Gender-Identity and Gender-Ideology Discrepancies in Same-Sex Relationships

Kayla Montaque

Haverford College

Thesis Advisor: Benjamin Le
Second Reader: Shu-wen Wang
Abstract

Gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies were examined in individuals currently in same-sex romantic relationships. Gender-identity discrepancy is a discrepancy between your biological sex and gendered behavior. Gender-ideology discrepancy is a discrepancy between your gendered behavior and your ideology towards gender roles. In this study, gender-ideology discrepancy predicted avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, low relationship satisfaction, and high commitment. Gender-identity discrepancy predicted avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, positive well-being, and high relationship satisfaction. In addition, avoidant attachment negatively predicted relationship satisfaction. Lastly, relationship satisfaction predicted positive well-being. Together, these findings suggest that gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies interact differently with various dynamics of romantic relationships, avoidantly attached partners are less satisfied with their relationship, and homosexuals who are more satisfied with their relationships have greater well-being.

*Keywords:* gender, identity, ideology, discrepancies, same-sex relationships
The Effects of Sex-Identity and Gender-Role Discrepancies in Same-Sex Relationships

Does a lesbian consider herself a woman? Or has Freud and much of the world have implied, is she but a man in drag; not a real woman and only a copy of a man (D’Ercole, 1996)? These lines from *Postmodern Ideas About Gender and Sexuality*, illustrate how society constructs lesbians as less feminine and entirely masculine. It is precisely these attacks against homosexual individuals that hinder their satisfaction with life and acceptance of their true identity. Even in romantic relationships, homosexual partners do not fully accept or feel satisfied with their identity (D’Ercole, 1996). Thus, one’s perception and construction of their identity and its approval by others is important for their self-positivity and general well-being (D’Ercole, 1996). Because the realities of gays and lesbians are continuously reinforced by social expectancies and stigmatization, homosexuals may experience internal discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). However, little research has examined the effects of homosexual identity-discrepancies within their romantic involvements (Sharma & Sharman, 2009). We know virtually nothing about the implications of such discrepancies when they are directed at both partners in close relationships. The present study aims to further enhance our understanding of identity-discrepancies by exploring its effects on attachment styles, subjective well-being, and relationship quality, for homosexuals in romantic partnerships.

**Gender and Identity**

Self-identity, consists of personal and role identities that ultimately establish and maintain its connection to a broader entity called social identity (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Personal identities are one’s self-definitions of their unique and idiosyncratic characteristics (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). In other words, personal identities relate to how one creates a conscious sense of their individual uniqueness. At the same time, role identities characterize the self as a person who performs a particular role (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). A growing body of research
maintains that successful role identities greatly influence one’s personal identity and overall contentment with their self-identity. Specifically, to the extent that individuals perceive themselves as successfully enacting roles, they experience a positive or negative sense of self in addition to an enhanced (or reduced mental) health and well-being (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Since negative internalizations of identity acceptance can be detrimental to a person’s mental health and well-being, it is relevant to address different types of role identities and social expectancies that cause such internalizations.

One type of role identity is gender. Despite conflicting definitions, gender is commonly regarded as the physical and social condition of being male, female, or intersex (Chang, 2011). A person acquires his or her gender identity through repeated behaviors and actions that either solidify or contradict the social norms for that gender (Bailey, Linsenmeier, & Skidmore, 2006). In other words, gender identity is constructed and reinforced by norms that dictate gender differences (Acitelli et al., 1999). According to one source, discussions on gender identity suggest that girls tend to develop and define their gender identity in terms of the attachments they form with others (Acitelli et al., 1999). Boys however, tend to develop and define their identities with a greater sense of separateness and independence from others (Acitelli et al., 1999). Such findings indicate that female gender identities are more relational and dependent upon close involvements, while male gender identities are more independent and autonomous (Acitelli et al., 1999). From this perspective, masculinity and femininity depend on the degree to which female behavior is consistent with conventions for female gender, and vice versa for male behavior.

There are many reasons why men and women vary in their masculinity and femininity. Many studies have linked gender role ideology to this focus. Gender role ideology is defined as an individual’s attitudes and beliefs about proper roles for men and women (Fitzpatrick et al.,
2004). It is based on expectations from societal values of women and men, their occupations, and their capacity for performing their gendered roles (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2004). For example, one’s gender ideology for female roles within the home might reflect societal expectations of female domesticity. Likewise, it is important to note that gender-role ideology is conceptualized in terms a traditional-nontraditional dimension. Studies on gender-role ideology tend to focus more on the extent to which one believes a woman should move beyond roles or expectations represented by traditional standards (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). According to Chang (2011), the ideal notion of a woman traditionally expects that they bear most responsibilities in childrearing and housework. For men, they are expected to be the main breadwinners for households, have less housework responsibilities, and exercise their greater importance in the realm of politics (Chang, 2011).

A significant amount of psychological research on gender-role ideology has recently begun to include dimensions of equality (specifically, egalitarianism) in respect to men and women’s role behaviors (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). At the same time, there is still more to be discovered on gender and role conformity. Specifically, researchers have not directly examined orientation in regards to role expectancies and gender ideology. Similar to heterosexual male and females, societal expectancies for homosexual individuals influence their attitudes and performance of their gender roles. For example, common stereotypes portray gay men as more feminine than heterosexual men and lesbian women as more masculine than heterosexual women (Lippa, 2000). However, there is a kernel of truth to these stereotypes, as gay men report greater feminine attributes in comparison to heterosexual men, while lesbians report greater masculine attributes in comparison to heterosexual women (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012). In fact, research suggests that interests for gay men tend to be more female-typical, whereas lesbian interests tend to be more male-typical (Lippa, 2000). Similarly, in comparison to heterosexual men, gay men are less likely to possess
traditionally masculine physical characteristics, traits, roles, and occupations, and more likely to possess traditionally feminine characteristics and traits (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). These qualities include feminine mannerisms, vocal acoustics, and walking styles (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006).

Gays and lesbians both receive negative evaluations regarding their gender-typical violations, however these violations are viewed far more negatively for males than females (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012). Since stereotypical masculine characteristics are more socially desirable than feminine characteristics in either gender, people tend to more disapproval of gay men’s violations of masculinity (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012). Thus, the reality of these gendered ideals affect how gay men feel about themselves and their self-identity. Greater conflict with masculine ideals has been shown to be associated with lower self-esteem and greater depression and anxiety among gay men (Greenberg, Liu, Sanchez, & Vilain, 2009). Additionally, gay men who are concerned with conforming to traditional masculine ideals are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction if their bodies do not meet the physically powerful masculine ideal prescribed by social norms (Greenberg, Liu, Sanchez, & Vilain, 2009). Hence, the more gay men are concerned with conforming to societal constructs of the “ideal man”, the more likely they are to experience constant negative arousal that is detrimental to their psychological well-being (Greenberg, Liu, Sanchez, & Vilain, 2009).

Lesbians are also affected by social disapproval of their gender-atypical traits. Studies indicate that lesbians who display higher masculinity on the femininity-masculinity scale for Heterosexuals face the challenge of building positive feelings towards being a lesbian and the uncertainty of social support for their identity (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010). In regards to mental health, Peplau’s (1995) study found that for lesbian women, perceived support from others is strongly related to their well-being. Other studies found that internalized homo-
negativity (e.g., negative feelings about one’s sexual orientation) and the fear of being judged by others are the two most significant difficulties faced by lesbians, in addition to their high levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010). Together, these studies suggest that both positive internalizations of identity and strong social support contribute to lesbians’ well-being. Therefore, to the extent that mental health and well-being are negatively associated with dissatisfaction of same-sex identities, similarities may be expected from the contribution of other variables (e.g., self-discrepancies) that upset homosexual identity.

**Gender and Self-Discrepancy Theory**

Individuals strive for consistency in their identity. This entails congruence between their view of themselves (identity standard) and their perceptions of how others see them (reflected appraisals) (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004). When inconsistencies arise between one’s identity standards and reflected appraisals, the individual acts in ways that bring the reflected appraisals more in line with their identity standard (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004). What motivates an individual to act upon an inconsistency? Research on self-consistency theory, proposes that attitude-discrepant-behavior creates negative arousal by reducing one’s sense of being a good and competent person (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004). Accordingly, when individuals receive information that threatens the self-impressions they want to maintain, they attempt to reduce this dissonance by compensating in their behavior, attitudes, and self-descriptions (Kroska, 2009). By engaging in behavior that alters how one perceives him or herself, the individual handles these discrepancies and returns to a state of equilibrium, thus, decreasing their distress (Johnson, & Kaufman, 2004).

There are two compensatory techniques used to combat discrepancies (Johnson, & Kaufman, 2004). The first, reaction formation, occurs when individuals react to an unacceptable characteristic by asserting the opposite attitude or behavior (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004). For
example, a biological male who identifies as feminine might compensate for this socially unacceptable trait by asserting more dominance or power in a romantic relationship (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004). This authoritativeness creates an impression of masculinity that is socially acceptable. Second, self-enhancement is the idea that individuals inflate aspects of their personality or character to make themselves or others, feel better about their discrepancy (Kroska, 2009). For example, when a man who sees himself as very masculine perceives a friend that thinks of him as slightly feminine, the man is likely to exaggerate or self-inflate his masculine behavior so that his perceptions of his friend’s view match his identity standard (Johnson & Kaufman, 2004).

Individuals with higher discrepancies between their actual and ideal self, report negative self-concepts (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Moreover, both self-concept (positive-negative dimensions) and self-ideal discrepancies are associated with anxiety and decreased well-being (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). There are a range of factors that contribute to one’s perception of their ideal self. The goal of the present study is to examine such factors. Specifically, the general focus of the study is concerned with gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies. A gender-identity discrepancy is a discrepancy between one’s biological sex and gendered behavior. Biological sex refers to the sex that one is born with (e.g., male, female, intersex), based on sexual anatomy. Gender-identity will refer to the behavioral expression of one’s biological sex, i.e whether you are higher/lower in masculinity. An individual who possesses high levels of both masculinity and femininity, is regarded as androgynous. On the flip slide, an individual who is lower in both masculinity and femininity is regarded as undifferentiated in their gender identity. A gender-ideology discrepancy is a discrepancy between one’s gendered behavior and ideology towards gender roles. In other words, there is an inconsistency in how masculine and/or feminine you act, versus how think men and women should ideally act.
Discrepancies and Homosexuality

Research indicates that gender discrepancies are more prevalent in homosexual individuals than heterosexual cisgender men and women. For instance, individuals in heterosexual relationships are more consistent in their sex and gendered behavior, than individuals in lesbian partnerships (Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 2006). In other words, heterosexual men behave more masculine and heterosexual women behave more feminine, while lesbian women tend to behave more masculine. (Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 2006). Additionally, this sex–behavior differentiation in lesbian couples is associated with higher levels of dissatisfaction among both partners in the relationship (Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 2006). At the same time, gay partners are the least congruent in their sex-behaviors because both individuals interchangeably express masculinity and femininity in their sex-behaviors (Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 2006).

Discrepancies in one’s sex-behavior spark further interest in how homosexual partners cope with this dissonance. Research on gendered specific responses to discrepancies provide insight for understanding discrepancies within same-sex relationships. Kroska (2009) suggests that women respond to discrepancies more negatively than men, with greater distress and lower self-esteem. Men on the other hand, combat their discrepancies using reaction formation, thereby enhancing their self-esteem by asserting an opposite attitude or behavior (Kroska, 2009). There are even rare cases where negative affects resulting from gender-conformity discrepancies potentiate males’ aggression towards their partner (Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002). Given these gender specific responses, research predicts that the doubling of genders in homosexual relationships might influence partners’ coping styles for their discrepancies (Kroska, 2009). Since women respond to discrepancies with distress and reduced self-esteem, in a lesbian relationship where both partners are both enduring discrepancies, it can be predicted that distress might be
expressed by both women (Kroska, 2009). Similarly, for gay partners who are both experiencing internal dissonance, partner aggression and reaction formation might be expressed twofold in their relationship.

Additional research on gender differences and discrepancy coping styles suggest a type of resolution involving sex-typed behavior. One study found that females tend to move away from their traditional sex-role orientation to resolve identity crises (Prager, 1983). Sex-role orientation, as defined in the study, is the balance of masculine and feminine personality traits within the individual, viewed in terms of the following categories: androgyny, femininity, masculinity, or undifferentiated. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BRSI; 1974) was used to measure how well an individual conformed to those gender categories. As previously noted, androgyny is characterized by high levels of both masculinity and femininity, whereas undifferentiated is characterized by low levels of both masculinity and femininity.

Prager’s study (1983) suggests that women with a low resolution for their identity crisis are more feminine sex-typed or undifferentiated in their behavior. In other words, females who lack resolution for an identity crisis adopt low levels of masculine traits (Prager, 1983). However, females who successfully resolve high identity crises adopt greater masculine-type behaviors (Prager, 1983). Thus, these results support predictions that adopting higher levels of masculinity promotes successful identity crisis resolution in females. However, research in this study was largely focused on heterosexual females. It is unknown whether men resolve their own identity crises by adopting opposite sex behaviors to the same extent as females. Additionally, how do partners experience their own crisis and resolution within romantic relationships? The present study aims to examine this by first exploring individual differences in romantic relationships.

**Attachment Style and Discrepancy Theory.** Attachment theory is one framework for
understanding individual differences in close relationships. Although attachment theory proposes a general attachment behavioral system, much attachment research focuses on individual differences in attachment orientation (Etcheverry, Le, Wei, & Wu, 2013). Initial experiences with a primary caregiver shape individuals’ orientations to close relationships, and these orientations are theorized to influence characteristics of adult romantic relationships (Etcheverry, Le, Wei, & Wu, 2013). Anxious attachment is marked by hyper activating strategies such as high distress and compulsive insurance seeking, whereas avoidant attachment is characterized by strategies of disengagement (i.e. reluctance to rely on others for emotional support and discomfort with closeness and intimacy) (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). In the context of romantic love, adult attachment theory demonstrates that secure attachment is associated with intimacy, support, and caregiving towards the partner, while avoidant attachment is associated with fear of intimacy with partner and reluctance to rely on partner for interpersonal needs (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010). Anxious attachment is associated with a fear of abandonment by partner which the individual compensates for with an obsessive preoccupation and desire for union (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010).

In general, literature on insecure attachment style suggests that women tend to be more anxious attached than avoidant, and men tend to be more avoidant attached than anxious (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). Thus, links between avoidance and relationship outcomes tend to be stronger for men, and links between anxiety and relationship outcomes tend to be stronger for women (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). This pattern is consistent with traditional gender role norms, where self-reliance is valued in men and emotional connectedness is valued in women (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). On a biological level, women also tend to have higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of avoidance, and vice versa for men.
These gender biases in attachment style seem to be reversed in same-sex oriented males and females. Evidence from one study reveals that lesbians report higher levels of avoidance and lower levels of anxiety in comparison to gay men (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). From this finding, researchers speculate that higher levels of avoidance found in lesbians might stem from a considerable amount of assertiveness and independence that they must cultivate in order to develop a lesbian identity. Alternatively, high levels of anxiety in gay men might stem from their fears of non-conformity to traditional male norms for intimacy (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013).

It can be imagined, then, that one’s perception and experience in a romantic relationship is influenced by their own attachment style in addition to their partner’s. According to the working model of attachment (Collins & Allard, 2001), a person’s attachment-related memories, beliefs, expectations, needs, and strategies for attaining these needs, guides their cognition and behavior within relationships. Prior social experiences also influence internal working models of attachment, which in turn, are associated with current relationship cognition and behavior (Etcheverry et al., 2013). The resulting attachment dimensions predict a wide range of relationship variables and outcomes, including relationship quality, trust, and social support, among many others (Collins & Allard, 2011). Most research utilizes this theory of attachment in applications for understanding relationship commitment, stability, and quality (Collins & Allard, 2011).

Insecure attachment creates differing perceptions of experiences and outcomes for relationship functioning among heterosexual partners. In one study, it was found that partners with anxious attachment perceived themselves to be in inequitable and disadvantaged situations in their relationship (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010). Partners with avoidant attachment however, appeared to be unable to draw upon their partner’s contribution to the relationship, and while
they rated themselves as being treated equitably by their partner, they themselves did not feel like they contributed to the same degree as the partner (Biss & Horne, 2009). Gender differences in insecure attachment styles support these outcomes. Studies suggest that women place a high degree of importance on equality within their relationships (Biss & Horne, 2009). For example, an anxiously attached female who perceives the relationship to be unequal, may question her partner’s commitment and availability or she might seek to reduce closeness with her partner. In the same respect, if the female is avoidant attached and perceives relationship inequality, she might disengage or withdraw from her partner completely (Biss & Horne, 2009).

Thus, individual differences, such as attachment anxiety and avoidance, can influence perceptions and expectations among romantic partners and evaluations of outcomes in the relationship (Etcheverry et al., 2013). In fact, longitudinal research on heterosexual couples has demonstrated that attachment style predicts relationship stability (commitment) and relationship satisfaction (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003). Concerns of highly anxious people are associated with lower rewards and higher costs in relationships (Etcheverry et al., 2013). Likewise, negative expectations of avoidant individuals are associated with lower relationship rewards and higher costs, as well as less decreased motivation to continue the relationship (Etcheverry et al., 2013). Therefore, for individuals high in the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance, low rewards and high costs, along with more self-focused goals and motivations, result in lowered relationship outcomes and decreased satisfaction (Etcheverry et al. 2013). The dimensions of anxiety and avoidance then, are negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. These findings are similarly representative of individuals in same-sex relationships. Survey results from a large sample of same-sex couples indicates that attachment anxiety and avoidance in both partners are linked to less positive relationship evaluations and experiences by both (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). Consistent with findings that attachment style predicts relationship
satisfaction for individuals in heterosexual relationships, the present study predicts that attachment will be associated with relationship quality (satisfaction and commitment) for individuals in same-sex relationships. Hypothesis 1 predicts that anxious attachment will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (a) and commitment (b). It is also predicted that avoidant attachment will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (c) and commitment (d). Also, since research has shown that psychological depression and distress are experienced by all individuals with discrepancies, it is reasonable to posit that the attachment styles for these individuals might be more reflective of the insecure dimensions, such as anxiety and avoidance, rather than secure.

The lack of research on same-sex romantic attachment may stem from assumptions that attachment functions in a similar fashion across all couple types (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). The main difference between same-sex and heterosexual couples is that only the latter is socially sanctioned (Fassinger, Mohr, & Selterman, 2013). However, in order to test this perceived notion of similarity, research on same-sex couples is needed to advance understanding of ways in which attachment shapes the behavior and experiences of romantic partners who are currently faced with stereotyping and stigmatization from the outside world. Attachment styles for lesbian and gay couples may provide insight for how internalized distress from social expectations guides cognition and behavior for both partners (Keleher, Liao, & Wei, 2010). One study reported that gay men were securely attached to their partner only when there was an internalization of self-acceptance in their identity and role behavior (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003). This study is a novel contribution for attachment and discrepancy theory. There is no other literature on attachment in same-sex romantic relationships. Thus, the current study hopes to shed some light within this area of focus. The second hypothesis of the study posits that insecure attachment styles will be related to discrepancies experienced by individuals in
same-sex relationships. Specifically, it is predicted that avoidant attachment will be positively associated with a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity (Hypothesis 2a). Likewise, it is predicted that avoidant attachment will be positively associated with a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology (b) anxious attachment will be positively associated with a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity (c), and anxious attachment will be positively associated with a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology (d).

**Subjective Well-Being and Discrepancy Theory.** Well-being is a complex construct. It is commonly defined in terms of an individual’s physical, mental and social status. Well-being might also appear as a fit between personal accomplishments and aspirations (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Other scholars understand it as a combination of self-worth, uniqueness, boundaries, coherence, and continuity (Pilarska, 2014). Within a psychological context, well-being is a subjective sense of enduring life satisfaction (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Research shows that the structural properties of the self are related to psychological well-being. Discrepancies within these structural properties can create psychological disturbance and dejection-related emotions such as sadness, depression, and disappointment (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Homosexuals already experience greater vulnerability to psychological distress and negative well-being, due to their differential access to social support and constant marginalized status. The addition of self-identity-threatening discrepancies might also play a role in shaping their subjective well-being within romantic relationships. On behalf of this reasoning, the third hypothesis for the present study offers to explore the effects of discrepancies and subjective well-being for individuals in same-sex relationships. It is predicted that high discrepancies in one’s gender-identity will be negatively associated to their subjective well-being (Hypothesis 3a), and high discrepancies in one’s gender-ideology will be negatively associated to their subjective well-being (3b).
Gender differences offer connections between relationship quality and the positivity experienced by partners in same-sex relationships. Data suggests that women invest more in their relationships, feel a stronger commitment to maintain their relationships, and desire to work hard for the greater duration of their relationship (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). We see similar desires for relationship commitment and maintenance in lesbian females. Duffy and Rusbult (1985) found that lesbians are more likely to form stable relationships, more likely to want affection and companionship in their relationships, more likely to desire relationship permanence, and more likely to enjoy longer-lasting relationships (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). Due to twice the number of females in monogamous lesbian relationships than in monogamous heterosexual relationships, it is likely that these feelings of satisfaction and commitment will be expressed in the actions and behaviors of both partners (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). Men, on the other hand, do not tend to desire relationship permanence (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). This is expressed two-fold by both partners in gay relationships. Peplau (1982) found that gay men have a strong desire for sexual exclusivity, which has been recognized in other studies to inhibit the development of a long-lasting relationship. Despite this prediction of short-term permanence, both partners expressed positivity and satisfaction with the current standing of their relationship (Peplau, 1982). These finding sparks interest in the associations between relationship quality and subjective well-being for homosexual partners in romantic relationships.

Past research has investigated factors that leads partners in romantic relationships to feel satisfied with and committed to maintaining their relationships, and whether these variables are associated to the quality of the relationship (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). For the purposes of the present study, relationship quality is operationalized by the variables, satisfaction and commitment. Satisfaction is defined as the degree to which an individual finds their relationship gratifying (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). Commitment is defined as the individual’s feelings of
attachment to the relationship coupled with a strong intent to maintain the relationship (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). According to Rusbult’s (1980, 1983) Investment Model, a person’s commitment to a relationship is predicted to be greater if the relationship is more satisfying, if a person has fewer desirable alternatives, and if a person has more investments in the relationship (Sprecher, 1988). Specifically, these investments are resources put into the relationship that could not be retrieved if the relationship were to end (Sprecher, 1988).

There is reason to expect that same-sex relationships would differ substantially in regards to the level or causes of partner satisfaction and commitment (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). For one thing, societal factors contribute to lower satisfaction and commitment among lesbians and gay males than heterosexual women and men (Bailey, Linsenmeier, & Skidmore, 2006). Non-traditional relationships such as same-sex relationships have been and continue to be viewed more negatively by society than traditional relationships (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2006). The difficulty of establishing and maintaining a relationship in the face of such negative societal sanctions notably results in greater relationship cost and lower satisfaction (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). A significant amount of research even posits that marginalization of homosexuals are significant negative predictors of relationship commitment (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2006). One explanation for this is that individuals in marginalized relationships have a generalized expectation to be stigmatized by others (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2007). Additionally, the secrecy that is acquired to keep homosexual relationships away from homophobic disapprovers, potentially leads to a restriction on relationship investment by both partners (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2007). Because investments are one of the three primary components of relationship commitment, scholars surmise that decreased investments are associated with decreased levels of commitment in romantic relationship (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2006).

In fact, due to current legalities for homosexual rights, the concept of property might not
yet apply to homosexual relationships, and consequentially, lesbians and gay men might be less likely to make huge investments in their relationships, such as buying a home (Duffy & Rusbult, 1985). Other studies comparing lesbian and gay relationship investment have found that gay men generally tend to have lower investments in their partnerships. However, these investments are less powerful predictors of relationship commitment for gay men than heterosexual men, heterosexual women, and lesbians (Lehmiller, 2010). Kurdek (2006) found that gay partners are more likely to cite tangible investments (i.e. children) as deterrent in the quality of their relationship. In considering why this is so, research suggests that it is harder for gay partners to share children than is for heterosexual partners (Lehmiller, 2010).

In addition to commitment, research supports connections between relationship satisfaction and relationship quality for individuals in same-sex relationships. While some studies have shown that lesbians report higher relationship satisfaction than gay men, others report no differences between the two types of couples (Kurdek, 1991). However, there are uncommonly studied variables that account for variability in relationship satisfaction for gay and lesbian couples. These individual difference variables influence a partner’s subjective state in moments that immediately precede their behavior, which are also specific to the relationship (Kurdek, 1991). These variables (e.g. social support, individual expressiveness, social belief, self-consciousness) and their discrepancies, or mismatch in ideal versus current display in the relationship, creates a negative consciousness in the subjective state of the individual (Kurdek, 1995). Although an individual is not fully aware of such discrepancies, their behaviors are shaped by those negative cognitions, which has implications for their experiences and resulting satisfaction within the relationship.

The discrepancies measured in Kurdek’s study (1995), are not representative of discrepancies might participate in the consciousness and resulting experiences for romantic
partners in same-sex relationships. This logic motivates the fourth hypothesis for the present study, which predicts that discrepancies will be negatively related to the relationship quality of same-sex relationships (Hypothesis 4). It is predicted that a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity will be negatively associated to relationship commitment (4a), a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity will be negatively related to the relationships satisfaction (4b), a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology will be negatively associated to relationship commitment (4c), and a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology will be negatively associated to relationship satisfaction (4d).

Literature on relationship quality contributes to knowledge on well-being for homosexual partners. Specifically, social support and perceived marginalization predict relationship outcomes that in turn predict partners’ well-being. According to research by Elizur & Mintzer (2003), social support promotes the attainment of goals and the resolution of life tasks, as well as offering protection against risk factors associated with everyday adversity (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003). This degree of social support experienced by homosexuals, impacts their well-being. Findings from another study suggest that a lack of familial support for same-sex relationships results in hurt, anger, lowered well-being, and impaired ability of partners to receive more social support from peers than their family of origin (Blair & Holmberg, 2008). Friends are the ones that fill in the empty space created when homosexuals become distanced from their families (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003) Likewise, literature suggests that peer support is more influential than parental support in predicting emotional well-being for both partners in same-sex relationships (Blair & Holmberg, 2008). Thus, general social support from friends and family are vital for the happiness of homosexual partners.

Longitudinal analyses of lesbian and gay cohabitating couples indicate that online social support also predicts relationship quality (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003). Specifically, perceptions of
network approval or disapproval are associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment among partners in same-sex relationships (Etcheverry, Charania, & Le, 2008). This is because receiving network support in addition to being labeled as a couple, strengthens the couple’s dyadic identity (Etcheverry, Charania, & Le, 2008). Alternatively, online network approval also decreases both partner’s uncertainty about their relationship, changing their perceptions and behaviors in the relationship itself (Etcheverry, Charania, & Le, 2008). Partners acquire knowledge about one another and their relationship not only from interactions with one another, but also from members of their social support networks (Bryant & Conger, 1999). Further, online networks regulate attitudes that partners adhere to in their relationship, as well as guides both partners with outside knowledge that is not easily seen within the relationship (Bryant & Conger, 1999). In this way, online network approval has been shown to predict better relational quality and commitment among partners in same-sex relationships (Bryant & Conger, 1999).

There has been a recent surge examining whether being involved in a marginalized romantic relationship affects the degree to which a person is invested and committed to his or her partner (Agnew, & Lehmiller, 2006). One study suggests that lesbian and gay partners lack satisfaction of their relationships due to perceived marginalization. They found that homosexuals who perceive greater disapproval of their relationship, have significantly lower levels of commitment, suggesting that perceptions of marginalization affects how people feel about their partners (Agnew, & Lehmiller, 2006). In addition, it is suggested that gays and lesbians who perceive their relationship as marginalized, invest significantly less than those who don’t perceive it as marginalized (Agnew, & Lehmiller, 2006). Due to low investment, same-sex partners perceive less commitment to the their relationship, and consequentially, lowered relationship satisfaction (Agnew, & Lehmiller, 2006).
It is clear from these studies that relationship quality is associated with social support and perceived marginalization for individuals in same-sex relationships. Since a vast amount of research supports the contribution of relationship quality to one’s subjective well-being, the present study plans to examine the well-being of socially marginalized individuals (i.e. gays and lesbians) in regards to the quality of their relationship. Furthermore, the last hypothesis of the this study predicts that relationship quality will be related to one’s subjective well-being in same-sex relationships (Hypothesis 5). Specifically, it is predicted that relationship commitment will be positively associated to one’s subjective well-being (5a), and relationship satisfaction will be positively associated to one’s subjective well-being (5b).

**Hypotheses Driving the Current Research**

In review, the current study aims to explore sexual orientation and identity-discrepancies to associations among attachment styles, relationship quality, and subjective well-being, for individuals in same-sex relationships. Based on findings that attachment style predicts relationship satisfaction, it is predicted that attachment is related to relationship quality for same sex-couples (Hypothesis 1). Specifically, avoidant attachment is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (1a) and commitment (1b), and anxious attachment is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (1c) and commitment (1d). Due to all but one study on attachment style and discrepancy theory, the second hypothesis predicts that attachment is related to high levels of discrepancies (Hypothesis 2). More generally, avoidant attachment is positively associated with high levels of a gender-identity discrepancy (2a), avoidant attachment is positively associated with high levels of a gender-ideology discrepancy (2b), anxious attachment is positively associated with high levels of a gender-identity discrepancy (2c), and anxious attachment is positively associated with high levels of gender-ideology discrepancy (2d). Consistent with findings on homosexual’s vulnerability to psychological distress and negative well-being from social
disapproval and perceived marginalization, it is predicted that the addition of self-identity threatening discrepancies might also play a role in shaping their subjective well-being within romantic relationships. It is predicted that discrepancies are negatively associated to subjective well-being (Hypothesis 3). A high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity is negatively associated to their subjective well-being (3a), and a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology is negatively associated to their subjective well-being (3b). Research on individual difference variables and relationship satisfaction motivates the fourth hypothesis for the study, which states that discrepancies are negatively related to the relationship quality of same-sex relationships (Hypothesis 4). Specifically, a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity is negatively associated to relationship commitment (4a), a high discrepancy in one’s gender-identity is negatively related to relationship satisfaction (4b), a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology is negatively associated to relationship commitment (4c), and a high discrepancy in one’s gender-ideology is negatively associated to relationship satisfaction (4d). Due to research supporting associations among relationship quality and social disapproval and marginalization, the final hypothesis for the study aims to examine relationship quality and subjective well-being for individuals in same-sex relationships (Hypothesis 5). It is predicted that commitment in same-sex relationships is related to subjective well-being (5a), and relationship satisfaction is related to subjective well-being (5b).

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants consisted of 153 cisgender males and females in romantic, same-sex relationships. Cisgender individuals provide consistency for assigned sex at birth and the sex of the individual, as this study is not looking at transgender males or females. The participants were recruited from Mturk. Among the pool, there were 62 gay men and 91 lesbians. Mean ages for male
and female participants were 31 ($SD = 9.7$) and 34 ($SD = 9.8$) years, respectively (range = 18-70 years). Among the sample, 9.2% were Hispanic, 80.4% Caucasian, 11.8% African American, 2.6% Native American, 5.9% Asian, and 1.3 percent reported an “other” ethnic group membership. Participants reported on educational level, where 14% of the sample completed high school, 40% were currently in college, 21% completed 2 years of college, 65% completed 4 years of college, 10% hold a Masters degree, and 3% hold a Professional degree. Median responses for educational background were “currently in college” and “4 years of college”. Participants also reported on their relationship status; 5.2% of the sample reported casually dating, 59.5% reported steadily dating, 9.8% were engaged, and 25.5% were either married or currently in a serious relationship. In regards to relationship length for same-sex couples, the mean was 6 years ($SD = 6.7$; range = 7 months to 21 years).

**Materials**

**Attachment.** Participants completed a self-reported measure of attachment styles. The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale short form (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007; see Appendix A) was used to assess the degree of maladaptive attachment styles (avoidance and anxiety) for adults in same-sex romantic relationships. On this 12-item self-report, participants were asked to rate their agreement with items on a 7-point scale ($1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree$). The items measuring anxious attachment included statements such as, “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner”, while the items measuring avoidant attachment included statements such as, “It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need”. For analysis, ratings for anxiety and avoidance were reversed scored and summed, so that higher ratings indicated a higher degree of anxious or avoidant attachment ($\alpha = .79$ and $\alpha = .81$ for anxious and avoidant attachment, respectively).

**Relationship Quality.** The Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult et al., 1998) was used to
assess relationship quality for same-sex partners. This instrument is designed to measure satisfaction level, commitment level, quality of alternatives, and investment size-variables, that represent diverse qualities of relationships in addition to personal dispositions. Since relationship quality is operationalized by Satisfaction and Commitment, only these dimensions were used from the IMS scale (Please refer to Appendix B). This 6-item measure included a combination of 3 satisfaction and 3 commitment items. Respondents indicated their extent of agreement to questions on a 7-point scale (1 = do not agree at all, to 7 = completely agree). Responses for satisfaction and commitment were summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment. Coefficient alphas for satisfaction and commitment were .92 and .68, respectively.

**Subjective Well-Being.** Three scales assessed participants’ subjective well-being in same-sex relationships. The first was a 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) designed to measure self-esteem. This scale assesses global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. In assessing positive self-esteem, some of the items that participants rated included statements such as, “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “I take a positive attitude towards myself”. For negative self-esteem, some of the items that participants rated included statements such as, “I feel that I do not have much to be proud of” and “I certainly feel useless at times”. All the statements were answered using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = strongly agree, to 5 = strongly disagree. For analysis, items were reversed scored so that higher scores indicated higher self-esteem. The coefficient alpha for the RSES in this sample is .93.

Participants also responded to the Brief Symptom Inventory–18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2000), a widely used self-report questionnaire that measures general psychological distress. The BSI-18 consists 18 descriptions of physical and emotional complaints. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 0 = not at all to 4 = extremely, the extent to which they
were bothered in the past week by the list of negative symptoms. Physical complaints included statements such as “Faintness or dizziness” and Pains in heart or chest”. For psychological distress, some of the complaints included statements such as “Feeling fearful” and “Feeling hopeless about the future”. Responses to the BSI-18 were summed to provide a score for overall distress, with higher scores indicating higher levels of distress. The BSI-18 yields high internal consistency with a coefficient score of .94.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Griffin, & Larsen, 1985) was also used in assessing participants’ subjective well-being. This 5-item scale is designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one’s life satisfaction. The SWLS scale is recommended as a compliment to scales assessing subjective well-being because it focuses on the psychopathology and emotional well-being of an individuals' conscious evaluative judgment of his or her life. Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Some of items that participants rated their agreement to, included statements such as, “I am satisfied with my life” and “The conditions of my life are excellent”. Responses to each item in the scale are summed to provide an overall score for satisfaction with life. Higher scores indicate a higher level of satisfaction with life. The SWLS yields a coefficient score of .92.

The last measure used to assess subjective well-being is the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009). The SPANE assesses a broad range of negative and positive experiences and feelings, based on the amount of time those feelings were experienced within the past 4 weeks. It is a brief, 12-item scale that converges with measures for emotions and affective well-being. On a 5-point scale, individuals were asked to rate the degree to which they experienced the list of feelings. Among those items, a score for positive feelings, negative feelings, and their combination (a balance score), is produced. For analysis, responses
were divided into SPANE Positive and SPANE Negative feeling scales and summed. Higher scores in the positive scale indicates positive well-being, and higher scores in the negative scale indicates negative well-being. Coefficient alphas for SPANE Positive and SPANE Negative were .91, respectively.

**Gender Identity.** To measure participants’ gender identity, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) was used. The PAQ describes abstract personality traits that stereotypically differentiate between masculinity, femininity, and in between masculine-feminine. This measure contains 24 items, forming three 8-item subscales, Masculinity (M), Femininity (F), and Masculinity-Femininity (M-F). Items on the M subscale are traits that are found in higher levels in men; items in the F subscale are traits that are found in higher levels in females; the M-F subscale items are determined to be socially desirable traits for each gender, with the ideal man scoring in the masculine direction, and the ideal woman scoring in the feminine direction. Since this study is concerned with levels of femininity and masculinity in ascribing one’s gender identity, the M-F subscale in the PAQ was disregarded during scoring (See Appendix G). Subjects responded to a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all; 5 = Very much) with a list of contradictory characteristics, and they had to rank where they fell for each statement. For example, one of the statements was “Not at all independent - Very Independent”, and participants had to rank where they fell within this trait description. Responses for all statements were summed in their given M and F scales, with higher scores indicating higher levels of masculinity or femininity for one’s gender. The PAQ has adequate internal consistency. Coefficient alphas for the PAQ M and F scales are .83 and .82.

**Gender Ideology.** The Sex Role Traditionalism Scale (SRTS; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993) was used to assess the gender ideology of individuals in same-sex relationships. This is a 10-item scale designed to measure levels of traditionalist attitudes towards the opposite gender.
Participants rated their degree of agreement with items such as, “It's just as appropriate for a woman to hold a door open for a man as vice versa”, and “In marriage, the husband should take the lead in decision-making”, on a 6-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 6 = *Strongly Agree*). For analysis, some of the items in the SRTS were reversed scored so that when totaled, high scores on all items in the scale indicate more traditionalist views towards the opposite gender. The SRTS has high reliability, with a coefficient alpha of .86.

**Discrepancies.** A gender-identity discrepancy assesses whether or not the biological sex of a homosexual individual matches his or her gendered behavior. For example, if an individual’s sex is reported as female and her PAQ score for femininity is low, then she is discrepant in her gender-identity and vice versa, for males. A gender-ideology discrepancy, assesses whether or not the gendered behavior of a homosexual individual matches his or her ideology towards the opposite gender. For example, if an individual receives a high score on the PAQ M scale and a low traditionalism score on the SRTS scale, then this individual displays a gender-ideology discrepancy. It is commonly accepted that masculine men are very traditional in their ideology towards women, and feminine women are less traditional in their ideology towards men. To assess both types of discrepancies, z-scores were calculated for the two variables involved in each discrepancy (sex vs. PAQ score, and PAQ score vs. SRTS score). Then, the two variables were subtracted to form an overall discrepancy variable.

**Design and Procedure**

The design of the study consisted of a questionnaire made on Qualtrics. It included all measures for hypothesis testing and their appropriate scales, in addition to a demographics section with questions on age, education, relationship status, ethnic background, number of children, etc. The questionnaire was distributed online via Amazon’s Mturk website. It was specified that in order to qualify to take to the survey, participants had to currently be in
monogamous gay or lesbian relationships. It was also specified that only one partner participate in survey, instead of both partners. On the first page of the questionnaire, there was an option to exit or proceed with the study if the stated requirements were met. Participants were paid $1.50 for completing the study. The questionnaire was not be timed, but participants were instructed to complete it in one-sitting. The length of time suggested for full completion was stated as approximately 30-45 min.

**Results**

To test Hypothesis 1, anxiety and avoidance were entered into a multiple regression predicting relationship quality. Avoidant attachment significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.659$, $p < .01$) and commitment ($\beta = -.679$, $p < .01$), however anxious attachment was not associated with satisfaction ($\beta = -.020$; $R^2$ for the model = .41) or commitment ($\beta = .089$; $R^2$ for the model = .32).

To test Hypothesis 2a and 2c, gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies were entered into a multiple regression predicting avoidant attachment. Gender-ideology and gender-identity discrepancies significantly predicted avoidant attachment ($\beta = .120$, $p < .01$) and ($\beta = -.139$, $p < .01$), respectively. For Hypothesis 2b and 2d, both discrepancies were entered into a multiple regression predicting anxious attachment. Gender-identity discrepancy ($\beta = -.223$, $p < .01$) and gender-ideology discrepancy ($\beta = -.115$, $p < .01$) significantly predicted anxious attachment.

To test Hypothesis 3, gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies were entered into a multiple regression predicting subjective well-being. Gender-identity discrepancy significantly predicted less distress ($\beta = -.127$, $p < .01$), however gender-ideology discrepancy was not associated with distress ($\beta = -.009$; $R^2$ for the model = .04). Gender-identity ($\beta = -.093$) and gender-ideology ($\beta = -.036$) discrepancies were not significantly associated with low self-
esteem ($R^2$ for the model = .04). Gender-identity discrepancy significantly predicted positive feelings ($\beta = .177, p < .01$), however gender-ideology discrepancy ($\beta = .075$) was not associated with positive feelings ($R^2$ for the model = .05). Lastly, gender-identity discrepancy significantly predicted less negative feelings ($\beta = -.170, p < .01$), however gender-ideology discrepancy ($\beta = .029$) was not significantly associated with negative feelings ($R^2$ for the model = .04).

To test Hypothesis 4, gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies were entered into a multiple regression predicting relationship quality. Gender-identity ($\beta = .197, p < .01$) and gender-ideology ($\beta = -.215, p < .01$) discrepancies significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Gender-ideology discrepancy significantly predicted commitment ($\beta = .146, p < .01$), however gender-identity discrepancy was not associated with commitment ($\beta = .066; R^2$ for the model = .02).

To test Hypothesis 5, relationship satisfaction and commitment were entered into a multiple regression predicting subjective well-being. Relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.192, p < .01$) and commitment ($\beta = .123, p < .01$) significantly predicted self-esteem. Relationship satisfaction significantly predicted less distress ($\beta = -.200, p < .01$), however commitment was not associated with low distress ($\beta = .097; R^2$ for the model = .06). Relationship satisfaction significantly predicted positive feelings ($\beta = .303, p < .01$), however commitment was not associated with positive feelings ($\beta = -.079; R^2$ for the model = .12) Lastly, relationship satisfaction significantly predicted less negative feelings ($\beta = -.275, p < .01$), however commitment was not associated with low negative feelings ($\beta = .096; R^2$ for the model = .08).

**Discussion**

The first aim of the current study was to measure the extent to which attachment styles predict lower relationship satisfaction and commitment for individuals in same-sex relationships. These data suggests that avoidant attachment negatively predicts relationship quality, however,
anxious attachment has no overall effect on relationship quality. This finding is shocking, especially given that past research has suggested lowered relationship outcomes and decreased satisfaction for both avoidant and anxious attachment styles (Etcheverry et al. 2013). There are some reasons that might explain for the strong effect of avoidant attachment on relationship quality, and not for anxious attachment.

The first, is reasoned from the dynamics of attachment pairings among partners. Research proposes that avoidant and anxious pairings are more common than anxious-anxious or avoidant-avoidant partner pairings (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). In studies that have focused on heterosexual samples, partner pairings typically involve avoidant males with anxious females (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Since the current study sampled homosexual partners, it is unclear whether the commonality of avoidant-anxious pairings were present. Therefore, further research on attachment pairings among homosexual partners is needed for understanding the dynamics of attachment styles and relationship quality.

In addition, research suggests that in serious dating relationships, attachment style is related to satisfaction, commitment, and conflict (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). In this study, 91% of participants reported to be steadily dating, 15% engaged, 39% married, and 8% casually dating. Because not all of the participants were in serious dating relationships, this could explain for the interaction between attachment style and relationship quality in my sample. Future research on types of dating relationships would be helpful for understanding the associations among attachment styles and relationship quality.

The second goal of this study (Hypothesis 2) was to measure gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies as predictors for attachment (avoidance and anxiety) for individuals in same-sex relationships. This hypothesis was supported. Overall, gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies had significant interactions with anxious and avoidant attachment.
However, the direction of these interactions are interesting and worth mentioning. Gender-ideology discrepancy is positively correlated with avoidant attachment, but negatively correlated with anxious attachment. Gender-identity discrepancy is negatively correlated with both anxious and avoidant attachment. I see no obvious explanation for these differences. Yet, it is important to recognize the significance of these results, given that no other study has looked into the interactions among discrepancies and attachment styles.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies would negatively correlate with one’s well-being. Studies have shown that having a threatened self or social identity negatively impacts an individual’s well-being (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). However, my results suggest otherwise. Gender-identity discrepancy predicted low levels of distress. Gender-identity discrepancy also correlated with high positive feelings and low negative feelings. Gender-ideology, however, had no overall effect on well-being. These data suggest that individuals with gender-identity discrepancies experience positive well-being.

This finding underscores previous research on gendered responses to discrepancies, where women are shown to respond with greater distress and lower self-esteem, and men are shown to enhance their self-esteem by asserting the opposite attitude or behavior (Kroska, 2009). Since my sample consisted of more women than men, it is surprising that none of the discrepancies correlated negatively with well-being. In addition, previous studies propose that homosexuals already experience greater vulnerability to psychological distress and negative well-being because of their differential access to support and marginalized status (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Thus, it is interesting that there was a positive association among gender-identity discrepancy and well-being for my sample.

Several mechanisms could be responsible for these results. Because discrepancies and same-sex orientation are socially devalued, homosexual individuals in romantic relationships
may not experience distress, low self-esteem, or negative feelings while amongst their partner, who is like them. While on the outside, non-conforming individuals face rejection from others, in-group social support is shown to protect these individuals from the negative effects of stigma (Bailey, Skidmore, & Linsenmeier, 2006). This in-group social support may be romantically or socially. On the other hand, these results can also be explained in terms of certain coping mechanisms, such as denial. According to Sharma and Sharma (2010), in order to protect a devalued or threatened identity and well-being, denial is a common strategy associated with a disidentification response where individuals reduce the extent to which their well-being is contingent on their outgroup membership. Individuals with gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies are the out-group members among my sample, and it could be possible that they activated this denial-type response when answering questions about their subjective well-being.

Socioeconomic status might also explain for these results. Most gender-nonconforming individuals report a lower socioeconomic status on average, and lower socioeconomic status has been shown to be associated with greater psychological distress (Bailey, Skidmore, & Linsenmeier, 2006). The median response for education in my sample was a 4 year college, with 8.5% of people holding either a Masters or some Professional degree. Since my sample included a good amount of participants who were highly educated, their feelings of satisfaction and well-being might have been heavily influenced by their socioeconomic experiences, rather than their personal discrepancies (i.e., gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancy). Future research would be helpful in testing the effects of discrepancies on subjective well-being for individuals within different socioeconomic groups.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that gender-identity and gender-ideology discrepancies would be negatively associated with relationship quality, specifically, low relationship satisfaction and commitment. This hypothesis was not fully supported, however, the findings present interesting
areas for discussion. It was found that individuals with gender-identity discrepancies perceive high relationship satisfaction. However, individuals with gender-ideology discrepancies perceive low satisfaction and high commitment.

There are some speculations for why individuals experienced high relationship satisfaction despite having a gender-identity discrepancy. First, perhaps it was the case that self-report bias was prevalent in participants’ answers for questions regarding their satisfaction with the relationship. Studies suggest that homosexual orientation promotes distress in the way these individuals think about others’ perception of them and their relationships (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Thus, the addition of a gender-identity bias might have made them more prone towards negative attitudes about their appearance. Therefore, these individuals might have inflated their feelings of satisfaction in the relationship in order to protect themselves from external and internal shame. Second, perhaps there was an internalization of acceptance for one’s gender-identity discrepancy, and the individual probably felt less distress and was able to perform in a manner that was conducive in promoting his or her feelings of satisfaction.

On the contrary, individuals with gender-ideology discrepancies reported low relationship satisfaction, providing some support for Hypothesis 4. This finding is consistent with previous research on the effects of masculine and feminine ideals on gay men’s and women’s self-image and their relationships. Gay men and women report feeling restricted by traditional gendered roles and ideals (Greenberg, Liu, & Sanchez, 2009), and so portraying the appropriate masculine and feminine image might be important to them. In this process, homosexual partners might feel targeted or shamed by the outside world, which could interfere in their relational outcomes and experiences. Specifically, studies have found that gay men overcompensate for their hyper-masculine ideology by internalizing their shame and projecting their shame onto their partner (Greenberg, Liu, & Sanchez, 2009). Due to discomfort with their
gender ideology, some studies have even found that gay men do not intimately connect with their partner, but consequentially use sex as a substitute for intimacy (Greenberg, Liu, & Sanchez, 2009). From these outcomes, it makes sense that an individual would feel less satisfied with their relationship.

Surprisingly, gender-ideology discrepancy also predicted high commitment in addition to low relationship satisfaction. I have no explanations for why this type of discrepancy is strongly associated with high commitment. However, this finding offers insight for understanding satisfaction and commitment, using the theories from Rusbult’s investment model. The investment model (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986) asserts that people can be dissatisfied with their relationships yet feel strongly committed to maintaining them; or conversely, they can feel relatively satisfied, but not at all committed (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986). Thus, the model’s theory of low satisfaction and high commitment seems to be supported in the presence of a gender-ideology discrepancy. It would be interesting to see whether the opposite case - low commitment and high satisfaction, is influenced by other types of discrepancies. This would require further empirical testing.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that relationship quality (satisfaction and commitment) is positively associated with subjective well-being for my sample. Meaning, if one is more satisfied with and committed to his or her relationship, they will have greater well-being. My results indicate that relationship satisfaction is strongly tied to more positive feelings, less negative feelings, and less distress. Moreover, this suggests that individuals who are satisfied with their relationships feel more positively about themselves. This finding is consistent with research on relationship satisfaction as a predictor for general well-being (Pilarska, 2014).

Regarding my sample, these data are surprising, given that studies report that social support for homosexual individuals greatly impacts their relationship quality and overall well-
being (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2006). Due to an overall lack of social support for homosexual couples, one would expect that although a partner is satisfied within their relationship, their knowledge of that lack in external support might still hinder their overall well-being. Thus, further research on social support as a mediator for relationship satisfaction and well-being for same-sex partners would be useful for understanding the dynamics of well-being and relationship satisfaction for homosexual partners.

In addition to relationship satisfaction, commitment was predicted to correlate highly with well-being. However, my results indicate no associations among commitment and subjective well-being. There are some explanations for why this is the case. One of such, comes from research on the impact of social disapproval on homosexual relationships. Same-sex relationships are viewed as non-traditional relationships, which have been and continue to be viewed more negatively by society than traditional relationships (Agnew & Lehmiller, 2006). So, although homosexual partners might feel satisfied with their relationship, they might not have any desire for commitment due to social disapproval. In addition, because commitment did not correlate with well-being, this questions the operationalization of satisfaction and commitment in measuring relationship quality. Research has suggested that satisfaction and commitment are both associated with one’s well-being (Kurdek, 1991). In attempts to replicate this finding for a general population, homosexual individuals were tested. Since commitment was not associated with subjective well-being, it could be the case that this measure of relationship quality may not work the same way for homosexuals. Moreover, future research would be helpful in examining other factors that attribute to relationship quality for same-sex couples, in addition to satisfaction and commitment.

Conclusion

Limitations. There are some limitations of this study which may be problematic. First, it
is unclear if the homosexual participants were in the midst of exploring their orientation or if their orientation was stable for a given number of years. If they were in the midst of exploring their sexual orientation, this could have affected the outcomes for subjective well-being because research suggests that ongoing identity exploration is related to increased identity confusion, which adversely affects well-being (Burrow, Hill, & Sumner, 2015). On the same note, perhaps partners were in different phases of orientation exploration which could have also affected relationship satisfaction and/or commitment. In this respect, it would be valuable to examine the direction of identity exploration and its influence on subjective well-being and relationship quality for individual in same-sex relationships.

Another limitation of this study was that it was strictly correlational, and hypothesis data was only collected from one partner in the relationship. To make sure of this, duplicate IP addresses were removed from data analysis because it was unclear if these addresses were from one person who took the survey twice, or if partners were taking the survey on the same device. It would have been useful to analyze the presented hypotheses with responses from both partners, however, this would require a more elaborate survey design where both partners were actively recruited to participate. A comparative analysis of both partners’ data could provide additional insight into partner attachment, relationship quality, and well-being.

Other limitations involved problems with the scales used for hypotheses testing. For example, some of the questions in the PAQ went missing when survey results were converted from Microsoft Excel to SPSS for analysis testing. This was realized after composite scores were made, and it was too late to start over with the original data set. So, it is unknown whether the remaining questions used during analysis were justified in providing the appropriate scores for masculinity and femininity. In addition, although the SRTS was used to measure levels of traditionalism in men and women, the scale is slightly outdated and some of its items are not
applicable for homosexual situations. Specifically, some of the questions cater to heterosexual husband and wife scenarios, and this may have affected the responses in my sample. Since the SRTS is a measure for gender-ideology discrepancy, the heterosexual scenarios in some of the questions therefore problematize the answers that are used to denote a gender-ideology discrepancy.

**Significance and Implications.** Despite its limitations, there are many qualities that render this research notable. First, this study provides a glimpse into the correlates of well-being, relationship quality, and attachment styles, using the domains of discrepancies and homosexuality. The hypotheses tested in this study were formulated from previous research where little hypothesis testing had been done on homosexual individuals. Thus, one strength of this study is that it tests predictions from previous studies with a sample that is not commonly used in most research on romantic relationships. Specifically, studies have shown that attachment is related to relationship quality, and this study samples homosexual couples to test this process. In addition to a homosexual sample, this study sheds light on the relationship between discrepancies and attachment styles, as they have never been directly studied. Second, although past works have shown that internal distress has negative consequences for one’s well-being, this study furthers those findings by exploring different types of internal distress (discrepancies) in socially marginalized members in romantic relationships. The last strength of this study is that it samples homosexual couples in proving the effects of relationship quality on one’s subjective well-being. In testing those effects, relationship quality was operationalized as satisfaction and commitment level domains, whereas other studies focused on the combination of investment size, decision making, and power, in addition to satisfaction and commitment. Thus, my measure of relationship quality may provide further insight for operationalizing it and whether or not those variables are applicable for studying unique sample groups.
The results of this study have implications for understanding the dynamics of homosexual relationships and individual partners. This study demonstrates that for same-sex partners, avoidant attachment predicts low relationship satisfaction and low commitment. In addition, for homosexual partners who are avoidantly attached, they have a strong, positive association with gender-ideology discrepancy and a strong, negative association with gender-identity discrepancy. From these interactions, it seems that avoidant attachment is a significant factor that influences the outcomes of homosexual relationships and the experiences of discrepancy stressors for certain partners. Specifically, avoidant gay men and women may manifest certain qualities that contribute to the short term-stability and concurrent unhappiness with their relationship. This piece of information might be helpful for a relationship counselor or sexuality therapist who may need to understand how behavioral systems and internal cognitions predict relationship outcomes and experiences for homosexual partners.

This study also demonstrates that homosexual partners with gender-identity discrepancy feel less distress and have fewer negative feelings in regards to their mental health. Contrary to previous research on internal distress and negative well-being, it seems to be the case that internal distress caused by identity discrepancies are internalized in a way that informs a positive outlook and satisfaction with one’s self. Significantly, this reveals that discrepancies may work differently in socially marginalized individuals than in heterosexual individuals. This has applications for research on homosexuals and types of discrepancies that influence their well-being. For researchers, this finding is useful for understating the types of discrepancies that homosexuals may face. For a mental health specialist, this finding can be beneficial in deciding whether or not to treat patients based off discrepancy outcomes on subjective well-being.

It is also shown that homosexual individuals with gender-identity discrepancies experience high relationship satisfaction, whereas individuals with gender-ideology discrepancy
experience low relationship satisfaction and high commitment. This implies that in addition to
similar general principles that appear in the close relationships of lesbians, gays, and
heterosexual men and women, there are other variables that predict the overall quality of
homosexual relationships. However, the effects of discrepancies on the quality of homosexual
relationships is not as black and white as was expected. For instance, why do gender-ideology
discrepancies cause lower satisfaction instead of gender-identity discrepancies? Moreover, to
gain an even broader understanding of the behavior and outcomes for these individuals, future
research efforts should be directed towards a better understanding of other types of discrepancies
or stressors that gay men and women may face in their romantic relationships, and their effects
on relationship satisfaction and commitment.
Appendix A

The Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form (ECR-S; Wei et al. 2007)

Instructions: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1= strongly disagree
2= disagree
3= slightly disagree
4= neutral
5= slightly agree
6= agree
7= strongly agree

1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
10. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Scoring Instructions:
Anxiety = 2, 4, 6, 8 (reverse), 10, 12 Avoidance = 1 (reverse), 3, 5 (reverse), 7, 9 (reverse), 11
Sum together all items for anxiety and avoidance. Higher scores indicate higher anxiety and avoidance.
Appendix B

Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult et al., 1998)

* Most of the items in the scale were disregarded except for the Commitment and Satisfaction level facets that were used in this study.

Instructions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship.

1 = Do not agree at all, 2, 3, 4 = Agree Somewhat, 5, 6, 7 = Completely Agree

S 1. I feel satisfied with our relationship
S 2. Our relationship makes me very happy
S 3. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.
C 4. I want our relationship to last for a very long time
C 5. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
C 6. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.

Scoring Instructions:
S = Measures for satisfaction, C = Measures for commitment
Item 6 should be reversed scored. Then, sum scores for all items in the satisfaction and commitment domains. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction and commitment.
Appendix C

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Scoring Instructions:
Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Give “Strongly Disagree” 1 point, “Disagree” 2 points, “Agree” 3 points, and “Strongly Agree” 4 points. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.
Appendix D

The Brief System Inventory-18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2000)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you have been bothered in the past week by the following symptoms:

(0 = Not at all, 1, 2 = Somewhat, 3, 4 = Extremely)

1. Faintness or dizziness
2. Feeling no interest in things
3. Nervousness or shakiness inside
4. Pains in heart or chest
5. Feeling lonely
6. Feeling tense or keyed up
7. Nausea or upset stomach
8. Feeling blue
9. Suddenly scared for no reason
10. Trouble getting your breath
11. Feeling of worthlessness
12. Spells of terror or panic
13. Numbness or tingling in parts of your body
14. Feeling hopeless about future
15. Feeling so restless you couldn’t sit still
16. Feeling weak in parts of your body
17. Thoughts of ending your life
18. Feeling fearful

Scoring Instructions:
Add up all the items. Higher scores indicate higher levels of distress.
Appendix E

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Griffin, & Larsen, 1985)

Instructions: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = slightly disagree
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = slightly agree
6 = agree
7 = strongly agree

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Scoring Instructions:
Sum together the items. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction.
Appendix F

Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009)

Instructions: Please think about what you have been doing and experiencing during the past four weeks. Then report how much you experienced each of the following feelings, using the scale below.

1 = Very Rarely or Never
2 = Rarely
3 = Sometimes
4 = Often
5 = Very Often or Always

Positive
Negative
Good
Bad
Pleasant
Unpleasant
Happy
Sad
Afraid
Joyful
Angry
Contented

Scoring Instructions:
The measure can be used to derive an overall affect balance score, but can also be divided into positive and negative feelings scales.

Positive Feelings (SPANE-P): Add the scores, varying from 1 to 5, for the six items: positive, good, pleasant, happy, joyful, and contented. The score can vary from 6 (lowest possible) to 30 (highest positive feelings score).

Negative Feelings (SPANE-N): Add the scores, varying from 1 to 5, for the six items: negative, bad, unpleasant, sad, afraid, and angry. The score can vary from 6 (lowest possible) to 30 (highest negative feelings score).

Affect Balance (SPANE-B): The negative feelings score is subtracted from the positive feelings score, and the resultant difference score can vary from -24 (unhappiest possible) to 24 (highest affect balance possible). A respondent with a very high score of 24 reports that she or he rarely or never experiences any of the negative feelings, and very often or always has all of the positive feelings.
Appendix G

Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978)

Instructions: Each pair describes contradictory characteristics - that is, you cannot be both at the same time, such as very artistic and not at all artistic. The numbers form a scale between the two extremes. You are to choose a number that describes where YOU fall on the scale.

For example, if you think that you have no artistic ability, you would choose 1. If you think that you are pretty good, you might choose 5. If you are only medium, you might choose 3, and so forth.

M-F  1. Not at all aggressive 1........2........3........4........5 Very aggressive*
M    2. Not at all independent 1........2........3........4........5 Very independent*
F    3. Not at all emotional 1........2........3........4........5 Very emotional*
M-F  4. Very submissive 1........2........3........4........5 Very dominant*
M-F  5. Not at all excitable in a major crisis* 1........2........3........4........5 Very excitable in a major crisis
M    6. Very passive 1........2........3........4........5 Very active*
F    7. Not at all able to devote self completely to others 1........2........3........4........5 Able to devote self completely to others*
F    8. Very rough 1........2........3........4........5 Very gentle*
F    9. Not at all helpful to others 1........2........3........4........5 Very helpful to others*
M    10. Not at all competitive 1........2........3........4........5 Very competitive*
M-F  11. Very home oriented 1........2........3........4........5 Very worldly*
F    12. Not at all kind 1........2........3........4........5 Highly needful of others’ approval* 1........2........3........4........5 Able to devote self completely to others*
M-F  13. Indifferent to others approval* 1........2........3........4........5 Able to devote self completely to others*
M-F  14. Feelings not easily hurt* 1........2........3........4........5 Feelings easily hurt
F    15. Not at all aware of feelings of others 1........2........3........4........5 Very aware of feelings of others*
M    16. Can make decisions easily* 1........2........3........4........5 Has difficulty making decisions
M    17. Gives up very easily 1........2........3........4........5 Never gives up easily*
M-F  18. Never cries* 1........2........3........4........5 Cries very easily
M    19. Not at all self-confident 1........2........3........4........5 Very self-confident*
M    20. Feels very inferior 1........2........3........4........5 Feels very superior*
F    21. Not at all understanding of others 1........2........3........4........5 Very understanding of others*
F    22. Very cold in relations with others 1........2........3........4........5 Very warm in relations with others*
M-F  23. Very little need for security* 1........2........3........4........5 Very strong need for security
M    24. Goes to pieces under pressure 1........2........3........4........5 Stands up well under pressure*
Cont’d…

**Scoring Information:**
The scale to which each item is assigned is indicated by M (Masculinity), F (Femininity) and MF (Masculinity-Femininity)

Items with an *asterisk indicate the extreme masculine response for the M and M-F scales and the extreme feminine response for the F scale.

Items in the M and F scales are summed. Higher scores indicate higher masculinity and/or femininity.
Appendix H

Sex Role Traditionalism Scale (SRTS; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993)

Instructions: Please indicate how much you personally agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Slightly Disagree
3 = Disagree
4 = Slightly Agree
5 = Agree
6 = Strongly Agree

1. One of the most important things a mother can do for her daughter is to prepare her for being a wife.
2. When a couple is going somewhere by car, it's better for the man to do most of the driving.
* 3. If a husband and wife both have fulltime jobs, the husband should devote just as much time to house-keeping as the wife should.
4. The women's movement exaggerates the problems faced by women in America today.
* 5. It's just as appropriate for a woman to hold a door open for a man as vice versa.
* 6. Working women should not be expected to sacrifice their careers for the sake of home duties to any greater extent than men.
7. In marriage, the husband should take the lead in decision-making.
8. It's reasonable that the wife should have major responsibility for the care of the children.
* 9. Women could run most businesses as well as men.
* 10. If both husband and wife work full-time, her career should be just as important as his in determining where the family lives.

Scoring Instructions:

Items with an * should be reverse scored (so that 1 becomes 6, 2 becomes 5, 3 becomes 4). The result is that high scores on all items indicate more traditional views. To handle missing data, the final scale score is the person’s mean score on the set of items multiplied by 10.
### Tables

Table 1.

*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Relationship Quality (Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 4)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\beta$ Satisfaction</th>
<th>$\beta$ Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>-.659*</td>
<td>-.679*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Identity Disc</td>
<td>.197*</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Ideology Disc</td>
<td>-.215*</td>
<td>.147*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For p <.01

Table 2.

*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Attachment (Hypothesis 2)*

<table>
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<th>$\beta$ Avoidant Attachment</th>
<th>$\beta$ Anxious Attachment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Identity Disc</td>
<td>-.139*</td>
<td>-.223*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Ideology Disc</td>
<td>.120*</td>
<td>-.115*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For p <.01
Table 3.

*Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Subjective Well-Being (Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 5)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β Distress</th>
<th>β Self-Esteem</th>
<th>β Pos. Feelings</th>
<th>β Neg. Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Identity Disc</td>
<td>-.127*</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>.177*</td>
<td>-.170*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Ideology Disc</td>
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<td>-.036</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.200*</td>
<td>-.192*</td>
<td>.303*</td>
<td>-.275*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.123*</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For p < .01*
References


Roles, 60, 313-328.


