

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

UNVEILING THE DATA GAP:  
UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOECONOMIC WELLBEING OF LGBTQ+ AMERICANS

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**TARA WATSON:** Hi everyone. I am delighted to welcome you to our event today. I'm Tara Watson. I'm an economist here at Brookings and I'm also the director of the Center on Children and Families. We're actually going to be refreshing in the name of our center soon. It will be called the Center for Economic Security and Opportunity, which will better reflect the broad range of subjects that we work on. But understanding how individuals and families thrive in the American economy and all types of individuals and families thrive in the American economy is a core mission of both the current center and the future center. And so we're really excited to share this event with you today as part of our work in this area.

We published a report this spring investigating what can be learned from major surveys about the socioeconomic well-being of the LGBTQ+ population. And we highlighted some data gaps that continue to exist in understanding that question. I'm going to share a couple of pictures from the report and refer you to the website if you're interested in learning more. So one figure from a report is just trying to assess the prevalence of people identifying as lesbian, gay and bisexual. Using the National Health Interview survey. And what you can see here is that there has been a really sharp increase between 2013 and 2021 in this type of identification, and it is especially pronounced among younger generations. So this impresses upon us the importance of understanding this large and growing population. And because of the fact that younger adults are more likely to be identifying as LGBTQ. Plus it suggests that going forward, we may have a pretty pronounced generational shift in identification and family formation.

When we look across surveys, surveys ask a variety of questions about identities. And what we see here is that the way the questions are asked or the types of questions that are asked make a big difference. And they ask how we might walk away believing different numbers. As far as the prevalence of the LGBTQ ID or population in the United States and specifically the American Community Survey, which is a major survey run by the census that is a source of much of our economic and social well-being data does not ask sexual identity, sexual orientation or gender identity questions. And so the only way to infer that population is to look at people who are co resident with each other, who are living together as romantic partners. And what you can see in this picture is that you're really then understating the prevalence of the population by a large degree compared to surveys where you ask direct questions about identities.

And so I am now going to refer you to our report if you'd like to see more, and I'm going to introduce our esteemed panel. I really couldn't imagine a better group of people together here talking about these issues. While they are talking, I hope you will feel free to ask questions. You can do that by emailing [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu) or on Twitter you can use the hashtag LGBTQ data gap. Either one of those. We'll get your questions into our queue and we'll answer as many as we can. Today we're going to hear from Kitt Carpenter, who is the founder and director of the Vanderbilt LGBTQ Plus Policy Lab. We'll, then hear from Bianca Wilson, who is the Rabbi Zacky senior scholar of public policy at the Williams Institute at UCLA, and Meghan Maury, who is a senior official at Department of Commerce, but also has served as policy director for the National LGBTQ Task Force and co-led the federal evidence agenda on object plus equality. And they will be joined and moderated by Hansi Lo Wang, who is a correspondent for NPR, and see reports on the state of U.S. democracy, and especially relevant for our purposes, has done a lot of work reporting on the census and on LGBTQ data collection. And so we're really delighted to have all of these panelists and the moderator with us today. I'm going to turn it over to our panelists to give a few remarks each, and then we'll jump into a conversation. So we'll start with Kitt.

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** Thank you very much, Tara. Let me try to share my screen here. I am hoping this works. And that you can see my screen. I'm Kitt Carpenter. I'm from. If not, please. Somebody jump in and tell me. I'm Kitt Carpenter. I'm from Vanderbilt. I use he/him pronouns. I'm super excited, Happy pride. I'm super excited to be in community with you all and especially excited to talk about data gaps. And I read that fantastic report by Tara and beyond and learned a lot. And as somebody who's been working on these topics for my entire career, to learn something new about surveys that have been using for two decades is really wonderful. So I commend you on an excellent report. I was asked to talk about economic outcomes from for LGBTQ people and what the state of the research literature says and how that relates to data gaps. So before getting started, I want to just kind of summarize how we think we know as social scientists what we know about the economic livelihoods of LGBTQ people. And it's two broad buckets. So certainly there's the very important qualitative interviews where we go to places where we think queer people are and we talk to them. And then there's the kind of work that myself and other people do, which is use quantitative surveys where these surveys either ask direct questions about sexual behavior, sexual attraction, sexual identity, questions of the variety that you see here on this screen. That's one way that we do it in large surveys. The other way that we do it in large surveys was referenced by Tara as well, which is that we infer minority sexual orientation through household relationships. So this is just a picture of literally the survey that you would get if you were filling out the American Community survey in the United States. And it shows you the different response options that these first four kind of make clear how we identify and distinguish same sex couples in romantic unions from different sex couples. These response

options have changed over time, which cause all manner of interesting research challenges for how we identify same sex couples. But this gives you a flavor of the two main ways that queer people have been identified. In particular sexual minorities have been identified in data. And what that research shows in one slide is very clear. It shows that gay men earn significantly less than observationally similar straight or heterosexual men. So when we compare people with the same education in the same state of residents, the same, you know, disability status, for example, we uniquely find are we always find an independent association that self-identified gay men are in significantly less than heterosexual men. This is in contrast to what we find for lesbian women. Lesbian women, we consistently estimate and people and other research teams as well consistently estimate an earnings premium on the order of 5 to 10%. And I'll show you how that has evolved over time in the United States. There are a lot of economic theories for why there might be different effects for gay men and lesbians, and we can talk about those in the Q&A if people have any questions. One thing that is also quite clear across many places and times is that bisexual people earn much less than otherwise similar heterosexual people. And here there is not this different direction. Gay men earn less and lesbians earn more. All bisexual people seem to earn less. So self-identified bisexual men, of which there are relatively few, and self-identified bisexual women, of which there are relatively many. They both earn significantly less than otherwise similar heterosexual men and women. This is these results are quite stable. You find these in nearly every survey that's asked identification questions for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. You find that to be true. And there's actually very limited evidence that this is improving over time. This is a picture from a review paper that we are we wrote a couple of years ago where it shows you the kind of difference in log earnings for women on the top panel and then on the bottom panel. And it shows you see the coefficient on lesbian or gay lesbian on the top panel, gay on the bottom panel. What you see is this lesbian premium has been noticeably falling over time, which is quite interesting and surprising given that attitudes towards queer people have noticeably improved over this same time period. The other thing that's also kind of quite surprising is that the gay male earnings penalty. Doesn't really seem to have budged much over this time period. It's always about kind of five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10%. And again, against a backdrop of enormous increases and improvement in attitudes towards queer people, you don't see the same pattern with respect to earnings differentials. And so that's a puzzle that the research literature needs to figure out. I'll also just note that experiments also show worse economic outcomes for sexual minorities. So these are where you send fake resumes to real jobs and the resumes that have some marker of minority sexual orientation, they get called back, less call calls for an interview. For example. Turning to trans and non-binary folks, these are how we identify trans folks in major surveys. So we either ask people directly, Are you transgender? Or in other surveys. We use what's called a two step approach where we ask first sex assigned at birth and then current gender. And that's what's that is what has been used in a major Census Bureau survey called Household Pulse, which was designed to understand the experience of individuals coming out of COVID. Here's what those data show. I've worked with both of those data sets, and they actually are quite consistent, non cisgender folks, which includes trans and non-binary folks when you compare them to otherwise similar cisgender folks, i.e. people whose sex at birth matches their current gender. If you compare them and you say, Let's look at people with the same education, the same state of residents, the same disability status, etc. non cisgender folks across the board are doing worse. They have lower and economically they have lower employment, they have higher poverty rates. They are more likely to use public health insurance, which maybe is a good thing if you think that they are being connected to public supports. But here's an unambiguously bad thing. They have significantly more likely to say that they are food insecure. These results are these patterns are especially true for trans women. And so there we can talk in the Q&A about why that might be. Let me just very briefly say that the international data landscape looks quite interesting relative to the United States. The United States is behind most of our developed country counterparts. Many countries, you can get these same sex couples, but only a handful of countries actually ask a direct questions, unlike censuses, very large like mandate. Many countries have mandatory censuses, and in some some of those countries it is mandatory to tell people to include information on both sexual orientation and in Canada. Also transgender status in the United Kingdom, also transgender status in New Zealand in 2023. I think this is the first such survey that I am aware of. They're also asking a direct question that will allow us to know something about intersex status, which is an identity and part of the umbrella that we know very, very little about in the community. Let me end by just trying not to go over time by just saying that there's a bunch of research looking at, you know, we're on the eighth anniversary of Obergefell versus Hodges that granted legal same sex marriage and that rolled out across states in a very kind of roll out kind of way, as you see here. And very briefly, that research clearly shows that gay people, queer people, demanded same sex marriage. They took up same sex marriage when it was offered to them. Same sex marriage was associated with less discrimination towards queer people, increased employment of sexual minorities, increases in health insurance coverage, and also improved mental health of sexual minorities with thus far no obvious decrement to different sex relationships. That rates of different sex marriage or anything of the variety that many people were concerned about. When same sex marriage was discussed before I handed over to Dr. Wilson, let me just say that we wrote a kind of a review paper pitched at a general audience, and you can find that in the Journal of Economics Perspectives, and I'd be happy to

take your questions. And I thank Tara and Company for this opportunity. And with that, I will hand it over to Bianca.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Great. Thank you, Kitt. All right. I'm going to screen as I do that. You know, I'm really excited to be here and be here, particularly with this group, to talk about some of these issues. And, you know, I'm I'm going to review a study that I did at the Williams Institute on LGBTQ Poverty with Lee Badgett and other colleagues. But I'm also happy, given our, you know, that we're really grounding this in a discussion about data and data collection. Happy to talk about also my role as one of the panelists on the National Academy of Sciences Consensus Panel on Sexual orientation and gender identity and sex measurement. So I'm happy to kind of circle back to that as well. So I'm just gonna maybe start off a little bit where Kitt left off when he noted that something that the research needs to wrestle with is how these disparities are happening. So as he indicated in several ways, and here I'm talking about poverty, not, you know, which we do understand is both related but distinct to earnings and income. But specifically when we talk about the lowest level of of income and economic stability, that is the status of poverty. You know, we've consistently seen these disparities and we have noted is, as Kitt noted, that there are not only an LGBT disparity estimate, however, there's also, you know, clear differences among LGBT people with bisexual CIS women and trans people in particular, showing some of the highest rates of poverty. But I really want to talk about this question why? And we don't have a lot of data really supporting that, an obvious thing to that. So to that end, my colleagues and I designed a qualitative study to try to better understand some of these pathways into economic stability and barriers to getting out. And again, you're going to see me kind of go through a lot of slides, happy to revisit, come back to some of them. But I want to make sure that I give my other panelists time. So we designed this study. We interviewed nearly 100 people. I won't go into all the methods details, but just to give you a sense, it was in two counties in California selected specifically to have both an urban and a rural or non-urban location. So that was Kern County. You know, as you can imagine, the extent to which people might have access not only to LGBT kind of services in a large urban setting like Los Angeles, that that might have a potential impact on what's available for them as they manage economic insecurity. So we wanted to make sure that we spoke to people outside of that context. These are qualitative interviews, most of which were conducted pre-COVID. So I'm just going to jump right in. I mean, in our interviews, this these were lengthy interviews. We used a life, a life narrative approach where we try to understand their experiences as children and growing up and where economic issues came into play there. And then as they moved into adulthood, how they experienced a number of barriers or facilitators of economic well-being in housing, in employment, with regard to food and with regard to accessing services. And as I noted, part of our goal was also to really try to understand, you know, not just an LGBTQ plus narrative is as if that is monolithic, but to try to understand whether or not subgroups were experiencing, you know, some factors differently than others to help try to also get those differential disparities among LGBTQ people, something we noted across the sample that there were several factors that this slide speaks to here, several factors that seemed related to the onset of poverty or just their experience in managing poverty and low income. That were relatively across the board. And, you know, so some of these factors like substance use, mental health, structural barriers to employment, that could include lower levels of education, you know, various limitations and barriers related to services, including transportation, to getting to those services. These are a lot of the factors we see in the literature generally among all people experiencing poverty throughout the U.S.. Some that are LGBT or sexual and gender minority specific include anti-lgbtq bias and discrimination. So those are some of the factors across the board. When we look at each of the subgroups, we know that there were some factors that were more relevant for different groups. And as I noticed, you know, we've we've seen kind of differential rates see wage disparity among men, gay men, bisexual men, lesbians, bisexual women and trans folks. And then in poverty, we also see some differential rates. But our question here was among those that are low income in each of those groups, what type of experiences are they having? And for example, with cis gay men who do not have significantly higher poverty rates than straights as men, Nonetheless, those who are experiencing low income, for example, managing HIV was a major theme that was unique to that group, and it came up quite a bit. The issues of parenting and caring for families. We actually saw a lot among both trans men, insists queer women also kind of the role as family caretaker for the their parents and other adults, kind of parents and grandparents in their lives came out for both lesbians and CIS by men. And issues of pervasive gender policing and discrimination came up for gender non-conforming, such as butch, masculine or center cis women, as well as nonbinary and trans men and trans women. So, you know, that's giving us at least some sense of how regardless of whether actual disparity rates might look different, we do have a sense that their experiences are different, that that are impacted by the intersection of gender, sexual orientation and other factors. One significant factor that I want to highlight that our study revealed was that when asking about their experiences as children, the theme of childhood poverty was a major pathway into adult poverty. And I'll just put up this quote and then kind of talk through it. This is significant because often when we talk about LGBT poverty, we kind of start with the LGBT part and not their experiences as whole. People, households with families who grew up in neighborhoods and communities. And what we learned is most of our sample, close to 80% of the people we interviewed as children, experienced some kind of economic insecurity and in that way appeared to be part of a known

pattern of intergenerational poverty when we think about that outside of the LGBT context. So when I say some degree of childhood poverty, this included major indicators like some of these listed on the left, like experiencing homelessness as children to maybe some more minor indicators, like noting that they grew up in mobile parks or or trailer parks or just overhearing their parents talk about money being an issue. In essence, for for many, the transition into adulthood was not necessarily supported economically. Skip this. And just kind of come here to this visualization for this was our effort at really thinking about how the themes in these qualitative data came together to indicate that there might be different pathways into economic insecurity and that this differed by whether or not an LGBT adult had experienced childhood poverty. But for those who had experienced childhood poverty, like many of those who experienced child poverty in the U.S., regardless of social status, you know, that leads to lower educational opportunities, low wage jobs, parenting with very little resources for those who grew up middle or upper class. This is where LGBT status seemed to be a major component to the onset of poverty through the loss of financial family support, through rejection from their family and and kind of similar anti LGBT bias. But this whole middle constellation reflects that regardless of their starting point. Many respondents experience varying degrees of all of these factors once they had really entered some level economic instability. Happy to return to this, so I'll just close it maybe on the. One of the main implications is really just thinking about LGBT poverty in ways that connect to intergenerational poverty and structural racism. I'll highlight a couple the data indication in implications here. One being that we really need more data on the experiences that that affects stigmatized groups to better understand the mechanisms through which sexual orientation and gender identity have an impact on economic insecurity. So I'm going to stop it there as my timer just reminded me, and I'll turn it over to Meghan.

**MEGHAN MAURY:** Thank you so much, Bianca. And it's always such a pleasure to see that data on the screen. I'm Meghan Maury as Tara said in the introduction. I'm currently working in the Biden administration. Before this, I spent quite a lot of years working in the LGBTQI plus movement on economic justice and data policy, which is part of why I'm so excited to be here today and also why I was so excited to learn that the executive order E.O. 1407 five was going to include a section on data. So, um, if you have taken a look at EO 1407 five um, you may have missed the fact that tucked way down in section 11, there is a section on sexual orientation and gender identity data collection. And, you know, as a, as a person who's worked on economic justice issues for a long time, I'm the first to say that data does not change lives. But if we put data to work, it can help us make better policy decisions that that we hope can advance equity. And that was really the goal of this section of Executive Order 1407 five. So the way we thought about it looked a little bit something like this, we would create this learning agenda that that helped us understand what questions we needed to answer to better serve LGBTQ people. Then agencies would develop action plans to put that learning agenda into practice, and they'd collect the data they needed to answer these questions to impact policy and ultimately advance equity. I think beyond and give you a really lot of examples of why this is important. But just to call back on something Bianca just shared, you know, if we're making policy without data, it often can be grounded in assumption. We might think we might see the data that shows that LGBTQ plus adults are more likely to live in poverty. And we might make an assumption that the core reason for that is a loss of family support. But when we dig deeper and ask more questions about the experiences of LGBTQ people, we see all of this additional information, including the fact that childhood poverty is a really big driver to adult poverty for the LGBTQ community. So if we're making policy based on that initial assumption, we might really focus in on loss of family support. But when we expand and look at the data and what the data is telling us, it might help us make different policy interventions that that focus more on on how we support people throughout their lives to to to move from childhood poverty out of poverty in their adulthood. So I want to give you a quick you know, that's the logic behind what we did. I want to give you a quick overview of of how we did that work. A couple of highlights from the agenda itself and then a little bit of a preview of what's to come and then happy to take any questions on this in the long term. I don't want to dwell on process, so why do I have this slide up about the process? Because I just want to make sure that folks know that when we built this federal evidence agenda on LGBTQ equity, we didn't we didn't do it in a vacuum. We brought together 40 plus almost 50 subject matter experts on LGBTQ data and LGBTQ policy from across government. Many of those people were themselves identified as LGBTQ Plus, so they were bringing the lived experience to the table along with their subject matter expertise. And then we complemented that with a quite a lot of community input from responses to a request for information to a ton of listening sessions. And and we also got input from other federal groups like federal employees who identify as LGBTQ PLUS, but also the statistical community within the federal government. Overall, the structure of the evidence agenda is pretty broad. We do. The first chapter is something that you might think of, like a little review. It kind of goes through what data is out there and what big, big picture needs there are. And then it dives into this learning agenda that helps to find these questions that we as the US government need to answer to to support the improvement of the lives of LGBTQ plus people. And then it also has a section in the end that talks a little bit about how we do this in the administrative data context. I'm not going to get into that today, but we added that in because of a direct call from our colleagues in government who who really wanted a better understanding of how to how to do this work and how to do it with the needs of

LGBTQ people, really at the core. So the learning agenda is where we want to focus our attention today. That learning agenda includes 13 big overarching questions that fit into four domains health, health care and access to care, housing, stability and security. Economic security and education and safety, security and justice. Now, all of these sections have really large implications for what we know or what we will know about LGBTQ people's economic security. But just to hone in on the economic security and education section in particular, and the questions in that chapter run the gamut. Focus on things like what types and levels of wealth or access are LGBTQ IP, plus people able to build at different stages of their life course? We didn't ask questions like, How do we ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity? Because we know those questions are well covered. And things like the Nasser report that Bianca discussed and said we looked at what are the questions that we as the government need to know to better serve our communities. And we try where we could to hone in on the components of federal government that are unique. So how like the third set of questions here that really focus in on how LGBTQ people are experiencing federal government programs, This is just a tiny taste of what's in the document. I hope you had a chance to look at it more deeply, but just to give you a sense of where we're going from here, the next step is that federal agencies have been building, so due to the action plans, no need to look at this. I know the type of two too tiny to see, but the concept behind it is they identified some of the learning questions that were most relevant to their agencies, discussed how they're going to build evidence to answer those questions, and then talk about what infrastructure they need to support that evidence building. Do they need more staff? Do they need a dedicated unit and of course, rounded it out with how are we going to use that evidence to advance equity? So we're not talking about data in a vacuum, but how it's part of supporting the lives of LGBTQ people and of course, how do we monitor progress in the end? So those were the that's sort of like the focus of how we intended to move forward equity using data. We're just that a starting point there. But hopefully you can see the vision of how we're moving forward. And I'd love to answer any questions that people have them about where their work is going from. Yes. Toss it back to you.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Thank you, Meghan. And thanks to Bianca and Kitt, too, for your presentations. We're going to move into the Q&A section of today's gathering, and we've compiled some questions that some viewers have sent in when you registered. And if you're watching live right now, you still have a chance to send in your question. You can email events at Brookings dot edu again, events with an s at Brookings. Do edu send that email or you can use Twitter and make sure use the hashtag LGBTQ data gap. I Panelists. I'll start with three topics to kick us off before we get to viewer questions. Based on everyone's presentations, it sounds like to fill this LGBTQ plus data gap, we're going to need more data. We're going to need more surveys to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity. And some people may be thinking new sexual orientation, gender identity. These are potentially sensitive or difficult topics to ask on a survey. And you know, there's an interesting study the Census Bureau did back in 2016, 2017 from my reporting of the Census Bureau of the Current Population Survey. And it found that most respondents do not find sexual orientation and gender identity questions difficult or sensitive to answer for themselves or for other people in their households. And in fact, questions about income, employment and disability are more difficult, according to this research from the Census Bureau. But I was running panels. Based on your experience and your research, how sensitive are sexual orientation, gender identity questions, and are there ways to make sure participants continue responding to a survey after they're asked these type of questions?

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Yeah, I'll be happy to jump in there, but Meghan could jump in as needed. Yeah. I mean, you know, one thing, one of the things we looked at in the Nasser report were, for example, response rates for sexual orientation and gender identity. They didn't differ significantly from the other variables that are asked and in fact had better response rates than many of those similar variables. Of the 2016 study that you referred to talked about particularly income and even some questions about race. So we know at this point, 35 plus years in that people are answering subject questions in large scale surveys. That doesn't mean that there's no potential risk, you know, But you know something? I know a young a young person told me when I was doing cognitive interviews about subject measurement in a in a very vulnerable youth population. And I asked about whether asking such a questions would be a major risk or if she'd be too concerned to respond. And she was like, you know, this is in foster care. And she said, you know, don't ask me about how I ended up in foster care. I'm not really worried about you asking me. They're not on my. So that was just a reminder that many that that the census, many of the governmental surveys and including many of the investigator initiated surveys, we hold a lot of sensitive information. We're all expected to do that confidentially and with integrity and with the interests of the people filling that out. And that's along a lot of dimensions. And so when we talk about Soji, we should you know, I would suggest that we continue to have that expectation as opposed to assuming these are now a whole new set of extra sensitive variables that we can't. We can't talk about. No, Meghan can.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Thank you, Bianca. I wanna jump in real quick. If you haven't heard the term SOGI before, it stands for sexual orientation and gender identity. Meghan.

**MEGHAN MAURY:** Bianca really said it all. I will say, you know, there are contexts where we ask these questions, where there is increased sensitivity, but I don't think surveys are really the place where that comes up for people the most. I do think that there are times when it can feel uncomfortable to be asked your sexual orientation or gender identity when, for example, you're going to pick up medicine at the pharmacy. There might be a concern when people are trying to access certain public benefits, especially in places where they feel like there's a threat to their safety. More broadly in the state. But again, I would I would say that. People have. People have learned to navigate those contexts for a long time and they they know when to course correct and make sure that they're. You know, creating protective spaces for themselves when asked these questions and again, surveys and are just not at the place where the risk is the highest for folks.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Thank you. It also sounds like, based on everyone's presentations, that we want to know, the full picture of the socio economic well-being of LGBTQ plus people in the US. It'd be helpful to know a whole range of factors that affect people's lives and including race. Rates of homelessness and houseless ness and incarceration, for example. But it's difficult to get that reliable data on those topics broken down by sexual orientation and gender identity. And why is that based on your experience?

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** I'll jump in here. I mean. Oh. I'm not sure what happened to my. There we go. Sorry I hit the wrong button. I'll just say that I think the point you raise is an excellent one, which is that we know relatively a lot about queer people in some context, but not others. So health is one where we know quite a bit. And the reason that is, is because most of the data collection that we have had historically has been around things like sexual practices, sexual behavior, men who have sex with men, HIV epidemic related causes that led us to start including those questions. We're now envisioning sexual orientation and gender identity, in my view, much more appropriately as demographic characteristics about people as opposed to like behavioral choices. Now, in some context, it's still absolutely appropriate that we want to know that other type of information. But what we're learning, I think, is that sexual orientation, gender identity may be relevant and loss of context. So housing is a great example, the one that you raise and there are many education, other, many other non-health aspects where I think it's important. I think one of the things that has helped us in terms of I'll give you a very concrete example. In the case of gender identity, for example, policy imperatives have really helped us push the argument and need for understanding, for adding things like gender identity to economic census, as are questions that include surveys that include economic outcomes, for example, before 2020 or whatever Bostock year was a couple of summers ago. We didn't have federal employment protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Now we do because of a Supreme Court ruling, and that just magnifies the federal imperative for really comprehensively measuring sexual orientation in the context of economic settings. Whereas before we had literally no way to measure things like are there different employment rates? And now, thanks to the household pulse, we have some at least basic understanding of that.

**MEGHAN MAURY:** If I could add one thing to this. The the I agree with Kitt that the most critical thing we can do is ask more, ask more sexual orientation and gender identity questions on more of the services that we field so that we can have a broader picture of of the experiences of LGBTQ people. But we don't always have a great picture of the target community more broadly either. You mentioned one of the groups you mentioned with people experiencing homelessness or helplessness, and our data in the federal government on that population in general is not an exceptionally high quality. And so even if we ask sexual orientation and gender identity questions in the places where we're asking about homelessness and housing instability, we still may not have as clear the picture of a picture as we could have of of the experiences of those populations. Some of that we can compliment by doing more qualitative research that tells us more about people's lived experience. But we could also there are also spaces where it might be helpful to bolster our overall data collection on communities like people experiencing homelessness and housing instability so that we can get great data about people's lived experiences in that community.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Anything you wanted to add?

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** No, no, I think that's great.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Okay, one more topic I want to raise before we turn to questions from our viewers is I personally reported on the Trump administration blocking efforts to add sexual orientation and gender identity questions to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Kitt, you brought up that serve a little bit earlier. The Justice Department says there is a need for this data to better enforce civil rights protections. But, of course, you know, there were researchers and advocates calling for more federal sexual orientation, gender identity data before the Trump administration came into office and panel. So I'm just wondering, why do you think it's taken this long for more federal surveys to start asking about sexual orientation and gender identity? And are there ways to overcome any of these challenges?

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Sounds like Meghan.

**MEGHAN MAURY:** Well, I'll give you the answer from inside government, which is, you know, I think I think there is a. There's some comfort in standards. So for a long time, the federal government has had clear standards on how to ask questions about things like race and ethnicity and has had more of a consensus about how to ask questions about, for example, disability or income. But there have not been any standards around how to ask sexual orientation and gender identity questions in federal government. One thing that I think is going to really help turn the tide on that is at the same time as we publish this federal evidence agenda on LGBTQ people, we also the the Office of Management and Budget here in the federal government, produced best practices on how to ask sexual orientation and gender identity questions. They say in that document quite a few times, you know, there's still research to be done. We may improve these questions over time, but at least gives people a baseline that they know that they can use to ask questions that are going to give them good data. So I'm hopeful that that's going to supercharge efforts to move forward with these questions across government. But I'll let the acting Kitt supplement that with your thoughts from outside government.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Yeah, no, I mean, I agree. I think I've seen this in in multiple domains in both administrative and investigator run scientific kind of communities or contexts for data collection. So, I mean, we know part of the impetus for the National Institute into Institutes of Health to convene the nascent panel on measurement. I mean, part of that kind of impetus was that at the same time, there was there were efforts to promote that more investigators and federal agencies collected information on sexual orientation, gender identity. There were a number of there was pushback on whether we knew how to do this. And, you know, our report lands with a set of recommendations. It's not necessarily the same recommendations everyone would land on. But the you know, we were at least able to, you know, communicate that. In fact, again, these have been collected for some time. There is a number of testing that has happened for at least a certain set of measures. It doesn't mean that they can't be improved. It doesn't mean that more work should not be supported to alter the measurement. But there is a strong starting place and no longer a good reason to claim that we have no idea how we would ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity. And when we say things like that, I know that sounds ridiculous to those who have been doing community based research, particularly in sexual health, literally for 40 years. But, you know, when you kind of come out of that that environment into the federal data collection context, it still somehow felt new. And that was a lot of the impetus for that needs to or in other subsequent work that Meghan and others have have noted.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Okay. Well, thank you. I'm going to jump into now some of our viewers submitted questions and we just got a question here. It this viewer writes, And it is clear that it is important to include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to better understand the experiences of LGBTQ plus people given the current hostile climate, however. How can researchers responsibly collect sexual orientation and gender identity data in a way that keeps respondents safe? For example? How can we advocate for sexual orientation, gender identity, data collection for foster youth? Even as states are weaponizing the child welfare system against queer youth and families?

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Great question. I mean, it is definitely something we need to continue to. To take very seriously. I think one of the things that we need to consider is, is to both see the threats, but also be very clear about where so the data collection happens and how that impacts the threat. So, for example, if we talk about, you know, Texas essentially and other states that might attempt to weaponize gender affirming care and create create standards, which first of all, the governor does not actually have the ability to create standards for what defines child abuse and neglect, but efforts to do that. You know, they're we're not talking about identifying trans youth in the system with foster care data collection. We're talking about your teacher in your community knowing that you provided gender affirming care to your child and reporting you to Child Protective Services. That is a whole nother mechanism that's outside of whether or not data have been collected. So it is important then, as we think about these real threats, that we're also very careful about how our understanding of how they connect to women when we're talking about administrative data collection and the context in which that data collection is happening. So, you know, again, that is a real threat, not likely connected to the identification of trans youth that are already under in a dependency custodial arrangement with the state and have already been removed from their homes of origin. And when we talk about foster foster care related data collection, those are the youth that we're talking about. So with that said, I will go back to the point I made earlier, which is particularly in a vulnerable setting like that, the types of information we expect the state to hold about the lives of these children, most of that is far more personal, far more damaging to their to their livelihood, to their transition into adulthood, the things that they've experience than whether or not they happen to identify as gay or trans in that moment. And we have every expectation that the state hold that information appropriately and confidentially. So I would ask that we don't kind of participate in making Sochi data collection all of a sudden more sensitive than those other types



of information that we know that they're expected to hold. And we work on how we hold the state accountable. We're doing the job that it is supposed to do.

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** Can I jump in there too? Just because Bianca is much more the relevant person to comment on the things that you just thoughtfully commented on. But let me just step back and take a broader point about a kind of responsible data collection and how we as researchers might contribute to that. I just want to pull back to the Brookings Report. Like when I read the Brookings report where they disaggregated the data across different types of surveys and across different age groups, I had not seen the data disaggregated that way. And the point that I would make is that we need more scholarship that kind of does that type of thing across different modes, across different lots of different aspects of survey data collection so that we can try to understand which groups we are missing. So it may be missing this is related to, for example, the hostile policy environment, which would not be that surprising. And then more fundamentally, or more importantly, then think about how that affects our interpretation of things like trends. So if you look at that picture of trends in earnings gaps that I showed you, which showed basically surprisingly no change in the gay male earnings penalty, despite a clear, rapid improvement in attitudes towards gay men. One very plausible hypothesis for that is that there are changes in who is being willing to identify themselves as being in a same sex couple over time, and that that's related to kind of unobserved determinants of earnings. So the broader point I think is just taking a taking account of the context within which people are volunteering their information.

**HANSI LO WANG:** We did get a number of questions raising concerns about data privacy. And then once another related question is who has access to this data, which I guess is a very complicated question to ask, because it depending on the data source who's collecting it, and we're talking about the states as in the governor, are we talking about a specific state government? Are we talking about the US federal government? Where are the different policies in place? Meghan If I can put you on the spot and you also was a former advisor on the Census Bureau Advisory Committee, talks a lot about these issues. What what is the privacy policy regarding how the Census Bureau and generally federal agencies when they're collecting this demographic data?

**MEGHAN MAURY:** There's a time when I try to not get too lawyerly in the answer to this question. But there's a really there's a big web of protections for federal data, and they are especially strong when it comes to survey data collection. So the census is protected under Title 13, which is the statute that that creates those privacy protections and standards. But there are analogous things across government. IRS data, for example, is protected by Title 26. The data in the rest of the federal statistical system is is protected by something we lovingly call sexy. All of these both create government wide and individual penalties for any sharing of the data. So that is really well protected and each agency has a layer of implementation of that, that that looks like a data stewardship committee that talks about how they're how they're going to make sure that the those strong protections are really put into place for for every data collection instrument and the data that they hold and the data that they that they publish. So on the survey side, it's extraordinarily strong protection. On the administrative collection side, it's a different set of laws. They mostly do the same, same thing. It's a little bit more of a patchwork. So I think on the administrative side, it's good for us to be more thoughtful about what those privacy protections look like and make sure that we're acting within those bounds. But as Bianca so said so clearly in the last the other you know, those those those protections are just protecting data on our sexual orientation and gender identity. They're protecting other very sensitive information about ourselves, including other criminalized identities, like when your doctor asks you questions about your drug use or your experience with sex work or other criminalized activities. Those are those are also protected with the same laws. So happy to go lawyer with anybody, anytime. But I will say that the protections are strong and that there are a really strong network of advocates external to government who are really invested in making sure that those protections stay strong and are enforced well.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Switching gears. A different kind of a line of questioning. Where do intersex persons, persons with variations and sex characteristics fit into this data gap issue? Given that intersex traits do not fit neatly into either sexuality or gender identity.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Yeah, that is correct. So our report, the Nasser report, we did take up the issue of the measurement of sex characteristics. And, you know, the primary conclusion is that at this point we're not in a place of testing measurement for intersex status to be able to clearly, like, confidently recommend which measures and in which context it should be measured. However, we do know that globally as well as increasingly in the U.S.. Communities are tying the concerns of those with intersex status or intersex identities or intersex conditions with those who are LGBTQ. Plus, you know, this is within a broader framework of not fitting into kind of a heteronormative or, you know, an expectation of a cisgender body. So within that context, intersex condition issues are often or are becoming increasingly tied to LGBTQ issues. And so, you know, at this point, we know it's something we need to be thinking about. We know that this is a,

you know, a marginalized, potentially stigmatized community in many ways, but also invisible in many ways and not. And as you noted, honestly, not necessarily strongly identified with LGBTQ people at all. So, you know, it's something that we should remain committed to, understanding how best to document both the estimates of this population and their experiences and understand to what extent are there overlapping concerns with the way stigma plays out for LGBTQ people and in economic and other settings? I don't know if you want to respond to that too.

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** I just wanted to jump in just since in my presentation I referenced New Zealand, including a direct question. Their question is were you born with a variation of sex characteristics, parentheses, otherwise known as intersex variation? And the response options are Yes. No. Don't know or prefer not to say. So from my sense, I think that might be the first large scale evidence from a country where we will be able to link that to responses to employment, earnings, poverty, health care, etc..

**HANSI LO WANG:** Is there a survey that quantitative researchers can use as a good example about how to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity? Is there kind of like a best practices for in 2023 as of June 26? Where can people find best practices right now?

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** There's a few locations for that, I think, at this point. And like I said, they may not be exactly the same. The Nasser Report on sexual orientation and gender identity measurement, which I think we published, was the last year or the year before. Now to this point, 2021.

**HANSI LO WANG:** This is the National Academies of Science.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Medicine and Engineering and Medicine. And a report was convened on measuring sex, gender identity and sexual orientation and including myself. And I think my eight other colleagues included. Nancy Bates was one of the chairs from the census. And so we had a set of recommendations for the measurement of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. But this is one of a few different sets of recommendations. I think Meghan can speak to others. They all relatively overlap. Most of them kind of land in the similar places that we've seen measure these measures that have actually been tested and used on large scale surveys primarily.

**MEGHAN MAURY:** The only thing I'll add to that is a is actually a a non ad, which is to say that the the the US government best practices document that was published really does focus in on on survey data collection rather than on other forms of research. So I would defer to the Bianca's guidance to take a look at at least some report as a good for first place to go.

**HANSI LO WANG:** Another line of questioning here. Despite the consistent findings to the contrary of your rights, there seems to be a persistent belief among many that LGBTQ people are more financially well off than the general population. Why does this persist? If it does, what are its consequences and what can be done to address it?

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** Maybe I should take that since I'm the card carrying unrest in the group. This is a fantastic question. I would direct folks to the outstanding work of my colleague Lee Badgett, who has written extensively about this question in a book called Money Myths and Change. This question didn't ask where it comes from, but I think where it comes from is strongly tied to data, because that myth came from evidence, from surveys of people, from, for example, subscribers to Out magazine or The Advocate. And it will maybe come as no surprise that if you have enough money to subscribe to magazines, that you might be more financially well off. More generally, it's related to this DINK hypothesis dual income, no kids, and the idea that people have just lots of just queer people might have lots of disposable income lying around. I don't think that the same perception holds for trans folks as it does for in particular, the sexual minority folks. And I also don't know and I think that's a great subquestion within the question. I don't know how prevalent it still is. It certainly used to be prevalent. I don't know how prevalent it still is. The consequences, I think, are that people have are missing the what the research clearly shows about that I referenced earlier, which is that for gay men, they you know, we want to compare people in the same basic situation in life with the same education, with the same race, ethnicity, etc.. And that evidence is incontrovertible that gay men earn significantly less, though lesbians do earn more. But again, from resumé audit studies and experimental studies, they get called back for interviews less. They are definitely facing labor market challenges. What can be done to address it is \$1,000,000 question. That is more than the 2 minutes that we have left. So I think unfortunately, I'm going to punt on that one.

**HANSI LO WANG:** There's clearly a lot more we can talk about, but our hour together is almost over. So I want to turn back to each panelist, give you just shy of a minute to bring up anything We have discussed that you think we should all know about the LGBTQ plus data gap before we wrap up.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** I mean, the one thing I just because we didn't raise it specifically very much in this presentation is the significance of race and the racial demographics of the LGBTQ population. And to the extent that many studies tend to show that the LGBTQ population is has a higher proportion of racial minorities than the non LGBTQ population. So something to think about as we talk about LGBTQ economic disparities broadly and the extent to which that's also driven by experiences as racial minorities, and then even to and then even knowing that race alone may not explain the LGBTQ economic outcomes. Just understanding what those distinct experiences look like for those who are both racial minorities and sexual and or gender minorities.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Thank you, Kitt and Meghan. 10 seconds each.

**CHRISTOPHER (KITT) CARPENTER:** I totally agree with what Bianca said. What I would say is there's going to be a data explosion. We are on the weird part of the curve where, like, soon there's going to be so much data and we need young people to study this extensively.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** And my last thing to add, building off of what Kitt said is I really look forward to partnering with everyone on this call to make sure that we're also using that data to advance equity once we have it.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** All right. We are at the hour. Thank you very much, everyone, for joining us. Thank you for watching. And stay safe out there.

**BIANCA D.M. WILSON:** Thank you.