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# Demographics of Same-sex Couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota: Analyses of the 2013 American Community Survey

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## Executive Summary

Analyzing data from the 2013 US American Community Survey, this report considers the demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics of same-sex couples (married and unmarried), especially those raising children, in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Comparisons are made with their different-sex counterparts.

In Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, as of 2013, there are an estimated 19,652 same-sex couples. An estimated 12% of these couples report being married, meaning that there were more than 2,350 married same-sex couples in these states in 2013.

An estimated 4,500 same-sex couples (married and unmarried) are raising 9,100 children under age 18 in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. In these states, the median annual household income of these couples is more than 12% lower than the median annual household income of married different-sex couples raising children (\$66,000 versus \$71,000). Nearly a third of children being raised by same-sex couples (32%) live in poverty compared to 11% of children being raised by different-sex married parents.

Same-sex couples in these five states are more likely to have adopted or foster children than their different-sex counterparts. Same-sex couples are 1.3 times more likely than married different-sex couples to have an adopted or foster child (2.2% versus 1.7%, respectively). An estimated 740 adopted or foster children are being raised by same-sex couples in these states.

Other key findings in the report include:

- Census 2010 figures suggest that same-sex couples are present in 77% of counties across the five states.
- More than two-thirds of same-sex couples in these states are female (69%).
- The average age of individuals in same-sex couples is more than 10 years younger than that of married different-sex couples—40.8 and 50.9 years old, respectively.
- Individuals in same-sex couples are more likely to be members of racial and ethnic minorities when compared to individuals in married different-sex couples, 26% and 16%, respectively.
- Same-sex couples (both with and without children) have a lower median annual household income than that of married different-sex couples (\$66,300 versus \$70,000).
- Individuals in same-sex couples are much more likely to be living in poverty than their married different-sex counterparts (22% versus 5%, respectively).
- Individuals in same-sex couples are less likely to own their homes than their married different-sex counterparts (60% versus 84%, respectively).

## Introduction

The United States Court of Appeals from the Eighth Circuit will be hearing arguments in cases from Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota challenging the constitutionality of those states' bans on marriage for same-sex couples.

These analyses consider the demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics of same-sex couples (married and unmarried), especially those raising children, in the five states in the Eighth Circuit where same-sex couples currently cannot legally

marry: Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Comparisons are made with their different-sex counterparts.

## Data and methodology

The analyses use the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the 2013 American Community Survey. Couple households are defined as such when a householder (Person 1 on the survey form) identifies another individual in the household who is aged 16 or older as his or her "husband/wife" or

“unmarried partner.” Respondents also provide information about the sex of the householder and spouse or partner such that same-sex and different-sex couples can be identified.

Prior analyses of same-sex couples using US Census Bureau data have documented difficulties associated with accurate measurement, particularly of married same-sex couples (Gates and Steinberger, 2009; O’Connell and Feliz, 2011; Cohn, 2014). These difficulties occur when very small portions of surveys from different-sex couple households include miscodes in the sex of the spouses or partners such that they appear to be a same-sex couple. Even small numbers of such miscodes among different-sex couples mean that a relatively large portion of the same-sex couple sample includes miscoded different-sex couples. Since nearly 90% of different-sex couples are married, the accuracy of the married same-sex couple sample has been shown to be more compromised.

These analyses make several adjustments to the data to improve the likelihood that observed same-sex couples, particularly married same-sex couples, are not miscoded different-sex couples. These adjustments remove responses from the sample that are most likely to be comprised of miscoded different-sex couples. Several of the adjustments remove households where responses to key variables used to determine if a couple is same-sex or different-sex and if a couple is married or not have been “allocated.” Census Bureau procedures allocate a variable if the original response was missing or there was an anomaly in the response. In those cases, statistical procedures are used to assign the most likely accurate response.

The adjustment procedure for these analyses removes responses from the analytical sample if:

- The sex of a partner or spouse in a same-sex or different-sex couple is allocated.
- The marital status of a partner or spouse in a same-sex or different-sex couple is allocated.
- Spouses in same-sex and different-sex couples report being currently married but record different years when the marriage occurred.
- Spouses in same-sex couples report that their marriage occurred prior to 2004, when Massachusetts became the first state to permit same-sex couples to marry.

It is possible that the adjustment procedure removes a small number of valid same-sex couples who report being married prior to 2004. Same-sex couples have

been able to legally marry in some countries outside of the US since 2001. Further, some couples who had civil unions, registered domestic partnerships, or commitment ceremonies could report the dates of those occasions (regardless of when a legal marriage actually occurred) as some of those statuses automatically converted to marriage or couples just view those dates as more significant than the date of a legal marriage.

The 2013 ACS PUMS for the entire United States includes 617,090 married different-sex couple households and 8,340 same-sex couple households, of which 3,102 are married and 5,238 are unmarried. The adjustment procedure removes 48,506 married different-sex couple households from the analyses (nearly 8%). It removes 2,346 same-sex couple households (married and unmarried), accounting for 28% of the original sample. This is consistent with prior estimates of the portion of same-sex couples that are likely miscoded different-sex couples (Gates and Steinberger, 2009; O’Connell and Feliz, 2011). Also consistent with prior analyses of the accuracy of same-sex couple samples in Census Bureau data, the adjustment results in proportionally more observations being removed among married same-sex couples (55%) than among unmarried same-sex couple households (12%).

The sample used in these analyses include 24,435 married different-sex couple households, 2,146 unmarried different-sex couple households, and 151 same-sex couple (married and unmarried) households. The sample includes 38 same-sex couples in Arkansas, 81 in Missouri, 19 in Nebraska, 4 in North Dakota, and 9 in South Dakota. There were also 20 married same-sex couples across the five states. The small samples of married same-sex couples and of same-sex couples within each of the four states limit the ability to make reliable estimates of characteristics of married versus unmarried same-sex couples and of characteristics within particular states. As a result, these analyses report characteristics of all same-sex couples (married and unmarried combined) across these five states in the Eighth Circuit.

## Demographics of couples

Because of the challenges associated with accurate measurement of same-sex couples in the ACS and the necessity of adjusting samples to improve the validity of the same-sex couple sample, it is difficult to use the ACS data to provide accurate estimates of the total number of same-sex couples in the US or in particular states.

Analyses of the 2013 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) indicate that in the United States there are approximately 690,000 same-sex couples (including both married and unmarried couples), meaning that nearly 1.4 million Americans are members of a same-sex couple (Gates 2014). This marked an increase from the “preferred” estimates of same-sex couples based on the adjustments made by the US Census Bureau to Census 2010 data to correct the measurement problems described above, which suggested that there were 646,464 same-sex couples in the country (O’Connell & Feliz, 2011).

To generate current estimates for the number of same-sex couples in the five states in the Eighth Circuit, the assumption is made that the number of same-sex couples in the US has increased since 2010 to 690,000 but the proportion in particular states remains the same as in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

An estimated 19,652 same-sex couples live in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The figures for each state are shown in Table 1. Census 2010 figures suggest that same-sex couples are present in 77% of counties across the five states (Gates and Cooke, 2011a; Gates and Cooke, 2011b; Gates and Cooke 2011c; Gates and Cooke, 2011d; Gates and Cooke 2011e).

**Table 1. Estimated number of same-sex couples (married and unmarried), by state.**

	Same-sex couples (married and unmarried)
Arkansas	4,511
Missouri	11,268
Nebraska	2,515
North Dakota	597
South Dakota	762
Total	19,652

An estimated 12% of same-sex couples across the five states reported that they were married. This implies that, as of 2013, there were more than 2,350 married same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

<sup>1</sup> So in Missouri, for example, findings from Census 2010 showed that there were 10,557 same-sex couples. That represents approximately 1.6% of all same-sex couples in the US. If 1.6% of the 690,000 same-sex couples living in the US derived from 2013 NHIS estimates reside in Missouri, it implies that there are now 11,268 same-sex couples in the state.

## Sex, Age, and Race/Ethnicity

More than two-thirds of same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota are female (69%).

The average age of individuals in same-sex couples in those states is nearly 9 years younger than that of different-sex couples—40.8 and 49.4 years old, respectively. Individuals in same-sex couples in these five states are, on average, 10 years younger than their married different-sex counterparts, who have an average age of 50.9, and 4 years older than those in unmarried different-sex couples, who have an average age of 36.6.

Individuals in same-sex couples in those states are more likely to be members of racial and ethnic minorities when compared to individuals in different-sex couples, 15% and 13%, respectively. An estimated 12% of those in married different-sex couples are racial and ethnic minorities compared to 23% of individuals in unmarried different-sex couples (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Race and ethnicity of individuals in same-sex and different-sex couples (married and unmarried).**

	Same-sex	Different-sex
Non-White	15%	13%
White	85%	87%
African-American	6%	5%
Latino/a	5%	4%
Am Ind/AK Nat	-	1%
Asian/Nat HI/Pac Isl	3%	2%
Other	1%	1%
	Different-sex	
	Married	Unmarried
Non-White	12%	23%
White	88%	77%
African-American	5%	11%
Latino/a	4%	6%
Am Ind/AK Nat	1%	3%
Asian/Nat HI/Pac Isl	2%	1%
Other	1%	2%

## Socio-Economic Status

Same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota have comparable median annual household income when compared to that of different-sex couples (\$66,300 versus \$67,700, respectively). Median annual household income is \$70,000 for married different-sex couples and \$47,000 for unmarried different-sex couples.

Despite the patterns seen with regard to median household incomes, individuals in same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota are much more likely to be living in poverty than their different-sex counterparts (22% versus 8%, respectively). Poverty is less common among those in married different-sex couples (5%) and more common among unmarried different-sex couples (33%).

In those states, individuals in same-sex couples are less likely to own their homes than their different-sex counterparts (60% versus 80%, respectively). Homeownership is higher among married different-sex couples at 84% than among unmarried different-sex couples at 44%.

## Demographics of couples raising children

Nearly one in four (23%) same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, is raising children under age 18 in their homes. This means that an estimated 4,500 same-sex-couples in these states are raising nearly 9,100 children. Same-sex couples with children are present in the vast majority of counties in these states (Gates and Cooke, 2011a; Gates and Cooke, 2011b; Gates and Cooke 2011c; Gates and Cooke, 2011d; Gates and Cooke 2011e).

### Sex, Age, and Race/Ethnicity

An estimated 91% of same-sex couples raising children under age 18 in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota are female. Nearly a third of female couples (31%) and 7% of male couples are raising children in these states.

Individuals in same-sex couples raising children in those states are, on average, 5.5 years younger than their different-sex counterparts (33.7 versus 39.1, respectively). Among different-sex married couples raising children, the average age is 39.9 compared to 33.5 among unmarried different-sex couples.

Parenting by individuals in same-sex couples is more prevalent among racial and ethnic minorities in those states. More than one in four (43%) individuals who is a member of a racial or ethnic minority and in a same-sex couple is raising children. That figure is 21% among White individuals in same-sex couples. By comparison, 56% of racial and ethnic minorities in different-sex

couples are raising children compared to 39% of White individuals in those couples.

Among parents raising children in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, 26% are racial and ethnic minorities compared to 18% of those in comparable different-sex couples. Among those in married different-sex couples raising children, 16% are racial or ethnic minorities compared to 30% among those in unmarried different-sex couples raising children (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Race and ethnicity of individuals in same-sex and different-sex couples raising children under age 18 (married and unmarried).**

	Same-sex	Different-sex
Non-White	26%	18%
White	74%	82%
African-American	19%	6%
Latino/a	3%	6%
Am Ind/AK Nat	-	1%
Asian/Nat HI/Pac Isl	5%	2%
Other	-	2%
	Different-sex	
	Married	Unmarried
Non-White	16%	30%
White	84%	70%
African-American	5%	16%
Latino/a	6%	8%
Am Ind/AK Nat	1%	3%
Asian/Nat HI/Pac Isl	2%	1%
Other	1%	2%

### Socio-Economic Status

Same-sex couples with children evidence relatively high levels of economic vulnerability when compared to their different-sex counterparts in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

In those states, the median annual household income of same-sex couples with children under age 18 in the home is 7% less than the median annual household income of comparable different-sex couples (\$66,000 versus \$71,000). The median household income of same-sex couples with children is 12% less than that of comparable married different-sex couples, which is \$75,000. The median annual household income among unmarried different-sex couples with children is \$44,780.

Poverty rates are high among children being raised by same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri,



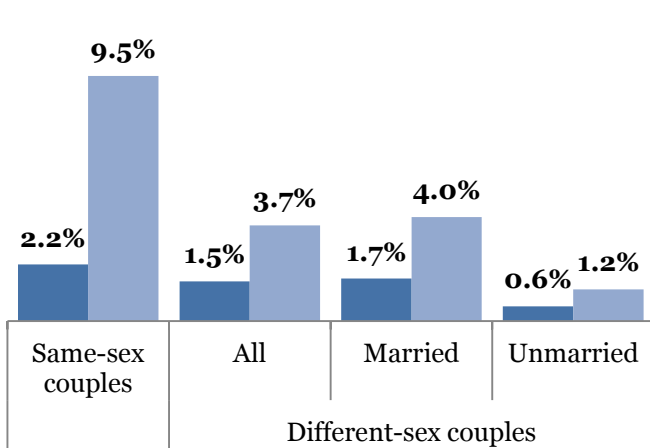
Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Nearly a third of children being raised by same-sex couples in those states (32%) are living in poverty compared to 15% of children being raised by different-sex couples. Among children in married different-sex couples, the poverty rate is 11% compared to 47% among children being raised by unmarried different-sex couples.

Home ownership is much higher in those states among different-sex couples with children (74%) than among same-sex couples with children (34%). More than 78% of married different-sex couples with children own their home compared to 39% of unmarried different-sex couples.

### Adoption and Fostering

The ACS data do not allow for a full assessment of the nature of relationships between parents and children in couples. Instead, the data provide information about how the householder (the person who completed the survey) is related to other members of the household, including all children under age 18 in the home.

**Figure 2. Percentage same-sex and different-sex couples (married and unmarried) raising adopted or foster children under age 18, by presence of children.**



■ All couples ■ Couples raising children under age 18

Even though many same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota may face more restrictive laws regarding adoption in their home states, they are more likely to have adopted or fostered children than their different-sex counterparts.

Same-sex couples are 1.4 times more likely than different-sex couples to have an adopted or foster child (2.2% versus 1.5%, respectively). Among married different-sex couples, 1.7% are raising adopted children compared to less than 1% of unmarried different-sex couples (see Figure 2). An estimated 740 adopted or foster children are being raised by same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Among couples raising children under age 18 in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, 9.5% of same-sex couples have an adopted or foster child compared to 3.7% among different-sex couples. Among different-sex couples, the figure among married couples is 4% and is 1.2% among unmarried couples.

While a larger portion of children being raised by same-sex couples in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota are adopted or foster children when compared to the children of different-sex couples, children of same-sex couples still likely have a biological relationship with one of their parents.

**Table 4. Relationship to householder among children under age 18 in same-sex and different-sex couples (married and unmarried).**

	Same-sex	Different-sex
Biological	48%	84%
Adopted	6%	3%
Step	17%	5%
Foster	1%	0.3%
Grandchild, Sibling, Other	29%	7%
	Different-sex	
	Married	Unmarried
Biological	86%	75%
Adopted	3%	0.5%
Step	5%	6%
Foster	0%	0.3%
Grandchild, Sibling, Other	6%	18%

Nearly half of children being raised by same-sex couples are the biological children of one of the parents (48%), and 17% are stepchildren, who may also be biologically related to one member of the couple. An estimated 6% of children are adopted, and 1% are foster children. The remaining 29% are grandchildren, siblings (of one member of the couple), or some other relationship. Among different-sex couples, only 3% of children are adopted, and just 0.3% are foster children.

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## About the author

**Gary J. Gates**, PhD is the Blachford-Cooper Distinguished Scholar and Research Director at the Williams Institute. His is a national expert in the demographic, geographic, and economic characteristics of the LGBT population.

## About the Institute

**The Williams Institute** on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law advances law and public policy through rigorous, independent research and scholarship, and disseminates its work through a variety of education programs and media to judges, legislators, lawyers, other policymakers and the public.

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