Labor-Market Specialization within Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples

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Abstract

We use data from the 2000 decennial Census to compare differences in earnings, hours worked, and labor-force participation between members of different household types, including same-sex couples, different-sex couples, and roommates. Both same-sex and different-sex couples exhibit some degree of household specialization, whereas roommates show little or no degree of specialization. Of all household types, married couples exhibit by far the highest degree of specialization with respect to labor-market outcomes. With respect to differences in earnings and hours, gay male couples are more similar to married couples than lesbian or unmarried heterosexual couples are to married couples.

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Introduction

A variety of research considers how couples allocate their time to market and home production. Most research about household specialization is based on Becker's (1991) theories that members of households make interdependent economic decisions. Becker's specialization theories are built on the idea that women have a comparative advantage in bearing and raising children. If men and women share a household, the woman is therefore more likely to specialize in home production, and her husband is more likely to specialize in market production. Men who anticipate marrying women have incentives to invest more in market-based human capital, so the theories of gender-specific household specialization predict that men may earn more than women and that married men may earn more than single men.

Recently researchers have applied Becker's theories to other household types. The availability of decennial U.S. Census data for cohabiting same-sex couples for the 1990 and 2000 Censuses allows economists to study a variety of topics related to sexual orientation, including household specialization. The data also allow economists to study cohabiting but unmarried different-sex couples. Becker's theories predict a greater degree of household specialization for married couples compared to all other types of couples. Married households contain both a man and a woman, and the woman has the legal protections of marriage should the union dissolve. Different-sex but unmarried couples could also benefit from the sexual division of labor, but a woman in such a union might be more reluctant to specialize in home production than a married woman because she lacks the legal protections of marriage. Same-sex couples are the least likely to exhibit household specialization because they lack an obvious means of sexual division of labor.

We extend the specialization work that focuses on married couples to same-sex couples. Our analysis also extends the small literature on same-sex couples by considering earnings differences, hours worked differences, and labor-force participation differences as signals of household specialization. The overall research goal is to understand the extent to which all household types specialize, as well as how specialization differs by couple type. Because the vast majority of the specialization literature focuses on married couples, we compare other household types directly to married couples to address the research goal.

Because roommates often meet in school or through work, they likely share many of the traits for which Becker (1991) predicts positive assortative mating, or the pairings of people with similar traits. We expect couples to make a household-level decision about how to allocate their time to the labor market based, in part, on potential earnings differences, but we do not expect roommates to make a joint decision about any aspects of working. Hence, roommates provide an appropriate comparison group.

We find evidence consistent with specialization for all couple types but not for roommates. Members of couples have larger earnings and hours worked differences than roommates, and married couples have the largest differences. If larger earnings and work hours differences suggest specialization, then our results suggest that both same-sex and different-sex couples exhibit some degree of household specialization. Gay male couples are more similar to married couples than lesbian couples are to married couples with respect to differences in earnings and hours worked, and gay male couples are more similar to married couples than unmarried different-sex couples are to married couples with respect to differences in earnings. With respect to labor-force participation, unmarried heterosexual couples are more like married

couples than gay male or lesbian couples are to married couples. For all outcomes, married couples are noticeably different from all other household types.

Relation to Previous Literature

Direct Measures of Housework

An established literature considers labor-market specialization for married-couple households. Early research uses data sets with direct measures of time spent on household tasks. In several papers, Hersch and Stratton analyze the impact of housework on labor-market outcomes, using a variety of data sets that include direct measures of hours of household work. Hersch (1985) finds that additional hours of housework decrease the piece-rate earnings of wives but have no effect on the earnings of husbands. She finds that women spend more time on housework than men (Hersch 1991a). Most of their studies find evidence of a negative relationship between hours of housework and wages for women and that the magnitude of the effect is stronger for married women than for married men (Hersch 1991a, Hersch 1991b, Hersch and Stratton 1994, Hersch and Stratton 1997, Hersch and Stratton 2002, Hersch 2009). South and Spitze (1994) support the findings of Hersch and Stratton in that women spend more time doing household chores than men within all heterosexual cohabiting couples (married and unmarried), and the gap is largest for married couples.

Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) published one of the earliest studies to include homosexual couples. They report large differences in hours spent on housework across heterosexual and homosexual couples. In married couples where the wife is employed full time, 59 percent of wives spend more than 10 hours per week, on average, on household tasks, compared to only 22 percent of their husbands. The percentages drop to 42 percent and 21 percent, respectively, for unmarried heterosexual couples. The percentages are lower still for

members of cohabiting gay male and lesbian couples: 37 percent for gay men and 31 percent for lesbians. The descriptive statistics suggest a potentially more egalitarian division of labor in homosexual households.

Previous research based predominantly on small samples of gay male and lesbian couples finds that same-sex couples are more likely to share household tasks than opposite-sex couples, particularly married couples. Within opposite-sex couples, women spend substantially more time on housework than men. Kurdek (2007) suggests that "partners from gay and lesbian couples appear to be more committed than heterosexual couples to an ethic of equality in their relationships" (p.145). Solomon et al. (2005) find that being a member of a same-sex couple is a stronger predictor of sharing household tasks equally than having similar incomes. Taken together, studies that include direct measures of household work suggest that same-sex couples may divide household tasks more equally than opposite-sex couples and that married (opposite-sex) couples may have the least equal divisions of labor.

Earnings

Three studies analyze earnings for evidence of specialization. Zavodny (2008) investigates specialization in gay male households by analyzing the earnings of one member of a cohabiting couple (same-sex male, different-sex, or married) with the partner's education and hours of work. Using data from the General Social Survey and the National Health and Social Life Survey, she does not find support for specialization within gay male households. Jepsen (2007) considers differences in women's earnings using 2000 Census data for cohabiting women. She does not find support for specialization as an explanation of the higher earnings of lesbians compared to heterosexual women.

Jepsen and Jepsen (2006) are the first to include roommates as a reference group when analyzing specialization within couples. They examine whether differences in earnings predict whether a pairing of people is a couple or roommates. Using data from the 1990 Census and logit models, they find that larger differences in earnings make a pairing of men more likely to be a gay male couple than male roommates and that larger differences in earnings make a pairing of women more likely to be a lesbian couple than female roommates. When considering members of different-sex couples (both married and unmarried) and different-sex roommates, larger differences in earnings make a different-sex pairing more likely to be a married couple than either an unmarried couple or different-sex roommates. Taken together, the results are consistent with some degree of specialization for couples in comparison to roommates, with married couples showing the most evidence consistent with specialization.

Labor Supply and Hours Worked

Differences in labor-supply decisions between homosexuals and heterosexuals could reflect differences in household specialization. Black et al. (2007) provide descriptive statistics of specialization in same-sex couples using the 2000 Census. For gay male couples, 19.4 percent have only one partner who works, and for lesbian couples, 19.5 percent have only one partner who works. For heterosexual couples, including both married and unmarried couples, 31.9 percent have only one partner who works. The presence of children is much higher for couples with only one working partner, which is consistent with economic theory that children promote specialization.

Tebaldi and Elmslie (2006) study hours worked and the propensity to work part time rather than full time. They find that cohabiting gay men work fewer hours than married or cohabiting heterosexual men and that cohabiting gay men are more likely to work part time than

either cohabiting heterosexual or married men. They find the opposite effect for homosexual women. Lesbians are more likely to work full time and work more hours per week than cohabiting or married heterosexual women. Carpenter (2008) finds similar results for hours worked using data from Canada. Antecol and Steinberger (2013) find that the primary earners work about 475 more hours a year than their partners. They find that the labor-supply outcomes of primary-earner lesbians are similar to those of married men, and the labor-supply outcomes of secondary-earner lesbians are similar to married women.

Leppel (2009) considers the probability of being employed as a measure of labor-force participation. She finds that cohabiting gay men and cohabiting lesbian women have similar probabilities of being employed. Heterosexual married or cohabiting women are less likely to be employed than cohabiting lesbians or gay men, but married men are the most likely to be employed of any group. She finds similar results when she analyzes the probability of being out of the labor force rather than the probability of being unemployed. Leppel (2009) finds that the presence of young children in the household increases the probability of being out of the labor force for both heterosexual women and gay men but not for lesbian women or heterosexual men.

Oreffice (2011) studies the labor-supply decisions of members of same-sex couples compared to roommates to estimate the effect of intra-household bargaining.[1] Using data from the 2000 Census, she finds that for lesbian, gay male, and cohabiting but unmarried heterosexual couples, the individual who is younger and richer has more bargaining power as evidenced by that person's lower labor supply and the partner's higher labor supply. For married heterosexual couples, the older and richer individual has more power, although the magnitude is smaller than for same-sex couples. She finds no evidence of bargaining power for roommates.

[1] Grossbard and Jepsen (2008) apply household bargaining theory to specialization within same-sex households. They suggest that if women are more willing than men to engage in household production, lesbian households may be the most egalitarian of cohabiting couple types.

Giddings et al. (2014) also investigate specialization using the 1990 Census and the 2000-2011 American Community Surveys. They find that same-sex couples are less likely than their different-sex counterparts to exhibit a high degree of specialization with regard to multiple measures of labor supply. However, the "specialization gap" between same-sex and different-sex couples narrows across birth cohorts. The results are robust to the inclusion of controls for the presence of children.

Our Contributions

We make two primary contributions to the growing literature on specialization in same-sex couples. First, we provide multiple comparison groups for same-sex couples by comparing them to roommates with similar gender compositions as well as to other couple types. We extend previous work on roommates by Jepsen and Jepsen (2006) and Oreffice (2011) to include comparisons across couple types in addition to comparisons between couples and roommates, and we include a broader range of labor-market outcomes than previous work using roommates.

Second, we use three labor-market outcomes as potential measures of specialization. We study differences in earnings as our preferred measure of specialization because annual earnings capture wages and hours worked and may account for differences in human capital that result from previous years of specialization within a household. We assume that larger differences in earnings between two adult members of a household are more consistent with specialization than smaller differences, given that we control for observable factors that could also influence earnings such as age and educational level. In addition to measuring specialization by differences in earnings, we also measure specialization based on differences in hours worked. Finally, we include models of labor-market participation in keeping with previous studies of

specialization (Antecol and Steinberger 2013, Carpenter 2008, Giddings et al. 2014, Leppel 2009, Oreffice 2011, Tebaldi and Elmslie 2006).

The focus on indirect measures of specialization – earnings, labor supply, and bargaining power – is necessary because we are unaware of current data sets with measures of time spent on specific household activities by each member of same-sex couples. Thus, we provide a comprehensive analysis of specialization by modeling a variety of related measures of earnings and/or hours worked in the labor force that builds on the previous literature along with multiple comparison groups for same-sex couples.

Data

The data are from the five-percent sample of the 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Set (PUMS). The 2000 Census provides the largest sample of same-sex male and same-sex female couples available to researchers, which is an advantage of the decennial Census over the American Community Survey.[2] Census data are nationally representative and include large samples of different-sex couples, both married and unmarried, and roommates; these couples and roommates represent appropriate comparison groups from which to study household specialization. PUMS data are available at the individual and household levels. The unit of analysis is the household, but we include information at the individual level for the head of household and spouse/partner/roommate. Household type – couple or roommate – is determined by using information from the variable "relationship to head of household" combined with information about the person's sex. Roommates are identified as pairs of individuals where one person selects "roommate" for the category "relationship to head of household," and the other person selects "head of household." Gay male and lesbian couples are identified as those same-

[2] We are unable to use data from the 2010 Census because the government stopped distributing the "long form" to a random sample of U.S. households, so data are no longer available at the individual level about people's age, education, race, and income, for example.

sex couples where the partner selects "unmarried partner" (bypassing the choice of roommate) for the category relationship to head of household.

In the 2000 Census, all same-sex couples are defined as unmarried even if the couple identifies themselves as married. Census documentation defines an unmarried partner as a "person who is not related to the householder, who shares living quarters, and who has a close personal relationship with the householder" (Lofquist et al. 2012). Due to the negative stigma attached to homosexuality, the likelihood that platonic roommates of the same sex would inadvertently select unmarried partner is low. We exclude households where more than one person claims to be unmarried partner of the head of household. For households with more than one roommate, we randomly pick one roommate.[3]

Because we focus on labor-market characteristics, specifically earnings and hours worked, we exclude households where either individual (the head of household or the roommate/partner) reports negative earnings and households where both individuals report zero earnings. We limit the sample to households where both individuals are aged 18 to 65 and are not in the military. We exclude households where the values for sex, marital status, or relationship to head of household are imputed from other information. Finally, we exclude individuals in group quarters such as college dormitories or prisons.

With these restrictions, our sample contains 27,810 female roommate pairs (i.e. households); 6,420 lesbian households; 36,841 male roommate pairs; 6,200 gay male couples; 34,439 different-sex roommate pairs; 2,143,870 married couples; and 185,461 unmarried different-sex couples.

Methods

[3] In order to consider whether some of the same-sex roommates are really same-sex couples who prefer not to identify their sexual orientation, we randomly select one roommate within same-sex households where there is more than one roommate. We thank the editors for this clever suggestion.

We estimate differences in earnings and hours worked between the heads of household and their cohabiting partner or roommate. Specifically, we estimate the following regression equations at the household level:

(1) Earnings difference = f(household type, head of household characteristics, partner/roommate characteristics, household characteristics, state fixed effects)

In the first set of regressions modeled in equation (1), the dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference in earnings between the head of household and the partner/roommate, measured either in dollars or in percentage terms. For the main set of regressions (reported in Table 3), the earnings difference is the absolute value of the difference in each individual's annual wage, salary, and self-employment income from 1999 as measured in thousands of dollars. As a robustness check, we use an alternative measure of earnings as the dependent variable: the percentage of annual household earnings of the head of household, calculated as the head's earnings divided by the sum of the head and partner/roommate earnings. We also study differences in hours worked and measures of labor-force participation as additional dependent variables.

The main independent variables of interest are the dummy variables for household types, defined as unmarried different-sex couples, different-sex roommates, same-sex female couples, female roommates, same-sex male couples, male roommates, and married couples (the omitted category). Of particular interest are whether members of couples have larger earnings differences than roommates and whether opposite-sex couples have larger differences than same-sex couples. Such findings would be consistent with specialization.

The regressions include control variables for individual-level characteristics for the head of household and the partner/roommate. Specifically, we include Age; Years of Schooling,

measured as the highest year of formal schooling converted from Census codes; Black, Hispanic, and Other Race/Ethnicity, which are dummy variables for race/ethnicity (White is the omitted category); Investment Income, defined as the individual's 1999 annual interest, dividend, and net-rental income measured in thousands of dollars; Disability, which is a dummy variable equal to one when the individual has a disability; and Moved, which is a dummy variable equal to one when the individual moved residences in the last five years. Age and education would positively influence earnings. Non-whites earn less than whites, on average. A disability would likely reduce earnings. Investment income is an important proxy for wealth, and recent mobility controls for the fact that same-sex couples and roommates are more mobile than married couples (Table 1).[4]

We include several measures of household characteristics, including the Number of Children Under 6, Number of Children Ages 6 to 17, Home Ownership, Center City, Suburb, and Other Urban. The Number of Children variables measure the total number of children in the household in each of two age ranges: under 6 years old and ages 6 to 17, as in Antecol and Steinberger (2013). The inclusion of separate measures based on age allows us to distinguish between children who are too young to attend school and school-aged children. Home Ownership is a dummy variable equal to one if the household owns its primary residence rather than rents it and equal to zero otherwise. Center City is a dummy variable equal to one if the household is in the central city of an urban area and equal to zero otherwise. Suburb is a dummy variable equal to one if the household is in a suburb and equal to zero otherwise, and Other Urban is a dummy variable equal to one if the household is in an urban area where we cannot identify whether the household is in the center city or the suburbs and equal to zero otherwise. Living in a Rural Area is the omitted category. We expect children and home ownership to

[4] We thank an anonymous referee for suggesting the likely differences across household types in mobility.

increase specialization. We expect earnings to be positively influenced by the various types of urban living when compared to rural locations.

Results

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for each household type. The top portion of the table contains household-level characteristics. The average earnings difference between the head of household and the partner/roommate is much higher for married couples and same-sex couples than for roommates. The average earnings difference is very similar, however, between unmarried, different-sex couples and different-sex roommates. The average earnings difference is larger for married couples than for any other couple type. Interestingly, gay male couples have the second highest earnings differences, followed by lesbians and unmarried couples. With respect to hours worked, married couples also have greater differences than same-sex couples. Female roommates are similar to female same-sex couples, male roommates are similar to male same-sex couples, and same-sex female and male couples are more similar to each other than to different-sex pairings of any kind – roommates or couples.

Sharp differences between couples and roommates are evident in the number of children in the household and home ownership. Different-sex couples and roommates have a greater number of school-aged children in the household than same-sex couples and roommates. Same-sex female couples have a greater number of school-aged children than same-sex male couples. Married couples have the highest average number of school-aged children, followed by unmarried, different-sex couples. The differences are similar for the number of young children in the household: married couples have the highest average number of young children, followed by unmarried, different-sex couples. Different-sex roommates and lesbian couples have similar average numbers of young children; same-sex roommates and gay male couples have the lowest

number of young children living in the household. Homeownership rates are highest for married couples at 81 percent. Lesbian and gay male couples have the next highest rates at 64 percent, much higher than the rate for cohabiting, different-sex couples (46 percent). Not surprisingly, roommates have markedly lower home ownership rates of less than 40 percent.

When considering the individual characteristics of the heads of household and partners/spouses, shown in the bottom two panels of Table 1, we see that gay male heads of household have the highest earnings, followed by married and lesbian heads. Unmarried and roommate heads earn at least $10,000 less, on average, than the top three categories of earners. We observe very little difference in the hours worked by any head of household, except that female roommates work about three to seven fewer hours than anyone else, on average. Gay male and lesbian heads of household have the highest average years of education, whereas cohabiting, different-sex heads of household have the lowest. For partners/spouses, gay males have the highest average earnings, followed by lesbians. All other groups earn roughly $10,000 less, on average, than lesbians. Gay male partners, lesbian partners, and male roommates work the most hours.

The raw averages suggest that married couples are the most likely to specialize, given the large differences between husbands and wives with respect to both hours worked in the labor force and earnings. But the differences are likely influenced by the fact that married couples are the most likely to have children in the house, particularly young children, and to own rather than rent. People with children and homes to maintain may benefit the most from specialization, so we must control for these demographic characteristics when analyzing specialization.

Among unmarried couples, the comparisons in descriptive statistics are mixed. When we consider differences in earnings, gay male couples are far more similar to married couples than

to lesbians, different-sex unmarried couples, or any type of roommates. But when we focus on differences in hours worked, gay male couples are quite similar to lesbian couples and to same-sex roommates, regardless of gender. All different-sex pairings, whether roommates or couples, have larger differences in hours worked than same-sex pairings. For all measures except earnings differences and children, gay male couples appear to be the most similar to lesbian couples. We would expect that lesbians would have more children than gay male couples because they can produce children more easily (through donor insemination); in fact, many of the children are likely from previous heterosexual relationships (Gates 2011).

Same-sex couples are comprised of both couples who would choose to marry if given the opportunity and those who would not, whereas unmarried, different-sex couples have rejected the option of legal marriage. Hence, unmarried, different-sex couples are likely to be the least committed type of couple. Under that assumption, we would expect lower levels of specialization among unmarried, different-sex couples than married couples, which is consistent with the descriptive statistics.

Table 2 reports the correlation coefficients between the head of household and the partner or roommate for all variables. We would expect negative correlations if couples or roommates experienced complete specialization. Instead, all the earnings correlations are positive. However, the correlation is lowest for married couples, at only 0.05. The next lowest correlations among couples are for gay male, lesbian, and cohabiting, different-sex couples. As expected, the pattern of earnings correlations across household types is similar to the pattern in average earnings differences in Table 1. The correlations for hours worked show more evidence of specialization than earnings. The correlation coefficients for married and unmarried different-sex couples are negative, with magnitudes of -0.10 and -0.01, respectively. For same-sex

couples, the correlation in hours worked is near zero: 0.05 for lesbians and 0.07 for gay males. The other variables have high positive correlations, consistent with the correlations in Jepsen and Jepsen (2006) from the 1990 Census.

The descriptive statistics and correlations in Tables 1 and 2 provide a useful starting point from which to study earnings patterns across couple types, but they ignore the potential influence of other factors like education, children, and home ownership. Table 3 contains regression results for the model in equation (1) where we compare labor-market outcomes across household types, focusing on differences between couple and roommate types. In other words, all household types are included in the same regression, with dummy variables for household type. Because the omitted household type in Table 3 is married couples, the coefficients for household type provide a direct comparison of the difference between members of each household type and members of married couples. The table also includes F-tests for comparisons across other household types such as between gay male and lesbian couples as well as between couples and roommates of similar gender composition.

In the first column in Table 3, the dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference in earnings. The coefficients for all couple and roommate types are negative, meaning that each couple or roommate type has a smaller earnings difference than married couples. Because the omitted category is married couples, the closer a coefficient is to zero, the more similar the pairing is to married couples. If larger earnings differences indicate specialization, then the results in Table 3 suggest that married couples specialize more than each other couple or roommate type. For example, the coefficient of -11.96 for same-sex females in column 1 is interpreted (somewhat loosely) as members of same-sex female couples having an earnings difference that is $11,960 less than the earnings difference of members of married couples.

Members of gay male couples have smaller earnings differences than married couples of $3,210, on average, and unmarried different-sex couples have smaller earnings differences than married couples of $5,120. Thus, gay male couples are the most similar to married couples, whereas lesbian couples are the least similar to married couples. Yet all three couple types (unmarried heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian) have smaller earnings differences than married couples.

All couple types except female same-sex couples are statistically different at the five-percent level from roommates of the same gender composition. The differences are most pronounced for married couples, followed by same-sex male couples.

F-tests also show that the coefficient for lesbians is different from the coefficient for gay men. The coefficient for unmarried different-sex couples is different from the coefficient for gay male couples and different from the coefficient for lesbian couples. Taken together, the results of the F-tests are consistent with our regression results that gay male couples are not only more similar to married couples but also different from lesbian and unmarried opposite-sex couples with respect to specialization based on earnings.

The dependent variable in the second column is the percent of the pair's (head of household's and partner's/roommate's) earnings that is earned by the head of household. This alternative measure of earnings provides a robustness check. For example, suppose the absolute value difference of two households is $50,000, but the first household has individual earnings of $150,000 and $100,000 while the second household has individual earnings of $50,000 and $0. We would view the potential specialization occurring in each household quite differently, yet the measure of earnings difference is the same. But if we calculate the percentage of household earnings earned by the head, the measure of earnings difference changes greatly; the value of the first household is 0.6, whereas the value for the second household is 1.0.

The pattern of results in the second column is similar to the pattern in the first. All coefficients are negative, meaning that all earnings differences are largest for married couples (the omitted group). All couple types except same-sex females are significantly different at the five-percent level from roommates of similar gender composition. Among couples, lesbians have the smallest differences in head of household's share of earnings at 8.8 percent smaller than married couples, followed by members of unmarried different-sex couples (-7.8 percent), followed by gay men (-7.0 percent). Smaller differences imply that lesbians have more equal earnings, whereas married couples have less equal earnings. All the differences among couple types are statistically different from each other at the five-percent level, as they are for the original model of absolute earnings differences.

The outcome measure in column three is the absolute value of the difference in usual hours worked between the head of household and the partner/roommate, as in Giddings et al. (2014). As with earnings, coefficients for all three couple types – as well as all three roommate types – are negative and statistically significant at the one percent level. If the difference in hours worked is a measure of specialization, then married couples exhibit more specialization with respect to hours worked than other couple or roommate types. Again, lesbian couples are most different from married couples. The difference in hours worked between the head of household and the partner is 4.64 hours smaller, on average, in lesbian couples compared to married couples. For gay males, the hours difference is 3.98 hours less than married couples, whereas the hours difference is 3.37 hours lower for unmarried different-sex couples relative to married couples. In other words, the hours difference is smaller for same-sex couples than it is for different-sex couples.

In contrast to the earnings outcomes, the coefficients for hours worked for roommates (female, male, opposite-sex) are closer to zero than the coefficients for couples (lesbian, gay male, and unmarried), respectively. Thus, roommates are more similar to married couples with respect to differences in hours worked than unmarried couples are to married couples. All the F-tests comparing couples and roommates are significant at the one-percent level.

The dependent variable in the final column of Table 3 is the percent of the pair's (head of household's and partner's/roommate's) hours that are worked by the head of household, analogous to the earnings share variable in column 2. For this outcome, the head of household in all three couple types works a smaller percentage of the pair's hours than the head of a married couple, by approximately six percentage points. There is no statistically significant difference in this percentage between gay males, lesbians, and unmarried different-sex couples.

In summary, the most striking result in Table 3 is that married couples are noticeably different from the other household types across all outcomes, even when controlling for differences in the number of children, including young children, and home ownership. The pattern of results is consistent with married couples specializing more than other household types, as the gap in earnings between partners is noticeably larger in married couples than in same-sex couples, unmarried different-sex couples, or roommates. In general, gay male couples are more similar to married couples than lesbian couples are to married couples. With respect to earnings, gay male couples are more similar to married couples than unmarried different-sex couples are to married couples.

In Table 3, the measures of specialization are based on the actual earnings and hours worked. Recent literature on specialization has also included dichotomous measures of labor-force participation and work intensity. Table 4 includes the results from three dichotomous

outcomes used elsewhere in the literature.[5] In the first column, the dependent variable is a dummy variable equal to one for households where only one member works, as in Black et al. (2007). All three couple types are approximately six percentage points less likely than married couples to have only one individual working. In contrast, the coefficients for roommates are only two to four percentage points.

In the second column, the dependent variable is a dummy variable equal to one for households where both the head of household and the partner/roommate are in the labor force (employed or unemployed), as defined in Stevenson (2007) and Giddings et al. (2014). All three couple types are much more likely than married couples to have both individuals in the labor force. Gay male and lesbian couples are approximately nine percentage points more likely to have both members in the labor force than married couples, and unmarried heterosexual couples are 6.4 percentage points more likely. Thus, the biggest difference is between married couples and all other couples, but both same-sex couple types are more likely to have both individuals in the labor force than both different-sex couple types. The difference between married couples and the three types of roommates is at most four percent, a statistically significant difference at one percent for all couples types.

In the third column, the dependent variable is a dummy variable for working full time, measured as at least 35 hours a week.[6] The three coefficients for couple type – lesbian, gay male, and unmarried different-sex – are positive and significant, again showing that married couples are noticeably different from other couple types. Another similar pattern is that the coefficient for unmarried different-sex couples is statistically smaller than the coefficients for the

[5] Ordinary least squares (i.e. linear probability) models are estimated for all binary outcomes. Results from probit and logit models are qualitatively similar.

[6] The choice of 35 hours a week as a threshold is consistent with the definition in Stevenson (2007) and Giddings et al. (2014). However, unreported results available from the authors are similar when full-time work is defined as at least 40 hours a week.

same-sex couples. Unmarried different-sex couples are 6.7 percentage points more likely than married couples to have both partners working full-time, whereas the coefficients for lesbians and gay males are 9.0 and 12.1 percent, respectively. In contrast, the coefficients for roommates are statistically insignificant at the ten percent level or negative. Male and different-sex roommates are indistinguishable from married couples, whereas female roommates are actually less likely to work full-time than married couples. Throughout Table 4, there is no evidence to support specialization with respect to labor-force participation or work intensity for same-sex and unmarried, different-sex couples relative to roommates of similar gender composition.

Children in the household may affect household specialization decisions in ways that may be better captured by dividing the sample into households with children and households without children. Splitting the sample allows the coefficients of the control variables to differ for the two types of households. In Table 5, the sample is split into households with children (top panel) and households without children (bottom panel). The first four columns of the table are arranged as in Table 3, and the last three columns are arranged as in Table 4 to facilitate comparisons. For brevity, the table does not contain the results for roommates, although roommates and controls for roommate type are included in the model.

The results in Table 5 are generally similar for households with children and households without children.[7] Again, married couples are noticeably different from other couple types. For earnings, gay males are most similar to married couples; for nearly all other outcomes, unmarried different-sex couples are most similar to married couples. For couples with children, however, we cannot reject the hypothesis that many of the unmarried (different-sex and same-sex) couple-type coefficients are not statistically different from each other in the labor-force and hours

[7] Unreported results available from the authors upon request also show that the results for households with children under 6 are similar to the results for households with children under 18.

models. One possible explanation is that the coefficients for same-sex couples with children are not estimated precisely due to the relatively small number of such couples (1,685 lesbian couples and 629 gay male couples with kids).

Summary

We extend previous research that attempts to identify household specialization in non-traditional households. We look for evidence of specialization in all couple types. We compare couples to roommates of similar gender composition because roommates share many similar traits but do not make joint household decisions with respect to labor-market allocations. We also compare married and unmarried heterosexual couples to same-sex male and same-sex female couples.

We consider several measures of earnings differences, including raw differences and the ratio of family earnings earned by the head of household. We consider differences in hours worked and the ratio of hours worked by the head of household. We expand our proxies of specialization to alternative measures of labor-force participation. Our models control for a variety of human capital and demographic variables that could be correlated with earnings, including age, education, race, and household location, and for variables likely to influence specialization, such as the number of children and/or young children, and home ownership. Because previous work on specialization has paid limited attention to children and homeownership, our inclusion of these factors is also a contribution to the literature.

Our results paint a consistent picture that, if larger earnings differences represent household specialization, then members of couples are more likely to specialize than roommates. Not surprisingly, members of married couples have the largest earnings and hours worked differences, which is consistent with the predictions of economic theory. When we focus on

comparisons across couples, we find that members of gay male couples appear to be the most similar to members of married couples in terms of earnings differences. Lesbians are less similar to married couples. They have smaller differences in earnings and hours worked, which is consistent with previous findings that lesbians share household tasks more equally.

When we expand our analysis to broader measures of labor-force participation, we do not find consistent evidence that same-sex couples and unmarried, different-sex couples specialize more than roommates. Unmarried heterosexual couples are more similar to married couples, and we no longer observe differences between gay male and lesbian couples for most specifications. However, we continue to find evidence that married couples specialize more than any other couple or roommate type. Because annual earnings are a function of wages and hours worked, differences in earnings are our preferred measure of specialization.

We look for evidence of specialization across many couple types. Our findings for roommates and married, opposite-sex couples are as expected. Regardless of whether we study earnings, hours worked, or labor-force participation, we find strong evidence of specialization for married couples, and we find very little if any evidence of specialization for roommates. The results for the other couple types – same-sex male, same-sex female, and opposite-sex cohabiting – are mixed. When we focus on earnings differences, gay male couples are more similar to married couples than to any other couple type. Perhaps household specialization decisions based on earnings are influenced by the presence of a high-wage earner, as married men and gay men have the highest average earnings. Perhaps couples are more comfortable with specialization once the family has achieved a certain threshold of income.

But when we focus on hours differences, unmarried opposite-sex couples are more similar to married couples than either gay male or lesbian couples are to married couples, and

gay male couples are similar to lesbian couples, suggesting differences based on sexual orientation. A potential explanation is that homosexuals do not have the expectation of specializing in home production because they have so few public or private examples.

We hope that in the future a representative data set that includes information about sexual orientation will also include more detailed questions about the division of household labor.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics by Household Type

	Female		Male		Different-sex		
		Same-sex		Same-sex		Married	Unmarried
	Roommates	Couples	Roommates	Couples	Roommates	Couples	Couples
Household characteristics							
Earn difference	13.1	25.0	16.1	34.7	19.0	37.1	20.2
(1000s)	(21.6)	(39.6)	(28.0)	(53.7)	(27.8)	(52.5)	(30.9)
Household head	0.53	0.55	0.54	0.57	0.56	0.67	0.57
share of earnings	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.28)
Hours difference	12.1	12.8	12.5	13.3	16.0	20.5	15.1
	(13.6)	(15.1)	(14.6)	(15.4)	(16.9)	(19.2)	(16.7)
Household head	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.53	0.53	0.62	0.54
share of hours	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.23)
Only one worker	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.14	0.21	0.27	0.18
in the pair	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.41)	(0.44)	(0.39)
Both in labor force	0.73	0.81	0.77	0.81	0.71	0.65	0.73
	(0.44)	(0.40)	(0.42)	(0.39)	(0.45)	(0.48)	(0.44)
Both working full	0.50	0.67	0.62	0.71	0.56	0.51	0.62
time (35+ hours)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.49)	(0.45)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.49)
Homeowner	0.25	0.64	0.21	0.64	0.37	0.81	0.46
	(0.44)	(0.48)	(0.41)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.39)	(0.50)
Number of kids in	0.09	0.17	0.04	0.08	0.20	0.38	0.35
HH under 6	(0.37)	(0.49)	(0.28)	(0.35)	(0.53)	(0.69)	(0.66)
Number of kids in	0.14	0.27	0.06	0.11	0.35	0.77	0.51
HH ages 6 to 17	(0.51)	(0.69)	(0.34)	(0.49)	(0.77)	(1.03)	(0.91)
Center city	0.24	0.22	0.24	0.34	0.19	0.10	0.15
	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.43)	(0.47)	(0.40)	(0.30)	(0.36)
Suburb	0.23	0.29	0.24	0.23	0.26	0.31	0.27
	(0.42)	(0.45)	(0.43)	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.46)	(0.44)
Other urban	0.41	0.37	0.40	0.36	0.38	0.36	0.37
	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)
Rural	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.07	0.16	0.22	0.21
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.26)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.40)
Head of household							
Earnings (1000s)	22.3	38.4	26.1	50.7	25.6	46.8	28.9
	(24.54)	(41.05)	(30.20)	(56.81)	(27.92)	(52.46)	(32.80)
Hours worked	34.8	40.0	38.7	41.6	37.6	42.3	39.5
	(14.79)	(13.44)	(14.98)	(14.08)	(15.56)	(14.81)	(14.50)
Years of schooling	14.2	14.7	13.4	14.8	13.0	13.5	12.8
	(2.37)	(2.81)	(3.08)	(2.80)	(2.81)	(3.00)	(2.52)
Age	30.6	38.8	29.9	40.0	36.0	43.3	34.9
	(11.20)	(9.71)	(9.79)	(9.78)	(11.62)	(10.50)	(10.47)

Table 1 (Continued): Descriptive Statistics

	Female		Male		Different-sex		
		Same-sex		Same-sex		Married	Unmarried
	Roommates	Couples	Roommates	Couples	Roommates	Couples	Couples
Head of household							
White	0.85	0.88	0.80	0.89	0.78	0.85	0.79
	(0.36)	(0.33)	(0.40)	(0.31)	(0.41)	(0.36)	(0.41)
Black	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.11	0.07	0.12
	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.33)
Hispanic	0.08	0.08	0.16	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.12
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.36)	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.29)	(0.32)
Other race	0.11	0.08	0.17	0.07	0.14	0.10	0.11
	(0.31)	(0.27)	(0.37)	(0.26)	(0.34)	(0.30)	(0.32)
Investment income	0.91	2.17	0.97	3.01	0.91	2.19	0.97
(1000s)	(7.39)	(12.65)	(8.17)	(15.05)	(7.88)	(12.53)	(8.40)
Disability	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.14	0.23	0.16	0.18
	(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.37)	(0.35)	(0.42)	(0.37)	(0.38)
Moved in last 5 yrs	0.81	0.64	0.83	0.63	0.70	0.43	0.71
	(0.39)	(0.48)	(0.38)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.49)	(0.46)
Partner / Roommate							
Earnings (1000s)	19.1	30.6	22.2	35.7	20.2	21.8	21.2
	(20.84)	(32.42)	(24.81)	(41.10)	(24.07)	(30.07)	(24.14)
Hours worked	33.5	37.7	37.1	38.5	34.7	29.5	35.5
	(15.39)	(15.05)	(15.99)	(15.30)	(17.10)	(18.75)	(16.48)
Years of schooling	14.0	14.4	13.1	14.2	12.7	13.3	12.6
	(2.38)	(2.77)	(3.11)	(2.77)	(2.81)	(2.80)	(2.47)
Age	29.3	37.8	28.5	37.8	33.9	41.5	33.7
	(10.41)	(9.60)	(8.88)	(9.35)	(11.27)	(10.26)	(10.25)
White	0.83	0.86	0.79	0.86	0.77	0.84	0.78
	(0.38)	(0.35)	(0.41)	(0.35)	(0.42)	(0.36)	(0.42)
Black	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.13
	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.32)	(0.24)	(0.33)
Hispanic	0.09	0.08	0.17	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.13
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.37)	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.30)	(0.33)
Other race	0.12	0.09	0.18	0.11	0.14	0.11	0.12
	(0.33)	(0.28)	(0.38)	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.31)	(0.33)
Investment income	0.47	1.04	0.43	1.35	0.38	0.78	0.41
(1000s)	(4.87)	(7.44)	(4.96)	(9.66)	(4.68)	(7.36)	(5.01)
Disability	0.12	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.20	0.13	0.16
	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.40)	(0.34)	(0.37)
Moved in last 5 yrs	0.88	0.73	0.90	0.71	0.82	0.43	0.81
	(0.32)	(0.45)	(0.30)	(0.45)	(0.39)	(0.50)	(0.39)
Observations	27,810	6,420	36,841	6,200	34,439	2,143,870	185,461

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 2: Correlations between Head of Household and Partner/Roommate

	Female		Male		Different-sex		
		Same-sex		Same-sex		Married	Unmarried
	Roommates	Couple	Roommates	Couple	Roommates	Couple	Couple
Earnings	0.40	0.23	0.33	0.23	0.19	0.05	0.22
Hours	0.27	0.05	0.24	0.07	0.004	-0.10	-0.01
Nonwhite	0.65	0.66	0.70	0.47	0.72	0.85	0.75
Age	0.80	0.70	0.69	0.62	0.74	0.90	0.80
Schooling	0.60	0.58	0.66	0.50	0.54	0.61	0.53
Investment Income	0.06	0.15	0.10	0.09	0.04	0.17	0.09
Disability	0.38	0.31	0.43	0.28	0.37	0.37	0.37
Moved in last 5 yrs	0.62	0.71	0.51	0.73	0.55	0.91	0.62
Observations	27,810	6,420	36,841	6,200	34,439	2,143,870	185,461

Table 3: Effect of Household Type on Earnings and Hours Worked

	Earnings Difference (000s)	Houshold head share of earnings	Difference in hours worked	Houshold head share of hours
Couple Type				
Lesbian couple	-11.96 ***	-0.088 ***	-4.64 ***	-0.066 ***
	(0.59)	(0.003)	(0.23)	(0.003)
Gay male couple	-3.21 ***	-0.070 ***	-3.98 ***	-0.062 ***
	(0.60)	(0.004)	(0.23)	(0.003)
Unmarried different-sex	-5.12 ***	-0.078 ***	-3.37 ***	-0.063 ***
	(0.12)	(0.001)	(0.05)	(0.001)
Roommate type				
Female	-12.69 ***	-0.093 ***	-3.28 ***	-0.063 ***
	(0.29)	(0.002)	(0.11)	(0.002)
Male	-4.91 ***	-0.091 ***	-2.86 ***	-0.061 ***
	(0.26)	(0.002)	(0.10)	(0.001)
Different-sex	-5.81 ***	-0.085 ***	-1.99 ***	-0.063 ***
	(0.26)	(0.002)	(0.10)	(0.001)
F-test statistic for equality across couple types				
Lesbian vs gay male	110.3 ***	13.6 ***	4.2 **	0.90
Lesbian vs unmarried	132.4 ***	8.7 ***	29.8 ***	0.83
Gay male vs unmarried	9.9 ***	4.7 **	6.5 **	0.17
F-test statistic for equality between unmarried couples and roommates				
Female	1.3	1.6	28.9 ***	0.60
Male	7.0 ***	29.8 ***	19.6 ***	0.10
Different-sex	6.3 **	21.3 ***	166.1 ***	0.08
Observations	2,441,041	2,441,041	2,441,041	2,441,041
R-squared	0.15	0.08	0.07	0.07

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote coefficients / F-tests that are statistically significant at the ten-percent, five-percent, and one-percent levels for a two-sided test. All specifications also include control variables for head of household years of schooling, age, race/ethnicity, investment income, disability status, and mobility in the last five years; partner/roommate years of schooling, age, race/ethnicity, investment income, disability status, and mobility in the last five years; number of children under 6, number of children ages 6 to 17, home ownership, and location (urban, suburban, etc.).

Table 4: Effect of Household Type on Other Labor Market Outcomes

	Only one worker in the pair	Both in labor force	Both work full time
Couple Type			
Lesbian couple	-0.067 ***	0.086 ***	0.090 ***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Gay male couple	-0.063 ***	0.089 ***	0.121 ***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Unmarried different-sex	-0.057 ***	0.064 ***	0.067 ***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Roommate type			
Female	-0.017 ***	-0.024 ***	-0.122 ***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Male	-0.038 ***	0.028 ***	-0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Different-sex	-0.025 ***	0.041 ***	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
F-test statistic for equality across couple types			
Lesbian vs gay male	0.38	0.17	13.3 ***
Lesbian vs unmarried	3.7 *	15.6 ***	13.4 ***
Gay male vs unmarried	1.1	19.8 ***	74.4 ***
F-test statistic for equality between unmarried couples and roommates			
Female	74.9 ***	305.7 ***	995.0 ***
Male	18.4 ***	95.9 ***	344.1 ***
Different-sex	166.6 ***	72.5 ***	525.9 ***
Observations	2,441,041	2,441,041	2,441,041
R-squared	0.09	0.09	0.06

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote coefficients / F-tests that are statistically significant at the ten-percent, five-percent, and one-percent levels for a two-sided test. All specifications also include control variables for head of household years of schooling, age, race/ethnicity, investment income, disability status, and mobility in the last five years; partner/roommate years of schooling, age, race/ethnicity, investment income, disability status, and mobility in the last five years; number of children under 6, number of children ages 6 to 17, home ownership, and location (urban, suburban, etc.).

Table 5: Earnings and Hours Differences by Presence of Children in the Household

	Earnings Difference (000s)	Houshold head share of earnings	Difference in hours worked	Houshold head share of hours	Only one worker in the pair	Both in labor force	Both work full time
Households with children							
Lesbian couple	-12.6 ***	-0.123 ***	-5.8 ***	-0.091 ***	-0.080 ***	0.092 ***	0.105 ***
	(1.16)	(0.007)	(0.46)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Gay male couple	-2.2	-0.117 ***	-4.4 ***	-0.100 ***	-0.067 ***	0.065 ***	0.108 ***
	(1.90)	(0.011)	(0.76)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Unmarried different-	-5.3 ***	-0.098 ***	-4.4 ***	-0.079 ***	-0.072 ***	0.077 ***	0.089 ***
sex couple	(0.17)	(0.001)	(0.07)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Observations	1,368,223	1,368,223	1,368,223	1,368,223	1,368,223	1,368,223	1,368,223
R-squared	0.16	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.05
F-test statistic for equality across couple types							
Lesbian vs gay male	21.6 ***	0.23	2.6	0.60	0.40	1.6	0.01
Lesbian vs unmarried	38.7 ***	14.3 ***	9.1 ***	3.7 *	0.57	1.8	1.8
Gay male vs unmarried	2.6	3.1 *	0.00	4.4 **	0.08	0.44	0.9
Households with no children							
Lesbian couple	-10.5 ***	-0.066 ***	-3.3 ***	-0.049 ***	-0.052 ***	0.068 ***	0.055 ***
	(0.67)	(0.004)	(0.25)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Gay male couple	-1.9 ***	-0.050 ***	-2.9 ***	-0.045 ***	-0.048 ***	0.072 ***	0.090 ***
	(0.62)	(0.004)	(0.23)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Unmarried different-	-4.5 ***	-0.053 ***	-1.9 ***	-0.043 ***	-0.038 ***	0.042 ***	0.033 ***
sex couple	(0.17)	(0.001)	(0.06)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
F-test statistic for equality across couple types							
Lesbian vs gay male	92.0 ***	7.8 ***	1.6	0.59	0.23	0.21	13.9 ***
Lesbian vs unmarried	79.4 ***	9.8 ***	28.3 ***	2.6	5.4 **	15.6 ***	9.8 ***
Gay male vs unmarried	16.9 ***	0.37	15.3 ***	0.4	3.3 *	24.2 ***	75.8 ***
Observations	1,072,818	1,072,818	1,072,818	1,072,818	1,072,818	1,072,818	1,072,818
R-squared	0.13	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.13	0.12	0.09

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. *, **, and *** denote coefficients that are statistically significant at the ten-percent, five-percent, and one-percent levels for a two-sided test. All specifications include the same set of control variables as in Tables 3 and 4.
+All same-sex couples are defined as unmarried in the 2000 Census data.