

Are Homosexuals a Disadvantaged Minority?

Homosexuals are certainly a minority group in American society—a tiny minority, in fact (see chapter 2 on “How Many Homosexuals Are There?”). And they may be said to suffer “discrimination,” if the fact that a majority of the American people disapprove of same-sex sexual contact can be said to constitute “discrimination.” However, most laws against “discrimination” target only discrimination that is irrational or intolerable because it is based on characteristics that are inborn, immutable, involuntary, innocuous, or in the Constitution. Race and sex are the classic examples; voluntary behavior patterns that are demonstrably harmful, such as homosexual acts, do not qualify for special protection.

Even with that distinction in mind, however, it is worth examining the claims of homosexual activists that they have experienced a long continuing history of pervasive discrimination and outright persecution. If any group in society has experienced such treatment, members of that group might be expected to be at a disadvantage with respect to various measures of achievement in society, such as education or income levels. Let’s examine whether homosexuals suffer such disadvantages.

Education Levels among Homosexuals

Some minority groups in American society are at a clear disadvantage with respect to educational attainment. For example:

- According to the U. S. Census Bureau, as of 1998, 25.0 percent of white Americans had completed four years of college or more. However, only 14.7 percent of black Americans and 11.0 percent of Hispanics had the same level of educational attainment.

U. S. Census Bureau, "Educational Attainment, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1960 to 1998," *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*, 119th edition (Washington, DC: October 1999), Table No. 263, 169.

However, studies indicate that homosexuals as a group actually have *higher* levels of education than heterosexuals.

- Michael, et al., report that homosexuals and lesbians tend to be more highly educated: "Our study shows that twice as many college-educated men identify themselves as homosexual as men with high-school educations, 3 percent of college-educated men said they were gay compared to 1.5 percent of men with high-school educations. For women the trend is even more striking. Women with college educations are eight times more likely to identify themselves as lesbians as are women with a high-school education. Four percent of female college graduates identify themselves as lesbians as compared to less than half a percent of female high-school graduates."

Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina Kolata, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), 182.

- Laumann et al. add, "In general, women with high school degrees or less report very low rates of same-gender sexuality." On the other hand, women who have graduated from college always "report the highest level of same-gender sexuality." The authors conclude that "acceptance of nontraditional sexual behavior is likely to be higher among the more educated."

Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 309.

- Similarly, a study in *Family Planning Perspectives* concludes that education was "positively associated with having had a same-gender sexual experience within the last ten years..."

John O. G. Billy, Koray Tanfer, William R. Grady and Daniel H. Klepinger, "The Sexual Behavior of Men In the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives* 25, no. 2 (March/April 1993): 59.

- The Gay Financial Network reports that a readership survey of homosexual newspapers found higher levels of education and income among homosexuals as compared with the U.S. population as a whole: “The results of the paper’s readership survey were highly impressive, with income and education levels significantly above that of the median population. Among its results, it found that 60 percent of readers were college graduates, compared to 18 percent for the general public.”

Mike Wilke, “Commercial Closet: Are Gays All Rich?” 21 August, 2000, <http://www.gfn.com>.

- A study in *American Demographics* also found high education levels among homosexuals: “The precise size of the gay market may not be known, but the characteristics of gays make them prime consumer targets. The median educational attainment of gays is 15.7 years, compared with 12.7 for the overall adult U.S. population. Thirty-two percent of gays have attended college for four years or more, compared with 21 percent of the overall population.”

J. Schwartz, “Gay Consumers Come Out Spending,” *American Demographics* 42 (April 1992): 10–11.

- A study on the income of homosexuals and lesbians in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* reports: “[I]n our sample, men and women in same-sex couples have more education than people in different-sex couples.”

Marielka M. Klawitter and Victor Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (4): 662 (1998).

- A study in *Sociological Perspectives* concludes that “gays overall, in fact, have higher educational attainment than comparable nongays. Their analysis of census data on couples finds that the average educational level for same-sex couples is above that of nongays.” The study found that “65.7 percent of the respondents fall within the relatively narrow range of having a B.A. or an M.A., with only 7.9 percent reporting having no college, 19.1 percent reporting some college but no degree, and 7.2 percent having a Ph.D.”

Donald C. Barrett, Lance M. Pollack, and Mary L. Tilden “Teenage Sexual Orientation, Adult Openness, and Status Attainment in Gay Males,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 45 (2002): 166, 170.

Income Levels among Homosexuals

If a minority group has experienced a long history of pervasive discrimination and persecution (as homosexuals claim to have done), members of that group might be expected to have lower average incomes than the rest of the population. For example, 1999 Census Bureau statistics showed that 23.6 percent of black Americans live in poverty, compared to only 9.8 percent of white Americans.

Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, "Poverty by Family Status, Sex, and Race, 1986–99," in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2002* (New York: World Almanac Education Group, Inc., 2002), 388.

However, a similar comparison of the incomes of homosexuals and heterosexuals does not produce a similar result:

- "A measure often used to demonstrate sex or race discrimination—individual or household income—reveals an unexpected pattern. Surveys that collect such data usually find incomes for the lesbian and/or gay respondents that are higher than the national averages."

M.V. Lee Badgett and Rhonda M. Williams, "The Economics of Sexual Orientation: Establishing a Research Agenda," *Feminist Studies* 18 (3): 649–657 (Fall 1992).

A Study in Contradictions

Actually, homosexual advocates alternately portray two competing, mutually contradictory images of the homosexual community. One is that of homosexuals as an affluent "niche" market that demands special consideration by Madison Avenue and corporations. The other is the portrayal of homosexuals as suffering economic discrimination—an argument offered in support of their demands for special legal protections.

- A study in *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* downplays the former "image": "It has been widely reported over the last decade that gay and lesbian consumers constitute a more affluent market on average than non-gay American households. Meanwhile, in reaction to these (often exaggerated) claims concerning gay affluence, the opposite argument is now being advanced, namely that gay and lesbian consumers are actually less affluent than their non-gay counterparts."

Howard Buford, "Understanding Gay Consumers," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 7 (Spring 2000): 26–28.

- Similarly, a report in the *Contra Costa Times* comments on the two competing images: “Who’s right? A dearth of reliable demographic data on the gay market makes it hard to tell. But the debate is increasingly contentious and has created rifts within the gay community. Marketers say gay Americans should be recognized as a vibrant segment of the consumer market. But civil-rights advocates maintain that an exaggerated image of comfort and success hurts their battles for protection from workplace discrimination, the right to marry and other causes.”

Ronald Alsop, “Gay’s Affluence Data Contradicted; Are Homosexuals More Affluent than Others? Some Activists Suggest that the Data are Overstated,” *Contra Costa Times* (January 16, 2000): D1.

- The *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* study mentions those who attempt to “benefit by claiming that the gay market was extravagantly more affluent and better educated than mainstream America....More recently still, the opposite claims are being made by people who prefer to present lesbians and gay men as a “marginalized” or oppressed minority.”

Buford, “Understanding Gay Consumers,” 26–28.

- *Business Week* makes much the same point: “A common perception, especially among marketing experts, is that gays are far more affluent than other groups. Not so, say many who favor laws banning workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Gays, they claim, are often discriminated against by employers.”

Gene Koretz, “Do Gays Have Higher Incomes?” *Business Week* 21 (April 2003): 30.

Do homosexuals earn less—or more?

Conclusive evidence to answer this question once and for all may simply not be available. As one observer wrote:

- “The fact is, we don’t know with certainty how gay and lesbian affluence compares to that of the general public, because studies to date have not satisfied the rigors of sound methodology.”

Howard Buford, “Understanding Gay Consumers,” *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 7 (2): 26–28 (Spring 2000).

However, this uncertainty has not prevented one pro-homosexual researcher

from dedicating much of her professional career to decrying what she calls the “myth” of homosexual affluence. M.V. Lee Badgett, professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts, argues that:

- “[L]esbians and gay men earn no more than heterosexual people; indeed, in some cases gay men appear to earn less than comparable heterosexual men.”

M. V. Lee Badgett, *Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Americans*, (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies: 1998): 2.

Badgett is also the Director of the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, a “think tank” associated with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a pro-homosexual political activist organization. This strong bias should always be considered when weighing her research.

Ways of Measuring Affluence

No one measure of income is sufficient for analyzing this issue. Because women’s earnings are different from men’s, we can likewise differences in income between male homosexuals and lesbians. In addition, measuring the income of individual earners yields a different result from measures of total household income (i.e., the combined income of workers who live together).

As measured by individual income, there are indications that homosexual men may earn less than heterosexual men.

While the data appear to be inconclusive, some research does indicate that homosexual men earn slightly less than do heterosexual men. Pro-homosexual activist M. V. Lee Badgett, however, is the source of most of these claims.

- For example, in one study she claims that the “average gay man earns from 4 percent to 7 percent less than the average heterosexual man.”

Badgett, “The Myth of Gay & Lesbian Affluence,” 22–25.

- In another article, she reports: “By analyzing pooled 1989–1991 data from a national random sample, the General Social Survey, it is found that gay and bisexual male workers earned from 11 percent to 27 percent less than heterosexual male workers with the same

experience, education, occupation, marital status, and region of residence.”

M. V. Lee Badgett, “The Wage Effects of Sexual Orientation Discrimination,” *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, 48 (4): 726 (July 1995).

- *Business Week* reported one of the few studies by someone other than Badgett with similar findings: “Based on six years of survey data from the 1990s, a recent study by economists Nathan Berg of the University of Texas at Dallas and Donald Lien of the University of Texas at San Antonio finds that gay men earn about 22 percent less than similarly qualified straight men, controlling for such variables as age, race, education, occupation, and area of residence.”

Gene Koretz, “Do Gays Have Higher Incomes?” *Business Week*, 21 April 2003, 30.

Is discrimination the reason homosexual men may earn less?

Even if it is true that the individual income of homosexual men is less, there are a number of factors other than discrimination that could be the cause. For example:

- **Workforce participation.** A study in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* offers the following explanation as to why homosexual men often earn less: “Gay men, unlike heterosexual men, may share their home with other males and pool two male-sized incomes. Because of this income-sharing, and perhaps in anticipation of not serving as a primary household earner, gay men might devote less time and effort to the labor market.”

Klawitter and Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians,” 662.

- **Occupational choice.** Barrett et al., in *Sociological Perspectives*, reported that “occupation selection had the greatest negative effect on the incomes of men who could be defined as gay. In particular, men who could be defined as gay and in traditionally female-dominated jobs earned the least.” They concluded that “[G]ay males may be likely to self-select career paths in traditionally lower status and lower income female-dominated occupations.”

Donald C. Barrett, Lance M. Pollack, and Mary L. Tilden “Teenage Sexual Orientation, Adult Openness, and Status Attainment in Gay Males,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 45 (2): 168 (2002).

- **Marital status.** Barrett et al. report a 1990 study that found that “both gay men and unmarried heterosexuals...had lower income than married heterosexuals.” They also note a 2001 study that “the majority of the difference between gay men and nongays can be considered to derive from” their marital status, “rather than their sexual orientation.” Barrett et al. agree with this conclusion, noting “it may be that any negative or positive effects due to openness [about a homosexual orientation] are relatively limited and that the actual causes for reduced income of gay men may result from their status as single, not their status as gay.”

Barrett, *et al.*, “Teenage Sexual Orientation, Adult Openness, and Status Attainment in Gay Males,” 165, 166, 178–79.

Other research, however, indicates that “households” headed by homosexual men actually have higher incomes

- In the case of one study, high incomes were noted even in “households” consisting of only one homosexual man. *Sociological Perspectives* reports: “The average household income in the sample is also high and remains high even if analysis is limited to those who do not have a live-in partner (51.6 percent of those without a partner reported a household income of \$40,000 or more.)”

Barrett, *et al.*, “Teenage Sexual Orientation, Adult Openness, and Status Attainment in Gay Males,” 175.

- Even Badgett has admitted the increased earning power of homosexual male couples. “The Census results show that male same-sex couples have household incomes 24 percent higher than married couples,” she reports.

M.V. Lee Badgett, *Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Americans*, (New York: The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, 1998), 15.

- A study in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* reports: “Regardless of the level of employment protection, male same-sex couples had the highest household incomes, followed by married couples, female same-sex couples, and unmarried different-sex couples.”

Klawitter and Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for

Gays and Lesbians,” 669.

Lesbian incomes

As the quote above indicates, there is some evidence that female same-sex couples have lower household incomes than married couples. However, once again, the reason probably has less to do with discrimination based on sexual orientation than with a more basic factor—being female. Even Badgett concedes this:

- “In 1996, the typical woman working full-time, all year round, still earned only 74 percent of a man’s income. So we would expect the average household income of a female couple to be less than the income of a typical male-female couple...”

M.V. Lee Badgett, *Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Americans*, (New York: The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, 1998), 15.

- It is also notable that despite this factor, Klawitter and Flatt found that “female same-sex couples” still earned more than “unmarried different-sex couples.”

Klawitter and Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians,” 669.

As measured by individual income, lesbians earn more than heterosexual women

- Even Badgett, a chief proponent of the “income disparity based on discrimination” theory, is forced to admit that when it comes to lesbians, according to the 1990 U.S. Census “the average woman with a female partner earns more than the average heterosexual woman does.”

Badgett, “The Myth of Gay & Lesbian Affluence,” 22–25.

- *Sociological Perspectives* agrees: “Limited research on lesbians,” they note, “suggests that they may make more than comparable heterosexual women.”

Barrett, *et al.*, “Teenage Sexual Orientation, Adult Openness, and Status Attainment in Gay Males,” 164.

- The *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* also reports that even

in areas without laws to forbid employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, “women in same-sex couples earned about 18 percent more” than married women.

Mariëka M. Klawitter and Victor Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (4): 674 (1998).

- The same University of Texas study that found homosexual men earning less than heterosexuals also found that “gay women earn approximately 30 percent more than similarly qualified heterosexual women.”

Gene Koretz, “Do Gays Have Higher Incomes?” *Business Week*, 21 April 2003, 30.

Household Income According to Marketing Surveys

The evidence may be mixed regarding the individual income of homosexuals compared with heterosexuals. However, a number of marketing surveys have given indication that combined household income of gays and lesbians is higher than that of married households.

Some critics claim that not too much weight should be placed on market surveys, because they often use data drawn from an unrepresentative sample of the homosexual population, such as particular mailing lists.

- Badgett argues, for example, that “gay men and lesbians surveyed from samples of magazine readers have higher-than-average incomes compared to all Americans, but this does not translate into higher average incomes for gay and lesbian people in general.”

M.V. Lee Badgett, “The Myth of Gay & Lesbian Affluence,” *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 7 (2): 22–25 (Spring 2000).

However, even viewed with such caution, many of the marketing studies have shown impressive results, and make clear that many homosexuals are doing very well economically.

- An Internet survey of nearly 6,000 homosexuals and lesbians conducted jointly by the gay and lesbian market research firm Opus-Comm Group, Syracuse University, and the media/entertainment company GSociety, Inc., reports: “The median combined household income of gay couples is \$65,000, nearly 60 percent higher than the 1999 U.S. median income of \$40,800....More than a fifth of

respondents reported a total combined income of \$100,000 or more. Nearly 60 percent of gay male households and 46 percent of lesbian households showed a combined income in excess of \$60,000.”

“Gay Purchasing Power a Significant Force, Major Study Reveals,” News Release:OpusComm Group, Inc. (October 17, 2001).

The higher household incomes of homosexuals and lesbians is confirmed by the “gay-friendly” marketing firm Rainbow Referrals:

- “21 percent of Gay and Lesbian households have income greater than \$100,000 per year. This represents a greater household income versus the average U.S. household income.”
- “28 percent of Gay and Lesbian households have income greater than \$50,000 per year. This represents a greater household income versus the average U.S. household income.”

Furthermore, homosexuals are:

- “Twice as likely to have household income over \$60,000 than general U.S. population.”
- “Twice as likely to have household income over \$250,000 than general U.S. population.”

This leads to the conclusion that the “gay market:”

- “Consists of the most economically advantaged people in the U.S.”

“National Marketing Studies Confirm the Affluence of the Gay and Lesbian Market,” 23 April 2003, <http://www.rainbowreferrals.com>.

Their incomes and spending patterns make homosexuals a coveted market

- The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports: “Community Marketing reports that gays and lesbians spend \$54 billion a year on travel, and that 91 percent take yearly vacations, compared with the national average of 64 percent. And, when traveling, they spend at least \$1,500 per person.”

Linda K. Harris, “Philadelphia Finds a New Travel Clique,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 April 2003.

The marketing firm Rainbow Referrals cites data gleaned from national marketing studies that confirms the affluence of the gay and lesbian market, described as a “relatively untapped, lucrative and extremely brand loyal market.” These “gay-market facts” concerning the spending habits of homosexuals and lesbians include:

- Over 90 percent of homosexuals and lesbians took a domestic trip during the year of research study.
- 60 percent took a foreign trip in the last 3 years.
- They are three times more likely to be online than the average American (1997).
- They are four times as likely to spend over \$150 on long distance monthly.
- They are twice as likely to spend \$250 on cellular service.
- 65 percent identify themselves as having to have the “latest.”
- 68 percent readily upgrade to a product’s latest model.
- 77 percent “believe in indulging themselves.”
- 57 percent “prefer to buy top-of-the-line.”
- 59 percent describe themselves as buying for themselves whatever they want.

“National Marketing Studies Confirm the Affluence of the Gay and Lesbian Market,” 23 April 2003, <http://www.rainbowreferrals.com>.

Homosexuals and lesbians enjoy higher disposable income because they are unfettered by the expenses of rearing children

The homosexual community enjoys higher discretionary income largely because it has absolved itself of participating in one of society’s most vitally important functions: the rearing of the next generation.

- The *Gay Financial Network* reports: “Gay people are said to have higher disposable incomes chiefly because they don’t appear as likely to raise children. They gay community was charmingly known for

a while in the marketing industry as DINKS, short for Double Income, No Kids.”

Mike Wilke, “Commercial Closet: Are Gays All Rich?” 21 August, 2000, <http://www.gfn.com>.

- According to *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, lesbians are also comparatively unfettered by the rearing of children, which provides them with an advantage in the workplace: “Lesbians... may choose to get more education and to devote more time and energy to the labor market than heterosexual women. Lesbian couples are also much less likely than married women to be living with children. (Child-rearing responsibilities cut into time and energy to devote to market work.)”

Klawitter and Flatt, “The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians,” 662.

- Sarah Craig of Overlooked Opinions, a marketing firm that surveys gay consumers, reports in *American Demographics*: “Businesses have overlooked the fact that gay people often have more discretionary income.... They also travel more often simply because they have no children. ‘Gays can take a job transfer without thinking about schools or child care,’ she says.”

Schwartz, “Gay Consumers Come Out Spending,” 10–11.

- Syracuse University professor Amy Falkner, cited in the Opus-Comm study, concurs: “This means well-heeled gay and lesbian couples, sharing two incomes and generally without the expense of raising children (13 percent of Gay/Lesbian couples have children under 18 years of age living at home), can plan to be actively courted in the near future by industry and services anxious to open up this “new” market,” says Falkner.

Falkner, “Gay Purchasing Power a Significant Force,” 2.

- The *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* elaborates: “Two lifestyle facts in particular account for much of the difference in the gay community’s patterns of consumption: higher discretionary income and more disposable time. The absence of children in the vast majority of gay households means that these households, which probably do not earn dramatically more than others in the U.S., do have dramatically more discretionary income, that is, money that’s not earmarked for necessities like feeding and clothing the kids and paying for their health care. An even stronger effect of the absence of children is a

gain in disposable time. Today's "supermom"—or dad—devote much of their non-working time to child care, while gay and lesbian consumers are more likely to have time for leisure activities, and are thus especially interesting prospects for products and services that are consumed in units of disposable time. This includes entertainment and travel and all the industries they encompass, such as movies, premium TV channels, airlines, cruise companies, resorts, and so on."

Buford, "Understanding Gay Consumers," 26–28.

Prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals would have little effect in improving their income relative to heterosexuals

Pro-homosexual activists claim that homosexuals are disadvantaged relative to heterosexuals (even though the evidence with respect to income is mixed on that score, as we have seen). They also contend that laws barring "discrimination" based on "sexual orientation" are necessary and valuable in order to improve the economic status of the homosexual population.

There is evidence that such legal protections have boosted the economic position of some other groups in society:

- "Researchers have judged the federal-level antidiscrimination policies in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent revisions to have moderate but measurable effects on earnings for women and ethnic minorities."

Marieka M. Klawitter and Victor Flatt, "The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (4): 659 (1998).

However, contrary to what might be expected, Klawitter and Flatt found that neither private nondiscrimination policies nor public anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation have the same effect:

- "In contrast to studies of antidiscrimination laws for women and ethnic minorities, we have produced no evidence that employment protections for sexual orientation directly increase average earnings for members of same-sex households."

Marieka M. Klawitter and Victor Flatt, "The Effects of State and Local Antidiscrimination Policies on Earnings for Gays and Lesbians," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (4): 676 (1998).