



Accelerating Acceptance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A Harris Poll survey of Americans'
acceptance of LGBT people





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methodology

In late 2014, GLAAD commissioned Harris Poll to measure attitudes toward LGBT Americans. Questions were included in online surveys conducted August 21-25, 2014 among 2,014 Americans—of whom 1,754 indicated they are straight, cisgender—and November 10-12, 2014 among 2,010 Americans—of whom 1,821 indicated they are straight, cisgender. Both surveys were nationally representative samples of U.S. adults. Results from straight, cisgender Americans are presented here. For a full methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Seth Adam, Director of Communications at (646) 871-8018 or seth@glaad.org.

executive summary

2015 is poised to be an historic year for the rights of LGBT Americans. With 37 states having legal marriage for same-sex couples, the Supreme Court may be on the verge of recognizing a constitutional right to marriage equality nationwide. But beneath this progress lies a layer of uneasiness and discomfort. While the public is increasingly embracing LGBT civil rights and equal protection under the law, many are still uncomfortable with having LGBT people in their families and the communities where they live. Closing the gap to full acceptance of LGBT people will not come from legislation or judicial decisions alone, but from a deeper understanding and empathy from Americans themselves.

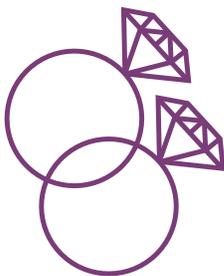
Non-LGBT Americans' views on LGBT issues fall across a broad spectrum but can be broken down into three groups: those who are accepting and supportive across the board, those who are hostile and uncomfortable on most issues, and those who fall in the middle – they are accepting on some topics while expressing reservations on others.

Broadening acceptance of LGBT Americans will require the help of *allies* – everyday non-LGBT Americans who feel strongly that their LGBT friends and family must be fully accepted members of society. These allies need to be empowered and activated to be advocates for the LGBT community – they are the ones that will help bridge the gap to full acceptance. Judicial decisions and legal protections for LGBT people foster progress, but ultimately changes of heart are equally as meaningful and long lasting.

1. Recognition that the battle is not over

A large majority of the non-LGBT public (80%) agrees that despite gains on marriage in most states, there is much more work to be done in order to change the hearts and minds of Americans on LGBT issues. This reflects a shared understanding that we still have further to go before LGBT Americans are truly accepted by their fellow citizens.

Recognition of further work to be done exists among non-LGBT Americans across all regions of the country (83% in the Northeast, 83% in the West, 78% in the South and 77% in the Midwest). Young people aged 18-34 are more likely to agree that the work is not done (86% agree), demonstrating an awareness of the challenges still facing the LGBT community, even among those who are most supportive.



2. Discomfort with weddings for same-sex couples

While a majority of non-LGBT people may support equal marriage protections for same-sex couples, there remain large numbers that still have a significant degree of discomfort surrounding actual weddings for same-sex couples. One-third (34%) say they would be uncomfortable attending the wedding of a same-sex couple, with 22% saying they would feel very uncomfortable.

While personal discomfort is one indication of lack of full acceptance, a substantially larger group (43%) say they would be uncomfortable bringing a child to the wedding of a same-sex couple. This indicates that for many of those “in the middle,” acceptance is tentative and conditional. A smaller minority (28%) would be very uncomfortable bringing a child to the wedding of a same-sex couple.

Discomfort with attending the wedding of a same-sex couple differs substantially by generation, with 41% of those over 65 being uncomfortable, while just over a quarter (27%) of those 18-34 reporting discomfort. Men are also significantly more likely (41%) to be uncomfortable than women (28%).

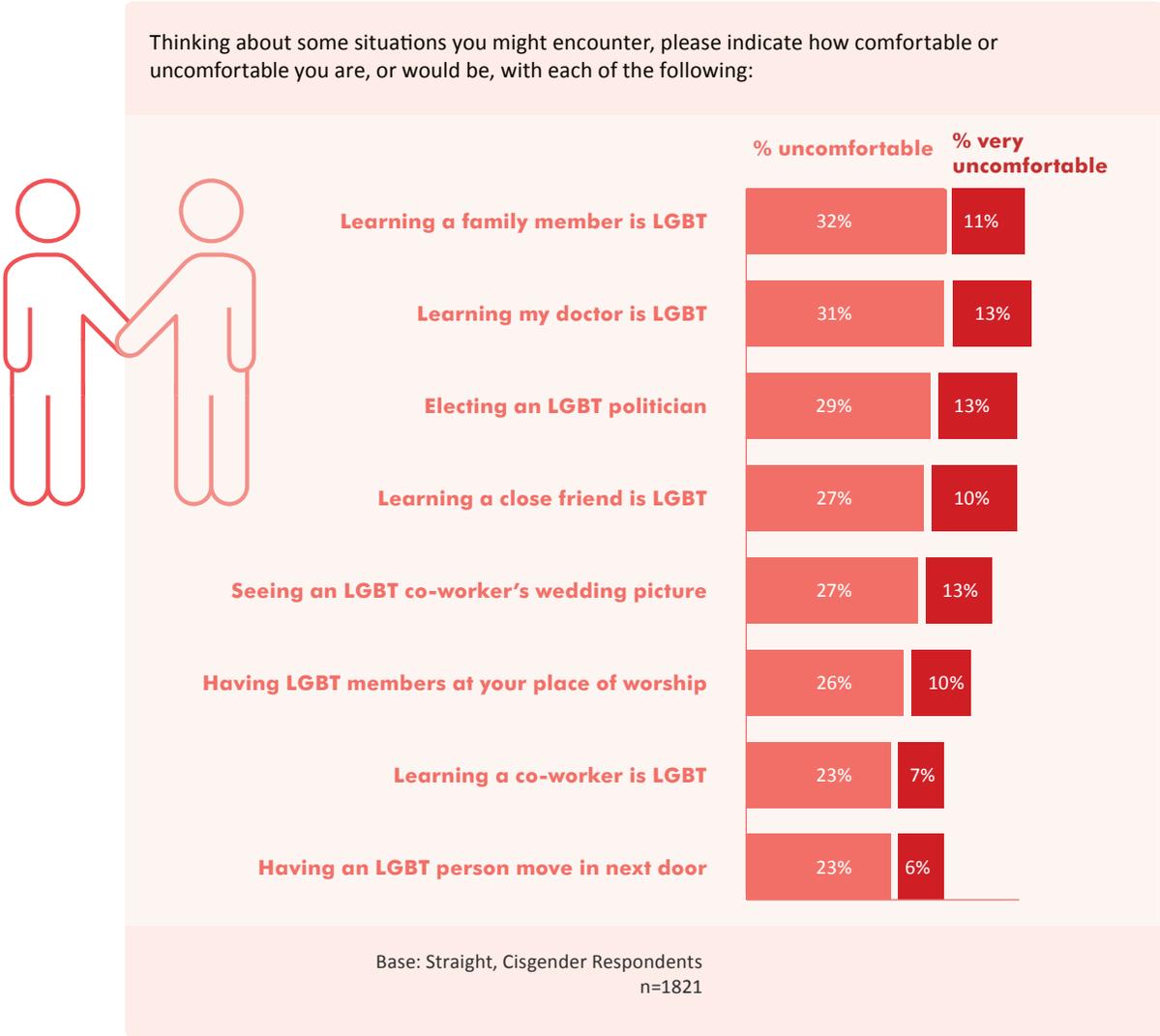
3. Discomfort with same-sex couples and the LGBT community in general

Beyond weddings for same-sex couples, the survey reveals that many are still uncomfortable simply seeing and interacting with same-sex couples. A third of non-LGBT Americans (36%) say that just seeing a same-sex couple holding hands makes them uncomfortable. This includes 13% who say it makes them very uncomfortable.

Further demonstrating the importance of cultivating more allies, those who know LGBT people display substantially lower levels of discomfort – just 30% are uncomfortable seeing a same-sex couple hold hands among those who have LGBT family members, while that number drops to 25% among those with an LGBT

co-worker and 17% among those with a close LGBT friend. On the flip side, almost half (47%) of those who don't know any LGBT people say seeing a same-sex couple holding hands makes them uncomfortable. Clearly, familiarity cultivates acceptance.

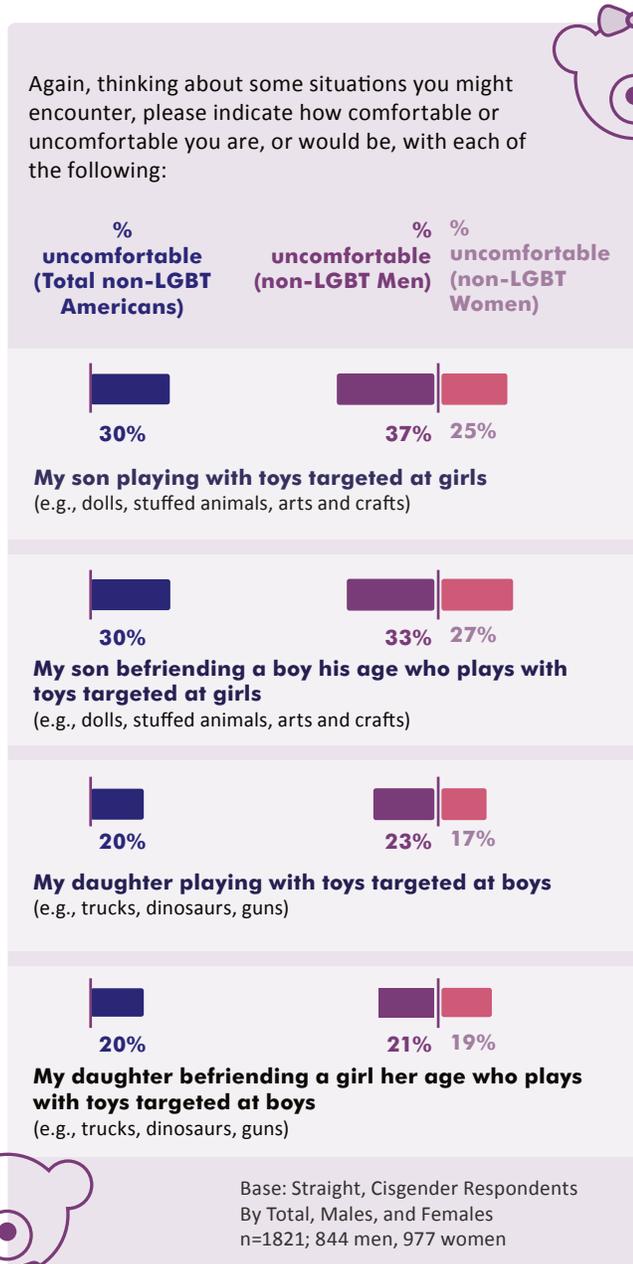
A range of common situations or issues also bring discomfort for as many as one-third of non-LGBT Americans that are still highly uncomfortable with LGBT people. These range from simple things like having an LGBT person move in next door to more personal situations such as learning that a family member is LGBT.



4. The transgender community faces an even greater challenge

Acceptance of the transgender community faces more resistance than does acceptance of the rest of the LGBT community. Most notably, a majority of Americans (59%) say they would be uncomfortable if they learned their child was dating a transgender person. More than a quarter (31%) say this would make them very uncomfortable.

Even something as casual as being on a sports team with a transgender person still makes large numbers of Americans uncomfortable. Roughly equal numbers report discomfort with being on the same team as a transgender woman (32%) and a transgender man (31%). These numbers are higher than the reports of discomfort with being on a sports team with a gay man (26%) or lesbian (20%).



5. Gender issues involving children

Beyond issues dealing directly with LGBT people, survey questions also reveal more work to be done on comfort levels regarding children behaving in gender non-conforming ways. The source of many people’s discomfort may not be a same-sex relationship in and of itself, but the non-adherence to gender stereotypes. When non-LGBT Americans were asked about their child playing with toys targeted at the opposite gender, or befriending other children that do, we see substantial discomfort.

We see that gender non-conforming boys are a greater source of discomfort, especially driven by discomfort among non-LGBT men. The discomfort around their own children defying gender roles is equally matched by discomfort with their children befriending others who fall outside of typical gender expectations.

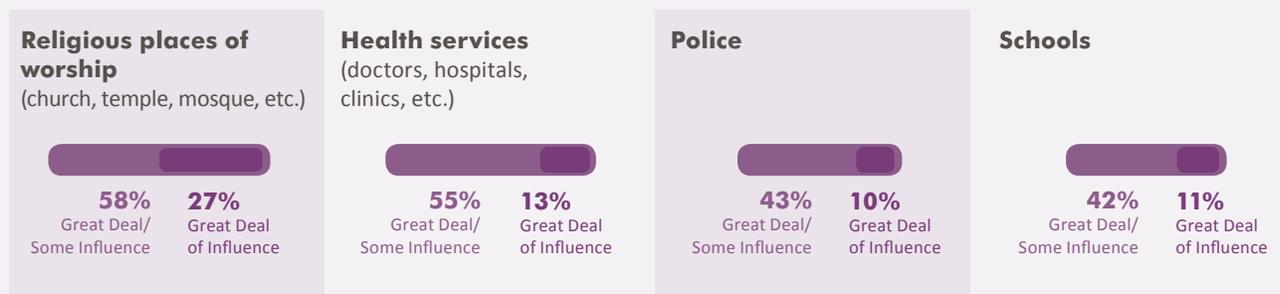
We also see a resistance to LGBT parents by other parents in the community. Roughly a third of non-LGBT parents say they would be uncomfortable with their child playing at the home of an LGBT parent – 40% for a transgender parent, 29% for a gay dad and 28% for a lesbian mom. For a truly accepting society, all parents should be supportive of both their own children and other families in their community.

6. Influence of institutions on opinions about LGBT topics

Many different institutions and groups play a role in forming people’s opinions. The beliefs and values that people hold are deep-seated, but many times can be influenced by those around them and the forces in their lives that are important to them. For much of non-LGBT America, religious institutions are among the strongest influencer of these values, standing far above the rest in the number who say they exert a “great deal” of influence on their beliefs and values. Secondary to religious institutions are other important players like the medical community, police, schools, and their neighbors.

The greatest challenge for advocates of acceptance for the LGBT community is that the most influential institution – religious places of worship – is also least often reported as accepting. This will continue to be a challenge for the community, even as progress on marriage equality is solidified. Other institutions, especially the health community, are viewed as accepting by a large majority of non-LGBT Americans.

Thinking about your local community, how much influence do each of the following individuals or institutions have on your beliefs and values?



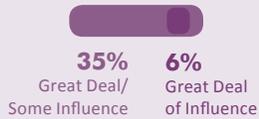
Thinking about your local community, on a scale of 1 to 7, with “1” being “completely rejecting” and “7” being “completely accepting,” please indicate how much each of these individuals or institutions are either accepting or rejecting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people:



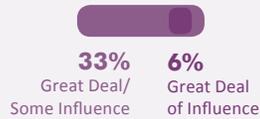


Base: Straight, Cisgender Respondents
n=1821

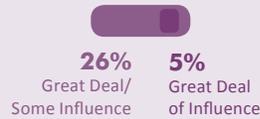
Local neighbors



Local government



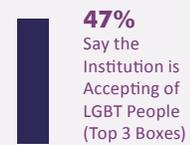
Community centers



Housing associations



Base: Straight, Cisgender Respondents
n=1821



Conclusion

Despite progress on the issue of marriage equality, much work remains to be done to ensure the safety and acceptance of LGBT Americans in their communities, workplaces, and families. These longer-term social and cultural attitudes will require persistent dialogue and education to change and convince those who still hold negative attitudes towards the LGBT community. This change will not solely come through legislative or judicial action, but also through the actions of LGBT people and allies who take an active role to build a more accepting society in their daily lives – in their schools, with their own children, with friends, and neighbors in the community.



about glaad

GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBT 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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