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Early Labor Market Outcomes of Young Adults From Same-Sex Families: Evidence From Population Data

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study offers the first population-based evidence on how young adults from same-sex families fare when entering the labor market shortly after leaving full-time education.

Background: Same-sex couples' parenting rights remain controversial in many countries. Although most studies suggest that children from same-sex families perform at least as well as children from different-sex families in childhood or adolescence, data limitations have prevented investigation of how children from same-sex families perform in adulthood.

Method: Using Dutch longitudinal tax registers, we observe 381,131 young adults who are no longer in education at age 25, of which 760 are from same-sex families. We use linear regression models to compare young adults from same-sex and different-sex families on a range of early labor market outcomes (annual earnings, hourly earnings, employment, full-time employment).

Results: Young adults who lived in a same-sex family earn just as much, are equally employed, and have equal probability of being full-time employed as young adults from different-sex families. Moreover, especially young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth more often choose industries dominated by the opposite sex. Nonetheless, such choices are not reflected in earnings differentials.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that children of same-sex parents do well on the labor market, and are less inclined to follow traditional gender norms when choosing occupations.

1 | Introduction

Whether same-sex couples should be granted equal parenting rights as different-sex couples is a debated topic in many countries. In the US, despite the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 (U.S. Supreme Court case Obergefell v. Hodges 2015), same-sex couples have been facing a recent wave of bills aimed at reversing their marital equality rights (Yang 2025). Further, they still experience considerable discrimination in parenting, as for example, private foster care agencies refused to work with same-sex couples in Pennsylvania (Fulton v. City of Philadelphia 2020), and lesbian married couples were denied motherhood on the child's birth certificate in Indiana (Box v. Henderson 2020). Uneven support for same-sex couples' parenting rights also occurs in the European Union, where ten countries maintain adoption restrictions that apply specifically to same-sex couples, and one country—Hungary—recently introduced a constitutional ban on adoptions by same-sex couples (ILGA Europe 2021). Opponents of same-sex parenting claim that children raised in same-sex families experience substantial hardships during childhood (Patterson 2000; Stacey and Biblarz 2001), which translate to adverse outcomes in

adulthood. However, most studies using either nationally representative census data or administrative population data indicate that children from same-sex families perform at least as well as children from different-sex families on a range of psychological, health and school outcomes (Aldén et al. 2017; Boertien and Bernardi 2019; Cenegy et al. 2018; Mazrekaj et al. 2020; Reczek et al. 2017; Rosenfeld 2010; Watkins 2018; see also Mazrekaj and Jin 2023; Mazrekaj et al. 2024 for reviews). Despite the considerable evidence about how children from same-sex families perform during their childhood or adolescent years, few studies have been able to collect data about how children from same-sex families perform in adulthood.

This paper contributes to both the policy debate on same-sex couples' parenting rights and the scientific knowledge on children from same-sex parents' well-being by examining the following question: "Does being raised by same-sex parents influence children's labor market prospects in early adulthood?" The early years in the labor market are recognized as the most crucial phase of occupational socialization, as young adults transition into adulthood and at the same time assume responsibility roles in the workplace for the first time (Elfering et al. 2007). Yet, young adults are traditionally a vulnerable population that is more exposed to difficulties on the labor market (Caliendo and Schmidl 2016). For example, in 2021, the EU youth unemployment rate (16.6%) was over twice that of the overall working-age population (7.0%) (Eurostat 2022). Previous research has shown that poor early experiences are likely to have scarring effects on mental health and psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005), which in turn may lead to lower future wages and weaker employment prospects (Gregg and Tominey 2005; Nordstrom Skans 2011). These challenges may be amplified among young adults from same-sex families, who might be subjected to an extra layer of vulnerability due to the unique stressors arising from being raised in a minority family structure (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Given that compensatory policy measures are still possible for workers of young age, examining the labor market outcomes of young adults from same-sex families at especially this age can be key to designing policies that facilitate their transition into the labor market.

To the best of our knowledge, only Regnerus (2012) has included labor market information in his comparison of children from same-sex and different-sex families on 40 outcomes using the New Family Structures Study (NFSS) survey. He found that, in the US, children from same-sex families were less full-time employed and more unemployed than children who lived in an intact biological family until the age of 18. However, several analytical choices—heavily criticized in the subsequent literature—spread doubt on these findings (Cheng and Powell 2015; Perrin et al. 2013; Rosenfeld 2015). Cheng and Powell (2015) showed that half of the children from same-sex families never lived with the partner of the same-sex parent, and one tenth never lived with the same-sex parents themselves. Only 51 of the 236 adult children originally included in the sample could be confidently defined as raised for at least 1 year in a same-sex family. Once the analyses were performed on the newly defined sample, Cheng and Powell (2015) found no significant difference in labor market performance between children from same-sex and different-sex families. Nonetheless, this small number of only 51 children casts doubt on whether the results found in these studies can be generalized to the population of children from same-sex families. Moreover, neither of these studies has reflected on potential theories that may explain the findings.

This paper contributes to the literature by analyzing a range of early labor market outcomes (annual earnings, hourly wages, employment, and full-time employment) using a population dataset of young adults who lived in a same-sex family in their childhood. In addition, we develop and test an extensive set of mechanisms through which young adults from same-sex families may perform differently on the labor market than their peers from different-sex families. These mechanisms are based on internal aspects that commonly characterize same-sex families (i.e., an egalitarian division of household labor among same-sex parents, a non-conforming behavior of children to sex stereotypes, a small family size, and a high human capital), or on external aspects that might affect young adults' labor market performance (such as discrimination on the labor market). We use unique administrative longitudinal data from the Netherlands, which allows us to observe the entire population of children born between 1995 and 1999, following them until 2024. We focus on young adults who are no longer in education at age 25 and assess their labor market outcomes at that age. We identify 760 young adults who lived in a same-sex family in childhood (714 in female same-sex families and 46 in male same-sex families), of which 246 were raised in a same-sex family from birth. Unlike the small self-reported sample used in Regnerus (2012), our data allow us to look at the population of children from same-sex families while observing labor market information in the tax registers. Moreover, the Netherlands is a particularly interesting country to study because of the extensive support—cultural and legal—it provides to the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, the Netherlands was among the first countries to recognize registered partnerships for same-sex couples in 1998, and the first country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001.

2 | Theoretical Mechanisms

We draw on four theoretical perspectives to explain why young adults from same-sex families may perform better or worse on the labor market (defined here as having higher or lower annual and hourly earnings and employment and full-time employment levels) than young adults from different-sex families: the *family composition*, *human capital/signaling*, *discrimination*, and *sector selection* perspectives. These frameworks offer competing expectations about the mechanisms linking same-sex parenting to young adults' outcomes.

Considering family formation processes, the pathways to parenthood for same-sex couples are typically more intentional and deliberate than for different-sex couples. Processes to have joint children—such as adoption, artificial insemination, and surrogacy—are time-consuming and costly, making the decision to have children among same-sex couples generally less spontaneous and more intentional than among different-sex couples (Mazrekaj et al. 2020). Same-sex couples may also raise children from one partner's previous different-sex relationship (Black et al. 2007). Altogether, these distinctive routes to parenthood are reflected in the *family composition* of same-sex families,

as regardless of how children enter the household, male and female same-sex families are shown to be of smaller size than different-sex families, both in the US and in the Netherlands (Black et al. 2007; Mazrekaj et al. 2020). In the literature, the relationship between family size and young adults' outcomes is mostly shown to be negative. According to the resource dilution theory, parental resources are finite and the proportion of such resources that can be devoted to every child decreases as the number of children increases (Downey 2001), leading to a negative correlation between family size and children's outcomes including, among others, labor market outcomes (Lampi and Nordblom 2012). Yet, some studies find that birth order is more important than the number of siblings in determining children's outcomes (Black et al. 2005). One possible explanation for this lies in that children low in the birth order have generally spent more quality time with their parents compared to children higher in the birth order (Price 2008). As a result, this literature finds that later-born young adults have less favorable labor market outcomes (earning less and being less likely to work full-time) than their earlier-born siblings, all else equal (Black et al. 2005). Either way, young adults from same-sex families may benefit in their labor market performance from having grown up in a family environment consisting of fewer siblings.

Previous literature has also found that in the Netherlands, children from same-sex families obtain higher test scores in primary education (Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020), and in the US, they are just as likely to progress through school as children from different-sex families (Boertien and Bernardi 2019; Rosenfeld 2010; Watkins 2018). In both countries, these results show little heterogeneity by parents' sex. It is well documented that higher schooling leads to better performance on the labor market (Oreopoulos and Salvanes 2011), either as a result of higher human capital (Becker 1993) (*human capital theory*) or as a result of signaling (Spence 1973) (*signaling theory*). Thus, young adults from same-sex families may perform better on the labor market than their peers from different-sex families also as a result of their school performance.

In sum, building on the *family composition* and *human capital/signaling perspectives*, we expect that young adults from same-sex families will, on average, perform better on the labor market than young adults from different-sex families (Hypothesis 1a). We further expect that this advantage arises because young adults from same-sex families are more likely to have lived in smaller family compositions (Hypothesis 1b) or because they performed better in school (Hypothesis 1c).

Although the aforementioned theories suggest that young adults from same-sex families should perform at least as well, and likely better, than young adults from different-sex families on the labor market, the *discrimination perspective* provides a contrasting view. Earlier literature showed that both male and female same-sex parents may experience substantial prejudice and minority stress due to their sexual orientation (Meyer 2003; Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Experiences of discrimination or feelings of social inappropriateness of same-sex parents in the workplace might weaken their possibility to construct family networks on the labor market, which are shown to be relevant for young workers (Corak and Piraino 2011). For instance, young workers are found to frequently work in factories where their parents are also employed or to work with employers for which their parent(s) also worked (Corak and Piraino 2011). Although our study is set in the Netherlands, where LGBT-identified individuals enjoy broad legal and cultural support (Mazrekaj et al. 2020), prior research indicates that such acceptance can vary geographically within a country. Urban areas are generally more inclusive than rural ones (Barefoot et al. 2015; Boso 2019; Peltomaa 2013), leading (male and female) same-sex couples to cluster in cities to reduce minority stress and find more supportive environments (for a review, see Lee et al. 2018). This pattern holds in the Netherlands as well, as same-sex couples are more concentrated in urban municipalities (Statistics Netherlands 2021), and LGBT-identified people report feeling more accepted in urban than in rural areas (Hasselt et al. 2025). To the extent that less tolerant attitudes are associated with higher discrimination and minority stress (Tilcsik 2011), any remaining bias in a progressive context like the Netherlands would likely be confined to smaller, rural communities, where personal information on sexual orientation and family composition can more easily circulate by word of mouth.

Thus, building on the *discrimination perspective*, we expect that young adults from same-sex families will perform worse on the labor market than young adults from different-sex families (Hypothesis 2a). We further expect that this negative difference is driven by young adults from same-sex families born in rural areas performing significantly worse on the labor market than young adults from same-sex families born in urban areas (Hypothesis 2b).

An important alternative perspective is what we label the *sector selection perspective*. Earlier literature showed that young adults from same-sex families are less exposed to sex stereotypes while growing up (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). In a review of the literature, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) observed that, unlike in different-sex families, girls and boys in same-sex families frequently play and behave in ways that do not conform to cultural gender norms and tend to develop greater interests in gender-neutral activities. Additionally, same-sex parents have been shown to frequently share paid and unpaid work (e.g., housework and childcare) equally between each other, both in female and male same-sex families (Biblarz and Stacey 2010; Fulcher et al. 2008). By contrast, although the differences have declined over time, parents in different-sex families are likely to divide these commitments unevenly (Cotter et al. 2011; Dribe and Stanfors 2009). These features are also true in the Netherlands, where a traditional gendered division of labor remains common (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009), most women work part-time (OECD 2019), and both male and female same-sex couples divide the time they spend on paid work more equally than different-sex couples (Jaspers and Verbakel 2013). Earlier research has found that an egalitarian parental division of household labor and liberal parental attitudes on occupational gender roles are correlated with gender atypical occupational aspirations of children (Fulcher et al. 2008; Fulcher 2011; for daughters only in Croft et al. 2014). Not conforming to sex-typed cultural norms in childhood and having parents with paid employments who equally share household tasks, young adults from same-sex families may thus be more likely employed in gender-atypical industries, that is, industries that are atypical from their sex. This means that men from same-sex families might be more

likely employed in female-dominated industries while women from same-sex families might be more likely employed in male-dominated industries.

Because earlier research has found that, in the US as well as in the Netherlands, wages tend to be lower in female-dominated industries and higher in male-dominated ones, but may also depend on workers' adherence to gender stereotypes (Begall and Mills 2013; Cohen and Huffman 2003), a consequence of these shifts in industry choice to earnings is that differences in wage levels between men and women from same-sex families are empirically ambiguous as contingent upon men's and women's adherence to the theory. Among women, earlier research has shown that lower conformance to feminine stereotypes (e.g., by being more assertive or exhibiting stronger leadership or self-confidence) is typically rewarded with higher pay, with women employed in male-dominated sectors earning more than women employed in female-dominated ones (Busch 2020; Drydakis et al. 2018). Among men, although previous studies have documented the existence of a "glass escalator" effect—whereby men in predominantly female professions often experience faster career advancements and higher earnings (Schilt and Westbrook 2009) – recent research suggests that this effect possibly applies only to men who adhere closely to traditional male stereotypes (Isacco and Morse 2015; Williams 2015). Because we do not expect men from same-sex families to conform to these norms, we do not expect the glass escalator effect to occur.

In sum, based on the *sector selection perspective*, we expect that young adults from same-sex families are more likely to be employed in gender-atypical industries (Hypothesis 3a). We further expect men from same-sex families to sort into female-dominated industries (Hypothesis 3b) and women from same-sex families to sort into male-dominated industries (Hypothesis 3c). Finally, we expect that as a result of these gender-atypical employment patterns—and the weaker adherence to traditional gender norms that underpins them—men from same-sex families will earn less than men from different-sex families, and women from same-sex families will earn more than women from different-sex families (Hypothesis 3d).

3 | Data

3.1 | Sample Construction

We use administrative registry data collected by Statistics Netherlands that annually cover the entire population residing in the Netherlands from 1995 to 2024. Each Dutch municipality is legally required to maintain a register of all individuals residing within its jurisdiction, and to record and verify, through local authorities, all relevant personal data of residents (e.g., marriages, childbirths, address changes). Statistics Netherlands compiles and links these municipal registers and assigns every resident a unique anonymous identifier, which we use to retrieve the data necessary to reconstruct households and family structures. Specifically, in the data, each child is associated to a mother (either female or male) and a father (either male or female) through an identifier. Parent–child relationships are drawn from the civil registration system where they are recorded based on legal parenthood (e.g., birth certificates, adoption records, court decisions), whereas the sex for each parent comes from the legal identity information stored in the personal records database. For every year, individuals are also associated to their address (or addresses, if they relocated during the year) of residence, with precise start and end dates for every residential spell. This information allows us to reconstruct the entire address history of individuals from 1995 until 2024, and identify households as the set of individuals sharing the same address in a particular year.

Further, we observe identifiers for each individual's partner. We have information on whether two individuals are married, in a registered partnership, or are cohabiting as well as the start and end date of these spells. Two partners are observed as cohabiting if they live together and have signed a written agreement of cohabitation, or are registered as tax partners in the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration (note that by combining partner identifiers with reconstructed address histories, we are able to identify same-sex couples who were already cohabiting prior to the introduction of registered partnerships in 1998). Combined with the household information, we can thus distinguish whether children have lived with their biological parents during childhood, with a parent and a stepparent, or with a single parent. Further, by matching parental and partner identifiers with sex, we are able to distinguish whether and how long the child has resided in a same-sex or a different-sex family during childhood.

Finally, we associate young adults to their early labor market outcomes. Income, employment, and related variables are drawn from tax and social security registers (e.g., the Dutch Tax Authority). Employers and public agencies are required to submit these records, and Statistics Netherlands compiles them for statistical use.

To study labor market outcomes of young adults who lived in a same-sex family in childhood, we restrict the sample as follows. First, we only study young adults raised by couples as our administrative data do not have a measure of sexual orientation. This means that while we are able to observe the sex of partners in a couple, we cannot assign sexual identities to parents. For instance, women in same-sex couples may be bisexual and may display significantly different behavior than lesbian couples (Jaspers et al. 2024). Similarly, we cannot determine the sexual orientation of single parents. Although this choice results in excluding children who may have lived in a same-sex family after a period in a single-parented family, we adopt this criterion partly because it avoids discretionary assumptions about the sexual orientation of single parents who do not repartner and partly because it aligns with prior studies using large-scale data sources that similarly focused on two-parent same-sex families (for a review, see Mazrekaj et al. 2024). However, we do not exclude that couples might break up, and thus both young adults from different-sex and same-sex families may experience the dissolution of their parents' partnership. Additionally, to account for potential bureaucratic delays in the registration of the new relationship status of the parents, we include young adults who lived with a single parent for up to 12 months during childhood. Second, to reconstruct households longitudinally and considering that our panel ends in 2024, we restrict the sample to the birth cohorts that we can follow without breaks from birth throughout childhood, and that we observe again at the oldest

age covered by the panel. That is, we select young adults born between 1995 and 1999 and study their labor market outcomes at the age of 25 between 2020 and 2024. Third, we drop observations with missing covariates (15.40% of the sample).

Finally, to limit the likelihood that young adults might be involved in student jobs and internships, we exclude individuals enrolled in a post-secondary or tertiary educational program during the academic year that either preceded or overlapped the year in which labor market outcomes are observed (see Appendix A online for details on the Dutch educational system). Note that we do not require young adults to have completed secondary education to be in our sample, but just that they are not enrolled in an educational program at age 25. Our sample thus consists of young adults who either never enrolled in higher education after high school, enrolled and dropped without graduating, or enrolled and graduated. Although the age of 25 allows young adults to complete their studies, we observe that many young adults are still in education at this age and thus the number of young adults from same-sex families eligible for the sample is reduced from 1213 (total sample) to 760 (current sample of young adults no longer enrolled in education). This may lead to a non-random composition of the sample if young adults from same-sex families leave education (e.g., by graduating) at a different pace than young adults from different-sex families. However, supplementary analyses reveal no significant differences in higher education enrollment or graduation at age 25 and confirm the robustness of results in a pooled sample of 25–28-year-olds not enrolled in education (see Tables A1 and A.2 online).

The final sample consists of 381,131 young adults who are not in education at age 25.

3.2 | Young Adults From Same-Sex Families

Given that we focus on couples, a household in a given year can consist of young adults living with their biological parents, adoptive parents, or a parent and a stepparent. If we observe that the parents (or parent and stepparent) the young adult resided with are two men or two women, we conclude that the young adult has lived in a same-sex household in that year. In the analyses, we consider young adults to be from a same-sex family if they have lived for at least 1 year in a same-sex family before turning 16 years old, and from a different-sex family if they have continuously lived from birth until age 15 in a different-sex family. According to Dutch law, minors who have reached the age of 16 can request to be emancipated, that is, to be legally responsible for themselves. To avoid misclassification because there is a higher likelihood of having moved away from parents above the age of 16, we set the age limit at 16 years old.

In our data, young adults may have resided in a same-sex family if they were born to different-sex parents who later separated during young adults' childhood. This way, young adults necessarily lived through the dissolution of their parents' partnerships (and the formation of a new same-sex family). This is particularly prominent among the birth cohorts born before 1998 who for the vast majority entered a same-sex family later in life. Alternatively, young adults may have resided in a same-sex family if they were born to two male or female same-sex parents (e.g., through fertility treatments or adoption). Such 'planned' same-sex families are likely to differ from later-formed same-sex families for two main reasons. First, the mechanisms discussed earlier in Section 2 may be stronger for individuals who were nurtured by same-sex parents since birth. Second, planned same-sex families share distinctive features relative to later-formed same-sex families. For instance, given the costly and time-consuming procedures to obtain children for same-sex couples, only the motivated and wealthy same-sex couples are likely to engage in these procedures to obtain children. Thus, planned same-sex families will likely have higher resources than later-formed same-sex families. Moreover, same-sex (female) parents conceiving their children through donor insemination may even choose their donor to be young and highly educated (Whyte et al. 2016).

In our sample, we identify 760 young adults from same-sex families, of whom 246 were raised by same-sex parents from birth whereas 514 entered a same-sex family later in childhood. In Figure 1, we show the distribution of years lived in a same-sex family for the latter group. Nearly half (48.25%) of this subsample lived at most 2 years with same-sex (step)parents, with a median of approximately 2.5 years (by contrast, young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth all lived 15 years with same-sex parents, as they were born to two same-sex parents).

It should be noted that, given the low proportion of adopted children among same-sex couples (less than 10 in our sample), we do not further distinguish between adopted and biological children. Further, in line with earlier administrative data studies (Aldén et al. 2017; Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020), most young adults from same-sex families in our sample are from female same-sex families (714 young adults), whereas only 46 young adults are from male same-sex families. This is likely due to the relatively easier legal path to motherhood for female same-sex couples, the delayed introduction of surrogacy practices for gay couples in the Netherlands until 2019, and the prevailing tendency to grant child custody to the mother in cases of parental divorce (Mazrekaj et al. 2020). The low number of same-sex male families prevents us from estimating our models separately by parental sex.

3.3 | Variable Construction

3.3.1 | Outcome Variables

We measure labor market outcomes by looking at four variables of interest: log gross earnings in euros, log gross hourly wage in euros, employment, and full-time employment. We construct log gross earnings by summing the total amount of income from salaried employment and income from self-employment that each individual has earned in the reference year and taking the logarithm of this quantity to 'smoothen' the extremes of the distribution and reduce its skewness.

Given that individuals may earn different wages due to the different number of hours worked, as a second outcome, we also calculate log gross hourly wages by dividing the total amount of income from salaried employment obtained by the individual

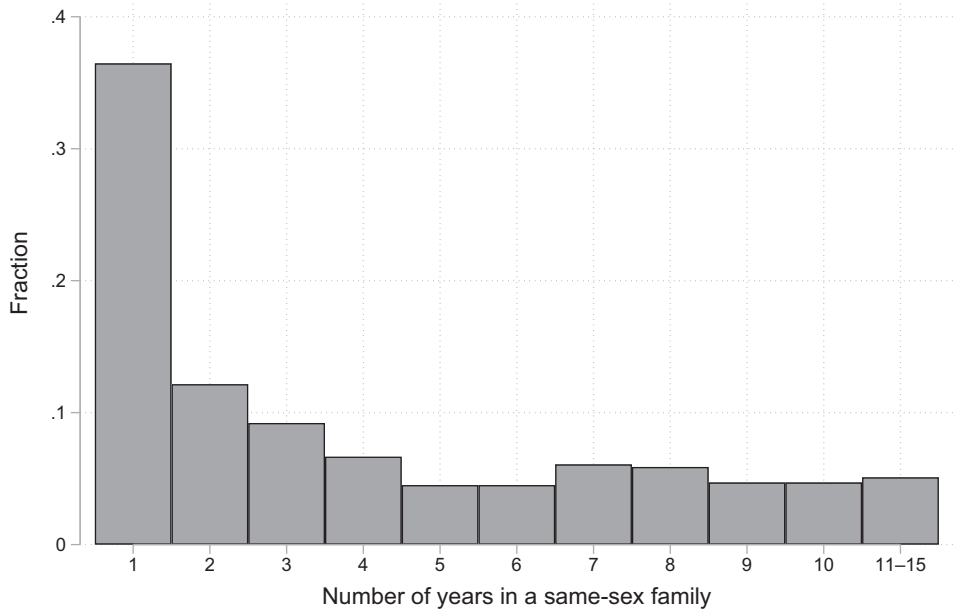

FIGURE 1 | Number of years in a same-sex family for young adults not raised in a same-sex family from birth (note that years 11 to 15 have been coarsened to one category due to disclosure agreements preventing us from showing statistics based on small numbers).

in the reference year by the total number of hours worked in the same period, and then taking the logarithm of this quantity. Note that, as we do not have data on the number of hours worked by self-employed persons, we construct the hourly wage only for workers with salaried employment (thus excluding self-employed individuals).

Third, we construct full-time employment using Statistics Netherlands' classification of full-time versus part-time work. Specifically, full-time employment is defined as a binary variable coded as 1 if, in the reference year, an individual worked in an occupation where the agreed daily and weekly working hours correspond to a full-time schedule (i.e., at least 35 h per week), and as 0 if the agreed working hours are below this threshold. For individuals who had more than one job in the reference year, we take the agreed working hours from the job in which they worked the most days during the year. Similarly to log gross hourly wage, we construct this variable only for workers with salaried employment, thereby excluding self-employed individuals, given that we do not observe an agreed working hours schedule in the case of self-employment.

Finally, we define employment as a binary variable coded 1 if the individual earned a positive income from employment—either from salaried work or self-employment—and 0 if the individual did not earn a positive income from work or was unemployed in the reference year.

3.3.2 | Control Variables

We control for a range of individual, family, and socioeconomic characteristics identified in prior research as determinants of labor market outcomes and as factors correlated with same-sex parenting. At the individual level, we include an indicator for sex (1 if man, 0 if woman) as labor market outcomes are shown to differ between men and women (Blau and Kahn 2017). Further, given that migrants might face difficulties on the labor market and that young adults from same-sex families are less likely to have two foreign-born parents than young adults from different-sex families (Dustmann et al. 2010), we account for ethnicity by including a categorical variable for parental country of birth (1 = both parents born in the Netherlands; 2 = one parent Dutch-born, the other born in another Western country; 3 = one parent Dutch-born, the other born in a non-Western country; 4 = both parents foreign-born). Finally, we account for heterogeneity in birth cohorts and broader economic context by including indicators for young adults' year of birth, and for the higher likelihood of young adults from same-sex families to have grown up in urban areas (Black et al. 2007) by including indicators of individuals' municipality of birth.

As measures of young adults' socioeconomic background, first, we include an indicator for parental educational attainment (1 if both parents have at least completed secondary education, 0 otherwise). Second, we include a continuous variable for the gross childhood household income, measured when the child is 8 years old (the earliest age allowing a balanced measure of family income across all birth cohorts, given that income data are available from 2003 onward). This variable is obtained by summing the gross annual income of both parents (or step-parents) and taking logarithms of this quantity to have a smooth distribution. Finally, we include a discrete variable for maternal age at childbirth to account for young adults from same-sex families usually having older parents than young adults from different-sex families (Black et al. 2007; Mazrekaj et al. 2020). The socioeconomic background has been shown to strongly correlate with children's early labor market outcomes (Duncan et al. 1998) and to explain part of the differences between children's performance in same-sex and different-sex families (Mazrekaj et al. 2020; Rosenfeld 2010).

Finally, at the family level, we account for the greater likelihood of family instability among young adults from same-sex

families compared to young adults from different-sex families (Cáceres-Delpiano 2006). First, we include a discrete variable for the number of family transitions experienced in childhood, defined as either a change in residence or a change in coresident partner by a parent. Second, we account for parental union status at childbirth, arranged in three categories: parents married or in a registered partnership (equivalent to marriage, Trandafir 2014); parents cohabiting; other (e.g., married or cohabiting unions of a parent and a step-parent). For young adults from later-formed same-sex families, this variable refers to the marital status of different-sex parents. Family instability is traditionally associated with compromised developmental outcomes in childhood, including higher likelihood of early entry in the labor force (Fomby and Bosick 2013; Palmaccio et al. 2026). Together with the socioeconomic status, it often accounts for most of the differences in performance between children in same-sex and different-sex families (Gates 2015; Manning et al. 2014).

3.3.3 | Measures to Test the Theoretical Mechanisms

To test the predictions of the family composition perspective (Hypothesis 1b), we construct discrete variables for individuals' birth order and family size (number of full and half-siblings, including the focal person) as possible mediators of the relationship between having lived in same-sex families and labor market outcomes. Further, to test the predictions of the human capital/signaling perspective (Hypothesis 1c), we use diploma attainment in secondary education as a mediator. We construct diploma attainment as a binary indicator coded 1 if the young adult has passed high school exit exams at age 18, and 0 otherwise. Next, to test the predictions of the discrimination perspective (Hypothesis 2b), we test the role of urbanicity at birth as a moderator of our relationship of interest and construct a binary indicator for whether the young adult was residing in a rural or urban area at birth. We distinguish between rural and urban areas by considering the number of residence addresses registered at the municipality where young adults were residing in the reference year. We label as rural (urban) all municipalities where the number of residence addresses per squared kilometer is lower (larger) than 1500.

Finally, to test the predictions of the sector selection perspective (Hypotheses 3a–3d), we construct a measure of young adults' gender atypical industry choices, which we use as a mediator for their earnings. Specifically, we construct a binary indicator coded as 1 if the individual is employed in a gender-atypical industry, and as 0 if employed in a gender-typical or mixed industry, based on the sex composition of the sector in which the individual worked the most days in the reference year. For salaried workers, we identify 69 sectors as defined by the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration (Belastingdienst 2021), whereas for self-employed workers, we identify 99 sectors as defined by the Dutch Standard Industrial Classification (SBI 2008). Following earlier literature (e.g., Bose and Rossi 1983; Hakim 1992) we define, for every given year, a sector as female-dominated (male-dominated) if the share of women employed in the sector is higher than the percentage of women in the workforce plus (minus) 20 percentage points. Because the share of women in the Dutch workforce has nearly reached 50% during the study period (World Bank 2024), we apply the aforementioned 20 percentage points threshold to capture gender atypical sectors beyond gender-mixed compositions. Earlier research has used different thresholds to define gender-mixed sectors, ranging from 10 to 20 percentage points above and below the share of women in the workforce (Hakim 1992, 1993; Jusenius and Shortlidge Jr 1975). Throughout this paper, we use the more conservative threshold of 20 percentage points. However, we find consistent results using slightly lower thresholds. Examples of female-dominated sectors defined this way consist of health and mental services, social work activities, education, cleaning services, catering activities, and wellness activities such as hairdressing and beauty treatment. As a final step, we define gender atypical industries based on the match between the individual's sex and the sex composition of the sector of employment. In other words, gender atypical industries are coded as 1 if men (women) are employed in female- (male-) dominated sectors, and as 0 otherwise.

4 | Analyses

4.1 | Linear Regression Model

We estimate labor market outcomes of young adults raised in same-sex families with a linear regression model estimated by ordinary least squares (OLS):

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1^{\text{ever}} H_i^{\text{ever}} + \alpha X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where Y_i indicates the labor market outcome variables for individual i: log gross earnings in euros, log gross hourly wage, and (full-time) employment. Further, H_i^{ever} defines the key variable of interest, and takes value 1 if the individual has lived for at least 1 year in a same-sex family during childhood (before age 16), and 0 if the individual lived exclusively in a different-sex family. Thus, β_1^{ever} is the association between having lived in a same-sex family in childhood and labor market outcomes. Finally, X_i defines individual, family, and socioeconomic control variables, which we include differently according to our specification. In all models, we include individual-level controls, that is, sex, ethnicity, year of birth, and municipality of birth (note that municipality of birth is however not included in analyses on the rural–urban subsamples to avoid overcontrolling). In the full model specifications, in addition to individual-level controls, we include family and socioeconomic controls, that is, childhood household income, parental education, family transitions, family structure at birth, and age of mother at birth. To account for heteroskedasticity, we use Huber-White robust standard errors.

As discussed earlier, our sample of same-sex families is heterogeneously defined as it includes both later-formed and planned same-sex families. In order to test whether the heterogeneity in family types may influence our results, and to examine our proposed mechanisms in a sample where children were continuously exposed to same-sex parents, we also always estimate a second specification as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1^{\text{cont}} H_i^{\text{cont}} + \alpha X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where H_i^{cont} takes the value 1 if the individual has been raised in a same-sex family from birth (i.e., has lived from birth until

before age 16 in a same-sex family), and 0 if the individual always lived in a different-sex family. The coefficient β_1^{cont} thus captures the association between continuous exposure to a same-sex family in childhood and labor market outcomes. All other variables are defined as in Equation (1).

4.2 | Mediation Analysis

To test the predictions derived from the family composition, human capital/signaling, and sector selection perspectives, we perform mediation analyses building on the framework proposed by Hayes (2009) and Zhao et al. (2010), which extend the traditional Baron and Kenny (1986) approach. In this framework, the total effect—the overall association between the independent and dependent variable when no mediator is included (in our case, $\widehat{\beta}_1$)—can be decomposed into a direct effect (the portion of $\widehat{\beta}_1$ not explained by the mediator) and one or more indirect effects (the portion of $\widehat{\beta}_1$ explained by the mediator). According to Hayes (2009), a significant indirect effect may exist even when the total effect is nonsignificant, since the total effect may consist of the sum of multiple indirect effects operating in opposite directions and thus offsetting each other. For clarity, throughout the paper, we will use the wording 'mediated effect' in case we find a significant total association, whereas we will simply judge the significance of the indirect effect in case we find a nonsignificant total association, acknowledging that in the latter case meaningful indirect pathways may still exist even in the absence of an overall association. The significance of the indirect effect is tested using bootstrapping procedures following Preacher and Hayes (2004).

5 | Results

5.1 | Sample Characteristics

Our sample consists of 381,131 young adults, of which 760 lived for at least 1 year in a same-sex family during childhood, and 246 were raised by same-sex parents from birth. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics as well as the *p*-values of a difference in means test.

Consistent with earlier studies (Boertien and Bernardi 2019; Kabátek and Perales 2021; Mazrekaj et al. 2020), young adults from same-sex families are more likely to have fewer siblings (thus lower birth order) and older mothers in column 2. They also appear to have more highly educated parents than young adults from different-sex families, but lower childhood household income. Moreover, they experienced more family transitions during childhood, and are less likely to be born into married families, which aligns with the fact that most entered a same-sex family later in life, having to deal with parental breakups and changes in the household composition while growing up. If, however, we only consider the subsample of young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth in column 3, we notice that these young adults have lived in more stable families during childhood than the full sample of young adults from same-sex families, as they experienced less family transitions while growing up. Nonetheless, these young adults remain less likely to be born into married families but more likely to be born into cohabiting families. It is likely that same-sex couples delayed registered partnership and marriage, even though they lived together since the birth of the child. We further observe that young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth enjoy significantly higher socioeconomic status (both higher childhood household income and parental education) than young adults from different-sex families.

Based on descriptive statistics, young adults from same-sex families seem to earn, in levels, significantly less annually and per hour than young adults from different-sex families, both a in the full sample and in the subsample of young adults raised in a same-sex family from birth. Further, both in the full sample and in the subsample of those raised from birth, young adults from same-sex families do not appear to be differently employed and full-time employed than young adults from different-sex families. Finally, especially young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth appear significantly more employed in industries that are atypical to their sex. Yet, it should be reminded that descriptive comparisons do not control for possible differences in observed characteristics between young adults from same-sex and different-sex families.

5.2 | Young Adults From Same-Sex Families and Labor Market Performance

In this section, we begin by addressing Hypotheses 1a and 2a about the general (positive or negative) association between having lived in same-sex families and labor market outcomes, and then discuss the formal testing of the underlying mechanisms (Hypotheses 1b, 1c, and 2a). For reading purposes, we relate our findings to our hypotheses at the end of the section.

Table 2 compares young adults from same-sex families to young adults from different-sex families on their early labor market performance. Columns 1 and 2 show results for log gross earnings, columns 3 and 4 for log gross hourly wage, columns 5 and 6 for full-time employment, and columns 7 and 8 for employment. Odd columns include individual controls only; even columns include the full set of controls. In Panel A, we report results for the full sample that includes both young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth and young adults from later-formed same-sex families. Overall, our findings suggest that young adults from same-sex families earn just as much and are just as likely to be employed and full-time employed as young adults from different-sex families. Although in column 1 young adults from same-sex families appear to earn significantly less than their comparison group from different-sex families ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = -0.069$), the coefficient becomes small and no longer significant when the full set of covariates (and particularly those accounting for family stability) is included in column 2 ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = 0.018$). Moreover, no statistical difference is found between the two groups when compared on hourly earnings in columns 3 ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = -0.018$) and 4 ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = 0.017$). Similarly, no meaningful differences are found between the two groups when full-time employment and employment are considered in columns 6 ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = -0.002$) and 8 ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = 0.003$), respectively. Thus, our findings overall suggest that young adults from same-sex families earn just as much and are just as likely to be employed and full-time employed as young adults from different-sex families.

TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics.

	Young adults from different-sex families	Young adults from same-sex families	Young adults raised in same-sex families from birth
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sex (1 is male)	0.505	0.499	0.504
Ethnicity (1 is both parents born in NL, 0 is at least one parent not born in NL)	0.784	0.720	0.825
Household annual gross income	61,509.1	61,205.2[a]	67,782.6[a]
Parental education	1.231	1.377[a]	2.096[a]
Family transitions	0.080	1.326[a]	0.159[a]
Family structure at birth (1 is married parents, 0 is cohabiting parents or other)	0.884	0.580[a]	0.260[a]
Age of mother at birth	30.517	31.028[a]	36.203[a]
Mechanism variables			
Family size	2.674	2.362[a]	2.061[a]
Birth order	1.844	1.549[a]	1.431[a]
High school diploma (1 is yes)	0.903	0.863	0.931
Urbanicity (1 is urban, 0 is rural)	0.468	0.600[a]	0.703[a]
Gender atypical industry (1 is yes)	0.070	0.091	0.140[a]
Outcome variables			
Gross annual earnings in EUR	40,425.0	36,576.6[a]	36,023.3[a]
Log gross annual earnings	10.508	10.408[a]	10.398
Gross hourly wage in EUR	19.095	18.582[a]	18.907[a]
Log gross hourly wage	2.911	2.888	2.907
Full-time employment (1 is yes)	0.591	0.558	0.537
Employment (1 is yes)	0.936	0.911	0.902
Number of children	380,371	760	246

[a]The mean for young adults from same-sex families (raised in same-sex families from birth) is significantly different at the 5% level from the mean for young adults from different-sex families in column 1 by means of a two-tailed z-test (t-test). Note that because disclosure agreements prevent us from showing statistics based on small numbers, in this table, we aggregate ethnicity and family structure at birth at a higher level and show parental education as a continuous variable (0 if at least one parent is a high school dropout, 1 if both parents have a high school diploma, 2 if at least one parent has a higher education diploma, 3 if both parents have a higher education diploma). However, in the analyses, we include these control variables as described in Section 3.3.

As discussed earlier, however, young adults from same-sex families form a heterogeneous group. To better examine the influence of prolonged exposure to same-sex parenting, in Panel B we focus our analyses on the subsample of young adults who lived with same-sex parents from birth (to age 15). Our results for this subsample are consistent with those estimated for the full sample. In column 1, we find that young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth earn less annually than young adults from different-sex families, with the coefficient being close in magnitude–but not significant, probably due to lower power–to the one estimated in Panel A ($\widehat{\beta}^{\text{cont}} = -0.088$). When controlling for the full set of covariates in column 2, the earnings differential largely reduces, and remains not significant ($\widehat{\beta}^{\text{cont}} = -0.037$). Further, similarly to what was estimated for the full sample, the estimated coefficients for hourly wages in columns 3 and 4 are negligible and statistically nonsignificant ($\widehat{\beta}^{\text{cont}} = 0.003$ and $\widehat{\beta}^{\text{cont}} = 0.016$ respectively), suggesting that the earnings differences observed in columns 1 and 2 are likely driven by differences in hours worked. Consistent with this, column 6 shows that young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth are 4.5 percentage points less likely to be full-time employed, although this estimate is not statistically significant. Finally, our results show no differences in employment frequencies between young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth and young adults from different-sex families ($\widehat{\beta}^{\text{cont}} = -0.022$).

Altogether, these findings provide no support for Hypotheses 1a and 2a, as we find no differences in labor market outcomes between young adults from same-sex and different-sex families. This lack of support is formally supported by the mediation and moderation analyses reported in Table 3. We start by describing the results from the mediation analyses shown in Panel A

TABLE 2 | Young adults from same-sex families and labor market outcomes.

	Log gross earnings		Log gross hourly wage		Full-time Employment		Employment	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: full sample								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	−0.069*	0.018	−0.018	0.017	−0.024	−0.002	−0.018	0.003
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family-SES controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	356,797	356,797	333,858	333,858	333,858	333,858	381,131	381,131
Young adults from SSF	692	692	651	651	651	651	760	760
Method	LRM	LRM	LRM	LRM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM
R-squared	0.049	0.055	0.108	0.120	0.124	0.126	0.021	0.025
Panel B: raised from birth								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	−0.088	−0.037	0.003	0.016	−0.053	−0.045	−0.033	−0.022
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family-SES controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	356,327	356,327	333,421	333,421	333,421	333,421	380,617	380,617
Young adults from SSF	222	222	214	214	214	214	246	246
Method	LRM	LRM	LRM	LRM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM
R-squared	0.049	0.055	0.108	0.120	0.124	0.126	0.021	0.025

Note: The table shows the estimated association between living in a same-sex family and labor market outcomes, for the full sample that includes both young adults raised and not raised from birth in a same-sex family (Panel A) and for the sample that includes only young adults raised from birth (Panel B). Individual controls include sex, ethnicity, birth year fixed effects, and municipality at birth fixed effects. Family-SES controls include log childhood household income, parental education, family transitions, family structure at birth, and age of mother at birth. LRM indicates a linear regression model estimated by ordinary least squares (OLS), LPM a linear probability model, SSF same-sex families. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

for the family composition perspective and in Panel B for the human capital/signaling perspective. In Table B5 online, we test the relevance of our mediators, finding that young adults from same-sex families significantly live in smaller families ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = -0.202$; $\widehat{\beta}^{cont} = -0.317$) and occupy lower positions in the birth order ($\widehat{\beta}^{ever} = -0.221$; $\widehat{\beta}^{cont} = -0.563$) than young adults from different-sex families, but do not differ in high-school diploma attainment frequencies, although the coefficient is positive in the raised-from-birth sample ($\widehat{\beta}^{cont} = 0.034$). In any case, these mediators do not play a meaningful role in explaining our results. Panel A shows that although the indirect pathway through family size and birth order is statistically significant for most outcomes, the magnitude of these effects is negligible. Similarly, Panel B shows no evidence that diploma attainment exerts a significant indirect effect on any of the labor market outcomes considered. Accordingly, we find no meaningful support for Hypotheses 1b and 1c.

Finally, Panel C presents the associations between living in same-sex families and labor market outcomes separately for young adults born in urban (Panel C1) and rural (Panel C2) municipalities. Our results lead us to reject Hypothesis 2b given that first, there is no indication that young adults from same-sex families born in rural areas perform poorly on the labor market. Second, any difference in young adults from same-sex families' labor market performance between the born-in-rural versus the born-in-urban subsamples is not statistically significant by means of a *t*-test of equality of coefficients.

5.3 | The Sector-Selection Perspective

We now turn to Hypotheses 3a–3d, which encompass what we have labeled as the sector-selection theory perspective. This perspective predicts that young adults from same-sex families, by not conforming to sex stereotypes in childhood and having parents who equally divide paid and unpaid labor among each other, will be more likely to sort into gender-atypical industries (Hypotheses 3a–3c), with this choice possibly affecting their earnings (Hypothesis 3d).

TABLE 3 | Testing the family composition, human capital/signaling, and discrimination perspectives.

	Full sample				Raised from birth			
	Log gross earnings	Log gross hourly wage	Employment	Full-time employment	Log gross earnings	Log gross hourly wage	Employment	Full-time employment
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Family composition perspective (N = 381,131; 760 from SSF and 246 raised from birth)								
Direct effect	0.014	0.017	0.003	−0.005	−0.045	0.014	−0.022	−0.054
	(0.030)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.053)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.034)
Indirect effect	0.003[b]	−0.000	0.001[b]	0.004[b]	0.008[b]	0.002[b]	0.001[b]	0.010[b]
	[0.002, 0.004]	[−0.001, 0.001]	[0.000, 0.001]	[0.003, 0.005]	[0.006, 0.010]	[0.001, 0.004]	[0.000, 0.002]	[0.007, 0.011]
Total effect	0.018	0.017	0.003	−0.002	−0.037	0.016	−0.022	−0.045
	(0.030)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.054)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.034)
Panel B: Human capital/signaling perspective (N = 333,603; 641 from SSF and 204 raised from birth)								
Direct effect	0.013	0.015	0.002	−0.005	−0.005	0.019	−0.035	−0.052
	(0.031)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.052)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.037)
Indirect effect	−0.001	−0.000	0.001	−0.000	0.006	0.001	0.003	0.001
	[−0.008, 0.006]	[−0.003, 0.002]	[−0.002, 0.003]	[−0.002, 0.002]	[−0.004, 0.015]	[−0.002, 0.005]	[−0.000, 0.007]	[−0.002, 0.004]
Total effect	0.012	0.015	0.002	−0.005	0.001	0.020	−0.032	−0.051
	(0.031)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.052)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.037)
Panel C: Discrimination perspective								
C1: Urban sample (N = 178,567; 456 from SSF and 173 raised from birth)								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	−0.009	0.030*	0.010	−0.014	−0.040	0.028	−0.024	−0.050
	(0.043)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.025)	(0.070)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.041)
C2: Rural sample (N = 202,564; 304 from SSF and 73 raised from birth)								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	0.056	−0.002	−0.009	0.017	−0.029	−0.009	−0.018	−0.034
	(0.037)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.030)	(0.071)	(0.025)	(0.033)	(0.059)
p[a], t-test of H_0: $\hat{\beta}_1^{C1} = \hat{\beta}_1^{C2}$	0.250	0.118	0.386	0.431	0.914	0.257	0.890	0.824

Note: The table shows the mediation analyses employed to assess the family composition perspective (Panel A) and the human capital/signaling perspective (Panel B), as well as the moderation analyses used to test the discrimination perspective (Panel C). All models include the full set of controls (sex, ethnicity, birth year fixed effects, municipality at birth fixed effects, log childhood household income, parental education, family transitions, family structure at birth, and age of mother at birth), except for analyses in Panel C where we do not control for municipality at birth. Note that the sum of the direct and indirect effects may not exactly equal the total effect due to rounding. Square brackets show 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals (R = 1000); parentheses robust standard errors.

[a]The p-value for each outcome is obtained from a test evaluating the equality of the estimated β-coefficients between the urban and rural subsamples.

[b]Indirect effect is significant at the 5% level.

*p < 0.05.

**p < 0.01.

***p < 0.001.

We start by examining in Table 4 the association between living in same-sex families and gender atypical sector choice, for men and women combined (columns 1–4) as well as separately (columns 5–8). Our results reveal that when the full sample is considered, young adults from same-sex families are weakly but positively likely to sort into gender atypical industries in column 2 ($\hat{\beta}^{ever} = 0.023$, an increase of 32.9% relative to young adults from different-sex families). Examining the sample of young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth further strengthens this association, as when the full set of covariates is controlled for in column 4, this group appears as about 6.5 percentage points more likely than young adults from different-sex families to choose an industry that is atypical of their sex. Given a baseline mean of 0.070 among young adults from different-sex families, this corresponds to a sizeable 92.9% increase—nearly double.

In columns 5–8, we further explore this relationship by sex. Our results show that men from same sex families are particularly likely to choose gender-atypical sectors. In particular, men raised in same-sex families from birth are 10.0 percentage points more likely than men from different sex families to work in female-dominated industries. Although we cannot report the exact employment frequencies due to the confidential nature of our data, among the female-dominated sectors men raised by same-sex parents from birth are especially concentrated in the health, mental health, and social services sectors as well as in education (about 20% of them are employed in these sectors altogether). A positive but not significant association ($\hat{\beta}^{cont} = 0.031$) is found for women raised in same-sex families from birth.

Because gender atypical sector sorting may influence earnings, Table 5 reports mediation analyses by sex (men in columns 1–4 and women in columns 5–8) for both the full sample (Panel A) and the sample of raised from birth (Panel B). Odd-numbered columns show the total effect of living in same-sex families and earnings, whereas even-numbered columns show the direct effect when gender-atypical industry choice as a mediator is included. Among men, our results show that both in the full sample and the sample of raised from birth, men from same-sex families earn as much as men from different-sex families in columns 1 and 3. We also find that gender atypical industry choice is positively associated with earnings (probably due to the escalator effect taking place in a sample of mostly men from different-sex families), and that including gender atypical choice leaves coefficients virtually unchanged, with the magnitude of the indirect effect negligible (albeit significant). Similarly, among women, although a positive association between living in same-sex families and hourly earnings appears in column 7, Panel A ($\hat{\beta}^{ever} = 0.028$), with a similar though nonsignificant pattern in panel B ($\hat{\beta}^{cont} = 0.025$), including gender-atypical choice hardly alters coefficients in column 8, suggesting no mediation effect.

Regarding our hypotheses, our findings provide broad support for the sector selection perspective. Specifically, the gender-atypical industry sorting of young adults from same-sex families is in line with Hypothesis 3a. Further, when examined separately by sex, our results support Hypothesis 3b given that men from same-sex families choose more for female-dominated industries. However, we only find partial support for Hypothesis 3c given that among women the association on male-dominated industry sorting is positive but not significant. Finally, as

TABLE 4 | Young adults from same-sex families and gender atypical industries.

	Men and women				Men		Women	
	Full sample		Raised from birth		Full sample	Raised from birth	Full sample	Raised from birth
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	0.021	0.023*	0.066**	0.065**	0.039*	0.100**	0.006	0.031
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.038)	(0.013)	(0.023)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family-SES controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	356,797	356,797	356,327	356,327	179,549	179,314	177,248	177,013
Young adults from SSF	692	692	222	222	347	112	345	110
Method	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM	LPM
R-squared	0.005	0.006	0.005	0.006	0.008	0.008	0.006	0.006

Note: The table shows the estimated association between living in same-sex families and sorting into gender atypical industries on the labor market. Gender atypical industries are defined by comparing the individual's sex to the sector's sex composition. Individual controls include ethnicity, birth year fixed effects, municipality at birth fixed effects, and except for columns 5-8, sex. Family-SES controls include log childhood household income, parental education, family transitions, family structure at birth, and age of mother at birth. LPM indicates a linear probability model. SSF indicates same-sex families. Robust standard errors, clustered at the individual level, in parentheses.

*$p < 0.05$.

**$p < 0.01$.

***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE 5 | Young adults from same-sex families, gender-atypical industries, and earnings.

	Men				Women			
	Log gross earnings		Log gross hourly wage		Log gross earnings		Log gross hourly wage	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: full sample								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	0.004	0.003	0.008	0.004	0.032	0.031	0.028*	0.028*
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Gender atypical industry		0.019***		0.099***		0.114***		−0.013***
		(0.005)		(0.002)		(0.007)		(0.002)
Additional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	179,549	179,549	163,661	163,661	177,248	177,248	170,019	170,019
Young adults from SSF	347	347	323	323	345	345	327	327
Indirect effect		0.001[a]		0.004[a]		0.001		0.000
		[0.000, 0.002]		[0.000, 0.007]		[−0.002, 0.004]		[−0.001, 0.000]
R-squared	0.059	0.059	0.117	0.127	0.045	0.046	0.127	0.127
Panel B: raised from birth								
Lived in a SSF (1 is yes)	−0.015	−0.017	0.008	−0.002	−0.061	−0.064	0.025	0.025
	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Gender atypical industry		0.019***		0.099***		0.115***		−0.013***
		(0.005)		(0.002)		(0.007)		(0.002)
Additional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	179,314	179,314	163,447	163,447	177,013	177,013	169,797	169,797
Young adults from SSF	112	112	109	109	110	110	105	105
Indirect effect		0.002*		0.010*		0.004		−0.000
		[0.000, 0.004]		[0.002, 0.018]		[−0.002, 0.010]		[−0.001, 0.000]
R-squared	0.059	0.059	0.117	0.127	0.045	0.046	0.127	0.127

Note: The table shows the estimated associations between living in same-sex families from birth and log gross annual and hourly earnings by sex, in models without (odd-numbered columns) and with (even-numbered columns) gender atypical industry choice as a mediator. A gender atypical industry is an occupation in a female-dominated sector for men, and an occupation in a male-dominated sector for women. Square brackets show 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals ($R = 1000$); parentheses robust standard errors. SSF indicates same-sex families. Additional controls consist of all the controls indicated in Table 2 except sex. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

[a]Indirect effect is significant at the 5% level.

*$p < 0.05$.

**$p < 0.01$.

***$p < 0.001$.

gender-atypical sector choice does not meaningfully mediate the relationship between having lived in a same-sex family and earnings for neither men nor women, we find no evidence in favor of Hypothesis 3d.

5.4 | Additional Analyses

5.4.1 | Alternative Explanations

In Table B4 online, we examine two additional explanations that may account for the gender-atypical sector sorting observed in Table 4. We examine such explanations for the subsample of young adults raised from birth, although consistent findings hold for the full sample of young adults from same-sex families. First, it might be argued that young adults from same-sex families (primarily female same-sex families in our data) are simply "following their mothers" by selecting into female-dominated industries. However, we reject this explanation by linking young adults' industry choices to the industry choices of their (different-sex or female same-sex) parents (Panel a). Our results show that young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth are not more likely than young adults from different-sex families to be employed in the same sector in which at least one of their parents worked. On the contrary, the estimated coefficients are close to zero and not meaningful. Supporting this, prior research indicates that lesbian women are less likely than heterosexual women to be employed in female-dominated sectors (Badgett and Frank 2007), further weakening the plausibility of this interpretation.

Second, it may be argued that mothers and fathers are not perfect substitutes but rather provide different inputs to a child's growth (Allen 2013). By having two mothers or two fathers,

young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth might sort into gender-atypical sectors because they miss the complementary parenting styles that different-sex parents provide. In Panel b, we test this by observing industry choices of young adults from different-sex families who lost a parent during their childhood (and thus lacked the parenting style provided by the parent who prematurely passed away). Our results provide no evidence that young adults from bereaved families sort into gender-atypical sectors, thus contradicting the tentative prediction of this alternative explanation.

5.4.2 | Sensitivity Analyses

We evaluate the robustness of our findings by performing a range of sensitivity tests. First, we assess the sensitivity of our results to the small size of the treated group of young adults from same-sex families. To do so, we pool individuals aged 25 to 28 to increase treated sample size by reducing the number of individuals still in education (Table A2 online); use a continuous measure of years spent in a same-sex family to capture treatment intensity and leverage the full treated sample (Table B6 online); and apply Coarsened Exact Matching to reduce covariate imbalance (see Section B1 online). Second, we examine whether findings are driven by control variable specifications by re-estimating our main model on a restricted sample for which a more refined control variable for parental education is available (Table B7 online); by measuring family structure in 2001 instead of at birth to account for same-sex parents not being able to enter a registered partnership before 1998 (not reported); by additionally including polynomial controls up to the third order for childhood household income (Table B8 online); by imputing missing values using Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations (MICE) (Table B9 online); and by using Oster's (2019) bounds to assess robustness to omitted variable bias (see Section B2 online). Finally, we check whether our results are robust to alternative modeling and statistical approaches, namely to logistic regression models (Table B10 online) and Heckman (1979) selection models (Table B11 online); to restricting our analyses to the cohorts born after the legalization of same-sex partnerships—that is, born in 1998–1999 (Table B12 online); and to using young adults from different-sex families who experienced parental separation as a comparison group (Table B13 online). The results from all these checks are consistent with our main findings and yield point estimates that are close in magnitude to those estimated in our main models, suggesting that despite the sometimes limited statistical precision due to lower power, our main results are stable in magnitude.

6 | Discussion

In this paper, we addressed the question: "Does being raised by same-sex parents influence children's labor market prospects in early adulthood?" Using longitudinal administrative data from the Netherlands, we compared young adults from same-sex families and young adults from different-sex families who are no longer enrolled in education at the age of 25 on a range of labor market outcomes. We theorized that the labor market performance of young adults from same-sex families may be shaped by internal aspects that commonly characterize same-sex families (a small family size, a higher human capital, and a less gender-conforming parental behavior) as well as external aspects (such as potential labor market discrimination).

Our analyses revealed several notable patterns. First, our results showed no significant difference in labor market performance between the two groups. Specifically, in samples that included both men and women, young adults from same-sex families were found to earn just as much, to be equally employed, and to have equal probability of being full-time employed as young adults from different-sex families. These findings did not hide large heterogeneities by the time spent in same-sex families, as young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth until age 15 were similarly found to earn and be employed as much as young adults from different-sex families. They were, however, found to be less frequently employed in full-time occupations, albeit not significantly.

Considering our hypotheses, these results contrast with predictions of the family composition and human capital/signaling perspectives, according to which young adults from same-sex families were to perform better on the labor market either as a consequence of being raised in small families or as a result of their expectedly higher school performance. While we did find that young adults from same-sex families come from smaller families and, when raised from birth, show slightly better school performance (though not significant), these advantages did not translate into positive labor market outcomes. It is possible that young adults from same-sex families may not aim at obtaining jobs with better earning prospects but give priority to other factors, such as jobs in industries more aligned with their preferences. Our findings also contradict the discrimination perspective, according to which young adults from same-sex families were to perform poorly on the labor market, especially because of weaker labor market ties of same-sex parents living in rural areas at the time of their children's birth. Contrary to this expectation, we found that even among young adults born in rural communities, those from same-sex families were performing no differently than their peers from different-sex families. This suggests that, in the Netherlands, discrimination against same-sex parents is unlikely to play any role in shaping young adults' labor market outcomes.

In the second part of our analysis, we examined and tested the predictions of what we originally have labeled the sector-selection perspective. This perspective posits that young adults from same-sex families, less bound by gender stereotypes and influenced by their same-sex parents' egalitarian division of labor, are more likely to work in industries atypical of their sex. As a result of these industry patterns, men from same-sex families were expected to earn less and women more than their comparison group from different-sex families. Our results confirmed some but not all of these predictions. Specifically, young adults from same-sex families were significantly more likely to be employed in a gender atypical industry than young adults from different-sex families. This pattern was especially pronounced among young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth, who were 6.5 percentage points (pp) more likely to be employed in gender atypical industries than young adults from different-sex families–an increase of almost double relative to the mean observed among young adults from different-sex families. Splitting

the raised-from-birth sample by sex, the association was largely driven by men from same-sex families, who predominantly entered female-dominated industries (by 10.0 pp), while for women, although in the same direction, the association was smaller and statistically nonsignificant (3.1 pp).

We did not find, however, support for the prediction that employment in gender-atypical industries affected earnings. On the contrary, despite men from same-sex families being predominantly employed in female-dominated occupations, generally less lucrative than male-dominated occupations, our findings showed that they were earning as much as men from different-sex families, with sector choice not meaningfully mediating this relationship. Likewise, although women from same-sex families were found to earn slightly more per hour than women from different-sex families (2.5 percent), this difference was not explained by gender-atypical industry choice. Additional mechanisms might be at play in offsetting the expected earnings differentials. For example, men from same-sex families might choose to work in more diverse and inclusive environments (including toward LGBT-identified employees), which have been shown to be positively associated with firm performance (Ullah et al. 2025), and may thus offer overall better working conditions, including pay opportunities. At the same time, women from same-sex families may develop individual characteristics (e.g., higher assertiveness or self-confidence) that are rewarded across all industries, not just in male-dominated ones.

Our findings explicitly contrast with the only other study that examined adult children from same-sex families and, among other things, labor market outcomes. Notably, while Regnerus (2012) found a negative association between having lived in a same-sex family in childhood and employment and full-time employment frequencies, our analysis reveals no significant differences in either employment status or full-time employment. Our findings are consistent with the no differences found in reanalysis by Cheng and Powell (2015), who showed that the original Regnerus results were sensitive to analytical choices. We contribute to this literature by offering first evidence on population data and by adding to the body of research that has shaped the 'no-difference hypothesis', namely the consensus that children with same-sex parents fare as well as children with different-sex parents across a range of school, health, and psychological outcomes (for a review, see Mazrekaj et al. 2024).

Our findings have important implications, as they inform us about the relationship between gender identity formation, gender norms, and labor market outcomes. Specifically, our findings suggest that gender-role modeling and values within the family of origin internalized during childhood may play a significant role in shaping industry preferences in early adulthood. As such, our study thus contributes to the broader literature on how gender norms are transmitted and influence education and career choices (e.g., Cunningham 2001; Davis and Greenstein 2009; Dryler 1998; Perales et al. 2021), a body of work that has paid comparatively little attention to how parental gender norms shape children's industry choices specifically. Because sexual minority parents tend to hold more progressive views and less rigid attitudes toward gender norms (Fulcher et al. 2008; Stacey and Biblarz 2001), their children are likely exposed to a broader range of normative behaviors and career aspirations. Additional analyses showed that these gender-atypical patterns were not explained by mothers' occupations or by the absence of complementary gendered parenting styles. Instead, the results pointed to the broader influence of the upbringing environment in "degendering" occupational sorting. This is consequential, as career paths are often chosen early in life, and persistent sex-based sorting across industries contributes to enduring gender wage disparities (Correll 2001). Our findings are thus suggestive that encouraging more egalitarian household models might contribute to reducing gender segregation in the labor markets.

Some final considerations and limitations of this study, as well as directions for future research, are worth noting. First, our data do not provide a measure of individuals' sexual orientation. Accordingly, our findings pertain to young adults raised by couples and do not extend to young adults raised in single-parent families. Second, our results mostly refer to female same-sex families as the number of male same-sex families is too small to derive correct inference. Nonetheless, because male same-sex parents share many characteristics with female same-sex parents and differ in important ways from different-sex parents, similar patterns may apply to male same-sex families. Consistent with this, exploratory descriptive analyses – conducted as supplementary checks and not reported in the main text – reveal little heterogeneity by parent's sex in the finding that young adults raised in same-sex families from birth enter gender-atypical industries. However, such a statement remains speculative and should be taken with extreme caution, given the very low numbers of male same-sex couples (less than ten). As more same-sex families are formed and can be identified over time, future research should further explore the dynamics of parental sex, also paying attention to the interactions between the sex of the parent and the sex of the child.

Third, about half of the young adults from same-sex families in our sample experienced same-sex parenting for less than 3 years. Such brief exposure may limit the extent to which some of the theorized mechanisms may operate. For example, the processes underlying the family composition and human capital/signaling perspectives—related to small family size, parental investment, and educational advantages—may require longer exposure to same-sex parents to unfold. Consistent with this, our results for the sector-selection perspective proved to be strongest among young adults exposed the longest to same-sex parents. Although the absence of overall differences in labor market performance between young adults from same-sex and different-sex families in our full-sample analyses may thus partly reflect this short exposure to same-sex parenting, the consistent findings obtained on the raised-from-birth sample give us more confidence that exposure effects do not drive such full-sample results. Nevertheless, future research should examine in more detail whether the length of exposure to same-sex families moderates the mechanisms linking same-sex parenting to young adults' labor market outcomes, particularly when considering later-formed same-sex families.

Fourth, we should emphasize that our analysis refers to the Netherlands, a country where the LGBTQ+ community enjoys broad cultural support and where same-sex partnerships have been legal for more than 20 years. Thus, the associations we document may represent an upper bound on what would

be observed in less supportive contexts, where effects on gender atypical choices may be weaker and on labor market outcomes even negative. At the same time, the cohorts considered in this study were born around the legalization of same-sex partnerships in the Netherlands. In fact, although our study is directly related to previous research by Mazrekaj et al. (2020) and Perales et al. (2021), our sample is somewhat different than the samples employed in these studies due to the focus on older birth cohorts to study early labor market outcomes of young adults from same-sex families. Consequently, in the context of the Netherlands and comparable countries with long-standing support for same-sex couples, our findings may even represent a lower bound of the effects that might be observed considering same-sex families formed in a legally and socially institutionalized environment that is longer-standing than the one considered in this study.

Finally, we should acknowledge that much of the variation in the outcomes examined remains unexplained by the mechanisms tested, as our models only account for a modest share of the variance in labor market outcomes. As noted earlier, it is possible that other attitudinal factors, such as higher assertiveness or self-confidence among women or preferences for inclusive workplace environments among men, may also influence young adults from same-sex families' labor market trajectories. Gaining a deeper understanding of these attitudes and beliefs represents an important direction for future qualitative and quantitative research. This way, we can better shed light on the mechanisms through which same-sex parenting, family upbringing, and gender norms interact to shape the labor market trajectories of young adults from same-sex families.

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Data Availability Statement

The data for this study are protected by a confidentiality agreement and we are precluded from sharing the data with others. We would be happy to provide information on how to obtain access to the data as well as assistance and Stata code to replicate the results of this study.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Appendix A:** Supporting Information. **Table A1:** Young adults from same-sex families, and higher education enrolment and graduation at age 25. **Table A2:** Young adults from same-sex families, and labor market outcomes and industry choices, pulling ages 25 to 28. **Figure B1:** Sample imbalance before versus after CEM. **Table B1:** Young adults from same-sex families, labor market outcomes, and industry choice with data processed by means of Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM). **Table B2:** Young adults from same-sex families, labor market outcomes, and coefficient stability. **Table B3:** Young adults from same-sex families and labor market outcomes, full model results. **Table B4:** Young adults raised by same-sex parents from birth, family sectors, and parental death comparisons. **Table B5:** Young adults from same-sex families, family composition perspective, human capital/signaling perspective, and labor market outcomes. **Table B6:** Number of years in same-sex families, labor market outcomes, and industry choices. **Table B7:** Labor market outcomes and industry choices of young adults from same-sex families using categorical parental education. **Table B8:** Young adults from same-sex families, labor market outcomes, and industry choices using polynomial income controls. **Table B9:** Young adults from same-sex families, labor market outcomes, and industry choices using imputed covariates' missing values. **Table B10:** Logistic regression on employment, full-time employment, and industry choices. **Table B11:** Young adults from same-sex families and earnings using Heckman selection model. **Table B12:** Labor market outcomes and industry choices of young adults from same-sex families for selected later birth cohorts. **Table B13:** Young adults from same-sex families versus young adults from separated different-sex families.