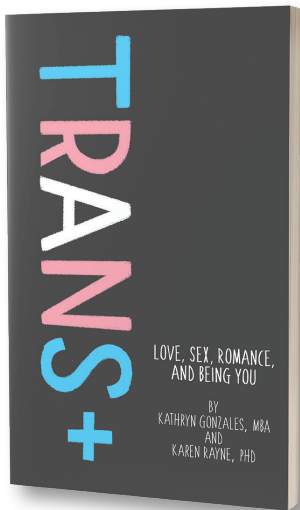




The Making of TRANS+: Interview with the Authors



Magination Press presents an interview with the co-authors of *TRANS+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You*. Read about why and how they wrote *TRANS+* and their advice for supporting trans+ kids.

Magination Press: What inspired you to write *TRANS+*?

Kathryn Gonzales: No book like *TRANS+* had ever been written. I could have certainly used a book like *TRANS+* growing up, and I knew that the transgender and nonbinary youth I work with at Out Youth needed it too! Even when the writing process got tough, I knew I had to keep going because this book was going to help a lot of youth feel less alone.

Karen Rayne: When Magination Press invited me to write a book about love, sex, and romance for teens who identify as a girl, my first question was whether they had a book for trans and nonbinary youth also planned. They didn't – until I asked that question and they were immediately enthusiastic. I was lucky enough to find Kathryn as a co-author for this book that desperately needed to be written.

MP: What is *TRANS+* about?

KG: *TRANS+* is a growing-up guide for transgender and nonbinary youth and all the people who love them. We cover a variety of topics like “What is gender?” and coming out to puberty, transition, dating, and relationships! It's important to understand that *TRANS+* is meant to be a starting point for a reader's journey and we link to many resources in the book and on our website at thetransbook.com.

MP: *TRANS+* is such a comprehensive guide. How did you decide what to include?

KG: Even though I am transgender, I didn't for a moment think I knew what transgender and nonbinary youth growing up in the 21st century wanted to know about. That's why we sent out a survey to transgender and nonbinary youth all over the country to get their input. A special thanks, of course, to my literal in-house focus group of youth at Out Youth!

KR: We asked trans and nonbinary youth what they have questions about — and what they wish they had known at the beginning of their journey into their identity.

MP: What have reader responses been?

KG: I don't think we've received a single response from a reader that wasn't about their deep and heartfelt gratitude that Karen and I wrote *TRANS+*. Trans and nonbinary youth tell us it's exactly what they needed, Trans and nonbinary adults tell us it's exactly what they wished they'd had growing up, and parents tell us that it's helped them communicate with their youth about being trans, transition, and mental health.

MP: You wrote *TRANS+* as a team. What was your process working together?

KG: Our writing partnership worked so well because we each took charge of writing chapters about topics in which we were experts. Karen, being a world-renowned sex educator, wrote all of the content about sex, sexual health and reproduction, and healthy relationships. I, as a transgender person, wrote about gender dysphoria, the dangers of the trans narrative, and transition. *TRANS+* simply would not exist in the way it does today without both of our voices.

KR: Kathryn and I had a great time working together! We split up the content for the initial writing and then read over each other's content, leaving notes and edits. This two-pass process brought our voices into alignment in really beautiful ways.

MP: What was fun or unexpected about the writing process?

KG: Becoming friends with Karen. In addition to that wonderful stroke of luck, I didn't expect to learn so much about myself and my trans identity as I did while writing the book. Digging deeply into topics I had only thought about, but never spoken or written about, helped me refine my own understanding of transness and how I fit under the trans umbrella.

KR: For me the most fun and unexpected thing was becoming friends with Kathryn! I've co-authored many things with many people, and the process doesn't always end in friendship. (Not that it ends badly — it's just that the person stays a colleague or co-worker.)

MP: Do you have a favorite part of *TRANS+* or was there a section that was especially challenging to write?

KG: My favorite part that I wrote was the line "Know that your ancestors were no less than gods" from the Dear Reader at the beginning of the book. It was inspired by my work on Chapter 1 digging into the history of transgender and nonbinary people all over the world and throughout time. I am deeply moved by my learning that in many cultures transgender and nonbinary people were healers, shamans, and revered rulers.

My favorite part that Karen wrote was the phrase she coined: "gamete situation" in order to explain how it might happen that transgender and nonbinary people could make a baby. Instead of using genitals or reproductive organs as the frame, she took it all the way down to the kinds of gametes people have and how they might interact.

MP: Are there trans+ people in the world that you think are role models?

KG: My trans+ role models are people I work with to make Austin and Texas a better place for trans+ people. Sam Clubb, Wes Cowan, Cece Flores, Liam Garcia, Frederick Heather, Cassidy Laminack, Rocky Lane, Anna Nguyen, Emmett Schelling, Danielle Skidmore, Elle Smith, Jessica Soukup, Naomi Wilson, Alister Womack, and so many more.

And when I find myself needing to commune with one of my trans+ ancestors, I turn to a photo of Marsha P. Johnson that sits on my desk behind my right shoulder. Marsha was a Black trans woman and is widely believed to be the person who threw the first brick at the Stonewall Uprising.

MP: This is such an important resource for teens. What other resources do teens need?

KG: Trans+ youth need to be loved, acknowledged, and accepted EXACTLY as they are. This means we must hold our trans+ youth close. This means that any legislation meant to demean and dehumanize trans+ youth must be defeated. This means we must believe trans+ youth when they tell us who they are.

KR: Teens need adults to talk with about this book! While having something written is powerful and connecting, having a caring adult who can talk with the young person about their specific situation and needs is even more powerful.

MP: How can adults be allies to and advocates for transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, or gender-fluid youth?

KG: Make sure your allyship with trans+ youth means that you are taking action at every opportunity to affirm their humanity and right to exist in the world. Seek out education and resources beyond *TRANS+*. Donate to and volunteer with organizations that support trans+ youth. Show up when trans+ youth are under attack by elected officials who use them as the latest scapegoat or fear tactic.

KR: Listen! Realize you might not understand, and that's okay. Just keep listening and centering the feelings and experiences of the youth as real, valid, and important. Find experts who do understand the emotional, psychological, and medical processes of being trans or nonbinary.

MP: What do you do when you aren't writing?

KG: By day, I am the Operations & Programs Director at Out Youth, an Austin-based nonprofit organization serving LGBTQIA+ people ages 12 and up. In my spare time, I serve as the Vice-Chair of the City of Austin's LGBTQ+ Quality of Life Advisory Commission where I work with my fellow commissioners to make recommendations to the City Council to improve the quality of life for LGBTQIA+ Austinites. I also love to study the importance of storytelling to the human species, restore antique technology, and play Star Trek: Online.

KR: Well, I have three kids, two dogs, a wife, and I'm the Executive Director of a sex education nonprofit (www.unhushed.org). So I don't have a lot of extra time on my hands! But when I do find myself with time, I love to make food. Everything from gardening to raising chickens (for eggs, not meat) to making jam and bread and cheese!

MP: Do you have any fun facts readers might not know that you'd like to share?

KG: Is it a fun fact that I can never think of a fun fact? Also, I did stand up comedy in college.

MP: What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?

KG: *Professor Wormbog in Search for the Zipperump-a-Zoo* by Mercer Mayer. Reading it as an adult, I find it ironic that I can so easily draw parallels between Professor Wormbog's search for the Zipperump-a-Zoo (which is often hiding in plain sight) and my journey of self-discovery.

KR: There's no way that I could pick one book from my childhood — I loved all of them! Recently I've been loving Roald Dahl. I'm reading his books to my youngest right now and they're just so delightfully whimsical!

This Article's Author

Kathryn Gonzales, MBA, is the Operations & Programs Director at Out Youth, a co-chair of the steering committee for the Central Texas Transgender Health Coalition, the chair of the board of directors at HavenCon, and a commissioner on the City of Austin's LGBTQ Quality of Life Commission. She has been working in the nonprofit sector, specifically youth advocacy and organizing, for 15 years. She has facilitated state-wide youth lobby days, organized state-wide conferences on LGBTQIA+ youth leadership and empowerment, and created the Queer Youth Media Project during her time at the Austin Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival.

Karen Rayne, PhD, is the Executive Director of UN|HUSHED. She writes comprehensive sexuality education curricula, books for children, teenagers, and parents, and trains professionals internationally. She can be found on Facebook and Instagram @karenrayne. Visit the Dr. Karen Rayne and UN|HUSHED websites to learn more.

TRANS+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You

Trans+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You is an all-inclusive, uncensored guide for teens who are transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, or gender-fluid. *TRANS+* answers all your questions, easy and hard, about gender and covers mental health, physical health and reproduction, transitioning, relationships, sex, and life as a trans or nonbinary individual. It's full of essential information you need — and want — to know and includes real-life stories from teens like you!