Locating demographic information on GLBT people: A guide to the available reference sources

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Abstract
Librarians are often asked questions which seek demographic information about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual people. However, even such basic questions as "How many gay people live in Minneapolis?" or "How many gay and lesbian people were uninsured in 2004?" are not easy to answer because information about sexual orientation or sexual preference is not usually included in standard reference books. One reason for this absence is that information in those reference books is often based on data obtained from large-scale government surveys such as the U.S. Census and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and these surveys have not typically included questions about sexual preference or sexual identity.

However, a great deal of information about GLBT people is available, it's just a little harder to find. Some large-scale surveys did include questions about sexual preference and others contain information from which it is possible to define, for instance, same-sex couples. In addition, many smaller surveys and polls have included information about sexual preference, and these data may be available on the internet or in print. This talk will review sources of information about GLBT people, including data files, reference books, research articles and websites.

Bio:
Sarah Boslaugh received her MA in Library Science from the University of Chicago and her PhD in Educational Psychology from the City University of New York Graduate Center. She is currently a Senior Statistical Data Analyst in the Department of Pediatrics at Washington University in Saint Louis. Dr. Boslaugh published *An Intermediate Guide to SPSS Programming* with Sage is currently writing *Secondary Data Sources for Public Health* for Cambridge University Press and is editing *The Encyclopedia of Epidemiology* for Sage. She writes more informally on a variety of topics and has recently published an article in the *International Journal of Motorcycling Studies* on motorcycle imagery in lesbian novels.

Why ask about (study) sexual behavior?

> "Sexual behavior is not only of basic biological importance, but of central social importance." Tom W. Smith, NORC (*American Sexual Behavior*, p. 1)

Questions like "How many gay people are there in Minneapolis?" raises the following difficulties:

1. What does the question mean? differing definitions, different reasons to ask the question
2. Need current, geographically-specific information
3. problems of sampling, error in small population etc.

Why is this information not readily available? Because it falls outside the most typical kinds of research done (bearing in mind that it takes money to collect and disseminate data)

1. No ongoing national (U.S.) effort to collect this information; for instance for the U.S. Census, every question added must be specifically requested (by a politician) and be needed for policy reasons
2. Just establishing demographics is not usually the interest of scholarly researchers in sociology, psychology, etc., and there is not usually grant funding to collect this data, nor will it lead to prestigious publications
3. It falls outside the domain of archival collections and publications also, which focus on historical materials
4. GLBT behavior is against the law in many places and GLBT people experience discrimination, which make data collection sometimes unwise and frequently difficult

GLBT as a demographic category, similar to race/ethnicity, sex, disability etc.: so large numbers of people who have major characteristics in common, although they are certainly not "the same"

This approach has been adopted by other communities, for instance much of the literature on disability focuses on large functional categories (so a person is classified as having difficulties with mobility or needing assistance with mobility rather than considering people with cerebral palsy in one group, people with spinal cord injuries due to trauma in another group, etc.

This still raises questions: should GLBT people be classified by:

1. Their sexual activity (preponderance, preference, exclusive, most recent, going how far back, "one drop")?
2. Their self-identity (Laumann: desire vs behavior)
3. How others perceive them

Types of demographic information collected relating to GLBT people (and this is a relatively small subset of GLBT-related publications, compared to literary collections and analysis, biography, history, etc.):

1. numbers of GLBT people in an area, profession, etc.
2. people's opinions on GLBT issues
3. GLBT people's opinions on issues
4. studies relating GLBT status to health, income, etc.

Approaches

1. Search Medline etc. for studies relating to your geographical area
2. Extrapolate from national or state estimates
3. Use the online data sources to make your own estimate
4. Enlist a demographer to make the estimates for you

Resources

Books, Reports and Methodological Articles

Aaron, DJ, Chang, Y-F, Markovic, N, LaPorte, RE. 2003. Estimating the lesbian population: a capture-recapture approach. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57:207-209.

- Demonstrates how to estimate the size of a GLBT population in a given geographic area, using the capture-recapture method
- Estimated number of lesbians in Allegheny County, PA

Badgett, Mary Virginia Lee. 2001. *Money, myths, and change: The economic lives of lesbians and gay men.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Based on analyses of the 1989-91, 1993 and 1994 General Social Survey, and the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey

Black, Dan, Gates, Gary, Sanders, Seth, Taylor, Lowell. Demographics of the gay and lesbian population in the United States: Evidence from available systematic data sources. *Demography* 37(2): 139-154.

- Summary of data sources and analyses based on them

Gates, Gary and Ost, Jason. 2004. *The gay and lesbian atlas*. Washington: Urban Institute Press.

- Based on U.S. Census 2000.

Laumann, EO, Gagnon, JH, Michael, RT, Michaels, S. 1994 *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Based on the NHSLS; one chapter on homosexuality
- For a scholarly audience

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Youth Sexual Orientation Measurement Work Group. 2003. *Measuring sexual orientation of young people in health research*. Available for download from: http://ce54.citysoft.com/_data/n_0001/resources/live/msoyphr2003.pdf

- General introduction and summary of issues
- Practical guide to choosing questions

Michael, Robert T., Gagnon, John H., Laumann, Robert O, Kolata, Gina. 1994. *Sex in America: A definitive survey*. Boston: Little, Brown.

- Based on the NHSLS
- For a popular audience

Laumann, EO, Michael, RT. (2001). *Sex, Love, and Health in America: Private Choices and Public Policies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Based on the NHSLS
- 13 essays on more specific topics

Pruitt, MV. 2002. Size matters: A comparison of anti- and pro-gay organizations' estimates of the size of the gay population. *Journal of Homosexuality* 42(3): 21-29.

- Discusses methodological difficulties with Kinsey's "10%" estimate, discussion of this and estimates of the size of the gay population on pro- and anti-gay websites

Saewyc, EM, Bauer, GR, Skay, CL, Bearinger, LH, Resnick, MD, Reis, E, Murphy, A. 2004. Measuring sexual orientation in adolescent health surveys: Evaluation of eight school-based surveys. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 35:345e1-e15.

Smith, Tom W. 1998. *American sexual behavior: Trends, socio-demographic differences, and risk behavior*. GSS Topical Report # 25. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, updated Dec. 1998. Available for download from http://cloud9.norc.uchicago.edu/dlib/t-25.htm.

- Summarizes information on sexual behavior from many sources; concludes that 2-3% of sexually active men and 1-2% of sexually active women are currently homosexual, and has been stable since the mid-1990's

Large data sets

The General Social Survey http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/projects/gensoc.asp

- annual 1972-1994; every other year since 1996
- multi-stage area probability sample
- from 1988: "Have your sex partners in the last 12 months been exclusively male, both male and female, exclusively female?"
- from 1991: same question for last five years
- from 1989: "Now thinking about the time since your 18th birthday (including the past 12 months), how many male partners have you had sex with?" (and similar question for female partners
- Combined with information on respondent's gender to define GLBT (variously)
- More resources at http://www.soc.qc.cuny.edu/QC_Software/GSS.html

The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS) aka "The Sex Survey" (in lieu of the GSS, 1992) http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/

- Includes GSS questions
- Includes "Do you think of yourself as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or something else?"
- Includes information about lifetime sexual partners and living arrangements

1990 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) www.census.gov

- 5% and 1% samples of 1990 census
- Identify same-sex unmarried partners living in the same household

2000 The U.S. Census and PUMS www.census.gov

- same sex unmarried partner households

Smaller/more specific data sets (verified available/relevant)

Canadian Community Health Survey 2003, 2005: request data from mario.bedard@statcan.ca

California Health Interview Survey 2001, 2003
http://www.chis.ucla.edu/main/default.asp?page=puf

College Alcohol Study 1997 (Robert Wood Johnson/Harvard School of Public Health); 1999, 2001 available from http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/

Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/

- Repository of many data sets
- Searchable by topic

National Alcohol Survey, 2000 (Alcohol Research Group, NIAAA) http://www.arg.org/
Data available by application to: AEDSDATA@csrincorporated.com.

National Comorbidity Survey 1990-1992
http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/SAMHDA-STUDY/06693.xml

National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1988-94, 1999+
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhanes/nh3data.htm

National Health Interview Survey 1988+
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhis/quest_data_related_doc.htm

Nurses' Health Study II 1995 (data available by application: see
http://www.channing.harvard.edu/nhs/questionnaires/nhs-data-use.doc

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse/National Survey on Drug Use and Health 1996 http://oas.samhsa.gov/oasftp.cfm

National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health 1994, 1996, 2001
http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/data

National Survey of Family Growth 2002 http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Oregon 1996-98, 2000, 2002-03; online access: http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/chs/brfs/96/brfsques.shtml

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System New York 2002+; online access
http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/survey/survey.shtml

Reports only: data sets not verified available/relevant

Adult Tobacco Survey Illinois 2003, 2005; New York 2003+;

Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System-California 1997+ (?); Connecticut 1995+; Georgia 2001+; Massachusetts 2000+; North Dakota 2004; Vermont 1996+

British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey (McCreary Centre Society) 1992, 1998, 2003

Growing Up Today Study 1999 (offshoot of the Nurses' Study)

HIV/AIDS Surveillance System and Supplement (CDC) HASS 1981+; SHAS 1990+

Kaiser Survey of Sexual Orientation 2000

Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey 1986-1987

National American Indian Adolescent Health Survey 1991

National Crime Victimization Survey 2001 (gay-bashing)

National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NIAAA) http://www.arg.org/datasets.html (will be included in Wave II, 2004-05????)

National Violence Against Women Survey 1996

Project Hope International Survey of AIDS-Risk Behaviors 1988 (US, UK, France)

Urban Men's Health Study (UCSF) 1996-97

Women's Health Initiative 1991-2005 (limited data release: does not include sexual orientation questions?) http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/deca/whios/index.html

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, California (various cities) 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003; Colorado 2003; Delaware 2003; Illinois 2003; Massachusetts 1993, 1995, 1997, 1000, 2001, 2003; Wisconsin 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003

Websites

American Statistical Association Committee on Gay and Lesbian Concerns in Statistics website.
http://www.amstat.org/comm/index.cfm?fuseaction=memberlist&Year=2006

GayData.org (Randy Sell's website) http://www.gaydata.org/

- Index of national and state surveys which include sexual orientation questions, summary of some research based on specific surveys
- Discussion of ways of measuring sexual orientation, reasons for doing so; includes recommended questions

glbtq: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture. http://www.glbtq.com/

- includes articles on Demographics, Market Research, Census 2000

Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies website. http://www.iglss.org/index.html

- Demographic research (downloadable reports)
- Emphasis on public policy, e.g. "Will Providing Marriage Rights to Same-Sex Couples Undermine Heterosexual Marriage? Evidence from Scandinavia and the Netherlands"

Databases

GLBT Life (EBSCOhost database) and GLBT Life® with Full Text

GenderWatch (ProQuest database)

Medline (NLM/NIH free database)