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RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN KIN AND
CHOSEN KIN FAMILIAL NETWORKS

By

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CHOSEN KIN FAMILIAL NETWORKS

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University of Nebraska, 2020

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Family relationships are sources of both stress and support for most individuals. They are also among the most resilient, offering support through long periods of conflict. Growing scholarly research on LGB families demonstrates that LGB individuals face greater levels of conflict, which stems from a lack of acceptance of their identities. As of yet, little work has directly compared LGB familial relationships to heterosexual family relationships. This study seeks to fill this gap by comparing the relationship characteristics of LGB and heterosexual individuals using network data drawn from the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (2018 and 2019). I employed multilevel logistic regression models to estimate the relationship between sexuality and characteristics of familial relationships. I measured relationship characteristics in two ways: perceived closeness and the presence of conflict. Analysis reveals few differences between the relationships of LGB and heterosexual individuals. LGB individuals experience feeling less emotionally close to their biological kin than heterosexual individuals but are equally close.

Introduction

Family relationships can be among the most supportive and most stressful in a person's life. These relationships are among the most resilient as well, persisting and often offering support even through extreme conflict. Although a long line of qualitative literature has examined conflict within lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) family relationships, only recently has this conflict, in comparison to conflict within heterosexual families, become a subject of scholarly interest. This thesis will answer the question: How do the family relationships of LGB individuals compare with heterosexual individuals?

Here, I examine two critical distinctions between LGB and heterosexual family relationships. First, conflict is likely to be rooted in different sources for LGB and heterosexual family relationships. Conflict in heterosexual familial relationships frequently arises from a failure to meet normative expectations and life course transitions. On top of failing to meet normative expectations, LGB individuals frequently report strain arises from not feeling supported in their identities. As a result, they have relationships that are seemingly contradictory, maintaining connections with their family that are full of conflict and not particularly close.

Second, the role of chosen kin is likely to differ in LGB and heterosexual family relationships. LGB individuals frequently develop familial relationships with individuals beyond their biological kin to create a chosen family who gives them the support they may lack. Chosen kin may also expand upon the familial roles an individual may already have in their biological kin, acting as extra siblings or parental figures. Chosen kin can offer an individual an opportunity for a more well-rounded family. As such, LGB

individuals may be substantially closer emotionally to their non-kin family relationships than heterosexual individuals are to their chosen kin. LGB romantic partner relationships may be less close than heterosexual ones as the strain from unsupportive family members and homophobia can lead to greater relationship stress (Todosijevic et al. 2005; Knoble and Linville 2012). Support from these relationships can help LGB individuals balance strain felt from other relationships (Walen and Lachman 2000).

While past studies have discussed how LGB familial relationships differ from the average heterosexual familial relationships, very little has been done to directly compare the features of LGB and heterosexual familial relationships. A direct comparison will allow us to see how levels of conflict and closeness differ and give us a more complete understanding of the LGB family.

To compare these relationships, I will draw on two theories of familial conflict and compare the emotional closeness and conflict in the family relationships of LGB and heterosexual individuals. To start, Simmel's theory of conflict is one possible explanation for why LGB individuals may maintain conflictual relationships with family members. Second, family ambivalence literature may further explain how an LGB individual may report having a highly conflictual relationship while still considering the relationship among the closest they have. I will then use these theories to better elucidate direct comparisons between LGB and heterosexual individuals and their relationships with individuals they consider to be family.

Testing how the qualities of LGB and heterosexual family relationships compare will give us a better understanding of the role of ambivalent relationships in families. To

answer my research question, how do the family relationships of LGB individuals compare with heterosexual individuals, I will test four hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: LGB individuals' relationships with their biological kin will contain more conflict than heterosexual individuals'.

Hypothesis 1b: LGB individuals' relationships with their biological kin will be less close than heterosexual individuals'.

Hypothesis 2: LGB individuals' relationships with their chosen kin will be the same as or emotionally closer and less conflictual than heterosexual individuals'.

Hypothesis 3: There will be no significant difference between LGB and heterosexual individuals' relationships with their romantic partners.

Literature Review

Closeness and Conflict in Family Relationships

Family relationships are often emotionally closer and more supportive than others, with relationships between romantic partners, parents and children being among the closest (Agneessens, Waeye, Lievens 2006). However, in family relationships, closeness and conflict are bound up together as two sides of the same coin: the closest relationships are also the most likely to be conflictual (Connidis and McMullin 2002, Bengston et al. 2002).

In his classic argument, Simmel (1954) argues that conflict allows individuals to include in their lives people they would otherwise avoid and reject. Expressing conflict allows individuals to move past areas of tension and focus on building other aspects of their relationships. This allows them to maintain close, stable relationships without necessarily needing to avoid the conflict. Thus, this perspective suggests that conflictual

relationships can persist without definite resolution even though they cause inter-personal distress. This may mean that in cases where biological kin are not supportive of an individual's sexuality, yet the relationships are maintained, we may see more conflict.

More recently, sociologists have explored how structural tensions differentially produce conflict between family members over the life course (Connidis and McMullin 2002). Connidis and McMullin call this family ambivalence, defining it as “structurally created contradictions that are experienced by individuals in their interactions with others” (559). Relationships can become ambivalent when an individual, through the societal expectations and structures embedded in familial relationships, has more privilege (Bengston et al. 2002, Connidis 2015). LGB individuals experience ambivalence in their biological kin relationships when the social expectation to maintain a relationship is contradicted by the heteronormative structures embedded in the traditional family dynamic itself. They often lack the financial and social resources to avoid the conditions that lead to ambivalent relationships. LGB individuals who are not supported by their biological kin may not feel able to end the relationship. For example, an LGB individual who was kicked out of their home by their parents may still feel the social pressure to care for them when they reach old age. In the case that they lack the financial resources to pay for care, LGB individuals face the expectation to personally care for their aging parents. LGB individuals are expected to be able to negotiate their familial relationships, navigating relationships with those they continue to depend upon and those that depend upon them, through constantly shifting expectations and arrangements (Connidis 2015).

Although LGB individuals may find themselves in ambivalent biological kin relationships due to heteronormative expectations, it does not mean that they lack the agency to avoid the same expectations in all their relationships (Bengston et al. 2002). In chosen kin relationships this may mean less overall conflict as an individual may be less willing to maintain a chosen relationship if it is incongruous. The desire for relationships with less conflict may be especially strong for LGB individuals looking for a chosen family without heteronormative limitations after their biological family has stopped supporting them.

Family ambivalence counteracts the notion that biological kin relationships are either fully in solidarity or fully in conflict (Bengston et al. 2002). It also supports the hypotheses that LGB individuals' biological kin relationships will be less close and contain more conflict than heterosexuals'. LGB individuals may include biological kin among their closest relationships even if they are not actually very close and contain conflict as societal expectations dictate that the relationship is maintained. On the other hand, chosen kin and romantic partner relationships are less likely to become ambivalent as individuals are more willing to terminate the relationship when the pressures of social expectations are not present (Wilson, Shuey, and Elder 2003; Reczek 2016).

Together, Simmel's theory of conflict and the concept of family ambivalence may shed light on the contradictory familial arrangement that may explain why LGB individuals maintain relationships with their biological families even when conflict is frequent, and they do not feel particularly close to them. Ambivalence theory tells us that LGB individuals may be expected to maintain close relationships with their biological kin, even if they do not support the individual's identity. These perspectives also suggest

that the relationship between closeness and conflict that has been found in studies dominated by heterosexual families may be modified among LGB family relations. We may expect to find that the closeness experienced between heterosexual individuals and their biological family may be found in the close relationships of LGB individuals and their chosen kin, resulting in LGB individuals having closer relationships with their chosen kin than heterosexual individuals.

Biological Families and Chosen Kin

Definitions of family have expanded beyond what is considered to be their traditional boundaries of blood and marriage (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock 2012), and although this boundary remains what is considered traditional has been highly contested (Powell et al. 2010). “Traditional” families are frequently defined as being made up of a heterosexual married couple and their children (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock 2012). Throughout this thesis, I will use the term biological kin to describe traditional family members. Nontraditional families that fall outside this definition encompass a wide variety of families including same-sex families, single-parent families, nonmarried families, and multi-generational families (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock 2012). Often sexual and racial minority families fall into this nontraditional label (Nelson 2013) as they less frequently take the form of a traditional family.

Terms for relationships that fall outside the boundary of traditional families vary and can be points of disagreement within the field (Nelson 2013). For example, intentional family (Muraco 2006; Nelson 2013), situational kin, ritual kin (Nelson 2013), voluntary kin (Braithwaite et al. 2010), gay family (Levitt 2015), fictive kin and pseudo-kin (Battle and Ashley 2008) have all been used to describe these relationships. Fictive

kin or chosen family/kin are among the most common used (Weston 1991; Nelson 2013; Nelson 2014; Barker, Herdt, and de Vries 2006; Dempsey 2010; Mitchell 2008; Muraco 2006). In many cases different labels refer to different identities; the term Chosen kin is the term used most more often used in sexuality research. Therefore, I use the term chosen kin throughout this thesis.

Strain and Conflict in LGB Family Relationships

LGB individuals may not have support from their blood kin, resulting in negative outcomes. For example, many LGB youth are forced out of their homes at a young age (Robinson 2018; Etengoff and Daiute 2015). Family rejection can result in negative mental health outcomes (Ryan et al. 2010) and feelings of isolation and alienation (Hiller, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2011) for LGB individuals. Lacking approval from their extended biological kin may also cause an LGB individual to decide to cut themselves off from their biological family (Reczek 2016), which results in LGB individuals searching out a chosen family in order to replace their biological family (Braithwaite 2010; Robinson 2018; Etengoff and Daiute 2015).

The stigmas faced by older LGB adults differ from those experienced by their younger counterparts. Older adults feel pressured by the norms of their generation to remain in the closet and are offered less family support than younger generations when they do come out (Barker, Herdt, de Vries 2006). Having spent the majority of their lives in a time that stigmatized non-heterosexuality, older adults face new problems as they come out. Much like their younger counterparts, older LGB adults feel more supported by friends and family who know of their orientation than those who do not and even report higher levels of mental health when living with a partner (Grossman, D'Augelli,

and Hershberger 2000). Healthcare professionals now also need to develop sex education programs for elderly patients who are coming out and exploring their sexuality (Chaya and Bernert 2014). Elderly LGB individuals face their own problems that younger generations do not have to face. As a group they face the possibility of not being able to be with their partners at the end of their lives as a result of homophobic policies and stigma (Almack, Seymout, and Bellamy 2010).

Chosen kin in LGB families

LGB individuals form familial networks that include both their blood and chosen kin. Often, the individuals alternate between their chosen kin and their blood kin (Reczek 2016), having a mix of both in their immediate networks. In minority populations these networks are often built around need (Stack 1974) and the desire to be around others with similar identities (Levitt et al. 2015; Hunyady 2008; Mitchell 2008; Scanzoni 2001). Nontraditional familial networks serve the role of extended kin networks, providing childcare (Stack 1974, Scanzoni 2001) and other support in the household.

Supportive relationships can offer a buffering effect from the strain felt in other relationships. Walen and Lachman (2000) found that where the support/strain comes from impacts the strength of the buffering. In fact, support felt from one relationship type (biological kin, chosen kin, and romantic partner) can buffer the effects of a strained relationship with a different type (Walen and Lachman 2000). Both strain and support are common in most relationships; the balance of the two defines the strength of the relationship. This balancing of strain and support may explain an individual's willingness, or unwillingness, to cut off relations with their parents (Wilson, Shuey, and Elder 2003; Reczek 2016). Biological kin support can buffer strain felt in any of the

relationship types. Conversely, familial strain often results in negative effects on mood and well-being regardless of the buffering coming from friends and romantic partners. The strength of familial relationships and the impact that they have on wellbeing explains why biological kin relationships are more likely to become ambivalent relationships compared to strained friend relationships.

Chosen kin fill in where biological kin fall short, performing and expanding upon the role of traditional family for LGB individuals. Family then becomes a collection of practices and rituals rather than an institution (Nordqvist 2012; Oswald and Masciadrelli 2008; Gazso and McDaniel 2015; Etengoff and Daiute 2015; Braithwaite et al. 2010). In these cases, the role and meaning of family varies from case to case. These families are more fluid, with individuals able to decide if they want to be a part of a family or not. Family becomes a choice rather than a requirement (Oswald and Masciadrelli 2008). In black LGB communities blood kin and chosen kin are kept separate as their chosen kin are more likely to understand them and provide the comfort of more fluid gender roles (Battle and Ashley 2008; Levitt et al. 2015). Chosen family members can even serve in roles that a biological family member cannot, acting as additional siblings and parents able to provide care (Braithwaite et al. 2010; Gazso and McDaniel 2015). In these cases, chosen kin can act as role models to the individual, teaching behaviors such as coping habits (Levitt et al. 2015; Mitchell 2008).

Chosen kin can “fill in” and extend LGB families in different ways that depend on sexual and religious identity and geographic distance. Within lesbian communities tightknit groupings often form that act as each other’s families. These families give women the support they need in order to be out and live healthy lives, often forming

closer relationships than with the women's biological families (Ariel 2008; Mitchell 2008; Hunyady 2008). These lesbian communities face similar hardships to those that traditional families face: infighting, isolation, and even a hesitation to share personal issues if the family becomes too big and impersonal (Hunyady 2008).

Religious LGB individuals turn to the internet to gain support from their religious community. In religious communities coming out can be an even greater challenge, and many LGB individuals worry about the repercussions of coming out to their religious communities (Hunyady 2008; Etengoff and Daiute 2015). The internet allows religious LGB individuals to find communities that are catered to their specific needs and religions. These spaces also allow older community members to mentor and look out for younger members (Etengoff and Daiute 2015). In one example a collection of Mormon blogs run by LGB individuals are monitored by older community members to make sure those in need of emergency resources can access them. In a different example a family of lesbian nuns was founded online in order to provide each other the support they need in a community that might otherwise be intolerant (Hunyady 2008).

Unlike traditional families, chosen families can be formed across long distances. Chosen families are increasingly found in the digital world, overcoming barriers such as distance and disapproving families and giving LGB individuals a sense of belonging (Craig and McInroy 2014; Hiller, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012; Etengoff and Daiute 2015; Hunyady 2008; Nimrod 2010). Support online is especially appealing for individuals coming from religious families as the internet allows individuals to find online communities catered to their specific needs that offer both friendship and mentors (Etengoff and Daiute 2015).

Current Investigation

In summary, I address two research questions. First, are the biological family relationships of LGB individuals as supportive as the biological relationships of heterosexual individuals? Or conversely, are they less emotionally close, or more likely to contain conflict? Second, are the chosen family relationships of LGB individuals as supportive as the chosen family relationships of heterosexual individuals? Studying these questions allows us to better compare the characteristics of LGB and heterosexual families.

Driven by these questions, I offer four hypotheses. First, I expect that conflict will be more common among the biological relationships of LGB individuals. I also expect that these relationships will be less emotionally close than biological relationships of heterosexual individuals. Second, I expect that these differences will be muted, or even reversed, among LGB individuals' chosen family members. I expect to find that LGB individuals are as close to their chosen family as heterosexuals and that conflict will be as common in LGB individuals' chosen family relationships as it is in heterosexuals' chosen family relationships. Last, I predict that LGB individuals' relationships with their spouses and romantic partners are as close and contain the same levels of conflict as heterosexual individuals'.

To test these hypotheses, I will present statistical models that directly compare the relationship characteristics of LGB individuals and their heterosexual counterparts. Specifically, I will compare both the emotional closeness and perceived conflict in these relationships. As previously noted, most LGB family analyses fail to directly compare the LGB family with the heterosexual family. These models will allow me to begin to bridge

that gap in the literature and gain a more robust understanding of the differences and similarities between the two family types.

Through comparing the emotional closeness and levels of conflict between family types, I will also examine how familial ambivalence and Simmel's theory of conflict can be applied to LGB families. Simmel's theory of conflict tells us that we should see conflict in the close relationships of individuals. Based on the literature we can expect that a lack of support from their blood kin in regard to their sexuality will cause conflict in LGB individuals' familial relationships. If Simmel's theory holds true for LGB families, we would expect to see high levels of conflict with those respondents consider to be among their closest relationships in line with my first hypothesis.

Likewise, finding both high levels of conflict and emotional closeness would lend support to concept of familial ambivalence. Family ambivalence literature tells us that even in the presence of conflict, familial relationships are held together due to societal expectations. We would expect to see these ambivalent relationships occur in blood kin relationships more frequently than in chosen kin relationships, as individuals may feel more strongly obligated to maintain a conflictual relationship with their blood kin than with chosen kin. Testing the levels of conflict and emotional closeness in varying relationship types will allow me to see how ambivalence differs between the kin types.

Data and Sample

My data are drawn from the Nebraska Annual Social Indicator Survey (NASIS). The NASIS is an annual survey of the adult (over age 19) population of Nebraska excluding individuals who reside in custodial institutions or on military bases and

reservations. The survey sample was generated from a complete list of residential addresses in Nebraska, which was sampled with an equal probability of selection (Smyth et al, 2018; Smyth et al, 2019). The data were collected using paper questionnaires that were mailed to the sampled addresses. We combine two waves of data collection: the first was conducted in the spring of 2018 and the second in the spring of 2019. The response rate was 26% in 2018, and it dropped to 16% in 2019 when the state experienced severe flooding. In total, 1328 individuals completed either survey.

Network Measures

The following name generator was used to elicit family relationships. *“Please list the initials of up to 5 of the most important people in your life, people who are so important that you consider them to be part of your family, even when you do not get along.”* Of those surveyed, 1,328 completed the network module, reporting data for at least one family member. These responses were then broken down to their individual ties, resulting in 6,640 points of analysis.

Conflict. The first dependent variable in my analyses is the presence or absence of conflict in kin relationships. A relationship interpreter was used to ascertain the level of conflict perceived by the respondent in each relationship. Respondents were given the following prompt: *How much conflict do you have with each person? [Very strong/strong/not strong/no] Conflict or “I can’t choose”.* We dichotomized the variable so that each relationship either contains conflict (Very strong/strong/not strong), or it does not (No conflict). Just under half (39.75%) of the relationships in the sample contained conflict (reference category = No conflict).

Closeness. The second dependent variable in my analyses is how close the respondent feels to their kin. Respondents were asked: *How close do you feel to each person?[Extremely/Quite/ Fairly/Not very] close?* Most relationships (68.67%) were characterized as being “Extremely close.” Knowing this, the measure was dichotomized with the categories “Extremely close” and “Not extremely close” (reference category = Not extremely close).

Role. A relationship interpreter ascertained the social role assigned to each dyad. For each relationship, respondents were asked: *Is each person your: [Parent/Child/Romantic partner/spouse/sibling/friend/other relative/other non-relative]?* Children are the most frequently nominated people (33% of all dyads), followed by other non-relatives (including friends) (17%), spouses/romantic partners (15%), parents and siblings (12% each), followed by other relatives (10%). These categories were then collapsed into three categories, Chosen kin (friend, other non-relative), Romantic partner (romantic partner/spouse), and Blood kin (child, other relative, parent, sibling). (Where applicable, reference category = Chosen kin.)

Sexuality. Respondents were asked: *Do you think of yourself as: [Heterosexual/straight/ Homosexual/gay or lesbian/Bisexual/Something else/Not sure].* This measure was then dichotomized to the categories LGB and Heterosexual. The majority of respondents (96.85%) were heterosexual (0 = Heterosexual). The complete NASIS dataset has 195 LGB relationships.

Demographic measures

Race. The overwhelming majority of the sample (87%) is white (reference category = White).

Education. The sample is highly educated. Over three-quarters (83%) of respondents have completed at least some college. 17% of respondents have completed high school or less. (0 = Completed high school or less.)

Income. The majority of the sample (76.50%) earns an income of less than \$100,000. 3.09% of respondents earn less than \$10,000 a year, 29.82% earn \$10,000 to less than \$50,000, 43.60% earn \$50,000 to less than \$100,000, and 23.49% earn \$100,000 or more (reference category = Less than \$10,000).

Analytic Strategy

To examine the relationships characteristics of biological and chosen kin, I use multilevel logistic regression models to estimate the relationship between conflict/closeness and sexuality. Given that the majority of respondents only reported one romantic partner or spouse, I used generalized linear models to test the respondents' relationships characteristics with these individuals. The NASIS dataset contains 6640 relationships nested within 1328 respondents. Demographic controls are measured at the individual level. Properties of kin relationships are measured at the dyadic level. I use the lme4 package (Bates, Maechler, Bolker and Walker 2015) in R to estimate these models.

Missing Data

In order to handle missing data, two strategies were used. First, the means were imputed to remove missing data in the independent and control variables. Second, two separate data sets were made. The first data set is used to analyze conflict in the

respondents' familial relationships. The second data set is used to analyze the emotional closeness in the respondents' familial relationships. After the datasets were created, listwise deletion was done to remove incomplete responses based on the dependent variables, emotional closeness and conflict. The decision to create two datasets was made in order to minimize the impact of listwise deletion on sample size. The decision to use listwise deletion was made to match the results output from the lme4 package (Bates, Maechler, Bolker and Walker, 2015). The lme4 package automatically uses listwise deletion when completing a regression. The two datasets are nearly identical in composition (see table 1). The two datasets are described in more detail below.

Dataset: Close

In the close dataset listwise deletion was used to remove incomplete responses, which created a sample size of 5516. The close dataset includes the independent variables, sexuality and kin role, the dependent variable, close, and the control variables. In this dataset there are 172 LGB relationships.

Dataset: Conflict

In the conflict dataset listwise deletion was again used to remove incomplete responses, which created a sample size of 4662. The conflict dataset includes the independent variables, sexuality and kin role, the dependent variable, conflict, and the control variables. In this dataset there are 162 LGB relationships.

Results

LGB and heterosexual individuals do report differences both in how emotionally close they are to their loved ones and in how much conflict those relationships contain.

The percentages of relationships that are extremely close give us an early indication that these differences may be significant. Nearly half (48.39%) of all LGB respondents report being extremely close to their biological kin while nearly three quarters (71.87%) of heterosexual respondents report being extremely close. Chosen kin and spousal relationships follow a similar trend in that Heterosexual respondents report closer relationships more often (See Table 2).

In the case of conflict in familial relationships, over half (53.41%) of all LGB respondents report the presence of conflict in their biological kin relationships. Fewer heterosexual respondents (only 40%) reported conflict. (See Table 3.) Chosen kin and spousal relationships are the opposite: LGB respondents report being in conflict less often (19.61% and 30.43%, respectively) than heterosexual respondents (25.41% and 50.57%).

While these descriptive results cannot tell us whether or not these differences are significant, they do show that differences exist in the relationship characteristics of LGB and heterosexual individuals in this sample. The results also provide initial support for my first two hypotheses, that LGB individuals will be less close to their biological kin than heterosexual individuals, and that they will also experience more conflict. This gives us enough evidence to move forward with further tests.

To further test the differences in kin type, the data was broken down into three datasets subsamples. Having three separate datasets will allow me to directly test the differences in closeness and conflict between LGB and heterosexual respondents.

Biological Kin

To start I conducted multilevel logistic regressions to analyze the effects of sexuality on an individuals' relationship with their biological kin. I first modeled the effects of sexuality on how close respondents feel to their familial relationships (Table 4). The first model was tested without including controls. This model tells us that the odds of LGB individuals reporting having extremely close relationships with their biological kin are 0.19 times as high as heterosexual individuals.

Model 2 adds the control variables (race, education, and income) to the initial model predicting closeness in biologically based family relationships. This model tells us that the odds of LGB individuals' relationships with their biological kin having any conflict in them is 0.22 times higher than heterosexual individuals, all else equal. These results show a significant difference in how close individuals feel to their biological kin on the basis of sexuality. This supports my hypothesis 1a: that LGB individuals are less close to their biological kin than heterosexual individuals.

Next, I modeled the effects of sexuality on conflict in familial relationships (Table 5). Again, I first modeled the effects of sexuality without control variables. Model 3 indicates that the odds of an LGB individual experiencing conflict in biological kin relationships are 2.89 times higher than a heterosexual individual. However, the p-value, 0.07, reveals that there is not a statistically significant difference between the amount of conflict in LGB individuals' relationships and heterosexual individuals' relationships.

In model 4 the control variables were added back in. This complete model of conflict in biological family relationships indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between LGB individuals and heterosexual individuals. Knowing this, the model indicates that the odds of an LGB individual experiencing conflict in their

biological kin relationships is 2.56 times higher than heterosexual individuals. These results do not support hypothesis 1a, that LGB individuals experience more conflict in their biological kin relationships.

The models provide mixed support for my first two hypotheses, that there will be significant differences between LGB and heterosexual individuals and the emotional closeness and level of conflict in their relationships with their biological kin. There is moderate support for hypothesis 1b, showing that LGB people are less close to their biological kin than heterosexual individuals, yet we also see that there is not significantly more conflict in LGB relationships than in heterosexual ones. While not statistically significant, it is still important to note that LGB individuals are two and a half times more likely to experience conflict, lending some support to hypothesis 1a.

Chosen Kin

Focusing now on chosen kin relationships, Table 6 tests the effects of sexuality on closeness in these relationships. Model 5 shows the effects without control variables. The model shows that the odds of LGB individuals having extremely close relationships with their chosen kin is .44 times as high as in heterosexual relationships. However, this model indicates that there is no statistical difference between LGB and heterosexual individuals' relationships ($p\text{-value}=0.2$). In model 6, adding the control variables again shows there is no relationship between sexuality and how close an individual feels to their chosen kin.

When testing for differences in conflict in chosen kin relationships, table 7 shows tests for the effects of sexuality on chosen kin relationships. Model 7 shows us that without controls there is no statistically significant difference between LGB individuals

and heterosexual individuals. Adding the control variables in model 8 indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference when it comes to sexuality. This model indicates that the odds of LGB individuals having any form of conflict in their chosen kin relationships are 0.59 times as high as heterosexual individuals; however, the p-value of 0.725 shows this is not significant.

These results lend partial support to hypothesis 2, that there will be little difference in closeness between LGB and heterosexual relationships with chosen kin and that LGB relationships will contain less conflict. Table 6 shows that there is no statistical difference in how close LGB and heterosexual individuals are to their chosen kin, supporting the hypothesis. However, table 7 shows that there is no difference in the amount of conflict present in chosen kin relationships, failing to support my hypothesis. These models show that there is no difference between LGB and heterosexual individual's relationships with their chosen kin.

Romantic Partners

Finally, looking at romantic partner relationships, table 8 depicts the differences in closeness between LGB and heterosexual individuals. Model 9 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference when it comes to sexuality. Adding the controls in Model 10 again shows us that there is no difference in closeness.

Looking next to conflict in romantic partner relationships, model 11 (table 9) indicates that when controls are excluded, there is a slight statistically significant differences between LGB and heterosexual individuals' relationships at the 0.1 level. The model indicates that the odds of LGB individuals having conflict in the romantic partner

relationships is .82 times that of heterosexual individuals. Adding the controls in model 12 does not change the significance of the results. This model indicates that there is little difference in the odds of conflict being present in romantic partner relationships for LGB and heterosexual individuals.

These models offer mixed support to hypothesis 3, that there will be no significant differences between LGB and heterosexual individuals' romantic partner relationships. There is no difference in how emotionally close the relationships are, however there is a slight significant difference in how much conflict is present in these relationships.

Summary

Familial relationships are sources of both stress and support for most individuals. They can be among the most resilient, offering support through long periods of conflict. LGB individuals often report facing even greater levels of conflict, which stems from a lack of acceptance of their identities. Despite the growing scholarly research on LGB families, little work has been done to directly compare LGB familial relationships to heterosexual relationships. Working to bridge this gap, my thesis answers the question: How do the family relationships of LGB individuals compare with heterosexual individuals?

Analyzing the amount of conflict and emotional closeness present in LGB and heterosexual individuals' relationships, I find that there are few differences. LGB individuals experience feeling less emotionally close to their biological kin than heterosexual individuals. While they are less likely to both feel extremely close to their biological kin and experience conflict with romantic partners, there are no significant

differences in how likely they are to experience conflict with biological and chosen kin or feel less emotionally close to chosen kin and romantic partners.

Discussion

Motivated by the previous literature on LGB families, as well as the concepts of familial ambivalence and Simmel's theory on conflict, this thesis started with five hypotheses:

H1a: LGB individuals' relationships with their biological kin will contain more conflict than heterosexual individuals'.

H1b: LGB individuals' relationships with their biological kin will be less close than heterosexual individuals'.

H2: LGB individuals' relationships with their chosen kin will be the same as or emotionally closer and less conflictual than heterosexual individuals'.

H3: There will be no significant difference between LGB and heterosexual individuals' relationships with their romantic partners.

The results from this thesis offer moderate support to hypothesis 1b. There is a significant difference in the odds that an LGB individual, compared to a heterosexual individual, will feel extremely close to their biological kin. While there is a difference in how close LGB individuals feel to their blood kin, there is not a significant difference in the amount of conflict present. These results are not supportive of hypothesis 1a.

The biological kin results, while in mixed support of my hypotheses, are in line with the family ambivalence literature. LGB individuals are less likely to be extremely close to their biological kin but still list them among the closest people to themselves,

suggesting that these relationships may be ambivalent. The ambivalence literature tells us that biological kin relationships may persist, even when they are not close, due to societal expectations (Reczek 2016).

These results also tell us that while LGB individuals are less likely to be extremely close to their biological kin, they are willing to maintain relationships that have conflict at the same rate as heterosexual individuals with closer relationships. This is supported by Simmel's theory on conflict. The presence of conflict in these relationships, if Simmel is correct, allows these less-close relationships to persist because conflict allows individuals to include others in their lives that they might otherwise reject.

The results offer mixed support to hypothesis 2: LGB and heterosexual individuals are equally likely to have chosen kin relationships that are extremely close and that contain less conflict. While failing to fully support the hypothesis, these results are supported by the literature. Chosen kin are not as bound by societal expectations to persist through periods of conflict (Wilson, Shuey, and Elder 2003; Reczek 2016). Without these expectations chosen kin relationships become a matter of choice rather than a requirement, especially for LGB individuals (Oswald and Masciadrelli 2008).

Hypothesis 3 is partially supported by the analysis conducted: there is no significant difference in the odds that a relationship between LGB and heterosexual individuals and their romantic partners will be extremely close. However, there is a significant difference in the odds that an LGB individual will experience conflict compared to a heterosexual individual. The odds of LGB individuals experiencing conflict in their romantic partner relationship is lower than that of a heterosexual individual. Romantic partners, much like chosen kin, do not have the same societal

expectations placed upon them that biological kin do. This may be an example of LGB individuals enacting their agency to chose relationships that do not hold them to the same heteronormative expectations their biological kin relationships do.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis provides insight into the differences between LGB and heterosexual familial relationships; however, it does have its limitations. For one, the NASIS dataset is not nationally representative. While the results may be representative of relationships in Nebraska or the Midwest, it would be hard to argue that these results are entirely representative of LGB individuals across the country. Location can play a large role in the way LGB individuals act and see themselves (Abelson 2019). However, many chosen kin relationships are formed over long distances and are no longer bound by geography thanks to the internet (Craig and McInroy 2014; Hiller, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012; Etengoff and Daiute 2015; Hunyady 2008; Nimrod 2010). The possibility of long distance chosen kin may mitigate some of the representation issues that come from studying LGB individuals in the Midwest.

Another limitation to this study to consider is the small population of LGB individuals in the dataset. While there are enough LGB relationships to conduct analysis, the LGB population pales in comparison to the number of heterosexual individuals.

Given the limitations present, future research should focus on conducting this research on a more expansive population in the aims of creating a more nationally representative dataset. Another area of future research is to find out if the types and sources of conflict experienced by LGB individuals, while just as likely, are the same as

heterosexual individuals. Doing so may give further insights into how the characteristics of familial relationships may differ between LGB and heterosexual individuals.

Conclusion

Before now, little research has been done to directly compare the relationship characteristics of LGB and heterosexual familial relationships. We know that there are differences between the relationship types and that LGB individuals often report conflict with their biological kin, but we did not know if this conflict is comparable. This thesis bridges this gap and answers the question: How do the family relationships of LGB individuals compare with heterosexual individuals? By showing that LGB biological kin relationships, while listed among the respondents closest, are often less close while containing the same levels of conflict, this thesis supports the theories of familial ambivalence and Simmel's theories of conflict. This thesis also allows us to better understand how LGB familial relationships compare to heterosexual ones. Conducting this study on a larger scale and further comparing the relationship characteristics is a critical area for future research.

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Appendix A: Tables and Figures

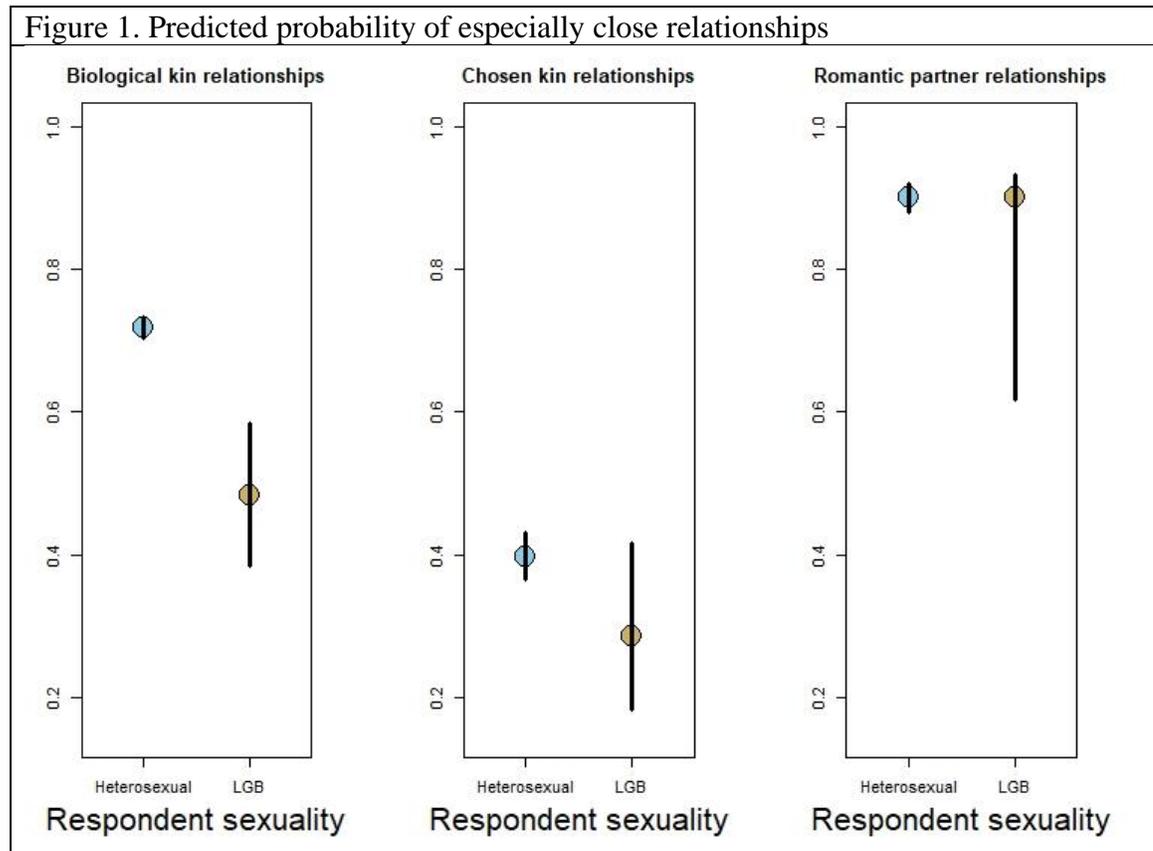


Figure 2. Predicted probability of conflict in relationship

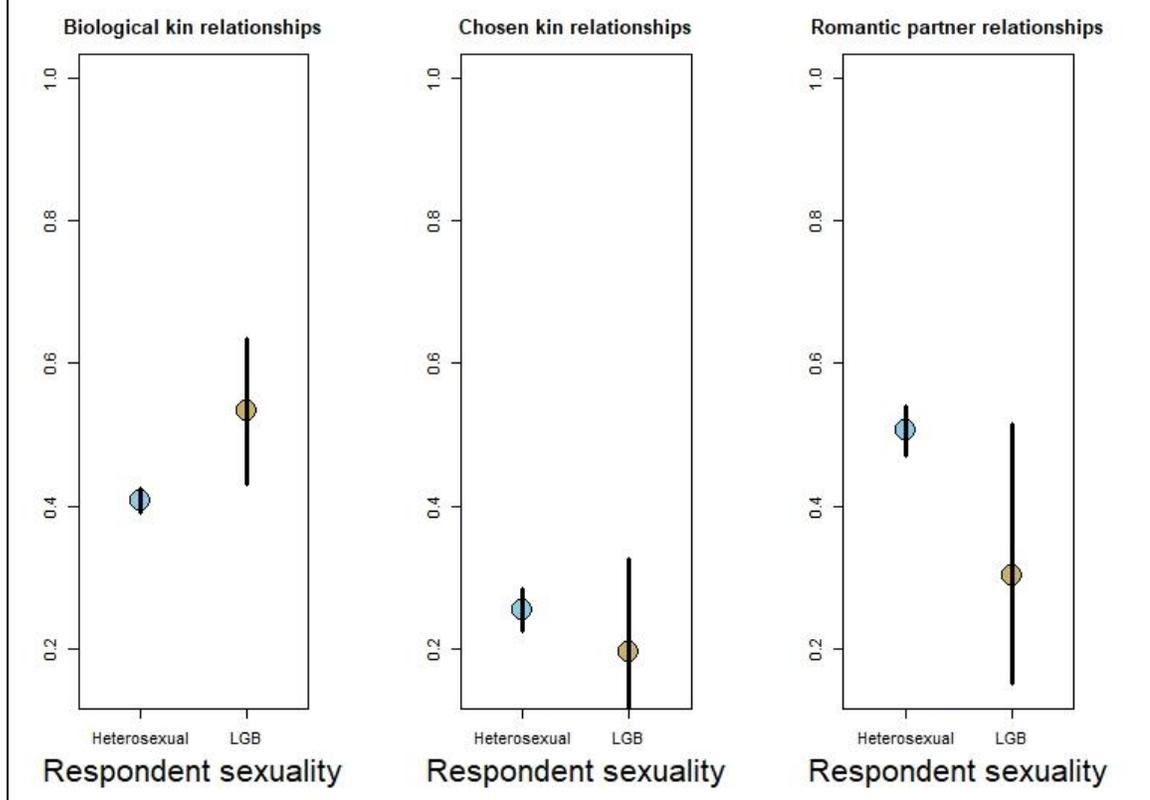


Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample – ego alter		
	Characteristics of respondents who provided data on closeness	Characteristics of respondents who provided data on conflict
Respondent characteristics	M/%	M/%
<i>Sexuality</i>		
LGB	3.12	2.99
Heterosexual	96.88	97.01
<i>Income</i>		
Less than 10k	2.53	2.66
10k to less than 50k	29.88	29.22
50k to less than 100k	42.08	42.30
100k or more	25.51	25.83
<i>Race</i>		
White	88.91	89.28
Not white	11.10	10.72
<i>Education</i>		
High school or less	15.46	15.31
Some college or above	84.54	84.69
Family Member Characteristics		
<i>Kin Role</i>		
Biological kin	68.27	68.40
Chosen kin	16.77	16.55
Spouse	14.96	15.05
Characteristics of respondent – family member relationships		
<i>Closeness</i>		
Especially close	68.67	
Not especially close	31.33	
<i>Conflict</i>		
Any conflict		39.75
No conflict		60.25
	N=5516 relationships, LGB=37, Heterosexual=1152	N=4662 Relationships, LGB=36, Heterosexual=1142

Table 2. Percentage of relationships that are extremely close	LGB	Heterosexual
	M/%	M/%
Biological Kin	48.39	71.87
Chosen Kin	28.57	39.70
Romantic partner	82.61	90.15
Notes: N = 5516 relationships, LGB=37, Heterosexual=1152. The variables are not likely to be independent $\chi^2 = 550***$		

Table 3. Percentage of relationships that contain conflict	LGB	Heterosexual
	M/%	M/%
Biological Kin	53.41	40.75
Chosen Kin	19.61	25.41
Romantic partner	30.43	50.57
Notes: N = 4662 relationships, LGB = 36, Heterosexual=1142. The variables are not likely to be independent $\chi^2 = 146^{***}$		

Table 4: Odds ratios predicting an especially close biological kin relationship		
	Model 1: no controls	Model 2: complete
Intercept	8.50***	10.70***
	(6.31, 11.46)	(5.58, 20.49)
LGB	0.19*	0.22*
	(0.05, 0.67)	(0.06, 0.78)
Race		
Not White		2.83**
		(1.40, 5.76)
Education		
Some College or more		0.41**
		(0.22, 0.76)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		5.64***
		(2.16, 14.75)
50,000 to less than 100,000		0.63
		(0.30, 1.30)
100,000 or more		1.42
		(0.90, 2.29)
BIC	3733.6	3749.9
Notes		
Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001		
Confidence intervals in parenthesis		

Table 5: Odds ratios predicting conflict in biological kin relationships		
	Model 3: no controls	Model 4: complete
Intercept	0.45*** (0.37, 0.55)	0.22*** (0.12, 0.38)
LGB	2.89† (0.92, 9.11)	2.56 (0.81, 8.07)
Race		
Not White		0.79 (0.42, 1.47)
Education		
Some College or more		3.32*** (1.89, 5.86)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		0.60 (0.26, 1.41)
50,000 to less than 100,000		2.23* (1.16, 4.25)
100,000 or more		0.75 (0.50, 1.12)
BIC	4209.9	4223.0
Notes		
Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001		
Confidence intervals in parenthesis		

Table 6: Odds ratios predicting an especially close chosen kin relationship		
	Model 5: no controls	Model 6: complete
Intercept	0.47*** (0.34, 0.64)	0.38* (0.18, 0.81)
LGB	0.44 (0.13, 1.54)	0.38 (0.11, 1.34)
Race		
Not White		2.18† (0.91, 5.22)
Education		
Some College or more		1.51 (0.70, 3.20)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		0.88 (0.26, 2.99)
50,000 to less than 100,000		2.05 (0.80, 5.29)
100,000 or more		1.19 (0.66, 2.12)
BIC	1163.7	1188.2
Notes		
Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001		
Confidence intervals in parenthesis		

Table 7: Odds ratios predicting conflict in chosen kin relationships		
	Model 7: no controls	Model 8: complete
Intercept	0.00***	0.00***
	(0.00, 0.002)	(6.77e-05, 0.003)
LGB	0.58	0.59
	(0.03, 10.11)	(0.033, 10.69)
Race		
Not White		0.66
		(0.09, 4.92)
Education		
Some College or more		1.46
		(0.021, 27.00)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		0.73
		(0.087, 801.08)
50,000 to less than 100,000		1.38
		(0.019, 17.83)
100,000 or more		0.90
		(0.15, 14.79)
BIC	919.8	953.3
Notes		
Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001		
Confidence intervals in parenthesis		

Table 8: Odds ratios predicting an especially close romantic partner relationship		
	Model 9: no controls	Model 10: complete
Intercept	2.46***	2.32***
	(2.41, 2.52)	(2.16, 2.49)
LGB	0.93	1.01
	(0.82, 1.05)	(0.88, 1.15)
Race		
Not White		1.00
		(0.93, 1.07)
Education		
Some College or more		0.98
		(0.92, 1.04)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		1.29***
		(1.14, 1.46)
50,000 to less than 100,000		0.88*
		(0.81, 0.97)
100,000 or more		1.05
		(0.99, 1.11)
AIC	363.72	354.21
Notes		
Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001		
Confidence intervals in parenthesis		

Table 9: Odds ratios predicting conflict in romantic partner relationships		
	Model 11: no controls	Model 12: complete
Intercept	1.66*** (1.60, 1.72)	1.53*** (0.46, 5.05)
LGB	0.82† (0.66, 1.01)	0.81† (0.65, 1.01)
Race		
Not White		0.94 (0.83, 1.05)
Education		
Some College or more		1.15* (1.03, 1.28)
Income		
10,000 to less than 50,000		0.94 (0.76, 1.16)
50,000 to less than 100,000		1.12 (0.959, 1.31)
100,000 or more		0.97 (0.89, 1.07)
AIC	1186.9	1183.5
Notes Significance levels: † < 0.1 * < 0.05 ** < 0.01 *** < 0.001 Confidence intervals in parenthesis		