



Coming Out in a Dating App Culture:

eharmony partners with GLAAD for National Coming Out Day to explore the role dating apps play in coming out and disclosing identity in 2024

Dating apps play a huge role in how we search for love, express who we are, and discover what authentic connection means to us. In fact, **nearly 1 in 3 (32%) LGBTQ+ Gen Z and Millennial survey respondents say dating apps are the third most popular place for them to come out, after family and friends.** In honor of **National Coming Out Day, and Spirit Day**, [eharmony](#) and [GLAAD](#) teamed up to explore the ways dating apps and pop culture intersect with how the LGBTQ+ community shares their identities in their dating lives. In this report, we unpack brand new insights from the LGBTQ+ community (age 18+) including tips from Alex Schmitter, Senior Director of Entertainment & Transgender Inclusion at GLAAD.

“eharmony continues to be an incredible example of what brands can achieve when choosing to responsibly support and serve their LGBTQ audiences and consumers, especially in the face of anti-LGBTQ attacks on corporate inclusion,” said **Sarah Kate Ellis, President and CEO of GLAAD.** “Together with GLAAD, eharmony’s new study measuring dating and pop culture sentiment will have a profound impact on expanding our understanding of the roles dating apps play in the coming out process and sharing identities. Coinciding with National Coming Out Day and Spirit Day, organized by GLAAD, this research underscores the fact that while there is no correct timeline for coming out, LGBTQ people must feel safe and supported in the coming out process, no matter how or where they decide to.”

Coming out in a digital world

In the not so distant past, the LGBTQ+ community used forums, online messaging platforms and personal ads in newspapers to come out and find connections. For older generations, coming out at bars was common (21%), but now, rare for Gen Z (4%). Fast forward and the adoption of dating apps has expanded access to dating and connection, and offered LGBTQ+ people new ways to explore their sexual orientation and express themselves authentically in an increasingly digital world. In fact, **66% of Gen Z came out before the age of 18** (93%, by age 22), compared to 40% of Millennials (76%, by age 22) — and many did so on dating apps, especially cisgender (cis) bisexual men and women (34%).

When asked to describe their coming out experience, the majority of respondents said **coming out made them feel true to themselves (64%) and true to family and friends (49%).** It also helped them gain a sense of community (46%). Understandably, more than half of respondents noted that **coming out was a scary experience (53%).**

Disclosing on dating apps and fear of fetishization

While the vast majority of LGBTQ+ respondents share their sexual orientation (92%) and gender (88%) on dating app profiles, this is especially true amongst cis Gen Z and Millennial respondents. However, 76% of transgender and nonbinary people report disclosing their gender and sexual orientation **on all dating apps** they use, compared to 94% of cis men and 90% of cis women. **The #1 reason transgender and**



nonbinary people reported not disclosing their gender is that they might be fetishized (45%). Only 6% of cis men flagged fetishization as a hesitation.

"I've had others kind of fetishize me [for] looking feminine to them..."

Nonbinary Man, 33 years old

"I got invited to be a third in heterosexual relationships and was oftentimes used for experimenting sexually."

Bi+ Nonbinary Queer Woman, 21 years old

What remains true, is that honoring and sharing LGBTQ+ identity is, above all else, the most important step in finding connection. In fact, less than half of all respondents said they would disclose their occupation (41%), religion (38%) and income (6%) before a first date, behind sexual orientation (94%) and gender (88%). When asked what was most exciting about dating someone as your true self, **41% of Gen Z and 42% of Millennials said they finally felt able to express themselves authentically.**

While 70% of participants said they revealed their gender and sexual orientation on a dating app to identify themselves to potential partners, **many did so because they were ready to explore their sexual orientation (43%),** including almost half of Gen Z (48%) and Millennials (43%).

Safety is key for transgender and nonbinary daters

This past Summer, **anti-LGBTQ incidents in the US rose 112% year-over-year,** according to [GLAAD's data](#), and **over 30% of all incidents** were motivated by hate targeting transgender and gender nonconforming people. While everyone's coming out journey is individual, for transgender and nonbinary people, many who are gender nonconforming, [this process can be uniquely complex](#). Among transgender and nonbinary people surveyed, **only 18% came out regarding their gender before they turned 18.** By age 26, 59% had come out, and over half (59%) say their coming out experience was scary.

We're seeing stories about transgender people reflecting on this today, including the documentary [Will & Harper](#), where Harper Steele comes out as a trans woman to her longtime friend and fellow Saturday Night Live alumnus Will Ferrell, not knowing how he will react. The two ultimately go on a friendship-affirming roadtrip across the country, showing how little some things can change even with big life transitions.

"Despite the fact that the majority of transgender and nonbinary people [report](#) being a lot more satisfied with their lives after taking steps to be themselves, the fear of not being accepted by others remains a reality."

Alex Schmider, Sr. Director of Entertainment & Transgender Inclusion

Compared to cis respondents, only a quarter (25%) of transgender and nonbinary people came out on dating apps. But when they did update their gender on their profiles, while half (50%) described the



experience as emotionally difficult, nearly two-thirds (65%) said doing so made them feel true to themselves (65%).

Coming out on dating apps: concerns among transgender and nonbinary people

- Concerns of being bullied rose 3x higher among transgender participants compared to cis participants
- 58% find it hard to know who will be accepting of their gender
- 53% feel like an after-thought by dating app companies
- 41% feel unwanted by cis people

Dating as a bi+ person in 2024

In our culture, myths and judgements about what it means to be bisexual continue to circulate, and while we've come a long way from Carrie Bradshaw declaring "I don't think bisexuality even exists" in 2000, bisexual erasure is prevalent in mainstream discourse around topics on dating and identity. In fact, **74% of all LGBTQ+ respondents say that bisexuality is still misunderstood in our society, with 84% of bi+, Gen Z (79%), and Millennials (78%) reporting this.** Thirty percent of cis bi+ men and women said that it was emotionally difficult when they first disclosed their gender and/or sexual orientation on a dating app. **However, this does not seem to deter prospective partners from wanting to date bi+ people.** When cis gay men and lesbians were asked about their feelings dating a bisexual person, **87% said they were open to it.**

The dating app experience for bi+ people

- 43% said that indicating their sexuality on dating profiles gives them more options and helps them confirm who is interested in them
- 42% said they don't like having to interact with straight people on dating apps
- 30% reported men tend to fetishize them
- 26% reported feeling judged by others in the LGBTQ+ community

"I've been very pleasantly surprised by how many people publicly identify as bisexual, and how not-exceptional I feel for doing so too."

Bi+ Queer Woman, 38 years old

Calling all LGBTQ+ Icons: Why Representation Matters

"While we know that storytelling allows LGBTQ+ people to more clearly see themselves and be seen by others, we cannot underestimate the power of out and visible LGBTQ+ people in our culture who impact the way LGBTQ+ people feel about themselves, particularly those who are transgender," says Alex Schmitter, Senior Director of Entertainment & Transgender Inclusion at GLAAD. **75% of respondents** said that seeing transgender people in the media gives them more confidence. According to Schmitter, "It's not always been the case that LGBTQ+ people could be out as public figures but as they are, more LGBTQ+ people relate to and can find confidence in their examples."



LGBTQ+ Icons that are fueling confidence amongst trans and nonbinary respondents:

- Elliot Page (57%)
- Marsha P. Johnson (52%)
- Laverne Cox (51%)
- Sylvia Rivera (32%)

LGBTQ+ Icons that are fueling confidence amongst lesbian respondents:

- Jodie Foster (43%)
- the L Word Cast (40%)
- Audre Lorde (35%)
- Wanda Sykes (35%)
- Megan Rapinoe (34%)

The Dating *Femininomenon*

In 2024, we saw increased discourse around women sharing stories about [coming out later in life](#). From pop culture queer icons like Chappell Roan giving us songs like *Good Luck, Babe!*, to stars like Sasheer Zamata, Parvati Shallow and Sophia Bush coming out, **we're in the midst of a "Dating Femininomenon."** Many cis women are turning to dating apps to not only explore their sexual orientation and gender identity (41%), but to authentically express themselves when dating someone as their true selves (45%). **In fact, 61% report having deeper emotional intimacy when dating women.**

But with the rise of discourse, comes the increase of myths around how cis lesbian and gay women are approaching dating. **Let's debunk!**

- 🚚 **U-Hauling:** Only 26% of cis lesbian and gay women report moving in together too quickly. "U-Hauling" isn't as pervasive as we thought.
- 🛏️ **Lesbian Bed Death:** Only 33% of cis lesbian and gay women said sex life declines over time when dating the same person, and 43% said they have a better sex life because their partners understand their body.
- 🐱 **Friend-zoning:** Just over one-quarter, 28% said they can't get out of the friendzone.
- 💬 **Is there *really* a Masc Lesbian shortage?** This past summer there was [social media chatter](#) regarding a lack of masc lesbians, but only 17% said they have experienced this.

The top 2 "must haves" for Gen Z and Millennials to feeling safer sharing their identity on a dating app

1. They want to see a lot of LGBTQ+ members already using the app: Gen Z (69%) Millennials (72%)
2. Hate speech is not tolerated on the app: Gen Z (68%) Millennials (64%)

"Younger generations are more likely to be LGBTQ than the generations before them. While the LGBTQ community, including our corporate allies, is facing extraordinary levels of legislative and cultural



backlash, LGBTQ people are wanting places to feel safe and be able to be fully themselves,” said **Sarah Kate Ellis, President & CEO of GLAAD**. “Providing places that not only invite and welcome LGBTQ people, but also take measures to protect and support their belonging will not only bring about connection online but create a more accepting world outside.”

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About eharmony

eharmony celebrates the passions, quirks and vulnerabilities that make us who we are, helping daters find relationships based on authentic self-expression and acceptance. We have and continue to help millions of daters find someone they can be themselves with – someone who gets them.

eharmony is headquartered in Los Angeles, and operates in the UK, US, Canada and Australia. For more information, visit www.eharmony.com, download the app on iOS and Android, and follow @eharmony on social platforms.

About GLAAD

GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic force in media, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke powerful dialogue that shifts culture. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished in LGBTQ representation and visibility, creating a world where everyone can live the life they love. Learn more at GLAAD.org and connect with @GLAAD on social media.

Methodology: *Coming Out in a Dating App Culture report was commissioned by eharmony and conducted by Community Marketing & Insights. It was fielded online between August 26 and September 8, 2024 and surveyed over 1,400 participants. Participants qualified if they were aged 18+ LGBTQ+ community members living in the United States and had used a dating app in the past 3 years.*