Initial Examination of Social Compensation and Honing Frameworks for Sexual Minority Social

Life and Well-Being

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Abstract

The present study used an ecologically-valid approach to address the lack of understanding of similarities and differences in social network size and social interaction quality, and links to affect, among same- and different-gender couples. People in couples who self-identified as a woman with a woman ($n = 48$), man with a man ($n = 40$), woman with a man ($n = 33$), and man with a woman ($n = 33$) completed a single measure of social network size, and momentary assessments of social interaction quality and affect throughout their days over two weekends. Women reported lower interaction quality, less positive, and more negative affect (actor effects); similar results were also found for those who were partnered with a woman (partner effects). However, results showed an interaction of actor and partner gender, such that people in different-gender couples experienced lower interaction quality, less positive, and more negative affect than same-gender couples. Overall, results provide preliminary evidence of a honing framework, where people in same-gender couples hone their social networks down to high-quality interaction partners, more than people in different-gender couples, and experience similar links between social interactions and affect compared to people in different-gender couples.

Keywords: sexual minority, Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA), ambulatory assessment, LGBT, social network

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The quantity and quality of social network ties are linked to health and well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; House et al., 1988; Kim et al., 2017). Despite well-documented associations, much of this research has excluded sexual minorities (hereafter SMs)– those who identify as not exclusively heterosexual—or excluded sexual orientation as a possible moderating factor. This is problematic because SMs' social networks and interactions may be influenced by the stigma and discrimination they often face living in a heteronormative society (Doyle & Molix, 2015; Meyer, 2003), and by the unique strengths in their romantic relationships (e.g., positive conflict management; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). While there are no existing models of SMs' social networks and social interaction quality, past research points to two potential overarching frameworks: (1) one in which interactions with one's romantic partner may compensate for poorer interaction quality with others due to rejection and discrimination (Mohr & Sarno, 2016), and (2) one in which SMs hone their social networks to only include high-quality interaction partners. The present study aimed to provide initial evidence for these two frameworks by examining the possible similarities and differences among SMs' and heterosexuals' social context—their social network size, social interaction quality, and associated affect.

There is currently a dearth of theoretical frameworks by which we can understand the similarities and differences that emerge between SM and heterosexual people as a result of their different social contexts. Therefore, we present two competing frameworks derived from a review of past literature regarding how social context differs between people in same- compared

to different-gender couples. Thus, we review the evidence for these frameworks, and then test them using an ecologically-valid approach.

Social Compensation Framework

Same-gender romantic relationships have important strengths. A comprehensive review identified three relationship strengths that people in same-gender relationships often report: appreciation of individual differences, positive emotions and interactions, and effective communication (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). For example, an observational study found that same-gender couples tend to resolve conflict in more positive and constructive ways than different-gender couples (Gottman et al., 2003). People in same-gender couples also often experience greater partner equality compared to different-gender couples—including division of household labor (Kurdek, 2005; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Hypothesized reasons for these patterns include greater value placed on equality among partners, and similar gender socialization leading to more effective communication among people in same-gender compared to different-gender couples.

Despite these strengths, SMs are often stigmatized because of their sexual minority status; thus experiencing more challenges than heterosexuals within their interactions in their broader social networks (Frost et al., 2017; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). SMs are sometimes rejected by family members and friends after coming out (D'augelli et al., 1998; D'augelli & Grossman, 2001), and may feel stigmatized within their own families (Rostosky et al., 2016). One qualitative study revealed that some same-gender couples got married in-part to validate their relationship in the eyes of family members (Rostosky et al., 2016). These experiences are part of minority stress due to sexual minority status (Meyer, 2003; Tao et al., 2018). Minority stress can entail greater awareness and anticipation of stigma, as well as greater rejection

sensitivity and experiences of discrimination. Some same-gender couples report "complex mixtures of support and rejection from their family members" (p. 1027, Rostosky et al., 2016). Accordingly, several studies have found that SMs' social context is often more stressful and less supportive than heterosexuals' social context (LeBlanc et al., 2015; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Social interactions are one main source of minority stress, as they convey information about identity and self-worth, thereby impacting well-being (Meyer, 2003). For SMs, interactions with their social networks may sometimes be a source of stress if they feel the need to be vigilant due to expectations of rejection, or engage in couple concealment to hide their stigmatized identity. Thus, SMs may need to rely more on their romantic partners for support.

The strengths in same-gender romantic relationships may compensate for potential deficits in social interaction quality within broader social networks. In the social compensation framework, the strengths identified among same-gender couples would potentially compensate for the deleterious effects of minority stress that SMs often face within their social networks. Thus, well-being would be more strongly coupled with interaction quality with one's partner than with other social network members, potentially rendering daily affect levels similar to those of people in different-gender relationships.

Honing Framework

SMs sometimes have smaller social networks, but closer and more supportive friendships than heterosexuals (Diamond & Lucas, 2004). This may be the case because SMs might choose to have social networks who support their minority status; thereby paring down their social networks to eliminate relationships with people who are not supportive of, or express prejudice against, their minority sexual orientations (Poteat et al., 2009). One of the most common social network types identified among surveyed older-adult SMs was "friend-centered/restricted,"

meaning they have close and frequent contact with friends, and less contact with others, such as family (Kim et al., 2017). In a similar vein, a qualitative study found that some participants in a gay or lesbian relationship experienced a stronger relationship with their partner due to disapproval of their parents (Reczek, 2016). In a smaller number of cases, parental disapproval of their romantic relationship led to reductions in contact with parents. This lends evidence to the idea that some SMs may hone their social networks to those who are perceived as supportive. Indeed, another qualitative study found that some same-gender couples cited the support from people in their social networks as a major contributor to their relationship's longevity (Riggle et al., 2016).

In a honing framework, people in same-gender couples may report higher quality social interactions with most people in their social networks, compared to people in different-gender couples, due to a honing process wherein they eliminate most ties that are low quality. Further, links between social interaction quality and well-being (e.g., high positive and low negative affect) would be equally strong among interactions with romantic partners, friends, and family, and interaction quality among people in same-gender couples. Having such positive social interactions could lead to people in same-gender couples experiencing greater positive and less negative affect, on average, compared to people in different-gender couples.

It is important to examine the potential differences outlined in these two frameworks because research has established strong links between social relationships and well-being, but it is unclear if this knowledge applies the same or differently among same- and different-gender couples. Having a reliable social network is consistently positively associated with well-being (Cohen & Lemay, 2007; Steptoe et al., 2009). However, SMs have been systematically excluded or ignored from much of this research, particularly in studies of romantic relationships (Andersen

& Zou, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to begin to rectify this gap by conducting studies comparing same- and different-gender couples' social context and well-being.

Gender

Gender is inherent in exploring differences among people in same- and different-gender romantic relationships. Most studies examining gender differences in relationships have focused on partners in different-gender relationships (Thomeer et al., 2020). However, recent research using a gender-as-relational perspective has demonstrated that gender is performed in the context of one's own gender, one's partner's gender, as well as whether one is in a same- or different-gender relationship (Umberson et al., 2018). Thus, the dynamics within a couple depend on the *combination* of genders within the couple (Thomeer et al., 2020). For example, one study found that "women are more likely than men to attempt to regulate a spouse's health habits, but this pattern is stronger for women married to men than women married to women" (p. 442; Umberson et al., 2018). In light of such evidence, the present study draws from the gender-as-relational perspective to examine complex interplay between gender, social interaction quality, and affect among couples.

Methodological Considerations

Most research on SMs' relationships and well-being has used retrospective self-reports, which limits understanding of everyday experiences and processes (for notable exceptions, see Mohr, 2016; Mohr & Sarno, 2016; Totenhagen, Randall, Cooper, Tao, & Walsh, 2017; Totenhagen, Randall, & Lloyd, 2018). This research has largely demonstrated the positive association between social networks and global perceptions of subjective well-being. However, some have called for more precise methods to understand SMs' daily experiences, as this entails understanding fleeting experiences like social interaction quality and affect, and understanding

within-person associations of these constructs (Fish & Russell, 2018; Livingston, 2017; Peplau &

Fingerhut, 2007; Robbins & Kubiak, 2014). By utilizing momentary self-reports collected from

Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA; Shiffman, Stone, & Hufford, 2008), we are able to

gather a deeper, more contextualized understanding of the interplay between SM and

heterosexual couples' social interactions and affect.

Present Study

Using EMA, the present study tested the degree to which SMs' social network, social

interaction quality, and associations with one aspect of well-being (i.e., affect) provide support

for a social compensation or honing framework, when compared to people in different-gender

relationships.

Given prior research supports both frameworks, we present the following competing

hypotheses (see Table 1 for a summary of predictions). In support of the social compensation

framework (Table 1a), we hypothesized people in same-gender couples will have social

networks similar in size to people in different-gender couples, in addition to having higher

quality interactions with the partner, lower quality interactions with family and friends compared

to people in different-gender couples. We also hypothesized that levels of affect would be similar

among all couples. Further support for this framework would come from observing that

interactions with one's partner are more strongly related to affect (an important component of

well-being) for people in same- compared to different-gender couples. Conversely, in support of

the honing framework (Table 1b), we hypothesized that people in same-gender couples would

have social networks that are smaller, and social interactions are overall higher quality than those

of people in different-gender couples. We also hypothesized that people in same-gender couples

would have greater positive and less negative affect than people in different-gender couples.

Evidence of similar associations between social interactions and affect across different interaction partners for people in same- and different-gender couples would further support the honing framework.

All participants were in committed romantic relationships, in order to test these frameworks with three distinct social roles: family, friends, and romantic partner ("partner"). We did not solely test differences between people in same- and different-gender couples; rather, we tested them using one's own and their partner's gender, and the interaction of the two, as the predictors to allow for the possibility that these are gender, rather than couple composition (e.g., men with men versus men with women), effects (Thomeer et al., 2020; Umberson et al., 2018).

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited throughout Southern California using flyers distributed in public places where permitted, including in newsletters from the LGBT Community Center of the Desert in Palm Springs. Eligible couples were: (1) married or in a marriage-like relationship, (2) living together for at least one year, and (3) had no symptoms of physical or mental health conditions that impeded their daily functioning. These criteria ensured that we studied people in committed romantic relationships, who were not coping with health problems that would change their normal activities. Further, each participant owned a smartphone or had email access to complete EMA questions throughout their day.

Out of 170 interested couples, 78 were eligible and started the study. Fifty-one couples (30%) were no longer interested after initial communication or were no longer able to participate, 17 couples (10%) were not living together, 17 additional couples (10%) did not meet the criteria for being in a marriage-like relationship, and 7 couples (4%) had medical issues that

impeded their daily functioning, making them ineligible for the current study. Seventy-four out

of the 78 couples (95%) couples who consented to participate completed the entire study. Of the

couples that dropped out, two couples broke up before completing all parts of the study, and two

couples stopped participating after the first weekend for unknown reasons; however, all four

couples completed the first weekend monitoring and initial global questionnaire measures. One

couple did not have usable data as their momentary data were not distinguishable between

partners due to an error in entering their participant ID numbers.

The final samples included the 77 couples that completed at least one monitored weekend

and had usable momentary data. The sample included people who self-identified as being a

woman in a romantic relationship with a woman ($n = 48$ individuals), a man with a man ($n = 40$

individuals), a woman with a man ($n = 33$ individuals), and a man with a woman ($n = 33$

individuals). All participants were compensated $25 per completed weekend, up to $50 per

individual. Demographics are in Table 2.

Procedure

This study received Institutional Review Board approval from the University of

California, Riverside. All participants were verbally given information about the study and then

received a written informed consent form, where they indicated their willingness to participate.

After consenting, participants met the experimenter on two separate Fridays, separated by one

month, where each partner independently completed questionnaires assessing social and

psychological factors.

Participants were briefed on the EMA procedures to be completed over the weekend.

Participants were told they would receive a text message or email (if they did not own a

smartphone) once on Friday, during the meeting, and five times each on Saturday and Sunday,

between the hours of 10am and 9pm, within 2.5-hour blocks, where they did not receive two

prompts within one hour of each other. Participants were instructed to complete EMAs as soon

as possible upon receipt. If they did not complete the EMA within 15 minutes, they were sent up

to 3 reminders, every 15 minutes. After 45 minutes from the initial text prompt, participants were

no longer able to complete that assessment.

After the weekend, on a Monday, participants were sent follow-up questionnaires to

assess their experiences over the weekend and their demographic characteristics (Table 2). The

second weekend of monitoring followed the same procedures one month after the first weekend

monitoring. Weekend, as opposed to weekday, monitoring was chosen to maximize the amount

of leisure time participants could choose to spend with people in their social networks and to

avoid concerns with being recorded at work (Robbins, 2017).

EMA Response Rate

There was a high completion rate for EMA measures throughout both weekends. During

weekend one, 1,270 EMA responses were recorded out of a possible 1,694, yielding a 75%

completion rate. Similarly, in weekend two, 1,182 out of 1,606 EMAs were recorded, yielding a

74% completion rate. The average number of EMAs completed per person for the first weekend

was 8.21 ($SD = 2.74$) and was 7.64 ($SD = 3.22$) for the second weekend (out of 11 possible),

indicating fairly high response rates.

Measures

Social network size. Social network size was measured once, before any EMA measures,

assessed by the Social Network Index (SNI; Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, Rabin, & Gwaltney, 1997).

Questions assessed the number of people in participants' social network they communicated with

over the past two weeks. There were 12 categories of people, such as family (including in-laws),

friends, and romantic partners (possible range 0 – 73).

Social interaction quality. In the EMA prompts via text or email, participants were first asked if they had engaged in a social interaction in the last 10 minutes. If they responded "yes," they were also asked with whom they were interacting, and the choices were *spouse/partner*, *friend*, *family member*, *stranger*, or *other* (with a box where they were able to type a free response). Following this, and based on the Rochester Interaction Record to measure quality of social interactions (Reis & Wheeler, 1991), participants were asked to rate the quality of the social interaction ("What was the quality of the social interaction?") using a five-point scale (1 = *unpleasant*; 3 = *neutral*; 5 = *pleasant*). Single-item measures were used for brevity, to minimally intrude on the natural course of participants' normal, daily lives.

Affect. EMA prompts included brief measures of affect. Participants reported the degree to which they felt positive and negative (separately) on a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly;* 3 = *moderately*; 5 = *extremely*) in response to the question "What is your mood right now?" All ten separate positive and negative adjectives from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule were listed as examples for positive (e.g., enthusiastic or proud) and negative affect (e.g., afraid or ashamed; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Data Analytic Plan

A series of three-level multilevel regression models were used to test our hypotheses, given the nesting of the data (all momentary observations nested within individuals, nested in couples). By applying these models, we more accurately estimated standard errors for the regression coefficients compared to the ordinary least squares approach (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Following the data analytic strategy used by Umberson and colleagues (2018), all models were mixed effects models; intercepts were random, while slopes were fixed. Further, both

partners' data were inputted into the models that contained each participant's own gender, their partner's gender, and the interaction between both partners' genders. The interaction term allowed us to distinguish separate effects for four different groups—women with women, men with men, women with men, and men with women—all of which refer to their own and their romantic partner's gender.

Our first set of regressions tested mean-level differences between these groups, using both partners' genders and the interaction between them to predict affect and interaction quality. We analyzed interaction quality separately for interactions with family, friends, and partners. Then, a second set of regressions were used to test the strength of the associations between daily affect and interaction quality, and any group differences in these associations. These models contained three-way interactions to test group differences (i.e., own gender x partner's gender x interaction quality). We deconstructed the terms to calculate the simple slopes and then compare across groups to explore potential differences in the magnitude of the associations using the equation, $t(df) = (b_1 - b_2)/\sqrt{SE_1{}^2 + SE_2{}^2}$. Age was used as a control variable in all models given the mean-level differences we found between groups in our sample (Table 2).

All results were interpreted following guidelines presented by Hurlbert, Levine, and Utts (2019). Based on these guidelines, we did not use $p < .05$ as a threshold to determine "significance" of effects; rather, we looked for patterns of results, magnitude of effect sizes, and width of confidence intervals, in addition to exact p-values, to judge the quality of evidence, and which effects are most likely to be meaningful and robust.

Results

Social Network Size

Results revealed evidence that social network size differed by couple composition. Specifically, men with men tended to have smaller social networks than all other groups. See Figure 1 for an example APIM modeling interaction quality, and the actor x partner gender interaction for estimates in Table 3. Comparisons between groups revealed all other groups had larger social networks than men with men. The largest difference from men with men was women with men, $t(152) = 2.29$, $p = .02.$, $d = 0.37$, 95% CI: [0.05,0.69], followed by women with women, $t(152) = 1.62$, $p = .11$, $d = 0.26$, 95% CI: [-0.06,0.58], and then men with women, $t(152) = 1.48$, $p = .14$, $d = 0.24$, 95% CI: [-0.08,0.56]. The other differences between groups were smaller and more likely to be spurious, (ts < 0.84, ps $> .40$, ds < 0.14).

Interaction Quality

Interaction quality with family and one's partner, but not with friends, tended to differ among groups, such that people in same-gender couples reported better interaction quality with family compared to people in different-gender couples (see Table 3). Women with women reported better interaction quality than women with men, $t(102) = 2.55$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.41$, 95% CI: [0.09,0.73], and men with women, $t(102) = 1.89$, $p = .06$, $d = 0.30$, 95% CI: [-0.02,0.62]. This pattern was similar for men with men compared to men with women, $t(102) = 2.26$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.36$, 95% CI: [0.04,0.69], and women with men, $t(102) = 2.62$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.10$, 95% CI: [0.10,0.74], though this difference was substantially smaller than the other estimates.

We found the same pattern of differences for interactions with partners. People in same- compared to different-gender couples reported better interaction quality with their partner. Women with women reported better interaction quality with their partners compared to women with men, $t(152) = 3.52$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$, 95% CI: [0.28,1.09], and men with women, $t(152) = 4.27$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.84$, 95% CI: [0.43,1.24]. Again, men with men also mirrored this pattern,

having higher quality interactions with their male partner compared to men with women, $t(152)$ = 3.34, p = .001, d = 0.66, 95% CI: [0.26,1.05], and women with men, $t(152)$ = 2.70, p = .008, d = 0.53, 95% CI: [0.13,0.93]. Despite these consistent differences among interactions with family and partners, no consistent differences emerged between groups for interaction quality with friends, nor did they emerge when comparing men with men and women with women for any of the interaction partners (ts < 1.15, ps > .25, ds < 0.19).

Affect

Positive affect. A pattern of main effects emerged such that women, and people partnered with women, reported experiencing less positive (and more negative) affect than men (Table 3). However, the interactions between actor and partner gender suggested a different pattern of effects: people in same-gender couples reported more positive and less negative affect than their corresponding gender in different-gender couples. Specifically, women with women tended to have more positive affect than women with men, $t(152)$ = 4.84, p < .001, d = 0.78, 95% CI: [0.45,1.11], and men partnered with women, $t(152)$ = 4.90, p < .001, d = 0.79, 95% CI: [0.46,1.12]. Men with men also experienced more positive affect than men partnered with women, $t(152)$ = 5.99, p < .001, d = 1.11, 95% CI: [0.72,1.51], and women with men, $t(152)$ = 5.96, p < .001, d = 0.96, 95% CI: [0.62,1.30]. There was less robust evidence for a difference in positive affect between men with men and women with women. Men with men reported slightly more positive affect than women with women, but the difference was smaller than the other comparisons and had more likelihood of spuriousness, as indicated by a larger p-value, $t(152)$ = 1.57, p = .12, d = 0.25, 95% CI: [-0.07,0.57].

Negative affect. Similar patterns to positive affect emerged for negative affect, although the main effects were not as reliable. Being a woman, or being partnered with a woman, was

associated with experiencing more negative affect (Table 3). There was robust evidence for the interaction between actor and partner gender; however, which revealed that women with women reported less negative affect compared to women with men, $t(152) = 5.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$, 95% CI: [0.57,1.24], and men with women, $t(152) = 3.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$, 95% CI: [0.27,0.92]. Similarly, men with men reported less negative affect than men with women, $t(152) = 4.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$, 95% CI: [0.44,1.21], and women with men, $t(152) = 6.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$, 95% CI: [0.67,1.35]. As with positive affect, the difference between men with men and women with women was much smaller and more likely to be spurious in comparison, $t(152) = 1.10$, $p = .27$, $d = 0.18$, 95% CI: [-0.14,0.50].

Interaction Quality and Affect Links by Gender and Couple Composition

In this set of analyses, we used positive and negative affect as our measure of one aspect of well-being to test our last hypotheses from the social compensation and honing frameworks. In general, we found main effects of interaction quality positively predicting positive affect, but relatively fewer interaction effects indicating differences in these associations among people in same- and different-gender couples. This pattern lends support for the honing framework (Table 1).

In a model accounting for gender and couple composition, there was a positive main effect for interaction quality with one's partner and positive affect, $b = 0.44$, 95% CI: [0.005,0.88], $t(68) = 1.98$, $p = .05$. Results also revealed positive main effects between interacting with family or friends and positive affect; however, they were less precise, as indicated by the CIs and higher p-values, $b_{family} = 0.43$, 95% CI: [-0.42,1.29], $t(43) = 1.00$, $p = .32$; $b_{friends} = 0.66$, 95% CI: [-0.34,1.66], $p = .20$.

Figure 2 shows an example APIM modeling affect by two-way interactions of gender and interaction quality, and a three-way interaction between actor gender, partner gender, and interaction quality. There was no strong evidence for three-way interactions between actor gender, partner gender, and interaction quality with family, b = -0.06, 95% CI: [-0.57,0.45], $t(43)$ = -0.25, p = .81; friends, b = 0.13, 95% CI: [-0.36,0.61], $t(60)$ = 0.51, p = .61; or partners, b = 0.05, 95% CI: [-0.14,0.23], $t(68)$ = 0.49, p = .63, predicting positive affect, indicating low likelihood of differences between groups. Accordingly, simple slopes analyses revealed positive associations between positive affect and interaction quality regardless of couple composition or interaction partner (Table 4). After calculating the simple slope estimates, all pairwise comparisons of regression estimates revealed very low likelihood of any differences across genders or couple compositions for interactions with family, friends, or partners to predict positive affect (ps > .71).

There was no strong evidence for main actor or partner effects of interaction quality with any interaction partner on negative affect (p's > .24). However, there was evidence for a three-way interaction of actor gender, partner gender, and interaction quality with one's partner on negative affect (b = 0.20, 95% CI: [0.02,0.38], $t(68)$ = 2.13, p = .03) such that there were strong negative associations between interaction quality with one's partner and negative affect among all groups except for men with men, for whom there was a near-zero association (Table 4). Associations between interaction quality with one's partner and negative affect for men with men were reliably weaker than the associations for men with women, $t(136)$ = 1.56, p = .12, d = 0.25, 95% CI: [-0.07,0.57], and women with women, $t(136)$ = 1.86, p = .07, d = 0.30, 95% CI: [-0.02,0.62]. There was a somewhat stronger association between interaction quality with partner and negative affect for women with women, compared to women with men, $t(136)$ = 1.67, p =

.10, $d = 0.27$, 95% CI: [-0.05,0.59].

Three-way interactions between actor gender, partner gender, and interaction quality with family and friends predicting negative affect were less robust than for interaction quality with partners, given the wider confidence intervals and larger p-values, $b_{family} = 0.41$, 95% CI: [-0.09,0.91], $t(43) = 1.60$, $p = .11$; $b_{friends} = 0.24$, 95% CI: [-0.19,0.66], $p = .27$. However, we still calculated simple slopes to understand any potential group differences. Similar to the pattern of findings for interactions with partners, the simple slopes for men with men did not reveal reliable associations between interaction quality with family or friends and negative affect (Table 4). When comparing men with men to the other groups, none of the differences in simple slopes were very large, and they tended to be imprecise (ts < 1.33, ps > .19, largest $d = 0.25$, 95% CI: [-0.12,0.62]).

Discussion

To provide initial evidence for the social compensation and honing frameworks, the present study examined social interaction quality and affect among people in same-gender and different-gender couples. To do so, we used EMA to examine the similarities and differences in social contexts among people within different couple compositions (i.e., women with women, men with men, women with men, and men with women). In sum, results showed initial support for the honing framework of sexual minority relationships and well-being.

Men with men had the smallest social network size out of all four groups, and there were no other meaningful differences among the groups. This is consistent with previous literature revealing that men with men tend to experience the most non-acceptance from family members in particular (LaSala, 2000). Further, people in same-gender couples had better social interaction quality with partners and family, but not with friends, compared to those in different-gender

relationships. Likewise, people in same-gender couples also had greater positive and less negative affect. Finally, there was little evidence that links between social interaction quality and affect differ among groups.

Results showed that same-gender couples reported better interaction quality with their partners compared to different-gender couples, which is consistent with past in-lab and survey studies (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). The present study extends this prior research to daily life, and to people's perceptions of the quality of their everyday, rather than instructed, interactions with their partner.

Better interaction quality among same- compared to different-gender couples may be due to more similarity between partners when they share a gender identity. For example, similarities in socialization within each gender may result in easier and higher-quality communication. Additionally, the lack of societally-imposed gender roles in same-gender couples may lead to more equality within same- compared to different-gender romantic relationships (Kurdek, 2005), further facilitating high-quality interactions. On the other hand, when male and female partners interact, they may do so from a culturally-imposed frame wherein men and women are considered "opposites," which creates more potential for tension in interactions (Thomeer et al., 2020). Directly examining the possible underlying mechanisms of this difference is an important direction for future research.

Whereas the finding for better interaction quality with partners is largely consistent with prior evidence, the finding that people in same-gender couples have better interaction quality with their family members compared to different-gender couples is not. One major theme in research on SMs' biological families is that SMs often experience rejection from family members (D'augelli et al., 1998; D'augelli & Grossman, 2001; Reczek, 2016). We believe our

finding is likely due to one or some combination of a few factors. First, this finding supports the

honing framework; participants may have already reduced their interactions with family to those

who are supportive. One qualitative study found that parental disapproval of one's same-gender

romantic relationship sometimes led to reductions in contact with parents (Reczek, 2016). Thus,

our finding that people in same- compared to different-gender couples have better interaction

quality with family is consistent with past evidence revealing that SMs often face rejection from

their families, honing this part of their social network. Second, it is possible that this finding is

due to the growth of acceptance of SMs in the U.S. (Witeck, 2014). Finally, these results could

be in part due to where couples were recruited. Specifically, California is often cited as one of

the most accepting states for SMs in the U.S. (Gates, 2013).

The lack of differences between groups for quality of interactions with friends might be

due to the notion that everyone more or less chooses their friends, thus, there is perhaps less

honing needed. One study found similar numbers of friends among SMs and heterosexuals,

lending evidence to the notion that perhaps everyone hones their friendships at about the same

rate (Galupo, 2009).

Couple composition. Main effects for affect revealed that being, or being partnered with,

a woman, as compared to a man, was associated with less positive affect and more negative

affect. However, finer-grained comparisons within interaction effects revealed that being in a

different- compared to same-gender couple was associated with less positive affect and more

negative affect. Men with men, compared to men with women; and women with women,

compared to women with men, tended to report more positive and less negative affect. That there

was no notable difference in affect between women with women and men with men suggests that

the "true" differences lie between same- and different-gender couples, rather than between

women and men. This is important because it could mean that gender effects observed in close

relationships research may be due to the interaction of one's own and their partner's gender,

rather than solely due to their own gender. This idea—that gender can be relational—is

supported in emerging lines of research that have begun to study one's own and one's partner's

gender as an interaction (Goldberg, 2013; Thomeer et al., 2020; Umberson et al., 2018). In the

present study, teasing apart gender and couple composition effects yielded information about the

major role that people's partner's gender plays in their social context, creating unique outcomes

for how they behave and feel with others.

Links Between Interaction Quality and Affect

High quality interactions with one's partner were unsurprisingly related to greater

positive affect across all groups. There were no meaningful differences between any of the

groups in this analysis. It was surprising, however, that positive affect had more tenuous links to

interaction quality with family and friends. Though the estimates were positive, indicating that

better interaction quality with family and friends is associated with more positive affect, these

estimates were more likely to be spurious than the estimates for interaction quality with partners.

This difference was not predicted; however, the lack of difference in associations between

groups (same- versus different-gender couples) lends further support to the honing framework,

which proposed roughly equal associations across groups (Table 1b).

Interestingly, there was a strong positive association between low-quality interactions

with one's partner and negative affect for everyone but men with men. Stereotypically, men do

not "let things get to them," and empirical evidence suggests this might be the case in some

marital interactions. For example, one study found that wives' negative affect lingered longer

than husbands' following a conversation about a problem, despite the fact that wives had fewer

episodes of negative affect (Griffin, 1993). These results suggest that perhaps women, not men, are the drivers of lasting negative affect following a low-quality interaction with their partner. In light of this evidence, it is possible that men with men do not linger on negative feelings after a low-quality interaction with their partner. Bolstering evidence for this point is our finding that women with women had a slightly stronger negative association between partner interaction quality and negative affect compared to women with men, suggesting a possible dose-response in which more women in a romantic relationship further sustain negative affect following a low-quality interaction. Future research on this idea is needed, as learning how interactions with one's partner may differently influence affect depending on couple composition is information clinicians could use to tailor communication interventions for same- and different-gender couples.

Alternative Frameworks

There are many ways to structure one's social network, and there is no reason to believe that all SMs' social patterns follow one framework. One factor that may alter a model of social ties and well-being would be the degree to which SMs perceive stigma or acceptance in their communities. Geographical areas that are more inclusive may make it more possible to hone one's social network down to those high-quality, accepting ties; whereas SMs in areas that are less densely-populated or less accepting may socially compensate for the lack of support outside their relationship by relying more on their partner for social needs. Despite the fact that models may vary across a variety of individual difference factors (e.g., geographical regions, other intersecting marginalized identities), results from this study are useful in providing initial evidence for frameworks that may help to guide future research. Such use of a framework could facilitate mental health practitioners' knowledge of when similar assumptions and techniques can

be applied to people in same- compared to different-gender couples (Patterson, 2013).

Additionally, practitioners could consider how gender composition and social network structure

may influence the quality of couples' interactions and subsequent affect, tailoring interventions

to couples' particular social context. Thus, it is important to expand on this work in future studies

which further test the honing framework, as well as other potential models of SMs' social

relationships and well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

To expand this research, a few areas should be considered. First, it would be interesting

to examine the stability of these effects for the same people when they are in a same- versus

when they are in a different-gender relationship. This would test the degree to which this study's

observed effects are due to the experience of being in a same-gender relationship, versus due to

stable characteristics that SMs bring to their same- or different-gender relationship.

Second, while we found some preliminary evidence for the honing framework, these

patterns of results may not apply to those in different geographical regions or those in less

accepting societies. In areas where being an SM is more stigmatizing, perhaps a social

compensation framework, or some other pattern of effects would emerge. The present study's

results may represent the potential for people in same-gender couples to thrive—at levels greater

than people in different-gender couples—when living in a mostly accepting culture. Thus, all

conclusions drawn from the present study must be applied with caution to people in other

geographical regions.

Further, it is also possible that these findings only apply to well-adjusted, stable couples.

Given that couples in this study reported very high-quality interactions with their social

networks, we are limited to the conclusions we can draw from the present study. Replication

among more diverse samples of couples is necessary to understand social context and affect

among people in same- versus different-gender couples more fully. Diversity in future research

should include extending 'beyond the binary' to examine the effects of social interaction quality

for all individuals in a romantic relationship, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation

(Meuwly & Randall, 2019).

Conclusions

Data from this EMA study supported the honing framework—men with men had smaller

social networks, and people in same-gender romantic relationships had higher-quality social

interactions and more positive and less negative affect in-general than people in different-gender

relationships. Findings also yielded valuable insights about the interpretation of gender effects

for differences in affect and social interaction quality—that they can be relational. Different

combinations of romantic partners' genders can create a unique social context in which they

interact with each other and others, as well as influence how social interactions relate to affect.

Including same-gender couples and using an EMA approach shed light on strengths among

same-gender couples, from which both same- and different-gender couples may benefit.

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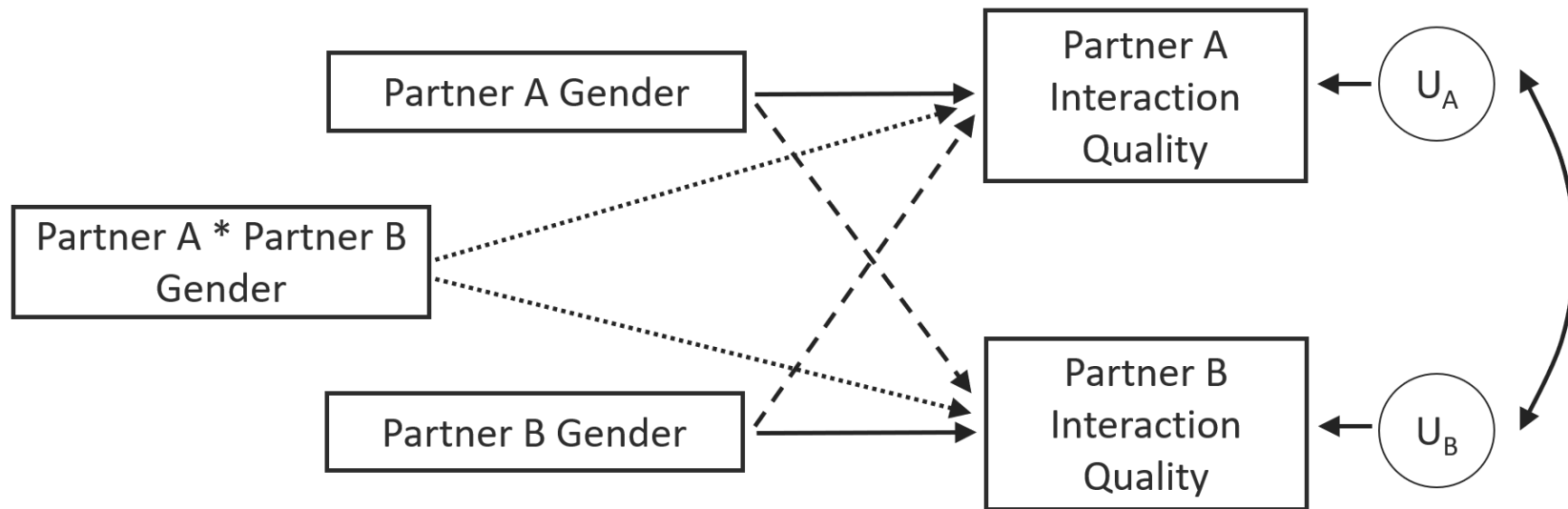
Figure 1. APIM for Table 3. Age was also included in all models as a covariate. Actor paths are solid; partner paths are dashed; actor-partner interaction paths are dotted.

Figure 2. Example APIM for Interaction between Interaction Quality and Gender Predicting Affect. Main effects for all predictor variables, as well as age as a covariate, were also included in the models but are not pictured here, for simplicity. Simple slopes from deconstructed inte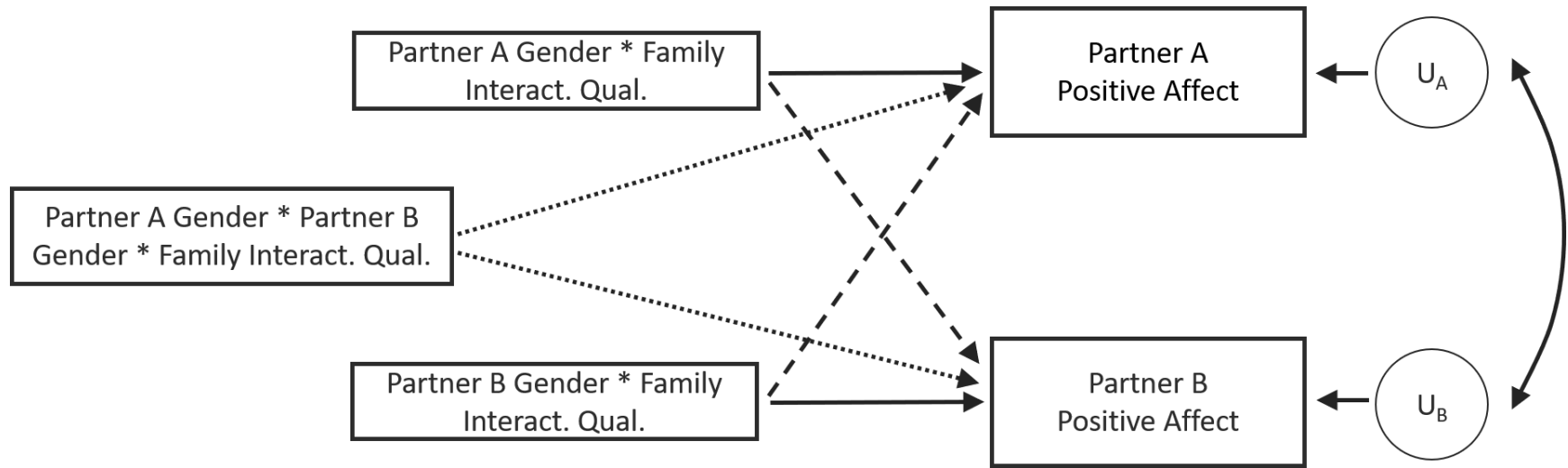ractions appear in Table 4. Actor paths are solid; partner paths are dashed; actor-partner interaction paths are dotted.

Table 1a. *Social Compensation Framework Predictions*

People in Same-Gender Relationships		People in Different-Gender Relationships
Social network size	≈	Social network size
Lower quality interactions with family/friends	<	Higher quality interactions with family/friends
Higher quality interactions with partner	>	Lower quality interactions with partner
Positive affect	≈	Positive affect
Negative affect	≈	Negative affect
Strength of partner interaction quality link to WB	>	Strength of partner interaction quality link to WB
Strength of family/friend interaction quality link to WB	<	Strength of family/friend interaction quality link to WB

Table 1b. *Honing Framework Predictions*

People in Same-Gender Relationships		People in Different-Gender Relationships
Social network size	<	Social network size
Higher quality social interactions (all close others)	>	Lower quality social interactions (all close others)
Positive affect	>	Positive affect
Negative affect	<	Negative affect
Strength of interaction quality links to WB	≈	Strength of interaction quality links to WB

Note. WB = well-being

Table 2. *Demographics and descriptive characteristics for study variables*

	WW		MM		WM		MW	
$N_{individuals}$	48		40		33		33	
N_{EMA}	820		611		534		476	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Age (years)	33.46	12.97	42.95	18.26	26.16	7.61	27.45	8.19
Relationship Length (years)	7.13	7.33	11.08	11.92	6.09	5.93	5.90	6.21
Social Network Size	19.48	8.12	16.60	8.17	21.06	7.90	19.48	9.07
Interaction Quality	4.49	0.49	4.49	0.55	4.28	0.62	4.29	0.58
Positive Affect	3.90	0.52	3.99	0.67	3.59	0.62	3.66	0.64
Negative Affect	1.51	0.54	1.49	0.58	1.86	0.70	1.69	0.65
Ethnicity	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
Asian	2	4.35	3	7.50	5	15.15	2	6.06
Black	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	6.06	0	0.00
Latinx	11	23.91	8	20.00	11	33.33	12	36.36
White	26	56.52	21	52.50	10	30.30	12	36.36
Other/Mixed	5	10.87	4	10.00	3	9.09	3	9.09
Missing	2	4.35	4	10.00	2	6.06	4	12.12

Note. WW = women with women, MM = men with men, WM = women with men, MW = men with women, EMA = Ecological Momentary Assessment, Freq. = Frequency. Affect and conversation quality are averaged over 2 weekends, size of social network (number of people) was assessed at time 1 (before the EMA measures).

Table 3. *Differences in Social Network Size, Social Interaction Quality, and Affect, by Gender*

	b	*SE*	**95% CI**	*t*	*p*
Social Network Size					
Actor Gender	5.22	8.26	-4.65,15.09	1.04	.30
Partner Gender	6.50	5.04	-3.30,16.29	1.30	.20
Actor x Partner Gender	-5.07	3.33	-11.61,1.46	-1.52	.13
Age	0.002	0.06	-0.11,0.12	0.03	.98
Interaction Quality with Family					
Actor Gender	-1.07	0.58	-2.21,0.06	-1.85	.07
Partner Gender	-1.13	0.57	-2.24,-0.01	-1.98	.06
Actor x Partner Gender	0.79	0.41	0.001,1.59	1.96	.06
Age	0.01	0.01	-0.004,0.03	1.40	.17
Interaction Quality with Friends					
Actor Gender	-0.13	0.38	-0.86,0.61	-0.33	.74
Partner Gender	-0.07	0.36	-0.77,0.64	-0.19	.85
Actor x Partner Gender	0.09	0.25	-0.40,0.58	0.36	.72
Age	0.01	0.004	0.001,0.02	2.08	.04
Interaction Quality with Partner					
Actor Gender	-0.68	0.33	-1.34,-0.03	-2.06	.04
Partner Gender	-0.61	0.33	-1.25,0.04	-1.84	.07
Actor x Partner Gender	0.40	0.22	-0.04,0.84	1.80	.08
Age	0.01	0.004	-0.002,0.01	1.33	.19
Positive Affect					
Actor Gender	-0.93	0.34	-1.59,-0.27	-2.76	0.01
Partner Gender	-0.85	0.33	-1.50,-0.20	-2.55	0.01
Actor x Partner Gender	0.61	0.22	0.17,1.05	2.73	0.01
Age	0.003	0.004	-0.004,0.01	0.87	0.39
Negative Affect					
Actor Gender	0.59	0.32	-0.04,1.21	1.84	.07
Partner Gender	0.69	0.32	0.07,1.31	2.17	.03
Actor x Partner Gender	-0.42	0.21	-0.83,-0.001	-1.97	.02
Age	-0.01	0.004	-0.02,-0.001	-2.30	.05

Note. Multilevel models predicting social network size, social interaction quality, positive affect, and negative affect from actor gender (participant's gender), partner gender (participant's partner's gender), and actor gender x partner gender. For gender, woman = 1, man = 0. The interaction effect between actor and partner gender reveals differences among different couple compositions (e.g., men with men versus men with women). Age was a covariate to control for group differences.

Table 4. *Simple Slopes Predicting Affect from Interaction Quality*

Interaction Partner Type	*b*	*SE*	95% CI	*t*	*p*
Positive Affect					
Men with men	0.43	0.44	-0.42,1.29	0.99	.33
Women with men	0.52	0.16	0.20,0.84	3.17	.003
Men with women	0.47	0.17	0.14,0.81	2.75	.008
Family Women with women	0.50	0.07	0.35,0.64	6.80	< .001
Negative Affect					
Men with men	0.14	0.43	-0.71,0.98	0.32	.75
Women with men	-0.29	0.16	-0.61,0.03	-1.79	.08
Men with women	-0.43	0.17	-0.76,-0.10	-2.53	.01
Women with women	-0.44	0.07	-0.58,-0.30	-6.19	< .001
Positive Affect					
Men with men	0.66	0.51	-0.34,1.66	1.30	.20
Women with men	0.51	0.20	0.11,0.90	2.51	.02
Men with women	0.52	0.22	0.09,0.95	2.36	.02
Women with women	0.49	0.09	0.32,0.66	5.59	< .001
Friend **Negative Affect**					
Men with men	-0.53	0.45	-1.41,0.34	-1.19	.24
Women with men	-0.65	0.18	-1.00,-0.31	-3.69	< .001
Men with women	-0.72	0.19	-1.10,-0.34	-3.72	< .001
Women with women	-0.60	0.08	-0.75,-0.45	-7.83	< .001
Positive Affect					
Men with men	0.44	0.22	0.01,0.88	1.98	.05
Women with men	0.40	0.10	0.21,0.58	4.15	< .001
Men with women	0.43	0.10	0.24,0.62	4.45	< .001
Women with women	0.44	0.04	0.35,0.52	10.46	< .001
Partner **Negative Affect**					
Men with men	0.04	0.22	-0.39,0.46	0.17	.87
Women with men	-0.20	0.09	-0.38,-0.02	-2.18	.03
Men with women	-0.33	0.09	-0.51,-0.15	-3.51	< .001
Women with women	-0.37	0.04	-0.45,-0.29	-9.21	< .001

Note. All simple slopes are deconstructed from a three-way interaction term, actor gender x partner gender x interaction quality, predicting momentary affect. Age was a covariate to control for group differences.