

Psychological intimacy in the lasting relationships of heterosexual and same-gender couples

Authors: Richard A. Mackey, Matthew A. Diemer, Bernard A. O'Brien

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2000

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Richard A. Mackey

Professor Emeritus
Boston College
Chestnut hill, MA 02467-3807

Mailing Address

Dr. Richard A. Mackey
49 Webster St.
Westwood, MA 02090-1207

Email & Telephone

mackeyer@comcast.net
(781) 329-5787

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Abstract

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The research on which this paper is based explored how partners adapt in heterosexual and same sex relationships that had lasted an average of 30 years. In-depth, focal question interviews were used to explore various dimensions of these relationships, including psychological intimacy. The focus of this paper is on factors that shaped the meaning of psychological intimacy to a matched sample of 24 lesbian and 24 straight women. Psychological intimacy was defined as the sense that one could be open and honest in talking with a partner about personal thoughts and feelings not usually expressed in other relationships. Quantitative procedures were integrated into this qualitative study. Statistical techniques were used to give direction to the content analysis of interview data. The factors that shaped psychological intimacy were sexual orientation, satisfaction with relationships, the sensitivity and understanding of the partners of respondents.

Key words:

intimacy, women, gender, relationships

Psychological intimacy in the lasting relationships of heterosexual and same sex women

Beginning in the 1970's, a new paradigm for understanding the role of gender in human development began to emerge in the social and behavioral sciences (Chodorow, N., 1978). The paradigm for understanding development - cognitively, psychosocially and morally - was enriched as researchers attended to the differing ways in which males and females were socialized in their formative years (Gilligan, C., 1982). Based on these studies, females were hypothesized to value continuity in attachments compared to males who view relationships as a means to other ends. Based on these differences, females were hypothesized to experience a sense of security within relationships while males experienced security in a sense of separateness (Gilligan, C., 1982).

Although differences by sex continue to be acknowledged, there has been an increasing recognition that the issue needs to be considered in a broader context. Data is usually reported for groups, and as a consequence, individual variations within groups may be obscured. Mean differences offer only a sense of aggregate differences around which considerable variation may occur.

The question of endogenous differences between the sexes may be more established for specific characteristics but is certainly less clear for relational factors. Although males and females may bring differing competencies to loving relationships, no responsible researchers today attribute those differences to biology alone. Any inherent predispositions by sex toward relational competency need to be assessed against social experiences that differentiate the expected roles of males and females in relationships.

Cultural norms and values probably have as much or more effect of one's sense of self as a boy or girl, a man or woman, than do any biological predispositions.

Previous studies have found that men and women differ in their relational competencies when specific factors are controlled. For example, males tend toward avoidance in contending with relational conflict compared to women who are more likely to be confrontive in heterosexual marriage (Gottmann, J., Coan, J., Carriere, S., & Swanson, C., 1998; Author 1, 1995). In our studies of loving relationships that endure, the majority of husbands compared to wives continued to avoid face to face discussions about relational conflict, although some shift occurred in conflict management styles over the years (Author 2, 2000). In the same research, many lesbian partners also avoided face-to-face discussions of relational conflict during the early years of their relationships. Over the years, lesbian partners grew in their skill to confront problems by face-to-face discussions, which was associated with the development of psychological intimacy in their relationships (Author 3, 1997).

These data raised questions about how psychological intimacy may be experienced by straight and gay women in relationships that last. Do differences in gender in marriage temper the quality of psychological intimacy to heterosexual women? Conversely, does sameness in gender between lesbian partners mutually reinforce the quality of psychological intimacy?

The goal of this paper is to understand the meaning of psychological intimacy in long-term relationships from the perspectives of heterosexual and lesbian partners. There is no pretense that the findings can be generalized, an important distinction between research designed to test hypotheses and research designed to develop theory.

The paper addresses the following questions:

What factors shape how heterosexual and lesbian women viewed psychological intimacy in their relationships?

What themes emerge from the interview data that help in understanding the meaning of psychological intimacy to these women?

In the next section, we present an understanding of psychological intimacy that emerged from our research on lasting relationships, which is followed by a discussion of the research methodology. Findings are presented that includes both quantitative results and qualitative themes from interviews with individual partners in these relationships. The limitations of the research are then discussed followed by a discussion of the data and conclusions.

Toward a definition of psychological intimacy

In an earlier paper (Author 2, 2000), we developed a definition of psychological intimacy, which was based on interviews with 216 partners in 108 relationships that had lasted an average of 30 years ($SD = 10.28$). We said that:

Intimacy referred to the meanings associated with relational experiences as participants reported them in interviews. Operationally, psychological intimacy was defined as the sense that one could be open and honest in talking with a partner about personal thoughts and feelings not usually expressed in other relationships. This concept of intimacy is different from actual observations of verbal and non-verbal interactions that may contribute (or not contribute) over time to an inner sense of being psychologically intimate in relationships. The focus of our research was on inner psychological themes (i.e. schemas of intimacy) as reported by participants that were assumed to be contingent

on the quality of specific relational experiences between partners (Author 2, p. 208, 2000).

Arriving at that definition involved an assessment of responses to questions that asked individual partners to talk about various aspects of their relationships. These questions included a range of topics, how their relationships may have been different from other relationships, how participants felt about being open with their partners, what words best described the meaning of partners to participants. Of particular importance were questions that elicited responses about the quality of communication between partners. Positive communication was essential for the development of psychological intimacy; the two factors were correlated substantially ($\phi = .50$). When respondents talked positively about the quality of their communication, they were referring to psychologically intimate communication, a phrase that captured what we are referring to as psychological intimacy

A review of research, which spanned the literature over the past 10 years, revealed no studies that focused specifically on how women in heterosexual and same sex relationships that have lasted as long as those in our studies viewed the quality of psychological intimacy with their partners. The following discussion focuses on studies of psychological intimacy in relationships that have lasted for considerably shorter lengths of time than those in our research.

Psychological intimacy and sexual orientation

Peplau (1991) observed that "research on gay male and lesbian relationships dates mainly from the mid-1970's" (p.197). No significant differences have been found between gay males and lesbians on measures of dyadic attachment and personal autonomy within relationships (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Peplau, 1991). High dyadic attachment and low personal autonomy have been associated with the quality of relationships, a positive aspect of which was effective

communication. Research was not conclusive about the quality of communication in same gender relationships, however. Some studies have found emotional distancing (Levine, 1979) and impaired communication (George & Behrendt, 1987) between gay male partners. Perhaps, those characteristics of gay male relationships suggest gender differences, rather than differences based on sexual orientation. In gay male relationships, distancing may become mutually reinforcing and compromise psychologically intimate communication between partners.

There has been much discussion about fusion in lesbian relationships based on hypotheses that have emerged from women's developmental research. Fusion, as an element in lesbian relationships (Burch, 1982), has been characterized by high levels of self-disclosure between partners (Slater & Mencher, 1991). Elsie (1986) found that lesbian partners tended to merge emotionally compared to gay male partners who maintained emotional distance from each other. In contrast, Author 3 (1997) found that lesbian couples valued autonomy within attachment and rejected the idea of fusion in their relationships. Although these discrepancies may reflect gender differences within the context of these committed relationships, they may also be affected by how attachment and autonomy were defined operationally and how they were measured in these studies. Moreover, there is the issue of clarifying self-disclosure, fusion and differentiation as elements in psychological intimacy, especially in lesbian relationships.

A sense of equity or fairness has been identified as a central value in relationships that last, especially those of lesbians (Kurdek, 1988; Schneider, 1986). Couple decision-making characterized by negotiation and discussion about roles, household responsibilities and finances has been linked to relational satisfaction and potentially to perceptions of psychological intimacy (DeCecco & Shively, 1978)..

Kurdek (1998) compared relational qualities among heterosexual, gay male and lesbian couples at one year intervals over a 5 year period. Of particular interest to our research were the scales that purported to measure "intimacy." Although there were many similarities between the three groups on other measures of relational quality, such as problem solving and conflict management styles, lesbians reported "higher levels of intimacy than partners in heterosexual relationships" (Kurdek, p. 564). That finding resonates with research on gender differences referred to earlier in this paper and has been attributed to the relational orientation of women. The valuing of mutuality, rather than autonomy within relationships (Surrey 1987), may nurture the development of psychological intimacy in women's relationships.

Method

The research methodology for the larger study has been reported in several publications (see references) so we will focus here specifically on those parts of the methodology that seem most pertinent to the sub-sample of heterosexual and homosexual women, the focus of this paper. The principal data collection tool were semi-structured interviews, which consisted of focal questions that were designed to elicit how individual partners viewed several dimensions of their relationships from the early to recent years. This approach, which adapted clinical interviewing skills to the needs of the research, explored the relational experiences of individuals as they remembered and reported them. The recent years, which are the focus of this paper, were the last 5-10 years prior to the interviews.

Sample

In order to compare the perspectives of heterosexual and lesbian women in these lasting relationships, a matched sample was selected from the larger study of 216

respondents. One partner from each of the 48 lesbian relationships in the database was selected. We then selected a comparable group of heterosexual women from the 72 married couples in the larger study. Table 1 shows the results of the matching process.

[Insert table 1]

Since all of the lesbians were White, we selected only White heterosexual women for the comparison group. Although there were minor differences between the two groups, only the factor of years together reached significance ($X^2=5.58$ (2DF) $p<.05$). All of the women in same sex relationships were together for less than 30 years (but more than 20 years). Twenty one percent of the heterosexual women were married for more than 30 years. Given the fact that all of these women were in a stable relationships for at least 15 years, we did not think that the difference in years together compromised our goal of exploring the meaning of psychological intimacy to women in lasting relationships.

Coding

Each interview, which lasted about 2 hours, was tape recorded and transcribed. Interview passages were coded for relational themes that were then developed into categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Initially, a research team (2 women, 2 men) coded eight transcriptions blindly and individually. Having both sexes involved in that process helped to neutralize subjectivity.

Once a relationship coding system was developed, each interview was coded and scored independently by two raters (one male and one female) who noted themes and categories as they emerged from the transcripts. One member of the research team coded all interviews to insure continuity in the operational definitions of variables and

consistency of judgments from case to case. The agreement between raters, determined by dividing the number of identical judgments by the total number of codes, was 87%. Cohen's kappa, used as a measure of inter-rater reliability, ranged from .79 to .93.

HyperResearch software (Hesse-Biber, Dupuis and Kinder, 1992) enabled the researchers to complete a content analysis of interview transcripts and to identify, catalogue and organize specific interview passages on which categorical codes were based.

Data analysis

The coded data from the scoring sheets yielded frequencies, which were analyzed using SPSS software. With psychological intimacy as the dependent variable, cross tabulations were computed with all relational factors that were explored in the interviews (see Table 2). Using an Alpha criterion of .001 for the chi-square analysis, we identified those factors that contributed to psychological intimacy from the perspectives of women in these lasting relationships. To determine the strength of the factors that were associated significantly with psychological intimacy, phi coefficients were then computed.

Based on that analysis, a theoretical model was constructed and tested with logistic regression (see Table 3). Independent factors significantly related to psychological intimacy ($p < .001$) were incorporated into the model. Although the sample was small for regression analysis, the criterion of an expected frequency in each cell was not less than 5, which supported the use of this procedure (Garson, 2008).

Finally, we returned to the interview data to enrich the understanding of how those factors contributed to and shaped the meaning of psychological intimacy.

Findings

The bivariate analysis of psychological intimacy by all relational factors is shown in Table 2. These data focus on the observations of respondents about their relationships during recent years (the last 5 to 10 years prior to the interviews). The alpha criterion was set at .001 although the table also includes factors significant at the .05 level.

[Insert table 2]

At the Alpha level of $< .001$, the relational factors that were related significantly to psychological intimacy were:

the sexual orientation of respondents,
satisfaction with relationships,
the sensitivity of partners toward respondents, and
the understanding of partners toward respondents.

To determine the strength of the associations between psychological intimacy and those four factors, phi coefficients were computed. Although a weak to moderate correlation with psychological intimacy was found for sexual orientation ($\phi = .49$), partner sensitivity ($\phi = .28$) and understanding ($\phi = .48$), relational satisfaction had a moderate to strong correlation with the dependent variable ($\phi = .65$). Based on the results of the chi square analysis, these factors were incorporated into a theoretical model and tested with logistic regression.

[Insert table 3]

Of the four factors that made up the model, relational satisfaction had the most powerful predictor of psychological intimacy followed by sexual orientation. The role of satisfaction was not unexpected given its moderate to strong correlation with the dependent variable

To amplify upon these findings, we returned to the interview data to explore what these factors meant to respondent as they discussed the meaning of psychological intimacy in their relationships. Vignettes of their responses by sexual orientation, satisfaction, partner sensitivity and understanding are presented.

Sexual orientation and satisfaction

Of the 69% of respondents who viewed their relationships as psychologically intimate in recent years, 67% were lesbians and 33% were heterosexuals ($X^2 = 11.73$ (1df) $p = <.001$). Of the eight out of 10 respondents who reported being satisfied with their relationships, 58% were lesbians and 42% were heterosexuals. From a different perspective, 67% of heterosexual women were satisfied with their relationships in recent years compared to 92% of lesbians. The following woman identified the close connection between the quality of communication between partners and psychological intimacy. Kim, a 44 year old heterosexual woman who had been married for 23 years, spoke to that connection and also commented on what she perceived as the source of poor communication:

The communication's poor. I think that's probably his worst problem. He's a clone of his father. He cannot express emotion. And he doesn't like to get into these philosophical, psychological conversations ... I can't talk to him about, you know, like things that make me crazy because he either doesn't want to hear it or just can't relate to it. He's not communicative at all; like last night, we had a discussion. I said to him, "You think that everybody is a mind reader. Nobody knows what's on your mind because you don't tell them." He's not verbal ... so now I feel guilty that he doesn't communicate. It's got to be my fault. But he's always been that way... he doesn't seem to

want to or be able to change. He said to me ... "I'm not changing. This is the way I am. Take it or leave it." Those were his words ... so I decided to take it 'cause I didn't leave.

Kim also expressed the level of dissatisfaction with that aspect of her relationship:

The only thing that doesn't satisfy me is his lack of communication and support - emotional support. But other than that, he fills the bill.

Kim's comments were not unusual especially among heterosexual respondents. When individuals expressed how they felt about their relationships, they usually talked about specific aspects of relationships with which they were not satisfied. At the same time, they often acknowledged other aspects of relationships with which they were satisfied. For example, Kim described her spouse as kind, loyal and a good provider. More often than not, respondents differentiated among several factors that either contributed to or compromised satisfaction with their relationships.

In contrast to the marriage of Kim, Felise described how her lesbian partner,

Flora, facilitated the development of mutual intimacy in their relationship of 29 years:

We have an extraordinarily close emotional connection... except for the reserved part. We talked about things that I never talked about in certain heterosexual relationships. Flora never let me do all the things I had done which were to go away and hide, to sulk, to be angry, to distance. She made me hang in there over and over again. Talking about what was going on with me but she didn't talk about what was going on with her often. She would say that nothing is going on with her but that she just wanted to understand what was going on ... I was euphoric about being in a relationship where you could talk about emotional things and where you could process almost anything that came up.

The response of Flora was compromised somewhat by the "reserved" quality in her partner although not to the extent that "poor" communication undermined satisfaction in Kim's marriage. As she talked about the meaning of her satisfying relationship with Flora, Felise said:

She is the most important thing in my life. I don't really enjoy things without her. Not really ... to me a committed relationship is that central thing in life and everything else

goes around it. I don't know where that notion came from. But it has worked pretty well; we are still here.

A heterosexual woman, Emily, age 51 and married for 28 years, spoke of the development of a sense of mutual intimacy with her spouse. Unlike, the relationship of Kim, Emily was an instrumental figure in developing a sense of mutual intimacy with her spouse:

He's my best friend, and I think I'm his best friend ... what keeps the marriage together is when you care more about the other person than you do about yourself, when you lose and give up the selfish part of your life ... I think when you first get married, for some strange reason, you bite your tongue a lot, and you don't let out a lot of your true feelings, ... I don't know if all marriages are that way, but for me, I was still trying to make an impression. I married the guy and didn't even know him,; I hardly knew him. I was trying to be, you know, my better self ... we never got that familiar because we didn't know each other. As the years went on, If I was upset about something, he knew it ... I think I made him understand me ... I probably resented his not really understanding me or understanding where I was coming from. ... Down through the years, I tried to confide in him. It was difficult for him at first, to confide in me. I don't think he ever had that kind of relationship with a woman.

Emily's comments reflected a theme that was frequently expressed by these women. Usually, the feeling of satisfaction with their relationships was the result of a long journey with periods of difficulty and relational challenges. Satisfaction tended to ebb and flow depending on how close and connected respondents felt with their partners. There was an inherent interdependence between psychological intimacy and satisfaction, which was mirrored in the strong correlation between these two factors.

Partner sensitivity and understanding

As respondents spoke of the meaning of psychological intimacy to them, their responses reflected how they viewed the roles of their partners. Of those respondents who described their relationships in psychologically intimate terms, 83% assessed their partners as emotionally sensitive to their needs and feelings ($X^2 = 11.97$ (1df) $P = .001$),

and 81% assessed their partners as understanding of them ($X^2 = 11.43$ (1df) $p = .001$). In the responses of most women, it was difficult to differentiate between understanding and sensitivity since they were so closely connected in the minds of respondents and in what they said. The more important finding in these data was that psychological intimacy was related significantly to the sensitivity and understanding of partners and not to how respondents viewed their own sensitivity and understanding.

Alice, who had been in a committed relationship with Angela for 20 years, spoke of the importance of these factors in their relationship:

On a real basic level, she knows who I am; she appreciates me. I feel wonderfully understood. There's a depth that long-term relationships get to, that's like very rich ... it just gets richer and deeper, so I would say maybe understanding has gotten more and more. I just hope it continues. I think we're both very sensitive. There are times when we do terribly insensitive things, but they're the exception not the rule.

For most respondents, the development of relational empathy was a challenge as partners struggled to understand and to become sensitive to each other. Joyce, who was 65 years of age discussed how the process occurred in her relationship of 25 years:

In the beginning we both didn't understand a lot ... We laugh now when we think about it, but the issue around her mother was very difficult for us ... used to make me very angry. What I didn't understand was how different my mother was from hers. For a long time we were stuck on it. Eventually it dawned on me that what she was dealing with was not what I dealt with. I had a mother who could learn, who could hear you if you challenged her enough ... her mother couldn't. Once I was able to put it together, I was able to back off. She does the same for me ... if I don't get it, she can get pissed off and sometimes if she doesn't get it, I get pissed off. The issue is that you finally get what the other person is saying ... When she talks to me now, I get it. When I talk to her, she gets it.

The process of learning to become more sensitive and understanding was a struggle for both partners. Among most couples, that process often took place over many years. A

major difference between heterosexual and lesbian respondents was in their descriptions of the mutuality of sensitivity and understanding that resulted in empathy.

Thirty-one percent of respondents reported that their partners were not sensitive or understanding of them, which resulted in an empathy void in their relationships. Most of these responses were from heterosexual women. Sixty three year old Linda, who had been married to Lou for 39 years, spoke to that theme:

I'm way too sensitive. I think maybe it comes from growing up in a family where nobody really talked too much. Lou's not especially sensitive. I remember one time I was sad about something that was going on between us, and he later said, "Oh, I thought you were sad about that movie we watched." But I think that he's worked a lot on that. There are times when I could have been more sensitive ... I regret that ... I always think I know what's going on in someone's head. Right or wrong, I'm always thinking about what the other person is thinking. I don't think Lou does that, but he tries hard to figure out where I'm coming from in a given situation.

Male partners of heterosexual women were not perceived similarly to the partners of lesbian respondents. While heterosexual spouses were frequently described in positive terms in other aspects of their relationships, they were not viewed as sensitive or as understanding as the partners of lesbians.

Discussion

In addition to its value in understanding loving relationships, psychological intimacy is important to individual well being (Prager (1995). Openness within a meaningful relationship has been found to reduce stress, enhance esteem and respect for oneself, and to reduce symptoms of physical and psychological impairments. Conversely, studies of isolated individuals who are unable to engage in relationships that promote openness and disclosure of inner thoughts and feelings are at risk for developing physical and psychological symptoms. Prager concluded "people ... are likely to develop

symptoms of psychological disturbance in the face of stressful events if they lack confiding relationships (pp. 2-3)."

While psychologically intimate relationships, such as those reported in this paper, may be important to individual well being, there are many other factors that need to be considered. Biological and socio-cultural factors may have as much effect in shaping the quality of relationships, especially lasting ones, as does a psychological factor such as intimacy. There is little question, however, that psychological intimacy is a critical factor in understanding relational stability and individual well being.

One of the most interesting findings in our study was that the quality of psychological intimacy as reported by respondents was related significantly to the sensitivity and understanding of their partners and not to their own sensitivity and understanding. The two factors of partner sensitivity and understanding were very important in the development of psychological intimacy and concomitantly to relational satisfaction. When respondent were asked to describe how sensitive and understanding their partners were to them, their responses reflected the level of empathy that they perceived in their partners. That is, taken together, sensitivity and understanding may be thought of as the components of empathy. Sensitivity was the emotional component and understanding the cognitive component. The data suggest that there was a higher level of empathy among lesbian partners than among the husbands of heterosexual women. That observation fits with differences between males and females that have been reported in the research literature over the past several years.

Although the three factors of satisfaction with relationships, sensitivity and understanding of partners, contributed to the development of psychological intimacy, there may have been at least somewhat of a difference in how each factor made its

contribution. A relationships may become intimate as a result of the sensitivity and understanding of one's partner, an offshoot of which is satisfaction, which reinforces one's motivation to maintain a psychologically intimate relationship characterized by sensitivity and understanding. The process was circular in nature with each factor, satisfaction and psychological intimacy, reinforcing the other and having a positive effect on relationships.

Even when there was a difference in the quality of psychological intimacy in recent years, relationships were still satisfying, although not as satisfying as those characterized by psychological intimacy. Other factors, usually personal qualities, compensated for the empathic hole created by a problem with being psychologically intimate. That theme was manifested in differences found in the observations of respondents, notably heterosexual women, about their partners' sensitivity and understanding.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of factors that may shape psychological intimacy in loving relationships that last. The challenge of understanding factors that may predict the development of psychological intimacy was underscored by the results of the logistic regression analysis. It is important to consider temporal factors in assessing the data. We were focused on the last 5 to 10 years of relationships that had lasted an average of 30 years. At other points in the lives of these respondents, the quality of psychological intimacy was quite different. Many women talked of the challenges to developing and maintaining a psychologically intimate connection with their partners over the years. For many if not most of these women, there was considerable change in the quality of psychological intimacy from early to recent years.

Limitations

Modes of data collection based on in-depth interviews are an effective tool for studying elusive phenomena, such as psychological intimacy. The richness of data elicited through this method is quite different from data collected through other means, but there are concerns about validity and reliability as well as the nature of the sample.

It is difficult to assess the validity of the data in the traditional sense of that concept since we were eliciting the personal perceptions and evaluations of these women about the meaning of psychological intimacy in their relationships at a particular point in time. The candor of respondents about highly personal matters, such as their sexual relations, suggests that they were equally candid about other aspects of their relationships, such as psychological intimacy.

In a cross sectional design in which individuals are asked to report on their life today and in the past, traditional measures of reliability are inadequate. The meaning of life events and an individual's response to these events vary, and may even vary within the same person at different points over the life span. While longitudinal designs may be superior in contending with problems of validity and reliability, cross sectional designs that use interviews to uncover the meaning of behavior have the strength of eliciting the richness in the experiences of human beings. Retrospective observations also include a perspective on the total life span of a relationship, which is not possible longitudinally.

To offset the potential reductionistic effects of coding data derived from interviews and to enrich the discussion, we incorporated excerpts of interviews into the results. The integration of qualitative and quantitative procedures was intended to support the theory development objective of the research.

The use of an interdisciplinary team throughout the research process enhanced the quality of the study and helped to control subjectivity. Issues of bias and misinterpretation were discussed along with other matters that could affect the validity and reliability of the data

Conclusion

Psychological intimacy referred to the sense that one could be open and honest in talking with a partner about personal thoughts and feelings not usually expressed in other relationships. This concept of intimacy was different from actual observations of verbal and non-verbal interactions that may contribute (or not contribute) over time to an inner sense of being psychologically intimate in relationships. The focus of our research was on psychological themes (i.e. schemas of intimacy), which were assumed to be contingent on the quality of specific relational behaviors between partners. Although a single mode of data collection – in depth interviews – was used, both quantitative and qualitative modes were employed in analyzing the data.

The factors that contributed to and shaped the quality of psychological intimacy were sexual orientation, relational satisfaction, the sensitivity and understanding of the partners of respondents. Twice as many lesbian respondents compared to heterosexuals viewed their relationships as psychologically intimate. The data suggested that the empathy of partners, as manifested in their sensitivity and understanding, were instrumental in the development of psychological intimacy, more so among lesbian rather than heterosexual couples. With one exception, lesbians viewed their partners as sensitive and understanding compared to one half of heterosexuals, data that resonate with previous research on gender differences.

Finally, psychological intimacy and relational satisfaction were closely intertwined and appeared to have a mutually reinforcing, positive effect on each other as relationships developed. Among lesbians, the perceived empathy of their partners – i.e. sensitivity and understanding - was a very important factor in shaping satisfaction with relationships. Many heterosexual women apparently derived satisfaction from other aspects of their relationships, since less than one half of them viewed their husbands as empathic toward them.

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Table 1
Demographic characteristics of heterosexual and lesbian respondents

Characteristics	Respondents			χ^2
	Heterosexual	Lesbian	Totals	
Age				
40's	05	13	18	
50's	09	06	15	
60 and over	10	05	15	
totals	24	24	48	5.82 (2 DF)
Religion				
Catholic	05	05	10	
Protestant	13	14	27	
Jewish	06	05	11	
Totals	24	24	48	.13 (2 DF)
Education				
Some college or less	06	03	09	
College graduate or more	18	21	39	
Totals	24	24	48	1.23 (1 DF)
Family income				
Under 50,000.	05	05	10	
50,000. - 74,900	07	09	16	
75,000. and over.	12	10	22	
Totals	24	24	48	.43 (2 DF)
Years together				
20 - 30	19	24	43	
Over 30	05	00	05	
Totals	24	24	48	5.58 (1 DF)*
Number of children				
2 or less	14	20	24	
3 or more	10	04	14	
Totals	24	24	48	3.65 (1 DF)

N=48 * $p = < .05$

Table 2
Psychological intimacy by relational factors

Factors	Psychological intimacy			X ² (1DF)
	No/mixed	Yes	Totals	
Sexual orientation				
heterosexual	13	11	24	
lesbian	02	22	24	
totals	15	33	48	11.73**
Physical affection				
no/mixed	11	4	15	
yes	9	24	33	
totals	20	28	48	9.00*
Relational satisfaction				
no/mixed	9	6	15	
yes	1	32	33	
totals	10	38	48	20.29**
Equity				
no/mixed	7	8	15	
yes	4	29	33	
totals	11	37	48	6.97*
Partner sensitivity				
no/mixed	9	6	15	
yes	4	29	33	
totals	13	35	48	11.97**
Partner understanding				
no/mixed	8	7	15	
yes	3	30	33	
totals	11	37	48	11.43**
Partner conflict management style				
avoid	13	2	15	
confront	13	20	33	
totals	26	22	48	9.38*

N=48 * p= <.05 ** p= <.001

Table 3

Logistic regression coefficients for factors associated with psychological intimacy

Factors	B	S.E.	Sig	Exp(B)
Sexual orientation	2.14	1.30	.10	8.55
Relational satisfaction	3.81	1.47	.01	45.25
Partner sensitivity	.96	1.06	.37	2.60
Partner understanding	.22	1.10	.84	1.24
Constant	-3.76	1.51		

N=48

Model X^2 (4DF) = 28.86 $p < .001$