Examining the Influence of Attachment on the Association between Stress and Partner Emotions among Same-Sex Couples

by

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ABSTRACT

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals are exposed to specific stressors due to their sexual minority status. One such stressor may result from the negative family reactions to one's romantic partner. Encountering this stress may be especially harmful for LGB individuals' emotional well-being, as it could be considered a "double rejection": that of their partner and possibly their own sexual orientation. The stress surrounding family members' negative attitudes about their partner may affect how one feels about their partner. Furthermore, there may be individual differences that affect how an individual may perceive and respond to this stress. Specifically, one's attachment style could either exacerbate (anxious) or weaken (avoidant) the experiences of stress, which may influence the emotions they feel about their partner. Using 14-day daily diary data from 81 same-sex couples, the purpose of this study was to examine whether there was an association between daily perceptions of stress via negative family reactions to partner and negative partner-related emotions, and whether attachment insecurity (anxiety and avoidance) moderated this association. Individuals' perceptions of stress via negative family reactions was found to be positively associated with their reports of negative emotions about one's partner. Anxious and avoidant attachment did not moderate the association between perceptions of stress and negative emotions due to one's partner. The finding suggests this specific stressor on negative emotions due to partner may be an intrapersonal process, in which case couple therapists can increase clients' awareness of this stress and how it impacts their feelings towards their romantic partner.

Keywords: same-sex couples, minority stress, emotions, attachment style

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sexual minority individuals (lesbian, gay, and bisexual [LGB]) in the United States experience discrimination due to their sexual orientation status, as evidenced by the enforcement of discriminatory laws and policies based on heteronormative beliefs and attitudes (Meyer and Frost, 2013). Discrimination is pervasive and can impact the daily experience of stress for LGB individuals and same-sex couples (e.g., negative judgment from family) (Reczek, 2015). According to the minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995), LGB individuals experience unique stressors due to their sexual minority status, which has been defined as *minority stress*. Minority stress theory posits that stress is a result of society's institutions and laws that reinforce prejudices and stigmatization against one's sexual minority status, creating stressful social environments (Meyer, 2003). One such environment is one's family. Specifically, one's family environment can reinforce negative attitudes and stigma about one's sexual identity, based on the family's negative reactions towards the individual or their romantic partner (Reczek, 2015). Stress as a result of perceived negative attitudes from one's family towards their same-sex romantic partner may spillover into the relationship and influence their perceptions of their partner, which could impact how they feel about their partner as well as how their partner feels about them (Neff & Karney, 2004).

The purpose of the present study was to examine the association between daily perceptions of stress surrounding negative family reactions to a romantic partner, a specific form of sexual minority stress, and partners' reports of daily negative emotions about their partner. Furthermore, one's attachment style describes the way in which

individuals experience stress (Cassidy, 1994). Therefore, a second goal of the present study was to examine whether attachment style moderated the association between perceptions of stress via negative family reactions towards one's partner and negative partner-related emotions.

Minority Stress Theory

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) posits that LGB individuals experience chronic stressors (e.g., negative attitudes from family, friends, co-workers etc.) as a result of living in a heterosexist environment that stigmatizes non-heterosexual, romantic relationships (Meyer and Frost, 2013). Minority stress may affect an individual in three ways: 1) the occurrence of objective, chronic and/or acute external stressful events 2) stress surrounding the expectation of such an event along with the stress of having to be vigilant for when one might experience that stress and 3) the internalization of negative societal messages and attitudes (Meyer, 2003). As such, same-sex individuals may experience stress as a result from outward rejection to or anticipatory negative attitudes and/or the internalization of negative messages from family members about their romantic partners (Meyer, 2003).

Meyer (1995) also posited that stress not only results from objective, negative events, but also from an individual's subjective experience. For example, one may experience stress as a result of anticipating family rejection of their romantic partner based on their sexual orientation before meeting their partner. Sexual minority stress differs from other types of minority stress in that individuals have the added stress associated with a perceived need to conceal their identities in some situations (Lindquist & Hirabayashi, 1979). LGB individuals may be able to conceal their identity to their

family, co-workers or friends out of fear of experiencing discrimination resulting in additional stress (Rostosky et al., 2007). As such, partners may be experiencing stress by anticipating their family's disapproval and/or experience more stress from having to conceal their relationship/identity as a result of these fears.

Same-sex romantic partners may experience different types of sexual minority stressors on a daily basis and an example of this may be outward rejection from family members, friends or community members (Rostosky et al., 2016). Rejection from one's partner's family, may have adverse effects on both individual and relational well-being (Reczek, 2015; Willoughby, Doty & Malik, 2010), and these negative attitudes may impact LBG individuals' relationships in a number of ways. For example, the perceived, chronic stress surrounding family members' negative attitudes towards one's sexual orientation may indirectly impact the relationship by affecting how one feels about their partner. As such, same-sex partners may internalize the negative, rejecting messages, which could impact their feelings towards their romantic partner in that they may project these negative attitudes onto them (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017).

Perceived stress associated with negative family reactions. Perceptions of stress associated with family members' negative attitudes towards one's partner, may spillover into the relationship, affecting emotions about one's partner (hereafter partner-related emotions) (Rostosky et al., 2007). Studies have shown the negative effects of stress surrounding rejection or a lack of support from family members on the individual's negative emotions towards their partner (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). For instance, Thomas (2014) conducted a qualitative study using a sample of 45 same-sex couples to examine partners' experiences of minority stressors. More research is needed to examine

how perceptions of stress associated with negative family reactions affect negative partner-related emotions in same-sex couples. In the context of a romantic relationship, experiences of stress are shared as a result of partner's interdependence (Bodenmann, 1995). While a specific stressor may be experienced by both partners, each partner may appraise the event differently, and as a result, report different emotions and intensity of emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Emotion Dynamics in Romantic Relationships

Adult romantic partners spend a considerable amount of time together, which means more opportunities to share emotional experiences with one another (Anderson, Keltner & John, 2003; Randall & Schoebi, 2015). Partners disclose personal, negative emotions that they may not share with others (e.g., co-workers or friends) as a romantic partner is seen in many ways as a source of security in times of distress (Cassidy, 1994; Rimé, 2009). Given the amount of time partners spend with one another on a daily basis, stressors that originate outside of the relationship may easily spillover into the relationship and affect partners' emotions about one another (Neff & Karney, 2004). For example, stress can spillover into the relationship and lead to decreased time spent with a partner, diminished effective communication and increased expression of partner's challenging traits (e.g., anxiety), all of which are positively associated with negative emotions (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017; Thompson & Bolger, 1999). As heterosexual romantic partners experience increases in stress that are associated with things outside of the relationship (e.g., in-laws), the more they negatively evaluate their partner and the relationship as well as cognitively develop more negative attributions about their partner (Neff & Karney, 2004; Tesser & Beach, 1998). In the interpersonal context, the

attributions one partner makes about the other regulates their affective and behavioral responses (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Examining stress in the interpersonal context may be particularly relevant to understanding negative partner-related emotions because stress is shared between partners and linked to negative partner attributions.

Perceived stress associated with negative family reactions towards a romantic partner may impact negative partner-related emotions. In a qualitative study, Rostosky and colleagues (2016) found a common theme of avoidance in same-sex couples who experienced sexual minority stressors, such as anticipated stigma. The authors reported that some partners would avoid (behavior motivated by negative emotion) each other as a way to cope with minority stressors. However, avoiding such conversations may negatively affect partner-related emotions as avoidance has been linked with increased reports of negative partner-related emotions; partners become more isolated and disconnected from one another if chronic, relational stressors are not processed (Johnson, 2012). For instance, one couple reported they do not talk about issues they face as a sexual minority. Given these examples, the rejection from one's family could be especially harmful to LGB individuals and their partners.

Temporal dynamics. Experiences of stress and emotions in the context of a relationship system require the use of temporal data to understand how these processes unfold in real time (Butler, 2011). Individuals of sexual minority status may experience specific minority stressors on a daily basis either by being subjected to an objective event or brooding over the anticipation of such an event (Meyer, 2003). In addition, the level of how that stress is experienced may impact the level of emotional expressiveness. Therefore, temporal data (e.g., daily diaries) is necessary to understand how these

processes unfold in real time.

In the context of a romantic relationship, one's partner may be the person with whom they feel safest with, allowing for the expression of negative emotions, directly or indirectly, towards their partner on a daily basis. Examining the associations between daily perceptions of stress and reports of emotions allow researchers to further understand the variation in stressful experiences and negative partner emotions (Bolger et al., 1989). Using daily diaries allows researchers to understand how partners feel about one another on the same day over the course of several days as opposed to at one point in time (Lida et al., 2012). As sexual minority stress may be chronic and emotions are momentary, examining the association between daily perceptions of stress and negative partner-related emotions on the same day may be more accurate than if more time had passed. Examining such concurrent (same day) effects of daily reports of stress via negative family reactions towards one's partner on negative partner-related emotions was a goal of the present study.

Attachment as a Moderator between Stress and Emotions

Individual traits exist that may impact how people perceive stress. In addition to factors such as personality (Fingerhut, Peplau & Gable, 2010), one's attachment styles may be an important moderator in the link between perceptions of stress and negative partner-related emotions. One's reported attachment style, or how one emotionally bonds with others in romantic relationships, may affect that association as attachment describes how romantic partners respond to relational stressors. Attachment theory posits romantic partners act as a secure base, and under stressful circumstances, partners respond to stress in certain ways based on their attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Although many

categorizations of attachment exist (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), the two main dimensions researchers have examined are anxiety and avoidance. Anxiously attached individuals tend to have a strong need for closeness and are hypervigilant to relationship stressors, whereas avoidant individuals view close relationships as non-essential and value independence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As such, anxiously attached individuals may exacerbate their experiences of stress, while avoidantly attached individuals may minimize it (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Because anxiously attached individuals tend to be hyperaware of the impact stress has on their relationship, these individuals may be more likely to report negative emotions about their partner. Avoidant individuals tend to downplay their experience of stress or distract themselves from the source of stress (Shaver & Hazan, 1993; Collins & Feeney, 2000) thus weakening the negative effects of stress on partner-related emotions. Individuals high in attachment avoidance may not let stress interfere with their emotions about their partners, thereby the more stress they experience the less negative partner-related emotions they report.

Researchers have examined the interpersonal associations between attachment styles and partner-related emotions. For example, Randall and Butler (2013) examined whether one partner's emotions at time 1 predicted their partner's emotions at time 2 and if individual differences were evident in those predictions. They proposed that since one's attachment style describes how they regulate relationship-relevant emotions (i.e., feelings about romantic relationship) and behave in close relationships, then it would moderate the link between partner A's relationship-relevant emotions at time 1 and their partner B's relationship-relevant emotions at time 2. In a sample of 30 heterosexual couples, they found evidence for individuals' daily and second-by-second reports of

relationship-relevant emotions at time 1 predicting their partner's emotions at time 2. Furthermore, attachment anxiety increased and attachment avoidance decreased predictability in partners' emotions across time meaning anxious individuals may be more attuned to their partners' emotions while avoidant individuals may downplay their partners' emotions. The above study provided evidence for couples' interpersonal emotion systems, while also showing how individual difference factors, such as one's attachment style, may affect partner-related emotions. As stress surrounding negative family reactions towards one's partner is a relational stressor and given the context of a romantic relationship, partners may respond in certain ways based on their attachment style. Thus, when experiencing relationship stress, such as in the case of rejection from one's family, while anxious individuals tend to exaggerate their reactions to stressful experiences, avoidant individuals may downplay it (Mikulincer, Florian, & Tolmacz, 1990). Therefore, anxious individuals may be more aware of their family's rejection towards their partner and exacerbate this stress, leading to an increase in reports of negative emotions about their partner. Avoidant individuals may minimize their experience of this stress, such that their attachment style may weaken the effects of stress on negative partner-related emotions.

The Present Study

Grounded in Meyer's minority stress theory (2003) and attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), the purpose of the present study was to examine the association between perceptions of stress via negative family reactions and negative partner-related emotions using daily diary data from 81 same-sex couples. The use of daily diary data allows for the examination of both intrapersonal (actor effects) and

interpersonal (partner) effects (e.g., how one's partner's experiences of stress affect the emotions they report about them). Additionally, as one's attachment style is associated with perceptions of stress, attachment style is treated as a moderator of the association between perceptions of stress via negative family reactions to partner and negative partner-related emotions (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Specifically, the following research questions were examined and hypotheses were tested:

RQ1a: How are one's daily experiences of stress via family reactions to partner associated with reports of negative partner-related emotions (actor effects)?

H1a: It was hypothesized that there would be a positive association between daily perceptions of stress via family reactions and negative partner-related emotions, based on research suggesting family members' nonacceptance of one's romantic partner may lead to increases in negative emotions towards their partner (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017).

RQ1b: How are partner A's daily perceptions of stress via negative family reactions to partner related to partner B's daily report of negative emotions about partner A (partner effect)?

H1b: It was hypothesized that there would be a positive association between partner A's reports of stress via family reactions to partner and partner B's reports of negative emotions about partner A, based on literature that suggests concurrent effects of daily experiences of sexual minority stressors spillover into the relationship (Totenhagen et al., 2016).

RQ2: Does one's attachment style moderate the association between perceptions of stress via negative family reactions to partner and negative partner-related emotions?

H2: As anxious attachment is associated with hypervigilance to relationship stressors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), it was hypothesized anxious attachment style would exacerbate the association between perceptions of stress via negative family reactions and negative partner-related emotions. Due to the association between attachment avoidance and disengagement (Cassidy, 1994), it was hypothesized avoidant attachment style would weaken the association between perceptions of stress via family reactions to partner and negative partner-related emotions.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Data utilized for this study were collected as part of the Same-Sex Stress Study funded by the National Council on Family Relations.

Participants

A total of 95 same-sex couples (n = 64 female, n= 31 male dyads; women = 128, men = 62) from Arizona (n=53 dyads) and Alabama (n=42 dyads) participated in both the baseline and daily diary potion of the study. Daily diary data was retained for couples only when both partners completed 3 days of the daily diaries, 81 same-sex couples (n=58 female, n=23 male dyads). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 61 years old (women: *M* = 33.22, *SD* = 9.19; men: *M* = 34.99, *SD* = 11.24). Couples reported being in a relationship for an average of 6.47 years (*SD* = 10.19 years). A majority of the couples reported being in a committed relationship and living together (49.5%), approximately 18% reported being engaged and living together, approximately 18% reported being married, around 12% reported being in a committed relationship and about 1% selected "other."

A majority of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian (73.7%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (10.5%), Asian (5.3%), Native Ameircan (3.2%) and 3.2% selected "other." In our sample, forty-eight percent of participants identifed themselves as lesbian, thirty-four percent as gay, eleven percent as bisexual, five percent as queer and two percent selected "other." A majority of the participants reported having some college (32%), about 30.5% reported having a graduate degree, approximately 28% reported having an undergraduate degree, and about 4% reported having a professional

program certificate and 4% reported having a high-school diploma. Most of the participants reported their yearly household income was between $0 and $25,000 (26.3%), followed by an income between $25,000 and $50,000 (24.7%), between $75,000 and $100,000 (19.5%), between $100,000 and $150,000 (14.2%), between $50,000 and $75,000 and greater than $150,000 (1.6%).

Recruitment and Procedures

Participants were recruited from various LGB organizations and flyers posted in the Arizona and Alabama communities for this web-based study. Interested couples contacted the research assistant, who then sent them the informed consent form and a screening survey to determine eligibility. Each partner was assigned a unique ID (e.g., Couple-1: Partner 1- 001, Partner 2- 501). Couples who met the following criteria were eligible to participate: (1) in a same-sex romantic relationship for at least two months (2) both were adults (over the age of 18 in Arizona, and over the age of 19 in Alabama), and (3) both partners were willing to participate. If couples were eligible then each partner was directed to an online baseline survey, which included a demographic questionnaire and measures including attachment style (described in detail below). The day after they completed the baseline survey, participants were asked to fill out an online questionnaire every evening for a consecutive 14 days.

Measures

Family reaction to partner stress. In order to measure daily perceptions of stress via family reactions to partner, one item was taken from the original *Measure of Gay-Related Stress* based on face validity (Lewis et al., 2001). Response options were on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = “no stress” to 3 = “severe stress.” Participants were

prompted to choose the option that best describes their experience of stress regarding the statement today: family reactions to my partner (e.g., "having my partner and family in the same place at the same time; unwillingness of family to accept my partner"). The average family reaction to partner stress was .06 (*SD* = .37). Descriptive information can be found in Table 1.

Negative partner-related emotions. Three items were created to assess daily perceived negative emotions due to one's partner. Response options were on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = "not at all" to 10 = "a large amount." Sample items included "Have you had any of the following negative emotions related to your partner today: frustrated or angry due to your partner?" and "sad or depressed due to your partner?" A higher rating indicated a greater amount of negative emotions due to partner. To create a composite score, the three items were averaged. Average negative partner-related emotions was 1.27 (*SD* = 1.85). Internal reliability for the three items was .85 in the present study's sample. Descriptive information can be found in Table 1.

Attachment style. *The Experiences in Close Relationships-Short Form* (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007) measure was administered at baseline to assess for attachment style. The ECR-S is designed to assess for participants' attachment styles in close relationships. Response options were on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 7 = "agree strongly." A sample item that assessed anxious attachment style is "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner(s)." A sample item that evaluated avoidant attachment style is "I try to avoid getting too close to my partner(s)." A higher score on the ECR-S indicated higher levels of attachment anxiety or avoidance. Scores were summed from the six items of each subscale. Average attachment anxiety was 23.48 (*SD*

= 8.15), and average attachment avoidance was 13.35 (*SD* = 6.19). Internal reliability for the ECR-S was .80 for the avoidant attachment subscale and .79 for the anxious attachment subscale in the present study's sample. Descriptive information can be found in Table 1.

Control variables. Controlling for certain variables allows the researcher to test whether changes in the dependent variable are due to the hypothesized independent variable rather than extraneous variables (Leary, 2012). By controlling for extraneous variables that may influence reports of negative partner-related emotions, perceptions of stress can be more strongly associated with negative partner-related emotions. Both location and relationship length, both assesed at baseline, were controlled for in the present study.

Data were collected from participants in Alabama and Arizona; as attitudes towards same-sex relationships can differ between regions, those in the western states tend to be more supportive (Pizmony-Levy & Ponce, 2013); therefore, individuals may experience additional stress depending on the state they live in. Location, coded as "-5" for those in Phoenix and "5" for those who live in Alabama, was found to be significantly associated with negative partner-related emotions (b=-.76, p =.03), and therefore retained in the models.

Relationship length has been negatively associated with negative partner-related emotions, such that the longer partners are in a relationship together, the fewer negative emotions they report about one another (Norton, 1983). Relationship length, coded as the number of years partners reported to be in a relationship, was found to be significantly associated with negative partner-related emotions (b = .01, p =.05), and

therefore retained in the models.

Data Processing and Analysis

Non-normative data. The mean level of perceived stress associated with negative family reactions was .08 (*SD* = .37). To account for low levels of perceived stress, the response items were re-scaled from “3 = severe stress” and “2 = a lot of stress” to “1 = some stress.” The mean for this recoded variable was .06 with a standard deviation of .37. The daily study variable, family reaction to partner stress, was centered within-person in order to examine how the individual varied in stress compared to their mean stress level across all 14 days of assessment (Laurenceau, Barrett & Rovine, 2005).

The negative partner-related emotions scale was scored by creating a composite score of the three items, where responses ranged from 0= “not at all” to 10= “a large amount.” A Shapiro-Wilk’s (1965) test, and a visual inspection of their historgram showed that the negative partner-related emotions scores were not normally distributed, with a right skewness of 2.25(SE = .12) and kurtosis of 5.64(SE = .12). Due to the very low levels of reported negative partner-related emotions, it did not make sense to use data transformation functions, such as the log or square root, because zeros cannot be transformed. Statistical consultants recommended to run the tested models with the skewed variable as running a binnomial regression model to account for the right skewness uses count data (Min & Agresti, 2002). Given the fact that negative partner-related emotions variable is continuous, it does not make sense to use this type of model.

Dyadic data analysis. Dyadic data contains main sources of interdependence, wherein variables are often nested within other variables (e.g., time within person and person within dyad). A three-level structure intuitively makes sense with dyadic daily

dairy data, where Level 1 represents time, Level 2 reflects the person and Level 3 represents the couple. However, due to statistical problems that may arise from analyzing a three-level structure, a two-level structure is recommended when working with this type of data (Iida et al., 2012). Within a two-level structure, Level 1 represents time and Level 2 reflects time nested within individuals (person-centered). To compute the Level 2 or within-person centered means, each persons' mean scores over all days of assessment were subtracted from their daily scores. To account for the Level 3 (i.e., couple level data), indistinguishable dyad partners were randomly given dummy-coded roles, "partner 1" and "partner 2" to systematically differentiate between the two partners. As the partners are indistinguishable, parameter estimates for the average fixed effects and average intercepts were aggregated across partners as well as dyads (Kenny et al., 2008). Assigning dummy-coded roles allows for the containment of the estimates of variance to be equal for partners, such that if the outcome score is for partner 1, then partner 1= 1 and partner 2 = 0, if the score is for partner 2, then partner 2 = 1, and to 0 otherwise.

Given the interdepdence nature of dyadic data, where the scores of two partners in a dyad are nonindependent from one another, multilevel modelling for indistinguishable dyads was used (Kashy et al., 2008; Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006). Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000) were used to test the extent to which a partner impacts their own outcomes (actor effect) as well as the extent to which an individual's partner impacts their outcomes (partner effect). To determine whether inidividuals' stress was associated with the negative emotions they report about their

partners (actor effect), as well as whether their partners report greater negative emotions about them (partner effect), concurrent effects (i.e., same-day effects) were examined.

Three models were used to test the study hypothses using PROC MIXED in SAS 9.3 (SAS Institute, Cary NC) .

Model 1: The main effect of daily perceptions of stress via family reactions to partner on daily negative partner-related emotions was tested. Actor and partner effects of perceived stress via negative family reactions to partner associated with individual's negative emotions on the same day was assessed.

The following code was used to examine RQ1:

```
PROC MIXED DATA=temp1 COVTEST;
CLASS coupleid partner day;
MODEL negpartot=  reltime_years age locale SOS2_pc p_SOS2_pc /S DDFM =
SATTERTH;
RANDOM intercept  /     TYPE=UN SUBJECT=coupleid GCORR;
REPEATED partner day/ TYPE= UN@AR(1) SUBJECT=coupleid;
TITLE ëStress and Emotions (same day stress);
RUN;
```

The model statement refers to the actor and partner effects of stress via family reaction to partner on negative partner-related emotions. Since dyadic data will be used, actor and partner effects will be included together in the same model to test for interdependence (Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006). The random statement specified the random effects (i.e., variance of slopes and intercepts). The repeated statement referred to the structure of the Level 1 residual variance/covariance (i.e., the deviance of partner A's negative partner-related emotions on day 1 that is not predicted by their experiences of stress). The "subject" line refers to the Level 2 variable, or how the Level 1 units (partners' perceptions of stress) are divided into the Level 2 units (couples).

Model 2: A two-way interaction of family reaction to partner stress by anxious

attachment style on negative emotions was tested. In the syntax used, the model statement referred to the main effects of stress via family reactions to partner on negative partner-related emotions as well as the interaction between stress and anxious attachment on negative partner-related emotions. The random statement specified the random effects (i.e., variance of slopes and intercepts). The repeated statement referred to the structure of the Level 1 residual variance/covariance (i.e., the deviance of partner A's negative partner-related emotions on day 1 that is not predicted by their experiences of stress).

The following code was used to examine RQ2:

```
PROC MIXED DATA=temp1 COVTEST;
CLASS coupleid partner day;
MODEL negpart=  reltime_years age locale SOS2_pc p_SOS2_pc ecr_sanx_c
p_ecr_sanx_c SOS2_pc*ecr_sanx_c /S DDFM = SATTERTH;
RANDOM intercept  /     TYPE=UN SUBJECT=coupleid GCORR;
REPEATED partner day/ TYPE= UN@AR(1) SUBJECT=coupleid;
RUN;
```

Model 3: Two-way interaction of stress via family reactions to partner by avoidant attachment style on negative emotions was tested. The syntax used was the same as the one described in the above model except attachment avoidance replaced anxiety.

The following code was used to examine RQ3:

```
PROC MIXED DATA=temp1 COVTEST;
CLASS coupleid partner day;
MODEL negpartot=  reltime_years age locale SOS2_pc p_SOS2_pc
p_ecr_avoid_c ecr_avoid_c SOS2_pc*ecr_avoid_c /S DDFM = SATTERTH;
RANDOM intercept  /     TYPE=UN SUBJECT=coupleid GCORR;
REPEATED partner day/ TYPE= UN@AR(1) SUBJECT=coupleid;
RUN;
```

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Descriptives

Means and standard deviations of the study variables are displayed in Table 1. Due to the interdependent nature of the data (e.g., partners nested within dyads), correlations and t-tests include many sources of variance (e.g., between person and dyad, within person and dyad). Therefore, the significance tests were not reported and correlations are provided for descriptive purposes only. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the association between study variables for study participants (see Table 1). There was a significant positive association between perceived stress and negative partner-related emotions for participants (r = .05, p <.05). Perceived stress via family reactions was significantly, negatively correlated with anxious attachment (r = -.06, p <.05) for individuals. Additionally, there was a significant positive correlation between perceived stress via negative family reactions and avoidant attachment for participants (r = .19, p <.01). Anxious and avoidant attachment were significantly positively associated with negative partner-related emotions (r = .12, p <.01, r = .08, p <.01).

H1: Actor and Partner Effects of Perceived Stress on Negative Emotions

It was first hypothesized that on days when individuals perceived greater levels of stress associated with negative family reactions towards their partner, they would also report more negative emotions towards their partner. Controlling for location and relationship length, there was a significant main effect of daily perceived daily stress on negative partner-related emotions (b = 1.60, p = .01), which suggests that individuals'

perceptions of stress were positively associated with their own daily reports of negative partner-related emotions (actor effect).

It was also hypothesized that on days when individuals reported greater levels of stress associated with negative family reactions, partners would report more negative emotions about their partner (see Table 2). Controlling for location and relationship length, perceived daily stress was not associated with negative partner-related emotions ($b = 1.13$, $p = .10$), which suggests perceptions of stress did not affect their partner's daily reports of negative partner-related emotions (partner effects).

H2: Attachment Style as a Moderator on the Association between Perceived Stress and Negative Emotions

It was hypothesized that anxious attachment would strengthen, while avoidant attachment would weaken, the association between one's perceptions of stress and their reports of negative partner-related emotions. Controlling for location and relationship length, the interaction between perceived stress and anxious attachment ($b = .01$, $p = .88$) and avoidant attachment ($b = -.01$, $p = .23$) on negative partner-related emotions were not significant. Therefore, attachment style (both anxious and avoidant) did not moderate the association between perceptions of stress associated with negative family reactions towards one's partner and negative partner-related emotions.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

Stress associated with negative family reactions to one's partner can spillover into the relationship (Neff & Karney, 2004), which may influence partners to report negative emotions about one another. Stress spillover effects have been studied using heterosexual couples, for example the effects of work stress on relationship quality (Ledermann et al., 2010). However, there is a lack of literature examining these effects within same-sex couples and the unique sexual minority stressors they may experience (Rostosky and Riggle, 2017; Meyer and Frost, 2013). Family rejection of one's partner may be especially stressful as it is discriminatory against the individual's and their partner's sexual orientation (Rostosky et al., 2016). Based on this evidence, same-sex romantic partners may be likely to report levels of stress as a result of family members' negative reactions towards their partner, which may in turn affect the emotions they feel about their partner (Randall & Schoebi, 2015).

In addition to the stress spillover effect, partners may react to daily stressors differently based on their attachment style. Given that perceived stress associated with negative family reactions towards one's partner is a relational stressor, partners' attachment styles may influence their experience of that stressor and influence how they respond emotionally to their romantic partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012).

The purpose of the present study was to understand the association between daily perceptions of stress surrounding negative family reactions and daily negative partner-related emotions in same-sex couples. Based on previous research suggesting levels of anxious and avoidant attachment may influence perceptions of stress (Mikulincer &

Shaver, 2007), the moderating associations of attachment were also examined. By understanding how specific, daily minority stressors, like negative family reactions, are associated with negative partner-related emotions, researchers are able to further clarify the interpersonal associations between stress and emotions within a dyadic context.

Perceived Stress and Daily Negative Emotions

Same-sex couples who perceive stress associated with their family's negative biases towards their romantic partner may project their family's experiences onto their partner, based on defense mechanisms, like projection (Lingiardi & Nardelli, 2014). Based on this, it was hypothesized perceptions of daily stress associated with negative family reactions would spillover into the relationship and affect negative partner-related emotions (stress spillover; Neff & Karney, 2004). As predicted, results showed a signficant actor effect: on days individuals perceived stress associated with negative family reactions towards their partner, they also reported more negative emotions about their partner. This finding supports prior literature that found partners express more negativity towards one another when experiencing stress associated with discrimination as a sexual minority stressor (Reczek, 2015; Rostosky et al., 2016).

Interestingly, results did not show a significant partner effect such that individuals' perceptions of stress did not impact the negative emotions their partners reported about them; it may be that the stress associated with negative family reactions may not carry over and affect how the partner feels about the individual due to possibly being resilient as a couple in the face of stress (Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005). Same-sex couples may be more resilient to stress associated with rejecting messages from family members as they may have experienced similar stressors before,

and are able to better cope with them together as a couple (Oswald, 2002; Reczek, 2015). For example, Randall and colleagues (2016) found that the negative effects of stress associated with discrimination at work was buffered for female same-sex couples who perceived emotional and problem-focused supportive behaviors from their partners. Given this, individuals may be affected by the stress associated with their family's negative reactions and report negative partner-related emotions (intrapersonal process); however, that stress may not carry over and negatively affect the partner's emotions about the individual (interpersonal process). This actor effect has been supported by previous research; however, not specifically with these variables nor using a sample of same-sex couples (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; 2017). Ledermann and colleagues (2010) found evidence for an actor-only effect in a sample of heterosexual couples. They found a significant positive association between individuals' perceptions of external stress (e.g., work-related stress) and their reports of relationship stress (e.g., annoying partner habits); however, no effect of the individuals' stress on their partners' reports of relationship stress. This suggests stress that exists outside of the relationship (external stress), such as stress relating to partners' family, may only have an effect of their own reports of partner/relationship variables, but not on their partner's reports. Given this, there could be other moderating variables that might affect the association between one's perceptions of stress and their partner's negative emotions. Previous research suggests that partner effects are more likely to be found when examining relationship stress (e.g., communication difficulties, conflict etc.) (Ledermann et al., 2010).

Attachment Style as a Moderator on the Association between Perceived Stress and Negative Emotions

Attachment theory has been used in relationship research to examine individual differences in experiences of stress, as one's level of anxious or avoidant attachment may influence their perceptions of stress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As perceived stress associated with negative family reactions about one's partner is a relational stressor because it is related to the relationship, the behaviors associated with one's attachment style might be triggered when that stress is experienced (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Anxious individuals tend to exacerbate the experience of stress and may report more negative partner-related emotions on a daily basis, while avoidant individuals tend to minimize that experience and may report significantly less negative partner-related emotions. Based on this, it was hypothesized that anxious attachment would strengthen the association between perceptions of stress and negative partner-related emotions, while avoidant attachment would mitigate it. Contrary to what was hypothesized, attachment insecureity (both anxiety and avoidance) did not moderate the association between stress due to negative family reactions and partner-related emotions.

Previous research has shown that one's attachment style may change across the relationship lifespan (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), such that one may show lower levels of attachment anxiety or avoidance over time. For example, if an individual who is high in attachment anxiety is in a long-term relationship with a partner who is very low in attachment anxiety, then the high anxiously attached person may have good experiences with the other responding to their emotional needs; therefore, may themselves react in ways associated with having lower level of anxious attachment. While the present study

accounted for low levels of attachment insecurity, attachment security, defined as being more well-adjusted in relationships, was not meaused to determine how it may affect the association between perceptions of stress and negative partner-related emotions. Future studies should account for low levels of anxious and avoidant attachment in statistical models by creating a separate category for those who report very low levels of insecure attachment. In addition, incorporating this variable into tested models may allow researchers to investigate the effects of low levels of attachment insecurity on partner-related emotions.

Limitations

This study is notwithstanding limitations. Generaliziability of the findings might be limited as majority of the sample self-identified as Caucasian (73.7%), lesbian (48%), in a relationship for about 6 years and around 35 years old. Individuals of ethnic and/or racial minority status and sexual minoriy status may experience more stress as a result of having a 'double minority status' (Balsam et al., 2011). Additionally, research has shown racial and/or ethnic minority gay males experience the highest number of negative family reactions to their sexual orientation compared with lesbian and bisexual individuals (Ryan et al., 2009). Taken together, the study's findings are limited to undersatnding family reactions to partner stress outside of a predominantly Caucasiam sample who self-identifed as lesbian.

Given that social attitudes may differ based on location (Pizomny-Levy & Ponce, 2013), resulting in additional stress due to one's social context (Story & Bradbury, 2004), partners may report more negativity towards one's partner in one state over the other. Location (Arizona vs. Alabama) was a significant predictor of daily negative partner-

related emotions, as predicted. Analyses were not conducted to detect differences between the two locations, Alabama and Arizona, in terms of negative partner-related emotions as this was beyond the scope of the present study. Given the significant effect of location on negative partner-related emotions, there may be differences between individuals in Alabama and Arizona in their reports of daily negative partner-related emotions. For example, couples in Alabama may report greater negative partner-related emotions than couples in Arizona. There could be a multitude of factors that contribute to differences between the two states. One such factor might be the social environment, which could put additional stress on the relationship leading to greater negative partner-related emotions (Story & Bradbury, 2004). The study's findings are limited to understanding how perceptions of stress via negative family reactions affect negative partner-related emotions irrespective of where participants live (and resulting implications for the types and amount of stress they report experiencing).

Limitations may also exist with repect to how the study variables were measured. Daily family reactions to partner stress was measured using a single item from the Measure of Gay Related Stress scale (Lewis et al., 2003). Other items from the original variable to assess family reactions might have been more relevant to our sample. Based on this, future studies may consider using the entire "family reactions to my partner" subscale to assess stress associated with negative family reactions (Lewis et al., 2001). Another potential confounding variable is the lack of understanding about how family was defined for the current sample. The single item chosen for this study does not specify how family is defined (e.g., family of origin vs. family of choice). Research has shown same-sex couples may define who makes up their family due to experiences of

rejection from family members of origin (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Future studies should assess the importance of whom the participant may be reporting on. For example, same-sex couples may place more importance on those to whom they have come out to versus other members of their family to whom they have not come out to. The family members a couple may feel comfortable coming out to might be those that they are closest to in which case, may not report high levels of stress associated with family members' negative reactions. This suggests that researchers need to control for variables assessing outness as it could affect one's perceptions of stress depending on how open one is about their sexual orientation.

Future Directions

Future research examining perceptions of stress associated with negative family reactions towards one's same-sex partner may wish to recruit a more diverse sample in terms of race and ethnicity and relationship length (e.g., younger and older couples). Doing so could create more variability in variables such as partners' stress levels and emotions about their partners as well as variability between groups (e.g., younger and older couples in terms of relationship length). In addition, it may be worthwhile to include a text box or another variable that allows participants to define who is a part of their family and then ask if there is any stress surrounding these individuals' reactions towards their partner. Doing so may allow researchers to gain a better understanding of perceptions of stress associated with negative family reactions towards one's same-sex partner.

In order to better understand the interpersonal process of stress associated with negative family reactions on negative partner-related emotions, relationship behaviors

(e.g., communication patterns) should be examined as previous research indicates partner effects have been found when relationship behaviors are examined (Ledermann et al., 2010). It may be worthwhile to assess the ways in which partners communicate stress associated with negative family reactions and how it affects not only the individual's emotions but also the emotions the partner reports about the individual. For example, researchers may consider including the Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI; Bodenmann, 2008) to measure partners' stress communication processes.

In addition to measuring levels of anxious and avoidant attachment, measures of secure attachment should be incorporated in future studies. Researchers may consider studying how secure attachment may buffer the maladaptive responses to stress associated with anxious and avoidant attachment. When experiencing relational stressors, securely attached individuals tend to not worry about being abandoned or becoming too dependent on their partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Therefore, when faced with relational stress, securely attached individuals may not perceive any threat to their relationship. Securely attached individuals may convey their stress to their insecure attached partner in a way that would maintain security within the relationship and potentially model behaviors for anxiously or avoidantly attached partners. Examining the interaction between partners' attachment styles on negative partner-related emotions may lead to a more accurate result as one partner's secure or insecure attachment style may affect the other's attachment style (e.g., a secure partner with an insecure, anxious, partner).

Lastly, individuals who have been with their partner for a longer period of time may have "earned attachment security" (Saunders et al., 2011). "Earned attachment

security" is defined as the corrective experience that takes place when an insecurely attached individual finds a secure base (e.g., romantic partner) in which they can learn and develop ways of relating to others that are associated with having a secure attachment (Saunders et al., 2011). Individuals who have been in their relationship for a longer time frame, may have adapted to or learned new ways from their partner's style of behaving in relationships (e.g., response to relational stressors). In addition to assessing relationship length, researchers may consider incorporating measures of both early and later in life attachment questionnaires to account for "earned attachment security."

Implications for Mental Health Professionals

Given the results presented in this study, clinicians may consider how specific minority stressors, such as the negative family reactions towards a romantic partner may affect one's negative feelings about their partner. According to the American Psychological Association's practice guidelines for LGB clients (2012), psychologists are encouraged to consider the social and familial factors that may affect same-sex couples. Therapists can use techniques from multicultural counseling (e.g., psychoeducation on concepts surrounding stereotyping and culturally ingrained prejudice) as it emphasizes the social context in which clients live in and how it affects them (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). Multicultural counseling is an inclusive approach to counseling that requires professionals to have a broad level of awareness and understanding of the important roles that a client's identity, gender, ethnicity, culture and other features of diversity play in the counseling process. In addition, it recommends a culturally skilled counselor to be aware of their own biases and attitudes towards aspects of diversity (e.g., sexual minority status) that could interfere with their working relationship with the client

(Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). It would be important for counselors to acknowledge their own reactions to their client's same-sex romantic partner as well as their attitudes towards the client's stress surrounding their family's negative reactions and how that might affect the client. Counselors may consider utilizing interpersonal processing strategies to identify any beliefs the client may have about the counselor that would prevent the client from feeling comfortable discussing stressors, such as negative family reactions towards one's partner. A culturally skilled counselor tries to the best of their ability to understand the worldview of their clients (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). One way to do this is for counselors to familiarize themselves with Meyer's minority stress theory (2003) to better understand the stressors LGB individuals may face as a result of living in a heteronormative society.

Affirmative Practice (Hunter & Hickerson, 2003) is a model consisting of a set of culturally sensitive guidelines for providing services to LGB clients for practitioners working with clinical populations. The guidelines suggest practitioners to reinforce a positive view of one's sexual identity and the expression of that identity in one's social context. Affirmative practice may also be a useful framework for couple therapists to practice, as it encourages therapists to assess via questioning the importance of one's social environment and the multiple roles they have in it. For example, in session affirmative practitioners may assess external stressors, such as one or both partners' family's negative attitudes about the relationship, that could put additional strain on the relationship. If one's family's negative attitudes is a source of stress, then the practitioner could reinforce a positive expression of the couple's sexual identity in the face of that

stressor (i.e., confronting the family's negative attitudes) by identifying and challenging any barriers (e.g., negative view of the relationship and/or partner).

Couple's experiences of stress are shared due to their interdependence (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). While the results from the present study do not provide any evidence for a partner effect, there is evidence that perceptions of stress associated with negative family reactions affect one's report of their feelings towards their partner. Mental health clinicians working with couples may consider utilizing stress prevention programs such as the Couples Coping Enhancement Training (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004), which could help couples identify stressors and utilize supportive coping strategies.

Couple's counselors may also be able to identify how attachment dynamics play out in one's romantic relationship, specifically by implementing emotion-focused therapy (Johnson, 2012). Emotion-focused therapy is a therapeutic approach based on attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Couple therapists who use this approach in their practice help partners identify communication patterns that lead to emotional disconnection. When experiencing chronic, everyday stressors, romantic partners may become alienated from one another via maladaptive communication patterns (Bodenmann et al., 2007). For example, partners may become stuck in a demand-withdraw pattern of communication where one partner is seen as constantly nagging and the other is perceived as aloof, leading to emotional disconnectedness. It is the therapists job to identify maladaptive communication patterns and encourage partners to respond to each other empathically to develop security within the relationship. Emotion-focused therapy is effective in helping romantic partners learn more effective ways of communicating to relieve partners' distress (Johnson, 2012). While emotion-focused

therapy has not been empirically validated using a sample of same-sex couples, Josephson (2003) suggested it would be an appropriate approach to use with same-sex couples as it is suited for partners who are emotionally invested in the relationship and ready to address relationship concerns.

Using this approach, counselors can assess one partner's insecure or secure attachment levels and communicate in such a way that a securely attached individual would as well as model how partners can communicate with one another to establish security within the relationship. As a result of establishing secure attachments between partners and couple-therapist, clients may feel more comfortable being vulnerable and disclosing stressors, such as those relating to one's family's negative reactions towards their partner.

Conclusion

LGB individuals may experience stress due to their sexual minority status (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017) which then may spillover into the relationship and affect the emotions they report about their partner. Same-sex couples who experience daily stress associated with negative family reactions towards their partners report more negative partner-related emotions; however, there may be specific individual (e.g., personality) and relational (e.g., communication) factors that may exacerbate this association, although beyond the scope of the present study. The present study provides initial evidence for understanding the interpersonal associations between stress and interpersonal emotions in same-sex couples; however, future research in the area is needed.

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Figure 1. Actor-partner interdependence model

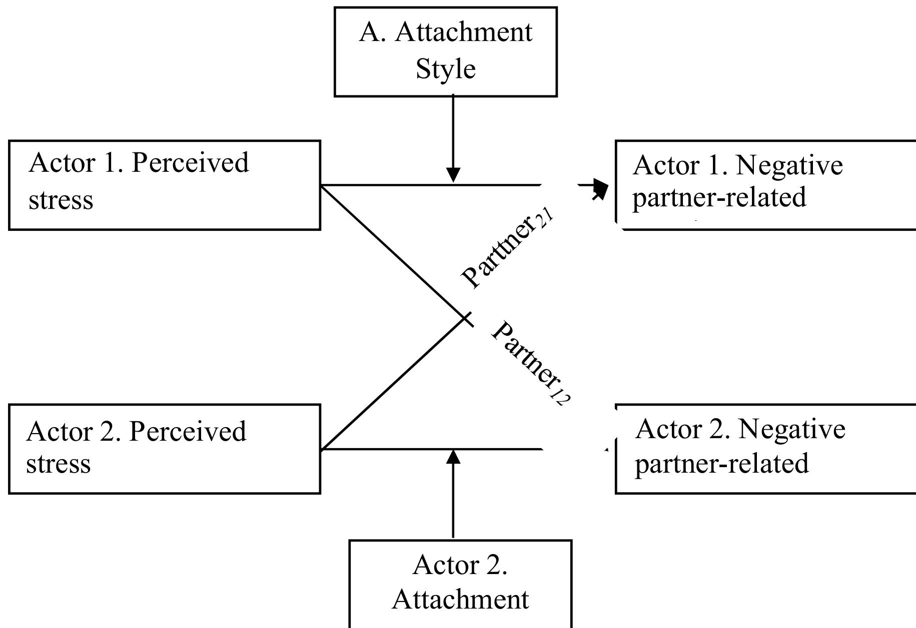

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Location	1.55	.77	_	.13***	-.11***	-.11***	.04*	-.08***
2. Relationship Length (years)	5.41	10.19		_	-.10**	-.05*	-.10**	-.13**
3. Family Reaction to Partner Stress	.06	.37			_	.05*	-.06*	.19**
4. Negative Partner-Related Emotions	1.27	1.85				_	.12**	.08**
5. Anxious Attachment	23.48	8.15					_	.14**
6. Avoidant Attachment	13.35	6.19						_

Note. Family reaction to partner stress item has been recoded, 0 = no stress and 1 = some stress. Negative partner-related emotions scale has been transformed, the ranges are from 0 = not at all to 1.5 = some negative emotions. The minimum score for each attachment style subscale is 7 (lowest level of anxious or avoidant attachment) and the maximum is 42 (highest level of attachment anxiety or avoidance).

Table 2

Actor and Partner, Concurrent Effects of Perceived Stress on Negative Partner-Related Emotions

Fixed Effects	*F(df)*	*F*	*B*	*p*
Intercept			4.90^{***}	.00
Controls				
Location	(1, 105)	4.88	$-.76^{*}$	.03
Reltime_Years	(1, 177)	3.94	$-.01^{*}$	.05
Main Effects				
A_Stress	(1, 1201)	6.00	1.60^{**}	.01
P_Stress	(1, 1275)	2.73	1.13	.10

Note. Reltime_Years = relationship length; A_Stress = actor effect; P_Stress = partner effect.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .0001$

Table 3

Attachment Style as a Moderator on the Association between Perceptions of Stress and Negative Partner-Related Emotions

Fixed Effects	*F(df)*	*F*	*B*	*p*
Intercept			4.75***	.00
Controls				
Location	(1, 101)	6.33	-.86**	.03
Reltime_Years	(1, 169)	5.46	-.01*	.03
Main Effects				
A_Stress	(1, 1178)	5.91	1.60*	.02
P_Stress	(1, 1278)	3.37	1.11	.11
Anx	(1, 90)	6.25	.07^{t}	.09
Avoid	(1, 92)	2.64	.01*	.03
Interactions				
A_Stress*Anx	(1, 1094)	.02	.01	.88
A_Stress*Avoid	(1, 926)	1.21	-.01	.23

Note. Reltime_Years = relationship length; A_Stress = actor effect; P_Stress = partner effect; Anx = Anxious attachment style; Avoid = Avoidant attachment style. p^{t}<.50; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .0001