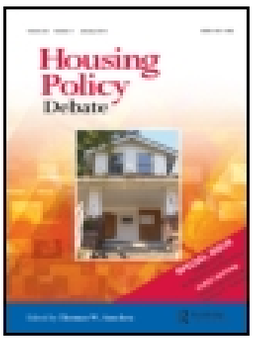

Housing Policy Debate

ISSN: 1051-1482 (Print) 2152-050X (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rhpd20

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To cite this article: David Schwegman (2018): Rental Market Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples: Evidence From a Pairwise-Matched Email Correspondence Test, Housing Policy Debate, DOI: 10.1080/10511482.2018.1512005

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2018.1512005

HOUSING POLICY DEBATE
https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2018.1512005

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Rental Market Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples: Evidence From a Pairwise-Matched Email Correspondence Test

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ABSTRACT

I present the results of a randomized matched-pair email correspondence test of 6,490 unique property owners in 94 U.S. cities to provide a nationally representative estimate of the level of discrimination that same-sex couples experience when inquiring about rental housing. I find that same-sex male couples, especially non-White same-sex male couples, are less likely to receive a response to inquiries about rental units. I also find that same-sex Black male couples are subject to more subtle forms of discrimination than heterosexual Black couples are. I then examine whether state and local antidiscrimination laws covary with rates of housing discrimination against same-sex couples. Although my results are not causal, I find that antidiscrimination laws have an ambiguous relationship with rates of discrimination faced by same-sex couples. State-level housing protections, for example, covary positively with response rates for same-sex Black male couples, whereas local-level laws covary negatively with response rates for these couples.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 16 April 2018
Accepted 11 August 2018

KEYWORDS
discrimination; LGBTQ; state and local housing policy; email correspondence study

As of 2018, it was legal for property owners to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in 28 U.S. states.[1] Sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected classes under the U.S. Fair Housing Act of 1968, and no subsequent federal legislation has provided protections for the LGBTQ community.[2] Although housing discrimination against the LGBTQ community has received limited attention from federal lawmakers or, until somewhat recently, scholars, it is a key concern within the LGBTQ community. In a 2015 survey of self-identified LGBTQ individuals, 73% of respondents were "strongly concerned" about housing discrimination by real estate agents, home sellers, property owners and/or neighbors (Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate [BHGRE] and National Association of Gay and Lesbian Real Estate Professional [NAGLREP], 2015). Most of the estimates of the level of housing discrimination experienced by LGBTQ-identified individuals comes from survey studies (Colin, 2004; Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011; Herek, 2009a, 2009b; Kaiser Foundation, 2000). These studies consistently find evidence that LGBTQ-identified individuals are discriminated against when searching for housing. However, these studies are potentially nonrepresentative, may suffer from nonresponse bias, and likely only capture blatant forms of discrimination (not more subtle forms of discrimination, such as nonresponse to housing inquiries or the quality of the property owner's response).

Scholars have recently begun to quantify the level of discrimination faced by the LGBTQ community in the United States using more internally valid methods, notably housing audits and correspondence tests. Friedman, Reynolds, Susan Scovill, Brassier, and Ballou (2013), Levy et al. (2017), and Murchie (2017) find that same-sex male couples experience less favorable treatment

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relative to same-sex female couples and heterosexual couples. With the exception of Friedman et al. (2013) and Murchie (2017), the existing research does not provide nationally representative estimates of housing discrimination against same-sex couples. These nationally representative studies, however, have two limitations. These scholars test property owners in the largest 20 to 50 municipalities, the majority of which have state or local (i.e., city-specific) housing protections for same-sex couples. Therefore, it is possible that these studies underestimate the level of housing discrimination faced by same-sex couples in localities without such protections. These scholars also only examine property-owner response rates to housing inquiries sent by same-sex couples; they do not test whether property owners practice subtle discrimination. That is, do same-sex couples experience poorer treatment, such as more negative responses and longer wait times for a response, than do their heterosexual peers? Moreover, no study has empirically tested whether state or local antidiscrimination laws for same-sex couples covary with higher or lower rates of discrimination compared with localities without these protections.

In this article, I explore these questions using data gathered from a matched-pair email correspondence field experiment. Between December 2016 and March 2017, I tested 6,490 randomly selected unique property owners[3] in 94 cities who posted rental units on craigslist.org.[4] I sent each property owner two emails—one containing a signal that the inquiring couple is a same-sex couple and the other containing a signal that it is a heterosexual couple—to estimate the rate of discrimination against same-sex couples at the property-owner level. I find that same-sex male couples are 4.6 percentage points less likely to receive an active response to their housing inquiry than are heterosexual couples. These results vary significantly by race. Black same-sex male couples are the group least likely to receive a response. Compared with Black heterosexual couples, Black same-sex male couples are 5.6 percentage points less likely to receive a response. This rate—compared with their own-race heterosexual peers—is 5.2 percentage points for Hispanic same-sex male couples and 4 percentage points for White same-sex male couples. I find no evidence that the property owners discriminate against same-sex female couples, which is consistent with prior scholarship (see Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2008).

I then extend the existing literature on housing discrimination against same-sex couples in two ways. This is the first study to examine whether property owners practice subtle discrimination. I find that property owners are more likely to use negative language (e.g., inquiring about evictions, mentioning fees, etc.) when responding to emails containing apparently non-White names than to emails containing apparent White names. I find no evidence that property owners take more time responding to or send shorter emails to same-sex couples compared with heterosexual couples. This is also the first study to investigate whether state and local antidiscrimination laws covary with higher or lower response rates for same-sex couples, which I also examine by race. I find that Black same-sex couples are more likely to receive a response in localities within states with state-level protections, but they are less likely to receive a response in localities with local-level protections.

I begin this article by describing the current state of housing protections for same-sex couples in the United States. I then provide a brief review of the theory on housing discrimination, summarize the small body of literature that currently exists examining housing discrimination against same-sex couples and the LGBTQ community, and detail my correspondence study. I then provide the results of my study, and I conclude the article by discussing avenues for future research and the policy implications of my findings.

Antidiscrimination Housing Laws in the United States for Same-Sex Couples

No federal law explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In 1974, Representatives Bella Abzug and Ed Koch introduced the Equality Act. Congress did not pass the act, which would have prohibited housing discrimination based on sexual orientation nationwide. Under the Obama administration, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) posted a public statement that discrimination against an LGBTQ individual "may be covered

by the Fair Housing Act if it is based on non-conformity with gender stereotypes." Additionally, HUD has an internal departmental policy that prohibits housing providers who received HUD or Federal Housing Authority funds from discriminating against a tenant based on sexual orientation (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2012a). This policy was codified under the Obama administration and remains in place under the Trump administration.[5]

With federal inaction, many states, counties, and local municipalities have begun to enact their own local antidiscrimination laws. At the time I conducted this study, 22 states and hundreds of local municipalities had comprehensive state- and local-level antidiscrimination laws in place to protect same-sex couples in the housing market. As of 2018, 28 still do not have antidiscrimination laws, and the 22 states that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, except for Wisconsin (Human Rights Campaign Foundation [HRCF], 2018). To explore municipal-level protections, this study relies on the 2016 Human Rights Campaign Foundation Municipal Equality Index (MEI), which "examines the laws, policies, and services of municipalities and rates them on the basis of their inclusivity of LGBTQ people who live and work there" (HRCF, 2016). This article uses a subcategory of the MEI's nondiscrimination law section, which examines housing protections.[6] The MEI identifies laws or ordinances at state, county, and city levels that prohibit discrimination against same-sex couples. This article uses global positioning system (GPS) coordinates on the tested properties to verify whether a property is located in a locality with LGBTQ protections or in a locality without a protection. For example, Tampa, Florida, has a local LGBTQ nondiscrimination ordinance, but the state of Florida and Hillsborough County, where Tampa is located, do not. In the Tampa rental market, any properties with GPS coordinates within the city of Tampa are included in the local protections category.

Housing Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples: Theory and Evidence

There is a robust theoretical and empirical literature on housing and labor market discrimination. (Allport, 1954; Arrow, 1973; Becker, 1973; Phelps, 1972). With respect to same-sex couples, one theoretical framework posits that property owners hold a "taste for discrimination," and there is thus a disamenity value to housing and renting to same-sex couples (Becker, 1973, p. 6). In this taste-based model, the prejudicial agent pays an economic penalty (in the form of lower rents or more risky tenants) for their prejudice against the minority community. However, in rental markets where there is high rental demand and a pool of highly qualified rental-unit applications, it is unlikely that a prejudicial agent will suffer any economic penalty (assuming there is no social or legal penalty to their discrimination). In this instance, property owners will engage in cherry-picking —seeking high-quality tenants who conform to their socioeconomic and demographic preferences. In a correspondence study, the prejudiced property owner is most likely to exercise their prejudice by not responding to a housing inquiry from a qualified same-sex couple.

Property owners may also have limited information about prospective tenants, and thus may use race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation as a signal for unobservable characteristics that are correlated with market interactions (Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972; Ross & Turner, 2005; Yinger, 1995). If there is a perception among property owners that same-sex couples are a greater housing risk than heterosexual couples, then property owners may respond to them less frequently. Researchers have found that gay male workers earn between 10% and 30% less than their equally qualified heterosexual peers, and employers are more likely to discriminate against openly gay candidates in the hiring process (Lee Badgett, 1995; Lee Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Deborah, 2007; Tilcsik, 2011).[7] If property owners believe that same-sex couples are less likely to be able to afford rent or more likely to lose their job because of discrimination, then they may be less likely to respond to a housing inquiry from a same-sex couple.

The location of the property and the number of same-sex couples in a particular locality may also influence the level of discrimination faced by same-sex couples. Increased contact between

property owners and the LGBTQ community may reduce negative stereotypes and improve intergroup interactions (Allport, 1954). A visible LGBTQ community that regularly interacts with the local customer base may also reduce opposition among local residents (the customer base for the property owner) to being housed in the same apartment complex and/or live near same-sex couples (Yinger, 1995). These interactions may also reduce the propensity of a nonprejudicial property owner who is cognizant of the preferences of their customer base to discriminate.[8]

However, for there to be interactions between property owners, the local customer base/local community, and the LGBTQ community, there must be a visible LGBTQ community and a willingness for same-sex couples to be open about their sexual orientation. There may be greater social costs (e.g., social ostracism, threats of physical violence) or economic penalties (loss or denial of housing, or loss of employment) for presenting as LGBTQ or as a same-sex couple (as opposed to same-sex roommates) in localities and states without legal protections for same-sex couples and LGBTQ individuals. It is thus more likely that a property owner will be less discriminatory in localities with state or local housing protections because this agent is more likely to know (and/or rent to) a same-sex couple (or LGBTQ individuals) compared with a property owner in an unprotected locality where the penalties for presenting as a same-sex couple are higher. If there are lower levels of discrimination against same-sex couples in protected localities, it could be because property owners are rationally responding to the threat of legal action (or social disapproval) for their illegal discrimination (or they are not prejudicial).

In this article, it is theoretically ambiguous whether and to what extent property owners will discriminate against same-sex couples of different racial backgrounds. Unlike most of the existing literature on housing discrimination and the theoretical frameworks of discrimination, this article explicitly considers, for same-sex Hispanic and Black couples, the consequences of belonging in more than one stigmatized group in the U.S. rental market. Social scientists have long understood that all people have multiple interlocking and intersectional identities (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). The identities may be additive, and thus being both a sexual and a racial minority may increase the level of discrimination experienced by someone belonging to these two minority groups. This *double (or multiple) jeopardy* phenomenon could imply that, for instance, a gay Black man faces the collective discrimination of a gay White man and a heterosexual Black man (Beale, 1970; Best, Edelman, Krieger, & Eliason, 2011).

However, these identities may interact and intersect in a way that actually reduces the level of discrimination faced by an individual belonging to more than one stigmatized group (Beale, 1970; Bowleg, 2008; Mazziotta, Zerr, & Rohmann, 2015). For example, in a survey experiment in the United States, Pedulla (2014) found that negative stereotypes of gay men being weak and effeminate counteracted the negative stereotypes of Black men as threatening and aggressive. It is unclear how property owners will respond to inquiries from individuals who can identify with (or be identified as belonging in) one or more stigmatized groups. Recent research from Germany found little benefit from the intersection of ethnicity (being Turkish) and sexual orientation (Mazziotta et al., 2015).

This article contributes to a small, but growing, literature on the intersection of racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation (Mazziotta et al., 2015; Pedulla, 2014; Remedios, Chasteen, Rule, & Plaks, 2011). This article is, however, situated within an extensive literature of audit studies and correspondence tests that estimate discrimination in the housing and labor markets (Ahmed et al., 2008; Ahmed et al., 2010; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Bosch, Carnero, & Farré, 2010; Edelman, Luca, & Svirsky, 2017; Gaddis, 2015; Hanson & Hawley, 2011; Neumark, Burn, & Button, 2015; Ondrich, Stricker, & Yinger, 1998, 1999; Turner & James, 2015; Yinger, 1986, 1995; Zhao, 2005).[09] The vast majority of this literature has focused on discrimination against racial minorities, or members of other protected classes.

In recent years, scholars in the United States, Canada, and Europe have begun to use audits and correspondence tests to estimate the extent to which sexual minorities are discriminated against in the housing market. In general, scholars have found that, in the United States, Canada, and Sweden, gay men are discriminated against when searching for housing, whereas

gay women experience little to no discrimination. Small-scale audits in Michigan found evidence of adverse treatment of same-sex couples when searching or applying for housing (Michigan's Fair Housing Centers, 2007). National correspondence studies have found evidence of discrimination against same-sex male couples in the U.S. rental markets. Friedman et al. (2013) found evidence of discrimination against same-sex male couples in the U.S. rental market, using a research design similar to that of this article. Levy et al. (2017) conducted an audit study in three metropolitan areas—Washington, DC, Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas, and Los Angeles, California—to test whether property owners discriminate against members of the LGBTQ community. They found evidence that property owners discriminate against same-sex male couples and transgender individuals.[10]

Outside of the United States, Ahmed et al. (2008) found little evidence that lesbian couples are discriminated against in Swedish rental markets, whereas Ahmed and Hammarstedt (2009) found evidence of rental market discrimination against same-sex male couples in Sweden. Lauster and Easterbrook (2011) found that property owners discriminate against same-sex male couples and single parents in Vancouver, Canada. Recent work by Mazziotta et al. (2015) found no evidence that gay men are discriminated against in large German cities, but did find that property owners discriminate against ethnic minorities.

Research Questions

To contribute to this growing literature, I examine three research questions:

(1) Do property owners who post ads for rental units on Craigslist discriminate against same-sex couples in the United States? I include a larger number of cities, as well as more cities without any housing protections, than prior research did.
(2) Do property owners who post ads for rental units on Craigslist subtly discriminate against same-sex couples? Do property owners demand more information from same-sex couples? Do they send more terse or rude emails? Do they take longer to respond or send shorter emails?
(3) Do state and/or local antidiscrimination laws covary with response rates? State and local adoption of antidiscrimination laws is clearly endogenous, but I examine the conditional correlation between the presence of these laws and discrimination rates for same-sex couples.

Experimental Design

Following the email-correspondence methodology of Ahmed et al. (2008) and Hanson and Hawley (2011), I examine whether property owners who post rental units on Craigslist discriminate against self-identified gay (two male) or lesbian (two female) couples. When identifying property owners to test, I do not include property owners seeking roommates, property owners seeking in-house tenants to live in the same house as them, or providers of short-term rental units (e.g., hostels, Airbnb, etc.). Although Fair Housing Laws prohibit racially discriminatory advertisements for housing, owner-occupied housing in a building with fewer than four units is exempt from the federal Fair Housing Act and from many state- and local-level laws (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016). I use a pairwise-matched design for several reasons. In my primary model, I control for property-owner unobservables with property-owner fixed effects. This design also provides improved precision for a given sample size. Although the risk of detection is higher with a matched-paired correspondence study than with a single-email correspondence design, I included 94 cities in this study and thus I did not send a preponderance of inquiries within any single rental market (see Table 1 for a breakdown by city). I test property owners in cities that fall within three major legal regimes: cities with

state-level sexual orientation housing protections, cities with municipal- or county-level sexual orientation housing protections, and cities with no housing protections for same-sex couples.

Using a web-scraper program, I collected each property owner's phone number (if provided) and contact email, as well as all the self-provided structural characteristics of the unit (e.g., size, how many bedrooms, etc.), the rent, and the address (street address and longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates) for randomly collected ads from selected cities' Craigslist websites.[11] I did not use an online post if it did not have an email address or longitude–latitude coordinates, which prevented me from either contacting the property owner or confirming the property location.

Once I collected each property owner's information, I randomly assigned property owners to a sexual orientation category for their first email. If the sexual orientation was gay male or lesbian, the second sexual orientation category was mechanically heterosexual. The order in which I sent emails to property owners was randomized. If the unit's rent was at or below 150% of HUD's County-level Fair Market Rent (FMR) for 2016, I classified the post as low-income/low-class. To limit the risk of detection, I sent out four different email types: two versions of a high-class email, which were sent to property owners with units 150% or more above the FMR price; and two versions of low-class emails. A high-class email contained a formal greeting and complete sentences (see version A of the high-class email below).

Example of High-Class Email

> Dear sir/madam,
> [My husband] NAME and I are interested in the rental unit you posted on Craigslist, is it still available? We both have good rental histories and references. We are happy to send a copy of a recent credit report.
> Regards,
> [First name]

The low-class email contained broken and informal syntax. This email structure signals that the emailer has less education and less income, would be interested in a lower cost rental unit, and, possibly, is younger.

Example of Low-Class Email

> Hi! [My wife] NAME, saw your post CL and were interested in the apartment. Were both employed and can afford the apartment. We do you need to know about us. Let us know! Thanks!
> [First Name #1] & [First Name #2]

I randomly assigned the first email as either version A or version B; the second version followed mechanically from this random assignment. I also randomly selected emails to contain an income value rounded to the nearest $1000.[12] To limit the risk of detection, socioeconomic status is not randomly assigned to the property owner. I randomly assigned each property owner a race for each email. Following Murchie (2017), this study uses stereotypical Black and Hispanic names that are generally unique to each racial group. These names are from New York City birth records from the early 2000s, and reflect popular baby names within specific racial communities at this time. The names used in this study are listed in Table 2. I randomly assigned names in combinations (two male, two female, and male female) to emails. If the email was randomly selected to be a Black same-sex male couple, I randomly selected Leroy, Jamal, or Darnell, and then, from the remaining two, I randomly selected the second name. I also randomly selected the member of the couple who is explicitly contacting the property owner and referencing their partner. For each heterosexual couple, for instance, I random selected whether the email was sent by the man or by the woman.

Table 1. Cities in the sampling frame and number of property owners emailed.

City	Property owners	City	Property owners	City	Property owners
Auburn, Alabama	49	Lawrence, Kansas	51	Buffalo, New York	87
Birmingham, Alabama	16	Topeka, Kansas	25	New York City, New York	69
Huntsville, Alabama	16	Wichita, Kansas	76	Syracuse, New York	45
Mobile, Alabama	60	Bowling Green, Kentucky	32	Raleigh, North Carolina	64
Montgomery, Alabama	44	Louisville, Kentucky	44	Bismarck, North Dakota	59
Anchorage, Alaska	83	Baton Rouge, Louisiana	79	Cleveland, Ohio	92
Phoenix, Arizona	101	New Orleans, Louisiana	53	Columbus, Ohio	102
Tucson, Arizona	54	Bangor, Maine	15	Dayton, Ohio	70
Little Rock, Arkansas	105	Portland, Maine	38	Toledo, Ohio	55
Bakersfield, California	24	South Portland, Maine	5	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	33
Los Angeles, California	144	Annapolis, Maryland	75	Eugene, Oregon	75
Orange County, California	36	Baltimore, Maryland	120	Erie, Pennsylvania	102
Riverside, California	64	Boston, Massachusetts	132	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	132
San Diego, California	143	Detroit, Michigan	142	Providence, Rhode Island	35
San Francisco, California	44	Lansing, Michigan	38	Chattanooga, Tennessee	119
Boulder, Colorado	121	Minneapolis, Minnesota	65	Clarksville, Tennessee	13
Colorado Springs, Colorado	30	Jackson, Mississippi	69	Nashville, Tennessee	109
Denver, Colorado	119	Columbia, Missouri	40	Dallas, Texas	127
Hartford, Connecticut	83	Jefferson City, Missouri	19	Houston, Texas	146
New Haven, Connecticut	83	St. Louis, Missouri	187	Lubbock, Texas	82
Dover, Delaware	6	Helena, Montana	52	Waco, Texas	40
Newark, Delaware	16	Lincoln, Nebraska	106	Provo, Utah	40
Wilmington, Delaware	37	Omaha, Nebraska	94	Burlington, Vermont	67
Daytona, Florida	112	Las Vegas, Nevada	95	Richmond, Virginia	89
Miami, Florida	171	Concord, New Hampshire	12	Pullman, Washington	42
Tampa, Florida	68	Dover, New Hampshire	5	Seattle, Washington	76
Atlanta, Georgia	189	Durham, New Hampshire	6	Parkersburg, West Virginia	24
Savannah, Georgia	32	Manchester, New Hampshire	20	Green Bay, Wisconsin	72
Boise, Idaho	96	Nashua, New Hampshire	18	Madison, Wisconsin	144
Chicago, Illinois	71	Albuquerque, New Mexico	33	Cheyenne, Wyoming	65
Bloomington, Indiana	37	Santa Fe, New Mexico	68		
Indianapolis, Indiana	79	Albany, New York	68		

Table 2. Names used in the correspondence test.

Names by race	Men	Women
White	Brian	Jennifer
	Robert	Sarah
	Eric	Denise
Black	Leroy	Michelle
	Jamal	Akeelah
	Darnell	Jada
Hispanic	Santiago	Sofia
	Alejandro	Isabella
	Mateo	Gabriella

Study Execution/Data Gathering

I conducted an initial pilot of 300 property owners in New York City, New York; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; and Los Angeles, California, in November 2016 to evaluate whether property owners responded at substantively and statistically different rates to the two different within-class email versions. For example, did email A for the high-class email convey something different than email B, which prompts property owners to respond more to version B than to A? The average response rate for the high-class email types was 60% for version A and 62% for version B. For low-class emails, the average response rate for version A and B was 53% and 54%, respectively. These differences were not statistically significantly different from one another.

I conducted the full email correspondence study between December 2016 and March 2017. During these months, I anonymously emailed 6,490 unique property owners from 94 cities in 46 states.[13] Of the 94 localities, 66 cities (70.2%) have state or local antidiscrimination laws prohibiting housing discrimination against same-sex couples, whereas 28 cities (29.8%) did not have such protections. The localities tested are geographically dispersed—15.8% of the localities are located in the Northeast, 35% are located in the South, 25.4% are located in the Midwest, and 23.8% are located in the West. Table 2 presents a list of the cities tested and the number of property owners I contacted in each locality. Almost all of the localities without housing protections are located in the South, and all localities tested in the Northeast have local- or state-level protections.

Discrimination by Sexual Orientation

My main measure of discrimination is whether a property owner expressed an active interest in a couple's inquiry. I thus treat any responses received within 1 minute of an inquiry being sent by both the same-sex and heterosexual couples, and/or emails that contained the exact same wording (a bot email) as a nonresponse. In the regression output, the dependent variable is binary and adopts a value of 1 if the property owner, not an automatic-email program or bot, responded to an inquiry, and 0 otherwise. To provide an overview of the results, Table 3 reports the mean callback rate by sexual orientation and race, where the mean callback rate is the number of active positive responses received for each sexual orientation (or sexual orientation–race group) divided by the number of inquiries sent for each group.

The top panel of Table 3 reports response rates by sexual orientation regardless of race. The first column presents the pooled responses for all inquiries; column 2 provides the mean callback rate

Table 3. Baseline response rate by sexual orientation and race (%).

	(1) Overall (O)	(2) State (S)	(3) Local (L)	(4) No protections
All races				
Heterosexual	40	40	40	41
Gay	35	36	33	35
Lesbian	38	38	38	39
White	42	45	40	42
Heterosexual	44	44	42	44
Gay	40	42	38	39
Lesbian	42	42	42	42
Black	35	35	34	37
Heterosexual	37	36	37	39
Gay	31	32	29	32
Lesbian	35	35	35	37
Hispanic	38	41	38	38
Heterosexual	40	41	40	41
Gay	34	35	34	34
Lesbian	38	39	36	38

Note. Baseline rates are calculated by dividing the number of active responses received by each race–sexual orientation group by the number of inquiries sent by each group.

for inquiries sent to property owners in localities with state-level protections; column 3 provides the results for inquiries sent to property owners in localities with only local-level protections; and column 4 provides the results for inquiries sent to property owners in localities without any protections. Consistent with Friedman et al. (2013), I find that same-sex couples regardless of race receive fewer responses compared with opposite-sex couples. Same-sex male couples across all legal regimes receive fewer responses (4–6 percentage points fewer) than lesbian couples do (approximately 2 percentage points fewer). Table 3 also provides initial evidence suggesting that race exacerbates discrimination: Black and Hispanic same-sex couples receive fewer responses on average than White same-sex couples do.

Table 3 presents the gross measure of discrimination. It is possible that some differences in response rates by race and sexual orientation could be driven by random differences in the manner in which property owners respond to emails—for example, responding to the most recent emails, failing to read one or more of the emails sent, etc. (Pitingolo & Ross, 2015). In Table 4, I calculate the net rate of discrimination, which is the difference in responses to email inquiries between heterosexual and same-sex couples expressed as a percentage of those observations where at least one of the couples received a response. The top panel presents the rate of discrimination for all gay male and lesbian couples regardless of race; the bottom panel separates these results out by race.

The net rates of discrimination are not substantively different from the gross rates presented in Table 3. In column 7 of Table 4, I present the results of a restricted McNemar paired difference-in-propositions test of the hypothesis that column 4 and column 5 are equally likely. Gay Black and Hispanic couples receive significantly fewer responses than heterosexual Black and Hispanic couples do. Although the results are not statistically significant at conventional measures of statistical significance, same-sex White male couples receive fewer responses than opposite-sex White couples do. White same-sex couples receive responses at higher rates than non-White same-sex couples do. Consistent with the findings of Ahmed et al. (2008), there is little evidence that property owners discriminate against same-sex female couples.

To control for property-owner observables, I use a linear probability model (LPM) with property-owner fixed effects to estimate the level of discrimination faced by individuals stratified on race and

Table 4. Net response rate by sexual orientation and race.

	(1) No response	(2) At least one response	(3) Both couples	(4) Only hetero-sexual couples	(5) Only same-sex couples	(6) Net discrimi-nation	(7) Critical value (χ^2)
Gay male couples	65.1%	34.9%	69.9%	21.5%	15.6%	5.9%	10.61
(all races)	[2,130]	[1,140]	[797]	[245]	[178]	[67]	$p = .001$
Lesbian couples	61.7%	38.3%	52.6%	27.9%	25.6%	2.1%	1.11
(all races)	[1,988]	[1,232]	[648]	[318]	[292]	[26]	$p = .292$
White male couples	58.5%	41.5%	72.1%	6.1%	4.5%	4.2%	2.70
	[606]	[426]	[310]	[69]	[51]	[18]	$p = .103$
White lesbian couples	57.4%	42.6%	60.3%	8.6%	7.7%	2.1%	0.54
	[630]	[468]	[282]	[98]	[88]	[10]	$p = .462$
Black male couples	66.2%	33.8%	72.4%	5.4%	3.4%	6.3%	5.24
	[716]	[366]	[265]	[62]	[39]	[23]	$p = .022$
Black lesbian couples	63.8%	36.2%	52.7%	8.1%	7.5%	1.9%	0.28
	[658]	[374]	[197]	[92]	[85]	[7]	$p = .596$
Hispanic male couples	63.3%	36.7%	52.4%	10.0%	7.7%	6.1%	3.35
	[732]	[424]	[222]	[114]	[88]	[26]	$p = .067$
Hispanic lesbian couples	61.8%	38.2%	40.6%	11.2%	10.4%	2.2%	0.33
	[674]	[416]	[169]	[128]	[119]	[9]	$p = .560$

Note. The analysis is restricted to emails with substantive responses. The number of property owners is given in square brackets. *p* values are from the McNemar paired difference in proportions tests. The test statistics follows a chi-squared distribution with 1 degree of freedom.

sexual orientation. I use an LPM model for ease of interpretation (the coefficients can be directly interpreted as probabilities), to benefit from the increased precision of an LPM estimator as opposed to a nonlinear estimator, and because the data are generated from a completely randomized experiment with a binary outcome. The data-generation process largely ensures that there will be no predicted probabilities outside of the required [0, 1] range. I checked my LPM results using a probit model; the results are not substantively different and are available upon request.

$$y_{il} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SameSex_i + \beta_2 Inc_i + \lambda_l + \varepsilon_{il} \quad (1)$$

In Equation (1), $y_{il}$is a dummy variable that adopts a value of 1 if couple *i* receives a reply to their inquiry about the posted rental unit from property owner *l*. In this case, the property owner is synonymous with the rental units. $SameSex_i$adopts a value of 1 if the email contained signals that the inquiring couple is a same-sex couple. $Inc_i$is a control variable that equals 1 if the email contained a randomly generated income measure, and 0 otherwise. Equation (1) includes property-owner fixed effects, synonymous with property-unit fixed effects, denoted by λ_l. The identifying variation for Equation (1) is thus within-unit responses to paired emails, in which the only difference between responses is the sexual orientation of the emailers. I cluster the standard errors at the property-unit level. If there is no discrimination, $\beta_1$will be 0. Any nonzero value can be understood as the within-landlord differential response rates (measured in percentage points) based on sexual orientation. A negative coefficient implies that same-sex couples are less likely to receive a response compared with heterosexual couples, whereas a positive coefficient indicates that the same-sex couple is receiving preferential treatment. Table 5 presents the result of Equation (1) stratified on sexual orientation and race.

Column 1 of Table 5 pools all same-sex male couples together regardless of race. The comparison group is heterosexual couples. Same-sex male couples were 4.6 percentage points less likely to receive a response than were heterosexual couples. Stratifying on race, the remaining terms reflect the pattern seen in Tables 3 and 4. White male couples were approximately 4 percentage points less likely to receive a response compared with White heterosexual couples. This disparity was higher (and more statistically significant) for non-White same-sex couples. Same-sex Black and Hispanic couples were 5.6 and 5.2 percentage points, respectively, less likely to receive a response from a property owner compared with their same-race heterosexual counterparts. For all same-sex male couples, these results are statistically significantly different from zero. Consistent with Friedman et al. (2013) and Levy et al. (2017), these results provide further evidence that same-sex male couples face discrimination in U.S. rental markets. Columns 5–8 in Table 5 report the results of Equation (1) stratified on sexual orientation for same-sex female couples. Consistent with the results shown in Tables 3 and 4, there is little evidence that property owners discriminate against same-sex female couples. The coefficients on these estimates are small in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Subtle Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples

Prejudicial property owners who do not want to rent to a same-sex couple may respond to a same-sex couple so as not to appear to be discriminatory. However, such a property owner may subtly

Table 5. Response rate with property-owner fixed effects.

	Couples							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Gay (all races)	Gay White	Gay Black	Gay Hispanic	Lesbian (all races)	White lesbian	Black lesbian	Hispanic lesbian
Sexual orientation	− 0.046**	− 0.039**	− 0.056***	− 0.052***	− 0.012	− 0.011	− 0.015	− 0.014
	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.021)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
No. observations	6,540	2,072	2,164	2,312	6,440	2,196	2,064	2,180

Note. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. All models include property-owner fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the property-owner level.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

discriminate against a same-sex couple in an attempt to dissuade them from viewing the property or further contacting the property owner by taking longer to respond to their email, or by sending a less polite email or an email containing less information.

Following the methodology employed by Hanson, Hawley, and Taylor (2011), I examine whether property owners respond with less positive language or more negative language to emails from same-sex couples compared with emails from heterosexual couples. Hanson et al. (2011) find that property owners are more likely to use positive language and write longer emails to housing inquiries containing White names than to those containing Black names. Using a modified version of Hanson, Hawley, and Taylor's list of search terms, I perform keyword searches for both positive and negative language of the email texts for all property owners who responded to a housing inquiry. This analysis is restricted to the active responses used in the analysis above. Table 6 contains a breakdown of the positive and negative search terms used to analyze property owner responses. Positive language includes positive descriptors of the unit, words that indicate a willingness to show additional units, and polite language, as well as providing contact information. Negative language is coded as any references to fees, employment history, background or rental history, or eviction history.

Table 7 presents the within-race results of these keyword searches. Differential response rates between same-sex couples and heterosexual couple responses are tested using the McNemar test. Property owners do not respond differentially to same-sex White or Hispanic couples. However, when responding to same-sex Black couples, property owners were 2.4 percentage points less likely to describe the unit or the unit's neighborhood positively, or to respond using polite language and/or salutations, compared with responses to heterosexual Black couples. Property owners were also measurably less likely to offer to show any additional units or to schedule an appointment to view the unit with a same-sex Black male couple.

Although White and Hispanic same-sex couples were also less likely to receive a response compared with heterosexual White and Hispanic couples, these differences are not statistically significantly different from zero. When these results are pooled and compared across race regardless of sexual orientation, there are clear patterns of racial discrimination against non-White couples. I present the results of this analysis in Table 8. Black couples are less likely to receive emails containing positive descriptions of the unit, less likely to be offered to view the unit or schedule an appointment, and less likely to receive emails containing polite language or contact

Table 6. Keyword groupings used for email text searches.

		Positive language			
Offer to show other units	Another, another	Second, second	Several, several		
Offer to schedule viewing	View, view	Tour, tour	Show, show	Stop/come by, stop/come by	Appointment, appointment
Contact information	@	Numerical values [0–9][a]	Email, email	Contact, contact	Application, application, Apply, apply
Greetings/polite language	Thanks, thanks	Thank you, Thank you	Please call	Sincerely	
		Negative Language			
Fees	Application fee,[b] Application Fee[b]	Deposit, deposit	$		
Employment	Employed, employed	Employment, employment	Employer, employer	Pay stub,[b] pay stub,[b] paystub	
Background/rental history	Crime, crime, Criminal, criminal	Verification, verify	SSN, ssn	References, references	
Eviction history	Eviction, eviction	Evicted, evicted	Court, court		

Note. [a]This was confirmed visually by the author to be a phone number and coded appropriately.
[b]This was confirmed visually by the author to be a two-word phrase and coded appropriately.

Table 7. Property owner response differences in email content.

	White couples				African American couples			Hispanic couples		
	Present in none	Heterosexual only	Same sex only	$H_0 = R_W{}^{SS} - R_W{}^{H} = 0$	Heterosexual only	Same sex only	$H_0 = R_{AA}{}^{SS} - R_{AA}{}^{H} = 0$	Heterosexual only	Same sex only	$H_0 = R_{AA}{}^{SS} - R_H{}^{H} = 0$
Positive language										
Positive descriptive	85.8% [4,280]	11.9% [84]	10.7% [76]	1.1% $p = .527$	9.3% [66]	6.9% [49]	2.4% $p = .012$**	9.2% [65]	7.2% [51]	2.0% $p = .194$
Other units	95.0% [4,738]	10.4% [26]	8.4% [21]	2.0% $p = .532$	9.6% [24]	8.8% [22]	0.8% $p = .075$*	8.8% [22]	8.0% [20]	0.8% $p = .758$
View unit/ schedule appointment	71.7% [3,574]	12.2% [173]	11.0% [156]	1.2% $p = .349$	9.6% [136]	8.6% [121]	1.1% $p = .008$***	9.1% [128]	8.7% [123]	0.4% $p = .752$
Contact information	66.9% [3,340]	12.2% [201]	11.8% [195]	0.4% $p = .763$	9.8% [162]	9.6% [158]	0.2% $p = .136$	10.1% [167]	9.0% [148]	1.2% $p = .284$
Greetings/polite language	43.0% [2,144]	10.8% [308]	9.9% [281]	0.9% $p = .266$	9.7% [277]	9.0% [256]	0.7% $p = .001$***	10.1% [286]	9.0% [255]	1.1% $p = .182$
Negative language										
Fees	92.0% [4,590]	6.3% [25]	5.8% [23]	0.5% $p = .773$	11.8% [47]	13.3% [53]	1.5% $p = .549$	8.8% [35]	9.3% [37]	0.5% $p = .815$
Employment	91.6% [4,570]	1.9% [8]	2.9% [12]	1.0% $p = .371$	5.0% [21]	4.3% [18]	0.7% $p = .631$	3.6% [15]	4.1% [17]	0.5% $p = .724$
Background/ history	95.0% [4,738]	4.8% [12]	5.6% [14]	0.8% $p = .695$	8.4% [21]	10.4% [26]	2.0% $p = .406$	5.6% [14]	5.2% [13]	0.4% $p = .847$
Eviction	96.1% [4,794]	4.6% [9]	5.1% [10]	0.5% $p = .513$	10.8% [21]	14.9% [29]	4.1% $p = .258$	7.7% [15]	7.2% [14]	0.5% $p = .852$

Note. The analysis is restricted to emails with substantive responses. The number of property owners is given in square brackets. p values are from the McNemar paired difference in proportions tests. The test statistics follows a chi-squared distribution.

*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

Table 8. Content analysis with restricted categories.

	Same-sex couples compared with heterosexual couples			Within-race responses				
	Heterosexual total	Same sex total	$H_0 = R_{Total}{}^{SS} - R_{Total}{}^{H} = 0$	White	Black	Hispanic	$H_0 = R_{White}{}^{Total} - R_{Black}{}^{Total} = 0$	$H_0 = R_{White}{}^{Total} - R_{Hispanic}{}^{Total}$
Positive language								
Positive descriptive	30.4%	24.9%	5.5%	39.3%	30.1%	30.6%	9.2%	8.6%
	[215]	[176]	$p = .049$**	[278]	[213]	[217]	$p = .003$***	$p = .006$***
Other units	28.8%	25.2%	3.6%	35.2%	33.6%	31.6%	1.6%	3.6%
	[72]	[63]	$p = .439$	[88]	[84]	[79]	$p = .763$	$p = .486$
View unit/schedule appointment	30.9%	28.3%	2.6%	39.3%	31.1%	29.6%	8.2%	9.8%
	[437]	[400]	$p = .201$	[556]	[440]	[418]	$p = .001$***	$p = .001$***
Contact information	32.2%	30.4%	1.8%	38%	31%	31%	7.5%	7.7%
	[530]	[501]	$p = .366$	[633]	[510]	[506]	$p = .001$***	$p = .001$***
Polite language	30.6%	27.8%	2.8%	34.9%	32.3%	32.8%	2.6%	2.1%
	[871]	[792]	$p = .053$*	[993]	[920]	[932]	$p = .095$*	$p = .164$
Negative language								
Fees	26.9%	28.4%	1.5%	26.4%	39.4%	34.4%	13.1%	8.0%
	[107]	[113]	$p = .686$	[105]	[157]	[137]	$p = .002$***	$p = .040$**
Employment	10.5%	11.2%	0.7%	31.3%	35.2%	33.7%	3.8%	2.4%
	[44]	[47]	$p = .753$	[131]	[147]	[141]	$p = .337$	$p = .544$
Background/history	18.8%	21.2%	2.4%	26.8%	46.0%	27.2%	19.2%	0.4%
	[47]	[53]	$p = .549$	[67]	[115]	[68]	$p = .001$***	$p = .931$
Eviction	23.1%	27.2%	4.1%	19%	50%	31%	31.3%	11.8%
	[45]	[53]	$p = .419$	[37]	[98]	[60]	$p = .001$***	$p = .020$**

Note. The analysis is restricted to emails with substantive responses. The number of property owners is given in square brackets. *p* values are from the McNemar paired difference in proportions tests.

*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

information. Black couples were also more likely to receive emails with information about fees, and, compared with White couples, Black couples were almost 30 percentage points more likely to be asked about their eviction histories. Although Black couples were also less likely to be offered other units to view or asked about their employment histories than White couples were, the differences are not statistically significantly different from zero. Hispanic couples are also less likely to receive emails containing positive descriptors of the unit, contact information, or offers to schedule an interview. Hispanic couples are 8 percentage points more likely than White couples are to be asked about fees (13 percentage points more likely for Black couples) and approximately 12 percentage points more likely than White couples to be asked about their eviction histories. These results are consistent with those of Hanson et al. (2011).

Do property owners take longer to respond to same-sex couples, and do they send emails with fewer words? Although property owners take longer to respond and send shorter emails to same-sex male and female couples, these differences are not statistically significantly different from zero. These results are presented in Table 9. The magnitudes of these results are also not substantively different between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples. It took property owners between 10 and 20 additional min to respond to same-sex female couples, and 20 and 30 min longer to respond to same-sex male couples, compared with heterosexual couples. It does not appear that property owners are attempting to discourage potential same-sex applicants by taking longer to respond to their emails.

Although no property owner responded using any pejorative, derogatory, racist, or homophobic language, eight property owners in five Southern states (seven different cities) explicitly mentioned that they will not house anyone with HIV/AIDS. HUD classifies HIV/AIDS as a disability, and individuals with HIV/AIDS are thus protected under the Federal Fair Housing Act. Each inquiry that received this response contained names to signal the inquiring couple was a Black same-sex male couple. This is anecdotal evidence that some property owners associated either being gay or being a Black gay male with HIV/AIDS, a form of statistical discrimination.

Do State and Local Laws Covary With Higher Response Rates?

Lastly, I examine the correlation between state and local laws, respectively, and response rates. Table 3 provides some evidence that property owners operating under different legal regimes respond at differential rates. I formally examine whether antidiscrimination laws correlate with lower rates of discrimination using the following model:

$$y_{ilcks} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SameSex_i + \beta_2 Law_{cs} + \beta_3 (SameSex_i * Law_{cs}) + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + \phi + \varphi_i + \varepsilon_{ilcks} \quad (2)$$

The terms y_{ilcs} and $SameSex_i$ are defined in Equation (1). The indicatory variable Law_{cs} adopts a value of 1 if the locality c in census region k in state s where the rental unit is located has a local or state antidiscrimination law (Law_{cs}), and a value of 0 if the rental unit is in a locality where there are no antidiscrimination protections. I coded localities in states that have state-level housing protections and local-level housing protections as only having state-level housing protections. The coefficient of interest is the interaction between the same-sex indicator variable and the legal regime variable (captured by β_3). I include location-specific fixed effects (ϕ), which are state-specific fixed effect for specifications with municipal-level protections and census-region fixed effects for specifications with state-level protections.[14] I also include email-class fixed effects (φ_i)and a vector of unit-level characteristics, and an income value if it was contained in the email ($\mathbf{X}_i$). I run this model separately by legal regime and race.

Equation (2) is a linear probability model; the results do not substantively change if a probit model is used. The coefficient β_3 captures property owners' differential response rates to same-sex inquiries in localities with state-level housing protections, compared with same-sex inquires in localities without housing protections. Localities choose whether to adopt antidiscrimination laws and thus this coefficient only captures the conditional correlation between differential response

Table 9. Time to response and word count at the email level.

Time elapsed	Heterosexual	Same-sex male couples	Difference in means heterosexual vs. same-sex males	Same-sex female couples	Difference in means heterosexual vs. same-sex females
White	6:46	7:14	0:28	7:05	0:19
	(22:12)	(22:16)	$p = .565$	(21:49)	$p = .760$
African American	6:55	7:23	0:28	7:16	0:21
	(23:10)	(24:23)	$p = .591$	(23:01)	$p = .770$
Hispanic	7:02	7:41	0:39	7:26	0:24
	(22:51)	(22:43)	$p = .434$	(22:57)	$p = .720$
Word count					
White	27.06	24.03	3.03	25.61	1.45
	(61.23)	(54.11)	$p = .374$	(58.67)	$p = .608$
African American	24.19	23.51	0.68	24.61	0.42
	(55.64)	(55.51)	$p = .833$	(56.61)	$p = .885$
Hispanic	25.52	24.16	1.36	24.06	1.46
	(57.22)	(58.45)	$p = .753$	(58.12)	$p = .603$

Note. In the upper half of the table, rows 1, 3, and 5 express average time elapsed between when an inquiry is sent and when a property owner reply is received, reported in (hours:minutes) format. This analysis only includes emails to which a substantive reply is made. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. *p* values in columns 3 and 5 report the results of a difference in means test. In the lower half of the table, rows 1, 3, and 5 report the average word count of emails sent from White, African American, and Hispanic names, respectively. Columns 3 and 5 report the *p* values of a standard difference in means test.

rates to same-sex inquires and each jurisdiction's legal regime. Table 10 provides the results from Equation (2) run only for localities with state housing protections in the top panel, and for those with local housing protections in the bottom panel. In both panels, Equation (2) is run separately for same-sex male (column 1) and female couples (column 5) regardless of race, and then stratified by race in columns 2, 3, and 4 (for White, Black, and Hispanic gay couples, respectively) and columns 6, 7, and 8 (for White, Black, and Hispanic lesbian couples, respectively).

State-level housing protections do not covary at statistically significant rates for same-sex White or Hispanic same-sex couples. However, same-sex Black male couples are 2.7 percentage points more likely to receive a response than same-sex Black male couples are in localities without any protections. This coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero at the 10% level. This suggests that same-sex Black male couples may benefit from state-level protection, although this coefficient may simply be identifying the differences in the endogenous propensity for property owners to discriminate in these different localities. State laws also do not covary measurably with response rates for same-sex female couples.

The bottom panel of Table 10 presents the results of Equation (2) where Law_{cs} equals 1 if the locality has enacted a local antidiscrimination law. There appears to be no overall correlation between the response rate in localities with local-housing protections and those with no protections for same-sex male couples. However, once stratified by race, same-sex Black male couples in localities with local housing protections are 2.6 percentage points *less* likely to receive a response than are same-sex Black male couples in localities without such protections. The results for same-sex White and Hispanic couples and same-sex female couples of all races are small in magnitude and are not statistically significantly different from zero.

Although these results are only conditional correlations between response rates and the legal protections for same-sex couples, they suggest that localities may choose to adopt local protections in response to high levels of discrimination against same-sex couples and other sexual minorities. However, this evidence also suggests that these local protections do not reduce the propensity for property owners to discriminate in these localities relative to unprotected localities. This may be especially true if there is little public or political support for same-sex couples or members of the LGBTQ community at the state level (or outside more urbanized localities). State-

Table 10. Relationship between state and local housing protections and response rates.

	Couples							
	(1) Gay (all races)	(2) Gay White	(3) Gay Black	(4) Gay Hispanic	(5) Lesbian (all races)	(6) Lesbian White	(7) Lesbian Black	(8) Lesbian Hispanic
				State law analysis				
Sexual orientation	− 0.038***	− 0.032*	− 0.044**	− 0.042**	− 0.011	− 0.006	− 0.013	− 0.011
	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)
State protection	0.022	0.032*	0.019	0.016	0.008	0.012	0.006	0.005
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Sexual orientation*	0.014	0.021	0.031*	0.022	− 0.006	0.002	− 0.016	− 0.002
State protection	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Observations	4,360	1,404	1,438	1,518	4,290	1,440	1,418	1,432
				Local law analysis				
Sexual orientation	− 0.050***	− 0.041**	− 0.058***	− 0.052***	− 0.009	− 0.006	− 0.008	− 0.011
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Local Protection	− 0.010	0.011	− 0.025	0.011	− 0.012	0.008	− 0.012	− 0.014
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Sexual orientation*	− 0.010	0.010	− 0.026*	0.012	− 0.002	0.005	− 0.020	0.012
Local protection	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Observations	3,994	1,238	1,298	1,458	3,928	1,368	1,206	1,354

Note. Robust standard errors are given in parentheses. All models include unit-level controls, annualized monthly rent, and income values as provided in the inquiry. The state-level results presented in the top panel include census-tract fixed effects and email-class fixed effects. The local-level results presented in the bottom panel include state fixed effects and email-class fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the property-owner level.

*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

level protections are correlated with higher response rates for same-sex Black male couples (the most discriminated-against subgroup), which suggests that broader formal protection, political support for LGBTQ rights, and/or less ambiguous legal protections may help reduce the level of discrimination faced by same-sex couples.

Testing for Property-Owner Detection

The primary risk of a matched-pair email correspondence test is that property owners may detect that a test is being conducted. If they do, they are likely to alter their behavior as a result. A property owner could respond to the first email and then, having found similarities to the first email in the second email, they may not respond to the second email. Alternatively, if a property owner becomes aware of the test, they may respond to both emails when, in the absence of being aware of the test, they would have only responded to one of the emails. The effect is ambiguous—if the landlord reviews their emails from the most recent to the oldest, they will read the second email first (it will appear first in their email), and then read the first email. However, there is no evidence that property owners responded differently to the first versus second emails—there were no statistically different rates of response between the first and second emails.

Discussion, Limitations, and Future Work

Using a unique data set compiled through a rigorous field experiment, I find that same-sex couples, especially same-sex male couples and minority same-sex couples, face higher barriers to access rental housing access in the United States. Compared with heterosexual couples, same-sex male couples are less likely to receive a response to their rental inquiry. There is no measurable evidence that same-sex female couples are actively discriminated against by property owners. I find that property owners subtly discriminate against same-sex Black male couples compared with Black heterosexual couples. I also find evidence that property owners subtly discriminate against Black and Hispanic couples, compared with White couples, regardless of sexual orientation.

The results of this article suggest that, for males, membership in multiple stigmatized groups exacerbates rather than reduces the level of discrimination faced by individuals belonging to these groups. In the rental market, same-sex couples who are also racial minorities receive fewer responses compared with heterosexual members of their own race and with same-sex White male couples. This is the second study, following Mazziotta et al. (2015), and the first in the United States to find that being a sexual minority does not reduce, and may exacerbate, the level of discrimination experienced by individuals who are also racial minorities. I do not find evidence that women, whom property owners appear to prefer as tenants compared with men, suffer any adverse treatment regardless of their membership in a racial/ethnic and/or sexual minority group (Andersson, Jakobsson, and Kotsadam 2012). This is initial evidence that, for childless women, gender may supersede any racial and sexual preferences that property owners have when considering prospective tenants.

However, this study is limited in the degree to which it applies broadly to members of the LGBTQ community, and may, in fact, understate the level of discrimination experienced by the members of this community. The results of this study are limited explicitly to married same-sex couples. One potential avenue for future research is to examine whether same-sex couples (who disclose that they are married or partnered) are less likely to receive a response to their housing inquiry compared with two heterosexual male (or female) roommates, or same-sex couples who are not married (signaled using *boyfriend/girlfriend* rather than *husband/wife*). Presumably, property owners prefer married couples because these two individuals are less likely to separate than are two individuals who are dating. As a result, it is possible that unmarried same-sex male and female couples will face higher levels of discrimination than do married same-sex male and female couples.

Scholars and activists should also consider, in the spirit of Levy et al. (2017), conducting more audit studies to examine property owners' in-person responses to same-sex couples, as well as to single gay men and women. Such studies would also allow researchers to examine how property owners respond to transgender and nonbinary individuals, which is extremely difficult to test in correspondence studies without raising the suspicions of property owners.

This article only examines discrimination at the very beginning of the housing selection process (Yinger, 1995) and only examines property owners who post ads on Craigslist. Even if a property owner responds to a housing inquiry, it does not necessarily follow that they will sign a lease with a same-sex couple. A property owner may also treat a same-sex couple less favorably than a heterosexual couple when setting terms and conditions. To my knowledge, no study has examined whether there is discrimination in the later stages of the housing process. Future work should examine whether same-sex couples are able to access credit in the mortgage market, or the degree to which they are discriminated against in the residential home market.

Given that the sampling frame for this correspondence test is Craigslist, the external validity of this study is limited to the extent that the distribution of property owners and rental stock on Craigslist is comparable with the distribution of rental stock and property owners in each locality more broadly. Although Craigslist is a popular site for rental housing (for both property owners and renters), it is possible that there are systematic differences in the property owners who post to Craigslist or the rental stock posted on Craigslist compared with the average property owner/rental unit in each specific locality.[15] This study is not generalizable to property owners of rental properties in rural areas. Mazziotta et al. (2015)[16] suggest that levels of discrimination may be much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The results of this study are also not generalizable to property owners who do not post their rental properties online but serve specific neighborhoods within cities and expect in-person phone calls from prospective tenants. These property owners house low-wealth individuals who may not regularly use the Internet (or have access to the Internet) to explore other housing options.[17] Future work examining housing discrimination more broadly, and discrimination against the LGBTQ community in particular, should actively test (or audit) rental and residential properties in these less wired, less easy-to-access communities where low-income LGBTQ individuals are likely to live.

Future work should examine how variation in support for local LGBTQ protections in housing (or employment, public accommodations, etc.) covaries with rates of discrimination. Large cities may be able to pressure their state government to enact state-wide protections, but this may not reflect the opinions of most of the state's residents. Moving away from binary policies toward—in the spirit of work by Taylor, Lewis, Jacobsmeier, and DiSarro (2012)—more multidimensional measures of these policies (that include components of support, breadth, and implementation) are likely to provide practical insights into the efficacy of these policies and help improve policy design.

Policy Implications

The results of this study raise questions whether codified local antidiscrimination ordinances are effective at lessening or eliminating discrimination. Whereas antidiscrimination laws, especially at the state level, do not appear to be correlated with less discrimination for all same-sex couples, these laws are correlated with less discrimination against same-sex Black male couples, which are the most discriminated-against subgroup. This suggests that these laws may reduce the intensity by which property owners discriminate, even if they do not reduce all levels of discrimination. States should adopt state-wide antidiscrimination laws. Such adoption would also help eliminate any legal ambiguity regarding which groups can and cannot be discriminated against in one locality in a state versus a different locality in the same state. Local laws appear to be relatively ineffective at reducing discrimination for all groups. This may be because property owners are unconcerned with the consequences for discriminating against same-sex couples in a state that

does not prohibit this behavior, even if the locality in which their property is located does outlaw such discrimination.

Congress should codify sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes for purposes of antidiscrimination legislation, and should remove any existing legal inequities. However, at the moment, this appears highly unlikely. If the federal government and state governments are unwilling to act, local governments should improve enforcement of local antidiscrimination laws (for all protected classes, including the LGBTQ community). This may involve increasing access to arbitration or civil remedies for individuals who have been discriminated against, or imposing economically meaningful fines on discriminatory property owners.

It might further help if local governments or police departments appoint an LGBTQ liaison to serve as a point of communication between the local government and a locality's LGBTQ residents. Such a liaison might not only improve the relationship between the local government and the LGBTQ community, but, for a member of the LGBTQ community who has been the victim of housing discrimination (or some other form of discrimination or hate crime), this may increase the likelihood that they report the crime. Increased visibility of the LGBTQ community and improved relations between the community and the local government may also reduce the level of discrimination by signaling to property owners that their discriminatory behavior both is socially inappropriate and has a higher risk of being detected.

The ability to access a wide area of housing matters: barring individuals, couples, and families from housing and neighborhoods can have adverse ripple effects throughout their lives. Limiting someone's housing options can affect the types of communities where they can live, the schools and public services they can access, and numerous other dimensions of their lives (Browne-Yung, Ziersch, & Baum, 2013; Cutler & Glaeser, 1997) As the number, visibility, and mobility of same-sex couples increase, it is imperative that scholars and activists examine and attempt to eliminate barriers to housing access for same-sex couples and other members of the LGBTQ community.

Notes

1. Defining what constitutes discrimination is not without controversy. See Yinger (1998) for a summary of the legal and scholarly definitions. This article will take a broad definition of discrimination: any disparate treatment because of their membership to a particular group (e.g., race and/or sexual orientation) that I measured via differential response rates to inquiries for housing between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples.
2. The Fair Housing Act, or Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing or in other housing-related transactions because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability. In 2012, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published its final "Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," which prohibited making a determination of eligibility for HUD-assisted or HUD-insured housing on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2012b, 24 CFR Parts 5, 200, 203, 236, 400, 570, 574, 882, 891, and 982; volume 77, no. 23—Friday, February 3, 2012). However, this is an agency rule and can be amended or revoked with a change unilaterally within the executive branch. As of June 2018, this rule remains in place under the Trump administration and can be accessed at: https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/12LGBTFINALRULE.PDF
3. *Property owner* is a generic term I use in this article to refer to the property manager, the property owner, the *landlord*, or the real estate agent who publicly posted the rental unit on craigslist.org and is responding to the housing inquiries that I sent. Examining whether property owners versus property managers are more or less likely to discriminate against same-sex couples is beyond the scope of this article, but is a worthwhile topic for future studies to examine. To ensure that each property owner is a unique property owner, I collected their email address, global positioning system (GPS) coordinates for each property, information on the property management company if provided, phone number if provided, post title, post identification number, and other identifiable information. I unduplicated all scrapped ads based on these parameters prior to contacting the property owner. Note: property location, the name of the property management company, and property-owner identifiable information were not retained after duplicate ads were removed.
4. Hereafter referred to as Craigslist. craigslist.org is a major free local classified and forum website that is popular for jobs and housing searches. There are 80 million unique classified ad posts (across all service types) each

month and more than 60 million monthly users of Craigslist each month (50 billion page views/month). It is an extremely popular site for email correspondence tests; see Hanson and Hawley (2011) and Murchie (2017).

5. The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled, in April 2017, that the Fair Housing Act's ban on sex discrimination applied in the case of two married plaintiffs, one of whom was transgender (see Smith & Smith v. Avanti, 2017). This is not a national ruling and does not apply to same-sex couples. The Trump administration submitted an amicus brief in this case that argued the ban on sex discrimination in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.
6. The MEI assigns a numerical value to a municipality's housing protections: 0 points for no protection, 5 points for prohibiting housing discrimination based on sexual orientation, and 10 points for prohibiting discrimination based on both gender identity and sexual orientation; 129 of the 186 municipalities analyzed by the HRFC have housing protections. Fourteen municipalities (11%) prohibit discrimination only based on sexual orientation, and the remaining 115 prohibit discrimination based on either sexual orientation or gender identity.
7. For other studies examining compensation and sexual orientation, see Allegretto and Arthur (2001), Antecol, Jong, and Steinberger (2008), Berg and Lien (2002), Klawitter (2011), and Klawitter and Flatt (1998).
8. For work on this contact hypothesis, see Ellison and Powers (1994), Lee, Firebaugh, John Iceland, Michael Gaddis, and Ghoshal (2015), and Sigelman and Welch (1993).
9. Ross and Yinger (2002) offer a comprehensive overview of discrimination in the mortgage markets, and Oh and Yinger (2015) provide a recent summary of paired testing in the housing market more broadly. An excellent resource on the current state of housing discrimination audit and correspondence studies is the 2015 edition of *Cityscape* (volume 17(3)).
10. Although in-person audits provide richer insights into property-owner behavior, these studies are expensive to conduct. These studies also require trained confederates who must visit numerous sites to generate a sufficient sample size. The internal validity of an in-person audit study requires that pairs of confederates behave and present themselves more or less identically across property owners, as even subtle differences in behavior could potentially bias a study's results (Heckman, 1998).
11. To ensure that I did not email the same property owner twice, I removed ads with the same phone number, ads posted multiple times by a rental agent/property management company (this information, per my Institutional Review Board (IRB) authorization, was not retained after the removal of duplicates), ads with the same longitude and latitude coordinates (this information was also not retained after the removal of duplicates and correctly placing the property within a locality, per my IRB authorization), and ads with the same posting ID.
12. This income measure adds additional variation to the email sent, to reduce detection further. This income was randomly generated to make the fictitious applicant's annual salary (rounded to the nearest $1000) between 25% and 45% of the posted annual rent (the stated monthly rent multiplied by 12). I test whether property owners discriminate less against same-sex couples who provide income information. Whereas providing additional information improved response rates for all racial-sexual orientation groups, these differences were not statistically significant. It is possible (and even likely) that property owners do not give much credence to self-reported income values.
13. As an additional precaution, I used nine different email accounts to contact property owners. I did not contact any property owner with the same two email accounts. However, Craigslist uses anonymized email links that generally prevent end users from seeing one another's email name.
14. I cannot use smaller census-division fixed effects because all states in the New England region (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont) have adopted state-level protections, and thus it would be perfectly collinear with my treatment indicator.
15. Craigslist is popular for email correspondence test studies given the website's flexibility and the ability to automatically scrape property owner information; however, future research needs to explore other platforms and economies (e.g., the sharing economy) to confirm or reject the finding that discrimination against same-sex couples (notably, same-sex male couples) is systemic throughout the U.S. rental market.
16. I am extremely grateful to an anonymous reviewer for directing me to this article.
17. See Matt Desmond's *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2017) for an ethnographic perspective on low-wealth rental-property seekers.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Judson Murchie and John Yinger for their guidance and helpful comments. Many thanks to Phil Murchie for the scraping programs used in this article. I am also grateful to Katherine Michelmore, Sarah Hamersma, Marina Gorsuch, Akanksha Patnaik, Mattie Mackenzie-Liu, Kitt Carpenter, Marieka Klawitter, and the participants of the Research Related to Gender and Sexual Minorities at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management at the fall 2017 Conference and the Maxwell School's Public Administration and International Affairs Doctoral Student Seminar for very helpful comments. Thank you to the Human Rights Campaign for their assistance with accessing the Municipal Equality Index. All errors, omissions, and points of confusion are my own.

Disclosure Statement

The author has no financial arrangements that might give rise to conflicts of interest with respect to the research reported in this article.

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