



# Accelerating Acceptance 2017

harris poll

A Harris Poll survey of Americans' acceptance of LGBTQ people



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# Accelerating Acceptance 2017

## Introduction

Without question, the past few decades have yielded remarkable progress for the LGBTQ community in the United States, with historic advancements achieved for both legal equality and cultural acceptance. Today, more Americans than ever before support and accept their LGBTQ family members, coworkers, and neighbors – a fact this report, now in its third iteration, reflects.

But on the heels of historic gains, including the watershed victory for marriage equality at the U.S. Supreme Court, Americans have once again found themselves divided as President Donald Trump ascended to the White House – an unexpected turn of events that has left many marginalized groups fearful that hard-fought progress may now be in jeopardy. Indeed, beginning with President Trump's very first pick for his cabinet, Vice President Mike Pence – who has opposed LGBTQ equality at every turn – it became clear to LGBTQ Americans that their rights and safety may soon be at serious risk.

In the face of this new political reality, GLAAD's *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey reveals a remarkable new era of understanding and acceptance among young people who increasingly reject traditional labels like "gay/straight" and "man/woman," and instead talk about themselves in words that are beyond the binary – they are, in essence, igniting an identity revolution.

GLAAD's survey, which reveals answers to questions never before asked, also shows that young people today are more accepting of LGBTQ people than ever before. And as acceptance has grown in this country, so too has the number of young people who describe themselves as LGBTQ. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that people today are less likely to be straight and/or non-cisgender; rather, it more likely suggests that accepting environments allow people to more openly and safely talk about who they are and who they love.

Now, as the Trump Administration begins fulfilling its pledges to move the country in a different direction – one wherein marginalized people are already in the crosshairs of President Trump's early executive orders – many in the LGBTQ community worry: will the pace of progress be stalled or even undone altogether?

But though laws can be unwritten, hearts and minds in America have been changed for the better – and that is a reality less easily unraveled. The LGBTQ community has a long history of demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity, fighting to protect the people they love, and defending the core American value that all people are created equal.

That fight and the pursuit of full acceptance will no doubt continue. And GLAAD will be there every step of the way.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of GLAAD.

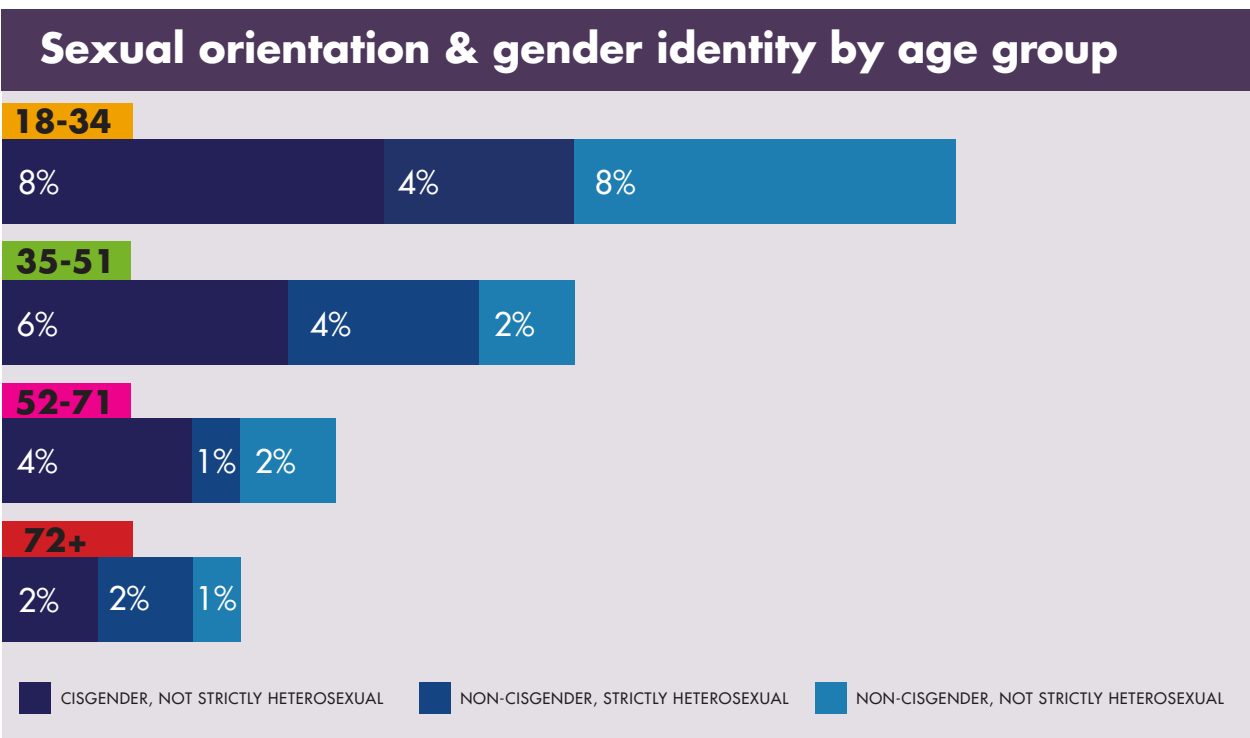
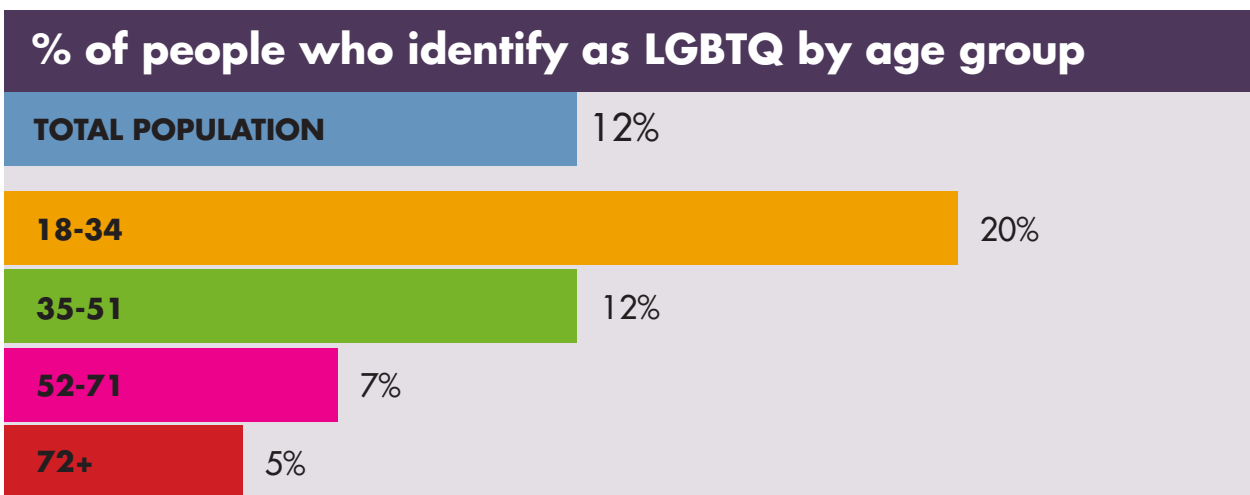
The 2016 survey was fielded from November 2-4, 2016 among 2,037 adults ages 18 and older, including 1,708 adults who self-identified as heterosexual (i.e., the non-LGBTQ sample). 100 respondents were not classified in regards to LGBTQ status because they declined to answer for gender identity and sexual orientation and therefore were not included in this analysis.

For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Matt Goodman, GLAAD's Associate Director of Communications, at [mgoodman@glaad.org](mailto:mgoodman@glaad.org).

# 1

## Young people are more likely to identify as LGBTQ than older generations

GLAAD's *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey shows that Millennials (people ages 18-34) are significantly more likely to openly identify as LGBTQ than older generations. This could be attributed to increasingly accepting environments, wherein for many people, family rejection is less frequent, job security is less at risk, and overall safety is less of a concern when coming out. (Of course, these concerns remain a stark reality for many LGBTQ people, particularly transgender people of color, and must still be addressed at both the legislative and cultural levels.) Additionally, increased media visibility has, for the most part, led to a greater understanding of LGBTQ people, which has diminished stereotypes and stigma that fuel discrimination, making it generally less challenging for many young people to openly identify as LGBTQ. In fact, Millennials (people ages 18-34) are more than twice as likely to identify as LGBTQ as the Boomer generation (people ages 52-71), and 56% percent more likely to identify as LGBTQ than Generation X (people ages 35-51). Perhaps most striking, 12% of Millennials identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, meaning they do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth or their gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity – doubling the number of transgender and gender nonconforming people reported by Generation X. Of the 12% of Millennials who identify as transgender and gender nonconforming, 63% also say they do not identify as heterosexual.

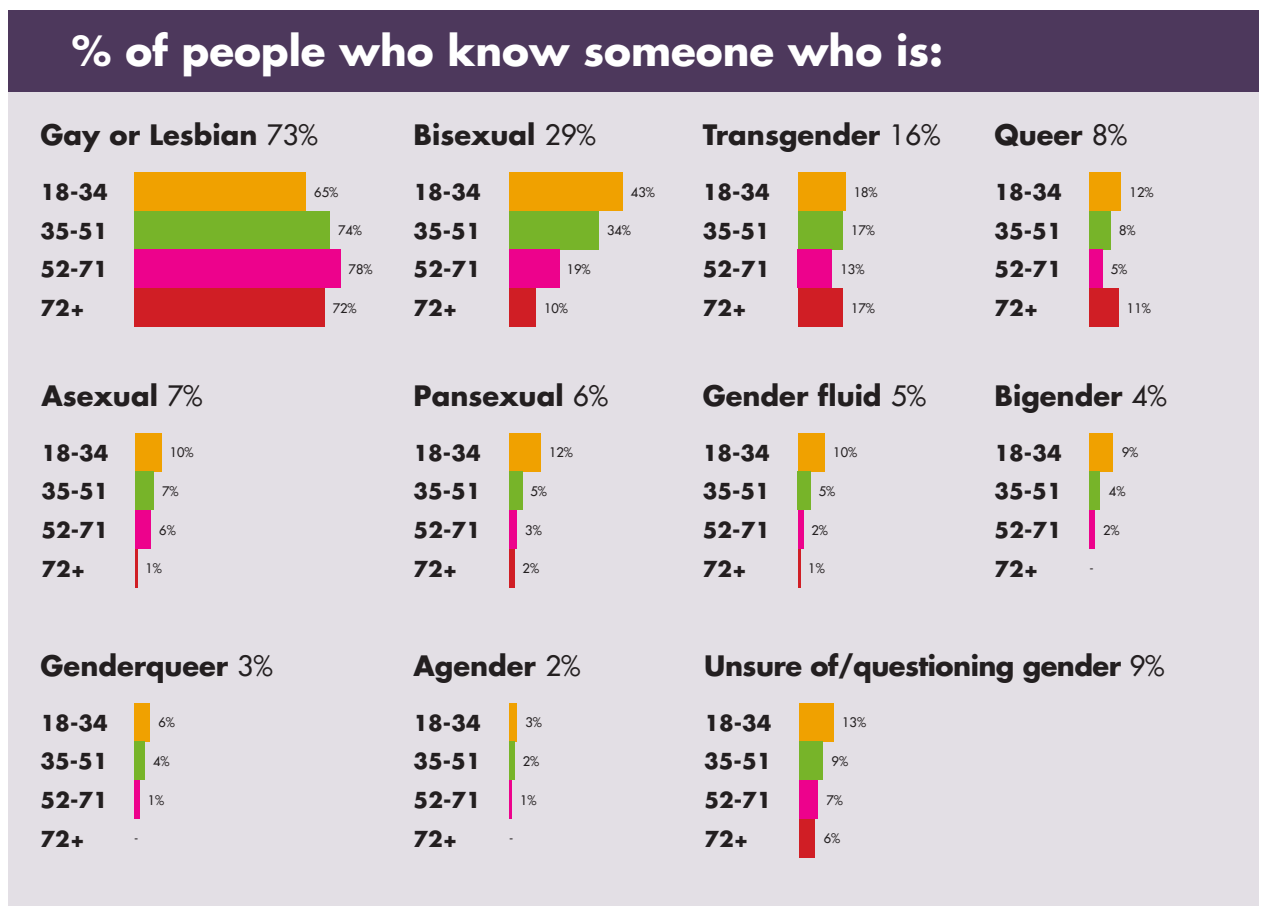


# 2

## Young people appear more likely to identify outside traditional binaries such as “gay/straight” and “man/woman”

While older generations of LGBTQ people (people ages 35+) largely use the words “gay” and “lesbian” and/or “man” and “woman” to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity respectively, Millennials (people ages 18-34) appear more likely to identify in terminology that falls outside those previously traditional binaries. This could again be attributed to increased cultural acceptance and media visibility that oftentimes allows for an earlier and more sophisticated understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity as spectrums. Indeed, GLAAD’s *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey shows this heightened sophistication is shared among non-LGBTQ Millennials, significantly more of whom report knowing someone who identifies beyond the traditional binaries of “gay” and “straight” and/or “man” and “woman” than generations before them. Interestingly, non-LGBTQ Millennials are also significantly less likely to know someone who identifies as “gay” or “lesbian” than generations before them, ergo indicating that their LGBTQ peers largely describe themselves in words outside more traditional binaries.

Sexual orientation by age group					Gender identity by age group				
	18-34	35-51	52-71	72+		18-34	35-51	52-71	72+
Strictly heterosexual	84%	91%	94%	98%	Cisgender	88%	94%	97%	97%
Bisexual	6%	4%	2%	1%	Agender	3%	>0.5%	>0.5%	1%
Asexual	4%	1%	1%	>0.5%	Gender fluid	3%	1%	-	-
Strictly gay/lesbian	3%	3%	2%	>0.5%	Transgender	2%	1%	>0.5%	-
Pansexual	2%	1%	1%	1%	Unsure/questioning	2%	3%	2%	2%
Unsure/questioning	1%	-	>0.5%	-	Bigender	1%	>0.5%	1%	-
Queer	-	-	-	-	Genderqueer	1%	1%	-	-



# 3

## Young people are much more likely to be allies of the LGBTQ community

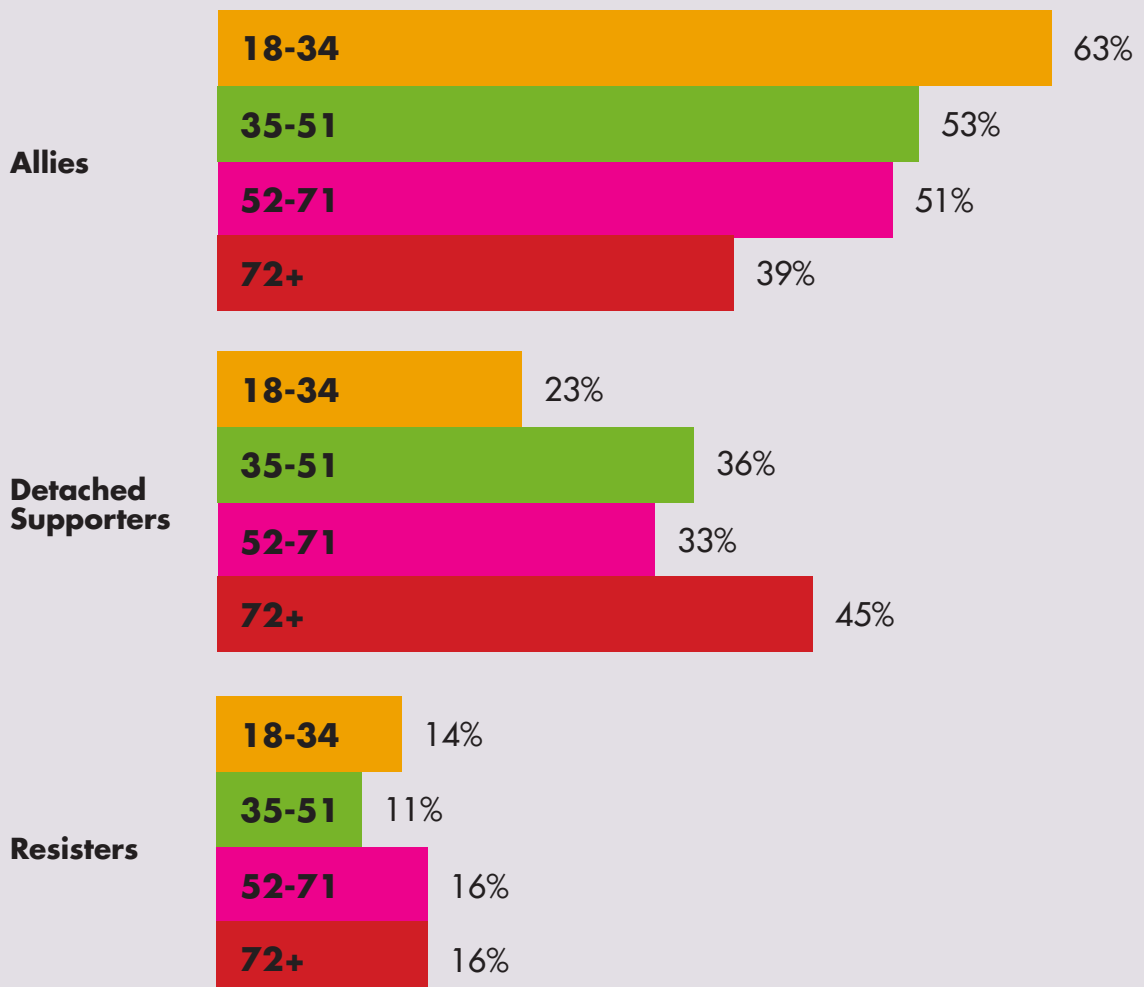
To better understand how support for the LGBTQ community differs across society, GLAAD has split non-LGBTQ Americans into three segments based on respondents' comfort levels across seven surveyed LGBTQ-related situational questions. GLAAD's segmentation is defined by the following categories:

- **Allies:** Non-LGBTQ respondents who were either "very" or "somewhat" comfortable in all situations.
- **Detached Supporters:** Non-LGBTQ respondents whose comfort level varied across situations.
- **Resisters:** Non-LGBTQ respondents who were either "very" or "somewhat" uncomfortable in all situations.

Studies show that people who personally know someone who is LGBTQ are more likely to support LGBTQ equality. Given that Millennials (people ages 18-34) are more likely to openly identify as LGBTQ than generations before them, it is perhaps no surprise then that Millennials are also more accepting of their LGBTQ peers. GLAAD's *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey shows that Millennials (people ages 18-34) are much more likely to be Allies of the LGBTQ community, while older generations -- though still mostly comfortable with LGBTQ people -- include larger numbers of Detached Supporters:

1. Millennials (people ages 18-34) are most likely to be Allies (63%), with Detached Supporters (23%) and Resisters (14%) making up the remainder of the age group.
2. Although Millennials are the most likely to be Allies, the majority (53%) of Generation X (people ages 35-51) and the majority (51%) of Boomers (people ages 52-71) are also likely to be Allies.
3. Elders (people ages 72+) are most likely to be Detached Supporters (45%), with substantially fewer Allies (39%) than other generations -- but a similar number of Resisters to Boomers (16%). Elders' level of discomfort with LGBTQ people is wide-ranging in its disparity:

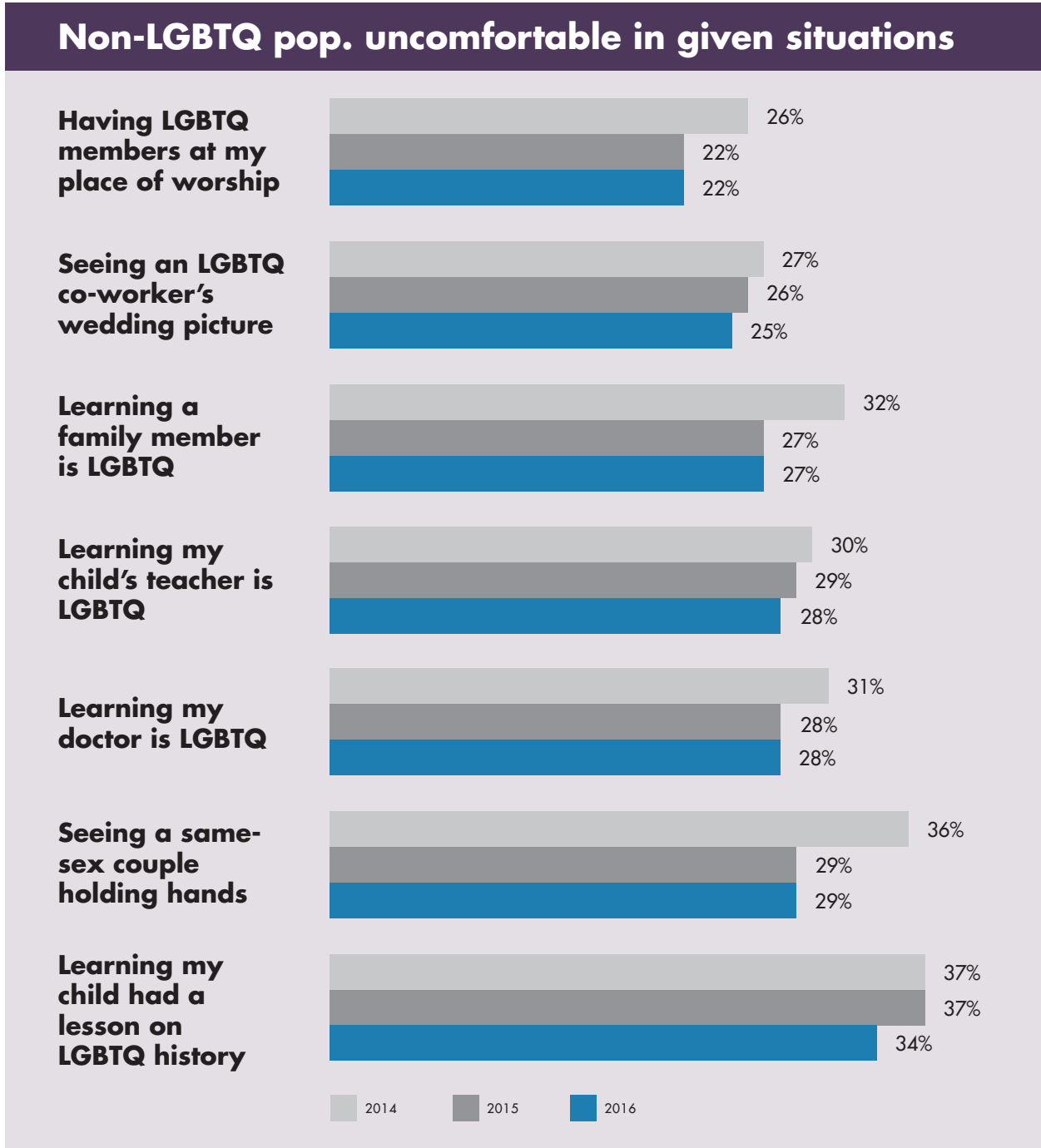
### Segmented non-LGBTQ population, by age



# 4

## Acceptance of LGBTQ people remains high, but progress has slowed since the historic SCOTUS ruling on marriage equality

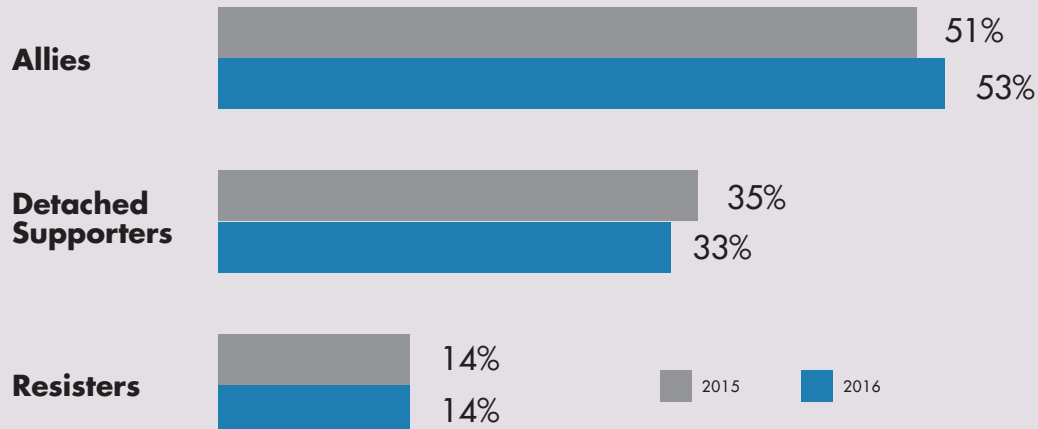
Perhaps the crescendo of progress for LGBTQ legal equality in the United States came in June 2015, when the nation's highest court ruled that every American has the constitutional right to marry the person they love. GLAAD's *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey shows that while acceptance of LGBTQ people remains high, progress has slowed since the landmark Supreme Court ruling. Whereas the number of Americans who reported feeling "very uncomfortable" or "somewhat uncomfortable" with LGBTQ people declined on average by 3% from 2014-2015, rates of discomfort largely went unchanged from 2015-2016. This is not wholly unexpected, however. The 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, as well as the preceding court hearings, attracted massive media coverage, the likes of which were largely unprecedented in their scope and reached millions upon millions of viewers with stories of loving same-sex couples and their families. This saturation of the media with stories of real LGBTQ people in 2015 could explain the significant attitudinal change for acceptance observed between 2014-2015, which also underlines the media's impact on hearts and minds. As the media's spotlight turned to the U.S. presidential election in 2016 and LGBTQ people became less visible in national news coverage, it is not surprising then that attitudinal changes slowed between 2015 and 2016. Overall, acceptance of the LGBTQ community remained high, with roughly two-thirds of Americans reporting that they are comfortable with their LGBTQ family members, coworkers, and neighbors.



## Change in segmentation, 2015-2016

- **Allies:** Non-LGBTQ respondents who were either “very” or “somewhat” comfortable in all situations.
- **Detached Supporters:** Non-LGBTQ respondents whose comfort level varied across situations.
- **Resisters:** Non-LGBTQ respondents who were either “very” or “somewhat” uncomfortable in all situations.

Professed comfort across the seven surveyed LGBTQ-themed situations (see page 6) was used to segment the non-LGBTQ population. Compared to 2015, we see no significant change in the proportion of each segment. About one-half of the non-LGBTQ population are Allies, whereas about 1 in 7 are Resisters.



## Summary

GLAAD's *Accelerating Acceptance 2017* survey shows acceptance of LGBTQ people has reached historic levels, particularly among Millennials. Perhaps because acceptance is more common than ever before, young people are now more likely to openly identify as LGBTQ while also rejecting traditional labels and seeing the world in terms that are beyond a binary. This “identity revolution” likely spurred by increased cultural understanding and acceptance also indicates that many young people today feel freer to be themselves and thus likely to lead happier lives.

Still, nearly a third of Americans remain uncomfortable with their LGBTQ family members, coworkers, and neighbors. And as the Trump Administration turns America in a new direction, one that leaves many people fearful that their rights and wellbeing may now be in danger, will cultural acceptance of LGBTQ people continue to rise and will young LGBTQ people in particular continue to feel safe to come out and simply be who they are?

Regardless of what measures the Trump Administration takes either to roll back or advance progress for equality, GLAAD will remain on the front lines in the fight for full acceptance – building on the organization's 30-year legacy of leveraging the power of the media to change hearts and minds until all LGBTQ people can live the life they love.

## Appendix: Definitions of Terms

- **Gay/Lesbian:** experiencing sexual attraction to the same gender
- **Bisexual:** experiencing sexual attraction to more than one gender
- **Pansexual:** experiencing sexual attraction to people of all gender identities
- **Queer:** experiencing sexual attraction in a way that does not fit into the previously mentioned, dominant norms
- **Asexual:** not experiencing sexual attraction
- **Cisgender:** strictly identifying with the sex you were assigned at birth
- **Transgender:** identifying with a gender that does not correspond to the sex you were assigned at birth
- **Bigender:** or identifying equally as both genders
- **Genderqueer:** identifying outside of, or beyond, the binary of female and male
- **Gender fluid:** identifying as male, female, and/or outside the binary at different times



GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

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