2025

“Without It, I Wouldn’t Be Here Today”

LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE SPACES

BORNTHIS WAY/ FOUNDATION

HOPELAB

Table of Contents

Glossary of LGBTQ+ Terms

Below are definitions for terms that describe the LGBTQ+ community throughout the report. They are based on GLAAD's Media Reference Guide and The Trevor Project's Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Young People.

LGBTQ+

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning. The "+" is added to recognize all identities beyond heterosexual and cisgender.

Sexual orientation

The term for a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Sexual orientations can include heterosexual (straight), lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, and other orientations; this list is not exhaustive and may include additional identities.

Gender

The concept of gender describes the internal experience of being a boy/man, a girl/woman, a nonbinary person, or otherwise. Every person experiences gender differently; you cannot know someone's gender by simply looking at them.

Cisgender

The term cisgender, or "cis" for short, describes people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth—for example, someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman or aligns with that identity.

Transgender

The term transgender, or "trans" for short, describes people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth—for example, someone who was assigned female at birth but has the internal sense of being a boy/man and identifies as a boy/man.

Nonbinary

The term "nonbinary" refers to participants who identified as such in qualitative interviews or selected "nonbinary, genderfluid, or genderqueer" in the survey.

Queer

An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity is not exclusively heterosexual or cisgender (e.g., queer person, queer woman). Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves. It's always a good idea to ask people how they describe their identity before labeling them, as some people find the term queer offensive.

"Being out" or "Coming out"

Coming out or being out refers to making one's sexual orientation or gender identity known to others. Coming out is a process and not a single event, and people often come out at different times in different contexts and may be out to some people and not others.

Data Definitions

Subgroup analyses are included throughout the report. Definitions of groups are provided below.

Age

The survey was conducted among those aged 15 to 24. Throughout the report, this population is referred to collectively as “young people.” Two developmentally distinct subpopulations of this broader group are also discussed: teens (aged 15 to 17) and young adults (aged 18 to 24).

Gender

The terms “boy” (aged 15 to 17), “man” (aged 18 to 24), “girl” (aged 15 to 17), and “woman” (aged 18 to 24) are used to refer to participants who self-labeled with those gender categories on the survey or in qualitative interviews. This is inclusive of both cis and trans boys/men and cis and trans girls/women. The term “nonbinary” includes participants who self-labeled as nonbinary during qualitative interviews or endorsed “nonbinary, genderfluid, or genderqueer” on the survey.

Gender identity

The term “transgender” refers to those who self-identified as transgender during qualitative interviews or who endorsed, “Yes, I am transgender” to a question that read, “Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?” The term “cisgender” refers to those who self-identified as cisgender during qualitative interviews or who endorsed, “No, I am not transgender” to the above question and also endorsed “boy/man” or “girl/woman” to the question about gender.

Urbanicity

The term “rural” is used to describe those who selected “in a rural area (such as out in the country)” or “in a small town” to a question asking to select the option that best describes where you live. In contrast, the term “suburban/urban” is used to describe those who selected “in a small or medium-sized city,” “just outside a large city (such as in a suburb),” or “in a large city.”

Depression

The survey employed a previously validated scale for assessing depressive symptoms, the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 Scale (PHQ-2). The PHQ-2 inquires about the degree to which an individual has experienced depressed mood and anhedonia over the past two weeks. This tool helps screen for depression but does not provide a formal diagnosis.

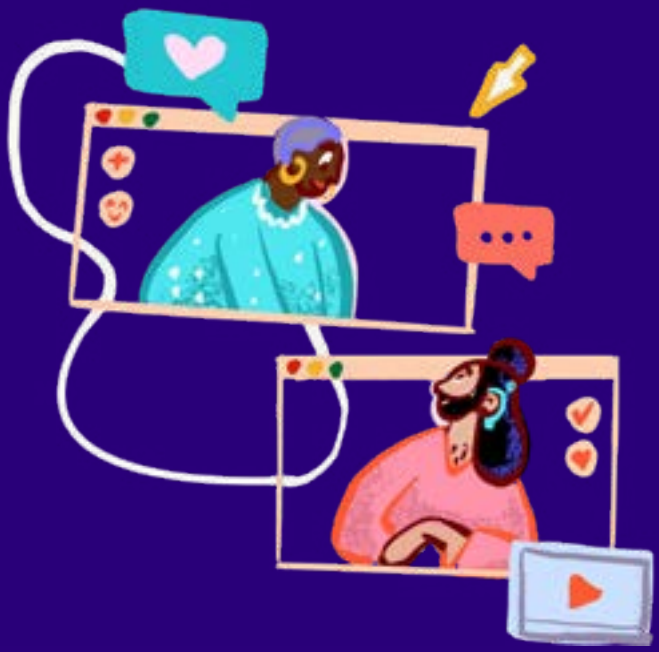
Anxiety

The survey employed a previously validated scale for assessing anxiety, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 Scale (GAD-2). The GAD-2 inquires about the degree to which an individual feels anxious and has trouble controlling their worries over the past two weeks. Its purpose is to screen for anxiety rather than provide a formal diagnosis.

VIEW THE COMPLETE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Introduction

Peer relationships are vital to young people's sense of self, helping them understand who they are and informing their internal evaluations of themselves.[1] Peer relationships can offer emotional support, foster critical social skills, contribute to identity development, and help young people make sense of the world around them. In today's digital world, young people often find these relationships in online spaces; young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, transgender, and other diverse sexualities and gender identities (LGBTQ+) are no exception to this. Given rates of parental and family rejection, LGBTQ+ young people may rely even more strongly on their peer and non-familial connections for support.



LGBTQ+ young people face greater challenges with mental health and well-being than their heterosexual and cisgender peers due to their experiences of rejection, discrimination, and victimization. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 53% of LGBTQ+ high school students reported poor mental health in the 30 days prior to data collection, compared to 21% of heterosexual and cisgender students.[2]

Transgender young people face even higher rates of poor mental health than their cisgender LGBQ+ peers, largely due to the unique challenges and stigma related to their gender identity.[3] Additionally, LGBTQ+ young people living in rural areas are at greater risk for poor mental health in comparison to LGBTQ+ young people living in suburban/urban areas.[4] Despite these disparities, protective factors—such as supportive friends and environments—may help mitigate these

1 Cote, J.E. (2015). Identity Formation, Youth, and Development: A Simplified Approach (1st ed.). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203767047

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013-2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

3 Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., Barrios, L. C., Demissie, Z., McManus, T., Rasberry, C.N., Robin, L., Underwood, J. M.(2019). Transgender identity and experiences of violence victimization, substance use, suicide risk, and sexual risk behaviors among high school students — 19 states and large urban school districts, 2017. MMWR Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report, 68(3), 67–71. http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803a3

4 Elliott, K. J., Stacciarini, J. M. R., Jimenez, I. A., Rangel, A. P., & Fanfan, D. (2022). A review of psychosocial protective and risk factors for the mental well-being of rural LGBTQ+ adolescents. Youth & Society, 54(2), 312-341. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X211035944

challenges and promote well-being.[5, 6]

For LGBTQ+ young people, online spaces may serve as a place to explore different identities, find affirmation and support, and gain access to peers like them. This is particularly true for LGBTQ+ young people living in rural areas who have less access to support in their in-person communities. However, online spaces also bring the potential for exposure to bullying and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments being expressed by others.[7] Actively engaging young people to understand this duality is essential in how they experience online environments.

With that in mind, this report examines the perspectives of LGBTQ+ young people to provide a comprehensive view of their online experiences. Specifically, it explores how they use online communities to explore their sexual and gender identities, engage in reciprocal peer support, and build lasting friendships. It also examines some of the negative aspects of online environments, such as teasing and bullying, and details how LGBTQ+ young people manage their online safety. As part of this study, we engaged directly with LGBTQ+ people about their perspectives on the survey data; young people offered their insights on interpreting and sharing these findings. This approach underscores our commitment to equity-centered, youth-engaged research.

“For LGBTQ+ young people, online spaces may serve as a place to explore different identities, find affirmation and support, and gain access to peers like them.”

5 Brooks VR: Minority Stress and Lesbian Women. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1981.

6 Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. Psychological Bulletin, 129(5), 674–697. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674

7 Fisher, C.B, Tao, X., Ford, M. (2024). Social media: A double-edged sword for LGBTQ+ youth. Computers in Human Behavior (156). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2024.108194

Summary of Methodology

Instrument development

The survey instrument was created using a collaborative survey development process to develop and prioritize topics and create items that reflected the voices and experiences of young people. The research teams engaged 19 LGBTQ+ young people, focusing on those who were Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and/or transgender, in the process of providing information about their experiences online—including those related to support, safety, and kindness. Input from LGBTQ+ young people was supplemented by expert interviews (n = 7) with professionals in LGBTQ+ youth research, policy, and direct practice. The first draft of the survey instrument underwent cognitive interviewing with 10 LGBTQ+ young people via the DScout platform. DScout is a qualitative data collection platform where participants provide their thoughts and experiences by responding to written prompts via video and text and through individual interviews. After updating the survey instrument to reflect the results of the cognitive interviewing process, two members of Born This Way Foundation's Youth Advisory Board engaged in a full review of the survey. Input from these young people was incorporated into the final survey instrument.

Using the standard IRB review process and providing all requested materials, the survey was submitted to Salus IRB for review and approval, and Salus determined that the survey was exempt from full review. Youth participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Parent/guardian consent was not sought as the research posed a minimal risk and could have presented potential harm for young people who were not out to their parents/guardians about their LGBTQ+ identity. No names or personal details were included to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

Procedure

Survey recruitment of LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 24 in the United States was conducted via targeted ads on social media. Survey data were collected through an online survey platform between August and September 2024. The **survey** consisted of 67 questions, including a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, as well as a validity check and honesty check. Quota-based sampling was applied for recruitment; this approach ensured diverse representation across key demographics, including age, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. To qualify, participants needed first to enter demographic information about their age, LGBTQ+ identity, and race/ethnicity. Those who did not meet study qualifications (LGBTQ+ aged 15 to 24) or identified as part of a quota group that had already been met were provided a message that they did not qualify for the study. A total of 1,386 LGBTQ+ identified young people aged 15 to 24 consented to participate in the research and met quota conditions. The analytical sample for this report included

1,267 LGBTQ+ young people who provided valid responses and passed our data-cleaning measures.

Data analyses

Data segmentation in this report focused on age (teens aged 15 to 17 vs. young adults aged 18 to 24), gender identity (cisgender vs. transgender), and urbanicity (suburban/urban vs. rural or small town). Given the importance of examining the intersection of LGBTQ+ and racial/ethnic identities to understand overlapping forms of oppression better, data were also examined by race/ethnicity. However, few significant differences emerged in these analyses, and most of those results were weak or relied on small sample sizes. In co-distillation interviews where results of analyses by race/ethnicity were shared with BIPOC young people for their feedback and input, they did not feel those analyses reflected their lived experiences. All reported differences are significant at the $p < .05$ level. Throughout the report, superscripts a and b are used in graphs to indicate significant differences across variables and identities.

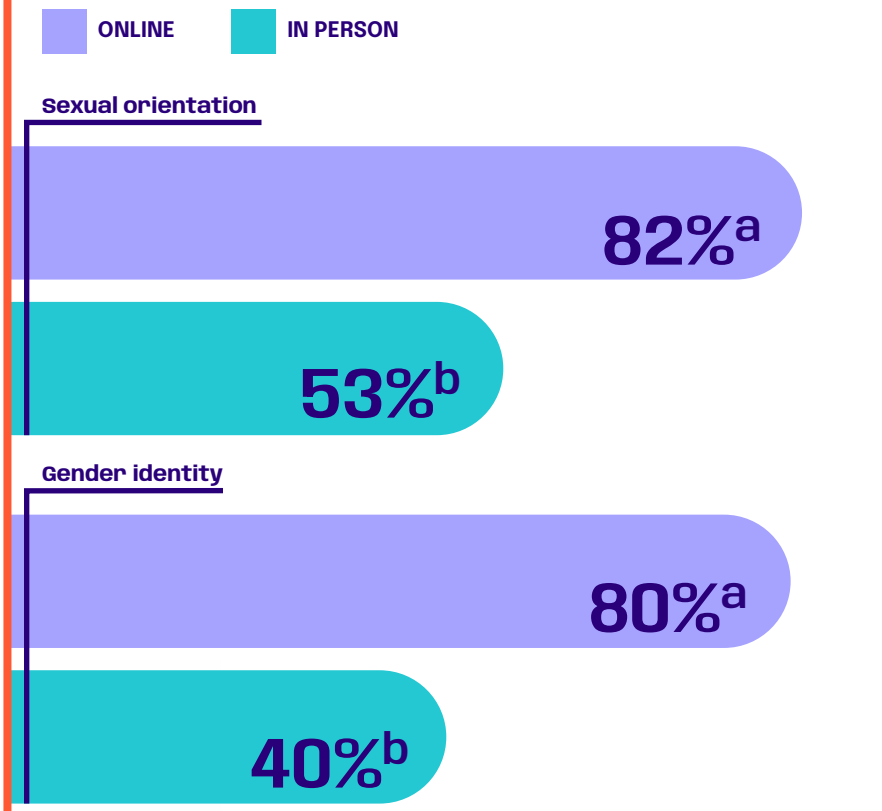
Following data analysis, the research teams conducted co-distillation interviews and focus groups with 20 LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 24 to contextualize and prioritize the findings. The research teams intentionally sought input from transgender and BIPOC young people to elevate underrepresented perspectives in research about LGBTQ+ young people. This co-distillation research was reviewed and approved by Salus IRB. Information and select quotes from young people—which were lightly edited for length and clarity (e.g., ums, like, and other filler words removed)—are incorporated throughout the report.

Key Findings

Key Finding 1

LGBTQ+ young people, particularly those who are transgender and nonbinary, are more comfortable being out online than in person. Young people who identify as transgender or nonbinary disclose their gender identity online twice as frequently as they do in person (80% online compared to 40% in person).

OUTNESS AMONG LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS CONTEXTS



NOTE

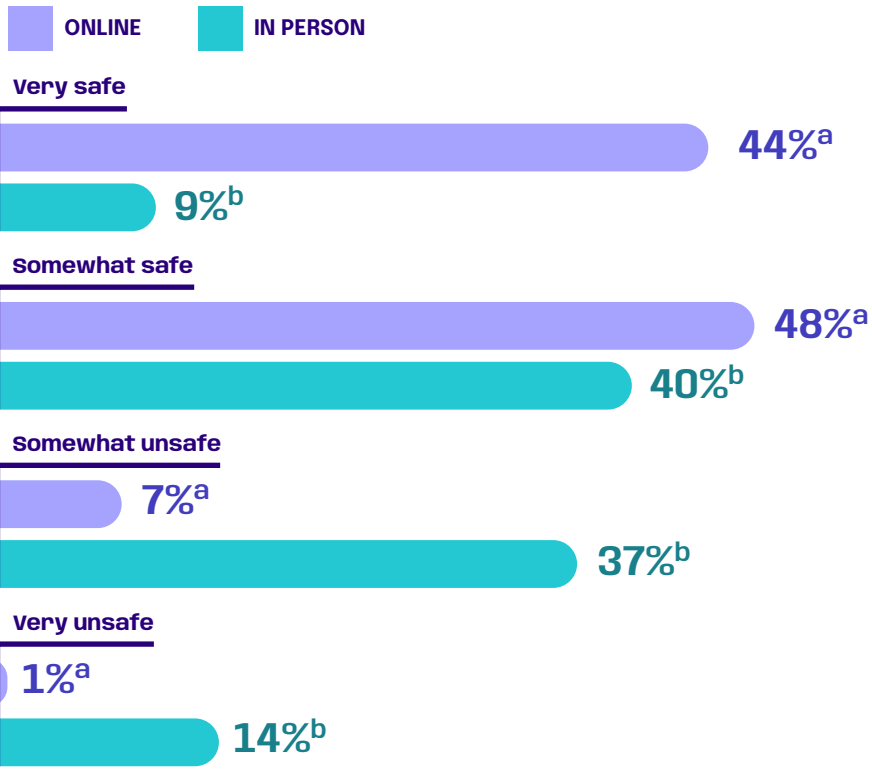
Data reflect responses to the items, "Thinking about people who you know [in person / online]. Please respond to the following questions: I am open (out) about my [sexual orientation/gender identity] to:" Responses include those who selected "a lot, " or "most or all." Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed for sexual orientation and data from 862 young people surveyed who identified as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning their gender identity. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between online and in-person spaces ($p < .05$).

Significantly higher rates of LGBTQ+ young people share their sexual orientation with a lot, most, or all of the people they know online compared to in person (82% vs 53%). The same is true for gender identity, with twice the rate of transgender or nonbinary young people being out about their gender identity to a lot, most, or all of the people they know online compared to those they know in person (80% vs. 40%). There were comparable levels of outness online for sexual orientation and gender identity (82% vs 80%). In open-ended responses, LGBTQ+ young people highlighted ways in which being able to come out and be accepted online made a huge difference in their lives, contributing to their ability to be their whole selves in ways they couldn't with their in-person communities and families.

Key Finding 2

LGBTQ+ young people feel safer expressing their identities online than in person: nearly half (44%) feel very safe in online spaces compared to just 9% in person.

PERCEIVED SAFETY OF ONLINE AND IN-PERSON SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES



NOTE

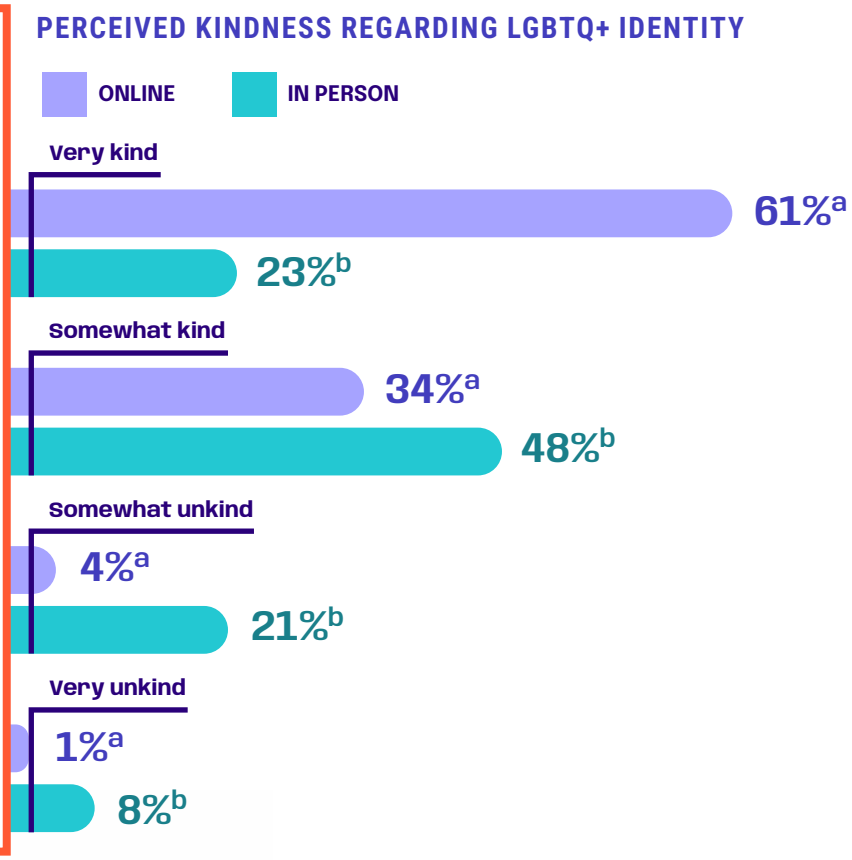
Data reflect responses to the item, "In general, how safe do you feel in these places when expressing your LGBTQ+ identity?" with responses reflecting each of in person and online spaces. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between online and in-person spaces ($p < .05$).

The vast majority of LGBTQ+ young people felt at least somewhat safe expressing their LGBTQ+ identities online (92%), whereas only about half reported feeling at least somewhat safe doing so in person (49%). Perceptions of safety online did not differ by age, gender identity, or urbanicity. However, for in-person spaces, only 7% of transgender young people reported feeling very safe compared to 14% of their cisgender LGBQ+ peers. Co-distillation conversations suggest that young people perceive online spaces as safer because—unlike in-person spaces—there aren't physical safety concerns; they can block hateful content and express their identity without fear of real-life repercussions. As one white transgender teen boy wrote in the survey:

> "If I'm in a [online] community of like people, I feel completely safe and open, but in my [in-person] community, I'm sometimes scared to just go to the store in fear of being harassed."

Key Finding 3

Kindness related to LGBTQ+ identities is more common online than in person: more than six out of 10 (61%) reported that people were very kind regarding their LGBTQ+ identities online, compared to just over two out of 10 (23%) for in-person spaces.



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, “In general, how kind are people to you in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?” with responses reflecting each of the in-person and online spaces. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between online and in-person spaces ($p < .05$).

Young people’s perception of online kindness regarding their LGBTQ+ identity did not differ based on age, gender identity, or urbanicity. Cisgender LGBTQ+ young people were more likely than their transgender peers to report that people in person were very kind regarding their LGBTQ+ identity (31% vs. 19%). Similarly, young adults were more likely than teens (25% vs. 18%), and those in suburban or urban areas were more likely than those in rural areas (25% vs. 17%) to report that people in person were very kind regarding their identities. When asked why online spaces feel kinder than in-person spaces, participants in the co-distillation interviews explained that online platforms offer greater control over interactions and the ability to choose spaces where they can freely express themselves.

Key Finding 4

Online and in-person friends are rated as more supportive than family among LGBTQ+ young people. In-person spaces are associated with lower depression: those with in-person spaces that were very supportive of their LGBTQ+ identity had nearly half the rate of depression compared to those without such support (28% vs. 53%).

RATES OF DEPRESSION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH VERY SUPPORTIVE VS. SOMEWHAT SUPPORTIVE OR LESS IN-PERSON SPACES

Very supportive

28%[a]

Somewhat supportive or less

53%[b]

NOTE

Data reflect responses to the PHQ-2 and the item, "In general, how supported do you feel in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that depression rates differ significantly between "very supported" and "somewhat supported or less" spaces ($p < .05$). See the glossary for more information.

Despite unique differences in access to and features of online and in-person spaces, both types of friendships provided much higher levels of social support than family (63% for online friends, 62% for in-person friends, and 33% for family), highlighting their crucial role for LGBTQ+ young people.

For online support, there were no significant differences in depression among those who felt spaces were very supportive compared to somewhat supportive or less (47% vs. 52%). However, large significant differences in depression were found depending on whether in-person spaces were described as very supportive compared to somewhat supportive or worse (28% vs. 53%).

These findings underscore the importance of improving in-person spaces. As one Latinx and multiracial cisgender teen girl observed in co-distillation interviews:

> “Instead of looking at the data and thinking, ‘Oh, how can we prevent online spaces (from being risky)?,’ we should ask how can we make in-person spaces even more supportive for LGBTQ+ youth, so that they don’t have to invest all their energy and emotions into relationships that are online … ‘How can we make physical spaces more comfortable?’”

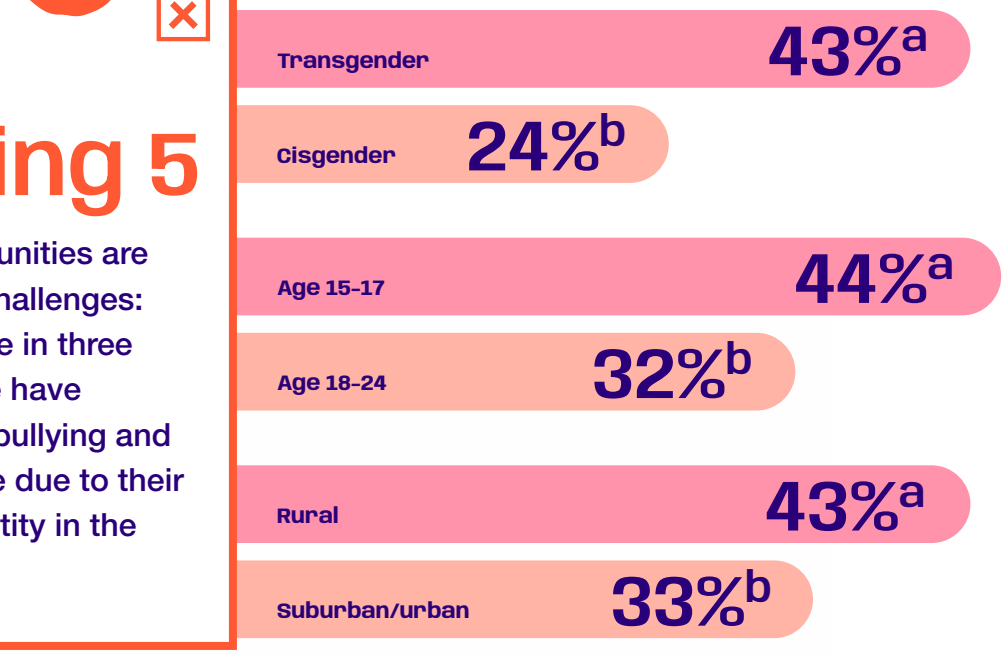
When asked what was missing from online friendships, many wanted experiences that only happened in person, such as one multiracial nonbinary transgender young adult who stated:

> “I don’t like not being able to hang out with my [online] friends in normal ways. I wish I could hug and embrace my friends.”

Key Finding 5

Online communities are not without challenges: more than one in three young people have experienced bullying and teasing online due to their LGBTQ+ identity in the past year.

RATES OF HAVING BEEN TEASED OR BULLIED ONLINE DUE TO THEIR LGBTQ+ IDENTITY AT LEAST "SOMETIMES" IN THE PAST YEAR



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "How often have you been teased, bullied, or harassed online in the past year because of your actual or perceived LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between each category within each group (i.e., transgender vs. cisgender, age 15-17 vs. age 18-24, and rural vs. suburban/urban ($p < .05$).

Significant disparities exist among LGBTQ+ young people who were at least sometimes teased or bullied online in the past year. LGBTQ+ teens aged 15 to 17 reported higher rates of frequent online teasing or bullying (44%) compared to their 18 to 24-year-old peers (32%). Frequent online teasing or bullying was reported at higher rates by LGBTQ+ young people in rural areas (43%) and transgender young people (43%) compared to those in suburban/urban areas (33%) and cisgender LGBQ+ young

people (24%). As one white nonbinary transgender young adult described:

> “Recently, there has been a large influx of rude people who refuse to listen with an open heart and bully people in the community for having different opinions on trivial topics. The bullying and harassment has been very distressing, and many community members, including myself, have had to take breaks from the community because of how upsetting the rudeness is.”

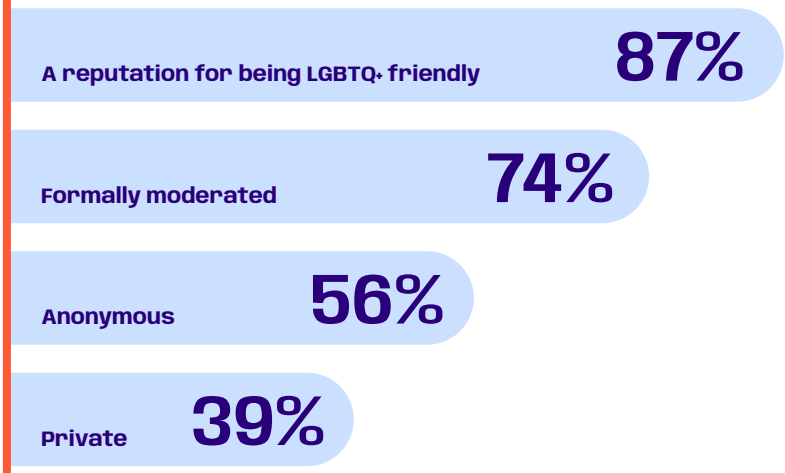
Although young people in co-distillation conversations emphasized bullying as a reality online, they also described how in-person risks—such as threats to physical safety and harassment—can often feel scarier and less manageable than online bullying. As one multiracial nonbinary transgender young adult wrote in the survey:

> “People where I live tend to be more conservative, so we have to mask in public a lot, but being who I am online gives me at least physical protection to be who I am. People can be brutal online, but those are just words on a screen. A screen can’t beat me up.”

Key Finding 6

LGBTQ+ young people do not want their online access limited and prioritize platform safety: the vast majority value a platform's reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly (87%) and consider formal moderation important (74%).

QUALITIES LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ARE IMPORTANT OR VERY IMPORTANT FOR A PLATFORM TO HAVE FOR THEM TO FEEL SAFE ONLINE



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "When it comes to feeling/staying safe in online spaces, how important is it to you that a platform is/has:" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

LGBTQ+ young people do not want their access limited. Three-quarters (76%) of LGBTQ+ young people were concerned (22%) or very concerned (54%) that their state or the federal government might restrict online access to LGBTQ+-affirming online communities and content. Instead, they prefer strategies that make their online experience safer. The vast majority of LGBTQ+ young people (87%) felt a reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly was important or very important. Moderation was also of high importance for LGBTQ+ young people, with nearly three in four (74%) endorsing formal moderation as important or very important to their perceptions of safety online. More than half (56%) of LGBTQ+ young people felt safer in online spaces when anonymous, while 39% valued privacy. Co-distillation conversations highlighted that before engaging deeply with a new online space or community, LGBTQ+ young people often proactively look for evidence that the space is LGBTQ+ friendly by examining posted community guidelines, looking for LGBTQ+-friendly signifiers such as posted pronouns, examining the profiles of hosts and moderators, and scrolling through comments to make sure there isn't hateful or negative commentary. When asked why survey respondents rated "a reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly" so highly, co-distillation participants explained that if a space within a platform isn't LGBTQ+-friendly, its privacy or anonymity doesn't matter—it's unlikely to feel supportive.

Key Finding 7

LGBTQ+ young people develop and maintain rich and meaningful friendships online: qualitative data highlights ways online friendships offer support and are often the only space for LGBTQ+ young people to feel safe and confident about being themselves.

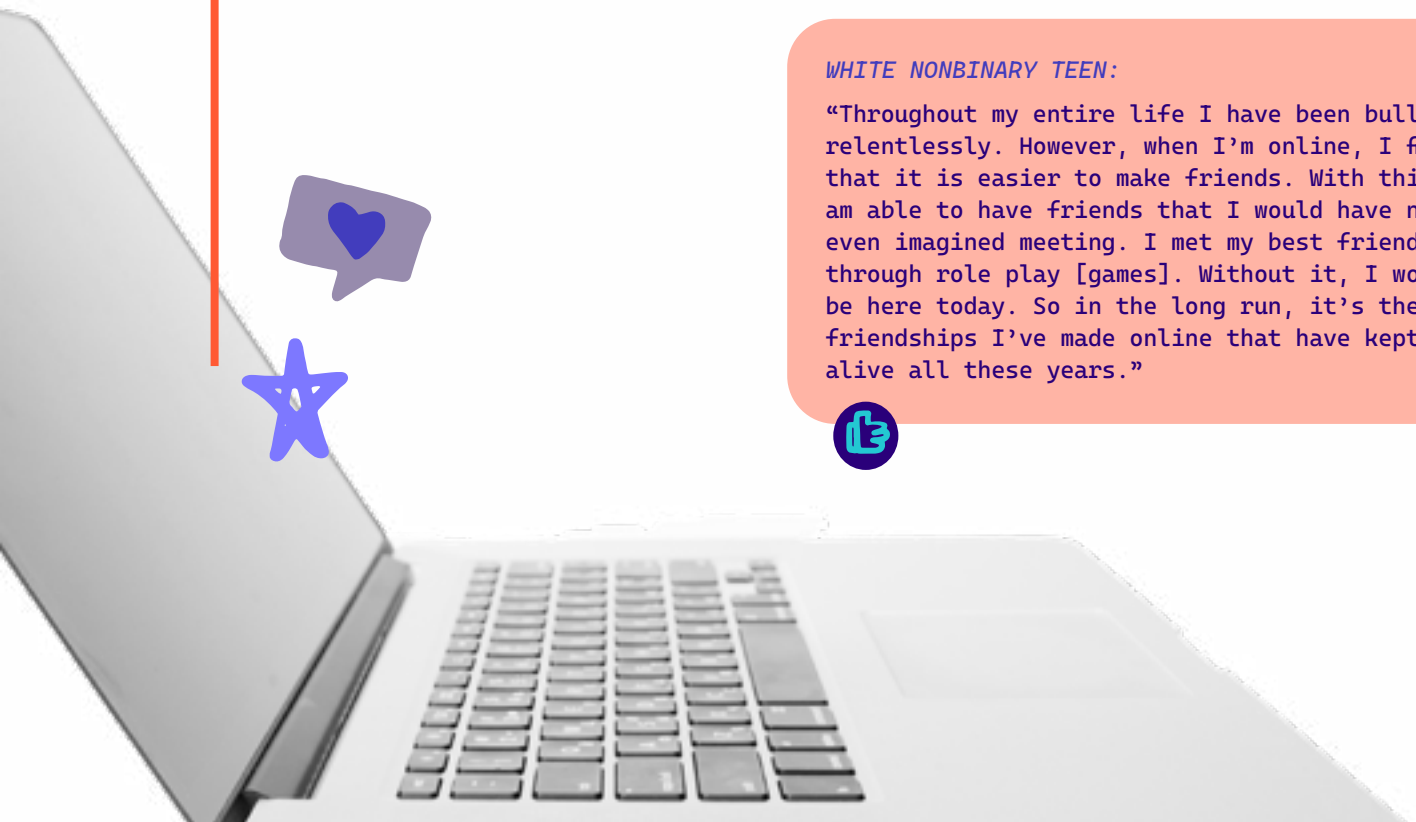
In the survey's open-ended questions and our qualitative co-distillation interviews, LGBTQ+ young people shared rich, nuanced insights into the value they see in online communities and friendships. It is abundantly clear that online friendships are a lifeline for LGBTQ+ young people, providing reciprocity, shared interests, and values and often serving as their only source of LGBTQ+ affirmation. Within co-distillation conversations, young people stressed the importance of contextualizing the data within the broader framework of LGBTQ+ young people's diverse online and offline experiences. As one Black cisgender teen girl said: "For me, it's just representing everything with nuance. I think that there is no platform that is entirely good or entirely bad. I think that real life is just like that as well."

MULTIRACIAL TRANSGENDER YOUNG MAN:

"Often one can feel very isolated in the LGBTQ+ community, be it from their family, their community, or even so-called friends. It means everything when someone is willing to listen and can understand. Friends online have helped me off ledges and I've done the same for them."

WHITE NONBINARY TEEN:

"Throughout my entire life I have been bullied relentlessly. However, when I'm online, I find that it is easier to make friends. With this, I am able to have friends that I would have never even imagined meeting. I met my best friend through role play [games]. Without it, I wouldn't be here today. So in the long run, it's the friendships I've made online that have kept me alive all these years."



LATINX NONBINARY YOUNG ADULT:

"It feels like I've met people who will stay with me no matter what happens, and I even found someone who thinks of me as their sibling. These people I've met are some of my closest friends and I don't think anything will ever change that, no matter what someone is going through. We all have each other's backs. I love my online friends so much."

WHITE NONBINARY TEEN:

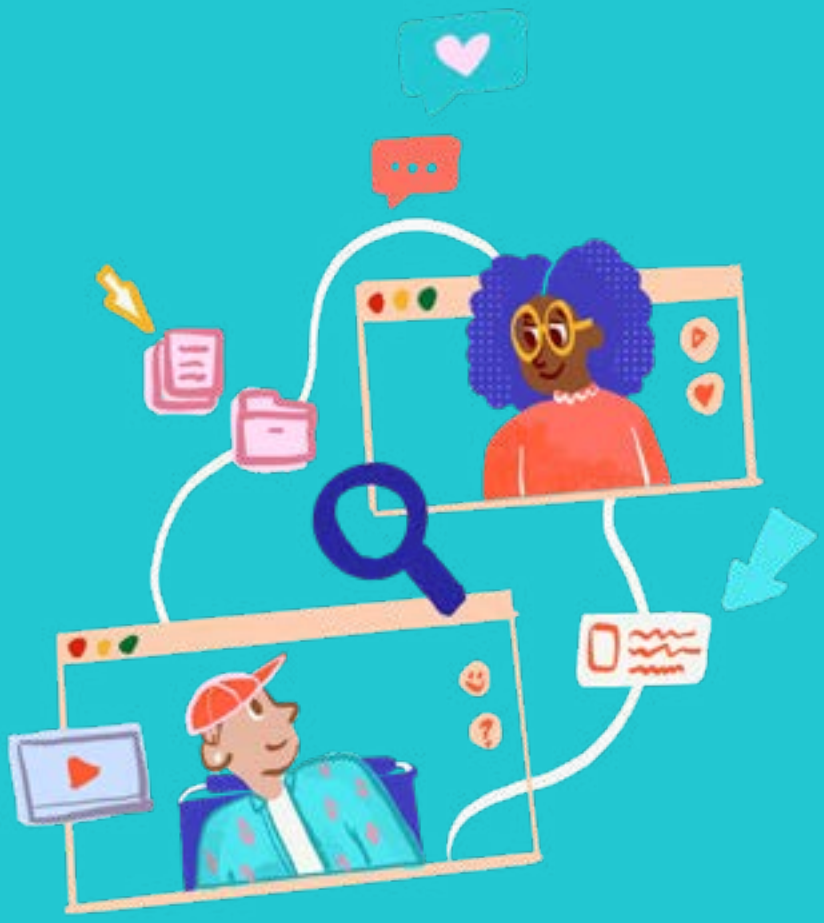
"In the real world, barely anybody truly knows me because I have had to hide half of myself that is essential to who I am as a person, but not online. I have grown as a person because of my online friends and have been able to feel better about myself with their support. I have told online friends things I have never told anyone in real life, and it feels amazing to have a safe space like that."

BLACK NONBINARY TRANSGENDER YOUNG ADULT:

"I feel like I can be my truest self [online] instead of having to hide like I have to do in my daily life because I live with transphobic parents and family and experience transphobia almost daily."

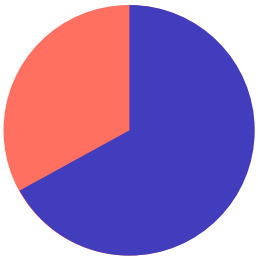
MULTIRACIAL NONBINARY TRANSGENDER YOUNG ADULT:

"I've been able to talk to [online friends] about things I'm never able to talk to my family about. I'm able to express my emotions to them more easily through the use of tone tags [e.g. using /s to mean sarcasm], having time to think of what I should say before I say it, and they support me through things that my family would only scream at me and shut me out over."



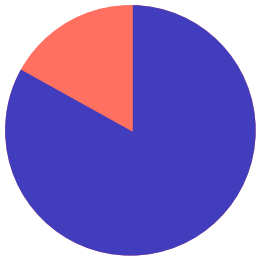
Detailed Insights

Who Are the LGBTQ+ Young People in our Sample?

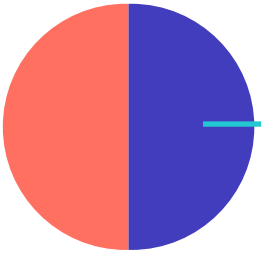


36% TEENS, AGED 15-17

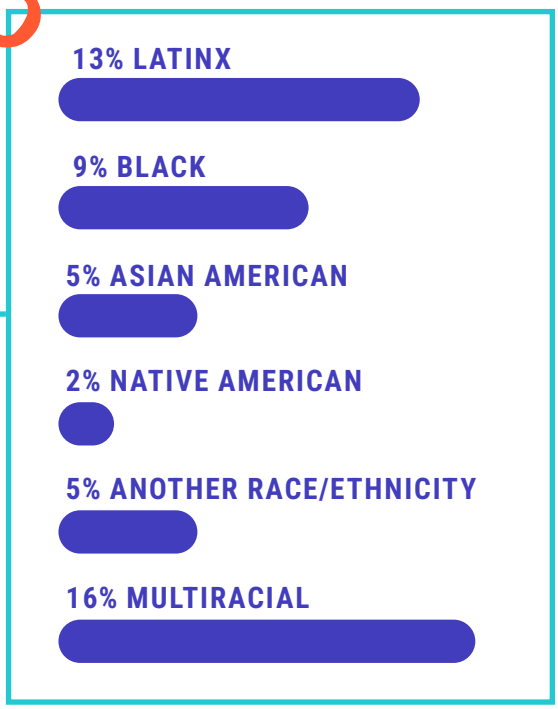
64% YOUNG ADULTS, AGED 18-24



20% STRUGGLING TO MEET BASIC NEEDS



50% BIPOC



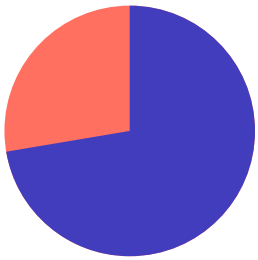
Any data’s ability to speak to the larger population relies heavily on who is represented in the sample. The young people who took part in this study represent a broad range of identities and come from diverse backgrounds, all of which help ensure these data reflect the varied experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in online spaces.

The young people in the sample were between 15 and 24 years old, with an average age of 19. Just over one-third (36%) of the participants were teenagers aged 15 to 17, and just under two-thirds (64%) were young adults aged 18 to 24. Throughout the report, “teen” refers to those aged 15 to 17 and “young adult” refers to those aged 18 to 24.

There was representation concerning socioeconomic status in that 20% of the sample of LGBTQ+ young people reported that they were struggling to meet their basic expenses or were not meeting them at all.

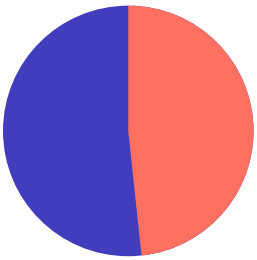
Concerning race/ethnicity, 50% of the sample identified as BIPOC, including 13% Latinx, 9% Black, 5% Asian American, 2% Native American, and 16% were multiracial. Additionally, 8% of the young people in the sample were born outside of the United States, and 28% had at least one parent or caregiver born outside of the United States.

Finally, regarding urbanicity, 29% of the LGBTQ+ young people in our sample were from rural areas or small towns, with the remaining 71% being from suburban or urban areas.



29% RURAL

71% SUBURBAN/ URBAN



55% TRANSGENDER

43% BISEXUAL OR PANSEXUAL

28% LESBIAN OR GAY

16% QUEER

9% ASEXUAL

2% UNSURE

1% TRANSGENDER WHO IDENTIFIED AS HETEROSEXUAL

27% GIRLS/WOMEN

30% BOYS/MEN

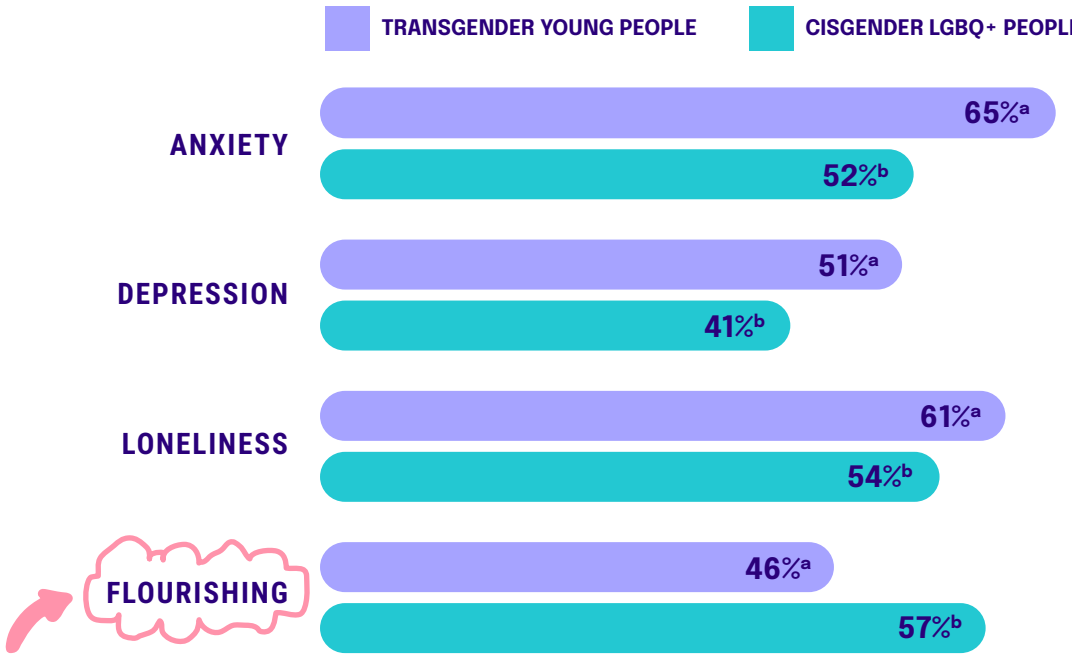
38% NONBINARY

The LGBTQ+ young people in this sample were also diverse in their sexual orientation and gender identity. The most frequent sexual orientation among the sample was bisexual or pansexual (43%), 28% of young people were lesbian or gay, 16% were Queer, 9% were asexual, 2% were unsure of their sexual orientation, and 1% of the sample were transgender young people who identified as heterosexual.

There was a relatively even distribution of girls/ women (27%), boys/men (30%), and nonbinary young people (38%)—additionally, 55% of the sample identified as transgender.

Challenges and Resilience Among LGBTQ+ Young People

Mental Health and Well-being Indicators Across Gender Identity



NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across transgender and cisgender participant identities ($p < .05$).

LGBTQ+ young people report high rates of poor mental health and well-being with significant within-group disparities, particularly among transgender young people and teens.

The LGBTQ+ young people in our sample had markedly high rates of poor mental health indicators,[8] with more than three in five (62%) screening positive for anxiety using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 (GAD-2),[9] and nearly half (49%) screening positive for depression using the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2).[10] Throughout the report, respondents who scored three or higher on the GAD-2 are referred to as experiencing anxiety, and those who scored three or higher on the PHQ-2

8 Anxiety is based on sum scores of 3 or greater on the GAD-2. Depression is based on sum scores of 3 or greater on the PHQ-2. Loneliness is based on mean scores of 3 or greater on the UCLA Loneliness Scale-3, and Flourishing is based on sum scores of 40 or above for the Flourishing Scale 8

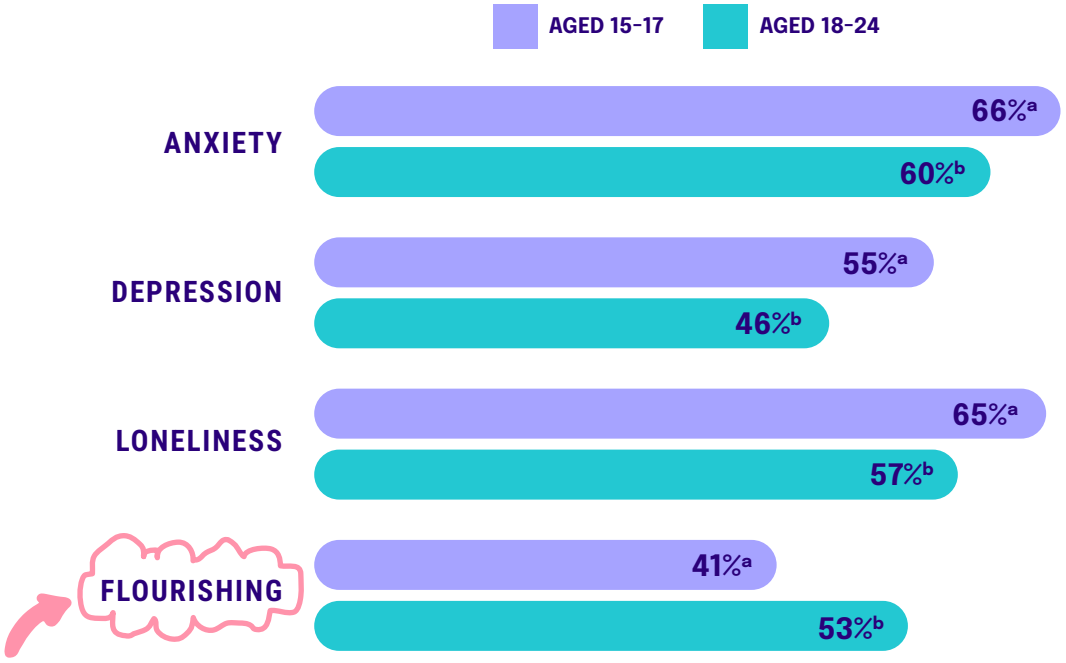
9 Plummer, F., Manea, L., Trepel, D., & McMillan, D. (2016). Screening for anxiety disorders with the GAD-7 and GAD-2: A systematic review and diagnostic meta-analysis. General Hospital Psychiatry, 39, 24-31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2015.11.005

10 Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., & Williams, J. B. (2003). The Patient Health Questionnaire-2: Validity of a two-item depression screener. Medical Care, 41(11), 1284-1292. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.MLR.0000093487.78664.3C

are referred to as experiencing depression. However, there is an important difference between positive screening scores on these instruments and a clinical diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder or major depressive disorder—which requires a diagnostic assessment made by a trained, licensed medical or mental health practitioner. Additionally, three in five (60%) LGBTQ+ young people reported loneliness using the UCLA 3-item Loneliness Scale.[11] Nearly half (49%) were characterized as flourishing (17%) or somewhat flourishing (32%) based on their responses to the Flourishing Scale[12]—a measure of the respondent's perceived success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism.

Several significant differences in mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ young people emerged. Across all indicators of mental health and well-being, transgender young people and teens aged 15 to 17 reported worse outcomes compared to their cisgender LGBQ+ peers and those aged 18 to 24. Moreover, those in rural areas had higher rates of positive screenings for depression (57% vs. 45%) as well as lower rates of at least somewhat flourishing (43% vs. 52%) compared to suburban/urban LGBTQ+ young people.

Mental Health and Well-being Indicators Across Ages



NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across age groups ($p < .05$).

11 Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Hawkley, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2004). A short scale for measuring loneliness in large surveys: Results from two population-based studies. Research on Aging, 26(6), 655-672. https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027504268574

12 Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. Social Indicators Research, 39, 247-266. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2354-4_12

The Importance of Online Spaces for LGBTQ+ Identity Exploration

Online spaces are extremely useful and important for LGBTQ+ young people as they begin to explore their sexuality and gender identity, and, in turn, LGBTQ+ young people are more out online compared to in-person spaces.

The majority of LGBTQ+ young people (80%) shared that online spaces were important as they began to explore their sexuality and gender. Although the importance of online spaces for self-exploration applied across the board for all LGBTQ+ young people, transgender young people more often agree that their online communities and friendships were important or very important (84%) when they began to explore their sexuality or gender compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people (71%).

Identity exploration and affirmation emerged as core themes in the analysis of open-ended questions about the benefits of online friendships and online spaces, particularly among those who didn’t have access to them in person.

For example, one white nonbinary transgender young adult said:

> “While [my online friends] don’t fully get it because they identify differently, many of my [online] friends are transgender and queer and understand how I feel. I have rarely felt comfortable enough to come out to people in person because they are either cishet [cisgender and heterosexual] or don’t believe that there are more identities than gay, lesbian, bi, and binary trans.”

In addition to friendships found online, many LGBTQ+ young people also felt online spaces helped them explore and affirm their identity.

One Asian American cisgender young woman described this:

> “It’s given me a chance to explore my sexuality in a safe space that wasn’t available at home. I feel confident in myself as a result of it, and I’m able to learn new things about myself in a free manner.”

Higher rates of LGBTQ+ young people are out about their sexual orientation to a lot, most, or all of the people they know online compared to those who they know in person (82% vs. 53%). Transgender young people are twice as likely to be out about their gender identity online (80%) compared to in person (40%). There were comparable levels of outness online for sexual orientation and gender identity (82% vs. 80%); however, in-person sexual orientation outness levels were higher than in-person gender identity outness levels (53% vs. 40%).

In open-ended responses, LGBTQ+ young people highlighted how being able to come out and be accepted online made a huge difference in their lives.

One white nonbinary transgender young adult stated:

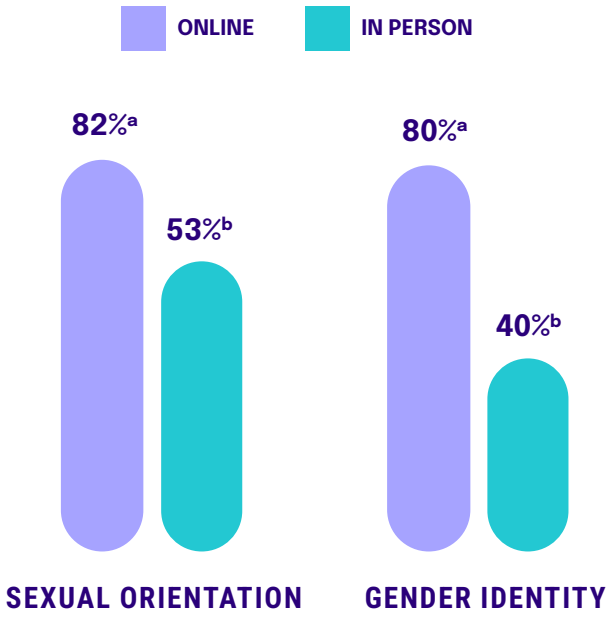
> “When I came out, I felt very alone. I wasn’t as open with my identity as I am now. When I opened up for the first time about how I really felt about my identity and expressed my confusion with my identity, my online friends congratulated me on sharing my experience, helped me to discover my nonbinary identity, and even helped me pick my name and pronouns. I felt so respected and loved, and it helped me build the confidence I have in myself today. It made me feel loved.”

They also highlighted their outness online as contributing to their ability to be their whole self.

One Black nonbinary transgender young adult stated:

> “I feel like I can be my truest self instead of having to hide like I have to do in my daily life because I live with transphobic parents and family and experience transphobia almost daily.”

Outness Among LGBTQ+ Young People Across Contexts



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the items, “Thinking about people who you know [in person / online], please respond to the following questions: “I am open (out) about my [sexual orientation/gender identity] to:” Responses include those who selected “a lot” or “most or all” in reference to people they knew online or in person. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed for sexual orientation and data from 862 young people surveyed who identified as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning their gender identity. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between online and in-person spaces ($p < .05$).

LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 17 were less likely to be out about their gender identity online compared to those aged 18 to 24 (76% vs. 83%) but not less likely to be out about their sexual orientation. Additionally, those aged 18 to 24 were more likely to have higher levels of outness in person than those aged 15 to 17 for both their sexual orientation (58% vs. 44%) and gender identity (45% vs. 29%). There were no differences in outness online across rural compared to suburban/urban regions, but suburban/urban LGBTQ+ young people had higher levels of outness about their sexual orientation in person than rural LGBTQ+ young people (56% vs. 47%).

As part of the co-distillation process, a number of LGBTQ+ young people shared how the context of their in-person environment (e.g., conservative, unsafe, unaccepting) was a major factor in driving them to seek support for their LGBTQ+ identity online. As evidenced by one Black transgender young man stating:

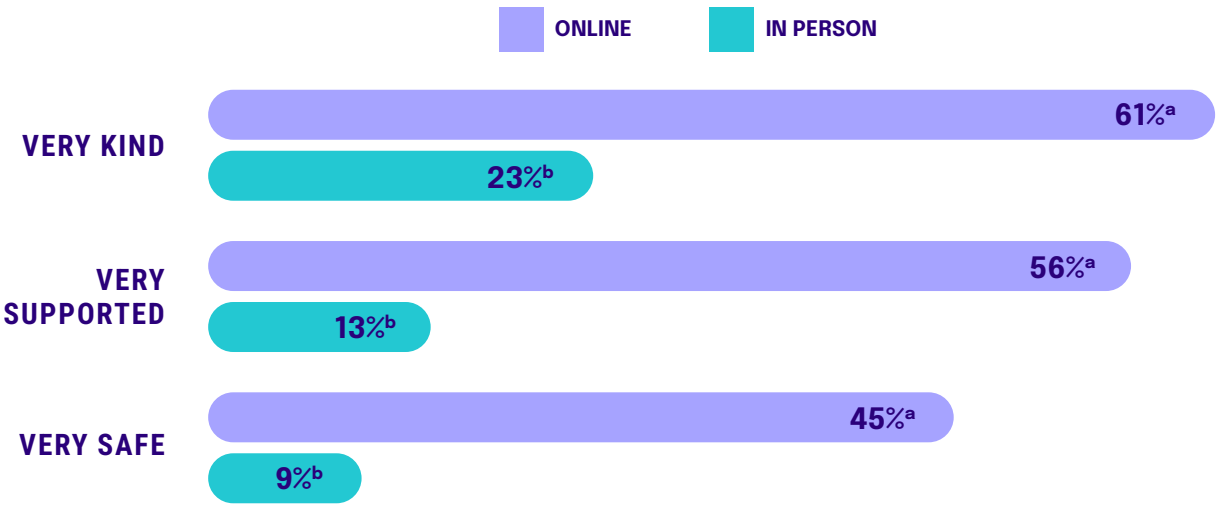
> "I'm going to always bring up the background and the area I grew up in because I think that really influenced me. Growing up in a place that was more conservative and also having parents and people who were definitely not affirming of my identity, I think that's what drove me online, because in-person spaces for me were very unsafe or, at the very least, were just not affirming."

A white transgender young man echoed the ways lack of acceptance offline can lead to finding acceptance online:

> "When I was younger, I kept around lots of friends in school because they were the only people I knew. They didn't necessarily view me the way I felt was right at all. It's harder to find people who can see you and understand you in person because they just don't get it, especially if they aren't LGBT or trans. So I feel like it's easier, especially when you go online, you can find people who share the same experiences."

Kindness, Safety, and Support: LGBTQ+ Young People in Online Communities

Perceptions of Online and In-Person Spaces Related to Young People's LGBTQ+ Identity



NOTE

Items reflect responses to the item, “In general, how [kind are people / supported do you feel / safe do you feel] in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?” with each item applied to online and in-person spaces. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly between online and in-person spaces ($p < .05$).

Most LGBTQ+ young people report an overall feeling of kindness, support, and safety in spaces online regarding their LGBTQ+ identity, particularly in comparison to what they experience in person.

Over 60% of LGBTQ+ young people reported that people in online spaces are very kind regarding their LGBTQ+ identity. In comparison, only 23% of LGBTQ+ young people felt that people were very kind to them in in-person spaces regarding their LGBTQ+ identity. One in three (33%) LGBTQ+ young people reported not having access to either in-person or online spaces that were “very kind.” Moreover, the majority (93%) of those without “very kind” online spaces also lacked “very kind” in-person spaces. In open-ended responses, LGBTQ+ young people provided numerous examples of ways they saw or experienced kindness online related to LGBTQ+ identities. For example, one white cisgender young woman described:

> "When a trans woman in one of my online communities had her feminine clothes burnt by a family member, the community put money together in a GoFundMe to help her rebuild her wardrobe, and the outpouring of love and support for her was beautiful. She was able to replace some things and also purchase newer clothes that fit her style better."

One Asian American nonbinary transgender young adult described ways that kindness can be used to combat some of the hate that is directed at LGBTQ+ young people online, saying:

> "I see a lot of love on LGBTQ+ livestreams and comments. While yes, there are a few rude and awful people, there are people actively either trying to educate them or there are people uplifting who are being attacked, like 'Don't listen to them – you continue being the beautiful individual you are!'"

Similarly, more than half (56%) of LGBTQ+ young people reported feeling very supported regarding their LGBTQ+ identity in online spaces compared to just 13% who felt very supported in in-person spaces. Support was the most frequent theme uncovered in the analyses of the open-ended responses to a question about the benefits of online friendships. As one multiracial nonbinary transgender young adult noted:

> "I've been able to talk to [online friends] about things I'm never able to talk to my family about. I'm able to express my emotions to them more easily through the use of tone tags [e.g. using /s to mean sarcasm] having time to think of what I should say before I say it, and they support me through things that my family would only scream at me and shut me out over."

Finally, nearly half (45%) of LGBTQ+ young people felt very safe in expressing their LGBTQ+ identity online compared to only 9% who felt very safe doing so in person. When asked specifically about support from online friends and communities that they couldn't get in person, one cisgender white young woman stated:

> "Feeling safe and not having to worry about in-person reactions."

A Black nonbinary transgender young person said:

> "Most gender and sexuality stuff, I can't talk about it with most people in real life, and there was a time where there was no one I felt safe talking to about it in real life."

When asked why online spaces felt kinder, more supportive, and safer than in-person spaces, participants in the co-distillation conversations explained that online platforms provide greater control over interactions and access to supportive spaces where they can authentically express their identities. As one Black transgender young man shared with us:

> "When it comes to online spaces, you have more control over who you could interact with … because, you know, I didn't grow up in [large city name]. I grew up in a place that was a little more conservative and maybe not really LGBTQ-affirming."

However, co-distillation participants acknowledged that online spaces, like in-person ones, aren't free from unkindness. In the words of one white genderqueer teen:

> "Online, it's definitely easier to find supportive spaces. But online, it just really depends, because sometimes people are amazing and sometimes people are even worse than in person."

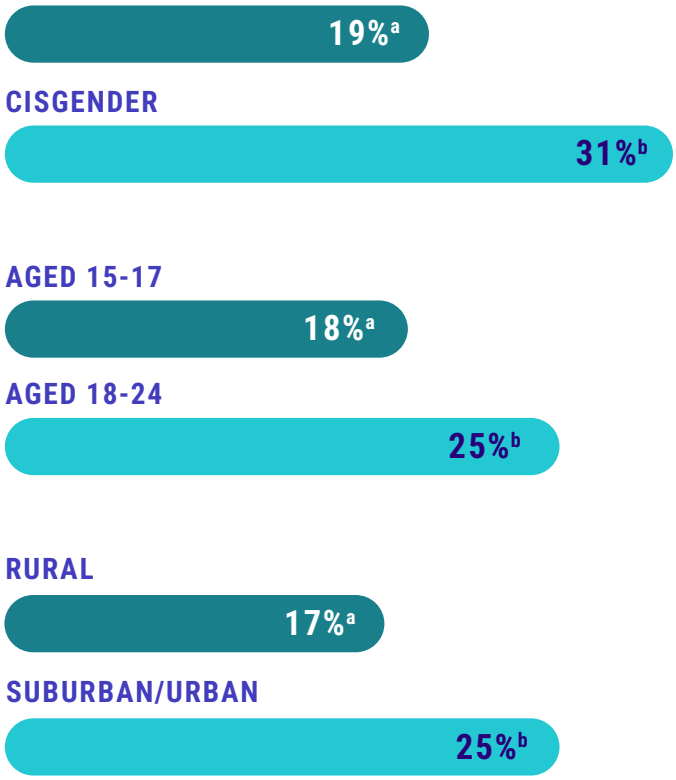
In reflecting on why online spaces generally felt safer, co-distillation participants noted that online, you can flag, block, or disconnect from hate, whereas in person, you can't always easily walk away, and your physical safety can be threatened. They also explained that online spaces provide an opportunity to share vulnerable feelings at a distance and express their identities without fearing they will get back to people they know in real life.

For example, a white cisgender teen girl explained:

> "If I say something to someone I know, what if they tell my parents? What if they tell people that I don't feel comfortable knowing, and it kind of spirals into a thing that kind of makes me feel uncomfortable with everything? … So I think [in sharing online] I just felt like a safety net, and I'm not telling people that could directly impact my life by finding out."

Perceptions of kindness, support, and safety regarding their LGBTQ+ identity online did not differ by gender identity, age, or urbanicity; however, there were significant differences in these perceptions across these identities for in-person spaces. Compared to their cisgender LGBQ+ peers, transgender young people were less likely to say in-person spaces were very kind (19% vs. 31%), very supportive (11% vs. 18%), or very safe (7% vs. 14%). Those aged 15 to 17 were less likely to say in-person spaces were very kind (18% vs. 25%) than those aged 18 to 24. Rural LGBTQ+ young people were less likely than their suburban/urban peers to say in-person spaces were very kind (17% vs. 25%) and very supportive (10% vs. 15%).

LGBTQ+ Young People who Rate In-Person Spaces as "Very Kind" Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "In general, how kind are people to you in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?" with the figure reflecting responses of "very kind." Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across gender identity, age, and urbanicity groups ($p < .05$). Superscripts indicate significant differences within each pair of results.

Reinforcing these findings, co-distillation participants shared that online communities were particularly vital to the well-being of transgender teens growing up in rural areas because they lacked a supportive in-person community. For example, one multiracial transgender young man shared:

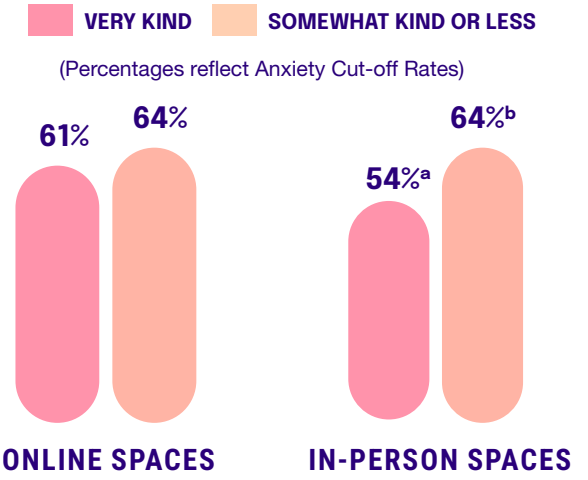
> "When I was a teenager in high school, I barely had any friends in person that were queer. My parents were not particularly open to it, so I was in the closet most of the time. And so, really, the primary avenue that I had for exploring questions that I had about my identity and getting to talk to older people who could serve as mentors was entirely online. There was just no avenue for me to get anything in person."

LGBTQ+ young people's mental health is associated with in-person kindness, support, and safety rather than what they experience online.

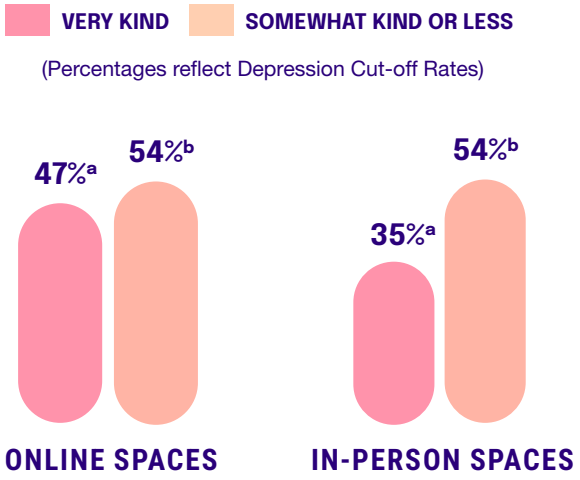
In online spaces, perceptions of kindness were not related to anxiety levels; however, for in-person spaces, rates of anxiety were lower when LGBTQ+ young people described people as "very kind" compared to only somewhat kind or less.

Lower depression rates were found among those who had access to spaces described as "very kind" to LGBTQ+ identities compared to those with spaces that were only "somewhat kind" or worse. This trend was evident for both in-person (35% vs. 54%) and online (47% vs. 54%) spaces; however, the discrepancy was greater for in-person spaces.

Young People's Rates of Anxiety by Kindness Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



Young People's Rates of Depression by Kindness Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



NOTE

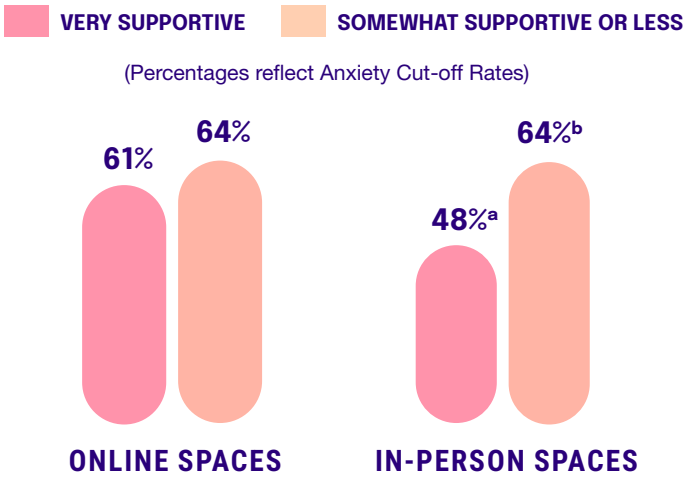
Data reflect responses to the GAD-2 and responses to the item, "In general, how kind are people to you in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that anxiety rates differ significantly between "very kind" and "somewhat kind or less" spaces ($p < .05$).

NOTE

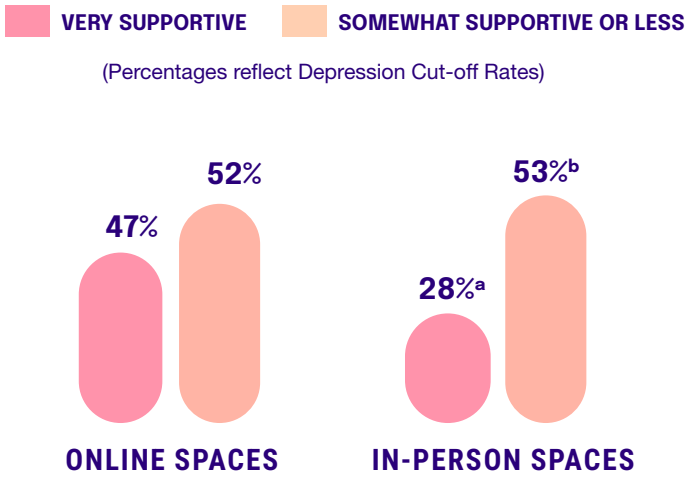
Data reflect responses to the PHQ-2 and responses to the item, "In general, how kind are people to you in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that depression rates differ significantly between "very kind" and "somewhat kind or less" spaces ($p < .05$).

For online support, there were no significant differences in anxiety (61% vs. 64%) or depression (47% vs. 52%) among those who felt spaces were very supportive compared to somewhat supportive or less. However, large differences in anxiety (48% vs. 64%) and depression (28% vs. 53%) were found and correspond to whether in-person spaces were described as very supportive compared to somewhat supportive or worse.

Young People's Rates of Anxiety by Supportiveness Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



Young People's Rates of Depression by Supportiveness Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



NOTE

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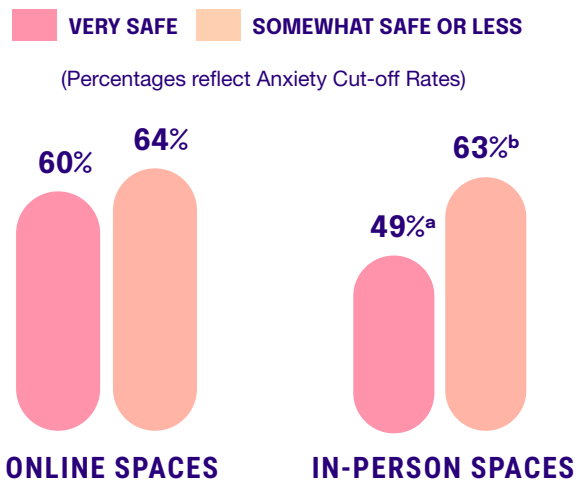
NOTE

Data reflect responses to the PHQ-2 and responses to the item, “In general, how supportive are people to you in these spaces, with regard to your LGBTQ+ identity?” Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that depression rates differ significantly between “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive or less” spaces ($p < .05$).

There were no significant differences in anxiety (60% vs. 64%) based on safety levels in online spaces; however, those who felt very safe online had lower rates of depression than those who felt somewhat safe or worse (46% vs. 52%). There were higher rates of both anxiety (63% vs. 49%) and depression (51% vs. 37%) among young people who felt somewhat safe or worse expressing their LGBTQ+ identity in person compared to those who felt very safe doing so.

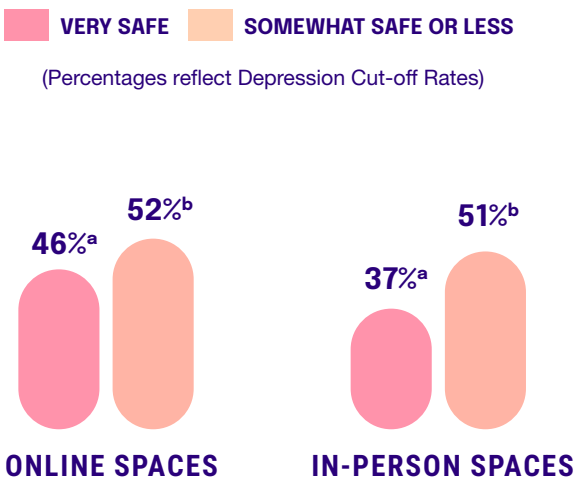
Young People's Rates of Anxiety by Safety Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "In general, how safe do you feel in these places when expressing your LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that anxiety rates differ significantly between "very safe" and "somewhat safe or less" spaces ($p < .05$).

Young People's Rates of Depression by Safety Regarding their LGBTQ+ Identity

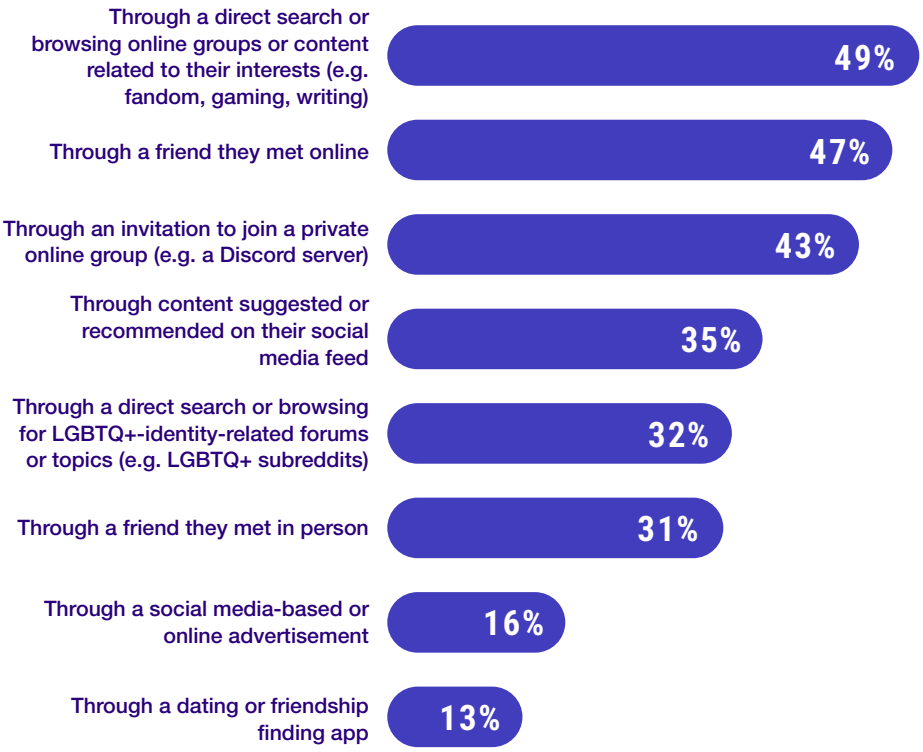


NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "In general, how safe do you feel in these places when expressing your LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show that depression rates differ significantly between "very safe" and "somewhat safe or less" spaces ($p < .05$).

How LGBTQ+ Young People Build Connections Online

How LGBTQ+ Young People Found their Online Friends and Communities



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, “How did you find your online friends or online communities? Please check all that apply.” Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

Most LGBTQ+ young people initially find their online friends and communities through online searches related to their interests and interact almost daily.

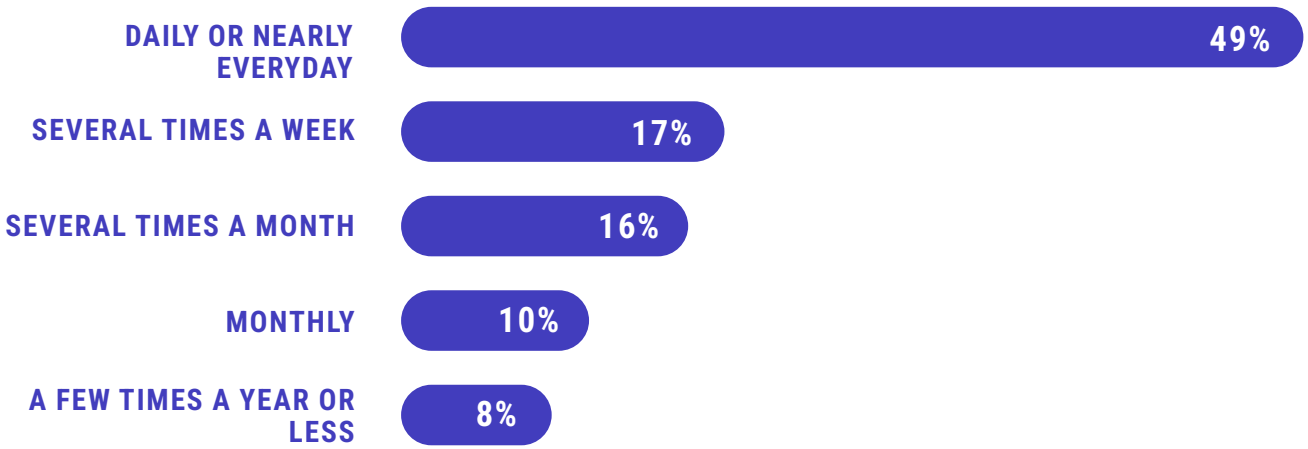
LGBTQ+ young people who interacted with an online friend or community in the past year were asked how they initially found their online friends or communities. The most common responses included having found them through a direct search or browsing for online groups or content related to their interests (49%), through a friend they had met online (47%), through an invitation to join a private online group (e.g., a Discord server; 43%), and through content suggested or recommended on their social media feed (35%). Young participants involved in co-distillation conversations offered detail and color to these common channels for online connection. For example, one Asian American transgender young man explained how he found online connections by directly searching for information on binders (i.e., a tight-fitting undergarment that compresses

the chest). This connected him to supportive online forums for transgender people. Another cisgender Black young woman mentioned how online friends often serve as the source of invitations to private online groups, explaining:

> “For me, ‘through a friend I met online’ and the ‘invitation to online groups’ kind of go hand-in-hand because a lot of the time it’s friends I met online introducing me to these massive servers and a bunch of people in the community.”

After finding online communities and friends, nearly two in three (66%) LGBTQ+ young people reported connecting with online communities and friends that were important to them as an LGBTQ+ person several times a week or more frequently—nearly half (49%) reported connecting daily or nearly every day.

Frequency in Connecting with the Online Communities or Online Friends who are Important



NOTE

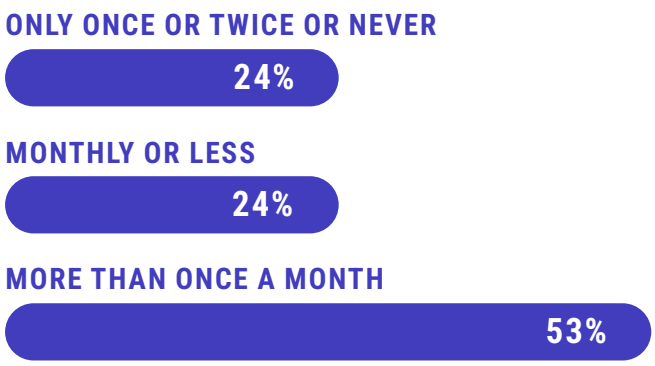
Data reflect responses to the item, “How often do you connect with the online communities or online friends that are important to you as an LGBTQ+ young person?”. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

Giving and Receiving Support Online

Online friends and communities are places of reciprocal support for LGBTQ+ young people, with the majority reporting both receiving and giving support.

Once LGBTQ+ young people find their online communities and friends, they can often tap into a support network where they regularly provide and receive support. The majority of LGBTQ+ young people (53%) reported receiving support from online friends or online communities more often than monthly in the past year. LGBTQ+ young people living in rural areas were more likely to report support from online friends more than monthly (57%) compared to LGBTQ+ young people living in suburban/urban areas (51%). There were no differences in rates of receiving support within gender identity or age groups.

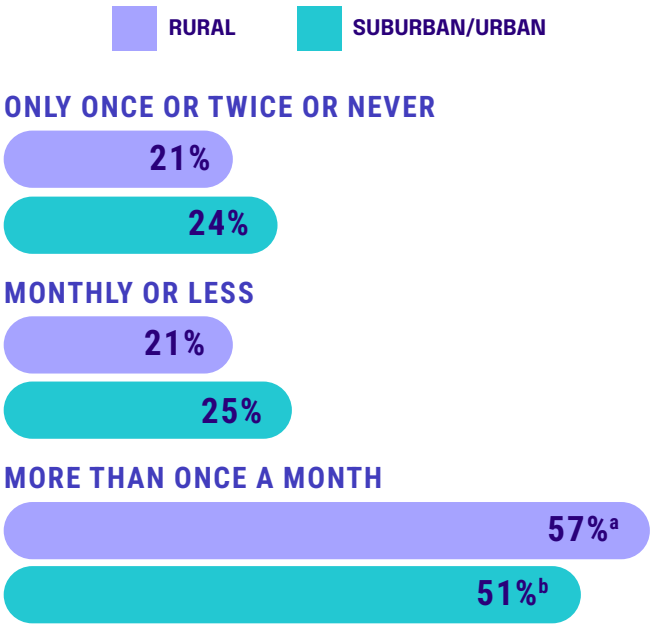
Frequency of Receiving Support from Online Friends or Communities in the Past Year



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "How often did you receive support (such as someone listening to you, encouraging you, or helping you) from your online friends or online communities in the past year?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

Frequency of Receiving Support from Online Friends or Communities in the Past Year



NOTE

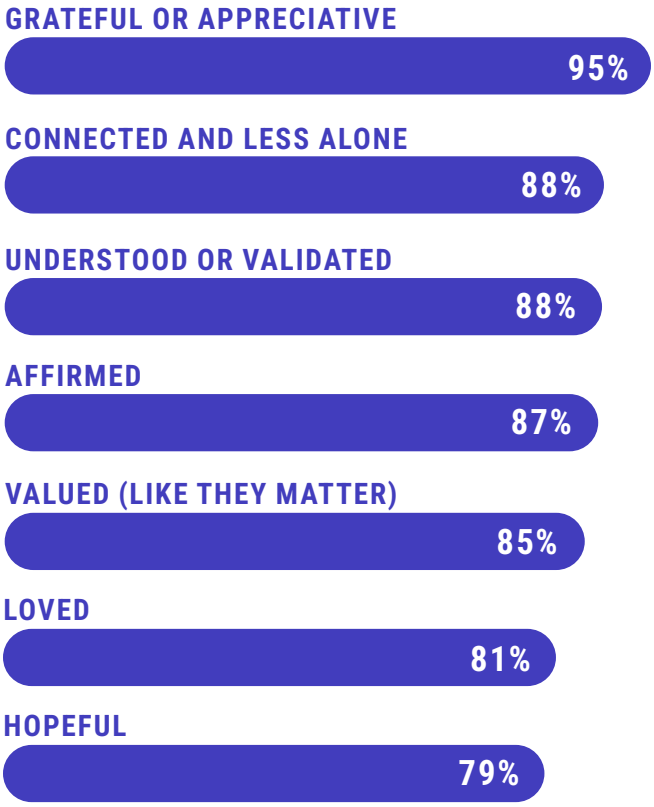
Data reflect responses to the item, "How often did you receive support (such as someone listening to you, encouraging you, or helping you) from your online friends or online communities in the past year?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rural and suburban/urban groups ($p < .05$).

As a result of receiving this support from online friends and online communities, LGBTQ+ young people reported feeling somewhat or very grateful or appreciated (95%), connected or less alone (88%), understood or validated (88%), affirmed (87%), valued (85%), loved (81%), and hopeful (79%), among other positive emotions.

Nearly three in four LGBTQ+ young people (71%) gave support online in the past year.

Transgender young people were more likely to give support online more often than monthly (74%) compared to their cisgender LGBQ+ peers (63%). Transgender participants in co-distillation conversations attributed this finding to transgender young people, providing other transgender young people with specific forms of support around their identities and the process of transitioning. Similar to recipients of support, LGBTQ+ young people living in rural communities reported higher rates of giving support online in the past year, more than monthly (76%) compared to LGBTQ+ young people living in suburban/urban communities (70%). There were no differences in rates of giving support by age.

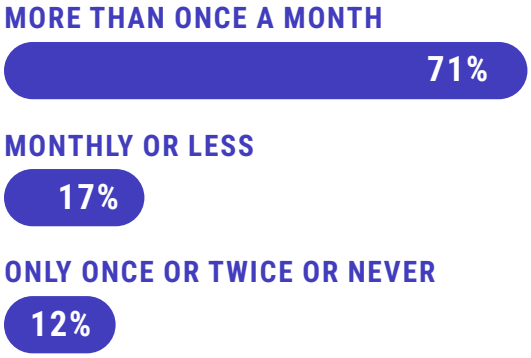
How did Receiving Support Online Make LGBTQ+ Young People Feel?



NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Data reflect responses to the item, "When you received support from your online friends or online communities in the past year, how did it make you feel?" Percentages reflect those who responded 'somewhat' or 'very' to each item.

Frequency of Giving Support to Online Friends in the Past Year



NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Data reflect responses to the item, "How often did you give support (such as listening to someone, encouraging someone, or helping someone) to your online friends or online communities in the past year?"

Notably, over eight in 10 of those who gave support said it made them feel at least somewhat compassionate (89%), sympathetic (89%), empathetic (88%), kind (87%), authentic (86%), connected and less alone (85%), loving (85%), and helpful (84%).

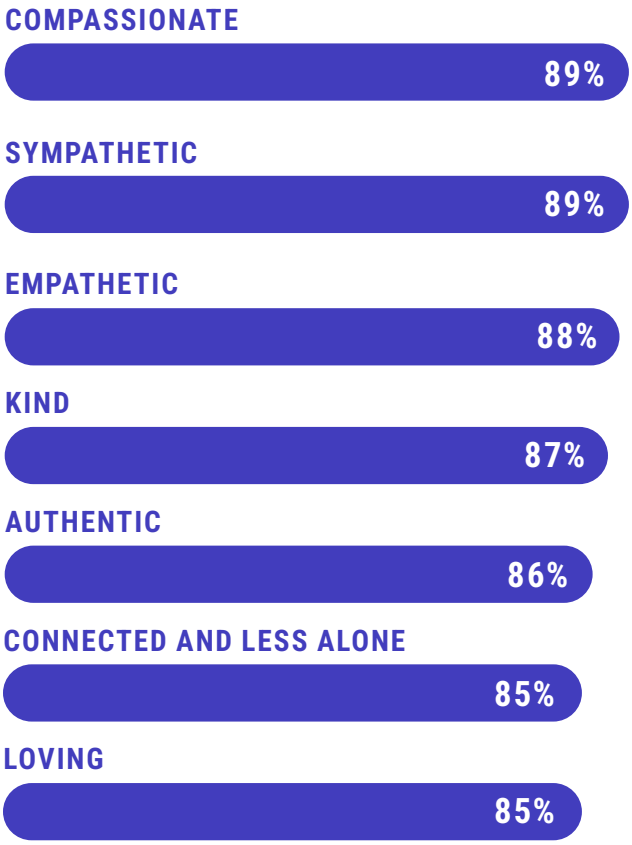
Although there were no differences in the receipt of support among those who met the screening criteria for depression and anxiety, there were differences in giving support, with young people with anxiety (76% vs. 64%) and depression (75% vs. 68%) providing support to others online more frequently compared to their peers without anxiety or depression. This finding resonated with young participants in the co-distillation conversations. They explained that when feeling anxious and depressed, they are often both more motivated to go online for community and more likely to provide support to others who are also feeling down. As one Black transgender young man explained:

> “A lot of the times, when you’re feeling depressed and anxious, and you go in certain forums, or maybe something just pops up on your ‘for you’ page on TikTok. You will come across people going through the same thing as you. And when you’re going through something so hard, you understand how the person’s feeling and you don’t want anyone else to feel that way and maybe share what you’ve gone through, and share any ounce of support.”

Some co-distillation participants speculated that helping others may serve a dual purpose of drawing attention away from one’s own issues and getting an emotional boost from being of service to others.

The type of support LGBTQ+ young people provide to their online friends and communities regularly is comprehensive and nuanced, ranging from connecting with them over common interests such as art, music, anime, or gaming (81%) to tangible support (14%). Transgender young people reported higher rates of all forms of support compared to their cisgender LGBQ+ peers except connecting on common interests and tangible support. In co-distillation interviews, transgender participants elaborated on this finding, highlighting how, as a

How did Giving Support to Others Make LGBTQ+ Young People Feel?



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, “When you provided support to your online friends or online communities in the past year, how did it make you feel?” Percentages reflect those who responded ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ to each item. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

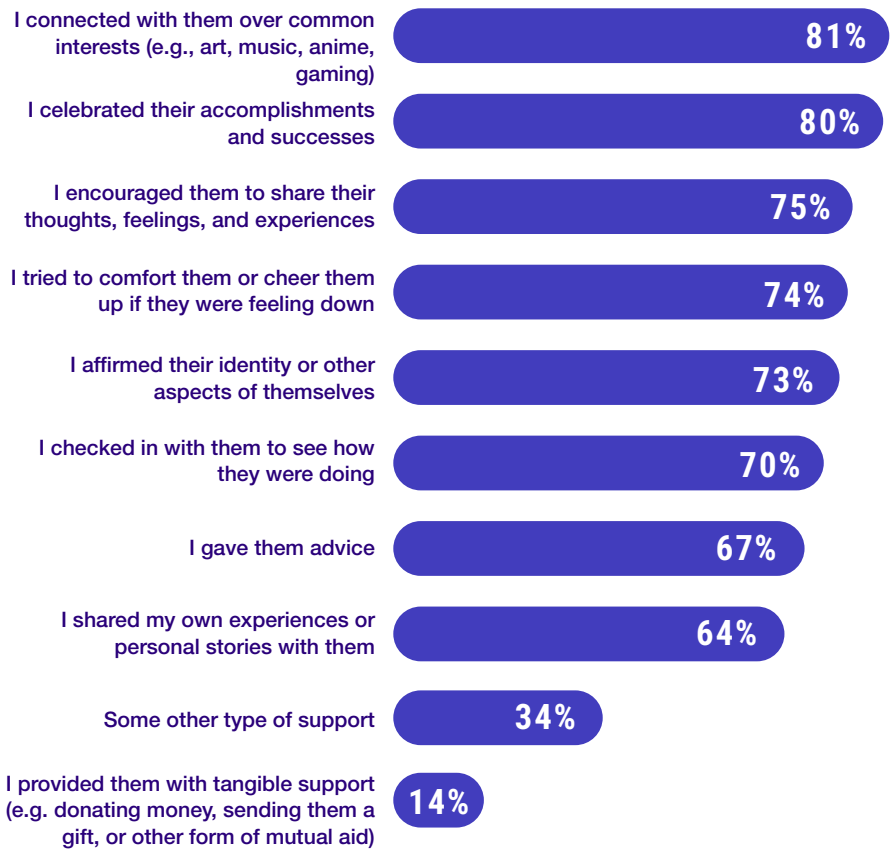
minority within the LGBTQ+ community, it's often much easier to find people online who relate to and affirm their experiences than in offline spaces. For example, one multiracial transgender young man reported:

> "In a lot of in-person spaces that I've been, usually, I'm either the only trans person there or there is maybe one or two other trans people there….Online spaces are so much more siloed, and you can find a lot more other trans people to have those connections … I've definitely had that experience of finding people to be more supportive in that context."

LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 17 also reported higher rates of trying to comfort their online friends or cheering them up when they are down (78%) and celebrating their accomplishments and successes (84%) compared to LGBTQ+ young people ages 18 to 24 (72% and 77%, respectively). Further, LGBTQ+ young people living in rural areas (19%) had higher rates of providing tangible support compared to those living in suburban/urban areas (11%).

Though most LGBTQ+ young people (66%) reported that their online support was acknowledged, the majority (60%) said it's not at all important or only a little important to them that it be acknowledged.

LGBTQ+ Young People's Type of Support for their Online Friends and/or Communities Several Times a Month or More



NOTE

Data reflect responses several times a month or more frequently to the item, "In the past year, how often have you supported your online friends AND/OR online communities in the following ways?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

The Unique Benefits of Online vs. In-Person Friendships

Online friends and communities offer unique and valued forms of social support for LGBTQ+ young people[13].

When asked about online social support, participants revealed deep and impactful friendship qualities in both qualitative and quantitative responses. Many young people described the support they received online as lifesaving—particularly as a protective factor against low levels of in-person support. For example, one multiracial transgender young man stated:

> "Often one can feel very isolated in the LGBTQ+ community, be it from their family, their community, or even so-called friends. It means everything when someone is willing to listen and can understand. Friends online have helped me off ledges, and I've done the same for them."

A white nonbinary teen echoed this life-saving impact, saying:

> "Throughout my entire life, I have been bullied relentlessly. However, when I am online, I find that it is easier to make friends. I am able to have friends that I would have never even imagined meeting. I met my best friend through role-play. Without it, I wouldn't be here today. So, in the long run, it's the friendships that I've made online that have kept me alive all these years."

Others described the genuine joy they've felt from their online friends. One Latinx nonbinary young adult stated:

> "It feels like I've met people who will stay with me no matter what happens, and I even found someone who thinks of me as their sibling. These people I've met are some of my closest friends, and I don't think anything will ever change that. No matter what someone is going through, we all have each other's backs. I love my online friends so much."

The positive feelings of online friendship were also shared by a white nonbinary teen who stated:

> "In the real world, barely anybody truly knows me because I have to hide half of myself that is essential to who I am as a person, but not online. I have grown as a person because of my online friends and have been able to feel better about myself with their support. I have told online friends things I have never told anyone in real life, and it feels amazing to have a safe space like that."

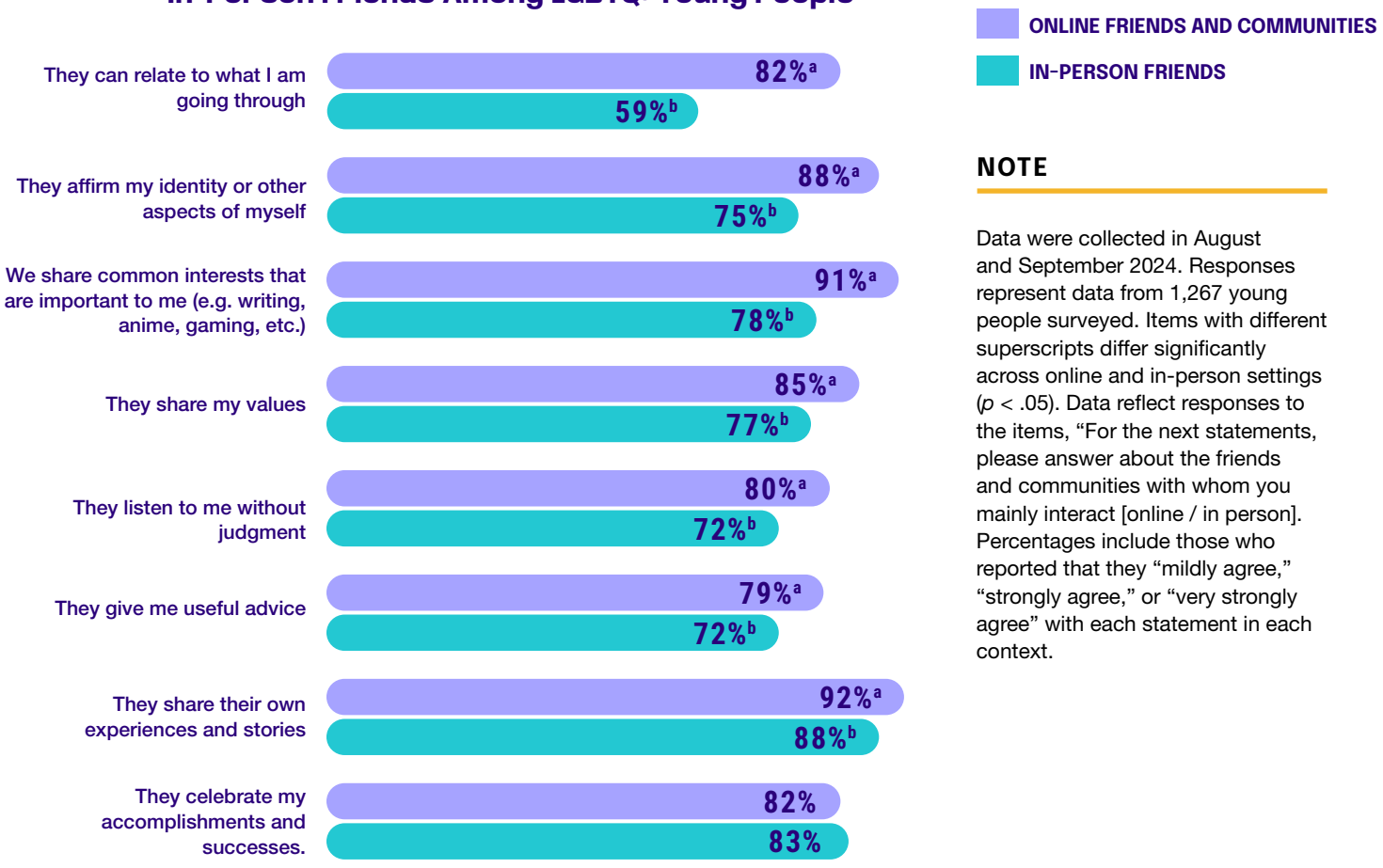
13 Comparisons are made between online friends and communities and in-person friends. "In-person communities" were not included in the prompt based on feedback from young people, as these communities were broader and not considered "chosen" in the same way as online communities. Online communities were included because many young people strongly felt these connections were more intentional and contained elements of friendship.

Across quantitative data, significantly more LGBTQ+ young people mildly, strongly, or very strongly agreed their online friends and communities fulfilled certain relationship needs more than their in-person friends, including talking to them about their problems (82% vs. 73%), sharing their values (85% vs. 77%), relating to what they were going through (82% v.s 59%), affirming their identity (88% v.s 75%), listening without judgment (80% vs. 72%), giving useful advice (79% vs. 72%), sharing common interests (90% vs 78%), and sharing their own stories with them (92% vs 88%).

Many LGBTQ+ young people in the co-distillation interviews reported actively cultivating supportive in-person friendships alongside their online connections—reflecting a relatively high endorsement of both types of friendship. Additionally, when asked in an open-ended item what was missing from online friendships, many participants expressed a desire for experiences unique to in-person interactions. As one multiracial nonbinary transgender young adult shared:

> "I don't like not being able to hang out with my [online] friends in normal ways. I wish I could hug and embrace my friends."

Comparing Features of Online Friends and Communities to In-Person Friends Among LGBTQ+ Young People



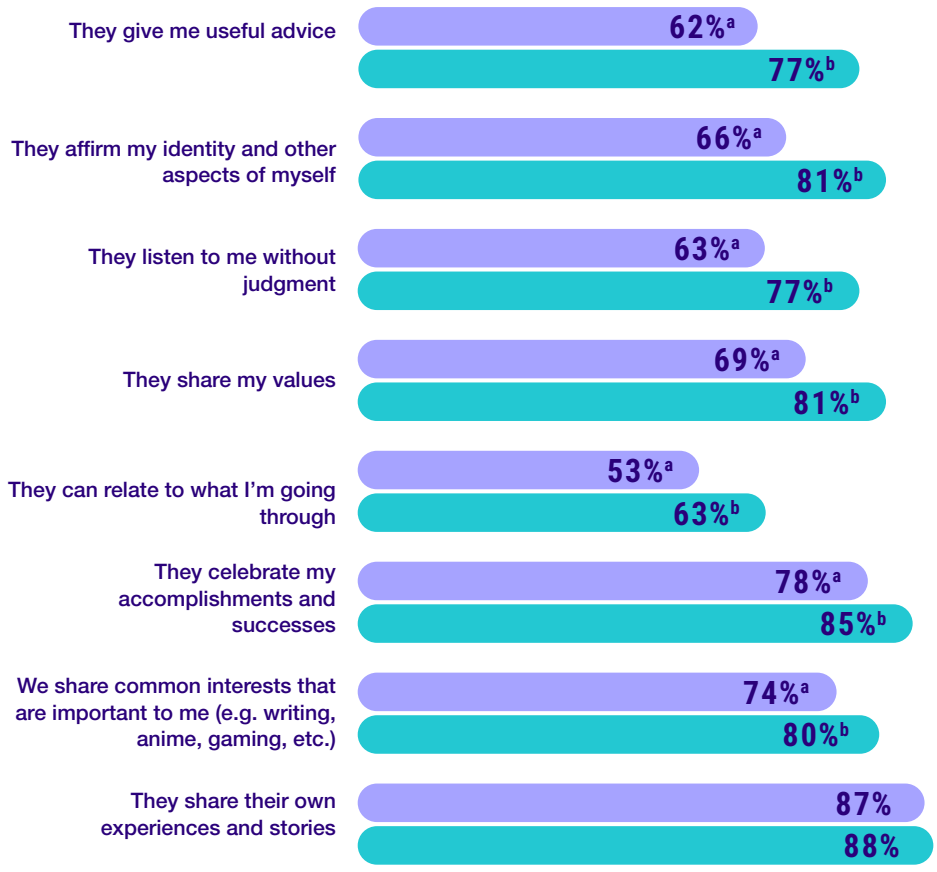
NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across online and in-person settings ($p < .05$). Data reflect responses to the items, "For the next statements, please answer about the friends and communities with whom you mainly interact [online / in person]. Percentages include those who reported that they "mildly agree," "strongly agree," or "very strongly agree" with each statement in each context.

Compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people, transgender young people more often agreed that their online friendships and communities shared their values (87% vs. 83%), affirmed their identity (91% vs. 84%), and listened without judgment (82% vs. 76%). Notably, compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people, transgender young people report lower rates of their in-person friends being able to relate to what they are going through (56% vs. 68%) and offering useful advice (68% vs. 78%). These findings resonated with transgender participants in the co-distillation conversations, who explained that as a stigmatized minority, they often find it easier to form relatable and affirming connections with other transgender young people online than in person.

There were no differences by age or urbanicity related to features of online friendships and communities; however, these groups of LGBTQ+ young people rated many features of the social support they received from in-person friends and communities differently. LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 17 were less likely than those aged 18 to 24 to agree that their in-person friendships offered all of these supportive features, except for friends sharing their own stories. LGBTQ+ young people living in rural communities also were less likely to agree that their in-person friends can relate to what they are going through (55% vs. 61%), celebrate their accomplishments and successes (79% vs. 84%), and listen without judgment (66% vs. 75%) as compared to suburban/urban young people.

Comparing Features of In-Person Friends by Age Groups Among LGBTQ+ Young people

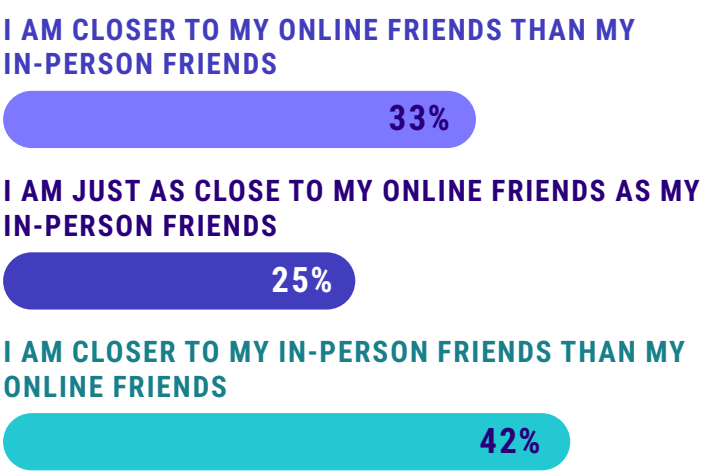


NOTE

Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across age groups ($p < .05$). Data reflect responses to the items: "For the next statements, please answer about the friends with whom you mainly interact in person" (rather than [in person/online]. Percentages include those who reported that they "mildly agree," "strongly agree," or "very strongly agree" with each statement in each context.

When directly asked, the majority of LGBTQ+ young people said they were just as close or closer to their online friends as their in-person friends. Specifically, one in three LGBTQ+ young people reported that they were closer to their online friends than they were to their in-person friends, and another one in four were just as close to their online friends as their in-person friends.

Closeness of Friends Among LGBTQ+ Young People



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "When thinking about your closest online and in-person friends, which of the following best describes you?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

There were notable differences across gender identity, urbanicity, and age regarding the closeness of online and in-person friends. Compared to their cisgender LGBQ+ peers, transgender young people were more likely to say they were closer to their online friends than in person (35% vs. 25%) and less likely to say they were closer to their in-person friends than online friends (37% vs. 55%). This finding resonated with transgender co-distillation participants, who elaborated on the difficulty of finding people in person who share their identities and can relate to their experiences—particularly those living outside of suburban/urban areas. They also explained that it could be scary and potentially dangerous to *"put yourself out there as a trans person within in-person spaces"* given the current transphobic political atmosphere, and thus safer to be out about their identities online.

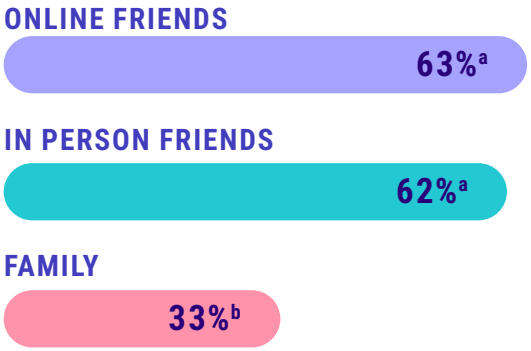
Teens aged 15 to 17 were also more likely to report being closer to online friends than in-person friends (38% vs. 30%) compared to young adults aged 18 to 24, as were those from rural areas compared to suburban/urban areas (39% vs. 30%). LGBTQ+ young people from rural areas were also less likely to say they were closer to their in-person friends than online friends compared to those in suburban/urban areas (34% vs. 46%).

Despite unique differences in access to and features of online and in-person friends, both types of friendship groups provided much higher levels[14] of social support than family (63% online friends, 62% in-person friends, 33% family) when assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.[15]

14 Calculated as mean scale scores ranging from 1 to 2.9 considered low support, 3 to 5 considered moderate support, and 5.1 to 7 considered high support.

15 Zimet, G. D., Powell, S. S., Farley, G. K., Werkman, S., & Berkoff, K. A. (1990). Psychometric characteristics of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Journal of Personality Assessment, 55(3-4), 610-617. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.1990.9674095

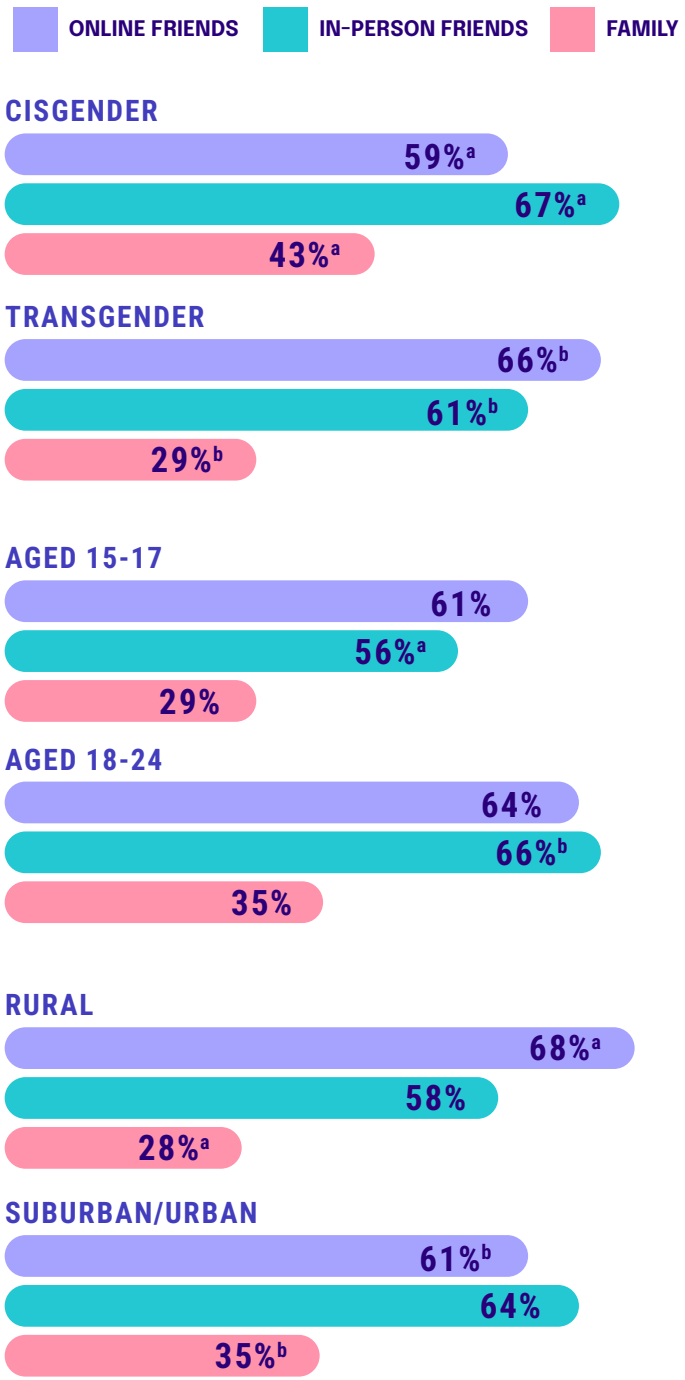
High Levels of Social Support Among LGBTQ+ Young People



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the items on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across support categories ($p < .05$).

Further, although the proportion of those with high levels of family support was significantly lower among transgender compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people (29% vs. 43%) and among rural compared to suburban/urban LGBTQ+ young people (28% vs. 35%), the proportion of those with high levels of online friend support was greater for transgender (66% vs. 59%) and rural (68% vs. 61%) LGBTQ+ young people compared to their cisgender and suburban/urban peers. There were no significant differences in having high levels of online or family support based on age, but teens aged 15 to 17 were less likely than those aged 18 to 24 to have high support levels from their in-person friends (56% vs. 66%).

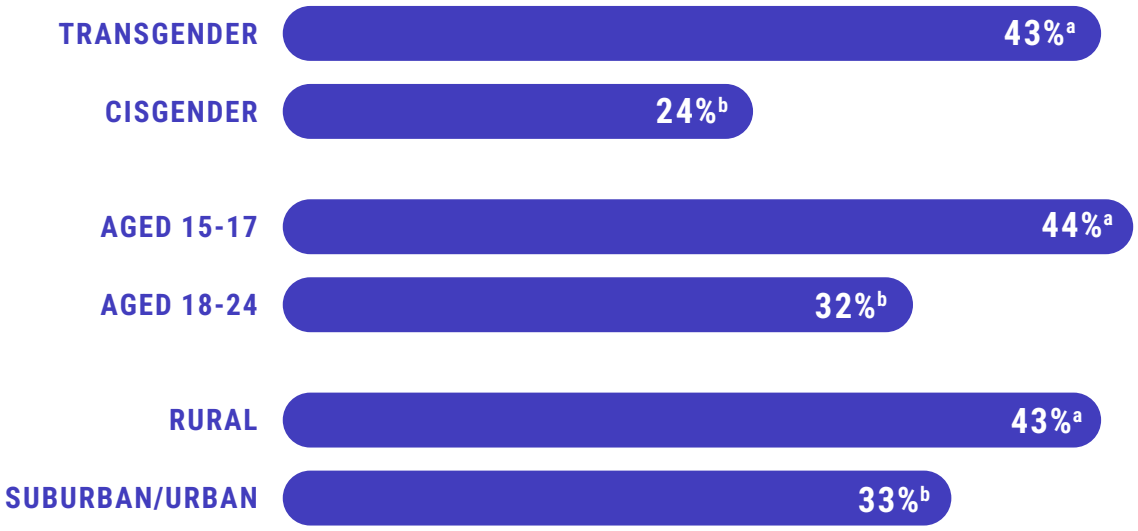


NOTE

Data reflect responses to the items on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across gender identity, age, and urbanicity ($p < .05$). Superscripts indicate significant differences between each pair of results (i.e. transgender vs. cisgender, ages 15-17 vs. 18-24, and rural vs. suburban/urban”)

Navigating the Challenges of Negative Online Experiences

Rates of Having Been Teased or Bullied Online Due to their LGBTQ+ Identity at Least "Sometimes" in the Past Year



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item "How often have you been teased, bullied, or harassed online in the past year because of your actual or perceived LGBTQ+ identity?" Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across gender identity, age, and urbanicity ($p < .05$). Superscripts indicate significant differences within each pair of results.

More than one in three LGBTQ+ young people have experienced bullying and teasing online due to their LGBTQ+ identity—with disparities by demographics. The impact of seeing negative things online can have a lasting impact.

Overall, 64% of LGBTQ+ young people reported having ever been bullied or teased online due to their LGBTQ+ identity, with more than one in three (36%) having been teased or bullied online due to their LGBTQ+ identity at least sometimes in the past year.

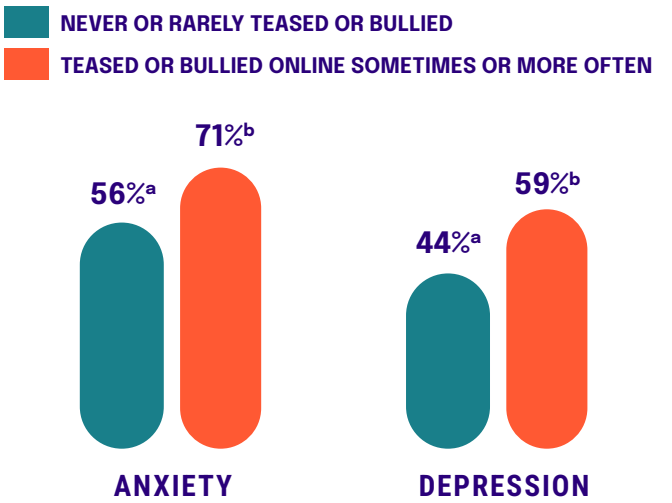
Significant disparities exist among LGBTQ+ young people who were at least sometimes teased or bullied online in the past year. LGBTQ+ young people aged 15 to 17 reported higher rates of frequent online teasing or bullying (44%) compared to 18 to 24-year-old peers (32%). LGBTQ+ young people living in rural towns (43%) and transgender young people (43%) reported higher rates of online

teasing or bullying when compared to LGBTQ+ young people living in suburban/urban areas (33%) and cisgender LGBQ+ young people (24%).

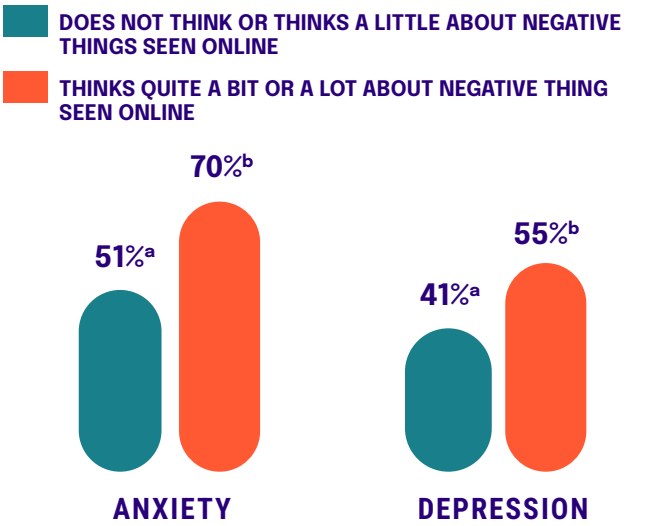
LGBTQ+ young people who had never or rarely been teased or bullied due to their LGBTQ+ identity in the past year reported significantly lower rates of anxiety (56%) and depression (44%) compared to LGBTQ+ young people who had been teased or bullied online at least sometimes in the past year (71% and 59%, respectively).

When LGBTQ+ young people came across negative things online, nearly three in five (58%) reported thinking about it quite a bit or a lot later in the day. More transgender young people (60%) reported thinking about negative things they had seen online later in the day compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people (53%). There were no differences by age or urbanicity. People for whom these negative things stayed on their minds reported significantly higher rates of anxiety (70% vs 51%) and depression (55% vs. 41%) than their peers who didn't think of them at all or just a little.

Mental Health Among LGBTQ+ Young People by Having Been Teased or Bullied Online in the Past Year Due to their LGBTQ+ Identity



Mental Health Among LGBTQ+ Young People by Thinking About Negative Things they Saw Online



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item "How often have you been teased, bullied, or harassed online in the past year because of your actual or perceived LGBTQ+ identity?" as well as PHQ-2 and GAD-2 scores. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show differences in rates of anxiety and depression based on how frequently the young person was bullied online ($p < .05$).

NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, "When you see something online that is hateful toward yourself or an identity group you are a member of (e.g., in terms of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, etc.), to what degree do you find yourself continuing to think about that thing later in the day?" as well as PHQ-2 and GAD-2 scores. Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed. Items with different superscripts show differences in rates of anxiety and depression based on how frequently the young person thinks about negative things seen online ($p < .05$).

In co-distillation conversations, young people acknowledged the pernicious effect of bullying on online experiences—which can be extreme at times. For example, one Black transgender young woman reported that someone online encouraged her to end her life and described how depressed these types of comments made her feel. However, young people also stressed that the risks of online bullying should be contextualized next to the risks and dangers that they face within in-person spaces. They pointed out that no space—either online or offline—is completely risk-free and further explained how the risks they faced in person often felt more threatening than those they faced online. For example, one white transgender young man pointed out:

> “In person, it is more of like a physical security concern. Like, I don’t want to be approached. I don’t want to be harassed. Online, I can block somebody and move on.”

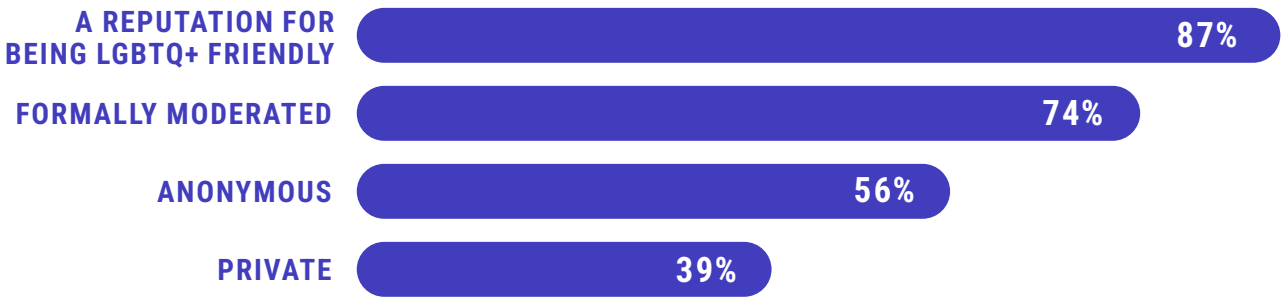
LGBTQ+ Young People’s Agency and Autonomy in Online Spaces

LGBTQ+ young people are attuned to ways to promote better safety online despite the negative experiences that happen or have the potential to happen online.

When it came to their perspectives on which social media platform features are most important in helping LGBTQ+ young people feel safe online, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ young people felt a reputation for being LGBTQ+ friendly was important or very important to their perceptions of safety (87%). Moderation was also of high importance for LGBTQ+ young people, with nearly three in four (74%) endorsing formal moderation as important or very important to their perceptions of safety online.

Anonymity and privacy were less frequently endorsed as important or very important, with more than half of LGBTQ+ young people (56%) saying they would feel safer in online spaces if they were anonymous, and nearly two in five LGBTQ+ young people (39%) feeling that it was important or very important that online spaces are private.

Qualities LGBTQ+ Young People Think are Important or Very Important for a Platform to Have for them to Feel Safe Online



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, “When it comes to feeling/staying safe in online spaces, how important is it to you that a platform is/has:” Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

There were no significant differences among LGBTQ+ young people who felt it was important for online spaces to be anonymous or for online spaces to be private for them to feel safe. However, higher rates of transgender young people (77% vs. 68%) and 18 to 24-year-olds (77% vs. 68%) thought it was important or very important for online spaces to be formally moderated (i.e., someone is actively monitoring and removing inappropriate or hateful content) compared to cisgender LGBQ+ young people and 15 to 17-year-olds. Similarly, more transgender than cisgender LGBQ+ young people (89% vs. 84%) and 18 to 24-year-old vs. 15 to 17-year-old LGBTQ+ young people (90% vs. 83%) reported that to feel safer online, it was important or very important that the site had a reputation for being LGBTQ+ friendly. There were no significant differences between rural and suburban/urban LGBTQ+ young people.

When asked why survey respondents rated a reputation for being LGBTQ+ friendly so highly, co-distillation participants explained that if a space within a platform isn't LGBTQ+ friendly, its privacy or anonymity doesn't matter; it's unlikely to feel supportive. As one white genderqueer teen respondent said:

> "For me, personally, if it's not LGBTQ friendly, I'm not going on at all."

Interviewees also echoed the importance of good moderation and reported greater trust in online groups and servers where the community guidelines were clear and efficiently enforced and the moderator was a known member of the LGBTQ+ community or an ally.

For example, in response to the question "What makes for good moderation," one multiracial transgender young man explained:

> "The two things that came to mind for me was thinking about Reddit forums and subreddits having very specifically stated rules, and part of those rules usually being no bigotry of any form, including racism, homophobia, or transphobia. As far as moderation, specifically in a lot of Discord spaces, usually, there are pretty active moderators who will not hesitate to kick or ban people if they mention anything that's not within the stated rules of the space. And, usually, there will be an explicit rule section that will have those rules."

Others described a list of strategies they use before deciding an online space is safe for LGBTQ+ young people, such as a Native American nonbinary young adult who said:

> "I look at the past posts to see how clean the feed is and whether there are posts related to the LGBTQ+ community. The next thing I do is go through profiles to get an idea of how the individuals are, whether their bios are lacking if the profiles look like bots, and the ages of the people. Age is important to me because I don't want to message people who are way older than me."

Co-distillation conversations also revealed the diverse strategies young people use to assess whether an online space is LGBTQ+ friendly and to address hateful or inappropriate content.

Before engaging deeply with a new online space or community, interviewees reported proactively searching for signs of inclusivity. These strategies included reviewing community guidelines, looking for LGBTQ+-friendly signifiers such as posted pronouns, examining the profiles of hosts and moderators, and scanning comments to ensure the absence of hateful or negative remarks. These young people also reported flagging any hateful online commentary they encountered and blocking the person posting the comments.

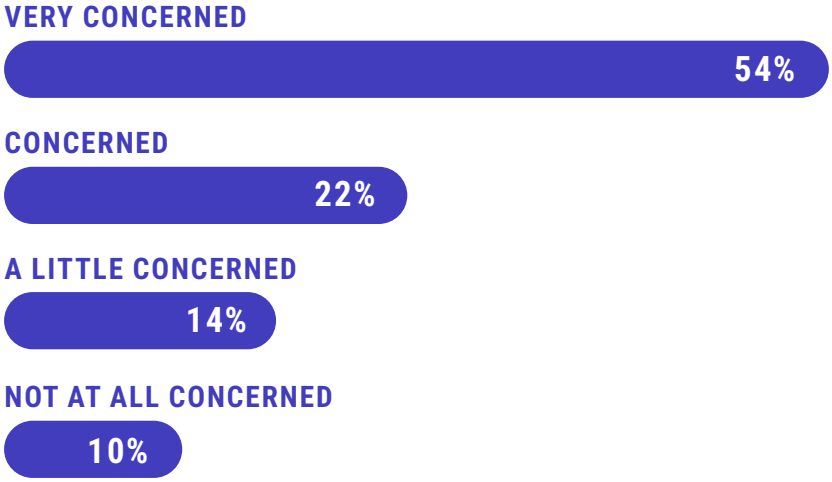
For example, one white nonbinary teen reported:

> “Personally, when it comes to hate online, I just block them … even if it’s like the smallest thing ever. .... I don’t want to deal with that, and the algorithm of, especially Instagram, is so annoying to deal with. If I even slightly interact with it where it’s a comment of, “You’re being stupid,” then that’s going to get onto my ‘for you’ page. So I just block it, and I move on, which is easier said than done.”

This teen’s quote, along with survey data on the emotional impact of negative online content later in the day, highlights the significant emotional toll of hateful content and underscores the need for better moderation.

Regardless of the concerns and issues with online spaces, LGBTQ+ young people do not want their access limited. Three-quarters (76%) of LGBTQ+ young people were concerned (22%) or very concerned (54%) that their state or the federal government might restrict online access to LGBTQ+-affirming online communities and content. More young people aged 15 to 17 (93%) and transgender young people (91%) were at least a little concerned about their state or the federal government limiting access to LGBTQ+-affirming online communities and content compared to 18 to 24-year-old young people (88%) and cisgender LGBQ+ young people (83%), respectively.

Concerns that State or Federal Government May Limit Online Access Among LGBTQ+ Young People



NOTE

Data reflect responses to the item, “How concerned are you that your state or the federal government might limit online access to LGBTQ+-affirming online communities and content?” Data were collected in August and September 2024. Responses represent data from 1,267 young people surveyed.

Co-distillation conversations revealed that while young people express concern about government restrictions, many are unaware of the specific policies being considered at the state or federal level. For example, one participant was highly knowledgeable about the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA).

More commonly, however, interviewees expressed uncertainty about what regulation might entail. For example, one Asian American cisgender teen girl explained:

> “I guess I don’t really know how the state or the federal government could limit online access. I guess they could block certain sites or whatever. But I feel certain communities would find a way to still have a platform where they could speak out against something like this.”

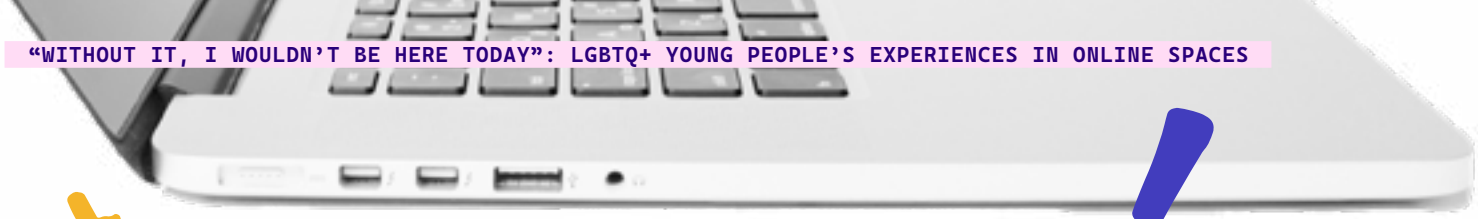
Interviewees also expressed uncertainty about whether this question was asking about the likelihood of limits being enacted or the severity of the consequences if they were enacted.

Moving Forward

INSIGHTS FOR SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

Online friends and spaces are crucial for LGBTQ+ young people to learn about who they are and find others like them for shared interests and support.

Many LGBTQ+ young people are contending with a host of mental health concerns, but they can find refuge in online friends and communities. LGBTQ+ young people often seek out online friends and communities due to shared interests or mutual friends and, as a result, have enduring, supportive peer relationships. LGBTQ+ young people connect with their online communities and friends often. Many report being just as close or closer to their online friends than their in-person friends and share that their online friends are more supportive across many domains, such as identity affirmation, than their in-person friends. LGBTQ+ young people also feel that online spaces are kinder, safer, and more supportive regarding their LGBTQ+ identity than the in-person spaces they find themselves in. Because many LGBTQ+ young people use online spaces to compensate for what is missing or superficial in their in-person spaces, they must be allowed to safely navigate online communities to find peers and communities that can serve as important protective factors for them. Indeed, partners and leaders in efforts to support LGBTQ+ young people’s well-being should consider the utility of online communities as well as leveraging the potential of online spaces to deliver prevention and intervention strategies, such as **imi guide**, a digital resource meant to help LGBTQ+ young people affirm their identity and cope with stress and stigma.



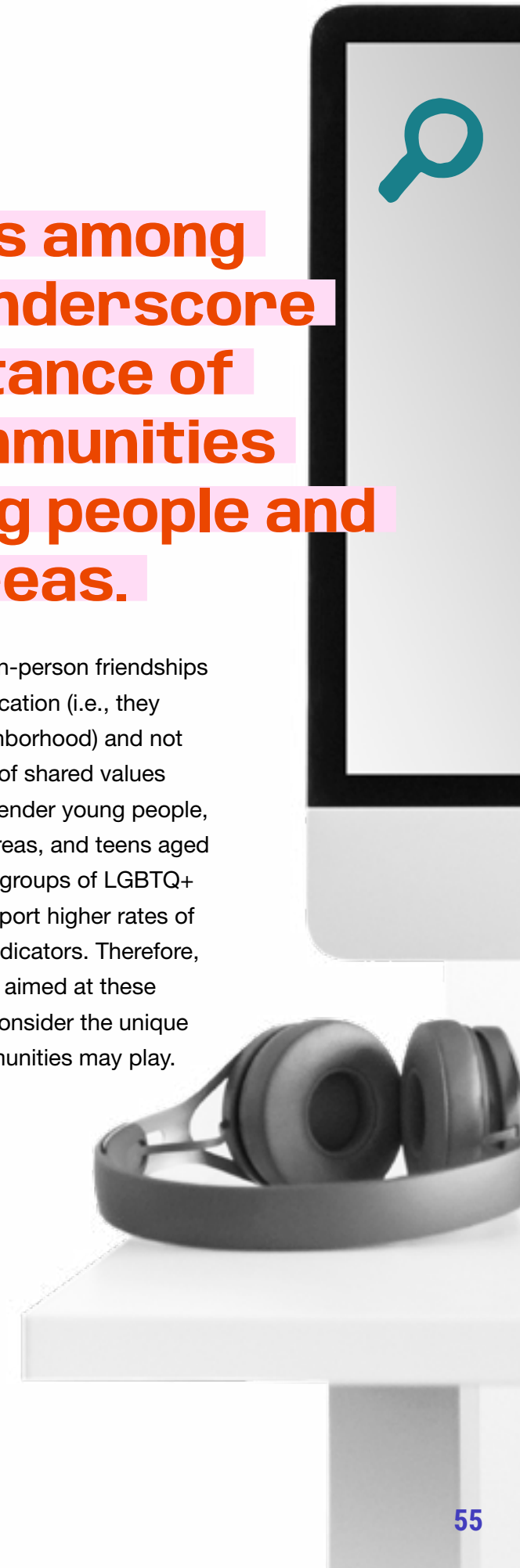
The potential dangers of online spaces are clear, but outright bans could also put LGBTQ+ young people at risk, so they are eager to collaborate on ways to make them safer.

While LGBTQ+ young people overwhelmingly rate online spaces in a positive light, they do not come without their faults; more than one in three LGBTQ+ young people reported being teased or bullied online due to their LGBTQ+ identity in the past year. That said, LGBTQ+ young people express much greater safety concerns about their in-person spaces, which were associated with poor mental health indicators. Removing what may be LGBTQ+ young people’s only access to supportive people and the resultant mental health benefits could do more harm than good. The potential danger of limiting online access was underscored in co-distillation conversations, where many young people expressed trepidation about cutting off a vital lifeline of online support. Summing up this concern, one Black cisgender young woman shared:

> “I think it’s really important for people to know that the youth may not always have a trusted adult that they can talk to or someone that they can express themselves to if they’re having scary or dangerous thoughts. It literally is important to their safety and their well-being.”

LGBTQ+ young people have learned to navigate the online world to find spaces, with most agreeing that a site’s reputation for being LGBTQ+ friendly is essential. Platforms and site administrators can build this reputation by posting clear, inclusive, LGBTQ+-friendly community guidelines and investing meaningfully in effective, fair content moderation. While improving online spaces is critical, young people in co-distillation conversations emphasized the need for adults to make in-person spaces safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ+ young people, reducing their reliance on online communities for support.

Alongside enhancing media literacy and digital safety for LGBTQ+ young people, peers, parents/caregivers, teachers, and other adults should focus on creating in-person environments that are safe, supportive, and kind. For example, Born This Way Foundation offers the platform, Channel Kindness, where young people can find and share stories of kindness, bravery, resilience, and community, and the platform, #BeKind365, where young people can find and share curated suggestions for kind acts they can practice in service of themselves and others.



Significant differences among LGBTQ+ young people underscore the heightened importance of online friends and communities for transgender young people and those living in rural areas.

Although many of the online experiences explored were similar for all LGBTQ+ young people, there were significantly lower rates of access to in-person safety, support, and kindness for transgender young people and those living in rural areas compared to their cisgender and suburban/urban peers. LGBTQ+ teens aged 15 to 17 also reported differences compared to their older peers, such as having less support from their in-person friends. At that age, it’s particularly difficult to move about freely, and people are often stuck with in-person friendships primarily based on location (i.e., they live in the same neighborhood) and not necessarily because of shared values and interests. Transgender young people, those living in rural areas, and teens aged 15 to 17 are also the groups of LGBTQ+ young people who report higher rates of poor mental health indicators. Therefore, prevention strategies aimed at these populations should consider the unique role that online communities may play.

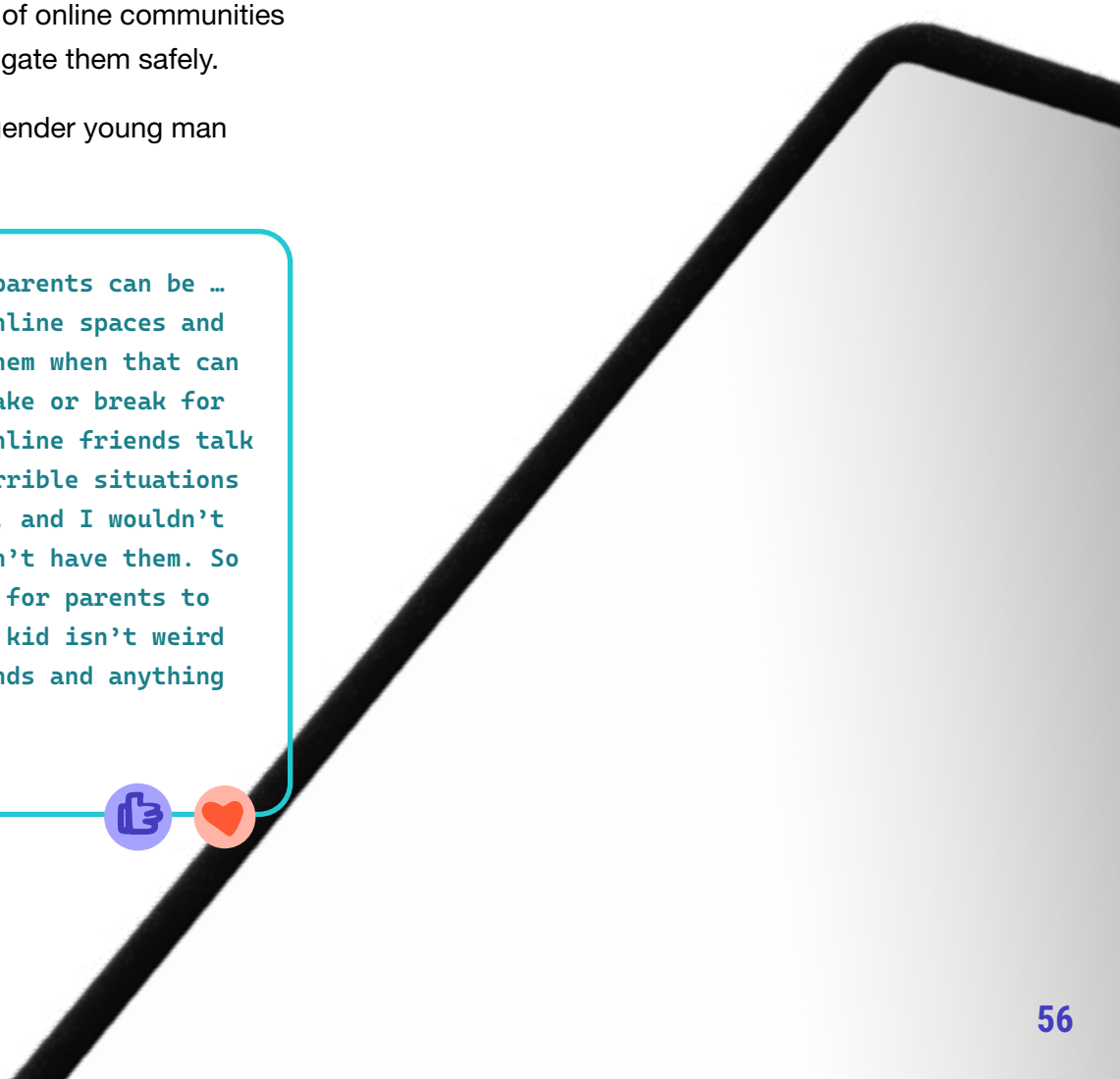
Young people believe this report can be most impactful for younger teens who are beginning to explore their LGBTQ+ identities and for parents/guardians of LGBTQ+ young people.

During co-distillation conversations, LGBTQ+ participants shared that they would have benefited from knowing how to access safe and supportive online communities when they first began exploring their identities. They also expressed a desire for parents/guardians, teachers, and older Queer allies to understand the importance of online communities and to help young people navigate them safely.

For example, one white transgender young man shared:

> “I feel like a lot of parents can be … really demonizing of online spaces and really protective of them when that can be the place that is make or break for your child. I’ve had online friends talk me out of terrible, terrible situations that I put myself into, and I wouldn’t be here today if I didn’t have them. So it is really important for parents to understand that … your kid isn’t weird for having online friends and anything like that.”

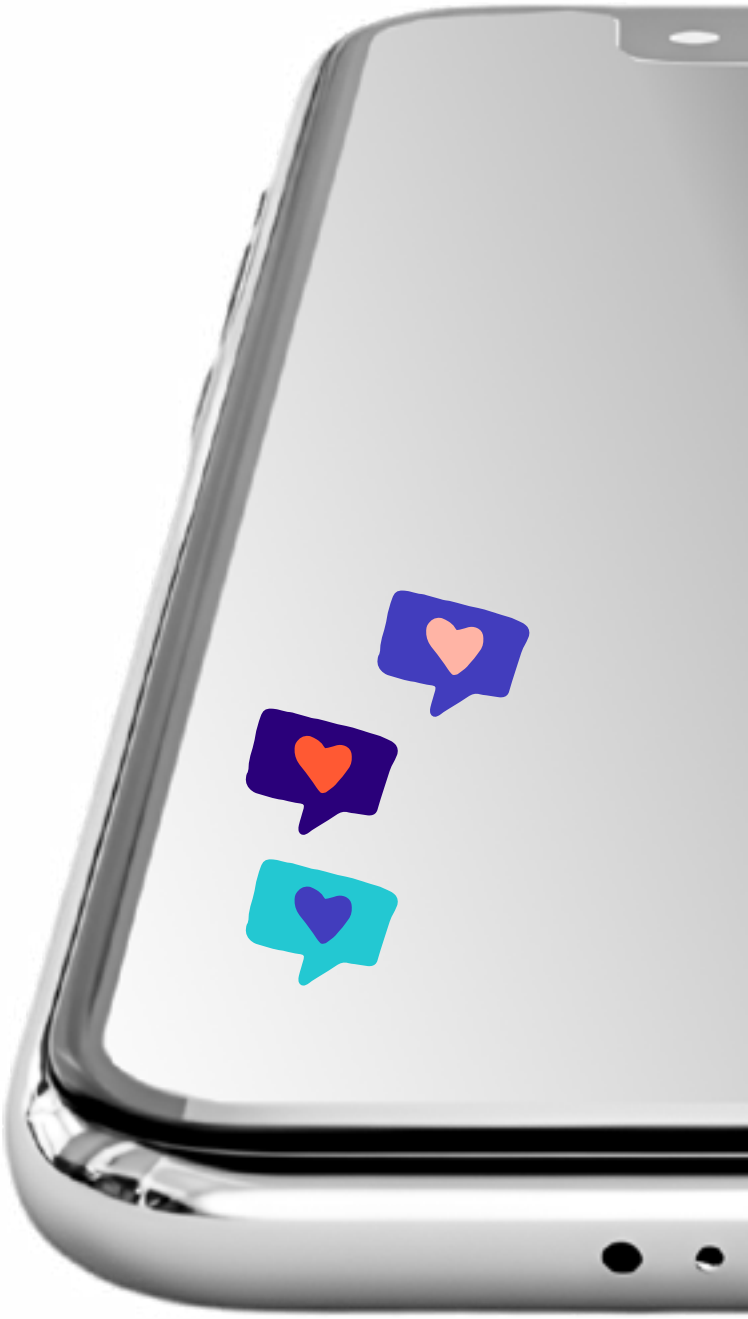
Co-distillation participants shared that when parents/guardians acknowledge the importance of online friends and communities in their LGBTQ+ teens’ social lives, it fosters trust and communication, encouraging teens to seek support when facing negative content or unwanted interactions online.



Online spaces are here to stay, and we must find a way to help them meet the needs of our young people.

As the world becomes increasingly digital, it is essential to consider how to work with it and LGBTQ+ young people to better meet their needs. In describing desired features of an ideal online community for LGBTQ+ young people, one white gender questioning young adult participant stated:

> “It would be focused on uplifting queer people by making them feel less alone, focusing on peer mental health support, giving advice on housing or medical issues relevant to queer youth, and also enabling queer youth to get involved in queer struggles across their country to help gain rights and recognition, even in small ways.”



Among the many ways to help support a more kind online environment, Jack.org, in partnership with Born This Way Foundation, created the Be There Certificate, a free, digital, self-paced mental health course designed to increase mental health literacy and provide young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to safely support anyone who may be struggling with their mental health.

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Contributions

This project represents the work of Indiana University Associate Professor and Kinsey Institute Associate Research Scientist, Dr. Myeshia Price, Hopelab, and Born This Way Foundation. Below, we detail each part of the project and its contributors.

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Data collection. 1984 LLC, in collaboration with Dr. Mike Parent and Dr. Amy Green

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Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. Dr. Emma Bruehlman-Senecal and Jayla Stokesberry

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Design and production. Stacy Nguyen

Communications. Hopelab (Juan Martinez, Robin Raskob, Phuong Pham, Jaweer Brown) and Born This Way Foundation (Mitu Yilma, Shadille Estepan, Josh Hollin)

About

Hopelab envisions a future where all young people have equitable opportunities to live joyful and purposeful lives. As a funder, connector, and science translator, Hopelab supports and builds equity-centered solutions for the mental health of Brown, Black, and Queer young people. For more information, visit **hopelab.org**.

Born This Way Foundation, co-founded and led by Lady Gaga and her mother, Cynthia Bissett Germanotta, empowers and inspires young people to build a kinder, braver world that supports their mental health. Based on the scientific link between kindness and mental health and built in partnership with young people, Born This Way Foundation leverages research, programs, grantmaking, and partnerships to engage young people and connect them with accessible mental health resources. For more information, visit **bornthisway.foundation**.

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