

LGBTQ Family Fact Sheet

*In Support of August 2017 presentation to
NAC Undercount of Young Children Working Group:
Last Updated on June 2020*

LGBTQ Families: Who We Are and What Our Families Look Like

Who We Are:

- **LGBTQ.** Approximately 4.5% of adults in the U.S. identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). That means that there are more than 11.3 million LGBTQ adults in the U.S. ([Conron 2019](#)).
- **Transgender.** Recent reports from the Williams Institute estimate that 1.4 million adults (.6% of adults) in the U.S. identify as transgender. ([Conron 2019](#); [Flores et al 2016](#)).
- **Bisexual.** Roughly half of the LGBTQ population identify as bisexual. ([Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#)).

What Our Families Look Like: Like other parents, LGBTQ parents are married, unmarried and cohabitating, separated or divorced, and single. There are intact families and blended families, and children who live between households.

- **Married.** While the prevalence of marriage in the general population continues to decline, the number of same-sex married couples has increased significantly in the last decade as LGBTQ people gained the freedom to marry nationwide. Based on data from 2017-2019, it is estimated that there are at least 543,000 married same-sex couples in the U.S. ([Press Release 2019](#); [Romero 2017](#); [Gallup Poll 2017](#)).
- **Unmarried.** According to a 2019 Census Bureau estimate, there are over 469,000 same-sex couples who are unmarried and living together. ([Press Release 2019](#)).
- **Parenting.** Between 2 million and 3.7 million children under age 18 have an LGBTQ parent. Many of these children are being raised by a single LGBTQ parent, or by a different-sex couple where one parent is bisexual. Approximately 191,000 children are being raised by two same-sex parents. Overall, it is estimated that 29% of LGBTQ adults are raising a child who is under 18. ([LGBT Demographic Data, 2019](#); [Press Release 2019](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#)).

Family Formation: How LGBTQ Families Are Created

- **Family Formation.** The legal and social climate for LGBTQ people has a direct impact on how LGBTQ people form families and become parents. Historically, in the face of an anti-LGBTQ legal and social climate, LGBTQ people have tended to come out later in life, oftentimes after having a different-sex relationship. As such, most children today who are being raised by a same-sex couple were conceived in a different-sex relationship; however, this trend is changing as the legal and social climate has become more accepting of LGBTQ people and same-sex relationships. Today, LGBTQ people are coming out earlier in life, and an increasing number of same-sex couples are planning and creating their families through assisted reproductive technology (ART) and surrogacy, as well

as adoption and foster care; 63% of LGBTQ people planning families expect to use ART, foster care, or adoption to become parents. ([Family Equality Council 2019](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#)).

- **Adoption/foster care.** LGBTQ people and same-sex couples are more likely to adopt and foster children, compared to their non LGBTQ counterparts; specifically, same-sex couples are seven times more likely to foster or adopt than different-sex couples. ([Goldberg 2018](#)).

Demographics of LGBTQ Families

- **Where LGBTQ Families Live.** The proportion of same-sex couples raising kids tends to be higher in more socially conservative areas of the country where LGBTQ people have come out later in life and were more likely to have a child with a different-sex partner earlier in life. Overall, the highest proportions of same-sex couples raising children under age 18 reside in Southern, Mountain West, and Midwestern states – largely rural areas, with the fewest protections for LGBTQ families. ([Movement Advancement Project 2019](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#); [Gates 2013](#)).
- **Family Composition.** Among LGBTQ adults under 50 living alone or with a spouse or partner, 48% of women and 20% of men are raising a child who is under 18 years old. ([Gates 2013](#)). When looking specifically at those who live together, the US Census Bureau estimates that 16% of all same-sex couples are raising children under 18 in their household: 9.3 % of male couples and 23% of female couples ([Characteristics, 2018](#)).
- **Race and Ethnicity.** Racial and ethnic minorities who are LGBTQ are more likely to be raising or having kids. More than a third of same-sex couples raising children are racial or ethnic minorities – approximately 12% are African American and 15% Latinx. Out of all LGBTQ people aged 25 or older, 34% of African American adults and 39% of Latinx adults are raising children, in comparison to 21% of white adults. ([LGBT Demographic Data, 2019](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#); [Gates, Demographics 2015](#)).
- **Income.** LGBTQ individuals and same-sex couples raising children have lower incomes than different-sex counterparts and higher levels of poverty. Nearly one in five children being raised by same-sex couples (24%) live in poverty compared to 14% of children being raised by different-sex couples. In 2015, 33% of LGBTQ parents raising children experienced food insecurity, compared with 20% of their non-LGBTQ counterparts. ([Taylor et. Al, 2016](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#); [Gates, Demographics 2015](#)).
- **Education.** Nearly all research shows that individuals in same-sex couples have higher levels of education; however, this is not true for those raising children. Only one third of same-sex couples raising children have a college degree. ([Characteristics, 2018](#); [Gates, Marriage and Family 2015](#)).

Unique Challenges for LGBTQ Families That May Contribute to The Undercount of Small Children

Confusion. The complex and varied family structures of LGBTQ families may cause confusion for some parents on how to accurately fill out the census. This is especially true for blended families, families where only one parent is legally recognized as a parent, families with more than two parents, or families raising foster children.

Discrimination. The LGBTQ community has seen considerable legal and social progress in recent years; however, discrimination continues and increasing hostility under the current Administration may cause government mistrust and fear of discrimination amongst LGBTQ parents that could impact how they fill out the census. For more information on laws affecting LGBTQ parents, please see these [Equality Maps](#).

- While same-sex couples have the right to marry nationwide, anti-LGBTQ discrimination and social stigma remains. There is no comprehensive federal nondiscrimination law expressly protecting LGBTQ people and less than half of states have state nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people. In states where LGBTQ people feel vulnerable to such discrimination, they may be reluctant to report marital and parental status.
- Parenting and foster and adoption laws, practices, and procedures vary throughout the U.S., and many states do not have express protections for LGBTQ parents. Thus, depending on the law of a given state, LGBTQ parents may feel vulnerable to discrimination or retribution. This is especially true for transgender parents who have historically faced discrimination in the courts, custody disputes, foster care, and adoption, and a non-biological parent who does not have legally established rights to her or his child.
- In the last few years, there has been a notable increase in hate crimes and hostility toward LGBTQ people. Those who live in a hostile or socially conservative community may feel vulnerable and may be reluctant to fill out the census in a manner that reveals their sexual orientation or familial relationships, especially where such relationships are without legal recognition or protection.

Table of Authorities

Andrew R. Flores, Jody L. Herman, Gary J. Gates, and Taylor N. T. Brown, *How Many Adults Identify As Transgender in the United States?* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2016), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/How-Many-Adults-Identify-as-Transgender-in-the-United-States.pdf>

Adam P. Romero, *1.1 Million LGBT Adults are Married to Someone of the Same Sex at the Two-Year Anniversary of Obergefell v. Hodges* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2017), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Obergefell-2-Year-Marriages.pdf>

Characteristics of Same-Sex Couple Households (United States Census Bureau, 2018), at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/same-sex-couples/ssc-house-characteristics.html>

Family Equality Council, *LGBTQ Family Building Survey* (2019), at https://www.familyequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LGBTQ-Family-Building-Study_Jan2019-1.pdf

Gary J. Gates, *Marriage and Family: LGBT Individuals and Same-Sex Couples*, *The Future of Children*, 25(2):67–87 (Princeton: Brookings, Fall 2015), at [https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/marriage and child wellbeing revisited 25 2 full journal.pdf](https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/marriage_and_child_wellbeing_revisited_25_2_full_journal.pdf)

Gary J. Gates, *Demographics of Married and Unmarried Same-Sex Couples: Analyses of the 2013 American Community Survey* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2015), at <https://time.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/demographics-same-sex-couples-acs2013-march-2015.pdf>

Gary J. Gates and Frank Newport, Gallup Poll: An Estimated 780,000 Americans in Same-Sex Marriages (April 24, 2014), at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/182837/estimated-780-000-americans-sex-marriages.aspx>

Gary J. Gates, *LGB Families and Relationships: Analyses of the 2013 National Health Interview Survey* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2014), at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/lgb-families-nhis-sep-2014.pdf>

Gary J. Gates, *LGBT Parenting in the United States* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2013), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting-US-Feb-2013.pdf>

Jeffery M. Jones, Gallup Poll: In U.S., 10.2% of LGBT Adults Now Married to Same-Sex Spouse (June 22, 2017), at http://www.gallup.com/poll/212702/lgbt-adults-married-sex-spouse.aspx?g_source=Social+Issues&g_medium=newsf

Kerith J. Conron, *Adult LGBT Population in the United States* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2019), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Adult-US-Pop-Mar-2019.pdf>

LGBT Demographic Data Interactive (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2019), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#demographic>

Movement Advancement Project, *Where We Call Home: LGBT People in Rural America* (Boulder, CO, 2019), at <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/lgbt-rural-report.pdf>



Press Release: U.S. Census Bureau Releases CPS Estimates of Same-Sex Households (United States Census Bureau, November 19, 2019), at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/same-sex-households.html>

Shoshana Goldberg & Kerith J. Conron, *How many same-sex couples in the U.S. are raising children?* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2018), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Same-Sex-Parents-Jul-2018.pdf>

Taylor N. T. Brown, Adam P. Romero, and Gary J. Gates, *Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation in the LGBT Community* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2016), at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Food-Insecurity-SNAP-July-2016.pdf>

**For more information, contact Shelbi Day, Senior Policy Counsel
at sday@familyequality.org**