



Heterosexuals' acceptance predicts the well-being of same-sex attracted young adults beyond ingroup support

Sharon K. Dane

The University of Queensland

Geoff MacDonald

University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

Ingroup support for sexual minority individuals may be somewhat different from that of many (heterosexual) racial/ethnic minority groups whose sense of belonging may stem from a shared identity with family and similar community members. This distinction raises the important question of whether outgroup (i.e., heterosexual) acceptance plays a unique role in predicting the well-being of sexual minorities even in the presence of support from their own ingroup. Findings from same-sex attracted young adults in Australia supported this hypothesis, suggesting that acceptance from the broader community is an important facet of well-being beyond the important support provided by fellow sexual-minority members. Notably, this study specifically targeted those most likely to have access to support from their sexual minority peers.

KEY WORDS: gay and lesbian • ingroup support • minority stress • sexual minority health • social acceptance

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Although marked by the methodological challenges of researching a stigmatized and somewhat invisible population, large population-based studies suggest that some sexual minority individuals, compared with their heterosexual counterparts, appear to be at higher risk for psychological and substance-use disorders (Cochran & Mays, 2006; Meyer, 2003). One factor to which researchers generally attribute the apparent higher incidence of mental health problems among sexual minority individuals is the stressors associated with having a devalued minority status (e.g., Mays & Cochran, 2001). Studies examining the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination against racial/ethnic minority groups have generally found that strong affiliation with one's own minority group can enhance psychological well-being, as well as provide a buffer against the adverse effects of a stigmatized status (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002). However, the socialization of sexual minority individuals differs from that of many (heterosexual) racial/ethnic minority individuals due to the relatively concealable nature of sexual orientation and the fact that members generally do not share this minority status with their families. As such, ingroup support for this minority group may be somewhat different from that of minority groups whose members are more likely to experience a strong sense of belonging through a shared identity with family and similar others living within their communities. The different nature of ingroup support for sexual minority individuals raises the important question of whether positive evaluations from outgroup members (i.e., the heterosexual community) play a unique role in contributing to their well-being even in the presence of support from similar others.

To our knowledge, no study has explored whether outgroup members are an important source of support above and beyond that provided by members of a same-sex attracted person's own ingroup. That is, does perceived acceptance from others who do not share a person's sexual minority status make a unique contribution to these individuals' well-being, even when accounting for support from what seems like an extremely important reference group (i.e., their like-minded peers)? As young people with same-sex attractions appear to be reporting disclosure of their sexual orientation to others in growing numbers (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005) and at earlier ages (Savin-Williams, 1998), it is increasingly important to investigate the potential differences between the many who report high levels of well-being and those who do not. Thus, the main purpose of the current study was to investigate whether, for young adults who have access to ingroup support, perceived acceptance of their sexual orientation from various sectors of the heterosexual community would significantly predict their psychological well-being over and above the support they perceived receiving from friends sharing their sexual minority status.

Disclosure of same-sex attractions

The secular trend in disclosure of same-sex attraction is that more young people are disclosing to others and they are doing so at an earlier age (e.g., Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998). Although early disclosure can have benefits, (e.g., Anderson,

1987; Gonsiorek, 1988; Herek, 2003), the likelihood of disclosing at an age when one may be emotionally and financially dependent on one's family has also raised concerns about the consequences of negative reactions (e.g., D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005). As studies indicate that people who lack support from family and friends are vulnerable to a range of emotional problems, such as increased anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990), lowered self-esteem (Leary & MacDonald, 2003), and depression (Leary, 1990), it is important to understand what factors play a role in protecting young people who are at least somewhat open about their same-sex attractions.

Ingroup identification and support

Research on minority groups generally has suggested that identification with and support from members of the minority group can enhance individual members' psychological well-being and provide a buffer against the ill-effects of a devalued status. In a review, Halpern (1993) provided cross-cultural evidence that minorities living in areas with a high concentration of fellow group members demonstrated lower psychiatric admission rates than those more isolated from their minority community (see also Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002; Romero & Roberts, 2003). One mechanism by which ingroup affiliation may lead to better psychological health is the availability of social comparison targets who are of similar (disadvantaged) status (Crocker & Major, 1989). Indeed, research suggests that higher levels of minority group identification are associated with a greater perception of devaluation by dominant groups (e.g., Chavira & Phinney, 1991; Sanders Thompson, 1990). Overall, this research supports the notion that feelings of support from and similarity to a marginalized ingroup can serve to temper the negative effects of rejection from a more powerful outgroup. This may well explain the somewhat counter intuitive findings of lower rates of psychiatric morbidity among several racial/ethnic minority groups when compared with their White American counterparts (e.g., Breslau et al., 2006).

This evidence for minority resilience against stigmatized status, however, is inconsistent with the findings on sexual minority mental health from recent large population-based studies. Although it is important to note that a review of these studies indicated that the majority of sexual minority respondents did not meet criteria for any measured disorder (Cochran & Mays, 2006), findings do suggest the possibility of an elevated risk for mental health problems among nonheterosexual adults and youth when compared with their heterosexual counterparts (Cochran & Mays, 2006; Meyer, 2003). The experience of a sense of belonging may be very different for a marginalized group member whose family does not share their minority status. Telljohann and Price (1993) noted that even under the worst conditions of social rejection, racial, ethnic, and religious minority youth generally have the opportunity to receive positive socialization from their family about their subculture and group identity. Safren and Pantalone (2006) found that although both ethnic and sexual minority youth reported fewer social supports than their peers, ethnic minority youth did not report less satisfaction with this support than

their peers, whereas sexual minority youth did. The authors suggest that one reason for these findings may be that while heterosexual ethnic minorities generally have family members with whom they have the opportunity to receive satisfactory support through shared experiences, being a sexual minority can result in being set apart from one's family. Leap (2007), in presenting the life stories of gay men, suggests that although support from others is possible in gay socialization, the availability of this form of support is by no means reliable. Instead, the details in these men's narratives suggest that the gay socialization process is a self-initiated and self-managed experience, or what Leap refers to as self-managed socialization.

These differences in the socialization of sexual minorities suggest that the protection offered by a cohesive minority community may be less accessible for this minority group when compared with those whose members have hereditary and more visible identities. This is not to suggest that sexual minorities lack resilience or generally suffer low support from their own group. Rather, this type of support, even when present, may not equate to the sense of community belonging provided by family and neighbors who share one's minority status. As such, positive evaluations from outgroup members (i.e., the heterosexual community) may play a unique role in predicting the psychological well-being of sexual minorities, even in the presence of support from similar others.

Acceptance and support

Research involving both young (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Floyd, Stein, Harter, Allison, & Nye, 1999; Vincke & van Heeringen, 2002) and older-aged (e.g., Grossman, D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 2000; Kurdek, 1988; Luhtanen, 2003) same-sex attracted individuals has demonstrated that perceived social support from various sources is related to psychological well-being. Research in this area, however, has yet to investigate the contribution of heterosexual acceptance while at the same time taking into account support gained from members of one's own sexual minority group.

The present study aimed to address this gap by examining whether perceived acceptance from others who do not share a young adult's sexual minority status uniquely contributes to the prediction of these young people's well-being, even when controlling for support from what seems likely to be an extremely important reference group (i.e., their sexual minority friends). As the current study aimed to investigate the role of outgroup acceptance in the presence of support from one's ingroup, same-sex attracted young adults in south-east Queensland, Australia were recruited through various sexual minority social groups, events, and friendship networks. That is, individuals most likely to have access to ingroup support were targeted for recruitment. They were invited to complete a self-report questionnaire on issues related to support and acceptance of their sexual orientation which included well-being.

In keeping with findings showing a positive association between affiliation with one's own racial/ethnic minority group and well-being (e.g., Halpern, 1993), we predicted that these young adult's perceptions of support from

their sexual minority friends would be a positive predictor of well-being. In light of the unique socialization of sexual minorities, however, we also predicted that perceptions of acceptance of their sexual orientation from heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts (apart from friends), and from their mothers and fathers, would each predict their psychological well-being over and above the support they perceived receiving from their sexual minority friends. We have no prediction as to which source of perceived heterosexual acceptance (friends, contacts, mother, and father) would be most likely to predict well-being over and above sexual minority support, or the effect of possible gender differences in these relationships.

Method

Participants

Participants were 127 self-defined same-sex attracted young adults. The 67 females and 60 males ranged from 18 to 25 years of age (mean = 21.1). The vast majority (94%) reported being sexually attracted only or mostly to members of the same sex. Four participants reported having an equal attraction to both sexes and ten used the term “bisexual” to describe their sexual identity.

The sample was 91% Caucasian, 6% Asian, and 3% mixed race, with 69% currently attending an educational institution. The majority resided in metropolitan areas of southeast Queensland, Australia. Participants were recruited from five university campuses’ Queer collectives (37%), two gay youth support services (8.7%), a gay and lesbian association (6.3%), the annual Brisbane Pride Fair Day (18.1%), the national Queer Collaborations Conference (15.7%), and various sexual minority social groups and friendship networks (14.2%).

Measurement

A self-report questionnaire was specifically developed for this study to assess (i) participants’ self-defined sexual orientation, (ii) areas of disclosure and extent of disclosure of sexual orientation, (iii) perceived level of acceptance of sexual orientation for each area of disclosure, and (iv) perceived level of support from sexual minority friends. The questionnaire also included two dependent measures to assess positive well-being: global self-esteem and satisfaction with life.

Areas of disclosure or awareness by others of sexual orientation. Participants were asked in which, if any, of four separate domains they had disclosed their sexual orientation or were confident that others were aware of their sexual orientation: heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts apart from friends (e.g., neighbors, co-workers, employers, or teachers), mother, and father. To differentiate heterosexual friends from contacts, the questionnaire, at the onset, described a “contact” as “anyone that you feel you communicate with on a somewhat regular basis but would not actually

classify as a friend.” Respondents were additionally advised that if they felt that a co-worker or neighbor, for example, was better described as a friend, to include them in the questions and statements that refer to “friends” rather than “contacts.”

Specifically, participants were asked “Do you currently have any heterosexual friends to whom you have disclosed your sexual orientation or who you are confident are aware of your sexual orientation?” with the response options being “Yes” or “No.” The same format and response options were used to address the remaining domains (contacts apart from friends, mother and father).

Extent of disclosure or awareness by others of sexual orientation. The number of heterosexual friends participants perceived as being aware of their sexual orientation was assessed using two items. The first was a question that asked “When you consider the number of friends you have in general, how many do you estimate to be heterosexual?” Response options ranged from 1 = *none* to 9 = *all*. Those participants reporting heterosexual friends aware of their sexual orientation were presented with an additional item, “When I consider only my heterosexual friends, the amount who I am confident are aware of my sexual orientation is _____,” (1 = *none*; 9 = *all*).

As the vast majority of the population is heterosexual it was deemed unnecessary to ask how many contacts (e.g., neighbors or co-workers) were heterosexual. Therefore, the assessment in this case relied on the following single item, “When I consider my heterosexual contacts in general (apart from friends), I feel the amount who I am confident are aware of my sexual orientation is: _____,” (1 = *none*; 9 = *all*). The assessment of the number of individuals aware in the cases of mother and father was not applicable.

Perceived level of acceptance. Participants who responded with “Yes” to others’ awareness of their sexuality in a relationship domain were asked to indicate their perceptions of acceptance from these individuals on a scale from 1 = *not at all accepting* to 9 = *fully accepting*. If a parent was deceased, they were asked to indicate how they currently felt about their parents’ level of acceptance while they were alive. The term “acceptance” in all cases was specified as referring to acceptance of sexual orientation.

Support from sexual minority friends. Those who responded “Yes” to having sexual minority friends were asked to complete the statement “Overall, I feel that when it comes to receiving support from my sexual minority friends, they are _____,” (1 = *not at all supportive*; 9 = *extremely supportive*). The term “support” was specified as referring to ways in which a friend may be helpful, caring, or encouraging.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). This 10-item scale (Rosenberg, 1965) assessed global self-esteem (e.g., “On the whole I am satisfied with myself”) using a 9-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 9 = *very strongly agree*), with higher average scores indicating higher self-esteem. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .92.

Satisfaction With Life Scale. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a 5-item scale used as a global measure of life satisfaction (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”). Ratings in this study were recorded on a 9-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*; 9 = *very strongly agree*), with higher average scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was .87.

Procedure

The measures were presented as a single package, with the well-being measures presented last. Accompanying the questionnaire was an information sheet, a form requiring signed consent, and an envelope for confidentiality. With the exception of the small percentage recruited through support services and friendship networks, individuals were approached with a flyer that invited the participation of nonheterosexual individuals 18 to 25 years of age. The flyer advised potential participants to approach the researcher if she or he was interested in taking part. As all individuals were approached in a sexual minority “safe place,” the issue of disclosure through the request of a questionnaire was not a concern.

With the exception of the Queer Conference and the Pride Fair Day, young adults presented with the opportunity to participate in the study tended to be in small groups (e.g., universities’ diverse sexuality rooms) of a few to a dozen individuals. Under these conditions, a majority (approximately 85%) approached the researcher for a questionnaire. For the Pride Fair Day, only individuals appearing to meet the age criterion were approached with advertising flyers. Approaches were limited to situations conducive to filling in a questionnaire (e.g., sitting at tables). Of these, approximately 50% of those presented with a flyer approached the researcher for a questionnaire. At the Queer Conference, a single public announcement resulted in 50 questionnaires being distributed with 21 (42%) returned completed. In twelve instances, questionnaires were mailed out at the participant’s request. Six of these (50%) were returned completed by the closure date.

Participants were instructed to allow enough area around them to be able to complete the questionnaire in private. They were also advised to place their copy in the envelope provided upon completion. All participants were then provided with a feedback sheet supplying them with further information on the study, providing contact details of the researchers, and thanking them for their participation.

Results

A larger number of participants reported being “out” to their mothers ($n = 115$; 90.6%) than to their fathers ($n = 90$; 70.9%). “Heterosexual friends” was the most common area of disclosure ($n = 125$; 98.4%). A strong majority of participants indicated that at least one heterosexual contact from the wider community ($n = 101$; 79.5%) knew of their sexual orientation. Only 59% (32 males, 43 females) of the total sample, however, reported others in all four groups knew of their sexual orientation.

Means and standard deviations for perceived acceptance, sexual minority support, and the two well-being measures (before being standardized and averaged to form a single measure) are presented in Table 1. As perceptions of acceptance are dependent upon others' awareness, the sample sizes for the acceptance variables are consistent with those for the disclosure variables.

Age and gender differences

For each of the four targets of disclosure (i.e., heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts, mother and father), there were no significant age differences between participants who were "out" or not, nor were there significant gender differences. Further, the correlation between age and well-being as well as gender differences and well-being were not statistically significant. There were no significant gender differences for perceptions of acceptance of sexual orientation in any of the disclosure categories. However, females ($M = 8.07, SD = 1.15$) perceived significantly higher levels of support from their sexual minority friends than did males ($M = 7.24, SD = 1.70$), $t(124) = -3.28, p = .001, \eta^2 = .08$. Finally, older participants perceived significantly higher levels of acceptance from their father than younger participants, $r = .27, p = .009$.

Acceptance, support and well-being

The self-esteem (RSE) and satisfaction with life (SWLS) scales correlated very strongly, $r = .76, p < .001$. As such, these measures were standardized and averaged to form a single measure of well-being.

Table 2 indicates that well-being correlated significantly with perceived acceptance from heterosexual friends, perceived acceptance from heterosexual contacts, and perceived support from sexual minority friends. Perceived acceptance from either parent was not significantly related to well-being, although perceived acceptance from one's mother approached significance, $p = .052$.

TABLE 1
Means and standard deviations for acceptance and support variables and the dependent variables for well-being

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Acceptance Heterosexual Friends	125	7.29	1.54
Acceptance Heterosexual Contacts	101	5.70	1.52
Acceptance Mother	115	6.26	2.42
Acceptance Father	90	5.87	2.47
Support Sexual Minority Friends	126	7.68	1.48
Self-Esteem	127	6.77	1.61
Satisfaction with Life	127	5.92	1.84

Note. For all measures the range of possible scores was from 1–9.

TABLE 2
Correlations for acceptance, support, and dependent variable well-being

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Acceptance HF	– (125)					
2. Acceptance HC	.40*** (101)	– (101)				
3. Acceptance Mother	.29** (113)	.08 (95)	– (115)			
4. Acceptance Father	.27* (88)	.27* (76)	.39*** (90)	– (90)		
5. Support SMF	.20* (124)	.08 (101)	–.05 (115)	.00 (90)	– (126)	
6. Well-Being	.21* (125)	.21* (101)	.18 (115)	.13 (90)	.22* (126)	– (127)

Note. Sample size is presented in parentheses.

HF = Heterosexual Friends, HC = Heterosexual Contacts, SMF = Sexual Minority Friends

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Multivariate analyses

As only 59% of the sample reported that they felt confident others in all four target groups were aware of their sexual orientation, a separate hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted for each group. To control for perceived support from sexual minority friends, this predictor was entered into a hierarchical regression on step 1 with the perceived acceptance variable added in step 2 (see Table 3). In all four cases, perceived support from sexual minority friends significantly predicted well-being in step 1 of the regression analyses. The inclusion of the acceptance variable on the second step revealed that perceived acceptance of sexual orientation from heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts, and from one's mother, each resulted in a significant increase in R^2 . This indicates these variables accounted for a significant unique proportion of variance in well-being scores beyond that explained by support from sexual minority friends. Perceived acceptance from father, however, did not significantly influence well-being.

A series of hierarchical regression analyses were then conducted to evaluate the effects of gender in each of the four areas of acceptance. Support from sexual minority friends, gender, and the acceptance variable were entered on step 1 (continuous variables were zero-centred with the categorical variable dummy coded, as outlined by Aiken and West, 1991). To examine interaction effects, the product of support and gender, acceptance and gender, and support and acceptance were added on step 2. The 2-way interaction between gender and mother's acceptance was significant, $\beta = .30$, $t(3,108) = 2.11$, $p < .05$. A simple slopes analysis examining this

TABLE 3
Hierarchical regressions of support and acceptance variables on well-being

Independent variables	Step	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>p</i>	dfs	Final Step	
						β	unique variance
Support SMF	1	.05*	.05*		1,122	.20*	3.7%
Acceptance HF	2	.10**	.05*	.015	1,121	.21*	4.2%
Support SMF	1	.09**	.09**		1,99	.26**	6.2%
Acceptance HC	2	.12**	.04*	.045	1,98	.20*	3.8%
Support SMF	1	.04*	.04*		1,113	.20*	3.6%
Acceptance M	2	.07*	.04*	.038	1,112	.20*	3.6%
Support SMF	1	.07*	.07*		1,88	.26*	6.9%
Acceptance F	2	.09*	.02	.211	1,87	.14	1.9%

Note. SMF = Sexual Minority Friends, HF = Heterosexual Friends, HC = Heterosexual Contacts M = Mother, F = Father.
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

interaction revealed that mother’s acceptance was a significant predictor of well-being over and above support from sexual minority friends for female participants, $t = 2.78$, $p = .006$, but not male, $t = -0.23$, $p = .817$. No other interactions were statistically significant.

A hierarchical regression analysis was then conducted to examine the unique proportion of variance in well-being scores accounted for by each of the four acceptance variables when acting together. All four sources of acceptance were entered simultaneously on the second step with the support variable entered on the first. As only 59% of the sample felt confident others in all four domains were aware of their sexual orientation, the sample size for this regression analysis was reduced to 75. Results for this subgroup (see Table 4) show that R^2 was significant on step 1, with support from sexual minority friends accounting for approximately 9% of the variance in well-being. The increase in R^2 on step 2 shows that the four acceptance variables acting together accounted for approximately an additional 11% of the variance. The increment in R^2 for this reduced sample approached significance, $p = .053$. Investigation of the contribution of each individual predictor revealed that support from sexual minority friends made a significant unique contribution to the prediction of well-being and the contribution of acceptance from heterosexual contacts approached significance. Note that the interpretation of these results is restricted to a select group of young adults who were open about their sexuality in all disclosure domains.

Disclosure variables and well-being

It can be argued that being open about one’s same-sex sexual orientation may be, in and of itself, a predictor of well-being (i.e., those who choose to disclose may have higher self-esteem in the first place). To address this

TABLE 4
Support and acceptance on well-being for young adults ‘out’ in all areas

Independent variables	Step	R^2	ΔR^2	p	dfs	Final Step		
						β	p	unique variance
Support SMF	1	.09**	.09**		1,74			
Acceptance	2	.21**	.11	.053	4,70			
Support SMF						.25*	.027	5.8%
Acceptance HF						.15	.218	1.7%
Acceptance HC						.22	.062	4.1%
Acceptance M						.10	.386	0.9%
Acceptance F						-.01	.934	0.0%

Note. Analysis represents only 59% of the total sample.

SMF = Sexual Minority Friends, HF = Heterosexual Friends, HC = Heterosexual Contacts, M = Mother, F = Father.

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

possibility, independent samples t -tests were conducted to examine differences in well-being scores between those who were “out” and those who were not in the four domains of disclosure. Differences were found only for one domain. Those who were “out” to heterosexual contacts (i.e., the wider community) reported significantly higher levels of well-being ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.87$) than those who were not ($M = -0.45$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(125) = -2.83$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .06$.

Acceptance, well-being and extent of disclosure

Multivariate analyses using hierarchical regression were then conducted to investigate the role of acceptance in predicting well-being over and above extent of disclosure (i.e., proportion of heterosexual friends or contacts to which participants were “out”), after controlling for sexual minority support. As extent of disclosure does not apply in the case of parents, the following analyses involved only heterosexual friends and contacts. Due to the fact that degree of disclosure to heterosexual friends is dependent upon the proportion of one’s friends that are heterosexual, this measure was included in the analysis for friends. In the case of heterosexual contacts, this measure becomes superfluous given that it can be assumed that at least 90% of the wider community is mainly attracted to members of the other sex.

Acceptance from heterosexual friends. Perceived support from sexual minority friends was entered on Step 1. The proportion of friends that were heterosexual, the proportion of these friends that were aware of the participant’s sexual orientation, and the product of these zero-centred variables

were added on Step 2. The acceptance variable was added on step 3. Results presented in Table 5 indicate that R^2 was significant on step 1, with perceived support from sexual minority friends accounting for approximately 5% of the variance in well-being scores. The increase in R^2 on step 2 was not significant. The inclusion of the acceptance variable on step 3 revealed that perceived acceptance of one's sexual orientation from heterosexual friends resulted in a significant increment in R^2 , indicating that this acceptance accounted for approximately 3% of the variance in well-being scores beyond that explained by perceived support from sexual minority friends and extent of disclosure to heterosexual friends.

Acceptance from heterosexual contacts. Perceived support from sexual minority friends was entered on step 1 with the proportion of heterosexual contacts aware of the participant's sexual orientation (i.e., extent of disclosure) entered on step 2. To examine the significance of acceptance from heterosexual contacts over and above support from sexual minority friends, as well as extent of disclosure to contacts, this acceptance variable was then entered on step 3. Results presented in Table 6 show that R^2 was significant on step 1, with support from sexual minority friends accounting for approximately 8% of the variance in well-being. The significant increase in R^2 on step 2 reveals that the proportion of heterosexual contacts aware of a participant's sexual orientation accounted for approximately an additional

TABLE 5
Support, disclosure to heterosexual friends, and acceptance variables on well-being

Independent variables	Step	R^2	ΔR^2	p	dfs	Final Step		
						β	p	unique variance
Support SMF	1	.05*	.05*					
PHF								
PHF aware								
PHF \times PHF aware	2	.08	.02	.407	3,117			
Acceptance HF	3	.11*	.03*	.039	1,116			
Support SMF						.22*	.021	4.2%
PHF						.06	.506	0.3%
PHF aware						.03	.764	0.0%
PHF \times PHF aware						.10	.297	0.9%
Acceptance HF						.20*	.039	3.6%

Note: SMF = Sexual Minority Friends, PHF = Proportion of Heterosexual Friends, HF = Heterosexual Friends.

* $p < .05$

TABLE 6
Support, disclosure to heterosexual contacts, and acceptance variables on well-being

Independent variables	Step	R^2	ΔR^2	p	dfs	Final Step		
						β	p	unique variance
Support SMF	1	.08**	.08**					
PHC aware	2	.14**	.05*	.018				
Acceptance HC	3	.15**	.02	.167				
Support SMF					.27*	.005	7.5%	
PHC aware					.19	.056	3.3%	
Acceptance HC					.14	.210	1.7%	

Note: SMF = Sexual Minority Friends, PHC = Proportion of Heterosexual Contacts, HC = Heterosexual Contacts.

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

5% of the variance in well-being scores beyond that explained by support from sexual minority friends. The increase in R^2 on step 3, however, reveals that perceived acceptance from heterosexual contacts did not significantly add to the prediction.

Discussion

Ingroup support and outgroup acceptance

As predicted, the level of support young adults perceived from their sexual minority friends was positively associated with their psychological well-being. This outcome is consistent with research involving racial and ethnic minority groups which suggests that ingroup support and ingroup identification can enhance well-being, as well as serve to temper the ill-effects of a devalued status (Branscombe et al., 1999; Halpern, 1993; Postmes and Branscombe, 2002). Further, as the current study specifically targeted individuals who were most likely to be already receiving support from same-sex attracted others, these findings suggest that even young people who already have ingroup support benefit from higher levels of this support.

The primary aim of this study, however, was to examine if outgroup (heterosexual) acceptance would contribute to the prediction of same-sex attracted young adults' well-being, when first taking into account support from their own minority group. This hypothesis was supported overall, with the level of acceptance participants perceived from their heterosexual friends, heterosexual contacts apart from friends, and from their mothers

each predicting well-being over and above sexual minority support. Importantly, support from sexual minority friends remained a significant predictor of well-being after heterosexual acceptance was added to the analyses. As such, favorable evaluations from outgroup members appear to play an additive role in contributing to the well-being of same-sex attracted young adults, rather than simply acting as a substitute for support from similar others.

This study also attempted to explore which areas of outgroup acceptance would relate more strongly to well-being. However, as same-sex attracted individuals do not uniformly disclose their sexuality to others, with some being “out” in some areas but not in others, an exploratory analysis was restricted to a sub-sample (59%) of participants who had disclosed in all four domains assessed in this study. Results suggest that for these relatively “out” young people acceptance from heterosexual contacts (neighbors, co-workers, etc.) plays the strongest role in predicting their well-being, over and above the support garnered from their same-sex attracted friends. Perhaps for this group of individuals who have already crossed the hurdles associated with “coming out” to family and friends, overcoming hurdles within the wider community takes on a new importance; disclosure to contacts is a continuous lifetime process and is a key to establishing new friendships.

Only partial support was found for the role of parental acceptance in promoting well-being. When first taking into account the level of support participants reported receiving from their same-sex attracted friends, a mother’s acceptance predicted the well-being of female participants, but not males. Further, acceptance from fathers was not a predictor of well-being over and above ingroup support for either gender (even though fathers’ level of acceptance was equivalent to mothers’ level of acceptance). These findings echo those of an earlier study showing positive maternal but not paternal attitudes predict same-sex attracted youth’s well-being (Floyd et al., 1999), and research suggesting that a mother’s approval is particularly important for lesbian youth (Savin-Williams, 1989).

One explanation for these findings may lie in evidence suggesting that these young people generally place more importance on their maternal as opposed to paternal relationships (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Another contributing factor, however, may be the effects of a father’s delayed knowledge of his child’s sexual orientation. Findings, including those from the current study, suggest that these young people are less likely to disclose their same-sex attractions to their father than to their friends or to their mother. Fathers are frequently the last of these targets to know (Savin-Williams, 1998). As such, the failure to find an association between father’s acceptance and these young adult’s well-being may be partially due to the fact that by the time fathers are able to convey their acceptance, many participants may already have had the baseline of support they needed. Indeed, for some, it may be this secure base outside of their relationship with their father which provides the incentive to be open with him about their same-sex attractions.

Overall, findings from this study are consistent with the argument that the unique socialization of sexual minorities renders positive appraisals from outgroup members an important facet of well-being, beyond the support provided by their own minority group. Although results indicate that the majority of young adults in this study did not lack support from similar others, this form of ingroup support may not be comparable to the protection afforded minority groups whose members elect to live in a relatively homogenous environment within a dominant population. As suggested by Meyer (2003), perhaps it is the somewhat restricted access to ingroup protection from social oppression that at least partially accounts for the apparent discrepancy between racial/ethnic minority mental health and sexual minority mental health when compared with their mainstream counterparts.

Limitations and future research

Although this study's findings reveal a positive association between outgroup acceptance and well-being, its correlational nature renders the causal sequence of these variables ambiguous. Other arguments explaining the relationship between well-being and perceptions of acceptance from others could be posed (e.g., those who feel good about themselves attract positive evaluations from others, or assume others feel good about them). Nonetheless, correlational studies (e.g., Nezlek, 2001), experimental studies (e.g., Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998), and longitudinal work that directly tested two alternative paths (Srivastava & Beer, 2005), have provided evidence to suggest that being accepted by others leads to more positive perceptions of the self and not vice versa.

Another potentially valid argument is that individuals who feel better about themselves may be more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Results from the current study revealed that, however, simply disclosing to either parent did not predict well-being. Further, the proportion of these young adults' friends who were heterosexual, the proportion of these friends to whom they had "come out," and the interaction between these two variables failed to significantly predict well-being. Instead, it was only when acceptance from heterosexual friends was added to these friendship variables that the model became predictive of psychological well-being. Therefore, although these findings cannot provide conclusive evidence on causation, they nonetheless add credence to the suggestion that acceptance promotes well-being, rather than well-being simply leading to feelings of acceptance by facilitating disclosure. Further, these findings are consistent with a growing body of evidence indicating that disclosure of a same-sex sexual orientation in and of itself does not relate to established indicators of well-being (e.g., Mohr & Daly, 2008; Oetjen & Rothblum, 2000).

However, the proportion of heterosexual contacts participants reported being aware of their sexual orientation (i.e., extent of disclosure to or openness with people such as neighbors, co-workers, employers, or teachers) was a significant predictor of positive well-being, with perceptions of acceptance not significantly adding to this prediction. Perhaps in this case the well-being

initially gained from the support and acceptance of close others encourages disclosure on a wider scale, which, if met with acceptance, leads to further disclosure and the ongoing opportunity to establish new friendships.

The findings from this study may not be generalized to all same-sex attracted young adults. For example, the vast majority of participants in this sample identified as White. As such, future research may do well to examine which types of support and acceptance are functional for nonheterosexuals whose ethnic origin differs from that of the dominant population (i.e., those of dual minority status). Another limitation of this study was its inclusion of young adults (18–25) and not younger-aged individuals. Therefore, many of these young people may have been living independent of their families modifying the importance of parental acceptance. As the current study was focused on examining the role of outgroup acceptance in the presence of ingroup support, the results may also not extend to those who identify less with the sexual minority community or do not access sexual minority social networks. Savin-Williams (2005), in describing the new gay teenager, suggests that some of today's same-sex attracted youth, who are perhaps more likely to see the ordinariness of their sexual desires, may focus more on other self-defining qualities rather than a "gay identity."

The current study tried to minimize the possibility of restricting the sample to those who relate to a specific sexual identity, by advertising the study in terms of a person's sexual orientation (i.e., same-sex attractions). Nonetheless, and despite the possible presence of interpersonal ingroup support, non-identifying young people may have been less accessible due to a reduced need to seek a connection with organized social networks formed on a basis of a shared sexual identity. Another factor potentially affecting the breadth of recruitment is the apparent variability of female same-sex sexuality. Diamond (2008), in a 10-year longitudinal study involving non-heterosexual young women, found that two thirds of these women changed identity labels at least once (e.g., lesbian to bisexual, bisexual to unlabeled) with the most commonly adopted identity at some point being "unlabeled." Therefore, the current study may have failed to capture the experiences of same-sex attracted women who may feel that gay and lesbian social networks do not reflect the complexity of their sexual and romantic feelings. As such, the current results leave unclear the role of heterosexual acceptance for those who are open to some extent about their same-sex attractions but for various reasons may lack affinity with the sexual minority community.

Overall, the findings of this study add to the current literature in identifying the unique contribution of heterosexual acceptance in relation to sexual minority support. It is important to acknowledge that, although our findings were statistically significant, there is a large proportion of variation in well-being scores unaccounted for in this research, suggesting that the contribution of outgroup and ingroup support is likely to be one among many relevant factors.

Further, we have argued that due to the unique socialization of sexual minorities, positive outgroup appraisal may be particularly important for this minority group when compared with marginalized groups whose family

members share their minority status. However, we do not have any direct evidence to support this proposed mechanism. One way to test this hypothesis in future research would be to examine the importance of positive outgroup appraisal, in relation to ingroup support, for (heterosexual) individuals belonging to various racial/ethnic minority groups.

Conclusion

While the outcome of this study lends credence to the importance of outgroup acceptance for same-sex attracted young adults who access sexual minority social networks, it does not imply that these young people play a passive role when engaging with others who differ in sexual orientation. Conversely, evidence suggests that sexual minorities utilize an array of active strategies when dealing with intergroup interactions (Conley, Devine, Rabow, & Evett, 2002). What we hope this study does convey is that due to the somewhat isolating nature of a person's nonheterosexuality, the roots of well-being for same-sex attracted young people go beyond having access to their like-minded peers. Although gaining support from others with whom they can share their experiences is clearly important, as was evident in this study, these young people are likely to spend the bulk of their lives engaging with others who differ in values and lifestyles, whether at home, among classmates, or in the workforce. As such, although sexual minority social groups appear to play a vital role in offering ingroup support, such support is likely to be most beneficial when complemented by mainstream acceptance. Given this, research investigating which factors promote, as well as impede, effective communication between individuals differing in sexual orientation can provide an avenue towards future parity in well-being.

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