

# The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender And Queer Community In Hampton Roads



# THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND QUEER COMMUNITY IN HAMPTON ROADS

*Virginia's Hampton Roads region has long attracted diverse and mobile people . . .*  
– Charles H. Ford and Jeffery L. Littlejohn, “LGBT Hampton Roads: Images of Modern America”  
(Arcadia Publishing, 2016)

**L**GBTQ is the abbreviation most often employed to represent people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning in orientation. Recent judicial decisions, combined with changes in the law in many cities and states, have given LGBTQ populations and related issues a prominence they did not have even only a few years previous.

Our purpose in this chapter is neither to advocate nor to litigate LGBTQ issues. Instead, it is to focus on the economic and social impact and importance of the LGBTQ community. How big is this community in Hampton Roads and in Virginia? What are its major characteristics? How much income and spending power does the LGBTQ community have? Where is this community most prominent? What major issues do members of the LGBTQ community face that are not common to others?

## The Size Of The LGBTQ Community In Hampton Roads

The Movement Advancement Project (MAP), a national think tank that focuses on LGBTQ issues, reports that approximately 2.9 percent or 183,545 adult Virginians have self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning.<sup>1</sup> The National Center for Health Statistics surveyed more than

34,000 adults in the United States in 2013 and reported that 3.4 percent of respondents self-reported a sexual orientation other than “straight.” It seems likely, however, that self-identification processes result in an underestimation of the actual number of LGBTQ people in our population because of the reluctance of some to provide such personal information. MAP and others suggest that 5 percent may be a more accurate number. Michael Berlucchi, who is the president of Hampton Roads Pride, the primary regional LGBTQ advocacy organization, agrees. However, he believes that even the 5 percent estimate may be conservative. Whatever the percentage of LGBTQ individuals, the Williams Institute at UCLA’s School of Law reports that 18 percent of these individuals nationally are part of same-sex couples that are raising children.

**Note that the U.S. Census directly collects very little data relating to LGBTQ populations, excepting the number of households that are headed by two individuals of the same sex. However, such households may or may not contain LGBTQ individuals. As a consequence, demographic and financial estimates concerning LGBTQ populations typically are drawn or inferred from other less rigorous and documentable sources.**

<sup>1</sup> [www.lgbtmap.org/equality\\_maps/profile\\_state/46](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/46).

Gallup Inc., the well-known public opinion poll organization, boasts the largest ongoing study of the LGBTQ population in the United States. Between 2012 and 2014, Gallup conducted more than 370,000 tracking interviews of LGBTQ people. Graph 1 reports **a portion of the results. Gallup ranked the Virginia Beach-Norfolk Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) 12th (at 4.4 percent of our population) on the list of the 50 largest U.S. metro areas in terms of the percentage of individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ.** Hampton Roads was followed by the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria MSA (ranked 25th at 4 percent) and Richmond (ranked 41st at 3.5 percent).<sup>2</sup>

The Gallup study provides other interesting information about LGBTQ populations. Graph 2 reveals significant differences in LGBTQ self-identification across racial and ethnic lines – with blacks being much more likely to self-identify as LGBTQ than whites. This flies in the face of the historic opposition of most black churches to LGBTQ identification and behavior. Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas explored this phenomenon in detail in “Sexuality and the Sacred” (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

In 1948, renowned sex researcher Alfred Kinsey suggested that 10 percent of the male population was gay. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that homosexual couples constituted less than 1 percent of all American households. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates 3 to 8 percent of both sexes. A 2012 Gallup Poll reported that 3.8 percent of all individuals were LGBTQ. It seems likely that the actual percentage is higher than 3.4 percent or 3.8 percent because of the reluctance of some individuals to provide information about their sexual orientation to pollsters.

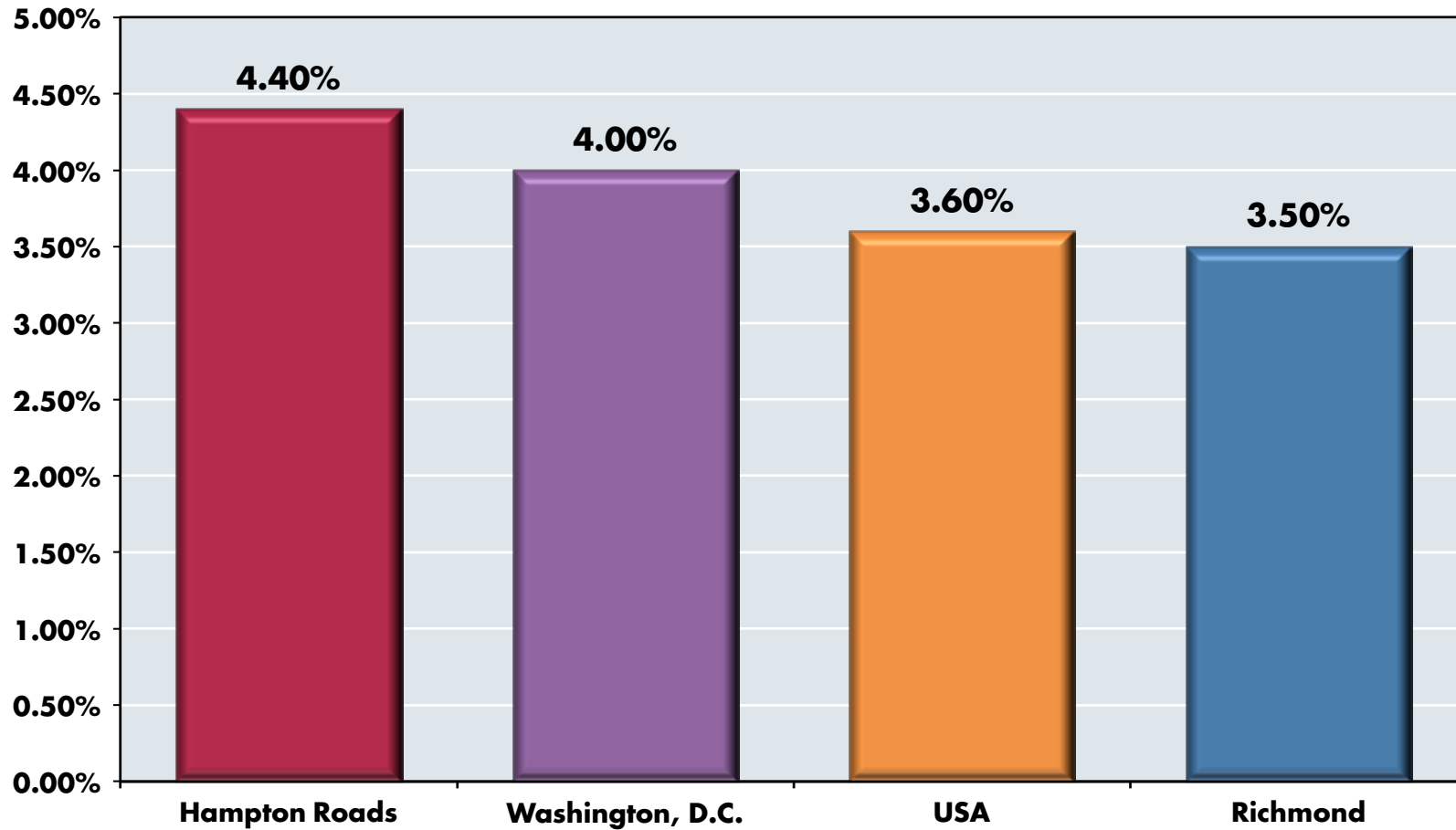
Additionally, as Graph 3 makes clear, the younger one is, the more likely he or she is to self-identify as LGBTQ. Indeed, individuals ages 18-29 are more than three times as likely to self-identify as LGBTQ than those 65 or older. This tendency is especially evident among women ages 18-29, where fully 8.3 percent of respondents indicated an LGBTQ sexual orientation.



<sup>2</sup> [www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx).

**GRAPH 1**

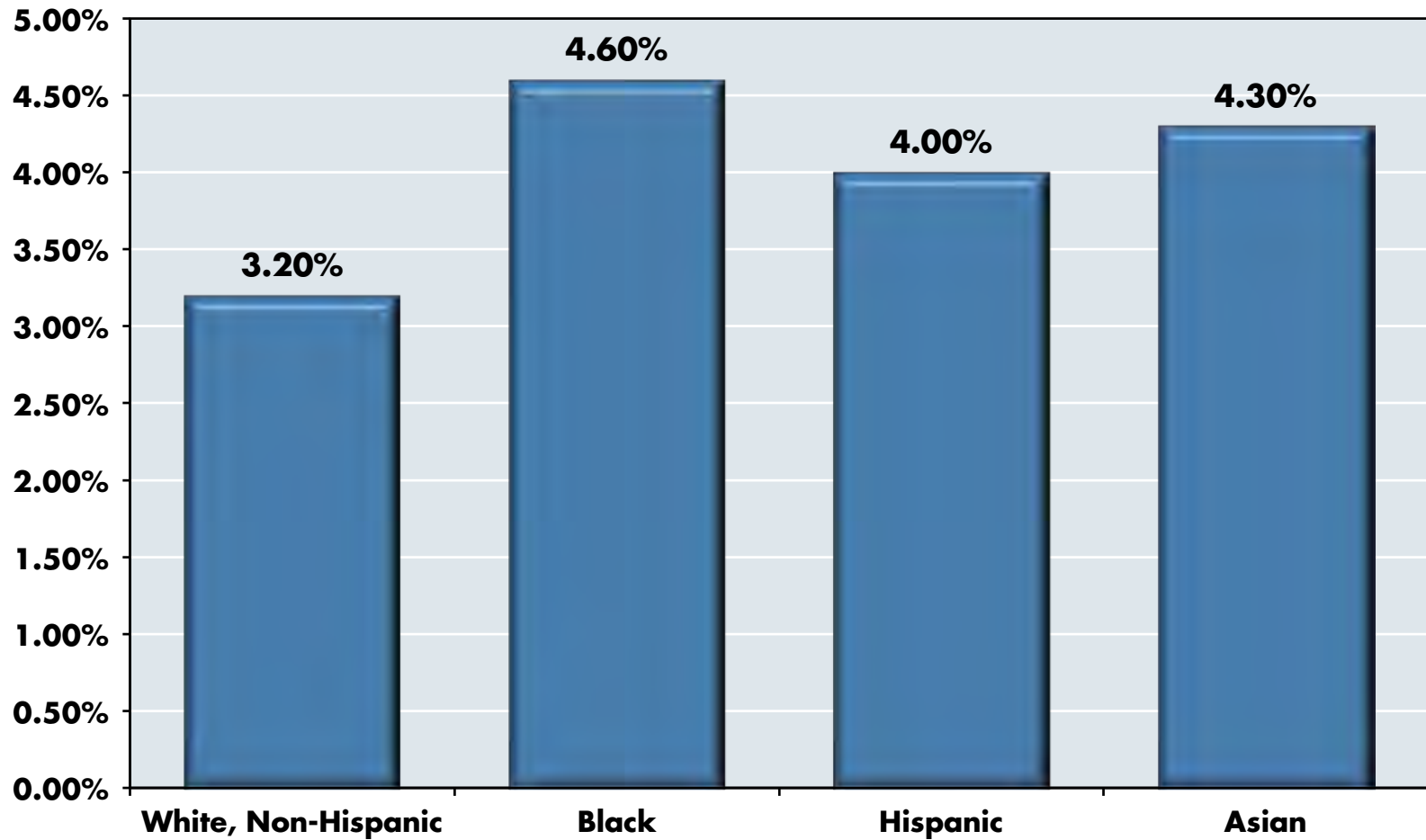
**PERCENT OF LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, GAY AND TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS IN SELECTED AREAS, 2012-2014, ACCORDING TO GALLUP**



Source: [www.gallup.com/poll/182051/san-francisco-metro-area-ranks-highest-lgbt-percentage.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/182051/san-francisco-metro-area-ranks-highest-lgbt-percentage.aspx)

**GRAPH 2**

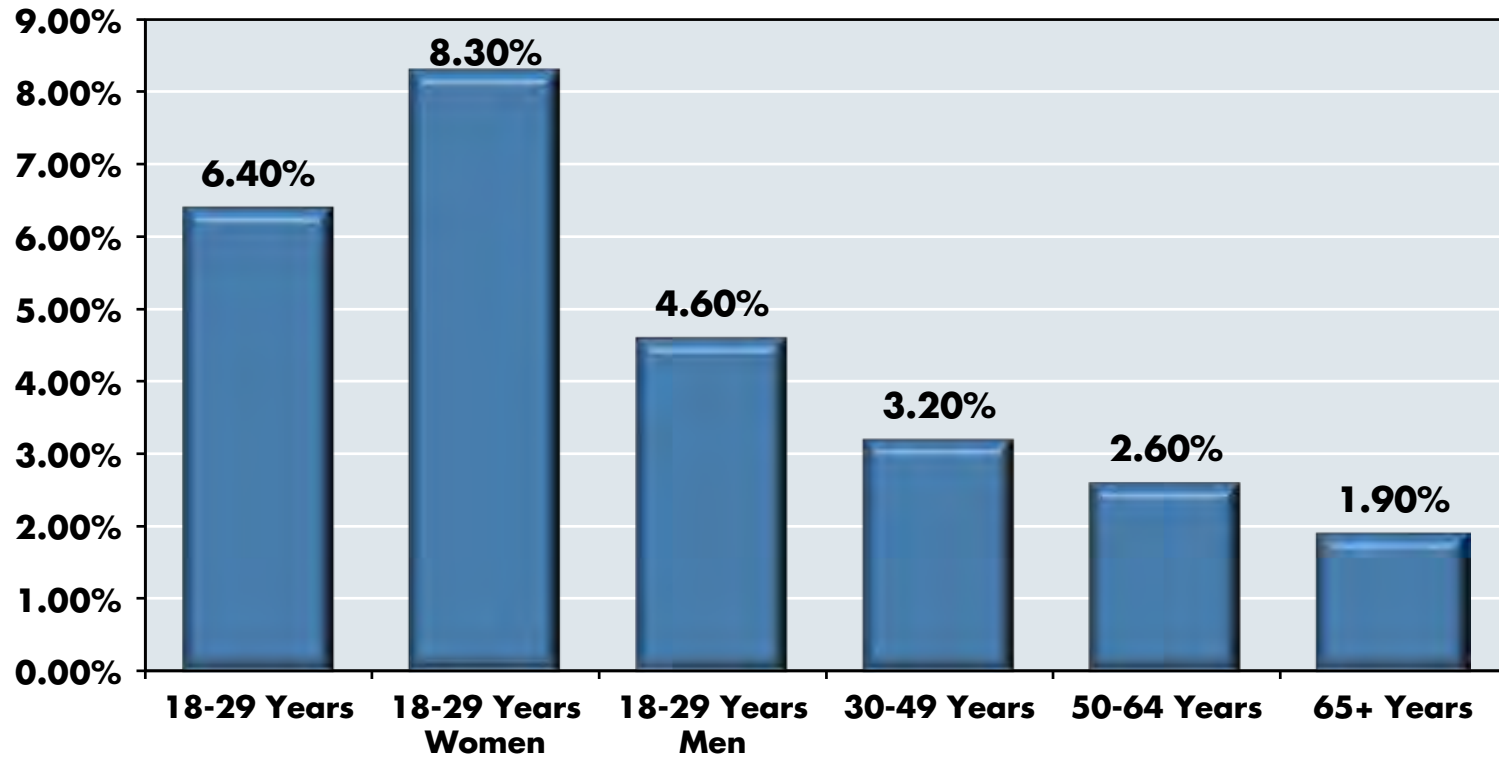
**PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS SELF-IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQ BY RACE/ETHNIC ORIGIN: GALLUP POLL, 2012**



Source: "Special Report: 3.4% of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT," [www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx)

**GRAPH 3**

**PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS SELF-IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQ BY AGE: GALLUP POLL, 2012**



Source: "Special Report: 3.4% of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT," [www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx)

# Some Clarifying Notes On Definitions And Language

If we wish to focus on the LGBTQ community, then we need to sharpen our terminology. For those not familiar with this population, language can be a challenge.

## **Q: What is the difference between the LGBTQ, LGBT and other acronyms?**

A: “Q” stands for “queer” or “questioning.” The word “queer,” once perceived to be highly offensive, has become acceptable terminology. “Queer” does have a long history as a slur, but has been brought back as an umbrella term for all sexualities and genders. Most LGBTQ individuals no longer object to the use of queer with reference to them, though like any word, it can be used in a fashion in which it is offensive.

The most inclusive acronym currently in use is LGBTQQIAAP (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, allies and pansexual) and even it omits some possibilities. Most people choose to draw the line where it is most expedient – with the cutoff occurring at “T,” and therefore LGBT is the most commonly used abbreviation.

## **Q: How appropriate is it to refer to someone’s “sexual preference”?**

A: LGBTQ individuals and organizations are not fond of the term “sexual preference” because it suggests that LGBTQ status is chosen by individuals rather than a result of their genetic disposition. Hence, they prefer “sexual orientation” or “orientation.” This interpretation invites discussions about relative importance of nature vs. nurture, but clearly reflects a consensus within the LGBTQ community.

## **Q: Which is the correct term: “gay marriage” or “same-sex marriage”?**

A: In the LGBTQ community, neither term is considered correct. For those who identify as LGBTQ, marriage is simply marriage, regardless of what categories government clerks and courts may opt to use.

## **Q: What about the word “homosexual”?**

A: For many within the LGBTQ community, the word “homosexual” constitutes a form of “hate speech.” This reflects the origin of the word, which emanated from clinical diagnoses of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Those diagnoses concluded that LGBTQ individuals were suffering from a curable psychiatric illness rather than exhibiting an orientation with which they were born.

## **Q: What about the term “gay”?**

A: “Gay” is an adjective that is used as shorthand for LGBTQ individuals, though transgender people often are excluded when the term gay is utilized. And while many lesbians identify as gay, the term lesbian(s) is correctly used more narrowly to refer to a lesbian woman or a group of women who identify as gay.

## **Q: Is there a “gay lifestyle”?**

A: The term “gay lifestyle” meets with very little favor inside the LGBTQ community because it often is used to stigmatize gay people and usually focuses on their sex lives rather than taking a broader view. Similarly, the LGBTQ community frowns upon describing one of its members as “admittedly gay” because this suggests prior deception, or a sense of shame.

**Q: What about the term “transgender”? When should one signify or identify gender when talking about LGBTQ individuals?**

A: The gender transition story of Caitlyn Jenner became national news in 2015 and often was presented sympathetically. The question of who can use public bathrooms and under what circumstances has been the subject of controversy in North Carolina, and Mississippi has adopted legislation that would appear to allow business operators to deny service to LGBTQ individuals if they are so minded. Regardless, it is fair to observe that members of the transgender community believe they are too often the recipients of scorn and misunderstanding. The LGBTQ community prefers to speak of “transition” between genders in such cases because this usage diminishes the focus on medical surgeries as a means to facilitate gender transition. Many transgender people either do not undertake or cannot undergo such surgery. An older related term, “transvestite,” is out of favor in the LGBTQ community because it often is used pejoratively. The LGBTQ community strongly prefers that individuals who self-identify as a certain gender should be referred to using pronouns consistent with that gender.

## Economic Status

Do LGBTQ individuals earn more or less than straight individuals? It depends on whom one wishes to believe. Those who report that LGBTQ people earn more than straight people include Experian Marketing Services, U.S. News & World Report magazine, Prudential Insurance and Business Insider, a business, celebrity and technology news website. The quality of the empirical evidence these sources rely upon, however, is questionable.

Arrayed on the other side of this issue is a range of academic studies, including one by the Center for American Progress. Also, *The Atlantic Magazine* went so far as to title its 2014 article exploring this issue “The Myth of Affluence.” This is language that is replicated in a 2015 *New Labor Forum* article, which concludes that a high proportion of LGBTQ individuals are economically vulnerable.

M.V. Lee Badgett (1995) of the Williams Institute at UCLA concluded that gay and bisexual men earned between 11 and 27 percent less than their comparable heterosexual counterparts, though there was no statistically significant difference when lesbian women’s incomes were compared to straight women’s incomes. Badgett’s 2001 book, *“Money, Myths, and Change: The Economic Lives of Lesbians and Gay Men”* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), made the case that members of the LGBTQ community typically earn less than comparable straight individuals.

Sylvia A. Allegretto and Michelle M. Arthur (*Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, April 2001) reported that gay men who were part of a same-sex couple earned 15.6 percent less than comparable heterosexual married men and 2.4 percent less than similarly situated partnered, but unmarried, heterosexual men. Dan A. Black et al. (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, spring 2007) found that gay men earned 14 to 16 percent less than their heterosexual counterparts, but notably that lesbian women earned 20 to 34 percent more than comparable straight women.

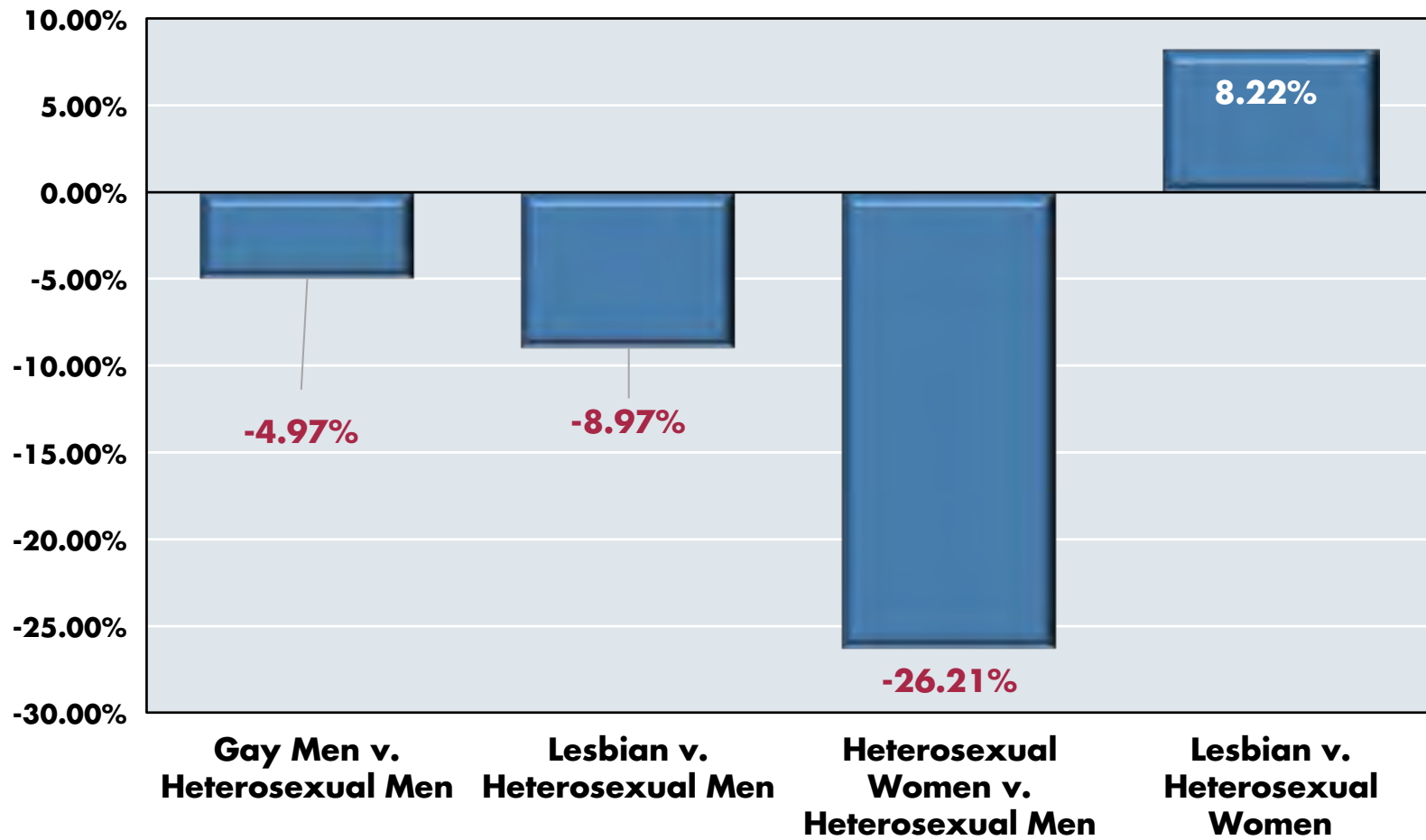
The Black et al. and Allegretto and Arthur studies are often cited because they were based on U.S. Census data, albeit data on unmarried partner households that therefore could include non-LGBTQ individuals. The Census forms that households complete do not directly address sexual orientation. Hence, while these studies are interesting, they do not constitute unimpeachable evidence.

Presuming one is willing to accept evidence from Canada, more recent and more rigorous evidence is contained in a study by Sean Waite and Nicole Denier, published in *Gender and Society* in May 2015. In contrast to the United States, the Canadian Census records relationship status, sexual orientation, educational background and employment status. Graph 4 summarizes their results. Three patterns emerge: (1) men are paid more than women; (2) gay men are paid less than heterosexual men; and (3) lesbians are paid more than heterosexual women. In addition, the authors found that the presence of children and marriage had no effect on the earnings of either gay men or lesbians in conjugal relationships and that the individuals characterized as “gay” in Canada typically were better educated than straight people. However, they were less likely to enter occupations associated with STEM disciplines.



**GRAPH 4**

**GAY-STRAIGHT WAGE GAPS IN CANADA, 2006**



Source: Sean Waite and Nicole Denier, "Gay Pay for Straight Work," *Gender and Society* (May 2015)

What the authors termed the “gay-straight” pay gap virtually disappeared inside the public sector, where unionization and job security provisions diminished opportunities both for market-based wage differentials and discrimination.

Taking into account the typical distribution of LGBTQ individuals across occupations, and the wage data we have just seen, how much income can be attributed to the LGBTQ community in Hampton Roads? We can make this task a bit simpler by focusing on

Why do “gay” women earn more than “straight” women? The most important reasons appear to be that gay women have fewer children and more often work full time.

individuals ages 25 through 64, the prime ages for working adults. There were 900,947 such Hampton Roads residents in May 2015.<sup>3</sup> If 5 percent of this population identify as LGBTQ, that translates to 45,047 prime working-age individuals. If LGBTQ males earn less than straight men, but LGBTQ women earn more than straight women, and taking into account the occupational distribution of LGBTQ individuals as well as their labor force participation (see especially Waite and Denier), we estimate that the working members of the LGBTQ community earned a total income of \$2.017 billion in 2015. This is 4.86 percent of the estimated total income earned by all people in that age group in Hampton Roads in 2015.

To provide some perspective, the working-age LGBTQ community in Hampton Roads is only slightly smaller in size than that of the Hispanic/Latino community in our region and about 50 percent larger in size than that of the Filipino community in Hampton Roads.

Hampton Roads Business Outreach (HRBOR), based in Norfolk, is Virginia’s only LGBTQ chamber of commerce. HRBOR’s 1,000 contacts include 200 active LGBTQ businesses owned by a member of the LGBTQ community. Fully 670 members are “interested parties” or those business owners who wish to connect with the LGBTQ community in a positive manner and show their support by joining the HRBOR. The organization boasts several supportive

“platinum partners” (Decorum Furniture, the Tysinger Automotive Family and Met Life). “Gold partners” include Deadline Digital Printing, Distinctive Events and Rentals, and New York Life.



<sup>3</sup> [www.usa.com/virginia-beach-norfolk-newport-news-va-nc-area-population-and-races.htm#PopulationbyAge](http://www.usa.com/virginia-beach-norfolk-newport-news-va-nc-area-population-and-races.htm#PopulationbyAge).

# LGBTQ Health: A Differentiated Picture

Historically, a stereotypical view of members of LGBTQ communities has been that they are unhealthy individuals who pursue unhealthy lifestyles. The empirical evidence on this issue is mixed, at least according to a 2013 survey of 34,557 adults ages 18 and over that was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and published under the aegis of the National Center for Health Statistics. Table 1 reports some of the findings of this report.

Individuals who self-identify as lesbian or gay are more likely to be smokers and heavy users of alcohol than straight individuals, and lesbians are more likely to be obese than straight women. Gay men, however, are less likely to be obese than straight men. Lesbians and gay men are more likely to report that they did not obtain medical care for reasons relating to cost than are straight individuals. On the other hand, lesbian and gay individuals are more likely to hold private health insurance than straight individuals.

The long-running Showtime television series “The L Word,” which focused on the LGBTQ community in Los Angeles, deliberately cast a diverse range of individuals in LGBTQ roles in an attempt to broaden public perceptions of the LGBTQ community. The content and language of the series, however, made it an unlikely vehicle to reach those whose attitudes the producers perhaps wished to change. The popular television series “Orange Is the New Black” streams on Netflix and deals with many LGBTQ themes within the context of a prison. “Orange” has received generally favorable reviews but, once again, its content and language diminish its ability to reach and inform large numbers of viewers.

|   | <b>LG Population</b> | <b>“Straight”<br/>Population</b> |
|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Tobacco smoker</b>   | <b>25.8%</b>         | <b>17.6%</b>                     |
| <b>Consumed five or more alcoholic drinks in one day in the last year</b> | <b>33.0%</b>         | <b>22.3%</b>                     |
| <b>Experienced serious psychological stress in last 30 days</b>           | <b>4.9%</b>          | <b>3.7%</b>                      |
| <b>Obese</b>  | <b>29.5%</b>         | <b>29.0%</b>                     |
|   | <b>23.6% Men</b>     | <b>29.7% Men</b>                 |
|   | <b>36.7% Women</b>   | <b>28.3% Women</b>               |
| <b>Ever tested for HIV</b>  | <b>66.6%</b>         | <b>36.7%</b>                     |
| <b>Failed to obtain medical care because of cost in the last year</b>     | <b>11.7%</b>         | <b>8.8%</b>                      |
| <b>Have private health care insurance coverage</b>                        | <b>69.1%</b>         | <b>62.3%</b>                     |

Source: “Sexual Orientation and Health Among U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013,” No. 77, July 15, 2014, [www.hivlawandpolicy.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-health-among-us-adults-national-health-interview-survey-2013-us](http://www.hivlawandpolicy.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-health-among-us-adults-national-health-interview-survey-2013-us)

Members of the LGBTQ community in Hampton Roads believe that the manner in which gender information is collected at area health agencies and hospitals is problematic. One is considered either to be male or female, and no other choices exist. They point out that the same binary system of gender identification exists within our regional law enforcement agencies. Referring to bisexual and transgender individuals, Cpl. Melinda Wray, a Norfolk Police Department public affairs officer and its LGBTQ advocate, told us in an interview, “There’s no doubt we need those numbers to be known so that we can move forward. But this is Pandora’s box, because opening it will allow a lot more opportunity, but opening it also allows, possibly, more division. In that case you qualify a person as being this way, or that way, when really they’re just us.”

Standardized police incident reporting forms in the region also use the term “homosexual” to describe crimes against or committed by LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ advocates believe this term is both limiting and pejorative. No option exists for designating or recording crimes against transgender people. The forms used locally come from the standardized federal Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which is used to generate all of the incident-based reporting forms used by the Virginia State Police and police departments nationally. When coupled with the reluctance of many LGBTQ individuals to identify their sexual orientation, it is difficult to make definitive statements about the amount of crime directed toward or committed by the LGBTQ community.<sup>4</sup>

Mary Aab, director of the LGBT Center of Hampton Roads in Norfolk, which also runs Access AIDS Care, told us in a personal interview, “Virginia does not have a hate crime law that says if you commit a crime that is specifically against an LGBTQ individual, then it’s specifically regarded as a hate crime. Getting statistics for this community is really hard because first, people have to disclose their sexual orientation [being LGBTQ] on a form that they’re part of the LGBTQ community.”

<sup>4</sup> “We have to use, and in using promote, this kind of hate language every day as part of our jobs,” said one openly gay Norfolk Police officer, who asked to remain anonymous. “We need to make forms that include a transgender M-F (male to female) and F-M (female to male) designation for transgender people so we can begin tracking those crimes and so we can get the training sessions needed in order to better serve the community.”



Virginia Beach residents and life partners Robert Roman and Claus Ihlemann are owners of Decorum Furniture in Norfolk’s Ghent district and have been strong advocates of LGBTQ rights within Hampton Roads.

An increasing proportion of younger Americans appear to view gender as a more fluid, flexible concept than do their elders. Some resist binary gender identification as either male or female and assert that there is nothing immutable about either gender identification or sexual orientation. Both, they say, can change over time. Some individuals report that they move back and forth along what they perceive to be a gender continuum.

# How Our Cities Rank In Terms Of Policies And Procedures

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) represents more than 1.5 million members and supporters and is the largest national LGBTQ civil rights organization in the United States. HRC's Municipal Equality Index (MEI) evaluates municipal laws affecting LGBTQ communities in 408 municipalities around the country. The index demonstrates the ways that many cities "can – and do – support the LGBT people who live and work there, even where states and the federal government have failed to do so," according to the HRC website.

HRC rated five regional cities: Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Virginia Beach. The city of Norfolk garnered the highest score in Hampton Roads. Norfolk scored 57 out of 100, higher than all other Hampton Roads cities as well as Richmond and Fairfax County. However, Norfolk's score only slightly exceeded the national average score of 56. Scoring categories included housing, employment, accommodations, nondiscrimination policies, city contractor nondiscrimination ordinances, the number of openly LGBTQ individuals elected to office, and each city's overall relationship with the LGBTQ community. Table 2 reports the scores for the five included cities in Hampton Roads.

Norfolk receives high praise from local advocates for being the only city in the region to create an LGBTQ liaison position within its police department. A Norfolk Police Department spokesperson confirmed that at least 20 officers self-identify as being lesbian or gay.

According to Hampton Roads Pride president Michael Berlucchi, the cities of Virginia Beach and Norfolk lead the region in implementing inclusive policies. Norfolk has the distinction of hosting, and financially supporting, the region's annual Pridefest event, which drew a crowd of 20,000 in 2015.

| <b>City</b>           | <b>Total Points</b> | <b>Bonus Points</b>  |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--|
| <b>Chesapeake</b>     | <b>18</b>           | <b>N/A</b>   |
| <b>Hampton</b>        | <b>14</b>           | <b>N/A</b>   |
| <b>Newport News</b>   | <b>23</b>           | <b>3 points for:<br/>providing enforcement<br/>mechanism via its Human<br/>Rights Commission</b>   |
| <b>Norfolk</b>        | <b>57</b>           | <b>14 points for:<br/>services to LGBTQ youth<br/>services to LGBTQ homeless<br/>services to LGBTQ elderly<br/>services to people living with<br/>HIV/AIDS</b> |
| <b>Virginia Beach</b> | <b>31</b>           | <b>3 points for:<br/>providing enforcement<br/>mechanism via its Human<br/>Rights Commission</b>   |

Source: [www.hrc.org/resources/mei-2015-see-your-citys-score](http://www.hrc.org/resources/mei-2015-see-your-citys-score)

Old Dominion University, the College of William & Mary and Norfolk State University each has an LGBTQ student organization on campus, and ODU and W&M have LGBTQ alumni organizations. Virginia Wesleyan College and Hampton University do not appear to host LGBTQ organizations, nor do any of the region's three community colleges. In addition, ODU has a Gay Cultural Studies academic program.

When discussing jobs and the labor force, one should not forget that Virginia is an at-will employment state – meaning that employers may terminate any employee at any time, for any reason, or for no reason, unless they are constrained by contract from doing so. “Frankly, in Virginia they can fire you for anything,” says Mary Aab, who directs Norfolk’s LGBT Center for Hampton Roads. “Especially if you identify as trans [transgender]. It’s very hard to prove you were fired for being transgender or LGBT because an employer will find another reason. Maybe they will say, ‘You were late too much.’ But the reality we are seeing is that may tend to happen right after the employer sees a picture of an LGBT person with their spouse on the desk.”

## Marriage

On Oct. 6, 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of a case emanating from the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upholding lower court rulings that Virginia’s ban against same-sex marriages was unconstitutional. Since that date, same-sex marriage has been legal in the Commonwealth. This stance was fortified on June 6, 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court formally struck down statutes denying marriage rights to same-sex individuals. The UCLA School of Law’s Williams Institute and the National Center for Transgender Equality estimated that 96,000 same-sex couples married in the four months following this decision. Wedding spending by these couples and their out-of-state guests totaled an estimated \$813 million and generated an estimated \$52 million in state and local sales tax revenue. In an economic study of the Commonwealth of Virginia, M.V. Lee Badgett estimated that extending marriage to same-sex couples in Virginia would generate up to \$60 million in spending within the Commonwealth.<sup>5</sup>



Acquiring accurate data on marriage in Hampton Roads is still a painstaking process because marriage certificates themselves make no distinction between types of marriage. The only place where gender distinctions are made is on marriage license applications, where it has always been standard to ask applicants to self-identify as male or female.

Between October 2014 and August 2015, 3,600 apparent LGBTQ marriage certificates were filed in Virginia, 839 of which were issued in Hampton Roads. **Overall, the cities of Norfolk and Virginia Beach have seen the greatest absolute number of LGBTQ unions in the Commonwealth since the 2014 ruling went into effect.**

TABLE 3

### SAME-SEX MARRIAGES IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2015

| City           | Total | Same-Sex    | Not Same-Sex |
|----------------|-------|-------------|--------------|
| Chesapeake     | 1,022 | 38 (3.72%)  | 984          |
| Hampton        | 832   | 50 (6.01%)  | 782          |
| Newport News   | 1,657 | 110 (6.64%) | 1,547        |
| Norfolk        | 2,748 | 264 (9.61%) | 2,484        |
| Portsmouth     | 831   | 49 (5.90%)  | 782          |
| Suffolk        | 414   | 12 (2.90%)  | 402          |
| Virginia Beach | 4,499 | 281 (6.32%) | 4,218        |
| Williamsburg   | 654   | 35 (5.35%)  | 619          |

Source: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/HealthStats/stats.htm>

In 2015, Norfolk had the highest share of same-sex marriages, 9.61 percent, followed by Newport News with 6.64 percent. Table 3 reports these data. **LGBTQ individuals report that the greatest proportionate concentration of LGBTQ residents in Hampton Roads is to be found in Norfolk, with the Ghent district constituting the preferred location. In general, LGBTQ populations nationally and in Virginia tend to prefer urban areas, which appear to promise greater levels of tolerance and, in some cases,**

**a greater ability to remain inconspicuous or anonymous, if that is what is desired.** Though not prevalent in Hampton Roads, “gayborhoods” arise in some large cities – high concentrations of LGBTQ individuals living in specific areas. Hence, their presence and business clout can easily be discerned. Urbanist writer Richard Florida also argues that high proportions of LGBTQ individuals are associated with higher levels of creative activity and inventiveness.

## Legislation

The Commonwealth of Virginia does not have a hate crime law that specifically protects LGBTQ citizens. Regionally, only the city of Virginia Beach has enacted such a statute that applies to LGBTQ individuals. These are among the reasons why it is difficult to assess or count the number of potentially civil or criminal episodes that might pertain to LGBTQ populations.

Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in 2015 that effectively extended marriage to same-sex couples, a spate of bills was introduced in the Virginia General Assembly that responded to the content of this decision. While most of the bills were designed to thwart the Supreme Court’s decision within the confines of Virginia, several proposed pieces of legislation had the support of most members of the LGBTQ community. In general, these proposals failed to pass, primarily because of opposition from Democrats and Republicans responding to pressure from the business community.

In January 2015, Gov. Terry McAuliffe opined that scrubbing the state code of references to “husband and wife” in exchange for the gender-neutral term “spouse” would help attract businesses to the state. “While this change may seem small, it does send a message to the entire commonwealth, to the nation and to the globe that Virginia is welcome to members of the LGBT community,” he said in *The Washington Post*.\*

\* Jenna Portnoy, “Same-sex marriage is legal in Virginia, but maneuvering rages on in Richmond,” *The Washington Post* (Jan. 12, 2015), [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

## Summing It Up

Surveys suggest that 3 to 7 percent of all adults self-identify as LGBTQ. If we take the midpoint, 5 percent, as our estimate, then approximately 45,000 people ages 25-64 in our region are LGBTQ. Extrapolating from this number and available evidence on LGBTQ earnings, we estimate that these working-age LGBTQ Hampton Roads residents earn more than \$2 billion in income annually.

The bottom line is that the LGBTQ community in our region is sizable and exercises considerable economic clout, even though the best evidence available suggests that the typical LGBTQ individual earns less than the typical straight individual with comparable characteristics.

Among the area’s largest cities, Norfolk receives the most favorable ratings from LGBTQ advocacy organizations for its laws and procedures, followed by Virginia Beach. Norfolk also appears to host the largest proportion of LGBTQ residents of any of our region’s cities.

Approximately half of the states have adopted legislation that outlaws discrimination in employment and accommodations against LGBTQ people. The Commonwealth of Virginia is not among them. Changing this circumstance is one of the highest priorities of LGBTQ individuals and advocacy organizations.

