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Social and Demographic Characteristics of Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adults with and Without Children

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SUMMARY. This is the first study to compare lesbian mothers (n = 150), lesbians without children (n = 236), heterosexual mothers (n = 175), heterosexual women without children (n = 38), gay fathers (n = 40), gay men without children (n = 163), heterosexual fathers (n = 157), and heterosexual men without children (n = 32) on social and demographic characteristics. Demographic differences included age, education, length of relationship, religion, and geographic location. Only 28% of gay fathers

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and 37% of lesbian mothers had at least one child from their current relationship. For women the most important factor in predicting contact with family of origin was sexual orientation, while for men it was parenting status. More gay and lesbian parents had disclosed their sexual orientation than those without children. Gay fathers reached most milestones in the coming-out process between 2.5 and 4 years later than gay men without children, while lesbian mothers reached all milestones in the coming-out process 3 to 5 years later than lesbians without children. Lesbian mothers who had children before coming out reached developmental milestones 4 to 8 years later than lesbian mothers who had children after coming out. doi:10.1300/J461v03n02_03 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Research examining demographic and social characteristics of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) parents is valuable for a number of reasons. Investigators can help to increase the visibility of GLB parents as a legitimate social group with experiences and needs similar to the mainstream population. In the current political climate in the United States, dehumanization of GLB parents and prevailing stereotypes about them have been used as political justification for antigay measures that could seriously impact the financial, social, and medical security of GLB adults and the children they are parenting. At the same time, it is important to study variables related to the unique identity of being a sexual minority such as sexual identity development and degree of disclosure. These factors have not been addressed in mainstream parenting research.

The present study's broad goal is to examine social and demographic factors that differentiate gay men and lesbians who are parents from those who are non-parents and also from heterosexual parents and non-parents. The study's method allows for the first comparison of these eight groups based on gender, sexual orientation, and parenting status. The study's specific goals are related to three categories of variables: (1) demographic factors; (2) perceived social support from family and friends;

and (3) (for lesbians and gay men) the development of sexual identity through both the achievement of milestones in the coming-out process and current levels of disclosure.

Demographic Factors

Due to the small sample sizes of prior studies, the fact that participants were often recruited from parenting groups, and the lack of heterosexual comparison groups, there has been no research on the demographic similarities and differences among lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals with and without children. Yet even the most basic demographic information (e.g., age, income, education) is interesting in determining the socioeconomic, geographic, and religious setting in which children are raised by parents of differing sexual orientations. The present study provides descriptive demographic data among the eight groups of lesbian, gay male, heterosexual female and heterosexual male parents and non-parents. Differences were examined by gender, sexual orientation, and parenting status for age, ethnicity, education, income, occupational status, location (e.g., large city versus rural area), geographic mobility, length of relationship, religion growing up and current religion, the importance of religion, and frequency of attendance at religious services. Given the small sample of gay fathers in the current study and its impact upon statistical comparisons between all eight groups of participants, analyses will be run separately for female and male participants.

Contact with Family of Origin and Social Support

Previous research (e.g., Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987) found that gay male and lesbian couples perceive more support from friends and less support from their families relative to heterosexual couples. Lesbian and gay male couples may be more distant from family and closer to friends because of actual or anticipated experiences of rejection due to their sexual orientation (Kurdek, 1988). The literature on lesbian mothers provides very limited information regarding contact with and perceived social support from family, and the general lesbian and gay male couples literature provides only slightly more information. Preliminary findings suggest that children conceived in a lesbian relationship (e.g., through donor insemination) may have as much contact with biological grandparents as children from heterosexual relationships (Patterson, Hurt, & Mason, 1998). One study suggests that lesbians may perceive greater acceptance and support from some family members when they become

parents (Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop, & Rodas, 1999; Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas, & Deck, 2000; Gartrell, Hamilton, Banks, Mosbacher, Reed, Sparks, & Bishop, 1996). Though little is known about the relationship between parenthood status and perceived family support for gay men, Crosbie-Burnett and Helmbrecht (1993) found that members of gay step-parenting couples received more frequent support from gay friends than from family members or non-gay friends.

Heterosexual biological parents, adoptive parents, and stepparents tend to receive more support from their own parents after having their first child (Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, & Stewart, 2004), while women who are voluntarily or involuntarily childless may feel stigmatized by family and the broader culture (Miall, 1986; Park, 2002).

This study explores the effect of gender, sexual orientation, and parenting status on contact with family of origin and partner's family. Regarding social support, it is hypothesized that there will be a main effect for women's parenting status on social support. Both lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers will perceive greater social support from their families than lesbians or heterosexuals without children. The first hypothesis does not examine differences in the perceived social support from family among men since our earlier research found that gay men in civil unions, gay men not in civil unions, and heterosexual men did not differ on this variable (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004).

Degree of Disclosure and Milestones in the Coming-Out Process

The research with gay fathers and lesbian mothers has emphasized disclosure to children, with little reference to disclosure to other people. These studies suggest that a majority of the children of lesbian and gay male parents may know about their parents' sexual orientation (e.g., Gartrell et al., 1996; Barrett & Tasker, 2001). With gay fathers and lesbian mothers, degree of disclosure may reflect open affection with a partner in the home, close ties to their children that encourage disclosure, the desire for children to learn this information from parents instead of another source, or selection bias of lesbians and gay men who value open discourse with their children. However, studies have not empirically assessed the degree of disclosure of lesbian and gay parents to other people in their lives such as friends, family, and coworkers.

One might expect lesbian and gay parents to be less forthcoming about their sexual orientation than lesbians and gay men without children as a way of protecting themselves and their children from stigma. Open disclosure of gay or lesbian sexual orientation could lead to reduction or

termination of custody rights, possibly biased treatment by their children's school system, and hostility towards the children. In addition, children of lesbian and gay parents may exert social control to have their parents remain closeted as a way of avoiding stigmatization (Bozett, 1988). On the other hand, lesbian and gay male parents may be more out than non-parents. The simplest questions from strangers—such as asking a gay male couple which one is the father of the child—necessitate either concealment of one's identity (and setting a negative example for the child) or coming out. Lesbians and gay men who have children need to make decisions about degree of disclosure to family members, co-workers, and their child's teachers. Conversely, lesbians and gay men without children can pass as single or heterosexual in family, work, and public settings.

Only one study (Morris, Balsam, & Rothblum, 2002) has explored coming out as a delayed developmental process for lesbian mothers, particularly those who have children before fully coming out as lesbian. Prior research and theory suggest that gay men may come out earlier and in a more sequential pattern than women (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2004). While theoretical stage models of the coming-out process exist for gay fathers (Miller, 1978) and for lesbians and gay men in general (Rust, 2004), the coming-out process has not been tested empirically through the examination of specific milestones considered important to this developmental process. The present study explored two hypotheses related to milestones in the coming-out process. First, we predicted that lesbian mothers and gay fathers would reach milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbians and gay men without children, respectively. Secondly, we hypothesized that lesbian mothers who had children before coming out would reach milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbian mothers who had children after coming out. Given the small sample size of gay men, it was not feasible to divide gay fathers into those who had children before versus after coming out.

Methodological Problems in Lesbian and Gay Male Parenting Research

Research with lesbians and gay male adults presents unique methodological challenges. It is difficult, if not impossible, to locate a representative sample of gay men and lesbians since the social stigma they face leads them to hide their sexual orientation. Additionally, homosexuality was classified as an emotional and behavioral disorder by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973, possibly contributing to suspicions among the lesbian and gay communities regarding the potential misuse

of psychological research. As a result, much of the research with gay male and lesbian populations has relied on convenience and snowball (network) samples, so that it is difficult to know how representative these samples are of lesbians and gay men in general.

These methodological problems are exacerbated for researchers interested in the experiences of lesbian and gay male parents. Pressures to hide a lesbian or gay male sexual orientation may be particularly strong for parents who are concerned about possible loss of child custody, unequal treatment by school systems, and stigmatization of themselves and their children (e.g., Falk, 1989). Despite consistent research findings to the contrary, stereotypes persist that children of lesbian and gay parents will develop psychopathology at elevated rates, will be encouraged to defy gender conventions, will be isolated from their extended families, will be denied adult role models who are the opposite sex of their parents, and will be gay or lesbian themselves (c.f., Allen & Burrell, 1996, for a review).

As a result, researchers who have studied lesbian and gay parents face particular problems with selection bias. Participants in many of these studies were willing to be interviewed, and in several cases to have their children interviewed, by researchers who knew about the participants' sexual orientation. Often, these participants were solicited from lesbian and gay parenting groups, and may therefore have been unusually privileged or motivated parents who were receiving a fair amount of social support.

Previous research with GLB parents has also been characterized by the use of small, convenience samples, particularly for gay men. Only one study since 1978 (Barrett & Tasker, 2001) has recruited more than 40 gay fathers; all others used smaller samples. Gay and lesbian parenting studies often lack adequate, large comparison groups from the heterosexual and GLB populations, and rarely compare gay men and lesbians with and without children. For example, the only empirical study to compare gay fathers with non-fathers (Robinson & Skeen, 1982; Skeen & Robinson, 1985) sampled 30 gay fathers, all of whom were members of a Catholic parenting group. Only one research team (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a, 1989b, 1992) has conducted empirical research specifically designed to compare gay fathers with heterosexual fathers. Only four empirical studies have compared lesbian parents and their families with gay male parents and their families. In three of these studies (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Turner, Scadden, & Harris, 1990; Wyers, 1987), the combined sample sizes ranged from 21 to 66 participants. Harris and Turner (1985/1986) conducted the one study to date comparing lesbian and gay parents

with heterosexual single parents, with 13 lesbian, 10 gay male, 14 heterosexual female and only 2 male heterosexual parents participating. The lack of comparison groups and adequate statistical power limits the meaningful inferences that can be drawn from the GLB parenting research.

Benefits of Studying Couples with Civil Unions

In June 2000, Vermont was the first of the United States to extend legal recognition of same-sex couples in the form of civil unions. Several years ago, three of the present authors (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004, in press) surveyed same-sex couples who had civil unions in Vermont during the first year of this new legislation (2000-2001). Although civil union legislation only covers statewide benefits for residents of Vermont, 79% of the same-sex couples who took advantage of this legislation during its first year were from other states (due to the fact that this study took place before same-sex marriage in Massachusetts or Canada, or domestic partnerships in other U.S. states). We contacted all 2,475 couples who had civil unions in Vermont during the first year of the legislation about participation in our questionnaire study. We received back reply forms from 947 couples (42%) indicating willingness to participate in the study.

Couples were also asked to provide contact information for a married, heterosexual sibling and his/her spouse and for a gay or lesbian couple in their friendship circles who had not had a civil union. This methodology allowed comparison between same-sex couples in legal relationships, same-sex couples not in legal relationships, and heterosexual couples in legal relationships. Because civil union couples were compared with heterosexuals recruited from among siblings, our results showed that these two types of couples were similar on race, ethnicity, age, and childhood factors, such as religion while growing up. Because civil union couples were compared with same-sex couples from their friendship circles who were not in civil unions, our results indicated that these two types of couples were similar on such factors as age and length of relationship (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004). Before our study, all couples research in the United States had focused on same-sex couples without legalized relationships; thus, the same-sex couples not in civil unions represent the *status quo* of couples research.

The public registration of couples with civil unions provides the first opportunity to access gay and lesbian parents recruited from a population as well as their friends and heterosexual siblings. Furthermore, couples

were not recruited specifically for a study about parenting. As a result, the Civil Union Study (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004) can be considered more representative than much of the previous research that has recruited generally small numbers of lesbian and gay male parents from geographically limited areas and where participants were specifically recruited for studies on parenting.

METHOD

Participants

This study utilized the data set of the Civil Union Study (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004, in press), consisting of 1,538 lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual women and men¹ from across the United States. Photocopies of certificates of all civil unions held between July 1, 2000 and June 31, 2001, the first year these were legally available in the state of Vermont, were obtained from the Vermont Division of Health Surveillance. Contact letters were mailed to each of the 2,475 gay and lesbian couples who had civil unions during this time, requesting participation in the study. A reply form was included in each letter requesting both their involvement and the names and addresses of a heterosexual married sibling and his or her spouse, and a lesbian or gay couple in their friendship circle who had not had a civil union. The contact letter asked civil union couples to: "Only give us contact information for a sibling if you are out to this sibling and if he/she knows that you have had a civil union." Participation was voluntary and compensation was not provided.

Of the original population of 2,475 civil union couples, 165 addresses (7%) were incorrect, five individuals contacted the researchers and reported that their partner had died, 28 replied that their relationship had ended, and eight couples were deemed ineligible for the study because they were personally known to members of the research team. Of the remaining 2,270 couples, 947 couples (42%) completed the reply form and reported willingness to participate.

Funding limited the mailing of questionnaires to 400 civil union couples, 400 lesbian and gay couples from their friendship circle who did not have civil unions, and 400 married heterosexual couples. Members of civil union couples provided the highest response rate with 659 of 800 questionnaires returned (82%). Of the same-sex couples not in civil unions, 12 couples (3%) were not included (one had ended their relationship; one could not be located; and six couples had actually had civil

unions of their own). Of the remaining 776 members of same-sex couples not in civil unions, 466 (60%) returned completed questionnaires. Additionally, members from four same-sex couples responded that they would not participate. Among heterosexual married couples, four (1%) were not included in the study (two spouses had died, one marriage had ended, and one address was incorrect). Of the remaining 792 members of heterosexual couples, 413 (52%) returned completed questionnaires. Additionally, members from four heterosexual couples responded that they would not participate. Family participation rates can also be calculated. Each family consisted of both members of the civil union couple, same-sex friendship circle couple, and married sibling couple. In all, 388 of 400 (97%) families provided at least one respondent.

Civil union certificates provided information about gender, race/ethnicity, and current address. This allowed comparison of the sample with the entire civil union population. The Civil Union Study sample was representative of the entire civil union population in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and the ranking of the states with the highest proportions of civil union couples (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004). As in the general civil union population, the majority of the participants in the Civil Union Study sample were United States citizens who did not reside in Vermont (88%). Solomon et al. (2004) found that 36.1% of participants from of civil union couples were male and 63.9% were female, reflecting the approximately 2:1 ratio found on public certificates. After Vermont, the largest number of participants came from New York (10%), Massachusetts (8.8%), California (8.2%) and Florida (5.8%).

Procedure

Between January and May 2002, Solomon et al. (2004) sent questionnaires to the first 400 civil union couples to return the reply form with all contact information (including names and addresses of friends and siblings) as well as to their friends and siblings. Each couple was sent two questionnaires and postage-paid reply envelopes. Questionnaires were completed without names or addresses and were returned in postage-paid envelopes. Each survey was identified by both a code number and a letter. The number identified the civil union couple that was originally contacted, and the letter identified the type of couple to which the respondent belonged. For example, members of a civil union couple might be identified as 10A and 10B, with members of their same-sex friendship circle identified as 10C and 10D, and the heterosexual sibling and his or

her spouse identified as 10E and 10F. When couples had not returned questionnaires after approximately one month, they received a reminder via email or letter.

Measures

Demographic Information. Demographic items included age, gender, ethnicity, education, occupation, income, current location (e.g., size of city or town), years lived in current location, and length of relationship. One item, based on the Kinsey Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948) asked respondents to rate their sexual orientation from 0 (exclusively heterosexual) to 6 (exclusively lesbian or gay). The questionnaire asked respondents about their childhood and current religions. In addition, respondents were asked to rate, "How important is your religious faith to you?," on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all important*; 5 = *Very important*), and to rate the frequency of their attendance at religious services on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Weekly*; 6 = *Never*). Respondents also provided their occupation which was coded for occupational status using Achenbach's (1998) modification of the Hollingshead coding system. Scores ranged from 10 (lowest-status occupation) to 90 (highest-status occupation). Lesbian and gay male respondents were asked to rate how active they have been in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer rights movement using a 9-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = *Extremely active* to 9 = *Not at all active*.

Child and Parent Characteristics. Respondents were asked if they had any children, the number of children, the age and sex of each child, and whether each child was from their current relationship or a previous relationship. Parents were also asked about the amount of time their children lived with them annually. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Full-time* to 7 = *Never visits*. Age at which respondents originally became parents was estimated by subtracting age of the respondent's oldest child from the respondent's age.

Contact with Family of Origin and Partner's Parents. A subscale measuring contact with family of origin was modified from the American Couples Survey (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Respondents were asked how frequently they had any contact with their mothers or stepmothers, and their fathers or stepfathers, respectively. Contact was defined broadly to include phone conversations, mail, and visits. Responses were rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Daily or almost every day* to 9 = *Never*. Distance at which respondents lived from their mother and father was rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *Less than*

one mile to 6 = *More than 1,000 miles*. One question asked respondents to estimate, "About what proportion of the time is your partner with you when you visit your parents or meet them outside your own home?" Responses were rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Always* to 9 = *Never*. Two items measured the respondent's perceived acceptance by their partner's mother/stepmother and father/stepfather, asking, "To what extent do your partner's parents make you feel like you are 'one of the family'?" Responses were measured using a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Very much* to 9 = *Not at all*. Respondents were also asked how frequently they initiated any contact with their partner's mother/stepmother, and their partner's father/stepfather. Responses were scored on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Daily or almost every day* to 9 = *Never*. Respondents were also asked both if they sent a Christmas, Chanukah, or holiday card and/or gift to their parents in the last year, and if they received a Christmas, Chanukah, or holiday card and/or gift from any of their parents in the last year. Responses were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *No*, 2 = *Yes, addressed to/by me alone*, 3 = *Yes, addressed to/by both my partner and me*, 4 = *Does not apply to me alone*).

Perceived Social Support. Procidano and Heller's (1983) measures of Perceived Social Support From Friends and Perceived Social Support From Family were used to assess perceived social support. These two scales measure the extent to which respondents believe that peers and family fulfill their needs for support, feedback, and information. For each scale, respondents circled "Yes," "No," or "Don't Know" to 20 statements regarding either friends or family, respectively. For example, one item read, "My friends give me the moral support I need." Items were scored +1 if the participant indicated perceived social support; "don't know" answers are not scored. Therefore, higher scores indicated higher perception of social support.

Degree of Disclosure and Milestones in the Coming-Out Process. For lesbian and gay male respondents, degree of disclosure was assessed using the Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), an 11-item self-report measure of the degree to which lesbians and gay men are open about their sexual orientation in different areas of their lives such as with specific family relationships and work peers. A 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 = *Person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status* to 7 = *Person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status and it is openly talked about*. Mean scores on this measure range from 1 to 7. The instrument also included three subscales in addition to the general outness factor. Outness to the World measured self-disclosure to new straight friends, work peers, work supervisors,

and strangers. Outness to Family measured disclosure to mother, father, siblings, and extended family or relatives. Outness to Religion examined disclosure to members of the respondent's religious community (e.g., church or temple), and to leaders of their religious community (e.g., minister or rabbi).

The ages at which lesbian and gay male participants achieved milestones in the coming-out process were estimated using questions that were adapted from the Lesbian Wellness Survey (Morris & Rothblum, 1999). Items requested ages at which respondents first: (a) noticed attraction to someone of the same sex; (b) questioned that they might be lesbian/gay/bisexual (GLB); (c) thought of themselves as GLB; (d) told someone that they were GLB; (e) had a sexual experience with someone of the same sex; and (f) had a sexual/romantic relationship with someone of the same sex.

Estimates of whether respondents had children before or after coming out were determined by subtracting the age of their oldest child from reported age of endorsing item (d) (age participants told someone that they were GLB).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Sample. The following method was used as a means to maximize the number of individuals from same-sex couples who are parents. In cases where only one member of a couple returned a questionnaire, that questionnaire was utilized. In cases where both members of a couple returned a questionnaire and agreed on parenting status, questionnaire A was systematically selected from the civil union couple (A and B) and questionnaire C from the couple that did not have a civil union (couple C and D). In cases where both members of a couple completed questionnaires and only one reported having children, data from the individual who reported being a parent were retained for analysis (in all cases, the reason for this discrepancy was due to the fact that the children came from the prior relationship of one partner). In addition, lesbians and gay men with civil unions, respectively, were combined with lesbians and gay men without civil unions. Three preliminary analyses were run to examine the potential impact of selecting cases in the above fashion. Using this selection method, the total sample consisted of 993 lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual women and men.

Analyses. The first analysis compared scores on several continuous demographic variables for members of couples where only one questionnaire was returned (e.g., questionnaire A but not questionnaire B) with averaged scores for couples where both questionnaires were returned (questionnaires A and B). Independent samples *t*-tests were performed separately for lesbians, heterosexual women, gay men, and heterosexual men, respectively. No significant differences were found on age, education, occupational status, and income. These results support the inclusion of data from individuals from couples with one respondent and those with two respondents.

The second analysis examined members of same-sex couples where both members returned questionnaires to determine whether a difference existed as a function of which forms were completed. Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare mean scores of respondents who completed questionnaires A and C (the questionnaires used in this study when a couple returned both forms) with those who completed questionnaires B and D. No significant differences were found for lesbians and gay men, respectively, on age, education, occupational status, and income. These results support the selection of questionnaires A and C from couples that returned both questionnaires.

The third preliminary analysis compared members of same-sex couples in civil unions with those not in civil unions. Independent samples *t*-tests were performed separately for lesbians and gay men. Lesbians with civil unions were significantly younger ($M = 42.6$ years) than lesbians without civil unions ($M = 44.2$ years). No significant differences were found for lesbians on education, income, and occupational status. Gay men with civil unions had significantly higher occupational status ($M = 71.9$) than gay men without civil unions ($M = 68.3$). No significant differences were found for gay men on age, education, and income. These results suggested that respondents who had civil unions were different from respondents who did not have civil unions in minor ways. Nevertheless, relatively small percentages of lesbian and especially gay men with children necessitated combining these two groups.

Comparisons by Sexual Orientation and Parenting Status

Of the 993 participants included in the present analyses, 39.5% ($n = 392$) were male and 60.5% ($n = 601$) were female. Nine hundred (90.6%) participants were from couples that returned both questionnaires (though we used only one questionnaire from each couple), and 93 (9.4%) were from couples that returned only one questionnaire. The sexual orientation of

participants was 59.4% ($n = 590$) lesbian/gay and 40.6% ($n = 403$) heterosexual. Of the female participants, 64.4% ($n = 387$) were lesbians and 35.6% ($n = 214$) were heterosexual. Of the male participants, 48.2% ($n = 189$) were gay and 51.8% ($n = 203$) were heterosexual. Mean Kinsey Scale scores (where 6 is “exclusively lesbian or gay” and 0 is “exclusively heterosexual”) were 5.4 ($SD = 0.8$) for lesbians, 5.8 ($SD = 0.5$) for gay men, 0.2 ($SD = 0.6$) for heterosexual women, and 0.1 ($SD = 0.4$) for heterosexual men.

With regards to parenting status, 38.8% ($n = 150$) of lesbians were mothers and 61.2% ($n = 237$) reported not having children. Among heterosexual women, 81.8% ($n = 175$) were mothers and 18.2% ($n = 39$) did not have children. Among gay men, 19.7% ($n = 40$) were fathers and 80.3% ($n = 163$) did not have children. Among heterosexual men, 83.1% ($n = 157$) were fathers and 16.9% ($n = 32$) did not have children. Among lesbians, 58.7% of mothers and 54.9% of women without children had a civil union. Among gay men, 77.5% of fathers and 57.1% of men without children were in civil unions.

Tables 1 (for women) and 2 (for men) show all variables for the eight groups based on sexual orientation and parenting status. This includes demographic information, child and parent characteristics, contact with family of origin and partner’s parents, perceived social support from family and friends, degree of disclosure, and milestones in the coming out process. The tables also display main effects for sexual orientation and parenting status for each variable (see Table 1 for the four groups of women and Table 2 for the four groups of men). Due to the uneven sample size of the groups and the small number of gay fathers and heterosexuals without children, interaction effects were not reported in these tables.

In addition to examining the above variables for the eight groups, we also had several specific hypotheses. The first was that both lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers would perceive greater social support from their families than lesbians or heterosexuals without children. A2 (sexual orientation) X2 (parenting status) analysis of variance was conducted. A significant main effect was found for sexual orientation, $F(1,593) = 21.20, p < .001$. Heterosexual women ($M = 15.3, SD = 5.2$) perceived greater support from their families than lesbians ($M = 11.8, SD = 6.6$). The main effect for parenting status and the interaction between parenting status and sexual orientation were not significant.

We examined whether lesbian mothers and gay fathers would differ on degree of disclosure compared with lesbian non-mothers and gay non-fathers, respectively. A2 (gender) X2 (parenting status) analysis of variance was performed for lesbians and gay men. A significant main

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Female Participants Based on Sexual Orientation and Parenting Status

Characteristic <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Lesbians		Lesbians		Heterosexual		Statistic: Parenting Status
	with children (n = 150)	without children (n = 236)	women with children (n = 175)	women without children (n = 38)	Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Sexual Orientation	
<i>Demographics</i>							
Age	46.0 (9.4)	42.1 (8.4)	44.1 (10.8)	38.3 (7.9)	$F(1,589) = 8.92^{***}$	$F(1,589) = 25.96^{***}$	
(Range)	24-81	22-70	20-82	21-55			
Ethnicity (%)					$\chi^2(6,595) = 6.55$	$\chi^2(6,595) = 5.82$	
African American/Black	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.0			
Asian American/Pacific							
Islander	0.0	0.9	1.7	0.0			
Latino/Latina	1.4	2.6	1.1	0.0			
Native American/							
American Indian	1.4	1.7	0.6	0.0			
European/White	93.9	91.9	93.1	100.0			
Biracial	1.4	2.6	1.7	0.0			
Other	1.4	0.0	1.7	0.0			
Years of education	15.8 (1.8)	16.0 (1.4)	15.1 (1.9)	15.6 (1.5)	$F(1,594) = 10.28^{***}$	$F(1,594) = 3.92^*$	
(Range)	9-17	12-17	11-17	12-17			
Mean occupational status ¹	72.0 (15.5)	70.4 (14.4)	69.7 (14.4)	69.6 (16.6)	$F(1,512) = 0.89$	$F(1,512) = 0.27$	
(Range)	30-90	10-90	20-90	10-90			
Mean individual income (Dollars)	55,864 (87,733)	55,323 (45,680)	38,560 (47,825)	44,062 (25,030)	$F(1,549) = 4.88^*$	$F(1,549) = 0.15$	
(Range)	0-999,998	0-340,000	0-400,000	0-100,000			

TABLE 1 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Lesbians		Lesbians without children (n = 236)		Heterosexual women with children (n = 175)		Heterosexual women without children (n = 38)		Statistic: Parenting Status
	with children (n = 150)		with children (n = 236)		with children (n = 175)		without children (n = 38)		
Location									$\chi^2(5,596) = 12.23^*$ $\chi^2(5,596) = 13.45^*$
Large city	13.5	20.3	12.7 (12.1)	16.7 (13.9)	12.2 (13.0)	11.7 (6.8)	12.2 (13.0)	11.7 (6.8)	$F(1,595) = 46.81^{****}$ $F(1,595) = 19.57^{****}$
Medium city	23.6	17.7	11.7 (8.2)	21.3 (12.1)	13.2 (7.0)	11.7 (6.8)	13.2 (7.0)	11.7 (6.8)	$F(1,538) = 21.16^{****}$ $F(1,538) = 10.81^{****}$
Small city	25.7	21.5	10.0 (7.4)	20.4 (12.2)	11.7 (6.8)	11.7 (6.8)	11.7 (6.8)	11.7 (6.8)	$F(1,586) = 5.13^*$ $F(1,586) = 0.86$
Suburb	17.6	19.8	9.2 (7.2)	15.9 (10.4)	9.7 (5.9)	9.7 (5.9)	9.7 (5.9)	9.7 (5.9)	$F(1,592) = 37.87^{****}$ $F(1,592) = 15.28^{****}$
Rural	18.9	20.7							
Other	0.7	0.0							
Years in current location	10.5 (9.1)	12.7 (12.1)							
Years since first met	11.2 (7.4)	11.7 (8.2)							
Years since first started going out	9.6 (7.1)	10.0 (7.4)							
Years since started living together	8.6 (6.8)	9.2 (7.2)							
CU Status (%)									
Had Civil Union	58.7	54.9							n.a. $\chi^2(1,387) = 0.54$
No Civil Union	41.3	45.1							n.a.
Religion while growing up (%)									
Catholic	26.4	40.0							$\chi^2(6,596) = 6.48$ $\chi^2(6,596) = 4.96$
Islamic	0.0	0.0							
Jewish	11.5	7.7							

Protestant	50.7	43.0	40.8	44.7
Buddhist	1.4	0.9	0.0	0.0
None	6.1	6.8	4.6	2.6
Spiritual beliefs—no formal religion	2.0	0.9	1.1	5.3
Other	2.0	1.7	4.0	5.3
Religion now (%)				
Catholicparent characteristics	8.3	6.0	22.9	13.9
Islamic	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0
Jewish	11.1	5.2	8.9	5.6
Protestant	27.8	26.6	39.5	33.3
Buddhist	0.7	1.7	0.6	0.0
None	11.1	18.5	10.8	11.1
Spiritual beliefs—no formal religion	37.5	40.8	12.7	30.6
Other	3.5	1.7	3.8	5.6
Importance of religion ²	3.2 (1.4)	3.0 (1.4)	3.6 (1.4)	3.3 (1.4)
Frequency of religious service attendance ³	4.2 (1.8)	4.5 (1.6)	3.6 (1.9)	4.2 (1.7)
Active in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer rights movement ⁴	4.6 (2.5)	5.3 (2.5)		
Child				
Number of children	1.9 (1.1)		2.2 (1.1)	
Range	1-8		1-7	
				n.a.
				$F(1,320) = 6.86$
				$\chi^2(7,571) = 55.48^{****}$
				$\chi^2(7,571) = 33.62^{****}$
				$F(1,590) = 5.54^*$
				$F(1,592) = 6.63^*$
				$F(1,384) = 7.81^{***}$

TABLE 1 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Lesbians		Heterosexual women		Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
	with children (n = 150)	without children (n = 236)	with children (n = 175)	without children (n = 38)		
Gender of children (%)						n.a.
Male	53.1		51.8			
Female	46.9		48.2			
Age of children per parent <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	15.7 (11.7)		14.7 (12.1)		$F(1,314) = 0.59$	n.a.
Range	0-60		0-49.3			
Age of oldest child	17.2(12.3)		16.5(12.5)		$F(1,314) = 0.22$	n.a.
Range	0-60		0-52			
Age of youngest child	14.1(11.5)		12.6(11.8)		$F(1,314) = 1.21$	n.a.
Range	0-60		0-46			
Any children from previous relationship (%)					$\chi^2(1,325) = 63.33^{****}$	n.a.
Yes	62.0		18.9			
No	38.0		82.1			
Any children from current relationship (%)					$\chi^2(1,325)=57.87^{****}$	n.a.
Yes	36.7		78.3			
When had first child (%)					n.a.	n.a.
Before coming out	44.3					
Time children spend with parents ⁵	3.3 (2.3)		2.2(2.1)		$F(1,299) = 19.39^{****}$	n.a.

with

% of children living with participants during the year									
Full-time	39.1			70.6					
7-11 months	10.3			0.6					
2-4 months	1.9			2.4					
Less than 2 months	2.3			0.6					
On weekends only	5.0			0.3					
Visit occasionally	35.2			18.5					
Never visit	6.1			7.1					
<i>Contact</i>									
Distance from mother (miles) ⁶	4.0 (1.6)			3.3 (1.6)			4.0 (1.3)		$F(1,459) = 2.92$
Distance from father (miles) ⁶	4.1 (1.5)			3.6 (1.6)			3.9 (1.3)		$F(1,375) = 4.99^*$
Frequency of contact with mother ⁷	3.3 (1.7)			2.4 (1.2)			2.9 (1.2)		$F(1,459) = 17.65^{*****}$
Frequency of contact with father ⁷	4.1 (1.8)			3.5 (2.0)			3.9 (1.6)		$F(1,376) = 4.10^*$
Proportion of time partner is with you when you visit your mother ⁸	2.9 (2.2)			3.6 (2.1)			3.6 (2.3)		$F(1,441) = 5.22^*$
Proportion of time partner is with you when you visit your father ⁸	2.8 (2.3)			3.4 (2.1)			3.4 (1.9)		$F(1,350) = 2.16^*$
Perceived acceptance by partner's mother ⁹	3.1 (2.8)			2.4 (2.1)			2.8 (2.3)		$F(1,477) = 3.81^*$
Perceived acceptance by partner's father ⁹	3.3 (2.9)			2.6 (2.5)			2.5 (1.5)		$F(1,356) = 4.91^*$

TABLE 1 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Lesbians		Heterosexual women		Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
	with children (n = 150)	without children (n = 236)	Heterosexual women with children (n = 175)	Heterosexual women without children (n = 38)		
Initiate contact with partner's mother ⁷	6.8 (1.8)	6.7 (1.9)	4.9 (1.9)	6.0 (1.9)	$F(1,475) = 4.81^{****}$	$F(1,475) = 5.64^*$
Initiate contact with partner's father ⁷	7.4 (1.8)	7.1 (1.9)	5.7 (2.0)	6.7 (1.7)	$F(1,359) = 19.00^{****}$	$F(1,359) = 1.96$
Sent parents holiday card/ present last year (%)					$\chi^2(2,498) = 8.41^*$	$\chi^2(2,498) = 8.55^*$
Yes, signed by me alone	5.2	9.9	1.4	3.0		
Yes, signed from me and my partner	91.3	84.0	93.5	90.9		
No	3.5	6.1	5.1	6.1		
Received holiday card/ present from at least one parent last year (%)					$\chi^2(2,493) = 11.31^{***}$	$\chi^2(2,493) = 6.29^*$
Yes, addressed to me	9.6	14.5	3.6	3.0		
Yes, addressed to both my partner and me	84.3	80.7	91.3	93.9		
No	6.1	4.8	5.1	3.0		
<i>Social</i>						
Perceived social support from friends ¹⁰	15.4 (4.5)	15.6 (4.6)	14.8 (4.4)	15.2 (4.0)	$F(1,597) = 1.19$	$F(1,597) = 0.44$
Perceived social support from family ¹⁰	12.2 (6.5)	11.6 (6.6)	15.6 (5.1)	13.9 (5.2)	$F(1,593) = 21.20^{****}$	$F(1,593) = 3.39$

<i>Degree</i>				
Sexual Identity (%)				$\chi^2(1,382) = 1.67$
Lesbian/Gay	92.6	95.7		n.a.
Bisexual	7.4	4.3		
Kinsey Scale ¹¹	5.3 (0.9)	5.5 (0.7)		$F(1,383) = 5.07^*$
Level of overall outness ¹²	5.7 (1.1)	5.4 (1.3)		$F(1,382) = 4.27^*$
Outness to world ¹³	5.5 (1.4)	5.1 (1.6)		$F(1,381) = 4.63^*$
Outness to family ¹³	5.9 (1.2)	5.7 (1.3)		$F(1,381) = 2.15$
Outness to religion ¹⁴	5.7 (1.8)	5.6 (2.1)		$F(1,170) = 0.15$
Age first noticed attraction to member of same sex	16.9 (9.8)	13.6 (6.2)		$F(1,375) = 15.44^{****}$
Age first questioned being LGB	22.6 (9.7)	18.3 (5.7)		$F(1,373) = 29.22^{****}$
Age thought of self as LGB	26.5 (9.7)	21.7 (6.1)		$F(1,380) = 35.71^{****}$
Age first told someone you were LGB	27.1 (9.9)	22.6 (5.8)		$F(1,374) = 31.31^{****}$
Age of first sexual experience with someone of the same sex	24.5 (10.1)	21.1 (6.0)		$F(1,383) = 16.66^{****}$
Age of first sexual/romantic relationship with someone of the same sex	26.1 (9.7)	21.9 (5.7)		$F(1,371) = 27.46^{****}$

1. 10 = lowest status occupation, 90 = highest status occupation

2. 1 = not at all important, 3 = moderately important, 5 = very important

3. 1 = weekly, 2 = more than once a month, 3 = about once a month, 4 = several times a year, 5 = rarely, 6 = never

TABLE 1 (continued)

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4. 1 = extremely active, 9 = not at all active
 5. 1 = full-time, 2 = 7-11 months, 3 = 2-4 months, 4 = less than 2 months, 5 = on weekends only, 6 = visits occasionally, 7 = never visits
 6. 1 = less than 1 mile, 2 = 1 to 10 miles, 3 = 11 to 100 miles, 4 = 101 to 500 miles, 5 = 501 to 1,000 miles, 6 = More than 1,000 miles
 7. 1 = Daily or almost every day, 2 = 3 or 4 times a week, 3 = 1-2 times a week, 4 = 2-3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = about once a year, 8 = less often than once a year, 9 = never
 8. 1 = always, 5 = half the time, 9 = never
 9. 1 = Very much, 9 = Not at all
 10. 20 items, each given 1 point if in the direction of perceived social support
 11. 0 = exclusively heterosexual, 3 = bisexual, 6 = exclusively lesbian/gay
 12. 11 item Outness Inventory, where 1 = person *definitely* does *not* know about your sexual orientation status, 2 = person *might* know about your sexual orientation status, but it is *never* talked about, 3 = person *probably* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *never* talked about, 4 = person *probably* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *rarely* talked about, 5 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *rarely* talked about, 6 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is *s* talked about, 7 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is *openly* talked about
 13. 4 item subscale from Outness Inventory
 14. 2 item subscale from Outness Inventory

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .005$ **** $p < .001$

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Male Participants Based on Sexual Orientation and Parenting Status

Characteristic <i>M(SD)</i>	Gay men with children (n = 40)	Gay men without children (n = 163)	Heterosexual men with children (n = 157)	Heterosexual men without children (n = 32)	Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
<i>Demographics</i>						
Age (Range)	46.9 (9.5) 24-61	43.9 (10.2) 23-77	46.6 (10.4) 23-80	40.4 (8.8) 24-57	$F(1,383) = 1.90$	$F(1,383) = 11.83^{**}$
Ethnicity (%)					$\chi^2(6,388) = 6.19$	$\chi^2(6,388) = 6.68$
African American/Black	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0		
Asian American/Pacific Islander	2.6	2.5	0.6	3.1		
Latino/Latina	0.0	1.2	0.6	0.0		
Native American/American Indian	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0		
European/White	97.4	91.4	95.5	96.9		
Biracial	0.0	1.8	1.9	0.0		
Other	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.0		
Years of education (Range)	15.8 (1.6) 12-17	15.8 (1.6) 12-17	15.1 (2.0) 10-17	15.7 (1.6) 12-17	$F(1,386) = 3.30$	$F(1,386) = 1.77$
Mean occupational status (Range)	69.4 (16.3) 30-90	71.5 (14.1) 30-90	66.3 (19.9) 10-90	65.6 (17.8) 10-90	$F(1,341) = 3.71$	$F(1,341) = 0.09$
Mean individual income (Dollars) (Range)	66,114 (41,478) 0-200,000	73,317 (91,697) 0-999,998	76,309 (87,281) 0-750,000	63,830 (36,053) 0-150,000	$F(1,352) = 0.00$	$F(1,352) = 0.05$

TABLE 2 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M(SD)</i>	Gay men with children (n = 40)	Gay men without children (n = 163)	Heterosexual men with children (n = 157)	Heterosexual men without children (n = 32)	Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
Location						$\chi^2(4,388) = 60.08^{*****}$ $\chi^2(4,388) = 44.93^{*****}$
Large city	33.3	42.9	7.7	16.1		
Medium city	17.9	20.2	18.1	25.8		
Small city	17.9	12.9	33.5	19.4		
Suburb	17.9	14.1	30.3	19.4		
Rural	12.8	9.8	10.3	19.4		
Years in current location	13.4 (11.8)	12.4 (10.7)	16.9 (15.1)	11.0 (10.1)	$F(1,382) = 0.38$	$F(1,382) = 3.96^*$
Years since first met	12.1 (9.0)	13.3 (9.1)	21.1 (12.2)	13.5 (7.3)	$F(1,381) = 11.38^{*****}$	$F(1,381) = 5.46^*$
Years since first started going out	10.9 (7.5)	12.9 (9.2)	20.1 (12.2)	11.8 (6.8)	$F(1,379) = 8.79^{***}$	$F(1,379) = 5.54^*$
Years since started living together	10.3 (7.1)	12.2 (9.1)	16.1 (10.6)	8.9 (5.0)	$F(1,348) = 1.00$	$F(1,348) = 4.45^*$
CU Status (%)					n.a.	$\chi^2(1,203) = 5.65^*$
Had Civil Union	77.5	57.1				
Religion while growing up (%)						$\chi^2(5,392) = 3.47$
Catholic	37.5	36.2	36.9	21.9		
Islamic	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Jewish	7.5	10.4	12.1	0.0		
Protestant	40.0	44.8	41.4	87.5		
Buddhist	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
None	7.5	2.5	6.4	0.0		

Spiritual beliefs—no formal religion	5.0	1.8	0.6	0.0	
Other	2.5	4.3	2.5	0.0	
Religion nonparental characteristics					$\chi^2(6,365) = 28.17^{****}$
Catholic	5.4	8.7	22.6	26.7	$\chi^2(6,365) = 11.27$
Jewish	0.0	9.3	9.5	0.0	
Protestant	37.8	24.8	33.6	46.7	
Buddhist	2.7	0.0	0.7	0.0	
None	24.3	28.0	14.6	13.3	
Spiritual beliefs—no formal religion	27.0	25.5	16.8	13.3	
Other	2.7	3.7	2.2	0.0	
Importance of religion ²	2.6 (1.4)	2.7 (1.5)	3.3 (1.4)	3.0 (1.3)	$F(1,387) = 7.30^{**}$
Frequency of religious service attendance ³	4.0 (2.0)	4.7 (1.5)	4.0 (1.9)	4.3 (1.4)	$F(1,387) = 0.92$
Active in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer rights movement ⁴	4.5 (2.4)	4.6 (2.3)			n.a.
Child					$F(1,201) = 7.81$
Number of children	1.7 (0.9)		2.2 (1.1)		$F(1,191) = 5.84^*$
Range	1-4		1-7		n.a.
Gender of children (%)					
Male	62.3		50.6		n.a.
Female	37.7		49.4		

TABLE 2 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M(SD)</i>	Gay men with children (n = 40)	Gay men without children (n = 163)	Heterosexual men with children (n = 157)	Heterosexual men without children (n = 32)	Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
Age of children per parent	17.3 (10.2)		15.2 (12.5)		$F(1, 186) = 0.92$	
Range	0-35		0-48.3			
Age of oldest child	18.9 (11.5)		17.0 (13.2)		$F(1, 186) = 0.67$	n.a.
Range	0-37		0-51			
Age of youngest child	15.8 (9.8)		13.3 (12.0)		$F(1, 186) = 1.36$	n.a.
Range	0-35		0-45			
Any children from previous relationship (%)					$\chi^2(1, 197) = 35.64^{****}$	n.a.
Yes	65.0		17.8			
No	35.0		72.2			
Any children from current relationship (%)					$\chi^2(1, 197) = 36.64^{****}$	n.a.
Yes	27.5		77.7			
No	72.5		22.3		n.a.	n.a.
When had first child (%)						
Before coming out	29.4					
Time children spend with parents ^s	4.6 (2.4)		2.5 (2.2)		$F(1, 178) = 21.87^{****}$	n.a.
Percentage of children living with participants during the year						n.a.
Full-time	17.5		61.5			

with

7-11 months	1.8			0.6		
2-4 months	5.3			2.3		
Less than 2 months	0.0			0.6		
On weekends only	14.0			1.3		
Visit occasionally	22.8			22.9		
Never visit	38.6			10.8		
<i>Contact</i>						
Distance from mother (miles) ^e	3.8 (1.5)	4.2 (1.4)	3.5 (1.5)	4.2 (1.4)	$F(1,289) = 0.44$	$F(1,289) = 7.04^{**}$
Distance from father (miles) ^e	3.7 (1.3)	4.2 (1.4)	3.5 (1.5)	4.3 (1.4)	$F(1,221) = 0.00$	$F(1,221) = 7.29^{**}$
Frequency of contact with mother ^r	3.3 (1.9)	3.4 (1.4)	3.1 (1.2)	3.9 (1.4)	$F(1,290) = 0.81$	$F(1,290) = 5.22^{**}$
Frequency of contact with father ^r	4.4 (2.1)	4.2 (1.6)	3.8 (1.8)	4.4 (1.4)	$F(1,222) = 0.47$	$F(1,222) = 0.47$
Proportion of time partner is with you when you visit your mother ^a	4.0 (2.6)	3.5 (2.3)	3.0 (1.9)	2.3 (1.5)	$F(1,280) = 11.78^{***}$	$F(1,280) = 3.91^*$
Proportion of time partner is with you when you visit your father ^b	4.6 (3.0)	3.1 (2.2)	3.3 (2.1)	2.4 (1.5)	$F(1,210) = 7.05^{**}$	$F(1,210) = 10.20^{***}$
Perceived acceptance by partner's mother ^b	2.7 (2.8)	2.7 (2.6)	2.1 (1.9)	1.7 (1.6)	$F(1,312) = 6.21^*$	$F(1,312) = 0.32$
Perceived acceptance by partner's father ^b	3.7 (3.2)	3.4 (3.2)	2.1 (2.0)	1.5 (1.1)	$F(1,243) = 18.10^{****}$	$F(1,243) = 1.10$
Initiate contact with partner's mother ^r	5.2 (2.4)	6.6 (2.0)	5.7 (2.2)	6.0 (2.3)	$F(1,309) = 0.03$	$F(1,309) = 7.07$

TABLE 2 (continued)

Characteristic <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Gay men with children (n = 40)	Gay men without children (n = 163)	Heterosexual men with children (n = 157)	Heterosexual men without children (n = 32)	Statistic: Sexual Orientation	Statistic: Parenting Status
Initiate contact with partner's father ^r	6.6 (2.1)	7.1 (1.8)	5.9 (2.2)	6.1 (1.9)	$F(1,246) = 6.75^{**}$	$F(1,246) = 1.30$
Sent parents holiday card/present last year (%)						$\chi^2(2,309) = 8.93^*$
Yes, signed by me alone	6.7	13.7	1.6	0.0		
Yes, signed from me and my partner	76.7	75.0	89.7	96.6		
No	16.7	11.3	8.7	3.4		
Received holiday card/present from at least one parent last year (%)						$\chi^2(2,305) = 7.16^*$
Yes, addressed to me alone	10.7	16.3	3.2	0.0		
Yes, addressed to both my partner and me	75.0	74.8	88.9	92.9		
No	14.3	8.9	8.7	7.1		
<i>Social</i>						
Perceived social support from friends ¹⁰	15.4 (4.9)	15.4 (4.6)	11.4 (5.4)	11.6 (5.1)	$F(1,385) = 34.63^{****}$	$F(1,385) = 0.03$
Perceived social support from family ¹⁰	12.2 (7.3)	11.4 (6.3)	13.1 (5.9)	11.7 (5.9)	$F(1,379) = 0.59$	$F(1,379) = 1.78$

<i>Outness</i>			
Sexual Identity (%)			$\chi^2(1,202) = 8.44^{***}$
Lesbian/Gay	94.9	100.0	n.a.
Bisexual	5.1	0.0	
Heterosexual	0.0	0.0	
Kinsey Scale ¹¹	5.7 (0.7)	5.8 (0.4)	n.a.
Level of overall outness ¹²	5.9 (1.0)	5.5 (1.3)	n.a.
Outness to world ¹³	5.6 (1.5)	5.4 (1.6)	n.a.
Outness to family ¹³	6.1 (1.1)	5.7 (1.3)	n.a.
Outness to religion ¹⁴	6.6 (0.8)	5.3 (2.1)	n.a.
Age first noticed attraction to member of same sex	10.1 (3.8)	9.7 (3.8)	n.a.
Age first questioned being LGB	16.6 (5.9)	14.1 (3.9)	n.a.
Age thought of self as LGB	22.3 (7.1)	18.5 (5.7)	n.a.
Age first told someone you were LGB	24.4 (7.6)	20.2 (5.3)	n.a.
Age of first sexual experience with someone of the same sex	15.8 (6.6)	15.3 (5.4)	n.a.
Age of first sexual/romantic relationship with someone of the same sex	23.5 (8.2)	21.1 (5.4)	n.a.
			$F(1,196) = 5.21^*$

TABLE 2 (continued)

1. 10 = lowest status occupation, 90 = highest status occupation
 2. 1 = not at all important, 3 = moderately important, 5 = very important
 3. 1 = weekly, 2 = more than once a month, 3 = about once a month, 4 = several times a year, 5 = rarely, 6 = never
 4. 1 = extremely active, 9 = not at all active
 5. 1 = full-time, 2 = 7-11 months, 3 = 2-4 months, 4 = less than 2 months, 5 = on weekends only, 6 = visits occasionally, 7 = never visits
 6. 1 = less than 1 mile, 2 = 1 to 10 miles, 3 = 11 to 100 miles, 4 = 101 to 500 miles, 5 = 501 to 1,000 miles, 6 = More than 1,000 miles
 7. 1 = Daily or almost every day, 2 = 3 or 4 times a week, 3 = 1-2 times a week, 4 = 2-3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = about once a year, 8 = less often than once a year, 9 = never
 8. 1 = always, 5 = half the time, 9 = never
 9. 1 = Very much, 9 = Not at all
 10. 20 items, each given 1 point if in the direction of perceived social support
 11. 0 = exclusively heterosexual, 3 = bisexual, 6 = exclusively lesbian/gay
 12. 11 item Outness Inventory, where 1 = person *definitely* does *not* know about your sexual orientation status, 2 = person *might* know about your sexual orientation status, but it is *never* talked about, 3 = person *probably* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *never* talked about, 4 = person *probably* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *rarely* talked about, 5 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is *rarely* talked about, 6 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is *s* talked about, 7 = person *definitely* knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is *openly* talked about
 13. 4 item subscale from Outness Inventory
 14. 2 item subscale from Outness Inventory
- "n.a." signifies analyses not available for sexual orientation (variable included in questionnaires given to participants in same-sex relationships)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .005$ **** $p < .001$

effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,580) = 7.69, p < .01$. Parents ($M = 5.7, SD = 1.1$) were significantly higher in degree of disclosure than those without children ($M = 5.4, SD = 1.3$). A main effect was not found for gender; no significant difference existed between gay men and lesbians on degree of disclosure. The interaction between gender and parenting status was also non-significant.

We speculated that lesbian mothers and gay fathers would reach milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbians and gay men without children, respectively. A2 (gender) X2 (parenting status) analysis of variance was conducted for each milestone. For the sexual attraction variable, a main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,571) = 6.83, p < .01$. Parents first noticed a same-sex attraction at a later age ($M = 15.5$ years, $SD = 9.3$) than individuals without children ($M = 12.0, SD = 5.7$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,571) = 58.19, p < .001$. Gay men first noticed a same-sex attraction at a significantly earlier age ($M = 9.8$ years, $SD = 3.8$) than lesbians ($M = 14.9, SD = 8.0$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was also significant, $F(1,571) = 4.13, p < .05$. Separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted in order to compare simple effects of this interaction. Lesbian mothers were significantly older ($M = 16.9, SD = 9.8$) than lesbians without children ($M = 13.6, SD = 6.2$) when they first noticed a same-sex attraction, $F(1,375) = 15.44, p < .001$. Gay fathers were not significantly different ($M = 10.1, SD = 3.8$) from gay men without children ($M = 9.7, SD = 3.8$), $F(1,196) = .59, p = \text{n.s.}$ However, gay fathers first noticed a same-sex sexual attraction at a significantly younger age than both lesbian mothers, $F(1,186) = 17.67, p < .001$, and lesbians without children, $F(1, 265) = 3.41, p = .001$. Gay men without children first noticed a same-sex sexual attraction at a significantly younger age than both lesbian mothers, $F(1,306) = 72.75, p < .001$, and lesbians without children, $F(1, 385) = 49.72, p < .001$.

The second variable examined the age at which respondents first questioned whether they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,566) = 24.86, p < .001$. Parents first questioned their sexual orientation later ($M = 21.3$ years, $SD = 9.3$) than individuals without children ($M = 16.6, SD = 5.4$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,566) = 54.33, p < .001$. Gay men first noticed a same-sex attraction at a significantly earlier age ($M = 14.6$ years, $SD = 4.4$) than lesbians ($M = 19.9, SD = 7.8$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was not significant.

The third variable examined sexual identity formation, i.e., specifically the age at which respondents first considered themselves gay, lesbian, or

bisexual (GLB). A main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,578) = 34.05, p < .001$. Parents first considered themselves to be GLB at a significantly older age ($M = 25.6, SD = 9.3$) than individuals without children ($M = 20.4, SD = 6.1$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,578) = 25.22, p < .001$. Gay men first considered themselves to be GLB at a significantly earlier age ($M = 19.2$ years, $SD = 6.2$) than lesbians ($M = 23.5, SD = 8.0$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was nonsignificant.

The fourth variable examined the age at which respondents first told someone else they were GLB. A main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,570) = 34.82, p < .001$. Parents first told someone they were GLB at a significantly older age ($M = 26.5, SD = 9.5$) than individuals without children ($M = 21.6, SD = 5.8$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,570) = 11.32, p = .001$. Gay men first told someone they were GLB at a significantly earlier age ($M = 21.0$ years, $SD = 6.0$) than lesbians ($M = 24.3, SD = 7.9$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was nonsignificant.

The fifth variable examined the age at which respondents first had a sexual experience with a member of the same sex. A main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,579) = 6.71, p = .01$. Parents had a first sexual experience at a significantly older age ($M = 22.7$ years, $SD = 10.1$) than individuals without children ($M = 18.8, SD = 6.4$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,579) = 95.90, p < .001$. Gay men had a first sexual experience at a significantly earlier age ($M = 15.4$ years, $SD = 5.6$) than lesbians ($M = 22.4, SD = 8.0$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was nonsignificant.

The sixth variable examined the age at which respondents had their first sexual and/or romantic relationship with a member of the same sex. A main effect was found for parenting status, $F(1,567) = 20.74, p < .001$. Parents first had a same-sex sexual/romantic relationship at a significantly older age ($M = 25.6$ years, $SD = 9.5$) than individuals without children ($M = 21.6, SD = 5.6$). A main effect was also found for gender, $F(1,567) = 5.71, p < .05$. Gay men first had a same-sex sexual/romantic relationship at a significantly earlier age ($M = 21.6$ years, $SD = 6.1$) than lesbians ($M = 23.6, SD = 7.8$). The interaction between parenting status and gender was nonsignificant.

Our final hypothesis was that lesbian mothers who had children before coming out will reach milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbian mothers who had children after coming out (the number of gay fathers was too small to compare in this way). A series of one-way analyses of variance was conducted. Welch's statistic was used to adjust

for heterogeneity of variances where they existed. To summarize the findings below, lesbians who had children before-coming-out (hereafter referred to as BC mothers) reached all developmental milestones in the coming-out process at significantly older ages than lesbians who had children after-coming-out (AC mothers).

BC mothers first noticed an attraction to another woman at a later age ($M = 20.6$ years, $SD = 11.3$) than AC mothers ($M = 13.3$, $SD = 6.3$), $F(1,138) = 23.12$, $p < .001$, Welch's statistic (1,90.4) = 20.47, $p < .001$. BC mothers first questioned whether they might be lesbian or bisexual at a later age ($M = 29.2$ years, $SD = 10.0$) than AC mothers ($M = 17.5$, $SD = 5.8$), $F(1,134) = 73.71$, $p < .01$, Welch's statistic (1,89.7) = 65.15, $p < .001$. BC mothers first considered themselves lesbian or bisexual at a later age ($M = 33.8$ years, $SD = 9.1$) than AC mothers ($M = 20.8$, $SD = 5.5$), $F(1,137) = 108.08$, $p < .01$, Welch's statistic (1,93.4) = 97.12, $p < .001$. BC mothers first told another person they were lesbian or bisexual at a later age ($M = 34.7$, $SD = 8.4$) than AC mothers ($M = 20.9$, $SD = 5.7$), $F(1,138) = 133.27$, $p < .01$, Welch's statistic (1,103.6) = 123.58, $p < .001$. BC mothers first had a sexual experience with another woman at a later age ($M = 30.3$ years, $SD = 10.5$) than AC mothers ($M = 19.6$, $SD = 6.3$), $p < .001$, $F(1,138) = 55.65$, Welch's statistic (1,94.9) = 49.95, $p < .01$. BC mothers first had a sexual or romantic relationship with another woman at a later age ($M = 31.9$ years, $SD = 9.9$) than AC mothers ($M = 21.3$, $SD = 6.2$), $F(1,134) = 58.53$, $p < .001$, Welch's statistic (1,96.3) = 53.44, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The current study has several novel features. It is the first to focus on eight groups of lesbians, gay men, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women as a function of their parenting status. Participants were not recruited for a study of parenting, thereby reducing selection bias potentially found in prior studies. In addition, this study focused on demographic and social characteristics of parents, while prior GLB parenting research has emphasized the adjustment of children. While the total number of gay fathers was small, the present research nevertheless constitutes one of the largest studies with gay fathers in same-sex couples—another indication of the low base rate of gay fathers in parenting research and the difficulties encountered in sampling this group. The unique sibling design allowed for comparison of individuals with similar family and

demographic backgrounds and was extended for the first time to include categorization of participants based on parenting status.

Response Rate

The response rate was 82 percent among members of same-sex couples with civil unions and slightly lower for members of same-sex couples without civil unions and for members of heterosexual married couples. Todosijevic, Rothblum and Solomon (in press) surveyed a separate sample of couples who had civil unions and found a similarly high level of participation. The response rate of 60 percent among same-sex couples without civil unions was comparable to earlier surveys with lesbians (e.g., Balsam, Beauchaine, Mickey, & Rothblum, in press; Morris & Rothblum, 1999). Fifty-two percent of heterosexuals who were mailed Civil Union Study questionnaires also participated. Considering the length of the mailed questionnaire and the lack of compensation for participants, the overall response rate was high.

Demographic Factors

In general, this sample resembled the demographic profile of other studies of lesbians and gay men in that participants tended to be white, well-educated, and affluent. Among GLB participants, the presence of children did not appear to be highly influential on these variables. For example, parents were older than those without children presumably because older participants had more time to have children while younger participants might be planning to raise a family eventually. The majority of participants were European-American, and ethnicity did not differ as a function of parenting status or sexual orientation. Therefore, members of civil union couples appeared to be nominating friends from similar ethnic and racial groups.

Access to lesbians and gay men from ethnic minorities and/or lower socioeconomic groups remains limited for a number of reasons. Less than ten percent of individuals from the entire civil union population were members of ethnic minorities—much lower rates than encountered in the general population (e.g., Spraggins, 2003). GLB research typically engages few participants of color even in studies that attempt to over-sample them (e.g., Balsam et al., in press). GLB ethnic minorities may have been unlikely to seek civil unions for a number of reasons including the cost of travel and concerns about facing discrimination for sexual orientation as well as ethnicity and possibly gender. The state of

Vermont is 97% Caucasian which is potentially another disincentive for travel.

Women without children were more educated than mothers but did not have higher occupational status or incomes. As in other studies, lesbians were more educated and had higher incomes than heterosexual women (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2003; Rothblum & Factor, 2001; Rothblum, Balsam, & Mickey, 2004). Interestingly, lesbian mothers did not appear to be less educated or to experience reduced geographic mobility when compared to lesbians without children. These results replicate the findings of Morris et al. (2002) that, contrary to expectations, the presence of children did not prevent lesbians from attending college, seeking employment, or moving to pursue social or career opportunities. Being gay or a father did not lead to significantly reduced educational attainment, occupational status, or income.

For both genders, participants without children were more likely to live in larger cities. The urban setting may be less conducive to raising children leading parents to settle in smaller towns and suburbs. However, as in prior studies (Laumann et al., 1994; Rothblum & Factor, 2001), a high percentage of gay men and lesbians lived in large and medium cities possibly as a proactive way of coping with homophobia, gaining greater anonymity and distance from extended family, and increasing opportunities for finding a supportive community. Lesbian and gay male parents may, therefore, have to choose between living in a city with its greater social support and proximity to other GLB parents and living in a non-urban setting with its greater resources and safety for children.

This study was the first to examine religious affiliation and involvement as a function of both parenting status and sexual orientation. The total sample was not highly religious in affiliation. The low rates of religious affiliation and infrequent religious service attendance reported by lesbians and gay men in this study are consistent with research using large convenience samples (Morris et al., 2002) and comparisons of siblings (Rothblum & Factor, 2001; Rothblum et al., 2004).

Parents did attend religious services more frequently than participants without children. Religious practices also shifted from childhood to adulthood and suggested declining involvement in formal religious membership among lesbians and gay men. Regardless of their parenting status, many lesbians and gay men reported having spiritual practices that do not fit a formal religion. Almost one-third of heterosexual women without children also reported having informal spiritual practices compared to a much lower percentage of heterosexual mothers. Heterosexual mothers may therefore have particularly valued a formal

religious upbringing for their children or conformed to social pressure to raise a religious family, while lesbian mothers did not.

Parents from same-sex couples may also have attempted to raise their young children within a religious community either by maintaining connection with their childhood religion or joining a new denomination. These GLB parents may have subsequently experienced discrimination or difficulty with religious doctrine and dropped their active religious involvement, particularly once their children were older.

While they were not more formally religious in affiliation, lesbian mothers were more politically active in the GLB rights movement than were lesbians without children. Gartrell et al. (1999, 2000) also found lesbian mothers to be high in degree of political activism. Concern about the impact of discrimination on their children and parental rights might motivate some women to increase their political involvement after having children. The presence of children was not associated with increased political activity by gay men.

Child and Parent Characteristics

A fairly homogenous pattern was found among heterosexual married couples. Over 80 percent of married heterosexuals had children. These heterosexual parents generally reported having several teenage children through their current relationship and living full-time with these children. Parenthood was less frequent and parent-child relationships more heterogeneous among members of same-sex couples. Less than 40 percent of lesbians and 20 percent of gay men were parents. The majority of lesbian and gay male parents had at least one child from a previous relationship, while only one-third had any children from their current relationship.

Lesbians and gay men spent less time per year living with their children than did heterosexual women and men, respectively. Almost 40 percent of gay fathers reported that their children never visited them, and the majority of gay fathers reported that their children did not live with them at all during the year. Is this due to homophobia in ex-partners (e.g., the children's mother)? Are courts preventing gay fathers from visitation rights? Or does the fact that gay fathers have moved away to large cities mean that they visit the children in their former locations rather than the children coming to stay with the dads? This is an important area, and should be the focus of future research.

In this sample, over three-quarters of gay fathers were in civil unions—a higher percentage than found among gay men without children. This

comparison suggests that gay fathers in general might be more inclined toward traditional family structures and toward legal recognition of their relationship than gay men without children. It is also possible that gay men are more likely to lose children in custody cases and, thus, sought out the legal protection of a civil union.

Contact with Family of Origin and Social Support

The influence of parenting status and sexual orientation on contact with families of origin differed for men and women. Compared to lesbians, heterosexual women lived closer to their fathers, had more frequent contact with both their mothers and fathers, and were more likely to bring their partners along when visiting their parents. However, the presence of children did not significantly impact women's contact with their families of origin. Compared to men without children, fathers had more frequent contact and lived closer to their families of origin. Heterosexual and gay men did not differ on family contact. Therefore, for women, the most important factor in predicting contact with family of origin was sexual orientation, while for men it was parenting status.

Sexual orientation was also more important than parenting status for relationships with partner's parents. Gay men and lesbians felt less accepted by their partners' parents than did their heterosexual counterparts [consistent with Kurdek's (2001) findings], and being a parent did not significantly increase perceived acceptance. Lesbians and gay men were less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to receive holiday gifts or cards addressed to both themselves and their partners; approximately 25 percent of gay men and 20 percent of lesbians did not receive a single holiday card or present that was addressed to them from one of their partner's parents over the previous year. Certain mainstream heterosexual families may experience heightened difficulties when an adult child is in a long-term same-sex relationship. The presence of a committed partner might make both the adult child's sexual orientation and the parent's antigay judgment particularly difficult to hide. The same-sex partner may experience this dynamic as outright rejection or lack of acknowledgement from their partner's family of origin.

In turn, members of same-sex couples made less effort to connect with their partner's parents. Lesbians and gay men were more likely than heterosexuals to send holiday gifts or cards signed only by themselves but not their partner, less likely to bring their same-sex partners along when visiting parents, and generally less likely to initiate contact with their partner's parents. Despite having long-term committed relationships

and even being parents themselves, the partners of lesbians and gay men may anticipate rejection from their partner's families and reduce contact as a form of protection (Kurdek, 1988).

The hypothesis that both lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers would perceive greater social support from their families than lesbians or heterosexuals without children was not supported by the data. Instead, there was an effect for sexual orientation with heterosexual women reporting higher levels of family support than lesbians. Being a lesbian was associated with both less family contact and lower support from family of origin, and this estrangement was not overcome by having children.

Gay men perceived less social support from their families, but more social support from their friends than did heterosexual men, as found in earlier research (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987). As Kurdek (2003) has noted, gay men may be particularly reliant on a gay social network for support and may therefore congregate in large cities. Access to supportive friends appeared to be consistent for gay men in the present study whether or not they had children.

Since families of origin are generally less accepting of same-sex partners and see them less often than heterosexual partners, family members may be less likely to observe positive elements of the same-sex relationship that might help them overcome homophobia. They may not have opportunities to witness and intervene on co-parenting problems. Alienated gay men and lesbians may also be less likely to seek family help in coping with specific issues such as relationship difficulties and co-parenting problems.

Degree of Disclosure and Milestones in the Coming-Out Process

Most same-sex participants were strongly identified as lesbian or gay and were generally open about their sexual identity. Lesbians and gay men may become more out as a result of having children. This could occur for a number of reasons. GLB parents may also attempt to create a less homophobic world for their descendants.

The presence of children was associated with increased political involvement for lesbian mothers in this study and in the National Lesbian Family Study (Gartrell et al., 1999, 2000, in press). Lesbian and gay male parents may also choose to live in gay-affirmative regions where they have greater anonymity, access to resources, and opportunity to be out to select others. Raising children in the context of a same-sex relationship may also make sexual orientation more difficult and more costly to

hide. Members of long-term committed parenting relationships may be inclined to go together to school functions and parent-teacher conferences. Therefore, members of committed same-sex couples may be more out in general than those who are raising children as single parents, are in newer relationships, or don't have children.

Lesbians and gay men also differed on when they reached milestones in the coming-out process based both on gender and whether or not they had children. The hypothesis that lesbian mothers and gay fathers would reach milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbians and gay men was supported by our data. Differences were consistently found for both parenting status and gender. GLB parents were older than GLB participants without children.

Lesbian mothers generally reached each milestone in the coming-out process three to five years later than lesbians without children. Mean scores indicate that lesbian mothers experienced an approximately ten-year delay between first noticing a same sex attraction in their late teens and having a same-sex relationship and disclosing their sexual orientation in their late twenties. The ages at which lesbians without children reached early milestones in the coming out process were comparable to those reported by Rust (1993) in a sample that did not account for parenting status; participants first noticed an attraction during their early high school years, questioned their sexual identity at age 17, and thought of themselves as lesbian or bisexual around age 21.

Based on mean scores, gay men had same-sex attractions, were sexually active, had questioned their sexual identity as teenagers, and had been in same-sex relationships and disclosed their orientation by their mid-twenties. Both gay men with and without children first noticed a same-sex attraction around age 10 and had their first same-sex sexual experience during their 16th year. Gay fathers reached all other milestones an average of 2.5 years to 4 years later than gay men without children with the greatest mean difference in the age of sexual orientation self-disclosure. Therefore, gay fathers experienced a longer period of uncertainty and silence about their sexual identity than gay men without children despite similar ages of initial same-sex attractions and currently similar identification as gay. Some fathers may have had children in part to avoid coming-out and the presence of children may also have contributed to this delay.

These results are the first to compare the ages at which gay men with and without children come out. They partially replicate the findings of Morris et al. (2002) with lesbians. Gay fathers are not quite so delayed in reaching milestones and generally come out earlier than women. They

may, therefore, not face the stressors postulated for lesbian mothers of being much older than other members of the gay community with similar life experience or encountering men their own age who are much further along in the coming-out process (Morris et al., 2002).

Additional differences may exist between gay men and lesbians in the coming-out process. Regardless of their parenting status, gay men appear to be aware of their sexual identity at a much earlier age than lesbians. Gay men had smaller variances than lesbians in the ages at which they achieved milestones, with standard deviations ranging from 4 to 8 years for gay fathers and non-fathers compared to 6 to 10 years for lesbian mothers and non-mothers. Overall, these findings appear to fit with prior theory and research suggesting that gay men come out earlier and in a more sequential pattern than women (e.g., Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2004; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994).

The last hypothesis was also supported by the data. Lesbian women who had children before coming out (BC mothers) reached all six milestones in the coming-out process later than lesbian mothers who had children after coming out (AC mothers). Therefore, the study's findings replicated the earlier research by Morris et al. (2002), although BC mothers in the present study came out 4 to 8 years later than AC mothers, compared to a 3 to 5 year difference in the Lesbian Wellness Survey. The experience of BC mothers may be very different from that of AC mothers. BC mothers experienced a substantial gap between first noticing a same-sex attraction (age 21 on average) and becoming active and identified as lesbian, on average not disclosing to others until age 34 on average. During this period, they may have experienced considerable distress related to raising children while being closeted. As Morris et al. (2002) noted, BC mothers may have been delayed in their ability to come out due to having children and husbands. BC mothers may have also been significantly older than lesbians at similar stages in the coming-out process and than AC mothers with children of equivalent age. BC mothers may initially find they have little in common with AC mothers and lesbians without children, particularly if BC mothers have raised biologically-conceived children in heterosexual mainstream culture while many AC mothers may have planned to have their children through alternate methods (e.g., via adoption or donor insemination) and to raise them in the alternate GLB community. Initial adjustment to a lesbian community may therefore be particularly difficult for the BC mothers group.

Sequential or stage models have both their benefits and their obvious limits. Mean scores tend to highlight turning points in sexual identity development whose significance may vary according to the individual.

Results from the current study should not be interpreted to prescribe specific developmental ages at which individuals normally pass through milestones. Mean scores tend to obscure the fact that specific individuals reach milestones in different orders. For instance, while mean scores may indicate that lesbian mothers first disclosed their sexual identity at age 27, AC mothers disclosed when they were 21, and BC mothers when they were approximately 35 years of age.

LIMITATIONS

The study has a number of limitations most of which are familiar to GLB researchers. The Civil Union Study sample consisted primarily of European-American, well-educated, and affluent participants consistent with samples found in prior GLB research. The current study's generalizability is limited to individuals with the above demographic characteristics and who are most likely the more visible members of the GLB population.

Couples that had civil unions during the first year of that legislation may be considered pioneers who are perhaps more socially and politically active than others. A majority of couples did not live in Vermont, and therefore risked discrimination by making their same-sex relationships a matter of public record while not reaping legal benefits from the union. These individuals may have felt particularly comfortable with their economic status, social support, and sexual orientation, although demographics suggest they are similar to participants in other GLB studies. As with other research on lesbians and gay men, the current study included participants who open in their sexual orientation. Recruiting lesbians and gay men who are less out is challenging given the hidden nature of this population.

The Civil Union Study questionnaire (Solomon et al., 2004) was not designed specifically for a parenting study, and the present study's analyses were run on an existing data set. In addition, the study faced an almost universal problem in research with gay men: the recruitment of an adequate sample size of gay fathers. However, the inclusion of 40 gay couples provides one of the largest samples in the past two decades of research with gay fathers.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research may also help GLB researchers and community members to identify both patterns and unique experiences of this heterogeneous population. Large population-based surveys and questionnaire research such as the Civil Union Study

provide important information regarding larger patterns and potential differential impact of factors such as gender, parenting status, and outness at the time of becoming a parent. Continued study of individual narratives, particularly longitudinal research such as that conducted by Gartrell et al. (1996, 1999, 2000) and Patterson (1992, 1996) will help generate additional research questions and provide memorable examples for advocacy and clinical interventions.

During the current era, it may be particularly important to sponsor and publicize research about lesbian and gay male parents. As same-sex marriage and parenting have become more visible and technologically feasible, they have also become more controversial and political. Conservative movements to ban gay marriages and civil unions, as well as same-sex adoption, have been gaining momentum in recent years. Even in liberal geographic locations, prospective GLB parents and community members will regularly make behavioral decisions that hide or reveal their sexual identity, and these choices can impact well-being, social support, parenting decisions, and economic status.

NOTE

1. Participants in same-sex couples were asked to identify their sexual orientation. Of these 593 participants, 570 identified as lesbian or gay, while only 23 identified as bisexual. Thus, for the remainder of this study, we will refer to participants in same-sex relationships as lesbians and gay men, and those in opposite-sex relationships as heterosexual women and men.

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