

## **The Rainbow Families Scale (RFS): A Measure of Experiences Among Individuals with Lesbian and Gay Parents**

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According to two decades of research, parental sexual orientation does not affect overall child development. Researchers have not found significant differences between offspring of heterosexual parents and those of lesbian and gay parents in terms of their cognitive, psychological, or emotional adjustment. Still, there are gaps in the literature regarding social experiences specific to offspring of lesbian and gay parents. This study's objective was to construct a measure of those experiences. The Rainbow Families Scale (RFS) was created on the basis of focus group discussions ( $N = 9$  participants), and then piloted ( $N = 24$ ) and retested with a new sample ( $N = 91$ ) to examine its psychometric properties. Exploratory factor analyses uncovered secondary dimensions and Rasch analytic procedures examined item fit, reliability, and category usage. Misfitting items were eliminated where necessary, yielding a psychometrically sound measurement tool to aid in the study of individuals with lesbian and gay parents.

What is it like growing up with lesbian or gay (L/G) parents? In recent decades, the increased visibility of L/G parents has prompted questions about the well-being of their offspring. The scientific literature addressing these inquiries has grown considerably, and the results are clear and cohesive (Patterson, 2006, 2009). To date, researchers have not found significant differences between children of heterosexual parents and those of L/G parents in terms of their cognitive, psychological, social, or emotional adjustment (e.g., Bos, Balen, and Boom, 2004; Brooks and Goldberg, 2001; Chan, Brooks, and Patterson, 1998; Goldberg, 2007; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001; Tasker and Golombok, 1995). Therefore, psychologists have concluded that parental sexual orientation is not an important factor in child development. Rather, the quality of family relationships seems to be the primary predictor of children's overall adjustment (APA, 2004; Wainright and Patterson, 2006, 2008; Wainright, Russell, and Patterson, 2004).

Although many studies have demonstrated that overall child adjustment is not related to parental sexual orientation, several topics still warrant investigation. One such topic pertains to social experiences. Most previous studies of children with L/G parents have examined mental health outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxiety), demonstrating that offspring of L/G parents are comparably adjusted to those of heterosexual parents. However, this focus on overall adjustment has left our knowledge of day-to-day interpersonal experiences among children of L/G parents rather sparse. Some recent evidence suggests that children of L/G parents face stigma related to their parents' sexual orientation (Clarke, Kitzinger, and Potter, 2007; Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, and Balen, 2008), and that sexual stigma is associated with interpersonal difficulties and psychological distress (Meyer, 2003). While such negative social experiences do not seem to adversely affect psychological adjustment for these individuals, they may still be painful, and it would be useful to have data on

where and how often such stressors occur (Patterson, 2006, 2009).

A second gap in research on children of L/G parents involves the positive aspects of having non-heterosexual parents. In a qualitative study of 46 adult offspring of L/G parents, Goldberg (2007) found that participants regarded themselves as especially accepting of diversity and of other minority groups due to their parents' sexual orientations. Participants also reported that they felt particularly close to their families. Since strong family bonds are associated with positive child adjustment (Wainright and Patterson, 2006; Wainright, Russell, and Patterson, 2004), children of L/G parents may benefit from healthy relationships with their families. Despite this possibility, the adaptive benefits related to having L/G parents have not been studied in detail. A psychometrically strong measurement tool could help to provide the data necessary to reach conclusions about the potentially positive aspects of L/G childrearing.

Another gap in previous research is a limited investigation of within-group differences. Lesbian- and gay-parent families are diverse, and children may face varying experiences across different family situations. For example, some L/G parents disclose their sexual orientation in the context of a heterosexual marriage. Children in this type of family may face stress as they simultaneously cope with a parent's sexual minority status and their parents' separation (MacCallum and Golombok, 2004; Perrin, 2002). Alternatively, adoption of children by L/G parents has become increasingly common (Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytteroy, 2002; Brooks and Goldberg, 2001; Connolly, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Perrin, 2002), as has the use of donor insemination, which allows L/G individuals to become parents in the context of a same-sex relationship (Ariel and McPherson, 2000; Brewaeys, Ponjaret, Hall, and Golombok, 1997; Chan et al., 1998). Growing up with L/G parents from birth, individuals born via donor insemination or adopted at a young age may feel more comfortable disclosing their parents' sexual orientation than do individuals whose

parents come out to them later in life. Researchers have yet to make extensive comparisons among offspring in various types of lesbian- and gay-parent households, and it would be helpful to have a measurement tool that can reveal individual differences in experiences within this diverse community.

Finally, although there is a growing body of literature examining children and adolescents with L/G parents, few studies have moved beyond adolescence to consider this population during adulthood (Patterson, 2006, 2009). Since development continues across the lifespan, it is important to determine how these individuals' experiences evolve over time (Tasker and Golombok, 1995). Studying experiences of individuals with L/G parents across the lifespan may provide a better understanding of their psychosocial development and of any long-term impact of parental sexual orientation on children.

In summary, while the literature on children of L/G parents has grown substantially in recent decades, a number of topics warrant empirical attention. In the above review, we highlighted four such gaps: (1) limited knowledge of social experiences among children of L/G parents; (2) little information about positive aspects of L/G parenting; (3) few systematic investigations of within-group differences; and (4) few studies of adults (as opposed to children). Our goal was to create and test a measure to help address these topics. The scale was intended to provide data about a range of experiences, examining possible benefits of having L/G parents as well as potential stressors. The scale was also designed to consider changes in experiences over time, offering information about development across the lifespan. Finally, the scale was intended to apply broadly to offspring of L/G parents, so that it can be used to help explore within-group differences among them. By providing an assessment of social experiences among offspring of L/G parents that addresses these limitations in the current literature, we aimed to enhance understanding of the myriad experiences of individuals reared by L/G parents.

## Method

### *Statistical Methodology*

The scale was created and analyzed with Rasch (1960) measurement procedures, which specify an interval-level scale of measurement for both items and the persons responding to those items (Bond and Fox, 2007). Rasch analyses provide individual fit statistics for persons and items, probabilities of person responses to items given their trait level, and item and person mapping onto the same scale to examine the suitability of the items to a sample (Anderson, 1977; Bond and Fox, 2007; Fischer and Molenaar, 1995). In this way, Rasch measurement provides several advantages over Classical Test Theory (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994):

1. It places item difficulties and person scores on an equal-interval measurement scale, allowing for meaningful comparisons to be made between participants' responses and the items themselves.
2. It holds that item difficulties are independent and reliant upon individual trait levels, allowing researchers to compare participants in terms of their underlying abilities in relation to the difficulty of each item.
3. It assesses irregular item and person response patterns, pinpointing problematic items and thereby providing a useful tool for scale development.

Thus, Rasch analysis offers detailed information about scale functioning, item difficulty, and participant response patterns, providing a detailed understanding of a scale's effectiveness.

Since the scale created in this study has multiple, ordered response options, we chose a rating scale format of the Rasch model: The partial credit model (PCM; Masters, 1982). The PCM allows for between-item variation of category threshold locations. Its logistic form is:

$$P_{ix}(\theta) = \frac{\exp\left[\sum_{j=0}^x (\theta - \delta_{ij})\right]}{\sum_{r=0}^{m_i} \exp\left[\sum_{j=0}^r (\theta - \delta_{ij})\right]}.$$

In this equation,  $\delta_{ij}$  is the threshold difficulty associated with a category score of  $j$  for item  $i$ , where  $r$  and  $x$  are the current threshold,  $m$  is the full set of all categories, and  $\theta$  is the person trait level, such that higher values of  $\delta_{ij}$  indicate threshold locations associated with higher trait levels (Masters, 1982). The PCM uses a logit scale to provide estimates of individual trait levels and item locations, and indicates how likely a participant with a particular trait level is to answer, for example, “Strongly Agree” versus “Somewhat Agree” on a given item (Cowles, 2001).

The PCM offers several useful indicators of scale functioning. First, disordering occurs when threshold difficulties do not progress evenly for a given item, which could indicate that participants had difficulty discriminating between the response options for that item relative to both their responses on other items and to their trait level. If disordering is present, one might consider reducing the number of response options by collapsing adjacent categories or revising item content for future scale use (Bond and Fox, 2007).

Next, point-measure correlations (PTMEA) indicate the association between participants’ scores on each item and their overall trait level. PTMEA values range from  $-1.0$  to  $1.0$  and are expected to be positive, with large values indicating high levels of discrimination (i.e., items that are able to distinguish between participants with low trait levels and those with high trait levels). Items with low ( $<0.15$ ) or negative PTMEA correlations are problematic and should be examined for potential rescoring or elimination to reduce measurement error (Varma, n.d.).

Infit and outfit mean squares (MNSQ) are indicators of item misfit (Bond and Fox, 2007; Wright and Masters, 1982). Infit MNSQ is the mean square residual, weighted by the variance of that residual, and outfit MNSQ is the unweighted

mean square residual (Smith, 1991). For both infit and outfit mean squares, values range from zero to infinity, with  $1.0$  indicating conformity between Rasch expected variance and observed variance (Bond and Fox, 2007). Psychometric researchers have recommended  $0.6 < x < 1.4$  as the acceptable range for MNSQ values when considering rating scale data (Wright and Linacre, 1994). Items that fall outside of this range display misfit, and they may warrant deletion in order to provide more accurate measurement.

It should be noted that up to 5% of the items in a scale might display misfit by chance, and that the Type I error rate is higher for MNSQ values below  $1.0$  than for those above  $1.0$  (Smith, 1991). Therefore, the cause and extent of misfit should be examined before deleting items, especially those with infit or outfit mean squares below  $1.0$ . This may be accomplished by examining ZSTD scores, which are MNSQ values that have been transformed to a  $t$  statistic that is symmetric about  $0.0$  (Wright and Linacre, 1994). ZSTD values range from positive to negative infinity, with values close to  $0.0$  indicating good fit. In general, ZSTD values between  $-2.0$  and  $2.0$  are considered acceptable (de Ayala, 2009).

### Scale Development

**Item construction.** Based upon a review of scientific literature and personal memoirs published by individuals with L/G parents (e.g., Back, 1985; Bozett, 1987; Lewis, 1980; Rafkin, 1990; Saffron, 1996), 54 items were drafted. The items were written to address a broad spectrum of experiences that adult offspring of L/G parents may have encountered throughout their lives, both positive (e.g., “I felt comfortable talking with my friends about my parent’s sexual orientation”) and negative (e.g., “Others teased me because of my parent’s sexuality”).

In order to evaluate the face validity of the items, focus group discussions were held with  $N = 9$  adults reared by L/G parents, who were recruited via snowball sampling. Participants were asked to comment on item clarity and on items’ ability to capture the full range of experiences related to having L/G parents. The meetings were

unstructured, so that participants could comment on the proposed items in their own terms, without leading questions from interviewers. Based on their responses, we eliminated several items and altered the wording on several others, retaining items that the majority of participants felt were consistent with their experiences.

Next, the items were split into two sections. Section One assessed past experiences among adults with L/G parents. Participants rated the extent to which they experienced each statement as a child (0-12 years old), as an adolescent (13-17 years old), and as an adult (18 + years old) on a 5-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). See Example 1.

Section Two assessed participants' current feelings about their parents. Some items in this section differed from those in Section One. Since Section Two pertained to the present moment, participants responded to each item only once. See Example 2.

Thus, the RFS measured social experiences during four developmental periods: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and today. Higher total scores in each developmental period reflected more positive experiences (e.g., family pride) whereas lower scores suggested negative experiences (e.g., stigma, harassment).

*Pilot testing.* To pilot test the scale we traveled to an annual gathering of lesbian- and gay-parent families in Provincetown, MA (the Family Equality Council's "Family Week 2008"). We approached young adult camp counselors who had grown up with L/G parents, explained that we were validating a new measure of experiences

among children of L/G parents, and provided paper copies of the scale. Twenty-four camp counselors agreed to participate. They ranged in age from 18 to 40 years old ( $M = 23$  years), and were mostly White (87%) and female (67%). In addition, 13% were Asian American, 9% were Hispanic / Latino, and 4% were Black. Most participants grew up with lesbian mothers, though 22% were reared by gay fathers. Over half of the participants (59%) had a L/G parent who came out in the context of a heterosexual marriage, 27% were born through donor insemination, and 14% were adopted by L/G parents. They grew up in 15 states and in three countries.

We applied the PCM to these data using WINSTEPS software (Linacre and Wright, 2000) and examined item misfit based upon infit and outfit MNSQ values and category response usage. Fourteen items displayed notable misfit and category disordering, and they were removed from the scale. Although the pilot sample was relatively small, these analyses helped to reduce the RFS and ensure proper item functioning before the scale was distributed to a larger sample.

### *The Rainbow Families Study*

*Recruitment.* We next sought to test the RFS in a larger sample. Individuals aged 18 years and older with at least one lesbian or gay parent were eligible to participate. We recruited participants through a variety of sampling procedures, including: (1) snowball and convenience sampling; (2) advertising at organizations for lesbian- and gay-parent families (e.g., Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere [COLAGE]); (3) entering

#### **Example 1**

##### **Others teased me because of my parent's sexuality**

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
As a Child (0-12)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As an Adolescent (12-13)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As an Adult (18+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### **Example 2**

##### **I feel comfortable talking with my friends about my parent's sexuality**

☐ Strongly Disagree   ☐ Somewhat Disagree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Somewhat Agree   ☐ Strongly Agree



the scale in a pool of studies for introductory psychology students at a large public university; and (4) advertising to online support groups for children with L/G parents.

*Procedure.* We asked individuals who were interested in participating to contact us via email and give a brief description of their family. Once we verified eligibility (i.e., adults over the age of 18 with at least one openly lesbian or gay parent), we gave participants the web link and access code to the study, which was administered online. Participants read instructions, provided consent, and completed the RFS in their own time and without compensation. The University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences approved this research.

*Participants.* The final sample consisted of 91 adult offspring of L/G parents who completed

most or all of the items. About half of them heard about the study by word of mouth, and the other half learned about it through national L/G family organizations, online support groups, or a university participant pool. Participants were predominately White females who ranged from 18-61 years old. They grew up in 22 states and in five countries, and most considered themselves heterosexual. In general, participants and their parents were well educated. Most participants had a parent who disclosed a gay or lesbian identity in the context of a heterosexual marriage, though nearly one fifth were adopted or born to sexual minority parents through donor insemination. Many of them reported learning at a young age that a parent identified as lesbian or gay. Finally, the majority of participants were reared by lesbian mothers as opposed to gay fathers (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Demographic Summary of Rainbow Families Study*

Demographic Variable	Percent	
How did you hear about this study?	53	Friend / Family
	6	University Pool
	24	Family Organization
	7	Online L/G Group
	11	Other / No Response
Sex	75	Female
	22	Male
	3	Other
Race / Ethnicity	91	White
	4	Hispanic / Latino
	2	Black
	2	Other
Highest Level of Education	4	High School
	31	Some College
	2	Associate's Degree
	23	Bachelor's Degree
	15	Some Graduate School
	17	Master's Degree
	8	PhD / MD / PsyD / JD
Family Type	80	Divorce
	14	Donor Insemination
	6	Adoption
Parent Sex	69	Lesbian Mother
	31	Gay Father
Participant Sexual Orientation	60	Heterosexual
	26	Gay / Lesbian / Homosexual / Queer
	14	Bisexual
Demographic Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Participant Age	27.6 years	7.2 years
Participant Age When Parent Disclosed	7.6 years	5.2 years
Number of Siblings	2.3	1.2

*Plan of analysis.* Responses to items that referenced negative experiences (e.g., “Others teased me because of my parent’s sexuality”) were reverse-scored (1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1), such that a high total score on the RFS reflected positive life experiences, whereas a low score indicated negative experiences. After the data were rescored, we examined the dimensionality of the scale using exploratory factor analysis with polychoric correlations and weighted least squares estimation. Polychoric correlations are well-suited to estimating relationships between latent variables from ordinal data, reducing the chance of obtaining statistical artifacts from spurious correlations in self-reports (Lee, Poon, and Bentler, 1995). Model fit was examined on the basis of root mean square residuals (RMSR). In the case of a perfectly fitting model, the RMSR would be 0, with higher values indicating worse fit (Kline, 2005). In general, RMSR values less than 0.1 indicate good fit (Kline, 2005; Shevlin, Miles, and Lewis, 2000).

Using the factors obtained from the exploratory analyses, we applied the PCM to the data using WINSTEPS (Linacre and Wright, 2000) to generate results about item fit, reliability, and category usage. We used  $0.6 < x < 1.4$  as the acceptable range for MNSQ values (Wright and Linacre, 1994). Misfitting items were examined and eliminated where necessary.

## Results

### *Exploratory Factor Analysis*

Exploratory factor analyses using polychoric correlations, weighted least squares estimation, and promax rotation were conducted for each developmental period of the RFS (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, today). We placed most items on the factors onto which they loaded most strongly. For seven items that loaded moderately on two different factors, we put the item with the factor onto which it loaded somewhat less strongly because it fit logically with the other items on that factor.

Final solutions revealed 11 subscales within the RFS, with identical three-factor models for

childhood (RMSR = 0.08), adolescence (RMSR = 0.07), and adulthood (RMSR = 0.07), and a two-factor model for the present day (RMSR = 0.10). For childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, we titled the first factor “Stigma” (15 items loading). Most of the items on this factor were reverse-scored, such that a high total score indicated few memories of interpersonal stress during childhood. Factor two assessed “Openness” (9 items), with high scores indicating a high degree of openness with others about one’s family situation, as well as acceptance of other minority groups. The third factor was titled “Benefits” (9 items), measuring positive outcomes that participants believed they had gained from having L/G parents. The items differed in the present day section, and a two-factor model (RMSR = 0.10) was chosen. The factors were titled “Stigma” (5 items) and “Benefits” (7 items).

Therefore, exploratory factor analysis revealed eleven subscales underlying the RFS: childhood stigma, childhood openness, childhood benefits, adolescent stigma, adolescent openness, adolescent benefits, adulthood stigma, adulthood openness, adulthood benefits, stigma today, and benefits today. All RMSR values were  $\leq 0.10$ , indicating that the factor structure fit the data well for each developmental period. Individual factor loadings are displayed in Appendix A.

### *PCM Analyses*

*Item fit.* To satisfy the unidimensionality requirement of the PCM, each of the 11 factors obtained from the exploratory analysis was analyzed as a separate subscale of the RFS. Item fit was examined based upon the suggestion of 0.6 to 1.4 as the acceptable range of infit and outfit MNSQ values and  $-2.0$  to  $2.0$  as the acceptable range of ZSTD values (Wright and Linacre, 1994). We present these findings in order of developmental period, reporting fit statistics for the childhood subscales, then for adolescent subscales, adulthood subscales, and the present day.

For childhood, the first factor was Stigma. Two items displayed misfit: “I questioned my own sexual orientation” (Infit MNSQ = 1.65, Outfit MNSQ = 2.19) and “I felt pressure NOT

to be lesbian or gay when I was younger" (Outfit MNSQ = 1.56). Three items on the Openness factor displayed misfit: "It was easy to talk to my teachers / administrators about my family," (Infit MNSQ = 1.51, Outfit MNSQ = 2.30), "I didn't know many other families like mine," (Infit MNSQ = 1.64, Outfit MNSQ = 2.00), and "I tried to keep my parent's sexuality a secret to avoid rejection," (Outfit MNSQ = 0.57). All items on the Benefits factor displayed acceptable fit.

For adolescence, the Stigma factor had had two misfitting items: "HIV was a concern for me and my family" (Outfit MNSQ = 4.04) and "I questioned my own sexual orientation" (Infit MNSQ = 1.91, Outfit MNSQ = 2.72). Three items on the Openness factor showed misfit: "It was easy to talk to my teachers / administrators about my family" (Outfit MNSQ = 1.82), "I didn't know many other families like mine" (Infit MNSQ = 1.63, Outfit MNSQ = 1.75), and "I hid evidence of my parent's sexual orientation whenever I knew that my friends were coming over to my home," (Outfit MNSQ = 0.55). All items on the Benefits factor had acceptable fit.

For adulthood, two Stigma items displayed notable misfit: "HIV was a concern for me and my family" (Infit MNSQ = 1.44, Outfit MNSQ = 3.96) and "I questioned my own sexual orientation" (Infit MNSQ = 1.68, Outfit MNSQ = 2.03). For the Openness factor, one item was misfitting: "I didn't know many other families like mine" (Infit MNSQ = 1.42, Outfit MNSQ = 2.13). There were two misfitting items on the Benefits factor: "I was accepting of sexual minorities" (Outfit MNSQ = 0.29) and "My parent's sexuality embarrassed me" (Outfit MNSQ = 0.45).

Finally, on the present day subscale, two of the Stigma items displayed misfit: "My parent's sexuality embarrasses me" (Outfit MNSQ = 1.93) and "I continue to feel nervous that I may face harassment due to my parent's sexuality" (Outfit MNSQ = 1.60). The Benefits subscale did not initially converge in our WINSTEPS analysis, so we deleted one highly misfitting item – "HIV is a concern for me and my family" (Outfit MNSQ = 1.86). After this deletion, the scale converged, and there was one additional item that showed misfit:

"My family continues to face verbal and physical threats because of my parent's sexuality" (Infit MNSQ = 1.60, Outfit MNSQ = 2.98).

Thus, participants responded to most of the items in the RFS according to Rasch measurement expectations, but there were several instances of misfit. It should be noted that up to 5% of the items in a scale might display misfit by chance (Smith, 1991). Therefore, we performed additional analyses to diagnose the cause of the misfit before deleting items. In this case, we were interested in determining if the items functioned poorly for the majority of participants, or whether several particularly unexpected responses caused misfit. We sequentially dropped up to six of the most unexpected responses from each misfitting item, and then determined whether the misfit values fell within the 0.6 – 1.4 range of acceptable fit. After dropping the most unexpected responses, fit was corrected for all but six items. In instances where this process corrected misfit, we concluded that the items performed well for the majority of participants in the sample, and we retained the items for use by future researchers. The following items did not show improved fit, and they were removed from the RFS to ensure stronger measurement: "I questioned my own sexual orientation," "I hid evidence of my parent's sexual orientation whenever I knew that my friends were coming over to my home," "I was accepting of sexual minorities," "My parent's sexuality embarrassed me," "I tried to keep my parent's sexuality a secret to avoid rejection," and "My family continues to face verbal and physical threats because of my parent's sexuality."

For most of the items that we retained, ZSTD values fell within the acceptable range of –2.0 to 2.0. However, two items had slightly low infit values: "As an adolescent, I felt nervous that I may face harassment due to my parent's sexuality" (ZSTD = –2.2) and "As an adult, I felt nervous that I may face harassment due to my parent's sexuality." (ZSTD = –2.4). Since we were theoretically interested in these items, and since they were relatively close to the acceptable range of fit, we retained them for future use and psychometric testing. See Appendix B for the revised RFS.



After deleting misfitting items, point-measure correlations were relatively high, with no values below 0.15 and median values ranging from 0.51 to 0.69 for each subscale, indicating strong item discrimination (Varma, n.d.). Rasch item separation reliability ( $M = 0.91$ ) was also high across subscales, and all items showed acceptable MNSQ values. Median PTMEA correlations and interquartile ranges, infit and outfit standard deviations, and Rasch item separation reliability for each subscale are presented in Tables 2-5.<sup>1</sup>

1 The mean infit / outfit MNSQ values approach 1.0 in a WINSTEPS analysis, and the mean of PTMEA correlations may be skewed by several particularly high or low values. Therefore, we reported standard deviations, medians, and inter-quartile ranges to provide a better indication of central tendency in our PCM results

*Category usage.* We examined category response curves (CRCs) to see how well participants utilized the rating scale for each item in the RFS. Several example curves are shown in Figure 1. The top figures (A and B) illustrate fairly evenly spaced categories and a distinct peak for each curve, indicating that for a given response category, there exists a trait level range in which it is the most likely response. The bottom two examples (C and D) have middle categories that are not used well, according to the trait levels of the persons who were expected to respond in them.

CRC results from the current sample indicated that some items in the RFS might function better with fewer categories: 72 of the original items indicated that category reduction to two or three categories might improve the items, while

Table 2

*Partial Credit Model Summary for the Childhood Subscale of the RFS*

Factor	MdnPTMEA[IQR]	Infit MNSQ SD	Outfit MNSQ SD	Item Reliability
Stigma	[0.60, 0.10]	0.14	0.18	0.94
Openness	[0.66, 0.04]	0.10	0.13	0.96
Benefits	[0.51, 0.16]	0.15	0.19	0.74

Table 3

*Partial Credit Model Summary for the Adolescence Subscale of the RFS*

Factor	MdnPTMEA[IQR]	Infit MNSQ SD	Outfit MNSQ SD	Item Reliability
Stigma	[0.62, 0.14]	0.20	0.21	0.97
Openness	[0.69, 0.07]	0.11	0.11	0.97
Benefits	[0.51, 0.15]	0.10	0.18	0.85

Table 4

*Partial Credit Model Summary for the Adulthood Subscale of the RFS*

Factor	MdnPTMEA[IQR]	Infit MNSQ SD	Outfit MNSQ SD	Item Reliability
Stigma	[0.51, 0.14]	0.18	0.20	0.96
Openness	[0.62, 0.11]	0.18	0.21	0.96
Benefits	[0.50, 0.07]	0.07	0.19	0.83

Table 5

*Partial Credit Model Summary for the Present Day Subscale of the RFS*

Factor	MdnPTMEA[IQR]	Infit MNSQ SD	Outfit MNSQ SD	Item Reliability
Stigma	[0.65, 0.14]	0.22	0.19	0.93
Benefits	[0.57, 0.18]	0.15	0.24	0.95

41 items showed that participants used four or five categories relatively evenly. However, it is difficult to make inferences about category usage when response options have fewer than 10 observations per category, like some of ours did, so we are hesitant to make broad reductions in the RFS response options (Bond and Fox, 2007). Future testing is required before reducing the rating scale of the RFS.

### *Subscale Correlations*

Theta scores provide a more accurate mode of latent trait measurement than raw data scores, as they convert all responses to an equal-interval measurement scale ranging from  $-6.0$  to  $6.0$  (Armor, 1974). We used theta scores to confirm the relatedness of the factors in childhood, ado-

lescence, and adulthood. The present day subscale was excluded from this analysis because it contained different items than the other subscales.

Results indicated that the Stigma, Benefits, and Openness factors were highly associated across developmental periods. For example, participants' reports of stigma were statistically significantly correlated in childhood and adolescence ( $r = 0.76, p < 0.01$ ), in adolescence and adulthood ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ), and in childhood and adulthood ( $r = 0.57, p < 0.01$ ). These results indicate that participants' reports were closely related over time, justifying our use of the same items and same factor structure across three different developmental periods for offspring of L/G parents. See Table 6 for theta correlation values.

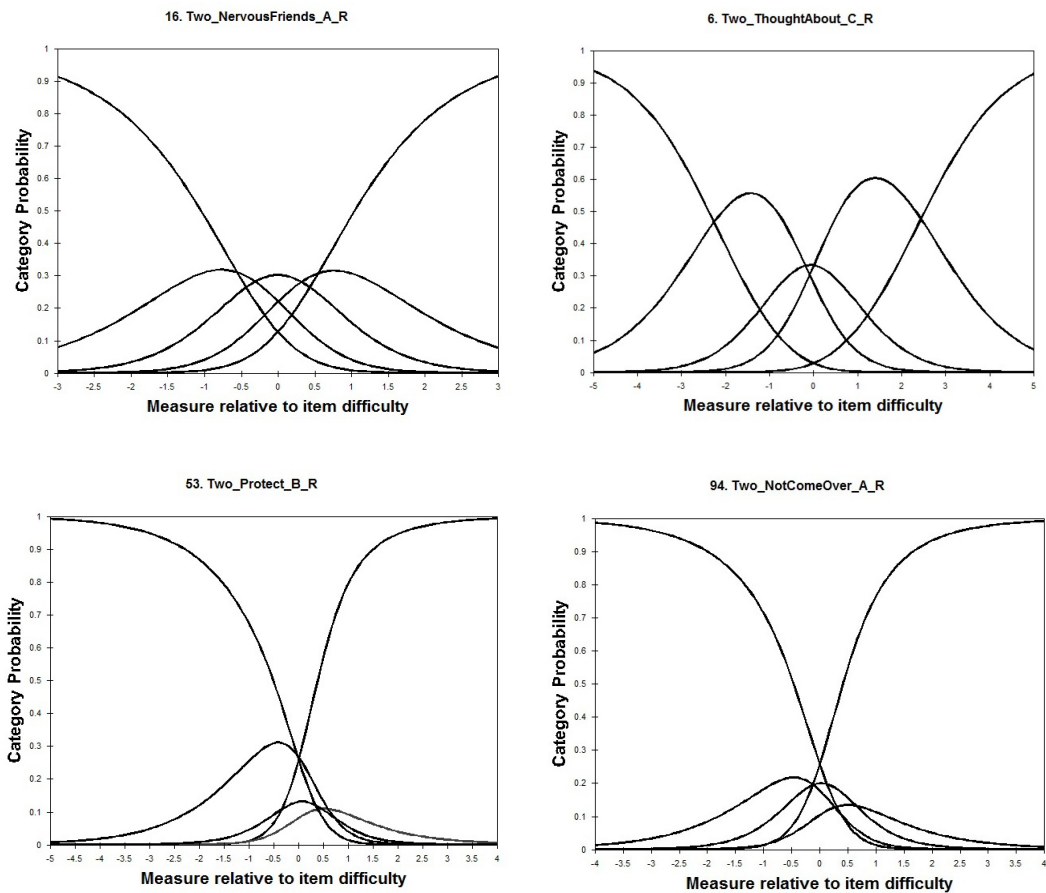


Figure 1. Example Category Response Curves (CRCs) for RFS items.

Table 6

*Theta Correlations for RFS Factors over Time*

Factor	Developmental Periods	Pearson <i>r</i>
Stigma	Childhood / Adolescence	0.76*
	Adolescence / Adulthood	0.78*
	Childhood / Adulthood	0.57*
Benefits	Childhood / Adolescence	0.81*
	Adolescence / Adulthood	0.74*
	Childhood / Adulthood	0.53*
Openness	Childhood / Adolescence	0.66*
	Adolescence / Adulthood	0.49*
	Childhood / Adulthood	0.28*

\**p* < 0.01, two-tailed test**Discussion**

The goal of this study was to create a psychometrically strong scale that would be useful in exploring experiences among adult offspring of L/G parents. Based upon a review of the literature, focus group discussions, and pilot testing, we constructed a measure that allows researchers to examine social experiences among offspring of gay fathers as well as lesbian mothers, those from different geographic locations, and those from diverse kinds of lesbian- and gay-parent families. The items were written to address both positive and negative experiences, shedding light on potential benefits as well as stressors for offspring of L/G parents. They also capture participants' retrospective memories of experiences across the lifespan. In these ways, the Rainbow Families Scale addresses several gaps in the current literature and may help to enhance knowledge of experiences among individuals with L/G parents.

Exploratory factor analyses revealed 11 subscales in the RFS, measuring recalled stigma, openness with other people, and benefits related to having L/G parents. RMSR values indicated strong fit for the exploratory models. Future researchers using the RFS may wish to consider these factors as individual subscales, computing scores on each subscale and comparing participants' scores to determine whether or how the major facets of their experiences changed over time.

Partial credit model statistics showed that most of the items functioned according to Rasch

expectations. Items displaying misfit were examined, and those that displayed notable misfit were eliminated, yielding a psychometrically sound scale for the quantitative measurement of social experiences among individuals with L/G parents.

*Strengths and Limitations*

The current study had several distinctive strengths. First, because there are few convenient methods for locating children reared by L/G parents, studies in this field tend to have small samples of specialized populations (e.g., adoptive children of gay fathers). In comparison to other work in this area, our sample was relatively large and diverse, bolstering the strength and generalizability of the current results. Also, the RFS addresses several gaps in the literature. For example, by examining retrospective reports of experiences among individuals with L/G parents across the lifespan, the RFS provides information about changes in their experiences that have not been studied in detail by other investigators. The scale was also written to address positive and negative reports among offspring of L/G parents, broadening our understanding of various experiences within this community. Finally, the RFS was developed using Rasch measurement techniques across multiple samples. This is a powerful method of test construction, which provides information about the fit of individual items, dimensionality of a scale, and category usage across items. These analyses resulted in a psychometrically sound measurement tool that can be used in future research to enhance quantitative findings in this area.

Our study also had limitations. Despite having a large sample relative to previous studies of individuals with L/G parents, an even larger sample would be desirable. Researchers seeking to uncover small effects of L/G parenting with the RFS may need to obtain larger samples. Further, although the current sample was relatively diverse, some demographics were over-represented, especially female, White, North American, and well educated individuals. Further testing may be necessary to evaluate the scale's measurement properties among more diverse samples.

Moreover, because these data relied on reports given over the Internet, we could not monitor participants while they completed the survey. Since participants responded to an invitation and since they were not compensated for completing the study, however, insincere responses were not likely. Finally, since the RFS relies on retrospective self-reports of experiences during earlier developmental periods, it is possible that current psychological states or poor memory might have distorted results. However, recent studies have indicated that retrospective reports are reliable and that memory distortion is not so great that it invalidates significant findings (Rieger et al., 2008; Yancura, 2009). While retrospective reporting may have influenced RFS responses to some degree, it is not likely to have had a major impact on our findings.

#### *Future Directions*

With regards to the RFS, there are several directions for future study. First, although the majority of our participants reported living in the United States, there are many lesbian- and gay-parent families around the world. It might prove interesting to compare the experiences of individuals with L/G parents who live in different cultures. Before the RFS is used in cross-cultural studies, however, additional psychometric testing is necessary to confirm strong measurement properties in diverse ethnographic groups.

Category Response Curves suggested that some items in the RFS are measured more effectively with a three-point scale than with a five-point scale. However, our sample was not large enough to make strong inferences about rating scale reduction. Future testing with larger samples could help to guide decisions about category reduction.

Finally, although we intended the RFS to measure experiences using retrospective reports, it might prove interesting to utilize the scale in longitudinal studies of children being reared by L/G parents. That way, researchers could obtain rich information about development as it occurs, eliminating possible retrospective bias and providing more acute measurement of changes

in individuals' experiences over time. However, psychometric testing should be employed to ensure proper measurement among children and adolescents before conducting such longitudinal studies, as the current sample was comprised solely of adult participants.

#### **Conclusion**

For two decades, researchers have concluded that offspring of L/G parents are comparable to those of heterosexual parents in terms of overall well-being. Still, it is possible that individuals with L/G parents have some unique social experiences related to parental sexual orientation, which may be problematic (e.g., stigma) or adaptive (e.g., close family bonds), and which may vary over time. In addition, individual differences surely exist among diverse individuals with lesbian and gay parents. The RFS will be useful in future studies of these topics, providing psychometrically strong results that will contribute to a deep, full, and adequate knowledge of the impact of parental sexual orientation on children.

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## Appendix A

### Exploratory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings

*Factor Loadings for the Childhood Subscale of the RFS.*

Item	STIGMA	OPENNESS	BENEFITS
Teachers regarded me differently_R	<b>0.77</b>	-0.11	-0.10
Thought about family's queerness_R	<b>0.50</b>	0.14	0.05
Others teased me_R	<b>0.70</b>	0.00	-0.09
Easy to talk about parent	0.32	<b>0.25*</b>	-0.01
Difficulty telling romantic partners_R	0.12	<b>0.61</b>	0.00
Nervous bringing new friends over_R	0.16	<b>0.67</b>	0.06
Closer to my parents	0.02	-0.03	<b>0.51</b>
Hid evidence of L/G parent_R	-0.04	<b>0.94</b>	-0.04
Lifelong friends	0.15	-0.26	<b>0.52</b>
No one to talk to_R	-0.03	<b>0.58</b>	0.24
Nervous about harassment_R	<b>0.34*</b>	0.67	-0.10
Did not have to follow norms	0.19	-0.03	<b>0.34</b>
Kept parent's sexuality secret_R	-0.12	<b>1.03</b>	-0.04
Parent's sexuality embarrassed_R	0.02	<b>0.80</b>	0.16
Comfort in L/G community	-0.28	0.19	<b>0.71</b>
Family faced threats_R	<b>0.93</b>	-0.14	0.03
Uncomfortable talking to parents_R	0.07	<b>0.51</b>	0.18
Had to protect my family_R	<b>0.39*</b>	0.55	-0.21
Others judged my family_R	<b>0.85</b>	0.08	-0.22
Had to be on best behavior_R	<b>0.71</b>	-0.05	0.08
Did not know families like mine_R	-0.14	<b>0.44</b>	0.18
Sensitive to other minorities	-0.15	-0.24	<b>0.50</b>
Stressful family gatherings_R	<b>0.51</b>	0.30	-0.03
Questioned my sexuality_R	<b>0.48</b>	-0.22	0.17
Participated L/G community	-0.05	0.01	<b>0.73</b>
Feel good about how I was raised	0.32	0.06	<b>0.61</b>
Accepting of sexual minorities	-0.18	0.10	<b>0.79</b>
Difficult childhood_R	<b>0.47</b>	0.33	0.15
Missed not having nuclear family_R	0.07	0.30	<b>0.36</b>
HIV concerns_R	<b>0.52</b>	-0.07	0.18
Struggles_R	<b>0.57</b>	0.36	0.08
Friends not allowed to visit_R	<b>0.74</b>	0.06	-0.20
Pressure not to be L/G_R	<b>0.27</b>	0.36	0.14

*Note:* RMSR = 0.08. Reverse-scored items are denoted by “\_R.” Dominant factor loadings are shown in bold. \* indicates items placed on a secondary factor for the sake of theory.

*(Appendix A continues on the next page.)*

**Appendix A** (continues from the previous page)  
**Exploratory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings**

*Factor Loadings for the Adolescent Subscale of the RFS.*

Item	STIGMA	OPENNESS	BENEFITS
Teachers regarded me differently_R	<b>0.64</b>	0.14	-0.07
Thought about family's queerness_R	<b>0.44</b>	0.16	0.05
Others teased me_R	<b>0.64</b>	0.26	-0.10
Easy to talk about parent	0.02	<b>0.47</b>	0.19
Difficulty telling romantic partners_R	-0.01	<b>0.71</b>	0.11
Nervous bringing new friends over_R	0.11	<b>0.82</b>	-0.04
Closer to my parents	0.07	-0.02	<b>0.38</b>
Hid evidence of L/G parent_R	0.04	<b>0.94</b>	-0.07
Lifelong friends	0.03	-0.36	<b>0.61</b>
No one to talk to_R	0.07	<b>0.52</b>	0.25
Nervous about harassment_R	<b>0.48*</b>	0.66	-0.21
Did not have to follow norms	0.16	-0.08	<b>0.34</b>
Kept parent's sexuality secret_R	0.07	<b>0.91</b>	-0.04
Parent's sexuality embarrassed_R	0.06	<b>0.76</b>	0.20
Comfort in L/G community	-0.26	0.24	<b>0.67</b>
Family faced threats_R	<b>0.86</b>	0.08	-0.07
Uncomfortable talking to parents_R	0.15	<b>0.40</b>	0.21
Had to protect my family_R	<b>0.58</b>	0.34	-0.21
Others judged my family_R	<b>0.86</b>	0.02	-0.05
Had to be on best behavior_R	<b>0.62</b>	-0.02	0.19
Did not know families like mine_R	-0.15	<b>0.43</b>	0.29
Sensitive to other minorities	-0.24	-0.29	<b>0.61</b>
Stressful family gatherings_R	<b>0.53</b>	0.18	0.08
Questioned my sexuality_R	<b>0.36</b>	-0.27	0.18
Participated L/G community	-0.13	0.13	<b>0.54</b>
Feel good about how I was raised	0.23	0.18	<b>0.54</b>
Accepting of sexual minorities	0.08	0.21	<b>0.74</b>
Difficult childhood_R	<b>0.49</b>	0.34	0.22
Missed not having nuclear family_R	0.17	0.24	<b>0.42</b>
HIV concerns_R	<b>0.59</b>	-0.26	0.05
Struggles_R	<b>0.46</b>	0.41	0.10
Friends not allowed to visit_R	<b>0.62</b>	0.06	-0.11
Pressure not to be L/G_R	<b>0.47</b>	0.02	0.21

*Note:* RMSR = 0.07. Reverse-scored items are denoted by “\_R.” Dominant factor loadings are shown in bold. \* indicates items placed on a secondary factor for the sake of theory.

**Appendix A** (continues from the previous page)  
**Exploratory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings**

*Factor Loadings for the Adulthood Subscale of the RFS.*

Item	STIGMA	OPENNESS	BENEFITS
Teachers regarded me differently_R	<b>0.55</b>	0.15	-0.08
Thought about family's queerness_R	<b>0.49</b>	0.06	-0.11
Others teased me_R	<b>0.62</b>	0.13	0.01
Easy to talk about parent	-0.02	<b>0.57</b>	-0.05
Difficulty telling romantic partners_R	-0.02	<b>0.79</b>	0.08
Nervous bringing new friends over_R	0.30	<b>0.67</b>	-0.07
Closer to my parents	-0.14	0.17	<b>0.47</b>
Hid evidence of L/G parent_R	0.25	<b>0.81</b>	-0.03
Lifelong friends	0.07	-0.12	<b>0.58</b>
No one to talk to_R	0.14	<b>0.54</b>	0.14
Nervous about harassment_R	<b>0.68</b>	0.37	-0.09
Did not have to follow norms	0.02	0.02	<b>0.48</b>
Kept parent's sexuality secret_R	0.19	<b>0.71</b>	0.20
Parent's sexuality embarrassed_R	0.06	<b>0.80</b>	0.19
Comfort in L/G community	-0.12	0.40	<b>0.59</b>
Family faced threats_R	<b>0.82</b>	-0.20	0.00
Uncomfortable talking to parents_R	0.25	<b>0.46</b>	0.16
Had to protect my family_R	<b>0.65</b>	0.21	-0.33
Others judged my family_R	<b>0.85</b>	-0.02	0.03
Had to be on best behavior_R	<b>0.73</b>	0.08	0.07
Did not know families like mine_R	-0.20	<b>0.57</b>	0.07
Sensitive to other minorities	-0.32	-0.02	<b>0.74</b>
Stressful family gatherings_R	<b>0.59</b>	0.16	0.09
Questioned my sexuality_R	<b>0.37</b>	-0.28	0.29
Participated L/G community	0.06	0.19	<b>0.38</b>
Feel good about how I was raised	0.15	0.20	<b>0.51</b>
Accepting of sexual minorities	0.03	0.36	<b>0.95</b>
Difficult childhood_R	<b>0.44</b>	0.38	0.16
Missed not having nuclear family_R	0.21	0.43	<b>0.36*</b>
HIV concerns_R	<b>0.36</b>	-0.09	0.12
Struggles_R	<b>0.50</b>	0.38	0.13
Friends not allowed to visit_R	<b>0.60</b>	0.15	-0.03
Pressure not to be L/G_R	<b>0.41*</b>	0.24	0.55

Note. RMSR = 0.07. Reverse-scored items are denoted by “\_R.” Dominant factor loadings are shown in bold. \* indicates items placed on a secondary factor for the sake of theory.

**Appendix A** (continues from the previous page)  
**Exploratory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings**

*Factor Loadings for the Present Day Subscale of the RFS*

Item	STIGMA	BENEFITS
Nervous about harassment_R	<b>0.82</b>	-0.02
Fortunate to be raised outside norm	0.08	<b>0.67</b>
Worry about telling romantic partners_R	<b>0.75</b>	0.20
Worry parent faces harassment_R	<b>0.63</b>	-0.10
Comfortable in L/G community	0.27	<b>0.67</b>
Anxious when introducing friends_R	<b>0.83</b>	0.13
Embarrassed_R	<b>0.66</b>	0.43
Family faces threats_R	-0.35	<b>0.27*</b>
HIV concerns_R	-0.07	<b>0.32</b>
Accepting of L/G people	0.59	<b>0.97</b>
Understand romance	-0.05	<b>0.79</b>
Open and accepting of all diversity	0.10	<b>0.71</b>
Comfortable talking to friends	<b>0.56</b>	0.51
Family is particularly close	-0.16	<b>0.74</b>

Note. RMSR = 0.10. Reverse-scored items are denoted by “\_R.” Dominant factor loadings are shown in bold.



## Appendix B

### The Rainbow Families Scale (RFS) with Misfitting Items Removed

#### Instructions:

This survey assesses lifetime experiences among individuals who grew up with lesbian or gay parents. While we recognize that there are many different family types, including those headed by bisexual and transgender parents, the survey is designed only to capture experiences of adults with lesbian and gay parents. Also, we often refer to parents in the singular. We realize that you may have grown up with more than one lesbian or gay parent, but we refer to them in the singular for the sake of consistency.

We understand that your experiences and ideas concerning the sexual orientation of your parents may have changed over time. Therefore, in Section One you will be asked to respond to statements about experiences and emotions you might have felt at three separate times: During childhood (0-12 years), during adolescence (13-17 years), and during adulthood (18+ years). Section Two deals with your current feelings, thoughts, and emotions concerning your parents. You will be asked to respond to each statement in Section Two only once.

The items in this survey might evoke some difficult memories. While it may seem frustrating to reflect upon negative experiences, please answer each question as honestly as possible. There will be space at the end to comment on any experiences that you feel are not adequately assessed in these questions.

#### Section One

The following questions refer to your experiences growing up with a lesbian or gay parent. Please read each statement and decide how strongly you agree with it in consideration of your daily experiences growing up with a lesbian or gay parent.

1. My teachers regarded me differently than other students because of my parent's sexuality.  

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	-----	STRONGLY AGREE
As a Child (0-12)	1	2	3
As an Adolescent (13-17)	1	2	3
As an Adult (18+)	1	2	3
2. I thought about my family's queerness.
3. Others teased me because of my parent's sexuality.
4. It was easy to talk to my teachers / administrators about my family.
5. I had difficulty telling my romantic partners and significant others about my parent's sexuality.
6. Bringing new friends home to meet my family for the first time made me nervous.
7. I was closer to my parents than my friends were with their heterosexual parents.
8. My childhood friends who knew about my parent's sexuality have proven to be lifelong friends.
9. When I was growing up, I had no one to talk to about my feelings concerning my parents.
10. When I was growing up, I felt nervous that I may face harassment due to my parent's sexuality.
11. I felt like I did not have to fit into gender norms.
12. When I was growing up, I felt comfortable in the gay community.
13. My family faced verbal and / or physical threats because of my parent's sexuality.

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*(Appendix B continues on the next page.)*

*(Appendix B continues from the previous page.)*

14. I felt uncomfortable talking to my parents about my concerns regarding gay / lesbian harassment.
15. When I was growing up, I felt like I had to protect my family with regards to issues about sexual orientation.
16. People judged my family because of my parent's sexuality.
17. I felt like I had to be on my best behavior because my parent's sexuality placed us under constant scrutiny.
18. I didn't know many other families with gay or lesbian parents.
19. Because of my parent's sexuality, I was sensitive to the difficulties faced by other minorities.
20. Extended family gatherings (holidays, weddings, etc.) were stressful because certain relatives do not / did not accept my parent's sexuality.
21. My parents participated in the queer community.
22. When I look back on my childhood, I feel good about how I was brought up.
23. My childhood was more difficult than most because of my parent's sexual orientation.
24. I missed not having one mom and one dad.
25. HIV was a concern for me and my family.
26. My parent's sexuality caused struggles for me.
27. I had friends whose parents did not allow them to come over to my house because of my parent's sexuality.
28. I felt pressure NOT to be lesbian or gay when I was younger.

## Section Two

The following questions refer to your current feelings about and experiences with your family. Please read each statement below and decide how strongly you agree with it in consideration of your current feelings about your family.

1. I continue to feel nervous that I may face harassment due to my parent's sexuality.  
 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5  
 [Strongly [Somewhat [Neutral] [Somewhat [Strongly  
 Disagree] Disagree] Agree] Agree]
2. I feel fortunate to have been raised outside of the "norm."
3. I worry about telling romantic partners and significant others about my parent's sexuality.
4. I worry that my parents face harassment and discrimination and do not tell me.
5. Today, I feel comfortable and at home in the gay community.
6. I am anxious when introducing friends to my gay / lesbian parents for the first time.
7. My parent's sexuality embarrasses me.
8. Because of my family, I have grown to understand romantic relationships better than most people.
9. Because of my family, I am open and accepting of all types of diversity.
10. I feel comfortable talking with my friends about my parent's sexuality.
11. Due to the stress of living in a minority family, I feel like my family has come to be particularly close.