Our Families
ATTRIBUTES OF BAY AREA LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The LGBT Family Collaborative brings together three innovative agencies and programs to address the comprehensive needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) families. Collaborative partners include: COLAGE (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere), Our Family Coalition (OFC), and the San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center (The Center). This collaborative was formed to ensure that LGBT families in the San Francisco Bay Area have healthy, safe, supportive environments to define their family structure and express their self-identity, and to create a safer, more inclusive community for LGBT parents and children in LGBT families.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

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The San Francisco Bay Area is uniquely positioned to play a lead role in creating a safer, healthier, more vibrant environment for families headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents. San Francisco and Alameda counties rank number two and number three among California counties with the greatest number of same-gender couples (Los Angeles County is number one).

LGBT families in the San Francisco Bay Area come from every racial, cultural, social, and economic group, and live in every county and neighborhood. LGBT families are headed by single parents/caregivers, same-gender couples, couples with bisexual parents/caregivers, and transgender parents/caregivers. Our families involve various models of family formation, including adoption, foster parenting, donor insemination, surrogacy, co-parenting, kinship care, and blended families with children from previous heterosexual relationships. As a result of these different family forms, some parents may have no legal relationship to the children for whom they care, raising critical legal and psycho-social issues. In this report, when using the word “parents,” we include primary caregivers who may not be legal parents of the children they are raising.

Even in the Bay Area, with its substantial LGBT presence and history of a strong, visible, and public LGBT community, LGBT families struggle against exclusion and isolation. This may be especially true if a family encompasses multiple minority identities and faces multiple forms of discrimination. LGBT parents particularly struggle to protect the physical and emotional safety of their children and themselves in this environment. LGBT families frequently experience discrimination — and sometimes harassment — in daycare and school settings, medical settings, at the playground, in religious communities, in their neighborhoods, and even within their own extended families.

To date, there has been little to no systematic documentation of LGBT families with children and their basic demographics in the Bay Area. This report intends to fill that gap, providing an important resource to policy makers, the media, the LGBT community, and others who are working to create and improve systems of support for this emerging population of families.

Recommendations to create systems of support for LGBT families include: social arenas that build a sense of community; peer-to-peer support strategies; service provider trainings; and educational programs to respond to legal, financial and psycho-social issues specifically faced by this population. Other supportive measures include children’s programs, opportunities for youth of LGBT parents to meet and connect, and strengthening education from preschool through high school so that both the children of LGBT parents and their peers are aware of the many kinds of families that live in their communities. Sound public policy, research, and parents’ and families’ civic engagement are vital mechanisms of social change.
Serena Lambert (2005) completed a full literature review on the state of scientific knowledge about gay and lesbian parents. In addition to the statistics at left, some of the main points were:

- It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of LGBT parents nationally and locally because most traditional research methods do not address the fears of coming out;\(^5\)

- Gay and lesbian people become parents at different points in their lives, both from previous heterosexual relationships, and increasingly after coming out;

- Research on gay and lesbian parents is not diverse enough. Unfortunately, most studies of gay and lesbian parents exclude working class, ethnic minority, bisexual, and transgender parents.\(^6\)

Lambert’s full literature review has shown that children of gay and lesbian parents are as well-adjusted and healthy as children of heterosexual people. This research has been useful in establishing that there are no inherently negative consequences to children who have gay or lesbian parents.

With a broadly held understanding that LGBT families, like all families, have the potential to cultivate positive and nurturing environments for children, the work of the LGBT Family Collaborative focuses on ensuring the rights of LGBT families as well as providing needed supports and services to the full diversity of LGBT parents and their children.
WHO ARE WE? DATA FROM THE 2000 CENSUS

The 2000 United States Census made it possible, for the first time, to count the number of homes with same-gender couples. In-depth analyses of this data has resulted in numerous reports by many groups. Collectively, the reports by these agencies and others have provided us with information documenting the significant presence of gays and lesbians in this country, as well as highlight key areas of need for LGBT family communities.

Specifically addressing the lack of information on ethnic minority same-gender couples with children, the UCLA Williams Project has published several reports that detail characteristics of African American, Asian Pacific Islander (API), and Latina/o same-gender couples and their families in California. From the volume of important data reported, we have learned the following pieces of information.

A LOOK AT CALIFORNIA

Among same-gender couples with children in California, ethnic minority couples are much more likely to be raising children than White couples. More than half of all African American, API and Latina/o same-gender couples between the ages of 25-55 years are raising children of their own (43%, 45%, and 62%, respectively), while only 18% of White same-gender couples are raising children.

Across racial categories, California’s same-gender couples with children are earning less than different-gender married couples with children [see figure 1]. Statewide, the average household income of same-gender parents is $13,000 lower than the average household income of married couples with children.

Ethnic minority same-gender families are raising children with significantly fewer economic resources than White same-gender families. For example, Latina/o same-gender couples are over three times as likely to be raising children, on less than half the average household income of White same-gender couples.

IN CALIFORNIA, AT LEAST 52,000 SAME-GENDER COUPLES ARE RAISING AT LEAST 70,500 CHILDREN.

FIGURE 1. Average Household Incomes of Couples with Children in California.
As a single parent, finding time to take care of myself is difficult. Who would take care of him if something happened to me? Myles’ first three years of life were very challenging and rewarding, frightening, and wonderful all at the same time. Making decisions for him in some ways is easy, because I don’t have to check with anyone else, but also very difficult because I have no one to talk things through with and help in the decision.

— Bryan Nadeau

My kid is still coming into her own about having a queer household. It would be nice to have a space or creative time where kids can be proud of their families and their differences. I also think it is important not to lump all queer folks together, as people of color families are really dealing with specific family and societal stressors.

— Tei Okamoto, Toby Eastman & Pura Fe Eastman (9yrs)

I would like to see more education and support geared towards gay fathers. My partner and I would have taken advantage of classes and social opportunities geared for gay dads. I’d also like to see more information on non-traditional parenting arrangements, like ours; being that my partner and I are co-parenting our child with his mother and her partner. Perhaps my biggest challenge was telling my parents that I was co-parenting with a lesbian couple. I come from a fairly religious, conservative, African-American family and this kind of arrangement is very foreign to them.

— Loren Henning

All reports on the Census 2000 data indicate that these figures likely underestimate the number of same-gender couples and same-gender couples with children for a number of reasons. An important detail to consider when interpreting the Census 2000 data is that it is a count of same-gender couples, not a count of all individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. That is, single LGBT people, including single LGBT parents, were not counted in these figures. Surveys conducted by Our Family Coalition in 2003 indicate that, out of all parents who responded, 14% were single at the time that the survey was administered. Considering these data, it is likely that 2000 Census estimates of Bay Area same-gender couples with children may be missing a significant segment of the overall LGBT family community.

In addition, it is likely that many individuals were not “out” on the Census for a variety of personal, cultural, or societal reasons, and did not report their “same-gender” household status. Finally, the Census data are limited because they do not record bisexual people who are currently in different-gender couples or transgender people.

Considering these limitations of the Census, we have looked at other data sources that also highlight the counts of lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents in the Bay Area. For example, UCLA California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) data indicate that up to 5% of all Alameda citizens and 14% of all San Francisco citizens identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual (compared to 2% and 8% of couples reported in the 2000 Census, respectively).

Nonetheless, the 2000 Census data set is currently the largest representative sample of sexual minority homes in the United States. As such, the following pages report descriptive statistics on the characteristics of same-gender couple families in Alameda and San Francisco Counties. The data were tabulated by Dr. Gary Gates of the UCLA Williams Institute, and the estimates are based on the 5% PUMS° datasets.
A LOOK AT ALAMEDA COUNTY

22% of all same-gender couples in Alameda County have children. At least 1,272 same-gender couples are raising at least 2,163 children.

**Female and Male Same-Gender Couples with Children in Alameda County:**

Female Same-Gender Couples with Children: 69%
Male Same-Gender Couples with Children: 31%

**Median Age of Parent:** 38 yrs
**Median Age of Child:** 6.2 yrs
**Average of 1.7 Children per Household**
**Parents’ Education:** 40.7% College Degree
**Parents’ Employment:** 26.8% Unemployed
**Median Household Income:** $70,000

IN ALAMEDA COUNTY, THE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF SAME-GENDER COUPLES WITH CHILDREN IS $9,000 LESS THAN DIFFERENT-GENDER MARRIED COUPLES WITH CHILDREN.

Among all California counties, Alameda County has the highest rate of African American same-gender couples. (Defined by study as couples wherein both partners identify as African American, 1 A per 1000 households)

**Ethnic/Racial Identity of Same-Gender Parents:**

- White: 45%
- Latino/a: 29%
- Asian Pacific Islander: 12%
- African American: 13%
- Native American or Other: 1%

**Ethnic/Racial Identity of Children of Same-Gender Parents:**

- White: 33%
- Latino/a: 33%
- African American: 13%
- Native American or Other: 11%
- Asian Pacific Islander: 10%

My parents divorced when I was four, and my mom came out as a lesbian. When I was young I went through a lot of teasing. I changed schools, then changed again. At my school now, only a few people know and they’re very supportive. My mom has taught me to love all types of people… Because of my mom, I’m not like everyone else; I’m different and I love it. — Claire V. (15yrs), Berkeley

During pregnancy and through parenthood, we constantly have to wrestle with how “out” to be with all of our identities in all of our communities. In the parents-with-babies-with-Down-Syndrome community, we worried we would be overrun by religious conservatives who would think we were going to hell. In the network of queer and straight new parents, we worried we would be less desirable as a family and that Jonah would be left out of play dates.

— Kristen Zimmerman, Adrienne Bloch & son Jonah, Oakland
6.6% of all same-gender couples in San Francisco County have children. At least 589 same-gender couples are raising at least 825 children.

There is a real need to provide support to parents and children as they navigate the children’s teen years. Many of the children born during the 1990’s and afterwards are starting to reach their teen years. These children have to negotiate peer pressure and societal pressures relating to having LGBT parents. Both the parents and their teen and pre-teen-aged children need support in dealing with these unique pressures.

— Phillip Parkerson, San Francisco

I think most of our day-to-day challenges — which include juggling schedules, balancing family time with work demands, and obtaining the best education and activities for our children — are common challenges with all parents. As my children grow older, I expect to face more challenges as they encounter possible discrimination towards them or our family in the broader world around us.

— Juan Carlos Wallace, San Francisco

In Same-Gender Couple Households with Children in San Francisco County:

- **Median Age of Parent:** 43 yrs
- **Median Age of Child:** 8.4 yrs
- **Average of 1.4 Children per Household**
- **Parents’ Education:** 59.1% college degree
- **Parents’ Employment:** 22.6% unemployed
- **Median Household Income:** $83,060

### Ethnic/Racial Identity of Same-Gender Parents:
- White 58%
- Latino/a 18%
- African American 3%
- Asian Pacific Islander 19%
- 2% Native American or Other

### Ethnic/Racial Identity of Children of Same-Gender Parents:
- White 44%
- Latino/a 34%
- Asian Pacific Islander 17%
- 5% African American
Looking across all of the data reported here, we see a few important trends. Bay Area families headed by LGBT parents are diverse in ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. However, the data also suggest that diversity among LGBT families, with regard to characteristics such as gender identity and partner status, has not been well-documented. It is particularly notable that while Whites make up the largest ethnic group in the Bay Area, African American, Asian Pacific Islander, and Latino/as comprise the largest proportions of LGBT families with children in the area. Further, these LGBT ethnic minority parents are also making significantly less money to raise these children than White LGBT parents. Considering the high rates of unemployment among same-gender couples in the Bay Area, lack of economic resources is a real concern in the community.

Although the Census 2000 data does not specifically report information on transgender individuals or families, a recent study of the economic health of transgender people indicates that transgender parents likely experience unemployment at levels equal to or greater than those of the same-gender parents reported here. Finally, the literature on LGBT parents illustrates that children in these families are no less healthy than children in the general public, and as such the data suggest that some of the most difficult challenges to children’s well-being for these families are those associated with economic and legal disparities.

My son, who is in fourth grade, was being teased about having two moms at his after school program. When he came home in tears, he said, “I don’t get the big deal, mom, there are tons of families like ours.” At that moment I was so grateful that he had grown up going to Our Family Coalition events, and that through OFC I had learned the skills to talk to the after school program staff about how to make the program more welcoming for my son.

— Aimee L. Fisher

When we take our children to a hospital, we never know if we are going to have a problem with how we are treated as a family. One of us as a parent may be discounted, and only one parent permitted to sign consents, be listed as the parent on forms, or be allowed into the ICU or ER to visit the child. Forms that we and our children have to fill out never reflect the diversity of our families. There are check boxes for male and female but there are some transgender parents who don’t fit either box, or fit both.

— Rabbi Levi Alter, President of Female-To-Male International
The data presented in this report, together with information gathered from interviews with people living in LGBT-headed families, points us toward some recommendations for better serving LGBT families.

- Focus more of our programming and other services toward meeting the needs of ethnic minority families as well as ensuring that other sources of support that they may be using outside of the LGBT community are addressing their unique needs as LGBT parents.

- Create social arenas where LGBT families of different ethnic, gender and socio-economic status can gather so that children see themselves reflected in other families like theirs, and allow families to connect through peer-to-peer support groups, parent/child activity classes and other vehicles for ongoing contact and support.

- Provide more systems of support for adoptive families, particularly families who have adopted through public adoption.

- Create opportunities for youth of LGBT parents to meet one another, socialize, and gain support through the recognition of their shared experience of being raised in LGBT families.

- Empower children of LGBT parents to become involved in the movement to gain equal rights for LGBT people, and create mechanisms for LGBT families to play an active role in this movement.

- Support programs and initiatives that build a sense of pride in children raised in LGBT families and thereby positively affect their growth and development.

- Provide comprehensive training to service providers to help them better understand and serve LGBT families, with emphasis placed on agencies serving low income families, so that families feel welcome and are well-served throughout the provider system.

- Offer educational programming on legal, financial, parenting, and psycho-social issues that respond to the needs of LGBT parents and prospective parents. Also connect with mainstream parenting education programs to ensure that they welcome LGBT families and speak to their needs.

- Ensure that early childhood education is inclusive of children in LGBT families. Provide training to early childhood education staff to work effectively with children of LGBT families so that they can create respectful and welcoming environments.

- Collaborate with parents and educators to actively combat anti-gay and gender bias in schools. Require K-12 schools to adopt inclusive curricula for LGBT families. Support and include Gay-Straight Alliances in school funding for after-school groups.

- Create mechanisms for improved data collection on LGBT families.

- Create sound public policy that ensures equal rights for LGBT parents, regardless of whether or not the parents are registered as California domestic partners.

- Encourage, support, and fund research about LGBT parents, guardians, and their children.
ABOUT THE SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

**COLAGE (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere)**

Today, COLAGE is the only national organization specifically supporting children, youth and adults with LGBT parent(s). Using our experiences and creativity, COLAGE offers a diverse array of support, education and advocacy by and for people with LGBT parents.

**Our Family Coalition (OFC)**

Our Family Coalition promotes the civil rights and wellbeing of Bay Area lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families with children and prospective parents through education, advocacy, social networking, and grassroots community organizing.

**The San Francisco LGBT Community Center**

The San Francisco LGBT Community Center, formed in 1993, serves over 9,000 visitors and hosts more than 400 events each month. Many family collaborative events occur at The Center, and The Center is proud to have been the first LGBT Center in the country to open a free childcare program, The KidSpace—for children of parents attending programming throughout the facility.

ABOUT THE PRIMARY AUTHOR

**Bianca D.M. Wilson, PhD** completed this document during her tenure as a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California at San Francisco. She is currently an assistant professor in the Psychology Department at California State University and studies sexual health among African American gays and lesbians. For this report, she identified and synthesized the scientific literature and data.

FOOTNOTES

1. Throughout this report, we will use the terms describing sexual orientation and gender identity as they are used within the sources we cite. We are required to do this to accurately reflect the data collected through the various studies. One exception to this format is the use of “same-gender” to replace the phrase “same-sex” used by the Census-based reports. We feel this change is appropriate since same-gender is more commonly used within the community and there is no risk of misrepresenting the data collected since the Census makes no distinction between born and claimed gender.


3. Gottman, 1990


7. Organizations reporting findings from the 2000 Census include the UCLA Williams Project, the Urban Institute, and the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce.

8. The following reports were used in this document for summaries of the Census data in California published by the UCLA Williams Institute: Race and ethnicity of same sex couples in California: Data from Census 2000 (2006), Black same sex couples in California: Data from Census 2000 (2005), Latino/as in same sex couples in California: Data from Census 2000 (2005), Asian and Pacific Islanders in same sex couples in California: Data from Census 2000 (2005). In cases where estimates differed between publications, we used data reported in the most recent publication.

9. 5% PUMS refers to the 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Sample, a dataset comprising 5% of all long-form Census surveys completed in a given geographic area.
