

Counting With Care: Why (Better) Data Matters for LGBTQ+ Communities

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All views are my own.



Outline of Comments

- About me
- How we (social scientists) have studied LGBTQ people
- How we have studied T/NB/GQ people
- How it has changed over time, where it is headed
- Why it matters
- Unsettled questions

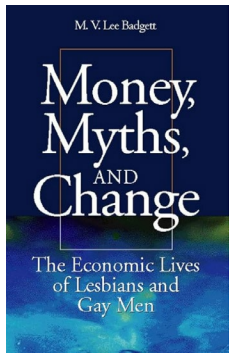
About me

- I am a health and labor economist studying LGBTQ+ populations, their health, and their earnings.
- I have studied LGBTQ+ people in the USA, Canada, the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand for 25 yrs.
- I use surveys (e.g., Censuses) and administrative data.
- I've been actively involved in building LGBTQ+ social science communities.



A Brief History of How We Have Studied Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual People

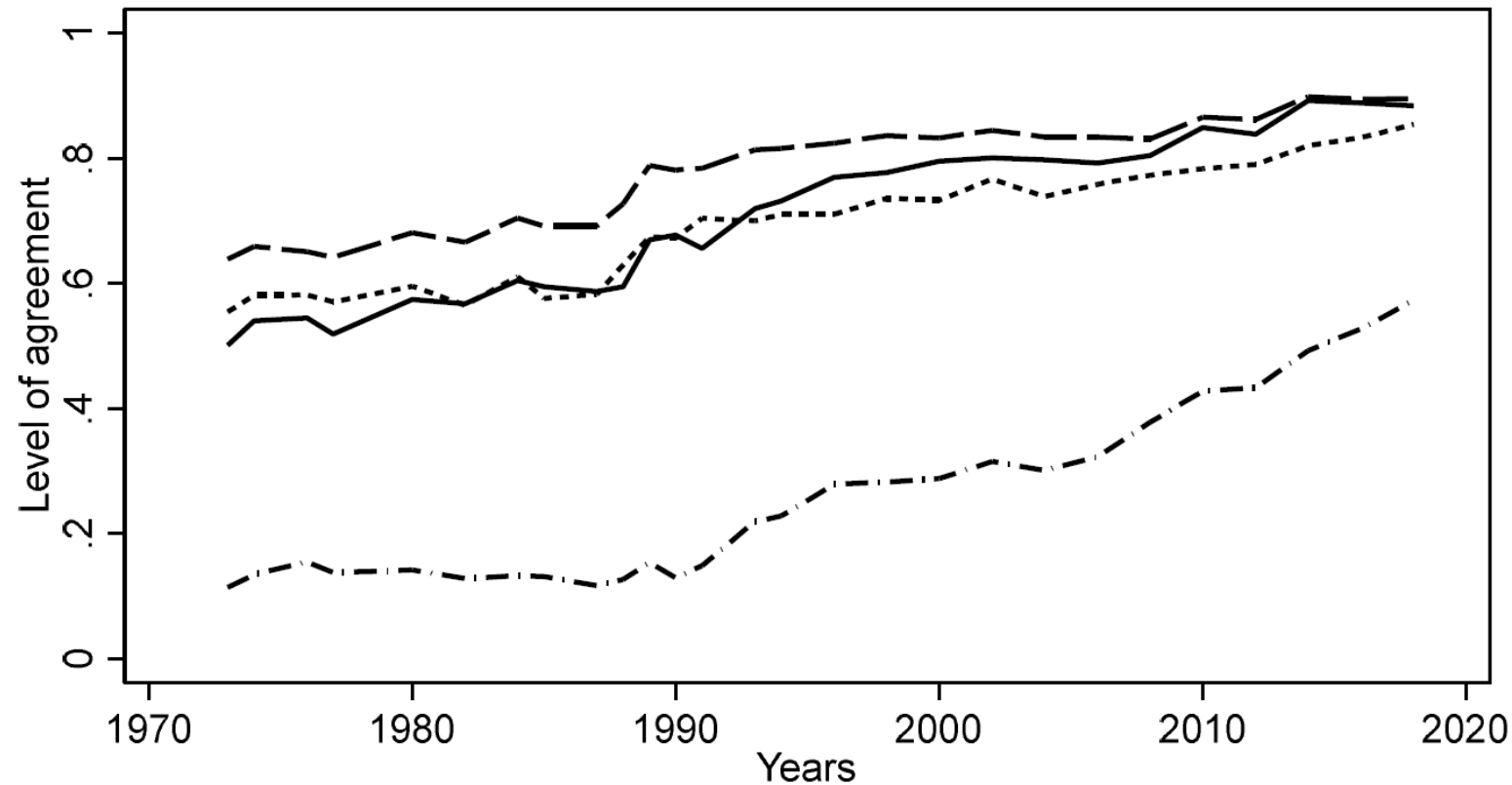
- Subscribers to *The Advocate* magazine
 - Attendees at gay pride festivals
 - MV Lee Badgett debunked these sources in her book: *Money, Myths, and Change*
-
- Health surveys began asking about MSM (AIDS/HIV)
 - Demographic surveys began asking about LGB status
 - Censuses began allowing ID of same-sex couples
 - Very limited use of admin data on same-sex relationships



Important Case Study: US General Social Survey

- Has asked consistently worded questions about social attitudes since the 1970s. Eg:
- “And what about a man who admits that he is a homosexual? Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?”
 - Response options: Allowed, Not allowed, Don’t know

General Social Surveys (attitudes questions)



- Homosexual allowed to speak
- Homosexual allowed to teach in college
- ... Homosexual book not removed from public library
- . - Same-sex sexual relation not wrong at all

GSS same-sex sexual behavior (1988)

- “There is a great deal of concern today about the AIDS epidemic and how to deal with it. Because of the grave nature of this problem, we are going to ask you some personal questions and we need your frank and honest responses. Your answers are confidential and will be used only for statistical reports.”
- “Have your sex partners in the last 12 months been...”
 - Exclusively male, Both male and female, Exclusively female

GSS sexual orientation (2008)

- “Have you ever, even once, taken any drugs by injection with a needle (like heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, or steroids)?”
- “Have you ever, even once used ‘crack’ cocaine in chunk or rock form?”
- “Have you ever been tested for HIV?”
- “Which of the following best describes you?”
 - Gay, lesbian, or homosexual; Bisexual; Heterosexual or straight

Game-Changer: relationship to Person 1

- Case study: 1990 US Census

Your Guide for the 1990 U.S. Census Form

This guide gives helpful information on filling out your census form. If you need more help, call the local U.S. census office. **The telephone number is on the cover of the questionnaire.** After you have filled out your form, please return it in the **envelope** we have provided.

On the inside	Page
How to fill out your census form	2
Example	2
Your answers are confidential	2
Instructions for the census questions	3–11
What the census is about	12
Why the census asks certain questions	12

CENSUS '90



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

PLEASE ALSO ANSWER HOUSING QUESTIONS ON PAGE 3 

Please fill one column → for each person listed in Question 1a on page 1.	PERSON 1	PERSON 2
	Last name First name Middle initial	Last name First name Middle initial
2. How is this person related to PERSON 1? Fill ONE circle for each person. If Other relative of person in column 1, fill circle and print exact relationship, such as mother-in-law, grandparent, son-in-law, niece, cousin, and so on.	START in this column with the household member (or one of the members) in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented. If there is no such person, start in this column with any adult household member. ■	If a RELATIVE of Person 1: ☐ Husband/wife ☐ Natural-born or adopted son/daughter ☐ Stepson/stepdaughter ☐ Brother/sister ☐ Father/mother ☐ Grandchild ☐ Other relative → If NOT RELATED to Person 1: ☐ Roomer, boarder, or foster child ☐ Housemate, roommate ■ ☐ Unmarried partner ☐ Other nonrelative
3. Sex Fill ONE circle for each person.	☐ Male ☐ Female	☐ Male ☐ Female

1980 US Census

Page 2

→ ALSO ANSWER THE HOUSING QUESTIONS ON PAGE 3

Here are the QUESTIONS ↓	These are the columns for ANSWERS → Please fill one column for each person listed in Question 1.	PERSON in column 1	PERSON in column 2	PERSON in column 3
		Last name	Last name	Last name
		First name Middle initial	First name Middle initial	First name Middle initial
2. How is this person related to the person in column 1? Fill one circle. If "Other relative" of person in column 1, give exact relationship, such as mother-in-law, niece, grandson, etc.		<i><u>START</u> in this column with the household member (or one of the members) in whose name the home is owned or rented. If there is no such person, start in this column with any adult household member.</i>	If relative of person in column 1: ☐ Husband/wife ☐ Father/mother ☐ Son/daughter ☐ Other relative ☐ Brother/sister _____ If not related to person in column 1: ☐ Roomer, boarder ☐ Other nonrelative ☐ Partner, roommate _____ ☐ Paid employee _____	If relative of person in column 1: ☐ Husband/wife ☐ Father/mother ☐ Son/daughter ☐ Other relative ☐ Brother/sister _____ If not related to person in column 1: ☐ Roomer, boarder ☐ Other nonrelative ☐ Partner, roommate _____ ☐ Paid employee _____
3. Sex Fill one circle.		☐ Male ☒ Female	☐ Male ☒ Female	☐ Male ☒ Female

If a **RELATIVE** of Person 1:

1990

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| ☐ Husband/wife | ☐ Brother/sister |
| ☐ Natural-born
or adopted
son/daughter | ☐ Father/mother |
| ☐ Stepson/
stepdaughter | ☐ Grandchild |
| | ☐ Other relative |

If **NOT RELATED** to Person 1:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Roomer, boarder,
or foster child | ☐ Unmarried
partner |
| ☐ Housemate,
roommate | ☐ Other
nonrelative |

2. How is this person related to Person 1? Mark ☒ **ONE** box.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Husband or wife | ☐ Parent-in-law |
| ☐ Biological son or daughter | ☐ Son-in-law or daughter-in-law |
| ☐ Adopted son or daughter | ☐ Other relative |
| ☐ Stepson or stepdaughter | ☐ Roomer or boarder |
| ☐ Brother or sister | ☐ Housemate or roommate |
| ☐ Father or mother | ☐ Unmarried partner |
| ☐ Grandchild | ☐ Other nonrelative |

2010

2 How is this person related to Person 1?

Mark ☒ **ONE** box.

- ☐ Husband/wife
- ☐ Natural-born son/daughter
- ☐ Adopted son/daughter
- ☐ Stepson/stepdaughter
- ☐ Brother/sister
- ☐ Father/mother
- ☐ Grandchild
- ☐ Parent-in-law
- ☐ Son-in-law/daughter-in-law
- ☐ Other relative — *Print exact relationship.*

2000

If **NOT RELATED** to Person 1:

- ☐ Roomer, boarder
- ☐ Housemate, roommate
- ☐ Unmarried partner
- ☐ Foster child
- ☐ Other nonrelative

3. How is this person related to Person 1? Mark ☒ **ONE** box.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Opposite-sex husband/wife/spouse | ☐ Father or mother |
| ☐ Opposite-sex unmarried partner | ☐ Grandchild |
| ☐ Same-sex husband/wife/spouse | ☐ Parent-in-law |
| ☐ Same-sex unmarried partner | ☐ Son-in-law or daughter-in-law |
| ☐ Biological son or daughter | ☐ Other relative |
| ☐ Adopted son or daughter | ☐ Roommate or housemate |
| ☐ Stepson or stepdaughter | ☐ Foster child |
| ☐ Brother or sister | ☐ Other nonrelative |

2020

Many Important Data Issues with Same-Sex Couples

- People not captured here
- Relationships not captured here
- Mismarking of gender
- Mismarking of relationship status
- No one checks the names (really)
- Who is person 1? That person fills it out for everyone.

Some country Cenuses now ask sexual orientation *directly* at the individual level

- UK, NZ already do
- Canada will add in 2026 Census (but reported by person 1)
- US: was field testing in 2024 American Community Survey

Figure 10: Sexual identity (2023 Census online form and paper form)

2023 Census online form

Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?

Sexual identity is how a person thinks of their own sexuality and which terms they identify with.

☐ heterosexual / straight

☐ gay or lesbian

☐ bisexual

☒ another identity

Please specify:

☐ prefer not to say

29 Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?

☐ heterosexual / straight

☐ gay or lesbian

☐ bisexual

☐ another identity. Please state:

or ☐ prefer not to say

Online functionality

Respondents who have indicated they are 15 years of age or over are asked this question. They will be able to select only one response to this question. The write-in box is not shown on first view but appears when the respondent selects ‘another identity. Please state’. This question is supported by as-you-type functionality. When respondents begin typing, a list of potential responses matching what the respondent has typed appears. The respondents can then choose from the list of possible responses. Answering this question is not compulsory; respondents will be able to leave this question blank and move forward with the questionnaire.

2023 NZ Census

How We Have Studied Transgender & Nonbinary People

- Qualitative interviews – attendees at transgender events
- Internet surveys (e.g., US Transgender Survey)
- Direct survey questions – Are you transgender?
- Two-step approach: Sex at birth? Current gender?
- Administrative data:
 - driver license applications, electronic health records
 - gender affirming care
 - name changes, gender marker changes

Figure 8: Gender (2023 Census online form and paper form)

2023 Census online form

What is your gender?

?

Help

Gender refers to a person’s social and personal identity as male, female, or another gender (or genders) that may be non-binary. A person’s sex at birth may differ.

☐ male

☐ female

☒ another gender

Please specify:

3

What is your gender?

☐ male

☐ female

☐ another gender. Please state:

Mark your answer like this: ☒

Online functionality

Respondents can select multiple responses to this question. They are only presented with the write-in text box if they select ‘another gender, please state:’. This text box has as-you-type functionality.

Respondents must answer either this question, the sex at birth question, or both questions. They will not be able to proceed further on the online form if they have not provided a response to either the gender question or the sex at birth question.

What was your sex at birth?

For example, what was recorded on your birth certificate.

☐ male

☐ female

 Help

4 What was your sex at birth?

For example, what was recorded on your birth certificate.

☐ male

☐ female

Online functionality

Respondents can select either 'male' or 'female' for this question. Respondents must answer either the gender question or the sex at birth question. If the respondent has responded to the gender question, they do not have to provide an answer to the sex at birth question, likewise, if a respondent answers the sex at birth question, they do not have to provide an answer to the gender question. If they have not responded to either question, they will not be able to continue with the form.

2021 Canadian Census

1 NAME In the spaces provided, copy the names in the same order as in step B . Then answer the following questions for each person.	PERSON 1	PERSON 2
The following questions refer to each person's situation on May 11, 2021 , unless otherwise specified.	Family name	Family name
	Given name	Given name
2 What was this person's sex at birth ? Sex refers to sex assigned at birth.	☐ Male ☐ Female	☐ Male ☐ Female
3 What is this person's gender ? Refers to current gender which may be different from sex assigned at birth and may be different from what is indicated on legal documents.	☐ Male ☐ Female Or please specify this person's gender: 	☐ Male ☐ Female Or please specify this person's gender:



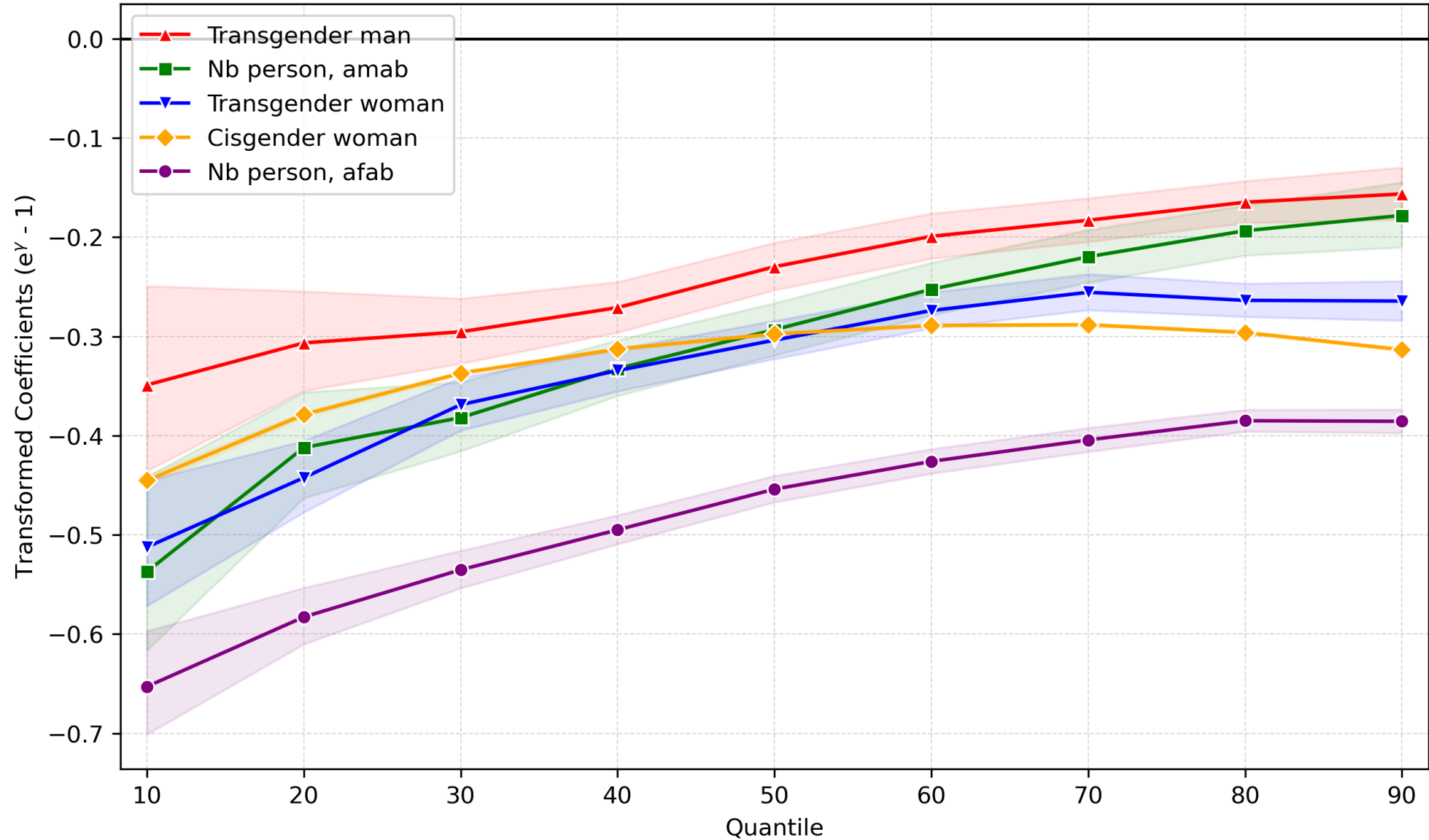
A word cloud centered around the term "Non-binary". The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the central text, with varying font sizes and colors. The colors include shades of blue, orange, green, purple, and red. The words represent various gender identities and expressions.

Non-binary

Two-Spirit Intergender Third gender
Polygender Pangender Gender neutral
Man and woman Gender-nonconforming
Androgynous Questioning Queer
Demi Bigender Genderfluid
Other gender Agender
Neither man nor woman Trigender

Source(s): Census of Population, 2021 (3901).

2019 log earnings, compared with demographically similar cisgender men



Where we are headed/recent trends

- Many countries expanding LGBTQI+ data inclusion
 - Canada: adding sexual orientation to 2026 Census
 - NZ: asked about intersex status on 2023 Census
 - More countries permitting nonbinary response option
 - More countries permitting write-in responses
- Some countries going in other direction
 - US: Current administration Executive Order prohibiting data collection on gender identity, transgender status
 - US: Removal of SOGI Qs from federally funded surveys
 - Chile: removed SOGI from 2024 Census

Why it matters (from US perspective)

- Flurry of US legislative and Supreme Court activity
 - Calls for same-sex marriage to be overturned (multiple sitting justices of the US Supreme Court)
 - Court to rule on trans people in sports, laws banning gender affirming care for minors, conversion therapy
- Whether policies targeting LGBTQ+ people merit 'heightened scrutiny' or just 'rational basis'
- Compliance with nondiscrimination law (*Bostock*)

Civil Rights Law Protects Gay and Transgender Workers, Supreme Court Rules

The court said the language of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex discrimination, applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.



Share full article



1.9K



Tiffany Munroe on Sunday in Brooklyn during a rally to call attention to violence against transgender people of color. Demetrius Freeman for The New York Times

Remaining issues for policy, science

- How has LGBTQ+ people's trust in surveys been affected?
- Who will support (read: fund) research on LGBTQ+ populations?
- What will be the chilling effect for LGBTQ+ people working on LGBTQ+ research?
- How will academic freedom be affected?
- What are the new ways we will need to support LGBTQ+ youth?