

Strategies for Addressing Multiple Stigmas Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth and Transition Aged Youth

San Francisco Suicide Prevention

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In Their Own Words: LGBTQ Youth and Young Adults

Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews of 92 LGBTQ Youth
November / December 2014

Produced by:



PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

State of Residence

Two in-person focus groups in Seattle, WA
with 19 participants

Two in-person focus groups in Dallas, TX
with 11 participants

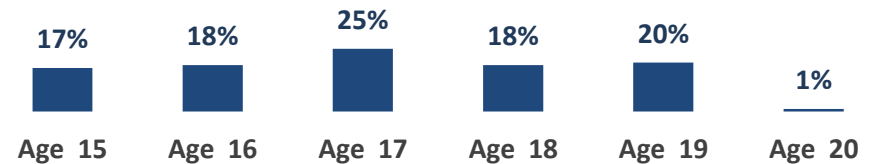
Eight national focus groups and
twenty personal telephone interviews
With a total of 62 online/telephone participants

LGBTQ participants were from 27 states

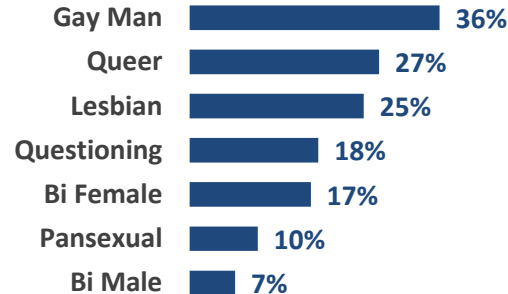
Alabama	Minnesota
Alaska	Mississippi
Arizona	Montana
Arkansas	Nebraska
California	New Jersey
Delaware	New York
Florida	North Carolina
Georgia	Ohio
Illinois	Oklahoma
Indiana	Tennessee
Louisiana	Texas
Massachusetts	Virginia
Maryland	Washington
Michigan	

Age

Base: n=92



Sexual Orientation

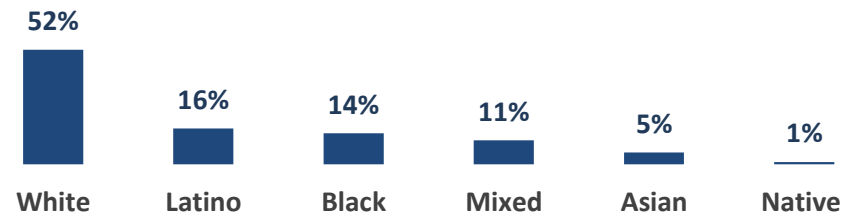


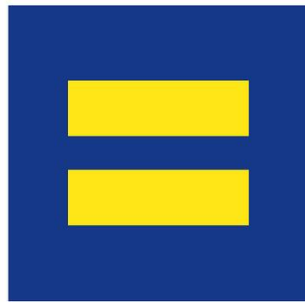
Multiple identities allowed

Gender Identity

Male	34%
Female	34%
Gender Queer, Gender Fluid or Non-binary	18%
Transgender	14%

Ethnicity





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Mental Health Concerns of LGBTQ Youth

New Identities and Orientations

Today's youth are leading society to a broader understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity that goes well beyond the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Many youth search the internet to try to find ways of describing their inner feelings. This has led them to establish and share new descriptions and terms that better describe their true identities.

Older adults and many young people are often perplexed by these newer descriptive terms.

Common Terms Used by Youth

Queer
Questioning
Pansexual
Panromantic
Asexual
Aromantic
Agender
Gender Queer
Gender Fluid
Same Gender Loving
Straight Ally
Androgynous
Demigirl
Non-binary
Cisgender
Use of plural pronouns

LGBTQ Youth Feel Strongly about Mental Health Issues, and View Their Peers as At-Risk for Mental Health Concerns

One of the most consistent findings is that LGBTQ young people perceive themselves and their peers to be at greater risk for mental health concerns.

Nearly all of the youth participants discussed this issue and felt strongly that fear, isolation, lack of support, verbal harassment and sometimes physical abuse has a negative impact on their mental state.

Transgender, gender fluid and gender queer youth were especially concerned about mental health concerns

“I think they’re more likely to have depression and such just because there’s a lack of acceptance. When your family doesn’t accept you, that’s really tough. Your family needs to be there to back you up.”

“I think that if there was a research study conducted about mental health and transgender-identified teens, the results would be so shocking and so disturbing that nobody would know what to say. I think there are a ton of people that identify as transgender that really need counseling right now. This is a problem right now.”

The Coming Out Process

The coming out process, which often takes years for an LGBTQ young person, is a time of significant anxiety. It is a time when the young person feels isolated and feels tremendous fear of what their sexual orientation or gender identity may mean for their future.

Many youth expressed frustration that coming out is not a once and done process. It is a continuous, almost daily process, that gives them persistent anxiety and stress.

Depending on the youth's circumstances, LGBTQ youth make an assessment of where to come out first based on perceived safety. Sometimes they come out first to parents or siblings, at school, to friends or to strangers on the internet.

Coming out as transgender or gender fluid is far more difficult than gay or lesbian

"I waited almost half a year to tell my mom. The first thing—it was scary. Your heart's beating. Your palms are sweaty. You're wondering, oh, my God, are they going to hate me? Are they still going to love me? What's going to happen to me?"

"The first person I told, I felt so alone. I cried for three hours after I told them because I was so afraid that they were going to hate me."

Most Parents are Supportive, but LGBTQ Youth Have Strong Anxiety about Parental Reactions

Most LGBT youth participants reported positive to neutral reactions from their parents when coming out.

LGBTQ youth have strong anxiety about negative consequences from parents if they were to come out. The strongest fears are being thrown out of their house, loss of financial support or being emotionally cut off by their parents

Negative consequences did happen to some youth in the study. Some youth were disowned by their parents or endured months to years of negative cohabitation with their parents after coming out.

“I kind of came out in high school. I just told them I had a girlfriend. My mom threw me out of the house, called the police on me. It was bad.”

“My dad was in the Marines. I kind of expected him to be like, “I don’t want this at my house.” I thought yeah, this is pretty much it. But no—like right away, he’s like “Okay. Are you dating anybody?” My parents are so accepting and understanding”

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A Distorted Perception of Parental Expectations

Society expects parents to be protecting and loving of their children. LGBTQ teens do not necessarily expect that standard from their parents.

Many teens don't expect to be treated well, let alone given unconditional love upon disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTQ teens feel grateful if parents do not completely reject them (even if the parent's response is still quite negative).

More subtlety, many LGBTQ teens think their parents will be disappointed in them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

“Their response was not positive. I am so, so lucky to have a family that didn’t kick me out, a family that didn’t leave me homeless.”

“I guess my biggest fear is just them disowning me, and just seeing the disappointment in their eyes, like I failed them. I think that would be pretty terrible.”

“My parents are not mean and they haven’t cut me off and everyone still talks to me, which I’m thankful for completely.”

Most LGBTQ Teens Feel Isolated

Most LGBTQ youth find themselves at least somewhat socially isolated in high school, and isolation feelings often persist as a young adult.

Most LGBTQ youth do find some peer support systems, often a group of other LGBTQ young people at their schools. They create for themselves a group of friends to protect and accept them unconditionally, despite their home/school challenges. However, many reported that it is just a couple of LGBTQ peers, and that they wished they had a larger support structure.

Many young gay men and some lesbians reported that once they are “out,” it can be difficult to establish friendships with other same-gender peers at their schools.

“I have no support system—maybe one or two friends that I can maybe talk to on a Saturday afternoon when the sky is blue.”

“It’s pretty much a really lonely existence in a rural community when you’re gay in high school...Isolation. I don’t have many friends in my hometown. It gets pretty lonely.”

“I have a group of friends. We’re pretty much all LGBTQ. We somehow managed to drift to each other.”

Bullying

Although only a small number of LGBTQ youth, some participants reported physical bullying by their peers. The stories of violence and intimidation by participants were quite striking during the interviews. Abuse and harassment leaves an LGBTQ young person feeling completely isolated with insufficient resources to gain support. Furthermore, the bullying leaves them in a constant state of fear.

While not all LGBTQ youth experienced physical violence, the majority in the research experienced verbal bullying, negative jokes and harassment by their peers at some point during or after their coming out process.

The transgender youth, and those who did not fit traditional gender roles, reported receiving a tremendous amount of bullying, discrimination and harassment.

“The main challenge I faced when I was young was gay bashing and homophobia from my peers...pushed into lockers, gay slurs, somebody tried to run me over just wanting to watch me run and squirm. I couldn’t really walk around without being screamed at from a car or having things thrown at me”.

“I ended up dropping out because I was getting bullied so much and so suicidal that the school board had a meeting with my parents. They advised my parents that it was better for my safety to pull me out of school.”

“I would walk down the hallways and people whose names I had never even knew, people who I’d never even seen before, would yell at me, “tranny,” and stuff like that, and they’d yell at their friend, “Look out. Go back to your classrooms. Here comes the tranny.” There was no place that I was safe.”

LGBTQ Youth Report Being at High Risk For Suicidal

The most tragic outcome of bullying, abuse and isolation is suicide.

Considering the number of youth interviewed in the study, a disturbingly large number expressed suicidal ideation, spending time in adolescent psychiatric emergency wards, and/or knowing LGBTQ youth who killed themselves. Suicidal ideation appeared to correlate with isolation, harassment and/or physical abuse in the family or at school.

LGBTQ youth, and especially transgender youth, are acutely aware of the relationship between bullying and suicidal ideation.

“I did a week in an outpatient program at the hospital near where I live for mental health reasons. While I was there, I interacted with more queer people than I had in six months.”

“It was tough because they would tell me to kill myself and stuff, and I did try multiple times. I don’t like to throw numbers out there, but it was probably in the double digits.”

Supportive Schools Make a Big Difference

One of the most encouraging findings of the research was that many schools in the United States are supportive of LGBTQ youth. Most youth participants describe their school environments as neutral to positive.

Many youth are able to find peers, teachers, counselors and Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) support structures in their schools. The importance of a supportive school staff when LGBTQ youth have safety concerns should not be underestimated.

Many participants described family structures that were unsupportive (or the young person was unsure if parents would be supportive), and that their school environment was a place they could be themselves or find support.

“My school is a really safe place because my school has a zero tolerance policy, so people know better. You don’t go there.

My school was super, super institutionally accepting... teachers and stuff, are very accepting. There aren’t a lot of gay kids, but there are a good number who are older than me and some who are younger than me.”

Not All Schools are Supportive

However, not all schools are supportive. In fact, some school administrators or teachers, especially those in some suburban and rural areas, are quite hostile to LGBTQ youth.

A few LGBTQ youth described school situations where administrators protected others that were physically and emotionally abusive to LGBTQ students. Some school administrators or teachers blamed the LGBTQ students for their abusive situations, sometimes in ways that further compounded the harassment and could be considered emotionally abusive to a person experiencing a traumatic event.

“It was absolutely terrible. I was bullied immensely for being gay because I had a girlfriend and we didn’t hide it. We were jumped on numerous occasions for being gay and we were tagged, I had gotten jumped twice, and then she had gotten jumped four times, they wrote stuff on our faces. We were both bullied and harassed, as well as my friends who were gay, by not only students but staff as well. We went to the administration, and we got to talk to the Assistant Principal who then told us that we were going to hell and started questioning us and asking us if along with homosexuality if we were worshipping Satan.”

Positives about Being LGBTQ

Many participants expressed that there are positives to an LGBTQ identity.

For one, they feel that the LGBTQ community sticks together as a group, and the overall community is a strong source of support.

Another positive for LGBTQ youth who had successfully come out and now feel safe and supported, is that they have become empowered by the experience in all aspects of their lives.

In addition, some youth expressed that being LGBTQ gave them a better understanding of all people; to experience discrimination firsthand. The experience of being LGBTQ gives them more empathy for everyone, which they feel will be helpful as they get older.

A few participants mentioned that being LGBTQ has helped their college applications.

“It’s made me more open-minded, I’ve learned more about different individuals, their gender identity, and being trans. It’s opened me up and it’s educated me more on different people and what they’re about.”

“I think that as a young person with an LGBTQ identity and being out, it’s very empowering. You realize how much power you have over yourself and over what you can choose to do with yourself. If you can survive coming out and if you can make it through all that, and you can make it through people saying negative things, what can’t you do? The answer is nothing.”

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ReachOut fact sheets are written by young people for young people and edited by a mental health professional. Want to discuss the topic in more depth? Visit the [ReachOut Forums](#).

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FACT SHEET

Debunking LGBTQ Myths & Stereotypes

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akahawkeyefan

A lot has changed with how society thinks about what it means to identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ). In the past, these figures were largely misunderstood and the issues that faced the LGBTQ community were not as openly discussed. Now, we hear more and more proud LGBTQ and ally voices of all ages speaking up. A growing number of states across the US are passing legislation that promotes acceptance and equality.

Still, even with all this progress and better representations in pop

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Home > Real Stories > LGBTQ: Sexuality and Gender Identity > Making myself at home on campus

REAL STORY

Making myself at home on campus



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I grew up in a small town. Everyone knew everyone, and I liked living there. I didn't think about college often, but that changed when I got older. I heard so many great things about the local junior college that I decided to register for my first semester. I came to learn that this great college did not live up to what I was hoping for.

Before my first semester, I considered living in a dorm. I contacted

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Home > Real Stories > LGBTQ: Sexuality and Gender Identity > Marching in the Tet Parade

REAL STORY

Marching in the Tet Parade



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Pe de. This translates to a Vietnamese slur used to insult people who act "gay." In Westminster, California home to the largest population of Vietnamese Americans in the United States, I grew up hearing this term casually tossed around by my Vietnamese classmates.

Pe de was also the term my dad and his friends used to say when

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FACT SHEET

Coming Out Conversation Starters

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Starting a conversation around coming out can be hard. You might not know exactly what to say, be worried about how the other person will react, or have had a bad experience in the past telling someone who didn't react well.

While you won't know everything about how the conversation will go and each person (friends, family, teachers, etc.) is likely to have a slightly different response depending on your relationship, you can think about what you want to say before to start the conversation in a certain direction. A few tips for considering what

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64.7%
of LGBTQ users



50.6%
of non-LGBTQ users

visited ReachOut for
this reason: "I'm going
through a tough time
and looking for help."

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Concerns of LGBTQI visitors to ReachOut



69% mental health issues
(depression and anxiety)



10.6% sexuality



11.5% self-harm



9% eating disorders



9.4% suicide

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Percentage of LGBTQ young people who reported that ReachOut.com helped 'somewhat', 'quite a bit' or 'a lot'

89%

Helped you to understand
others experience with
the topic

85%

Gave you the
info you needed

68%

Helped you to feel
more able to deal
with the issues

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"It really does help to come here and talk about it! I appreciate you giving advice, and trying to help... I think you guys here on ReachOut are the only people I can really talk to, sincerely, honestly."

- 14-year-old LGBTQ user on the ReachOutHere forums

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