Exploring Data and Research on Homeownership Disparities and Disparate Treatment for Applicants or Borrowers Identifying as LGBTQ+

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Homeownership is the largest vehicle for creating and generating wealth in the United States, including for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community (*see* Brahma et al. 2023; Dietz and Haurin 2003). Existing literature shows that homeownership is often associated with many financial and social benefits.[1] A recent report using the 2020-21 **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)** data estimates that 5.5% of U.S. adults identify as LGBT, or a total of 13.9 million adults.[2] Although there are many different estimates, they generally show that there is a growing share of the U.S. population—with higher shares among younger generations—that identifies as LGBTQ+.[3] Data and research on LGBTQ+ people and housing are still quite limited. There is increasing evidence that there is a substantial disparity in homeownership rates between members of the LGBTQ+ community and non-LGBTQ+ individuals. However, data on the LGBTQ+ community are not standardized across sources and methodologies of data collection and analyses are still evolving. This paper focuses on identifying available data to monitor homeownership disparities or disparate treatment for applicants or borrowers identifying as LGBTQ+ in the U.S.

Survey Data and Homeownership Rates among LGBTQ+ People

Many surveys started collecting self-reported sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data in recent years. These surveys have been gathering new information from people who identified themselves as LGBTQ+ regarding their arrangements, attitudes, and circumstances that pertain to housing and mortgage markets.

Table 1 lists major surveys that include SOGI measures or approximation variables. The Office of the Chief Statistician of the United States developed recommendations for federal agencies on the best practices for collecting SOGI data in 2023.[4] As more surveys from both public and private sectors add SOGI questions, we begin to see new insights on homeownership rates covering larger samples of LGBTQ+ individuals and/or for longer periods of time. Fannie Mae's **National Housing Survey (NHS)** introduced SOGI questions in 2022 and found that the overall LGBT homeownership rate among LGBT consumers to be 46% in 2023. This share is much lower than the overall U.S. homeownership rate of 65% in 2022.[5] Moreover, these estimates from the NHS are comparable with other notable survey sources, including the Census Bureau's **Household Pulse Survey (HPS)**, the Federal Reserve's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), and other industry surveys from Freddie Mac and the LGBTQ+ Real Estate Alliance.[6] LGBTQ+ homeownership rates generally have been found to be between 44% and 52%, although there are differences in the classification of LGBTQ+ status and time periods studied. Meyer et al. (2019) analyzed a nationally

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[1] For example, homeowners are more likely to be involved in their communities (DiPasquale and Glaeser 1999; Rossi-Hansberg, Sarte, and Owens 2010) and children of homeowners have better educational outcomes (Galster et al. 2007; Haurin, Parcel, and Haurin 2002). Homeownership is also associated with better neighborhood amenities such as higher quality schools, lower crime rates, and increased social networks (Dietz and Haurin 2003; Rohe, Van Zandt, and McCarthy 2013; Rossi-Hansberg, Sarte, and Owens 2010).

[2] See Flores and Conron (2023). BRFSS is a widely-used population survey in estimating LGBTQ+ shares in the health literature.

[3] Based on BRFSS, 15.2% of adults aged 18 to 24 identify as LGBT while 4.1% of adults aged 35 to 49 and 1.8% of adults aged 65 and older identify as LGBT (Flores and Conron 2023). There is no universal estimate of LGBTQ+ population in the U.S., and official estimates vary based on the survey. For more discussions about estimating LGBTQ+ populations, see Deng and Watson (2023), Flores and Conron (2023), and Gates (2011). There are a few commonly-referenced sources in addition to BRFSS. Badgett, Carpenter, and Sansone (2021) tabulated the shares with the 2013-18 National Health Interview Survey, another population health survey. The authors estimated 3% of adult women identify as lesbian, bisexual, or "something else." For men, 2.7% identify as gay, bisexual, or "something else." LGBT share is estimated to be 8.6%, according to Fannie Mae Economic and Strategic Research Group (ESR)'s calculations using the Household Pulse Survey data between January 4 and October 30, 2023. There are estimates from other surveys. For example, a 2023 Gallup poll concludes that 7.6% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ+. The same poll shows 22.3% of Generation Z (born 1997-2012) and 9.8% of Millennials (born 1981-1996) identify as LGBTQ+.

[4] See Recommendations on the Best Practices for the Collection of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data on Federal Statistical Surveys and Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity. Debates still exist on survey designs and techniques with regards to capturing SOGI information. Various entities and scholars have provided recommendations and research on the issue. See recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and the Williams Institute at the University of California – Los Angeles School of Law in addition to other pieces referenced above. For a list of surveys with sexual orientation and/or gender identity measures, refer to the discussion on surveys and measures from the National Institutes of Health.

[5] Fannie Mae ESR's computations from the 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year estimates public use microdata sample.

[6] See a summary of estimates for LGBTQ+ homeownership rates in Table 1 of Visalli et al. (2024). In addition, the LGBT homeownership is estimated to be 52% with Fannie Mae's calculation from pooled HPS data between January 4 and October 30, 2023.

representative sample of transgender adults and found that only a quarter (25%) are homeowners, compared to 58% of cisgender adults. Statistics for LGBTQ+ subgroups are rare. Scholarly work examining the disparities in homeownership rates will be discussed below.

The number of population surveys with SOGI identifiers is still small in 2024. BRFSS and HPS are the main two nationally-representative datasets that include SOGI identifiers.[7] SOGI data collection usually consists of three main questions: sex at birth, current gender identity, and current sexual orientation.[8] Data users often derive a full spectrum of LGBTQ+ or, more narrowly, LGBT identity by combining these questions. Many health-related surveys include SOGI questions, such as BRFSS administrated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, data with SOGI identifiers suitable for housing research are rare. The HPS has been used frequently in recent housing research, including for topics looking at the LGBTQ+ population and housing. The HPS was initially designed to track the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on households. Many other population surveys fielded by the federal and state governments, however, still have not included direct SOGI questions, such as Current Population Survey and Housing Vacancy Survey. Administrative data also lack SOGI identifiers in general.[9] While some surveys, such as the **American Community Survey (ACS)**, invite people to answer questions about their marital status or household composition in ways that allow researchers to identify same-sex couples or estimate partnered relationships, this only captures a portion of the LGBTQ+ population (i.e., LGB couples). The Census Bureau has plans to test SOGI collection in 2024 and add a nonbinary option for current gender in the ACS.[10] Badgett, Carpenter, and Sansone (2021), Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez (2009), and many others have provided additional insights on the challenges in data collection about LGBTQ+ people, notably in question design, willingness to self-identify, data accuracy and confidentiality, sampling and coverages, and data processing.

Nonetheless, by estimating LGB status with household composition data, prior research found that same-sex *couples* are less likely to own their homes than opposite-sex couples, controlling for other factors such as age, presence of children, educational attainment, and income (Leppel 2007a; Jepsen and Jepsen 2009; Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez 2020). Demographic surveys also point to the fact that LGBTQ+ people are younger and have lower incomes when compared to non-LGBTQ+ individuals (Anderson et al. 2021; Kent and Scott 2022). One study concluded that income and age remain two important determinants among LGBTQ+ people in explaining the homeownership disparity (Leppel 2007b). Housing decisions of the LGBTQ+ community are found to be dependent on the prevailing social attitudes and local amenities (Black et al. 2002). LGBTQ+ people tend to concentrate in amenity-rich and high-cost metropolitan areas (Black et al. 2002; Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez 2009). Furthermore, survey results generally indicate that LGBTQ+ homeowners are more often first-time homebuyers compared to non-LGBTQ+ homeowners.

Table 1: Sample of Major Nationally Representative Surveys with SOGI or Relevant Identifications

Survey	Sponsor	Design & Sampling	SOGI or Relevant Questions	Note
Household Pulse Survey	Census Bureau	An experimental data product with a national population sample on social and economic matters affecting households since the COVID-19 pandemic. It has various sample sizes. For January 9 – February 5, 2024, about one million invitations were sent, and 68,544 online responses were received.	Gender identity; Sex at birth; Sexual orientation.	Difficult to identify queer and nonbinary populations. Census's handling of missing data results in misidentification of transgender individuals.[11]

[7] BRFSS is a national probability sample which includes all telephone numbers (both landline and cellular) to be randomly selected for dialing. HPS utilizes the Census Bureau's Master Address File for sampling. The Bureau calculates weights to ensure that each panel represents the full population.

[8] See footnotes 4 and 9 for resources with more detailed discussions on the design of SOGI questions and evaluation criteria.

[9] Administrative data do not collect SOGI identifiers except in a few health settings. See Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Action Plan from the Department of Health and Human Services and Collecting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[10] See Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; American Community Survey Methods Panel: 2024 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Test on Federal Register.

[11] Several variables in HPS are imputed when missing, including "sex at birth." A data user may code someone as "transgender" if the respondent has different sexes on "sex at birth" and "current gender identity" in Census-provided data. One recent memo points out that "nearly a quarter of all respondents identified as transgender could be miscoded."

American Community Survey	Census Bureau	An annual demographics survey program with an extensive population sample. It has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses.	No direct questions; A relationship variable to approximate sexual orientation.[12]	Only captures coupled/partnered LGB households. Currently testing to include a SOGI module.
Survey of Consumer Finances	Federal Reserve	A triennial cross-sectional finance survey of U.S. families. The 2022 sample includes 4,602 families headed by those age 22 to 59. The sampling unit is a "primary economic unit," not a household.	No direct questions; Approximate with sexes of respondent and spouse/partner.	Only captures coupled/partnered LGB households.
General Social Survey	National Science Foundation	This survey currently collects information biennially about concerns, experiences, attitudes, and practices of U.S. adult population with a probability sample. Sample sizes vary—the 2022 survey includes 3,544 completes from a sample of 15,012.	Gender identity; Sex at birth; Sexual orientation.	Have a longitudinal panel to link respondents across years.
National Health Interview Survey	Centers for Disease Control & Prevention	Provide information on the health of the U.S. population with clustered sampling techniques. The survey includes over 28,000 adult and 8,400 child interviews each year.	Gender identity; Sex at birth; Sexual orientation.	Provide free-text responses for gender labels.
Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System	Centers for Disease Control & Prevention	Provide information on U.S. adult population regarding their health-related risk behaviors, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services. The sample includes 400,000 adult telephone interviews each year. Collection is done at the state level.	Gender identity; Sex at birth; Sexual orientation; Detailed transgender question.	Provides information on those considered to be transgender and nonbinary.

LGBTQ+ People and Mortgage Lending

The most important vehicle that Americans use to buy a home is a mortgage. Kent and Scott (2024) estimated with HPS that LGBTQ+ homeowners were more likely to have a mortgage than non-LGBTQ+ homeowners. The literature on LGBTQ+ people's experiences with mortgage lending is extremely limited, in part because lenders are not required to collect data on applicants' and borrowers' SOGI. Despite the research finding that overall unequal treatment of minorities in the housing market has fallen over time (Ross and Turner 2005; Turner et al. 2013), previous research still showed that ethno-racial minorities face substantial barriers (*see* Goering and Wienk 2018; Quillian, Lee, and Honoré 2020; Steil et al. 2018; Turner and Skidmore 1999) and ethno-racial differences in mortgage market outcomes (Bayer, Ferreira, and Ross 2018; Carolyn and Williams 2007; Faber 2013; Howell and Korver-Glenn 2021; Kuebler and Rugh 2013; Loya and Flippen 2020). It is unclear how mortgage experiences and outcomes differ for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly for LGBTQ+ people of color and subgroups within the community, compared with other groups.

Existing research on the disparities in mortgage lending for applicants and borrowers identifying as LGBTQ+ tend to focus on two stages: mortgage shopping and application outcomes. Lenders do collect data on applicants' and borrowers' gender, allowing for analyses comparing same-sex to different-sex applicants and borrowers by estimating relationships. This approach captures only probable coupled LGBTQ+ households while ignoring completely single LGBTQ+ individuals.[13]

Table 2 lists commonly used mortgage datasets, such as the **Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA)** data, survey components of the **National Mortgage Database (NMDB)** program, and the **National Housing Survey (NHS)**, and their SOGI identification strategies. Prior studies with these datasets found that state and federal recognitions of same-sex marriage have increased the

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[12] This variable retains how a household member is related to the reference person. For example, one household member is the same-sex husband/wife/spouse or the same-sex unmarried partner of the reference person. A reference person, used to be also referred as the householder, is the person living or staying in whose name a house or apartment is owned, being bought, or rented. If there is no such person, it is any adult living or staying in a housing unit.

[13] HMDA does not ask for marital status. Researchers have approximated same-sex relationship with genders of applicant/borrower and co-applicant/co-borrower. However, this approach assumes an in-household relationship exists based on information from a borrowing unit. It also ignores subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community. Existing studies often do not distinguish between lesbian and gay households.

demand for mortgage credit from same-sex borrowers in recent years (Miller and Park 2018) and reduced price disparities between heterosexual and same-sex co-borrowers (Liao, Song, and Zhang 2023). A few existing studies also showed that same-sex applicants experience lower approval rates (Dillbary and Edwards 2019; Hagendorff, Nguyen, and Sila, 2022; Park 2021, 2022; Sun and Gao 2019) and higher interest rates (Sun and Gao 2019). Park (2022) found that same-sex borrowers had slightly higher than expected default risk, while Sun and Gao (2019) found same-sex borrowers are less risky overall.[14] Using small-scale paired tests, fair housing groups found disparate treatment against same-sex couples in sales and mortgage markets (Michigan's Fair Housing Centers 2007).[15] However, there have not been any recent or larger-scale studies. While scholars have documented important shifts and declines in disparate treatment associated with access to mortgage credit, as well as broad and secular trends in lending inequality, there remains a relative paucity of comparative analysis of variation by sexual orientation and subgroups in the homebuying and homeowning processes.

Table 2: Selected Mortgage Related Data Sources with SOGI or Relevant Identifications

Survey	Sponsor(s)	Description	SOGI or Relevant Questions	Note
National Housing Survey	Fannie Mae	Monthly online survey with a nationally representative sample polling 1,000 consumers about owning and renting a home, home and rental price changes, the economy, household finances, and overall consumer confidence.	Gender identity; Sex at birth; Sexual orientation.	Housing survey with tracking questions and quarterly special topics. SOGI questions added since 2022.
Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau	An administrative database that includes mortgage application and approval data provided by *certain* financial institutions.[16]	No direct questions; Approximate with sexes of applicant/borrower and co-applicant/co-borrower.	Only captures coupled/partnered LGB borrower unit. Exact household relationship is unclear; Marital status is not recorded.
National Survey of Mortgage Originations (NSMO) & **American Survey of Mortgage Borrowers** (ASMB)	Federal Housing Finance Agency & Consumer Financial Protection Bureau	NSMO: quarterly survey from borrowers regarding their loan originations with a 1-in-300 sample; ASMB: annual survey from borrowers about their experience with maintaining their mortgage and property. Each survey includes about 1,800 responses.	No direct questions yet; Approximate with sexes of respondent and spouse/partner.	Part of the National Mortgage Database (NMDB) program.[17] Only captures coupled/partnered LGB households currently. Confidential access to variables used in the identification.

Future Research and Examination

Overall, there is still a lack of data on LGBTQ+ people and their experiences in the housing market. We have begun to see more large-scale population surveys including SOGI questions, especially those fielded by the federal government. However, it is still too early to assess coverage and accuracy when identifying LGBTQ+ people across the U.S. We also need more population surveys frequently used in housing research to include measurements of SOGI. There is a vacuum in administrative data except in a few health settings.[18] Furthermore, SOGI questions are not standardized across sources, and categorization of gender identity and
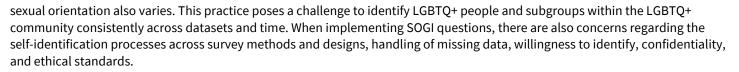
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[14] These studies rely on HMDA and/or data from Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae and have a rich set of controls for credit profiles and loan characteristics. However, these datasets do not cover the entire mortgage market (see footnote 16 for HMDA coverages).
[15] Similar disparate treatment outcome is also found in the rental market against same-sex couples. For example, see Friedman et al. (2013), Levy et al. (2017), and Schwegman (2018). Recent paired tests have focused more on email communications with potential housing providers.
[16] For HMDA institutional and transactional coverages, visit the explainers posted on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website.
[17] The core NMDB builds on credit bureau and administrative files. The data represent a 1-in-20 random sample of all closed-end, first-lien mortgages reported in the files of a credit bureau. The data, however, do not have information on SOGI, household composition, or marital status.
[18] See footnote 9.

sexual orientation also varies. This practice poses a challenge to identify LGBTQ+ people and subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community consistently across datasets and time. When implementing SOGI questions, there are also concerns regarding the self-identification processes across survey methods and designs, handling of missing data, willingness to identify, confidentiality, and ethical standards.

Currently, researchers and policy analysts have been examining housing disparities focusing on a subset of the LGBTQ+ population (such as married/partnered LGB households) or using estimation approaches with limited information (such as classifying an LGB couple with genders of the applicant/borrower and the co-applicant/co-borrower). LGBTQ+ data, especially population surveys and administrative data with SOGI questions, are much needed in mortgage lending as we try to identify and address factors contributing to the disparate outcomes in homeownership rates and access to credit. However, there are no systemic collections of data with SOGI measures regarding LGBTQ+ people's experiences with the mortgage market to date. Lastly, previous studies have not yet considered the intersection of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on potential disparate outcomes in the mortgage market.

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