The Gay Pay Gap in Washington

-or-

Impacts of Misogyny on LGBT Wages

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Executive Summary

How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

What’s that lipstick doing on your collar?

If a drug store is open 24 hours, why are there locks on the doors?

How many LGBT people are there in the United States?

Some questions are really hard to answer.

But they needn’t all be. The Census Bureau works tirelessly to suss out the statistical composition of our country. Because of this, we know that approximately 20,590 U.S. residents speak Irish Gaelic, the greeting card industry employs about 14,162 people, and that 13,873 firms were Hispanic-owned in Illinois in 2015.

But we don’t know how many LGBT people there are. The Census Bureau has never cared to ask.

This means there have never been reliable national data about how many LGBT people live in the United States, a void that has major effects on public policy. There are no clear estimates of how many LGBT people live in poverty, how well LGBT people are educated, how many are homeowners, whether they have health insurance, whether they speak Irish Gaelic – or countless other indicators that policymakers use to determine how programs impact Americans who are urban, rural, women, African-American, blind, or almost anything else.

Since same-sex marriage was legalized nationwide in 2015, it is possible to compare people in same-sex and opposite marriages, however. In Washington State, there are four years of data.

The data show that men in same-sex marriages make less money than men in opposite-sex marriages, and women in same-sex marriages make more than women in opposite-sex marriages.

This is consistent with finding from numerous national and international studies, which has found the trend to hold true even for people within the same occupation.

As with the gender pay gap, part of this is due to societal pressures and stereotypes placed on LGBT people. Gay men are pushed into feminine roles, and lesbians into masculine roles. As femininity is financially penalized in the United States and masculinity is incentivized, gay men suffer and lesbians profit (but not to the extent that straight men do).

But also like with the gender pay gap, part of this is due to discrimination. When in the same fields with the same experiences, researchers find this trend to hold true.

Despite the legalization of same-sex marriage, LGBT people in America have been reporting more discrimination, not less.
This report, using more localized data than the DC study, found Seattle's tax system to be the most regressive of major cities in Washington, estimating that a household making $25,000 per year pays 17.0 percent of its income in state and local taxes, while a household making $250,000 pays 4.4 percent.

The majority of taxes paid by residents of Washington go to the state. Seattle and other cities raise revenue using the same tax tools, compounding the regressivity of the state tax structure. Even if public expenditures are relatively progressive in nature, city projects are increasingly being built on the backs of those who can least afford to pay for them.

**Washington cities lose millions of dollars every year by enacting taxes that mimic the state’s tax breaks on the wealthy.**

Seattle likes to think of itself as a progressive beacon in the state. But in a beauty pageant among regressive tax structures, it’s actually Spokane that comes out on top.

There are some regional trends. Seattle and Bellevue consistently jockey for the highest tax rates at any household income level. Cities in King County tend to have higher tax rates than other cities in Western Washington, driven largely by voter-approved property and sales tax levies for schools, transit, low-income housing, and other services. Tax rates in Eastern Washington cities overall reflect fewer of these urban services.

**Households making $25,000 pay an extra 7.3 percent of their incomes if they live in Seattle rather than Yakima, while households making $250,000 only pay 1.9 percent more.**

Increasing income inequality has pushed this regressive tax structure to a breaking point. Skyrocketing costs for basic necessities mean more people are turning to public services, but low-income and middle-class residents simply can’t afford to pay more in taxes. However, the rich can and should. The gap between the poorest and richest quintiles statewide went from $152,631 in 2010 to $192,146 in 2016, adjusted for inflation. In Seattle, it grew from $193,738 to $256,249. The income gap between the top and bottom quintiles is more than 25 percent greater in Seattle than it is statewide.

Opponents to progressive taxation say that giving the rich bigger tax breaks than working-class and middle-class people encourages job growth. But statistical analysis shows that this isn’t true. Linear regression models show that state tax systems with no personal income taxes or light personal income taxes cannot explain at least 96 percent of state job growth since 2006.

When comparing the largest cities in each state, tax systems that lightly tax the rich cannot explain at least 99 percent of growth.

**Note: All figures in this PDF are interactive. Click on them to be taken to a webpage where you can explore the data.**
1) The Census Bureau Does Not Count LGBT People

No presidential administration has made it a priority to add statistics on LGBT people to the data the government collects.

During the last days of Barack Obama’s incumbency in 2016, at least four federal agencies – the Justice Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – asked the Census Bureau to add questions about sexual orientation and gender identity in the decennial U.S. Census and the yearly American Community Survey.1

In March 2017, after Donald Trump took office, the Census Bureau sent out a memo that it planned to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity.

That was immediately rescinded. The Census Bureau concluded that there was “no federal data need” for information on LGBT people. The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Health and Human Services concurrently dropped LGBT questions they had previously asked from surveys they conduct.2

There are some approximations of the LGBT population, however. Numerous polling agencies, universities and government agencies have estimated how many Americans are lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Occasionally, they also seek data on transgender people. Since 2008, the estimate of LGB people has ranged from 2.3 percent (Centers for Disease Control National Health Interview Survey, 2013) to 8 percent (YouGov, 2013). In every survey that is repeated over multiple years, the number of respondents who identify as LGB and sometimes T increases.

Researchers expect that number to continue increasing, as younger generations are more comfortable with coming out of the closet. A 2018 report from research center Boston Indicators found that nearly 16 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 25 in Massachusetts identify as LGBT, but fewer than 3 percent of those 65 to 74.3

Nonetheless, these academic extrapolations are rough estimates taken from surveys of a few thousand people. Their limited scope means the data are not easily comparable to draw larger conclusions about the LGBT population.

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We have to rely on other independent research to surmise how many homeless youth identify as LGBT (between 11 and 40 percent),\(^4\) how many transgender people are in poverty (29 percent),\(^5\) or the proportion of same-sex-attracted men in the prison population (9.3 percent).\(^6\) We know that LGBT youth are much more prone to suicide than other groups, but not how much more, which the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention ascribes to lack of data.\(^7\)

As a survey of everyone, the U.S. Census can be cross-referenced with almost anything else one might want to know about a population. Including questions about sexuality and gender identity would fill an innumerable amount of data gaps for LGBT people.

Even using the low CDC estimate from 2013 that 2.3 percent of the population is LGB, that means there are more LGB people in the U.S. than there are total people in Washington or 37 other states. Imagine if the 2020 Census neglected to count anyone in Washington State, and instead inferred data and characteristics from its California count.


\(^5\) https://nwlc.org/blog/income-security-is-elusive-for-many-transgender-people-according-to-u-s-transgender-survey/


\(^7\) http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.blogspot.com/2012/04/national-action-alliance-for-suicide.html
2) What We *Can* Learn about LGBT People from the Census Bureau.

*That headline is a bit disingenuous. We can learn nothing about transgender people from the Census Bureau. They are completely uncounted.*

Because the Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal nationally in 2015, we can learn about the people in these marriages – not because the U.S. Census has tried to get a better picture of people in these marriages, but because you can see what the sexes are of people in the census, and it’s easy to figure out which are same-sex and which aren’t.

Married lesbian and gay people are counted this way. Bisexual married people are sort of counted. They stand out if they are married to a person of the same sex. If a bisexual woman marries a man, however, in the eyes of data collectors, she’s just a drop in a sea of heterosexuality.

The whole LGBT community is boiled down to people in same-sex marriages. It’s certainly not representative.

Adding insult to erasure, the Census Department released “corrected” data meant to extrapolate the number of same-sex couples who reported being spouses after 2013. Prior to 2013, the bureau assumed anyone who reported being in a same-sex relationship was making a clerical error.

The bureau also attempted to guess which couples with missing data were in same sex marriages by seeking out commonly gendered first names. This guess may work for all the Beckys and Chads in same-sex relationships, but seems unlikely to locate all the gay Devins or lesbians named Alex. Only this year will the Bureau stop treating respondents who report being in a same-sex married couple as unmarried partners.

Washington State, as a national leader on marriage equality, is fortunate enough to currently have four years of data on same sex-marriage from the American Community Survey, whereas most states have just one.

It’s still a tiny data set, and barely large enough to provide a level of in-depth analysis.

Nonetheless, it’s not possible to find the data through the American Fact Finder, the Census Department’s online tool.

To see the unadulterated results – or get Washington-specific results – you have to go through the raw survey data and analyze it yourself. The University of Minnesota has been kind enough to create a tool to do just that.

The Census Department will begin tracking and releasing data on same-sex married and unmarried couples. But it’s not exactly a change of heart. It’s harder to deny that same-sex couples exist when they’re legally allowed to get married in all 50 states. The Census Bureau is just repackaging what it’s already doing.

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10 https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml
11 https://usa.ipums.org/usa/
LGB people who stand out because they are married will remain a small sample for many years. About 50 percent of U.S. adults are married, but it seems unlikely this statistic holds true for the LGB community.

According to the ACS, the amount of people in same-sex marriages in Washington almost tripled from 2013 to 2016. If LGB people marry at the same rate of heterosexuals, it’s going to take time for the proportion of married LGB people to catch up.

That is, if they even want to. Many queer people aren’t interested in patriarchal norms or assimilating into heterosexual monoculture. There may never be the same proportion of married people in the LGBT community as there are among cisgender heterosexuals. Unless we start counting non-married LGBT people, we’ll never know.

Until then, the only LGB people are counted in the census are those that are in married same-sex partnerships, and transgender people aren’t counted at all.

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3) The Gay Pay Gap and Gay Migration

When you disaggregate data for wage income for full-time married workers in Washington from 2013 to 2016, you get this lovely chart:

At first blush, it doesn’t make sense. Statewide, men in same-sex marriages make the same amount of money as men in opposite-sex marriages, but they make less money in Seattle and less money in the rest of the state. How is that possible?

It’s because LGBT people, migrate to find more accepting communities – in cities. But not just any city. In Washington, they only move to Seattle.

In every census tract outside Seattle, the proportion of married couples that are same-sex hovers around 1 percent. In fact, the proportion is higher in Clallam and Jefferson Counties (0.91 percent) than in Spokane (0.61 percent). In much of Seattle, however, the proportion approaches 4 percent.

Seattle has been a mecca for LGBT people since the end of World War II, when LGBT people leaving the military did not want to return home to unwelcoming communities and congregated in cities near military bases, such as San Francisco, Seattle, Miami and New Orleans.14

Incomes (and costs of living) tend to be higher for residents of Seattle than for people in other parts of the state. Therefore, when comparing income and sexuality data statewide, the disproportionate amount of same-sex couples in Seattle hides the true gaps in income based on sexuality.

14 https://csw.ucla.edu/2017/07/10/city-hill-san-francisco-great-gay-migration-u-s-colonial-present/
This is the same issue with a recent study from Vanderbilt University, which found for the first time that gay men make more than straight men in the United States. That headline has been touted by the media, when the researchers acknowledges that because of uneven distribution, gay men in New York City were being compared with straight men in Dubuque.15

Because same-sex couples have very different geographies than opposite-sex couples, it’s imperative to look at Seattle and the rest of the state separately.

Where Washington’s Same-Sex Married Couples Live

You may notice that there is a higher proportion of same-sex married households in West Seattle (3.67 percent) than there is on Capitol Hill (3.54 percent). That’s because gayborhoods are dying to gentrification.

The flip side of increased acceptance of LGBT people means that cisgender heterosexuals are no longer averse to living next to them, and have been taking over their areas. From San Francisco’ Castro to Chicago’s Boystown to D.C.’s Dupont Circle, affluent straight people are displacing LGBT people from their gayborhoods, and Seattle is no different.16

Well, maybe they’re not all OK with living by LGBT people. Hate crimes on Capitol Hill have steadily increased since 2012.17

17 http://www.capitolhilltimes.com/Content/News/News/Article/Updated-Hate-crimes-bias-incidents-up-230-percent-in-Seattle-since-2012/26/337/5471
4) Gay Men Are Paid Less than Straight Men and Lesbians Are Paid More than Straight Women: The Impact of Misogyny on LGB wages

The chart above on full-time worker income shows that men in same-sex marriages in Seattle made a median of $78,600 in 2016, 18.4 percent less than $96,300 for men in opposite-sex marriages ($57,100 vs. $65,500 in the rest of the state – 12.8 percent less).

Women in same-sex marriages in Seattle made a median of $71,600, 1.4 percent more than $70,600 for women in opposite-sex marriages ($53,200 vs. $47,200 in the rest of the state – 12.8 percent more). But women in same-sex marriages still make less than men in same-sex marriages – 25.6 percent less in Seattle and 18.8 percent less everywhere else.

Nonetheless, these median incomes cannot be extrapolated to represent the entire population, as Census data consistently show that married people consistently earn more, are more likely to own a home, are more likely to be white, and are better educated. This holds true for same-sex married couples as well.\(^{18}\)

As is the case with why women in general are paid less than men,\(^ {19}\) part of these gaps can be explained by differing places of employment – but only part.

Men in same-sex marriages are less likely than men in opposite-sex marriages to work in traditionally male or high-paying fields. They are less likely to work in computers, science, mathematics, construction or police. They are more likely, however, to work in the arts, healthcare, and administrative support – traditionally female and lower-paying fields. Contradictorily, men in same-sex marriages are also more likely to work in business, financial and management jobs, which tend to be higher-paying. That belies a separate barrier: the gay glass ceiling.

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18 https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/same-sex-couples/ssc-house-characteristics.html
19 http://www.eoionline.org/blog/we-need-to-update-equal-pay-laws/
This year, researchers at the IZA Institute of Labor Economics looked into the disparity between gay and straight men at higher organizational levels. They found that while gay men are more likely to become supervisors and managers, they are 7.9 percent more likely to be stuck in low-level jobs or at smaller, less prestigious organizations. The authors suggest that the stereotypes of successful manager and gay man may not have much overlap. “Gay men may be penalized for not being perceived to have the stereotypically male heterosexual traits thought to be required among managers,” they write.

For women in same-sex marriages, the opposite is true. They are more likely to work in science, construction, policing, the military, computers and mathematics than women in opposite-sex marriages, and less likely to work in administrative support, healthcare, education and personal care.

It’s hard to break down median wages in particular sectors, because when only looking at people who are married, the subset of same-sex married people in any given field becomes impossibly unrepresentative. For people working in sales, however, there is enough of a sample to compare workers in non-management roles outside of Seattle. When comparing married full-time workers the same field, the trend reoccurs.

Men in opposite-sex marriages earn more than men in same-sex marriages, who earn more than women in same-sex marriages, women, who earn more than women in opposite-sex marriages. This is a trend that has been backed up by researchers multiple times. In 2015, Marieka Klawitter of the University of Washington undertook a meta-analysis of 31 studies published between 1995 and 2012 from the United States and other developed countries. She found that on average, gay men earned 11 percent less than heterosexual men. Lesbians, however, earned 9 percent more than heterosexual women.

It has been argued that perhaps lesbian women are more competitive than straight women. Correspondingly, that because gay men still earn more than women in general, they don’t feel the need to push as hard. Nonetheless, research has found no correlation between competitiveness and sexual preference.

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22 https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/124905/1/dp9382.pdf
Researchers consistently find, however, that gay men are stereotyped as more feminine than straight men, and lesbian women as more masculine than straight men. A 2015 study from McGill University examining the pay gap in Canada supposed that the imbalance may arise because lesbian women are “perceived as less feminine and closer to the unencumbered male ideal.”23 In concert, German researchers into gender stereotypes wrote in 2016 that “lay people expect straight women to be more feminine and less masculine than lesbians, and straight men to be more masculine and less feminine than gay men.”24 As femininity is financially penalized in our society, this stereotyping may help explain why gay men earn less and lesbian women earn more than their straight counterparts.

23 http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0891243215584761
24 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4932111/
Gender stereotyping helps explain why the job choices of men in same-sex marriages mirrors the job choices of women as a whole.

The problem may also be enculturation. It has been repeatedly shown that girls are less likely to go into STEM fields not because of their inherent aptitude, but because of negative messages they hear about girls being bad at math, and that girls are expected to pursue people-oriented careers.\(^{25}\) When gay boys are told by their peers that they are essentially girls, it follows that they may be subject to the same career pressures.

A study from the University of Nevada, which used national data from the year 2000, also found that lesbians who had previously lived with male partners made 9.5 percent less money than those who’d never cohabited with a male romantic partner.\(^{26}\) After controlling for characteristics like education and experience, the authors found a 6.6 percent premium for cohabiting lesbians over cohabiting heterosexual women, with the premium falling to 5.2 percent if the lesbians had ever been married to a man. Based on this data, researchers have surmised that women married to men are often mentally primed to opt out of work, as the man’s salary is frequently higher, or because women are expected to do a greater share of the housework due to gender norms.

In contrast, studies have shown that same-sex households share chores more evenly than heterosexual ones, and that lesbian couples work more equal hours, even when they have children.\(^{27}\)

Women are sometimes “mommy tracked,” or passed over for high-profile projects or promotions, when employers assume motherhood (but not fatherhood) zaps productivity. A 2014 study from the University of Georgia found that, for this reason, expectant mothers are often afraid to tell their bosses they’re pregnant.\(^{28}\) Men, however, experience a fatherhood premium, and both receive a premium for marriage.

The McGill study found, however, that the presence of children and marriage have no effect on the earnings of gay men or lesbians in conjugal relationships.\(^{29}\)

Regardless, LGBT people frequently report a consistent level of queer-specific discrimination. According to the 2008 General Social Survey, as much as 37 percent of lesbian and gay people experienced workplace harassment over the previous five-year period, and 12 percent lost a job because of their sexual orientation.\(^{30}\)

In 2018, it is still unclear under federal law whether a person can be fired for simply being LGBT. A federal case to determine whether LGBT people are covered under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is working its way through court, and the Trump Administration is arguing that LGBT are not covered.\(^{31}\) It is illegal to fire someone for being LGBT in Washington and two-fifths of the states, however.

In a similar vein, 90 percent of respondents to the largest survey of transgender people to date reported having experienced harassment or mistreatment at work, or had taken actions to avoid it. In addition, 47 percent reported having been discriminated against in hiring, promotion, or job retention because of their gender identity, according to a 2009 study.\(^{32}\)


\(^{27}\) https://rd.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10680-015-9363-z


\(^{29}\) http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0891243215584761

\(^{30}\) http://gss.norc.org/


5) Same-Sex Married Households in Washington Have Higher Incomes than Opposite-Sex Married Households Because They Work More

Again, this doesn’t seem to make much sense at first blush.

A couple of two married men makes 23.8 percent more than an opposite-sex couple in Seattle, and 18.1 percent more in the rest of the state. For same-sex women marriages, its 16.1 percent in Seattle and 3 percent everywhere else.

Yet men in same-sex marriages are paid less than men in opposite-sex marriages, and women in same-sex marriages are paid less than both.

One explanation is that the incomes of two men in same-sex marriages added together are still higher than the incomes in an opposite-sex marriage. But math doesn’t support that conclusion. The mean income for a straight man in Seattle plus that of a straight women is $166,900, but for two gay men it’s $157,200. For two lesbian women, it’s $143,200.
It’s also not the case that newlywed same-sex couples tend to be of prime working age. Charting a histogram of ages for people in married couples shows that opposite-sex and same-sex couples are of the same general ages.

There is, however, a stark difference between same-sex married couples and opposite-sex married couples in how much they work.

In Seattle, 57 percent of opposite-sex married households have both spouses working (full- or part-time), and 12 percent have neither working. For men in same-sex marriages, however, 71 percent have both partners working and 3 percent have neither. For women in same-sex marriages, 74 percent have both partners working and 6 percent have neither. In the rest of the state, the gap is less pronounced, but still holds true.
Final Remarks

When the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote this statement:

“*Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization’s oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.*”

Despite the dismissal of non-married LGBT couples as characters from Dante’s Inferno, Kennedy is saying that LGBT people are equal under the Constitution.

But until LGBT people are counted in the Census, it’s impossible to know whether LGBT people are treated more equally. For now, we know that they aren’t in terms of pay, imprisonment, homelessness, youth suicide, and the law.

There’s a perception that same-sex marriage was the pinnacle of LGBT rights, and it’s all solved now. Perhaps that’s why public acceptance of LGBT people is backsliding. People are less comfortable around LGBT people than they were in 2015 when same-sex marriage was approved.

According to a recently released poll from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and Harris Poll, 36 percent of people in 2017 felt uncomfortable with seeing a same-sex couple holding hands in public, compared to it was 29 percent in 2015. In addition, 32 percent said they’d be unhappy learning a family member is LGBT in 2017, compared with 27 percent in 2015.

In terms of discrimination, 55 percent LGBT reported experiencing discrimination in 2017, over 44 percent in 2016.

*The arc of history doesn’t bend toward justice on its own. It requires work. Work requires knowledge. Knowledge requires data.*

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