LGBTQ Institute Southern Survey:
Design and Methodological Overview

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This report and more information about the study and the LGBTQ Institute is available online at: www.lgbtqsouthernsurvey.org.

This research brief was produced in collaboration and through a partnership between the LGBTQ Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and Georgia State University.

The LGBTQ Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights connects academics and advocates to advance LGBTQ equity through research and education focused on the American South.

Georgia State University is an enterprising urban public research institution in Atlanta. A national leader in graduating students from diverse backgrounds, Georgia State provides a rich experience with award-winning housing, hundreds of student clubs and organizations, and one of the most diverse student bodies in the country.

Statement of Independence and Objectivity: The LGBTQ Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and Georgia State University is committed to rigorous, independent research. We do not alter our findings and conclusions to accommodate funders, other organizations, government bodies or officials.
Introduction to the LGBTQ Institute Southern Survey

Purpose:

The purpose of the Southern Survey is to document and examine the contemporary life circumstances and social experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people living across the American South. Our primary research aim is to improve public and scientific understanding of LGBTQ Southerners’ educational and employment status, access to healthcare, community and political involvement, and experiences of sexuality and/or gender-related discrimination. The data was collected using an untraceable, online, anonymous survey of self-identified LGBTQ adults living in 14 US states, including: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. In addition to analyzing the survey data, we also plan to compare the survey results with corresponding publicly available national and state-level data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other national surveys.

The results of this study will be used to help raise awareness and contribute new scientific knowledge about the experiences and needs of LGBTQ people in the South. We also believe that LGBTQ community organizations, state and local government will find the results of this study useful in planning services, initiatives, and programming for this vulnerable minority population. Our initial focus will be on preparing a series of public reports about the life of the LGBTQ people living in the South as a region and in each of the 14 focal states. These reports, and additional research briefs will be made publicly available via the LGBT Institute's website at: www.lgbtsouthernsurvey.org. In addition, we plan to use the data to develop manuscripts for publication in scientific literature.

Background:

The LGBTQ Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights was established in 2015 to shine a steady spotlight on the need for LGBTQ rights, recognize advances and milestones, and create a public imperative for LGBTQ equality in the south and around the world. In order to advance LGBTQ rights and equality, the LGBTQ Institute, in partnership with Georgia State University, collaborated with many community and grassroots organizations and individuals across the south to develop the LGBTQ Institute Southern Survey to fill a gap – there are not only very few representative surveys of LGBTQ people but there are no targeted surveys in the South. Therefore, the LGBT Institute Southern Survey is a survey of, by, and for Southern LGBTQ people.

Furthermore, while planning for this survey began in 2015, the need for this survey became even more urgent as LGBTQ people continue to be erased from federal policy and research. Thus, our hope is that this research amplifies the voices of LGBTQ Southerners and the issues affecting our lives, creating a safer and more welcoming South – a region where LGBTQ people have been under

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1 Respondents could select the following for sexuality: Heterosexual, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Other Sexuality (note that Queer is include in the “other sexuality” section, as well as Asexual or anything that is not LGB or heterosexual). Gender is broken down into Cisgender Male, Cisgender Female (Cisgender means individuals whose current gender identity and assigned sex at birth is the same), Transgender and Other Gender. Therefore, you may see LGBT and LGBTQ used at different times, depending on the data being discussed.
attack most often legislatively, politically, and physically throughout history. We believe this resource can help tell our stories, reframe narratives, and dismantle discriminatory systems. And, we endeavor for this data to serve as a tangible tool that can be used by our partner organizations (many of which are completely volunteer-led and have limited resources) as they develop their policy initiatives, grassroots strategies, and fundraising campaigns.

**Survey Preparation:**

The LGBTQ Institute's Advisory Board, a collective of LGBTQ advocates and academics, set the agenda for our work which centers on three focus areas: 1) Education and Employment, 2) Public Health and Wellness, and 3) Criminal Justice and Safety, with a specific emphasis on the Southern LGBT experience. The LGBTQ Institute and Georgia State University created a research partnership which provides experienced scholars who coordinate research initiatives in our three focus areas using a community-based participatory research model. Over the course of 2016, quarterly public meetings were held to obtain community input on key questions they would like to be asked in a survey of Southern LGBTQ people as it pertained to each focus area. More than 150 people took part in the meetings, which centered on filling the research gaps within the focus areas.

**Survey Design:**

By the winter of 2016, hundreds of potential questions had been submitted and the research team began designing the survey tool. The entire survey and study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (Approval H17451). The survey was designed to rely on passive, snowball recruitment over an approximate seven (7) month field period via a URL that was distributed between June 19, 2017 to January 13, 2018 in both English and Spanish. The completely anonymous survey was administered using Qualtrics, a survey administration package licensed by Georgia State University.

The first two sections of the survey presented potential respondents with a detailed informed consent statement, with an additional reminder regarding the risks of participating in online surveys. In this regard, recruitment of human subjects occurred entirely online via the web interface. When respondents consented to participate, they were presented with a series of required screening questions asking them to verify their age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and whether they resided in one of the focal 14 southern states (including both a state identifier and ZIP code). All respondents had to verify that they were adults over the age of 18 and currently resided in one of the 14 southern states before they were allowed to take the survey.

**Survey Content:**

The full survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participation was completely voluntary, and the respondents were allowed and informed that they could skip any of the questions in the survey (except for the mandatory screening questions). Modeled after the General Social Survey (National Opinion Research Center n.d.), the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (US Census Bureau n.d.), and a Pew Research Center national survey of LGBT Americans (Pew Research Center 2013), this survey is an omnibus survey that included a range of questions about respondents' current living situation, education and employment situation, and access to healthcare.
It also included questions about subjects’ political attitudes as well as their perceptions of and involvement in the local LGBTQ community, and other topical areas. Specifically:

1. Identity and Location Screeners (Age, State, Zip Code, Gender/Sex; Sexuality Identity (Required)
2. Gender and Sexuality Identity Details
3. Demographic Background
4. Educational and Employment Background and Experiences
5. Relationship Status, Living Situation, and Household Composition
6. Health and Wellness
7. Political and Social Attitudes
8. Sexual-Gender Identity Development and Experiences
9. LGBT Community Perceptions and Involvement
10. LGBTQ-Related Experiences of Discrimination
11. Veteran Status
12. Religion
13. Individual and Household Income

Survey Outreach:

Prior to the launch of the survey, research fellows compiled an extensive contact list of local, state, and regional LGBTQ nonprofits, supportive businesses, and houses of worship within the 14 focal states using web resources. On June 1, 2017, initial emails were sent to the list asking organizations to serve as partners. The email made clear there was no cost to become a partner and a one-page overview of the project was attached describing the reason for the survey and the benefits. The benefits included:

- Recognition as a partnering organization on the survey website, social media, and in the full report and state specific reports
- Opportunity to participate in biweekly (every two weeks) conference calls that serve as a community of practice for partnering organizations to strategize and receive updates
- Data that can be used for policy development, grassroots organizing, and fundraising
- Opportunity to request additional analysis of the data around areas of interest

The overview included a timeline of the project and detailed what a partner's involvement looked like, which included: (1) Registering your organization as a partner; (2) Promoting the survey (using sample tweets and posts included in the online toolkit); and, once published, (3) Utilizing the survey findings in policy development, grassroots organizing, and fundraising.

Information about the study and an open public invitation to participate was advertised and distributed with the assistance of our network of partner organizations and agencies across 14 focal states. The survey website: southernsurvey17.org was a key tool platform for prospective survey partners, participants, and the public. The website has included an overview of the survey, a listing of survey partners and a number of ways to promote the survey, including sample emails, tweets, and a customizable social media tool that could generate unique social media posts.
The website also included partner sign-up links, a copy of the survey protocol, and an online toolkit to help individuals and organizations promote the survey. In addition, we worked with these agencies to disseminate the study invitation via local social and print media outlets and websites of interest to the LGBTQ community. We also encouraged individuals and organizations in the targeted areas to share information about the study and the project URL with LGBTQ people they knew in their area.

Throughout the survey period, the LGBTQ Institute research fellows continued outreach to prospective partners with an emphasis on underrepresented communities, onboarded new partners (sending the link to the online toolkit and letting them know about partner calls) and updating the partner and prospect outreach lists. Survey partner calls were conducted every two weeks beginning in mid-July to update partners on the number of people taking the survey from each state and address any additional issues and strategies for engagement. Partners and survey participants promoted the survey on social media through their online networks. Facebook advertisements were also created to engage LGBTQ people to take the survey. Two ads were created for the general LGBTQ population and ran on July 14-17 and September 24-29 reaching 24,692 people resulting in 4,490 impressions and 382 survey link clicks.

As the survey period continued into October, the participation rates by communities of color was less than expected, given their presence in the population and outreach to organizations serving primarily people of color. From that point forward, all ads were created to focus on communities of color, with the help of the Advisory Board and partnering organizations, vetting the sample ads, which we used for the remainder of the survey period.² The ads reached 100,051 people and resulted in 129,883 impressions and 3,113 survey link clicks.

Ultimately, the LGBTQ Institute partnered with 146 nonprofit, community, and state organizations across 14 southern states to disseminate the survey. Approximately 11,644 people entered the survey website. Approximately 6,502 people completed the survey who met our study eligibility criteria. The Principal Investigator and members of the approved GSU study team and solely responsible for the collection, security, management, and analysis of the data gathered as part of this study. All of the analyses will be conducted on password protected computers using GSU software and computing resources.

**Survey Strengths and Limitations:**

**Major Strengths**

- Survey was designed with significant community input throughout the project
- Survey was carried out using existing resources and volunteer labor
- Sample size is large
- Sample was generated with the help of a wide and large network of LGBT community organizations
- There are many questions on a wide range of topics

² The ads ran from Sept. 29-Oct. 7, Oct. 13-27; Oct. 20-Nov. 16, Nov. 22-Dec. 1, Dec. 9-28, Jan. 4-5, 2018; and Jan. 8-12, 2018
There are very few representative surveys of LGBTQ people and NO targeted surveys in the South

Major Limitations

- It is a convenience sample and may not be representative of all LGBTQ people or all of the intersectional experiences in the South
- The participation rates by people of color are underrepresented in the sample, given their rates in the population
- The data do not provide for a full, robust insight/in-depth analysis of the intersectionality present with respondents, as many issues that intersect due to multiple identities participants embody
- The data are based on a survey

Dissemination of Findings:

In addition to analyzing the Survey data, the team is compiling data from publicly available national and state level data from sources to use in comparing the experiences of LGBTQ Southerners with other groups of Americans. The approved study team will also take the lead in preparing the planned public reports (at least one for the region as a whole and one for each of the 14 focal states) as well as manuscripts to be submitted for publication consideration in scientific and professional journals. The LGBTQ Institute will also be releases future analyses of this survey data exploring how different experiences, identities, and variables interact to contribute to the life experiences of LGBTQ people in the South.

With this survey and other programs at the LGBTQ Institute, we envision creating the needed pipeline that connects academics to advocates in order to move from research to action by providing critical, potentially actionable information to agencies and state and local governments interested in responding to the unique needs of this population. This infrastructure can assist in developing community intervention resources and bring to light real-world experiences of those who may not immediately benefit from recent legal gains, and whose issues have not been at the forefront. All of the reports and information about papers published from this study will be made publicly available at: www.lgbtqsouthernsurvey.org

Contact:

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact: Dr. Eric R. Wright, Principal Investigator, Georgia State University at (404) 413-6527 or ewright28@gsu.edu or Ryan Roemerman, LGBTQ Institute Executive Director at (404) 991-6985 or ryan.roemerman@lgbtqinstitute.org.

References: