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Historically, US Census Bureau data on same-sex couples have been a critical resource for informing the many national, state, and local debates about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights. The Williams Institute has been a leader in disseminating and analyzing these data from Census 2000 and will continue to do so with the release of data from Census 2010. This press advisory/FAQ summarizes the time table for data releases and explains Census procedures regarding data on same-sex couples.

How does the Census Bureau identify same-sex couples?

Same-sex couples are identified in households where Person 1 describes his or her relationship with another adult of the same sex as either a “husband/wife” or “unmarried partner”.

When will Census 2010 data about same-sex couples be released?

In June 2011, the first release of data specifically about same-sex couples will begin with the weekly releases of the “Summary File 1” (SF-1) data posted on the US Census Bureau’s [American Factfinder](#) website. Data from several states are distributed each week. These data will include official tabulations of same-sex male and female couples and information about the presence of children in their homes at a variety of geographic levels (e.g., state, county, and Census tract).

For more information on the SF-1 data release, see the [Census Bureau Press Kit](#).

Will the Williams Institute be releasing any analyses of Census 2010 data?

Yes. The Williams Institute will publish two-page *Census Snapshot: 2010* reports on each state as the SF-1 data are released. These briefs will highlight the geographic distribution of same-sex couples across the state, rankings of cities and counties, and information about the number of male and female couples and the number of couples raising children.

How accurate are the Census counts of same-sex couples?

There are at least two reasons that Census figures may reflect an undercount of same-sex couples. It is possible that some same-sex couples may be unwilling to identify themselves as such on the Census due to concerns about confidentiality. Same-sex couples may experience stigma and discrimination and consider it too risky to identify as spouses or unmarried partners on a government survey like the Census. Instead, they may choose to call themselves roommates or unrelated adults.

A second reason for an undercount is that only couples where one partner is Person 1 can be identified on the Census since identification relies upon knowing the relationship between Person 1 and others in the household. For example, a younger couple residing in the home of a parent would not be identified if one of the parents was Person 1 in the household.

The Williams Institute conducted a [survey of same-sex couples](#) just after Census 2010 and found that about 15% either identified themselves as something other than spouses or unmarried partners or were in a household where neither partner was Person 1.

Another concern about the accuracy of same-sex couple data involves the possibility that a small portion of different-sex couples miscode the sex of a spouse or unmarried partner and are incorrectly counted as a same-sex couple. Since there are more than a hundred different-sex couples for every same-sex couple, even a very small amount of errors among different-sex couples result in relatively large numbers of misidentified same-sex couples.

Williams Institute scholars estimate that perhaps 25% of identified same-sex couples in Census 2010 may, in fact, be miscoded different-sex couples. Given that most different-sex couples are married, the bulk of these miscodes likely occur among same-sex couples identified as spouses.

Will Williams Institute analyses consider possible inaccuracies in the Census 2010 same-sex couple data?

Yes. The same-sex couple data presented in the *Census Snapshot: 2010* reports are adjusted to account for possible inaccuracies. As a result, some of the information reported on in the Snapshots will differ from official Census tabulations.

For more information about the procedures used to adjust the Census data in the Snapshots, see this [methodology brief](#).

Will we be able to consider trends by comparing Census data on same-sex couples from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses with the data from 2010?

Unfortunately, no. Procedures used by the Census Bureau to edit and process same-sex couple data have varied over time. In 1990, same-sex couples who identified a partner as a spouse were not identified as same-sex couples at all. In 2000 and 2010, the Census Bureau did count same-sex spouses among same-sex couples but the procedures used to process same-sex spouse couples differed. As a result, it is not appropriate to compare the same-sex couple tabulations across the three decennial Census years.

For more information on this issue, see this [Census Bureau Technical Note](#).

Will the SF-1 data provide separate information about same-sex couples identified as spouses and those who called themselves unmarried partners?

No. The SF-1 data will not include separate information about same-sex couples who designated themselves as spouses and those who used unmarried partner. These groups are combined in these tables and all are identified as same-sex “unmarried partners”.

Will the Census Bureau release any information about same-sex spouses?

Yes. Later in the year, the Census Bureau will release tabulations on its [American FactFinder](#) website and a technical note about same-sex couples that will include national and state counts of the number of same-sex couples who designated themselves as spouses versus unmarried partners.