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Re-evaluating the honing framework: Naturalistic observation of same- and different-sex couples' conversations

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Abstract

The current study tested the honing framework, which posits that people in same-, versus different-, sex couples may reduce their social networks to primarily include members perceived as supportive, facilitating more satisfying social interactions and enjoying more positive affect. The honing framework also predicts similarities among people in same- and different-sex couples, including quantity of social interactions, and social interaction links to well-being. Seventy-eight couples participated: 25 women with women, 19 men with men, and 34 different-sex couples. Over two weekends, both partners wore the Electronically Activated Recorder, a device that records audible, naturally-occurring social interactions. Additionally, each partner completed well-being questionnaires. Actor-partner interdependence models mostly supported the honing framework, revealing similarities among same- and different-sex couples, including

Statement of Relevance: Understanding how social engagement compares across people in same- and different-sex couples can contribute to knowledge of the social lives of sexual minorities, which may add to the growing body of evidence that their social lives and relationships should not face legal or social barriers. This may also contribute to clinicians' understanding similarities or differences among clients with same- or different-sex romantic partners, potentially contributing to appropriately-tailored therapy.

the quantity of social interactions, as well as interaction quantity links to well-being. The data also revealed a novel, unpredicted component of the honing framework: people in same-sex couples tended to have more one-on-one and fewer group interactions compared to people in different-sex couples. This lends support to and further develops the honing framework, revealing that people in same-sex couples manage to hone their social networks to close, supportive members with whom they have one-on-one, satisfying interactions.

KEYWORDS

Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR), happiness, LGBT, romantic relationships, sexual minorities, social interactions, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

A large body of research indicates that social relationships and social interactions are robust predictors of physical health and mental well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Ishii-Kuntz, 1990). Despite the growing body of work on how social interactions impact health and well-being, much of this work has excluded people who are sexual minorities—those who identify with a sexual orientation other than exclusively heterosexual (Cundiff et al., 2016)—or have not addressed sexual orientation as a factor in this association (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007).

A recent article supported a honing framework for examining similarities and differences in social network size, social interaction quality, and associated affect among people in same- and different-sex romantic relationships (Robbins et al., 2020). The honing framework outlines the ways people in same-sex couples may reduce their social networks to primarily include members who are perceived as supportive, thus experiencing more satisfying social interactions and enjoying more positive affect. Past evidence revealed that people in same-sex couples have social networks that are smaller, social interactions that are higher quality, and greater positive and lower negative affect compared to people in different-sex couples (Robbins et al., 2020). These data answered questions about the perceived *quality* of social interactions among people in same- and different-sex couples, and their links to one facet of well-being, but could not address questions about the frequency and social context of interactions with close others. This study further tested the honing framework, using direct, behavioral measures of the *quantity* of social interactions, or social engagement, among people in same- and different-sex couples, as well as links to well-being.

1.1 | Honing framework

Sexual minorities have higher rates of depression (Marshal et al., 2011) and report higher levels of stress (Meyer & Frost, 2013) and lower well-being (Semlyen et al., 2016) relative to

heterosexual people. These disparities are linked to experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and stigma that sexual minorities are more likely to encounter due to their sexual orientation (Branstrom et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Ogolsky et al., 2019a). However, frequent, high-quality engagement in social interactions can buffer against negative effects of sexual minority stressors on health and well-being (Detrie & Lease, 2007; Ehlke et al., 2020). This may be particularly prevalent among sexual minorities in committed relationships. Several studies have revealed the strengths among same-sex couples, including appreciation of individual differences, positive interactions, and effective communication (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Even among couples seeking therapy, same-sex couples tend to have better individual and relationship well-being than different-sex couples (Gottman et al., 2020).

In light of this evidence, the honing framework models resiliency among sexual minorities. It proposes that people in same-sex relationships have higher quality social interactions relative to people in different-sex relationships, due to a honing process in which they eliminate their low-quality social ties. Through this process, sexual minorities' social networks are refined to include mostly supportive and high-quality social ties. These supportive ties increase positive social interactions among people in same-sex couples and may lead them to experience greater positive and less negative affect compared to people in different-sex relationships (Robbins et al., 2020).

1.2 | Sex and sexual orientation differences

Though there are more similarities than differences among social relationships and interactions of people of different sexes (Helgeson & Mascatelli, 2018), there are some documented sex differences. For example, one study found that when evaluating their subjective level of loneliness, women tend to focus on the quality of their close relationships, whereas men tend to use more group-oriented criteria, like social network interconnectedness (Stokes & Levin, 1986). When engaged in social interactions, women tend to self-disclose and receive self-disclosure more often (Helgeson & Mascatelli, 2018) and have more intimate interactions than men (Leary et al., 1994; Nezlek, 1995). Different gender combinations among interaction partners can also influence characteristics of social relationships and interactions. For example, men tend to feel more explicit competition in same-sex relationships compared to women (Helgeson & Mascatelli, 2018). Further, people tend to spend more time and feel less motivation for impression management when engaged in in same- versus different-sex interactions with familiar others (Leary et al., 1994).

Social network members and sources of social support can also differ depending on sexual orientation. Some research reveals that gay men and women seek out support from, and spend most of their time with, "chosen families," which are primarily composed of friends, coworkers, and their romantic partner (Frost et al., 2016; Hailey et al., 2020). This may be due to the fact that, relative to heterosexual men and women, gay men and lesbian women are more likely to experience familial rejection as a result of their non-heteronormative partner choice (Carastathis et al., 2017; Katz-Wise et al., 2016). However, this may be changing as society is becoming more accepting of sexual minorities. Indeed, some sexual minorities experienced greater well-being after the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision legalizing gay marriage in the United States (Ogolsky et al., 2019a), which may be attributed to feeling less stigma and more acceptance in society (Ogolsky et al., 2019b). Further, Robbins et al. (2020) found that same-sex couples had higher social interaction quality with their family (and partner) compared to

different-sex couples. Perhaps sexual minorities who *are* accepted by family members tend to have higher quality interactions with those family members and avoid interacting with unsupportive family members.

1.3 | Dyad gender

Regardless of sexual orientation, dyad gender—the gender/sex composition of romantic couples (e.g., men with men, women with men)—can influence social engagement. First, same-sex and different-sex couples are similar in many ways. For instance, previous research found that the factors that predict romantic relationship quality and functioning in long-term relationships (e.g., parental stress) are similar across dyad genders (Balsam et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2004). However, there is evidence that people in same-sex couples have better relationship quality than people in different-sex couples (Chonody et al., 2020).

There is also indirect evidence that dyad gender can influence partners' behavior with each other and broader social network members. For example, though gender roles and expectations in relationships often differ between men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2016; Eisenchlas, 2013), these dynamics are more flexible in same-sex couples, where expectations of gender conformity and assumptions of one's "role" within a relationship are less socially-prescribed compared to different-sex couples (Pollitt et al., 2018). Differences in role expectations may lead to differences in social engagement and well-being of people in same- versus different-sex relationships. For example, people in different-sex couples, "especially women, [may] put up with poor relationship quality because they perceive gender inequalities to be the norm" (p. 205, Chonody et al., 2020). More research is needed to determine how these factors are associated with similarities and differences in levels of social engagement among people in same- and different-sex couples, and the degree to which these potential differences impact well-being.

1.4 | Methodological considerations

Previous research on social engagement has measured this construct via self-reports of the amount of time they spend doing social activities (Tang et al., 2017), perceived reciprocity and friendliness of their social interaction partners (Park, 2009), or frequency with which participants help and feel useful to their social network members (Zunzunegui et al., 2003).

While these measures of social engagement are informative, they can be limited by poor retrospection, social desirability, or the subjective nature of self-reports (Mehl, 2017; Schwarz, 2007). Furthermore, these measures may overlook some of the more nuanced and subtle aspects that characterize social interactions, such as time spent talking to others, time spent around one person versus a group of people, and time spent alone. The current study uses the Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR; Mehl, 2017; Mehl et al., 2001) to assess the observed, objective, and unprompted social interactions of individuals within different couple types (i.e., same- and different-sex couples), which will further understanding of how social engagement may influence well-being. The EAR captures intermittent samples of ambient sound from the wearer's environment, which provides details regarding the frequency of social interactions, behaviors, and environment of the wearer. It enables deeper insight into a diverse array of naturally-occurring conversations participants engage in with their social network members.

1.5 | Present study

The current study used the EAR to examine social interaction quantity among people in same- and different-sex romantic relationships and determine how it is similarly or differently associated with well-being, guided by the honing framework. A number of hypotheses were made based on the honing framework (Robbins et al., 2020), with a couple additions for the present study, regarding the quantity of social interactions. First, we hypothesized that same- and different-sex couples would engage in similar quantities of EAR-observed social interactions (i.e., time alone, with one person, in a group, talking, with their significant other, with a friend, and with family). This was based on the finding that men with men had smaller self-reported social networks, but same-sex couples on average had higher ecological momentary assessment (EMA) interaction quality than different-sex couples (Robbins et al., 2020). Smaller social networks, yet more satisfying social interactions, may lead people in same-sex couples to seek out social interactions at a similar rate to those in different-sex couples with larger networks. Second, we hypothesized that people in same-sex couples would have greater well-being compared to people in different-sex relationships, measured by self-reported happiness and depressive symptoms, based on EMA affect findings (Robbins et al., 2020), relationship quality findings across multiple studies (Chonody et al., 2020; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017), and well-being findings in Gottman and colleagues' study (2020). Third, we hypothesized that the link between *quantity* of social interactions and well-being would be consistent across groups, as it was with interaction *quality* in a past study (Robbins et al., 2020), and based on a review of social relationship similarities across genders in Helgeson and Mascatelli (2018).

We did not hypothesize specific differences among women with women and men with men, nor among men with women and women with men, so these comparisons were exploratory.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Transparency and openness

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all relevant measures in the study, and we follow JARS (APA, n.d.). All anonymized data and analysis code are available at https://osf.io/7ft6v/. This study's design and its analysis were not preregistered.

2.2 | Participants

Participants were 78 couples recruited from the Southern California community from 2014 to 2018. Couples were eligible if they were at least 18 years old, married or living together in a (self-identified) marriage-like relationship, had no health problems that interfere with daily life, and could complete questions in English. LGBTQ+ communities were targeted for recruitment (via flyers, community events, and meetup groups) to oversample same-sex couples. Data were collected until funds for the project expired. Fifty participants identified as a woman with a woman (WW), 38 identified as a man with a man (MM), 34 identified as a woman with a man (WM), and 34 identified as a man with a woman (MW). One MW did not have usable data due to a technical malfunction with the EAR. Therefore, there were 155 participants in this study

for the present analysis. A previous article used these data as an initial test of the honing framework, using EMA measures of affect and social interaction quality (Robbins et al., 2020). None of the present study analyses overlap with the previous analyses, as the present study used EAR data and the previous study used EMA data. Table 1 shows demographic characteristics for this sample.

2.3 | Procedure

Couples were given a verbal overview of the study procedures, and a detailed consent form, approved by the University of California, Riverside IRB. Once both members of the couple agreed to participate in the study, participants completed questionnaires assessing various constructs, including well-being. Time 1 (T1) typically occurred on a Friday, at the start of participants' weekend.

When the questionnaires were completed, participants were given instructions for the EAR and EMA portions of the study. For the EAR portion, participants were told that they should wear the device as much as possible, clipped to their waistline or pocket, during their waking hours until they go to bed on Sunday night. Participants were also instructed to use a pause button or to remove the device if they did not want to be recorded for a particular activity. The pause lasted 5 min each, at which point the participant could press it again if they wished.

Participants were also instructed to wear a bystander button indicating to social interaction partners the potential to be recorded. The button had a picture of a microphone and the words "This conversation may be recorded" displayed on it (Manson & Robbins, 2017; Robbins, 2017). Further, the researchers encouraged participants to tell others about the EAR. As another

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics.

	WW		MM		WM		MW	
$N_{individuals}$	50		38		34		33	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
$N_{sound\ files}$	181.67	36.58	196.50	35.34	187.22	36.49	180.15	36.67
Age (years)	33.46	12.97	42.95	18.26	26.16	7.61	27.45	8.19
Relationship length (years)	7.13	7.33	11.08	11.92	6.09	5.93	5.90	6.21
Ethnicity	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
Asian	2	4.00	2	5.26	5	14.71	2	6.06
Black	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	5.88	0	0.00
Latinx	11	22.00	8	21.05	12	35.29	9	27.27
Middle Eastern	2	4.00	0	0.00	1	2.94	0	0.00
White	26	52.00	20	52.63	10	29.41	11	33.33
Other/mixed	5	10.00	4	10.53	4	11.77	7	21.21
Missing	4	8.00	4	10.53	0	0.00	4	12.12

Note: $N_{sound\ files}$ is the number of Electronically Activated Recorder sound files per participant, averaged over 2 weekends. Abbreviations: Freq., frequency; MM, men with men; MW = men with women; WM, women with men; WW, women with women.

privacy protection, participants were told they would have the opportunity to listen to and delete any sound files they did not wish the researchers to have.

EAR devices were retrieved by the researchers on a Monday or Tuesday following the first monitored weekend (time 2; T2), and participants completed another set of questionnaires, including demographics. Participants also completed a time diary of when they were generally unable to wear the EAR over the weekend, to assist with coding. They also completed questions about EAR compliance and obtrusiveness.

One month later, participants repeated the same procedures as the first monitored weekend in a second monitored weekend, again completing well-being questionnaires at time 3 (T3) and EAR compliance and obtrusiveness measures at time 4 (T4). At T4, participants were given instructions for reviewing their sound files privately and informing the researchers of any sound file numbers they wish to delete. Participants were thanked and paid $50 each at this last visit.

Once participants had the opportunity to review their sound files for both weekends, their sound files were made available to research assistants for coding in a secured laboratories.

2.4 | Measures

2.4.1 | The EAR

The EAR device

The EAR device was an iPod with the EAR app installed (Mehl, 2017; Mehl et al., 2001; Robbins, 2017). Participants wore it in a protective case, clipped to their waistline or pocket. The EAR app was programmed to record 50 s of sound every 6 min, with a 6-h blackout period while participants were sleeping. The purpose of this far more intensive sampling procedure, compared to typical EAR studies (Mehl et al., 2012), was for a methodological study of how sampling rate affects coded estimates of behavior and social settings (Karan & Robbins, 2017). This yields far more coding work than is necessary for robust estimates of the behaviors of interest (Karan & Robbins, 2017; Mehl et al., 2012). Thus, we omitted every third sound file from coding to make the coding process maximally efficient for this project. This resulted in a variable sampling rate, where half the data were sampled with an interval of 6 min, and the other half were sampled with an interval of 12 min and 50 s. The mean sampling rate was 9 min and 25 s. Table 2 gives an example of how we calculated the sampling interval based on skipping every third sound file, where the interval is the time between the previous coded sound file's end time and the next coded sound file's start time. There was an average of 236.92 (SD = 38.10) sound files per participant in weekend 1 and an average of 228.78 (SD = 56.06) in weekend 2, with a total of 69,659 sound files. This total excluded the files participants chose to delete. One participant deleted 100, and two participants deleted 23, sound files. Per our privacy policy, no questions were asked about why the sound files were deleted.

EAR coding

Trained research assistants (RAs) coded the sound files for a host of variables, including problems with EAR sound files, sleeping, social setting, and with whom participants interacted. Problems with the EAR and sleeping were coded to sort those files from the valid and waking sound files with usable data. RAs coded a problem if there was silence that was not sleeping (176 files; 0.25%), if there was bad recording quality (211 files; 0.30%), if the participant was not wearing the EAR (4320 files; 6.20%), or if the participant was engaged in sexual behavior,

TABLE 2 Example of Electronically Activated Recorder sampling intervals.

	Sound file #	Start, min:s	End, min:s	Interval time, min:s
Coded	1	0:00	0:50	-
Coded	2	6:50	7:40	6:00
Skipped	3	13:40	14:30	-
Coded	4	20:30	21:20	12:50
Coded	5	27:20	28:10	6:00
Skipped	6	34:10	35:00	-
Coded	7	41:00	41:50	12:50

despite the researchers' encouragement to put the EAR in another room during very private behaviors (39 files; 0.06%). RAs coded sleeping if there was silence surrounding the nighttime blackout period, if they heard snoring, or if they knew the participant was napping (e.g., the participant mentioned in a sound file that they would nap). Sleeping was coded in 10,100 files (14.50%). After excluding the problem and sleeping sound files, participants had an average of 193.25 (SD = 39.11) valid and waking files in weekend 1 and an average of 177.60 (SD = 50.83) valid and waking files in weekend 2.

RAs coded social setting by indicating whether the participant was alone, with one person (one-on-one interaction), or in a group (two or more people). These were coded from cues in the environment, such as hearing others' voices in the participants' immediate environment (or not).

RAs coded with whom participants interacted in each sound file. This project focuses on three types of close others: significant other (romantic partner), friends, and family members. These were not mutually exclusive, as participants could be interacting with multiple people. Research assistants listened to several sound files before they began coding, to familiarize themselves with the participant's and others' voices. Significant others' voices are easily distinguished from others, as research assistants had sound files from both partners. RAs distinguished between friends and family members using conversational cues (e.g., referring to someone using a familial title like "mom"), with unclear instances defaulting to "friend."

Intercoder agreement for EAR coding was calculated using two-way random intraclass correlations (ICCs). All coders coded the first couple's sound files, as a training set, before moving on to coding unique participants. ICCs are derived from coder agreement on this training set, and the numbers are reported in Table 3, ranging from .88–.97. ICCs for one category, time with family, could not be computed due to it not occurring at all in the training set. This was an oversight, but there are strong reasons to believe this ICC would have been at least acceptable. First, all coders agreed these participants did not spend time with family; no coders marked this category as present. Second, other ICCs for this project are very high, including related categories (e.g., time with friends). Third, the first author's previous EAR projects have yielded good agreement for this category (Robbins et al., 2014). Therefore, these variables were retained in the present analyses.

After the sound files were coded, the binary data (1, 0) were aggregated across all sound files to yield estimates of the waking time spent in each category over the sampled period (e.g., proportion of time spent alone). These were the units used in all present analyses.

TABLE 3 Descriptive characteristics for Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR) and self-report measures.

	Reliability	Avg partner	Mean (SD)			
Measure	**ICC[2,k]**	***r* (*p*)[b]**	**WW**	**MM**	**WM**	**MW**
EAR variables						
Talk about EAR	.92	.59	0.76 (0.75)	0.51 (0.43)	0.61 (0.71)	0.63 (0.66)
Alone	.88	.68	14.23 (11.47)	28.45 (21.17)	19.16 (17.09)	17.86 (11.99)
One-on-one interaction	[a]	.83	58.61 (18.33)	56.18 (19.81)	51.57 (20.72)	54.23 (20.11)
Group interaction	[a]	.82	27.16 (18.00)	15.37 (15.78)	29.28 (19.01)	27.91 (18.40)
With sig. other	.88	.81	72.59 (20.87)	61.55 (24.55)	68.65 (21.52)	70.88 (20.23)
With friend(s)	.97	.80	18.75 (19.59)	13.25 (13.43)	20.88 (14.13)	19.24 (13.43)
With family	-	.62	9.72 (11.10)	3.71 (9.27)	6.45 (10.60)	8.31 (12.37)
Talking	.95	.70	59.39 (10.89)	42.27 (15.85)	55.65 (14.69)	52.54 (12.81)
Self-reports	Avg α					
Happiness	.86	.06 (.60)	5.64 (0.97)	5.74 (1.24)	5.17 (1.21)	5.57 (1.21)
Depressive symptoms	.88	.34 (.003)	0.49 (0.37)	0.50 (0.32)	0.69 (0.41)	0.62 (0.41)

Note: EAR means are % of sampled time engaged in that behavior/social environment.

Abbreviations: ICC, intraclass correlation; MM, men with men; MW = men with women; WM, women with men; WW, women with women.

[a]Alone, one-on-one, and group interaction are the same ICC because they are derived from the same variable: with others = 0 (alone), 1 (one-on-one), or 2 (group).

[b]All *p*-values for EAR variable partner correlations are <.001.

EAR compliance and obtrusiveness

Participants completed the EAR evaluation questionnaire (Mehl et al., 2001), reporting the percent of time they wore the EAR over each monitored weekend, as a measure of self-reported compliance. As previously mentioned, there was also a behavioral measure of compliance, coded instances of not wearing the EAR.

Participants also rated the obtrusiveness of wearing the EAR on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all through 5 = a great deal) by answering five questions about how uncomfortable or impeded they were by wearing the EAR (e.g., "To what degree did the EAR impede your daily activities?"). They also rated the obtrusiveness of the EAR for bystanders by answering three questions on the same 5-point scale (e.g., "To what degree did the EAR influence the behavior of people around you?"). The behavioral measure of EAR obtrusiveness was coded instances of talking about the EAR in the sound files (Table 3).

2.4.2 | Well-being

Two self-report measures, completed at T1 and T3 and then averaged, were used to assess well-being. The Subjective Happiness Scale was used to measure happiness. It is a 4-item scale, and

has been well-validated in California and in several countries (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale is a 20-item measure of depressive symptoms, that is reliable and extensively used in psychological research (Radloff, 1977). For both well-being measures, higher scores indicate higher levels of that construct. Reliability (Cronbach's α), means and standard deviations are reported in Table 3.

2.4.3 | Sex and dyad gender

Participants reported their sex as "male," "female," or "other (please specify)." We refer to participants who reported they are male as "men" and those who reported they are female as "women," and we refer to the different couple combinations of these sexes as "dyad gender."

2.5 | Data analytic strategy

A series of two-level multilevel regression models, run in SPSS version 27 using MIXED models, were used to test our hypotheses, given the nesting of the data (individuals nested in couples). These models were actor-partner interdependence models (APIMs) that included actor and partner predictors, while accounting for the non-independence among members of each couple (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). Both partners' data were input into the models that contained each participant's own sex (actor gender), their partner's sex (partner gender), and the interaction between both partners' sexes (dyad gender; Umberson et al., 2018; West et al., 2008). Dyad gender allowed us to compare same- and different-sex couples (WW, MM, WM, and MW). All predictors and outcomes were level 1 (individual-level) variables. Following recommendations by Kenny and Ledermann (2010), a threshold of $p \leq .20$ was used to determine which interactions should be deconstructed. This approach was used to err on the side of examining the simple slopes comparing the dyad genders, rather than assuming they are equal. When interactions met the threshold, they were deconstructed using Case 1 of the online HLM 2-way and the HLM 3-way interaction utilities at quantpsy.org (Preacher et al., 2006). Age was used as a control variable in all models given the mean-level differences we found between groups in our sample (Table 1; Robbins et al., 2020). Relationship length was considered as a control variable, but not included due to its high correlation with age ($r = .77$, $p < .001$). All variables, except dichotomously-coded gender (woman = 1, man = 2), were standardized to yield standardized estimates.

To address Hypothesis 1, we entered actor gender, partner gender, dyad gender, and age as a covariate, to predict social interaction frequency. This was tested in seven different multilevel models, each with a different EAR social interaction outcome variable: time alone, with one person, in a group, talking, with their significant other, with a friend, and with family. The primary predictor of interest was the dyad gender interaction term, to test for any differences in quantity of social interactions among people in same- and different-sex couples. All other predictors were exploratory.

To address Hypotheses 2 and 3, we ran four multilevel models, where actor gender, partner gender, dyad gender, and a 3-way interaction between actor gender, partner gender, and each social interaction variable were predictors of subjective happiness and depressive symptoms, with age as a covariate. There were two multilevel models per outcome: one for a grouping of social setting variables (with one person or in a group) and one for a grouping of social

interaction partner type (time spent with significant other, friend, and/or family). These groupings of predictors were done to avoid problems with multicollinearity among variables with substantial overlap (e.g., time spent with one person or in a group will almost always be with a significant other, friend or family member). Thus, there were two 3-way interactions for social setting in two models, and three 3-way interactions for social interaction partner type in the other two models.

The dyad gender variable (2-way interaction between partners' genders) was of primary interest for testing Hypothesis 2, to examine differences in well-being among people in same- versus different-gender couples. The primary predictors for testing Hypothesis 3 were the 3-way interaction terms, to test the strength of the association between interaction quality and well-being among same- versus different-gender couples. All other predictors were exploratory.

All results were interpreted following guidelines presented by Hurlbert et al. (2019). Based on these guidelines, we did not use $p < .05$ as a threshold to determine "significance" of effects; rather, we looked for patterns of results, magnitude of effect sizes, and width of confidence intervals, in addition to exact p-values, to judge the quality of evidence, and which effects are most likely to be meaningful and robust.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | EAR compliance and obtrusiveness

Participants generally reported good compliance wearing the EAR. The average percentage of time participants reported wearing the EAR was 83.14% (SD = 20.96) at T2 and 85.66% (SD = 12.96) at T4. Participants also reported fairly low obtrusiveness into their own lives and behavior ($M_{T2} = 1.83$, SD = 0.56; $M_{T4} = 1.73$, SD = 0.52) and low-to-midlevel obtrusiveness for bystanders' behavior ($M_{T2} = 2.56$, SD = 0.89; $M_{T4} = 2.37$, SD = 0.79).

The EAR-derived measure of obtrusiveness also indicated fairly low levels. Participants mentioned the EAR in 0.78% (SD = 0.81) of sound files in weekend 1 and in 0.45% (SD = 0.71) of sound files in weekend 2. Average self-reported own obtrusiveness was not related to the average EAR measure of obtrusiveness ($r = -.01$, $p = .87$), whereas average self-reported bystander obtrusiveness was somewhat positively related ($r = .15$, $p = .08$), indicating that self-reported psychological and EAR-observed behavioral obtrusiveness may be separate constructs.

3.2 | Quantity of social interactions

See Table 4 for estimates from multilevel APIMs testing actor, partner, and dyad gender (the gender composition of couples, modeled as actor × partner gender) differences. Main effects revealed that women and people partnered with women tended to engage in more frequent one-on-one interactions than men or people partnered with men. When deconstructed, the simple slopes for dyad gender revealed a pattern such that people in same-sex couples tended to spend slightly more time in one-on-one interactions than people in different-sex couples. Specifically, WW spent more time in one-on-one interactions than WM ($\beta = -.48$, $t = -1.81$, $p = .08$) and MW ($\beta = -.37$, $t = 1.36$, $p = .18$), as did MM ($\beta_{WM} = .49$, $t = 1.64$, $p = .11$; $\beta_{MW} = .38$, $t = 1.25$, $p = .22$).

TABLE 4 Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR) social setting and interaction partner by gender and dyad gender.

	β	SE	95% CI	*t*	*p*
Alone					
Actor gender	.48	0.62	−.75, 1.71	0.78	.44
Partner gender	.56	0.63	−.70, 1.82	0.89	.38
Dyad gender	−.10	0.42	−.94, .73	−0.24	.81
Age	.28	0.10	.09, .47	2.86	.01
One-on-one interaction					
Actor gender	−1.23	0.71	−2.63, .18	−1.74	.09
Partner gender	−1.34	0.70	−2.73, .05	−1.91	.06
Dyad gender	.86	0.47	−.08, 1.80	1.83	.07
Age	−.23	0.09	−.41, −.05	−2.53	.01
Group interaction					
Actor gender	.86	0.68	−.50, 2.22	1.25	.21
Partner gender	.92	0.67	−.41, 2.26	1.38	.17
Dyad gender	−.81	0.45	−1.71, .10	−1.78	.08
Age	.03	0.09	−.16, .22	0.32	.75
With significant other					
Actor gender	−.47	0.69	−1.84, .89	−0.69	.49
Partner gender	−.52	0.69	−1.90, .86	−0.75	.46
Dyad gender	.17	0.46	−.75, 1.09	0.37	.72
Age	−.16	0.10	−.35, .03	−1.70	.09
With friend(s)					
Actor gender	.53	0.70	−.87, 1.92	0.75	.46
Partner gender	.67	0.69	−.71, 2.04	0.96	.34
Dyad gender	−.49	0.47	−1.42, .44	−1.04	.30
Age	.01	0.09	−.20, .17	−0.14	.89
With family					
Actor gender	−.29	0.67	−1.63, 1.04	−0.44	.66
Partner gender	−.53	0.64	−1.81, .75	−0.83	.41
Dyad gender	.04	0.44	−.84, .92	0.09	.93
Age	−.03	0.10	−.23, .17	−0.28	.78
Talking					
Actor gender	−.09	0.63	−1.36, 1.17	−0.15	.88
Partner gender	.07	0.63	−1.19, 1.32	0.11	.92
Dyad gender	−.33	0.43	−1.18, .51	−0.78	.44
Age	−.13	0.10	−.33, .06	−1.40	.16

Note: Multilevel models predicting EAR behavior and social environment from actor gender (participant's gender), partner gender (participant's partner's gender), and dyad gender (actor gender × partner gender). Gender: woman = 1, man = 2. Age was a covariate to control for group differences.

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

Estimates of main effects for actor and partner gender predicting group interactions were both positive, but the *p*-values and confidence intervals were fairly large. Simple slopes for dyad gender revealed differences between two sets of groups. WM ($\beta = -.76$, $t = 2.61$, $p = .01$) and MW ($\beta = -.69$, $t = 2.31$, $p = .02$) engaged in more group interactions than MM. *p*-Values for the other simple slopes were large (>.64), indicating no reliable differences.

3.3 | Well-being and social interaction quantity

Table 5 displays the estimates from multilevel APIMs primarily testing the degree to which dyad gender and its statistical interaction with social interaction variables predicts two measures of well-being. The table also displays main effects, which were not of primary interest. It does not show all the 2-way interactions that were included in the model (i.e., all possible combinations of predictors in the model), as these were only included in the models of deconstructing the 3-way interactions. First, the dyad gender predictor (actor × partner gender) tested Hypothesis 2, which revealed mixed support. Only one of the four interactions met the $p \leq .20$ threshold. When deconstructed, there was some support for our hypothesis, such that MM ($\beta = .56$, $t = 1.83$, $p = .07$) and WW ($\beta = -.43$, $t = -1.67$, $p = .10$), were happier than WM. This is consistent with the happiness means in Table 3; however, we interpret this cautiously as it was inconsistent with the three other interactions we tested.

Nine out of the 10 3-way interactions, which tested Hypothesis 3, supported the hypothesis that people in same- and different-gender couples have similar links between quantity of social interactions and well-being. That is, the *p*-values did not meet the .20 threshold for deconstructing to examine differences among the groups. The interaction term that did meet this criterion was an interaction between dyad gender and time with family predicting subjective happiness. However, simple slopes revealed no likely differences between groups (*p*s > .81).

4 | DISCUSSION

This study used the honing framework to test relationships between dyad gender, social interactions, and well-being among people in same- and different-sex relationships. Results mostly supported the honing framework, revealing similarities in quantity of social interactions, as well as similar interaction quantity links to well-being among people in same- and different-sex relationships (Hypotheses 1 and 3). Our second hypothesis, that people in same-sex relationships would have greater well-being than those in different-sex relationships, had limited support.

We found partial support for the hypothesis that quantity of social interactions is similar among people in same- and different-sex couples. Two out of the seven interactions testing this hypothesis met the threshold for deconstruction, meaning five out of the seven tests supported the hypothesis that there are no meaningful differences. The two deconstructed interactions revealed that people in same-sex couples spent more time in one-on-one interactions than those in different-sex couples, and that people in different-sex couples spent more time in group interactions than MM (but not WW). Though we did not predict these differences, they are discoveries that seem consistent with the principles of the honing framework. The premise that sexual minorities may need to hone their social networks to those who are supportive, more than

TABLE 5 Gender, dyad gender, and Electronically Activated Recorder social interaction variables predicting well-being.

	β	SE	95% CI	*t*	*p*
Subjective happiness					
Actor gender	−.72	0.66	−2.03, 0.60	−1.09	.28
Partner gender	−1.07	0.64	−2.35, 0.22	−1.66	.10
One-on-one interaction	−.87	1.34	−3.54, 1.79	−0.65	.52
Group interaction	−.94	1.38	−3.67, 1.80	−0.68	.50
Dyad gender	.64	0.44	−0.23, 1.51	1.46	.15
Dyad gender × One-on-one interaction	−.44	0.51	−1.46, 0.57	−0.87	.39
Dyad gender × Group interaction	−.54	0.56	−1.64, 0.56	−0.97	.33
Subjective happiness					
Actor gender	−.52	0.65	−1.82, 0.79	−0.79	.43
Partner gender	−.82	0.63	−2.08, 0.45	−1.29	.20
Significant other	−.11	0.92	−1.93, 1.71	−0.12	.90
Friend	.60	0.94	−1.26, 2.46	0.64	.52
Family	−1.21	0.91	−3.01, 0.60	−1.32	.19
Dyad gender	.44	0.43	−0.42, 1.30	1.02	.31
Dyad gender × Significant other	−.06	0.39	−0.83, 0.71	−0.16	.88
Dyad gender × Friend	.36	0.43	−0.50, 1.21	0.83	.41
Dyad gender × Family	−.74	0.40	−1.53, 0.05	−1.85	.07
Depressive symptoms					
Actor gender	.78	0.67	−0.56, 2.12	1.16	.25
Partner gender	.87	0.66	−0.45, 2.18	1.31	.19
One-on-one interaction	−.50	1.30	−3.09, 2.08	−0.39	.70
Group interaction	−1.00	1.32	−3.61, 1.61	−0.76	.45
Dyad gender	−.53	0.45	−1.42, 0.37	−1.17	.25
Dyad gender × One-on-one interaction	−0.24	0.50	−1.23, 0.74	−0.49	.63
Dyad gender × Group interaction	−.19	0.54	−1.24, 0.87	−0.35	.73
Depressive symptoms					
Actor gender	.80	0.67	−0.54, 2.15	1.19	.24
Partner gender	.94	0.65	−0.37, 2.24	1.43	.16
Significant other	−.51	0.91	−2.31, 1.29	−0.56	.57
Friend	−.12	0.95	−2.00, 1.76	−0.13	.90
Family	.04	0.89	−1.72, 1.81	0.05	.96
Dyad gender	−.53	0.45	−1.43, 0.36	−1.20	.24
Dyad gender × Significant other	−.25	0.39	−1.03, 0.53	−0.63	.53
Dyad gender × Friend	−.01	0.44	−0.87, 0.86	−0.01	.99
Dyad Gender × Family	.27	0.39	−0.51, 1.05	0.70	.49

Note: Multilevel models predicting well-being from actor gender (participant's gender), partner gender (participant's partner's gender), dyad gender (actor gender × partner gender), and social interaction variables. Gender: woman = 1, man = 2. Age was a covariate to control for group differences.
Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

people who do not experience the stigma of sexual minorities, is consistent with the notion that sexual minorities have more one-on-one, rather than group, social interactions. Sexual minorities may hone their social networks, and then spend focused, quality time with close others. This is consistent with the past finding from EMA data from this same study that people in same-sex relationships reported higher quality social interactions than people in different-sex relationships (Robbins et al., 2020), as well as with other studies that found higher relationship quality among same- versus different-sex couples (Balsam et al., 2008; Chonody et al., 2020; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Thus, the two interactions that did not support our first hypothesis gave rise to an interesting new facet of the honing framework: people in same-sex couples have more one-on-one and fewer group interactions compared to people in different-sex couples.

Our hypothesis that people in same-sex couples would have greater well-being than those in different-sex couples received limited support. However, the honing framework describes one potential path to resilience against the stigma sexual minorities face, and the present data still support this principle: people in same-sex couples did not have lower well-being than those in different-sex couples, despite the documented challenges that come with a visible sexual minority status (Doyle & Molix, 2015; Herek, 2007; Ogolsky et al., 2019a). In fact, there was some evidence that MM and WW were happier than WM, but not MW. The prediction that people in same-sex couples would have greater well-being was derived from evidence that people in same- versus different-sex couples tend to have higher-quality social interactions and also greater momentary positive affect and lower negative affect (Robbins et al., 2020), as well as better relationship quality (Chonody et al., 2020; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). It may be the case that higher quality social interactions within high-quality relationships do give an in-the-moment boost in affect, but that, overall, they may not amount to greater levels of subjective happiness and lower levels of depressive symptoms for people in same- compared to different-sex couples. This may be due to the stigma of being in a same-sex relationship counteracting the temporary affect boost, which should be directly tested in future research.

Our hypothesis that the link between interaction *quantity* and well-being would be similar among people in same-and different-sex couples was supported. The *p*-values were large and the confidence intervals were fairly wide, suggesting that there were no substantial differences among couple types for these associations. This is consistent with past evidence that the strength of ties between interaction *quality* and well-being is similar among the different couple types (Robbins et al., 2020).

4.1 | Limitations and future directions

Though this research has several strengths, including naturalistic observation data directly sampling the social interactions of a somewhat ethnically-diverse community sample, it also has limitations that should be addressed in the future research. First, all the participants live in California, where there is a history of more acceptance of people in same-sex couples, legally and culturally, compared to many other states in the United States. Therefore, these findings may not generalize to people living in less accepting parts of the country or world. Future research should test whether the honing framework, or another framework accounting for more experiences of stigma, applies to people in same-sex couples living in less accepting places.

Second, this study could not test whether the observed patterns of results are due to the experience of being in a same-sex relationship, or are due to stable characteristics that sexual

minorities bring to their same- or different-sex relationship. This would require a long-term, longitudinal study of people who might couple up with people of different genders over time.

Finally, our examination of same- versus different-sex couples included only people who self-identified as male or female. We did not intentionally exclude people who identify as non-binary or another sex, but it is possible that our study only attracted those who identify within the binary. It is also possible that it was less common or accepted to identify as non-binary when our data were collected (2015–2018), compared to now. Increasing the diversity of future relationships research should include extending "beyond the binary" to examine characteristics of social interactions for all people in romantic relationships, regardless of sex, gender, or sexual orientation (Meuwly & Randall, 2019).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The current study adds to a growing body of work demonstrating that same-sex couples are similar, and in some cases better off, than different-sex couples on several aspects of relationship functioning such as relationship stability and satisfaction (Kurdek, 2004; Manning et al., 2016; Rosenfeld, 2014). This is particularly important in light of evidence that same-sex relationship outcomes (Drabble et al., 2021), and the personal well-being of people in same-sex relationships (Ogolsky et al., 2019a, 2019b), are influenced by regional and national marriage policies, which often cite scientific studies.

The honing framework was largely supported by the data, with two unexpected findings adding further richness to the framework—people in same-sex couples not only report higher quality social interactions than people in different-sex couples, but they also tend to have more one-on-one social interactions as well. This adds to the picture of the ways in which the social lives of people in same-sex relationships compare to that of people in different-sex relationships. Though people in same-sex couples generally experience greater stigma (Doyle & Molix, 2015; Herek, 2007), these results, coupled with past literature (Robbins et al., 2020), reveal that they may manage to hone their social networks to close, supportive members with whom they have intimate, satisfying interactions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All anonymized data and analysis code are available at https://osf.io/7ft6v/. This study's design and its analysis were not pre-registered.

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