Attitudes toward Union Formation at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Identity

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Abstract

The last several decades have brought significant social changes in the industrialized West that may influence young adults' attitudes about union formation. We use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (N=14,121) to compare men to women, and sexual minorities to heterosexuals, on attitudes towards cohabitation and ratings of the importance lifelong commitment and marriage. We find that compared to heterosexuals, sexual minorities hold more accepting attitudes towards non-marital cohabitation and report that marriage is less important to them. Regardless of sexual identity, all young adults give high ratings to the importance of lifelong commitment. However, interactions with gender indicate that straight women rate lifelong commitment exceptionally high – significantly higher than straight men and sexual minorities of both genders. We discuss possible reasons for the differences we reveal including the ambiguity of contemporary survey questions on marriage and cohabitation for sexual minorities.

One of the most important life-course events of young adulthood is the formation of intimate relationships. The last several decades have brought significant social changes in the industrialized West that may influence young adults' attitudes about intimate relationships, including changes in gender ideologies and sexual attitudes and practices. Women's identities are not as narrowly defined by romantic ties and family roles as in the past (Gerson, 2001). Attitudes about premarital sex, cohabitation and homosexuality have liberalized, expanding sexual and relationship possibilities (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 2007; Loftus, 2001; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). As a reflection of these changes, cultural, political and legal battles about same-sex marriage have intensified, and differential access to marriage among sexual minorities (gays, lesbians, and bisexuals) may shape young adults' views of relationships.

With changes in the social context and heightened public interest in and debate about same-sex relationships, we take stock of the relationship views that a new generation of young adults holds. Do young people's relationship attitudes differ by gender, or have recent trends toward gender equality and the erosion of traditional ideologies erased differences? With more opportunities to pursue a range of relationships, the once transgressive relationships of sexual minorities are less transgressive today. Are the relationship attitudes of heterosexuals and sexual minorities similar or different? Do gender and sexual identity intersect to shape relationship attitudes?

Past Research on Relationship Views

Marriage and Relationship Views of Youth. American youth's relationship attitudes have remained fairly consistent over several decades. From the mid-1970s to the late 1990s,

80% of female high school seniors and 70-75% of male seniors reported that they expected to marry eventually, and similar percentages rated having a good marriage and family life as "extremely important". Somewhat lower percentages (62-69% of females and 55-57% of males) reported that it was "very likely" they would remain married to the same person for life (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). More recent data are consistent: 80-90% of youth expect to marry, 70-80% say marriage and family life is "extremely important," and 60% say lifelong marriage is "very likely" (Johnston et al., 2007). Gender differences are modest yet consistent: female youth express higher expectations to marry, greater importance of marriage and family life, and higher expectations for lifelong marriage (see too Harris & Lee 2006). This suggests that young women are more likely than young men to hold traditional relationship attitudes.

Researchers have examined other factors associated with youth's marriage and relationship views. Harris and Lee (2006) found that race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), family background, religiosity, and previous cohabitation experience were associated with one or more measures of marriage and relationship views. For example, lower SES youth expressed less desire for marriage and religious youth placed greater value on lifelong commitment, but those with cohabitation experience placed less value on lifelong commitment. While not central to our study, we include these factors as controls.

Relationship Beliefs and Practices of Sexual Minorities. Research indicates that same-sex relationships have a shorter average duration than heterosexual relationships (Kurdek, 2004), and female same-sex relationships may be shorter than male same-sex relationships (Andersson et al., 2006). Differences in relationship dissolution rates for

sexual minorities may reflect the lower social and legal support for same-sex couples and/or lower value placed on long-term commitment by sexual minorities. Observed differences in relationship stability may also influence the aspirations and expectations of sexual minorities, leading them to view lifelong commitment as less desirable or achievable.

Despite their higher dissolution rates, female couples engage in wedding-like public commitment rituals more often then male couples (Hull, 2006), and in jurisdictions where marriage-like legal partnership status is available, female couples enter such partnerships at higher rates than male couples (Ring, 2007). These findings challenge the idea that lesbians value commitment less; they may value commitment as much as others, but for various reasons, such as a lack of economic resources, find relationship permanence difficult to achieve.

Little research exists on relationship practices and views of sexual minority youth, but we know that they are less likely than heterosexuals to experience <u>any</u> romantic relationships during adolescence (Diamond & Dubé, 2002). Relationship experiences of sexual minority youth may vary by gender, with male same-sex relationships more likely to begin as sexual liaisons with less closeness, attachment and support, and lesbian relationships more likely start as friendships (Diamond, 2003). A recent interview study of gay male youth found commitment to the sexual script of romantic love and desire for relationships, but also a pattern of repeated casual sexual encounters, and openness to the idea of nonmonogamous relationships (Mutchler, 2000).

Past research on relationship beliefs and practices of youth and sexual minorities reviewed above suggests patterns that may help us understand the relationship attitudes of

contemporary young adults. Youth overwhelmingly endorse marriage and commitment as important goals, though girls slightly more than boys. Sexual minorities have somewhat shorter average relationships, though it is unclear if these patterns stem from the attitudes sexual minorities hold or the relationship constraints they face. Theories about gender and sexual minorities as relationship innovators further inform our expectations about young adults' relationship attitudes.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Attitudes

Gender Theories. Dominant cultural norms link love, nurturance and relationship concerns with women. Cancian (1987) traces this to the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant development of the doctrine of separate spheres—that women's personalities were uniquely suited for the private realm of family and home and men's for the public world of work and civic life. Prominent approaches to studying gender provide theoretical frameworks for understanding how dominant cultural norms such as feminized love produce, and are reproduced by, gender-typed attitudes and practices.

The *gender socialization* framework, based in psychology, includes psychoanalytic (Chodorow, 1978), social learning (e.g. Mischel, 1966; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003) and cognitive theories of gender development (Bem, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). All gender socialization theories suggest gender identity formed through early socialization is a fairly stable characteristic of individual personalities in adulthood. We know of no past research that links gender socialization processes to young adult relationship attitudes, but the theoretical framework suggests that girls are socialized to place greater importance on romance than boys, and this early socialization translates into gender differences in adult relationship attitudes.

Current perspectives on gender view the gender socialization framework as too limited because it treats gender as a stable individual characteristic of adults and neglects issues of power and social structure (Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 2000). Two theoretical alternatives are the gender performativity and the gender-as-institution approaches. *Gender performativity* theories regard gender as emergent in social interaction, and therefore variable and dependent on situations rather than a fixed internal characteristic. This "doing gender" approach (West & Zimmerman, 1987) suggests individuals adapt their gender presentation to the demands of specific situations and interactions, and are aware of the social costs of a failed performance, i.e. departing from dominant gender norms. Further, gender performances occur in the context of regulative gender discourses (Butler, 1990). This suggests that part of women's gender performance will be the expression of interest and skill in intimate relationships and adherence to relationship values celebrating love, faithfulness, and commitment, what Swidler (2001) calls the romantic love myth. While the myth influences all cultural actors, women are expected to enact it with particular enthusiasm and expertise.

Theories of *gender as a social institution* broaden perspectives on gender by highlighting issues of inequality, power and constraint, ideology, and the gendered nature of social institutions such as marriage, family, and workplace (Connell, 1987; Martin, 2004; Risman, 1998). This places socialization and gender performances in a broader context of inequalities that are reinforced by institutional arrangements (e.g. domestic division of labor, organization of paid work) and legitimating ideologies (e.g. essentialist accounts of male-female difference). The gendered beliefs, practices, and relationship values of individuals, then, are not solely the product of socialization processes or the

exigencies of situated interactions but also of institutional pressures. Despite different angles of vision, all of these theories suggest women will be more relationally-orientated and adherent to hegemonic relationship attitudes than men.

Sexual Minorities as Relationship Innovators. Three middle-range theories of sexual identity and relationships cast sexual minorities in the role of relationship innovators. First, Giddens (1992) argues that modern societies are shifting from a relationship model based on romantic love to one of *confluent love and the pure relationship*. Romantic love entails lifelong commitment and "a psychic connection, a meeting of souls" which completes individuals and produces a shared life trajectory (Giddens, 1992, pp. 45). In confluent love, partners aspire to the pure relationship, "where a social relation is entered into for its own sake . . . and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual" (Giddens, 1992, p. 58). The rise of confluent love undermines ideas of commitment; in pure relationships, everything is open to negotiation and no one is bound to the relationship out of duty. Because same-sex couples cannot resort to complementary roles prescribed by dominant gender ideology, their relationships represent the vanguard of the shift to confluent love (Giddens 1992, p. 135).

Similarly, Cherlin (2004) extends his idea of *incomplete institutionalization* to same-sex relationships. He originally argued that that remarriages are less stable than first marriages because they are incompletely institutionalized: partners face ambiguity regarding their roles and responsibilities toward each other and stepchildren (Cherlin, 1978). Extending the idea to same-sex partnerships, he notes: "Lesbian and gay couples who choose to marry must actively construct a marital world with almost no institutional

support" (Cherlin, 2004, p. 851). The ideas of confluent love, the pure relationship, and incomplete institutionalization suggest that sexual minorities will be less likely to hold traditional relationship attitudes and more open to relationships that depart from social norms.

Finally, a recent theoretical extension is offered by Rosenfeld (2007). According to his *age of independence* theory, the latter part of the twentieth century saw the rise of an independent life stage, a period between leaving the parents' home and forming one's own family, in which young adults live independently and are free to pursue relationships that do not conform to parents' expectations. Parents' influence over mate selection has declined dramatically, as reflected in increases in interracial relationships and same-sex relationships (Rosenfeld 2007, Figure 4.1). We can extrapolate from Rosenfeld's theory to predict that sexual minorities will be more open to relationships that violate parents' desires, such as cohabiting relationships, since they have already violated the norm of heterosexuality and achieved considerable independence from their parents' influence.

In sum, all three of these theories point in the same direction—that sexual minorities are less tethered to traditional relationship attitudes and practices. For Giddens and Cherlin, incomplete attachment to dominant norms (the romantic love ideology, the institution of marriage) accounts for sexual minorities' greater degree of relationship innovation. For Rosenfeld, the new independent life stage frees all young adults, but especially sexual minorities, to form relationships that deviate from the desires of their families.

Intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality was originally developed by feminist and critical race theorists to call attention to the ways in which identity

categories intersect to produce distinctive social experiences that are not reducible to their component parts (e.g. Davis, 1981; Glenn, 1985). The concept implies, for example, that African American women's experience is not merely the sum of their experience as Blacks and as women, but rather that the experience of being Black has a different meaning for men and women, and the experience of being a woman is different for African Americans and those of other racial/ethnic groups.

Several of the ideas discussed above can be extended to consider how the intersection of two identity categories shapes relationship views. For example, the gender-as-institution theory asserts that gendered beliefs and practices are the product of institutional pressures. This perspective suggests that marriage, as the primary institution that governs intimate relationships, reinforces gender differences which reflect the hegemonic belief that roles of partners should be complementary or different. However, because legal access to marriage is largely unavailable to same-sex couples in the U.S., most sexual minorities are not governed by these same institutional forces. Therefore, their views regarding relationships may not be as influenced by the hegemonic gender ideologies of institutions like marriage. Thus, the intersection of gender and sexual identity may produce unique relationship views; one's gender may not shape relationship attitudes for lesbian and gay young adults in the same ways that it does for straight young adults.

Much of the empirical work on intersectionality emphasizes its complexity and nuance, leading researchers to favor qualitative methods (McCall, 2005). But intersectionality is also amenable to quantitative inquiry with the use of interaction terms or subgroup comparisons to test whether the effects of holding one identity are

conditioned by other identities. We use these methods to examine the intersection of gender and sexual identity with respect to relationship values.

Hypotheses

Based on past research and theories reviewed above, we offer the following general hypotheses regarding the association of gender and sexual identity with young adults' relationship attitudes:

H1: Gender: Young adult women will place greater importance on traditional relationship attitudes such as the importance of lifelong commitment and marriage than their male counterparts.

H2: Sexual identity: Sexual minorities will place less importance on traditional relationship attitudes (importance of lifelong commitment and marriage) than heterosexuals, but they will express greater support for less traditional relationships forms like cohabitation.

H3: Intersectionality: Gender and sexual identity will intersect such that the gender differences found among heterosexuals will not always hold among sexual minorities.

Data, Measures, and Methods

Data

We use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health. Adolescents in 80 high schools and 52 middle schools were sampled to yield a nationally representative survey of U.S. adolescents who were in grades 7-12 in 1994-1995 (Udry 2003). In 1995, more than 90,000 adolescents completed a self-administered in-school survey and a sub-sample of adolescents and their parents (about 20,000) also completed an intensive, in-

home interview (time 1). About 14,700 also completed in-home interviews in 1996 (time 2), and 15,197 did so in 2001-2002 (time 3). For our analyses, all variables come from either wave 1 or wave 3. We use data from all respondents who completed the most recent interview (at ages 18-26) and who had non-missing information on our key measure of sexual identity and weight and survey design measures (N=14,121). Sample weights and design measures are missing (N=860) if the case was not in the original sampling frame but was added in the field, if the case was selected as part of a pair (twins, half-siblings) and both were not interviewed, or if the case did not have an indicator for whether it was part of a special oversample (Tabor, 2003). Item non-response on sexual identity self-reports resulted in the loss of an additional 216 cases. After these restrictions, our analysis sample is 14,121.

Measures

Gender and Sexual Identity. Gender is self-reported by respondents as either male (0) or female (1). We use a wave 3 question that asks respondents to choose the description that best fits how they think about themselves in terms of their sexual identity. We code them into three groups: 1) *straight* – '100% heterosexual (straight)' or 'mostly heterosexual (straight), but somewhat attracted to people of your own sex'; 2) *bisexual* – 'attracted to men and women equally'; and 3) *gay/ lesbian* – '100% homosexual (gay)' or 'mostly homosexual (gay), but somewhat attracted to people of the opposite sex.' We tested more stringent criteria for inclusion in the straight or gay/lesbian categories - that one must report 100% heterosexual or homosexual identity, respectively. This did not alter our results. Because we are interested in relationship views in the context of social and legal

attention to same-sex relationships, sexual identity (v. behavior or attraction) is the appropriate component of sexual orientation to assess (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007).

Relationship Attitudes. We use three measures of relationship attitudes as dependent variables. We assess *attitudes about cohabitation* using a wave 3 question that asks respondents how much they agree with the statement 'It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together even if they aren't interested in considering marriage.' We code responses to indicate: 1 – 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree somewhat'; 2 – 'neither agree nor disagree'; 3 – 'agree somewhat'; and 4 – 'strongly agree.'

To measure *attitudes about marriage*, we use a wave 3 question that asks respondents how important it is for them to be married someday. We use all four response options: 1 – not at all important; 2 – not very important; 3 – somewhat important; and 4 – very important. Those who are currently married are skipped out of this question (17%).

Finally, we measure *attitudes about lifelong commitment* using a wave 3 question that asks respondents: "How important do you think lifelong commitment is for a successful marriage or serious committed relationship?" In its original scale this measure ranges from 1 to 10 where 1 represents "not at all important" and 10 represents "extremely important." However, some values on the scale have very few cases, especially for sexual minority groups. In coding this measure, we seek to retain as much gradation in ratings as possible while insuring that each category on the scale represents enough cases for meaningful analyses. The distribution of responses on the lifelong commitment scale is highly skewed; an overwhelming majority rate it a 10 – extremely important (76%). In ancillary analyses (not shown) we treated this measure as

continuous and regressed it on sexual identity, gender, and other measures. Our results indicated a significant interaction between sexual identity and gender. Therefore, to assess group specific associations, the scale of this measure must have enough cases in each category for each sexual identity by gender group (e.g. bisexual women, bisexual men, gay men, lesbians, etc). Thus, we collapse the 1 to 10 scales into three categories: 1 – not important to important (1-7 on the original scale); 2 – very important (8-9 on the original scale); and 3 – extremely important (10 on the original scale). Note that even the lowest category on this measure includes those who rate lifelong commitment as important. There are simply too few cases to make finer distinctions at the bottom of the distribution. Thus, it is best to interpret these measures as mostly gradations of importance in the top half of the original distribution.

Background Factors. To control for other factors that may influence relationship attitudes, we use a number of controls in our models: race/ethnicity, adolescent family structure, family socio-economic status all measured at time 1, and religiosity, political orientation and involvement, age, and whether the respondent has ever married, cohabited, or had a child, measured at time 3. Because of space limitations, we do not detail the measurement of these variables here, although the measures and their distributions are shown in Table 1.

Methods

Because our dependent variables are ordinal, we use ordered logistic regression. Long (1997) suggests ordinal over linear regression models for dependent variables where there is no explicit and consistent metric separating categories. In these cases, linear regression would require the assumption that the intervals between adjacent categories

are equal. We cannot comfortably make this assumption with our measures. Moreover, Winship and Mare (1984) and McKelvey and Zavoina (1975) have shown that linear regression of an ordinal outcome can produce biased results.

Our analyses proceed as follows. In Table 2 we show the distributions of relationship values overall, and by gender and sexual identity. In Table 3, we show associations between relationship attitudes, gender, sexual identity, and controls in ordered logistic regression models. Model 1 shows associations between each relationship attitudes and gender, sexual identity, and control measures. We then test gender-by-sexual-identity interactions (not shown). For attitudes toward lifelong commitment and marriage, the interactions are significant so a second model explicitly tests differences between each sexual-identity-by-gender subgroup using post-hoc Wald tests. We adjust for the Add Health sampling design using the *svy* commands in STATA 9.0. We estimate associations but cannot test causal effects because sexual identity and our outcomes are both measured at wave 3.

RESULTS

Table 1, Panel A shows descriptive statistics for our key independent variables with those groups serving as the reference category in later models indicated by (ref). Percentages are weighted, and N's are unweighted. Ninety-seven percent of respondents identify as straight, and 1.5 and 1.6 percent identify as gay/lesbian and bisexual, respectively. When further defined by gender, gay men slightly outnumber lesbians, but among bisexuals, women outnumber men. Control variable distributions are shown in Panel B.

<Table 1 about here>

Table 2 shows the distributions of our relationship attitudes overall and in cross-tabulations with gender and sexual identity. Seventy-six percent rate lifelong commitment as extremely important, 13% rate it as very important, and just 11% rate it as not important to important. Straight women are more likely than straight men to rate lifelong commitment as extremely important, but lesbians are less likely than gay men to do so. Bisexuals do not show large gender differences. Overall, straight respondents rate lifelong commitment as extremely important more often than sexual minorities. The second panel shows cross tabulations for importance of marriage. Here we see that nearly half of all respondents rate marriage someday as very important and another third rate it as somewhat important. Straight men and women are substantially more likely to rate it as 'very important' than their gay and lesbian counterparts. The third panel shows attitudes towards cohabitation. The distribution of responses is more even overall with a quarter agreeing that cohabitation is OK and another responding that they disagree. About half of all sexual minorities strongly agree that non-marital cohabitation is OK compared to one quarter of all straight respondents.

<Table 2 about here>

Table 3 shows results of models estimating associations between sexual minority status and attitudes about lifelong commitment, marriage and cohabitation. For attitudes about commitment and marriage, we include a second model showing associations for gender by sexual identity subgroups. The first set of models estimates the ordered log odds of ratings of lifelong commitment. Model 1 shows that sexual minorities rate lifelong commitment as less important than heterosexuals. A gender-by-sexual-identity interaction proved significant (not shown), therefore we estimate model 2 to show

contrasts between gender-specific sexual identity subgroups in the ratings of importance of lifelong commitment. Subgroups are defined by letters 'a' through 'f' in the left-most column, and these letters are used to denote statistically significant contrasts ($p<0.05$) in model 2. Compared to straight women all other groups rate lifelong commitment as less important. Lesbians are the least likely to rate lifelong commitment as important, but they are significantly different from only straight women and straight men, not other sexual minorities.

The second set of models shows associations between sexual minority status and attitudes about marriage. Sexual minorities are less likely to rate marriage as 'very important' compared to straight young adults. However, among sexual minorities, gay and lesbian young adults are particularly unlikely to rate marriage as very important – the gay/lesbian coefficient is also significantly different than the bisexual coefficient. Women's higher level of participation in public commitment rituals and higher rates of entry into state-sanctioned same-sex unions when they are available led us to test gender-by-sexual identity interactions. Model 2 shows that sexual minority youth in all groups rate marriage as less important than straight women and straight men. There is no significant difference between bisexual women and bisexual men in their ratings of the importance of marriage. There is, however, a difference between lesbians and gay men – gay men rate marriage significantly less important than lesbians do. In fact, gay men rate marriage as significantly less important than all other groups.

The third set of models shows that sexual minorities are more likely than heterosexuals to agree that cohabitation is OK even without the intent to marry, but there

is no significant difference between gays/lesbians and bisexuals. We tested the interaction between gender and sexual identity for cohabitation attitudes, but it was not significant.

<Table 3 about here>

Discussion

Our results suggest that gay, lesbian, and bisexual young adults hold somewhat more liberal relationship attitudes than their heterosexual counterparts and less traditional attitudes than straight young adult women. We expected that sexual minorities would rate the importance of lifelong commitment lower than heterosexuals. Our findings are only partly consistent with this expectation. Our results suggest that most sexual minorities rate lifelong commitment as less important only in contrast to straight women, not straight men. The one exception here is that lesbians rate commitment as less important than both heterosexual men and women. This is consistent with work by Kurdek (2004) and Andersson and colleagues (2006) which suggest that lesbians have the least committed relationships as indicated by their relatively higher dissolution rates, but our findings indicate that the difference is only significant in contrast to straight men and women, not other sexual minority groups. Not only do all sexual minority groups differ from straight women in ratings of lifelong commitment, straight men also have lower ratings than straight women. Thus, it seems that straight women especially endorse favorable attitudes toward commitment.

Despite the significant differences for sexual minorities, especially lesbians, in the value of lifelong commitment, it is important to note that in general *all* respondents have very favorable attitudes toward commitment. Because its distribution was highly skewed, we collapsed responses on the original measure into a smaller set of categories, but most

of those who are coded below the top category of 'extremely important' actually rated the measure as an 8 or 9 on the original scale ranging from 0 to 10. We believe this indicates a fairly favorable attitude toward lifelong commitment and suggests the pervasive cultural influence of romantic love mythology across sexual identity categories (see Swidler 2001).

Our findings on differences in attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation are consistent with our expectations. Bisexuals, lesbians, and especially gay men, place less importance on marriage than heterosexuals. The finding that gay men differ from lesbians in the importance that they place on marriage is consistent with evidence that female couples are more likely to enact marriage culturally through public commitment rituals and with statistics showing that lesbians more often opt-in to state-sanctioned partnerships in states where the option exists. The fact that gay men are just as likely as lesbians to rate lifelong commitment as highly important but less likely than lesbians to rate marriage as highly important suggests that marriage holds distinct meanings for different sexual minority subgroups and is not necessarily seen as synonymous with, or necessary for, lifelong commitment.

Our finding that both bisexuals and gays/lesbians register more pro-cohabitation attitudes may reflect the liberalizing effect of experiences of discrimination. It may also reflect the legal conditions facing sexual minorities in most of the U.S., with the lack of access to legal marriage for same-sex couples making sexual minorities more accepting of non-marital cohabitation (since it is the only option for residential unions for most same-sex couples). Likewise, the less favorable attitudes toward marriage among sexual minority youth may reflect the legal realities confronting same-sex couples in the U.S.

today – some may not aspire to marriage because they view it as a legal impossibility.[1] But the item gauging attitudes about marriage could be interpreted more expansively, to include nonlegal "marriages" formed by same-sex couples through adoption of marriage terminology or participation in public or private commitment rituals (see Hull 2006). If sexual minority young adults interpret the question in this broader fashion, their lower average aspirations for marriage take on a different meaning. In this case, lower desire for marriage might reflect greater skepticism toward the institution of marriage, perhaps grounded in queer critiques of marriage as a tool for the social control of sexuality (e.g. Warner 1999) and/or feminist critiques of marriage as a site of gender oppression (e.g. Polikoff 1993).

Our findings point to several important areas for future research on sexual identity and relationship attitudes. First, research should attempt to gauge the specific causal mechanisms linking sexual identity and relationship views, and adjudicate among competing explanations (e.g. liberalizing effects of personal experience of discrimination vs. constricted sexual markets). Second, while we tested gender-specific sexual identity associations with values, attitudes, and desires, we would have liked to also test race- or class-specific associations (or gender *and* race- or class-specific associations) between sexual identity and the status trait values. Unfortunately, we are precluded from doing so because we have too few cases in most race- or class-specific sexual identity groups. If possible, future research should investigate the intersection between racial/ethnic and/or class minority status and sexual minority status as it relates to relationship attitudes.

[1]The data we use to assess relationship views was collected in 2001 when same-sex marriage was less of a legal possibility than it is today—Massachusetts had not yet legalized same-sex marriage, and Vermont was the only state with civil unions. Thus, we might see more support for same-sex marriage among sexual minority youth now as it is increasingly an available, though still quite limited, option.

Third, future research should further explore the interaction between gender and sexual identity among sexual minority youth, to confirm or refute our findings that lesbians place *less* and that straight women place *more* importance on lifelong commitment than most other young adults. Fourth, researchers would benefit from data that tracks the relationship attitudes of sexual minorities of different cohorts over time. This would allow examination of both age and cohort influences on relationship attitudes to test whether views change throughout the life course and/or with the shifting social, legal and cultural context that is experienced differently by those in different cohorts.

Finally, future research should more carefully address the issue of sexual minority youth's views regarding marriage. The vague wording of the Add Health question on aspirations to marry someday makes the findings reported here very difficult to interpret, since we do not know how sexual minorities interpreted the question – in reference to legal marriage only, to cultural practices of marriage, or some combination of these. This is a problem common to many large survey projects. Surveys that gauge marriage-related attitudes, values, and behaviors should correct this problem with more precise wording of questions, since legal same-sex marriage is currently available in two U.S. jurisdictions (Massachusetts and California) and two other states recognize same-sex marriages contracted outside of their jurisdictions (New York and Rhode Island). In addition, four states now offer domestic partnerships or civil unions proper (Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont). Finally, cultural practices related to marriage have spread among same-sex couples regardless of their access to legal marriage or marriage-like statuses. Given the increased prevalence of options for legal unions and cultural practices related to marriage, it is increasingly important to refine our

survey measures to accurately reflect the options and experiences of sexual minorities. In addition, other methods of research – such as in-depth interviewing and focus groups – would provide more depth and nuance to our understanding of how sexual minority youth think about marriage and other relationship matters.

With the dramatic changes of recent decades in the social context for intimate relationships, there is a heightened public interest in and debate about the character of sexual minorities' relationships. Given this context, it is important to take stock of the relationship attitudes a new generation of youth hold for themselves. This study shows that among recent cohorts of young adults, sexual minorities hold different relationship views than heterosexuals on some dimensions: they desire marriage less and they hold more positive attitudes towards non-marital cohabitation. In other ways sexual minority young adults are quite similar to heterosexual young adults: they highly value lifelong commitment. Among young adults, most sexual minorities are no different than straight men in their rating of the importance of lifelong commitment. Sexual minorities are different than straight women on ratings of lifelong commitment, but so are straight men. Rather than indicating a division along sexual identity lines, these findings highlight the exceptionally high value that straight women place on commitment. Despite these relatively small intergroup differences, we submit that the bigger story is the overall high ratings on the value lifelong commitment across sexual identity groups, a pattern that suggests that the romantic love ideology is alive and well as this new generation of young adults comes of age. Regarding attitudes toward the more formal union formation measures of cohabitation and marriage, we are left wondering whether the differences we find are real differences in attitudes or attributable to the ambiguity of traditional survey

questions regarding these union types for sexual minorities who are substantially constrained by the state in the types of unions they can form.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables (weighted and design adjusted)

Panel A: Key Independent Variables

	Percent		Percent	Unwgt N
Sexual Identity		Sexual Identity x Gender		
Straight (ref)	96.95	straight women (ref)	47.20	7162
Gay/Lesbian	1.50	straight men	49.75	6512
Bisexual	1.55	lesbians	0.58	84
		gay men	0.93	134
Gender		bisexual women	1.26	187
Men (ref)	50.97	bisexual men	0.30	42
Women	49.03			

Panel B: Background Variables

	Percent		Percent
Race		Family of Origin	
Non-Hispanic White (ref)	67.55	2-parent, bio/adoptive (ref)	57.13
Non-Hispanic Black	15.54	other family structure	42.87
Hispanic	11.64		
Non-Hispanic Asian	3.65	Parent's Education	
Non-Hispanic Other	1.62	< HS grad	24.79
		HS grad/some college (ref)	40.05
		college grad+	32.45
Political Orientation		missing	2.71
liberal	17.51		
moderate (ref)	52.30	Family Formation History	
conservative	20.35	married, intact	17.00
missing	9.84	married, divorce, no remarry	1.62
		ever cohabit	41.04
Registered to Vote	71.39	ever parent	20.09
Religion		Ever on Public Assist.	8.15
conservative Protestant	13.24		
moderate Protestant (ref)	9.46		Mean
liberal Protestant	4.54	Religiosity Index	4.34
Black Protestant	7.97	(range)	(0 - 9)
Catholic	23.64	Age	21.81
Jewish	0.76	(range)	(18 - 26)
other religion	2.64		
no religion	22.00	Average log of family income	3.57
affiliation missing	15.74	Missing Family Income	21.90%

Note: N=14,121; Population Size=21,706,868

Table 2: Weighted Percentage Distributions of Relationship Attitudes by Gender & Sexual Identity

	Overall Total %	Importance of Lifelong Commitment					
		Males			Females		
		straight	gay	bisexual	straight	lesbian	bisexual
not impt to impt	10.82	14.00	17.59	31.92	6.65	25.48	24.59
very important	12.80	14.57	18.81	11.67	10.57	26.89	15.31
extremely important	76.39	71.43	63.60	56.41	82.79	47.63	60.10

	Overall Total %	Importance of Marriage Someday					
		Males			Females		
		straight	gay	bisexual	straight	lesbian	bisexual
not at all important	4.90	4.77	24.73	10.55	4.12	8.58	16.83
not very important	12.21	12.25	35.62	17.81	10.85	40.02	22.74
somewhat important	33.35	35.68	24.10	41.50	30.91	42.59	25.48
very important	49.53	47.29	15.56	30.14	54.12	8.81	34.95

	Overall Total %	OK to Cohabit w/o Intent of Marriage					
		Males			Females		
		straight	gay	bisexual	straight	lesbian	bisexual
strongly/somewhat disagree	24.09	19.42	7.85	14.36	30.01	9.90	8.19
neither agree nor disagree	18.80	18.82	19.97	18.28	18.98	15.32	11.91
agree somewhat	31.29	34.18	18.81	12.69	28.60	25.87	33.58
strongly agree	25.82	27.58	53.36	54.66	22.41	48.91	46.31

Note: distributions are adjusted for complex survey design using STATA 9.2 *svy* commands

Table 3: Ordered Logistic Models of Relationship Attitudes - Log Odds (std err)

	Importance of Lifelong Commitment		Importance of Marriage Someday		OK to Cohabit w/o intent to marry
	1	2	1	2	1
Female	0.59 **		0.237 **		-0.397 **
	(0.06)		(0.063)		(0.048)
Gay/Lesbian	-0.62 **		-1.87 *		0.798 *
	(0.22)		(0.128)		(0.203)
Bisexual	-0.94 **		-1.031 *		0.947 *
	(0.22)		(0.216)		(0.185)
St Women (a) (ref)					
St Men (b)		-0.63 ac		-0.236 acdef	
		(0.06)		(0.063)	
Lesbians (c)		-1.38 ab		-1.747 abde	
		(0.25)		(0.163)	
Gay men (d)		-0.75 a		-2.191 abcef	
		(0.28)		(0.182)	
Bisexual women (e)		-1.05 a		-1.089 abcd	
		(0.24)		(0.245)	
Bisexual men (f)		-1.18 a		-1.069 abd	
		(0.52)		(0.411)	
NH-Black	-0.08	-0.08	-0.357 **	-0.357 **	-0.481 **
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.093)
Hispanic	-0.21 *	-0.21 **	-0.191 *	-0.19 *	-0.203 *
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.088)
NH-Asian	-0.09	-0.10	0.085	0.087	-0.295 **
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.124)	(0.124)	(0.112)
NH-Other race	-0.17	-0.17	-0.293	-0.295	-0.078
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.203)	(0.202)	(0.186)
Age (wave 3)	0.04 *	0.04 *	-0.002	-0.002	-0.027
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Alt. Family Structure	-0.05	-0.05	-0.052	-0.052	0.196 **
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.058)	(0.016)	(0.045)
Par Ed <HS	-0.19 *	-0.19 *	-0.157 *	-0.158 *	-0.012
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.076)	(0.077)	(0.061)
Par Ed Coll Grad	-0.32 **	-0.33 **	0.098	0.098	0.071
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.057)
Log Family Inc	0.00	0.00	0.13 **	0.130 **	0.031
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.031)
Ever Pub Asst	-0.12	-0.12	-0.156	-0.156	0.149
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.102)	(0.101)	(0.080)
Observations	14109	14109	11643	11643	14105

Note: Analysis adjusts for complex survey design using STATA 9.2 svy commands. Other background controls included, not shown. Letter superscripts 'a-f' indicate significant differnces at p<0.05.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01