

Same-gender couples interact better than heterosexual couples: study

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Same-gender couples have higher-quality interactions with one another than heterosexual couples in Southern California, a new UC Riverside study finds.

The study also holds that couples with two men have the smallest social networks.

Researcher Megan Robbins says the recently published study is the first to compare same- and different-sex couples' social networks and daily interactions with one another.

Past research shows that same-gender couples enjoy strengths including appreciation of individual differences, positive emotions, and effective communication. But research hasn't compared the quality of their daily interactions—inside and outside the couple dynamic—to those of [heterosexual couples](#).

"The comparison is important because there is so much research linking the quality of romantic relationships and other [social ties](#) to health and well-being, yet it is unclear if this applies similarly or differently to people in same-gender [romantic relationships](#) because they have been historically excluded from past research," said Robbins, who is an associate professor of psychology at UCR. Reasons for potential differences include the stigma sexual minorities face, and also their resilience.

For the study, Robbins and her team recruited same-gender and different-gender couples throughout Southern California. The couples had to be in a married or "married-like" committed [relationship](#); living together for at least a year; and have no physical or mental health conditions that impeded their daily functioning.

Among those who applied to be in the study, 78 couples were found to be eligible, 77 of which provided enough data to be used. Twenty-four of the couples were woman-woman; 20 were man-man, and 33 were man-woman.

Participants met with the researchers on two separate Fridays, a month apart, completing surveys. They received text or email prompts several times in the days following the in-person meetings. In the text/email prompts, participants were asked whether they had an interaction with their partner, a family member, or a friend in the past 10 minutes, then asked to rate the quality of the social interaction using a five-point scale—one being unpleasant; three, neutral; five, pleasant.

In terms of social networks, the study found couples in man-man relationships had smaller social networks than woman-woman and man-woman couples. On the other end of the results spectrum, women in relationships with men were most likely to have the largest social networks.

Robbins said the finding is consistent with previous research showing men with men experience the least acceptance among [family members](#).

"We hypothesized that one model for how the social life of people in same-gender couples might differ from those in different-gender couples was a honing model, where people in same-gender couples reduce their social networks down to only those people who are supportive. We found some support for this by learning that the men with men had the smallest social networks in our sample," Robbins said.

The quality of interactions with families was reported to be greatest by same-gender couples. There was no difference for interaction quality with friends.

In terms of the quality of interactions with their partners, the study found same-gendered relationships had better-quality interactions than found in different-gendered relationships.

Robbins said that may be due to greater similarity between partners

when they share a gender identity, and greater equality within the couple, compared to people in different-sex couples.

"When male and female partners interact, they may do so from a culturally imposed frame wherein men and women are considered 'opposites,' which creates more potential for tension in interactions," Robbins wrote in the paper, titled *Social Compensation and Honing Frameworks*, and published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

More information: Megan L. Robbins et al, Initial examination of social compensation and honing frameworks for sexual minority social life and well-being, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0265407520961840](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520961840)

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