

Coming Out Survey

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Author Note

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Abstract

The default sexual orientation for humans is heterosexual; the default genders or cisgenders are male and female. According to the Williams Institute, only 3.8% of the population of the United States fall outside these categories.¹ However, according to a Gallup poll conducted in 2018, the number varies based on how “gay” is defined. If “gay” means “same-sex attraction, or behavior” the number is closer to 10% of the population. The process of verbally expressing same-sex sexual attraction and behavior or expressing that a person’s gender identity does not match that which was assigned at birth is called “coming out.” Because coming out is such an intimate process, people tend to come out to close friends and family members first before approaching people with whom they have frequent contact such as classmates and teachers, co-workers and bosses, and members of our faith community.

Keywords: coming out, gender identity, sexual orientation

Coming Out Survey

Human beings are social creatures. We want the love and acceptance of our family, friends, and peers; we fear their scorn and rejection. When people come out to themselves, they may feel fear, anxiety, and frustration. They feel the pain that comes from the belief that they are all alone; that no one will understand or accept them for who they are. They seek people whom they believe will be supportive and accepting of their sexual orientation or gender identity that is somehow different from societal norms.

Some people find that their families and close friends are very accepting. Others find themselves isolated, kicked out of their homes, and faced with difficult choices. Each person's coming out story is different, but they have common themes or experiences that most people within the LGBTQ+ community recognize. This survey is intended to identify the people to whom most LGBTQ+ people came out, whether family members approve, how difficult the coming out process is, and whether individuals are out at their school, work, and faith community. Furthermore, we seek to raise awareness about coming out, and to offer suggestions based on our evidence to people who seek to come out.

Methodology

The Pennsylvania Equality Project conducted an online survey of people aged 13 and above between October 1 and November 30, 2019. The survey consisted of a series of contact information and demographics questions regarding age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race. Survey respondents were asked to whom they had already come out, if anyone. Next, they were asked how comfortable they were coming out to a trusted adult. The next three questions asked whether the respondent's family was accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, whether coming out was easier or more difficult than expected, and whether the respondent wanted

assistance coming out. The final three questions asked about whether the respondent was out at school, within their faith community, and at work. One optional question at the conclusion of the survey directed respondents to tell their coming out story.

Limitations

1. The survey ran for over two months. Typically survey respondents have considerably less time to submit responses to surveys. According to SurveyMonkey, surveys with between 50 and 500 responses receive 80% of all responses within the first 7 days of the survey release.²
2. Not all survey respondents told their coming out story. Of the 159 responses to the survey, only 42 respondents told their coming out story.
3. The definition of “coming out” is slightly different depending on the respondent. For some people, coming out to close friends and parents, but no one else, counted as *being out*. A few people reported that they are out to close friends but did not want to come out to anyone else at this time. They too also viewed themselves as *being out*. A few people admitted to being out to close friends and siblings but defined themselves as *not* being out.
4. The Pennsylvania Equality Project spent \$50, or \$25 per month, from an anonymous donor to promote this survey via Facebook.
5. Some of the subcategory groups of respondents are too small to make statistically reliable determinations for those subcategories.

Confidence Interval and Margin of Error

Given the 159 respondents all of whom are from Pennsylvania, the confidence interval for this survey was 95% with a margin of error of +/- 4.66%

Demographics

As of November 30, 2019, a total of 160 people responded to the survey, however, one response was from someone who admitted to being heterosexual and cisgender, which was not a group included in the parameters of the survey. Responses came from 45 of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties. Responses were categorized based on age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Although the survey asked a question related to race, 140 of the 159 responses came from people whose race is white or Caucasian only. The total breakout for all races is shown here, however, the survey results are not parsed based on race (Tables 1A & 1B).

Table 1A: Responses by Race

African American	1
Asian-American	1
Latinx	5
Other	12
White/Caucasian	140
Total	159

Table 1B: Other Race Breakdown

Biracial	1
Middle East Mix	1
White and African American	1
White/African American/Native American	1
White and Ashkenazi Jewish	1
White and Native American	2
White, Black, Native American	1
White and Jewish	1
White and Hispanic	1
White and Latinx	2
Total	12

The largest group of respondents by age (76 people) were between the ages of 18 and 29. Of the 159 respondents, one-third were non-cisgender (53 people). Furthermore, most responses (113

people out of 159) came from people who identify as gay, bisexual, or pansexual. The survey respondents age, sexual orientation, and gender identity demographics are listed in greater detail in Appendix A.

Findings

The survey was divided into eight questions. This section considers the responses to each question in the order in which they were asked on the survey. The first question considered to whom the respondents have come out, apart from themselves. Among the choices were parents, grandparents, siblings, aunt or uncle, other relatives, close friends, acquaintances, co-workers, boss, or not out at all. Overall, 37 respondents claim not to be out at all; however, 150 out of 159 respondents are out to close friends. Thus, for some people, the concept of coming out excludes close confidants. We will compare our survey results to those from Gallup Polling and the Human Rights Campaign in the conclusion of this report.

Question 1: *Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?*

When the question is narrowly focused to consider whether the respondent has come out to parents, age is a determining factor. As a relative percent of their respective populations, approximately 68% of respondents have come out to their parents. That number increased to 72.4% between 30 and 39 years of age, and hits 100% between ages 50 and 59.

Respondents under 18 years old came out to friends in greater numbers than to their own parents. While 19 out of 28 (67.9%) respondents said that they have come out to parents, all the people in the same age group said that they have come out to their close friends. Entry 140 was one example who told us in his coming out story, “My sophomore year of high school I developed a crush on a senior. I got tired of hiding my feelings and decided to let others know

that I am gay. I came out to my close friends and over the course of several more months, I came out to my parents and people in school. The likeliest reason for waiting to come out to parents was the fear of being kicked out of home. Entry 97 reported that they came out at 19 after one year of college, at which time their parents kicked them out of the house. “From there, life was awful for several decades.” Most people between 13 and 29 cannot afford to lose the only home or family they have known just by coming out.

Fear of rejection and loss of home and family are among the explanations why respondents from all sexual orientation categories are out to their close friends in greater numbers than to their parents. Bisexuals and pansexuals are the least likely to come out to their parents when compared to people with different sexual orientations. Out of 40 bisexual respondents’ answers, only 21 came out to parents, but 35 are out to their close friends. Of the 30 pansexual respondents, only 19 came out to parents, but 28 came out to close friends. Table 2 shows the total number of people and the relative percent of their population that have come out to parents and to close friends.

Table 2: Coming out to Parents & Close Friends

	Parents		Close Friends	
	Total	Relative Percent	Total	Relative Percent
Asexual	7	70.0%	9	90.0%
Bisexual	21	52.5%	35	87.5%
Demisexual	4	66.7%	5	83.3%
Gay	37	86.0%	43	100.0%
Lesbian	16	80.0%	20	100.0%
Other	4	80.0%	5	100.0%
Pansexual	19	63.3%	28	93.3%
Queer	5	100.0%	5	100.0%

The anticipated or actual reaction we receive from parents is likely the primary reason why regardless of sexual orientation, more people come out to their closest friends before telling

parents. In one case, Entry 126 came out as both gender non-binary and pansexual to their parents. According to the response, “I came out to my mom and she sobbed and begged me not to marry someone of the same sex about a decade ago. She claims she doesn’t remember it. My father’s side of the family disowned me. I no longer have communication with any of them. ... My friends know – I just know that if people are upset about it, they don’t matter in my life. ... My family is my friends...”

Gender identity also appears to play a role in whether a person comes out to family and close friends. People who are cisgender male are likelier to be out to their parents than people who are cisgender female. According to the survey results, 40 out of 66 cis female respondents report coming out to parents, whereas 33 out of 40 cis male respondents report coming out to parents. The two groups are comparable in terms of coming out to close friends, with both groups reporting about 95% of respondents as being out to their close friends. People whose gender identity is transgender from female to male reported 11 out of 11 are out to their parents. As a relative percent, they are the likeliest group to be out to parents. The least likely group to come out to parents were people who identify as gender non-binary or genderfluid. Out of 29 respondents, only 20 report being out to parents, which is approximately 69.0% of the overall group.

Based on sexual orientation, coming out to siblings is likeliest to happen with people who identify as gay, and least likely to happen for people who are bisexual or pansexual. Based on gender identity, people who are transgender female to male are likeliest to come out to their siblings, while people who are genderfluid are least likely. Additional statistics on coming out to family members and friends can be found in Appendix B on pages 27 and 28.

Question 2: *If you are not out yet, do you feel comfortable coming out to a trusted adult?*

Based on the responses from question 1, only 37 people who responded to the survey said they are not out at all yet. However, for question 2, 53 people offered a response other than “I’m already out.” For the purposes of this question, we considered that some of the respondents to question 2 have just begun coming out, or that they are in the process of coming out and do feel comfortable telling a trusted adult about their sexual orientation, gender identity, or both. For this question, we shall be examining a subset of the 53 people who did not say they are already out.

In terms of age, the survey results show that the largest age group with people who have not come out is the 18 to 29-year group (24 out of 76 have not yet come out). Of that group, 12 want to come out, but not at this time. An additional three respondents do not want to come out. Only 9 of the 24 would be comfortable coming out to a trusted adult. Given the size of each of the other subcategories based on age, it is impossible to make statistically accurate claims about them. Thus, we shift our focus for this question to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Fewer bisexual people report coming out than not. Of the 40 bisexual respondents, 22 stated that they have not yet come out. Of those, half are comfortable telling a trusted adult, while the other half are not willing to come out at this time. Meanwhile, people who are gay or pansexual responded in greatest numbers as having already come out. Table 3 shows the breakdown by sexual orientation of the number of people and their position on coming out.

In terms of gender identity, cisgender females make up the largest group of respondents who are not yet out (31 out of 66 respondents), and of those 31, slightly more than half (16 out of 31) would be comfortable coming out to a trusted adult. Although agender and transgender female to male people subcategories are too small to be statistically significant (2 and 11 people respectively), all people in both groups that responded to our survey are already out.

Table 3: Coming Out to a Trusted Adult (by sexual orientation)

2. If you are not out yet, do you feel comfortable coming out to a trusted adult?					
	Yes, I am comfortable coming out to an adult I trust.	No, I want to, but not currently.	No, I don't want to come out right now.	I'm already out.	Total in group
Asexual	0	3	0	7	10
Bisexual	11	8	3	18	40
Demisexual	0	2	1	3	6
Gay	6	3	0	34	43
Lesbian	4	1	1	14	20
Other	0	1	0	4	5
Pansexual	4	3	1	22	30
Queer	1	0	0	4	5
	26	21	6	106	159

Meanwhile cisgender males are out in greater proportions than their cisgender female counterparts. Of the 40 cisgender male respondents, only one does not want to come out, two want to come out but not right away, and six are comfortable telling a trusted adult. (See Appendix C on page 29 for details on gender identity and coming out to a trusted adult.)

The key statistical takeaway from this question is the overall number. Only 17 people out of 159 who responded do not want to come out. The remaining 142 are either out or would be willing to tell a trusted adult. According to Gary Gates, a demographer with Gallup Research, “Millennials are responsible for nearly all of the increases observed in overall LGBT self-identification,” which is unsurprising because they are “the first generation in the U.S. to grow up in an environment where social acceptance of the LGBT community markedly increased.”³ We would add that people who identify as gay, queer, or pansexual are also likelier to come out than people of other sexual orientations.

Although more people are coming out at a younger age, and more people are identifying with sexual orientations and gender identities beyond the societal default, it is important to note here that coming out is not completely without risk. Entry 58, a pansexual cisgender female said that the only person to whom she came out was her boyfriend. While she is supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, she said, “My work, there are rules in place about the LGBTQ+ [community.] Most people in my department are very old fashioned and don’t agree with it and talk about people behind each other’s backs.

In one other case reported to us, life for an asexual transgender person was far more gruesome. She writes in part, “when I was 6 years old, my abusive father found my dolls and dresses and saw me in my blue dress and blonde wig. I was choked, punched repeatedly, stripped down to my underwear and socks in the freezing cold and snow at night.” She continues by saying that when she did confide in one boy about how she felt, she was given the nickname “Nicky the sissy,” and was “beaten to a pulp, punched, kicked, and even picked up and thrown.” We encourage anyone who is in a situation that is threatening to one’s safety and well-being to reach out for help from a neighbor, trusted friend, or even 9-1-1 if necessary.

Question 3: *From what I know, my family is accepting of the LGBTQ community.*

More than half of our survey respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement. Of the 159 participants in the survey, 93 respondents (58.5%) believe their family members are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. An additional 27 out of 159 (17.0%) were neutral toward the statement. While these numbers are optimistic overall for the community, we should note some of the subcategories are not as reassuring as these statistics would have us believe.

We considered geographical location to be one of differences between acceptance and disapproval. The survey had responses from 45 Pennsylvania counties; of these responses, 25

counties (12 rural, 13 urban or suburban) had responses in which a respondent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Of the 31 responses received from people in rural Pennsylvania counties, 16 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, or 51.6% of respondents from the rural counties. However, of the 86 urban county respondents, only 23 disagreed or strongly disagreed, which accounts for only 26.7% of total urban respondents.

Within the LGBTQ+ community is a saying, “It gets better.” With age, based on the respondents’ answers, we can conclude that this saying has additional evidence to support that assertion. When we considered age as a factor for coming out, people who are under 18 reported that only 50% think their family is accepting, but for people between 18 and 29, the number jumps to 55.6% and goes to 72.4% for people between 30 and 39 years old. Although the numbers drop back to 50.0% for adults 40 to 49, all our 50 to 59-year-old respondents believe that their families are accepting. We don’t make too much an issue of these two age groups because the total number of affirmative responses in both groups is relatively small (a total of 14 people 40 to 49 responded, while only 5 people aged 50 to 59 responded).

When we consider sexual orientation and gender identity, the statistics across all categories were approximately the same, indicating that neither sexual orientation nor gender identity are a factor in determining whether respondents believe their families are accepting or not. However, two sexual orientations are worthy of note: bisexual respondents (40 total) had 18 responses (45%) indicating they were either unsure whether their families are accepting of their identity, or they disagreed with the statement. Likewise, pansexual respondents accounted for 30 people, but of those 13 (43.4%) reported whether they were unsure or disagreed. (To see the accompanying tallies for this question, please see Appendix D on pages 22 and 23).

Question 4: *My coming out process was easier than I expected.*

Of the 159 responses we received, 122 were from people who are already out. Considering these 122 respondents, six out of ten admit that their coming out process was easier than expected; four out of ten disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. We wanted to know which age groups, sexual orientations, and gender identities faced the most or least difficulty in coming out. First, we examined the various age categories.

The age category with the most respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29. Of the 76 people who responded to the survey, 35.5% agree or strongly agree with this statement. An additional 28.9% disagree or strongly disagree. Another 35.5% of this age group remained neutral or have not yet come out. As the age of the respondents increased, they were likelier to be more comfortable coming out. The people who are aged 40 – 49 reported 50% agree or strongly agree that their coming out process was easier than expected. That number jumps to 80% for those aged between 50 and 59. However, the total number of respondents in the older age group is not statistically significant, as the population size is too small.

People who identify as queer, lesbian and gay were most likely to agree with this statement, although the queer population in our survey was too small to be statistically significant. Of those who identify as lesbian and gay, 10 out of 20 lesbians, and 19 out of 43 gay people respectively either agreed or strongly agreed that their coming out process was easier than they expected. People who identify as pansexual or bisexual were at ease coming out in smaller numbers. For people who identify as pansexual, 12 out of 30 or 40.0% of the population agreed or strongly agreed. People who identify as bisexual account for 15 out of 40 or 37.5% of their overall population agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Of greater concern among all sexual orientations were the number of people who reported that their coming out process was more difficult than anticipated. For lesbians, 6 out of 20, or 30.0% of respondents said their coming out process was not as easy as expected. For gay people, 16 out of 43, or 37.2% of respondents, found their coming out process not as easy as expected. All other sexual orientation groups that were statistically significant reported 3 out of 10 for their respective groups or fewer had a difficult time coming out.

For respondents coming out about their gender identity, people who are transitioning from female to male, 54.5% (6 out of 11) reported that their coming out experience was easier than anticipated. People who are non-binary or genderfluid were least likely among non-cisgender individuals to report that their coming out was easier than expected. Among those who are non-binary, 5 out of 21 claimed that their coming out process was easier, and only 3 out of 8 genderfluid respondents agreed. For further information, see Appendix E on page 31.

Question 5: *I would like help or support coming out.*

Coming out is a process that may span an individual's entire lifetime. Based on our findings to question 1, we realize that people are likelier to come out to their close friends before or at about the same time they come out to family. Almost half of all respondents (49.7%) were neutral on the idea of needing help or support to come out. However, only 14 out of 159 said they don't need the help or support. Overall, 41.5% (66 out of 159) respondents do want the help or support necessary to come out to friends, family, and other people. According to the US Census Bureau, Pennsylvania has a population of 12.8 million as of 2017.⁴ If as many as 5% of the population is a part of the LGBTQ+ community, it is quite reasonable to extrapolate that as many as 256,000 people would like help or support to come out. We examined the responses to this question based on age, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Our results indicate that the older one is, the less likely they want support or help to come out. Of the 28 respondents under age 18, 17 people (60.7% of all respondents in the category) wanted help or support coming out. That number drops to 32 out of 76 between the ages of 18 and 29 and falls to as few as 4 out of 14 for all people whose ages are between 40 and 49. The number of people who claim they do not want help or support overall was 14 out of 159. By age, only 1 out of 28 people under 18 years of age disagreed with the statement; additionally, only 7 out of 76 people aged 18 to 29 disagreed.

People who identify as gay were most likely to be indifferent as to whether they wanted help or support to come out. Of the 43 people who responded, 33 respondents claim they neither would like nor would not like help. People who are asexual and a sexual orientation other than those listed in the survey reported as many as 12 out of 15 would like help to come out (80% of both categories). Of the people who identify as lesbian, 40% would like help to come out. The largest relative percent of people who would like help or support to come out are those who identify as pansexual. A total of 19 out of 30, or 63.3% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Based on gender identity, people who identify as non-binary are those most likely to want help or support to come out. Of the 21 people in this category, 16 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. People who are transitioning from female to male accounted for 5 out of 11 people (45.5 % of the category) who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. For more details on this question, see Appendix F on page 32.

Question 6: *I am out at school.*

For this question, we begin by reporting that of the 159 survey respondents, only 66 report still attending school. Overall, 21 people claim to be out to teachers and classmates at their school. Only 9 reported not being out at all school, and an additional 36 people reported being out to some people but not everyone. Unlike the previous questions, we are primarily concerned with the results based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The tables for this question appear in Appendix G on page 33.

Overall, 12 out 15 bisexual people are out either to their teachers and classmates, or some combination thereof. Likewise, people who identify as gay are out at school in almost the same numbers (13 out of 16). People who are pansexual are least likely to be out to both teachers and classmates (10 out of 13 report only being out to some people but not everyone).

When we consider gender identity and sexual orientation simultaneously, cisgender females are least likely to be out to everyone at school. While 7 out of 30 respondents are out to everyone at school, 19 are only out to some, and an additional 4 people are not out at all at school. Cisgender males are likelier than any other category to be out at to both teachers and classmates (9 out of 15 respondents). When we consider only non-cisgender people, those who identify as non-binary are least likely to be out to both teachers and classmates (8 out of 11 respondents). The remaining groups based on gender identity are too small within the population to be considered statistically significant.

Question 7: *I am out to my religious or faith community.*

According to Gallup poll conducted in 2014, 62% of the LGBT population across the United States seldom or never attend religious services. Of the overall LGBT population nationwide, 47% are not religious at all.⁵ In Pennsylvania, 69.2% of all LGBTQ people do not

belong to a church or faith community. As the margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.66%, these results are comparable to the national average. Of the 159 respondents to our survey, only 49 report belonging to a church or faith community. Within that smaller population, 29 respondents are out to their faith community and the remaining 20 are not. We parsed responses based on age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and location in Pennsylvania. Regardless of how we divided the data, all the subcategories show at least half of the demographic population does not attend church on a regular basis, if at all.

The number of church attendees declines significantly for respondents who are over 18 years old. Although the under 18 group showed 50% lacking a faith community, respondents who are between 18 and 29 reported 80.3% not attending church. For older age categories, both those over 60 and those between 40 and 49 reported at least half not attending church. A review of age groups shows that for those in the LGBTQ community who do attend church, more people are out to their faith communities than not in every age group, except those between 18 and 29.

While the number of queer and demisexual people who responded to our survey is relatively small, none of the people in our population attend church or belong to a faith community. People who are pansexual are the next least likely group to attend church. Of the 30 pansexual respondents, only 6 attend church on a routine basis, and only half of them are out to their respective faith communities. Table 4 shows the results for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual categories. Additional information can be found in Appendix H at the end of this report.

Table 4: I am out to my religious or faith community. (by sexual orientation)

Sexual Orientation	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.	Totals
Gay	13	5	25	43
Lesbian	4	1	15	20
Bisexual	6	7	27	40

People who reported that they are cisgender male are the likeliest group to be out at their church or faith community. Of the 40 cisgender males, 16 have a faith community, and 12 of them are out at their respective churches. Of the 66 cisgender females who responded, 12 out of 66 are out to their religious community. However, the non-cisgender community is far likelier not to have a church or faith community at all. People who are transgender reported more than 80% overall do not have a church, and of those who do belong to a church, only 2 are out. People who are genderfluid or non-binary reported 62.5% and 71.4% respectively as not having a faith community. We cannot make any assertions about the asexual respondents, however, neither of the two respondents belong to a faith community.

People who live in rural counties across Pennsylvania are only slightly less likely to belong to a faith community. We received survey responses from 45 of the 67 counties in the Commonwealth. Overall, we have responses from 58 people in 27 rural counties, and 101 responses from people in 18 urban counties. Table 5 shows the overall differences between the urban and rural respondents. Tallies for each individual county are shown in Appendix I at the end of this report.

Table 5: I am out to my religious or faith community (by county)

County Type	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.	Totals
Rural	8	9	41	58
Urban	21	11	69	101
Overall	29	20	110	159

Question 8: *I am out at my place of employment.*

Although 159 people participated in our survey, 50 reported that this statement does not apply to them. We can presume these people are not working for a variety of reasons including unemployment, being too young to work, retirement, disability, or other reasons. Thus, our survey results focus only the remaining 109 responses. According to an HRC study of coming out in the workplace in the United States, in 2018, 46% of all those surveyed said they are not out at work.⁶ Our survey shows 46% of the LGBTQ+ population is out at work in Pennsylvania to both their co-workers and their boss or human resources personnel. Overall, according to our survey, nearly seven out of ten people said they are out to co-workers, their boss, or both. Only 31.2% of respondents said they are still closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Respondents who are out only to some people at work report that they are seven times likelier to be out to co-workers more than their boss or human resources. While three people said they were out to their boss but not their co-workers, 22 reported the opposite to be true. For this statement, we again consider age, sexual orientation, and gender identity; however, unlike the previous questions, we consider the degree to which respondents are out to boss, co-workers, or both.

People between the ages of 30 and 39 (14 out of 24) were the likeliest group to be out at work both to their bosses and their co-workers. However, people between the ages of 40 and 49 are the least likely to be out (3 out of 10). Within the 40 to 49 age group, more people were not out at all at work (7 out of 10) than any of the other groups. What does seem promising is that people who are between the ages of 18 and 29 are out at work in numbers almost as great as the age 30 to 39 group (43 out of 60).

Respondents who identify as gay are the likeliest group based on sexual orientation to be out at work to their bosses, co-workers, or both (24 out of 30). Those who identify as lesbian, queer, and demisexual are out at work almost to the same degree. Of all the listed sexual orientations, those who identify as pansexual are most likely to remain closeted at work (9 out of 21).

Overall, a total of 35 people who are not cisgender reported that this question applies to them. Within this category, 23 out of 35 people report being out at work in some fashion. Individuals who are non-binary are the least likely people to be out to everyone at work (6 out of 16).^a People who are transitioning from female to male are the most likely to be out at work, with 5 out of 6 claiming to be out to both their boss and co-workers. For further details about this statement, see the tables in Appendix J at the end of the report.

Anecdotal Evidence

The Human Rights Campaign reports in a survey of 10,000 people that 9 out of 10 LGBTQ youth are out to their close friends and that 64% of those surveyed are out to their classmates. Our results from a smaller population of LGBTQ youth were within the margin of error. Regardless of age, gender identity, or sexual orientation, LGBTQ people are likelier going to confide their orientation or identity to their close friends before their parents, classmates, co-workers, or faith community. Most people in the LGBTQ community either accept or are unsure that their families are accepting of other people who are not cisgender or heterosexual.

Too many people believe that their coming out process was more difficult than they expect. Whether fear of losing home, job, or friends is the reason, 45 out of 159 people in the LGBTQ community believe their coming out process did not go according to plan. In some cases, these same individuals were forced to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity

either through coercion or blackmail. According to one of our respondents whom we shall call “Entry 75” a cisgender female who is asexual, they said, “A person I knew wasn’t my true friend found out and tried outing me to other friends and family when I wasn’t ready. She kept making fun of me and trying [*sic*] to get people to believe I was less than dirty, ‘Did you hear she’s bi?’...It turned the town against me.”

Although our families may be initially uncomfortable with our sexual orientation or gender identity, to the point of not wanting to discuss it, some families eventually learn to tolerate and even accept their LGBTQ family members. Entry 83 said, “My parents weren’t very accepting when I came out to them 30 years ago. My dad told me I was going to hell, and my mom told me I was just going through a phase. ... Once I started dating the girl I ended up marrying, they learned to accept and even love her, and they started accepting me.”

The fear of retribution as a result of revealing sexual orientation and gender identity leads to depression, anxiety, and self-doubt, but it also has the effect of hiding one’s true self. For example, Entry 58 a cisgender pansexual female reports “The only person I came out to was my boyfriend who was completely understanding and accepting. ... My work, though there are rules in place about the LGBT+ (community), most people in my department are very old fashioned and don’t agree with it and talk about people behind each other’s backs.” Additional anecdotal evidence can be found in a separate report available on our website.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The process of coming out begins when an individual openly admits their sexual orientation or gender identity without hesitation to themselves. We encourage this process to begin as soon as the individual is aware of these characteristics. Before deciding to come out, first it is recommended that an individual have a plan about coming out. One should be prepared

to live apart from family for an extended time, as some families are intolerant of other people's sexual orientation and gender identity variations. A good plan includes keeping enough money on hand to be able to purchase essential items such as food, water, and toiletry items. We recommend that individuals who are coming out have a safe place to discuss their sexual orientation and gender identity, and that resources about the LGBTQ community be readily available.

Coming out to co-workers and supervisors should not be a matter that results in termination. Presently pending before the United States Supreme Court are three cases that could remove any shred of protection in the workplace for LGBTQ+ employees. As a result, we call on the Pennsylvania legislature to pass the Pennsylvania Fairness Act to prevent discrimination in the workforce. We further recommend that the United States Congress pass the Equality Act which would ban discrimination federally.

The Pennsylvania Equality Project supports the First Amendment of the United States Constitution's freedom of religion clause. We firmly believe that churches and faith communities should be free to determine the practices and dogma followed within their faith communities. However, that does not mean that LGBTQ+ people should feel compelled to follow those practices and dogmatic teachings. We recommend to the LGBTQ+ community who want to attend services within a faith community to find one that is more than simply LGBTQ+ tolerant or welcoming. Rather, we recommend finding an LGBTQ+ affirming church whose dogma stresses that not only are all people welcome in the faith community, but that their sexual orientation and gender identity do not make them less than acceptable within the eyes of the church. This recommendation comes with the understanding that we do not expect people to leave the churches or faith communities in which they have spent most of their lives. Instead, it

is a challenge to the LGBTQ+ community to actively engage with clergy to determine whether their sexual orientation or gender identity are at issue with the teachings of their church.

We recommend the Pennsylvania Department of Education develop further guidelines to protect LGBTQ+ students from bullying and harassment not only from their fellow students, but also from their teachers. We further recommend that teacher unions implement policies to counsel their co-workers who bully other teachers and students. According to the HRC previously referenced, 92% of all LGBTQ+ youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBTQ+, and the top sources of those messages are their schools, the Internet, and their peers. These negative messages have long-term mental health consequences that can lead to trauma including death by suicide. Thus, we recommend further that the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide better training on LGBTQ+ issues for guidance counselors and other professional support personnel within schools.

For the LGBTQ+ community, we recommend having Community Drop-In Centers and other resource facilities across Pennsylvania. Rural communities are the least likely to be served by these centers as most of them are located within urban centers. Additional centers should provide pamphlets, brochures, support groups and online information for those in need. These centers need to be accommodating for all members of the LGBTQ+ community and our allies.

Coming out is a personal journey that lasts an entire lifetime. To that end, Pennsylvania Equality Project remains committed to creating online and in-person safe space opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community. We will resume holding local social gatherings across Pennsylvania and encourage individuals to attend Pride events. Together, we can make the coming out process a little easier for all.

References

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5. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/174788/lgbt-population-significantly-less-religious.aspx>, Search February 16, 2020
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Footnotes

a. While people who are agender have a higher percentage of people who are not out at work, only two people in the category reported that this question applied to them. Thus, their information was excluded from consideration when determining which group is least likely to be out at work.

Appendix A

Sexual Orientation by Age								
	Asexual	Bisexual	Demisexual	Gay	Lesbian	Other	Pansexual	Queer
Under 18	1	7	1	5	3	2	8	1
18 - 29	9	21	4	18	8	3	11	2
30 - 39	0	7	0	9	4	0	8	1
40 - 49	0	3	0	5	2	0	3	1
50 - 59	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0
Over 60	0	2	0	3	1	0	0	0
None (X)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	10	40	6	43	20	5	30	5

Gender Identity by Age								
	Agender	Cis Female	Cis Male	Genderfluid	Non-Binary	Other	F to M	M to F
Under 18	0	19	4	1	2	0	2	0
18 - 29	1	22	18	4	17	3	7	4
30 - 39	1	14	8	1	2	1	2	0
40 - 49	0	7	5	1	0	0	0	1
50 - 59	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	0
Over 60	0	2	2	1	0	1	0	0
None (X)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2	66	40	8	21	6	11	5

Sexual Orientation by Gender Identity								
	Asexual	Bisexual	Demisexual	Gay	Lesbian	Other	Pansexual	Queer
Agender	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cis Female	1	25	2	5	17	1	12	3
Cis Male	1	7	1	31	0	0	0	0
Genderfluid	1	3	0	0	1	1	2	0
Non-binary	3	1	1	1	0	2	11	2
Other	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	0
Trans (FtoM)	3	2	1	1	0	1	3	0
Trans (MtoF)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Total	10	40	6	43	20	5	30	5

These population statistics reflect the demographics of the people responding to this survey.

Appendix B

Question 1: Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?

Based on Age

1. Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?					
	Parents	Grandparents	Siblings	Aunt/Uncle	Other Family
Under 18	19	10	13	7	8
18 - 29	52	20	50	29	29
30 - 39	21	10	19	19	20
40 - 49	10	6	8	8	11
50 - 59	5	1	5	3	4
Over 60	5	0	5	2	3
None (X)	1	1	1	1	1
	113	48	101	69	76

	Close Friends	Acquaintances	Co-workers	Boss	Not out
Under 18	28	13	8	3	8
18 - 29	70	35	34	23	17
30 - 39	27	20	20	17	7
40 - 49	13	8	6	6	4
50 - 59	5	3	4	3	0
Over 60	6	5	5	4	1
None (X)	1	1	1	1	0
	150	85	78	57	37

Based on Sexual Orientation

1. Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?					
	Parents	Grandparents	Siblings	Aunt/Uncle	Other Family
Asexual	7	2	7	2	0
Bisexual	21	10	15	10	12
Demisexual	4	1	4	1	2
Gay	37	17	37	25	26
Lesbian	16	8	15	14	14
Other	4	0	3	1	2
Pansexual	19	8	16	14	17
Queer	5	2	4	2	3
	113	48	101	69	76

Appendix B *continued*

Based on Sexual Orientation (continued)

1. Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?					
	Close Friends	Acquaintances	Co-workers	Boss	Not out
Asexual	9	4	3	2	3
Bisexual	35	13	15	8	16
Demisexual	5	2	3	1	3
Gay	43	31	29	27	4
Lesbian	20	13	11	8	3
Other	5	3	2	2	1
Pansexual	28	16	12	7	6
Queer	5	3	3	2	1
	150	85	78	57	37

Based on Gender Identity

1. Other than yourself, have you come out to anyone?					
	Parents	Grandparents	Siblings	Aunt/Uncle	Other Family
Agender	2	0	1	1	1
Cis Female	40	19	35	24	30
Cis Male	33	16	30	20	21
Genderfluid	5	3	3	4	3
Non-binary	15	4	14	7	8
Other	3	1	4	3	3
Trans (FtoM)	11	3	10	5	7
Trans (MtoF)	4	2	4	5	3
	113	48	101	69	76

	Close Friends	Acquaintances	Co-workers	Boss	Not out
Agender	2	1	1	1	0
Cis Female	63	29	29	16	21
Cis Male	38	26	23	21	5
Genderfluid	7	3	3	2	3
Non-binary	19	14	8	5	6
Other	6	4	4	4	1
Trans (FtoM)	10	6	6	5	0
Trans (MtoF)	5	2	4	3	1
	150	85	78	57	37

Appendix C

Question 2: If you are not out yet, do you feel comfortable coming out to a trusted adult?

Age	Yes, I am comfortable coming out to an adult I trust.	No, I want to, but not currently.	No, I don't want to come out right now.	I'm already out.	Total
Under 18	1	5	2	20	28
18 - 29	9	12	3	52	76
30 - 39	10	2	0	17	29
40 - 49	4	1	1	8	14
50 - 59	0	0	0	5	5
Over 60	1	1	0	4	6
None (X)	1	0	0	0	1
	26	21	6	106	159

Sexual Orientation	Yes, I am comfortable coming out to an adult I trust.	No, I want to, but not currently.	No, I don't want to come out right now.	I'm already out.	Total
Asexual	0	3	0	7	10
Bisexual	11	8	3	18	40
Demisexual	0	2	1	3	6
Gay	6	3	0	34	43
Lesbian	4	1	1	14	20
Other	0	1	0	4	5
Pansexual	4	3	1	22	30
Queer	1	0	0	4	5
	26	21	6	106	159

Gender Identity	Yes, I am comfortable coming out to an adult I trust.	No, I want to, but not currently.	No, I don't want to come out right now.	I'm already out.	Total
Agender	0	0	0	2	2
Cis Female	16	12	3	35	66
Cis Male	6	2	1	31	40
Genderfluid	0	2	1	5	8
Non-binary	3	5	0	13	21
Other	0	0	1	5	6
Trans (FtoM)	0	0	0	11	11
Trans (MtoF)	1	0	0	4	5
	26	21	6	106	159

Appendix D

Question 3: From what I know, my family is accepting of the LGBTQ community?

Age	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Under 18	4	10	7	3	4	28
18 - 29	10	32	12	16	6	76
30 - 39	6	15	3	4	1	29
40 - 49	2	5	3	2	2	14
50 - 59	3	2	0	0	0	5
Over 60	2	2	1	1	0	6
None (X)	0	0	1	0	0	1
	27	66	27	26	13	159

Sexual Orientation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Asexual	0	5	1	3	1	10
Bisexual	6	16	6	5	7	40
Demisexual	0	3	2	1	0	6
Gay	12	17	6	6	2	43
Lesbian	3	9	5	3	0	20
Other	1	1	0	2	1	5
Pansexual	4	13	5	6	2	30
Queer	1	2	2	0	0	5
	27	66	27	26	13	159

Gender Identity	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Agender	0	1	0	1	0	2
Cis Female	12	25	15	8	6	66
Cis Male	9	15	6	8	2	40
Genderfluid	0	4	1	1	2	8
Non-binary	3	9	2	6	1	21
Other	1	3	2	0	0	6
Trans (FtoM)	2	6	1	2	0	11
Trans (MtoF)	0	3	0	0	2	5
	27	66	27	26	13	159

Appendix E

Question 4: My coming out process was easier than I expected.

Age	SA	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	SD	Total
Under 18	6	5	9	7	1	28
18 - 29	14	13	27	21	1	76
30 - 39	4	9	9	3	4	29
40 - 49	1	6	2	2	3	14
50 - 59	3	1	0	0	1	5
Over 60	0	3	1	1	1	6
None (X)	0	1	0	0	0	1
	28	38	48	34	11	159

Sexual Orientation	SA	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	SD	Total
Asexual	1	2	4	3	0	10
Bisexual	4	11	17	7	1	40
Demisexual	0	2	3	1	0	6
Gay	9	10	8	8	8	43
Lesbian	5	5	4	5	1	20
Other	1	1	1	1	1	5
Pansexual	7	5	10	8	0	30
Queer	1	2	1	1	0	5
	28	38	48	34	11	159

Gender Identity	SA	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	SD	Total
Agender	0	0	2	0	0	2
Cis Female	12	19	22	12	1	66
Cis Male	9	9	9	6	7	40
Genderfluid	2	1	2	2	1	8
Non-binary	0	5	8	7	1	21
Other	0	1	3	1	1	6
Trans (FtoM)	5	1	1	4	0	11
Trans (MtoF)	0	2	1	2	0	5
	28	38	48	34	11	

Appendix F

Question 5: I would like help or support coming out.

Age	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Under 18	12	5	10	1	0	28
18 - 29	17	15	37	7	0	76
30 - 39	5	5	15	2	2	29
40 - 49	3	1	8	2	0	14
50 - 59	0	0	5	0	0	5
Over 60	2	0	4	0	0	6
None (X)	1	0	0	0	0	1
	40	26	79	12	2	159

Sexual Orientation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Asexual	6	2	1	1	0	10
Bisexual	4	10	19	6	1	40
Demisexual	2	1	3	0	0	6
Gay	6	2	33	2	0	43
Lesbian	7	1	10	1	1	20
Other	2	2	1	0	0	5
Pansexual	11	8	9	2	0	30
Queer	2	0	3	0	0	5
	40	26	79	12	2	159

Gender Identity	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Agender	0	2	0	0	0	2
Cis Female	18	12	28	7	1	66
Cis Male	4	2	30	3	1	40
Genderfluid	3	1	3	1	0	8
Non-binary	9	7	4	1	0	21
Other	2	0	4	0	0	6
Trans (FtoM)	3	2	6	0	0	11
Trans (MtoF)	1	0	4	0	0	5
	40	26	79	12	2	159

Appendix G

Question 6: I am out at school.

Age	Yes, I am out to my teachers and classmates.	I am out to some people, but not everyone.	No, I am not out at all at school.	I no longer attend school.	Total
Under 18	7	15	4	2	28
18 - 29	10	19	4	43	76
30 - 39	1	2	0	26	29
40 - 49	2	0	1	11	14
50 - 59	0	0	0	5	5
Over 60	0	0	0	6	6
None (X)	1	0	0	0	1
	21	36	9	93	159

Sexual Orientation	Yes, I am out to my teachers and classmates.	I am out to some people, but not everyone.	No, I am not out at all at school.	I no longer attend school.	Total
Asexual	1	4	1	4	10
Bisexual	3	9	3	25	40
Demisexual	0	1	0	5	6
Gay	10	3	3	27	43
Lesbian	4	4	0	12	20
Other	0	2	1	2	5
Pansexual	2	10	1	17	30
Queer	1	3	0	1	5
	21	36	9	93	159

Gender Identity	Yes, I am out to my teachers and classmates.	I am out to some people, but not everyone.	No, I am not out at all at school.	I no longer attend school.	Total
Agender	0	0	0	2	2
Cis Female	7	19	4	36	66
Cis Male	9	4	2	25	40
Genderfluid	0	2	0	6	8
Non-binary	2	8	1	10	21
Other	1	0	1	4	6
Trans (FtoM)	2	3	1	5	11
Trans (MtoF)	0	0	0	5	5
	21	36	9	93	159

Appendix H

Question 7: I am out to my religious or faith community.

Age	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.	Totals
Under 18	8	6	14	28
18 - 29	6	9	61	76
30 - 39	5	2	22	29
40 - 49	5	2	7	14
50 - 59	1	1	3	5
Over 60	3	0	3	6
None (X)	1	0	0	1
	29	20	110	159

Sexual Orientation	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.	Totals
Asexual	2	3	5	10
Bisexual	6	7	27	40
Demisexual	0	0	6	6
Gay	13	5	25	43
Lesbian	4	1	15	20
Other	1	1	3	5
Pansexual	3	3	24	30
Queer	0	0	5	5
	29	20	110	159

Gender Identity	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.	Totals
Agender	0	0	2	2
Cis Female	12	8	46	66
Cis Male	12	4	24	40
Genderfluid	1	2	5	8
Non-binary	2	4	15	21
Other	0	1	5	6
Trans (FtoM)	2	0	9	11
Trans (MtoF)	0	1	4	5
	29	20	110	159

Appendix I

Question 7: I am out to my religious or faith community. (By location)

County	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.		Belongs	Doesn't Belong
Adams	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Armstrong	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Blair	1	0	1		50.0%	50.0%
Cambria	0	2	3		40.0%	60.0%
Clearfield	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Clinton	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Columbia	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Crawford	1	0	2		33.3%	66.7%
Fayette	1	1	2		50.0%	50.0%
Franklin	1	1	2		50.0%	50.0%
Greene	0	0	2		0.0%	100.0%
Jefferson	0	1	0		100.0%	0.0%
Juniata	0	1	1		50.0%	50.0%
Lawrence	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Lycoming	0	0	3		0.0%	100.0%
McKean	0	1	2		33.3%	66.7%
Mercer	0	0	2		0.0%	100.0%
Northumberland	0	0	3		0.0%	100.0%
Perry	0	0	2		0.0%	100.0%
Pike	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Schuylkill	0	0	3		0.0%	100.0%
Somerset	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Susquehanna	1	0	0		100.0%	0.0%
Union	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Venango	1	0	1		50.0%	50.0%
Washington	1	0	3		25.0%	75.0%
Wayne	1	2	0		100.0%	0.0%
Totals	8	9	41		29.3%	70.7%

Question 7: I am out to my religious or faith community. (By location) *continued*

County	Yes, I am out to my faith community.	No, I am not out to my faith community.	I do not belong to a faith community.		Belongs	Doesn't Belong
Allegheny	5	0	11		31.3%	68.8%
Berks	2	0	5		28.6%	71.4%
Bucks	1	0	2		33.3%	66.7%
Chester	1	0	1		50.0%	50.0%
Cumberland	1	1	5		28.6%	71.4%
Dauphin	1	1	3		40.0%	60.0%
Delaware	1	0	2		33.3%	66.7%
Erie	4	1	8		38.5%	61.5%
Lackawanna	0	0	2		0.0%	100.0%
Lancaster	1	2	4		42.9%	57.1%
Lebanon	0	1	3		25.0%	75.0%
Lehigh	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Luzerne	1	0	5		16.7%	83.3%
Montgomery	1	3	5		44.4%	55.6%
Northampton	0	1	1		50.0%	50.0%
Philadelphia	0	0	1		0.0%	100.0%
Westmoreland	1	1	6		25.0%	75.0%
York	1	0	4		20.0%	80.0%
Totals	21	11	69		31.7%	68.3%

Question 8: I am out at my place of employment.

Age	Yes, I am out at my place of employment.	Yes, I am out to my boss of HR, but not to my co-workers.	Yes, I am out to at least one of my co-workers, but not my boss or HR.	No, I am not out at work.	Totals
Under 18	2	0	3	4	9
18 - 29	27	2	14	17	60
30 - 39	14	1	4	5	24
40 - 49	3	0	0	7	10
50 - 59	1	0	1	0	2
Over 60	2	0	0	1	3
None (X)	1	0	0	0	1
	50	3	22	34	109

Sexual Identity	Yes, I am out at my place of employment.	Yes, I am out to my boss of HR, but not to my co-workers.	Yes, I am out to at least one of my co-workers, but not my boss or HR.	No, I am not out at work.	Totals
Asexual	2	1	2	2	7
Bisexual	14	1	5	11	31
Demisexual	1	0	2	1	4
Gay	19	1	4	6	30
Lesbian	6	0	1	3	10
Other	1	0	0	1	2
Pansexual	5	0	7	9	21
Queer	2	0	1	1	4
	50	3	22	34	109

Gender Identity	Yes, I am out at my place of employment.	Yes, I am out to my boss of HR, but not to my co-workers.	Yes, I am out to at least one of my co-workers, but not my boss or HR.	No, I am not out at work.	Totals
Agender	1	0	0	1	2
Cis Female	20	1	7	16	44
Cis Male	15	1	8	6	30
Genderfluid	1	1	0	1	3
Non-binary	3	0	7	6	16
Other	3	0	0	1	4
Trans (FtoM)	5	0	0	1	6
Trans (MtoF)	2	0	0	2	4
	50	3	22	34	109