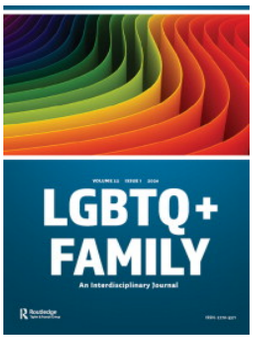

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It Takes More than a Village: Involvement in Positive LGBTQIA+ Socialization from Origin Family, Chosen Family, Community, and Parasocial Relationships

Eric K. Layland[a], August X. Wei[a], Natalie M. Maurer[a] and Ilana Seager van Dyk[b]

[a]Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA; [b]School of Psychology, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Parents remain the focus of LGBTQIA+ socialization, and contributions of other family and non-family relationships remain unknown. We identified who contributes to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization using a broad, queered definition of family. Data from the Queer Joy Project (New Zealand and United States, 2023–2024) included LGBTQIA+ adolescents and adults (ages 16–71; $n = 490$). Using repeated measures ANOVA, frequency of positive LGBTQIA-related messages while growing up were compared across origin family, chosen family, community, and media. Qualitative content analysis of brief narratives identified who positively influenced participants' sense of LGBTQIA+ self. Positive messages were most frequent from chosen family, then media, origin family, and community ($F = 280.03$, $p < .001$). Transgender and nonbinary participants received positive messages from origin family less frequently than cisgender participants ($t = 2.27$; $p = 0.03$). Generation Z participants received positive messages more frequently in all relationship domains compared to older participants ($Fs = 19.61–55.14$; $ps < .001$). In narratives, participants most frequently identified chosen family (48.3%), community (22.8%), origin family (18.3%), and parasocial relationships (16.3%). Many participants (69.6%) identified someone who was LGBTQIA+. LGBTQIA+ socialization could be enhanced by improving origin family participation and increasing youth access to LGBTQIA+ peers, community, and media. Future positive socialization research and practice should broaden and diversify conceptualization of family.

KEYWORDS

Chosen family; socialization; queer; parasocial relationships; sexual and gender minority

Introduction

Generally, adolescents learn to make sense of interpersonal roles, cultural norms, and their place in social groups via social learning—the process through which one person patterns their behavior, thoughts, and feelings after others who serve as role models and sources of information and guidance (Bandura & Walters, 1977). The origin family provides one of the most important contexts for social learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Garcia et al., 2020), including identity-specific social learning processes (Hughes et al., 2006). While there exists a robust body of research on how individuals learn about their racial and ethnic identity and gender (typically according to birth-assigned sex) in the family context (D. J. Johnson, 2022; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020), research remains nascent on who plays an important role in similar socialization processes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other sexual and gender

CONTACT Eric K. Layland layland@udel.edu University of Delaware; Department of Human Development and Family Sciences; Newark, DE, USA.

minoritized (LGBTQIA+) youth learning to understand and navigate their minoritized sexual and/or gender identity.

Building from established evidence on racial socialization and grounded in social learning theory, LGBTQIA+ socialization is a hypothesized developmental, communal process through which adolescents are socialized by others to a shared understanding of their LGBTQIA+ identities, creation of LGBTQIA+ social bonds, and navigation of stigma-related stress (Fish & Ezra, 2023). Development of these social and individual resources may in turn protect LGBTQIA+ adolescents by buffering the impact of stigma, providing access to social support, and establishing a strong, integrated LGBTQIA+ identity. Although research shows LGBTQIA+ identity pride, coping strategies, and community connection are associated with improved mental health (Higa et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2010; Toomey et al., 2018), it is only recently becoming clear how LGBTQIA+ adolescents achieve these outcomes (Fish et al., 2025). Moreover, emerging research on LGBTQIA+ socialization has investigated the experience of LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ parents as central figures in LGBTQIA+ family socialization (e.g., Fish et al., 2025; Simon et al., 2024). Although parents are among the most influential figures for child and adolescent development, researchers have yet to critically and empirically examine *who* the key players are in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization processes extending from childhood into young adulthood.

Origin family and positive impact on LGBTQIA+ development

Established and emerging theories about family socialization can provide a helpful lens for studying LGBTQIA+ socialization processes—specifically, how parents may play a role in bolstering a positive sense of self and connection to community for LGBTQIA+ youth (Fish & Ezra, 2023). The central role of parents in LGBTQIA+ adolescent development, especially identity disclosure, is demonstrated by consistent evidence that parent support and acceptance predict better mental health for LGBTQIA+ adolescents (Hall, 2018). Specifically, parents can take positive actions to affirm LGBTQIA+ youth in their identities (e.g., using affirmed name and pronouns, advocating in school and community settings), actions which are linked to better mental health outcomes for youth (Johnson et al., 2020; Simons et al., 2013; Stone et al., 2022). Many parents of LGBTQIA+ youth, however, may not know the best ways to support their children, due in part to their lack of direct experience with LGBTQIA+ communities and the anti-LGBTQIA+ stigma their adolescents may face (Ben-Ari, 1995; D'amico et al., 2015; Roe, 2017; Ryan et al., 2010). Furthermore, research on parents of LGBTQIA+ youth often emphasizes parents' seemingly static traits and behaviors in response to their LGBTQIA+ child coming out, and focuses less on what they might say and do to shape LGBTQIA+ youths' understanding of their identity throughout development, including pre-disclosure (Johnson et al., 2020; McCurdy et al., 2023). Although similar family socialization processes for racial and ethnic identities have been widely studied with emphasis on parents and origin family, the vast majority of LGBTQIA+ young people grow up in families composed predominantly of people who do not share their LGBTQIA+ identities. As an emerging area of research, recent studies demonstrate parents, especially mothers, do engage in positive socialization through communicating positive messages related to sexual orientation (Fish et al., 2025; Harkness & Israel, 2018). Ultimately, more research is needed on who, including parents, may contribute to LGBTQIA+ youth developing a positive sense of self and a connection to the broader cultural experience of having a minoritized sexual or gender identity.

Although parents are often framed as the most central players in LGBTQIA+ youth development, siblings and other family members also play key roles. Compared to parent-child relationships, sibling relationships are often less hierarchical and more egalitarian, introducing the possibility for a more peer-like influence than parents (Connidis, 1992; Her et al., 2021). The egalitarian structure of sibling relationships may allow LGBTQIA+ youth to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity to siblings with less concern for rejection repercussions compared to parents who possess greater authority to withhold material support and control access to LGBTQIA+

resources. Recent work on identity disclosure processes demonstrates how LGBTQIA+ individuals often tell a sibling first about their identity before telling a parent (Barrow & Allen, 2020; Grafsky et al., 2018). After identity disclosure, siblings can provide emotional support which LGBTQIA+ individuals can draw upon when they later come out to parents. Moreover, like parents, support from siblings can confer protective benefit for LGBTQIA+ youth mental health (Bosse et al., 2024; Pariseau et al., 2019). Although a small number of studies point to the unique role of siblings in disclosure and post-disclosure support, the participation of siblings in broader positive LGBTQIA+ socializing processes remains generally unexamined, with limited exceptions. In a study of transgender and nonbinary youth whose siblings were also transgender or nonbinary, these siblings provided a unique type of support and affirmation by sharing the burden of navigating cisnormativity in the family context (McCandless-Chapman et al., 2025). Still, most research on LGBTQIA+ people and their siblings is focused on disclosure decisions and reactions (Szymanski & Hilton, 2021), with little consideration of whether siblings engage in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization and how their level of engagement compares to parents and other family contributions.

Although parents and siblings are often considered the most important family relationships in adolescent development, extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents can augment or fill-in support beyond what parents and siblings provide (Scales & Gibbons, 1996). In some cases, extended family members such as aunts or uncles present a blend of hierarchical and egalitarian relationships, unique from siblings and parents, thereby allowing them to act as mediators between parents and LGBTQIA+ children during coming out processes (Grafsky et al., 2018). Extended family members can also support LGBTQIA+ youth by helping navigate norms and practices around LGBTQIA+ identity in the broader family sphere (Robinson et al., 2023; Roe, 2017; Stone et al., 2022). In Latinx families in particular, cultural norms around familism present expectations of family loyalty and adherence to cultural norms (Munoz & D'Aniello, 2020). However, this emphasis on family closeness also involves maintaining active relationships with extended family members whose acceptance can buffer rejection from parents (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Overall, research on the impact and involvement of extended family in LGBTQIA+ individual development is limited. Across two reviews of LGBTQIA+ youth disclosure, only a handful of studies assessed involvement of extended family (Mousavi et al., 2025; Son & Updegraff, 2023) and typically demonstrated lower rates of disclosure to extended family relative to parents or siblings (Grafsky et al., 2018; McInroy et al., 2021). Whether extended family members contribute to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization is generally unexamined, with one known exception. For some LGBTQIA+ adolescents, having an LGBTQIA+ extended family member provided a role model that adolescents could learn from and emulate (Roe, 2017). Ultimately, most studies of extended family also focus on disclosure rates and reactions, with less attention paid to their involvement in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization and whether engagement in socialization may vary across different types of extended family relationships.

Queering family to include chosen family and community

Recent research emphasizes the role of origin family, especially parents, in LGBTQIA+ socialization (Fish & Ezra, 2023; Harkness & Israel, 2018; Kuvalanka & Munroe, 2020; Mares et al., 2023), yet most LGBTQIA+ adolescents grow up in families and communities comprised predominantly of people who do not share their LGBTQIA+ identities (Toomey et al., 2018). Thus, opportunities for social learning specific to LGBTQIA+ identities, cultural experiences, and stigma navigation may be difficult to access. Cisgender heterosexual parents who do not share LGBTQIA+ youths' lived experiences may be particularly constrained in their ability to help LGBTQIA+ youth navigate what it means to hold a minoritized sexual or gender minority identity. Indeed, LGBTQIA+ parents of LGBTQIA+ youth may have a unique capacity for positive socialization earlier in childhood, facilitation of understanding identity earlier, and potential for deeper relational bonds based on shared experience and identity (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009;

Kuvalanka & Munroe, 2020). Furthermore, the framing of family research for LGBTQIA+ youth should be attuned to the diversity in family relationships as defined within queer communities that defy and expand family roles (Donovan et al., 2003). Thus, a queered approach to family research necessitates acknowledging other figures as influential socializing agents in the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals (Fish & Russell, 2018), including consideration of chosen family members (e.g., supportive friends, romantic partners, intergenerational queer elder relationships) and even non-family relationships (e.g., educators, faith leaders, LGBTQIA+ community leaders).

Apart from origin family, LGBTQIA+ individuals often form close social ties with friends and romantic partners, known as "chosen family." Although the concept of chosen family was originally grounded in discourse about kinship, mutual aid, and caregiving among sexual minorities during the HIV/AIDS crisis (Weston, 2005), these figures also play a significant role in providing emotional validation and knowledge necessary for LGBTQIA+ individuals to explore and affirm their identities, especially for those who experience rejection from their origin families (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Weston, 2005). Given that it is more likely for chosen family members to also hold LGBTQIA+ identities compared to parents and other origin family, they may be able to provide affirmation and even socialization differently from origin family. Indeed, research demonstrates how chosen family members provide unique support in navigating medical systems and emotional support due to shared understanding of LGBTQIA+ identity (Jackson Levin et al., 2020). Research on positive LGBTQIA+ development often splits the impact of origin and chosen family into separate studies, thereby suggesting that these roles are disconnected and part of separate processes and contexts. For the developmental process of positive LGBTQIA+ socialization, it is important to consider how *both* chosen and origin family, across diverse relationships, contribute to this process. Comparative research can reveal both who contributes most to positive socialization and who could be better supported to contribute more.

There is also substantial research on the ways that LGBTQIA+ individuals find emotional and instrumental support through their involvement in LGBTQ-focused community organizations and programs (Huynh, 2023; J. F. Miller & Capello, 2022). Such groups can provide educational resources and community connection for LGBTQIA+ individuals seeking more information about navigating their identities. However, there is less research on how different figures in the community (e.g., educators, faith leaders, LGBTQIA+ community organization leaders) may play a socializing role in helping LGBTQIA+ individuals come to a positive understanding of their identities. Consideration of community helping relationships, together with origin and chosen family, can further elucidate who the key players are in facilitating positive LGBTQIA+ socialization across development.

The potential of parasocial relationships

Family and community relationships can provide benefits to LGBTQIA+ youth through explicit support and acceptance, yet many LGBTQIA+ youth turn to the internet to find their primary source of social interaction and information about their identities (Alix, 2020; Craig & McInroy, 2014). Beyond providing LGBTQIA+ youth with educational resources and peer connection, online engagement can also facilitate the development of parasocial relationships, defined as "non-reciprocal socio-emotional connections with media figures such as celebrities or influencers" (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Research on parasocial relationships among adolescents shows how adolescents can develop one-way connections to media figures who act as role models during adolescents' identity formation and autonomy development (Giles & Maltby, 2004). These parasocial relationships developed through online and other media sources may be particularly meaningful for LGBTQIA+ individuals who experience structural barriers to developing in-person peer bonds (McInroy & Craig, 2015; Woznicki et al., 2021). As LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate identity disclosure, including to family members, they often turn to online media sources, like YouTube, to create and find examples of disclosure, authenticity, and other shared experiences (B. Miller & Bond, 2022). In addition to parasocial relationships with online and social media

creators, LGBTQIA+ individuals report receiving parasocial affirmations from media characters and personalities who exemplify successful negotiation of LGBTQIA+ identity disclosure, thereby providing an affirming template for their own experiences (Lowe, 2025). Although these parasocial relationships are typically unidirectional, they do provide a unique additional relationship that may be integral to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. By including parasocial relationships together with study of origin family, chosen family, and community, it is possible to identify who among these relationships may be most actively engaged in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization and whether some types of family and non-family relationships are more relevant to LGBTQIA+ socializing processes.

Subgroup differences in socialization

LGBTQIA+ populations include diverse identities and lived experiences which may differentiate positive socialization experiences and impact who has access to positive socialization across relationships. Research on varying levels of acceptance by gender modality, geographic and cultural context, and generational cohort could suggest that engagement in positive socialization may also differ across these groups. For example, acceptance and support are often higher for cisgender sexual minority adolescents relative to their transgender peers (Burke et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2017). This reflects the lagging support for transgender people and social discomfort around engaging in gender identity topics. Similarly, geographic regions, especially at national levels, constitute cultural contexts in which norms of acceptance for LGBTQIA+ individuals vary (Adamczyk & Liao, 2019; Earle et al., 2021). These macro-level differences could shift how accessible and prevalent positive socializing messages are for LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults. Even in Western countries (e.g., United States, New Zealand) where LGBTQIA+ individuals have benefited from increased visibility (Townsend et al., 2022) and progress in human rights protections (Flores, 2021), it is unknown whether the key players in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization would be universal. Though similar in many ways (e.g., European colonizer history, democratic government, developed economy), the United States and New Zealand diverge in their cultural attitudes and legal protections for LGBTQIA+ and especially transgender youth and adults (e.g., federal conversion therapy bans, legal rights to name and gender markers, history of federal same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws; International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Asexual Association, 2026). Thus, comparison of LGBTQIA+ developmental processes in similar but distinct national contexts can (1) demonstrate convergence (or divergence) in socialization processes across cultures and (2) explore whether concepts of socialization first established in the United States are evidenced in other Westernized nations.

Finally, comparison across generational cohorts demonstrates increasing acceptance and support for LGBTQIA+ people across historical time (Hagai et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2022). Specifically, younger generations (e.g., Gen Z, Millennials) have come of age in historical periods with more visibility and acceptance relative to prior generations (e.g., Gen X, Baby Boomers) (Puckett et al., 2022). These generational shifts may also translate into differences in access to and engagement in positive socialization from origin family and other relationships. Ultimately, understanding who plays a role in LGBTQIA+ positive socialization is critical to understanding how LGBTQIA+ young people develop a positive sense of self, but not all LGBTQIA+ people may have equal access to these positive processes.

Current study

The purpose of the current study was to investigate who contributes to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization while LGBTQIA+ people are growing up. Specifically, we addressed two research questions: (1) Who provided positive sexual and gender identity-related messages to LGBTQIA+ adolescents and adults more often while they were growing up? (2) Who do LGBTQIA+

individuals identify as having had a positive influence on how they came to understand their LGBTQIA+ sense of self? In addition, we examined whether participant demographic characteristics (i.e., nationality, gender identity, generational cohort) were associated with differences regarding who contributes to positive socialization. This study builds on prior research examining the role of family, especially parents, in providing acceptance and support following identity disclosure, by considering the potential contributions of origin family, chosen family, and others in guiding a broader developmental process of LGBTQIA+ socialization. Using a two-country sample of LGBTQIA+ adolescents and adults and a multi-method approach, we first quantitatively compared frequency of positive LGBTQIA+ messages from origin family, chosen family, community, and media. Then we used qualitative content analysis to identify who played an influential role in the positive LGBTQIA+ socialization based on participants' brief narratives. Results of each analysis were interpreted separately and then synthesized to provide a more complete picture of the "who" of LGBTQIA+ socialization. Because empirical research on LGBTQIA+ socialization remains nascent, all analyses were considered exploratory rather than hypothesis driven.

Methods and materials

Sample

Data for the present study come from participants of the Queer Joy Project, a cross-sectional two-country study conducted in the United States (US) and Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) from August 2023 to March 2024. The Queer Joy Project included a survey on queer joy, queer role models, and positive developmental milestones among LGBTQIA+ adolescents and adults. Eligible participants: (1) resided in the US or NZ, (2) were at least 16 years old, (3) endorsed any LGBTQIA+ identity, and (4) were able to complete the study in English. Data were collected through a web-based survey that included both quantitative measures and qualitative open-ended prompts. We recruited participants through social media (i.e., paid and unpaid Instagram ads) and outreach to LGBTQIA+ organizations and groups. We developed advertising strategies and content and then made minor adjustments for cultural differences (e.g., "Rainbow" is often used to describe LGBTQIA+ communities collectively in NZ but not in the US). Participants who completed the survey were eligible to opt in for a drawing for a $40 gift card. Participants provided written consent to participate in the study. All human subjects research was reviewed and overseen by Massey University Human Ethics Committee for participants in NZ (ID# 4000027425) and University of Delaware Institutional Review Board for participants in the US (ID# 2093198).

Positionality

The Queer Joy Project was designed with feedback from members of US and NZ LGBTQIA+ communities at every stage of development and research. Community member input resulted in revision to survey content and questions (e.g., shifting questions away from medicalized models of trans affirmation and adaptation of surveys to use culturally specific language). Community members also provided input that shaped interpretation of analysis (e.g., changing queer relationship category names to better reflect terms used in community). We acknowledge that the identities and lived experiences of researchers may shape the interpretation of data and results. Our authorship team includes three US and one NZ author who all identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Collectively, our author team includes gay, bisexual, queer, cisgender, genderqueer, transgender, Chinese-American, Māori, and Pākehā/White lived experiences. These lived experiences, together with evidence from LGBTQIA+ youth and family literature, prompted us to expect positive LGBTQIA+ socialization experiences in our sample. Through engagement in reflexive processes, we regularly discussed our biases as insiders, presumption of

positive interpretation of data, and recognition of participants who reported experiences that rejected or conflicted with our own assumptions or experiences of LGBTQIA+ socialization.

Measures

Positive socialization messages

Participants were asked, "When you were growing up, how much did the following people or groups communicate POSITIVE messages to you about being an LGBTQIA+ person?" Using a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from Not at all (1) to Very frequently (5), participants rated each of the following groups: (a) parents, (b) siblings, (c) other extended family, (d) LGBTQIA+ peers, friends, chosen family, (e) non-LGBTQIA+ peers, friends, chosen family, (f) significant other or romantic partner, (g) religious leaders, (h) media, (i) teachers and school leaders, and (j) healthcare providers. A not applicable option was allowed for all groups. Parents, siblings, and other extended family were averaged to create an Origin Family score. LGBTQIA+ peers, friends and chosen family, non-LGBTQIA+ peers, friends, and chosen family, and significant other or romantic partner were averaged to create a Chosen Family score. Teachers and school leaders, healthcare providers, and religious leaders were averaged to create a Community score. Because participants could select the option of "Not applicable" for any relationship category, top-level aggregated relationship groups were mean scored based on available valid data from each participant. Therefore, aggregated scores may have been based on one to three subgroup scores per participant.

Positive influence on LGBTQIA+ self

Participants read this prompt, "Many different people might influence how you grew to understand yourself as an LGBTQIA+ person. Please take a moment to think about people who have had a positive influence on how you see yourself as an LGBTQIA+ person." They were then invited to "write 3–4 sentences about a person or persons who influenced you positively," accompanied by follow-up prompts, "Who were they?", "What did they do to influence your understanding of yourself or your identity?", and "How did they positively influence you?"

Demographic measures

Participants selected which country they live in from a drop-down list, as well as their state or territory if they lived in the US. Participants reported their age in years. Age was used to categorize participants into generational cohorts: Generation Z (GenZ; ages 16–27 years), Millennials (ages 28–43 years), and Generation X and Baby Boomers (GenX+; ages 44–71).

Participants were also asked whether they would like to be included in a transgender group and in a nonbinary group when their data is used. To create a simplified gender variable for analysis, we collapsed these responses to create a single transgender and nonbinary variable that reflected inclusion of all participants who reported belonging to either or both the transgender and nonbinary groups. This binary variable thus indicated two groups: (1) transgender and nonbinary participants and (2) cisgender participants.

Participants reported their sexual orientation and gender using open-ended responses. For reporting, gender identities were collapsed into agender, gender-nonconforming, genderfluid/Irahuri, genderqueer, cisgender and transgender femme/woman and masc/man, non-binary, questioning/unsure, multiple identities, or something else. Sexual orientations were categorized as asexual (i.e., asexual, aromantic, demisexual, other asexual spectrum), monosexual (i.e., gay, lesbian, heterosexual, homosexual, other monosexual), plurisexual (i.e., bisexual, pansexual, other plurisexual), queer, questioning/unsure, multiple identities, no label, or something else. Participants reported whether they were intersex or had any variation of sex characteristics.

Participant financial security was reported based on their household's ability to make ends meet using a 6-point Likert scale with options: With great difficulty (1), With difficulty (2),

With some difficulty (3), Fairly easily (4), Easily (5), and Very Easily (6). To reflect cultural differences in terminology, US and NZ assessments of race and ethnicity were aligned with standard national practices. In US, participants chose one or more from the following options: American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous American, Asian, Black/African American/African, Hispanic/Latinx/Latino/Latina, Middle Eastern/North African, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, and Another Group (write-in). In NZ, participants chose one or more from the following options: New Zealand European, Māori, Samoan, Cook Islander, Tongan, Niuean, Chinese, Indian, and Another Group (write-in). To describe the US and NZ samples together, a summative category for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) was created to include participants who were Asian, Black/African, Middle Eastern/North African, Indigenous American, Pacific Islander/Pasifika, Māori, Latinx/Hispanic, and More than one group. Additionally, White (US) and New Zealand European (NZ) were combined into a White/European group.

Nationality, generational cohort, and trans and nonbinary status were included in analytical models. Sexual orientations, gender identities, financial security, race, and ethnicity were included only to describe the sample.

Analysis plan

Analyses proceeded in two major stages to (1) quantitatively compare how frequently different groups provided positive LGBTQIA+ messaging and (2) contextualize quantitative results by qualitatively identifying who provided positive socializing influence in brief narratives.

Quantitative analysis

Repeated measures analysis of variance (RMANOVA) was used to compare frequency of positive messages in the four top-level groups: origin family, chosen family, community, and media. Because participants provided multiple responses for comparison, scores in each relationship category were non-independent within participants. Therefore, RMANOVA allowed us to test whether the mean score for each top-level group significantly varied within-persons. RMANOVA omnibus tested differences across all groups and post-hoc pairwise t-tests examined mean-differences between each of the four top-level groups. To further probe differences in positive message frequency, we used RMANOVA and post-hoc pairwise comparisons to contrast subgroups within each origin family, chosen family, and community. Due to the high number of tests required to compare all subgroups, these probing tests only contrasted frequency within each top-level grouping.

Next, we examined whether frequency of positive messages in origin family, chosen family, community, and media varied by nationality (US vs. NZ), gender modality (cisgender vs. transgender and nonbinary), and generational cohort (Gen Z vs. Millennial vs. Gen X+) using two-tailed *t*-tests for nationality and gender modality and ANOVA for generational cohort.

Qualitative analysis

To provide additional context into who the key players are in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization, we analyzed participants' brief narratives using qualitative content analysis with a primarily inductive approach, including description of manifest content and low abstraction of results (Graneheim et al., 2017). Using participant brief socialization narratives, we identified any person or group of people described as positively influencing the participant's understanding of their own LGBTQIA+ identities. Across brief narratives from all participants, we first created an exhaustive list of all people, including their relationship to the participant when applicable. This list of person-codes was then collapsed into larger categories based on similarities (e.g., parents and siblings are both part of origin family). We additionally coded whether each person identified in the initial coding process was described as LGBTQIA+.

To confirm reliability, the first three authors double-coded 15% of the sample and then calculated interrater reliability scores using Cohen's Kappa wherein values higher than .60 indicated acceptable reliability (McHugh, 2012). The coding authors met to discuss disagreements and resolve consensus through full team discussion. Following consensus meetings, researchers coded additional participants and reevaluated coding agreement periodically until we reached acceptable interrater reliability. After coding around 20% of the sample, all codes reached acceptable interrater reliability, and the remaining data were divided and single-coded by three authors.

After content analysis coding was completed, we examined participant endorsement of relationship categories in four ways. First, we described and summarized how many distinct individuals or groups participants identified on average. Second, we described and summarized how many participants endorsed each relationship category (e.g., origin family) and subcategory (e.g., siblings). Each participant was only counted once per category even if they named multiple people from a given category. For example, if a participant named two friends, the particpant would only be counted once in the chosen family category. Third, we tested differences in frequency across top-level relationship groups by nationality, gender modality, and generational cohort using chi-square tests. Fourth, exemplary participants quotes were identified to illustrate and contextualize distinct positive socialization actions observed in relationship subgroups.

Across all tests, *p*-values were adjusted with a Benjamini-Hochberg correction to account for the inflated risk of Type I error (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Quantitative analysis was completed using the *rstatix* package (Kassambara, 2023) in RStudio with R version 4.5.0 (R Core Team, 2024). Qualitative analysis was completed using Dedoose version 10.0.0 (Dedoose, 2025).

Results

A total of 490 participants, balanced between the US (50.4%; $n = 247$) and NZ, provided positive messaging data ($n = 488$) and/or socialization narratives ($n = 447$). Table 1 provides a detailed summary of sample gender identity, sexual orientation, intersex status, and race and ethnicity. The sample was majority transgender (61.0%; $n = 299$). Cisgender woman (26.5%) and bisexual (23.5%) were the most frequent gender and sexual identities, respectively. More than one fourth (28.6%, $n = 140$) of participants were Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC), with Asian participants (11.2%) comprising the largest BIPOC subgroup. Participant ages ranged from 16 to 71 years old ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 11.3$), with the majority (56.3%) being from Generation Z (age 27 and younger). Nearly half of the sample 44.2% ($n = 217$) reported difficulty making financial ends meet. US participants were from 36 states and 2 territories and were well-distributed across census regions: Northeast 21.9%, Midwest 19.4%, South 28.7%, West 25.1%, and Territories 2.4%.

Who provided positive socialization messages related to being LGBTQIA+?

As shown in Table 2, the highest frequency of positive LGBTQIA+ messaging was from LGBTQIA+ chosen family ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.19$) followed by romantic partners ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 151$) and non-LGBTQIA+ chosen family ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.18$). The lowest frequency of positive LGBTQIA+ messaging was from religious leaders ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.88$) followed by extended family ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.00$) and healthcare providers ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.86$). For aggregated summative categories, frequency of positive LGBTQIA+ messaging was most frequent among chosen family ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.15$) followed by media ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.02$), origin family ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.03$), and community ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.95$). RMANOVA revealed significant differences in positive messaging frequency among aggregated social groups ($F = 280.03$, $p < .001$) with post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrating significant differences between all groups. Therefore, positive messaging from chosen family was more frequent than media, media was more frequent than origin family, and origin family was more frequent than community.

Table 1. Summary of sample country, gender, sexual identity, and race/ethnicity.

	n	%
Country		
Aotearoa New Zealand	243	49.6
United States of America	247	50.4
Gender Identity[1]		
Agender	21	4.3
Gender non-conforming	7	1.4
Genderfluid/Irahuri	27	5.5
Genderqueer	21	4.3
Femme/Woman	168	34.3
Cisgender	130	26.5
Transgender	26	5.3
Masc/Man	135	27.6
Cisgender	50	10.2
Transgender	83	16.9
Non-binary	128	26.1
Multiple identities	53	10.8
Another identity not listed[2]	18	3.7
Questioning/Unsure	6	1.2
Sexual Identity[1]		
Asexual Spectrum	76	15.5
Asexual	54	11.0
Aromantic	13	2.7
Demisexual	17	3.5
Other Asexual Spectrum	5	1.0
Monosexual	182	37.1
Gay	67	13.7
Lesbian	85	17.3
Heterosexual	13	2.7
Homosexual	8	1.6
Other Monosexual	13	2.7
Plurisexual	180	36.7
Bisexual	115	23.5
Pansexual	59	12.0
Other Plurisexual	8	1.6
Queer	106	21.6
Questioning/Unsure	7	1.4
Multiple Identities	87	17.8
No label	5	1.0
Another identity not listed[3]	10	2.0
Intersex	15	3.1
Race and Ethnicity[1]		
BIPOC	140	28.6
Asian	55	11.2
Black/African	38	7.8
Middle Eastern/North African	6	1.2
Indigenous American	9	1.8
Pacific Islander/Pasifika	10	2.0
Māori	31	6.3
Latinx/Hispanic	34	6.9
More than one group	77	15.7
White/European	389	79.4

Note. $n = 490$; Missing: gender identity $n = 2$, Race and ethnicity $n = 9$; no other missingness.[1]Participants were counted in multiple categories when they reported more than one identity or group.[2]Other identities reported by <1% of the sample included Irahuhua, Takatāpui, androgyne, anything, bigender, butch, demi-girl, dyke, gender diverse, genderfae, intersex, transgender, and xenogender, together with participants reporting no gender and participants listing only pronouns (e.g., they/them, they/she). [3]Other identities reported by <1% of the sample included Takatāpui, aceflux, biromantic, demipanromantic, fluid, gay/lesbian, gray sexual, hetero-flexible, homoflexible, homoromantic, men loving men, non-monosexual, omniromantic, panromantic, poly, and same sex attracted.

Further probing into frequency differences within relationships groups, revealed significant differences within origin family ($F = 53.74$; $p < .001$), chosen family ($F = 154.02$; $p < .001$), and community ($F = 50.99$; $p < .001$). All post-hoc pairwise comparisons were significant indicating

all relationship subgroups differed within each top-level aggregated category (e.g., siblings, parents, and extended family were all significantly different from one another within origin family). Thus, positive messages were most frequently received from siblings in origin family, from LGBTQIA+ friends and peers in chosen family, and from teachers and schools in community relationships.

Did frequency of positive messages vary by nationality, transgender status, or generational cohort?

As shown in Table 2, results of t-tests revealed that, compared to cisgender participants, transgender and nonbinary participants reported lower frequency of positive messages from origin family (cis: $M = 2.21$ $SD = 1.09$, trans/nonbinary: $M = 1.99$ $SD = 0.97$; $t = 2.27$; $p = 0.036$). Cisgender and transgender and nonbinary participants did not differ in frequency of positive messages from chosen family (t=-0.86; $p = 0.502$), community ($t = 0.24$; $p = 0.824$), or media ($t = 0.59$; $p = 0.637$). Contrasting messaging frequency by country revealed no significant differences between participants in the US and NZ: origin family ($t = 1.09$; $p = 0.373$), chosen family ($t = 0.58$; $p = 0.637$), community ($t = 0.53$; $p = 0.666$), and media (t=-0.33; $p = 0.766$).

Positive messaging frequency by generational cohort is reported in Table 3. Comparing generational cohorts revealed significant differences for frequency of positive messaging from origin family ($F = 10.01$; $p < .001$), chosen family ($F = 27.99$; $p < .001$), community ($F = 20.44$; $p < .001$), and media ($F = 20.52$; $p < .001$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons showed positive messaging from all relationship groups was most frequent among Gen Z participants, followed by Millennials and then Gen X+. Positive messaging was more frequent among Millennials relative to Gen X+ for origin family, chosen family, and media, but did not differ for community relationships.

Who positively impacted understanding of LGBTQIA+ self?

In qualitative narratives ($n = 447$), the vast majority of participants (93.7%) identified at least one person or group of people who positively influenced their LGBTQIA+ identity. Most participants identified only one person or group (69.4%), with 14.5% identifying two, 6.2% identifying three, 1.8% identifying four, and less than 1% identifying each five to seven. Overall, as shown in Table 4, the largest category of others identified was peers and friends (39.1%), predominantly comprised of LGBTQIA+ peers (79.4% of peers). Only 4.5% of participants reported either no one impacted them positively or they alone were responsible for directing their own positive LGBTQIA+ development.

More than two-thirds (69.6%) of participants identified other LGBTQIA+ people in their responses. Among LGBTQIA+ people identified, the most frequently named groups were peers and friends, followed by broader community, origin family, and parasocial relationships. Participants most frequently identified LGBTQIA+ others who were part of the same generation as the participant (44.1%) and 15.7% identified LGBTQIA+ individuals from an older generation, who could be described as queer elders. These LGBTQIA+ others also included specifically identifying the first LGBTQIA+ person the participant ever met (6.5%). Of the 30.4% of participants who did not identify another LGBTQIA+ person, most participants did not specify the sexual or gender identity of the people they identified.

As shown in Table 5, results of chi-square tests revealed that, compared to cisgender participants, transgender and nonbinary participants identified origin family less frequently (cis: 23.9%, trans/nonbinary: 14.8%; χ^2=5.31; $p = 0.034$). No significant differences were uncovered between participants in the US and NZ. Chi-square tests showed participants from Gen X+ less frequently named LGBTQIA+ others (χ^2=13.43; $p = 0.002$) and chosen family (χ^2=7.59; $p = 0.035$) relative to Gen Z and Millennial participants.

Table 2. Positive message frequency across relationships categories and differences by country and gender modality.

	Overall[1]		NZ	US	Country Differences[2]		Cisgender	Transgender & Nonbinary	Gender Identity Differences[2]	
	M [*SD*]	*n*	*M* [*SD*]	*M* [*SD*]	*t*	*p*	*M* [*SD*]	*M* [*SD*]	*t*	*p*
Origin Family	2.08 [1.03]	483	2.13 [1.04]	2.03 [1.01]	1.09 (481)	0.373	2.21 [1.09]	1.99 [0.97]	**2.27 (481)**	**0.036**
Parents	2.18 [1.25]	479	2.29 [1.27]	2.08 [1.22]			2.34 [1.37]	2.08 [1.15]		
Siblings	2.29 [1.35]	420	2.31 [1.33]	2.27 [1.38]			2.38 [1.36]	2.23 [1.35]		
Extended Family	1.72 [1.00]	459	1.74 [0.98]	1.71 [1.03]			1.87 [1.08]	1.62 [0.94]		
Chosen Family	3.20 [1.15]	486	3.23 [1.14]	3.16 [1.17]	0.58 (484)	0.637	3.14 [1.25]	3.23 [1.09]	0.83 (361)	0.502
LGBTQIA+	4.01 [1.19]	412	4.02 [1.12]	4.00 [1.25]			3.97 [1.25]	4.03 [1.15]		
Non-LGBTQIA+	2.66 [1.18]	479	2.70 [1.18]	2.61 [1.18]			2.72 [1.25]	2.61 [1.13]		
Romantic Partner	3.26 [1.51]	358	3.34 [1.43]	3.19 [1.59]			3.17 [1.52]	3.32 [1.50]		
Community	1.90 [0.95]	476	1.92 [0.96]	1.88 [0.94]	0.52 (474)	0.666	1.91 [0.92]	1.89 [0.96]	0.24 (474)	0.824
Religious Leaders	1.35 [0.88]	335	1.19 [0.59]	1.50 [1.05]			1.44 [0.95]	1.29 [0.82]		
Teachers & Schools	2.06 [1.08]	456	2.11 [1.09]	2.01 [1.07]			2.02 [1.06]	2.08 [1.09]		
Healthcare Providers	1.89 [1.11]	446	1.95 [1.15]	1.83 [1.07]			1.96 [1.13]	1.84 [1.10]		
Media	2.64 [1.02]	482	2.63 [1.03]	2.66 [1.01]	0.33 (480)	0.766	2.68 [1.02]	2.62 [1.02]	0.59 (480)	0.637

Note. $n = 488$. Frequency scores ranged from "not at all" (1) to "very frequently" (5) with higher scores indicating greater frequency of LGBTQIA+ positive messages. Subsample size reported for each relationship type reflects the total number of participants who provided a valid response from the 1 to 5 range, missing participants indicated this relationship type was not applicable ($n = 1$ participant was missing a response for healthcare providers). [1]Repeated measures ANOVA conducted among top-level categories (Origin Family, Chosen Family, Community, and Media), indicated significant differences in frequency of positive messaging across groups ($F = 280.03(3, 1322)$; $p < .001$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated all top-level categories differed from one another. [2]Results of independent sample t-tests for pairwise comparisons for top-level categories between countries and gender identities. All RMANOVA, post-hoc pairwise tests, and t-tests adjusted for multiple tests of comparison with Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment. Reported p-values reflect this adjustment. Bold font indicates adjusted $p < .05$.

Table 3. Positive messages frequency across relationship categories and generational differences.

	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X+	Generation Differences	
	M [*SD*]	*M* [*SD*]	*M* [*SD*]	*F*	*p*
Origin Family	2.22 [1.03]	1.98 [1.03]	1.55 [0.75]	**10.01**	**<.001**
Parents	2.34 [1.25]	2.06 [1.25]	1.67 [1.01]		
Siblings	2.53 [1.36]	2.13 [1.35]	1.48 [0.92]		
Extended Family	1.77 [1.03]	1.72 [0.99]	1.47 [0.84]		
Chosen Family (CF)	3.47 [1.00]	2.99 [1.18]	2.29 [1.01]	**27.99**	**<.001**
LGBTQIA+ CF	4.24 [1.00]	3.76 [1.28]	3.25 [1.61]		
Non-LGBTQIA+ CF	2.86 [1.12]	2.52 [1.19]	1.94 [1.15]		
Romantic Partner	3.55 [1.46]	3.05 [1.49]	2.28 [1.50]		
Community	2.13 [1.00]	1.63 [0.75]	1.50 [0.83]	**20.44**	**<.001**
Religious Leaders	1.42 [0.96]	1.27 [0.77]	1.28 [0.79]		
Teachers & Schools	2.35 [1.13]	1.76 [0.92]	1.41 [0.69]		
Healthcare Providers	2.08 [1.18]	1.67 [0.92]	1.57 [1.12]		
Media	2.86 [1.01]	2.48 [0.93]	1.96 [0.95]	**20.52**	**<.001**

Note. $n = 488$; $n = 7$ missing stage of coming out. Frequency scores ranged from "not at all" (1) to "very frequently" (5) with higher scores indicating greater frequency of LGBTQIA+ positive messages. All ANOVA and subsequent post-hoc pairwise tests adjusted for multiple tests of comparison with Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment. Reported p-values reflect this adjustment. Bold font indicates adjusted p<.05.

Summaries of each relationship domain (origin family, chosen family, community, and parasocial relationships) reflect organization into similar top-level categories from the quantitative analysis. Exemplary quotes are provided for subgroups named by at least 5% of the overall sample. These quotes further contextualize the types of positive messages and distinct impact of each relationship subgroup. Participant descriptors include gender and sexuality as directly reported by participants.

Origin family

Origin family were identified by 18.3% of participants, including parents (6.9%), siblings (5.8%), and other extended family (5.8%; mostly aunts, uncles, and cousins). Of participants who identified origin family, 80.5% identified LGBTQIA+ origin family.

Parents contributed positively to socialization through vicarious support of other LGBTQIA+ people and through exposing and connecting participants to LGBTQIA+ others. For example, one participant described how their mother expressed support for gay people even before the participant knew of their own queer identity: "My Mum once said when I was younger, before I realised my own identity that she didn't care if people were gay as it wasn't hurting anyone," (non binary, queer, White-European, NZ, age 31). Parents also played a role in providing connections to LGBTQIA+ adults outside the family, thereby making a positive socializing impact without necessarily stating explicit support for LGBTQIA+ identities. One participant described how early life exposure to their mother's gay friend had a positive impact,

> They were a very interesting person for me and I asked my mother why that was, to which she answered that the person was gay and has a boyfriend, which were concepts I was totally oblivious to before that point. (non-binary, asexual, White-European, US, age 27).

Because parents are involved in development from such an early stage, they have a unique potential to provide impact early in life. One participant described how her parents "expressed to me very early what LGBTQ was and I immediately knew it applied to me. They never tried to stop me from being a tomboy growing up and encouraged me to come out and be myself," (nonbinary, queer, Black/African American, US, age 55).

The most common way that siblings contributed to positive socialization was through their own queer identities and coming out processes that thereby allowed the participant to observe a role model and share the queer experience. Among participants who identified a sibling in their narrative ($n = 26$), 61.5% explicitly described their sibling as LGBTQIA+. By being out first, siblings provided access to queer or trans content within the origin family. For some participants,

Table 4. Content analysis of the "Who" in LGBTQIA+ socialization.

	n	%
LGBTQIA+ Others	311	69.6
Origin Family	66	14.8
Chosen Family	169	37.8
Community Relationships	62	13.9
Parasocial	71	15.9
1st LGBTQIA+ person met	29	6.5
Generation		
Older	70	15.7
Same	197	44.1
Younger	3	0.7
Origin Family	82	18.3
Parents	31	6.9
Mothers	21	4.7
Fathers	8	1.8
Siblings	26	5.8
Sisters	14	3.1
Brothers	6	1.3
Siblings[1]	7	1.6
Other Family	26	5.8
Aunts	10	2.2
Uncles	7	1.6
Cousins	8	1.8
Grandparents	2	0.4
Children	2	0.4
Chosen Family	216	48.3
Friends and peers	175	39.1
Romantic Partners	42	9.4
Other Chosen Family	12	2.7
Community Relationships	102	22.8
Teachers	43	9.6
Healthcare Providers	12	2.7
Religious Leaders	2	0.4
Other helping relationship[2]	24	5.4
LGBTQIA+ Community Groups	19	4.3
Other Community Groups	6	1.3
Parasocial	73	16.3
Social Media	24	5.4
Celebrities	19	4.3
Artists/Authors	14	3.1
Public Figure	13	2.9
Fictional Characters	10	2.2
Other parasocial[3]	4	0.9

Note. $n = 447$. % indicates percent of the full sample. Sections do not total to 100% because categories are not mutually exclusive. [1]Sibling gender was either not reported or reported as non-binary in these identified cases. [2]Included mentors, role models, coaches, bosses, and youth program leaders. [3]Included talk show hosts, gamers, nonfiction media representation, athletes, and general queer media.

Table 5. Country, gender, and generation differences in qualitative endorsement of primary relationship categories.

	Country			*Gender*			*Generation*			
	US $n = 224$	NZ $n = 223$		Cis $n = 176$	TNB $n = 271$		Gen Z $n = 253$	Mill. $n = 149$	Gen X+ $n = 45$	
	%	%	*p*	%	%	*p*	%	%	%	*p*
LGBTQIA+ Others	68.3	70.9	.689	67.0	71.2	.502	70.4	75.2	46.7	**.002**
Origin Family	18.6	17.9	.921	23.9	14.8	**.034**	19.8	16.1	17.8	.703
Chosen Family	52.9	43.8	.426	44.3	50.9	.533	49.0	52.3	31.1	**.035**
Community Relationships	20.6	25.0	.095	25.0	21.4	.283	22.9	18.1	37.8	.062
Parasocial	17.9	15.2	.606	15.3	17.3	.706	15.0	21.5	8.9	.119

Note. $n = 447$. *P*-values from chi-square tests were adjusted for multiple tests of comparison using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction. Bold font emphasizes *p*-values <.05. Cis = cisgender. TNB = transgender and nonbinary. Mill.=millennial.

this allowed access to advice and guidance: "My foster brother who was openly gay…helped me come to terms with being queer a bit more. And I would often go to him for advice," (transgender male, bisexual, White-European, NZ, age 19). Having a queer sibling also helped connect participants to broader LGBTQIA+ spaces: "The person who influenced me the most was my younger sister who came out in high school. We were very close in age (11 mos apart). She took me to LGBTQ+ safe spaces & places," (cisgender female, LGBTQ+, Asian Pacific Islander, US, age 68). Although the majority of siblings were LGBTQIA+, non-LGBTQIA+ siblings were observed to provide unconditional support and advocacy. For example, one participant described how her non-LGBTQIA+ sister's advocacy and allyship had a positive impact, "She has always surrounded herself with a large network of queer friends and was always incredibly outspoken about LGBTQ rights. It just made me feel like I would always have at least one person's support," (agender, lesbian, White-European, US, age 25).

Other origin family included cousins, aunts, and uncles and, less frequently, grandparents, nieces, and children. Among these extended family members, 69.7% were explicitly described as LGBTQIA+. Aunts, uncles, and cousins were involved in navigating family dynamics and providing evidence of positive regard for LGBTQIA+ people in their origin family system. This is illustrated by a participant who stated that their lesbian aunt being out "taught me that you can be in a same sex relationship and be proud. She never apologised for who she was and my extended family never treated her different," (cisgender female, pansexual, Māori White-European, NZ, age 41). LGBTQIA+ aunts and uncles paved the way for positive LGBTQIA+ socialization from origin family by providing early life examples of being out and by cultivating family acceptance. For example, a participant described their gay uncle who "has been very supportive my whole life and very kind when I came out as trans. He helped when other family members like his mum/my grandma wasn't accepting," (transgender male, bisexual, White-European, NZ, age 20). Participants also described the positive influence of aunts and uncles who provided allyship in the family, "[My aunt] often makes a point of bringing up rainbow topics and people around me…if I do ever tell my extended family she will be on my side to support me," (cisgender female, pansexual, White-European, NZ, age 20).

Chosen family

Chosen family were identified by 48.3% of participants, including peers and friends (39.1%), romantic/sexual partners (9.4%), and other chosen family (2.7%). Of participants who identified chosen family, 77.9% identified LGBTQIA+ chosen family.

By living authentically and openly as LGBTQIA+, friends often gave participants a way to see themselves and their identities positively reflected in others. LGBTQIA+ friends specifically played a role in normalizing LGBTQIA+ identities that exist outside of cisgender and heterosexual norms. This was exemplified by a participant with two lesbian friends in high school who "helped [her] understand it was ok to be different and to be [herself] as a lesbian and not worry about the judgment of others," (cisgender female, lesbian, Māori, NZ, age 27). These experiences with LGBTQIA+ friends often exemplified meaningful firsts in positive socialization such as the first person a participant came out to or the first queer friend they ever had. These firsts filled the gaps for participants who received no positive socialization from origin family. One participant described the positive impact of meeting their first queer friend, "[LGBTQIA+] was a non-topic in my youth and family and society for years, so I struggled to comprehend what options I even had to be. [My friend's] existence…allowed my horizons to expand," (cisgender female, asexual, Black/African-American, US, age 38).

Other chosen family typically included romantic partners (mostly LGBTQIA+) and LGBTQIA+ family-like relationships (e.g., chosen dads, chosen grandmas, tuākana). The positive influence of romantic partners often included sharing LGBTQIA+ experiences and experimenting with gender and sexuality to mutually reinforce positive understanding of LGBTQIA+ identity. As an illustration, one participant described their shared experience with their partner, "We've had lots

of conversations about what it means to be gay and our respective experiences, and it's been insightful to hear from him about things he'd been through and his perspectives," (cisgender male, gay, Asian, US, age 21). Beyond connecting over identity and prior shared experience, some participants actively experimented with gender and sexuality together with their partner. One participant identified the positive influence from their wife, saying, "We have gone through experiments together to try and find our right identities and even now, we are still doing this together," (unsure they/she, demisexual homoromantic, White-European, NZ, age 18). Both romantic partners and other chosen family were also instrumental in undoing prior negative socialization and creating access to LGBTQIA+ genders and sexualities. One participant described the way a chosen family member facilitated the process, "My friend…[has] been in a tuakana role for me since I was 14. They helped me realise how colonised my thinking about being Māori was, and that I could use the term takatāpui," (takatāpui, lesbian, Māori White-European, NZ, age 22).

Community relationships

Broader community relationships–inclusive of helping relationships–were identified by 22.8% of participants primarily including teachers (9.6%), LGBTQIA+ community and groups (4.2%), healthcare providers (2.6%), and other helping relationships (mentors, coaches, program leaders, and role models; 5.1%). Of participants who identified community members or groups, 62.0% explicitly identified LGBTQIA+ community members.

Teachers were the most commonly identified community relationship with 60.5% of teachers explicitly described as LGBTQIA+. Participants described the positive contribution of teachers who were out and teachers whose LGBTQIA+ identity was unspoken. Openness from LGBTQIA+ teachers often came in the form of casually normalizing their LGBTQIA+ relationships and families. For one participant, her teacher's openness filled in gaps at home where queer people were never talked about, "My 6th grade math teacher was just really open about his relationships with his husband. I don't think he knows that hearing about their wedding was a positive influence on my life," (transgender female, bisexual, Black/African-American, US, age 21). Positive impact was not predicated on teachers being out at school. As described by one participant, unspoken connections were also powerful socializing experiences,

> My choir teacher was a gay man, but never actually said the words to me that he was in fact gay…one day we started to talk about gay marriage and I told him that I was gay and he gave me the biggest smile I had ever seen. That was all the answer I needed. This made me feel so seen. This was also my first experience with another queer person and I still vividly remember it to this day," (they/them, lesbian, White-European, US, age 29)

This narrative emphasizes the potential for long-lasting impact after meeting another LGBTQIA+ person for the first time and having their own identity seen and reflected in another, especially in an adult role model. Finally, teachers who were not LGBTQIA+ also had potential to positively socialize participants by openly speaking about their LGBTQIA+ family members (e.g., their children or parents) and by facilitating connections to LGBTQIA resources or content (e.g., queer literature, binders and gender affirming clothing).

Parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships were identified by 16.3% of participants, primarily including social media creators and influencers (5.4%), celebrities (4.3%), artists and authors (3.1%), public figures (2.9%), and fictional characters (2.2%). Of participants who identified parasocial relationships, 97.3% explicitly identified LGBTQIA+ people (with the sexual and gender identity of the remaining 2.7% unnamed or not publicly known).

Social media influencers had positive impact through online documentation of their own journeys with gender and sexuality. A participant described a trans man YouTube creator who,

"documented being both gay and trans and really introduced the language I was missing to explain how I felt. He helped me understand being both gay and trans through his videos about his own gender and sexuality journey," (non-binary, queer/gay, Latinx, US, age 17). Other participants echoed the access to new LGBTQIA+ and especially trans terminology through personal accounts shared on YouTube and other social media. Access to LGBTQIA+ social media influencers gave one participant "the language to be able to describe what I was feeling," (transgender man, pansexual, Asian, US, age 26). Other participants shared that seeing LGBTQIA+ people living normal everyday lives normalized LGBTQIA+ identities. After describing a social media account run by two women in a relationship, one participant summarized their impact, "It had a huge impact on me seeing a happy couple live their life together as it was normal," (cisgender female, lesbian, White-European, NZ, age 29).

Nobody/self-directed

Compared to participants who identified at least one person who provided positive socialization, participants who reported no one or that they alone were responsible for their own socialization were older (29.1 vs. 34.3 years old) and more frequently trans femme (4.7% vs. 25.0%). Participants reporting no positive socialization were otherwise similar to the overall sample in sexual orientation, nationality, and BIPOC status. Participants who did not identify any others described this absence in two general ways: having no one or being responsible for their own socialization. For example, one participant stated, "Honestly, no one had a positive influence on me growing up. It wasn't cool to be gay until I got to college," (cisgender female, lesbian, White-European, US, age 23). Another participant specifically highlighted the absence of family socialization, "I don't think any specific person had an influence on my identity…It wasn't something my family ever discussed so I simply had no ideas and thus no prejudice," (genderqueer, gay/aromantic/queer, White-European, US, age 17). For participants who felt their socialization was self-directed, they sometimes identified the absence of others as an impetus for the need to take control of their socialization. For example, a participant said, "I don't think I've had any positive LGBTQ influences. Everyone around me I grew up with was straight. I just figured it out on my own," (non-binary, gay/lesbian, Black/African-American, US, age 24).

Discussion

Identifying key contributors to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization uncovers both who is most frequently involved in positive socializing processes naturally and who could be better supported to contribute more to this process in the future. Using data from LGBTQIA+ adolescents and adults across two countries, we used multi-method analysis to provide evidence that positive LGBTQIA+ socialization does occur for many LGBTQIA+ individuals and that many different people may play a role in this process. Notably, this study makes major contributions to our understanding of LGBTQIA+ socialization by (1) demonstrating the capacity of origin family, inclusive and beyond parents, to participate in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization, (2) showing the relatively frequent participation from peers, romantic partners, and other chosen family, (3) emphasizing the high involvement of other LGBTQIA+ people across relationship groups, and (4) highlighting community helping relationships and parasocial relationships as less explored resources for positive socialization. Finally, to our knowledge, this is the first study of LGBTQIA+ socialization to include a non-US sample, thereby extending evidence of this process to LGBTQIA+ people in New Zealand.

In a two-country sample with diverse representation of ages, genders, sexual orientations, and ethnicities, results of the current study demonstrate that the vast majority of this LGBTQIA+ sample was able to access at least one interpersonal source of positive LGBTQIA+ socialization while they were growing up. Due to stigma against minoritized sexual and gender identities, research on LGBTQIA+ youth is frequently and justifiably situated in narratives of minority

stress and health inequities rather than positive youth development (Russell, 2005; Toomey et al., 2017). This new evidence that many LGBTQIA+ people experienced positive influence from others diversifies our understanding of LGBTQIA+ youth development and the potential for positive socialization during child, adolescent, and early adult development. Identification of positive developmental processes and the key players in these processes is responsive to the call for research that examines positive youth development (Fish, 2020) and recognizes the potential for LGBTQIA+ youth to thrive and resist oppression (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021). By identifying positive contributions of origin family, chosen family, community, and parasocial relationships, results are encouraging with regards to the potential for positive socialization across a variety of relationships. Although the majority of trans and nonbinary participants in this sample did identify at least one person who provided positive influence, results also suggest that they may not receive positive messages as frequently from origin family, relative to cisgender young people. This echoes findings of prior research that found transgender and genderqueer youth reported less parent support than cisgender sexual minority youth (Abreu et al., 2024). As research on positive LGBTQIA+ youth development expands to consider additional family processes like LGBTQIA+ socialization, it remains relevant and pertinent to examine inequities in who is granted access to these positive resources and processes.

Origin family participation in LGBTQIA+ socialization was evident in the current study, yet their level of involvement leaves room for improvement, especially when compared to other key players. Quantitative results of the current study suggest that origin family, on average, rarely provided positive messages about the participant being LGBTQIA+ while they were growing up. These results were further contextualized by qualitative results that provided evidence of relatively infrequent participation in LGBTQIA+ socialization from origin family members. Although many studies have identified the importance of origin family, especially parents, in supportive reactions to LGBTQIA+ identity disclosure (Mousavi et al., 2025; Son & Updegraff, 2023), results of the current study highlight the gap between initially responding with support and origin family engagement in the broader developmental process of positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. Results stand in contrast to studies of racial and ethnic family socialization where origin family, especially parents, are frequently viewed as the primary agents of racial and ethnic socialization (Ayón et al., 2020; McHale et al., 2006). In the current study, positive messaging from parents was relatively rare in quantitative measures, but qualitative findings suggested that positive socializing influence of parents may not always be easily captured in terms of direct positive messaging. In narratives, parents stood out as having positive socializing influence by including LGBTQIA+ adults in their own social circles and by supporting LGBTQIA+ issues even before participants knew of or disclosed their own LGBTQIA+ identities. This additional context shows how parents may uniquely provide early life positive socialization without necessarily directly verbalizing support of their own LGBTQIA+ child. Overall, findings of the current study suggest origin family does play a role in LGBTQIA+ socialization, but the extent and frequency of their involvement may be variable across families, types of family relationships, and across the lifespan.

Although the potential for origin family involvement in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization may be unrealized, increasing participation in family socialization may be achievable by holistically considering contributions of parents, siblings, and extended family. A notable trend across family involvement in socialization was the frequent contribution of women. Across all gendered family relationships (i.e., parents, siblings, aunts/uncles), women were identified as sources of positive influence more often than men. This finding adds to other studies that have highlighted the unique contributions of women–especially mothers (D'Amico & Julien, 2012; van Bergen et al., 2021) and aunts (Grafsky et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2023)—in providing support and acceptance to LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults (Reed et al., 2019). This gendered pattern may, in part, reflect broader gendered norms around socializing processes and family roles wherein mothers often engage in more emotional socialization than fathers (Brand & Klimes-Dougan, 2010) and sibling pairs that include at least one sister report higher relationship quality and more engagement in shared social activities (Layland et al., 2020, 2021). Furthermore, across all

origin family relationships, participants reported the highest frequency of positive messaging from siblings. Because they often hold a role that bridges their capacity as family and peers, siblings may play a distinct role in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. Much like prior research on coming out (Barrow & Allen, 2020; Grafsky et al., 2018), LGBTQIA+ young people may engage with their siblings differently and earlier than with their parents when it comes to shared engagement in LGBTQIA+ socialization. Future development of resources that guide and educate family members for participation in socialization should be intentionally designed to consider the potential of diverse family relationships inclusive of parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and others.

By taking a queered approach to family and family socialization, we found that the most frequent players in LGBTQIA+ socialization were chosen family. In narratives about positive influence on LGBTQIA+ self, chosen family were named more than twice as often as any other type of relationship, with nearly half of participants identifying a friend, romantic partner, or other chosen family. As called for in prior queered approaches to family research (Fish & Russell, 2018), these results emphasize the importance of expanding our view of positive LGBTQIA+ socialization to expansively include more than just origin family. The decision to include non-origin family relationships in LGBTQIA+ socialization, including peers, mirrors emerging novel research on racial and ethnic socialization where peers' racial and ethnic socialization messages facilitated positive development (Golden et al., 2025). Although efforts to increase origin family involvement in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization are warranted, it is important to note chosen family has been identified as naturally participating in socialization without any need for programmatic intervention.

As evidenced in the current study, the involvement of chosen family in positive socialization, especially LGBTQIA+ chosen family, may be increasing across generational cohorts. Gen X+ participants were less likely to identify LGBTQIA+ others and chosen family in their narratives, despite reporting highest frequency of positive messages from chosen family in quantitative analysis. This could be explained by increasing visibility and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people that has allowed proliferation of LGBTQIA+ social spaces and online connections that were not as readily available to Generation X and Baby Boomers. This expanded access to LGBTQIA+ others could play a significant role in the emergence of LGBTQIA+ socialization as a more accessible developmental process. Similarly, prior research on chosen family emphasizes the reliance of LGBTQIA+ people on chosen family, especially friendships, to compensate for the lack of support from origin family (Dewaele et al., 2011; Hailey et al., 2020). Indeed, the current study provides evidence that throughout development, LGBTQIA+ people relied on chosen family to provide positive messages related to being LGBTQIA+ and to be sources of positive influence. In their narratives participants often noted that chosen family, especially LGBTQIA+ chosen family, helped undo negative socialization and provide alternative, positive narratives they had not received in their origin family. This higher involvement of chosen family in positive socialization is likely due, in part, to the shared culture and identities of LGBTQIA+ chosen family who may share lived experiences and cultural knowledge related to LGBTQIA+ identities. This shared cultural connection may position LGBTQIA+ chosen family in particular to confer a positive socializing force that many origin family members are unprepared or unable to provide.

The vital role of LGBTQIA+ others in positive socialization is emphasized by their high rate of involvement uncovered in the current study. Not only did LGBTQIA+ peers provide positive messages more frequently than any other single relationship group, but more than two thirds of participants named another LGBTQIA+ person who positively influenced their identity. These LGBTQIA+ others included origin family, chosen family, community relationships, and parasocial relationships; thereby underscoring the need to examine how LGBTQIA+ socialization unfolds both in and outside the origin family home. Notably, more than 80% of participants who identified origin family, explicitly named LGBTQIA+ origin family members. These shared LGBTQIA+ experiences, especially of siblings, cousins, and aunts and uncles provided LGBTQIA+ role models and shared experience within origin family and helped participants navigate family dynamics. These results add to a small number of studies that provide evidence of the unique capacity of

LGBTQIA+ origin family members to help LGBTQIA+ youth navigate heteronormativity and cisnormativity in the family context (McCandless-Chapman et al., 2025; Stone et al., 2022) and to discover and understand their gender and sexuality (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). These LGBTQIA+ family members may be especially equipped to engage in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization given their presence from early life onward, their shared familiarity with origin family dynamics, and their lived LGBTQIA+ experience. For LGBTQIA+ youth who do not have access to LGBTQIA+ family members, connection to LGBQIA+ chosen family and community relationships may be especially important.

Results of the current study identified LGBTQIA+ others from older generations (sometimes called queer elders) as a particular type of relationship involved in socialization. Because social learning begins very early in childhood (Vance, 1965), positive exposure to LGBTQIA+ others from a young age may have a profound impact on LGBTQIA+ young people. Although a modest proportion of the sample described positive influence from the first LGBTQIA+ person they met, this finding does underscore the importance of considering positive socializing agents very early in childhood, even before young people are aware of or disclose their own sexual or gender identity. Because participants identified these first encounters without specific prompting, results suggest that early and first encounters with LGBTQIA+ others may be especially powerful developmental events that participants draw on for years to come.

Intergenerational connection between queer elders and youth suggest that queer elders can be sources of cultural wisdom, provide guidance for navigating an oppressive society, and encourage youth to celebrate oneself (McLean et al., 2025). Despite evidence that queer elders can participate in positive socialization, this intergenerational transference of cultural knowledge and wisdom is rare (Weststrate et al., 2024) and may require intervention or community programs to facilitate these connections (Weststrate, Greteman, et al., 2024). A number of barriers exist to connecting LGBTQIA+ youth to queer elders including stigmatization of LGBTQIA+ adults as "groomers" (Bohan et al., 2002), separation of adult and youth LGBTQIA+ community spaces (e.g., youth centers, gay bars), and legislation that prohibits LGBTQIA+ adults from introducing LGBTQIA+ youth to shared culture and wisdom (e.g., "Don't say gay" laws and prohibition of drag queen story hours) (Kline et al., 2022; Marwick et al., 2024). In addition to intergenerational connection, queer elders also included cross-age peer relationships including same-generation peers, friends, siblings, and cousins only a few years or grade levels above the participant. The positive effect of cross-age mentoring on youth psychosocial development is thought to be due to the strong influence of same-generation peers who share cultural and social group knowledge concurrent to the developmental transition toward increased time spent with peers (Burton et al., 2022). To date, cross-age peer mentoring among LGBTQIA+ youth remains an understudied resource for supporting positive development and socialization among LGBTQIA+ youth.

In addition to origin and chosen family, we found evidence that broader community relationships, especially helping relationships, were actively involved in LGBTQIA+ socialization. Notably, among community relationships, teachers were the most frequently named relationship in brief narratives and the community group who provided the most frequent positive messaging. Teachers play an important role in fostering inclusive classrooms, implementing measures that improve school safety, and opening dialogue about LGBTQIA+ topics (Leung et al., 2022). Their helping relationship role as educators through childhood and adolescence may uniquely position them to provide an additional or alternative source of LGBTQIA+ socialization outside the origin family home. In terms of intergenerational access to queer elders, in the current study 60% of named teachers were explicitly identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Likely due in part to formal and informal regulation of LGBTQIA+ identities in education space, teachers may elect not to be completely open about their sexual and gender identities in the classroom. However, results of the current study suggest that even without direct, personal conversations about sexuality and gender, LGBTQIA+ teachers frequently engaged in socialization through directing students to queered course content, speaking openly about their families, and

encouraging students to be themselves. Teachers may comprise one of the most common naturally occurring intergenerational LGBTQIA+ connections for youth outside of their extended origin family. Pressures or restrictions for teachers not to share their LGBTQIA+ identity at school (Gray, 2013) may deny youth an important source of non-family socialization and effectively render role models invisible. In contrast to frequent teacher involvement in socialization, the low frequency of positive messages from healthcare providers highlights a potential avenue for increasing positive socialization outside family contexts. Recent research demonstrates that both teachers and healthcare providers can be trained to engage in more affirming practices when working with LGBTQIA+ adults and youth (Coulter et al., 2021; Pachankis et al., 2022; Price et al., 2024), and it is possible that future training could provide guidance for how to engage in positive socializing processes.

Lastly, results of the current study provide novel evidence of the potential for parasocial relationships to contribute to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. Although frequency should not be interpreted as magnitude of impact, the rate at which participants named the positive influence of parasocial relationships was virtually the same rate as origin family. Indeed, despite being the second most frequent group for positive messages in quantitative results, parasocial relationships were identified less frequently than community and approximately equally to origin family in narratives. This contrasting ranking suggests that while messages from media and parasocial relationships may be more frequent, they may not have the same magnitude of positive influence as reciprocal, person-to-person relationships. Although socialization may often be thought of as occurring through two-way interactions in established relationships, identification of parasocial relationships in LGBTQIA+ socializations emphasizes the critical need for access to LGBTQIA+ role models and representation, especially among LGBTQIA+ youth. In addition, over 90% of participants who named a parasocial relationship explicitly identified LGBTQIA+ individuals, underscoring the importance of queer others, even through queer media representation, in providing a template for navigating LGBTQIA+ identity. Given the internet's role as an information source for LGBTQIA+ identity and a primary platform for social connection among LGBTQIA+ people (Fox & Ralston, 2016), it is unsurprising that the most commonly named parasocial figures in participant narratives were social media content creators. In prior research, LGBTQIA+ youth derived hope and inspiration from parasocial figures who showed them it was possible to live happily and authentically in LGBTQIA+ identity while resisting negative messaging from others (Craig et al., 2021). The frequency of positive messaging from LGBTQIA+ parasocial relationships in the current study echoes evidence that media representation can support members of marginalized communities to develop a positive view of their identity (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016).

By including participants from the US and NZ, we provide added evidence of LGBTQIA+ socialization in the US, and we establish novel evidence of this developmental process in NZ. Notably, the lack of differences between the US and NZ across LGBTQIA+ positive messaging frequency and identified socialization agents in narratives, suggests relevance of these constructs and their accessibility across distinct cultural contexts. Although the US and NZ are both western, settler nations, policy, cultural, and structural systems for LGBTQIA+ individuals vary (e.g., NZ's availability of universal healthcare, Gauld, 2016; and legal human rights protections that include transgender people, New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 1993). As an extension of these institutional differences, public opinions also vary. For example, recent national polls show differences between the US and NZ in support for same-sex marriage (US: 54%, NZ: 70%) and anti-discrimination protections for transgender people (US: 72%, NZ: 84%; Ipsos, 2023). Additionally, the racial and ethnic composition of the samples from the US and NZ reflects one of the primary ways these subsamples differed in the current study. The largest non-White subgroup in NZ subsample was Māori in contrast with similar or larger subgroups of Asian, Black, and Latinx subgroups in the US. These differences become apparent in some participant narratives, including those quoted in this study, where the intersection of Māori and LGBTQIA+ identities presented a unique aspect of socialization for some NZ participants. Despite these

ethnic differences in subsample composition and institutionalized differences in protections for LGBTQIA+ people, evidence from the current study suggests that frequency of positive socialization messages and access to key socializing agents are similar in the US and NZ. In the future, deeper qualitative research may be necessary to ethnographically examine cultural differences that may shape not only who play key roles in socialization in the US and NZ but also whether individual understanding of what it means to be LGBTQIA+ may vary across cultures. Thus, the current study provides a promising start to understanding LGBTQIA+ socialization across national cultural contexts but expanded future research in additional countries (including non-Western contexts) and international comparisons may reveal further important universal and culturally distinct aspects of LGBTQIA+ socialization.

Limitations

The strengths of this two-country investigation into key players in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization must be interpreted within the limitations of the study. First, the study design was cross-sectional with retrospective recall from adults and adolescents. As such, we were unable to identify how different socializing agents may engage at different rates across development. Similarly, although the age range of this sample extended from adolescence (age 16) to older adulthood (age 71), the sample was predominantly from Generation Z (27 years old and younger). By including participants from multiple generational cohorts, it is possible that different recall periods and advancement through developmental stages may have shaped how participants remembered, reported, and retold experiences from earlier in development. Future research should examine how socialization occurs across both individual development and historical time, including perspectives from the coming-of-age Generation Alpha. Second, in the current study we only examined who engaged in positive socialization without parallel data collected with negative socialization. Prior research on family support for LGBTQIA+ youth demonstrates that the same family members who engage in accepting behaviors may also engage in rejection (Johnson et al., 2020). As research on LGBTQIA+ socialization expands, it will be important to consider how processes of positive and negative socialization are intertwined. Even when focused exclusively on positive socialization processes, some participants provided narratives that positive socialization was inaccessible. Future research must examine the complex intricacies of both positive and negative LGBTQIA+ socialization across development and how young LGBTQIA+ people make sense of potentially conflicting messages about their identities (e.g., Compton, 2016). Third, although the current sample achieved a moderate level of diversity with nearly 30% of the sample identifying as BIPOC, a full intersectional analysis across racial and ethnic groups was not possible due to (1) small subgroups within most minoritized racial and ethnic subgroups and (2) the lack of data specifically collected regarding intersectional social processes. To uncover how LGBTQIA+ socialization may unfold distinctly in specific ethnic or racial groups, future research could consider intrasectional approaches that focus on homogenous samples for whom shared ethnic cultural and experiences may be relevant to socialization. Finally, measures of positive messaging frequency and socialization agent frequency, even with comparison across groups, should not be equated with impact. As demonstrated in the current study, first experiences with another LGBTQIA+ person, especially adult role models, were infrequently identified but left long-lasting positive impression on participants. Future research should investigate how socialization impact may vary across relationships, message content, and age at which messages were received.

Conclusion

Understanding who contributes most to LGBTQIA+ socialization allows researchers and practitioners to identify who naturally engages most in this process already and who may require

additional support and guidance to become more involved. In a two-country sample, we found evidence that origin family, including parents, do contribute to LGBTQIA+ socialization, however, origin family lagged behind chosen family, especially LGBTQIA+ chosen family, in their contribution to positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. In contrast to the typical emphasis on origin family in family socialization research, LGBTQIA+ others, both in and outside origin family, appeared to play the most prominent role in positive LGBTQIA+ socialization. This connection to LGBTQIA+ others may fulfill a role in positive socialization that non-LGBTQIA+ origin family members are unable or unprepared to provide. Ultimately, positive LGBTQIA+ socialization may be a process that requires involvement of origin family together with chosen family, community relationships, and even parasocial relationships.

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Data availability statement

Quantitative data are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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