



# Same-sex parenting and children's outcomes: A closer examination of the American psychological association's brief on lesbian and gay parenting

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## ABSTRACT

In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued an official brief on lesbian and gay parenting. This brief included the assertion: "Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents" (p. 15). The present article closely examines this assertion and the 59 published studies cited by the APA to support it. Seven central questions address: (1) homogeneous sampling, (2) absence of comparison groups, (3) comparison group characteristics, (4) contradictory data, (5) the limited scope of children's outcomes studied, (6) paucity of long-term outcome data, and (7) lack of APA-urged statistical power. The conclusion is that strong assertions, including those made by the APA, were not empirically warranted. Recommendations for future research are offered.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, differences have been observed between outcomes of children in marriage-based intact families and children in cohabiting, divorced, step, and single-parent families in large, representative samples.<sup>1</sup> Based on four nationally representative longitudinal studies with more than 20,000 total participants, McLanahan and Sandefur conclude:

*Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents... regardless of whether the resident parent remarries.*<sup>2</sup>

Differences have recurred in connection with myriad issues of societal-level concern including: (a) health,<sup>3</sup> mortality,<sup>4</sup> and suicide risks,<sup>5</sup> (b) drug and alcohol abuse,<sup>6</sup> (c) criminality and incarceration,<sup>7</sup> (d) intergenerational poverty,<sup>8</sup> (e) education and/or labor force contribution,<sup>9</sup> (f) early sexual activity and early childbearing,<sup>10</sup> and (g) divorce rates as adults.<sup>11</sup> These outcomes represent important impact variables that influence the well-being of children and families, as well as the national economy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Table 2; McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) and Wilcox et al. (2005).

<sup>2</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), p. 1 (emphasis in original).

<sup>3</sup> Waite (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Gaudino et al. (1999) and Siegel et al. (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Wilcox et al. (2005, p. 28) and Cutler et al. (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Bachman et al. (1997), Flewelling and Bauman (1990), Horwitz et al. (1996), Johnson et al. (1996), Simon (2002), Waite and Gallagher (2000), Weitoft et al. (2003), and Wilcox et al. (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Blackmon et al. (2005), Harper and McLanahan (2004), Kamark and Galston (1990, pp. 14–15), Manning and Lamb (2003), and Margolin (1992, p. 546).

<sup>8</sup> Akerlof (1998), Blackmon et al. (2005), Brown (2004), Oliver and Shapiro (1997), Rank and Hirschl (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Amato (2005), Battle (1998), Cherlin et al. (1998), Heiss (1996), Lansford (2009), Manning and Lamb (2003), McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), Phillips and Asbury (1993), and Teachman et al. (1998).

<sup>10</sup> Amato (2005), Amato and Booth (2000), Ellis et al. (2003), and McLanahan and Sandefur (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Cherlin et al. (1995) and Wolfinger (2005).

By way of comparison, social science research with small convenience samples has repeatedly reported no significant differences between children from gay/lesbian households and heterosexual households. These recurring findings of no significant differences have led some researchers and professional organizations to formalize related claims. Perhaps none of these claims has been more influential than the following from the 2005 American Psychological Association (APA) Brief on "Lesbian and Gay Parenting".<sup>12,13</sup>

Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.

Are we witnessing the emergence of a new family form that provides a context for children that is equivalent to the traditional marriage-based family? Many proponents of same-sex marriage contend that the answer is yes. Others are skeptical and wonder—given that other departures from the traditional marriage-based family form have been correlated with more negative long-term child outcomes—do children in same-sex families demonstrably avoid being "disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents" as the APA Brief asserts? This is a question with important implications, particularly since the 2005 APA Brief on "Lesbian and Gay Parenting" has been repeatedly invoked in the current same-sex marriage debate.

## 2. Statement of purpose

The overarching question of this paper is: *Are the conclusions presented in the 2005 APA Brief on "Lesbian and Gay Parenting" valid and precise, based on the cited scientific evidence?*<sup>14</sup> In the present paper, seven questions relating to the cited scientific evidence are posed, examined, and addressed.<sup>15</sup>

Two portions of the APA Brief are of particular concern to us in connection with these questions: (a) the "Summary of Research Findings" (pp. 5–22), and (b) the first and largest section of the annotated bibliography, entitled "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" (pp. 23–45). In the latter section (pp. 23–45), the APA references 67 manuscripts. Eight of these studies are "unpublished dissertations".<sup>16</sup> The 59 published studies are listed in Table 1 of this paper, providing clear parameters from which to formulate responses to the seven outlined questions, next.

### 2.1. Question 1: how representative and culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse were the gay/lesbian households in the published literature behind the APA brief?

In response to question 1, more than three-fourths (77%) of the studies cited by the APA brief are based on small, non-representative, convenience samples of fewer than 100 participants. Many of the non-representative samples contain far fewer than 100 participants, including one study with five participants (Wright, 1998; see Table 1). As Strasser (2008) notes:

Members of the LGBT community... vary greatly in their attitudes and practices. For this reason, it would be misleading to cite a study of gay men in urban southern California as if they would represent gay men nationally (p. 37).

By extension, it seems that influential claims by national organizations should be based, at least partly, on research that is nationally representative.

Lack of representativeness often entails lack of diversity as well.<sup>17</sup> A closer examination of the APA-cited literature from the "Empirical Studies" (pp. 23–45) section of the APA Brief reveals a tendency towards not only non-representative but racially homogeneous samples. For example:

<sup>12</sup> The APA Brief's stated objective was primarily to influence family law. The preface states that "the focus of the publication... [is] to serve the needs of psychologists, lawyers, and parties in family law cases... Although comprehensive, the research summary is focused on those issues that often arise in family law cases involving lesbian mothers or gay fathers" (APA Brief, 2005, p. 3). Redding (2008) reports that "leading professional organizations including the American Psychological Association" have issued statements and that "advocates have used these research conclusions to bolster support for lesbian and gay parenting and marriage rights, and the research is now frequently cited in public policy debates and judicial opinions" (p. 136).

<sup>13</sup> Patterson, p. 15 (from APA Brief, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Kuhn (1970/1996) has stated that there is an "insufficiency of methodological directives, by themselves, to dictate a unique substantive conclusion to many sorts of scientific questions" (p. 3). To draw substantive conclusions, a socially and historically influenced paradigm is needed. Research is then "directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies" (p. 24). Indeed, paradigmatic biases, and other influences, can make us vulnerable to "discrepancies between warranted and stated conclusions in the social sciences" (Glenn, 1989, p. 119; see also Glenn, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Kuhn (1970/1996) has noted that "when scientists disagree about whether the fundamental problems of their field have been solved, the search for rules gains a function that it does not ordinarily possess" (p. 48).

<sup>16</sup> These unpublished dissertations include Hand (1991), McPherson (1993), Osterweil (1991), Paul (1986), Puryear (1983), Rees (1979), Sbordone (1993), and Steckel (1985). An adapted portion of one of these dissertations (Steckel, 1985) was eventually published (Steckel, 1987) and is included in the present examination; the other unpublished work is not included in Table 1 of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> Of the 59 published "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children", no studies mention African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-American families in either their titles or subtitles. The reference list in the APA Brief's "Summary of Research Findings" (pp. 15–22) is also void of any studies focusing on African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-American families. None of the "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" (pp. 23–45) holds, as its focus, any of these minorities. (Note: Three years after the 2005 APA Brief, Moore (2008) published a small but pioneering study on African-American lesbians.)

**Table 1**  
Publications Cited in APA brief on lesbian and gay parenting (pp. 23–45).

Author and year	GayLes N	Hetero N	Stat used	Cohen N	Stat power	Outcome studied	Hetero compar group
Bailey et al. (1995)	55par; 82chl	0	T-test/Chi	393	N/A	Sexual orientation	None
Barrett and Tasker (2001)	101	0	T-test/Chi	393	N/A	Child responses to a gay parent	None
Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a)	33	33	T-test	393	No	Parents reports of values of children	Fathers
Bigner and Jacobsen (1989b)	33	33	T-test	393	No	Parent reports of parent behavior	Fathers
Bos et al. (2003)	100	100	MANOVA	393	No	Parental motives and desires	Families
Bos et al. (2004)	100	100	MANOVA	393	No	Parent reports of couple relations	Families
Bozett (1980)	18	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Father disclosure of homosexuality	None
Brewaeyts et al. (1997)	30	68	ANOVA	393	No	Emotional/gender development	DI/Non-DI Couples
Chan et al. (1998a)	30	16	Various	393	No	Division of labor/child adjustment	DI Couples
Chan et al. (1998b)	55	25	Various	393	Reported	Psychosocial adjustment	DI Couples
Ciano-Boyce and Shelley-Sireci (2002)	67	44	ANOVA	393	No	Division of child care	Adoptive Parents
Crawford et al. (1999)	0	0	MANOVA	393	N/A	388 Psychologists' attitudes	N/A
Flaks et al. (1995)	15	15	MANOVA	393	No	Cognitive/behavioral/parenting	Married Couples
Fulcher et al. (2002)	55	25	T-test/Chi	393	Reported	DI/adult-child relationships	Parents
Gartrell et al. (1996)	154	0	Descript.	N/A	N/A	Prospective Parent Reports	None
Gartrell et al. (1999)	156	0	Descript.	N/A	N/A	Reports on parenting issues	None
Gartrell et al. (2000)	150	0	Descript.	N/A	N/A	Reports on parenting issues	None
Gartrell et al. (2005)	74	0	Descript.	N/A	N/A	Health, school/education	None
Gershon et al. (1999)	76	0	Reg.	390	N/A	Adolescent coping	None
Golombok et al. (1983)	27	27	T-test/Chi	393	No	Psychosexual development	Single mother families
Golombok et al. (2003)	39	134	Various	393	No	Socioemotional dev./relations	Couples & singles
Golombok and Rust (1993)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Reliability testing of a pre-school gender inventory	
Golombok and Tasker (1996)	25	21	Pearson	783	Reported	Sexual orientation	Children of single mothers
Golombok et al. (1997)	30	83	MANOVA	393	No.	Parent-child interactions	Couples & singles
Green (1978)	37	0	Descript.	N/A	N/A	Sexual identity	None
Green et al. (1986)	50par; 56chl	40par; 48chl	Various	390	No	Sexual identity/social relations	Single mothers
Harris and Turner (1986)	23	16	ANOVA/Chi	393	No	Sex roles/relationship with child	Single moth. & fath.
Hoefler (1981)	20	20	ANOVA	393	No	Sex-role behavior	Single mothers
Huggins (1989)	18	18	T-test	393	No	Self-esteem of adolescent children	Divorced mothers
Johnson and O'Connor (2002)	415	0	Various	N/A	No	Parenting beliefs/division of labor/etc.	None
King and Black (1999)	N/A	N/A	F	393	N/A	338 College students' perceptions	N/A
Kirkpatrick et al. (1981)	20	20	Descript.	N/A	No	Gender development	Single mothers
Koepke et al. (1992)	47 couples	0	MANOVA	N/A	N/A	Relationship quality	None
Kweskin and Cook, 1982	22	22	Chi-Sqr	785	No	Sex-role behavior	Single mothers
Lewis, 1980	21	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Child response to m. disclosure	None
Lott-Whitehead and Tully, 1993	45	0	Descriptive	N/A	N/A	Adult reports of impacts on children	None
Lyons, 1983	43	37	Descriptive	N/A	No	Adult self-reports	Divorced mothers
McLeod et al., 1999	0	0	Mult. regr.	N/A	No	151 College student reports	N/A
Miller, 1979	54	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Father behavior & f-child bond	None
Miller et al., 1981	34	47	Chi-Sqr	785	No	Mother role/home environment	Mothers
Morris et al., 2002	2431	0	MANCOVA	N/A	N/A	Adult reports on "coming out"	None
Mucklow and Phelan, 1979	34	47	Chi-Sqr	785	No	Behavior and self-concept	Married mothers
O'Connell, 1993	11	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Social and sexual identity	None
Pagelow, 1980	20	23	Qual/Descr.	N/A	N/A	Problems and coping	Single mothers
Patterson (1994)	66	0	T-test	393	No	Social/behavioral/sexual identity	Available norms
Patterson (1995)	52	0	T-test/Chi/F	393	No	Division of labor/child adjustment	None

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Author and year	GayLes N	Hetero N	Stat used	Cohen N	Stat power	Outcome studied	Hetero compar group
Patterson (2001)	66	0	Various	393	No	Maternal mental health/child adjustment	None
Patterson et al., 1998	66	0	Various	393	No	Contact w/grandparents & adults	None
Rand et al. (1982)	25	0	Correlations	783	No	Mothers' psychological health	None
Sarantakos, 1996	58	116	F-test	393	N/A	Children's educational/social outcomes	Married/non-married
Siegenthaler and Bigner, 2000	25	26	T-test	393	No	Mothers' value of children	Mothers
Steckel (1987)	(Review)	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	Psychosocial development of children	None
Sullivan, 1996	34 couples	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Division of labor	None
Tasker and Golombok, 1995	25	21	Pearson/T	783	No	Psychosocial/sexual orientation	Single mothers
Tasker and Golombok (1997)	27	27	Various	393	Reported	Psychological outcomes/family rel.	Single mothers
Tasker and Golombok (1998)	15	84	ANCOVA/Chi	785	N/A	Work and family life	DI & NC couples
Vanfraussen et al. (2003)	24	24	ANOVA	393	No	Donor insemination/family funct.	Families
Wainwright et al. (2004)	44	44	Various	393	No	Psychosocial/school/romantic	Couples
Wright (1998)	5	0	Qualitative	N/A	N/A	Family issues/processes/meaning	None

N/A = Not applicable (e.g., In connection with statistical power, qualitative studies and studies without heterosexual comparison groups are coded as N/A).

1. "All of [the fathers in the sample] were Caucasian" (Bozett, 1980, p. 173).
2. "Sixty parents, all of whom were White" comprised the sample (Flaks et al., 1995, p. 107).
3. "[All 40] mothers... were white" (Hoeffler, 1981, p. 537).
4. "All the children, mothers, and fathers in the sample were Caucasian" (Huggins, 1989, p. 126).
5. "The 25 women were all white" (Rand et al., 1982, p. 29).
6. "All of the women... [were] Caucasian" (Siegenthaler and Bigner, 2000, p. 82).
7. "All of the birth mothers and co-mothers were white" (Tasker and Golombok, 1998, p. 52).
8. "All [48] parents were Caucasian" (Vanfraussen et al., 2003, p. 81).

Many of the other studies do not explicitly acknowledge all-White samples, but also do not mention or identify a single minority participant—while a dozen others report "almost" all-white samples.<sup>18</sup> Same-sex family researchers Lott-Whitehead and Tully (1993) cautiously added in the discussion of their APA Brief-cited study:

Results from this study must be interpreted cautiously due to several factors. First, the study sample was small ( $N = 45$ ) and biased toward well-educated, white women with high incomes. These factors have plagued other [same-sex parenting] studies, and remain a concern of researchers in this field (p. 275).

Similarly, in connection with this bias, Patterson (1992), who would later serve as sole author of the 2005 APA Brief's "Summary of Research Findings on Lesbian and Gay Families", reported<sup>19</sup>:

Despite the diversity of gay and lesbian communities, both in the United States and abroad, samples of children [and parents] have been relatively homogeneous... Samples for which demographic information was reported have been described as predominantly Caucasian, well-educated, and middle to upper class.

In spite of the privileged and homogeneous nature of the non-representative samples employed in the studies at that time, Patterson's (1992) conclusion was as follows<sup>20</sup>:

Despite shortcomings [in the studies], however, results of existing research comparing children of gay or lesbian parents with those of heterosexual parents are *extraordinarily clear*, and they merit attention... There is no evidence to suggest that psychosocial development among children of gay men or lesbians is compromised in *any respect* relative to that among offspring of heterosexual parents.

<sup>18</sup> Examples of explicit or implicitly all-White (or nearly all-White) samples include, but are not limited to: Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a,b), Bozett (1980), Flaks et al. (1995), Green (1978), Green et al. (1986), Hoeffler (1981), Huggins (1989), Koepke et al. (1992), Rand et al. (1982), Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000), Tasker and Golombok (1995, 1998), Vanfraussen et al. (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Patterson (1992, p. 1029).

<sup>20</sup> Patterson (1992, p. 1036) (emphasis added).

Patterson's conclusion in a 2000 review was essentially the same<sup>21</sup>:

[C]entral results of existing research on lesbian and gay couples and families with children are *exceptionally clear*. . . [The] home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are just as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to enable psychosocial growth among family members.

Although eight years had passed, in this second review, Patterson (2000) reported the continuing tendency of same-sex parenting researchers to select privileged lesbian samples. Specifically, she summarized, "Much of the research [still] involved small samples that are predominantly White, well-educated [and] middle-class" (p. 1064).<sup>22</sup> Given the privileged, homogeneous, and non-representative samples of lesbian mothers employed in "much of the research", it seems warranted to propose that Patterson was empirically premature to conclude that comparisons between "gay or lesbian parents" and "heterosexual parents" were "extraordinarily clear"<sup>23</sup> or "exceptionally clear".<sup>24</sup>

There is an additional point that warrants attention here. In Patterson's statements above, there are recurring references to research on children of "gay" men/parents. In 2000, Demo and Cox reported that "children living with gay fathers" was a "rarely studied household configuration".<sup>25</sup> In 2005, how many of the 59 published studies cited in the APA's list of "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" (pp. 23–45) specifically addressed the outcomes of children from gay fathers? A closer examination reveals that only eight studies did so.<sup>26</sup> Of these eight studies, four did not include a heterosexual comparison group.<sup>27</sup> In three of the four remaining studies (with heterosexual comparison groups), the outcomes studied were:

- (1) "the value of children to . . . fathers" (Bigner and Jacobsen, 1989a, p. 163);
- (2) "parenting behaviors of . . . fathers" (Bigner and Jacobsen, 1989b, p. 173);
- (3) "problems" and "relationship with child" (Harris and Turner, 1986, pp. 107–8).

The two Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a,b) studies focused on fathers' reports of *fathers'* values and behaviors, not on children's outcomes—illustrating a recurring tendency in the same-sex parenting literature to focus on the parent rather than the child. Harris and Turner (1986) addressed parent–child relationships, but their study's male heterosexual comparison group was composed of two single fathers. Although several studies have examined aspects of gay fathers' lives, none of the studies comparing gay fathers and heterosexual comparison groups referenced in the APA Brief (pp. 23–45) appear to have specifically focused on children's developmental outcomes, with the exception of Sarantakos (1996), a study to which we will later return.

In summary response to question 1 ("How representative and culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse were the gay/lesbian households in the published literature behind the APA Brief?"), we see that in addition to relying primarily on small, non-representative, convenience samples, many studies do not include any minority individuals or families. Further, comparison studies on children of gay fathers are almost non-existent in the 2005 Brief. By their own reports, social researchers examining same-sex parenting have repeatedly selected small, non-representative, homogeneous samples of privileged lesbian mothers to represent all same-sex parents. This pattern across three decades of research raises significant questions regarding lack of representativeness and diversity in the same-sex parenting studies.

## 2.2. Question 2: how many studies of gay/lesbian parents had no heterosexual comparison group?

Of the 59 publications cited by the APA in the annotated bibliography section entitled "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" (pp. 23–45), 33 included a heterosexual comparison group. In direct response to question 2, 26 of the studies (44.1%) on same-sex parenting did not include a heterosexual comparison group. In well-conducted science, it is important to have a clearly defined comparison group before drawing conclusions regarding differences or the lack thereof. We see that nearly half of the "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" referenced in the APA Brief allowed no basis for comparison between these two groups (see Table 1). To proceed with precision, this fact does not negate the APA claim. It does, however, dilute it considerably as we are left with not 59, but 33, relevant studies with heterosexual comparison groups.

## 2.3. Question 3: when heterosexual comparison groups were used, what were the more specific characteristics of those groups?

We now turn to a question regarding the nature of comparison samples. Of the 33 published "Empirical Studies Specifically Related to Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children" (APA Brief, pp. 23–45) that did directly include a heterosexual

<sup>21</sup> Patterson (2000, p. 1064) (emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> Patterson (2000, p. 1064).

<sup>23</sup> Patterson (1992, p. 1036).

<sup>24</sup> Patterson (2000, p. 1064).

<sup>25</sup> Demo and Cox (2000, p. 890).

<sup>26</sup> Bailey et al. (1995), Barrett and Tasker (2001), Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a,b), Bozett (1980), Harris and Turner (1986), Miller (1979), Sarantakos (1996).

<sup>27</sup> Bailey et al. (1995), Barrett and Tasker (2001), Bozett (1980), Miller (1979).

**Table 2**  
Brief overview of 15 intact/divorce/step/single family studies.

(N)	Number of reported participants			
Probability	Is the study based on a probability sample?			
Comp Grp	Is a probability sample used as a comparison group?			
Long	Does the study employ measurements across time?			
Key	I = Yes; X = No			
	(N)	Probability	Comp Grp	Long
Amato (1991)	9643	I	I	I
Aquilino (1994)	4516	I	I	I
Brown (2004) <sup>a</sup>	35,938	I	I	X
Chase-Lansdale et al. (1995) <sup>b</sup>	17,414	I	I	I
Cherlin et al. (1998) <sup>c</sup>	11,759	I	I	I
Ellis et al. (2003)	762	I	I	I
Harper and McLanahan (2004) <sup>d</sup>	2846	I	I	I
Hetherington and Kelly (2002) <sup>e</sup>	1400	I	I	I
Jekielek (1998)	1640	I	I	I
Lichter et al. (2003) <sup>f</sup>	7665	I	I	X
Manning and Lamb (2003)	13,231	I	I	X
McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) (based on four data sets)				
PSID <sup>g</sup>	2900	I	I	I
NLSY <sup>h</sup>	5246	I	I	I
HSBS <sup>i</sup>	10,400	I	I	I
NSFH <sup>j</sup>	13,017 <sup>k</sup>	I	I	I
Mitchell et al. (2009) <sup>l</sup>	4663	I	I	I
Nock (1998) <sup>m</sup>	3604	I	I	I
Page and Stevens (2005) <sup>n</sup>	2023	I	I	I
Total	148,667			

<sup>a</sup> National Survey of America's Families (NSAF).

<sup>b</sup> United Kingdom study and sample.

<sup>c</sup> United Kingdom study and sample.

<sup>d</sup> National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men and Women (NLSY).

<sup>e</sup> Virginia Longitudinal Study (VLS).

<sup>f</sup> National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).

<sup>g</sup> Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID).

<sup>h</sup> National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men and Women (NLSY).

<sup>i</sup> The High School and Beyond Study (HSBS).

<sup>j</sup> National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH).

<sup>k</sup> This is the total original sample. The sub-sample is unlisted but is likely smaller.

<sup>l</sup> National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health).

<sup>m</sup> National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men and Women (NLSY).

<sup>n</sup> Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID).

comparison group, *what were the more specific characteristics of the groups that were compared?* The earlier examination and response related to question 1 documented that, by Patterson's reports, "Despite the diversity of gay and lesbian communities... in the United States",<sup>28</sup> the repeatedly selected representatives of same-sex parents have been "small samples [of lesbians] that are predominantly White, well-educated [and] middle-class" (p. 1064).<sup>29</sup>

In spite of homogeneous sampling, there is considerable diversity among gay and lesbian parents. Considerable diversity exists among heterosexual parents as well. Indeed, the opening paragraph of the present article noted recurring differences in several outcomes of societal concern for children in marriage-based intact families compared with children in cohabiting, divorced, step, and single-parent families.<sup>30</sup> Many of the cited findings are based on probability samples of thousands (see Table 2).

Because children in marriage-based intact families have historically fared better than children in cohabiting, divorced, step, or single-parent families on the above outcomes, the question of what "groups" researchers selected to represent heterosexual parents in the same-sex parenting studies becomes critical. A closer examination of the 33 published same-sex parenting studies (APA Brief, pp. 23–45) with comparison groups, listed chronologically, reveals that:

1. Pagelow (1980) used "single mothers" as a comparison group (p. 198).
2. Hoeffler (1981) used "heterosexual single mothers" (p. 537).
3. Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) used "single, heterosexual mothers" (p. 545).
4. Kweskin and Cook (1982) used women from Parents without Partners (p. 969).

<sup>28</sup> Patterson (1992, p. 1029).

<sup>29</sup> Patterson (2000, p. 1064).

<sup>30</sup> See Footnotes 2–10 for documentation.

5. Lyons (1983) used "heterosexual single mothers" (p. 232).
6. Golombok et al. (1983) used "single-parent households" (p. 551).
7. Green et al. (1986) used "solo parent heterosexual mothers" (p. 175).
8. Harris and Turner (1986) used 2 "male single parents" and 14 "female single parents" (p. 105).
9. Huggins (1989) used "divorced heterosexual mothers"<sup>31</sup> (p. 123).
10. Tasker and Golombok (1995) used "heterosexual single mothers" (p. 203).
11. Tasker and Golombok (1997) used "single heterosexual mothers" (p. 38).

We see that in selecting *heterosexual* comparison groups for their studies, many same-sex parenting researchers have not used marriage-based, intact families as heterosexual representatives, but have instead used single mothers (see Table 1). Further, Bigner and Jacobsen used 90.9 percent single-father samples in two other studies (1989a, 1989b).<sup>32</sup> In total, in at least 13 of the 33 comparison studies listed in the APA Brief's list of "Empirical Studies" (pp. 23–45) that include heterosexual comparison groups, the researchers explicitly sampled "single parents" as representatives for heterosexual parents. The repeated (and perhaps even modal) selection of single-parent families as a comparison heterosexual-parent group is noteworthy, given that a Child Trends (2002) review has stated that "children in single-parent families are more likely to have problems than are children who live in intact families headed by two biological parents".<sup>33</sup>

Given that at least 13 of the 33 comparison studies listed in the APA Brief's list of "Empirical Studies" (pp. 23–45) used single-parent families as heterosexual comparison groups, what group(s) did the remaining 20 studies use as heterosexual representatives? In closely examining the 20 remaining published comparison group studies, it is difficult to formulate precise reports of the comparison group characteristics, because in many of these studies, the heterosexual comparison groups are referred to as "mothers" or "couples" without appropriate specificity (see Table 1). Were these mothers continuously married—or were they single, divorced, remarried, or cohabiting? When couples were used, were they continuously married—or remarried or cohabiting? These failures to explicitly and precisely report sample characteristics (e.g., married or cohabiting) are significant in light of Brown's (2004) finding based on her analysis of a data set of 35,938 US children and their parents, that "regardless of economic and parental resources, the outcomes of adolescents (12–17 years old) in cohabiting families...are worse...than those...in two-biological-parent married families".<sup>34</sup> Because of the disparities noted by Brown and others, scientific precision requires that we know whether researchers used: (a) single mothers, (b) cohabiting mothers and couples, (c) remarried mothers, or (d) continuously married mothers and couples as heterosexual comparison groups.

Due to the ambiguity of the characteristics of the heterosexual samples in many same-sex parenting studies, let us frame a question that permits a more precise response, namely: *How many of the studies in the APA Brief's "Empirical Studies" section (pp. 23–45) explicitly compare the outcomes of children from intact, marriage-based families with those from same-sex families?* In an *American Psychologist* article published the year after the APA Brief, Herek (2006) referred to a large, national study by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) "comparing the children of intact heterosexual families with children being raised by a single parent". Herek then emphasized that "this [large scale] research literature does not include studies comparing children raised by two-parent same-sex couples with children raised by two-parent heterosexual couples".<sup>35</sup> Isolated exceptions exist with relatively small samples (as discussed shortly in response to question 4 and as listed in Table 1), but they are rare.

Given what we have seen regarding heterosexual comparison group selection, let us revisit three related claims. First, in 1992, Patterson posited that<sup>36</sup>:

[N]ot a single study has found children of gay and lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.

Patterson's (2000) claim was similar<sup>37</sup>:

[C]entral results of existing research on lesbian and gay couples and families with children are exceptionally clear... [The] home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are just as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to enable psychosocial growth among family members.

Lastly, and most significantly, we turn to the APA Brief's "Summary of Research Findings on Lesbian and Gay Parenting", also single-authored by Patterson (see p. 5)<sup>38</sup>:

Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.

<sup>31</sup> "Four of the 16 [divorced] heterosexual mothers were either remarried or currently living with a heterosexual lover" (p. 127).

<sup>32</sup> "Of the 66 respondents, six were married, 48 were divorced, eight were separated, and four had never been married" (Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a, p. 166). This means the sample was 90.9% single.

<sup>33</sup> Moore et al. (2002); for an extensive review, see Wilcox et al. (2011).

<sup>34</sup> Brown (2004, p. 364) (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> Herek (2006, p. 612).

<sup>36</sup> Patterson (1992, p. 1036) (emphasis added).

<sup>37</sup> Patterson (2000, p. 1064) (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Patterson, p. 15 (from APA Brief, 2005), (emphasis added).

In all three of these claims (including that latter from the 2005 APA Brief), Patterson uses the broad and plural term “heterosexual parents”, a term that includes marriage-based, intact families. This broad claim is not nuanced by the information that, with rare exceptions, the research does not include studies comparing children raised by two-parent, same-sex couples with children raised by marriage-based, heterosexual couples. Further, no mention is made that in at least 13 of the 33 extant comparison studies referenced in the Brief (pp. 23–45), the groups selected to represent “heterosexual parents” were composed largely, if not solely, of single parents. We now move to another related examination of the APA Brief.

2.4. Question 4: does a scientifically-viable study exist to contradict the conclusion that “not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged”?

There is at least one notable exception<sup>39</sup> to the APA's claim that “Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents”.<sup>40</sup> In the “Summary of Findings” section, the APA Brief references a study by Sarantakos (1996),<sup>41</sup> but does so in a footnote that critiques the study (p. 6, Footnote 1). On page 40 of the APA Brief's annotated bibliography, a reference to the Sarantakos (1996) article is offered, but there is no summary of the study's findings, only a note reading “No abstract available”.

Upon closer examination, we find that the Sarantakos (1996) study is a comparative analysis of 58 children of heterosexual married parents, 58 children of heterosexual cohabiting couples, and 58 children living with homosexual couples that were all “matched according to socially significant criteria (e.g., age, number of children, education, occupation, and socio-economic status)”.<sup>42</sup> The combined sample size (174) is the seventh-largest sample size of the 59 published studies listed in the APA Brief's “Summary of Research Findings on Lesbian and Gay Parenting” (see Table 1). However, the six studies with larger sample sizes were all adult self-report studies,<sup>43</sup> making the Sarantakos combined sample the largest study (APA Brief, pp. 23–45) that examined children's developmental outcomes.

Key findings of the Sarantakos study are summarized below. To contextualize these data, the numbers are based on a teacher rating-scale of performance “ranging from 1 (very low performance), through 5 (moderate performance) to 9 (very high performance)”.<sup>44</sup> Based on teacher (not parent) reports, Sarantakos found several significant differences between married families and homosexual families.<sup>45</sup>

Language Achievement	Married 7.7, Cohabiting 6.8, Homosexual 5.5
Mathematics Achievement	Married 7.9, Cohabiting 7.0, Homosexual 5.5
Social Studies Achievement	Married 7.3, Cohabiting 7.0, Homosexual 7.6
Sport Interest/Involvement	Married 8.9, Cohabiting 8.3, Homosexual 5.9
Sociability/Popularity	Married 7.5, Cohabiting 6.5, Homosexual 5.0
School/Learning Attitude	Married 7.5, Cohabiting 6.8, Homosexual 6.5
Parent-School Relationships	Married 7.5, Cohabiting 6.0, Homosexual 5.0
Support with Homework	Married 7.0, Cohabiting 6.5, Homosexual 5.5
Parental Aspirations	Married 8.1, Cohabiting 7.4, Homosexual 6.5 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Sarantakos, 1996, pp. 24–27.

Sarantakos concluded, “Overall, the study has shown that children of married couples are more likely to do well at school in academic and social terms, than children of cohabiting and homosexual couples”.<sup>46</sup>

The APA's decision to de-emphasize the Sarantakos (1996) study was based, in part, on the criticism that “nearly all indicators of the children's functioning were based on subjective reports by teachers”.<sup>47</sup> The Sarantakos study was based, in part, on teacher reports. However, teacher reports included “tests” and “normal school assessment” (p. 24). Subsequently, it may be

<sup>39</sup> Other arguably contradictory studies are reviewed by Schumm (2011).

<sup>40</sup> Patterson, p. 15 (from APA Brief, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Among the diverse types of gay/lesbian parents there are at least two major categories that warrant scholarly precision: (a) two lesbian or gay parents raising an adopted or DI (donor insemination) child from infancy with these and only these two parents; and (b) two lesbian or gay parents raising a child who is the biological offspring of one of the parents, following a separation or divorce from a heterosexual partner. The Sarantakos sample is of the latter (b) type. In terms of scholarly precision, it is important to differentiate and not draw strong implications from ‘a’ to ‘b’ or ‘b’ to ‘a.’ Indeed, the author would posit that adopted versus DI children may also warrant separate consideration. The core issue is that precision is essential and overextension of findings should be avoided. This same issue is of serious concern in connection with the tendency to overextend findings regarding lesbian mothers to apply to gay fathers (see Regnerus, this volume).

<sup>42</sup> Sarantakos (1996, p. 23).

<sup>43</sup> In order, these six studies include: (1) Morris et al., 2002 (N = 2431), who addressed adults' reports of “coming out”; (2) Johnson and O'Connor (2002) (N = 415), who addressed adults' reports of parenting beliefs, division of labor, etc.; (3) Crawford et al. (1999) (N = 388), who addressed psychologists' self-reports of gay adoption; (4) King and Black (1999) (N = 338), who addressed college students' perceptions of gay parents; (5) Bos et al. (2003) (N = 200), who addressed parental motives and desires; and (6) Bos et al. (2004) (N = 200), who addressed parental reports of couple relations. These foci are not children's outcomes.

<sup>44</sup> Sarantakos (1996, p. 24).

<sup>45</sup> Social Studies Achievement is significant at the  $p = .008$  level; the eight other differences are significant at the  $p = .000$  level.

<sup>46</sup> Sarantakos (1996, p. 30).

<sup>47</sup> APA Brief (2005), Footnote 1, p. 6 (emphasis added).

argued that Sarantakos' decision *not* to rely solely or extensively on parent reports, as is done in most same-sex parenting studies, is a strength, given parents' tendencies towards bias when reporting on their own children.<sup>48</sup> Sarantakos<sup>49</sup> also drew data from school aptitude tests and observations, thereby modeling a research ideal of *triangulation of sources*.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the study integrated not only three data sources to triangulate; it featured at least four (i.e., teachers, tests, observations, and child reports). Further, the study controlled for "education, occupation, and socio-economic status" and then, based on teacher reports, compared marriage-based families with gay/lesbian families and found nine significant differences—with children from marriage-based families rating higher in eight areas. By objective standards, compared with the studies cited by the APA Brief, the 1996 Sarantakos study was:

- (a) *The largest comparison study to examine children's outcomes*,<sup>51</sup>
- (b) *One of the most comparative (only about five other studies used three comparison groups)*,<sup>52</sup> and
- (c) *The most comprehensively triangulated study (four data sources) conducted on same-sex parenting*.<sup>53</sup>

Accordingly, this study deserves the attention of scientists interested in the question of homosexual and heterosexual parenting, rather than the footnote it received.

As we conclude the examination of question 4, let us review a portion of APA's published negation of Sarantakos' (1996) study<sup>54</sup>:

[*Children Australia*, the journal where the article was published] cannot be considered a source upon which one should rely for understanding the state of scientific knowledge in this field, particularly when the results contradict those that have been repeatedly replicated in studies published in better known scientific journals.

For other scientists, however, the salient point behind the Sarantakos findings is that the novel comparison group of marriage-based families introduced significant differences in children's outcomes (as opposed to the recurring "no difference" finding with single-mother and "couple" samples). We now turn to the fifth question.

#### 2.5. Question 5: what types of outcomes have been investigated?

With respect to the APA Brief's claim that "not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to [have] disadvantaged [outcomes]", *what types of outcomes have been examined and investigated?* Specifically, how many of the same-sex parenting studies in Table 1 address the societal concerns of intergenerational poverty, collegiate education and/or labor force contribution, serious criminality, incarceration, early childbearing, drug/alcohol abuse, or suicide that are frequently the foci of national studies on children, adolescents, and young adults, as discussed at the outset of this paper?

Anderssen and colleagues cataloged the foci of same-sex parenting studies in a 2002 review and reported<sup>55</sup>:

Emotional functioning was the most often studied outcome (12 studies), followed by sexual preference (nine studies), gender role behavior (eight studies), behavioral adjustment (seven studies), gender identity (six studies), and cognitive functioning (three studies).

Examination of the articles cited in the 2005 APA Brief on Lesbian and Gay Parenting yields a list of studied outcomes that are consistent with Anderssen's summary, including: "sexual orientation"<sup>56</sup>; "behavioral adjustment, self-concepts, and sex-role identity"<sup>57</sup>; "sexual identity"<sup>58</sup>; "sex-role behavior"<sup>59</sup>; "self-esteem"<sup>60</sup>; "psychosexual and psychiatric appraisal"<sup>61</sup>; "socioemotional development"<sup>62</sup>; and "maternal mental health and child adjustment".<sup>63</sup>

<sup>48</sup> It is well replicated that individuals tend to rate the group with which they most identify more positively than they do other groups. This positive bias includes within-family ratings Roese and Olson (2007).

<sup>49</sup> Sarantakos is the author of several research methods textbooks (2005, 2007b) and the author/editor of a four-volume, 1672-page work in Sage Publications' Benchmarks in Social Research Series (2007a).

<sup>50</sup> "Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources, ... multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all of these" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). In effect, the standard of triangulation is advocacy for checks and balances.

<sup>51</sup> Six of the 59 studies listed in the 2005 APA Brief (pp. 23–45) had larger samples, but, as discussed earlier, they all focused on adult reports of adult perceptions and outcomes.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Brewaeys et al. (1997), Golombok et al. (2003, 1997), MacCallum and Golombok (2004), and Tasker and Golombok (1998).

<sup>53</sup> In spite of the strong design with respect to triangulation, the Sarantakos study does not appear to be based on a true probability sample, nor is it or a large sample (although it is a subsample of a 900-plus study). The study is rigorous by comparison to other same-sex parenting studies, but is limited compared with most of the nationally representative studies on intact families listed in Table 2.

<sup>54</sup> Patterson (2005) in APA Brief, p. 7, Footnote 1.

<sup>55</sup> Anderssen et al. (2002, p. 343).

<sup>56</sup> Bailey et al. (1995) and Golombok and Tasker (1996).

<sup>57</sup> Patterson (1994).

<sup>58</sup> Green (1978).

<sup>59</sup> Hoeffler (1981) and Kveskin and Cook (1982).

<sup>60</sup> Huggins (1989).

<sup>61</sup> Golombok et al. (1983).

<sup>62</sup> Golombok et al. (1997).

<sup>63</sup> Patterson (2001).

With these focal outcomes identified, it is noteworthy that all of the aforementioned outcomes of societal-level concern are absent from the list of “most often studied outcome(s)” as identified by Anderssen et al.<sup>64</sup> In response to the present article’s question 5 (what types of outcomes have been investigated for children of gay/lesbian families?), it may be concluded: In the same-sex parenting research that undergirded the 2005 APA Brief, it appears that gender-related outcomes were the dominant research concern. To be more precise, Table 1 lists several categories of information regarding the 59 published empirical studies; one of these categories is the “outcome studied”. More than 20 studies have examined gender-related outcomes, but there was a dearth of peer-reviewed journal articles from which to form science-based conclusions in myriad areas of societal concern.<sup>65</sup>

One book-length empirical study<sup>66</sup> entitled *Same-Sex Couples* (Sarantakos, 2000, Harvard Press) did examine several issues of societal concern. In connection with the questions raised in the present article, this study:

- (1) includes a diverse sample of lesbian and gay parents instead of focusing on privileged lesbian mothers (question 1);
- (2) uses not only one but two heterosexual comparison samples; one married parent sample and one cohabitating parent sample (questions 2 and 3);
- (3) examines several outcomes of societal concern (question 5); and
- (4) is unique in presenting long-term (post-18 years old) outcomes of children with lesbian and gay parents (question 6, addressed later).

This study’s conclusion regarding outcomes of gay and lesbian parents reads, in part:

If we perceive deviance in a general sense, to include excessive drinking, drug use, truancy, sexual deviance, and criminal offenses, and if we rely on the statements made by adult children (over 18 years of age) . . . [then] children of homosexual parents report deviance in higher proportions than children of (married or cohabiting) heterosexual couples (Sarantakos, 2000, p. 131).

The 2005 APA Brief does not cite this study, again leaving us to more closely examine the claim that “Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents” (p. 15).

The Sarantakos (2000) study also includes the report that “the number of children who were labeled by their parents as gay, or identified themselves as gay, is much higher than the generally expected proportion” (p. 133). However, the study also notes areas of no significant heterosexual–homosexual differences (i.e., “Physical and emotional well-being”, p. 130), consistent with the 2005 APA Brief’s claims. All of these findings warranted attention in the 2005 APA Brief but were overlooked. Of most interest to us here, however, is the novel attention of Sarantakos (2000) on multiple concerns of societal importance, including drug and alcohol abuse, education (truancy), sexual activity, and criminality.

In any less-developed area of empirical inquiry it takes time, often several decades, before many of the central and most relevant questions can be adequately addressed. This seems to be the case with same-sex parenting outcomes, as several issues of societal concern were almost entirely unaddressed in the 2005 APA Brief.

## 2.6. Question 6: what do we know about the long-term outcomes of children of lesbian and gay parents?

In the preceding response to question 5, the outcomes of intergenerational poverty, criminality, college education and/or labor force contribution, drug/alcohol abuse, suicide, early sexual activity, early childbearing, and eventual divorce as adults were mentioned. Close consideration reveals that the majority of these outcomes are not “child” outcomes. Indeed, most of these outcomes are not optimally observable until (at the earliest) mid-late adolescence or early adulthood (and in the case of divorce, not until middle adulthood). As discussed in question 5, virtually none of the peer-reviewed, same-sex parenting comparison studies addressed these outcomes.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, of the 59 published studies cited by the APA 2005 Brief (pp. 23–45), it is difficult to find comparison studies of any kind that examine late adolescent outcomes of any kind. The few that utilize comparison groups have comparison groups of 44 or fewer.<sup>68</sup> Let us further explore the importance of a lack of data centered on adolescents and young adults.

Table 2 identifies 15 of the hundreds of available studies on outcomes of children from intact families (as contrasted with comparison groups such as cohabiting couples and single parents). One of these studies included a data set of 35,938 children—one of “the largest . . . nationally representative survey[s] of US children and their parents”.<sup>69</sup> Based on analysis of this

<sup>64</sup> Anderssen et al. (2002, p. 343).

<sup>65</sup> Including: intergenerational poverty, criminality, college education and/or labor force contribution, drug/alcohol abuse, suicide, sexual activity and early childbearing, and eventual divorce.

<sup>66</sup> This study is a later, larger, and more detailed report on the earlier mentioned Sarantakos (1996) study. The sample of that study was larger than the other comparison samples in Table 1.

<sup>67</sup> Gartrell and colleagues (1999, 2000, 2005) have commenced to do so, but in 2005 they were reporting on children who were only 10 years old (with a sample size of 74 and no heterosexual comparison group).

<sup>68</sup> I.e. Wainwright et al. (2004).

<sup>69</sup> Brown (2004), p. 355.

nationally representative sample, Susan Brown emphasized, “The findings of this study... demonstrate the importance of separately examining children and adolescents”. She then explained<sup>70</sup>:

Although the outcomes of children (6–11 years old) in cohabiting families... are worse... than those of children in two-biological-parent married families, much of this difference... is economic... In contrast, regardless of economic and parental resources, the outcomes of adolescents (12–17 years old) in cohabiting families... are worse... than those... in two-biological-parent married families.

In short, in the case of cohabiting families and “two-biological-parent married families” the differences in children’s outcomes increase in significance as the children grow older. The likelihood of significant differences arising between children from same-sex and married families may also increase across time—not just into adolescence but into early and middle adulthood. For example, research indicates that “[d]aughters raised outside of intact marriages are... more likely to end up young, unwed mothers than are children whose parents married and stayed married”, and that “[p]arental divorce increases the odds that adult children will also divorce”.<sup>71</sup>

Longitudinal studies that follow children across time and into adulthood to examine such outcomes are comparatively rare and valuable. We briefly turn to a key finding from one such study that followed children of divorce into middle adulthood. Based on a 25-year longitudinal study, Wallerstein and colleagues (2001) state:

Contrary to what we have long thought, the major impact of divorce does not occur during childhood or adolescence. Rather, it rises in adulthood as serious romantic relationships move center stage. When it comes time to choose a life mate and build a new family, the effects of divorce crescendo (p. xxix).

Wallerstein’s research, like nearly all of the studies in the same-sex parenting literature, is based on a small, non-representative sample that should not be generalized or overextended. Her longitudinal work does, however, indicate that “effects [can] crescendo” in adulthood. Did any published same-sex parenting study cited by the 2005 APA Brief (pp. 23–45) track the societally significant long-term outcomes into adulthood? No. Is it possible that “the major impact” of same-sex parenting might “not occur during childhood or adolescence... [but that] it will rise] in adulthood as serious romantic relationships move center stage”? Is it also possible that “when it comes time to choose a life mate and build a new family” that the effects of same-sex parenting will similarly “crescendo” as they did in Wallerstein’s study of divorce effects? In response to this or any question regarding the long-term, adult outcomes of lesbian and gay parenting we have almost no empirical basis for responding. An exception is provided by the findings from self-reports of adult “children” (18+ years of age) in Sarantakos’ (2000) book-length study, but those results not encouraging. This is a single study however—a study that, like those cited by the APA Brief, lacks the statistical power and rigor of the large, random, representative samples used in marriage-based family studies (see Table 2). We now move to a final related empirical question regarding the same-sex parenting literature.

#### 2.7. Question 7: *have the studies in this area committed the type II error and prematurely concluded that heterosexual couples and gay and lesbian couples produce parental outcomes with no differences?*

The Summary of Research Findings in the APA brief reads, “As is true in any area of research, questions have been raised with regard to sampling issues, statistical power, and other technical matters” (p. 5). However, neither statistical power nor the related concern of Type II error is further explained or addressed. This will be done next.

In social science research, questions are typically framed as follows: “Are we 95% sure the two groups being compared are different?” ( $p < .05$ ). If our statistics seem to confirm a difference with 95% or greater confidence, then we say the two groups are “significantly different”. But what if, after statistical analysis, we are only 85% sure that the two groups are different? By the rules of standard social science, we would be obligated to say we were unable to satisfactorily conclude that the two groups are different. However, a reported finding of “no statistically significant difference” (at the  $p < .05$  level; 95%-plus certainty) is a grossly inadequate basis upon which to offer the science-based claim that the groups were conclusively “the same”. In research, incorrectly concluding that there is no difference between groups when there is in fact a difference is referred to as a Type II error. A Type II error is more likely when undue amounts of random variation are present in a study. Specifically, small sample size, unreliable measures, imprecise research methodology, or unaccounted for variables can all increase the likelihood of a Type II error. All one would have to do to be able to come to a conclusion of “no difference” is to conduct a study with a small sample and/or sufficient levels of random variation. These weaknesses compromise a study’s “statistical power” (Cohen, 1988).

It must be re-emphasized that a conclusion of “no significant difference” means that it is unknown whether or not a difference exists on the variable(s) in question (Cohen, 1988). This conclusion does not necessarily mean that the two groups are, in fact, the same on the variable being studied, much less on all other characteristics. This point is important with same-sex parenting research because Patterson (1992, 2000) and the 2005 APA Brief seem to draw inferences of sameness based on the observation that gay and lesbian parents and heterosexual parents appear not to be statistically different from one another based on small, non-representative samples—thereby becoming vulnerable to a classic Type II error.

<sup>70</sup> Brown (2004), p. 364.

<sup>71</sup> Wilcox et al. (2011), p. 11.

To make the APA Brief's proposition of sameness more precarious, in a review published one year after the APA Brief in the flagship APA journal, *American Psychologist*, Herek (2006) acknowledged that many same-sex parenting studies have "utilized small, select convenience samples and often employed unstandardized measures".<sup>72</sup> Anderssen et al. (2002) similarly indicated in their review of same-sex parenting studies, "The samples were most often small, increasing the chance to conclude that no differences exist between groups when in fact the differences do exist. This casts doubt on the external validity of the studies".<sup>73</sup> With these limitations noted, the 2005 APA Brief explicitly claimed that findings of non-significant differences between same-sex and heterosexual parents had been "repeatedly replicated" (p. 7, Footnote 1).

Reasons for skepticism regarding the APA Brief's claim that findings have been "repeatedly replicated" rest in Neuman's (1997) point that "the logic of replication implies that different researchers are unlikely to make the same errors".<sup>74</sup> However, if errors (e.g., similarly biased sampling approaches employing "small, select convenience samples"<sup>75</sup> and comparison groups) are repeated by different researchers, the logic behind replication is undermined. As has been previously detailed in the response to question 1 in this article, same-sex parenting researchers have repeatedly selected White, well-educated, middle- and upper-class lesbians to represent same-sex parents. This tendency recurred even after this bias was explicitly identified by Patterson (1992, 2000).<sup>76</sup> Further, repeated sampling tendencies in connection with heterosexual comparison groups (e.g., single mothers), were documented in response to Question 3 in this paper. These repeated (convenience) sampling tendencies across studies that employed different measures do not seem to constitute valid scientific replication.

An additional scientific question raised by the above information regarding "small, select convenience"<sup>77</sup> samples is framed by Stacey and Biblarz (2001) who reveal that "many of these [comparative same-sex parenting] studies use conventional levels of significance. . . on miniscule samples, substantially increasing their likelihood of failing to reject the null hypothesis".<sup>78</sup> Was the APA's claim that "Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged. . ." based on clear scientific evidence or (perhaps) Type II errors? In response, we now turn to the APA-acknowledged but unexplained critique of low "statistical power" in these studies (p. 5).

The last three editions of the APA Publication manual (1994, 2001, 2010) have urged scholars to report effect sizes and to take statistical power into consideration when reporting their results. The APA 5th Publication manual (2001) in use at the time of APA's 2005 Brief on Lesbian and Gay Parenting stated:

Take seriously the statistical power considerations associated with your tests of hypotheses. Such considerations relate to the likelihood of correctly rejecting the tested hypotheses, given a particular alpha level, effect size, and sample size. In that regard, you should routinely provide evidence that your study has power to detect effects of substantive interest (e.g., see Cohen, 1988). You should be similarly aware of the role played by sample size in cases in which not rejecting the null hypothesis is desirable (i.e., when you wish to argue that there are no differences [between two groups]). . . (p. 24).

This awareness of statistical power in cases "when you wish to argue that there are no differences" bears directly on same-sex comparative research. The APA 5th Publication manual (2001) continues:

Neither of the two types of probability [alpha level or *p* value] directly reflects the magnitude of an effect or the strength of a relationship. For the reader to fully understand the importance of your findings, it is almost always necessary to include some index of effect size or strength of relationship in your Results section (p. 25).

Let us review three statements from the *APA 5th Publication Manual* for emphasis:

- (1) The APA urges researchers to: "Take seriously the statistical power considerations" and "routinely provide evidence" (p. 24).
- (2) The APA identifies a specific concern with sample size and statistical power in connection with cases where authors "wish to argue that there are no differences" between compared groups (p. 24).
- (3) The APA concludes: "It is almost always necessary to include some index of effect size or strength of relationship in your Results section" (p. 25).

The APA's first highlighted exhortation is that an author "should routinely provide evidence that your study has sufficient power. . . (e.g., see Cohen, 1988)" (p. 24). The reference cited here by the APA is the volume *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed.) by the late psychometrician Jacob Cohen, who has been credited with foundational work in statistical meta-analysis (Borenstein, 1999). In his APA-cited volume, Cohen states:

<sup>72</sup> Herek (2006), p. 612.

<sup>73</sup> Anderssen et al. (2002), p. 348.

<sup>74</sup> Neuman (1997), p. 150.

<sup>75</sup> Herek (2006), p. 612.

<sup>76</sup> Further, single mothers have been repeatedly selected to represent heterosexual parents as documented in this paper's response to question 3.

<sup>77</sup> Herek (2006), p. 612.

<sup>78</sup> Stacey and Biblarz (2001, p. 168), Footnote 9.

<sup>79</sup> Patterson, p. 15 (from APA Brief, 2005).

Most psychologists of whatever stripe believe that samples, even small samples, mirror the characteristics of their parent populations. In effect, they operate on the unstated premise that the law of large numbers holds for small numbers as well. ... [Citing Tversky and Kahneman] "The believer in the law of small numbers has incorrect intuitions about significance level, power, and confidence intervals. Significance levels are usually computed and reported, but power and confidence levels are not. Perhaps they should be".

But as we have seen, too many of our colleagues have not responded to [this] admonition. ... They do so at their peril (p. xv).

Let us contextualize "the law of small numbers" with respect to the same-sex parenting studies cited in the APA Brief. The combined non-representative sample total of all 59 same-sex parenting studies in the 2005 APA Brief (pp. 23–45) is 7800<sup>80</sup> (see Table 1). By comparison, Table 2 lists 15 prominent studies that contrast children's outcomes in intact, single-parent, divorced, and/or step-family forms using large probability samples and comparison groups.<sup>81</sup> The average sample size in these studies is 9911<sup>82</sup>—a figure larger than all 59 same-sex parenting studies combined (7800).

We now turn to another question relating to Cohen's statements: How many of the published same-sex parenting studies with a heterosexual comparison group cited in APA's Brief (pp. 23–45) "provide[d] evidence" of statistical power, consistent with APA's *Publication Manual* and the "admonition" of Jacob Cohen who is cited in the APA manual? An examination of the studies indicates that only four of the 59 did so.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to Cohen's (1988) statement that statistical power is ignored at our own peril, he offered several tables in his volume for researchers to reference. Employing these tables, statistical experts Lerner and Nagai (2001) computed the sample sizes required for "a power level of .80, or a Type II error rate of .20, or one in five findings" (p. 102). At this power level, the minimum number of cases required to detect a small effect size<sup>84</sup> is 393 for a T-test or ANOVA, or 780-plus for Chi-Square or Pearson Correlation Coefficient tests.<sup>85</sup> In Table 1 of this report, the 59 published same-sex parenting studies cited in the APA Brief (pp. 23–45) are compared against these standards. A close examination indicates that not a single study, including the few that reported power, meets the standards needed to detect a small effect size. Indeed, it appears that only two of the comparison studies (Bos et al., 2003, 2004) have combined sample sizes of even half of "the minimum number of cases".<sup>86</sup>

In their book-length examination of same-sex parenting studies, Lerner and Nagai (2001) further indicate that 17 of the 22 same-sex parenting comparison studies they reviewed had been designed in such a way that the odds of failing to find a significant difference [between homo- and hetero-sexual groups] was 85% or higher.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, only one of the 22 studies they analyzed revealed a probability of Type II error below 77 percent, and that study *did* find differences.<sup>88</sup> These methodological concerns (and others) were raised and explained in Lerner and Nagai's monograph (see pp. 95–108), and in an 81-page report by Nock (2001) preceding the APA Brief.<sup>89</sup> Nock concluded:

All of the [same-sex parenting] articles I reviewed contained at least one fatal flaw of design or execution. Not a single one was conducted according to generally accepted standards of scientific research. ... [I]n my opinion, the only acceptable conclusion at this point is that the literature on this topic does not constitute a solid body of scientific evidence (Nock, 2001, pp. 39, 47).

<sup>80</sup> This figure (7800) includes same-sex parents and their children, as well as heterosexual comparison samples (1404), psychologists (388), and college students' perception reports (489).

<sup>81</sup> Table 2 lists 15 studies that contrast children's outcomes in intact families compared with other family forms using large, probability samples and comparison groups. The focal topics of these studies are not "sexual preference, gender role behavior... [and] gender identity" (Anderssen et al., 2002, p. 343), but outcomes such as "educational attainment", "labor force attachment", and "early childbearing" (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994, pp. 20–21), as recommended in the earlier examination of question 5. Further, all but two of the 15 studies employ longitudinal designs, as recommended in the earlier examination of question 6.

<sup>82</sup> This figure is the result of 148,667 divided by 15 studies.

<sup>83</sup> These include Chan et al. (1998b), Fulcher et al. (2002), Golombok and Tasker (1996), and Tasker and Golombok (1997).

<sup>84</sup> By way of context, in a 67 study meta-analysis of the average differences in outcomes between children with "divorced and continuously married parents", Amato (2001) reported an average weighted effect size of between  $-0.12$  and  $-0.22$  (a  $-0.17$  average) with an advantage in all five domains considered to children of continuously married parents (p. 360). These effect sizes of about .20, although statistically robust, would be classified by Cohen (1992) as small effect sizes. Even so, based on the data, most family scholars would agree that children whose parents remain continuously married tend to fare slightly to moderately better than when parents divorce. However, large numbers were needed to determine this "small" but important effect. Indeed, most effect sizes in social science research tend to be small. Rigorous and sound social science tends to include and account for many influential factors that each has a small but meaningful effect size. In social science, detecting a novel "large effect" from a single variable (whether it is divorce, remarriage, or same-sex parenting), is a comparatively rare occurrence. If we are to examine possible effects of same-sex parenting with scientific precision and rigor, related examinations would, like Amato's work, be designed and refined to detect "small effect" sizes.

<sup>85</sup> Cohen (1988) proposes a "relatively high power" of .90 for cases where one is trying to "demonstrate the r [difference] is trivially small" (p. 104). If the .90 power were applied, the required sample sizes would further increase. However, because none of the studies in Table 1 of the present report approach the .80 power levels, .90 calculations are unnecessary here.

<sup>86</sup> The "minimum number of cases" is 393. The two Bos et al. studies both have combined samples of 200. Four other larger samples are not comparison studies Crawford et al. (1999), Johnson and O'Connor (2002), King and Black (1999), and Morris et al. (2002).

<sup>87</sup> Lerner and Nagai (2001, p. 103).

<sup>88</sup> The single exception was Cameron and Cameron (1996) with a comparatively low probability error rate of 25%. This study, like the Sarantakos (1996) study mentioned earlier, did report some significant differences between children of heterosexual and homosexual parents but, like Sarantakos (1996), was not addressed in the body of the 2005 APA brief but was instead moved to a footnote on p. 7. See Redding (2008) for additional discussion (p. 137).

<sup>89</sup> For similar critiques preceding the 2005 APA brief, see Nock (2001), Schumm (2004), Wardle (1997), and Williams (2000). For similar critiques post-dating the 2005 APA brief, see Byrd (2008), Schumm (2010a,b, 2011), and Redding (2008, p. 138).

More specifically, Nock identified: (a) several flaws related to sampling (including biased sampling, non-probability sampling, convenience sampling, etc.); (b) poorly operationalized definitions; (c) researcher bias; (d) lack of longitudinal studies; (e) failure to report reliability; (f) low response rates; and (g) lack of statistical power (pp. 39–40).<sup>90</sup> Although some of these flaws are briefly mentioned in the 2005 APA Summary of Research Findings on Lesbian and Gay Parenting, many of the significant concerns raised by Nock or Lerner and Nagai are not substantively addressed.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the Lerner and Nagai volume and the Nock report are neither mentioned nor referenced.

To restate, in connection with the APA's published urging that researchers: "Take seriously the statistical power considerations" and "routinely provide evidence", the academic reader is left at a disadvantage.<sup>92</sup> Only a few comparison studies specifically reported statistical power at all and no comparison study approached the minimum sample size of 393 needed to find a small effect.

The author's response to question 7 has examined how comparisons have been made from a research methods standpoint. In summary, some same-sex parenting researchers have acknowledged that "miniscule samples"<sup>93</sup> significantly increase "the chance to conclude that no differences exist between groups when in fact the differences do exist"—thereby casting "doubt on the external validity of the studies".<sup>94</sup> An additional concern is that the APA Brief's claim of "repeatedly replicated" findings of no significant difference rested almost entirely on studies that were published without reports of the APA-urged effect sizes and statistical power analyses.<sup>95</sup> This inconsistency seems to justify scientific skepticism, as well as the effort of more closely assessing the balance, precision, and rigor behind the conclusions posed in the 2005 APA Brief.

### 3. Conclusion

The 2005 APA Brief, near its outset, claims that "even taking into account all the questions and/or limitations that may characterize research in this area, none of the published research suggests conclusions different from that which will be summarized" (p. 5). The concluding summary later claims, "Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psychosocial growth" (p. 15).<sup>96</sup>

We now return to the overarching question of this paper: Are we witnessing the emergence of a new family form that provides a context for children that is equivalent to the traditional marriage-based family? Even after an extensive reading of the same-sex parenting literature, the author cannot offer a high confidence, data-based "yes" or "no" response to this question. To restate, not one of the 59 studies referenced in the 2005 APA Brief (pp. 23–45; see Table 1) compares a large, random, representative sample of lesbian or gay parents and their children with a large, random, representative sample of married parents and their children. The available data, which are drawn primarily from small convenience samples, are insufficient to support a strong generalizable claim either way. Such a statement would not be grounded in science. To make a generalizable claim, representative, large-sample studies are needed—many of them (e.g., Table 2).

Some opponents of same-sex parenting have made "egregious overstatements"<sup>97</sup> disparaging gay and lesbian parents. Conversely, some same-sex parenting researchers seem to have contended for an "exceptionally clear"<sup>98</sup> verdict of "no difference" between same-sex and heterosexual parents since 1992. However, a closer examination leads to the conclusion that strong, generalized assertions, including those made by the APA Brief, were not empirically warranted.<sup>99</sup> As noted by Shiller (2007) in *American Psychologist*, "the line between science and advocacy appears blurred" (p. 712).

The scientific conclusions in this domain will increase in validity as researchers: (a) move from small convenience samples to large representative samples; (b) increasingly examine critical societal and economic concerns that emerge during adolescence and adulthood; (c) include more diverse same-sex families (e.g., gay fathers, racial minorities, and those without middle-high socioeconomic status); (d) include intact, marriage-based heterosexual families as comparison groups; and (e)

<sup>90</sup> Four of these seven issues are addressed in the present paper. The exceptions include researcher bias, failure to report reliability, and low response rates.

<sup>91</sup> The 2005 APA Brief's Summary on Research Findings acknowledges criticisms of same-sex parenting research including: (a) non-representative sampling, (b) "poorly matched or no control groups", (c) "well-educated, middle class [lesbian] families", and (d) "relatively small samples" (p. 5). The respective responses to these criticisms in the APA brief are: (a) "contemporary research on children of lesbian and gay parents involves a wider array of sampling techniques than did earlier studies"; (b) "contemporary research on children of lesbian and gay parents involves a wider array of research designs (and hence, control groups) than did earlier studies"; (c) "contemporary research on children of lesbian and gay parents involves a greater diversity of families than did earlier studies"; and (d) "contemporary research has benefited from such criticisms" (p. 5). The APA Brief does not challenge the validity of these research criticisms but notes that improvements are being made.

<sup>92</sup> See Schumm (2010b) for more comprehensive, article-length treatment of these statistical issues.

<sup>93</sup> Stacey and Biblarz (2001, p. 168).

<sup>94</sup> Anderssen et al. (2002, p. 348).

<sup>95</sup> Schumm (2010b).

<sup>96</sup> The APA Brief also states that "the existing data are still limited, and any conclusions must be seen as tentative". Also, that "it should be acknowledged that research on lesbian and gay parents and their children, though no longer new, is still limited in extent" (p. 15). For some scientists, these salient points seem to be overridden by the APA Brief's conclusions.

<sup>97</sup> This reality has been disapprovingly documented by Shiller (2007).

<sup>98</sup> Patterson (1992).

<sup>99</sup> In 2006, the year following APA's release of the brief on Lesbian and Gay Parenting, "former APA president Nicholas Cummings argued that there has been significant erosion" of the APA's established principle (Shiller (2007), p. 712). . . that "when we speak as psychologists we speak from research evidence and clinical experience and expertise" (Cummings (2006), p. 2).

constructively respond to criticisms from methodological experts.<sup>100</sup> Specifically, it is vital that critiques regarding sample size, sampling strategy, statistical power, and effect sizes not be disregarded. Taking these steps will help produce more methodologically rigorous and scientifically informed responses to significant questions affecting families and children.

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<sup>100</sup> At least one such study (Rosenfeld, 2010) has emerged in the years since the 2005 APA brief was issued. This study features a very large sample but has also received criticism (Schumm, 2011).

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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.

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### 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; Sirotka, 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](http://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 (2001 a,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
<i>Family-of-origin structure groups</i>				
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
<i>Mother's education</i>				
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
<i>Family-of-origin income</i>				
\$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 (Hatzzenbuehler 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 category 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 <sup>*</sup>	0.31	0.19	0.19	0.13
Family received welfare growing up	0.17	0.69	0.57	0.12 <sup>*</sup>	0.47 <sup>*</sup>	0.53 <sup>*</sup>	0.48 <sup>*</sup>	0.35 <sup>*</sup>
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 <sup>*</sup>	0.43 <sup>*</sup>	0.39
Currently unemployed	0.08	0.28	0.20	0.22	0.15	0.14	0.13 <sup>*</sup>	0.15
Voted in last presidential election	0.57	0.41	0.73 <sup>*</sup>	0.58	0.63 <sup>*</sup>	0.57 <sup>*</sup>	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 <sup>*</sup>	0.83 <sup>*</sup>	0.81 <sup>*</sup>	0.83 <sup>*</sup>	0.82 <sup>*</sup>
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 <sup>*</sup>	0.32	0.19 <sup>*</sup>	0.16 <sup>*</sup>
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 <sup>*</sup>	0.03 <sup>*</sup>	0.10	0.12	0.10	0.08 <sup>*</sup>
Ever forced to have sex against will	0.08	0.31	0.25	0.23	0.24	0.16	0.16 <sup>*</sup>	0.11 <sup>*</sup>

**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 IBFs, 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	<b>2.39</b>	<b>2.64</b>	3.21 <sup>*</sup>	<b>2.88</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>2.64</b>	<b>2.66</b>	<b>2.54</b>
Family-of-origin safety/security	4.13	<b>3.12</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>3.77</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>3.52</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.58</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.77</b> <sup>*</sup>
Family-of-origin negative impact	2.30	<b>3.13</b>	<b>2.90</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>2.76</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>2.64</b> <sup>*</sup>
Closeness to biological mother	4.17	4.05	<b>3.71</b>	3.58	3.95	4.03	<b>3.85</b>	<b>3.97</b>
Closeness to biological father	3.87	3.16	3.43	–	<b>3.29</b>	3.65	<b>3.24</b>	3.61
Self-reported physical health	3.75	<b>3.38</b>	3.58	3.53	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>3.41</b>
Self-reported overall happiness	4.16	3.89	3.72	3.92	4.02	<b>3.87</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>3.83</b>
CES-D depression index	1.83	<b>2.20</b>	<b>2.18</b>	1.95	2.01	1.91 <sup>*</sup>	1.89 <sup>*</sup>	1.94 <sup>*</sup>
Attachment scale (depend)	<b>2.82</b>	<b>3.43</b>	3.14	<b>3.12</b>	<b>3.08</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.10</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.05</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>3.02</b> <sup>*</sup>
Attachment scale (anxiety)	2.46	2.67	2.66	<b>2.66</b>	2.71	2.53	2.51	2.56
Impulsivity scale	1.90	2.03	2.02	1.85	1.94	1.86 <sup>*</sup>	1.82 <sup>*</sup>	1.89
Level of household income	8.27	<b>6.08</b>	7.15	7.93 <sup>*</sup>	7.42 <sup>*</sup>	<b>7.04</b>	<b>6.96</b>	<b>6.19</b>
Current relationship quality index	4.11	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.63</b>	3.79	3.95	<b>3.80</b>	3.95	3.94
Current relationship is in trouble	2.04	<b>2.35</b>	<b>2.55</b>	2.35	<b>2.43</b>	<b>2.35</b>	<b>2.26</b>	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 ( <sup>\*</sup> ) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the group's coefficient and that of IBFs, 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 ( <sup>^</sup> ) 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	<b>1.84</b>	1.61	1.33 <sup>*</sup>	<b>2.00</b>	1.47	<b>1.73</b>	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	<b>2.76</b>	2.61	2.34	2.44	<b>2.31</b>	<b>2.18</b>	1.91 <sup>*</sup>
Frequency of watching TV	3.01	<b>3.70</b>	3.49	3.31	3.33	<b>3.43</b>	3.25	2.95 <sup>*</sup>
Frequency of having been arrested	1.18	<b>1.68</b>	1.75	1.31 <sup>*</sup>	1.38	<b>1.38</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>1.35</b> <sup>*</sup>	<b>1.34</b> <sup>*</sup>
Frequency pled guilty to non-minor offense	1.10	<b>1.36</b>	1.41	1.19	1.30	<b>1.21</b>	<b>1.17</b> <sup>*</sup>	1.17 <sup>*</sup>
N of female sex partners (among women)	0.22	<b>1.04</b>	<b>1.47</b>	0.47 <sup>*</sup>	<b>0.96</b>	0.47 <sup>*</sup>	<b>0.52</b> <sup>*</sup>	0.33 <sup>*</sup>
N of female sex partners (among men)	2.70	3.46	4.17	3.24	3.66	<b>3.85</b>	3.23	3.37
N of male sex partners (among women)	2.79	<b>4.02</b>	<b>5.92</b>	3.49	<b>3.97</b>	<b>4.57</b>	<b>4.04</b>	2.91 <sup>*</sup>
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 ( <sup>\*</sup> ) next to the estimate indicates a statistically-significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the group's coefficient and that of IBFs, 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 ( <sup>^</sup> ) 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

comparisons, but there are many more differences by any method of analysis in comparisons between young-adult children of IBFs and LMs than between IBFs and GFs.

While the NFSS may best capture what might be called an “earlier generation” of children of same-sex parents, and includes among them many who witnessed a failed heterosexual union, the basic statistical comparisons between this group and those of others, especially biologically-intact, mother/father families, suggests that notable differences on many outcomes do in fact exist. This is inconsistent with claims of “no differences” generated by studies that have commonly employed far more narrow samples than this one.

Goldberg (2010) aptly asserts that many existing studies were conducted primarily comparing children of heterosexual divorced and lesbian divorced mothers, potentially leading observers to erroneously attribute to parental sexual orientation the corrosive effects of enduring parental divorce. Her warning is well-taken, and it is one that the NFSS cannot entirely mitigate. Yet when compared with other young adults who experienced household transitions and who witnessed parents forming new romantic relationships—for example, stepfamilies—the children of lesbian mothers looked (statistically) significantly different just under 25% of the time (and typically in suboptimal directions). Nevertheless, the children of mothers who have had same-sex relationships are far less apt to differ from stepfamilies and single parents than they are from still-intact biological families.

Why the divergence between the findings in this study and those from so many previous ones? The answer lies in part with the small or nonprobability samples so often relied upon in nearly all previous studies—they have very likely underestimated the number and magnitude of real differences between the children of lesbian mothers (and to a lesser extent, gay fathers) and those raised in other types of households. While the architects of such studies have commonly and appropriately acknowledged their limitations, practically—since they are often the only studies being conducted—their results are treated as providing information about gay and lesbian household experiences *in general*. But this study, based on a rare large probability sample, reveals far greater diversity in the experience of lesbian motherhood (and to a lesser extent, gay fatherhood) than has been acknowledged or understood.

Given that the characteristics of the NFSS’s sample of children of LMs and GFs are close to estimates of the same offered by demographers using the American Community Study, one conclusion from the analyses herein is merited: the sample-selection bias problem in very many studies of gay and lesbian parenting is not incidental, but likely profound, rendering the ability of much past research to offer valid interpretations of *average* household experiences of children with a lesbian or gay parent suspect at best. Most snowball-sample-based research has, instead, shed light on *above-average* household experiences.

While studies of family structure often locate at least modest benefits that accrue to the children of married biological parents, some scholars attribute much of the benefit to socioeconomic-status differences between married parents and those parents in other types of relationships (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999). While this is likely true of the NFSS as well, the results presented herein controlled not only for socioeconomic status differences between families of origin, but also political-geographic distinctions, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and the experience of having been bullied (which was reported by 53% of LMs but only 35% of IBFs).

To be sure, those NFSS respondents who reported that a parent of theirs had had a romantic relationship with a member of the same sex are a very diverse group: some experienced numerous household transitions, and some did not. Some of their parents may have remained in a same-sex relationship, while others did not. Some may self-identify as lesbian or gay, while others may not. I did not explore in detail the diversity of household experiences here, given the overview nature of this study. But the richness of the NFSS—which has annual calendar data for household transitions from birth to age 18 and from age 18 to the present—allows for closer examination of many of these questions.

Nevertheless, to claim that there are few meaningful statistical differences between the different groups evaluated here would be to state something that is empirically inaccurate. Minimally, the population-based estimates presented here suggest that a good deal more attention must be paid to the real diversity among gay and lesbian parent experiences in America, just as it long has been among heterosexual households. Child outcomes in stable, “planned” GLB families and those that are the product of previous heterosexual unions are quite likely distinctive, as previous studies’ conclusions would suggest. Yet as demographers of gay and lesbian America continue to note—and as the NFSS reinforces—planned GLB households only comprise a portion (and an unknown one at that) of all GLB households with children.

Even if the children in planned GLB families exhibit better outcomes than those from failed heterosexual unions, the former still exhibits a diminished context of kin altruism (like adoption, step-parenting, or nonmarital childbirth), which have typically proven to be a risk setting, on average, for raising children when compared with married, biological parenting (Miller et al., 2000). In short, if same-sex parents are able to raise children with no differences, despite the kin distinctions, it would mean that same-sex couples are able to do something that heterosexual couples in step-parenting, adoptive, and cohabiting contexts have themselves not been able to do—replicate the optimal childrearing environment of married, biological-parent homes (Moore et al., 2002). And studies focusing on parental roles or household divisions of labor in planned GLB families will fail to reveal—because they have not measured it—how their children fare as adults.

The between-group comparisons described above also suggest that those respondents with a lesbian mother and those with a gay father do not always exhibit comparable outcomes in young adulthood. While the sample size of gay fathers in the NFSS was modest, any monolithic ideas about same-sex parenting experiences in general are not supported by these analyses.

Although the NFSS offers strong support for the notion that there are significant differences among young adults that correspond closely to the parental behavior, family structures, and household experiences during their youth, I have not and will not speculate here on causality, in part because the data are not optimally designed to do so, and because the causal reckoning for so many different types of outcomes is well beyond what an overview manuscript like this one could ever purport to accomplish. Focused (and more complex) analyses of unique outcomes, drawing upon idiosyncratic, domain-specific conceptual models, is recommended for scholars who wish to more closely assess the functions that the number, gender, and sexual decision-making of parents may play in young adults' lives. I am thus not suggesting that growing up with a lesbian mother or gay father causes suboptimal outcomes *because of* the sexual orientation or sexual behavior of the parent; rather, my point is more modest: the groups display numerous, notable distinctions, especially when compared with young adults whose biological mother and father remain married.

There is more that this article does not accomplish, including closer examinations of subpopulations, consideration of more outcomes and comparisons between other groups, and stronger tests of statistical significance—such as multiple regression with more numerous independent variables, or propensity score matching. That is what the NFSS is designed to foster. This article serves as a call for such study, as well as an introduction to the data and to its sampling and measurement strengths and abilities. Future studies would optimally include a more significant share of children from planned gay families, although their relative scarcity in the NFSS suggests that their appearance in even much larger probability samples will remain infrequent for the foreseeable future. The NFSS, despite significant efforts to randomly over-sample such populations, nevertheless was more apt to survey children whose parents exhibited gay and lesbian relationship behavior *after* being in a heterosexual union. This pattern may remain more common today than many scholars suppose.

## 5. Conclusion

As scholars of same-sex parenting aptly note, same-sex couples have and will continue to raise children. American courts are finding arguments against gay marriage decreasingly persuasive (Rosenfeld, 2007). This study is intended to neither undermine nor affirm any legal rights concerning such. The tenor of the last 10 years of academic discourse about gay and lesbian parents suggests that there is little to nothing about them that might be negatively associated with child development, and a variety of things that might be uniquely positive. The results of analyzing a rare large probability sample reported herein, however, document numerous, consistent differences among young adults who reported maternal lesbian behavior (and to a lesser extent, paternal gay behavior) prior to age 18. While previous studies suggest that children in planned GLB families seem to fare comparatively well, their actual representativeness among all GLB families in the US may be more modest than research based on convenience samples has presumed.

Although the findings reported herein may be explicable in part by a variety of forces uniquely problematic for child development in lesbian and gay families—including a lack of social support for parents, stress exposure resulting from persistent stigma, and modest or absent legal security for their parental and romantic relationship statuses—the empirical claim that no notable differences exist must go. While it is certainly accurate to affirm that sexual orientation or parental sexual behavior need have nothing to do with the *ability* to be a good, effective parent, the data evaluated herein using population-based estimates drawn from a large, nationally-representative sample of young Americans suggest that it may affect the *reality* of family experiences among a significant number.

Do children need a married mother and father to turn out well as adults? No, if we observe the many anecdotal accounts with which all Americans are familiar. Moreover, there are many cases in the NFSS where respondents have proven resilient and prevailed as adults in spite of numerous transitions, be they death, divorce, additional or diverse romantic partners, or remarriage. But the NFSS also clearly reveals that children appear most apt to succeed well as adults—on multiple counts and across a variety of domains—when they spend their entire childhood with their married mother and father, and especially when the parents remain married to the present day. Insofar as the share 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.

## Appendix A. Comparison of weighted NFSS results with parallel national survey results on selected demographic and lifestyle variables, US adults (in percentages)

	NFSS 2011, N = 941 (18–23)	NSYR 2007–2008, N = 2520 (18–23)	NFSS 2011, N = 1123 (24–32)	Add Health 2007–2008, N = 15,701 (24–32)	NFSS 2011, N = 2988 (18–39)	NSFG 2006–2010, N = 16,851 (18–39)	CPS ASEC 2011, N = 58,788 (18–39)
<i>Gender</i>							
Male	52.6	48.3	47.3	50.6	49.4	49.8	50.4
Female	47.4	51.7	52.8	49.4	50.6	50.2	49.6

## Appendix A (continued)

	NFSS 2011, N = 941 (18–23)	NSYR 2007–2008, N = 2520 (18–23)	NFSS 2011, N = 1123 (24–32)	Add Health 2007–2008, N = 15,701 (24–32)	NFSS 2011, N = 2988 (18–39)	NSFG 2006–2010, N = 16,851 (18–39)	CPS ASEC 2011, N = 58,788 (18–39)
<i>Age</i>							
18–23					28.9	28.6	28.2
24–32					41.2	40.6	42.1
33–39					29.9	30.9	29.8
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>							
White, NH	54.2	68.3	60.2	69.2	57.7	61.6	59.6
Black, NH	11.0	15.0	13.0	15.9	12.6	13.3	13.2
Hispanic	24.9	11.2	20.7	10.8	20.8	18.6	19.5
Other (or multiple), NH	10.0	5.5	6.2	4.2	8.9	6.5	7.8
<i>Region</i>							
Northeast	18.9	11.8	16.5		17.6		17.5
Midwest	18.7	25.6	23.3		21.1		21.2
South	34.3	39.1	39.6		36.7		37.0
West	28.2	23.5	20.6		24.6		24.4
Mother's education (BA or above)	28.4	33.3	24.6	21.9	25.3	22.2	
Respondent's education (BA or above)	5.3	3.8	33.7	30.0	26.5	24.2	
<i>Household income (current)</i>							
Under \$10,000	21.0		9.7	5.6	11.9	9.5	5.7
\$10,000–19,999	13.3		9.1	6.9	9.2	13.1	7.4
\$20,000–29,999	11.6		10.3	10.1	10.5	13.5	9.5
\$30,000–39,999	8.0		11.0	11.1	9.6	13.4	9.4
\$40,000–49,999	6.5		12.8	11.8	9.9	8.5	9.1
\$50,000–74,999	14.9		22.3	24.3	19.2	19.5	20.3
\$75,000 or more	24.7		24.9	30.2	29.8	22.7	38.6
Ever had sex	66.5	75.6	90.6	93.9	85.6	91.2	
Never been married	89.3	92.8	45.7	50.0	51.7	52.3	54.4
Currently married	8.0	6.9	44.9	44.6	40.6	39.2	37.9
<i>Church attendance</i>							
Once a week or more	18.4	20.2	22.1	16.0	22.3	26.2	
Never	32.3	35.6	31.2	32.1	31.7	25.8	
Not religious	21.1	24.7	22.5	20.2	22.0	21.7	
<i>Self-reported health</i>							
Poor	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.2	1.5	0.7	
Fair	8.4	9.2	11.0	7.9	10.7	5.3	
Good	28.7	26.7	37.6	33.5	33.9	24.9	
Very Good	39.6	37.5	35.7	38.2	37.3	40.9	
Excellent	21.5	25.2	14.8	19.1	16.7	28.3	
Never drinks alcohol	30.5	21.9	22.4	26.1	25.4	18.7	

## Appendix B. Construction of outcome indexes

### B.1. CES-D (depression) index (8 items, $\alpha = 0.87$ )

Respondents were asked to think about the past 7 days, and assess how often each of the following things were true about them. Answer categories ranged from “never or rarely” (0) to “most of the time or all of the time” (3). Some items were reverse-coded for the index variable (e.g., “You felt happy.”):

1. You were bothered by things that usually do not bother you.
2. You could not shake off the blues, even with help from your family and your friends.
3. You felt you were just as good as other people.
4. You had trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing.
5. You felt depressed.
6. You felt happy.
7. You enjoyed life.
8. You felt sad.

### B.2. Current romantic relationship quality (6 items, $\alpha = 0.96$ )

Respondents were asked to assess their current romantic relationship. Answer categories ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5):

1. We have a good relationship.
2. My relationship with my partner is very healthy.
3. Our relationship is strong.
4. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.
5. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.
6. Our relationship is pretty much perfect.

### B.3. Family-of-origin relationship safety/security (4 items, $\alpha = 0.90$ )

Respondents were asked to evaluate the overall atmosphere in their family while growing up by responding to four statements whose answer categories ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5):

1. My family relationships were safe, secure, and a source of comfort.
2. We had a loving atmosphere in our family.
3. All things considered, my childhood years were happy.
4. My family relationships were confusing, inconsistent, and unpredictable.

### B.4. Family-of-origin negative impact (3 items, $\alpha = 0.74$ )

Respondents were asked to evaluate the present-day impact of their family-of-origin experiences by responding to three statements whose answer categories ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5):

1. There are matters from my family experience that I am still having trouble dealing with or coming to terms with.
2. There are matters from my family experience that negatively affect my ability to form close relationships.
3. I feel at peace about anything negative that happened to me in the family in which I grew up.

### B.5. Impulsivity (4 items, $\alpha = 0.76$ )

Respondents were asked to respond to four statements about their decision-making, especially as it concerns risk-taking and new experiences. Answer categories ranged from 1 (never or rarely) to 4 (most or all of the time):

1. When making a decision, I go with my ‘gut feeling’ and do not think much about the consequences of each alternative.
2. I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules.
3. I am an impulsive person.
4. I like to take risks.

### B.6. Closeness to biological mother and father (6 items, $\alpha = 0.89$ 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, $\alpha = 0.80$ ; anxiety, 6 items, $\alpha = 0.82$ )

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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# Growing Up With Two Moms: The Untold Children's View

by Robert Oscar Lopez

within Marriage

AUGUST 6TH, 2012

The children of same-sex couples have a tough road ahead of them—I know, because I have been there. The last thing we should do is make them feel guilty if the strain gets to them and they feel strange.

Between 1973 and 1990, when my beloved mother passed away, she and her female romantic partner raised me. They had separate houses but spent nearly all their weekends together, with me, in a trailer tucked discreetly in an RV park 50 minutes away from the town where we lived. As the youngest of my mother's biological children, I was the only child who experienced childhood without my father being around.

After my mother's partner's children had left for college, she moved into our house in town. I lived with both of them for the brief time before my mother died at the age of 53. I was 19. In other words, I was the only child who experienced life under "gay parenting" as that term is understood today.

Quite simply, growing up with gay parents was very difficult, and not because of prejudice from neighbors. People in our community didn't really know what was going on in the house. To most outside observers, I was a well-raised, high-achieving child, finishing high school with straight A's.

Inside, however, I was confused. When your home life is so drastically different from everyone around you, in a fundamental way striking at basic physical relations, you grow up weird. I have no mental health disorders or biological conditions. I just grew up in a house so unusual that I was destined to exist as a social outcast.

My peers learned all the unwritten rules of decorum and body language in their homes; they understood what was appropriate to say in certain settings and what wasn't; they learned both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine social mechanisms.

Even if my peers' parents were divorced, and many of them were, they still grew up seeing male and female social models. They learned, typically, how to be bold and unflinching from male figures and how to write thank-you cards and be sensitive from female figures. These are stereotypes, of course, but stereotypes come in handy when you inevitably leave the safety of your lesbian mom's trailer and have to work and survive in a world where everybody thinks in stereotypical terms, even gays.

I had no male figure at all to follow, and my mother and her partner were both unlike traditional fathers or traditional mothers. As a result, I had very few recognizable social cues to offer potential male or female friends, since I was neither confident nor sensitive to others. Thus I befriended people rarely and alienated others easily. Gay people who grew up in straight parents' households may have struggled with their sexual orientation; but when it came to the vast social universe of adaptations not dealing with sexuality—how to act, how to speak, how to behave—they had the advantage of learning at home. Many gays don't realize what a blessing it was to be reared in a traditional home.

My home life was not traditional nor conventional. I suffered because of it, in ways that are difficult for sociologists to index. Both nervous and yet blunt, I would later seem strange even in the eyes of gay and bisexual adults who had little patience for someone like me. I was just as odd to them as I was to straight

people.

Life is hard when you are strange. Even now, I have very few friends and often feel as though I do not understand people because of the unspoken gender cues that everyone around me, even gays raised in traditional homes, takes for granted. Though I am hard-working and a quick learner, I have trouble in professional settings because co-workers find me bizarre.

In terms of sexuality, gays who grew up in traditional households benefited from at least seeing some kind of functional courtship rituals around them. I had no clue how to make myself attractive to girls. When I stepped outside of my mothers' trailer, I was immediately tagged as an outcast because of my girlish mannerisms, funny clothes, lisp, and outlandishness. Not surprisingly, I left high school as a virgin, never having had a girlfriend, instead having gone to four proms as a wisecracking sidekick to girls who just wanted someone to chip in for a limousine.

When I got to college, I set off everyone's "gaydar" and the campus LGBT group quickly descended upon me to tell me it was 100-percent certain I must be a homosexual. When I came out as bisexual, they told everyone I was lying and just wasn't ready to come out of the closet as gay yet. Frightened and traumatized by my mother's death, I dropped out of college in 1990 and fell in with what can only be called the gay underworld. Terrible things happened to me there.

It was not until I was twenty-eight that I suddenly found myself in a relationship with a woman, through coincidences that shocked everyone who knew me and surprised even myself. I call myself bisexual because it would take several novels to explain how I ended up "straight" after almost thirty years as a gay man. I don't feel like dealing with gay activists skewering me the way they go on search-and-destroy missions against ex-gays, "closet cases," or "homocons."

Though I have a biography particularly relevant to gay issues, the first person who contacted me to thank me for sharing my perspective on LGBT issues was Mark Regnerus, in an email dated July 17, 2012. I was not part of his massive survey, but he noticed a comment I'd left on a website about it and took the initiative to begin an email correspondence.

Forty-one years I'd lived, and nobody—least of all gay activists—had wanted me to speak honestly about the complicated gay threads of my life. If for no other reason than this, Mark Regnerus deserves tremendous credit—and the gay community ought to be crediting him rather than trying to silence him.

Regnerus's study identified 248 adult children of parents who had same-sex romantic relationships. Offered a chance to provide frank responses with the hindsight of adulthood, they gave reports unfavorable to the gay marriage equality agenda. Yet the results are backed up by an important thing in life called common sense: Growing up different from other people is difficult and the difficulties raise the risk that children will develop maladjustments or self-medicate with alcohol and other dangerous behaviors. Each of those 248 is a human story, no doubt with many complexities.

Like my story, these 248 people's stories deserve to be told. The gay movement is doing everything it can to make sure that nobody hears them. But I care more about the stories than the numbers (especially as an English professor), and Regnerus stumbled unwittingly on a narrative treasure chest.

So why the code of silence from LGBT leaders? I can only speculate from where I'm sitting. I cherish my mother's memory, but I don't mince words when talking about how hard it was to grow up in a gay household. Earlier studies examined children still living with their gay parents, so the kids were not at

liberty to speak, governed as all children are by filial piety, guilt, and fear of losing their allowances. For trying to speak honestly, I've been squelched, literally, for decades.

The latest attempt at trying to silence stories (and data) such as mine comes from Darren E. Sherkat, a professor of sociology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, who gave an interview to Tom Bartlett of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, in which he said—and I quote—that Mark Regnerus's study was “bullshit.” Bartlett's article continues:

Among the problems Sherkat identified is the paper's definition of “lesbian mothers” and “gay fathers”—an aspect that has been the focus of much of the public criticism. A woman could be identified as a “lesbian mother” in the study if she had had a relationship with another woman at any point after having a child, regardless of the brevity of that relationship and whether or not the two women raised the child as a couple.

Sherkat said that fact alone in the paper should have “disqualified it immediately” from being considered for publication.

The problem with Sherkat's disqualification of Regnerus's work is a manifold chicken-and-egg conundrum. Though Sherkat uses the term “LGBT” in the same interview with Bartlett, he privileges that L and G and discriminates severely against the B, bisexuals.

Where do children of LGBT parents come from? If the parents are 100-percent gay or lesbian, then the chances are that the children were conceived through surrogacy or insemination, or else adopted. Those cases are such a tiny percentage of LGBT parents, however, that it would be virtually impossible to find more than a half-dozen in a random sampling of tens of thousands of adults.

Most LGBT parents are, like me, and technically like my mother, “bisexual”—the forgotten B. We conceived our children because we engaged in heterosexual intercourse. Social complications naturally arise if you conceive a child with the opposite sex but still have attractions to the same sex. Sherkat calls these complications disqualifiable, as they are corrupting the purity of a homosexual model of parenting.

I would posit that children raised by same-sex couples are naturally going to be more curious about and experimental with homosexuality without necessarily being pure of any attraction to the opposite sex. Hence they will more likely fall into the bisexual category, as did I—meaning that the children of LGBT parents, once they are young adults, are likely to be the first ones disqualified by the social scientists who now claim to advocate for their parents.

Those who are 100-percent gay may view bisexuals with a mix of disgust and envy. Bisexual parents threaten the core of the LGBT parenting narrative—we *do* have a choice to live as gay or straight, and we *do* have to *decide* the gender configuration of the household in which our children will grow up. While some gays see bisexuality as an easier position, the fact is that bisexual parents bear a more painful weight on their shoulders. Unlike homosexuals, we cannot write off our decisions as things forced on us by nature. We have no choice but to take responsibility for what we do as parents, and live with the guilt, regret, and self-criticism forever.

Our children do not arrive with clean legal immunity. As a man, though I am bisexual, I do not get to throw away the mother of my child as if she is a used incubator. I had to help my wife through the difficulties of pregnancy and postpartum depression. When she is struggling with discrimination against mothers or women at a sexist workplace, I have to be patient and listen. I must attend to her sexual needs. Once I was a

father, I put aside my own homosexual past and vowed never to divorce my wife or take up with another person, male or female, before I died. I chose that commitment in order to protect my children from dealing with harmful drama, even as they grow up to be adults. When you are a parent, ethical questions revolve around your children and you put away your self-interest . . . forever.

Sherkat's assessment of Regnerus's work shows a total disregard for the emotional and sexual labor that bisexual parents contribute to their children. Bisexual parents must wrestle with their duties as parents while still contending with the temptations to enter into same-sex relationships. The turbulence documented in Mark Regnerus's study is a testament to how hard that is. Rather than threatening, it is a reminder of the burden I carry and a goad to concern myself first and foremost with my children's needs, not my sexual desires.

The other chicken-and-egg problem of Sherkat's dismissal deals with conservative ideology. Many have dismissed my story with four simple words: "But you are conservative." Yes, I am. How did I get that way? I moved to the right wing because I lived in precisely the kind of anti-normative, marginalized, and oppressed identity environment that the left celebrates: I am a bisexual Latino intellectual, raised by a lesbian, who experienced poverty in the Bronx as a young adult. I'm perceptive enough to notice that liberal social policies don't actually help people in those conditions. Especially damning is the liberal attitude that we shouldn't be judgmental about sex. In the Bronx gay world, I cleaned out enough apartments of men who'd died of AIDS to understand that resistance to sexual temptation is central to any kind of humane society. Sex can be hurtful not only because of infectious diseases but also because it leaves us vulnerable and more likely to cling to people who don't love us, mourn those who leave us, and not know how to escape those who need us but whom we don't love. The left understands none of that. That's why I am conservative.

So yes, I am conservative and support Regnerus's findings. Or is it that Regnerus's findings revisit the things that made me conservative in the first place? Sherkat must figure that one out.

Having lived for forty-one years as a strange man, I see it as tragically fitting that the first instinct of experts and gay activists is to exclude my life profile as unfit for any "data sample," or as Dr. Sherkat calls it, "bullshit." So the game has gone for at least twenty-five years. For all the talk about LGBT alliances, bisexuality falls by the wayside, thanks to scholars such as Sherkat. For all the chatter about a "queer" movement, queer activists are just as likely to restrict their social circles to professionalized, normal people who know how to throw charming parties, make small talk, and blend in with the Art Deco furniture.

I thank Mark Regnerus. Far from being "bullshit," his work is affirming to me, because it *acknowledges* what the gay activist movement has sought laboriously to erase, or at least ignore. Whether homosexuality is chosen or inbred, whether gay marriage gets legalized or not, being strange is hard; it takes a mental toll, makes it harder to find friends, interferes with professional growth, and sometimes leads one down a sodden path to self-medication in the form of alcoholism, drugs, gambling, antisocial behavior, and irresponsible sex. The children of same-sex couples have a tough road ahead of them—I know, because I have been there. The last thing we should do is make them feel guilty if the strain gets to them and they feel strange. We owe them, at the least, a dose of honesty. Thank you, Mark Regnerus, for taking the time to listen.

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