

# The Evolution of Data Collection for Same-Sex Married Couple Households

Blue Current Population Survey (CPS) Green American Community Survey (ACS) Orange American Housing Survey (AHS) Grey Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Purple Decennial Censuses

## CURRENT EVENTS

1997 – Ellen DeGeneres comes out  
 1998 – Matthew Shepard is beaten and killed; Will & Grace premieres.  
 2004 – First same-sex marriage in the US takes place in MA  
 2011 – The military policy of “Don’t ask, Don’t tell” ends

## LEGAL CHANGES

- State legalizations of same-sex marriages
- Federal legislation/ US Supreme Court rulings about the recognition of same-sex marriage
- Other US court rulings about the recognition of same-sex marriage

1996 - The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is signed into federal law, defining marriage as consisting of one man and one woman  
 2003 – US Supreme Court rules sodomy laws are unconstitutional  
 2003 - MA is the 1<sup>st</sup> state to legalize same-sex marriage  
 2008 - CT legalizes same-sex marriage  
 2009 - IA, NH, VT, DC legalize same-sex marriage  
 2011 - NY legalizes same-sex marriage  
 2012 - ME, MD, WA legalize same-sex marriage  
 2013 - DE, HI, IL, MN, RI, NJ, NM, CA\* legalize same-sex marriage  
 2013 - US Supreme Court strikes down part of DOMA. The federal government is now required to recognize same-sex marriages from states where they are legal  
 2014 - AK, OR, ID, MT, CO, WY, NV, UT, KS, AZ, OK, KS, WI, IN, WV, PA, VA, NC, SC legalize same-sex marriage  
 2015 - US Supreme Court rules that legal prohibitions on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional  
 2017 – The 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals rules that the Civil Rights Act prohibits workplace discrimination against LGBT employees

## DATA COLLECTION AND RELEASE

- Question changes
- Estimates released

1995 – CPS  
 1996 – SIPP  
 “Unmarried partners” is added as a relationship category to several surveys. Same-sex status is determined based on the sex of the two individuals 1995 – CPS; 1996 – SIPP  
 2008 – ACS updates form design to reduce reporting errors in sex  
 2009 – Unofficial estimates of same-sex spouses are released from the 2000 Census  
 2011 – Preferred estimates for same-sex spouses and unmarried partners are released from 2010 Census  
 2013 – ACS  
 2014 – SIPP  
 2015 – CPS and AHS  
 2019 – ACS  
 2020 – Decennial Census  
 Surveys begin updating the relationship categories in data collection to include “same-sex” and “opposite-sex” identifiers for spouses and unmarried partners. 2014 – SIPP; 2015 – CPS and AHS; 2019 – ACS; 2020 – Decennial Census  
 Surveys begin releasing data with same-sex spouses present. 2013 – ACS; 2014 – SIPP; 2019 – CPS ASEC; AHS; 2020 – Decennial Census

## EDITS

- Edit changes

Prior to each of these edit changes, the policy in each survey was to change reported same-sex spouses to opposite-sex spouses  
 2000 & 2010: Same-sex spouses are changed to same-sex unmarried partners  
 1996 – 2013: In the SIPP, same-sex spouses are changed to same-sex unmarried partners  
 2005 – 2013: In the ACS, same-sex spouses are changed to same-sex unmarried partners  
 2010 – 2018: In the CPS, same-sex spouses are changed to same-sex unmarried partners  
 2014 – Present: SIPP retains same-sex spouses in the data  
 2013 – Present: ACS retains same-sex spouses in the data  
 2015 & 2017: In the AHS, same-sex spouses are changed to same-sex unmarried partners  
 2019 – CPS ASEC & AHS retain same-sex spouses in the data  
 2020 Decennial will retain same-sex spouses in the data

## RESEARCH AND TESTING

- Data issues
- Testing
- Research

1999 – Research indicates that changing same-sex spouses to unmarried partners combines two distinct groups  
 2000 – Census  
 2006 – Research indicates that first names can be used to confirm same-sex couples  
 2007 – ACS  
 2010 – ACS research indicates that 2008 changes to data processing and form layout of the sex question resulted in cleaner data for same-sex couples in the ACS  
 2010 – 2011 researchers conduct focus groups to develop an updated relationship question, and then cognitively test the recommendations - updated categories that include “same-sex” and “opposite-sex” identifiers for spouses and unmarried partners  
 2013 – Research identifies misreports of sex as the source of measurement error in same-sex couple estimates in the 2010 census  
 2013 – SIPP, ACS, AHS  
 2014 – 2019 – The updated relationship categories are fielded in a series of tests as part of the Decennial Census preparations. Results indicate response rates are stable, and data quality is good.  
 2014 – SIPP, ACS, AHS  
 2015 – Researchers use administrative data to confirm that misreports in sex are causing measurement error in same-sex couples  
 2016 – ACS  
 2016 & 2017 – Evaluations of data collected with the Inter-agency working group’s recommended relationship categories are conducted using data from the 2014 Content Test, 2015 National Content Test, and 2016 ACS Content Test  
 Research indicates that misreports of sex lead to inflated estimates of same-sex married couples.  
 The updated relationship categories are tested in several surveys prior to adoption 2013 – SIPP, AHS, and ACS 2016 - ACS

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1999 – Using the Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal collected in 1998, researchers determined that by changing reported same-sex spouses to same-sex unmarried partners, the Decennial Census was combining two heterogeneous groups (Fields & Clark, 1999).  
Fields & Clark (1999) **“Unbinding the Ties: Edit Effects of Marital Status on Same Gender Couples”** - <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1999/demo/POP-twps0034.html>

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In 2008, researchers determined that the ACS form layout for sex, which placed “Male” above “Female” in a stacked layout rather than side by side, resulted in a large number of records with marks in both “Male” and “Female” (Chestnut, 2008). This layout was used in the ACS until 2007. During this time, responses with both “Male” and “Female” reported were recorded as “Male.” These two factors together resulted in a higher proportion of same-sex couples than were supported by checks against first name (O’Connell, et. al., 2010). Unfortunately, this stacked layout for “Male” and “Female” was also present in the non-response follow-up collection (NRFU) for the 2010 Census. In addition, investigation into the 2010 Census data led to the realization that a significant portion of same-sex married couples were likely the result of misreporting by a small portion of the larger group of opposite-sex married couples (O’Connell & Feliz, 2011; DeMaio et. al., 2013; Kreider & Lofquist, 2015).

Chesnut, J. (2008) **“Effects of Using a Grid versus a Sequential Form on the ACS Basic Demographic Data”** - [https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2008/acs/2008\\_Chesnut\\_01.pdf](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2008/acs/2008_Chesnut_01.pdf)

O’Connell, et. al. (2010) **“New Estimates of Same-Sex Couple Households from the American Community Survey”** - <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2010/demo/ss-new-estimates.pdf>

O’Connell & Feliz (2011) **“Same-Sex Couple Household Statistics from the 2010 Census”** - <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2011/demo/SEHSD-WP2011-26.html>

DeMaio, et. al. (2013) **“Exploring Measurement Error Issues in Reporting of Same-Sex Couples”** - <https://academic.oup.com/pog/article/77/S1/145/1877806>

Kreider & Lofquist (2015) **“Matching Survey Data with Administrative Records to Evaluate Reports of Same-Sex Married Couple Households”** - <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2015/demo/SEHSD-WP2014-36.html>

\* In 2008, the Supreme Court of California rules that the state’s constitution guarantees same-sex couples the right to marry. Later in the year, however, California voters approve a constitutional amendment (known as Proposition 8) banning same-sex marriage. In 2013, the US Supreme Court declines to rule on the merits of the case involving Proposition 8 saying that those defending Proposition 8 did not have the legal standing to do so. Same-sex marriages begins again in California.

Development of the Revised Relationship to Householder Question:

Interagency Working Group – **“Improved Measurement of Household Relationships in Federal Surveys – Paper 1. Measuring Same-Sex Co-Residential Relationships”**

- [https://s3.amazonaws.com/sitesusa/wp-content/uploads/sites/242/2014/04/MRFHS\\_StatisticalPolicyWorkingPaper201408.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/sitesusa/wp-content/uploads/sites/242/2014/04/MRFHS_StatisticalPolicyWorkingPaper201408.pdf)

• **Focus Groups:** Bates, et. al. (2012) **“Classifying Relationship and Marital Status among Same-Sex Couples”**

- <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2012/adrm/rsm2012-01.html>

• **Cognitive Tests:** DeMaio & Bates (2012) **“New Relationship and Marital Status Questions: A Reflection of Changes to the Social and Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couples in the U.S.”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2012/adrm/rsm2012-02.pdf>

Decennial Test Reports:

- **2014 Census Test:** Nichols, et. al. (2015) **“Usability Testing of the 2014 Census Test Online English Instrument”**

- <http://www.census.gov/srd/papers/pdf/ssm2015-04.pdf>

- **2015 National Content Test:** Seem & Coombs (2017) **“2020 Research and Testing: 2015 National Content Test Relationship Question Experiment Analysis Report”**

- <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/final-analysis-reports/2015nct-relationship-question-experiment.pdf>

- **2016 Census Test:** Kreider, et. al. (2017) **“Improving Measurement of Same-Sex Couple Households in Census Bureau Surveys: Results from Recent Tests”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2017/demo/SEHSD-WP2017-28.pdf>

ACS Test Reports:

- **2006 Content Test Results:** **“New and Modified Content on the 2008 ACS Questionnaire: Results of Testing Prior to Implementation”**

- [https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2007/acs/2007\\_CensusBureau\\_01.pdf](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2007/acs/2007_CensusBureau_01.pdf)

- **2013 ACS Questionnaire Design Test** **“Testing Alternative Relationship and Marital Status Questions on the 2013 American Community Survey – Questionnaire Design Test”**

- [https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2014/acs/2014\\_Lewis\\_01.pdf](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2014/acs/2014_Lewis_01.pdf)

- **2016 ACS Content Test** **“2016 American Community Survey Content Test Evaluation Report: Relationship”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2017/demo/SEHSD-WP2017-28.pdf>

SIPP Test Reports:

- **2013 SIPP Event History Calendar field test:** Lofquist & Lewis (2015) **“Improving Measurement of Same-sex Couples”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2015/demo/SEHSD-WP2015-13.pdf>

AHS Test Reports:

- **2013 AHS split panel test:**

- Lofquist & Lewis (2015) **“Improving Measurement of Same-sex Couples”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2015/demo/SEHSD-WP2015-13.pdf>

- Lewis, Bates, & Streeter (2015) **“Measuring Same-Sex Couples: The What and Who of Misreporting on Relationship and Sex”**

- <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2015/demo/SEHSD-WP2015-12.pdf>

Estimates of Same-Sex Married Couples:

Unofficial estimates of same-sex couples from the 2000 Decennial Census:

- O’Connell & Lofquist (2009) **“Counting Same-Sex Couples: Official Estimates and Unofficial Guesses”**

- <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2009/demo/oconnell-01.html>

Preferred estimates of same-sex couples from the 2010 Decennial Census:

- O’Connell & Feliz (2011) **“Same-Sex Couple Household Statistics from the 2010 Census”**

- <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2011/demo/SEHSD-WP2011-26.html>

Characteristics of same-sex couple households - estimates from the American Community Survey, 2005 to present:

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/same-sex-couples/ssc-house-characteristics.html>