

Economic Consequences on Gays and Lesbians of Heteronormativity in the Workplace

Meredith Leigh Morgan

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Neal King  
Toni Calasanti  
Michael Hughes

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## ABSTRACT

Feminist scholars have theorized that the workplace is gendered and heteronormative<sup>1</sup>, but little research quantifies the economic consequences of those organizations. This study investigates income discrepancies between gay men and straight men and between lesbians and straight women, to quantify these consequences. Using the National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010, and controlling for several correlates of income, I use ordinary least squares regression to test the hypothesis that lesbians have higher incomes on the average than straight women do, and that straight men earn more than gay men. I also use hierarchical regression to test the relative strengths of the associations between income and possible causes of variation in it. The study found that gay men earn more than straight men because of higher educational attainment, and that lesbians earn more than straight women, though this finding is not statistically significant.

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## Introduction

The combination of organized homophobic activism in the United States (Stein 2005), as well as a dearth of laws to protect gender and sexual minorities from such discrimination and harassment, may well have economic consequences, amounting to a “gay penalty” (Tilcsik 2011). Additionally, gendered divisions of household labor maintain the persistence of wage inequalities between men and women, which may lead to a lesbian premium<sup>1</sup> over straight women. The purpose of this study is to determine whether a wage gap exists between gay and straight men and between lesbians and straight women; and the relative strength of the correlations with income of race, gender, age, marriage or cohabitation, presence of children in the home, education, having a partner who specializes in home production, and attitude towards same-sex sex. By controlling for these other variables that affect income in a hierarchical regression analysis, I hope to specify the economic consequences of sexual discrimination. I use the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) 2006-2010 as data on which to perform this quantitative analysis, and I analyze and interpret those data using a staged set of ordinary least squares regressions, first to test the hypothesis that gender and divisions of household labor interact to affect incomes, and then to assess the relative importance of sexual orientation above the other variables.

To shed light on the economic consequences of sexual discrimination and gendered organization of work, I first outline the similarities between the gendered wage gap and the possibility of a sexual wage gap, based on the heterosexualizing of organizations about which feminist scholars have raised concerns. Next, I review literature on income discrepancies between gay/lesbian and straight people and test my hypothesis that straight men and lesbians generally earn more than gay men and straight women, respectively, but that all men earn more than all women on the average.

### Literature Review: Theories of gender and sexual inequality at work

This research is important because the economic situations of gay and lesbian people affect rates of poverty and the stability of their families, and may result in part from discrimination policies. Such studies may be necessary to assess the need for new antidiscrimination policies for sites of paid work. Feminist scholars have raised concerns about the way in which employing organizations are gendered and sexualized, such that they are structured for the benefit of (white) straight men (Acker 1990; Paap 2006; Pierce 1996; Salzinger 2003; Williams 1995). I synthesize those theories of organizations, describe the intersectional approach to theorizing gender and sexuality, and then focus those theories on the incomes of members of sexual minorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian premium is defined as an advantage in wages for lesbians over their straight woman counterparts.

The workplace reflects the heteronormativity of the home through its gendered division of labor and gendered pay gaps. Those who structure jobs and other organizational activities often assume that the male workers both bear financial responsibility for their families and have wives who facilitate their occupations and take care of their households. Consequently, managers presume that female employees are dependent upon males and are adequately compensated by low pay and little mobility, while ensuring that many men's jobs are paid higher family wages and include opportunities for promotion and stability (Acker 1990). For example, in her research of global factories in Mexico, Leslie Salzinger (2003) observes that factory managers, who are nearly always men, hire women for factory line jobs not only because of their supposed small, nimble fingers, but also because they rationalize their meager wages with the assumption that the women workers have husbands earning living wages.

These relations of gender inequality interact with those of sexuality in ways that are likely to affect the pay scales of all women, straight and gay. The presumption, by employers, that families are heterosexual and practice a gendered division of labor at home, combined with the actual dynamics of many heterosexual nuclear families, may contribute to wage differences between straight and gay/lesbian people, just as these presumptions have limited the incomes of women relative to men (Blandford 2003; Clain & Leppel 2001; Cushing-Daniels & Yeung 2009; Peplau & Fingerhut 2004). For example, dual-earner heterosexual couples tend to prioritize men's paid jobs over women's, and the women perform most of the unpaid household labor and care work (Cha 2010; Sayer 2005). In this gendered ideal, women's incomes are secondary to those of men, and their employment may be temporary as they take time off to bear and rear children. In addition to their paid work, women also bear primary responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, childcare, and emotional support of the family (Berk 1985; Cha 2010; Hartman 1981; Hersch 1994; Hochschild 1989). This arrangement enhances straight men's incomes; throughout their lives, they prepare themselves for careers with the expectation that they will be financially responsible for families and that their wives will support their commitment to their jobs. Employers consider married male workers to be dependable and stable, assume that they are married to women who can depend upon them, and pay them better as a result (Coltrane 2004).

These ideals in mind, employers may inadvertently be crafting jobs in ways that limit the incomes of gay men as well as those of straight women. Acker (1990) points out that "the closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children." Gay men may not benefit from the heteropatriarchy (Smith 2006; Valdes 1996) of the workplace; they may not receive the marriage premiums, or benefits for being married in the form of income, that straight married men enjoy, in part because they are less likely to have strict divisions of labor in their homes that would reduce their loads of housework (Kurdek 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut 2007; Peplau et al. 1996). This is in line with previous research suggesting that individual gay men earn less than individual straight men whether single or married/cohabiting (Alegretto and Arthur 2001; Badgett 1995; Clain and Leppel 2001; Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009).

However, lesbians may earn more than straight women, to the extent that their lives are more comparable to those of straight men, even though they do not fit the ideal of the breadwinning man. Some researchers (Blandford 2003; Clain & Leppel 2001; Cushing-Daniels & Yeung 2009; Peplau & Fingerhut 2004) argue that single lesbians may earn more than single straight women because many straight women plan on either earning supplements to their husbands' primary incomes or specializing in unpaid home production. Since lesbians do not date or marry men, they most often do not conform to heteronormative gender roles; so, they are less likely to believe that their roles as women include sole responsibility for domestic chores and care. This may allow them more quickly to advance in their careers or to prepare to support families with only their own incomes. However, such women still face gender discrimination, which keeps them earning less than men on average; and they may face discrimination from their employers against their sexual orientations.

Related to this, the lesbian premium may result in part from the fact that women who have dependent children earn less than women without children, and lesbians are less likely to have children than straight women (Jepsen 2007). Additionally, lesbians on average have more egalitarian relationships than straight couples (Kurdek 2007; Peplau and Cochran 1990; Peplau and Fingerhut 2007; Peplau, Veniegas & Campbell 1996). Therefore, if they have children, they are more likely to share childcare responsibilities, or just share household responsibilities if they are cohabiting without children (Etzler 1998). Even though lesbian couples are more likely to have egalitarian relationships, they are also more likely than heterosexual women in relationships to have partners who specialize in home production, meaning they work at home without pay. Cohabiting lesbians who are in these egalitarian relationships would be able to devote more time and energy to their careers than cohabiting or married straight women who also perform most of the domestic labor in their households. Furthermore, lesbians are less likely to rely solely on their partners' family wages than straight women are, thus, they will not have as many distractions from career development (Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009). Lesbians also may be promoted faster than their straight counterparts, and work in higher-paying, male-dominated jobs because of the reduced workload at home, and the likelihood that they will not have as many interruptions from their paid jobs as straight women have.

On the other hand, lesbians are more likely to experience discrimination based on sexual orientation than straight women, if they are out at work. This discrimination may directly negatively affect their wages through the denial of promotions and wages, and the mental stress of working in a hostile environment.

The "gay penalty" (Tilcsik 2011) for men may result from related processes as the lesbian-straight woman income gap. Like lesbians, gay men also do not have to conform to traditional gender roles in their homes, so they may feel less pressure than straight men to be sole breadwinners. For this reason, they might invest less in their careers than straight men (Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009). Furthermore, employers may favor straight married men over straight unmarried men, believing that they are more dependable since they have to provide for their families, and because they are more likely to have children than gay men. Because gay men do

not participate in heterosexual marriage, they are barred from opportunities to which straight married men are privy (Blandford 2003). Straight, partnered men usually benefit from unequal divisions of household labor, in which women perform most of the domestic duties. This allows straight men more time and energy to devote to their careers because they have few responsibilities outside of their paid jobs. In gay male couples, however, usually both participate in the paid workforce and divide household responsibilities equally by specializing in tasks (Kurdek 1993 and 2007), which may affect their careers and incomes. They do not fit the mold of the ideal worker, as Acker describes, of the male worker with no responsibilities outside their paid employment.

These relations between such forms of inequality as sexuality and gender have been the foci of much theoretical discussion, which has produced an *intersectional* approach (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005). Taking this intersectional approach, we expect that sexuality, intersecting with gender, will have different consequences in different contexts. For example, gay men are stereotyped as effeminate and fashionable, so being out as gay in the fashion industry may benefit their careers, and they may receive support from colleagues. However, on a construction site, hypermasculinity, which includes a derogatory heterosexuality to women, is vital to surviving the job (Paap 2006). Gay men most likely would not thrive in this environment if they were out. Being out or closeted is an important variable because sexual orientation is not a protected class at the federal level, unlike age, ability, national origin, race, religion, and sex (U.S. EEOC). Therefore, 21 states plus Washington D.C. have added sexual orientation as a protected class, and in 29 other states, people can be harassed, fired, or discriminated against for their sexual orientation without penalty (HRC 2013). As a result, incomes and positions of gays and lesbians may suffer more in states without work protection than in others, because, as Gayle Rubin (1992) theorizes, gays/lesbians are below heterosexuals on the erotic pyramid, and are therefore given less “respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits” (Rubin 1984).

Previous studies of earnings discrepancies based on sexual orientation have yielded conflicting results, but those conflicts may result in part because researchers have defined and operationalized sexual orientation in diverse ways. I conclude this literature review by detailing the findings and methods of those studies, in order to provide warrants for my use of NSFG variables as bases for sexual categorization and my hypotheses about the relations of those variables to income.

M.V. Lee Badgett, the first to study the sexual orientation wage gap, analyzed data from the General Social Survey from the years 1989 through 1991. Although the survey did not include a direct question about the respondents’ sexual orientations, it did ask about the gender and number of sexual partners in their lifetimes, in the last five years, and in the previous year. Badgett included people in the homosexual category who had at least as many same-sex partners as opposite-sex partners in their lifetimes. She found that gay and bisexual males earn 11% to 27% less than straight males while controlling for experience, education, occupation, marital status, and region of residence. Lesbians tend to earn 12% to 30% less than heterosexual females,

although this finding was not statistically significant. Badgett explained the lack of statistical significance as either a small sample size of lesbians or that she was not able to control for certain, possibly unobservable, differences between lesbians and straight women (Badgett 1995).

Since Badgett paved the way for research on earnings discrepancies between people of different sexual orientations, researchers have modeled their work after hers, with modifications. Such research has consistently found a wage penalty for men who are gay, ranging from 2.4% to 32% of income (Allegretto and Arthur 2001; Badgett 1995; Clain and Leppel 2001; Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009b). In contrast to Badgett's study, a wage premium for lesbians is the most common finding in subsequent research on sexual orientation wage gaps; compared to heterosexual women, lesbians earn 10% to 38% more (Baumle, Compton, and Poston 2009; Blandford 2003; Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009; Jepsen 2007).

To test the theories that lesbians earn more than straight women because of mediating effects of egalitarian divisions of household labor, and that the absence of children may facilitate lesbians' careers, Jepsen (2007) controlled for the presence of children and for lesbians whose partners specialize in home production (as well as race, education, potential work experience, proficiency in English, status as a disabled worker, geographic region, industry, and occupation). Her results did not support the theory that the absence of children or having a partner who takes care of the home explains the wage premium for lesbians (Jepsen 2007). This study updates these statistics with more recent data, and unlike Jepsen, also looks at the correlation between single lesbians' incomes, single gay men's incomes, and presence of children in the home.

In contrast to previously mentioned studies that looked at individuals' incomes, Liu et al. (2013) and Denney (2013) looked at household income instead of individual income, and found that both cohabiting gay male and lesbian couples have higher household incomes and socioeconomic statuses (based on poverty status, education, and insurance coverage) than married and cohabiting straight couples. This result is to be expected in gay male homes, because both men typically work and benefit from their male status. This may lead to higher household incomes than appear in straight households, where there is a primary breadwinner and a supplementary breadwinner, or in straight households that are setup with breadwinner and primary caregiver gender roles. Liu et al. and Denney et al. also found that gays and lesbians are generally more educated than people in the different-sex relationships. Because of the studies that have found that college-educated people are less disapproving of same-sex sex than less educated people (Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas 2005), there may be more gay/lesbian couples who are out in upper class jobs, or more gays/lesbians who are willing to live in same-sex relationships because of the emotional and financial support they receive from their similarly-educated colleagues and peers. In this study, I only look at individual income rather than household income and SES; so, although these studies found that gay household incomes are greater than those of straight households, this does not affect my hypothesis that gay men, measured as individual units of analysis, will earn less than straight men and that lesbians will earn more than straight women.

In summary, researchers who explain gaps between earnings of straight people and gay and lesbian people have focused on divisions of household labor, presence of children in the home, marital status, and early preparations for gender roles they will expect to play during their working and partnered lives.

### ***Hypotheses***

I hypothesize that lesbians have higher incomes on the average than straight women do, and that straight men most likely earn more than gay men, when controlling for *race, age, gender, marital or cohabitation status, and education*. When controlling for these variables, we will likely see the association between orientation and income decrease. The individual is the unit of analysis, and this proposition is expected to hold true for individuals in the United States over the age of 25 who work full time and part time.

For this study, I measure the dependent variable *income*, in dollars reportedly earned by full-time and part-time workers in a given year. To simplify the income categories, I use the midpoints of each category. For the category of \$75,000 and up, I use data from the 2008 Census, since it is the middle of this survey's collection period. From the personal income data for men and for women in the Census, I find the mean income of the category that includes \$75,000, and use this number as an estimate of the NSFG's income category of "\$75,000 and up." The independent variable in the first regression, *sexual orientation*, is defined according to an individual's identification of his or her sexual desires and attractions. I will categorize the respondents using the terms "gay/lesbian" and "straight" in place of "homosexual" and "heterosexual." Although the NSFG survey uses the latter pair as terms of identification, I use different words because "homosexual" has historically been used to pathologize same-sex attraction and has been used in religious texts to condemn the sin of same-sex sexual attraction and/or behavior (Brickell 2006).

As previously discussed, most researchers have used one of two different sources of data related to earnings of gay and straight people. The U.S. Census allows people to report that they live with unmarried, same-sex partners. Because they are also given the option of "roommate," it is unlikely that a heterosexual person platonically living with someone of the same sex would choose "same-sex partner." A researcher can identify thousands of cohabiting gays and lesbians through the Census. However, for the purpose of this study, the *National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010* is more appropriate. With the NSFG, we can distinguish between cohabiting and non-cohabiting respondents and married and unmarried respondents.

I control for *marital status* and *cohabitation* because married heterosexual women earn less than unmarried heterosexual women whereas the opposite is true for men. I categorize marital and cohabitation status as married/cohabiting, or single. The *National Survey of Family Growth* asks respondents to categorize their marital status as married, not married but living with a partner of the opposite sex, widowed, divorced, separated because you and your spouse are not getting along, or never been married. Gay and lesbian people are unable to specify that they are living with their partners, because the survey only gives options for cohabiting heterosexual

couples. Therefore, I have created a variable for cohabiting gays and lesbians. I subtracted the number of children living in the respondents' homes from number of family members in the household. If there is at least one left over, then the respondents most likely have same-sex partners. If there are none left over, then the respondents do not have partners living in the home.

Because there are more genders and sexes than two, dichotomous categories of gay/lesbian and straight are not inclusive of all identities, including queer, asexual, pansexual, and autosexual. I address these problems by using the NSFG questions about sexuality, including "Do you think of yourself as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or something else?" with response choices of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, something else, refused, and don't know. I will categorize respondents' *sexual orientation* according to how they identify their sexual desires and attractions, rather than base it on sexual behavior. However, because of the construction of the survey, I am limited to using this small set of response categories. On the positive side, the sexual orientation question includes the category of "something else," which will account for the few respondents who do not identify with either side of the binary. While deconstructing gender, sex, and sexuality has its place and is necessary in order to break down stereotypes and gender roles that lead to inequalities, as well as to reflect the real world that does not operate in binaries, this study must utilize the given categories to determine if, in general, people who identify as gay or lesbian receive treatment in the workplace in the form of wages that is different from straight people.

The literature reviewed above has not tested for the effect of minority stress<sup>2</sup> (Meyer 1995) of gays and lesbians on income, which is important because internalized homophobia is negatively correlated with the likelihood of being out at work, meaning that the more internalized homophobia one feels, the less likely s/he is to be out at work (Rostosky and Riggle 2002; Griffith and Hebl 2002). Being closeted at work can lead to ill health and extra stress, which leads to decreases in job satisfaction, opportunities for promotion, and compensation (Ragins and Cornwell 2001). Therefore, I create a variable for gays' and lesbians' *attitudes* towards same-sex sex. This allows me to test for the possibility that maintaining a gay-negative attitude, while identifying at least privately as gay, may lead to a decrease in wages. The best way to sort the respondents who disagree with same-sex sex from those who are open to the idea is to divide them according to their sexual orientation combined with their views on homosexuality. The survey asks:

- *How do you think of yourself?:* heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, something else, and don't know.
- *Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right:* strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, neither, and don't know.

Respondents' attitudes will be classified based on the six-point scale of the second survey questions listed above. The respondents will most likely suffer from internalized homophobia,

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<sup>2</sup> Minority stress is "excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer 2003), conceptualized as "internalized homophobia."

which may lead to decreased wages, if they answered that they “strongly disagree” that same-sex sex is alright. They will least likely suffer from internalized homophobia if they answer “strongly agree.” It is important to test whether the direction of negative social attitudes towards the self impacts gays’ and lesbians’ incomes.

Using this same scale of measuring respondents’ *attitudes* of same-sex sex, I also test whether respondents suffer from discrimination in the form of income, based on positive attitudes towards same-sex sex. Gays and lesbians with positive attitudes towards same-sex are more likely to have strong sexual identities, which increases the likelihood that they are out at work (Chobrot-Mason et al. 2001; Button 2001). The respondents will most likely draw discrimination from their positive attitudes towards same-sex sex if they answered the question with “strongly agree.” To separate the effect of attitudes on wages from stress from the effect of attitudes on wages from discrimination, I include straight people’s attitudes in the analysis, as those with positive attitudes on same-sex sex would only lower their pay through the discrimination effect. If the effect of attitudes via stress is different for straight people than it is for gay and lesbian people, then it supports the hypothesis that gays and lesbians suffer from internalized homophobia in the form of decreased wages. If the effect of attitudes via discrimination is the same for straight people and gay/lesbian people, then this supports the hypothesis that positive attitudes towards same-sex sex lead to discrimination.

In order to isolate the mediating effects on wage discrepancies of *home situations*, I will control for several variables. *Race* and *gender* are control variables because racial minorities and white women, on average, earn less than whites and men of color. Race is defined in terms of individual self-identification, choosing among the options white, Black, and other. For the sake of simplicity, gender is defined as male or female, even though some observers, many of whom may be focused on the questions raised by this research, see more than two options for gender. Categorizing an individual into one of two sexualities based on a gender that does not fall into a binary category is complicated. Therefore, gender will be coded as a dummy variable, with 0 representing female and 1 representing male.

*Education* is defined as years of schooling and/or the highest degree received. I will use this as a control variable, because amount of education is strongly correlated with income. *Age* is the respondent’s age in years, and I am controlling for this because income is correlated with age. Young employees, such as teenagers, earn less than workers who have several years of experience. Elderly people, especially elderly women, earn less than people in their 30s and 40s because of ageism in the workforce.

*Sexual orientation* is a dummy variable, with gay or lesbian being coded as 1 and straight as 0, and is the independent variable in the first regression. The coefficient for sexual orientation will explain how being gay/lesbian affects wages positively or negatively, and the R-squared will determine how much these variables explain the variability of wages among gay men, straight men, and lesbian women and straight women.

*Labor force status* is a dummy variable in this study, and I will only use respondents who indicate that they work full time and part time when asked to describe their labor force status and

are given these options: working full-time, working part-time, working-temp ill/etc, working-maternity or family leave, not working but looking for work, school, keeping house, caring for family, and other.

The major shortcoming in these data is the lack of a measure of occupation and industry, which makes it impossible for me to assess the effects of my independent and control variables in light of the effect of well-documented segregation of jobs by sex. For example, women and men segregate to different fields and different positions within fields. The positions that men hold are generally better paid and more stable than the positions that women hold. There are many theories as to why this happens. Women may prefer certain types of occupations, in order to have flexible hours and the ability to leave work easily to bear and rear children. Others posit that employers prefer men or women for particular jobs because of learned social values and stereotypes about gender (Anker 1997). Daneshvary, Waddoups, and Wimmer (2009) and Jepsen (2007) found a small effect of industry and occupation on wage differences between lesbians and straight women. Others, such as Blandford (2003), Badgett (1995), Cushing-Daniels and Yeung (2009), and Black et. al (2003) found that industry and occupation did not have a statistically significant effect on income differences between gay men and straight men and between lesbians and straight women. Despite these limitations, I believe that a test of relations between other variables remains worthwhile given the need for more research on this important topic, and that others' findings on job segregation by sexuality support that this variable is not crucial to the study.

My independent variable in this study is self-identified *sexual orientation*, named ORIENT on the survey, as previously discussed. The dependent variable is *income*, which I have nominally defined as the amount of money in dollars that a full-time and part-time worker earns in a given year. In the survey, full time is defined as working 35 or more hours per week, and part time is working less than 35 hours per week.

**Table 1: Variables**

Variable Name	Operational Definition
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>	
<i>Sexual Orientation</i> (ORIENT) Straight=0, gay/lesbian=1	Straight or gay identity based on sexual attraction
<i>Partner who keeps house</i> (SPLSTWK1F) Works for pay=0, keeps house=1	Partner is keeping house or taking care of family exclusively
<i>Presence of children in home</i> (KIDSRECODE) No children=0, children=1	Dependent children living at home or not
<i>Attitude</i> (SAMESEX) Agree=0, disagree=1	Degree of agreement that “ <i>Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right</i> ”
<i>Labor force status</i> (LABORFOR) Part-time=0, full-time=1	Respondent is working full time (35 or more hours per week) or part time (<35 hours per week)
<b>DEPENDENT VARIABLE</b>	
<i>Income</i> (EARN)	Total individual annual earnings in dollars
<b>CONTROL VARIABLES</b>	
<i>Race</i> (RACE) Black=0, white=1	Self-identified race: white or Black
<i>Gender</i> (GENDER) Male=0, female=1	Self-identified gender: Male or female
<i>Age</i> (AGER) 24 years old=0	Age in years
<i>Marital status or cohabitation</i> (MARRIED and COHAB) No partner=0, partnered=1	The respondent is legally married or informally cohabiting
<i>Education</i> (HIEDUC) 9 <sup>th</sup> grade=0	Years of schooling and/or highest degree earned

## Methods

The National Center of Health Statistics (NCHS) conducted the *National Survey of Family Growth* in 2006-2010. Using an area probability sample in order to obtain a nationally representative sample, the data collection included 60 to 80-minute confidential face-to-face interviews with trained, female interviewers. These women interviewed more than 10,000 males and more than 12,000 females and conducted these interviews 48 weeks out of each year. One benefit of having only female interviewers is that they are perceived to be more sensitive and understanding than men, which may encourage the interviewees to be more open in their responses, especially for sensitive topics such as sex. Additionally, the most sensitive part of the survey was administered by a computer, and the respondents answered these questions privately to ensure more truthful responses. A shortcoming of the sample is that it is a young sample, which prevents us comparing these data to the incomes of elderly people. Additionally, 357 people reported that they are gay or lesbian workers and 17,230 reported that they are straight workers. There is no way to know if this is representative of the working American adult

population, because no conclusive research exists on sexual orientation demographics in the United States.

On these data from the *National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010*, I conduct separate hierarchical OLS regression analyses for males and females, in order to determine a relationship between annual income and sexual orientation by gender (Mirowsky 2013). In the first stage, I control for *race, education, labor force status* and *age*. In the second stage, I add the independent variable *sexual orientation*; and the regression tests the effect of sexual orientation on income. In the third model, to test the hypothesis that the gendered division of household labor affects income discrepancies between gay/lesbian and straight people, I add *marital or cohabitation status, partner who keeps house* and *presence of children in the home* as independent variables. This allows us to see the extent to which the household variables mediate the relationship between sexual orientation and income. Finally, in a third stage, I test the hypothesis that gays' and lesbians' negative *attitudes* towards same-sex sex correlate with mental health problems, make their own mediating contributions to a wage gap.

A limitation of the study is that the NSFG does not ask about the number of hours worked per week. Therefore, I cannot break income down to dollars per hour. Part time work could mean anything from one hour to 34 hours of work per week. Although this variable is not ideal, it will still give an idea of the employment status of the respondents.

In a contribution to the established literature, this research uses a sexual orientation variable rather than sexual behavior, which is important because respondents' current sexual identities are more important than their past sexual behaviors, as they could have gone through experimental phases or had unusual sexual encounters. This research also has a larger sample of gays and lesbians and a larger overall sample than do previous studies; and it creates an *attitude* variable that has not been used before, in order to provide a measure of the effects of internalized homophobia on income. Limitations to this research include not knowing whether the sample of gays and lesbians is representative of the United States population. We currently lack data that would allow for a test of that. Also, the survey lacks a question on industry of occupation, which limits my ability to control for intervening variables because occupational segregation may contribute to income differences among gay and straight people, just as it does for men and women. And the survey lacks a direct measure of discrimination, forcing me draw an inference from other measures.

Nevertheless, with this test of the correlation between sexuality and income, I hope to contribute to the literature reviewed above, on the role of sexuality on gendered divisions of labor and income, by using updated data to determine whether a wage gap exists, and using my analysis to infer the relative importance of various factors. Finally, I will use those conclusions to formulate suggestions for policies that could close the income gaps between groups.

## Results

As shown in Table 2, the average annual income of female working respondents is \$29,440. Twenty four percent are Black and 76% are white; and, on average, female respondents

completed some college but did not earn a degree. The mean age of female participants is 33 years old, which reflects the survey's analysis of responses from people aged 25 to 45; 1.7% are lesbian; 73% are married or cohabiting; and 68% have children living at home. Partners taking care of the home were unable to be reported for men and women because of a large number of missing cases and small sample sizes for lesbians and gays. The average level of education attained is a high school diploma or GED.

Men's average income is \$41,690, and they are slightly older than the women, with an average age of 34. Eleven percent of the male respondents are Black and 89% are white, 2.7% are gay, 77% are married or cohabiting, and 43% have children living in the home. Men are slightly less educated than women. Although the average respondent completed high school, more women received some college education than men. More men than women are opposed to same-sex sex (see Table 3).

In the hierarchical regression as reported in Table 4, I controlled for race, age, labor force status, and highest degree earned in the first regression model; sexual orientation in the second regression model; marital or cohabitation status, presence of children in the home, and marital or cohabitation status in the third; and attitude towards same-sex sex in the fourth. The variables on which we see a statistically significant difference between these two groups of women are age, level of education, race, and attitude towards same-sex sex. For women, for every year that age increases, annual income increases by about \$550.00. The correlation of level of education to income in this model is statistically significant at the .00 level; and, for each degree earned, income rises by about \$4,500. Whites earn about \$4,800 more than Blacks. Also, the more a woman disagrees that same-sex sex is all right, the less money she makes; but the coefficient for the variable of same-sex sex attitudes is very small. Presence of children in the home, marital or cohabitation status, sexual orientation, and opinions of same-sex sex have only trivial direct effects on income, in this model. Contrary to my hypotheses, introducing new variables in each regression model does not affect the correlations reported in previous models. The zero-order correlations show that lesbians earn \$1,911.46 more than straight women without any controls, and that as women disagree that same-sex sex is all right, their income decreases by \$6,725.40 (see Table 4).

The mean values of all of the control variables are similar for gay men and straight men except for those of education (see Table 3). In this sample, gay men earn about \$8,000 more than straight men do per year, and are more educated than straight men. Gay men, on average, have completed some college, but no degree; and straight men, on average, attain a high school diploma or GED. Age is also strongly correlated with income; and, as a man ages, his income increases by \$1,100 per year. Before adding controls, the bivariate regression shows that gay men earn \$8,282.94 more than straight men and that men who disagree with same-sex sex earn \$3,941.92 less than those who believe that it is all right (see Table 5). The rest of the variables for men have statistically significant but substantively trivial correlations with income. The strongest correlations of income are with age and education. For each degree a man earns, his income increases by approximately \$5,000 (see Table 5).

## Conclusions

Findings of this study fail to support my hypotheses that gay men earn less than straight men and lesbians earn more than straight women. This may owe, in part to the limitations of this study, which include an imprecise income variable and a large number of missing cases for some variables. Respondents recorded their income by selecting from among a limited list of ranges of varying size rather than particular dollar amounts. Categories range in size from \$2,500 to \$10,000; and the upper income bracket includes all of those who make \$75,000 and more. Such data do not allow for a thorough analysis of respondents in middle- and upper-income brackets. A large number of missing cases were found in the partner's labor force status variable, which limits the ability to fully analyze results from this variable. Also, there is an overrepresentation of Black women in this sample, but a representative ratio of Black to white men.

These limitations noted, this analysis can still add to the growing literature on income gaps between gay men and straight men and lesbians and straight women, a question originally raised by Badgett (1995). For both men and women, age and education have the strongest correlation with income. This research finding of a gay premium is not consistent with the bulk of the literature, which shows that gay men earn less than straight men (Alegretto and Arthur 2001; Badgett 1995; Clain and Leppel 2001; Custing-Daniels and Yeung 2009). But the difference in education offers an explanation for the gay premium. In 2003, Black et al. also found that gay men attain more education than straight men, though they offered no explanation for this.

In a follow-up study published while the article by Black et al. was forthcoming, Barrett et al. (2002) discovered that gay men attain more education if they come out later in life than they do if they come out earlier. Early self-identification as being gay and gay sexual activity earlier in life are both related to reduced education; and the authors of that study hypothesize that this results from discrimination early in life, because the negative effects did not seem to result from such family background factors as parental education and minority status. They specify that this discrimination is in the form of homophobia rather than harassment. They suggest that gay men who are sexually active or aware of their gay sexual orientation before they are 17 years old perform just as well as nongay men, but those who are aware later in life are overachievers. They did not compare gay male educational attainment to that of straight males. This study found a very small difference in educational attainment between younger gay men and older gay men. This conflicts with Black et al.'s study, because Floyd and Bakeman (2006) and Grov et al. (2006) found that younger cohorts came out earlier than older cohorts. Based on this finding, we should see a difference in education between younger and older gay men in this study.

The LGBT rights movement has made remarkable strides since 2002, including anti-discrimination policy implementation, an increase in the legality of marriage equality across states, and an overall shift in opinions of same-sex relationships. Although prejudice and discrimination against gays and lesbians is still widespread, the shift in acceptance of it and reduced prejudice may relate to gay men attaining more education than straight men. This hypothesis is supported in this data set. In this sample, the difference in education between

younger gay men and younger straight men is much greater than the difference in education between older gay men and older straight men. The recent cultural shift and the stronger unity in the LGBT community may influence especially younger gay men's educational attainment.

The income disparity found between lesbians and straight women may lack statistical significance because I could not account for differences between these two groups that were not included in this study, such as industry of occupation or amount of time performing domestic labor. The weak correlation between sexual orientation and income for women fails to confirm the hypothesis of a lesbian premium, and is inconsistent with previous literature, which shows that lesbians earn more than straight women (Baumle, Compton, and Poston 2009; Blandford 2003; Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009; Jepsen 2007). In this sample, lesbians and straight women are nearly identical in average age, education, partner's employment status, presence of a partner, and race. The major differences are in the presence of children, as straight women are more likely to have children in the home, and in attitudes of same-sex sex, as straight women are more likely to disagree that same-sex sex is all right. The slight lesbian premium may come from lesbians being less likely to have children, or the fact that women earn less money as they disagree that same-sex sex is all right.

This research poses new questions to add to those in the literature on discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workforce. Because of the finding that gay men are more educated than straight men, especially at a younger age, more research on the relation between sexuality and education is warranted. Additionally, this research shows that the more homophobic men and women are, the less money they make. With a larger sample of gays and lesbians, one could study whether this differs for gays and lesbians versus straight people, which will test the effects of internalized homophobia on income.

In order to determine whether divisions of household labor do indeed have an effect on gays' and lesbians' incomes, more research on this is necessary. This research could investigate how gay and lesbian couples divide household labor and child care, how many hours they work for pay each week, and whether or not they hire professionals to take care of their households and/or children.

Future surveys should include a variable for being out or closeted at work, because this variable could help clarify whether income differences are results of direct discrimination. Industry of occupation is also an important variable to include, because male-dominated industries tend to pay better than female-dominated industries, and some researchers found a small effect of industry on wage differences between lesbians and straight women (Daneshvary, Waddoups, and Wimmer 2009, Jepsen 2007). Income variables should be more precise, especially in upper-income brackets. Questions about people's domestic burdens that bear asking in surveys include number of hours spent taking care of households, average numbers of hours of sleep per night, precise number of hours worked for pay per week, and similar questions about their partners as well. State of residence should be included in future studies, as antidiscrimination laws vary from state to state, and overall viewpoints about the morality of queer identities vary in different regions of the United States. Testing the effectiveness of these

antidiscrimination laws will aid in creating and reforming policies that protect gay and lesbian individuals. Finally, as transgender issues come to the forefront of LGBT and feminist activism, surveys need to start including more gender identities than man/woman or male/female. Options for this are allowing respondents to self-identify, or adding responses such as “transgender,” or “transgender: male to female,” and “transgender: female to male.” This will not only aid in the study of the effects of sexual orientation on income by providing a more accurate gender identity, but it will also open doors for more research on the status of transgender people at work.

Although this study found only a small link between sexual orientation and income, it warrants further research on this topic. That gay men in this sample attained more education than straight men may mean that gay men in our country have been making different decisions in the workforce based on their sexual orientation, which led to the gay premium observed here. Another speculation for the gay premium relates to the rising rates of working-class male unemployment (Rosin 2012), and this trend may be stronger for straight men than for gay men. One reason is that uneducated females end up working in the service industry. Their male counterparts do not follow because their masculinity is not appropriately reflected in this type of work, so they remain unemployed. This pressure on men to conform to a particular model of masculinity is “imposed by men on themselves, by women on men, and even by workplace structures that penalize men more heavily for, say, taking time off to be with their families” (Rosin 2012). Working-class gay men may feel less pressure to exhibit this masculinity, as they do not have female partners to hold them accountable to it. Also, they may be less likely to adhere to strict gender roles, as their gender roles in the home usually are not heteronormative. Therefore, they may be less susceptible to this trend in unemployment. Furthermore, as speculated earlier in this paper, because studies that have found that college-educated people are less disapproving of same-sex sex than less educated people (Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas 2005), more gays and lesbians may be out in professional careers or may intentionally seek out professional careers for this reason.

Regardless of sexual orientation, men are still earning significantly more than women, and reasons for these differences, such as having children, may give lesbians a slight advantage over straight women. This sheds light on the need for affordable childcare, which can facilitate the primary caregiver’s success at work, and second-parent leave when a new child comes into the family, rather than only maternity leave, which assumes the female is the caretaker and that there is a female parent. Based on the results of this study, it is apparent that antidiscrimination laws must remain in place, as incomes between gays and lesbians and straight people seem to be leveling out. Although this may be so, activism promoting equal rights must continue, as gays and lesbians continue to experience harassment, bullying, youth homelessness, and other forms of discrimination.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Women**

<b>Orientation</b>		<b>Annual earnings in dollars</b>	<b>Labor Force Status</b> (part time=0, full time=1)	<b>Highest degree earned</b> (9 <sup>th</sup> grade=0)	<b>Age in years</b> (25 to 43 years old, 25=0)	<b>Race</b> (Black=0, white=1)	<b>Relationship status</b> (no partner=0, partner=1)	<b>Presence of children</b> (no kids=0, kids=1)	<b>Attitude towards same-sex sex</b> (agree=0, disagree=1)
<b>Straight:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	29408.12	.76	High school graduate	33.35	.75	.73	.68	.52
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	23296.67	.43	2.31	5.50	.43	.44	.47	.50
	<b>Median</b>	22500.00	1.00	Some college, but no degree	33.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	<b>N</b>	6925	4868	7345	7045	6492	7345	7345	7116
<b>Lesbian:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	.31319.58	.76	Some college, but no degree	33.45	.74	.65	.32	.32
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	21352.76	.43	2.30	5.58	.44	.48	.47	.47
	<b>Median</b>	27500.00	1.00	Some college, but no degree	32.00	1.00	1.00	.00	.00
	<b>N</b>	117	88	123	113	113	123	123	123
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	29439.88	.76	High school graduate	33.36	.76	.73	.68	.68
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	23265.59	.43	2.31	5.50	.43	.44	.47	.47
	<b>Median</b>	22500.00	1.00	Some college, but no degree	33.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	<b>N</b>	7042	4956	7468	7158	6605	7468	7468	7468

\*Statistically significant at the 1% level

\*\*Statistically significant at the 5% level  
(Standardized coefficients in parentheses)

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Men**

<b>Orientation</b>		<b>Annual earnings in dollars</b>	<b>Labor Force Status</b> (part time=0, full time=1)	<b>Education</b> (9 <sup>th</sup> grade=0)	<b>Age in years</b> (25 to 43 years old, 25=0)	<b>Race</b> (Black=0, white=1)	<b>Relationship status</b> (no partner=0, partner=1)	<b>Presence of children</b> (no kids=0, kids=1)	<b>Attitude towards same-sex sex</b> (agree=0, disagree=1)
<b>Straight:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	41470	.87	High school graduate	34	.79	.77	.44	.61
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	30691	.34	2.36	6	.41	.42	.50	.49
	<b>Median</b>	32500	1.00	Some college, but no degree	33	.00	1.00	.00	1.00
	<b>N</b>	5725	4781	5934	5674	5051	5934	5934	5813
<b>Gay:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	49753	.84	Some college, but no degree	35	.84	.62	.03	.06
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	38090	.36	2.44	6	.41	.49	.16	.23
	<b>Median</b>	37500	1.00	Associate Degree in college/university	37	.00	1.00	.00	.00
	<b>N</b>	156	116	159	151	141	159	159	159
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	41690	.87	High school graduate	34	.79	.77	.43	.60
	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	30935	.34	2.36	6	.41	.42	.50	.49
	<b>Median</b>	32500	1.00	Some college, but no degree	33	.00	1.00	.00	1.00
	<b>N</b>	5881	4897	6093	5825	5192	6093	6093	5972

\*Statistically significant at the 1% level

\*\*Statistically significant at the 5% level

(Standardized coefficients in parentheses)

**Table 4: Bivariate Regressions of Income on Sexual Orientation and on Attitude Towards Same-sex Sex**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b> (Straight=0, gay/lesbian=1)	1911.46 (.01)	8282.94* (.04)
<b>R square</b>	.011	.043
<b>Constant</b>	29408.12	41470.20
<b>Attitude towards same-sex sex</b> (Agree=0, disagree=1)	-6725.40* (-.15)	-3941.92* (-.14)
<b>R square</b>	.145	.019
<b>Constant</b>	32483.26	52597.84

\*Statistically significant at the 1% level

\*\*Statistically significant at the 5% level

(Standardized coefficients in parentheses)

**Table 5: Regression Coefficients of Annual Income**

	<b>Women (1)</b>	<b>Women (2)</b>	<b>Women (3)</b>	<b>Women (4)</b>	<b>Men (1)</b>	<b>Men (2)</b>	<b>Men (3)</b>	<b>Men (4)</b>
<b>Age</b> (25-43 years old; 25=0)	543.20* (.13)	543.24* (.13)	547.82* (.13)	563.47* (.14)	1149.55* (.21)	1144.45* (.20)	1017.22* (.18)	1026.83* (.18)
<b>Education</b> (9 <sup>th</sup> grade = 0)	4610.98* (.45)	4613.72* (.42)	4582.38* (.42)	4445.38* (.40)	5265.18* (.38)	5255.28* (.38)	5433.77* (.39)	5283.74* (.38)
<b>Labor force status</b> (part time = 0, full time=1)	12574.99* (.23)	12571.26* (.23)	12524.57* (.23)	12439.36* (.23)	21791.37* (.23)	21819.46* (.23)	20906.96* (.22)	21007.76* (.22)
<b>Race</b> (Black=0, white=1)	4818.04* (.09)	4821.47* (.09)	4669.28* (.09)	3675.27* (.07)	10972.50* (.14)	10959.72* (.14)	10620.58* (.13)	9970.53* (.12)
<b>Sexual Orientation</b> (straight=0, gay/lesbian=1)		-1539.94 (-.01)	-1736.19 (-.01)	-3187.71 (-.02)		2616.86 (.01)	6147.82** (.03)	4826.10 (.02)
<b>Relationship status</b> (no partner=0, partner=1)			483.91 (.01)	635.30 (.01)			-1296.31 (-.02)	-1288.27 (-.02)
<b>Presence of children in home</b> (no kids=0, kids=1)			-560.33 (-.01)	-153.58 (.00)			8611.45* (.14)	8948.90* (.14)
<b>Attitude towards same-sex sex</b> (agree=0, disagree=1)				-4037.17* (-.09)				-2944.94* (-.05)
<b>Constant</b>	-8745.93	-8731.90	-8441.15	-5464.56	-18205.46	-18191.63	-19798.98	-17119.29
<b>R Square</b>	.275	.275	.276	.282	.298	.298	.315	.317

\*Statistically significant at the 1% level

\*\*Statistically significant at the 5% level

(Standardized coefficients in parentheses)

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