants, whose ages ranged from twenty-one to twenty-seven, as *adults* or *young adults*.

self" when their relationships in one or more of the three other contexts improved. Finding spaces such as school- or community-based LGBTQ youth groups *that felt genuinely safe* and relationships in which they could *communicate openly, be themselves, and have their identities affirmed* was associated for many with the cessation of risk behaviors and a greater sense of self-acceptance. One key indicator of this self-acceptance, to draw an analogy to Gilligan's findings about women's development, was that participants spoke "in a different voice" (Gilligan 1982) than they had at other points in their interviews—one that reflected optimism about the future, a sense of pride about their identities, a rejection of self-destructive attitudes and behaviors, and a willingness to challenge gender and sexuality norms. Said another way, each participant's narrative reflected the emergence of a positive, self-affirming, and in some cases even defiant "queer voice."

After project colleagues Stephen Chow, Constance P. Scanlon, and I published an article in the *Journal of LGBT Youth* that synthesized our team's findings and highlighted three case studies we found to be illustrative of central themes (Sadowski, Chow, and Scanlon 2009), I began to wonder how the nascent queer voices we heard in our research had evolved as participants took on the challenges of adulthood. Because of the highly personal, in-depth nature of Listening Guide methodology, whereby the researcher's experience of the interview makes up a central aspect of the analysis, I limited my outreach for what I hereafter call Phase II of the study to participants whom I had interviewed personally, had met and interacted with (e.g., the president of the urban LGBTQ youth group, who was key in approving our team's entry into the site), and/or whose Phase I narratives I had already studied closely. From this group of thirteen—after numerous e-mails and telephone calls (many to addresses and numbers that were no longer valid) as well as searches of several social networking sites—I located six participants from Phase I who agreed to be interviewed as adults. These interviews took place in different parts of the country between the fall of 2009 and the fall of 2010.

Organization and Content of the Book

Case studies of the six participants interviewed for both phases of the research make up Chapters 1 through 6. Based on the ways in which the themes in each case unfold, I have chosen to present some chronologically and others in "flashback" form. Each chapter ends with a section in which I offer a "listening" to the participant's voice and discuss the unique contribution I believe it makes to an understanding of the issue of queer voice development in

adolescence and young adulthood (with a recognition that many such listenings and interpretations are possible).

In all six chapter-length case studies, we hear various manifestations of the central relational paradox, of participants keeping the LGBTQ aspects of their voices *out of relationship* in order to stay *in relationships*, and the costs of this silencing. But we also hear how various forms of resistance help each participant survive and discover her or his own queer voice. In Chapter 1, David employs what Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy M. Sullivan (1995) have called both covert and overt political resistance in order to survive, first quietly planning his escape from his rural community, then becoming an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ rights and his own right to be himself. In Chapter 2, Lindsey gives up self-destructive forms of indirect communication such as cutting and attempting suicide and learns how to "talk to people" and place honest, communicative relationships at the center of her life. Ruth, profiled in Chapter 3, draws on support from institutions and on the power of mentoring, both as a mentee in adolescence and as a mentor in adulthood, to cope with a difficult family situation and ultimately to find her voice as an LGBTQ scholar. In Chapter 4, we hear Travis respond to unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" policies with his family and at school by adopting a stoic voice of rugged individualism, which transforms in adulthood through loving relationships with a partner and with friends. As a transgender youth, Jordan in Chapter 5 attempts to balance the need for self-fulfillment with a desire not to hurt the people she loves and emerges as an adult with her own, unique expression of gender that is ever-evolving. Eddie's coming-out story, related in Chapter 6, represents the gradual integration of an LGBTQ identity with a more expansive view of himself as a citizen of the world.

Although I could not locate six of the study participants whom I had interviewed personally for Phase II of the research, Chapter 7 includes mini-profiles of these youth that focus primarily on how aspects of family and school relationships either supported or silenced their emerging queer voices. The accounts in this chapter include efforts by abusive teachers, an "ex-gay" conversion therapist, sexual harassers, and others to silence these young people, but they also illustrate how supportive family, peer, and school relationships made a positive difference in their lives.

In Chapter 8, I synthesize the patterns and themes found across the case studies and mini-profiles and discuss their practical implications. In so doing, I envision what *some* of the foundations of a voice-centered approach to supporting LGBTQ youth might look like, in the hope that future research will build on these foundations. Finally, in the interest of transparency, basic

fairness, and the relational nature of Listening Guide methodology, I attempt in the afterword to capture my own experience listening to the stories participants in this research so generously shared, in particular their resonances with my own history. As I do for the research participants, I discuss the ways in which I believe my own queer voice has evolved—and continues to evolve—through the writing of this book.

In both the case studies and the mini-profiles, I have attempted to capture the authentic voices of the study participants as accurately as possible. Accordingly, interview excerpts are verbatim, with all "ums," "uhs," and "likes" included—in some cases to illustrate possible tentativeness, hesitation, or uncertainty about a particular topic and in others simply to depict with authenticity contemporary adolescent speech patterns. Ellipses in interview excerpts indicate where participants' responses have been abbreviated for clarity, and dashes illustrate midsentence changes in participants' lines of thought.

"Queer Voice": A Note about Terminology

It is with some caution and, admittedly, a fair amount of discomfort that I apply the term *queer voice* to the narratives of the adolescents and young adults profiled in this book. Having come out as gay after graduating from college in the 1980s, I am a member of what may be called the "pre-queer" generation—those who came of age after the AIDS crisis emerged but before the LGBTQ community started pushing back en masse against government inaction about AIDS and the dominant heterosexist culture through organizations like ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation. When I hear the word *queer*, I still have difficulty separating the political and prideful uses of the term from its history (and from *my* history with it) as a demeaning epithet.

I certainly know people my age and older who have embraced *queer* as a self-identifier, or at least as a way of describing the community. Conversely, even among the "post-queer" generation, represented by the adolescents and young adults profiled in this book, the adoption of *queer* is far from universal. While some of these young people—David in particular, profiled in Chapter 1—adhere adamantly to *queer* and its variants as important foundations of their self-definition, others—Lindsey and Travis, for example, in Chapters 2 and 4—reject these terms in favor of pre-queer self-identifiers such as *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual*.

As I listened to and read the interviews, however, it became clear that something collectively "queer" was emerging, and this included the

participants who do not think of themselves in those terms. In her 1982 book *In a Different Voice* (which paved the way for much of the research on girls and women cited here as well as the Listening Guide qualitative research method), Gilligan reported that women brought a different voice into conversations about self, relationships, and morality—one that challenged the gender binaries and hierarchies that are integral to patriarchal social structures. In my interviews with LGBTQ individuals, particularly in adulthood, I heard a new but strikingly analogous "different voice" in response to patriarchal—and heterosexist—social structures, a way of living in and speaking about the world that challenged and contradicted the strict rules about sexuality and gender that had silenced them as children and adolescents.

My use of the term *queer voice*, then, is not to imply that each of the individuals profiled herein *is* queer; we all are the utmost experts on the identifiers that help us make sense of who we are. Rather, across all of their narratives one can hear *ways of thinking and being* that may be considered queer according to the term's most agreed-on definitions. Each individual profiled in this book, deliberately or not, speaks in ways that, to borrow from theorist Michael Warner's definition of queer, "challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means" (Warner 1993, xiii).[5] In this sense, each represents at least some aspect of a queer sensibility, especially if we recognize that merely living as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer constitutes a "queer" challenge to the silence about LGBTQ identity that still pervades American society.

A central aspect of *queer* as it is defined in most theoretical texts involves *resistance*—a current that runs deeply through all the participants' narratives in different but related ways. Several youth tell stories of severe harassment and ostracism from peers, a lack of support (and in some cases abuse) from adults, and the silencing of their LGBTQ identities in the relationships and institutions that were most important in their lives during adolescence. These oppressive experiences at first led some youth to direct their resistance inward, using various forms of what Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992) and others have called *psychological resistance*: keeping silent, harming themselves through cutting and other self-destructive behaviors, and even attempting suicide. Ultimately, however, they all found unique pathways toward a healthier *political resistance* (Brown and Gilligan 1992) in later adolescence and/or young adulthood: speaking out for the equal rights

5. For further discussion of queer challenges to socially constructed gender and sexuality norms, see Butler 1993.

of LGBTQ people and other oppressed groups, working to make schools and communities safer for younger LGBTQ youth, advocating for and being part of same-sex unions and families, and simply asserting and defending their right to express sexuality and gender in whatever ways they choose. Just as feminist psychologists have highlighted resistance as a key adaptive strategy that resilient girls employ to fight against the silencing of their voices in adolescence (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995), there is evidence that these LGBTQ young adults, despite the different life challenges each of them continues to face, have developed over time the personal and relational resources to "push back" against the forces that would hold them down and keep their voices from being heard.

Imagining the Possible

The small number of young people profiled in this book obviously cannot in any general way represent the experiences of all LGBTQ adolescents or young adults in the United States. Especially when one considers the often vastly different experiences of young people who adopt the various self-identifiers under the LGBTQ umbrella, overgeneralizations are misleading at best and dangerous at worst. One thing that the case studies illustrate, for example, is how the experiences of Lindsey, a young woman whose family and friends ultimately accept her lesbian identity after initially rejecting and harassing her for it, are vastly different from those of Jordan, who describes an internal "war" between a strong desire for gender reassignment and an equally powerful desire to spare her family emotional pain. These profiles show how both Lindsey's and Jordan's experiences, as well as those of all the other research participants, are unique to them based on the individual circumstances of their lives.

Moreover, a serious limitation of this research project thus far is that all Phase II case studies in Chapters 1 through 6 are based on white young adults raised in the Northeast, and only one youth of color is profiled in Chapter 7 (Clark, an African American youth from a Southern U.S. city, who could not be reached for participation in Phase II). To an extent, this limitation reflects the difficulty that some LGBTQ youth groups, including those to which our participants belonged, have had in connecting successfully with communities of color and making youth of color feel welcome. Rather than conduct additional outreach to include more youth of color in this study—and thus place an unrealistic burden on these new participants to represent somehow the experiences of youth of color within a limited sample—I have chosen to maintain the original two-phase research model

and draw only from participants in the original Harvard study. Thus, I present this book as the first overture in what I hope will be an ongoing conversation about voice and LGBTQ youth.[6]

While the experiences of the LGBTQ young people profiled in this book are in some ways unique to their social locations with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, education, and other factors, I also believe they speak to many issues that affect LGBTQ youth regardless of these categorizations. At the same time, the accounts in this book admittedly leave unaddressed other important issues related to what theorists have called the "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1991) of homophobia, heterosexism, and transgender oppression with racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. A colleague and I are in the planning stages of a subsequent phase of this research that will focus specifically on the development of queer voice among LGBTQ youth of color in New York City, thus extending—though by no means completing—an ongoing research conversation that must ultimately involve the voices of LGBTQ youth from all around the world.

Another limitation of this book, a tragic but also inevitable one, is that the voices of the many LGBTQ young people who have been lost to suicide remain unheard. News accounts following Tyler Clementi's death suggested he had little to say between the time his peers humiliated him online and his fatal leap into the Hudson River. (His Facebook posting read simply, "Jumping off the gw bridge sorry.") We can never presume to know what Clementi was thinking and feeling in the hours before he died, or what—if anything—might have made a difference in his decision to take his own life. In one sense Clementi's "voice" was heard loudly and clearly after his death, when people around the world were suddenly focused on the injustice he had suffered and on the harassment and humiliation that so many young people

6. The retrospection inherent in these interviews (and, to some degree, in all interviews), whereby participants reflect on experiences that have taken place in the past, is another limitation of this research. Certainly a wave of this study conducted while participants were in their early teens would have been highly informative, but other researchers have noted significant obstacles to conducting research with younger LGBTQ youth, including those associated with self-identification and parental consent (Elze 2003). LGBTQ-identifying youth in their early teens who could obtain parental consent to participate in research studies would likely represent a highly skewed subsample of young people who (1) self-identified at an early age and felt ready to talk about it, and (2) had high levels of parental support for their LGBTQ identities. While I acknowledge that one's attitudes about experiences inevitably change in retrospect, I argue that the nature of the inquiry involved in this study—particularly the *development* of queer voice—is such that participants' attitudes about their past experiences are highly relevant to the analysis. Moreover, the high emotional salience of participants' past experiences in school, family, and community contexts, even several years later, is evident across these interviews.

endure every day. Still, it is hard not to wonder what might have happened if we had listened sooner.

This book has two primary purposes. The first is to listen closely to the voices of a small number of LGBTQ young people and, in so doing, begin to understand the factors that can help a voice silenced by oppressive gender and sexuality norms break free. The second is to use what we understand—incomplete as our understanding might be—to work toward a better future. How do teachers, parents, counselors, mentors, and others who work with and care about LGBTQ youth create opportunities, spaces, and relationships in which they can "talk back" to the forces that threaten to silence them? The voices heard in these chapters cannot provide all the answers, but the process clearly needs to start with listening.