

“We Never Give Up the Fight”

A Report of the National LGBTQ+ Women’s Community Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes the responses of 5,002 LGBTQ+ women who answered 110–170 questions in a national community survey fielded from June 2021–June 2022. While more than 8,000 respondents engaged with the survey, these 5,002 women answered all, or nearly all, of the questions posed.

Study principals wondered: When LGBTQ+ women partner or make family with other LGBTQ+ women, how do the burdens of misogyny and other structures of violence add up in our lives? In what specific areas do we struggle? What strategies best support us in building the lives we want, regardless? How and under what circumstances are we thriving?

Accordingly, we looked at many crucial domains that create or foreclose possibilities in the lives of LGBTQ+ women who partner with women, including identity, education, housing, economic security, employment, health and health access, disability, policing and incarceration, family and parenting, sociality and community, sex and sexual practices, religious upbringing and religious life, aging, political and civic engagement, and interpersonal violence.

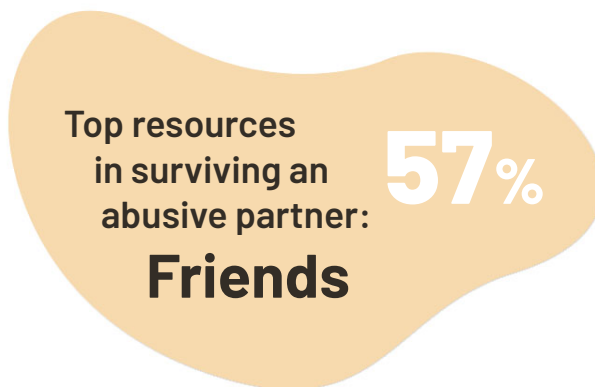
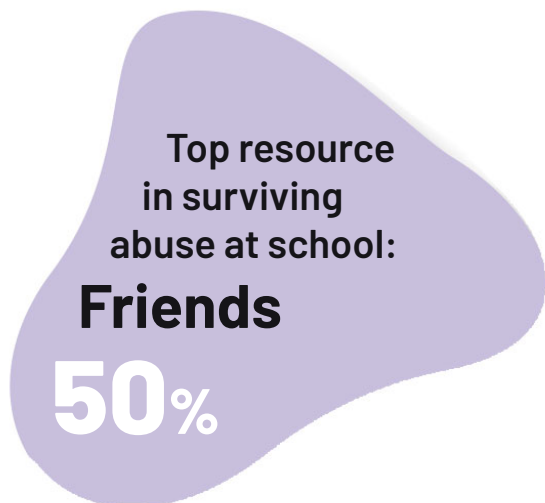
In this pilot release of data, we examine seven of these critical arenas: gender and sexuality across the lifespan; education; disability; experiences of violence; religious upbringing and religious life; sexual practices, joy, and resilience; and policy priorities. Chapters covering the remaining domains will be released over the next several months.



META FINDINGS

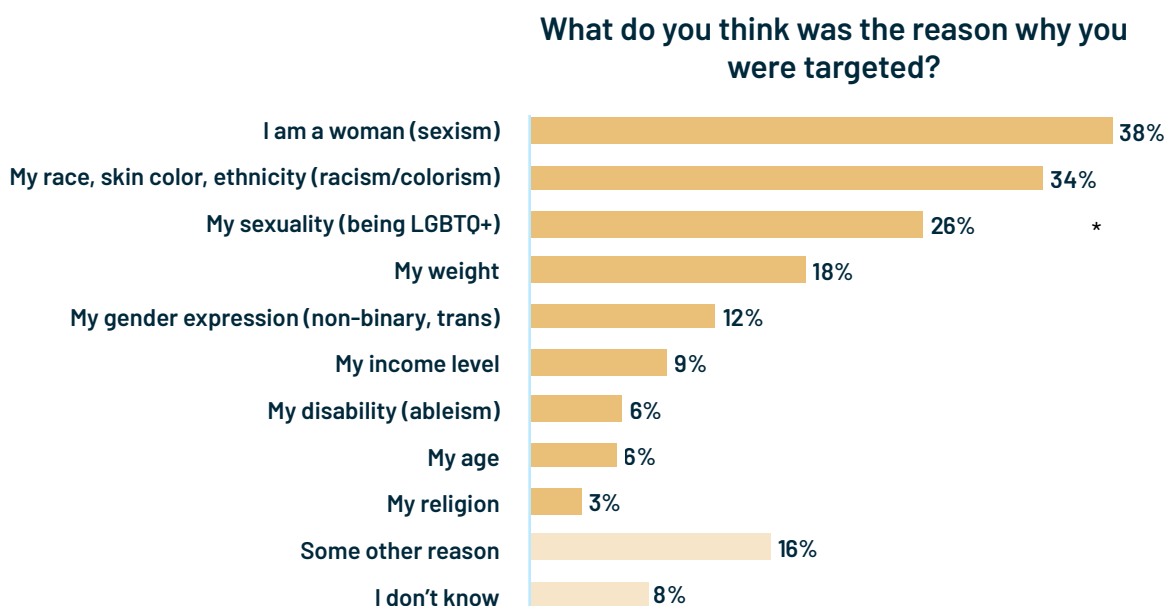
+ INSTITUTIONS FAIL US, BUT WE SAVE US

Institutions often fail us; queer friendships, family, and our allies save us.



+ VARIED DRIVERS OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

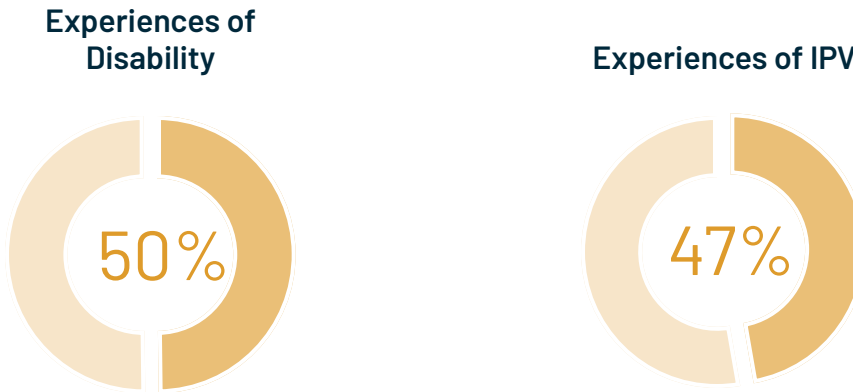
Naming what they believe to be the key drivers of discrimination and violence against them, respondents pointed most often to sexism (38%), racism (34%), anti-LGBTQ+ animus (26%), and being targeted due to their weight (18%).



N=4995 *N=1345 BIPOC respondents

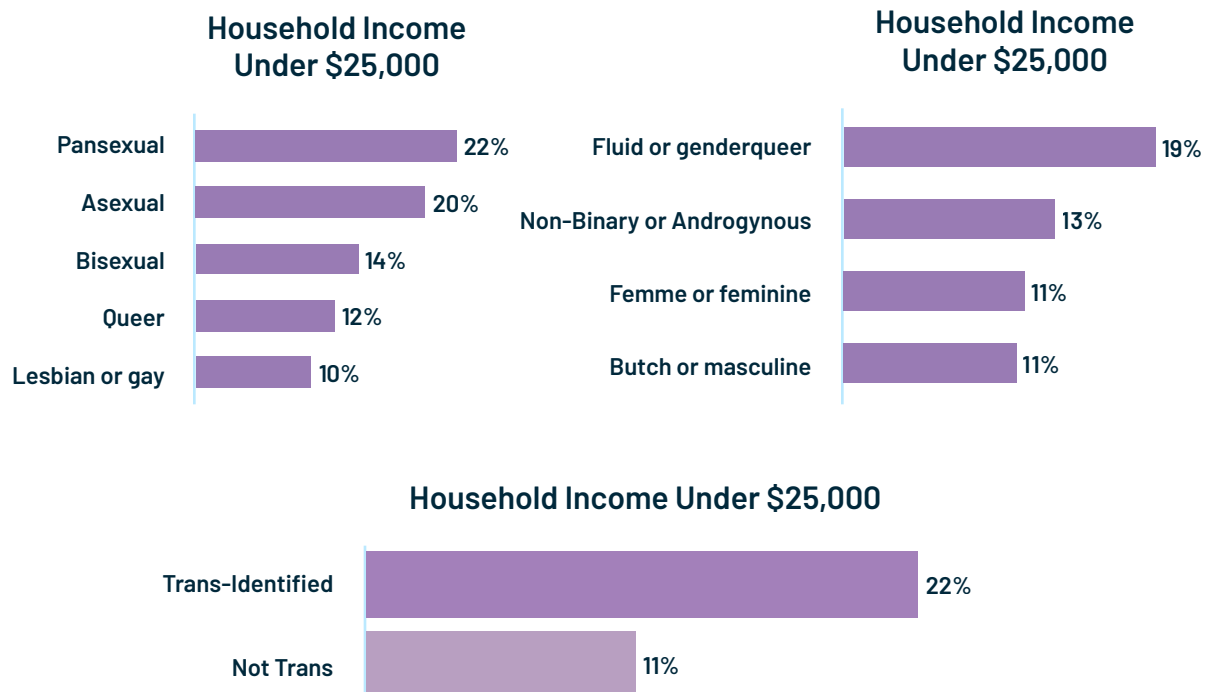
+ HIGH RATES OF DISABILITY AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

LGBTQ+ women in the study endure very high rates of disability (50%) and exposure to intimate partner violence (47%). Their experiences of this then multiply in their partnerships with other LGBTQ+ women.



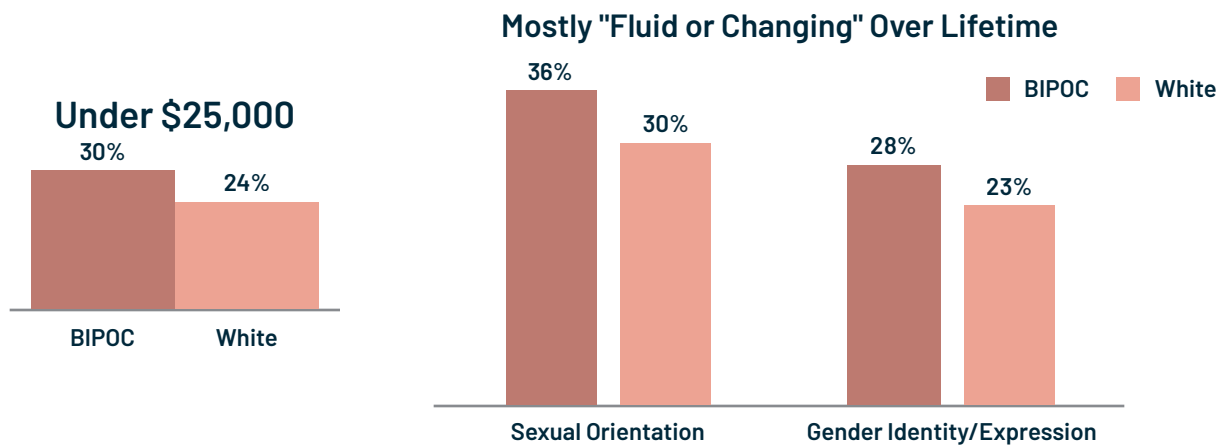
+ FLUIDITY AND ECONOMIC PRECARITY

Gender fluid, pansexual, and trans-identified respondents often experienced more social and economic precarity than their peers in the study whose gender and sexuality is not fluid or changing over the course of their lives.



+ HIGHER POVERTY AND FLUIDITY AMONG BIPOC RESPONDENTS

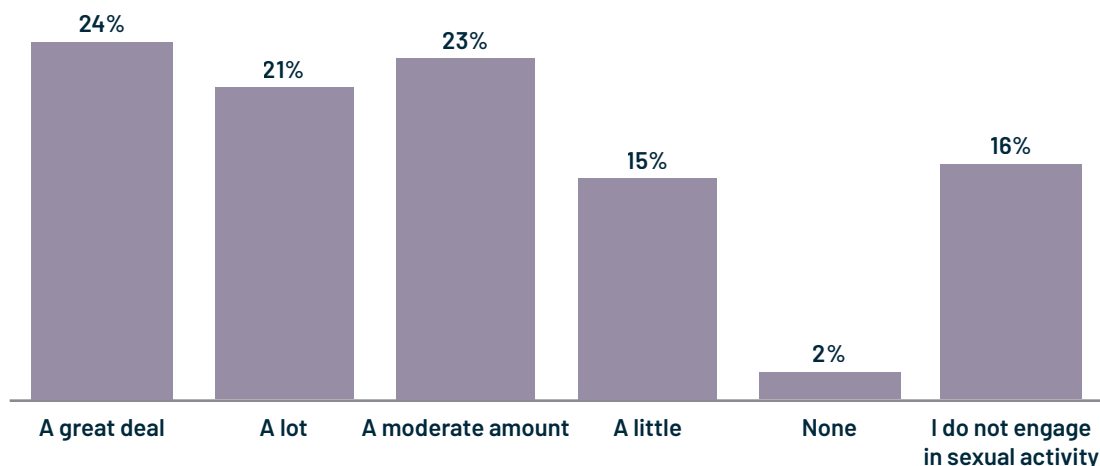
BIPOC women reported fluid and changing genders and sexualities more often than their white peers in the study, thus bearing multilayered vulnerabilities due to the combined effects of racism and sexism alongside that fluidity.



+ MORE SEX, MORE JOY

Respondents are having sex more often (84%) than people in the general population (74%).¹ Nearly 1 in 2 study participants reported that their sexual life gives them a great deal (24%) or a lot (21%) of joy and pleasure.

How much joy and pleasure does your sexual life give you?



+ OUR FAVORITE THINGS

In naming their three favorite things about being an LGBTQ+ woman, embodied self-determination and the joy of living and loving in community with queers and especially other LGBTQ+ women were paramount.

Our Favorite Things:

Embodied Self-Determination
Joy in Queer Community
Loving LGBTQ+ Women

+ POLICY FOCUS ON HEALTHCARE, CLIMATE AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

By far, respondents' top three policy priorities were Universal Healthcare, Environment/Climate Justice, and Reproductive Rights, Access, and Care.



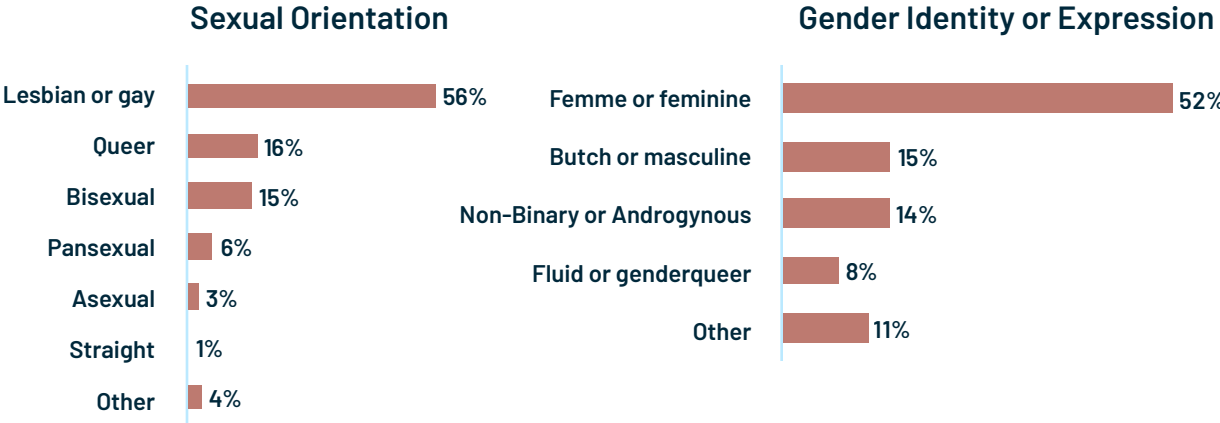
Our Top Policy Priorities:

Universal Healthcare
Environment/Climate Justice
Reproductive Rights,
Access, and Care

A Portrait of Our Respondents: Demographics

Of the 5,002 people in the study, they were largely assigned female at birth (94%) and have identified or do identify as women.

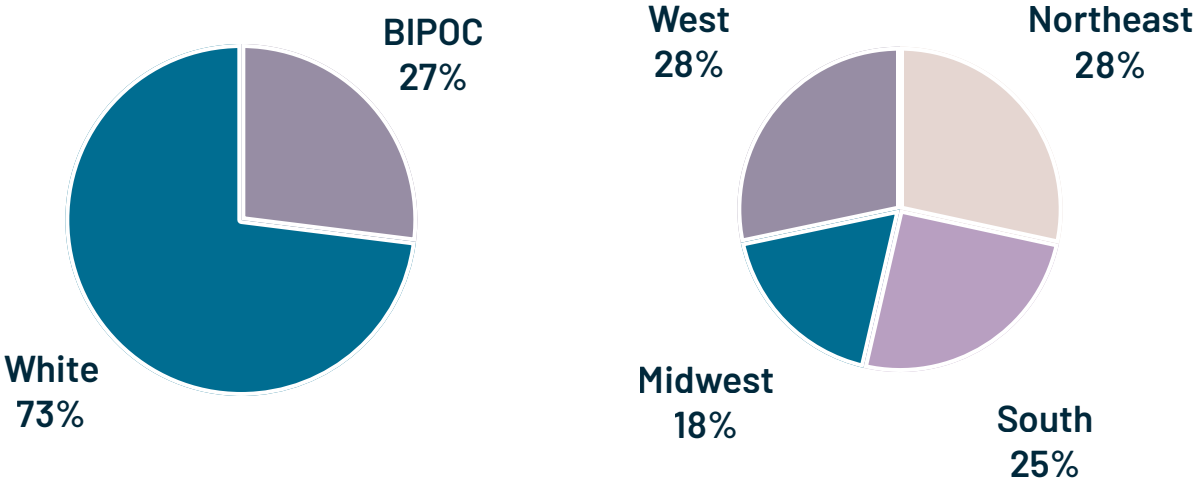
A majority identify on the femme or feminine spectrum in terms of gender (52%), while 15% identify on the butch or masculine spectrum, 14% identify as non-binary/androgynous, and 8% as genderqueer/fluid. Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents identify as transgender.



Respondents identify largely as lesbian or gay (56%), with 16% identifying as queer, 15% reporting bisexual identity, 6% pansexual, and 3% asexual.

Study participants are between 18 and 93 years of age, 73% white and 27% BIPOC.²

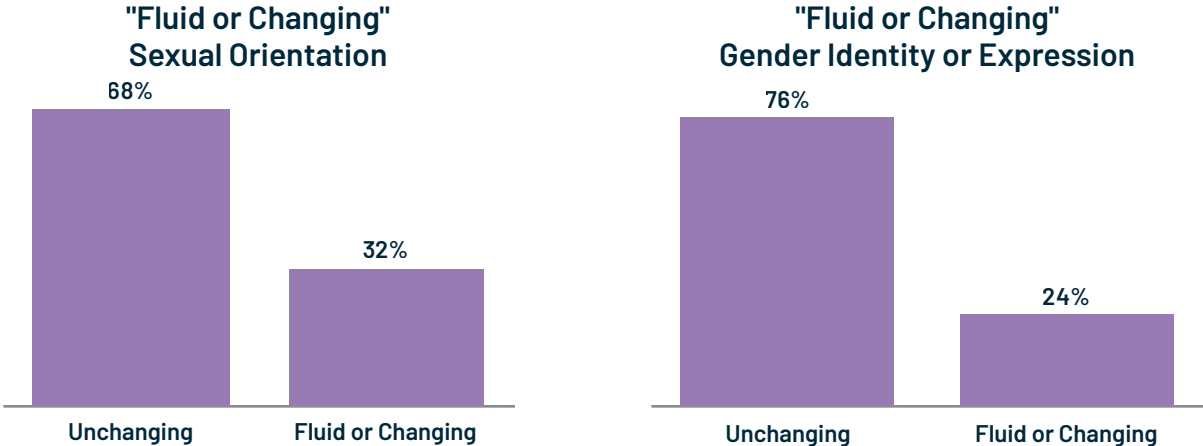
They live all over the US, with 29% in the Northeast, 25% in the South 18% in the Midwest, and 28% in the West.



Gender and Sexuality

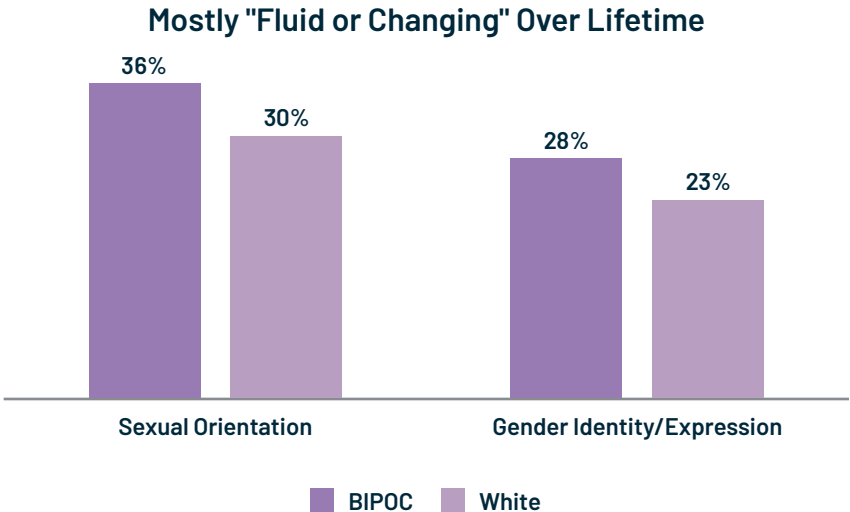
Forty one percent (41%) of study participants described their gender as “complex” and 41% described their sexuality as “complex.”

Respondents reported their sexuality as “fluid or changing” (32%) more often than they reported their gender as “fluid or changing” (24%).



Respondents who reported “fluid or changing” genders and sexualities were living on lower incomes more often than those who did not.

BIPOC LGBTQ+ women more often reported a “fluid and changing” sexuality than their white peers (36% vs. 30%) and “fluid and changing” genders more often as well (28% vs. 23%).



Education

Respondents held graduate degrees at more than twice the rate of the general population; they have extensive experience in our nation’s educational institutions.

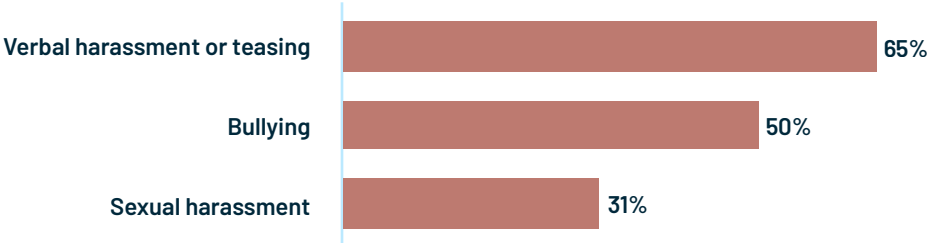
Harassment and abuse at school was pervasive for study participants, with verbal harassment (65%), bullying (50%), and sexual harassment (31%) reported most often.

On average, respondents reported surviving 2.5 forms of abuse at school, including physical (16%) and sexual assault (13%).

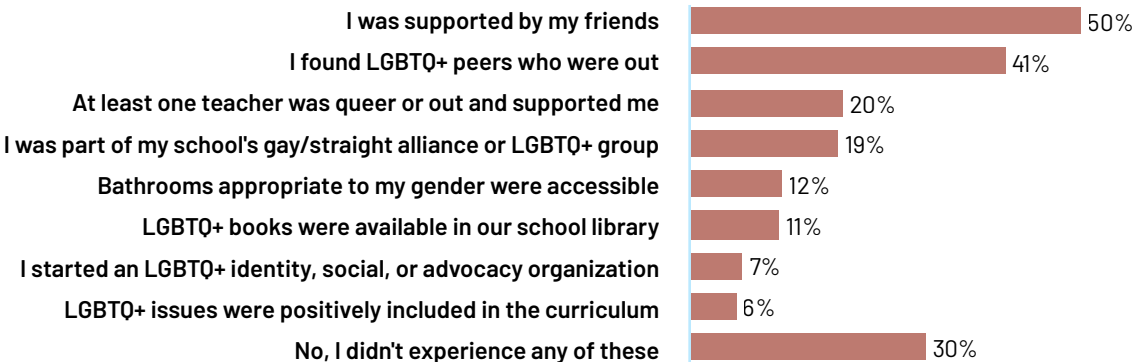
When reporting on sources of support in K-12 and higher education, respondents said: “I was supported by my friends” most often (50%) and “I found LGBTQ peers who were out” (41%).

Thirty percent (30%) of respondents who expressed an LGBTQ+ identity while in a learning environment said they had no experience of positive support at school—not from a teacher, book, social club, or pro-LGBTQ curriculum.

Harassment and Abuse at School



Positive Supports at School

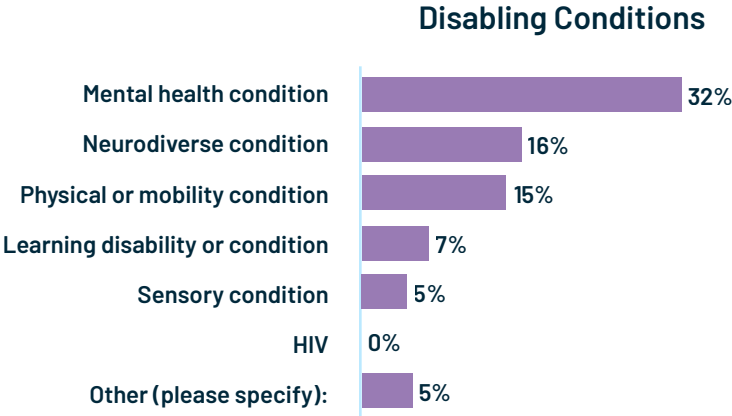


Disability

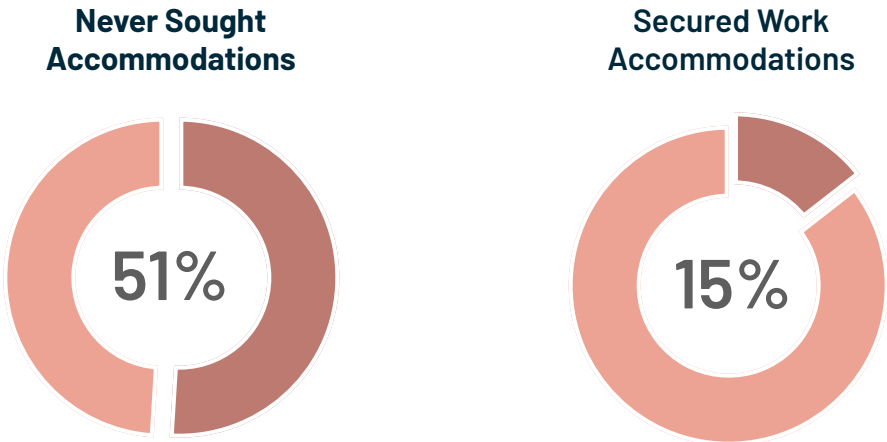
Disability is a fact of life for LGBTQ+ women who partner with women.

Half of respondents in the study (50%) are living with at least one disabling condition.³ Given that study participants are centering their social, emotional, and familial lives on LGBTQ+ women, *many are navigating multiply disabled households.*

Disabling mental health conditions were most common (32%).



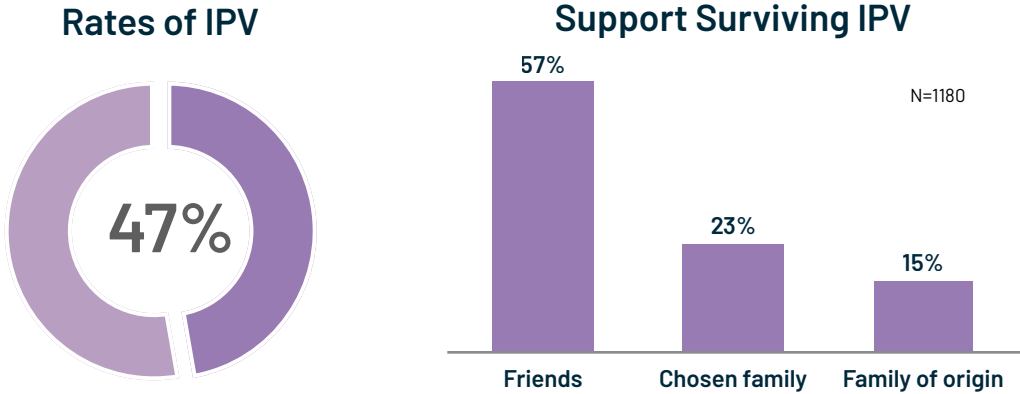
LGBTQ+ women are accessing workplace accommodations (15%) and government benefits (9%) at a tiny fraction of the level at which we are experiencing disability.



N=2372

Intimate Partner Violence

Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents had experienced intimate partner violence—emotional, physical, or sexual. By contrast, 1 in 3 women in the general population experience IPV.



Respondents reported that their friends, by far (57%), have been their best resource and support in surviving IPV.⁴

Only 20% of respondents experiencing emotional or physical violence sought institutional support. Among survivors interacting with police, 54% found that the police were “not helpful at all.”

54%

The Police Were
“Not Helpful At All”
With Intimate
Partner Violence

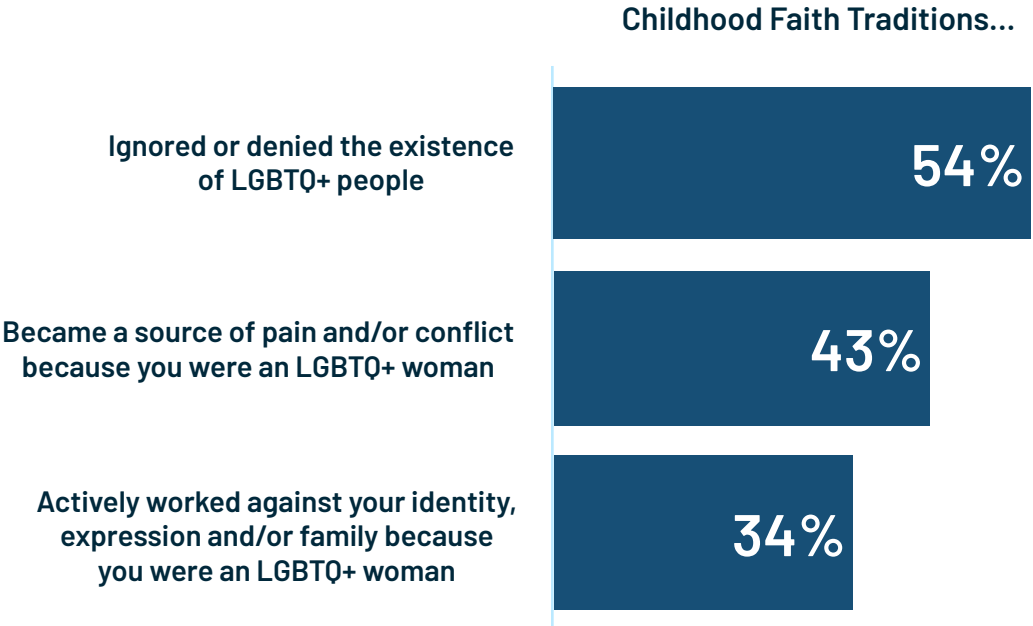
Religious Upbringing and Religious Life

A vast majority of respondents were raised in Christian faith traditions (77%), with Catholic (28%), Baptist (9%), and United Methodist (6%) reported most often.

Respondents' top three *current religious identifications* were spiritual, no affiliation (22%), agnostic (21%), and atheist (18%).

Study participants often reported that their childhood faith traditions either ignored or denied the existence of LGBTQ+ people (54%) or became a source of conflict or pain (43%).

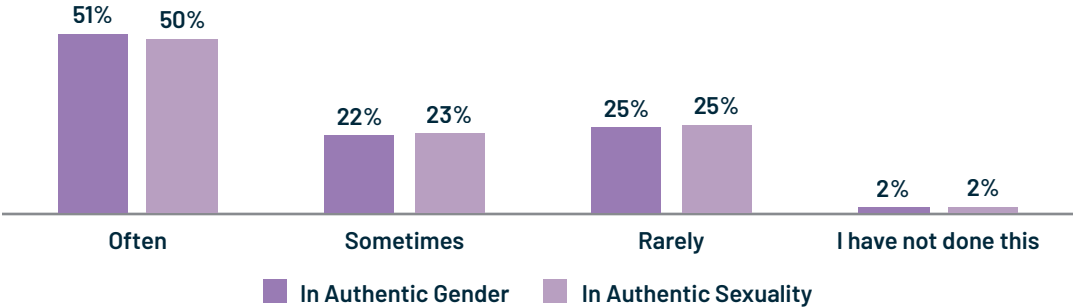
More than 1 in 3 or 34% of respondents reported family members drawing on childhood faith traditions or adopted religious doctrine to justify verbal or emotional abuse against them.



Sexual Practices, Joy, and Resilience

Respondents are having sex more often (84%) than people in the general population (74%). Moreover, 73% reported being in their “authentic” sexuality and gender “sometimes” or “often” when engaging in sex.

73% of respondents "often" or "sometimes" have consensual sex in their authentic gender or sexuality



Forty-five percent of respondents, almost 1 in 2, reported that their sexual life gives them a great deal (24%) or a lot (21%) of joy and pleasure.

Low libido or lack of desire was reported as respondents’ biggest barrier to pleasure, followed by body shame/internalized fatphobia; depression and anxiety; and being unable to locate appropriate partners.

In naming their three favorite things about being an LGBTQ+ woman, **embodied self-determination** and **the joy of living and loving in community with queers and especially other LGBTQ+ women** were paramount.

Policy Priorities

Respondents were given the option to write in three top areas for policy advocacy. By far, they declared as their very top priorities:

45%
**Universal
Healthcare**

37%
**Environment/
Climate Justice**

36%
**Reproductive Rights,
Access, and Care**

Conclusion

Universal healthcare, environment/climate justice, and reproductive rights, access and care are crucial issues for LGBTQ+ women. To address our needs, LGBTQ+ movement organizations must prioritize them. With these priorities, LGBTQ+ women are sending a clear message to women’s and LGBTQ+ movements: we situate our well-being within a larger world, ergo justice for LGBTQ+ women can only be achieved in context.

The burdens of violence and discrimination that LGBTQ+ women carry—driven by sexism, racism, anti-LGBTQ+ bias, and fatphobia—go largely unrecognized and unaddressed within and beyond the LGBTQ+ movement, and among mainstream institutions that purport to serve us.

Sexism, as an animating structure of violence in LGBTQ+ women’s lives in the U.S.—a system of punishment and reward that glorifies a version of white supremacist femininity—is driving so much violence across our LGBTQ+ communities and against BIPOC communities seeking justice.⁴

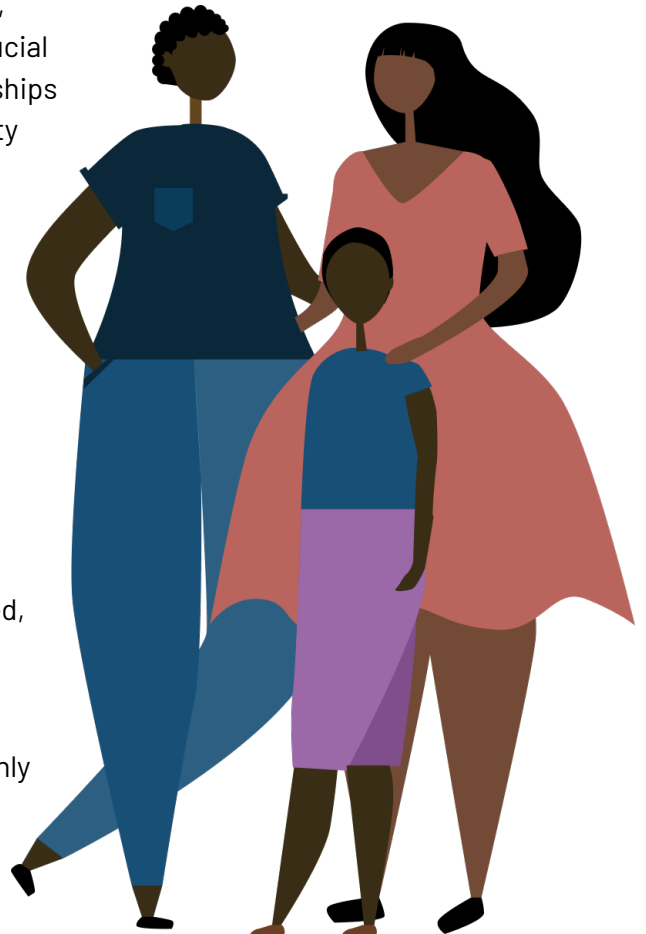
The LGBTQ+ movement has lost this thread: Racialized sexism undergirds the violence against us and imperils our planet; dismantling it is a core project of LGBTQ+ liberation.⁵

LGBTQ+ women’s friendships are foundational to our health, well-being, and economic security. This largely ignored, crucial safety net deserves attention: The pressures on our friendships given the level of violence and social and economic precarity we experience is enormous.

Our communities would benefit from growing the capacity to sustain friendships by creating opportunities for building connections, tools for resolving conflicts, and cost-free avenues for collective healing. LGBTQ+ women’s friendships are perhaps our least appreciated and yet most impactful resource and refuge.

Institutions are failing us. Whether the education system in this country, or the religious traditions we grew up in, or government and community safety nets when we are in need, respondents report that they are struggling against these institutions to create the lives they envision and deserve.⁶

The fight for LGBTQ+ women’s lives and families must not only fight for service and benefits; it must re-think these structures on a fundamental level so that we are not



merely elbowing our way into institutions that ultimately only confer poverty and control. For example, our finding on police being “not helpful at all” as crisis responders for members of our community demands creative dismantling of policing structures and radical reallocation of resources into programs that actual serve and care for us.⁷

Despite these challenges, LGBTQ+ women who partner with women are making a way out of no way, every day. Respondents’ descriptions of their complex genders and sexualities reveal a joyful and anarchic project of self and community creation. Their descriptions of sexual practices and intimacies tell a story of finding pleasure in spite of it all; their claiming of thousands of favorite things about being an LGBTQ+ women—all of these add up to breathtaking lives of our own choosing; to resistance, community, and joy.

Q. 6.7 What are three of your favorite things about being an LGBTQ+ woman?

A. Respondent Z:

**Women are strong and hot.
Queerness means always growing.
We never give up the fight.**

Thank you to our donors: The Laughing Gull Foundation, the Arcus Foundation, Grindr4Equality, the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Collaborative for Gender and Reproductive Equity, the Palette Fund, the Rising Fund, the Field Hamilton Fund, Linda Kettner, Dee Mosbacher, the Masto Foundation, the Ms. Foundation, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, donors of the Horizons Foundation, The New York Women’s Foundation, The Freeman Foundation, and the Johnson Family Foundation.

Thank you to our 120 community partner organizations that supported the development of our survey questionnaire and distributed links to the survey to their community members.

[View partners.](#)

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ENDNOTES

1 In 2021, 26% of Americans claimed they hadn’t had sex in the past year. (General Social Survey, Data Explorer, 2021). In this study, 16% report “not engaging in sexual activity at all.” Our measure is not a yearly measure; accordingly, it is not precisely comparable to the GSS. This data point plus several additional questions in the chapter on Sexual Practices, Pleasure, and Joy lead us to this conclusion.

2 BIPOC is an umbrella term for Black, Indigenous and People of Color in the US. The term foregrounds the enslavement of Black people and the displacement of and genocidal violence against Indigenous people as foundational to structural racism in the US, while denoting that all people of color are targeted by the system.

3 In *Disability is Not a Dirty Word*, scholar/activist Anjali Forber-Pratt claims disability as an identity around which community and activism forms while informing and energizing social justice movements. We use “disabling conditions” throughout this report to emphasize that structures of discrimination are themselves disabling, and to examine how our respondents are surviving and thriving under these conditions.

4 [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

5 The Combahee River Collective Black Feminist Statement, 1977; *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*, Suzanne Pharr, 1988.

6 [Pod Mapping](#) is a friendship and safety network building exercise that has been developed by BIPOC queer feminist anti-violence and disability justice activists.

Great resources on repair, friendship and justice: *Fumbling Toward Repair*, Kaba and Hassan; *Emergent Strategy*, and *We Will Not Cancel Us*, adrienne maree brown

7 [Mutual Aid](#) is an example of this kind of rethinking.