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The Impact of Couple Minority Stress and Perceived Relationship Equity on Relationship Satisfaction of Women in Same-Gender Relationships

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THE IMPACT OF COUPLE MINORITY STRESS AND PERCEIVED
RELATIONSHIP EQUITY ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION OF WOMEN IN
SAME-GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

By

REBEKAH ELIZABETH MALOTT, Bachelor of Science

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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RELATIONSHIP EQUITY ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION OF WOMEN IN
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test two hypotheses (H1: relationship satisfaction will mediate the relationship between perceived relationship equity and potential relationship dissolution in women in same-gender relationships. H2: Relationship satisfaction will mediate the relationship between perceived minority stressors and potential relationship dissolution in women in same-gender relationships). Participants who met the demographic profile and consented to the study were asked to complete five questionnaires: relationship equity (Kurdek, 1998), couple minority stress (Neilands et al., 2019), relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007), potential relationship dissolution, and demographics. The results showed that relationship satisfaction was a partial mediator between perceived relationship equity and potential relationship dissolution. Additionally, the results showed that relationship satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between couple minority stress and potential relationships dissolution. The current study sought to understand the reasons why women in same-gender relationships are more likely to end a relationship than all other configurations of couples (Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019).

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Introduction

Romantic relationships play an important role in many people's lives. They can provide benefits such as intimacy, humility, and a social bond (Bell & Fincham, 2017; Davis et al., 2013; Van Tongeren et al., 2014), which enhance the human experience. Instability within the relationship, however, can affect the potential benefits that relationships can provide. Stable relationships can promote emotional support and overall well-being in the relationship, whereas unstable relationships can cause distress within the relationship and, if prolonged, can ultimately lead to dissolution (Simpson, 1987). Each relationship has both unique and common challenges, such as infidelity, loss of intimacy, communication difficulties, coping with personal stress, and financial pressures (AIPC, 2010), which couples must overcome to build healthy romantic relationships. The experiences of same-gender couples differ from different-gender (i.e., cisgender man and cisgender woman) couples (Khaddouma et al., 2015), and same-gender women couples differ from same-gender men couples in meaningful ways, especially related to the dissolution of the relationship (Scott et al., 2019).

Previous research has found that same-gender relationships have less stable relationships than different-gender couples (Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Meyer, 2003). Conversely, Manning and colleagues

(2016) found that same-gender relationships were shown to be more stable than different-gender relationships, which highlights how research is not consistent. Further, these disparate findings imply that there are likely additional variables that need to be considered. Not only do individuals who are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) ¹community face predictable relational stressors, those in a relationship with someone of the same gender may face discrimination and prejudice because of their sexual orientation. Because both partners in a same-gender relationship are sexual minorities, the environmental stressors are objectively greater in these relationships than in relationships in which neither partner is a sexual minority (i.e., different-gender couples). Additional stressors such as stigma, discrimination, seeking safety as a couple, perceived unequal relationship recognition, couple-level visibility, stereotyping, lack of integration with families of origin, or lack of social support (Neilands et al., 2020), in same-gender relationships could cause additional strain within the relationship and contribute to its dissolution.

Recently, research has indicated that almost 11.7% of Americans identify as part of the LGBQ+ community (i.e., 88.3% identify as heterosexual, 3.3% as gay or lesbian, 4.4% as bisexual, 2.1% don't know and 1.9 % as something else; Anderson et al., 2021). However, even though potentially upwards of 31,123 Americans out of the 266,011 Americans who completed the U.S. Census identified as members of the LGBT

¹ To be inclusive and remain true to the target populations, the current study will use the term regarding the target populations in specific to each mentioned literature.

community, their civil rights continue to be up for debate in political arenas (Anderson et al., 2021). In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which declared that states have the option to not recognize same-gender marriages that were performed in another state (Defense of Marriage Act, 1996). Additionally, the act stated that marriage should only be recognized, by federal law, between a man and a woman (Defense of Marriage Act, 1996).

Approximately 19 years later, same-gender marriage was legalized across the United States via the Supreme Court (SCOTUS) decision of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). This landmark SCOTUS ruling granted same-gender couples the opportunity to get married in any of the 50 states (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). However, many states issued their own responses to the SCOTUS decision regarding same-gender marriage, such as the Texas Pastoral Protection Act (2015), which stated that religious organizations and individuals have the right to not perform a marriage ceremony if the ceremony violates the individual performing the ceremony's religious beliefs. In other words, same-gender couples are at risk for experiencing discrimination and rejection on the opportunity to get married from qualified officials (i.e., ordained ministers, public officials, and religious leaders) when seeking to be bond in legal matrimony.

Approximately eight years after legalizing same-gender marriages, the SCOTUS is now potentially set to debate the overturning of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, as well as *Lawrence v. Texas*, and *Loving v. Virginia*, other important landmark rulings that could potentially disproportionately impact the LGBTQ community (Stolberg, 2022). In 2022, President

Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act (2022), which protects the legal and federal recognition of interracial and same-gender marriages. This legislative act, however, does not completely guarantee the right to same-gender marriage in all 50 U.S. states but protects legal recognition of a same-gender marriage throughout the country, regardless of the state in which it was performed (Respect for Marriage Act, 2022).

Many members of the LGBTQ community face the potential loss or reduction of their rights to legal marriage recognition, as well as other controversial legal issues, which are increasing the number and severity of stressors experiences by LGBTQ community members. For example, women in the LGBTQ community are at risk for losing their right for marriage, in addition to coping with the loss of bodily autonomy with the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, another landmark SCOTUS decision (*Roe v. Wade, 1973*; Navarro et al., 2023). The current government actions and debates bring uncertainty, stress, and overall concern for protection of equal rights for LGBTQ individuals (Durso et al., 2017), concerns that affect both members of women-women relationships.

Over the last decade and because of the U.S. Supreme Court verdict legalizing same-gender marriages (*Obergefell v Hodges, 2015*), American society has made some progress in the acceptance of same-gender couples (Flores & Barclay, 2015). Despite this acceptance, fundamental differences exist between same-gender and different-gender couples (Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019). Research has shown that prejudice and discrimination can affect stress levels of members of the LGB community

(Denton et al., 2014; Frost et al., 2015; Lick et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003), who have faced discrimination about their sexual orientation that people who are in different-gender relationships likely have not.

Members of same-gender couples are 34% less likely than different-gender couples to have weekly contact with their mothers (Fischer & Kalmijn, 2020), which suggests less familial support for those in same-gender couples. Additionally, people in same-gender couples were found to have less contact with their fathers than those in different-gender couples (Fischer & Kalmijn, 2020), again, exemplifying the lack of familial support. It is possible this lack of parental relational strength could explain at least some of the stress of integrating partners of same-gender couples into families of origin and the lack of family support.

In addition to a lack of support from families of origin, same-gender couples face the stress of self-disclosure of their sexual orientation to others, also known as sexual outness (Knoble & Linville, 2010). Same-gender couples reported that being in a relationship increased their level of visibility as a sexual minority and served as a catalyst for sexual outness (Knoble & Linville, 2010). Knoble and Linville (2010) conducted a qualitative study in which participants in same-gender relationships were questioned about how their levels of sexual outness affected their relationships. Several women participants in same-gender relationships expressed how the level of sexual outness was important to them and that being out with their partner was another form of affirmation of their relationship (Knoble & Linville, 2010). Furthermore, one woman-participant stated

that hiding her relationship status created stress within the relationship and led to resentment (Knoble & Linville, 2010). Of the participants whose relationship ended, almost half reported that the varied levels of outness between them and their partner had a major negative impact on their relationship and may have ultimately contributed to the overall dissolution of the relationship itself (Knoble & Linville, 2010). Almost half of the participants stated that differences in the level of outness negatively affected relationships that ended in dissolution (Knoble & Linville, 2010).

The Minority Stress Model

In 1973, the term ‘homosexuality’ was taken out of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1973). The debate was asking whether homosexuality was a mental disorder or did society unfairly treat individuals of part of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community, which is what could have potentially caused mental disorders (Bailey, 1999; Bayer, 1981; Herek, 2004). Approximately, 29 years later, Meyer (2003) introduced the minority stress model to explain why members of the LGB community who were put in several stressful social situations experienced mental health problems (Meyer, 2003). The minority stress model was created to outline unique stressors that individuals who are sexual minorities (i.e., LGB individuals) face (Meyer, 2003). Additionally, the model was formed from several sociological and psychological theories on how social interactions can affect sense of self and well-being (Meyer, 2003). These stressors can include experiences of prejudice, discrimination, anticipation or expectations of rejection from

others, decision processes of self-disclosure or concealment, internalized stigma or negative views of one's own sexual identity, and negative views toward their same-gender partner's sexual identity. Moreover, learning to cope with these stressors was also determined to be a stressor itself (Meyer, 2003; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Physical health can also be negatively impacted as a result of stress from any of the aforementioned factors (Meyer, 2003), potentially leading to issues with increased internalized homophobia or victimization. The minority stress model was designed to facilitate an understanding of stressors that minority members face that majority members do not (Meyer, 2003).

Frost and Meyer (2009) focused on how internalized homophobia, sexual outness, community connectedness, and depressive symptoms, which often stem from environmental stressors, can impact relationship quality among LGB individuals. Depressive symptoms mediated the relationship between internalized homophobia and relationship quality, which suggested that internalized homophobia was associated with increased relationship conflict (Frost & Meyer, 2009). However, the level of outness was not a predictor of internalized homophobia. Conversely, community connectedness was negatively correlated with internalized homophobia, resulting in overall poor relationship quality (Frost & Meyer, 2009).

Meyer (2003) described the minority stress processes in LGB populations. To explain the model, Meyer (2003) emphasized that the root of stress are the circumstances in the environment, which could be general stressors, that could lead to positive or

negative mental health outcomes. Having a minority status increases the chance of experiencing a prejudicial event (e.g., discrimination or violence) and experiencing expectations of rejection, concealment, or internalized homophobia, which, overall, could lead to negative mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003). Women in same-gender relationships are, at minimum, double minorities in that they are in minoritized gender and sexual-orientation groups (and could also be in other minoritized groups as well).

One of the main reasons why same-gender couples have a higher dissolution rate than different-gender couples is due to a lack of social support from society and family (Horne & Biss, 2009; Joyner et al., 2017; Kurdek, 2005; Sun et al., 2021). This is especially true in cultures that emphasize traditional standards (i.e., bringing honor to one's family; Sun et al., 2021). It is possible that the higher levels of dissolution in same-gender relationships are due to the additional stressors relational partners experience as double minorities. Although there are several studies on minority stress, there is scant research on how minority stress can impact dissolution in same-gender women couples. Therefore, the current study focuses on the relationship minority stress has on the potential to dissolve romantic relationships among women in same-gender romantic relationships.

Relationship Equity

In 2011, researchers Hatfield and Rapson proposed the equity theory in close (i.e., romantic) relationships. This theory was proposed based on Hatfield's (1978) foundational research on the equity theory. The equity theory proposed a formula that

showed one partner's benefits minus their costs should equal the other partner's benefits minus their costs (Hatfield et al., 1978; Riley, 2018). The two sides of the relationship being unequal would lead to dissatisfaction within the relationship (Hatfield, 1983). For these reasons, relationship equity can be defined as the overall perception couples have of equality in their relationship and how that aligns with their experiences in the relationship (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011; Horne & Biss, 2009; Peplau et al., 1982; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990).

Relationship equity and relationship equality are concepts that are related to how partners in a relationship distribute resources and responsibilities (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981; Jonathan, 2009; Kurdek, 1987). Despite how similar the two concepts are, they are not the same. Relationship equality is when both partners have the same level of rights, responsibilities, and power (e.g., dividing up household chores or financial resources) within the relationship (Bauer, 2016; Carlson et al., 2020; Kurdek, 1987). The purpose of maintaining relationship equality is to ensure that both partners in the relationship have equal power in making decisions in the relationship (Mahoney & Knudson-Martin, 2009). Equity, however, is the perception of fairness and balance within a relationship (Riley, 2018; Ross, 2020). Stafford and Canary (2006) found that the partners who over-benefited from the relationship reported being more satisfied within the relationship than the partner who under-benefited. Additionally, the partner who under-benefited from the relationship reported less satisfaction within the relationship (Riley, 2018; Stafford & Canary, 2006). The primary problem with the previous research on relationship equity is

that the studies lack generalizability to same-gender relationships. Previous research focused on different-gender couples and did not account for how different the equity experiences may be for those in same-gender relationships.

The current study primarily focused on relationship equity rather than equality. However, due to the lack of research on relationship equity in women same-gender couples, foundational information was drawn from studies focusing on relationship equality in same-gender relationships. Given that equality is a prerequisite for equity, it is important to note that equality is still essential to understanding the concept of equity, therefore, the current study will remain true to the language of those respective studies (Fischer, 2021).

Overall, perceived relationship equity has been linked to perceived relationship satisfaction (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981). Previous studies have shown that women in same-gender relationships have a strong value of relationship equity (Jonathan, 2009; Peplau et al., 1982). Additionally, equity is a value that is important for both same-gender and different-gender couples and has been shown to positively predict relationship satisfaction (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981; Jonathan, 2009; Peplau et al., 1982). Kurdek (1987) found further evidence that when the perceptions of the relationship no longer seem equal, the relationship satisfaction decreased. In other words, when others' expectations or understanding of relationships were not equivalent to their experiences in the relationship, they were less satisfied with their relationship. The current study primarily focused on relational equity in same-gender couples based on the equity theory

(Hatfield et al., 1978) as well as attunement and relationship power to account for the experiences of same-gender couples.

Attunement is the response to a partner's needs and interests. This factor seems to play a significant role in many relationship dynamics, particularly the perception of relationship equity (Jonathan, 2009) and power (Jonathan & Knudson-Martin, 2012). Women participants from same-gender couples expressed that they perceived relationship equality to be "equal weight in responsibilities, respect, and access to resources" (Jonathan, 2009, p. 86). The more equal the aforementioned factors are between partners, the higher the relationship satisfaction (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Jonathan, 2009; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). Additionally, studies have found that power within the relationship is strongly related to perceived equity within a relationship (Jonathan & Knudson-Martin, 2012; Kurdek, 1994). Specifically, the more equal the power dynamic is between partners, the more equal the relationship is perceived to be by both partners. In a study conducted by Dunne (1997), findings suggested that women in same-gender relationships often express that the relationship roles between partners are close to equal. These findings were later supported by Pollitt and colleagues (2018), who suggested that same-gender women couples were unique in that gender conformity was not related to shared power within the relationship as compared to same-gender men and different-gender couples.

Other factors unrelated to relationship roles may influence perceptions of power inequality. One such indicator of perceived power inequality is financial income. Varying

income levels among partners can often determine who has the most objective power within a relationship, thereby, possibly creating inequality within a relationship that may potentially lead to lower overall relationship satisfaction (Cho et al., 2020; Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek, 1994; Toder, 1992).

Power differences related to income are not the only factor contributing to perceptions of inequality. Studies have shown that if one partner has a higher level of sexual outness than the other partner, the potential exists for differentiation in couple power dynamics, specifically when one partner holds more power than the other (Jonathan, 2009; Ossana, 2000). The partner who is not public about their sexuality holds more power over the partner who is public about their sexuality (Jonathan, 2009; Ossana, 2000). This imbalance in power dynamics is due to the readjustments one partner makes to compensate for the other partner's level of stress due to anxiety surrounding the discovery by others of their sexuality. By taking personally unnecessary extra steps to help alleviate their partner's anxiety for the sake of the relationship, the socially out partner is contributing to the ebb and flow of emotional equity.

This division of power dynamics and relationship equity does not come without cost. Research has found that in addition to the effects of power dynamics within a relationship, when sexual outness is low, satisfaction is low (Jonathan, 2009; Knoble & Linville, 2010; Ossana, 2000). Stated differently, lower levels of public sexual outness in one or both partners are associated with lower perceptions of relationship existence or validity, leading to lower satisfaction, and, potentially, relationship dissolution.

Given the nature of same-gender couples being of the same gender, traditional gender roles are often not implicit within the relationship. Therefore, same-gender relationship roles must be uniquely navigated within each relationship (Scott et al., 2018). Although previous studies have shown the effect perceived equity can have on relationship satisfaction, there is little research on how equity affects women in same-gender relationships, given that most of the previous research has been based on foundational knowledge of relationship equity theories of different-gender couples (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1987).

Relationship Satisfaction and Dissolution

Relationship satisfaction can be defined as an interpersonal positive feeling one has toward their romantic relationship and their partner (Miller & Tedder, 2011; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Relationship satisfaction has been linked to relationship equality, equity, and emotional attachment (Dalglish et al., 2015; Miller & Tedder, 2011; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Additionally, couples report higher relationship satisfaction when they have resolved a significant point of conflict or emotional distress (Dalglish et al., 2015). High levels of relationship satisfaction can contribute to enhancing emotional intimacy and increasing the social bond between two partners (Dalglish et al., 2015).

When relationship partners do not have high relationship satisfaction, they are likely to experience relationship dissolution (i.e., they end the relationship and break up; Ketcham & Bennet, 2019). Relationship dissolution occurs when one or both partners in the relationship decide to end the relationship. Ketcham and Bennet (2019) examined

differences between same-gender men and women couples. This study found that same-gender women relationships had the highest chances of dissolving. Researchers studied dissolution rates between same-gender and different-gender couples across a 12-year period. Results indicated that women in same-gender relationships were more likely to dissolve their relationships than men in same-gender relationships and those in different-gender relationships (Andersson et al., 2006; Balsam et al., 2017; Kurdek, 2004).

Khaddouma and colleagues (2015) examined factors that lead relationships to become unstable and found that women were more likely than men to end a relationship when satisfaction was low. Furthermore, women were more likely than men to dissolve their relationship when the relationship experienced low commitment and high-quality alternatives (i.e., other possible dating partners) were available.

One possible predictive factor for relationship dissolution among same-gender couples is perceived stress (Otis et al., 2006). Same-gender relationships experience stressors that do not exist (or exist to a much lesser extent) in different-gender relationships. Furthermore, research has found that women in same-gender couples are less stable than men same-gender couples and different-gender couples (Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019). Because minority stress plays an important role in relationship satisfaction, it is necessary to analyze the relationships among perceived relationship equity, minority stressors, relationship satisfaction, and relational dissolution.

Overview of Current Research

Not only do same-gender couples face normal relationship challenges, they also face societal challenges related to their same-gender nature. Furthermore, it needs to be understood why the research suggests that women who are in same-gender relationships are less likely to stay together compared to all other couples (i.e., different gender and same-gender male couples; Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019). These additional stressors likely decrease relationship satisfaction and increase the chances of relationship dissolution. Same-gender couples may face judgment from strangers as well as close others. These additional stressors could be exacerbated for same-gender women couples rather than different-gender couples.

The purpose of this study is to test two hypotheses:

- H1: Relationship satisfaction will mediate the relationship between perceived relationship equity and potential relationship dissolution (See Figure 1)
- H2: Relationship satisfaction will mediate the relationship between perceived minority stressors and potential relationship dissolution (See Figure 2)

Method

Participants

Women over the age of 18 who were in relationships with other women and who could speak and read English were recruited via social media, snowball sampling starting with known associates, and via Sona Systems², to participate in this survey. Initially, 6,000+ participants showed interest in the survey, however, 2,732 participants provided usable data. Participants' data were excluded from the analysis if they met the exclusion criteria (i.e., failed prescreening, did not complete the survey, failed two out of the three attention checks placed throughout the study, and the time it took to complete was three plus standard deviations from the mean [$M > 42,560.63$ seconds]). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 62 years old ($M = 26.8$, $SD = 6.27$). Furthermore, 45.5% of participants were within the college age range (i.e., 18 to 24 years old), whereas 54.5% of participants were older than college-age (i.e., 25 years and up). Approximately, 83.4% of participants were White, 4.8% were Black or African American, 4.4% were more than one race, 2.9% were American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.9% were unreported, 1.2% were Asian, and .8% were native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Additionally, 29.6% of

² SFASU psychology department's online research recruitment portal.

participants were Hispanic or Latina. Additionally, 52.9% of participants identified their sexual orientation as lesbian, 18.1% as bisexual, 13.4% as heterosexual, 8% as something else (i.e., asexual, asexual-panromantic, asexual-biromantic, demisexual, gay, pansexual, queer, and sapphic), and 7.1% avoided labeling. Although women were targeted for this study, 84.9% of participants identified as cisgender women, 7.8% identified as Transgender women, and 6.8% identified as something else (i.e., queer, non-binary, bi-gender, and gender fluid). The reported relationship length ranged from less than a year to 21 years, and most (68%) participants reported they were not married to their partner. Data from all participants were collected online via Qualtrics.

Measures

Informed Consent (See Appendix B). The informed consent form appeared within Qualtrics. It gave a brief introduction of the study, explained what would happen in the study, listed whom to contact if participants had any questions, and explained participants' privacy protection rights, the risk and benefits of the study, their rights as a participant, and how participants would be compensated for their participation. Participants who consented to participate selected "I agree to participate." Those who did not agree to participate were not allowed to participate in the study.

Relationship Equity (See Appendix C). At the time of the study's commencement, a same-gender relationship equity scale did not exist. To create a same-gender measure of equity, items from the *Relationship Equality Subscale* of the

Relationship Quality Scale (Kurdek, 1998) were combined with two questions about sexual outness and a single item of perceived family support to create an 11-item measure that assessed partner equity within a same-gender relationship (i.e., *Perceived Equity in Same-Gender Relationship Scale: Modified version of Relationship Equality Subscale*). Although there was already a relationship equity scale that existed (i.e., *Measuring Equity in Close Relationships*, Young & Hatfield, 2009), no previous research on same-gender relationships used the equity scale, and the Young and Hatfield (2009) scale reported lower internal consistency than the Kurdek (1998) scale. In addition, Young and Hatfield (2009) did not consider the different experiences that same-gender couples may face compared to different-gender couples, which was the population for which the scale was originally designed. Sexual outness and perceived family support are two domains that contribute to relationship equity in same-gender couples that are not experienced by different-gender couples (Jonathan, 2009; Knoble & Linville, 2010; Ossana, 2000). For this reason, sexual outness and perceived family support were included in the modified version of the *Relationship Equality Subscale* (Kurdek, 1998) (i.e., *Perceived Equity in Same-Gender Relationship Scale*). Sample items include, “My partner and I have equal power in the relationship” and “My partner shows as much affection to me as I think I show to her.” Responses were measured using a 9-point scale with anchors of Not at all true (1) and Very True (9). Participants were asked to indicate how true each of the eight statements was to their current relationship. The sexual outness items included, “To what extent are you ‘out’ about your sexual orientation with your friends and family?” and “To

what extent is your partner ‘out’ about your sexual orientation with your friends and family?” Responses were measured using a 4-point scale with anchors of Not at all (1) and Very Out (4). To account for the difference of sexual outness between partners, the partner’s sexual outness score was subtracted from the participant’s sexual outness score. The difference of sexual outness scores and perceived family support scores were transformed to fit into the 9-point Likert scale (i.e., *Relationship Equality Subscale*) using the mathematical formula as see in (i) to allow the different scales to be combined (IBM, 2020).

$$Y = \left[(B - A) * \frac{x-a}{b-a} \right] + A \quad (i)$$

Note. (i). a = original minimum value, b = original maximum value, A = new minimum value, B = new maximum value

Once scores were transformed so that all items were scored on the same Likert scale, individual question scores were averaged into a single item, with higher scores indicating more same-gender relational equity. This measure demonstrated a high internal consistency, $\alpha = .90$.

Couple Minority Stress (See Appendix D). Minority stress was assessed using the *Couple-Level Minority Stress Scale* (Neilands et al., 2019), a 55-item measure that assessed eight sublevels of stress: couple-level stigma, couple-level discrimination, seeking safety as a couple, perceived unequal relationship recognition, couple-level

visibility, managing stereotypes about same-gender couples, lack of integration with families of origin, and lack of social support for couples (Neilands et al., 2019). Sample items included, “Thinking about life right now, how much do you worry about if strangers will harm you and/or your partner if you display affection in public?” (Couple-Level Stigma subscale) and, “People we know asked that we not show affection toward one another in their presence” (Couple-Level Discrimination subscale). The responses were measured using a 5-point scale with anchors of Not at all (1) and A great deal (5). Items from each subscale were averaged, and higher scores indicated higher couple-level minority stress (Neilands et al., 2019). The eight subscales have demonstrated internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = .75$ to $\alpha = .94$ (Neilands et al., 2019).

Relationship Satisfaction (See Appendix E). Perceived relationship satisfaction was measured using the *Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-17; Funk & Rogge, 2007)*, a 17-item measure that assessed perceived relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Sample items include, “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?” and, “Our relationship is strong.” Participant’ responses were measured using a six-point scale with anchors, Never (1) and All the time (6). Scores were averaged, and higher scores indicated greater relationship satisfaction. This measure had an internal consistency of $\alpha = .98$ (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Relationship Dissolution (See Appendix F). Relationship dissolution was measured using the *Potential Relationship Dissolution* question, a single-item measure

that assessed potential relationship dissolution. Participants were asked “How likely are you and your partner to end your relationship at some point in the future?” Participants’ responses were measured using a 4-point scale with anchors ranging from, (1) very unlikely for the relationship to end at some point in the future to (4) very likely for the relationship to end at some point in the future. Higher scores indicated higher potential relationship dissolution. This item was modeled after similar questions posed by other researchers (Hall & Fincham, 2006; Koessler et al., 2019; Røsand et al., 2013).

Demographics (See Appendix G). The demographic survey assessed the self-identified sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, and the gender identification of participants. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate their current relationship length.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through links that were posted in several digital spaces (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Tiktok, etc.), shared with known associates who fit the desired demographic profile (i.e., women over 18 in monogamous relationships with other women), and SONA. Further, using snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961), all participants were encouraged to share the study link with others who fit the desired demographic profile. Data were collected using Qualtrics, an online data collection website.

Before the study began, participants were asked three pre-screening questions (i.e., Are you 18 years of age or older? Do you identify as a woman? Are you in a relationship with a person who identifies as a woman?; See Appendix A). Participants who selected “no” to any of the pre-screening questions were prohibited from continuing on to the study as they did not meet the demographic requirements. Participants who selected “yes” to all three pre-screening questions were then asked to read an Informed Consent form and indicate whether they consented to participate in the study (See Appendix B). Those who did not consent were prohibited from participating in the study.

Those who met the demographic profile and consented were then asked to complete five questionnaires: Perceived Relationship Equity for Same-Gender Relationships (created for the current study, modified from the Relationship Equality Subscale; Kurdek, 1998), Couple Minority Stress (Neilands et al., 2019), Relationship Satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007), Potential Relationship Dissolution, and Demographics (see Appendices C, D, E, F, and G, respectively). The Perceived Relationship Equality Scale, Couple Minority Stress Scale, and Relationship Satisfaction Scale appeared in random order. This randomization was done to control for potential order effects. Participants completed the Potential Relationship Dissolution item and demographics questionnaire in that order.

Following participation, participants were debriefed and compensated for their time (See Appendix H). Students enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU)

and recruited through SONA received 1 credit. Participants who were not students enrolled at SFASU had the option to be entered into a drawing for a \$20 Amazon gift card (See Appendix I and J, respectively). These participants were linked to a new survey, where they could submit their names and contact information for entry into the drawing, so that their names could not be tied to their study responses.

Results

Relationship Equity and Potential Relationship Dissolution

To assess the effect of perceived relationship equity, as measured by the Perceived Relationship Equity for Same-Gender relationships scale, on potential relationship dissolution, as measured by the potential relationship dissolution item, potential relationship dissolution was regressed on perceived relationship equity. Hypothesis one (H_1) predicted that potential relationship dissolution scores would be significantly, negatively correlated with perceived relationship equity, such that the more equity an individual perceived they had in their relationship the less likely they would perceive their relationship to dissolve in the future. Results supported this prediction ($R^2 = .30$, $\beta = -.32$, $t(2728) = -33.87$, $p < .001$). It was proposed that the above predicted pattern of results would be influenced by the mediating role of perception of relationship satisfaction. Specifically, H_1 predicted that higher relationship satisfaction would be associated with lower potential relationship dissolution. Because the direct path from the independent variable (perceived relationship equity; $M = 7.10$, $SD = 1.27$) to the dependent variable (potential relationship dissolution; $M = 1.64$, $SD = .80$) was significant in the predicted (negative) direction, the next step in the mediational model was tested.

Perceived relationship satisfaction, the proposed mediator, was regressed on perceived relationship equity, the independent variable. H_1 predicted that this relationship would be significant in a positive direction such that high levels of perceived relationship equity would be associated with increased perceptions of perceived relationship satisfaction. This relationship was significant ($R^2 = .58$, $\beta = .46$, $t(2719) = 61.29$, $p < .001$), such that higher perceived relationship equity scores ($M = 7.10$, $SD = 1.27$) were correlated with higher levels of perceived relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .81$).

Based on meditation instructions provided by Barron and Kenny (1986), the next step in testing the mediational model, regressing the dependent variable on the mediator, was performed. Potential relationship dissolution, the dependent variable, was regressed on relationship satisfaction, the proposed mediator. H_1 predicted that perceived relationship satisfaction would significantly, negatively predict potential relationship dissolution, such that the higher the levels of relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .81$), the lower the chance of potential relationship dissolution ($M = 1.64$, $SD = .80$). Results from this analysis supported the hypothesis ($R^2 = .33$, $\beta = -.57$, $t(2720) = -36.66$, $p < .001$).

To test for full mediation, the dependent variable, potential relationship dissolution, was regressed on perceived relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship equity. H_1 predicted that, when including the mediator in the model, the direct path from independent variable (relationship equity) to dependent variable (potential relationship dissolution)- would no longer be significant, indicating full mediation. Results partially supported this

prediction, indicating partial mediation ($R^2 = .35$, $\beta = -.15$, $t(2718) = -10.58$, $p < .001$). Perceived relationship equity had a direct effect on potential relationship dissolution and had an indirect effect on potential relationship dissolution through the mediator, relationship satisfaction, after the full mediational analysis was completed (See Figure 3). Together, these results suggest that relationship satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between perceived equity and potential relationship dissolution.

Minority Stress and Potential Relationship Dissolution

To assess the effect of couple minority stress, as measured by the couple-level minority stress scale, on potential relationship dissolution, as measured by the potential relationship dissolution scale, potential relationship dissolution was regressed on minority stress. Hypothesis two (H_2) predicted that, higher potential relationship dissolution scores would be significantly, positively correlated with couple minority stress, as the more external stress an individual feels they have in their relationship the more likely to perceive their relationship to dissolve in the future. Results supported this prediction ($R^2 = .01$, $\beta = .25$, $t(729) = 2.39$, $p = .017$). It was proposed that the above predicted pattern of results would be affected by the mediating role of perception of relationship satisfaction. In other words, it was predicted that higher relationship satisfaction would be associated with increased levels of potential relationship dissolution, which in turn would be associated with higher levels of couple minority stress. Because the direct path from the independent variable (minority stress; $M = 2.91$, $SD = .28$) to the dependent variable (potential

relationship dissolution; $M = 2.10$, $SD = .80$) was significant in the predicted (positive) direction, the next step in the mediational model was tested.

Perceived relationship satisfaction, the proposed mediator, was regressed on couple minority stress, the independent variable. H_2 predicted that this relationship would be significant in a negative direction such that higher perceived relationship satisfaction would be predictive of lower couple minority stress. This relationship was significant ($R^2 = .04$, $\beta = -.49$, $t(725) = -5.65$, $p < .001$), such that lower couple minority stress scores ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .28$) resulted in higher levels of perceived relationship satisfaction ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .67$).

Based on meditation instructions provided by Barron and Kenny (1986), the next step in testing the mediational model, regressing the dependent variable on the mediator, was performed. Potential relationship dissolution, the dependent variable, was regressed on relationship satisfaction, the proposed mediator. H_2 predicted that perceived relationship satisfaction would significantly, negatively predict potential relationship dissolution, such that higher levels of relationship satisfaction would be associated with lower chances of potential relationship dissolution. Results from this analysis supported the hypothesis ($R^2 = .33$, $\beta = -.57$, $t(2720) = -36.66$, $p < .001$).

To test for full mediation, the dependent variable, potential relationship dissolution, was regressed on perceived relationship satisfaction and couple minority stress. H_2

predicted that, when including the mediator in the model, the direct path from independent variable (couple minority stress) to dependent variable (potential relationship dissolution) would no longer be significant. Results did support this prediction, indicating full mediation ($R^2 = .28$, $\beta = -.04$, $t(724) = -.43$, $p = .665$). Couple minority stress affected potential relationship dissolution by influencing the perceived relationship satisfaction (See Figure 4).

Discussion

The current study contributes to the body of research on same-gender relationships among women and the understanding of the differences between same-gender and different-gender relationships. The current study sought to understand the reasons why women in same-gender couples are more likely to end a relationship than all other configurations of couples (Joyner et al., 2017; Ketcham & Bennett, 2019). This study focused on two important factors, those that are internal and external (i.e., relationship equity and minority stress), that impact women in same-gender romantic relationships.

H₁ predicted that relationship satisfaction would mediate the relationship between perceived relationship equity and potential relationship dissolution. It was found that the results of the study partially supported this hypothesis. In other words, an individual's perception of the level of equity in their own romantic relationship with their partner can impact their satisfaction level with the relationship, which can impact the potential of dissolving the relationship. Given that the results yielded only partial mediation, it is important to study other variables that might also influence this relationship. Regardless, perception of relationship equity still had a direct effect on potentially dissolving the romantic relationship.

H₂ predicted that relationship satisfaction would mediate the relationship between perceived minority stressors and potential relationship dissolution. It was found that the results of the study fully supported this hypothesis. In other words, the level of external (societal) stressors (i.e., stigma, discrimination, couple-level visibility, seeking safety as a couple, lack of social support, lack of family support, perceived unequal relationship recognition, and stereotyping) an individual encountered had an impact on satisfaction in their own romantic relationship. Furthermore, the impact on relationship satisfaction indirectly affected the levels of potentially dissolving the relationship.

Overall, the current study found that relationship satisfaction plays a key role in the chances of potentially dissolving the relationship. These results echo previous findings showing that women strongly value satisfaction levels within a relationship (Khaddouma et al., 2015). Furthermore, these results suggest that, because women value satisfaction within the relationship, when satisfaction decreases, the decrease impacts the likelihood of the relationship ending. Additionally, the results from the current study support previous research on the importance woman place on perceiving their relationship to be equitable. In order for the relationship to be maintained, women must be gaining just as much they are giving to the efforts of maintaining the relationship with the other partner involved (Hatfield et al., 1978; Jonathan, 2009).

The results of this study further our knowledge on how better to understand the conflict within women same-gender relationships and what methods, if any, can be

sufficiently used to resolve the problems that arise in the relationships. In order to find solutions to conflicts, it is important to understand the origin of the conflict (Segal et al., 2023). The current study provided an insight for members of the LGBTQ+ community and those supporting members of this community regarding same-gender relationships amongst women. Results from this study further the knowledge of the potential impact society has on LGBTQ+ members in their personal, romantic relationships. Furthermore, this study could potentially serve to educate individuals who are not in the LGBTQ+ community on the universality of the effects of outside influences on any kind of romantic relationship.

Although, the current study investigated potential factors that play a role in dissolving relationships, it is important to note that the current study also showed that women same-gender relationships are not necessarily “unstable,” such as previous research may have suggested. It could be inferred that instability could be derived from low relationship equity and high minority (societal) stress. Furthermore, the current study found additional evidence to suggest that women tend to stay in relationships that feel the most equitable to them. Therefore, it could be inferred that the couples who do stay together could be viewed as “stable” due to their perceptions within the relationship.

Additionally, if women’s same-gender relationships are the most likely to dissolve, women in these relationships may never reap the benefits of marriage (Bell & Fincham, 2017; Davis et al., 2013; Frech & Williams, 2007; GetLegal, 2023; Guillen,

2022; Van Tongeren et al., 2014). The current United States government recognizes marriage as a legally binding union. Relationships that are not bound by matrimony do not have the same benefits under the law as do couples who are not legally married. Examples of such legal benefits include Social Security survivor benefits, Medicare, and disability benefits for spouses (GetLegal, 2023; Guillen, 2022).

Understanding the factors that predict relationship dissolution could also benefit couples' therapists, who may see issues of same-gender relationship instability in their clinics. Educating marriage and family therapists and counselors about the unique pressures facing those in same-gender relationships may increase the likelihood these women can develop and maintain satisfying and healthy relationship, which could lead to marriage and the benefits that marriage affords.

Limitations

Although this study provides insights into the factors that affect relationship satisfaction and dissolution, it was not without limitations. This study was conducted entirely by self-report using snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) and primarily via social media. The obtained results may not be easily generalizable, as the sample was not randomly selected. Additionally, there is no manipulation of the independent variable or control group used, so no causations should be inferred. Moreover, the *Perceived Equity in Same-Gender Relationship Scale* created for the current study, despite the reported high internal consistency, may not have measured actual relationship equity. It is possible

the scale measured *perceived* relationship equality, seeing as the perception of equity and equality are closely related.

Future Research

Although the results from this study add to a growing body of literature on the experiences of those in the LGBTQ+ community, there is still much to know about the similarities and difference between relationship partners' experiences in men and women same-gender relationships and different-gender relationships. Furthermore, future research should consider investigating relationships and minority stress for those who are non-binary. Because 7.8% of women in this study identified as trans, future research should examine the relationship experiences of trans folx to determine whether the experiences of cisgender women in same-gender relations mirror those of others in the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, future research should study how relationship equity and minority stress affect same-gender men couples. Additionally, the relationship between the level of sexual outness and sexual orientations needs to be investigated.

Future research should seek to investigate longitudinal effects that relationship equity, minority stress, and relationship satisfaction have on relationship dissolution as well as the comparison of those variables amongst married and non-married couples. Tracking relationship partners across time would allow for data collection about actual relationship dissolution rather than perceived likelihood of dissolution.

Conclusion

Romantic relationships, particularly long, stable ones that lead to marriage, afford relationship partners many benefits (Bell & Fincham, 2017; Davis et al., 2013; GetLegal, 2023; Van Tongeren et al., 2014). Because women are more likely than men to end relationships (Sprecher, 1994), relationships involving two women are the most likely to end (Andersson et al., 2006; Balsam et al., 2017; Kurdek, 2004). Research from the current study found that relationship satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between relationship equity and likelihood of dissolution and fully mediated the relationship between couple minority stress and likelihood of dissolution. Together, these studies provide evidence that relationship equity and couple minority stress play pivotal roles in whether women in same-gender relationships stay together.

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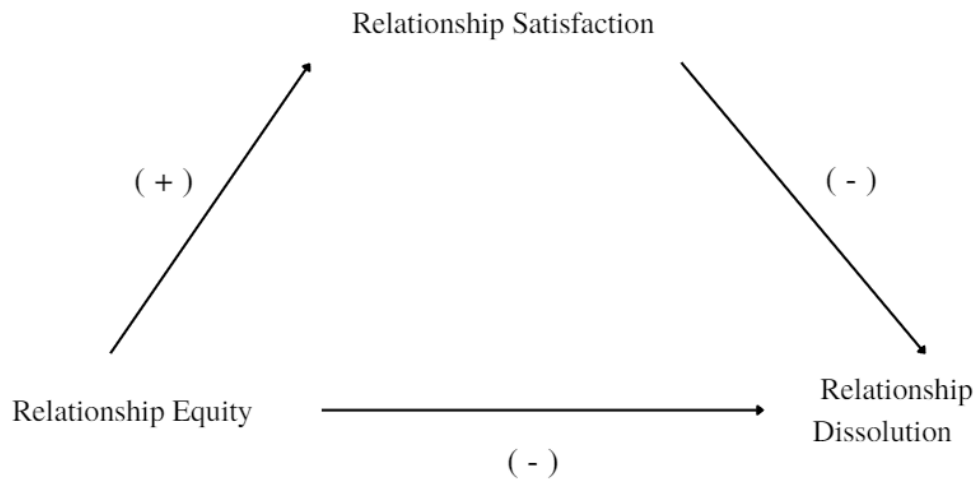
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Figure 1

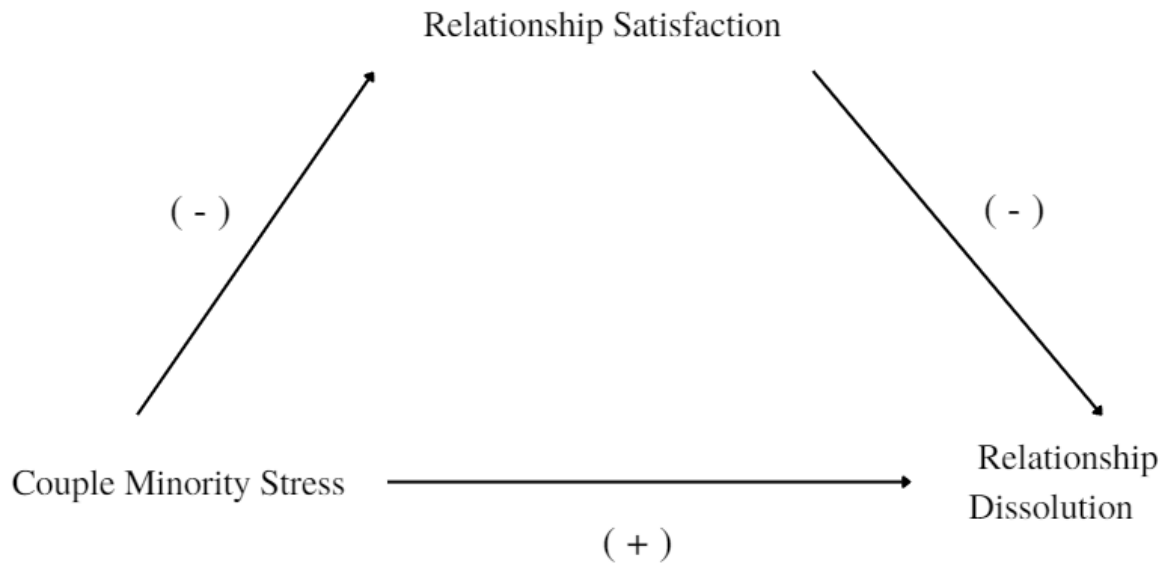
Proposed Model for H1 Mediation



Note. This model was produced by Baron and Kenny (1986) to analyze a regression mediational hypothesis. It is predicted that the independent variable (relationship equity) will predict the outcome of the dependent variable (relationship dissolution), and the independent variable will predict the mediator (relationship satisfaction).

Figure 2

Proposed Model for H2 Mediation



Note. This model was produced by Baron and Kenny (1986) to analyze a regression mediational hypothesis. It is predicted that the independent variable (couple minority stress) will predict the outcome of the dependent variable (relationship dissolution), and the independent variable will predict the mediator (relationship satisfaction).

Appendix A
Pre-screening Questions

Thank you for your interest in this study. Please answer a few questions to determine your study eligibility.

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Do you identify as a woman?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Are you in a relationship with a person who identifies as a woman?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

*If response **No** is selected on any of the above questions, participants will be shown the statement below.*

Unfortunately, based on your response, you are not eligible to complete this study.

If response Yes is selected for all three of the above questions, participants will be shown the statement below.

Congratulations! You are eligible to participate in this study. Please click the arrows below to begin.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Study Title: The Impact of Minority Stress and Perceived Relationship Equity on Relationship Satisfaction of Women in Same-Gender Relationships

Introduction to the Study: Thank you for your interest in this study. Today we are interested in three factors in your current relationship: relationship equity, couple minority stress, and overall relationship satisfaction.

Purpose of the study: We are interested in factors that influence relationships between self-identified women. Specifically, we are interested in knowing how things like perceived relationship equity, stress, and satisfaction affect women in relationships with other women. As a self-identified woman, we'd like to ask you some questions about your relationship.

What will happen during the study: You will be asked to fill out four questionnaires. Participation in this study will take you approximately 30 minutes.

Who to go to with questions: If you have any questions or concerns about being in this study, you should contact Rebekah Malott at parrishre@jacks.sfasu.edu or Dr. Lauren E. Brewer at brewerle@sfasu.edu. The researchers may also be reached by phone through the Psychology department at Stephen F. Austin State University: (936) 468-4402. Additionally, you may also contact the Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at orsp@sfasu.edu or 936-468-6606 if you would like more information regarding your rights as a research participant.

How participants' privacy is protected: The records of this study will be kept private. Your name will not be attached to answers you provide. The investigators will have access to the raw data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

Once collected, all data will be kept in secured files, in accordance with the standards of SFASU, federal regulations, and the American Psychological Association. In addition, please remember that the researchers are not interested in any individual person's responses. We are interested in how people respond, in general.

Risks and Benefits: There are certain risks (or discomforts) associated with this research, which may include deep reflection regarding their own romantic relationship. There are no direct benefits associated with your participation in this research other than the enhancement of scientific knowledge. Those experiencing psychological distress are encouraged to contact psychological services in their area. Those in Texas may be able to contact the SFA Counseling Center (<https://www.sfasu.edu/counseling>).

Your rights: Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this study or withdraw your consent at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or withdraw. You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable or any question you do not wish to answer.

Compensation: Following participation, students recruited from participating introductory psychology classes will receive 1 credit for every 30 minutes of research participation. This study is worth 1 credit. Students from other classes will receive credit in that class in an amount that is considered appropriate by the course instructor (e.g., 5 points extra credit or 1-2% of the overall points possible in the class). Participants who are not students enrolled at SFASU will have the option to be entered into a raffle drawing for a \$20 Amazon gift card.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least 18 years of age, and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. I have read the information in this consent form.

I agree to be part of this study

I do NOT agree to be part of this study

Appendix C

Instructions: In this study you will be asked a series of questions. Please read the instructions and answer the questions carefully. We ask that you respond openly and honestly as possible; there are no right or wrong answers. Click the arrows below to begin.

Perceived Equity for Same-Gender Relationships³

Instructions: The following questions should be answered using the following scale.

Please refer to the scale before answering each question.

1. My partner and I have equal power in the relationship
2. My partner shows as much affection to me as I think I show to her
3. My partner and I invest equal amounts of time and energy in the relationship
4. My partner and I are equally committed to working out problems that occur in our relationship
5. All things considered, my partner and I contribute an equal amount to the relationship
6. My partner and I deal with each other as equals
7. My partner treats me and respects me as an equal
8. My partner depends on me as much as I depend on her

³ Modified version of Relationship Equality Subscale (Kurdek, 1998).

Response categories for all 8 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

9 = Very true

1) To what extent are you “out” about your sexual orientation with your friends and family?

1. Not at all

2. Not very out

3. Somewhat out

4. Very out

2) To what extent is your partner “out” about your sexual orientation with your friends and family?

1. Not at all

2. Not very out

3. Somewhat out

4. Very out

3) To what extent do you feel supported by your family regarding your relationship with your partner?

1. Not at all supported
2. Not very supported
3. Neither supported nor not supported
4. Somewhat supported
5. Very supported

Appendix D

Couple-Level Minority Stress Scale (Neilands et al., 2019)

(1) Couple-Level Stigma

Thinking about life right now, how much worry do you have about the following regarding your romantic relationship?

1. If something happens to one of us the hospital won't recognize me or my partner.
2. Strangers will hassle us when we're eating in restaurants.
3. Showing affection for my partner when we are in new environments/unfamiliar places.
4. Strangers will harm us if we display affection in public.
5. Social situations may require me to explain more about my relationship than I want.
6. Our neighbors will discriminate against us.
7. That if something happens to my partner, her family won't allow me to be included in the management of her affairs.
8. That if something happens to me, my family won't allow my partner to be included in the management of my affairs.
9. Retirement communities and nursing homes won't be accepting of us.
10. My relationship with partner would negative affect my chances of getting or keeping a job.

Response categories for all 10 survey items:

1 = Not at all

1 = A little

2 = A moderate amount

3 = A lot

5 = A great deal

Decline to answer

(2) Couple-Level Discrimination

Please indicate how often in the past year the following things have happened to you and your partner:

1. People we know asked that we not show affection toward one another in their presence.
2. People we know asked us to hide physical displays of affection (for example: hugging or kissing) towards one another around children.
3. We received poor service in restaurants or stores.
4. People we know sat or stood away from us when we were together in public.
5. We were harassed when we were out in public together.
6. We have been denied the right to be together in health care settings (e.g., to visit one another in the hospital).
7. People we know went out of their way to avoid talking about our relationship.
8. People we know said they wished my partner was the “opposite sex.”
9. We were made fun of when we were out in public together.
10. At times when we talked about our life as a couple, people we know cut us off or tried to change the subject.

Response categories for all 10 survey items:

1 = Never

1 = Rarely

2 = Sometimes

3 = Often

5 = Always

Decline to answer

(3) Seeking Safety as a Couple

Thinking about life right now... Please tell us how true the following statements are for you and your partner.

1. When planning travel, we consider whether potential destinations are accepting of us as a couple.
2. We would like to move to a new city or neighborhood that is more accepting of us as a couple.
3. We have to be cautious when traveling to less tolerant areas.
4. There are places we would never consider living as a couple.
5. We try to work with professionals (for example: attorneys and health service providers) that we know are accepting of other couples like us.
6. When choosing where to live, it is important to find a neighborhood where there are other couples like us.
7. We choose to shop at stores where we feel welcomed as a couple

Response categories for all 7 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

1 = Somewhat true

2 = Moderately true

3 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

(4) Perceived Unequal Relationship Recognition

Thinking about life right now... How true are the following statements for you and your partner?

1. Important milestones (for example: buying a house or writing a will) are complicated for us.
2. It is difficult for us to keep up with the changing legal status of same-sex relationships.
3. It is harder for us to file our tax returns than it is for other couples.

Response categories for all 3 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

1 = Somewhat true

2 = Moderately true

3 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

(5) Couple-Level Visibility

Please indicate how often you and your partner have done the following in the past year.

1. We tried to hide our relationship to avoid making others feel uncomfortable.
2. We went “back in the closet” when traveling to conservative or unfamiliar places.
3. We avoided displaying LGBTQ identified symbols (for example: Rainbow Flag, Pink Triangle) at our home or on our car(s).
4. We avoided social interactions that might require us to answer questions about our relationship.
5. We avoided talking about our relationship.
6. We misrepresented one another as friends, roommates, siblings, cousins, etc.
7. We found it challenging to tell people about our relationship.
8. We had to come out as a couple in order to get the things we want in life.

Thinking about life right now... How true are the following statements for you and your partner?

9. I wrestle with whether it's easier to go to important events alone or with my partner.

Response categories for survey items 1–8:

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Sometimes

4 = Often

5 = Always

Decline to answer

Response categories for survey item 9:

1 = Not at all true

2 = Somewhat true

3 = Moderately true

4 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

(6) Managing Stereotypes about Same-Sex Couples

Thinking about life right now... How true are the following statements for you and your partner?

1. There are no good role models for how to be in a same-gender relationship.
2. We have to make our own rules about what it is like to be in a same-gender couple.

Thinking about people you and your partner encounter in your everyday lives... How true are the following statements? In general...

3. People assume one of us is more like “the man” in the relationship and the other is more like “the woman” in the relationship.
4. People think our relationship is mainly about sex.
5. People assume we do not want to be parents.
6. People assume we have an open or non-monogamous relationship.

Response categories for all 6 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

2 = Somewhat true

3 = Moderately true

4 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

(7) Lack of Integration with Families of Origin

Thinking about your life right now... How true are the following statements?

1. We prefer to attend family holidays and events together.
2. My family acknowledges that my partner and I are in a relationship with each other.
3. My partner's family acknowledges that we are in a relationship with each other.
4. My family invites my partner to family holidays or events.
5. My partner's family invites me to family holidays or events.
6. We include our families in our celebrations and events.

Response categories for all 6 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

2 = Somewhat true

3 = Moderately true

4 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

(8) Lack of Social Support for Couples

Thinking about your life right now... How true are the following statements?

1. There is no one that partner and I can call when we are having a rough time in our relationship.
2. There are people we know who are rooting for us to make it as a couple.
3. People we know support our efforts to achieve our goals as a couple.
4. People we know take concerns about our safety seriously.

Response categories for all 4 survey items:

1 = Not at all true

2 = Somewhat true

3 = Moderately true

4 = Mostly true

5 = Completely true

Decline to answer

Appendix E

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-17)

Instructions: Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
	5	4	3	2	1	0

	Not at all TRUE	A little TRUE	Somewhat TRUE	Mostly TRUE	Almost Completely TRUE	Completely TRUE
Our relationship is strong	0	1	2	3	4	5

My relationship with my partner makes me happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
I really feel like part of a team with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?	0	1	2	3	4	5
How well does your partner meet your needs?	0	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	0	1	2	3	4	5
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*. Base your responses on your first impression and immediate feelings about the item.

Interesting	5	4	3	2	1	0	Boring
Bad	0	1	2	3	4	5	Good

Full	5	4	3	2	1	0	Empty
Sturdy	5	4	3	2	1	0	Fragile
Discouraging	0	1	2	3	4	5	Hopeful
Enjoyable	5	4	3	2	1	0	Miserable

Appendix F

Potential Relationship Dissolution Item

1. How likely are you and your partner to end your relationship at some point in the future?

1- very unlikely for the relationship to end at some point in the future

2- somewhat unlikely for the relationship to end at some point in the future

3- somewhat likely for the relationship to end at some point in the future

4- very likely for the relationship to end at some point in the future

Appendix G
Demographics

Instructions: Please provide the following information.

- 1) How do you describe your sexual orientation?
 - a. Bisexual
 - b. Lesbian
 - c. Heterosexual
 - d. Avoid labeling
 - e. Other (please specify)

- 2) How does your partner describe her sexual orientation?
 - a. Bisexual
 - b. Lesbian
 - c. Heterosexual
 - d. Avoid labeling
 - e. Other (please specify)

- 3) What is your gender identity?
 - a. Transgender woman
 - b. Cisgender woman
 - c. Other (please specify)

- 4) What is your partner's gender identity?
 - a. Transgender
 - b. Cisgender
 - c. Other (please specify)

- 5) Age (in years): _____

- 6) Please state your ethnicity (choose ONE)

- a. Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- b. Not Hispanic or Latino/a/x

7) What is your race?

- a. American Indian/Alaska Native
- b. Asian
- c. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- d. Black or African American
- e. White
- f. More than one race
- g. Unknown or not reported

8) How long have you and your partner been together? (In months; 12 months = 1 year)

9) Are you and your partner legally married?

- a. Yes
- b. No

10) Do you and/or your partner have children?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11) What is your average annual salary before tax (in US Dollars)? _____

12) What is your highest level of education?

- a. High School Diploma or GED
- b. Some College
- c. Associates Degree
- d. Bachelor's Degree
- e. Master's Degree
- f. PhD or MD Degree

13) Did your partner take this same survey as well?

a. Yes

b. No

Appendix H

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in the present study, *The Impact of Minority Stress and Perceived Relationship Equity on Relationship Satisfaction of Women in Same-Sex Relationships*. The purpose of the current research is to further the knowledge of factors that affect women in same-sex relationships to help the process of enhancing relationship models for same-sex couples. It was hypothesized that relationship equity and couple minority stress may interact with and can predict overall relationship satisfaction for women in same-sex relationships.

Your time and participation are appreciated. Following this debriefing, you will have the opportunity to complete a survey that will enter you into a raffle drawing of potentially winning a \$20 Amazon gift card. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Rebekah Parrish at parrishre@jacks.sfasu.edu or Dr. Brewer at brewerle@sfasu.edu. The researchers may also be reached by phone through the department of Psychology at Stephen F. Austin State University: (936) 468-4402. Additionally, you may also contact the Stephen F. Austin State University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at orsp@sfasu.edu or 936-468-6606 if you would like more information regarding any questions or concerns. Thank you.

Appendix I

Drawing Pre-Screening Questions

1. Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please pick the answer below that fits you best.

- a) I am a student enrolled in a psychology course at SFASU
- b) I am a student enrolled at SFASU but not enrolled in a psychology course
- c) I am not a student enrolled at SFASU

If response was either "a" or "b," participants saw the screen below.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

If response was "c," participants saw the screen below.

Congratulations! You are eligible to enter a drawing for a \$20 Amazon gift card. Please click the link below to enter the drawing.

Click [HERE](#) to enter drawing

Appendix J

Drawing

Congratulations! You have been selected to enter our drawing for a \$20 Amazon gift card for completing this survey. Please enter your name and a good contact email address.

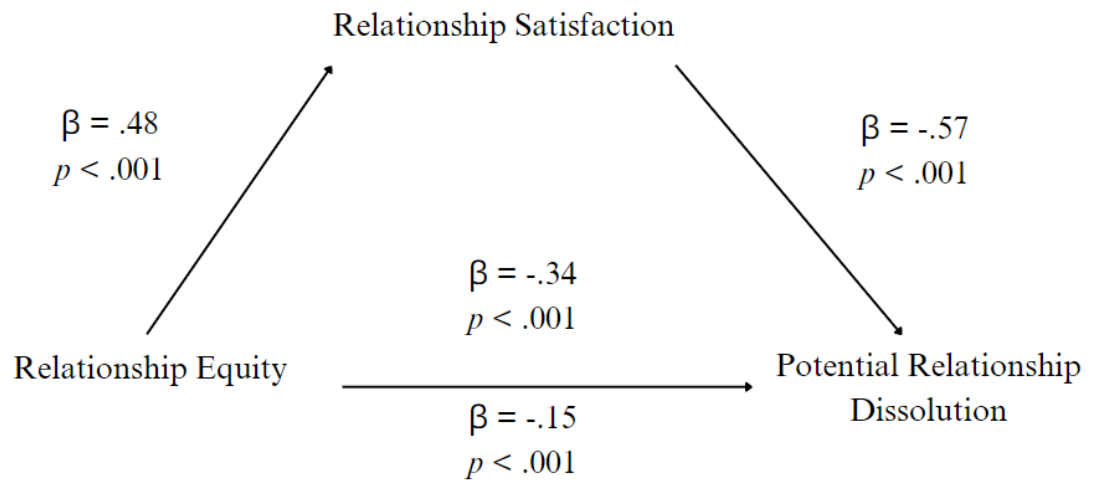
Disclaimer: Name will be used for raffle purposes only. Information will remain confidential between the researcher and the participant. There will be no public announcement of the winner.

Name:

Email Address:

Figure 3

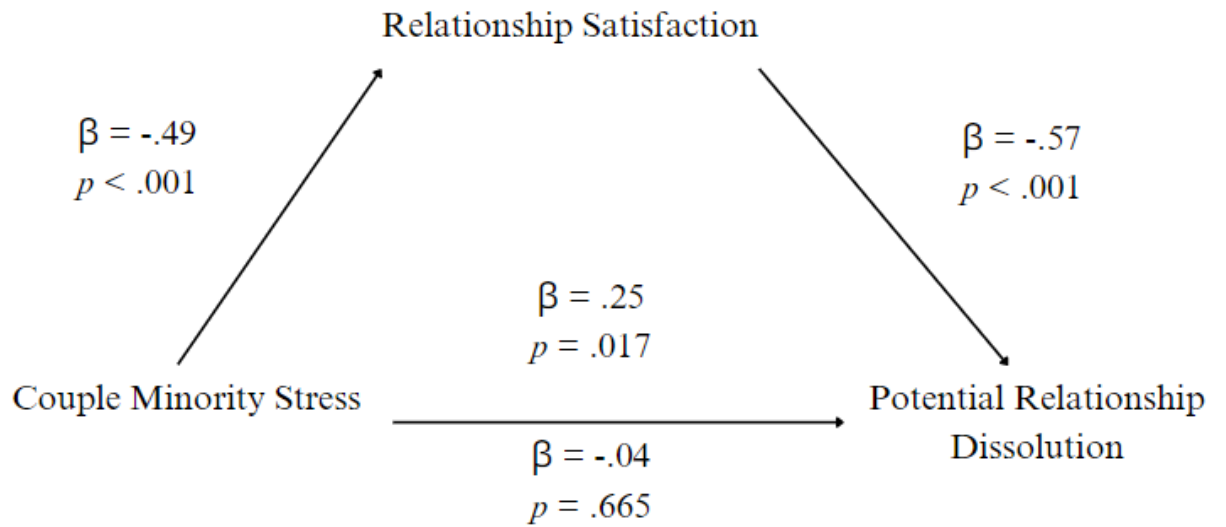
Model for H1 Mediation Results



Note. This figure shows the effect of relationship satisfaction on the relationship between relationship equity and potential relationship dissolution. Results supported partial mediation, given the independent variable (relationship equity) was still significant when the last step of the multiple regression analysis was run.

Figure 4

Model for H2 Mediation Results



Note. This figure shows the effect of relationship satisfaction on the relationship between couple minority stress and potential relationship dissolution. Full Mediation was significant.

VITA

After completing her work at Cy-Fair High School, Houston, Texas, in 2016, Rebekah Malott entered Stephen F. Austin State University at Nacogdoches, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Science of psychology and a minor in combined sciences from Stephen F. Austin State University in May 2020. In August of 2020, she entered the Graduate School of Stephen F. Austin State University and received the degree of Master of Arts of psychology in May of 2023.

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This thesis was typed by Rebekah E. Malott.