

THE EFFECTS OF BINARY STARS ON INFERRED REMNANT POPULATIONS IN GLOBULAR CLUSTERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract Here

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Globular Clusters

Globular clusters (GCs) are dense, spheroidal collection of hundreds of thousands of stars bound by their own self-gravity. GCs are found in most galaxies, with the Milky Way hosting roughly 150, mostly located in the outer halo (Heggie and Hut, 2003). GCs represent some of the oldest stellar populations in the universe and are usually in excess of 10 billion years old. Figure 1.1 shows the globular cluster NGC 7006, imaged by the Hubble Space Telescope's Advanced Camera for Surveys. The dense core of the cluster is clearly visible and is made up of tens of thousands of stars. The dynamics of globular clusters are almost entirely governed by the interactions between individual cluster members, with small effects from the galactic potential of its host galaxy as well as mass loss due to stellar evolution. Two-body relaxation is essentially the main of the evolution of GCs and through this process they display a wide range dynamical phenomena. Among these phenomena, mass segregation is a process through which heavier objects migrate to the centre of a cluster and lighter objects move to the outer regions. As objects interact with each other, their kinetic energies will tend to equalize which leads to heavier objects slowing down and lighter objects speeding up (Heggie and Hut, 2003). This process leads to the core of cluster



Figure 1.1: The globular cluster NGC 7006 imaged by the Hubble Space Telescope's Advanced Camera for Surveys, photo courtesy of ESA/Hubble & NASA

containing a much higher proportion of high-mass stars and heavy remnants than the rest of the cluster. Figure 1.2 shows the mean mass of objects within a realistic model of a globular cluster as a function of distance from the cluster centre. The regions closest to the core of the cluster have a much higher mean mass due to the increased presence of heavy remnants and high-mass stars caused by the effects of mass segregation.

The study of stellar remnants in globular clusters has far-reaching implications for diverse fields of astrophysics. Globular clusters are one of the most commonly

proposed candidates to host intermediate-mass black holes (IMBHs). Due to the effects of mass segregation and the high densities within the cores of globular clusters, the central regions of globular clusters are an ideal environment for mergers of compact objects (Rodriguez et al., 2021). These mergers can be detected through their resultant gravitational waves and the expected rates for gravitational wave events depend significantly on the compact object populations in globular clusters. These mergers are also thought to be one of the most promising formation channels for IMBHs (Giersz et al., 2015), a so-far undetected class of black holes whose masses fall between those of stellar mass black holes and those of supermassive black holes. The formation of these black holes have important implications for understanding the formation of the supermassive black holes that we find at the centre of galaxies.

The work presented in this thesis builds on a previous project I worked on which used pulsar timing data to constrain the properties of the globular cluster 47 Tuc. In that work, we were able to place strong limits on the mass in dark remnants (black holes, neutron stars, white dwarfs) within the cluster, establishing strong constraints on the black hole content specifically. While this project was able to fully account for effects like mass segregation and uncertain mass functions, one limitation of the models that it used (which we will discuss in the following section) was the assumption that all objects within the cluster are single. Because the masses of some binary stars are higher than the typical masses of objects within the cluster, they too will mass segregate to the core of the cluster like heavy stellar remnants. While the binary fraction in 47 Tuc is expected to be quite low (Milone et al., 2012), the effects that a centrally concentrated population of binary stars might have on the inferred remnant

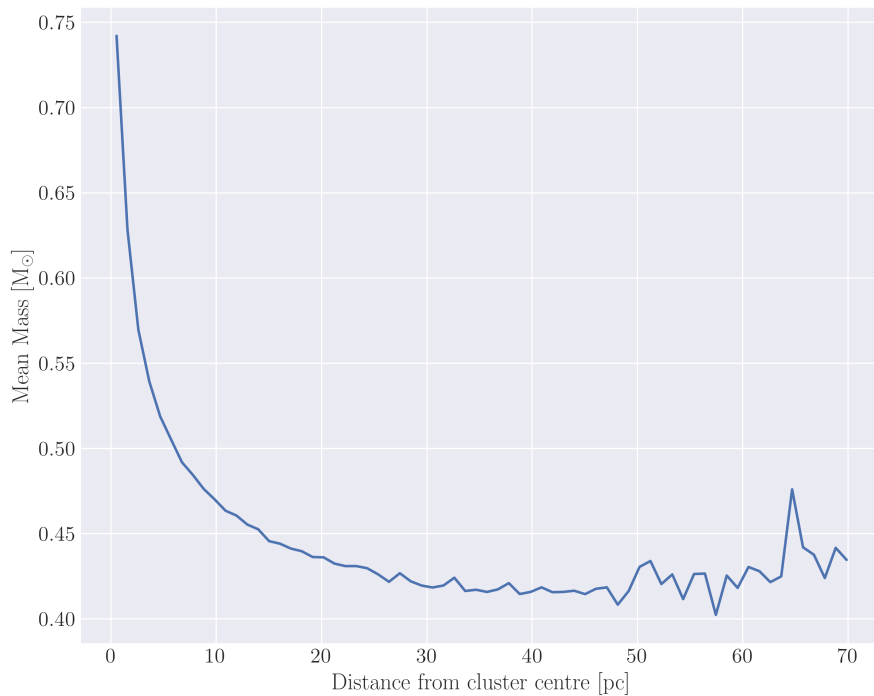


Figure 1.2: Mean mass of objects within a realistic model of the globular cluster 47 Tuc, as a function of distance from the cluster centre. The concentration of high-mass objects in the central regions of the cluster is obvious, as is the preference for low-mas objects in the outskirts of the cluster, clearly demonstrating the effects of mass segregation.

content of the cluster is still unclear and worth investigating.

1.2 Modelling Globular Clusters

When modelling the dynamics of globular clusters, there are generally two approaches commonly used. The first is to model the entire evolutionary history of the cluster from initial conditions to the present day. The most commonly employed versions of these “evolutionary models” are direct N-body integration (see for example Baumgardt 2017) which directly calculate the gravitational interactions between each object in the cluster and Monte Carlo models (e.g. Rodriguez et al. 2021, Hypki

and Giersz 2013) which approximate the gravitational interactions between objects according to the method of Hénon (1971). While these models provide insight into the dynamical history of the cluster, they are very computationally expensive with even the fastest models taking on the order of a day to model a realistic globular cluster (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

The second approach is to model just the present-day conditions of the cluster. These models, which we call “equilibrium models”, capture none of the dynamical history of the cluster but fully describe the present-day state of the cluster. These equilibrium models are much less computationally demanding than evolutionary models. Their relative efficiency allows us to explore a significantly larger parameter space when fitting the models to observations to constrain the present-day properties of a cluster. In particular, it is worth highlighting that by using equilibrium models we are able to vary the stellar mass function of the cluster as well as the black hole and remnant retention fractions with more flexibility than what might be possible with evolutionary models, due to the computational cost of computing extensive grids of evolutionary models with many parameters varied in the initial conditions (e.g. various stellar initial mass functions, initial cluster radii, masses, etc.).

The comparative efficiency of these models further enables the use of statistical fitting techniques like MCMC or Nested Sampling which would be prohibitively expensive to use with evolutionary models. This means that instead of a computing a grid of models and finding the “best-fitting” model we can instead recover posterior distributions for key cluster parameters.

In this work we use the `LIMEPY` family of models presented by Gieles and Zocchi

(2015). The **LIMEPY** models are a set of distribution function based equilibrium models that are isothermal for the most bound stars near the cluster centre and described by polytropes in the outer regions near the escape energy. The models have been extensively tested against N -body models (Zocchi et al., 2016; Peuten et al., 2017) and are able to effectively reproduce the effects of mass segregation. Their suitability for mass modelling globular clusters has been tested on mock data (Hénault-Brunet et al., 2019) and they have recently been applied to real datasets as well (e.g. Gieles et al., 2018; Hénault-Brunet et al., 2020).

The input parameters needed to compute our models include the central concentration parameter W_0 , the truncation parameter g^1 , the anisotropy radius r_a which determines the degree of radial anisotropy in the models, δ which sets the mass dependence of the velocity scale and thus governs the degree of mass segregation, and finally the specific mass bins to use as defined by the mean stellar mass (m_j) and total mass (M_j) of each bin, which together specify the stellar mass function. In order to scale the model units into physical units, the total mass of the cluster M and a size scale (the half-mass radius of the cluster r_h) are provided as well. Figure 1.3 demonstrates the ability of the models to simultaneously fit many cluster observables, specifically pictured are the line-of-sight velocity dispersion profile and the number density profile.

In their current implementation, these models assume that all objects within the cluster are single and make no attempt to model the dynamical effects of stellar

¹Several well-known classes of models are reproduced by specific values of g : Woolley models (Woolley, 1954) have $g = 0$, King models (King, 1966) $g = 1$, and Wilson models (Wilson, 1975) $g = 2$.

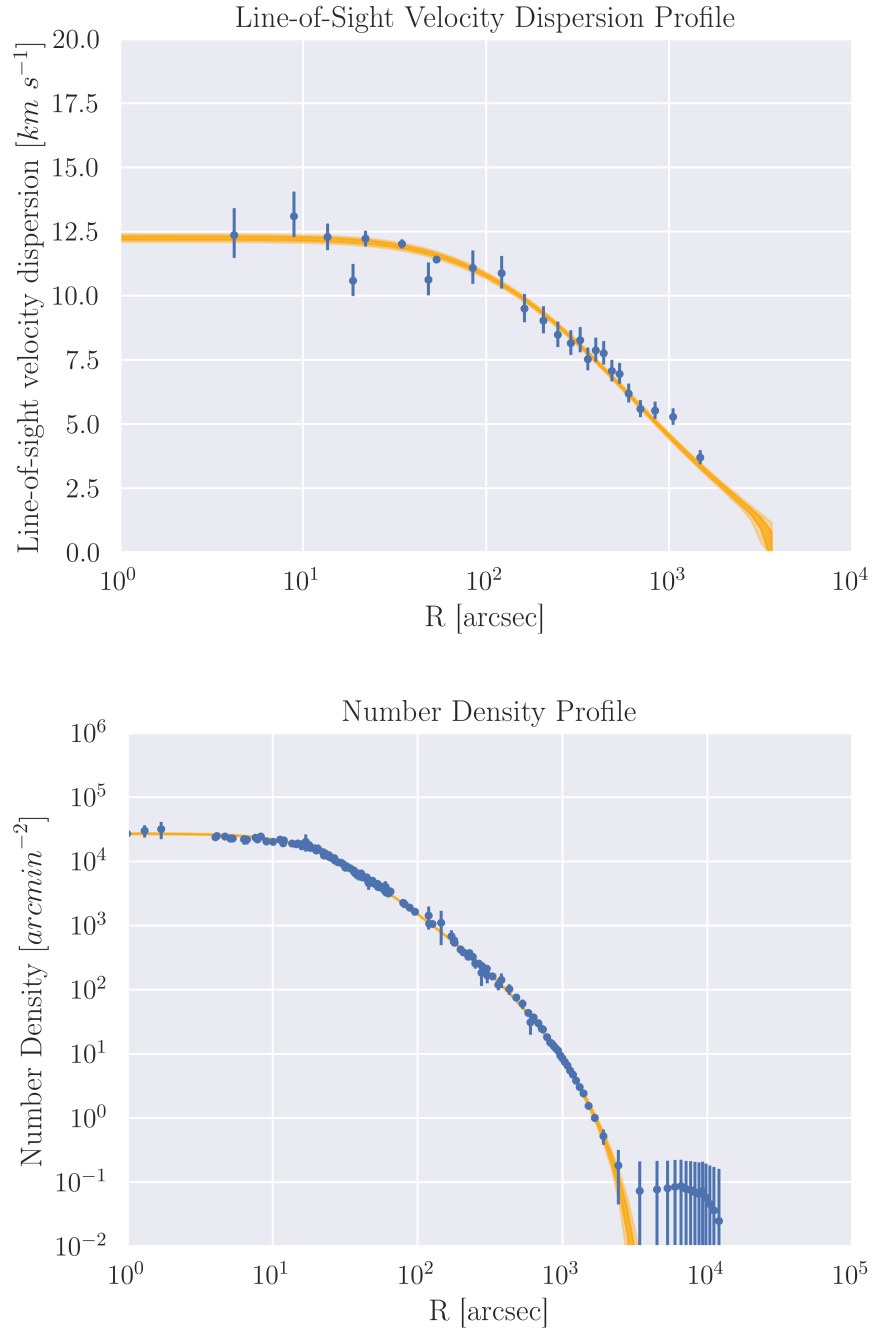


Figure 1.3: The line-of-sight velocity dispersion profile and number density profile of 47 Tuc, simultaneously fit by a LIMEPY model. The LIMEPY models are able to very accurately reproduce a range of cluster observables including simultaneous fitting of stellar mass function data and kinematic data.

multiplicity. In this project we adapt these models to incorporate some of the effects of binary stars under the assumption that binaries with very long periods have been ionized by the present day. This allows us to treat binary systems as point-masses and lets us model their dynamics by simply moving some of the mass in stars into heavier bins according to the specified binary population.

1.3 Binary Stars

1.3.1 Binaries in Globular Clusters

In general, the binary systems found within present-day clusters differ significantly from the field binaries that are more easily observed. In particular, we expect very few long-period binaries, on account of them being ionized by the frequent interactions with other cluster members (Heggie and Hut, 2003). We frequently use the terms “hard” and “soft” to describe binaries where “soft binaries” have a binding energy less than or comparable to the average kinetic energy of a cluster member while “hard binaries” have a larger binding energy. Due to the frequent interactions within clusters we expect that all soft binaries have long since been ionized by the present day leaving only a population of hard binaries with a truncated period distribution compared to field binaries (Heggie and Hut, 2003).

The most obvious way that binaries can effect the dynamics of a cluster is through three- or four-body interactions with other cluster members. When a single star (or another binary) interacts with a binary system at a close enough range, if the binary

is hard, it will impart some of its energy to the ejected star and “harden” further. If the binary is soft, it will further “soften”, potentially becoming unbound. Through these processes, soft binaries are slowly disrupted while hard binaries become harder (Heggie, 1975). Hard binary systems can act as a reserve of kinetic energy for a cluster through these three-body interactions with passing cluster members (Heggie and Hut, 2003). Binary stars are thought to be one of the primary mechanisms through which core-collapse (the collapse of the core of a cluster into extremely high density cause by runaway mass segregation) is halted in some clusters by continually adding to the energy of stars which migrate to the central regions, thereby pushing them back out into the extended regions of the cluster (Chatterjee et al., 2013). Because the models that we will be focusing on do not model the evolutionary history of individual objects within the cluster, we will instead focus of the second way that binaries can effect the dynamics of a cluster.

Because binaries are tightly bound, for all interactions except for the very closest, they effectively act as a single point mass equal to the sum of each component’s mass. In this way, binaries can affect cluster dynamics in much the same way that a large population of heavy remnants might. Much like black holes and neutron stars, binary systems will migrate to the centre of a cluster due to the effect of mass segregation. It has been found (e.g. Kremer et al. 2019) that a central population of black holes can fulfill a similar role to binary systems in halting core collapse by injecting kinetic energy through two-body interactions within the core of the cluster. This same mechanism could apply with tightly-bound binary systems that have mass-segregated to the centre of the cluster. This predicted increase in binary fraction as

you get closer to the centre of a cluster is also seen in observations, and is illustrated in Figure 1.4 for NGC 3201.

The effect of having a large central population of binaries could be that our models are overestimating the number of black holes and other high-mass objects (neutron stars, massive white dwarfs) in the core of the cluster. Because the gravitational potential in the central regions of the cluster is fairly well constrained by kinematic measurements, if we are missing a significant contribution from binaries, the models may be compensating for this “missing mass” by adding more mass to the heavy end of the IMF which would lead to an overestimation of the number of neutron stars and black holes. By including realistic populations of binary stars in our models, we hope to recover more accurate remnant populations for present-day clusters.

1.3.2 Observations of Binary Stars in Globular Clusters

In general, there are two methods used to detect binaries within globular clusters: high-precision photometric observations and radial velocity surveys.

High-precision photometry can be used to detect binaries along the main sequence which have a significant difference in the mass of their components. We often use the ratio between the mass of the primary star and the companion star to quantify this difference: an equal mass binary will have a mass ratio of $q = 1$ while a binary with a large difference in the masses of its components will have a mass ratio closer to zero. Binaries that are detectable through this method typically have a mass ratio greater than $q = 0.5$. These systems will appear to be raised above the main sequence when

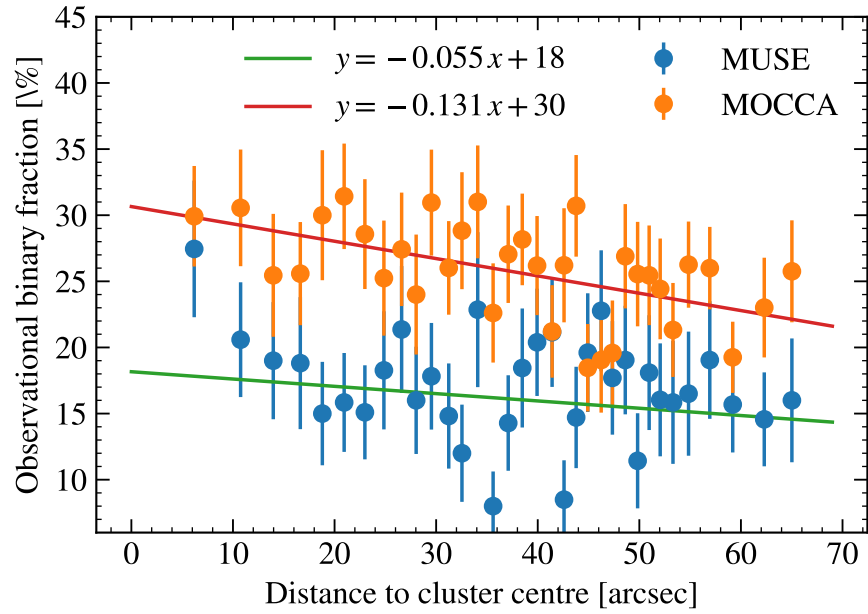


Figure 1.4: Observed binary fraction vs projected distance from cluster centre for NG 3201 as measure by the MUSE instrument. The slight trend in radial binary fraction is visible. Also plotted is the observed binary fraction in a MOCCA model which matches well with NGC 3201. MOCCA is a Monte Carlo model designed to model globular clusters for which there is a large grid of pre-computed models available. Reproduced from Figure 8 of Giesers et al. (2019).

plotted on a colour-magnitude diagram as their colour will match that of a typical main-sequence star however their luminosity will be the sum of each component. Figure 1.5 shows the main sequence of the cluster NGC 2298. The binary stars in this cluster are visible above the main-sequence, raised according to their mass ratio. Milone et al. (2012) performed high-precision photometry on several globular clusters using the Hubble Space Telescope’s (HST) Advanced Camera for Surveys and were able to place strong constraints on the binary fraction for binaries with a mass ratio above $q = 0.5$. This method allows for large studies of binary populations in GCs without the need for dedicated observations of individual systems but suffers from an inherent bias towards systems with high mass ratios. Systems with mass ratios below $q = 0.5$ are typically too close to the regular main-sequence to confidently classify as binaries (see Figure 1.5). This means that studies which employ this method must assume an underlying mass-ratio distribution for low values of q if they wish to place any limits on the overall binary fraction of a cluster. Typical values for the binary fraction found using this method range from almost zero to an upper limit of around 15% for massive clusters (Milone et al., 2012). Additionally, studies of the mass ratio distribution within these clusters using the same method find a preference for a uniform or “flat” distribution unlike the distribution in the solar neighbourhood which is peaked at $q = 1.0$ (Milone et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2005)

Large-scale campaigns to measure the radial velocities for many stars in a cluster over many epochs are another method which can be used to detect binaries in GCs. Systems which are found to have periodically varying radial velocities can typically

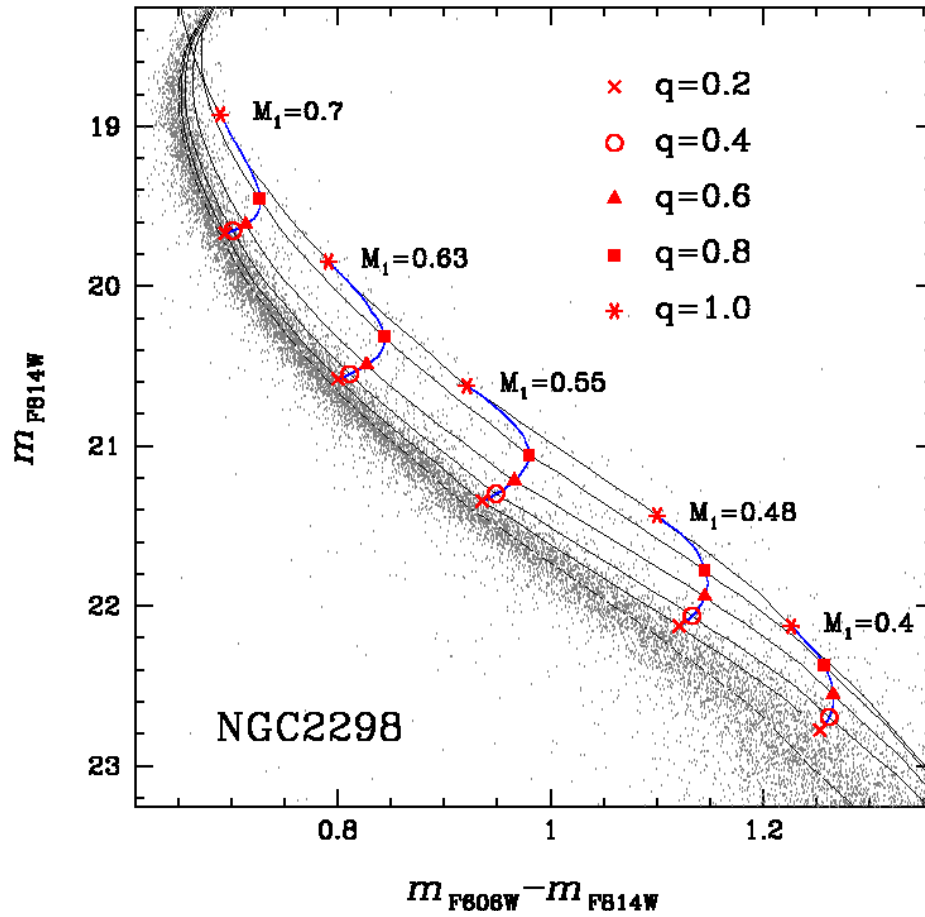


Figure 1.5: The main-sequence portion of the colour-magnitude diagram for NGC 2298. Binary systems are visible as being raised above the primary main sequence with systems with a higher mass ratio being raised further off of the main sequence. Systems below a mass ratio of $q = 0.5$ are nearly indistinguishable from the regular spread in main sequence stars. Reproduced from Figure 1 of Milone et al. (2012).

be confidently classified as binary systems. Giesers et al. (2019) used the MUSE integral field spectrograph installed at the European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope to observe several GCs and reported the results for NGC 3201. Integral field spectrographs provide spatially resolved spectra for the entire field of view of the detector which enables far more time-efficient surveys than previous methods. Because this method measures radial velocities over time, periods for the binaries can be accurately determined and given enough measurements, many other parameters like eccentricity and companion mass can be accurately constrained in contrast to photometric methods which can only provide the mass ratio. This method also suffers from biases in that it requires the primary star of a binary to be bright enough to enable good spectroscopic measurements which may bias the sample towards systems with more massive primary stars. For NGC 3201, the binary fraction found using this method was $6.75 \pm 0.72\%$ (Giesers et al., 2019) which differs from the photometric estimates of Milone et al. (2012) which range from 10-12% for different fields.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: in Chapter 2 I will describe the method used to generate mass functions which include realistic binary populations, as well as the specifics of fitting these modified mass functions to observations of stellar mass functions in real clusters. Chapter 3 discusses the results of the simulations, including the differences between models with and without binaries when fit to observations of real clusters. Chapter 4 discusses the overall implications of including binaries.

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Chapter 2

Methods

Chapter 3

Results

Chapter 4

Discussion

Appendix A

Appendix

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