

Technical Note on Comparing Statistics on Same-Sex Couple Households between the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey

Tabulations from Summary File 1 of the 2010 Census will be released between June and August that present detailed geographical information on the number of same-sex unmarried couple households. This number combines those who initially reported that they were spouses of the householder and those who were unmarried partners of the householder.

Tables PCT15 and PCT17 in the Summary File state releases will show the presence of children in the household. Later this year, an additional table will be released that further specifies if the partner of the householder reported that they were the spouse of the householder. This is the first time such detailed data have been released from any decennial Census.

Since 2005, statistics on characteristics of same-sex couple households—both for those identified as spouses and as unmarried partners—have been released from the American Community Survey (ACS).¹ The American Community Survey is nationally representative household survey of 3 million households that contains detailed social, economic, and housing items formerly contained on the long or sample form of the decennial Census.

Data users are advised not to make comparisons of estimated numbers of same-sex couple households between the ACS and the 2010 Census because of differences in data collection procedures. Although the majority of both ACS and Census returns were collected via mail, differences occur in the data collection instruments for the households not responding by mail.

For the 2010 Census, individual enumerators were sent out to the nonresponding households and were administered a paper form for nonresponse followup. The ACS did not employ a paper form for followup but collected the information in person using a laptop computer or by telephone using a computerized instrument. These instruments had a key collection component that was absent from the paper form. When an interviewer recorded that a household was headed by a same-sex spouse, a message in a “popup box” appeared on the instrument screen that prompted the interviewer to verify the responses to the relationship and the gender items. Previous Census Bureau research has demonstrated the sensitivity of same-sex couple estimates to different data collection procedures.² Subsequent analysis of 2010 Census data on same-sex couple households will be forthcoming later this year that addresses any differences noted between the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey in the estimates of same-sex couple households.

¹ See the tables under the Same-Sex Couples heading at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html>

² See Martin O’Connell, Daphne Lofquist, Tavia Simmons, and Terry Lugaila, “New Estimates of Same-Sex Couple Households from the American Community Survey,” April 2010 , http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/SS_new-estimates.pdf.