

Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations

DEMOGRAPHY

There are more than 11 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the United States. Most surveys and other data collection instruments, however, lack measures to capture sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status, making it challenging to accurately determine the size and other characteristics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other sexual and gender diverse (LGBTQI+) populations. This lack of inclusive data collection also hinders efforts to track and address disparities affecting LGBTQI+ populations in health, employment, education, and other areas of everyday life.

To address these gaps, in 2020 the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened an expert committee to explore what is currently known about sexual and gender diverse populations. The resulting report, *Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations*, highlights the need for attention to the social and structural inequities that drive disparities affecting sexual and gender diverse populations and argues for new research on the full range of sexual and gender diversity, especially among LGBTQI+ people at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities, such as Black, Indigenous, and other LGBTQI+ people of color. This brief summarizes available information about the changing demography of sexual and gender diverse populations, as well as the role of evolving public attitudes in creating broader acceptance for LGBTQI+ people. These demographic trends challenge researchers and policy makers to collect more and better data and to ensure that research questions, media discussions, and policy proposals reflect the most pressing needs of LGBTQI+ populations. Citations and further information can be found in Chapter 3 of the report.

PROPORTION OF U.S. ADULTS IDENTIFYING AS LGBT

4.5%	5.6%
in 2017	in 2021

Sexual and Gender Diverse Populations: By the Numbers

Available data show substantial increases in LGBT identification over the past decade—a 2021 Gallup report found that 5.6 percent of U.S. adults identify as LGBT, up from 4.5 percent in 2017. An estimated 1.4 million people (0.6% of the U.S. population) identified as transgender in a 2016 analysis, and approximately 1.7 percent of people are born with an intersex trait. The demographics of sexual and gender diverse populations are dynamic and rapidly evolving: These communities are becoming younger and more racially and ethnically diverse, and they include growing proportions of women, nonbinary people, and people who identify as bisexual. Increasing numbers of people, particularly women, also report same-sex sexual attraction or behavior. Data remain scarce on many characteristics of LGBTQI+ populations, however, particularly about transgender and intersex people and LGBTQI+ people of color.

GEOGRAPHY

LGBTQI+ people live everywhere across the United States, including in suburban and rural areas. Greater numbers of people identify as LGBT in the Northeast and along the West Coast, regions that tend to have higher levels of social acceptance and legal protections for LGBTQI+ people. This underscores the degree to which concerns about safety and privacy among LGBTQI+ people in less-accepting environments can affect their willingness to share information about their sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status, making the documented size of sexual and gender diverse populations in these areas a likely undercount.

GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Women—particularly bisexual women—comprise much of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population: In the 2018 General Social Survey, 66 percent of LGB respondents were women, and bisexual women made up 46 percent of the entire LGB population. Women also represent a majority of same-sex couples; over half of cohabitating same-sex couples are female. In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), a nationwide sample of 27,000 transgender and nonbinary adults, 57 percent of respondents said they were assigned female at birth; 29 percent of respondents identified as transgender men, 33 percent as transgender women, and 35 percent as nonbinary. The largest proportion (21%) of respondents identified their sexual orientation as queer; 18 percent were pansexual; 16 percent were gay, lesbian, or same-gender-loving; 15 percent were straight; and 14 percent were bisexual.

GENDER IN THE LGB POPULATIONS

66%
as women

46%
as bisexual women

AGE

Younger people are increasingly identifying as LGBTQI+. In fact, virtually all growth in the U.S. LGBT population between 2012 and 2017 is due to Millennials, of whom 8.2 identified as LGBT in 2017. Generation Z, whose youngest members were born in the late 1990s, are more likely to identify as LGBT than any previous U.S. generation: For instance, a 2017 survey found that 1.8 percent of high school students identified as transgender, which is three times the proportion among adults.

8.2%
Millennials identify
as LGBT

1.8%
high schoolers identify
as transgender



RACE AND ETHNICITY

The LGBTQI+ population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The 2010 Census showed that 36 percent of individuals in same-sex couples identified their race or ethnicity as other than non-Hispanic White, which increased to nearly 40 percent in 2018. An analysis of 2014 data from the state-based Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System suggested that the transgender population has a higher proportion of people of color (45%) than the U.S. population at large (34%).

CHILD REARING

An estimated 37 percent of LGB people report having a child, which is half the proportion of heterosexual people (74%). Same-sex couples are also less likely than different-sex couples to be raising children under age 18 (19% versus 41%, according to the 2010 Census). LGBT women are much more likely than men to be raising children, and between a quarter and half of transgender people report being parents. There are no statistics on parenting among people with intersex traits.

WHO ARE PARENTS?

37%
of LGB people

25.5%
of transgender people

74%
of heterosexual people

Changing Public Attitudes

These demographic trends among the LGBTQI+ population may be products of a number of factors, including growing awareness and acceptance of diverse sexual and gender identities; expansion of laws, policies, and practices that protect and support communities and individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status; and an increasing willingness and ability among LGBTQI+ people to self-identify. In particular, public acceptance of sexual and gender diversity has increased significantly over time. Today, most Americans approve of same-sex relationships and support legal protections to ensure fundamental civil rights for LGBTQI+ people. The laws are also changing to reflect this move toward acceptance: In 2020, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act protects individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in employment. A substantial majority of Americans support nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people in public accommodations, employment, health care, health insurance, and housing. However, the public appears more divided on other policies, such as gender identity protections in public accommodations (e.g., public restrooms) and whether businesses and others should be allowed to deny services to LGBT people on the grounds of a sincerely held religious belief.



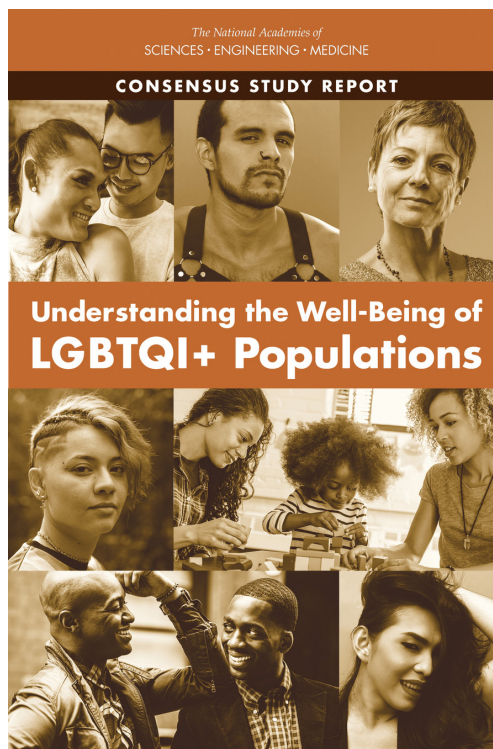
Resources

Read the report highlights and the full report online, download a free PDF, or order the paperback publication today.

[Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations](#) (2020)

View the project's interactive [resource](#), highlighting the key findings of the report.

Learn more about the Committee on Population [#PopulationResearch](#)



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