INTRODUCTION: DATA AND DIFFERENCE

Queer data is a tension. On one hand, it freezes in time and space particular ideas about what it means to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or queer. It establishes these meanings as categories, which are fed into counting machines and used as the basis for decision-making. This construction and deployment of categories are at odds with the *queering* of data, which critically questions the foundations upon which these categories stand, the value granted to some identities above others and who *actually* benefits from the collection, analysis and use of data about LGBTQ people. Queer data is more than a study of individuals that sit outside the categories of heterosexual or cisgender. It is equally a brash, confrontational and in-your-face challenge to conventional understandings of how data and identities intersect – how people respond to queer data is either their problem or their wake-up call. As an approach to data and identities, queer data disrupts the binaries of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and cis/trans and asks us to reconsider the notion that 'numbers speak for themselves'. When data captures the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people, numbers do not speak for themselves – they always speak for someone. As I will argue, decisions made about who to count, what to count and how to count are not value-neutral but bring to life a particular vision of the social world.[1] Queer data exposes the decisions made about data, from collection to its use for action, to ensure that data about LGBTQ people is used to construct a social world that values and improves the lives of LGBTQ people.

Gender, sex and sexuality data is having a particular moment in the UK with increased interest from those outside of academic contexts and those engaged in data practices in the public, private and voluntary sectors.[2] Some

[1] I use the term 'social world' to underscore that perceptions of reality are contested, contextual and shaped by our actions rather than something objective that exists beyond us.

[2] A constellation of activities related to gender, sex and sexuality data occurred between 2019 and 2021, including the Scottish Government's formation of a Sex and Gender in Data Working Group, proposals to reform the Gender Recognition Act in the Scottish and UK Parliaments, and debate about approaches to the collection of diversity monitoring data in public, private and voluntary sector organizations.

of this interest relates to the UK's 2021 and 2022 censuses, which, for the first time, capture data about the population's sexual orientation, gender identity (England and Wales) and trans status/history (Scotland), discussed in Chapter 3. The addition of these questions marks a landmark moment for LGBTQ representation and the potential for improved evidence to address inequality. Yet, participation in the census, and other data collection exercises, is a double-edged sword as they require LGBTQ people to engage in practices that flattens the diversity of experiences and design-out certain lives. This data dilemma, the potential benefits of being counted versus the risk of being counted in ways that are inaccurate or further entrench inequality, might seem relatively new. However, there exists a long history of political and social struggles over the design of classification systems that present themselves as 'purely technical' but promote a biased account of the social world.[3] Several studies have investigated the implications of this data dilemma for women, indigenous communities and people of colour.[4] María Lugones has described how mechanisms of 'heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classifications' were forged by colonial powers as a 'colonial/modern gender system' that has since shaped contemporary ideas about identity classifications.[5] Lauren E. Bridges has also explained that histories of naming and categorization 'have long been entangled in histories of sovereignty, colonialism, subjugation and exploitation'.[6] Critical race theorists, such as Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, have similarly argued that races operate as 'categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient'.[7] Although 'invented' as a category, the effects of race on social relations and people's life opportunities are material and multiple.[8] *Queer Data* expands on feminist, postcolonial and critical race scholarship to explore how,

[3] Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 196.
[4] Scholarship includes Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020); Maggie Walter and Chris Andersen, *Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology* (Walnut Creek: Routledge, 2013); Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Medford: Polity, 2019).
[5] María Lugones, 'Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System', *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 187.
[6] Lauren E. Bridges, 'Digital Failure: Unbecoming the "Good" Data Subject through Entropic, Fugitive, and Queer Data', *Big Data & Society* 8, no. 1 (1 January 2021): 2.
[7] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (London: New York University Press, 2001), 7.
[8] Zeus Leonardo, 'Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in Post-Civil Rights America', *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (1 December 2005): 409.

among LGBTQ individuals, those who stand to benefit from 'being counted' also risk engaging with technologies that might normalize categories and practices that hamper rather than help the wider LGBTQ population.

The topic of difference has energized the work of LGBTQ researchers, practitioners and activists since, at least, the middle decades of the twentieth-century. Although this work addressed themes such as social mobilization, political organization and cultural representation, the experiences of people we might now describe as LGBTQ have historically eluded data collectors and analysts, an absence I explore in Chapter 1.[9] In rare instances where data about individuals that transgressed normative ideas about gender, sex or sexuality was captured in datasets, it predominantly featured as a means to pathologize or stigmatize, record acts understood as criminal or deviant, or differentiate individuals from the normative majority. Knowing more about the membership and contours of an identity group can inform decisions made about the allocation of resources, changes in legislation, access to services and protections under the law. Gathering evidence of a problem is one of the key methods used to advance the rights of marginalized groups in the UK. For example, public bodies are required to publish relevant and proportionate information that demonstrates their compliance with the duties described in the 2010 Equality Act.[10] This includes the collection, analysis and publication of employees and service users' data, as it relates to nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment (trans status), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. Heightened data competence can therefore ensure data is used to improve the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people rather than only serve the interests of, what Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein describe as, the three S's: science (universities), surveillance (governments) and selling (corporations).[11] As a contested and political practice, the collection, analysis and presentation of data about LGBTQ people are partly constructed through administrative

[9] John Grundy and Miriam Smith, 'Activist Knowledges in Queer Politics', *Economy and Society* 36, no. 2 (May 2007): 301.

[10] The Equality Act has three general duties: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, noted in Equality and Human Rights Commission, 'Public Sector Equality Duty', 26 March 2021.

[11] D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.

decisions made at each stage of this journey, as I discuss in Chapter 2. The production of meaning and subsequent distribution of life chances have the effect of reflecting an incomplete account of LGBTQ lives and experiences to the outside world and among LGBTQ people, whose sense of self is informed by this partial reflection. To minimize the risk of mistakes being made, LGBTQ people need to lead this work and seize control of data that impacts their lives, rather than trust that others will understand, or care enough to understand, experiences that sit beyond their personal frames of reference.

For this reason, *Queer Data* is unapologetic in its focus on the use of data for action that improves the lives of people about whom the data relates. With a focus on events in the UK, *Queer Data* offers an accessible introduction to the interplay between queer theory and gender, sex and sexuality data.[12] Peppered with examples from my work as an equality, diversity and inclusion researcher in Scotland and engagement in the design process of recent UK censuses, *Queer Data* encourages researchers, practitioners and activists to think about data differently and ask critical questions such as 'Why do we collect data this way?', 'Whose interests does data serve?' and 'Why do we collect data at all?' *Queer Data* charts a practical path through this tension that acknowledges data's potential to recreate simplified, stereotypical and exclusionary rules but also operates as a tool to gather evidence, document inequality and bring about change. The conflictual ingredients of queer data therefore require researchers to adopt a mixed approach that elevates the stories of LGBTQ people but also exposes the constructed structures upon which all minority *and* majority identity characteristics stand. By demonstrating that data about cis and heterosexual people also has a history – shaped by social, cultural, economic and political factors – queer data ensures that LGBTQ people are not further marginalized or defined as the 'other' by the research tools used to investigate their lives and experiences.[13]

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[12] Recent studies that have also explored the intersection of queer theory and gender, sex and sexuality data include Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, eds., *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow, and Kristen Schilt, eds., *Other, Please Specify*: *Queer Methods in Sociology* (University of California Press, 2018); Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim, eds., *Imagining Queer Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

[13] For discussion of queer theory's disruption of the centre and the margins, see Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer, '"I Can't Even Think Straight" "Queer" Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology', *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 2 (1994): 178.

Count me in

This book is for those interested in research and policy about data and identity who might not necessarily describe themselves as an academic, scholar or statistician. This reflects my background. I live in Edinburgh, Scotland and – for five years – worked as a researcher in the higher education sector. *Queer Data* is based on my experiences of collecting, analysing and using a variety of data related to the identity characteristics of staff and students. My job involved providing advice and guidance to university staff, mainly practitioners working in human resources or EDI teams, on the use of data to identify how staff and students are impacted differently in terms of access, participation and success. From these experiences, I know there are many other diversity and inclusion leads, equality activists, data analysts, research officers and policy managers engaged in on-the-ground work with gender, sex and sexuality data keen to incorporate critical ideas into everyday practices. I started to write this book in response to misconceptions I came across related to data about LGBTQ staff and students. University practitioners, tasked with the responsibility to collect data, contacted me to ask how to undertake meaningful analysis of a minority group when the numbers were 'too small'? What was the rationale for collecting data on identity characteristics other than gender or race? Did they have any business asking staff and students about their sexual orientation? It also became clear to me that, both inside and outside higher education, a small number of campaign groups had weaponized gender, sex and sexuality data in an attempt to roll back the rights of LGBTQ people.[14] This was particularly evident in the spread of misinformation and fearmongering about self-identification and proposed reform of the 2004 Gender Recognition Act in the Scottish and UK Parliaments (legislation intended to simplify the process by which trans people gain legal recognition of their lived gender, through a Gender Recognition Certificate, and change the sex marker on their birth certificate).[15] In one instance, those opposed to

[14] For example, LGB Alliance campaigned against the inclusion of materials on 'gender identity' in school lessons on relationships and sex education, see LGB Alliance, 'Schools Crisis? Which Crisis?', LGB Alliance.

[15] The UK Government has described the current system for legal gender recognition as 'bureaucratic and intrusive', while the Scottish Government has labelled it 'intrusive and onerous', in Government Equalities Office, 'LGBT Action Plan: Improving the Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People' (London: Government Equalities Office, 2018), 22; Scottish Government, 'Review of the Gender Recognition Act 2004: Analysis of Responses to the Public Consultation Exercise' (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2018), 23.

the reform of the GRA distributed leaflets that falsely claimed 82 per cent of UK voters were against the proposals, although this claim was subsequently described as 'Mostly false' by the fact-checking news service The Ferret.[16] Accompanied by conspiratorial ideas that proponents of a 'sex-denialist transgender ideology' had captured control of policymaking in Scottish and UK political institutions, campaign groups used data to position trans lives as a legitimate topic of debate, a concern I explore in more detail in Chapter 7.[17] With data about gender, sex and sexuality increasingly understood as a hot topic, its use to delegitimize the lives and experiences of trans people highlights how a greater focus on data can also cause harm to the people about whom the data relates.

I felt frustrated that a general lack of data literacy meant that people rarely looked beyond the headline numbers. I started to write in response. My writing started as a series of blog posts on the practice of EDI work in large public, private and voluntary sector organizations (such as local government, universities, businesses and charities); specific developments in Scotland related to the design of the census; and the Scottish Government's formation of a Sex and Gender in Data Working Group.[18] There was something timely about this work as censuses in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland asked questions about people's sexual orientation and trans/gender identity for the first time.[19] Decisions made about these census questions were important as censuses do more than simply populate a national dataset for researchers and policymakers, a topic I discuss in Chapter 3. As an exercise conducted every ten years in the UK, they also establish norms for diversity monitoring and data collection that other major organizations tend to follow. Censuses show how data about LGBTQ people goes beyond the identification of problems. It also means something for LGBTQ people. Being included, whether in a list of identity options on a diversity monitoring form or a national census, is an act of registration. Seeing yourself reflected in a data collection exercise can positively shape how you perceive your own identity.[20] It is a means to fight

[16] Alastair Brian, 'Claim of 82 Per Cent Opposition to Transgender Self-ID Is Mostly False', *The Ferret*, 2 July 2019.
[17] Jane Clare Jones and Lisa MacKenzie, 'The Political Erasure of Sex: Sex and the Census', 2020, 7–8.
[18] See Scottish Government, 'Sex and Gender in Data Working Group'.
[19] A trans/gender identity question is only asked in censuses in Scotland, England and Wales.
[20] Browne, 'Queer Quantification or Queer(y)ing Quantification: Creating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Heterosexual Citizens through Governmental Social Research', 233.

back against opponents working to silence and erase particular lives: if you appear on the form, it is harder to claim you do not exist. Queer data is also a thorn in the side for liberal figures who understand the addition of more categories or use of inclusive language as mission accomplished. These actions are just the beginning and overlook the construction of gender, sex and sexuality categories, the relationship between these concepts, the mismatch between how people self-identify and how they are perceived by others and the fluidity of gender, sex and sexuality to change across time and space.[21] As discussions about the collection of gender, sex and sexuality data continue to grow among those outside of academic communities, *Queer Data* provides an accessible introduction to these issues, highlights the potential benefits and dangers of data practices for LGBTQ people, and encourages readers to take action.

What is queer data?

Rob Kitchin describes data as 'the raw material produced by abstracting the world into categories, measures, and other representational forms – numbers, characters, symbols, images, sounds, electromagnetic waves, bits – that constitute the building blocks from which information and knowledge are created'.[22] Queer data is more than using data to tell stories about the lives and experiences of LGBTQ individuals: the presentation of data is also an opportunity for LGBTQ people to see themselves reflected, although this mirror image is never a truly accurate representation. In 2016 the Office for National Statistics estimated that 2.5 per cent of the UK population aged sixteen or above identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation 'other' than heterosexual.[23] The Government Equalities Office also estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 trans people live in the UK, though Gender Identity Research & Education Society has argued that the number of people who are 'likely to be gender incongruent to some degree' is more likely

[21] Laurel Westbrook and Aliya Saperstein, 'New Categories Are Not Enough: Rethinking the Measurement of Sex and Gender in Social Surveys', *Gender & Society* 29, no. 4 (1 August 2015): 537.
[22] Rob Kitchin, *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures & Their Consequences* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014), 1.
[23] Government Equalities Office, 'National LGBT Survey: Research Report' (Manchester: Government Equalities Office, 2018), 14.

around 650,000 or 1 per cent of the UK population.[24] Since August 2019 the polling company YouGov has tracked responses from a sample of just under 2,000 UK adults to the question how do you identify your sexuality on a scale of zero to six, where zero is 'completely heterosexual' and six is 'completely homosexual'. When presented with a scale, in January 2021 just 66 per cent of adults described themselves as 'completely heterosexual'.[25] Data, from sources such as the ONS and YouGov, enables individuals to position their personal experiences within a larger, social tapestry. Feeling part of a community can mobilize people to recognize a shared struggle and take action to change the status quo.[26] Data about LGBTQ lives is not something that people stumble upon, already existing and awaiting discovery – it is produced through the ideas and actions of people in different cultural contexts and historical moments.

Queer data brings together two distinct, though related, strands. Firstly, gender, sex and sexuality data particularly (though not exclusively) as it relates to the lives and experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQ. My use of the expression 'gender, sex and sexuality' focuses on how researchers and analysts might deploy these terms in data projects, and adopts the following definitions:

- First, gender is used to describe a person's social and personal identity as a man, woman, something between or beyond these concepts; how this is expressed to the outside world; and how this is perceived by others. Gender is enacted in day-to-day life through norms, roles and relationships; those who break from these expectations often face stigma, discrimination or exclusion, depending on the cultural and social context. An individual's gender expression may not conform with their gender identity, just as gender may not correspond with a person's sex assigned at birth or information presented on legal or official documents. Some people may not identify with any gender.

[24] The GEO noted that no robust measure of the trans population in the UK exists. Their estimate is therefore based on studies from other countries that indicate between 0.35 per cent and 1 per cent of the population are likely to identify as trans. The GIRES figure is cited in Terry Reed, 'Written Evidence Submitted by GIRES to the Transgender Equality Inquiry', 2015, 2.
[25] YouGov, 'How Brits Describe Their Sexuality', 21 January 2021.
[26] Writing about the history of gay and lesbian activism in the United States, Jeffrey Escoffier notes, 'homosexual emancipation is not possible without a politics of knowledge', in Jeffrey Escoffier, *American Homo: Community and Perversity* (London: Verso, 2018), 118.

- Second, sex is an identity based on primary and secondary sex characteristics, such as genitalia, reproductive functions, hormones, breasts and facial hair. In the UK, the term 'sex' encapsulates concepts that include biological characteristics, legal status (for example, the sex marker on an individual's birth certificate) and a person's lived identity (in other words, how they self-identify and present themselves to others). Although distinct, concepts of gender and sex rely on each other for meaning: sex is not exclusively biological (as it is understood through gendered ideas about bodies), just as gender is not exclusively a social or cultural phenomenon (how we experience our gendered bodies is informed by sex). As Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, physical bodies do not exist outside of the social meanings we ascribe to them.[27] A queer approach to data is therefore not invested in the erasure or overwriting of sex as a category. In particular, the collection, analysis and use of data about sex (as it relates to biological characteristics) are important in many specific situations such as matters related to sex-specific health conditions. However, consideration of the sexed body in isolation is never enough. People's everyday lives are impacted by how ideas about bodies intersect with power structures in the social world to create and deny life opportunities according to constructed notions of sex and gender. My definition of sex therefore accommodates the binary poles of female/male as well as space between and beyond those poles, for example intersex and non-binary people.
- Third, sexuality is inclusive of identities, attractions and actions that are sexual and/or romantic and directed towards people of the same sex or gender, a different sex or gender, multiple sexes or genders, or no sexes or genders. Data about sexuality can take many forms, such as information about the proportion of men who have sex with men to the number of women married to other women.

The terms presented here are intended to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. How someone defines their gender, sex or sexuality can vary from person to person and, for some people, is experienced as something

[27] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), chap. Introduction.

fluid and context-specific that can change over time.[28] Furthermore, my use of distinct terms should not obscure how gender, sex and sexuality are contingent on each other to establish meaning nor should readers assume that concepts exist frozen in time and space. Gender modality, which describes the correspondence or lack of correspondence between one's current sex/gender and their sex/gender assigned at birth, is a term that encapsulates trans and cis identities, as well as ways of identifying beyond the trans/cis binary. Florence Ashley, a transfeminine jurist and bioethicist, explains how gender modality 'recognises the difference between, say, trans and cis women, while at the same time recognising that this difference is not one that makes trans women any less or worse women […]. Whereas trans and cis women have a different gender modality, they share the same gender identity: woman'.[29] Movement between and beyond genders and sexes, as well as changes in an individual's sexuality during the course of their life, requires a fluid approach. This approach must also accommodate linguistic, cultural and conceptual particularities that emerge in different spaces, as well as accounting for absences (such as asexuality and agender) in the collection, analysis and use of gender, sex and sexuality data. Furthermore, it is not possible to unpick attributes related to gender, sex and sexuality from wider intersectional experiences that mark and shape our everyday lives. As observed by Karen Celis et al., 'gender is never just about sex but varies by race, ethnicity, nation, class, and a variety of other dimensions of social life'.[30] My use of the LGBTQ acronym is therefore a simplified shorthand. Similarly, my use of the expression 'LGBTQ people' should be read as inclusive of the diverse and multiple peoples that constitute each dimension of the acronym. While paying heed to Lee Edelman's claim that 'queerness cannot define an identity, it can only ever disturb one', I include Q in the

[28] For discussion, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough', *Sciences* 33 (1 January 1993): 20–4; Amanda Bittner and Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, 'Sex Isn't Gender: Reforming Concepts and Measurements in the Study of Public Opinion', *Political Behavior* 39, no. 4 (1 December 2017): 1021; Anna Lindqvist, Marie Gustafsson Sendén, and Emma A Renström, 'What Is Gender, Anyway: A Review of the Options for Operationalising Gender', *Psychology & Sexuality* Online (18 February 2020): 4.

[29] Florence Ashley, '"Trans" Is My Gender Modality: A Modest Terminological Proposal', in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2.

[30] Karen Celis et al., 'Introduction: Gender and Politics: A Gendered World, a Gendered Discipline', in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, ed. Georgina Waylen et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

acronym to recognize the wider range of gender and sexual identities (such as asexual, gender-fluid, pansexual and polysexual) not explicitly included under the LGBT umbrella, as well as those who identify their gender, sex and/or sexuality as 'queer'.[31]

Queer, as an identity label, differs from its use in the second strand of queer data, which examines the *queering* of research methods. Building on Edelman's definition of queerness, Laura Doan draws a distinction between 'queerness-as-being' and 'queerness-as-method' in her historical investigation of same-sex relations between women in early twentieth-century Britain.[32] Doan provides a framework that brings together data *about* LGBTQ people and the *queering* of approaches deployed to collect, analyse and use this data. A queer approach presents more questions than answers. It asks how categories such as 'gay', 'lesbian', 'trans' (and 'queer') emerge, what marks the borders of these categories, who do they exclude and how are they contested?[33] In their edited collection *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash describe queer research as 'any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations'.[34] In the more recent edited collection *Other, Please Specify*, CJ Pascoe describes 'a queer social science' as 'a method in tension with itself' that 'suggests ways to bring the experiences of "actual people" into dialogue with queer theory'.[35] The clash between queer theory and actual people forces us to consider who is the intended beneficiary of data about LGBTQ people. Most LGBTQ people already know that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia exist and permeate the structures of everyday life. Whether it is a feeling of discomfort that happens when you travel on public transport, the fear of being misgendered when you meet someone for the first time or the

[31] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 17.
[32] Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), viii–ix.
[33] Ki Namaste, 'The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality', *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 2 (1994): 224.
[34] Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, 'Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction', in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 4.
[35] CJ Pascoe, 'What to Do with Actual People?: Thinking through a Queer Social Science Method', in *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*, ed. D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow, and Kristen Schilt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 301, 302.

use of gender-neutral terms such as 'spouse' or 'partner' to avoid having to out yourself. For LGBTQ people with first-hand experiences, data is not necessary to prove the existence of these problems.

Furthermore, who is involved in decision-making about gender, sex and sexuality data? The state is a key operator in the generation of data, through administrative sources such as tax records and exercises such as the census, and the use of data to provide services to citizens.[36] Around the world, Yoan Mantha and Simon Hudson's analysis of articles published in leading journals for research into artificial intelligence found that of the 4,000 researchers published, 88 per cent were men.[37] In UK universities, in the 2018/19 academic year just 18.4 per cent of computer science students were women.[38] This means that the next generation of data scientists will likely be overwhelmingly male and design future projects, based on their own experiences of the social world, that default to a male subject.[39] D'Ignazio and Klein describe this phenomenon as a privilege hazard, where those in dominant positions are blinded by their social, political and economic interests and unable to see problems that exist for people different from themselves.[40] Yet, in the global tech sector, there are notable examples of gay men in powerful positions, such as Tim Cook (Chief Executive Officer of Apple) and Peter Thiel (Co-founder of Paypal and Director on the board of Facebook).[41] Meaningful change therefore needs to go beyond the logic of more (gay, male) faces in high places and instead reconfigure how those who design data practices and systems conceptualize gender, sex and

[36] Kitchin, *The Data Revolution*, 114.
[37] Yoan Mantha and Simon Hudson, 'Estimating the Gender Ratio of AI Researchers Around the World', Element AI Lab, 2018.
[38] Advance HE, 'Equality in Higher Education: Student Statistical Report' (London, 2020).
[39] See Caroline Criado-Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019). The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence also identified the lack of diversity in the AI workforce as a key issue in the design and implementation of equitable technology, in Clementine Collett and Sarah Dillon, 'AI and Gender: Four Proposals for Future Research' (Cambridge: The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, 2019), 26.
[40] D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.
[41] Furthermore, a 2020 survey conducted for Ukie, the trade association for the UK's games and interactive entertainment industry, found that while 70 per cent of the workforce identified as male, 21 per cent also identified as LGBTQ+. We therefore should not assume that those working in fields related to data are disproportionately heterosexual or cis, in Mark Taylor, 'UK Games Industry Census: Understanding Diversity in the UK Games Industry Workforce' (Ukie, February 2020), 8, 9.

sexuality data so that 'data about us' becomes synonymous with 'data for us', as described in more depth in Chapter 7.

Expanded interest in data about LGBTQ people, among researchers and the general population, has brought with it increased scrutiny of the borders of gender, sex, sexuality and trans identities. The policing of these categories, often by people who do not identify as LGBTQ, tends to foreground biological characteristics, legal documents or sexual practices that fail to acknowledge how identities gain value through the meanings attached to them by society and the uneven distribution of power. Much of this focus involves the concept of self-identification, discussed in Chapter 6. This is where an individual is understood as best-placed to describe their identity characteristics rather than the state, a medical practitioner nor any other 'expert witness'. For opponents of a queer approach to data, self-identification and the fluidity of LGBTQ identities are framed as problems: queer data is understood as postmodern, political and anti-scientific.[42] Gender, in particular, is singled out as something based on social factors such as upbringing, environment, culture and history. This ignores the body of scholarship that demonstrates how social factors impact most, if not all, markers of identity (including sex).[43] A queer approach to data problematizes the authority to categorize LGBTQ people – whether through practices, identities, communities or something else entirely – and who determines if identity claims are valid and an 'accurate' representation of the social world.

Although *Queer Data* foregrounds the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people, the *queering* of methods has implications for all data collection, analysis and presentation, whether or not it relates to LGBTQ individuals. Importantly, the application of 'queer methods' to categories such as 'cis' and 'heterosexual' can disrupt assumptions and biases that have traditionally positioned these identities as default, ahistorical, natural or normal. The

[42] For a discussion of sex and gender in survey design, see Alice Sullivan, 'Sex and the Census: Why Surveys Should Not Conflate Sex and Gender Identity', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 23, no. 5 (2 September 2020): 7; Andi Fugard, 'Should Trans People Be Postmodernist in the Streets but Positivist in the Spreadsheets? A Reply to Sullivan', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 23, no. 5 (25 May 2020): 525–31; Sally Hines, 'Counting the Cost of Difference: A Reply to Sullivan', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 23, no. 5 (2 September 2020): 533–8.

[43] See Judith Lorber, 'Believing Is Seeing: Biology as Ideology', *Gender and Society* 7, no. 4 (1993): 568–81; Linda Nicholson, 'Interpreting Gender', *Signs* 20, no. 1 (1994): 79–105; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

fusion of data *about* LGBTQ people and the *queering* of methods used to collect, analyse and present this data becomes something more than the sum of its constituent parts. Queer data emerges as the product of tension between categories and anti-categories, assimilation and difference, intrinsic qualities and social constructs, and individuals and populations.

Different types of data

This book explores the *queering* of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is numerical data that, as the name suggests, can be quantified and analysed using a range of statistical methods. When we talk about quantitative data we usually discuss statistics such as the number of students in UK higher education who disclosed that their gender identity is different from that assigned at birth (13,245 in the 2018/19 academic year) or the proportion of Members of Parliament in Westminster who openly identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual (8.6 per cent, as of July 2021).[44] The collection of quantitative data allows for different types of statistical analyses, which might include the calculation of averages (for example, the mean age of LGBTQ staff in an organization), cross-tabulations (when two or more pieces of data are analysed together, such as the proportion of students who are Indian and bisexual) or more advanced analyses that can identify statistical significance (whether or not a finding was the result of chance). Browne has described a lack of critical engagement between users of quantitative methods and those involved in the field of queer studies, as 'quantitative methods require the use of categories' whereas a queer approach 'often eschews the use of labels and definitional fixities in favour of fluid discussions of practices, lives and relegating processes'.[45] Laurel Westbrook et al. explain that 'quantitative methods have long been characterized as both positivist and reductionist, and thus unable to represent systems of oppression such as sexuality, gender, and race with complexity and nuance'.[46] David Gillborn et al. have also discussed how methods used to collect quantitative data, such as surveys, 'can reproduce human bias' and 'should lead us to treat

[44] Advance HE, 'Equality in Higher Education', 301; John Peart, 'LGBT MP', LGBT MP, 2021.
[45] Browne, 'Queer Quantification or Queer(y)Ing Quantification', 231, 248.
[46] Laurel Westbrook, Jamie Budnick, and Aliya Saperstein, 'Dangerous Data: Seeing Social Surveys through the Sexuality Prism', *Sexualities* Online (10 February 2021): 2.

quantitative analyses with at least as much caution as when considering qualitative research and its findings'.[47] The operation of quantitative methods, particularly in large-scale exercises such as national censuses, can mask design decisions about how to categorize groups and who to count.

Qualitative data, in contrast, is about qualities: information that does not involve numbers or numerical data. Qualitative data includes transcripts from interviews or focus groups, open-text responses in surveys and sources such as images, song lyrics, film and television dialogue. Analysis of qualitative data can present rich findings and insights into how and why things have happened. Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data does not require a large sample of participants to conduct analysis and provide meaningful results. For example, whereas a survey requires a certain number of people to respond, a one-to-one interview needs just one researcher and one participant. Analysis of qualitative data can take many forms. This might include thematic analysis, where a source is reviewed to identify key themes, or statistical analysis, where qualitative concepts (such as satisfaction) are transformed into quantitative data using a scale of response options (for example, where respondents select an option between 'very dissatisfied' and 'very satisfied').

Quantitative and qualitative methods often overlap. Aside from the transformation of qualitative concepts into quantitative data, qualitative data can help 'plug the gaps' and explain the 'why' of quantitative data trends. For example, we know that one-third of LGBT people in the UK aged sixty-five and over drink alcohol almost every day.[48] However, this data alone does not explain why a difference might exist between LGBT people and the general population. To better understand this issue we need to use qualitative data to help answer the question of why, which could involve running focus groups, conducting one-to-one interviews or analysing open-text survey responses. Feminist scholars, such Ann Oakley and Donna Haraway, are central to how we understand the use of research methods to collect data about the social world. Oakley, for example, championed the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure research findings

[47] David Gillborn, Paul Warmington, and Sean Demack, 'QuantCrit: Education, Policy, "Big Data" and Principles for a Critical Race Theory of Statistics', *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21, no. 2 (4 March 2018): 159.
[48] Stonewall, 'LGBT in Britain – Health Report' (London, November 2018), 16.

distinguish between personal experience and collective oppression.[49] Haraway, along with Sandra Harding and Linda Alcoff, devised an approach called standpoint theory, which highlighted the importance of disclosing the limits of researchers' knowledge.[50] Both approaches involve reflexive considerations of the interplay between researcher and participant, the strengths and weaknesses of 'insider' and 'outsider' research, and the biases and assumptions that researchers bring to their studies – themes explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

The power of queer data

Gender, sex and sexuality data can help address many of society's inequalities. Data enables us to know how many people identify with a particular identity group, this group's experience of services such as healthcare and education, and relative levels of advantage and disadvantage (which involves comparing data for one group against another group or a defined benchmark). Data can expose the effects of patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia on the systems and structures we rely upon to navigate our everyday lives. Whether it's differences in the use of transport networks, perceptions of crime or success in education, data is central to the diagnosis of a problem and decisions made about how to respond.

Discussions about identity data in the UK tend to focus on headline statistics about a small number of issues, for example, the difference in average pay between men and women or the gap in educational qualifications awarded to people from different racial groups. The reasons for this focus are multiple, including longer histories of collecting data on gender and race and legal requirements for organizations to report particular information.[51] Although data about the gender pay gap or race awarding gap are hugely important, and has focused attention on these inequalities, those engaged in the collection, analysis and use of data about identity characteristics (myself

[49] See Ann Oakley, 'Paradigm Wars: Some Thoughts on a Personal and Public Trajectory', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 2, no. 3 (January 1999): 247–54.
[50] For a more detailed account of how Haraway, Harding and Alcoff's scholarship relates to data practices, see D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.
[51] For example, since 2017 all employers in England, Scotland and Wales with 250 or more employees are required to publish and report data on the average pay gap between male and female employees.

included) have only tapped a tiny fraction of the potential insights available. Although LGBTQ people equally experience disadvantage because of their gender and/or race, it is less common to see headline statistics related to a person's sexual orientation or whether they are cis or trans. I am particularly surprised when I see intersectional analysis of data about sexual orientations or cis/trans identities and other identity characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion or belief. An intersectional approach to analysis can identify particularities and new challenges. For example, without disaggregated data and an intersectional lens, we would not know that in the UK:

- Half of Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people (51 per cent) have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from others in their local LGBT community because of their ethnicity. This number rises to three in five Black LGBT people (61 per cent).[52]
- Four-fifths of older LGBT people do not trust professionals to understand their culture or lifestyle.[53]
- Just under one in five LGBT people (18 per cent) were concerned that the Covid-19 pandemic would lead to substance or alcohol misuse. This figure was higher among BAME LGBT people (20 per cent) and disabled LGBT people (23 per cent).[54]
- 51 per cent of LGBT people living in Scotland's rural areas have personally experienced prejudice or discrimination for being LGBT.[55]
- Just one in four LGBT people of faith (25 per cent) think their faith community is welcoming of trans people.[56]

Intersectional LGBTQ data tells a nuanced story that better reflects the messy and overlapping experiences of people's everyday lives. Approaches to data collection and analysis are fundamental to the use of queer data to raise awareness, demonstrate where problems exist, challenge misinformation, galvanize communities and hold decision-makers to account. But this can

[52] Stonewall, 'LGBT in Britain - Home and Communities' (London, 2018), 5.
[53] Age UK, 'Combating Loneliness Amongst Older LGBT People: A Case Study of the Sage Project in Leeds' (London, 2018), 1.
[54] LGBT Foundation, 'Hidden Figures: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on LGBT Communities in the UK' (Manchester, May 2020), 6.
[55] Rebecca Crowther, Scott Cuthbertson, and Vic Valentine, 'Further Out: The Scottish LGBT Rural Equality Report' (Edinburgh: Equality Network, 2020), 11.
[56] Stonewall, 'LGBT in Britain - Home and Communities' (London, 2018), 5.

only be achieved in a meaningful way, which brings everyone on board, when intersectionality is embedded throughout the life journey of data, from its collection to its use for action.

The dangers of queer data

'Visibility is a trap', warned Michel Foucault in his account of how power operates in a panoptic prison, where prisoners are unsure when they are being watched and therefore adapt behaviours as if they are always under surveillance.[57] Although the collection of data and its use for positive representations have brought benefits for many LGBTQ people, this should not preclude critical examination of dangers that can emerge from shining light on gender, sex and sexuality data. In my work with universities, as with other large organizations, I saw how practitioners tasked with data collection could lose sight of what data meant and focus attention on fixing the numbers rather than the problems the data was intended to represent. I also grew sceptical of the unchallenged assumption that the use of data to increase the visibility of marginalized groups was always a positive endeavour. In Scotland, more data exists about LGBTQ people than ever before but this has not meant that the lives of all LGBTQ people have necessarily improved. In fact, as demonstrated in data on hate crimes where sexual orientation or transgender identity was an aggravating factor, the number of charges recorded has continued to increase.[58] In their account of how visual representations of trans people have impacted society, Reina Gossett et al. explain, 'We are living in a time of trans visibility. Yet we are also living in a time of anti-trans violence'.[59] More than twenty years prior, in her description of how Black women are seen and not seen, Evelynn Hammonds noted that 'visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor

[57] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 200.
[58] Between 2018–19 and 2019–20, the number of hate crime charges related to sexual orientation increased by 24 per cent to 1,486 and the number of charges related to transgender identity increased by one to 41, noted in Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 'Hate Crime in Scotland, 2019–20', 12 June 2020.
[59] Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, 'Known Unknowns: An Introduction to Trap Door', in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017), xv.

does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen'.[60] Furthermore, efforts to prove the existence of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (to a predominantly cis, heterosexual audience) require the use of finite resources and the physical, mental and emotional labour of researchers, practitioners and activists. If the burden of proof is higher for LGBTQ people than the general public, and it remains unclear whether the collection of evidence *actually* initiates meaningful change, the utility of a data-based response to fighting injustice is called into question.

Scholars have challenged responses to injustice that present the actions of individuals as removed from wider social contexts.[61] Data practices play a role in this sleight of hand. For example, Ruha Benjamin describes how a focus on the biases of individuals, rather than the data systems they work within, means that 'individuals are treated as glitches in an otherwise benign system'.[62] Data collection methods can compound the focus on individuals as removed from wider structures of power. For example, the collection of data via discrete survey entries or one-to-one interviews might frame an individual's negative experiences as something exceptional and unrelated to social issues such as education, law enforcement or poverty. As a response to problems identified by the research, minor tweaks are made to existing structures rather than a radical overhaul of the entire system. Rinaldo Walcott warns that these gestures towards social transformation, such as initiatives to improve diversity or inclusivity, can defuse attempts to radically change structural conditions that perpetuate the subordination of certain groups.[63]

Taking into account these critiques, the use of data to increase and diversify representations of LGBTQ people promises much but, on its own, is not an outcome that necessarily addresses injustice. In other words, a society with more data about LGBTQ people is not automatically a society that is better for LGBTQ people. In spaces where a queer approach to categorization clashes with the requirements of data to count, such as legal decisions about rights, some LGBTQ lives are valued at the expense of others.

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[60] Evelynn Hammonds, 'Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2–3 (1994): 141.

[61] For example, Jessie Daniels' detailed account of research into race and racism on the internet notes the tendency of studies to present racism as a problem of individuals' behaviour rather than something structural or institutional, in Jessie Daniels, 'Race and Racism in Internet Studies: A Review and Critique', *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (August 2013): 709.

[62] Benjamin, *Race after Technology*, 87.

[63] Rinaldo Walcott, 'The End of Diversity', *Public Culture* 31, no. 2 (1 May 2019): 394.

Dean Spade discusses this problem in his critical reading of legal equality approaches as a response to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the United States.[64] A legal equality approach involves granting rights to LGBTQ people so that they align with the existing rights of cis, heterosexual people. Recent examples of this approach include the expansion of the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples and demands for LGBTQ people to serve openly in the armed forces. Rather than seek to change or abolish existing institutions, which have historically excluded LGBTQ people, legal equality campaigners fight for entry into these institutions. However, when successful, access only tends to favour those considered most 'deserving' – in other words, the interests of cis, white, affluent gay men and lesbians.[65] Spade's account of legal equality approaches has implications for the collection, analysis and use of data about LGBTQ people. Participation in data collection exercises, such as national censuses, requires LGBTQ people to follow already-established rules that risk only counting those deemed 'deserving' (by cis, heterosexual standards) and further excludes the most marginalized.[66] By showing how the lives of the most 'deserving' have improved, practices and systems that perpetuate homophobia, biphobia or transphobia can continue to function relatively unscathed.

Data is not reality. Data is a record of the social world mediated through decisions made about what or whom to include and exclude. Queer data is not a passive reflection of the social world but is a productive force that, when handled correctly, can strengthen the efforts of researchers, practitioners and activists to create conditions that enable LGBTQ people to lead full, authentic lives. As an approach, queer data does not prescribe the lives people should lead but can, through the creation of a robust evidence base, construct the conditions that allow people to shape a life for themselves. These conditions will vary from person to person and might include the freedom to use public

[64] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), chap. What's Wrong with Rights?

[65] Spade notes how legal equality approaches rely on a strategy of simile, which argues 'we are just like you; we do not deserve this different treatment because of this one characteristic', in Spade, 44.

[66] Elizabeth McDermott describes how a 'demography of homosexuality' foregrounds the sexual citizenship of white, gay, male, middle-class adults and marginalizes those who are 'queerer, female, black, younger and poorer', in Elizabeth McDermott, '"Counting" for Equality: Youth, Class and Sexual Citizenship', in *Sexualities Research: Critical Interjections, Diverse Methodologies, and Practical Applications*, ed. Andrew King, Ana Cristina Santos, and Isabel Crowhurst (London: Routledge, 2017), 44.

space without fear of violence, access to affirmative healthcare, confidence in the rule of law, recognition by the state and access to adequate housing and food. Conditions that make an individual's life liveable are not evenly distributed, whether in the UK or other parts of the world, and often require LGBTQ people to lead inauthentic lives, where they conceal their sexual orientation or trans identity as a prerequisite of access. As Butler has argued, the conditions that make life liveable also include those who 'understand themselves as requiring – and wanting – a clear gender category within a binary frame' and those 'who require a gender designation that is more or less unequivocal'.[67] Queer data is therefore not about erasing the categories of gender or sex. Nor is queer data about increasing the volume or diversity of data collected in an attempt to achieve total knowledge. Rather, LGBTQ people need to continually review the strategic value of participation in data collection exercises, evaluate where reform of data structures is achievable and, when the potential for harm outweighs the potential for good, withdraw consent and call for the abolition of data practices and systems.

Chapter outline

Part I explores the collection of gender, sex and sexuality data. With a particular focus on quantitative data and the emergence of contemporary LGBTQ identities in twentieth-century Britain, Chapter 1 examines the historical collection of data about people who transgressed normative ideas about gender, sex or sexuality, the methods used and the purposes of data collection exercises. As a productive and political practice, collection methods bring assumptions about the social world we inhabit, the possibilities as to what these methods can reveal and the participation of those from whom data is collected. Chapter 2 therefore reviews the use of surveys, one-to-one interviews and focus groups to collect data about LGBTQ people. I highlight how a queer approach to collection methods can encourage participants and researchers to evaluate their identities in new and unexpected ways, which simultaneously presents an account of the social world and changes what it seeks to describe. These issues surfaced during the design of questions for the UK's 2021 and 2022 censuses. Chapter 3 presents an in-depth account of the design process for the sex, sexual orientation and trans questions in

[67] Sara Ahmed, 'Interview with Judith Butler', *Sexualities* 19, no. 4 (1 June 2016): 491.

Scotland's census with particular focus on plans to introduce a non-binary response option to the sex question (in which respondents could answer 'male', 'female' or 'other'); the conceptualization of sexual orientation in question design; and efforts to avoid use of the term 'cis' in the census. Part I concludes with Chapter 4, which investigates the collection of gender, sex and sexuality data in nations and regions outside of the UK, with specific reference to national, transnational and international administrative practices, the capture of data about same-sex couples in the US census, data initiatives to address hate crime and violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, the provision of 'third gender' options in censuses in South Asia, the use of virtual censuses in several European countries, and the roll-out of a 'gender by default' approach to data in Canada and New Zealand. This review examines similarities and differences in approaches to gender, sex and sexuality data around the world to provide an exchange of lessons for researchers, practitioners and activists.

Part II investigates what happens after data is collected and how it is shaped through analysis. Chapter 5 argues that data analysis involves making decisions that can influence findings, and therefore the lives of LGBTQ people about whom the data relates. This occurs during the cleaning of data, where attempts to subvert the collection process are removed, as well as the aggregation or disaggregation of individual responses into categories such as LGBTQ. Data analysis is increasingly automated, where algorithms instruct computers of the steps to turn data into meaningful information, and invested in the promise of big data. Yet these developments can fail to recognize the impacts of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia on historical and contemporary practices of amassing data about LGBTQ people.[68] Chapter 6 focuses on how data is recognized as a valid representation of the social world and explores the role of self-identification (where an individual determines the validity of data about themselves), external-identification (where the power to decide lies with another individual or organization), biometric data (which reads physical markers in/on our bodies) and behavioural data (which makes decisions based on our encounters with everyday technologies, such as online browsing and mobile phones).

The third and final part explores the use of data for action. Chapter 7 explores who has a voice in discussions about queer data and whose voice

[68] Jen Jack Gieseking, 'Size Matters to Lesbians, Too: Queer Feminist Interventions into the Scale of Big Data', *The Professional Geographer* 70, no. 1 (January 2018): 150.

matters. With a particular focus on tactics deployed to shut down discussions about gender, sex and sexuality data in online spaces, I outline how enhanced queer data competence among decision-makers might foster opportunities for improved communication about data. Chapter 8 concludes with an account of how data can document the lives of LGBTQ people, challenge negative ideas of otherness and bring about material changes in people's lives (for example, the use of data to counter arguments that limit trans people's access to bathrooms).[69] The *queering* of data can both elevate the voices about whom data relates and ask new questions about how data is constructed, with implications for whose stories are positioned in the centre and on the margins. However, this might not be enough. Projects that examine the relationship between structural inequality, racism, patriarchy and data have highlighted the biased foundations of data and challenged the assumption that the collection of data is a source for good. Critical interventions from the United States, often led by people of colour, call attention to the need for LGBTQ groups in the UK to re-evaluate their relationship with data, assess whether existing structures are capable of reform and, if not, how might an abolitionist approach put data in the hands of those most in need.

* * *

We stand at a key moment in history. New technologies and approaches, from big data to data abolition, overlap with longer-term disagreements over how to recognize difference among identity groups, the representation of difference through data and its use as an evidence base for action. Failure to engage with agencies that collect, analyse and use data potentially locks out LGBTQ communities from recognition and access to vital funding and resources. Yet, participation in these practices requires submission to normative approaches to categorization that involve the inclusion and exclusion of particular lives and experiences.

This work cannot take place with LGBTQ people looking in from the outside. Data is more than numbers in a database – it also presents a method for individuals to join together and shout 'Look here, we exist!' However, at the heart of these developments lies a tension between 'being counted' and 'being beyond counting', which exposes the strained relationship between queer theory's disavowal of categories and the requirements of data

[69] Petra L. Doan, 'To Count or Not to Count: Queering Measurement and the Transgender Community', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3/4 (2016): 105.

to classify, arrange and make judgements based on these results. There is no simple solution to the push and pull that exists between understanding identity characteristics as something disparate and fluid versus something that you can tick on a diversity monitoring form. *Queer Data* navigates a path through this challenge that uplifts LGBTQ stories but also destabilizes the normalcy of data about cis, heterosexual people. How we think about data, a product of historical and cultural traditions, has blinkered us to how gender, sex and sexuality data can and should impact LGBTQ lives in positive ways. For those already engaged in data practices, *Queer Data* showcases ways to embed critical approaches in your work. For those new to these themes, I hope the following chapters demonstrate the diversity of initiatives underway, offer entry points to expand your queer data competence and embolden you to use data to challenge injustice. Queer data is a powerful weapon; in the right hands, it can reshape all of our futures.