



## QUEER & API: ENGAGING WITH API COMMUNITIES

# THE KOREAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

### BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1.7 million Korean Americans live in the U.S.
- Over 500,000 Korean Americans live in California, about 386,000 on Southern California.
- Near the API community average, the Korean community is mostly (65%) foreign-born.
- The rate of growth of the Korean American community from 2000 to 2010 was 39%, compared with 10% for the U.S. population generally.
- The U.S. has the second largest population of Koreans outside of Korea.

A recent Williams Institute report estimates that 2.8% of API adults identify as LGBT and that there are 324,600 LGBT API Adults in the U.S. These individuals live in areas where there are higher proportions of API people, suggesting that high numbers reside in California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Texas, Illinois, Hawaii, Washington, Georgia, Pennsylvania where the largest populations of APIs live.

### OUR PURPOSE

#### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

API Equality-LA and API Equality-Northern California partnered with Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy to collect research on **Asian Pacific Islander (API) views on same-sex marriage and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.**

These fact sheets highlight key findings from a combination of one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus groups among voters and individuals in California's Chinese, Filipino, and Korean communities. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in each ethnic community in English and participants' primary languages: Mandarin, Korean, or Tagalog. Participants were of varying genders, age, and education levels. This research was designed to explore views on same-sex marriage as well as values, attitudes, and feelings related to LGBT people.

**Factsheets are for community members and LGBT advocates looking to gain a better understanding of these communities, so they can reach out and build better understanding across difference between and among our communities.**

### GROWTH AND CHANGE

Over recent years, growth and change have been constant for the Korean American community in the U.S.—especially in metropolitan areas with high concentrations of Korean Americans. This has also meant political change in terms of recognition of the community as a political force and shifting political dynamics in the community.

Korean Americans, like APIs in general, are very supportive of other traditionally progressive causes, namely increased access to health care and health insurance for all and fair and comprehensive immigration reform. Overwhelming support by Korean Americans for Barack Obama in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, suggests a change in political persuasions of Korean American voters. The perception that Korean Americans unilaterally favor conservative political candidates is inaccurate and changing over time.

The Korean American community has historically been a highly religious community—the vast majority are Christian with a very small Buddhist minority. Religious values inform Korean American views on LGBT issues. But the assumption that the Korean American community is monolithically and immutably conservative and anti-LGBT is incorrect.



Korean LGBT advocate Lt. Dan Choi

Source: <http://www.koreanbeacon.com/2011/07/12/ka-presbyterians-opposition-to-potential-gaylesbian-ordination/>

## KEY FACTORS FOR MOVEMENT TO ACCEPTANCE

### SHARED VALUES: FAMILY, FAITH, AND FELLOWSHIP

Research conducted by API Equality-LA shows that Korean American values include love of family, hard work to achieve success, religious faith and a sense of commitment to others in a shared community. While the lives of LGBT people are not necessarily in contradiction, respondents expressed a palpable uneasiness about how acceptance of LGBT equality might destabilize these values. They wondered aloud about how LGBT equality could be consistent with existing traditions and values. Providing a space for this doubt and discussion is essential to beginning an honest dialogue about equality.

### CONCERN ABOUT DISCRIMINATION

Even those focus group participants who ultimately oppose LGBT equality reject discrimination in society and expressed deep concern for those who experience this unfairness. They condemned real-world examples of discrimination and showed sympathy for LGBT people, believing they should not be relegated to lives of discrimination and unequal treatment.

### RESOLVING INTERNAL CONFLICT

Among Korean Americans in the study compiled by API Equality-LA, much of the uncertainty around LGBT equality was focused on marriage, and their internal conflict about whether LGBT marriage equality would affect all of the family and cultural traditions marriage is intended to preserve. There is a desire for equal rights without conflict with basic traditions.

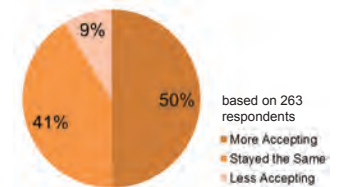
## DESIRE FOR OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION

A common refrain among respondents was that “we/I don’t know enough” about many issues related to the LGBT community—for example, whether same-sex marriages are as strong, whether same-sex parents are as good, whether children of LGBT parents have as good an upbringing. News articles and publicly available research influence deliberations on this issue. More publication on such LGBT topics is needed for API communities.

## POLLING RESULTS

50%

SAY THAT IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, THEIR OPINIONS ON GAY AND LESBIAN PEOPLE HAVE BECOME MORE ACCEPTING



Source: Koreatown Youth Attitudes Towards Gay and Lesbian Issues, API Equality-LA

Amidst increased support for marriage equality for same-sex couples among all API as a group in 2008 in California, Korean Americans were by far the least supportive. Voter exit polls in 2008 showed that Koreans and Korean Americans as a whole supported a ban on same-sex marriage equality. Young voters (ages 18-34), however, and those who do not regularly attend church (irrespective of their self-identified religiosity) were significantly more in favor of equality. API Equality-LA’s Koreatown Youth study in 2011 showed that among youth (under 25) in Koreatown, LGBT equality is increasingly a widely held value among Korean American youth. This study also showed that parents and religious beliefs are highly influential in reducing acceptance of LGBT rights, while friends, school, and media increase acceptance.

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API EQUALITY-LA  
Asians and Pacific Islanders for LGBT Equality

API Equality-LA advocates in the Greater Los Angeles Asian and Pacific Islander communities for the fair treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and marriage equality for same-sex couples. API Equality-LA’s vision is to create a society that celebrates the loves and lives of all people - free from discrimination and injustice.



API EQUALITY  
Northern California

API Equality-Northern California works at the intersections of the Asian and Pacific Islander and LGBTQ communities to transform people, practices, and policies to make the world an equitable and safe place for everyone. API Equality - Northern California envisions a world where LGBTQ Asians and Pacific Islanders are empowered to practice self-determination, cultivate intergenerational connections, and live truthfully.