

Healthy romantic relationships are protective against the negative effect that stressors, such as discrimination, have on health, among same- and different- gender couples (Donnelly et al., 2019; Lavner et al., 2018; Robles et al., 2021), and provide a health advantage (Waite & Gallagher, 2001). However, the strength of this relational health advantage varies by gender, sexual identity, and race (Hsieh & Liu, 2019; Liu et al., 2013, 2017). Health differences between couples with shared or distinct social identities have been well-documented, yet scholars have also long argued that categorical identities are limited proxies for the social systems and interpersonal and individual processes that shape health (Meyer, 2003). Thus, research on couples has rarely examined if couples' shared or distinct experiences of their identities (e.g., identity centrality) shape individual and dyadic health and well-being.

When identities are more central or important to a person, it connects them to potential internal resources and external community that can help cope with marginalization. However, when people have identities they see as important to their sense of self, it can also mean that they are more aware of and therefore susceptible to threats (e.g., discrimination) specific to these identities (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brittian et al., 2015; Burke, 1991; Hinton et al., 2021). Indeed, research on racial and ethnically diverse groups find that people who have greater identification with their racial and ethnic groups report more racial discrimination, but also that greater identification with one's racial groups buffers the negative effect of discrimination on mental health (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brittian et al., 2015; Burke, 1991; Chae et al., 2011; Giamo et al., 2015). Among sexual and gender minorities (SGM), greater centrality of a SGM identity is related to positive group identification, but also greater reports of marginalization (Hinton et al., 2021). These findings align with the rejection-identification hypothesis that proposes that the negative consequences prejudice can be somewhat alleviated by identification with one's minority group. (Branscombe et al., 1999).

When partners share identities that they view as important, this may provide a shared resource that can support the relationship, but when couples vary in terms of how they view their identities, it may be an additional source of stress (Donnelly et al., 2019; Frost, 2017; Pollitt et al., 2018). For example, among different-gender couples, husbands and wives' levels of masculine and feminine expression is associated with their relationships satisfaction (Bradbury et al., 1995). Similarly, among same-gender couples partners with varying gender expressions (e.g., butch, femme, or androgenous) corresponded with their differences in identity centrality, relational dynamics, and reports of marginalization (Rothblum et al., 2018). Interracial couples report that differences in racial backgrounds are important topics that they discuss and their ability to resolve (or not resolve) differences in experiences and understandings of race shape their relational dynamics positively or negatively (Killian, 2001; Negy & Snyder, 2000). Even among same-race couples, variability in identity-related experiences such as acculturation and racial identity centrality affects relational dynamics (Kelly & Floyd, 2001, 2006; Orengo-Aguayo, 2015). Among same-gender couples differences in partners reports of discrimination and relationship stigma are associated with worse health among same- and different-gender couples (Donnelly et al., 2019), and variability in outness (i.e. how out partners are to different people in their life about their sexual identity) are associated with relationship quality, perception of minority stressors, and health and well-being (Knoble & Linville, 2012; Song et al., 2021; Totenhagen et al., 2018).

In the current study, we utilize a population representative sample of people in same- and different-gender couples to examine descriptive differences in how identity-related experiences vary across same-gender and different-gender, interracial and same-race relationships to begin unpacking

how these experiences differ across diverse relationship configurations.

Methods

Data come from the National Couples' Health and Time Study (NCHAT), which is a population-based study of couples in America that contains representative samples of racial and ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, white, and heterosexual couples. The sample includes 3,642 participants who were between 20-60 years old ($M = 36$ yrs old), married or cohabiting, and who were able to read English or Spanish. The sample was 10% Black or African American, 6% Asian, 9% multiracial 4% other race, 72% White, and 16% Hispanic. The sample was diverse in terms of sexual identity: 20% Gay/Lesbian, 11% Plurisexual (i.e., Bisexual, Pansexual, or Omnisexual), 1% Queer, and 12% had other or multiple sexual identities. The sample was comprised of cisgender men (54%), and cisgender women (43.6 %) with some participants identifying as trans (0.7%) and other labels (1.7%). About 28% of the sample was in a same-gender relationship and 34% were in an interracial relationship.

Participants were grouped based on whether they were in a same- or different-gender relationship, whether this relationship was a same-race or interracial relationship, and their gender. This resulted in eight relationship configurations. Men in same-race/different-gender relationships (SR/DG; $n = 799$; 22%); Women in SR/DG relationships ($n = 893$; 25%); Men in same-race/same-gender relationship (SR/SG; $n = 368$; 10%); Women in SR/SG relationships ($n = 301$; 8%); Men in interracial/different-gender relationships (IR/DG; $n = 409$; 12%); Women in IR/DG relationships ($n = 467$; 13%); Men in interracial/same-gender relationship (IR/SG; $n = 229$; 6%); and women in IR/SG relationships ($n = 94$; 3%).

Measures

Identity centrality was measured with three items, one for race, gender, and sexual identity: "My [race/gender/sexual identity] is a central part of my identity" on a scale from (0) Strongly disagree to (4) Strongly agree. **Pride in racial-ethnic and sexual identity** were measured with two items: "I am proud to be LGBTQ+" and "I am proud of my racial-ethnic identity" from (0) Strongly disagree to (4) Strongly agree. **Gender expression** was measured with one item: "A person's appearance, style, dress, or mannerisms may affect the way people think of them. On average, how do you think other people would describe your appearance, style, dress, or mannerisms?" from (0) Very feminine to (6) Very masculine. **Outness to family and friends** was measure with two items asking how out participants were from (0) None to (4) All. **Family acceptance** family was assessed with two items asking (1) how accepting participants families were of their partner and (2) how accepting their partners family was of them with response options from (0) strongly disagree to (4) Strongly agree. **Discrimination** was measured with the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al., 1997), which was 9-items on a scale with response options from (0) Never to (4) Very Often. The mean score of items was used ($\alpha = .88$).

Preliminary Results

Data were managed and analyzed in Stata 17 (Stata Corp, 2021). Regressions were estimated with each identity-related variable regressed on relationship configuration controlling for age. Weights were included, so results are representative of cohabiting and married adults in different and same-gender unions between ages 20 and 60. A bonferroni correction was used to account for multiple comparisons. Detailed comparisons between groups are presented in Table 1 and summarized below.

The results for the identity centrality measures indicated that for racial identity centrality, women in IR/DG relationships reported the highest levels of race identity centrality compared to all other groups of couples except for women in IR/SG relationships and women in SR/DG relationships. Patterns of results for sexual identity centrality, indicated that men and women in same-gender relationships tended to have the highest sexual identity centrality while men and women in different-gender relationships tended to have the lowest levels, with a few differences between men and women within same-gender and different-gender relationships. Lastly for gender identity centrality, indicated that regardless of the type of relationship they were in, women had the highest levels of gender identity centrality, followed by men in same-gender relationships, and men in different gender relationships had the lowest levels of gender identity centrality.

Next, the results for sexual identity pride indicated that among participants who reported a sexual minority identity, participants in same-gender relationships reported the highest levels of pride in their sexual identity compared to participants in different-gender relationships, with a few differences between interracial and same-race relationships. For pride in racial-ethnic identity, results were more complex with no clear pattern of which participants reported the highest and lowest levels of pride in their racial-ethnic identity.

Among participants who reported a sexual minority identity, differences in outness between participants who had a sexual minority identity were the same for outness to friends and family. Generally, participants who were in same-gender relationships were more out to their friends and family about their sexual identity compared to people in different gender relationships regardless of, gender and if they were in a same-race or interracial relationship.

For gender expression, results were best explained by men in different-gender relationships reporting a more masculine gender expression compared to men in same-gender relationships and women in different-gender relationships reporting a more feminine gender expression compared to women in same-gender relationships.

There were few differences between participants in terms of family acceptance from their own family, their partners family, and experiences of discrimination. The exceptions were that women in SR/DG relationships reported greater acceptance from their own family compared to men in IR/SG relationships and men in SR/DG relationships reported greater family acceptance from their partners family compared to men in IR/SG relationships.

Differences between groups of participants on identity-related experiences were typically in directions that aligned with participants sexual identity and gender, but differences were more complex regarding experiences related to racial identity. Importantly there were few differences in marginalization between groups. These findings provide some preliminary evidence that identity-related experiences may better differentiate diverse groups of couples, with less support for indicators of marginalization, which has implications for understudying differences in relationship dynamics and health's between different groups of couples. Final results will use regressions with mental health and physical health regressed on identity-related variables and marginalization, demographic controls, and tests of moderation across relationship configurations.

Table 1

Mean values and comparisons of identity variables across relationship comparisons

	SR/DG Men	SR/DG Women	SR/SG Men	SR/SG Women	IR/DG Men	IR/DG Women	IR/SG Men	IR/SG Women
Variable	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)
Race Centrality (n = 3472)	1.96(0.06) ^a	2.01(0.05)	1.73(0.09) ^b	1.94(0.1) ^c	1.99(0.08) ^d	2.34(0.07) ^{abcde}	1.76(0.13) ^e	2.15(0.21)
Sexual Identity Centrality (n = 3475)	2.13(0.06) ^{abc}	2.15(0.05) ^{def}	2.46(0.14) ^{gh}	2.89(0.08) ^{ad}	2.06(0.08) ^{gij}	2.22(0.07) ^h	2.60(0.14) ^{bei}	2.99(0.17) ^{cfj}
Gender Centrality (n = 3481)	2.3(0.05) ^{abc}	2.46(0.05)	2.13(0.08) ^{cdef}	2.73(0.08) ^{ad}	2.27(0.07) ^g	2.59(0.07) ^{bc}	2.39(0.14)	2.76(0.17) ^{fg}
Sexual Identity Pride (n = 1506)	1.98(0.13) ^{abcd}	2.34(0.17) ^{efgh}	3.24(0.09) ^{acij}	3.23(0.11) ^{bfgkl}	1.76(0.13) ^{ikmno}	2.35(0.14) ^{ilmpq}	3.16(0.12) ^{egnp}	3.5(0.13) ^{dhoq}
Racial Pride (n = 3477)	2.68(0.05) ^{abc}	2.63(0.04) ^{def}	2.16(0.10) ^{adghi}	2.18(0.08) ^{bcjkl}	2.75(0.06) ^{gi}	2.96(0.06) ^{efhk}	2.54(0.13)	2.82(0.14) ^{il}
Out to Family (n = 1502)	2.48(0.27) ^{abcd}	1.83(0.17) ^{efgh}	0.47(0.08) ^{aci}	0.31(0.07) ^{bfi}	1.2(0.49)	2.06(0.23) ^{ijkl}	0.38(0.06) ^{cgk}	0.38(0.13) ^{dhl}
Out to Friends (n = 1502)	2.30(0.28) ^{abcd}	1.4(0.16) ^{efgh}	0.3(0.08) ^{aci}	0.14(0.08) ^{bfi}	1.18(0.48)	1.62(0.25) ^{ijkl}	0.26(0.06) ^{cgk}	0.13(0.09) ^{dhl}
Gender Expression (n = 3482)	5.34(0.03) ^a	1.01(0.04) ^{bc}	4.09(0.45)	2.30(0.21) ^{bd}	5.29(0.04) ^e	1.11(0.05) ^{df}	4.38(0.13) ^{ae}	2.25(0.24) ^{cf}
Own Family Acceptance (n = 3484)	3.49(0.04)	3.57(0.04) ^a	3.44(0.09)	3.29(0.09)	3.4(0.05)	3.41(0.06)	3.19(0.10) ^a	3.28(0.17)
Partner Family Acceptance (n = 3485)	3.46(0.04) ^a	3.41(0.04)	3.27(0.12)	2.96(0.24)	3.27(0.06)	3.31(0.06)	3.01(0.12) ^a	2.99(0.22)
Everyday Discrimination (n = 3481)	0.48(0.02)	0.42(0.02)	0.4(0.07)	0.45(0.07)	0.5(0.03)	0.48(0.03)	0.45(0.06)	0.54(0.08)

Note. Columns with the same-letters indicate differences between groups. SR/DG = Same-race/Different-gender; SR/SG = Same-race/Same-gender relationship; IR/DG = Interracial/Different-gender relationships; IR/SG = Interracial/Same-gender relationship.