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Food Insecurity and SNAP (Food Stamps) Participation in LGBT Communities

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), approximately 49 million Americans (nearly 16%) were food insecure in 2012.¹ Food insecurity is generally defined as having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.² US Department of Agriculture surveys measure food insecurity through a variety of questions including worries about food running out, not having enough food, not being able to afford a balanced meal, reducing or skipping meals, eating less than one should, feeling hungry but not eating, losing weight, and not eating over extended time periods.³ Despite evidence that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities may be at increased risk of poverty when compared to the heterosexual population,⁴ little is known about the degree to which LGBT communities experience food insecurity. USDA surveys do not include sexual orientation or gender identity measures that would allow for direct measures of food insecurity in the LGBT population.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal program designed to alleviate food insecurity. More than 47 million Americans (nearly one in five adults) participate in SNAP, which provides food purchase assistance to low- and no-income individuals.⁵ Analyses suggest that LGB individuals and those in same-sex couples are more likely to participate in SNAP when compared to heterosexuals or those in different-sex couples, respectively.⁶

This research brief analyzes data from three national population-based surveys that include measures of LGBT identity or being part of a same-sex couple along with measures of food insecurity or participation in SNAP. Both descriptive and multivariate analyses are used to show that LGBT communities and those in same-sex couples, particularly those raising children, experience disproportionate levels of food insecurity and higher participation rates in SNAP. This elevated risk of food insecurity and participation in SNAP remains even when possible differences in demographic characteristics between LGBT and non-LGBT individuals like gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment are taken into account.

Key findings of the analyses include:

- More than 1 in 4 LGBT adults (29%), approximately 2.4 million people, experienced a time in the last year when they did not have enough money to feed themselves or their family.
- More than one 1 in 5 LGB adults aged 18-44 (21%), approximately 1.1 million people, participated in the SNAP program through receipt of food stamps in the past year.
- More than 1 in 8 same-sex couples (13%), approximately 84,000 couples, participated in SNAP in the last year.
- More than 4 in 10 LGB adults aged 18-44 who were raising children (43%), approximately 650,000 people, participated in SNAP.
- More than 1 in 4 same-sex couples raising biological, adopted, or step children under age 18 (26%), approximately 27,000 couples, participated in SNAP.
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¹ See <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#.UuboXhDTncs>

² Life Sciences Research Office, S.A. Andersen, ed., "Core Indicators of Nutritional State for Difficult to Sample Populations," *The Journal of Nutrition* 120:1557S-1600S, 1990.

³ See <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#.Uub3zxDTncs>

⁴ Albelda, R, Badgett, MVB, Gates, GJ, Schneebaum, A. 2009. Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Available at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Albelda-Badgett-Schneebaum-Gates-LGB-Poverty-Report-March-2009.pdf>; Badgett, MVL, Durso, L, Schneebaum, A. 2013. New Patterns of Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Available at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGB-Poverty-Update-Jun-2013.pdf>

⁵ See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/34SNAPmonthly.htm>

⁶ Badgett, MVL, Durso, L, Schneebaum, A. 2013. New Patterns of Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Available at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGB-Poverty-Update-Jun-2013.pdf>

- Rates of food insecurity are higher for LGBT adults when compared to non-LGBT adults across several national surveys, and across gender, age, racial/ethnic, and education level groups. After taking these factors into account:
 - LGBT adults are 1.7 times more likely than non-LGBT adults to not have had enough money to feed themselves or their family in the past year.
 - LGB adults aged 18-44 are 1.3 times more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to receive food stamps.
 - Same-sex couples are 1.7 times more likely than different-sex couples to receive food stamps.
 - LGB adults aged 18-44 raising children are 1.8 times more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to receive food stamps.
 - Same-sex couples raising children under age 18 are 2.1 times more likely than comparable different-sex couples to receive food stamps.

- Certain sub-populations within the LGBT community are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity or report relatively high rates of participation in SNAP. These include bisexuals, women, and people of color.
 - Approximately 1 in 4 bisexuals (25%) receive food stamps, compared to 14% of lesbians and gay men.
 - More than a third (34%) of LGBT-identified women did not have money for food in the last year compared to 20% of non-LGBT women and 24% of LGBT men.
 - An estimated 17% of female same-sex couples received food stamps compared with 10% of male same-sex couples and 9% of different sex couples.
 - While nearly 1 in 4 White LGBT adults (23%) experienced food insecurity at some point last year, the figure was more than 1 in 3 for African-American LGBT adults (37%), more than 1 in 2 for LGBT Native Americans (55%), and more than 3 in 4 for Native Hawaiians (78%).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The analyses use three data sources that are described below in Table 1. All three surveys are population-based, meaning that they can be used to describe characteristics of the full populations that are surveyed.

Table 1. Description of surveys used in the analyses.

Name	Sample population	Sample size	Food insecurity measure	LGBT/same-sex couple measure
Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, June-December 2012	Adults aged 18 and older	LGBT: 6,004 Non-LGBT: 190,104	Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?	Do you, personally, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender? (yes or no)
National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), 2006-2010	Adults aged 18-44	LGB: 1,025 Heterosexual: 18,597	In the year [INTERVIEW YEAR], did you or any members of your family living here receive food stamps?	Do you think of yourself as... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterosexual or straight • Homosexual, gay, or lesbian • Bisexual • Something else
American Community Survey (ACS), 2012 Public Use Microdata Sample	Adults aged 15 and older who are in a cohabiting relationship with a spouse or unmarried partner	Same-sex couples: ⁷ 5,219 Different-sex couples: 671,594	In the past 12 months, did anyone in this household receive Food Stamps or a Food Stamp benefit card?	Respondents are asked the sex of all members of the household. Person 1 is asked to identify how all other household members are related to him or her. Cohabiting couples are those where Person 1 identifies his or her relationship to another individual in the household (aged 15 or older) as either “husband/wife” or “unmarried partner.”

The Gallup data measures one aspect of food insecurity: not having enough money to buy needed food. Comparisons can be made between adults who self-identify as LGBT and those who do not. The NSFG and ACS data include measures of participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps. The NSFG data allow for consideration of differences among adults aged 18-44 who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (these data do not include any measurement of gender identity or transgender status) and allow comparison of each of those groups to those who identify as heterosexual. The ACS data do not directly measure sexual orientation or gender identity but do allow for comparisons between cohabiting same-sex and different-sex couples (both groups are comprised of married and unmarried couples, though the legal marital status of same-sex couples cannot be accurately determined).

For all data sources, comparisons can be made by sex, across age categories, across racial and ethnic groups, and by educational attainment categories. Analyses will include bivariate cross-tabulations and multivariate estimation procedures.

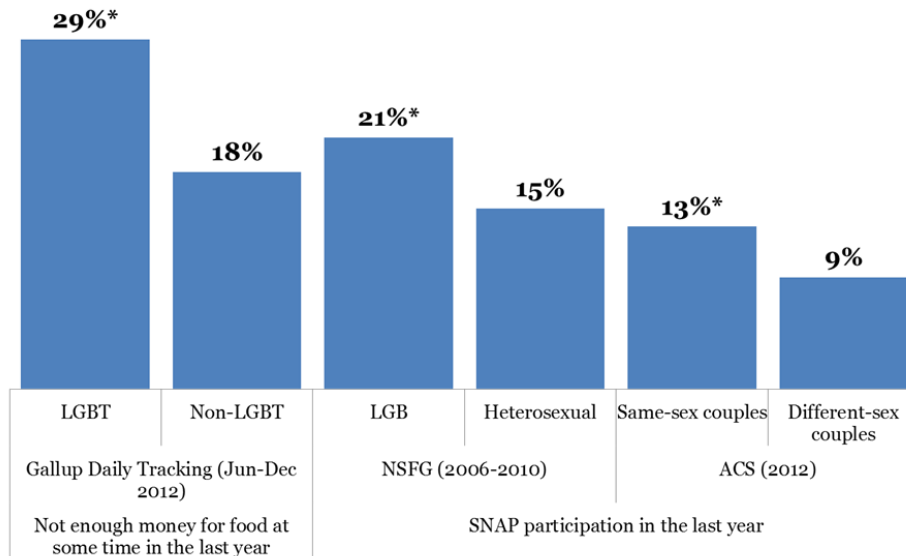
⁷ US Census Bureau analyses suggest that a very high portion of same-sex couples who use the category of “husband/wife” to describe their relationship are comprised of different-sex married couples who inadvertently miscoded the sex of one spouse, thus appearing to be a same-sex couple in the data. These analyses do not include same-sex “husband/wife” couples who used the mail-in response form. Same-sex spousal couples who were surveyed using the Computer-aided Telephone Interview or Computer-aided Personal Interview were included since sex of spouse was separately verified in the case of couples identifying a same-sex husband or wife. This procedure excluded 1,836 same-sex couples.

FOOD INSECURITY AND SNAP PARTICIPATION

LGBT population and same-sex couples

LGBT individuals and those in same-sex couples have higher levels of food insecurity and participation in SNAP when compared to non-LGBT individuals and those in different-sex couples, respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Food insecurity and SNAP participation, by survey and sexual orientation/couple type (Gallup Daily Tracking, NSFG, and ACS)



*Difference with Non-LGBT, Heterosexual, or Different-sex couples is significant at $p < 0.05$

An estimated 29% of LGBT individuals indicated that there was a time in the last year when they did not have enough money to feed themselves or their family, compared to 18% of non-LGBT individuals. This implies that more than 2.4 million LGBT adults in the US have experienced at least some aspect of food insecurity.⁸

Participation in SNAP is also higher among LGB individuals aged 18-44 when compared to heterosexuals in the same age group, 21% versus 15%, respectively. An estimated 1.1 million LGB adults aged 18-44 are participating in SNAP.⁹ SNAP participation is lower among those in couples when compared to the broader LGB population. But it is higher among same-sex couples when compared to different-sex couples, 13% versus 9%, respectively. Approximately 84,000 same-sex couples report SNAP participation.¹⁰

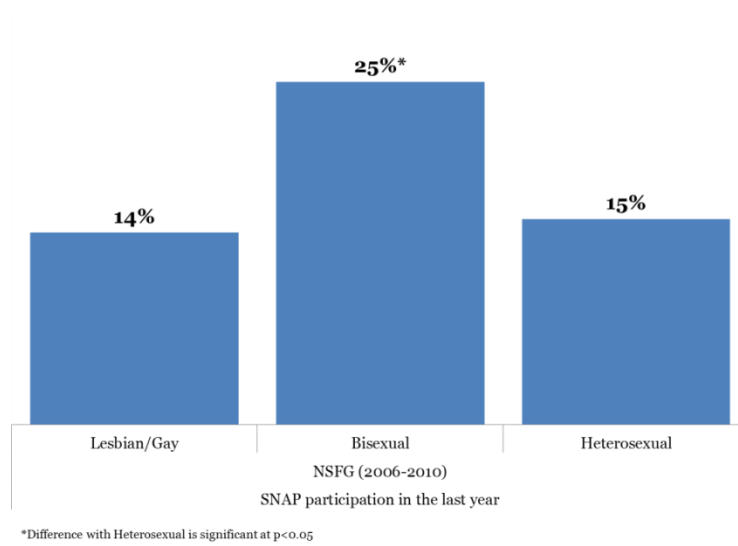
NSFG data allow for separate analyses of lesbian/gay- versus bisexual- individuals. Findings suggest that the higher rates of SNAP participation among LGB individuals when compared to heterosexuals are largely driven by the high SNAP participation rates (25%) among bisexuals (see Figure 2).

⁸ Gallup data show that approximately 3.5% of adults in the US are LGBT, implying a population of approximately 8.4 million LGBT-identified adults.

⁹ Gallup data suggest that an estimated 60.2% of all LGBT-identified adults are aged 18-44 and that approximately 8.4 million adults are LGBT (3.5%). This implies that there are estimated 5,057,000 LGBT adults aged 18-44.

¹⁰ Data from Census 2010 show that there are nearly 650,000 same-sex couples in the US.

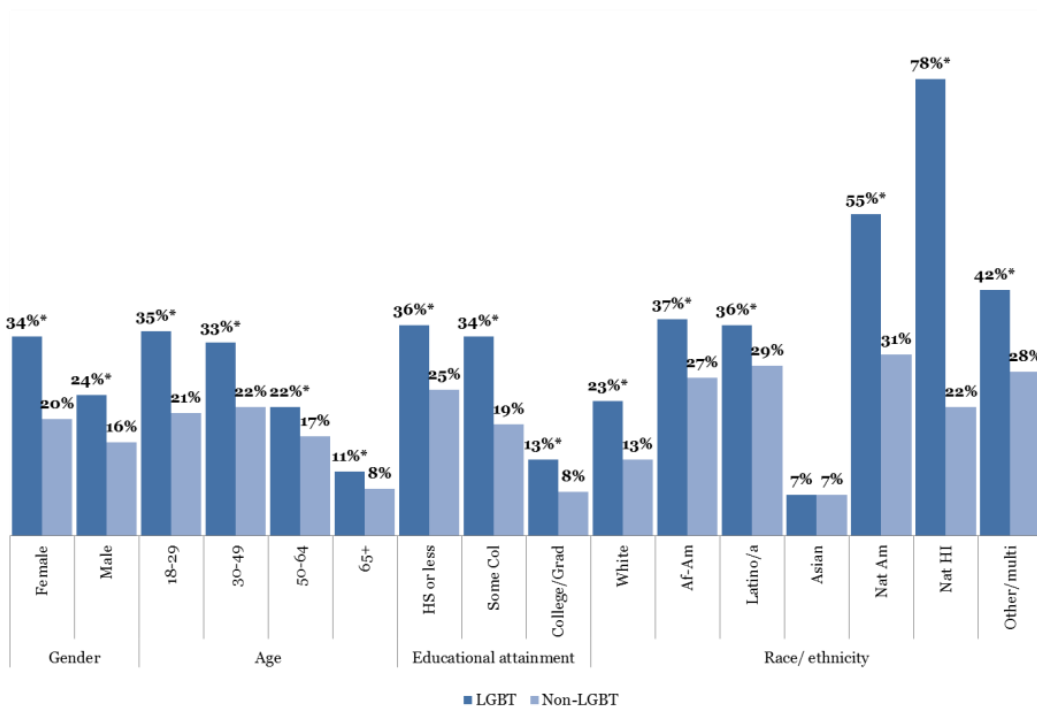
Figure 2. SNAP participation, by sexual orientation (NSFG)



Differences by demographic characteristics

Persistent differences in food insecurity, as measured by not having had enough money to purchase food in the last year, remain between LGBT and non-LGBT individuals across gender, age, racial/ethnic classification, and educational attainment levels (see Figure 3). More than a third (34%) of LGBT-identified women did not have money for food in the last year compared to 20% of non-LGBT women. Among men, the comparable figures are 24% versus 16%. LGBT individuals appear to have a greater risk of food insecurity when compared to non-LGBT individuals across all educational categories (though the level of insecurity declines as education increases) and among all racial/ethnic groups except Asians. Notably high levels of this measure of food insecurity exist among LGBT individuals without a college degree (36% among those with a high school degree or less and 34% among those with some college), African-Americans (37%), Latino/as (37%), Native Americans (55%), Native Hawaiians (78%), and multi-racial individuals (42%).

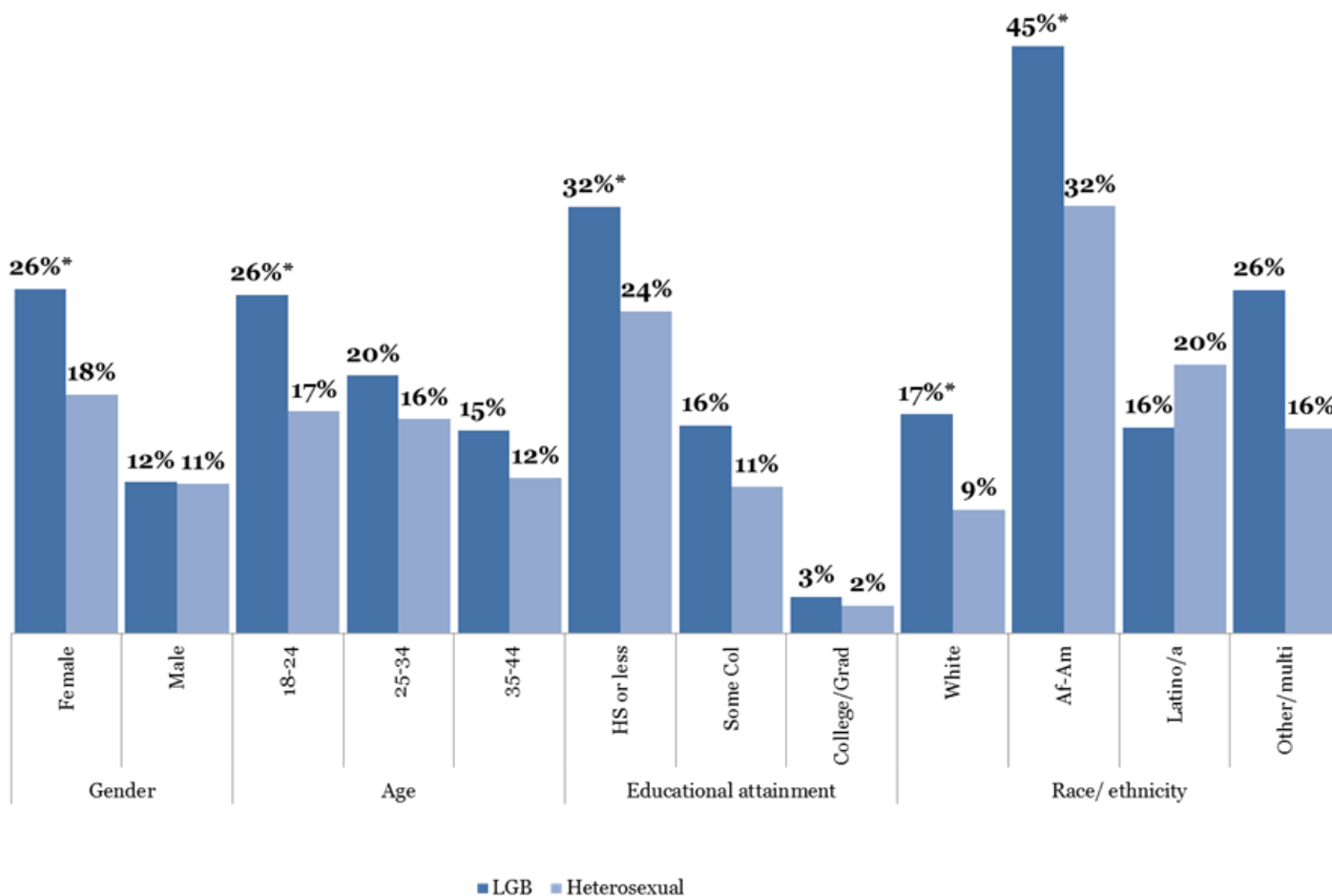
Figure 3. Not having enough money for food, by LGBT identity and demographic characteristics (Gallup Daily Tracking, Jun-Dec 2012)



*Difference with Non-LGBT is significant at $p < 0.05$

SNAP participation rates among adults aged 18-44 are higher among LGB-identified individuals when compared to heterosexual-identified individuals. LGB women, those aged 18-24, those with lower levels of education, and White and African-American LGB individuals show particularly high levels of SNAP participation when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (see Figure 4). More than a quarter of LGB women and 45% of African-American LGB individuals aged 18-44 report participating in SNAP compared to 18% of heterosexual women and 32% of African-American heterosexuals in that age group. More than a quarter of LGB individuals aged 18-24 (26%) report SNAP participation compared to 17% of their heterosexual counterparts.

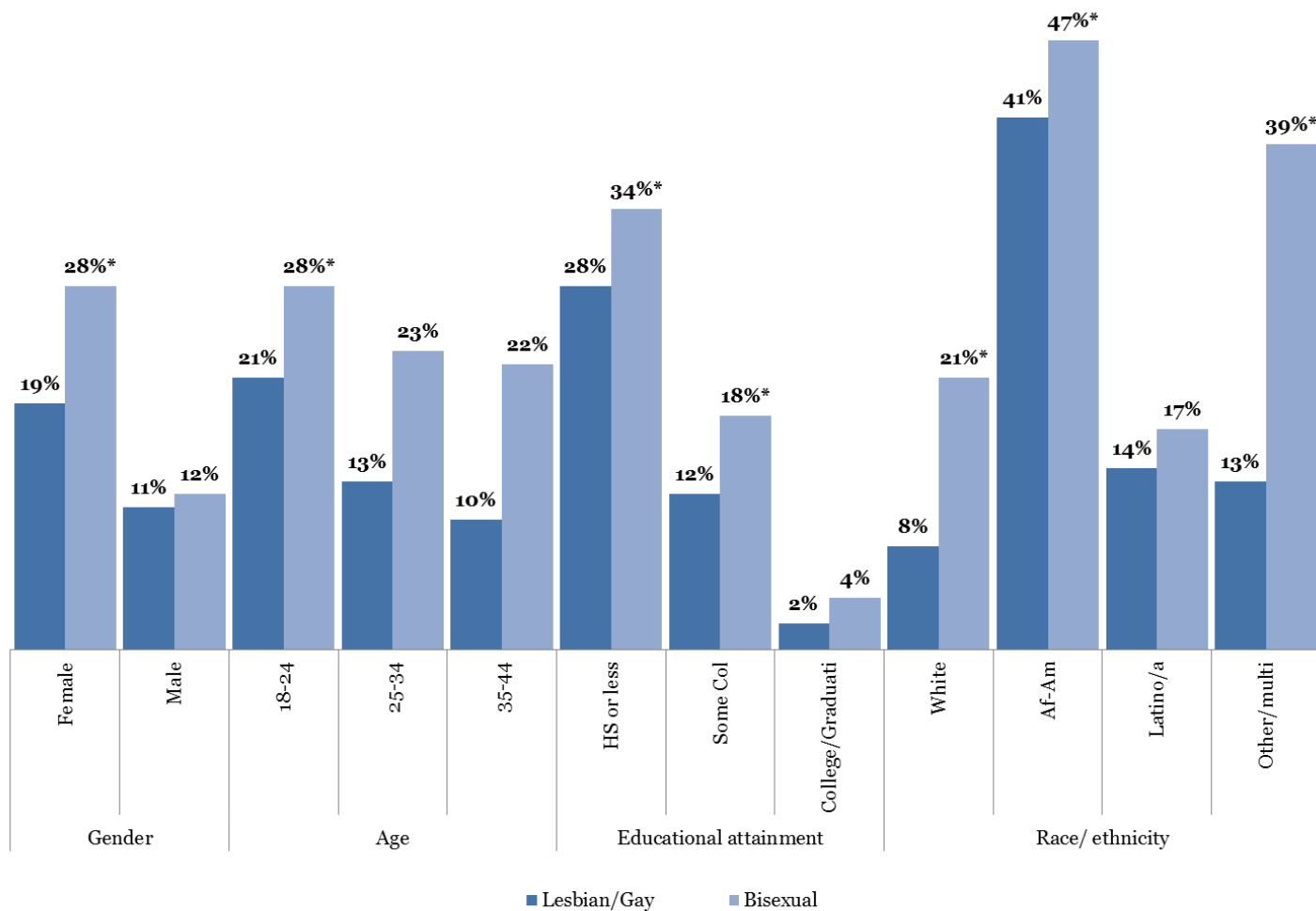
Figure 4. SNAP participation by sexual orientation (LGB v. heterosexual) and demographic characteristics (NSFG)



*Difference with heterosexual is significant at $p < 0.05$

SNAP participation rates among adults aged 18-44 are notably higher among bisexual-identified individuals. Bisexual women, along with bisexuals aged 18-24, those with lower levels of education, and White, African-American, and multi-racial bisexual individuals show particularly high levels of SNAP participation (see Figure 5). An estimated 28% of bisexual women and bisexuals aged 18-24 report SNAP participation. More than a third (34%) of bisexuals with a high school education or less, one in five White bisexuals (21%), nearly half of African-American bisexuals (47%) and 39% of multiracial bisexuals report participating in SNAP.

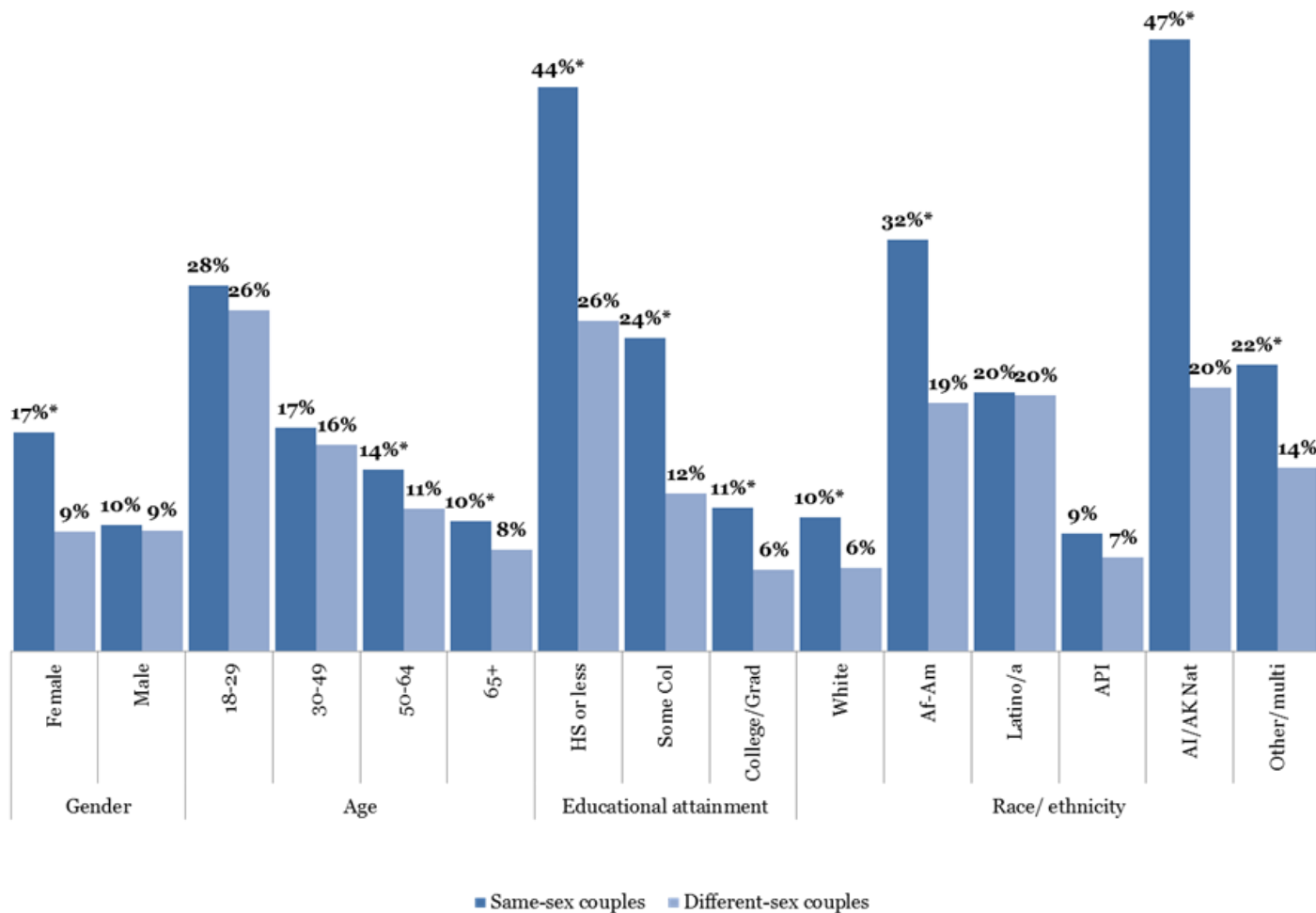
Figure 5. SNAP participation by sexual orientation (lesbian/gay v. bisexual) and demographic characteristics (NSFG)



*Difference with heterosexual is significant at $p < 0.05$

SNAP participation is also generally higher among same-sex couples when compared to different-sex couples. Female couples have notably higher rates of participation when compared to different-sex couples (see Figure 6). Differences between same-sex and different-sex couples persist across all levels of educational attainment and are particularly high among those with a high school education or less. An estimated 44% of those in same-sex couples with that level of education report participation in SNAP. There are also differences in SNAP participation between those in same-sex and different-sex couples among White, African-American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and multi-racial individuals. Nearly half of African-Americans in same-sex couples (47%) participate in SNAP as do 39% of multi-racial individuals in same-sex couples.

Figure 6. SNAP participation by couple status and demographic characteristics (ACS)



*Difference with different-sex couples is significant at $p < 0.05$

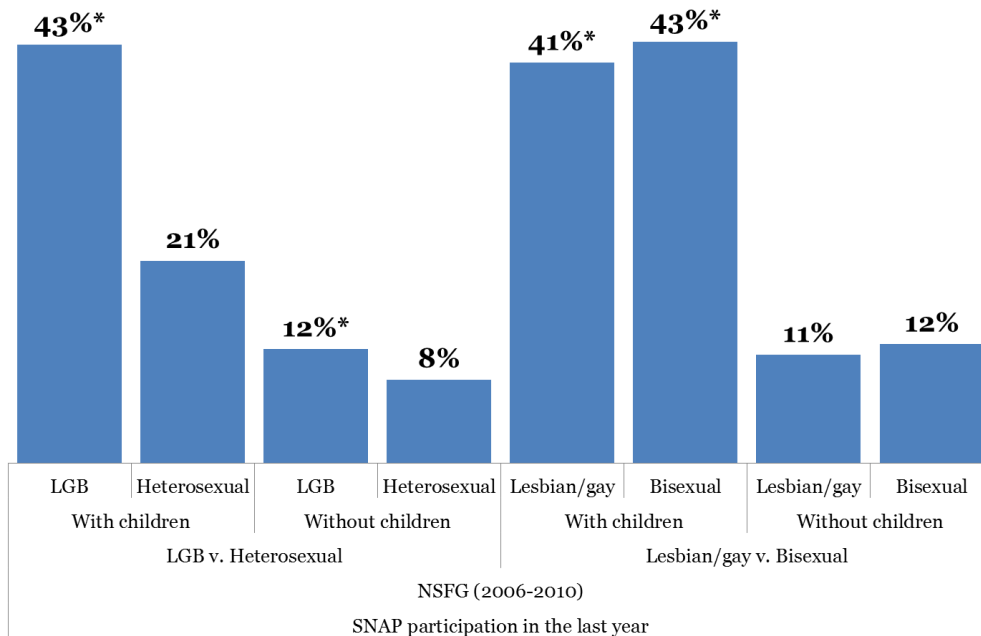
Households with children

The NSFG and ACS data both allow for identification of families in which respondents are likely the legal parent or guardian of children under age 18 in the home. Approximately 30% of LGB individuals aged 18-44 are raising a child under age 18 compared to 51% of heterosexual individuals. Among gay- and lesbian- identified individuals aged 18-44, the figure is 11% compared to 41% of comparably aged bisexual-identified individuals.

LGB individuals aged 18-44 with children are substantially more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to report SNAP participation (see Figure 7). An estimated 43% of LGB-identified individuals raising children in the NSFG report SNAP participation compared to 21% of heterosexual-identified individuals raising children (see Figure 7). Among those without children, SNAP participation is still higher among LGB individuals than heterosexuals (12% v. 8%) but is much lower than rates of participation among those with children.

Unlike prior analyses showing higher SNAP participation among bisexuals when compared to their gay or lesbian counterparts, SNAP participation rates among those with children do not differ much between lesbian/gay individuals and bisexuals. Approximately 41% of lesbian- and gay-identified individuals aged 18-44 raising children report participating in SNAP compared to 43% of comparable bisexual-identified individuals.

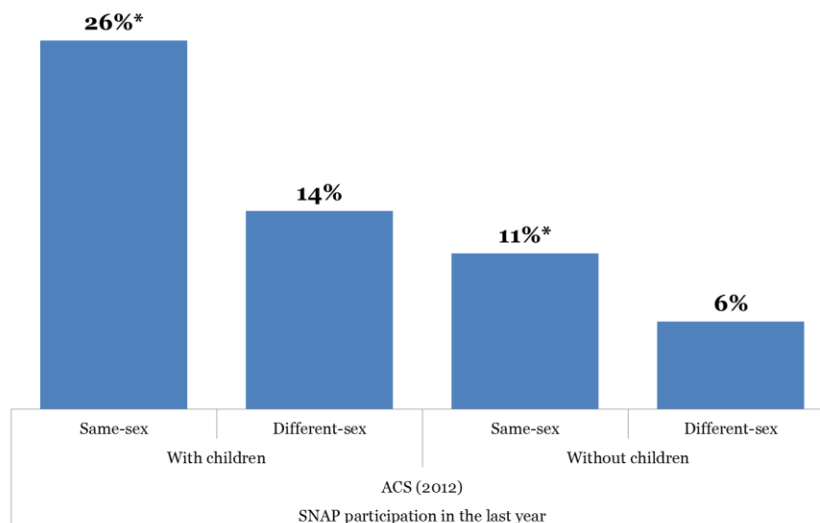
Figure 7. SNAP participation by sexual orientation and raising children under age 18 (NSFG)



*Difference with Heterosexual is significant at $p < 0.05$

Approximately 16% of same-sex couples in the ACS are raising a biological, adopted, or step child compared to 40% of different-sex couples. Among same-sex couples raising children, an estimated 26% report SNAP participation compared to 14% of comparable different-sex couples. Among those not raising children, 11% of same-sex couples and 6% of different-sex couples report participating in SNAP (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. SNAP participation by couple type and raising biological, adopted, or step children under age 18 (ACS)

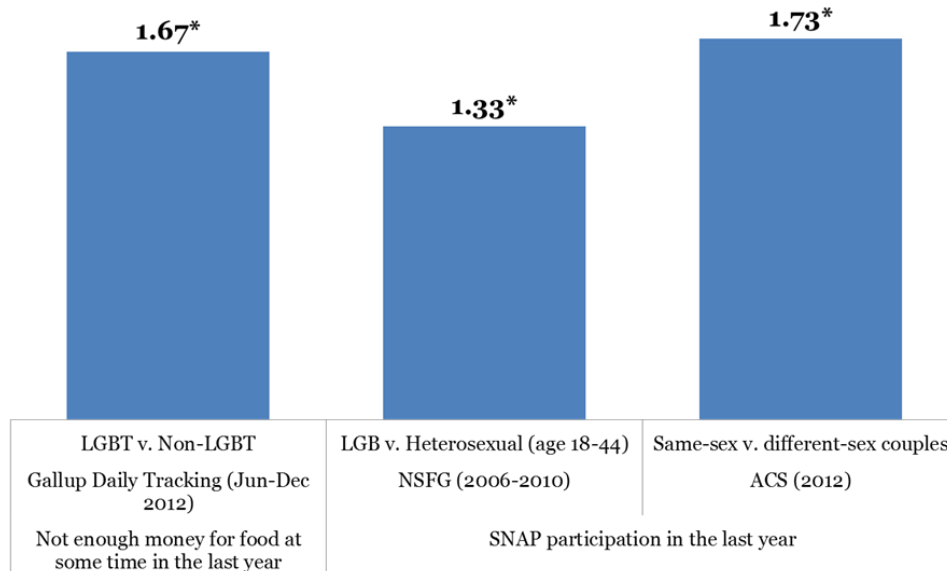


*Difference with Different-sex is significant at $p < 0.05$

Multivariate analyses

Multivariate logistic regression using the Gallup data allows for an estimation of the odds that LGBT individuals experience some level of food insecurity (as measured by not having enough money at some time in the last year to pay for food) relative to non-LGBT individuals while taking into account possible differences in gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment between the two groups. Similar analyses using the NSFG data can assess the odds that LGB individuals aged 18-44 are more likely than heterosexual individuals to participate in SNAP and analyses using the ACS can consider the odds that same-sex couples are more likely to participate in SNAP than are different-sex couples.

Figure 9. Odds of not having enough money to pay for food for LGBT individuals relative to non-LGBT individuals, odds of SNAP participation for LGB individuals aged 18-44 and same-sex couples relative to heterosexual individuals aged 18-44 and different-sex couples, respectively (Gallup Daily Tracking, NSFG, and ACS)



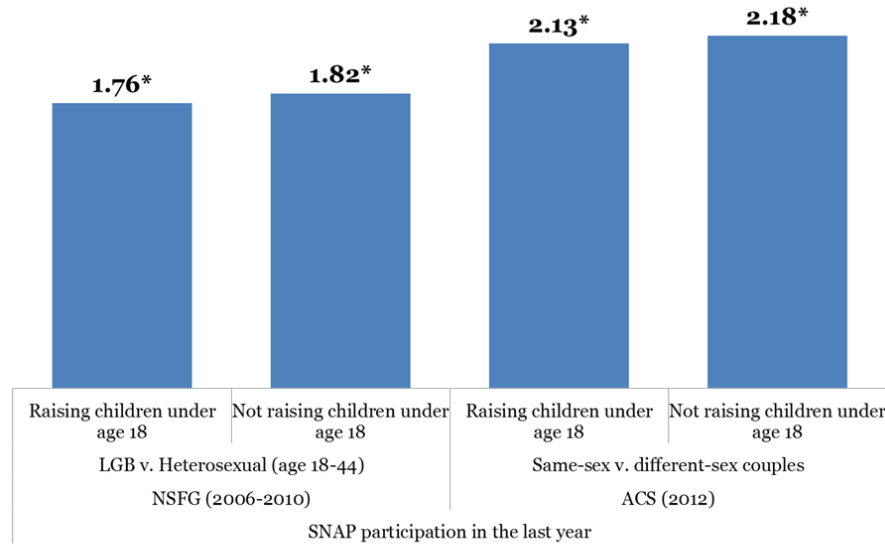
*Coefficient is significant at $p < 0.05$

Findings from the multivariate analyses using the Gallup data suggest that LGBT-identified individuals are, on average, 1.7 times more likely than their non-LGBT counterparts to say that they did not have enough money for food at some time in the last year (see Figure 9). Analyses of the NSFG data suggest that LGB-identified individuals aged 18-44 are 1.3 times more likely than heterosexuals to have participated in SNAP in the last year. Analyses of the ACS show that same-sex couples are 1.7 times more likely than different-sex couples to report SNAP participation.

Further analyses separately estimated the odds of SNAP participation for those raising children under age 18 and those not raising children. NSFG data allow a comparison between LGB and heterosexual individuals aged 18-44 while ACS data allow for comparisons between same-sex and different-sex couples. Findings suggest that while SNAP participation rates are higher among those raising children, the relative differences in SNAP participation between LGB and heterosexual individuals and between same-sex and different-sex couples are similar for both those with and without children.

LGB individuals aged 18-44 who are raising children are nearly 1.8 times more likely to participate in SNAP compared to their heterosexual counterparts, taking into account possible differences in the two groups in gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment (see Figure 10). The figure is also 1.8 for those without children. Same-sex couples raising biological, adopted, or step children are 2.1 times more likely than comparable different sex couples to participate in SNAP. The comparable figure for those without children is nearly 2.2.

Figure 10. Odds of SNAP participation for LGB individuals aged 18-44 and same-sex couples relative to heterosexual individuals aged 18-44 and different-sex couples, respectively, by raising children under age 18 (NSFG and ACS)



*Coefficient is significant at $p < 0.05$

About the Author

Gary J. Gates, PhD is the Williams Distinguished Scholar and a national expert in the demographic, geographic, and economic characteristics of the LGBT population.

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