**Abstract**

In lesbian couples, attachment, self-esteem and life satisfaction are highly correlated with relationship satisfaction. To further explore factors contributing to relationship quality, in the current study, we explored the relationship between women’s comfort with their sexuality (i.e., “outness”), self-esteem, and gender identity as predictors of relationship intimacy and commitment. Seventy-two lesbian couples (M=33.4 years of age, SD=10.2 years), were recruited to complete several personality and relationship measures. Gender identity, specifically femininity, consistently and uniquely predicted women’s intimacy and commitment in their relationships.

**Introduction**

Attachment, self-esteem, and life satisfaction have been found to be predictors of relationship satisfaction in lesbian relationships (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990). In a study across relationship types, including gay and lesbian couples (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986), liking one’s partner, having few alternatives to the relationship, high dyadic attachment, and high shared decision making were all linked to relationship quality. Furthermore, attraction and having few disagreements on beliefs were linked to relationship satisfaction. Dyadic attachment was associated with a measure of love in the relationship. Degree of outness has been associated with self-identification as a lesbian and is inversely related to psychological distress (i.e., lower suicidality). Measures of “outness” and gender identity have not yet been correlated with relationship measures in lesbian couples. The current study examines couples, not individuals.

**Aims**

In the current study, we aim to further previous research on romantic relationships by identifying and exploring factors that relate to positive romantic relationship experiences in lesbian partnerships. We hypothesized that:

1) Greater levels of “outness” will predict stronger (higher) relationship commitment and intimacy.

2) Sex-consistent gender identity (femininity in women) will predict positive relationship commitment and intimacy.

**Participants**

144 women in relationships with women; 72 couples

Women’s Mean Age = 33.4 years, SD = 10.2

Average Relationship Length = 4.68 years;

83% were cohabitating

Predominantly (69%) European-American

Diverse Socioeconomic backgrounds

Recruited from a Northeastern University Campus and surrounding area

**Results**

Simultaneous regression analyses were used to determine predictors of positive sexual and romantic relationships factors (commitment, sexual attitudes, sexual satisfaction) in lesbian women. Masculinity, femininity, and the outness of the women were examined as possible predictors.

Masculinity and outness was not related to any of these measures.

Femininity was found to be a significant indicator of positive sexual attitudes (beta=.207, p=.016), sexual satisfaction (beta=.169, p=.050) and relationship commitment (beta=.296, p<.001).

**Discussion**

Despite expectations that women’s comfort with their sexuality would be essential to their experience of positive relationships, results revealed that gender identity was the strongest and only predictor of women’s intimacy and commitment in lesbian relationships. In particular, women who identified as more feminine were more likely to report more positive romantic relationship experiences.

Further research is needed to better understand positive romantic and sexual relationships among lesbian women.