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Research Article

Same-sex relationship experiences and expectations regarding partnership and parenthood

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Same-sex relationship experiences and expectations regarding partnership and parenthood

Karsten Hank¹

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

Whereas recent years have brought comprehensive demographic accounts of the gay and lesbian population in the United States and several European countries, relatively little is yet known about gays' and lesbians' family-related attitudes and expectations.

OBJECTIVE

The present study contributes to closing this research gap, comparing individuals with and without same-sex relationship experiences regarding their expectations concerning partnership and parenthood.

METHOD

We run OLS regressions, using nationally representative survey data for two cohorts of young adults in Germany (born 1971–1973 and 1981–1983).

RESULTS

In several regards, gays and lesbians expect lower benefits and greater costs of being in a partnership, but not of being a parent.

CONCLUSIONS

We propose that the latter finding results from same-sex parenthood still being a comparatively rare event and expectations being formed on the basis of heteronormatively shaped values rather than on experience. This is different when considering romantic relationships. Even if partnership-related expectations are partially influenced by the same structural constraints that limit gays' and lesbians' factual opportunity to form a family, these expectations might still exhibit an independent additional impact on demographic outcomes.

CONTRIBUTION

Accounting for individuals' expectations might contribute to better explaining why, for

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example, marriage-like partnerships and cohabitation are less frequent in gay and lesbian couples than in heterosexual partnerships.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century brought a rapid expansion of social science studies on gay and lesbian (henceforth: G&L) family issues (for reviews see Biblarz and Savci 2010; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Umberson et al. 2015). Much of this research was spawned by the greater availability of high-quality data, especially that allowing quantitative analyses based on censuses, population registers, and probability samples. This data provided the basis for comprehensive demographic accounts of the G&L population in Western societies (e.g., Andersson et al. 2006; Black et al. 2000), indicating marked behavioral differences between G&Ls and their heterosexual counterparts.

Marriage-like partnerships and cohabitation were shown to be less frequent in G&L couples than in heterosexual partnerships (e.g., Carpenter and Gates 2008; Festy 2006). Moreover, several European studies (Andersson et al. 2006; Lau 2012; Wiik, Seierstad, and Noack 2014) indicated similar determinants but higher levels of union dissolution in same-sex than in opposite-sex cohabiting and married partnerships. Finally, G&Ls were found to exhibit a lower propensity to become parents than heterosexual adults (e.g., Brewster, Tillman, and Jokinen-Gordon 2014; Patterson and Riskind 2010).

Institutional and biological constraints on G&Ls forming a family are an obvious and important driver of these behavioral differences (e.g., Chamie and Mirkin 2011; Waaldijk 2009). However, differences in the structural opportunity to realize existing parenting desires might also result in G&Ls' lower propensity to express a desire for parenthood (e.g., Baiocco and Laghi 2013; Riskind and Patterson 2010). Along the same lines, G&Ls' family-related attitudes and expectations – constituting a basis for subsequent demographic behaviors (e.g., Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995; Liefbroer 2005) – might differ from those expressed in the heterosexual population (e.g., Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009; Riskind and Patterson 2010).

The present study contributes to the still sparse literature investigating the extent to which this is actually the case. We ask whether individuals with nonheterosexual and heterosexual-only relationship experiences differ with regard to their expectations regarding the costs and benefits of partnership and parenthood. Our analysis is based on data from the German Family Panel (*pairfam*), a nationally representative cohort study of young adults. In addition to providing a broad array of measures of respondents'

family-related expectations, the survey includes detailed information on respondents' partnership histories, allowing the identification of individuals with same-sex partnership experiences (see Bates and Demaio 2013), labeled here as G&L. It is important to note that this behavioral measure captures only one dimension of the individual's sexual orientation, which also encompasses elements such as sexual attraction, identity, and arousal (e.g., Bailey et al. 2016).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section introduces the German context of the present study. We then provide a brief overview of previous research on same-sex partnerships and parenthood as well as our hypotheses. Following a description of the data and methods used, we present our findings. The final section concludes.

2. Same-sex partnerships and parenthood in Germany

Estimates of the (increasing) number of cohabiting same-sex couples in Germany ranged between 67,000 and 185,000 in 2011 (see Rupp and Haag 2016, for a detailed sociodemographic account). In 2001, preceding the legalization of G&L marriage in 2017, Germany adopted the *Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz*, which enabled couples to obtain legal recognition for their union through a registration procedure that was distinct from marriage but still provided them with benefits very similar to those received by married opposite-sex couples.

The law also regulated child-related issues in same-sex partnerships, particularly custody and adoption rights. In this regard the law was initially very restrictive, but was modified in 2005 to allow, for example, the adoption of the other partner's biological child (see Rupp 2009: Chapter I.3, for legal details). Still, the number of minor children cohabiting with a same-sex – mostly lesbian – couple is very low (< 6,000). Increasingly, these children are born within the same-sex union, so that their share today is almost equal to that of children born in a previous heterosexual relationship (Rupp and Haag 2016). Correspondingly, a considerable proportion of partnered childless lesbians (43%) and gay men (35%) reports desiring having children (Haag 2013).

Despite an overall tendency towards greater liberalism and tolerance of G&L rights, there appears to be a lag in the acceptance of same-sex partnerships and same-sex parenthood in Germany (Steffens and Wagner 2004). Overall, the German population expresses attitudes towards homosexuality which are less positive than in the Netherlands, Sweden, or Denmark, but more positive than in Ireland or Southern and Eastern Europe (e.g., Gerhards 2010; Slenders, Sieben, and Verbakel 2014).

3. Previous research and hypotheses

3.1 Same-sex partnerships

Within-household specialization has often been suggested as increasing (married) partners' economic and noneconomic utility (e.g., Becker 1973). Compared to opposite-sex couples, however, socioeconomic status homogamy among G&L partners is lower (e.g., Jepsen and Jepsen 2002; Schwartz and Graf 2009), the division of labor is less likely to be highly specialized, and domestic labor in same-sex couples is more likely to be shared equally (e.g., Bauer 2016; Giddings et al. 2014). Even though G&L couples may benefit from resource pooling, the lack of specialization is associated with lower – if any – ‘marriage premiums’ in labor earnings (e.g., Aldén et al. 2015; Zavodny 2008). Whereas Tornello, Ivanova, and Bos (2018) reported lower life satisfaction among individuals in same-sex relationships, there is generally no indication of significant differences by sexual orientation in happiness (Wienke and Hill 2009), relationship satisfaction (Kurdek 2008; Perales and Baxter 2018), psychological well-being (Wight, LeBlanc, and Badgett 2013), or self-rated health (Denney, Gorman, and Barrera 2013; Wienke and Hill 2009). However, parental disapproval of same-sex romantic relationships has been shown to be associated with increased relationship strain (Reczek 2016), and there is also evidence of lower social network support for G&L relationships, especially from family members (see, for example, Holmberg and Blair 2016).

Next to the benefits which individuals may expect to arise from a partnership, it is important to ask which values G&Ls rate highly in a relationship. Meier, Hull, and Ortyl (2009) have conducted the most comprehensive study on this issue to date, using data from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The authors find that sexual minorities are more tolerant of racial difference and less concerned with financial security in long-term relationships. Irrespective of sexual identity, love, faithfulness, and life-long commitment are rated as extremely important for a successful relationship, albeit to a lesser extent among homosexuals and bisexuals (except love).

Because G&Ls have been shown to be less concerned about finding partners with a similar socioeconomic status, to be less likely to exhibit a high degree of household specialization, and to be less concerned with financial security in long-term relationships than their heterosexual peers (e.g., Giddings et al. 2014; Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009; Schwartz and Graf 2009), we expect G&Ls to express lower expectations with regard to receiving instrumental support from a partner (*Hypothesis 1a*), but to place greater value on their individual autonomy (*Hypothesis 1b*). Whereas we do not expect to observe significant differences in G&Ls' and heterosexuals' emotional expectations of their partnership (Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009; *Hypothesis 1c*), concerns

about disapproval of one's partner(ship) should be more prevalent among respondents with same-sex partnership experiences (Reczek 2016; *Hypothesis 1d*).

3.2 Same-sex parenthood

Same-sex parenthood continues to be a controversial issue in the general public (e.g., Baiocco et al. 2013; Hollekim, Slaatten, and Anderssen 2012) and biological as well as institutional constraints clearly increase the cost of children for G&L couples, which has been proposed as resulting in a lower demand for children (Black, Sanders and Taylor 2007). At the same time the social pressure to fulfill the widespread heteronormative expectation to have children is substantially lower for G&Ls than for heterosexuals. Accordingly, Riskind and Patterson (2010; for the United States) and Baiocco and Laghi (2013; for Italy) find that childless G&Ls are less likely to express a desire for parenthood than their heterosexual peers. Moreover, Costa and Bidell (2017) report a significant gap between the expressed desire for parenthood (65%) and stated fertility intentions (56%) in a sample of Portuguese lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. However, the aforementioned US and Italian studies found such a gap only for gay men and not for lesbian women, possibly resulting from gender differences in structural opportunities to realize parenting desires.

Riskind and Patterson (2010) find that G&L individuals – even if they do not express any intention to have a child themselves – endorse the value of parenthood as strongly as their heterosexual counterparts. However, perceptions of parenting may still differ by sexual orientation. In Baiocco and Laghi's (2013) study, for example, childless lesbian and – especially – gay participants report lower levels of perceived enrichment and more negative expectations of social support available to parents. Finally, Bos, van Balen, and van den Boom (2003) find that lesbian parents' hierarchy of parenthood motives is quite similar to that observed for heterosexual mothers, but that happiness is significantly more important and identity development significantly less important for the former than for the latter.

Because parenthood is still not an expected social role for G&Ls and remains a controversial issue among the heterosexual majority population, we assume that G&Ls expect to experience greater mental pressure than their heterosexual peers (*Hypothesis 2a*). However, since G&L individuals have been shown to endorse the overall value of parenthood as strongly as their heterosexual counterparts (Riskind and Patterson 2010) we do not expect to find significant differences between these groups in their expectations with regard to the benefits of children (e.g., as providers of support) and economic costs (*Hypothesis 2b*).

4. Method

4.1 Data

Our empirical analysis is based on data derived from the German Family Panel (pairfam; see Brüderl et al. 2017; Huinink et al. 2011), which is funded by the German Research Foundation as a long-term project. Respondents in the sample are nationally representative of three cohorts – born in 1971–1973, 1981–1983, and 1991–1993 – and were first interviewed in 2008/09 (annual follow-up computer-assisted personal interviews have been conducted since then, but are not included in our study). Information on respondents' expectations regarding partnership and parenthood was collected in pairfam's baseline wave. Because our identification of G&L respondents depends on self-reported same-sex partnerships prior to or at the time of the baseline interview (see below), we (a) excluded respondents who never had a partner till then and (b) restricted our analytic sample to respondents from the two oldest cohorts who were in their mid-20s and mid-30s when first interviewed. This leaves us with a total of 7,483 respondents, of whom 106 (= 1.4%) reported having had one or more gay or lesbian relationships. Tornello, Ivanova, and Bos (2018) report a similar proportion of respondents in same-sex relationships in analysis based on the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. Note that 17 of our 106 G&L respondents were identified as having had same- and different-sex partners. This number of observations is too small to consider them as a distinct category of bisexuals in our analysis. Excluding them from the sample did not change any of our substantive findings.

4.2 Dependent variables

Pairfam collects a broad array of information about respondents' family-related expectations, from which we derived a total of eight dependent variables, whose answer categories range from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('very strongly'):

- Expectations regarding the receipt of instrumental support from a partner (*Hypothesis 1a*) were measured by the question "How strongly do you expect to get support from a partner if you need help or become ill?" The value of individual autonomy (*Hypothesis 1b*) was assessed by asking "How strongly do you worry about being constrained by a partner?" Emotional expectations (*Hypothesis 1c*) were measured by the question "How strongly do you expect to get affection and a feeling of safety in a partnership?" and concerns about disapproval of one's

partnership (*Hypothesis 1d*) were assessed by asking “How strongly do you worry about your family and friends rejecting or disliking a partner?”

- Expectations regarding the experience of mental pressure (*Hypothesis 2a*) were assessed by two questions: “How strongly do you expect that children will put you under nervous strain?” and “How strongly do you expect that children will limit your personal freedom?” Expectations with regard to children’s economic costs and benefits (*Hypothesis 2b*) were measured by asking how strongly respondents’ “expect that adult children will be there for you when you are in need?” and how strongly they “expect to be able to afford less with children?” respectively.

4.3 Explanatory and control variables

Our main explanatory variable of interest is a binary indicator accounting for any same-sex partnership experience prior to or at the time of the interview (irrespective of partnership duration); see Bates and Demaio (2013). Furthermore, we account for a standard set of respondents’ sociodemographic characteristics, namely: cohort (1981–1983 vs. 1971–1973), sex, place of birth (West Germany; East Germany; abroad), education (low; medium; high), and dummy variables indicating the individual’s employment, partnership, and parental status (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Table 1: (Unweighted) descriptive sample statistics

| | Respondents w/out same-sex partnership experience (heterosexual) | | | Respondents w/ same-sex partnership experience (homosexual; G&L) | | |
|---|--|---------------|-----------------|--|---------------|-----------------|
| | Total Mean/ N % | Men Mean/ N % | Women Mean/ N % | Total Mean/ N % | Men Mean/ N % | Women Mean/ N % |
| Dependent variable | | | | | | |
| Expecting instrumental support from partner | 4.72 7,358 | 4.65 3,381 | 4.79 3,977 | 4.58 106 | 4.61 51 | 4.55 55 |
| Concerned about being constrained by partner | 2.16 7,346 | 2.24 3,373 | 2.10 3,973 | 2.26 105 | 2.14 50 | 2.36 55 |
| Expecting affection and feeling of safety | 4.81 7,319 | 4.75 3,368 | 4.86 3,951 | 4.89 106 | 4.88 51 | 4.89 55 |
| Concerned that partner will be rejected by social network | 1.75 7,334 | 1.69 3,368 | 1.81 3,966 | 2.04 105 | 2.02 50 | 2.05 55 |
| Expecting that children will cause nervous strain | 2.52 7,336 | 2.51 3,366 | 2.53 3,970 | 2.84 101 | 2.84 49 | 2.85 52 |
| Expecting that children will limit personal freedom | 2.41 7,330 | 2.42 3,366 | 2.40 3,964 | 2.74 101 | 2.88 49 | 2.62 52 |
| Expecting that children will provide support | 3.93 7,299 | 3.93 3,355 | 3.92 3,944 | 3.64 98 | 3.55 47 | 3.73 51 |
| Expecting that children will cause economic strain | 2.98 7,321 | 2.97 3,362 | 2.99 3,959 | 3.15 101 | 3.10 49 | 3.19 52 |

Table 1: (Continued)

| | Respondents w/out same-sex partnership experience (heterosexual) | | | Respondents w/ same-sex partnership experience (homosexual; G&L) | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------|-----------------|--|---------------|-----------------|
| | Total Mean/ N % | Men Mean/ N % | Women Mean/ N % | Total Mean/ N % | Men Mean/ N % | Women Mean/ N % |
| Control variables | | | | | | |
| Partner (ref.: no partner) | 82% 7,377 | 78% 3,389 | 84% 3,988 | 76% 106 | 80% 51 | 71% 55 |
| Child (ref.: no child) | 55% 7,377 | 45% 3,389 | 64% 3,988 | 23% 106 | 18% 51 | 27% 55 |
| Employed (ref.: not employed) | 71% 7,365 | 81% 3,385 | 63% 3,980 | 76% 106 | 80% 51 | 71% 55 |
| Cohort 1981–1983 (ref.: 1971–1973) | 52% 7,377 | 50% 3,389 | 54% 3,988 | 52% 106 | 51% 51 | 53% 55 |
| Education: low | 16% 7,352 | 16% 3,378 | 16% 3,974 | 20% 105 | 24% 50 | 16% 55 |
| Education: medium | 56% 7,352 | 55% 3,378 | 58% 3,974 | 50% 105 | 44% 50 | 56% 55 |
| Education: high | 27% 7,352 | 28% 3,378 | 26% 3,974 | 30% 105 | 32% 50 | 27% 55 |
| Country of birth FRG | 63% 7,374 | 64% 3,387 | 61% 3,987 | 72% 106 | 76% 51 | 67% 55 |
| Country of birth GDR | 20% 7,374 | 20% 3,387 | 21% 3,987 | 18% 106 | 12% 51 | 24% 55 |
| Country of birth not Germany | 17% 7,374 | 16% 3,387 | 18% 3,987 | 10% 106 | 12% 51 | 9% 55 |

4.4 Method

We estimate two OLS regression models for each dependent variable to identify significant differences between G&L and heterosexual respondents in our sample. Whereas Model 1 accounts for individuals’ same-/opposite-sex partnership experiences only, Model 2 additionally includes standard sociodemographic controls (see above). Remaining differences in expectations towards partnership and parenthood are thus net of possible compositional (that is, sociodemographic) differences between the G&L and heterosexual populations.

5. Results

The results of our regression analyses³ are presented separately for expectations regarding partnerships (Table 2) and parenthood (Table 3). Most of the results for our

³ Note that in additional models (details not shown) we also estimated interactions between our indicator of individuals’ same-sex partnership experience and respondents’ sex, which, however, turned out to be insignificant. Against the background of, for example, gender differences in G&Ls’ structural opportunity to realize parenting desires, this finding may be surprising, and may be driven primarily by our low sample size.

'partnership' models turned out to be in line with our hypotheses. Individuals with same-sex partnership experience expressed lower expectations regarding instrumental support (*Hypothesis 1a*), but, contrary to the proposal of *Hypothesis 1b*, they were not more concerned about maintaining their personal autonomy. As expected, there was no difference between individuals with and without same-sex partnership experience regarding their expectations concerning affection and feelings of safety (*Hypothesis 1c*), but G&Ls expressed greater concern that family and friends might reject their partner (*Hypothesis 1d*). These findings remained robust when controlling for sociodemographic characteristics in Model 2.

Table 2: Results of OLS regressions for expectations of partnership

| | Expecting instrumental support | | Concerned about being constrained by partner | | Expecting affection and feeling of safety | | Concerned that partner will be rejected by social network | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|--|----------|---|----------|---|----------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| G&L | -0.15** | -0.13* | 0.09 | -0.04 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.29** | 0.25* |
| (ref.: heterosexual) | (0.06) | (0.05) | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| Female | | 0.13*** | | -0.05 | | 0.11*** | | 0.15*** |
| (ref.: male) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Partner | | 0.14*** | | -0.73*** | | 0.10*** | | -0.43*** |
| (ref.: no partner) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Child | | 0.03 | | -0.18*** | | -0.00 | | -0.05 |
| (ref.: no child) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Employed | | 0.02 | | -0.01 | | 0.03* | | -0.01 |
| (ref.: not employed) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Cohort 1981–1983 | | -0.03* | | -0.00 | | -0.03* | | -0.02 |
| (ref.: 1971–1973) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Education: medium | | 0.05* | | -0.04 | | 0.03 | | -0.08* |
| (ref.: low) | | (0.02) | | (0.04) | | (0.02) | | (0.04) |
| Education: high | | 0.00 | | 0.06 | | -0.00 | | -0.09* |
| (ref.: low) | | (0.02) | | (0.04) | | (0.02) | | (0.04) |
| Country of birth GDR | | -0.01 | | -0.08* | | 0.01 | | 0.01 |
| (ref.: FRG) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) | | (0.01) | | (0.03) |
| Country of birth not Germany | | 0.03 | | -0.06 | | -0.10*** | | -0.00 |
| (ref.: FRG) | | (0.02) | | (0.04) | | (0.02) | | (0.03) |
| Constant | 4.72*** | 4.43*** | 2.16*** | 2.98*** | 4.81*** | 4.62*** | 1.75*** | 2.02*** |
| | (0.01) | (0.04) | (0.01) | (0.09) | (0.01) | (0.04) | (0.01) | (0.08) |
| r^2 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.00 | 0.03 |
| N (Total) | 7,464 | 7,432 | 7,451 | 7,420 | 7,425 | 7,393 | 7,439 | 7,407 |
| n (G&L) | 106 | 105 | 105 | 104 | 106 | 105 | 105 | 104 |

Source: pairfam (Wave 1), Release 8.0, own calculations. Significance: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Turning to expectations regarding parenthood, we assumed that G&Ls expect greater mental pressure than their heterosexual peers (*Hypothesis 2a*). Initial differences suggesting that G&Ls were more concerned that children might put them under nervous

strain or limit their personal freedom became statistically insignificant once sociodemographic controls – especially parental status – were accounted for. Consistent with *Hypothesis 2b*, we detected no robust differences between individuals with and without same-sex partnership experience concerning the expected benefits and economic costs of children. Again, initial differences in expectations that adult children will provide support disappeared after the inclusion of controls in Model 2.

Table 3: Results of OLS regressions for expectations of having children

| | Expecting that children will cause nervous strain | | Expecting that children will limit personal freedom | | Expecting that children will provide support | | Expecting that children will cause economic strain | |
|------------------------------|---|----------|---|----------|--|----------|--|----------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| G&L | 0.32** | 0.19 | 0.33** | 0.17 | -0.28** | -0.21 | 0.17 | 0.07 |
| (ref.: heterosexual) | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.12) | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.11) | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| Female | | 0.07** | | 0.07** | | -0.04 | | 0.07* |
| (ref.: male) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) |
| Partner | | -0.09* | | -0.24*** | | 0.05 | | -0.20*** |
| (ref.: no partner) | | (0.03) | | (0.04) | | (0.03) | | (0.04) |
| Child | | -0.34*** | | -0.42*** | | 0.10** | | -0.24*** |
| (ref.: no child) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.04) |
| Employed | | -0.11*** | | -0.03 | | 0.02 | | -0.02 |
| (ref.: not employed) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) |
| Cohort 1981–1983 | | 0.17*** | | 0.05 | | -0.19*** | | 0.13*** |
| (ref.: 1971–1973) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) |
| Education: medium | | 0.00 | | 0.03 | | -0.00 | | 0.02 |
| (ref.: low) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) |
| Education: high | | 0.13** | | 0.18*** | | -0.21*** | | -0.12* |
| (ref.: low) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) | | (0.05) |
| Country of birth GDR | | -0.16*** | | -0.18*** | | 0.16*** | | -0.01 |
| (ref.: FRG) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | | (0.04) |
| Country of birth not Germany | | -0.30*** | | -0.12*** | | 0.36*** | | -0.16*** |
| (ref.: FRG) | | (0.04) | | (0.04) | | (0.03) | | (0.04) |
| Constant | 2.52*** | 2.36*** | 2.41*** | 2.61*** | 3.93*** | 4.31*** | 2.98*** | 2.90*** |
| | (0.01) | (0.09) | (0.01) | (0.09) | (0.01) | (0.08) | (0.01) | (0.10) |
| r^2 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| N (Total) | 7,437 | 7,408 | 7,431 | 7,401 | 7,397 | 7,367 | 7,422 | 7,393 |
| n (G&L) | 101 | 100 | 101 | 100 | 98 | 97 | 101 | 100 |

Source: pairfam (Wave 1), Release 8.0, own calculations. Significance: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

6. Summary and conclusions

Using data from the German Family Panel, a nationally representative cohort study of young adults, we compared expectations regarding partnership and parenthood among

individuals with nonheterosexual and heterosexual-only relationship experience. Our empirical findings only partially support our hypotheses.

Individuals with and without same-sex partnership experience were shown to be statistically indistinguishable regarding their expectations concerning affection and personal autonomy in partnerships. However, G&Ls' lower expectations with regard to the receipt of instrumental support by a partner reflect previously documented lower degrees of household specialization and less concern about financial security in G&Ls' long-term relationships (e.g., Giddings et al. 2014; Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009). At the same time, they were more likely to worry about family or friends rejecting or disliking a partner. Such concerns seem plausible in the light of narratives of parental disapproval of same-sex relationships and lower levels of perceived social network support (e.g., Holmberg and Blair 2016; Reczek 2016).

Even though parenthood is still not an expected social role for G&Ls and remains the subject of controversial public debate, our analysis did not reveal any robust differences between individuals with and without same-sex partnership experience as far as their expectations towards parenthood are concerned. Any initial differences observed could be explained by the differential sociodemographic composition of the G&L population – especially the lower probability of being a parent – rather than by sexual orientation. These findings corroborate previous research suggesting that G&Ls tend to endorse the value of parenthood as strongly as their heterosexual counterparts (Riskind and Patterson 2010).

Whereas pairfam's direct question about the sex of current and previous partners is likely to identify individuals in same-sex relationships more accurately than indirect measures (based on, for example, information about the sex of household members and their relationship to each other), our study still suffers from common methodological problems in research on G&L family issues (e.g., Régnier-Loilier 2018; Umberson et al. 2015). Particularly, the small number of observations constitutes a major limitation. We observe, for example, too few cases of registered partnerships or parenthood, too few demographic events, and too few individuals with partnership histories suggesting bisexuality to properly account for these in the empirical analysis. Moreover, our identification of G&Ls is based on revealed preferences, which need not be identical to individuals' sexual orientation or identity (and possible changes therein across the life course). Hopefully, future studies will be able to draw on richer data sources, allowing an even better assessment of sexual minorities' attitudes and – eventually – actual demographic behaviors. Efforts should also be made to collect data allowing more cross-nationally comparative research. This is an important perspective for future research because G&Ls' relationship preferences (Potârca, Mills, and Neberich 2015) and pathways to parenthood (Patterson and Tornello 2010) have been shown to vary across different legal and cultural contexts.

To conclude, our findings from the German case suggest that in several regards G&Ls anticipate lower benefits and greater costs of being in a partnership, but not of being a parent. One explanation for the latter finding might be that same-sex parenthood continues to be a comparatively rare event, where expectations may be based on heteronormatively shaped values rather than on experience. This is different when considering romantic relationships. Even if partnership-related expectations are partially influenced by the same structural constraints limiting G&Ls' factual opportunity to form a family (Black, Sanders, and Taylor 2007), these expectations might still exhibit an independent additional impact on demographic outcomes (e.g., Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995; Liefbroer 2005), thereby contributing to better explaining why, for example, marriage-like partnerships as well as cohabitation are less frequent in G&L couples than in heterosexual partnerships (e.g., Carpenter and Gates 2008; Festy 2006).

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