2019 **Black & African American LGBTQ Youth Report**
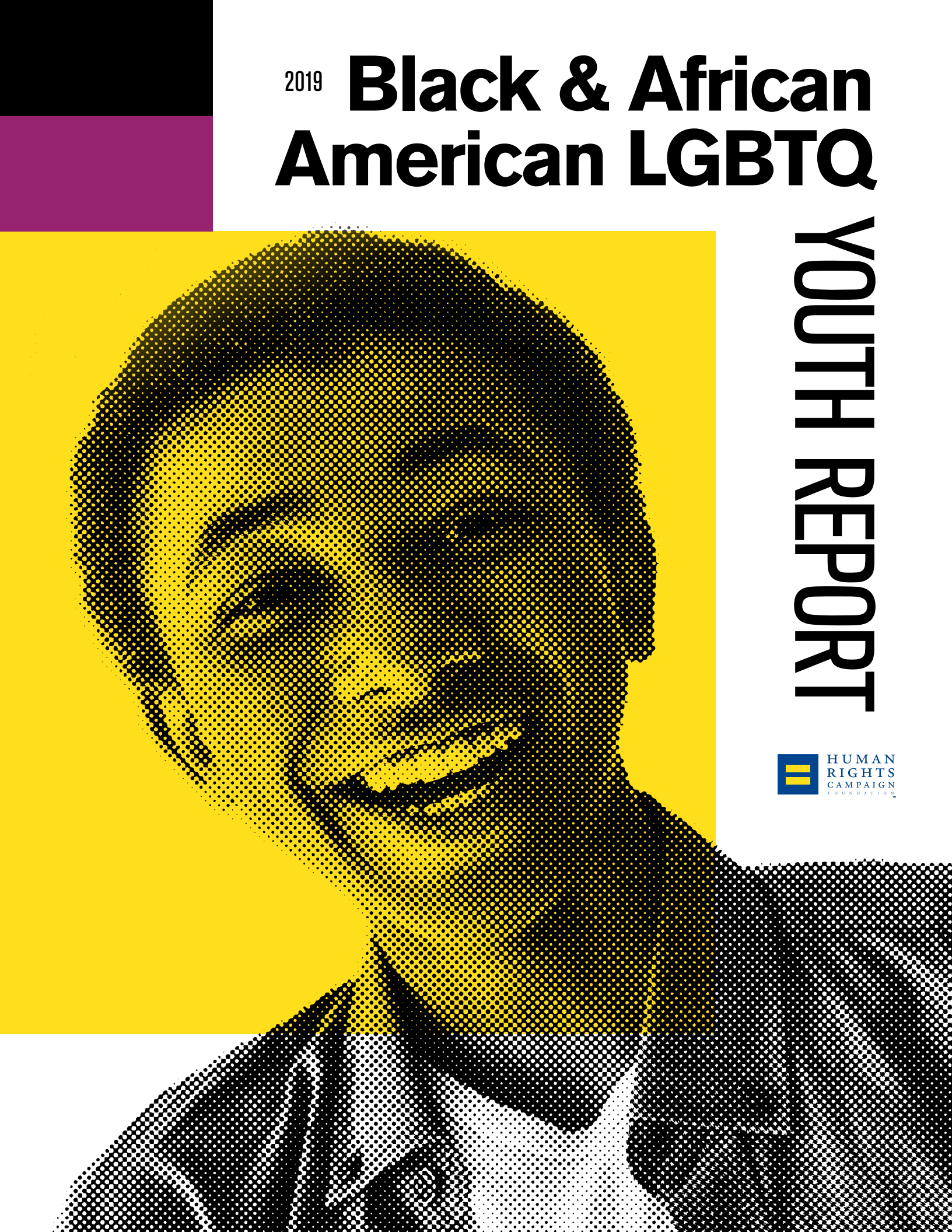
YOUTH REPORT

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

This resource draws on a subset of data from the 2018 HRC LGBTQ Youth Report to highlight the experiences of respondents who identified part or all of their ethnoracial identity as either Black or African American.

Table of Contents

Supporting Black and African American LGBTQ Youth

In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to conduct a groundbreaking survey of over 12,000 LGBTQ youth and capture their experiences in their families, schools, social circles and communities. More than 1,600 Black and African American LGBTQ youth responded to the survey. This resource presents data collected from these young people, shedding light on their challenges and triumphs encountered while navigating the world.

While there is immense power in being both a person of color and LGBTQ, holding multiple marginalized identities can magnify discrimination. This reality can have a devastating impact on Black and African American LGBTQ youth's mental health and overall well-being. Virulent and inflammatory anti-Blackness from elected officials, negative portrayals in the media, and historically maintained systems of racial oppression complicate the ability of Black and African American LGBTQ youth to fully express and explore their intersecting racial and LGBTQ identities.

For youth-serving professionals

This resource draws on a subset of data from the 2018 HRC LGBTQ Youth Report to highlight the experiences of respondents who identified part or all of their ethnoracial identity as either Black or African American. We hope this information helps to encourage youth-serving professionals to apply an intersectional lens to their work.

Supportive parents, school administrators, teachers, counselors and other youth-serving professionals play an essential role in the lives of Black and African American LGBTQ youth. The support of these adults is especially important when youth struggle in the absence of affirmation from their families and communities regarding their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

However, Black and African American LGBTQ youth continue to be their own powerful forces of change; their stories of empowerment, resilience, activism and advocacy are pronounced in these findings. Across the country, they are demanding due respect and equity. They need us to do the same.

We must support Black and African American LGBTQ youth in their pursuit of collective equity, inclusion and racial justice.

The Importance of Family

Parents and families have a critical role to play in creating open environments that foster positive self-esteem, mental health and well-being among Black and African American LGBTQ youth.

Black and African American LGBTQ youth whose families provide safe, supportive and affirming homes are more likely to experience positive health outcomes across several dimensions, including: greater self-esteem and resilience; a lowered risk of depression, distress and feelings of hopelessness; and a reduced risk of substance use.

77%
of Black and African American LGBTQ youth have heard family members say **negative things about LGBTQ people**
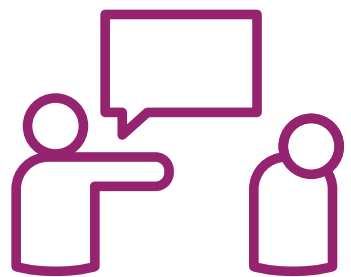
47%

have been **taunted or mocked by family for being LGBTQ**

Only **19%** say they can **"definitely"** be themselves at home

Only **26%** have had **family get involved** in the larger **LGBTQ community**

Examples could include attending pride events, advocating for LGBTQ inclusion in their workplaces, or learning about LGBTQ identities and experiences

"I have discussed my sexuality a bit with my family, but it is not quite a comfortable topic yet. Me coming out to my family was met with mixed reviews; they were accepting, but they also still feel like it's just hormonal changes or something."

59%

say their **families make them feel bad because of their LGBTQ identity,** including

67%

of transgender and gender-expansive youth

55%

of cisgender LGBQ youth

Note: cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

We use both transgender and gender-expansive to describe all non-cisgender respondents because every person defines their identity differently. For example, some non-binary people identify as transgender, but not all do.

Supportive and affirming families can also act as a buffer against some of the discrimination, harrassment and bullying that Black and African American LGBTQ youth might experience in their schools and communities.

Yet, the youth in our survey report that sharing their sexual orientation or gender identities with their families is incredibly stressful. These young people say that their real and perceived fears of rejection are compounded by negative comments they hear about the LGBTQ community from parents and family members.

As a youth-serving professional, family member or community member, you can provide life-changing support to Black and African American LGBTQ youth who may not receive it from their parents or immediate family. Where possible, you may also be able to play a role in educating families in your community.

Negative attitudes voiced by family members, peers and other community members can make youth reluctant to disclose or embrace their identities. Living authentically is a deeply personal process. Youth-serving professionals who wish to better understand the specific challenges that Black and African American youth face when coming out as LGBTQ are encouraged to read HRC's resource, *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Black and African American LGBTQ Americans.*

"My mom supports gay people, but she doesn't want a gay daughter."

"Being a person who lives in the South, the LGBTQ community is joked about a lot and judged."

The Burden of Rejection

Along with the fear of familial rejection, Black and African American LGBTQ youth face a variety of other stressors – harassment, peer rejection, bullying and isolation – that can take a major toll on their overall well-being.[1]

[1] Birkett, M., Newcomb, M.E., & Mustanski, B. (2014). Does it Get Better? A Longitudinal Analysis of Psychological Distress and Victimization in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth. Journal of Adolescent Health, 56 (3), 280-285.

"I'm comfortable talking to my counselor about anything, but I am afraid that what I tell her, which is confidential and important to me, she will tell my mother who isn't all that accepting of me and my sexuality. I know it's her job to relay any important information to my guardian about me, but it would possibly affect me negatively at home."*

* It is imperative that counselors and other youth-serving professionals uphold a student's right to confidentiality, and should not disclose a student's sexual orientation or gender identity to others (including parents and families) without a student's explicit consent

90%

have had **trouble getting to sleep**

[2] Frank R., Dillion, Lilian Ordera, Alia Fons-Scheyd, Hung-Bin Sheu, Ryan C. Ebersole, Lisa B. Spanierman, 2016. A Dyadic Study of Multicultural Counseling Competence, Journal of Counseling Psychology, Vol 63., No.1 57-66.

Additionally, many Black and African American LGBTQ youth face significant challenges accessing affirming, competent counseling services or mental health support. When they do receive this support, it is often of a lower quality than their peers and can be fraught with both intentional and unintentional discrimination.[2]

Black and African American LGBTQ youth are also wary of opening up; **only 10 percent of respondents would be very comfortable discussing a question about their LGBTQ identity with a counselor**. This may be because their counselors do not seem open to discussing LGBTQ topics, especially those experiences or issues at the intersections of race and LGBTQ identities. However, several respondents wrote in that they would be more willing to talk about their identities if they knew their counselors were supportive and understanding of the interconnectedness of their LGBTQ and racial identities.

8 in 10

rate their **average stress level a 5 or higher** on a 10 point scale

"The oppression that I'm stepping into makes me afraid and unwilling to talk to people, so sometimes advisors need to have a lot of nuance when addressing an LGBTQ person, instead of asking targeted questions they won't want to answer."

18%

have been **forced to do unwanted sexual acts**, including

27%

of transgender and gender-expansive youth

14%

of cisgender LGBQ youth

Access to culturally competent and LGBTQ-affirming mental health service providers is essential to the well-being of Black and African American LGBTQ youth.

Learning opportunities, from web-based learning modules to large-scale conferences, are available to professional counselors and therapists who work with LGBTQ youth and wish to improve their skills, knowledge and competence in working with Black and African American LGBTQ youth.

A note about sexual harassment and violence:

LGBTQ young people may be at an increased risk of sexual violence, which can be particularly problematic given the lack of resources, family support and community support that too many continue to face due to their identities.

While research on this sensitive topic is understandably limited and difficult to conduct, one thing is certain: we must continue to do better to support Black and African American LGBTQ young people in the face of sexual violence and intimate partner violence. These efforts go hand in hand with accepting and affirming them for who they are, establishing safe spaces and communities, as well as ensuring that all youth have access to fully inclusive and culturally competent physical and mental health resources.

13%

have been **sexually attacked** or **raped**

62%

have **experienced unwanted gestures, jokes** or **comments**

"I have a few counselors I can talk to. One of the counselors is the sponsor of Pride Club (similar to GSA). He is at every meeting and is gay which makes me feel more comfortable."

80% "usually" **feel depressed** or **down**

71% "usually" **feel worthless** or **hopeless**

80% "usually" **feel worried, nervous** or **panicked**

Only **35%** **received counseling** in the **past year**

46% **feel critical** of **their LGBTQ identities**

"Looking at my counselor specifically, she has been vocal about her pro-diversity stances in many respects. So I'm sure that has been a major factor in me feeling comfortable around her."

When Schools Fall Short

While some schools offer safe and affirming spaces that enable LGBTQ youth to thrive, many young people still experience negative – and even hostile – school environments.

"If my school showed a more accepting attitude toward other cultures, or different groups of people, I'd feel comfortable. It'd be nice to see a LGBTQ flag, or a sign that says "Safe Place" to know that what I say won't go to anywhere else, nor will I feel like I'm being judged."

Only

35%
can "definitely" be themselves in school, including

27%
of transgender and gender-expansive youth

38%
of cisgender LGBQ youth

Without non-discrimination laws, state-wide policies to protect LGBTQ students, or comprehensive cultural competency training, the majority of Black and African American LGBTQ youth remain vulnerable to discrimination and bullying from peers, teachers and administrators.

Even in schools that seek to protect LGBTQ students from sexual orientation or gender identity based discrimination and bullying, Black and African American youth still face more barriers than their peers. The School to Prison Pipeline refers to a set of policies, procedures and barriers (such as increased police presence on campus or bias-ridden disciplinary policies) that pushes students out of school and into disciplinary settings. Research shows that youth of color, and particularly LGBTQ youth of color, are more likely to be negatively impacted and unfairly disciplined via these policies than their peers, and therefore are more likely to be forced out of school before graduation.

Youth-serving professionals must address both LGBTQ inclusion and anti-racism when designing policies and programs to support Black and African American LGBTQ youth in schools.

32%
always feel safe in the classroom

40%
have been **bullied on school property within the last 12 months**

"I am somewhat comfortable because I know my counselor will not tell my parents about my sexual orientation. Though it might be awkward, I trust my counselor."

"Being in a predominantly white school set in its ways, talking about being LGBTQ (something that is not necessarily praised) is very awkward and uncomfortable."
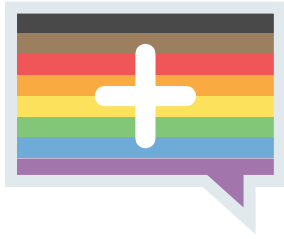
21%

have **heard positive messages about being LGBTQ in school**
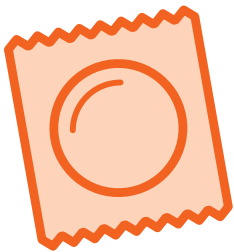
20%

have **received information about safer sex** that was **relevant to them in school**

"I go to a Christian private school. A very small handful of students support the LGBTQ community and/or are actually a part of it. We rarely discuss things with teachers though. They're always very clear about how they feel about LGBTQ people. They let students call each other slurs without telling them it's wrong. They basically don't treat them like they are bad words at all. That scares me and lets me know that I can trust little to no one in my school for help."

*#!@?!

67%

have been **verbally insulted because of their LGBTQ identity**, including

82%

of transgender and gender-expansive youth

61%

of cisgender LGBQ youth

30%

have been **physically threatened because of their LGBTQ identity**, including

41%

of transgender and gender-expansive youth

25%

of cisgender LGBQ youth

At the Intersection: Racism-related Stress

Negative experiences, whether in the classroom, in the halls, at lunch or during extracurricular activities, have a tremendous impact on Black and African American LGBTQ youth as they navigate interconnected forms of discrimination.

90%
have **experienced racial discrimination**

To understand the experiences of Black and African American LGBTQ youth, we must acknowledge the impact of historical and contemporary realities of **white supremacy**. The combination of discriminatory policies, systems, portrayals and biases complicate the ability of Black and African American LGBTQ youth to fully express and explore their intersecting racial and LGBTQ identities.

*Note: When we discuss **white supremacy**, we are referring to an intentionally created and historically maintained political, social and economic system in which white people, both individually and collectively, are able to control power and resources and maintain conscious and/or unconscious beliefs about their superiority.*[3]

The historical impact of white supremacy can be observed in the many systemic barriers impacting Black and African American people in the United States. This includes targeted hate violence, discriminatory policing, environmental pollution of predominantly Black and African American neighborhoods, voter suppression, education segregation and funding disparities, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline, among many others.

White supremacy can also manifest itself when youth-serving professionals fail to acknowledge, address and/or examine their own roles in perpetuating harmful systems of discrimination for Black and African American youth. It is possible to unintentionally perpetuate white supremacy. Individuals often are ill-equipped and/or react negatively when asked to do the difficult work of confronting their own roles in oppression and societal discrimination.

*However, **in building a world where Black and African American youth can thrive, we all must dismantle the barriers that deprive them of equal opportunities, dignity and respect**. Both white and non-Black people of color allies must actively work to eliminate the forms in which anti-Blackness appears in our daily lives, communities and society as a whole. These efforts must also include examining our own personal experiences or implicit biases, and how our complicity in anti-Blackness upholds white supremacy, while questioning how our society continues to hold Black and African American people to differing standards and actively and passively discriminates against them in all areas of life.*

[3] Adapted from Frances Lee, Ansley, Stirring the Ashes: Race, Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship, 74 Cornell L. Rev 993, 1024 n.129, (1989).

"I feel it is very hard for me to talk in general about how I feel as an LGBTQ person because it's hard to find people who actually understand all what you are going through and who will talk about it with you."
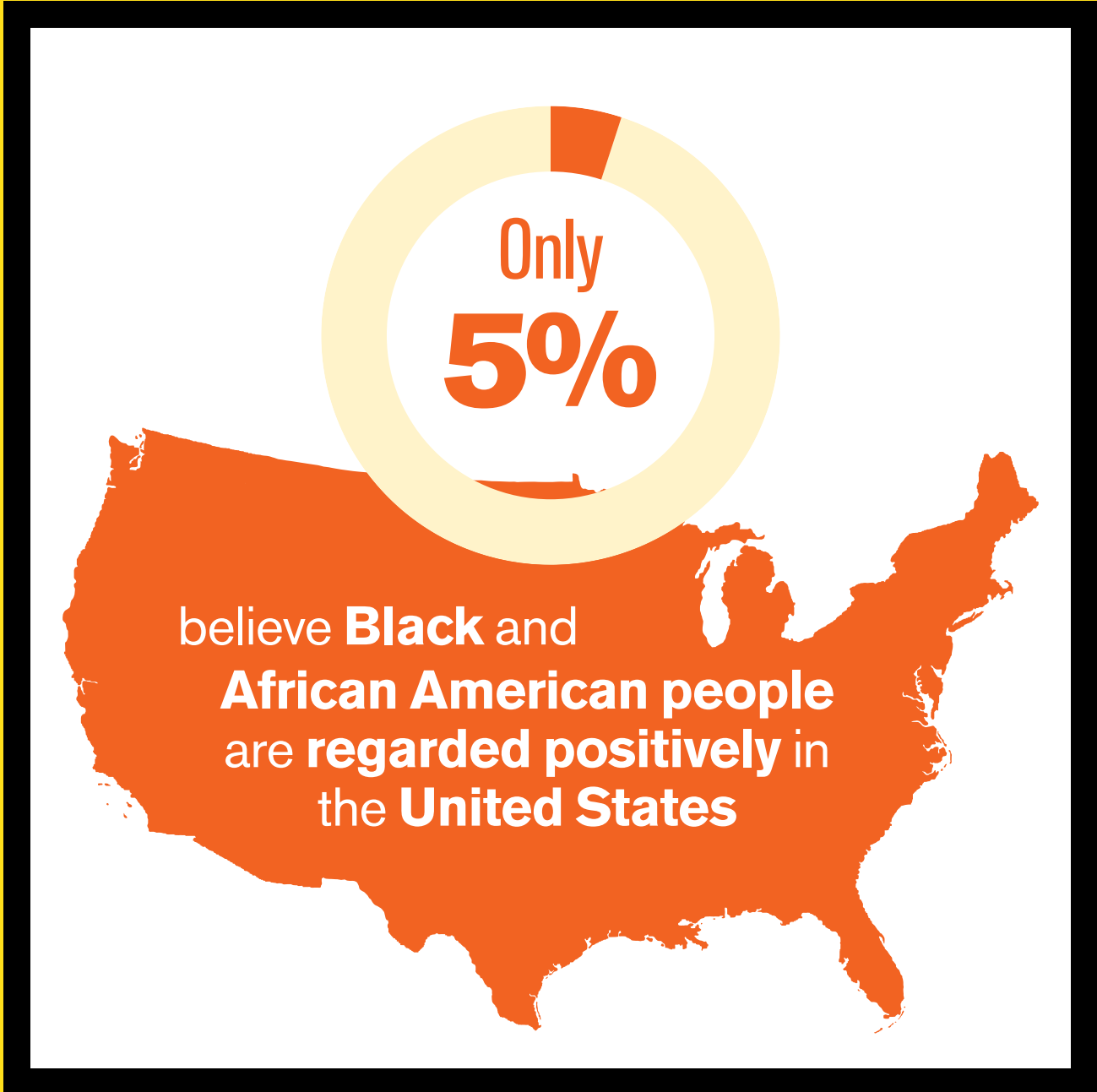
98%

say **racism affects the lives of Black** and **African American people**

91%

say **racism has impacted the lives of their friends** and **family**

Only
5%

believe **Black** and
African American people
are **regarded positively** in
the **United States**

"My counselor is gay, so since he's part of the LGBTQ community it makes me feel a lot better. But what makes me uncomfortable is the fact that I'm Black and he's white, and he's subtly pointed that out several times. Whether it was conscious or not, I'm not sure, but it's uncomfortable."

Gender-Expansive Youth Need Our Support

Transgender and gender-expansive youth of all backgrounds and experiences face particularly serious challenges in the school system.

However, for Black and African American gender-expansive youth, these challenges can be magnified by peers, teachers and staff harboring both anti-transgender and anti-Black biases. Furthermore, mainstream coverage of the transgender community often exclusively features white narratives, leaving out the contributions and legacies of transgender individuals of color and further impeding the ability of Black and African American transgender youth to receive necessary and overdue support from people in their lives.

RESTROOM

50% of Black and African American transgender and gender-expansive youth can **never use the restroom that aligns with gender identity at school**

57% don't feel safe using them

47% don't know if they're allowed

63% try to **avoid using the restroom during the school day**

HELLO
my name is

Only
41%
are **always called by their true name**

Black and African American transgender and gender-expansive youth report that they often feel unsafe and unprotected at school. They also report being barred from using locker rooms and bathroom facilities that match their gender identity, being misgendered, and getting called the wrong name by adults and peers.

Combined, the effects of this verbal and physical harassment, along with overtly discriminatory practices and policies, can have damaging implications for transgender and gender-expansive Black and African American youth.

Only
21%
are **always called by the correct pronouns**

Only
29%
are able to **dress in a way that completely reflects their gender identity**

"My counselor has already met with me, telling me not to transition while in high school and threatening to kick me out of school for being transgender."

Coming Out

Every coming out story and process is unique. Black and African American youth who identify as LGBTQ can face a more complex process than some of their peers as they reconcile multiple and intersecting identities.

Cultural norms, religious identities and family dynamics can pull youth in different directions as they navigate the coming out process.

Yet, studies show that LGBTQ youth who live openly are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as better academic performance, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of anxiety and depression.[4]

To best support Black and African American LGBTQ youth through the coming out process, youth-serving professionals must take into account how intersectional factors shape each individual's experience.
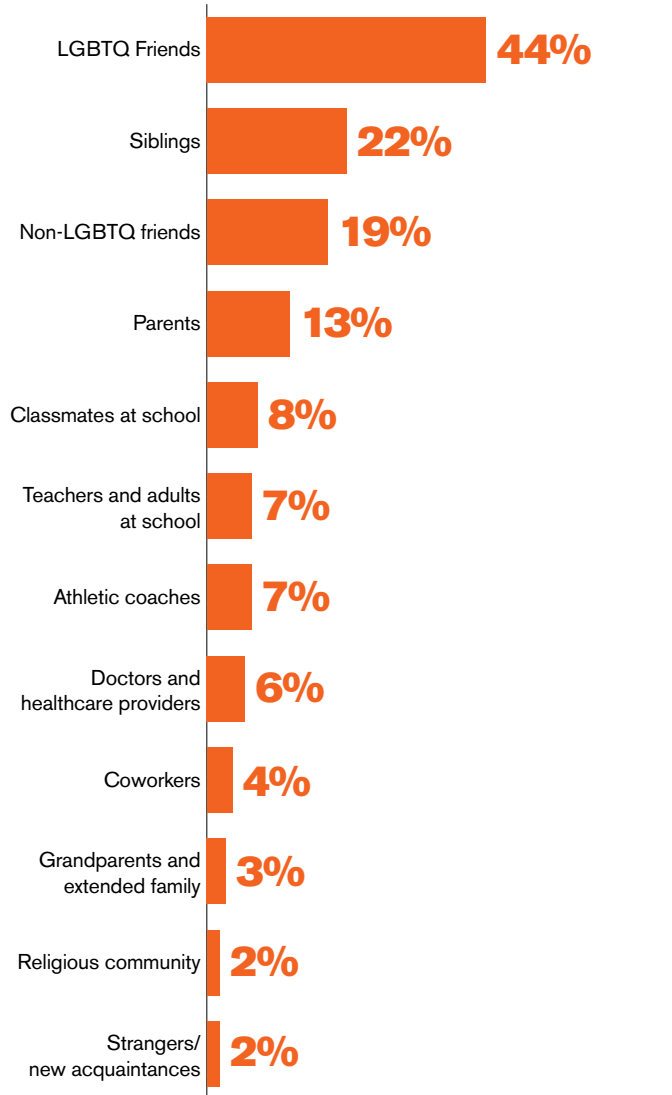
Resources like HRC's *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Black and African American LGBTQ Americans* are a good place to start.

[4] 9 Russell, S. & Fish, J.N., (2016) Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12, 465-487.
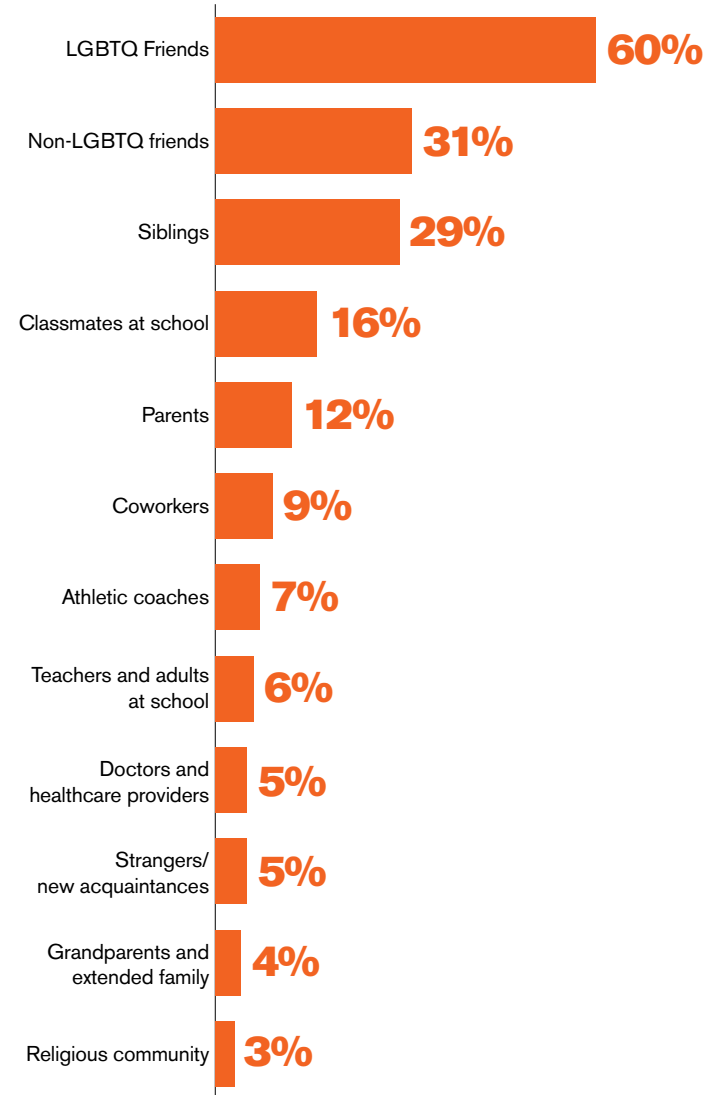
Despite the benefits associated with coming out, too many Black and African American LGBTQ youth are unable to live authentically.

Percentage of **transgender and gender-expansive youth** who are **out regarding their Gender Identity** to **all** of their

Category	Percentage
LGBTQ Friends	**44%**
Siblings	**22%**
Non-LGBTQ friends	**19%**
Parents	**13%**
Classmates at school	**8%**
Teachers and adults at school	**7%**
Athletic coaches	**7%**
Doctors and healthcare providers	**6%**
Coworkers	**4%**
Grandparents and extended family	**3%**
Religious community	**2%**
Strangers/ new acquaintances	**2%**

Percentage of **LGBQ youth** who are **out regarding their Sexual Orientation** to **all** of their

Category	Percentage
LGBTQ Friends	**60%**
Non-LGBTQ friends	**31%**
Siblings	**29%**
Classmates at school	**16%**
Parents	**12%**
Coworkers	**9%**
Athletic coaches	**7%**
Teachers and adults at school	**6%**
Doctors and healthcare providers	**5%**
Strangers/ new acquaintances	**5%**
Grandparents and extended family	**4%**
Religious community	**3%**

What You Can Do

Every adult can play a role in changing the landscape for Black and African American LGBTQ youth. Often, small but impactful actions can reinforce inclusive, supportive and loving environments in homes, schools and communities.

We must also confront the very real and present discrimination and institutional obstacles that hinder too many Black and African American LGBTQ youth from fully thriving and living as who they are.

Five things you can do to support Black and African American LGBTQ young people:

1. **Elevate Black and African American LGBTQ narratives.**

    In schools and community settings, it is imperative to highlight the experiences of Black and African American LGBTQ people. Black and African American LGBTQ young people in our research cite struggling to find relatable role models. Highlighting a variety of narratives can make this representation more accessible while also combating stigma and misconceptions about Black and African American people more broadly.

2. **Expand opportunities and resources for parents of Black and African American LGBTQ youth to become better advocates for their children.**

    Develop culturally-appropriate LGBTQ resources that center the experiences of Black and African Americans, including educational materials, support groups, community centers and others. Too often, resources for LGBTQ people and their families are centered on white narratives, which may neglect or unintentionally exclude the experiences of people of color. Listen to the experiences of Black and African American LGBTQ people and families, acknowledge their advocacy work and lift it up, while continuing to use your resources as a supportive platform.

3. **Advocate for more inclusive educational spaces that provide equal and enhanced opportunities for Black and African American youth to succeed.**

   Evaluate the impact and way your school's policies may perpetuate or even enforce systems like the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Partner with advocates and organizations doing reform around subjective disciplinary standards and punitive justice in order to create an environment where Black and African American LGBTQ youth feel safe and are not targeted by unjust systems.

4. **Encourage youth-serving professionals, especially health care professionals, to adapt their practices to actively dismantle systems of oppression that harm Black and African American LGBTQ youth.**

   Black and African American people face significant barriers to accessing affirming and appropriate health care. We must reconcile historical trauma at the hands of medical providers, socioeconomic barriers and cultural stigma that prevent access to necessary and competent health care.

5. **Support and address policy reform that uniquely impacts Black and African American LGBTQ youth.**

   Juvenile justice, youth homelessness, environmental justice, income inequality, and access to education and health care are just some of the areas where Black and African American LGBTQ young people face rampant disparities due to historically maintained systems of bias and discrimination. When undergoing policy work, ensure you are comprehensively viewing your advocacy through both an LGBTQ equity and anti-racist lens.

To best support Black and African American LGBTQ youth, we must address anti-LGBTQ attitudes, racism and other systems of oppression that present undue challenges to their well-being. Youth-serving professionals, parents, school staff, policy-makers and community members can find more tips here that, as always, should be viewed through an intersectional lens.

Respondent Profile

Gender Identity

	N Values
Cisgender boy	540
Cisgender girl	850
Transgender boy	165
Transgender girl	26
Non-binary	160
Genderqueer	132
Different Identity	56

N = 1,678

Note: Cisgender boy, cisgender girl, transgender boy and transgender girl numbers are a combination of self-identification and concorda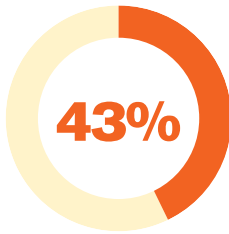nce with sex assigned at birth. N values may add up to more than 1,678 as some respondents self-identify with more than one answer choice provided.

Different identity includes write-ins such as: agender, androgynous, bigender, confused/ don't know, demigender, genderfluid/flux, questioning, not listed and more.

27%
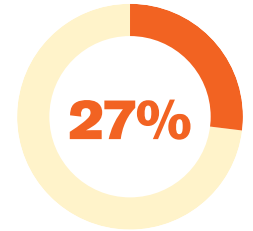
of respondents **are gender-expansive**

Race

43%

of respondents **are multiracial**

Ability

15%

have a disability

15%

don't know

Location

Northeast 18%
Midwest 22%
South 48%
West 12%

Age

13 — 6%
14 — 15%
15 — 21%
16 — 27%
17 — 32%

Sexual Orientation

Bisexual — 40%
Gay or Lesbian — 34%
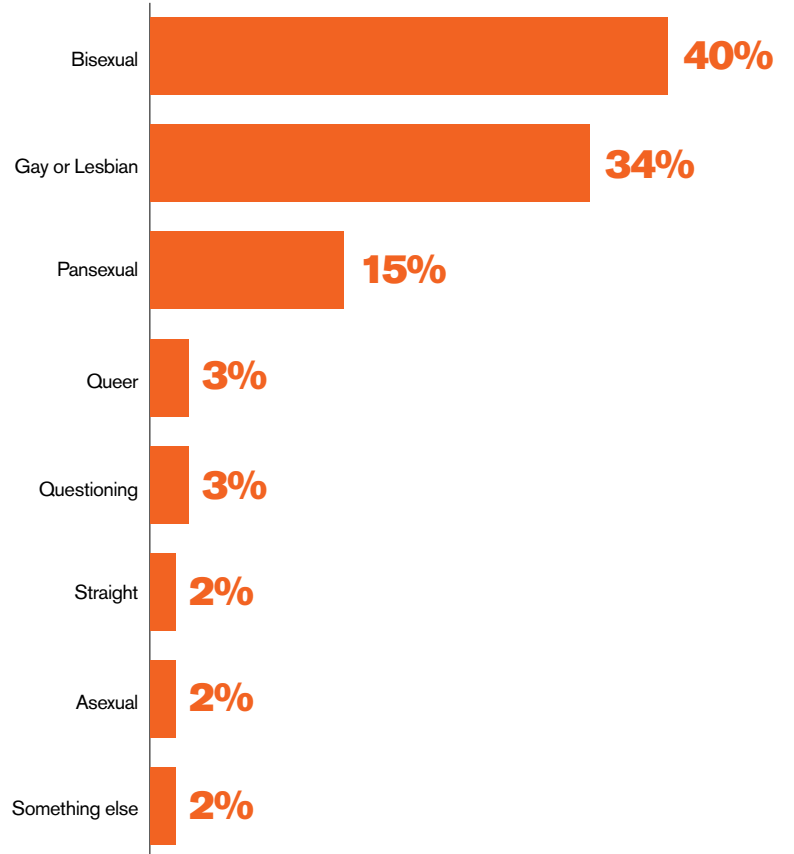Pansexual — 15%
Queer — 3%
Questioning — 3%
Straight — 2%
Asexual — 2%
Something else — 2%
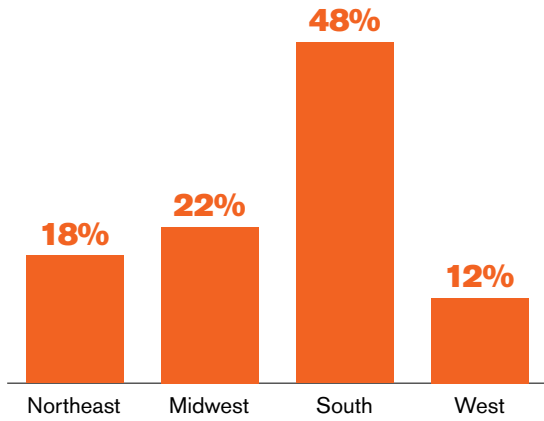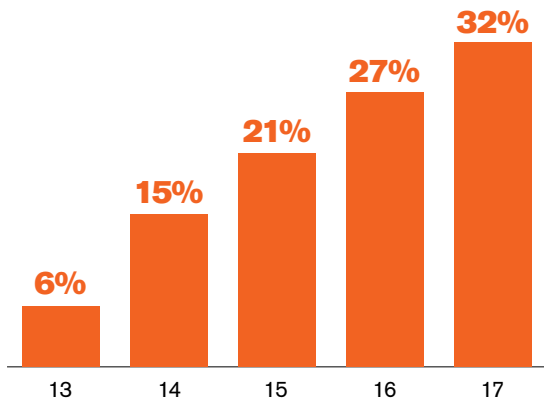
Percentages may add up to over 100 due to rounding.

Acknowledgements

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program spearheads a wide variety of LGBTQ advocacy and outreach campaigns, working to ensure that the HRC Foundation's resources and programs are timely, impactful and inclusive. In addition to publishing resource guides, informational materials and reports, the team conducts original quantitative and qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. The program also collaborates with academic researchers and provides guidance to other HRC initiatives in support of efforts to advance LGBTQ equality and well-being. Special thanks to Senior Research Manager **Liam Miranda**, Senior Content Manager **Mark Lee**, Outreach and Research Coordinator **Katalina Hadfield**, former Public Education & Research Intern **Charlie Whittington** and current Public Education & Research Intern **Sadies Yanes** for their leadership and work on this resource.

Children, Youth & Families Program

Becoming a parent, sending your 5-year-old to kindergarten, watching your teenager graduate from high school – these are life's biggest moments. For LGBTQ parents and LGBTQ children, they can also be some of life's most challenging moments. That's where HRC's Children, Youth and Families Program comes in. Through innovative training and direct consultation with schools, child welfare agencies and other service providers, HRC's Children, Youth and Families Program creates welcoming, affirming and supportive environments for LGBTQ prospective parents, LGBTQ-led families and LGBTQ youth. Special thanks to **Ellen Kahn** and **Jay Brown** for their leadership and guidance on this and similar resources related to the well-being of LGBTQ youth.

HRC's Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program

HRC's HBCU Program arose out of a need to support LGBTQ students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) after two violent, anti-LGBTQ incidents occurred at two prominent HBCUs in 2001. Shortly after the incidents, HRC convened a dynamic group of HBCU LGBTQ student-leaders committed to advocating for LGBTQ-inclusion and social justice on campuses and in their communities. The HBCU Program has expanded to engage administrators, faculty/staff, students and alumni through various initiatives. Since the program's inception, HRC has established relationships with over 30 HBCUs by providing support to LGBTQ and allied students, faculty and staff who wish to improve LGBTQ inclusion on their campuses. Special thanks to **Rishard Butts** and **Leslie Hall** for their help in creating and sharing this resource.

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As the largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Americans, the Human Rights Campaign represents a force of more than 3 million members and supporters nationwide – all committed to making HRC's vision a reality.

HRC envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.

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