

# CANDIDACY AND LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS

An offered resource for ELCA Candidacy Committees

Prepared by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries

2013

## CANDIDACY AND LGTBQ INDIVIDUALS

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December 2013

**Dear Colleague,**

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“Candidacy and LGBTQ Individuals” was prepared by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) as an offered resource for Synodical Candidacy Committees in the ELCA in their work with candidates seeking rostering in the ELCA. It is especially designed to facilitate relationships with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer-identified (LGBTQ) candidates, although much of it is applicable to the work with all candidates.

Some candidacy committees may have limited experience in engaging LGBTQ candidates. This guide is intended to help that engagement to be a respectful and rewarding one for both candidates and committees. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries has been working with openly LGBTQ candidates for ministry for many years and has learned quite a bit in the process. This resource has developed out of that work and through extensive review and conversations with LGBTQ candidates, Candidacy Committee members, seminary staff, and synodical personnel.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries ([www.elm.org](http://www.elm.org)) is a social ministry organization that affirms and supports publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those pursuing a call to rostered leadership while engaging allied congregations and ministries to proclaim God’s love and seek justice for all. We have three primary programs: **Proclaim**, the professional community for Lutheran rostered leaders and seminarians who publicly identify as LGBTQ; **Ministry Engagement**, which connects ministries led by or open to leadership by LGBTQ leaders; and **Accompaniment**, which supports LGBTQ people through the candidacy and call processes. The Accompaniment Advisory Team includes the following people: Rev. Dr. Randy Nelson, Rev. Dawn Roginski, Rev. Rod Seeger, Rev. Anita Hill, Rev. Tom Taylor, Rev. Joy McDonald Coltvvet, Rev. Jason Bense, Rose Beeson, and Asher O’Callaghan. Any member of the Advisory Team can be reached via the email [candidacy@elm.org](mailto:candidacy@elm.org).

It is our hope that this document will be a useful resource for the church.

With gratitude for your partnership,



The Rev. Dr. Randy A. Nelson

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### **Entrance**

Entrance is a significant step in the life of a candidate and in the life of the church. Typically it is a time in which candidates are invited to share their basic call story and for Candidacy Committee panel members to become acquainted with the candidate. Usually the entrance interview provides the entry into a fruitful relationship that builds over time.

For candidates it can be a time of some uncertainty and anxiety as they experience the process for the first time. That may be especially true for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) candidates for whom the church has not always been a welcoming or safe place. Panel members are expected to be aware that LGBTQ candidates have not always been treated respectfully by the church or Candidacy Committees in the past.

In order to begin the relationship in the most positive light, panel members are expected to approach the entrance interview keeping in mind that the purpose of the interview is a time to get acquainted with the candidate and determine whether the candidate is to be encouraged in their journey. It is not a time for extensive discussion about a candidate's sexuality or LGBTQ sexuality in general. Even if such an exchange is informative for the panel, a candidate is not expected to educate a panel about their sexuality and/or gender identity. Asking candidates intimate questions about their sexual life is an abuse of power.

In all stages of the candidacy process, candidates, particularly vulnerable seminary students, may feel forced to answer overtly sexual questions that violate the candidate's boundaries and leave the interviewee feeling sexually harassed or exploited.

This does not imply that panel members should avoid talking about sexuality or other issues that are very real and important to the candidate's life and ministry. However, panel members are expected to be aware of their motivations in their questioning. Candidates of all sexual orientations and gender identities, at each level of the candidacy process, can expect to be asked about their sexual ethics. Here are some suggested questions for inviting conversation about sexuality specifically with LGBTQ individuals:

- How do you see being LGBTQ as a gift to your ministry and to the wider church?
- Being a pastor is hard work for anyone, but the discrimination that LGBTQ pastors sometimes experience in the church and society could add additional stress to your work as a pastor. What are some ways you take care of yourself when life gets stressful?
- How do you define family? If you do not have the support of your family of origin, what are some of the other ways you have created family or participate in communities of accountability?
- It is reasonable to have feelings about how the church has discriminated against LGBTQ individuals or ways that you have experienced the church as abusive in your life. Are there ways

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in which the church can be a place of reconciliation in light of the need for healing from such experiences?

Some common things that may come up at an entrance interview with LGBTQ candidates:

- LGBTQ candidates often exhibit strength and insight as they have explored the connections between their sexuality and/or gender identity and their faith and calling to ministry.
- An LGBTQ candidate's home congregation may refuse to support them because they are LGBTQ or the candidate's home congregation may be of another denomination when all the Lutheran congregations in their geographic region are not welcoming to LGBTQ individuals. Perhaps, affiliation with an ELCA congregation while in college would be possible. If that is not possible either, the expectation that each candidate's entrance application include registration in an ELCA congregation would need to be explored by the candidate and panel together. Perhaps, the requirement of one year of membership in a Lutheran church and the expected registration could be waived, with a strong recommendation that the candidate become a member of a welcoming congregation near their seminary (if possible).
- Some LGBTQ candidates express (current or past) questioning of their call because of their experiences with discrimination in the church or because they fear that they would have to be political or an activist in order to be a pastor who is LGBTQ. Alternatively, candidates may express a deep conviction of their call, one that they have chosen to follow despite challenges.
- Candidates may talk about their coming out process (to themselves, God, family) in different stages. The individual pressures faced in the coming out process cannot be fully understood. For some people resolution in the coming out process happens quickly, for others it takes decades. Loss of support, family, jobs and many other important factors play a role in this process. Like all people, LGBTQ individuals have different levels of disclosure to different people in their lives. While it may be possible, it should not be assumed that if it takes a long time for someone to come out or to be out in all aspects of their life that it is an indication that they are manipulative or untrustworthy.
- Some LGBTQ candidates are alienated from their biological family because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. In these instances, the panel is expected to be sensitive to these realities and focus on the networks of family support the candidate has created.

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### Best Practices:

1. *It is always best to let a candidate choose if and how they want to self-identify* (pronouns, sexual orientation, family status, etc). While there are many benefits to coming out, there are times when this is not safe. Being fully out can result in physical harm, loss of citizenship, loss of employment, and/or loss of custody or visitation rights of their children. All candidates should be allowed to self identify and to choose the pronouns that work for them understanding that such self-identification may change over time. Additionally, candidates should be encouraged to self-identify in terms of their relationship. LGBTQ couples may use various terms to describe their relationship, including partner, spouse, wife, husband, etc. Ask how the candidate identifies their relationship and then use those terms respectfully.
2. *Ideally, there should be at least one LGBTQ member on the candidacy panel.* In order to prevent tokenism we encourage candidacy panels to expand their diversity. Each panel is expected to have at least one person who can provide advocacy and education to the panel while recognizing that there are a variety of ways of understanding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. While helpful to have people with diverse backgrounds, orientations, and lived experiences on the panel, one LGBT and/or Q person cannot speak to the situation of all candidates.
3. *Candidates may need a liaison to help them navigate discrimination issues at their seminary.* Discrimination around scholarships, housing opportunities, and grading are issues that LGBTQ candidates sometimes experience. It is essential to have a liaison to support the candidate and ensure that the candidate is able to continue through seminary and the candidacy process. It is also useful to allow the panel to discern any red flags to which they want to pay attention in contrast to what may be an expression of the bound conscience of a member of the seminary faculty and thus not a red flag with respect to the candidate.
4. *Panel Members Need to Educate Themselves.* Panel members are expected to know the basics about LGBTQ issues and terminology, common discrimination LGBTQ members face, and their own assumptions about LGBTQ individuals and communities. There are many resources available for this kind of education, and Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is ready to suggest resources if necessary or desired.

### **Psychological Report**

The intention of this section is to serve as a way to learn about how some of society's discrimination against LGBTQ individuals uniquely affects their psychological reports. Reviewing psychological reports is to be done with care, or it can easily become a traumatic or abusive experience for some LGBTQ candidates. While the information listed below can give the panel information about what can typically be expected on the psychological report of a LGBTQ individual, it is still important, as a part of due diligence, not to ignore something simply because the candidate is LGBTQ.

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Some common things found in the psychological reports of LGBTQ individuals:

- Some LGBTQ individuals experience (past and present) abuse from psychological communities, psychological tests, or individual therapists.
- We recommend specialized education for any panel about transgender issues and the ways that the psychological community has been and, in some cases, continues to be abusive toward transgender individuals. This should be a diverse education that, at minimum, covers:
  1. Information about the spectrum of transgender individuals and experiences (for example many transgender persons don't desire surgery or are financially or otherwise incapable of having operations; also it should not be assumed that any given transgender individual uses hormones).
  2. Information from others who are working outside the psychological community who are sensitive to the ways that psychology can be abusive to transgender individuals.
- It is common to see anger and defensiveness with respect to the church in psychological reports, given the discriminatory and sometimes abusive experiences many candidates have had. Some reports have indicated that the candidate "has issues with authority" or "needs to be in charge." While these can be red flags for some, they may also be the very gifts that enable the LGBTQ candidate to find a first call, to renew a congregation, to serve in a geographical region where there is little collegial support, or to do missionary work. For some individuals, approval in candidacy or ordination provides greater healing in this area than any other work the LGBTQ person is able to do.

### Best Practices:

1. *Require the individuals providing psychological evaluations for candidates to be free from bias against LGBTQ individuals, women, or other minority groups.*
2. *Learn about the particular growth areas, characteristics and ways that psychological tests affect LGBTQ individuals (should include but not be limited to):*
  - LGBTQ individuals may be described as having identity disorders or delayed identity development. This may mean that the candidate came out later in life or is still in the process of naming their identity and/or gender expression even as they engage in the work of theological education.
  - Gender role tests are questionable at best. For example, a gender queer person may present themselves in different ways. The committee is expected to be aware that doing so is not evidence of dysfunction.
  - Sometimes trial and error in relationships or finding new ways to have families can be called "inconsistency" or "immaturity." Sometimes it is true, but other

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times this is one way a psychologist's bias can appear in a psychological evaluation.

3. *The following may be more prevalent among LGBTQ individuals given their experience as LGBTQ persons:*
- History of family trauma and/or abuse.
  - Abandonment, unhealthy relationships or shunning from family members and/or support communities.
  - Increased depression, addiction and suicide rates.
  - Higher rates of disabilities (particularly the autistic spectrum and learning disabilities which tend to be diagnosed later in life than in their straight counterparts)
  - Increased exposure to trauma (from attack, discrimination and abuse)
  - Differences in bodily expressions or being closed off to some expressions or experiences (as a result or protection from trauma, transgender identity, and the dynamics of the closet).
  - Higher likelihood that divorce (as response to coming out) may be violent, legally complicated, and result in messy custody battles.
  - Differences in how family is defined or organized, gender roles in relationship and diverse parenting styles, birth and custody arrangements.
  - Greater financial difficulties (due to discrimination, lack of family support or lack of health insurance).
  - May have a hard time being successful in traditional therapy (particularly group therapy) and require more attempts to find therapy or group settings that are a better match for them.

Acknowledging the presence of one or more such factors in the journey of an LGBTQ candidate can become an opportunity to explore how the candidate has addressed such issues in their life and how that has contributed to their sense of readiness for a call to rostered service.

### **Clinical Pastoral Education**

Some CPE supervisors use the same psychological models that are used in psychological reports. Not only is a panel expected to pay attention to any discrimination or bias against LGBTQ candidates that may appear in the supervisor's report or in the dynamics between the candidate and their supervisor, but also in the comments of their peers which are intentionally diverse and from many different theological backgrounds. Sometimes theological differences about the essence of who an LGBTQ person is, and how they live their life, appear in their evaluation as a "significant conflict with other

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members of the group,” “an inability to handle conflict,” labeling the candidate as “confrontational” or “unable to receive feedback or criticism.” These comments are common ways that LGBTQ discrimination or bias gets documented in CPE evaluations. It is always important to clarify the meaning of such comments with a candidate.

### **Background Checks**

Candidacy committees will have due diligence when it comes to background checks. While reviewing background check red flags for LGBTQ individuals it is important to note that discrimination can appear in the following ways:

- As the stated or unstated cause of a termination from a job or training program.
- In laws that may or may not still be enforced. These laws vary dramatically from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. A law that may seem unimaginable in your current location may well still exist in other parts of the country. It is not that long ago that being gay, lesbian, or changing one’s gender was a criminal offense in many jurisdictions. Additional laws about LGBTQ assembly, behavior, bias or harassment from law and judicial officials still exist today.
- Some LGBTQ individuals have been arrested in solidarity with the oppressed or in demonstrations against unjust laws and practices.
- Divorces and custody issues may cause red flags due to injustice in the justice system, the extra layer of family conflict that “coming out” can cause in a family, or from the LGBTQ individual’s sense that they have to hide a part of themselves in order to be allowed to have a family legally.
- Particular care is expected to be paid to transgender individuals during the background check as they may not want, nor should they be required, to reveal their transgender status. For example, they may want a letter to certain past employers to say “he” and a letter to other employers to say “she.” For the safety of the candidate, these accommodations are appropriate.
- Some LGBTQ individuals will have red flags on the background check because of financial discrimination. Sometimes these issues are caused by employment discrimination, the inability to share health care with their partner or family, the low number of jobs for out LGBTQ pastors in the Lutheran church, decreased pay due to minority status, lack of familial support, housing discrimination or other issues. Candidacy committees may need to readjust their understanding of financial health for LGBTQ individuals acknowledging the economic realities in the life of the individual candidate and facilitating a realistic discussion about the causes of any financial issues that exist and how to avoid additional financial difficulty going forward.



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### **Endorsement**

In addition to the best practices and tips from the section on Entrance, there are also some things that particularly affect LGBTQ candidates during the time of endorsement.

It is worth repeating that while endorsement is a particularly appropriate time to ask questions about the candidate's ethics in a congregation, panel members should avoid asking inappropriate sexual questions that they would not ask heterosexual candidates.

Some common things that may come up in an endorsement interview with LGBTQ candidates:

- Most LGBTQ candidates are aware that receiving a call as an openly LGBTQ rostered leader is likely to be difficult and they may have some anxiety in relation to that awareness. The panel, therefore, will continue to encourage the candidate's call without attempting to relieve that anxiety inappropriately. It is also inappropriate for a panel to encourage candidates into non-ordination tracks or out of their call in order to protect them from discrimination. Candidates should be thinking about how they will work as a rostered leader in a church with diverse views of LGBTQ individuals and how their particular gifts can be an asset to our church.
- Some LGBTQ candidates who have experienced discrimination may be very interested in justice work and may express a desire to work outside of congregations in non-parish settings. Sometimes this is practical, as it may take years or decades before some congregations or synods are willing to call LGBTQ rostered leaders. Other times it is just where someone is in their process of healing from discrimination or abuse from churches. Still other times it is a true call to justice ministry in or outside of congregational settings. The candidacy panel is expected to take care with this part of a candidate's discernment to help them recognize their call.

### **Internship**

Hosting a LGBTQ intern benefits both the intern and the congregation. The intern's preparation for rostering in the ELCA is advanced and the congregation has the opportunity to further explore and define its mission and ministry as it witnesses to the larger church and community the mutual benefit in partnering with an LGBTQ intern.

For some LGBTQ candidates, acceptance and success in internship can be healing affirmation after past discrimination as they discern their call to congregational ministry. Other candidates will find that a congregation or supervisor that said they would be a welcome and safe space for the LGBTQ candidate was wrong about what the congregation was ready for. While congregations tend to work through their discomfort and are often more willing to accept LGBTQ rostered leaders and seminarians after they have experienced one, great care is to be taken to check in with LGBTQ candidates on internship to make sure

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they have outlets of support (in or outside of the congregation), that they have appropriate self care, and to prevent serious harm or abuse of the candidate.

ELM experience with internships prior to and after the 2009 ELCA policy changes can provide helpful counsel for Candidacy Committees. What follows are some of our more important learnings.

- The internship site is to be arranged through an ELCA seminary according to guidelines developed by the ELCA.
- The congregation as a whole, not just a smaller group in the congregation, is expected to be open to the intern. Supervisors bear the responsibility of educating the congregation about LGBTQ issues and informing the congregation of the candidate's sexual orientation and/or gender identity before they arrive. This process can be transformative in the life of a congregation and one of the gifts of hosting an LGBTQ intern. Requiring the candidate to come out after arriving at their internship site not only makes it hard for the intern to be a student in that setting, but often ends up creating an unsafe and sometimes abusive environment. Additionally, it risks the congregation feeling as if they were tricked. Regardless of how the congregation handles it, a plan to keep secrets from the congregation (particularly secrets about sexuality) is dangerous and a poor model for an intern. Thus, the intern is to be able to be publicly transparent to the congregation and authentic in their self-understanding of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Expectations about living arrangements for the candidate's partner or about the candidate's ability to date while on internship are to be expressed before the candidate arrives.
- The candidate's family (however they define that) is to be allowed to fully participate in the life of the internship site. However, the large amount of discrimination and abuse people have experienced from the Lutheran church means that it is possible that the candidate's family may not be Christian, Lutheran or interested in participating in the life of the internship site. The candidate's family is to be invited to participate fully, and allowed to decide what is right for them. Talking about these expectations before the candidate arrives prevents unnecessary conflicts.
- Open conversation is expected to occur about any expectations the internship site has about gender roles, dress or behavior. LGBTQ individuals may have different assumptions about gender roles and dress than straight people. Outlining what professional dress is in the internship site is helpful for all interns, but having different expectations based on gender can be problematic.

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- The internship supervisor is expected to be out about their sexual orientation (LGBTQ or not). While closeted rostered leaders can be wonderful supervisors, it is a dangerous situation in which to put an out candidate. For example: the rostered leader could become envious of the candidate's ability to be open with the congregation; the rostered leader could act in inappropriate ways in order to keep their secret; or it could lead to an unhealthy dynamic where the intern is asked to keep other secrets from colleagues, the congregation, the seminary or their candidacy panel that are potentially abusive.
- LGBTQ individuals may have different financial needs (due to lack of support from family, variations in available health insurance for partners, and employment discrimination), and additional support for the candidate may be needed for a healthy internship experience.
- LGBTQ individuals may need help finding a healthy match and the candidacy committee and seminary may need to be flexible in order to provide the best internship experience possible for the candidate.

### **Approval**

The more active and direct relationship between the candidate and the Candidacy Committee panel typically concludes with the approval decision. Once approved and assigned to a synod, the candidate comes under the care of the leadership of the synod to which the candidate has been assigned. However, the need for support continues as this has proven to be a very difficult time for some candidates, especially LGBTQ candidates. Until an approved candidate receives a call, the relationship between candidate and Candidacy Committee remains an active one. The greater the length of time between approval and first call, the more important the need for continued support of the candidate becomes. A Candidacy Committee panel will want to consult with the appropriate synodical personnel/bishop with respect to any particular role it may be able to play in that waiting period.

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### **Conclusion**

We hope this has been a useful guide and support for your work with candidates for ministry. Thank you for your ministry and service to these leaders.

### **Acknowledgements**

This resource is a revision of a document written by the Rev. Megan Rohrer. It was revised under the leadership of the Rev. Randy Nelson. Reviewers and contributors included members of the LGBTQ community; rostered leaders; seminarians; former and current candidacy committee members; seminary faculty; and ELCA synodical bishops. Additional information about Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is available at [www.elm.org](http://www.elm.org).

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### Short Glossary of Terms

**Accompaniment:** Program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries – walking with LGBTQ seminarians or candidates in the Lutheran candidacy process.

**Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM):** ELM is a self-funded social ministry organization that affirms and supports publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those pursuing a call to rostered leadership while engaging allied congregations and ministries to proclaim God's love and seek justice for all. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries does this work through three main programs: Proclaim, Accompaniment, and Ministry Engagement. Through this work, ELM ensures that LGBTQ leaders and the ministries they lead can proclaim God's love and seek justice for all people.

**Gender Identity:** One's innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the sex assigned at birth. Individuals are conscious of this between the ages 18 months and 3 years. Most people develop a gender identity that matches their biological sex. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their biological or assigned sex. Some of these individuals choose to socially, hormonally and/or surgically change their sex to more fully match their gender identity.

**Gender Expression:** Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way as people assign gender to others based on their appearance, mannerisms, and other gendered characteristics. Sometimes, transgender people seek to match their physical expression with their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Gender expression should not be viewed as an indication of sexual orientation.

**Gender Role:** This is the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). People who step out of their socially assigned gender roles are sometimes referred to as transgender. Other cultures have three or more gender roles.

**LGBTQ:** Often used as shorthand to refer to a variety of people with diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identity. The letters commonly refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

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**Ministry Engagement:** Program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries – connects Lutheran ministries that are led by an LGBTQ rostered leader or who are open to calling LGBTQ rostered leaders.

**Proclaim:** Program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries – a professional community for Lutheran rostered leaders and seminarians who publicly identify as LGBTQ.

**Queer:** Anyone who chooses to identify as such. This can include, but is not limited to, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, intersex people, asexual people, etc. This term has different meanings to different people. Some still find it offensive, while others reclaim it to encompass the broader sense of history of the gay rights movement. Can also be used as an umbrella term like LGBT, as in “the queer community.”

**Sexual orientation:** Sexual orientation is an enduring personal quality that inclines people to feel romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to both sexes or more than one gender.

**Transgender.** Sometimes used as an umbrella to describe anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. More narrowly defined, it refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth gender. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (attraction to people of a specific gender.) Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

**Transsexual:** Individuals who do not identify with their birth-assigned genders and physically alter their bodies surgically and/or hormonally. This physical transition is a complicated, multi-step process that may take years and may include, but is not limited to, sex reassignment surgery.

**Additional definitions of terms related to sexuality and gender can be found here:**

[www.hrc.org/resources/entry/glossary-of-terms](http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/glossary-of-terms)

[www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)

[www.tolerance.org/LGBT-best-practices-terms](http://www.tolerance.org/LGBT-best-practices-terms)

[www.thegenderbook.com](http://www.thegenderbook.com)