

Differences Between Partners From Heterosexual, Gay, and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples

Partners from four types of couples without children (gay unmarried, lesbian unmarried, heterosexual unmarried, and heterosexual married, $N_s = 1,412, 1,310, 1,036,$ and $1,728,$ respectively) were compared to partners from heterosexual married couples with children ($N = 3,116$) on mean levels of variables from a model of relationship adjustment as well as on the strength of links posited by the model. Although 82% of the mean-level comparisons were significant, only 36% of the comparisons had effect sizes that were at least small in strength. Type of couple affected links between variables in only 33% of the instances, with effect sizes trivial in strength. Findings support the view that despite variability in structure, close dyadic relationships work in similar ways.

Because close relationships come in diverse forms, a major issue for developing models of relationship adjustment is identifying what features of relationship functioning apply to any close relationship and what features are specific to particular types of relationships (Berscheid, 1999). In the current article, a model of relationship adjustment is presented that is based almost exclusively on evidence from spouses from married couples, most of whom have children. As one way of assessing the generality of the model, cohabiting partners from four kinds of couples without children—gay unmarried, lesbian unmarried,

heterosexual unmarried, and heterosexual married—were compared to partners from the normative reference group of partners from married couples with children on components of the model. Unmarried gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners living together without children were of interest because the majority of these couples do not reside with children (Seltzer, 2004; Simmons & O’Connell, 2003).

The four kinds of comparison couples represent several sources of diversity in close relationships relative to married heterosexual couples with children. Diversity in sexual orientation is represented by gay and lesbian couples. These couples were of interest in light of current efforts to legalize same-sex unions (Kurdek, 2004). Diversity in marital status is represented by heterosexual unmarried couples who have the option to marry but choose not to do so. These couples were of interest because the prevalence of cohabitation as either a precursor or alternative to heterosexual marriage is expected to increase (Seltzer, 2004). Finally, diversity in parent status is represented by heterosexual married couples without children. These couples were of interest because of the increased frequency of voluntary childlessness (Bulcroft & Teachman, 2004) as well as evidence that the stress associated with parenting spills over to marital interactions (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003).

Partners from the four comparison couples were compared to partners from heterosexual married couples with children in two ways. The first comparison concerned the extent to which partners from each of the four comparison couples differed from partners in heterosexual married couples with children in average levels of

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variables from the model. The second comparison concerned the extent to which partners from each of the four comparison couples differed from partners in heterosexual married couples with children in the strength with which variables from the model were linked to each other. Although the model can be viewed as a complex mediation model, only the bivariate links implied by the model were of interest here. An examination of type-of-couple differences in these bivariate links is preliminary to a more complex examination of type-of-couple effects in mediational processes that goes beyond the scope of this work.

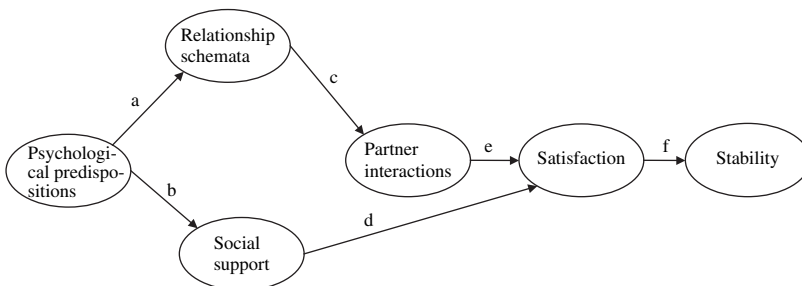
A MODEL OF RELATIONSHIP ADJUSTMENT

The model of relationship adjustment that provided the framework for this study was derived from previous work by Huston (2000) and Karney and Bradbury (1995). As illustrated in Figure 1, the model has six components that form a time-ordered sequence of six linkages (letters a through f). The *psychological predispositions* component refers to personality traits partners bring to their relationships that affect both the manner in which the relationship events are appraised (relationship schemata; Link a) and the quality of perceived social support that is received (Link b). In the current study, this component was represented by *expressiveness*, a personality trait that reflects traditional feminine attributes such as being compassionate, affectionate, and understanding. This trait has been linked to having positive views of one's partner (Bradbury, Campbell, & Fincham, 1995; Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003) as well as to being satisfied with social support (Roos & Cohen, 1987).

The *relationship schemata* component refers to beliefs and attitudes about the partner or the relationship that affect how partners interact with each other (Link c). This component was represented by *positive regard for the partner*. On the basis of attachment theory (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), secure attachment, in part, depends on regarding the relationship partner as being available in times of need and as trustworthy. Such views of the partner have been linked to reports of positive partner interactions (Cobb, Davila, & Bradbury, 2001; Kurdek, 2003).

The component *social support* underscores the view that intimate relationships coexist with other personal relationships, particularly those involving friends and family members (Huston, 2000; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The level of support from friends and family members may affect satisfaction with the relationship (Link d) inasmuch as it represents investments made in the relationship that would be lost if the relationship were to end (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), helps partners from the couple form a dyadic identity on the basis of how others treat them (Lewis, 1973), and reduces uncertainty about the partner by providing confirmation from others that a right choice has been made (Parks & Adelman, 1983). This component was approximated by three variables that were indirect measures of social support. The frequency of *contact with friends relative to that with family* was regarded as a possible index of problematic support from family members in that it assessed the extent to which partners had more contact with friends than they did with family members. *Feeling accepted by partner's mother* and *feeling accepted by partner's father* were regarded as two possible indices of support from partner's parents. Perceived support from

FIGURE 1. A TIME-ORDERED SEQUENTIAL MODEL OF RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES



friends, family members, and parents has been positively related to satisfaction with the relationship (Kurdek, 2004; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992).

The *partner interactions* component represents how partners behave toward one another and forms another basis for overall satisfaction with the relationship (Link e). This component was represented by three domains of interaction. The frequency of *sexual relations* was regarded as one index of physical intimacy and has been related to positive relationship satisfaction (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000). Appraisals of the extent to which *household labor* was equally distributed was regarded as one index of equality in the relationship and has been related to positive relationship satisfaction (Coltrane, 2000). Finally, the frequency of *conflict* was regarded as one index of the extent to which partners have difficulty accepting influence from each other and has been negatively related to relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1992).

Finally, the model includes two components that represent commonly studied relationship outcomes. *Satisfaction* refers to the overall level of positive affect experienced in the relationship and the extent to which important personal needs are being met in the relationship and is one determinant of relationship stability (Rusbult et al., 1998) (Link f). *Stability* was represented by both *separation proneness* that tapped thoughts or discussions about ending the relationship (Previti & Amato, 2003) and whether partners actually *separated* over a single follow-up period.

PREDICTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENCES IN MEAN LEVELS OF VARIABLES

Relative to heterosexual married couples with children, the other four types of couples differ in gender-linked effects (Fox & Murry, 2000). In part because of socialization pressures for women to be communal (caring and nurturing) and for men to be agentic (assertive and dominant; Wood & Eagly, 2002), men and women have been found to differ on each of the variables from the model of relationship adjustment. For example, there is evidence that women are more expressive than are men (Kurdek, 1987); that women develop more positive models of others than do men (Taylor et al., 2000); that women are better integrated into social support systems than are men (Cross & Madson, 1997); that female sexuality is more malleable, fluid, and relationship-focused than is male sexuality

(Peplau, 2001); that wives perform more household labor than do their husbands (Coltrane, 2000); that wives are more likely than their husbands to have a complex grasp of relationship conflict (Buysse et al., 2000); that wives report stronger marital satisfaction than do their husbands (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005); and that stability is predicted better by wives' satisfaction than by husbands' satisfaction (Kurdek, 1993).

The biosocial ecologies within which each of the five types of couples of interest here develops, however, foster variability in the extent to which each couple represents mixtures of traditional masculine and feminine influences. Whether as a result of biological predispositions or socialization experiences, relative to their heterosexual counterparts, gay men see themselves as more communal and lesbians see themselves as more agentic (Kurdek, 1987). As such, gay and lesbian couples might be viewed as representing "double doses" of relatively high levels of communion and agency that provide the basis for their employing relatively effective strategies for resolving conflict (Gottman et al., 2003) and for their basing their relationships on an ethic of equality (Kurdek, 2004).

In addition, the experience of parenthood has profound implications on how couples function. For example, parenthood has been found to result in intensified self-ascribed masculine attributes for husbands and self-ascribed feminine attributes for wives (Feldman & Aschenbrenner, 1983), in decreased physical intimacy between spouses (Belsky & Rovine, 1990), in wives' increased involvement in household labor (Coltrane, 2000), and in increased opportunities for conflict as the stresses of parenthood spill over to marital interactions (Twenge et al., 2003).

If gay and lesbian couples represent mixtures of relatively high levels of communion and agency and a strong commitment to an ethic of equality, then, relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples and lesbian couples were expected to be more expressive, to hold more positive views of their partners, to be more likely to distribute household labor equally, and to have less frequent conflict. On the basis of findings that lesbian partners have sexual relations less frequently than gay partners do because they express physical intimacy in ways other than genital activities, such as hugging, cuddling, and kissing (Peplau, Fingerhut, & Beals, 2004), lesbian partners also were expected to report less frequent sexual relations than did the partners from heterosexual married couples with children.

Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from the other four types of couples of interest also reflect variability with regard to stabilizing effects on relationship processes (Adams & Jones, 1997). Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) proposed that marital stability is the result of not only wanting to continue in the relationship (personal commitment) but also the result of barriers to leaving the relationship. Such barriers may include pressure from members of one's social support network, the difficulty of procedures needed to end the relationship, and irretrievable investments made in the relationship (structural commitment) as well as feeling obligated to honor vows to regard marriage as a life-long commitment and to safeguard the well-being of children at any cost (moral commitment; see also Previti & Amato, 2003; Waite & Lillard, 1991).

Previous studies have shown that unmarried partners from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples are relatively lacking in institutionalized barriers to leave their relationships (Kurdek, 2004; Seltzer, 2004). As a result, these partners might be relatively more satisfied with their relationships because there are few constraints to keep them in unhappy relationships. Partners from gay and lesbian couples in particular often do not enjoy the support of family members and thus may not benefit from any stabilizing influences such support provides (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Kurdek, 1988). In addition, partners from heterosexual unmarried couples often do not see cohabitation as a precursor to marriage (Seltzer, 2004), and their unconventional choice to cohabit without marriage may come at the cost of reduced support from family members (Seltzer, 2000). On the basis of this evidence, relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual unmarried couples without children were expected to report more contact with friends than with family members, to feel less accepted by their partner's parents, to be more satisfied with their relationships, and to be less stable.

PREDICTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENCES IN STRENGTH OF CORRELATIONS

The second focus of this article was whether partners from the four types of couples without children (gay unmarried couples, lesbian unmarried couples, heterosexual unmarried couples, and heterosexual married couples) differed from partners in

heterosexual married couples with children in the strength of bivariate links a through f in Figure 1. Two issues were addressed for each of these links.

The first issue was whether the proposed link was found for the total sample. On the basis of previous findings, expressiveness was expected to be positively related to having positive views of one's partner (Bradbury et al., 1995; Link a). Expressiveness also was expected to be positively related to social support (Roos & Cohen, 1987), that is, to contact with friends rather than family (Link b-1), to acceptance from partner's mother (Link b-2), and to acceptance from partner's father (Link b-3). Having a positive view of one's partner was expected to be positively linked to partner interactions, that is, to frequent sexual relations (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Link c-1), to equal distribution of household labor (Coltrane, 2000; Link c-2), and to infrequent conflict (Kurdek, 1992; Link c-3). Each of the three aspects of social support (contact with friends, acceptance from partner's mother, and acceptance from partner's father) was expected to be positively related to relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1993; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000; Sprecher & Felmler, 1992; Links d-1, d-2, and d-3, respectively). Each of the three domains of partner interactions (frequent sexual relations, equal distribution of household labor, and infrequent conflict) was expected to be positively related to relationship satisfaction (Christopher & Sprecher; Coltrane; Kurdek, 1992; Links e-1, e-2, and e-3, respectively). Finally, satisfaction was expected to be negatively related to both separation proneness (Previti & Amato, 2003; Link f-1) and to actual separation (Rusbult et al., 1998; Link f-2).

The second issue addressed for each link was whether there were type-of-couple differences in the strength of the link. Although only few studies have examined type-of-couple differences in the strength of such links (Kurdek, 2004; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986b), overall, the findings from these studies have revealed few type-of-couple differences. Consequently, a similar trend was expected with regard to type-of-couple differences in the links of interest in this study.

METHOD

Participants

Data were derived from Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) study of American couples. In this study, questionnaires were initially mailed

in 1978 and 1979 to 1,875 gay couples, 1,723 lesbian couples, and 7,397 heterosexual couples (married and cohabiting not distinguished). Usable questionnaires were mailed back by both partners from 969 gay couples, 784 lesbian couples, and 4,314 heterosexual couples, for return rates of 58%, 52%, and 46%, respectively. Participants from the nonrandom sample were recruited primarily from the Seattle, San Francisco, and New York areas. From these couples, 98 gay couples, 93 lesbian couples, and 129 heterosexual couples who lived within 1 hour of travel were chosen to be interviewed.

Most of the gay and lesbian couples learned of the study through a publication or newspaper (48% and 45%, respectively), through someone who had already participated or planned to participate (23% and 27%, respectively), or through interviews with Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) on television and radio programs (10% and 9%, respectively). Most of the married and cohabiting heterosexual couples learned of the study through either a publication or newspaper (58% and 72%, respectively), through interviews with Blumstein and Schwartz on television and radio programs (34% and 23%, respectively), or through descriptions of the study on television or radio (18% and 14%, respectively). Follow-up questionnaires were sent out about 18 months later in 1979 through 1981. These data were collected before the onset of the AIDS health crisis and before domestic partnerships, civil unions, and marriage were available for some gay and lesbian couples.

Participants in the current study included both partners from 706 gay couples, 655 lesbian couples, 518 heterosexual unmarried couples, and 864 heterosexual married couples, all cohabiting without children, as well as 1,558 heterosexual married couples cohabiting with children. The number of couples used in this study was reduced from that originally studied by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) because couples were selected only if both partners had complete data for age, education, annual income, and years living together, and because gay, lesbian, and heterosexual unmarried couples were selected only if they did not have children living with them. (If only one partner provided information regarding years living together, that information was used for the other partner as well.) About 10% of the gay partners, 20% of the lesbian partners, and 41% of the heterosexual unmarried partners had been married at least once prior to the current relationship. Ten percent of the heterosexual married

partners without children and 12% of the heterosexual married partners with children had been married at least once before the current marriage. Because over 95% of the partners from each group of couples were White, the sample was not ethnically diverse. Further, because partners from each group of couples averaged almost 16 years of education, the sample was also biased toward fairly well-educated partners. Additional data on the demographic characteristics of the sample are presented later.

Two kinds of follow-up questionnaires were sent. About 18 months after the original survey was completed, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) sent follow-up questionnaires to 75% of the gay couples, 73% of the lesbian couples, 53% of the unmarried heterosexual couples, and 34% of the married heterosexual couples who had not been interviewed. The actual number of couples contacted and the reasons for the selected percentages were not provided. In this questionnaire, partners were asked whether they and their partner currently lived together. Return rates were 75%, 73%, 67%, and 82%, respectively. Couples who were interviewed were sent a longer questionnaire, with a return rate of 99% for gay couples, 98% for lesbian couples, and 88% for heterosexual couples. Partners from couples with follow-up data were selected in the current study only if they had complete demographic data and at least one partner provided information on stability. The number of gay, lesbian, heterosexual unmarried, heterosexual married without children, and heterosexual married couples with children who had follow-up data were 491, 335, 209, 440, and 489, respectively. The number of separated couples was 42, 47, 22, 12, and 8, respectively, with percentages for instability of 8.6%, 14.0%, 10.5%, 2.7%, and 1.6%, respectively.

Measures of Demographic Variables

Age. Participants reported their age in years. The intraclass correlation (ICC), an index of similarity between partners, was .78, $p < .01$. Here and in rest of the article, the ICC was derived from the total sample.

Race. Participants described their race as White, Black, Asian, Mexican American, Native American, Puerto Rican, or other. For 93% of the couples, both partners were White.

Education. Participants indicated the highest number of years of education they had completed, 1 = 1 year, 17 = 17 or more years. ICC = .40, $p < .01$.

Income. Participants reported their own total annual income as falling into 1 of 12 categories: 1 = no income, 12 = \$50,000 or more. ICC = -.23, $p < .01$.

Years cohabiting. Participants reported how many years and months they had been living together. Number of years living together was converted to number of months living together and was added to number of months living together. This sum was then converted to number of years living together. ICC = .99, $p < .01$.

Children. Participants indicated, for up to 6 children, the age and gender of each child who lived with them. This information was used to exclude the few gay, lesbian, or heterosexual unmarried couples living with children and to form the two groups of married heterosexual couples (i.e., those not living with children and those living with children).

Measures of Variables From the Relationship Adjustment Model

Expressiveness. Participants indicated how well, 1 = not at all, 9 = extremely, five attributes realistically described them (compassionate, express tender feelings easily, affectionate, romantic, and understanding of others). Cronbach's α for the summed averaged composite score was .82. ICC = .01, $p > .05$. Here and in rest of the article, Cronbach's α was based on a subsample that included one randomly chosen person per couple in order to avoid problems with interdependent scores.

Positive model of partner. Participants indicated how often, 1 = never, 9 = always, their partners did seven things in reference to them (confided their innermost thoughts and feelings to them; tried to bring them out of being restless, bored, or depressed; knew their feelings without saying anything; told them what was liked most about them; suggested workable solutions to dilemmas; acted affectionately; and told them feelings about the future of the relationship). Cronbach's

α for the summed averaged composite score was .86. ICC = .33, $p < .01$.

Contact with friends rather than family. Participants indicated whether, overall, they had more contact with relatives (their own or their partner's) or with friends, 1 = more with relatives, 5 = equal with relatives and friends, 9 = more with friends. ICC = .50, $p < .01$.

Feeling accepted by partner's mother. Participants rated the extent to which their partner's mother made them feel like "one of the family," 1 = not at all, 9 = very much. ICC = .02, $p > .05$.

Feeling accepted by partner's father. Participants rated the extent to which their partner's father made them feel like "one of the family," 1 = not at all, 9 = very much. ICC = .14, $p < .01$.

Frequency of sexual relations. Participants rated how often during the last year they and their partners had sexual relations, 1 = a few times, 7 = daily or almost every day. ICC = .80, $p < .01$.

Equal distribution of household labor. Participants rated how often each partner did each of five household tasks (doing the dishes, cooking the evening meal, doing the laundry, cleaning the bathroom, and doing the grocery shopping), 1 = I do this all the time, 5 = we do this equally, 9 = he/she does this all the time. Responses were recoded to a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 = the respondent or the partner does this all the time, 5 = we do this equally. Cronbach's α for the summed composite score was .73. ICC = .76, $p < .01$.

Frequency of conflict. Participants indicated how often, 1 = never, 9 = daily or almost every day, they and their partner had open disagreements or fights in 12 areas (how the house is kept, our social life, relations with my relatives, relations with partner's relatives, our moral and religious beliefs and practices, how we communicate, the amount of money coming in, how we manage our finances, how we express affection for each other, whether we both should work, our sex life, and our relationship in general). Cronbach's α for the summed composite score was .88. ICC = .51, $p < .01$.

Relationship satisfaction. Participants rated how satisfied, 1 = *not at all satisfied*, 9 = *extremely satisfied*, they were with nine parts of their relationship (our moral and religious beliefs and practices, how we communicate, how the house is kept, the amount of influence I have over the decisions we make, our social life, the amount of money coming in, how we express affection for each other, how we manage our finances, and our sex life) as well as with their relationship in general. Cronbach's α for the summed composite score was .82. ICC = .53, $p < .01$.

Separation proneness. Participants rated how often, 1 = *never*, 4 = *more than three times*, they seriously considered ending the relationship as well as how often they seriously discussed ending the relationship. Cronbach's α for the summed averaged composite score was .85. ICC = .65, $p < .01$.

Separation. In the follow-up questionnaire, partners were asked whether they and their partner currently lived together. If they did not live together, they were asked the reason for not living together. The reason that was used to identify unstable couples was "We decided to terminate our relationship as a couple."

RESULTS

Statistical Analyses

Because scores from partners in the same couple are likely to be correlated (as shown by most of the ICCs reported above), analyzing data in which both partners from the same couple provide information requires special techniques to accommodate nonindependent observations (Sayer & Klute, 2005). Accordingly, data involving variables in which the partner was the unit of analysis were analyzed by means of multilevel modeling with the multilevel module available in LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog, Sörbom, du Toit, & du Toit, 2001). Data regarding relationship stability in which the couple was the unit of analysis and in which nonindependent observations were not an issue were analyzed by means of logistic regression.

The hierarchical linear models tested were two-level random-intercept models in which individual partners (Level 1) were nested in couples (Level 2). The Level 1 model was a *within-couple* model that used information from both

partners to define one parameter—an intercept—for each couple. This intercept reflected the average value of the outcome score for a couple and was treated as a random variable based on the assumption that the couple-level intercepts from the sample were derived from couple-level intercepts from a larger population. The Level 2 model was a *between-couple* model that explained variability in the intercepts derived at Level 1 in terms of type of couple while taking into account the extent to which partner scores from the same couple were inter-related.

In the Level 2 model, comparisons between partners from specific types of couples were made using dummy-coded variables that represented *lack of membership* (a value of 0) or *membership* (a value of 1) in the group of gay couples, lesbian couples, heterosexual unmarried couples without children, heterosexual married couples without children, or heterosexual married couples with children. Because partners from heterosexual married couples with children served as the reference group, the unstandardized regression coefficient associated with each dummy variable represented the difference between the mean for partners from the target group of couples and the mean for partners from heterosexual married couples with children. Thus, a *positive* sign for this coefficient indicates that the mean for partners from the target group was *higher* than the mean for partners from the reference group, and a *negative* sign for this coefficient indicates that the mean for partners from the target group was *lower* than the mean for partners from the reference group. The *t* statistic associated with each coefficient is a test of whether the difference between the relevant pair of means is reliably different from 0. As one way of controlling for chance significance effects, the four type-of-couple contrasts were initially assessed with a single multivariate test.

Because the number of partners in each group of couples was fairly large, comparisons that were statistically significant could nonetheless account for very little variance. Consequently, the *t* values associated with the coefficients in the multilevel analyses and the Wald statistics associated with the coefficients in the logistic regression analyses were converted to Pearson correlations (*rs*) so that the strength of the comparison effects could be estimated. As with any correlation coefficient, the square of the effect-size

correlation coefficient can be interpreted as the percentage of variance accounted for by the comparison with regard to the outcome score. On the basis of Rosenthal (1994), $r = \sqrt{t^2/(t^2 + df)}$ for the multilevel analyses and $r = \sqrt{\text{Wald statistic}/N}$ for the logistic regression analyses. Following Cohen (1988, pp. 79 – 80), cutoff values for small, medium, and large effects were represented by r s of .10 (1% of explained variance), .30 (9% of explained variance), and .50 (25% of explained variance), respectively. Significant differences between means that have effect-size correlations less than .10 were designated as trivial effects.

Differences Between Partners on Mean Levels of Scores for Demographic Variables

Means and standard deviations for partners' scores for the demographic variables are presented by type of couple in Table 1. Type-of-couple differences for these variables were assessed by two-level hierarchical linear regression analyses in which the only predictors were the four dummy variables for type of couple, with partners from heterosexual married couple with children serving as the reference group. The χ^2 value for the multivariate type-of-couple effect is presented in Table 2 for each variable along

with the unstandardized coefficients (β) and effect-size correlations (r) for the four dummy variables, which are classified below as trivial, small, medium, or large.

As seen from the χ^2 column of Table 2, the multivariate type-of-couple effect was significant for age, years of education, personal income, and years cohabiting. As seen from the unstandardized coefficients in Table 2, relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (small), heterosexual unmarried couples (small), and heterosexual married couples without children (small) were younger. Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (trivial), and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial) had more years of education. Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (trivial) and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial) had higher personal incomes, whereas partners from lesbian couples had lower personal incomes (trivial). Finally, relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from each of the other four types of couples lived together fewer years (all medium). Because partners differed

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Partner Demographic Scores by Type of Couple

Score	Type of Couple				
	Unmarried			Married Heterosexual	
	Gay	Lesbian	Heterosexual	No Children	With Children
Age					
<i>M</i>	34.33	31.83	30.20	29.18	36.82
<i>SD</i>	9.04	8.14	8.21	6.05	8.53
Proportion White					
<i>M</i>	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.97
<i>SD</i>	0.23	0.22	0.22	0.20	0.19
Years of education					
<i>M</i>	15.42	15.46	15.31	15.73	15.16
<i>SD</i>	1.92	1.83	1.90	1.65	2.03
Personal income ^a					
<i>M</i>	6.83	6.04	6.37	6.57	6.33
<i>SD</i>	2.51	2.67	2.65	2.64	3.74
Years cohabiting					
<i>M</i>	5.79	3.86	2.36	5.45	13.83
<i>SD</i>	6.45	4.50	2.12	4.71	8.00
<i>N</i> of partners	1,412	1,310	1,036	1,728	3,116

^aPersonal income was divided into 12 categories, 1 = no income, 12 = \$50,000 or more.

Table 2. Type-of-Couple Multivariate Effect (χ^2) and Unstandardized Coefficient (β) and Effect-Size Correlation (r) for Type-of-Couple Dummy Variables for Demographic Scores

Score	Multivariate χ^2	Dummy Variable for Type of Couple			
		Unmarried Without Children			Heterosexual Married Without Children
		Gay	Lesbian	Heterosexual	
Age	717.30**				
β		-2.48**	-4.98**	-6.61**	-7.64**
r		.07	.15	.18	.24
Proportion white	9.07				
β		-0.36	-0.32	-0.09	-0.28
r		.02	.02	.00	.01
Years of education	77.40**				
B		0.26**	0.30**	0.15	0.58**
r		.03	.04	.02	.09
Personal income	41.75**				
β		0.49**	-0.29**	0.03	0.23*
r		.04	.02	.00	.02
Years cohabiting	2358.81**				
β		-8.04**	-9.96**	-11.47**	-8.37**
r		.30	.35	.37	.33

Note: For the dummy variables, partners from heterosexual married couples with children were the reference group.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

on age, years of education, personal income, and years cohabiting, these variables were used as covariates in subsequent analyses.

Differences Between Partners on Mean Levels of Scores From the Relationship Model

Means and standard deviations for partners' scores from the relationship adjustment model are presented by type of couple in Table 3. Because data were missing for some scores, the number of partners from each type of couple is also presented. Type-of-couple differences for these scores were assessed by two-level hierarchical linear regression analyses in which the predictors were the four covariates noted earlier (age, years of education, personal income, and years cohabiting) as well as the four dummy variables for type of couple, with partners from heterosexual married couple with children serving as the reference group. The χ^2 value for the multivariate type-of-couple effect is presented in Table 4 for each score along with the unstandardized coefficient and effect-size correlation for each covariate and dummy variable. As seen from

Table 4, the multivariate type-of-couple effect was significant for each score. Because the focus of this study is on type-of-couple effects, only the findings for the four dummy variables are summarized for each variable from the relationship adjustment model.

Expressiveness. As seen from the means in Table 3, most participants scored relatively high on expressiveness (maximum score = 9). On the basis of the unstandardized coefficients presented in Table 4, it can be seen that, relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (small), heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial), and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial) were more expressive.

Positive model of partner. Most participants had fairly positive evaluations of their partner (maximum score = 9). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples (small), heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial), and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial) had more positive evaluations of their partners.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Relationship Adjustment Model Scores by Type of Couple

Score	Type of Couple				
	Unmarried Without Children			Married Heterosexual	
	Gay	Lesbian	Heterosexual	No Children	With Children
Expressiveness					
<i>M</i>	7.16	7.57	7.27	7.09	7.02
<i>SD</i>	1.24	1.09	1.24	1.28	1.31
<i>N</i> of partners	1,403	1,301	1,027	1,707	3,090
Positive partner					
<i>M</i>	6.50	7.30	6.81	6.75	6.39
<i>SD</i>	1.47	1.18	1.31	1.35	1.61
<i>N</i> of partners	1,391	1,295	1,020	1,712	3,058
Contact with friends					
<i>M</i>	7.43	7.26	6.58	6.00	6.17
<i>SD</i>	2.13	2.17	2.45	2.59	2.57
<i>N</i> of partners	1,400	1,297	1,028	1,722	3,092
Mother acceptance					
<i>M</i>	6.13	5.73	6.35	7.48	7.31
<i>SD</i>	2.93	3.06	2.74	2.17	2.38
<i>N</i> of partners	1,084	1,051	888	1,614	2,601
Father acceptance					
<i>M</i>	5.27	5.17	6.02	7.33	7.20
<i>SD</i>	3.07	3.00	2.76	2.22	2.39
<i>N</i> of partners	829	846	729	1,387	2,005
Frequency of sex					
<i>M</i>	5.11	4.42	5.38	4.95	4.90
<i>SD</i>	1.25	1.27	1.06	1.05	1.05
<i>N</i> of partners	1,403	1,301	1,027	1,707	3,090
Equal household labor					
<i>M</i>	3.14	3.43	3.13	2.77	2.16
<i>SD</i>	0.99	0.87	0.96	0.94	0.83
<i>N</i> of partners	1,257	1,210	1,027	1,628	2,889
Frequency of conflict					
<i>M</i>	2.79	2.75	3.02	2.98	2.90
<i>SD</i>	1.14	1.06	1.23	1.13	1.15
<i>N</i> of partners	1,352	1,220	889	1,691	3,060
Relationship satisfaction					
<i>M</i>	6.94	7.28	6.94	7.02	6.94
<i>SD</i>	1.18	1.04	1.23	1.18	1.30
<i>N</i> of partners	1,342	1,232	969	1,655	3,058
Separation proneness					
<i>M</i>	2.22	2.05	2.38	1.87	1.95
<i>SD</i>	0.99	0.99	1.02	0.97	1.00
<i>N</i> of partners	1,404	1,301	1,031	1,720	3,101
% Stable	91.4	86.0	89.5	97.3	98.4
<i>N</i> of couples	491	335	209	440	489

Contact with friends rather than family. Most participants tended to have more contact with friends than with family members (equal contact = 5). Relative to partners from heterosexual married

couples with children, partners from gay couples (small), lesbian couples (small), and heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial) had more contact with friends than they did with family members.

Table 4. Type-of-Couple Multivariate Effect (χ^2) and Unstandardized Coefficients (β) and Effect-Size Correlations (r) Associated With Covariates and Type-of-Couple Dummy Variables for Relationship Adjustment Model Scores

Score	Multivariate χ^2	Unstandardized Coefficient							
		Age	Education	Income	Years Cohabiting	Unmarried Without Children			Heterosexual Married Without Children
						Gay	Lesbian	Heterosexual	
Expressiveness	134.49**								
β		0.01**	0.01	-0.08**	0.00	0.17**	0.53**	0.27**	0.11**
r		.02	.01	.18	.01	.04	.12	.06	.03
Positive partner	213.00**								
β		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.83**	0.32**	0.29**
r		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.14	.05	.05
Contact with friends	161.58**								
β		0.01**	0.08**	0.02**	0.03**	1.49**	1.44**	0.83**	0.14
r		.03	.06	.03	.05	.15	.14	.07	.02
Mother acceptance	317.90**								
β		0.00	0.03*	0.06**	0.02**	-1.02**	-1.33**	-0.71**	0.30**
r		.01	.02	.06	.04	.11	.14	.07	.03
Father acceptance	497.88**								
β		0.00	0.01	0.05**	0.03**	-1.70**	-1.71**	-0.82**	0.36**
r		.00	.01	.06	.05	.18	.18	.08	.04
Frequency of sex	323.08**								
β		-0.01**	-0.01*	0.00	-0.03**	-0.10	-0.85**	0.05	-0.28**
r		.06	.02	.00	.11	.02	.16	.01	.06
Equal labor	660.70**								
β		0.00	0.02**	0.02**	-0.02**	0.78**	1.04**	0.70**	0.39**
r		.02	.05	.11	.10	.21	.26	.16	.11
Frequency of conflict	50.89**								
β		-0.02**	0.01	0.03**	-0.01**	-0.26**	-0.35**	-0.16**	-0.18**
r		.10	.01	.09	.03	.05	.07	.03	.04
Relationship satisfaction	65.94**								
β		0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.42**	0.11	0.20**
r		.05	.01	.01	.01	.01	.08	.02	.04
Separation proneness	197.85**								
β		-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02**	0.41**	0.25**	0.59**	0.01
r		.05	.00	.00	.07	.10	.05	.12	.00
Separation	71.46**								
β		-0.07**	0.02	0.03	-0.03	1.44**	1.82**	1.43**	0.35
r		.08	.00	.01	.02	.08	.10	.07	.01

Note: For the four dummy variables (gay unmarried without children, lesbian unmarried without children, heterosexual unmarried without children, and heterosexual married with children), partners from heterosexual married couples with children were the reference group.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Feeling accepted by partner's mother. Most participants indicated that they were fairly well accepted by their partner's mother (maximum score = 9). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (small), lesbian couples (small), and heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial) felt less accepted, whereas partners from heterosexual married couples without children felt more accepted (trivial).

Feeling accepted by partner's father. Most participants indicated that they were fairly well accepted by their partner's father (maximum score = 9). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (small), lesbian couples (small), and heterosexual unmarried couples without children (trivial) felt less accepted, whereas partners from heterosexual married couples without children felt more accepted (trivial).

Frequency of sexual relations. Most partners had fairly frequent sexual relations (maximum score = 7). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples (small) and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial) had less frequent sexual relations.

Equal distribution of household labor. Only partners from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual unmarried couples without children tended to distribute household labor equally (maximum score = 5). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from each of the other four groups of couples were more likely to distribute household labor equally (all small).

Frequency of conflict. Most partners reported fairly infrequent conflict (maximum score = 9). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from each of the other four types of couples had less conflict (all trivial).

Relationship satisfaction. Most partners were fairly satisfied with their relationships (maximum score = 9). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples and partners from heterosexual married couples without children were more satisfied (both trivial).

Separation proneness. Most partners were not prone to separation (maximum score = 4). Relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples (small), lesbian couples (trivial), and heterosexual unmarried couples (small) were more prone to separation.

Separation. A logistic regression was run in which the probability of separating (0 = no, 1 = yes) was predicted from the four covariates as well as the four dummy variables for type of couple. The total model was significant, $\chi^2(8, N = 1,962) = 110.21, p < .01$. As seen from the unstandardized coefficients in Table 4, with controls for the demographic variables, relative to heterosexual married couples with children, gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (small), and heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial) were less stable.

Differences Between Partners on the Strength of Links From the Relationship Model

Links a through f derived from the relationship adjustment model (Figure 1) were first assessed for the total sample with a two-level hierarchical regression analysis in which the predictor of interest was mean centered. Type-of-couple differences in these links were assessed by adding to this hierarchical regression analysis three sets of predictors: (a) age, years of education, personal income, and years cohabiting as mean-centered covariates; (b) the four dummy variables representing type-of-couple effects, with partners from heterosexual married couples with children as the reference group; and (c) four Predictor \times Dummy Variable interaction terms. The four interaction terms were assessed simultaneously with a multivariate test to guard against chance significant effects. If the multivariate test was significant, then individual interaction terms were interpreted.

Findings are summarized for each link in Table 5, which contains the unstandardized coefficient and effect-size correlation based on the predictor-outcome link for the total sample. This table also presents the multivariate χ^2 value for the overall Predictor \times Type-of-Couple interaction effect as well as the unstandardized coefficient and effect-size correlation for each of the four individual interaction terms. Effects for the covariates and the dummy variable main effects are omitted to simplify the presentation.

Table 5. *Unstandardized Coefficients (β) and Effect-Size Correlations (r) Associated With Links From the Relationship Adjustment Model for the Total Sample, Multivariate Type-of-Couple Interaction Effect (χ²), and β and r for Individual Type-of-Couple Interaction Effects*

Link	Total Sample		Multivariate χ ²	Unmarried Without Children							
	B	r		Gay		Lesbian		Heterosexual		Heterosexual Married Without Children	
				B	r	B	r	B	r	B	r
(a) Expressiveness → positive other	0.21**	.19	7.33	-0.01	.00	0.09*	.02	0.00	.00	0.04	.01
(b-1) Expressiveness → contact with friends	0.02	.01	2.98	0.02	.00	0.03	.00	0.08	.01	-0.01	.00
(b-2) Expressiveness → mother acceptance	0.01	.00	2.28	-0.02	.00	0.09	.01	0.05	.00	-0.01	.00
(b-3) Expressiveness → father acceptance	0.03	.01	1.71	-0.09	.01	0.00	.00	-0.02	.00	-0.06	.01
(c-1) Positive partner → frequency of sex	0.07**	.12	22.91**	-0.06**	.04	0.04	.02	0.00	.00	0.00	.00
(c-2) Positive partner → equal labor	0.04**	.07	8.55	0.00	.00	-0.03	.02	0.03	.02	-0.01	.01
(c-3) Positive partner → frequency of conflict	-0.15**	.20	9.38	0.00	.00	-0.06*	.02	-0.04	.01	0.01	.00
(d-1) Contact with friends → satisfaction	0.02**	.05	4.17	-0.02	.01	-0.03	.02	-0.02	.01	-0.01	.00
(d-2) Mother acceptance → satisfaction	0.03**	.08	17.44**	-0.03**	.03	-0.05**	.04	-0.03**	.03	0.00	.00
(d-3) Father acceptance → satisfaction	0.04**	.11	15.53**	-0.05**	.04	-0.05**	.04	-0.01	.01	-0.01	.00
(e-1) Frequency of sex → satisfaction	0.19**	.17	37.99**	-0.20**	.06	-0.12**	.04	0.00	.00	-0.10**	.03
(e-2) Equal labor → satisfaction	0.03	.02	10.67**	0.14**	.03	0.10	.02	0.10	.02	0.10*	.02
(e-3) Frequency of conflict → satisfaction	-0.46**	.44	7.47	0.04	.01	0.07*	.02	0.04	.01	0.06	.02
(f-1) Satisfaction → separation proneness	-0.27**	.34	4.75	0.00	.00	-0.05	.02	-0.03	.01	0.00	.00
(f-2) Satisfaction → separation	-0.32**	.11	12.28*	0.38	.02	0.00	.00	-0.14	.01	0.57	.03

Note: For the four dummy variables (gay unmarried without children, lesbian unmarried without children, heterosexual unmarried without children, and heterosexual married with children), partners from heterosexual married couples with children were the reference group.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Psychological predispositions → relationship schemata (Link a). As expected, high levels of expressiveness were linked to high levels of the positive model of the partner for the total sample (small). Because the multivariate test was not significant, this link was not moderated by type of couple.

Psychological predispositions → social support (Links b-1, b-2, and b-3). None of the expected links involving expressiveness and the three aspects of social support were obtained for the total sample. In addition, the multivariate test was not significant for any of the three links.

Relationship schemata → partner interactions (Links c-1, c-2, and c-3). As expected, the posi-

tive model of the partner was linked to each of the three domains of partner interactions for the total sample. Having high levels of a positive model of the partner was linked to frequent sexual relations (small), a tendency to distribute household labor equally (trivial), and infrequent conflict (small). The multivariate test indicated that type of couple moderated only the link between positive model of the partner and frequency of sexual relations, and this moderation occurred only for the contrast involving partners from gay couples (trivial). Tests of simple slopes indicated that whereas the link between positive model of the partner and frequency of sexual relations was significantly positive for partners from heterosexual married couples with children

($B = .08, p < .01, r = .10$ [small]), this link was not significant for partners from gay couples.

Social support → *satisfaction* (Links *d-1, d-2, and d-3*). As expected, the three aspects of social support were each positively related to relationship satisfaction for the total sample. High levels of having more contact with friends than with family was linked to high satisfaction with the relationship (trivial) as was high levels of feeling accepted by partner's mother (trivial) and high levels of feeling accepted by partner's father (small).

The multivariate test indicated that type-of-couple interactions were obtained for feeling accepted by partner's mother and feeling accepted by partner's father. Regarding feeling accepted by partner's mother, the interaction involved the contrasts involving partners from gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (trivial), and heterosexual unmarried couples (trivial). Tests of simple slopes indicated that whereas the link between feeling accepted by partner's mother and satisfaction with the relationship was significantly positive for partners from heterosexual married couples with children ($B = .05, p < .01, r = .08$ [trivial]), this link was not significant for partners from the other three types of couples. Regarding feeling accepted by partner's father, the interaction was the result of contrasts involving partners from gay couples (trivial) and lesbian couples (trivial). Tests of simple slopes indicated that whereas the link between feeling accepted by partner's father and satisfaction with the relationship was significantly positive for partners from heterosexual married couples with children ($B = .07, p < .01, r = .10$ [small]), this link was not significant for partners from either gay or lesbian couples.

Partner interactions → *satisfaction* (Links *e-1, e-2, and e-3*). Two of the three partner interactions assessed were linked to satisfaction with the relationship for the total sample. As expected, frequent sexual relations were linked to high levels of relationship satisfaction (small), and frequent conflict was linked to low levels of relationship satisfaction (medium). The link between equal distribution of household labor and relationship satisfaction was not significant.

The multivariate test indicated that type-of-couple interactions were obtained for both frequency of sexual relations and equal distribution of household labor. Regarding sexual relations,

the interaction occurred for the contrasts involving partners from gay couples (trivial), lesbian couples (trivial), and heterosexual married couples without children (trivial). Tests of simple slopes indicated that whereas the link between frequency of sexual relations and satisfaction with the relationship was significantly positive for partners from heterosexual married couples with children ($B = .33, p < .01, r = .16$ [small]), this link was significantly positive, but weaker, for partners from gay couples ($B = .13, p < .01, r = .05$ [trivial]), partners from lesbian couples ($B = .21, p < .01, r = .08$ [trivial]), and partners from heterosexual married couples without children ($B = .23, p < .01, r = .09$ [trivial]).

Regarding household labor, the interaction occurred for the contrast involving partners from gay couples (trivial) and partners from heterosexual married couples without children (trivial). Tests of simple slopes indicated that whereas the link between the tendency to distribute household labor equally and satisfaction with the relationship was significantly negative for partners from heterosexual married couples with children ($B = -0.06, p < .01, r = .02$ [trivial]), this link was significantly positive for partners from gay couples ($B = .07, p < .05, r = .02$ [trivial]) but was not significant for partners from heterosexual married couples with children.

Satisfaction → *stability* (Links *f-1 and f-2*). As expected, low satisfaction with the relationship was linked to being prone to separation for the total sample (medium). The multivariate test for type-of-couple interactions was not significant. Low satisfaction also predicted actual separation for the total sample (small). Although the multivariate test for type-of-couple interactions was significant, none of the individual interaction effects was significant.

DISCUSSION

The conceptual framework for the current article was a model of relationship adjustment that is based primarily on research involving married persons, most likely with children (Huston, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The major issue examined was whether the model is a general one that addresses *universals* of any close dyadic relationship. To this end, partners from four types of couples without children (gay unmarried, lesbian unmarried, heterosexual unmarried, and heterosexual married) were

Table 6. Summary of Direction and Effect Size of Type-of-Couple Comparisons for Mean Levels of Scores From the Relationship Adjustment Model

Score	Unmarried Without Children			Heterosexual Married Without Children (HMNC)
	Gay (G)	Lesbian (L)	Heterosexual (H)	
Expressiveness	G > HMC, trivial	L > HMC, small	H > HMC, trivial	HMNC > HMC, trivial
Positive partner	ns	L > HMC, small	H > HMC, trivial	HMNC > HMC, trivial
Contact with friends	G > HMC, small	L > HMC, small	H > HMC, trivial	ns
Mother acceptance	G < HMC, small	L < HMC, small	H < HMC, trivial	HMNC > HMC, trivial
Father acceptance	G < HMC, small	L < HMC, small	H < HMC, trivial	HMNC > HMC, trivial
Frequency of sex	ns	L < HMC, small	ns	HMNC < HMC, trivial
Equal labor	G > HMC, small	L > HMC, small	H > HMC, small	HMNC > HMC, small
Frequency of conflict	G < HMC, trivial	L < HMC, trivial	H < HMC, trivial	HMNC < HMC, trivial
Relationship satisfaction	ns	L > HMC, trivial	ns	HMNC > HMC, trivial
Separation proneness	G > HMC, small	L > HMC, trivial	H > HMC, small	ns
Separation	G > HMC, trivial	L > HMC, small	H > HMC, trivial	ns

Note: ns = not significant.

compared to partners from heterosexual married couples with children on mean levels of variables from the model as well as on the strength of bivariate links posited by the model.

Differences in Mean Levels of Variables From the Relationship Model

Table 6 contains a summary of the direction of mean differences for the type-of-couple comparisons that were significant as well as a designation of the associated effect size as being trivial, small, medium, or large. Of the 44 comparisons performed, 8 (18.1%) were not significant, 20 (45.4%) were significant but trivial in size, and 16 (36.3%) were significant but small in size. Because no significant effects were medium or large in size, overall, the findings indicate that the differences obtained were not striking ones. On a methodological note, the fairly large number of significant but trivial effects underscores the need to provide effect-size estimates when statistical analyses are conducted with large samples (Rosenthal, 1994). Next, on the basis of effects that were small in size, a descriptive profile of how partners from each target couple differed from partners from heterosexual married couples with children is presented.

Gay couples without children. Of the 11 comparisons performed, 5 (45.4%) were significant and were small in size; they occurred for the social support, partner interactions, and stability com-

ponents of the relationship adjustment model. Regarding the social support component, consistent with earlier evidence that partners from gay couples perceive more support from friends than from family members (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987), relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from gay couples had more contact with friends than they did with family members and perceived less support from partners' mothers and fathers. Regarding the partner interactions component, in agreement with findings that partners from gay couples perceive fairly high levels of equality in their relationships (Kurdek, 2004), relative to partners from heterosexual married couple with children, partners from gay couples were more likely to distribute household labor equally. Finally, regarding the stability component, in line with claims that partners from gay couples have few institutionalized barriers that help to stabilize their relationships in times of distress (Eskridge, 1996; Patterson, Ciabattari, & Schwartz, 1999), gay couples were more prone to separate than were heterosexual married couples with children.

Lesbian couples without children. Of the 11 comparisons performed, 8 (72.7%) were significant and were small in size; they occurred for five of the six components of the relationship adjustment model. Of all the target couples, lesbian couples differed most frequently from married heterosexual couples with children. Regarding the psychological predispositions component, consistent

with earlier reports that partners from lesbian couples perceive themselves to have fairly high levels of "feminine" personality traits (Kurdek, 2004), relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples were higher in expressiveness. Regarding the relationship schemata component, in line with findings that partners from lesbian couples hold fairly positive views of their partners (Kurdek, 1997), relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples had more positive models of their partners. Regarding the social support component, consistent with earlier evidence that partners from lesbian couples report more support from friends than from family members (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987), relative to partners from heterosexual married couples with children, partners from lesbian couples had more contact with friends than they did with family members and perceived less support from partners' mothers and fathers.

Regarding the partner interactions component, in agreement with findings that partners from lesbian couples perceive fairly high levels of equality in their relationships (Kurdek, 2004), relative to partners from heterosexual married couple with children, partners from lesbian couples were more likely to distribute household labor equally. The finding that lesbian partners reported less frequent sexual relations may result, in part, from the fluid nature of female sexuality (Peplau, 2001) and the diverse ways in which lesbians express physical intimacy (e.g., cuddling, kissing, genital stimulation; Diamant, Lever, & Schuster, 2000). Finally, regarding the stability component, in line with claims that partners from lesbian couples have few institutionalized barriers that help to stabilize their relationships in times of distress (Eskridge, 1996; Patterson et al., 1999), lesbian couples separated more frequently than did the heterosexual married couples with children.

Heterosexual unmarried couples without children. Of the 11 comparisons performed, 2 (18.1%) were significant and were small in size; they occurred for the partner interactions and stability components of the relationship adjustment model. Regarding the partner interactions component, in agreement with findings that partners from heterosexual cohabiting unions are unconventional with regard to gendered roles (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a; Seltzer, 2000), relative to partners from heterosexual married couple with children,

partners from heterosexual unmarried couples were more likely to distribute household labor equally. Finally, regarding the stability component, in line with claims that heterosexual cohabiting unions are somewhat unstable (Seltzer, 2004), heterosexual unmarried couples were more prone to separation than were heterosexual married couples with children.

Heterosexual married couples without children. Of the 11 comparisons performed, 1 (9.0%) was significant and was small in size; it occurred for the partner interactions component of the relationship adjustment model. Concordant with evidence that parenthood results in wives doing more household labor than husbands do (Coltrane, 2000), partners from heterosexual married couples without children were more likely to distribute household labor equally than were partners from heterosexual married couples with children.

In sum, although the number of significant effects that were small in size was infrequent, when they did occur, they more likely involved gay and especially lesbian partners than they did heterosexual partners. In a separate comparison of partners from both gay and lesbian couples without children to partners from married heterosexual couples with children on a similar range of variables, Kurdek (2004) also found that differences most frequently occurred for comparisons involving lesbian partners. One unique feature of lesbian partners is that they perceive themselves as having relatively high levels of both communion and agency (Kurdek, 1987), and this level of psychological androgyny may account for the differences found here.

Differences in Strength of Links From the Relationship Model

For the total sample, most of the expected links derived from the relationship adjustment model occurred, and they were at least small in size. Consistent with past findings, expressiveness was positively related to having positive views of one's partner (Bradbury et al., 1995; Link a). Having a positive view of one's partner was positively linked to partner interactions; that is, to frequent sexual relations (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Link c-1), to equal distribution of household labor (Coltrane, 2000; Link c-2), and to infrequent conflict (Kurdek, 1992; Link c-3). Each of the three aspects of social support (contact with friends, acceptance from partner's

mother, and acceptance from partner's father) was positively related to relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1993; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992; Links d-1, d-2, and d-3, respectively). Two of the three domains of partner interactions (frequent sexual relations and infrequent conflict) were positively related to relationship satisfaction (Christopher & Sprecher; Coltrane; Kurdek, 1992; Links e-1, e-2, and e-3, respectively). Finally, satisfaction was negatively related to both separation proneness (Previti & Amato, 2003; Link f-1) and to actual separation (Rusbult et al., 1998; Link f-2).

The only link not receiving support involved that between expressiveness and social support (Links b-1, b-2, and b-3). Roos and Cohen (1987) did find support for this link, but their measure of social support included an appraisal of the kinds of support received. In contrast, the measures of social support used here simply indexed frequency of contact with potential providers of support (e.g., friends rather than family members) and feelings of being accepted by partner's parents and not one's satisfaction with the support provided. In addition, the failure to find a link between the equal distribution of household labor (one of the three domains of partner interactions) and relationship satisfaction likely results from relationship satisfaction being more strongly linked to appraisals of the *fairness* with which household labor is distributed rather than to the relative amount of household labor performed by each spouse (Coltrane, 2000).

Of the 15 links examined from the relationship model, type of couple moderated the link in only 5 instances (33%). More importantly, in each of these instances, the size of the effect associated with the specific interaction was trivial. Thus, in the absence of sizable effects associated with these interactions, it is perhaps more parsimonious to conclude, consistent with other evidence (Kurdek, 2004), that the links derived from the relationship model were fairly robust and did not differ markedly by type of couple. Thus, the model appears to have utility across diverse types of couples.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study need to be viewed in the context of its limitations: No claim is made that the sample of couples is representative; all measures were open to biases associated with self-report methods; partners from different kinds

of couples were not matched on demographic variables; unmarried couples who lived with children were excluded; heterosexual couples in first marriages and remarriages were not distinguished; cross-partner effects were not compared; some of the variables assessed here (e.g., those from the social support domain) were only indirect, single-item indicators of the relevant constructs of the relationship adjustment model; other variables representing components of the model could have been selected; and only bivariate effects derived from the model were tested. Further, because the data were collected in 1978–1981, when issues regarding same-sex couples were not topics of political interest, cohort effects might have influenced responses of partners from the gay and lesbian couples in particular.

Despite these limitations, the findings from this study indicate that partners from unmarried gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples without children as well as partners from heterosexual married couples without children did not differ markedly from partners in heterosexual married couples with children in either mean levels of variables relevant to relationship functioning or in links among these variables. Thus, the preliminary findings reported here suggest that the relationship adjustment model captures what might be regarded as universal features of relationship functioning (Berscheid, 1999).

Future work could address whether the entire model, not just bivariate links derived from it, also applies to diverse types of couples. As currently presented, the model indicates that distal effects exert their influences on relationship outcomes through more proximal components of the model. For example, psychological predispositions are posited to exert their effect on relationship satisfaction through relationship schemata, social support, and partner interactions. It is also likely, however, that distal components of the model exert a direct effect on relationship outcomes separate from their effects on more proximal components of the model (e.g., Miller et al., 2003). Thus, future research could specifically use the multigroup features of most structural equation modeling programs to examine where indirect and direct effects based on the model apply to partners from diverse types of couples.

NOTE

This research used the *American Couples, 1975–1978*, data set (made accessible in 1992, computer data). These data

were collected by Pepper Schwartz and Philip Blumstein and are available through the archive of the Henry A. Murray Research Center at the Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (Producer and Distributor).

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