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LGBT Adult Immigrants in the United States

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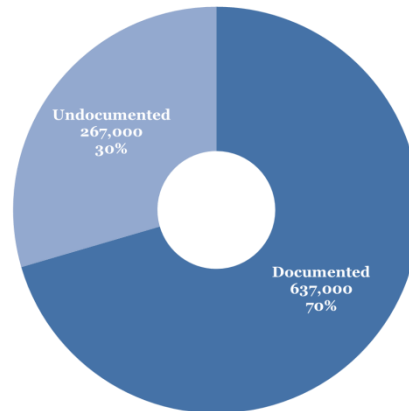
by Gary J. Gates
March 2013



Executive Summary

As ongoing debates about immigration reform continue in the United States, little is known about how many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals might be affected by the outcome of these debates. While some information is available regarding same-sex couples who include foreign born partners or spouses ([Gates and Konnoth, 2012](#)), it is likely that many LGBT immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are not part of a same-sex couple. This research brief uses data about the characteristics of the adult foreign-born immigrant population in the US provided by the Pew Research Hispanic Center¹ along with analyses of Gallup Daily Tracking Survey data and the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2011) to estimate the number of LGBT-identified adult (age 18+) undocumented and documented immigrants and describe some of their characteristics. Analyses also provide updated estimates for the number of foreign born residents who are part of a same-sex couple and describes their demographic characteristics.

LGBT foreign born adults in the United States



Key findings regarding adult undocumented immigrants include:

- There are an estimated 267,000 LGBT-identified individuals among the adult undocumented immigrant population, representing approximately 2.7% of undocumented adults in the US.
- Relative to all undocumented immigrants, LGBT undocumented immigrants are more likely to be male and are younger.
- 71% of undocumented LGBT adults are Hispanic.
- 15% of undocumented LGBT adults are Asian or Pacific Islander.

Key findings regarding adult documented immigrants include:

- There are an estimated 637,000 LGBT-identified individuals among the adult documented immigrant population, representing approximately 2.4% of documented adults in the US.
- Like their undocumented counterparts, LGBT documented immigrants are more likely to be male and are younger.
- 30% of documented LGBT adults are Hispanic.
- 35% of documented LGBT adults are Asian or Pacific Islander.

Key findings regarding same-sex couples that include a foreign born spouse or partner:

- There are an estimated 113,300 foreign born individuals (naturalized citizens and non-citizens) who are part of a same-sex couple. An estimated 54,600 of these individuals are not US citizens.
- An estimated 24,700 same-sex couples are binational (one US citizen and one non-citizen) along with 11,700 same-sex couples comprised of two non-citizens.
- Nearly 7,000 same-sex couples that include two non-citizens (58%) are raising an estimated 12,400 children under age 18.

¹ Special thanks to Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn for their assistance in providing the data.

- An estimated 6,200 binational same-sex couples (25%) are raising more than 11,000 children.
- Compared to foreign born individuals in different-sex couples, foreign born individuals in same-sex couples are more likely to be male and younger.
- Non-citizens in both same-sex and different-sex couples are economically disadvantaged. Comparing non-citizens to naturalized citizens in same-sex couples, the median annual personal income of non-citizen men in same-sex couples who are in the labor force is \$24,000 versus \$40,000 for their naturalized citizen counterparts. For women in same-sex couples, the comparable figures are \$22,400 versus \$45,000.
- Despite higher education levels, personal income for men in same-sex couples is lower compared to men in different-sex couples, regardless of citizenship status or labor force participation.

Adult foreign born immigrants in the United States

The Pew Research Hispanic Center estimates that there are 36.4 million foreign born adult (age 18 and older) immigrants living in the United States. Of that group, an estimated 10.1 million are undocumented and 26.3 million are documented.² Data that directly assess the number of these undocumented immigrants who identify as LGBT do not exist.

This research brief considers the demographic characteristics of the adult foreign born population along with the characteristics of LGBT-identified adults surveyed in the Gallup Daily Tracking Poll from June-September 2012 ([Gates and Newport, 2012](#)) and characteristics of same-sex couples in the US to estimate the number of LGBT adult undocumented immigrants in the US.

The estimation procedure (described in the Methodology section) assumes that differences observed in the percentage of adults who self-identify as LGBT by sex, age, and race/ethnicity are similar within immigrant populations. The procedure also assumes that differences in the likelihood of being in a same-sex cohabiting couple observed between foreign born residents in the US and the general population provide inference about differences in the likelihood of identifying as LGBT among undocumented and documented immigrants as compared to the general population.

It is important to remember that the estimation procedures only consider LGBT identification and largely assume that such identification is

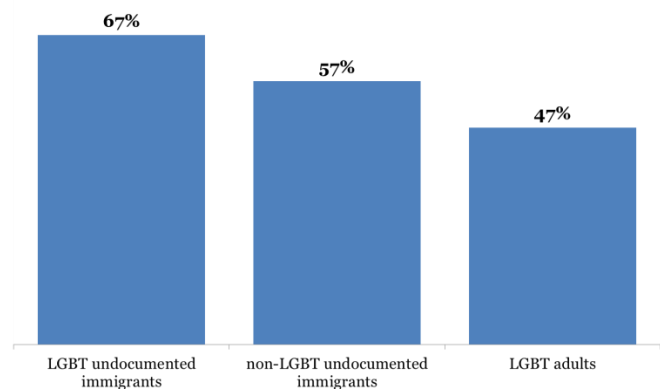
lower within immigrant populations than the general population. There are certainly LGBT individuals who are reluctant to identify as such and this reluctance may be even higher among LGBT foreign born immigrants in the US. As such, all LGBT population figures in this research brief are likely lower-bound estimates of the true LGBT population.

Undocumented adult immigrants

There are an estimated 267,000 LGBT-identified adult undocumented immigrants living the US, representing 2.7% of that population (see Table 1).

When considering the demographic characteristics of the LGBT population of foreign born immigrants, it is important to remember that they are in part driven by the assumption that patterns of LGBT identity in the general population are also broadly true among undocumented immigrants. For example, younger people in the general population are much more likely to identify as LGBT. The estimation procedure assumes that this is also true among undocumented immigrants.

Figure 1. Percent male, among undocumented immigrants and LGBT adults



² Tabulations by age, sex, and race/ethnicity of the adult undocumented and documented foreign-born immigrant population in the US are based on augmented March Supplements to the Current Population Survey for 2009-2011. Estimates are consistent with [Passel and Cohn, 2012](#).

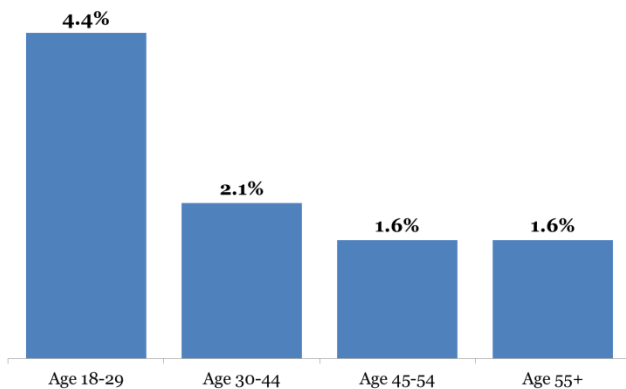
Pew Research Hispanic Center data suggest that men comprise more than 57% of adult undocumented immigrants (see Figure 1). Among LGBT undocumented immigrants, the estimated portion of men is higher at 67%. This contrasts with the broader LGBT community, which Gallup Daily Tracking data suggest is majority female (53%).

Estimates suggest that 3.1% of undocumented immigrant men identify as LGBT compared to 2% of comparable women.

LGBT undocumented immigrants are younger than the broader undocumented population. Nearly half (49%) of LGBT undocumented immigrants are estimated to be under age 30 compared to 30% of all undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented immigrants under age 30 are twice as likely as all other undocumented immigrants to identify as LGBT. Approximately 4.4% of that group identify as LGBT compared to 2.5% of those aged 30-44 and 1.6% of those 45 years or older (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent LGBT among undocumented immigrants, by age



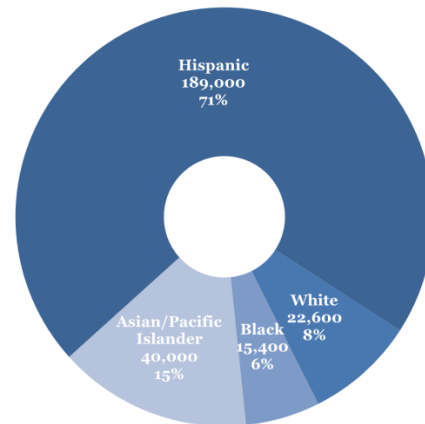
A substantial majority of LGBT undocumented immigrants identify as Hispanic (71%). This is slightly lower than the 77% of all undocumented immigrants who are Hispanic.

Asians and Pacific Islanders comprise 15% of LGBT undocumented immigrants, somewhat higher than the 11% of that group among all undocumented immigrants.

Among racial and ethnic groups, LGBT identity is highest among Asian and Pacific Islander undocumented immigrants at 3.6% and lowest

among Hispanic undocumented immigrants (2.5%).

Figure 3. LGBT undocumented immigrants, by race and ethnicity



Documented adult immigrants

The estimation procedure suggests that there are 637,000 LGBT-identified adult documented immigrants living in the US, representing 2.4% of that population (see Table 2).

All of the patterns observed when comparing undocumented LGBT immigrants to the broader undocumented community hold when comparing LGBT documented immigrants to all documented immigrants. LGBT documented immigrants are more male, younger, more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be Asian.

While women comprise a majority of all documented immigrants (53%), men comprise a substantial majority of LGBT documented immigrants (57%).

Estimates suggest that 2.9% of documented immigrant men identify as LGBT compared to 2% of comparable women.

LGBT adult documented immigrants are twice as likely as the broader documented population to be under age 30 (31% to 15%, respectively).

An estimated 5% of adult documented immigrants under age 30 identify as LGBT compared to 2.4% of those aged 30-44 and less than 2% of those aged 45 and older.

Hispanics comprise a smaller proportion (30%) of LGBT-identified adult documented immigrants when compared to all adult documented immigrants (38%). The converse is

true for Asians and Pacific Islanders. They represent 35% of LGBT documented immigrants compared to 28% of all documented immigrants.

Among racial and ethnic groups, LGBT identity is highest among Black and Asian documented immigrants (3.3% and 3.0%, respectively) and lowest among Hispanic documented immigrants (1.9%).

Same-sex couples with foreign born spouses or partners

An estimated 113,300 foreign born individuals, citizens and non-citizens, in the US are part of a same-sex couple. They comprise 0.54% of all foreign born individuals who have either same-sex or different-sex spouses or partners (see Table 3) and 9% of all individuals in same-sex couples.

In total, 87,900 same-sex couples residing in the US include a foreign born spouse or partner. They comprise 14% of all same-sex couples.

The composition of same-sex couples that include a foreign born spouse or partner with regard to citizenship status of the spouses or partners is quite different from comparable different-sex couples.

Same-sex couples are more likely to be binational, meaning the couple includes a US citizen and one non-citizen (37% v. 27%, respectively) and half as likely to include two non-citizens (13% v. 27%, respectively). These figures imply that there are an estimated 24,700 same-sex binational couples and 11,700 dual non-citizen same-sex couples.

Among dual citizen couples that include a foreign born spouse or partner, same-sex couples are twice as likely as their different-sex counterparts to include a naturalized citizen and a native born citizen (44% v. 22%) and much less likely to include two naturalized citizens (6% v. 24%).

Foreign born individuals in same-sex couples are about as likely as those in different-sex couples to be non-citizens (48% v. 49%, respectively).

Foreign born individuals in same-sex couples, both naturalized citizens and non-citizens, are more likely to be male. Men comprise 62% of

naturalized citizens who have a same-sex spouse or partner and 59% comparable non-citizens.

Compared to foreign born individuals in different-sex couples, those in same-sex couples are younger, particularly among non-citizens. Nearly a quarter of non-citizens in same-sex couples (23%) are under age 30 compared to 15% of non-citizens in different-sex couples. Among naturalized citizens, the comparable figures are 7% and 4%, respectively.

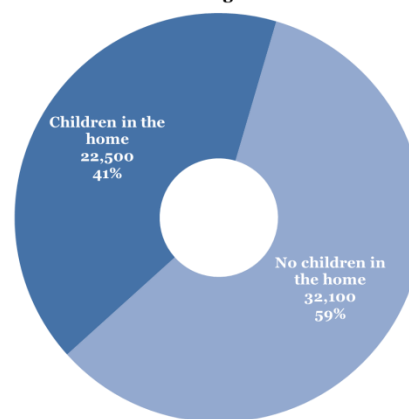
Naturalized citizens in same-sex couples are more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be Hispanic (37% v. 31%, respectively) and White (30% v. 26%), and less likely to be Asian (24% v. 33%).

Among non-citizens, individuals in same-sex couples are also more likely than those in different-sex couples to be White (28% v. 16%, respectively) but less likely to be Hispanic (46% v. 58%) and Asian (16% v. 20%).

Childrearing among couples with foreign born spouses or partners

An estimated 33,500 foreign born men and women who are part of a same-sex couple are raising children under age 18. Among non-citizens in same-sex couples, 41% (22,500) have children (see Figure 4), compared to 19% (11,000) of naturalized citizens in same-sex couples.

Figure 4. Non-citizens in same-sex couples, by presence of children under age 18 in the home



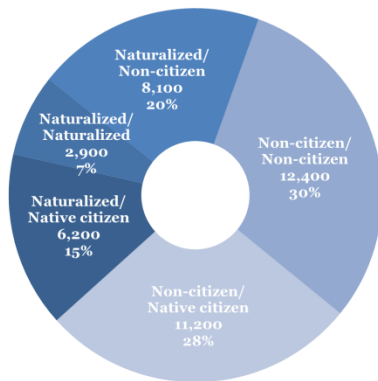
Nearly 41,000 children are being raised by same-sex couples that include a foreign born spouse or partner.

Same-sex couples with two foreign born partners are most likely to be raising children. Nearly 6

in 10 (58%) same-sex couples where both spouses or partners are non-citizens, are raising an estimated 12,400 children. This is true of 47% (3,600) of same-sex couples that include one non-citizen and one naturalized citizen. A quarter (25%) of binational same-sex couples (6,200) are raising more than 11,000 children.

Nearly 6 in 10 children being raised by same-sex couples with a foreign born spouse or partner are being raised by binational or dual non-citizen couples (see Figure 5). Approximately 30% live with dual non-citizen couples and 28% live with binational couples.

Figure 5. Children being raised by same-sex couples that include a foreign partner or spouse, by citizenship status of spouses and partners



Socio-economic status of foreign born individuals in couples

Most men and women in same-sex couples, regardless of citizenship status, have higher levels of education than their counterparts in different-sex couples (see Table 6). The one exception is among non-citizen women in same-sex couples. They are slightly less likely than non-citizen women in different-sex couples to have a college degree (22% versus 24%, respectively).

Labor force participation among women in same-sex couples, regardless of citizenship status, is substantially higher than among comparable women in different-sex couples (see Table 6). Male citizens in same-sex couples (naturalized and native) also have higher labor force participation than comparable men in different-sex couples. However, male non-citizens in same-sex couples are less likely to be in the labor force than similar men in different-sex couples (81% versus 90%, respectively).

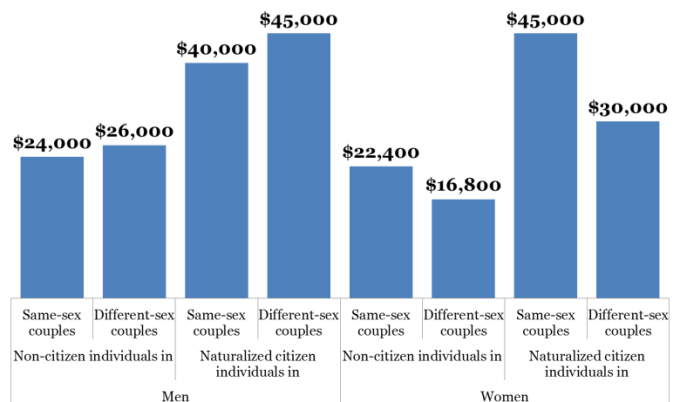
Levels of employment do not differ substantially between men in different-sex and same-sex couples. However, naturalized and non-citizen women in same-sex couples report higher levels of employment than their different-sex counterparts. An estimated 98% of naturalized women in same-sex couples are employed compared to 93% among comparable women in different-sex couples. For non-citizens, the figures are 90% and 87%, respectively.

Non-citizens in both same-sex and different-sex couples have lower personal incomes than naturalized citizens. Comparing non-citizens to naturalized citizens in same-sex couples, the median annual personal income of non-citizen men in same-sex couples who are in the labor force is \$24,000 versus \$40,000 for their naturalized citizen counterparts. For men in different-sex couples, the comparable figures are \$26,000 versus \$45,000.

For women in same-sex couples, non-citizens have median annual personal incomes of \$22,400 compared to \$45,000 among naturalized citizens. The same comparison among women in different-sex couples is \$16,800 versus \$30,000.

Despite relatively high levels of education, men in same-sex couples, regardless of citizenship status, report lower median annual personal income compared to men in different-sex couples.

Figure 6. Median annual personal income among foreign born in the work force, by citizenship status and couple type



Among non-citizen and naturalized citizens in male same-sex couples in the labor force, median annual personal income is \$24,000 and \$40,000, respectively (see Figure 6). For their

different-sex counterparts, the figures are higher at \$26,000 and \$45,000, respectively. The difference is greatest among non-citizen men who are not in the labor force. Those in same-sex couples had a median personal income of \$0 compared to \$7,800 among comparable men different-sex couples.

Regardless of labor force participation or citizenship status, women in same-sex couples report higher median annual personal income as

compared to women in different-sex couples (see Table 6). This is consistent with their generally high levels of college education. Not surprisingly, median personal income is the most similar among non-citizen women who are not in the labor force (\$2,400 for women in same-sex couples and \$0 for women in different-sex couples). These women have very similar levels of college education, 22% among those in same-sex couples and 24% for those in different-sex couples.

Table 1. Characteristics of adult undocumented immigrants in the US³

	LGBT		All		Estimated %LGBT
	Estimated Total	Percent	Estimated Total	Percent	
All	267,000	-	10,100,000	-	2.7%
Male	180,000	67%	5,777,200	57%	3.1%
Female	87,000	33%	4,282,400	43%	2.0%
Age 18-29	131,500	49%	3,009,800	30%	4.4%
Age 30-44	96,500	36%	4,595,500	46%	2.1%
Age 45-54	29,000	11%	1,818,000	18%	1.6%
Age 55+	10,000	4%	636,300	6%	1.6%
Hispanic	189,000	71%	7,696,200	77%	2.5%
White	22,600	8%	808,000	8%	2.8%
Black	15,400	6%	444,400	4%	3.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	40,000	15%	1,111,000	11%	3.6%

Table 2. Characteristics of adult documented immigrants in the US

	LGBT		All		Estimated %LGBT
	Estimated Total	Percent	Estimated Total	Percent	
Total	637,000	-	26,300,000	-	2.4%
Male	362,000	57%	12,387,800	47%	2.9%
Female	275,000	43%	13,886,400	53%	2.0%

³ Estimates on all tables are rounded to the nearest hundred. Due to this rounding, subtotals may not all exactly sum to totals.

	LGBT		All		Estimated %LGBT
	Estimated Total	Percent	Estimated Total	Percent	
Age 18-29	197,600	31%	3,945,000	15%	5.0%
Age 30-44	201,800	32%	8,468,600	32%	2.4%
Age 45-54	96,900	15%	5,391,500	21%	1.8%
Age 55+	140,800	22%	8,468,600	32%	1.7%
Hispanic	190,600	30%	9,862,500	38%	1.9%
White	146,500	23%	6,706,500	26%	2.2%
Black	79,600	12%	2,393,300	9%	3.3%
Asian/Pac Isl	220,300	35%	7,311,400	28%	3.0%

Table 3. Characteristics of individuals in same-sex couples who are foreign born and living in the US

	Foreign born individuals in same-sex couples		Foreign born individuals in different-sex couples		Estimated %individuals in same-sex couples among all couples
	Estimated total	Percent	Estimated total	Percent	
Total	113,300	-	21,021,300		0.54%
Naturalized	58,700	52%	10,681,400	51%	0.55%
Non-citizen	54,600	48%	10,339,900	49%	0.53%
Naturalized	36,300	62%	5,327,900	50%	0.68%
Male	22,400	38%	5,353,500	50%	0.42%
Female	32,100	59%	5,107,800	49%	0.63%
Non-citizen	22,500	41%	5,232,100	51%	0.43%
Naturalized	3,900	7%	388,000	4%	1.01%
Age 18-29	21,500	37%	3,276,400	31%	0.66%
Age 30-44	19,500	33%	2,876,500	27%	0.68%
Age 45-54	13,800	23%	4,140,500	39%	0.33%
Age 55+	12,700	23%	1,554,700	15%	0.82%
Non-citizen	27,800	51%	5,335,100	52%	0.52%
Age 18-29	8,500	16%	2,085,900	20%	0.41%
Age 30-44					
Age 45-54					

Age 55+	5,600	10%	1,364,200	13%	0.41%
	Foreign born individuals in same-sex couples		Foreign born individuals in different-sex couples		
	Estimated total	Percent	Estimated total	Percent	Estimated %individuals in same-sex couples among all couples
Naturalized					
Hispanic	21,500	37%	3,308,000	31%	0.65%
White	17,700	30%	2,817,300	26%	0.63%
Black	4,300	7%	768,000	7%	0.56%
Asian/Pacific Islander	13,800	24%	3,549,500	33%	0.39%
Other	1,500	3%	238,800	2%	0.63%
Non-citizen					
Hispanic	25,300	46%	6,016,700	58%	0.42%
White	15,200	28%	1,653,300	16%	0.92%
Black	4,300	8%	488,400	5%	0.87%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8,700	16%	2,030,700	20%	0.43%
Other	1,200	2%	150,800	1%	0.80%
Naturalized					
Children in the home	11,000	19%	5,296,900	50%	
No children in the home	47,700	81%	5,384,500	50%	
Non-citizen					
Children in the home	22,500	41%	7,208,800	70%	
No children in the home	32,100	59%	3,131,100	30%	

Table 4. Couples living in the US that include a foreign born spouse or partner, by citizenship status of spouses/partners

	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples		Estimated %same-sex couples among all couples
	Estimated total	Percent	Estimated total	Percent	
Total	87,900		12,843,600		0.68%
Naturalized/ Native citizen	38,700	44%	2,810,600	22%	1.38%
Naturalized/Naturalized	5,200	6%	3,118,800	24%	0.17%
Naturalized/Non-citizen	7,600	9%	1,634,500	13%	0.47%
Non-citizen/Non-citizen	11,700	13%	3,430,400	27%	0.34%
Non-citizen/Native citizen	24,700	28%	1,849,300	14%	1.33%

Table 5. Childrearing among couples living in the US that include a foreign born spouse or partner, by citizenship status of spouses/partners

	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples		Estimated %same-sex couples among all couples
	Estimated total	Percent	Estimated total	Percent	
Total					
Children in the home	21,800	25%	7,414,400	58%	0.29%
No children in the home	66,100	75%	5,429,200	42%	1.20%
Naturalized/ Native citizen					
Children in the home	3,700	9%	1,250,400	44%	0.29%
No children in the home	35,000	91%	1,560,200	56%	2.20%
Naturalized/Naturalized					
Children in the home	1,600	31%	1,500,800	48%	0.11%
No children in the home	3,600	69%	1,618,000	52%	0.22%
Naturalized/Non-citizen					
Children in the home	3,600	47%	1,044,900	64%	0.34%
No children in the home	4,000	53%	589,600	36%	0.68%
Non-citizen/Non-citizen					
Children in the home	6,800	58%	2,550,400	74%	0.26%
No children in the home	4,900	42%	880,000	26%	0.56%
Non-citizen/Native citizen					
Children in the home	6,200	25%	1,067,900	58%	0.58%
No children in the home	18,500	75%	781,400	42%	2.31%
Children under age 18 in homes with a foreign born spouse or partner	40,800	-	14,884,700	-	0.27%
Naturalized/ Native citizen	6,200	15%	2,388,300	16%	0.26%
Naturalized/Naturalized	2,900	7%	2,824,500	19%	0.10%
Naturalized/Non-citizen	8,100	20%	2,051,100	14%	0.39%
Non-citizen/Non-citizen	12,400	30%	5,476,500	37%	0.23%
Non-citizen/Native citizen	11,200	28%	2,144,200	14%	0.52%

Table 6. Economic status of individuals in couples, by sex, couple type, and citizenship status

	Individuals in same-sex couples			Individuals in different-sex couples		
	Foreign born		Native Citizens	Foreign born		Native Citizens
	Non-citizens	Naturalized		Non-citizens	Naturalized	
College degree						
Men	34%	50%	49%	24%	38%	33%
Women	22%	42%	45%	24%	36%	32%
In the labor force						
Men	81%	83%	81%	90%	79%	75%
Women	74%	80%	82%	52%	64%	63%
Employed (among those in the labor force)						
Men	90%	95%	93%	92%	94%	94%
Women	90%	98%	92%	87%	93%	94%
Median annual personal income						
In the labor force						
Men	\$24,000	\$40,000	\$48,500	\$26,000	\$45,000	\$50,000
Women	\$22,400	\$45,000	\$38,500	\$16,800	\$30,000	\$31,500
Not in the labor force						
Men	\$0	\$13,000	\$14,000	\$7,800	\$15,600	\$24,000
Women	\$2,500	\$28,000	\$11,500	\$0	\$3,100	\$6,600

Methodology

Data sources

- Jeffrey Passel at The Pew Research Hispanic Center provided tabulations by age, sex, and race/ethnicity of the adult undocumented and documented foreign-born immigrant population in the US. The tabulations are based on augmented March Supplements to the Current Population Survey for 2009-2011. Estimates are consistent with [Passel and Cohn, 2012](#).
- Gallup Daily Tracking Survey of adults in the United States (June-September 2012) (see [Gates and Newport, 2012](#) for additional details)
- 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample

Estimation procedure for LGBT foreign born immigrants

The estimation procedure applies an adjusted %LGBT to the undocumented and documented immigrant population, accounting for differences across sex (male and female), age (18-29, 30-44, 45-54, and 55+) and race/ethnicity (Hispanic, White, Black, and Asian) categories. Data from the 2011 ACS suggest that 0.5% of all adults in the US are part of a same-sex couple compared to 0.3% of foreign-born individuals. This offers evidence that the percent of self-identified LGBT within immigrant populations may be lower than the percent of LGBT identification within the general US adult population. The estimation procedure attempts to take this difference into account.

The procedure is as follows:

- Calculate the percentage of all American adults who identify as LGBT separately for each sex, age, and race/ethnicity category described above (Gallup Daily Tracking Survey).
- Calculate the fraction of individuals who are part of a same-sex cohabiting couple among adults within the sex, age, and race/ethnicity categories listed above (ACS 2011).
- Calculate the percent of foreign-born individuals in the US who are part of a same-sex cohabiting couple among adults within each sex, age, and race/ethnicity category (ACS 2011).
- Calculate an adjustment factor within each sex, age, and race/ethnicity category by dividing the fraction of foreign-born adults who are part of the same-sex couple by the fraction for all adults in the US who are part of a same-sex couple (ACS 2011).
- Calculate an adjusted %LGBT for immigrants by multiplying the %LGBT among adults in the US (Gallup Daily Tracking Survey) by the adjustment factor calculated above within each sex, age, and race/ethnicity category.
- Apply the adjusted %LGBT for each sex, age, and race/ethnicity category to the undocumented and documented immigrant population estimates (Pew Hispanic Center).

Same-sex and different-sex couple estimates

Characteristics of individuals in same-sex and different-sex couples (foreign born and citizenship status, sex, age, and race/ethnicity) are all derived from analyses of the 2011 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS). ACS PUMS estimates are applied to tabulations of the total number of same-sex and different-sex couples from Census 2010 ([Gates and Cooke, 2011](#); [O'Connell and Feliz, 2011](#)).

Adjustments to the same-sex couple data in the ACS PUMS are consistent with the procedure described for adjusting Census 2000 data in [Carpenter and Gates \(2008\)](#).

About the author

Gary J. Gates, PhD is the Williams Distinguished Scholar and 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. These studies can be accessed at the Williams Institute website.

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