



# Grooming a Narrative

## How Rhetoric and Old Lies Take on New Life in a Culture War

**Politics and identity have blurred into something beyond being synonymous and into something where one dictates the other.**

In the latest example of identity politics and rhetoric driving broader societal conversations, we see the demonization of the LGBTQ community unfolding before us through the term “grooming.” Conservative politicians and pundits have taken to labeling anyone who opposes their anti-LGBTQ legislations, such as Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay Bill”, as “groomers.” The term might be confusing to some, but is rooted in fear and used as a propaganda tool the same way the term “thug” has been used to create fear of various ethnic groups.

The term itself refers to the psychological manipulation and coercion that sexual predators use to abuse their victims without being caught. This likening of helping kids to understand personal and sexual identity in a different way than previous generations to predatory behaviors is an obvious, grotesque mischaracterization and a clear attempt to create fear and anger toward the LGBTQ community and those who support it.



It's just the latest attack from a right wing that has embraced increasingly extremist views in recent years. Fox News pundits seized the opportunity to use what was once a fringe conspiracy theory on par with Hilary Clinton running child sex trafficking rings to stir up fear that children are in danger of being "recruited" if identity is discussed at a young age.

The network ran segments devoted to pedophilia throughout March and April while simultaneously having pundits describe the actions of parents and teachers who want to allow children to express their transgender identity as "grooming." One guest pundit went so far as to suggest that children were "being ripened for grooming for sexual abuse by adults."

Elsewhere, conservative voices have likened affirming trans identities in young people to psychological torture. You may also recall that during the confirmation hearings for Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, conservatives involved in her questioning brought up her sentencing record for child pornographers and some on the fringes of the right even suggested that supporting her confirmation was akin to supporting pedophilia.

It's a tactic that has been gaining traction on the right since last summer when the same conservative activists who developed a strategy to attack critical race theory started using the word grooming to attack progressive policies around gender and sexual identity. The choice of word is not accidental, playing

on modern conspiracy theories and fear as well as long held homo/trans phobic stereotypes.

## Another Chapter in a Dark History

Homophobic and transphobic rhetoric has long relied on painting members of the LGBTQ community out as evil or pedophiles. This latest collective effort to discriminate now also ties in the work of LGBTQ allies, educators and anyone whose views don't align with conservatism. It is at best a poorly thought-out propaganda strategy and at worst an attack on important ideals surrounding personal freedoms and social equality within our society.

Social media has been used as a platform for divisive rhetoric in recent years. In 2020, posts began to circulate through the social media platform Facebook claiming that the acronym LGBT was being expanded to add the letter "P," which would stand for pedosexual and claimed that this is what the left means when they say "equality and acceptance."

Going as far back as the 1970s, efforts have been made to cast LGBTQ people as child predators or to sexualize their very existence. Back then, the goal was to roll back LGBTQ legal protections and used rhetoric that said "LGBTQ people cannot reproduce, therefore they must recruit" in an effort to stoke fear of an "other" coming to do harm.



By creating a moral panic, conservative voices create a vacuum in which logic and reason cease to exist. Reality and facts are no longer objective, policy and elections are no longer substantive but rather, shaped by public sentiments that are informed by contrived narratives and manipulated images, symbols and terminology.

This right-wing focus on fear is intentional and increasingly tied to white nationalism and groups that have only looked to become stronger in the wake of Donald Trump's loss to Joe Biden. In some cases, the same groups and cultural forces that were at play in staging the events of January 6, 2021 are again involved and their rhetoric pours out of representatives that walk the halls of congress and seek election across the country.

J.D. Vance, a Republican senate candidate from Ohio, recently argued that conservatives must "seize" the cultural institutions of the left and use them to reclaim the nation through a committed "de-wokeification program."

The goal is ultimately political, but the price paid along the way is devastating for marginalized groups.

## The Language of Hate and Politics

Language often shapes perception and because of that, it's a valuable tool for those who wish to use powerful human emotions such as anger to persuade people to vote for certain politicians or policies.



The language used to breed hate evolves like any other type of language, pulling on strings of nationalism or patriotism to evoke powerful emotions when fear and anxiety simply won't cut it. You've likely heard a racial justice advocate referred to as "Marxist" or "neo-racist." Grooming is just the new version of a decades old trope for those with homophobic and transphobic views to compare people from the LGBTQ community with pedophiles.

It's a tactic that falls in line with other efforts to stir up hate for specific groups. Centuries ago, stories that Jews were ritually murdering children were often accompanied by accusations of witchcraft and used as an excuse to commit anti-Semitic atrocities.

The "Satanic Panic" of the 1970s and '80s, a term used to describe a period in which fears were stoked that satanic cults were committing ritual abuse against children, even alleging murder and sexual assault, has provided many of these contemporary conspiracies a template to build narratives about child abduction, secret societies and other abuses. They simply plug in language that directs the ire of people toward whatever group they want to isolate, be it liberals, the LGBTQ community, social justice advocates or any other group they view as harmful to what they define as traditional values.

Ultimately, the language battle is lost over time as people have experiences with and come to know the LGBTQ community. The fact is, the myths simply don't stand up to reality and people can see and experience that. Politicians and pundits alike know this in many cases, but simply don't care. The formula works to spark outrage and build an audience of outraged citizens who will help them retain power or ratings.

Along the way, they normalize homophobic rhetoric and the belief in conspiracy theory under the guise of protecting children. Sadly, the rhetoric becomes entrenched in personal identities and provides the fuel for a culture war that the LGBTQ community is forced to sit on the front lines of and endure the harm that comes with that war.

## Timeline

### 1649

Sara Norman and Mary Hammon of Yarmouth, Plymouth Colony, are taken to court for lewd behavior, the first and only record of American colonial women tried for lesbianism.

### 1867

“Father of the LGBT Movement” Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs is considered the first person to speak out for gay rights when he testified before the Congress of German Jurists to repeal anti-homosexual laws.

### 1903

The Ariston Bathhouse Raid: the first recorded police raid on a gay bathhouse takes place in New York City. Thirty-four men were arrested and 16 men were charged with “sodomy.”

### 1924

Society for Human Rights, first gay rights organization in United States, is founded in Chicago by Henry Gerber. Police shut it down within a few months.

### 1941

The term “transsexuality” is coined.

### 1944

Poet Robert Duncan becomes the first prominent American to reveal his sexuality, writing an article in the anarchist magazine, *Politics*, that gays are an oppressed minority and campaigning for greater equality.



1969 - Stonewall Inn in New York City.

### 1945

The Veterans Benevolent Association (VBA), the first organization for LGBTQ veterans of the U.S. armed forces, is formed by four honorably discharged gay veterans.

### 1952

Transgender actress Christine Jorgensen becomes the first American to have sex reassignment surgery.

### 1953

U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signs an executive order banning homosexuals from working for the federal government.

### 1955

The Daughters of Bilitis was founded as the first lesbian rights group.

### 1958

Dancer, director, choreographer and activist Alvin Ailey founds a historic dance company based in New York City with the vision of honoring Black culture through dance.

*One, Inc. v. Olesen*: In the first case regarding LGBTQ rights, Supreme Court protects the First Amendment rights of ONE: The Homosexual Magazine, the first widely distributed publication for gay and lesbian readers.

### 1962

Illinois becomes the first U.S. state to remove criminal penalties for consensual sodomy from its criminal code.

### 1969

The Stonewall Riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back against a police raid of the famed gay bar. These riots gain mainstream national attention for gay rights. A Black transgender woman, Marsha P. Johnson is widely credited as being the event organizer who threw the first brick at Stonewall.

### 1970

The first Gay Liberation Day March is held in New York City. Similar events take place in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

**1973**

American Psychiatric Association removes label classifying “homosexuality” as a mental disorder.

Joel Grey becomes the first gay man to win the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Cabaret*.

**1974**

Kathy Kozachenko becomes first openly LGBTQ candidate to win elected office, representing the 2nd Ward of the Ann Arbor City Council.

**1975**

Minneapolis becomes first city to pass law protecting transgender people from discrimination.



1985 - Ronald Reagan becomes the first U.S. President to publicly mention the AIDS epidemic

**1978**

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California, is assassinated. He served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors beginning in 1977 and sponsored a bill banning discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment on the basis of sexual orientation. He had served in the U.S. Navy in the Korean War.

The rainbow flag, designed by artist Gilbert Baker, is first used as a symbol of gay pride in San Francisco. The original version of the flag included 8 stripes of varying colors. Pink and light blue were eventually removed, creating the six-color version of the flag we recognize today.

**1980**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is alerted to the case of San Francisco resident Ken Horne, who has developed a type of cancer known as Kaposi’s sarcoma. In 1981, the CDC would retroactively classify Horne as the first patient of the AIDS epidemic in the U.S.

**1982**

Wisconsin is the first state to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations.

**1983**

U.S. Representative Gerry Studds of Massachusetts’ 10th District becomes first openly gay member of Congress.

**1985**

Ronald Reagan becomes the first U.S. President to publicly mention the AIDS epidemic. Despite this, his commission on the HIV epidemic was far too late and research into the virus was slow and underfunded.

**1986**

In *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the Supreme Court upholds Georgia law banning homosexual sex.

**1987**

ACT UP was formed at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City to bring attention to AIDS-related issues.

**1989**

Jodie Foster becomes the first lesbian actress to win the Oscar for Best Leading Actress for her role in *The Accused*. Three years later, she wins her second Oscar for Best Leading Actress for her role in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

**1991**

The red ribbon is first used as a symbol of the campaign against HIV/AIDS. The first kiss between a homosexual couple airs on network TV during an episode of NBC’s *L.A. Law*.

## 1993

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” allows gays/lesbians to serve in the military if they remain closeted. Deborah Batts becomes the first openly LGBTQ federal judge in 1994.

## 1996

President Bill Clinton signs Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) into law. It defines marriage as existing exclusively between one man and one woman.

## 1997

Controversial “coming out” episode of the television sitcom “Ellen” airs. Ellen DeGeneres herself would come out later that year on the cover of Time magazine saying “Yep, I’m Gay.”

## 1998

The groundbreaking NBC sitcom “Will & Grace” debuts. The series is built around four main characters: two gay men and two heterosexual women.

## 1999

California becomes first state to legalize domestic partnerships for same-gender couples. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is founded.

## 2000

Vermont becomes first state to legalize civil unions for same-gender couples while Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage.

President Bill Clinton declares the month of June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month. Showtime’s “Queer as Folk” becomes the first hour-long drama on American television centered on homosexual men and women.

## 2002

For the first time in Oscar history, three gay men were nominated for Best Director: Pedro Almodóvar for “Talk to Her”, Stephen Daldry for “The Hours” and Rob Marshall (who goes on to win) for Chicago.

## 2004

Massachusetts becomes the first state to legalize same-sex marriage.

## 2005

“Brokeback Mountain”, a film starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as two cowboys in a gay relationship, is released. The film receives rave reviews and wins numerous awards, including three Oscars.

## 2006

South Africa’s parliament legalizes gay marriage and is the only African country that legally recognizes same-sex marriages.

## 2008

Diego Sanchez becomes the first openly transgender staffer on Capitol Hill.

Kate Brown of Oregon becomes the first LGBTQ person elected governor.

Rachel Maddow becomes the first openly gay or lesbian host of a primetime news program in the United States. Maddow is also the first openly lesbian Rhodes Scholar.

## 2009

President Barack Obama expands existing hate crime laws, making it a federal crime to assault someone because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Drag queen RuPaul begins hosting “RuPaul’s Drag Race”. The reality competition television show goes on to win numerous awards and helps to bring drag performance into the mainstream.

Lee Daniels becomes the first Black gay man nominated for Best Director, directing the critically acclaimed “Precious”.

## 2010

President Obama repeals “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” allowing LGBTQ people to serve openly in the military. Jane Lynch wins the Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series for her role in “Glee”.

## 2012

At the Democratic National Convention, the Democratic Party becomes the first major U.S. political party in history to publicly support same-sex marriage on a national platform.

Seven LGBTQ candidates win election into U.S. House and Senate. One of whom is Mark Takano of California — the first openly gay POC congressman.

## 2013

In *United States v. Windsor*, the Supreme Court strikes down the section of DOMA that denies federal benefits to legally married same-gender couples.

U.S. Department of the Treasury announces that legal same-gender marriages will be recognized for federal tax purposes.

Transgender actress Laverne Cox earns notoriety for her role in the hit Netflix series, “Orange Is the New Black”, becoming the first transgender actress to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award.



2013 - Transgender actress Laverne Cox

## 2014

National Basketball Association player Jason Collins becomes first gay athlete to play in one of the U.S.’s four major sports leagues. Michael Sam becomes the first openly gay player drafted in the NFL, playing for the St. Louis Rams.

## 2015

In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court legalizes marriage equality nationwide.

Boy Scouts of America President Robert Gates lifts ban on gay scout leaders and employees.

President Obama appoints Raffi Freedman-Gurspan as a staffer, the first transgender person to work in the White House.

## 2016

International Olympic Committee (IOC) no longer requires transgender athletes to undergo reassignment surgery to compete.

Eric Fanning is confirmed as secretary of the Army, becoming the first openly gay person to head a United States military branch.

President Obama designates the first-ever monument dedicated to LGBTQ rights, the Stonewall National Monument at the Stonewall Inn in New York City.

## 2017

The District of Columbia becomes the first place in the U.S. where residents can choose gender “X” on their driver’s license.

For the first time, a U.S. appeals court rules that federal civil rights law protects LGBTQ employees from discrimination in the workplace.

Danica Roem is elected to the Virginia House of Delegates, becoming the first transgender person to be elected and serve in any U.S. state legislature.

“Moonlight” makes history as the first LGBTQ movie to win Best Picture at the Oscars.

## 2018

The Pentagon confirms the first openly transgender person has signed a contract to join the military.

U.S. Representative Jared Polis wins the Colorado governor’s race, becoming the nation’s first openly gay man elected governor.



Television show “Pose” premieres. The drama, set in the 1980s ballroom scene, features the largest transgender cast ever assembled in one series.

## 2019

Ten openly LGBTQ people are sworn in as members of the 116th of Congress — a historic number.

The governors of New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, and California fly the Pride Flag from their state capitols and government office buildings for the first time during Pride Month.

Billy Porter becomes the first openly gay Black man to win an Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his role in “Pose”.

## 2020

For the first time, the census allows people living in the same household to mark themselves as same-sex partners or spouses. However, it still does not identify how many people in the U.S. identify as gender nonbinary.

RuPaul enters the Guinness World Records, becoming the most Emmy Award-winning Host for a Reality or Competition Program. In total, “RuPaul’s Drag Race” has received 39 nominations and won 19 Emmys.

Groundbreaking singer, actor, record producer, and model Janelle Monáe comes out as nonbinary. Known early in her career for playing with gender, donning a traditional male “tuxedo” as her uniform, Monáe also came out as bisexual/pansexual in 2018.

Elliot Page, best known for his Oscar-nominated titular role in Juno, comes out as a transgender man.

## 2021

New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard became the first openly transgender woman to compete in the Olympic Games.

President Biden signs an executive order directing agencies to interpret federal laws prohibiting sex discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Arkansas lawmakers enact a bill that prohibits access to gender-affirming care for transgender youth. Trans youth ages 13-17 in Arkansas are prohibited from accessing gender-affirming care in the state.

The U.S. State Department announces a policy allowing X gender markers on passports and eliminating medical requirements for gender marker changes.

Switzerland becomes the 30th country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.

Same-sex adoption and same-sex marriage become legal in Chile and Switzerland.

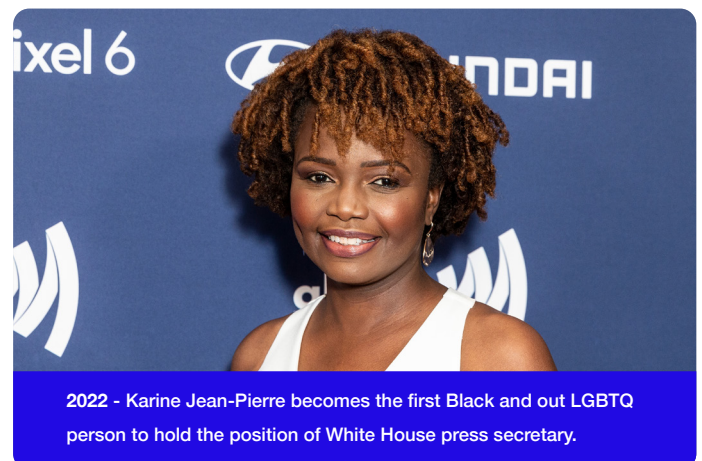
## 2022

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, signs the controversial Parental Rights in Education bill, labeled by critics as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. The law bans public school teachers from holding classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity.

Karine Jean-Pierre becomes the first Black and out LGBTQ person to hold the position of White House press secretary.

Greece, Canada, India, New Zealand and France ban LGBTQ conversion therapy.

Iowa, Oklahoma and Arizona pass bills banning transgender students from playing in K-12 and higher education sports.

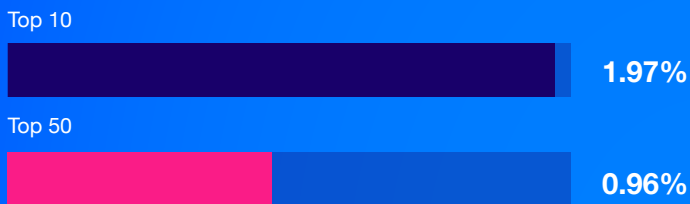


2022 - Karine Jean-Pierre becomes the first Black and out LGBTQ person to hold the position of White House press secretary.

# FACTS AND FIGURES

## DEMOGRAPHICS POPULATION

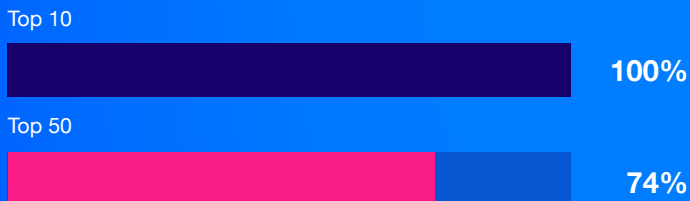
### OVERALL WORKFORCE TOTAL LGBTQ EMPLOYEES:



### OVERALL MANAGEMENT TOTAL LGBTQ EMPLOYEES:



### ABILITY TO SELF ID:

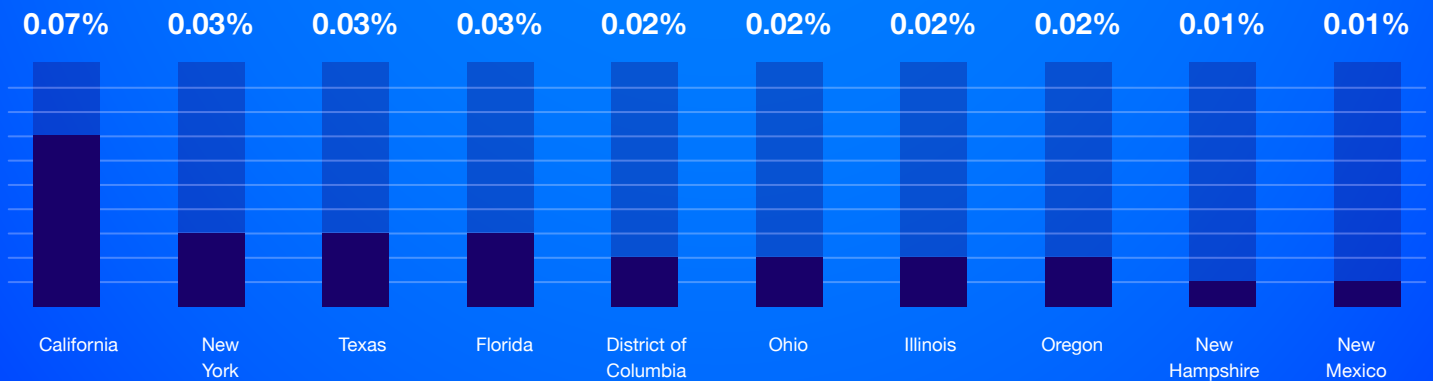


### LGBTQ RESOURCE GROUPS:



\*Figures above based on the Top 50 2022 data reveal (data from 2021)

### % OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE SAME-SEX HOUSEHOLDS 2021



\*\*Figures above are based on the 2021 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of Census.gov

# Good News in LGBTQ Rights Around the World

**Lately, progress in LGBTQ rights can feel like it has been moving backwards because of what has gone in certain states around the country. It's easy to feel discouraged and forget how far the needle has moved for the global LGBTQ community, especially in the past year. Here's a roundup of the good news around the world since last year's Pride Month.**

## **Greece Bans Conversion Therapy**

In May 2022, Greece banned conversion therapy for minors. Psychologists or other health professionals will now need a person's explicit consent and will face fines and a prison term if they break the law.

## **Tokyo Recognizes Same-sex Unions**

Tokyo, Japan will now recognize same-sex couples, allowing them access to services previously available only to married couples, like renting an apartment together. The capital has yet to recognize same-sex couples as legally married, and activists are fighting for this next step.

**More Than 1,000 LGBTQ Officials Serve in the U.S.**

In November 2021, the United States elected more than 1,000 concurrently serving LGBTQ officials for the first time in history.

**Canada Lifts Restrictions on Blood Donations From Gay Men**

Health Canada's original policy in 1992 banned gay men from donating blood. Now, screening questions will no longer ask about gender sexuality. Instead, potential donors will be asked if they have had new or multiple partners in the last few months. If so, they will be asked if they have engaged in higher-risk sexual activity. Those who have will need to wait three months after the activity before donating blood.

**Baja California Approves Gender Identity Law**

In Mexico, the state of Baja California approved a Gender Identity Law, which will make it easier for people to update their data on birth certificates.

**New Zealand Weightlifter Becomes First Transgender Athlete to Compete at the Olympics**

Laurel Hubbard, a weightlifter from New Zealand, became the first transgender athlete to compete at the Olympics. She competed in the super-heavyweight 87-kg category at the Tokyo Games.






**Indian Court Calls For Reforms to Respect LGBTQ Rights**

Judge N Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court in India ruled in favor of a lesbian couple, who had complained about harassing questions from the police. The court ordered state and federal officials to reform their policies and respect LGBTQ rights.

**19 U.S. States Offer Refuge for Trans Youth**

Despite the wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation in the U.S. that criminalizes the families and physicians of transgender children, many states are fighting back. So far, 19 states plan to offer legal refuge to displaced trans youth and their families.

## Discussion questions for employees

-  What do you think we as a company can do to better support LGBTQ employees during times when certain segments of the media or politics are attacking them?
-  What can you do to better respond to homophobic or transphobic attitudes in the workplace?
-  What are some other examples of stereotypes or labels that are used to mischaracterize the LGBTQ community and how can you help eliminate them?
-  How can companies continue to build an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging around the LGBTQ community, regardless of personal or religious views?
-  What does it say about the United States to have so much LGBTQ legislation, while at the same time having a significant amount of LGBTQ people in public office?