Parent-Adult Child Estrangement in the United States by Gender, Race/ethnicity, and Sexuality

Rin Reczek,
Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University

Lawrence Stacey,
Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University

Mieke Beth Thomeer
Department of Sociology, The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Abstract

Objective: To provide nationally-representative estimates of parent-adult child estrangement.

Background: Population-level research is needed on parent-adult child estrangement to understand the full range of family dynamics in the U.S.

Method: We estimate logistic regression models using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 Child and Young Adult supplement to determine estimates of estrangement (and subsequent unestrangement) from mothers (N=8,495) and fathers (N=8,119) by children's gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. We then estimate hazards of first estrangement from mothers (N = 7,919) and fathers (N = 6,410), adjusting for adult child's and parents' social and economic characteristics.

Results: Six percent of respondents report a period of estrangement from mothers, with an average age of first maternal estrangement of 26 years old; 26 percent of respondents report estrangement from fathers, with an average age of first paternal estrangement of 23 years old. Results further show heterogeneity by gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality; for example, daughters are less likely to be estranged from their mothers than are sons, Black adult children are less likely than White adult children to be estranged from their mothers but more likely to be estranged from fathers, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual adult children are more likely than heterosexuals to be estranged from fathers. The majority of estranged adult children become unestranged from mothers (81%) and fathers (69%) in subsequent waves.

Conclusion: This study provides compelling new evidence on an overlooked aspect of intergenerational relationships, concluding with insight into the structural forces that unequally contribute to estrangement patterns.

Keywords

Conflict; Family Stress; Intergenerational relationships; LGBTQ; Parent-Child Relationships; Race

Reczek.2@osu.edu .

Parent-child relationships are often assumed to be of high quality and persistent (Blake, 2017; Swartz, 2009), with family theorists proposing that intergenerational relationships are "virtually indissoluble" (Pillemer et al., 2007, p. 786) due to strong socio-cultural norms and economic interdependence (Perales & Huang, 2020; Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). Yet, recent evidence shows that some parents and adult children *do* dissolve their relationships and become estranged, a concept defined as either no contact at all or as limited contact with poor relationship quality (for a review, see Blake, 2017; Scharp, 2019). A growing scientific consensus is building—but has yet to be reached—regarding the details of parent-adult child estrangement in the U.S. at the population level (Blake, 2017; Conti & Ryan, 2013; Pillemer, 2020).

Recent research provides important insight into intergenerational estrangement, but this body of work is limited in several ways. First, studies often rely on retrospective reporting of estrangement or have only one wave of quantitative or qualitative data and are thus unable to provide nationally representative estimates of estrangement prevalence and timing, as well as degree of subsequent "unestrangement" (for a review, see Blake, 2017). Second, past work focuses on narrow life course periods (e.g., adolescence, early adulthood, later life), preventing a complete view of estrangement timing and persistence across the life course (Agllias, 2013, 2018; Hartnett et al., 2018). Finally, while research has begun to detail the gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality dynamics of estrangement (e.g., Pillemer, 2020), how estrangement varies across demographic characteristics has not been fully detailed.

We address each of these limitations with the aim to provide family scholars a population-level profile of which parent-adult child ties are most at risk for estrangement. We use dyadic data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 and accompanying Child and Young Adult supplement to determine estimates of estrangement from mothers and fathers among children born to a nationally representative cohort of midlife women in the U.S. (born between 1957–64). We leverage these linked longitudinal panel data to examine adult children's average age of first estrangement, whether paternal and maternal estrangement varies across children's gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, and whether children reconcile their relationships with parents in subsequent waves. In doing so, this paper provides new evidence on the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics associated with the dissolution (and resolution) of the parent-adult child relationship, and further theorizes the structural and sociocultural factors that may shape patterns of parent-adult child estrangement in the United States and its consequences.

BACKGROUND

The intergenerational solidarity-conflict paradigm, which theorizes the full range of parent-child tie dynamics, argues that the parent-adult child tie is highly solidarious, typified by high degrees of contact (e.g., most report twice a week/100 days a year of contact, Fingerman, Huo, & Birditt, 2020a), close residential proximity (Choi, Schoeni, Wiemers, Hotz, & Seltzer, 2020), and high levels of emotional closeness (Levitt, Silver, & Santos, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007). This paradigm further suggests that most parent-adult child relationships also have dimensions of conflict (Fingerman, et al., 2020a), which are fueled by disagreements on a variety of topics including finances, politics, and life events. These

conflicts can lead to a reduction in closeness and contact – so much so that the parent-child tie can become estranged (Blake, 2017). Further, a life course framework (Bucx et al. 2008; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003) calls attention to how the dynamics of the parent-adult child tie likely vary significantly by the age of the child, and further suggest that children and adults may move in and out of estrangement. Using intergenerational solidarity-conflict and life course frameworks, we discuss what is known about parent-adult child estrangement prevalence and timing, followed by a discussion of how estrangement patterns may differ by parental gender, and the gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality of the child. Finally, we discuss what is known about patterns of unestrangement (i.e., re-entering the relationship after a period of estrangement).

Estrangement Prevalence, Timing, and Life Course Factors

Prevalence.—A growing and vibrant body of work has begun to explore the prevalence of estrangement in the parent-adult child relationship. In this research, there are differences in prevalence estimates due a lack of longitudinal population-based data and inconsistencies in the measurement of estrangement. Two key studies focus on measures of *contact* to identify estrangement. Conti (2015) surveyed 345 primarily White U.S. university students to measure communication between family members for more than 30 days; this study found that 8% of students had no contact with their fathers and 1% with their mothers (also see Conti & Ryan 2013). Hartnett and colleagues (2018) used a national sample of young to mid adults aged 25–32 to demonstrate that 20% of this age group lacked contact with a father figure (due to estrangement, death, divorce, incarceration, and/or the respondent never had or does not see one as a father figure), while 6.5% lacked contact with a mother figure, primarily due to maternal death. While not technically measuring estrangement, which excludes parental death and never having a parent figure, this study provides important information regarding low intergenerational solidarity among this specific age group. Other studies use a "direct" measure of estrangement by relying on self-reports of estrangement from family members. In a web-based retrospective survey of 1,340 Americans, Pillemer (2020) estimated that of 10% of Americans identified themselves as estranged from a parent or child at the time of the survey. Although important, the data are retrospective and cross-sectional, and direct measures may underestimate the prevalence of estrangement due to social desirability bias given that estrangement is generally perceived negatively (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022).

Still others—as we do—advocate for a more inclusive measure of estrangement, which accounts for both contact *and* closeness; this is because some family members may not have a choice but to have contact due to geographic immobility and community co-integration. For example, Gilligan and colleagues (2015) used a representative sample of the Boston Metropolitan area in their study of 556 mother-child ties to look at estrangement prevalence and showed that, from the perspective of the later-life (ages 65–75) mother, 11.5% of mother-child ties were estranged, measured as (1) having no contact in the previous year *or* (2) less than monthly contact *and* scoring low on relationship quality. In one of the first national population-based studies of estrangement in Germany, Becker & Hank (2022) used a similar measure as Gilligan and colleagues and analyzed ten waves of longitudinal panel data with adult children (ages 18–48) from the German Family Panel; they found 20% of

German adult children reported any period of estrangement from fathers and 9% reported any period of estrangement from mothers over the period of a decade.

Timing.—Life course theory (Elder et al., 2003) points to how different life course moments may shape the timing of estrangement from parents (Bucx, Van Wel, Knijn, & Hagendoorn 2008; Scharp & Hall, 2019). In line with life course theory, the transition to young adulthood is among the most volatile periods in the parent-child tie, with parent-adult child relationships seeing a reduction in both contact (Fang, Galambos, and Johnson 2021; Ward, Deane, and Spitze 2014) and closeness (Parra et al., 2015; Whiteman et al., 2011). However, few studies test whether there are high rates of estrangement during this transitional period. To parse age at first estrangement, Kim (2006) used three waves of longitudinal panel data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (AddHealth) data, containing 11,321 emerging adults (ages 12–18 at Wave I and ages 19–25 at Wave III). Kim (2006) found that younger adult children (e.g., those in emerging adulthood, 18–21) in the sample were more likely to be estranged than slightly older adult children (e.g., young adults ages 21–25). However, this study is limited in that it does not examine estrangement beyond age 25. The study of estrangement in Germany by Becker & Hank (2022) showed that adult child respondents had an average estrangement age of 34 years old. Few U.S. studies include the entire young and mid-adult period or test when age at first estrangement occurs, and the present study fills this gap.

Life Course Factors.—Building on the life course framework, especially the notion of "linked lives" (Carr, 2018), we adjust for characteristics of the adult child, mother, and father within our models as each person's life experiences and background likely contributes to the overall risk of estrangement from the child's perspective. First, in line with insights from both intergenerational solidarity-conflict and life course perspectives, adult children's life course patterns and events are associated with relationship quality and patterns of coresidence with parents (Ma & Wen, 2016; Stee, 2022), thus, these factors likely play a role in the prevalence and timing of estrangement. Adult children who are married typically have lower levels of intergenerational solidarity than those who are unmarried (Bucx, van Wel, and Knijn 2012; Swartz et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2014), in part because marriage is a "greedy institution" that takes time and resources away from other social ties (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). As such married adult children may have an increased risk of estrangement relative to their unmarried counterparts (Blake, 2017; Colemen, 2020; Pillemer, 2020). In contrast, an adult child being a parent may be protective against estrangement, as adult children who are parents report more contact with and support from their parents, and parents in turn may have greater incentive to keep positive and intact relationships with their children to play a role in the lives of their grandchildren (Bucx et al., 2012; Furstenberg et al., 2005; Mutchler & Backer, 2009; Ward et al. 2014). On the other hand, if a parent-adult child tie is conflictual, adult children may limit grandparental contact (Avieli & Levy, 2022). Further, an adult child's higher educational attainment and full-time employment status may be associated with increased estrangement, as higher socioeconomic status may reduce the financial reasons to maintain the tie give that children no longer need financial help from parents (Swartz et al., 2011). Alternatively, higher socioeconomic achievement of the adult

child may suggest lower odds of estrangement as more financial resources have been shown to reduce relational conflict and tension (Stee, 2022).

Parents' life course factors may also matter in estrangement prevalence and timing. First, parental co-residence and marital histories likely influence intergenerational estrangement (Coleman, 2020; Kalmijn, 2015a; 2015b; Pillemer, 2020), as prior research showed that a parents consistently intact marital and residential union was related to better parent-child relationship quality and thus likely lower rates of estrangement (Levitt et al., 2007; Kalmijin, 2015a, 2015b; Ward et al., 2014). Parents' educational attainment and employment status are likely important in estrangement patterns, although exactly how is not clear. Some research suggests that lower parental education and income are related to harsher discipline practices and less parent-child communication in adolescence (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002), which may lead to lower relationship quality. Further, it may be that parents having more resources decreases strain and conflict (Napolitano, Furstenberg, & Fingerman, 2020a; Stee, 2022), and in turn perhaps lower estrangement. Finally, because maternal age at birth is associated with a host of outcomes for both mothers and children (e.g., Addo, Sassler, & Williams, 2016), maternal age at the child's birth may be related to estrangement, although the direction is not clear from past work and parental age at birth is much less studied.

How Estrangement Varies Across Gender, Race/ethnicity, and Sexuality

Gender of parent and child.—Intergenerational solidarity-conflict and life course frameworks further posit that the quality of the parent-adult child tie is shaped by demographic characteristics of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality and their corollaries sexism, racism, and homo/biphobia. In terms of gender of the parent, previous studies suggest that adult children are more likely to be estranged from fathers than mothers (Becker & Hank 2022; Kim, 2006; Fingerman et al., 2020b). Mothers are more often the primary caregivers for their young children and as such are much more likely to have higher rates of coresidence, intensive caregiving, and hours spent with children (Amato, 2000, Collins, 2016; Perälä-Littunen, 2007). Fathers are more likely than mothers to be non-residential and have less daily contact when children are young (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), and distinctive gendered norms circumscribe what it means to be an involved father (Eggebeen, 2002; Randals, 2020). These gendered dynamics carry over into a child's adulthood, possibly shaping estrangement patterns. Further, parental divorce is a predictor of less frequent contact and higher conflict levels between adult children and fathers relative to mothers (Becker & Hank 2022; Kalmijn, 2015a, 2015b) and is suggestive of more paternal, relative to maternal, estrangement.

We also expect differences in estrangement based on the gender of the adult child, with past research indicating that sons are more likely to be estranged from parents—especially mothers—than daughters (Blake, 2017; Coleman, 20220; Pillemer, 2020). Children's, especially daughter's, closer connection to mothers relates to societal expectations of women as "kin-keepers" which promotes daughter's regular contact, family maintenance, kin work, and "peacekeeping" with family members, while also stigmatizing daughters who terminate contact with parents (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2021). It may also be that sons are more likely to stay connected to their fathers due to same-gender solidarity (Levitt et al., 2007),

a hypothesis supported by recent German panel study evidence, which found that daughters were slightly more likely to be estranged from their fathers than were sons (Becker & Hank, 2022).

Race/ethnicity.—Due to historical and contemporary structural and institutional racism as well as different cultural norms and expectations, family patterns are racialized in the U.S. today (Chatters, Taylor, & Schultz, 2022; Cross, Fomby, & Letiecq, 2022). Because of frameworks within family studies that treat White families as the "assumed default," White family patterns of estrangement are under-theorized (Cross et al., 2022). In contrast, Black adults are theorized to be more deeply connected to their mothers (Ackert & Wikle, 2021; Bailey-Fakhoury, 2018; Collins, 1987; Dow, 2015), and Latine people are theorized to adhere to norms of "familism," which stipulate stronger social norms and obligations of intergenerational connection, than White people (Acosta, 2013; Schwartz, 2007). Supporting this point, empirical work shows Black and Latine individuals have higher rates of coresidence with their parents and a greater degree of contact than White people (Goldman & Cornwell, 2018; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012). Black and Latine families also experience more interpersonal strains due to multiple types of racism (e.g., vicarious, institutional) that may impact fatherhood in particular via the mass incarceration of Black men, Black men's lower wages and educational access due to systemic economic oppression (relative to White men), and the resulting higher levels of non-residential fatherhood in childhood (Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King 2007; Roberts, 2003; Perry & Bright, 2012; Williams & Perry, 2019). As such, we hypothesize that White adult children will have higher rates of estrangement from mothers compared to Black and Latine adult children.

Sexuality.—Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adult children likely experience a heightened risk of estrangement with parents compared to heterosexual children. A child's sexual minority identity has been shown to be associated with negative interactions, lower solidarity, and less contact with parents, especially fathers (Montano et al., 2018; Needham and Austin 2010; Reczek, 2014; Van Bergen et al., 2021). LGB people appear to have fewer family contacts and confidants than heterosexuals (Dewaele, Cox, Van den Berghe, & Vinke, 2011; Fischer, 2022), report significant effort needed to maintain ties with parents (Bosley-Smith & Reczek, 2022), and tend to rank social support from friends as more consistent and important than support from family (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Lyons, Pitts, & Gierson, 2013). Further, gay and lesbian individuals have greater geographic distance from parents relative to other sexual identity groups, suggesting less secure ties (Levine, 2022). Given this large body of work, it is likely that LGB adults are more likely to experience estrangement from parents than heterosexual children, and this may be especially true for fathers given research showing that fathers are more likely to have homophobic reactions to their children than mothers (Bucher 2014; Stacey, 2021; Stacey & Padavic, 2021).

Prevalence of Subsequent Unestrangement

Although previous studies focus on estrangement patterns, our life course focus draws attention to the need to consider estrangement as a dynamic experience that can end (e.g., unestrangement). Becker & Hank (2022) showed in Germany that most people who reported estrangement experienced only one acute period of estrangement (across a 10-year

period), suggesting that estrangement is both temporary and not repeated. Agllias (2013) used qualitative data to show how parents often pressure estranged ties into reconciling, while other studies showed an "off again, on again" pattern of estrangement (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022; Scharp & Hall, 2019). However, still other research demonstrates that at least some estranged ties were maintained for decades (see Blake, 2017). The present study is among the first to comprehensively test whether estrangement persists over time or if people become "unestranged" at the population-level in the U.S. in ways that differ across sociodemographic characteristics.

METHOD

We use linked mother-child data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) and the Child and Young Adult supplement (NLSY79-CYA) to examine the prevalence of estrangement among children and parents and to understand variation by gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. The NLSY79 is a nationally representative longitudinal cohort study of 12,686 men and women aged 14 to 22 in 1979; the NLSY79-CYA is comprised of children born to the original women in the NLSY79. Data from the NLSY79 were collected from respondents annually from 1979 to 1994, and biennially afterwards, with 2018 being the most recent wave of data collection. Starting in 1994, children ages 15 and older were eligible for the Young Adult interview, which collected important data on parent-child relationship contact and closeness. The NLSY79 contains a rich array of data on family background, parenting, intergenerational relationships, and health, in addition to other topics, making it suitable to provide population-level estimates of intergenerational estrangement.

As of 2018, 8,585 children of the NLSY79 mothers had completed the young adult interview and had been observed at age 15 or later (ages 15 to 46 in 2018). Interviews occurred biennially throughout the entire study period, but starting in 2010, adult children over age 30 were interviewed only every four years, or every other wave, which could mean that we underestimate older adult children's estrangement and unestrangement from mothers and fathers. From the total sample size of 8,585 children, we arrived at our analytic sample of 8,495 mother-child relationships and 8,119 father-child relationships by excluding 90 individuals who did not report on contact with or closeness to their mother and 466 individuals who did not report on contact with or closeness to their father.

Measures

Construction of Estrangement Indicator—From 1994 to 2018, across 13 waves of data collection, adult children reported on various indicators of parent-child contact and closeness. Following Gilligan and colleagues' (2015) and Becker and Hank's (2022) approach to construct our measure of estrangement, we construct our lifetime measure of estrangement (0 = not estranged; 1 = estranged) from the respondent's mother and father from three variables at each wave: how often respondents see their mother and father (not at all, about once a year or less, several times a year, about once a month, two or three times a month, once a week, several times a week, or every day); how often respondents talk to their mother and father via telephone, card, letter, e-mail, Skype, or text message (not at

all, about once a year or less, several times a year, about once a month, two or three times a month, once a week, several times a week, or every day); and how close the child feels toward their mother and father (not very close, fairly close, quite close, or extremely close). The first two of these variables depend on detailed living arrangement indicators asked at each wave. Respondents were categorized as being estranged from their mother or father if they reported (1) seeing them "not at all" or "about once a year or less" *and* talking to them "not at all" or "about once a year or less" regardless of the closeness to each parent they reported; or (2) seeing them "about once a year or less" or "several times a year," talking to them "about once a year or less" or "several times a year," *and* being "not very close" or "fairly close" to their parent. Respondents were categorized as *not* estranged when reporting other configurations of seeing and/or talking to the parent with more frequency (i.e., several times a year or more), greater levels of closeness, or residing with the parent.

Measures of parent-child contact and closeness were asked about mothers and fathers separately. To be included in our estrangement indicator, respondents must have reported on contact and closeness with a living parent in at least one wave; in the case of parental death, if a respondent reported contact and closeness with a parent prior to their death, they are included in the analytic sample. Therefore, this measure is inclusive of a relationship to any living parent at any wave. We measure estrangement inclusive of measures of "seeing" parents *and* "talking" to parents because one may live geographically far from parents or not be able to visit for various reasons (e.g., health, transportation) and thus not see a parent in person, but still talk with a parent regularly; in this case, the respondent would not be estranged. Consistent with Gilligan and colleagues (2015) and Becker and Hank (2022), we include people who may still "see" or "talk" to their parent (although not very often) as being estranged if they *also* reported low levels of closeness to account for people who are geographically close and thus are more limited in their ability to avoid seeing their mother or father. For example, it may be that because most adult children live geographically close to a parent, even very bad relationships that have little emotional closeness may still experience physical proximity – be it at an extended family event or in a common, close geographic location (e.g., church). Therefore, we take the approach of including people who may still see and/or talk to a parent but also report very low relationship closeness as "estranged." We also perform supplemental analyses with a more conservative measurement of estrangement based solely on minimal parent-child contact and *not* on closeness; we provide those results in the Online Appendix (Tables A1–A3). Overall, although estimates of prevalence are smaller using the more conservative measure of estrangement, variations by gender of child and parent, race/ethnicity of child, sexuality of child, and age at first estrangement remain robust to this alternative specification of estrangement.

For unestrangement, we considered only the sample of people who had experienced estrangement who were also in at least one subsequent wave of the sample (*N*=448 for maternal sample, *N*=2,258 for paternal sample). We then identified whether they were classified as estranged in all subsequent waves or became unestranged (i.e., categorized as not estranged using operationalization discussed above, such as seeing and/or talking to parents several times a year or more;=): 0 = stays estranged, 1 = becomes unestranged. Given that measuring unestrangement required that respondents be in the sample for at least one additional wave after first categorized as estranged, this is likely an underestimation

of unestrangement if adult children who experienced estrangement were less likely to participate in subsequent rounds of data collection.

Other Measures

Gender.—Our measure of gender is reliant on self-reported "sex," treated as a time-invariant variable and distinguishes between "males" and "females." We use the more commonly accepted social language to convey gender: "man/son/father" and "woman/daughter/mother."

Race/Ethnicity.—Race/ethnicity is treated as a time-invariant factor. The young adults' racial/ethnic identity was constructed from the racial/ethnic measure at their most recent wave of data collection for which they were present. The racial/ethnic identity measures include the following response categories: (1) White; (2) Black; (3) Asian; (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; (5) American Indian or Alaska Native; (6) Other; (7) More than one race; and (8) Latine (encompassing Latino and Latina). From these eight categories, we constructed a race/ethnicity variable categorizing respondents as non-Latine White, non-Latine Black, Latine, non-Latine "Other", or as non-Latine multiracial. We categorized those who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or identified with "Other" race to belong to the non-Latine "Other" race category, which was done to ensure a sufficient sample size of this category.

Sexual identity.—Sexual identity is treated as time-invariant, as it was asked only in the 2018 wave. Respondents were asked, "Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?" Response categories included, "lesbian or gay," "straight, "bisexual," or "something else." We dropped the 56 individuals who identified as "something else" from analyses because the small sample sizes preclude meaningful analyses and it is likely a highly heterogenous group of people (Goldberg, Rothblum, Russell, & Meyer, 2020). Because sexuality was only asked in one wave and not all the adult children were present for that round of data collection, the sample sizes for models including sexuality and predicting estrangement from mothers is 4,776 and 4,575 for models predicting estrangement from fathers.

Covariates.—All models adjusted for respondent's gender, race/ethnicity, and birth year. We included only these covariates in our initials model because our goal is to provide an overview of the prevalence of estrangement in the most general terms. Hazard models (described below) accounted for a full range of covariates. For children's characteristics, we included *educational attainment* (less than high school as reference, high school, some college, and college), *employment status* (not employed as reference, part-time employed, full-time employed), *marital status* (never married as reference, married, previously married, and cohabiting), and *parental status* (no children as reference and any children). For mother's and father's characteristics (respectively, in separate models), we accounted for *parental birth year*, *whether mother and father reside together*, *parental education* (less than high school as reference, high school, some college, college), *parental employment status* (not employed as reference and any employment), and *mother and father's marital history* (parents married when respondent born and still married as reference, parents married when

respondent born but later divorced, parents never married). Child characteristics were all time-varying, as were whether mother and father reside together and parental employment status.

Analyses

We first examined the prevalence of estrangement and unestrangement from mothers and fathers and examined heterogeneity by gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. We conducted chi-square tests to examine whether there were significant gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality differences for each group. We then used logistic regressions to estimate the associations between gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality and odds of estrangement from mothers and estrangement from fathers, adjusting for birth year of child. Because of the missing data on the sexuality variable, only asked in 2018, estimates are shown in full sample first without sexuality, then in smaller subsample with sexuality.

Next, to estimate prevalence of estranged respondents becoming "unestranged" at a future point of time, we repeated these analyses with the subsample of respondents who were estranged at one wave and then remained in the sample for at least one additional wave, estimating associations between the sociodemographic factors and "unestrangement." Because our goal in these initial analyses is to describe the general patterns, we again do not include additional covariates beyond gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and birth year.

Finally, to estimate age at first estrangement, we used Cox's proportional hazard regression models to estimate hazard ratios along with 95 percent confidence intervals. For these models, we only included respondents who were in at least two waves, and this is reflected in the smaller sample size for this portion of the sample (N=7,919 for full maternal sample and N=6,410 for full paternal sample). These models estimate the incremental risk of an event occurring, such that each respondent's hazard is a multiplicative replica of the baseline hazard according to the respondent's own covariates (Cox 1972). Cox's proportional hazard models are appropriate when the precise parametric form of the association of the hazard with time is not known or not of main interest to the analysis (Allison 1984), as in our analysis. They are also appropriate for discrete data, as in our case, when an event (i.e., first estrangement) is only observed at discrete moments. Age (estimated as every other year due to the structure of the data) was our analytic unit of time (from age 15 until estrangement occurs or a censoring event). Respondents were included in models as at risk when they were at least age 15 years. Respondents who were never estranged throughout the study period were included in the first set of models and right censored in the analysis. We examined model fit statistics and concluded that the semiparametric models produced more efficient estimates than the parametric hazard models, although parametric models found statistically similar results. Additionally, using Schoenfeld residuals, we identified that the proportional-hazards assumption was not violated (Schoenfeld 1982). We handled ties with the Breslow method. Model 1 for these analyses adjusted only for birth year, gender, and race/ethnicity, in line with our initial logistic regression models. In Model 2, we added additional adult child characteristics and mother or father characteristics (depending on whether modeling mother or father estrangement), with both set of variables described above. In supplementary analysis (not shown), we adjusted for child and parental variables

separately, but this led to few significant differences. We also repeated these analyses with the subsample of respondents with sexuality data (N=4,483 for maternal sample and N=3,737 for full paternal sample).

We used listwise deletion to deal with most missing values. However, multiple imputation was used for paternal age when child was 18 due to the high number of missingness for this variable. We also included a missing flag for parental education, as paternal education also had a high degree of missingness. For all analyses, we weighted the data using the NLSY79-CYA custom longitudinal weights, using the most recently available data from 2018 (National Longitudinal Surveys, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics across gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and birth year by estrangement from mothers and fathers. Approximately 6.3% of respondents reported an estranged relationship with their mother at least once over the study period, compared to about 26.0% who reported estrangement from fathers. Further, these descriptive results, together with significance tests, clearly show that estrangement from parents is gendered and racialized. First, for gender, women reported higher rates of estrangement from their fathers compared to men, with 27.7% of daughters being estranged from their fathers compared to only 24.3% of men, but there was no statistical difference in estrangement from mothers by gender of the child. Regarding race/ethnicity, only multiracial adult children reported lower rates of estrangement from mothers than White respondents. Regarding father estrangement, Black, Latine, and "Other" race respondents reported higher rates of estrangement from fathers relative to White respondents, and the opposite trend was observed for multiracial respondents. With sexuality, gay/lesbian (32.1%) and bisexual (36.3%) adult children were more likely to be estranged from fathers than were heterosexual (21.7%) adult children, but there was no difference in estrangement from mothers by sexual identity of child.

We show logistic regression results in Table 2, adjusting for gender, race/ethnicity, and birth year. The first three columns of Table 2 shows coefficients and odds ratios for estrangement from mothers. Black respondents were 27 percent less likely to report estrangement from their mothers than were White respondents (p<.01), but there was no significant difference in maternal estrangement for White respondents compared to other groups. Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that Black respondents were also less likely to report maternal estrangement than Latine respondents. There was no observed difference in maternal estrangement for men compared to women. In terms of estrangement from fathers, Table 2 shows that women were 22 percent more likely to report estrangement from their fathers than were men (p<.01), whereas Black adult children had more than three times higher odds of being estranged from fathers than White adult children (p<.001) and Latine respondents were nearly 80 percent more likely to be estranged from fathers than were White respondents (p<.001).

Table 3 shows logistic regression results predicting estrangement from mothers and fathers with sexuality, also adjusting for gender, race/ethnicity, and birth year. Table 3 Column 1 demonstrates that no statistically significant differences by sexuality were observed in the

odds of estrangement from mothers. Table 3 Column 4 shows that gay/lesbian individuals were 86 percent more likely to report estrangement from fathers than heterosexuals ($p<.01$), while bisexuals were nearly 3 times as likely to report an estranged relationship from fathers ($p<.001$).

Unestrangement

Table A4 in the online appendix shows bivariate differences in unestrangement among adult children who reported estrangement at least once and who were observed in subsequent waves. Among those who become estranged from mothers, the vast majority became unestranged (81.3%), and among those reporting estrangement from fathers, 68.6% became unestranged. Table 4, presented below showing logistic regression results, indicates that there are no sociodemographic differences by gender, race/ethnicity, or birth year in the likelihood of subsequent unestrangement. Put another way, while there are important sociodemographic differences in the occurrence of parental estrangement by gender and race/ethnicity (and sexuality, as shown in Table 3), there were no significant sociodemographic patterns in who became unestranged among those who experienced parental estrangement.

Hazard Models

We turn next to hazard models in Table 5, which focus on estimating hazard ratios of estrangement across the sample period. Descriptive statistics for variables used in these models, stratified by whether ever estranged or not, are shown in Table A5 of the online appendix. The mean respondent age at first estrangement from mothers was 25.89 years. In the baseline model (Table 5, Model 1) for maternal estrangement, in line with the logistic regression results, we show that Black respondents were less likely to be estranged from mothers relative to White respondents (HR=0.73, $p<.01$). When we adjust for children's and mother's covariates in Model 2, we see the same general patterns as observed in the baseline models, with one exception. Notably, in the fully adjusted models, daughters had lower hazards of maternal estrangement compared to sons (HR=0.74, $p<.01$), suggesting a suppressor effect. Adjusting for covariates provides insight into how the adult children's and their mother's characteristics (beyond gender, race/ethnicity, and birth year) are associated with hazards of maternal estrangement. Considering child's characteristics, full-time employment and part-time employment were both associated with a lower risk of estrangement (HR=0.64 and 0.77, respectively, $p<.05$). At the same time, an adult child being previously married was associated with a greater hazard of maternal estrangement compared to being never married (HR=1.60, $p<.05$). Adult children's educational attainment and parental status were not associated with the hazard of maternal estrangement. Considering maternal characteristics, respondents with mothers who are older when the respondent is 18 had lower hazards of estrangement (HR=0.91, $p<.001$), as did respondents whose mothers are full-time employed (HR=0.78, $p<.05$) and part-time employed (HR=0.64, $p<.05$) as compared to those not employed and whose mothers and fathers live together (HR=0.38, $p<.001$).

Turning to Table 5 Models 3 and 4, which estimate hazards of paternal estrangement, the baseline model (Model 3) again shows a similar pattern of results as the logistic regression

tables. The mean age of first estrangement from fathers was 23.17 years old. Consistent with the logistic regression results, daughters had a higher hazard of paternal estrangement relative to sons (HR=1.15, p<.05), and Black respondents, Latine respondents, and respondents with other racial/ethnic identities had higher hazards of paternal estrangement compared White respondents (HR=2.25, 1.62, and 1.61, respectively). Adjusting for adult children's and fathers' characteristics (Model 4) reduced the hazards of paternal estrangements for women compared to men and for other race respondents compared to White respondents to non-significance at the p<.05 level. Within these models, for children's characteristics, part-time employment was related to lower hazards of estrangement relative to not being employed (HR=0.69, p<.01), as was having children (HR=0.79, p<.01). Being previously married was associated with higher hazards of paternal estrangement compared to being never married (HR=1.47, p<.01). Finally, when adding paternal characteristics, we found that fathers having more education, specifically some college or a college degree compared to less than high school, was associated with lower hazards of estrangement (HR=0.72 and 0.68, respectively, p<.01), as was full-time employment (HR=0.51, p<.001). Similarly, fathers still living with the mother of the respondent was also associated with a much lower hazard of paternal estrangement (HR=0.12, p<.001). Additionally, younger paternal age—meaning respondent and father are closer in age—was associated with lower hazards of estrangement (HR=0.99, p<.05).

We also tested the risk of estrangement from parents by sexuality (Table 6), using the subsample of respondents who responded to the sexual identity measure in 2018. We found no significant differences across sexuality for maternal estrangement without (Model 1) and with (Model 2) child and parent covariates. However, consistent with regression results, Model 3 shows that adult children who are lesbian/gay (HR=2.03, p<.001) and bisexual (HR=1.82, p<.01) had a higher hazard of paternal estrangement compared to heterosexual respondents without covariates. The pattern regarding lesbian/gay respondents persists in the fully adjusted model, although the bisexual pattern did not remain significant with controls added.

DISCUSSION

We use national longitudinal data to provide population-based estimates of U.S. paternal and maternal estrangement by gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. We demonstrate not only estrangement prevalence and patterns across sociodemographic groups, but also average age at first estrangement, how both children's and parents' socioeconomic and family characteristics relate to estrangement, and the pattern of subsequent "unestrangement." In discussing our contributions below, we show how our assessment of estrangement patterns provides a more holistic view of the "dark" side of family life today, and further highlight the ways in which societal inequalities (most notably racism, homophobia, and gendered systems of oppression) are revealed in estrangement patterns.

As a first key contribution, we show the prevalence, timing, and rates of subsequent unestrangement in our population-based U.S. sample. Six percent of respondents reported estrangement from their mothers at least one time from age 15 onward, and more than a quarter reported at least one period of estrangement their fathers from age 15 onward—

representing 1 in 4 adult children-father relationships and more than 1 in 20 adult child-mother relationships. These findings are consistent with long-studied gendered differences in the structure of parenting across the life course (Amato, 2000, Eggebeen, 2002), wherein mothers are considered more central and consistent players in the lives of their children than are fathers (Fingerman et al., 2020b). Still, our findings suggest that estrangement, even maternal estrangement but especially paternal estrangement, is a key aspect of family life for a sizable minority of adult children in the U.S. today despite assumptions of the permanence of the parent-child tie in much family scholarship today.

Our analyses further provide some insight into the timing and correlates of first estrangement corresponding to key transitions in young adulthood. According to life course theory, adult children's emerging and young adulthood periods are rife with considerable life course transitions including parenthood, marriage, enrollment in higher education, and full-time employment; these transitions may precipitate or protect against estrangement patterns. Our hazard models show the average age of first estrangement occurs in the emerging and early adult life course stage, about 26 years for mother estrangement and about 23 years for father estrangement. Further, our hazard results give clues as to why this life course stage is most at risk of estrangement. First, adult children who were previously married had a higher hazard of maternal and paternal estrangement compared to never married adults. Young adults who have been previously married have undergone two major life transitions fairly early in the life course—marriage and divorce, with our results indicating that this instability in the marriage relationship may translate (or be a key selection factor) driving parental estrangement (Birditt, Fingerman, Zarit, 2010). Second, an adult child having their own children decreases their risk of estrangement from fathers (although not from mothers), suggesting that multigenerational ties form a further tether between fathers and their adult children (Bucx et al., 2012; Furstenberg et al., 2005; Mutchler & Backer, 2009).

Yet it is not only adult children's characteristics that matter; some parental characteristics decrease the likelihood of estrangement, including mother's and father's older age and employment and father's higher levels of education (Schoppe-Sullivan, Coleman, Wang, & Yan, 2021). This suggests that, when parents are older and employed and fathers are highly educated, there may be more economic and financial stability that in turn puts less strain on the parent-adult child tie; it may also be that parents who are older, employed, or with higher levels of education can provide more financial and instrumental support during the emerging and young adult life stages, keeping the bond intact (Fingerman, 2017; Lowe & Arnett, 2020). In line with a family systems model that suggests one relationship in a larger family unit shapes all other individuals and relationships (Willoughby, Carroll, Vitas, & Hill, 2011), results also show that when both parents are living together, there is a much lower hazard of both maternal and paternal estrangement. This implies that when parents maintain a consistent relationship, adult child-parent ties are more stable as well (Coleman, 2020; Kalmijn, 2015a; 2015b; Levitt et al., 2007; Pillemer, 2020). While our study provides new insights into the familial and economic characteristics that relate to estrangement, future investigations into the causes of estrangement are needed, specifically using a life course approach sensitive to the transitions common within emerging adulthood.

A second key contribution of this paper is that we demonstrate that paternal and maternal estrangement is not evenly distributed across the population but rather varies by the adult child's gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. We theorize these findings are a consequence of broader institutional and structural factors such as gendered (and often sexist) expectations and inequalities, racism, and homo/biphobia. Regarding gender, as discussed above, adult children are less likely to be estranged from mothers compared to fathers and children estranged from mothers are especially unlikely to stay estranged. This is consistent with gendered constructions of mothers as the primary parent and caregiver—a construction supported not only by gendered norms and expectations but by structural factors which undermine women in the workforce and provide few supports for parents and childrearing more broadly (Collins, 2019). In terms of the adult child's gender, consistent with past work, fully adjusted hazard models show that daughters are less likely to be estranged from mothers than sons (Blake, 2017; Pillemer, 2020; Ward et al., 2013), possibly because of social norms that keep adult daughters as "kin keepers" in their family-of-origin ties (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). Further, consistent with Becker and Hank (2022), sons are less likely to be estranged from their fathers than are daughters, suggesting that adult sons exhibit stronger same-gender solidarity with fathers that may keep them more closely tied together (Levitt et al., 2007). The strength of the same-gender parent-child pair in shaping estrangement patterns is notable. It appears that it is not simply one family member's gender that matters, but rather the relational gendered dyad dynamics that shape estrangement risk (Thomeer, Umberson, & Reczek, 2020).

We also find that there are important estrangement patterns structured by race/ethnicity, likely due to the institutional and structural factors of racism together with racialized expectations, constraints, and enactments of parenthood. In line with research suggesting that Black mothers are a uniquely stable feature in U.S. family life (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2018; Collins, 1987; Cross, Fomby, & Letiecq, 2022; Dow, 2015, 2019), results show that Black adult children are less likely to be estranged from their mothers than are White adult children (Ackert & Wikle, 2021). This likely reflects sociocultural norms centering mothers in Black family life. Scholars have also suggested that young Black adults experience fewer resources outside of the family and more discrimination and reduced socioeconomic opportunities compared to White young adults (Cross et al., 2022). As such, the family— with expectations of mothers' labor at its center—may take on heightened importance, and estrangement from parents may possibly be more consequential and thus rarer in the lives of Black adult children. In contrast, and perhaps on the flip side of the coin, Black and Latine adults are more likely to report an estranged relationship from fathers than are White adults. This finding is likely shaped by the long-standing restriction of Black and Latine men's material and social resources through institutional and interpersonal discrimination and structural barriers to employment and education, and a carceral system that disproportionally imprisons men of color (Geller, 2013; Mauer & King 2007; Perry & Bright, 2012; Williams & Perry, 2019). Thus, the higher paternal estrangement of Black and Latine adults does not likely reflect inherent instability in these paternal ties, but instead the long-standing political, institutional, and structural undercutting of Black fathers' relationships with their children (Cross, Fomby, & Letiecq, 2022; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004).

Finally, past work has theorized and shown that parental homophobia and biphobia can create weak or severed ties among LGB adult children and their parents (Balsam et al., 2008; Dewaele et al., 2011), although data limitations have prevented a look at LGB adult child estrangement at the population-level. Our analysis indicates that that gay/lesbian and bisexual adult children have higher hazards of paternal estrangement than heterosexuals, consistent with past research showing that fathers can exhibit more homophobia in their responses to a child's coming out (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). Notably, no significant differences were observed in the odds of estrangement from mothers by sexuality, suggesting that mothers maintain more intact ties with their adult children even when adult children identify as sexual minorities, another finding suggesting greater solidarity in the maternal-adult child bond. This is again consistent with qualitative work showing that mothers are more accepting than fathers of a non-heterosexual sexuality and that fathers can be particularly homophobic and biphobic towards their children (Reczek, 2020; Stacey, 2021), likely leading to increased fissures in this intergenerational tie. Future work should continue to explore how sexuality shapes parent-adult child ties in adulthood to include potential considerations of estrangement.

Third, given that first estrangement happens fairly early in the child's adulthood—especially with fathers—we further questioned whether estrangement continues across waves, or whether adult children reconcile their relationship with their parent. We found that most people who experience estrangement become "unestranged" in subsequent waves, consistent with some past work (Agllias, 2013; Becker & Hank, 2022; Scharp et al., 2013; 2015). Becoming unestranged was a more common experience for those who had experienced maternal estrangement (only about a fifth of respondents stayed estranged from mothers) than paternal estrangement (about 30% remained estranged from fathers). This suggests that estrangement tends to be a relatively impermanent phenomenon with most adult children reconciling their relationships, especially with their mother and at least in the short-term. This pattern of relative impermanence does not negate the potential importance of estrangement, but rather points to the pull of "compulsory kinship" that reasserts the dominance of the parent-adult child tie (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). Future research should incorporate the back-and-forth dynamics of estrangement and unestrangement over the life course into models, noting that estrangement is often an impermanent state, especially when considering unestrangement from mothers.

Limitations

While this study provides key new insights into the prevalence of estrangement across adulthood, it has limitations that future research should address. First, our measure of estrangement is focused on the adult children's reports of both quality and contact—which is distinct from past work that focuses on mothers' assessments of relationships with children to measure estrangement (e.g., Gilligan et al., 2015). The use of adult children's reports is important because adult children are more likely to initiate low or no contact and thus may be more likely to report an estranged tie (Agillias, 2016). Still, we are limited in that we do not assess parental perceptions of contact and closeness with children, and future work should consider both parent and children's accounts of estrangement. We also note that we detail results using an alternative measurement of estrangement in the online

appendix (Table A1–3), and hope that this additional set of details spurs future work to build consensus on appropriate measurement of the estrangement construct. Additionally, the NLSY79-CYA data represent the children born to a nationally representative sample of mothers, meaning that these results are not necessarily representative of young adults within the United States during this time period but rather representative of this cohort of mothers. We also note that we likely underestimate estimates of estrangement from mothers and especially from fathers, given that we excluded from analysis those who did not report on contact and closeness with mothers and fathers. Insofar as those who do not report on contact and closeness might indicate low relationship quality and minimal contact, and given that those who drop out of the adult child study are more likely to have a poor relationship with parents as it was instigated through the maternal survey, our estimates of the prevalence of estrangement might be conservative. Additionally, our study is potentially limited by narrow definitions of fatherhood, as recent research draws attention to the close ties between Black adult children and social fathers (Cross and Zhang 2022; McDougal and George, 2016). It is likely that rates of estrangement would differ depending on whether parents are biological, step, or social. For instance, we might see lower levels of estrangement within Black and Latine communities if we were to examine rates of adult children's estrangement from social fathers.

Finally, while we are looking at general patterns of estrangement across race/ethnicity, we note that there are differences across racial/ethnic categories in parental marital histories, as well as employment, education, and the other variables we consider (which are apparent when adding in covariates into our hazard models). These differences are consistent with theory and research on how family structure and socioeconomic opportunities are deeply shaped by institutional and structural racism that limit the opportunities, and increase the strain and stress, of Black and Latine individuals and families (Cross et al., 2022). While we do not conduct formal mediation or moderation analysis as this is outside of the scope of our research questions, our race/ethnicity coefficients in our Table 4 indicate that even after adjusting for parental marital history (alongside our parent and child characteristics) we see evidence of robust differences in the association across racial/ethnic categories with estrangement. Additionally, we suggest future studies investigate how more child and parental, as well as institutional and structural, factors matter for estrangement at different points in the life course—even extending into the child's mid- and later-life.

Conclusion

By demonstrating the prevalence of estranged relationships in the general population, age at first estrangement, and subsequent unestrangement patterns across gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, this study provides compelling new evidence that a deeper look at estrangement—including the consequences of estrangement for both generations—should be a central goal for future family scholarship. Despite moderate estrangement events, estrangement appears to be a relatively unstable family dynamic, with most people ending estrangement in subsequent waves. Still, life course theory suggests that even minor periods of strain can cause long-term consequences for well-being, and thus estrangement remains an important site of future research. Given how many people report estrangement from parents, such estrangement may lower the well-being and life chances of both generations

as they age due to the stress of an estranged tie; on the other hand, estrangement may boost the health of the individual initiating estrangement as a chronic stressor may no longer be consistently present. While we provide key insights into some of the sociodemographic correlates of estrangement, future work must continue to interrogate the role of estrangement in family life. Some groups, especially Black mothers and their children, appear to experience especially secure family ties (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2018; Collins, 1987; Dow, 2019), while fathers appear less tightly bound to children – especially their LGB children, Black and Latine children, and their daughters. This paper provides a new and more comprehensive look at how estrangement is distributed unevenly in the U.S. population, and thus is a needed step toward fully understanding the full range of family dynamics.

Acknowledgments

ONLINE ONLY APPENDIX

Table A1.

Prevalence Estimates of Parent-Child Estrangement (based only on contact) by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Identity, and Birth Year of Child

	Mother		Father	
	Not Estranged	Estranged	Not Estranged	Estranged
	%/Mean (SD)	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*
Gender				
Man (ref)	96.01	3.99	81.19	18.81
Woman	96.14	3.86	79.15	20.85[*]
Race/Ethnicity				
White (ref)	95.53	4.47	84.15	15.85
Black	96.06	3.94	59.28	40.72[***]
Latinx	94.38	5.62	72.77	27.23[***]
Other	93.02	6.98	73.37	26.63[**]
Multiracial	97.79	2.21[***]	90.68	9.32[***]
Sexuality				
Heterosexual (ref)	96.52	3.48	83.81	16.19
Gay/lesbian	96.88	3.12	80.53	19.47
Bisexual	95.81	4.19	74.82	25.18[**]
Birth year	1988.15 (6.37)	1983.93[***] (6.03)	1988.93 (5.96)	19984.42[***] (6.74)

Note:

[*] p < 0.05

[**] p < 0.01

[***] p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted. Sexual identity was only asked in 2018, so sample sizes vary relative to other variables. Mother n = 8,495. Father n = 8,119. Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table A2.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Estrangement (based only on contact) from Mothers and Fathers

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
Gender						
Woman	−0.01	0.12	0.99	0.15[*]	0.06	1.16
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	−0.39[*]	0.15	0.68	1.14[***]	0.07	3.12
Latinx	0.20	0.16	1.22	0.67[***]	0.09	1.96
Other	0.36	0.29	1.44	0.61[**]	0.23	1.84
Multiracial	0.24	0.22	0.78	−0.20	0.11	0.82
Birth year	−0.11[***]	0.01	0.90	−0.09[***]	0.01	0.91
Constant	213.20	24.17		195.97	11.41	
F		18.77			121.46	
df		8,494			8,118	
N		8,495			8,119	

Note:

[*]
 $p < 0.05$

[**]
 $p < 0.01$

[***]
 $p < 0.001$.

[A]Odds Ratios.

Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table A3.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Estrangement (Based Only on Contact) from Mothers and Fathers with Sexuality

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
Gender						
Woman	−0.01	0.17	0.99	0.19[*]	0.09	1.21
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	0.33	0.21	0.72	1.04[***]	1.04	2.82
Latinx	0.17	0.25	1.19	0.62[***]	0.62	1.86
Other	0.30	0.56	1.36	0.46	0.46	1.56
Multiracial	−0.13	0.27	0.88	−0.31[*]	−0.31	0.74
Sexual identity						
Gay/lesbian	0.00	0.59	1.00	0.25	0.25	1.29
Bisexual	0.48	0.49	1.62	0.86[***]	0.86	2.36
Birth year	−0.11[***]	0.01	0.89	−0.11[***]	−0.11	0.89
Constant	223.16	29.7		211.14	14.86	
F		9.93			52.58	

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
df		4,775			4,574	
N		4,776			4,575	

Note:

*
p < 0.05

**
p < 0.01

***
p < 0.001.

[A]Odds Ratios.

Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table A4.

Prevalence Estimates of Parent-Child Unestrangement by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Identity, and Birth Year of Child

	Mother		Father	
	Stays Estranged	**Becomes Unestranged**	**Stays Estranged**	**Becomes Unestranged**
	%/Mean (SD)	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*
Gender				
Man (ref)	19.73	80.27	32.64	67.36
Woman	17.41	82.59	30.28	69.72
Race/Ethnicity				
White (ref)	19.73	80.27	31.32	68.68
Black	11.91	88.09	28.67	71.33
Latinx	27.02	72.98	32.33	67.67
Other	13.15	86.85	27.21	72.79
Multiracial	17.32	82.68	37.54	62.46
Birth year	1984.27 (4.98)	1983.64 (5.78)	1984.98 (6.16)	1984.54 (5.51)

Note:

*
p < 0.05

**
p < 0.01

***
p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted. Sexual identity was only asked in 2018, so sample sizes vary relative to other variables. Mother n = 448. Father n = 2,258. Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table A5.

Descriptive Statistics for Covariates Used in Hazard Models (Percentages and Means with Standard Deviations)

	Mother		Father	
	Never Estranged	**Ever Estranged**	**Never Estranged**	**Ever Estranged**
Woman (Men: Reference)	49.23	45.99 ***	47.82	52.4 ***
Race/Ethnicity				
White	41.12	47.21	44.65	35.88

	Mother		Father	
	Never Estranged	**Ever Estranged**	**Never Estranged**	**Ever Estranged**
Black	18.36	19.81 [*]	11.73	33.17 [***]
Latine	11.28	13.76	10.15	14.11 [***]
Other	1.38	1.79	1.24	1.61 [***]
Multiracial	27.86	17.41 [***]	32.23	15.23 [***]
Sexuality [A]				
Straight	93.83	93.06	94.73	90.46
Gay/lesbian	2.48	2.46	2.19	3.59 [***]
Bisexual	3.69	4.48 [*]	3.08	5.95 [***]
Birth year	1987.8 (6.00)	1983.86 [***] (5.22)	1988.72 (5.88)	1984.90 [***] (5.54)
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	35.51	34.21	34.35	38.99
High school	23.48	30.87 [***]	20.88	28.23 [***]
Some college	27.06	27.55	28.37	24.47 [***]
College degree or more	13.95	7.37 [***]	16.41	8.31 [***]
Marital Status				
Never married	71.29	57.22	74.01	65.57
Married	14.58	20.16 [***]	14.3	15.68 [***]
Previously married	2.61	6.29 [***]	1.79	4.13 [***]
Cohabiting	11.52	16.32 [***]	9.91	14.63 [***]
Has child/children	25.44	44.14 [***]	36.74	19.26 [***]
Employment status				
Not employed	40.52	41.65	39.67	43.53
Part-time employed	16.55	11.08 [***]	18.5	12.11 [***]
Full-time employed	42.93	47.28	41.83	44.36
Parent Characteristics				
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	10.44	18.42	10.59	23.36
High school	41.68	47.44 [***]	3.89	51.62 [***]
Some college	24.62	27.32 [***]	20.03	14.38 [***]
College degree or more	23.26	6.82 [***]	30.48	10.64 [***]
Maternal/Paternal age at child age 18	45.32 (5.63)	41.29 [***] (4.62)	48.29 (5.88)	44.36 [***] (5.83)
Parents' marital history				
Parents married when respondent born and still married	79.05	52.38	87.28	49.01
Parents married when respondent born but later divorced	14.19	37.24 [***]	9.62	33.41 [***]
Parents never married	6.76	10.38 [***]	3.1	17.58 [***]
Employment status				
Not employed	27.63	39.57	2.49	14.61
Part-time employed	11.64	9.04 [***]	6.53	9.09 [***]
Full-time employed	60.73	51.39 [***]	90.98	76.3 [***]

	Mother		Father	
	Never Estranged	Ever Estranged	Never Estranged	Ever Estranged
Lives with father/mother of respondent	55.17	24.87 ***	70.67	15.06 ***
N	7,392	527	4,900	1,510

Note:

*
 p < 0.05

**
 p < 0.01

***
 p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted.

*A*Sample size for sexuality is n=4,483 for maternal estrangement and n=3,737 for paternal estrangement.

Source: NLSY79 and Child and Young Adult Supplement.

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Table 1.

Prevalence Estimates of Parent-Child Estrangement by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Identity, and Birth Year of Child

	Mother		Father	
	Not Estranged	**Estranged**	**Not Estranged**	**Estranged**
	%/Mean (SD)	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*	*%/Mean (SD)*
Gender				
Man (ref)	93.30	6.70	75.67	24.33
Woman	94.12	5.88	72.26	27.74 [**]
Race/Ethnicity				
White (ref)	92.88	7.12	78.33	21.67
Black	93.15	6.85	50.51	49.49 [***]
Latine	92.09	7.91	66.55	33.45 [***]
Other	92.48	7.52	69.41	30.59 [*]
Multiracial	96.06	3.94 [***]	85.45	14.55 [***]
Sexuality				
Heterosexual (ref)	94.53	5.47	78.32	21.68
Gay/lesbian	94.70	5.30	67.93	32.07 [*]
Bisexual	93.99	6.01	63.68	36.32 [***]
Birth year	1988.26 (6.35)	1983.95 [***] (5.87)	1989.12 (5.91)	1984.94 [***] (6.65)

Note:

[*]
p < 0.05

[**]
p < 0.01

[***]
p < 0.001.

Mother *n* = 8,495. Father *n* = 8,119. Estimates are weighted. Sexual identity was only asked in 2018, so sample sizes vary relative to other variables: Mother *n* = 4,776 and Father *n* = 4,575. Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table 2.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Estrangement from Mothers and Fathers by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
Gender						
Woman	−0.13	0.10	0.88	0.20**	0.06	1.22
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	−0.31**	0.12	0.73	1.12***	0.07	3.07
Latinx	0.07	0.13	1.07	0.58***	0.08	1.79
Other	−0.07	0.36	0.94	0.42	0.22	1.52
Multiracial	−0.12	0.17	0.89	−0.12	0.1	0.89
Birth year	−0.11	0.01	0.89	−0.09***	0.01	0.91
Constant	223.71			183.88		
F		30.6			125.89	
df		8,494			8,118	
N		8,495			8,119	

Note:

*
p < 0.05

**
p < 0.01

***
p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted.

[A]Odds Ratios.

Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table 3.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Estrangement from Mothers and Fathers by Sexuality

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
Sexual identity						
Gay/lesbian	0.09	0.44	1.09	0.62 [**]	0.22	1.86
Bisexual	0.42	0.37	1.52	1.04 [***]	0.23	2.82
Gender						
Woman	−0.09	0.14	0.92	0.15	0.08	1.16
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	−0.37 [*]	0.17	0.69	1.06 [***]	0.10	2.89
Latinx	0.08	0.21	1.08	0.53 [***]	0.12	1.71
Other	−0.04	0.49	0.96	0.32	0.33	1.38
Multiracial	−0.04	0.21	0.96	−0.17	0.13	0.84
Birth year	−0.12 [***]	0.01	0.88	−0.10 [***]	0.01	0.90
Constant	241.78 [***]			202.10 [***]		
F		16.59			55.54	
df		4,775			4,574	
N		4,776			4,575	

Note:

[*]
p < 0.05

[**]
p < 0.01

[***]
p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted.

[A]Odds Ratios.

Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table 4.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Unestrangement from Mothers and Fathers

	Mother			Father		
	B	*SE B*	*OR* [A]	*B (SE)*	*SE B*	*OR*
Gender						
Woman	0.17	0.29	1.18	0.13	0.11	1.14
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	0.57	0.39	1.78	0.12	0.13	1.12
Latinx	−0.39	0.34	0.68	−0.04	0.15	0.96
Other	0.46	1.13	1.58	0.23	0.51	1.26
Multiracial	0.22	0.47	1.25	−0.25	0.2	0.78
Birth year	−0.02	0.03	0.98	−0.01	0.01	0.99
Constant	38.2			15.67		
F		1.3			1.26	
df		447			2,257	
N		448			2,258	

Note:

[*]
p < 0.05

[**]
p < 0.01

[***]
p < 0.001.

Estimates are weighted.

[A]Odds Ratios.

Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table 5.

Hazard Regression Models Predicting First Estrangement from Parents

	Mothers				Fathers			
	Model 1		**Model 2**		**Model 3**		**Model 4**	
	B (SE B)	HR[A]	*B (SE B)*	HR	*B (SE B)*	HR	*B (SE B)*	HR
Respondent Characteristics								
Gender (Man: Reference)								
Woman	−0.17 (0.10)	0.84	−0.30** (0.11)	0.74	0.14* (0.06)	1.15	0.07 (0.06)	1.08
Race/Ethnicity (White: Reference)								
Black	−0.31** (0.12)	0.73	−0.63*** (0.13)	0.53	0.81*** (0.07)	2.25	0.34*** (0.08)	1.40
Latine	0.03 (0.13)	1.03	−0.16 (0.14)	0.85	0.48*** (0.08)	1.62	0.24** (0.08)	1.27
Other	−0.16 (0.38)	0.85	−0.44 (0.36)	0.64	0.48* (0.23)	1.61	0.27 (0.21)	1.31
Multiracial	0.04 (0.17)	1.04	0.10 (0.17)	1.10	−0.09 (0.11)	0.91	−0.04 (0.11)	0.96
Birth year	−0.12*** (0.01)	0.89	0.04 (0.02)	1.04	−0.10*** (0.01)	0.91	−0.03*** (0.01)	0.97
Educational attainment (less than high school: Reference)								
High school			−0.06 (0.14)	0.94			−0.12 (0.08)	0.88
Some college			0.06 (0.16)	1.06			−0.13 (0.09)	0.88
College degree or more			−0.37 (0.23)	0.69			−0.19 (0.13)	0.83
Marital Status (Never Married: Reference)								
Married			0.23 (0.15)	1.26			0.13 (0.10)	1.14
Previously married			0.47* (0.20)	1.60			0.39** (0.14)	1.47
Cohabiting			0.04 (0.15)	1.04			0.11 (0.09)	1.11
Has Child/Children			0.26 (0.14)	1.30			−0.24** (0.08)	0.79
Employment status (Not employed: Reference)								
Part-time employed			−0.44* (0.20)	0.64			−0.37** (0.11)	0.69
Full-time employed			−0.28* (0.11)	0.76			−0.08 (0.07)	0.93
Parent Characteristics								
Educational attainment (Less than high school: Reference)								
High school			0.00 (0.14)	1.00			−0.08 (0.08)	0.92
Some college			0.26 (0.16)	1.29			−0.32** (0.11)	0.72
College degree or more			−0.12 (0.27)	0.89			−0.39** (0.13)	0.68
Maternal/Paternal age at child age 18			−0.09*** (0.02)	0.91			−0.02* (0.01)	0.98
Parents married when respondent born and still married (Reference)								
Parents married when respondent born but later divorced			0.31 (0.16)	1.36			0.01 (0.09)	1.01
Parents never married			0.02 (0.22)	1.02			−0.01 (0.10)	0.99

	Mothers				Fathers			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B (SE B)	HR*A*	*B (SE B)*	HR	*B (SE B)*	HR	*B (SE B)*	HR
Not employed (Reference)								
Part-time employed			−0.41 (0.23)	0.66			−0.29 (0.24)	0.74
Full-time employed			−0.25*(0.12)	0.78			−0.68***(0.14)	0.51
Missing data on employment			0.59***(0.17)	1.80			0.00 (0.13)	1.00
Lives with father/mother of respondent			−0.97***(0.18)	0.38			−2.13***(0.12)	0.12
N		7,919				6,410		
Estranged (Failures)		527				1,510		

Note:

*
p < 0.05

**
p < 0.01

***
p < 0.001.

A
Hazard Ratio.

Estimates are weighted. Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

Table 6.

Hazard Regression Models Predicting First Estrangement from Parents with Sexuality

| | Estrangement from Mother | | | | Estrangement from Father | | | |
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 (Fully adjusted[B]) | | Model 3 | | Model 4 (Fully adjusted) | |
	B (SE B)	HR[A]	B (SE B)	HR	B (SE B)	HR	B (SE B)	HR
Respondent Characteristics								
Sexual Identity (Heterosexual: Reference								
Lesbian/gay	−0.08 (0.42)	0.93	0.07 (0.43)	1.07	0.71*** (0.19)	2.03	0.59** (0.18)	1.81
Bisexual	0.38 (0.38)	1.46	0.20 (0.37)	1.23	0.60** (0.21)	1.82	0.34 (0.23)	1.41
Woman (Man: Reference)								
Woman	−0.20 (0.14)	0.82	−0.30 (0.16)	0.74	0.04 (0.08)	1.04	−0.01 (0.09)	0.99
Race/Ethnicity (White: Reference)								
Black	−0.35* (0.17)	0.71	−0.74*** (0.19)	0.48	0.73*** (0.09)	2.08	0.23* (0.11)	1.26
Latine	−0.01 (0.21)	0.99	−0.24 (0.22)	0.79	0.43*** (0.12)	1.54	0.17 (0.12)	1.18
Other	−0.22 (0.51)	0.80	−0.63 (0.46)	0.53	0.28 (0.34)	1.33	0.03 (0.34)	1.03
Multiracial	0.07 (0.21)	1.08	0.10 (0.22)	1.10	−0.20 (0.14)	0.82	−0.14 (0.14)	0.87
Birth year	−0.13*** (0.01)	0.88	0.05 (0.03)	1.05	−0.10*** (0.01)	0.91	−0.02* (0.01)	0.98
N			4,483				3,737	
Failures			249				776	

Note:

*
p < 0.05

**
p < 0.01

***
p < 0.001.

[A]Hazard Ratio.

Estimates are weighted. Source: NLSY79 Child and Young Adult Supplement.

[B]Models 2 and 4 adjust for child's educational attainment, child's marital status, child's parental status, child's employment status, parent's educational attainment, parent's age when child 18, parents' marital history, parent's employment status, and whether parents live together.