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Issue Brief

Issue Brief: LGBT and Social Welfare

Key Words (4-6)

LGBT Community, Gay Affluence, Poverty, Income Inflation, Myth vs. reality, DINK (double income no kids)

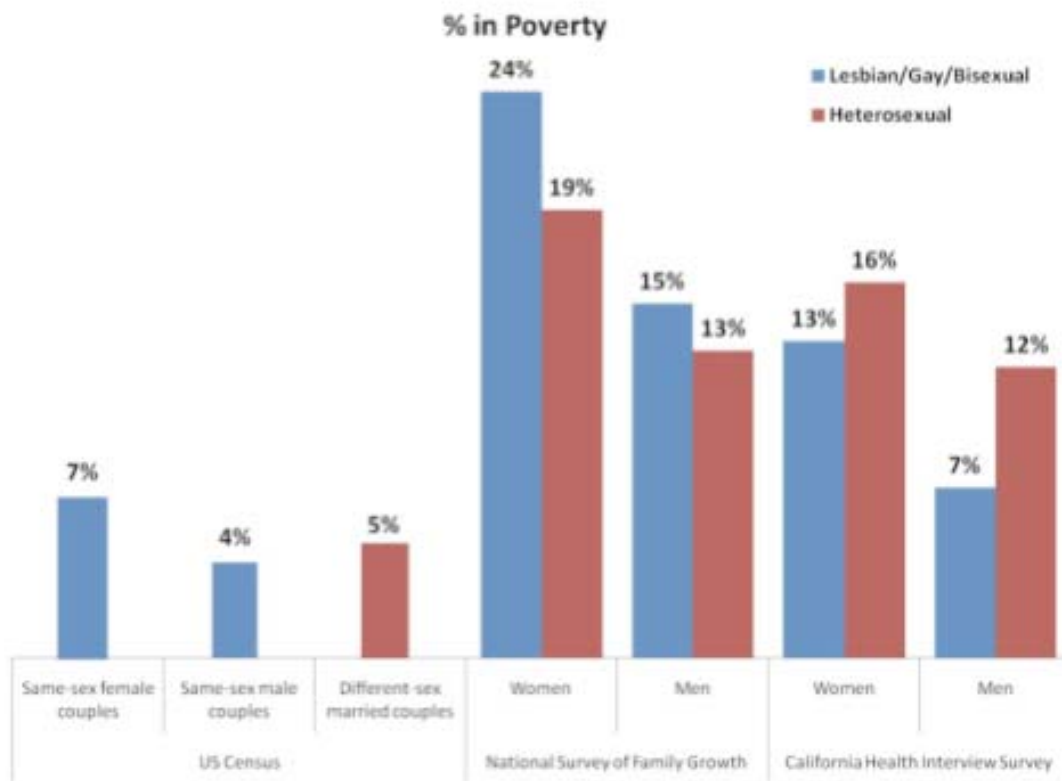
Description (1-2)

This brief shall focus on social welfare as it specifically relates to the LGBT community. The myth of gay affluence is widely accepted, but the reality is the LGBT community is at least as likely – and perhaps more likely – to experience poverty as are heterosexual people.

Key Points (4-6)

- There is an overall misconception that LGBT individuals have more disposable income than heterosexual individuals.
- Much of this misconception is due to surveys marketing companies put out. These tend to not be random samples and instead are convenience samples leading to skewed results.
- In reality, a study by the Williams Institute shows that LGBT community is at least as likely to be poor as heterosexuals.
- When adjusted for factors that explain poverty, the study found that the LGBT community is more likely to be poor than heterosexuals.
- There are negative consequences of assuming this idea of affluence in the LGBT community is true.

Images (2-4)



<Williams Institute Study>

Issue Brief (500-700)

It is not uncommon to see gay individuals portrayed in the media as rich, white, urban men. There is this constant misconception that the LGBT community is surrounded by privilege and are very affluent. Besides this portrayal in media, marketing companies are also prone to paint a similar picture. Marketing companies collect data from samples of the LGBT community, which serve as the most common sources of statistics about gay people. This data portrays high incomes and lavish lifestyles. The issue, however, is that these surveys are usually not random, and with such a convenience sample (readers of a magazine, or individuals at a gay rights rally), does not represent the entire LGBT population (Badgett 2001 5). Thus, anyone picking up such surveys would be misguided when they look at the numbers to believe that all people in the LGBT community are affluent. Overall, since the Census Bureau does not explicitly ask questions about sexual orientation, it is hard for data to be compiled about the gay community, which is why many turn to the aforementioned surveys.

To further this notion, many people argue that because most same-sex couples do not have children, they have more disposable income. This idea, known as DINK (double income, no kids) is also very misleading (Anastas 101). Although it is true that gay people are less likely to have kids than straight couples, about a third of lesbian couples as well as almost a quarter of gay male couples have children, putting less weight on such a factor (Soule 15). Thus, the public view of the LGBT community may be polluted with false notions.

The truth is that gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals as well as households are found at all levels of the income distribution with some being poor, some rich and some in the middle. However, it is important to note that due to the social policy context of LGBT life it is perhaps more likely for LGBT individuals to experience higher rates of poverty than heterosexual people. Such social issues include being more likely to lack health insurance coverage than their heterosexual counterparts, vulnerability to employment discrimination, and less family support (Albelda et al i). To further this notion, most same-sex couples are shut out of some institutions that enhance the economic position of families, such as marriage (IBID 1).

A 2009 report released by UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute delves deeper into poverty in the LGBT community. According to the report, poverty is at least as common in the LGBT population as among heterosexual individuals, and after adjusting for a range of family characteristics that tend to explain poverty (such as race, location, and education) the study found that gay and lesbian couples were significantly more likely to be poor than heterosexual couples (Albeda et al i). The study also found that lesbian couples face a higher risk of being in poor than their heterosexual counterparts that have the same characteristics. Furthering this point, gay men are just as likely to face poverty as are heterosexual men as a whole, but when looking at heterosexual men with the same characteristics, gay men are more likely to be poor (IBID 15).

So what's wrong with the myth of gay affluence? This myth could be very destructive to the LGBT community. This false data is often cited by individuals who are opposed to gay civil rights initiatives for they state that LGBT individuals do not need such protection if they are so well off (Anastas 101). This view of high disposable income of the LGBT population has made it into the courts in crucial civil rights

challenges, with such data causing Justice Scalia to state “that ‘high disposable income’ gave gay people ‘disproportionate political power’” (Badgett 1999 iv). On another front, such a myth could divide the LGBT community from within as they do not connect with such an image and break apart from the community (Soule 17). Overall, it is clear that the entire LGBT community has to be recognized for its diversity in order to avoid the negative implications of accepting the stereotype of gay affluence.

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