BENCHMARKING CENSUS SAME-SEX UNMARRIED PARTNER DATA WITH OTHER GLBT SURVEY DATA*

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Introduction

In the past decade there has been a noticeable increase in social science research focusing on gay men and lesbians. This is in large part due to the combination of intense public policy interest in gay and lesbian issues and the availability of new social science data that allow credible identification of sexual minorities. Perhaps the most widely cited data source used to explore demographic characteristics of the gay and lesbian population is the United States Decennial Census, which allows for the identification same-sex "unmarried partners," commonly understood as coupled gay men and lesbians, through descriptions of intra-household relationships (Gates and Ost 2004). Black, et al. (2000) compare demographic traits of the census same-sex couples with other surveys where identification of sexual orientation and/or behavior is more explicit and find significant evidence that the census same-sex couples are for the most part gay and lesbian. Another study using public health data shows that these same-sex unmarried partner couples exhibit sexual and family planning behaviors that are consistent with a gay or lesbian sexual orientation (Carpenter 2004a).

Additional surveys using probability sampling have begun to ask questions either directly about respondents' sexual orientation or about sexual behavior or attraction. Since 1988, the General Social Survey (GSS), a biannual survey of approximately 3,000 adults conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, has included questions about sexual behavior (including same-sex sexual behavior). Further, the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS), conducted in 1992 in lieu of the GSS, asked respondents if they identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A major focus of Black, et al. 2000 was to explore demographic characteristics of the respondents in these surveys with same-sex couples in the 1990 census data. One limitation of the GSS and NHSLS regards their generally small sample sizes of gay men and lesbians. These sample sizes are even smaller if one attempts to limit the sample to those with a partner to provide comparisons to the census couples.

In this paper, we build on this work and compare census data with two additional surveys using probability sampling that have relatively large samples of gay men and lesbians and include questions on partnership status: the Urban Men's Health Study (UMHS) and the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). UMHS is a probability sample of men who have sex with men (MSM) in four cities conducted in 1997 and 1998. The 2001 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is a probability sample of the California population that contains self-reported information on sexual orientation and partnership status. The timing of the CHIS data collection is fortuitous for this research question because the 2000 Decennial Census was fielded just two years prior. Similarly, the UMHS was fielded just two years prior to the census. We use the UMHS sample of MSM and the CHIS sample of gay men and lesbians to provide an important point of comparison to a geographically matched sample of same-sex unmarried partners in Census 2000.

We believe this research advances the literature in several key ways. First, each of the datasets we explore identifies "gay" and "lesbian" people using different approaches. Very little is known about how these different methodologies affect the samples drawn. These comparative analyses begin to illuminate both common demographic traits as well as differences that might be in part due to methodological differences related to measuring sexual orientation. Second, the increasing use of census data in policy debates, such as marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples, and in academic research means it is crucial to understand how these data compare to other samples of the gay and lesbian population. The census approach does not permit identification of non-partnered gay men and lesbians, who far outnumber their "coupled" gay and lesbian counterparts (Black et al. 2000). If non-partnered

sexual minorities have different demographic characteristics compared to their partnered counterparts – either through selection effects into partnership status or through different choices made by partnered and non-partnered individuals – then Census-based research may provide a biased overall picture of gay men and lesbians. The comparative analyses in this paper allow us to consider how a couples-only sample potentially biases characteristics relative to samples with both coupled and single gay and lesbian people. It might also help in assessing the impact of several measurement error issues regarding census data raised in Black et al. 2003 and Gates and Ost 2004.

Motivation

We begin by noting that Census 2000 represents the largest and most diverse sample of gay men and lesbians in the United States available for analyses. In addition to being recognized as a gold standard for research into gay and lesbian populations (owing to its very large samples), census data on same sex unmarried partners are regularly used by government officials and policymakers in major national debates. For example, the Congressional Budget Office recently released a report on the budgetary implications of legalizing same-sex marriage; their analysis relied almost exclusively on assumptions about gay and lesbian people based on data from Census 2000 (CBO 2004).

Although the census has much to recommend it, there are a number of important limitations to the data. First, while research suggests that the same-sex unmarried partners in the census are likely to be gay men and lesbians, it must be clearly understood that census does not ask any questions about sexual attraction, behavior, or orientation. This raises the question about the extent to which the sample is truly gay or lesbian. Further, the census sample is only couples. We must then ask how useful these data are for providing inference about the characteristics of the broader gay and lesbian population.

As to the first question, there is relatively good evidence that the Census couples sample is, indeed, gay and lesbian. Black et al. (2000) discuss the reasons why it is unlikely that individuals check the "unmarried partner" option by mistake, and they show that the spatial distribution of same-sex male couples in the 1990 Census closely matches area-specific death rates from AIDS. Carpenter (2004a) further documents that same-sex unmarried partner type households exhibit sexual and family planning behaviors that are both 1) systematically different from their married and different-sex unmarried partner type households, and 2) what one would expect if they were, indeed gay or lesbian. For these reasons, we find it credible to assume that the Census sample is, indeed, composed of gay men and lesbians. However, changes in census enumeration processes for Census 2000 potentially created additional measurement error issues that could mean that a non-trivial proportion of couples counted as "same-sex unmarried partners" are actually heterosexual couples (Black et al. 2003). In addition, the census likely undercounts the true population of gay and lesbian couples.[1] We address this new form of error in our analyses.

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[1] The census only identifies those same-sex couples who describe their relationship to each other as "unmarried parnters". If gay and lesbian couples who choose to describe their relationship as "unmarried partners" differ from couples who do not choose this designation, a similar potential problem arises. We will have little to say about this issue, however, as our comparison data do not permit us to identify which couples *would choose* the unmarried partner option. Put differently, we explicitly assume that the process by which couples decide to identify themselves as "same-sex unmarried partners" in the census is the same process that would lead gay and lesbian couples to self-report to a telephone interviewer both their true sexual orientation and living arrangements. We believe this assumption to be both nontrivial and generally reasonable, though some survey evidence does suggest differences between these couple types (see, for example, Badgett and Rogers 2003).   A related issue is that the census does not permit separate identification of bisexuals, since they could logically be engaged in a same-sex unmarried

Thus far, we have used the terms "gay" and "lesbian" as if these were well-defined states of being for individuals. They are not. Defining and measuring sexual orientation is a complex and challenging issue. What questions are asked, by whom, where, and for what purpose could all affect survey responses and ultimately change the composition of samples garnered. Below, we carefully outline how sexual orientation is measured in each of the datasets we consider. These comparative analyses provide a first step in considering how differing survey methodologies and definitions of "gay" and "lesbian" might affect the demographic composition of samples. The analyses likely raise more questions in this regard than provide clear answers.

The other main issue with census data is the degree to which the same-sex couples in the census reflect the average characteristics of the gay and lesbian population. This is important because census is the only data available where characteristics of the gay and lesbian population can be explored below the national level. Indeed, public use samples are sufficiently large to explore state and metropolitan area characteristics. Black et al. 2000 find that 44 percent of lesbians and 28 percent of gay men report themselves as currently partnered. Our analyses of the 2001 CHIS show similarly that fewer than half of all lesbians in California report that they are currently living with their partner, and only slightly more than one quarter (27%) of gay men report this household structure (see Table 5). Clearly, the vast majority of gay men and lesbians are, in fact, not in living situations that would even make them eligible to be included in the census sample, since the census measures are based on allocation of intra-household relationships. In some respects, it would be surprising if characteristics of the couples sample were identical to the average characteristics of gay men and lesbians overall. Empirically, this would only be true if partnership status were purely randomly assigned within the gay and lesbian population (i.e. if partnership were uncorrelated with observable characteristics).

Of course, it is incredibly unlikely that being a member of a couple is completely random. Put differently, it is likely that there exists systematic selection into partnership status on the basis of demographic characteristics for gay men and lesbians. This, of course, would not be surprising, since there is substantial selection into traditionally conceived marriage and even heterosexual cohabitation (though the direction and magnitude of those selection effects is not always clear). Several studies, for example, show that married men are more highly educated than their unmarried male counterparts. It is natural to ask, therefore, whether similar processes occur for gay men and lesbians. Indeed, our paper will provide some of the first evidence on the determinants of partnership status for sexual minority individuals.

Selection into partnership on the basis of demographic characteristics, then, has the potential to impart mechanical biases on the resulting sample of gay men and lesbians (relative to the "true" underlying distribution). Given a reasonable distribution of education within the gay and lesbian sample, for example, if more highly educated individuals are more likely to find partners, then the resulting "couples" sample will have a higher average level of education than both the resulting non-partnered sample and the "true" sample of gay men and lesbians. The same logic follows for other demographic characteristics such as race, geographic location, and age.

Equally important (and troubling) is the real possibility that the effects of selection and its resulting composition biases might be relevant for the question at hand. Policy evaluations in

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partnership, a different-sex unmarried partnership, or a traditionally conceived heterosexual marriage. Though CHIS 2001 does permit separate identification of bisexuals, we are unable to create a Census comparison sample. We therefore focus on gay men and lesbians.

which the effect of treatment actually depends on the characteristic being selected upon could produce misleading results. In studying the effects of sexual orientation-based antidiscrimination ordinances on the earnings of gay people, for example, education-based selection (such as that described above) might return no significant effects despite the presence of a "true" effect for gay men and lesbians with low levels of education. Gaining at least some intuition about the initial biases can therefore provide an important guide for researchers doing census-based analyses.

Data and Methodology

In this section we describe each of the data sources used in this analysis. We pay particular attention to the ways in which sexual orientation is measured in the various surveys, as these differences may be related to patterns of demographic characteristics of the "gay" samples.

2001 California Health Interview Survey

The 2001 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is a telephone based random-digit dialing (RDD) survey that was administered in 2001 to approximately 50,000 households. We use confidential versions of these data that contain information on the respondent's self-reported sexual orientation. Specifically, one adult in each household is randomly selected to provide individual information on a variety of health conditions, health behaviors, and demographic characteristics. At the end of the "demographics" section, adult respondents age 18-64 are asked the following, "The next question is about your sexual orientation, and I want to assure you that your answers are completely confidential. Are you gay [, lesbian,] or bisexual?".[2] Fully 99 percent of respondents do not refuse to answer this question.

CHIS 2001 also includes information on each individual's partnership status. Specifically, respondents are asked to state their marital status, and one of the choices is "living with partner." We use this information as our measure of partnership among gay men and lesbians. We note that the measure implies *cohabitation* with one's partner and therefore excludes other types of "dating" relationships where the individuals do not live together. This is important because of its conceptual similarity with the Census household definition used to identify same-sex unmarried partners. That is, we assume that those couples who reveal to the CHIS that they are gay or lesbian and living with their partner are the same couples who would mark the "unmarried partner" option in the Decennial Census. We exclude the small handful of gay men and lesbians who report that they are currently "married" because we cannot further identify the nature of their relationship.[3] Our sample of non-partnered gay men and lesbians therefore includes never married, widowed, separated, and divorced individuals.

Note that the CHIS 2001 sexual orientation variable is likely to suffer from less measurement error than the associated census measure. Specifically, Census 2000 analyses requires correctly measured information on the respondent's own sex, a description of detailed intra-household relationships, *and* the sex of other household members (especially the unmarried partner). As Black et. al. (2003) point out, because of the very low rate of homosexuality in the

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[2] If the respondent answered "yes" but did not further make clear her sexual orientation, a follow up question was asked to differentiate between bisexuals, gay men, and lesbians.

[3] These individuals may be in a traditionally conceived heterosexual marriage (i.e. closeted gay men and lesbians), or they may a member of a same-sex couple that essentially considers themselves "married". Unfortunately, the sex composition of the household is not available to researchers even in the confidential data, and we are therefore unable to provide further evidence on these individuals.

population, even a small rate of sex miscoding could lead to large biases associated with "same-sex" couples. In contrast, sexual orientation in the CHIS relies on the response of a single individual – the respondent – to a single question. As such, the CHIS approach is less prone to mismeasurement of sexual orientation.

Our approach for identifying partnership among the sample of gay men and lesbians in CHIS 2001 has a few drawbacks, however. First, we identify partnership on the basis of a question about marital status, and respondents are forced to choose among several categories that need not be mutually exclusive. That is, a gay man living with his same-sex partner who is also divorced from a previous different-sex spouse might choose "living with partner" or "divorced", and we do not know the factors that would induce him to choose one or the other. This issue does not arise in the Census, as marital status is asked independently of one's relationship to the household head.[4]

The Urban Men's Health Study

Conducted in 1997 and 1998, The Urban Men's Health Study (UMHS) is a household-based telephone survey of a probability sample of men who have sex with men (MSM) living in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago (see Catania, et al. 2001 for more detailed information about the data collection procedures and findings from the survey). MSMs were determined by a screening question and is defined to include men reporting any same-sex sexual contact since age 14 and those who self-identify as gay or bisexual.

In the analyses shown, we include all of the MSM in the UMHS, however, the survey does include a variable that incorporates respondents' self-description of their sexual orientation. The full sample includes nearly 80 percent who say they are homosexual, 8 percent who are bisexual, and nearly 3 percent who are heterosexual. However, among the cohabiting sample, 94 percent describe themselves as homosexual, 3 percent as bisexual and less than 0.4 percent as heterosexual.

The actual geographic area of the survey included only zip codes where MSM densities were estimated at 4 percent or higher. The UMHS includes 2,881 respondents, of whom 794 report having a male partner. The UMHS also includes demographic information on both the respondent and his partner including age, education, race/ethnicity, and income.

UMHS did not actually collect a household roster, so identifying the group of cohabiting partners required several steps. Demographic information was collected on the respondent and up to four of his sex partners, including a "primary" partner identified as someone the respondent was "currently in love with" or felt "a special commitment to." Respondents were separately asked, "Do you have a relationship with a man who you would describe as your domestic partner or spouse?" Responses could include "yes" and "yes, registered as a domestic partnership." The challenge was to identify households where the respondent says he is living with a domestic partner and determine if the "primary" partner is that domestic partner. There were 564 men who claimed to be living with a person they identified as a "primary" partner. Of them 540 said that they had a relationship that they would describe as a domestic partnership. We used those 540 responses as the men who we considered "cohabiting" for comparison with the census same-sex "unmarried partners."

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[4] Another potential problem with our measure is that we do not actually observe the overall sex composition of the household. While it is reasonable to assume that a gay man who reports he is "living with a partner" is, in fact, living with a man (and similarly for lesbians), we cannot verify this to be true. This source of error is likely trivial.

We also used the entire UMHS sample for analyses and drew a census sample designed to most closely approximate the geography of the UMHS sample. Details of this matching process are described later.

Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample, 5-percent

We use the Census 2000 5-percent Public Use Microdata Sample for these analyses. These data are drawn from the approximately 20 percent of households in the United States who received a Census "long-form" that asks detailed demographic and economic questions. The 5-percent PUMS is designed as a one-in-twenty sampling of the total United States population.

The census does not ask any questions about sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or sexual attraction. Rather, census forms include a number of relationship categories to define how individuals in a household are related to the householder. These fall into two broad categories: related persons (e.g., husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister), and unrelated persons (e.g., roomer/boarder, housemate, unmarried partner). If the householder designates another adult of the same sex as his or her "husband/wife" or "unmarried partner", census enumerates this household as a same-sex unmarried partner couple.

These counts of same-sex couples likely undercount the true population of gay and lesbian couples. Concerns about the confidentiality of their responses may have led many gay and lesbian couples to indicate a status that would not provide evidence of the true nature of their relationship. Other couples may have felt that "unmarried partner" or "husband/wife" does not accurately describe their relationship. A study of the undercount of same-sex unmarried partners in Census 2000 indicates that these were the two most common reasons that gay and lesbian couples chose not to designate themselves as unmarried partners (Badgett and Rogers 2003). Estimates of the undercount range from 15 to 50 percent (Gates and Ost 2004, Badgett and Rogers 2003).

While the existence of an undercount is quite likely, an equally relevant issue is the possibility that some portion of the same-sex unmarried partner couples might be incorrectly designated as such due to a miscoding of either the "unmarried partner" relationship status or the sex of one of the partners. There are a number of ways a household could be classified in the census data as a same-sex unmarried partner household even though it is not headed by a gay or lesbian couple.

One potentially serious source of measurement error among the same-sex unmarried partner data from Census 2000 is likely a result of sex miscoding errors among heterosexual couples. It can be assumed that some very small fraction of the population makes an error when completing the census form and possibly miscodes a variety of responses, including the sex of the householder or the householder's "husband/wife" or "unmarried partner." Under Census 2000 editing procedures, all these miscoded couples would be included in the counts of same-sex unmarried partners. Because the ratio between married couples and same-sex couples is so large (roughly 90 to 1), even a small fraction of sex miscoding among married couples adds a sizable fraction of heterosexual married couples to the same-sex unmarried-partner population, possibly distorting some demographic characteristics, particularly child rearing. While this same error could occur among heterosexual unmarried partners, the smaller ratio between them and same-sex unmarried partners greatly reduces the effects of this form of measurement error on the same-sex couple population. Black, et al. 2003 suggest that as much as a third of the sample of same-sex unmarried partners could be miscoded heterosexual couples.

Same-sex unmarried partner households where one member of the couple was identified as "husband/wife" are the most at risk for this form of measurement error. Black et al. 2003 show that one way to isolate this group of same-sex couples is to check the marital status variable allocation flag (a variable indicating that the original response had been changed). A large portion of the same-sex unmarried partners who had their marital status allocated likely originally responded that they were "currently married" and included a same-sex "husband/wife." For this reason, we show analyses for the full census sample of same-sex couples as well as the subsample of couples without marital status allocation. This group is likely free of significant measurement error but also likely eliminates same-sex couples in which one partner was identified as a "husband/wife".

There are other possible sources of measurement error in census counts. Mistakes in the designation of an unmarried partner could also cause errors. One essentially undetectable form of error (discussed at length in Black et al. 2000) occurs when the person filling out the census form (the householder) does not have a spouse or unmarried partner in the household, but does have a child or other adult in the household living with an unmarried partner. For example, if a female householder classifies the female unmarried partner of her son as an "unmarried partner," then this household would be counted as a female same-sex unmarried partner, or lesbian, household. While this type of error likely has negligible effects on the quality of the data at a national level, it could be more common in analyses of certain communities where extended families are more likely to be living in the home, and households are larger.

Another form of measurement error could be language-based. Confusion may result when respondents fill out a census form not written in their native language or if the census enumerator translations of terms such as "unmarried partner" and "roommate" in other languages, particularly Spanish, do not have the same meanings as the English version.

Geographic correspondence

Geographic correspondence between the census and CHIS sample is exact as the PUMS files identify respondents at the state level. In this case, all census respondents from California are included in the analyses. These state-level samples are considered to be representative of the population.

Geographic correspondence between the UMHS and census samples is more complex and not exact. The finest level of geography available in the PUMS is the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA). PUMAs are census designated geographic areas each with a population of approximately 100,000. The analysis uses the complete UMHS sample and attempts to select respondents in PUMAs that most closely match the geography of the UMHS survey area as determined by the zip codes surveyed.[5] The process of matching the geographies proceeded as follows:

1. Census data were extracted to include respondents in all PUMAs with any portion in the area (determined by zip codes) surveyed in the UMHS. In total, these PUMAs covered a much wider geographic area than the UMHS survey area.
2. Census geographic correspondence files were used to determine what portion of the population (in 2000) within each PUMA resided in the area surveyed by the UMHS and vice versa.

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[5] Lance Pollack kindly provided a list of zip codes used in the UMHS with counts of respondents in each.

3. PUMAs were selected to jointly maximize the proportion of the UMHS survey area population contained with the PUMAs and the proportion of the population of the PUMAs in the UMHS survey region.

The results of this selection process are shown in Table 1. Across all four cities, 94.2 percent of the population of the UMHS survey area lives in the census sample selected while just over two-thirds of the population of the census sample area lives in the UMHS survey region. New York provided the closest geographic match while Los Angeles showed the greatest disparity. In interpreting the analyses, one must consider that the census sample covers a wider and likely less urban geographic area than the survey region of the UMHS.

Sample sizes for the UMHS and the comparable census samples for the four cities in the UMHS are shown in Table 2. The UMHS sample includes 2,881 MSM while the corresponding census sample includes 1,674 coupled same-sex male unmarried partners, of whom 1,376 have no marital status allocation.

Findings: UMHS versus Census 2000

We begin with comparative analyses of the census and UMHS. We explored four major demographic characteristics within the two samples: age, education, race/ethnicity, and income. Comparisons among the non-cohabiting UMHS sample, the cohabiting UMHS sample, the full census sample of same-sex male unmarried partners and the sub-sample of census same-sex male unmarried partners who did not have a marital status allocation are shown in Table 3. Nearly all of the differences observed between the UMHS cohabiting sample and the census sample were observed regardless of the census marital status allocation. This suggests that the measurement error in the census sample is likely not very prominent within these four very large urban areas. Additional comparisons within the four cities surveyed in the UMHS are shown in Table 4. While small sample sizes limited the utility of showing categorical variables, comparisons are made for mean age, college education, non-white, and income above $100K.

Age
The men in the census sample of same-sex unmarried partners were on average more than three years older than the comparable UMHS sample. There were significantly higher proportions of men in the census sample aged 45 and older. This group accounted for nearly 30 percent of the census sample while it comprised less than 18 percent of the UMHS cohabiting sample. These same patterns are observed within each of the four cities. Within the UMHS sample, the cohabiting men are nearly two years younger than the non-cohabiting sample.

Education
The UMHS sample of cohabiting men is significantly more educated than the census sample. Approximately two-thirds of the census sample reports having a college degree compared to 78 percent of the cohabiting men in the UMHS. On the other end of the education spectrum, the portion of men with less than a high school degree in the census sample is double that of the UMHS cohabiting sample. These same patterns are observed within each of the four cities. The cohabiting men in the UMHS sample were more educated than their non-cohabiting counterparts, 78 percent compared to 68 percent, respectively.

Race/Ethnicity
UMHS and census samples showed the greatest similarity in this trait. While non-cohabiting men in the UMHS were less likely to be white than their cohabiting counterparts, the differences in this trait between the UMHS cohabiting men and the census samples are not significant. There is a higher proportion of African-American men in the census sample, approximately 4 percent versus 2 percent in the UMHS sample. There is also a higher proportion of Hispanic men in the census sample than the UMHS cohabiting sample, but the difference is not significant when you remove the men with a marital status allocation from the census sample.

The similarity of race/ethnicity holds true within cities, as the portion non-white within the UMHS cohabiting sample falls between the estimates from the census full sample and the subsample of men without a marital status allocation in each city except New York, where the UMHS sample is less non-white than the census sample.

Income[6]
Despite lower levels of education, respondents in the census sample have a higher probability of having income greater than $100,000 per year than cohabiting men in the UMHS sample, approximately 43-45 percent versus 36.5 percent respectively. This pattern is true in each of the four cities, although the differences are not significant in New York. Income levels among cohabiting men in the UMHS are generally higher than the non-cohabiting men.

Findings: 2001 CHIS versus Census 2000
Partnership rates for gay men and lesbians (age 18-64) in the 2001 CHIS are shown in Table 5. Of the 329 total lesbians in the CHIS sample, 144 (43.8 percent) report that they are currently living with their partner. Among the 568 gay men, 152 are partnered, representing 26.8 percent of the gay male sample. Overall, just one third of the gay and lesbian sample reports currently living with a partner. These figures indicate that the vast majority of gay and lesbian respondents are *not* currently in partnerships and therefore would not make it into a "Census-eligible" sample.

We note that the observed partnership rates for men in the 2001 CHIS and the UMHS data are very similar: around 25 percent of gay men, variously defined, report currently living with a partner. This is also very close to the estimate (28%) from the General Social Survey and National Health and Social Life Survey as reported in Black et. al. (2000). Coupled with the much higher partnership rates for lesbians shown here in 2001 CHIS data and documented previously using GSS and NHSLS, this implies that if selection effects associated with partnership distort the representation of sexual minority individuals identified through the census same-sex unmarried partner sample, the biases are likely to be more severe for gay men than for lesbians. This is both because partnership rates are substantially lower among the gay sample relative to the lesbian sample and because (as will be shown below) partnered gay men appear *more* selected relative to non-partnered gay men than the associated selection effects for lesbians.

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[6] Incomes from the census sample were CPI adjusted and then categorized into the same categories used in the UMHS data, which only reported income as a categorical variable.

Males

Table 6 presents mean characteristics by partnership status for gay men in the 2001 CHIS, as well as comparisons with the sample of same-sex male couples in California in the 2000 Census.

Age

Coupled gay men in the CHIS are slightly younger than the coupled men in the census sample: 39.3 versus 40.7 years. Unlike the UMHS, we find that partnered gay men in the 2001 CHIS are on average a year and a half older than their nonpartnered gay male counterparts.

Education

We find slight differences with the Census sample in California with respect to education: Census gay couples are less likely to have college degrees than the 2001 CHIS sample and they are more likely to have less than a high school education. These differences are attenuated, however, when the couples with allocated marital status are dropped. This is consistent with the likelihood that many of the couples with allocated marital status were in fact heterosexual couples who may have misreported the sex of one spouse, since in results unreported (and documented elsewhere) we find that the CHIS gay men in partnerships are substantially more educated than the overall population of men.

Consistent with the findings from UMHS, we find evidence in the CHIS that partnered gay men are positively selected on education relative to their non-partnered gay counterparts. For example, gay men with partners in CHIS 2001 are substantially more likely to have graduate degrees than gay men without partners.

Race/Ethnicity

The CHIS gay male couples are more likely to be white than their census counterparts; however, this difference goes away once couples with allocated marital status are dropped. The likelihood that they report as Latino is also similar in both samples with the 16.3 percent figure for coupled gay men in the CHIS falling between the two estimates from the census, 15.5 and 20.8 percent. As with the patterns for education, the finding from the census analyses, that adjusting for the possible measurement error lowers the rate of Latinos, is consistent with a possible role for bias from incorrectly coded non-white heterosexual households.

Further, gay men with partners in the CHIS data were much more likely to be white than gay men without partners. This pattern was also observed for partnered gay men as compared to nonpartnered gay men in the UMHS sample.

Income

Census gay male couples in California are estimated to earn between $50,000 and $55,000 annually; in contrast, gay male couples in the CHIS report annual incomes of over $80,000. This is a pattern that contrasts with the UMHS, where the men in the census sample reported higher earnings than their UMHS counterparts.

Consistent with the findings from the UMHS, we find evidence in the CHIS that partnered gay men are positively selected on income relative to non-partnered gay men. For example, partnered gay men have average annual earnings almost $19,000 greater than non-partnered gay men.

Children

Table 6 shows that partnered gay men are less likely than non-partnered gay men to have children present in the household (3.6% vs. 7.6%, respectively). Both figures are substantially smaller than the raw census fraction, which indicates that over 22% of gay male couples in California have children in the home. Notably, dropping observations with allocated marital status lowers this fraction to 8.4 percent, which is still twice the associated estimate in the CHIS data.

Females

Table 7 follows the format of Table 6 and presents the associated demographic characteristics by partnership status for lesbians in the 2001 CHIS. Table 7 also includes the sample of same-sex female couples in California in the 2000 Census for comparison.

Age

Different from the male sample, the coupled women in the census sample are slightly younger (mean age 39.9) than coupled lesbians in the 2001 CHIS (mean age 40.8). The finding is robust to dropping observations with allocated marital status (39.8 years). Age differences between partnered (40.8 years) and non-partnered (39.5 years) lesbians in the CHIS are very small on average.

Education

The CHIS partnered lesbians are more educated than the census lesbian couples in California. Both the full census sample and the sample restricted to couples without marital status allocation reveal rates of college degrees that are about 10-17 percentage points lower than the CHIS lesbian couples and rates of less than a high school degree that are about 4-9 percentage points higher.

The strong education differences associated with partnership status that we observed among gay men in the 2001 CHIS do not appear to be as important for the lesbian sample. For example, an estimated 20 percent of partnered lesbians report having a graduate degree, while the associated figure for non-partnered lesbians is 17.5 percent.

Race/Ethnicity

Similar to the male samples, the race and ethnicity results show a fair bit of similarity between the CHIS and the census samples. In the CHIS, 82.5 percent of coupled lesbians were white, a figure that falls in between the two census estimates of 77.0 and 84.3. The CHIS sample of coupled lesbians was less likely to report as Latina than the women in the census sample, even with the correction for possible measurement error. Similar to the findings for men, correcting for the possibility that the census sample of same-sex couples may contain miscoded heterosexual couples increases the proportion of white respondents and decreases the proportion of Latinas.

As with education, the degree of partnership-based selection on race for the CHIS lesbian sample is less severe than for the gay male sample. For example, partnered lesbians are only about 6 percentage points more likely to be white than lesbians without a partner (82.5% vs. 76.7%) – a smaller difference than the ten percentage point differential among gay men with and without partners.

Income
Lesbians in the CHIS exhibit higher average earnings than the earnings reported in the census sample of lesbian couples although the proportion of coupled lesbians working full-time is similar in both samples. These are the same patterns as observed with the CHIS gay male sample in comparison to the census, though the differences are smaller. Partnered lesbians in the CHIS are more likely to work full time and have higher earnings than non-partnered lesbians.

Children
As with the gay male sample in the CHIS, partnered lesbians are less likely than their non-partnered counterparts to have children in the household (18% vs. 23%). Both figures, however, are much smaller than the census estimate of over 36%. When couples with allocated marital status are excluded, however, the differential falls substantially.

Discussion

The analyses in this study include multiple levels of comparisons. The primary purpose of the study is to explore differences between the census samples of same-sex unmarried partners and coupled gay men and lesbians in the UMHS and 2001 CHIS. These three data sources ascertain sexual orientation in three very different ways. The UMHS screened respondents based on sexual behavior (reporting having had sex with men since age 14). The CHIS asked respondents directly about their sexual orientation. Inference about sexual orientation in the census comes from the household roster and identification of same-sex "unmarried partners." Considering differences across these datasets sheds some light on how different methodologies used to identify gay men and lesbians could yield different populations.

A second level of comparison involves differences between coupled and non-coupled gay men and lesbians. Both the UMHS and CHIS have reasonably large samples of both. Similarities in findings within these two data sources provide insight into selection into partnership status in the gay and lesbian population.

The third form of interesting comparisons involves the issue of measurement error in the census data. The analyses show the possible effects of measurement error by identifying a subsample of same-sex couples largely free of the measurement error that could add heterosexual couples into the same-sex couple sample.   The discussion to follow will explore each of these three comparative analyses

Comparing findings across the three data sources
If sexual orientation were a random event in the population, we would have no reason to believe that a sample of gay and lesbian people would look demographically any different from the population at large. However, in the limited data available on the demographic characteristics of the gay and lesbian population, we do observe what appear to be systematic differences in some traits. Samples drawn from the Census, GSS, NHSLS, and CHIS all show gay men and lesbians having higher education levels than the population in general (Black et al. 2000; Badgett 1995; Carpenter 2004b; Gates and Ost 2004). Most of these studies also find gay men generally earning less than other men and lesbians earning more than other women, even when age and education differences are taken into account.[7] While sexual orientation may be

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[7] Badgett 1995 actually find no differences between lesbian wages and those of non-lesbians but in a replication of Badgett's work using more recent data, Black et al. 2003 find that lesbian earnings are higher than the earnings of other women.

random, the propensity to reveal details about sexual orientation, behavior, or attraction may indeed by correlated with a variety of demographic characteristics. So may the decision to identify someone of the same sex in your household as an "unmarried partner."

Hypothesizing about how different methods of measuring sexual orientation might affect demographic characteristics is beyond the scope of these descriptive analyses. As such, we cannot say with certainty that a given methodology regarding measuring sexual orientation yields a specific set of characteristics in the sample drawn. However, simply describing the characteristics of the gay and lesbian samples derived from these three data sources provides fodder for further research in this area. In comparing the three samples, we observe several interesting findings:

- While coupled men the in the census were older than the coupled men in both the CHIS and UMHS, coupled women in the census were younger than their counterparts in the CHIS.
- Among the three samples, the same-sex couples in the census had the lowest levels of education, even though this group still has education levels above that of the general population. Both the UMHS sample of MSM and the CHIS 2001 sample of gay men and lesbians had higher rates of college education than the same-sex couples in the census.
- Race and ethnicity were the demographic traits in which the census sample benchmarked the best against both the UMHS and CHIS.
- Men in the census sample had somewhat higher incomes than their counterparts in the UMHS, but the differences were not as pronounced as the CHIS, where coupled men had incomes substantially higher than men in the census. Coupled women in the CHIS also had incomes above that of women in the census, but the differences were not actually as pronounced as those observed in men.
- The most dramatic differences between the census sample and the CHIS were observed in the presence of children in the household. Both men and women in the census had rates of child-rearing substantially above the coupled gay men and women in the CHIS.

It is important to remember that the geographic match between the UMHS and the Census is not exact. The PUMAs included in the census analyses extend the geographic bounds beyond the UMHS sampling region. Without knowing the specific characteristics of the full population of the UMHS area to compare with the census region, we cannot rule out the possibility that there exist systematic differences in these broader demographics that help to explain differences observed in our comparisons. On the other hand, the geographic match with California and the CHIS data is exact.

It is interesting to note that in the two surveys with a more direct question about sexual behavior and/or orientation, the samples show higher education levels than the census, where sexual orientation is inferred based on household structure. The census sample is also somewhat more racially and ethnically diverse than the UMHS or CHIS sample (although this characteristic had the most similarity across the samples). It might be that this form of "indirect" questioning yields a broader demographic cross-section of the gay and lesbian population than when asked direct questions about sexual behavior or orientation.

The presence of children marked perhaps the most striking difference between the census sample and the two other data sources. Coupled gay men and lesbians in the CHIS were much less likely to be raising children than their census counterparts, even in comparisons with the census sample likely free of measurement error that could bias it substantially toward over-

reporting the presence of children among same-sex couples. Given the high profile status of policy debates about child-rearing among same-sex couples, our findings highlight the need for additional research exploring the true incidence of this trait among gay and lesbian couples.

Differences between coupled and non-coupled gay men and lesbians

The analyses comparing coupled and uncoupled gay men in the UMHS and CHIS yielded very similar findings. Respondents who were coupled were more educated, more white, and had higher incomes and their non-coupled counterparts. While the benefits of marriage for heterosexual men have been well documented (Korenman and Neumark 1991 and others), we know little about the effects of partnering in gay and lesbian couples. Our findings offer preliminary evidence that partnering may indeed yield positive benefits, regardless of the sex of the partners. Of course, this could also be evidence of positive selection into partnering with regard to education and income. Education could be correlated with a host of characteristics that make higher educated gay men and lesbians more attractive as partners. As with the associated literature on the causal effects of heterosexual marriage, longitudinal data on gay and lesbian individuals would be particularly useful for disentangling these two hypotheses.

Measurement error in the census

These analyses do not attempt to construct an estimate of the "true" characteristics of the same-sex couples that in some way adjusts for measurement error resulting from sex miscoding in heterosexual couples. However, reporting results of census respondents without a marital status allocation does offer evidence of the direction of the bias in unadjusted estimates. In both sets of comparisons, marital status allocation – though it does not appear to affect patterns substantially – is consistent with likely miscodes. The sample of same-sex couples without marital status allocation is older, less educated, less white, more black and Hispanic, and has lower income than the full sample of same-sex couples. In unreported results exploring the characteristics of married couples, we find that all of these differences are consistent with measurement error that introduces heterosexual married couples into the same-sex couple sample.

Conclusion

These findings highlight the inherent challenges associated with describing and studying the "gay and lesbian" population. The terms gay and lesbian, and perhaps even more so terms like bisexual and transgender, are fluid constructions and can be measured in a variety of ways. While we do not argue for or against a particular method in these analyses, we do strongly urge researchers to take into consideration how the concept of sexual orientation is measured in their work. Different definitions of sexual orientation and behavior yield different samples. However, a danger arises if these samples are grouped into a common category of "gay" and "lesbian." These distinctions can become especially important if research is used to inform the high profile policy debates around gay and lesbian issues.

We view these descriptive analyses as an attempt to demonstrate the importance of defining the parameters of the sample when describing the characteristics of the gay and lesbian population. As we stated at the outset, these analyses raise more questions than provide clear answers. But they certainly demonstrate that additional research exploring how and why people answer different questions about sexual attraction, behavior, and orientation along with relationship status is vital to our understanding of the characteristics of sexual minorities.

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Table 1. Geographic correspondence between the UMHS and Census 2000, 5% PUMS.

	Percent of UMHS survey area population in the Census area (PUMAs)	Percent of Census area population (PUMAs) in the UMHS survey area
San Francisco	95.5	60.3
New York	95.6	81.9
Los Angeles	90.8	51.4
Chicago	94.7	76.4
TOTAL	**94.2**	**67.3**

Table 2. Sample sizes, UMHS and Census 2000, 5% PUMS.

	UMHS			Census 2000 5% PUMS	
	Total respondents	Cohabiting respondents	Fraction cohabiting (weighted)	Same-sex male unmarried partners	Same-sex male unmarried partners (no marital status allocation)
San Francisco	915	176	0.25	494	443
New York	800	154	0.26	556	441
Los Angeles	752	130	0.22	398	302
Chicago	414	80	0.28	226	190
TOTAL	**2,881**	**540**	**0.25**	**1,674**	**1,376**

Table 3. Comparing demographic characteristics between UMHS and Census 5% PUMS samples.

	UMHS				Census 2000 5% PUMS			
	Non-cohabiting MSM	s.e.	Cohabiting MSM	s.e.	Same-sex male unmarried partners	s.e.	Same-sex male unmarried partners (no marital status allocations)	s.e.
Age (mean)	39.52	0.322	37.85	0.509	**41.50**	0.305	**41.11**	0.318
Age distribution								
18-24	7.9%	0.007	5.3%	0.013	3.8%	0.005	4.3%	0.006
25-34	35.8%	0.012	41.9%	0.026	**29.1%**	0.012	**28.6%**	0.013
35-44	29.1%	0.011	35.1%	0.025	37.4%	0.013	38.0%	0.014
45-54	16.4%	0.009	12.3%	0.017	**17.4%**	0.010	**18.1%**	0.011
55+	10.8%	0.008	5.4%	0.012	**12.3%**	0.009	**11.0%**	0.009
% w/ College degree	67.9%	0.012	78.2%	0.021	**63.9%**	0.013	**67.7%**	0.013
Education distribution								
HS and less	10.8%	0.008	5.0%	0.01	**13.9%**	0.009	**9.3%**	0.008
Some College	21.3%	0.011	16.8%	0.02	**22.1%**	0.011	**23.1%**	0.012
College	37.3%	0.012	42.8%	0.03	**35.9%**	0.013	38.2%	0.014
Post College	30.6%	0.012	35.4%	0.03	**28.0%**	0.012	**29.5%**	0.013
Race/ethnicity								
White (non-Hisp)	81.7%	0.010	88.2%	0.016	85.1%	0.009	87.9%	0.009
Black (non-Hisp)	4.7%	0.005	2.3%	0.007	**4.5%**	0.006	**4.1%**	0.006
Hispanic	11.9%	0.009	8.9%	0.014	**14.1%**	0.009	11.5%	0.009
Income distribution								
<10K	7.1%	0.007	1.7%	0.007	1.7%	0.004	1.0%	0.003
10-20K	11.8%	0.009	5.0%	0.012	2.8%	0.004	**1.7%**	0.003
20-40K	32.5%	0.013	8.2%	0.013	9.3%	0.007	7.4%	0.007
40-60K	21.4%	0.011	17.1%	0.021	13.8%	0.009	14.2%	0.010
60-80K	12.0%	0.009	14.9%	0.019	14.4%	0.009	16.3%	0.011
80-100K	4.8%	0.005	16.5%	0.020	14.5%	0.010	14.3%	0.010
100K+	10.4%	0.008	36.5%	0.025	**43.5%**	0.013	**45.1%**	0.014

Table 4. Comparing demographic characteristics within cities between UMHS and Census 5% PUMS samples.

	UMHS				Census			
	Non-cohabiting MSM	s.e.	Cohabiting MSM	s.e.	Same-sex male unmarried partners	s.e.	Same-sex male unmarried partners (no marital status allocations)	s.e.
Age (mean)								
San Francisco	40.5	0.485	38.8	0.771	41.8	0.479	40.7	0.823
New York	40.6	0.583	37.9	0.905	41.4	0.513	40.6	0.609
Los Angeles	37.7	0.604	38.4	0.934	41.4	0.596	41.0	0.558
Chicago	36.9	0.593	33.8	0.955	41.2	0.829	42.0	0.506
% w/ College degree								
San Francisco	62.2%	0.021	73.8%	0.038	65.8%	0.022	66.1%	0.023
New York	74.6%	0.020	86.5%	0.030	72.9%	0.020	76.2%	0.021
Los Angeles	58.9%	0.026	68.4%	0.050	50.6%	0.026	57.9%	0.029
Chicago	76.8%	0.026	69.7%	0.056	58.8%	0.035	63.7%	0.037
% Non-white								
San Francisco	18.4%	0.016	10.1%	0.025	12.1%	0.015	9.8%	0.015
New York	17.3%	0.017	9.3%	0.023	13.4%	0.016	12.4%	0.016
Los Angeles	20.4%	0.020	18.1%	0.041	19.5%	0.020	15.2%	0.021
Chicago	16.6%	0.022	13.9%	0.046	17.3%	0.027	11.8%	0.026
% Income >$100K								
San Francisco	9.2%	0.014	25.6%	0.039	39.7%	0.023	39.8%	0.024
New York	13.0%	0.015	47.9%	0.043	49.4%	0.022	49.0%	0.024
Los Angeles	9.0%	0.016	29.1%	0.046	42.0%	0.026	47.2%	0.030
Chicago	4.6%	0.011	22.0%	0.053	39.3%	0.034	43.5%	0.037

Table 5. CHIS 2001: partnership rates among lesbians and gay men, adults age 18-64.

	Total Number	Number Partnered	Raw Partnership Rate
Lesbians	329	144	43.8%
Gay Men	568	152	26.8%

Table 6. Comparing demographic characteristics between CHIS 2001 and Census 5% PUMS samples, males

	2001 CHIS Gay Men *Not* Living with a Partner	2001 CHIS Gay Men Living with a Partner	Census same-sex male couples (full sample)	Census same-sex male couples (no mar alloc)
N	416	152	4,410	2,859
Age	37.6	39.3	40.7 (0.1643)	40.4 (0.1973)
Less than HS diploma	3.6	0	12.3 (0.5431)	6.6 (0.5147)
At least a HS diploma	49.6	40.1	45.5 (0.8153)	43.1 (1.0030)
At least a College Degree (BA)	32.6	37.7	26.7 (0.7212)	31.4 (0.9355)
Graduate Degree	14.1	22.2	15.4 (0.5831)	18.9 (0.7817)
White (main race)	75.5	85.5	78.2 (0.6742)	83.3 (0.75542)
Latino (ethnicity)	15.1	16.3	20.8 (0.6825)	15.5 (0.75408)
% full time (>=35 hrs)	69.0	78.7	74.9 (0.7042)	77.3 (0.8445)
Earnings last month (among full time workers)	61,421	80,724	50,351 (985)	54,917 (1,290)
Any children	7.6	3.6	22.4 (0.9350)	8.4 (0.7319)

Weighted means

Table 7. Comparing demographic characteristics between CHIS 2001 and Census 5% PUMS samples, females

	2001 CHIS Lesbians *Not* Living with a Partner	2001 CHIS Lesbians Living with a Partner	Census same-sex female couples (full sample)	Census same-sex female couples (no mar alloc)
N	185	144	4,136	2,532
Age	39.5	40.8	39.9 (0.1697)	39.8 (0.2140)
Less than HS diploma	1.2	2.1	11.0 (0.5161)	6.6 (0.5279)
At least a HS diploma	48.7	40.9	48.2 (0.8381)	45.1 (1.0614)
At least a College Degree (BA)	32.6	37.0	24.0 (0.7206)	27.4 (0.9506)
Graduate Degree	17.5	20.0	16.8 (0.6225)	20.9 (0.8635)
White (main race)	76.7	82.5	77.0 (0.7076)	84.3 (0.7806)
Latina (ethnicity)	18.6	11.7	19.8 (0.6713)	14.4 (0.7537)
% full time (>=35 hrs)	70.9	74.9	72.4 (0.7497)	75.1 (0.9211)
Earnings last month (among full time workers)	45,345	56,175	42,300 (830)	43,647 (996)
Any children	23.0	18.0	38.8 (1.132)	25.8 (1.256)

Weighted means