

PSRC first in the nation to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity in a large-scale travel survey



Limited data for LGBTQ+ populations

June is Pride month and provides a chance to celebrate the experiences of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and more such as nonbinary and two-spirit (LGBTQ+). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are becoming larger proportions of the population. According to [Gallup's 2021 survey results](#), about 7.1% of U.S. adults self-identify as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or something other than heterosexual," with larger numbers among younger generations (Millennials and Generation Z).

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey has been collecting some basic [household characteristic data](#) for same-sex couples since 2005; however, these data are limited and do not include anyone who is not coupled. The data are in tables, which are not easily accessible through the [Census data portal](#), and information is available only at the state and national levels.

While historical data on LGBTQ+ communities are limited, data collection approaches continue to evolve and include more inclusive questions. Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) questions are being added to more surveys to better understand the experiences of these individuals and communities.

In 2023, PSRC began to ask about sexual orientation, in addition to gender identity, in its Household Travel Survey to better understand the unique transportation and housing needs for LGBTQ+ people in the region.

LGBTQ+ adult population in the Seattle metro area

The U.S. Census Bureau's [Household Pulse Survey](#) ("Census Pulse") is a data collection effort that began in April 2020 to understand the impacts of COVID-19. Data are available at the state-level as well as for the 15 largest metropolitan areas. Fortunately, data for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA Metropolitan Statistical Area ("Seattle MSA") are available; however, this includes only three of PSRC's four counties. Kitsap County is excluded.

Although SOGI questions were not asked of respondents in the earlier phases of the Census Pulse survey, they were added in Phase 3.2 starting in July 2021¹:

Do you currently describe yourself as male, female or transgender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- None of these

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

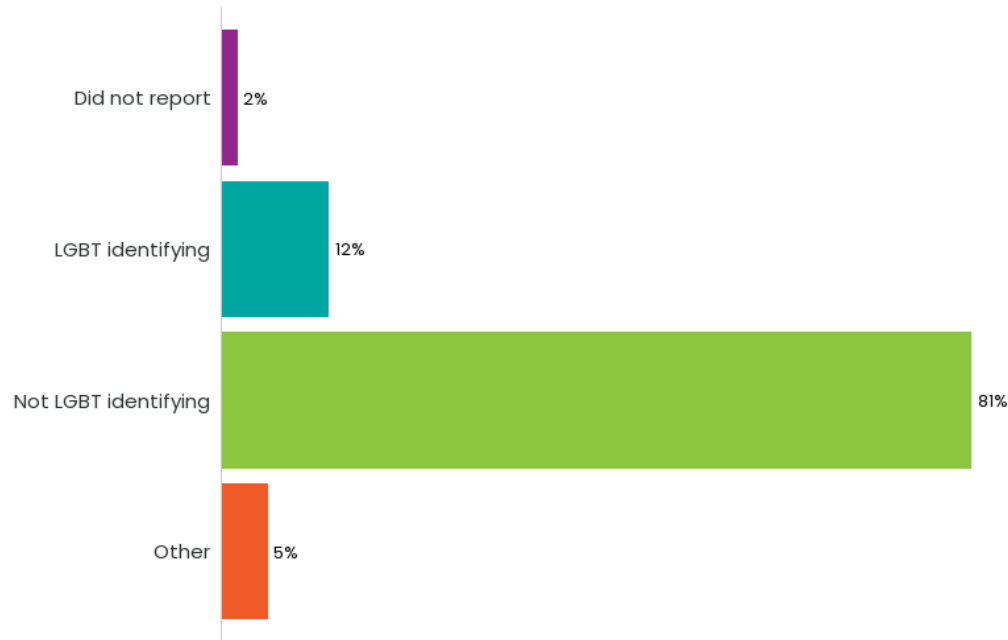
- Gay or lesbian
- Straight, that is, not gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Something else, please specify
- I don't know

According to the Census Pulse survey data averaged between July 2021 and May 2023, about 516,000 (17%) adults identify as LGBTQ+ in the Seattle MSA². Of those, 360,000 (12%) adults identify as "Gay or lesbian," "Bisexual" or "Transgender" (LGBT). The remaining 156,000 (5%) adults identify as something else (Q+).

¹ Prior to Phase 3.2, the Census Pulse survey asked a binary question for males and females.

² This included all adults who did not select "Male" or "Female" for the first question or "Straight, that is not gay or lesbian." for the second question.

Sexual orientation and gender identity in Seattle metro area (Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue MSA)



U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (weeks 34-57 average, July 2021-May 2023)

Intersection of mental health, sexual orientation and gender identity

Even though historical data are not readily available, there have been increased efforts to better understand the experiences of people identifying as LGBTQ+. Mental health within LGBTQ+ communities is an important topic that has received recent attention in the news. New surveys have shown that the increase in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and rhetoric are negatively impacting these communities.

In early 2023, The Trevor Project published a [report](#) based on a national survey of over 28,000 LGBTQ+ people ages 13-24 years old. When asked about their mental health, almost one-third of respondents reported that their “mental health was poor most of the time or always” due to anti-LGBTQ+ policies. Two-thirds of LGBTQ+ young people reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety and over half reported experiencing symptoms of depression, with even larger

proportions for transgender and non-binary young people.

These trends among LGBTQ+ youth reflect the larger adult population. The Census Pulse survey asks respondents about the frequency of experiencing symptoms related to anxiety and depression:

Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

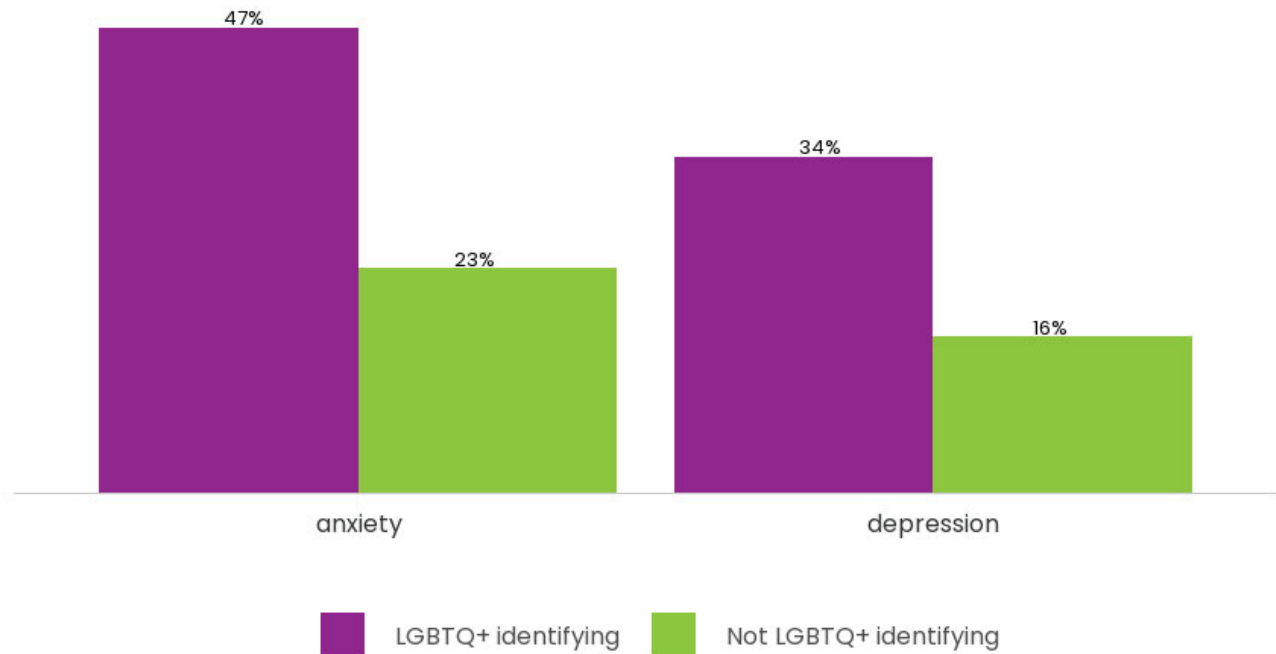
- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

For our analysis of mental health, we focused on those who identified as LGBTQ+³, and we aggregated answers from those who said they were experiencing mental health symptoms “more than half the days” and “nearly every day” to determine the share of people experiencing this most of the time.

When survey results were averaged across the survey weeks (July 2021–May 2023), over twice the share of adult respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ reported experiencing anxiety and/or depression symptoms most of the time compared to adults who do not.

³ We defined the LGBTQ+ group in the Census Pulse data as adults who identify as “Gay or lesbian,” “Bisexual,” or “Transgender” (LGBT) or those who identify as something else (Q+).

Percent of adults experiencing mental health symptoms most of the time by LGBTQ+ identification



U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (weeks 34-57 average, July 21, 2021-May 8, 2023)

The Census Pulse survey results illustrate the utility and importance of including SOGI questions. The information collected highlights how different communities are faring – their experiences and outcomes – and it shows the significance of representation within survey design.

Data collection for LGBTQ+ populations is starting at PSRC

For the past three decades, PSRC has been conducting a [Household Travel Survey](#) in which we ask residents about their travel patterns and their socio-demographic characteristics. The 2023 data collection is complete and builds on a previous three-wave, six-year program that began in 2017. In the current survey, a question about respondents' sexual orientation was added (to complement one regarding gender identity):

Which of the following best describes your sexuality?

- Bisexual, gay, lesbian or queer
- Heterosexual (straight)
- Something else fits better
- Don't know or questioning
- Prefer not to answer

This addition makes PSRC's Household Travel Survey the first travel survey in the nation to include this type of question. Initially there was discussion about excluding this question because of worry about respondent dropout. Despite this fear, final survey counts show that the survey population reflects the Seattle MSA population from the Census Pulse survey.

Table. 2023 Household Travel Survey responses by Sexual Orientation

Sexuality	Travel Survey Total	Travel Survey %	Census Pulse* %
Bisexual, gay, lesbian or queer	814	12.3%	10.6%
Heterosexual (straight)	5,640	85.3%	84.7%
Something else fits better	91	1.4%	2.6%
Don't know or questioning	68	1.0%	2.1%
Prefer not to answer	991	0.0%	0.0%
Total	7,604	100.0%	100.0%

**Census Pulse results have been averaged to increase sample size for weeks 34-57, for Seattle Metropolitan Statistical Area (King, Pierce, Snohomish counties)*

To date, PSRC has had higher-than-typical response rates and lower-than-typical dropout relative to other study areas conducting similar travel surveys. These results are preliminary, and we anticipate being able to do more region-specific analysis next year so that we can understand more about the housing and transportation needs of LGBTQ+ people and potential disparities.

PSRC hopes to explore questions like:

- Do LGBTQ+ adults experience residential displacement at higher rates than heterosexual people?
- What are the unique housing and transportation needs of older LGBTQ+ people?
- Do LGBTQ+ workers telework more or less than other groups?