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A Typology of Younger Adults' Nuclear and Extended Family Relations in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To develop a typology of relationship quality for nuclear and extended family relations of younger adults in the United States, accounting for variation across kinship types and racial/ethnic groups.

Background: Existing typologies of family relationships primarily focus on nuclear ties, often neglecting relations with extended kin. Ties to extended kin are, however, central to many people's lives and may be particularly salient in certain racial/ethnic groups. Expanding current typologies to include nuclear and extended kin is therefore important for describing the diverse landscape of family relations.

Method: We applied latent class analysis to data from the US sample of the KINMATRIX survey. Data of respondents aged 25 to 35 were collected online, capturing their perspectives on a wide array of nuclear and extended family members. The analytic sample comprised $N = 3772$ respondents and $n = 65,270$ dyadic relationships with their biological kin.

Results: We identified five classes of relationships: tight-knit, connected-but-autonomous, disharmonious-but-supportive, intimate-but-distant, and detached. Across these classes, we found a pronounced gradient, whereby closeness declined and detachment increased with genealogical distance. Considering absolute kin numbers revealed a substantial "relational reserve" in extended family ties, particularly those characterized as connected-but-autonomous. These were especially relevant among Black respondents, who were less close to nuclear kin, but also less detached from extended kin.

Conclusion: This study highlights the relevance of kin relations beyond the nuclear family and demonstrates the value of typological approaches assessing commonalities and differences—especially along racial/ethnic lines—in contemporary American families.

1 | Introduction

Building on the intergenerational solidarity paradigm (Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Silverstein 2021), numerous empirical studies have identified distinct types of adult parent-child relations across a variety of countries and regions, including the

United States, Europe, and Asia (e.g., Guo et al. 2012; Silverstein and Bengtson 1997; Silverstein et al. 2010; Van Gaalen and Dykstra 2006). These typologies indicate a continuum of family relations ranging from "tight-knit" to "detached" or from "amicable" to "disharmonious", with some variation in the numbers and labels of types, depending on the relational dimensions (emotional,

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functional, etc.) investigated (see Guo et al. 2012, Table 1, for an overview). Such typological analyses provide important insights into the heterogeneity of family relations, because they “capture the nuances and complexities of intergenerational relationships and present combinations of relationship qualities or support patterns that differentiate families” (Fingerman et al. 2020, 395).

A much smaller body of research dealt with family relationships beyond the parent–child dyad and generated similar typologies for relationships between adult siblings (Budginaitė-Mačkinė and Juozeliūnienė 2023; Stewart et al. 2001), grandparents and adult grandchildren (Barrett and Gunderson 2021; Hwang et al. 2022), as well as other extended kin, such as cousins, aunts, and uncles (Hessel 2024; Vogt 2020). Whereas these latter relationships have often been described as “forgotten kin” (Milardo 2010) and a “neglected topic” (Furstenberg 2020) in family research, interest in kin relations “beyond the nuclear family” has recently been growing again, taking advantage of methodological advances and an increasing availability of microdata on kin ties beyond the household (e.g., Kolk et al. 2023; Leopold et al. 2024; also see Alburez-Gutierrez et al. 2022).

Expanding the investigation of relationship typologies to family relations comprising various nuclear and extended ties seems crucial: While corroborating the well-known primacy of nuclear kin, Leopold et al. (2025) concluded that extended kin are central to younger adults’ lives, accounting for half of the family members they are emotionally close to, in regular contact with, and deem important (also see Vogt 2020). Moreover, although the distribution of various types of nuclear family relationships seems to differ between kin types (e.g., Silverstein and Bengtson 1997), most previous work has focused on single dyadic relationships or aggregate family patterns, thereby masking considerable variation in relationship qualities among dyads within families (Suitor et al. 2018). A more integrated approach to describe the diverse landscape of family relations thus requires analyses on multiple relationships in the same (extended) family system.

In the US context, accounting for *racial/ethnic differences* in relationship typologies beyond nuclear ties seems important for several reasons. First, previous studies indicate that Black families are characterized by a higher number of collateral (i.e., “horizontal”) kin—such as (half)siblings and cousins (e.g., Daw et al. 2016)—constituting a broader opportunity structure for social interaction and support. This structural feature gains in importance in light of the long-standing notion that Black people maintain stronger ties to extended kin than White people (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). Accordingly, studies have emphasized the crucial role of extended Black family networks in providing instrumental, financial, and social support protecting against adversities associated with societal marginalization and economic precarity (Cross et al. 2018; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004; Taylor et al. 2022; also see Spring et al. 2023). Second, Hispanic and Asian-American families constitute further important and fast-growing racial/ethnic groups that have been shown to exhibit unique features. Sarkisian et al. (2006), for example, found distinctive patterns of extended family integration where Mexicans and Puerto Ricans exhibited higher rates of coresidence and proximate living than White people, who, however, had greater involvement in financial support than Mexicans or Puerto Ricans (also see Sarkisian et al. 2007). Regarding Asian-American families, previous research has generally indicated

high levels of commitment and cohesion among family members and extended kin, emphasizing family solidarity (and specifically filial obligation) that is derived from Confucian ethics (e.g., Ishii-Kuntz 1997; also see Mui and Shibusawa 2008, Chapters 5 and 6).

The KINMATRIX survey (Leopold et al. 2024; <https://kinmatrix.eu>) provides unique data to investigate these aspects, collected from the perspective of younger adults aged 25 to 35 and capturing a wide array of their family members. Focusing on biological genealogical kinship, KINMATRIX offers comprehensive information on respondents’ relationships with members of the nuclear family (parents, siblings; see de Bel and Widmer 2021) and the extended family, comprising nuclear-extended (grandparents, half-siblings) and distant-extended (aunts, uncles, cousins) ties. The “nuclear”, “nuclear-extended”, and “distant-extended” categories capture distinctions in genetic relatedness and genealogical distance: Nuclear kin share the closest genetic ties with respondents (e.g., 50% relatedness for parents and full siblings), while nuclear-extended kin represent one step removed or partial genetic overlap (e.g., ~25% relatedness for grandparents and half-siblings). Distant-extended kin have lower degrees of genetic overlap (~12.5% relatedness for aunts, uncles, and first cousins) and greater genealogical distance, being separated from the respondents by at least three genealogical links. These distinctions have been shown to be associated with specific relationship qualities in families and should thus also be reflected in the distribution of relationship types: Next to differences in opportunity structures for social interaction and support resulting from differences in geographic proximity (specifically: coresidence; see de Bel and Widmer 2021), kin selection theory predicts that individuals should invest more in their closer related kin than in distantly related kin (e.g., Danielsbacka et al. 2015; Tanskanen and Danielsbacka 2014).

The first round of the KINMATRIX survey was conducted between December 2022 and March 2023 in nine European countries and the US. A second round was fielded 1 year later, only in the US (December 2023 until January 2024), repeating the survey with minor modifications on a newly recruited sample. Pooling the US samples from both rounds yielded a large single-country analytic sample comprising $N = 3772$ respondents and $n = 65,270$ biological respondent-kin dyads. Applying latent class analysis to these data, we aimed to answer the following three research questions: *First*, which classes of relationship qualities can be identified in younger adults’ nuclear and extended family relations in the contemporary US? *Second*, how does the distribution of these relationship types vary across kinship types (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins)? *Third*, does the distribution of younger adults’ relationship types differ by respondents’ race/ethnicity?

2 | Data and Method

2.1 | Data and Sample

The KINMATRIX survey investigated kinship networks among individuals aged 25–35 in nine European countries and the United States (Leopold et al. 2024). The survey consisted of two rounds: the first was conducted in late 2022 to early 2023 across all 10 countries; the second, in late 2023

to early 2024, focused only on the US. Thus, the US was the largest of all samples, constituting around 40% of all respondents of the KINMATRIX survey, therefore most suitable to study within-country stratification of relationship patterns (find more details on the other samples and their specifics in Leopold et al. 2024). After data cleaning, the pooled US sample from both rounds included $N = 5005$ respondents—each representing one kinship network—and $N = 113,697$ respondent-kin dyads, enabling us to obtain a detailed typology of nuclear and extended kin relationships as well as robust racial/ethnic group comparisons.

2.1.1 | Survey Design

KINMATRIX collected data centering on respondents and their connections to a wide array of kin. The definition of kinship emphasized genealogical ties, the focus of the current study. Specifically, the set of kin covered all parents, full- and half-siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first-degree cousins (as well as step-relatives, which were not considered in the present analysis). Ties to adoptive kin were not part of the study. Data were collected through web-based tools, inviting respondents to create their family trees and subsequently report about their relationship to and attributes of each kin. Visual aids and iterative updates ensured data accuracy and respondent engagement.

2.1.2 | Sampling and Data Quality

Respondents were recruited from access panels with quotas for demographics (sex, age, education, region) and various quality controls during and after data collection. Validation against probability-based data and official statistics (e.g., American Community Survey) showed a good match with external benchmarks on respondent demographics, kinship structure (e.g., number living, parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.), and family relations (e.g., contact frequency, emotional closeness). A detailed account of KINMATRIX, including data collection, cleaning, and benchmarking, is available in Leopold et al. (2024, 2025).

2.1.3 | Sample Selection

From the pooled US samples, we derived information on respondents' relationships with living biological kin, distinguishing 16 kin categories from three kin groups: (a) *nuclear* kin comprising father (1) and mother (2), full brothers (3) and sisters (4); (b) *nuclear-extended* kin comprising paternal and maternal grandfathers and grandmothers (5–8), and paternal and maternal halfsiblings (9–10); and (c) *distant-extended* kin comprising paternal and maternal aunts and uncles (11–14), as well as paternal and maternal first-degree cousins (15–16).

The initial sample included $n = 84,879$ of respondent-kin dyads, clustered within $N = 4980$ respondents reporting at least one living biological kin. We excluded observations in case of missing information on the respondent's gender ($n = 933$, $N = 57$), race ($n = 7143$, $N = 419$), or ethnicity ($n = 9179$, $N = 601$). We also excluded respondents categorized as “(Non-Hispanic) Other” (see

below), because the size of this group was too small to be analyzed separately ($n = 2354$, $N = 131$). This resulted in an analytical sample of $n = 65,270$ respondent-kin dyads clustered within $N = 3772$ respondents.

Compared to the analytical sample, excluded cases were largely similar in their socio-demographic and relationship indicators (Table 1). Compared to those included in the analysis, the excluded group contained a smaller proportion of women (0.52 vs. 0.62) and individuals with high educational attainment (i.e., more than secondary education; 0.78 vs. 83), but a higher proportion of individuals with medium education (i.e., completed secondary education; 0.19 vs. 0.16). Moreover, excluded respondents reported, on average, 1.1 fewer ties in their kin network, mostly due to lower numbers of uncles and cousins. However, the reported number of siblings, particularly brothers, was a bit higher among those excluded. We did not identify any noteworthy differences in the average relationship indicators, except for a somewhat larger share of relationships with “at least a little” conflict for the excluded respondents (0.67 vs. 0.71). Repeating the main analysis with the “full” sample (containing also the excluded cases) provided robust results, despite some expectable deviations in the distributions of the item response probabilities and class sizes.

2.2 | Indicators of Relationship Quality

We employed six indicators of interpersonal relationship qualities, reflecting various dimensions of current and previous expressions of solidarity in family relations, including conflict (see, for example, Silverstein 2021):

(a) *Geographic proximity* (“structural solidarity”) to [kin] was measured as travel time distance with the usual mode of transportation on a five-point-scale ranging from “lives in the same building” [1] to “one hour or longer” [5]; (b) *frequency of contact* (adding up all visits, letters, phone calls, etc.; “associational solidarity”) with [kin] ranges from “daily or several times per week” [1] to “never” [6]; and (c) *emotional closeness* (“affectual solidarity”) to [kin] ranged from “not at all close” [1] to “very close” [5]. “Functional solidarity” was assessed accounting for social and financial support: (d) *Social support* was a binary indicator taking the value 1 if the answer to at least one of the following three items was positive: whether the respondent ever received good advice from [kin] when they had to make an important decision, was ever comforted by [kin] when they were sad, or could really count on [kin] if they needed help in the future. (e) *Financial support* was a binary indicator taking the value 1, if [kin] has ever given or loaned a larger amount of money to the respondent. Finally, (f) *conflict* (including tension and disagreement) with [kin] was assessed on a four-point scale ranging from “none at all” [1] to “a great deal” [4]. Distributions of the answers to each of these items by kin category can be found in the Supporting Information (Figures B1–B6).

2.3 | Stratification Variables

Next to *gender*, we stratified our models by respondents' *race/ethnicity*, which we operationalized by combining

TABLE 1 | Comparison of descriptive sample statistics between excluded cases during data cleaning process^a and analytical sample.

	Excluded cases	Analytical sample	<i>p</i> -value of <i>t</i> -test for difference
Respondent's age	30.45	30.23	0.0326
Respondent's gender			
Female	0.52	0.62	< 0.0001
Male	0.43	0.38	0.0006
Other or missing	0.05	0.00	< 0.0001
Respondent's education ^b			
High (more than secondary edu.)	0.78	0.83	0.0010
Medium (secondary education)	0.19	0.16	0.0045
Low (incomplete secondary edu.)	0.02	0.02	0.1770
Respondent's number of living kin			
Father	0.84	0.87	0.0094
Mother	0.92	0.93	0.4494
Brother	0.83	0.75	0.0613
Sister	0.81	0.77	0.8410
Paternal grandfather	0.23	0.22	0.5698
Maternal grandfather	0.29	0.26	0.0486
Paternal grandmother	0.39	0.37	0.2064
Maternal grandmother	0.42	0.41	0.4362
Paternal halfsibling	0.36	0.39	0.3730
Maternal halfsibling	0.25	0.25	0.6290
Paternal uncle	1.02	1.11	0.0130
Maternal uncle	0.84	0.97	0.0004
Paternal aunt	1.04	1.10	0.0513
Maternal aunt	0.98	1.03	0.0736
Paternal cousin	3.62	4.08	0.0015
Maternal cousin	3.39	3.81	< 0.0001
Respondent's total number of kin	16.23	17.30	0.0002
Relationship quality (dyad-level) ^c			
Geographic proximity (< 1 h)			
Missing	0.18	0.18	0.1981
No	0.53	0.55	< 0.0001
Yes	0.29	0.27	< 0.0001
Frequency of contact (≥ monthly)			
Missing	0.06	0.06	0.9424
No	0.61	0.63	< 0.0001
Yes	0.34	0.31	< 0.0001
Emotional closeness (≥ pretty close)			
Missing	0.06	0.06	0.9424

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

	Excluded cases	Analytical sample	<i>p</i> -value of <i>t</i> -test for difference
No	0.64	0.65	0.0247
Yes	0.30	0.29	0.0204
Social support (received from kin)			
<i>Advice</i> missing	0.05	0.05	0.5932
No	0.77	0.77	0.8428
Yes	0.17	0.18	0.9225
<i>Comforted</i> missing	0.05	0.05	0.3536
No	0.75	0.74	0.1556
Yes	0.20	0.21	0.0403
<i>Counting on</i> missing	0.05	0.06	0.6325
No	0.73	0.72	0.0001
Yes	0.22	0.23	0.0001
Financial support (received from kin)			
Missing	0.04	0.04	0.0120
No	0.88	0.88	0.0726
Yes	0.08	0.08	0.7165
Conflict ($\geq$ a little)			
Missing	0.06	0.06	0.9424
No	0.67	0.71	<0.0001
Yes	0.28	0.23	<0.0001
Number of relationships (<i>n</i> , unweighted)	19,609	65,270	
Number of respondents (<i>N</i> , unweighted)	1208	3772	

Note: Statistically significant *p*-values in bold ($p < 0.05$).

^aExcluded cases due to missing values in gender ($n = 933$, $N = 57$), race ($n = 7143$, $N = 419$), ethnicity ($n = 9179$, $N = 601$) or because categorized as “(Non-Hispanic Other)” ($n = 2354$, $N = 131$).

^bEducation included only for this comparison.

^cBased on all respondent-kin dyads with missing values due to missing relative's names imputed.

information on respondents' race (“Asian/Asian American”, “Caucasian/White”, “African American/Black”, and “Other” comprising “Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander” as well as others) with a binary variable indicating whether they had a Hispanic background. This information was partly assessed in the KINMATRIX interview, and partly supplied by the data provider. Excluding “Non-Hispanic Others” from our analytic sample (see above), we eventually distinguished four racial/ethnic groups: “Non-Hispanic White”, “Hispanic”, “Non-Hispanic Black”, and “Non-Hispanic Asian”. We describe the socio-demographic composition of the sample and the distribution of relationship indicators by race/ethnicity in Table 2.

2.4 | Latent Class Analysis

We employed latent class analysis (LCA) to identify typical patterns of relationship qualities using dyadic respondent-kin

relationships (respondent-father, respondent-mother, etc.) as units of analysis. We conducted the LCA with the R package “poLCA”, version 1.6.0.1 (Linzer and Lewis 2011).

To identify the ideal number of classes, we started with the estimation of a latent class model including one class only (corresponding to a log-linear independence model) and then increasing the number of estimated classes step-wise, estimating a model with a maximum of seven different classes. We repeated the estimation of each latent class model thirty times to ensure finding the global maximum of the log-likelihood function (Linzer and Lewis 2011, 16). Following previous research (e.g., Bauer 2022), we based the selection of the best cluster solution on model fit measures, such as the sample-size adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (aBIC) and the consistent Akaike Information Criterion (cAIC), as well as relative entropy and the average posterior class probabilities for classification accuracy, and the substantive interpretability of the results.

TABLE 2 | Descriptive sample statistics, by respondents' race/ethnicity (means, weighted).

	NH White	Hispanic	NH Black	NH Asian	Total
Respondent's age	30.45 ^b	29.77 ^a	29.95 ^a	30.11 ^{ab}	30.24
Female respondent	0.51 ^a	0.51 ^a	0.50 ^a	0.51 ^a	0.51
Respondent's number of living kin					
Nuclear kin					
Father	0.84 ^a	0.87 ^a	0.83 ^a	0.88 ^a	0.85
Mother	0.91 ^a	0.94 ^a	0.92 ^a	0.95 ^a	0.92
Brother	0.71 ^a	0.93 ^b	0.83 ^{ab}	0.84 ^{ab}	0.77
Sister	0.73 ^a	0.93 ^{bc}	0.99 ^c	0.75 ^{ab}	0.80
Nuclear-extended kin					
Paternal grandfather	0.21 ^{ab}	0.26 ^b	0.26 ^{ab}	0.18 ^a	0.23
Maternal grandfather	0.26 ^a	0.27 ^a	0.26 ^a	0.24 ^a	0.26
Paternal grandmother	0.36 ^a	0.44 ^b	0.39 ^{ab}	0.37 ^{ab}	0.38
Maternal grandmother	0.40 ^a	0.45 ^a	0.39 ^a	0.44 ^a	0.41
Paternal halfsibling	0.37	0.58 ^a	0.75 ^a	0.21	0.44
Maternal halfsibling	0.26 ^a	0.35 ^{ab}	0.54 ^b	0.05	0.30
Distant-extended kin					
Paternal uncle	0.97 ^a	1.42 ^c	1.04 ^{ab}	1.27 ^{bc}	1.08
Maternal uncle	0.89 ^a	1.18 ^b	1.04 ^{ab}	1.08 ^{ab}	0.97
Paternal aunt	1.01 ^a	1.36 ^c	1.11 ^{ab}	1.36 ^{bc}	1.11
Maternal aunt	0.89 ^a	1.39	1.03 ^a	1.04 ^a	1.01
Paternal cousin	3.25 ^a	5.95 ^b	3.87 ^a	5.37 ^b	3.96
Maternal cousin	3.13 ^a	5.24 ^b	4.41 ^b	4.02 ^{ab}	3.74
Respondent's total number of kin	15.20	22.57	18.66 ^a	19.03 ^a	17.24
Relationship quality (dyad-level) ¹					
Geographic proximity (< 1 h)	0.31	0.27	0.33	0.17	0.29
Frequency of contact (≥ monthly)	0.31 ^a	0.30 ^a	0.37	0.31 ^a	0.31
Emotional closeness (≥ pretty close)	0.28 ^a	0.30	0.32	0.27 ^a	0.29
Social support (received from kin)	0.31	0.24 ^a	0.26 ^a	0.25 ^a	0.28
Financial support (received from kin)	0.08 ^a	0.06	0.08 ^a	0.08 ^a	0.08
Conflict (≥ a little)	0.26 ^b	0.20 ^a	0.21 ^a	0.24 ^b	0.24
Number of relationships (<i>n</i> , weighted)	36,444	16,381	8259	4187	65,270
Number of respondents (<i>N</i> , weighted)	2389	723	441	219	3772
% of total respondents (weighted)	63.32	19.17	11.69	5.81	100

Note: Superscripts (^a, ^b, ^c) indicate statistically different groups at $p < 0.05$. Groups sharing a letter are not significantly different.

Abbreviation: NH = Non-Hispanic.

¹Based on all respondent-kin dyads with missing values due to missing relative's names imputed.

An alternative to latent class analysis is latent profile analysis (LPA), which allows for the inclusion of continuous variables. However, similar to Hwang et al. (2024), we did not identify interpretable results using LPA and therefore opted for LCA, despite having to reduce information when we dichotomized the measures.

2.4.1 | Choice of Cut-Off Criteria

The choice of cut-off thresholds to dichotomize variables affects the identified classes in their substance as well as the relationships that are assigned to each class. Because our analysis covered a diverse array of 16 nuclear and extended kin categories,

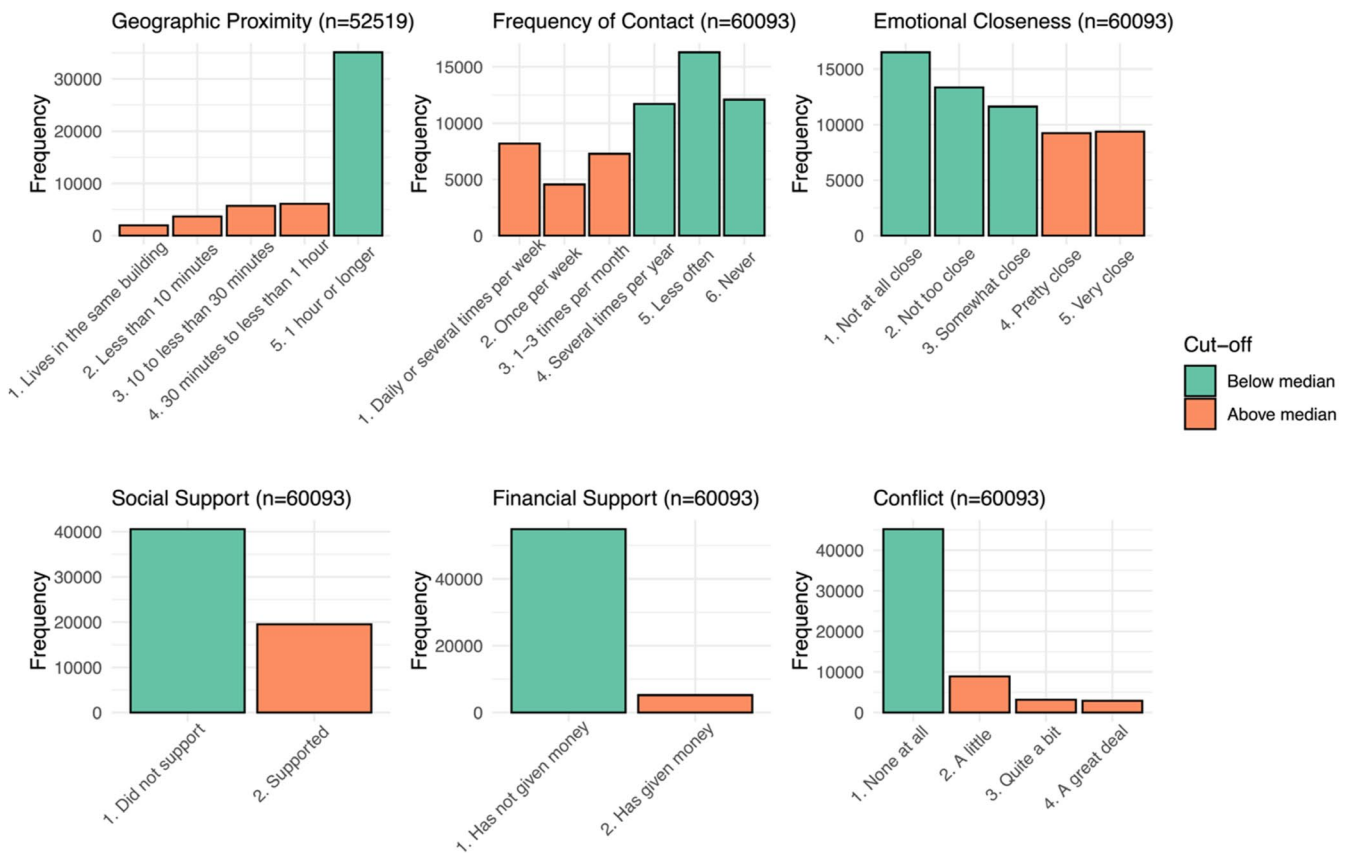


FIGURE 1 | Distributions of relationship quality indicators including their cut-offs. Based on observations with full information. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

exhibiting considerable variation in our variables of interest, we opted for the median as cut-off (see Figure 1). For geographic proximity, frequency of contact, and emotional closeness, we distinguished relationships (a) with less vs. more than 1 h travel time distance, (b) with at least monthly vs. fewer contacts, and (c) feeling pretty or very close vs. less than pretty close. These dichotomies captured relationships with an intact emotional bond, regular contact, and within physical reach (note that it was not possible to further disaggregate the broad category of distances greater than 1 h travel time). For the skewed distribution of conflict, we contrasted those reporting no conflict, tension, or disagreement at all with those exhibiting at least a little. When respondents did not know a relative's name, the relationship indicators were not assessed (~8%; item non-response in geographic proximity was higher (18%) because respondents could select "Don't know" explicitly). Because this item non-response is not random but assumed to occur especially in detached relations (Hünteler and Wetzel 2020), case-wise deleting them would result in the included relationships to be positively biased. Instead, we imputed missing values with the below-median cut-off values, that is, with the values representing more detachment (e.g., "less than monthly contact").

2.5 | Regression Analysis

To predict class membership by kin category as well as race/ethnicity and their interaction, we employed multivariate

regression analysis following the LCA. We conducted the regression analysis using Stata's "mlogit" command with clustered standard errors to account for the dependence of relationships within respondents, "margins" to obtain predicted probabilities of the class types for each kin category by race/ethnicity, and "coefplot" for visualization (Jann 2014). All analytical code is available at <https://osf.io/bhjdj/>.

3 | Results

3.1 | Typical Relationship Patterns

With respect to our first research question, we identified five typical patterns of relationship qualities that differed in their combinations of outcomes for the six relational indicators. Statistical model fit measures over models with one to seven classes (Table A1) and average posterior class membership probabilities for the five-class solution (Table A2) can be found in the Supporting Information. Figure 2 indicates the item response probabilities (y-axis) for each of the included indicators (x-axis), conditional on the relationship being of a specific type. Higher values indicated a higher likelihood of responses equaling 1 (i.e., greater proximity, more frequent contact, greater emotional closeness, greater propensity to receive emotional and/or financial support, more conflict). The interpretation of conditional item response probabilities is comparable to that of class loadings in factor analysis.

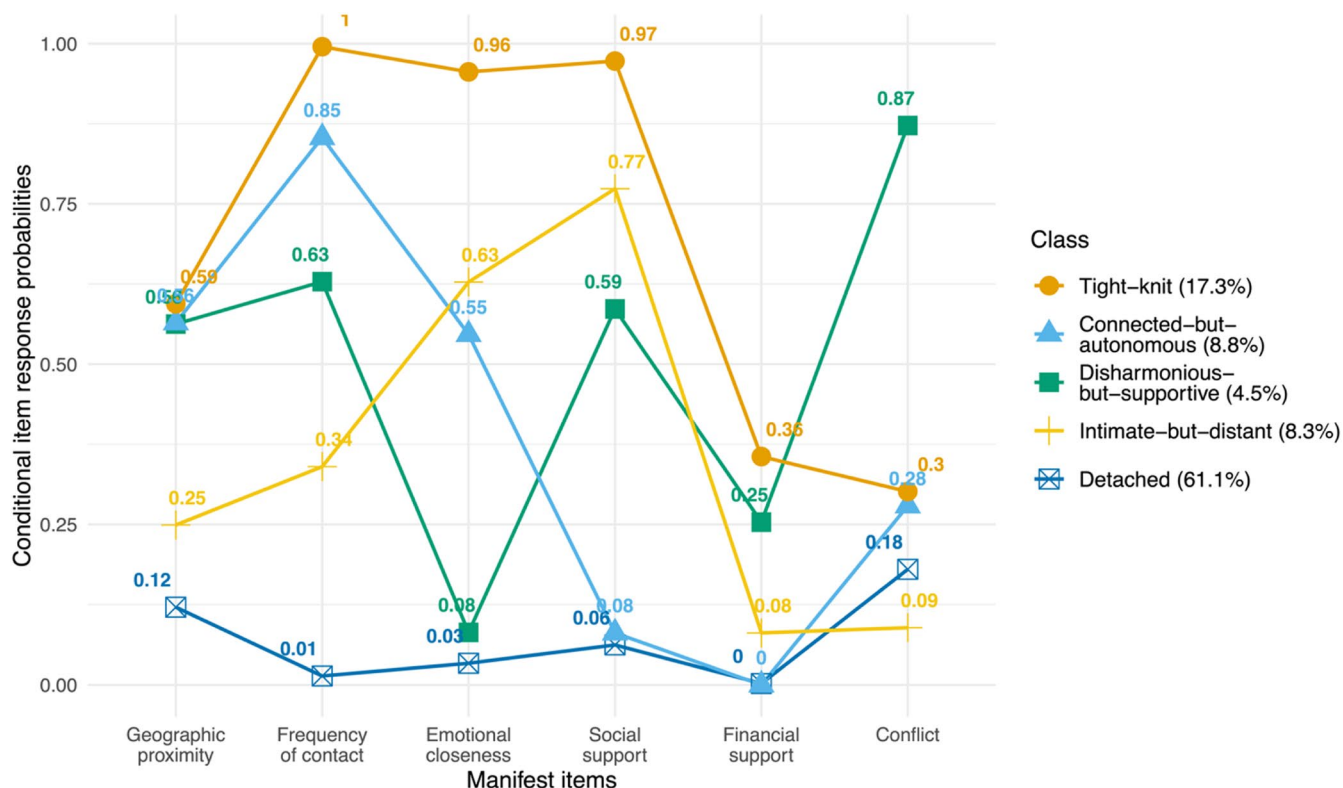


FIGURE 2 | Conditional item response probabilities for relationship indicators in the five-cluster-solution. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12014)]

The first relationship quality cluster (orange, round markers) was unique in its very high response probabilities on geographic proximity, contact frequency, emotional closeness, as well as social and financial support, while showing a medium probability to experience conflict. It is best described as “tight-knit”, because it was characterized by high levels of solidarity on all dimensions. The average posterior class membership probability for this cluster was 17.3%.

The second relationship pattern (light blue, triangle markers) was characterized by a high likelihood of close geographic proximity and regular contact, a medium propensity to feel emotionally close or to have conflict, as well as a low probability of receiving social or financial support. Relations in this cluster resembled tight-knit ones in their degree of structural and associational solidarity as well as their conflict propensity, but stood out in their merely average level of affectual solidarity and particularly low levels of functional solidarity, reflecting a high degree of autonomy in these relations. We therefore labeled this cluster as “connected-but-autonomous.” The average probability of a relationship to be of this type amounted to 8.8%.

Relationships in the third cluster (green, filled squared markers) exhibited relatively high probabilities to live geographically close, to be in regular contact, and to receive support while showing, at the same time, a very low propensity to feel emotionally close paired with the highest overall likelihood for conflict. Because of the co-occurrence of strong positive and strong negative elements, this cluster was labeled as “disharmonious-but-supportive.” This cluster was the smallest, with an average posterior class membership probability of 4.5%.

The fourth cluster (yellow, cross markers) exhibited low probabilities for close geographic proximity, frequent contacts, receipt of financial support, and conflict, paired with a high likelihood of emotional closeness and the receipt of social support. This pattern is, thus, best described as “intimate-but-distant”, highlighting the presence of close emotional bonds (in terms of both attachment and support) despite relatively low levels of structural and associational solidarity. The average posterior class membership probability for this cluster was 8.3%.

Finally, the fifth cluster (dark blue, hollow squared markers) was characterized by very low response probabilities on all relationship items (including conflict), therefore, representing a “detached” relationship pattern. This was the by far largest cluster, with an average posterior class membership probability of 61.1%.

3.2 | Relationship Patterns by Kin Category

To address our second research question, we assessed the distribution of the five typical relationship patterns (or “classes”) identified above across 16 kin categories, running multinomial logistic regressions controlling for respondents’ gender and race/ethnicity (including post-stratification weights, see [Supporting Information: Table A3](#)). To begin with, we predicted the probability to be sorted into a specific class for each kin category. We then multiplied this predicted probability with the average number of kin per each category in the respondent’s family network, providing us with the average absolute number of kin by category (e.g., “cousin”) and class (e.g., “detached”). Figure 3 depicts the distribution of typical relationship patterns across all

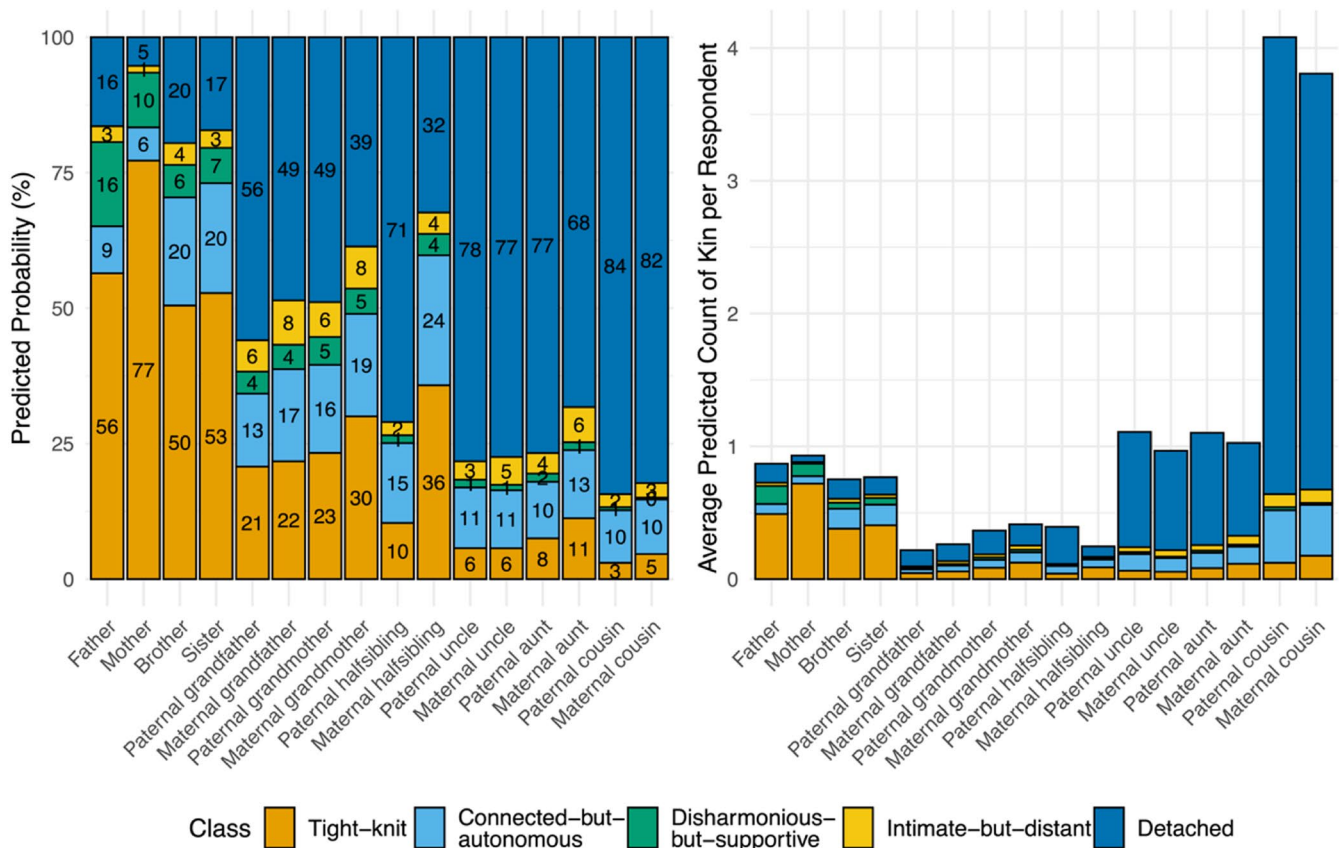


FIGURE 3 | Distribution of relationship patterns by kin category. Based on multinomial logistic regressions controlling for respondents' gender and race/ethnicity (weighted; see [Supporting Information: Table A3](#)). Left panel: Predicted probability of relationship being of a specific relationship pattern (class), displayed as probabilities within each kin type (summing up to 100%). Right panel: Number of kin as absolute counts by kin type, differentiated by relationship pattern (calculated through multiplying the predicted probabilities with the average number of kin). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

categories of kin, displayed as predicted probabilities for each kin (left-hand panel) and their predicted average counts per respondent (right-hand panel).

The *tight-knit* pattern was by far the most common in nuclear family ties, especially in relationships with mothers (~75%), followed by fathers and full siblings (more than 50%). Sizeable proportions of tight-knit relations were also found in respondent-grandparent dyads, ranging from more than ~20% on average to 30% of relationships with maternal grandmothers. Whereas more than one-third of relations to maternal half-siblings were tight-knit, this applied to only ~10% of paternal half-siblings. For extended-distant kin, that is, aunts, uncles, and cousins, tight-knit ties were generally rare but more common in relations to aunts, especially on the maternal side. Notably, in relative terms, the probability of a tight-knit tie to a maternal aunt was more than twice that of any uncle (about 1 in 10 vs. 1 in 20).

Overall, nuclear-extended and distant-extended family relations were dominated by *detachment*, ranging from roughly half of the relationships to grandparents (~40% among maternal grandmothers to ~55% among paternal grandfathers) to ~70% in maternal aunts and more than 80% in cousins. Importantly, though, a substantial minority of nuclear ties was also detached, comprising between 16% and 20% of ties

to fathers and full siblings. With a proportion of only 5%, detached relationships with mothers clearly constituted an exception.

With regard to the other, overall smaller classes, sizeable proportions of *connected-but-autonomous* relations (between 13% and 24%) were found in respondent-sibling and respondent-grandparent dyads, with slightly higher shares found in female kin and across the maternal lineage (except for siblings). *Disharmonious-but-supportive* relations were most common in respondent-parent dyads (fathers: 10%; mothers: 16%) and were close to non-existent in nuclear-extended (~5%) and particularly distant-extended kin relationships ($\leq 1\%$). The prevalence of *intimate-but-distant* relationships, in contrast, was negligible in almost any respondent-kin dyad ($< 5\%$) except for relations with grandparents and maternal aunts, with a proportion of 6%–8%.

In sum, these findings show a clear gradient by genealogical distance in the closeness of family relationships. Yet, despite the primacy of nuclear family members, and especially mothers, a substantial minority of extended kin ties was characterized by frequent contact, emotional closeness, or social support, particularly visible in maternal half-siblings and grandparents (especially maternal grandmothers), but also maternal aunts.

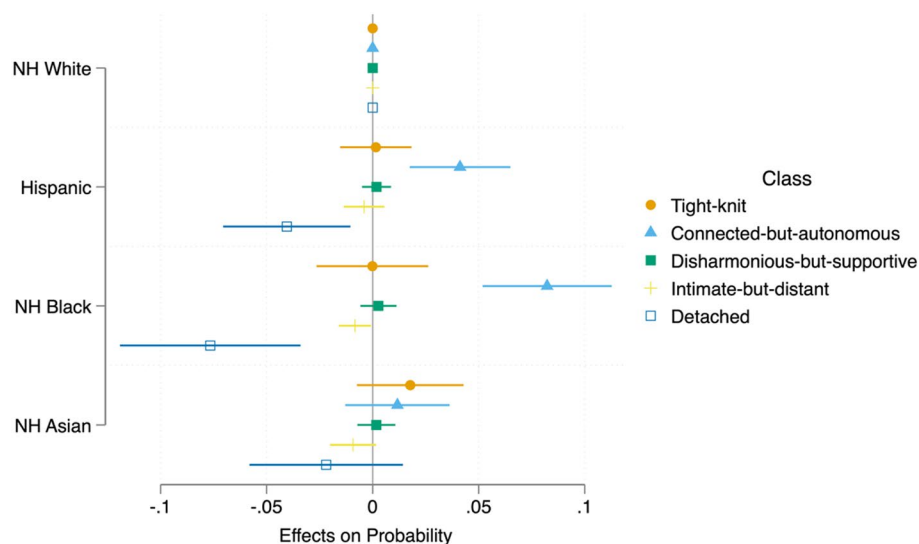


FIGURE 4 | Average marginal effects of race/ethnicity on probability for class membership. Based on multinomial logistic regressions controlling for respondents' gender (weighted; see [Supporting Information: Table A3](#)). Positive values indicate that members of this racial/ethnic group have a higher probability of their kin being of the respective relationship pattern (class) compared to White individuals, on average. Negative values indicate a smaller probability. Horizontal lines reflect 95%-confidence intervals of the average marginal effects. NH=Non-Hispanic. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

Considering the predicted absolute numbers of kin in a specific class in the family network revealed a substantial “relational reserve” (Cullati et al. 2018) in family ties outside the nucleus, particularly the distant-extended family. This was specifically reflected in the average of two distant-extended kin (i.e., cousins, aunts, or uncles) with whom the respondent had either tight-knit (0.6), connected-but-autonomous (1.1), or intimate-but-distant relationships (0.4). Thus, distant-extended relations accounted for 20% of all tight-knit, 62% of all connected-but-autonomous, and 66% of all intimate-but-distant relationships.

3.3 | Racial/Ethnic Differences

Turning to our third research question, we estimated multinomial logistic regression models (controlling for gender) to explore differences in relationship quality patterns by race/ethnicity. Detailed results are available in the [Supporting Information: Table A3](#). In Figure 4, we show average marginal effects on the probability of being sorted into a specific class by race/ethnicity, using White respondents as the reference. Whereas an overall picture indicated more similarities than differences across racial/ethnic groups, there were important exceptions: Hispanic and Black respondents both were significantly less likely than White respondents to have detached relationships, but more likely to experience connected-but-autonomous relations. Additionally, intimate-but-distant relations were less likely to be found across Black compared to White respondents.

Figure 5 provides a more nuanced picture, differentiating our comparison of racial/ethnic groups by kin category. For readability, we collapsed the original 16 categories into the three broader categories of “nuclear” (comprising parents and full siblings), “nuclear-extended” (comprising grandparents and half-siblings), and “distant-extended” (comprising aunts, uncles, and

cousins) kin. Table A5 in the [Supporting Information S1](#) shows detailed comparisons across all of the original kin categories.

Across all racial/ethnic groups, a clear gradient from tight-knit relations most prevalent in the nuclear family to distant-extended relations being dominated by detachment emerged, with nuclear-extended ties situated between these poles. Parallel to these strong racial/ethnic similarities, we also observed noteworthy differences (see [Supporting Information: Table A4](#) for significance tests of the pairwise comparisons of the predicted probabilities for classes between racial/ethnic groups across the three kin categories plotted in Figure 5): Compared to each of the other racial/ethnic groups, Asian respondents were clearly most likely to have tight-knit (68%) and least likely to have detached (6%) nuclear family relations. These differences were driven by more tight-knit ties to mothers and brothers, and fewer detached ties to all nuclear kin (see [Supporting Information: Table A5](#)). In terms of nuclear ties, a particularly large contrast emerged between families of Black and Asian respondents: While the probability of having tight-knit nuclear ties was one-quarter lower among Black than among Asian respondents (51% vs. 68%), the probability of detached nuclear ties was almost three times as high (17% vs. 6%).

Moreover, Black respondents' nuclear and distant-extended family ties were more likely than any other group to be characterized as connected-but-autonomous, mostly because of the relationships to siblings and cousins (nuclear: 20%; distant-extended: 17%), although differences between connected-but-autonomous aunts and uncles of White and Black respondents were also significant and substantial. Importantly, Black respondents' distant-extended relationships were also least likely to be detached. Differences were substantively largest in maternal aunts and uncles, with around 15% points difference to Asian respondents. Finally, nuclear-extended ties were broadly similar across racial/ethnic groups.

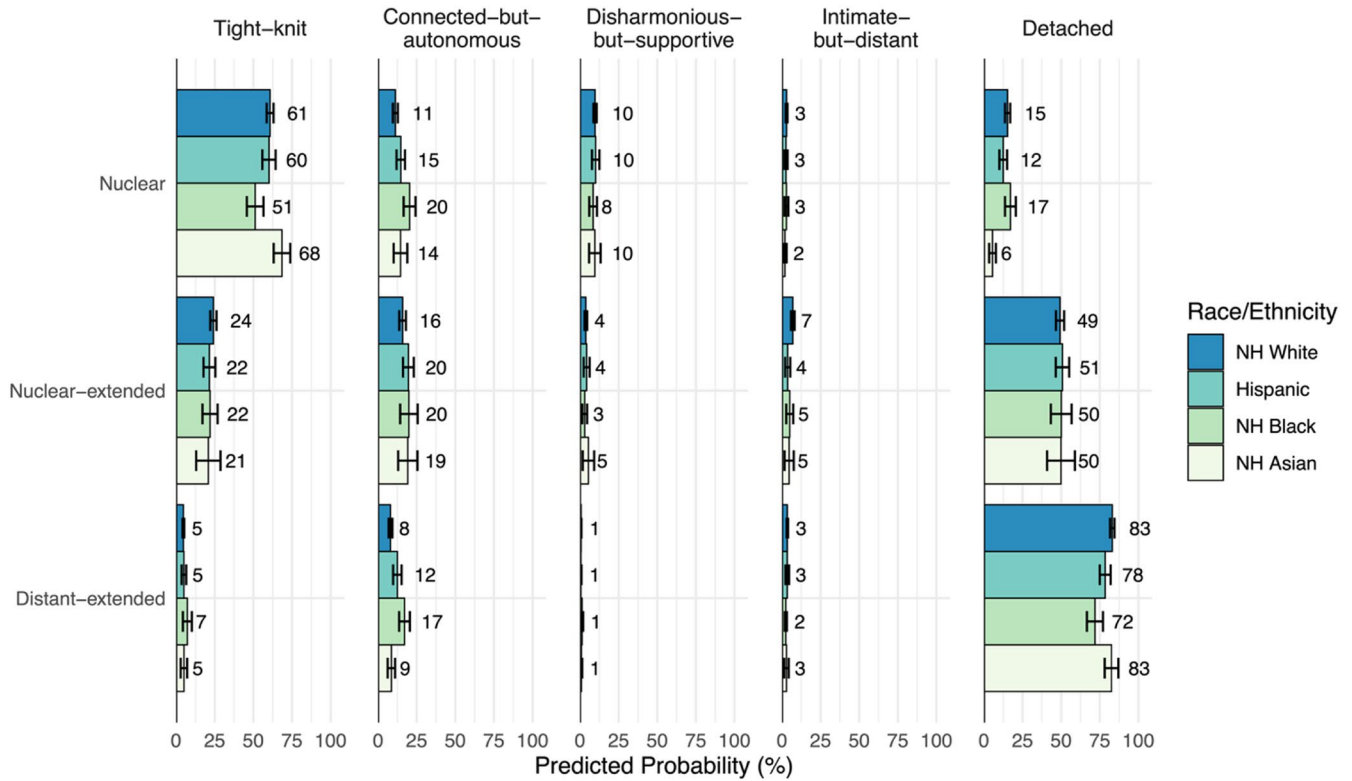


FIGURE 5 | Predicted probabilities of class membership by kin category and race/ethnicity. Based on multinomial logistic regressions controlling for respondents' gender (weighted; see [Supporting Information: Table A3](#)). Probabilities over the classes sum to 100% for each kin category. Confidence intervals (95%) relate to the predicted probabilities to be different from zero and do not indicate whether they differ between the groups. P-values for pairwise comparisons of predicted probabilities are displayed in [Supporting Information: Table A4](#). NH = Non-Hispanic. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

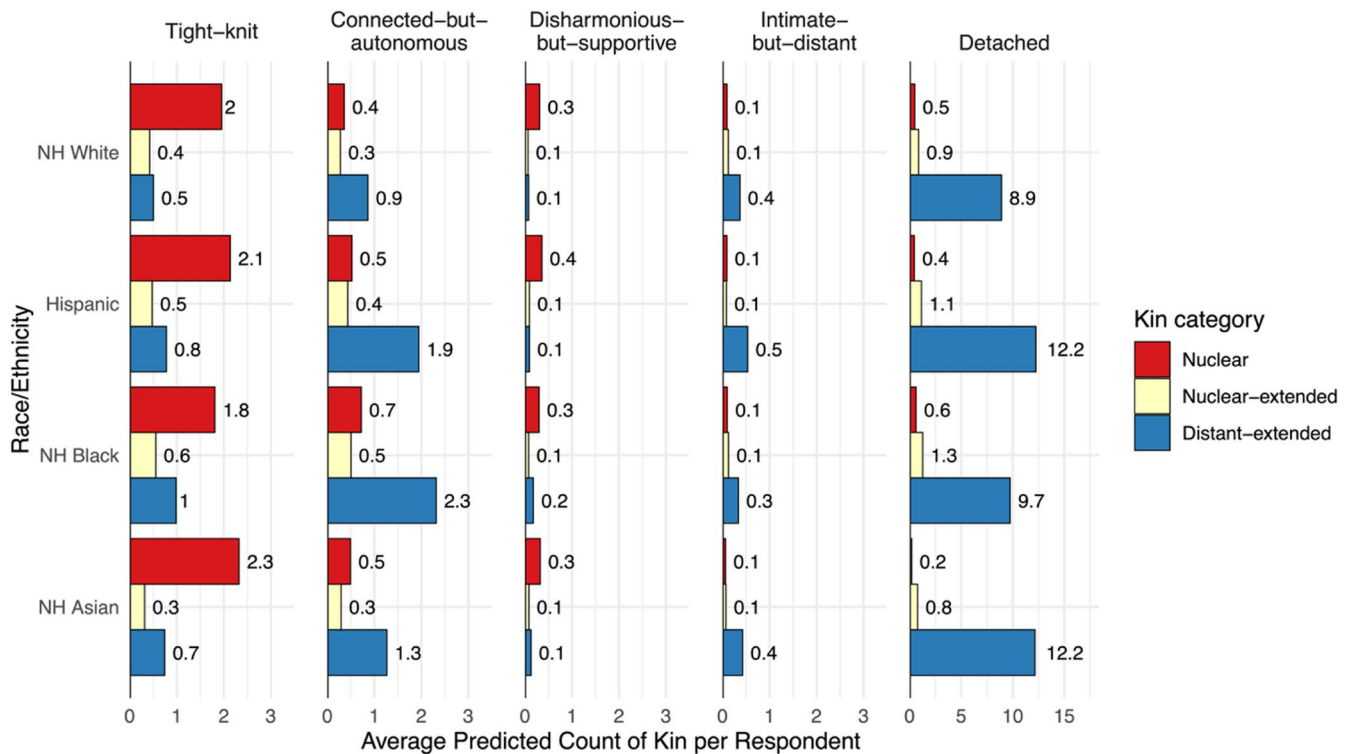


FIGURE 6 | Average predicted number of kin by relationship type across race/ethnicity displayed as absolute counts. Based on multinomial logistic regression controlling for respondents' gender (weighted, [Supporting Information: Table A3](#)). Counts are calculated through multiplying the predicted probabilities (Figure 5) with the average number of kin for each race/ethnicity. Note the different x-axis scaling for the "Detached". NH = Non-Hispanic. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

In Figure 6, we again turn to absolute numbers, displaying the average predicted counts of nuclear, nuclear-extended, and distant-extended kin in a specific class for each racial/ethnic group. This shift in perspective is particularly important for obtaining an accurate picture of racial/ethnic differences, given the sizable gaps in the demographic availability of kin across racial/ethnic groups (ranging from a total of ~15 among White to ~23 among Hispanic respondents; see Table 2). These gaps in terms of numeric availability may mitigate or exacerbate the relative differences described above.

The overall picture shown in Figure 6 was similar across all racial/ethnic groups: detached distant-extended family members accounted for the vast majority of family ties, while nuclear kin outnumbered extended kin in terms of tight-knit relationships (see [Supporting Information: Table A5](#) for a detailed breakdown across 16 kin categories). However, both categories of extended kin contributed a substantial share to the total number of tight-knit relationships: For example, White and Asian respondents had, on average, around three tight-knit family ties, one of which came from their extended family; in the remaining groups, this fraction was even larger, approaching almost 50% (1.6 of 3.4 tight-knit ties) among Black respondents.

Black respondents also differed from other groups (especially White and Asian respondents) in terms of their large number of connected-but-autonomous ties. Importantly, not all racial/ethnic differences in the previously presented probabilities (Figure 5) translated into equivalent differences in the absolute counts of kin included in the classes. For instance, White and Asian respondents had significantly higher probabilities of detached relations to distant-extended kin than Hispanic respondents. However, Hispanic respondents' absolute counts of detached distant-extended kin were substantially higher than those of White respondents and on par with those among Asian respondents. In contrast, other relative differences were reinforced through absolute differences in kin counts. For instance, the probability for siblings of White respondents to be connected-but-autonomous was less than half of that of siblings of Black respondents (17% vs. 30%, respectively) while in absolute counts, Black respondents had more than twice the number of White respondents (0.24 vs. 0.55 connected-but-autonomous siblings, respectively).

4 | Conclusion

Using unique data from the US sample of the KINMATRIX survey (Leopold et al. 2024), the present study aimed to obtain a comprehensive typology of younger adults' family relations comprising multiple nuclear (parents, siblings), nuclear-extended (grandparents, halfsiblings), and distant-extended (aunts, uncles, cousins) ties. We also paid particular attention to potential differences along the lines of race/ethnicity (distinguishing, White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents). Three main findings emerged from our analysis:

We, *first*, identified five classes of typical patterns of relationship qualities in nuclear and extended family ties, pointing to substantial heterogeneity of relationships: “tight-knit”, “connected-but-autonomous”, “disharmonious-but-supportive”,

“intimate-but-distant”, and “detached”. The relationship profiles reflected in these classes resemble those previously reported in the literature focusing on nuclear—primarily adult parent-child—relations (see Guo et al. 2012, Table 1). The distribution of classes in our sample is, however, clearly driven by the inclusion of extended family ties, resulting in an overall very high proportion of detached (~61%) and a relatively small share of tight-knit (~17%) relationships. This finding is consistent with previous research focusing on specific relationship qualities, which detected weaker ties in genetically/genealogically more distant family relations (Danielsbacka et al. 2015; Tanskanen and Danielsbacka 2014).

Closer inspection indicated, *second*, that the closest relationships were indeed found in respondents' ties with nuclear family members (especially mothers), followed by nuclear-extended kin (particularly along the maternal line and for female kin), whereas detachment dominated distant-extended relations (found in more than 80% of respondent-cousin ties, for example). Importantly, though, a sizeable proportion (up to 20%) of detached relationships was also identified in nuclear family relations, specifically with fathers and full siblings (consistent with recent research on “estrangement” in adult parent-child and sibling relationships; see Hank and Steinbach 2023; Reczek et al. 2023). Conversely, up to one out of five ties to distant-extended kin was found to be connected-but-autonomous, intimate-but-distant, or even tight-knit. Their substantially larger absolute numbers further supported the relevance of distant-extended kin as a “relational reserve” (Cullati et al. 2018) that matters to individuals and has been largely overlooked in previous assessments of family ties. Notably, 20% of all tight-knit ties were to members of the distant-extended family. Although the relative probability of being tight-knit was much lower for each tie to distant-extended kin (ca. 6%), their large average numbers, especially of cousins, turned them into a sizable opportunity structure not only of connected-but-autonomous and intimate-but-distant, but also tight-knit relationships. Although the nature of tight-knit ties may still vary between nuclear and distant-extended kin, the latter clearly constitute a relevant part of the closer family network, or “latent kin matrix” (Riley 1983), whose inherent support potential may be (re-)activated in times of need (also see Leopold et al. 2025).

Turning to race/ethnicity, we—*third*—found, on the one hand, strong similarities across different groups: Tight-knit relations were universally more present in the nuclear family, whereas distant-extended relations were clearly dominated by detachment (both in relative and in absolute numbers). On the other hand, we also observed some clear differences: Asian respondents, for example, tended to be more focused on maintaining close nuclear family ties than other racial/ethnic groups, in line with the notion of a continued relevance of norms of filial piety (e.g., Ishii-Kuntz 1997). Conversely, Black families were more likely than others to be characterized by weaker ties among nuclear family members (primarily driven by weaker respondent-father ties), whereas they were more strongly integrated with their extended kin. A notable finding was that nearly half of all tight-knit ties among Black younger adults were with members from their extended family. Moreover, Black respondents were more likely to have (larger numbers of) connected-but-autonomous ties—particularly in their distant-extended kin

network, but also in the nuclear family with siblings, speaking to the potential of compensation of weaker nuclear ties by stronger extended ties.

However, relatively high levels of structural and associational solidarity observed in extended Black families are not necessarily translated into high levels of actual support across all dimensions. Even though close proximity to kin and high levels of instrumental support exchange continue to be a norm in Black families (Spring et al. 2023; Taylor et al. 2022), previous research suggested that the exchange of financial and emotional kin support is more likely in White than in Black families (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). Stronger horizontal integration within Black kinship networks may still provide an important relational reserve that has been largely overlooked to date.

Overall, the present study demonstrated the relevance of considering kin relations beyond the nuclear family and the potential of typological approaches to assess commonalities as well as differences, especially along racial/ethnic lines, in the diverse landscape of nuclear and extended family relations in the contemporary US. Despite their benefits in supporting such analyses, it is important to note some limitations of the KINMATRIX data used in the current study: First, the survey focuses on respondents in younger adulthood, a developmental stage typically marked by increased independence from one's family of origin, more independent connections to family members, and own family formation. Whereas prior research indeed provides indication of variation in important dimensions of family solidarity across the life course (e.g., geographic proximity), studies primarily point to generally high levels of stability in the overall quality of individuals' relationships with, for example, parents (Hwang et al. 2023), siblings (Buchanan 2021), and grandparents (Wetzel and Hank 2020) across different stages of adulthood. The general conclusions drawn from our analysis should thus not be compromised by the limited age range of our sample. Second, although the coverage of extended kin is more comprehensive than in previous assessments, the data underestimate the number of extended kin due to unknown or unreported relatives, with the maternal line being particularly affected (Leopold et al. 2024). Third, the sample is skewed toward higher education levels, relational and attribute data on family members are limited, and potentially important "fictive kin" remain entirely unobserved.

Further limitations of the present study also point toward potentials for future research: First, the intergenerational solidarity paradigm and related typologies of family relations have recently been extended to account for "digital solidarity" (e.g., Hwang et al. 2024). This has been suggested to be particularly relevant for the maintenance of ties beyond the nuclear family, because "contact using technology could be the means by which extended family members continue to play a role in the lives of [...] adults, especially when they are not seeing them frequently in-person" (Hessel 2024, 142). Second, functional solidarity was only considered from the perspective of the respondent as recipient of social and/or financial support. Sarkisian and Gerstel (2004, 816) pointed out, however, that "reciprocal exchanges are especially important for the study of race differences in kin support because they most clearly signal family integration." Moreover, KINMATRIX' simple measure of

financial support does not capture variations in the frequency and/or the intensity of monetary exchanges within families, which have also been shown to be an important aspect of racial/ethnic differences (see Taylor et al. 2022). Third, we only considered nuclear and extended family relations that were fully or at least partially (half-siblings) biologically determined, neglecting affinal kin (i.e., ties to marital partners or in-laws) and all step- or adoptive relations. van Houdt (2023) showed, however, that relationship profiles specific to step-relations may exist—and such differences between biological and non-biological family relations might further vary by race/ethnicity (e.g., Wiborg and Yahirun 2024). Fourth, and finally, detached or conflicted types of adult parent-child relationships have been shown to be associated with poorer psychological well-being (Hwang et al. 2024; Kim et al. 2020), possibly resulting from violations of norms of family ties. Given that we found detachment to be the norm rather than the exception in more distant-extended kin relations, it seems worthwhile for future studies to investigate, how individual well-being is differently associated with relationship quality in different kin categories. Exploring the full range of family ties will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of how families matter to individuals.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.