Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School

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Word Count: 13,400

Draft: Do Not Cite Without Permission

To be presented at the Population Association Meetings in New York in

March, 2007

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Thanks are due to Michael Wald and Paula England for helpful comments, and to Diana Baumrind for help in developing this idea.

Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School

Abstract:

This paper uses the massive sample size of the US census to compare progress through school (versus grade retention) for children of different family types. This paper represents the first (as far as the author knows) large sample nationally representative study of the children of same-sex couples. The results show that children of same-sex couples are as likely to make normal progress through school as the children of heterosexual cohabiting couples. Heterosexual married couples are the family type whose children have the lowest rates of grade retention, but the advantage of heterosexual married couples is mostly due to their higher SES. Compared to heterosexual married parents and their children, gay and lesbian parents and their children are more working class, and are more likely to be members of a racial minority group. In general there are only modest differences in progress through school between children of different family types. Children of all family types (including children of same-sex couples) are far more likely to be making normal progress through school than children living in group quarters. Some implications are discussed.

Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School

How do same-sex couples perform as parents? What types of outcomes can be expected for children raised by same-sex couples, relative to children in other types of families? The answers to these questions are vitally important both for public policy and for theories of how family structure matters. In this paper I examine progress through school, i.e. normal progress versus grade retention, for children of same-sex couples compared to children of other family types, using data from the 2000 US census.

The expected efficacy of same-sex couples as parents has been a fundamental issue in the US courts whenever same-sex marriage rights and gay and lesbian adoption rights are litigated (Eskridge 2002; Koppelman 2002). Both supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage rights argue that the legal issue of same-sex marriage rights should revolve around the question of childhood outcomes for children raised by same-sex couples (Alvaré 2005; Patterson 2002).

The debate over same-sex unions and their children draws from and informs a more general literature concerning family structure's effect on children. One classic debate concerns the effects of divorce (Cherlin 1992; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Arguments which endorse marriage and raise questions about the effects of divorce on children have a variety of different implications for same-sex marriage and same-sex parenthood. Same-sex couples are *couples*, not single parents, so arguments which favor the benefits and resource advantages of two parents

over one (McLanahan 2004; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994) might support same-sex marriage (Sullivan and Landau 1997). Waite and Gallagher (2000 p.200), though they argue fervently against divorce on the grounds that divorce is disadvantageous for children, are divided on the issue of same-sex marriage.

McLanahan and Sandefur's (1994) analysis demonstrated not only the disadvantages (for outcomes of adolescent children) of single parents, but the disadvantages of step parent families as well (see also Harper and McLanahan 2004; Hetherington and Clingempeel 1992; Hetherington, Henderson and Reiss 1999). By many childhood outcome measures, step families (usually biological mother and a step father) seem to do as poorly as single parents even though step families are two-parent families with incomes and other resources that are similar to those of married biological parents. The possible explanations for the problematic development of children in step families have interesting ramifications for same-sex couples and their children.

Same-sex couples with children from one partner's previous (presumably failed) heterosexual relationship might be thought of as similar in family structure to heterosexual step families with children from one partner's prior relationship, and this would lead us to expect a higher incidence of problematic outcomes for children in these families. Other same-sex couples enter into parenthood together, through adoption, in vitro fertilization, or surrogate pregnancy (Stacey 2006). If the difficulty with step parenthood is that step parents have lower credibility and authority as parents as a result of role ambiguity and coming into the family years after the biological parent has established a relationship with the children (Cherlin 1978), then same-sex couples who enter into parenthood together (through adoption, in vitro fertilization, or surrogate pregnancy) might not share the problems of step parents. Same-sex couples who enter into parenthood together might have, as a consequence of entering into the parenting role together, a

relationship with their children that would be less similar to step-parenthood and more similar to the parent-child relationship that heterosexual married couples have with their common biological children (Hare and Richards 1993).

Empirical Disensus on the Effects of Family Structure on Children:

Large sample nationally representative studies of family structure and children's outcomes nearly universally find at least a modest advantage for children raised by two biological parents who are married to each other. The question which has bedeviled researchers, and which remains essentially unresolved, is *why* (Cherlin 1999). Some results have indicated that socioeconomic status explains most or all of the advantage of children raised by intact two parent families (Biblarz and Raftery 1999; Gennetian 2005; Ginther and Pollak 2004). Married couples tend to be the most prosperous type of family unit, and this economic prosperity undoubtedly has certain advantages for children (but even the benefits children derive from family income are controversial, see Mayer 1997). Other scholars have argued that divorce itself may be less harmful to children than the marital discord and personality struggles that lead to the divorce (Aughinbaugh, Pierret and Rothstein 2005; Cherlin et al. 1991). Once the idiosyncratic or family specific features (some of which are highly correlated with divorce) are controlled for, the children of divorced families can seem hardly different from children of intact two parent families. Cherlin and his colleagues (1991) found that children whose parents were married but would divorce years later were already showing signs of bad behavior and low achievement at age seven. Other studies have suggested that even after accounting for marriage quality and

family income, divorce has a significantly negative long term impact on children (Amato and Cheadle 2005; Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin and Kiernan 1995; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Marital dissolution does not occur randomly in families, but rather takes place in a selective subset of families who have problems that are usually difficult to measure before the divorce. Sometimes one spouse does not realize that their marriage is in trouble until the other spouse demands a divorce (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980). Certain parental qualities might be associated with both negative outcomes for children and with parental divorce, which would render spurious the observed association between divorce and poor childhood outcomes. The selection bias problem is a fundamental problem in studies of divorce and children's outcomes, and it is a problem for which there is no complete technical solution. The selection bias problem is one reason that the literature on the effects of divorce has resisted scholarly consensus.

Same-sex unions are different from divorced and remarried couples in that same-sex unions are not necessarily the result of failed heterosexual marriages, but rather same-sex unions are an autonomous, alternative family form. Research on same-sex couples has the potential to provide new insights into long running and unresolved debates over how family structure matters to children.

While selection bias due to poor (but unmeasured) prior marriage quality is less of a problem for those gay and lesbian parents who become parents together than for divorced heterosexual parents, same-sex couples present different and new selection bias problems. Although divorce is still stigmatized in the US, divorce is a matter of public record so we reasonably expect respondents to report their marital and divorce history accurately. Same-sex unions are not recognized by law in most of the US, and gays and lesbians still face legal

discrimination and popular hostility. As a result of a hostile environment, many gays and lesbians remain in "the closet" (Sedgwick 1993), and national surveys may only capture a selective portion of same-sex couples (Badgett and Rogers 2003). The absence of data on the closeted gay couples precludes statistical analysis of the selection effects,[1] so the ramifications of selective reporting into same-sex couplehood or gay or lesbian identity are unknown.

Same-Sex Parenting in Theory:

The modern reality of same-sex couples raising children long postdates the classical psychological theories of child development, such as the theories developed by Sigmund Freud in the early 20th century. Although Freud appreciated the variety and diversity of human sexual behavior, and is highly regarded in gay and lesbian studies for this reason (Abelove 1993; D'Emilio and Freedman 1988), his theories of child development, including the Oedipal complex whose resolution was supposed to be a necessary step towards adulthood, were decidedly heteronormative (Freud [1905] 1975 p.93; Maccoby 1992). Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s and 1970s (Bandura 1977), relied heavily on children learning by modeling adult behavior, and included the idea that children more readily modeled the behavior of same-gender adults (Bandura, Ross and Ross 1961).

Taking their lead from the classical psychological theories of child development, and fueled by alarm at the statistical decline of married heterosexual nuclear families, opponents of

[1] In Heckman's (1979) example of women's wages, the idea was to model the bias of selective labor market participation on women's wages (but see also Stolzenberg and Relles 1997). The datasets one would use for such an exercise contain both working women and nonworking women, so the first step (selection into labor market participation) could be modeled explicitly. In the case of census data on same-sex couples, we have no data about the closeted same-sex couples; these are the couples or individuals who chose not to disclose their relationship status and who are therefore invisible as gays or lesbians in the census.

same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian family rights argue that mothers and fathers perform essentially and fundamentally different roles. The gender essentialists argue that only heterosexual married biological parents can raise children appropriately (Alvaré 2005; Attorney General of Vermont 1998; Popenoe 1996; Wardle 1997). One problem in the gender essentialist research paradigm is the intrusion of other intervening factors such as divorce and single parenthood (Silverstein and Auerbach 1999). Divorce is undoubtedly traumatic for all parties involved, especially the children (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989). The gender essentialist literature has compared heterosexual married couples to divorced parents, remarried couples, or single mothers, whose father absence was usually the result of a traumatic breakup. Research on same-sex couples and their children can provide new and better information on the importance of gender in parenthood, because same-sex couples can have children (through donor insemination or adoption, for instance) without having the prior divorce or breakup.

Recent research has shown that children are socialized to gender differences not so much by exposure to the idealized strong father and pliant mother at home, but rather largely through their peer networks (Maccoby 1990), a finding which renders parental gender less essential. In-depth studies of the psychosocial development of children raised by lesbians or by same-sex couples has found that these children are normal and well-adjusted (Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Flaks et al. 1995; Golombok et al. 2003), though as I discuss below, there are also critics of the small-N literature on same-sex couples and their children.

One of the key ways in which same-sex couples differ from heterosexual married couples is that same-sex couples have fewer children. Childlessness is both more acceptable and more biologically understandable within the gay and lesbian community. Same-sex couples who do have children average roughly the same number of children in their household (just under two)

as heterosexual married couples, but only 22.7% of gay male couples and 37.2% of lesbian couples lived with minor children, compared to 44.8% of heterosexual married couples who lived with minor children in the 2000 census (see below, Table 3).

Research has shown that same-sex couples have a different demographic profile from heterosexual married couples. Same-sex couples tend to live in cities, especially in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago (Black et al. 2000; Gates and Ost 2004). Same-sex couples are more geographically mobile, that is they are more likely to live farther away from their communities of origin, and gays and lesbians have higher educational attainment than the national average (Badgett 1995; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005; Rothblum and Factor 2001). In theory, the demographic profile of gays and lesbians in the US ought to provide their children with an average environment that is somewhat different from (though not necessarily better or worse than) the average environment provided by heterosexual married couples.

Same-sex couples become parents in three main ways. First, through a prior heterosexual relationship; second, through adoption; third, through donor insemination or surrogate parenting (Stacey 2006). Same-sex couples cannot become parents through misuse or failure of birth control, the way heterosexual couples can. Parenthood implies a stronger selection effect for same-sex parents than for heterosexual couples. If gays and lesbians have to work harder to become parents, it could be the case that the gays and lesbians who do become parents are on average more dedicated to the hard work of parenting than their heterosexual peers, and this could be beneficial for their children.

In Judith Stacey's (2006 p. 39) discussion of gay adoption, she describes the gay men of Los Angeles as having to search through the state's "...overstocked warehouse of 'hard to place' children, the majority of whom... have been removed from families judged negligent, abusive, or

incompetent. Most of the state's stockpiled children... are children of color, and disproportionately boys with 'special needs.' " If it is the case that same-sex couples who adopt mainly have access to 'special needs' children, the special needs of these children could exert a downward bias on the average outcomes for children of same-sex couples. Luckily, the census distinguishes between the head of household's "own children," adopted children, step children, and foster children.

Homophobia is still powerful in the U.S., and it would be surprising if the prevalence of antigay attitudes did not impact children of same-sex couples in some way. Same-sex couples are more highly educated than heterosexual couples, but gays and lesbians receive a lower return to education in the labor market, and this may be due to discrimination (Badgett 1995). Children of gay and lesbian parents might be subject to more teasing and bullying from their peers if the sexual orientation of the parents is widely known.

While gays and lesbians in the US clearly prefer to live in the cities (Gates and Ost 2004; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005), gays and lesbians are not concentrated in ghettos the way blacks in the U.S. are and historically have been (Massey and Denton 1993; Rosenfeld 2007). Some empirical studies seem to demonstrate that neighborhood environment influences childhood development even after parental resources are taken into account (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov 1994), while others suggest that neighborhood effects are small compared to family effects (Duncan, Boisjoly and Harris 2001).

Nearly all children of gay and lesbian parents attend schools and live in neighborhoods whose other children come overwhelmingly from families with heterosexual parents. In other words, children of same-sex couples share a common peer and school environment with children of heterosexual couples. To the extent that peer environment is a primary socializing

environment for children (Harris 1998; Maccoby 1990; for a survey see Rutter 2002), whatever differences sexual orientation of parents makes within the home may well be mediated and diffused by the common peer and school environments that children share regardless of the sexual orientation of their parents.

[Table 1 here]

How the Census Complements the Existing Literature of Same-Sex Couples and Their Children

Table 1 lists 37 studies of outcomes of children of same-sex couples, comprising all of the journal articles listed in Fiona Tasker's (2005) comprehensive survey which examined childhood outcomes, plus several more recent studies listed by Wald (2006), and all four studies listed by Meezan and Rauch (2005) as the highest quality studies in this field.[2] Several points are worth commenting upon. First, as the critics have noted, convenience sampling dominated this literature in the past (Nock 2001). More recent scholarship has answered this criticism by using nationally representative probability samples derived from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Ad Health, see Wainright and Patterson 2006; Wainright, Russell and Patterson 2004), as well as studies constructed from a hybrid of probability sampling and convenience sampling (Golombok et al. 2003; Perry et al. 2004). A second critique of the literature, that the sample sizes of the studies are too small to allow for statistically powerful tests, continues to be relevant. The mean number of children of gay or lesbian parents in these studies is 40, and the median is 37, and both numbers would be slightly lower if studies without

[2] The four articles featured in Meezan and Rauch are: Wainright, Russell, and Patterson (2004); Golombok et al (2003); Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (1998); and Brewaeys et al (1997).

comparison groups were excluded. The nationally representative studies in the series found only 44 children of lesbian couples in the Ad Health survey (Wainright and Patterson 2006; Wainright, Russell and Patterson 2004). Golombok et al (2003) found only 18 lesbian mothers out of 14,000 mothers in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, which is why they supplemented this sample with snowball sampling and their own convenience sample. The universally small sample sizes of the studies in the existing literature has left room for several critiques, including the critique that small sample studies would not have the statistical power to identify the effects of homosexual parents on childhood outcomes, even if such effects did exist (Lerner and Nagai 2001; Nock 2001). A third potential weakness of this literature is the narrowness of family structures under study (Tasker 2005). Of the 37 studies listed, only six examined the children of gay fathers, and only one of these six studies had a more traditional family control group built into the study.

Among the convenience sample studies, several of the most important have been based on samples of women who became parents through artificial reproductive technology (ART-Brewaeys et al. 1997; Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Flaks et al. 1995). Because individuals who become parents through assisted means are easier to recruit into a study than the general population, the literature on same-sex couple parenting has tended to feature studies of the kind of women who can afford ART: white upper middle class women. Nationally representative data tends to paint a different picture: in the US census, same-sex couple parents tend to be more working class and are much more likely to be racially nonwhite compared to heterosexual married couples.

There is a great deal to admire about the richness and variety of the small scale studies of children of gay and lesbian parents, especially the ability of these studies to make use of careful

one-on-one psychological studies of parents and children (Brewaeys et al. 1997; Flaks et al. 1995; Golombok et al. 2003; Patterson 1995; Tasker and Golombok 1997), and the ability of the studies to triangulate by surveying teachers as well as parents, to avoid some of the problems of parental report bias (Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Flaks et al. 1995). The uniformity of the findings (of no measurable disadvantages for children of gay and lesbian parents) has been generally convincing to many scholars who have reviewed the literature (Ball and Pea 1998; Meezan and Rauch 2005; Stacey and Biblarz 2001; Wald 2006), though others cite methodological flaws, low statistical power resulting from small sample sizes, and thus have remained unconvinced (Lerner and Nagai 2001; Nock 2001; Wardle 1997). The debate over same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian adoption rights revolves around many competing sets of assumptions with political, religious, and ideological axes which cannot be resolved or even fully addressed in this paper. To the extent the debate is an empirical debate, that is to the extent that disagreement remains over the meaning of the empirical literature on the development of children of same-sex couples, this paper offers a modest contribution.

To supplement the existing small-scale studies, I offer a large sample study of children from the US Census, including more than 8,000 children of same-sex couples, and more than 1,000,000 children from other family types. The US census has several major disadvantages: normal progress through school is the only available children's outcome, and even this outcome is measured with less precision than one would hope for. Despite the limitations of the US census, however, the massive sample size and national representativity allow for a series of tests with the statistical power to identify even small differences between children of different family types. Furthermore, the wide variety of family structures available in the census allows for a wider set of comparisons between children of different family structures. Although the current

study has several important limitations, the strengths of this study (large sample, national representativity, and a full array of family structures) address important lacunae in the literature and as such this study offers a potentially useful new perspective on how family structure matters to children.

Putting Statistically Significant Differences into Social Perspective:

Even if the effects of parental divorce on children are significantly negative in statistical tests (after controlling for important potential confounding factors such as SES), the social significance of the effects may be modest. Evaluation of social significance of family structure's effect on children requires a social yardstick to which differences in children's outcomes can be compared. In this paper, I take advantage of the US census' inclusion of individuals living in group quarters as well as in households. I compare the differences in children's outcomes for children in different family structures, and I also compare children in all family types to children living in group quarters and to foster children living with families. The differences in childhood outcomes between family types, even when they are statistically significant, turn out to be quite small when compared to the much larger differences between children living in families and children living in group quarters. This finding accords nicely with the literature on family rights, adoption rights, and state intervention in the family which has always recognized the superiority of the family (even families viewed as suboptimal) over the state as an institution for raising children (Bartholet 1999; Goldstein, Freud and Solnit 1979; Kennedy 2003). Because children in group quarters and foster children represent the pool of children awaiting adoption, the ability to

identify this population is crucial in assessing the potential impact of expanded adoption rights for gay and lesbian parents.

There are a multitude of other social and demographic features of families which are known to be associated with children's school performance. In assessing the social importance of family structure for children's school performance, I will compare the apparent effects of family structure on children's normal progress through school with other factors which are already known to influence normal progress through school: children's race, children's disabilities, children's gender (girls are less likely to be retained in the primary grades, see Hauser 2001), parental educational attainment, household income, geography, and US nativity.

The Advantages of Legal Marriage

Legal marriage confers a host of protections and advantages both to the couples who marry, and also to their children. Married couples generally share joint legal custody of their coresident children. In a system of employer-based health care insurance, either spouse in a married couple can usually provide health insurance for both spouses and all their children. Marriage is a long-term contract which allows and encourages parents to make long-term investments in their children (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Divorce rights, which are a corollary to marriage rights, provide guarantees for child support and visitation that are intended to minimize the damage of a breakup to a couple’s children. Given the many practical, legal, economic, and social advantages of marriage as a child rearing family structure, it should come as no surprise that children of long term married couples have the best outcomes (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). The various benefits of marriage extend far beyond income, so one would

generally expect children in married couples to have advantages even after SES is accounted for in regressions.

Some same-sex couples who married at City Hall in San Francisco in 2004 found their marriages to have surprising personal importance, even though these same-sex couples were never sure that their marriages would survive legal challenges. The California courts revoked the San Francisco same-sex marriage licenses about six months after the marriages had taken place (Murphy 2004; Murphy and Marshall 2004). Even with doubts about the permanence of their marital status, and even though they initially saw the City Hall weddings as more of a political statement than a personal statement (Rosenfeld 2007), marriage made them see their relationships in a new light. One man put it this way:

> It's sort of like, when you're traveling back from some place far-far away you're not home yet when you take this long plane flight and you land at the airport. You're home after the cab ride. And it's the cab ride which was our marriage. You know, and then we were home (Rosenfeld 2007 p.179).

The moral claim for same-sex marriage rests in part on the many practical and psychological benefits of marriage, benefits which conservative family scholars have made the most careful and enthusiastic case for (Waite and Gallagher 2000; Wilson 2002). The benefits of marriage, combined with the exclusion of gays and lesbians (and their children) from those benefits, together form one cornerstone of the case for same-sex marriage (Eskridge 1996).

Because none of the same-sex couples surveyed in the 2000 census were entitled to the same legal benefits and rights as heterosexual married couples in the US[3], the comparison between the children of heterosexual married couples and the children of same-sex cohabiting couples is not a fair comparison. Heterosexual cohabiting couples are a more logical comparison group for same-sex cohabiting couples in terms of family structure, legal rights, and social position. Both family types (heterosexual cohabiters and same-sex cohabiters) are two parent families living without the rights and benefits of marriage. Certainly, there are differences: heterosexual cohabiting couples can marry if they want to, whereas in the US at the time of the 2000 census, same-sex couples could not marry. The comparison between children of same-sex cohabiting couples and children of heterosexual cohabiting couples allows for a more specific test of the effect of same-sex parenthood on children, while holding constant legal rights and the number of parents.

Data and Measures

While the census microdata (obtained from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, or IPUMS, see Ruggles et al. 2004) has the advantage of national representativity and unparalleled sample size, the census has little in the way of measurable outcomes for children. To my knowledge, the only measure of childhood and youth outcomes in the U.S. census is normal progress through school.[4] Grade retention has been increasing in US schools since US

[3] As many as half of the same-sex couples in the 2000 census reported themselves as "married," see Rosenfeld and Kim (2005) and U.S. Census Bureau (2003).

[4] College attendance and graduation are important indicators of young adult outcomes, but young adults who are old enough to attend college are increasingly unlikely to live with their parents, so no association with parental family structure can be measured. Even secondary school students are already old enough to live apart from their parents. A 9th grader who was over age for their grade at the time of the census in April, 2000 would have been at least 16 years old, and a 12th grader who was over age would have been at least 19 years old, old enough to be living on

President Bill Clinton proposed ending social promotion in schools in his State of the Union Address in 1998 (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber 2003 p.viii; Hauser 2001).

Grade retention is an important measure of childhood outcomes because retention is a strong indicator of poor classroom performance, and students who are held back at least once are at much higher risk for eventually dropping out of high school (Guo, Brooks-Gunn and Harris 1996; Moller et al. 2006; Rumberger 1987; Tillman, Guo and Harris 2006). Failure to graduate from high school is associated with low earnings, high unemployment, low self-esteem, and high mortality rates (Guo, Brooks-Gunn and Harris 1996; McLanahan 1985; Tillman, Guo and Harris 2006). Guo, Brooks-Gunn and Harris (1996) studied grade retention among urban black children and found that some indicators of parental stress such as unemployment and welfare use were associated with increased grade retention for children; in other words, they found childhood grade retention to be a useful measure of difficulties the students were experiencing at home. Guo, Brooks-Gunn, and Harris (1996 p.218) identify three potential sources of grade retention: "weak cognitive ability, behavioral problems, and lack of engagement in school." Of these three causes of childhood grade retention, the second two might be partly associated with the quality of the home environment. Even when grade retention takes place in the early grades, the 'crystallization' of behaviors and academic abilities implies that deficits or difficulties a child experiences when he or she is 7 or 8 carry forward (more so for girls than for boys) into adolescence and young adulthood (Kowalesi-Jones and Duncan 1999).

Age and current grade (variable GRADEATT) from the US census can be used to create a crude measure of prior grade retention. Delayed progress through school (also known as age-grade retardation) is a widely used proxy for prior grade retention (Hauser 2001; Hauser, Pager

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their own. Children who live apart from their parents cannot be connected to parental family structure in a household survey such as the census, which is why my analysis focuses on the primary grades.

and Simmons 2001). There is a strong correlation between being older than one's classmates, and having been retained a grade in the past, which can be documented using the October supplements to the Current Population Survey, which has more precise questions about childhood grade retention (though unfortunately much smaller sample size). For example, for 8th grade students in October 2004 (author's tabulation), 2% of the 13 year olds had ever been held back a year in school, but 31% of the 14 year olds had ever been held back. The census survey, which occurs 6 months later in the school year (April rather than October), requires a later age cutoff, so I use age 15 as the cutoff age at which 8th graders are considered too old to be making normal progress through school.

A student can be over age without having ever repeated a grade, and it is also possible for students to be retained a grade without being over age. Students who enter school younger than their classmates can repeat a grade without being over age; those students would appear to be making normal progress in the census. Some students who are older than their classroom peers might have been held back a year before starting school (a practice known as 'redshirting'[5]), and thus would never have repeated a grade. Other students might have repeated the same grade but at different schools, thus avoiding the stigma of falling a grade behind one's friends in the same school. Finally, parents might underreport grade retention of their children, because of stigma associated with poor classroom performance, but might be more likely to report their children's age and grade accurately.

The census 2000 question about current grade for students collapsed grades 1-4 into a single category, and grades 5-8 into a single category. Students attending grades 1-4 can only be

[5] Children ready to start kindergarten at 5 are sometimes redshirted by affluent parents so that their child might be one of the oldest rather than one of the youngest students in the class, and thus be comparatively better prepared for school than his or her classmates. The late age cutoff I use to define grade retention- 11 years old for 4th grade and 15 years old for 8th grade would tend to exclude the redshirted children, who usually fall at the higher range of normal age distribution in each grade.

identified as over age if they are too old to be in the 4th grade (i.e. age at least 11) and students attending grades 5-8 can only be identified as over age if they are too old to be in the 8th grade (i.e. age at least 15). Despite the census survey design which limits the identification of prior grade retention to students in the 4th and 8th grades, the massive sample size of the census provides sufficient sample sizes for analysis. The unweighted census 2000 microdata contains more than 1.5 million children in grades 1-8, and 33,000 children who are over age for grades 4 or 8. Among children of same-sex couples, 8,212 (3,300 children of gay male parents and 4,912 children of lesbian parents) were in grades 1-8, and 219 of those children can be identified as over age.[6]

The 2000 census did not include a question about the number of times respondents had been married, so married coresident couples cannot in general be distinguished from remarried couples. This problem is mitigated somewhat by the census' ability to distinguish the head of household's "own children" from the head of household's "step children." The census provides only a cross-sectional snapshot of family structure, which fails to capture the way in which family changes over time can affect children (Wolfe et al. 1996; Wu and Martinson 1993)

Unmarried partners were first distinguished from roommates in the 1990 census. For census 2000, the Census Bureau changed its long standing policy by counting self-reported same-sex "married" couples as unmarried partners (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005; U.S. Bureau of the

[6] There is potential value in analyzing the adopted children separately, given the rancorous public policy debates over adoption rights for gay couples. Even the massive sample size of the census becomes stretched too thin when children are limited to adopted children only. Adopted children comprise 2.2% of all primary school children in the census. For gay men there were 129 adopted primary school children (of whom 4 were over-age), and for lesbian parents there were 180 adopted children (4 over-age) in the 2000 census microdata 5% sample. The sample size of adopted children of same-sex couples who were over-age is too small to allow for statistical analyses with any reasonable degree of power, though the small samples do suggest that adopted children living with same-sex couples do as well as adopted children living with any other type of family.

Census 2001).[7] The recoded "married" couples accounted for roughly half of the same-sex partners in the 2000 census, and 80% of the children of same-sex couples. The inclusion of the self-reported "married" couples among the same-sex partnered couples is thought to yield a more accurate population count of same-sex couples (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001), but the self-reported married and the self-reported partnered same-sex couples differ in some systematic ways. Not only do the self-reported same-sex married couples have more children than the self-reported same-sex partnered couples, but the self-reported same-sex married couples are more similar to heterosexual married couples along several other key dimensions: the self-reported same-sex married couples are more likely to be white, less likely to be geographically mobile, more likely to have high incomes, and so on (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005).[8] Because the same-sex partner population in the 2000 census is composed of two rather distinctive subgroups, every table which includes statistics on same-sex couples and their children includes alternative versions of the same statistics calculated with the dual marital status recoded couples (and their children) excluded, to indicate whether the results are robust with respect to this underlying diversity.

In the census data, all married couples are heterosexual married couples by Census Bureau definition. Since the 2000 census, however, Massachusetts and several localities have issued marriage licenses to same sex couples, so I add the modifier "heterosexual" to married

[7] In the 1990 census, the Census Bureau continued a long census tradition of assuming that same-sex married responses could only occur by error, and recoded the gender of one partner in self-reported same-sex married couples in order to transform these respondents into heterosexual married couples. The forced recoding of self-reported same-sex married couples is why the US census contains zero identifiable same-sex couples prior to 1990.

[8] One reason why the self-reported same-sex married couples may have been more similar to heterosexual married couples in the 2000 census is that the same-sex married couples may have included a number of heterosexual married couples who misreported one partner's gender. O'Connell and Gooding (2006) studied test census data using first names as a check against gender misclassification, and found that as many as 26% of lesbian couples in the 2000 census might have actually been heterosexual couples with one partner's gender misclassified. On the other hand, some self-reported heterosexual couples had first names which suggested they might actually be same-sex couples. Applying the first name gender changes to all individuals resulted in a net increase of same-sex couples. This procedure cannot be reproduced with the publicly available microdata, which does not contain individual names.

couples for clarity. The only gays and lesbians who can be identified in the census are heads of household who live with a same-sex partner. Same-sex cohabiting partners constitute 1.1% of all married and cohabiting couples in the weighted 2000 census microdata. For the case of different sex couples (married or cohabiting), the "heterosexual" label refers to the public identity they chose on the census form rather than to their private behavior. For divorced, separated, or widowed single parents, I make the same assumption that prior marriage (absent other information) suggests a public, if not a private, heterosexual identity. For never married unpartnered single parents, the census provides no information about sexual identity.

[Table 2 here]

First Order Predictors of Childhood Grade Retention

Because denominator school populations cover four years (grades 1-4, grades 5-8), but the students who can be identified as over age for their grade come only from the last grade of each four year span (grades 4 and 8)[9], the implied grade retention rate is four times higher than the observed rate of students from grades 1-8 who are identifiably over age. Table 2 shows both the observed rate of overage students and the implied grade retention rate, for primary school students using weighted data from the 2000 census.

Table 2 suggests that childhood grade retention is correlated with family type. Children of heterosexual married couples had the lowest implied rate of grade retention, 7.2%. Children of all other non-group quarters household types, including same-sex couples, had rates of grade retention that were somewhat higher, between 10.1% and 12.0%. Between the nontraditional

[9] This assumes that no children are held back more than one year in the primary grades, which is a fairly safe assumption based on October, CPS data.

family types (same-sex couples, unmarried heterosexual cohabiters, single parents), childhood grade retention rates were similar.

Removing the dual marital status recoded parents and their children from the model reduces the unweighted number of children of gay parents by 80%, and worsens the implied grade retention rate to 11.8% for children of lesbian mothers (a modest change), and to 15.4% for children of gay fathers (a change which appears more substantial). The apparent worsening of grade retention rates for children of lesbian mothers and especially for children of gay fathers after dual marital status couples have been excluded is offset in most of the statistical models that follow by the increasing statistical uncertaintly that results from lower sample size. The exclusion of dual marital status recoded couples and their children left only 577 primary school children of gay fathers in the sample, only 19 of whom were identifiably over age because the percentage identifiably over age was less than 4%.

The differences in childhood grade retention between all types of non group quarters households were dwarfed by the high grade retention rates of children living in group quarters. According to Table 2, children living in group homes, many of them awaiting adoption or foster parents, had an implied grade retention rate of 38.8%. Children who were incarcerated had a grade retention rate of 81.1%. Some of the difference between children in group quarters and children living with parents and guardians must be due to selection effects- the most troubled children available for adoption may never be adopted and may do poorly in school as a result of emotional or physical disabilities. Similarly, children who were neglected or abused at home (negative environmental factors which would be expected to impact school performance) may have been taken away from their parents and put under the care of the state. The census, as a cross-sectional survey, is poorly suited to the analysis of selection effects. Despite these caveats,

the data strongly suggest that children do better in school when living with a family (compared to living in group quarters), regardless of whether the parents are a traditional heterosexual married couple, or a same-sex couple. Later in the paper, I show that the enormous difference in grade retention between children raised in families and children living in group quarters remains even after individual level student disabilities are accounted for.

One way to gauge the advantage of living with families is to note that adopted children (11.1% grade retention) and foster children (21.8% grade retention) performed considerably better than children living in group quarters (38.8% grade retention for non-inmates). The performance hierarchy which favors own children, and then (in declining order of school performance) adopted children, then foster children, then children in group quarters confirms the long standing research finding that children do best when living with parents who make a long term commitment to the children's development (Bartholet 1999). Selection bias (wherein the children with the most severe disabilities or children who have suffered the worst abuse are the least likely to be adopted) must also play a role, which unfortunately cannot be quantified with these data. The consistency of census data on grade retention with prior research on child development using other data sources and other measures is one reassuring test of the census data's validity.

The rest of Table 2 shows implied grade retention along several other dimensions. Asian children had the lowest rates of grade retention, while black children had the highest. Girls were less likely to be held back in the primary grades than boys were. Suburban schools had lower rates of grade retention than city schools, which in turn were lower than rural schools. Household socioeconomic status (SES) was a crucial predictor of childhood school performance. In

households with income less than $25,000, 12.3% of the primary school students were left back, compared to only 5.8% for children in households with incomes over $100,000. Householder's education had an even stronger effect on children's progress through school: parents who had less than a high school degree had primary school children who were retained 14.4% of the time, whereas householders with college degrees had children who were retained only 4.4% of the time.

Table 2 shows that the strongest factor in making normal progress through elementary school is living with a family rather than living in group quarters. For children living in a family, whether the family is headed by a heterosexual married couple or by some less traditional parenting arrangement, the second most important factor in childhood progress through school appears to be parental educational attainment.

[Table 3 here]

The Demographics of Family Type

It is widely believed that gay men and lesbians are among the most economically prosperous populations in the US, and there is a basis for this belief. Table 3 shows that gays and lesbians are among the most educated populations, with an average of 13.6 years of education (i.e. 1.6 years of college) compared to 13.4 years for heterosexual married heads of household. Across family types, gay couples have the highest median household income at $61,000 per household. It should also be noted that men have higher earnings than women, and gay male couples are the only household type that relies on the earnings of two men, so the earnings

advantage of gay male couples may be nothing more than the accrual of a double advantage of maleness. The second four family types are all single parent (i.e. single income) families, so their household incomes are naturally on the order of 50% as high as the household incomes of the first four family types.

Despite the fact that the cost of becoming parents may be higher for gays and lesbians than for heterosexual couples, Table 3 shows that gay and lesbian couples who did have children had substantially lower income and educational attainment than gay and lesbian couples in general. Whereas heterosexual married couples had a similar educational and income profile whether they have children or not, the economic elites among gay and lesbian couples were the least likely to have children. While gay and lesbian cohabiters had relatively high household incomes, gay and lesbian parents had lower SES than heterosexual married parents ($50 thousand per household for gay couples compared to $58 thousand for heterosexual married couples), and when the dual marital status recodes were excluded, the income and educational level of gay and lesbian parents was even lower. Among gay and lesbian couples, parenthood appears to be a working class phenomenon.

Not only were heterosexual married parents economically advantaged, the heterosexual married couples were also racially advantaged. Only 22.9% of children of heterosexual married couple were black or Hispanic, whereas 41.6% of children of gay men were black or Hispanic, and this percentage rose to 53.7% when dual marital status recodes were excluded. The children of lesbians were similarly likely (37.1%) to be black or Hispanic. Never married mothers were the most likely parenting family type to have racially minority children. There was a fairly high concordance between children's race and head of household's race, which did not vary much between same-sex couples and heterosexual parenting families. Among non Hispanic white

married heads of household, 97% of "own children" were also non Hispanic white; this percentage was 95% for gay male heads of household, and 95% for lesbian heads of household. The rate of racial concordance between parents and children for black and Hispanic families was similar. The racial breakdown of parents by family type is therefore similar to the racial breakdown of children described in Table 3. Among heterosexual married heads of household, 22.2% were black or Hispanic, while 40.4% of gay fathers were black or Hispanic, and 36.1% of lesbian mothers were black or Hispanic (not shown in Table 3).

Among all family types, children of lesbian mothers were the most likely (more than 12%) to be adopted children, step children, or foster children. Gay fathers had the second highest rate of adopted children, foster children, and step children compared to "own children." Because economic disadvantage, minority racial status, and experience with the adoption or foster care system are all challenges for children, a careful analysis of the school performance of children of gay and lesbian parents must take these disadvantages into account.

[Table 4 here]

Multivariate Tests of Childhood Progress Through School

1) Comparisons with Children of Heterosexual Married Couples

Tables 4-6 present a series of multivariate logistic regression coefficients for normal progress through primary school (versus grade retention), of the following type:

$$Log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \alpha + \beta_k X_{k,i}$$

Where P_i is the predicted probability that the ith primary school student is making normal progress through school. The constant term is α and β_k represents a column of k coefficients in the model.[10] Positive coefficients imply better outcomes (i.e. higher probability of making normal progress through school) for the students. Negative coefficients imply higher rates of grade retention. The sample in Table 4 includes only "own children," (excluding step children, foster children, and adopted children) to reduce the number of children who are the result of previous relationships, and to minimize the potential selection bias that adopted children or other "chosen" children might introduce (Stacey 2006). This narrowing of the sample of children, along with the inclusion of household income and parental education (in Models 2-5), excludes children living in group quarters (by far the worst performers in school) from the analysis. See below for an analysis which includes the group quarters children.

Model 1 of Table 4 shows the raw log odds ratios of normal progress through school for children of all the less traditional family types, compared to heterosexual married couples. Similar to the result from Table 2, Model 1 shows that children from all the nontraditional family types were less likely to be making good progress through school, with coefficients varying from -.336 for children of lesbian couples (the most modest disadvantage among the nontraditional family types), to -.545 for children of separated, widowed, or divorced men. According to Model 1, the odds of making good progress through school were 0.60 as high ($e^{-.545}$ =0.60) for children living with separated, divorced, and widowed men as for the children of heterosexual married couples. The odds of making good progress through school were 0.71 as

[10] Coefficients are based on weighted census microdata, with weights re-normed to average 1, so that model likelihoods and coefficient standard errors reflect the real unweighted sample size. In general children of same-sex cohabiting parents appear to do slightly better in these multivariate tests when the models are run without taking the census weights into account.

high ($e^{-.336}$=0.71) for children of lesbian couples compared to children of heterosexual married couples. We know, however, that all the nontraditional types of parenting families have lower SES than the heterosexual married couples, and that family types differ by other demographic measures as well.

Model 2 introduces controls for household SES, including the natural logarithm of household income, and a categorical variable for the head of household's educational attainment. The presence of these controls for household SES reduces the magnitude of the negative coefficients for children of all types of nontraditional families, compared to Model 1. For children of gay fathers, the introduction of household SES reduces the grade retention gap (compared to children of heterosexual married couples) by 38% ([.499-.307]/.499=0.38), and for children of lesbian mothers, controlling for household SES reduces the grade retention gap by 36%.

Model 3 introduces student gender (girls were more likely to be making good progress), US nativity, student race, and four dichotomous measures for disabilities among the students. The most influential type of disability was memory deficits, which reduced the odds of making good progress through school by more than half ($e^{-.810}$=0.44). Model 4 adds controls for urban, rural, or suburban residence, for grade attending, and for private school versus public school. Model 5 adds dummy variables for the 50 US states (plus the District of Columbia) to account for differences in social promotion policy between states.

In Models 3-5 of Table 4, the difference between children of lesbian parents and children of heterosexual married parents is not statistically significant. In other words, even with the massive sample size of the US census, the difference in making good progress through school between children of lesbian parents and children of heterosexual married couples is not

significantly different from zero. Children of gay men are significantly more likely to be left back in school compared to children of heterosexual married parents regardless of which controls are applied, but even these results turn out not to be robust.

Biblarz and Raftery (1999) noted in their study of children's outcomes and family structure that their results were fragile; their conclusions about how children's outcomes depended on family structure were heavily influenced by somewhat arbitrary decisions about model specification. Although the models presented in Table 4 are a reasonable set of models, they are not the only reasonable set of models. At the bottom of Table 4, I report what the coefficients for children of gay and lesbian parents (compared to heterosexual married parents) would be if dual marital status recoded couples and their children were excluded from the sample. The exclusion of dual marital status recodes worsens the coefficients for children of gay and lesbian parents, but reduces all comparisons in models 2-5 to insignificance, because the exclusion of dual marital status recodes reduces the unweighted sample size of children of gay parents by 80%.

In Appendix Table 4A I run the same models as Table 4, but Table 4A uses unweighted census data whereas Table 4 uses the person weights of the census (renormed to average 1, for various views on the appropriate uses of weights in regression, see Clogg and Eliason 1987; Winship and Radbill 1994). The main difference between Table 4A and Table 4 is that in Table 4A the difference between children of gay parents and children of heterosexual married parents is smaller, and insignificant in Models 2-5.[11] Appendix Table 4B uses robust standard errors

[11] Since the census is not a complex sampling survey, but rather a probability survey with weights employed to correct for modest differences in response rates to the long form compared to the short form, the weights usually don't make an important difference in regressions with census data. The fact that the use of weights does make a difference in statistical tests between children of same-sex couples and children of heterosexual married couples is one indication that the differences between children of different family structures are small to begin with.

instead of ordinary standard errors (White 1980; White 1982), but this alteration makes no substantive difference.

How is one to interpret the variety of findings in Table 4, and Appendix Tables 4A and 4B? One conclusion is that the measured difference between children of gay and lesbian couples and children of heterosexual married couples is fragile- the significance of the difference depends on arbitrary choices. On the other hand, across 5 models and 4 versions of Table 4 and both gay and lesbian parented families, all 40 coefficients for children of gay and lesbian parents are negative (compared to children of heterosexual married couples), even if the standard errors are large enough to include zero in the 95% confidence interval for many individual tests. Taken together, the evidence suggests that children of gay and lesbian parents probably have a small disadvantage in making progress through school compared to children of heterosexual married couples, but that is what we would expect to find given the powerful advantages of marriage.

[Table 5 Here]

2) Comparisons Between Less Traditional Family Types

Table 4 uses heterosexual married couples as the implicit family standard. Heterosexual married couples enjoy a variety of legal advantages, so this may not be the most reasonable type of comparison for same-sex couples. Table 5 starts with the same models and controls (and therefore the same fit statistics) as Table 4, but Table 5 highlights comparisons among the less traditional family structure types. As in Table 4, all children in Table 5 were "own children" of the head of household; step children, foster children and adopted children are excluded. The comparison between children of same-sex couples and children of heterosexual cohabiting

couples is especially important because this is the comparison between family types that were most similar, but for the gender of the parents. Heterosexual cohabiting couples and same-sex couples were both unmarried (at least as far as the Census Bureau and US federal law were concerned[12]), two parent families. The main family structure difference between same-sex couples and heterosexual cohabiting couples was parental gender. In addition, I compare children of gay and lesbian parents to children of single parents.

Of the 30 comparison coefficients in Table 5, only 1 is statistically significant at the 5% level (see Appendix Table 5A for the full set of coefficients), which is no more than would be expected by chance alone if children of all the less traditional family types had the same school performance. In other words, the children of less traditional family types are statistically indistinguishable as far as making normal progress through school is concerned, regardless of which kinds of controls are entered into the models. Most importantly, the comparisons from Table 5 suggest that, for children's normal progress through elementary school, heterosexual cohabiting couples have no parenting advantage over same-sex cohabiting couples, regardless of which kinds of sociodemographic controls are applied.[13]

[Table 6 here]

3) Comparisons with Children in Group Quarters

Table 6 represents a different variation on the type of analysis in Table 4. In Table 6, the

[12] For a discussion of the 1996 Defense Of Marriage Act, see Koppelman (2002).

[13] Appendix Table 5A includes all the coefficients summarized in Table 5, plus additional versions of the same contrasts with dual marital status recodes excluded. The exclusion of dual marital status recodes and their children had no substantive effect on comparisons between children of lesbians and children of other nontraditional family types, but the exclusion of dual marital status recodes did make the children of gay fathers significantly more likely to be left back in school compared to the children of heterosexual cohabiting couples, and significantly more likely to be left back compared to the children of never married men.

sample of children includes children in group quarters, and these children are the comparison category for the analysis. Because no household income nor parental education can be associated with children in group quarters, these variables are dropped from the analysis. The sample of children in Table 6 is larger than Table 4 because the group quarters children are included, and also because categories of child's relationship to head of household are expanded to include own children, adopted children, step children, and foster children.[14]

Table 6 uses multivariate logistic regression to confirm the robustness of a previous finding from Table 2, that children who live with parents regardless of family type are much more likely to make normal progress through school than children living in group quarters. Even after student disabilities (more common among group quarters children than among children living with families) are taken into account, all types of families structures have children that are more likely to make normal progress through school than children living in group quarters. The only children who were consistently less likely to make normal progress through school than the non-inmate children in group quarters were the incarcerated children.

Discussion:

The literature on the outcomes of children of same-sex couples has been dominated by small N studies. The limitations of the small scale studies have proven to be useful fodder for alarmists who claim that, in the absence of scientific data demonstrating their adequacy as parents, same-sex couples should not have the legal rights that heterosexual married couples

[14] Since the children in group quarters have no head of household to have a relationship with, it seemed appropriate to use the broadest definition of 'children' for children who were living with families. Furthermore the adopted and foster children include an unknown but probably important group who formerly lived in group quarters. Unlike Table 3, the substantive results of Table 5 do not depend on the use of census weights or on the exclusion of dual marital status recodes.

enjoy (Alvaré 2005; Wardle 1997). Researchers who advocate for same-sex couple rights have claimed that no differences between children of heterosexual couples and homosexual couples could be found (Patterson 2002), but this claim overlooks the manifest diversity of heterosexual family types.

To the extent that delayed progress through primary school is a useful and valid measure of child development, the census analysis here represents the first large sample, nationally representative test comparing outcomes for children of same-sex couples with outcomes for children of various types of heterosexual and single parent families. The large sample size of the census allows tests with the statistical power to identify even small differences in rates of making normal progress through elementary school. The results confirm that children of same-sex couples are as likely to make normal progress through school as children of most heterosexual family types. Heterosexual married couples are the most economically prosperous, the most likely to be white, and the most legally advantaged type of parents; their children have the lowest rates of grade retention. Parental SES accounts for more than one third of the relatively small gap in grade retention between children of heterosexual married couples and children of same-sex couples. Childhood disabilities and race account for a further portion of the grade retention gap, and what remains is usually too small of a gap to be identified with statistical certainty, even with the massive sample size of the census. When one controls for parental SES and characteristics of the students, children of lesbian couples are as likely to make normal progress through school as children of heterosexual married couples. Children of two gay fathers may be slightly less likely to make normal progress through school than children of heterosexual married couples, but even these results are fragile.

The existing literature of small scale convenience sample studies of children of gays and lesbians has usually compared these children to the children of a variety of types of heterosexual parenting families, including single parents and unmarried cohabiting heterosexual couples (Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Patterson 1995). The analysis in this paper shows that same-sex couples do as well in school as children of less traditional types of heterosexual couples, including children of heterosexual cohabiting couples, so in that regard the analysis of the census data presented here vindicates the results of the small scale studies.

Although the massive sample size of the census allows even small differences in students' progress through school to be identified, it is important to put the modest differences between non-group quarters family types into perspective. Children of all non-group quarters family types, including households headed by same-sex couples, are dramatically more likely to make normal progress through school than students living in group quarters. Any policy that would deny gay and lesbian parents the right to adopt or foster children would force some children to remain in group quarters unadopted or without foster parents, and would seem to be contrary to the best interest of the children. In recent years scholars have arrived at a consensus that moving children out of group homes and into adoptive families should be the goal of public policy. Both sides of the debate over the role of an activist government in protecting children acknowledge that families, even suboptimal families, are better equipped than the state to raise children (Bartholet 1999; Goldstein, Freud and Solnit 1979).

Historical restrictions against interracial adoption in the US represent one relevant historical precedent for the current debate over the adoption rights of same-sex couples. Randall Kennedy (2003) argues that even though restrictions against interracial adoption have been proposed as a way of protecting children, such restrictions have victimized children by taking

them away from loving homes or by forcing children to remain in group quarters for too long. Policies which limit the kinds of families that can adopt or foster children ignore the enormous advantages of personal attention that families have (even single parents and other nontraditional family types) over the state in raising children well. Current adoption law in the US has turned against categorical judgments about potential parents in favor of a careful, case-by-case assessment of the best interests of the children (Wald 2006).

Parental education has a much greater effect on childhood grade retention than differences between non-group quarters family types. If children were only allowed to be adopted by parents under the most ideal circumstances, i.e. by families whose children were predicted to have the best possible outcomes (what Wald 2006, refers to as the doctrine of optimality), then both black *and* white parents would lose their adoption rights (since Asian children have the lowest rates of grade retention). A policy of exclusion against all family types but the most ideal family type (in terms of likelihood of avoiding childhood grade retention) would result in favoritism towards rich suburban highly educated Asian parents who send their US born children to private school, and discrimination against all other family types. Such a policy, taken to its logical extreme, would result in discrimination against almost every American family.

Grade retention, or normal progress through primary school, is a crude indicator of childhood progress. The inadequacy of existing datasets is a fundamental problem in evaluating outcomes for children of same-sex couples. The analysis here using census data cannot avoid or overcome the inherent shortcomings of the data. Since the 2000 census, the political landscape for same-sex marriage has changed substantially. Massachusetts has legalized same-sex marriage, while Vermont, Connecticut, and California have some form of civil unions or

domestic partnerships. Full marriage equality has become available to same-sex couples in Spain, Canada, South Africa and the Netherlands. The trend in the developed world towards marriage equality for same-sex couples (Meezan and Rauch 2005) will provide new opportunities to study family structure (including same-sex couple families) while holding legal rights constant across family types.

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Table 1: Studies of Children of Same-Sex Couples

	Sampling Frame	N of children of same-sex couples	parental structure, test group	parental structure, comparison group
Bailey et al (1995)	cs	82	gf	none
Bos et al (2004)	cs	100	lc	none
Brewaeys et al (1997)	cs	30	lm	hm
Bozett (1987)	cs	19	gf	none
Chan, Raboy, Patterson (1998)	cs	55	lm	hm
Chrisp (2001)	cs	13	lm	none
Crosbie-Burnett and Helmbrecht (1993)	cs	48	gf	none
Dundas and Kaufman (2000)	cs	20	lm	none
Flaks et al (1995)	cs	15	lc	hc
Fulcher et al (2002)	cs	55	lm	hm
Gartrell et al (2000)	cs	85	lm	none
Gartrell et al (2005)	cs	74	lm	none
Gershon, Tschann, and Jemerin (1999)	cs	76	lm	none
Golombok and Tasker (1996); Tasker and Golombok (1997)	cs	39	lm	hsm
Golombok et al (2003)	ps+ cs	39	lm	hc and hsm
Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983)	cs	37	lm	hsm
Golombok, Tasker, and Murray (1997)	cs	30	lm	hm
Gottman (1990)	cs	35	lm+gf	hm
Green (1978)	cs	37	lm+ts	none
Green et al (1986)	cs	56	lm	hsm
Hoeffer (1981)	cs	20	lm	hsm
Huggins (1989)	cs	18	lm	hsm
Javaid (1993)	cs	26	lm	hsm
Kirkpatrick et al (1981)	cs	20	lm	hsm
Lewis (1980)	cs	21	lm	none
MacCallum and Golombok (2004)	cs	25	lm	hm
McCandlish (1987)	cs	7	lm	none
Miller (1979)	cs	14	gf	none
Patterson (1995)	cs	26	lc	none
Patterson, Sutfin, and Fulcher (2004)	cs	33	lc	hc
Perry et al (2004)	ps+ cs	38	lm	hm
Vanfraussen et al (2002; 2003)	cs	37	lm	hm
Wainright, and Patterson (2006)	nr, ps	44	lc	hc
Wainright, Russell, and Patterson (2004)	nr, ps	44	lc	hc
Wyers (1987)	cs	66	lm + gf	none

Sampling frame: cs=convenience sample; ps=probability sample; nr=nationally representative.
Family structure gf=gay fathers lm=lesbian mothers lc=lesbian couples; ts=transsexuals; hm=heterosexual mothers; hc=heterosexual couples; hsm=heterosexual single mothers.

Table 2: Selected First order Predictors of Childhood Grade Retention

	A Unweighted N of Children in grades 1-8	B Pct over age at grades 4 or 8	C=4B Implied Pct retained in grades 1-8
Family Type			
Heterosexual Married	1,140,075	1.79	7.2
Heterosexual Cohabit	65,168	2.53	10.1
Gay Male Cohabit	**3,300**	**2.99**	**12.0**
Lesbian Cohabit	**4,912**	**2.60**	**10.4**
Separated, Divorced, Widowed Men	43,129	2.94	11.8
Separated, Divorced, Widowed Women	203,644	2.73	10.9
Never Married Men	6,267	2.56	10.2
Never Married Women	78,304	2.79	11.2
Group Quarters Non-Inmates	2,242	9.71	38.8
Group Quarters Inmates	1,885	20.27	81.1
Child's Relationship to Householder			
Own Child		1.95	7.8
Adopted Child		2.78	11.1
Step Child		2.79	11.2
Foster Child		5.46	21.8
Child's Race			
Non Hispanic White		1.79	7.2
Non Hispanic Black		3.13	12.5
Asian American		1.61	6.4
Hispanic		2.35	9.4
Household Income (1999 $)			
<25,000		3.08	12.3
25,000-49,999		2.22	8.9
50,000-99,999		1.59	6.4
>100,000		1.46	5.8
Metro Status			
Rural		2.73	10.9
Urban		2.34	9.4
Suburban		1.57	6.3
Child's Gender			
Male		2.39	9.6
Female		1.74	7.0
Householder's Education			
<HS		3.61	14.4
HS degree		2.28	9.1
Some College		1.65	6.6
BA+		1.09	4.4

Source: US Census 2000 microdata, via IPUMS. Children include own children, adopted children, step children, foster children plus children in group quarters where appropriate.
Percentage overage at grades 4 and 8 is percentage of children in grades 1-4 who are over age for grade 4, averaged with the percentage of children in grades 5-8 who are over age for grade 8.

Children of same-sex couples with dual marital status recoded parents excluded: children of gay fathers in grades 1-8, N=577, pct over age=3.85%, implied grade retention=15.4%; children of lesbian mothers N=1424, pct over age=2.96%, implied grade retention= 11.8%

Table 3: Characteristics of Households With and Without Children

		Number of households	Head of Household Mean Education	Median Household Income (1999$)	Head of Household mean Age	Pct HH have children	
All Households							
	Heterosexual Married	55,477,124	13.4	57,640	48.7	44.8	
	Heterosexual Cohabit	4,566,338	13.0	44,200	36.0	37.2	
	Gay Male Cohabit	**331,747**	**13.6**	**61,000**	**44.6**	**22.7**	
	Lesbian Cohabit	**328,406**	**13.6**	**55,000**	**42.8**	**35.4**	
	Separated, Divorced, Widowed Men	9,071,563	12.7	30,500	54.3	10.7	
	Separated, Divorced, Widowed Women	20,626,824	12.4	22,200	59.6	20.3	
	Never Married Men	7,456,114	13.7	30,500	36.7	2.6	
	Never Married Women	7,700,852	13.7	24,500	37.3	26.0	
Households With Children						Pct Children who were adopted, step, or foster	Pct Children who were black or Hispanic
	Heterosexual Married	24,862,111	13.4	58,000	39.0	8.9	22.9
	Heterosexual Cohabit	1,699,954	12.0	36,600	33.2	11.4	44.5
	Gay Male Cohabit	**75,414**	**12.2**	**50,000**	**37.6**	**10.2**	**41.6**
	Lesbian Cohabit	**116,329**	**12.8**	**47,000**	**37.0**	**12.4**	**37.1**
	Separated, Divorced, Widowed Men	973,714	13.0	37,000	41.5	5.2	24.6
	Separated, Divorced, Widowed Women	4,180,122	12.8	23,000	38.0	3.4	40.3
	Never Married Men	191,988	11.9	28,600	34.3	9.8	54.9
	Never Married Women	2,002,598	12.1	14,000	31.4	2.6	75.1

Source: Weighted census microdata via IPUMS
In families with children, mean education, median household income and mean age of householder age are weighted by number of children. Children include own children, adopted children, step children and foster children.
With dual marital status recodes excluded, 11% of gay couples and 26.6% of lesbian couples had children, and median household income for gay fathers was $42,000, and for lesbian mothers income was $43,350. For children of gay fathers: pct children who were adopted, step, or foster=13.7% pct black or Hispanic=53.7%; for children of lesbians mothers pct adopted etc=18.0%, pct minority=42.0%..

Table 4: Predictors of Making Normal Progress Through Primary School, for Own Children,
Family Types Compared to Heterosexual Married Couples,
Selected Coefficients from Logistic Regressions

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family type (Heterosexual Married)					
Heterosexual Cohabit	-.369***	-.152***	-.090***	-.100***	-.123***
Gay Male Cohabit	**-.499*** **	**-.307** **	**-.271***	**-.284***	**-.303** **
Lesbian Cohabit	**-.336*** **	**-.216***	**-.178**	**-.186**	**-.188**
Sep, Div, Widowed men	-.545***	-.466***	-.434***	-.402***	-.405***
Sep, Div, Widowed women	-.480***	-.368***	-.289***	-.271***	-.271***
Never Married Men	-.404***	-.127	-.028	-.056	-.105
Never Married Women	-.512***	-.226***	-.037	-.066*	-.086***
Ln of household Income		.035***	.024***	.020***	.014***
Householder's education (<HS)					
HS degree		.487***	.490***	.485***	.486***
Some College		.830***	.835***	.801***	.769***
College degree+		1.183***	1.168***	1.089***	1.062***
Student US born			.642***	.622***	.640***
Student gender- Female			.288***	.288***	.287***
Student Disabilities					
difficulty with memory			-.810***	-.798***	-.791***
physical disability			-.331***	-.319***	-.319***
hearing or vision disability			-.442***	-.433***	-.420***
Personal care limitation			-.126*	-.156**	-.165***
Student Race (NH white)					
NH Black			-.324***	-.358***	-.262***
Hispanic			.216***	.147***	-.005
Asian			.290***	.221***	.036
Metropolitan Status (rural)					
City				.192***	.165***
Suburbs				.304***	.267***
Grade attending- 5th-8th Grade				-.305***	-.307***
School Type- Private School				.148***	.165***
State Dummy Variables					Yes
Constant	4.072***	3.073***	2.520***	2.629***	2.713***
Unweighted N	1,397,235	1,397,235	1,397,188	1,397,188	1,397,188
df	7	11	22	28	78
Log Likelihood	-134,323	-131,907	-129,956	-129,367	-128,336

Source: Weighted census microdata via IPUMS. Comparison categories in parentheses. Some categories of metro status and race excluded for clarity. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** P<.001
With dual marital status recodes excluded, coefficients for children of gay men (models 1-5) would be: -0.650*, -0.386, -0.294, -.329, -.359, only significant in model 1. For children of lesbian mothers, coefficients would be -0.508**, -0.361, -0.250, -0.276, -0.301, only significant in model 1.

Table 5: Similarities In Normal Progress Through School for own children
Among Children of Less Traditional Family Types, Models from Table 4
Coefficients if Significant, 'NO' if differences not statistically significant

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Compared to Children of Lesbian Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	no	no	no	no	no
Sep, Div, Widowed women	no	no	no	no	no
Never Married Women	-.177*	no	no	no	no
Compared to Children of Gay Male Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	no	no	no	no	no
Sep, Div, Widowed men	no	no	no	no	no
Never Married Men	no	no	no	no	no

Source: Weighted census microdata via IPUMS
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Table 6: Predictors of Making Normal Progress Through Primary School,
Family Types Compared to Group Quarters,
Selected Coefficients from Logistic Regressions

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Family type (Group Quarters non inmates)				
Heterosexual Married	1.774***	1.384***	1.360***	1.442***
Heterosexual Cohabit	1.423***	1.146***	1.136***	1.199***
Gay Male Cohabit	**1.248*** **	**.955*** **	**.932*** **	**1.002*** **
Lesbian Cohabit	**1.393*** **	**1.077*** **	**1.050*** **	**1.127*** **
Sep, Div, Widowed men	1.266***	.903***	.926***	1.008***
Sep, Div, Widowed women	1.342***	1.069***	1.078***	1.166***
Never Married Men	1.410***	1.192***	1.162***	1.200***
Never Married Women	1.322***	1.207***	1.182***	1.256***
Group Quarters Inmates	-.861***	-.727***	-.649***	-.575***
Student US born		.683***	.670***	.684***
Student gender- Female		.280***	.279***	.279***
Student Disabilities				
difficulty with memory		-.836***	-.819***	-.814***
physical disability		-.367***	-.348***	-.340***
hearing or vision disability		-.454***	-.433***	-.419***
Personal care limitation		-.089	-.130**	-.148**
Student Race (NH white)				
NH Black		-.457***	-.480***	-.367***
Hispanic		-.135***	-.183***	-.312***
Asian		.268***	.185***	.010
Metropolitan Status (rural)				
City			.366***	.232***
Suburbs			.550***	.402***
Grade attending- 5th-8th Grade			-.302***	-.304***
School Type- Private School			.277***	.291***
State Dummy Variables				Yes
Constant	2.230***	1.996***	2.127***	2.181***
Unweighted N	1,548,926	1,548,926	1,548,926	1,548,926
df	9	20	26	76
Log Likelihood	-155,473	-152,823	-151,787	-150,442

Source: Weighted census microdata via IPUMS
Comparison categories in parentheses. Students include own children, adopted children, foster children, step children, and children in group quarters. Some categories of metro status and race excluded for clarity.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Appendix Table 4A: Predictors of Making Normal Progress Through Primary School, for Own Children,
Family Types Compared to Heterosexual Married Couples,
Selected Coefficients from Logistic Regressions, Unweighted data

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family type (Heterosexual Married)					
Heterosexual Cohabit	-.369***	-.160***	-.097***	-.110***	-.131***
Gay Male Cohabit	**-.407*** **	**-.223**	**-.195**	**-.212**	**-.230**
Lesbian Cohabit	**-.320** **	**-.200***	**-.164**	**-.177**	**-.182**
Sep, Div, Widowed men	-.569***	-.491***	-.458***	-.429***	-.428***
Sep, Div, Widowed women	-.475***	-.372***	-.294***	-.280***	-.276***
Never Married Men	-.450***	-.185*	-.083	-.117	-.161
Never Married Women	-.497***	-.218***	-.025	-.061*	-.075**
Ln of household Income		.035***	.024***	.020***	.014***
Householder's education (<HS)					
HS degree		.482***	.487***	.486***	.485***
Some College		.832***	.840***	.807***	.774***
College degree+		1.195***	1.183***	1.102***	1.074***
Student US born			.632***	.617***	.631***
Student gender- Female			.295***	.295***	.294***
Student Disabilities					
difficulty with memory			-.829***	-.819***	-.812***
physical disability			-.377***	-.363***	-.363***
hearing or vision disability			-.395***	-.386***	-.373***
Personal care limitation			-.101*	-.136**	-.144***
Student Race (NH white)					
NH Black			-.327***	-.373***	-.267***
Hispanic			.226***	.141***	-.012
Asian			.314***	.224***	.032
Metropolitan Status (rural)					
City				.297***	.178***
Suburbs				.402***	.274***
Grade attending- 5th-8th Grade				-.316***	-.319***
School Type- Private School				.100***	.115***
State Dummy Variables					Yes
Constant	4.032***	3.039***	2.481***	2.298***	2.388***
Unweighted N	1,397,235	1,397,235	1,397,235	1,397,188	1,397,188
df	7	11	22	28	78
Log Likelihood	-137,496	-135,020	-133,002	-132,361	-131,332

Source: Unweighted census microdata via IPUMS
Comparison categories in parentheses. Some categories of metro status and race excluded for clarity. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** P<.001

Appendix Table 4B: Predictors of Making Normal Progress Through Primary School, for Own Children,
Family Types Compared to Heterosexual Married Couples,
Selected Coefficients Unweighted data with Robust SE (Exactly the same as Table 4)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family type (Heterosexual Married)					
Heterosexual Cohabit	-.369***	-.160***	-.097***	-.110***	-.131***
Gay Male Cohabit	**-.407*** **	**-.223**	**-.195**	**-.212**	**-.230**
Lesbian Cohabit	**-.320** **	**-.200***	**-.164**	**-.177**	**-.182**
Sep, Div, Widowed men	-.569***	-.491***	-.458***	-.429***	-.428***
Sep, Div, Widowed women	-.475***	-.372***	-.294***	-.280***	-.276***
Never Married Men	-.450***	-.185*	-.083	-.117	-.161
Never Married Women	-.497***	-.218***	-.025	-.061*	-.075**
Ln of household Income		.035***	.024***	.020***	.014***
Householder's education (<HS)					
HS degree		.482***	.487***	.486***	.485***
Some College		.832***	.840***	.807***	.774***
College degree+		1.195***	1.183***	1.102***	1.074***
Student US born			.632***	.617***	.631***
Student gender- Female			.295***	.295***	.294***
Student Disabilities					
difficulty with memory			-.829***	-.819***	-.812***
physical disability			-.377***	-.363***	-.363***
hearing or vision disability			-.395***	-.386***	-.373***
Personal care limitation			-.101*	-.136**	-.144***
Student Race (NH white)					
NH Black			-.327***	-.373***	-.267***
Hispanic			.226***	.141***	-.012
Asian			.314***	.224***	.032
Metropolitan Status (rural)					
City				.297***	.178***
Suburbs				.402***	.274***
Grade attending- 5th-8th Grade				-.316***	-.319***
School Type- Private School				.100***	.115***
State Dummy Variables					Yes
Constant	4.032***	3.039***	2.481***	2.298***	2.388***
Unweighted N	1,397,235	1,397,235	1,397,235	1,397,188	1,397,188
df	7	11	22	28	78
Log Likelihood	-137,496	-135,020	-133,002	-132,361	-131,332

Source: Unweighted census microdata via IPUMS
Comparison categories in parentheses. Some categories of metro status and race excluded for clarity. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** P<.001

Appendix Table 5A: Similarities In Normal Progress Through School,
Among Children of Less Traditional Family Types, Compare to Table 4 with full set of coefficients

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
1) For the Full dataset, including dual marital status recodes					
Compared to Children of Lesbian Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	-.034	.064	.088	.086	.066
Separated, Divorced, Widowed women	-.144	-.153	-.111	-.085	-.083
Never Married Women	-.177*	-.010	.141	.120	.102
Compared to Children of Gay Male Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	.130	.155	.181	.184	.181
Separated, Divorced, Widowed men	-.046	-.159	-.163	-.118	-.101
Never Married Men	.095	.180	.243	.228	.199
2) With Dual Marital Status Recodes and Their Children Excluded					
Compared to Children of Lesbian Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	.104	.179	.120	.135	.134
Separated, Divorced, Widowed women	-.014	-.041	-.083	-.040	-.018
Never Married Women	-.047	.102	.170	.166	.167
Compared to Children of Gay Male Parents					
Heterosexual Cohabit	.551*	.500*	.437	.460*	.465*
Separated, Divorced, Widowed men	.369	.183	.089	.154	.178
Never Married Men	.509*	.522*	.496*	.500*	.478

Source: Weighted census microdata via IPUMS
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001