



Relationship Outcomes and Their Predictors: Longitudinal Evidence from Heterosexual Married, Gay Cohabiting, and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples

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Relationship Outcomes and Their Predictors: Longitudinal Evidence from Heterosexual Married, Gay Cohabiting, and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples

Data from partners of 236 married, 66 gay cohabiting, and 51 lesbian cohabiting couples were used to assess if members of married couples differed from those of either gay couples or lesbian couples on five dimensions of relationship quality (intimacy, autonomy, equality, constructive problem solving, and barriers to leaving), two relationship outcomes (the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction and relationship dissolution over 5 years), and the link between each dimension of relationship quality and each relationship outcome. Relative to married partners, gay partners reported more autonomy, fewer barriers to leaving, and more frequent relationship dissolution. Relative to married partners, lesbian partners reported more intimacy, more autonomy, more equality, fewer barriers to leaving, and more frequent relationship dissolution. Overall, the strength with which the dimensions of relationship quality were linked to each relationship outcome for married partners was equivalent to that for both gay and lesbian partners.

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Five themes recur in the research regarding how heterosexual close relationships are maintained over time. Theme 1—women define themselves in terms of their relationships—is consistent with evidence that women are more likely than men to derive their self-worth from the quality of their relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997). Theme 2—men prize autonomy—is derived from findings that men in relationships are more likely than women in relationships to value independence and self-sufficiency (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Theme 3—men and women make unequal contributions to the maintenance of their relationships—is grounded on reports that women are more likely than men to identify relationship problems, to do a disproportionate share of household labor, and to seek support for relationship problems (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Theme 4—men and women find it difficult to resolve relationship conflict constructively—is consonant with the claim that, whereas women are motivated to talk about relationship problems, men tend to withdraw from such conflict (Gottman, 1994). Finally, Theme 5—institutional barriers are needed to stabilize marriages—is in accord with the view that, if society is to benefit from stable marriages, then it must pose barriers (e.g., the loss of rights and privileges) to prevent unhappy spouses from ending their marriages (Adams & Jones, 1997).

The study presented here is based on the premise that these five themes provide the basis

for constructing a five-dimensional model of relationship quality. The major assumption of this model is that relationship quality can be understood in terms of gender-linked forces within the relationship that promote the happiness of each partner, as well as institutionalized forces outside of the relationship that enable partners to continue their relationship despite personal unhappiness. Based on the five themes as well as previous accounts of the nature of relationship quality (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Cochran & Peplau, 1985; Fitzpatrick, Vangelisti, & Firman, 1994; Harter et al., 1997), forces within the relationship were represented by intimacy (merging the self and the other), autonomy (maintaining a sense of self separate from the relationship), equality (having equal power and investment in the relationship), and constructive problem solving (negotiating and compromising). Forces outside of the relationship were represented by barriers to leaving the relationship (pressure to remain together).

This study first compares appraisals of the five dimensions of relationship quality of partners from married couples with those of partners from both gay and lesbian cohabiting couples. If these five dimensions represent gender-linked processes of how men and women experience their close relationships and socially sanctioned barriers that promote the stability of these relationships, then the average levels of intimacy, autonomy, equality, constructive problem solving, and barriers perceived by partners from opposite-sex couples in socially approved relationships—heterosexual married couples—should differ from those perceived by partners from same-sex couples in socially stigmatized relationships—gay and lesbian cohabiting couples.

Five specific predictions seemed plausible: (a) If women are socialized to define themselves in terms of their relationships, then, relative to partners in married couples, those in lesbian couples should report greater intimacy because they experience a double dose of relationship-enhancing influences. (b) If men are socialized to value independence and self-sufficiency in their relationships, then, relative to partners in married couples, those in gay couples should report greater autonomy because they experience a double dose of individual-enhancing influences. (c) If different gender roles result in men and women making unequal contributions to the relationship, then, relative to partners in married couples, those in both gay couples and lesbian couples should report greater equality because they cannot use gender roles to assign re-

lationship work. (d) If men and women regard relationship problems from incompatible perspectives, then, relative to partners in married couples, those in both gay couples and lesbian couples should report greater constructive problem solving because, being of the same gender, they approach problems from similar perspectives. (e) If marriage as a social institution brings with it external constraints to ending the relationship, then, relative to partners in married couples, those in both gay and lesbian couples should report fewer barriers to ending their relationships because there are no institutional constraints to protect their relationships.

Although there has been increased scientific interest in gay and lesbian couples (see review by Huston & Schwartz, 1995), existing evidence of type-of-couple differences in relationship outcomes is limited. Researchers have studied only one partner from the couple (e.g., Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 1981; Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Falbo & Peplau, 1980), have used measures with unknown psychometric properties (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), have collected longitudinal data with only one follow-up assessment (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), and have treated each partner as an independent unit of analysis (e.g., Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Metz, Rosser, & Strapko, 1994). This last limitation is especially problematic because when partners' scores share common variability—as is usually the case with dyadic data—the test statistic associated with type-of-couple differences is too large, resulting in inaccurate estimates of effect size and *p* values that are smaller than they should be (Kashy & Snyder, 1995).

Second, this study addresses these limitations by assessing whether partners from married couples differed from partners in either gay or lesbian couples with regard to two relationship outcomes based on longitudinal evidence: the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction derived from psychometrically sound assessments of relationship satisfaction taken over a 5-year period and relationship dissolution over this same interval. The trajectory of change is a growth curve that is defined by two parameters—the initial status of the curve and the rate of change (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). To the author's knowledge, there is no previous evidence regarding differences between heterosexual couples and either gay or lesbian couples in the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. However, based on evidence that there are few, if any, differences in concurrent appraisals of rela-

tionship satisfaction among heterosexual, gay, and lesbian partners (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Cardell et al., 1981; Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Howard et al., 1986; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Metz et al., 1994), one might expect that these three types of couples would experience the same trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction.

With regard to relationship dissolution, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) did an 18-month follow-up of their sample of 1,021 married, 493 gay, and 335 lesbian couples to see how many couples were still together. The respective breakup rates were 4%, 13%, and 18%. Although Blumstein and Schwartz did not statistically test the differences in stability by type of couple, they interpreted the relatively high breakup rate of lesbian couples as evidence that lesbian partners find it difficult to give their relationships central importance in their lives and, at the same time, have personal ambitions outside of the relationship. Based on this evidence, one might expect that, in the present study, lesbian couples would show the highest rate of relationship dissolution.

The final purpose of this study was to validate the five dimensions of relationship quality as risk factors for relationship distress by linking their values at the first annual assessment to both the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction and in relationship dissolution over the 5-year period of study. In contrast to most work in this area that has focused on only intrapartner linkages (e.g., the link between one's own appraisal of relationship quality and the pattern of change in one's own relationship satisfaction), for the first outcome, I also examined cross-partner linkages (e.g., the link between the appraisal of relationship quality by one's partner and the pattern of change in one's own relationship satisfaction). The focus on both intra- and cross-partner links is consistent with the notion that close relationships are interdependent phenomena in which one's own experiences in the relationship are influenced by one's own appraisals of the relationship, as well as those of one's partner (Kelley, 1979; Kenny, 1996).

Two hypotheses were of interest. An assumption underlying the first hypothesis was that the five dimensions of one's own relationship quality and the relationship quality of one's partner obtained at the first assessment formed a meaningful set of risk factors for later relationship distress. Thus, when considered as a set, one's own appraisals and the appraisals of one's partner of problematic levels of each dimension of relationship quality (i.e., low intimacy, high autonomy, low equality,

low constructive problem solving, and low barriers) were expected to account for unique variability in the trajectory of change in one's own relationship distress (i.e., low initial status of relationship satisfaction and a linear decline in relationship satisfaction). Furthermore, partners' averaged levels of these problematic appraisals were expected to account for unique variability in the likelihood of relationship dissolution. An assumption underlying the second hypothesis was that the link between each dimension of relationship quality and each relationship outcome was robust across type of couple. Thus, the link between each dimension of relationship quality and each relationship outcome was expected to be as strong for partners from married couples as it was for partners from either gay or lesbian couples.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were drawn from two separate longitudinal studies in which annual assessments were obtained over a 5-year period. Married couples initially were recruited from marriage licenses published in the *Dayton Daily News* from May, 1986, through January, 1988. Each couple was sent a letter that described the study as an examination of factors contributing to marital happiness. Of the 7,899 couples who received the letter, 1,407 indicated an interest in the study. This response rate of 18% is similar to that obtained from other studies recruiting unpaid participants from public records (e.g., 17% by Spanier, 1976). Completed surveys were returned by 538 couples. This return rate of 38% is close to the rate of 33% obtained by Kurdek and Schmitt (1986) in a study that involved a survey of similar length but required anonymous participation of both partners.

The data from the married couples that are of interest in this study were drawn from the fifth through tenth annual assessments of the original sample, referred to here as Year 1 through Year 5. The number of couples in the Year 1–Year 5 waves of data collection was 236, 203, 155, 135, and 118, respectively. (Three couples in which one spouse died over the course of the follow-up assessments were not included.) Compared with the husbands and wives who did not participate in the fifth annual assessment (i.e., Year 1 here), those who did participate were younger, had more formal years of education, had higher personal incomes, and had lived together for fewer months at

the start of the first wave of data collection, $F_s(1, 531)$ ranging from 4.05 to 65.06, $p < .05$. Thus, the married couples in this study cannot be regarded as representative.

At Year 1, 95% of the husbands and 97% of the wives were White. Husbands' and wives' mean ages were 34.42 years ($SD = 8.55$) and 32.32 years ($SD = 8.05$), respectively; 59% of the husbands and 61% of the wives had earned at least a baccalaureate degree. The modal personal annual income was between \$35,000 and \$39,000 for husbands and less than \$5,000 for wives. Spouses had lived together a mean of 4.71 years ($SD = 1.09$).

Partners from gay and lesbian couples at Year 1 were drawn from the first annual wave of data collection (1990) in a longitudinal study of gay and lesbian couples. Couples were recruited through requests for participants published in periodicals for gay men and lesbians. Couples who completed the survey also were asked to provide the names and addresses of other couples who might be interested in the study. Given the informal nature of these recruiting strategies, no response rates could be calculated for the gay and lesbian couples. It is unlikely that the sample of gay and lesbian couples is representative. The number of gay couples in the Year 1–Year 5 waves of data collection in the current study was 66, 60, 55, 49, and 45, respectively. (Nine gay couples in which one partner died over the course of the follow-up assessments were not included.) Corresponding numbers for lesbian couples were 51, 46, 42, 38, and 36.

At Year 1, 93% of the gay partners and 93% of the lesbian partners were White. The mean age of gay partners was 41.45 years ($SD = 12.40$), whereas that of lesbian partners was 40.17 years ($SD = 8.64$); 75% of the gay partners and 71% of the lesbian partners had earned at least a baccalaureate degree. The modal personal annual income was between \$35,000 and \$39,000 for gay partners and between \$30,000 and \$34,999 for lesbian partners. The average length of cohabitation was 10.88 years ($SD = 8.85$) for gay partners and 7.12 years ($SD = 5.30$) for lesbian partners.

Procedure

At each annual assessment, both partners from each couple were mailed two identical surveys. Partners were directed to respond to their surveys privately and not to discuss their answers with each other until the surveys were completed.

Demographic Variables (Year 1)

Partners provided information about age, level of education (1 = *less than seventh grade*, 8 = *doctoral degree*), personal annual income (1 = *\$5,000 or less*, 12 = *\$80,000 or more*), and the number of months they had lived with their partners. To facilitate the interpretation of findings, months of cohabitation were converted to years of cohabitation.

Measures of Year 1 Relationship Quality

Intimacy. Using a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *very true*) partners indicated how true each of seven statements was of their relationship. Items for this and all other scores of relationship quality are presented in the Appendix. High scores (maximum value = 63) indicated high intimacy. Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score across all partners was .76. Means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 45.76 (8.38), 45.39 (8.72), and 43.15 (8.84), respectively.

Autonomy. Using a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *very true*) partners indicated how true each of six statements was of their relationship. High scores (maximum value = 54) indicated high autonomy. Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score across all partners was .73. Means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 37.39 (8.07), 38.67 (7.23), and 33.86 (8.68), respectively.

Equality. Using a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *very true*) partners were asked to indicate how true each of eight statements was of their relationship. High scores (maximum value = 72) indicated high equality. Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score across all partners was .91. Means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 60.35 (9.01), 63.33 (8.74), and 56.82 (10.57), respectively.

Constructive problem solving. Constructive problem solving was assessed by having partners complete the self-rating and the partner-rating versions of three scales (conflict engagement, positive problem solving, and withdrawal) from the Conflict Resolution Inventory (Kurdek, 1994). Using a 5-point response format (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) partners rated how frequently they (in the self version) or their partner (in the partner version) used each style to deal with argu-

TABLE 1. PEARSON CORRELATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS, PEARSON CORRELATIONS AVERAGED OVER PARTNERS, AND INTRACLASSE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PARTNERS FOR YEAR 1 RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND QUALITY AND RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION SCORES

Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Satisfaction	.53**	.55**	-.07	.75**	.56**	-.12	-.13*
2. Intimacy	.48	.41**	-.23**	.63**	.31**	.00	-.14*
3. Autonomy	-.08	-.17	.27**	.06	.07	-.15**	.02
4. Equality	.66	.57	.09	.48**	.57**	-.22**	-.12*
5. Problem solving	.43	.25	.06	.43	.67**	-.11**	-.13*
6. Barriers	-.08	.01	-.12	-.19	-.07	.40**	-.09
7. Dissolution (0 = no, 1 = yes)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note: Intraclass correlations were tested for statistical significance with procedures described by Griffin and Gonzalez (1995). Pearson correlations below the diagonal are for individual partners and were not tested for statistical significance because partner interdependence was not controlled. Pearson correlations averaged over partners appear above the diagonal. Intraclass correlations between partners are on the diagonal.

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

ments or disagreements. To reduce problems with a self-report bias, self-report ratings were included with partner-report ratings, so there were eight items for each style of conflict resolution. Cronbach's alphas for the summed composite scores across all partners were .87 for conflict engagement, .78 for positive problem solving, and .83 for withdrawal. Because correlations among the three scores were moderately high, ranging from .45 to .57 across all partners, the three scores were summed to form an aggregate score. (Items from the conflict engagement and withdrawal styles were reverse-scored.) High scores (maximum value = 120) indicated frequent constructive problem solving. Cronbach's alpha for this summed composite score across all partners was .90. Means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 75.95 (10.97), 77.66 (10.02), and 74.88 (11.79), respectively.

Barriers. Using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) partners indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with each of five statements. High scores (maximum value = 25) indicated strong barriers to leaving the partner. Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score across all partners was .67. Means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 11.74 (3.76), 10.79 (4.00), and 13.87 (4.44), respectively.

Because all but the constructive problem-solving scores were new to this study, I assessed the validity of the five relationship quality scores by performing a principal components analysis of the 29 relationship quality items. Evidence supporting the validity of the scores would be obtained if the entire set of items could be reduced to five latent

variables that corresponded to the five dimensions of relationship quality of interest. Indeed, the analysis indicated that five eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were extracted, accounting for 54% of the total variance. A varimax rotation indicated that the first factor was defined by the eight equality items. (Loadings of individual items ranged from .62 to .81.) The second factor was defined by the six autonomy items. (Loadings of individual items ranged from .44 to .82.) The third factor was defined by the seven intimacy items. (Loadings of individual items ranged from .40 to .66.) The fourth factor was defined by the five barrier items. (Loadings of individual items ranged from .52 to .76.) The fifth factor was defined by the three constructive problem-solving items. (Loadings of individual items ranged from .75 to .78.)

For descriptive purposes, Pearson correlations between each of the five relationship quality scores are presented in Table 1, both for individual partners (below the diagonal) and for couples (above the diagonal, based on averaged partner scores). Because the first set of correlations does not control for partner interdependence, I did not perform tests of statistical significance.

Measure of Relationship Satisfaction from Year 1 to Year 5

Relationship satisfaction was assessed by Schumm et al.'s (1986) three-item Marital Satisfaction Scale, which used a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *extremely true*) to assess how true it was that one was satisfied with one's relationship, one's partner, and one's relationship with one's partner. High scores (maximum value = 27) indicated high relationship satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score across all partners

ranged from .97 to .98 across the five assessments. At Year 1, means (and standard deviations) for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual partners were 23.14 (4.01), 24.04 (3.31), and 22.04 (4.41), respectively.

Measure of Longitudinal Outcomes over Time 1–Time 5

If both partners did not return completed surveys one month after mailing, a letter prompting a response was sent. In this letter, respondents were given an opportunity to indicate if they had separated or if they chose to withdraw from the study. Three prompt letters were sent. If participants had not responded to the third letter, they were notified that they were dropped from the study and would not be contacted again. Thus, longitudinal outcomes were assessed as four dichotomous variables: whether the couple dissolved the relationship, withdrew from the study, was dropped from the study, or completed all five assessments. The numbers of gay couples for each outcome were 9 (14%) dissolved, 7 (11%) withdrawn, 5 (7%) dropped, and 45 (68%) completed. Parallel values for lesbian couples were 8 (16%), 3 (6%), 4 (8%), and 36 (70%). Parallel values for heterosexual couples were 17 (7%), 64 (27%), 37 (16%), and 118 (50%). Bias with regard to Year 1 demographic factors for couples completing all assessments is addressed later.

RESULTS

Accounting for Levels of Partner Interdependence and Type-of-Couple Differences on Demographic Variables

Because scores from partners in the same couple are likely to be related to each other, couple effects play a key role in the statistical analysis of data collected from both relationship partners (Kenny, 1996). Indeed, as shown by the intraclass correlations in the diagonal of Table 1, for the entire sample, partners' scores for Year 1 relationship quality and relationship satisfaction were moderately related to each other. In this study, I handled partner interdependence by means of hierarchical linear modeling or random-effects regression methods (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Hedeker, Gibbons, & Flay, 1994). The hierarchical nature of these models is due to the fact that I used sets of simultaneous equations to estimate parameters from lower levels of the model, which then became outcome variables to be explained at higher levels

of the model. In analyses comparing types of couples on relationship quality at Year 1, I fitted two-level random-intercept models so that individual partners (Level 1) were nested in couples (Level 2). In analyses comparing types of couples on the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction, I fitted three-level random-intercept models so that years of assessment (Level 1) were nested in partners (Level 2), which, in turn, were nested in couples (Level 3).

Both types of hierarchical linear analyses were conducted with version 4.02 of Bryk, Raudenbush, and Congdon's (1996) program. In these analyses, information about the type of couple was captured by means of two dummy-coded variables in which heterosexual couples served as the reference group (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, pp. 183–198). The first dummy variable compared gay couples with heterosexual couples, and the second dummy variable compared lesbian couples with heterosexual couples. These dummy variables will be referred to as the gay versus heterosexual effect and the lesbian versus heterosexual effect.

The unstandardized coefficient associated with each effect represents the number of outcome units by which the mean for the targeted group of couples (gay couples or lesbian couples) differed from the mean for heterosexual couples. A positive (or negative) sign for this coefficient indicated that the sample mean for the targeted group of couples was higher (or lower) than the sample mean for heterosexual couples. Further, the *t* test associated with each unstandardized coefficient is a test of the significance of the difference between the mean of the targeted group of couples and that of heterosexual couples (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 195).

To provide an estimate of the strength of obtained effects, I converted *t* ratios to Pearson correlations (*r*s). Based on Rosenthal and Rosnow (1984, p. 217), $r = \sqrt{t^2/(t^2 + df)}$. By convention, *r* (which, based on the formula, is always positive) was assigned a positive or negative sign that matched the sign of the corresponding *t* ratio. Following Cohen (1988, pp. 79–80), cutoff values for small, medium, and large effects were represented by *r*s of .10, .30, and .50, respectively.

To assess effects associated with type of couple on age, education, income, and years of cohabitation, I fitted a two-level random-intercept model for each demographic variable so that individual partners (Level 1) were nested in couples (Level 2). The intercept derived at Level 1 was treated as an outcome variable to be explained at Level 2. Of interest at Level 1 was a within-couples model that

used information from both partners to define one parameter—an intercept—for each couple. I regarded this intercept as a random variable because I assumed that the couple-level intercepts obtained in each sample were derived from a larger population of couple-level intercepts. Of interest at Level 2 was a between-couples model that tested the presence of either the gay versus heterosexual effect or the lesbian versus heterosexual effect.

Both effects associated with type of couple were significant for age, education, and years of cohabitation. Gay partners and lesbian partners were older, had higher levels of education, and had cohabited more years than heterosexual partners (*ts* associated with the unstandardized estimates ranged from 3.53 to 10.03, $p < .01$). To reduce the ambiguity of effects associated with type of couple, I used age, education, years of cohabitation (as well as income) as covariates in all analyses. However, the use of these covariates might not yield the same pattern of effects if partners from the three types of couples were, indeed, equivalent on each demographic variable (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 425).

Effects Associated with Type of Couple for Dimensions of Relationship Quality at Year 1

To assess effects associated with the type of couple for each of the five scores of relationship quality obtained at Year 1, I fitted a two-level (partner-couple) random-intercept model for each score. Three covariates at the partner level—age, education, personal annual income—were included in the Level 1 model, and one covariate at the couple level—years of cohabitation—was included in the Level 2 model. The unstandardized coefficients derived from these models are presented for each score of relationship quality in Table 2.

Of particular interest are the coefficients associated with the two effects for type of couple for each relationship quality score. Preliminary multivariate tests (see Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992, p. 52) indicated that these two effects considered together were significant for all but the problem-solving score, $\chi^2(2, n = 353)$ ranging from 5.74 (for intimacy) to 41.39 (for barriers), $ps < .05$. Consequently, each separate effect for type of couple was interpreted. Table 2 indicates that, with controls for demographic variables, partners in gay couples reported higher autonomy and fewer barriers (both small effects) than partners in heterosexual couples. Partners in lesbian couples reported higher intimacy, higher autonomy, higher equality, and fewer barriers (all small effects) than partners in heterosexual couples.

Effects Associated with Type of Couple for Relationship Outcomes

Trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. I assessed effects associated with type of couple for the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction over the five annual assessments with a three-level hierarchical linear model. Assessment time (varying from Year 1 to Year 5, Level 1) was nested in partner (Level 2), which, in turn, was nested in couple (Level 3). Thus, in an extension of the two-level model, estimates at Level 1 became outcomes at Level 2, which, in turn, became outcomes at Level 3. As in the two-level models, partner-level and couple-level covariates were included in the respective level models. Bryk and Raudenbush's (1996) program was especially useful in modeling change because it used the data from all couples, even those with only data at Year 1, to obtain estimates of effects (Bryk &

TABLE 2. UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR CONTROL VARIABLES AND TYPE-OF-COUPLE DUMMY VARIABLES AND *t* RATIOS AND EFFECT SIZES (*r*) ASSOCIATED WITH TYPE-OF-COUPLE EFFECTS FOR TWO SETS OF RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES

	Coefficient for Control Variable				Type-of-Couple Dummy Variable					
	Age	Education	Income	Years Cohabiting	Gay vs. Heterosexual			Lesbian vs. Heterosexual		
					Coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	Coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>
Relationship quality at Year 1										
Intimacy	0.05	-1.33**	-0.03	0.15	2.04	1.77	.09	2.38	2.06*	.11
Autonomy	-0.08*	1.01**	-0.07	-0.26**	5.18	5.06**	.26	5.36	5.21**	.27
Equality	0.03	-0.13	0.07	0.14	2.40	1.75	.09	5.96	4.32**	.22
Problem solving	0.03	0.52	0.03	-0.10	1.09	0.65	.03	2.41	1.44	.07
Barriers	-0.03	0.34*	-0.12**	0.07	-2.52	-4.51**	-.23	-3.20	-5.70**	-.29
Trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction										
Initial status	0.00	-0.12	0.03	0.09	0.38	0.61	.03	1.04	1.63	.09
Rate of change	0.00	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.17	.00	-0.30	-1.64	.09

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

TABLE 3. CHI-SQUARE FOR MODEL AND UNSTANDARDIZED LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR FOUR LONGITUDINAL OUTCOMES

Outcome	χ^2 for Model	Unstandardized Coefficient					
		Age	Education	Income	Years of Cohabitation	Gay vs. Heterosexual	Lesbian vs. Heterosexual
Dissolution	10.23	-0.01	-0.14	0.00	-0.09	1.25**	1.19**
Withdraw	20.08**	0.01	-0.07	-0.02	-0.02	-1.03*	-1.72**
Dropped	22.04**	-0.06*	-0.45**	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	-0.08
Completed all assessments	30.64**	0.02	0.32*	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.39

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

Raudenbush, 1992, p. 133). However, the statistical significance of these effects was based on the sample of 309 couples who provided information from at least two assessments.

As is common in growth-curve modeling (Karny & Bradbury, 1997), the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction for each couple was described in terms of both an intercept (initial status) and a slope (rate of change). Similar to the previous two-level analyses, only the intercept was modeled at Level 1 as varying randomly across time within partners. However, at Level 2, both the intercept and the slope associated with time (i.e., linear change) were regarded as varying randomly across partners within couples. Each of the two change parameters (intercept and slope) at Level 2 became an outcome variable to be modeled by the covariates of age, education, and personal income at Level 1, the covariate of years of cohabitation at Level 2, and the two effects associated with type of couple at Level 2.

I tested two three-level hierarchical models. Of particular concern in the first model was whether, for the entire sample, relationship satisfaction changed over time. In a model run to estimate only the intercept and the slope for the total sample, the intercept was 22.28, and the slope was -0.17 , $t(308) = -2.70$, $p < .01$, $r = -.15$ (a small effect). Thus, considering the total sample, relationship satisfaction tended to decrease over time. (In analyses not reported here, the coefficient associated with a quadratic term was not significant, so only the linear trend was retained.)

Of interest in the second model was whether the two effects associated with type of couple were significant for either the initial status of relationship satisfaction (the intercept) or the rate of change in relationship satisfaction (the slope). The multivariate test in which the two effects associated with the type of couple were considered together was not significant for either the intercept or the slope. Thus, the growth trajectories for

relationship satisfaction for partners from married couples were equivalent to those for partners from both gay couples and lesbian couples. The unstandardized coefficients for the two effects associated with the type of couple are provided at the bottom of Table 2.

Relationship dissolution. To determine whether the two effects associated with the type of couple were significant for relationship dissolution, a logistic regression was run. As is typical in logistic regression (Menard, 1995), the dichotomous outcome was transformed to the natural logarithm of the odds that the outcome was 1 (where, in the present context, such odds were defined as the ratio of the probability that a dissolution occurred to the probability that a dissolution did not occur). Six predictors were entered at one step and included the four control variables (age, education, income, and years of cohabitation—each averaged over both partners) and the two effects associated with the type of couple. The chi-square value associated with the overall model and the unstandardized coefficients for each predictor are presented in the first row of Table 3.

Although the chi-square value associated with the overall model was not significant, the coefficients for the two effects associated with the type of couple were significant, as determined by the Wald statistic. Nonetheless, because the overall model was not significant, the effects associated with the type of couple need to be interpreted cautiously. The positive values of the coefficients for these effects mean that, compared with heterosexual couples, gay couples and lesbian couples were more likely to experience the dissolution of the relationship.

To place the findings for dissolution in the context of the other three longitudinal outcomes (whether the couple withdrew from the study, was dropped from the study, or completed all annual assessments), I conducted parallel logistic regres-

sions for these outcomes. The findings from these analyses are summarized in Table 3. In each instance, the overall model was significant, but the two effects associated with the type of couple were significant for only the withdraw outcome. With controls for demographic variables, both gay and lesbian couples were less likely to withdraw from the study than heterosexual couples were. To underscore the selective nature of the full longitudinal sample, note that couples who completed all five assessments had higher levels of education than those who did not complete them.

Effects Associated with Type of Couple for the Link Between Year 1 Scores on Relationship Quality and Relationship Outcomes

Trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. I was interested in answering three questions. First, considering each dimension of relationship quality at Year 1 separately, did self-appraisals of relationship quality and partner appraisals of relationship quality contribute independent information to the initial status (intercept) and the rate of change (slope) of one's own trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction? Second, considering as a set the self-appraisals and the partner appraisals of the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1, did any particular dimension of relationship quality account for unique variability in the two parameters of one's own trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction? Finally, did the type of couple moderate the relation between the set of self-appraisals and partner appraisals of relationship quality at Year 1 and either parameter of one's own trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction?

To address the first question regarding the relative importance of self-appraisals and partner appraisals of each dimension of relationship quality at Year 1, five three-level hierarchical linear models were tested, one for each dimension of relationship quality. Time was nested in partner, which was nested in couple. Initial status was regarded as randomly varying at Level 1, and both initial status and rate of change were regarded as randomly varying at Level 2. For each model, only two predictors were of interest at Level 2—the self value and the partner value for the same dimension of relationship quality. To control for chance findings, I initially tested the effects associated with the two predictors for both initial status and rate of change (i.e., four effects) in a multivariate fashion. The multivariate test was significant for all but barriers, $\chi^2(4, n = 309)$

ranging from 7.93 (autonomy) to 451.40 (equality), $ps < .05$. The unstandardized coefficients for individual scores of relationship quality with associated t ratios and effect size r s are presented in Model 1 of Table 4 for both initial status and rate of change.

Table 4 shows two trends. First, relationship quality at Year 1 tended to be related to the initial status of the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction, rather than to the rate of change in relationship satisfaction. Second, self-appraisals and partner appraisals provided unique information for only three of the five dimensions of relationship quality—intimacy, equality, and constructive problem solving. Taking each dimension of relationship quality in turn, one's own high initial status regarding the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction was independently linked to high self-appraisals of intimacy (a large effect) and to high partner appraisals of intimacy (a small effect); to high self-appraisals of equality (a large effect) and to high partner appraisals of equality (a medium effect); and to frequent self-appraisals of constructive problem solving (a medium effect) and to frequent partner appraisals of constructive problem solving (a medium effect). The only dimension of relationship quality at Year 1 that predicted the rate of change in relationship satisfaction was equality. High self-appraisals of equality were linked to a decrease in relationship satisfaction (a small effect).

To address the second question regarding the relative importance of the entire set of self-appraisals and partner appraisals of the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1, a single three-level (time-partner-couple) hierarchical linear model was tested in which 10 predictors were of interest at Level 2—self values and partner values for the five dimensions of relationship quality. Unstandardized coefficients with associated t ratios and effect size r s are presented in Model 2 of Table 4 for initial status and rate of change.

Three trends are evident. First, as would be expected from the findings just presented, relationship quality at Year 1 tended to be related to the initial status of the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction, rather than to the rate of change in relationship satisfaction. Second, with controls for information about the other dimensions of relationship quality, intimacy and autonomy provided unique information about initial status, but only for the self-appraisal versions of these dimensions. Specifically, one's own high initial status of relationship satisfaction was uniquely linked to high

TABLE 4. UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR OWN AND PARTNER VERSIONS OF RELATIONSHIP QUALITY SCORES AT YEAR 1, *t* RATIOS AND EFFECT SIZES (*r*) FOR SCORES CONSIDERED SEPARATELY (MODEL 1) AND TOGETHER (MODEL 2) IN PREDICTING TRAJECTORY OF CHANGE IN RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

Score	Model 1			Model 2		
	Coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>	Coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i>
Intimacy						
Initial status						
Own	0.18	11.43**	.52	0.04	2.73**	.14
Partner	0.07	4.82**	.24	-0.01	-0.27	-.01
Rate of change						
Own	-0.01	-1.19	-.06	0.00	0.08	.00
Partner	0.01	0.92	.04	0.00	0.43	.02
Autonomy						
Initial status						
Own	-0.04	-2.31*	-.12	-0.05	-3.86**	-.20
Partner	-0.02	-1.03	-.05	-0.01	-1.27	-.06
Rate of change						
Own	-0.01	-0.43	-.02	0.00	0.00	.00
Partner	-0.01	-1.21	-.06	-0.01	-1.39	-.07
Equality						
Initial status						
Own	0.20	15.57**	.63	0.15	8.92**	.43
Partner	0.08	6.76**	.34	0.05	2.98**	.15
Rate of change						
Own	-0.02	-3.13**	-.16	-0.02	-2.95**	-.15
Partner	0.01	1.40	.07	0.00	0.28	.01
Problem solving						
Initial status						
Own	0.10	7.76**	.38	0.06	4.53**	.23
Partner	0.10	7.72**	.38	0.04	3.63**	.19
Rate of change						
Own	0.01	1.89	.10	0.01	2.40*	.12
Partner	-0.01	-1.04	-.05	0.00	0.04	.00
Barriers						
Initial status						
Own	-0.02	-0.83	-.04	0.03	1.27	.06
Partner	-0.04	-1.25	-.06	0.01	0.36	.01
Rate of change						
Own	0.01	1.21	.06	0.01	0.63	.03
Partner	-0.01	-0.06	.00	-0.01	-0.23	-.01

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

self-appraisals of intimacy (a small effect) and to low self-appraisals of autonomy (a small effect). Third, with controls for information about the other dimensions of relationship quality, equality and constructive problem solving provided unique information about initial status for both the self-appraisal and partner-appraisal versions of these dimensions. Specifically, one's own high initial status of relationship satisfaction was uniquely linked to high self-appraisals of equality (a medium effect) and to high partner appraisals of equality (a small effect), as well as to frequent self-appraisals of constructive problem solving (a small effect) and to frequent partner appraisals of constructive problem solving (a small effect).

To address the last question of whether any of the linkages just described were moderated by the

type of couple, I tested a three-level (time-partner-couple) hierarchical linear model for each relationship quality score. For each model, the predictors of initial status and rate of change at Level 2 included self values and partner values for the same dimension of relationship quality, as well as one's own age, education, and income as covariates. At Level 3, the link between initial status and both the self-appraisal and the partner appraisal of the relationship quality score, as well as the link between rate of change and both the self-appraisal and the partner appraisal of the relationship quality score, were modeled in terms of the two effects for type of couple. The number of years of cohabitation was included as a covariate at Level 3.

To control for chance effects, I initially tested the four effects associated with the type of couple

(two effects for self-appraisals and two effects for partner appraisals) for initial status as the outcome and for rate of change as the outcome in a multivariate fashion. Because the chi-square value associated with each multivariate effect was not significant for any of the five relationship quality scores, the link between the trajectory of change in one's own relationship satisfaction and both self-appraisals and partner appraisals of relationship quality at Year 1 was as strong for heterosexual partners as it was for both gay partners and lesbian partners.

Relationship dissolution. I addressed three issues in the final set of analyses. The first was whether each of the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1 predicted the dissolution of the relationship. Five logistic regressions were run in which dissolution (0 = no, 1 = yes) was the outcome score, and one of the five relationship quality scores at Year 1 (averaged over both partners) was the sole predictor. For descriptive purposes, couple-level correlations involving the five relationship quality scores and the dichotomous dissolution score are presented in column 7 of Table 1. Model 1 in Table 5 shows that the only dimension of relationship quality that did not predict dissolution was autonomy. Based on the unstandardized coefficients in Table 5, dissolution was likely when, on the average, partners in the couple at Year 1 perceived low levels of intimacy, low levels of equality, infrequent constructive problem solving, and weak barriers to leaving the partner.

The second issue was whether any of the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1 uniquely predicted the dissolution of the relationship. All five relationship quality scores (averaged over partners) were entered as predictors in a single logistic regression. The overall model was significant, $\chi^2(5, N = 353) = 13.65, p < .05$. Model 2 of Table 5 shows that, of the five dimen-

sions of relationship quality, only barriers uniquely predicted whether a relationship would dissolve.

The third issue was whether the type of couple moderated the link between dissolution and the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1. This was examined with a two-step hierarchical logistic regression conducted on each score of relationship quality. In the first step, the seven predictors included the single score for relationship quality at Year 1 of interest (averaged over partners); age, education, income, and years of cohabitation (averaged over partners) as control variables; and two dummy variables representing differences among types of couples in which heterosexual couples served as the reference group. At Step 2, two interaction terms, the relationship quality score \times each dummy variable, were entered as a set. Of particular interest was whether the fit of the model was improved significantly by adding the two interaction terms.

Of the five dimensions of relationship quality, the only dimension for which the chi-square value associated with the improved fit of the model was significant was barriers, $\chi^2(2, N = 353) = 7.87, p < .05$. Of the two interaction terms, only the one involving the comparison between lesbian and heterosexual couples was significant, unstandardized coefficient = 0.40, Wald's statistic = 7.20, $p < .01$. Separate logistic regressions for lesbian couples and heterosexual couples were performed. With controls for the four demographic variables, the presence of strong barriers to leaving the partner at Year 1 predicted dissolution for lesbian couples, unstandardized coefficient = 0.26. However, the presence of weak barriers to leaving the partner at Year 1 predicted dissolution for heterosexual couples, unstandardized coefficient = -0.14.

TABLE 5. UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS AND WALD STATISTICS FOR AVERAGED SCORES OF PARTNER YEAR 1 RELATIONSHIP QUALITY CONSIDERED SEPARATELY (MODEL 1) AND TOGETHER (MODEL 2) IN PREDICTING RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION

Year 1 Score	Model 1			Model 2	
	Model χ^2	Coefficient	Wald	Coefficient	Wald
Intimacy	6.47*	-0.06	6.34**	-0.04	1.33
Autonomy	0.23	0.01	0.22	0.00	0.00
Equality	4.78*	-0.04	5.03*	-0.01	0.17
Problem solving	5.53*	-0.04	5.42*	-0.03	1.84
Barriers	3.06*	-0.09	2.90*	-0.12	4.31*

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

DISCUSSION

*Effects Associated with Type of Couple
for Year 1 Relationship Quality*

Based on previous evidence that the relationship quality of partners from heterosexual couples is influenced by gender-linked processes (intimacy, autonomy, equality, and constructive problem solving) within the relationship and institutionalized barriers that promote the stability of a relationship, a five-dimensional model of relationship quality was formulated and supported by evidence from a principal components analysis. As an additional way of validating this model, I expected the appraisals of partners from married heterosexual couples to differ from appraisals of partners from both gay cohabiting couples and lesbian cohabiting couples. Not all the expected differences were obtained, and the differences that were found were generally small.

As predicted, partners in lesbian couples reported higher levels of intimacy than partners in heterosexual couples. This finding is consistent with the notion that lesbian relationships might benefit from a double dose of relationship-enhancing influences (Burch, 1985). In contrast to the expectation that partners from gay couples would report higher autonomy than partners from heterosexual couples, both gay partners and lesbian partners reported higher autonomy than heterosexual partners. Although this finding is at odds with the view that gay relationships (and not lesbian relationships) might reflect a double dose of individual-enhancing influences (see Buss & Schmitt, 1993), it is consistent with evidence that gay men and lesbian women do not differ in self-perceptions of personal efficacy (Kurdek, 1987).

Because partners from gay and lesbian couples cannot use the sex of their partner as a way to assign relationship roles, they were expected to report more equality in their relationships than married partners. This prediction was supported for only lesbian partners. As Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) speculated, lesbian partners might be especially likely to value and promote equality in their intimate relationships because, as women, they are prone to experience inequity and unfairness in contexts removed from the relationship, such as the workplace.

To the extent that men and women view relationship problems from different—and perhaps even incompatible—perspectives (Gottman, 1994), I expected that partners from gay and les-

bian couples would report more constructive problem solving than married partners. On the contrary, gay and lesbian partners did not differ from married partners on this dimension of relationship quality. Because styles used to resolve conflict have been found to depend on which partner is more invested in the issue at hand (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995), it may be that expected differences among types of couples would be obtained when the styles of conflict resolution that partners use are considered, along with characteristics of the issue that they are trying to resolve.

Finally, the prediction that married partners whose relationships are formally supported by social and cultural institutions would report stronger barriers to leaving their relationship than either gay or lesbian partners was supported. This finding highlights the importance of barriers as a unique dimension of relationship quality and underscores previous claims that the processes that maintain a relationship need to include forces that prevent a partner from leaving the relationship, as well as forces that attract a partner to the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997).

*Effects Associated with Type of Couple
for Relationship Outcomes*

Previous studies have assessed differences in relationship satisfaction among partners from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual married couples at only one time point (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Howard et al., 1986; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Metz et al., 1994) or, at most, two time points (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). In contrast, this study used longitudinal data over five annual assessments to examine whether gay or lesbian couples differed from heterosexual married couples in both the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction and relationship stability. Neither lesbian nor gay partners differed from heterosexual partners in the level of relationship satisfaction with which they started their trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. Further, although all three types of couples considered together tended to show a decrease in relationship satisfaction over the 5 years of the study, gay and lesbian partners did not differ from heterosexual partners in the rate of change in relationship satisfaction. Taken together, these findings support the view that, in the overall affective appraisals of their relationships, married heterosexual partners are more similar to than different from cohabiting gay or lesbian partners.

Finally, the raw breakup rates obtained in this study over a 5-year period were similar to those obtained by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) over an 18-month period. Blumstein and Schwartz reported that the percentage of couples initially studied who had ended their relationships by the follow-up assessment was 4% for heterosexual married couples, 13% for gay couples, and 18% for lesbian couples. The corresponding values obtained in this study were 7%, 14%, and 16%. Although Blumstein and Schwartz did not determine the statistical significance of differences in the breakup rate by type of couple, they emphasized that lesbian couples had the highest rates of dissolution. In contrast, my statistical analyses indicated that, with controls for demographic variables, both gay and lesbian couples were more likely to dissolve their relationships than heterosexual couples were. Nonetheless, this finding needs to be viewed cautiously because the overall model from which effects associated with type of couple were derived was not statistically significant.

The lack of formalized social and cultural supports for committed gay and lesbian relationships is a plausible explanation for the tendency of gay and lesbian couples to dissolve their relationships more frequently than married heterosexual couples. In the course of experiencing the distress that invariably occurs in any relationship, gay and lesbian partners encounter few institutionalized barriers to leaving their relationships on at least three fronts. On the legal front, because gay and lesbian relationships are not legally sanctioned, partners in these relationships do not have to fret about the cost of a divorce, the loss of health and survivor insurance, or retirement and tax benefits. On the religious front, because most formal religious sects condemn homosexuality, gay and lesbian partners in troubled relationships are unlikely to have religious qualms about ending their relationships. Finally, on the social front, because family members may never have approved the relationship in the first place (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986), it is unlikely that gay and lesbian partners on the brink of ending their relationship will worry much about what family members have to say.

Nonetheless, despite the absence of institutionalized forces that promote the stability of gay and lesbian couples, it is remarkable that 86% of the gay couples and 84% of the lesbian couples remained together over the 5 years of study. From a psychological standpoint, one might interpret these stability percentages as impressive evidence

that gay and lesbian partners bear a strong sense of personal responsibility to maintain their relationships and perceive noninstitutionalized constraints to ending their relationships. In contrast to married partners, gay and lesbian partners may be especially likely to derive the wherewithal for dealing with the vagaries of a close relationship from the support of small circles of friends (Bryant & Demian, 1994). Also, because gay and lesbian partners score higher than heterosexual partners on the personality factor tapping openness to new experiences (Kurdek, 1997), they may be predisposed to find creative ways to make a relationship work in spite of a larger hostile social environment.

*Predictive Relations Between Self-Partner
Assessments of Relationship Quality
at Year 1 and Later Relationship Distress*

One novel feature of this study was that change in a person's relationship satisfaction over 5 years was linked to two sets of appraisals of five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1—those of the person (self-appraisals) and those of that person's relationship partner (partner appraisals). I first examined how both the self-appraisals and partner appraisals were linked to one's own trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction on a dimension-by-dimension basis. Overall, I found that the values of relationship quality at Year 1 did a fairly good job of predicting where someone would start the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. Further, self-appraisals and partner appraisals for three dimensions of relationship quality—intimacy, equality, and constructive problem solving—provided unique information about the start of the trajectory. This pattern of findings is consistent with the view that one person's experiences of a relationship are affected by both his or her own view of the relationship, as well as that of his or her partner (Kelley, 1979).

I also examined how the entire set of self-appraisals and partner appraisals of the five dimensions of relationship quality at Year 1 was linked to one's own trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. In this case, I found that unique information regarding the initial status of relationship satisfaction was provided by self-appraisals of intimacy, autonomy, equality, and constructive problem solving, as well as by partner appraisals of equality and constructive problem solving. Because the strongest unique effect was obtained for self-appraisals of equality (a medium-sized effect), I tentatively con-

clude that this may be a core dimension of relationship quality. The finding that partner appraisals of equality and constructive problem solving contributed unique information to one's own initial status of relationship satisfaction is noteworthy because these two dimensions of relationship quality highlight the interdependent nature of partner interactions in a close relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Harter et al., 1997).

Although the values of relationship quality at Year 1 were linked to where someone would start the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction, overall they were not linked to the rate at which relationship satisfaction would change. The most likely explanation for this finding is that the dimensions of relationship quality studied here are likely to change as the relationship develops. Thus, rather than being static appraisals, the dimensions of interest are dynamic appraisals. This finding is of conceptual importance because, although researchers are beginning to recognize that change is a core relationship process, the developmental focus in research on close relationships has been almost exclusively on how relationship outcomes change (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). The present findings provide a basis for urging that researchers also address how appraisals of relationship quality change, as well as how change in these appraisals is linked to change in relationship outcomes.

When couple-level appraisals of each dimension of relationship quality at Year 1 were linked to relationship dissolution, the most notable finding was that barriers to leaving the relationship emerged as a significant predictor. In fact, of the five dimensions of relationship quality, only barriers provided unique information about eventual dissolution. The importance of barriers to leaving the relationship for relationship stability is in contrast to the failure of this dimension of relationship quality to provide any information about the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction. This evidence supports Adams and Jones's (1997) viewpoint that the stability of relationships needs to be studied with regard to the forces that prevent one from leaving a relationship.

Type of Couple as a Moderator of the Link Between Relationship Quality at Year 1 and Relationship Outcomes

The analyses of type of couple as a moderator variable indicated that the link between the dimensions of Year 1 relationship quality and both

the trajectory of change in relationship satisfaction and relationship dissolution was as strong for married partners as it was for gay partners and lesbian partners. Only one moderator effect was obtained, and this suggested that eventual dissolution was predicted by strong Year 1 barriers for lesbian partners and weak Year 1 barriers for heterosexual couples. Because this was the sole moderator effect, its significance is uncertain, especially in the absence of information about how changes in appraisals of barriers were linked to eventual dissolution for any of the couples studied.

Because findings for married partners were so similar to those for both gay and lesbian partners, one might question the assumption underlying the five-factor model of relationship quality that intimacy, autonomy, equality, and constructive problem solving represent gender-linked forces within a relationship that promote relationship satisfaction. An alternative viewpoint, consistent with the generality of findings across type of couple, is that these dimensions of relationship quality represent a blend of forces within any relationship, forces that affect how each partner—regardless of biological sex—is likely to regard himself or herself as connected to the relationship or as autonomous from it (Harter et al., 1997).

Limitations and Conclusions

The findings of this study need to be considered in view of five major limitations. First, no claims can be made that the samples of couples studied were representative. Indeed, there was evidence that couples who completed all assessments tended to be well educated. Second, the equivalence of couples on demographic variables was approximated by covariate corrections, rather than by matching couples on demographic variables. Third, although relationship quality appears to have been assessed reliably and validly, no claims can be made that the assessments were exhaustive. Fourth, all measures—especially the problem-solving ones—were obtained from self-reports, with attending problems of self-presentation bias. Finally, because the focus of this study was on intercouple differences, no information was presented regarding intracouple differences (e.g., gender effects in heterosexual couples).

Despite these limitations, the findings provide evidence that intimacy, autonomy, equality, constructive problem solving, and barriers are meaningful dimensions of relationship quality; that one's own relationship satisfaction is influenced

by one's partner's appraisals of the relationship, as well as one's own appraisals; that static Year 1 assessments of relationship quality provide no information about the rate of change in relationship satisfaction; that barriers to leaving a relationship are of distinct importance for understanding the process of relationship dissolution; and that the links between relationship quality and relationship outcomes obtained for heterosexual married partners are equivalent to those obtained for both gay and lesbian cohabiting partners.

NOTE

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APPENDIX

ITEMS FOR RELATIONSHIP QUALITY SCORES

Score	Item
Intimacy	I spend as much time with my partner as possible; I do as many activities with my partner as possible; my partner and I have built an identity as a couple; I get so close to my partner that I'm not sure where she/he begins and I end; my partner is a very important part of how I see myself; I think in terms of "we" or "us," instead of "I" or "me"; I can never get too close to my partner.
Autonomy	I have major interests of my own outside of the relationship; I have a supportive group of friends separate from my partner; I have a close friend other than my partner; my sense of being an individual is separate from my sense of being part of a couple; I make most decisions on my own without checking with my partner; I maintain the position that, if I had to, I could really make it on my own.
Equality	My partner and I have equal power in the relationship; my partner shows as much affection to me as I think I show to him/her; my partner and I invest equal amounts of time and energy in the relationship; my partner and I are equally committed to working-out problems that occur in our relationship; all things considered, my partner and I contribute an equal amount to the relationship; my partner and I deal with each other as equals; my partner treats me and respects me as an equal; my partner depends on me as much as I depend on him/her.
Constructive problem solving	Launching personal attacks*, exploding and getting out of control*, getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant*, throwing insults and digs*, focusing on the problem at hand, sitting down and discussing differences constructively, finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us, negotiating and compromising, remaining silent for long periods of time*, reaching a limit, "shutting down" and refusing to talk any further*, tuning the other person out*, withdrawing, acting distant, and not interested*.
Barriers	I would find it difficult to ever leave my partner because of my religious beliefs; I would find it difficult to leave my partner because it would hurt those who depend on me; I would find it difficult to leave my partner because of pressure from my family, friends, or community; I would find it difficult to leave my partner because I could not live as well on my own; I would find it difficult to leave my partner because I feel obligated to keep the relationship together.

*Item was reverse-scored.