

Child Well-Being in Same-Sex Parent Families: Review of Research Prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus Brief

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Received: 21 August 2013 / Accepted: 11 April 2014 / Published online: 11 May 2014
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Abstract Recent legal cases before the Supreme Court of the United States were challenging federal definitions of marriage created by the Defense of Marriage Act and California's voter approved Proposition 8 which limited marriage to different-sex couples only. Social science literature regarding child well-being was being used within these cases, and the American Sociological Association sought to provide a concise evaluation of the literature through an amicus curiae brief. The authors were tasked in the assistance of this legal brief by reviewing literature regarding the well-being of children raised within same-sex parent families. This article includes our assessment of the literature, focusing on those studies, reviews and books published within the past decade. We conclude that there is a clear consensus in the social science literature indicating that American children living within same-sex parent households fare just, as well as those children residing within different-sex parent households over a wide array of well-being measures: academic performance, cognitive development, social development, psychological health, early sexual activity, and substance abuse. Our assessment of the literature is based on credible and methodologically sound studies that compare well-being outcomes of children residing within same-sex and different-sex parent families. Differences that exist in child well-being are largely due to socioeconomic circumstances and family stability. We discuss challenges and opportunities for new research on the well-being of children in same-sex parent families.

Keywords Gay · Lesbian · Review of literature · Children · Same-sex parents · Legal brief

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The American Sociological Association (ASA) filed an *amicus curiae* brief to the Supreme Court outlining social science research findings on the well-being of children in same-sex parent families on February 28, 2013 (Brief for the American Sociological Association 2013). Sociological research was used in a number of cases reaching the Supreme Court, challenging the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and Proposition 8 in California (Prop 8). A talented legal team led by Carmine Boccuzzi at Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen and Hamilton LLP prepared arguments, wrote the final brief, and submitted the brief to the Supreme Court. The ASA has a tradition of contributing the consensus on social science research findings to the legal system.

Below we provide our assessment of the literature that was used to assist in the preparation of the amicus brief. The ASA Council requested a balanced review of the current social science literature on the effects of same-sex parenting on child well-being. The aim of this review was to note that the strengths and weaknesses of prior research and offer a scientific assessment of what can and cannot be concluded from the evidence. The review we present here developed through work with the legal team and has been reorganized and modified for journal publication. Since the filing of the *amicus curiae* brief, there have been a few new studies which are discussed in the “update” section at the end of the document. The ASA continues to submit amicus briefs in state and circuit court cases.

Summary

To date, the consensus in the social science literature is clear: in the United States, children living with two same-sex parents fare, as well as children residing with two different-sex parents. Numerous credible and methodologically sound social science studies, including many drawing on nationally representative data, form the basis of this consensus. These studies reveal that children raised in same-sex parent families fare just, as well as children raised in different-sex parent families across a wide spectrum of child well-being measures: academic performance, cognitive development, social development, psychological health, early sexual activity, and substance abuse.

Review

This assessment of the literature is based on the social science research on child well-being in same-sex parent families over the last decade (published work since 2002). This time restriction focuses on children’s most recent family experiences. The review is limited to studies based on U.S. respondents and includes over 40 published original studies in reports, book chapters, and journal articles. There have been many recent reviews of the literature (e.g., Biblarz and Stacey 2010a, b; Biblarz and Savci 2010; Bos et al. 2005; Marks 2012; Meezan and Rauch 2005), but few have been recent enough to include all of the latest literature. Taken together, the studies included in this review represent a collection of extensive research and

indicate that children under the age of 18 raised by same-sex parents fare, as well as their counterparts in different-sex families. The gold standard for much research on American families is the use of nationally representative data (Russell and Muraco 2013). Yet, as discussed below there are many valid reasons why nationally representative data may not be available to study same-sex parent families. We discuss the handful of recent studies reporting that children fare worse on any measure of child well-being (Allen et al. 2013; Goldberg et al. 2011; Gartrell et al. 2011; Regnerus 2012a, b), and each has shortcomings making broad generalizations impossible.

Data Sources

Table 1 provides a list of the studies used in the review of the literature (as well as the update), and are organized alphabetically. We denote whether the studies are based on nationally representative data or convenience samples; the number of children in same-sex parent families; the age range of children; and type of same-sex parent family. The four nationally representative data sets include the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), New Family Structures Study (NFSS), and U.S. Census data. Each data source reflects family experiences across a unique time period. For example, the ECLS-K is a cohort designed to represent the experiences of children who were in kindergarten and first grade in 1999 and 2000 and mid-adolescents in 2010. The Add Health references the experiences of teenagers (12–18) during the mid-1990s. The Census presents the living circumstances of school-age children in 2000. The NFSS is not specific to an age group or time frame, and it is challenging to assess a broad spectrum of ages and time periods. New data collections that reflect the current social, legal, and political environments are merited.

Convenience or snowball samples are more common in the literature, and the most widely used data source is the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS). The NLLFS is based on interviews with donor-inseminated lesbian mothers five times from insemination or pregnancy to the child's 17th birthday (e.g., Gartrell and Bos 2010; Goldberg et al. 2011; van Gelderen et al. 2012a) and since 2002, 15 studies used these data. This recruitment strategy is considered acceptable given that few national surveys are large enough to include many children raised by same-sex parents. Relying on convenience samples means that the same-sex parents within these studies are not representative of all same-sex parents and represent only those who were targeted and agreed to participate, perhaps selective of the most highly functioning families. Yet, this approach does provide key insights into a group that is challenging to capture in large-scale surveys. At times, the findings from this sample are contrasted to results from a national sample of adolescents in the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) (Gartrell et al. 2012).

As shown in Table 1, the studies focusing on child well-being are based on a wide range of sample sizes. The sample sizes of same-sex parent families range from 14 (Welsh 2011) to 3,502 (Rosenfeld 2010) with studies including a median of 78 respondents and seven consisting of more than 100 children from same-sex

Table 1 Description of studies on child well-being in same-sex parent families and data used

Author(s)	Data set(s) used	Same-sex sample size	Age of children	Family type
Allen et al. (2013)	U.S. Public-use microdata sample of the decennial census ^a	8,632 ^d	6–14	†
Averett et al. (2009)	Florida adoption project ^b	155 ^e	1.5–18	‡
Bos and Gartrell (2010)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Bos and Gartrell (2011)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Bos et al. (2008)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	76 ^e	10	†
Bos et al. (2008)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	152 ^e	10–11	†
	Parenting in planned lesbian families ^b			
Bos et al. (2012)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Ertch et al. (2005)	Network of gay and lesbian adoptive parents ^b	68 ^e	0–10+	‡
Farr et al. (2010)	Mid-Atlantic adoptive families sample ^b	56 ^d	1–6	‡
Farr and Patterson (2009)	Mid-Atlantic adoptive families sample ^b	56 ^d	1–6	‡
Farr and Patterson (2013)	Adoptive families sample ^b	54 ^d	1–6	‡
Fedewa and Clark (2009)	Early childhood longitudinal study kindergarten (ECLS-K) ^a	35 ^d	6–8	‡
Fulcher et al. (2002)	Contemporary families study ^b	55 ^e	~7	†
Fulcher et al. (2006)	Contemporary families study ^b	55 ^e	~7	†
Fulcher et al. (2008)	Families sample in the Mid-Atlantic United States ^b	33 ^e	4–6	†
Gartrell and Bos (2010)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
	Achenbach's normative sample of American youth ^a			
Gartrell et al. (2011a)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Gartrell et al. (2012)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
	2002 U.S. National Survey of Family Growth ^a			

Table 1 continued

Author(s)	Data set(s) used	Same-sex sample size	Age of children	Family type
Gartrell et al. (2011b)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	40 ^e	16–18	†
Gartrell et al. (2012)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Gartrell et al. (2005)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	74 ^e	~10	†
Goldberg (2007a)	Semi-structured children of LGB parents sample ^b	42 ^e	19–50	‡
Goldberg (2007b)	Semi-structured children of LGB parents sample ^b	46 ^e	19–50	‡
Goldberg et al. (2011)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Goldberg et al. (2012)	2002 U.S. National Survey of Family Growth ^a			
Goldberg et al. (2013)	Couples experiencing the transition to adoptive parenthood ^b	78 ^d	2–4	‡
Goldberg and Smith (2013)	Adoptive parents sample ^b	30 ^d	0–12	‡
Joos and Broad (2007)	Longitudinal study of the transition to adoptive parenthood ^b	75 ^d	0–12	‡
Kosciw and Diaz (2008)	Sample from COLAGE ^b	26 ^e	18–49	‡
	National sample of LGB parents ^b	588 ^d	5–18	‡
	Sample of secondary school students with LGBT parent ^b	154 ^e	13–20	‡
Lavner et al. (2012)	UCLA TIES for adoption ^b	22 ^d	0–8	‡
Leung et al. (2005)	Three samples of adoptive parents ^b	47 ^d	4–18	‡
Lick et al. (2013)	Adult children of LGB parents ^b	91 ^e	18–61	‡
Patterson and Wainright (2012)	National longitudinal study of adolescent health ^a	44 ^e	12–18	†
Potter (2012)	Early childhood longitudinal study kindergarten (ECLS-K) ^a	158 ^d	5–10	‡
Regnerus (2012a)	New family structures study ^a	248 ^e	18–39	‡
Regnerus (2012b)	New family structures study ^a	236 ^e	18–39	‡
Rosenfeld (2010)	U.S. Public-use microdata sample of the decennial census ^a	3,502 ^e	6–14	‡
Rosenfeld (2013)	U.S. Public-use microdata sample of the decennial census ^a	3,174 ^e	6–14	‡
Ryan (2007)	Multimedia adoptive parents ^b	94 ^d	5–9	‡
Sutfin et al. (2008)	Atlantic Coast families study ^b	57 ^e	4–6	†

Table 1 continued

Author(s)	Data set(s) used	Same-sex sample size	Age of children	Family type
Tan and Baggerly (2009)	Families with children from China and Raising China children ^b	31 ^c	1–11	†
van Gelderen et al. (2012a)	National lesbian longitudinal family study ^b Adolescents in Washington State ^c	78 ^e	16–18	†
van Gelderen et al. (2012b)	National lesbian longitudinal →nal family study ^b	78 ^e	16–18	†
Wainright and Patterson (2006)	National longitudinal study of adolescent health ^a	44 ^e	12–18	†
Wainright and Patterson (2008)	National longitudinal study of adolescent health ^a	44 ^e	12–18	†
Wainright et al. (2004)	National longitudinal study of adolescent health ^a	44 ^e	12–18	†
Welsh (2011)	Qualitative study of children of gay and lesbian parents ^b	14 ^e	13–18	‡

^a Nationally representative sample

^b Convenience or snowball sample

^c Representative sample

^d Number of same-sex couples

^e Number of children within same-sex parent families

‡ Studies that examine lesbian mother, gay father, and other family types

† Studies that examine only lesbian mother families

parent families. The range of sample sizes often rests on the methodological approach. Small sample sizes in quantitative surveys can be problematic because they may prevent distinguishing between key sources of variation that differentiate same-sex parent families, such as gender of parent, biological relationship of children to parents, and the time a child has spent in a particular family. Another issue with small sample sizes is statistical inferences may be challenging or harder to detect and may be biased. These issues are recognized by authors, and they at times speak to the range of effect sizes that are detectable with their approach. At the same time, smaller sample sizes in qualitative or observational data, as well as targeted surveys provide an in-depth assessment of specific family experiences that are unavailable in large-scale surveys.

The majority of these studies are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Longitudinal data collections permit temporal alignment of family experiences and child outcome indicators. An advantage of longitudinal data is that causal inferences regarding how family circumstances shape child well-being can be established. However, longitudinal studies may suffer from issues of attrition and typically reference a specific cohort of respondents. A cross-sectional approach provides a snapshot lens on families and may include retrospective reports of children's living arrangements provided by parents or child respondents. Most cross-sectional work relies on measurement of current family structure and current indicators of well-being (e.g., Averett, Nalavany and Ryan 2009; Erich et al. 2005; Farr et al. 2010; Rosenfeld 2010), and a few studies retrospectively determine family structure and well-being based on recall of childhood experiences (e.g., Goldberg 2007a; Joos and Broad 2007; Regnerus 2012b). Two key exceptions are analyses using the ECLS-K and the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Survey (NLLFS) which are both longitudinal panel surveys. As shown in Table 1 a wide variety of data collection strategies has been employed to study child well-being in same-sex parent families.

Academic Performance and Cognitive Development

The academic performance of children raised by same-sex parents is similar to that of children raised by different-sex parents. Most of the nationally representative studies have examined educational outcomes, such as grade retention, math and reading scores, academic achievement, grade point average, trouble in school, educational attainment, and school connectedness. Rosenfeld (2010) relies on Census data to focus on grade retention among children living in stable same-sex and different-sex families. He finds that overall grade retention of children is highest in different-sex married parent families and lower among same-sex couples, separated or divorced parents, cohabiting parents, or never-married parents. Yet, the differences are due to parental socioeconomic status and not due to relationship type.¹ Allen et al. (2013) report similar findings when comparing children of residentially stable same-sex parents with children of stable different-sex married parents. Research regarding grade retention utilizing Census data must limit their

¹ Rosenfeld (2010) further reports similar findings are observed when drawing similar sized samples of different-sex couples as well as employing propensity score matching.

analyses to residentially stable families because retrospective family histories are not collected, making it impossible to assess family composition when the child was held back in school. Thus, the Allen et al. (2013) findings which show family type distinctions in grade retention among children in residentially unstable families are not conclusive.

Fedewa and Clark (2009) use the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) and report no significant differences in terms of academic achievement for first grade children based on family living arrangements in kindergarten. Additionally, assessments of math and reading achievement scores in the ECLS-K data are similar among children (through 8th grade) in same-sex parent families and divorced, stepparent, single parent, cohabiting, and widowed families (Potter 2012). Children who experienced same-sex parent families initially score lower in reading and math scores than children from two biological married families. However, accounting for sociodemographic indicators explains the reading gap in same-sex and different-sex married parent families, and the association between family structure and math achievement is no longer statistically significant with the inclusion of number of family transitions (Potter 2012).

A similar set of results is observed among older children. Among adolescents in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wainright et al. (2004) find similar patterns of GPA scores and troubles in school among those living in female, same-sex couple and different-sex couple families. The scores of school connectedness or social integration are initially significantly greater in female same-sex couple families, but again this difference is explained by the parental socioeconomic status.

Additionally, research based on small scale samples indicates similar cognitive development (Lavner, Waterman and Peplau 2012) among children raised in same-sex and different-sex families. Evidence from the series of Gartrell and colleagues papers using the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS) indicates similar educational outcomes among children who lived with same-sex lesbian parents compared with an age-matched representative sample of children (Gartrell and Bos 2010; Gartrell et al. 2005, 2011, 2012, 2012). A larger scale purposive sample of parents and children from same-sex parents (Kosciw and Diaz 2008) indicates that gay and lesbian parents and children score at least as well on numerous indicators of educational achievement and involvement as parents and children reported in national studies.

Social Development

The social development of children raised by same-sex parents is similar to that of children raised by different-sex parents. Fedewa and Clark (2012) rely on the ECLS-K data and report no significant differences in first grade social adjustment based on whether they were living with different-sex or same-sex parents in kindergarten. Evidence about adolescent social well-being rests on the Wainright and colleagues studies using Add Health data and Gartrell and colleagues work using the NLLFS. Wainwright and Patterson (2008) find that the number, support, and quality of peer relationships are similar for teens living in female, same-sex couple families, and

those living with different-sex parents. The one family type distinction found in female friend support was no longer statistically significant with the inclusion of sociodemographic indicators. Research based on the NLLFS indicates that adolescents of same-sex parents experienced fewer social problems than a nationally representative age-matched sample of American youths (Gartrell and Bos 2010).

Psychological Well-Being

In terms of psychological well-being, findings from nationally representative data indicate that adolescents in female, same-sex and different-sex couple families report similar scores on depressive symptoms and self-esteem (Wainright et al. 2004). The presence of higher levels of anxiety found among children in female, same-sex couples no longer exist once parental sociodemographic indicators were accounted for (Wainright et al. 2004). The NLLFS shows that child scores on ADD/ADHD, anxiety, and depression were similar to the levels reported among similar aged teenagers (Gartrell and Bos 2010; Gartrell et al. 2012). Further contrasts between the NLLFS respondents and a matched sample with heterosexual parents indicate similar scores on positive aspects of psychological adjustment (van Gelderen et al. 2012b). Other research utilizing smaller convenience samples replicated the above findings using the different versions of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Behavioral Emotional Rating Scale (BERS). Across these studies, children's scores on measures of internalizing behavioral adjustments did not differ by family type (Erich et al. 2005; Farr et al. 2010; Farr and Patterson 2009; Fulcher et al. 2006; Lavner et al. 2012; Leung et al. 2005; Ryan 2007; Tan and Baggerly 2009).

Sexual Activity

Based on evidence from nationally representative data, similar proportions of teenagers from female, same-sex couple and different-sex couple families have had a romantic relationship and sexual intercourse (Patterson and Wainright 2012). In fact, sexual behaviors reported by 17 year olds in the NLLFS indicate that their age at first sex was older than those in a gender and age-matched national sample (National Sample of Family Growth or NSFG) (Gartrell et al. 2012). The odds of having a STI or getting pregnant/getting someone pregnant were statistically similar among adolescents in the NLLFS and national samples (Gartrell et al. 2012). Yet, at the bivariate level (no controls for socioeconomic status) contraceptive use is lower in same-sex parent families than reported by adolescents in the NSFG (Gartrell et al. 2011). In addition, none of the respondents in the NLLFS experienced physical or sexual abuse by a parent or caregiver (Gartrell et al. 2011). While the Regnerus (2012a, b) studies include a measure of any childhood sexual victimization, there is no way to link this experience to the time spent in any particular family structure. In fact, Regnerus (2012b), states "As noted in the original study text, the NFSS data is insufficiently capable of discerning much information about the context surrounding

respondents' sexual victimization. No simplistic conclusions about it ought to be discerned from the analyses." (p. 1376).

Problem Behaviors

Wainright and Patterson (2006) find that in a nationally representative sample, adolescents living with female, same-sex parents fare similarly to their counterparts raised in different-sex parent families in terms of frequency of substance use (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana), problems with substance use, and delinquent behavior. Drawing on the NLLFS, Goldberg et al. (2011) reports that at the bivariate level, adolescents from same-sex parent families have higher levels of occasional substance use, but similar levels of heavy substance use compared with children in the Monitoring the Future Data set. Furthermore, the NLLFS respondents report similar levels of problem behaviors, rule-breaking behavior, and aggressive behavior as age-matched respondents from the National Study of Family Growth (NSFG) (Gartrell and Bos 2010). Additional convenience samples indicate related findings; children in same-sex and different-sex parent families performed similarly on various externalizing behavioral indicators of child development contained in the CBCL (Erich et al. 2005; Farr et al. 2010; Farr and Patterson 2009; Fulcher et al. 2006; Lavner et al. 2012; Leung et al. 2005; Tan and Baggerly 2009) and Behavioral Emotional Rating Scale (Ryan 2007).

Differentials in Child Well-Being in Same-Sex and Different-Sex Parent Families

Even though a handful of studies does indicate that children fare worse on a few measures of child well-being (Allen et al. 2013; Goldberg et al. 2011; Gartrell et al. 2011; Regnerus 2012a, b), the majority of literature finds no differences between those raised in same-sex and different-sex parent families. Research conducted by Regnerus (2012a, b) stands apart because it has been widely brought forth as evidence that children in same-sex parent families do not fare, as well as children in different-sex families. This is surprising because Regnerus (2012a) himself states that the New Family Structures Study (NFSS)—“is poised to address [questions] about the lives of young adults between the ages of 18 and 39, but not about children or adolescents.” (p. 755).

Rosenfeld (2010) and Allen et al. (2013) both report that children in residentially stable families with same-sex and different-sex parents have similar grade progression in school. By introducing residentially unstable households into analyses, Allen et al. (2013) find differentials in school retention for children in same-sex and different-sex parent families. This approach generates substantial bias because the living arrangements of when the child was held back in school cannot be established. As noted by Rosenfeld (2013), children come into same-sex parent families from a variety of situations, including orphanages, foster families, and divorced or separated heterosexual families. Thus, children living with same-sex couple parents may start out with educational disadvantages that accrued before they came to be raised by same-sex couples.

Goldberg et al. (2011) report that children from same-sex parent families have higher levels of occasional substance use, but similar levels of heavy substance use than children in the Monitoring the Future data. The Gartrell et al. (2011) study finds lower levels of having ever used contraception among children in same-sex parent families than the results based on nationally representative data (NSFG). However, both of these studies do not account for socioeconomic circumstances, which may explain the family type differences.

Although the data used for the research performed by Regnerus (2012a, b) are based on nationally representative data, the results from these studies are suspect. The data possess critical flaws in the basic measurement of family structure and assessments of child outcomes. As quoted above Regnerus (2012a) himself claims these data are not to be used to assess the well-being of children or adolescents.

The most fundamental shortcoming of this study is that it does not examine children of parents raised in same-sex parent families. The measurement of family structure in the Regnerus studies does not follow traditional conventions used in the literature on family structure and child well-being. Unlike any other study, the same-sex family indicator is based on adult children's recollection of their parents' sexual experiences and orientation with questions regarding the gender composition of parental romantic relationships (Regnerus 2012a).² This strategy presumes that adult children have accurate recall and knowledge of their parent's sexual partnerships and to our knowledge has not been used in prior work on family structure and child well-being.

Second, even though most research on family structure is typically based on the child's residence, the initial study (Regnerus 2012a) did not measure whether the respondent had lived with the parent who at some point had a same-sex sexual partner. Thus, adults were categorized as being raised by a same-sex parent regardless of whether they had ever lived with this parent and his or her romantic partner. Responding to this shortcoming, Regnerus, in the follow-up paper (Regnerus 2012b), included a family category based on whether the respondent had spent time living with a mother who had a same-sex sexual partner. There were 85 respondents in this category of adults who had spent some of their childhood with their mother and her same-sex partner.

However, the core contrast group was children raised by completely stable (intact at time of interview for 18–39 year olds) different-sex parent families. In other words, he removed all divorced, single, and stepparent families from the different-sex groups, leaving only stable, different-sex parent families as the comparison group. This is an unusual strategy because it requires family stability even beyond childhood. While the data are available, this work does not account for the duration of time spent in same-sex mother families or any other type of family. Typically, stability would be a factor in the analytic models which most likely would explain

² Regnerus (2012a): "From when you were born until age 18 (or until you left home to be on your own), did either of your parents ever have a romantic relationship with someone of the same sex?" Response choices were "Yes, my mother had a romantic relationship with another woman," "Yes, my father had a romantic relationship with another man," or "no." (Respondents were also able to select both of the first two choices.) If they selected either of the first two, they were asked about whether they had ever lived with that parent while they were in a same-sex romantic relationship."

much of the observed differences between these conceptualized family types. Indeed, only 2 of the 85 children who Regnerus categorized as living within a same-sex parent family spent their entire childhood in a same-sex parent family, and none of the parents were legally permitted to marry when the child was born. Thus, the analyses are comparing quite different experiences: adult children who reported living their *entire* childhood and adulthood while living at home in stable, married, different-sex, two parent families to adult children who spent some portion of their childhood living in unstable, unmarried, same-sex, and two parent families.

Third, the Regnerus studies include retrospective indicators of childhood experiences that do not account for when these experiences occurred or if they lived with their parent's same-sex partner at the time. The recorded experiences included one behavioral retrospective indicator of well-being during childhood, sexual contact by an adult, and two indicators of perceptions (family safety or security and negative impact of the family). This use of retrospective measures reporting perceptions is not typically used in social science research on child well-being. In this case, asking about prior behavioral outcomes or childhood perceptions makes it impossible to determine whether these outcomes occurred during the time they lived with their mother's same-sex partner or during another childhood family experience. Given that Regnerus (2012b) reports that very few of the respondents lived in with their mother and her same-sex partner from birth to age 18, most of the respondents who lived with their mother and her same-sex partner are referencing experiences that occurred outside of the same-sex parent family experience. Thus, these data cannot be used to determine whether these occurred, while living in a same-sex parent family. Further, the range of recall is potentially long with a 20 year time window for 35 year olds reflecting on his or her mid-adolescent family experiences and a 10 year time window for 25 year olds.

While this study has been put forth to weigh in on the well-being of children today in the United States, it does not reflect the contemporary experiences of children. The wide age range of the NFSS makes it challenging to generalize to any age group or time period. For example, the NFSS reflects the experiences of five year olds from roughly 1976 to 1998 or the experiences of 16 year olds from 1998 to 2009. As a result, this study does not reflect the current social, legal, or political environment.

Taken together, the studies conducted by Regnerus do not provide empirical evidence regarding the effects of being raised in a same-sex parent family and their influences on child well-being. Assessments of child well-being in same-sex parent families cannot be made using these data because of the flawed measurement of core family measures as well as outcome indicators. Regnerus (2012a) himself confirms this statement and clearly states that "I am thus not suggesting that growing up with a lesbian mother or gay father causes suboptimal outcomes because of the sexual orientation or sexual behavior of the parent." (p. 766).

Next Steps in the Study of Same-Sex Parent Families

The field of research on child well-being in same-sex and different-sex parent families is expanding with significant advances. There are exciting avenues to be addressed in future research that we have identified and have been discussed in other

reviews of the field. Even though there are new directions of research to pursue, there remains a clear consensus in the literature on child well-being.

Identifying same-sex parent families presents several challenges (Gates Gates and Newport 2012; National Center for Family & Marriage Research 2011). Most large-scale, nationally representative surveys often do not include questions regarding a parent's sexual orientation identity, attraction, and behavior, but rely on the gender composition of household members (IOM 2011). For example, assessments of trends in same-sex parent families often rest on analyses of Census data that permit identification of same-sex parents who are living in couple households. In other words, the child is living with two parents who are of the same sex and report living with an "unmarried partner" or spouse. While the strategy of relying on household rosters moves forward our understanding of patterns and trends on a large scale in Census data, it leaves out children currently being raised by single lesbian or gay parents. In other words, current counts of same-sex parent families which rely on couple-based indicators exclude parents who identify themselves as gay or lesbian who are single. Further, the gender composition of the household focuses on children under age, the age of 18 who are living with their parents at the time of interview and exclude parents of older children or those who are nonresidential. In addition, there is variability in awareness of their parents' sexual orientation which may be consequential in assessments of same-sex parent family life and child well-being (Goldberg 2007b).

Our understanding of same-sex parent families rests largely on the experiences in lesbian mother families. Much of the research on child outcomes in same-sex parent families focuses on lesbian mother families compared to gay father families (exceptions, Patterson and Tornello 2010; Tornello et al. 2011). Specific assessments about the family life of bisexual parents are typically ignored in the literature (exceptions, Kosciw and Diaz 2008; Goldberg 2007a, b; Joos and Broad 2007).

An issue plaguing all research on family structure and child well-being is the selection of the comparison group. Much prior work compares child well-being in intact, two biological, married parent families versus other family experiences. Yet, fewer than half of the children in the United States will experience a stable, two biological, married parent family (Kreider and Ellis 2011). This contrast is particularly problematic among same-sex parents who until recently did not have the option to legally marry. As same-sex parents have new opportunities to enter marital unions, it will be important to consider parental marital status. In fact, two same-sex parents may be more akin to two different-sex parents cohabiting than married families. Indeed, perhaps the appropriate contrast family type should be two parent different-sex biological parent families or two parent different-sex stepparent families. Because same-sex parent families can at the most have one biological parent, comparisons to step families may be most prudent. Further, contrasts between adopted children of same-sex and different-sex parent families may provide insights by accounting for the adoption status of the child.

Typically research on family structure accounts for family resources and stability; and prior literature regarding children in different-sex parent families indicates that parental union status and stability are associated with child well-being (Brown 2010). Stable same-sex parent families may confer more benefits for child

well-being than unstable same-sex parent families. It is important for research on child well-being to account for the duration or stability of family life. Developmental perspectives suggest that a child's age when family change is experienced is associated with child well-being. New studies of same-sex parent families should acknowledge the timing of same-sex family formation or dissolution. Further, differences in child well-being according to family type that may be initially observed are typically explained with the inclusion of sociodemographic indicators. Parental resources are critical to child development and are important to include in studies of child well-being. Thus, careful attention to socioeconomic characteristics is important in future research.

Finally, there are a variety of pathways to parenthood for same-sex parent families including the following: traditional biological parenthood, reproductive technologies, adoption, and foster care, as well as parenting partner's children (Biblarz and Savci 2010; Gates 2011). Appearing to have implications for a child's socioeconomic advantage, the pathways to parenthood may influence child well-being (Chan et al. 1998; Gates 2011). Those children with experience in the foster care system and who are adopted may come to same-sex parent families with more disadvantaged backgrounds than children living in other types of families. Acknowledging these diverse pathways to parenthood is a key avenue for future work on child well-being.

Update

Since the preparation of the amicus curiae brief for the ASA, there have been several newly published U.S. based child well-being studies (Farr and Patterson 2013; Goldberg and Smith 2013) and reviews (Baumle 2013; Biblarz et al. 2014; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Perrin et al. 2013) as well a new article showcasing the characteristics of lesbian mothers (Brewster et al. forthcoming). Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer (2013) provide a thoughtful and comprehensive review of the sociological literature on LGBT sexuality, families and its intersection with race and ethnicity. Their review of the evidence accords with our assessment of the field. Further, Perrin et al. (2013) provide a detailed critique to the Regnerus studies. The Biblarz et al. (2014) review provides an insightful perspective and accords well with our assessment of the literature. They point out that comparisons of different-sex and same-sex parent families are challenging because same-sex parent families do not uniformly benefit from the same legal and societal protections as different-sex parent families. In addition, Biblarz et al. (2014) articulate issues of selection based in part on which same-sex couples can become parents. A new empirical paper by Brewster and colleagues document the many dimensions and pathways to motherhood that lesbian mothers take using national representative data (NSFG). These pathways to motherhood may have implications for the well-being of children in same-sex parent families. Compton (2013) reports on the successes and challenges in the application of demographic data to measure and study same-sex parent families. Additional chapters in the Baumle (2013) edited volume, *International Handbook on the Demography of Sexuality*, provide excellent analysis

of a range of topics including measurement of same-sex couples, same-sex identity, as well as stability of same-sex couples. In terms of new research on child well-being, Goldberg and Smith (2013) examine 120 families who have adopted children younger than 18 months old. Utilizing longitudinal data they report that adopted children fare as well in terms of externalizing and internalizing behaviors across male same-sex, female same-sex, and different-sex families. The Farr and Patterson (2013) study focuses on parenting processes and the relationship with child well-being in adopted male same-sex, female same-sex, and different-sex families. The authors conclude that parenting processes may differ across family types, but key factors, such as co-parenting, operate in a similar fashion according to family type.

Conclusion

This review outlines the findings and critiques of the literature on child well-being in same-sex parent families. The literature includes many studies, over forty in the last ten years, employing a wide spectrum of approaches. No singular research strategy represents a perfect assessment of child outcomes of same-sex parent families, with each study possessing several strengths and weaknesses. To date the consensus in the recent social science literature is clear: children living with two same-sex parents fare just as well as children residing with two different-sex parents. All researches on American families are recognizing an evolving range of childhood family experiences. The authors of studies and reviews on same-sex parent families agree that this is an important family context within the American landscape and further research on the well-being of children who live with same-sex parents is warranted. We need to continue to pursue multiple methodological strategies to best understand child well-being. One promising strategy is for new data collections to include over samples of LBGt respondents to ensure large samples of children raised in same-sex parent families. It is important that data collections keep pace with the full range of experiences of children in American families.

Acknowledgments This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R24HD050959). Additional support was provided by the American Sociological Association.

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