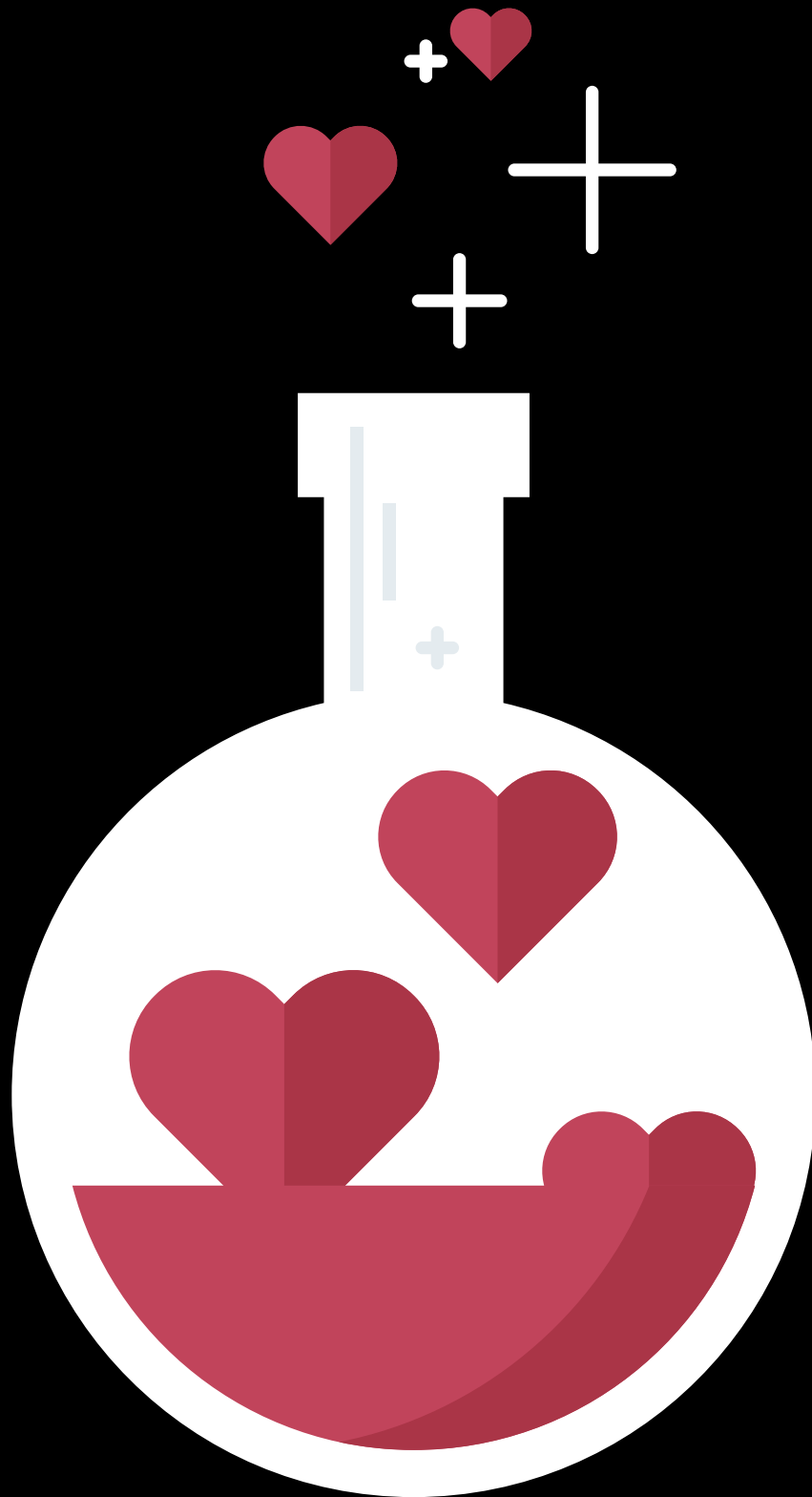




Ditch the Label
The Valentine Study

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Registered charity number 1156329.



ABOUT DITCH THE LABEL

WELCOME TO DITCH THE LABEL

We are one of the largest anti-bullying charities in the world, working internationally to help young people overcome bullying and the impacts it has on health, behaviour and self-esteem.

In 2016 alone, we helped over 540,000 young people overcome bullying through our partnerships with online games, social networks and our award-winning support programmes available on our website.

Within the past year, 1.5 million young people in the UK have experienced bullying, half of them never telling anybody through fear, embarrassment or a lack of faith from support systems.

Through our work with schools, colleges and online communities, we conduct world-leading research on an ongoing basis to help us better understand the dynamics of bullying so that we can tackle it with interventions which work.

We believe that bullying is a societal issue and advocate that everybody has a role to play in reducing effects and the prominence of bullying. This is why we work hard through our partnerships with celebrities, brands and the media to shift societal attitudes and to generate awareness of the issues affecting young people.

Our focus is not only on those who experience bullying, but also on those who are doing the bullying. Bullying is a learnt behaviour and we won't stop until it's over.

5 FACTS ABOUT US

1.) We are a digital anti-bullying charity. This means that most of our support services are provided online, integrated within environments that are authentic, approachable and comfortable to young people.

2.) We support the people who are doing the bullying, too, because we recognise that bullying is a learnt behaviour. Like all such behaviours, bullying has a root cause and a remedy for change. Reactive support is important, but proactive support is the only way in which we can prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

3.) All of our interventions are evidence-based, which means that we are continuously using new data and innovation to improve the support that we provide to young people.

4.) We don't patronise young people; instead, we empower them with skills, techniques and knowledge that enable them to resolve their own situations.

5.) We've won multiple awards in recognition of our work, our campaigns and our research.



ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

A MODERN VIEW ON SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Each year, thousands of young people speak to us about their sexuality. Many are confused and worried. Others are being bullied or discriminated against because of attitudes towards their sexual preferences.

Students who identify as anything other than 'straight' are those who are most likely to experience bullying and the impacts on their health and wellbeing can be profound.

In more positive terms, rates of homophobia in many areas continues to decrease, as young people are becoming increasingly tolerant and accepting. This shift has been heavily influenced from the progress made from the civil rights movements and an increased societal openness and discussion about sexuality.

Young people are starting to open up about their interests and are using the internet to explore who they really are. With this research, we wanted to explore the current climate of sexuality - proposing a new way to define it, beyond the current binary construct.

We wanted to see how access to the internet is redefining sexuality and relationships. This research explores how young people use the internet, now, to explore their sexuality online.

This research also explores how technology is impacting on relationships; investigating virtual relationships between consenting young people who have never met face-to-face.

We believe that this research will create important discussions and debates with regards to the modern view of sexuality and relationships. The findings will inform our interventions - enabling us to help young people navigate through difficult

situations related to bullying.

In addition to The Valentine Study, we have produced a range of other related reports - all of which are freely available at www.DitchtheLabel.org.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to thank everyone who has helped us to produce, analyse and disseminate our research. Special thanks goes to:

- Professor Ian Rivers, academic overview;
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- Hackett and Tiger, report design;
- Bullet PR, public relations;
- Proof Reading Service UK, quality control.

LIAM HACKETT

GLOBAL CEO



Executive Summary

Over the last decade public discourse surrounding sexuality has increased; what was once a taboo subject is now regularly discussed, explored and increasingly accepted by society. The civil rights movements have successfully campaigned for equal marriage and protections under a legal framework which is representative of popular opinion - a long-awaited development for those whose sexual identity does not fall within heteronormative confines.

For young people however, our research still consistently finds a strong correlation between those who do not identify as being 'straight' and experiences of bullying. Anecdotally, we know that many young people grow up feeling confused and also pressured into conforming to specific labels of sexuality and so we became curious about exploring a new, fluid construct which looks beyond the traditional labels people have previously used to identify themselves.

This report revealed that 76% of young adults surveyed no longer believe the conventional labels which are used in relation to sexuality to be relevant or of importance, with only 43% identifying as traditionally 'straight'. 93% agreed that the exploration of your sexual identity is a healthy and normal part of growing up and 90% acknowledged that the internet had enabled them to do this; in particular they pointed to the power of online anonymity as a tool for self-discovery. This means that young people do not have to 'commit' to any aspect of their identity prematurely when revealing themselves to their offline friends and family if they are not ready to do so. They have an opportunity to explore and come to terms with their sexual preferences at a pace that suits them, free from external pressures.

Looking deeper into online behaviours and how young people conduct relationships revealed that 55% of respondents overall have, at some point, experienced a virtual, romantic relationship with somebody they had never met. The data shows that young

people who do not identify as being exclusively attracted to members of the opposite sex, those with a disability, those who identify as transgendered or respondents from lower-income backgrounds are the most likely to have engaged in a virtual relationship with somebody online.

While virtual relationships are often blamed for a wider disconnection between people and our growing inability to communicate in offline environments, this report forces us to acknowledge the positive aspects of conducting a romantic relationship in such a way. Virtual relationships allow for human connection, contact and gratification - things which for some, might be challenging to obtain or experience in the physical world. People can present themselves how they wish and many find relief and also freedom from some of the prejudices they have encountered offline.

We hope this report goes some way to reassure young people that there is no right or wrong when it comes to identifying where you sit on the sexuality spectrum and indeed the exploration of your sexual identity is something that is completely normal. We released this research to fall within the Valentine's period as we know this to be a time that promotes and focuses primarily on heteronormative relationships, and this often leads to the isolation and alienation of those who fall outside of that catchment.

It is our hope that this research encourages open discussion and challenges the traditional - and seemingly archaic - concepts of relationships that we are exposed to on Valentine's Day.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "L HACKETT".

Liam Hackett - Global Chief Executive Officer

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Adams et al found evidence of homophobia being a result of latent homosexuality - through investigating the role of homosexual arousal in exclusively heterosexual men who admitted negative affect towards homosexual individuals. The results of this study indicated that individuals who score in the homophobic range and admit negative attitudes toward homosexuality demonstrate significant sexual arousal when presented with male homosexual pornography. The concept that homophobia in men is a counter-reaction to an internal unwanted attraction to other men has its roots in psychoanalysis; Freud termed this defense reaction formation.

Internalized homophobia has been defined as "the gay person's direction of negative social attitude toward the self, leading to a devaluation of the self and resultant internal conflicts and poor self-regard." (Meyer & Dean, 1998). Or as "the self-hatred that occurs as a result of being a socially stigmatized person" (Locke, 1998). In its extreme forms, it can lead to the rejection of one's sexual orientation. Internalized homophobia is further characterized by a conflict between experiences of same-sex affection or desire and feeling a need to be heterosexual (Herek, 2004)

Theories of identity development among lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals suggest that internalized homophobia is commonly experienced in the process of LGB identity development and overcoming internalized homophobia is essential to the development of a healthy self-concept (Cass, 1979); (Fingerhut, Peplau & Hgavami, 2005); (Mayfield, 2001); (Rowen & Malcom, 2002); (Troiden, 1979; 1989)

Young adults today do not want their sexuality to be boxed in or stifled by a label. They want alternatives and new ways to describe and identify their sexual and romantic selves.

A YouGov study (an internet-based market research company), conducted in 2015, found that almost half of young people aged between 18 and 24 in the UK do not consider themselves exclusively gay or straight; instead they identified with more "open-minded" definitions. The study used a modified Kinsey scale to measure sexuality by asking participants to place themselves on a range between "exclusively heterosexual" and "exclusively homosexual." The results showed that 60% of heterosexuals and 73% of homosexuals rejected the notion that sexuality is something that is fixed. One key finding highlighted the fact that, with each generation, people see their sexuality as less fixed and more fluid - with sexual orientation existing along a continuum rather than being a choice between being straight or gay.

Although sexual orientation is theoretically understood as existing along a continuum, in practice researchers usually place participants into three discrete categories: heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual (Sell, 1997) There is increasing evidence

that these traditional ways of describing sexuality have outgrown their usefulness and are no longer accurate. Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest the importance of considering groups that are located in the spaces between heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality (Austin et al, 2007; Diamond, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005; Thompson and Morgan, 2008; Vrangalova, Savin- Williams, 2010)

Virtual relationships are increasingly common in our contemporary multi-sphered society, and many scholars (Hall et al, 2010; Korchmaros et al, 2015; Nesi et al, 2015; Whitty et al, 2001) have called for further exploration into relationships formed online. Korchmaros et al found that adolescents who identify as LGBTQ might find it more difficult to form romantic relationships offline and contend that this could be due to fewer potential romantic partners being available to them (2015: 55).

Moreover, their study concluded that LGBTQ adolescents were more likely to form romantic relationships online than non-LGBTQ adolescents (2015: 62). As well as having less options in terms of potential romantic partners, LGBTQ individuals may be more inclined to form online relationships as a form of feedback-seeking whilst developing self-identities (Nesi et al, 2015: 1430). Nesi et al found a relationship between gender, depression and social media as well as a dependency on social media technologies as a means to create accepting social environments. This result highlights the urgency of making efforts to understand how such social environments could intersect with models of psychopathology (2015: 1347). This amplifies the need for further explorations of virtual relationships and their identity-variables and impacts.

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METHODOLOGY

INTRO

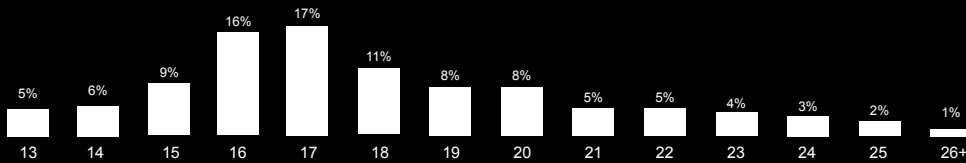
How we conducted this research:

1,006 young people aged 13-26 in the UK and USA took part in this survey which was available online through the Ditch the Label website for a period of 6-months. Participation was without incentive and was promoted across social media and through our partnerships with select online games and social networks.

We received further responses representing additional countries but for the purpose of this report, these were removed. Once the data was cleansed, we used SPSS data extrapolation to produce our analysis. Our data was then validated in-house by our research team and then independently by Professor Ian Rivers from the University of Strathclyde.

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Young people aged 13-26 were invited to take part in the survey. The average age was 17.9.



WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

- 53% female
- 45% male
- 2% transgender

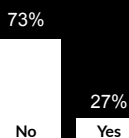
WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME?

- 3% said £200,001 or greater
- 4% said £100,001 to £200,000
- 4% said £70,001 to £100,000
- 6% said £50,001 to £70,000
- 5% said £41,000 to £50,000
- 8% said £31,000 to £40,000
- 10% said £20,001 to £30,000
- 13% said £12,001 to £20,000
- 12% said Below £12,000
- 35% Preferred not to say.

WHAT IS YOUR ETHNICITY?

- 0% Arab
- 3% Asian
- 1% Asian other
- 0% Bangladeshi
- 2% Black African
- 1% Black Caribbean
- 2% Black Other
- 1% Chinese
- 0% Gypsy/Irish Traveller
- 1% Indian
- 8% Mixed race
- 1% Pakistani
- 60% White British
- 3% White Irish
- 17% White other

ARE YOU RELIGIOUS?



IF YOU ARE RELIGIOUS, WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION?

- 2% Agnostic
- 1% Atheist
- 2% Buddhist
- 81% Christian
- 0% Hindu
- 2% Jewish
- 8% Muslim
- 2% Pagan
- 2% Sikh

DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY?

- 4% physical disability
- 9% learning disability
- 4% Autism/Asperger's

MODERN SEXUALITY

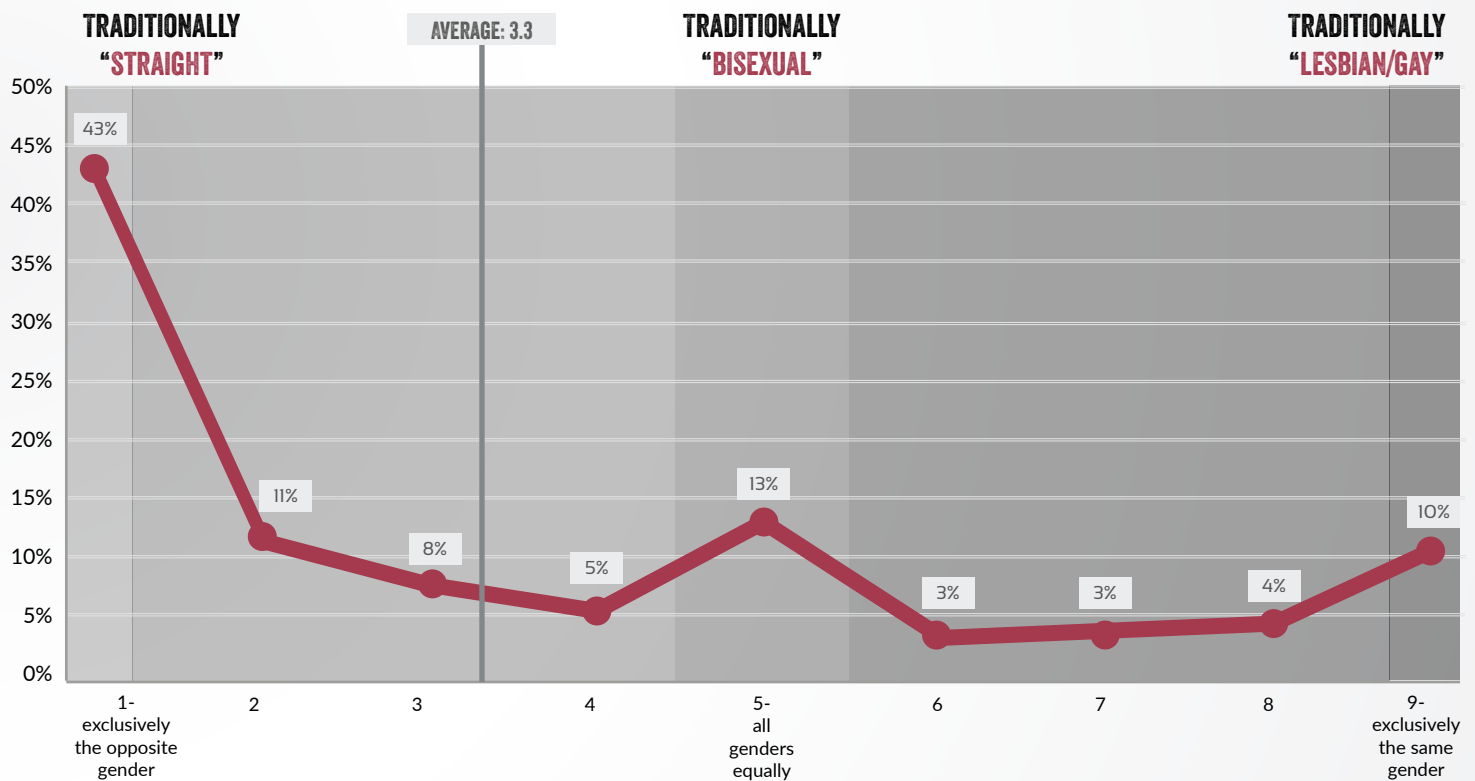
INTRO

About this section:

Over recent years, there has been an increase in the number of labels that young people use to describe and identify their sexuality. This expanding definition of sexuality inspired us to explore a spectrum approach, as opposed to using the traditional binary labels of “straight”, “bisexual”, “gay” and “lesbian”. This new fluid approach allows young people to explore their sexuality without involving unwanted implications or the pressure to conform to, or attach a specific label to their identity. Our research has shown that traditional ways of describing sexuality are now obsolete. 34% of respondents do not conform as being ‘straight’, ‘bisexual’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’.

ON A SCALE OF 1-9, HOW WOULD YOU BEST DESCRIBE YOUR SEXUALITY?

1 = EXCLUSIVELY ATTRACTED TO THE OPPOSITE GENDER AND 9 = EXCLUSIVELY ATTRACTED TO THE SAME GENDER.



SEXUALITY LABELS ARE NO LONGER IMPORTANT.

PEOPLE SHOULD JUST BE ABLE TO DATE WHO THEY WANT TO.



IT ISN'T NATURAL TO BE INTERESTED IN PEOPLE OF THE SAME GENDER.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW SOMEBODY COULD HAVE A DIFFERENT SEXUALITY TO ME



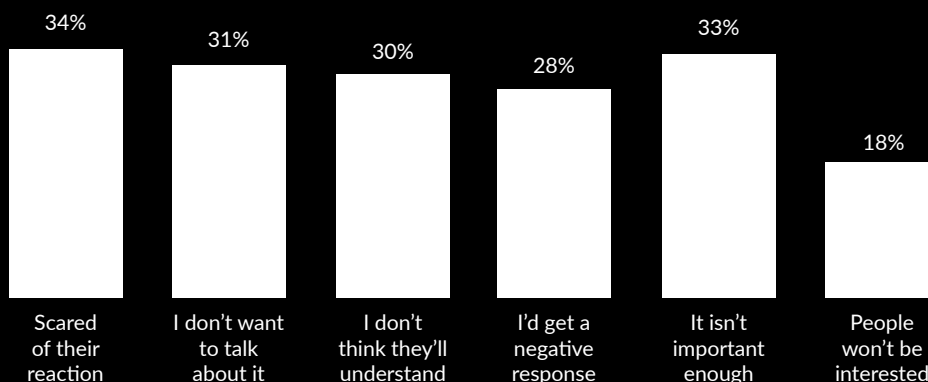
PEOPLE WHO CALL THEMSELVES BISEXUAL ARE JUST GREEDY.



HOW COMFORTABLE DO YOU FEEL TALKING TO OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY?



WHY DON'T YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY WITH OTHER PEOPLE?



| EXPLORING SEXUALITY |



MY STORY

**Female, 16, straight
USA**

"I was in middle school and I was hanging out with a girl a lot but she was only my friend. A group of kids thought that I liked her and they started calling me lesbian and girls were saying, "don't get close to me or you'll fall for me" and boys kept saying, "Are you gonna steal my girlfriend" and it kept on happening for a while, until I had to get a boyfriend so they could stop calling me lesbian when in reality I am straight."



MY STORY

**Male, 19, straight
USA**

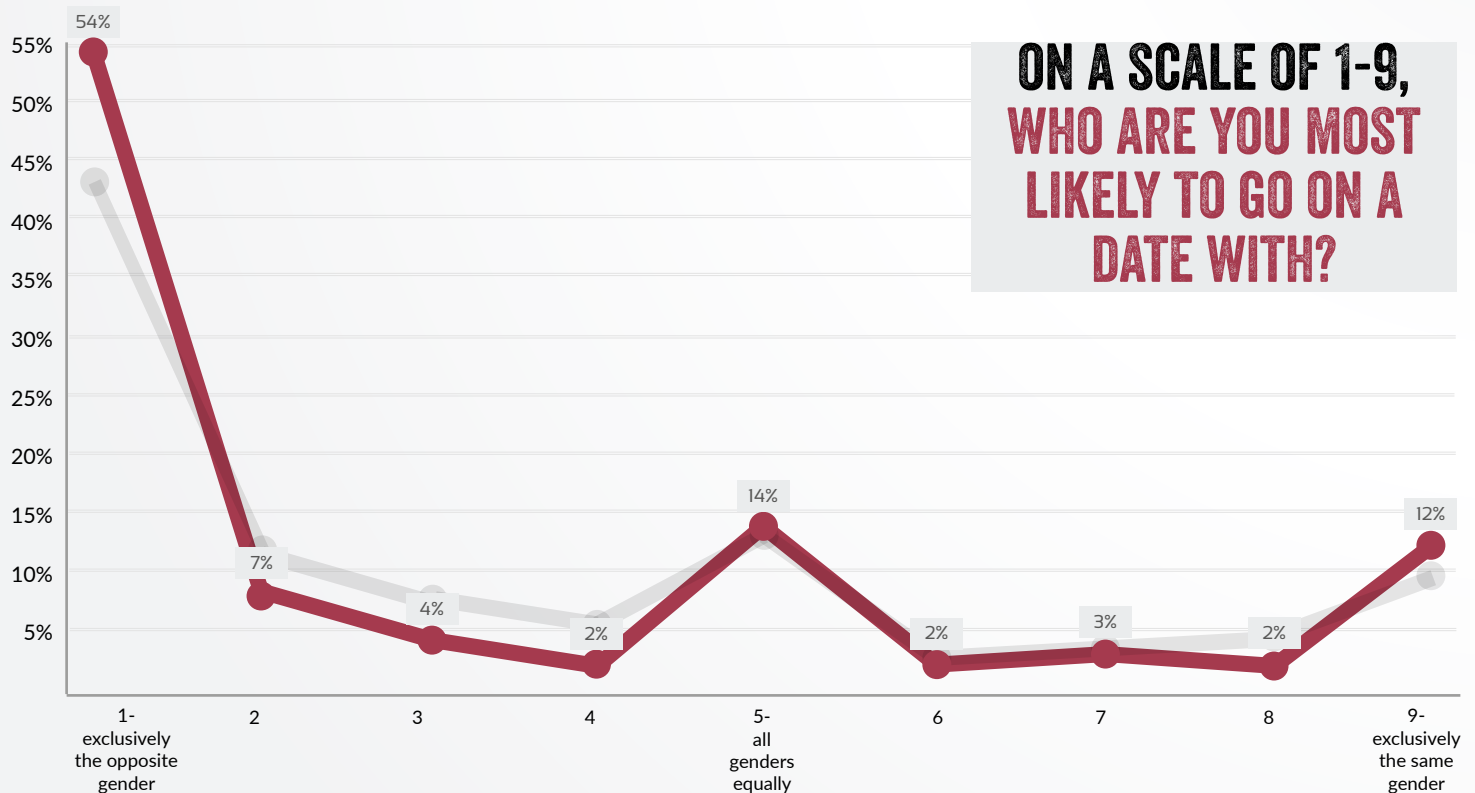
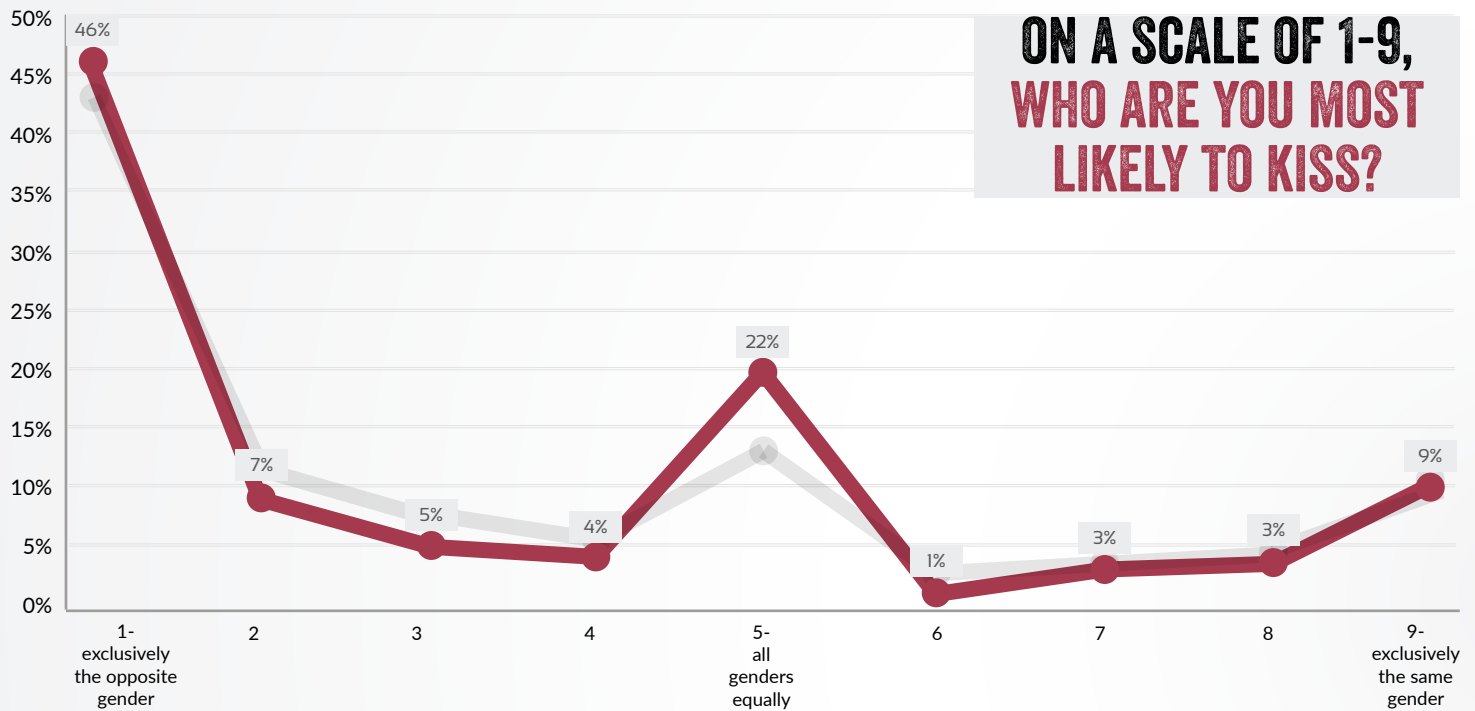
"I was romantically attracted to a FTM Transperson, and I honestly got a lot of junk about it because I usually am straight, but I was attracted to this person. Most of my friends left me because I was attracted to a trans person and my social status was just never the same."

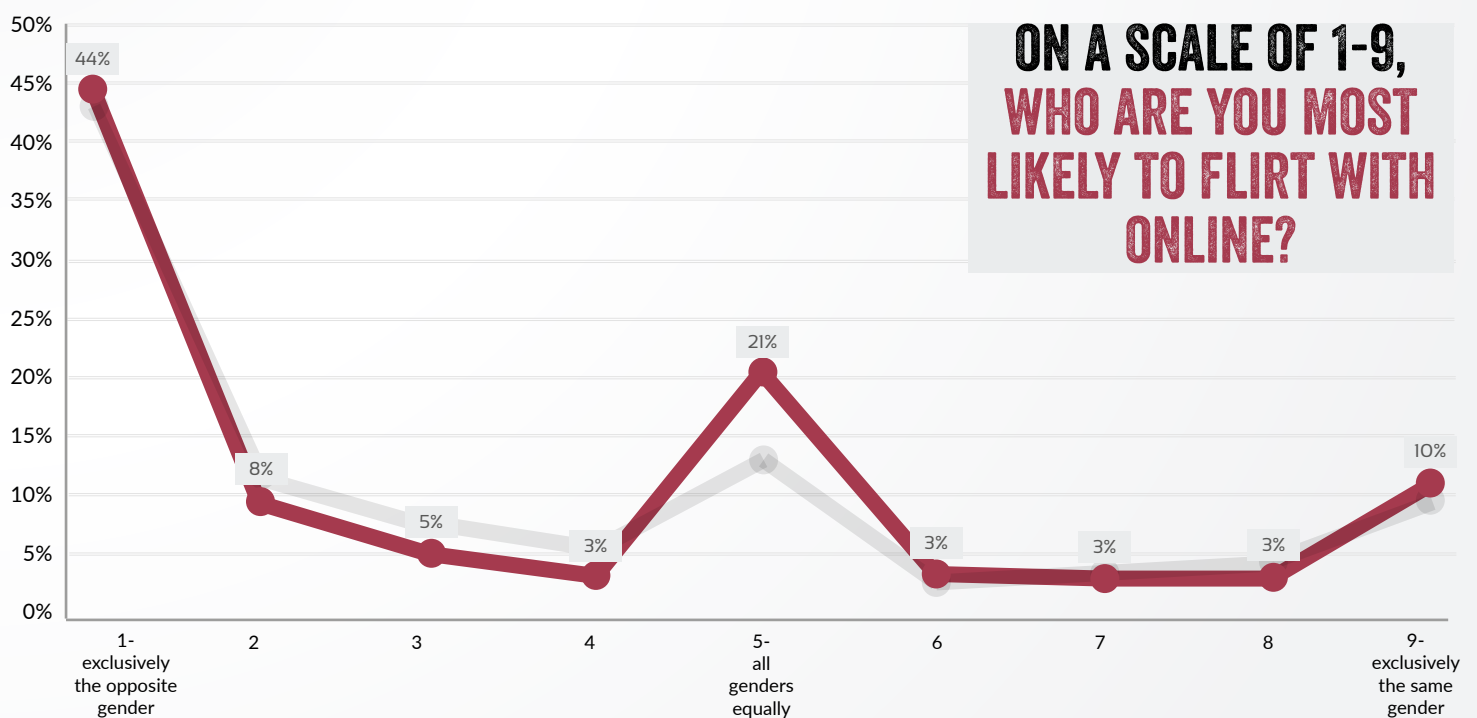
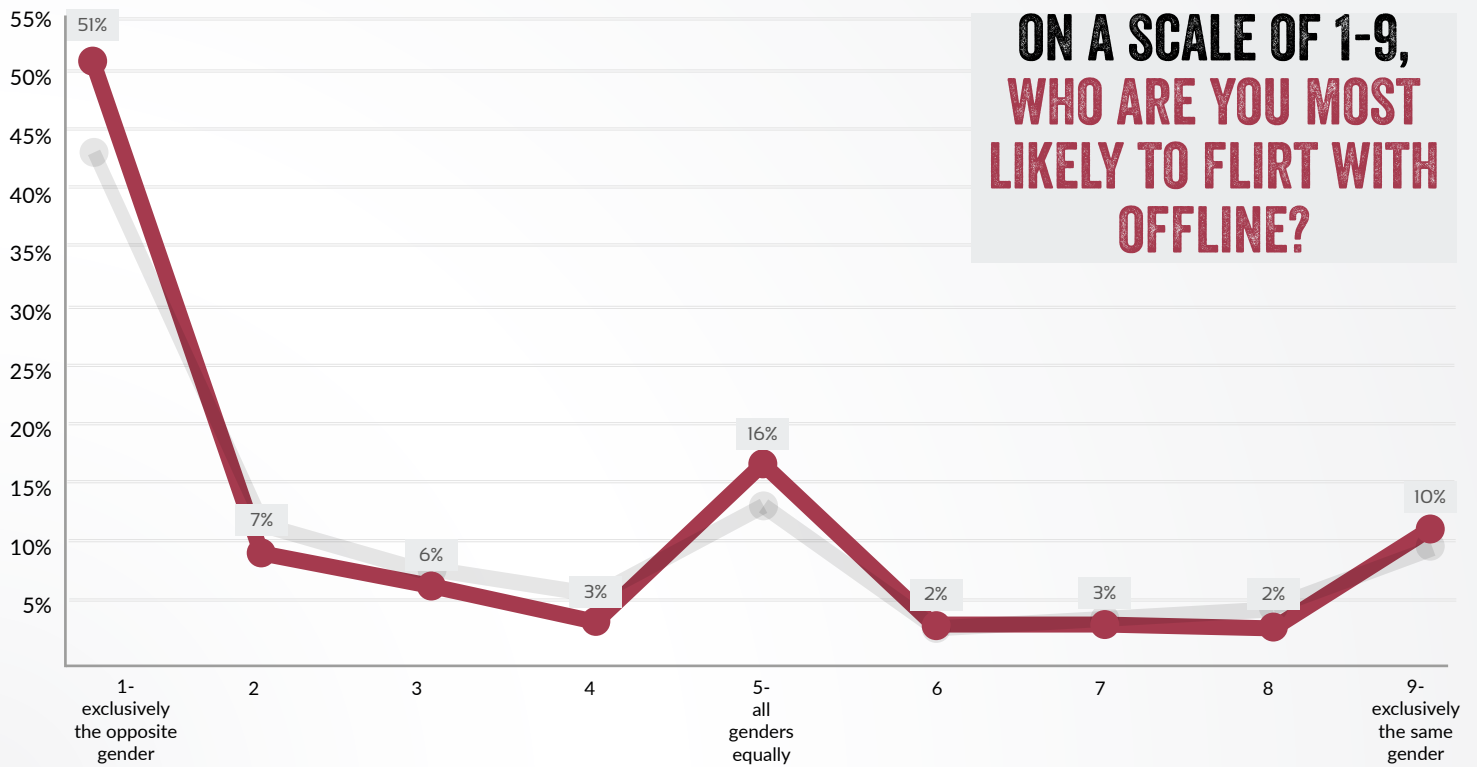
INTRO

About this section:

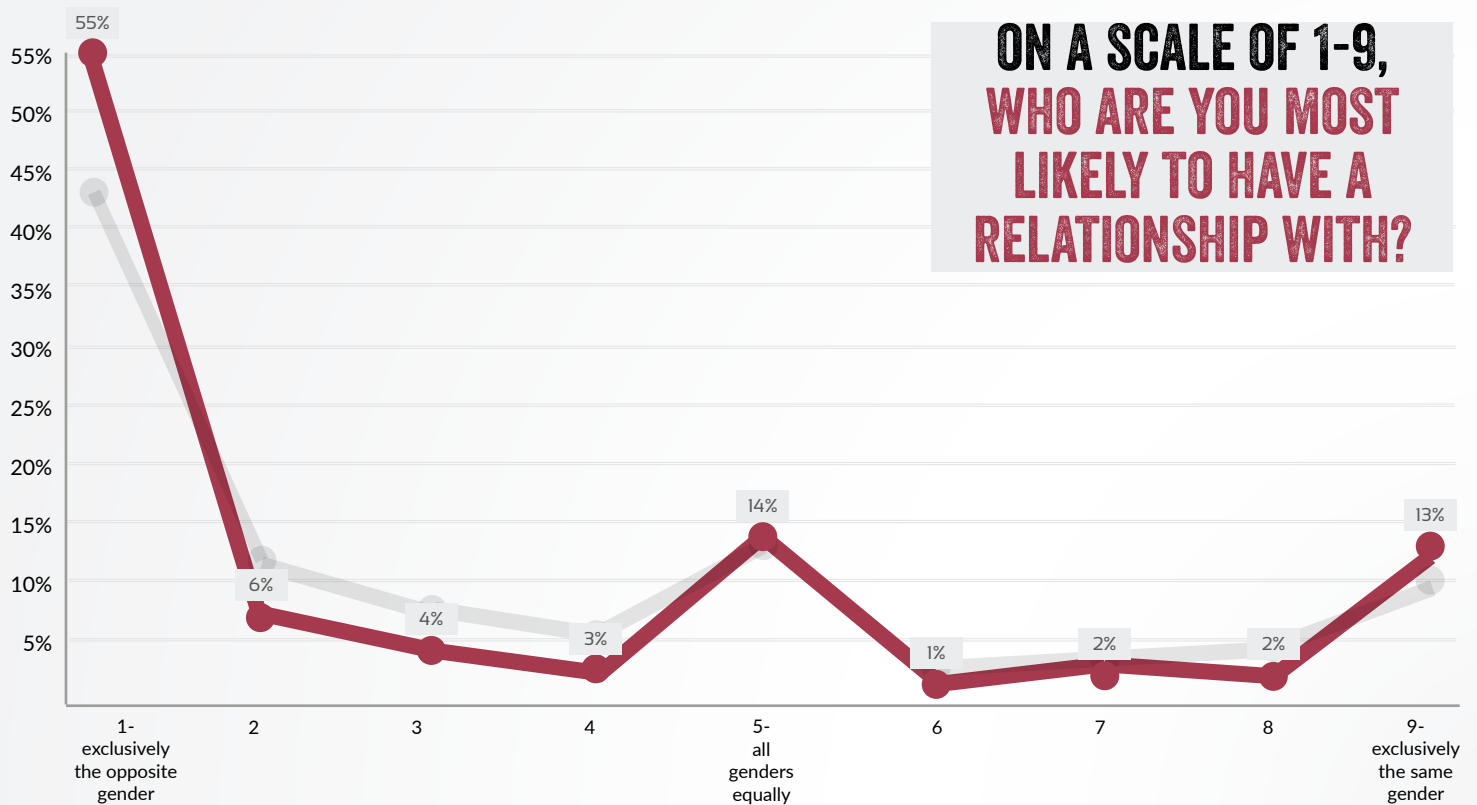
We asked young people to tell us who they are most likely to engage in certain behaviours with. Behaviours ranged from those involving low-commitment; such as flirting, to those involving higher-commitment, such as entering into a relationship. This data was then contrasted with the overarching scale of how respondents defined their sexuality.

Note that the grey faded data represents how respondents rated their sexuality on a scale of 1 to 9.



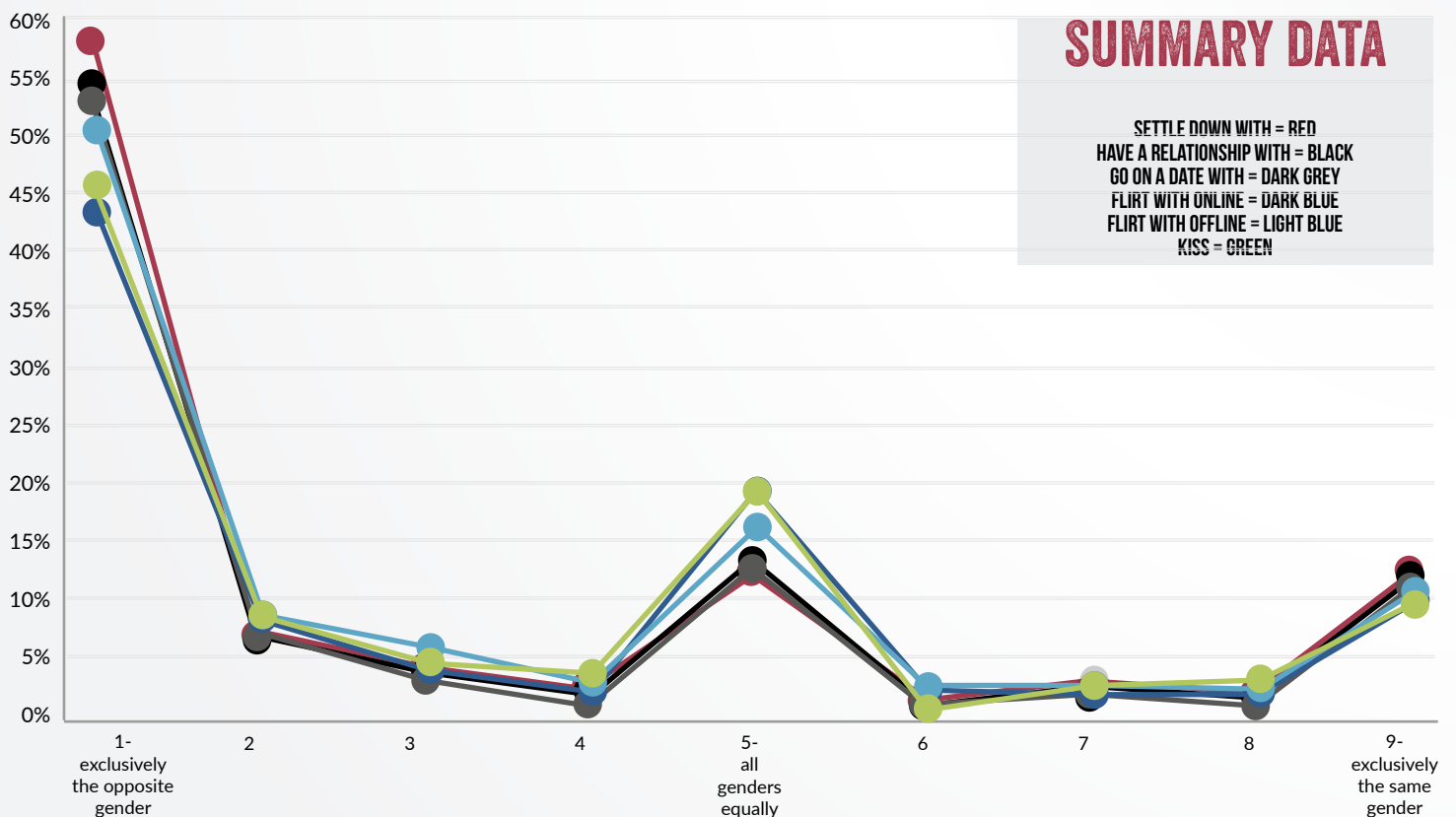


ON A SCALE OF 1-9, WHO ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH?



SUMMARY DATA

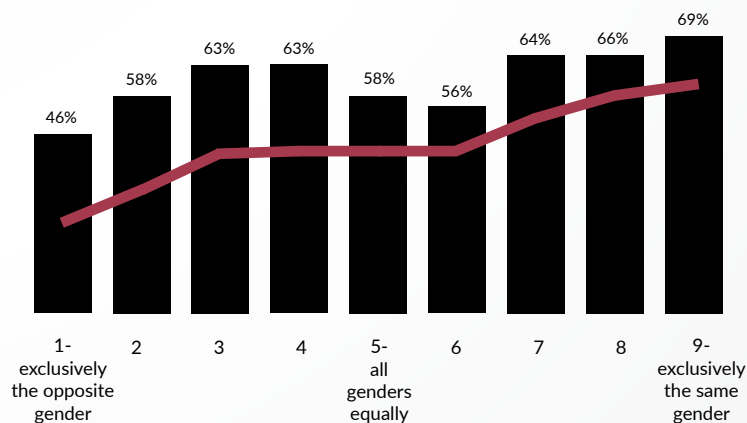
SETTLE DOWN WITH = RED
 HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH = BLACK
 GO ON A DATE WITH = DARK GREY
 FLIRT WITH ONLINE = DARK BLUE
 FLIRT WITH OFFLINE = LIGHT BLUE
 KISS = GREEN



VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS



WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY SEXUALITY



MY STORY

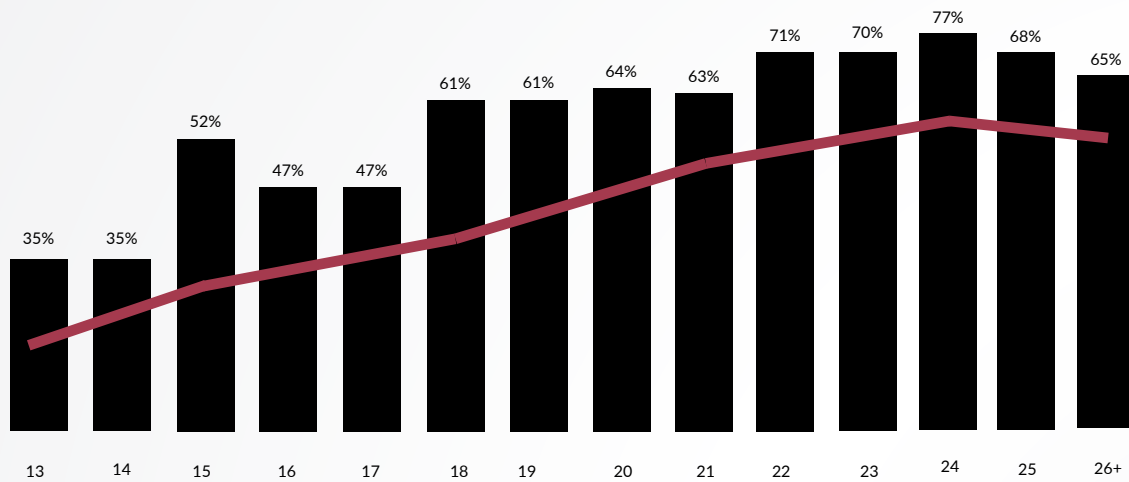
**Female, 24, asexual
USA**

"My grandparents, and even my parents were raised in a different age of generation, they still to do this day sweep my true self under the rug and hope that it's just a "young adult phase".

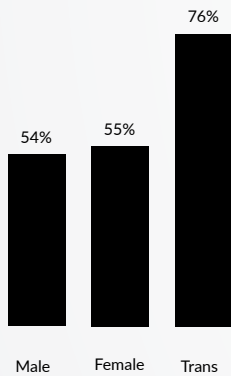
They've grown more to accept me but I've had to make more drastic changes to avoid the eye of hate. I left my church my family attended 7 years ago, due to them trying to push their agenda that my choices were "sins". I also left high school to enter into home school, the ease of social networking and cliches in school made me a easy target for whispers, words, or hateful messages left on my social media.

I felt like I was in a prison with narrow minded immature people who might never learn to accept others for being different."

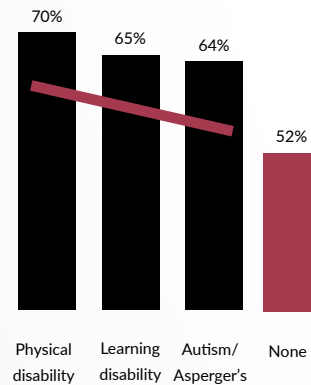
WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY AGE



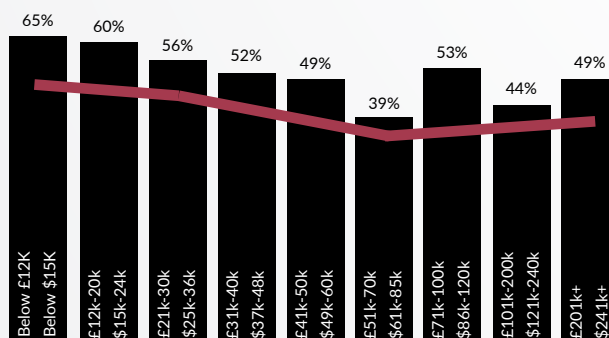
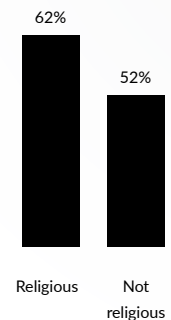
WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY GENDER



WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY DISABILITY

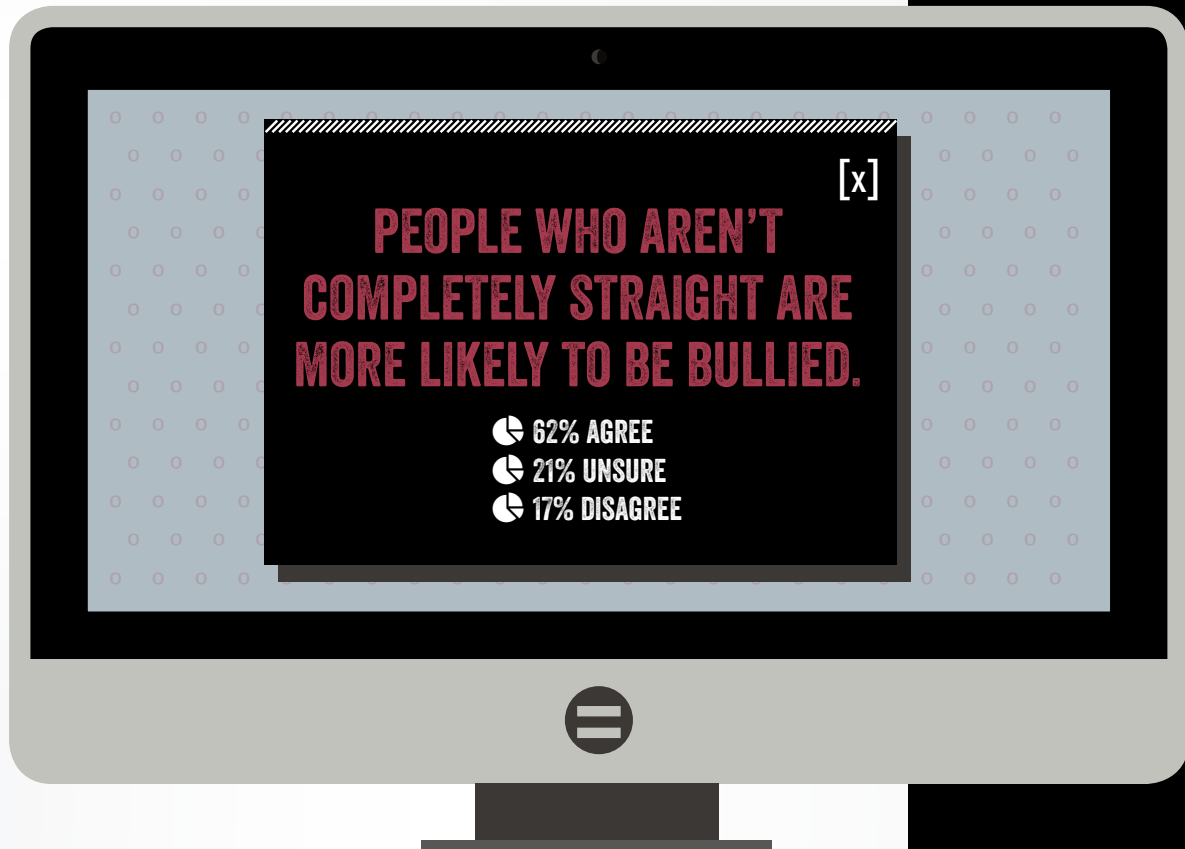


WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY RELIGION

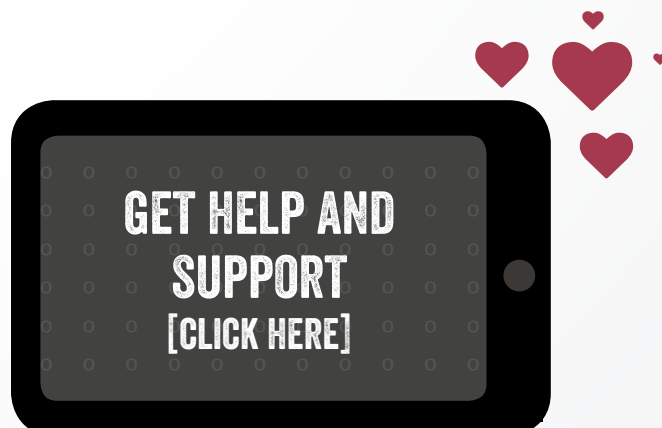


WHO'S HAVING VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS? BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

| SEXUALITY | AND BULLYING



**20% HAVE BEEN BULLIED
BECAUSE OF ATTITUDES
TOWARDS THEIR SEXUALITY**
18% IN UK, 22% IN USA.



MY STORY

**Male, 17, curious/unsure
UK**

"I haven't come out as someone exploring my sexuality, or bi, or i don't even know but I've been called gay and a faggot before which really struck me because I've been trying to act as "straight" as possible. It's awful and every time I hear it I feel like someone is punching me in my gut."

**Female, 20, bisexual
USA**

"Even people at school that find it okay to leave nasty messages or posts on how they disagree with my choice to marry whomever, regardless of their sexual or society standing in life. I'm in it for love, not labels."

Their words may hurt, even hurtful words from family have been thrown in my face. I hope family and even strangers someday understand that it's not a phase, it's a choice. I'm happy with it."



MY STORY

**Male, 24, gay
USA**

"I used to be called 'fag' and 'gay' a lot in middle school, which made coming out all the harder because I thought being gay was a bad thing. When I did come out in college, I still wasn't able to actually say the word 'gay' for half a year so I just said 'I like guys.'"



MY STORY

**Female, 21, bisexual
UK**

"In school, I was bullied a lot because of my bisexuality, a lot of people used to say I should go and change all alone in one of the cubicles so that I couldn't look at other girls. I was also bullied because people said that I was only interested in girls because I couldn't get boys, and that I was greedy for wanting both."



MY STORY

**Male, 16, curious/unsure
UK**

"I was called gay in my first year of secondary school with no evidence behind the accusation. Because of this I now have a much smaller friend-pool and am unsure about who I really am and am not confident in front of other classmates anymore."

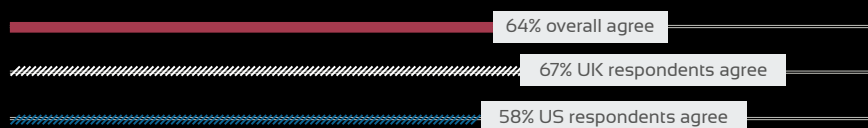


MY STORY

**Female, 23, bisexual
UK**

"Telling people I was bisexual was the worst as I had my own sister think I'd watch her getting changed because I was into women as well as men and embarrassed me by making me put my head under the covers as we shared the same bedroom. I just felt if that's how my own sister could feel how would other family members and friends feel about it."

**"MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE
AT SCHOOL TO EDUCATE
ABOUT DIFFERENT
SEXUALITIES."**





OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

First, never think that you are alone. Whether you're being bullied or you're having difficulty figuring yourself out, there is always somebody here for you and ready to talk at DitchtheLabel.org.

> Sexuality

It is important to remember that the exploration of your sexuality is something that is a completely normal and natural part of growing up. With that being said, we do not underestimate how hard it can be to come out to friends and family. It is vital that you go at your own pace and make decisions based on your own circumstances, free from external pressures. Your safety and wellbeing should always come first. There are support guides on how to navigate the coming out process on our website.

If you are experiencing bullying because of attitudes towards your sexuality, you can access advice and support materials on our website. We have a range of guides available for those who want to consider speaking to the person bullying them and to help young people better understand the psychology of those who bully.

> Virtual relationships

When engaging in virtual relationships, your safety is the priority. We recommend that you keep your privacy

settings high. Before you give away personal details like your full name, phone number, address etc to someone you have not met offline be sure that they are definitely who they say they are. If somebody is exhibiting threatening behaviour, or has your personal information and is giving you the impression that your safety might be at risk, contact the police or a trusted adult immediately. Visit our website for top tips on spotting a catfish, or ask for advice via our Community section.

FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

> Sexuality

Firstly, we advise that you build open and honest relationships with your children so that they know they can talk to you about any issues that might be on their mind, including their sexuality. Creating a home environment that is inclusive and allows for freedom of expression will enable your child to come out to you without having to fear repercussions.

Simple actions that you can take to ensure this include not being presumptive regarding their sexuality - instead of asking if they have a boyfriend/girlfriend, ask if they are seeing anyone; and when discussing sexuality in front of your child, refrain from attaching negative connotations to any orientation.

If you have any fears or concerns

surrounding your child's sexuality, remember that your child can experience love and fulfilment in relationships, however they identify. Happiness is not exclusive to traditionally 'straight' relationships.

> Virtual relationships

Friendships and relationships are an important part of young adult life and in this day and age this extends to connections they may form on the internet.

You might be worried about your child's safety; however, it is important that you build a relationship whereby your child feels they are able to talk openly with you about their online activity without provoking judgement or a negative reaction - such as you limiting their access to the computer or mobile phone.

We advise talking positively with them about online behaviours and giving them solutions to potential problem scenarios. For example, make them aware that if they ever feel as if a situation is getting out of control, they have your unconditional support. You could also give them the contact details of Ditch the Label or an organisation like Childline (0800 11 11), if you feel they are more likely to want to seek external support.

Reassure them that they will not be punished or chastised for seeking help and keep an open dialogue on the



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LABEL** YOUR WORLD, PREJUDICE FREE .