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Amanda K. Baumle *Editor*

International Handbook on the Demography of Sexuality

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Editor

Amanda K. Baumle

International Handbook on the Demography of Sexuality



Editor

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Part 1

Introduction to the Demography of Sexuality

1. Introduction: The Demography of Sexuality

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Abstract

The field of demography has historically been slow to embrace research that addresses the heterogeneity of populations. Indeed, research on the manner in which race and sex affect demographic outcomes has only become commonplace in the last 20–30 years (Saenz and Morales 2005; Riley 2005; Hauser and Duncan 1959). It is perhaps unsurprising then that demographic research has paid little attention to sexuality as a whole, or to sexual orientation in particular.

Introduction

The field of demography has historically been slow to embrace research that addresses the heterogeneity of populations.¹ Indeed, research on the manner in which race and sex affect demographic outcomes has only become commonplace in the last 20–30 years (Saenz and Morales 2005; Riley 2005; Hauser and Duncan 1959). It is perhaps unsurprising then that demographic research has paid little attention to sexuality as a whole, or to sexual orientation in particular.

The majority of demographic articles that do mention some aspect of sexuality are those that focus on sexual behavior as it relates to sexually transmitted infections (e.g. Schiltz 1998; Ericksen and Trocki 1994; Smith 1991). And, at demography conferences, sessions devoted solely to the examination of the demography of sexuality have occurred only in the past decade, and quite infrequently. Sexuality, therefore, has been introduced into the field of demography primarily through its connections to sexual behavior (rather than identity or desire) and, in turn, reproduction. It is to be expected that sexual orientation and other aspects of sexuality would have found their first entrance into the discipline through their interconnections with fertility, one of the core demographic processes. Indeed, it is noteworthy that so little demographic work has been done in the broad area of sexuality, given its undeniable tie to fertility outcomes.²

More recent research, however, shows that sexuality affects demographic outcomes well beyond specific studies estimating the odds of contracting sexually

transmitted infections (see e.g. Baumle and Poston 2011; Baumle et al. 2009; Gates and Ost 2004; Walther and Poston 2004; Black et al. 2000). Sexuality results in differential outcomes on a number of issues that are fundamental to population study, including migration, fertility, morbidity, and other areas (see e.g. Baumle et al. 2009; Gates and Ost 2004).

It is important, therefore, for demographers to consider the effects of sexuality on demographic factors, in addition to how sexuality intersects with other demographic characteristics—such as sex and gender—to shape outcomes. This handbook takes a step toward encouraging the incorporation of sexuality variables into demographic analyses, as well as demographic theory and models. In this introductory chapter, I provide a brief overview of the history of research on population sexuality, as well as explore what it would mean to formalize the development of the demography of sexuality. I conclude by highlighting the sections of this handbook and the topics covered herein.

A Brief History of Sex Research

Alfred Kinsey

In the early 1900s, sex research in the United States was very limited, focusing primarily on that of “deviant” sexual activities. Prohibitions on material of a sexual nature were to such a degree that it was unlawful to mail research surveys, or any other sexual material (Jones 1997). As a result, when the Rockefeller Foundation began to fund research in the area of sexuality in the 1930s, much of the initial research focused on areas such as prostitution, homosexuality, or endocrinology (Jones 1997). It was Alfred Kinsey who gained notoriety by encouraging the development of a methodical analysis of “typical” sexual behavior. Departing from a focus on the so-called deviant sexual experience, Kinsey explored the sexual behavior of married men and women in the United States, publishing two important works: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

Trained as an entomologist, Kinsey advocated detailed data collection and analysis when it came to human sexual behavior. To this end, his data were collected from thousands of individual “sexual histories,” in which Kinsey and his trained interviewers detailed sexual desires, behaviors, and identities from pre-pubescence onward (Jones 1997; Bullough 1994). Although his samples were those of convenience, and thus flawed in terms of their representativeness, Kinsey’s work nonetheless emphasized the notion of an objective and scientific approach to studying sexuality (Erickson and Steffen 1999; Jones 1997). This perspective was embraced by his successors, who were able to build upon the public dialogue about sexuality generated by Kinsey in order to further data collection efforts.

Beyond data collection, one of Kinsey’s most invaluable contributions to sexuality research concerns his seven point continuum regarding heterosexuality and homosexuality. In his analysis of sexual behaviors and desires, Kinsey emphasized individual variation. He did not ask individuals to simply identify as homosexual or heterosexual. Instead he questioned them on a broad range of behaviors and desires and then classified individuals along a continuum, with “essentially heterosexual” and

“essentially homosexual” as the extreme ends of the scale (Kinsey 1948). Similarly, when Kinsey presented data on his findings concerning homosexuality, he presented a range of percentages expressing differing degrees of behavior rather than classifying individuals into a binary scheme (Kinsey 1948). This approach was novel in many respects as it acknowledged the socially constructed nature of sexual categories: there is not an “essential” characteristic that renders one heterosexual or homosexual, which consequently makes categorization of sexual identities challenging. As discussed in Chapter 3 on measurement of sexual identity, researchers today still grapple with the best way to capture this variation in sexuality on surveys and in interviews.

Two of Kinsey’s findings have particularly persevered over the years. The most notable, perhaps, is his estimate that approximately 10% of men are gay (Kinsey 1948). This number is oft-cited as evidence that the gay population is not insignificant in size, particularly by those pursuing policy change. Notably, this is actually an overestimate even according to Kinsey’s nonrepresentative sample. Although Kinsey noted that approximately 10% of men reported some same-sex sexual desire, only about 4% classified themselves as “exclusively homosexual” on his scale (Kinsey 1948).³ Nonetheless, these data contributed toward a reduction in the stigma associated with homosexuality by “normalizing” the behavior to a broader segment of the population.

In terms of female sexuality, Kinsey’s (1953) work challenged the notion of whether and how females experience orgasm. The assumption was that females achieve orgasm primarily through intercourse, but Kinsey’s data provided one of the first indications of the importance of clitoral stimulation for orgasm and that orgasm was commonly achieved during masturbation and “heavy petting”. Although this and related findings are perhaps more commonly attributed to Shere Hite (2004), Kinsey’s work was some of the first to describe female sexuality in a manner beyond that of a passive participant in intercourse.

Kinsey’s research laid the groundwork for later demographic analyses of sexual behavior and desire. His contributions to both data collection and analysis for sexuality research lend merit to the assertions by Bullough (2004) and others that after Kinsey, “sex will never be the same.”

Sex Research After Kinsey

Since Kinsey’s groundbreaking work, there have been huge strides made in sex research. Data collection on sexuality has increased with scientific inquiry being shaped both by methodological developments as well as social changes or “crises” which prompt additional collection. As Michaels and Giami (1999) note, the content of data collected has often been spurred by crises. For example, while Kinsey’s data collection focused primarily on sexuality within marriage, surveys from the 1970s focused on heterosexual activity within nonmarital relationships, sexual positions, contraception, and abortion; the focus on such questions was spurred by the women’s movement and the notion of sexual freedom. The HIV/AIDS scare in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in increased data collection on the number of sexual partners, condom use, anal sex, and homosexuality. And, as identity politics have increasingly dominated the landscape, we have seen data collection turn toward sexual identities. In

this section, I provide an overview of three of the most well-known sexuality studies as illustrative of the evolution in data collection. Issues surrounding sexuality data collection and measurement are considered in more detail in [Chapters 2 and 3](#).

In the mid-1970s, Shere Hite conducted some of the most prominent studies of female sexuality. Published during the height of the women's movement, her "Hite Reports" were reflective of the period's focus on women's equality and sexual freedom. Advertising through women's magazines, Hite distributed essay questionnaires to women in order to gather data about the manner in which women themselves describe their sexuality (Weisstein 2006; Hite 2004; Ericksen and Steffen 1999). Hite argued that previous (primarily male) researchers had dictated to respondents what was or was not important to describe in terms of one's sexuality. With the essay approach, women had more freedom to describe rather than to simply select a pre-ordained response. Consequently, Hite collected data about sexual behaviors, as well as love and relationships.⁴

One of Hite's (2004) most important substantive findings was that 70% of women do not orgasm from intercourse alone, but do orgasm from more direct clitoral stimulation like through masturbation, genital touching, or oral sex. Hite was not the first one to realize the importance of the clitoris in female orgasm. Masters and Johnson (1966) noted that clitoral stimulation was important, but they asserted that females should receive enough clitoral stimulation during intercourse for orgasm. Similarly, Kinsey (1953) noted that women had the highest rate of orgasm during masturbation, but his analysis of the data did not then lead him to question whether this meant that orgasm during intercourse was limited due to insufficient stimulation. Hite contended that these researchers viewed female sexuality through "cultural blinders", wherein a patriarchal ideology detailed the appropriate sexual submissiveness and pleasures for women (Weisstein 2006: 458). Because of her distinct viewpoint and approach to gathering and analyzing data from women, she came to a different, maybe seemingly obvious, conclusion: that it was *normal* for women not to orgasm during vaginal intercourse. If most women said that was the case, then it was not due to low sex drive or another physical or psychological dysfunction. Hite's findings led her to question how we define sex, in that if our definition is one of penetrative intercourse, but women typically do not orgasm through intercourse, then is our definition of sex "sexist" (Hite 2004)? Her data collection, findings, and analysis are typified by the time period in which she was conducting her research, and raised questions regarding the manner in which sex researchers were (and should be) gathering data about sex.

In order to address health concerns that are linked to sexual behavior, such as HIV/AIDS, Edward Laumann and colleagues (1994) conducted the first nationally representative sex survey in 1992. The National Health and Social Life Survey captured data on topics such as the prevalence and type of sexual behaviors, the number of sexual partners, sexual networks, epidemiological issues, homosexuality, early sexual experiences, sex within marriage and cohabiting relationships, and fertility (Laumann et al. 1994). Laumann and colleagues, like Kinsey, attempted to assess the number, frequency, and types of sexual behaviors. Their data collection and analysis, however, went further in order to understand the manner in which sexual partners negotiate, navigate, and ultimately understand their interaction. In this

manner, their efforts incorporated the social aspect of sexual experience rather than simply the biological. Furthermore, their focus on capturing data on sexual desire, behavior, and identity render this survey important, as it incorporates a holistic approach to understanding sexuality that is usually absent from survey data collection efforts. This approach has at times been mirrored in later sex surveys (see [Chapters 2 and 3](#) for further discussion).

Today, some of the most prominent sex-related surveys focus on gathering data about sexual identity and corresponding attitudes, behaviors, or characteristics. For example, data from the General Social Survey and the U.S. Census capture sexual identity that can then be used to examine questions regarding political/social attitudes, demographic characteristics, economic outcomes, and family composition. Given the pressing social and legal issues surrounding sexual minorities, data which are able to shed light on existing inequalities or provide greater understanding of the lives of LGB persons have garnered the greatest attention by academics and policymakers. Publications based on such data have been used, for example, to explore whether antidiscrimination laws are needed due to inequalities in income based on sexual orientation (see e.g. Baumle and Poston [2011](#); Badgett [2001](#)).

The study of population sexuality is accordingly a constantly evolving field, with the quantity and content of data collected spurred on by broader changes in the public dialogue about sex. For demographers seeking to study sexuality at this point in time, the availability of data on sexual identity in nationally representative surveys permits new analyses of the extent to which sexual orientation affects traditional demographic outcomes. In the following section, I discuss some of the ways in which demographers might advance the discipline through consideration of sexuality.

The Demography of Sexuality

Although Kinsey's work might have spurred the collection of data on population sexuality, it is nonetheless the case that studies of sexuality have rarely been the foray of self-identified demographers. Instead, epidemiologists, psychologists, geographers, economists, and others have generated much of our current knowledge base regarding sexual behaviors and identities. While sexuality studies are increasingly published in demographic outlets, such articles remain limited in both number and scope.

In 2006, my colleagues and I conducted a search of the population journals in JSTOR⁵ focusing particularly on articles containing terms related to sexual orientation (Baumle et al. [2009](#)). We found that in the prior three decades, only 69 articles contained the phrase "sexual orientation", 48 contained the word "lesbian", 221 contained the word "gay", and 181 included the word "homosexual." As previously noted, the majority of these studies focused on sexual orientation as a variable in epidemiological studies, particularly those concerning HIV/AIDS (e.g. Schlitz [1998](#); Eriksen and Trocki [1994](#); Smith [1991](#)).

Given the increased availability of data on gay and lesbian persons, most notably the data on same-sex partners from the U.S. Census (see discussion in [Chapters 2 and 3](#) on these data), we might expect to see a large increase in publications within demographic journals on sexuality. From 2006 to the present, an additional 53 articles

were published in these same journals containing the phrase “sexual orientation”, 21 containing the term “lesbian”, 44 containing the word “gay”, and 35 containing the word “homosexual”. Although this is a notable leap, particularly in those articles containing “lesbian”, a review of the content of these articles suggests primarily a continued focus on reproductive and health outcomes (e.g. Hollander 2007; London 2006; Rice et al. 2006). Some notable exceptions include articles such as Festy (2006) analysis of the legal recognition of unions of same-sex couples in Europe, Carpenter and Gates’ (2008) study of gay and lesbian partnerships in California, and Manalansan’s (2006) analysis of sexuality within migration studies. Significantly, it is not that new research is absent on population sexuality in general, or sexual orientation in particular. Rather, it is that the research is being conducted by individuals other than “demographers” and/or published in other outlets.

Demographers, then, must consider the importance of embracing sexuality as both a disciplinary focus in and of itself, as well as its implications for more traditional demographic inquiry. To this end, the advancement of demographic research of sexuality should be twofold. Sexuality (behavior, desire, and identity) should be incorporated as a variable into traditional demographic research, but demographers must also consider the degree to which demographic models and theories are able to capture and explain the experiences of non-heterosexual individuals.⁶

As highlighted throughout this volume, there has been limited research assessing the manner in which sexual behavior or identity can serve as important shapers of demographic processes. Consequently, the first step toward opening the demographic discipline to studies of sexuality should involve incorporating such variables into current demographic models. Demographers must “bring sexuality in”⁷ to their studies of migration, fertility, mortality, labor force, family, and the other subfields of demography. When possible, sexual orientation should be included as an important individual characteristic in demographic research, much as gender, race, and ethnicity have become.

Several studies have already demonstrated the manner in which demographic outcomes are affected by sexual identity in particular. For example, research has established that sexual orientation affects both migration and the geographic distribution of individuals (e.g. Baumle et al. 2009; Gates and Ost 2004). Several studies (e.g. Baumle and Poston 2011; Klawitter and Flatt 1998; Badgett 1995) have highlighted the role that sexual behavior and identity play in labor outcomes, such as earnings from employment. In addition, research emphasizes that sexual orientation plays an important role in family structure, including partnership rates (Carpenter and Gates 2008), marital unions (Andersson et al. 2006), and the presence of children in the household (Baumle and Compton 2011; Baumle et al. 2009). Given these findings, and others discussed within the following chapters, it would seem that continued analysis of the manner in which sexual orientation and other sexuality variables affect demographic outcomes is warranted.

In addition to incorporating sexuality variables into demographic analyses, demographers should question whether our current models or theories are capable of explaining the experiences of non-heterosexual individuals. In particular, the interaction of sexual orientation and gender creates unique dynamics demanding new

assumptions, models, and theories. Studies in the areas of fertility, migration, family demography, labor demography, and other subfields, have been dominated by a heteronormative perspective. Research in all of these areas, for example, has examined the manner in which sex and gender affect demographic outcomes as a consequence of power differentials (e.g. women will be less likely to make migration decisions than men because, on average, they earn less money and have less relationship power than do men). When one considers same-sex couples, however, using sex as a proxy for power differentials becomes problematic and forces a reevaluation of current understandings of these models. As noted by Manalansan (2006: 224), incorporating sexuality into migration studies “not only expands the meaning of migration but also alters our understanding of gender and challenges migration studies’ reliance on heteronormative meanings, institutions, and practices.” This is the case for many demographic outcomes, wherein our current models and theories should be reevaluated for their applicability to non-heterosexual and—perhaps—to heterosexual individuals in response to new empirical findings on population sexuality.

In this handbook, data and analyses are presented in order to provide a foundation for the development of research in the demography of sexuality. In the following chapters, both researchers with traditional demographic backgrounds, as well as those with training in other disciplines, provide an overview of the state of current research on population sexuality. I have deliberately chosen not to include chapters focused on sexually transmitted infections or pregnancies, i.e. the “consequences” of sexual activity. Instead, the content of this handbook explores population sexuality in order to describe the prevalence of sexual behaviors, desires, and identities, as well as their connections with other demographic outcomes. The focus, then, is on analyzing sexuality as a demographic topic in its own right, rather than solely as a variable in studies of sexually transmitted infection or other health-related topics.

To this end, I have divided the handbook into six primary sections. First, an overview of data and methods pertaining to demographic studies of sexuality and sexual orientation is provided. The next section reviews population sexuality through an international lens, analyzing data from the United States, China, Africa, and Latin America. In the third section, a more life course perspective is adopted focusing on sexuality within the context of relationships, in adolescence, and in older age. Next, specific sexual identities are examined, with attention paid to the role of gay or lesbian identity/behavior in affecting several demographic outcomes (prevalence, geographic distribution, labor market, and the family). In addition, data relating to both asexual and transgender identities and behaviors are presented. The last section is more applied, incorporating data on population sexuality into policy analyses on the topics of marriage, military service, adoption, and census data collection. In the final chapter, I offer suggestions regarding further development of this burgeoning field of demographic work.

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Footnotes

- 1 Portions of this chapter are revised or reprinted by permission from *Same-Sex Partners: The Social Demography of Sexual Orientation* by Amanda K. Baumle, D’Lane R. Compton, and Dudley L. Poston Jr., the State University of New York Press ©2009, State University of New York.
- 2 Riley (1999) makes a similar observation regarding the surprising exclusion of feminist perspectives from demographic study, given the strong focus on reproductive behaviors in the field of demography.
- 3 It is noteworthy, given that he oversampled from prisons and university populations, that his estimate of 4% is so closely mirrored in today’s representative surveys (see [Chapter 11](#) for discussion of prevalence of gay and lesbian identity).
- 4 Hite was not alone in this focus. Simon and colleagues (1972), who gathered sexuality data in France during the late 1960s, were highly critical of Kinsey’s focus on counting orgasms and the acts that led to orgasm. Rather, Simon emphasized the importance of gathering data on love, relationships, and control of procreation.
- 5 The population studies journals included in this search are: *Demography*, *Family Planning Perspectives*, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, *International Migration Review*, *Population: English Edition*, *Population: French Edition*, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *Population and Development Review*, *Population Index*, *Population Studies*, and *Studies in Family Planning*.
- 6 See Riley (1999) for a similar discussion regarding incorporating gender into demographic research.
- 7 See Poston et al. (2005) or Riley (1999) for similar arguments regarding “bringing men in” or “bringing women in” to demographic studies.

2. Sexual Behavior and Practices: Data and Measurement

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Abstract

Sexuality is a broad and complex topic which has been studied from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, including its own discipline of “sexology.” Even when interest is confined to sexual behavior, research approaches can range from the biological sciences to the social sciences and the humanities and from the laboratory to the cultural and historical. Sexuality is also a particularly sensitive and emotionally charged topic that evokes a wide range of strong reactions including political, moral, ethical, and religious responses. Even in the area of empirical scientific research, it is difficult to escape the “specialness” of sexuality. This is what Rubin 1984 referred to as the “fallacy of misplaced scale,” referencing Sontag who pointed out that “everything pertaining to sex has been a ‘special case’ in our culture” (Sontag 1969: 46). It is often difficult to maintain a level of objectivity and scale when thinking of sex. This has made it particularly difficult to conduct research directly about sexuality.

Introduction

Sexuality is a broad and complex topic which has been studied from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, including its own discipline of “sexology.” Even when interest is confined to sexual behavior, research approaches can range from the biological sciences to the social sciences and the humanities and from the laboratory to the cultural and historical. Sexuality is also a particularly sensitive and emotionally charged topic that evokes a wide range of strong reactions including political, moral, ethical, and religious responses. Even in the area of empirical scientific research, it is difficult to escape the “specialness” of sexuality. This is what Rubin (1984) referred to as the “fallacy of misplaced scale,” referencing Sontag who pointed out that “everything pertaining to sex has been a ‘special case’ in our culture” (Sontag 1969: 46). It is often difficult to maintain a level of objectivity and scale when thinking of

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This chapter concerns research on sexual behavior and practices as part of the larger study of population, the domain of research and knowledge known as demography. My focus is on the problems and issues related to studying sexuality in representative surveys of the population. The chapter begins by addressing the conceptualization of sexuality and sexual behavior. I argue that in order to overcome the resistance to the study of sexuality, it has always had to be justified and legitimated as being a necessary response to some larger pressing social need. This has affected the definition and conceptualization of sexuality which, in turn, has affected how it is measured. My hope is that a heightened awareness of the framing of research on sexuality can improve theory and research in this area.

Similar factors affect the measurement of sexuality in research, especially surveys. One of the greatest concerns is whether we can actually get accurate data on sexual behavior across the population via survey research. Here, the “special case” of sexuality is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, we need to pay special attention to the particularities of sexuality as an especially “sensitive topic” in survey research. On the other hand, we are often better served by thinking of sexual behavior as not that special at all. It needs to be treated as a legitimate research topic prone to exactly the same problems as surveys on other forms of behavior; not necessarily posing any impassable barrier, but still subject to the same methodological challenges encountered in any survey. The study of sexual behavior in surveys can benefit from the large body of research on questionnaire design and response error in survey research, which can be used to inform and improve our data collection efforts in this area.

Surveying Sexual Behavior: Alfred Kinsey

My perspective grows out of my years of experience and reflection that began in 1988 when, as part of a team at the University of Chicago, we received a contract from the National Institutes of Health to design a national sexual behavior survey to produce data on sexual behavior and its correlates in the general population (Laumann et al. 1994a). The survey was motivated by the need for population-level information on sexual practices to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. At the time, there were practically no data from representative samples of the U.S. population on sexual behavior and risk. Policy and planning was still drawing on data from the pioneering Kinsey studies that were collected starting a half a century earlier in 1938, and published in 1948 and 1953 (Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953), which (in spite of their size and breadth) were not based on a representative sample. The representative population data which had been collected in the interim was far from comprehensive both in terms of the populations studied (almost exclusively women or adolescents) and in the specific behaviors and practices (primarily if not exclusively heterosexual vaginal intercourse) (see Turner et al. 1989).

At the time, and even today, a watershed in the study of sexual behavior was the appearance of the massive volumes in 1948 and 1953 which have come to be known as the “Kinsey Reports.” Their titles, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, highlight the centrality of “sexual behavior”, as the main topic of the research creating the paradigm for subsequent work in population