Anecdotal evidence suggests that, for some, individuals react strongly to their family “coming out” as gay/lesbian/bisexual (LGB), with sadness as the seemingly typical reaction. Our research sought to understand whether sadness arises as a focal reaction to family members coming out as LGB as a function of their age. We predicted that perceived loss of ability to reproduce drives some prejudices toward LGB family members. We predicted that participants would be more emotionally distressed towards LGB and infertile family members, especially at a younger age, than heterosexual family members due to a greater perceived loss of reproductive potential.

**Method**

**Participants**

(123) cisgender heterosexual online adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk
(66) Men and (57) Women

**Design & Procedure**

Participants reported their emotional reactions to a series of scenarios in which their hypothetical offspring varying in age (15 or 55) “came out” as heterosexual, bisexual, gay/lesbian, or infertile.

This yielded a 2 (target reproductive potential: age 15 or 55; within-subjects) x 4 (target orientation: heterosexual, bisexual, gay/lesbian, infertile; within-subjects) x 2 (target sex: male, female; between-subjects) experimental design

**Dependent Variable: Sadness**

sad, depressed, unhappy, disappointed

1 = not at all to 9 = extremely

Cronbach’s α ranged .85 to .98 across targets

**Analyses & Results**

We conducted a 2 (target reproductive potential) x 4 (target orientation) x 2 (target sex) mixed ANOVA on sadness. Results indicated that:

- Participants reported greatest sadness to kin “coming out” as infertile, followed by bisexual and gay/lesbian (which did not differ), followed lastly by heterosexual, ps < .05.
- They also reported greater sadness to their 15 year old offspring “coming out” as LGB or infertile relative to their 55 year old offspring “coming out” as LGB or infertile, ps < .05.

**Discussion**

We hypothesized that participant distress toward one’s offspring coming out as LGB stems, in part, from perceived loss of reproductive potential. Participants reported greater distress toward their offspring coming out as LGB relative to heterosexual, and more if the offspring came out as a 15 year old relative to a 55 year old. That distress was greater for 15 year olds coming out than 55 year olds indicates potential loss of inclusive reproductive fitness explains some distress toward family members coming out as LGB.