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Post-Obergefell v. Hodges: How LGBT Contact Can Alter Public LGBT Policy Positions in the U.S. and Arkansas

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Post-*Obergefell v. Hodges*: How LGBT Contact Can Alter Public LGBT Policy Positions in the
U.S. and Arkansas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy

by

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Abstract

The Contact Theory (CT) of attitudinal change has utilized to understand perceptions of minority-group members and the policies that surround them since the 1950s. It has further been used to specifically examine how we form our opinions of LGBT-identifying individuals, the LGBT community, and LGBT policies more generally. However, further evidence is still needed from the CT literature surrounding how this form of contact interacts with individuals' social identities to determine and alter their LGBT policy positions, how the level of contact with LGBT persons might have differing effects on these positions, and whether LGBT contact holds the same effects across multiple LGBT policy issues. Additionally, the literature surrounding LGBT contact and policy position formation has largely been limited to studies at the U.S. national level, which necessitates the examination of state-specific contexts to understand whether the relationships between LGBT contact and LGBT policy positions are stable across geographical location. As such, the following three studies address 1) whether and in what ways contact with LGBT individuals can influence Americans' views of major LGBT policies, 2) whether this interaction can be found within a state with a more tumultuous history with LGBT rights, and 3) what, if any, role the moral dimensions of each LGBT policy impact contact's effect on policy position formation.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Mike. For all you did to support me through this process, and for all you do for me every day. Thank you for being my best friend and number one supporter. I love you always.

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Abbreviations

CPA	Conditional process analysis
CT	Intergroup contact theory
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MLE	Maximum likelihood estimate
OLS	Ordinary least squares
Party ID	Party identification
RDD	Random digit dialing

List of Published Papers

- Chapter II Kordsmeier, B., Tumilson, C., & Song, G. (2019). Ideological orientations, LGBT contact, and formation of LGBT policy position. *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(3), 779-792.

Chapter I

Understanding the Rapid Trajectory of LGBT Rights in the United States

1. Introduction

In the early 1980s and 1990s, the United States saw an enormous increase in support for gay and lesbian rights, with the American public beginning to liberalize on many LGBT¹ issues at once. As cited by Garretson (2017), the Gallup analytics company first polled Americans about gays and lesbians in 1977 after Harvey Milk’s election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, finding that only 13 percent believed “being gay or lesbian is something a person is born with” rather than a result of their upbringing or environment. However, by the time Gallup surveyed Americans just over 40 years later in 2019, this number fell just short of a majority (at 49 percent). This change in view of gay and lesbians as individuals whose sexual orientation is naturally derived rather than a mere “choice” thereby created a shift in LGBT rights from being seen as unwarranted (and thus unwelcome) to being seen by more Americans as a societal necessity.

More importantly, however, this change in beliefs also opened the door for LGBT policy support across a wide variety of issues, including this community’s equal treatment in the workforce. Specifically, only 56 percent of Americans in 1977 agreed with the statement that “gay people should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities” (Garretson, 2017). This was during the same time that the Save Our Children campaign succeeded in overturning local

¹ Although the experiences utilized in this dissertation are solely between heterosexual and gay and lesbian individuals, we utilize the label “LGBT” – regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons – in congruence with its use in local, state, and national policy rhetoric. Some research has emphasized that contact experiences with other members of the LGBT community – including transgender and gender non-confirming individuals – are not processed in the same way as contact with gays and lesbians (e.g., see Flores, 2015; Lewis et al., 2017).

ordinances in multiple cities that banned discrimination against gay people in employment decisions and the workplace more generally. However, by the time Gallup surveyed Americans in 2019, support had increased to an overwhelming 93 percent, with support for all specific employment categories following suit. For example, though only 44 percent of respondents indicated that they would be comfortable with a gay or lesbian doctor in 1977, this number swelled to 91 percent by 2019 (Garretson, 2017). Americans showed similar increases in comfort with having gay and lesbian salespersons (rising from 68 percent in 1977 to 95 percent in 2019), military personnel (from 51 to 83 percent), elementary school teachers (from 27 to 81 percent), and members of the clergy (from 36 to 72 percent) (Garretson, 2017).

The same trend can be found regarding Americans' view of gay and lesbian *relationships*, with many states in 1977 holding same-sex intimacy as a legal offense that could even lead to imprisonment. However, the Supreme Court decided in the 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* case to prohibit states from outlawing same-sex relations, and the proportion of individuals who agreed with the statement that “gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should be legal” had reached 83 percent by 2019 (a full 40-percent increase from those polled in 1977) (Garretson, 2017). Similarly, the percentage of Americans who believed gay and lesbians should be allowed to adopt children increased from 14 to 75 percent during this period. As a result, while each specific LGBT rights issue has shown different levels of support over time, the overall trend of significant growth is consistent throughout (Garretson, 2017; Mucciaroni, 2008).

How are we then to understand this relatively rapid trend in support for LGBT rights? The following sections seek to explore the means by which the American public's LGBT attitudes have been altered, as well as the caveats to public opinion that are largely dependent on the specific group of Americans being analyzed. Then, the next section will present the

discrepancies that exist within this overall upward trend in LGBT policy support, focusing on on Arkansas as a specific case from which these divergences can be explored. Additionally, three of the major sets of theories currently used to explain the rapid increase in LGBT policy support over time will be analyzed in detail, followed by a discussion of the importance of understanding the potential *interaction* between an individual's various identities that can affect how they² form opinions on LGBT issues.

2. Across-State Distinctions: The Case of Same-Sex Marriage

Despite the overall improvements in LGBT attitudes over the past 40 years, this exact trend in public opinion has some important stipulations, specifically regarding cross-state differences. Generally, changing views toward LGBT rights appear to be geographically bound, where they have advanced faster in the Northeast and West while progressing more slowly in the South (Lax & Phillips, 2009; Ofosu et al., 2019). However, the potentially more interesting distinction (which has often, although not always, gone hand-in-hand with regional divisions) is for those states that did not have their own pro-LGBT legislation before federal LGBT policy was enacted.

This complexity can be illustrated by the case of same-sex marriage, where the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment corresponded to an overall decrease in public support (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). This specific decrease was seen on a national scale, where the 60 percent of polled Americans who believed marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by the law and

² The generic, third-person singular "they/them/their" pronouns will be used throughout this text, as the gender of the generic individual is irrelevant.

provided the same rights as traditional marriages a month before the Supreme Court ruling lowered to 58 percent just a month afterward (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019). Despite this initial decrease, however, support then began to rise once more and even surpassed previous levels, reaching 61 percent in 2016 and 63 percent by 2019.

More significant, however, is the reaction of states without LGBT-supportive policies (and who even had legal *limitations* on LGBT rights) to this federal ruling. In states that did not pass same-sex marriage legislation locally, some scholars have pinpointed a “backlash” effect, where federal legalization was associated with an immediate increase in antigay bias despite its overall decreasing trend within these states before the federal ruling (Flores & Barclay, 2016; Ofosu et al., 2019). In the state of Arkansas, for example, its General Assembly originally passed a statewide ban on same-sex marriage in 1997 that also further delegitimized those marriages performed out-of-state (Act 144, 1997). Then, once the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, the Arkansas State legislature responded with the introduction of a same-sex marriage ban to be added to the U.S. Constitution (*Senate Joint Resolution S2.9.17*, 2017). Eventually this ban was passed by the Arkansas Senate but later failed in its House (*H3.29.17*, 2017). A bill to reenact the statewide ban was introduced by Representative Stephen Meeks one month later, though it was later withdrawn.

And yet, even during this time of legislative opposition that preceded the Supreme Court ruling, Arkansans themselves showed increasing levels of support. In fact, the Arkansas Poll, an annual statewide survey, indicated that Arkansans gradually increased their support for same-sex marriage until the 2015 federal ruling, where public support decreased by over 20 percent (from 48 to 27 percent) in just one year (Parry, 2015). However, this percentage has since reversed and further increased to 33 and 50 percent in the years 2017 and 2018, respectively (Parry, 2018). As

a result, it is possible that public opinion surrounding LGBT rights in some states with statewide anti-LGBT policies can be best explained by experiencing an initial “shock” to the system due to federal pro-LGBT policy that can cause an abrupt decrease in state residents’ support, only to be quickly overcome as support continues its former increasing pattern.

3. Explaining Attitudinal Change: Three Theories of LGBT Issue Support

3.1 Demographic Explanations

With this understanding of the trajectory of U.S. LGBT public opinion, including its across-state complexities, how can we then *explain* the means through which it has developed? Within the public policy literature, three general sets of theories have been presented. One such set involves those that identify the shifting demographics of the public as the reason for such a sharp increase in LGBT policy support. Mostly discussed among sociologists, this set of theories focuses on the fact that, in general, more educated people, more secular people, and people born after 1970 have been more supportive of gay rights. These scholars then argue that, because these particular groups continue to make up a larger proportion of the American population over time, gay rights support has naturally increased (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Baunach, 2012; Olson et al., 2006).

And yet, though these demographic changes have appeared to contribute to more tolerant views toward the LGBT community, they have often failed to serve as a comprehensive theory of attitudinal change. Specifically, most studies that examine demographics and public opinion have determined that a larger proportion of this increase in mass support has to be a result of something else, largely because virtually *every* demographic group has seen increases in support for gay rights over time (Baunach, 2012; Loftus, 2001).

3.2 *Media Influences*

The second set of theories indicates the power of information that comes from news media in particular. Largely discussed in the science and communications disciplines, this set of theories stresses the importance of the changing understandings of homosexuality and LGBT rights that have been communicated to the mass public through news stories. It specifically implicates the early 1990s as a critical transitional period, as it was during this time that the press started to report on the different developments relating to gay and lesbian life in the U.S. and elsewhere due to intense pressure from LGBT activist groups such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) (Garretson, 2017). Within this set of theories are various subsets that attempt to explain how the media have influenced public opinion surrounding LGBT rights more generally, including those that build on attribution theory, value-framing theories, and the theory of issue evolution.

Attribution theory was first introduced by Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) within the social psychology discipline, where they suggested that the new belief in homosexuality as having a biological basis (i.e., that individuals are “born gay”) was the key to the shift in public opinion. Theoretically, they argued, adopting a “born gay” viewpoint can also shift an individual’s attitudes in favor of LGBT rights. News stories on genetic and physiological research on the biological basis for sexual orientation started becoming common in the 1990s and continued throughout the decade, which neatly matches the public opinion shifts.

However, the change in public opinion attributed to this shift in focus of the news media was shown to be heavily concentrated among political liberals, who, because they represented only roughly 30 percent of the public, revealed a limit to the news media on *mass* attitudes (Garretson & Suhay, 2016). Further, experimental evidence from more recent years has

suggested that this change in attribution to homosexuality as genetically founded does not always lead to an actual increase in support for LGBT rights (Suhay & Garretson, 2018).

Theories that focus on value-framing, on the other hand, argue that as LGBT issues started to be discussed in the news media during the 1990s, reporters began to shift the *ways* in which these issues were discussed and thereby affected public opinion surrounding them. Specifically, news stories began to utilize what have been labeled “egalitarian frames” – or stories that included quotations from activists as well as phrases in their narratives that mentioned lesbians and gays as seeking equality like other minority groups (Brewer, 2003b). These frames thereby brought the fundamental value of equal treatment (which is held strongly by most members of the American public) to the forefront of individuals’ thoughts when forming their opinion of specific LGBT rights, thereby resulting in an increase in their LGBT policy support (Brewer, 2003a; 2003b).

It is important to note, however, that alternative frames describing homosexuality as religiously sinful and immoral connected LGBT rights with another mass value – moral traditionalism – that thereby resulted in a *decreased* likelihood of LGBT policy support among those who strongly endorsed it. And yet, despite the polarization that resulted from the opposing frames, the fact that LGBT rights support was already so low initially made support among egalitarians increase faster than it dropped among moral traditionalists, thereby resulting in an overall increase in support for LGBT rights (Brewer, 2003a; 2003b; 2008).

The final subset within this particular set of theories is that which surrounds the theory of issue evolution. This theory argues that elected officials and political elites polarize an issue along partisan lines, which then causes those within the general public who identify with a particular party (i.e., the Democratic or Republican Party) to slowly bring their views on that

issue in line with their party's leaders. Though most often used to explain the evolution of racial and women's rights issues (e.g., see Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Wolbrecht, 2000), this theory has also been applied to the LGBT community. Beginning in the 1970s, Democrats increasingly favored LGBT rights, while Republicans stayed almost universally opposed to them over the years. Further, although media coverage is not explicitly mentioned in this theory, it appears that the 1990s coverage of pro-LGBT Democrats and anti-LGBT Republicans was a necessary prerequisite that triggered attitudinal change among members of their particular parties (Lindaman & Haider-Markel, 2002).

However, the major limitation of the entire set of theories regarding the influence of news media on LGBT public opinion is that they do not completely fit with the actual trend in attitudinal change regarding LGBT issues. Specifically, though younger people have changed more quickly and deeply in their support for LGBT rights since the mid-1990s than any other segment of the population, they have been the *least* likely demographic to consume news content. Further, Garretson (2015) analyzed responses to the American National Election Study from 1988 to 2008, finding that those who reported watching the news five days a week or more increased their support for LGBT anti-discrimination laws by 21 percent over that time period, but that those who reported watching the news an average of zero days a week saw their support increase by 30 percent – almost a full 10 percent higher than the more-informed group. As a result, news coverage in and of itself cannot be empirically shown to be responsible for the bulk of attitude change on LGBT issues and therefore requires further theoretical assistance.

3.3 *The Power of LGBT Contact*

The final set of theories attempting to explain the specific trend in LGBT policy support is that which is based on the Intergroup Contact Theory (CT). Derived from the larger LGBT

movement as well as the social psychology and communications disciplines, this theory predicates that increases in the rates of intergroup contact between LGBT individuals and others are largely responsible for the mass public's progressing viewpoints on LGBT issues (Garretson, 2017). More specifically, it argues that coming out to others as LGBT (which is an encouraged act that has been a key aspect of LGBT culture since the 1970s) has resulted in more liberal attitudes toward LGBT persons among those non-LGBT individuals who interact with them (Herek, 2003; Lewis, 2011).

This theory stems from the general findings first presented by Allport (1954) that argued positive interpersonal contact can effectively reduce prejudice through a variety of psychological mechanisms, especially when that contact involved the two individuals in question meeting multiple times and sharing a common identity or other aspect of their lives, such as a hobby or occupation (Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Surveys of Americans reflect this argument, where the less than 25 percent of the public who knew gays and lesbians increased to over 40 percent by the mid-1990s and then to a further 50 percent by the end of that decade (Garretson, 2017). Then, by 2013, Gallup showed that this figure had reached as high as 75 percent (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019). More importantly, this contact with LGBT-identifying individuals has been consistently shown to result in more positive expressed attitudes toward the general LGBT community (Egan & Sherril, 2009; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Sakalli & Uğurlu, 2001).

However, just as with the other theories surrounding the evolution of LGBT public opinion, there are critiques of the CT as the sole explanation for the specific increases that have been found. Specifically, there is the limitation of selection effects, or the notion that LGBT people are much more likely to come out to those whom they know are already supportive of

LGBT rights, which would indicate that contact itself is not a major initiator for attitudinal change (Garretson, 2017). And yet, the general evidence from recent research utilizing experimental and quasi-experimental methods that control for these potential effects have still found that intergroup contact with LGBT persons can be effective in reducing prejudice toward the LGBT community (Altemeyer, 2001; Garretson, 2015). Consequently, the CT has been proven to remain useful in understanding how LGBT attitudes have changed over time, which thereby makes the attempt to analyze the potential *interaction* between contact and other determinants of LGBT policy positions important to the public policy literature surrounding LGBT rights.

4. Identity-Based Complexities within LGBT Attitude Change

It is this interaction between multiple individual factors where a complete understanding of public opinion surrounding LGBT rights issues can be reached. Specifically, it is not simply the means or frames through which individuals receive information surrounding LGBT issues that affect their level of support for LGBT-specific policies, but also how they *process* this information via the various and particular social identities they hold. As previously stated, younger populations and those who have achieved higher levels of education tend to support pro-LGBT issues at higher levels, but other research indicates that females, whites, and the more politically and religiously liberal also show higher support (Burdette et al., 2005; Lewis, 2003; Loftus, 2001; Sherkat et al., 2010). Conversely, change in LGBT opinion has been less concentrated among political conservatives, Republicans, and those who hold evangelical or born-again Christian identities (Baunach, 2012; Burack, 2008).

Today, survey results reflect these differences across identity groups, where the expected divisions are found across a variety of LGBT issues. For example, a 2019 Gallup poll found that 97 percent of Americans surveyed supported equal rights for job opportunities for LGBT individuals, while 92 percent of those aged 35 to 54 and 91 percent of those 55 and older did so (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019). Similarly, 96 percent of college graduates supported this measure, while 90 percent of those with a high school diploma or less did so. Ninety percent of males (compared to 96 percent of females) supported the policy, and only 85 percent of Republicans (compared to 97 percent of Democrats) did the same. This trend is further replicated across the ideological spectrum, with 88 percent of conservatives (versus 95 percent of liberals) showing support for LGBT employment anti-discrimination (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019).

When analyzing perceptions of same-sex *relationships*, the distinction among these particular identity groups becomes even more well-defined. For example, 90 percent of those aged 18 to 34 believed in 2019 that intimate same-sex relations should be legal, while only 82 percent of both those aged between 35 and 54 and those over 55 did so (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019). Further, those with college degrees showed an overwhelming 91 percentage of support for this specific issue, while only 77 percent of those with high school diplomas or less supported it. There was an 85-percent-level of support among females, compared to 82 percent of males, as well as 86-percent-support among whites over 81 percent of non-whites. Lastly, both Democrats (showing 91 percent support) and liberals (88 percent support) showed higher support than Republicans (70 percent) and conservatives (74 percent) (*Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 2019). Because of these differences in support across identity groups, further theories surrounding the connection between group identification and LGBT policy support are required to create an all-inclusive understanding of the overall process of LGBT attitude formation.

5. Purpose of Research

As the above discussion emphasizes, to fully understand the formation of (and potential *change* in) LGBT policy perceptions, research in this area needs to further explore the relationship between – and potential interaction of –contact with LGBT-identifying individuals and one’s various social identity-based characteristics. In the chapters that follow, this relationship will be analyzed both in the U.S. and state-specific context, using Arkansas as a central case study, which will then be compared to the overall trends in LGBT public opinion that have been described. Given the current state of the LGBT policy literature, the following relationships will be specifically examined:

- **Chapter II** will address the overarching questions of whether and in what ways contact with LGBT individuals can influence Americans’ views of major LGBT policies, emphasizing contact’s potential relationship with individuals’ political ideologies in determining their level of support or opposition.
- **Chapter III** will further analyze this relationship, though it will do so within a smaller state context. Using Arkansas as a case study, the potential interaction between one’s LGBT contact experiences and their opinion of morality-based LGBT issues will be explored.
- **Chapter IV** will then continue exploring the role of LGBT contact within the Arkansas context, specifically attempting to understand the extent to which contact with LGBT individuals might interact, and potentially challenge, one’s evangelical beliefs – beliefs which are held by a large proportion of the state’s residents.

- And, finally, **Chapter V** will synthesize the findings across all three of the above studies and emphasize the contributions they make to the field of LGBT politics, policy, and public policy more generally. The chapter will conclude with the research questions that remain, as well as the areas for potential future research that can attempt to address them.

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Chapter II

Ideological Orientations, LGBT Contact, and Formation of LGBT Policy Positions

Abstract

LGBT rights in the United States have increasingly become a part of public discourse, with issues relating to policies on employment discrimination, adoption, and marriage emphasized often. The disparate views relating to these issues have often created an intense and contentious environment around the debate regarding LGBT rights. It has been proposed that contact with LGBT individuals shifts perspectives toward policies that provide equal protection for members of the LGBT community. However, empirical results have been mixed. In this study, we suggest these findings are due to a combination of different ideological perspectives shaping reactions to contact, as well as distinctive types of LGBT-oriented policies having a dissimilar valence to individuals, thus providing for inconsistent effects of contact on policy positions. We examine this hypothesis utilizing a recent national survey of 1,500 American adults, with the subsequent analyses indicating that, as expected, both ideology and the specific policy influence the effects of contact with LGBT individuals on policy support. Implications for LGBT rights-oriented policies are discussed.

1. Introduction

Recently there has been a significant increase in the attempted passage of LGBT-oriented legislation across various levels of government in the United States, much of which has resulted from either state-level responses to local ordinances (such as in Fayetteville, Arkansas and Salt Lake City, Utah) or local governments' reactions to state-proposed bills (e.g., in the case of Atlanta, Georgia). This surge in legislation, in conjunction with federal rulings such as the

Supreme Court legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, illustrates the need to better understand the dynamic nature of public opinion on related issues, particularly regarding LGBT-oriented policies. Previous literature indicates that ideological orientation constitutes a foundational building block in the formation of individuals' policy positions, while inter-group contact plays an influential role in changing majority individuals' perceptions of both minority individuals and their respective communities (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Zaller, 1992).

Consequently, this study seeks to examine how political ideology and LGBT contact influence an individual's level of LGBT policy support. In the sections that follow, we first provide a theoretical discussion of relevant literature, focusing specifically on ideological predisposition, the contact theory, and the importance of ideology at varying levels of contact in the formation of LGBT policy preferences. We then move to a discussion of the study's methodology and empirical findings, concluding with a discussion on the implications of these findings vis-à-vis the broader LGBT policy literature as well as possible directions for future research.

2. Political Ideology and Policy Preference Formation

For analytical purposes, the concept of "political ideology" specifically indicates an individual's place along the conservative-liberal continuum, which is also understood as the range between political liberalism and conservatism (e.g., Burnett & King, 2015; Dyck & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2014; Jost et al., 2009; Ripberger et al. 2012). There exists a debate among political scientists regarding whether political ideology or party affiliation is the most accurate predictor of policy preference, with one's self-described party affiliation within the two-party U.S. political system being found to have effects on both an individual's LGBT contact

experiences and their³ LGBT policy positions (e.g., Dyck & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2014). However, party affiliation has often been unable to capture ideological predisposition in its entirety (e.g., see Twenge et al., 2016). Specifically, some have argued that individuals learn how to use the left-to-right ideological continuum to adopt positions consistent with where they place themselves on that continuum (i.e., Zaller, 1992), which thereby lessens their responsibility to evaluate the plethora of social, economic, and other issues when determining their political and policy stances (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1991). Using this understanding of ideology formation, multiple studies have found that individuals who identify as “liberal” tend to adopt issue and policy positions that are traditionally recognized as left-of-center, while those who identify as “conservative” adopt those that are right-of-center (e.g., Federico & Schneider, 2007; Jacoby, 1991; Jost et al., 2009; Zaller, 1992).

Despite this theoretical connection, however, empirical research has shown that most individuals are unable to utilize their ideology along this continuum to actually form their policy positions (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Instead, other factors have been argued to be necessary to *bridge* the connection between an individual’s ideology and her policy positions, including the individual’s political knowledge and expertise (Jost et al., 2009; Zaller, 1992), cultural predispositions (Song, 2014; Song et al., 2014), affective emotions (Moyer and Song, 2016), and overall motivation (Federico, 2007), as well as the general effects of factors such as trust (Tumilson et al., 2017) and exposure to policy narratives (Jones and Song, 2014; Jorgensen et al., 2018). As a result, the effect of individuals’ political ideology on their policy preference formation, as well as the means by which this effect can be potentially realized, is still being explored. The following sections describe in detail the relationship between LGBT contact and

³ The generic, third-person singular “they/them/their” pronouns will be used throughout this text, as the gender of the generic individual is irrelevant.

one's related policy positions, as well as the potential role of contact as a "bridge" for political ideology in the context of LGBT policy preference formation.

3. The Contact Theory of Attitude Change

The Contact Theory (CT) posits that majority (or "in-group") prejudice toward a particular minority (or "out-group") is reduced through individual contact experiences between group members – contact which thereby improves inter-group relations and reduces inter-group conflict (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). This lessening of prejudiced views has been argued to largely result from the ability of personal contact to reduce feelings of uncertainty and anxiety toward minority out-groups (Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). The CT has been utilized to examine discrimination against LGBT individuals in particular, with multiple studies finding that heterosexual men and women who report knowing someone who identifies as either gay or lesbian express more positive attitudes towards the general LGBT community (Sakalsh & Ugurlu, 2001).

This contact has also been found to foster support for the overarching LGBT community, even when controlling for other potential explanatory variables such as demographic characteristics, political views, and religiosity (Lewis, 2011). Further, the particular creation of *friendship*, defined as frequent and intimate contact between heterosexual and LGBT individuals, has been shown to create an opportunity for empathy and identification with these out-group individuals and, as a result, decrease negative opinions toward the LGBT community (Becker & Scheufele, 2011; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993).

4. The Importance of Quality Contact

This previously discussed concept of friendship is part of a larger discussion on the importance of *close* contact for the reduction of prejudice toward a given out-group. Numerous studies argue that the quality of in-and-out-group contact has a greater impact on inter-group attitudes and anxieties toward out-groups than the mere quantity, or number, of their interactions (Brown et al., 2001; Ellison et al., 2011; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Stephan, et al., 2000). Regarding LGBT perceptions specifically, some research has found significantly more favorable attitudes and increased trust toward the LGBT community for heterosexuals who have a close gay friend than those with more distanced relationships, such as with coworkers or extended family members (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Lewis, 2011; Tausch et al., 2011). Grounded in such findings, this study seeks to further develop the understanding of how close contact with LGBT individuals (e.g., friendship in lieu of acquaintanceship) influences heterosexuals' perceptions of the LGBT community and their actual positions regarding LGBT-oriented policies.

5. Refined Understanding of LGBT-Oriented Policy Preference Formation

While contact, and quality contact more specifically, has been shown to reduce prejudice toward minority out-group individuals, there is less evidence for the translation of these attitudes into actual policy preferences. Some studies have found that those who personally know LGBT individuals are more likely to favor nondiscriminatory policies and oppose discriminatory actions (e.g., Lewis, 2011; Yen & Zampelli, 2016). Others have found possible *moderating* factors for the relationship between heterosexual contact with LGBT individuals and preferences toward LGBT policies, specifically regarding the influence of political elites and their messages on individual policy positions (e.g., Dyck & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2014; Sniderman, et al., 1991).

However, these findings still reveal a disconnect between heterosexuals' attitudes toward LGBT individuals and their resulting views toward LGBT-oriented policies – a discrepancy that can perhaps be understood as a result of their political and religious ideological predispositions that are not necessarily altered by LGBT contact experiences (Burnett & King, 2015; Bramlett, 2012; Skipworth et al., 2010). This gap in the CT literature is therefore necessary to address in order to more fully understand the dynamic nature of individuals' LGBT-oriented policy preference formation, particularly regarding how individuals' ideological orientation can influence their interpretative cognition of contact experiences to shape their attitudes toward LGBT-oriented policy.

Furthermore, previous research on LGBT policy positions has rarely concentrated on a single LGBT policy. Instead, LGBT-specific policies are often lumped together under the umbrella term of “LGBT” or “gay-related” policy regardless of their potential distinctions (see Barth & Parry, 2009; Taylor et al., 2012; Karch, 2007 for exceptions). To address this, this study attempts to examine how an individual's left-right political ideology and LGBT contact experiences collectively influence their preferences toward LGBT issues represented by three individual policy topics: LGBT employment anti-discrimination, same-sex marriage, and adoption.

Specifically, in the data analysis that follows, we expect to find the following conceptual relationships between political ideology, LGBT contact experiences, and LGBT policy support among members of the American public:

H_{1a}: Individuals' ideological orientation will have a positive influence on their LGBT-oriented policy support such that, when they are more liberal, their support for each of the three individual LGBT policies will be stronger.

Further, in examining whether individuals' LGBT contact experiences sustain a direct relationship with their support for these LGBT policies, we expect that:

H_{1b}: Individuals' LGBT contact experiences will have a positive effect on their LGBT-oriented policy support such that those with LGBT friends and/or acquaintances will demonstrate stronger support for each of the three LGBT-oriented policies than those without these types of contact experiences.

Finally, in analyzing whether and to what extent individuals' LGBT contact experiences – both close (through LGBT friendships) and more distanced (through LGBT acquaintanceships) – influence the effect of their ideological orientation on LGBT policy support (as discussed in *H_{1a}*), we expect that:

H_{2a}: Individuals with close LGBT friends will show stronger support for each of the three LGBT policies than those without close LGBT friends *regardless* of their individual ideological orientation, and

H_{2b}: Respondents with LGBT acquaintances will show stronger support for each of the three LGBT policies than those without LGBT acquaintances *regardless* of their individual ideological orientation.

Each of these hypotheses are addressed in full in the following analysis to determine the exact relationship between ideology and LGBT contact, as well as the extent of their combined effects on LGBT policy position formation.

6. Data, Variables, and Measures

6.1 Survey Data

This study utilizes responses from a 2009 nationwide internet survey of 1,500 American adults conducted by *Polimetrix* and designed to assess public attitudes regarding multiple topics, including opinions of LGBT individuals and LGBT-oriented policies. Participation in the survey was both voluntary and anonymous, with respondents being mostly female (~56 percent) and non-Hispanic white (~76 percent). Approximately 40 percent of respondents had completed at least a four-year college degree, and the median annual household income was in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 range.

6.2 Variables and Measures

The primary dependent variables in this study are used to assess the level of support for three distinct LGBT oriented policies – employment anti-discrimination, same-sex marriage, and same-sex child adoption (Table 2.1). Responses to each individual policy are measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (=Strong disagreement) to 6 (=Strong agreement). These policies were specifically selected to represent varying levels of morality policy issues, or those that can be classified through assessment of individuals’ deeply held, morally-based beliefs and attitudes (Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996). Including these three LGBT-oriented policies thereby allows us to analyze not only how individuals with differing ideological viewpoints process contact with LGBT persons, but also how this processing may vary depending on the perceived moral dimensions of the specific policy in question.

Table 2.1. Dependent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Support of LGBT employment policy	There should be laws to protect gays and lesbians from employment discrimination. (1(=Strongly disagree) to 6(=Strongly agree))
Support of LGBT marriage policy	The law should allow gay marriage. (1(=Strongly disagree) to 6(=Strongly agree))
Support of LGBT adoption policy	Gays and lesbians should be allowed to legally adopt. (1(=Strongly disagree) to 6(=Strongly agree))

Serving as one primary independent variable, respondent political ideology was measured using an index of seven survey items designed to gauge the levels of (dis)agreement for various government policies, including gun control, marijuana possession, legal prostitution, universal healthcare, income tax increases for high earners, affirmative action, and carbon emission standards (Table 2.2). We utilized the same 6-point Likert-type scale discussed previously, with responses ranging from 1 (=Strong disagreement) to 6 (=Strong agreement). The scores for the seven items were averaged to attain an ideology index, with lower scores representing more conservative orientations and higher scores reflecting those more liberal. The Cronbach's alpha score (=0.81) for the seven items indicated a high degree of reliability.

Table 2.2. Primary independent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Political Ideology	Stricter gun control laws in the United States. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Making it legal for adults to possess small amounts of marijuana. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Making prostitution legal for adults. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Universal healthcare. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Raising income taxes for persons in the highest-income tax bracket. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Affirmative action for minorities. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
	Stricter carbon emission standards to reduce global warming. (1(=Strongly oppose) to 6(=Strongly favor))
Having LGBT Friends	Are any of your close friends gay or lesbian? (1(=0) to 4(=11 or more)) (recoded to 0=No; 1=Yes)
Having LGBT Acquaintances	Other than your close friends and family, about how many gay people do you know personally (well enough that you know each others' names)? (1(=0) to 4(=11 or more)) (recoded to 0=No; 1=Yes)

As for the other independent variables of primary concern, we assessed individuals' LGBT contact experiences using two separate measures, each of which was dichotomized into "Yes" (coded 1) or "No" (coded 0) responses⁴. The first measure indicated whether the respondent had close friends who self-identified as gay or lesbian, while the second indicated whether the respondent simply knew any gay or lesbian-identifying individuals outside of their

⁴ The original survey responses were coded based on the number of LGBT relationships for each category, with response options of 0, 1-5, 6-10, and 11 or more. As the current study is focused on the existence of various types of contact and not their volume, the Yes/No contact dichotomy gives a more accurate representation of the experiences of individuals that are under examination in this study. Further, the original scale potentially creates issues of endogeneity as the response options (e.g., "11+" vs "0") may represent very different communities of individuals as related to LGBT exposure. Further discussion of the endogeneity issue is presented in this study's conclusion section.

close friend group (e.g., coworkers, friends of friends, or other more distanced relationships). These questions respectively represent whether individual respondents had close and/or more distanced, surface-level LGBT contact experiences.

We further included standard demographic control variables in our analysis (Table 2.3), including race (1=non-Hispanic white; 0=Other), gender (1=Male; 0=Female), age (in years), education (5-point scale from 1(=No high school) to 5(=Postgraduate)), and income (14-point scale anchored at 1(= Less than \$10,000) and 14(=Over \$150,000)). We also included a control measure of religiosity, operationalized as the frequency of church attendance using a 4-point scale, ranging from 1(=Once a week or more) to 4(=Almost never or never). Controlling for the effect of religiosity is particularly important for the purpose of this analysis, as it allows the ability to detangle the potential interrelation of ideological predisposition and religiously based perspectives on an individual's policy positions (e.g., Barth & Parry, 2009; Bramlett, 2012; Poteat & Mereish, 2012).

Table 2.3. Control variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Race	1=non-Hispanic white; 0=Other
Gender	1=Male; 0=Female
Age	Age in years
Education	1(=No high school) to 5(=Postgraduate)
Income	1(=Less than \$10,000) to 14(=Over \$150,000)
Religiosity	1(=Once a week or more) to 4(=Almost never or never)

7. Statistical Analysis and Results

To examine hypotheses regarding the relationships between political ideology, LGBT contact experiences, and LGBT policy positions, we conducted two stages of analysis. As the

objective of this research was to examine how LGBT contact – and specifically the intensity of contact – constrains the effects of ideology on LGBT policy positions, we focused first on confirming the direct effects of individuals’ ideology and LGBT contact experiences on their LGBT policy positions. We then further examined the effects of individuals’ ideological orientations on their attitudes toward three LGBT policies at four different LGBT contact conditions wherein individuals have (a) neither close LGBT friends nor acquaintances, (b) no close LGBT friends but LGBT acquaintances, (c) close LGBT friends but no LGBT acquaintances, and (d) both close LGBT friends and acquaintances.

7.1 *Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis*

For the first stage of analysis (see Table 2.4), we utilized ordinary least square (OLS) linear regression⁵ to examine the direct effects of respondents’ left-right political ideology and LGBT contact experiences on their support for each policy issue⁶. For these variables of interest, a liberal ideology was associated with an increase in support for each of the three LGBT policies (employment: $\beta=0.530$, $p<0.01$; marriage: $\beta=0.858$, $p<0.01$; adoption: $\beta=0.721$, $p<0.01$), indicating that as a respondent’s ideological predisposition becomes more liberal (i.e., increases on the ideology scale), their support for each individual LGBT policy also increases. Similarly, the analysis of LGBT contact indicated a positive effect, where having one or more close LGBT-

⁵ Based on the operationalization of the study’s dependent variables, one could argue that an ordered logit analysis would be the more generally acceptable method. However, we chose to use OLS regression to maintain consistency with the second stage of data analysis, as well as for the ease of result interpretation. To examine the acceptability of this analysis, we also ran an ordered logit model analysis, which produced similar results to those presented here.

⁶ Before conducting the analysis for the focus of this study, we also ran a regression with an index consisting of the average scores for each the three policies as the primary dependent variable. Results indicated no significant relationships with the independent variables of interest and LGBT policy support. This finding validates our assumption that support for LGBT oriented policies is inconsistent and has a basis beyond general attitudes toward LGBT individuals and the LGBT community.

identifying friends also increased support for each of the three policies (employment: $\beta=0.433$, $p<0.01$; marriage: $\beta=0.451$, $p<0.01$; adoption: $\beta=0.722$, $p<0.01$).

Additionally, several of the control variables exhibited significant relationships with multiple LGBT policies. For example, gender was found to be negatively associated with all three policies, demonstrating that females, as compared to males, are more supportive of LGBT equality-oriented policies. Similarly, religiosity was negatively associated with all three policies, indicating that as religiosity scores increase, support for LGBT policies decrease.

Table 2.4. Regression results across LGBT-oriented policies

	Employment Policy (1)	Marriage Policy (2)	Adoption Policy (3)
Ideology	0.530*** (0.033)	0.858*** (0.035)	0.721*** (0.034)
LGBT Friendship	0.433*** (0.082)	0.451*** (0.089)	0.722*** (0.086)
LGBT Acquaintanceship	0.206** (0.097)	-0.010 (0.105)	0.068 (0.102)
Age	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.021*** (0.003)	-0.016* (0.003)
Education	0.039 (0.029)	0.076** (0.032)	0.078*** (0.030)
Income	0.031*** (0.011)	0.029** (0.012)	0.051*** (0.011)
Gender	-0.239*** (0.080)	-0.368*** (0.086)	-0.420*** (0.084)
Race	-0.050 (0.094)	0.297*** (0.102)	0.384*** (0.099)
Religiosity	-0.168*** (0.032)	-0.375*** (0.034)	-0.317*** (0.034)
(Intercept)	2.568*** (0.263)	1.148*** (0.284)	1.446*** (0.276)
<i>n</i>	1,429	1,422	1,417
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.276	0.477	0.436
<i>F</i> Statistic	61.5***	145***	122.4***

7.2 *Conditional Process Analyses*

For the second stage of analysis, we examined whether individuals' LGBT contact experiences influence the effect their ideology has on policy positions concerning each of the three LGBT issues. We utilized Conditional Process Analysis⁷ (CPA) suggested by Hayes (2013), which is based on OLS regression and used to estimate the direct and indirect means by which a variable can transmit its effects, as well as whether and how the *size* of those effects depends on the value(s) of one or more moderating variables (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Specifically, we tested the relationships between left-right political ideology, LGBT contact, and policy positions using "Process Model 3", wherein 5,000 random samples were generated from the data to determine confidence intervals at a 95-percent threshold to examine the effects of political ideology on LGBT policy perceptions at various levels of LGBT contact quality.

For each of the three LGBT policies, the estimated effect of ideology on respondent policy position was calculated at each contact condition (i.e., where the respondent had no LGBT contact, contact with only LGBT acquaintances, only LGBT friends, or with both LGBT friends and acquaintances). Illustrated by Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, policy support scores were estimated for individuals who were conservative, moderate, and liberal at each of these four conditions. In this analysis, a "moderate" represented an individual at the mean ideology score, a "conservative" an individual at one standard deviation below the mean, and a "liberal" an individual at one standard deviation above the mean, respectively.

⁷ This analysis was conducted in R using the "allstatGUI" package.

7.2.1 LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination

When examining the effects of ideology on positions toward LGBT employment anti-discrimination at various levels of LGBT contact quality, results indicated that ideology has a statistically significant effect on individuals' policy positions for all contact conditions except for those who have LGBT friends but not LGBT acquaintances (see Figure 2.1 and Table 2.5). For all significant conditions, the effect of ideology on employment policy positions was positive, such that as ideology scores increased (i.e., became more liberal), support for LGBT employment policies also increased.

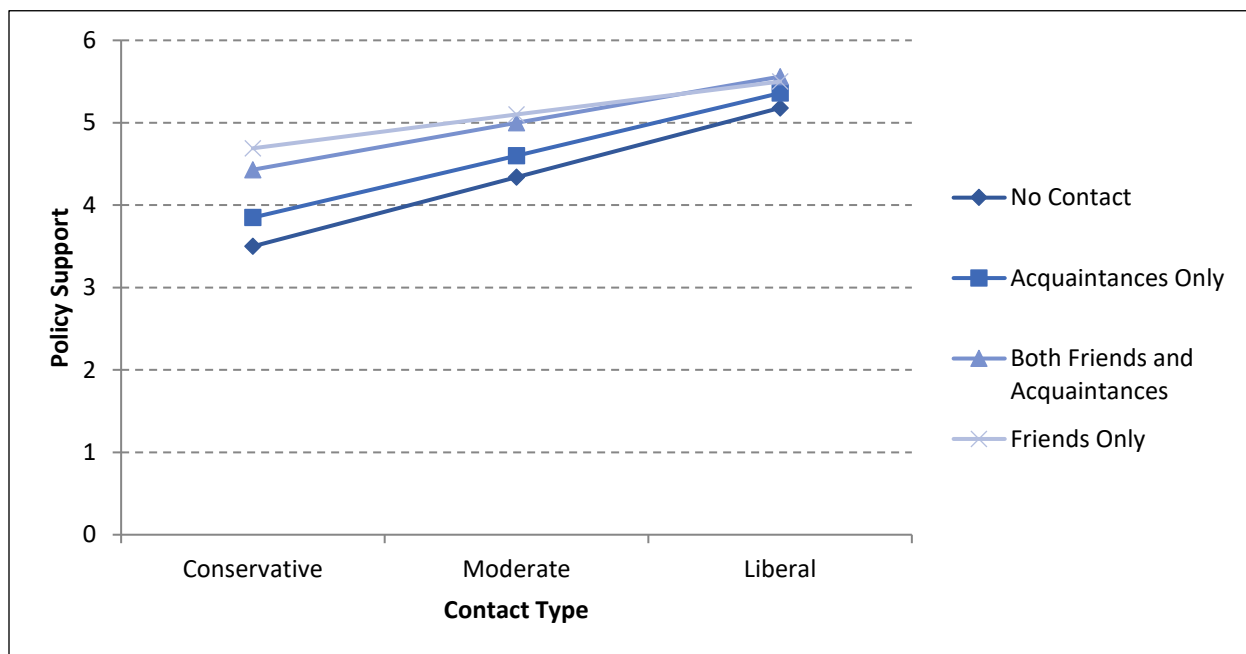


Figure 2.1. Effects of ideology and LGBT contact on employment policy support

Note: Predicted scores were calculated with all control variables held constant at their mean. Ideology was calculated as the mean score (“Moderate”) and +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean (“Liberal” and “Conservative”, respectively), allowing the predicted policy support score for each of the four contact conditions across each ideology level.

Table 2.5. Conditional effect of ideology on employment policy positions

LGBT Friends	LGBT Acquaintances	Effect	Standard Error	<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value	95% Confidence Interval	
No	No	0.610	0.075	8.189	0.000	0.464	0.756
No	Yes	0.637	0.054	11.739	0.000	0.531	0.744
Yes	No	0.267	0.151	1.761	0.078	-0.030	0.563
Yes	Yes	0.455	0.044	10.237	0.000	0.368	0.542

There was a greater effect of having LGBT contact experiences (particularly LGBT friendships) for conservatives as compared to those who identified as more liberal. However, this appears to be due to the already high(er) levels of support for employment policy by liberal individuals, which is indicated by the higher levels of support for employment policies by more liberal individuals who had no LGBT friendships compared to those who were more conservative and did. Having only LGBT acquaintances exhibited a relatively small increase in policy support for both liberals and conservatives, as compared to having no LGBT contact whatsoever.

7.2.2 Same-Sex Marriage

In the analysis of same-sex marriage policy positions (see Figure 2.2 and Table 2.6), ideology had a significant positive effect on policy support across all LGBT contact conditions, such that as ideology scores increased (i.e., became more liberal), same-sex marriage policy support also increased. However, the *size* of the effect was different across the various contact conditions, with the smallest effect occurring for individuals with LGBT friends but not acquaintances, and the largest effect occurring for those with both LGBT friends *and* acquaintances.

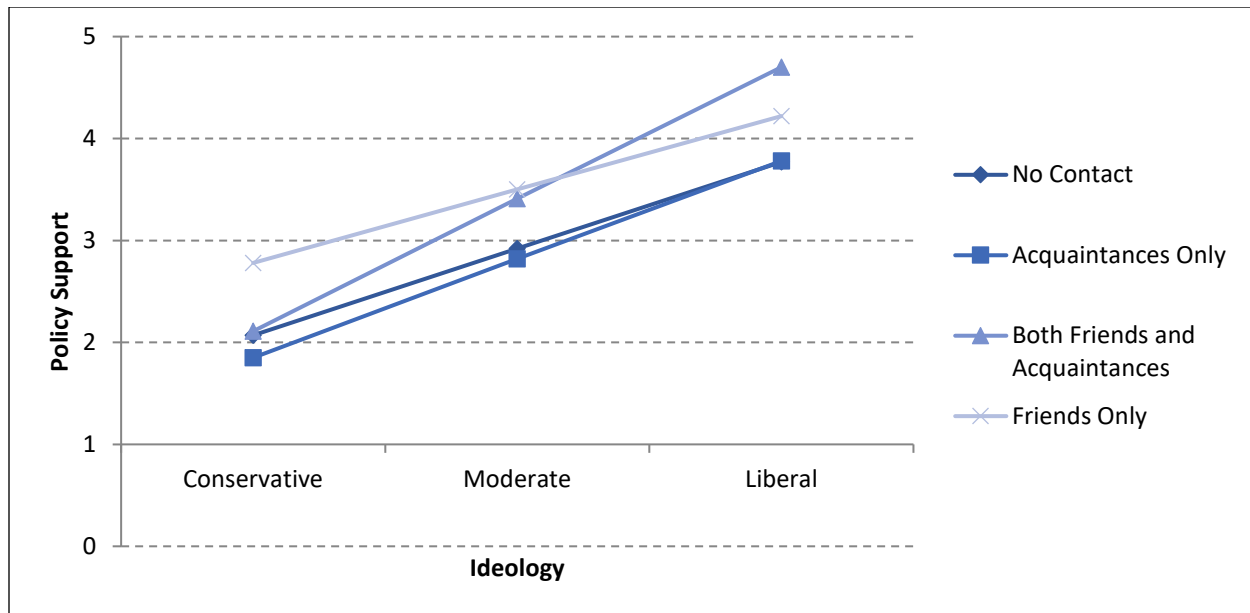


Figure 2.2. Effects of ideology and LGBT contact on marriage policy support

Table 2.6. Conditional effect of ideology on marriage policy positions

LGBT Friends	LGBT Acquaintances	Effect	Standard Error	<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value	95% Confidence	
No	No	0.650	0.080	8.105	0.000	0.492	0.807
No	Yes	0.778	0.059	13.299	0.000	0.663	0.893
Yes	No	0.523	0.163	3.212	0.001	0.203	0.842
Yes	Yes	1.007	0.048	21.041	0.000	0.913	1.101

For conservatives, the predicted score for marriage policy support was similar in all contact conditions except for those with LGBT friends but not acquaintances, who exhibited increased predicted support for the policy as compared to the other three contact conditions⁸. Thus, for conservatives, having LGBT acquaintances in addition to LGBT friends appears to *nullify* the increased policy support that would derive from LGBT friendship alone. Conversely, an additive effect was exhibited for liberals, wherein predicted support for same-sex marriage increased for those with LGBT friends, and then *further* increased for those with both LGBT

⁸ It should be noted that the increased score does not necessarily indicate support for marriage policies, but rather *less opposition* to LGBT-oriented marriage policies.

friends and acquaintances. Finally, as with employment policy, there was no significant increase in policy support among liberals or conservatives with only LGBT acquaintances from those who had no LGBT contact whatsoever.

7.2.3 Same-Sex Adoption

When examining the same-sex adoption policy (see Figure 2.3 and Table 2.7), results were similar to those of the same-sex marriage policy. Ideology exhibited a significant positive effect on policy positions across all four LGBT contact conditions, such that as ideology scores increased (i.e., became more liberal), same-sex adoption support did so as well. Further, this effect was also smallest for those with LGBT friends but not acquaintances, showing further indication of a decreased effect of ideology on same-sex adoption for those with close LGBT contact.

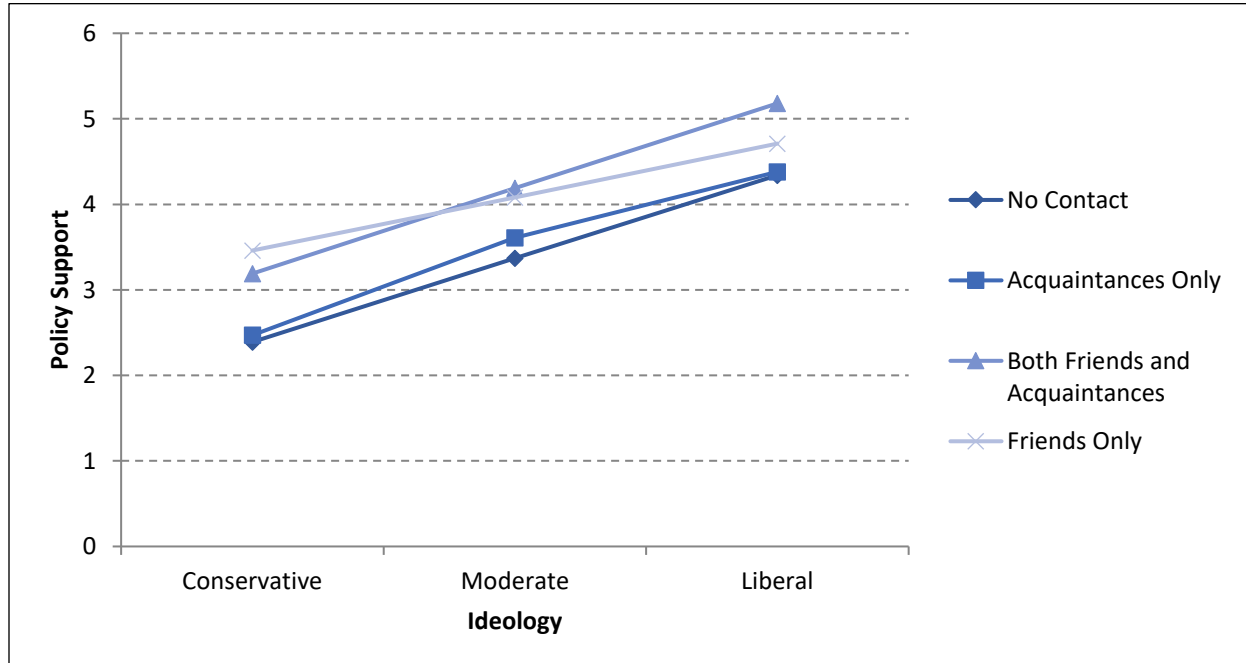


Figure 2.3. Effects of ideology and LGBT contact on adoption policy support

Table 2.7. Conditional effect of ideology on adoption policy positions

LGBT Friends	LGBT Acquaintances	Effect	Standard Error	<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value	95% Confidence	
No	No	0.659	0.079	8.378	0.000	0.505	0.813
No	Yes	0.721	0.057	12.614	0.000	0.608	0.833
Yes	No	0.407	0.159	2.556	0.011	0.095	0.719
Yes	Yes	0.767	0.047	16.363	0.000	0.675	0.859

For conservatives in particular, predicted scores for policy support were highest in the LGBT friend condition, with support again lower for those with both LGBT friends and acquaintances. For liberals, the reverse was true – those with LGBT friends and acquaintances actually held *increased* support for same-sex adoption policies as compared to those with only LGBT friends. Lastly, consistent with the analysis of both LGBT employment anti-discrimination and same-sex marriage, the move from having no LGBT contact to having only LGBT acquaintances resulted in no significant increase in adoption policy support for liberals or conservatives.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the current study generally support the CT in terms of the effects of contact with LGBT individuals on one's LGBT policy perspectives. However, this support comes with important caveats. First, the results indicate that contact has different effects on policy positions across ideological orientations. Second, different configurations of contact (i.e., close contact, more distanced contact, and both close and distanced contact) demonstrate distinct effects on policy preference formation. For the three types of LGBT-oriented policies analyzed, we discovered three unique relationships.

For LGBT employment anti-discrimination policy, we found support for the CT for those who identified as more conservative and had LGBT-identifying friends regardless of whether they also had LGBT acquaintances. However, this result did not hold true for those who identified as more liberal. From this analysis, it appears that this difference is largely due to the already high levels of support for LGBT employment anti-discrimination among more liberal individuals.

For same-sex marriage policy, both close and more distanced contacts (i.e., friends and acquaintances, respectively) appear to influence individuals' policy positions. For both liberal and conservative individuals, having LGBT friends was shown to increase support for the policy. For individuals with LGBT acquaintances only, however, we found differing effects for liberals and conservatives. Conservatives with LGBT acquaintances exhibited slightly lower support for same-sex marriage policy, while liberals with LGBT acquaintances showed no change. More distinct differences occurred between liberals and conservatives with both LGBT friends and acquaintances, with this contact condition increasing support amongst liberals but providing no increase in support for conservatives – and, in fact, *nullifying* the positive effects of LGBT friendship.

Lastly, for same-sex adoption, having LGBT friends was shown to increase support for both liberals and conservatives. However, similar to the findings surrounding same-sex marriage, there were different contact effects of joint LGBT friendship and acquaintanceship on same-sex adoption policy positions depending on the ideological orientation being analyzed. Conservatives with such contact experiences exhibited lower predicted policy support compared to conservatives with only LGBT friends, while liberals of the former contact experience group exhibited higher support than those of the latter group.

These results therefore appear to reveal an underlying distinction between how ideologically liberal and conservative individuals process contact with LGBT persons who are not close friends. Specifically, those who identify as conservative and who merely know an LGBT-identifying individual could be less likely than those who identify as liberal to *further* interact with that individual and develop a friendship, or closer form of contact (Ellison et al., 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). As a result, low-quality contact with an LGBT person could have a limited effect on conservatives' overall attitudes toward the LGBT community unless it creates a close bond (Skipworth et al., 2010).

Further, some have found that even those conservatives who do interact with LGBT individuals often *individuate* these contact experiences, viewing the LGBT persons as exceptions to their views of the overall LGBT community (Lewis, 2011; Skipworth et al., 2010). Through this individuation, their opinions of this community – as well as the policies oriented toward it – can go largely unchanged. This study's results indicate, however, that this individuation may not occur consistently. Instead, it appears that when those who identify as relatively conservative have LGBT friends, they may be more likely to interpret these LGBT individuals as representative of the overall LGBT community. However, when conservative individuals have both LGBT friends *and* acquaintances, they may view these friends as exceptions to how they view the overall LGBT community, whereas the acquaintances – or those they keep at arm's length – may be seen as a more accurate representation.

Finally, as previously mentioned, others have found that issues rooted in moral value predispositions tend to exhibit high stability for policy preferences (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). In the current context, both same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption may be seen as moral issues for conservatives, particularly as compared with LGBT employment anti-discrimination, which

could contribute to the distinct reactions we found between their contact with LGBT individuals and their level of policy support. Indeed, based on this study's findings, there does appear to be a different attitudinal valence toward the scope of the policies, potentially due to the policy topics tapping into different values held by the individual.

Regarding implications for the CT, we found mixed support for our second set of hypotheses, demonstrating that the ideological views of the receiver of contact determine whether the CT is supported. More specifically, the ideological views of the contact receiver, in conjunction with the type and combination of contact experienced, determine whether minority-group contact truly improves an individual's views of that group and the policies that effect it. Further, the effects of ideology vary across policy type, which in this case is LGBT equality in three different domains: employment, marriage, and adoption.

Each of these findings is significant in terms of our understanding of the CT. When it comes to the formation of policy preferences, it is not simply contact, ideology, or the combination of the two that is influential. Instead, there appears to be a distinction in attitudinal valence toward what a specific policy *represents*, and thus the support for LGBT equality in that area. We have suggested that, among the three policy areas in this study, this distinction may be a result of perceived morality – such that LGBT contact can positively influence policy support so long as policy acceptance is not perceived to impinge upon the moral values of the individual (e.g., see Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996). Future research should further investigate this factor as a potential explanation for the different effects that LGBT contact can exhibit over LGBT policy preferences.

While the current research provides some interesting and novel findings, it is not without its limitations. Importantly, there may be issues of endogeneity, as whether an individual had

contact with an LGBT individual was out of our control. Thus, it may be that the ideological differences of respondents *caused* them to either seek or avoid contact with LGBT individuals. However, this inability to determine the sequence of events that lead to contact is inherent to contact itself, where the decision-making that leads one to interact with others are largely psychological in nature and, as a result, outside of the scope of this study.

Regardless of how contact was formed, to avoid the issue of endogeneity in the future, it would be beneficial for researchers to utilize a more controlled environment or a longitudinal study that could track changes in LGBT contact over time. Despite this potential limitation, however, there is still strong evidence based on the current analysis that LGBT policy support is not simply centered around contact and acceptance of LGBT individuals but is at least partially derived from the interaction between ideological persuasions, the type and quality of contact that occurs, and the specific purpose of the policy in question.

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Chapter III

Are All States Equal? Analyzing the Role of LGBT Contact on LGBT Policy Preference

Formation in a State-Specific Context

Abstract

While there exists previous research into the effect of contact with LGBT-identifying individuals on how Americans' formulate their positions on LGBT-oriented policies, there is much less information surrounding whether these findings can be replicated at the state level. This study utilizes a statewide Arkansas public opinion survey ($n=801$) to determine whether and in what ways Arkansans' contact experiences with LGBT persons – in relation to their specific ideological orientations – alter their level of support across four distinct LGBT policies. Our findings indicate that Arkansans process LGBT contact in a way consistent with previous findings at the U.S. national level, where close LGBT friendships and family relationships can improve Arkansans' support for certain LGBT policies, although this support is not equal across levels of LGBT contact or the specific LGBT policy in question.

1. Introduction

When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision in 2015, bans on same-sex marriages were still in effect in a quarter of the American states. Among these was Arkansas, which has had a tumultuous relationship with LGBT⁹-based legislation in many

⁹ Please note that, although the contact experiences utilized in this study are solely between heterosexual and gay and lesbian individuals, we utilize the label “LGBT”—indicating lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons—in congruence with its use in local, state, and national policy rhetoric. We do acknowledge, however, that contact with other LGBT groups (specifically the transgender and gender non-conforming communities) can affect individuals' LGBT policy positions differently.

forms. For example, its General Assembly passed a statewide ban on same-sex marriage in 1997 that also further delegitimized those marriages performed out-of-state (Act 144 of 1997). Once the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, the Arkansas state legislature responded with the introduction of a same-sex marriage ban to be added to the U.S. Constitution (Senate Joint Resolution S2.9.17). Eventually this ban was passed by the Arkansas Senate but later failed in its House (H3.29.17). A bill to *reenact* the statewide ban was introduced by Representative Stephen Meeks one month later, though it was withdrawn within eight days.

Additional legislation in the state has focused on limiting LGBT rights in other areas. Regarding same-sex adoption, Act 1, which made it officially illegal for unmarried couples to either foster or adopt minors, was approved by Arkansas voters in November of 2008 (Arkansas Proposed Initiative Act No. 1). This decision was later struck down in April 2011 by the state's high court as a violation of an individual's right to privacy, thereby making it legal for individuals to adopt and foster minors regardless of their marital status (*Arkansas Department of Human Services v. Cole*, 2011). Once same-sex marriage was legalized four years later, same-sex adoption in and of itself became legally feasible, but related conflicts continued to emerge, including those surrounding the inclusion of same-sex partners on the birth certificates of their children (Liptak, 2017). Further, the Arkansas state legislature has continually attempted to block its lower assemblies from securing anti-discrimination measures for LGBT individuals. After the 2015 Court ruling, the Arkansas Supreme Court enacted a law making it illegal for state counties or municipalities to adopt any provision that would "create a protected classification or prohibit discrimination on a basis not contained in state law" (Intrastate Commerce Improvement Act, 2015). This rejection of LGBT civil protections, though not unique to Arkansas, illustrates the contentious nature of its statewide and local LGBT policy environments.

And yet, public attitudes toward LGBT rights within the state are more complicated than recent legislative actions suggest. Fifteen years of polling data on marriage equality, for example, show a gradual increase in Arkansans' support until the 2015 federal ruling, where support decreased from 48 to 27 percent in just one year (Parry, 2015). However, this percentage has since reversed and further increased to 33 and 50 percent in the years 2017 and 2018, respectively (Parry, 2018). In comparison, the issues of LGBT housing and employment anti-discrimination have been consistently and strongly supported by Arkansans over time, holding 72- and 79-percent support, respectively, in 2015 to 88- and 90-percent support in 2018. Further, though found to be uncomfortable with homosexuality, residents have historically been reluctant to support state-sanctioned discrimination measures (Barth & Parry, 2009).

Because of this tumultuous relationship between Arkansas public opinion and LGBT rights, this study uses Arkansas as a case study to determine whether past findings on LGBT policy position formation can be duplicated within this more conflictual context. Specifically, this study will build from previous research on the contact theory on the U.S. national stage (e.g., see Kordsmeier, et al., 2019) to determine whether and in what particular ways Arkansans' ideological orientations and contact with LGBT-identifying individuals interact to form their positions on LGBT policy issues.

In the sections that follow, we first summarize the major findings within the literature surrounding political ideology and minority-group contact. Then, we attempt to analyze their potential relationship within the context of Arkansas public opinion across multiple LGBT issues using responses to original survey questions added to an annual statewide poll. After analyzing our findings, we discuss their meaning in the context of state public opinion, as well as how they

compare to those made at the U.S. national level. We then conclude with remaining questions and suggestions for future research.

2. The Role of Ideology in Determining LGBT Policy Support

Understood as a spectrum between political liberalism and conservatism, “political ideology” is used to indicate one’s place along the liberal-conservative continuum (Knight, 1999). While some argue against its ability to predict policy preferences, multiple studies have determined that individuals who identify as “liberal” tend to adopt traditionally left-of-center issue positions, and those identifying as “conservative” right-of-center (Caprara & Vecchione, 2018; Jost et al., 2009). Specifically, some have found that individuals learn how to use the left-to-right ideological continuum when determining their policy positions, to the point that their positions begin to align with where they place themselves on that continuum (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1991; Zaller, 1992). This alignment then lessens their responsibility to evaluate the many social, economic, political, and ethical issues that surround a policy issue when determining their specific stances (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1991).

Even with these findings, however, other research has pointed to the need for additional factors – including one’s political knowledge and expertise (Jost et al., 2009), cultural predispositions (Song et al., 2014) and affective emotions (Moyer & Song, 2016), among others, to connect one’s ideological views with one’s actual policy positions. Consequently, the effect of an individual’s political ideology on the policy positions they form, as well as the means by which this effect can be realized, is still being explored.

3. LGBT Contact: A Bridge for LGBT Policy Support?

One-on-one contact with LGBT individuals also had a long history of empirical support. First introduced by Allport (1954), the Contact Theory (CT) of attitudinal change argues that prejudice toward minority groups can be reduced by having individual contact experiences with members of these groups. This prejudice is lessened through contact's ability to reduce feelings of anxiety and uncertainty toward a minority "out-group" (Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020).

The CT has been used to analyze LGBT discrimination specifically, where studies have found that those heterosexual men and women who report knowing someone who identifies as gay or lesbian tend to express more positive views of the LGBT community (Lewis, 2011). Even when controlling for other factors such as demographic characteristics, religiosity, and political views, LGBT contact has been found to foster support for the LGBT community overall (Lewis, 2011).

Contact in the form of a friendship or close familial relationship – both marked by relatively frequent, intimate contact between in-and-out-group individuals – has been found to further foster empathy and even identification with an out-group individual, which can thereby decrease an in-group individual's negative perception of the out-group overall (MacInnis & Hodson, 2018). In fact, multiple studies have argued that the *quality* of in-and-out-group contact has a larger effect on in-group member's attitudes toward out-groups than the quantity of contact experiences (Brown et al., 2001; MacInnis & Hodson, 2018), especially when the respective out-group members are viewed as highly typical of their group (Brown et al., 2007). Attitudes toward the LGBT community in particular have been shown to improve for heterosexuals with a close gay friend than those who have more distanced relationships, such as coworkers or extended

family members, especially when it comes to developing trust (Lewis, 2011; Tausch et al., 2011).

4. Discrepancies in Ideology and Contact's Influence on Policy Position Formation

While LGBT contact has been shown to improve opinions of the LGBT community, there is still a need for research that connects these views to their respective policy positions. Though some scholars have found that individuals who know and interact with LGBT-identifying persons are more likely to support LGBT policies (e.g., Lewis, 2011; Yen & Zampelli, 2016), others have pinpointed factors that can moderate, or alter this relationship. Kordsmeier et al. (2019), for example, determined that LGBT contact has different effects on individuals' LGBT policy positions depending on the ideological orientation of the person in question.

Specifically, the authors found that surveyed Americans who identified as conservative showed lower support for LGBT policies like same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption when they only had LGBT acquaintances than when they had LGBT friends. However, when conservative respondents had *both* LGBT friends and acquaintances, the positive effect of LGBT friendship on those respondents' LGBT policy positions was nullified. Liberal respondents, on the other hand, showed increased support when they had both LGBT friendships and acquaintanceships. These findings thereby indicate a potential distinction between how liberals and conservatives process contact with LGBT individuals, especially those who are not close friends or family members.

5. Analyzing Arkansans' LGBT Policy Positions

To further test this distinct relationship between ideology, LGBT contact, and LGBT policy positions within a state context, the following study will examine the relationship between one's ideological orientation and contact with LGBT individuals on Arkansans' level of LGBT policy support for four distinct LGBT policy issues: same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and employment and housing anti-discrimination. Illustrated in Figure 3.1, this study will involve multiple stages of analysis. In the first stage, we establish whether a respondent's ideological orientation has a direct influence on their LGBT policy support, where we expect to find that:

H_{1a}: Respondents' ideology will have a positive influence on their level of LGBT-oriented policy support, such that, when they are more liberal, their support for each of the four LGBT policies will be higher.

We then examine the direct impact of LGBT contact on these same individuals' level of LGBT policy support, where we similarly expect that:

H_{1b}: Respondents' LGBT contact experiences will have a positive effect on their LGBT-oriented policy support, such that those with LGBT friends and/or acquaintances will demonstrate stronger support for each of the four LGBT policies than those without these forms of contact.

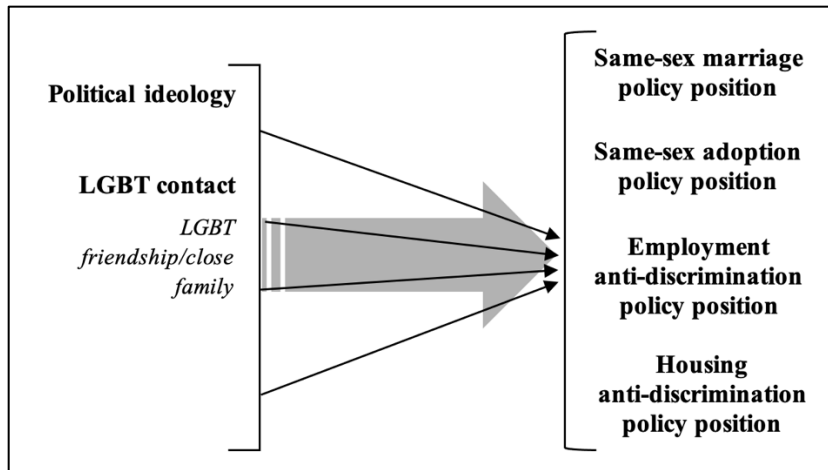


Figure 3.1. Proposed variable relationships to be studied

After analyzing these direct relationships, our second stage of analysis breaks down the impact of LGBT contact on Arkansans' LGBT policy positions by its level of intensity, or closeness, specifically differentiating between those with close LGBT friends and family members and those with more distanced LGBT acquaintanceships. Mirroring Kordsmeier et al.'s (2019) initial findings at the national level, we expect that:

H_{2a}: Respondents with close LGBT friends and family members will show stronger support for each of the four LGBT policies than those without these relationships, regardless of their individual ideological orientation; and

H_{2b}: Respondents with mere LGBT acquaintances will show varying support across the four LGBT policies based on their ideological orientation, such that this form of contact in and of itself will not lead to higher support like with close LGBT contact.

Each of these hypotheses are addressed in the analyses that follow, with the combination of their results determining the extent to which Arkansans' ideologies and their LGBT contact experiences influence whether and to what extent they support certain LGBT policies.

6. Data, Variables, and Measures

6.1. Survey Data

In this study, we utilize data from the 20th iteration of the Arkansas Poll gathered during the month of October 2017. With a response rate of 28 percent, 801 observations are used, which were gathered using a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method. Participation in the survey was both voluntary and anonymous, with the majority of respondents identifying as female (56 percent) and non-Hispanic white (82 percent) – percentages comparable to the overall Arkansas population (at 51 and 72.1 percent, respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The same is true for respondents' mean educational level and income, with 90 percent completing a high school degree compared to the state mean of 85 percent and the mean income falling within the \$35,001-\$50,000-income bracket (which contains the state mean of \$47,597) (Parry, 2017). Our respondent mean age, however, is higher than the state mean (~60 compared to 49). Though a potential explanation for this difference is the method through which survey responses were gathered (where older individuals are more likely to answer phone calls), there is no direct evidence of this effect.

6.2. Variables and Measures

The four LGBT-oriented policies that serve as our primary dependent variables are same-sex marriage support, same-sex adoption support, and support for LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination measures (see Table 3.1). Each are measured dichotomously, with support categorized as “1” and opposition “0”.¹⁰ These four policies were specifically chosen to represent the breadth of LGBT policy issues in both Arkansas and the United States overall.

¹⁰ See Appendix Table 3.1 for frequencies of responses for each LGBT policy.

Analyzing them individually also allows us to determine whether the effects of one’s ideological orientation and contact with LGBT persons are equal across LGBT policies or vary depending on the LGBT policy issue in question.

Table 3.1. Dependent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Support of Same-Sex Marriage	Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriage? (0=Should not be recognized; 1=Should be recognized) (n = 552)
Support of Same-Sex Adoption	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of adoption? (0= No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 543)
Support of LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities? (0=No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 562)
Support of LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of housing...renting and leasing, for example? (0=No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 550)

Our first independent variable – respondent political ideology – is measured on a 5-point ordinal scale (1=strongly conservative to 5=strongly liberal), where the average respondent identifies between somewhat conservative to moderate (with an associated value of 2.46). LGBT contact, however, is measured in two distinct ways. In the first stage, it is measured on a 6-point ordinal scale of increasing levels of contact (from 1=1-5 LGBT acquaintances to 6=11 or more LGBT family members/close friends), where the average and median level of contact are both just below the mark indicating 11 or more LGBT-identifying acquaintances (at 2.89 and 2.5, respectively). Then, in the second stage of our analysis, LGBT contact is treated as a dichotomous, categorical variable that indicates whether a respondent had close LGBT friends or family members (0=no; 1=yes). Using these two separate measurements for LGBT contact

allows us to examine not only whether this contact has a significant effect on respondents' support for LGBT policy issues, but also whether this effect is truly stronger when this contact results in a closer bond (see Table 3.2 for more information on all three operationalizations of our two independent variables).

Table 3.2. Primary independent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Political Ideology/Liberalism	How would you describe your views on most political matters? (1(=Strongly conservative) to 5(=Strongly liberal)) (n = 598)
Level of LGBT Contact	How many of your family members or close friends are gay or lesbian? + Other than your family and friends, about how many gay people do you know personally, that is, well enough that you know each other's names? (1(=1-5 LGBT acquaintances) to 6(=11 or more close LGBT friends/family members)) (n = 598)
Having LGBT Family/Close Friends	Are any of your family members or close friends gay or lesbian? (0=No; 1=Yes) (n = 598)

Both stages of our analysis also employ multiple control variables (Table 3.3), including demographic information such as respondent gender (0=female; 1=male), race/ethnicity (0=non-white; 1=white), age (in years), education (on a 7-point scale from 1=no high school to 7=receipt of a graduate or professional degree), and income (an 8-point scale from 1=\$7,500 or less to 8=\$100,001 or over). We then include measures of party identification and religiosity, which allows us to control for their particular effects, both in terms of how they might interact with a respondent's political ideology and because both have been found to affect an individual's LGBT policy positions on their own (e.g., Barth & Parry, 2009; Bramlett, 2012; Lewis et al., 2017). By controlling for their potential effects, we are thereby able to further determine the true influence of political ideology and LGBT contact in LGBT policy position formation.

Table 3.3. Control variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Party Affiliation	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? (0=Republican; 1=Independent; 2=Democrat) (n= 560)
Religiosity	About how often do you attend religious services? (1(=Never) to 7(=More than once a week)) (n=581)
Race/ethnicity	0=Non-white; 1=White (non-Hispanic) (n= 592)
Gender	0=Female; 1=Male (n= 598)
Age	Age in years (n=572)
Education	Highest level of schooling (1(=no high school) to 7(=graduate or professional degree)) (n=592)
Income	Which income category best describes your total 2016 household income? (1(=\$7,500 or less) to 8(=\$100,001 or over)) (n=421)

7. Statistical Analysis and Results

7.1. Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis

To examine the effects of both our independent variables, we utilized a binomial logistic regression analysis. This was chosen based on the dichotomous nature of our dependent variables, as well as our interest in first establishing whether a direct relationship exists between respondent ideology, LGBT contact, and policy support for each of the included LGBT policies. With this type of analysis, we are also able to determine the *direction* of these relationships, or whether respondent ideology and LGBT contact experience move respondent views of each LGBT policy closer to support or opposition.

Table 3.4. Binomial logistic regression analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Same-Sex Marriage	Same-Sex Adoption	LGBT Employment Anti- Discrimination	LGBT Housing Anti- Discrimination
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Liberalism	0.335*** (0.128)	0.299** (0.120)	-0.035 (0.191)	-0.212 (0.158)
LGBT contact	0.325*** (0.102)	0.368*** (0.098)	0.399** (0.171)	0.250* (0.136)
Independent	0.380 (0.325)	0.682** (0.304)	0.493 (0.459)	0.521 (0.403)
Democrat	0.817** (0.394)	0.864** (0.370)	1.118* (0.618)	0.824* (0.493)
Religiosity	-0.285*** (0.063)	-0.208*** (0.061)	-0.037 (0.098)	-0.156* (0.087)
White	0.144 (0.358)	0.818** (0.362)	0.147 (0.630)	0.157 (0.486)
Male	-0.220 (0.274)	-0.360 (0.265)	-0.387 (0.414)	-0.466 (0.359)
Age	-0.029*** (0.008)	-0.029*** (0.008)	-0.027* (0.014)	-0.007 (0.011)
Education	0.263** (0.104)	0.147 (0.099)	0.202 (0.163)	0.286** (0.141)
Income	-0.025 (0.067)	0.038 (0.066)	0.136 (0.107)	0.149* (0.089)
Constant	-0.669 (0.848)	-0.927 (0.844)	1.455 (1.413)	0.770 (1.150)
Observations	350	352	356	350
Log Likelihood	-183.026	-194.665	-94.067	-123.190
Akaike Inf. Crit.	388.052	411.330	210.134	268.380

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As shown in Table 3.4., results for political ideology indicated a significant positive effect on both same-sex marriage support ($p < 0.01$) and support for same-sex adoption ($p < 0.05$), where an increasingly liberal ideology was associated with higher levels of policy support. However, this effect was negative, though non-significant for LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination support, which might be explained by the fact that support for these policies is already high across all responses, *regardless* of respondents' individual ideological orientations (see Appendix Table 3.1 for the respective frequencies of responses across respondent political ideology values for both policies). As a result, H_{1a} is only partially supported, with a more liberal ideology being associated with higher support for only two of the four LGBT policies.

LGBT contact, on the other hand, had a significant effect across all policies (where $p < 0.01$ for same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and housing anti-discrimination support, and $p < 0.05$ for support of employment anti-discrimination). Specifically, respondents' contact experiences with LGBT individuals did have a positive effect on their level of support across all four LGBT policies, where increasing levels of contact were associated with increasing levels of support. Based on these findings, H_{1b} is supported in full.

Our control variables also showed some significant, if not predictable, effects. A Democratic affiliation, for example, was significant and positive for support of all four LGBT policies ($p < 0.05$ for same-sex marriage and adoption, and $p < 0.1$ for the anti-discrimination measures). A respondent's religiosity was further found to have a significant negative effect on support for same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption ($p < 0.01$) and approached significance for support of housing anti-discrimination ($p < 0.1$). Age held a significant negative effect on support for same-sex marriage, adoption, and employment anti-discrimination, and our other controls

held varying effects on two or fewer LGBT policy support variables, as consistent with previous studies of the effect of demographic factors on LGBT policy positions.

7.2 *Subsample Analysis*

While results of our logistic regression analysis establish a direct effect of both respondents' ideology and contact with LGBT individuals on support for multiple LGBT-oriented policies, we still need to determine the *extent* of this effect, especially across varying levels of LGBT contact. Our small sample size, mixed with methodological concerns, led us to use a subsample analysis to test the boundaries of ideology's and LGBT contact's effects. This method allows us to divide our sample into different groups that are given the same "treatment", though at different values. By doing so, we can determine whether and which potentially different effects exist across varying levels of LGBT contact.

Additionally, by using this methodology, we do not need to introduce an interaction term between our political ideology and LGBT contact variables, which thereby allows us to avoid a potential issue of multicollinearity. Instead, we simply create two separate subsamples from our full sample – one which contains only respondents with close LGBT-identifying friends and family members, and the other with respondents who have only LGBT acquaintances. Each of these subsamples is then run through the same binomial regression model to determine whether the effect of LGBT contact on one's LGBT policy perspectives is dependent upon the extent of that contact.

7.2.1. Same-Sex Marriage and Same-Sex Adoption

Illustrated in Tables 3.5 and 3.6, respondent political ideology was significant for both our general and close contact models that analyzed same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption support (where $p < 0.01$), which indicated that both general and close LGBT contact improved

support for these particular policies, with the relationship between ideology and policy support getting stronger with closer contact. However, this relationship was not significant for our LGBT acquaintanceship sample. As a result, H_{2a} is supported, where respondents with close LGBT friends and family members showed stronger support for both same-sex marriage and adoption than those without these relationships, regardless of their ideological orientations. As illustrated by our acquaintanceship-only model, H_{2b} is also supported, as having LGBT acquaintances did not appear to increase support for either of the two policies – at least not without a distinction in support caused specifically by one’s ideological orientation. These findings together indicate that LGBT contact quality does, in fact, moderate the relationship between respondent ideology and same-sex marriage/adoption support.

3.5. Same-sex marriage subsample analysis

<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
Same-Sex Marriage Policy Support			
	General Contact	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	0.335*** (0.128)	0.169 (0.177)	0.606*** (0.204)
Constant	-0.669 (0.848)	0.241 (1.209)	-3.159 (1.939)
Observations	350	183	167
Log Likelihood	-183.026	-92.973	-87.095
Akaike Inf. Crit.	388.052	207.946	196.189

*p<0.1; ** p<0.05; ***p<0.01

***Note:** All control variables were included in the model. The table is truncated for visibility. The full table is located in the supporting Appendix.

Table 3.6. Same-sex adoption subsample analysis

<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
Same-Sex Adoption Policy Support			
	General Contact	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	0.299** (0.120)	0.234 (0.159)	0.522** (0.203)
Constant	-0.927 (0.844)	-0.376 (1.158)	-4.043* (2.422)
Observations	352	185	167
Log Likelihood	-194.665	-108.495	-78.837
Akaike Inf. Crit.	411.330	238.990	179.674

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

***Note:** All control variables were included in the model. The table is truncated for visibility. The full table is located in the supporting Appendix.

7.2.2. Employment and Housing Anti-Discrimination

Unlike with the relationship-based LGBT policy issues, the civil anti-discrimination policy models showed mixed results regarding LGBT contact's moderating effect. We found that, while respondent ideology had no significant impact on employment anti-discrimination support for the general contact sample, this relationship was significant (and positive) for the close contact sample (supporting H_{2a}). As with the previous two policies, the relationship between ideology and employment policy support was not significant for the acquaintanceship sample (thereby supporting H_{2b}). We can therefore conclude that contact quality also moderates the ideology-policy support relationship in this case.

After analyzing the results across the three contact samples regarding LGBT housing anti-discrimination support, however, we found that neither respondent ideology nor LGBT contact had any effect on respondents' policy support whatsoever. Ideology had no significant effect on support across any of our three samples, and contact held no moderating effect. Again,

this is likely due to the same finding in our first analysis: the already high level of support that both policies received regardless of respondents' ideological orientations. Consequently, H_{2b} was supported, while H_{2a} was not.

Table 3.7. LGBT employment anti-discrimination subsample analysis

<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination		
	General Contact	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	-0.035 (0.191)	-0.219 (0.208)	1.849** (0.920)
Constant	1.455 (1.413)	0.605 (1.676)	35.032 (2,930.306)
Observations	356	182	174
Log Likelihood	-94.067	-67.783	-14.681
Akaike Inf. Crit.	210.134	157.566	51.362
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

***Note:** All control variables were included in the model. The table is truncated for visibility. The full table is located in the supporting Appendix.

Table 3.8. LGBT housing anti-discrimination subsample analysis

<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination		
	General Contact	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	-0.212 (0.158)	-0.317 (0.197)	0.024 (0.300)
Constant	0.770 (1.150)	0.086 (1.481)	1.163 (3.448)
Observations	350	181	169
Log Likelihood	-123.190	-77.037	-43.175
Akaike Inf. Crit.	268.380	176.074	108.351
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

***Note:** All control variables were included in the model. The table is truncated for visibility. The full table is located in the supporting Appendix.

7.3. *Density Plot Evaluation*

To further visualize the relationships described above, we created density plots that use kernel density estimates to show the probability density function of contact across respondent political ideology. The density plot for each LGBT policy support variable illustrates the probability distribution of each of our three LGBT contact models. Just as with interpreting regression estimates, the 0.0 dashed line on each density plot indicates a complete lack of effect of contact on support. If a contact model's distribution contains this line at any point, the effect of that specific level of contact is not significant from zero (0).

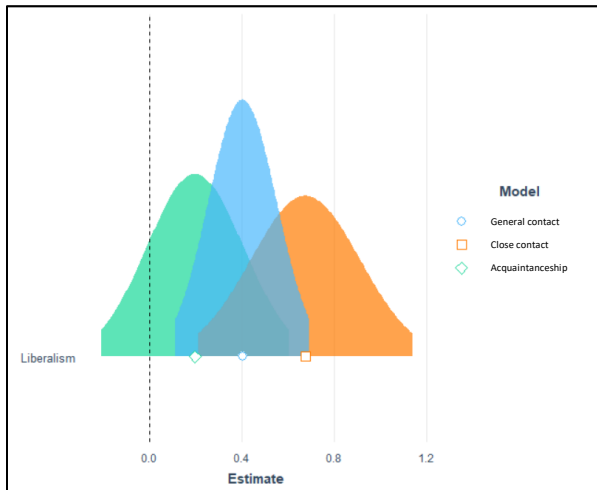


Figure 3.2. Same-sex marriage density plot

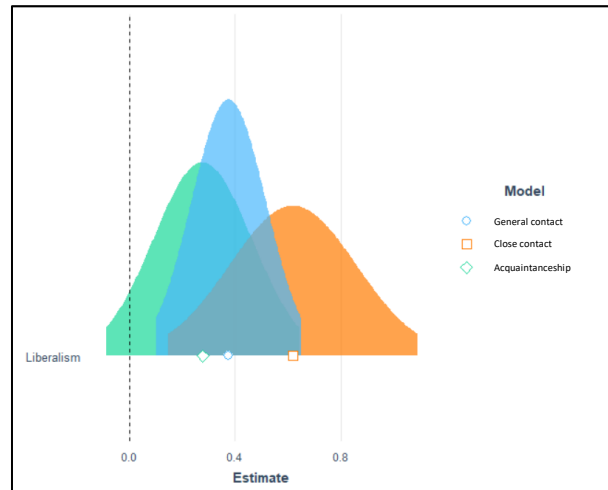


Figure 3.3. Same-sex adoption density plot

7.3.1. Same-Sex Marriage and Same-Sex Adoption

Beginning with same-sex marriage and adoption (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), the distribution of our general contact model sample (which used our full sample) fell to the right of the 0.0 threshold line, which signified a positive effect of LGBT contact in these cases. At the other end of the spectrum, the acquaintanceship sample's distribution did fall within the 0.0 threshold line,

which revealed a lack of change in the regression coefficient. Consequently, contact quality is a statistically significant moderator of the effect of political ideology on respondents' same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption support.

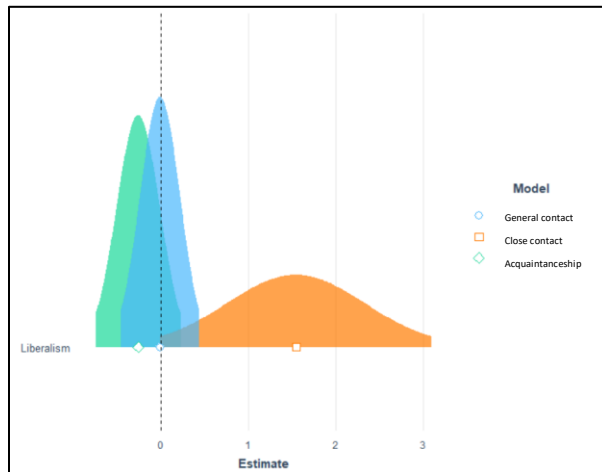


Figure 3.4. LGBT employment anti-discrimination density plot

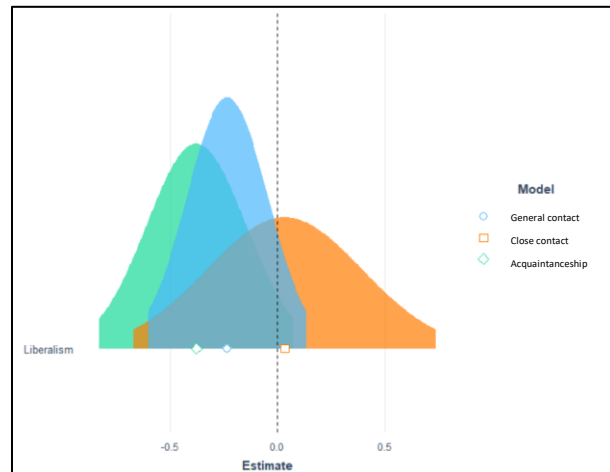


Figure 3.5. LGBT housing anti-discrimination density plot

7.3.2. LGBT Employment and Housing Anti-Discrimination

Figure 3.4 illustrates the relationships found in our subsample analysis of LGBT employment anti-discrimination support. While the general contact and acquaintanceship samples' distribution intersected the 0.0 threshold line, the distribution of the close contact sample did not. As a result, contact quality again appears to moderate the relationship between respondent ideology and policy support in this particular case. In visualizing support for LGBT housing anti-discrimination policy (Figure 3.5), on the other hand, we saw again that contact quality had no moderating effect, with all three models' distributions overlapping with the 0.0 threshold line.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the current study provide general support for the Contact Theory of attitudinal change, although this support is only partial. Specifically, contact appears to affect policy positions differently across Arkansans' ideological orientations and the LGBT policy in question, and each individual LGBT contact configuration demonstrates distinct effects on how these positions are formed. For same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption policies, an increasingly liberal political ideology was associated with increasing support. However, the same was not true for support of employment and housing anti-discrimination measures. For these policies, surveyed Arkansans' political orientation did not significantly determine their positions. Instead, it appears that these policies are viewed as separate from the relationship-based LGBT policies of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption – where the former are viewed positively by Arkansans *regardless* of their ideological orientations, while the latter activate their ideological orientations when they determine their particular stances.

LGBT contact, on the other hand, positively affected support for all four LGBT-oriented policies: as contact with LGBT-identifying individuals formed closer bonds (or moved closer to close LGBT friendships and family relationships), support for each policy increased. However, not all contact had an equal influence. For same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption policies, general LGBT contact improved support for these policies rather than just the close relationships alone. And yet, LGBT contact in the form of *solely* acquaintanceships was not found to increase support for the two policies on its own. Instead, political ideology was shown to overcome any potential moderating effect of this level of contact to determine surveyed Arkansans' policy positions.

Then, when determining support for the anti-discrimination measures across different levels of LGBT contact, we found that LGBT contact alone does not cause Arkansans to alter

their perceptions of these two policies, while – in the case of housing anti-discrimination – even *close* LGBT contact does not necessarily alter these perceptions. This again indicates that Arkansans view anti-discrimination policies as separate from the relationship-based policies of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption.

Due to the disparate impact of LGBT contact across the LGBT policy issue in question, we can further conclude that 1) Arkansans process contact with LGBT individuals who are not close friends or family members differently depending on where they place themselves on the liberal-conservative continuum, and 2) Arkansans' LGBT contact experiences are activated in the formation of their LGBT policy positions selectively. Specifically, Arkansans who identify as conservative do not transfer their experiences with LGBT acquaintances onto how they view LGBT-oriented policies. This could be explained as conservative Arkansans potentially *avoiding* more close contact with LGBT individuals (e.g., Ellison et al., 2011), or even *individuating* their LGBT contact experiences rather than viewing their LGBT acquaintances as representative of the overall LGBT community (Lewis, 2011). Conservative Arkansans might be more likely to experience negative surface-level interactions with LGBT persons might lead them to avoid any future interactions that could eventually develop into closer relationships. Additionally, if these LGBT acquaintances are not viewed by conservative Arkansans as representative of the LGBT community as a whole, then interacting with LGBT individuals at this level might not lead to these Arkansans' altering their opinions of this community, and so the policies surrounding it.

The differences in effects of both political ideology and LGBT contact across policy type also indicate that, just as with previous research at the U.S. national level, morality politics appear to be at play. Previous research has found that policy positions on issues rooted in moral value predispositions tend to be largely stable over time (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). As a result, it

is possible that Arkansans view same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption – unlike the employment and housing anti-discrimination policies – as *moral* in nature. This thereby causes their ideological orientations to play a larger role when determining their positions on these two policies, particularly when their contact with LGBT individuals is not close or frequent. As morality-based policies, views of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption can be marked by powerful conflicts over Arkansans’ deeply held personal opinions surrounding homosexuality, which can thereby make support more difficult to achieve (Cravens, 2015; Lax & Phillips, 2009). As such, it becomes important to differentiate the role of LGBT contact in forming or altering perceptions of these specific policies and to find empirically sound ways to operationalize moral traditionalism to 1) test its impact on individuals’ perceptions of LGBT policies and 2) determine the specific relationship it has with LGBT contact in forming these perceptions.

With the totality of its findings, this study also reveals that, despite the unique context and history LGBT rights and legislation in the state of Arkansas, contact with LGBT individuals operates in much the same way as it does for the general U.S. population. Just as with Americans as a whole, Arkansans process contact with LGBT individuals distinctively depending on where they place themselves on the ideological continuum and the specific policy issues with which they are presented. To further test whether state context plays a role in determining the exact relationship between LGBT contact, political ideology, and LGBT policy perception, future research should analyze other states with their own distinct histories with LGBT rights to see if these findings can be replicated.

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Appendices

Appendix Table 3.1. Frequencies of nominal scale variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Same-Sex Marriage	Against	345	62.5%
	For	207	37.5%
Same-Sex Adoption	Against	279	51.4%
	For	264	48.6%
LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination	Against	59	10.5%
	For	503	89.5%
LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination	Against	80	14.5%
	For	470	85.5%
Party Identification	Republican	194	34.6%
	Independent	221	39.5%
	Democrat	145	25.9%
Having LGBT Family/Friends	No	330	55.2%
	Yes	268	44.8%
Race/Ethnicity	Non-white	106	17.9%
	White	486	82.1%
Gender	Female	336	56.2%
	Male	262	43.8%

Appendix Table 3.2. Descriptive statistics of ordinal/interval scale variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	Mean	S.D.	Median	Min.	Max.
Ideology	598	2.46	1.24	2	1	5
Level of LGBT Contact	598	2.89	1.40	2.5	1	6
Religiosity	581	4.60	2.16	6	1	7
Age	572	59.57	18.51	64	18	97
Education	592	4.22	1.41	4	1	7
Income	421	4.70	2.17	5	1	8

Appendix Table 3.3. Full results of same-sex marriage support subsample analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Same-Sex Marriage Policy Support		
	Contact (General)	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	0.335*** (0.128)	0.169 (0.177)	0.606*** (0.204)
LGBT contact	0.325*** (0.102)	0.379 (0.295)	0.658* (0.356)
Independent	0.380 (0.325)	0.451 (0.458)	0.109 (0.488)
Democrat	0.817** (0.394)	0.698 (0.562)	0.824 (0.592)
Religiosity	-0.285*** (0.063)	-0.281*** (0.090)	-0.292*** (0.094)
White	0.144 (0.358)	0.108 (0.537)	0.345 (0.515)
Male	-0.220 (0.274)	-0.271 (0.389)	-0.266 (0.414)
Age	-0.029*** (0.008)	-0.037*** (0.013)	-0.023** (0.011)
Education	0.263** (0.104)	0.261* (0.142)	0.295* (0.159)
Income	-0.025 (0.067)	-0.034 (0.103)	-0.054 (0.097)
Constant	-0.669 (0.848)	0.241 (1.209)	-3.159 (1.939)
Observations	350	183	167
Log Likelihood	-183.026	-92.973	-87.095
Akaike Inf. Crit.	388.052	207.946	196.189

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix Table 3.4. Full results of same-sex adoption support subsample analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Same-Sex Adoption Policy Support		
	Contact (General)	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	0.299** (0.120)	0.234 (0.159)	0.522** (0.203)
LGBT contact	0.368*** (0.098)	0.363 (0.273)	0.977** (0.478)
Independent	0.682** (0.304)	0.892** (0.413)	0.430 (0.499)
Democrat	0.864** (0.370)	0.992** (0.487)	0.731 (0.635)
Religiosity	-0.208*** (0.061)	-0.089 (0.082)	-0.362*** (0.105)
White	0.818** (0.362)	1.325** (0.540)	0.586 (0.563)
Male	-0.360 (0.265)	-0.341 (0.351)	-0.279 (0.449)
Age	-0.029*** (0.008)	-0.042*** (0.012)	-0.020* (0.012)
Education	0.147 (0.099)	0.167 (0.132)	0.154 (0.168)
Income	0.038 (0.066)	-0.110 (0.094)	0.136 (0.107)
Constant	-0.927 (0.844)	-0.376 (1.158)	-4.043* (2.422)
Observations	352	185	167
Log Likelihood	-194.665	-108.495	-78.837
Akaike Inf. Crit.	411.330	238.990	179.674

Note: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Appendix Table 3.5. Full results of LGBT employment anti-discrimination support subsample analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination		
	Contact (General)	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	-0.035 (0.191)	-0.219 (0.208)	1.849** (0.920)
LGBT contact	0.399** (0.171)	0.360 (0.374)	-2.451* (1.299)
Independent	0.493 (0.459)	0.806 (0.530)	-0.488 (1.246)
Democrat	1.118* (0.618)	1.522** (0.705)	-0.543 (1.895)
Religiosity	-0.037 (0.098)	-0.043 (0.113)	-0.195 (0.317)
White	0.147 (0.630)	0.448 (0.705)	-15.055 (2,930.295)
Male	-0.387 (0.414)	-0.257 (0.476)	-1.746 (1.157)
Age	-0.027* (0.014)	-0.020 (0.017)	-0.108** (0.048)
Education	0.202 (0.163)	0.355* (0.192)	-1.122* (0.594)
Income	0.136 (0.107)	0.073 (0.126)	1.012** (0.448)
Constant	1.455 (1.413)	0.605 (1.676)	35.032 (2,930.306)
Observations	356	182	174
Log Likelihood	-94.067	-67.783	-14.681
Akaike Inf. Crit.	210.134	157.566	51.362

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Appendix Table 3.6. Full results of LGBT housing anti-discrimination support subsample analysis

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination		
	Contact (General)	Acquaintanceship	Close Contact
Liberalism	-0.212 (0.158)	-0.317 (0.197)	0.024 (0.300)
LGBT contact	0.250* (0.136)	0.443 (0.352)	0.267 (0.658)
Independent	0.521 (0.403)	0.599 (0.509)	0.275 (0.706)
Democrat	0.824* (0.493)	0.640 (0.585)	1.387 (1.040)
Religiosity	-0.156* (0.087)	-0.096 (0.106)	-0.258 (0.166)
White	0.157 (0.486)	0.230 (0.635)	-0.172 (0.905)
Male	-0.466 (0.359)	-0.412 (0.453)	-0.455 (0.631)
Age	-0.007 (0.011)	0.002 (0.015)	-0.021 (0.017)
Education	0.286** (0.141)	0.238 (0.175)	0.293 (0.259)
Income	0.149* (0.089)	0.122 (0.118)	0.248 (0.157)
Constant	0.770 (1.150)	0.086 (1.481)	1.163 (3.448)
Observations	350	181	169
Log Likelihood	-123.190	-77.037	-43.175
Akaike Inf. Crit.	268.380	176.074	108.351

Note: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Chapter IV

Shaping Arkansans' Attitudes toward LGBT Policies: The Role of Party Identification, Religious Identity, and LGBT Contact Experience

Abstract

This study investigates how one's party identification, religious identity, and contact experiences with LGBT¹¹-identifying individuals interactively shape one's LGBT policy positions. Utilizing binomial logistic regression and posterior simulation analyses to examine data from an Arkansas public opinion survey on same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and employment and housing anti-discrimination policies, we find a limited importance of LGBT contact experiences for those who are already either highly supportive of, or opposed to, the policy in question. However, these experiences can shift one's opposition to support for those who lie between the partisan and religious identity "poles" for same-sex marriage and adoption in particular. We conclude that there may be a significant effect of LGBT contact that exists only for the inverted, or theoretically contrasting, relationships of party identity and evangelical affiliation, and only for LGBT policies considered moral in nature.

1. Introduction

After the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states, many states still held a rather strained relationship with pro-LGBT policy within their individual borders. For example, after the Arkansas General Assembly

¹¹ Please note that, although the contact experiences utilized in this study are solely between heterosexual and gay and lesbian individuals, we utilize the label "LGBT"—indicating lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons—in congruence with its use in local, state, and national policy rhetoric.

banned same-sex marriage with Act 144 in 1997, a similar ban on same-sex adoption followed in 2008 after being supported by state voters (Arkansas Proposed Initiative Act No. 1). Though both were eventually struck down (the first following the *Obergefell* ruling and the second by the Arkansas high court in 2011), the enactment of same-sex marriage rights in 2015 was met with immediate hostility by the Arkansas state legislature. It introduced a same-sex marriage ban meant to be added to the U.S. Constitution, which passed in the Arkansas Senate but failed to gain any further momentum. Legislation in other areas was also introduced, including the state legislature's enactment into law a provision that would "create a protected classification or prohibit discrimination on a basis not contained in state law" (Intrastate Commerce Improvement Act, 2015).

Despite this institutional response, public attitudes toward LGBT rights in Arkansas have been more complicated. Documenting 15 years of polling data on marriage equality, the Arkansas Poll showed a gradual increase in public support up until the 2015 federal ruling, which resulted in a decrease from 48- to 27-percent support that year (Parry, 2015). Since then, however, this percentage increased to 33 percent in 2016 (Parry, 2016), and hit 50 percent by 2018 (Parry, 2018). Arkansas voters also approved Act 1 in 2008, which made it illegal for unmarried couples to foster or adopt minors, but this decision was then reversed by the state's supreme court (Arkansas Proposed Initiative Act No. 1). LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination measures have been consistently supported by Arkansans, where 79 percent supported employment protections and 72% supported housing protections in 2015. In 2018, this support increased to 90 and 88 percent, respectively (Parry, 2018).

What could form such diverse perceptions of LGBT issues, and how do these translate into the differing levels of support shown across individual LGBT-oriented policies? As the

following discussion will detail, Arkansas acts as a potentially interesting case study wherein specific policy-position determinants interact to create such a support trajectory, especially when comparing across policy type. To analyze this potential development, this study seeks to understand whether, to what degree, and in what specific ways Arkansans' varying identities – and their party identification and evangelical identity in particular – potentially interact to determine how they process both contact with LGBT-identifying individuals and whether and how these responses translate directly to their LGBT-oriented policy positions. By doing so, this research could offer more general findings into the formation of LGBT policy opinion in similarly situated states in the southern United States.

In the sections that follow, we first discuss the applicable literature and our resulting hypotheses; provide an explanation of the data, variables, and measures we utilize in the study; conduct an in-depth analysis of findings and summarize results; and finally establish our resulting conclusions that provide a more nuanced understanding of the CT, as well as identify further items of discussion that can inform potentially fruitful future research within LGBT politics.

2. The Importance of Party Identification and Evangelical Identity

Past scholarship has examined many individual-level determinants of LGBT policy preferences, including individuals' demographic characteristics, political ideology (Lewis & Gossett, 2008), and religiosity (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). This research shows that, in general, more educated people, more secular people, and people born after 1970 have been much more supportive of gay rights, further arguing that, because these groups continue to make up a larger proportion of the American population over time, gay rights

support has naturally increased (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Baunach, 2012; Olson et al., 2006). However, although these demographic changes have appeared to contribute to more tolerant views toward the LGBT community, they do not provide a comprehensive theory of attitudinal change. Specifically, most studies that examine demographics and public opinion have determined that a larger proportion of this increase in mass support must be a result of something other than these characteristics, largely because virtually *every* demographic group has seen increases in support for gay rights over time (Baunach, 2012; Loftus, 2001).

Political ideology as a determinant of LGBT policy support has also been examined. While researchers have found it useful in understanding policy opinion formation, there still exists a rather contentious debate about whether Americans think and organize their opinions based on ideological continuums (Converse, 1964, with responses from Abramowitz, 2010; Jost, 2006; Layman & Carsey, 2002; and others). An individual's partisan identity, on the other hand, has been found to be relatively stable and resistant to change than her general ideological principles (Goren, 2005). In fact, Goren (2005) found that party identification can actually *constrain* ideological beliefs, such as those revolving around equal opportunity, limited government, and moral tolerance. This finding, mixed with others determining a growing correlation between political ideology and party identification over time (Twenge et al., 2016), leads us to use the latter as a potentially clearer representation of how Arkansans may align their LGBT policy positions.

Many researchers have found that those who identify as liberal Democrats tend to be more accepting of policies centered around LGBT rights, especially when compared to conservative-identifying Republicans who tend to follow the “family values” agenda of social conservatism (Cravens, 2015; Herrick, 2008; Jelen, 1993; Kaufmann, 2002; Lewis & Gossett,

2008; Taylor et al., 2012). Further, because of the increased competitive environment that has developed between the two major parties, both are highly responsive to their constituents' positions on these matters (Cravens, 2015). In fact, Lewis and Gossett (2008) maintain that in the current political environment, Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided on most issues, including on socially charged policies like LGBT rights.

Moreover, Sherkat et al. (2011) found that respondents who both identify more strongly with the Republican Party and subscribe to biblical fundamentalism are often more opposed to same-sex marriage than other Americans. In the context of Arkansas specifically, there is potential for the attachment of certain LGBT policies to concepts of morality based largely on religious affiliation, and evangelism in particular. Lewis and Gossett (2008) found that evangelicals have shown strong documented opposition to same-sex marriage since at least 1985. Further, others have found that among religious traditions, evangelical Protestants take the most exclusive views of homosexuality, being more likely to oppose even LGBT individuals' basic civil liberties (Burdette et al., 2005; Reimer, 2011; Reimer & Park, 2001; Sherkat et al., 2011). Consequently, some have called for a further analysis of the relationship between evangelical Protestantism and opposition to same-sex marriage (Bramlett, 2012).

Lastly, though some have found that increasing religious commitment measured by levels of religiosity are often correlated with conservative religious beliefs (i.e., beliefs that would then formulate one's religious affiliation (Bramlett, 2012; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008)), in the case of Arkansas, its high proportion of individuals identifying as evangelicals becomes especially important to analyze. Despite evangelicals being found to have such negative views toward homosexuality, others have pointed to the need to better understand the degree to which evangelicals' attitudes on sexuality are actually *negotiated*, even to the extent of changing

their opinions of LGBT rights (e.g., see Aune, 2009). For example, even within evangelicalism, there are theologians and churches that give full membership rights to those in gay relationships, and there are even LGBT-supportive evangelical organizations, including Courage, the Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians, and Accepting Evangelicals (Aune, 2009). As a result, there is the potential for differing effects of an individual's identification with an evangelical Christian denomination on her LGBT policy positions, as well as differing impacts of mediating factors (such as contact with LGBT individuals) on this process. Since such a large percentage of Arkansans identify as evangelicals (41 percent of respondents from the state-wide survey we utilize¹²), attempting to understand the potentially more complex relationship between one's evangelical identity and corresponding LGBT policy positions becomes a valuable endeavor.

Further, the case of Arkansas becomes intriguing specifically for its representation of a unique relationship between party identification and evangelical identity, as well as how this relationship can interact with one's LGBT contact experiences in determining her LGBT policy positions. In this state, one's evangelical identity and her party identification can actually be statistically *independent* of one another (as will be shown in the following analyses). Individuals' religious identities have often been found to be tied to, and interact with, their political and party identities (e.g., see Campbell et al., 2018; Egan, 2020; Schmidt & Miles, 2016), and evangelicalism in particular has been tied to affiliation with the Republican Party (e.g., Deckman et al., 2017; Pelz & Smidt, 2015; Steensland & Wright, 2014). However, in the case of Arkansas, a substantial number of Republicans and Democrats alike identify as evangelicals. For this

¹² The only other available estimation of evangelical-identifying Arkansans is that from a 2014 Pew Research (n=311) study that found 46 percent of respondents identified as such, although its earlier reporting period and small sample size lead us to view the survey we utilize as having a more accurate estimation.

reason, these two identities may have a unique interaction with one's LGBT contact experiences that thereby affects the positions one has towards specific LGBT policy issues.

As such, a deeper study of the Arkansas case can provide a novel and detailed understanding of not simply whether and how party identity and religious affiliation can interact to determine an individual's LGBT policy positions, but also to analyze the *extent* of their combined effect, especially across the policies that evoke one's conceptions of morality. By doing so, our findings could provide insight into the relationship between identification with evangelicalism and party affiliation for southern states¹³ like Alabama (with 66 percent of evangelicals identifying as Republicans, 20 percent as Democrats, and 14 percent with no particular political leaning), Florida (37 percent Republican, 44 percent Democrat, and 19 percent with no leaning), Georgia (61 percent, 23 percent, and 16 percent, respectively), Kentucky (54 percent, 35 percent, and 11 percent), Louisiana (58 percent, 25 percent, and 17 percent), Mississippi (67 percent, 24 percent, and 9 percent), and many more (56 percent, 36 percent, and 8 percent) (Pew Research Center, 2016).

3. The Influence of LGBT Contact: Public Opinion and Policy Position

Even when an individual's party affiliation and religious identity do not inherently conflict, however, contact with LGBT-identifying persons, whether through a family relationship or a close friendship, could cause her to support issues like same-sex marriage and adoption *despite* either of these identities (Kreitzer et al., 2014; Lewis, 2011; Weishut, 2000). Specifically, contact with LGBT-identifying individuals has been consistently shown to result in more

¹³ As defined by the U.S. federal government (<https://www.britannica.com/place/the-South-region>). Other states within this region include Delaware (29 percent Republican, 55 percent Democrat, and 17 percent with no leaning), Washington, D.C. (38 percent, 47 percent, and 15 percent, respectively), and Maryland (44 percent, 38 percent, and 18 percent).

positive expressed attitudes toward the general LGBT community (Egan & Sherrill, 2005; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Sakalh & Ugurlu, 2001). However, others have found that political and religious value predispositions are not always altered by LGBT contact experiences (Burnett & King, 2015; Bramlett, 2012; Skipworth et al., 2010). For example, it has been reported that evangelicals in particular consistently reveal greater discomfort around LGBT individuals, which some have attributed to their fear of homosexual contamination (Reimer, 2011; Reimer & Park, 2001). This fear has been further connected to the concept of “religious threat” (Burdette et al., 2005) – a perceived danger that can be so influential for evangelicals that some researchers have found that even close and frequent contact with LGBT individuals cannot soften their opposition to LGBT policies (Bramlett, 2012). As a result, many researchers have cited the need to interpret the *combined influence*, or interaction, of both contact and religion on LGBT policy positions, with a specific focus on the morality-embedded policies surrounding same-sex marriage and adoption.

4. Analyzing the Intersection of Determinants

The above discussion emphasizes the importance of further research into the potential three-way interaction between one’s party affiliation, religious identity, and contact with LGBT persons on an individual’s perception of LGBT policy issues. Despite the literature showing significant effects of each variable individually, the above discussion emphasizes the current void within political science and policy research when it comes to understanding their combined effects. This relationship is therefore necessary to address in order to more fully understand the dynamic nature of individuals’ LGBT policy preference formation.

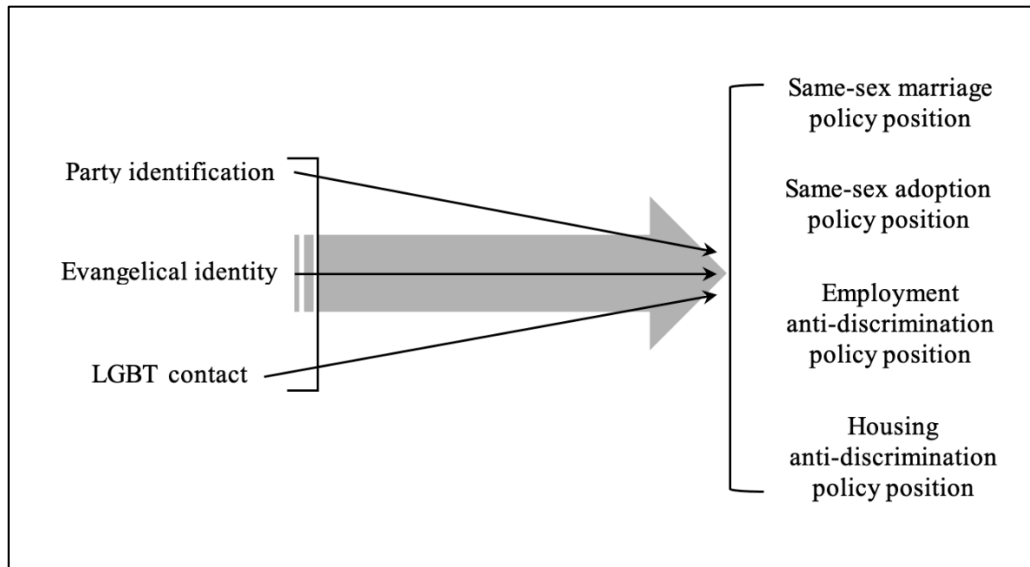


Figure 4.1. Proposed variable relationships to be studied

In the analysis that follows, we test and verify whether party, evangelical identity, and contact with LGBT-identifying individuals affect one's position regarding four specific LGBT policies: same-sex marriage and adoption, and LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination. We propose the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}: One's party identification will affect whether they¹⁴ support or oppose each LGBT policy, with those identifying as Republican, for instance, being expected to be more likely to oppose;

H_{1b}: One's identification as an evangelical will affect whether they support or oppose each LGBT policy, with those identifying as evangelical, for instance, expected to be more likely to oppose; and

¹⁴ The generic, third-person singular "they/them/their" pronouns will be used throughout this text, as the gender of the generic individual is irrelevant.

H_{1c}: Whether one has contact with LGBT-identifying individuals will affect whether they support or oppose each LGBT policy, with those that do have these experiences, for instance, expected to be more likely to support all policies analyzed.

Even more importantly, however, we will then determine whether the *combination* of our three independent variables (testing their interaction at each level of each variable) will have a significant effect on our LGBT policy position variables. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

H₂: One's party identity, evangelical identity, and LGBT contact experience will collectively affect whether they support or oppose each LGBT policy.

For instance, a non-evangelical Democrat with LGBT contact is expected to be most likely to support all LGBT policies, while an evangelical Republican with no-LGBT contact is expected to be least likely to support them. However, each evangelical x party affiliation intersection is expected to complicate positions that are dependent on the LGBT policy in question, which leads us to theorize 48 hypotheses in total¹⁵. Furthermore, based on the religiously tied nature of some LGBT issues, we expect these effects to be stronger for the morally charged LGBT policies of same-sex marriage and adoption than for anti-discrimination policies, which are typically situated within the context of traditional civil rights. Consequently, our final hypothesis states:

H₃: The effects of one's party identity, evangelical affiliation, and LGBT contact experience on their policy preference formation will be stronger for the same-sex marriage and adoption policies than for the housing and employment anti-discrimination policies.

¹⁵ For a full list of hypotheses for each of the 3-way interactions of our independent variables, please see Appendix Table 4.1.

5. Data, Variables, and Measures

5.1 Survey Data

This study analyzes a total of 1,601 individual survey responses collected from the 2017 ($n=801$) and 2018 ($n=800$) iterations of the *Arkansas Poll Survey (AR Poll)* that is conducted annually throughout the state of Arkansas. An *AR Poll* partner, the *Issues & Answers Network, Inc.* implemented a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method to administer the survey from October 12th to October 22nd in 2017 and October 1st to October 28th in 2018. Participation in the survey was both voluntary and anonymous, having a response rate of 28 percent for the 2017 survey and 21.9 percent for the survey conducted in 2018. The sample had a slight majority of female (approximately 54 percent) and non-Hispanic white respondents (approximately 79 percent), both characteristics which are largely representative of the Arkansas population (averaging a 51- and 73- percent presence, respectively, over the two-year period according to previous iterations of the *AR Poll*, the 2011 American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 census). Our respondent mean age of 59.8, however, is about 10 years higher than the Census estimate (which indicates a mean age of 48.6). Approximately 41 percent of survey respondents completed a college degree (compared to the Census-estimated 22 percent of the Arkansas population), although the median annual household income fell within the \$35,001 to \$50,000 range (which contains the state's Census-calculated average income of approximately \$42,000).

5.2 Variables and Measures

The primary dependent variables indicate respondent support toward four LGBT-oriented policies – same-sex marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and housing and employment anti-discrimination. As shown in Table 1, survey responses to each LGBT policy were originally measured using a dichotomous scale with the values 0 (indicating opposition) and 1 (signifying

support). We selected these four policies to provide a potential comparison between those LGBT issues that have been argued to be based in (im)morality (i.e., same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption) and the less morally charged issues surrounding workplace and housing discrimination. Doing so allows us to analyze not only how individuals with differing party identifications and religious orientations process their contact experiences with LGBT persons in forming their attitudes toward LGBT policies in general, but also how this mental process may vary depending on the perceived moral dimensions of the specific LGBT policy in question.

Table 4.1. Dependent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Support of Same-Sex Marriage	Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriage? (0=Should not be recognized; 1=Should be recognized) (n = 1,221)
Support of Same-Sex Adoption	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of adoption? (0= No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 1,185)
Support of LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities? (0=No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 1,256)
Support of LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination	Do you think gays and lesbians should or should not have equal rights in terms of housing...renting and leasing, for example? (0=No, they should not have equal rights; 1=Yes, they should have equal rights) (n = 1,229)

As presented in Table 2, our primary independent variables include respondents' self-described political party identification (ID), evangelical identity, and contact experiences with LGBT-identifying individuals. Our party ID variable was recorded according to respondents' choices among three identities (0=Republican; 1=Independent; 2=Democrat). The remaining variables of interest – evangelical identity and LGBT contact – were both measured dichotomously, with respondents indicating whether they identified as a “born-again” evangelical Christian (where 0=No; 1=Yes) and whether they had “family members or close

friends” who identify as gay or lesbian (where 0=No; 1=Yes)¹⁶. In our analysis that follows, those who identified as evangelical Christians were compared to those with a non-evangelical Christian affiliation (including those who did not identify with any religion), and those who indicated they had contact with LGBT persons (through LGBT family members or close friends) were compared to respondents who lacked this contact.

Table 4.2. Primary independent variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Party Identification	Do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what? (0=Republican; 1=Independent; 2=Democrat) (n = 1,438)
Evangelical Christian Identity	Do you consider yourself a born-again or evangelical Christian? (0=No; 1=Yes) (n = 1,556)
Having LGBT Family/Close Friends	Are any of your family members or close friends gay or lesbian? (0=No; 1=Yes) (n = 1,545)

As shown in Table 3, we also include measures of ideology (1=Liberal; 2=Moderate; 3=Conservative) and religiosity (or attendance of religious services, ranging from 1=Never to 7=More than once a week) as control variables to untangle any possible interrelations with our primary variables of interest. We also employ demographic characteristics as control variables, including race (0=non-white; 1=non-Hispanic white), gender (0=Female; 1=Male), age (in years), educational attainment (ranging from 1=no high school to 7=graduate or professional degree), and annual household income (ranging from 1=\$7,500 or less to 8=\$100,001 or more for both the 2017 and 2018 surveys), followed by the year of data collection itself (0=2017; 1=2018).

¹⁶ This operationalization of LGBT contact is consistent with similar previous surveys and studies (e.g., Burnett & King, 2015; Garner, 2013; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Skipworth et al., 2010), although we discuss its limitations in our conclusion.

Table 4.3. Control variables and measures

Variable	Measure
Ideology	How would you describe your views on most political matters? Do you think of yourself as a Liberal, Moderate, or Conservative? (1(=Liberal) to 3(=Conservative))
Religiosity	About how often do you attend religious services? (1(=Never) to 7(=More than once a week))
Race/ethnicity	0=Non-white; 1=White (non-Hispanic)
Gender	0=Female; 1=Male
Age	Age in years
Education	Highest level of schooling (1(=no high school) to 7(=graduate or professional degree))
Income	Which income category best describes your total 2016 household income? (1(=\$7,500 or less) to 8(=\$100,001 or over))
Year	Year of data collection (0=2017; 1=2018)

6. Statistical Analysis and Results

6.1 Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis

Due to the dichotomous nature of all four of our policy variables, we utilized binominal logistic regression to analyze how our primary independent variables (i.e., party ID, evangelical affiliation, and LGBT contact experience) influenced individuals' likelihood for LGBT policy support. As shown in Table 4, our analysis revealed relationships that were consistent with our expectations (H_{1a} through H_{1c}). For party ID, both Independents and Democrats were significantly more supportive of all four LGBT policies, to increasing degrees, when compared to Republicans (H_{1a}). Similarly, respondents who identified as evangelical Christians were less likely to support all LGBT policies (H_{1b}), although this lack of support was only significant for same-sex marriage and adoption. Finally, contact with LGBT individuals had significant positive effects on the support of all four LGBT policies (H_{1c}).

Table 4.4. Binomial logistic regression analysis

	Same-Sex Marriage	Same-Sex Adoption	LGBT Employment Anti- Discrimination	LGBT Housing Anti- Discrimination
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Independent	0.698*** (0.223)	0.661*** (0.216)	0.997*** (0.339)	0.560* (0.306)
Democrat	1.063*** (0.273)	0.839*** (0.266)	1.424*** (0.464)	0.868** (0.382)
Evangelical Christian	-0.533*** (0.194)	-1.361* (0.190)	-0.053 (0.300)	-0.348 (0.275)
LGBT Family/Friends	0.670*** (0.187)	0.739*** (0.183)	1.255*** (0.331)	0.508* (0.274)
Ideology	-0.584*** (0.136)	-0.558*** (0.134)	-0.510** (0.259)	0.057 (0.199)
Religiosity	-0.282*** (0.046)	-0.270*** (0.046)	0.033 (0.071)	-0.144** (0.070)
Race (1=White)	0.197 (0.240)	0.517** (0.242)	0.513 (0.413)	0.254 (0.360)
Gender (1=Male)	-0.339* (0.189)	-0.386** (0.187)	-0.428 (0.297)	-0.422 (0.271)
Age	-0.024*** (0.006)	-0.026*** (0.006)	-0.025** (0.010)	-0.016* (0.009)
Education	0.226*** (0.067)	0.165** (0.067)	0.129 (0.111)	0.200* (0.102)
Income	0.021 (0.047)	0.105** (0.047)	0.091 (0.075)	0.138** (0.067)
Year (1=2018)	0.388** (0.187)	0.057 (0.186)	-0.034 (0.290)	0.322 (0.267)
(Intercept)	1.860*** (0.651)	2.077*** (0.649)	2.854** (1.131)	1.642* (0.961)
<i>n</i>	733	721	749	742
Log Likelihood	-373.668	-381.350	-180.310	-218.521
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.261	0.232	0.166	0.101

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses.

Some of our control variables had both positive and negative influences on the likelihood of supporting the four LGBT policies, with varying levels of significance across each. Our ideology variable had significant effects on support for all LGBT policies except for housing anti-discrimination. Both same-sex marriage and adoption support were negatively affected by participants' ideology, where, perhaps unsurprisingly, higher levels of conservatism were associated with positions of opposition. We found very similar results for our variable measuring religiosity. Respondents' increasing religious activity significantly and negatively affected all but housing anti-discrimination policy support.

With respect to the standard battery of demographic control variables, we discovered expected outcomes for all but our race and income variables. Age had a significant negative effect on respondents' support of all policies, with older respondents being associated with less support. Further, respondents' education levels showed a positive influence on support across many of the LGBT policies, specifically regarding support of same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and housing anti-discrimination. Further, compared to those who identified as female, we observed a significant negative effect of males' support of both same-sex marriage and adoption. Generally, there was no significant difference in policy support between white and non-white respondents; however, we observed an unexpected positive effect on white respondents' views of LGBT employment anti-discrimination. Additionally, annual household income only positively and significantly affected respondents' support of same-sex adoption and housing anti-discrimination, although previous findings (Kordsmeier et al., 2019) show a positive influence across all four policy types. Lastly, between our two years of survey data we found only a difference in same-sex marriage support, where our 2018 responses indicated a positive and significant increase.

6.2 *Posterior Simulation-Based Probability Predictions*

While our initial analysis determining the statistically significant effect of each of our chosen predictors is informative, our central goal was to better understand the *interactions* among these predictors and their collective effects on policy support across each of the four LGBT policies. By doing so, we hoped to uncover more practical information regarding the likelihood that each hypothetical three-variable interaction group (and specifically how our two individual identity variables – one’s identification along party lines and evangelical affiliation– interact with LGBT contact) determines one’s likelihood of support for each policy surrounding a specific LGBT policy issue.

We analyzed twelve hypothetical and distinct groupings of respondents ((three party ID choices) X (two evangelical affiliation choices) X (two options surrounding LGBT contact)) to calculate their fitted probability of support for each of four LGBT policies. We then determined the number of observations that fell in each three-way interaction group, where all were found to be adequately represented (see Table 5). Finally, we calculated predicted support probabilities for each LGBT policy given the inclusion of our independent variables as predictors. This process involved finding the maximum likelihood estimate (MLE) that most likely represented the true probability that Arkansans within each of these identity groupings would support each LGBT policy (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017).

Table 4.5. Three-way interaction frequencies

IV 1	IV 2	IV 3	Frequency
Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	143
		No LGBT contact	121
	Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	53
		No LGBT contact	73
Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	174
		No LGBT contact	126
	Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	94
		No LGBT contact	113
Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	112
		No LGBT contact	103
	Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	126
		No LGBT contact	125

Using our full dataset, we employed an algorithm that would make individual attempts (or Fisher Score iterations) to “guess” the best-fitting probability estimate for each of the twelve said groupings of respondents until the MLE was reached. It is noteworthy that our algorithm utilized only the mean values of each control variable to conceptually “control” for their potential effects on the fitted probability estimates. These probability estimates were then analyzed to determine the hypothesized expected effects of our primary independent variables on Arkansans’ support for each LGBT policy (i.e., H_2), which provided us a means for comparing the intersecting effects between a respondent’s party ID, evangelical affiliation, and LGBT contact on their LGBT policy support.

Graphically represented in Figures 2 through 5, we created spider plots to visualize these interaction effects across each policy type. Each figure represents one of the four LGBT policies of study, with respondents’ party ID – either Republican (indicated by a black line with square data points), Independent (indicated by a dark grey line with triangular data points), or Democrat (indicated by a light grey line with circular data points) – represented along the graph’s “web”. These lines have distinct individual values across the other four identity intersections of

evangelical affiliation and LGBT contact, which were plotted in reference to the included probability scale that spanned from the value 0.0 (indicating no probability of support) to 1.0 (complete support). A darkened, dotted line was further added to show the “threshold” between support and opposition to the individual LGBT policy for each identity grouping, where predicted probability scores of 0.5 or higher indicate increasing levels of support, and those scores below 0.5 indicating growing levels of opposition.

6.2.1 Same-Sex Marriage

On same-sex marriage policy (Figure 2), Democrats exhibited the highest support, while Independents followed closely behind. Evangelical Democrats who had not experienced contact with LGBT persons as family or close friends were predicted to most likely oppose the policy (with an associated probability of 0.377), although this same group of individuals was predicted to cross the standard 0.5 threshold to actually *support* the policy (with a probability of 0.554) when this type of contact was present. However, Democrats who did not identify as evangelicals (including those who identified as non-evangelical Christians, who identified with another religion, or who had no religious ties at all), were expected to support same-sex marriage regardless of whether they had experienced close contact with LGBT individuals (where those without contact were associated with a support probability of 0.504, and those with this contact a probability of 0.675).

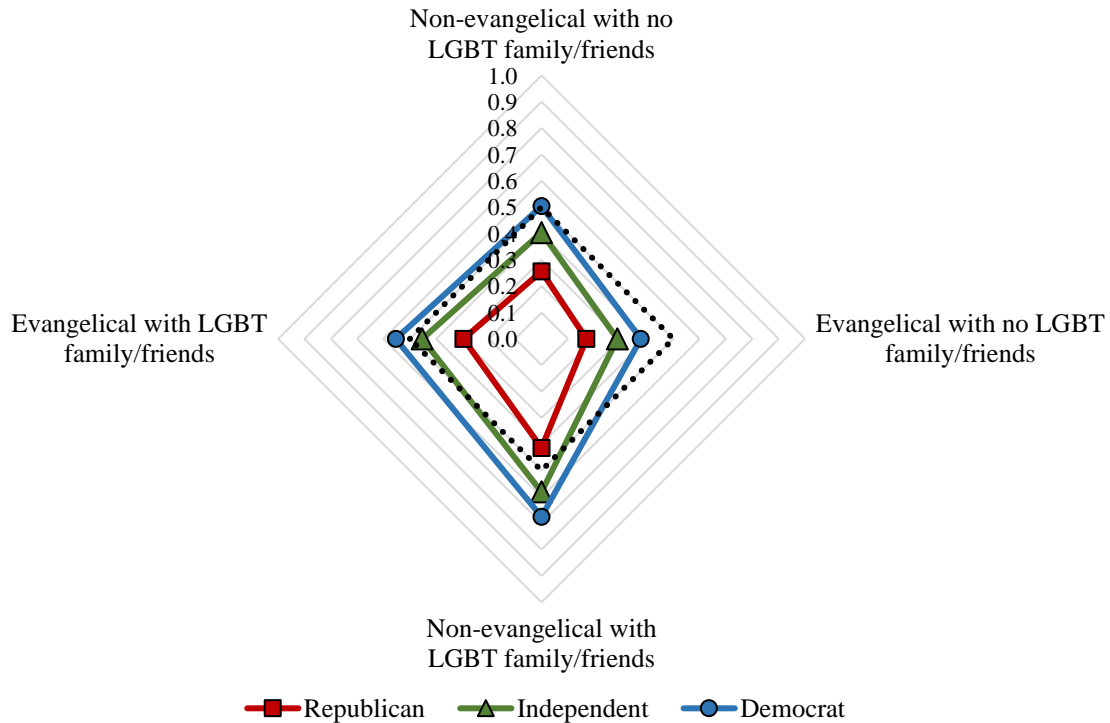


Figure 4.2. Predicted probability of same-sex marriage policy support

Similar to Democrats, respondents identifying as Independent, evangelical, and without close LGBT familial or friendship ties were predicted to rest below the 0.5-probability threshold to oppose same-sex marriage (0.288). However, unlike Democrat-identifying respondents, the presence of these forms of contact, though causing an increase in predicted policy support, did not cause Independent evangelicals to cross the threshold to indicate actual support (0.453). This shift from opposition to support was found for non-evangelical Independents, with close LGBT contact causing an increase in predicted support from a probability level below the support threshold (0.404) to one that rose above it (0.581).

Republicans showed the lowest support for same-sex marriage regardless of their evangelical affiliation or LGBT contact experiences. Those in this category who did identify as evangelical and did not have close contact experiences, for example, were predicted to strongly

oppose the policy (having a support probability of 0.170). Importantly, however, the opposition of evangelicals even *with* this form of contact was similarly predicted (with a support probability of 0.296), as was that of non-evangelical Republicans both with and without contact experiences (with a probability of 0.414 and 0.256, respectively).

6.2.2 Same-Sex Adoption

Though roughly the same pattern exists for support among all the identity cross-sections surrounding same-sex adoption (Figure 3), the overall predicted probability of support was higher than that found for same-sex marriage. Evangelical Democrats without LGBT contact experiences were still predicted to oppose the policy (with a corresponding probability of 0.464), but this same group was predicted to *support* the policy (having a probability of 0.646) when this form of contact was present. Similar to same-sex marriage policy, non-evangelical respondents were expected to support the issue whether they experienced contact with LGBT persons or not (with associated probabilities of 0.723 and 0.553, respectively).

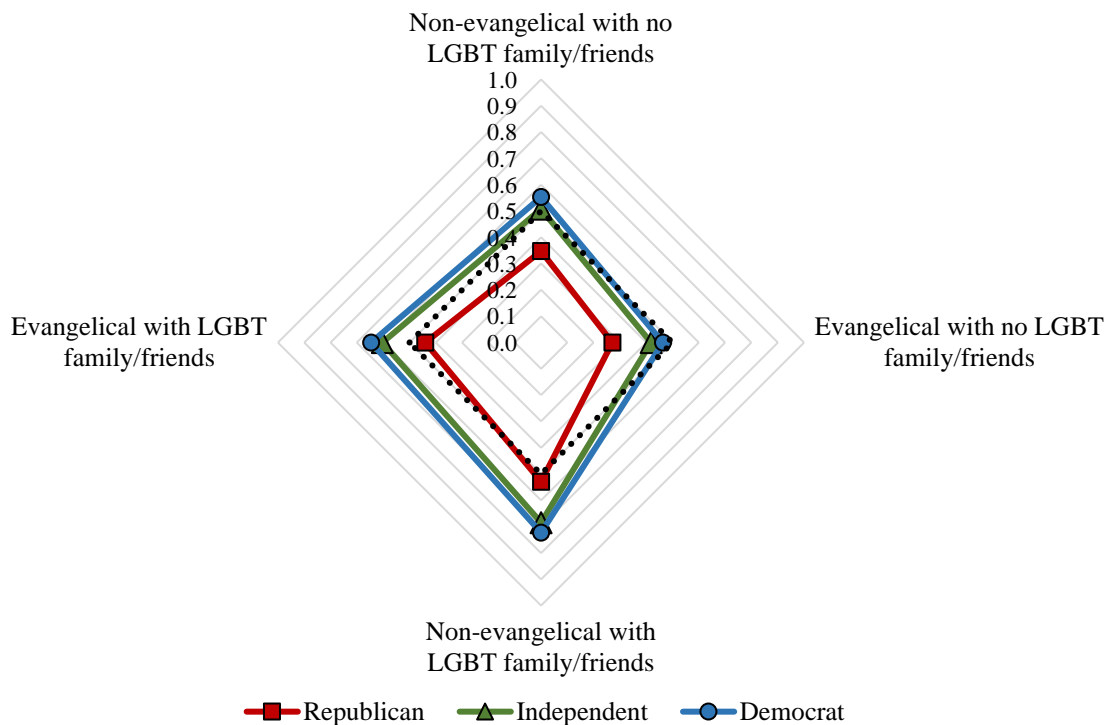


Figure 4.3. Predicted probability of same-sex adoption policy support

Independent-identifying evangelicals without LGBT contact (holding a probability of 0.419) were also predicted to likely oppose the policy, although contact did cause this probability to increase above the 0.5 threshold into policy-based support (with a probability of 0.603). This finding is somewhat significant given that evangelical Independents with LGBT contact experiences were not found to cross this support threshold regarding same-sex marriage. Non-evangelical Independents, unlike what was predicted for same-sex marriage, had probabilities indicating support for the policy regardless of whether the given respondent had LGBT contact experiences (with values of 0.507 for those without contact and 0.685 for those who did experience it).

Once again, Republicans were associated with the lowest support probabilities. Evangelicals in this group, like their predicted positions on same-sex marriage, were expected to

oppose the adoption policy, both for those with and without close LGBT contact (having associated probabilities of 0.271 and 0.440, respectively). However, those with these contact experiences were predicted to have a higher support probability than the same individuals regarding same-sex marriage (0.440 compared to 0.296). Similarly, non-evangelical Republicans were expected to cross the probability threshold to actually *support* same-sex adoption (with a 0.529 probability) if they had experienced close contact with LGBT individuals.

6.2.3 LGBT Employment and Housing Anti-Discrimination

It is between the previous and remaining two LGBT-focused policies where we saw a significantly large divergence in respondent support. Concerning employment anti-discrimination specifically (Figure 4), all identity cross-sections (across party ID, evangelical identity, and LGBT contact status) were predicted to support the policy. Whether individuals identified as Democrats or Republicans, evangelicals or otherwise, or as having close LGBT relationships or not – all were expected to support employment anti-discrimination.

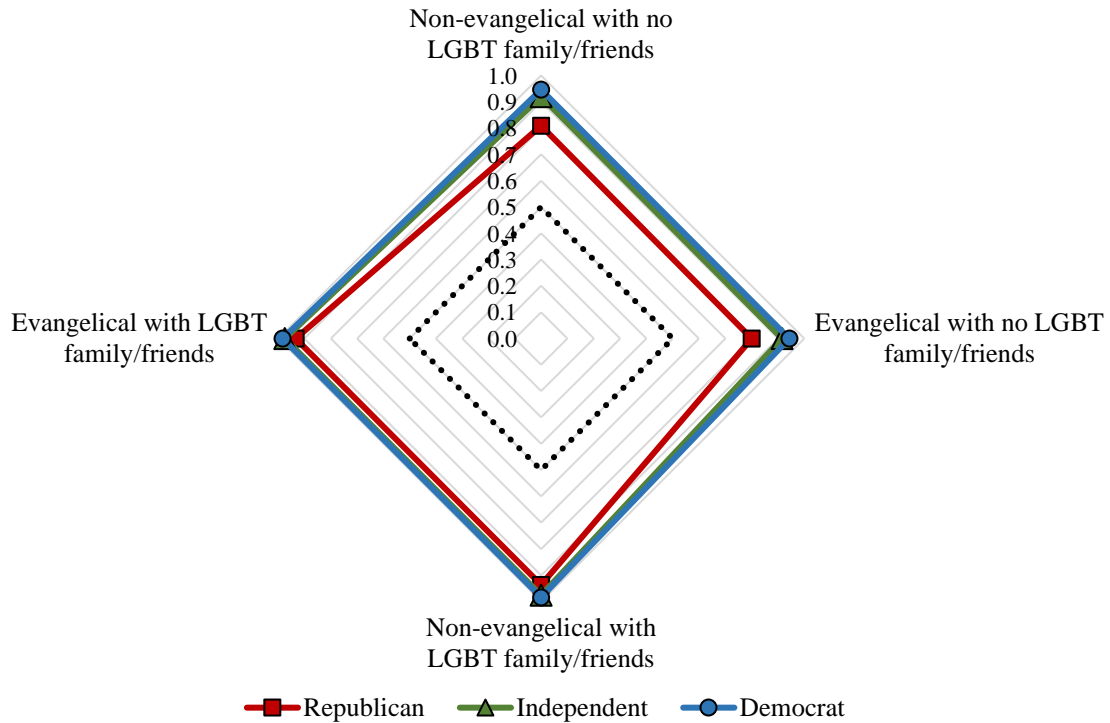


Figure 4.4. Predicted probability of LGBT employment policy support

The results regarding housing anti-discrimination support are similar (Figure 5), though almost all identity cross-section groups have a slightly lower predicted probability than on employment policy. Based on the findings for all four LGBT policies, our H_2 and H_3 hypotheses were also confirmed, where a dual Republican and evangelical identification without LGBT contact experiences was found to show the lowest level of support for all the LGBT policies (and especially the morality-based policies of same-sex marriage and adoption), followed by these same individuals who did have this form of contact.

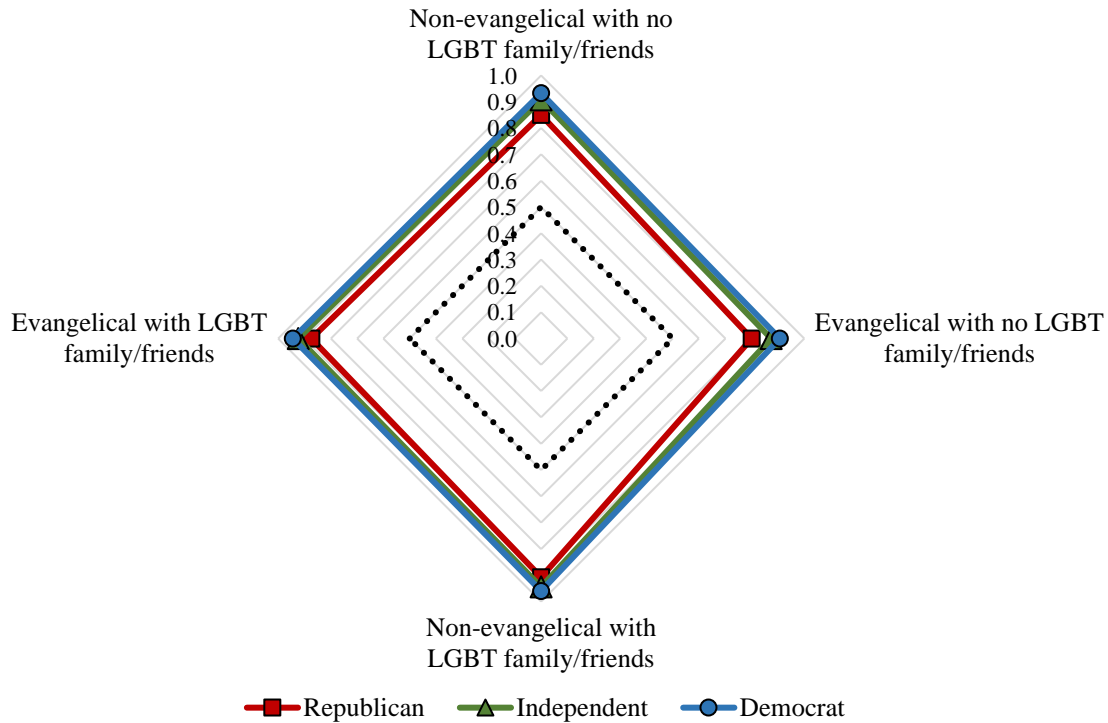


Figure 4.5. Predicted probability of LGBT housing policy support

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Our results indicate a complex relationship between party identity, religious affiliation, and LGBT contact. Support for LGBT policies was found to be dependent upon contact with LGBT individuals in the form of close friendships and familial ties as well as on how one identified both politically and religiously. Further, unlike with the same-sex marriage and adoption policies, LGBT contact was shown to have much less of a predicted effect on support for employment and housing rights, which can likely be explained by the already high level of support that those *without* these LGBT contact experiences were predicted to have. As a result, there appears to be a limit to the importance of these contact experiences for those who are already highly supportive of the policy in question. Similarly, for those groups expected to have

high opposition to a specific LGBT policy (such as Republican evangelicals toward same-sex marriage), contact with LGBT individuals does not necessarily increase support.

By contrast, for those who lie between these “poles” of party identification and religious affiliation, contact can actually shift their opposition to support for same-sex marriage and adoption. When LGBT contact with close friends or family members was present for evangelical Democrats and non-evangelical Independents, for example, their view of both same-sex marriage and adoption surpassed the support threshold. And for same-sex adoption, contact helped to gain the support of evangelical Independents and non-evangelical Republicans. As a result, it appears there may be a significant effect (i.e., movement from opposition to support) of LGBT contact that exists only for the *inverted* relationships, or interactions among contrasting identities of party identification and evangelical identity.

This effect of contact also might only be significant for LGBT policies that are considered morality-based issues. These findings thereby lead us to consider the potential effects of what many have called the *moral* dimensions of same-sex marriage and adoption policies. Haider-Markel and Meier (1996) are credited for determining the specific characteristics that policies identified to have a moral focus share: where they are classified through the assessment of an individual’s attitudes and beliefs, characterized by conflict surrounding what we would consider basic moral values (and so the inability to imagine, or even consider, potential alternatives to the issue), and they thereby create a heightened drive for individuals to both voice their partisan opinions and do so along the simple basis of what they believe to be “right” and “wrong” (Etzioni, 2018; Haider-Markel, 2018). As with other morality-based policies, those surrounding LGBT rights are often marked by intense clashes over individuals’ deeply personal opinions surrounding homosexuality. However, this influence has been found to be largely

dependent upon the specific issue in question. High-salience issues – such as same-sex marriage and adoption – have been previously found to be much more likely to evoke morality-based opinions than are LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination (Cravens, 2015; Lax & Phillips, 2009). As a result, direct contact with LGBT persons might be one of the only means through which individuals’ morally based opposition to LGBT policies can be challenged.

However, as is also the case with other areas of morality policy, local subcultures and other considerations shape LGBT policy outcomes (Sharp, 2005). In the case of Arkansas, the steady increase in citizen support for LGBT rights despite general conservatism toward LGBT policies within the state’s legislature could be seen as a result of heavy activism by groups in opposition to LGBT rights. Riverstone-Newell (2017), for example, found that states whose legislatures are dominated by conservative members and further pressured by pointed activism from organized conservative groups gives them the ability to thwart efforts to pass local LGBT-supportive policies, even when they have high support among residents. This occurred in Arkansas, where cities like Fayetteville (National Public Radio, 2017) and Eureka Springs (Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 2015) passed publicly supported LGBT anti-discrimination measures that were later struck down by the Arkansas state legislature. In this way, Arkansas can further act as a valuable case study whose results can be generalized to other similarly situated states dominated by conservative leadership but who also have high levels of public support for LGBT policies.

And yet despite these findings, they are not without their limitations. We specifically note our inability to determine the chronological order of events surrounding an individual’s contact with an LGBT-identifying person, as well as whether familial contact represented close contact with a family member or more distant familial relationships (such as the individual merely

knowing someone in their family who identified as LGBT). However, regarding the former point, the issue of endogeneity between contact and our other two independent variables of interest is inherent to contact itself, as determining all the outlying factors that lead to and/or affect LGBT contact experiences is not possible. With this, analyzing contact even in this limited way is useful to understand complex sociological processes as possible through the means we have available.

Further, our data's combination of LGBT friendships and family relationships as utilized elsewhere (e.g., Burnett & King, 2015; Garner, 2013; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Skipworth et al., 2010) can still serve as a valuable indicator for both chosen and unchosen contact experiences, even if their potential distinctions cannot be determined. However, to better understand these distinctions, we advise future studies with the adequate resources to utilize Bramlett's (2012) approach of asking survey participants to further describe their closest LGBT relationships. Lastly, the average age of our response pool should also be kept in perspective. Garretson (2015) and others have indicated that liberalization is more significant and faster for younger generations. As a result, our study's older-than-average response pool could actually be a *conservative* measure of how one's LGBT contact experiences, party affiliation, and evangelical identity affects their support for different LGBT policies. These considerations and others should be made in future studies in this area of public policy research both within and outside of Arkansas, especially in the quest to address whether and how the working of morality-based issues differs from those surrounding basic human rights.

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Appendices

Appendix Table 4.1. Complete listing of H₂ hypotheses

ID	IV 1	IV 2	IV 3	Value of DV
H _{2a}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex marriage
H _{2b}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2c}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2d}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2e}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex marriage
H _{2f}			No LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex marriage
H _{2g}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex marriage
H _{2h}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2i}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex marriage
H _{2j}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2k}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex marriage
H _{2l}			No LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex marriage
H _{2m}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex adoption
H _{2n}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2o}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2p}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2q}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex adoption
H _{2r}			No LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex adoption
H _{2s}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex adoption
H _{2t}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2u}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex adoption
H _{2v}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2w}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support same-sex adoption
H _{2x}			No LGBT contact	Oppose same-sex adoption
H _{2y}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support LGBT employment anti-discrimination
H _{2z}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2aa}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2bb}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2cc}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2dd}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2ee}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2ff}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2gg}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Oppose LGBT employment anti-discrimination
H _{2hh}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2ii}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support LGBT employment anti-discrimination
H _{2jj}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2kk}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Support LGBT housing anti-discrimination
H _{2ll}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2mm}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2nn}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2oo}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2pp}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2qq}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	
H _{2rr}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2ss}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	Oppose LGBT housing anti-discrimination
H _{2tt}			No LGBT contact	
H _{2uu}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	Support LGBT housing anti-discrimination
H _{2vv}			No LGBT contact	

Appendix Table 4.2. Frequencies of nominal scale variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Same-Sex Marriage	Against	691	57%
	For	530	43%
Same-Sex Adoption	Against	559	47%
	For	626	53%
LGBT Employment Anti-Discrimination	Against	114	9%
	For	1142	91%
LGBT Housing Anti-Discrimination	Against	148	12%
	For	1081	88%
Party Identification	Republican	489	34%
	Independent	537	37%
	Democrat	412	29%
Evangelical Christian Identity	No	913	59%
	Yes	643	41%
Having LGBT Family/Friends	No	764	49%
	Yes	781	51%
Race/Ethnicity	Non-white	323	21%
	White	1247	79%
Gender	Female	861	54%
	Male	740	46%
Year	2017	801	50%
	2018	800	50%

Appendix Table 4.3. Posterior simulation probability values

ID	IV 1	IV 2	IV 3	Value of DV
H _{2a}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.5537
H _{2b}			No LGBT contact	0.3769
H _{2c}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.6754
H _{2d}			No LGBT contact	0.5036
H _{2e}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.4530
H _{2f}			No LGBT contact	0.2876
H _{2g}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.5814
H _{2h}			No LGBT contact	0.4038
H _{2i}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.2963
H _{2j}			No LGBT contact	0.1703
H _{2k}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.4139
H _{2l}			No LGBT contact	0.2561
H _{2m}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.6460
H _{2n}			No LGBT contact	0.4638
H _{2o}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.7228
H _{2p}			No LGBT contact	0.5528
H _{2q}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.6029
H _{2r}			No LGBT contact	0.4185
H _{2s}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.6846
H _{2t}			No LGBT contact	0.5071
H _{2u}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.4399
H _{2v}			No LGBT contact	0.2713
H _{2w}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.5289
H _{2x}			No LGBT contact	0.3473
H _{2y}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9830
H _{2z}			No LGBT contact	0.9431
H _{2aa}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9839
H _{2bb}			No LGBT contact	0.9460
H _{2cc}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9743
H _{2dd}			No LGBT contact	0.9157
H _{2ee}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9756
H _{2ff}			No LGBT contact	0.9198
H _{2gg}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9333
H _{2hh}			No LGBT contact	0.8002
H _{2ii}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9366
H _{2jj}			No LGBT contact	0.8087
H _{2kk}	Democrat	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9443
H _{2ll}			No LGBT contact	0.9072
H _{2mm}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9599
H _{2nn}			No LGBT contact	0.9325
H _{2oo}	Independent	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9234
H _{2pp}			No LGBT contact	0.8743
H _{2qq}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9445
H _{2rr}			No LGBT contact	0.9075
H _{2ss}	Republican	Evangelical	LGBT contact	0.8740
H _{2tt}			No LGBT contact	0.8000
H _{2uu}		Non-evangelical	LGBT contact	0.9073
H _{2vv}			No LGBT contact	0.8495

Chapter V

Concluding Thoughts: The Role of Contact Theory in Contemporary Public Opinion of LGBT Rights

1. Dissertation Summary: An Overview of Findings

The three studies herein provide general support for the longstanding Contact Theory (CT), which emphasizes perceptual change in individuals who interact with people from a minority community, and the LGBT community in particular. Contact with LGBT-identifying individuals was, in fact, shown to have a positive effect on both Americans' and Arkansans' perceptions of LGBT policies. However, as results also showed, this effect is highly dependent upon an individual's identities, the form this contact takes, and the specific LGBT right a corresponding policy is addressing. Across all studies' findings, the effect of LGBT contact on support for relationship-based LGBT policies – namely, those that surround same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption – was conditional upon not only how one identified along the ideological spectrum, within the American political party system, or whether they identified with the Christian evangelist religion, but also the level of closeness with members of the LGBT community that the individual experienced. We will discuss each of these conditions in further detail, focusing specifically on their implications for our understanding of the CT in the formation of public perceptions on LGBT rights and for the directions they reveal for future research.

1.1. The Effects of Ideology, Party Identification, and Level of Contact

Both liberal and Democrat-identifying individuals expressed general support for LGBT relationship-based policies when they had close friends and family members within the LGBT

community, as well as when they had these close relationships and more distant LGBT acquaintances at the same time. However, for conservative and Republican-identifying individuals, the specific level, or closeness of their LGBT contact experiences determined whether they supported either of the relationship-based policies. Specifically, close contact increased support for both policies, even though this increase did not necessarily result in actual *support* for either. However, one study (Chapter II) determined that LGBT acquaintanceship actually *decreased* conservative respondents' support; two studies (Chapters II and IV) revealed that LGBT acquaintanceships in combination with close LGBT friendships and family relationships had no effect on their support for these policies; and all three studies indicated that mere LGBT acquaintanceship had no effect on conservative and Republican-leaning individuals' policy perceptions.

There are multiple reasons why conservative and Republican-leaning individuals process contact with LGBT persons who are not close friends differently, particularly for relationship-based LGBT rights like same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption. One such explanation is that these individuals could be less likely than liberal and Democrat-leaning individuals to *further* interact with their LGBT acquaintances to develop a closer bond – one that could lead to an actual friendship (Ellison et al., 2011). Instead, merely knowing a member of the LGBT community does not often appear to lead to a closer relationship for Americans or Arkansans who identify as conservative or Republican. As a result, this more distanced contact might have a limited effect on these individuals' overall attitudes toward the LGBT community (Skipworth et al., 2010).

As another potential explanation, others have found that conservatives who do interact further with their LGBT acquaintances to form closer bonds tend to *individuate* these

experiences. Specifically, more conservative Americans and Arkansans might view LGBT friends as exceptions, rather than representations, of the LGBT community (Lewis, 2011; Skipworth et al., 2010). This individuation of their LGBT friendships can thereby result in conservatives' opinions of the overarching LGBT community – as well as the policies that they correspond to – going largely unchanged.

As a potential caveat to this process, however, is that some of the present studies' findings suggest that the individuation of LGBT close contact experiences might not occur consistently. Instead, it appears that when those who identify as conservative or Republican have close LGBT friends, they might actually view these individuals as representative of the LGBT community as a whole. Instead, it might be that when these individuals have *both* close LGBT friends and LGBT acquaintances, they may – though not always – view these friends as exceptions, while their LGBT acquaintances (who do not actively challenge their perceptions of the LGBT community) may be seen as a more accurate representations.

1.2. The Interaction of Party and Evangelical Identity

When we further studied the potential interaction between respondents' party identity and identification with the evangelical Christian faith, we found another important distinction in our understanding of the effects LGBT contact on LGBT policy perceptions. Specifically, while evangelical Republicans were predictably unaffected by their LGBT contact experiences to oppose both same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, these contact experiences did influence those who identified as non-evangelical Republicans, as well as evangelical Democrats. When LGBT contact with close friends and family members was present both groups, their initial opposition to same-sex adoption actually shifted to support for the policy. As a result, there appears to be a significant effect of LGBT contact that only exists for *inverted* relationships, or

the interactions among seemingly contrasting identities an individual may hold. This relationship only exists, however, for perception-building surrounding LGBT relationship-based policies.

1.3. Which LGBT Right? The Role of Morality Politics

While unique effects on LGBT policy perceptions were found between an individuals' multiple social identities and the level of LGBT contact they experienced on same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, these effects did not exist when we analyzed perceptions surrounding LGBT employment and housing anti-discrimination. Instead, LGBT contact had much less of an effect – and often an insignificant one at that – on support for anti-discrimination policies. However, as described throughout this text this is likely explained by the fact that a large majority of both Americans and Arkansans support these policies *regardless* of their political ideology, party affiliation, or evangelical identity.

Support for the relationship-based policies, on the other hand, varied based on the specific combination of identities held by respondents, as well as the closeness of their relationships with LGBT individuals. These findings are consistent with studies on morality-based policies, which are treated as distinct due to the unique psychological processes they invoke. Specifically, others have found that issues rooted in moral value predispositions – including the perceived morality of same-sex relationships – tend to exhibit high stability in their policy preferences (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Policies that evoke these moral interpretations – interpretations that are rooted in a foundational understanding of what an individual believes to be “right” or “wrong” – can create opposition by those who view homosexuality in the latter light (Haider-Markel, 2018). As a result, direct, close contact with LGBT-identifying individuals might be the only means through which these individuals' opinions of policies that challenge

their moral perceptions can be improved, while merely knowing someone within the LGBT community has no effect.

2. Addressing Limitations: Areas for Future Research

While the above findings do provide compelling evidence for the positive, though varying, effect of contact with LGBT-identifying persons on LGBT policy positions, the analyses upon which they are based are not without their limitations. The most obvious issue is our inability to determine the chronological order of events that surrounded a respondent's contact with members of the LGBT community – a circumstance that could indicate an issue of endogeneity. Specifically, we could not, using the data available, rule out the prospect that the ideology, party identification, or religious-based identity of respondents *led* them to either seek or avoid contact with LGBT individuals. However, this issue is inherent to the study of contact itself, as it is largely impossible to determine all the outlying factors that lead one to seek out and further develop relationships with individuals from the LGBT community. As a result, analyzing contact – even in this limited way – can still be considered a viable method by which we can attempt to understand the complex psychological processes at play.

To further improve the measurement of LGBT contact relationships, future research should consider separating family relationships and close LGBT friendships into separate variables, or at least having a deeper understanding of the true nature of a respondent's contact with LGBT family members. None of the studies presented were able to methodologically determine whether familial contact as operationalized truly represented close family relationships or simply the knowledge that someone in the respondent's family identified as LGBT. If this contact for some respondents was in the latter category, their familial contact experiences could

have been incorrectly placed in the category with close LGBT friendships, thereby making our close contact variable misleading. However, our combination of LGBT close friendships and familial relationships in this way, as shown by others utilizing the same operationalization (e.g., Burnett & King, 2015; Garner, 2013; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2017), can still serve as a valuable indicator for both chosen and unchosen contact experiences, even if their potential distinctions cannot be determined. However, to better understand these distinctions, future studies could follow Bramlett's (2012) proposed approach of directly asking survey respondents to further describe their closest LGBT relationships.

Aside from the operationalization of LGBT contact, further analysis into state-specific environments and how they may impact findings in this area are also vital for a complete understanding the relationship between LGBT contact and LGBT policy positions in the U.S. context. Specifically, the U.S. is a large, diverse country comprised of 50 distinct states that have their own histories, even if they share a general American history with one another. These histories have impacted their respective cultures, as well as the way that state residents observe and interact with one another, and how they view the policy issues that affect them. As a result, further research into state public opinion surrounding LGBT issues should be conducted, with studies like Earle et al.'s (2021) potentially leading the way through their use of measures of both individual-level LGBT contact experiences and environment-based climate surrounding LGBT issues.

Finally, as is stated throughout this work, "LGBT" is commonly used as an identifier of lesbian and gay-related policies – whether within the state, national, or global context. However, as multiple scholars have pointed out (e.g., Tadlock et al., 2017), there are potential differences in the effect of contact with LGBT individuals if those individuals identify as transgender or

gender non-conforming. Future research should attempt to make this distinction to determine if the effect of contact on policy perceptions operates differently in these cases, as there appears to be mixed findings within current preliminary research (e.g., Tadlock et al., 2017 compared to Axt et al., 2021). Additionally, there is the option to analyze the effect of *parasocial* contact, or the exposure to transgender and gender non-conforming characters on individuals' views of LGBT gender-based issues, to combat the difficulty of finding a representative sample of those who have experienced contact with members of these groups (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2018; Massey et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2020).

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