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A Brief Look at Same-Sex and Opposite-Sex Couple Households in the United States: 2010-2016

Introduction

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As the need for more quality data has grown, the U.S. Census Bureau, as the lead agency charged with collecting, analyzing and disseminating demographic information on the people of the United States, has responded to the call for improved estimates of same-sex couples. The first same-sex marriage was performed in the state of Massachusetts in 2004 and many other states have followed since or offered domestic partnerships or other civil arrangements that grant some or all the privileges of marriage to same-sex couples.

*Although each state has the right to determine the legal recognition of same-sex marriages, same-sex marriages received greater recognition when the Supreme Court decision on the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 2013 ruled that restricting U.S. federal interpretation of “marriage” and “spouse” to apply only to opposite-sex unions, is unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment. Further, in June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in **Obergefell v. Hodges** that the 14th Amendment requires all U.S. state laws to recognize same-sex marriages, thereby establishing and expanding the rights of same-sex marriage in the United States. As a result, the Office of Personnel Management and other governmental agencies requires data on same-sex married couples to estimate beneficiaries and for other programmatic reasons. In addition, it has become increasingly apparent that quality data on same-sex couples are also needed to assess levels of discrimination. For these reasons, researchers at the Census Bureau have been working to improve the measurement of the characteristics of same-sex couples, both married and unmarried.*

There is little doubt that living arrangements are rapidly changing in the United States, especially when it comes to same-sex couple households. This report examines the data on the number of same-sex couple households and same-sex households who are same-sex spouses (married) using data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau from 2010 through 2016 for the United States, and by state for 2016 only. However, the main focus is on the comparative household characteristics of opposite-sex and same-sex couples in the United States using statistics collected by the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates (detailed characteristics data were not available by state). The characteristics presented are by age of

householder and partner, race of householder, interracial couples, employment status, educational attainment, presence of children, household income, and homeownership.

The 2016 estimates showed same-sex couples being generally younger, more highly educated, earned higher incomes, and less likely to have dependent children than opposite-sex couples (Tables 3 and 4). In addition, same-sex couples seemed to be more geographically concentrated, with highest numbers in states where same-sex marriages were legalized prior to the Supreme Court ruling in 2015, and in coastal states - from Massachusetts to Florida on the East coast and from Washington to California on the West coast.

General Facts on Same-Sex Couples

- Approximately 887,456 same-sex couple households lived in the United States in 2016, up from 593,324 same-sex couple households reported in 2010 (Table 1).
- Nationally, about 1.4 percent of all couple households were same-sex couples in 2016.
- The state with the largest number of same-sex households was California with 128,111 households, followed by Florida with 69,566 households, Texas with 64,266 and New York with 64,147. The District of Columbia ranked 31st among states with 7,036 same-sex households (Table 2).
- For the percent of all same-sex households who are same-sex spouses, Wyoming ranked first with 75.4 percent, followed by New Hampshire with 67.9 percent, Washington with 67.7 percent and New Jersey at 65.1 percent. The District of Columbia at 53.0 percent was just below the national average of 54.9 percent. South Dakota had the lowest percentage at 37.0 percent.
- opposite-sex unmarried couples were between 25 and 34 years old (34.8 percent).
- Most same-sex married couples were in the 45 to 54 years age group (24.0 percent) – this was true for both male-male couples and female-female couples. Same-sex unmarried couples were mostly in the 25-34 years age group (25.5 percent) just as opposite-sex unmarried couples.
- Approximately 80 percent of both opposite-sex and same-sex couple households were white – above the national share of the white population (72.6 percent) in 2016.
- Interracial couple households were highest in the male-male couple category (18.1 percent) compared to opposite-sex married or unmarried interracial couples and same-sex female-female couples.
- About 7.7 percent of same-sex couples were black and 12.5 percent of same-sex couples were Hispanic.
- Almost 50 percent of same-sex couple households had at least one member with a bachelor's degree as compared to 40 percent of opposite-sex married couples and 26.5 percent of opposite-sex unmarried couples.
- Thirty-two percent of same-sex couple households had both partners with at least a bachelor's degree as compared to 25 percent for opposite-sex married couple households and 13.8 percent of opposite-sex unmarried households.
- Seventy percent of same-sex married householders had at least one householder employed compared to sixty-seven percent of married opposite-sex couple householders.
- Highest employment percentages were for same-sex unmarried couple households

Household Characteristics of Same-Sex vs Opposite-Sex Couples

The demographic characteristics of same-sex couples are the same in many ways to their opposite-sex counterparts but differ in other ways as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau (Tables 3 and 4).

- Same-sex spousal (married) couples represented 55 percent of all same-sex couples in 2016 – up from 26 percent in 2010.
- The majority of same-sex spousal couples were female-female for the 2010 to 2016 period, according to the American Community Survey.
- Most opposite-sex married couples were 65 years and older (23 percent), and most

(male-male couples) with at least one householder or both partners employed – 83 percent and 69 percent, respectively, in 2016.

- Thirty-nine percent of opposite-sex households had children compared to 16.5 percent of same-sex households.
- On average, 14 percent of both opposite-sex and same-sex couple households made less than \$35,000 in income. However, while 41.3 percent of opposite-sex households earned \$100,000 or more, the percent for same-sex household was 44.6 percent.
- Median household income for opposite-sex married couple households was \$85,581. Unmarried opposite-sex couple median household income was \$61,909, which was \$23,700 less than married couples.
- Median household income for same-sex married couple household was \$97,252 – higher than for opposite-sex married couple households by \$11,671 or 13.6 percent.
- Same-sex male-male couple households had the highest median household income at \$108,614 as compared to opposite-sex couple and female-female couple households.
- Over 79 percent of opposite-sex married couple households owned their homes compared to 74 percent of same-sex married couple households.
- Renting was highest among opposite-sex unmarried couple households at 57.5 percent.

Table 1. Estimates of Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: 2010-2016 ACS

Year	Total same-sex couples			Same-sex spousal couples			Same-sex unmarried partner couples		
	Total	Male-male	Female-female	Total	Male-male	Female-female	Total	Male-male	Female-female
2016	887,456	435,862	451,594	486,994	235,167	251,827	400,462	200,695	199,767
2015	858,896	412,001	446,895	425,357	201,779	223,578	433,539	210,222	223,317
2014	783,100	377,903	405,197	334,829	163,239	171,590	448,271	214,664	233,607
2013	726,600	352,624	373,976	251,695	117,535	134,160	474,905	235,089	239,816
2012	639,440	305,794	333,646	181,922	80,727	101,195	457,518	225,067	232,451
2011	605,472	284,295	321,177	168,092	69,522	98,570	437,380	214,773	222,607
2010	593,324	287,687	305,637	152,335	68,513	83,822	440,989	219,174	221,815

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 to 2015 American Community Survey

Table 2: Same-Sex Marriage Legalization Year and Same-Sex Couple Households by State

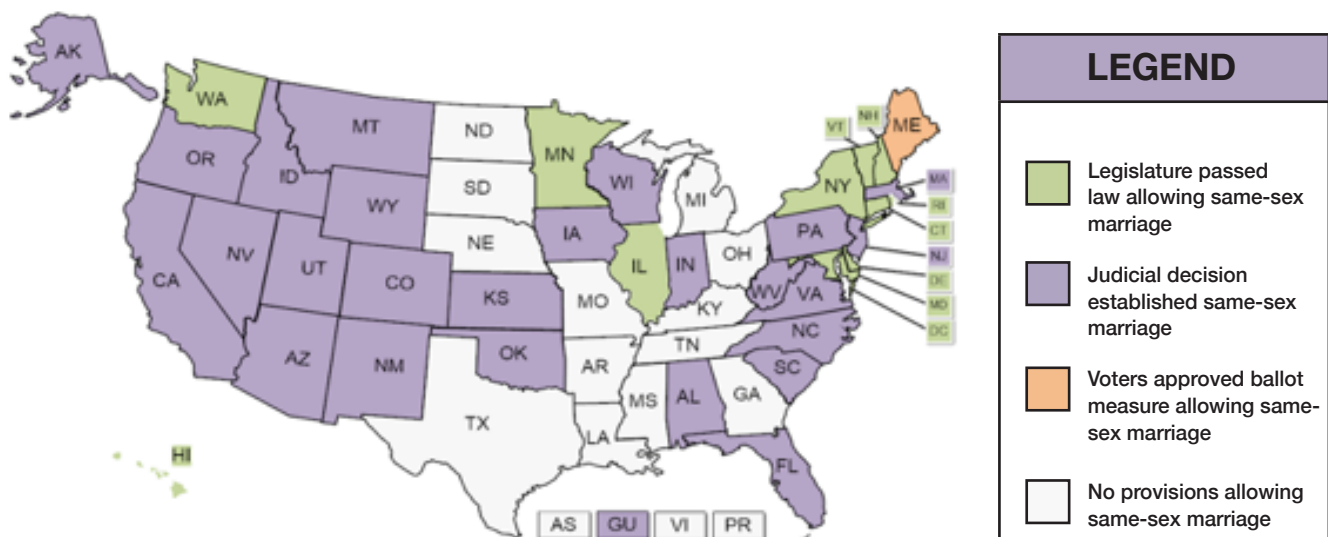
Area	Year same-sex marriage became legal	Total same-sex households		Percent of all same-sex households who are same-sex spouses	
		Number	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
United States	2015	887,456	8,220	54.9	0.5
Alabama	2015	7,885	784	49.5	5.0
Alaska	2014	1,952	436	55.0	11.0
Arizona	2014	20,656	1,209	52.7	3.1
Arkansas	2015	5,099	571	43.7	6.5
California	2008	128,111	2,759	57.7	1.3
Colorado	2014	17,929	1,243	55.1	3.2
Connecticut	2009	9,344	795	57.6	4.6
Delaware	2013	3,728	584	59.6	6.9
District of Columbia	2010	7,036	619	53.0	4.3
Florida	2015	69,566	2,370	56.0	1.7
Georgia	2015	25,949	1,579	53.3	3.4
Hawaii	2013	4,381	625	56.3	6.2
Idaho	2014	3,293	572	54.2	9.7
Illinois	2014	33,342	1,619	50.4	2.6
Indiana	2014	17,867	1,206	47.0	3.6
Iowa	2009	6,477	694	59.4	5.2
Kansas	2015	4,686	574	61.6	5.7
Kentucky	2015	11,342	960	43.7	3.8
Louisiana	2015	9,422	813	43.8	4.3
Maine	2012	4,446	461	51.4	5.5
Maryland	2013	17,470	1,334	64.7	4.1
Massachusetts	2004	28,113	1,535	62.7	2.4
Michigan	2015	21,579	1,118	48.7	2.7
Minnesota	2013	14,436	911	57.7	3.0
Mississippi	2015	3,964	549	50.2	8.2
Missouri	2015	14,514	1,023	52.8	3.4
Montana	2014	2,180	436	49.4	10.6
Nebraska	2015	3,454	499	58.0	6.4
Nevada	2014	9,827	955	55.6	5.3
New Hampshire	2009	4,915	570	67.9	5.8
New Jersey	2013	21,172	1,186	65.1	2.7
New Mexico	2013	6,692	929	45.4	7.0
New York	2011	64,147	2,123	55.9	1.7

Table 2: (cont...) Same-Sex Marriage Legalization Year and Same-Sex Couple Households by State

Area	Year same-sex marriage became legal	Total same-sex households		Percent of all same-sex households who are same-sex spouses	
		Number	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
North Dakota	2015	1,428	291	59.3	13.2
Ohio	2015	27,615	1,529	43.8	2.8
Oklahoma	2014	9,839	754	51.7	4.0
Oregon	2014	17,332	1,189	48.4	3.0
Pennsylvania	2014	32,451	1,725	53.7	2.4
Rhode Island	2013	3,963	491	61.8	7.5
South Carolina	2014	10,651	1,027	60.6	4.4
South Dakota	2015	1,650	333	37.0	10.8
Tennessee	2015	15,472	1,149	47.7	3.3
Texas	2015	64,266	2,658	54.0	2.1
Utah	2013	5,979	623	57.4	4.8
Vermont	2009	2,635	428	61.6	8.4
Virginia	2014	21,416	1,292	55.5	2.9
Washington	2012	25,401	1,498	67.7	3.0
West Virginia	2014	3,627	532	40.7	6.8
Wisconsin	2014	14,317	987	51.4	3.2
Wyoming	2014	816	362	75.4	16.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 to 2015 American Community Survey

State Same-Sex Marriage Laws Prior to 2015 U.S. Supreme Court Ruling



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

Table 3. Household Characteristics of Opposite-Sex and Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: 2016 American Community Survey

	Married		Unmarried		Total		Total		Total	
	Opposite-sex couples		Opposite-sex couples		Same-sex couples		Male-male couples		Female-female couples	
Household Characteristics	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
Total households (number)	56,480,804	91,180	6,821,077	27,652	887,456	8,220	435,862	5,800	451,594	5,746
Age of householder										
15 to 24 years	1.2	--	11.6	0.1	4.1	0.2	3.4	0.3	4.7	0.3
25 to 34 years	13.0	--	34.8	0.2	19.1	0.3	16.8	0.5	21.2	0.5
35 to 44 years	19.7	--	21.1	0.1	19.0	0.4	19.1	0.5	18.9	0.6
45 to 54 years	21.7	--	15.7	0.1	23.1	0.3	24.7	0.4	21.5	0.5
55 to 64 years	21.4	--	10.4	0.1	19.1	0.4	20.2	0.5	18.1	0.5
65 years and over	23.0	--	6.4	0.1	15.7	0.3	15.9	0.4	15.6	0.5
Average age of householder (years)	52.2	--	39.4	0.1	48.2	0.1	49.0	0.2	47.5	0.2
Average age of spouse/partner (years)	51.6	--	38.6	0.1	46.5	0.1	46.6	0.2	46.3	0.2
Race of householder										
White	81.3	--	76.4	0.1	82.1	0.4	83.8	0.5	80.4	0.6
Black or African American	7.0	--	11.3	0.1	7.7	0.3	5.5	0.3	9.8	0.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.6	--	1.1	--	0.7	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.9	0.1
Asian	5.8	--	2.4	0.1	3.3	0.2	3.8	0.3	2.8	0.2
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1	--	0.2	--	0.2	--	0.1	--	0.3	0.1
Some Other Race	3.5	--	5.8	0.1	2.9	0.2	3.1	0.3	2.7	0.2
Two or more races	1.7	--	2.9	0.1	3.2	0.2	3.1	0.3	3.2	0.3
Percent of couples interracial	7.3	--	13.8	0.2	15.9	0.4	18.1	0.5	13.9	0.5
Hispanic origin of householder										
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	12.9	--	18.8	0.2	12.5	0.4	13.0	0.5	12.0	0.4
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	72.5	--	64.5	0.2	73.6	0.5	75.0	0.6	72.2	0.7
Educational Attainment										
Householder has at least a bachelor's degree	39.7	0.1	26.5	0.2	49.7	0.5	53.9	0.6	45.5	0.6
Both partners with a least a bachelor's degree	25.0	0.1	13.8	0.1	31.6	0.4	33.3	0.6	30.0	0.5

Table 3. (cont...) Household Characteristics of Opposite-Sex and Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: 2016 American Community Survey

	Married		Unmarried		Total		Total		Total	
	Opposite-sex couples		Opposite-sex couples		Same-sex couples		Male-male couples		Female-female couples	
	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
Employment Status¹										
Householder employed	67.3	0.1	79.2	0.2	74.5	0.4	75.9	0.6	73.1	0.6
Both partners employed	48.4	0.1	61.8	0.2	60.2	0.4	61.2	0.7	59.2	0.7
Children in the household										
Children in the household ²	39.2	0.1	39.1	0.2	16.5	0.4	9.5	0.4	23.3	0.7
Own children in the household	39.1	0.1	36.3	0.2	15.7	0.4	9.2	0.4	21.9	0.7
Household income										
Less than \$35,000	13.5	--	23.2	0.2	13.6	0.3	10.7	0.4	16.5	0.6
\$35,000 to \$49,999	10.7	--	15.1	0.1	9.7	0.3	8.4	0.4	11.0	0.4
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.5	--	22.5	0.2	17.0	0.4	15.2	0.5	18.6	0.4
\$75,000 to \$99,999	16.1	--	15.0	0.1	15.1	0.3	14.3	0.4	15.9	0.5
\$100,000 or more	41.3	0.1	24.2	0.2	44.6	0.4	51.5	0.7	37.9	0.6
Median Household Income (dollars) ³	85,581	75	61,909	211	90,493	686	102,019	975	80,755	1,108
Home Tenure										
Own	79.1	0.1	42.5	0.2	65.6	0.5	67.3	0.7	63.9	0.7
Rent	20.9	0.1	57.5	0.2	34.4	0.5	32.7	0.7	36.1	0.7

¹Employed or in the Armed forces.

² Includes own children and nonrelatives of the householder under 18 years.

³In previous years this table displayed estimates of mean household income.

-- Rounds to zero.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-year data file

**Table 4. Household Characteristics of Same-Sex Couple Households by Relationship Type:
2016 American Community Survey**

	Relationship Type											
	Spouses						Unmarried partners					
	Total		Male-male		Female-female		Total		Male-male		Female-female	
Household Characteristics	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
Total households (number)	486,994	6,032	235,167	4,630	251,827	3,968	400,462	5,731	200,695	3,228	199,767	4,058
Age of householder												
15 to 24 years	1.5	0.2	0.9	0.1	2.1	0.3	7.1	0.4	6.3	0.5	7.9	0.6
25 to 34 years	13.8	0.5	10.8	0.6	16.6	0.7	25.5	0.6	23.8	0.9	27.1	0.8
35 to 44 years	18.6	0.6	17.9	0.8	19.4	0.7	19.4	0.5	20.5	0.8	18.3	0.9
45 to 54 years	24.0	0.5	26.1	0.6	22.1	0.7	21.9	0.5	23.1	0.8	20.7	0.7
55 to 64 years	21.0	0.6	22.1	0.8	20.0	0.8	16.7	0.5	17.8	0.7	15.6	0.6
65 years and over	21.0	0.5	22.2	0.7	19.9	0.7	9.3	0.3	8.4	0.5	10.2	0.5
Average age of householder (years)	51.6	0.2	52.9	0.3	50.5	0.3	44.1	0.2	44.4	0.3	43.8	0.3
Average age of spouse/partner (years)	50.0	0.2	50.5	0.3	49.5	0.3	42.2	0.2	42.1	0.3	42.2	0.3
Race of householder												
White	83.5	0.5	84.5	0.7	82.6	0.7	80.3	0.6	83.0	0.8	77.5	0.9
Black or African American	6.3	0.4	4.6	0.4	7.8	0.6	9.4	0.5	6.7	0.6	12.2	0.8
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.8	0.2	0.8	0.1	0.6	0.1	1.0	0.2
Asian	4.0	0.3	4.6	0.4	3.4	0.3	2.4	0.2	2.9	0.4	1.9	0.3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	--	0.4	0.2
Some Other Race	2.5	0.2	2.9	0.4	2.2	0.3	3.3	0.3	3.3	0.5	3.2	0.4
Two or more races	2.9	0.2	2.9	0.3	2.8	0.3	3.6	0.3	3.4	0.4	3.7	0.4
Percent of couples interracial	13.7	0.5	15.8	0.7	11.8	0.5	18.6	0.6	20.7	0.8	16.5	0.8
Hispanic origin of householder												
Hispanic or Latino origin(of any race)	11.5	0.4	12.0	0.6	11.1	0.6	13.6	0.6	14.1	0.8	13.1	0.7
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	75.7	0.6	76.5	0.8	75.0	0.8	71.0	0.8	73.3	0.9	68.7	1.2
Educational Attainment												
Householder has at least a bachelor's degree	52.2	0.7	55.9	1.0	48.8	0.9	46.6	0.7	51.7	1.0	41.4	0.9
Both partners with a least a bachelor's degree	34.6	0.7	35.7	0.9	33.5	0.8	28.0	0.6	30.4	1.0	25.6	0.7

**Table 4. (cont...) Household Characteristics of Same-Sex Couple Households by Relationship Type:
2016 American Community Survey**

	Relationship Type											
	Spouses						Unmarried partners					
	Total		Male-male		Female-female		Total		Male-male		Female-female	
	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error	Percent	Std Error
Employment Status¹												
Householder employed	69.6	0.6	69.9	0.9	69.3	0.8	80.4	0.6	83.0	0.7	77.9	0.9
Both partners employed	55.0	0.6	54.6	0.9	55.3	0.9	66.6	0.6	69.0	0.9	64.1	1.0
Children in the household												
Children in the household ²	19.4	0.5	12.8	0.6	25.5	0.8	13.0	0.6	5.6	0.5	20.4	1.0
Own children in the household	19.2	0.5	12.6	0.6	25.3	0.8	11.4	0.6	5.3	0.5	17.5	1.0
Household income												
Less than \$35,000	12.1	0.4	9.8	0.6	14.2	0.6	15.5	0.6	11.6	0.7	19.3	1.0
\$35,000 to \$49,999	9.1	0.4	7.7	0.5	10.4	0.6	10.5	0.4	9.2	0.5	11.8	0.7
\$50,000 to \$74,999	15.8	0.4	14.4	0.6	17.1	0.6	18.3	0.6	16.2	0.7	20.5	0.9
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14.4	0.4	13.3	0.6	15.4	0.7	16.0	0.5	15.4	0.7	16.7	0.9
\$100,000 or more	48.6	0.6	54.8	0.9	42.9	0.9	39.7	0.6	47.6	1.0	31.7	0.8
Median Household Income (dollars) ³	97,252	1,314	108,614	1,994	88,514	1,415	83,578	1,343	95,283	1,612	72,714	1,514
Home Tenure												
Own	74.1	0.5	76.2	0.8	72.2	0.9	55.2	0.7	56.9	1.1	53.5	1.0
Rent	25.9	0.5	23.8	0.8	27.8	0.9	44.8	0.7	43.1	1.1	46.5	1.0

¹Employed or in the Armed forces.

² Includes own children and nonrelatives of the householder under 18 years.

³In previous years this table displayed estimates of mean household income.

-- Rounds to zero.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-year data file

