Summary of Mark Regnerus's

"How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study"

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and

"Parental Same-Sex Relationships, Family Instability, and Subsequent Life Outcomes for Adult Children: Answering Critics of the New Family Structures Study with Additional Analyses"

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In "How Different," sociologist Mark Regnerus of the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, presents new and extensive empirical evidence that suggests that there are differences in outcomes between the children of parents who have had a same-sex relationship and children raised by their married, biological mother and father.

This evidence is based on data from the 2011 New Family Structures Study (NFSS), of which Regnerus was the lead investigator. It surveyed 2,988 young adults for the specific purpose of collecting nationally representative data about children from various family structures. The roster includes intact biological families, late-divorced families, stepfamilies, single-parent families, adoptive families, families with a parent who has been in a same-sex relationship,[1] and other family types (such as families with a deceased parent). The NFSS has been acknowledged by critics to be "better situated than virtually all previous studies to detect differences between these groups in the population."[2]

Strengths of the NFSS

The NFSS data and its "How Different" summary article are unique among gay-parenting research in four significant respects: First, the NFSS drew from a large, random sample of the U.S. population of young adults (ages 18–39). To date, the first generation of gay-parenting research has relied upon small, nonprobability samples for data, which are inadequate for drawing general conclusions about the population of gay parents at large.[3]

For example, one of the more famous gay-parenting data collection efforts, the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS), used what's called a convenience sample, recruiting respondents not randomly from the population

but from announcements posted in lesbian newspapers, at women's bookstores, and at lesbian events in several major metropolitan areas.[4] While these types of samples are valuable for gathering information about the behaviors of specific groups (in this case, women active in a lesbian community in a major urban area—and eager to contribute to research about their parenting), they are inadequate when the goal is to grasp general trends about the larger population of lesbian parents, many of whom do not have the socioeconomic, racial, geographic, or behavioral patterns of the selected group. Any claims about a general population that are based on a group that does not represent it must be limited, because the sample will be less diverse than what a truly representative sample would reveal.[5]

A second strength of the NFSS is that it focuses on the responses of adults who were once children in these households. Normally, studies on gay parenting focus on what is going on inside the households of lesbian and gay parents at present, while the children are still under their parents' care. Moreover, these studies typically interview the *parents* for their point of view about what it is like to parent as a gay man or lesbian woman. Such research cannot tell us how the children turn out later as adults or what they experienced while growing up. Moreover, in some cases, the data is collected in an atmosphere of awareness about the possible political ramifications of the replies, so parental bias in the reporting is a concern.[6]

Third, the comparison group of the Regnerus report is the intact (married) biological family. First-generation gay-parenting research has compared gay or lesbian families to single, divorced, or stepparent families—or has compared a select and often socioeconomically privileged population of gay or lesbian parents to a broad, representative sample of the general population.[7] "How Different" compares the outcomes of children who reported having a mother who had a lesbian relationship with another woman (MLR for short) or a father who had a gay relationship with another man (FGR) with the outcomes of children who reported coming from an intact, married biological family (IBF). The rationale for this choice is that the intact biological family has long been considered to be the gold standard for children, in part because household stability (intact parental relationships) have well-documented advantages for children. So in "How Different," the bar is kept high to determine if there are differences between children from the more traditional biological family and children from these new family structures.[8]

Fourth, the NFSS gathered data about children's outcomes in forty different areas of vital interest to parenting researchers, covering the social, emotional, and relational well-being of the adult children.[9] Categories ranged from satisfaction with their adult romantic relationships to living on public assistance to ever having experienced poverty, suffered sexual assault, or pled guilty to a crime. The Rosenfeld study (see note 3), by comparison, measured one important outcome of children's well-being: educational achievement. Most first-generation gay-parenting research studies have looked at gender-related and emotional outcomes in children (such as sexual identity/orientation and self-esteem), which are of less interest to society. Below is a summary of some of the most significant findings from the NFSS:[10]

Race

Public perceptions and stereotypes of gay/lesbian households with children usually assume them to be white, upper-middle-class members of society. In response to questions about race, the NFSS found that 48 percent of FGR respondents and 43 percent of MLR respondents indicated that they were either black or Hispanic, a number much higher than previously suggested by studies based on convenience samples.[11]

Public Assistance

On economic outcomes, grown children of a mother who had been in a lesbian relationship were almost four times more likely to be currently on public assistance than were the grown children of IBFs. As young adults, they were also 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed.

Crime

On criminal outcomes, the children of fathers who had been in a gay relationship showed the greatest propensity to be involved in crime. They were, on average, more frequently arrested, and they pled guilty to more non-minor offenses than did the young-adult children in any other category. The children of mothers who had had a lesbian relationship reported the second-highest average frequency of involvement in crimes and arrests, and in both categories, the young-adult children of IBFs reported the lowest average frequency of involvement in crimes or arrests.

Sexual Victimization

Contrary to recent and widely circulated conclusions[12] that there is no sexual victimization in lesbian households, the NFSS found that, when asked if they were ever touched sexually as children by a parent or another adult, the children of mothers who had had a lesbian relationship were eleven times more likely to say "yes" than were the children from an IBF, and the children of fathers who had had a gay relationship were three times more likely to say "yes." The children of IBFs were the least likely of all family types to have ever been touched sexually in this way: Only 2 percent reported affirmatively (compared to 23 percent of children of MLRs). When asked if they were ever forced to have sex against their will, the children of mothers who had had a lesbian relationship were the worst off again, four times more likely to say "yes" than were the children of IBFs. The children of FGRs were three times more likely to have been forced to have sex than were the children of IBFs.

In percentages, 31 percent of MLRs said they had been forced to have sex, compared with 25 percent of FGRs and 8 percent of IBFs. These results are generally consistent with research on heterosexual families; for instance, a recent federal report showed that children are least likely to be sexually, physically, or emotionally abused in an intact, biological, married family.[13]

Sexually Transmitted Infections

When asked if they had ever had a sexually transmitted infection (STI), the young-adult children of FGRs were three times more likely to say "yes" than were those of IBFs. Children of MLRs were two-and-a-half times more likely to say "yes," followed by the children of stepfamilies, who were two times more likely. Children of IBFs and children from "other" family types were the least likely of all to have had an STI.

Marijuana/Smoking

When asked to report upon frequency of marijuana use, the young-adult children of divorced parents were the worst off, reporting to use marijuana on average one-and-a-half times more frequently than the children of IBFs. Next came the children of MLRs, followed by the children of single parents, and the children of FGRs. The children adopted by people unrelated to them and the children of IBFs reported least-frequent marijuana use as young adults. When asked about frequency of smoking, the young-adult children of mothers who had had a lesbian relationship reported highest frequency, followed by the children of fathers who had had a gay relationship. The children of IBFs ranked lowest in smoking frequency for all family-of-origin types.

Perceived Safety

Respondents were asked to report their sentiment about their family experiences while growing up. The children of MLRs reported the lowest levels of perceived safety in their childhood homes, followed by children of FGRs, with the children of IBFs reporting the highest levels of perceived safety.

Mental Health

When asked if they were recently or currently in therapy "for a problem connected with anxiety, depression, relationships, etc.," the children adopted by nonrelatives reported receiving such therapy the most, followed by the children of MLRs. The children from IBFs were least likely of all family types to report receiving this therapy.

On the CES-D depression index—an eight-measure survey of respondents' happy-to-depressed thoughts over the previous seven days—the young-adult children of MLRs and FGRs reported statistically significant higher levels of depression than did young-adult children from IBFs. Specifically, the young-adult children of FGRs were two times more likely to have thought about suicide in the previous twelve months than were the children of MLRs (the second highest percentage), and almost five times more likely than the children from IBFs.

Romantic Relationships

When asked to rate their own current romantic-relationship quality, the adult children of FGRs reported the lowest quality, followed by children adopted by nonrelatives, the children of stepfamilies, and then the children of MLRs. The children from IBFs reported the highest levels of relationship quality.

When asked about the number of times they had thought that their current relationship was in trouble, the children of FGRs reported the highest numbers again, followed by the children of divorced parents. The children from IBFs reported that they had deemed their relationship to be in trouble the least number of times.

When asked about infidelity, children of MLRs were three times more likely to say they had had an affair while married/cohabiting than were children from IBFs, followed by children from stepfamilies (who were two-and-a-half times more likely to have had an affair than were IBFs) and children of FGRs (who were twice as likely).

Sexual Orientation and Behavior

The NFSS asked respondents to identify their sexual orientation and found that children of MLRs were more likely to report same-sex romantic relationships and bisexuality than were any other group. They were least likely, then, to identify as entirely heterosexual. Children of FGRs were the next least likely, and children from IBFs were most likely of all to identify as fully heterosexual.

Daughters of MLRs reported an average of just over one female sex partner and four male sex partners in their lifetimes, in contrast to daughters from IBFs, who reported an average of only 0.22 female sex partners and 2.79 male sex partners in their lifetimes. Daughters of MLRs were also most likely to self-report asexuality, "not sexually attracted to either males or females" (4.1 percent of females of MLRs, compared to 0.5 percent of females from IBFs).

An Overall Finding of Differences

Taken together, "How Different" found that there are differences between children raised by a parent who had a same-sex relationship and children raised in an intact, married biological family—in a variety of social, emotional, and relational outcomes.

On twenty-five out of forty outcomes evaluated, there were statistically significant differences between children from IBFs and those of MLRs in many areas that are unambiguously suboptimal, such as receiving welfare, a need for therapy, a history of infidelity, STIs, sexual victimization, lower educational attainment, lower sense of safety within the family of origin, depression, attachments and dependencies, marijuana use, frequency of smoking, and criminal behavior.

On eleven out of forty outcomes, there were statistically significant differences between children from IBFs and those who reported having an FGR in areas such as thoughts of suicide, STIs, being forced to have sex against their will, lower

sense of safety within the family of origin, depression, poor relationship quality, frequency of smoking, and criminal behavior.

There were important differences in both comparisons, but the young-adult children of MLRs exhibited the least favorable outcomes in a wider array of categories when compared to children from IBFs and fared worse in more categories than did the children of FGRs.

Reply to Critics: Addressing Same-Sex Parent Instability

In "Answering Critics" Regnerus offers a detailed reply addressing six different areas of concern that critics raised, including new analyses of data not found in the original essay. Of all of these concerns, the most significant criticism of the study involved the issue of how to handle the instability found within same-sex parental relationships. This summary focuses upon how Regnerus addresses this particular criticism, what methods he suggests for future research to address the instability factor, and the possible underlying causes of instability in same-sex relationships.

In his original article, "How Different," Regnerus alerts readers that the type of household that the young adults experienced while they were young was rarely a "planned" same-sex-parent household. The study found that the young adults surveyed (born 1973–1994) who had a parent who had a gay or lesbian relationship were usually conceived within a heterosexual marriage that then experienced divorce or separation, leaving the child with a single parent. Before, during, or after the divorce or separation, that parent had at least one same-sex romantic relationship.[14]

To be more specific, among the respondents who said their mother had a same-sex romantic relationship, 91 percent reported living with their mother while she was in the relationship, but fewer (57 percent) said they had lived with *both* their mother and her partner for at least four months at some point prior to age eighteen. An even smaller share (23 percent) said that they had spent at least three years living in the same household with their mother's romantic partner. This is to say that out of 2,988 respondents, only forty children reported living with two women (i.e., their mother and her partner) for three years or more. Only two out of the 15,000 screened had spent a span of eighteen years with the same two women. Among those who said that their father had had a same-sex relationship, there was even less longevity. Forty-two percent reported living with him while he was in the relationship, and only 24 percent reported living with him and his partner for at least four months. Only 1.1 percent of children whose father had had a same-sex relationship spent at least three years in the same household with both men.[15] No children lived with two men in a gay relationship for their entire childhood. These results strongly suggest that the parents' same-sex relationships were often short-lived, a finding consistent with the broader research on elevated levels of instability among same-sex romantic partners.[16]

Critics accused Regnerus of bad methodology and even ill will for not comparing children from the intact biological family to children from intact lesbian families and intact gay families. This was the so-called "apples to oranges" criticism of the NFSS.

In anticipation of this concern, Regnerus had stressed that despite the study drawing from a large, representative sample of the U.S. population and despite using screening tactics designed to boost the number of respondents who reported having had a parent who had had a same-sex relationship, a very small segment reported to have been parented by the same two gay or lesbian parents for three years or more. It was an insufficient number to make reliable comparisons between these groups and intact biological families.[17]

Nevertheless, criticism focused on this aspect—that Regnerus did not compare children from stable same-sex families to children from stable opposite-sex families. Critics further alleged that the NFSS represented an "outdated" data set, looking at parents' sexual behavior patterns in the 1970s–1990s, which were obsolete for making up-to-date judgments about children's outcomes in different family structures. Critics further alleged that today, there are many more stable same-sex households in the U.S. population (and that any remaining patterns of instability would decrease to the extent that same-sex couples could marry). Therefore, critics argued, the study was to be regarded as irrelevant to modern debates.

In "Answering Critics," Regnerus suggests that readers may have unrealistic expectations about same-sex families, partly because the popular media has given most attention to the well-educated, wealthy, white lesbian and gay families who use artificial reproductive technology (ART) to have children and who plan to raise them in a long-term household. The popular mind seems to have assumed these families to represent a general trend in the population and so have found it objectionable when these families were not found in the study's sample.

However, Regnerus points out that *no studies* based upon a large, random national sample of the population have confirmed the stable same-sex couple to be the norm. On the contrary, he cites a number of scholars who have found evidence for comparatively higher break-up rates among same-sex couples in the general population, even in countries where the social stigma is much less and same-sex marriage is legal and accepted. For instance, he cites Andersson and colleagues, whose 2006 study of same-sex marriages in Norway and Sweden found that "divorce risk levels are considerably higher in same-sex marriages,"[18] such that Swedish lesbian couples are more than three times as likely to divorce as are Swedish heterosexual couples, and Swedish gay couples are 1.35 times more likely to divorce (after controls). He refers to Timothy Biblarz and Judith Stacey, two outspoken advocates for same-sex marriage in the U.S. academy, who nevertheless acknowledge that lesbian parents face "a somewhat greater risk of splitting up," due in part, they suggest, to their "high standards of equality." And he cites Rosenfeld, who found higher patterns of instability among lesbian couples using a nationally representative data set of American relationships.[19]

Further, Regnerus challenges readers to consider whether they might have a race and class bias in favor of white, upper-middle-class portrayals of same-sex families, neglecting to consider the presence of black and Hispanic, as well as less-educated or less-economically-privileged parents in same-sex relationships (with a greater risk of household instability). He agrees with Rosenfeld: "The literature on same-sex couple parenting has tended to feature studies of the kind of women who can afford ART: white, upper-middle-class women. Nationally representative data tend to paint a different picture . . . same-sex couple parents tend to be more working class and are much more likely to be nonwhite compared with heterosexual married couples."[20]

Therefore, in order to be fair, Regnerus suggests that research on children's outcomes in the *general population* should include children from diverse families. He also proposes that the issue of household instability be one that scholars wrestle with, not explain away through methodological choices or ignore by using datasets of relatively more stable same-sex couples, as his critics have pressed him to do. To that end, Regnerus makes recommendations about how to deal with the issue of instability in future research.

Dealing with Channels or Pathways of Instability

Regnerus explains that family instability may be the very channel, or pathway, through which suboptimal child outcomes arise within same-sex parenting households. To explain what pathways are, he uses an example: measuring whether women or men are more likely to develop lung cancer.[21]

It is known that lung cancer is associated with smoking. Smoking is a common pathway, or channel, through which lung cancer arises. So "if, for example, most men smoked, but very few women ever did so, it is entirely unhelpful to declare that—controlling for smoking—there is no effect of gender on lung cancer."[22] Such an analysis would suggest that there are "no differences" between men and women when it comes to developing lung cancer, when that would not be the case in reality. Additionally, a real cause (that many men are smoking) would be masked, when in fact it ought to be of major concern.

Similarly, Regnerus notes, family instability is likely to be a pathway for suboptimal child outcomes. To "control for" instability (as past gay-parenting scholars have tended to do) would be to overlook the pathway and result in "a model that is unhelpful for understanding social reality."[23] In short, Regnerus encourages future research to study the possible link between same-sex-parent families, family instability, and negative outcomes for children.

Why Might Same-Sex Couples Be Less Stable?

Finally, Regnerus proposes a thesis for the observed instability among same-sex couples based on a sexual-economics approach to romantic relationships: "This perspective places no blame for instability on sexual orientation per se, but rather on stable gender differences and preferences in relationships."[24] Basically, the thesis is that women are more likely to set the bar high (in romantic relationships) for the meeting of their emotional needs and are more likely to be dissatisfied in relationships, making them more likely to separate. Gay men, by contrast, appear to be more stable in their relationships than are lesbian women, but the male sex drive has a greater tendency toward multiple partners, and so the men are less likely to remain monogamous, presenting a different kind of instability in households, the effects of which on children are unknown.[25]

Conclusion

In "How Different," Dr. Mark Regnerus presents new and compelling evidence for the view that young-adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships suffer significant and problematic outcomes when compared to young-adult children from IBFs. This conclusion contrasts strongly with the first generation of gay-parenting research, which claimed that there were "no differences" (and some benefits) to being raised by same-sex parents, a claim made despite a lack of empirical evidence for significant numbers of stable, two-parent gay/lesbian households in the U.S. population.[26]

Regnerus's conclusion better accords with the established body of social science over the last twenty-five years, which found children to do best when they are raised by their married, biological mother and father.[27] At the turn of the millennium, social scientists widely agreed that children raised by unmarried mothers, divorced parents, cohabiting parents, and stepparents fared worse than did children raised by their still-married, biological parents.[28] Although data on gay and lesbian parenting was not yet available (it was too rare to study adequately), it was difficult to imagine that gay and lesbian parents would be able to accomplish what heterosexuals in stepparenting, adoptive, single-parenting, and cohabiting contexts had not been able to do: namely, replicate the optimal child-rearing environment of an IBF.

By challenging these claims, Regnerus's "How Different" is consistent with the consensus that existed at the turn of the millennium. He concludes with a reminder of the social costs of family breakdown: "Insofar as the number of intact, biological mother/father families continues to shrink in the United States, as it has, this portends growing challenges within families, but also heightened dependence on public health organizations, federal and state public assistance, psychotherapeutic resources, substance use programs, and the criminal justice system."[29]

Notes

1. In "How Different," Regnerus uses the terms "lesbian mother" and "gay father." In "Answering Critics," he changes these two admittedly generalized descriptions to "respondents who report a maternal (or mother's) lesbian relationship, and respondents who report a paternal (or father's) gay relationship" (1368).
2. Paul R. Amato, "The Well-Being of Children with Gay and Lesbian Parents," *Social Science Research* 41 (2012): 771–774, p. 772. David Eggebeen, who, like Amato is critical of Regnerus's "How Different," nevertheless argues that the real importance of the paper is "the description of a new data set that offers significant advantages. Whether the New Family Structures Study has the possibility of unsettling previously settled questions depends in equal parts on the richness of the information collected, as well as the willingness of scholars to make use of these data" (David J. Eggebeen, "What Can We Learn from Studies of Children Raised by Gay or Lesbian Parents?" *Social Science Research* 41 (2012): 775–778, p. 777).
3. See Regnerus, "How Different," 753, 755 (citing Nock 2001; Perrin and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health 2002; Redding 2008). At the time of publication, there was only one other same-sex-parenting study that relied upon a large, random sample: that of Michael Rosenfeld of Stanford University, who used 2000 U.S. Census data (Michael J. Rosenfeld, "Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress through School," *Demography* 47 [August 2010]: 755–775). "How Different" was the second-known same-sex parenting study to rely upon a large, random national sample. Douglas Allen, Catherine Pakaluk, and Joseph Price (2013) offered a third study, a re-examination of Rosenfeld's research. Douglas Allen (2013) offered another study based upon the large, random national sample of the 2006 Canada Census. All of these papers are summarized in this book.
4. See Regnerus, "How Different," 753.

5. This problem is compounded when these studies compare data from a small convenience sample of gay or lesbian parents with data on heterosexual parenting from a large, population-level sample. Although researchers usually mention this limitation of their studies in their analysis, the media almost always fail to transmit that limitation to the public at large, so the overall portrayal of same-sex parents is privileged. By contrast, the NFSS drew a large, random sample from the general U.S. population so that comparisons would be representative of the general population.
6. Fiona Tasker (2010: 36) warns against this: "Parental self-report, of course, may be biased. It is plausible to argue that, in a prejudiced social climate, lesbian and gay parents may have more at stake in presenting a positive picture. . . . Future studies need to consider using additional sophisticated measures to rule out potential biases" (cited in Regnerus, "How Different," 3 [also citing Bos and Sandfort 2010; Brewaeys et al. 1997]).
7. "Rosenfeld (2010: 757) notes that of the forty-five studies listed in Tasker's (2005) review article, only two included 'a more traditional family control group built into the study.'" (Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1368–1369).
8. "If stability is a key asset for households with children, then it is sensible to use intact biological families in any comparative assessment" (Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1368).
9. Interactive visual representations of the findings are available at FamilyStructureStudies.com.
10. An important qualification that Regnerus stresses is that the study does not claim to establish *causality* between parenting styles and child outcomes. In other words, the results are not a "report card" on gay parenting but a report on the average condition of grown children from households of parents who had a same-sex relationship versus those from IBFs. So, for instance, when the study finds that children who had a parent who had been in a same-sex romantic relationship are much more likely to suffer from depression as young adults than are the children who came from intact biological families, the study does not claim that the gay parent was the *cause* of the depression in his or her child but simply that such children on average had more depression, for reasons unidentified by the study. The goal was simply to identify average differences among the groups of children and to test just how strong the groups' differences were. That said, the study did control for many other variables, such as age, gender, race or ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, the degree of legislative gay-friendliness of the respondent's home state, and the experience of being bullied as a youth. Controls help sociologists eliminate alternative explanations for a given outcome, making the causal link between parenting structure and children's outcomes more likely (though still not for certain) when the results remain statistically significant after controls are applied.
11. See Regnerus, "How Different," 757. These figures generally agree with those of Rosenfeld's (2010) analysis of American Community Survey data, "which reported that 37% and 42% of children from female and male same-sex households are Black and Hispanic, respectively" (Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1371).
12. For example, see *Huffington Post*, "Child Abuse Rate at Zero Percent in Lesbian Households, New Report Finds," November 17, 2011, available at huffingtonpost.com.
13. See Andrea J. Sedlak, Jane Mettenburg, Monica Basena, Ian Petta, Karla McPherson, Angela Greene, and Spencer Li, "Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress, Executive Summary," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, available at acf.hhs.gov.
14. Regnerus reports that "just under half of [MLR and FGR] respondents reported that their biological parents were once married. This distinguishes NFSS from numerous studies that have been entirely concerned with 'planned' gay and lesbian families, such as the NLLFS" ("How Different," 757). The claim that today's gay and lesbian couples are *more* likely to plan for children using IVF, surrogacy, or adoption than to have children through a prior heterosexual union has not been confirmed yet with data. Moreover, because IVF is expensive, it is usually restricted to persons from the upper-middle class. The NFSS suggests that children who were raised by a parent who had a same-sex relationship often came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. (See Regnerus, "How Different," table 2 scores on "Family received welfare growing up.")
15. See Regnerus, "How Different," 757.
16. See Charles Q. Strohm, "The Stability of Same-Sex Cohabitation, Different-Sex Cohabitation, and Marriage," California Center for Population Research, UCLA (February 1, 2012); Gunnar Andersson, Turid Noack, Ane Seierstad, and Harald Weedon-Fekjaer, "The Demographics of Same-Sex Marriages in Norway and Sweden," *Demography* 43 (February 2006): 79–98.
17. "Perhaps in social reality there really are two 'gold standards' of family stability and context for children's flourishing—a heterosexual stably coupled household and the same among gay/lesbian households—but no population-based sample analysis is yet able to *consistently confirm wide evidence* of the latter" (Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1377).
18. Andersson et al., "Demographics of Same-Sex Marriages," 95: "We found that divorce risks are higher in same-sex partnerships than opposite-sex marriages and that unions of lesbians are considerably less stable, or more dynamic, than unions of gay men. . . . In Norway, 13% of partnerships of men and 21% of female partnerships are likely to end in divorce within six years from partnership registration. In Sweden, 20% of male partnerships and 30% of female marriages are likely to end in divorce within five years of partnership formation. These levels are higher than the corresponding 13% of heterosexual marriages that end in divorce within five years in Sweden."

19. Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1370.
20. Ibid.
21. The example wasn't based on data but was just used to demonstrate his point.
22. Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1369.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 1370. Regnerus cites here Baumeister, 2010.
25. Regnerus, "Answering Critics," 1370.
26. For examples, see Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, "(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review* 66 (April 2001): 159–183; Fiona Tasker, "Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children: A Review," *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* (June 2005): 224–240; Jennifer L. Wainright and Charlotte J. Patterson, "Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents," *Journal of Family Psychology* 20 (September 2006): 526–530; Rosenfeld, "Nontraditional Families."
27. For examples, see Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Sara McLanahan, "Parent Absence or Poverty: Which Matters More?" pp. 35–48 in Greg Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, eds., *Consequences of Growing Up Poor* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997); Elizabeth Marquardt and David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bruce J. Ellis, John E. Bates, Kenneth A. Dodge, David M. Fergusson, L. John Horwood, Gregory S. Pettit, and Lianne Woodward, "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?" *Child Development* 74 (May–June 2003): 801–821; Sara McLanahan, Elisabeth Donahue, and Ron Haskins, "Introducing the Issue," *Future of Children* 15 (Autumn 2005): 3–12; Mary Parke, "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?" Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, DC (May 2003); Elizabeth Marquardt, "Family Structure and Children's Educational Outcomes" (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005); Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Crown, 2005); W. Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005).
28. Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization, summarized the scholarly consensus: "Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is the family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage" (Kristin Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek, and Carol Emig, "Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can Be Done about It?" Research Brief, Child Trends, Washington, D.C. [June 2002]). Likewise, Sara McLanahan, of Princeton Univesity, and Gary Sandefur, of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, wrote, "If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children's basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent ideal. Such a design, in theory, would not only ensure that children had access to the time and money of two adults, it also would provide a system of checks and balances that promoted quality parenting. The fact that both parents have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child, and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child" (Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994], 38).
29. Regnerus, "How Different," 766.

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How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study

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ABSTRACT

The New Family Structures Study (NFSS) is a social-science data-collection project that fielded a survey to a large, random sample of American young adults (ages 18–39) who were raised in different types of family arrangements. In this debut article of the NFSS, I compare how the young-adult children of a parent who has had a same-sex romantic relationship fare on 40 different social, emotional, and relational outcome variables when compared with six other family-of-origin types. The results reveal numerous, consistent differences, especially between the children of women who have had a lesbian relationship and those with still-married (heterosexual) biological parents. The results are typically robust in multivariate contexts as well, suggesting far greater diversity in lesbian-parent household experiences than convenience-sample studies of lesbian families have revealed. The NFSS proves to be an illuminating, versatile dataset that can assist family scholars in understanding the long reach of family structure and transitions.

1. Introduction

The well-being of children has long been in the center of public policy debates about marriage and family matters in the United States. That trend continues as state legislatures, voters, and the judiciary considers the legal boundaries of marriage. Social science data remains one of the few sources of information useful in legal debates surrounding marriage and adoption rights, and has been valued both by same-sex marriage supporters and opponents. Underneath the politics about marriage and child development are concerns about family structures' possible effects on children: the number of parents present and active in children's lives, their genetic relationship to the children, parents' marital status, their gender distinctions or similarities, and the number of transitions in household composition. In this introduction to the New Family Structures Study (NFSS), I compare how young adults from a variety of different family backgrounds fare on 40 different social, emotional, and relational outcomes. In particular, I focus on how respondents who said their mother had a same-sex relationship with another woman—or their father did so with another man—compare with still-intact, two-parent heterosexual married families using nationally-representative data collected from a large probability sample of American young adults.

Social scientists of family transitions have until recently commonly noted the elevated stability and social benefits of the two-parent (heterosexual) married household, when contrasted to single mothers, cohabiting couples, adoptive parents, and ex-spouses sharing custody (Brown, 2004; Manning et al., 2004; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). In 2002, Child Trends—a well-regarded nonpartisan research organization—detailed the importance for children's development of growing up in "the presence of *two biological parents*" (their emphasis; Moore et al., 2002, p. 2). Unmarried motherhood, divorce, cohabitation, and step-parenting were widely perceived to fall short in significant developmental domains (like education, behavior problems, and emotional well-being), due in no small part to the comparative fragility and instability of such relationships.

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In their 2001 *American Sociological Review* article reviewing findings on sexual orientation and parenting, however, sociologists Judith Stacey and Tim Biblarz began noting that while there are some differences in outcomes between children in same-sex and heterosexual unions, there were not as many as family sociologists might expect, and differences need not necessarily be perceived as *deficits*. Since that time the conventional wisdom emerging from comparative studies of same-sex parenting is that there are very few differences of note in the child outcomes of gay and lesbian parents (Tasker, 2005; Wainright and Patterson, 2006; Rosenfeld, 2010). Moreover, a variety of possible advantages of having a lesbian couple as parents have emerged in recent studies (Crowl et al., 2008; Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Gartrell and Bos, 2010; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004). The scholarly discourse concerning gay and lesbian parenting, then, has increasingly posed a challenge to previous assumptions about the supposed benefits of being raised in biologically-intact, two-parent heterosexual households.

1.1. Sampling concerns in previous surveys

Concern has arisen, however, about the methodological quality of many studies focusing on same-sex parents. In particular, most are based on non-random, non-representative data often employing small samples that do not allow for generalization to the larger population of gay and lesbian families (Nock, 2001; Perrin and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002; Redding, 2008). For instance, many published studies on the children of same-sex parents collect data from "snowball" or convenience samples (e.g., Bos et al., 2007; Brewaeys et al., 1997; Fulcher et al., 2008; Sirota, 2009; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). One notable example of this is the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study, analyses of which were prominently featured in the media in 2011 (e.g., *Huffington Post, 2011*). The NLLFS employs a convenience sample, recruited entirely by self-selection from announcements posted "at lesbian events, in women's bookstores, and in lesbian newspapers" in Boston, Washington, and San Francisco. While I do not wish to downplay the significance of such a longitudinal study—it is itself quite a feat—this sampling approach is a problem when the goal (or in this case, the practical result and conventional use of its findings) is to generalize to a population. All such samples are biased, often in unknown ways. As a formal sampling method, "snowball sampling is known to have some serious problems," one expert asserts (Snijders, 1992, p. 59). Indeed, such samples are likely biased toward "inclusion of those who have many interrelationships with, or are coupled to, a large number of other individuals" (Berg, 1988, p. 531). But apart from the knowledge of individuals' inclusion probability, unbiased estimation is not possible.

Further, as Nock (2001) entreated, consider the convenience sample recruited from within organizations devoted to seeking rights for gays and lesbians, like the NLLFS sampling strategy. Suppose, for example, that the respondents have higher levels of education than comparable lesbians who do not frequent such events or bookstores, or who live elsewhere. If such a sample is used for research purposes, then anything that is correlated with educational attainment—like better health, more deliberative parenting, and greater access to social capital and educational opportunities for children—will be biased. Any claims about a population based on a group that does not represent it will be distorted, since its sample of lesbian parents is less diverse (given what is known about it) than a representative sample would reveal (Baumle et al., 2009).

To compound the problem, results from nonprobability samples—from which meaningful statistics cannot be generated—are regularly compared with population-level samples of heterosexual parents, which no doubt are comprised of a blend of higher and lower quality parents. For example, Gartrell et al. (2011a,b) inquired about the sexual orientation and behavior of adolescents by comparing data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) with those in the snowball sample of youth in the NLLFS. Comparing a population-based sample (the NSFG) to a select sample of youth from same-sex parents does not provide the statistical confidence demanded of good social science. Until now, this has been a primary way in which scholars have collected and evaluated data on same-sex parents. This is not to suggest that snowball samples are *inherently* problematic as data-collection techniques, only that they are not adequate for making useful comparisons with samples that are entirely different with regard to selection characteristics. Snowball and various other types of convenience sampling are simply not widely generalizable or comparable to the population of interest as a whole. While researchers themselves commonly note this important limitation, it is often entirely lost in the translation and transmission of findings by the media to the public.

1.2. Are there notable differences?

The "no differences" paradigm suggests that children from same-sex families display no notable disadvantages when compared to children from other family forms. This suggestion has increasingly come to include even comparisons with intact biological, two-parent families, the form most associated with stability and developmental benefits for children (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Moore et al., 2002).

Answering questions about notable between-group differences has nevertheless typically depended on with whom comparisons are being made, what outcomes the researchers explored, and whether the outcomes evaluated are considered substantial or superficial, or portents of future risk. Some outcomes—like sexual behavior, gender roles, and democratic parenting, for example—have come to be valued differently in American society over time.

For the sake of brevity—and to give ample space here to describing the NFSS—I will avoid spending too much time describing previous studies, many of whose methodological challenges are addressed by the NFSS. Several review articles,

and at least one book, have sought to provide a more thorough assessment of the literature (Anderssen et al., 2002; Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Goldberg, 2010; Patterson, 2000; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001a). Suffice it to say that versions of the phrase "no differences" have been employed in a wide variety of studies, reports, depositions, books, and articles since 2000 (e.g., Crowl et al., 2008; Movement Advancement Project, 2011; Rosenfeld, 2010; Tasker, 2005; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001a,b; Veldorale-Brogan and Cooley, 2011; Wainright et al., 2004).

Much early research on gay parents typically compared the child development outcomes of divorced lesbian mothers with those of divorced heterosexual mothers (Patterson, 1997). This was also the strategy employed by psychologist Fiona Tasker (2005), who compared lesbian mothers with single, divorced heterosexual mothers and found "no systematic differences between the quality of family relationships" therein. Wainright et al. (2004), using 44 cases in the nationally-representative Add Health data, reported that teenagers living with female same-sex parents displayed comparable self-esteem, psychological adjustment, academic achievement, delinquency, substance use, and family relationship quality to 44 demographically "matched" cases of adolescents with opposite-sex parents, suggesting that here too the comparisons were not likely made with respondents from stable, biologically-intact, married families.

However, small sample sizes can contribute to "no differences" conclusions. It is not surprising that statistically-significant differences would *not* emerge in studies employing as few as 18 or 33 or 44 cases of respondents with same-sex parents, respectively (Fulcher et al., 2008; Golombok et al., 2003; Wainright and Patterson, 2006). Even analyzing matched samples, as a variety of studies have done, fails to mitigate the challenge of locating statistically-significant differences when the sample size is small. This is a concern in all of social science, but one that is doubly important when there may be motivation to confirm the null hypothesis (that is, that there are in fact no statistically-significant differences between groups). Therefore, one important issue in such studies is the simple matter of if there is enough statistical power to detect meaningful differences should they exist. Rosenfeld (2010) is the first scholar to employ a large, random sample of the population in order to compare outcomes among children of same-sex parents with those of heterosexual married parents. He concluded—after controlling for parents' education and income and electing to limit the sample to households exhibiting at least 5 years of co-residential stability—that there were no statistically-significant differences between the two groups in a pair of measures assessing children's progress through primary school.

Sex-related outcomes have more consistently revealed distinctions, although the tone of concern about them has diminished over time. For example, while the daughters of lesbian mothers are now widely understood to be more apt to explore same-sex sexual identity and behavior, concern about this finding has faded as scholars and the general public have become more accepting of GLB identities (Goldberg, 2010). Tasker and Golombok (1997) noted that girls raised by lesbian mothers reported a higher number of sexual partners in young adulthood than daughters of heterosexual mothers. Boys with lesbian mothers, on the other hand, appear to display the opposite trend—fewer partners than the sons of heterosexual mothers.

More recently, however, the tone about "no differences" has shifted some toward the assertion of differences, and that same-sex parents appear to be *more* competent than heterosexual parents (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Crowl et al., 2008). Even their romantic relationships may be better: a comparative study of Vermont gay civil unions and heterosexual marriages revealed that same-sex couples report higher relationship quality, compatibility, and intimacy, and less conflict than did married heterosexual couples (Balsam et al., 2008). Biblarz and Stacey's (2010) review article on gender and parenting asserts that,

> based strictly on the published science, one could argue that two women parent better on average than a woman and a man, or at least than a woman and man with a traditional division of labor. Lesbian coparents seem to outperform comparable married heterosexual, biological parents on several measures, even while being denied the substantial privileges of marriage (p. 17).

Even here, however, the authors note that lesbian parents face a "somewhat greater risk of splitting up," due, they suggest, to their "asymmetrical biological and legal statuses and their high standards of equality" (2010, p. 17).

Another meta-analysis asserts that non-heterosexual parents, on average, enjoy significantly better relationships with their children than do heterosexual parents, together with no differences in the domains of cognitive development, psychological adjustment, gender identity, and sexual partner preference (Crowl et al., 2008).

However, the meta-analysis reinforces the profound importance of *who* is doing the reporting—nearly always volunteers for small studies on a group whose claims about documentable parenting successes are very relevant in recent legislative and judicial debates over rights and legal statuses. Tasker (2010, p. 36) suggests caution:

> Parental self-report, of course, may be biased. It is plausible to argue that, in a prejudiced social climate, lesbian and gay parents may have more at stake in presenting a positive picture...Future studies need to consider using additional sophisticated measures to rule out potential biases...

Suffice it to say that the pace at which the overall academic discourse surrounding gay and lesbian parents' comparative competence has shifted—from slightly-less adept to virtually identical to more adept—is notable, and rapid. By comparison, studies of adoption—a common method by which many same-sex couples (but more heterosexual ones) become parents—have repeatedly and consistently revealed important and wide-ranging differences, on average, between adopted children and biological ones. In fact, these differences have been so pervasive and consistent that adoption experts now emphasize that "acknowledgement of difference" is critical for both parents and clinicians when working with adopted children and

teens (Miller et al., 2000). This ought to give social scientists studying gay parenting outcomes pause, especially in light of concerns noted above about small sample sizes and the absence of a comparable recent, documented improvement in outcomes from youth in adopted families and stepfamilies.

Far more, too, is known about the children of lesbian mothers than about those of gay fathers (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Patterson, 2006; Veldorale-Brogan and Cooley, 2011). Biblarz and Stacey (2010, p. 17) note that while gay-male families remain understudied, "their daunting routes to parenthood seem likely to select more for strengths than limitations." Others are not so optimistic. One veteran of a study of the daughters of gay fathers warns scholars to avoid overlooking the family dynamics of "emergent" gay parents, who likely outnumber planned ones: "Children born into heterosexually organized marriages where fathers come out as gay or bisexual also face having to deal with maternal bitterness, marital conflict, possible divorce, custody issues, and father's absence" (Sirota, 2009, p. 291).

Regardless of sampling strategy, scholars also know much less about the lives of *young-adult* children of gay and lesbian parents, or how their experiences and accomplishments as adults compare with others who experienced different sorts of household arrangements during their youth. Most contemporary studies of gay parenting processes have focused on the present—what is going on inside the household when children are still under parental care (Tasker, 2005; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Brewaeys et al., 1997). Moreover, such research tends to emphasize *parent-reported* outcomes like parental divisions of labor, parent–child closeness, daily interaction patterns, gender roles, and disciplinary habits. While such information is important to learn, it means we know far more about the *current* experience of *parents* in households with children than we do about young adults who have already moved through their childhood and now speak for themselves. Studies on family structure, however, serve scholars and family practitioners best when they span into adulthood. Do the children of gay and lesbian parents look comparable to those of their heterosexual counterparts? The NFSS is poised to address this question about the lives of young adults between the ages of 18 and 39, but not about children or adolescents. While the NFSS is not the answer to all of this domain's methodological challenges, it is a notable contribution in important ways.

1.3. The New Family Structures Study

Besides being brand-new data, several other aspects about the NFSS are novel and noteworthy. First, it is a study of young adults rather than children or adolescents, with particular attention paid to reaching ample numbers of respondents who were raised by parents that had a same-sex relationship. Second, it is a much larger study than nearly all of its peers. The NFSS interviewed just under 3000 respondents, including 175 who reported their mother having had a same-sex romantic relationship and 73 who said the same about their father. Third, it is a weighted probability sample, from which meaningful statistical inferences and interpretations can be drawn. While the 2000 (and presumably, the 2010) US Census Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) offers the largest nationally-representative sample-based information about youth in same-sex households, the Census collects much less outcome information of interest. The NFSS, however, asked numerous questions about respondents' social behaviors, health behaviors, and relationships. This manuscript provides the first glimpse into those outcomes by offering statistical comparisons of them among eight different family structures/experiences of origin. Accordingly, there is much that the NFSS offers, and not just about the particular research questions of this study.

There are several things the NFSS is not. The NFSS is not a longitudinal study, and therefore cannot attempt to broach questions of causation. It is a cross-sectional study, and collected data from respondents at only one point in time, when they were between the ages of 18 and 39. It does not evaluate the offspring of gay marriages, since the vast majority of its respondents came of age prior to the legalization of gay marriage in several states. This study cannot answer political questions about same-sex relationships and their legal legitimacy. Nevertheless, social science is a resource that offers insight to political and legal decision-makers, and there have been enough competing claims about "what the data says" about the children of same-sex parents—including legal depositions of social scientists in important cases—that a study with the methodological strengths of this one deserves scholarly attention and scrutiny.

2. Data collection, measures, and analytic approach

The NFSS data collection project is based at the University of Texas at Austin's Population Research Center. A survey design team consisting of several leading family researchers in sociology, demography, and human development—from Penn State University, Brigham Young University, San Diego State University, the University of Virginia, and several from the University of Texas at Austin—met over 2 days in January 2011 to discuss the project's sampling strategy and scope, and continued to offer advice as questions arose over the course of the data collection process. The team was designed to merge scholars across disciplines and ideological lines in a spirit of civility and reasoned inquiry. Several additional external consultants also gave close scrutiny to the survey instrument, and advised on how best to measure diverse topics. Both the study protocol and the questionnaire were approved by the University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Review Board. The NFSS data is intended to be publicly accessible and will thus be made so with minimal requirements by mid-late 2012. The NFSS was supported in part by grants from the Witherspoon Institute and the Bradley Foundation. While both of these are commonly known for their support of conservative causes—just as other private foundations are known for supporting more liberal causes—the funding sources played no role at all in the design or conduct of the study, the analyses, the interpretations of the data, or in the preparation of this manuscript.

2.1. The data collection process

The data collection was conducted by Knowledge Networks (or KN), a research firm with a very strong record of generating high-quality data for academic projects. Knowledge Networks recruited the first online research panel, dubbed the KnowledgePanel®, that is representative of the US population. Members of the KnowledgePanel® are randomly recruited by telephone and mail surveys, and households are provided with access to the Internet and computer hardware if needed. Unlike other Internet research panels sampling only individuals with Internet access who volunteer for research, the KnowledgePanel® is based on a sampling frame which includes both listed and unlisted numbers, those without a landline telephone and is not limited to current Internet users or computer owners, and does not accept self-selected volunteers. As a result, it is a random, nationally-representative sample of the American population. At last count, over 350 working papers, conference presentations, published articles, and books have used Knowledge Networks' panels, including the 2009 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, whose extensive results were featured in an entire volume of the *Journal of Sexual Medicine*—and prominently in the media—in 2010 (Herbenick et al., 2010). More information about KN and the KnowledgePanel®, including panel recruitment, connection, retention, completion, and total response rates, are available from KN. The typical within survey response rate for a KnowledgePanel® survey is 65%. Appendix A presents a comparison of age-appropriate summary statistics from a variety of socio-demographic variables in the NFSS, alongside the most recent iterations of the Current Population Survey, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Study of Youth and Religion—all recent nationally-representative survey efforts. The estimates reported there suggest the NFSS compares very favorably with other nationally-representative datasets.

2.2. The screening process

Particularly relevant for the NFSS is the fact that key populations—gay and lesbian parents, as well as heterosexual adoptive parents—can be challenging to identify and locate. The National Center for Marriage and Family Research (2010) estimates that there are approximately 580,000 same-sex households in the United States. Among them, about 17%—or 98,600—are thought to have children present. While that may seem like a substantial number, in population-based sampling strategies it is not. Locating minority populations requires a search for a probability sample of the general population, typically by way of screening the general population to identify members of rarer groups. Thus in order to boost the number of respondents who reported being adopted or whose parent had a same-sex romantic relationship, the screener survey (which distinguished such respondents) was left in the field for several months between July 2011 and February 2012, enabling existing panelists more time to be screened and new panelists to be added. Additionally, in late Fall 2011, former members of the KnowledgePanel® were re-contacted by mail, phone, and email to encourage their screening. A total of 15,058 current and former members of KN's KnowledgePanel® were screened and asked, among several other questions, "From when you were born until age 18 (or until you left home to be on your own), did either of your parents ever have a romantic relationship with someone of the same sex?" Response choices were "Yes, my mother had a romantic relationship with another woman," "Yes, my father had a romantic relationship with another man," or "no." (Respondents were also able to select both of the first two choices.) If they selected either of the first two, they were asked about whether they had ever lived with that parent while they were in a same-sex romantic relationship. The NFSS completed full surveys with 2988 Americans between the ages of 18 and 39. The screener and full survey instrument is available at the NFSS homepage, located at: www.prc.utexas.edu/nfss.

2.3. What does a representative sample of gay and lesbian parents (of young adults) look like?

The weighted screener data—a nationally-representative sample—reveal that 1.7% of all Americans between the ages of 18 and 39 report that their father or mother has had a same-sex relationship, a figure comparable to other estimates of children in gay and lesbian households (e.g., Stacey and Biblarz (2001a,b) report a plausible range from 1% to 12%). Over twice as many respondents report that their mother has had a lesbian relationship as report that their fathers have had a gay relationship. (A total of 58% of the 15,058 persons screened report spending their entire youth—up until they turned 18 or left the house—with their biological mother and father.)

While gay and lesbian Americans typically become parents today in four ways—through one partner's previous participation in a heterosexual union, through adoption, in-vitro fertilization, or by a surrogate—the NFSS is more likely to be comprised of respondents from the first two of these arrangements than from the last two. Today's children of gay men and lesbian women are more apt to be "planned" (that is, by using adoption, IVF, or surrogacy) than as little as 15–20 years ago, when such children were more typically the products of heterosexual unions. The youngest NFSS respondents turned 18 in 2011, while the oldest did so in 1990. Given that unintended pregnancy is impossible among gay men and a rarity among lesbian couples, it stands to reason that gay and lesbian parents today are far more selective about parenting than the heterosexual population, among whom unintended pregnancies remain very common, around 50% of total (Finer and Henshaw, 2006). The share of all same-sex parenting arrangements that is planned, however, remains unknown. Although the NFSS did not directly ask those respondents whose parent has had a same-sex romantic relationship about the manner of

their own birth, a failed heterosexual union is clearly the modal method: just under half of such respondents reported that their biological parents were once married. This distinguishes the NFSS from numerous studies that have been entirely concerned with "planned" gay and lesbian families, like the NLLFS.

Among those who said their mother had a same-sex relationship, 91% reported living with their mother while she was in the romantic relationship, and 57% said they had lived with their mother and her partner for at least 4 months at some point prior to age 18. A smaller share (23%) said they had spent at least 3 years living in the same household with a romantic partner of their mother's.

Among those who said their father had a same-sex relationship, however, 42% reported living with him while he was in a same-sex romantic relationship, and 23% reported living with him and his partner for at least 4 months (but less than 2% said they had spent at least 3 years together in the same household), a trend similarly noted in Tasker's (2005) review article on gay and lesbian parenting.

Fifty-eight (58) percent of those whose biological mothers had a same-sex relationship also reported that their biological mother exited the respondent's household at some point during their youth, and just under 14% of them reported spending time in the foster care system, indicating greater-than-average household instability. Ancillary analyses of the NFSS suggests a likely "planned" lesbian origin of between 17% and 26% of such respondents, a range estimated from the share of such respondents who claimed that (1) their biological parents were never married or lived together, and that (2) they never lived with a parental opposite-sex partner or with their biological father. The share of respondents (whose fathers had a same-sex relationship) that likely came from "planned" gay families in the NFSS is under 1%.

These distinctions between the NFSS—a population-based sample—and small studies of planned gay and lesbian families nevertheless raise again the question of just how unrepresentative convenience samples of gay and lesbian parents actually are. The use of a probability sample reveals that the young-adult children of parents who have had same-sex relationships (in the NFSS) look less like the children of today's stereotypic gay and lesbian couples—white, upper-middle class, well-educated, employed, and prosperous—than many studies have tacitly or explicitly portrayed. Goldberg (2010, pp. 12–13) aptly notes that existing studies of lesbian and gay couples and their families have largely included "white, middle-class persons who are relatively 'out' in the gay community and who are living in urban areas," while "working-class sexual minorities, racial or ethnic sexual minorities, sexual minorities who live in rural or isolated geographical areas" have been overlooked, understudied, and difficult to reach. Rosenfeld's (2010) analysis of Census data suggests that 37% of children in lesbian cohabiting households are Black or Hispanic. Among respondents in the NFSS who said their mother had a same-sex relationship, 43% are Black or Hispanic. In the NLLFS, by contrast, only 6% are Black or Hispanic.

This is an important oversight: demographic indicators of where gay *parents* live today point less toward stereotypic places like New York and San Francisco and increasingly toward locales where families are more numerous and overall fertility is higher, like San Antonio and Memphis. In their comprehensive demographic look at the American gay and lesbian population, Gates and Ost (2004, p. 47) report, "States and large metropolitan areas with relatively low concentrations of gay and lesbian couples in the population tend to be areas where same-sex couples are more likely to have children in the household." A recent updated brief by Gates (2011, p. F3) reinforces this: "Geographically, same-sex couples are most likely to have children in many of the most socially conservative parts of the country." Moreover, Gates notes that racial minorities are disproportionately more likely (among same-sex households) to report having children; whites, on the other hand, are disproportionately less likely to have children. The NFSS sample reveals the same. Gates' Census-based assessments further raise questions about the sampling strategies of—and the popular use of conclusions from—studies based entirely on convenience samples derived from parents living in progressive metropolitan locales.

2.4. The structure and experience of respondents' families of origin

The NFSS sought to provide as clear a vision as possible of the respondents' household composition during their childhood and adolescence. The survey asked respondents about the marital status of their biological parents both in the past and present. The NFSS also collected "calendar" data from each respondent about their relationship to people who lived with them in their household (for more than 4 months) from birth to age 18, as well as who has lived with them from age 18—after they have left home—to the present. While the calendar data is utilized only sparingly in this study, such rich data enables researchers to document who else has lived with the respondent for virtually their entire life up to the present.

For this particular study, I compare outcomes across eight different types of family-of-origin structure and/or experience. They were constructed from the answers to several questions both in the screener survey and the full survey. It should be noted, however, that their construction reflects an unusual combination of interests—the same-sex romantic behavior of parents, and the experience of household stability or disruption. The eight groups or household settings (with an acronym or short descriptive title) evaluated here, followed by their maximum unweighted analytic sample size, are:

1. IBF: Lived in intact biological family (with mother and father) from 0 to 18, and parents are still married at present ($N = 919$).
2. LM: R reported R's mother had a same-sex romantic (lesbian) relationship with a woman, regardless of any other household transitions ($N = 163$).
3. GF: R reported R's father had a same-sex romantic (gay) relationship with a man, regardless of any other household transitions ($N = 73$).

4. Adopted: R was adopted by one or two strangers at birth or before age 2 ($N = 101$).
5. Divorced later or had joint custody: R reported living with biological mother and father from birth to age 18, but parents are not married at present ($N = 116$).
6. Stepfamily: Biological parents were either never married or else divorced, and R's primary custodial parent *was* married to someone else before R turned 18 ($N = 394$).
7. Single parent: Biological parents were either never married or else divorced, and R's primary custodial parent did *not* marry (or remarry) before R turned 18 ($N = 816$).
8. All others: Includes all other family structure/event combinations, such as respondents with a deceased parent ($N = 406$).

Together these eight groups account for the entire NFSS sample. These eight groups are largely, but not entirely, mutually exclusive in reality. That is, a small minority of respondents might fit more than one group. I have, however, forced their mutual exclusivity here for analytic purposes. For example, a respondent whose mother had a same-sex relationship might also qualify in Group 5 or Group 7, but in this case my analytical interest is in maximizing the sample size of Groups 2 and 3 so the respondent would be placed in Group 2 (LMs). Since Group 3 (GFs) is the smallest and most difficult to locate randomly in the population, its composition trumped that of others, even LMs. (There were 12 cases of respondents who reported both a mother and a father having a same-sex relationship; all are analyzed here as GFs, after ancillary analyses revealed comparable exposure to both their mother and father).

Obviously, different grouping decisions may affect the results. The NFSS, which sought to learn a great deal of information about respondents' families of origin, is well-poised to accommodate alternative grouping strategies, including distinguishing those respondents who lived with their lesbian mother's partner for several years (vs. sparingly or not at all), or early in their childhood (compared to later). Small sample sizes (and thus reduced statistical power) may nevertheless hinder some strategies.

In the results section, for maximal ease, I often make use of the acronyms IBF (child of a still-intact biological family), LM (child of a lesbian mother), and GF (child of a gay father). It is, however, very possible that the same-sex romantic relationships about which the respondents report were *not* framed by those respondents as indicating their own (or their parent's own) understanding of their parent as gay or lesbian or bisexual in sexual *orientation*. Indeed, this is more a study of the children of parents who have had (and in some cases, are still in) same-sex relationships than it is one of children whose parents have self-identified or are "out" as gay or lesbian or bisexual. The particular parental relationships the respondents were queried about are, however, gay or lesbian in content. For the sake of brevity and to avoid entanglement in interminable debates about fixed or fluid orientations, I will regularly refer to these groups as respondents with a gay father or lesbian mother.

2.5. Outcomes of interest

This study presents an overview of 40 outcome measures available in the NFSS. Table 1 presents summary statistics for all variables. Why *these* outcomes? While the survey questionnaire (available online) contains several dozen outcome questions of interest, I elected to report here an overview of those outcomes, seeking to include common and oft-studied variables of interest from a variety of different domains. I include all of the particular indexes we sought to evaluate, and a broad list of outcomes from the emotional, relational, and social domains. Subsequent analyses of the NFSS will no doubt examine other outcomes, as well as examine the same outcomes in different ways.

The dichotomous outcome variables summarized in Table 1 are the following: relationship status, employment status, whether they voted in the last presidential election, and use of public assistance (both currently and while growing up), the latter of which was asked as "Before you were 18 years old, did anyone in your immediate family (that is, in your household) ever receive public assistance (such as welfare payments, food stamps, Medicaid, WIC, or free lunch)?" Respondents were also asked about whether they had ever seriously thought about committing suicide in the past 12 months, and about their utilization of counseling or psychotherapy for treatment of "any problem connected with anxiety, depression, relationships, etc."

The Kinsey scale of sexual behavior was employed, but modified to allow respondents to select the best description of their sexual orientation (rather than behavior). Respondents were asked to choose the description that best fits how they think about themselves: 100% heterosexual, mostly heterosexual but somewhat attracted to people of your own sex, bisexual (that is, attracted to men and women equally), mostly homosexual but somewhat attracted to people of the opposite sex, 100% homosexual, or not sexually attracted to either males or females. For simplicity of presentation, I create a dichotomous measure indicating 100% heterosexual (vs. anything else). Additionally, unmarried respondents who are currently in a relationship were asked if their romantic partner is a man or a woman, allowing construction of a measure of "currently in a same-sex romantic relationship."

All respondents were asked if "a parent or other adult caregiver ever touched you in a sexual way, forced you to touch him or her in a sexual way, or forced you to have sexual relations?" Possible answers were: no, never; yes, once; yes, more than once; or not sure. A broader measure about forced sex was asked before it, and read as follows: "Have you ever been physically forced to have any type of sexual activity against your will?" It employs identical possible answers; both have been dichotomized for the analyses (respondents who were "not sure" were not included). Respondents were also asked if they

Table 1
Weighted summary statistics of measures, NFSS.

NFSS variables	Range	Mean	SD	N
Currently married	0,1	0.41	0.49	2988
Currently cohabiting	0,1	0.15	0.36	2988
Family received welfare growing up	0,1	0.34	0.47	2669
Currently on public assistance	0,1	0.21	0.41	2952
Currently employed full-time	0,1	0.45	0.50	2988
Currently unemployed	0,1	0.12	0.32	2988
Voted in last presidential election	0,1	0.55	0.50	2960
Bullied while growing up	0,1	0.36	0.48	2961
Ever suicidal during past year	0,1	0.07	0.25	2953
Recently or currently in therapy	0,1	0.11	0.32	2934
Identifies as entirely heterosexual	0,1	0.85	0.36	2946
Is in a same-sex romantic relationship	0,1	0.06	0.23	1056
Had affair while married/cohabiting	0,1	0.19	0.39	1869
Has ever had an STI	0,1	0.11	0.32	2911
Ever touched sexually by parent/adult	0,1	0.07	0.26	2877
Ever forced to have sex against will	0,1	0.13	0.33	2874
Educational attainment	1–5	2.86	1.11	2988
Family-of-origin safety/security	1–5	3.81	0.97	2917
Family-of-origin negative impact	1–5	2.58	0.98	2919
Closeness to biological mother	1–5	4.05	0.87	2249
Closeness to biological father	1–5	3.74	0.98	1346
Self-reported physical health	1–5	3.57	0.94	2964
Self-reported overall happiness	1–5	4.00	1.05	2957
CES-D depression index	1–4	1.89	0.62	2815
Attachment scale (depend)	1–5	2.97	0.84	2848
Attachment scale (anxiety)	1–5	2.51	0.77	2830
Impulsivity scale	1–4	1.88	0.59	2861
Level of household income	1–13	7.42	3.17	2635
Current relationship quality index	1–5	3.98	0.98	2218
Current relationship is in trouble	1–4	2.19	0.96	2274
Frequency of marijuana use	1–6	1.50	1.23	2918
Frequency of alcohol use	1–6	2.61	1.36	2922
Frequency of drinking to get drunk	1–6	1.70	1.09	2922
Frequency of smoking	1–6	2.03	1.85	2922
Frequency of watching TV	1–6	3.15	1.60	2919
Frequency of having been arrested	1–4	1.29	0.63	2951
Frequency pled guilty to non-minor offense	1–4	1.16	0.46	2947
N of female sex partners (among women)	0–11	0.40	1.10	1975
N of female sex partners (among men)	0–11	3.16	2.68	937
N of male sex partners (among women)	0–11	3.50	2.52	1951
N of male sex partners (among men)	0–11	0.40	1.60	944
Age	18–39	28.21	6.37	2988
Female	0,1	0.51	0.50	2988
White	0,1	0.57	0.49	2988
Gay-friendliness of state of residence	1–5	2.58	1.78	2988
Family-of-origin structure groups				
Intact biological family (IBF)	0,1	0.40	0.49	2988
Mother had same-sex relationship (LM)	0,1	0.01	0.10	2988
Father had same-sex relationship (GF)	0,1	0.01	0.75	2988
Adopted age 0–2	0,1	0.01	0.75	2988
Divorced later/joint custody	0,1	0.06	0.23	2988
Stepfamily	0,1	0.17	0.38	2988
Single parent	0,1	0.19	0.40	2988
All others	0,1	0.15	0.36	2988
Mother's education				
Less than high school	0,1	0.15	0.35	2988
Received high school diploma	0,1	0.28	0.45	2988
Some college/associate's degree	0,1	0.26	0.44	2988
Bachelor's degrees	0,1	0.15	0.36	2988
More than bachelor's	0,1	0.08	0.28	2988
Do not know/missing	0,1	0.08	0.28	2988
Family-of-origin income				
$0–20,000	0,1	0.13	0.34	2988
$20,001–40,000	0,1	0.19	0.39	2988
$40,001–75,000	0,1	0.25	0.43	2988
$75,001–100,000	0,1	0.14	0.34	2988
$100,001–150,000	0,1	0.05	0.22	2988

(*continued on next page*)

Table 1 (*continued*)

NFSS variables	Range	Mean	SD	N
$150,001–200,000	0,1	0.01	0.11	2988
Above $200,000	0,1	0.01	0.10	2988
Do not know/missing	0,1	0.22	0.42	2988

had ever had a sexually-transmitted infection, and if they had ever had a sexual relationship with someone else while they (the respondent) were married or cohabiting.

Among continuous variables, I included a five-category educational achievement measure, a standard five-point self-reported measure of general physical health, a five-point measure of overall happiness, a 13-category measure of total household income before taxes and deductions last year, and a four-point (frequency) measure of how often the respondent thought their current relationship "might be in trouble" (never once, once or twice, several times, or numerous times). Several continuous variables were constructed from multiple measures, including an eight-measure modified version of the CES-D depression scale, an index of the respondent's reported current (romantic) relationship quality, closeness to the respondent's biological mother and father, and a pair of attachment scales—one assessing dependability and the other anxiety. Finally, a pair of indexes captures (1) the overall safety and security in their family while growing up, and (2) respondents' impressions of negative family-of-origin experiences that continue to affect them. These are part of a multidimensional relationship assessment instrument (dubbed RELATE) designed with the perspective that aspects of family life, such as the quality of the parent's relationship with their children, create a family tone that can be mapped on a continuum from safe/predictable/rewarding to unsafe/chaotic/punishing (Busby et al., 2001). Each of the scales and their component measures are detailed in Appendix B.

Finally, I evaluate nine count outcomes, seven of which are frequency measures, and the other two counts of gender-specific sexual partners. Respondents were asked, "During the past year, how often did you..." watch more than 3 h of television in a row, use marijuana, smoke, drink alcohol, and drink with the intent to get drunk. Responses (0–5) ranged from "never" to "every day or almost every day." Respondents were also asked if they have ever been arrested, and if they had ever been convicted of or pled guilty to any charges other than a minor traffic violation. Answers to these two ranged from 0 (no, never) to 3 (yes, numerous times). Two questions about respondents' number of sex partners were asked (of both men and women) in this way: "How many different women have you ever had a sexual relationship with? This includes any female you had sex with, even if it was only once or if you did not know her well." The same question was asked about sexual relationships with men. Twelve responses were possible: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4–6, 7–9, 10–15, 16–20, 21–30, 31–50, 51–99, and 100+.

2.6. Analytic approach

My analytic strategy is to highlight distinctions between the eight family structure/experience groups on the 40 outcome variables, both in a bivariate manner (using a simple *T*-test) and in a multivariate manner using appropriate variable-specific regression techniques—logistic, OLS, Poisson, or negative binomial—and employing controls for respondent's age, race/ethnicity, gender, mother's education, and perceived family-of-origin income, an approach comparable to Rosenfeld's (2010) analysis of differences in children making normal progress through school and the overview article highlighting the findings of the first wave of the Add Health study (Resnick et al., 1997). Additionally, I controlled for having been bullied, the measure for which was asked as follows: "While growing up, children and teenagers typically experience negative interactions with others. We say that someone is bullied when someone else, or a group, says or does nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. We do not consider it bullying when two people quarrel or fight, however. Do you recall ever being bullied by someone else, or by a group, such that you still have vivid, negative memories of it?"

Finally, survey respondents' current state of residence was coded on a scale (1–5) according to how expansive or restrictive its laws are concerning gay marriage and the legal rights of same-sex couples (as of November 2011). Emerging research suggests state-level political realities about gay rights may discernibly shape the lives of GLB residents (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009; Rostosky et al., 2009). This coding scheme was borrowed from a *Los Angeles Times* effort to map the timeline of state-level rights secured for gay unions. I modified it from a 10-point to a 5-point scale (Times Research Reporting, 2012). I classify the respondent's current state in one of the following five ways:

- 1 = Constitutional amendment banning gay marriage and/or other legal rights.
- 2 = Legal ban on gay marriage and/or other legal rights.
- 3 = No specific laws/bans and/or domestic partnerships are legal.
- 4 = Domestic partnerships with comprehensive protections are legal and/or gay marriages performed elsewhere are recognized.
- 5 = Civil unions are legal and/or gay marriage is legal.

Each case in the NFSS sample was assigned a weight based on the sampling design and their probability of being selected, ensuring a sample that is nationally representative of American adults aged 18–39. These sample weights were used in every

statistical procedure displayed herein unless otherwise noted. The regression models exhibited few ($N < 15$) missing values on the covariates.

This broad overview approach, appropriate for introducing a new dataset, provides a foundation for future, more focused analyses of the outcomes I explore here. There are, after all, far more ways to delineate family structure and experiences—and changes therein—than I have undertaken here. Others will evaluate such groupings differently, and will construct alternative approaches of testing for group differences in what is admittedly a wide diversity of outcome measures.

I would be remiss to claim causation here, since to document that having particular family-of-origin experiences—or the sexual relationships of one's parents—causes outcomes for adult children, I would need to not only document that there is a correlation between such family-of-origin experiences, but that no other plausible factors could be the common cause of any suboptimal outcomes. Rather, my analytic intention is far more modest than that: to evaluate the presence of simple group differences, and—with the addition of several control variables—to assess just how robust such group differences are.

3. Results

3.1. Comparisons with still-intact, biological families (IBFs)

Table 2 displays mean scores on 15 dichotomous outcome variables which can be read as simple percentages, sorted by the eight different family structure/experience groups described earlier. As in Tables 3 and 4, numbers that appear in bold indicate that the group's estimate is statistically different from the young-adult children of IBFs, as discerned by a basic T-test ($p < 0.05$). Numbers that appear with an asterisk (*) beside it indicate that the group's dichotomous variable estimate from a logistic regression model (not shown) is statistically-significantly different from IBFs, after controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived family-of-origin's income, experience with having been bullied as a youth, and the "gay friendliness" of the respondent's current state of residence.

At a glance, the number of statistically-significant differences between respondents from IBFs and respondents from the other seven types of family structures/experiences is considerable, and in the vast majority of cases the optimal outcome—where one can be readily discerned—favors IBFs. Table 2 reveals 10 (out of 15 possible) statistically-significant differences in simple t-tests between IBFs and LMs (the pool of respondents who reported that their mother has had a lesbian relationship), one higher than the number of simple differences (9) between IBFs and respondents from both single-parent and stepfamilies. All but one of those associations is significant in logistic regression analyses contrasting LMs and IBFs (the omitted category).

Beginning at the top of Table 2, the marriage rates of LMs and GFs (those who reported that their father had a gay relationship) are statistically comparable to IBFs, while LMs' cohabitation rate is notable higher than IBFs' (24% vs. 9%, respectively). Sixty-nine (69) percent of LMs and 57% of GFs reported that their family received public assistance at some point while growing up, compared with 17% of IBFs; 38% of LMs said they are currently receiving some form of public assistance, compared with 10% of IBFs. Just under half of all IBFs reported being employed full-time at present, compared with 26% of

Table 2
Mean scores on select dichotomous outcome variables, NFSS (can read as percentage: as in, 0.42 = 42%).

	IBF (intact bio family)	LM (lesbian mother)	GF (gay father)	Adopted by strangers	Divorced late (>18)	Stepfamily	Single-parent	All other
Currently married	0.43	0.36	0.35	0.41	0.36*	0.41	0.37	0.39
Currently cohabiting	0.09	**0.24***	0.21	0.07^	**0.31***	**0.19***	**0.19***	0.13
Family received welfare growing up	0.17	**0.69***	**0.57***	0.12^	**0.47*^**	**0.53*^**	**0.48*^**	**0.35^**
Currently on public assistance	0.10	**0.38***	0.23	**0.27***	**0.31***	**0.30***	**0.30***	**0.23***
Currently employed full-time	0.49	**0.26***	0.34	0.41	0.42	0.47^	0.43^	**0.39**
Currently unemployed	0.08	**0.28***	0.20	0.22*	0.15	0.14	**0.13^**	**0.15**
Voted in last presidential election	0.57	**0.41**	0.73*^	0.58	0.63^	0.57^	0.51	0.48
Thought recently about suicide	0.05	0.12	0.24*	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.05	0.09
Recently or currently in therapy	0.08	0.19*	0.19	**0.22***	0.12	**0.17***	**0.13***	0.09
Identifies as entirely heterosexual	0.90	**0.61***	0.71*	0.82^	0.83^	**0.81*^**	**0.83*^**	**0.82*^**
Is in a same-sex romantic relationship	0.04	0.07	0.12	0.23	0.05	0.13*	0.03	0.02
Had affair while married/cohabiting	0.13	**0.40***	0.25	0.20	0.12^	**0.32***	0.19^	0.16^
Has ever had an STI	0.08	0.20*	0.25*	0.16	0.12	**0.16***	**0.14***	0.08
Ever touched sexually by parent/adult	0.02	**0.23***	0.06^	0.03^	0.10*	**0.12***	**0.10***	**0.08*^**
Ever forced to have sex against will	0.08	**0.31***	0.25*	**0.23***	**0.24***	**0.16***	**0.16*^**	0.11^

Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.

An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from logistic regression models (not shown).

A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of LM (column 2), without additional controls.

Table 3
Mean scores on select continuous outcome variables, NFSS.

	IBF (intact bio family)	LM (lesbian mother)	GF (gay father)	Adopted by strangers	Divorced late (>18)	Stepfamily	Single- parent	All other
Educational attainment	3.19	**2.39***	**2.64***	3.21^	**2.88*^**	**2.64***	**2.66***	**2.54***
Family-of-origin safety/security	4.13	**3.12***	**3.25***	**3.77*^**	**3.52***	**3.52*^**	**3.58*^**	**3.77*^**
Family-of-origin negative impact	2.30	**3.13***	**2.90***	**2.83***	**2.96***	**2.76***	**2.78***	**2.64*^**
Closeness to biological mother	4.17	4.05	**3.71***	3.58	3.95	4.03	**3.85***	**3.97**
Closeness to biological father	3.87	3.16	3.43	–	**3.29***	3.65	**3.24***	3.61
Self-reported physical health	3.75	**3.38**	3.58	3.53	**3.46**	**3.49**	**3.43***	**3.41**
Self-reported overall happiness	4.16	3.89	3.72	3.92	4.02	**3.87***	**3.93**	**3.83**
CES-D depression index	1.83	**2.20***	**2.18***	1.95	2.01	1.91^	1.89^	1.94^
Attachment scale (depend)	2.82	**3.43***	3.14	**3.12***	**3.08*^**	**3.10*^**	**3.05*^**	**3.02*^**
Attachment scale (anxiety)	2.46	2.67	2.66	**2.66**	2.71	2.53	2.51	2.56
Impulsivity scale	1.90	2.03	2.02	1.85	1.94	1.86^	1.82^	1.89
Level of household income	8.27	**6.08**	7.15	7.93^	7.42^	**7.04**	**6.96**	**6.19***
Current relationship quality index	4.11	3.83	**3.63***	3.79	3.95	**3.80***	3.95	3.94
Current relationship is in trouble	2.04	**2.35**	**2.55***	2.35	**2.43**	**2.35***	**2.26***	2.15

Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.
An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from OLS regression models (not shown).
A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of LM (column 2), without additional controls.

Table 4
Mean scores on select event-count outcome variables, NFSS.

	IBF (intact bio family)	LM (lesbian mother)	GF (gay father)	Adopted by strangers	Divorced late (>18)	Stepfamily	Single-parent	All other
Frequency of marijuana use	1.32	**1.84***	1.61	1.33^	**2.00***	1.47	**1.73***	1.49
Frequency of alcohol use	2.70	2.37	2.70	2.74	2.55	2.50	2.66	2.44
Frequency of drinking to get drunk	1.68	1.77	2.14	1.73	1.90	1.68	1.74	1.64
Frequency of smoking	1.79	**2.76***	2.61*	2.34*	2.44*	**2.31***	**2.18***	1.91^
Frequency of watching TV	3.01	**3.70***	3.49	3.31	3.33	**3.43***	3.25	2.95^
Frequency of having been arrested	1.18	**1.68***	**1.75***	1.31^	1.38	**1.38*^**	**1.35*^**	**1.34*^**
Frequency pled guilty to non-minor offense	1.10	**1.36***	1.41*	1.19	1.30	**1.21***	**1.17*^**	1.17^
N of female sex partners (among women)	0.22	**1.04***	**1.47***	0.47^	**0.96***	0.47*^	**0.52*^**	0.33^
N of female sex partners (among men)	2.70	3.46	4.17	3.24	3.66	**3.85***	3.23	3.37
N of male sex partners (among women)	2.79	**4.02***	**5.92***	3.49	**3.97***	**4.57***	**4.04***	2.91^
N of male sex partners (among men)	0.20	1.48*	1.47*	0.27	0.98*	0.55	0.42	0.44

Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.
An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from Poisson or negative binomial regression models (not shown).
A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of LM (column 2), without additional controls.

LMs. While only 8% of IBF respondents said they were currently unemployed, 28% of LM respondents said the same. LMs were statistically less likely than IBFs to have voted in the 2008 presidential election (41% vs. 57%), and more than twice as likely—19% vs. 8%—to report being currently (or within the past year) in counseling or therapy "for a problem connected with anxiety, depression, relationships, etc.," an outcome that was significantly different after including control variables.

In concurrence with several studies of late, the NFSS reveals that the children of lesbian mothers seem more open to same-sex relationships (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Gartrell et al., 2011a,b; Golombok et al., 1997). Although they are not statistically different from most other groups in having a same-sex relationship *at present*, they are much less apt to identify entirely as heterosexual (61% vs. 90% of respondents from IBFs). The same was true of GF respondents—those young adults who said their father had a relationship with another man: 71% of them identified entirely as heterosexual. Other sexual differences are notable among LMs, too: a greater share of daughters of lesbian mothers report being "not sexually attracted to either males or females" than among any other family-structure groups evaluated here (4.1% of female LMs, compared to 0.5% of female IBFs, not shown in Table 2). Exactly why the young-adult children of lesbian mothers are more apt to experience same-sex attraction and behaviors, as well as self-report asexuality, is not clear, but the fact that they do seems consistent across studies. Given that lower rates of heterosexuality characterize other family structure/experience types in the

NFSS, as Table 2 clearly documents, the answer is likely located not simply in parental sexual orientation but in successful cross-sex relationship role modeling, or its absence or scarcity.

Sexual conduct within their romantic relationships is also distinctive: while 13% of IBFs reported having had a sexual relationship with someone else while they were either married or cohabiting, 40% of LMs said the same. In contrast to Gartrell et al.'s (2011a,b) recent, widely-disseminated conclusions about the absence of sexual victimization in the NLLFS data, 23% of LMs said yes when asked whether "a parent or other adult caregiver ever touched you in a sexual way, forced you to touch him or her in a sexual way, or forced you to have sexual relations," while only 2% of IBFs responded affirmatively. Since such reports are more common among women than men, I split the analyses by gender (not shown). Among female respondents, 3% of IBFs reported parental (or adult caregiver) sexual contact/victimization, dramatically below the 31% of LMs who reported the same. Just under 10% of female GFs responded affirmatively to the question, an estimate not significantly different from the IBFs.

It is entirely plausible, however, that sexual victimization could have been at the hands of the LM respondents' biological father, prompting the mother to leave the union and—at some point in the future—commence a same-sex relationship. Ancillary (unweighted) analyses of the NFSS, which asked respondents how old they were when the first incident occurred (and can be compared to the household structure calendar, which documents who lived in their household each year up until age 18) reveal this possibility, up to a point: 33% of those LM respondents who said they had been sexually victimized by a parent or adult caregiver reported that they were also living with their biological father in the year that the first incident occurred. Another 29% of victimized LMs reported never having lived with their biological father at all. Just under 34% of LM respondents who said they had at some point lived with their mother's same-sex partner reported a first-time incident at an age that was equal to or higher than when they first lived with their mother's partner. Approximately 13% of victimized LMs reported living with a foster parent the year when the first incident occurred. In other words, there is no obvious trend to the timing of first victimization and when the respondent may have lived with their biological father or their mother's same-sex partner, nor are we suggesting by whom the respondent was most likely victimized. Future exploration of the NFSS's detailed household structure calendar offers some possibility for clarification.

The elevated LM estimate of sexual victimization is not the only estimate of increased victimization. Another more general question about forced sex, "Have you ever been physically forced to have any type of sexual activity against your will" also displays significant differences between IBFs and LMs (and GFs). The question about forced sex was asked *before* the question about sexual contact with a parent or other adult and may include incidents of it but, by the numbers, clearly includes additional circumstances. Thirty-one percent of LMs indicated they had, at some point in their life, been forced to have sex against their will, compared with 8% of IBFs and 25% of GFs. Among female respondents, 14% of IBFs reported forced sex, compared with 46% of LMs and 52% of GFs (both of the latter estimates are statistically-significantly different from that reported by IBFs).

While I have so far noted several distinctions between IBFs and GFs—respondents who said their father had a gay relationship—there are simply fewer statistically-significant distinctions to note between IBFs and GFs than between IBFs and LMs, which may or may not be due in part to the smaller sample of respondents with gay fathers in the NFSS, and the much smaller likelihood of having lived with their gay father while he was in a same-sex relationship. Only six of 15 measures in Table 2 reveal statistically-significant differences in the regression models (but only one in a bivariate environment). After including controls, the children of a gay father were statistically more apt (than IBFs) to receive public assistance while growing up, to have voted in the last election, to have thought recently about committing suicide, to ever report a sexually-transmitted infection, have experienced forced sex, and were less likely to self-identify as entirely heterosexual. While other outcomes reported by GFs often differed from IBFs, statistically-significant differences were not as regularly detected.

Although my attention has been primarily directed at the inter-group differences between IBFs, LMs, and GFs, it is worth noting that LMs are hardly alone in displaying numerous differences with IBFs. Respondents who lived in stepfamilies or single-parent families displayed nine simple differences in Table 2. Besides GFs, adopted respondents displayed the fewest simple differences (three).

Table 3 displays mean scores on 14 continuous outcomes. As in Table 2, bold indicates simple statistically-significant outcome differences with young-adult respondents from still-intact, biological families (IBFs) and an asterisk indicates a regression coefficient (models not shown) that is significantly different from IBFs after a series of controls. Consistent with Table 2, eight of the estimates for LMs are statistically different from IBFs. Five of the eight differences are significant as regression estimates. The young-adult children of women who have had a lesbian relationship fare worse on educational attainment, family-of-origin safety/security, negative impact of family-of-origin, the CES-D (depression) index, one of two attachment scales, report worse physical health, smaller household incomes than do respondents from still-intact biological families, and think that their current romantic relationship is in trouble more frequently.

The young-adult GF respondents were likewise statistically distinct from IBF respondents on seven of 14 continuous outcomes, all of which were significantly different when evaluated in regression models. When contrasted with IBFs, GFs reported more modest educational attainment, worse scores on the family-of-origin safety/security and negative impact indexes, less closeness to their biological mother, greater depression, a lower score on the current (romantic) relationship quality index, and think their current romantic relationship is in trouble more frequently.

As in Table 2, respondents who reported living in stepfamilies or in single-parent households also exhibit numerous simple statistical differences from IBFs—on nine and 10 out of 14 outcomes, respectively—most of which remain significant in

the regression models. On only four of 14 outcomes do adopted respondents appear distinctive (three of which remain significant after introducing controls).

Table 4 displays mean scores on nine event counts, sorted by the eight family structure/experience groups. The NFSS asked all respondents about experience with male and female sexual partners, but I report them here separately by gender. LM respondents report statistically greater marijuana use, more frequent smoking, watch television more often, have been arrested more, pled guilty to non-minor offenses more, and—among women—report greater numbers of both female and male sex partners than do IBF respondents. Female LMs reported an average of just over one female sex partner in their lifetimes, as well as four male sex partners, in contrast to female IBFs (0.22 and 2.79, respectively). Male LMs report an average of 3.46 female sex partners and 1.48 male partners, compared with 2.70 and 0.20, respectively, among male IBFs. Only the number of male partners among men, however, displays significant differences (after controls are included).

Among GFs, only three bivariate distinctions appear. However, six distinctions emerge after regression controls: they are more apt than IBFs to smoke, have been arrested, pled guilty to non-minor offenses, and report more numerous sex partners (except for the number of female sex partners among male GFs). Adopted respondents display no simple differences from IBFs, while the children of stepfamilies and single parents each display six significant differences with young adults from still-intact, biological mother/father families.

Although I have paid much less attention to most of the other groups whose estimates also appear in Tables 2–4, it is worth noting how seldom the estimates of young-adult children who were adopted by strangers (before age 2) differ statistically from the children of still-intact biological families. They display the fewest simple significant differences—seven—across the 40 outcomes evaluated here. Given that such adoptions are typically the result of considerable self-selection, it should not surprise that they display fewer differences with IBFs.

To summarize, then, in 25 of 40 outcomes, there are simple statistically-significant differences between IBFs and LMs, those whose mothers had a same-sex relationship. After controls, there are 24 such differences. There are 24 simple differences between IBFs and stepfamilies, and 24 statistically-significant differences after controls. Among single (heterosexual) parents, there are 25 simple differences before controls and 21 after controls. Between GFs and IBFs, there are 11 and 19 such differences, respectively.

3.2. Summary of differences between LMs and other family structures/experiences

Researchers sometimes elect to evaluate the outcomes of children of gay and lesbian parents by comparing them not directly to stable heterosexual marriages but to other types of households, since it is often the case—and it is certainly true of the NFSS—that a gay or lesbian parent first formed a heterosexual union prior to "coming out of the closet," and witnessing the dissolution of that union (Tasker, 2005). So comparing the children of such parents with those who experienced no union dissolution is arguably unfair. The NFSS, however, enables researchers to compare outcomes across a variety of other types of family-structural history. While I will not explore in-depth here all the statistically-significant differences between LMs, GFs, and other groups *besides* IBFs, a few overall observations are merited.

Of the 239 possible between-group differences here—not counting those differences with Group 1 (IBFs) already described earlier—the young-adult children of lesbian mothers display 57 (or 24% of total possible) that are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (indicated in Tables 2–4 with a caret), and 44 (or 18% of total) that are significant after controls (not shown). The majority of these differences are in suboptimal directions, meaning that LMs display worse outcomes. The young-adult children of gay men, on the other hand, display only 11 (or 5% of total possible) between-group differences that are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and yet 24 (or 10% of total) that are significant after controls (not shown).

In the NFSS, then, the young-adult children of a mother who has had a lesbian relationship display more significant distinctions with other respondents than do the children of a gay father. This may be the result of genuinely different experiences of their family transitions, the smaller sample size of children of gay men, or the comparatively-rarer experience of living with a gay father (only 42% of such respondents reported ever living with their father while he was in a same-sex relationship, compared with 91% who reported living with their mother while she was in a same-sex relationship).

4. Discussion

Just how different are the adult children of men and women who pursue same-sex romantic (i.e., gay and lesbian) relationships, when evaluated using population-based estimates from a random sample? The answer, as might be expected, depends on to whom you compare them. When compared with children who grew up in biologically (still) intact, mother–father families, the children of women who reported a same-sex relationship look markedly different on numerous outcomes, including many that are obviously suboptimal (such as education, depression, employment status, or marijuana use). On 25 of 40 outcomes (or 63%) evaluated here, there are bivariate statistically-significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between children from still-intact, mother/father families and those whose mother reported a lesbian relationship. On 11 of 40 outcomes (or 28%) evaluated here, there are bivariate statistically-significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between children from still-intact, mother/father families and those whose father reported a gay relationship. Hence, there are differences in both

B.6. Closeness to biological mother and father (6 items, α = 0.89 and 0.92)

Respondents were asked to evaluate their current relationship with up to four parent figures—who they reported living with for at least 3 years when they were 0–18 years old—by reporting the frequency of six parent–child interactions. For each parent figure, these six items were coded and summed into a parental closeness index. From these, I derived indices of closeness to the respondent's biological mother and biological father. Response categories ranged from never (1) to always (5):

1. How often do you talk openly with your parent about things that are important to you?
2. How often does your parent really listen to you when you want to talk?
3. How often does your parent explicitly express affection or love for you?
4. Would your parent help you if you had a problem?
5. If you needed money, would you ask your parent for it?
6. How often is your parent interested in the things you do?

B.7. Attachment (depend, 6 items, α = 0.80; anxiety, 6 items, α = 0.82)

For a pair of attachment measures, respondents were asked to rate their general feelings about romantic relationships, both past and present, in response to 12 items. Response categories ranged from "not at all characteristic of me" (1) to "very characteristic of me" (5). Items 1–6 were coded and summed into a "depend" scale, with higher scores denoting greater comfort with depending upon others. Items 7–12 were coded and summed into an anxiety scale, with higher scores denoting greater anxiety in close relationships, in keeping with the original Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins and Read (1990). The measures employed were:

1. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.
2. I am comfortable depending on others.
3. I find that people are never there when you need them.
4. I know that people will be there when I need them.
5. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
6. I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.
7. I do not worry about being abandoned.
8. In relationships, I often worry that my partner does not really love me.
9. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
10. In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
11. I want to merge completely with another person.
12. My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.

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Parental same-sex relationships, family instability, and subsequent life outcomes for adult children: Answering critics of the new family structures study with additional analyses

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ABSTRACT

The July 2012 publication of my study on the outcomes of young adults who report parental same-sex relationship behavior raised a variety of questions about the New Family Structures Study and my analyses and interpretations of it. This follow-up article seeks to address a variety of the more common criticisms that have been raised, to offer new commentary and analyses, and to pose questions for future analysts of the NFSS and other datasets that are poised to consider how household dynamics are associated with youth and young-adult outcomes. The new analyses I present here still reveal numerous differences between adult children who report maternal same-sex behavior (and residence with her partner) and those with still-married (heterosexual) biological parents. Far fewer differences appear between the former and several other groups, most notably never-married single mothers.

1. Introduction

The July 2012 publication in this journal of my study on the young-adult children of parents who have had a same-sex relationship created more criticism and scrutiny than have most sociological studies. The intensity of the response can be attributed largely to the fact that the results of this study—based on a large population-based sample—differed markedly from earlier research based largely on small, nonrandom samples of same-sex families. Others would no doubt disagree. Apart from criticisms about measurement or sampling issues, concern has been expressed about all manner of minutiae, as well as details about the publication process, the funding agencies, and even the data collection firm.[1] Some perceive it as a tool for this or that political project, a role it was never designed to fill. It cannot answer political or legal questions, and is by definition a retrospective look at household composition and dynamics. The controversy surrounding its publication and reception has also aptly generated concern about freedom of inquiry in general. But in this manuscript I wish to get back to the basic task at hand—addressing concerns, describing the data in greater detail, and pursuing additional analyses of them.

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[1] The audit of the publication process of the original study—a rather uncommon and disturbing experience in social science research—appears elsewhere in this issue. While its author has long harbored negative sentiment about me, the audit nevertheless ought to dispel suspicions of malfeasance in the review process. It concluded that an ideologically-balanced pool of reviewers recommended publication. Concern has been also raised about the relationship of the author to the pair of funding agencies. As noted in the study, I have always operated without strings from either organization. No funding agency representatives were consulted about research design, survey contents, analyses, or conclusions. Any allegations that the funders might have improperly influenced me are simply false. Finally, Knowledge Networks is a premier online research organization, and their data collection efforts are featured in hundreds of published articles in the social sciences, public opinion, health, and other journals—including the August 2012 issue of the *American Sociological Review* (see Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012)—and are utilized by the American National Election Studies. Simply put, the KnowledgePanel® is a high-quality data source.

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While sample size issues—as well as concerns about representativeness—have long hampered the general line of inquiry into same-sex parents and child outcomes, prior to the NFSS most suppositions about possible problems with studies based on nonrandom samples were intellectual rather than data-based. That is, it was easy for scholars to admit the limitations of their study samples. What was more difficult, however, was to grasp just how nonrandom they were and how that might affect their results (Marks, 2012). Even while family scholars have long acknowledged the likelihood of demographic diversity among same-sex households, most have been unable to document the extent of this diversity in a statistically-meaningful way. National probability surveys have typically been constrained by the relatively small number of same-sex households in the general population, resulting in small sample sizes and limited statistical power to detect between-group differences. Most research has instead relied on snowball and convenience samples, which often minimize genuine racial, socioeconomic, and geographic heterogeneity (Tasker, 2005). Others have turned to the Census and the American Community Survey for more representative demographic characteristics of same-sex couples with children (Rosenfeld, 2010; Gates and Ost, 2004). However, these population-based resources are not able to tell us about gay or lesbian single parents or non-residential parents. In addition, Census data provide very little detail about the diversity of family structures experienced by children of same-sex parents over time.

Thus the original NFSS study, while subject to its own documented limitations, suggested the possibility that previous nonrandom studies were painting a rosier picture of child outcomes than would be the case were a more random sample to be employed or if the outcomes were based on the reports of young adults themselves rather than relying on parental self-reports. In other words, the original study muddied what had largely been, up to that time, a relatively consistent, positive portrait of child outcomes in gay and lesbian households (however defined).

In this article, I address six areas of concern with the original study, including an extended discussion of the challenges of dealing with household and relational instability in analyses, before briefly reporting the results of alternative approaches to presenting overview data. Throughout the article I make greater use of the NFSS's detailed family history calendar data to look at the variety of family structure experiences in the households in which young adults reported maternal same-sex relationship behavior.

2. Responses to criticisms

2.1. What constitutes an LM or GF respondent?

Concern about the use of the acronyms LM (lesbian mother) and GF (gay father) in the original study is arguably the most reasonable criticism. In hindsight, I wish I would have labeled LMs and GFs as MLRs and FGRs, that is, respondents who report a maternal (or mother's) lesbian relationship, and respondents who report a paternal (or father's) gay relationship. While in the original study's description of the LM and GF categories I carefully and accurately detailed what respondents fit the LM and GF categories, I recognize that the acronyms LM and GF are prone to conflate sexual orientation, which the NFSS did not measure, with same-sex relationship behavior, which it did measure. The original study, indeed the entire data collection effort, was always focused on the respondents' awareness of parental same-sex relationship behavior rather than their own assessment of parental sexual orientation, which may have differed from how their parent would describe it. Therefore, I will use the (albeit awkward) dual acronyms of LM/MLR and GF/FGR to provide orienting reference to the original study's acronym while capitalizing on the more appropriate acronym, which I begin using exclusively in the section on new analyses.

Some critics have correctly noted that the LM/MLR measure includes respondents who appear to have lived both with their mother and her romantic partner for many years, as well as respondents who never lived with their mother's romantic partner. The relationship(s) may or may not have been brief—the NFSS survey did not directly inquire about their number or duration. While it is possible that a one-night stand might have sufficed as a definition here, it stretches the imagination to hold that many respondents would have (a) been aware of such solitary experiences, (b) classify it/them as a "romantic relationship", and (c) list it when queried. In my own studies of heterosexual behavior, romantic relationships are typically perceived as enduring for far longer than an evening. In Wave III of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, less than three percent of all young adults' sexual relationships that were identified by respondents as "romantic" in content (rather than nonromantic) lasted for only a day (Regnerus and Uecker, 2011). However, it is a fair request to assess those LM/MLR respondents who lived with their mother and her romantic partner separately from those that did not. I do so below.

2.2. Comparing apples to oranges?

The most consistent criticism is that the original study's analyses "compare apples to oranges". That is, the primary comparison is between LM/MLRs, GF/FGRs, and intact biological families (IBFs), and that given prevalent instability in the NFSS sample of the former pair's households, that to compare them to IBFs is to cause the former pair to look poorly. However, if stability is a key asset for households with children, then it is sensible to use intact biological families in any comparative assessment. But this has rarely been the approach employed in past research: Rosenfeld (2010: 757) notes that of the 45

studies listed in Tasker's (2005) review article, only two included "a more traditional family control group built into the study".

Moreover, it is inaccurate to imply that the original study did not evaluate distinctions between LM/MLRs and other categories that displayed some degree of instability. Tables 2–4 in the original study (not shown) displayed indicators of statistically-significant differences between LM/MLRs and all other groups, and I briefly describe on page 13 (Section 3.2) of the original study text the number of (and percent of possible) statistically-significant differences both before and after controls between both LM/MLR and GF/FGR categories and all non-IBF groups.

The primary concern here, I presume, is that the LM/MLR and GF/FGR categories are comprised of households that have experienced *varying* degrees of instability, and that similar experiences of instability in the one ought to be compared with similar experiences in the other. In an ideal data world, that makes sense. But this is not as simple as it might seem, since there is likewise varying degrees of instability in the groups denoted as "stepfamily" and "single parent" in the original study. The household rosters, assessed over the course of 18 years, reveal quite diverse degrees of instability in stepfamilies and single-parent households. For example, some respondents in the "single parent" category certainly witnessed their never-married mother enter and exit multiple relationships, and yet I combined them with respondents whose mother never entered another relationship after divorcing the respondent's father. Some respondents entered a stepfamily as young children, while others later in adolescence. Thus the "apples versus oranges" criticism is, upon closer inspection, not a very realistic one in social reality. Americans' households, traced over the course of respondents' first 18 years of life, reveal considerable family diversity that requires challenging—and subjective—measurement decisions from researchers, as I noted in the original text.

Many critics have focused on the small number of stably-coupled lesbian families in the NFSS data, and some have taken this as a sign of a suspect dataset. It could be an undercount, but it may not be. A closer look at the respondents who stated that their mother had a same-sex romantic relationship and that they lived with both her and her partner at some point further reveals the short-term nature of many of the relationships. Of the 85 respondents who claimed such, 31 reported living with their mother's partner for up to 1 year only.[2] An additional 20 reported this relationship for up to 2 years, five for 3 years, and eight for 4 years.

2.2.1. Relationship Instability: Control variable or pathway in analyses of child outcomes?

What should social scientists do about household (and by inference, parental relationship) instability that is nearly coterminous with a key independent variable, in this case the LM/MLR and GF/FGR categories? It is not a simple decision. Control for instability?[3] But what does it mean to "control for" instability in this scenario? It is quite possible that household instability—via parental romantic-relationship fragility—was a key pathway or mechanism linking the LM/MLRs with the comparatively higher emotional and social challenges they report. This tendency to overlook pathways in favor of control variables more broadly reflects a typical misguided tendency in social science research to always search for "independent" effects of variables, often missing the pathways explaining how social phenomena actually operate. In this case, parental same-sex relationships, family instability, and more problematic young-adult life outcomes are quite possibly linked. In assessing young-adult outcomes, controlling for the effect of a parent's same-sex relationship with a "family instability" variable and concluding—presumably—that there is no association could well be the wrong thing to do. This is "controlling for the pathways", a model that is unhelpful for understanding social reality. If, for example, most men smoked, but very few women ever did so, it is entirely unhelpful to declare that—controlling for smoking—there is no effect of gender on lung cancer. In that case, men's predilection for smoking would merit close scrutiny and concern. Indeed, a key purpose of social science is "to identify and understand the various underlying causal mechanisms that produce identifiable outcomes and events of interest" (Smith, 2010: 293).

2.2.2. Gay and lesbian relationship instability: An artifact of the past?

Since the NFSS did not select by design a group of unstable gay or lesbian parents, a key issue is whether or not the LM/MLR and GF/FGR households are more unstable than those of heterosexual couples. If stability was comparatively rarer in the lives of MLRs and FGRs growing up some decades ago when stigma was more pronounced and social support for lesbian and gay parents far more modest than today, is it a safe assumption that the NFSS study is a "dated" one by definition and that if the study could be replicated in the future that the associations here would very likely disappear? Perhaps, but hardly certain: assumptions about comparative relationship stability among gay and lesbian couples—including parents—can and have been empirically tested using other data on current relationships.

[2] As I note below in greater detail, I have included in the LM/MLR group the 12 cases in which the respondent indicated that both parents had had a same-sex relationship. In the previous study, I analyzed them only as GF/FGRs, given sample-size concerns.

[3] One option is to utilize the NFSS calendars and create a measure of the number of household transitions rather than the experience of one or more transitions (Potter, 2012). But the household calendars could well miss the exact number of transitions, since the NFSS only asked respondents to denote when someone else lived with them for at least 4 months. This also overlooks parental romantic relationships which were either brief or else not residential (yet potentially still influential). And in cases of excessive household instability, respondents may experience survey fatigue and may underreport transitions when filling out what amounts to be for them a rather complicated household calendar. Moreover, to suggest that all romantic partner dissolution creates problems for respondents is short-sighted. Indeed, some dissolutions solve problems (Amato, 2000). Such is the messy business of documenting and assessing household histories.

A study of Norwegian and Swedish same-sex marriages notes that divorce risk is higher in same-sex marriages and that the "risk of divorce for female partnerships actually is more than twice that for male unions" (Andersson et al., 2006: 89). Moreover, early same-sex marriages—those occurring shortly after a shift in marriage law—exhibited a similar risk of divorce as did more recent marriages, suggesting no notable variation in instability over time as a function of new law or pent-up demand among more stable, longstanding relationships. The study authors estimate that in Sweden, 30% of female marriages are likely to end in divorce within 6 years of formation, compared with 20% for male marriages and 13% for heterosexual ones. Moreover, they found lesbian couples to be more "sociodemographically homogamous" than other couples, and speculate that "this situation may be conducive to a high level of dynamism in the relationship, but perhaps not to the kind of inertia that is related to marital stability" (Andersson et al., 2006: 96). Biblarz and Stacey (2010: 17) similarly note this phenomenon in their review of research on lesbian parents, asserting that they face a "somewhat greater risk of splitting up", due in part, they suggest, to their "their high standards of equality". A follow-up assessment of more recent Norwegian statistics, presented at the 2012 annual meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA), found no evidence that the gender gap in same-sex divorce has closed (Noack et al., 2012).

Michael Rosenfeld detects the same pattern in a study of nationally-representative data on American relationships presented at the 2012 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. He finds that lesbian couples report higher relationship satisfaction *alongside* higher break-up rates. The highest stability rates appear among heterosexual married couples, while notably better stability is located among married gay and lesbian couples than among those in civil unions (as would be expected). Yet his analysis too detects greater instability among lesbian couples in general, a finding that persists even after a lengthy series of control variables are included. While lesbian couples in the study are more apt to be raising children, the presence of children does not appear to be a factor in the diminished relationship stability evident among them.

That few LM/MLR respondents reported stability in their mother and her partner's relationship (in the domicile in which the respondent lived) ought not be simply chalked up to greater stigma or insufficient social support as factors that account for the entirety of the association. In light of evidence of the same pattern among current lesbian couples in the US and Scandinavia, it remains an open question.

While the cited study authors tend to find the difference in divorce behavior between lesbians and gay men intriguing, this "lesbian effect" is anticipated in a sexual economics approach to romantic relationships (e.g., Baumeister, 2010). This perspective places no blame for instability on sexual orientation per se, but rather on stable gender differences and preferences in relationships (e.g., for women, a significantly higher bar for the relationship's quality and emotional satisfaction). Gay men's relationships thus appear predictably more stable than lesbian relationships, but are less likely to be sexually monogamous when compared with lesbian or heterosexual relationships (Hoff and Beougher, 2010). Here again, this is believed to be due not to sexual orientation but stable gender differences in relationship preferences and sex drive (Baumeister and Vohs, 2004). While the effect of relationship stability on child health and development is well-documented and apparent in the original NFSS study's findings—as well as this follow-up exploration—the effect on children of parental nonmonogamy is not well understood.

2.3. Is the NFSS a representative sample?

As an extension of the second concern, many critics have focused on the small number of stably-coupled lesbian families in the NFSS data. Indeed, only two cases of LM/MLRs reported living with their mother and her partner uninterrupted from age 1 to 18. Of the 85 cases (out of 175 total LM/MLRs) wherein the respondent indicated living in residence for a time with both their mother and her female partner, only 19 spent at least five consecutive years together, and six cases spent 10 or more consecutive years together. Some have taken this as a sign of a suspect and non-representative dataset. It could be an undercount, but it may well not be. Rather, readers would do well to keep in mind anachronistic expectations concerning an era in which enduring same-sex relationships *with children* were simply less common, and those that existed certainly subject to greater social scrutiny and stigma. And, as noted above, there may be stability distinctions that foster unreasonable expectations, especially following upon decades of research conclusions based on nonrandom samples.

Moreover, such expectations also tend to reveal a class bias that may hamper studies in this domain, given that families wherein same-sex couples pursue the complicated—and potentially quite expensive—process of deciding just how and when they will have a child tend to be more educated, wealthy, and white than the families of many NFSS LM/MLRs. Rosenfeld (2010: 757) notes:

> ...the literature on same-sex couple parenting has tended to feature studies of the kind of women who can afford ART: white, upper-middle-class women. Nationally representative data tend to paint a different picture: in the US census, same-sex couple parents tend to be more working class and are much more likely to be nonwhite compared with heterosexual married couples.

The children of such a selective group—those who conceive by ART, or assisted reproductive technology—would be expected to witness greater stability and to fare better, enjoying advantages that tend to benefit children regardless of their parents' race, age, or sexual orientation. While this selective group is hardly the only face of same-sex parents in America, they are the ones who receive the majority of popular and scholarly attention.

In his assessment of group differences in academic progress, moreover, Rosenfeld (2010) restricted his Census-based sample to the children of same-sex couples "who had been living with both parents for at least 5 years", thus raising the like-

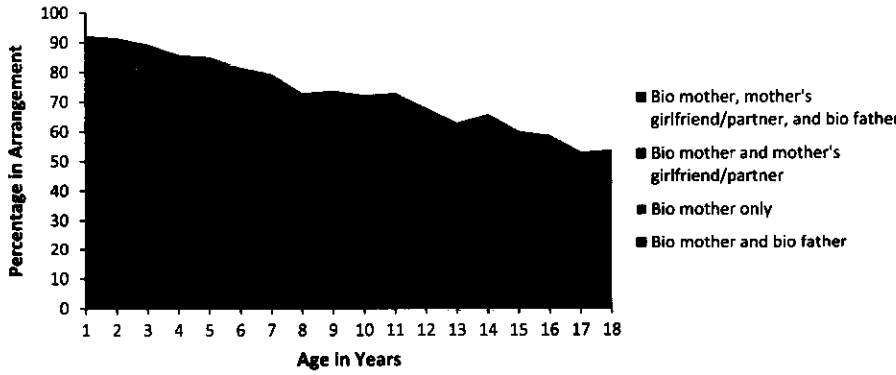

Fig. 1. Frequency of four living arrangements of young adults who reported maternal same-sex romantic relationship behavior, by age, NFSS (unweighted).

lihood that his sample was more residentially and relationally stable than a sample that included the children of same-sex couples who had not met this threshold of inclusion. I did not restrict my sample in the same manner, though such a measurement decision is potentially quite influential on respondents' outcomes. His "no differences" conclusion may be a result of dropping more unstable households from his analytic sample.

2.3.1. Differences and similarities between the NFSS and the census

While no sampling strategy can compete with a genuine census in scope, it is important to note that the Census does *not* ask respondents about their sexual orientation or any sort of sexual behavior. It can only identify couples of the same sex who are co-residing at the time of the survey. Gay or lesbian parents who are raising children as single parents or who do not live with their children are not enumerated as such in the Census.

The NFSS, which relied on asking respondents about their parents' same-sex relationship activity, includes numerous single-parent households among its LM/MLR and GF/FGR categories, as Fig. 1 details. Given greater instability among lesbian couples, failing to account for lesbian single-parent households seems a notable limitation. The original NFSS study's sample may actually be more representative than Rosenfeld's *Demography* article, since I did not impose stability limitations and could measure single-parent gay- and lesbian-headed households.

The Census also only takes a snapshot of a household, meaning it offers few insights into the family-structure dynamics of same-sex households. Thus the Census and the NFSS may reveal quite different household arrangements. The Census has an unparalleled ability to measure the fraction of households with children that are headed by same-sex couples.[4] The NFSS, looking retrospectively, can document parental same-sex relationships as reported by young adults who did not spend their entire childhood living with their biological parents, and can describe the stability of household arrangements over time. What results are simply different strengths and weaknesses. And yet both exhibit comparable race and class diversity. Rosenfeld's (2010) analysis of ACS data reported that 37% and 42% of children from female and male same-sex households are Black and Hispanic, respectively. He also noted that same-sex couples with children have, on average, less education and lower household incomes than both heterosexual couples with children and same-sex couples without children.

2.4. Mixed-orientation marriages?

There seems to be no scholarly consensus—as may well be the case in social reality—about what exactly makes a mother a *lesbian* mother, and what makes a father a *gay* father. Some critics seem to have largely presumed that the NFSS's LM/MLR or GF/FGR parent is in fact lesbian or gay, respectively, in their sexual orientation, despite my caution against doing so in the original study. (Others appear to question whether any of them are gay or lesbian.) Some speculate that what I have largely captured in the original study's findings are the challenges facing "mixed-orientation marriages" wherein a respondent's parent elects "against their orientation" to marry someone of the opposite sex, only to witness the subsequent dissolution of their union followed by the commencement of a same-sex relationship. As I noted in the original study text, there appear to be plenty of failed heterosexual unions in the data. Fig. 1 displays the unweighted frequencies of four of the most common living arrangements among LM/MLR respondents beginning at age 1 up through age 18.[5] As already noted, a slight majority spend their early years with their biological mother and father, a figure that diminishes to about 5% by age 18.[6] A consistently large segment of LM/MLRs (~35%) reports living exclusively with their biological mother, while a much smaller segment reports

[4] This ability is tempered, as is the case in many data collection efforts, by other challenges. In the case of the Census, the prevalence of gender miscoding may create notable over-counts of the number of same-sex households in the US (Black et al., 2007).

[5] Tables 1–3, however, employ weighted estimates, in consonance with the original study.

[6] An unknown (though likely sizable) number of the respondents who report living with both their "biological mother and father" do not share the same residence with them, but rather spend time in each one's household.

Table 1
Mean scores on select dichotomous outcome variables, NFSS (can read as percentage: as in, 0.43 = 43%).

	1-IBF	2-MLR no partner	3-MLR + partner	4-FGR	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Currently married	0.43	0.31	0.38	0.38	0.36*	0.49	0.37	0.41	**0.27**	**0.21***	**0.17***	0.47	0.63	0.41	0.45
Currently cohabiting	0.09	0.18	0.27*	0.23	**0.31***	0.11	**0.20***	0.10	**0.25***	**0.18***	0.31*	**0.22***	0.28*	0.07^	**0.32***
Family received welfare growing up	0.17	**0.72***	**0.70***	**0.51***	**0.47***	**0.41*,^**	**0.49***	**0.37^**	**0.70***	**0.75***	**0.56**	**0.58***	0.13^	0.12^	**0.47***
Currently on public assistance	0.10	**0.32**	**0.49***	0.14^	**0.31***	**0.21^**	**0.22*,^**	**0.27***	**0.52***	**0.44***	**0.49***	**0.28**	0.11^	**0.27***	**0.25**
Currently employed full-time	0.49	0.36	**0.17***	0.36	0.42*,^	0.48^	0.44^	0.55^	0.42^	**0.31**	**0.09***	0.52^	**0.75^**	0.41^	0.42^
Currently unemployed	0.08	0.10^	**0.40***	0.23	0.15^	0.13^	0.15^	0.06^	0.18	**0.19**	**0.34***	0.03^	**0.00^**	0.22	0.12^
Voted in last presidential election	0.57	0.46	0.43	0.71*,^	0.63	0.53	0.58	0.52	0.58	**0.43**	0.37	**0.70*,^**	0.44	0.58	0.59
Thought recently about suicide	0.05	0.23*	0.09	0.17	0.08	0.10	0.06	0.02	0.11	0.09	0.03	0.04	**0.01**	0.07	0.11
Recently or currently in therapy	0.08	**0.30***	0.17	0.10	0.12	**0.17***	**0.20***	0.11	0.24*	0.13	0.09	0.13	**0.01*,^**	**0.22***	0.09
Identifies as entirely heterosexual	0.90	**0.45***	**0.68***	0.80*	0.83	**0.82***	**0.82***	**0.89^**	0.80	**0.77***	0.83	0.91^	0.96^	0.82	0.72*
Is in a same-sex romantic relationship	0.04	0.12	0.02	0.14	0.05	**0.15***	0.01	**0.00***	0.05	0.01	0.04	**0.13***	-	0.23	0.21
Had an affair while married/cohabiting	0.13	**0.42***	**0.38***	0.26	0.12^	**0.28***	0.17	0.09^	**0.48***	0.23	0.18	0.23	0.18	0.20	0.30
Has ever had an STI	0.08	0.21	0.26*	0.18*	0.12	0.12	**0.17***	0.06^	**0.25***	**0.19***	0.26*	0.17	0.08	0.16	0.12
Ever touched sexually by an adult	0.02	**0.16***	**0.26***	0.07	0.10*	**0.09***	**0.10***	0.10*	**0.20***	**0.15***	0.11	0.05^	0.02^	0.03^	0.09
Ever forced to have sex against will	0.08	**0.42***	**0.27***	0.17*	**0.24***	**0.18***	**0.20***	0.13	0.17	**0.17**	0.11	0.12	0.10	**0.23***	0.17

*1 = Lived with both bio mother and father from 0 to 18 or until left home (N = 919).
*2 = MLR, but never lived with mother's same-sex romantic partner (N = 90).
*3 = MLR, spent time in residence with mother's same-sex romantic partner (N = 85).
*4 = FGR (N = 61).
*5 = Lived with both bio mom and dad until 18, but subsequently they've gotten a divorce (N = 116).
*6 = Parents were married, but got a divorce, R lived with mother, and R reported subsequent relationship(s) and remarriage (N = 223).
*7 = Parents were married, but got a divorce, R lived with mother, and R reported subsequent relationship(s) but no remarriage (N = 278).
*8 = Parents were married, but got a divorce, R lived with mother, and R reported NO subsequent relationship before 18 (N = 108).
*9 = Parents never married, R lived with mother, and R reported subsequent relationship(s) and marriage (N = 104).
*10 = Parents never married, R lived with mother, and R reported subsequent relationship(s) but no marriage (N = 221).
*11 = Parents never married, R lived with mother, and R reported NO subsequent relationship (N = 48).
*12 = Parents were married, but one parent died, and R reported subsequent relationship(s), possibly including remarriage (N = 117).
*13 = Parents were married, but one parent died, and R reported NO subsequent relationship (N = 28).
*14 = Adopted by strangers at birth or 1 year (at some point, either one or two adopted parents) (N = 101).
*15 = Parents were married, but got a divorce, R lived with father (84% of the time, R said father had another relationship) (N = 95).
Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.
An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from logistic regression models (not shown).
A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of Group 3 (MLR + partner), without additional controls.

Table 2
Mean scores on select continuous outcome variables, NFSS.

	1-IBF	2-MLR no partner	3-MLR + partner	4-FGR	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Educational attainment	3.19	**2.34***	**2.41***	2.70	**2.88*,^**	**2.72***	**2.82*,^**	3.06^	**2.41***	**2.18***	**2.01***	**2.78**	2.92	**3.21^**	**2.79***
Family-of-origin safety/security	4.13	**3.23***	**2.97***	**3.35***	**3.52*,^**	**3.70*,^**	**3.45*,^**	**3.71*,^**	**3.35***	**3.44*,^**	**3.59*,^**	**3.63*,^**	4.02^	**3.77*,^**	**3.12***
Family-of-origin negative impact	2.30	**3.30***	**2.97***	**2.89***	**2.96***	**2.67***	**2.97***	2.55	**3.04***	**2.74***	**3.02***	**2.72***	2.62	**2.83***	**2.67**
Closeness to biological mother	4.17	4.07	4.03	**3.71***	3.95	4.26*	**3.88**	3.90	**3.63**	**3.50***	4.20	3.87	4.17	3.58	**3.79**
Closeness to biological father	3.87	3.16	3.18	3.44	**3.29***	3.53	3.29	**2.77***	-	**1.57*,^**	**3.01**	3.28	3.27	-	3.89
Self-reported physical health	3.75	3.50	**3.24**	3.67	**3.46**	**3.51**	3.58^	**3.42**	**3.40**	**3.28***	**3.09***	3.54	3.66	3.53	3.54
Self-reported overall happiness	4.16	3.63	4.04	3.79	4.02	3.94	3.93	3.83	3.88	**3.70**	**3.64**	4.03	**4.58*,^**	3.92	3.80
CES-D depression index	1.83	**2.37***	**2.12**	**2.07**	2.01	1.88	1.92	1.84	**2.02**	**2.08**	1.99	1.76^	**1.48*,^**	1.95	1.90
Attachment scale (depend)	2.82	**3.63***	**3.27**	3.10	**3.08**	3.00	**3.12***	2.84	**3.26**	**3.22***	**3.40***	**3.16**	2.52^	**3.12***	3.10
Attachment scale (anxiety)	2.46	2.77	2.63	2.60	2.71	2.47	2.54	2.41	2.66	**2.65**	2.77	2.51	2.03	**2.66***	2.49
Impulsivity scale	1.90	2.03	2.06	1.95	1.94	1.79^	1.93	1.84^	1.98	1.79^	1.81	1.86	**1.66*,^**	1.85	1.76^
Level of household income	8.27	**6.45***	**5.96**	7.08	7.42	**7.46^**	7.67^	7.34	**5.72***	**5.38***	**3.67*,^**	7.68^	9.03*,^	7.93^	7.73^
Current relationship quality index	4.11	3.80	**3.76**	**3.73***	3.95	3.88	3.94	3.92	**3.65**	**3.66***	3.92	3.77	4.36^	3.79	4.02
Current relationship is in trouble	2.04	**2.60***	2.21	**2.47**	**2.43**	2.15	**2.32***	2.19	**2.77*,^**	**2.45***	2.60	2.31	1.85	2.35	2.31

Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.
An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from OLS regression models (not shown).
A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of Group 3 (MLR + partner), without additional controls.

Table 3
Mean scores on select event-count outcome variables, NFSS.

	1-IBF	2-MLR no partner	3-MLR + partner	4-FGR	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Frequency of marijuana use	1.32	1.78	1.85*	1.62	**2.00***	1.32	**1.71***	1.61	1.86*	**1.99***	1.70	1.50	1.62	1.33	1.50
Frequency of alcohol use	2.70	2.58	2.41	2.42	2.55	**2.35**	2.64	2.87	2.84*	2.63	**1.89**	2.55	2.59	2.74	2.84
Frequency of drinking to get drunk	1.68	1.89	1.88	1.89	1.90	1.58	1.75	1.91	1.96*	1.78	1.37	1.73	**1.32**	1.73	1.68
Frequency of smoking	1.79	**2.95***	**2.84***	2.22	2.44	**2.25***	2.03	2.31	2.38	**2.27**	2.14	1.90	2.59	2.34*	2.44
Frequency of watching TV	3.01	**4.21***	3.46	3.17	3.33	3.21	3.24	3.47	**3.98***	**3.50**	3.51	3.37	**2.27^**	3.31	2.77
Frequency of having been arrested	1.18	**1.82***	**1.76***	1.52	1.38	**1.39*,^**	**1.37*,^**	1.17^	1.34^	**1.43***	1.47*	1.27^	1.37	1.31^	**1.53***
Freq pled guilty to non-minor offense	1.10	**1.43***	**1.35***	1.36	1.30	1.20	1.21*	1.10^	1.22	1.15	1.18	1.20	1.23	1.19	1.24
N of female sex partners (among women)	0.22	**1.66*,^**	**0.70***	**0.74***	**0.96***	**0.52***	0.41	0.14^	0.51	**0.64***	0.94	0.52	0.36	0.47	0.47*
N of female sex partners (among men)	2.70	2.37^	3.97	4.16	3.66	3.79	3.30	2.03*	3.91*	**4.38***	2.06	**4.52***	3.43	3.24	3.60
N of male sex partners (among women)	2.79	**5.73*,^**	2.98	**4.51***	**3.97***	**4.55*,^**	**4.05*,^**	3.70	**4.90*,^**	**4.42*,^**	4.13	3.38	3.36	3.49	**4.53*,^**
N of male sex partners (among men)	0.20	2.13*	1.18*	1.47*	0.98	0.37	0.10^	0.72	0.20	0.35*	0.62*	0.21	0.47*	0.27	1.76

Bold indicates the mean scores displayed are statistically-significantly different from IBFs (currently intact, bio mother/father household, column 1), without additional controls.
An asterisk (*) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's coefficient and that of IBF's, controlling for respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of mother's education, perceived household income while growing up, experience being bullied as a youth, and state's legislative gay-friendliness, derived from Poisson or negative binomial regression models (not shown).
A caret (^) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the group's mean and the mean of Group 3 (MLR + partner), without additional controls.

their early years were spent with both their biological mother and her same-sex partner. The household presence of a same-sex partner begins emerging slowly but steadily through the course of childhood. In numerous cases LM/MLR respondents indicated first living with their mother's girlfriend/partner at a comparatively older age (for example, 54 began at or after age 10, 40 at or after age 13, and 18 at or after age 16).

Whether these were in fact mixed-orientation marriages or relationships is of course impossible to discern with confidence, since the study did not ask the respondents to identify their parents' sexual orientation, a decision I remain comfortable with given the era the data are describing. Many LM/MLR and GF/FGR respondents may well have witnessed their parents' mixed-orientation marriage. On the other hand, given the documented fluidity of women's sexuality, I would hesitate to assert that a same-sex relationship—especially if relatively brief—is indicative of a fixed sexual orientation (Diamond, 2008).

While the etiology of homosexuality is not under study here, the matter seems tacitly embedded in criticisms about classification. As such, the original study should be understood in the manner in which it is explicitly titled—about the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships. If for whatever reason that is an unsatisfying anchor—parental sexual behavior rather than orientation—it is beyond the scope of an academic study to be something it is not. Nevertheless, it suggests the importance of consistently employing the acronyms MLR and FGR.

2.5. Bisexuality in the NFSS?

As an extension of this, a few critics have raised the possibility that plenty of the NFSS LM/MLRs and GF/FGRs may in reality be bisexual in orientation. In an unpublished study of the most recent two series of data from the National Survey of Family Growth—presented at the 2012 PAA conference—Danielle Wondra reports that self-identified bisexual men and women are notably more likely to desire a (or another) child than self-identified gay or lesbian respondents. Suffice it to say that more research needs to be conducted on bisexual parents outside of a simplistic "mixed-orientation" rubric that may not reflect the reality of many couples' history of sexual experiences or preferences. Moreover, claims about "mixed orientation marriages" unnecessarily problematize bisexuality by prioritizing a dualistic (either/or) essentialism about sexual orientation that may not fit social reality (Diamond, 2008).

If the complex calendar histories are any clue, bisexuality is probable among some NFSS respondents' parents. Such frequencies of opposite-sex relationship behavior or opposite-sex attraction are not out of step with other studies of same-sex partnerships (Andersson et al., 2006; Potter, 2012; Rosenfeld, 2012). Nevertheless, only four LM/MLRs reported an opposite-sex parent figure—a stepfather—living in the household *after* having reported a same-sex parent figure (i.e., a mother's girlfriend/partner). In sum, the B in LGBT parenting deserves more attention than it has been given, and may constitute a more significant share of such households-with-children than has often been recognized.

2.6. Foster care experiences

A few critics have raised the suggestion that in the era represented by the NFSS respondents, gay and lesbian parents were more apt to either adopt foster children, or—at the other extreme—faced the forcible placement of their own children in foster care. Either scenario raises concern about the original study's claim that LM/MLR respondents were the most apt to report experience with the foster care system. This concern prompted a detailed exploration of the calendar data for the 21 LM/MLR respondents who reported such an experience, in order to discern the timing of their foster system experience. As with the original study's discussion about the timing of sexual victimization, here too the story is muddied. Three of the 21 LM/MLRs who spent time in foster care did so immediately prior to reporting living in a household with their mother and her female partner—one of the two scenarios anticipated by critics. Four of the 21 spent some time in foster care following their report of living in a household with their mother and her partner—the other scenario that concerned critics. Whether any of these seven cases actually match those scenarios in reality is impossible to know from the data. The remaining 14 cases display calendar data less apt to suggest either of these two scenarios as a likely fit. Just under half of the 21 respondents reported their foster care experience beginning before age 10.

3. Alternative analyses

Tables 1–3 display results in a manner similar to Tables 2–4 in the original study (not shown), with several changes made in response to criticisms:

1. I split the LM/MLRs (hereafter, MLRs) between those who never lived with their mother's same-sex romantic partner and those that have.

Why this particular division? Of the 85 cases wherein the respondent indicated living in residence with both their mother and her female partner, only 19 spent five consecutive years together, and six cases spent 10 consecutive years together. While this is not quite the comparison some critics seek, the statistical power is simply not present for a direct comparison

of the most stable MLRs, given uncommon relationship longevity in their households-of-origin. It is true, though, that greater longevity of such in residence relationships tended to reveal better outcomes at face value.

2. I shifted the 12 cases wherein a respondent reported that both parents had had a same-sex relationship from FGR to MLR.

As noted in the original study, analyses of the household calendar data for these 12 cases revealed comparable exposure to both their mother and father. As a result, there are now 90 MLR cases who never reported living with their mother's partner/girlfriend, 85 MLRs who did, and 63 FGRs. As reported in the original study, the latter group very infrequently reported living with their father and his partner/boyfriend, so this group remains unaltered in its structure.

3. I expanded the total number of groups to 15 in order to better reflect the different experiences of stability and partnering in American households. I did not include an "others" catch-all group in this set of analyses. As a result, the final tables reflect just under 400 fewer cases than in the original study.

Given the outcome measures are the same as employed in the original study, I do not describe their operationalization here. That can be located in the original study's text and its Appendix B. The analytic strategy—an overview featuring both simple between-group means tests as well as an indicator of statistical significance after controlling for several independent variables via outcome-appropriate forms of regression analyses—remains the same as well, for comparability.

As was the case in the original analyses, Tables 1–3 reveal that those adult children who report a maternal same-sex relationship—regardless of whether their mother ever resided with her same-sex partner—look far more similar to adult children of other types of households than they do to those from stably-intact biological families. There are 20 simple statistically-significant differences between group 2 (MLRs who never lived with their mother's same-sex partner) and IBFs, and an identical number between group 3 (MLRs who did live with their mother's same-sex partner for a time) and IBFs. After controls—via regression analysis—there are 21 and 19 statistically-significant differences between groups 2 and 3, respectively, and IBFs. These numbers are a dip from those reported in the original study.

Most of the distinctions between IBFs and groups 2 and 3 are consistent with those reported in the original study. On 16 different outcomes, *both* groups 2 and 3 appear statistically different from IBFs prior to controls (i.e., regression models); the same is true of 13 outcomes after controls. There are nine simple differences between FGRs and IBFs prior to controls, and 12 after them. As in the original study, distinctions between the two MLR groups and IBFs appear in the domains of sexuality, sexual behavior, sexual victimization, household economics and work, educational attainment, smoking, arrests, and retrospective sentiment about family life while growing up.[7]

Carets denote a simple statistically-significant difference between group 3 (MLRs who spent time living with their mother's partner) and all non-IBF groups. Of the 517 possible between-group differences, 89% (or 17%) appear significant at the bivariate level, a decline from the 24% figure when assessing all MLRs together in the original study. Several groups compare similarly to group 3 in terms of very few simple differences:

- Group 4 (FGRs): two differences.
- Group 11 (never-married single mothers with no subsequent relationships): two differences.
- Group 9 (single mothers who subsequently remarried): four differences.
- Group 10 (never-married single mothers with relationships but no marriage): four differences.
- Group 2 (MLRs who did not live with their same-sex partner): four differences.

Group 10 displays by far the most pre- and post-regression statistically-significant differences with IBFs (31 and 23, respectively), and tends to fare consistently poorly across most outcomes which are agreeably suboptimal. Group 3 (MLRs who lived with their mother's partner) compare less favorably with:

- Group 8 (divorced, lived with mother, no subsequent relationships): 12 differences.
- Group 13 (parents married until one died, no subsequent relationships): 15 differences.

In general, groups 8 and 13 fared rather well on many outcomes, shedding light on the likely importance of avoiding further household transitions. Where outcomes are clearly discernible as optimal or suboptimal—for example, educational attainment or STI, respectively—group 8 fares better than groups 6–7, whose only distinction is subsequent maternal romantic relationships and, in group 6's case, remarriage. Additional parental romantic partners, even remarriages, seem to make a (negative) difference. As in the original study, there is much that these analyses cannot document, including causation as well as any effects of sexual orientation. Selectivity is very likely at work on multiple outcomes.

Analyses comparing younger versus older NFSS respondents may prove a fertile avenue of exploration. Initial ancillary analyses suggest that older young adult MLRs seem to have struggled more than younger ones. Whether this is a function

[7] As noted in the original study text, the NFSS data is insufficiently capable of discerning much information about the context surrounding respondents' sexual victimization. No simplistic conclusions about it ought to be discerned from the analyses.

of time exposure, or more pronounced social stigma further in the past than among the "newest" young adult MLRs, is difficult to say, given the interpretive limitations of this data. Alternately, some challenges may cumulate over time; it may be that the older respondents have simply had more time to experience particular outcomes.

4. Conclusion

This follow-up study has sought to address six common criticisms that have arisen following the July 2012 publication in this journal of the original study entitled, "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships?" One in particular, about comparing stable heterosexual couples to stable same-sex couples, is particularly challenging to accomplish with all but the very largest datasets (which, in turn, tend to have fewer interesting outcome measures). It also raises important conceptual and analytic questions about how to navigate persistent instability in the NFSS's MLR and FGR cases. This is complicated by contemporary evidence in the US and Scandinavia suggesting that lesbian relationships in particular—including legally married couples—continue to exhibit instability in excess of heterosexual relationships and even gay male relationships.

Perhaps in social reality there really are two "gold standards" of family stability and context for children's flourishing—a heterosexual stably-coupled household and the same among gay/lesbian households—but no population-based sample analyses is yet able to *consistently confirm wide evidence* of the latter. Moreover, a stronger burden of proof than has been employed to date ought to characterize studies which conclude "no differences", especially in light of longstanding reliance on nonrandom samples of unknown bias and the high risk of making Type II errors in small-sample studies (Marks, 2012; Nock, 2001). In other words, the science here remains young. Until much larger random samples can be drawn and evaluated, the probability-based evidence that exists—including additional NFSS analyses herein—suggests that the biologically-intact two-parent household remains an optimal setting for the long-term flourishing of children.

Of course the flourishing of children involves many other factors besides parental relationship structure and decision-making, as analyses of the NFSS and numerous other datasets confirm. Indeed, most young-adult respondents in the NFSS report ample success and largely avoid problematic physical and emotional difficulties, regardless of their parents' experiences, decisions, and actions.

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