

Do Adult Men and Women in Same-Sex Relationships Have Weaker Ties to Their Parents?

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Using a national sample of people in same-sex relationships ($N = 843$) and different-sex relationships ($N = 510$) in the Netherlands, we examine the frequently discussed but infrequently tested hypothesis of weaker intergenerational ties between parents and their adult daughters and sons in same-sex relationships. We also test hypotheses linking the strength of these ties to gender differences and the liberal or traditional views held by the parents when the child was growing up (reported retrospectively). Overall, we find few differences in the strength of the current parent–child relationship but clear differences in the process of leaving home. Our findings show that people who are in same-sex relationships in adulthood left home earlier and moved further away from their parents than those in different-sex relationships. In addition, they left more often due to conflicts at home and due to an unpleasant atmosphere in the community of origin, and less often to move in directly with a partner. In adulthood, people in same-sex relationships show many commonalities with people in different-sex relationships and only a few differences. Men in same-sex relationships have more ambivalent relationships with their mothers and weaker relationships with their fathers than men partnered with women. When the parental home was more traditional in terms of gendered role division in parenting, the current relationship of women in same-sex relationships with their father is on average weaker in adulthood. Women in same-sex relationships also have less frequent contact with both parents compared to women in different-sex relationships.

Keywords: same-sex relationships, leaving home, intergenerational relationships, intergenerational ambivalence, sexual minorities

In the literature on parent–child relationships, much attention has been given to people in same-sex relationships in their role as parents, but less to their role as (adult) sexual minority daughters and sons (Reczek, 2020). As a result, we know little about how their intergenerational ties differ from those of people in the heterosexual majority. In the family literature, intergenerational ties refer to “the bonds between adults of different generations and their progeny,” whereby the parent–child tie serves as “the key link” between generations (Fingerman, Huo, & Birditt, 2020, p. 384). Research in this field has shown the importance of intergenerational ties between parent and adult child for the provision of support to aging parents as well as for the support that young adults receive in making important life transitions (Silverstein &

Giarrusso, 2010; Swartz, 2009). Recent work has emphasized the growing importance of support from parents to adult children, for example, by letting them move back into the parental home in the context of financial strain during the economic crisis in 2008 (Fingerman et al., 2020). The quality of intergenerational ties is also linked to psychological well-being for both parents and adult children (Gilligan, Sutor, Feld, & Pillemer, 2015). Differences in intergenerational ties of people in same-sex compared to different-sex relationships, therefore, may deepen our understanding of the economic, social and mental health inequalities faced by sexual minority people in contemporary society (Valfort, 2017).

The relationship between sexual minority people and their parents is addressed predominantly within the context of the first coming out of youth and young adults. There is much debate and research on how families deal with the coming-out process (Saltzberg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003), but the research to date has failed to address how the parent–child tie develops over the life course. This is concerning, given evidence that links stigma against sexual diversity and same-sex relationships with worse mental health outcomes in sexual minority youth and adults (LeBlanc & Frost, 2019; McConnell, Birkett, & Mustanski, 2015; Meyer, 2003).

Studies that directly compare the parent–child relationships of sexual minority people in adulthood to those of heterosexuals are scarce. One exception is an analysis of nationally representative survey data from Germany, which shows that people who currently

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are (or desire to be) in a same-sex relationship have less frequent contact and less close relationships with their fathers than otherwise comparable people (desiring to be) in different-sex relationships (Hank & Salzburger, 2015). For many other aspects of the father–child relationship, however, and for all aspects of the mother–child relationship, the German study found small and insignificant differences. Hank and Salzburger (2015) conclude that the intergenerational ties do not differ substantially between the two groups. While this finding seems to support a more general counterpoint in family studies that relationships generally do not work differently for people in same-sex and different-sex relationships (Kurdek, 2004), a broader perspective across the life course may be needed for a more refined understanding of possible differences in intergenerational ties.

The current study has two aims. First, we provide a retrospective analysis of the leaving-home process of people who are in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships in adulthood. The timing of leaving home, the geographic distance moved, as well as the reasons for leaving are indicators of how close these ties were in early adulthood and what potential they have to promote or hamper intergenerational solidarity across the life course (Leopold, 2012). With this comparison, we deepen our understanding of possible differences in intergenerational ties between sexual minority people and heterosexuals. Since we analyze a specific subgroup of sexual minority people, namely those who are in same-sex relationships in adulthood, bear in mind that any differences we find between people in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships would likely be amplified if we were able to distinguish truly between sexual minorities and heterosexuals; some sexual minority people are in different-sex relationships in adulthood (e.g., bisexual or pansexual people).

Second, we provide a comprehensive view of adult children's current relationships with their parents by examining contact as a behavioral component and both positive and negative affect (relationship strength, feelings of ambivalence and feelings of guilt). Relationship strength refers to the positive emotional dimension of the intergenerational tie, which in accordance with intergenerational solidarity theory, predicts the provision of material and practical support (Fingerman, Sechrist, & Birditt, 2013). Frequent contact with parents has been shown to reduce depressive symptoms among adult children although the perceived closeness of the tie appears more influential than contact itself (Umberson, 1992). Guilt is a negative and regulatory emotion in social relationships that relates to transgressions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). If a daughter or son having a same-sex partner is perceived as a transgression to heterosexist parental expectations, feelings of guilt may arise in some children for disappointing these expectations, even if they reject such views. In fact, it is not unusual for a complex mixture of positive and negative emotions to coexist in the relationship between parents and adult children (Lüscher, 2002). This is summed up in the concept of intergenerational ambivalence and pertains particularly to cases when "grown children suffer life problems or fail to live up to expected norms" (p. 387). Ambivalence in intergenerational ties, in turn, has been linked with psychological stress among both parents and adult children (Gilligan et al., 2015; Tighe, Birditt, & Antonucci, 2016). Feelings of guilt are associated with depression (Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011). In his account of the minority stress model, Meyer (2003) describes guilt as a possible factor underlying the

link of stigma and negative mental health outcomes in gay men. To test our hypotheses about differences in intergenerational ties between people in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships, we used new national survey data from the Netherlands (Fischer, Kalmijn, & Steinmetz, 2017a). The data are unique in that they are based on a systematic register-based oversample of households where same-sex couples live.

Theoretical Background

The Leaving Home Process

There are several possible explanations for previous null findings. The problems that parents may initially experience in dealing with their children's coming-out process may be temporary. During the transition to adulthood, parent–child relationships initially may become more complicated, leading in some cases to a rocky departure from the parental home. Family troubles related to sexual orientation disclosure of young sexual minority people are important pathways that can lead to homelessness, with sexual minority youth leaving the home prematurely and sometimes involuntarily (Castellanos, 2016; Morton et al., 2018). Several studies have documented the problems that both children and parents experience in the coming-out process (Richter, Lindahl, & Malik, 2017), and some—but certainly not all—observe problems on the part of parents (Reczek, 2016; Savin-Williams, 1998). Children may also actively choose to distance themselves from the community in which they grew up to find recognition and acceptance elsewhere (Pachankis, Eldahan, & Golub, 2016). As time goes on, however, both parents and children may adjust to the new situation and improve their relationship (Huebner, Roche, & Rith, 2019; Pachankis, Sullivan, & Moore, 2018). Children may feel less need to distance themselves from their parents and the community of origin. This would suggest strong effects on parent–child relations during the transition to adulthood but weaker or no effects on adult parent–child relationships.

Differences in the process of leaving home (reported retrospectively) between sexual minority people on the one hand, and heterosexuals on the other hand, may give an important clue as to how their parental relationships differed. Our first hypothesis is that people with a same-sex partner in adulthood have a "rockier" departure from the parental home than those with a different-sex partner, as indicated by moving out at an earlier age, moving further away from parents, and more frequently mentioning conflict as a reason for leaving (Hypothesis 1).

Intergenerational Ties in Adulthood

The central hypothesis of this article is that people in same-sex relationships have weaker ties with their parents compared to people in different-sex relationships, defined as less frequent contact and weaker relationships characterized by more guilt and ambivalence (Hypothesis 2). The idea of weaker intergenerational ties between parents and their adult sexual minority daughters and sons has been suggested frequently in the literature, and some authors argue that, when necessary, sexual minority people rely on "families of choice" rather than on their families of origin for support and companionship (Weston, 1991). There is also research on support networks suggesting that friendship ties are especially

important, as these ties may serve as substitutes when relationships with the family of origin are difficult (Dewaele, Cox, Van Den Bergh, & Vincke, 2011; Grossman, D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 2000). Yet this is only indirect evidence on the relative strength of parent–child relationships among sexual minority adults and few studies have systematically tested this hypothesis. There is some qualitative research suggesting that older lesbian women and gay men have relatively similar support relationships with their parents (Reczek, 2014). And the only study on the topic, comparing people who (desire to be) in same-sex relationships and people who (desire to be) in different-sex relationships, suggested no differences as well (Hank & Salzburger, 2015). In light of this mixed evidence, we empirically test the hypothesis of weaker intergenerational ties for adults currently in same-sex and different-sex relationships.

Gender Differences

Another issue which has not been resolved in past research—and which may explain prior null findings—is to what extent the potential effects of sexual orientation vary by the gender of the parent and that of the child. Both the parents' and the child's gender may play a role here, as has been suggested in research on intergenerational ties among heterosexuals (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Gender interactions may play an even greater role for people in same-sex relationships than for people in different-sex relationships, as many studies have shown that men are on average less tolerant of sexual diversity than women are (Kite & Whitley, 1996; Valfort, 2017; Worthen, 2013). This suggests that sexual minority people may have ties that are more strained with their fathers than with their mothers. The findings reported by Hank and Salzburger (2015) hint in this direction. The gender of the child may also play a role. Some parents may perceive sexual minority daughters and sons a threat to heteronormative understandings of gender, particularly their own. This would suggest that the relationships between men in same-sex relationships and their fathers and between women in same-sex relationships and their mothers would be the most difficult (Kite & Whitley, 1996). On average, men react more strongly to violations of heteronormative gender roles than women (Kimmel, 2009), implying that heteronormative masculinity is more easily threatened than heteronormative femininity. Studies have indeed shown that men tend to differentiate in their attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men by gender, showing more negative attitudes toward toward gay men than lesbian women (Worthen, 2013). In a large-scale analysis of antigay prejudice, Herek (2002, p. 40) concluded that “of all respondent-by-target combinations, heterosexual men were the least supportive of recognition of same-sex relationships and adoption rights for gay men [. . .] and most negative in their affective reactions to gay men.” These considerations suggest that some of the null findings on parent–child relationships may mask heterogeneous effects: It may be that we find weak and insignificant effects when all parent–child gender combinations are pooled, but strong effects for the specific tie between fathers and sons. Our hypothesis is that men in same-sex relationships have weaker ties to their fathers than men in different-sex relationships do, whereas the strength of other relationships (father–daughter, mother–son, and mother–daughter) depends less on the gender of the adult daughter or son's partner (Hypothesis 3).

Family Background Heterogeneity

Another important issue that deserves further scrutiny lies in social norms. Attitudes toward sexual diversity have become more tolerant over time in Western societies (Halman & van Ingen, 2015) and this would suggest greater tolerance among parents of adult daughters and sons in same-sex relationships today than in the past. It is important to recognize, however, that statistics on these attitudes represent average opinions and do not reflect absolute social consensus. Tolerance of sexual diversity varies between individuals and in particular is statistically related to gender role ideologies and religious orthodoxy (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Schnabel, 2016). Religiosity and traditional gender ideologies in parents do not necessarily lead to the outright rejection of a child who is coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Research on religious parents' acceptance of their sexual minority children shows that this is often a more nuanced process (Bertone & Franchi, 2014). Parents, for instance, may give their child the space to express their sexual orientation while still upholding their own heteronormative assumptions. Although parents with strong views against sexual diversity may be careful not to openly condemn their children, the children may still not feel accepted, which may lead to withdrawal or a decline in intimacy. Following the theoretical notion that normative disapproval of sexual diversity in the parents may jeopardize relationships between sexual minority adults and their parents to some extent (Reczek, 2016), our fourth and final hypothesis is that the effect of being in a same-sex relationship on adult parent–child relationships is more negative for people who grew up in traditional homes (as indicated by unequal gender roles and religiosity) than for people who grew up in liberal homes (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Participants

We use data from the Unions in Context survey (Fischer et al., 2017a), for which we received approval from the ethics review board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Amsterdam prior to data collection (Number 2015-AISSR-6327). The data were collected in 2016 by means of a web mode self-completion survey. The two-stage sampling procedure involved the random selection of Dutch municipalities (Stage 1), whose local authorities then drew random samples from three groups of households (Stage 2): different-sex couples, same-sex couples without children, and same-sex couples with children. The latter two groups were oversampled to obtain group sizes large enough for comparative analysis. We implemented an age range of 30 to 65 years to narrow in on the target group and maximize response with the limited funds available (i.e., by excluding students, who often share a flat, and the elderly, who are less likely to respond to web-based surveys). In the following, we refer to respondents in some cases as sons/daughters, keeping in mind that these are adults and not children.

Respondents were sent a letter by mail inviting them to participate in the web survey. On the starting homepage, participants gave explicit consent for us to use the data prior to beginning the survey. The survey achieved response rates of 34% and 27% among same-sex couples with and without children, respectively,

and 20% among different-sex couples (Fischer, Kalmijn, & Steinmetz, 2017b). The data include weights that allow correcting for the stratified sampling strategy and the oversample of same-sex households. The weights are a unique feature of our data. Generally, the sexual minority population is entirely unknown and the construction of a sampling frame is impossible. Thanks to the detailed information in Dutch population registers, we can generalize to the Dutch population of 30 to 65 year-olds who live with a partner of the same or of a different sex (Fischer et al., 2017b).

Our analytical sample includes 524 women and 319 men in same-sex relationships (as reported by the respondent), and 510 people in different-sex relationships. Sexual identity was not measured but virtually all people in same-sex partnerships answered questions about coming out, discrimination related to sexual orientation, and about disclosing their sexual orientation to friends and family. We therefore feel confident that most would ascribe themselves a sexual minority identity. These questions were asked to persons in same-sex relationships only, meaning we cannot identify sexual minority people who are in different-sex relationships. We therefore refer to our target group as men and women in same-sex and different-sex relationships.

The questionnaire covered a broad range of measures of respondents' current ties with their parents as well as detailed retrospective information on the leaving-home process. The average age in our data is 48.2 years; 71% of these respondents had a mother who was still living and 57% had a father who was still living at the time of the survey. Descriptive information on the sample with respect to age, marital status, parenthood, and education is presented in Table 1. For dichotomous variables, the mean indicates the proportion of respondents in the category with the value of 1 (e.g., 62% of respondents in our dataset are in same-sex relationships and 38% are in the different-sex reference category).¹

Measures of Leaving Home

Our first set of measures refers to aspects of the leaving-home process.

- (a) The age at which the respondent first left home to live on their own.
- (b) Geographic distance is assessed with the question, "How far away from your parents did you move then?" The answers were coded as 1 (*same street or neighborhood*), 2 (*same town or city but different neighborhood*), 3 (*a different town or city, less than 20 km away*), or 4 (*a different town or city, more than 20 km away*). This dependent variable was analyzed with an ordinal logit model.
- (c) Respondents are surveyed on their reasons for leaving by asking them to rate each possible reason separately on a scale from 0 (*played no role*), 1 (*played a small role*), to 2 (*played a role*). The following reasons were listed: (i) work or school, (ii) partner, marriage, or cohabitation, (iii) conflict with parents, and (iv) did not feel at home in the community. The dependent variables use the coding "as is."

Table 1
Descriptive Information on Variables Used in the Analyses

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>N</i> ^a
Daughter/son variables					
Same-sex partner (prop.)	0.623		0	1	1,353
Different-sex partner (prop.)	0.277		0	1	1,353
Men (prop.)	0.414		0	1	1,353
Women (prop.)	0.586		0	1	1,353
Has children (prop.)	0.437		0	1	1,353
Education	13.77	3.02	6	20	1,317
Age	48.2	9.7	30	77	1,353
Parental variables					
Parents religiosity (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-1.171	1.567	1,305
Parents gender roles (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-3.568	2.541	1,173
Parents education	10.38	2.9	6	20	1,279
Parents divorced (prop.)	0.146		0	1	1,353
Dependent variables					
Age at leaving home	20.3	3.0	12	30	1,348
Distance of move	3.20	0.95	1	4	1,350
Left for education	2.21	0.93	1	3	1,350
Left for partner	1.60	0.90	1	3	1,350
Left due to conflict	1.26	0.58	1	3	1,350
Left due to atmosphere	1.36	0.66	1	3	1,350
Weekly+ contact mother (prop.)	0.337		0	1	926
Strength of ties to mother (<i>z</i>) ^b	0	1	-3.001	1.51	926
Ambivalence toward mother (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-4.85	3.435	926
Guilt feelings toward mother (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-.957	3.044	926
Weekly+ contact with father	0.287	0.453	0	1	742
Strength of ties to father (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-3.055	1.557	742
Ambivalence toward father (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-3.992	3.255	742
Guilt feelings toward father (<i>z</i>)	0	1	-0.86	3.457	742

Note. Min = minimum; Max = maximum; prop. = proportion; *z* = the variable is standardized in the analysis. *Source:* UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

^a The *N* applies to the full sample for which the measure is available, not to the number of cases within a category.

Measures of Current Relationships

The second set of dependent variables refer to the current relationship the respondents have with their mother and father (asked separately). People whose parents are no longer living have not answered these items. We construct the following measures:

- (a) Weekly or more frequent face-to-face contact versus less frequent contact in the last 12 months. This was based on a recode of an original seven-category question.
- (b) The strength of the relationship with the parent is based on four items that were combined into a scale. The items were "I have a close relationship with my mother/father," "I am very fond of my mother/father," "I am annoyed with my mother's/father's behavior" (reversed), and "I sometimes get angry with my mother/father" (reversed). Each item could be answered on a 5-point scale from 1 (*fully disagree*) to 5 (*fully agree*). The reliability is very good ($\alpha = .81$ for mothers and .81 for fathers).

¹ The syntax of our analyses is available on the personal website of the corresponding author <https://mirjamfischer.com>.

- (c) A measure of ambivalence, which is based on the two positive items above and the two negative items above. The items were summed without first reversing the negative items. Our ambivalence measure is a simplified version of previous measures of the concept (Suito, Gilligan, & Pillemer, 2011).
- (d) A measure of guilt toward the parent based on the item "I have feelings of guilt towards my mother/father." The item could be answered on a 5-point scale from 1 (*fully disagree*) to 5 (*fully agree*). The item on guilt had been used previously in research on adult intergenerational relationships (Kalmijn, 2020).

Measures of Moderating Variables

The moderating variables are reported retrospectively and pertain to the situation in the parental home when the respondent (here the child) was growing up.

(a) Parents' religiosity when the respondent was growing up was an index of the following items: church membership (*yes/no*), the frequency of church attendance (using four categories ranging from 1 [*never*] to 4 [*more or less weekly*]), the frequency of praying (using three categories: 1 [*never*], 2 [*sometimes*], and 3 [*regularly*]), and the frequency of scripture reading (using three categories: 1 [*never*], 2 [*sometimes*], and 3 [*regularly*]). Because the items had different scales, we first standardized each item ($M = 0$ and $SD = 1$) and subsequently summed the items ($\alpha = .85$). Items referred to the parents as a couple rather than to fathers and mothers separately.

(b) The gender roles of the parents were based on four questions about the division of child rearing tasks between father and mother when the child was growing up: (i) talking about school, helping with homework, (ii) bringing the child to school, sports, or clubs, (iii) talking about personal matters, (iv) going on outings or sharing hobbies. Each item had to be rated on scale from 1 (*[almost] always mother*) to 5 (*[almost] always father*). After reversing the items, they were summed into a scale ($\alpha = .77$). The coding is such that higher values represent more traditional gender roles.

Control Variables

The control variables we used are the following: age, gender, education, whether the child has children, whether the parents divorced/separated when the child was growing up. All these variables have been shown to affect relationships between parents and adult children. For example, contact with parents is more common among daughters, younger adults, the lower educated, children who have children, and children of nondivorced parents (Kalmijn, 2014).

Data Analysis Approach

We analyze the leaving-home process in Table 2, relationships with mothers in Table 3, and relationships with fathers in Table 4. For each outcome in each table, we estimate a regression model that includes a dichotomous variable for people in same-sex versus different-sex relationships and our set of control variables. We estimate ordinary least squares models for continuous dependent variables, logit models for dichotomous outcome variables, and ordered logit models for ordered outcome variables. The continuous dependent variables are standardized ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$) so that the effect of sexual orientation is equal to an effect size (i.e., Cohen's d). We mention effect sizes in the text when these are noteworthy and refer to the tables for the other effect sizes. Note that the tables are based on different sample sizes: Table 2 applies to all respondents regardless of whether parents are alive, and Tables 3 and 4 apply to respondents with a living mother and father, respectively.

Gender differences are explored in Table 5. In this table, we analyze the effects separately for the four sets of dyads: mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, and father-son. Sons and daughters are different subsamples of respondents, whereas fathers and mothers are parallel dependent variables for the same respondents.

In Table 6, finally, we explore whether differences regarding relationship strength within these four sets of dyads interact with parental religiosity and parental gender roles. Note that Tables 5 and 6 contain only selected coefficients to save space. We include

Table 2
Ordinary Least Squares and Ordered Logit Regression of Leaving Home Process

Variable	(1) Age when left home ^a	(2) Distance of move	(3) Left for education	(4) Left for partner	(5) Left due to conflict	(6) Left due to atmosphere
Daughter/son						
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.407* (.023)	.678* (.000)	.808* (.000)	-1.374* (.000)	.365* (.025)	.804* (.000)
Year of birth	-.003 (.745)	.009 (.164)	-.001 (.853)	.004 (.643)	-.004 (.586)	.027* (.000)
Men (ref. women)	.935* (.000)	.088 (.426)	.115 (.330)	-.125 (.335)	-.294 (.059)	.296* (.023)
Parental						
Parents religiosity (z)	-.189* (.012)	.294* (.000)	.274* (.000)	-.117 (.069)	-.063 (.419)	.050 (.449)
Parents education	-.147* (.000)	.100* (.000)	.229* (.000)	-.223* (.000)	-.104* (.000)	-.070* (.003)
Parents divorced	-.791* (.000)	-.213 (.148)	-.360* (.025)	-.393 (.052)	1.030* (.000)	.487* (.006)
<i>N</i>	1,302	1,304	1,304	1,304	1,304	1,304
<i>R</i> ²	.075					
χ^2	89		154	163	50	56

Note. ref. = reference category; z = the variable is standardized in the analysis. The p values are in parentheses. Source: UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

^a Ordinary least squares; all other models are ordered logit models.

* $p < .05$.

Table 3
Logit and Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Relationship With Mother

Variable	(1) Weekly + contact ^a	(2) Strength of ties	(3) Ambivalence	(4) Guilt feelings
Daughter/son				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.418* (.011)	-.023 (.766)	.175* (.018)	.159* (.035)
Age	-.001 (.898)	-.013* (.002)	-.015* (.000)	-.006 (.137)
Has children	.461* (.004)	.062 (.410)	-.007 (.925)	.036 (.633)
Education	-.146* (.000)	.003 (.798)	-.006 (.599)	-.008 (.484)
Men (ref. women)	-.420* (.007)	.088 (.190)	-.223* (.002)	-.144* (.040)
Parental				
Parents religiosity (<i>z</i>)	-.112 (.131)	.023 (.475)	-.045 (.177)	.051 (.126)
Parents divorced	-.635* (.002)	-.319* (.000)	-.101 (.301)	-.111 (.177)
Constant	1.651* (.008)	.543* (.040)	.777* (.005)	.345 (.195)
<i>N</i>	907	907	907	907
χ^2	63			
<i>R</i> ²		.029	.041	.017

Note. ref. = reference category; *z* = the variable is standardized in the analysis. The *p* values are in parentheses. Source: UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

^a Logit model; all other models are ordered ordinary least squares.

* *p* < .05.

data from both members of a couple because each member has his or her own parents. We correct standard errors for the clustering of partners in households.

One concern in the literature has been the question of whether people are open toward their parents about their sexual orientation. We explicitly asked respondents, "Do the following people know you have a partner of your own sex?" Only two respondents said that either the father or mother did not know. Given our sample limitation to cohabiting couples, this seems plausible. The mean coming-out age is 23 in our data; many respondents came out during their teen years. It is important to emphasize as well that for the vast majority, parents became aware of their child's sexual orientation during or before the transition to adulthood.

We explored the role of marital status as well but found no main effects of marriage and no interaction effects between marital status and relationship type. Some U.S. authors have compared same-sex and different-sex couples within marital status categories, for example, unmarried same-sex couples to unmarried

different-sex couples (Reczek, Spiker, Liu, & Crosnoe, 2016). We think this is not a useful comparison per se, because it is unclear if the decision to marry means the same thing for different-sex couples as it does for same-sex couples. Marriage has not always been an option for same-sex couples and may therefore be more selective than it was for different-sex couples. In our data, 71% of different-sex couples are married compared to 56% of same-sex couples. We leave the role of marriage for exploration in a future study that can analyze the problem in more detail, with a broader set of outcome variables and with appropriate controls for selective entry into marriage.

Results

Leaving Home Analyses

Although it was not our core outcome variable, we begin by discussing the results for the retrospective measures referring to

Table 4
Regression of Relationship With Father

Variable	(1) Weekly + contact ^a	(2) Strength of ties	(3) Ambivalence	(4) Guilt feelings
Daughter/son				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.388* (.049)	-.180* (.043)	.028 (.751)	.009 (.922)
Age	.006 (.581)	-.005 (.336)	-.005 (.291)	-.005 (.314)
Has children	.622* (.001)	.044 (.610)	.070 (.405)	-.142 (.093)
Education	-.147* (.000)	.014 (.239)	-.006 (.628)	-.013 (.363)
Men (ref. women)	-.160 (.382)	-.019 (.809)	-.211* (.006)	-.145 (.068)
Parental				
Parents religiosity (<i>z</i>)	-.164 (.055)	-.069 (.073)	-.053 (.136)	.120* (.003)
Parents divorced	-1.593* (.000)	-.590* (.000)	-.567* (.000)	-.014 (.893)
Constant	.989 (.188)	.210 (.492)	.419 (.193)	.541 (.100)
<i>N</i>	730	730	730	730
χ^2	61			
<i>R</i> ²		.063	.061	.021

Note. ref. = reference category; *z* = the variable is standardized in the analysis. The *p* values are in parentheses. Source: UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

^a Logit model; all other models are ordered ordinary least squares.

* *p* < .05.

Table 5
Coefficients From Regression Models for Gender Configuration Subsamples

Relationship	(1) Weekly+ contact	(2) Strength of ties	(3) Ambivalence	(4) Guilt feelings
Daughter-mother				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.426* (.031)	-.037 (.701)	.051 (.572)	.205* (.033)
N daughters	543	543	543	543
Son-mother				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.483 (.123)	.050 (.730)	.366* (.004)	.003 (.979)
N sons	364	364	364	364
Daughter-father				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.467* (.044)	-.133 (.203)	.092 (.375)	.099 (.375)
N daughters	464	464	464	464
Son-father				
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.025 (.953)	-.395* (.021)	-.090 (.586)	-.171 (.289)
N sons	266	266	266	266

Note. ref. = reference category. The *p* values are in parentheses. Same control variables were used as in Table 4. Source: UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

^a Logit model; all other models are ordered ordinary least squares.

* *p* < .05.

the leaving-home process, because that occurs first in the life course (see Table 2). In general, we see significant differences between people who are in a same-sex relationship in adulthood versus those in different-sex relationships. People in same-sex relationships leave home earlier than heterosexuals do (14% of a standard deviation in the age at leaving home) and they more often move further away. When looking at unadjusted percentages, 37% of people in different-sex relationships stay in the same town or city when they first leave home, compared to 25% of those currently in same-sex relationships. The reasons for leaving also differ. People in same-sex relationships more often leave due to conflicts at home and because they do not feel at home in the community of origin. The strongest effect is observed for union formation. Those currently in different-sex relationships often leave home to move in together with a partner, but this is less often the case for those currently in same-sex relationships. All analyses include control variables, which means the effects that we observe are not due to compositional differences between the groups (e.g., educational differences). Keep in mind that we do not know

whether people were in a relationship at the time of leaving the parental home. The relationships refer to their current situation in adulthood and are used as a proxy to identify sexual minority people in our data.

Current Relationship Analyses

We now turn to the present and compare differences in respondents' relationships with their parents. In Table 3, we present the results for the mother-child relationship. First, we observe that people in same-sex relationships have somewhat less frequent contact with their mothers than those in different-sex relationships. Specifically, the odds of having weekly contact with the mother is 34% lower for people in same-sex relationships compared to people in different-sex relationships ($1 - e^{-0.418}$).

We explored to what extent the effects on contact frequency were mediated by geographical distance. We saw above that people in same-sex relationships more often moved further away from their community of origin when they left home. When we added

Table 6
Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Relationship Strength With Religion and Gender Roles as Moderator Variables by Gender Configuration

Variable	Gender configuration parent-child							
	Daughter-mother		Daughter-father		Son-mother		Son-father	
	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties	Strength of ties
Same-sex partner (ref. different-sex)	-.048 (.605)	-.023 (.814)	-.158 (.119)	-.125 (.225)	-.024 (.810)	-.058 (.566)	-.257* (.038)	-.130 (.275)
Parents religiosity (<i>z</i>)	.015 (.831)		-.065 (.408)		-.020 (.783)		-.044 (.558)	
Same-Sex × Parent Religiosity	.023 (.794)		-.002 (.985)		.081 (.438)		-.055 (.673)	
Parents gender roles (<i>z</i>)		.048 (.613)		-.005 (.958)		.055 (.455)		-.241* (.013)
Same-Sex × Parent Gender Roles		-.017 (.880)		-.245* (.034)		-.121 (.327)		-.056 (.712)
N daughters	543	499	464	433				
N sons					364	334	266	249
R ²	.046	.032	.063	.083	.012	.007	.063	.098

Note. ref. = reference category; *z* = the variable is standardized in the analysis. The *p* values are in parentheses. Controlled for age, parental divorce, and education. Source: UNICON data, the Netherlands, Fischer et al. (2017a).

* *p* < .05.

the variable measuring how far away people moved when they left home, the effect of being in a same-sex relationship on contact with the mother was reduced from $-.418$ (see Table 3) to $-.281$ ($p = .099$). A test for mediation using the *kfb* method in Stata (Kohler & Karlson, 2012) showed that this mediation was significant ($b = -.151, p < .01$). In other words, part of the reason why people in same-sex relationships had less frequent contact with their mother is that they moved further away from them. For contact with the father, the effect declined from $-.388$ to $-.255$ ($p = .210$), which was also a significant reduction ($b = -.144, p < .01$).

When looking at the subjective evaluations of the mother-child tie, we see no significant differences in the overall strength of the mother-child relationship between people in either type of relationship. There are some more subtle differences, however. People in same-sex relationships have more ambivalent feelings toward their mother than their counterparts in different-sex relationships, which means that they more often experience a combination of positive and negative feelings. We also see that people in same-sex relationships more often feel guilt toward their mother. While significant, both these effects are small in size (Cohen's $d = .18$ and $.16$).

Are the results for fathers similar to those for mothers? The effects on contact are similar, which is not surprising because many parents live together. People in same-sex relationships have less frequent contact with their fathers compared to people in different-sex relationships. In contrast to the results for mothers, we find no differences in terms of ambivalence or feelings of guilt. Yet, we do see a significant effect of relationship type on the overall strength of the relationship: people in same-sex relationships have weaker ties to their fathers than people in different-sex relationships do. Again, the effect is significant but small.

In Table 5, we provide a more detailed analysis of gender differences. We estimate models for the four gender combinations: mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, and father-son. We only present the effects of same-sex versus different-sex relationship but we control for the other variables listed in the previous tables. We see many nonsignificant effects, but there are also a few differences and these are meaningful. One of the strongest effects in the table is for the strength of the father-son relationship. Men in same-sex relationships have a weaker relationship with their fathers than men in different-sex relationships. The size of the effect is $d = .40$, which can be qualified as small-to-medium.

The effect can be compared in two ways: between sons and daughters and between fathers and mothers. First, we tested the difference in the effect of relationship type (same-sex or different-sex) between sons and daughters. Specifically, in the model with the strength of the father-child relationship as a dependent variable, we included an interaction of relationship type and child gender. This interaction effect was not significant primarily because there is also a small negative effect for daughters ($p = .18$). Hence, we cannot conclude that relationship type matters more for sons' than for daughters' ties to fathers. Second, we compared the effect for sons between fathers and mothers. Specifically, we used a seemingly unrelated regression model predicting the relationship quality with the father and the relationship quality with the mother (for sons only). We compared the effect of relationship type across these two outcomes and this difference was marginally significant

($p = .08$). Hence, relationship type (among sons) matters more for fathers' than for mothers' ties to their children.

The second interesting effect is observed for ambivalence in mother-son dyads. Men in same-sex relationships have more ambivalent ties to their mother than men in different-sex relationships do, and this difference is also small-to-medium in size ($d = .37$). Finally, we see that the effects on guilt are limited to the mother-daughter tie. The small but significant differences in contact frequency with both the mother and the father primarily concern the daughters.

Moderator Analyses

Our last question addressed heterogeneity in the families of origin. We estimated interaction effects of the type of union with (a) the index of parents' religiosity and (b) the index of traditional gender roles in the parental home. We tested the two interactions for the strength of the relationship only and did so separately for each gender combination (father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter). Of the eight tested interactions, only one was significant, providing no general support for the notion that effects are heterogeneous. The one exception is interesting, however, and pertains to the father-daughter relationship and the parents' gender roles. We observe a significant interaction effect of gender roles for the strength of the father-daughter tie. In other words, women in same-sex relationships have weaker ties to their fathers than women in different-sex relationships when the parents displayed more traditional gender roles while growing up. If we calculate the effect of being in a same-sex relationship on the strength of the father-daughter tie for different values of the gender role variable, we see that for the most traditional parents the effect is $-.615$, which is moderate to large (i.e., $-.125 + 2.541 \times -.245$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Using a national sample of people who live with a partner of the same or a different sex in the Netherlands ($N = 843$ and $N = 510$, respectively), we examined the frequently discussed but rarely tested hypothesis of weaker intergenerational ties among adult daughters and sons in same-sex relationships and their parents. We explored gender differences and tested hypotheses related to how liberal or traditional the parental home was while the child was growing up. Overall, the differences in the parent-child relationship between adult daughters and sons in same-sex relationships on the one hand and adult daughters and sons in different-sex relationships on the other are modest. This affirms findings in the literature suggesting similar functioning in relationships of same-sex and mixed-sex couples (Hank & Salzbunger, 2015; Kurdek, 2004). However, we have illuminated nuances in three areas of the parent-child tie, which deepen our current understanding of people in same-sex relationships in their role as adult sexual minority daughters and sons.

First, we have shown that people in same-sex relationships in adulthood leave home earlier, move further away, and more often report conflict and an unpleasant atmosphere in the community. These motives are clear signals that people who have a same-sex partner in adulthood more often had difficulties in relationships with their parents during the transition to adulthood than their

counterparts in different-sex relationships. These issues may only be temporary, however, and the parent-child tie seems strong enough to overcome these issues. We did not test the temporality of the problems explicitly. Yet the fact that a gap in the parent-child relationships barely exists in adulthood highlights the importance of adopting a life course perspective.

Our findings connect well with research that suggests increased vulnerability of sexual minority people during early adulthood in the development of mental health and substance abuse disparities, which persist over the life course (Marshall et al., 2011; Perales & Campbell, 2019). Pachankis et al. (2016) showed that young gay and bisexual men who recently migrated to New York had the largest risk of HIV transmission compared to young gay and bisexual young men who have spent more time there. The stress of a rocky departure from home may well add to the vulnerability of such a life transition. Even if ties with both parents seem to recover largely in adulthood, it is likely that a stress-related or involuntary departure from home increases economic and health vulnerability during this time. Later life disparities in these areas may well have their beginning in a rocky departure from home. Our findings add to a strand of investigation in family studies that suggests intergenerational ties with parents during adolescence and emerging adulthood are consequential for well-being in adulthood and should receive more attention in the field (Tighe et al., 2016).

Second, while the average effects regarding the intergenerational ties are modest in size, we see a few noteworthy gender-related effects. The literature on gender differences in tolerance of sexual diversity points toward the father-son tie as most susceptible to problems (Herek, 2002; Worthen, 2013). In line with these expectations, we find that the relationship between a father and a son with a same-sex partner is less close than between any other parent-child gender constellation. We also found an effect regarding ambivalence—a mix of positive and negative feelings—between mothers and sons in same-sex relationships. In adulthood, the quality of intergenerational ties between adult children and their parents is linked with psychological well-being and provision of support of parents to adult children (Fingerman et al., 2020; Gilligan et al., 2015). These subtle differences in parental ties of men in same-sex relationships compared to men in different-sex relationships points toward one possible mechanism underlying inequality between sexual minority men and the heterosexual majority. It is up to future research to test empirically the way in which parental ties can aid in explaining such disparities. For daughters in same-sex relationship, we observe only a very small effect on feelings of guilt toward their mothers; more notable is the less frequent contact women in same-sex relationships have with both of their parents. It is possible that diminished contact is a strategy to avoid complicated relationships. Because contact is both a condition and a requirement for obtaining emotional and practical support from parents (Hogerbrugge & Komter, 2012), this strategy may not come without cost. This could become especially salient when these couples have children on their own and typically require much support from others.

Third, we have examined hypotheses about how traditional the parental home was while growing up. Our findings provide little support for the idea that effects are heterogeneous in this sense. In other words, people who are currently in same-sex relationships do not have especially weak ties to their parents when these parents were more religious or more traditional in their gender roles. This

finding supports existing literature that suggests that religious families often find ways to accommodate sexual minority children (Bertone & Franchi, 2014). One exception is that daughters in same-sex relationships have weaker ties to their fathers when the parents held more traditional gender roles ($d = .60$). One would perhaps expect gender roles to play an especially important role for the father-son tie but this is not what our evidence shows. What is clear, however, is that the overall effects identified more often apply to fathers than to mothers.

We would like to note again that our analyses are limited to adult daughters and sons who live with a partner. This is a limitation of the current sample because it is conceivable that people who openly live with a partner of the same sex form a select group, distinct from people with a nonheterosexual orientation who do not live with their partner or who are single. The differences we found between people in same-sex and different-sex relationships in their adult relationships with parents, therefore, may well be larger among people who do not live with one single partner or who do not have any partner. This would be consistent with our evidence of stronger effects on the relationship with parents during the transition to adulthood, a period during which most of the daughters and sons were still single; some moved in with a partner directly after leaving the parental home albeit mostly with a different-sex partner. In cases where we did find a difference, the effects would be more pronounced in a sample that includes noncohabiting couples and singles. In instances where we found no significant differences, however, we cannot be certain whether the effect is suppressed by this downward bias or whether there truly is no effect. It is up to future research to explore the hypothesis of weaker intergenerational ties among sexual minority people who are not living with a partner.

What have we learned about people in same-sex couples in the role of adult children? While there is clear evidence pointing to difficulties in the parent-child relationship during the transition to adulthood, as exemplified by the leaving-home process, these difficulties appear to be weaker later in the life course. We have shown evidence that suggests an increased vulnerability of sexual minority young adults during their transition to independent living. We point toward avenues for future research seeking to understand early life conditions that may explain economic, social and mental health disparities among adult sexual minority people.

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