Intergenerational Mobility of Non-Heterosexual Individuals*

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Abstract

We document an intergenerational mobility gap for sexual minorities in the United States. As parental income rank increases, non-heterosexual men fall further behind heterosexual men in income rank, reflecting weaker transmission of parental advantage rather than lower predicted outcomes among men from low-income families. Equalizing returns to parental advantage would eliminate the non-heterosexual income gap. These patterns persist when comparing non-heterosexual men to their heterosexual brothers. We find modest and unsystematic mobility gaps for non-heterosexual women. Our results suggest occupational characteristics may play a role in generating these patterns.

Keywords: Intergenerational Mobility, LGBTQ Economics, Economic Disparities

JEL Codes: J15, J16

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1 Introduction

Intergenerational mobility (IGM) captures the extent to which parental socioeconomic status shapes children's economic outcomes. A large literature documents differences in mobility by race, gender, and immigrant background in the United States, showing that the transmission of parental advantage contributes to observed economic gaps (Chetty et al., 2019). We ask whether the well-documented economic gaps faced by sexual minorities—individuals who identify as non-heterosexual—have intergenerational roots (Badgett, 1995; Badgett et al., 2024). Non-heterosexual individuals face distinct frictions in parent-child relationships, educational investments, and occupational choices that may disrupt the processes through which socioeconomic status is reproduced across generations (Fish et al., 2020; Needham and Austin, 2010).

We examine whether parental income is less predictive of adult outcomes for non-heterosexual individuals than heterosexual individuals. We rely on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), a nationally representative longitudinal survey where we observe sexual orientation, adult economic outcomes, and parental income. An additional advantage of Add Health is its identification of sibling relationships, which allows us to compare the economic outcomes of non-heterosexual respondents to those of their heterosexual siblings.

The primary analysis compares IGM in income and education by sexual orientation, disaggregated by gender. We assess IGM in income using rank–rank specifications relating the children's position in the income distribution to that of their parents, and IGM in education by relating children's college attendance to parents' income rank. In this framework, we present two coefficients of interest: slope and level. We refer to the slope of the rank-rank relationship as *intergenerational persistence*. It captures the extent to which parental advantage is transmitted into children's economic success: higher persistence is consistent with stronger dependence of children's outcomes on parental resources and investments. Our second coefficient of interest is the level, which we refer to as *absolute upward mobility* (Chetty et al., 2014); it captures the extent to which children born near the bottom of the parental income distribution rise in the income distribution.

Our main finding is that sexual orientation is associated with differences in intergenerational persistence among men. Intergenerational income persistence is lower for non-heterosexual men, with a rank-rank coefficient of 0.13 compared to 0.27 for heterosexual men. In contrast, absolute

upward mobility does not differ significantly between heterosexual and non-heterosexual men. A flatter parent-child slope is often read as evidence of greater relative mobility, but here—where intercepts are similar but slopes diverge—it does not reflect improved outcomes for non-heterosexual men from low-income families; rather, it reflects a diminished return to parental advantage.[1] Imposing the heterosexual rank-rank slope would mechanically eliminate the income rank gap between heterosexual and non-heterosexual men.

Educational mobility exhibits a different pattern. Intergenerational persistence in college attendance is lower for non-heterosexual men. However, non-heterosexual men exhibit markedly higher absolute upward mobility in education—non-heterosexual men born at the bottom of the income distribution are 20 p.p. more likely to attend college. This pattern reflects greater educational attainment among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with convergence toward the outcomes of heterosexual men as parental income increases. The patterns observed for women differ in both magnitude and structure. Although non-heterosexual women also experience income mobility gaps relative to heterosexual women, these differences are modest and exhibit no systematic variation across the parental income distribution.[2]

We use self-identified sexual orientation rather than partnership status, behavior-based proxies, or administrative measures, which allows us to capture identity-based differences in economic trajectories more directly. A remaining concern is that the propensity to report a non-heterosexual identity may depend on factors that also shape economic outcomes. We conduct several analyses to explore this possibility, including sibling comparisons that absorb family-level factors that predict both disclosure and mobility.

Our findings are robust across a wide range of sample restrictions and alternative specifications. Income rank gaps for men—but not women—remain when analyses incorporate family fixed effects, suggesting observed disparities are consistent with barriers to intergenerational transmission rather than unobserved differences between families. Results are unchanged when the sample is restricted to non-students, sexual orientation is defined using reports from earlier or later adulthood, or we correct for life-cycle bias and attenuation from measurement error.

[1] We find similar results using nonparametric measures of mobility, suggesting the findings are not driven by functional form.

[2] One explanation is that gaps in fertility and partnership status between non-heterosexual and heterosexual individuals are smaller for women than for men. See Appendix Table A4.

We propose two potential mechanisms that may generate this slope attenuation—parental disinvestment and input substitution—and assess their roles by examining differences in endowments associated with later-life economic outcomes, including parental investment, childhood environment, education, and occupation. We find that occupational sorting may help explain the weaker transmission of advantage among non-heterosexual men and that direct parental disinvestment is unlikely.

While much of the IGM literature focuses on gaps in absolute upward mobility, we show that inequality can operate through attenuated transmission of advantage at the top of the parental distribution, and argue that parental disinvestment or input substitution can account for this pattern (Chetty et al., 2019; Jácome et al., 2022). If so, attenuated persistence should appear wherever these forces bind; consistent with this, children of immigrants exhibit shallower rank-rank slopes than US-born children (Abramitzky et al., 2021).

These results also extend the literature on LGBTQ+ economic outcomes by introducing an explicitly intergenerational perspective. A large literature documents wage gaps, higher poverty rates, and greater financial insecurity among sexual minorities (Badgett et al., 2024).[3] Existing evidence relies primarily on cross-sectional data. Concurrent work using Danish administrative data and partnership status—capturing sexual minority status through observed financial commitments—documents lower intergenerational mobility among sexual minorities, though they find level rather than slope differences (Groes et al., 2026). In contrast, we use US survey data and self-reported sexual orientation, allowing us to capture a broader population and a different institutional context. By linking adult outcomes to parental socioeconomic status, this study shows that non-heterosexual disparities reflect intergenerational processes governing the transmission of advantage.

2 Data

We use the restricted version of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) cohort (Harris, Kathleen Mullan et al., 2009). The data follows a nationally representative sample of about 15,000 adolescents, sampled when they were in secondary school. At

[3]For further evidence, see Badgett (2018); Klawitter (2014); Drydakis (2021); Deal et al. (2022).

the time of the first interview in 1994/5, children were in grades 7-12 and parent ages ranged from 33-52.[4] We also use data on major and occupational characteristics from external datasets such as the American Community Survey and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System's Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP).

A Add Health: Income, Education, and Mechanisms

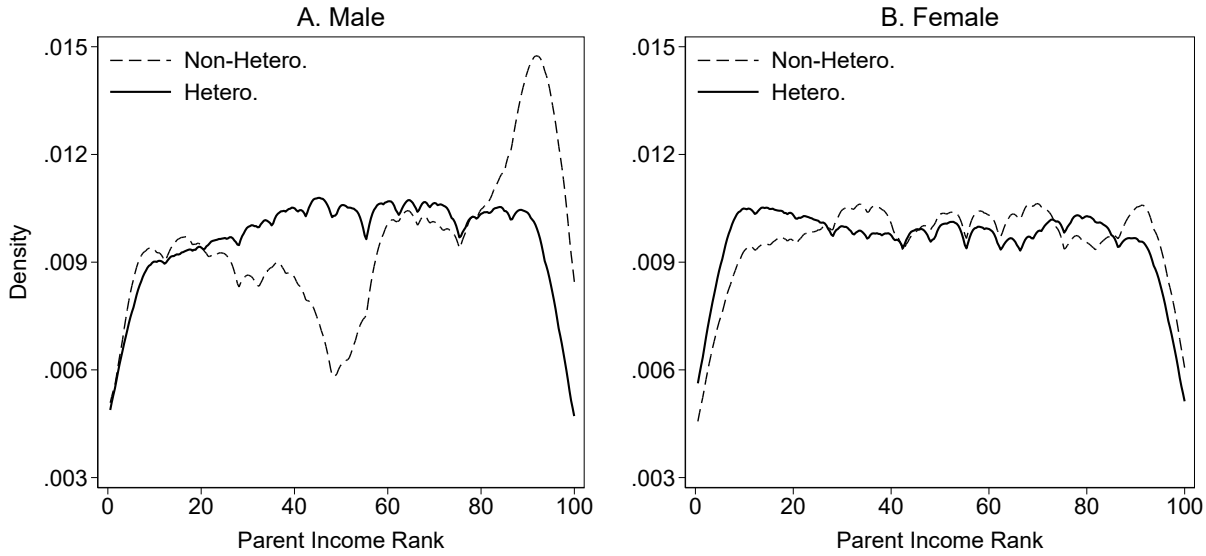
We measure parental income as total household pre-tax income, including wages, salaries, welfare benefits, dividends, and all other sources. This measure is recorded at the time of initial interview in 1994/95, when the children are in grades 7 through 12, and reflects the reported household income of the childhood residence. In our sample, 90% of these reports were completed by a biological parent, and the remaining 10% by another relative or an adoptive parent. We keep income reports of $0 but drop missing observations, following Chetty et al. (2014, 2019). We then construct a parental income rank from 0-100 that serves as our primary explanatory variable. Similarly, we measure child income as the total pre-tax individual earnings from wages or salaries, tips, bonuses, overtime pay, and self-employment income, from all jobs. Unlike parental income, this variable is individual rather than household level. This measure is recorded in 2006/2007 (Wave IV, when respondents are 26-32) and uses the same coding procedures as above. Approximately 200 respondents reported that they did not know their exact income and instead guessed in ranges. For these respondents, we assign the midpoint of that range as their income. We then construct a child income rank from 0-100 that serves as our primary dependent variable.

We measure educational attainment using respondents' highest level of education by Wave IV. We construct a binary measure of college attendance that includes respondents who report any postsecondary schooling, including incomplete education (see Appendix Table A12). Respondents were also asked whether they are "currently attending a college, university, or vocational/technical school where [they] take courses for academic credit?", which we use to measure current school attendance.

We additionally measure other characteristics in Add Health that serve as potential mechanisms for the mobility patterns we observe. For further details on the construction of these variables, see Appendix Table A12.

[4] Ages 33 and 52 are the 5th and 95th percentile, the lowest age recorded was 20 and the highest was 80.

Figure 1: Non-Heterosexual Men Have Higher Parental Income



Note: Panel A presents the distribution of parental income rank separately by non-heterosexual status for males. Panel B presents the distribution of parental income rank separately by non-heterosexual status for females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

B Add Health: Sexual Orientation

We measure sexual orientation in 2008/2009, when respondents are 26-32 years old. Respondents were asked to "choose the description that best fits how [they] think about [themselves]," with options ranging from "100% heterosexual (straight)" to "100% homosexual (gay)" (see Appendix Table A12). We coded all respondents who chose an option other than "100% heterosexual" as non-heterosexual, and excluded the less than 1% of the sample who did not reply. Appendix Figure A3 displays the distribution of specific responses by sex.

Our primary analytic sample consists of 9,733 heterosexual respondents and 1,593 non-heterosexual respondents.[5] Appendix Table A1 documents an income gap of $5,843 between heterosexual and non-heterosexual males in our sample, and a gap of $1,047 for females.

We observe that self-reported non-heterosexual identity is not uniformly distributed across parental income. As shown in Figure 1, non-heterosexual males are underrepresented among middle-

[5]For analyses that do not require parental income, including sibling comparisons, we rely on a larger sample of 12,805 heterosexual respondents and 2,082 non-heterosexual respondents. Appendix Table A2 provides summary statistics for our larger sample that does not restrict based on presence of parental income.

income households and overrepresented among high-income ones, while the distribution is uniform for females.[6] Sexual orientation is by definition self-reported, so in the absence of a ground truth we treat self-reports as a sensible measure of sexual identity, even though they may be context-dependent. This choice is in line with a large literature on labor market differentials (Badgett et al., 2021). Identity may also be the dimension most relevant to mobility, as it is more readily perceived than attraction or behavior and thus more likely to shape discrimination and parent–child frictions.

Several analyses confirm that these patterns are not specific to Add Health or to a particular measure of sexuality. First, we measure sexual orientation at three ages (18–24, 26–32, and 35–41) in Add Health and finds similar results (see Appendix B). Second, we use two alternative sources—the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)—to ask whether non-heterosexual males are similarly selected on parental education and income in other samples. Appendix Figure A4 shows positive gradients on maternal and paternal education, as well as self-reported parental income categories.[7] We know of no US dataset that would allow us to benchmark the parental income results directly, but the agreement across surveys suggests that the positive gradient in Figure 1 is not an artifact of Add Health.

We also take a different approach to the same concern, asking whether our results hold against a comparison group with the same parental income distribution. In Section 4C, we restrict to families with at least one non-heterosexual child, which mechanically equalizes parental income across the heterosexual and non-heterosexual samples. These results are substantively similar.

C Other surveys: CPS, ACS, and CIP

As Add Health has not been widely used to study intergenerational mobility, we compare our income measures against the Current Population Survey (CPS) (Ruggles, Steven et al., 2023). Appendix Figure A1 compares parental income in Add Health to the CPS distribution for parents of adolescents aged 13 to 18 in 1994–1995 (Panel A), and children income to CPS distribution for 26 to 30-year-olds in 2006 (Panel B). In both panels, the weighted Add Health distribution closely tracks the CPS, lending confidence to the representativeness of our income measures.

We characterize occupation, industry, and college major characteristics using data from the

[6] Appendix Figure A2 plots these patterns as the distribution over parental income deciles.

[7] This contrasts with Black et al. (2007), who find no difference in father's education for non-heterosexual individuals identified via sexual behavior in an earlier GSS sample.

American Community Survey (ACS) (Ruggles, Steven et al., 2023), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System's Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Using ACS data from 2007–2010, we computed weighted means of female share, average hours worked, average wage income, and occupational scores for each occupation by industry cell. These characteristics are merged into Add Health using respondents' reported occupation and industry codes in Wave IV, matched on the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. For college major composition, we use CIP data covering 2000–2005, computing the share of female graduates within each program, which we then merged into Add Health using respondents' reported primary major in Wave III.[8]

3 Empirical Strategy

We estimate whether non-heterosexual individuals see different returns to parental socioeconomic resources using a linear model that relates the outcome Y_{ij} for individual i in domain j to parental outcomes and indicators of non-heterosexual identification. We support our main analyses with two additional frameworks: Upward Rank Mobility, which provides a nonparametric alternative, and Sibling Comparisons, which exploits within-family variation to account for unobserved family-level differences.

A Linear Model Specification

The primary specification is a linear equation that, for outcome j, models outcome Y_j as follows:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta P_i + \delta \mathrm{S}_i + \lambda(P_i \times \mathrm{S}_i) + \varepsilon_i \tag{A}$$

where P_i denotes parental income rank, and S_i is an indicator equal to one if the respondent i self-identifies as non-heterosexual. The constant term α represents the expected base outcome for heterosexual children born to parents at the bottom of the parental outcome distribution, while δ captures the additional expected base outcome for non-heterosexual children.

The interaction between parental income and sexual orientation permits both the intercept and slope of the parent–child gradient to vary by sexual orientation. The parameter β measures the

[8]Individuals who were not already in college or studying by Wave III are excluded from these analyses.

rate of intergenerational persistence for heterosexual children, while λ captures the difference in persistence for non-heterosexual children. Both the level (δ) and slope (λ) estimators are important for interpreting mobility gaps.

We apply this model to examine IGM in income and education. For income, we follow the standard approach in Chetty et al. (2014) and construct a rank–rank specification using equation (A) with child income rank as outcome Y_i. For educational attainment, we use an indicator variable for whether an individual ever attended college. In this case, we interpret equation (A) as a linear probability model, with Y_i representing the probability of ever attending college. The interpretation of δ and $\beta + \lambda$ is consistent with the income case: δ measures baseline educational opportunity differences at low parental income, while differences in slopes indicate the extent to which parental income predicts educational attainment for heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals.

B Upward Rank Mobility

The linear rank–rank specification in equation (A) may mask nonlinear mobility gaps across the parental income distribution. This issue is particularly relevant in our context, as mobility gaps for non-heterosexual men are most pronounced among individuals born to parents at the top of the income distribution.

To capture this heterogeneity without imposing linearity, we complement equation (A) with a nonparametric measure of Upward Rank Mobility (URM), following Bhattacharya and Mazumder (2011). URM reports the share of children whose income rank exceeds that of their parents, providing an intuitive measure of upward movement that is not dependent on the linear specification.

We construct URM by calculating the fraction of children whose rank exceeds their parents' rank within bins of the parental income distribution. For parental-income quartile r, defined by bounds r_{lower} and r_{upper}, we estimate URM at rank r as:

$$U_r = Pr(C_i > P_i \mid r_{lower} < P_i < r_{upper}) \tag{B}$$

We estimate U_r separately for heterosexual and non-heterosexual children, where $r = 1$ denotes the bottom of the parental income distribution. We use parental income quartiles rather than decile-to-decile transition matrices given the limited sample size makes such granular estimates

highly uncertain and poorly suited to cross-group comparisons (Bhattacharya and Mazumder, 2011; Mazumder, 2014; Collins and Wanamaker, 2022).

Finally, we compute mean child income ranks by parental income quartiles and quintiles as an additional nonparametric alternative, reported in Appendix Figure A5. These results suggest that the linear specification of equation (A) is a solid approximation.

C Sibling Comparison

A potential concern in estimating group differences in IGM is that self reported sexual orientation may be correlated with parental socioeconomic status or with household characteristics associated with different mobility patterns. Between-family differences in background characteristics may bias comparisons using only cross-family variation. To address this concern, we estimate within-family models, following previous literature studying LGBTQ populations (Dujeancourt et al., 2025; Dujeancourt, 2026). These specifications hold parental socioeconomic status—along with all other shared family characteristics—constant by comparing heterosexual and non-heterosexual siblings raised in the same household. For family f, we estimate:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta \mathrm{S}_i + \gamma_f + B_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{C}$$

where γ_f is a family fixed effect. The coefficient β captures the within-family difference in the outcome j between non-heterosexual and heterosexual siblings, net of all shared family-level characteristics. We additionally control for birth order B_i in all sibling specifications, given previous work showing that birth order is correlated with both non-heterosexual status and improved economic outcomes (Blanchard and Bogaert, 1996; Black et al., 2005). Equation (C) is estimated first on the full sample of siblings, then on subsamples restricted to same-gender pairs (labeled Male and Female).

We see equation (C) as a specification that supports the main results from equation (A). If the cross-sectional gap is eliminated or attenuated when we include family fixed effects, this suggests that the types of families that the non-heterosexual sample belongs to may be driving our results. In contrast, if the cross-sectional gap and within-family comparisons accord, this is consistent with sexual orientation being a primary driver of distinct mobility outcomes. Taken together, these

estimates help assess the role of family background characteristics, including socioeconomic status correlated with self-reported sexual orientation, as an explanation for the observed disparities.

4 Results

A Income

Figure 2, Panel A reports rank-rank coefficients from equation (A).[9] Heterosexual boys born to parents at the bottom of the income distribution are predicted to reach the 43rd percentile of the adult income distribution. This intercept reflects absolute upward mobility, the expected economic position of children from the lowest income households. We allow this intercept to differ by non-heterosexual status, but our estimate of δ is statistically indistinguishable from 0.

Intergenerational persistence, by contrast, differs by sexual orientation: each 10 percentile increase in parental income raises a heterosexual man's income rank by 2.7 percentiles, whereas for non-heterosexual men, the corresponding gain is only 1.3 percentiles ($p < 0.05$).[10] This reflects substantially weaker transmission of advantage, not enhanced opportunity: even when born to high income parents, non-heterosexual men exhibit adult income ranks far closer to those of low income non-heterosexual men than to those of heterosexual men from similarly advantaged households.

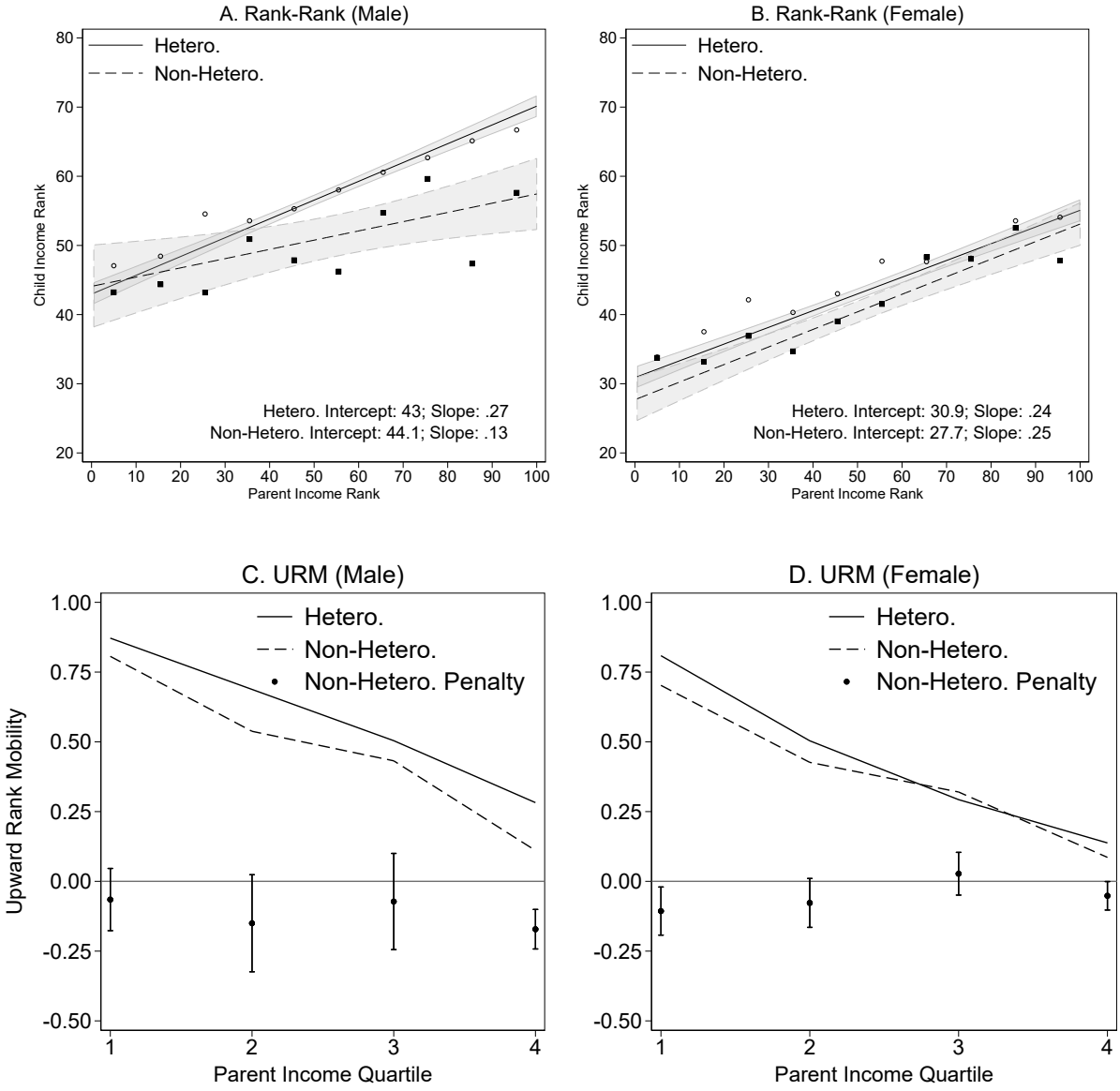
Figure 2, Panel A plots separate rank–rank curves by sexual orientation, for male respondents. The curve for non-heterosexual men is notably flatter, generating a widening gap in predicted adult rank over the upper half of the parental income distribution. This divergence at the upper end is notable because such top end attenuation is relatively uncommon in the IGM literature, where group differences typically arise from constraints facing low income children (Chetty et al., 2019). In Section 5, we propose parental disinvestment and input substitution as two potential mechanisms generating these differences and assess their explanatory power.

Among women, we observe a different pattern. Heterosexual women born to parents at the bottom of the income distribution are predicted to reach the 30th percentile of the adult income distribution—a lower level of absolute upward mobility than that observed among men but consis-

[9] See Appendix Table A5 for full results.

[10] Estimates for absolute mobility for both groups, and relative mobility for heterosexual men, are close to those reported in Chetty et al. (2014), who find an intercept of 34 and slope of 0.31. Several factors might cause these estimates to differ, including younger age at income measurement.

Figure 2: Non-Heterosexual Men Experience Less Intergenerational Persistence



Note: Panel A presents the relationship between parental income rank and child income rank separately by non-heterosexual status among males. Panel B plots the same among females. Panel C plots the mean of an indicator for child income surpassing parent income for each parent rank quartile, separately by non-heterosexual status among males. The coefficient plots below come from regressing the upward rank mobility indicator on an indicator for non-heterosexual identity, among that parental income quartile. Panel D plots the same among females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

tent with prior evidence (Chetty et al., 2019). Non-heterosexual women have a statistically indistinguishable intercept, indicating similar baseline outcomes for daughters from low income families regardless of sexual orientation. Turning to intergenerational persistence, each 10 percentile increase in parental income raises a heterosexual woman's adult income rank by 2.4 percentiles, a slope somewhat smaller than that for men. For non-heterosexual women, we again observe no significant differences in either intercept or slope. Thus, we conclude that parental income predicts adult outcomes for women in broadly similar ways across sexual orientation groups.

Two nonparametric approaches reinforce our rank–rank findings. Figure 2, Panels C and D show the share of children who exceed their parents' income rank in each parental income quartile, separately by sexual orientation and sex. Because children from higher income families have less room to surpass their parents' position, URM mechanically declines with parental income. The relevant comparison is therefore the gap between heterosexual (solid line) and non-heterosexual (dashed line) individuals within each parental income quartile, which we plot as coefficient points beneath the URM lines.

For men, this gap is largest at the top of the parental distribution: only about 11% of non-heterosexual men with top quartile parents surpass their parents' rank, compared with 28% of heterosexual men. This pattern aligns with the flatter rank–rank curve documented earlier and provides further confirmation that non-heterosexual men do not convert high parental income into high adult income to the same degree as their heterosexual peers. Among women, the URM lines match closely across quartiles, and deviations at the lowest and highest quartiles are modest and not systematic.

While gaps are large for non-heterosexual men, non-heterosexual women seem to mirror their heterosexual counterparts closely. One potential explanation is divergence in fertility or partnership status in later life. In Appendix Table A4, we present means of biological children counts and an indicator for a same-sex partner at ages 33-43 by sexual identity. We see that non-heterosexual men have fewer biological children and are more likely to have a same-sex partner relative to heterosexual men. In contrast, non-heterosexual women more closely resemble their heterosexual counterparts on both fertility and same-sex partner status.

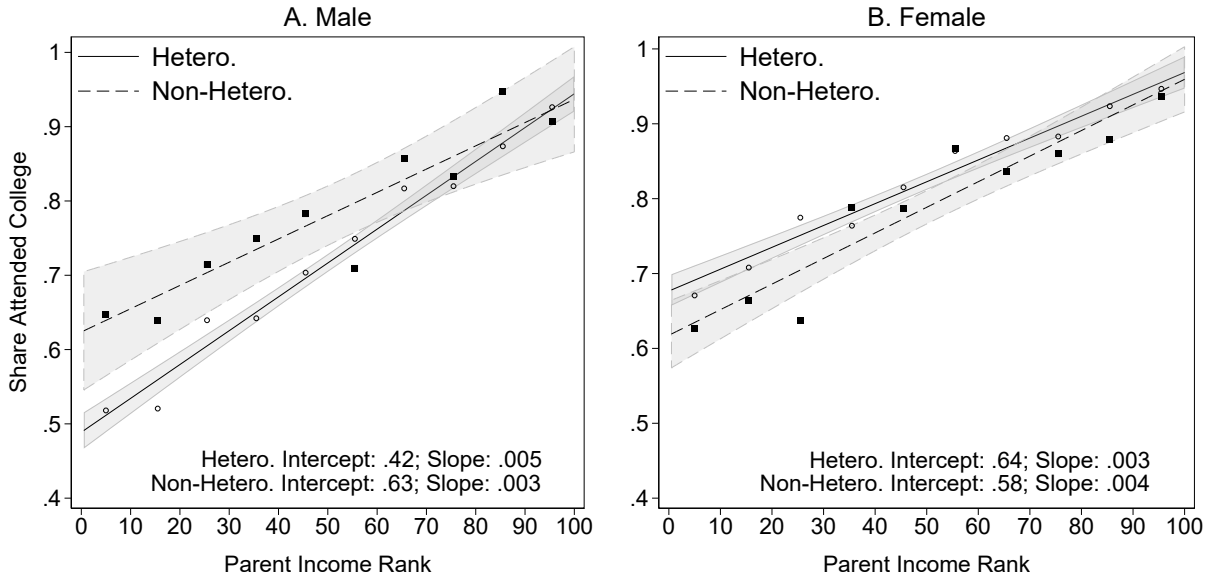
B Education

We proceed to estimate the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and educational attainment using equation (A), replacing adult income rank with an indicator for college attendance. We estimate the model separately by sex. Figure 3 reports the coefficients (see Appendix Table A5 for full results).

College attendance differs markedly by sexual orientation among men. Approximately 42 percent of heterosexual men born to parents at the bottom of the income distribution attend college, compared with 63 percent of non-heterosexual men from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds ($p < 0.01$)—a rate comparable to that of heterosexual women. The gradient with respect to parental income also differs: a 10-percentile increase in parental income raises attendance by 5.3 percentage points for heterosexual men and 3.1 percentage points for non-heterosexual men ($p < 0.05$). The combination of a higher intercept and a shallower slope indicates that parental income is a weaker determinant of college attendance for non-heterosexual men, and that educational mobility is correspondingly higher for this group.

Prior work documents that gay men attain higher education and earn lower incomes than heterosexual men on average, attributing both patterns to labor market discrimination, occupational sorting, and preferences (Badgett et al., 2021, 2024). These unconditional comparisons, however, cannot speak to whether there is an intergenerational component to the educational attainment of sexual minorities. Figure 3, Panel A plots the rank-attendance relationship for each group and suggests that family background is an important mediator of the relationship between sexual orientation and educational attendance. The educational mobility gap is driven primarily by differences at the bottom of the parental income distribution, where heterosexual men display comparatively low college enrollment. As parental income rises, attendance rates converge across groups. This pattern contrasts sharply with the income mobility results, where the gap between heterosexual and non-heterosexual men is negligible at the bottom of the parental distribution and widens toward the top. Previous work has suggested that the educational advantage for non-heterosexual men is driven by gender atypicality and that masculinity norms are stronger for lower-SES men, so this combination might produce the high absolute educational mobility we observe for non-heterosexual men (Mittleman, 2022; De Haas et al., 2026).

Figure 3: Non-Heterosexual Men Have Distinct Educational Mobility



Note: Panel A presents the relationship between parental income rank and an indicator for college attendance separately by non-heterosexual status among males. Panel B presents the same among females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child college attendance is the 2006/2007 reported education level (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old) being either "Some College" or "College Graduate," while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

The pattern for women is markedly different. Heterosexual women born to parents at the bottom of the distribution attend college at a rate of 64.2 percent; non-heterosexual women attend at a 5.9 percentage point lower rate, though this difference is statistically insignificant. Similarly, a 10-percentile increase in parental income raises attendance by 3.4 percentage points for heterosexual women, with no significant difference for non-heterosexual women. This absence of a detectable difference mirrors the results on income mobility and contrasts sharply with the male pattern, suggesting that, at least for women, sexual orientation does not meaningfully alter the intergenerational transmission of educational advantage. We also conduct these analyses using college graduation as an alternative marker of educational attainment (displayed in Appendix Figure A8) and find similar level differences to college attendance, but weaker differences in slope, suggesting these patterns may be concentrated in a lower part of the educational attainment distribution.

C Sibling Comparisons

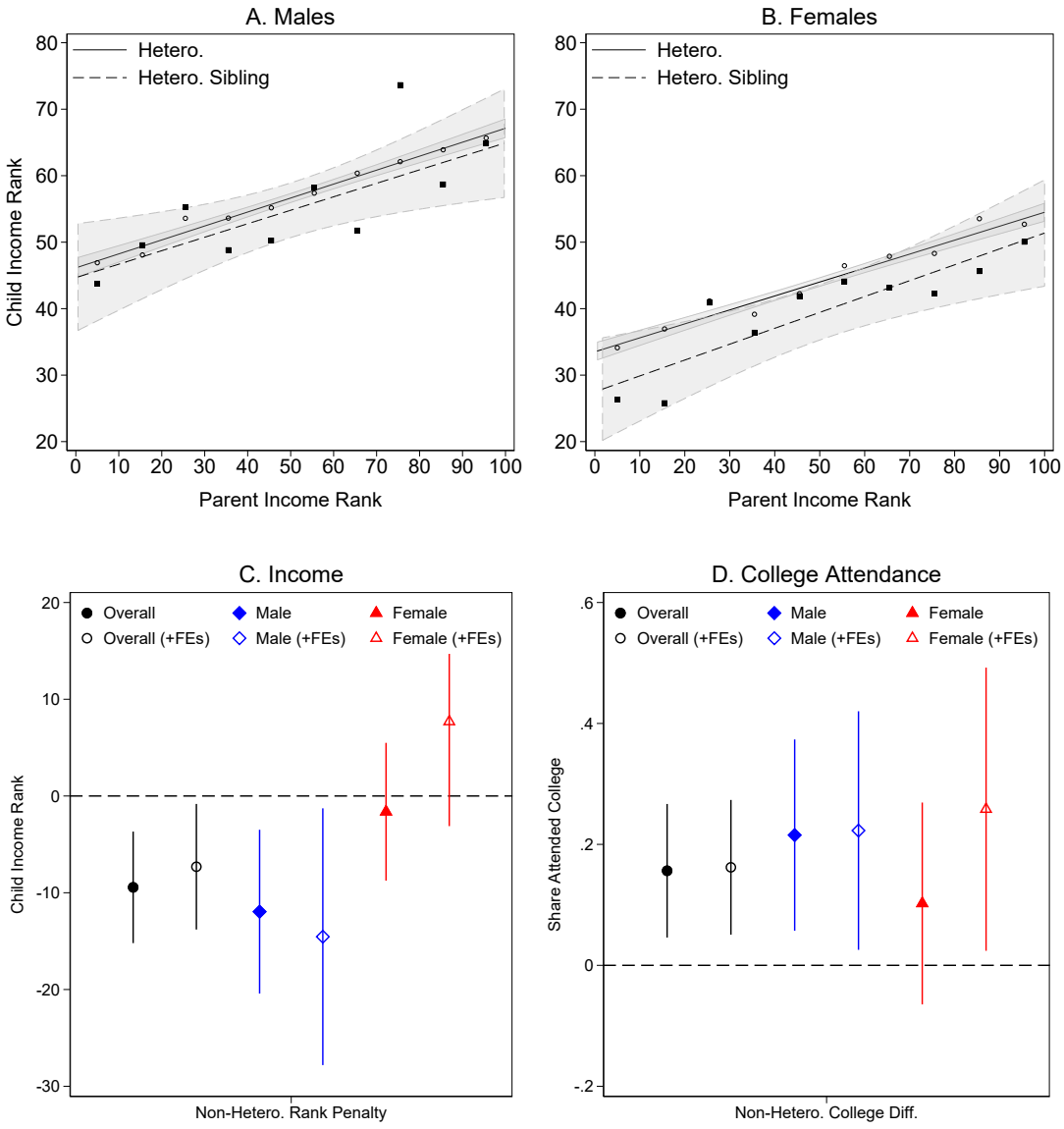
The mobility gaps documented above may reflect unobserved differences across families rather than sexual orientation itself. To address this concern, we first compare the outcomes of heterosexual individuals from families with non-heterosexual children to the general population. We re-estimate equation (A) replacing S_i with an indicator for whether a heterosexual individual has a non-heterosexual sibling. Panels A and B of Figure 4 show no meaningful differences in absolute or relative mobility for the heterosexual siblings of non-heterosexual children. The gaps we document therefore persist when the set of families—and hence the distribution of parental income—is held fixed, and cannot be explained by sorting on family income.

We then exploit within-family variation by comparing siblings raised in the same household. These specifications absorb shared family-level characteristics, mitigating concerns that unobserved factors—such as differential parental income (Figure 1)—drive the observed mobility gaps. Figure 4, Panels C and D, present the results. Circular markers compare non-heterosexual individuals to all heterosexual individuals in families with non-heterosexual children. This provides a benchmark that mirrors Panels A and B. Consistent with our previous findings, non-heterosexual individuals rank lower on average than heterosexual individuals drawn from the same families. When we estimate by sex, in the colored markers, the gap is entirely driven by men, whose non-heterosexual males rank more than 10 percentiles lower than heterosexual siblings, while estimates for women are smaller and not statistically significant.

The income penalty for non-heterosexual men persists in within-family comparisons. The hollow coefficients plot the results when controlling for family fixed effects, restricting comparisons to siblings within the same household. The results remain similar in magnitude, indicating that cross-family differences do not account for the earnings gaps documented earlier. Non-heterosexual men earn incomes roughly 14 percentiles lower in the national income distribution than their brothers raised in the same household.[11] In contrast, analogous comparisons among sisters suggest that non-heterosexual women experience modest earnings premia relative to their heterosexual sisters. This within-family estimate is similar in magnitude to the differences observed in the broader sample,

[11] These rely on very small sample sizes, which preclude further stratification by parent income rank. For men, there are 57 families with at least one non-heterosexual man and one heterosexual male sibling; for women, the analogous family count is 86.

Figure 4: Family Differences Do Not Explain Mobility Patterns



Note: Panel A presents the relationship between parental income rank and child income rank separately by whether an individual has a non-heterosexual sibling among heterosexual males. Panel B plots the same among heterosexual females. Panel C presents the coefficients on an indicator for non-heterosexual identity among a sample of siblings. The solid coefficients present results from regressions without family fixed effects, while the hollow coefficients present results from regressions that include fixed effects for families (so all comparisons are within family). The Overall coefficients include the entire sample, while the Male and Female coefficients correspond to regressions that restrict only to Male or Female respondents (thus restricting the comparison to same-gender siblings). Panel D presents the same results with college attendance as the outcome. Each specification in Panels C and D controls for birth order. All statistics are based on the sibling analysis sample (children in the Add Health who are identified as siblings). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995. Child college attendance is the 2006/2007 reported education level (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old) being either "Some College" or "College Graduate," while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

indicating that the earnings penalty for non-heterosexual men does not arise from differences in the types of families in which they are raised. Regardless of the underlying mechanism, these within-family comparisons reinforce the central finding of the paper: the income mobility penalty for non-heterosexual men persists even when comparing brothers raised in the same household and exposed to the same unobserved family environment.

We also find that the premium in college attendance for non-heterosexual men is robust to comparing among siblings or including family fixed effects. Figure 4, Panel D shows that within families, non-heterosexual men are 23 p.p. more likely to attend college than their heterosexual brothers. Interestingly, while the gap for women is small, the within-family comparisons suggest that non-heterosexual women are also substantially more likely to attend college than their heterosexual sisters.

D Robustness

We assess sensitivity to functional form, current school enrollment, the timing and definition of sexual orientation, alternative measures of family background, and correcting for attenuation from life-cycle bias and income measurement error in Appendix B; the results are broadly unchanged.

5 Mechanisms

In standard economic models of mobility (Becker and Tomes, 1979), status is reproduced across generations through parental investments, human capital, and intra-household interactions. This literature suggests two channels through which a non-heterosexual identity could disrupt these standard transmission mechanisms: parental disinvestment, and input substitution.

The first channel operates through a reduction in direct parental investment inside the household. When a child's identity diverge from parental expectations, family ties can become severely strained. Consistent with this, a large literature in psychology and sociology establishes that non-heterosexual individuals maintain weaker relationships with their parents, leave home earlier, and have less frequent contact in adulthood than their heterosexual counterparts (Needham and Austin, 2010; Fish et al., 2020; Kasprowski and Boertien, 2025). This fracturing of parent-child relationships might lead parents to lower investments directly, through disapproval or discrimination, or

indirectly, if they invest less in anticipation of lower labor market returns for non-heterosexual children. We examine this possibility using rich data on parent-child relationships and support, as well as mental health and friendships in adolescence.

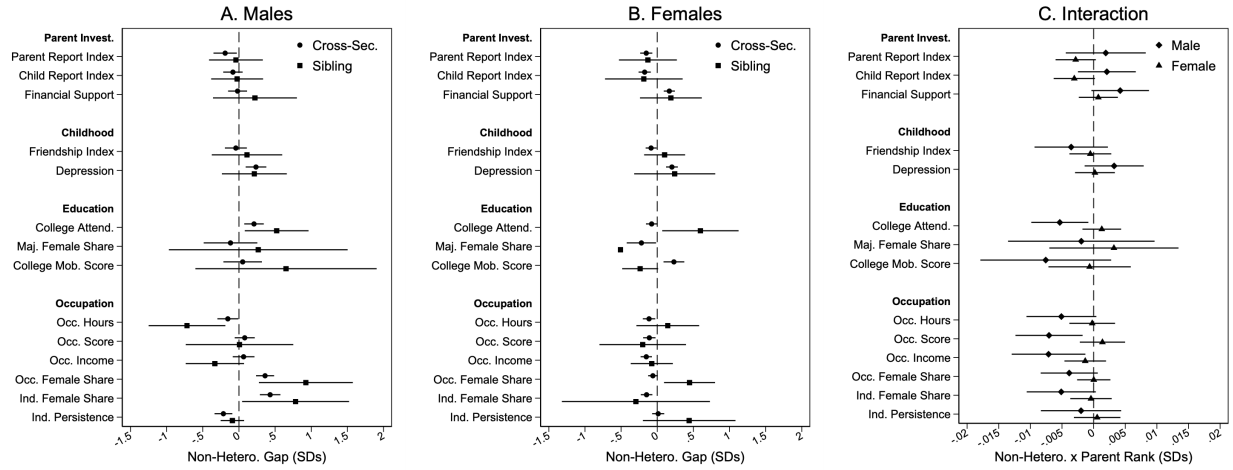
A second channel operates from the child's perspective, where sexual minorities may substitute away from parental inputs when those inputs misalign with their preferences and opportunities. Even when parental guidance remains available, non-heterosexual children may place less weight on it, turning instead to alternative networks. Non-heterosexual individuals frequently build 'families of choice'—kinship networks based on shared experience that substitute for traditional family support (Weston, 1991; Dewaele et al., 2011; Frost et al., 2016). As these networks and investments substitute for parental inputs, the forces shaping economic trajectories become less tied to parental resources, weakening the link between family background and outcomes. We examine this channel using educational attainment and several college-level outcomes, including major gender composition and institutional mobility scores.

Both channels have implications for occupational outcomes. Under the disinvestment channel, reduced parental investment may limit access to family occupational networks, referrals, and career guidance that would otherwise translate parental advantage into labor market success. Under the substitution channel, non-heterosexual men may actively sort into occupations that reflect the preferences and networks of their chosen social environment rather than those of their family, weakening the link between parental resources and adult earnings.

We test these mechanisms by examining whether they exhibit differential parental-income gradients and survive sibling comparisons.[12] We estimate a linear model analogous to equation (A), separately by sex, with each proposed mechanism as the outcome. Figure 5 presents these estimates. For each outcome, we focus on two parameters of interest: the level difference between non-heterosexual and heterosexual individuals (reported in Panels A and B) and the interaction with parental income rank (reported in Panel C). Panel A (Panel B) reports results for men (women) from both the linear specification and an equivalent within-family sibling comparison, with circular markers denoting pooled estimates and square markers denoting sibling estimates. Panel C reports the interaction coefficients for both sexes from the linear model. All coefficients are expressed in standard deviations of the candidate mechanisms.

[12] We outline the construction of each of these potential mechanisms in Appendix Table A12.

Figure 5: Candidate Mechanisms Driving IGM Gaps



Note: Panel A displays the intercept coefficients (circles) from estimating equation (A), the rank-rank specification, with each candidate mechanism as the outcome among males. It also displays the coefficients (squares) from estimating equation (C), the family fixed effects specification, with each candidate mechanism as the outcome among males. Panel B reports the same among females. Panel C reports the coefficient on the interaction between parental income rank and non-heterosexual identity when estimating equation (A) with each candidate mechanism as the outcome, capturing the differential endowment of that mechanism along parental income rank and non-heterosexual status. The diamond coefficients are from regressions restricted to males, while the triangles are among females.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

We find that occupational mechanisms display patterns in line with our income mobility results, while other potential mediators do not. Across most candidate mechanisms, Figure 5 shows small and imprecise differences in both levels and parental income gradients between non-heterosexual and heterosexual men, suggesting that these channels are unlikely to account for the observed mobility gap. In contrast, occupation level outcomes stand out: non-heterosexual men disproportionately sort into more female dominated occupations, and those from higher income families sort into occupations with lower average earnings and fewer hours worked. These differences are also robust to sibling comparisons. Occupational sorting thus appears to be a proximate channel through which parental advantage fails to translate into adult earnings, as non-heterosexual men from higher-income families disproportionately sort into lower-earning occupations. Controlling for occupational income reduces the persistence gap from 0.138 to 0.047 (see Appendix Table A8), suggesting that occupational sorting accounts for a substantial share of the weaker transmission of parental advantage among non-heterosexual men.

Additionally, when we directly examine industry persistence in Figure 5, we see that non-

heterosexual men are less likely to follow their father's occupation, even when controlling for the gender composition of that occupation.[13] This suggests that the disruption to occupational transmission is not a byproduct of sorting into female-dominated fields but instead reflects a weaker father-son occupational dependence. While prior work documents distinct occupational sorting among non-heterosexual individuals, we show that these differences have an intergenerational dimension: they are concentrated among children of top-income parents and mirror mobility gaps (Plug et al., 2014). While we are not able to distinguish whether these occupational gaps result from parental disinvestment or input substitution, the lack of explanatory power for parent-child relationships suggests that direct parental disinvestment is unlikely to play a role.

6 Conclusion

We study the intergenerational mobility of sexual minorities and document several patterns. Non-heterosexual men have lower intergenerational persistence—their rank-rank slope is much shallower, leading to a large income rank gap for those born to parents at the top of the income distribution. These differences are robust to restricting comparisons to be within family. We also record mobility differences in education, showing that non-heterosexual men are far more likely to attend college than their heterosexual counterparts at low levels of parental income, but these gaps close as parental income increases. Of the candidate mechanisms we examine—parental investment, childhood environment, education, and occupation—only occupational characteristics track the income mobility gaps, suggesting that occupational sorting may play a role.

Our study has several limitations. First, income is measured early in the life cycle for children and only once for parents, which may attenuate our estimates (Haider and Solon, 2006). In Appendix B, we report results that account for these biases and find they do not explain our results. Second, income is not measured symmetrically across generations: child income is individual-level while parental income is household-level. We use a rank–rank specification to mitigate this (Chetty et al., 2014), though asymmetric household formation by sexual orientation could distort estimated gaps. Third, we study individuals who report a non-heterosexual identity, so our estimates may not extend to those who would be classified differently under behavior- or partnership-based definitions.

[13] These results regress an indicator for sharing your father's (or mother's) occupation on an indicator for non-heterosexual identity.

Fourth, sample size constraints limit precision and preclude intersectional analysis (Chetty et al., 2019; Conron et al., 2018).

These limitations point toward a broader agenda. Our cohort came of age before the 2015 legalization of same-sex marriage and under different labor-market protections than sexual minorities face today, so whether these gaps persist for younger cohorts remains an open question. As richer data become available, future work could examine how evolving legal frameworks, geographic variation, and changing social attitudes shape the economic mobility of sexual minorities.

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Supplemental Appendix

for

Intergenerational Mobility of Non-Heterosexual Individuals

by

Cameron Deal and Santiago Deambrosi

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics - Main Sample

	Male		Female	
	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.
A. Child Outcomes				
Child Earnings	35,177.73	41,020.88	27,924.53	28,971.08
College Attendance	0.79	0.72	0.79	0.82
B. Child Characteristics				
White	0.70	0.71	0.75	0.67
Black	0.17	0.18	0.17	0.22
Hispanic	0.19	0.15	0.14	0.15
W1 Depression Score	11.51	9.93	13.14	11.55
W4 Depression Score	6.70	5.51	7.83	6.05
C. Parent Characteristics				
Parent Earnings	55,859.01	46,010.77	50,733.88	46,231.29
Parent College Attendance	0.59	0.56	0.58	0.53
Observations	383	5016	1210	4717

Note: This table presents summary statistics on income and demographic characteristics by non-heterosexual status and sex. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics–Sibling Sample

	Male		Female	
	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.
A. Child Outcomes				
Child Earnings	34,361.13	41,632.80	27,525.59	29,320.28
College Attendance	0.78	0.72	0.79	0.81
B. Child Characteristics				
White	0.61	0.61	0.63	0.57
Black	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.20
Hispanic	0.20	0.16	0.14	0.16
W1 Depression Score	11.57	10.12	13.39	11.81
W4 Depression Score	6.68	5.52	7.97	6.12
B. Parent Characteristics				
Parent Earnings	55,859.01	46,010.77	50,733.88	46,231.29
Parent College Attendance	0.49	0.48	0.49	0.44
Observations	496	6485	1586	6320

Note: This table presents summary statistics on income and demographic characteristics by non-heterosexual status and sex. All statistics are based on the sibling analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question and have identified siblings in the Add Health Data). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A3: Descriptive Statistics–Excluding Current Students

	Male		Female	
	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.
A. Child Outcomes				
Child Earnings	36,699.96	42,009.42	28,750.43	29,372.86
College Attendance	0.76	0.69	0.75	0.79
B. Child Characteristics				
White	0.71	0.71	0.75	0.69
Black	0.16	0.18	0.17	0.20
Hispanic	0.19	0.15	0.13	0.15
W1 Depression Score	11.27	9.95	13.27	11.60
W4 Depression Score	6.62	5.56	7.79	6.03
B. Parent Characteristics				
Parent Earnings	57,816.13	45,565.90	48,654.99	46,407.42
Parent College Attendance	0.56	0.55	0.56	0.52
Observations	310	4317	971	3802

Note: This table presents summary statistics on income and demographic characteristics by non-heterosexual status and sex. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample, excluding current students (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question and were not currently enrolled in education or training programs in Wave IV). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A4: Wave V Descriptive Statistics

	Male		Female	
	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.
Biological Children	1.50	2.01	1.92	2.10
Same-Gender Partner	0.40	0.00	0.10	0.00
Observations	251	3103	895	3474

Note: This table presents summary statistics on later-life fertility and partnership characteristics by non-heterosexual status and sex. All statistics are based on all members of the primary analysis sample who responded to the Wave V interview. Same-gender partnership is based on the gender of their most recent reported romantic partner.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A5: Rank-Rank Regressions

	Male		Female	
	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.
Panel A: Income				
Parent Rank	0.272***	0.134**	0.242***	0.254***
	(0.0196)	(0.0642)	(0.0187)	(0.0392)
P-value	0.040		0.782	
Intercept	42.96***	44.09***	30.90***	27.70***
	(1.171)	(4.154)	(1.013)	(2.149)
P-value	0.794		0.178	
N	4720	363	4449	1133
Panel B: College Attendance				
Parent Rank	0.00532***	0.00306***	0.00337***	0.00392***
	(0.000303)	(0.000926)	(0.000267)	(0.000602)
P-value	0.020		0.404	
Intercept	0.423***	0.627***	0.642***	0.583***
	(0.0200)	(0.0660)	(0.0183)	(0.0394)
P-value	0.003		0.174	
N	4720	363	4449	1133

Note: Each Column reports results from estimating equation (A) on a separate subsample. In Panel A, the outcome is child income rank, and in Panel B, the outcome is an indicator for college attendance. Both regressions are weighted by sample weights. Below each pair of coefficients, we report the p-value for a test of equality of coefficients using a two-sided Wald test. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A6: Rank-Rank Regressions: Robustness to Alternative Samples

	Full Sample		Male		Female	
	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.
Panel A: Baseline (Wave IV)						
Parent Rank	0.260***	0.228***	0.272***	0.134**	0.242***	0.254***
	(0.0139)	(0.0341)	(0.0196)	(0.0642)	(0.0187)	(0.0392)
Intercept	37.54***	31.47***	42.96***	44.09***	30.90***	27.70***
	(0.792)	(1.976)	(1.171)	(4.154)	(1.013)	(2.149)
N	9169	1496	4720	363	4449	1133
Panel B: Sexual Orientation at Wave III						
Parent Rank	0.247***	0.257***	0.247***	0.165**	0.245***	0.292***
	(0.0147)	(0.0404)	(0.0212)	(0.0734)	(0.0194)	(0.0479)
Intercept	37.84***	30.36***	44.72***	40.09***	30.53***	26.67***
	(0.841)	(2.392)	(1.259)	(4.808)	(1.061)	(2.683)
N	7967	956	3884	255	4083	701
Panel C: Sexual Orientation at Wave V						
Parent Rank	0.231***	0.206***	0.219***	0.115*	0.238***	0.239***
	(0.0163)	(0.0370)	(0.0250)	(0.0632)	(0.0202)	(0.0441)
Intercept	39.25***	33.85***	46.79***	42.97***	31.54***	30.55***
	(0.958)	(2.065)	(1.546)	(3.919)	(1.106)	(2.328)
N	6430	1173	3028	299	3402	874
Panel D: Same-Sex Attraction Only (Gay/Lesbian)						
Parent Rank	0.260***	0.176**	0.272***	0.119	0.242***	0.286*
	(0.0139)	(0.0843)	(0.0196)	(0.0941)	(0.0187)	(0.149)
Intercept	37.54***	42.68***	42.96***	50.24***	30.90***	30.84***
	(0.792)	(4.713)	(1.171)	(5.936)	(1.013)	(6.911)
N	9169	234	4720	137	4449	97
Panel E: Bisexual Only						
Parent Rank	0.260***	0.245***	0.272***	0.170**	0.242***	0.246***
	(0.0139)	(0.0360)	(0.0196)	(0.0858)	(0.0187)	(0.0397)
Intercept	37.54***	30.10***	42.96***	41.97***	30.90***	28.39***
	(0.792)	(2.104)	(1.171)	(6.043)	(1.013)	(2.208)
N	9169	1219	4720	210	4449	1009

Note: This table presents rank-rank results using several alternative sexuality measures. Each Column reports results from estimating equation (A) on a separate subsample, with child income rank as the outcome. Panel A presents first the baseline results in the Full Sample, separately by non-heterosexual status in Wave IV. Then, it presents the analogous results when restricting to only males and females. Panel B presents the same set of analyses, using sexual orientation as measured in Wave III. Panel C presents the same set of analyses, using sexual orientation as measured in Wave V. Panel D restricts the non-heterosexual group to be only those who reported mostly or 100% same-sex attraction (in Wave IV). Panel E restricts the non-heterosexual group to be only those who reported mostly different-sex attraction or 50% attraction to both sexes.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A7: College-Rank Regressions: Robustness to Alternative Samples

	Full Sample		Male		Female	
	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.
Panel A: Baseline (Wave IV)						
Parent Rank	0.00440***	0.00366***	0.00532***	0.00306***	0.00337***	0.00392***
	(0.000208)	(0.000504)	(0.000303)	(0.000926)	(0.000267)	(0.000602)
Intercept	0.523***	0.596***	0.423***	0.627***	0.642***	0.583***
	(0.0140)	(0.0337)	(0.0200)	(0.0660)	(0.0183)	(0.0394)
N	9169	1496	4720	363	4449	1133
Panel B: Sexual Orientation at Wave III						
Parent Rank	0.00437***	0.00426***	0.00544***	0.00435***	0.00330***	0.00424***
	(0.000219)	(0.000619)	(0.000324)	(0.00115)	(0.000277)	(0.000741)
Intercept	0.539***	0.552***	0.433***	0.486***	0.650***	0.577***
	(0.0149)	(0.0435)	(0.0218)	(0.0867)	(0.0190)	(0.0503)
N	7967	956	3884	255	4083	701
Panel C: Sexual Orientation at Wave V						
Parent Rank	0.00417***	0.00250***	0.00515***	0.00188*	0.00322***	0.00276***
	(0.000239)	(0.000548)	(0.000368)	(0.00105)	(0.000293)	(0.000642)
Intercept	0.563***	0.679***	0.461***	0.677***	0.665***	0.678***
	(0.0167)	(0.0369)	(0.0256)	(0.0689)	(0.0201)	(0.0438)
N	6430	1173	3028	299	3402	874
Panel D: Same-Sex Attraction Only (Gay/Lesbian)						
Parent Rank	0.00440***	0.00143	0.00532***	0.00198	0.00337***	0.000785
	(0.000208)	(0.00141)	(0.000303)	(0.00147)	(0.000267)	(0.00259)
Intercept	0.523***	0.743***	0.423***	0.775***	0.642***	0.701***
	(0.0140)	(0.0802)	(0.0200)	(0.100)	(0.0183)	(0.132)
N	9169	234	4720	137	4449	97
Panel E: Bisexual Only						
Parent Rank	0.00440***	0.00361***	0.00532***	0.00280**	0.00337***	0.00384***
	(0.000208)	(0.000531)	(0.000303)	(0.00110)	(0.000267)	(0.000604)
Intercept	0.523***	0.618***	0.423***	0.662***	0.642***	0.608***
	(0.0140)	(0.0373)	(0.0200)	(0.0848)	(0.0183)	(0.0415)
N	9169	1219	4720	210	4449	1009

Note: This table presents college attendance- parent rank results using several alternative sexuality measures. Each Column reports results from estimating equation (A) on a separate subsample, with child college attendance as the outcome. Panel A presents first the baseline results in the Full Sample, separately by non-heterosexual status in Wave IV. Then, it presents the analogous results when restricting to only males and females. Panel B presents the same set of analyses, using sexual orientation as measured in Wave III. Panel C presents the same set of analyses, using sexual orientation as measured in Wave V. Panel D restricts the non-heterosexual group to be only those who reported mostly or 100% same-sex attraction (in Wave IV). Panel E restricts the non-heterosexual group to be only those who reported mostly different-sex attraction or 50% attraction to both sexes.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A8: Controlling for Occupational Income Attenuates Persistence Gap

	Baseline	Same Sample	Occ. Inc. Control
		Panel A: Male	
Non-Heterosexual	1.122	3.035	-1.460
	(4.307)	(4.858)	(4.316)
Parent Rank	0.272***	0.253***	0.161***
	(0.0196)	(0.0202)	(0.0196)
Persistence Gap	-0.138**	-0.116	-0.0470
	(0.0670)	(0.0728)	(0.0615)
Constant	42.96***	44.17***	31.15***
	(1.171)	(1.179)	(1.414)
N	5083	4369	4369
		Panel B: Female	
Non-Heterosexual	-3.198	-1.343	-0.219
	(2.374)	(2.671)	(2.484)
Parent Rank	0.242***	0.246***	0.176***
	(0.0187)	(0.0201)	(0.0190)
Persistence Gap	0.0121	-0.00473	0.0101
	(0.0434)	(0.0494)	(0.0458)
Intercept	30.90***	30.14***	15.60***
	(1.013)	(1.077)	(1.242)
N	5582	4617	4617

Note: This table presents rank-rank results when controlling for occupational income. Each Column reports results from child income rank on parental income, an indicator for non-heterosexual identity, and the interaction between the two (labeled "Persistence Gap"). Column 1 presents the baseline results. Column 2 presents the results in the sample that has an occupational income, and Column 3 presents the results when controlling for occupational income. Panel A presents these results among males, while Panel B presents results among females.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A9: Implied Life-cycle Attenuation Factors by Age at Income Measurement

Age at Wave 4	Sample share (%)	λ_t^C	λ_t^{NS}
25	0.42	0.663	0.192
26	8.43	0.762	0.385
27	13.35	0.843	0.596
28	16.88	0.904	0.750
29	19.68	0.948	0.815
30	18.98	0.977	0.854
31	16.65	0.997	0.870
32	5.11	1.000	0.897
33	0.43	1.000	0.885
34	0.07	1.000	0.905
Weighted average	100.00	0.926	0.757

Notes: $N = 11{,}318$. λ_t^C is the ratio of the age-t rank-rank slope to the post-age-32 plateau in the population series of Chetty et al. (2014, Figure III, Panel A). λ_t^{NS} is the ratio of the age-specific annual estimate to the lifetime benchmark in Nybom and Stuhler (2017, Figure 1, Panel C). Both series hold parental income fixed and therefore isolate child-side measurement error. Weighted averages use sample shares.
Source: Add Health, Author's calculations, Chetty et al. (2014), Nybom and Stuhler (2017).

Table A10: Income Rank Persistence, Wave IV to Wave V, by Sex and Sexuality

	Male		Female	
	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.	Hetero.	Non-Hetero.
Wave 4 Rank	0.576***	0.681***	0.506***	0.529***
	(0.0149)	(0.0436)	(0.0150)	(0.0299)
N	3049	252	3366	867

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

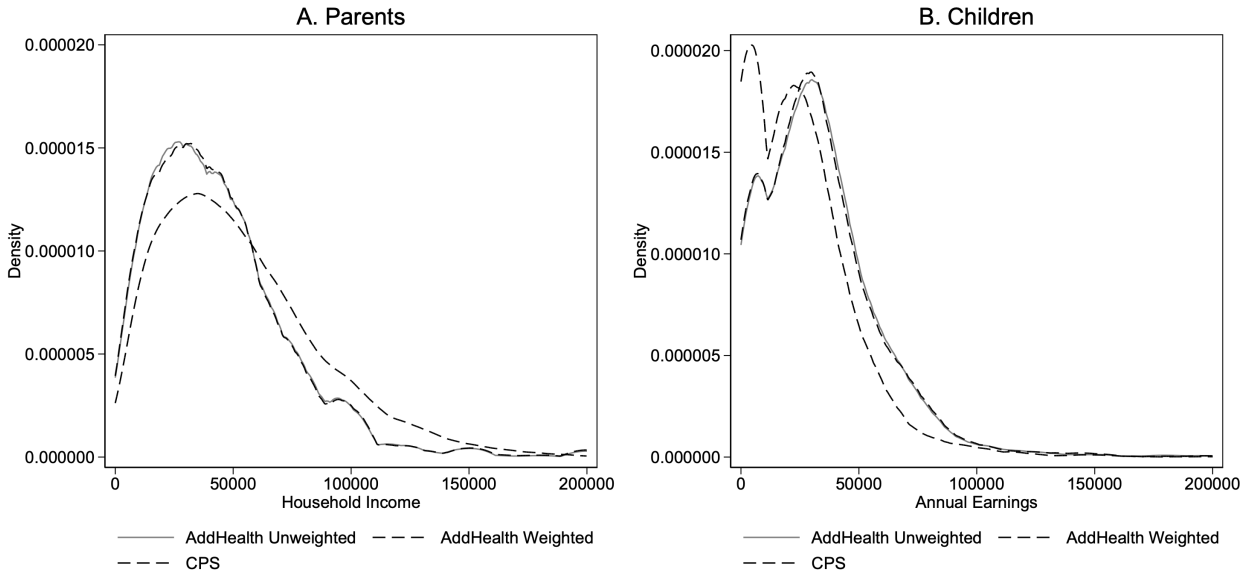
Notes: This table reports results from regressing Wave 5 Income Rank (deriving from 13 income categories) on Wave 4 Income Rank, separately by sex and non-heterosexual status. Both ranks are constructed for the sample of children who have valid income measurements in both waves. Column 1 displays results for heterosexual men. Column 2 displays results for non-heterosexual men. Column 3 displays results for heterosexual women. Column 4 displays results for non-heterosexual women.
Source: Add Health, Author's calculations.

Table A11: Baseline Estimates Rescaled for Life-Cycle Attenuation

	Baseline	Chetty-implied $\lambda = 0.926$	NS-implied $\lambda = 0.757$	Group-specific λ_g from W4–W5
Panel A: Male				
λ (Hetero. / Non-Hetero.)	—	0.926	0.757	0.576 / 0.681
Parent Rank	0.272***	0.294***	0.359***	0.472***
	(0.0196)	(0.0212)	(0.0259)	(0.0340)
Persistence Gap	-0.138**	-0.149**	-0.182**	-0.276**
	(0.0670)	(0.0723)	(0.0885)	(0.1337)
N	5083	5083	5083	5083
Panel B: Female				
λ (Hetero. / Non-Hetero.)	—	0.926	0.757	0.506 / 0.529
Parent Rank	0.242***	0.261***	0.320***	0.478***
	(0.0187)	(0.0202)	(0.0247)	(0.0370)
Persistence Gap	0.0121	0.0131	0.0160	0.0021
	(0.0434)	(0.0469)	(0.0573)	(0.0075)
N	5582	5582	5582	5582

Notes: Column 1 reproduces the baseline specification. Columns 2 and 3 divide coefficients and standard errors by sample-weighted life-cycle attenuation factors derived from Chetty et al. (2014, Figure III, Panel A) and Nybom and Stuhler (2017, Figure 1, Panel C) and weighted by the age distribution of children at income measurement (Table A9). Column 4 applies group-specific factors estimated within our own data: we regress the Wave 5 income rank on the Wave 4 income rank separately by sex and sexual orientation. Because observed and true ranks have equal variance by construction, this slope identifies $\lambda_4\lambda_5$; we impose $\lambda_5 = 1$, treating the Wave 5 rank as a measure of lifetime rank, so that the slope identifies λ_4 directly. This assumption is conservative in the sense of yielding the largest admissible correction: because $\lambda_5 < 1$ in truth, the estimated λ_4 is a lower bound and the corrected coefficients are upper bounds in absolute value. A test of equal λ_g across orientation rejects for men ($p = 0.023$) but not for women ($p = 0.49$). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.
Source: Add Health, Author's calculations.

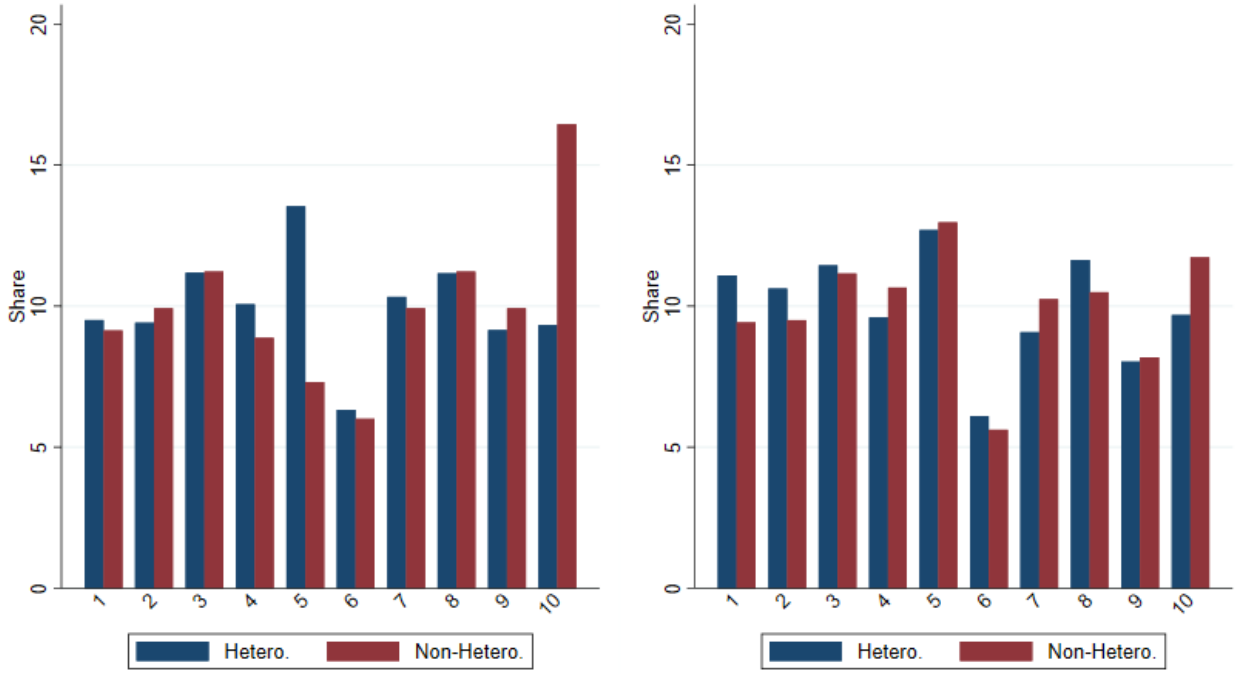
Figure A1: Comparing Add Health Earnings to CPS



Note: Panel A plots the distribution of parental income in Add Health alongside the CPS income distribution for parents of adolescents in 1994 and 1995. Panel B plots the distribution of child income alongside the CPS income distribution for 26-32 year olds in 2006. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

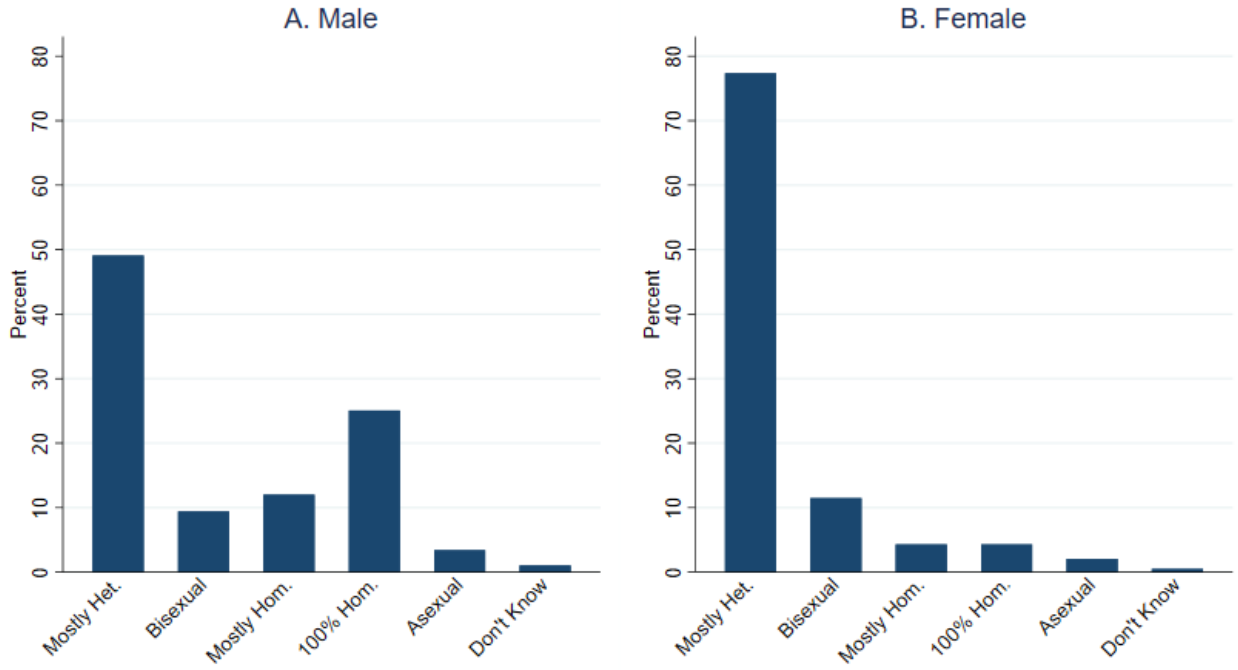
Figure A2: Non-Heterosexual Men Have Higher Parental Income, Decile Bar Graph



Note: Panel A presents the distribution of parental income deciles separately by non-heterosexual status for males. Panel B presents the distribution of parental income deciles separately by non-heterosexual status for females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

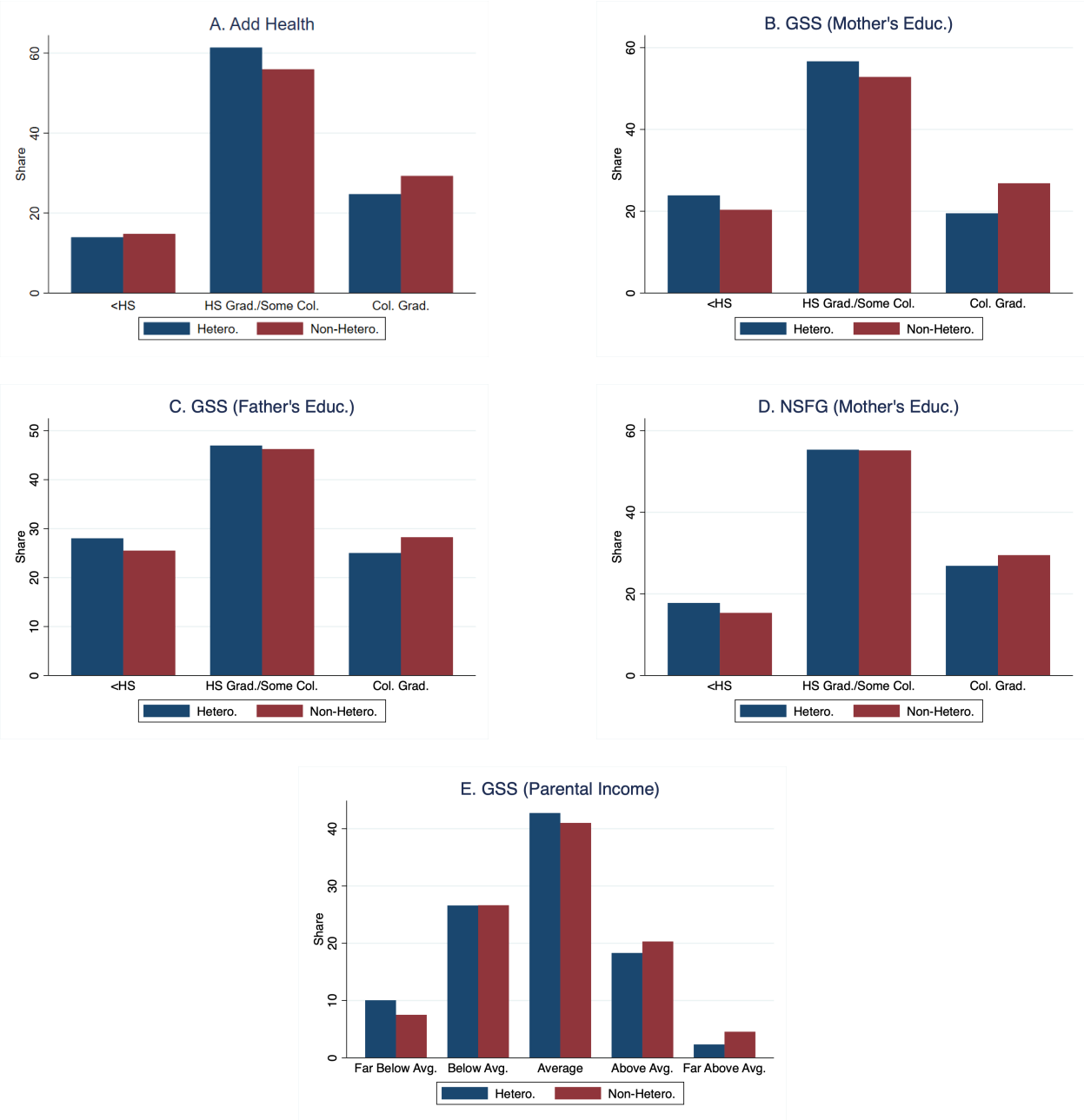
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Figure A3: Sexuality Categories by Sex



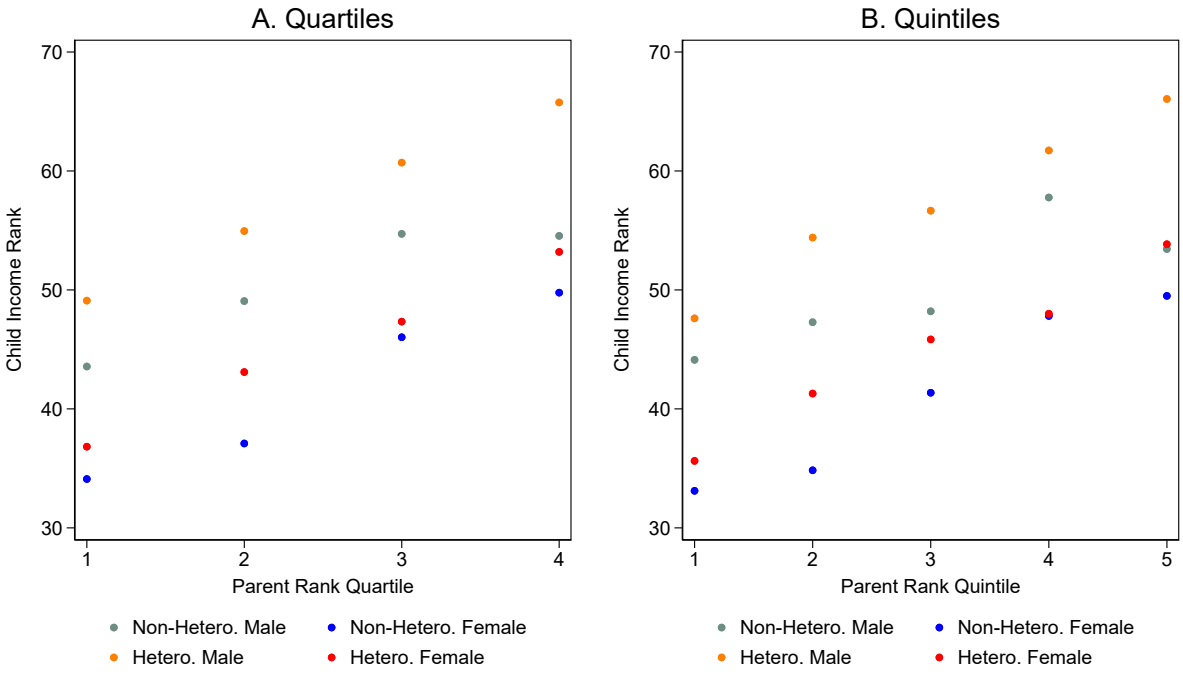
Note: Panel A plots the distribution of responses to the sexual identity question among non-heterosexual men. Panel B plots the distribution of responses to the sexual identity question among non-heterosexual women. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Figure A4: Non-Heterosexual Males Have Higher Parental SES



Note: Each panel plots the distribution of a childhood socioeconomic measure among heterosexual (blue) and non-heterosexual (red) men: parental education in Add Health (A); mother's and father's education in the GSS (B, C); mother's education in the NSFG (D); and self-reported family income at age 16 in the GSS (E). GSS pools survey years 2008–2024 of the 1972–2024 cross-sectional cumulative file (Release 3a), the years administering SEXORNT; non-heterosexual is gay/lesbian or bisexual. NSFG pools the 2011–2013 through 2022–2023 continuous files, using ORIENT (2011–2015, 2022–2023) and the randomly assigned ORIENT A/ORIENT B half-samples (2015–2019), excluding "something else" for comparability. Education is MADEG/PADEG (GSS) and EDUCMOM (NSFG), collapsed to three categories combining high-school graduates with those having some college; income is INCOM16.
Source: Add Health, GSS, NSFG; Authors' calculations.

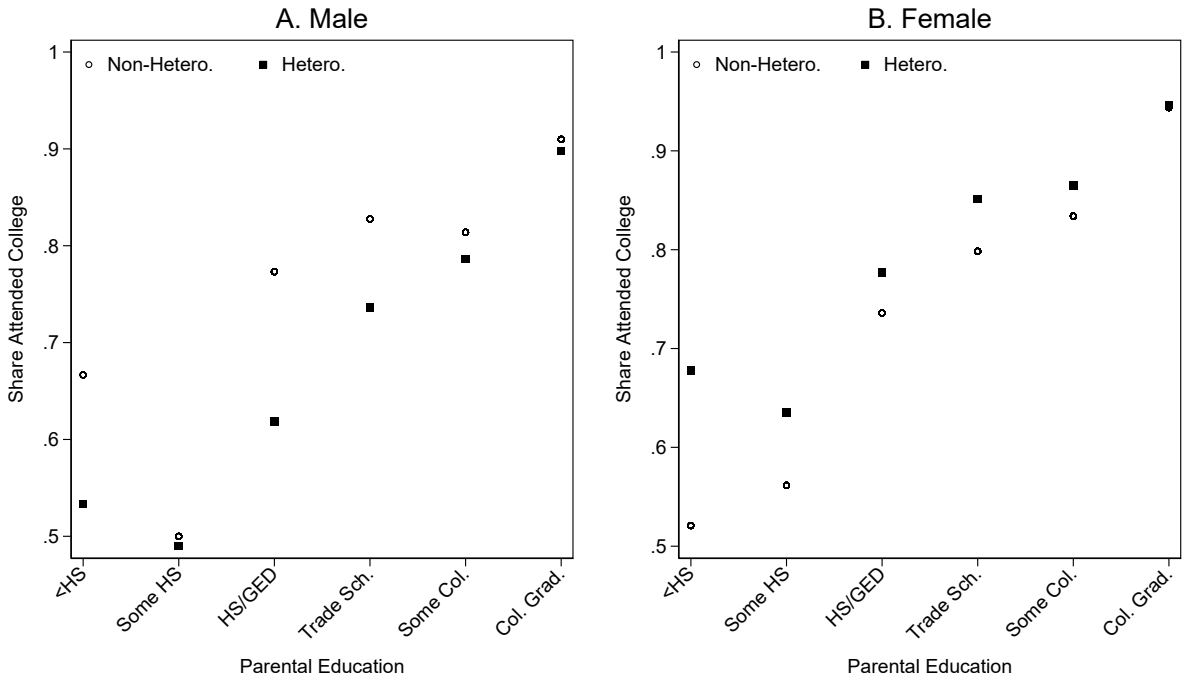
Figure A5: Child Income and Parent Income Percentiles, By Non-Heterosexual Status and Sex



Note: Panel A plots mean child income rank for each quartile of the parental rank distribution, separately by non-heterosexual status and sex. Panel B plots mean child income rank for each quintile of the parental rank distribution, separately by non-heterosexual status and sex. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

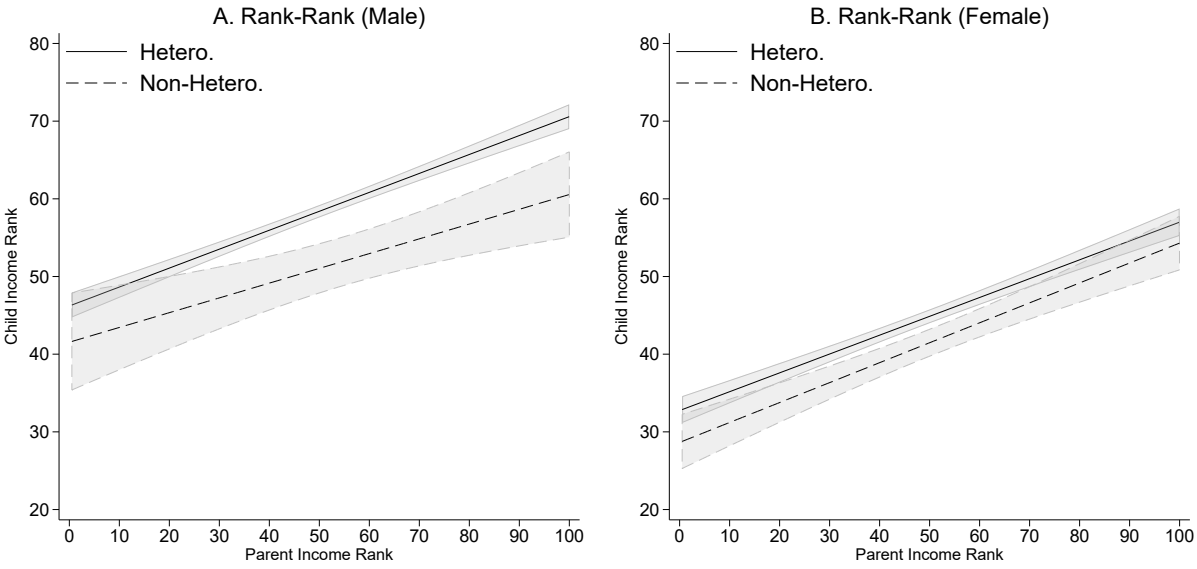
Figure A6: Educational Mobility, By Non-Heterosexual Status and Sex



Note: Panel A presents the relationship between parental educational attainment and an indicator for college attendance separately by non-heterosexual status among males. Panel B presents the same among females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child college attendance is the 2006/2007 reported education level (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old) being either "Some College" or "College Graduate," while parent educational attainment is reported education level from 1994–1995.

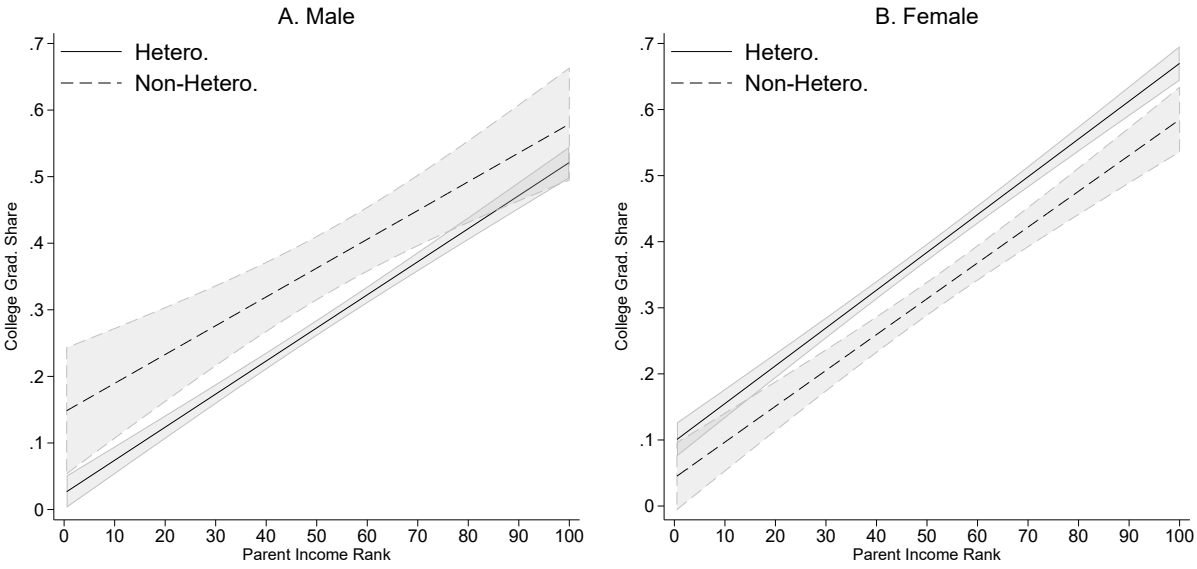
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Figure A7: Child Income Rank and Parental Income Rank, Not Currently Enrolled



Note: This figure presents the relationship between parental income rank and child income rank separately by non-heterosexual status and sex, restricting to individuals not currently enrolled in school. Panel A presents the results for males, while Panel B presents the results for females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child income is the mean of 2006/2007 individual income (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.
Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Figure A8: Child College Graduation and Parental Income Rank



Note: This figure presents the relationship between parental income rank and child college graduation separately by non-heterosexual status and sex. Panel A presents the results for males, while Panel B presents the results for females. All statistics are based on the primary analysis sample (children in the Add Health who reported an answer to the sexual orientation question). Child educational attainment is measured in Wave IV (when the child is between 26 and 32 years old), while parent income is mean household income from 1994–1995.

Source: Add Health; Authors' calculations.

Table A12: Construction of Key Variables

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
Sexual orientation			
Non-Heterosexual	Indicator equal to one if the respondent selects any option other than "100% heterosexual (straight)" when asked to "choose the description that best fits how [they] think about [themselves]." The full set of options is: "100% heterosexual (straight)"; "mostly heterosexual (straight), but somewhat attracted to people of your own sex"; "bisexual, that is, attracted to men and women equally"; "mostly homosexual (gay), but somewhat attracted to people of the opposite sex"; "100% homosexual (gay)"; "not sexually attracted to either males or females"; and "don't know." Respondents who did not reply (less than 1% of the sample) are excluded.	Wave IV (2008/09)	`H4SE31`
Parental investment and support			

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Table A12 continued from previous page

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
Parent Report Index	Parent-reported relationship-strength index. Recode items so higher values indicate a stronger parent-child relationship, then sum items. Candidate items include whether the parent and child get along, make decisions together, parent understands child, parent trusts child, and child interferes with parent activities (reverse-coded).	Wave I Parent Survey	PC10–PC18,PC25, PC26, PC27, PC34A–PC34E
Child Report Index	Child-reported relationship-strength index. Sum items capturing family support, understanding, attention, and enjoyment together; reverse-code "want to leave home."	Wave I	H1PF1–H1PF5
Financial Support	Parental financial support in early adulthood. Sum indicators/counts of whether mother/father figure paid living expenses or gave at least $50 for living expenses in the past 12 months. Alternative first-pass version: indicator equal to one if either parent provided support.	Wave IV	H4WP25, H4WP39
Childhood environment			

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Table A12 continued from previous page

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
Childhood Friendship Index	Strength of adolescent friendship network. Count friendship nominations.	Wave I; Wave I Friendship Files	`H1FF*`, `H1MF*`; friendship nomination IDs in Wave I Friendship Files; `FR_FLAG` for nomination structure
Depression	CES-D depressive symptoms score in adolescence. Sum the Wave I feelings-scale items after reverse-coding positive-affect items so higher values indicate more depressive symptoms.	Wave I	`H1FS1`–`H1FS19`; reverse-code positive items such as `H1FS4`, `H1FS8`, `H1FS11`, `H1FS15`
Education			

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Table A12 continued from previous page

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
College Attend.	Indicator equal to one if the respondent reports any postsecondary schooling by Wave IV, including incomplete education. Equal to one for respondents reporting: "some vocational/technical training (after high school)"; "completed vocational/technical training (after high school)"; "some college"; "completed college (bachelor's degree)"; "some graduate school"; "completed a master's degree"; "some graduate training beyond a master's degree"; "completed a doctoral degree"; "some post baccalaureate professional education (e.g., law school, med school, nurse)"; and "completed post baccalaureate professional education (e.g., law school, med school, nurse)."	Wave IV	`H4ED2`
Maj. Female Share	Female share of graduates in respondent's primary field of study. Merge respondent's reported primary college major to CIP; compute female share among graduates in the same CIP program using CIP data.	Wave III + IPEDS/CIP	H3ED16

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Table A12 continued from previous page

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
College Mob. Score	College-level percent of children who reach the top 20% of the income distribution among children with parents in the bottom 20% of the income distribution. Link respondent's attended institution to external college mobility estimates and assign the mobility score for that institution.	Wave III + Chetty et al. college mobility data	C4CMR05
Occupation and industry			
Occ. Hours	Average weekly hours worked in respondent's occupation. Merge respondent's Wave IV current/most-recent SOC code to ACS 2007–2010 occupation-by-industry cells and assign weighted mean hours.	Wave IV + ACS 2007–2010	`H4LM18`
Occ. Score	Occupational status/score assigned from ACS or another occupational-score crosswalk. Merge respondent's SOC code to external occupation-level score.	Wave IV + ACS / occupational-score crosswalk	`H4LM18`; external SOC score crosswalk

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Table A12 continued from previous page

Variable Name	**Construction procedure**	**Wave / source**	**Relevant Add Health variable(s)**
Occ. Income	Average wage or earnings in respondent's occupation. Merge Wave IV SOC code to ACS 2007–2010 and assign weighted mean wage income.	Wave IV + ACS 2007–2010	`H4LM18`; ACS wage income by SOC cell
Occ. Female Share	Share female in respondent's occupation. Merge Wave IV SOC code to ACS 2007–2010 and assign the weighted female share among workers in the same occupation cell.	Wave IV + ACS 2007–2010	`H4LM18`; ACS sex composition by SOC cell
Ind. Female Share	Share female in respondent's industry. Merge respondent's Wave IV industry code to ACS 2007–2010 and assign weighted female share among workers in the same industry.	Wave IV + ACS 2007–2010	`H5LM10`
Ind. Persistence	Indicator equal to one if child's broad occupation/industry category matches the corresponding parent category. Harmonize parent and child jobs to 14 broad categories, then set equal to one if the categories match.	Wave I Parent + Wave IV	Child: `H4LM18`; Parent: `H1RF4`, `H1RM4`

Appendix B

B.1 Functional Form

First, we relax the linearity assumption of our rank-rank income equation (A) by reporting mean child income ranks by parental income quartiles and quintiles. The results, displayed in Appendix Figure A5 closely mirror the main findings, with the gap between heterosexual and non-heterosexual men widening at the top of the parental income distribution (a 5.7 percentile gap in the bottom quartile versus an 11.3 percentile gap in the top quartile) while patterns for women remain small and largely unsystematic. These nonparametric estimates reinforce the rank-rank and URM results.

B.2 Current Enrollment

Second, since non-heterosexual men attend and remain enrolled in college at higher rates, they are more likely to report zero or low income at the time we measure earnings, raising the concern that their lower income ranks reflect continued enrollment rather than a true mobility gap. We address this by re-estimating equation (A) excluding currently enrolled students in Appendix Figure A7, which shows nearly identical results, suggesting that student status is not driving our findings.[14] However, it is possible that higher educational attainment and enrollment among non-heterosexual males in early adulthood may lead to higher earnings later in life, limiting our findings to this period.

B.3 Alternative Measures of Sexual Orientation

Additionally, we assess the robustness of our results to sexual orientation identification across ages and subgroups. Recent work highlights that sexual identity is fluid over time and across the life course (Mittleman, 2022); our primary measure is available across three waves of Add Health (Wave III: ages 18–26; Wave IV: 26–32; Wave V: 33–43) and allows us to examine this directly. Re-estimating our main rank–rank specification using both earlier and later measures of sexual orientation yields nearly identical results (see Appendix Table A6). Despite considerable transitions in reported identity across waves, we consistently find lower intergenerational persistence among non-heterosexual men, regardless of the timing of measurement. We further probe this

[14] Appendix Table A3 additionally provides descriptive statistics comparing the two groups

pattern by restricting the non-heterosexual group to specific subgroups: gay/lesbian individuals (those reporting being mostly or 100% homosexual) and bisexual individuals (those reporting being mostly heterosexual or bisexual). Although estimates are noisier due to smaller sample sizes, the results remain qualitatively similar, indicating that the lower intergenerational persistence among non-heterosexual men is not driven by any single subgroup. Interestingly, the intercept difference between bisexual and gay men also mirrors previous work showing bisexual income gaps are larger (Badgett et al., 2021). We also see similar results when we examine college attendance as an outcome, displayed in Appendix Table A7. Unfortunately, there are only 71 asexual individuals in our sample, so the sample size precludes reporting results for that subgroup.

B.4 Parental Education & Educational Mobility

Lastly, we verify that our educational mobility results are not specific to parental income as a measure of family background by replicating the analysis using parental education level instead. Appendix Figure A6 plots mean college attendance by parental education category separately by sex and sexual orientation. The results broadly mirror the main findings: non-heterosexual men attend college at higher rates than heterosexual men at lower levels of parental education, while non-heterosexual women attend at lower rates at lower levels of parental education, with both gaps narrowing as parental education increases.

B.5: Accounting for Measurement Error and Life-Cycle Bias

There are several potential measurement issues that may attenuate our estimates of rank-rank slopes (Solon, 1992; Mazumder, 2005; Haider and Solon, 2006; Nybom and Stuhler, 2017). Because we observe a single year of parental income rather than a longer panel, and because we observe child income at ages 26–32, both of our rank measures are noisy proxies for position in the distribution of lifetime income. Our use of rank-rank specifications mitigates the classic errors-in-variables issues as the variance of rank measures is identical by construction (Nybom and Stuhler, 2017). However, there is still the potential for attenuation because rank in a given year is an imperfect proxy for lifetime income rank. An additional issue emerges from life-cycle bias—we observe child income at ages 26–32, when many individuals with steep age-earnings profiles have not yet reached their lifetime income levels. Our estimates should therefore be read as lower bounds on the true rank-

rank persistence. To the extent that these measurement issues are symmetric across heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals, they do not threaten our core result of slope differences between these individuals.

We use evidence from two other papers (Chetty et al., 2014; Nybom and Stuhler, 2017) as well as the Add Health sample to estimate the size of these biases and the magnitude of a correction. First, we examine two other papers that have quantitatively assessed the magnitude of these biases. Both papers find a fairly small role for the attenuation effects of measuring parental income with error. However, they also estimate rank-rank slopes by the age of child income measurement, and find a large role for life cycle income bias, with slopes in the early 20s much shallower than those in the mid-30s. Additionally, Nybom and Stuhler (2017) compares the results to a lifetime income benchmark. We use the ratio of rank-rank slopes measured at earlier ages to the benchmark (for Nybom and Stuhler (2017)) or the age-32 slope (for Chetty et al. (2014)) as a proxy for the attenuation at each age, and then compute an aggregate attenuation factor weighted by the age distribution of our analytic sample. We are unaware of any external data that would allow for one to compute these statistics separately by self-reported sexual orientation, so we use a pooled factor to rescale. Appendix Table A9 displays the distribution of age and attenuation factors, as well as the weighted factors below.

In addition, we use a coarser observation of child income in Wave 5 of Add Health to assess whether income measured at 26-32 is equally predictive of income at 35-41 for non-heterosexual individuals. If non-heterosexual individuals invest more in human capital and tend to have steeper age-earnings profiles, this could spuriously generate the intergenerational mobility gaps that we record. Although we do not observe continuous income rank at 35-41, we see 13 bins of income.[15] We construct a rank variable based on this variable and regress on Wave 4 rank in subsamples by sex and sexual identity (both ranks are calculated in the sample of individuals who have valid observations of both). If these slopes are the same across groups, it suggests that our main income measure is similarly predictive of later income measures. In Appendix Table A10, we report these relationships by non-heterosexual status and sex, and see that the relationship between early and later income is stronger for non-heterosexual men relative to heterosexual men. This suggests that,

[15]The thirteen categories are: less than $5,000; $5,000–$9,999; $10,000–$14,999; $15,000–$19,999; $20,000–$24,999; $25,000–$29,999; $30,000–$39,999; $40,000–$49,999; $50,000–$74,999; $75,000–$99,999; $100,000–$149,999; $150,000–$199,999; and $200,000 or more.

if anything, life-cycle bias causes us to understate the persistence gap for non-heterosexual men. We see no difference for women. Under some stronger assumptions, we can use these estimates to rescale the estimated coefficients to account for heterogeneous life-cycle bias across groups. Specifically, if we assume that Wave 5 income is a perfect proxy for lifetime income, then the regression of Wave 5 rank on Wave 4 rank recovers the δ_t attenuation factor of Haider and Solon (2006). Thus, we can treat these coefficients as a rough estimate of group-specific life-cycle attenuation and rescale our estimated coefficients accordingly (though the correct scaling will be somewhat smaller depending on how imperfect a proxy Wave 5 income is for lifetime income).

In Appendix Table A11, we report our baseline results, scaled up by each attenuation factor. Using the estimates from Chetty et al. (2014), we see that the rank-rank slope among heterosexual mean grows modestly from 0.27 to 0.29, while the persistence gap grows from -0.14 to -0.15. Among women, the rank-rank slope increases from 0.24 to 0.26 and the persistence gap remains substantively unchanged. This is our preferred external adjustment, given that the Chetty et al. (2014) sample is also nationally representative in the US and the cohorts are relatively similar. However, we also report results using the implied adjustment factor from Nybom and Stuhler (2017), which implies more substantial scaling. The rank-rank slope grows to 0.36 for heterosexual men and 0.32 for heterosexual women, while the persistence gap grows to -0.18 among men. Finally, when we use the estimated attenuation factors from regressing Wave 5 rank on Wave 4 rank, the rank-rank correlation grows to 0.47 among heterosexual men and the persistence gap increases to -0.28, suggesting the gap would be even larger if we corrected for life-cycle bias (though these should be interpreted as upper bounds). Together, these results suggest that life-cycle factors and parental income measurement error may attenuate our results by a substantial amount (depending on the source of the attenuation estimate), but the finding of lower intergenerational persistence for non-heterosexual men remains, regardless of whether we use external corrections or internal analyses.