

Who's Afraid of Divorce?

Sexual Minority Young Adults and Their
Willingness to Divorce

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Young Adults' Attitudes toward Divorce

- 76% of young adults (18-34) say that divorce is morally acceptable (Gallup 2017)
 - *Not significantly different from older age groups* (Eickmeyer 2015)
- Still, there is some variation in young adults' attitudes toward divorce –
 - Sex/gender (Kapinus & Flowers 2008)
 - Parental relationship quality (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006)
 - Parental divorce (Kapinus 2004; Wolfinger 2002)

The *Specter* of Divorce

- Despite generally approving of divorce, most young adults report being ***anxious*** or ***worried*** about eventually getting a divorce themselves (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Manning & Smock 2009; Miller et al. 2011; Reed 2006; Willoughby et al., 2020)
 - 56-69% say there is at least “some chance” they will eventually divorce (Arocho & Purtell 2020)
 - Fear of divorce → Cohabitation, marital delay (Miller et al., 2011; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017; Waller & Peters, 2008)

Research Question

- However, research to date has focused exclusively on heterosexual young adults
- Given the recent legalization of same-sex marriage (2015), we ask–

How do young adults who identify as sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.) feel about divorce? Do they express similar concerns about getting divorced?

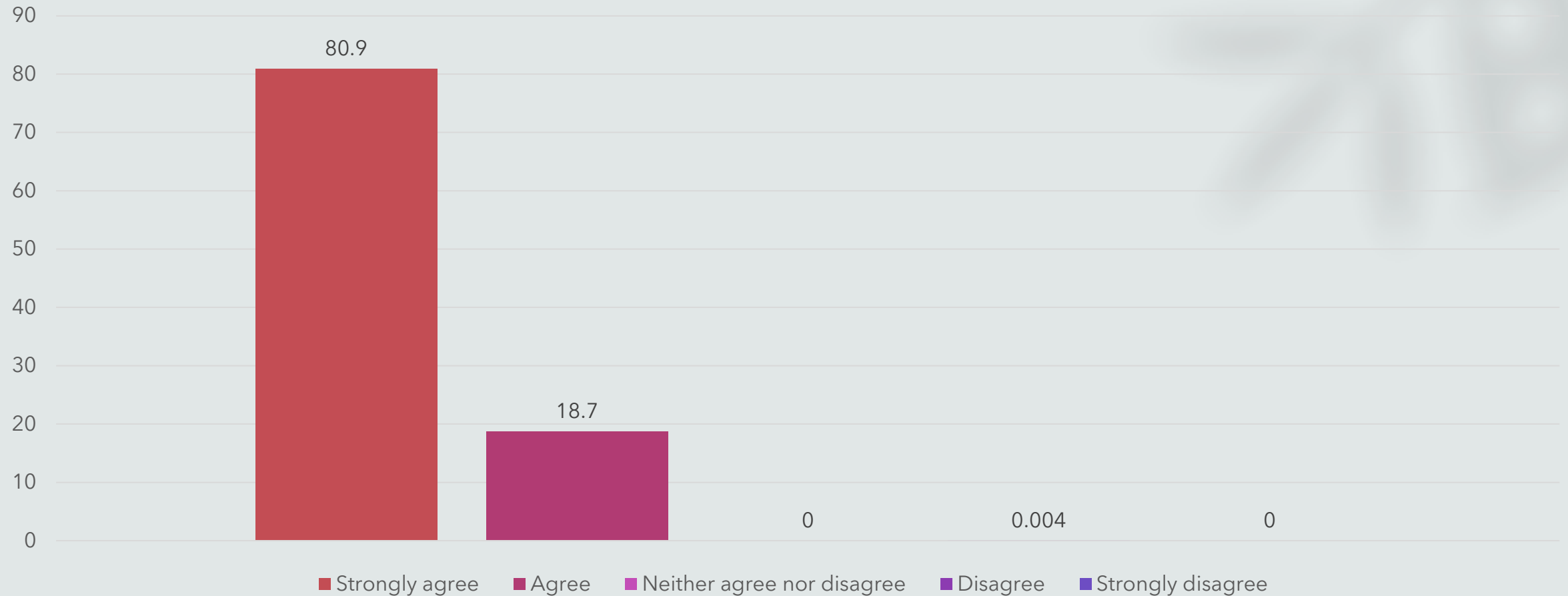
Methods

- Survey administered via Qualtrics from February to April 2021
 - 94 questions total - 86 closed-ended, 8 open-ended
- Non-representative convenience sample recruited primarily through social media
 - Respondents are 18-35 years old and identify as LGBTQ+
 - N=257
- Sample is disproportionately White, well-educated
 - 74.3% are White
 - 36.2% have a graduate degree

Methods, Cont.

- “If you get married someday, would you ever be willing to get a divorce? And if so, under what circumstances would you be willing?”
- Thematic analysis using grounded theory techniques
 - Open coding, focused coding, and analytic memo-writing
 - All 3 authors contributed to analytic process

If I ever got married, there would be some circumstances in which I would consider getting divorced.



Divorce: Reluctance

- “I would really not want to get divorced. However, if the marriage was failing and we could not make it work, then I would consider divorce” (22, Bisexual, Cisgender, Female, White)
- “I look at divorce as the ultimate last-resort solution to a troubling marriage. I would want to avoid it at all costs possible whether by attempting marriage counseling with my spouse, talking things out, [or] giving each other some space” (30, Gay, Cisgender, Male, Latino)

Divorce: No Reluctance

“I would absolutely get a divorce, and I don’t see it as a last-resort, ‘Break glass in case of emergency’ type of thing. If it’s not working and two people are no longer in love or simply don’t want to be married anymore, then they should split. You should, of course, try to work on your relationship for a while, just like you would before breaking up if you were unmarried, but I don’t see the point in persevering in a situation where people are unhappy just because of a ring and a piece of paper” (30, Bisexual, Cisgender, Female, White)

No Reluctance – *Happiness*

- “I would not stay with someone if I am not happy. Life is too short”
(22, Bisexual, Cisgender, Female, White)
- “I think it’s incredibly damaging to spend time in an unhappy relationship. If the ‘want’ for each other is gone, then divorce is the only logical conclusion. It should never even have to come to drastic causes like abuse or something” (23, Asexual, Cisgender, Female, White)

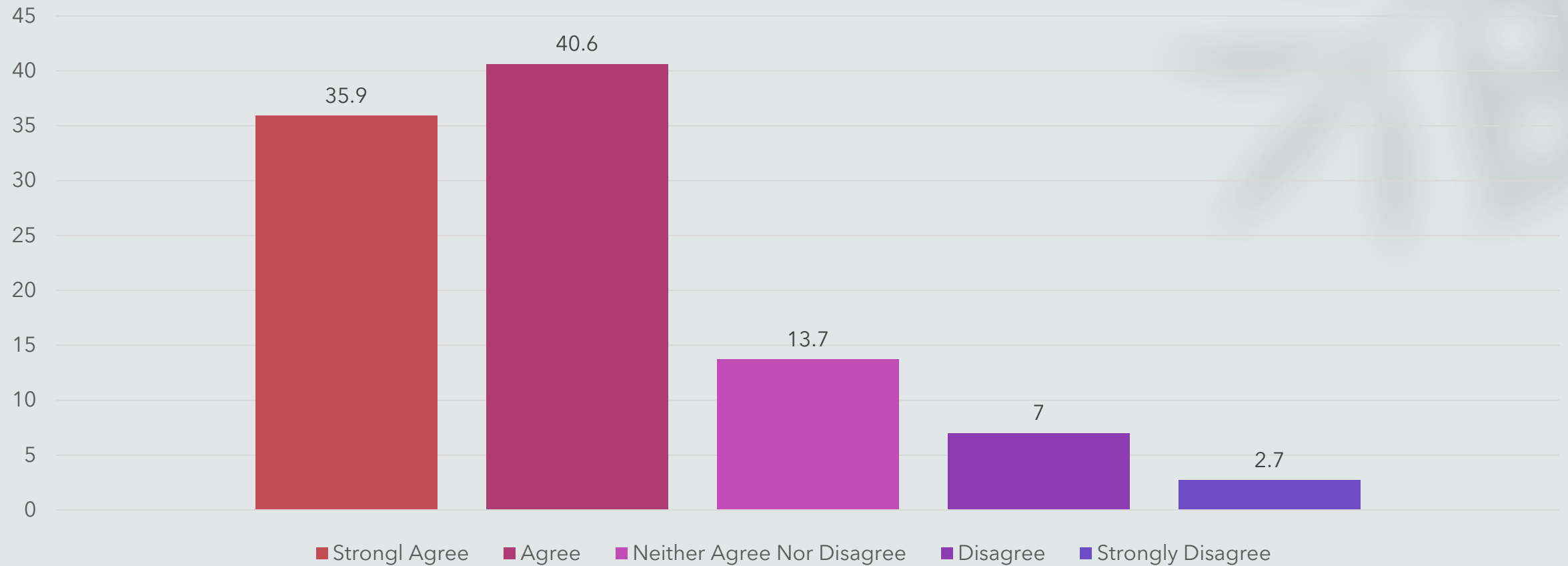
No Reluctance – *Fear of Being “Stuck”*

- “I would consider divorce because I don’t ever want anyone to feel trapped” (27, Queer, Transgender, Non-binary, White)
- “Absolutely [I would get divorced]. If the relationship isn’t working, if I lose trust in the person, etc., I wouldn’t want to feel stuck in a bad relationship” (30, Queer/Bisexual, Cisgender, Non-binary, White)

No Reluctance – *Reject Lifelong Commitment*

- “The concept of committing to someone for your life is nice in theory, but no one should be forced to live unhappily because they said they’d stay decades ago. I think when you get married, you’re not promising to stay until the end, you’re saying that at that time you want to, and you want to try. So, if it’s a time later, and everyone involved has tried and it’s not working, then yeah, time for it to be over” (21, Queer, Cisgender, Female, Asian)
- “I firmly believe that the longevity of a relationship is not the indicator of its success. Being married for two years and being happy for most of that time seems way better than being married for life and only being happy for the first year and a half” (27, Bisexual, Cisgender, Female, White)

I would see my own marriage as a lifelong commitment.



Discussion

- Sexual minority young adults appear to have distinct perspectives on divorce
 - Generally more willing to divorce, and less anxious or worried about divorce, than are heterosexual young adults
- How young adults feel about marriage and divorce can predict subsequent behavior (Miller et al., 2011; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017; Waller & Peters, 2008)
 - Pro-divorce attitudes → Lower marital quality (Amato & Rogers, 1999), increased risk of divorce (Amato & Booth 1991)
 - Fear of divorce → Marital delay (Miller et al., 2011; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017)

Thank you!

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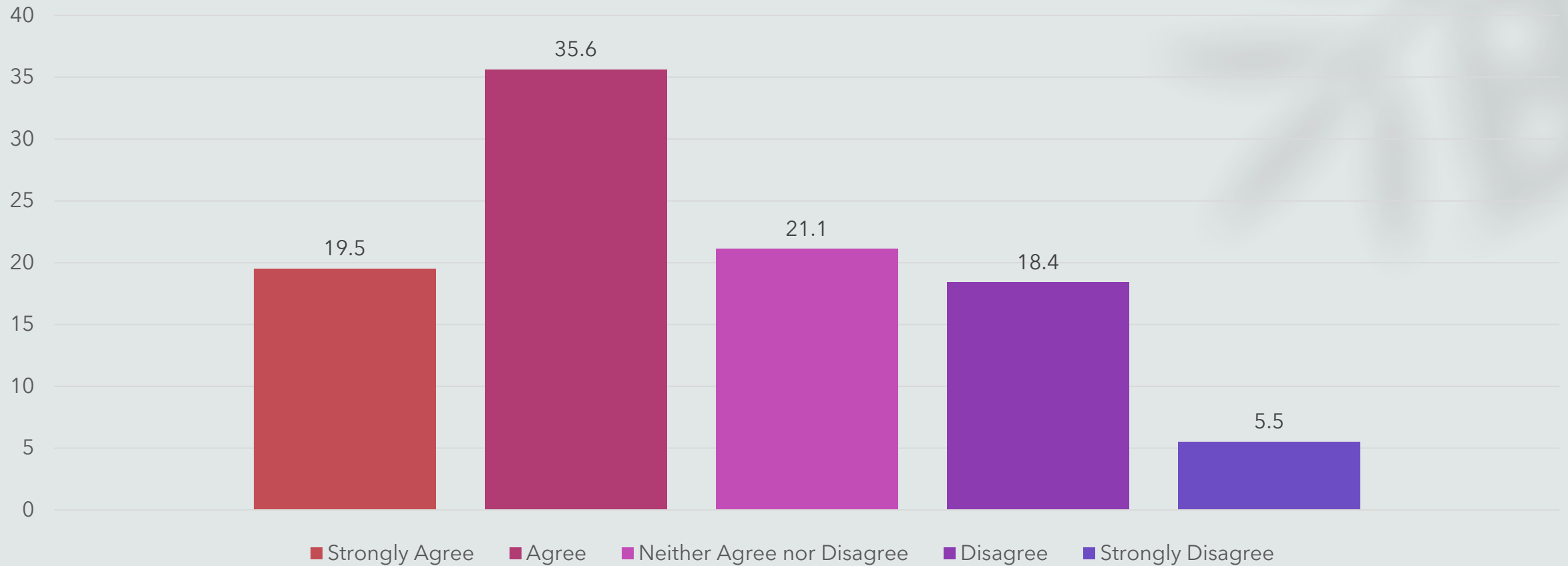
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I would see divorce as a last resort in my own marriage.



Sample Relationship Status, as a Percentage (N=257)

