

Recommendations for improving measurement of intimate partner relationships

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Beyond POSSLQ

- Measurements of intimate relationships remain largely marriage v. everything else
 - “Everything else” still primarily POSSLQ, so...
 - Different-sex couples
 - Co-residency required
- Can we move beyond this limited conceptual framework?
 - More inclusive concepts of relationships
 - Greater conceptual clarity in measurement
 - Inclusion of same-sex couples

Its complicated...

- Reality of intimate relationships is complex
 - Complexity rarely observed in measurement strategies
- Couples do not necessarily see the choice as marriage v. cohabitation but rather single v. cohabitation
- Co-residency is far from binary
 - Even 5% of married couples do not co-reside

A proposed conceptual framework

- Nature of relationships
 - What terms do individuals use to describe their relationship status ?
 - No need to tie this to co-residency
- Relationship behaviors
 - Co-residency
 - Resource allocation
- Legal relationship status
 - Marriage, civil union, registered domestic partnership

Conceptual clarity in measurement

- Household rosters conflate co-residency behavior with nature of relationship
- Marital status questions that include non-marital partnership conflate legal status with nature of relationship and co-residency behavior
 - NSFG: What is your current marital status?
 - A respondent can simultaneously be living with a partner, currently married, divorced, and widowed
 - Partner option conceptually veers away from assessing the current legal marital status

Conceptual clarity in measurement

- Marriage is largely the only relationship measured absent co-residency
- Census/ACS household roster can affect coding of marital status, again conflating constructs
 - Unmarried partners cannot be currently married
- Census/ACS also confines relationship possibilities
 - No multiple spouses and unmarried partners

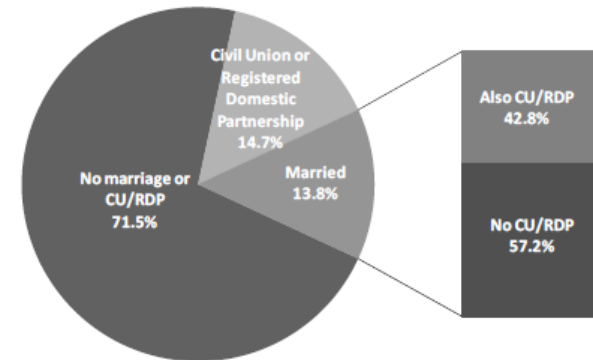
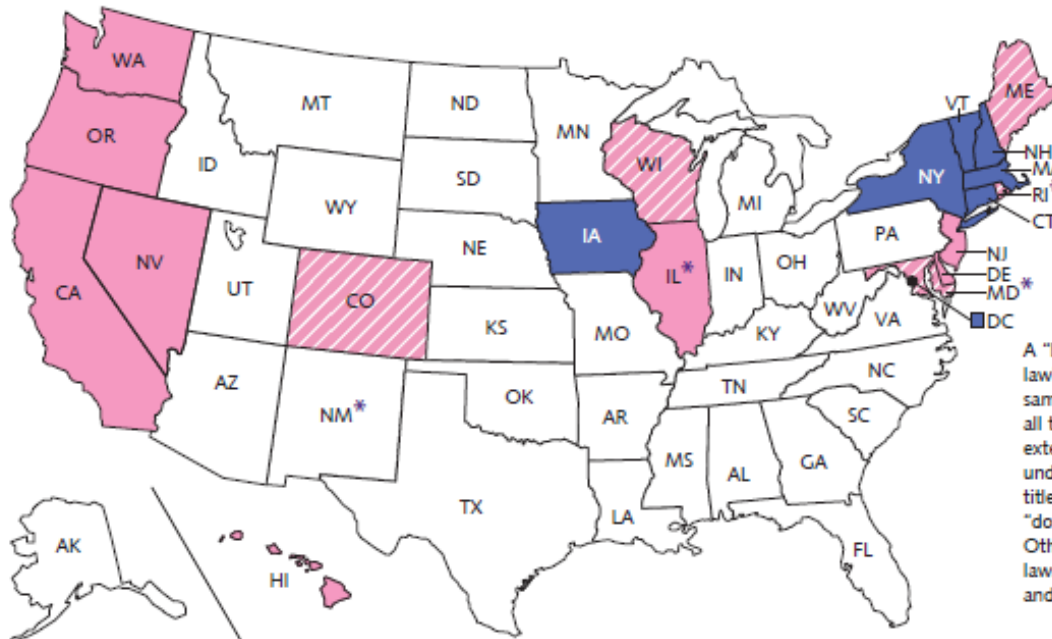
Measuring same-sex relationships

- Lack of conceptual clarity
- Measurement issues associated with small population
- Hetero-normative bias in measurement
- Lack of any measurement of non-marital forms of relationship recognition

Same-sex relationships in the US

Relationship Recognition for Same-Sex Couples in the U.S.

This map was last updated on: June 28, 2011



A "broa law" is one that extends to same-sex couples all or nearly all the rights and responsibilities extended to married couples under state law, whether titled a "civil union" or "domestic partnership" law. Other relationship recognition laws offer more limited rights and protections.

- States with full marriage equality**
Massachusetts (2004); Connecticut (2008); Iowa (2009); Vermont (2009)*;
New Hampshire (2010); District of Columbia (2010)*; New York (2011)
- States with broad relationship recognition laws**
civil unions: Vermont (2000); New Jersey (2007); Illinois (2011); Delaware (2012);
Hawaii (2012)²
domestic partnerships: California (2005)*; Oregon (2008); Washington (2008); Nevada (2009)

- States with limited relationship recognition laws designated beneficiaries:** Colorado (2009)
domestic partnerships: Rhode Island (2001); Maine (2004); Maryland (2008)*;
Wisconsin (2009)

- * **States that recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states**
Rhode Island (2007); Maryland (2010); New Mexico (2011); Illinois (2011)

What do terms like “married” or “husband/wife” mean for same-sex couples?

- Legally married with federal recognition
- Legally married regardless of recognition
- In a civil union or registered domestic partnership that includes all rights and responsibilities of marriage
- Married in a religious ceremony or had a commitment ceremony

Census Bureau coding procedures

- All same-sex couples are coded as unmarried partners in PUMS
- “Currently married” individuals in a same-sex couple have marital status allocated to something other than married
- Different-sex false positives create substantial measurement error
 - ACS 2007 and earlier: 30%
 - ACS 2008 and later: 15%
 - Census 2010: 25%

Hetero-normative bias

- Terms used in surveys largely apply only to different-sex couples
- Same-sex couples are made to “fit” into heterosexual constructs
- In some cases, questions only ask about different-sex relationships

Hetero-normative surveys and human subjects

- LGBT people routinely experience social stigma
 - That stigma contributes to a wide range of negative health outcomes
- Surveys that are not sensitive to same-sex relationships can reinforce stigma in LGBT respondents
- IRBs should consider this as a risk to human subjects

The ultimate hetero-normative measurement issue

- Sexual orientation and gender identity are key components in understanding intimate partner relationships
- Very few surveys measure sexual orientation and gender identity
- The lack of such measurement
 - Creates a presumption of heterosexuality among respondents
 - Severely limits the ability of social scientists to make meaningful contribution to public policy debates

Recommendations

- Refocus measurement toward a broader concept of intimate relationships
- Develop methods of measuring relationships that offer greater conceptual clarity
- Develop methods to measure non-marital relationship recognition forms
- Develop accurate methods of measuring different-sex and same-sex relationships
- IRBs should consider hetero-normative relationship measurements as stigmatizing to LGBT respondents
- Include measurement of sexual orientation and gender identity as a standard demographic characteristic