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## **Attitudes of Spanish LGBTI+ Adolescents and Emerging Adults. Cultural and Political Practices among 16 to 29-year-old Non-Cis-hetero People**

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# **Attitudes of Spanish LGBTI+ Adolescents and Emerging Adults. Cultural and Political Practices Among 16 to 29-year-old Non-Cis-hetero People**

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## **Abstract**

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Never in Spain's history have sexual minorities enjoyed the current rights. However, LGBTIphobic rhetoric displayed by extreme-right activism threatens the gains made. An online survey among LGBTI+ people between 16 and 29 years was conducted. 152 people answered. Results show that Spanish LGBTI+ youth is mostly prone to activism, they were quite informed about legal initiatives, and they mostly think that LGBTI+ people continue to suffer discrimination, the group of friends and peers appears to be the safest context and teachers seem to fail on the duty of help LGBTI+ young people. Additionally, LGBTI+ young people often use inclusive language, especially in casual context, and they seek referents in social media, where they follow influencers who openly declared themselves part of the LGBTI+ collective. The study serves as an example of the changing cultural and political practices of non-cis-hetero youth in a society moving fast towards equality but attending the raising of regressive movements.

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**Keywords:** LGBTI+, Adolescents, Emerging Adults, Youth, Spain, Attitudes.

# **Actitudes de los Adolescentes y Adultos Emergentes LGBTI+ Españoles. Prácticas Culturales y Políticas entre Personas No Cis-hetero de 16 a 29 años**

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## **Resumen**

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Nunca en la historia de España las minorías sexuales han disfrutado de los derechos actuales. Sin embargo, la retórica LGBTIfóbica mostrada por el activismo de extrema derecha amenaza los logros obtenidos. Se realizó una encuesta online entre personas LGBTI+ entre 16 y 29 años. 152 personas respondieron. Los resultados muestran que los jóvenes LGBTI+ españoles son mayoritariamente proclives al activismo, estaban bastante informados sobre las iniciativas legales y en su mayoría piensan que las personas LGBTI+ siguen sufriendo discriminación, el grupo de amigos y compañeros parece ser el contexto más seguro y los profesores parecen fallar en el deber de ayuda a los jóvenes LGBTI+. Además, los jóvenes LGBTI+ suelen utilizar un lenguaje inclusivo, especialmente en contextos casuales, y buscan referentes en las redes sociales, donde siguen a influencers que se declaran abiertamente parte del colectivo LGBTI+. El estudio sirve como ejemplo de las prácticas culturales y políticas cambiantes de los jóvenes no cis-heteros en una sociedad que avanza rápidamente hacia la igualdad pero que asiste al surgimiento de movimientos regresivos.

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**Palabras clave:** LGBTI+, Adolescentes, Adultos Emergentes, Jóvenes, España, Actitudes.

The lives of LGBTI+ young people in Spain are clearly marked by the landmark legal transformations in the fields of same-sex marriage and transexual rights of the beginning of the century. In 2005, the Spanish Parliament amended the Civil Code so that same-sex couples could marry and jointly adopt (Calvo and Pichardo, 2020). In 2007, new legislation allowed transexual people (as they were defined in that legislation) to change their sex and to amend their official identity documentation. These laws have contributed much to the redefinition of the public image of Spain as a country. Giorgi (2002), for instance, described Spain as an “exceptional example of the repositioning of a nation on the map of modernity” (2002, p. 58). According to the 2015 Eurobarometer on Discrimination (EU, 2015), while 90% of Spaniards agreed with the idea that ‘gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people’, 64% of them accepted that ‘same sex marriages should be allowed throughout Europe’. Similar results have been found in the Integrated Values Survey (IVS) (1981-2014) and in the World Values Survey (WVS), which present Spain as a leader regarding the commitment to individual freedom of choice in personal matters such as abortion or homosexuality (Blanco Martin, 2019). In relation to transgender rights, 80% of the population accepted the right to change civil documents ‘to match their inner gender identity’. According to data for 2010, 80% of young people (15 to 29) declared that if they knew of a close friend’s homosexuality “nothing would change as homosexuality is just another sexual option” (CIS, 2010).

The institutionalization of very visible urban subcultures in large cities, the salience of LGBT+ characters and storylines in prime television (González de Garay et al., 2019), or the appointment of LGBT+ politicians in high office (including, when this piece is written, the Home Secretary) add to the impression of a very tolerant and inclusive society. In terms of visibility, current Spanish Teen series such as *HIT* (TVE: 2020-), *Elite* (Netflix: 2018-), *Merlí* (TV3: 2015-2018) and its sequel *Merlí: Sapere Aude* (Movistar+: 2019-21), *Skam España* (Movistar+: 2019-20), *La edad de la ira* (Atresplayer: 2020-), *El desorden que dejas* (Netflix: 2020), *El internado: Las cumbres* (Amazon Prime: 2021-) or *Paraíso* (Movistar+: 2021-) content LGBTI+ characters and are very popular among young audiences and, and as Mateos-Pérez (2021, p. 155) maintains “promote positive social change through their characters and plots, are committed to integration and to the recognition of personal and cultural differences”.

How are Spanish LGBTI+ young people experiencing these transformations? This article builds on youth (Morán & Benedicto, 2016) and queer citizenship studies (see, for instance, Volpp, 2017), to explore the consequences of political and cultural transformations on the making of more active forms of citizenship for LGBTI+ young people. The democratic and citizenship deficits of LGBTI+ young people have been associated with the lack of opportunities to develop lives free from violence, discrimination and stigma. Conversely, we would expect LGBTI+ young people to react to advances in diversity recognition and tolerance by showing a keener interest in politics and more developed forms of cultural engagement.

To shed light on the question of the political and cultural attitudes of Spanish LGBTI+ young people, in this article we show the preliminary results of an ad hoc online survey that targeted LGBTI+ people from 16 to 29 years of age. These young people have sufficient political knowledge and interest in politics to live their political citizenship in full; they are aware of their sexual orientation and gender identity and organize their lives accordingly. At the same time, they cannot fully dissociate themselves with the legacies of previous forms of discrimination and violence. The article begins with the presentation of the theoretical back, to continue with the presentation of data and methods and the discussion of the main findings of the study. These findings are then assessed against the backgrounds of existing theories about the limitations of citizenship for young people in Spain.

### **Theoretical background**

LGBTI+ young people in Spain stand at a crossroads. Never has it been easier to identify publicly as a LGBTI+ person or to live a life free of stigma and discrimination (Borraz, 2021). In a context of very favorable societal attitudes towards the public expression of sexual and gender diversity, LGBTI+ young people in Spain have unprecedented cultural and political opportunities to live full, autonomous, we might dare say, happy lives. Constitutional provisions are currently interpreted to include protections against discrimination on grounds on sexual orientation and gender identity. National legislation punishes LGBTIphobia as a hate crime; it also recognizes a wide range of family rights and the right for trans people to amend their national

identification documents. Several sub-national governments have passed specific legislation that includes policies for the promotion of LGBTI+ diversity. The social and political conversation about sexual and gender diversity currently pays attention to urgent problems that connect with the well-being of LGBTI+ youths. This includes the issues of education, and in particular the problem of bullying.

Simultaneously, however, LGBTI+ young people face serious threats. Despite the obvious advances in legal equality and societal tolerance, Spanish LGBTI+ young communities are still exposed to some of the problems already identified by the international literature affecting LGBTI+ young people. LGBTI+ youngsters are being challenged by forms of anti-gender crusading that advocate for a dismantling of equality policies and legislation. The extreme-right political party *Vox*, currently the 3rd largest national political party in terms of parliamentary representation, champions this crusade. Their criticism is particularly loud regarding trans rights legislation: *Vox* argues that children and young people are exposed to harmful indoctrination by activists that lead them to believe that ‘they can freely choose to be either boys or girls’ (*Vox*, 2021). Unexpectedly, Spanish trans law opposition “comes from both the right and from reactionary transphobes who appropriate feminism as a way to promote anti-trans, hateful agendas” (*Bojanic*, 2021, p. 122), the so-called Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists. Education remains a problematic space. Pioneering work by the Madrid-based advocacy group COGAM has revealed the magnitude of homophobic harassment in primary and secondary education (*Generelo*, 2012; *López*, 2013; *Benitez*, 2016; *COGAM*, 2019). Nine out of ten students identified sexual orientation and gender identity as something motivating (and justifying) exclusion and violence. Spanish LGBTI+ adolescents regard the school as an unsafe space, and they criticize teachers for their lack of involvement in situations of abuse (*Pichardo et al.*, 2009). Persistent abuse causes a large amount of mental health issues, including increasing suicide rates (*Marchueta*, 2014). LGBTI+ young people appear to be the target of new forms of LGBTIphobic violence. Reporting on the situation in Catalonia in 2020, the *Observatori contra l’homòfobia* found that 60% of the cases of violence were reported by young people (up to 35 years of age) (*Observatori Contra l’Homòfobia*, 2020). This is remarkable considering that reporting abuse is age sensitive, and young people are generally much less inclined to contact the police after an assault or any other expression of violence.

In this context it is urgent to explore the world views of LGBTI+ young people, particularly regarding citizenship practices. Are they aware of their rights? What do they think about political associations? How important is their sexual orientation and gender identity when making important decisions? Previous research on this topic is limited and provides only episodic information about the problems of coming out and perceptions of discrimination (Fernandez-Rouco et al, 2020). Simón and Claveria (2021), for instance, found that LGBT(I+) people struggle to ‘come out’ in primary and secondary school. In direct reference to the COVID-19 crisis, Platero and López-Sáez (2020) found that mandatory lockdowns had consequences on a range of topics, including the destruction of the support networks that are so relevant for the mental health and general well-being of young LGBTI+ people. From the perspective of stereotypes and positive models, Francisco Amat et al. (2020) built on previous work in the field of education to reveal that dearth of positive examples for LGBTI+ young students in schools (see also Penna & Sanchez, 2015; Pichardo, 2009; Platero, 2014); these references need to be looked for (and only sometimes found) in TV series.

## Method

Data comes from an ad hoc online survey (using the Qualtrics platform) that targeted LGBTI+ individuals between the ages of 16 and 29. The survey used Spanish as the working language although we provide here translations for the different items. This decision regarding age reflects standard practice by pollsters in Spain: The Spanish Centre for Sociological Research, for instance, defines young people between the ages of 15 and 29 years of age. 152 individuals filled the questionnaire at least in part; and 81 people completed the questionnaire in full. This incidental sample size reflects sample sizes of LGBTI+ people in larger surveys in Spain, such as the “*Informe Juventud en España 2020*” (Injuve, 2020). For example, in the study carried out by the CIS between May and June 2021 (CIS, 2021), *Encuesta sobre relaciones sociales y afectivas en tiempos de pandemia de la COVID-19* (Survey on social and affective relationships in times of the COVID-19 pandemic), 2,972 interviews were conducted. 93.9% of the respondents identified themselves as

heterosexual, 1.9% as homosexual, 2.3% as bisexual, 0.1 as asexual, 0.1% of another orientation and 1.8% did not know or did not answer.

Accepting the difficulty of reaching out to respondents during pandemic times (and the complexities of reaching out to LGBTI+ respondents) we contacted LGBTI+ organizations hoping that they would distribute the survey within their communities. We also made public calls on social media. Due to the snowballing element in our sampling procedure, a process that also depended much on the efforts of organizations to reroute the call for participation, we could not come with a balanced composition of the sample in terms of geographical distribution. For instance, most of our respondents<sup>1</sup> live in Andalusia (28,2%), Castilla y León (21,8%), the Basque Country (9%) and Castilla La Mancha (9%). 39% of the respondents live in large towns, between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants, followed by those who live in relatively small towns (14,3%), between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants. Not surprisingly most of our respondents are students (51,3%), followed by workers (34,6%). The mean value for the ideology scale (1 to 10 where 1 means extreme left) is 2.4<sup>2</sup>. We carried out a pilot test with a sample of 15 participants; this was intended to check the comprehensibility of the questions, to identify potential difficulties when addressing questions and to evaluate its overall length. The pilot test was satisfactory and encouraged us to proceed with the administration of the survey.

The questionnaire included 47 items. The typology of the questions, as well as the topic categories, are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1  
*Typology of Questions*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Example</b>
Open	Why don't you do it? [referring to his lack of participation in any group of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and/or trans people]
Closed	Who do you live with most of the year?
Simple	Could you tell us how old you are?
Multiple	How do you identify yourself in relation to your sex-gender identity?



Table 2  
*Categories of Questions*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Example</b>
Sociodemographic	In which Autonomous Community do you currently live?
Activism	Do you participate in any group of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and/or transsexuals?
Politics and legislation	To what extent are you informed about the following policies and legal measures proposed in relation to LGBTI+ people?
Social, family sentimental life	andHow often do you comment or discuss political issues with your friends, family or co-workers?
Stereotypes	When it comes to flirting or meeting people, how often do you use...?
Discriminations	Did you suffer bullying?
Media	What is your degree of agreement with the following statement? The percentage of non-cisheterosexual characters (trans, non-binary, gay, lesbian, bisexual or other orientations) in audiovisual fiction corresponds to reality.

Some of the questions included in the questionnaire reflect standard wording of survey questions in large surveys. We particularly drew on the surveys by the Spanish youth institute (*Instituto de la Juventud*, INJUVE) and the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, CIS). We would like to note that this is one of the few surveys that incorporates truly political questions to a sample made by LGBTI+ participants. The survey was carried out using Qualtrics, which allows the necessary statistical operations such as descriptive frequency analysis, mean analysis, and correlational analysis between different variables.

The main objective of this paper is to describe the opinion of LGBTI+ Spanish 16-to-29 years old people on aspects related to their cultural and political practices. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. To what extent are Spanish LGBTI+ young people informed about legal initiatives and are committed to activism?

RQ2. To what extent do Spanish LGBTI+ young people suffer and perceive discrimination?

RQ3. Do their sexual orientation and/or gender identity influence their life decisions?

RQ4. What cultural practices is Spanish non-cis-hetero youth implementing?

## **Results**

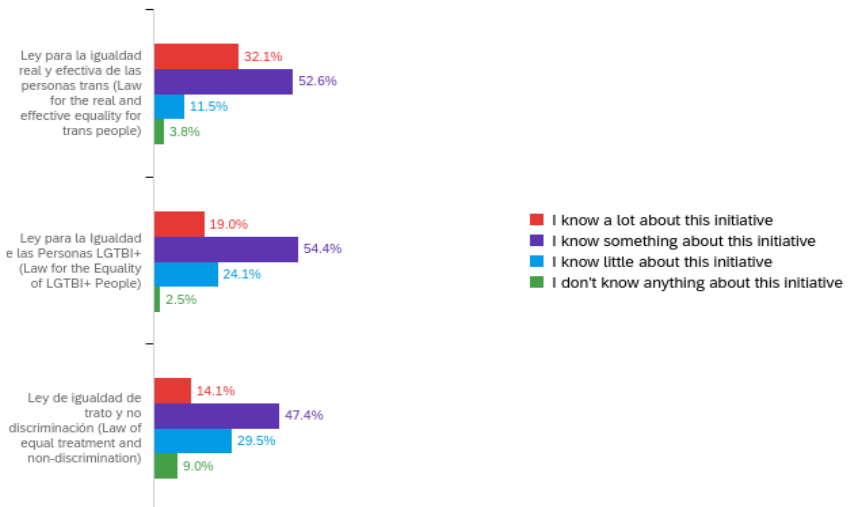
### ***Contemporary forms of LGBTI+ youth citizenship***

In our sample, 43% respondents define themselves as cisgender men and 31,8% cisgender women. Interestingly, more than 13% of respondents defined themselves as non-binary, while almost 6% were not yet sure about their gender identity. Trans respondents are not greatly represented (4% trans man, 2.3% trans woman). In terms of sexual orientation, 41% of respondents identified themselves as gay/lesbian, 37% as bisexual, 8 as heterosexual, 7% as others (asexual, demisexual, queer) while 6% told us that they were not sure. Such distribution is similar to other studies with young people. For example, Kelleher (2009) studied minority stress within a sample of youth aged 16–24 years and identified as lesbian (15%), gay (55%), bisexual (19%), questioning (9%), heterosexual (1%) and “other” (1%), and female (25%), male (69%), transgender (3%), and questioning (3%). Minton et al. (2008) reached 122 people (age range 15 to 31 years) but with a gender-unbalanced sample (14 females (11.4% of the sample), 102 males (82.9%) and six young people (5.7%) who identified as belonging to neither gender). Hazel et al. (2019) worked with similar percentages of students: 12% identified as transgender or gender-variant, 45% homosexual and 37% bisexual.

The political attitudes of Spanish young people in Spain combine high levels of interest in politics with obvious forms of political disaffection, such as low turnout in elections (Injuve, 2020 and 2019). It has been however very difficult to test the applicability of these conclusions to the case of LGBTI+ people. Our respondents exhibit political attitudes that suggest a willingness to participate in their political communities. For instance, when responding to questions about ‘belonging’, most of them react in a positive way to forms of collective identification that speak about the possibility of participating in large political organizations. Half of the sample declared to be a member of a

LGBTI+ association although in various degrees of commitment (‘Yes, I actively participate’: 24,1%; ‘Yes, I have ever participated’: 22,8%; ‘Yes, but I can’t get involved’: 2,5%). More than 30% of those uninvolved declared that they would love to be part of a political organization.

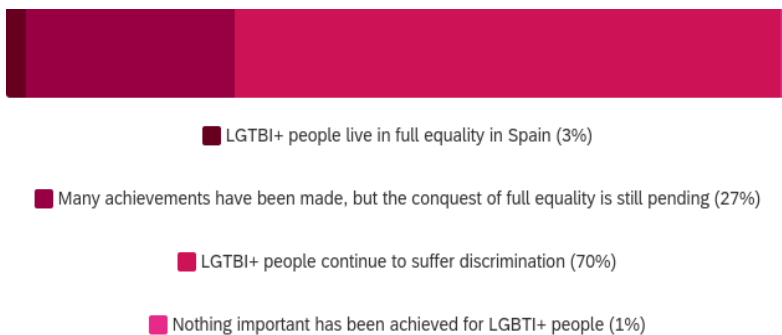
The possession of political knowledge is a requirement for any definitions of active young citizenship. The less informed youngsters are, the higher the possibilities of developing hostile attitudes towards politics in general, and more specifically towards political participation. Our respondents were quite informed about the current political conversation in Spain regarding LGBTI+ rights that includes a new LGBTI+ equality Bill, and new legislation guaranteeing the right to the self-determination of gender by trans people. As shown in Figure 1, only 3,8% of our respondents knew nothing about the equality Bill, 2,5% remained ignorant about the Law for the Equality of LGBTI+ People, and 9% about the Law of equal treatment and non-discrimination.



Note. N=79

Figure 1. Knowledge about Legal Initiatives Proposed in Relation to LGBTI+ People

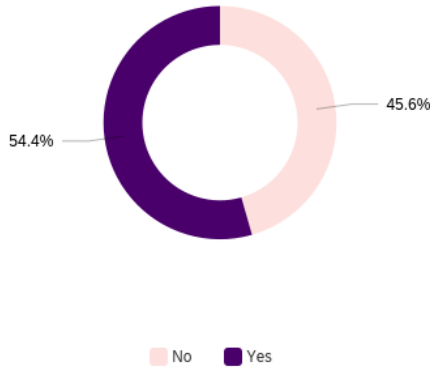
These results help understand the opinions about the advances in substantive equality for LGBTI+ people in Spain. They know that a gap remains between formal and substantive equality: 70% accept that important discriminations are still suffered, which is consistent with other studies that evidence that real equality is not yet achieved (FRA, 2020; Gabriel & Herranz, 2017). Only a tiny minority believes that full equality has been achieved. Still, almost 30% of respondents are appreciative of the advances in terms of equality. This is noteworthy considering the timing of LGBTI+ rights battles in Spain (Calvo & Pichardo, 2020): young people had not come to age politically between 2005 and 2007, the period when landmark legislation was passed in the areas of same-sex marriage and transsexual rights. In other words, most of our respondents entered the socialization period in a context already defined by significant advances in legal equality.



Note. N=79

Figure 2. Opinion about Spain in Terms of Equality for LGBTI+ People

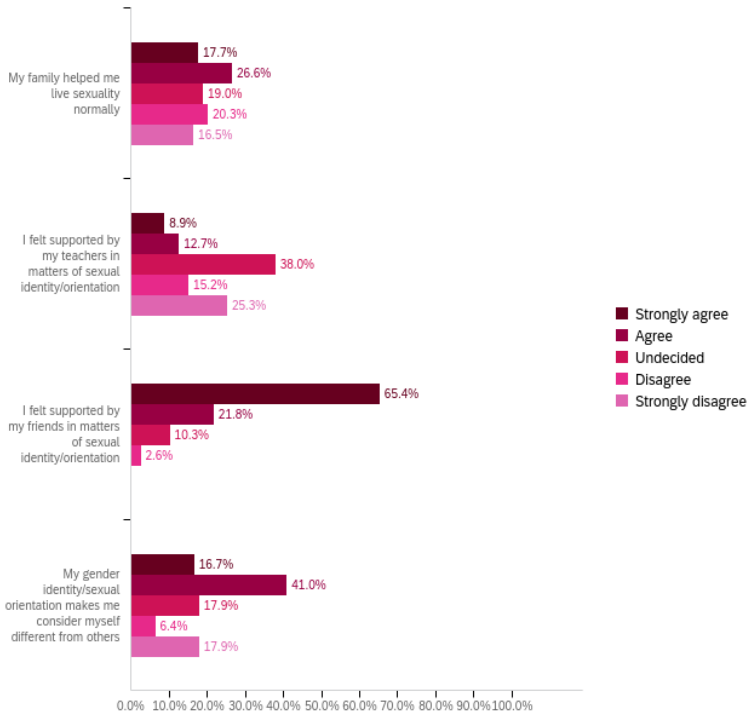
Elaborating further on the perceptions of discrimination, we included in the survey the following statement: ‘In my environment I see examples of discrimination (insults, contempt, violence...) towards the LGBTI+ people’. The question took the scale format, with values ranging from 1 to 10 (10 meaning full acceptance with the statement). The mean value was 5.1. Most of our respondents suffered bullying.



*Note.* N=79

*Figure 3.* People Who Suffered Bullying

As we show in Image 4, teachers are perceived as unsympathetic to the plight of LGBTI+ students: they fail on the duty of help LGBTI+ young people. 25,3% of our respondents strongly disagree with the statement that ‘I felt supported by my teachers in matters of sexual identity/orientation’.



Note. N=79

Figure 4. Degree of Agreement or Disagreement with Statements about Support of the Own Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

A simple bivariate analysis reveals, however, that homophobic harassment in schools expresses differently according to differences in the victim. As showed in Table 2, the odds for suffering bullying are lower in the case of lesbian cisgender women while higher in the case of trans people ( $X^2(3, N=81) = 14.528, p < .002$ ).

Table 3

*Relationship between Gender Identity and Suffering Bullying*

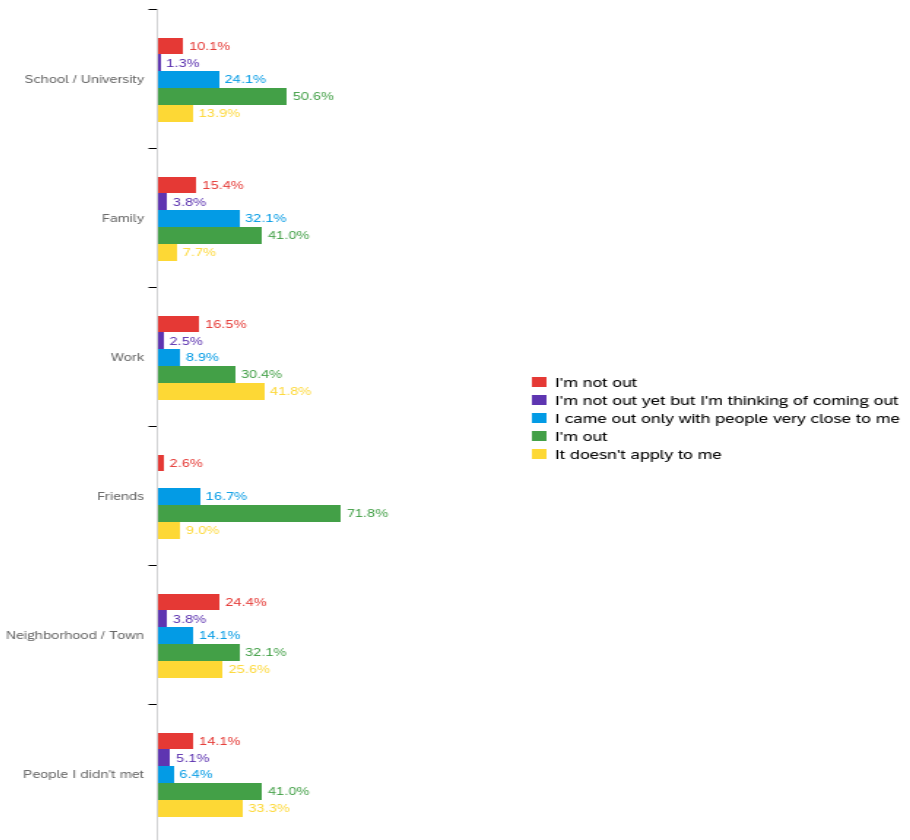
		No	Yes	Total
Cisgender men	Count	14	23	37
	%	37,8%	62,2%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-1,5	1,5	
Cisgender women	Count	20	7	27
	%	74,1%	25,9%	100%
	Adjusted residual	3,5*	-3,5*	
Non-binary	Count	4	8	12
	%	33,3%	66,7%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-1	1	
Trans	Count	0	5	5
	%	0%	100%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-2,2*	2,2*	
Total	Count	38	43	81
	%	46,9%	53,1%	100%

*Note.* \* Indicates it is statistically significant (<1,96 or >1,96).

***The personal is political***

‘Coming out’ remains a key personal decision that has gigantic personal and political consequences. For example, according to LGBTI FRA survey (2020), 53% of respondents are now fairly or very open about being LGBTI in Spain (for the EU-28, it is 47%). In a context of a growing opposition against equality and LGBTI+ rights, we could expect that future ‘queer counteractions’ would build on approach to sexuality and gender that weaponizes the public expression of their identities as resistance tools. Our expectations, however, are not fully confirmed. The context in which more young people are out of the closet is ‘with friends’ (71,8%), while ‘work’ (30,4%) and ‘neighborhood/town’ (32,1%) are less hospitable environments

for coming out. Accordingly, 24,4% of the respondents remained in the closet in their neighborhood or town, 16,5% at work and the 15,4% with their family. Coincidentally, LGBTI FRA survey (2020) shows that 41% of Spanish young people (18-24) hide being LGBTI+ at school and 28% of them are not open about being LGBTI+ with any of their family members, but 51% of them are openly LGBTI+ with all their friends (and 29% to most of them). Furthermore, 21% of the respondents felt discriminated against at work in the year before the survey in Spain.

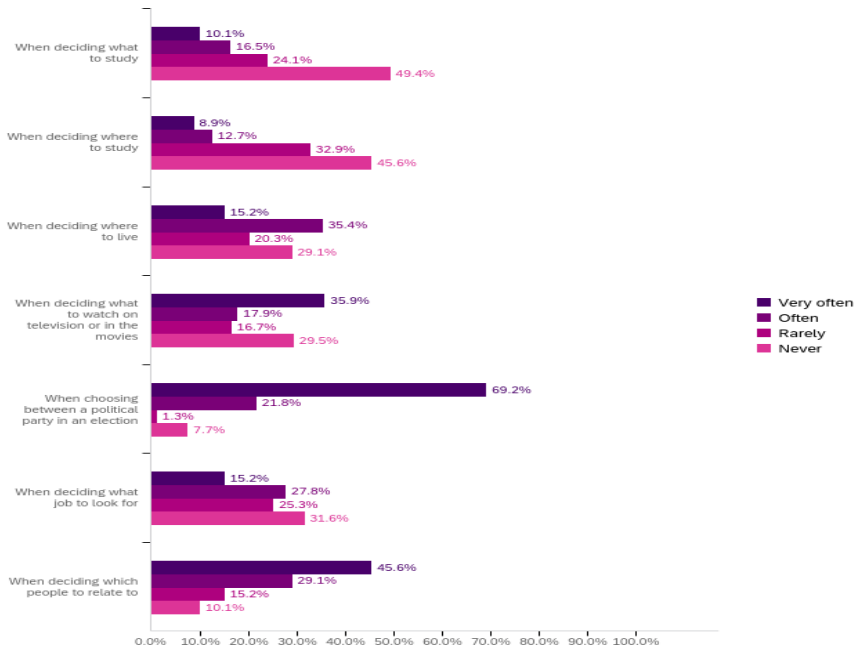


Note. N=79

Figure 5. Coming Out in Different Contexts



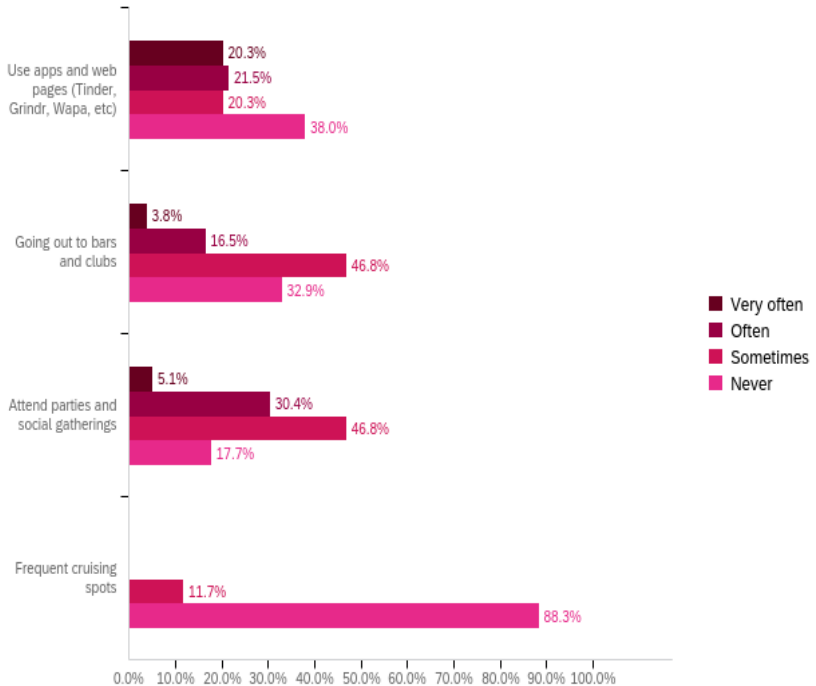
Remaining such a contentious issue, sexual orientation and/or gender identity are relevant factors when making decisions. 70% of respondents, for instance, accepted that sexual orientation/gender identity mattered ‘when choosing between a political party in an election’). Not with the same relevance, their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity also matters when deciding about education: 26,6% of our respondents agreed with the idea that their identity matters when deciding what to study. This is an interesting result: the private becomes truly public when making career choices, in processes that build on the ideas that several fields of knowledge and expertise are more suitable to accommodate queer experiences. Similarly, 31% of our respondents thought that their identity would be relevant when seeking employment.



Note. N=79

Figure 6. Influence of Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity in Life Decisions

Young LGBTI+ Spaniards use apps or web pages to flirt or to meet people more often than going out to bars and clubs or attending parties and social gatherings.



Note. N=79

Figure 7. Forms of Flirting or Meeting People

However, Chi-squared proof showed that cisgender men were much more likely to use those apps, such as Tinder ( $X^2(3, N=81)=14.528, p < .002$ ).

Table 4

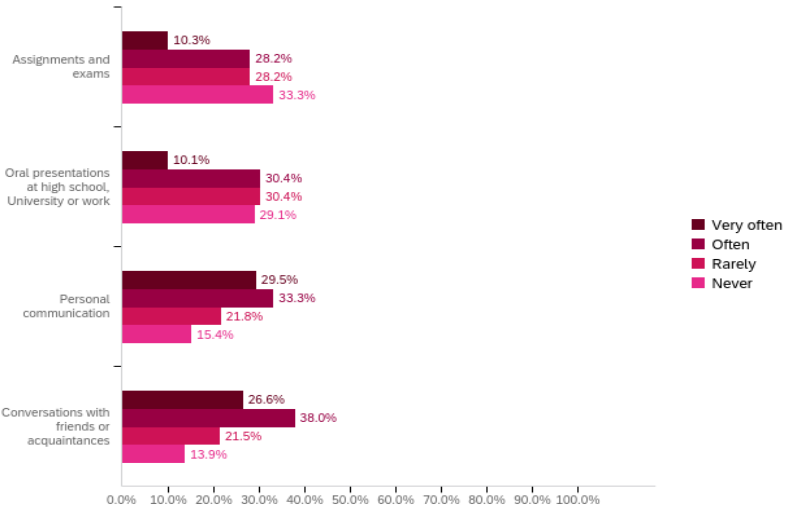
*Relationship between Gender Identity and Ways of Flirting or Meeting People*

		Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never	Total
Cisgender men	Count	14	8	9	6	37
	%	37,8%	21,6%	24,3%	16,2%	100%
	Adjusted residual	3,4*	,1	,7	-3,6*	
Cisgender women	Count	1	8	4	14	27
	%	3,7%	29,6%	14,8%	51,9%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-2,7*	1,4	-1	2*	
Non-binary	Count	1	1	3	7	12
	%	8,3%	8,3%	25%	58,3%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-1,2	-1,2	,4	1,7	
Trans	Count	1	0	1	3	5
	%	20%	0%	20%	60%	100%
	Adjusted residual	-,1	-1,2	-,1	1,1	
Total	Count	17	17	17	30	81
	%	21%	21%	21%	37%	100%

\* Indicates it is statistically significant (<1,96 or >1,96).

The results evidence that the more casual the context is, the more LGBTI+ young people use inclusive language. In other words, they ‘often or very often’ use any form of inclusive language in personal communications (62,8% of the cases) and in conversations with friends or acquaintances (64,6%). On the contrary, 33,3% of them never use inclusive language in assignments and exams and neither in oral presentations at high school, University or work (29,1%). Note that the forms of gender inclusive language in Spanish notably differ from other languages because it has no true neutral

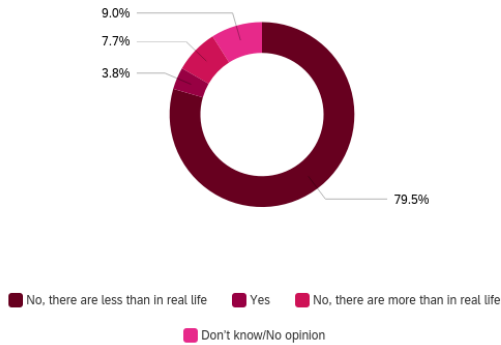
grammatical gender. The most frequent practices are to substitute the letters -a and -o, which indicate feminine or masculine, in nouns, articles and adjectives ending with the letters -@, -e or -x.



Note. N=79

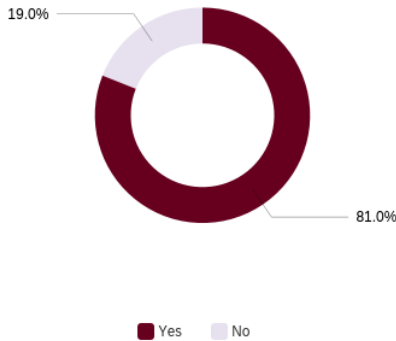
Figure 8. Use of Inclusive Language (@, x, e).

The wide majority of the Spanish LGBTQ+ surveyed think that the percentage of non-cisheterosexual characters (trans, non-binary, gay, lesbian, bisexual or other orientations) in audiovisual fiction does not correspond to reality. Consequently, they seem to migrate to social media, where they use to (81%) follow influencers who openly declared themselves part of the LGBTI+ collective. Chi-squared proof relating the variables of gender identity and follow influencers evidenced that non-binary people were the group less likely to follow openly LGBTI+ influencers ( $X^2(3, N=79)=6.809, p < .10$ ).



Note. N=79

Figure 9. Percentage of Non-cisheterosexual Characters (Trans, Non binary, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Other Orientations) in Audiovisual Fiction



Note. N=79

Figure 10. Statement 'I Follow "Influencers" Who Openly Declared Themselves Part of the LGBTI+ Collective'

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The results of this research are somewhat hopeful for young LGBT+ people, reflecting a greater degree of knowledge, interest and awareness of the importance and need of exercising citizenship. Firstly, they declare to be very informed about the advances made in equality laws; secondly, they present a high percentage of participation, where one in two interviewees recognized being part of a LGBTI+ association. Finally, the determination of the vote conditioned for being LGBTI+, reflects a strong awareness of the social condition and the political fact. Aspects that strengthen citizenship as a practice, distancing themselves from the aforementioned youth disinterest in politics (O'Toole et al. 2003) or from their dissatisfaction with traditional political procedures (Norris, 2002).

Sexual orientation and gender identity, however, are still a source of stigma. The Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union (FRA) launched in 2012 a large European survey about the social and political situation of LGBTI+ people in EU countries (and Croatia). Spain ranked amongst the most tolerant societies. Still, 38% of respondents felt that they had been discriminated against due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; similarly, 91% of respondents had been witness to offensive remarks linked to sexual orientation by fellow students, coworkers and even teachers. More than 30% of respondents confessed to remain 'in the closet' while in the workplace (and almost 70% of them did so while in primary and secondary education). In 2017, a study by the official body responsible for equality and non-discrimination in Spain showed that mocking and the use of derogatory remarks on grounds of sexual orientation remains a common problem at businesses and organizations (Gabriel & Herranz, 2017).

Similar results have been found in this work and it is worth reflecting on the role that certain institutions play in the support they offer these young people. Although the group of friends and peers appears to be the space in which it is easiest to come out of the closet, the school and especially the family show that they have made only timid advances. Both institutions, essential in the socialization process, maintain ambiguous positions in this regard since, according to the results of our survey, LGBTI+ youth do not seem to feel fully supported by either the school or the family, although they do, in a concrete way, by some of its members (teachers and families).

And, of course, LGBTphobic violence remains a serious problem. Young transgender and non-binary individuals are exposed to situations of

discrimination and have a greater risk of violence (Aparicio-García et al., 2018). According to the FRA survey, the rate of violent incidents against LGBTI+ people in Spain is 203 incidents per 1.000 interviewees; in the Netherlands, the figure was 157 per 1.000. Official statistics about hate crimes identified 259 aggressions motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity in 2018 (Ministerio del Interior, 2018). Civil society groups have reported higher figures; for instance, the so-called Madrid Monitoring Group on Homophobia (*Observatorio Madrileño contra la homofobia, transfobia y bifobia*) reported 345 cases in 2018, an increase from the 321 cases of 2017, in Madrid region alone. All the parties with a responsibility for combating hate crimes unanimously accept that these figures are only the tip of a much larger iceberg, as most people suffering for various forms of abuse or violence on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity are unlikely to come to the police for help. As the far-right political party VOX is reaching positions of power, we are strongly compelled to consider the consequences of menacing anti-gender “crusades” (Dietze & Roth, 2020). We might be living in a context that contributes to discourses and policies that deny the effects of violence on women and similar manifestations of sexist, discriminatory and patriarchal norms. Equality is formally and aesthetically accepted as an ideal value, but a constant criticism of feminism and similar emancipatory movements raise new questions about the future of equality legislation in the country. The fact that the people interviewed continue to perceive discrimination points to the existence of a deep gap between formal recognition of rights, on the one hand, and substantive equality, on the other. This gap has not been closed through the development of egalitarian legislation and thus 70% of those interviewed report that they continue to suffer significant discrimination.

All this suggests that the citizenship status of Spanish LGBTI+ youth might remain incomplete. In the first place, the normative, ‘formal’, regulation of equality does not guarantee full equality (for LGBTI+ people, or women). The public sphere is essential, but it is not always capable of guaranteeing the best fulfillment of democratic aspirations. LGBTI+ youth perceive obstacles when it comes to showing their gender identity and/or their sexual orientation in public spheres such as educational institutions or the workplace. The possibilities of making the LGBTI+ reality visible by normalizing and endowing sexual diversity with positive elements (Bellucci & Rapisardi, 1999) are only partially achieved. In the second place, LGBTI+ young people

are of course exposed to the difficulties of *any* young person in Spain (Benedicto & Morán, 2003; Cañas Restrepo, 2003). For young people, the lack of full citizen status has been justified on the basis of their civic deficit. An issue that could not be understood out of the particularity of the Spanish case, highly conditioned by well-established family relationships and precarious working conditions within a "generational pact" (Garrido & Requena, 1996; Bernardi, 2007) that delays the labor incorporation of young people and force them to exercise a "delegated citizenship" through their parents (Morán & Benedicto, 2016).

Youth emancipation policies can hardly be considered successful (Du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2004) and have focused more on trying to insert youth trajectories into the market demands than on strengthening the expression of concerns and demands of young people in political terms. In fact, Platero and López-Sáez (2021) described the risk of LGBT+ people during the pandemic of increased control and condescension while living in intensive cohabitation with family members and having their social contacts restricted.

Despite the advances made in terms of equality, the pending challenges are no less important. If family responsibility is evident, the responsibility of the educational institution is no less so. The results of this study show that in the educational sphere and especially in the family sphere, people come out of the closet in a very timid way; in the former, nearly 20% of the people interviewed have not yet done so or they have done only with people close to them (23,5% of cases) and in the latter, the family nearly 40% have not done so or they have done only with people close to them (31,8% of cases). The deficiencies shown a few years ago in the classrooms (Santoro et al., 2010) that pointed to the frequency of bullying at school do not seem to have been resolved. Despite an evident change in the social acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, educational centers are still not sufficiently safe. The danger of generating hostile school environments, normalizing homo and/or transphobic humor, no matter how minority they may be, has been highlighted by some researchers as a serious problem that undermines the ultimate goal of the school institution (Pichardo Galán et al., 2015).

More qualitative research is required to understand the impact that this violence has on the lives of the people who experience it. However, it is easy to perceive the weakness of the support that LGBTI+ youth have. Looking ahead to future works, and in the context of a time when awareness of mental



health problems is being raised (difficulties are known among Spanish youth -especially males- who report not having people they trust to talk about their problems or concerns (Megías et al., 2021), it will be necessary to remain attentive to the difficulties these young people have in expressing sadness and other negative feelings.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the INE (2021), 46 million people live in Spain, with Andalusia being the most populous autonomous community, with 8.48 million, followed by Catalonia (7.6 million), Community of Madrid (6.7 million) and Community Valencian (5 million). These four communities concentrate 60% of the Spanish population. Curiously, Castilla y León, which has had a very high response rate, is not among the most populated, since it has 2.3 million inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> In the barometer of the year 2020 (CIS, 2020), regarding the question that inquires about the intention to vote in the general elections to the Spanish Parliament, 23.7% would vote for the PSOE (social-democratic), 13.6% for the PP (conservative), 7.8% to Unidas Podemos (left-wing), 6.4% to VOX (national-conservative) and 4.5% to Ciudadanos (liberal). The rest of those surveyed would vote for other parties. These data are far from those collected in this survey, where the great part of the sample is ideologically very far to the left.

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