

## BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Over the past few decades, society has seen an increase in the number of gays and lesbians with children (Patterson 2000). The 2000 Census results suggest that more than one third of female and 22 percent of male same-sex householders are living with their own children (Simmons and O'Connell 2003). Gates, Macomber, and Chambers (2007) estimate that one out of every three lesbians has given birth and one sixth of gay men has either adopted or fathered a child. While in the past, many children living in gay and lesbian households may have been from previous heterosexual unions (Falk 1989, Patterson 1992), there has recently been such an increase in children born outside of heterosexual relationships (Patterson 1992, Siegenthaler and Bigner 2000). Some have even labeled the growth of homosexual women having children the "Lesbian Baby Boom" (Morris, Balsam, and Rothblum 2002, Patterson 1995). These fertility levels are striking considering the additional obstacles that sexual minorities<sup>1</sup> face when trying to have children. While bisexuals are able to have children the "traditional" way, most sexual minorities are only able to have children via donor insemination, surrogate mothers, and adoption. This limits their access to having children, as the costs of donor insemination are high. Furthermore, sexual minorities are more likely to face discrimination in the legal system when trying to adopt children (Siegenthaler and Bigner 2000). Yet, despite these obstacles, sexual minorities are increasingly having children.

Studies show that intentions are predictive of actual fertility behavior. That is people who intend having children, or have positive childbearing intentions, are much more likely to have children than those who do not intend having children (Schoen, Astone, Kim, Nathanson, and Fields 1999). Furthermore, positive attitudes towards children and childbearing, such as the meaning and importance children give to life, are also positively related to having children (Barber 2001, Schoen, Young, Nathanson, Fields, and Astone 1997). However, these studies do not distinguish respondents by sexual orientation. It may be posited that, after considering the additional obstacles that sexual minorities face when trying to have children, those who intend having children and consider them a rewarding and salient aspect of life, may be even more likely to actually have children.

This research will examine intentions to have a child and attitudes towards children among sexual minority men and women compared to their heterosexual counterparts. While Gates *et al* (2007) find that over 40 percent of lesbians and half of gay men want to become parents, it is not known how these childbearing intentions compare to heterosexuals. The primary research question is to determine whether the childbearing intentions and attitudes of sexual minority men and women are similar to that of heterosexual men and women. If they have greater positive intentions and attitudes towards children than heterosexuals, this research would support an argument that sexual minority status does not deter fertility goals. As doors open to parenting options among sexual minorities, we expect to see more children in families headed by sexual minorities. This has policy implications in terms of challenging traditional notions of the family. Policies that privilege heterosexual families may no longer be appropriate and lawmakers will have to reconsider laws that discriminate against same-sex families.

On the other hand, sexual minorities may have lower childbearing intentions and less positive attitudes towards children than heterosexuals. This would be consistent with a perspective that suggests sexual minorities pursue alternative goals than parenting. Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000) find that lesbian mothers are just as likely as heterosexual mothers to state that "having children gives a person a special incentive to succeed in life," and that "having children makes a stronger bond between partners", but less likely to think that "One of the highest purposes in life is to have children." They suggest that negative social attitudes towards lesbian women having children have resulted in some choosing alternate goals in life. Siegenthaler and Bigner (2000) only look at lesbians, but it may be posited that sexual minority men also choose to forgo parenthood in favor of some other aspect of life. In this case, sexual minorities would have less positive intentions and attitudes towards children as children may be a less salient aspect of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> The term sexual minority encompasses homosexuals, bisexuals, and many other sexual orientations as well.

This work builds on prior work in three key ways. First, it will contribute to our understanding of an understudied portion of society who is increasingly recognized as a growing family context for raising children. Second, this research informs public policy targeted at sexual minority families. If sexual minorities show fertility intentions on par with heterosexuals, public policies will have to address this growing part of contemporary society (Patterson 2000). Third, most research done on sexual minorities rely on small, non-representative samples (Lambert 2005; Patterson 2000) and this paper draws on nationally representative data.

## DATA and METHOD

Data for this study are drawn from the National Survey of Family Growth which is a nationally representative sample of 12,571 men and women between 15 and 44 years of age. The key advantages of using these data are that they are recently collected and include rich measures of fertility and a question establishing sexual orientation.

In addition to the general survey, the NSFG also collected data on the sexual behavior of adults (respondents over 18 years of age) using Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (ACASI). Included is a question that captures respondents' self-reported sexual orientation. As the question is only asked of adults, the analytic sample is limited to respondents 18-44 years of age.

## VARIABLES

**Dependent Variables:** The NSFG asks respondents their childbearing intentions with the question, "Do you intend to have (a/another) child at some time?" The effect of intention on fertility is affected by the degree of certainty to which intentions are held (Schoen *et al.* 1999; Thomson and Brandreth 1997). The survey also measures how certain respondents are about their intentions by asking, "How sure are you that you will/ will not have (a/another) baby?" Together, these questions are used to create a measure of childbearing intentions and certainty that ranges in intentions and certainty from "Definitely Yes" to "Definitely No." Similar questions are used for respondents in a union (marriage or cohabitation) that gauge their joint intentions and certainty. These are used for those who are married or cohabiting.

Two NSFG measures are used to grasp respondents' attitudes towards children. First, the salience of children in respondents' lives is captured by the question, "If it turns out that you do not have any children, would that bother you a great deal, some, a little, or not at all?" This is used to create the variable *Salience* that ranges from an attitude of low salience to high salience of children. Second, the variable *Rewarding* is created using the question, "The rewards of being a parent are worth it, despite the cost and work it takes." This shows respondents' attitudes towards the rewards of children and ranges from a low score where children are considered to be less rewarding to a high score where children are thought of as more rewarding.

**Independent Variables:** The primary independent variable is *Sexual Orientation*. The NSFG asks respondents to report their sexual orientation. The question includes the following responses: Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Something Else. As sexual minority status encompasses many orientations, all three groups, homosexual, bisexual, and something else, are included in the sexual minority group. The variable *Sexual Orientation* is created to compare all sexual minorities, coded (1), to heterosexuals, coded (0).

**Control Variables:** Research (Barber 2001, Schoen *et el* 1997, Trent and Crowder 1997) shows that other factors, such as age, race, education, income, and religion, are related to childbearing intentions and attitudes towards children. Therefore the analyses will include these variables as controls in the final models. Differences also exist by union status (Barber 2001, Schoen *et el* 1997). Initially, analyses would be done separately for those in a union (married or cohabiting) compared to those who are single. But, there are very few cases of sexual minorities in a union. Thus analysis will be more conservative and use union type as a control only.

## **ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

Analysis will be conducted separately by gender and sexual minority men and women will be compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The analysis is limited to only those without children, biological or adopted. Preliminary analysis of the data indicates that among childless adults, 11 percent of men (287) and 8 percent of women (149) report a sexual minority status. The final sample consists of 4531 respondents.

Ordinary least squares analysis is performed on the dependent variables. The models will be estimated separately for men and women. In the first model, the dependent variable is regressed upon the measure of sexual orientation. For the analysis on childbearing intentions and certainty, the attitude variables will also be added to the model. The final models will control for age, race, education, income, religion, and union type.

## **PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

Table 1 shows a cross-tabulation of the dependent variables by gender and sexual orientation. While these results are interesting, they are limited by small sample sizes because of the classification by union type.

Heterosexual men and women appear to have very much the same intentions and attitudes toward children and childbearing. Overall, heterosexuals have more certain positive childbearing intentions and show more favorable attitudes towards children. However, the picture is less clear for sexual minorities. While many do intend having children and most show positive attitudes towards children, the proportions that are positive are smaller and there is more variation in the results. It appears to be the case that sexual minority women, compared to heterosexuals, have slightly less positive attitudes towards children and are less sure about their intentions to have children, although differences exist between those in unions and those who are single. Single sexual minority men have very much the same intentions and attitudes towards children as single heterosexual men but, again, the proportions in these groups are smaller. Sexual minority men in unions appear to have fewer intentions to have children and less positive attitudes towards children than anyone else.

While the analyses are still in the initial stages, these results indicate differences in childbearing intentions and attitudes towards children between sexual minority men and women compared to heterosexuals. The results also suggest differences by union type, but the limited sample sizes will not allow for more examination of this issue. Thus future analyses will not differentiate by union type. Also, the impact of the control variables will have to be considered. Nonetheless, it is evident that there are disparities between the groups and further analyses should prove to be interesting.

Table 1. Childbearing Intentions and Attitudes Towards Children by Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Union Type

	N	%	Childbearing Intentions and Certainty				Children are Rewarding				Salience of Children				
			Definitely No	Probably No	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not At All Salient	A Little Salient	Somewhat Salient	Very Salient
<b>Females</b>															
<i>Heterosexual</i>															
In Union	674	33%	8.0%	11.3%	27.2%	<b>53.6%</b>	1.2%	4.7%	4.3%	39.6%	<b>50.1%</b>	12.9%	12.3%	30.0%	<b>44.8%</b>
Single	1191	59%	1.1%	3.9%	39.5%	<b>55.5%</b>	0.4%	2.0%	2.9%	45.6%	<b>49.1%</b>	6.8%	12.5%	32.7%	<b>47.9%</b>
<i>Sexual Minority</i>															
In Union	42	2%	7.1%	16.7%	31.0%	<b>45.2%</b>	2.4%	4.8%	2.4%	<b>52.4%</b>	38.1%	14.3%	19.0%	21.4%	<b>45.2%</b>
Single	107	5%	0.9%	6.5%	<b>53.3%</b>	0.0%	3.7%	7.5%	<b>48.6%</b>	40.2%	16.8%	21.5%	<b>32.7%</b>	29.0%	
<b>Males</b>															
<i>Heterosexual</i>															
In Union	410	16%	12.4%	9.2%	24.4%	<b>54.0%</b>	0.6%	4.4%	4.4%	41.6%	<b>48.9%</b>	20.6%	15.9%	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>31.7%</b>
Single	1820	72%	0.2%	3.1%	30.7%	<b>65.9%</b>	0.8%	4.1%	2.9%	<b>51.6%</b>	40.6%	14.5%	15.8%	33.9%	<b>35.8%</b>
<i>Sexual Minority</i>															
In Union	29	1%	<b>34.8%</b>	13.0%	17.4%	<b>34.8%</b>	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	<b>56.5%</b>	39.1%	17.4%	<b>34.8%</b>	21.7%	26.1%
Single	258	10%	1.3%	9.8%	43.8%	<b>45.1%</b>	2.0%	4.6%	5.2%	<b>51.0%</b>	37.3%	24.2%	21.6%	<b>29.4%</b>	24.8%

N=4531

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