

4 Lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings

Discrepancies in income and education in three US samples

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In his recent book *The Pecking Order: Which Siblings Succeed and Why*, Conley (2004) examines how siblings can start out on an equal footing in their family yet grow up to differ widely in income, occupational status, and education. We too have been interested in siblings, and our focus has been on the ways in which lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGBs) compare with heterosexuals. Whereas most Jewish people have Jewish siblings and most Asian Americans have siblings who are also Asian American, what is intriguing about LGBs is that they often have siblings who are heterosexual. True, some LGBs are only children or have siblings who are all lesbian, gay, or bisexual as well, but it is easy to find plenty of LGBs with heterosexual siblings. This provides a naturally-occurring comparison within families.

Most people are the same general age as their siblings, and also the same race and ethnicity. They were raised in the same religious tradition. Despite the increasing divorce rate and concomitant "blended families," most siblings grew up in the same household and attended the same schools, at least for a while. The parent(s) or other adults who took care of them had a particular income, educational level, and occupation, so that siblings, especially if close in age, came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. But now, in adulthood, one of those siblings identifies as LGB and one as heterosexual. How did this come about? What other factors are different (or similar) among siblings who differ in sexual orientation? Our focus for the present volume will be on income, educational level, and, where possible, occupational status (for a review of other variables, see Rothblum *et al.*, 2005). This is an innovative and useful methodology. To our knowledge, only Dibble and her colleagues (Dibble *et al.*, in press) have used the sibling method for studying LGB discrimination; in their case to examine differences between lesbians and their heterosexual sisters on breast cancer. Some researchers have used identical twins to study familial aggregation of sexual orientation (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 2000), but the prevalence of identical twins in the general population is so low that this method has some serious drawbacks.

Who are "comparable heterosexuals"?

The sibling methodology is also useful for solving a dilemma in LGB research: that of which heterosexuals to use for comparison purposes. When researchers survey LGBs via convenience samples (e.g. participants at a gay pride march, subscribers to a bisexual magazine, members of a lesbian organization), they can find hundreds of LGB participants but few heterosexuals via the same sources. If the researchers then compare results of LGB studies to published norms about heterosexuals (such as US Census data or large national surveys), the two samples often differ demographically. Specifically, participants in LGB convenience studies tend to have high levels of education, live in urban settings, earn incomes that are low relative to their educational level, and not belong to religious organizations (e.g. Bradford *et al.*, 1994; Morris and Rothblum, 1999). Because convenience studies are not representative, it is unknown whether LGB participants who had lower levels of education or who lived in rural areas, for example, were less likely to participate.

One way to obtain a demographic control group for LGBs is to conduct national probability studies and compare lesbians and bisexual women with heterosexual women, and gay and bisexual men with heterosexual men. This is becoming increasingly more feasible as some national health studies include an item or two on sexual orientation (usually on same-sex behavior, because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic). Despite the many strengths of such research, a major limitation is that very large sample sizes are necessary to find even tiny numbers of LGBs. For example, Laumann *et al.* (1994) interviewed 3,432 people and found only 24 women and 39 men to identify as "non-heterosexual." It is possible that the percentage of LGBs in the general public is extremely low. On the other hand, it is also possible that many LGBs are not willing to "out" themselves to anonymous telephone surveyors, so that the LGB respondents in national surveys are in fact quite non-representative. In contrast, convenience studies often find LGBs extremely willing to participate in research, especially if the research team is familiar to them.

Three studies incorporating siblings

Our first study was designed to focus only on lesbians and their heterosexual sisters. We knew that we wanted to include lesbians who were not "out" to their heterosexual sisters, so we made sure that the questionnaires did not state anywhere that ours was a study of sexual orientation. Among many demographic items and other subscales in the questionnaire were two items about sexual orientation (versus, for example, three about religion). Our main interest was the feasibility of the study – for instance, would enough heterosexual sisters participate?

This first study (see Rothblum and Factor, 1999) taught us a number of things. In many cases lesbians had multiple sisters and all of them wanted to participate. In hindsight, this had a major benefit: the response rate of the index participants (the original participants who contacted us) was much higher than

those of their sisters. But, with multiple sisters, we ended up with nearly identical numbers of lesbians (314) and heterosexual women (315). Furthermore, some of the respondents (133) were bisexual, so we could compare bisexual women with lesbians and heterosexual women. Finally, some index participants had sisters who were themselves lesbian or bisexual. This allowed us to examine possible selection bias – were bisexual women who were index participants different from bisexual women who were dragged into the study by their sisters? We did not find any differences between these two groups of women.

Our second study (see Rothblum *et al.*, 2004) recruited lesbians, gay men, and bisexual women and men, and their siblings (whether heterosexual or LGB). Once again, we wanted to include LGBs who were not “out” to their siblings, but we also wanted to survey LGBs about a number of issues specific to the coming out process. Consequently, we sent every participant a questionnaire printed on white paper, and sent LGB participants an additional questionnaire on lavender paper with items about the LGB experience. Based on the self-rating of sexual orientation, there were 348 heterosexual women, 125 bisexual women, 332 lesbians, 185 heterosexual men, 38 bisexual men, and 226 gay men in this study.

The third study took advantage of the recent same-sex civil union legislation in the US state of Vermont. We obtained copies of all civil union certificates from the first year of this legislation (July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2001) and wrote to all the couples. We also wanted to compare these civil union couples (two-thirds of whom were lesbians, ten percent people of color, and 80 percent from outside Vermont) to same-sex couples in their friendship circle who had not had civil unions, and also with heterosexual married siblings and their spouse. The analyses we will report on here are only those of civil union couples and heterosexual married couples recruited from their siblings (that is, we will not be discussing results of same-sex couples not in civil unions). This sample consisted of 212 lesbians in civil unions, 219 married heterosexual women, 123 gay men in civil unions, and 193 married heterosexual men.

This study (see Solomon *et al.*, 2004) differed from our first two studies in several ways. First, we had access to a whole population (rare in LGB research, where many participants are closeted or unknown to the research team), even though we had limited funding and thus only sent questionnaires to a subset of this sample. Furthermore, the civil union certificates also contained some information (year of birth of both partners, their race and ethnicity, educational level, where they lived, and whether they had been married heterosexually), which allowed us to compare characteristics of our sample with the whole population. This study was limited to couples (whether lesbian, gay, or heterosexual). Unlike the first two studies, we included only lesbian and gay male couples in civil unions who were “out” to their heterosexual married siblings.

The results of these studies point out many significant differences among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings (see Rothblum *et al.*, 2005, for an overview). A few words of caution are in order. We compared participants separately by gender. Thus, heterosexual men were compared with gay men (and in Study 2 to a very small sample of bisexual men). Heterosexual women

were compared with lesbians and in Study 2 with bisexual women (Study 1 also included bisexual women in some analyses).

The present chapter will focus on data about educational level, income, and (where available) occupational status. We also mention factors that we think are related to or might explain differences in education and income (for a complete set of results from each study, see the original article or contact the first author). In all three studies, we used Bonferroni corrections (dividing the usual significance level of .05 by the number of analyses, as stipulated by the psychology journal reviewers) to control for the large number of statistical comparisons, even though we present only some of the results in this chapter.

Study 1: lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual sisters

Rothblum and Factor (1999) recruited women for a study of “how lesbians and their sisters are similar or different.” Using resources listed in the 1997 *Gayyellow Pages*, they placed ads about the study in US lesbian periodicals and sent flyers to US gay religious organizations, lesbian bars, women’s bookstores, LGB campus groups, and organizations listed as “ethnic/multicultural.” A total of 1,264 questionnaires were requested and 762 were returned, for a response rate of 60 percent. Some of the women who requested questionnaires identified as bisexual rather than lesbian on an item asking “what is your sexual orientation?” (where 0=exclusively heterosexual, 3–4=bisexual, and 7=exclusively lesbian), and some lesbians had multiple sisters, including some who were lesbian or bisexual. We conducted matched comparisons between lesbian probands and a heterosexual sister (in cases of multiple sisters, the sister closest to them in age).

There was no significant difference between sister pairs in age, but lesbians had significantly higher levels of education than their heterosexual sisters. Whereas heterosexual women on average had just below a college degree, lesbians averaged between a college degree and some graduate or professional education. Higher educational level is usually related to higher income. Yet, despite the higher educational level among lesbians, there were no significant differences between sister pairs on individual income, household income, or occupational status. These results are portrayed in Table 4.1. In addition, sister pairs did not differ on full-time versus part-time employment, although there was a significant difference on homemaker status (25 percent of heterosexual women versus 1.1 percent of lesbians). On other variables, heterosexual sisters were more traditional than lesbians. Heterosexual sisters were more likely to be married, have children, be a member of a formal religion, and live closer to their mother and father. Whereas lesbians had moved to their current location because of their own education, heterosexual women had moved because of their partner’s job.

In addition to the matched comparisons of sister pairs, we also looked at the full data set. This included all 762 participants, grouped by sexual orientation (and thus included bisexual respondents, all sisters if more than two sisters responded, and cases in which only one sister returned a questionnaire). In this second set of analyses, the age difference was not significant, but lesbians and bisexual women

Table 4.1 Study 1: demographic information of lesbian/heterosexual sister pairs

Variable	Lesbians (N=184)	Heterosexual women (N=184)
Age	39.0	38.0
Educational level ^{1**}	4.7	3.9
Occupational level ²	66.8	64.4
Individual income ³	3.6	3.2
Household income ³	4.7	5.0

Notes

* = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .0005$.

1 2=high school degree; 3=some college; 4=college degree; 5=some graduate/professional school; 6=graduate degree.

2 Range is from 10 (lowest status occupation) to 90 (highest status occupation).

3 2=\$20,000–\$29,000; 3=\$30,000–\$39,000; 4=\$40,000–\$49,000; 5=\$50,000 or more.

had significantly higher levels of education than heterosexual women. The three groups did not differ significantly on individual income, but heterosexual women had higher levels of family income.

Study 2: lesbians, gay men, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings

Rothblum *et al.* (2004) recruited lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals via US LGB periodicals, organizations listed in the 2001 *Gayyellow Pages* (including LGB religious organizations, bookstores, community organizations), LGB websites listed in the book *Gay and Lesbian Online* (Dawson, 1998), email listservs, and friends and colleagues. A total of 2,354 questionnaires were sent out, and 1,274 were returned (54.1 percent). Based on the self-rating of sexual orientation, there were 348 heterosexual women, 125 bisexual women, 332 lesbians, 185 heterosexual men, 38 bisexual men, and 226 gay men.

Comparing all women who self-identified as heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian, respectively, bisexual women were significantly younger. Lesbians and bisexual women had significantly higher educational levels (in between a college degree and some graduate or professional education) than heterosexual women (who had on average a college degree). Despite the educational differences, there were no significant differences in individual income or household income among the three groups of women. However, lesbians had occupations with significantly higher status than heterosexual women. These results, based on analyses of variance comparing the three groups of women, are portrayed in Table 4.2. In addition, lesbians were significantly more likely to be employed full-time than heterosexual or bisexual women, and heterosexual women were significantly more likely to be homemakers. Among participants who attended college, lesbians had attended a college that was at a significantly greater distance from home than heterosexual women. As in the previous study, heterosexual women were more traditional – they were more likely to be married, have children, and belong to a formal religion,

Table 4.2 Study 2: demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic	Heterosexual women (N=348)	Bisexual women (N=125)	Lesbians (N=332)	Statistic
Mean age	36.8a	31.6b	36.8a	F(2,802)=11.69**
Mean highest educational level ¹	4.0a	4.5b	4.7b	F(2,798)=26.41**
Mean occupational status level ²	52.6a	58.6	68.0b	F(2,798)=8.03**
Mean individual annual income ³	3.8	3.4	4.2	F(2,771)=4.66
Mean household annual income ³	7.0	6.2	6.4	F(2,768)=5.18
Characteristic	Heterosexual men (N=185)	Bisexual men (N=38)	Gay men (N=226)	Statistic
Mean age	35.8a	35.2a	39.3b	F(2,446)=5.60*
Mean highest educational level ¹	4.0a	3.8a	4.5b	F(2,445)=32.96**
Mean occupational status level ²	58.8	53.4	60.5	F(2,445)=1.17
Mean individual annual income ³	5.3	4.0	5.2	F(2,440)=3.13
Mean household annual income ³	7.5	5.9	7.1	F(2,421)=3.82

Notes

* $p < .005$, ** $p < .001$.

Subscripts indicate significant differences in pairwise comparisons between groups.

1 =some or no high school; 2=high school degree; 3=some college; 4=college degree; 5=some graduate/professional school; 6=graduate/professional degree.

2 Ranges from 10 (lowest status occupation) to 90 (highest status occupation).

3 1=\$15,000; 2=\$25,000; 3=\$35,000; etc. up to 9=\$95,000.

than were lesbians or bisexual women. Heterosexual women had lived longer in their current location, and had moved there for their child's education or their partner's job. Lesbians and bisexual women had moved to their current location for their own education.

Among male participants, gay men were significantly older (late 30s on average) than heterosexual or bisexual men (mid-30s for the two groups). Gay men had significantly higher educational levels (between a college degree and some graduate or professional education) than did heterosexual men (college degree on average) and bisexual men (less than a college degree). Yet the three groups did not differ significantly on individual income, household income, or occupational status (see Table 4.2 for the analyses of variance for the three groups of men).

Additionally, there were no significant differences among the groups of men in reasons for moving to their current location, distance from home to college, or years lived in current location. Gay men were twice as likely to live in a large city than heterosexual or bisexual men. Heterosexual men were most traditional in terms of marriage, having children, and belonging to a formal religion. Whereas bisexual women were more similar to lesbians on demographic variables, bisexual men were more comparable to heterosexual men.

Study 3: same-sex couples in civil unions and heterosexual married siblings

Solomon *et al.* (2004) contacted all couples who were united in same-sex civil unions in the US state of Vermont during the first year of this new legislation (July 2000 to June 2001). Based on information on the civil union certificates, 21 percent of the couples were from Vermont and the rest were from all US states except Wyoming, as well as a few from other countries. Two-thirds of individuals in civil unions were female and 10 percent identified as members of ethnic minority groups. Of the 2,475 couples who had civil unions during this period (the entire population), 165 addresses were incorrect and another 41 couples could not be included (e.g. their partner had died or the relationship had ended). Of the remaining 2,269 couples, 947 couples indicated a willingness to participate (42 percent). Couples completed a reply form with their contact information, and were also asked if we could contact a married heterosexual sibling and his/her spouse and a lesbian or gay male couple in their friendship circle who had not had a civil union. Given that all same-sex couples research to date has been limited to couples without legal recognition of their relationship, this last group was included to reflect the status quo of same-sex couples.

We had funding to send out questionnaires to 400 civil union couples as well as 400 lesbian and gay male couples not in civil unions, and 400 married heterosexual couples. Questionnaires did not include names and addresses, but instead had an I.D. number (e.g. 312A and 312B for civil union couples, 312C and 312D for their same-sex friends not in a civil union, and 312E and 312F for the married heterosexual sibling and spouse). Of the 800 questionnaires sent to the 400 civil union couples, we received back 659 (82 percent), compared with 466 (58 percent) from same-sex couples not in civil unions, and 413 (52 percent) from married heterosexual couples (these numbers represent total respondents; we did not always receive back two questionnaires from each couple).

For the present analyses, we included results of one participant per couple. Because civil union couples were sent packets with two questionnaires labeled A and B, we consistently included the results of the person who completed questionnaire A. Same-sex couples not in civil unions were sent questionnaires labeled C and D, and we included the results of the person who completed questionnaire C. We then compared them with heterosexuals of the same gender (who completed questionnaire E or F). See Table 4.3 for results on age, educational level, and income, based on analyses of variance conducted separately for women and men.

Table 4.3 Study 3: comparison of same-sex couples in civil unions, those not in civil unions, and heterosexual married couples

Variable	Lesbians in civil unions (N=212)	Lesbians not in civil unions (N=166)	Heterosexual married women (N=219)	Statistic
Age	42.74 (8.57)	42.15 (9.25)	43.10 (1.52)	F=1.06
Years of education	15.93a (1.59)	15.86a (1.51)	15.20b (1.84)	F=12.26****
Individual income	\$55,518 (79,201)	\$54,733 (39,176)	\$40,583(44,931)	F=3.77
Variable	Gay men in civil unions (N=123)	Gay men not in civil unions (N=72)	Heterosexual married men (N=193)	Statistic
Age	44.03 (9.71)	44.41 (10.95)	45.84 (10.48)	F=1.27
Years of education	15.90 (1.46)	15.64 (1.76)	15.18 (1.90)	F=6.59
Individual income	\$65,847 (51,380)	\$79,172(125,661)	\$73,706(80,692)	F=0.60

Notes

*** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0005$.

Subscripts indicate significant differences in pairwise comparisons between groups.

Examining results for women (212 lesbians in civil unions, 166 lesbians not in civil unions, and 219 married heterosexual women), there were no significant differences in age. Note that this sample is older (early 40s on average) than our earlier samples of siblings (in their 30s on average). Lesbians in civil unions and those not in civil unions had significantly higher levels of education (close to 16 years, indicating a college degree) than heterosexual women (who were closer to 15 years, indicating some college). Lesbians in both types of couples earned an individual annual salary of about \$55,000, compared with about \$40,000 for heterosexual women; this difference was not significant. Furthermore, when we excluded heterosexual women who were homemakers, the mean individual income of heterosexual women was \$49,773. Married heterosexual women had been in their current relationship longer, were more likely to have children, and more likely to belong to a formal religion, than lesbians in both types of couples.

There were no significant differences in age for the three groups of men (123 gay men in civil unions, 72 gay men not in civil unions, and 193 married heterosexual men). The three groups did not differ significantly in either educational level or individual income. Married heterosexual men were more traditional than gay men in terms of length of relationship, having children, and belonging to a formal religion. Gay men in both types of couples were more likely to live in large cities.

Advantages of the sibling methodologies

These three studies point to some advantages of using siblings as a comparison group for LGB samples. First, most LGBs have siblings, and these siblings are often heterosexual, so there is a ready supply of heterosexual participants for

comparison purposes. This is in contrast to the vast majority of LGB convenience studies, which often have no heterosexual comparison group, compare the LGB sample to published norms of the general population (which often means controlling statistically for the ways in which the LGB sample is different from the general population), or recruit heterosexuals from different sources than LGBs.

Our first study on sisters initially matched every lesbian and heterosexual sister pair, then grouped all respondents by self-identity in order to be able to include the bisexual respondents. Our second study recruited siblings of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, and grouped participants by self-identity. Thus, some heterosexual women were sisters of lesbians or bisexual women; others were sisters of gay or bisexual men. This method greatly increased the sample size, given that some gay men have only sisters, for example, and the results of both studies (lesbians matched with their heterosexual sisters versus lesbians compared with heterosexual women recruited via sisters and brothers) are comparable.

Comparing LGBs to their siblings is more than just a methodological innovation, however. Presumably, every heterosexual in the first two studies grew up with a sibling who is now lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In our third study, every heterosexual is the sibling or in-law of a person now in a same-sex civil union. Before embarking on this research, we speculated that heterosexual siblings of LGBs might themselves be non-traditional. Perhaps they grew up in non-traditional families in which one child was given permission to come out, and others to take risks in other ways. Yet as far as we can tell from the demographic data, LGBs have siblings who are quite traditional. They are married, have children, are religious, and seem to live closer to their family of origin. Although this is good news from a methodological standpoint (the heterosexuals in these studies are not a special sample), it also raises some questions. Why do some people come out as LGB while their siblings follow more traditional paths? Much more research is needed to examine sexual orientation, familial, and demographic factors from a longitudinal perspective.

Discrepancies between educational level and income

There are two consistent findings in these three studies. One is the high educational levels of LGBs when compared with heterosexual siblings. The other is the discrepancy between this high educational level and income. What factors could account for this?

The good news: LGBs have high educational levels

In all three studies of women, lesbians had significantly higher educational levels than heterosexual women. In the two studies of men, gay men had higher educational levels than heterosexual men in Study 2 but not in Study 3. This difference in educational level between LGBs and heterosexuals is especially remarkable when one considers that siblings had similar family backgrounds (e.g. similar parental attitudes about higher education, and parental income to pay the tuition).

Does coming out as lesbian happen before or after obtaining higher education? For example, do lesbians have higher levels of education than heterosexual sisters because lesbians are less likely to get married or have children at a young age? The fact that lesbians have moved more often for their own education (Studies 1 and 2), and also that lesbians attended a college that was further from home (Study 2) provide some evidence for this direction of causality (i.e. first a woman is a lesbian and thus is more likely to seek higher education). Conversely, Faderman (1991) has argued that colleges expose women to feminism and lesbianism (i.e. first a woman goes to college and thus becomes a lesbian). Furthermore, many college campuses are in towns or cities that are liberal enclaves. This could further expose those women who attend college to liberal politics, including affirmative attitudes towards lesbianism. Laumann *et al.* (1994) have reported that the best way to find lesbians in national samples is to focus on college towns. In that case, what familial or personality factors allow some young women to leave their families of origin in order to seek a higher education? Could these factors (e.g. greater risk-taking ability) also provide these women with the ability to come out as lesbian? In sum, coming out as lesbian may precede, or follow from, some of the demographic factors that differentiate lesbians from heterosexual women.

Why are these findings less robust for gay men (Studies 2 and 3)? First, the sample sizes of men in both studies were smaller than those of women (in Study 3, this reflects the actual ratio of lesbian versus gay male civil unions; in Study 2 it might reflect the fact that women are more likely to volunteer for studies and/or the fact that our research team consisted of all women). Second, early marriage and children may not be an obstacle for heterosexual men's ability to pursue higher education to the extent that it is for heterosexual women. Consequently the difference in educational level between heterosexual and gay men is less marked. Furthermore, the possibility that colleges may be a vehicle for introducing students to gay-affirmative politics may be less salient for men, because gay men reach developmental milestones in the sexual identity process at earlier ages than do women (Garnets and Kimmel, 2003).

While lesbians leave home to go to college, gay men move to large urban areas. Both Studies 2 and 3 found gay men to live in large cities much more often than heterosexual men. Laumann *et al.* (1994) have indicated that the best way to find gay men for national surveys is to focus on 12 cities in the US. Non-monogamy is often an accepted part of gay male culture (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Peplau *et al.*, 2004), and large cities provide opportunities to meet other gay men, such as gay neighborhoods, gay bars, and LGB organizations. In contrast, fewer large cities have lesbian neighborhoods, and possibly women cannot easily afford to live in large cities. Perhaps seeking an education is a more acceptable way for young women to leave home.

Studies 1 and 2 were among the few published studies in psychology that included bisexuals, and that compared them with heterosexuals as well as with lesbians and gay men. In Study 1, we did not specifically recruit bisexual women, but about one-fifth of respondents scored near the midpoint (indicating bisexuality) of the self-identity scale of sexual orientation. In Study 2, where we made efforts

to recruit bisexuals, the samples of bisexual women and particularly of bisexual men were extremely small. The results indicate that bisexual women are more similar to lesbians on educational level whereas bisexual men are more similar to heterosexual men.

The bad news: higher education does not translate into higher incomes for LGBs

A consistent finding in the three studies is the discrepancy between educational level and income for LGBs, when compared with heterosexuals recruited from their siblings. This effect is particularly pronounced among women, but was also found for men in one of the two studies that included men. Despite the fact that heterosexual women have lower levels of education, had children, are married, and moved for their partner's job or child's education, their incomes are not significantly lower than those of lesbians and bisexual women who are more highly educated and geographically mobile.

There are several explanations for this, although more qualitative research is needed to gain an understanding of each person's circumstances that led up to her or his current income. First, it is possible that heterosexuals prioritize income (especially if they have children) whereas LGBs prioritize other factors in the workplace, such as companies with gay-affirmative policies (e.g. domestic partner benefits) or those that are located in liberal towns or states. Second, LGBs may feel a greater sense of responsibility in helping to create a more just society and therefore may be more likely to have jobs explicitly aimed at creating social change or in helping the underserved. Even though many LGBs had graduate degrees, they may choose lower-paid types of jobs for such degrees (e.g. social work and social services, non-profit organizations, academia) instead of higher-paid jobs (e.g. private practice, the corporate sector). Another possibility is that heterosexuals may be networked into jobs that are more mainstream and thus have better opportunities for raises in salary, whereas LGBs may select jobs that are less traditional. Furthermore, research indicates that heterosexuals find friends and spouses in settings (e.g. high school, college) that are highly stratified by income; this may not be the case in the LGB communities (cf., Laumann *et al.*, 1994, for a review). Consequently, LGBs may not experience as much pressure to afford a house in the most exclusive neighborhood or the most expensive car (in fact, there may be pressure among lesbians to live a more modest lifestyle). These possibilities are somewhat supported by evidence (in Study 2 though not in Study 1) that lesbians have jobs with higher occupational status than do heterosexual women, even though their income is not significantly different from heterosexual women.

The more disturbing possibility is that LGBs are discriminated against in the workplace and thus earn lower salaries relative to their education (see Badgett, 2001, for the major book on this topic). This can range from overt discrimination (e.g. firing someone who is LGB) to more subtle forms of prejudice. Most people do not know why they were passed over for a particular job, why they were let go

during an economic downswing, or even why a coworker was invited to the boss's party and they were not. In many companies, employees do not know each other's salary; when they do, they usually know the salary of someone of the same gender who is a friend (c.f. Schmader *et al.*, 2001).

Finally, it is interesting to speculate about the income of couples. Looking at Table 4.3 (for couples in Study 3), two gay men in a couple report the highest combined income, followed by heterosexual couples, and lesbian couples earn the lowest combined income. This fact (usually about gay men) is often cited by the media to explain why gay men are better off than other oppressed groups. Yet a number of factors need to be taken into account. Study 2, which focused on LGBs and heterosexuals, found that gay men are less likely to be in coupled relationships and Study 3 indicated that gay men have not been coupled for as many years as heterosexual men. This finding may also explain why the ratio of all couples who had civil unions in Vermont (both in our sample and in the whole civil union population) is so skewed in favor of lesbians. Furthermore, gay men are twice as likely to live in large cities (including some of the most expensive cities in the US, such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) as heterosexual and bisexual men, adding to their cost of living. Heterosexuals earn the next highest incomes for couples, but they are the most likely to be supporting children as well. Lesbian couples earn the lowest combined incomes, and lesbians, too, have not been in relationships for as long a time period than heterosexuals. In sum, factors affecting spending power are most likely more complicated than income alone.

We compared the income level of all participants in these studies, even those for homemakers (which was zero) and part-time workers. Given that lesbians are more likely to work full-time than heterosexual women (who are more likely to be homemakers), and that the income was not adjusted for hours of work, then in fact the income disparity is even more remarkable. That is, lesbians working full time and with higher educational levels are still earning incomes that are not significantly different from heterosexual women that include homemakers and those with lower educational levels.

In the last few years, the US public has become increasingly tolerant of lesbians and gay men in some arenas. Polls indicate that the majority of Americans know someone who is gay or lesbian and support gay rights (Bumiller, 2003). Gay characters are appearing in television situation comedies and reality shows. On the other hand, when it comes to marriage, the public opposes legalizing same-sex marriage by a strong margin. A July 2003 opinion survey indicated that 59 percent of Americans opposed allowing gays and lesbians to marry compared with 32 percent who were in favor (Lochhead, 2003). There has been extremely little research, including opinion surveys, about LGBs in the workplace. Thus it is difficult to know how discrimination based on sexual orientation continues to affect people who are known or suspected to be LGB on the job. This book is a first step to focus on sexual orientation discrimination in the labor market and related areas. The results will have implications for employers, policymakers, and the lives of workers who are LGB.

Acknowledgments

The three studies reported in this chapter were supported by grants from the Lesbian Health Fund of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and the Dean's Fund from the University of Vermont (Study 1); grants from the Lesbian Health Fund of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, the Scrivner Award of the American Psychological Foundation, and a University Research and Scholarship Grant from the University of Vermont (Study 2); and grants from the Gill Foundation and the University Committee on Research and Scholarship of the University of Vermont (Study 3).

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