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Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series

Seminar 1: Queer Data in/as Crisis

Kevin Guyan and Yvette Taylor seminar

A conversation that took place as part of the Royal Society of Edinburgh funded Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series The Series is part of Yvette Taylor's RSE Personal Fellowship on Queer Social Justice.

The Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series thinks through how queer lives, investments and resistances – materially, socially, and emotionally – might help inform solutions to, or ways through, living with and beyond crisis. These might include solutions from the state, or acting beyond or outwith the state. How might we think about those contexts as a way into and out of crisis, including our institutional context of the university?

What follows is the conversation that took place between Yvette Taylor and Kevin Guyan at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow on 30 November 2023 on the topic Queer Data in/as Crisis. **The conversation is the full transcript, and a shorter blog can be accessed via the PURE weblink.**

Kevin Guyan is a researcher whose work explores the intersection of data and identity. He is the author of *Queer Data* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) and is currently writing his second book, which explores queer encounters with different classification systems in the UK, from hate crime reporting to dating apps. https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/queer-data-9781350230729/

Yvette Taylor is a professor in the Strathclyde Institute of Education, a queer feminist sociologist, and author of *Working-Class Queers* (Pluto, 2023). Yvette researches intersecting social inequalities, often including social class, gender and sexuality, and is now editing a collection titled *Queer in A Wee Place* (Bloomsbury, 2025). https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745341026/working-class-queers/

Yvette (YT): It's good as researchers to turn back the recorder on ourselves and feel that discomfort, but for the most part we'll try to ignore it [the recorder]. So, Kevin Guyan is a researcher whose work explores intersectional data and identity, and the author of *Queer Data*. Kevin is currently writing his second book, and maybe he'll say a bit more about that, which explores different classification systems from hate crime to dating apps, and exploring how those classification systems produce ideas about LGBTQ+ community in the UK. You currently work as a research fellow, Kevin at the University of Glasgow. Am I okay to say your…

Kevin (KG): Yeah, you can say. I'm soon to move, yeah.

YT: Soon to move to a Chancellor's Fellow position – congratulations, at the University of Edinburgh. You've worked for five years as an equality, in the equality, diversity, and inclusion industry, which is an industry.

KG: It is an industry.

YT: You're a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Young Academy, and you sit on the board of The Equality Network. Well done, excellent full sweep of activities

KG: Thank you.

YT:. I think most of you know that I'm a professor in the School of Education, and that is by chance, and I am a queer feminist sociologist by choice. I've worked with the Scottish government on LGBTQ+ lives during the pandemic, with the Scottish Ballet on *Safe to be Me*, a programme looking at LGBTQ+ inclusion in Scottish schools, with Kate [Molyneaux] in the audience. I've researched queer life and class inequalities across the long-term – we might say more about that long-term, and what that has meant through different social and political contexts. So, the Seminar Series hopes to think through how queer lives, investments and resistances, materially, socially, emotionally, might help inform solutions to, or ways through, living with, beyond crisis. And these might include solutions from the state, or acting beyond or outwith the state. How might we think about those institutional contexts as a way into and out of crisis, including potentially our own institutional context of the university?

And I think, I was just saying to Kevin, I think crisis might even be the wrong frame. Because it suggests an interruption or a point, rather than a continuation, and for example we know, that poverty will not go away with a slight economic adjustment. But I wanted to say a word, I know that you, my students, have been saying words to me about this, so I wanted to say a word about compelling crises. We're all aware of global conflicts, specifically the Israel Palestine conflict, we might want to say occupation or war, as an urgent crisis context, and we live in that reality now, including via protests that we might go to and everyday spaces, classrooms, communities, where the cost of living can mean death. To inhabit the wrong body or territory can mean a denial of rights, including the right to life. So, I say this to acknowledge the times we're in, and as perhaps ever happening with timelines and the currencies of war, conflict, securitisation, borders, reaching back, and as much more than a simple incident or counts as thousands of deaths for example. I'm aware that these are depressing times.

In the book, in *Depression of Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich combines memoir and critical essays to write about depression as a cultural and political issue, rejecting medical models. And she describes her own experience of professional pressures and anxieties as well as political hopelessness that leads to intellectual blockage. Feeling bad might constitute the lived experience of crisis capitalism, reaching back to histories of slavery, colonialism, and reaching forward with violent, present-day legacies. But she, Ann Cvetkovich, also looks at utopian spaces created from lesbian feminist practices of crafting. So maybe we can craft together a queer analysis that accounts for crisis, as Cvetkovich accounts for depression, as a category, a felt experience, and a point of entry into discussions about thinking, feeling, being and doing, including doing data.

In thinking about the series and who to invite Kevin came straight to mind, and *Queer Data*, the book, came straight to mind. Data pervades our lives and our researches, perhaps as both a cure, in terms of finding out new knowledge, as knowledge generation, and as concern or risk. So, finding things out, through the ownership of knowledge, through GDPR, through copywrite and profit, for example. We're going to use this time together today to think through data in or as crisis, including

our own queer data generation, depositing, interrupting strategies. So, when we were having a conversation, and we created a document in collaboration…

KG: We did, yes.

YT: …which then became very difficult…

KG: It became a book almost.

YT: …to untangle. It did, and it was like 'but what is the question here?!' We wanted to think about this datafication of queer lives, and I wanted to, I was really compelled by Kevin's, one of Kevin's openers, which is 'to exist is to resist, with or without data'. And Kevin also says 'what happens when you're assigned a category but denied a say?' So you might be able to tick a box but that doesn't necessarily mean that you fully appear beyond the page. if you appear, to quote, 'if you appear on a form it's hard to claim you do not exist', and that might be an administrative disappearing. So I wanted to ask, in the process of gathering data about our lives and the many different ways that we try to engage and do data differently, how do we best situate ourselves and do that? Or are we always sort of failing in that, in generating data?

KG: I think, yeah good opening question, I guess the example that came to mind when you were speaking there was around, quite a lot of my work, or my kind of entry into this work, was around the census in Scotland and the wider UK. And I remember maybe about five years ago when the design decisions taking place around 'what's going to be in, how are the questions going to be asked?', and me just thinking, 'there's something up here'. There's something that's not being discussed around who is designing these questions, why, in this moment of time, has the Scottish government and parliament felt that now is the moment to count LGBTQ+ communities? The census was the first time the questions on sexual orientation and trans status were asked in a Scottish census. So for me there was just a lot of assumptions being made around the design of these data-gathering tools, and particularly quantitative data-gathering tools.

And I kind of thought, I'll dig a bit deeper and look into how this kind of counting process is taking place, and very quickly it became clear to me that it was a very, one representation of broader queer life was coming to view. The census counts people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, but at the same time there was a lot of other parts of the queer community who were not being counted in something like a census. And I think what kind of annoyed me I guess was that that kind of, those groups being pushed into the shadows weren't being discussed. So something like inclusion data was being sold to us as something that is universally inclusive, it's universally a positive, it will, it's a pinnacle of recognition by the state in a way.

So actually the task of then shining light on those communities who are further marginalised and minoritised by the data collection exercise actually becomes a bit harder, because we're almost pushing against something which has this veneer of inclusion. And I think we see that across many different data collection tools, where some parts of the broader queer community are counted, they're recognised, they're legible, they're kind of seen by the state as worth counting. But at the same time it kind of makes it trickier for those communities who aren't deemed legible or worthy of counting, actually the task of shining a light on them becomes even harder. So it's that kind of, I guess the risks and dangers of inclusion, or the kind of, the dark side of inclusion, which I wanted to come through in the book.

YT: Yeah.

KG: And I think people, particularly in terms of quantitative data it wasn't being discussed much, so I hoped with the book I could kind of shine a bit more light on that kind of double-edge to inclusion.

YT: Mmm yeah, it does come through. And it makes me think about my own data gathering practices. When you have, so the book says, 'based on two hundred and fifty plus interviews', so why 'plus'? And over a twenty-year period that's a lot of data. It's a lot of data, it surpasses the book, it can't be contained within it, it shouldn't be contained within it. So, it's always already an act of failure [...] How to then do justice to that, to conveying it, to capture it of sorts, in the context of maybe being asked to deposit a database publicly? And yeah, just the labour that's involved in that over a long period of time. Where does the data go? Does depositing data mean it'll be heard? Or, you know, does it never surpass the page?

And I think, what I see coming through your work, and I mentioned that in terms of introducing you and the work that you do with different LGBTQ+ communities, is that long-term commitment that means hanging around, that means sometimes the 'plus' are the people who didn't turn up, who don't get to speak to you. But you've had conversations, you've maybe had conversations in the corner, and they've not come into the room, or they've been outside in the corridor and have not come into the room. All those ways of appearing and disappearing, and sometimes that's about who has a story to tell, and who already feels that they have a place in research and will be heard.

I've got lots of interviewees who've said 'I don't know if you're interested in my story. I don't know if this is who you're looking for', versus a more confident assertion that I *will* be interested in their lives. And I think there's something to be said there about working-class people, working-class queers, hearing, knowing that their stories are already kind of 'deficit data'...

KG: Mmhmm.

YT: ...that they risk that sort of coming out, in terms of like 'where are you from?' being a loaded question, being more than just a metric data or postcode data, but it says a lot about you. And like whether, while we were talking about sort of institutions, and we had a little conversation about knowing or not knowing different parts of Scotland earlier, I think I felt that in my own sort of academic journey. Which is also a personal and professional journey in terms of coming back to Scotland and that, and that connection around the personal as political as a long-term sort of feminist expectation, that comes with risk in terms of declaring sometimes where you're from or who you are. There are risks in these categories and questions too.

KG: Yeah. And even just what you mentioned there around, a few ideas come to mind. I guess one is around, any work around gender, sex, sexuality data is always going to be a failure in some ways, because there's always going to be imperfections, there's always going to be something missing from that, and I think as researchers it's quite hard sometimes to acknowledge that in our work. Again, in something like a census, around sexual orientation there's always going to be an undercurrent. For a variety of reasons people will not wish to disclose data about certain aspects of their identity, and nor should they have to disclose to the state if the state wants to ask.

So I think kind of built into the design of these tools is failure, and I think that's quite hard to then, how do you vocalise that and present these percentages or these tables with a caveat that 'there is people missing from this'?

YT: Yeah.

KG: And I think, like another thing that came to mind when you were speaking was around like missingness as well, in data. So I'm really intrigued by like the option of 'prefer not to say' on surveys,

and when you tick the box 'prefer not to say' who's in that box? And can we make any assumptions about who ticks that box? I think we sometimes assume it's closeted LGBTQ+ people, but maybe not. So it might be straight people who don't agree with the question being asked, it could be a mix of people. So I think that missingness, I think is really exciting and interesting.

YT: Yeah, yeah.

KG: And how can we also acknowledge and value that as a data source? I think often we just, maybe as researchers, say 'we'll discard the void, we'll discard the "prefer not to says", we'll discard the "others"', but actually *in* those categories there's a lot of potential excitement.

YT: Yeah, yeah. And it makes me think about, we were talking about, how do you name and categorise and then question the categories that are normative, like whiteness, middle-classness? And I've talked about that in terms of recruitment as well, so who comes forward? Who responds to the call for paper versus a hesitancy? And one of my respondents really stands out, because she said something like 'well I'm working-class and queer, but I'm not sure that I'm British enough yet', because she hadn't lived long in the UK. Some respondents enable that data that kind of rushes forward, that occupies the page, it shouts and is heard. I've had to like hold back on recruitment too. I've had to say in other words 'I've got enough of you' to make space for other kind of interviewees.

But it makes me think about how we unpack those normative categories and name middle-classness and whiteness and heterosexuality for example. So, one of the things that I was interested in pulling out, as I hoped to attend to my own whiteness as a white researcher, in taking that as a story beyond me, right, as, not me just in confessional mode, because I don't think that's helpful, but to think, well how is whiteness produced in a research project? And I talk about that through a project advisory group, who, you know, were voluntarily giving me their time and their expertise, and were often people who were long implicated in LGBTQ+ community. And could talk complicatedly about sexual identities and gender categories.

But when we talked about whiteness, because we were talking about my sample as being predominantly white, it became a bit of an embarrassed conversation, and the conversation then shifted to the metric, the metric measure of Scotland – 'Well Scotland is ninety-six per cent white'. And it makes me pause on the way that if we had said that about sexuality it would definitely not have been sufficient, if we said like 'okay, well queers are only ten per cent, five per cent', whatever minority per cent, we wouldn't be satisfied with that kind of analysis. It make me really pause on that normativity in doing research.

KG: Mmhmm. I think it can come through quite subtly as well. So you mentioned like I'm writing a second book right now which looks at kind of classification practices very broadly around different systems in the UK, and one of them is around borders and how LGBTQ lives are classified at borders. And for me it's just opened this kind of fascinating yet terrifying box of what's happening within The Home Office, within immigration systems. And there's one thing around LGBTQ asylum seekers, and to kind of prove that you are gay or lesbian or trans, how would you do that to a Home Office official? And one way is to write a written testimony.

So the process of writing a testimony about yourself, again as a qualitative piece of data, is fascinating, but also comes with so many assumptions about what it means to write an account of oneself, what it means to tell the story about when you first realised that you were queer, then you came out, when you, dadada.

YT: Yeah.

KG: Which is very linear, very coherent, very Western, very white, this assumption that this is this universal, global experience of being queer, which is baked into all of these different systems in different ways. And it's often quite hard to see, particularly if you're not at the kind of sharp edge of it, as you are if you're claiming asylum in a country where you can't really start to kind of question these norms or go 'hold on, actually I came out when I was fifteen and went back in the closet for five years, came out again', and all of these kind of complexities to life which don't fit, I think, our assumptions of when we go out looking for data. We kind of assume that there's this coherent, linear, fixed thing that we can just kind of capture, when actually the thing we're trying to capture is really messy and complicated and all over the place.

YT: Yeah absolutely. And that story about, what do you do when you're pushing against and at borders, who administratively process you to understand if you are legitimate or not, or where you should go. I was thinking about Farj's story, which, and I think Farj opens a chapter on queer provincialisms. And Farj is somebody who's migrated multiply and experienced shifts in terms of identifications, gender and sexuality, but also in terms of religion as well, and talks about Scotland being one of the best places in the world. And I really wanted to challenge that story.

And it might be easy, as Farj says, 'it might be that somebody who's lived in Scotland all their life', I'm paraphrasing, but 'somebody who's lived in Scotland all their life might be sceptical and might see more than I do. But I've just arrived here and I'm getting these benefits, and I'm quite happy with that' really, and 'Scotland is the best place in the world'. So it made me think about who feels, whose able to kind of be critical of those classifications, and who feels that up close and to the point it can be a push out of borders too.

But I think Farj's story continues, as do all the stories, as do all the data, continues beyond our own data capture too. And Farj is somebody who's imagining themselves as living outside of Scotland and is imagining the next place to go and be actually, in terms of being queer, is San Francisco. So there is a 'what next?' to these stories as well.

KG: I think as well, like just when you were speaking there, I think it's impossible to separate like the work from the life as well. So when, I did with this book a little bit, I'm trying to do it more with the next book, is like I am in these examples as research. As a gay man I'm kind of, I can't be untangled from what I'm writing about, and again the sense of Scottishness as well is really interesting. So I grew up in Scotland, lived in England for a while, lived in Ireland for a few years. Ireland particularly was interesting because myself and my husband moved there just after marriage was legalised in the UK, so it wasn't yet legalised in Ireland, but we were there for the referendum to legalise same-sex marriage in Ireland. And again there was this strange sense of feeling like an outsider almost, or this sense of coming in with this legal classification which was recognised in Ireland but it wasn't available domestically within the country. So again the sense of how do you wish to classify yourself outside of that, or speak about Scotland in these other spaces and places?

YT: Right.

KG: Even just within this small part of the world as well.

YT: Yeah. And I moved back to Scotland 2015, so it was after the referendum and sort of before the Brexit vote, and I often describe my return back, and Kerry knows this, as a sort of return to the scene of the crime. Like I felt really pretty ambivalent about it. And lots had changed in that period, lots of legislative changes, lots of changes to Glasgow as a city. I was being told that Glasgow was cool and fun, and it is, we know this, but there's also another part of Glasgow's story that is, not that, but that it's kind of left out of that narrative about regeneration. Which, over a period of time I've

seen sort of physical scene space, the LGBTQ+ scene space, various pubs and clubs, various sort of community groups and all the rest of it shift across place, being rehoused, being redone through voluntary labour, reappear, disappear, and the kind of political fluxes through that. Politically from sort of New Labour, through austerity, through different kind of crises, as always happening. Which makes me think like when does community, when are communities able to be seen and take up space? Or is it always this ever sort of perpetual struggle for space?

KG: Yeah. And I guess it kind of touches on something we might come to later, but just around how across all of this work, whether it's data or your writing and research, it's a kind of, the shaping impact of capitalism, of consumption, of money, and all these spaces and places moving around.

YT: Right, yeah.

KG: Probably due to also rent required, all these kinds of things which really shape, I guess, again which lives can come into being, which lives are pushed into shadows, who is counted, why are they counted? Is there a business case for counting certain communities and not others? So this kind of overlay of money I think really does impact our work in many different ways.

YT: Yeah, yeah. And I know one of the things we were wanting to talk about was that kind of complicity, or connection, between queer and capitalism, or, where does the left fit in our critiques of queerness? Or where does the queerness fit in our critiques of the left? And I think, one of the things that Kevin says is that, you use '…queer data to expand on feminist, postcolonial, critical race scholarship…'. And I myself, as I was writing, wanted to hyphenate different terms to kind of stretch that queer-feminist approach through the kind of theories and the frameworks that I was used to. But I know that I say, and I push and I maybe don't fully answer the question of, 'what is a queer left?' Because I think it can be hopeful or pessimistic, but it's also that hyphenated work of hoping for a certain future, rather than returning to a pure, past, or a traditional left that always laments the sort of white, working-class masculinity as now gone. And I think you see that in the story of Glasgow as well.

KG: Yeah.

YT: So I guess the question is, is a queer approach always a radical or progressive position?

KG: No. I'll say more. So I think 'did I write a lot of this book because I was annoyed about things?' I think what annoyed me was this assumption that counting LGBTQ+ communities is an intrinsic good, and that actually just doing a survey on how many queer students or staff or employees are within an organisation on its own is going to change the world in a positive way. And I think we can already see, with something like a census, particularly in England and Wales, now that some of the data's been published, data about queer communities can both be good and bad. It can help LGBTQ rights. It can also weaponise and help opponents of LGBTQ rights. And thinking through how data on its own isn't necessarily going to help shift the dial, change people's material conditions, make people's lives better. And I think having that caution about what queer data can do.

So in the context of England and Wales, who have now published their data on the size of the LGBT population, as I kind of predicted the size of the trans population is both too big and too small at the same time. So right-wing media, anti-trans campaign groups are simultaneously arguing that there's too many trans people and there's too few trans people, according to the data. So caught in this kind of lose-lose situation, which then begs the question, 'should these communities participate in the data gathering exercise in the first place if it's only going to consume time, labour, energy responding

to this endless stream of kind of pushback?' Which is now made stronger because it has objective, quantitative - well not objective - quantitative data to back up these claims.

YT: Mmm, mmhmm.

KG: So I think the kind of misuse of data is one strand of it.

YT: Yeah.

KG: But also this kind of, I guess, queer complicity in larger projects can benefit some within the community, but also at the expense of others as well. So again I kind of briefly mention something like a business case rationale for doing equality, diversity and inclusion work can benefit some – often those who are closest to privilege in the first place – but it doesn't benefit everyone. And I think again the datafication of, as we spoke about earlier, the kind of equality, diversity and inclusion industry, and the huge role of data, and evidence-gathering is basically the fuel this industry runs on, how a lot of that time and money and energy could be used in other ways that might actually have bigger impacts. Because we are spending a lot of our time gathering data, more and more data, and I'm not yet convinced that all of that data is necessarily helping those who would probably benefit from the most help.

YT: Yeah, yeah. It makes me think about the idea of repetition, and this kind of repeated labour over a long-term, that sometimes you can do the work, and that you might think your idea is complex and, you know, muti-faceted, varied, and, you know, challenges ideas of working-classness or challenges ideas, and you can feel that reduction. It can be seen as excessive and niche: 'Are you still working on working-class queers? When are you going to do something else?' Or, you know, so that inability to be seen, even though you think you're doing interdisciplinary, and you think there is multiple audiences, you can hear and almost feel that as a reduction. So it forces you to repeat again.

KG: And it can kind of function, I guess, as a stalling mechanism as well. So I'm thinking of like Sara Ahmed's work on DEI policies, and again how the sense of, particularly within the context of a university it's really easy to write down the equality and diversity policy, but it's really hard to turn that into action. So actually this demand for more and more, whether it's policy or data or evidence, this kind of repetition of that cycle can actually just maintain the status quo. And I think data has a big role in providing justification for that stalling, that kind of distraction away from actually solving the problem. So I think, yeah that kind of sense of repetition comes through…

YT: Yeah.

KG: …you know, as a demand for data as well.

YT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think that appetite for proliferating identity categories can be good and bad, right, can't it? I was thinking about one of the respondents, and I sort of give him a little bit of a hard time in the book, because as you were talking there about queer left politics, or queerness appearing and maybe even having a certain sort of cultural capital, like in the celebration of, I don't know, mutual aid groups as another queer possibility, so queer's out there in the world and people are claiming it for themselves. I'll try to find Will [turns pages]. And I was thinking about the way that some respondents are talking about themselves in new and old ways, so like that repetition of maybe old issues in new language and through new debates, like intersectionality as a hashtag.

KG: Mmhmm.

YT: Like intersectionality as a protected characteristic in a list. And I think this sort of list-like version of equality is something that is evident in Will's quote. So I'll just quickly read it out. 'I would say

anyone using my Twitter feed would probably realise that sexuality and LGBT+ inclusion, I would hope people would perceive me as intersectional, that's about human rights. So I think, we have Black Lives Matter, there's disability rights, there's LGBT+ rights, there's age rights, yes and each of these are incredibly important. I think it's so important, it's just, it's human, it's people, so just accept them for who they are'. And I think that move into you owning or being or having intersectionality as something you are rather than something you do is an interesting sign of our times maybe.

KG: I think it's really interesting, and I think something which is maybe a bit controversial as well. So I'm thinking of the work of somebody, by this academic called Kadji Amin, based in the US, who's written around the kind of, I think taxonomy rent zones, so the rent zones of taxonomies. And basically kind of speaking to this idea of these ever-expanding lists of identity categories and intersecting identity categories, and how actually in some spaces and places that doesn't necessarily help. Actually just adding more and more options to a list isn't getting into the fundamentals of what's wrong with a system or what's wrong with a data collection tool. We see this particularly in tech spaces, where somewhere like Facebook or some social media platform will just think that, if we add more sexualities and more genders then great. But actually the inner workings of the system are still not helping everyone, or kind of addressing the problem in the first place.

And also it kind of, these ever-expanding lists, they do kind of enshrine, or kind of reify certain things, which maybe aren't reflective of the outside world as well. So I do, I think, there is some caution in the book about 'we're not going to fix the problems just by adding more and more identity categories'. There's actually a need to think about where are there kind of coalitions – and I think that's what your book does really well – across existing categories, across race, gender, disability, class, rather than trying to just disaggregate and disaggregate and disaggregate, where we've kind of diluted ourselves down to little beyond our individual self.

YT: Right, yeah. Yeah. And I think what we're both interested in is sort of those seemingly success stories of sexual citizenship, like the rights that we've got, and that we're told that these battles are won, we're in a post-equalities or a rainbow Europe or however you want to imagine it. We have rights, we can take up space, and, as you say Kevin, 'to an uncritical observer this rush of equality victories might resemble the endpoint in a progressive linear account of LGBTQ histories in Britain'. However, as with any apparent move forward, questions remain as to who's left behind'. And so what do you think are the new battlegrounds for sexual citizenship? Or is itmore like these new-old fights?

KG: I think it's really hard. I, and I know we're being recorded as well, so if you take Scotland for example there's a lot of activity in Scotland around LGBTQ rights. The Gender Recognition Reform Bill, which passed and then was kind of torpedoed by the UK government, there's legislation coming into force next year, around hate crimes, around coverage for LGBTQ people in hate crime legislation, and both of those things have positives, but also negatives, for LGBTQ people. And I think we don't speak a lot about the negatives. We don't speak about what something like gender recognition reform means for people who don't wish to have their sex registered by the state, who don't wish to be counted and classified by these top-down institutions.

YT: Yeah.

KG: With hate crime reform, again something like expanding hate crime legislation invites the police into more and more aspects of our lives. Something like legislation determines a group who are covered and a group who aren't covered by legislation. And again for those people who aren't covered where are they left in this inclusive, LGBTQ inclusive Scotland? So I think with all of these pieces of legislation, which are presented as progressive and in some regards are world-leading,

particularly maybe the hate crime work, I think people become winners and losers, and I don't think there's enough critical discussion about 'do we actually need or want more hate crime laws? Will that actually address the problem of hate directed towards queer people, or will it just provide more funding and resources to the police and to law enforcement?' With the Gender Recognition Reform Bill what about queer people who don't wish to register with the state? Where are they left in this new administrative setup?

So I think with all of these kind of developments on the horizon I think there are some really thorny questions where there's often not right or wrong answers to any of them as well.

YT: Yeah. Yeah. It makes me think about, so the promise of sort of civic nationalism and Scotland's grand claims around being world leading. And it sort of disappears a history that I think is felt very present across lives ranging from, I think the youngest interviewee was sixteen and the oldest was in their eighties, in the early 2000s, so the data set pulled on a massive history that of course is embodied in the present, and we can remember and feel these political shifts. And that message of being world-leading can be felt as a real sort of interruption and an ureality, you know, a myth.

KG: Mmhmm.

YT: But, and I was thinking of, I think it's Alisha in the book, who says something like, we were talking about Scottish independence and that hopefulness through a different kind of state, where, you know, queers have long been sceptical of the state and the promise that it protects us. And we might see different retractions, and people talked about that through EU legislation and the loss of being part of Europe, the promise or failure of Scottish independence. And I think it was Alisha's quote's ringing in my ears just now, because she says something like 'yeah, but it's just another structure. You've just replaced a structure with another structure and it'll be more of the same and we'll call it different things, we'll rename it, but my life likely won't get materially different'. So being super-sceptical about the promise of institutions.

KG: I think particularly the promise of representation as well. Because I think, particularly, like I saw some Tweet or something earlier this month around how no members of Rishi Sunak's cabinet are LGBTQ, and this person was presenting it as a negative. And I think, again thinking through Rishi Sunak and very senior UK politicians are very racially representative, racially diverse, but also hold extremely kind of dangerous right-wing politics. So again having representation of minoritised groups when the structure doesn't change doesn't necessarily make the situation better. Actually it can be harder, because you're now being sold that this kind of structure is representative, it's diverse, it's inclusive, but actually the politics it's installing is extremely harmful. And I think that risks sort of seeing representation as a be-all-and-end-all. And I think data's role in that as well, we see lots of equality and diversity projects around the kind of diversity breakdowns of the workforce of organisations, of institutions, and I think that's only one part of a far larger thing that we need to be fighting to change. Because on its own representation at senior levels, as I think the UK cabinet demonstrates, is not going to necessarily create a society that's good for everyone.

YT: Yeah, yeah. And because of, you've taken us to that question of 'well what to do?' Which, at events like this people think 'what do you do'

KG: Mmm.

YT: Quite rightly, because you should be holding us to account. But I was at an event last night and we were talking about activism, and it was about queer climate justice. And somebody was like 'well the thing about activists and activism, like it just sounds really pretentious. Like I don't say I'm an

activist', although it was clear they were doing a whole lot of stuff. So I just wonder about that fighting that we're both invested in, and in terms of like taking up space, inhabiting the university, but particularly in terms of what that means to do it in a classroom, to do it in a space as part of a learning community, and we're, like I think our reading lists are political, they're activist, they should be activated by different readers. And I know that you have, your book ends on the eight things to do, and I've ended on a reading list as well.

So I wondered if you could say more about that like doing and being a researcher again? I suppose we've looped right back around research agency and reflexivity.

KG: Yeah. Oh, I'm trying to think. Maybe I should've looked at the list before our conversation. It's a question I get a lot, I think particularly around kind of, 'this is all great, these ideas, these concepts, but what do we do about them in our day-to-day life?' And I think, what I hope, I think, with my work is that, it doesn't provide answers, but hopefully it provides these moments of just like thinking slightly differently about some things. So for example like numbers, the politics of counting, the politics of quantitative data, how these types of data have histories, they have politics, they have power, and just how whatever area that you're researching or working in you can apply that kind of critical thinking in your work.

And just challenging some assumptions we're told as well. So the book doesn't say it's kind of bad to be designing inclusive surveys or designing inclusive research methods, but it also says we might reach a point where we decide, actually these systems we're working in can't be fixed. Actually we need to change course and start to say that people should be refusing or kind of not participating in these surveys or censuses and these types of things. So I guess I try and prompt some critical ideas rather than providing a blueprint for what happens next. I mean I wrote the book maybe about three years ago now, and I think the world has changed a lot even in that period of time. So I think it's quite hard to kind of know what'll happen come next year or the kind of next few years after that either.

YT: Mmm, mmm. That's really interesting, that we are already sort of out of time when we're writing, we've already sort of we've lost our data as we're putting the words to the page. But I know this book was a great book that arrived right on time for me, and it felt like, I was reading it during the pandemic period where we were getting sort of inundated with a different kind of bad data as well, but it made me think through things more hopefully as well, and in terms of what to do next. So I don't see that as, well maybe that's part of that repetition, that labour, and I look forward to hearing more about your new book, because I know that you're engaged in that repeated labour.

KG: Yeah.

YT: So did you want to maybe say something about your new book?

KG: Yeah. So it's currently a work in progress, writing it at the moment, academic publishing is like painfully slow, so it's not going to come out until June 2025, so you have plenty of time to ready yourself for it. But it's going to look at, kind of zoom out from some of the, from queer data, and look at how different systems, particularly administrative systems, kind of make sense of LGBTQ lives. And what I mean by that is how different things we encounter across different sectors, industries, how they count classify, categorise and manage gender, sex, and sexuality in different ways.

And I think what's particularly interested me since writing *Queer Data* is how these systems - so in the book I look at hate crime reporting, borders, arts funding, dating apps and like business and business metrics and things – how they're not kind of reflecting a pre-existing world out there, how actually our engagement in these systems is shaping how we make sense of ourselves. So I've really

leaned into like work in science and technology studies of late, and how, this sense of when you are counting something you're actually producing something at the same time, and how that applies to queer lives in a variety of ways. And again something like a census, that was never discussed, in the sense that there was always assumption that a census just captures existing information about a community who are there, ready, waiting to be counted, and we just have to find the right tool to capture them.

YT: Right.

KG: Actually my argument is no, how we're deigning the tools is actually shaping how people understand themselves, make sense of themselves, label themselves in a kind of bodily, like at a very deep level, and how we see that across different systems within the UK. So I'm trying to do something a bit more ambitious…

YT: Yeah.

KG: …with the next book. But I think just how data and how these kind of data collection tools shape us in a variety of ways. And I think rewriting how we think about data is something more than just representative. Data is something generative, data is something productive, and what that means for queer people.

YT: Yeah, yeah. And one of the other things that I've tasked you with is producing a chapter for *Queer in a Wee Place*, and it's sort of a speak-back to where knowledge is generated from and how that circulates on a global circuit, of queer production being in and of and through the US and then filters sort of outwards. And thinking about the diversity within the wee place, what does that stand for? What kind of global claims does it make? And how we can think through those categories of Scottishness to make a place for queers, queers in a wee place. And I might end with that.

End.