

boundary violations (e.g., sexual harassment), incompetence, conflict, cross-gender or cross-race concerns, or undermining of the mentoring relationship by outsiders. Successful mentoring relationships are linked to shared goals and styles, open communication, willingness to address disagreements and conflicts, and commitment to the process and the relationship by both the mentor and the mentee.

For mentoring relationships in which one or both people are LGBTQ, there is unique potential for both challenge and support. For example, an “out” mentor’s influence on a sexual-minority mentee looking for role models or struggling with identity can be transformative (this is borne out in narrative studies of LGBTQ student experiences), but there also is potential for the mentee to use the mentor as a therapist or the mentor to impose an identity-disclosure approach on the mentee that is inappropriate. In educational settings, there may be pressure on mentees to work with the only LGBTQ mentor available, whose interests may or may not match those of the mentee, or there may be inflexibility in the system to allow the mentee to work with multiple mentors. Mentors or mentees who are not “out” may be challenged by the identity disclosure of the other in ways that may be uncomfortable or threatening, but they also may find inspiration for living a more authentic existence. Finally, although mentoring relationships are established for the benefit of the mentee, mentors also often find them rewarding experiences of professional collaboration and growth, and even though mentoring tasks may end formally, the collegiality of the relationship can last throughout the lives of both people.

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See also Career Development and Trajectories; Education; Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA); Work Environments; Workplace Discrimination; Workplace Policies

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METHODOLOGICAL DECISIONS BY RESEARCHERS OF LGBTQ POPULATIONS

Social scientists make many methodological decisions that can influence their research findings and the conclusions they draw about them. Scholars must decide how they will define their key concepts, design survey questions that measure these concepts appropriately, conduct multiple data analyses, decide which analyses make the most sense, and carefully identify the claims that they can make based on the entirety of their research. These challenges apply to all kinds of research, but may be even greater for scholarship that examines LGBTQ populations, as well as other groups that constitute a small percentage of the population. This entry reviews some key methodological issues and highlights one example of research to illustrate key issues that researchers examining LGBTQ populations may encounter and should be especially mindful of if their goal is to produce high-quality research.

Research on LGBTQ Families

One of the most controversial articles that purportedly studied lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) families was written by sociologist Mark Regnerus. This study provides a compelling example of both the challenges of studying LGBTQ populations and the many problems that scholars might find in

their own and in others' research. Using data from the New Family Structures Survey (NFSS), which he constructed, Regnerus concluded that adult children from same-sex families experience greater disadvantages than do children from two-biological parent families. This conclusion is counter to the social scientific consensus on this topic, a consensus that is based on the extant research on same-sex families. Research in sociology, psychology, and other social behavioral sciences has consistently documented minimal differences between children who were raised in same-sex households and their counterparts who were raised in father-mother households.

Regnerus's study elicited strong reactions, some positive, but mostly negative. It has been referred to positively by those in favor of same-sex marriage bans and critiqued by those that oppose such bans. Although critiques and reanalyses of the NFSS data have pinpointed serious problems in the methodological decisions made by Regnerus and noted that his findings are highly contingent on these decisions, this study has been cited in multiple court cases nationwide, as evidence that states should not recognize same-sex marriage. In a "Brief of Amicus/Amici Curiae Social Science Professors," for example, Regnerus and his colleagues argued that his study supported the claim that government should continue to restrict the definition of marriage to a union between a woman and a man.

The small group of scholars who have defended Regnerus's study claim that he relied on high-quality data. Specifically, they argue that the NFSS is the best survey on children's outcomes because it relied on the population-based random sampling techniques preferred by most social scientists and it measured a broad range of outcomes. This group of scholars favorably compares this study to other studies that, because of the difficulty of capturing such a small portion of the population, use non-random, convenience samples. The assessment by this group ignores the multiple studies that use population-based random sampling techniques and find minimal differences between children from LGB and heterosexual families.

Although efforts to obtain a population-based sample of LGB families are laudable, these efforts also must be accompanied by careful attention to all methodological decisions. Critics of Regnerus's study maintain that the findings from the study were a product of methodological decisions that do not reflect the standard recommendations of LGB scholars and the social and behavioral sciences more broadly. In other words, it is difficult to have confidence in the patterns reported in his article because there are serious concerns regarding measurement and data analysis. In the following sections, this entry discusses some of these concerns to show how methodological decisions during the design and analysis phases of research play a large role in shaping researchers' conclusions.

Design

In order to produce high-quality survey research, scholars must design surveys that measure what they claim to measure. This is a matter of validity. Admittedly, it is not straightforward to come up with valid measures, especially when studying LGB families. Without valid measures, however, even the most representative data sets cannot yield believable results. This concern has been directed to the Regnerus study as scholars have questioned whether Regnerus was really examining *children who were raised in same-sex families*.

Defining and Measuring Concepts

There are several different measurement issues that scholars who study LGB people and issues will encounter. First, researchers must consider how they define "lesbian" and "gay." Regnerus only used relationship history to define the respondents' parents as lesbian or gay, which may underestimate the number of same-sex families because some individuals who identify as lesbian and gay may not have been in a relationship with someone of the same sex. Researchers should ask questions about individuals' sexual attraction and behaviors, as well as how individuals define their sexual orientation.

Second, scholars need to be specific about how they define LGB families. For example, researchers should consider the amount of time a child should reside in a family in order to be defined as “raised” in that family structure. In Regnerus’s definition of same-sex family, he included children who reported that they never had lived with a lesbian or gay parent or spent as little as 1 year living in a household with a parent who had had a same-sex romantic relationship. Since Regnerus’s study was used—by others and himself—to advocate against same-sex marriage, it also is important to distinguish between children who were raised by a single parent who had had a same-sex romantic relationship; children who were raised by two same-sex parents; and children who experienced family transitions, such as parental divorce, that might lead to disadvantages for them, regardless of the relationship history of their parents.

Third, researchers have to consider whether they have constructed appropriate comparison groups. Regnerus’s definition of same-sex families was very broad (it included mostly unmarried and single-parent families), but his definition of two-biological parent families was quite specific (it only included two-parent married families). Some critics suggest that to fairly and systematically compare these groups, Regnerus should have focused on parents who identified as lesbian or gay and who were also married and in a relationship prior to having children together.

Survey Pretests

Researchers need to test their survey questions before conducting the survey to understand how respondents will interpret their questions. Frequently, respondents do not interpret the questions in the way that the researcher intends or may not understand certain words or questions. This problem may be exacerbated when being asked questions regarding sexuality or sexual relations. In fact, subsequent analyses of the Regnerus study suggest that a non-negligible number of respondents misinterpreted questions about parental relationship history, resulting in a

mislabeling of several respondents as being raised in same-sex households.

Analysis

Even after survey data are collected and recorded, researchers must make many decisions during the data analysis phase. Scientists should take multiple steps, known as sensitivity analyses, to ensure that their results are not tied to just one of the many possible methods of analysis and data presentation. In other words, they should double-check and triple-check their results using multiple methods. If the original findings change in the subsequent analyses, this is evidence that results are tied to a particular method, and the researcher should determine and use the most logical analysis strategy, regardless of whether that strategy results in the findings the researcher expects or wants to find.

Once again, it is helpful to use Regnerus’s study as an example of the analysis problems that arise when conducting research. In order to identify whether Regnerus’s findings changed based on different types of analyses, University of Connecticut sociologist Simon Cheng and Indiana University sociologist Brian Powell reanalyzed the NFSS data and conducted many sensitivity analyses. They carefully examined respondents’ data because they were concerned that some respondents may not have answered questions correctly because they (1) misinterpreted the meaning of the questions, (2) accidentally clicked on the wrong answer, (3) gave a response as a joke, or (4) were not paying attention.

Cheng and Powell found that some of the responses did not make sense. For example, one respondent categorized as being raised in a same-sex family also claimed that he was 25 years old, was 7 feet, 8 inches tall, weighed 88 pounds, had been married 8 times, and had 8 children. Another respondent reported being arrested as a 1-year-old. These examples are accompanied by other implausible answers by respondents who were categorized as being from a same-sex family. When respondents have apparent errors in their reports, research should, at minimum, assess the extent to

which the key findings are due to these cases. Cheng and Powell concluded that over one third of the cases that Regnerus had categorized as a “same-sex family” were unreliable or inconsistent, and they could not confidently categorize these individuals as children raised in same-sex families.

There are many other analysis techniques that researchers must use to make sure that their findings are robust. For example, Cheng and Powell used statistical techniques to ensure the differences found between same-sex families and two-biological parent families were not a result of other potential differences between these two family types, such as family income and region of residence. When Cheng and Powell performed these analyses on the NFSS data, they found that there were few differences between same-sex families and two-biological parent families. Cheng and Powell concluded that Regnerus’s findings were a product of one particular analysis strategy, which did not reflect the preferred methods of the field. In addition, the differences that did remain, which Regnerus called “disadvantages,” were not in fact disadvantages (e.g., whether or not the respondent identified as entirely heterosexual and the number of sex partners the respondent had had).

Conclusion

Social scientists must make many methodological decisions about measurement and analysis. These decisions will shape their findings and the conclusions they make about their data. Data on small groups, such as LGBTQ populations, are particularly sensitive to analytical decisions. Therefore, it is even more essential to carefully design surveys and to use multiple statistical techniques to make sure one’s findings are not the product of any single method of analysis. Although this entry uses a single study to illustrate methodological pitfalls, other studies may be limited because of data design and analysis strategies. Researchers in any field should carefully consider whether they can make certain claims based on their research design and methods of analysis. For example, Regnerus claimed he was measuring the outcomes of *adult*

children who were raised in same-sex households. Yet much of his sample consisted of children who had no sustained experience living with lesbian or gay parents, and even fewer lived in a household with two same-sex parents—making it imprudent, at minimum, to conclude from his findings that children raised in same-sex families experience any disadvantages. The methodological limitations of his study make it difficult to reject the longstanding empirical consensus in the social and behavioral sciences that there are minimal differences between children raised by LGB parents and those raised by heterosexual parents.

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See also Children With LGBTQ Parents, Academic Outcomes; Children With LGBTQ Parents, Psychosocial Outcomes; Ethical Research With Sexual and Gender Minorities; Population-Based Surveys, Collection of Data on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; Quantitative Research; Scientific Integrity, Debates About

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MICROAGGRESSIONS

Individuals who identify as LGBTQ face overt discrimination (e.g., physical violence) as well as less conspicuous forms of stigmatization, which are denoted as *microaggressions*. Microaggressions are subtle experiences of discrimination that communicate derogatory messages to members of marginalized groups (e.g., women, people of color, and LGBTQ people). Microaggressions frequently go unrecognized, typically resulting from unconscious beliefs regarding the characteristics of specific groups. For example, someone may tell a lesbian that she is “too pretty to be gay.” Although intended as a compliment, such a statement communicates a derogatory message (that lesbian women must be unattractive) based upon a potentially unrecognized personal belief (that lesbian women are usually unattractive).

Microaggressions can be grouped into three categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. *Microassaults* are explicit attacks, such as using the phrase “that’s so gay!” to describe something as undesirable. *Microinsults* are communications (verbal or nonverbal) that demonstrate insensitivity regarding an individual’s identity, such as expressing disgust when observing a same-sex couple. *Microinvalidations* are statements that belittle the experiences of oppressed groups, such as claiming that an LGBTQ individual is just going through a phase.

Microaggressions can be grouped into eight common themes: use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology, endorsing heteronormative/gender-normative culture, assuming a universal LGBTQ experience, exoticization, discomfort with/disapproval of LGBTQ experiences, denying the existence of heterosexism/transphobia, assuming that sexual and gender minorities have a form of sexual pathology or perversion, and denying