

HOW WELL, AND HOW QUICK, DO THEY CLICK? INITIAL DYADIC
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STRAIGHT WOMEN
AND GAY (VS. STRAIGHT) MEN

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

DECEMBER 2015

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Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my advisor and mentor, Dr. William Ickes, as well as the other members of my master's thesis committee, Dr. Jared Kenworthy and Dr. Lauri Jensen-Campbell, for their support and feedback on this project. Next, I want to thank Dr. Anna Park for her guidance, patience, and assistance with lab equipment and technical issues. In addition, I am grateful for my fellow graduate students, Meghan Babcock, Rebecca Robinson, and Vivian Ta in the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) Social Interaction Lab who have provided their unwavering support and reassurance for the duration of this project. I would like to thank my recruitment and scheduling coordinator, Morgan Thurow, as well as the UTA Gay-Straight Alliance and UTA LGBT Program for participant recruitment. Finally, I would like to thank the undergraduate research assistants in the UTA Social Interaction Lab who assisted with the coding of many behaviors: Kathryn Applin, Celina Beltran, Anna Cao, Kelsey Cheatham, Michelle Clark, Christine Ghabrous, Dekeitra Griffin, Marcene Grimsely, Danielle Langlois, Nohelia Longoria, Cassandra Porter, David Seddighzadeh, Monica Sheehan, Monica Solis, Monica Tran, and Andrea Turco.

September 30, 2015

Abstract

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Past literature and popular culture have suggested that a strong, interpersonal connection quickly develops between straight women and gay men; however, research has not yet explored whether this phenomenon can be observed in their initial interactions. I tested three hypotheses that were derived from the general prediction that straight women-gay men (SW-GM) dyads would exhibit a distinctive pattern of interaction that contrasts with that observed in opposite-sex dyads composed of straight women and *straight* men (SW-SM). Sixty-five heterosexual women and 65 men (33 heterosexual, 32 homosexual) were recruited to create 32 SW-GM dyads and 33 SW-SM dyads. Each dyad engaged in two five-minute-long interactions while being covertly audio- and video-recorded. The sexual orientation of the male participants was ambiguous to their female partners in the first interaction, but was made salient to them immediately before the second interaction period. Each dyad member then completed measures assessing their overall level of rapport and comfort with their interaction partner. The results revealed that, in the period after the male partner's sexual orientation was known, the SW-GM dyads—but not the SW-SM dyads—exhibited more intimate behaviors such as orienting their bodies more towards one another, maintaining longer eye contact, displaying more

positive affect, and spending more time discussing more intimate conversation topics. Moreover, the straight women in the SW-GM dyads reported feeling more comfortable and more inclined to discuss mating-related topics with their partner than the women who were in the SW-SM dyads. These converging findings capture the special connection between straight women and gay men in its earliest formative moments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“The capacity to talk and listen, to get and give emotional support, to know on a deeper level what some other soul is going through, and to empathize are the hallmarks of these friendships. Gay men and straight women prove that the ‘war of the sexes’ is not an eternal pitched battle, but that men and women can indeed have a deep, abiding connection.” (Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999, p. 62)

The close relationship between gay men and straight women has received much attention from popular culture and various media outlets in recent years (e.g., Anderson & Berman, 1997; Cruz & Dolby, 2007; Mapes, 2013; Riley, 2012), and has been portrayed in films such as *G.B.F.*, and TV series such as *Will and Grace*, *Sex and the City*, and *Glee*. This relationship is often distinguished from more traditional, heterosexual relationships because of the unique dynamics inherent in gay man-straight woman relationships (Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999; Malone, 1980; Nahas & Turley, 1979). For example, the ability and willingness to talk with one another on a deeper level often shows up early in relationships between gay men and straight women (Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999).

Although there has been a considerable amount of qualitative research documenting self-report testimonials from individuals who have had or have witnessed these relationships (Castro-Convers, Gray, Ladany, & Metzler, 2005; Gaiba, 2007; Grigoriou, 2004), there have been no empirical investigations exploring how the initial interactions of gay man-straight woman dyads compare to the initial interactions between a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. The proposed study corrects this omission by examining the initial, unstructured interactions between gay men and straight women and comparing them to the initial interactions between straight men and straight women. I advance a set of hypotheses which, taken together, predict that gay men and straight women will exhibit unique patterns of thought and behavior in their initial interactions that are not observed in the initial interactions between heterosexual men and women.

The Relationship Between Straight Women and Gay Men

Research has just begun to reveal the significance of the gay man-straight woman relationship. Although much of the work documenting these relationships has been qualitative in nature, the results of these studies suggest that gay men and straight women are quickly able to bond with one another (Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999). Because this claim might sound somewhat counterintuitive, researchers have been motivated to explain the interlinked reasons for the accelerated relationship development between gay men and straight women.

As a first chain in this link, researchers have proposed that gay men often offer more genuine positive attention to straight women; gay men are able to accept and admire their female friends above and beyond such superficial aspects as their physical appearance or their sexual appeal (Cho, 2001; Warren, 1976). In response to this kind of attention, straight women feel valued more for their personality than for their sexuality when they are in the company of gay men (Cho, 2001; Malone, 1980; Warren, 1976). Because straight men place a high premium on straight women's physical appearance (Buss, 1989a; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Larsen, 2001; Fink & Neave, 2005), women may value gay men's appreciation of their internal attributes rather than their external qualities. The heightened sense of security and validation provided by gay men may also allow women to feel less self-conscious about certain aspects of their physical bodies. Indeed, previous research has suggested that women who have more gay friends report higher body self-esteem (Barlett, Patterson, VanderLaan, & Vasey, 2009). Because women tend to feel more appreciated by gay men in these respects, they may be able to develop a closer bond with gay men than with straight men early in their acquaintance.

Just as straight women may receive these benefits from gay men, previous research findings suggest that gay men feel similarly valued by their straight woman friends. For example, gay men report that they usually develop deeper connections with straight women compared to other heterosexual or homosexual men (Grigoriou, 2004). This outcome may occur

because straight women exhibit more positive attitudes and less prejudice towards gay men than straight men do (Herek, 1988). Although gay men do not necessarily reject one another on the basis of their sexual orientation, gay men report that they can confide in straight women more than they can in other gay men when talking about their romantic life (Grigoriou, 2004), perhaps because of the absence of one-sided sexual interest or competitiveness in their relationships with straight women (Russell, DelPriore, Butterfield, & Hill, 2013). Collectively, these research findings point toward a special type of mutual understanding that gay men and straight women have with one another, one that may ultimately contribute to their accelerated relationship formation.

Sexual Complications Inherent in Heterosexual Opposite-Sex Dyads

Whereas gay men and straight women share a relationship that is not affected by sexual tension (Russell et al., 2013), relationships between straight men and straight women can be plagued with awkwardness and discomfort deriving from heterosexual men's often one-sided sexual attraction. For example, previous research has revealed that men tend to perceive more sexual interest in women's actions and reactions than the women intended (DeSouza, Pierce, Zanelli, & Hutz, 1992). As a consequence, women's friendly interactions with men tend to be over-perceived by men as signaling sexual interest, leading to sexual gestures, or even in some cases, to stalking (Abbey, 1982; Browne, 2006). Thus, it is likely that women will be somewhat more guarded in their initial interactions with heterosexual men compared to their initial interactions with gay men.

Although many studies have investigated the initial dyadic interactions between heterosexual men and women (e.g., Bente, Donaghy, & Suwelack, 1998; Ickes & Barnes, 1978; Stiles, Walz, Schroeder, Williams, & Ickes, 1996), these studies were not designed to detect and reveal sexual tension between men and women. However, the results of these studies have suggested that each sex must adjust their own behavior in response to the other's in order to maximize interpersonal comfort (Davis & Weitz, 1981). For example, Bente et al. (1998)

reported that gaze behavior differed for the men and the women: men broke off eye contact more often than women in an attempt to prevent the dyad from experiencing “too much” (i.e., too intense) eye contact. Because a high level of eye contact is positively associated with liking (Scherer & Schiff, 1973) and couples who make more eye contact are perceived to like each other more (Kleinke, Meeker, & LaFong, 1974), it is possible men’s prolonged gaze at women could indicate a desire for increased intimacy and even sexual intent (Abbey, 1982). Thus, men’s tendency to break eye contact in their dyadic interaction may function to reduce the potential tension that stems from sexual attraction.

Hypotheses Regarding the Initial Interactions Between Straight Women and Gay Men

Given the inherent sexual complications between straight women and straight men—but not between straight women and gay men—straight women should exhibit a pattern of differential feelings and behaviors in their initial encounters with gay versus straight men. However, women’s knowledge about men’s sexual orientation should play an essential role in their initial exchanges with them. If, in fact, gay men’s sexual attraction to men (but not to women) is the essential factor underlying women’s heightened comfort and trust with them, then women’s *knowledge* of a man’s homosexual orientation should lead to an interaction that is more open and intimate. Consistent with this reasoning, I propose three hypotheses (detailed below) which predict that a more intimate and mutually involving initial interaction should take place once a straight woman has become aware of a gay man’s sexual orientation.

Hypothesis 1: Straight woman-gay man initial interactions should become more mutually involving and intimate once the man’s sexual orientation has been made salient.

According to this hypothesis, straight women and gay men should exhibit different interaction behaviors in relation to one another when the man’s sexual orientation is made salient. In opposite-sex dyadic interactions, sexual orientation is an important piece of information because it alerts both dyad members to the gender that each person is sexually

attracted to. Straight women, in particular, may use this information to either open up or suppress their behaviors with a male stranger. Given that (a) straight men's one-sided sexual interests often create tension in their interactions with women (Abbey, 1982; Browne, 2006; DeSouza, Pierce, Zanelli, & Hutz, 1992) and that (b) women's interactions with straight men are more common than with gay men on average, straight women may err on the side of caution when interacting with all men initially. Accordingly, women are expected to withhold more intimate and "friendlier" behaviors when they do not possess concrete evidence of a male's sexual orientation.

However, a behavioral shift is expected to occur in gay-straight dyads once a woman learns of a man's homosexual orientation. Because gay men are sexually attracted to men (and not to women), the potential discomfort derived from sexual attraction that women experience with straight men is eliminated within these opposite-sex dyads. The knowledge of a man's homosexual orientation should therefore allow women to express more involved and intimate behaviors with gay men than they would before they learned his sexual orientation.

Following the disclosure of their sexual orientation, gay men are also expected to increase their verbal and non-verbal behaviors in response to straight women's behavioral shift. The decreased awkwardness and increased comfort that straight women are hypothesized to experience with gay men should increase gay men's willingness to engage in more intimate conversations with them. Therefore, the effect of revealing gay men's sexual orientation to straight women may be bidirectional, such that the unambiguous knowledge of a homosexual man's mating interests in the initial interaction between a straight woman and a gay man should result in a more interactive and intimate experience for both dyad members.

Based on this hypothesis, I reasoned that dyads composed of a straight woman and a gay man would display significantly more intimate and involving interaction behaviors after the gay man's sexual orientation becomes salient. Specifically, I predicted that these dyads would exhibit (1) more positive affect (increased smiling and laughing behaviors); (2) more non-verbal

engagement (increased duration of mutual gazes and having their bodies oriented more towards one another); and (3) more talking (increased number and duration of speaking turns) after the sexual orientation of both dyad members is revealed.

Hypothesis 2: Straight women and gay men should engage in more self-disclosure and longer discussions of mating-related topics after their sexual orientation is made salient. However, this same effect is not expected to occur in the straight woman-straight man dyads.

According to this hypothesis, not only should straight women and gay men exhibit more instances of self-disclosure (i.e., sharing something personal about themselves) with one another, but they should also engage in longer discussions of mating-relevant topics that mostly encompass romantic attraction, dating, relationships, and sex. Recent experimental evidence has shown that straight women and gay men share more mating-related advice than straight women and straight men do. This sharing presumably reflects the absence of one-sided sexual attraction or mating competition, and it may contribute to the heightened trust that straight women place in gay men (Russell et al., 2013; Russell, Ta, Lewis, Babcock, & Ickes, in press). If, in fact, straight women perceive unbiased mating-related information to be a benefit in their interactions with each other, it is likely that their conversations would include more discussions about mating-related topics. Further, because straight women and gay men tend to trust each other more, it is likely that they would also tend to share more personal information with each other.

As in Hypothesis 1, these specific conversational behaviors should be most evident only after the sexual orientation of both dyad members is revealed. As long as the man's sexual orientation remains ambiguous, the woman may still err on the side of caution and would therefore disclose few details about her personal or romantic life. However, once it becomes clear that the man is gay, the woman should feel free to open up and share this information.

In dyadic interactions between women and *straight* men, however, the potential for sexual attraction remains a consistent theme throughout the interaction, and it plays an important role in both dyad members' hesitancy to discuss aspects of their personal and romantic lives. For example, if a straight man is sexually attracted to a woman with whom he is interacting, he might withhold discussing details of his sexual and romantic life with other women to create the impression that he is available to become a partner in a committed relationship. His female interaction partner might be reticent for the same reason, but more often because she wants to avoid creating the impression that she is promiscuous and easily available to a stranger she has just met. Accordingly, personal or mating-related information may not be discussed as frequently among straight women and straight men in their initial interactions. I therefore predicted that (1) straight women and gay men would engage in longer discussions about mating-related topics and spend more time disclosing aspects of their personal lives with one another after the sexual orientation is made salient in the interaction, but that (2) this effect would not be pronounced in interactions between straight women and straight men.

Hypothesis 3: Straight women should report feeling less self-conscious, more comfortable, and more inclined to discuss aspects of their romantic lives in their initial interactions with gay men compared to their initial interactions with straight men.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 propose that straight women and gay men exhibit more mutually involving and intimate interaction behaviors due to the perceived absence of any sexual attraction and motivation between them. Hypothesis 3 predicts that the absence of sexual attraction and complication in gay-straight dyads will allow women to feel more comfortable in their interaction.

Strategic interference between the sexes may contribute to this hypothesized difference. Because the wants and sexual desires of straight men usually conflict with the desires of straight women (Buss, 1989b), initial interactions between straight man and female

strangers are frequently complicated by their differing intentions. It is possible that a straight man may want to pursue a straight woman, either as a mate or as a short-term sexual partner, whereas the woman may not be seeking such companionship with that particular man. This initial disconnect may create an array of negative feelings between both opposite-sex individuals that include discomfort, awkwardness, and tension. However, because gay men are not sexually attracted to women, Hypothesis 3 predicts that these negative feelings should be reduced in gay man-straight woman interactions. Thus, I predicted that the women in these dyads should report feeling (1) less self-conscious, (2) more comfortable, and (3) more inclined to openly discuss dates and romantic partners with gay men than with straight men in their initial interactions.

The Present Research

To test these predictions, I collected quantitative data from the initial, unstructured interactions of 66 female-male dyads. Thirty-four heterosexual opposite-sex dyads (34 straight women and 34 straight men), and 32 gay-straight opposite-sex dyads (32 straight women and 32 gay men) were initially included. The initial interactions of these dyads were studied using the unstructured dyadic interaction paradigm, which has been successfully employed in many previous studies (e.g., Cuperman & Ickes, 2009; Ickes, Bissonnette, Garcia, & Stinson, 1990; Ickes, Robertson, Tooke, & Teng, 1986; see Ickes, 2009, for a review).

Consistent with the method used in previous investigations, the experimenter escorted the participants into a waiting room and then left the room to retrieve a study instrument that he had “forgotten” to obtain before the session began. In the experimenter’s absence, any unstructured interaction the dyad members had was covertly video and audio-recorded. Unlike previous investigations however, a manipulation was employed after the first video recording period. It occurred when the experimenter provided the occasion for each dyad member to reveal her or his sexual orientation (indirectly) to their interaction partner by describing her or his ideal romantic partner. After assigning this task to the dyad members and recording their stated

answers, the experimenter left the room again so that the dyad member's unstructured interaction could be recorded a second time now that their respective sexual orientations had been disclosed to each other.

Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Sixty-six heterosexual women and 66 men (34 heterosexual men, 32 homosexual men) were recruited and randomly assigned to create two dyad types: (1) mixed-sex dyads composed of a straight woman and a straight man (SW-SM), and (2) mixed-sex dyads composed of a straight woman and a gay man (SW-GM).

Heterosexual participants were recruited via the University of Texas at Arlington's Experiment Management System (Sona Systems). Homosexual male participants, however, were recruited through university events, organizations, and advertisements directed towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student population. A trained undergraduate research assistant recruited these participants in person, by phone, and also via email.

Upon initial contact with each potential gay male recruit, the research assistant was instructed to state the following:

"We are recruiting for a psychology research study examining how individuals communicate various topic information to one another. We are recruiting gay men because we are needing a more diverse sample of participants, given that research in our field values diversity."

The purpose of this statement was to minimize having gay male recruits think that our study objective called for gay male subjects only. In addition, each gay male participant was required to confirm to the research assistant that he identified as an openly gay male. If this specific criterion was met, the research assistant proceeded with scheduling the gay male participant for an experiment session.

The heterosexual participants who were recruited via Sona Systems were compensated with partial course credit, whereas the homosexual male participants were entered into a drawing to win a gift card. Regardless of their biological gender or their sexual orientation, all subjects were required to be between the ages of 18 to 25 to participate. The sample was 40%

Caucasian, 32% Hispanic, 17% African American, 18% Asian, and 9% identified with other ethnicities.

Power Analysis

Before recruiting participants to the study, a statistical power analysis was performed for sample size estimation, based on data from a pilot study ($N = 12$), that compared the self-reported comfort level of women in SW-GM dyads with women in SW-SM dyads (3 women in SW-SM dyads, 3 women in SW-GM dyads). The effect size in this pilot study was a Cohen's d of 1.11, which is considered to be a large effect size using Cohen's (1988) criteria. With an alpha of .05 and power = 0.95, the projected sample size of straight women needed to achieve this effect size in the present study was approximately $N = 46$ (23 women in SW-GM dyads, 23 women in SW-SM dyads for this between-dyad comparison examining women's comfort level with their interaction partner). Thus, our total sample size ($N = 132$) consisting of 66 total heterosexual women (34 in SW-SM dyads, 32 in SW-GM dyads) should be adequate to test the current hypotheses and should also allow for any attrition or events leading to participant exclusion.

Setting and Materials

The study took place in the UT-Arlington Social Interaction Laboratory. This lab suite contained five rooms: an observation room, a storage room, a control room, and two adjacent cubicles. The dyadic interactions took place in the observation room, which contained a small coffee table, bookshelf, couch, and a hidden microphone behind the couch. The storage room—an unlit room directly across the hall from the observation room—contained the video camera hidden within a storage box. A small hole was cut out of a black printed area on the side of the storage box, thereby bringing the observation room within the camera's line of sight while allowing the camera itself to be concealed from the participants. The control room contained all of the audio, video, and computer equipment used to record and store the video and audio data from the participants' interactions. The neighboring cubicles in the lab space served as private

areas for each participant to complete self-report measures and a post-interaction questionnaire that assessed various aspects of their perceived interaction experience with the other participant.

Procedure

Two research personnel conducted each experiment session: (1) a research assistant and (2) an experimenter. When the participants arrived for their session, the research assistant, who was kept blind to the participants' dyad-type (SW-SM vs. SW-GM), was in charge of leading the participants through the steps of the experiment procedure. The experimenter was in charge of covertly audio- and video-recording the participant during each experiment session. While the participants interacted with the research assistant for the duration of the experiment, the participants never saw or interacted with the experimenter.

Each heterosexual female participant was randomly assigned to one of the two dyad types: (1) a straight woman/straight man (SW-SM) dyad or (2) a straight woman/gay man (SW-GM) dyad. Both the heterosexual and the homosexual male participants were randomly paired with a heterosexual female interaction partner, within the available scheduling constraints. The research assistant coordinated the scheduling of all participants to ensure that their schedules coincided and that the heterosexual female participant's assignment to a dyad type was as random as possible, given the current constraints.

After each participant arrived at his and her own respective waiting area outside of the lab, the research assistant escorted each participant into one of the two available cubicles used for the study. In the cubicles, the participants were asked to complete a brief online survey that included demographic items as well as other items assessing the participant's personality (e.g., the 44-item Big-Five Inventory (BFI)). As the participants were completing their surveys in the cubicles, the experimenter in the control room prepared the video and audio equipment to record their upcoming initial interaction that would take place in the control room. After the two participants completed the survey, the research assistant told each participant to leave all

belongings (including books and cell phones) in the cubicles. Then, the research assistant escorted both of the participants into the observation room and asked them to sit on the couch.

As part of the study's cover story, the research assistant explained to both participants that they would be taking part in an experiment examining how two strangers convey different kinds of topic information to one another. Accordingly, the research assistant told the participants that they would be drawing one topic to discuss out of a box containing many different topics. The research assistant then began searching for the topic box on the bookshelf, appearing to have misplaced the box. Appearing frustrated and pressed for time, the research assistant apologized to the participants and informed them that she must have mistakenly left the box in the office and must now retrieve it for the experiment to continue as planned. The research assistant then left the room and walked down the hall, audibly closing the outside door to the research lab behind her. During the next 5 minutes, the two participants were left alone in the observation room, and all of their verbal and non-verbal behaviors were recorded via the hidden microphone behind the couch and by the concealed video camera in the storage room across the hall. This first five-minute recording period will be referred to as the dyad's *baseline interaction*.

After the research assistant returned precisely 5 minutes later (i.e., at the end of the baseline-recording period), she returned with the box containing many slips of paper, each slip presumably specifying a different conversation topic. Unbeknownst to the participants, however, all of the slips of paper asked each dyad member to discuss the same topic. The research assistant then asked one of the participants to draw a topic out of the box, read it aloud, and then follow the instructions provided on the slip of paper. The instructions on each slip of paper read as follows:

“Please describe your ideal romantic partner to the other participant in 60 seconds. In your description, please state your ideal partner’s gender, what they would look like, their personality, and where you could see yourself with them in the future.”

As each participant was describing their ideal romantic partner to the other participant, the research assistant sat in a nearby chair pretending to be taking notes on their description. After one participant provided a description of their ideal romantic partner, the research assistant then instructed the other participant to do the same. In terms of the present study's actual goals, this activity was intended to (1) bolster the believability of the study's cover story (how people discuss different conversation topics); (2) reveal what gender each dyad member was sexually attracted to¹; and (3) "prime" the topic of mating behavior for all participants, so that the participants would feel free to discuss this topic subsequently if they felt comfortable doing that with their new interaction partner.

The research assistant then thanked both participants for their responses and explained that she needed to "print off a few documents" for the next half of the experiment. She told the participants that it would only take a few minutes and that they could wait on the couch until she returned. The research assistant again exited the observation room, walked down the hall, and shut the lab suite door behind her. During the next 5 minutes, the dyad members were again video and audio recorded, and this period of time will be referred to as the dyad's *post-baseline interaction*.

When the research assistant returned to the observation room after the post-baseline interaction period concluded, the participants were asked a couple of questions to identify any possible suspicions about being recorded. If either participant showed evidence of such suspicion, the data obtained from the two participants was not included in the subsequent data analyses. Only one dyad out of the 66 recruited dyads showed active suspicion of being recorded (i.e., 1.5% of the study sample). Because the goal of the investigation was to study naturally occurring interaction behavior, it would not have been appropriate to include data from the two participants who had suspicions of being recorded. Such suspicion would have likely caused these participants to behave in a less natural, more guarded fashion.

At this point in the procedure, the research assistant went on to inform all participants that they were, in fact, being recorded. Explaining the importance to the study's goals of not telling them about the recording in advance, the research assistant then requested their written permission to use their video recordings for data analysis purposes. If both participants consented to this request, they were asked to sign a video-release document. If either of the two participants were uncomfortable with having their video be watched and later analyzed by members of the research team, they were escorted into the control room, where they watched as their video- and audio-recording data were erased (this was the case for one out of the 66 dyads that were recruited).

Next, the research assistant escorted the two participants into two separate cubicles to complete the final part of the experiment: the post-interaction questionnaire. This online questionnaire (utilizing Qualtrics Survey Software) consisted of items that assessed various aspects of the participant's overall interaction experience with the other participant. Following the completion of the questionnaire, the participants were fully debriefed and given full credit for participating in the study. They also were told not to disclose the true purpose of the study to anyone to help ensure that other students in their classes were able to participate in the study without bias.

Behavioral Measures

Three verbal as well as four non-verbal behavioral measures were coded and recorded from the interaction videos by a team of undergraduate research assistants (raters) who were blind to the interaction partners' dyad-type (SW-SM vs. SW-GM dyad). The raters were divided into separate groups to code specific behaviors that they were assigned; however, each rater only coded one behavior at a time and was instructed to separately code the responses of each dyad member for those variables that were not dyadic in nature (i.e., not common to both members). A few behaviors that required a measure of duration (e.g., talking, gazing, smiling) were recorded via an event recorder device, which had the ability to record (1) the number of

occurrences (i.e., the frequency) of the behavior, (2) the total elapsed duration (seconds) of the behavior, (3) the frequency of co-occurring behavior (e.g., the frequency of mutual gazes or “eye contact”), and (4) the duration of the co-occurring behavior. Each rater had the ability to stop and review different parts of the video as many times as they needed. Because each dyad engaged in two interactions (i.e., baseline and post-baseline), each non-verbal and verbal behavior was coded in each interaction, and inter-rater reliability statistics for each behavior were computed in each period.

The three verbal behaviors that were coded included (a) the seconds of speaking turns (baseline: ICC = .96, post-baseline: ICC = .90), (b) the seconds of speaking about mating-related topics (baseline: ICC = 1.00, post-baseline: ICC = .99), and (c) the length of time (seconds) exhibiting self-disclosure (baseline: ICC = .65, post-baseline: ICC = .51).

The four non-verbal behaviors that were coded included (a) each dyad member’s body orientation relative to their partner (toward, away, or parallel; baseline): ICC = .89, post-baseline: ICC = .95); (b) the total frequency of positive affect (smiling or laughing) that each dyad member displayed (baseline: ICC = .96, post-baseline: ICC = .90); (c) the total frequency of each dyad member’s gazes at his or her partner (baseline: ICC = .99, post-baseline: ICC = .98); and (d) the total amount of time (seconds) that each dyad member looked at his or her partner (baseline: ICC = .99, post-baseline: ICC = .99).

Self-Report Measures

Personality Measures

Participants completed two personality inventories prior to participating in the experiment and interacting with their partner: the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), and the 44-item Big-Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Although the TIPI and the BFI measure the same Big Five dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and neuroticism, the TIPI’s smaller

number of items makes it less reliable and, in general, a weaker correlate of other variables than the BFI; see Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

Post-interaction questionnaire

Following the completion of the second interaction period, the participants completed an online questionnaire that assessed their overall level of perceived rapport with their interaction partner. Relevant items (rated on 7-point Likert scales) assessed whether the participant felt comfortable with the other participant (e.g., “I felt comfortable with the other person in the room”); the degree of self-consciousness experienced (e.g., “I felt self-conscious when I was interacting with the other person”); and the inclination to openly discuss mating-related topics with the other participant (e.g., “I felt like I could openly talk about dating and potential romantic partners with the other person”). In addition, a measure of perceived similarity was included to assess whether the participants felt that their interaction partner had similar interests (e.g., “How similar did you think your interests were with your partner?”).

Finally, because it was critical that each member of each dyad type could correctly identify his or her partner’s sexual orientation, a manipulation check item was included at the end of the post-interaction questionnaire which asked them to do so. Two women in our sample, (both of whom were assigned to the SW-GM condition), did not correctly identify their partner’s sexual orientation, and the data from their dyads were not included in the subsequent data analyses.

Chapter 3

Results

Data Screening and Selection

For various reasons, the data from 8 of the original dyads were not included in the data analyses reported below. Of the original 66 dyads (132 participants), (a) the data from three dyads were excluded because of equipment problems that resulted in missing or unusable recordings (i.e., conversation in which no sound was recorded); (b) the data from two dyads were excluded, either because of suspicion that the interactions had been recorded (one dyad) or because the dyad members did not both consent for their video-recordings to be viewed by the members of the research team (one dyad); (c) the data from two other dyads were excluded because a participant misidentified their partner's sexual orientation; and (d) one more dyad was excluded because the male member identified himself as bisexual rather than exclusively gay. Thus, 58 dyads ($n = 116$; 58 straight women randomly paired with 29 straight men or 29 gay men) were retained for the data analyses, the results of which are reported below.

Hypothesis 1: Behavioral Shift of SW-GM Dyads Following Sexual Orientation Disclosure

A series of paired-sample (i.e., dependent) *t*-tests were used to test the Hypothesis 1 prediction that behaviors reflecting intimacy and involvement would increase significantly *in the SW-GM dyads only* from the baseline period (before the dyad members' sexual orientations were known) to the post-baseline period (immediately after the dyad members' sexual orientations were known).

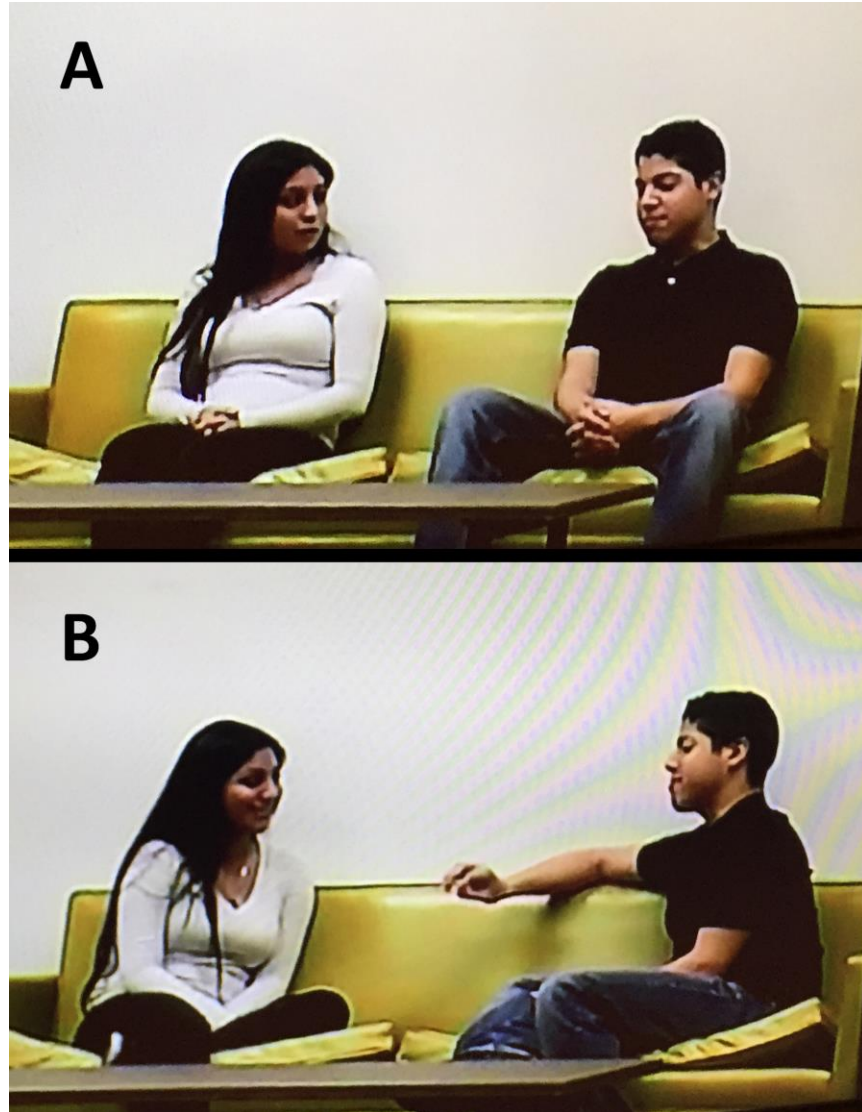


Figure 3-1 Photographs depicting body-orientation differences of a SW-GM dyad from the baseline interaction period (male's sexual orientation is ambiguous, A) to the post-baseline interaction period (male's sexual orientation is known, B).

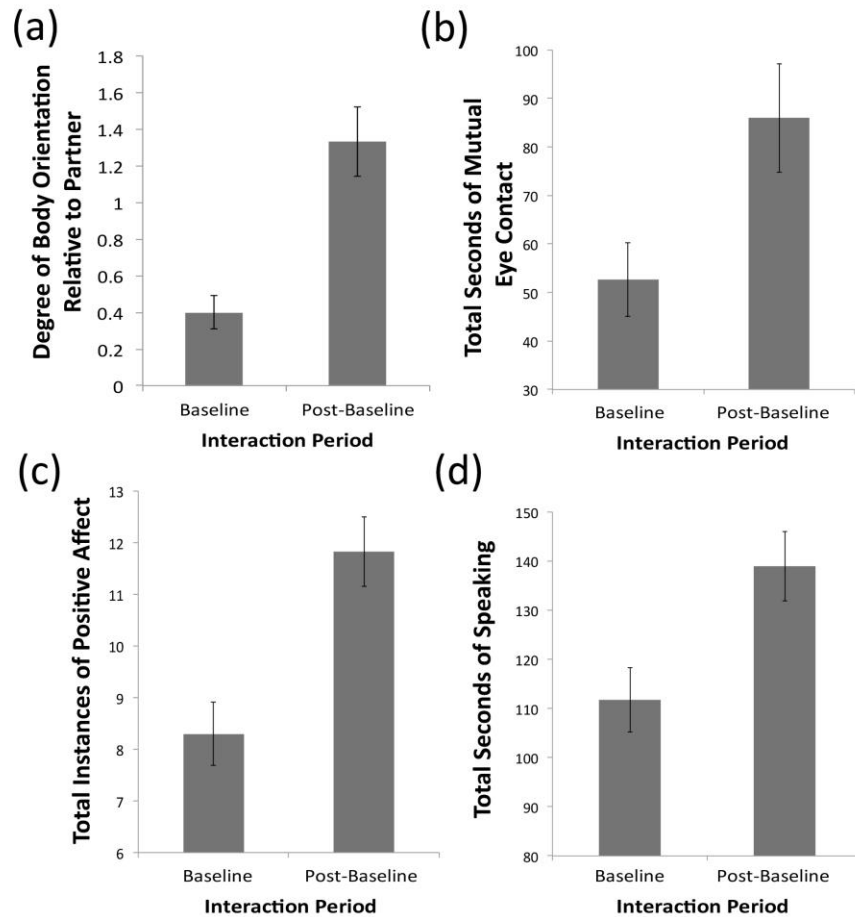


Figure 3-2 Interaction period differences for the SW-GM dyads in (a) body orientation, (b) seconds of mutual eye contact, (c) instances of positive affect, and (d) seconds of speaking engagement. Bars represent +/- 1SE.

Consistent with this prediction, the results showed the expected increases in the following four behaviors: (1) the frequency of *positive affect* (i.e., a combined measure of smiling and laughing), $t(57) = 5.52, p < .001, d = .72$; (2) the degree of *body orientation toward the partner* (see the sample photos that appear as Figure 3-1), $t(57) = 5.93, p < .001, d = .78$; (3) *the total seconds spent talking*, $t(58) = 4.20, p < .001, d = 1.10$; and (4) *the total seconds spent in mutual gaze* (i.e., “eye contact”), $t(28) = 5.10, p < .001, d = .95$ (see Figure 3-2 for graphs depicting all four behaviors). On the other hand, there was no significant difference between the

two interaction periods for the measure of frequency of *mutual eye contact* in the SW-GM dyads ($p = .32$). And, as predicted, there were no significant differences between the two interaction periods for any of the measured behaviors in the SW-SM dyads (all ps *ns*).

Hypothesis 2: Differences in Self-Disclosure and Mating-Related Discussion

Two 2 (Interaction Period) X 2 (Dyad Type) mixed model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test the Hypothesis 2 prediction that SW-GM dyads would spend more time talking about mating-related topics and engage in more self-disclosure in the post-baseline period compared to the baseline period, whereas there would be no baseline to post-baseline differences in these verbal behaviors in the SW-SM dyads.

As predicted, a significant interaction was found for the amount of time (*seconds*) spent talking about mating-related topics, $F(1, 114) = 4.12, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .04$. It indicated that the SW-GM dyads increased their speaking time about mating-related topics from the baseline period to the post-baseline period, $F(1, 114) = 25.94, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .19$. The SW-SM dyads also exhibited a significant increase in speaking about mating-relevant topics from the baseline period to the post-baseline period, $F(1, 114) = 4.89, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .04$, however they spoke about these topics significantly less than SW-GM dyads did during the post-baseline interaction, $F(1, 114) = 5.07, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .04$.

Also as predicted, a significant interaction was revealed for *seconds* of self-disclosure behavior, $F(1, 114) = 6.05, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .05$. It revealed that the SW-GM dyads disclosed significantly more about aspects of their personal lives in the post-baseline period than in the baseline period, $F(1, 114) = 23.15, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .17$, but this difference was not observed in SW-SM dyads ($p = .19$). Given this pattern of results, it is not surprising that the SW-GM dyads spent more time disclosing aspects of their personal lives to their partners during the post-baseline period than did the SW-SM dyads, $F(1, 114) = 27.86, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$ (see Figure 3-3).

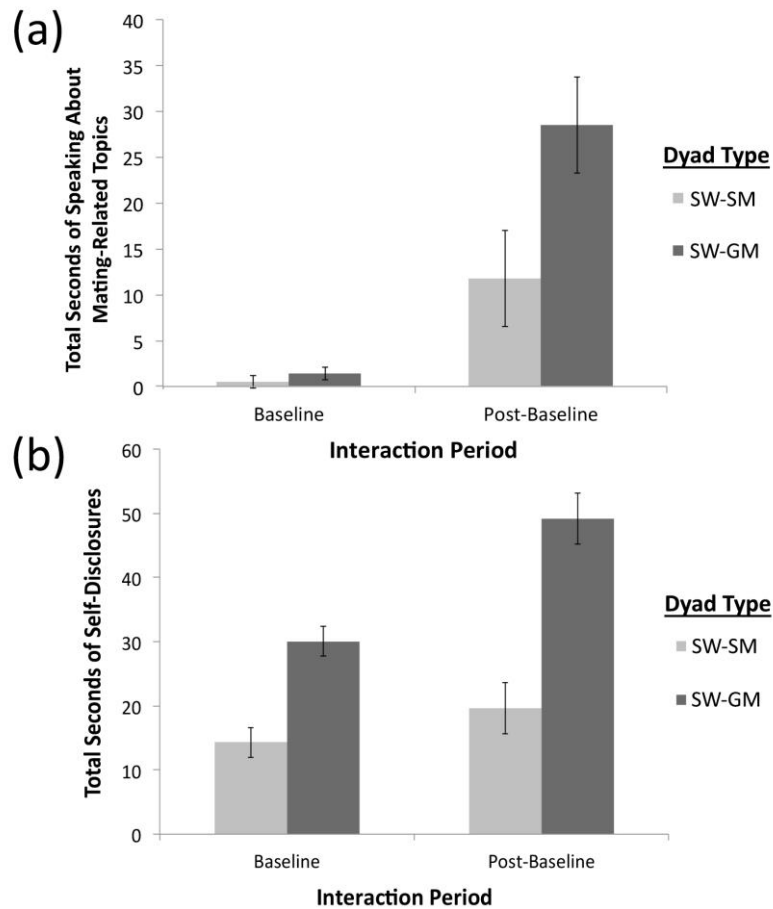


Figure 3-3 The amount of time (seconds) (a) speaking about mating-related topics and (b) self-disclosing to partner as a function of dyad-type and interaction period. Note: SW-SM = straight woman / straight man dyad, SW-GM = straight woman / gay man dyad.

Bars represent +/- 1 SE.

Hypothesis 3: The Effect of Dyad Type on Women's Overall Comfort Level

Three independent samples *t*-tests were used to test the Hypothesis 3 prediction that women's self-reported feelings of comfort would be higher in initial interactions with gay men than in initial interactions with straight men. Consistent with this prediction, the women in the SW-GM dyads felt more comfortable than did the women in SW-SM dyads, $t(56) = 2.77, p < .01, d = .74$, and these women also felt more inclined to openly discuss significant aspects of

their dating and romantic lives with gay men compared to straight men, $t(56) = 2.59, p = .01, d = .69$ (see Figure 3-4). On the other hand, however, there was no significant difference between women's reported levels of self-consciousness in initial interactions with gay men versus straight men ($p = .46$).

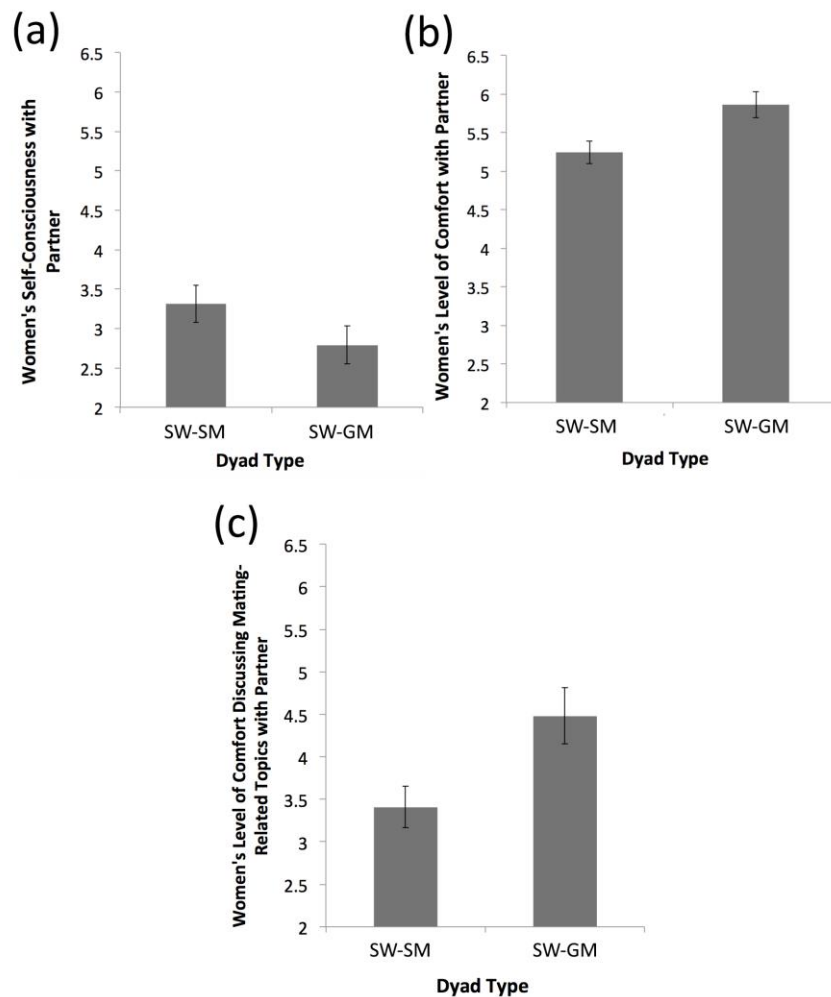


Figure 3-4 Women's self-reported (a) self-consciousness, (b) level of comfort, and (c) comfort discussing mating-related topics with partner as a function of dyad type. Note: SW-SM = straight woman / straight man dyad, SW-GM = straight woman / gay man dyad.

Bars represent +/- 1 SE. Full scale runs from 1 to 7.

Additional Analyses

Time Period X Dyad interaction effects

In addition to the paired sample t-tests that were reported above in support of Hypothesis 1, the data revealed three significant dyad-level interaction effects [Interaction Period (Baseline vs. Post-baseline) X Dyad Type (SW-GS vs. SW-SM)] that provided further evidence in support of this hypothesis (see Figure 3-5 for the three interaction effects).

The first of these interaction effects [$F(1, 114) = 20.39, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .15$] revealed that the total amount of partner-directed body orientation (summed across both dyad members) was greater during the post-baseline interaction period than during the baseline interaction period in the SW-GM dyads, $F(1, 114) = 63.43, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .36$, but not in the SW-SM dyads ($p = .12$).

The second of these interaction effects [$F(1, 56) = 16.83, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .23$] revealed that the frequency of mutual positive affect (instances where dyad members smiled or laughed simultaneously) was greater during the post-baseline interaction period than during the baseline interaction period in the SW-GM dyads, $F(1, 56) = 27.26, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .33$. Again, however, this difference was not observed in the SW-SM dyads ($p = .56$).

The third interaction effect [$F(1, 56) = 20.98, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .27$] revealed that the total seconds spent in mutual gaze (i.e., "eye contact") was greater in the post-baseline interaction period compared to the baseline interaction period in the SW-GM dyads, $F(1, 56) = 37.42, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .40$. Again, this increase in mutual eye contact was not observed in the SW-SM dyads ($p = .72$).

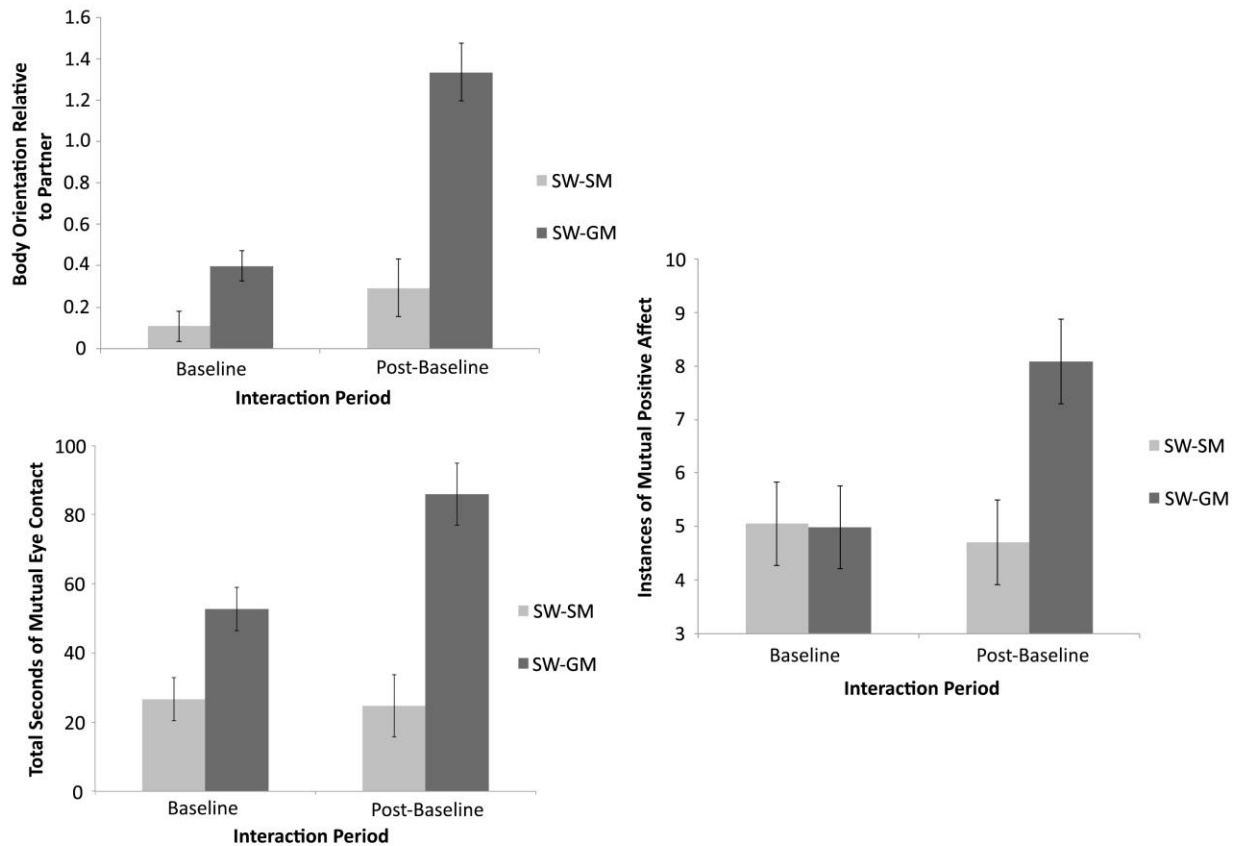


Figure 3-5 Interaction Period X Dyad Type interaction effects of body orientation, seconds of mutual eye contact, and instances of mutual positive affect. Note: SW-SM = straight man / straight woman dyad, SW-GM = straight woman / gay man dyad.

Bars represent +/- 1SE.

Examination of personality differences associated with male sexual orientation

Although there were significant behavioral effects for the SW-GM dyads and not for the SW-SM dyads, is it possible that effects could be attributable to personality characteristics that distinguish gay men from straight men and not to the partner's recognition of the difference in their sexual orientation? The answer is no—not likely. If the gay men's personalities were generally more *pro-social* (e.g., more agreeable, extraverted, and open; Ickes, 2009, Ch 11)

than those of the straight men, the effects relevant to Hypothesis 1 would likely have been evident during both of the interaction periods, rather than being limited to the post-baseline period only. Nevertheless, it was important to determine whether such personality differences existed, so I tested for possible mean differences between the gay men and the straight men in the sample on both the TIPI and the BFI measures of agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

Although the TIPI and BFI measures of each construct were highly correlated, (Agreeableness, **.51**; Extraversion, **.88**; Conscientiousness, **.76**; Neuroticism, **.70**; and Openness, **.60**), there was a significant mean difference between the gay men and straight men on only one personality trait: Openness to Experience, measured by the TIPI, $t(56) = 2.26$, $p = .03$. The gay men had a significantly greater score on Openness to Experience ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 0.99$) compared to the straight men ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 0.93$). However, there was no corresponding mean difference in Openness to Experience using the BFI, so the multi-method reliability of this difference is in question (see Table 3-1).

Regardless of the discrepancy between the TIPI and BFI Openness to Experience measures, I wanted to test whether this specific personality dimension affected the women's self-reported comfort in these interactions. It was also important to consider the possibility that gay men may have self-selected to participate in the study because they were more "friendly" or "trustworthy" than straight men on average. I therefore conducted a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) that examined women's comfort level as a function of dyad type (SW-SM vs. SW-GM) while controlling for their male partners' agreeableness and openness to experience scores from the TIPI. Even after accounting for these two personality dimensions in the model, the women's reported comfort level was still greater in the SW-GM dyads than in the SW-SM dyads, $F(1, 54) = 6.57$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .14$, suggesting that it was their male partner's sexual orientation, rather than their male partner's level of agreeableness and openness, that was responsible for the patterns of effects that were evident.

Table 3-1 Descriptive Statistics and Differences in Personality Dimensions

Variable		Straight men	Gay men	<i>t</i>
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
TIPI	Extraversion	4.53 (1.61)	4.98 (1.44)	1.12
	Agreeableness	4.47 (1.03)	4.86 (0.94)	1.53
	Openness	5.03 (0.93)	5.60 (0.99)	2.26
	Conscientiousness	5.33 (1.09)	5.29 (1.15)	-0.12
	Neuroticism	2.71 (1.15)	2.86 (1.13)	0.52
BFI	Extraversion	3.17 (0.85)	3.56 (0.73)	1.63
	Agreeableness	3.63 (0.60)	3.74 (0.59)	0.63
	Openness	3.63 (0.67)	3.91 (0.44)	1.57
	Conscientiousness	3.65 (0.64)	3.78 (0.51)	0.79
	Neuroticism	2.51 (0.62)	2.70 (0.67)	0.98

Note. Bold *t*-values indicate significance beyond $p < .05$.

Women's perceived similarity to, and comfort level with, gay men

In support of the third hypothesis, women reported being more comfortable interacting with gay men. However, I also wanted to know whether women's perceived similarity with gay men—more specifically, their perceived mutual interest in the same gender (i.e., men)—contributes to their comfort level with gay men. I therefore conducted a moderated multiple regression model to determine whether the relationship between the women's perceived similarity with gay men and their level of comfort with them was moderated by the women's perceived mutual interest in men with gay men.

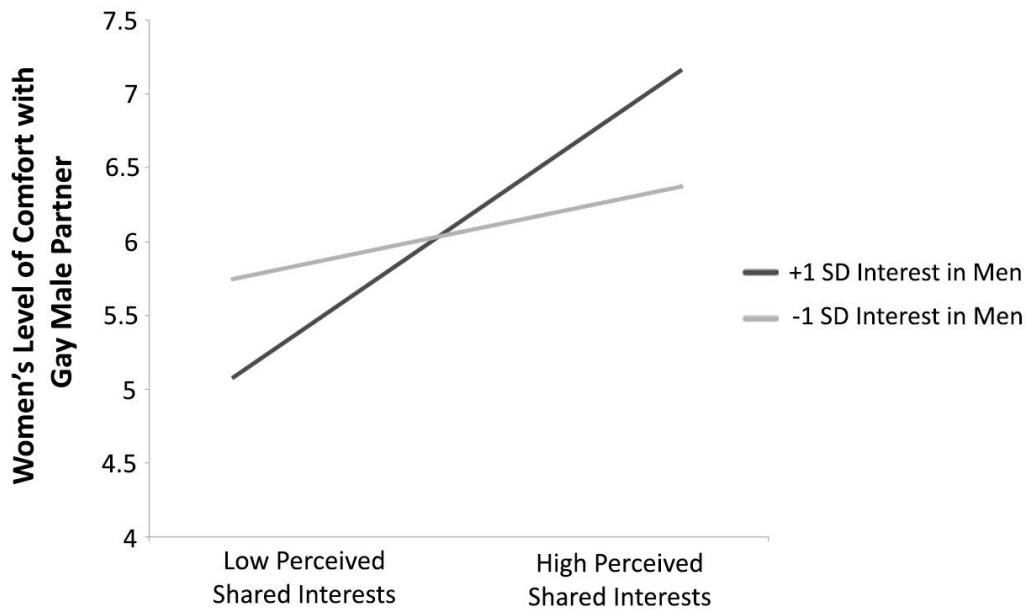


Figure 3-6 Women's level of comfort and their perceived shared interests with gay men moderated by women's degree of perceived mutual interest in men with gay men. Note: Women's perceived shared interests were analyzed at +/- 1 SD of women's perceived mutual interest in men.

As expected, there was an interaction effect of the women's perceived similarity and their perceived mutual interest in men on their overall comfort level, $b = .35$, $SE = .17$, $t(22) = 2.03$, $p = .05$, $s^2 = .13$. To probe the interaction, women's comfort level was examined at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) levels of their perceived mutual 'male' interest. When women perceived themselves to have more similarity with gay men in regards to the topic of men, their overall perceived similar interests with gay men predicted their comfort level with them, $b = 1.02$, $SE = .35$, $t(22) = 2.88$, $p = .01$, $s^2 = .27$ (see Figure 3-6). Conversely, at low levels of this moderator, there was no relationship between their overall perceived similarity and their comfort level with gay men ($p = .10$).

Chapter 4

Discussion

In recent years, researchers and social scientists in general have begun to examine the unique relationship that straight women and gay men share with one another (Castro-Convers et al., 2005; Gaiba, 2007; Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999; Russell et al., 2013; Russell et al., in press). However, across the psychological and social science literature, there have been no quantitative investigations examining the actual initial interactions that occur between straight women and gay men. The present study therefore fills an important gap in the research literature. Not only is it the first study to advance specific hypotheses regarding the special bond that develops quickly in straight woman/gay man interactions, but it is also the first to obtain both the behavioral and the self-report data needed to test these predictions. Overwhelmingly, the findings obtained in this study (many of them contributing to the strong pattern of Interaction Period X Dyad Type interaction effects that are detailed below) provide strong and consistent evidence that the unique pattern of interaction between straight women and gay men that is typically described in popular culture and self-report testimonials accurately reflects the actual behavior that is observed in these interactions.

Behavioral Shifts in Response to Sexual Orientation within SW-GM Dyads

Hypothesis 1, regarding the change in interaction behaviors within the SW-GM dyads once the male partner's sexual orientation is known, was supported. Specifically, the members of the SW-GM dyads had more involving and intimate interactions during the post-baseline period, as evidenced by an overall increase four behaviors: (1) the frequency of positive affect, (2) the total seconds of mutual gaze (i.e., "eye contact"), (3) the total seconds of talking, and (4) a greater degree of body orientation towards one another. Although there was no significant difference in the frequency of mutual gazes within SW-GM dyads (i.e., the number of times the dyad members simultaneously looked at each other), there was a significant increase for the total amount of time (seconds) spent in mutual gazes.

Although these results lend support for previous research findings that straight women and gay men have more intimate and involving interactions than straight women and straight men do (Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke & Rafaty, 1999), they do not necessarily imply that women and gay men automatically exhibit this type of behavior in their initial interactions. Rather, the current findings demonstrate that this behavior is not observed until the women know for certain that their new male interaction partner is gay. Once that happens, the interaction changes dramatically, as the present findings amply illustrate.

If the gay men in these dyads perceived their female partners to be more involved and intimate after the men's sexual orientation had been revealed, they should have felt encouraged to reciprocate and become more intimate and involved in the interaction as well. Indeed, previous research has revealed that gay men are particularly likely to befriend and interact with heterosexual women who express more positive and accepting attitudes towards gay men (Baiocco et al., 2014).

In addition to the interaction effects that were yielded for the three non-verbal behaviors, two other interaction effects were observed for verbal behaviors that supported my second hypothesis: the SW-GM dyads exhibited a greater shift in speaking about mating-related topics and disclosing aspects of their personal lives to one another than did the SW-SM dyads². Particularly, during the post-baseline interaction period, both of these specific verbal behaviors within SW-GM dyads were observed for a longer period of time compared to the SW-SM dyads. This finding supported the prediction that women and gay men are more likely to readily speak about significant aspects of their romantic and personal lives with one another because of the absence of sexual interest that allows for a trustworthy, interpersonal connection (Russell et al., 2013).

Women's Reported Comfort Level by Dyad Type

Hypothesis 3 predicted that straight women would report feeling less self-conscious, more comfortable, and more inclined to discuss mating-related topics when their interaction

partner was a gay man rather than a straight man. This hypothesis was partially supported. Specifically, the results revealed that straight women who were paired with gay men reported feeling more comfortable and more inclined to discuss mating-related topics when they had gay male interaction partners. However, there was no significant difference in women's reported level of self-consciousness when their male interaction partner was gay versus straight.

This evidence of women's greater comfort level with gay men is consistent with previous research findings suggesting that women do not have to worry about potential sexual complications with gay men that could arise in their interactions with straight men (Russell et al., 2013). Indeed, the women's greater reported inclination to discuss mating-related topics with gay, rather than straight, men not only provides further evidence for this notion, but it also is supported by direct behavioral evidence that is consistent with Hypothesis 2: the SW-GM dyads were significantly more likely to actually discuss mating-related topics in their conversations than the SW-SM dyads were.

Because previous findings suggest that gay men and straight women have many things in common, it is possible that women's heightened comfort with gay men might have been a result of their greater perceived similarity with gay men. Interestingly, however, there was a significant relationship between the women's reported comfort and their overall perceived similarity with gay men when the women felt that their similarity with gay men was based on their mutual interest in the male gender. This finding is consistent with the reasoning on which the current study's three hypotheses were based: gay men's sexual interest in men (and not in women) creates an interaction experience in the SW-GM dyads in which the straight women can comfortably interact with gay men and share common aspects of their romantic and dating lives involving males without worrying about an underlying sexual agenda.

With regard to the Hypothesis 3 predictions, there was one unexpected finding that contrasted with the expected ones. Specifically, the women's reported level of self-consciousness did not differ between the two dyad types. Although it was expected that the

women who interacted with gay men would feel less self-conscious than those who interacted with straight men, women's self-consciousness may not be the same as their perceived comfort with a particular individual. Interacting with any stranger often lead to increased feelings of self-consciousness, but people are nonetheless sensitive to the awareness that they feel more comfortable interacting with certain strangers than with others.

Strengths of the Current Investigation

The present study is either the first or one of the first to record and analyze initial interactions that involve gay male and straight female participants. Several behavioral measures were collected, ranging from nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact and bodily orientation to verbal behaviors such as amount of time speaking and, more specifically, speaking about certain topics (e.g., dating/relationships). The findings obtained for these measures provide a rich and nuanced view of how the initial interactions between straight women and gay men differ from those of straight women and straight men. Another strength of the present investigation was the design of the study, which permitted a comparison of how the recorded interactions differed before and after the male participants' sexual orientation was known to both members.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study has yielded many novel findings, it has a few limitations that should be noted. First, the sample size was moderate, rather than large, for a dyadic interaction study, considering that only 58 dyads (29 SW-SM dyads, 29 SW-GM dyads) remained for the final data analysis. On the other hand, despite the moderate sample size, the effect sizes obtained for the three Interaction Period X Dyad Type interactions were relatively large, suggesting the presence of robust effects in the data for this study. Nevertheless, future research using the unstructured dyadic interaction paradigm should test the replicability of the demonstrated effects across larger and—if possible—more diverse samples.

Second, although the present study's design and procedure provided a way for both dyad members to disclose their sexual orientation to one another (i.e., describe your ideal

romantic partner), this particular method may have elicited some unanticipated effects of its own. For example, because both participants were instructed to speak about a mating-related topic in order to indirectly reveal their sexual orientation to the other, the mating-related topic itself may have primed the dyad members to continue to talk about that particular topic in the subsequent, post-baseline interaction. It is possible that revealing each participant's sexual orientation through some other means might have eliminated, or at least reduced, this unintended consequence.

As a related issue, instructing both participants to describe their ideal romantic partner to one another could have influenced participants' levels of awkwardness and discomfort in ways that might have affected their subsequent interaction. First, the subset of gay men who normally prefer to wait some time before revealing their sexual orientation to a new acquaintance might have felt some concern about being required to do that so quickly. Second, the female partners of all the gay men might have worried that the interaction would be awkward after their partner was required to disclose his sexual orientation. Third, the subset of straight men and women who described an ideal partner who was very different from their current interaction partner might have felt some anxiety about potentially offending or insulting their new interaction partner. Note, however, because these three forms of anxiety should have been greater in the SW-GM dyads (in which all of the straight women were describing *heterosexual* men as their ideal partners), these forms of anxiety should have led the women to report greater discomfort, not less discomfort, when they interacted with gay male partners. The fact that the opposite occurred may therefore be regarded as strong support for my prediction regarding the women's comfort level in the face of these potentially counter-acting effects.

Lastly, the current investigation is limited in the generalizability of its findings. Because I took care to minimize the age gap between dyad members by limiting the recruitment to participants who were between 18 to 25 years of age, I did so knowing that the findings might or might not generalize outside of this age range. On the other hand, previous research has

revealed that the close friendships observed between straight women and gay men are also evident outside the age range of young adulthood (Gaiba, 2007; Muraco, 2012). It therefore seems likely that the present findings will also generalize to different age groups, but only future studies will be able to establish that conclusively.

Conclusion

Researchers—past and present—have attempted to explain the unique interpersonal connection that straight women and gay men share with one another; however, researchers have not studied the development of this bond in the initial interactions of straight women and gay men. The present investigation addresses this gap in the literature by documenting the specific behaviors that distinguish SW-GM dyads from SW-SM dyads in the earliest stages of their relationship. These findings are novel and contribute to a more holistic picture of the psychology of SW-GM relationships. I hope that the findings from the current investigation will stimulate future research on the relationship between straight women and gay men—an area in social psychology that, in my opinion, has the potential for considerable growth and new insights.

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