Demography (2024) 61(4):995–1009
DOI 10.1215/00703370-11482174 Published online: 24 July 2024

New Evidence From Census 2020 on the Residential Segregation of Same-Sex Households: A Research Note

Amy Spring and Amin Ghaziani

ABSTRACT The 2020 decennial census provides new insights into the demography of same-sex households and can shed light on ongoing debates in urban and gayborhood studies. Although the U.S. Census gives a vast undercount of the LGBTQ population, it is still the largest source of nationally representative data on same-sex households and is accessible over three time points (2000, 2010, 2020). In this research note, we use 2020 census data to examine the residential patterns of same-sex households down to the neighborhood level. By employing the index of dissimilarity, we present results for the 100 largest U.S. cities and 100 largest metropolitan areas that demonstrate moderate yet persistent segregation. In a continuation of prior trends, male same-sex households remain more segregated from different-sex households than do female same-sex households. We find moderate levels of within-group segregation by gender and marital status—representing new demographic trends. Finally, metropolitan areas have a higher dissimilarity index than cities, revealing greater levels of segregation when factoring in suburban areas. We discuss these trends in light of debates regarding the spatial organization of sexuality in residential contexts and outline future avenues for research utilizing recently released 2020 census data.

KEYWORDS Residential segregation • Same-sex households • LGBTQ populations • Gayborhoods • Decennial census

Introduction

The 2020 decennial census provides the latest snapshot of where same-sex households live in the United States. With more than 1 million households counted nationwide, it represents the largest available source of data on same-sex households. Although the census inadequately captures lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) populations more broadly, the newly released 2020 data provide an opportunity to assess, within some constraints, aggregate patterns of changing spatial inequalities of sexuality. We note, however, that the segregation of same-sex households is a limited and imperfect proxy for segregation by sexual orientation.

The estimated share of U.S. households that are same-sex is 0.9% nationwide—0.5% being same-sex married households and 0.4% being same-sex unmarried households (Wang and Jin 2023). There is significant variation by state, with those along the West Coast and in the Northeast having the highest shares of households that are same-sex in composition. However, state-level data obscure geographic variation *within* states, which is substantial (Marino et al. 2024). The 2020 census data, available down to the census tract level, provide a wealth of information to demographers seeking to illuminate residential trends among same-sex households. In this research note, we use these new data to assess the urban geography of same-sex households, with attention to their spatial concentration within and across individual cities, their segregation from different-sex households, and within-group differences based on gender and marital status.

Prior research on same-sex households has documented pockets of concentration that, while undergoing active transitions, still characterize many urban and suburban areas (Gates and Ost 2004). Much has been written about whether these residential clusters are diffusing, expanding, diversifying, or relocating (Ghaziani 2019, 2021a). An overarching question is whether neighborhoods with large concentrations of same-sex households and other LGBTQ individuals, colloquially called "gayborhoods" (Ghaziani 2014a), are disappearing from the urban landscape. Every 10 years, the decennial census provides the best opportunity to quantitatively assess such questions of relevance to demographers and other researchers.

Ten years ago, Spring (2013) analyzed the spatial concentration of same-sex households using census data from 2000 and 2010. The study revealed several key patterns. First, same-sex households appeared to be moderately segregated from different-sex households overall, but patterns differed substantially by gender. Spring (2013) estimated that, relative to different-sex households, the average index of dissimilarity—a common measure of segregation (Reardon and O'Sullivan 2004)—across the nation's 100 largest cities was 43.4 for male-male households and 25.5 for female-female households. This means that 43.4% of male same-sex households and one quarter of female same-sex households would need to move into neighborhoods where they were underrepresented in order to even their distribution with different-sex households (or vice versa). Second, segregation levels varied substantially by city. For male same-sex households, the most segregated cities in 2010 included San Diego, New York, and Houston, all in the high range of segregation. For female same-sex households, the most segregated cities of San Francisco, San Diego, and Boston were in the low to moderate range. Third, the average segregation of same-sex households from different-sex households had declined over the previous decade. Spring (2013) estimated an 8.1% decline in segregation overall for male same-sex households and a 13.6% decline for female same-sex households since the year 2000.

Census 2020 provides an opportunity for empirical reassessment in light of significant social, legal, and economic changes affecting LGBTQ populations from 2010 to 2020, including the passage of marriage equality (*Obergefell v. Hodges* 2015) and rising levels of support for same-sex partnerships in general (Ghaziani et al. 2016). The 2010s also saw rising housing costs and increasing gentrification in many urban areas (Ocejo 2014), which by some estimates contributed to the residential displacement of same-sex households (Spring and Charleston 2021). By the 2020 census, the United States was in the middle of a global pandemic, a contested presidential election, and resurgent anti-LGBTQ legislation (Human Rights Campaign 2023). In fact, the number of bills introduced that target LGBTQ rights has increased by 500% since the turning-point year of 2020 (ACLU 2023). We present the first look at where same-sex households, relative to different-sex households, were living during this time, as well as within-group differences based on gender and marital status.

Study Limitations

Readers should keep in mind the data limitations when interpreting our results. First and foremost, the 2020 census represents a vast undercount of the LGBTQ population. We are limited to discussing same-sex *households* because of the way census questions were worded. Excluded are individuals without spouses/partners, individuals who do not live with their spouses/partners, and individuals unwilling to identify themselves as living in a same-sex marriage/partnership. Furthermore, the census terms "spouses" and "partners" are imperfect indicators of sexual orientation because not all respondents understand or interpret "partnership" (or even marriage) to mean sexual, romantic, or intimate relationships (Brown and Knopp 2006).

Second, the census does not describe the number of LGBTQ individuals or sexual and gender minorities more broadly. In fact, the census does not ask directly about either gender identity or sexual orientation. As a result, the census count of LGBTQ individuals excludes individuals who identify as bisexual, pansexual, polyamorous, queer, transgender, two-spirited, or another of the increasingly diversifying categories for sexuality (Cover 2022; Lee et al. 2020).

Third, an estimated 90% of same-sex households self-identified in Census 2010 (Gates 2010), but similar follow-up studies are not yet available for Census 2020. However, the 2020 data should be less error-prone than prior counts as a result of a new question format for relationships. Two people living together were asked to define their relationship as "same-sex" or "opposite-sex" and as married or unmarried partners. Previously, "sex" and "relationship" were separate questions, and the accidental misreporting of sex led to data and coding errors (O'Connell and Feliz 2011). The reporting of married same-sex households was also an issue in 2010, because marriage equality had passed in some states but not yet at the federal level. In 2020, the Census Bureau stopped recoding responses of "same-sex spouse" to "unmarried partner," as was the previous practice.

Finally, the census data provide a descriptive snapshot of residential clusters. Thus, they cannot be used to address cultural questions, such as motivations for selecting places, what those places mean, perceptions about change, or the specific significance of gay districts (Ghaziani 2021a; Rich 2009). The data also cannot be used to tease out structural factors related to the housing market, such as how class, income, costs, and discrimination influence the choice to live in same-sex clusters (Doan and Higgins 2011; Romero et al. 2020).

Readers should also note that our results are currently not precisely comparable with prior estimates of same-sex segregation from Census 2000 and 2010 (e.g., Spring 2013) because geographically harmonized data are not yet available for 2020. Our results rely on administrative boundaries, such as census tracts and metropolitan areas, which can change. Until harmonized data that use constant boundaries across census years are released, we cannot be sure that any observed changes in segregation are not attributable to adjustments in administrative boundaries.

Data and Methods

We based segregation scores on complete-count data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics file, released on May 25, 2023

(U.S. Census Bureau 2020). We drew data from Table PCT15, "Coupled Households, by Type." These data reported the number of households consisting of same-sex or different-sex spouses or unmarried partners down to the census tract level.[1] The Census Bureau defined sex only as "male" and "female." They defined "unmarried partner" as a person who was not related to the householder but had a "close personal relationship" with them. With the 2015 passage of marriage equality at the federal level, same-sex spouses were distinguished from same-sex unmarried partners in Census 2020. However, we combined these two groups (spouses and unmarried partners) in portions of our analysis.

Following prior work on segregation, we used census tracts to represent neighborhoods.[2] We measured segregation scores using the index of dissimilarity for two sets of geographic areas: metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs)[3] and cities.[4] We calculated segregation scores separately for male and female same-sex households relative to different-sex households, relative to each other, and disaggregated by marital status. The index of dissimilarity (D) is a commonly used measure of the evenness of two groups' distributions across a geographic area (Massey and Denton 1988, 1993):

$$D = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \text{ABS}\left[\frac{x_i}{X} - \frac{y_i}{Y}\right] \times 100,$$

where x_i is the first group's population in tract i, y_i is the second group's population in tract i, X is the first group's population in the geographic area, and Y is the second group's population in the geographic area, which is subdivided into n census tracts. Values of the index range between 0 and 100 and represent the percentage of households needing to move to a census tract where they are underrepresented in order to achieve an even distribution. Massey and Denton (1993) interpreted dissimilarity scores below 30 as low segregation, between 30 and 60 as moderate segregation, and above 60 as high segregation.

We report scores for the 100 most populous MSAs and 100 most populous cities. Reporting at the city-level captures the extent of segregation in large, dense, urban places. We contrast this with reporting at the metropolitan level, which encompasses

[1] The Census Bureau uses the term "opposite-sex" households but we prefer the more neutral term "different-sex" households and use it throughout.

[2] Census tracts generally have populations between 1,200 and 8,000, with an optimum size of 4,000 people and boundaries that follow visible features such as major roads, rail lines, and waterways (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). The purpose of census tracts is to provide a stable set of geographic units for analysis. Nevertheless, tracts often do not align with residents' subjective definitions of neighborhoods (Gieryn 2000).

[3] We defined metropolitan areas (MSAs) with Census CBSA (core-based statistical area) boundaries. CBSAs consist of one or more counties associated with a core urbanized area plus adjacent counties that have a high degree of social and economic integration. A metropolitan area is a CBSA with a core urbanized area of at least 50,000 (see https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html). We linked census tracts to their MSAs by extracting the county FIPS code from the tract FIPS code and then linking to counties that made up the CBSA.

[4] We defined cities by census place boundaries. Census places include incorporated places (e.g., cities and towns) and census-designated places (i.e., settled concentrations of population that are identifiable by name but are not legally incorporated; see https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/bas/information/cdp.html). Place boundaries do not necessarily align with tract boundaries. To make linkages, we downloaded the Census 2020 TIGER/Line shapefiles for places and tracts and used ArcGIS software to assign tracts to places if the majority of their land area fell within the place's boundaries.

urban areas and their suburbs. Reporting for only the 100 largest areas helps to ensure that the population of same-sex households is sufficiently large to produce reliable estimates of segregation. Although the index of dissimilarity is statistically independent of the relative size of the two groups used in its calculation, the index is sensitive if the population of one group is small compared with the number of tracts (Johnson and Farley 1985). Although this approach is a practical necessity, our analysis of large areas may feed into an urban bias in the literature, an issue we address in the Discussion. In our results, we first document the average index of dissimilarity across the 100 largest cities and MSAs. We weight the results by the number of same-sex households in each geographic area so that areas with larger populations count more toward the segregation average. We then investigate segregation scores within individual cities and MSAs.

Results

In 2020, the 100 largest MSAs in the United States contained 878,547 same-sex households (440,486 male households and 438,061 female households), constituting 75% of the same-sex households nationwide (Table 1). The country's 100 largest cities, most of which are central cities to the 100 largest MSAs, contained 339,065 same-sex households (191,759 male households and 147,306 female households).

The weighted average index of dissimilarity for male same-sex households from different-sex households within the nation's 100 largest cities was 33.27 (Table 2). The index indicates that, on average, 33.27% of male same-sex households would need to relocate into census tracts where they were underrepresented in order to even their distribution with different-sex households. Across cities, the index ranged from 15.34 to 48.00. Within those same 100 cities, the index for female same-sex households from different-sex households was 24.75, ranging from 15.75 to 34.31.

These data suggest low to moderate levels of segregation by sexual orientation within the nation's largest urban centers. The index of 33.27 for male same-sex households is in the moderate range of segregation, while the index of 24.75 for female same-sex households is in the low range. As a point of comparison, for the same 100 cities, Black–White segregation using 2020 census data was 62.99, Asian–White segregation was 40.92, and Hispanic–White segregation was 50.20.

Within-group analysis shows an index of 27.74 for male same-sex households from female same-sex households, an index of 27.26 for male same-sex spouses from male unmarried partners, and an index of 33.14 for female same-sex spouses from female unmarried partners. These data suggest moderate levels of segregation within same-sex households by gender and marital status. Segregation by marital status is significantly greater among same-sex households (for male and female, $p < .001$) compared with different-sex households, whose dissimilarity index of spouses from unmarried partners is 23.96 (not shown).

Contrasting the city-level results with those for MSAs (see Table 2) reveals the influence of the suburbs. The average index of dissimilarity within the 100 largest MSAs was 38.44 for male same-sex households from different-sex households, ranging from 21.16 to 51.92. MSA segregation was about 5 points greater than it was in the largest cities. The average index of dissimilarity for female same-sex households

Table 1 Population counts of same-sex households from Census 2020

	United States	100 Largest MSAs	100 Largest Cities
Male Same-Sex Households	556,767	440,486	191,759
Male same-sex spouses	312,133	248,578	103,488
Male same-sex unmarried partners	244,634	191,908	88,271
Female Same-Sex Households	611,799	438,061	147,306
Female same-sex spouses	356,362	258,316	82,352
Female same-sex unmarried partners	255,437	179,745	64,954
Total same-sex households	1,168,566	878,547	339,065

Note: MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

Table 2 Segregation of same-sex households in 2020

	Index of Dissimilarity in 100 Largest Cities				Index of Dissimilarity in 100 Largest MSAs			
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Male Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households	33.27	7.15	15.34	48.00	38.44	6.34	21.16	51.92
Female Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households	24.75	4.20	15.75	34.31	28.68	3.49	20.44	36.26
Male Same-Sex Households From Female Same-Sex Households	27.74	4.13	19.58	37.93	30.24	4.13	20.97	42.46
Male Same-Sex Spouses From Male Unmarried Partners	27.26	5.98	15.11	50.00	32.97	5.03	24.30	54.79
Female Same-Sex Spouses From Female Unmarried Partners	33.14	4.44	23.07	52.01	35.03	3.48	25.81	52.66

Note: Results are weighted by the number of male or female same-sex households in each city or MSA in 2020.

from different-sex households within the same 100 MSAs was 28.68, ranging from 20.44 to 36.26. This is about 4 points greater than their city-level segregation, although still in the low range. From our calculations for the same 100 MSAs, Black–White segregation was 60.11, Asian–White segregation was 45.23, and Hispanic–White segregation was 48.07. Within-group analysis reveals similar patterns: segregation by gender and marital status among same-sex households was a few points greater in MSAs than in large cities.

We can draw a few conclusions. In 2020, segregation by sexual orientation was primarily low to moderate and, as a point of comparison, it did not reach levels of racial segregation. Male same-sex households were consistently more segregated than female same-sex households. Among same-sex households, segregation by gender and marital status was also moderate. For all comparisons, segregation in MSAs was greater than segregation in cities, meaning that the segregation of same-sex households was greater when factoring in the suburbs.

We now turn to descriptive analyses of specific cities and MSAs. We first documented the top 10 most segregated cities among the nation's 100 largest cities and compared their segregation scores to the national mean. Then, we did the same for MSAs. Readers are cautioned against overinterpreting the order of the rankings. Because census data include uncertainty and error, differences in a ranking of #1 versus #2 may not be statistically significant. However, the top 10 lists do provide clues into the characteristics of cities and MSAs that correlate with greater segregation.

The most segregated cities for male same-sex households included San Diego, Columbus, New York, and Philadelphia (Table 3). All were significantly more segregated (at $p<.001$) than the national mean. The most segregated city, San Diego, reached an index of 48.00. The most segregated cities for female same-sex households also included San Diego, Columbus, and New York. In fact, the most segregated cities for male and female same-sex households overlapped substantially and also included Chicago, Kansas City, and Houston. Other most segregated cities for female same-sex households were New Orleans and Irvine. Although all of the top 10 segregated cities for female same-sex households were significantly above the national mean, all were in the low to moderate range of segregation. For example, the most segregated city for female same-sex households, San Diego, had an index of 34.31. Within same-sex households, the most segregated cities by gender included Detroit, Arlington, and Cleveland. The most segregated cities by marital status included, for male same-sex households, Detroit, Lubbock, and Chesapeake, and for female same-sex households, Detroit, Irvine, and Plano.

In 2020, the most segregated MSAs for male same-sex households included Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario; Chicago–Naperville–Elgin; New Orleans–Metairie; and New York–Newark–Jersey City (Table 4). The most segregated MSA, Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, reached an index of 51.92. All MSAs listed in Table 4 had an index that was significantly above the overall MSA mean (at $p<.001$). The most segregated MSAs for female same-sex households included Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, Provo–Orem, Cleveland–Elyria, and Pittsburgh. The most segregated MSA, Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, reached an index of 36.26. Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario was also the most segregated MSA by gender within same-sex households, along with Provo–Orem and Jackson. By marital status, the most segregated MSAs included Jackson, McAllen–Edinburg–Mission, Provo–Orem, and Detroit–Warren–Dearborn. Each of these MSAs was in the top 10 of segregation by marital status for both genders.

As a group, these most segregated cities and MSAs reveal several patterns. First, no individual city or MSA reached a high level of segregation according to Massey and Denton's (1993) thresholds. Most were moderate, with some in the low range (e.g., cities for female same-sex households). Therefore, the characterization of the "top 10 most segregated" cities and MSAs must be kept in perspective. Second, the most segregated cities for both genders were drawn from all four regions and included coastal, inland, large, and mid-sized cities. There was no clear type of city that was associated closely with segregation. The most segregated MSAs for male same-sex households also covered all four regions, but they were exclusively large MSAs. In contrast, the most segregated MSAs for female same-sex households included many mid-sized MSAs and were almost entirely noncoastal (with one exception: Richmond) and outside the West (with one exception: Provo). Finally, comparison of Tables 3 and 4 suggests weak evidence that segregated cities correlate with segregated MSAs (or vice

Table 3 Top 10 most segregated cities for same-sex households in 2020

	Index of Dissimilarity[a]
Male Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households	
1. San Diego, CA	48.00
2. Columbus, OH	43.37
3. New York, NY	42.44
4. Philadelphia, PA	38.67
5. Chicago, IL	38.34
6. Detroit, MI	38.32
7. Kansas City, MO	38.14
8. Dallas, TX	37.37
9. Oklahoma City, OK	36.95
10. Houston, TX	36.62
Female Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households	
1. San Diego, CA	34.31
2. Columbus, OH	30.81
3. Chicago, IL	30.17
4. New Orleans, LA	30.15
5. New York, NY	29.91
6. Irvine, CA	29.30
7. Kansas City, MO	29.22
8. Scottsdale, AZ	28.83
9. Houston, TX	28.25
10. Newark, NJ	28.15
Male Same-Sex Households From Female Same-Sex Households	
1. Detroit, MI	37.93
2. Arlington, VA	37.05
3. Cleveland, OH	36.10
4. Chesapeake, VA	33.50
5. Boston, MA	33.30
6. Toledo, OH	33.19
7. Laredo, TX	33.10
8. Memphis, TN	32.55
9. Lexington, KY	32.53
10. New York, NY	32.40
Male Same-Sex Spouses From Male Same-Sex Unmarried Partners	
1. Detroit, MI	50.00
2. Lubbock, TX	49.01
3. Chesapeake, VA	46.71
4. Lincoln, NE	44.90
5. Fort Wayne, TX	44.89
6. Greensboro, NC	44.85
7. Toledo, OH	44.83
8. Virginia Beach, VA	44.68
9. Stockton, CA	44.20
10. Laredo, TX	44.09
Female Same-Sex Spouses From Female Same-Sex Unmarried Partners	
1. Detroit, MI	52.01
2. Irvine, CA	50.34
3. Plano, TX	45.51
4. Lexington, VA	44.16
5. Chula Vista, CA	42.53

Table 3 (continued)

	Index of Dissimilarity[a]
6. Scottsdale, AZ	41.89
7. Fremont, CA	41.68
8. Laredo, TX	41.39
9. Los Angeles, CA	39.27
10. El Paso, TX	39.03

[a] All indices are statistically significantly different at $p < .001$ from the mean for all 100 cities.

versa). Analyses of large, dense cities versus greater urban/suburban areas produce distinct portraits of segregation.

Discussion

Although the data we relied on are not yet geographically harmonized and so are based on the imperfect proxy of same-sex households, our findings suggest that segregation by sexual orientation is trending toward declines. This baseline finding has several theoretical implications for debates in gayborhood studies (see Ghaziani 2015, 2021b for reviews).

First, while comparisons across census years are technically not possible, with three data points (2000, 2010, 2020), we can tentatively say that trends toward segregation by sexual orientation are declining in consistent ways. This highlights a gap, hitherto unarticulated, about the drivers for changes in spatial inequalities. Three of the most common explanations assume linear adjustments. Arguments about assimilation foreground sentiments of "cultural sameness" between different-sex and same-sex households (Ghaziani 2015), particularly as the "closet" declines in its centrality for structuring interpersonal relationships (Seidman 2002). Another explanation prioritizes geocoded mobile technologies. This work details the impressions of users who suggest that locative platforms decenter the significance of urban gay districts (Renninger 2019), while diversifying communication channels in general enable individuals to live locally, globally, and digitally in more fluid ways (Usher and Morrison 2010). Economic pressures also affect the capacity to concentrate. Rising housing values (Doan and Higgins 2011), patterns of poverty among same-sex households (Badgett et al. 2013), and discriminatory lending practices (Sun and Gao 2019) increase spatial dispersion. Our analysis of the 2020 census suggests that the effects of culture, technology, and economics are potentially logarithmic, rather than linear, and they do not necessarily or inevitably require a dissimilarity index approaching zero.

Second, analyses of sexual segregation that use census data often focus on the 100 largest urban areas. These results consistently show declining (though still persistent) levels of segregation. Implied in these findings, including ours, is that big cities generally exhibit stable patterns. However, those patterns may not be

Table 4 Top 10 most segregated MSAs for same-sex households in 2020

		Index of Dissimilarity[a]
Male Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households		
1.	Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, CA	51.92
2.	Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI	46.92
3.	New Orleans–Metairie, LA	46.15
4.	New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY–NJ–PA	44.69
5.	Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Alpharetta, GA	44.40
6.	Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, MN–WI	44.32
7.	Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC–VA–MD–WV	44.21
8.	San Francisco–Oakland–Berkeley, CA	43.21
9	San Diego–Chula Vista–Carlsbad, CA	43.09
10.	Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach, FL	42.54
Female Same-Sex Households From Different-Sex Households		
1.	Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, MN–WI	36.26
2.	Provo–Orem, UT	35.16
3.	Cleveland–Elyria, OH	34.84
4.	Pittsburgh, PA	34.54
5.	Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Alpharetta, GA	33.91
6.	Detroit–Warren–Dearborn, MI	33.74
7.	Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI	33.30
8.	Richmond, VA	33.30
9	Milwaukee–Waukesha, WI	33.14
10.	Memphis, TN–MS–AR	33.09
Male Same-Sex Households From Female Same-Sex Households		
1.	Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, CA	42.46
2.	Provo–Orem, UT	40.48
3.	Jackson, MS	39.35
4.	Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach, FL	35.80
5.	Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI	35.11
6.	New Orleans–Metairie, LA	34.96
7.	Detroit–Warren–Dearborn, MI	34.79
8.	Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC–VA–MD–WV	34.74
9.	Cleveland–Elyria, OH	34.70
10.	Memphis, TN–MS–AR	33.93
Male Same-Sex Spouses From Male Same-Sex Unmarried Partners		
1.	Jackson, MS	54.79
2.	McAllen–Edinburg–Mission, TX	49.43
3.	Provo–Orem, UT	48.47
4.	Ogden–Clearfield, UT	47.60
5.	Toledo, OH	47.06
6.	Scranton–Wilkes-Barre, PA	46.96
7.	Hartford–East Hartford–Middletown, CT	46.20
8.	Detroit–Warren–Dearborn, MI	45.15
9.	Colorado Springs, CO	44.81
10.	Birmingham–Hoover, AL	44.51
Female Same-Sex Spouses From Female Same-Sex Unmarried Partners		
1.	Provo–Orem, UT	52.66
2.	Jackson, MS	46.59
3.	Detroit–Warren–Dearborn, MI	45.04
4.	McAllen–Edinburg–Mission, TX	44.69
5.	Toledo, OH	42.73

Table 4 (continued)

		Index of Dissimilarity[a]
6.	Bridgeport–Stamford–Norwalk, CT	42.27
7.	Cape Coral–Fort Myers, FL	41.30
8.	Scranton–Wilkes-Barre, PA	40.43
9.	Urban Honolulu, HI	40.39
10.	Poughkeepsie–Newburgh–Middletown, NY	39.69

[a] All indices are statistically significantly different at $p < .001$ from the mean for all 100 MSAs.

generalizable to geographic units with smaller population sizes (Brown 2008). The question is empirical and comparative, although examining the 100 largest cities alongside smaller places may be limited by the reliability of segregation estimates for smaller places.[5]

Third, arguments about city size allude to geographic variation not simply across but also *within* states (Gates and Ost 2004; Marino et al. 2024). This notion invites comparisons between, for example, Chicago and Carbondale; San Francisco and Guerneville; and Philadelphia and New Hope, among others. Assuming the ability to calculate reliable estimates, within-state comparisons would caution researchers from reducing states into singular geographic units while recognizing that residential outcomes are not always rational considerations unconstrained by noneconomic factors (Black et al. 2002). In this way, within-state comparisons can enable researchers to model the entwined dynamics of migration and spatial inequality (Gieseking 2020). A more comprehensive exploration of geographic variation would go beyond the U.S. context entirely. Although our results are specific to one country, they are of interest to researchers in other parts of the world where similar dynamics exist, including Australia (Goldie 2018), Brazil (Fortes de Lena 2022), and Sweden (Wimark and Fortes de Lena 2022).

Fourth, our analysis shows that segregation by sexual orientation is greater when we factor in the suburbs. Why? Studies that used the 2010 census suggest that greater rates of parenting by same-sex couples may create distinct nonurban migration patterns driven by homophily. This trend can create clusters in the suburbs that contribute to the dissimilarity index (Gates 2013). With 2020 data, researchers can examine the stability of these patterns over time. For example, states with the highest proportion of same-sex couples with children in 2010 included Mississippi (26%),

[5] Places like Provincetown, MA; Rehoboth Beach, DE; Montgomery, AL; and southeastern Missouri are examples of rural and small town clusters of same-sex households that are not represented in our analyses. In an effort to address the potential for metronormative bias in the literature (Halberstam 2005; Herring 2010) while recognizing the requirements of statistical power, some researchers propose a shift from measurement to conceptual innovation. Ruez (2021) offered "worlding" as an approach to compare the social construction of places relative to their spatial and temporal qualities; Mattson (2020) proposed "outposts" in contrast to big-city gayborhoods; and Knopp and Brown (2021) used Damron guides to catalog how same-sex households situate themselves in an "epistemological grid" (for reviews, see Ghaziani 2021b; Stone 2018).

Wyoming (25%), Alaska (23%), Idaho (22%), Montana (22%), Kansas (22%), and North Dakota (22%). Comparisons with 2020 data can provide insights about whether same-sex parenting compels ongoing buffers that contribute to persistent segregation, or if the process of normalizing diverse family forms has weakened the effects of parenting as a residential selection mechanism. Such studies would also add regional variation as another layer of comparison.

Fifth, in addressing the limitations of our analysis, future work can offer nuance in the definition of neighborhood in terms of boundaries and scale. There is a long-recognized concern about treating census tracts as equivalents to neighborhoods generally and gayborhoods specifically. Furthermore, varying the spatial scale of neighborhoods can impact how we understand the clustering of same-sex households and their relative segregation (Brown and Knopp 2006). Similarly, the areal units at which we measure segregation (MSAs and large cities) may or may not make the most difference for LGBTQ populations. In sum, our use of tracts, cities, and MSAs circumscribes the inferences we can make. We also note that our study emphasizes residential patterns as indicators of gayborhoods, but there are other possibilities, including the location of real estate listings targeting LGBTQ individuals (Whittemore and Smart 2016), clusters of commercial establishments (Mattson 2015), and the presence of anchor institutions (Ghaziani 2014b). Our study limitations point to opportunities for expanding our methodological toolkit and putting demography in closer conversation with sexuality studies and the emerging field of queer methods (Brown and Knopp 2008; Compton et al. 2018; Ghaziani and Brim 2019).

Sixth, new data facilitate comparisons that can examine variations based on demographic characteristics. For example, studies that used the 2010 census showed that "archipelago" (Ghaziani 2019) or "constellation" (Gieseking 2020) clusters form as a result of the location patterns of certain subgroups. These findings, which were based on historical and case study evidence, highlight location patterns for women (Newton 1993) and transgender individuals (Doan 2019). Future research employing Census 2020 data (and microdata, when available) could examine multiple methods of disaggregation based on a variety of sociodemographic characteristics. Finally, cross-case comparisons are promising. Results from the 2020 census show that racial segregation remains higher than sexual segregation across the board for Black–White, Asian–White, and Hispanic–White comparisons. This observation should prompt inquiries about both unique and shared properties of spatial inequalities based on race and sexual orientation.

Research that isolates within- and between-group patterns in the dissimilarity index can challenge place- and time-invariant assumptions about spatial singularity in the demographic study of sexual inequality (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014) and make headway in debunking the conceptualization of the city as a fundamentally "heterosexist" planning project (Frisch 2002). ■

Acknowledgments Computing support for this research came from a Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development research infrastructure grant (P2C HD042828) to the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology at the University of Washington, to which A. Spring is an affiliate. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

References

ACLU. (2023). *Mapping attacks on LGBTQ rights in U.S. state legislatures in 2023*. Retrieved from https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2023

Badgett, M. V. L., Durso, L. E., & Schneebaum, A. (2013). *New patterns of poverty in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community* (Report). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Retrieved from https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgb-patterns-of-poverty/

Black, D., Gates, G., Sanders, S., & Taylor, L. (2002). Why do gay men live in San Francisco? *Journal of Urban Economics, 51,* 54–76.

Brown, G. (2008). Urban (homo)sexualities: Ordinary cities and ordinary sexualities. *Geography Compass, 2,* 1215–1231.

Brown, M., & Knopp, L. (2006). Places or polygons? Governmentality, scale, and the census in *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*. *Population, Space and Place, 12,* 223–242.

Brown, M., & Knopp, L. (2008). Queering the map: The productive tensions of colliding epistemologies. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 98,* 40–58.

Compton, D., Meadow, T., & Schilt, K. (Eds.). (2018). *Other, please specify: Queer methods in sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Cover, R. (2022). Populist contestations: Cultural change and the competing languages of sexual and gender identity. *Sexualities, 25,* 660–675.

Doan, P. L. (2019). To count or not to count: Queering measurement and the transgender community. In A. Ghaziani & M. Brim (Eds.), *Imagining queer methods* (pp. 121–142). New York: New York University Press.

Doan, P. L., & Higgins, H. (2011). The demise of queer space? Resurgent gentrification and the assimilation of LGBT neighborhoods. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 31,* 6–25.

Fortes de Lena, F. (2022). From urban to highly urban: Internal migration patterns of sexual minorities in Brazil. *Population, Space and Place, 28,* e2575. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2575

Frisch, M. (2002). Planning as a heterosexist project. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 21,* 254–266.

Gates, G. J. (2010). *Same-sex couples in U.S. Census Bureau data: Who gets counted and why* (Report). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Retrieved from https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/SS-Couples-US-Census-Bureau-Data-Aug-2010.pdf

Gates, G. J. (2013). *LGBT parenting in the United States* (Brief). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute. Retrieved from https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-parenting-us/

Gates, G. J., & Ost, J. (2004). *The gay & lesbian atlas*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Ghaziani, A. (2014a). *There goes the gayborhood?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ghaziani, A. (2014b). Measuring urban sexual cultures. *Theory and Society, 43,* 371–393.

Ghaziani, A. (2015). The queer metropolis. In J. DeLamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of sexualities* (pp. 305–330). New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media.

Ghaziani, A. (2019). Cultural archipelagos: New directions in the study of sexuality and space. *City & Community, 18,* 4–22.

Ghaziani, A. (2021a). Why gayborhoods matter: The street empirics of urban sexualities. In A. Bitterman & D. B. Hess (Eds.), *The life and afterlife of gay neighborhoods: Renaissance and resurgence* (pp. 87–113). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Ghaziani, A. (2021b). People, protest, and place: Advancing research on the emplacement of LGBTQ+ urban activisms. *Urban Studies, 58,* 1529–1540.

Ghaziani, A., & Brim, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Imagining queer methods*. New York: New York University Press.

Ghaziani, A., Taylor, V., & Stone, A. (2016). Cycles of sameness and difference in LGBT social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology, 42,* 165–183.

Gieryn, T. F. (2000). A space for place in sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26,* 463–496.

Gieseking, J. J. (2020). Mapping lesbian and queer lines of desire: Constellations of queer urban space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 38,* 941–960.

Goldie, X. (2018). Together, but separate: Neighborhood-scale patterns and correlates of spatial segregation between male and female same-sex couples in Melbourne and Sydney. *Urban Geography, 39,* 1391–1417.

Halberstam, J. (2005). *A queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Herring, S. (2010). *Another country: Queer anti-urbanis*m. New York: New York University Press.

Human Rights Campaign. (2023, June 21). *As congress re-introduces equality act, Human Rights Campaign president calls for its urgent passage, testifies before Senate judiciary committee: "LGBTQ+ people are living in a state of emergency"* [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/as-congress-re-introduces-equality-act-human-rights-campaign-president-calls-for-its-urgent-passage-testifies-before-senate-judiciary-committee-lgbtq-people-are-living-in-a-state-of-emergency

Johnson, R., & Farley, R. (1985, August). *On the statistical significance of the index of dissimilarity*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Statistical Association, Las Vegas, NV.

Knopp, L., & Brown, M. (2021). Travel guides, urban spatial imaginaries and LGBTQ+ activism: The case of Damron guides. *Urban Studies, 58,* 1380–1396.

Lee, J. G. L., Boynton, M. H., Shook-Sa, B. E., & Wimark, T. (2020). Is where same-sex couples live a valid measure for where single lesbian, gay, and bisexual people live in population health research? Results from a national probability phone survey, 2017, United States. *Annals of LGBTQ Public and Population Health, 1,* 96–114.

Marino, F. A., Westrick-Payne, K. K., Manning, W. D., & Brown, S. L. (2024). Visualizing concentrations of couples and same-sex couples across U.S. counties. *Socius, 10*. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231222772

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1988). The dimensions of residential segregation. *Social Forces, 67,* 281–315.

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mattson, G. (2015). Style and the value of gay nightlife: Homonormative placemaking in San Francisco. *Urban Studies, 52,* 3144–3159.

Mattson, G. (2020). Small-city gay bars, big-city urbanism. *City & Community, 19,* 76–97.

Nash, C. J., & Gorman-Murray, A. (2014). LGBT neighborhoods and 'new mobilities': Towards understanding transformations in sexual and gendered landscapes. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 38,* 756–772.

Newton, E. (1993). *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty years in America's first gay and lesbian town*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. 644 (2015). Retrieved from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/576/14-556/

Ocejo, R. E. (2014). *Upscaling downtown: From Bowery saloons to cocktail bars in New York City*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

O'Connell, M., & Feliz, S. (2011). *Same-sex couple household statistics from the 2010 Census* (Working Paper, No. SEHSD-WP2011-26) Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Social, Economic and Housing Statistics Division. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2011/demo/SEHSD-WP2011-26.html

Reardon, S. F., & O'Sullivan, D. (2004). Measures of spatial segregation. *Sociological Methodology, 34,* 121–162.

Renninger, B. J. (2019). Grindr killed the gay bar, and other attempts to blame social technologies for urban development: A democratic approach to popular technologies and queer sociality. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66,* 1736–1755.

Rich, M. A. (2009). 'It depends on how you define integrated': Neighborhood boundaries and racial integration in a Baltimore neighborhood. *Sociological Forum, 24,* 828–853.

Romero, A. P., Goldberg, S. K., & Vasquez, L. A. (2020). *LGBT people and housing affordability, discrimination, and homelessness* (Report). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Retrieved from https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-housing-instability/

Ruez, D. (2021). We're in Asia: Worlding LGBTQI+ activism otherwise in Sydney. *Urban Studies, 58,* 1414–1430.

Seidman, S. (2002). *Beyond the closet: The transformation of gay and lesbian life*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Spring, A., & Charleston, K. (2021). Gentrification and the shifting geography of male same-sex couples. *Population Research and Policy Review, 40,* 1163–1194.

Spring, A. L. (2013). Declining segregation of same-sex partners: Evidence from Census 2000 and 2010. *Population Research and Policy Review, 32,* 687–716.

Stone, A. L. (2018). The geography of research on LGBTQ life: Why sociologists should study the South, rural queers, and ordinary cities. *Sociology Compass, 12,* e12638. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12638

Sun, H., & Gao, L. (2019). Lending practices to same-sex borrowers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 116,* 9293–9302.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Census of population and housing, 2020: Demographic and housing characteristics* [Dataset]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. Available from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/dec/2020-census-dhc.html#about-the-dhc

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022, April 11). *Geographic glossary*. Washington, DC. U.S. Department of Commerce. Available from https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/glossary.html

Usher, N., & Morrison, E. (2010). The demise of the gay enclave: Communication infrastructure theory, and the transformation of gay public space. In C. Pullen & M. Cooper (Eds.), *LGBT identity and online new media* (pp. 271–287). New York, NY: Routledge.

Wang, H. L., & Jin, C. H. (2023, May 25). *What the 2020 census can—and can't—tell us about LGBTQ+ people* [Radio broadcast]. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2023/05/25/1174739030/census-lgbtq-data-same-sex-households-ask-about-sexuality

Whittemore, A. H., & Smart, M. J. (2016). Mapping gay and lesbian neighborhoods using home advertisements: Change and continuity in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan statistical area over three decades. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 48,* 192–210.

Wimark, T., & Fortes De Lena, F. (2022). Same-sex marriage and neighbourhood landscape overlap—A revised understanding of the spatial distribution of gay men and lesbians. *Population, Space and Place, 28,* e2507. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2507

Amy Spring (corresponding author)
aspring@gsu.edu

Spring • Department of Sociology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, USA;
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4150-4462

Ghaziani • Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7118-0809