

# Experience of gay men in 2023

## Research summary

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# Research into the experience of gay men in 2023

In May 2023, BBC Three launched the UK's first gay dating show, *I Kissed a Boy*. To accompany the broadcast, BBC Three commissioned Walnut Unlimited to carry out a survey of gay men, exploring their experiences of what it's like to live in the UK in 2023.

- Walnut interviewed an online sample of 501 UK adults aged 16+ who identify as gay men, between 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> May 2023.
- Age and geographical quotas were set to ensure a representative sample. At the analysis stage, data were weighted by age.
- All percentages are based on the full sample of 501 respondents, unless stated otherwise.
- **We would like to thank all the men who shared their thoughts and experiences in the survey – without them, this research would not have been possible!**

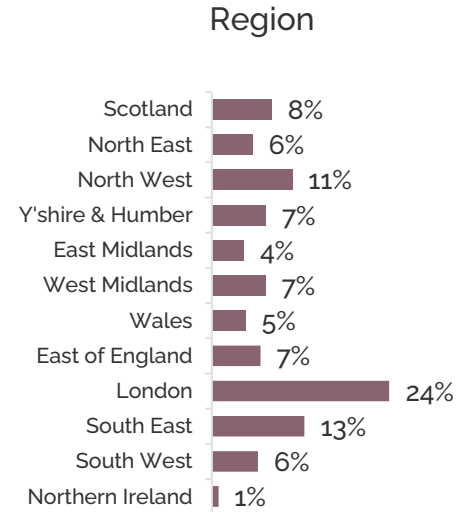
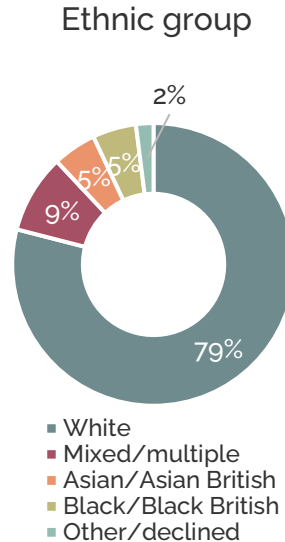
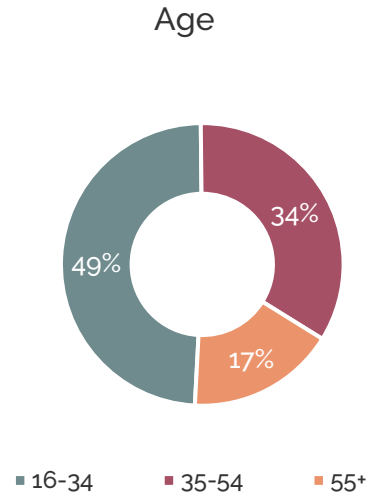
The research has been conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 and ISO 27001, the international standards for market research and information security management.

# Summary

Coming out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most gay men knew they were gay before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Almost all have 'come out' to at least one person, usually starting with a friend or their mum.</li> <li>Having the coming out conversation was difficult for many, though most said the person they came out to was supportive and it was a relief to talk about it.</li> <li>However, in everyday life, more than a third of gay men hide their sexual orientation around strangers, and a quarter at work.</li> </ul>
Relationships, dating and sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most gay men feel comfortable sitting close to a partner or hugging in public. Yet, less than half feel comfortable holding hands or kissing in public, and around half have experienced discrimination over public displays of affection.</li> <li>A quarter were happily single at the time of the survey. The same proportion were looking for a relationship and just under half were in a relationship – mainly a monogamous one.</li> <li>Almost three quarters of gay men have used a dating app, looking for a relationship, sex, or friendship. Experiences of using these apps is mixed.</li> <li>Most gay men enjoy either penetrative or side sex, and are split fairly evenly for preferring top or bottom.</li> </ul>
Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than half of gay men have experienced discrimination in public because they are gay; more than four in ten have experienced it online.</li> <li>Six in ten have experienced discrimination from other gay men, most commonly for the way they look, their sexual preferences or for 'being too camp'.</li> <li>However, most feel that the UK has become more accepting of gay men over the last decade, and that they experience less discrimination here than in other countries.</li> </ul>
Spaces and representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For most gay men, it's important that there are spaces for gay people in their area. That said, just over half say there are not enough spaces for gay people locally.</li> <li>While more than half of gay men agree that people like them are represented in fictional TV shows, a quarter believe they are not represented enough in dating shows.</li> <li>Most reported having seen an openly gay man on TV during their teenage years, with Julian Clary, Paul O'Grady and John Inman among those most commonly mentioned as the first.</li> </ul>

# About the sample

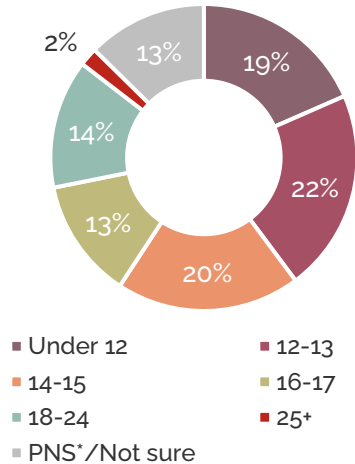
In the research we interviewed n=501 gay men from across the UK. This sample size, while smaller than may be typical for a national survey, reflected the challenge of interviewing a representative sample of respondents from a relatively low-incidence social group<sup>1</sup>. Quotas were set to ensure a representative sample, with small weights applied to the final data set on age. Weighted demographic figures are shown in the graphs below.



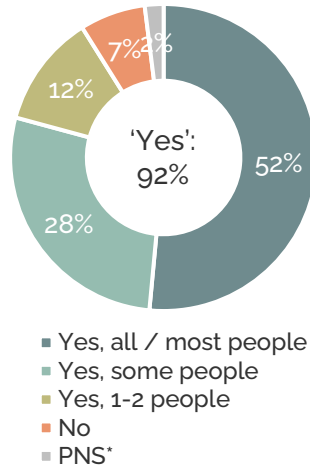
# Coming out

# Most knew they were gay before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Almost all have come out to at least one person, with their friend or mum usually the first to know

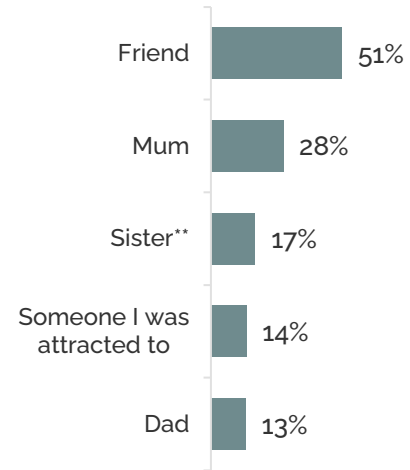
When did you first know you were gay?



Have you told other people about your sexual orientation?



Who was the first person you came out to? (Top 5)



\* Prefer not to say

\*\* Filtered on those with a sister

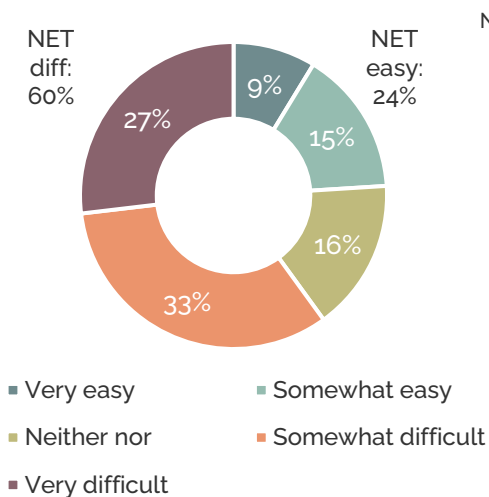
Q2. How old were you when you first knew that you are gay? (n=501)

Q3. Have you told other people about your sexual orientation (often referred to as 'coming out')? (n=501)

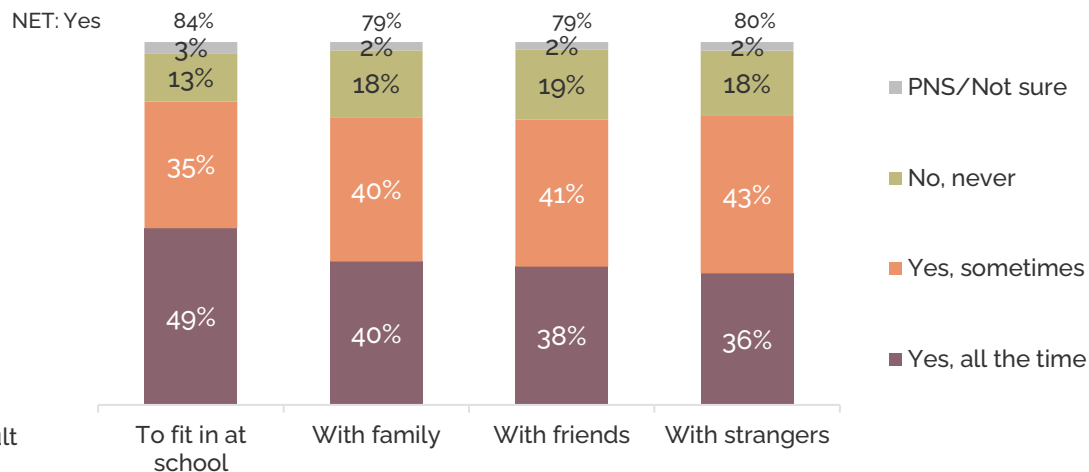
Q4. Who was the first person you told about your sexual orientation/came out to? Base: have told someone (n=460)

# Many gay men found it difficult to have their first conversation about their sexual orientation, and most report hiding their sexual orientation at some point as a teenager

How easy or difficult was it to come out?



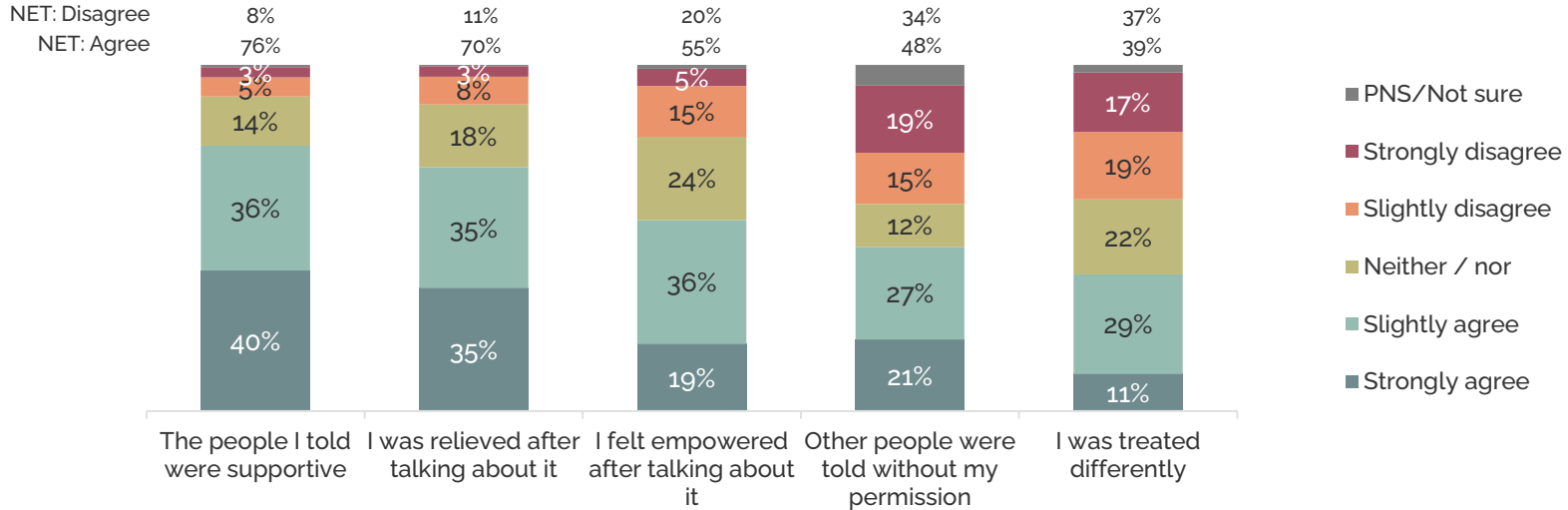
Did you ever hide your sexual orientation as a teenager...?



Q5a. How easy or difficult was it for you to have the conversation, the first time you told people about your sexual orientation? Base: have told someone (n=460)  
 Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about when you were a teenager? (n=501)

# Most gay men found that the people they first told were supportive, and that coming out was a relief. However, almost half said that other people were told without their permission

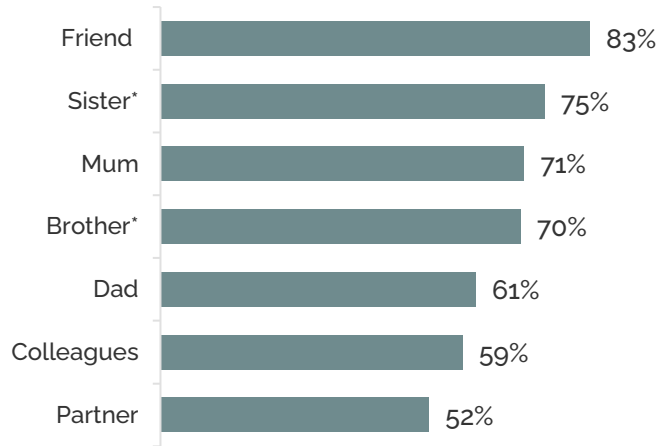
Experience of the first time telling people about your sexual orientation





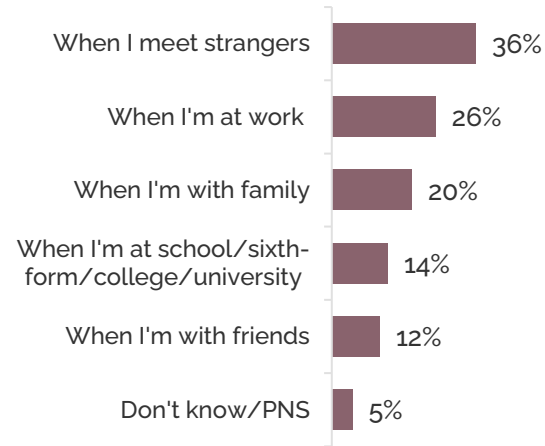
Thinking about today, most gay men have told a variety of people about their sexual orientation, though a quarter hide it at work, and over a third when meeting strangers.

Thinking about today, which people have you told about your sexual orientation?



\* Filtered on those with a sister/brother

Are there ever times you hide your sexual orientation now, e.g. to fit in?



Q7. Thinking about today, which of the following people have you told about your sexual orientation? Base: have told someone (n=467)

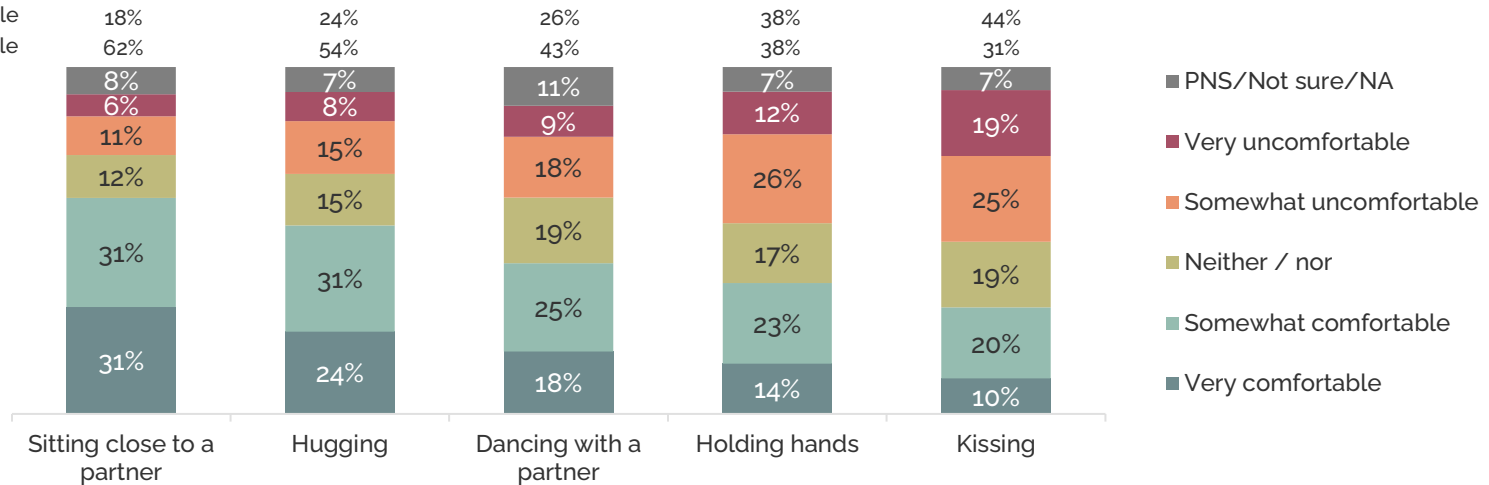
Q8. Are there ever times now when you hide your sexual orientation, for example to fit in? (n=501)

# Relationships, dating and sex

# Most gay men feel comfortable sitting close to a partner or hugging them in public, but only a minority feel comfortable dancing, holding hands or kissing in public

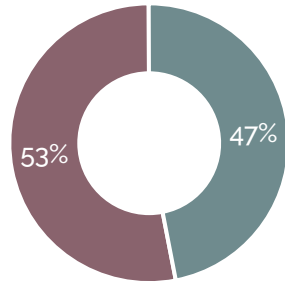
Feeling comfortable with public displays of affection

NET: Uncomfortable  
NET: Comfortable



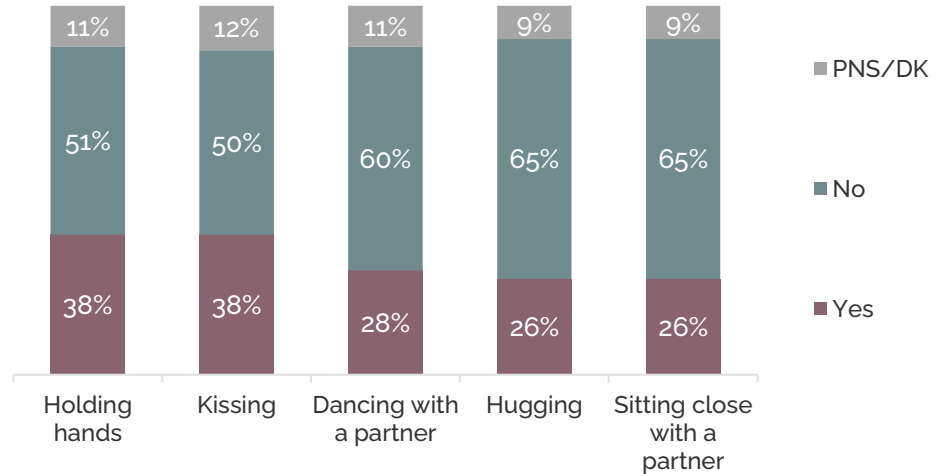
# Half of gay men say they have experienced discrimination while engaging in some sort of public displays of affection, most often for holding hands or kissing

NET: experienced discrimination while doing any of the following



■ Yes ■ No

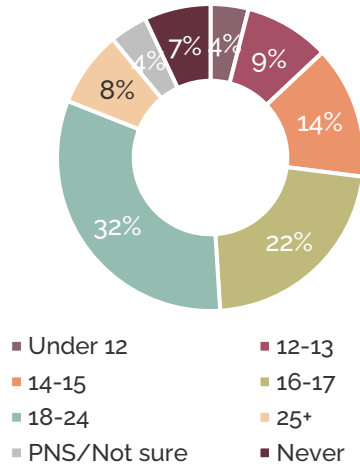
Have you experienced discrimination or prejudice for doing any of the following in public?



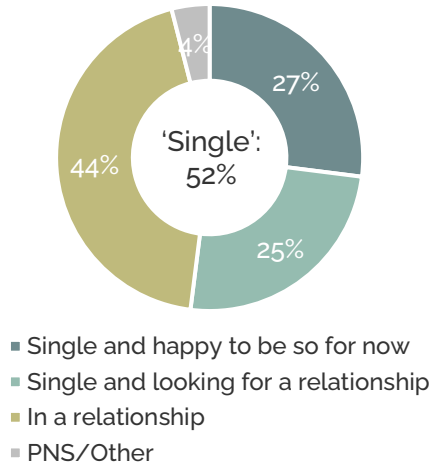
■ PNS/DK  
■ No  
■ Yes

# Almost half had their first gay kiss by the age of 18. Likewise, almost half were in a relationship at the time of interviews, mainly with one partner

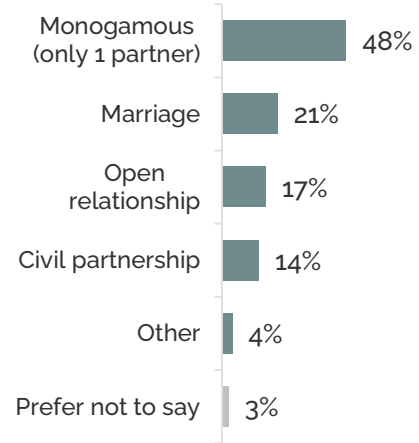
How old were you for your first gay kiss?



Current relationship status



Type of current relationship (top 5)



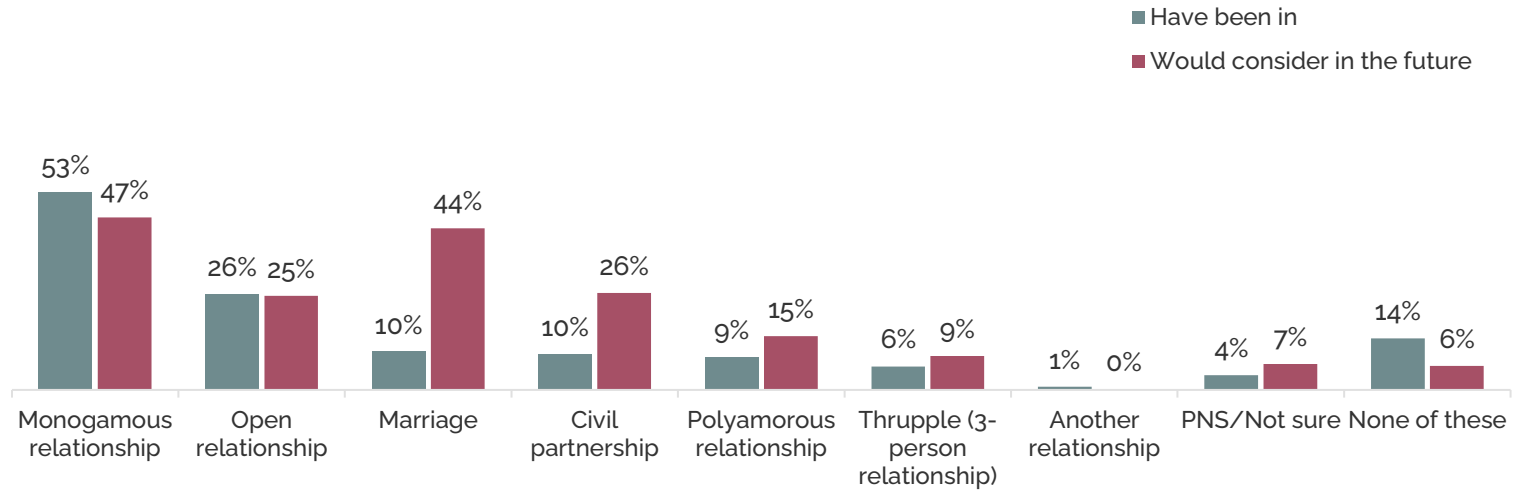
Q11. How old were you when you had your first gay kiss? (n=501)

Q12. Which of these best describes your relationship status? (n=501)

Q13. Which of these best describes the relationship you are in? Base: in a relationship (n=222)

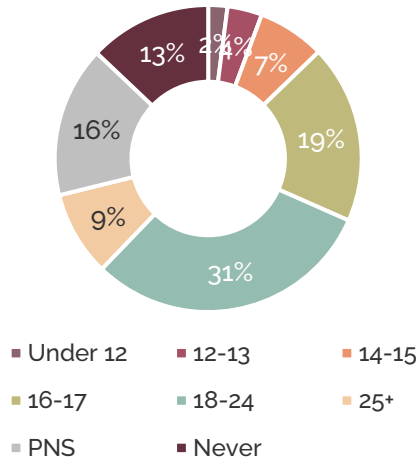
# Gay men are most likely to consider a monogamous relationship or marriage, though a quarter would consider a civil partnership or an open relationship

Previous and future relationships

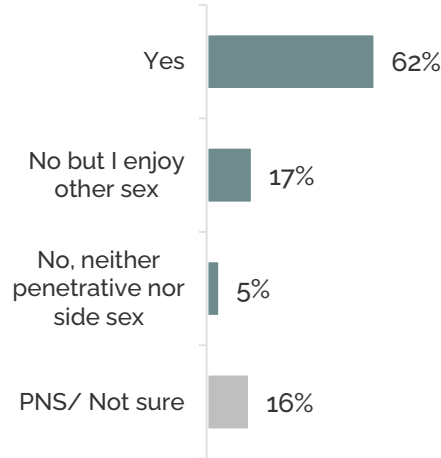


# Most gay men enjoy either penetrative or side sex, and are split fairly evenly for preferring top or bottom

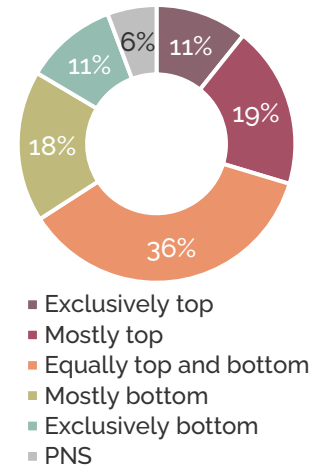
How old were you when you first had sex with a man?



Do you enjoy penetrative sex?



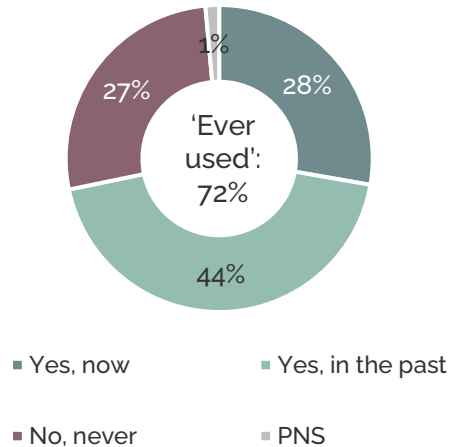
Which best describes your sexual preferences?



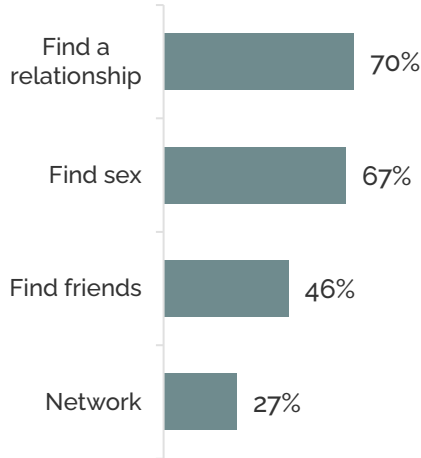
Q28. How old were you the first time you had sex with a man? (n=501)  
 Q29. Thinking about your sexual preferences, do you enjoy penetrative sex? (n=501)  
 Q30. Which of these, if any, best describes your sexual preferences? Base: enjoys penetrative sex (n=309)

# Most gay men have used dating apps, either now or in the past, looking for relationships, sex or friends. Experiences of using dating apps have been mixed for many

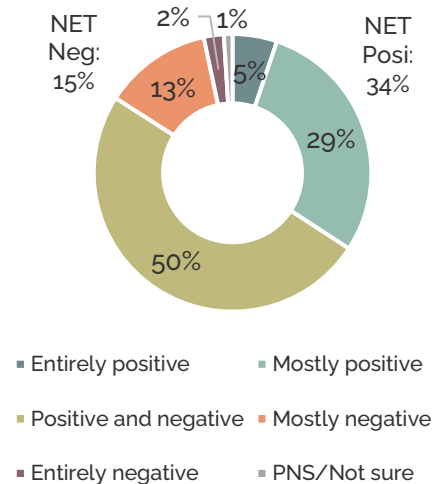
Use of dating apps



Reasons for using dating apps



Experience of dating apps



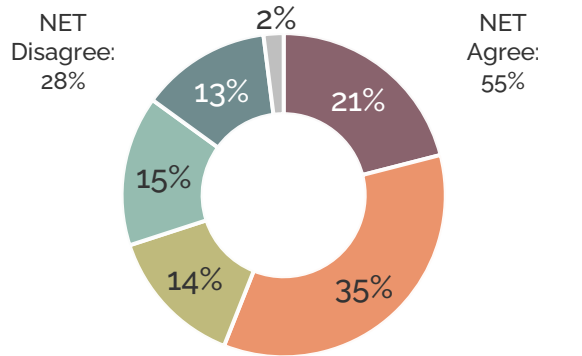
Q18. Do you use any dating apps, or have you used them in the past? (n=501)  
 Q19. Which of these reasons, if any, have you used dating apps for? (n=359)  
 Q20. Have your experiences using dating apps been positive or negative? (n=359)



# Discrimination

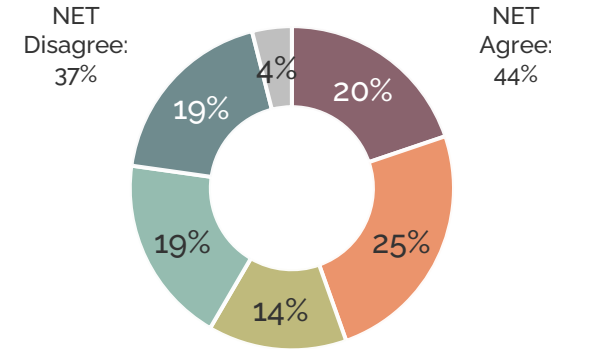
# Over half of gay men said that they have experienced discrimination in public because they are gay, and more than four in ten online

I have experienced discrimination or prejudice in **public** because I am gay



- Strongly agree   ■ Slightly agree   ■ Neither / nor
- Slightly disagree   ■ Strongly disagree   ■ PNS/Not sure

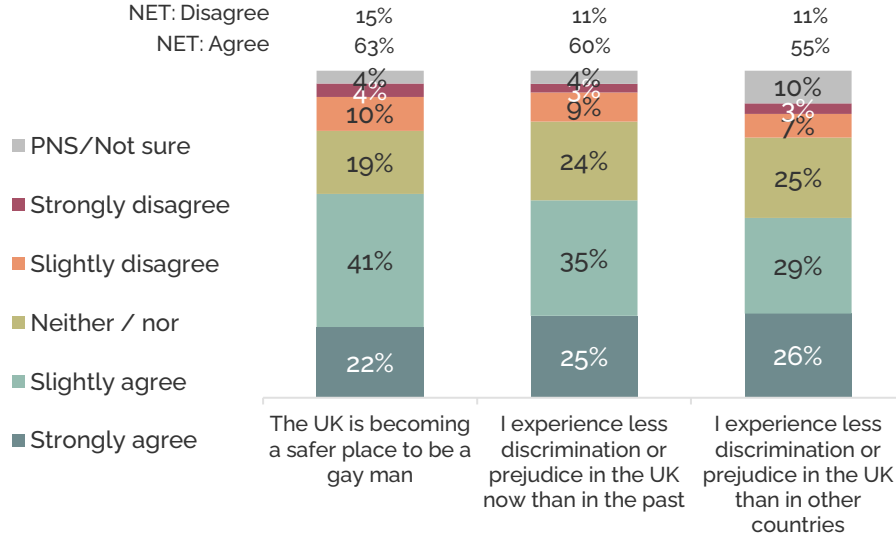
I have experienced discrimination or prejudice in **online** because I am gay



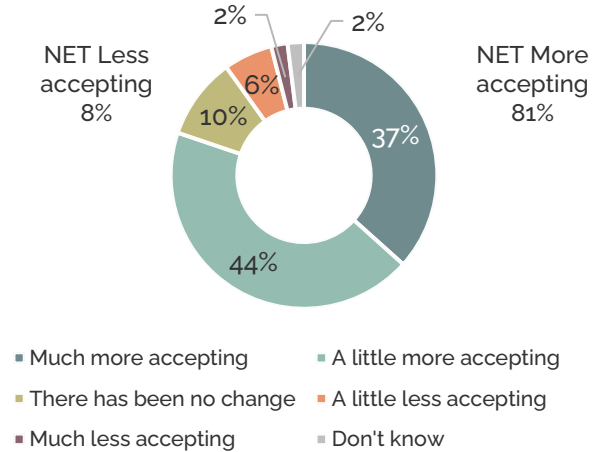
- Strongly agree   ■ Slightly agree   ■ Neither / nor
- Slightly disagree   ■ Strongly disagree   ■ PNS/Not sure

# Four out of five gay men believe that the UK has becoming more accepting towards them over the past 10 years, and most agree that the UK is becoming a safer place to be a gay man

Attitudes around discrimination



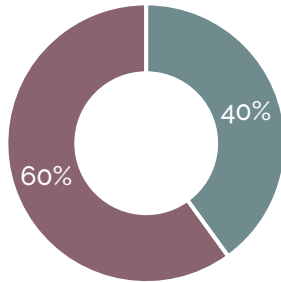
Change of acceptance over past 10 years



Q23. In the past 10 years, do you think the UK has become more accepting or less accepting towards gay men?  
 Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about discrimination in the UK?  
 Base: All respondents (501)

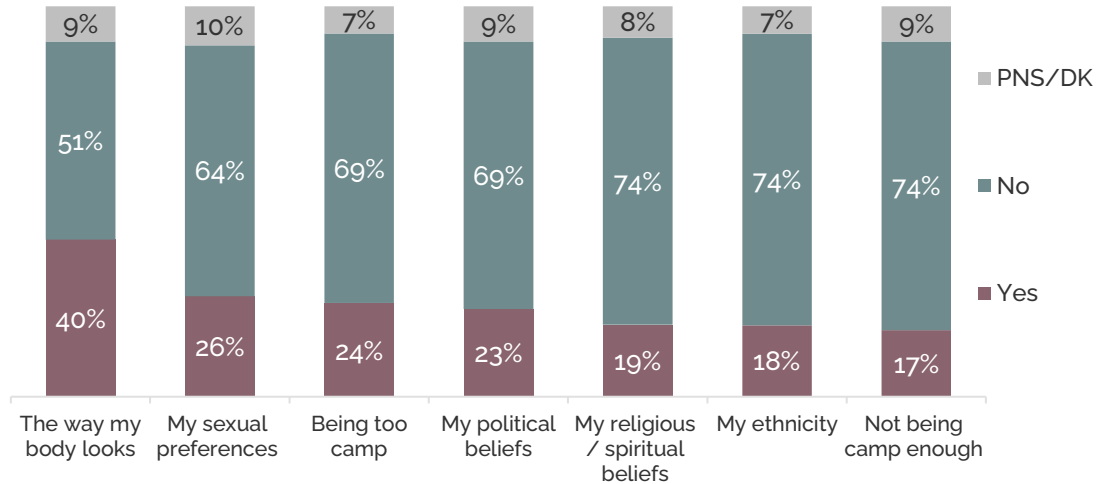
# Three out of five gay men said they have experienced discrimination from other gay men, most commonly for the way their body looks, for their sexual preferences or ‘being too camp’

NET: experienced any discrimination from other gay men



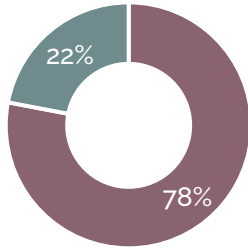
■ Yes ■ No

Have you experienced discrimination from other gay men for the following reasons?



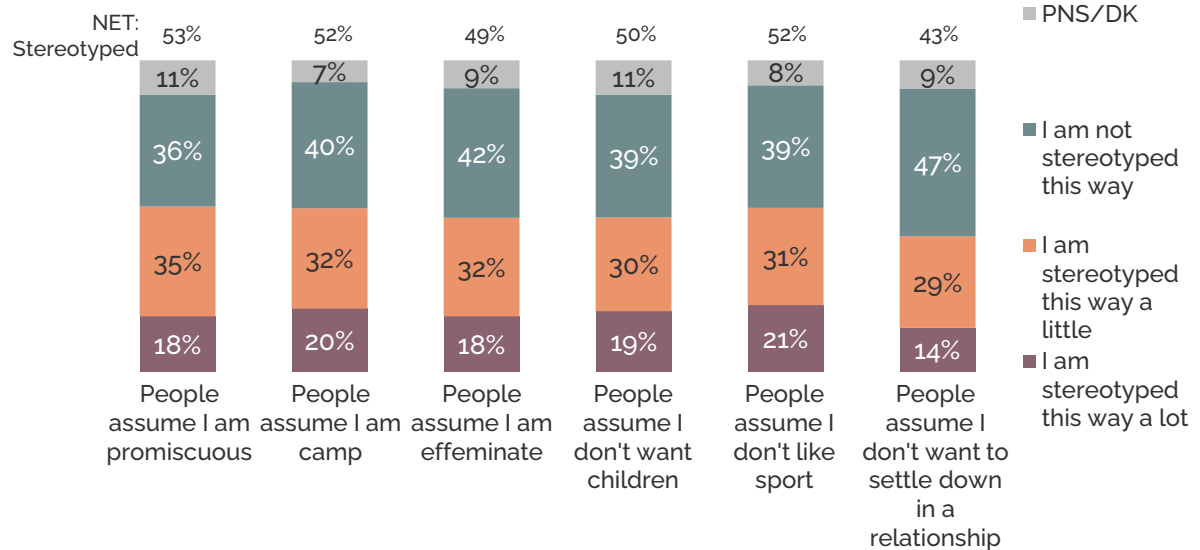
# Nearly four in five gay men have experienced some sort of stereotyping due to being a gay man

NET: experienced any stereotyping



■ Yes ■ No

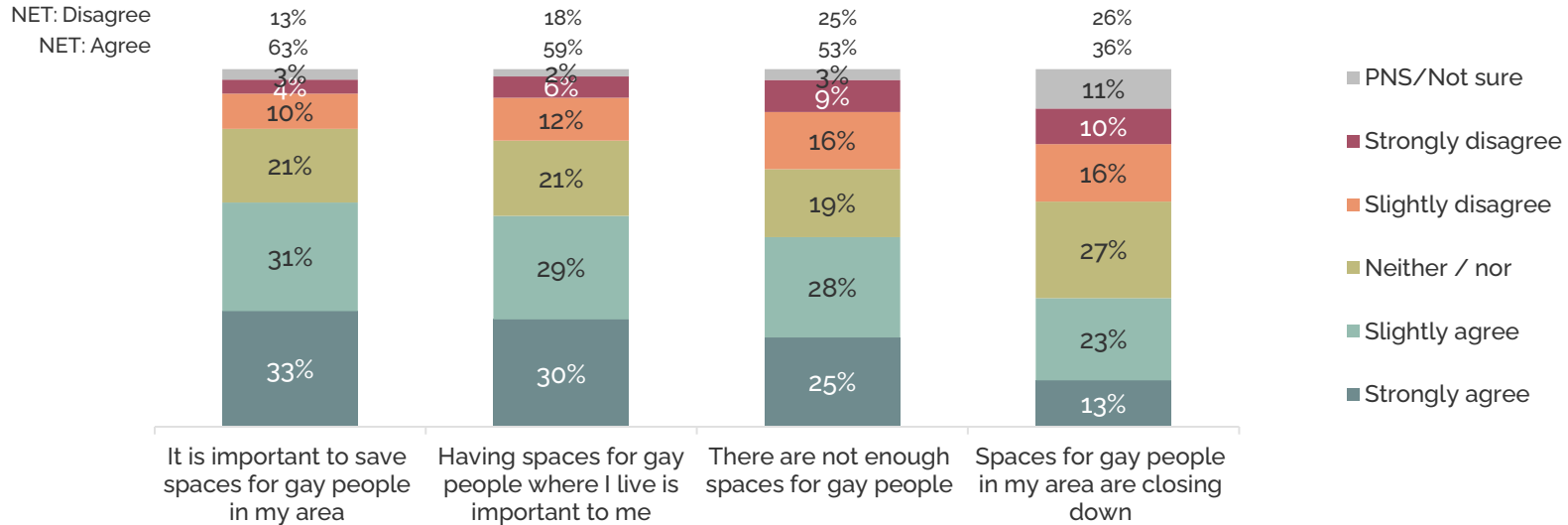
Experience of stereotypes



# Spaces and representation

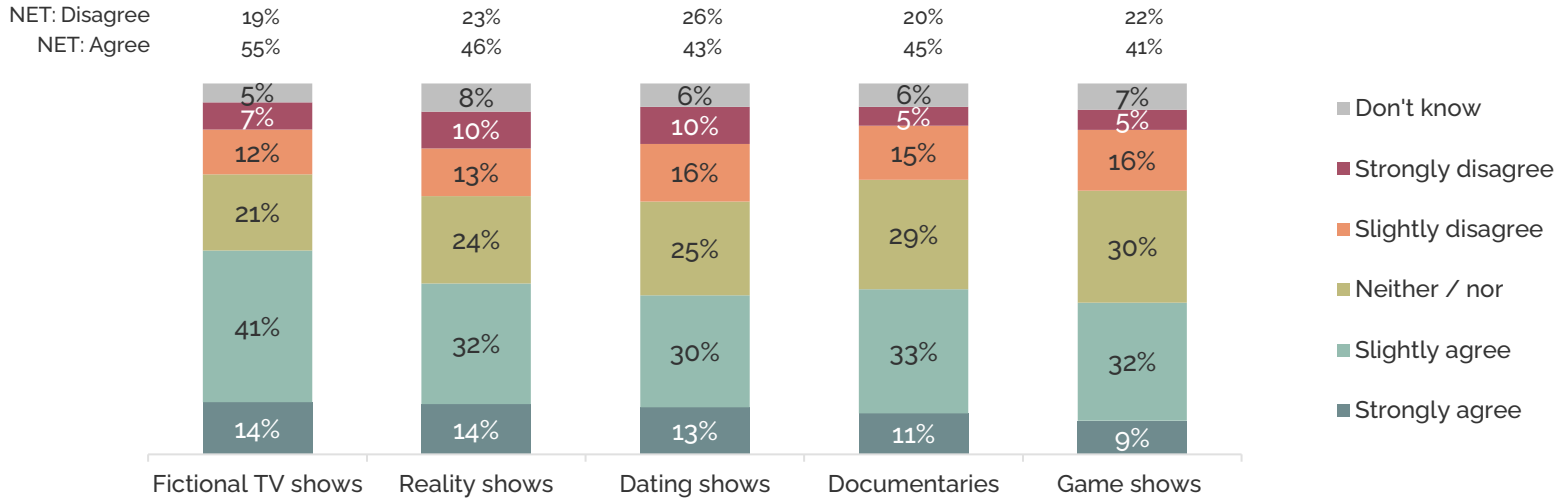
# Over half of gay men agree that it is important that there are spaces for gay people, and almost two thirds that it is important to save spaces for gay people in their area

Experience with gay bars, gay clubs and other spaces for gay people



# Over half of gay men agreed that people like them were represented on fictional TV shows, but a quarter thought they were not represented on dating shows

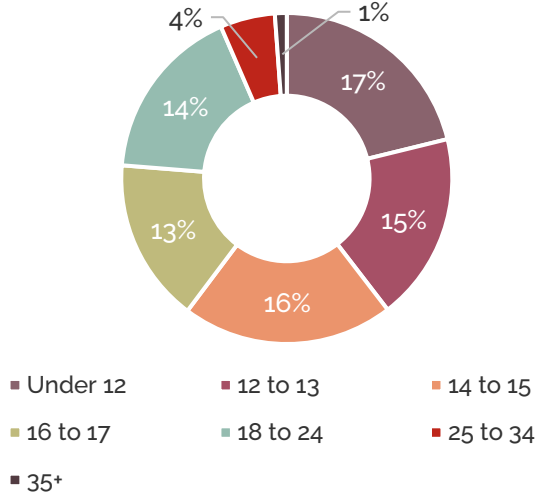
Do you agree or disagree that people like you are represented on TV shows?



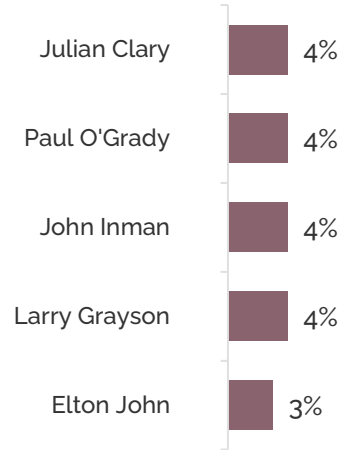


Most said that they first saw a gay man on TV in their teenage years. A wide variety of celebrities were cited as the first, with Julian Clary, Paul O’Grady, John Inman and Larry Grayson most commonly cited

When did you first see an openly gay man on TV?



Who was the first openly gay man that you saw on TV?  
(Spontaneous, Top 5)



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