

Leaving LGBTQ+ out of 2020 census perpetuates inequality

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The Census Bureau keeps track of how many people speak Gaelic, how many employees the greeting card industry has and how many houses have wood-burning stoves. Researchers, administrators and anyone with a basic knowledge of statistics can see how America has changed over the years for better or worse.

Census Bureau data are why we know that the wage gap for women's wages has narrowed from about 60 cents for every dollar a man earned in Washington state in 1960 to 77 cents in 2016. In Oregon, women make 79 cents for every dollar that Oregon men make. The data have prompted legislative action and policy changes.

But sexual and gender minorities are one of the few categories of people not covered by the Census Bureau. This means that problems that affect the community — including a wage gap that persists even here in Washington — are out of sight and out of mind.

Researchers like Marieka Klawitter of the University of Washington have studied this for decades. In 2015, she undertook a meta-analysis of 31 studies going back to 1995. She found that on average, gay men earned 11 percent less than heterosexual men. Lesbians, however, earned 9 percent more than heterosexual women.

Without census data, though, they've been reliant on surveys, presenting an imperfect picture.

We're finally starting to get federal data on the wage gap, but not because the government wants

to collect it. As same-sex marriage became legal, it became possible to disaggregate the data based on the sex of married individuals.

The data, recently published in an Economic Opportunity Institute report, show the same gap that Klawitter found. In Seattle, men in same-sex marriages earned a median of 18.4 percent less than men in opposite-sex marriages. Women in same-sex marriages in Seattle earned a median of 1.4 percent more than women in opposite-sex marriages — but they still make 25.6 percent less than men in same-sex marriages.

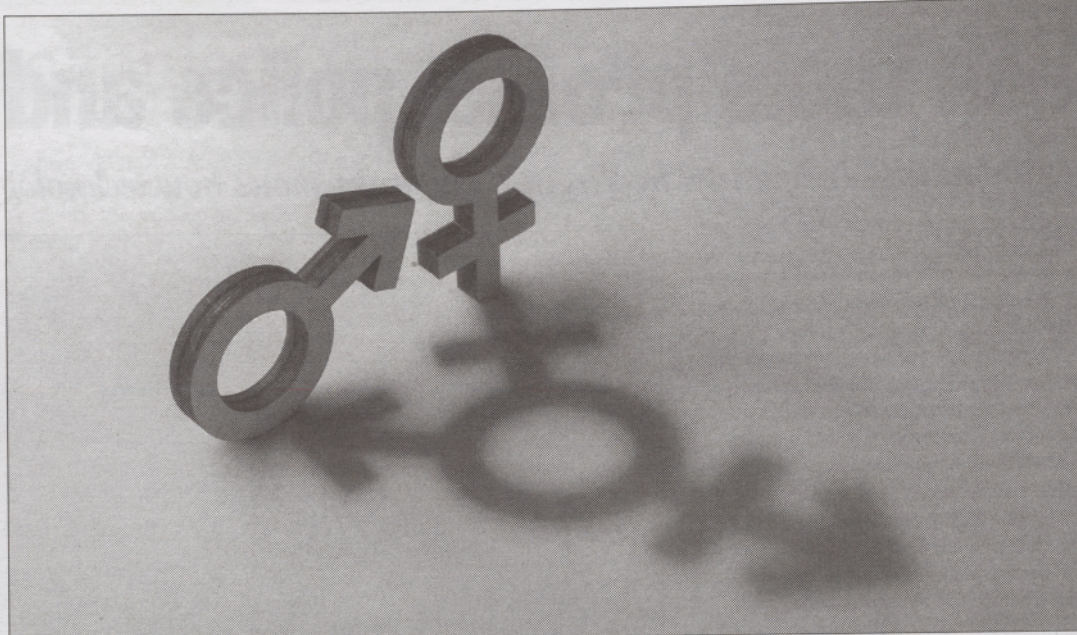
Why do gay men earn less than straight men and lesbians make more than straight women? They're two sides to the same coin: Gender bias. Researchers at the IZA Institute of Labor Economics found that gay men are penalized for not having the "stereotypically male heterosexual traits thought to be required among managers." On the other hand, researchers from McGill University found that lesbians benefit because

they are "perceived as less feminine and closer to the unencumbered male ideal." It's also been shown that women who have never lived with a man as an adult make more money, regardless of sexuality.

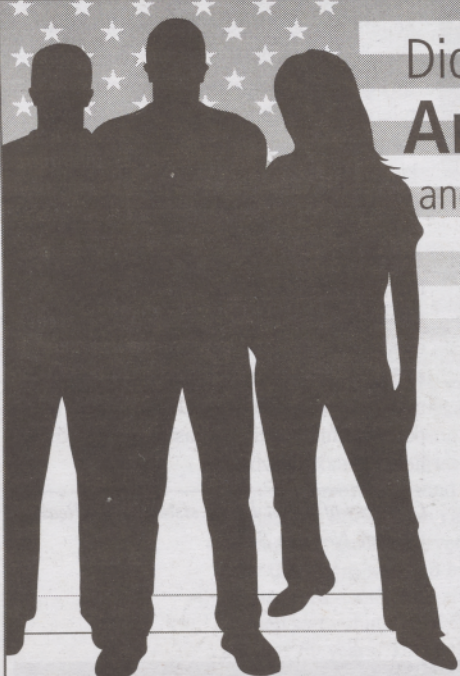
Like other documented wage gaps, so much of it boils down to stereotypes and devaluing what is seen as feminine work.

It's never been safe to be LGBTQ+ in the United States, but the current climate, which rejects even the collection of data, is making it less so. The data are not just important for wages — they also show gentrification and gaps in health insurance. If Washington wants to be serious about safeguarding the lives and equality of LGBTQ+ people, it must find a way to intuit the data that the federal government refuses to collect.

Courtesy of Street Roots' sister paper, Real Change News in Seattle.



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