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SAME-SEX AND DIFFERENT-SEX COHABITING COUPLE

RELATIONSHIP STABILITY

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Abstract

Relationship stability is a key indicator of well-being, but most research based in the U.S. has been limited to different-sex couples. The 2008 SIPP Panel provides an untapped data resource to analyze relationship stability of same-sex cohabiting, different-sex cohabiting and different-sex married couples (n=5,701). The advantages of the SIPP data include the recent, nationally representative, and longitudinal data collection, ample sample of same-sex cohabitators, respondent and partner socioeconomic characteristics, and identification of a state-level indicator of support for same-sex marriage. We tested competing hypotheses about the stability of same-sex versus different-sex cohabiting couples that were guided by incomplete institutionalization, minority stress, and couple homogamy perspectives (predicting same-sex couples would be less stable) as well as economic resources (predicting same-sex couples would be more stable). In fact, neither was supported as results indicated that same-sex cohabiting couples typically experience similar levels of stability as different-sex cohabiting couples. Among unmarried couples living in a state that has a policy that does not support same-sex couple marriage is negatively associated with stability. The level of same-sex couple stability is not on par with that of different-sex married couples. The findings contribute to a growing literature on health and well-being of same-sex couples and provide a broader understanding of family life.

Same-Sex and Different-Sex Cohabiting Couple Relationship Stability

The relationship stability of marriage and cohabitation has been studied extensively among different-sex couples (Amato 2010; Manning and Cohen 2012; Teachman 2002). To date there are only a handful of studies of relationship stability among same-sex couples with the bulk of this work on European couples (Andersson et al. 2006; Kalmijn et al. 2007; Lau 2012; Ross et al. 2011). In the U.S. most recent work has focused on distinctions among legally recognized relationships (marriages or civil unions) (Badgett and Herman 2013; Rosenfeld 2014). Given that most same sex couples still do not have the option to marry, it is important to examine relationship stability among same-sex cohabiting couples.

Drawing on recently collected, nationally representative, longitudinal data from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), we extend the limited knowledge about stability in same-sex relationships by evaluating how same-sex relationship stability compares with the stability of different sex cohabitations and marriages in the U.S. context. From the incomplete institutionalization, minority stress, and couple homogamy perspectives, we anticipate same-sex cohabiting couples are less stable. Alternatively, from an economic resources perspective, we expect same-sex cohabiting couples are more stable than different-sex cohabiting couples. In addition to testing these competing hypotheses, we also consider the role of social context gauged by residence in a state that has policies supportive of same-sex marriage. As relationship stability is a key indicator of well-being among different-sex couples a

focus on same-sex couples will demonstrate how same-sex couples fare in a context marked by sharp social and legal change (Gates 2013).

BACKGROUND

Prior research on the stability of same-sex couple relationships rests largely on work in Europe with a handful of recent U.S. based studies. Some of the European studies have contrasted formally recognized same-sex relationships (registered partnerships, civil partnerships, domestic partnerships) and different-sex marriages. Drawing on Swedish and Norwegian population registration data from the mid to late 1990s Andersson and colleagues (2006) report same-sex couples in registered partnerships have higher instability than their counterparts in different-sex marriages. In 2004 the British government formally recognized civil partnerships in England and Wales. Recent evidence shows that same-sex registered partnerships are more stable than different-sex marriages in these countries (Ross et al. 2011). This difference in stability could be due to early adopters who were the most stable same-sex couples.

European based research on cohabiting same-sex relationships finds same-sex relationships are less stable than different-sex relationships. Kalmijn, Loeve, and Manting (2007) analyze linked tax record data among unions formed in the 1990s in the Netherlands and report that same-sex couples over age 30 in relationships at least one year in length experience higher instability within a ten year window than either different-sex cohabiting or married couples. These were likely not formalized relationships because in the Netherlands registered domestic partnerships were introduced in 1998 and legal marriage in 2001 (Steenhof and Harmsen 2003). Drawing on two longitudinal birth cohort studies (16-34 year olds 1974 to 2004) in Britain, Lau (2012) shows that cohabiting same-sex couples have higher dissolution rates than different-sex

married or cohabiting couples. While not relevant for the Lau (2012) study, Britain provided formalized recognition of same-sex couples in 2004 and legalized same-sex marriage in 2013.

Evaluations of the U.S. context are important as the policy and social environments surrounding same-sex relationships are quite distinct from Europe. The paucity of recent research on same sex relationship stability in the U.S. context reflects the lack of suitable data. Specifically, a key limitation has been access to appropriate data with sufficient sample sizes of same-sex couples. A few earlier studies have considered stability among same-sex couples, for example Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and Kurdeck (1998, 2004), who drew on select convenience samples from the late 1970s and 1980s, respectively, and report lower stability among same-sex couples.

There are a few recent studies drawing on representative data sets that indicate similar levels of stability among same-sex and different sex-couples in the U.S. once accounting for legal or formal status of the relationship. Badgett and Herman (2013) use aggregate level U.S. administrative data and find among couples in legally recognized unions (domestic partnerships, civil unions, and marriages) dissolution rates are higher among different-sex than same-sex couples. They acknowledge that the stability differential may be due in part to the selection of same-sex couples who enter into formalized relationships as well as the legal complications in the U.S. surrounding the dissolution of same-sex marriages and partnerships. Rosenfeld (2014) employs longitudinal data from the How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) data set with an oversample of same-sex couples and observes stability from the point of relationship (not marriage) initiation. Rosenfeld (2014) reports that starting in 2009 and over a three-year time span same-sex couples in formalized or marriage-like relationships (n=137) share similar odds of dissolution as different-sex married couples.

Recent U.S. research focusing on unmarried same-sex couples suggests similar odds of relationship stability for same-sex and different-sex couples depending on gender or residence of the couple. Rosenfeld (2014) reports that in the HCMST sample unmarried different-sex and same-sex couples (sexual, dating, and cohabiting) (n=266) share similar dissolution rates. Joyner, Manning, and Bogle (2014) draw on the young adult cohort (ages 26-32) of the large nationally representative sample in the National Longitudinal Adolescent Health Survey (n=277), and find that relationship stability among same-sex and different-sex couples (sexual, dating, cohabiting, and married) depends on the gender and residence of the couple. Young adult female same-sex couples share comparable levels of stability as different-sex couples but male same-sex couples have higher levels of relationship instability (Joyner et al. 2014). Further, the observed stability differentials are related in part to context measured as the neighborhood concentration of same-sex couples and county-level voting patterns. Same-sex couples in neighborhoods with high concentrations of same-sex couples or living in counties with greater shares of democrats experience levels of relationship on par with different-sex couples (Joyner et al. 2014). These studies all move forward our understanding of same-sex couple stability, but to date no U.S. research has focused on the relationship stability of solely cohabiting same-sex relationships as well as addressing the policy climate toward same-sex marriage. It is important to focus on cohabiting same-sex relationships because they constitute about four out of five same-sex residential relationships (Badgett and Herman 2013) and until recently same-sex marriage was a legal option in only a few states.

Explanations for Relationship Stability

Same-sex couples may experience lower levels of relationship stability because of incomplete institutionalization, minority stress, relationship investments, and couple homogeneity.

The incomplete institutionalization (Cherlin 1978) and minority stress (Meyer 1995) perspectives on intimate relationships argue that same-sex relationships may be more unstable due to weaker social support and a lack of institutionalization of same-sex relationships. Based on an incomplete institutionalization perspective we expect greater instability among same-sex than different sex couples. This hypothesis builds on the incomplete institutionalization framework which was introduced by Cherlin (1978) to understand stepfamilies and extended by Nock (1995) to study cohabitation. It is well known that cohabiting couples do not enjoy the same stability as married couples, in part because of the lack of legal and social support. Further, selection processes are operating as more disadvantaged couples less often have sufficient economic resources to marry. Couples may experience stress and conflict as they navigate roles and relationships that lack shared norms and expectations. Further, consistent with a minority stress approach same-sex couples may face many barriers due in part to discrimination and challenges to establishing and maintaining high quality relationships in some communities (Mohr and Daley 2008; Otis et al. 2006). Cohabiting with a member of the same-sex may generate stress as it represents a public presentation of a gay or lesbian individual with their partner.

Further, lower levels of stability may be observed among same-sex couples in part because of sociodemographic indicators, the presence of children, and couple homogamy in terms of age, race and education. First, children represent a relationship-specific investment that act as a barrier to dissolution (Levinger 1965) and children have been found to deter separation (Brines and Joyner 1999; Kurdek 1998). Yet investments tied to stability such as relationship-specific capital (children) tend to be lower among same-sex cohabiting couples (Payne 2014). Further, children in same-sex families are typically the product of a prior different-sex

relationship (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2009) which are akin to step-parent families. As found among different-sex couples, among same-sex couples these step-family relationships may be associated with greater relationship stress and challenge relationship stability. Second, homogamy is associated with greater stability among different-sex couples (Bratter and King 2008; Phillips and Sweeney 2006; Teachman 2002). Prior work indicates that homogamy (age, race/ethnicity, education) is lower among same-sex than different-sex couples (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005; Schwartz and Graf 2009). On average, same-sex couples less often possess the protective factors offered by children and homogamy suggesting same-sex couples may experience lower instability than different-sex couples.

Alternatively, same-sex cohabiting couples may experience greater stability because of the higher socioeconomic levels of same-sex than different-sex cohabiting couples. Same-sex cohabiting couples may experience greater stability because they are more advantaged in terms of education, income, or home ownership, and are less likely to be poor or to receive public assistance (Gates 2009; Krivickas 2010; Williams 2012, 2013). We expect that once we adjust for socioeconomic factors any stability advantage for same-sex couples may decline.

Supportive state policy contexts have been found to provide some protective buffers for same-sex couples. Gays and lesbians who live in states with supportive policies (employment discrimination and bullying laws) targeted at sexual minorities experience lower levels of serious psychological conditions (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2009). In the U.S. DOMA (a state-level Defense of Marriage Act that forbids the recognition of same-sex marriages) policies have been found to not be associated with the formation of different-sex marriage or the stability of different-sex marriages at the aggregate level (Dillender 2014; Langbein and Yost 2009). To date there have not been assessments of the policy variable and stability of same-sex or different-sex cohabiting

couples. We introduce policy level support for same sex relationships by including an indicator measuring whether the state of residence is one in which a DOMA has been enacted by either a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as the union of a woman and a man or a statutory ban on same-sex marriage. In 2008, the initial year of the SIPP, there were 21 states that had not enacted DOMA.

Same-sex couples in cohabiting relationships may experience more stability than their different sex counterparts because they do not have a marriage option. Same-sex couples with characteristics that support stability will remain cohabiting if they cannot legally marry. The federal government is moving towards recognizing same-sex marriages and increasing numbers of states are offering legally sanctioned same-sex marriages. Also, some states and municipalities offer civil unions or domestic partnerships. At the time of the initial SIPP data collection in 2008 there were sporadic rulings supporting same-sex marriage, but the only states to consistently allow same-sex marriage were Massachusetts (May, 2004) and Connecticut (November, 2008). Consequently, at the time of the survey many same-sex couples in cohabiting relationships may have viewed cohabitation as alternative form of marriage and experienced high levels of stability. Thus, we contrast the stability of same-sex cohabiting couples and different-sex married couples. From the incomplete institutionalization and minority stress perspectives we anticipate same-sex cohabiting couples are less stable than different-sex married couples. Alternatively, from an economic resources perspective, we expect same-sex cohabiting couples may share similar levels of stability as different-sex cohabiting couples. Further, from a policy perspective, same-sex couples who largely do not have the option to marry may experience levels of stability on par with different-sex married couples.

Current Study

The present analysis of the 2008 SIPP data provides an opportunity to prospectively study a broad age range (16-87 years old) of same-sex and different-sex couples over a four year period. We focus on two competing hypotheses. We expect different-sex couples (married and cohabiting) to have greater relationship stability than same-sex cohabiting couples in part because of incomplete institutionalization of cohabitation, minority stress experienced by same-sex couples, fewer relationship investments in same-sex couples, and greater levels of heterogamy among same-sex couples. Alternatively, based on the greater levels of socioeconomic well-being in same-sex couples we expect similar or higher levels of stability in same-sex cohabiting than different-sex cohabiting couples. Finally, given the shifting policy climate surrounding same-sex marriage, we test whether state-level support for same-sex marriage is associated with relationship stability.

DATA

We used the 2008 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP 2008 panel), a longitudinal study that the Census Bureau conducted to provide reports on the sources and amounts of income, labor force participation, and welfare program participation as well as eligibility of the civilian noninstitutionalized population of the United States. The 2008 SIPP Panel included 14 waves that were fielded between 2008 and 2013. At each wave data about the previous four months were collected, yielding information that spanned 56 continuous months. All members of the household residing at the initial address units were considered original SIPP sample members. These original SIPP sample members were followed over time even if they moved to other places or formed other families. At follow-up waves, data were also collected about people who co-resided with original SIPP sample members. Thus, the SIPP provides a unique opportunity to examine how the families of the original SIPP sample members evolve

over time. Using the core respondent's household roster for the first reference month in the panel, we identified 2,283 cohabiting couples (126 same-sex and 2,157 different-sex). By relying on the traditional household roster we only identified couples where one partner was the household head; however, this approach had the added benefit that all couples entered the risk period at the same time. Discrete-time event history analyses were conducted where 126 same-sex couples contributed 5,175 "person"-period observations and the 2,157 different-sex couples contributed 75,369 person-period observations. We address the second research question by including married couples at the time of first interview. To avoid longer duration marriages, the results presented in tables are restricted to couples married 5 years or less (3,465). Sensitivity tests compared these estimates to 10 years or less (6,144) and results were comparable across marital duration samples.

Measures

Dependent variable. Union dissolution was measured by two variables: occurrence and timing. We specified the observation window from 2008 to 2013. A couple was coded as intact until one of the partners was not reported on the household roster. The occurrence of dissolution was operationalized as a binary variable coded 0 for couples that had not experienced dissolution between September 2008 and January 2013 and 1 if they did. Cohabitation can dissolve by either transitioning into marriage or breaking up, but, since same-sex cohabitators cannot marry in most states, we restrict our definition of dissolution to breaking up. Thus, cohabiting couples who transition into marriage are coded as 0 on dissolution. Timing was calculated in months such that respondents were exposed to risk upon entry in the survey and exited the risk period on (1) the date a partner was no longer in the household (for couples who separated before January 2013), (2) the earlier date that a partner dropped out of the study (for couples who were censored by

interview or those who separate or divorce before dropping out of the study or provided inconsistent reports on the presence of a partner), or (3) the end of the date of the last interview (for couples who did not drop out of the study, provided consistent reports on the presence of a partner, and remained together for the duration of the survey).

Supplemental analyses focused on respondents who formed unions after the initial SIPP interview in an effort to assess the extent of the left censoring bias (n=65 same-sex and n=1,760 different sex cohabiting couples). Duration is measured from the start of the relationship to the point of dissolution or censorship at the time of interview. Life table relationship stability estimates are reported along with relationship duration according to outcome (stable or unstable). Though these results are not definitive, they provide some insights into assessing whether there could be left censoring bias in our primary analyses.

Focal characteristics. We measure variables that identify characteristics of the couple and not just one member of the couple. A dummy-indicator distinguished *same-sex cohabiting couples* (1) from different-sex cohabiting couples (0). This measure captures the gender of the members of the couple and their relationship as provided on the roster and not their sexual orientation. Given the small sample size we could not distinguish female same-sex (n=65) and male same-sex (n=61) couples in all models but we do provide some descriptive findings. Two indicators measured age of the couple: a continuous indicator of the *younger partner's age* (in years) and a dummy indicator for *age heterogamy* flagging couples for which the age difference was at least five years were coded as 1. Race was coded into three mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories: both partners were white (reference), one partner was non-white, and neither partner was white. Small cell sizes for same-sex couples required that we use these indicators of race. Educational attainment was defined as a time-invariant variable and combined

both partners' *highest level of education* and was coded into a three-level dummy indicator: both have a college degree or higher (reference); one has a college degree, one does not; neither partner has a college degree. Further education refinements would have been preferable but the sample size prevented detailed categorization of education. A continuous, time-varying indicator for household income was included and logged to adjust for skewness. We measure the presence of *children in the household* with couples who lived in a household with at least one minor coded 1 and those living in a household without minor children as 0. We recognize that this child may or may not be the offspring of the head and his/her partner. Finally, a policy indicator at the state-level to measure support for same-sex couples was created, *no-DOMA state*, which flagged couples who lived in a state with no legislation explicitly banning same-sex marriage in 2008. In 2008 there were 21 states (including D.C.) in the United States that did not have a DOMA provision.

Analytic Strategy

Life table estimates illustrate the relative stability of same-sex and different-sex cohabiting unions. This strategy provides estimates of the timing of instability and accounts for right censoring. The SIPP data do not include measures of the duration of the relationship prior to interview. Thus, couples have been together for varying lengths of time. We conduct supplemental analyses of couples who formed relationships during the SIPP period to indirectly assess the potential role of left censoring.

Discrete-time, binary logistic event history models are estimated at the bivariate and multivariate level. Model fit statistics suggested duration dependence was best modeled as a simple continuous function for months. Multivariate models include an indicator denoting same-sex and different sex cohabiting couples, age, race, education, household income, and the

presence of minor children. A third model was limited to the gender of the couple and the no-DOMA state indicator. Finally, the full model included union status, all sociodemographic characteristics, and the no-DOMA state indicator. The second set of analyses is similar, but includes married couples in life table estimates and event history models.

RESULTS

Based on weighted life-table estimates from time of interview to dissolution we find that about one-quarter (27%) of same-sex couples and 28% of different-sex cohabiting couples dissolve their relationship (Figure 1). The time of observation is relatively short, 55 months or about 4.5 years.¹ The cumulative proportion who dissolve their relationship within a 36 month time window (from interview to month 36) is 22% for different-sex and 20% for same-sex couples. The dissolution levels for different-sex couples are consistent with reports from similar aged women in the NSFG at the 3 year relationship duration mark (Copen et al. 2013). The average time to dissolution from interview date was 22.8 months for different-sex cohabiting couples and 23.7 months for same-sex couples. Among those who ended their relationship the median duration was 20 months for both groups.

Supplemental analyses were conducted to assess left-censoring issues by contrasting a a subset of same-sex cohabiting couples (n=65) formed after the initial SIPP interview. Given the short observation period they were typically observed for two years or less (69%). The cumulative proportion dissolving their relationship at the two year mark was 33% among different-sex couples and 40% among same-sex couples (results not shown). The average time to breakup for different-sex couples was 12.4 months and for same-sex cohabiting relationships

¹ Even though the sample sizes do not support in-depth analyses of male-male and female-female couples separately, the life tables show higher levels of instability among female (33%) than male (24%) same-sex cohabiting couples. This is consistent with some prior work but these are not conclusive findings. The male-male and female-female couples are similar on all the sociodemographic indicators except presence of children which is higher among female-female couples.

was 10.4 months. The main analyses may be biased toward longer term relationships, meaning that we are missing disruptions that occur quickly after union formation. It appears that in the first two years of the relationship same-sex cohabiting relationships dissolve at similar but somewhat higher rates than different-sex couples. We believe this finding is tentative because of the very modest sample size of same-sex couples, but these findings align with Rosenfeld's (2014) analysis showing similar rates of union stability in the early years of unmarried relationships.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the same-sex and different-sex cohabiting couples as well as different-sex married couples. The table denotes significant differences across the relationship types. The SIPP sample of same-sex and different-sex cohabiting couples is similar in terms of age, race, income, and presence of children as reported in Census (ACS) data (Census Bureau 2008). Table 1 shows that same sex-couples had on average slightly older partners, age 41, than different-sex couples cohabiting, 31, and married, 33, couples. Same-sex couples were more often heterogamous in their ages, 59%, than different-sex couples cohabiting (39%) and married (34%) couples. The racial composition of same-sex couples was less diverse than different-sex couples. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of same-sex couples were both white in contrast to 59% of different-sex cohabiting and 63% of married couples. Same-sex cohabiting couples had much higher average levels of educational attainment than different-sex couples. Whereas in 42% of same-sex couples both individuals had a college degree, among different-sex couples cohabiting couples the share was just 10% and 23% for married couples. Same-sex couples reported a significantly higher median household income their first month in the survey (\$7,934) compared to their different-sex cohabiting counterparts (\$4,141). Given the skewed distribution of household income, multivariate analyses utilize the logged household income.

Same-sex couples less often had children in their home, 23%, in contrast to 44% of different-sex cohabiting and 54% of married couples. Finally, a greater share of same-sex cohabiting couples (62%) lived in a state in 2008 that did not have legislation banning same-sex marriage (No-DOMA) than did different-sex cohabiting (52%) and married (50%) couples. Overall, same-sex cohabiting couples may be more protected than different-sex cohabiting couples against dissolution because they possess characteristics associated with lower dissolution including higher income and education, but they may receive less support for their relationships, less often have relationship investments (children) and are less homogamous in terms of age and education.

Table 2 presents event history logistic regression estimates of the odds ratio of dissolving a same-sex cohabiting relationship. Corresponding with the life table findings presented above, same-sex and different-sex couples experience similar odds of dissolving their relationship. The characteristics of different-sex and same-sex couples are included in Model 2. After accounting for traditional predictors of relationship stability, same-sex and different-sex cohabiting couples share similar odds of instability. The sociodemographic characteristics operate in a similar way in this model as in bivariate models. Couples who are younger experience higher odds of dissolution, but age heterogamy is not tied to dissolution. Couples with education heterogamy, one has a college degree and the other does not, face a modestly higher dissolution than when both members of the couple have a college degree. Neither income nor presence of a child is associated with dissolution. Model 3 includes the indicator measuring state policy banning same-sex marriages. Couples living in a state without a ban against same-sex marriage experience lower odds of dissolution. Model 4 shows that the policy level variable remains statistically related to relationship stability net of the traditional sociodemographic predictors.

Next the relationship stability of same-sex and different-sex cohabiting couples is contrasted to married couples. Figure 2 shows that married couples have much higher levels of stability than cohabiting couples. Fewer than one in ten (7.9%) married couples had separated within three years of observation and the cumulative proportion of married couples that eventually dissolved their union was 11.3%. The mean duration among married couples who ended their relationships was 28.3 months.²

Table 3 presents the multivariate results showing that same-sex cohabiting and different-sex cohabiting couples have statistically significantly higher odds of dissolving their relationships than married different-sex couples at the zero-order and in Model 2 with the traditional sociodemographic indicators. Model 2 shows that couples who are younger experience lower odds of dissolution, and age heterogamy is associated with higher odds of dissolution. Non-white couples experience higher odds of dissolution. Among highly educated married and cohabiting couples (both have a college degree) there are lower levels of instability. Children are associated with marginally significant lower odds of dissolution. Model 3 includes the state level policy measure and shows that among the sample of cohabiting and married couples living in a state that has banned same-sex marriage is associated with marginally significant higher odds of dissolution. The policy level measure does not explain the association between union type (marriage or cohabitation) and dissolution. In the final model (Model 4) the sociodemographic indicators operate in a similar manner as shown in the earlier models, but the DOMA policy indicator is no longer statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

² Results are similar when the sample of married couples is limited to those who have been together for less than 10 years.

In this paper we examine how relationship stability varies for same-sex and different-sex cohabiting and married couples. Stable relationships are linked to high levels of emotional, financial, physical, and social health and well-being. The 2008 SIPP provides a new opportunity to study the stability of same-sex unions in the U.S. context. Specifically, the SIPP data were recently collected, nationally representative, longitudinal in design, contained an ample sample of same-sex cohabitators, and included data on both respondents and partners. We find that same-sex and different-sex couples share similar levels of relationship stability.

Our results belie several perspectives commonly used to explain variation in relationship stability, including incomplete institutionalization, minority stress, relationship investment, couple homogamy, or sociodemographic perspectives. We hypothesized that same-sex couples may experience higher levels of instability relative to their different-sex counterparts in part because of same-sex couples' lower levels of relationship-specific capital, children, and couple heterogamy. However, we find no statistically different levels of stability of different-sex and same-sex cohabiting couples. Also the findings are not consistent with the hypothesis that same-sex couples may experience higher levels of stability because of their more advantaged sociodemographic standing than different-sex cohabiting couples. Perhaps countervailing forces are operating resulting in no difference in stability. Alternatively, the findings from this study may spur researchers to pursue novel theoretical and empirical approaches to study same-sex couple stability that include assessments of variation within same-sex couples.

State-level policy targeted at preventing same-sex couples from legally marrying appears to be associated with relationship instability. In other words, cohabiting couples who live in states without DOMA legislation experience higher levels of stability. However, the state DOMA legislation does not produce differentials in same-sex and different-sex relationship

stability. These findings show that DOMA was associated with lower relationship stability for cohabiting couples. These findings are consistent with prior work that establishes the importance of context (demographic concentration of same-sex couples and voting patterns) in assessments of stability (Joyner et al. 2014). Yet DOMA is not associated with relationship stability for married couples which supports aggregate level analysis showing no association between DOMA policies and different-sex marriage and divorce (Dillender 2014; Langbein and Yost 2009). The DOMA legislation indicator may be a proxy for other contextual variables that are associated with stability. Thus, the policy context appears to play some role in the stability of cohabiting relationships and further attention to other policies related to lesbian and gay protections is warranted. Further, research shows that same-sex marriage policies may have different effects depending on region or ethnicity (Trandafir 2013), and suggests that variability in the role of policy variables is a promising avenue for future studies.

We provide new insights into relationship stability, but recognize this study has a few shortcomings. First, couples are observed after their relationships started so we are not assessing stability from the start of the union, rather from the point of interview. The SIPP data do not include the start date of cohabiting unions so we cannot determine the extent of left censoring. The supplemental analyses rely on a smaller sample and show same-sex cohabiting couples have slightly higher but similar levels of instability early on in the relationship and confirmed in Rosenfeld (2014). This is not conclusive but may suggest different-sex couples do not end their relationships at different paces and that left-censoring is operating similarly for same-sex and different-sex couples. Second, the data include a limited set of predictor variables. While we have measures about both members of the couple, the SIPP does not include indicators of some key factors found to be tied to relationship stability, such as religiosity or relationship history.

Third, the identification of sexual minority couples was based on household rosters and not sexual orientation. Fourth, these analyses do not account for same-sex legal marriages, domestic partnerships or civil unions. At the time of survey there were few states with legalized marriages and a handful of state and locally recognized domestic partnerships or civil unions. As formal recognition is growing it is important that future work recognize varying forms of formal recognition of same-sex relationships. Finally, we do not have a sufficiently large sample to consider variation according to gender or parenthood status of same-sex cohabiting couples.

The findings contribute to a growing literature on the well-being of same-sex couples and their families. Unlike the patterns observed in many European countries, here in the U.S. it seems that same-sex and different-sex cohabiting unions are similarly stable. Despite the distinctive demographic profiles of the two groups, their relationship stability does not differ. Not surprisingly, both types of cohabiting unions—same-sex and different-sex—are less stable, on average, than different-sex married unions. Future research on same-sex couple stability is essential as the legal and social context supporting same-sex couple relationship continues to change.

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Figure 1. Cumulative Proportion of Dissolutions among Same-Sex and Different-Sex Cohabiting Couples

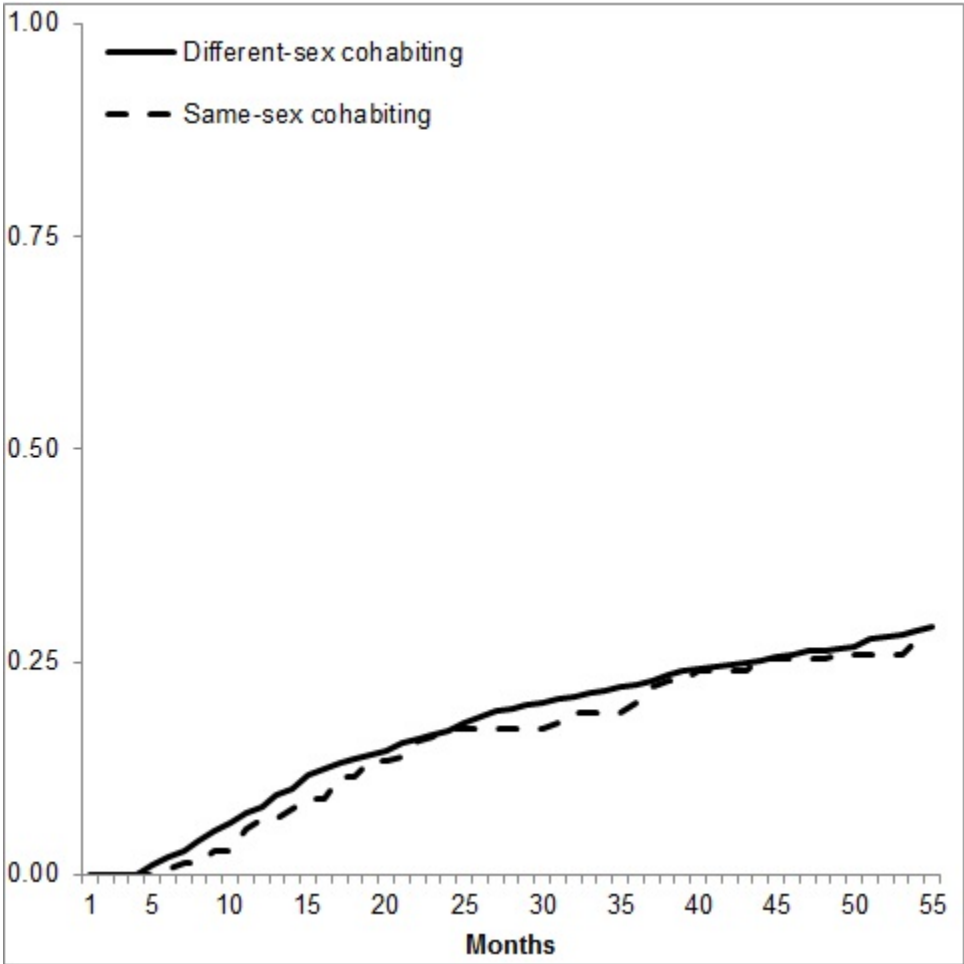


Figure 2. Cumulative Proportion of Dissolutions among Same-Sex Cohabiting Couples and Different-Sex Cohabiting and Married Couples

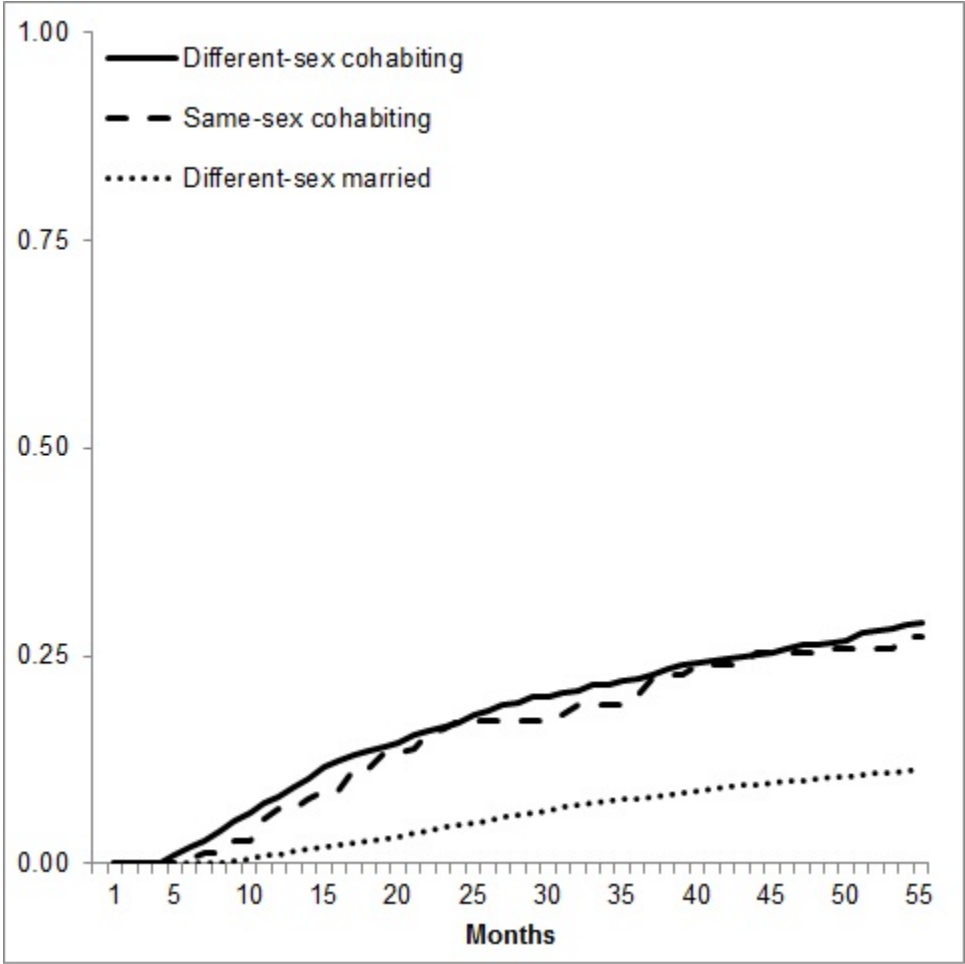


Table 1. Couple Characteristics, by Union Type

	Cohabiting Couples		Married Couples
	Same-Sex	Different-Sex	Different-Sex
Union Dissolution			
Dissolved	26.8%	28.2% ^a	11.3% [*]
Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics			
Age			
Younger partner's age (median)	41	31 ^{*a}	33 [*]
5+ years between partners	58.7%	39.1% ^{*a}	34.3% [*]
Race			
Both partners white	71.9%	59.2% ^{*a}	62.9% [*]
One partner non-white	18.2%	13.8% ^a	10.6%
Neither partner white	9.9%	26.9% [*]	26.5% [*]
Education			
Both partners have at least a Bachelor's degree	42.3%	10.3% ^{*a}	23.3% [*]
One partner a Bachelor's degree	29.0%	15.7% ^{*a}	21.2% [*]
Neither partner has a Bachelor's degree	28.7%	74.0% ^{*a}	55.5% [*]
Monthly household income (median)	\$7,934	\$4,141 ^{*a}	\$5,609 [*]
Minor child in household	23.0%	44.1% ^{*a}	53.6% [*]
No-DOMA state ¹	62.3%	51.8% [*]	50.0% [*]
Total	2.0%	34.7%	63.3%
N (unweighted)	126	2,157	6,144

Source. 2008 SIPP Core Data File Waves 1-14.

Notes. All estimates are weighted. * denotes a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from same-sex couples. "a" denotes a difference ($p < 0.05$) between different-sex cohabiting and married couples. 1). No-DOMA state is an indicator that flags couples living in a state that had neither constitutional amendments restricting marriage to one man and one woman nor state laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman.

Table 2. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Predicting Union Dissolution for Cohabiting Couples

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Same-sex union	0.89	1.04	0.91	1.05
Younger partner's age ¹		0.98**		0.98**
Age heterogamy ²		1.04		1.03
(Both partners white)				
One partner non-white		0.97		0.99
Neither partner white		1.03		1.04
(Both have a Bachelor's)				
One has a Bachelor's		1.35†		1.36†
Neither has a Bachelor's		1.24		1.22
Household income (logged)		0.97		0.97
Minor child in household		0.98		0.98
No-DOMA state ³			0.80*	0.81*
Month	0.99†	0.99	0.99†	0.99
N (observations)	80,544	80,544	80,544	80,544
N (couples)	2,283	2,283	2,283	2,283
Model X ²	1.73	2.27*	3.13*	2.52**

Source. 2008 SIPP Core Data File Waves 1-14.

Notes. Reference category in parentheses. 1). In years. 2). Age heterogamy flags couples having at least five years difference between partners' ages. 3). No-DOMA state is an indicator that flags couples living in a state that had neither constitutional amendments restricting marriage to one man and one woman nor state laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table 3. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Predicting Union Dissolution Among Married and Cohabiting Couples

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Different-sex married)				
Different-sex cohabiting	2.86***	2.64***	2.86***	2.65***
Same-sex cohabiting	2.53***	2.82***	2.57***	2.85***
Younger partner's age ¹		0.98**		0.99***
Age heterogamy ²		1.15*		1.15*
(Both partners white)				
One partner non-white		1.16		1.17
Neither partner white		1.18*		1.20*
(Both have a Bachelor's)				
One has a Bachelor's		1.49***		1.49***
Neither has a Bachelor's		1.62***		1.61***
Household income (logged)		0.97		0.97
Minor child in household		0.86†		0.86†
No-DOMA state ³			0.87†	0.89
Month	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
N (observations)	234,481	234,481	234,481	234,481
N (couples)	5,701	5,701	5,701	5,701
Model X ²	73.5***	28.2***	55.38***	25.9***

Source. 2008 SIPP Core Data File Waves 1-14.

Notes. Reference category in parentheses. 1). In years. 2). Age heterogamy flags couples having at least five years difference between partners' ages. 3). No-DOMA state is an indicator that flags couples living in a state that had neither constitutional amendments restricting marriage to one man and one woman nor state laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman

† p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.