Same-sex Couples in Tennessee: A demographic summary

by Gary J. Gates
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Introduction
This research brief offers analyses of data from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) to describe the characteristics of same-sex couples and their families in Tennessee compared to their different-sex married counterparts.

Same-sex couples are identified in the ACS when an adult in the household is identified as either the “husband/wife” or “unmarried partner” of the person who filled out the survey, referred to as the householder, and both partners or spouses are of the same sex. These analyses combine ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files from 2011 and 2012, yielding sample sizes of:

- 179 same-sex couples
- 53 children under age 18 being raised by same-sex couples
- 26,175 different-sex married couples
- 17,585 children under age 18 being raised by different-sex married couples

Tabulations from Census 2010 show that there are 10,898 same-sex couples living in Tennessee. These couples were identified in all but one of Tennessee’s counties. The majority of same-sex couples are female (54%).

Age
The average age of individuals in same-sex couples in Tennessee is more than seven years younger than that of different-sex married couples—43.4 and 50.8 years old, respectively. Table 1 shows the percentages of adults in same-sex and different-sex married couples by age group. The lowest percentage of same-sex couples is in the 65 and over group (10%) while the lowest percentage of different-sex married couples is in the youngest age group of those under age 30 (8%).

Table 1. Individuals in couples, by age (2011-2012 ACS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Same-sex</th>
<th>Different-sex married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than one seventh of individuals in same-sex couples in Tennessee are members of racial or ethnic minorities. Table 2 shows that over 14% of individuals in same-sex couples and in different-sex married couples are racial or ethnic minorities.

The portion of Latinas and Latinos is 2.8% among those in same-sex couples and 3.1% among those in different-sex married couples. The portion of African-Americans is 8% among those in same-sex couples and 8.5% among those in different-sex married couples. Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders comprise 1.5% of individuals in same-sex couples and 1.6% of those in different-sex married couples. American Indians and Alaskan Natives comprise 1.1% of individuals in same-sex couples and 0.2% of those in different-sex married couples.

Table 2. Individuals in couples, by race/ethnicity (2011-2012 ACS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Same-sex</th>
<th>Different-sex married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. Indian/AK Native</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Same-sex couples with children
Nearly one in five same-sex couples in Tennessee (18%) are raising children under age 18 in their homes. 1,949 same-sex-couple households in the state are raising 3,936 children.

More than three-quarters (79.8%) of children being raised by same-sex couples in Tennessee are biological children and 1.8% are adopted. This implies that same-sex couples in the state are raising an estimated 3,139 biological children and 72 adopted children. Nearly one fifth (18.3%) of children being raised by same-sex couples in Tennessee, or 725 children, are identified as grandchildren, other relatives, or other children who are not relatives.

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Among couples with children, same-sex couples in Tennessee are as likely as their different-sex married counterparts to be raising an adopted child. An estimated 3.7% of same-sex couples with children have an adopted child, compared to 3.8% of different-sex married couples. Approximately 1.8% of the children of same-sex couples in Tennessee are adopted, compared to 2.9% of the children of different-sex married couples.

While the most recent Census Bureau data do not identify any same-sex couples fostering children, only 0.3% of different-sex married couples are doing so in the state.

Race/ethnicity
Nearly four in ten individuals in same-sex couples who are members of racial or ethnic minorities (38%) are raising a child under age 18, compared to 14% of their White counterparts.

Income
The median annual household income of same-sex couples with children under age 18 in the home is less than half of the median annual household income of comparable different-sex married couples ($32,584 versus $69,704).

This may in part be because, compared to different-sex married couples raising children, same-sex couples with children include a higher portion of female couples, who tend to have lower earnings than different-sex married couples.

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.

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