Family Structure and Children's Economic Well-Being: Incorporating Same-Sex Cohabiting Mother Families

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Abstract

Research on family structure and child well-being rarely includes children in same sex parent families, a notable omission since 28% of lesbian couple households contain children. Using the 2010-2013 pooled Current Population Survey, we examined children's economic well-being by family structure. These data were ideal for this study because they included a sizable number of children in same-sex cohabiting mother families and the CPS measured both official and supplemental poverty, incorporating the cohabiting partner. Using the official poverty measure, children in cohabiting mother families were more likely to be poor than their counterparts in either the other cohabiting (two biological parent or stepparent) or married parent families. Yet, using the supplemental poverty measure, these children were no longer worse off and did not differ from children in different-sex two parent families, indicating that partner contributions vary considerably by family structure.

Children's living arrangements are diverse. Fewer children reside in married families, and increasing shares are in unmarried families, including cohabiting and single parent families (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Family structure is tied to child well-being, with those residing outside of married two biological parent families characterized by slightly lower levels of well-being, on average (Brown, 2010). Children in cohabiting families, whether they live with two biological parents or in a stepparent family, tend to fare worse than those in married two biological parent families and they appear more comparable to those in single-mother families (Artis, 2005; Brown, 2006, 2004; Manning & Lamb, 2003). Although the conceptualization and measurement of family structure has improved in recent years to accommodate the array of families in which children live, the research to date on the linkages between family structure and child outcomes largely has ignored same-sex parent families (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Potter, 2012). Our study helps to fill this gap in research on family structure and child well-being by incorporating children in same-sex cohabiting mother families.

The tremendous growth in cohabitation, especially as a living arrangement for children, is not limited to different sex couples. Roughly 21% of same-sex partner households include minor children (Payne, 2014). The prevalence of minor children depends on the sex composition of the partners with 28% of female-female cohabiting households including minor children versus just 13% of male-male cohabiting households. By comparison, 41% of different-sex households have minor children present (Burgoyne, 2012). These patterns indicate that same-sex cohabiting couples are rearing children together, making it important to understand how children fare in this family form versus other family types.

Very few national studies of family structure and child well-being actually have included children residing in same-sex partnered families. This omission largely reflects a paucity of data.

The number of children residing in same-sex parent families is relatively small and thus there are usually too few cases for analysis even in large scale, nationally representative data sets (Manning, Fettro, & Lamidi, 2014).

Our study extends prior research by examining children's economic well-being across a range of family structures, including same-sex cohabiting mother families, using recent, nationally representative data from the 2010-2013 Current Population Survey. We are able to measure both official and supplemental poverty. Official poverty estimates exclude the cohabiting partner's economic contributions and he or she is not counted as part of the family unit. In contrast, the supplemental poverty measure includes the cohabiting partner's income as part of the formula and adds the cohabiting partner as a member of the family unit. Our analyses also address the extent to which the cohabiting partner's contributions help to lift children out of official poverty. This study moves the field forward by elucidating how children in same-sex cohabiting mother families fare economically compared with children in other family forms, adding to the growing literature on children living in same-sex parent families.

Background

The linkage between family structure and child poverty is well-established. Early work in this area documented the large poverty gap between children in married two biological parent families versus children in single-mother families (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). As cohabitation became more common, studies uncovered that children in cohabiting families fared worse than their counterparts in married parent families but somewhat better than those in single-mother families (Bauman, 1999; Carlson and Danziger 1999; Manning & Lichter, 1996).

Manning and Brown (2006) further parsed the cohabiting family category, distinguishing between children residing in cohabiting two biological parent families and cohabiting stepparent

families since roughly equal shares of children reside in these two family types. About 38% of children in cohabiting two biological parent families lived in poverty and 45% of those in cohabiting stepparent families were poor in 1999. These official poverty levels were reduced dramatically when the definition of family was expanded to encompass cohabiting partners, lifting 40% of children in cohabiting two biological parent families and 58% of children in cohabiting stepparent families out of poverty (Manning & Brown, 2006). This social definition of poverty, which was recommended two decades ago by the National Academy of Sciences (Citro & Michael, 1995) and is now termed the supplemental poverty measure, is available in some federal data collections such as the CPS (Short, 2011). The supplemental poverty indicator reflects the assumption that cohabiting partners are family members who share economic resources with one another and with their children.

Similarly, same-sex cohabiting couples with children presumably function as a family by sharing and consuming one another's resources, especially given that marriage is not available to most same-sex couples. For this reason, we may expect children living in same-sex couple families to most closely resemble children in married two biological parent families. In fact, the handful of studies that has examined the well-being of children in same-sex parent families suggests that these children tend to fare similarly to their counterparts in married parent families (for summaries, see Biblarz, Carroll, & Burke, 2014; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Manning et al., 2014; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Moreover, there is some evidence that children may derive unique benefits from being raised by two mothers versus a mother and a father, which aligns with the cultural norm of intensive mothering and also may reflect selection into lesbian motherhood (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). How children in same-sex cohabiting parent families compare with those in different-sex cohabiting families is less clear.

Indeed, Potter (2012) calls for new research that emphasizes comparisons among various types of "nontraditional" families, or families formed outside of marriage. This study moves the field forward in this regard.

Although economic well-being is a critical dimension of child well-being that arguably shapes cognitive, behavioral, and other outcomes, it has been overlooked in prior work that has included children in same-sex parent families. Prior research has emphasized academic achievement, psychological well-being, behavioral outcomes, and sexuality (see Manning et al., 2014 for a summary). One of the contributions of the present study is its focus on child poverty.

According to a recent descriptive analysis of the 2010 American Community Survey, child official poverty levels vary considerably by family structure and those residing in same-sex parent families are distinctive. About 29% of children in same-sex couple households (whether two men or two women was not distinguished) are poor whereas among children in married families the proportion living in poverty is just 11%. Child poverty levels are much higher among different-sex cohabiting families and single mother families at 47% and 48%, respectively (Williams, 2012). Thus, children in same-sex parent families fall in between those in married families on the one hand and cohabiting different-sex and single-mother families on the other hand. Although informative, this analysis was only descriptive and did not consider the role of potential sociodemographic factors in accounting for variation by family structure. It also was limited to an official measure of poverty (i.e., the cohabiting partner was not included as part of the consuming or contributing unit); the study did not include an indicator of supplemental poverty that incorporated contributions of the cohabiting partner.

The Present Study

The current investigation uses recent, national data to address family structure variation in a key indicator of child well-being: poverty. Our approach incorporates children living in a range of family structures, allowing us to draw conclusions about how children fare in five different types of two parent families. Specifically, we classify children into married two biological parent families, married stepparent families, different-sex cohabiting two biological parent families, different-sex cohabiting stepparent families, and same-sex cohabiting mother families. Additional descriptive analyses include children in same-sex cohabiting father families (there are too few cases to include them in the multivariate regression models) and single-mother and single-father families.

We examine both official and supplemental measures of poverty to determine the extent of economic disadvantage experienced by children in same-sex cohabiting mother families compared with children in other family forms. Based on prior research, we anticipate that children in married parent families are least likely to be officially poor whereas those in different-sex cohabiting parent families are most likely to be poor. Children in same-sex cohabiting families are expected to fall in the middle. These family structure differences ought to be attenuated somewhat by the inclusion of controls for factors associated with both family structure and child poverty, such as child (gender, age, and race-ethnicity) and family characteristics (parents' ages, educations, and work hours as well as sibling complexity and residential instability). Given same-sex couples report higher levels of education, on average, than different-sex couples, we expect the inclusion of socioeconomic factors to be key correlates of poverty.

Family structure variation in supplemental poverty is expected to be smaller than that for official poverty because the former accounts for the presence and resources of the cohabiting partner. Our aim is to assess the relative contributions of cohabiting partners across family structures by establishing the share of children lifted out of official poverty when using the supplemental poverty measure. Certainly, we anticipate that the supplemental poverty measure will lift a considerable share of poor children in same-sex cohabiting mother families out of poverty, much like prior research has demonstrated for cohabiting two biological parent families and cohabiting stepparent families (Manning & Brown, 2006). Whether children in cohabiting mother families are more likely to be lifted out of poverty than those in the other cohabiting family types is difficult to predict. On the one hand, same-sex parent families tend to enjoy higher household incomes than different-sex cohabiting families (Payne, 2011), and thus the supplemental poverty measure might lift a disproportionate share of children out of poverty. On the other hand, mothers typically earn less and work fewer hours than fathers (Sayer, 2005), suggesting the inclusion of the partner's economic contributions gained by using the supplemental poverty measure may have a comparatively smaller effect on poverty among children in same-sex cohabiting mother families.

Method

This study drew on pooled data from the 2010-2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-Current Population Survey (IPUMS-CPS) (King, Ruggles, Alexander, Flood, Genadek, Schroeder, Trampe, & Vick, 2010). The CPS is a nationally representative survey jointly sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau and is the primary source of labor force statistics for the United States

population. These data provide extensive information on employment and earnings as well as social and demographic characteristics.

To maximize our sample size of children living with same-sex cohabiting mothers, we pooled four consecutive March CPS files from 2010-2013. The CPS design involved interviews of each sampled household once a month for four consecutive months in one year and then again for the same months a year later (allowing for month-to-month and year-to-year comparisons). An artifact of the survey design is that 50% of the sample was included in two consecutive years. So as to not double count children when pooling the data, we retained each sample household from the March 2013 data collection and each household completing their second March CPS interview in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (removing data from their previous March interview). Removing replicate households reduced the original 818,817 observations to 510,961. Of the remaining observations, 28% (N = 144,913) were children under age 18.

These data were ideal for our purposes because they provided a sample size large enough to analyze children living with same-sex cohabiting mother parents. Additionally, the information collected in the ASEC of the CPS allowed IPUMS-CPS to calculate and harmonize both official and supplemental poverty thresholds. The CPS data contained "parental pointer" variables that indicated whether an individual lived in the same household with their mother and/or father and identified the parents' locations (line numbers) on the household roster. Also recorded was whether the residential parent was biological, stepparent, or adoptive. In addition to the "parental pointers," the CPS provided spouse and cohabiting partner "pointers." This group of pointer variables allowed the CPS to collect information on secondary or subfamilies (e.g., cohabiting couples who live with a parent who is the householder). Relying on simple household rosters would miss these secondary families, because the rosters were based on the relationship

of household members to the household head (Kennedy & Fitch, 2013). Current estimates have indicated 10% of children live with a parent or parents who were not heads of households (Manning, Brown, & Stykes, in press).

Analytic Sample

Our descriptive analyses differentiated among children residing in eight family structures: married two biological parent family (n = 88,047), married stepparent family (n = 8,037), different-sex cohabiting two biological parent family (n = 4,484), different-sex cohabiting stepparent family (n = 5,573), same-sex cohabiting mother family (n = 229), same-sex cohabiting father family (n = 52), single-mother family (n = 26,619), and single-father family (n = 4,189). Children not living with any parents (n = 5,403) were excluded along with children living with a parent whose spouse was absent from the household (n=2,066) because data on one or both of their parents was not available. Finally, we excluded children with inconsistent data on parent and family specific variables (n = 187). Thus, the final sample size was 137,230 children and children were the unit of analysis. Multivariate analyses examined children in two parent households (n=106,370).

Dependent Variables

Official poverty was a dummy variable based on the Census Bureau's poverty thresholds. The poverty thresholds took into account family size, number of children, and age of the family householder. As defined by the U.S. Census, "family" excluded the income and presence of cohabiting partners; therefore their income was not included in the calculation of the family's official poverty status.

Supplemental poverty was a dummy variable that identified children living below the supplemental poverty level. This variable was derived from the Supplemental Poverty Measure,

which unlike the official poverty measure, treated the cohabiting partner as a family member. It also reflected other adjustments such as the value of tax and transfer benefits and geographic differences in the cost of living. The measure included foster children in the household head's family unit, and did not impose age or marital status restrictions on identifiable family relationships within the household even if individuals were unrelated to the household head (Short, 2011).

Lifted out of poverty was a binary variable coded 1 for those children classified as poor using only the official (but not the supplemental) measure of poverty and 0 for those children classified as poor using both the official and supplemental measures of poverty. Note that children who were not poor using the official definition of poverty were excluded from this variable.

Independent Variable

Family structure was captured by a series of eight dummy variables distinguishing among children who lived in married two biological (or adoptive) parent families (62.7%), married stepparent families (5.6%), different-sex cohabiting two biological (or adoptive) parent families (3.5%, hereafter, cohabiting two biological parent families), different-sex cohabiting stepparent families (4.0%, hereafter cohabiting stepparent families), same-sex cohabiting mother families (0.2%, hereafter cohabiting mother families), same-sex cohabiting father families (0.04%, hereafter cohabiting father families), single-mother families (21.2%), and single-father families (3.0%). The family structure measure was created using available information as well as relationship pointers to establish the type (biological, stepparent, or adopted) and number of parents each child lived with as well as the relationship status of the parents (marital status or presence of a cohabiting partner) and the gender of the parents.

Child Characteristics

Gender was coded 1 boy and 0 girl. *Child's age* was a continuous variable coded in years. *Race/ethnicity* of children was coded into four dummy categories: non-Hispanic White (reference), non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic Other (individuals identified as Asian, American Indian or as belonging to 2 or more racial/ethnic groups).

Family Characteristics

Mother's (or primary parent's) age and *partner's age* were continuous variables coded in years. *Mother's (or primary parent's) education* and *partner's education* were captured by a series of four dummy variables distinguishing among those with less than a high school diploma/GED, those with a high school diploma/GED (reference category), those with some college (including those with an Associate's degree), and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher. *Mother's (or primary parent's) work hours* and *partner's work hours* were continuous measures that captured the parent's usual work hours in a typical work week. Note that for cohabiting mother families, one woman was labeled by the CPS as the mother and the other was identified as her cohabiting partner. Similarly, there was a primary parent and a partner identified for cohabiting father families. In single father families, the father was the primary parent. *Sibling complexity* was a dummy variable that distinguished 1 children living with other minor children who had a different family structure (e.g., children living with a half or stepparent sibling, other relative, and/or nonrelative children) from 0 those who were not. *Residential instability* was coded 1 for children who had moved in the past year and 0 for all others.

Survey Year

Three dummy variables (2010, 2011, and 2012) were included to control for each year of data collection, with 2013 as the omitted year.

Analytic Strategy

Our first step was to provide a descriptive profile of children to elucidate family structure variation in poverty status and child and family characteristics. Additional descriptive analyses compared children's poverty classification (by family structure) using the four possible combinations of the official and supplemental poverty measures: not poor using either measure, poor using both measures, poor using the official measure only, and poor using the supplemental measure only. Finally, three sets of logistic regression models were estimated to predict the likelihoods of official poverty, supplemental poverty, and being lifted out of poverty using the supplemental definition (estimated only for those children who were poor according to the official definition of poverty). Logistic regression was appropriate because the three dependent variables were dichotomous. The initial model established the bivariate relationship between family structure and economic well-being. The full model introduced the measures of child and family characteristics to determine whether these factors accounted for the association between family structure and economic well-being. All models included controls for survey year.

The descriptive analyses included children in all of the eight family structures whereas the multivariate analyses included only those children residing in two parent families (children in cohabiting father families had to be excluded due to small sample size, n = 52). The main focus of our hypotheses concerned variation among types of cohabiting and married parent families and information on both parents' characteristics was only available for children in two parent families. All analyses used the IPUMS-CPS person-level weight (to adjust for complex stratified sampling) in conjunction with the person-level replicate weights to generate nationally representative estimates with empirically derived standard errors.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 shows the means (or percentages, as appropriate) for all of the variables in the analyses by family structure. As expected, official poverty status varied markedly by family structure. About 11% of children in married two biological parent families and 13% in married stepparent families were officially poor. Poverty levels were much higher among the three primary types of cohabiting families, at 50% for children in cohabiting two biological parent families, 42% for those in cohabiting stepparent families, and 46% for those in cohabiting mother families (i.e., same-sex mother families). In contrast, the poverty level among children residing in cohabiting father families (i.e., same-sex father families) was quite low at just 8%. About 43% of children in single-mother families were poor versus 20% of children in single-father families.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The variation in economic well-being by family structure diminished when we examined the supplemental measure of poverty that included the cohabiting partner. Of course, for children in married families, the poverty levels remained essentially the same at about 11%. But for those in cohabiting two biological parent families, 33% were poor using the supplemental measure. Similarly for children in cohabiting stepparent families, 21% were poor using the supplemental poverty definition. And, in cohabiting mother families, 18% of children were poor using the supplemental measure. The share was essentially unchanged for children in cohabiting father families at 7%. Among single mother families, supplemental poverty was lower than official poverty with 35% poor using the social definition. For single-father families, the share poor remained about 20%.

The shares of officially poor children lifted out of poverty varied by family structure. Most (62%) poor children in cohabiting mother families were lifted out using the supplemental definition. A majority (57%) of poor children in cohabiting stepparent families also were lifted out. The shares lifted out of poverty in other family forms were a bit more modest, at 43% for cohabiting two biological parent families, 36% for married stepparent families, 31% for married two biological parent families, 30% for single-mother families, and 22% for single-father families. In cohabiting father families, it was just 3%.

Child characteristics varied somewhat by family structure. Children living in cohabiting father families were disproportionately boys (65%) and boys were slightly overrepresented among single-father families, too (55%). In most family structures, the average age of children was around 9, except among those living in cohabiting two biological parent families (age 4). Children in married families were disproportionately White (62%) whereas children in cohabiting two biological parent families were often Hispanic (41%). In cohabiting stepparent families, about 45% were Non-White and in cohabiting mother families the Non-White share was about 55%. The pattern was similar for cohabiting father families. Children in single-mother families were mostly Non-White (67%) whereas among those in single-father families, about 60% were White.

Mother's (or primary parent's) average age ranged from a low of 30 in cohabiting two biological parent families to a high of nearly 43 for the primary parent in cohabiting father families. In cohabiting mother families, the average age was 37. A similar pattern was obtained among partners although the ages were a couple of years older (ranging from 33 to 44). Education levels in same-sex parent families were comparable to those of parents in married two biological parent families—roughly 40% reported having at least a college degree. The education

levels in the two different-sex cohabiting family types was much lower, with just 9% and 13% of parents in cohabiting two biological parent families and cohabiting stepparent families having a college degree, respectively. The pattern among partners was similar. Mother's work hours were highest among cohabiting mother families at 30 hours per week, followed by married stepparent, single mother, and cohabiting stepparent families at about 26 hours per week. Average hours worked by the primary parent in cohabiting two biological parent and cohabiting father families was a bit lower at roughly 22 hours. Mothers in married two biological parent families worked on average 23 hours each week. Partner work hours tended to be higher, with married fathers and partners in cohabiting father families working about 40 hours each week and partners in different-sex cohabiting and cohabiting mother families working from 33-36 hours each week.

The intersection between official and supplemental poverty measures is illustrated in Table 2, which provides the row percentages from the cross-tabulation of official and supplemental poverty by family structure. The first column in the table reveals the share of children who were not classified as poor using either the official or supplemental poverty definition. Over 90% of children in cohabiting father families were not poor, followed by roughly 85% of married families, and three-quarters of those in single-father families. Slightly more than half of children in cohabiting stepparent families (55%), cohabiting mother families (53%) and single-mother families (53%) were not poor using either definition of poverty versus 46% of children in cohabiting two biological parent families. A largely similar distribution emerged when considering the shares of children classified as poor using both definitions (the second column in the table); poverty was greatest among children in single-mother (30%) and cohabiting two biological parent (28%) families, followed by those in cohabiting stepparent (18%), cohabiting mother (18%), and single-father (15%) families. It was lowest among children

in married parent (around 8-9%) and cohabiting father (8%) families. As shown in the third column, the share of children who were classified as poor only using the official definition of poverty (and not the supplemental definition) was much smaller than observed when ignoring supplemental poverty (i.e., using official poverty status as shown in Table 1). Instead of poverty levels that reached close to 50%, the upper end of the range was 28% for cohabiting mother, 24% for cohabiting stepparent, and 21% for cohabiting two biological parent families. Children were very unlikely (no more than 5%) to be classified as poor solely on the basis of the supplemental poverty measure.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Multivariate Results

Table 3 shows the coefficients and odds ratios from the three sets of logistic regression models predicting official poverty, supplemental poverty, and being lifted out of poverty. Using the official definition, children in all family forms were more likely to be poor than their counterparts in married two biological parent families. This pattern held net of controls for child and family characteristics with the exception of children in married stepparent families. Children in married stepparent families were just as likely as children in married two biological parent families to be poor when child and family characteristics were added to the model. Superscripts indicate significant family structure contrasts. The four family structure categories were significantly different from one another, with children in cohabiting mother families most likely to be poor, followed by those in cohabiting stepparent families, then cohabiting two biological parent families, and finally married stepparent families. This pattern persisted with the inclusion of the controls. Notably, the differential between cohabiting mother and married two biological parent families increased with the addition of the controls. Whereas the initial odds of official

poverty were about 7 times larger for children in cohabiting mother families versus married two biological parent families, the odds rose to 15 with the inclusion of controls for child and family characteristics, indicating that despite the relative similarity in these two groups in terms of child and family characteristics, the economic returns associated with these factors were much smaller for cohabiting mother families.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Child and family characteristics were associated with official poverty. Boys were less likely to be poor than girls although poverty did not vary by child age net of other factors. Non-White children were more likely to be poor than White children. Children with younger parents were more likely to be poor. And, parental education was negatively associated with poverty. Both parents' work hours were also inversely related to the likelihood of being poor. Children residing with half or step siblings as well as those who had experienced residential mobility in the past year were more likely to be poor than their counterparts living with no or only full siblings and who did not changes residences, respectively.

The models for supplemental poverty revealed comparatively fewer family structure differences. Perhaps the most striking finding was that children in cohabiting mother families were no more likely to be poor than those in married two biological parent (or married stepparent or cohabiting stepparent) families, regardless of whether the controls were included. Children in cohabiting two biological parent and cohabiting stepparent families were more likely to be poor than those in married two biological or married stepparent families. And, relative to children in cohabiting stepparent families, those in cohabiting two biological parent families were significantly more likely to be poor. All of these differentials held net of controls for child and family characteristics.

The only child characteristic associated with supplemental poverty was race-ethnicity, with Non-White children having a higher likelihood of being poor than White children. Parental age was not related to supplemental poverty, although education and work hours were negatively associated with supplemental poverty. Residential instability was positively related to supplemental poverty.

The final set of models were designed to estimate family structure variation in the extent to which children were lifted out of (official) poverty by using the supplemental definition. In the initial model, officially poor children in the three types of cohabiting families were more likely to be lifted out of poverty using the supplemental definition than were children in married two biological parent families (who did not differ from those in married stepparent families), which was not surprising given that the supplemental poverty measure accounted for the cohabiting partner's presence and contributions. Poor children in cohabiting mother families also were more likely to be lifted out of poverty than children in married stepparent families, but did not significantly differ from poor children in the other two types of cohabiting families. Nonetheless, using a supplemental poverty definition was more likely to lift out poor children in cohabiting stepparent families compared with poor children in cohabiting two biological parent families. These differentials persisted in the full model although the inclusion of the controls reduced the positive effect for cohabiting mother families compared to married two biological parent families to nonsignificance.

Racial and ethnic minority poor children were less likely than White children to be lifted out of poverty using the supplemental definition. Parental age and education had negligible effects on the likelihood of being reclassified as non-poor using the supplemental poverty measure. Instead, work hours played a significant role, with higher hours worked linked to a

greater likelihood of being lifted from poverty. Sibling complexity was positively related to being lifted out, whereas residential instability was associated with reduced odds of being reclassified as nonpoor using the supplemental definition.

Discussion

Family structure is linked to children's economic well-being. Expanding on prior research, this study integrated children in same-sex cohabiting mother families to assess how they compared with children in various different-sex two parent family forms in terms of both official and supplemental measures of poverty. Contrary to our expectations, the odds of being officially poor were greatest among children in cohabiting mother families, net of child and family characteristics. Family structure variation in official poverty was considerable, with those in cohabiting stepparent families the next most likely to be poor, followed by children in cohabiting two biological parent families, and lastly children in married parent families (two biological parent and stepparent did not differ). The magnitudes of these differentials became larger with the inclusion of the control variables, suggesting that children in cohabiting mother families are not fully reaping the benefits of their mothers' relatively high levels of education. At the same time, partner work hours are smaller in cohabiting mother than other two parent families (although mother work hours are rather high).

A focus on official poverty provides a limited lens on child well-being because the income provided by cohabiting partners is not part of the calculation of poverty. As anticipated, the family structure variation in supplemental poverty was relatively modest. This makes sense considering that the supplemental poverty indicator accounted for the presence and contributions of the cohabiting partner. Children in cohabiting mother families were no longer categorized as disadvantaged. In fact, their risk of poverty was comparable to that of children in all other two

parent family forms. Children in cohabiting two biological parent and cohabiting stepparent families remained at greater risk of poverty than children in married families. Furthermore, children in cohabiting two biological parent families faced higher odds of poverty than their counterparts in cohabiting stepfamilies. This pattern of findings obtained regardless of whether the controls for child and family characteristics were included in the model.

The seemingly disparate findings for official versus supplemental poverty underscore the importance of the cohabiting partner. Across the three cohabiting family structures, children in cohabiting mother families were as likely to be lifted out of poverty as children in either type of different-sex cohabiting families. Children in cohabiting stepparent families were more likely to be lifted out of poverty than children in cohabiting two biological parent families, suggesting that the contributions of the cohabiting partner are especially great in the former type of cohabiting family (or particularly low in the latter type of cohabiting family).

How do cohabiting couples share resources and do these patterns vary by type of cohabiting union? This question is a logical next step for researchers given that the inclusion of the cohabiting partner in the poverty calculation results in such a dramatic reduction in child poverty levels. If it is reasonable to assume cohabiting couples pool their resources, then we can rely on the supplemental poverty measure and conclude that child poverty levels range from 18-32% for those in cohabiting families. Alternatively, if partners do not typically share their resources, then perhaps the official poverty measure more accurately reflects children's economic circumstances, which presents a grimmer picture with 42-50% of these children living in poverty. Kenney (2004) found that different-sex cohabiting couples with a young child typically pooled their economic resources, leading her to favor a supplemental poverty measure. Similarly, Winkler (1997) and Addo and Sassler (2010) concluded that most cohabitors

commingle their monies. To our knowledge, no study has considered whether same-sex cohabiting couples pool their economic resources, although there is no a priori reason to assume they would behave any differently than their different-sex counterparts.

This study had several limitations. First, our measures of economic well-being were limited to poverty. We were not able to capture other indicators of material well-being, such as food or housing insecurity, using the CPS data. Second, although our sample of children in cohabiting mother families was pretty large, the small number of children living in cohabiting father families prevented their inclusion in the multivariate analyses. Descriptive results demonstrated they were quite distinctive relative to other cohabiting family types in that child poverty was exceedingly rare. This family form merits attention in future research. A related point concerns the possibility of misclassification of opposite sex couples as same sex couples due to gender coding errors (Lofquist & Lewis, 2014). However, the CPS was conducted by face-to-face or telephone interview and thus the extent of gender misclassification should be quite modest compared with that documented for the Census mail-in form. Third, our cross-sectional measures of family structure did not account for family instability or change over the course of childhood, which may play a role in the linkage between family structure and children's outcomes. We were able to control for sibling complexity and residential mobility in the past year and both were related to being poor. Similarly, our measures of economic well-being were static but poverty is often dynamic and cyclical. Some children are mired in chronic poverty whereas others may experience economic disadvantage for just a relatively short period of time. Fourth, our analyses were cross-sectional and thus causal conclusions are not warranted. We were limited in the availability of control measures in the CPS data and it is possible that the relationship between family structure and child poverty could be explained by other factors not

included in the models. Moreover, family structure may be endogenous to children's economic outcomes since economic stability may lead parents to get and stay married (Gibson-Davis, 2009; Osborne, 2005). Couples facing economic disadvantages are less likely to formalize their cohabiting unions (Brown, 2000; Smock & Manning, 1997). Finally, the official poverty measure assumes no sharing of resources by cohabiting partners whereas the supplemental poverty measure assumes complete sharing. If cohabiting families do not fully share resources, then the supplemental poverty measure overestimates child well-being. And, if cohabiting families are less likely to pool resources than married families, then we have underestimated the magnitude of the disadvantage experienced by children in cohabiting families.

Despite these limitations, our study makes notable contributions to the larger literature on family structure and child well-being. It demonstrates the utility of differentiating among various types of cohabiting families, including cohabiting mother families, who tend to be rather disadvantaged in terms of official poverty but are indistinguishable from other children when using the supplemental poverty measure. This study also provides some preliminary evidence about the role of parental gender; economic well-being appears to be much higher for children in cohabiting father and single-father families than cohabiting mother and single-mother families, respectively (these gender differentials may largely reflect selection). The findings from this study contribute to prior research on child well-being in same-sex families by illustrating how children fare economically, a domain largely neglected to date.

Relying on a supplemental definition of poverty that incorporates the contributions of the cohabiting partner, we conclude that children in cohabiting mother families fare similarly to children in different-sex cohabiting families and to children in married parent families. However, children in different sex cohabiting families are less economically advantaged than their

counterparts in married two biological parent families (and, in some cases, married stepparent families). The relatively advantaged position of children in cohabiting mother families may shift as same-sex marriage becomes more widely available and couples with the most resources and in the most stable unions choose to formalize their relationships through marriage. A central task for future research on family structure and child well-being will be to examine children in same-sex married families, comparing their outcomes to their counterparts in other family forms, including different-sex married families and same-sex cohabiting families.

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Table 1. Children's Poverty Status, Child Characteristics, and Family Characteristics by Family Structure

	Married Two Bio/Adpt (62.7%)	Married Stepparent (5.6%)	Cohabiting Two Bio/Adpt (3.5%)	Cohabiting Stepparent (4.0%)	Cohabiting Mothers (0.2%)	Cohabiting Fathers (0.04%)	Single Mother (21.2%)	Single Father (3.0%)
Poverty								
Official poverty	11.0	13.3	49.5	42.4	46.1	8.0	43.2	19.6
Social poverty	10.6	11.2	32.5	20.7	18.3	7.7	34.6	20.5
Lifted out of poverty	30.9	35.5	42.7	56.6	61.6	3.0	30.0	22.2
Child characteristics								
Gender								
Boy	51.1	51.0	53.1	50.0	51.7	64.5	50.2	55.4
Girl	48.9	49.0	47.0	50.0	48.3	35.5	49.9	44.6
Age (*M*)	8.3	11.7	4.3	8.9	9.1	7.9	8.8	10.3
Race and ethnic group								
Non-Hispanic White	61.6	61.8	36.4	53.6	45.8	52.9	33.2	59.8
Non-Hispanic Black	6.8	11.0	13.7	14.0	19.7	10.1	32.6	16.5
Hispanic	21.6	20.4	41.0	24.5	19.8	22.3	27.0	16.6
Other	9.9	6.8	8.9	8.0	14.7	14.8	7.1	7.2
Family Characteristics								
Mother's age (*M*)	38.4	36.9	30.2	33.5	36.5	42.7*	35.4	40.7
Partner's age (*M*)	40.7	39.5	32.9	35.8	37.7*	44.2	N.A.	N.A.
Mother's education								
<High School	10.5	9.9	24.2	15.7	11.4	13.5*	17.4	13.7
High school	21.4	29.8	34.7	33.6	28.4	17.3*	31.5	36.6
Some college	27.3	36.8	31.9	37.7	20.5	30.8*	35.4	30.9
Bachelor's Degree+	40.9	23.5	9.2	13.1	39.7	38.5*	15.8	18.9
Partner's education								
<High School	12.3	12.9	29.2	18.9	6.6*	27.9	N.A.	N.A.
High school	25.2	35.9	40.8	42.0	32.3*	9.4	N.A.	N A.
Some college	24.0	30.8	23.3	29.3	20.3*	26.2	N.A.	N.A.
Bachelor's Degree+	38.5	20.4	6.6	9.8	40.8*	36.4	N.A.	N.A.
Mother's work hours (*M*)	23.2	27.0	21.6	26.4	30.3	22.1	26.6	35.0
Partner's work hours (*M*)	41.2	39.6	34.2	35.9	32.9*	39.3	N.A.	N.A.
Sibling complexity	5.7	46.6	25.5	22.3	2.8	0.0	3.2	4.3
Residential instability	14.2	17.0	36.2	27.8	27.7	25.1	25.1	15.9
Unweighted *N*	88,047	8,037	4,484	5,573	229	52	26,619	4,189

Note: Weighted percentages and means are shown. Lifted out of poverty identifies children who are classified as poor according to the official poverty definition but not poor according to the supplemental poverty definition. For those children living with a mother in a same-sex residential relationship, the characteristics on the mother variables are those of the self identified mother to the child. Children living in this family living arrangement only have one woman identified as their mother on the household roster and by the parental pointer variable. For those in cohabiting father and single-father families, the mother variables (age, education, and work hours) refer to the primary parent.

Table 2. *Children's Poverty Status by Family Structure (Percentage)*

	Not Poor, Official or Supplemental	Poor, Official and Supplemental	Poor, only Official	Poor, only Supplemental
Married two bio/adpt	86.1	7.6	3.4	3.0
Married stepparent	84.1	8.6	4.7	2.6
Cohabiting two bio/adpt	46.3	28.4	21.2	4.2
Cohabiting stepparent	55.3	18.4	24.0	2.3
Cohabiting mothers	53.3	17.7	28.4	0.6
Cohabiting fathers	92.0	7.7	0.2	0.0
Single mother	52.5	30.2	13.0	4.3
Single father	75.2	15.3	4.4	5.2

N = 137,230.

Table 3. *Logistic Regression Models Predicting Official & Supplemental Poverty and Being Lifted Out of Poverty*

	Official Poverty (N = 106,370)						Supplemental Poverty (N = 106,370)						Lifted Out of Poverty (N = 14,365)					
	Model 1a			Model 1b			Model 2a			Model 2b			Model 3a			Model 3b		
	Coef.	Odds Ratio		Coef.	Odds Ratio		Coef.	Odds Ratio		Coef.	Odds Ratio		Coef.	Odds Ratio		Coef.	Odds Ratio	
Family Structure																		
Married stepparent	0.22	1.25	***bc	0.00	1.00	bc	0.07	1.07	bc	0.01	1.01	bc	0.21	1.23	bc	0.00	1.00	c
Cohabiting two bio/adopt parent	2.08	7.97	***ac	1.47	4.36	***ac	1.41	4.09	***ac	0.66	1.93	***ac	0.51	1.67	***ac	0.21	1.24	*c
Cohabiting stepparent	1.79	5.98	***ab	1.80	6.06	***ab	0.80	2.22	***ab	0.44	1.55	***ab	1.07	2.91	***ab	0.65	1.91	***ab
Cohabiting mothers	1.94	6.93	***a	2.72	15.22	***abc	0.64	1.90		0.71	2.03		1.27	3.57	**a	0.87	2.40	
(Married two bio/adopt parent)																		
Child characteristics																		
Boy				-0.06	0.94	*				-0.03	0.98					-0.06	0.95	
Age				0.00	1.00					-0.01	0.99					0.00	1.00	
Race and ethnic group																		
Non-Hispanic Black				0.70	2.02	***				0.60	1.82	***				-0.29	0.75	*
Hispanic				0.35	1.42	***				0.72	2.05	***				-0.67	0.51	***
Other				0.45	1.57	***				0.67	1.95	***				-0.53	0.59	***
(Non-Hispanic White)																		
Family characteristics																		
Mother's age				-0.02	0.98	***				0.00	1.00					-0.01	0.99	
Partner's age				-0.01	0.99	*				0.00	1.00					-0.01	0.99	
Mother's education																		
<High School				0.56	1.76	***				0.39	1.48	***				-0.20	0.82	*
Some college				-0.37	0.69	***				-0.35	0.70	***				0.12	1.13	
Bachelor's Degree+				-0.96	0.38	***				-0.73	0.48	***				-0.28	0.75	
(High school)																		
Partner's education																		
<High School				0.48	1.62	***				0.39	1.48	***				-0.10	0.91	
Some college				-0.35	0.71	***				-0.20	0.82	***				0.04	1.04	
Bachelor's Degree+				-0.88	0.41	***				-0.66	0.52	***				-0.22	0.80	
(High school)																		
Mother's work hours				-0.05	0.95	***				-0.04	0.96	***				0.02	1.02	***
Partner's work hours				-0.05	0.95	***				-0.05	0.95	***				0.03	1.03	***
Sibling complexity				0.29	1.33	***				-0.05	0.95					0.24	1.28	*
Residential instability				0.22	1.24	***				0.34	1.41	***				-0.26	0.77	**
Constant	-2.10	0.12		2.15	8.55		-2.14	0.12		0.64	1.89		-0.78	0.46		-0.67	0.51	
Df	7			24			7			24			7			24		

Note: Models include controls for survey year. Subscripts identify significant differences by family structure: a = married stepparent; b = cohabiting two bio/adpt; c = cohabiting stepparent

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.