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New Census Bureau Data Shows Growth in Same-Sex Couples Outpacing Population

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Publication Date

2010-10-01



NEW CENSUS BUREAU DATA SHOW ANNUAL INCREASES IN SAME-SEX COUPLES OUTPACING POPULATION GROWTH; SAME-SEX COUPLES AFFECTED BY RECESSION

October 4, 2010

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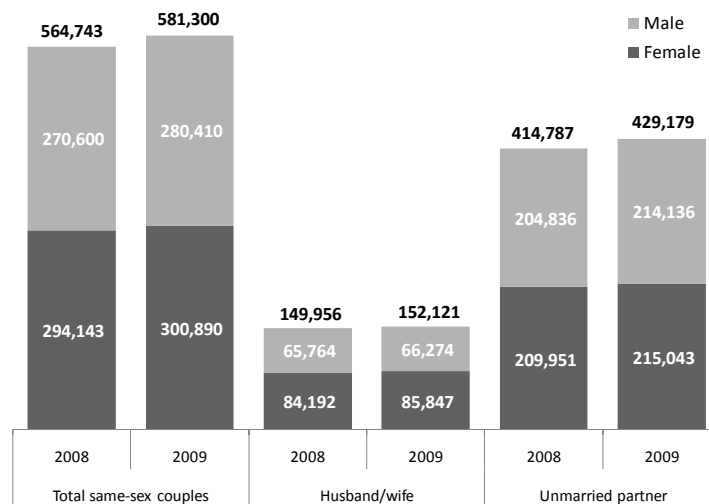
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The US Census Bureau last week released data from the 2009 American Community Survey. Williams Institute analyses of these data show that the estimated number of same-sex couples who identified themselves as either spouses or unmarried partners increased at three times the rate of population growth from 2008 to 2009.

The estimated number of same-sex couples in the US was 564,743 in 2008 and grew to 581,300 in 2009, marking a nearly 3% increase (see Figure 1). The US population only increased by approximately 1% between 2008 and 2009. Same-sex couples who indicated that one partner was a husband or wife increased from an estimated 149,956 to 152,121. Those who designated themselves as unmarried partners increased from 414,787 to 429,179.

Figure 1. Same-sex couples in the American Community Survey, 2008 and 2009.



Williams Distinguished Scholar Gary J. Gates notes that, “As states legally recognize the relationships of same-sex couples and social stigma declines, these data suggest that more couples are willing to identify themselves as such on government surveys like the American Community Survey.”

The Census Bureau will release official counts of same-sex couples from the 2010 Decennial Census next year.

Other findings from the newly released data show evidence of a disproportionate effect of the economic downturn on same-sex couples, particularly male couples, relative to their different-sex married counterparts. While the average household income of same-sex couples exceeded that of different-sex married couples (\$104,048 vs. \$93,351, respectively) in 2009, the incomes of same-sex couples fell by 3% between 2008 and 2009. This compares to a 1.8% decline among different-sex married couples. Same-sex male couples were particularly affected as evidenced by the 4.4% decline in their household incomes. This figure also exceeds the 3.6% decline in income among all households in the US.

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The Williams Institute for Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy advances law and public policy through rigorous, independent research and scholarship, and disseminates its work through a variety of education programs and media to judges, legislators, lawyers, other policymakers and the public. These studies can be accessed at the Williams Institute website, www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute.