

**EXAMINING SEXUAL AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AS  
INFLUENCED BY THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SEX POSITIVITY  
AND PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION FOR SEXUAL MINORITY  
COUPLES**

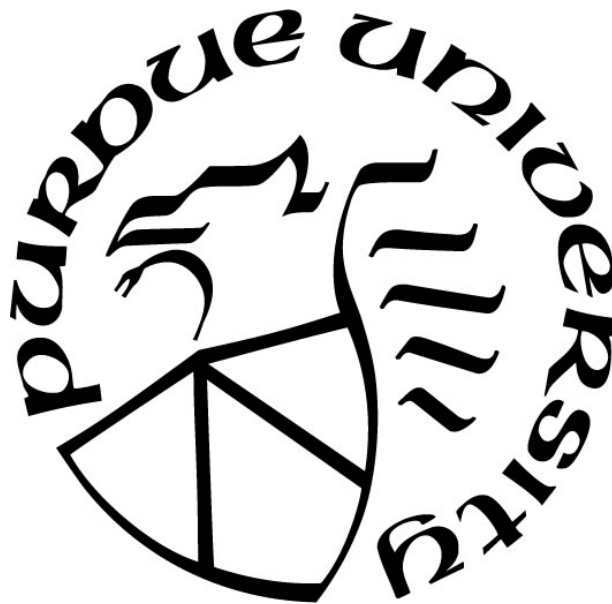
by

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**A Thesis**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

**Master of Science**



Department of Child Development and Family Studies

Hammond, Indiana

May 2021

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my family for encouraging me to pursue higher education and follow my academic and career passions. I would not be here without them and I am constantly grateful for every ounce of support they share with me. I would also like to acknowledge my thesis committee, Dr. Anne Edwards, Dr. Christopher Belous, and Dr. Catherine Gillotti, for all of your effort, patience, and expertise. To Anne, I want to especially express my gratitude for the immense time and effort you have put into this research study and your constant encouragement when I was feeling helpless. You have made me feel competent and strong in times that I really needed support.

I would also like to acknowledge my cohort. This flock of hotties have been vital to my survival and success in this program. Together, we have made memories that will last a lifetime and I know I will hold them close for the rest of my life. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends, who have been my most important support system throughout this process. To Kate and Gabriella, thank you for creating a home for me in our program. I look up to both of you and I am so thankful that I found you both in Northwest Indiana.

Finally, I would like to thank the three people who have seen me throughout this thesis process, that also just happened to be during a global pandemic, Tessa, Hallie, and Tom. Thank you for sitting with me during the hardest points of this process and celebrating with me during the best parts. I am so grateful to have such supportive people, who listened to me complain, practice, and question the topics that have come up throughout my grad school experience.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to look at the effects of perceived discrimination and sexual positivity on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. The present study hypothesizes that there will be a moderating relationship between sexual positivity and perceived discrimination; higher levels of sexual positivity will predict higher relationship and sexual satisfaction, and perceived discrimination will negatively effect relationship and sexual satisfaction of couples with lower sexual positivity. Individuals who identify as a sexual minority were asked to participate in this study and answer survey questions pertaining to the level of satisfaction they experience in their romantic relationship and their sexual relationship, how sex positive the individuals are, and the amount of perceived discrimination that they experience; all through a minority stress lens. The results suggest that neither perceived discrimination nor the interaction between perceived discrimination and sexual positivity has a significant impact on the relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority populations. However, the results of this study do suggest a statistically significant relationship between sexual positivity and relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

**Keywords:** *relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual minority, sexual positivity, perceived discrimination, minority stress*

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **Statement of the Problem**

In 2015, the estimated population of sexual minorities (a person who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual) in the United States was 2.4% (Ward et. al., 2014). However, in a more recent (2017) Gallup poll that used a wider and more inclusive definition of sexual minority, including most non-monosexually attracted persons, the estimated population of sexual minorities was 4.5% (Newport, 2018). With increasing acknowledgement and visibility of the non-heterosexual community more people are “coming out” and disclosing their non-heterosexual identities. Due to this, it is becoming more apparent that more people are gaining comfort in the identities they hold and are feeling more supported in the communities and cultures in which they live.

Perceived discrimination can negatively impact self-esteem, self-worth, and mental health problems (Mays & Cochran, 2001). Further, minority populations experience day-to-day discrimination as well as lifetime discrimination. In a study of sexual minorities, Mays and Cochran (2001) found that 42% of the participants related their perceived discrimination to their sexual orientation.

There are many factors that can impact the satisfaction that a couple experiences. When looking at couples and individuals within a minority population, there are systemic factors that may negatively impact their daily functioning. Sexual minority couples may feel that they experience more discrimination due to the non-traditional nature of the relationship, which has been termed as “gay-specific stressors” (Todosijevic et al., 2005).

It is critical for those who are working with a sexual minority to maintain a sex positivity mindset. This will encourage freedom and openness, while allowing the client to feel that they are in a judgment-free zone, otherwise known as gay affirmative therapy. Individuals who maintain a more sexually positive mindset feel more comfortable communicating about sex and sexuality (Parent et al., 2015). There is very little existing research studying the impacts of perceived discrimination on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. The purpose of this study is to explore sexual minority relationships (within the United States population) in order to gain insight into the needs and protective factors of that population. This



study will explore what impact perceived discrimination and sexual positivity on sexual minority relationship and sexual satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER 2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM**

This chapter will give a brief review of the literature and research that currently exists when looking at minority stress theory, perceived discrimination, sexual positivity, sexual minority populations, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Within the body of literature pertaining to these variables, the concept of sexual positivity within sexual minority populations is a newer idea. Additionally, looking at the connection between sexual positivity and perceived discrimination has not been looked at in sexual minority couples.

### **Sexual Minorities**

Meyer (2003), discusses that studying mental health in sexual minorities has been difficult because the term describing sexual minority status was “homosexuality,” and it was classified as a mental disorder in the DSM-II. Although removed in the following edition, this history of pathologizing sexual minorities has been complicated the research that has been conducted. The conversation of mental health for these populations was historically homophobic and antigay (Bailey, 1999). However, moving forward, much of the existing research about sexual minorities pertains to the overall well-being of sexual minority individuals and to definitional concerns for the various and changing identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, etc. (Meyer, 2003; Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). The relational research that has been conducted about sexual minority populations starts with a comparison to heterosexual relationships (Waldo, 1999; Wight et al., 2013; Graham & Barnow, 2013; Parent et al., 2015).

Wight, and colleagues (2013) explored whether the legalization of same-sex marriage had any effect on psychological well-being of sexual minority individuals. The results showed that married individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, experienced less distress regarding their psychological well-being than individuals not in a legally recognized relationship (Wigh, et al., 2013). The authors note the need for further research exploring the psychological health benefits of being in a legally recognized relationship. The purpose of mentioning this study is to acknowledge that sexual minority individuals are impacted by many outside factors.

Research continues to reveal that sexual minority individuals report worse mental health outcomes (Balsam, 2011; Borgogna et al., 2019; Meyer, 2003). These results can be connected to

minority stress; minority stress is based in social and cultural structures which create adverse and stressful environments for minority populations. There is an increasing number of queer identities developing, and as this number continues to change, there is an increased need for further research on the needs of this population (Borgogna et al., 2019).

In order to identify the mental health needs of sexual minorities, Borgogna and colleagues (2019) analyzed data from the Healthy Minds Study, which included 43,632 college students (Borgogna et al., 2019). The study compared the mental health outcomes between cisgender individuals and transgender or gender non-conforming individuals as well as comparing the mental health outcomes between heterosexual individuals and sexual minority individuals. The most significant disparities when compared to heterosexuals were pansexual identified participants who displayed higher levels of depressive symptoms, and demisexual participants who displayed more anxious symptoms (Borgogna et al., 2019). Finally, the researchers found that when participants held both gender and sexual minority identities, the mental health outcomes were significantly worse than those holding either gender or sexual minority identities (Borgogna et al., 2019). This concept is also known as multiple minority stress and is discussed by Balsam (2011). Balsam (2011) discusses the impact of social stress and how minority populations experience worse mental and physical health outcomes due to stress. When any individual holds multiple minority identities, they are open and vulnerable to discrimination for more than one part of themselves (Balsam, 2011).

### **Minority Stress Theory**

Although discrimination against minority populations has been a consistent part of the world for many centuries, minority stress theory, which was initially conceptualized for racial minority populations, was first applied to sexual minority populations by Meyer (1995). The initial application of minority stress theory to sexual minorities was ignited by the understanding that sexual minority populations have a unique experience different than other racial or ethnic minority populations (Meyer, 1995). This application spurred the research of Waldo (1999), who explored whether antigay hostility in workplace environments adversely impacted sexual minority individuals.

Although everyone experiences stress, minority stress is unique, chronic, and socially based. Minority stress is an additional level of heightened emotion. This is to say that minority

stress is another layer of stressors that is in addition to general stress. Minority stress is due to social processes and is based in social and cultural structures that create adverse and stressful environments; these heightened levels of stress can lead to mental health problems (Meyer, 2003). The minority stress model posits that minority populations receive negative verbal or behavioral interpersonal interactions that increase the stress levels for those individuals. These stressors can lead to negative health outcomes (Kelleher, 2009).

When looking at minority populations, it is important to prevent isomorphism in studies. Isomorphism, or the assumption of sameness, is especially important when looking at any minority population; there is an assumption that minority populations will compare their experiences to what is considered the norm. This norm typically consists of white, cisgender, heterosexual individuals. This is problematic, because a person who belongs to a minority group is not likely going to have the same experiences; “dominant culture, social structures, and norms do not typically reflect those of the minority group” (Meyer, 2003, p. 675). In a simple example, children’s toys and advertisements for them show white, heterosexual families. These images do not represent the entire population, but what has been constructed as the average experience. The experiences of minority groups are disregarded and belittled, leading to distress. This chronic devaluation and harm of a person’s identity connects to minority stress theory, acts of prejudice add stress to the lives of minority populations.

Kamen et al., (2011) explored the relational aspects of minority stress; the study was conducted to see if there was a relationship between minority stress and relationship satisfaction of sexual minority relationships. The authors share that there has not been much specific previous research on the relational impacts of discriminatory interactions. However, there is an understanding that experiencing discrimination leads to increased stress, which negatively impacts relationships of same-sex couples (Otis et al., 2006). Kamen, et al., (2011) found that additional variables, commitment, trust, and support, are important in understanding the relationship between minority stress and relationship factors.

An additional study was conducted looking at quality of relationship and experiences of discrimination (Gamarel et al., 2014). This research study explores how minority stress impacts the romantic relationships of sexual minorities and ways to intervene at both an individual level and dyadic level to help cope with these stressors (Gamarel et al., 2014). This study looked at transgender women and cisgender male relationships; although this is a specific relationship

structure, the findings express that experiences of discrimination negatively impact the relationship (Gamarel et al., 2014). The study found that higher levels of experienced stigma and perceived discrimination was associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Minority stress theory has typically been applied to individuals, however, this study applied minority stress theory to the relational level by examining minority stress in the context of intimate relationships. This particular study highlighted that stigmatizing social conditions negatively impacted relationship quality (Gamarel et al., 2014).

### **Perceived Discrimination**

Schmitt and Branscombe (2011), define perceived discrimination as “attributions to prejudice [that] are likely to be internal, stable, uncontrollable, and convey widespread exclusion and devaluation of one's group” (p. 167). From the available literature, researchers use both minority stress and perceived discrimination in similar ways. For the purpose of this research study, the concept of perceived discrimination will fall under the umbrella of minority stress theory. Perceived discrimination describes the active ways that minority individuals experience discriminatory interactions.

Brewster et. al., (2013) examined the relationships between minority stressors, bicultural self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility, on the psychological well-being and distress of bisexual individuals. Results found that minority stressors were related to psychological distress, internalized biphobia was related to high levels of distress, and expectations of stigma mediated the relationship of perceived discrimination and higher levels of distress (Brewster et. al., 2013). Mays and Cochran (2001) noticed that gay and lesbian individuals were at high risk for stress disorders. They explored whether there was a link between this higher risk and perceived discrimination. The study showed that sexual minority individuals experienced both day-to-day and lifetime discrimination. When discussing the results, 42% of participants attributed these experiences to their sexual orientation for all or part of the discrimination (Mays & Cochran, 2001). Both acute and chronic stress was experienced by sexual minorities in addition to general, everyday stressors.

According to Fassinger and Arseneau (2007), the experiences of discrimination are varied across sexual and gender identities. These researchers discussed the differences within and between different sexual minority groups. This publication points to the need to further

understand how those differences can appear and ways to reduce the distressing results of these experiences. Researchers have identified that different sexual minority groups have differing needs. Research has not kept up with our understanding of how significantly discriminatory stressors impact the well-being of people. Our understanding of the importance of culture, religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, etc., is growing deeper, however, our society is built on white power and privilege. While we still function under this oppressive structure, the ways we help diverse populations needs to continue to be understood. Each individual experiences every interaction in a different way, and each individual is deserving of culturally sensitive care.

There is little research and literature available when looking at the impacts of perceived discrimination on relationships. However, Simpson and Rholes (1994), discuss how chronic stress has an impact on relationships and has potential to promote changes in attachment style. When observing perceived discrimination through the lens of minority stress theory, it can be connected that receiving prejudicial acts would be a source of stress.

### **Relationship Satisfaction**

Relationship satisfaction is defined as “positive versus negative affect experienced in a relationship and is influenced by the extent to which a partner fulfills the individual’s most important needs” (Rusbult et al., 1998, p. 359). There is not a significant amount of research pertaining to relationship satisfaction, especially focused on sexual minorities, conducted prior to the 1990s, because this research has only picked up significant interest in the last few decades. For example, Funk and Rogge (2007), wanted to improve the measurement for relationship satisfaction. The researchers needed to improve the precision for the measurements in order to detect differences in levels of satisfaction within a relationship. The measurements were outdated and insufficient in gathering all of the information they needed to measure satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Graham and Barnow (2013), understood the importance of social support in romantic relationships. The researchers wanted to test previous findings on the fact that social support improved well-being in heterosexual couples, to gay and lesbian individuals. The study found that across sexual orientation, social support from a partner directly buffered the impact of stress on well-being and satisfaction. The main difference over sexual orientation was that family

support was beneficial to the relationship quality for heterosexual couples, it was unrelated for same-sex couples (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Graham & Barnow, 2013).

Meyer and Frost (2013) found that minority stressors such as discrimination from individuals in the lives of sexual minorities can impact their existing relationships and/or the journey towards a relationship. Further, the authors share that sexual minority individuals in relationships experience discriminatory interactions both on an interpersonal level and a relational level. Social stigma and discrimination have been shown to be a source of relationship stress of sexual minority relationships (Rostosky, et. al., 2007; Frost, 2011; Meyer & Frost, 2013). Throughout the available literature, relationship satisfaction is often tied closely to sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships, especially for sexual minority couples. The literature shows that there has been a consistent link between couples that report higher levels of relationships satisfaction when they report feelings of intimacy for their partner (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Schaefer & Olson, 1981).

### **Sexual Satisfaction**

Sexual satisfaction, within the context of all romantic relationships, has only gained popularity in the past three or four decades. Much of this research remains difficult to analyze because it differs in many integral aspects, such as definitions and conceptualizations of sexual satisfaction, theoretical approaches to understand sexual satisfaction, and effective ways to measure sexual satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1992, 1995; Pinney et al., 1987).

Sexual satisfaction has been defined as “the degree to which an individual is satisfied or happy with the sexual aspect of his or her relationship” (Sprecher & Cate, 2004, p. 235). While this definition is helpful for understanding sexual satisfaction in the context of relationships, the authors use exclusionary language that does not apply to individuals who identify outside of the gender binary. Intimacy is another term that is typically used to express the sexual connection of a couple. Intimacy is often explained as having two parts, the emotional aspects (Cordova et al., 2005; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001) and the sexual aspects (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Guo & Huang, 2005; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Sprecher, 2002; Yeh, et. al., 2006). For the purpose of this literature review, the sexual aspect of intimacy, as it relates to sexual satisfaction will be emphasized.

Byers, et. al. (1998) found that overall relationship satisfaction was the strongest predictor for higher levels of sexual satisfaction. In addition, Montesi et al., (2011), explained that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are, in fact, related, but open communication is integral to both. Specifically, they looked at how increased comfort and openness in sexual communication may lead to more satisfying sexual interactions between a couple. If a couple is able to openly discuss sex, they are likely to experience more satisfying sexual interactions (Montesi, et. al., 2011). Additionally, Cupach and Comstock (1990) found that sexual satisfaction was a mediating factor between a couple's sexual communication and their overall relationship satisfaction. This indicates that a couple's ability to engage in open communication about the sexual nature of their relationships enriches the sexual satisfaction that they report as well as the relationships satisfaction as a whole (Cupach & Comstock, 1990).

More recently, in a study examining older sexual minority adult relationships, Fleishman et al., (2019) found that relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with sexual satisfaction and resilience, and negatively correlated with internalized homophobia. Similarly, research conducted by Calvillo et al., (2020) found that for sexual minority relationships, sexual satisfaction was negatively associated with internalized homophobia, anxiety, avoidance, and number of sexual costs; however, sexual satisfaction was positively associated with sexual functioning, dyadic adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and number of sexual rewards (Calvillo et al., 2020). Rather than focusing on the influence of sexual orientation on sexual satisfaction, researchers have found that gender differences play a large part in the sexual satisfaction of relationships, specifically sexual minority relationships (Calvillo et al., 2020; Holmberg & Blair, 2009). The final point that was found from this study was that differences in gender identity, rather than sexual orientation (e.g. homosexual vs. heterosexual) were important for understanding sexual satisfaction (Calvillo et al., 2020).

### **Sexual Positivity**

Sexual positivity is a newer concept that has gained traction in the past decade. Sexual positivity is defined as attitudes of openness and liberation, without judgment, about sexuality and sexual expression (Donaghue, 2015). Ivanski and Kohut (2017), were able to identify seven themes within sex positivity after asking experts in human sexuality. These themes were as



follows: Personal beliefs, education, health and safety, respect for the individual, positive relationships with others, negative aspects, and other noteworthy facets (Ivanski & Kohut, 2017).

Burnes et al., (2017) discussed how sex positivity relates to the framework of social justice, wellness, and resilience that counseling psychology functions under (Burnes et al., 2017). This study explored the shift from pathologizing models to sex positive models that mental health practitioners are adopting. Currently the majority of mental health practitioners not only overlook the topic of sexuality, but also actively ignore the topic due to discomfort (Burnes et al., 2017).

The authors go on to explore the historical relationship that sex positivity and counseling psychology have with each other, the supervision, trainings, and research that are needed to develop and maintain a sexually positive mindset, and the clinical implications of sex positivity on mental health practitioners. The authors note that sex positivity is about the mindset that counselors gain about the expansive idea of sex, overall, not just applying positive psychological approaches to the topic of sex (Burnes et al., 2017). A main takeaway from this article is the need for counselors to continue to move away from pathologizing models in therapy. Many messages that are received from our society are pathologizing of sex; these messages can be very distressing to individuals and it is necessary for counselors to combat those messages with nonjudgmental and accepting approaches as to break the pattern of pathologizing (Burnes et al., 2017).

Additionally, Cruz et al., (2017) expressed a duty that counselors have to be active in the discussions they have with clients pertaining to sex and sexuality. Research suggests that in order for a clinician to be culturally sensitive and competent in their work, they must be comfortable and skilled when discussing sex and sexuality (Cruz et al., 2017).

According to Mosher (2017), “sexual health and well-being are integral aspects of human growth and development” (Mosher, 2017, p. 487). The purpose of the article is to encourage a sex-positive paradigm for counseling psychologists. A sex positive approach explores the many underlying theories that play a part in our human interactions, such as social justice, queer, multicultural, and feminist theories (Mosher, 2017).

## **Purpose**

As with much previously conducted research, much of the targeted populations examining relationship and sexual satisfaction were white, cisgender, heterosexual individuals. As we move away from this narrow view of the world's population, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there is a need for continued and constant cultural sensitivity. The majority of existing literature does not apply to the majority of the world, because the majority of the world does not fall into the box of white, cisgender, heterosexuals. There is a specific need for insight into the well-being of sexual minority populations. From a systemic lens, our society is continually promoting sexual negativity and rejection to sexual minorities. These messages can be distressing and damaging to sexual minority couples.

When looking at the professionals who work with these populations, it makes sense that couple and family therapists (CFTs) would understand that there are systemic issues that play a part in the presenting problems of clients. Sexual minorities are at a higher risk for chronic and socially based stress. Finding ways to mediate and reduce distress for sexual minority couples, due to minority stress is important, but has not been done. It is vital to learn more about the ways that stress impacts the relationships of sexual minorities.

Although minority stress and perceived discrimination has been shown to negatively impact minority populations as well as relational aspects of minority populations, there is no research that currently exists looking at the variables discussed previously or any moderating variables for perceived discrimination. As stated below in my research questions and hypotheses I believe that maintaining a sexual positive mindset will moderate the negative effects that perceived discrimination has on relationship and sexual satisfaction on sexual minority couples.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Question 1:** Does sexual positivity have a moderating effect on the association between perceived discrimination and relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples?

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived discrimination has a negative association with relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

**Hypothesis 2:** Sex positivity has a positive association with relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

**Hypothesis 3:** For people who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there is a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and relationship satisfaction, however, for those with a higher level of sex positivity, there is not a significant relationship.

**Research Question 2:** Does sexual positivity have a moderating effect on the association between perceived discrimination and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples?

**Hypothesis 4:** Perceived discrimination has a negative association with sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

**Hypothesis 5:** Sex positivity has a positive association with sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

**Hypothesis 6:** For people who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there is a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and sexual satisfaction, however, for those with a higher level of sex positivity, there is not a significant relationship.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

In order to participate in the present study, participants needed to be at least eighteen years old, identify as a sexual minority, have been in a romantic relationship for at least six months, and be sexually active. Since this study had two independent variables - sexual positivity and perceived discrimination - and four control variables, age, relationship status, sexual orientation, and education, Cohen (1992) reports that I needed a minimum of 107 participants to give my analysis statistical power. However, to ensure that I meet this minimum of participants that complete my survey, I wanted at least 200 participants. This power is determined by my ability to reject the null hypothesis. In order for someone to have completed the survey, they needed to be at least eighteen years of age, in a sexual minority relationship for at least six months, and be sexually active.

### **Procedure**

In order to conduct any research study involving human participants, I applied for Human Subjects approval by the IRB. In this study, I utilized online resources to collect data. Online data collection is a common modality, and therefore there are many ways to collect data online. Amazon Mechanical-Turk (Mturk) was used to find participants and gather data. Mturk allows researchers to quickly gain access potential large sample of diverse participants; this is due to crowdsourcing, meaning researchers are able to outsource their research surveys for others to participate in (Shank, 2016). Although the pool of potential participants is much larger, Shank (2016) reports that this population covers a mostly young and liberal base. Although that is not representative of the U.S. population, it is fairly diverse for the purpose of this study.

Online surveys allow participants from around the country to take researcher surveys with no additional human interaction. Another advantage is that participants get paid to participate. This can motivate more individuals to participate in the study. The use of Mturk allowed this research study to be available to many individuals, which increased the likelihood that sexual minority individuals had access and participated in this study. The data was collected through a survey on Qualtrics. Each participant, that fully completed the survey was paid \$0.80.

## Materials

To measure all of the variables in my research questions, I used four existing scales, the Sex Positivity Scale, (Belous, 2020), the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS), (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2010), the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI), (Funke & Rogge, 2007), and the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS), (Williams, et. al., 1997). The survey began with a demographic questionnaire to gather information about participant characteristics.

The Sex Positivity Scale (SPS) was developed by Belous, et al. (under review, 2020). The scale was developed to measure how sex-positive or sex-negative and individual is; this means it helps to explain how an individual may feel about concepts of sex and sexuality. This 27-item scale asked participants to answer as honestly as possible about their views and beliefs regarding sex and sexuality (Belous, 2020). This scale has three subscales: (1) Behaviors and Attitudes (e.g. sexual activity should be reserved for people in a committed, romantic relationship), (2) Talking about Sex and Community (e.g. if I have a question about sex, I am comfortable asking someone about it), and (3) Personal Beliefs, Knowledge, and Experiences (e.g. I always ensure consent prior to sexual activity with a partner). The SPS utilizes a 5-point scale from 1-5 (1= Completely disagree; 5= Completely agree) (Belous, 2020).

The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale is a 20-item measure of sexual satisfaction (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2010). Researchers identified two dimensions of sexual satisfaction; ego-centered and partner/activity-centered factors. The 20-item scale contained two subscales, ego-centered (e.g. the way I sexually react to my partner) and partner/activity centered (e.g. my partner's sexual creativity). The first ten items pertained to the individual's sexual experiences and the last ten items pertain to the partner/activity sexual experiences (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2010). Researchers found that even after taking gender and sexual orientation differences into account, they found the Cronbach's alpha for the 20-item scale was between .90-.93 (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2010). The scale asked the participant to rate 20-items that explore their satisfaction with their sex life over the last six months, on a 5-point scale, from 1-5 (1 = Not at all satisfied; 5 = Extremely satisfied).

The Couple Satisfaction Index has been used to effectively measure relationship satisfaction; this is done by asking participants to determine how much they agree with different relationship statements (e.g. our relationship is strong) in comparison to their own relationship. For the purpose of this research study, the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) was used to measure

relationship satisfaction. The original 32-item scale can be shortened to a 4-item or 16-item scale; this study utilized the 16-item scale. Both the 32-item and 16-item scales show high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .98. This scale has been found to be more precise of a measurement tool for relationship satisfaction than other measurements such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) or the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

The first item of this scale used a 7-point scale from 0-6 (0 = Extremely unhappy; 6 = Perfect), while the following 9 items used a 6-point scale from 0-5 (0 = Always disagree/Never; 5 = Always agree/All the time), (Funke & Rogge, 2007). The final 6 items presented the participant with a spectrum of relational impressions. This was done by presenting two opposite words, with a scale of 0-5 where the participant rates how well either of these words describe their relationship with 0 identifying the negative descriptor and 5 identifying the positive descriptor.

The Everyday Discrimination Scale is a 9-item scale that measures the amount of discrimination that an individual perceives they experience (e.g. you are called names or insulted); this scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .88 (Williams, et. al., 1997). The scale was initially developed to measure the amount of racial discrimination an individual experienced, however, the scale can be applied to sexual minorities as well. The scale asked participants to indicate how often the following experiences the participant occur in their day-to-day life; almost every day, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, less than once a year, or never. If the response was a few times a year or more, the participant was asked a follow-up question; what they think the main reasons behind this discriminatory behavior is (Williams, et. al., 1997).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed standard procedures, beginning with data screening through hypothesis testing and interpretation. Two linear regressions were conducted, one for each of the dependent variables. For the first research question, examining whether sexual positivity has a moderating effect on the association between perceived discrimination and relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples, the independent variable was perceived discrimination, the moderator was sexual positivity, the control variables were age, relationship structure, length of relationship and education level, and the dependent variable was relationship satisfaction. For

the second research question, examining whether sexual positivity has a moderating effect on the association between perceived discrimination and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples, the independent and control variables were the same, but the dependent variable was sexual satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Data Screening**

A total of 491 participants opened the survey via Mturk. Out of the 491 participants who consented to participate in the survey, 227 participants completed the survey and met the following requirements: a) a minimum age of 18 years old, b) currently in a relationship of 6 months or more, c) are currently sexually active, and d) are not heterosexual. Forty-six participants were excluded due to missing multiple answers or having inconsistent patterns in answering questions. The final number of participants in the final analysis was 181, which is approximately 37% of the original total of participants.

Before conducting the analyses, all data was screened for statistical assumptions, outliers, and normality through SPSS. There were no out-of-bounds data, unusual means or standard deviations, or univariate outliers.

Significant skewness was found in was found in multiple variables. EDS score had a skewness of .660 (SE = .181), participant age score had a skewness of .964 (SE = .181), length of relationship had a skewness of .964 (SE = .181), and highest level of education received had a skewness of -2.10 (SE = .181). Significant kurtosis was found for two variables; length of relationship had a kurtosis of 9.182 (SE = .369), and highest level of education received had a kurtosis of 4.071 (SE = .359). Because of central limit theory, skewness is acceptable due to sample size. However, bootstrapping would have been the best method, but I did not have access to that analysis. Through visual analysis of pairwise plots, linearity and homoscedasticity were indicated for all continuous variables. Since this sample of data was reasonably distributed and homogenous, data transformation was not necessary (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

### **Description of Sample**

The participants' ages ranged from 18 years to 66 years old and the majority (54.1%) of the sample were between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. The participants were in relationships ranging from 6 months to 240 months (20 years). The average length of the participants' relationships was 30.757 months.



Ninety-seven (53.6%) participants identified their gender as male and seventy-eight (43.1%) identified as female. Three (1.7%) participants identified as genderqueer, and one (.6%) participant identified as agender, one as transgender, and one as intersex. Ninety-three (51.4%) participants identified as bisexual. Thirty-six (19.9%) participants identified as a lesbian, and thirty-one (17.1%) identified as gay. Ten (5.5%) participants identified as asexual, three (1.7%) participants identified as pansexual, two (1.1%) participants identified as queer, and six (3.3%) marked other for their sexual orientation.

As displayed in Table 3, the majority of participants, at a frequency of 143 (79.0%) identified their relationship structure to be some form of monogamy. 104 (57.5%) of the participants are in a monogamous, committed relationship. Seventeen (9.4%) participants are in a non-serious monogamous relationship. Eleven (6.1%) identify as monogamous, single and looking for a relationship, six (3.3%) participants identify as monogamous, single and not looking, and five (2.8%) participants identify monogamous, not identifying with the other options. Thirty-five (19%) participants identified their relationship structure to be polyamorous. Nineteen (10.5%) participants are in multiple committed relationships, ten (5.5%) are in a relationship with one partner, but looking for additional partners, two (1.1%) are with a single partner and not currently looking for additional partners, three (1.7%) are currently single but looking for partners, and one (0.6%) participant identified as polyamorous, but not currently in a relationship with any partners and not looking for a relationship. The final three participants (1.7%) identified as a single partner.

Table 1: Age of Participants

<b>Age (N=181)</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
	18	66	34.967	11.084

Table 2: Length of Relationship in Months

<b>Length of Relationship (N=181)</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
	6	240	30.757	53.088

Table 3: Gender, Sexual Orientation and Relationship Structure of Participants

<b>Gender (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	97	53.6%
Female	78	43.1%
Agender	1	.6%
Transgender	1	.6%
Genderqueer	3	1.7%
Intersex	1	.6%
<b>Sexual Orientation (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lesbian	36	19.9%
Gay	31	17.1%
Bisexual	93	51.4%
Pansexual	3	1.7%
Asexual	10	5.5%
Queer	2	1.1%
Other	6	3.3%
<b>Relationship Status (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Monogamous-In a committed relationship	104	57.5%
Monogamous- In a non-serious relationship	17	9.4%
Monogamous- Single, but looking	11	6.1%

Table 3 continued

Monogamous- Single, not looking	6	3.3%
Monogamous- Not identified	5	2.8%
Polyamorous- In a committed multiple relationship	19	10.5%
Polyamorous- With a single partner, but looking	10	5.5%
Polyamorous- With a single partner, not looking	2	1.1%
Polyamorous- Single but looking	3	1.7%
Polyamorous- Single, not looking	1	.6%
Other/Single Partner	3	1.7%

As seen in Table 4, the majority of participants identified their race to be white at a frequency of 135 (74.6%). Thirty-one (17.1%) participants identify as Black or African American, two (1.1%) participants identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, three (1.7%) participants identify as Asian, eight (4.4%) identify as Hispanic, one (0.6%) participant identifies as multiracial, and one (0.6%) participant selected other. Twenty-six (14.4%) of the participants have completed some professional or master's degree, 126 (69.9%) of the participants completed a 4-year college degree, eight (4.4%) of the participants have completed a 2-year college degree, and seven (3.9%) have completed some college. Two (1.1%) of the participants completed some trade school and the remaining twelve (6.6%) participants have graduated high school.

Table 4: Race and Ethnicities and Highest Level of Completed Education of Participants

<b>Race/Ethnicity (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
White	135	74.6%
Black or African American	31	17.1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.1%
Asian	3	1.7%
Hispanic	8	4.4%
Multiracial	1	.6%
Other	1	.6%
<b>Highest Level of Completed Education (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
High School Graduate	12	6.6%
Trade School	2	1.1%
Some college	7	3.9%
2-year degree	8	4.4%
4-year degree	126	69.9%
Professional/Master's degree	26	14.4%

As shown in Table 5, the ideology with the most participant responses was liberal with a frequency of 76 (42.0%). Forty-six (25.4%) participants identify as conservative, thirty-two (17.7%) participants identify as moderate, twelve (6.6%) participants identify as fundamental, six (3.3%) participants identify as progressive, and three (1.7%) participants identify as a traditionalist. There were six (3.3%) missing responses. Eighty-three (45.9%) participants identify as a republican and seventy (38.7%) participants identify as a democrat. Thirteen (7.2%) participants identify as a libertarian; there were five (2.8%) participants in the green party, and three (1.7%) participants that are socialist/democratic socialist. Five (2.8%) participants responded with not being affiliated with any particular political party and 2 (1.1%) were missing responses.

Table 5: Ideology and Political Affiliation of Participants

<b>Ideology (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Conservative	46	25.4%
Fundamental	12	6.6%
Liberal	76	42.0%
Moderate	32	17.7%
Progressive	6	3.3%
Traditionalist	3	1.7%
Missing	6	3.3%
<b>Political Affiliation (N=181)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Democrat	70	38.7%
Green Party	5	2.8%
Libertarian	13	7.2%
Republican	83	45.9%
Socialist/Democratic Socialist	3	1.7%
No Party/Not Affiliated	5	2.8%
Missing	2	1.1%

### Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were the Sex Positivity Scale (SPS), the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS), the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS), and the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI). The observed and possible minimum and maximum, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha of each scale are listed in Table 6 (see Table 6).

Table 6: Instruments and Descriptive Statistics

Scales	# of items	N	Min	Max	Possible Min	Possible Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reported Cronbach's Alpha
Sexual Positivity Scale (SPS)	26	181	65	125	26	130	100.18	11.665	.851
Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS)	9	181	5	45	9	54	21.10	8.753	.896
New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS)	20	181	42	100	20	100	71.83	11.508	.902
Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)	16	181	36	89	0	81	60.77	11.695	.894

### Correlations

Pearson correlation analyses were run on continuous variables to assess for possible relationships (N=181). Length of relationship and age of participant were significantly correlated ( $r = .455$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Age of participant was significantly correlated with level of sex positivity ( $r = .233$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Level of relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated with age of participant ( $r = .156$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Level of perceived discrimination was significantly correlated with level of sex positivity ( $r = -.321$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Level of perceived discrimination was significantly correlated with level of relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.198$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Level of sex positivity was significantly correlated with level of relationship satisfaction ( $r = .636$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Level of sex positivity was significantly correlated with level of sexual satisfaction ( $r = .463$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Level of relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated with level of sexual satisfaction ( $r = .591$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 7: Correlations

	Length of Relationship	Age of Participant	Level of Perceived Discrimination	Level of Sex Positivity	Level of Relationship Satisfaction	Level of Sexual Satisfaction
Length of Relationship		.455**	-.084	.107	.019	-.019
Age of Participant	.455**		-.051	.233**	.156*	.063
Level of Perceived Discrimination	-.084	-.051		-.321**	-.198**	-.042
Level of Sex Positivity	.107	.233**	-.321**		.636**	.463**
Level of Relationship Satisfaction	.019	.156*	-.198**	.636**		.591**
Level of Sexual Satisfaction	-.019	.063	-.042	.463**	.591**	

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Analysis of Research Question 1

In order to address hypotheses one, two, and three, multiple regressions were used. For this analysis, the first model consisted of perceived discrimination, sex positivity, relationship satisfaction, along with four control variables. The control variables included age, sexual orientation, relationship structure, and highest level of education.

The regression indicated that model 1 was significant,  $F(10, 170) = 5.9271, p < .001$ . The correlation coefficient between the predictors and the outcome variable was  $R = .6594$  with an *adjusted*  $R^2$  value of .2585. This information explains that perceived discrimination and sex positivity, along with the control variables accounts for 25.85% of variance in relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples.



Table 8: DV: Relationship Satisfaction

<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>
Constant	21.5700	-18.8809	-.8753
Perceived Discrimination	.8579	1.2987	1.5138
Level of Sex Positivity	.2020	.7737	3.8308***
Interaction Between Perceived Discrimination and Sex Positivity	.0082	-.0112	-1.3628
Age	.0822	-.0427	-.5196
Length of Relationship	.0164	-.0116	-.7085
Lesbian (as compared to Gay)	2.5824	.2706	.1048
Bisexual/Pansexual (as compared to Gay)	2.2107	-.1210	-.0547
Asexual/Queer/Other (as compared to Gay)	3.1648	-4.7696	-1.5071
Polyamorous (as compared to Monogamous)	2.0488	-.1812	-.0884
Highest Level of Education Completed	.6678	.0704	.1055

\*\*\*p < .001

### Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one stated that perceived discrimination has a negative association with relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples. Statistical significance was not found for the independent variable of perceived discrimination ( $t = 1.513$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

## **Hypothesis Two**

Hypothesis two stated that sex positivity will have a positive association with relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples. There was a significant positive relationship between sex positivity and relationship satisfaction ( $t = 3.8308, p < .001$ ).

## **Hypothesis Three**

Hypothesis three stated that for people who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there will be a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and relationship satisfaction, however, for those with a higher level of sex positivity, there is not a significant relationship. Statistical significance was not found for the interaction between perceived discrimination and sex positivity ( $t = -1.3628, p > .05$ ). Because the relationship between the interaction of perceived discrimination and sex positivity and relationship satisfaction was not significant, a post-hoc analysis of this interaction was not needed.

## **Analysis of Research Question 2**

In order to address hypotheses four, five, and six, multiple regressions were used, as in the first analysis. This model consisted of perceived discrimination, sex positivity, sexual satisfaction, along with the same four control variables, age, sexual orientation, relationship structure, and highest level of education. This regression indicated the model 2 was also significant,  $F(10, 170) = 13.0778, p < .001$ . The correlation coefficient between predictors and the outcome variable was  $R = .4348$  with an *adjusted*  $R^2$  value of .4348. This information explains that perceived discrimination and sex positivity, along with the control variables accounts for 43.48% of variance in sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

Table 9: DV: Sexual Satisfaction

<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>
Constant	18.5320	-12.3461	-.6662
Perceived Discrimination	.7371	.7547	1.0240
Level of Sex Positivity	.1735	.8019	4.6214
Interaction Between Perceived Discrimination and Sex Positivity	.0071	-.0075	-1.0617
Age	.0706	.0197	.2783
Length of Relationship	.0141	-.0154	-1.0902
Lesbian (as compared to Gay)	2.2187	1.5506	.6989
Bisexual/Pansexual (as compared to Gay)	1.8994	1.0541	.5550
Asexual/Queer/Other (as compared to Gay)	2.7190	-3.5481	-1.3049
Polyamorous (as compared to Monogamous)	1.7602	-.8768	-.4981
Highest Level of Education Completed	.5738	.5156	.8987

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

#### **Hypothesis Four**

Hypothesis four stated that perceived discrimination will have a negative association with sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. Statistical significance was not found for the independent variable of perceived discrimination ( $t = 1.024$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

### **Hypothesis Five**

Hypothesis five stated that sex positivity will have a positive association with sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. Statistical significance was found for the moderator, sex positivity. There was a significant positive relationship between sex positivity and sexual satisfaction ( $t = 4.6214$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Hypothesis Six**

Hypothesis six stated that for people who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there will be a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and sexual satisfaction, however, for those with a higher level of sex positivity, there is not a significant relationship. Statistical significance was not found for the interaction between perceived discrimination and sex positivity ( $t = -1.0617$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Because the relationship between the interaction of perceived discrimination and sex positivity and sexual satisfaction was not significant, a post-hoc analysis of this interaction was not needed.

### **Conclusion of Results**

Following the completion of the data analyses, the results of this study supported hypotheses two and five. This suggests that higher levels of sex positivity were related to higher levels of relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not sex positivity and perceived discrimination had a significant impact on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. Additionally, this study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived discrimination and relationship and sexual satisfaction, the relationship between sex positivity and relationship and sexual satisfaction, and the relationship between perceived discrimination and sex positivity. This research study was conducted through the lens of minority stress theory.

### **Influence of Perceived Discrimination and Sex Positivity on Relationship Satisfaction**

Hypotheses one through three covered whether perceived discrimination and sexual positivity have a significant relationship to relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples. This study suggested that the level of discrimination that a sexual minority individual experienced would have a lower likelihood of being satisfied in their romantic relationships. The data suggests that perceived discrimination does not have a statistically significant association with relationship satisfaction of sexual minority couples. This study also proposed that individuals with higher levels of sexual positivity would have a higher likelihood of being satisfied in their romantic relationships. This second hypothesis was supported by the data. This suggests that the level of sexual positivity is positively associated with level of relationship satisfaction for sexual minority couples. Additionally, the results indicated that, for individuals who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there will be a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and relationship satisfaction, however, for individuals with a higher level of sex positivity, there will not be significant relationship. The interaction between perceived discrimination and sex positivity was not significant.

Potential reasoning behind the interaction term not being significant could be issues with the scales that were used in this research study; the Sex Positivity Scale is a new scale and has not been used in many studies, while the Everyday Discrimination Scale was very brief and there could be a scale that measures experiences of discrimination more precisely. The Everyday Discrimination Scale is set up so that the lower scores correlate to higher experiences of discrimination. In my sample, the mean score for experienced discrimination was 21.10. The

average participant in my study did not experience significantly high levels of discrimination. According to Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) this is unusual given that all of the participants identify as a sexual minority; this population has been more likely to report higher levels of perceived discrimination.

Current, existing research pertaining to sexual positivity has not been focused on the influence that it may play in relational contexts. Previous research on the influence of sex positivity has mostly pertained to counseling professions maintaining a sexually positive mindset when working in clinical settings (Burnes et. al., 2017). The limited research pertaining to the impact of perceived discrimination on relationship satisfaction suggests that the stress of chronic discrimination has potential to negatively impact relationships (Simpson & Rholes, 1994).

### **Influence of Perceived Discrimination and Sex Positivity on Sexual Satisfaction**

The final three hypotheses explored whether perceived discrimination and sexual positivity have a significant influence on sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. This study suggested that the level of discrimination that a sexual minority individual experienced would have a lower likelihood of being satisfied in their sexual relationships. The data suggests that perceived discrimination does not have a statistically significant association with sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. This study also proposed that individuals with higher levels of sexual positivity would have a higher likelihood of being satisfied in their sexual relationships. This second hypothesis was significantly supported by the data. This suggests that the level of sexual positivity is associated with level of sexual satisfaction for sexual minority couples. Additionally, this research study suggested that individuals who have a medium to low level of sex positivity, there will be a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and sexual satisfaction, however, for individuals with a higher level of sex positivity, there will not be significant relationship. The data did not report statistical significance for the interaction between perceived discrimination and sex positivity.

This research study suggested that there is a significant association between sex positivity and sexual satisfaction. This notion is supported by existing research studies; the research that has been conducted about sexual positivity leads readers to understand that individuals with higher levels of sex positivity are more comfortable having conversations about sex and sexuality with partners (Burnes, et. al., 2017; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Mosher, 2017). An

individual's ability to engage in open communication about the sexual aspect of their relationship have more enriched and fulfilling sexual satisfaction, as well as relationship satisfaction as a whole (Cupach & Comstock, 1990).

In this study, sex positivity was significantly related to both relationship and sexual satisfaction, but more highly related to relationship satisfaction. This is interesting because comfort with sex is only a part of what it means to be sex positive. Burnes, et al., (2017) discussed that being sex positive was about more than being positive about the topic of sex. While there is research that supports that higher levels of sex positivity are related to increased sexual satisfaction (Montesi, et al., 2011), the present study has found a significant positive association between sex positivity and relationship satisfaction. Donaghue, (2015) defined sex positivity as attitudes of openness and liberation, without judgment, about sexuality and sexual expression. This mindset can influence much more than just the sexual relationship.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study brings new insight to existing research on couple outcomes associated with sex positivity. This study was able to expand upon existing information of sexual minority couples, gain insight into the high-level influence of sexual positivity on relationship and sexual satisfaction for sexual minority couples. Another strength of this study is that the number of participants recruited ( $n = 181$ ); based on the proposed data analysis, 107 participants were needed to have significant statistical power, this sample was larger than that requirement. This study has presented interesting findings for a literature gap that exists. There is not significant research examining the influence that sex positivity has on couple outcomes. The interaction between perceived discrimination and sexual positivity has not been previously examined. This research study has highlighted the importance of a deeper exploration of the impacts of both perceived discrimination and sex positivity on relationship and sexual satisfaction. An additional strength of this study is that it was conceptualized through the lens of minority stress theory. The anonymity that comes with an online survey potentially allowed more comfort and space to challenge traditional expectations of heteronormative relationships.

With any research study and data collection, there are biases that can be expected. Fowler (2014) discusses four main types of error in a survey. Inferring from sample to population and from answers given in the sample to true population. Additionally, random sampling error and

invalidity of answers given by the participants. When thinking about this study, both sampling error and bias are possible, meaning, it is possible that this sample will not generalize to the greater population and that the individuals participating are somehow different than the intended population. The research question involves looking at the relationship of sexual positivity and perceived discrimination and what effect they play on relationship and sexual satisfaction. It is also possible that individuals may have just answered the survey to get paid. It is important to account for errors in all survey research; within this study, potential error with the sample frame is possible.

A limitation that may impact the results of this study is that the sample is very homogenous, in terms of demographics, 74.6% of participants identify as white, 51.4% identify as bisexual, 69.9% have a degree from a 4-year college, and 45.9% affiliate with the republican political party. This may not be an accurate representation of sexual minority populations. Additionally, there was not a question about the gender identity of the participant's partner. This can change how the couple is perceived by outside individuals. If an individual identifies as a sexual minority but can be perceived as heterosexual, for example, if their partner identifies with the opposite gender. Although the individual may still identify as a sexual minority, they may not experience heightened levels of discrimination due to the gender identity of their partner.

An additional type of error that is possible is answer error. This is when the current emotional states of participants may influence the answers given to the survey questions. The two cases that are most possible is if participants have recently experienced some type of discrimination because of their sexual orientation or if participants believe they are very sex positive. It is possible that if participants have recently experienced some type of discrimination, they may report high levels of discrimination because of sexual orientation. Additionally, selection effect may be another limitation; having the phrase "sexual positivity" in the name may lead more individuals to take the survey if they believe they are more sex positive. When analyzing the data, there were multiple participants who seemed to not want to respond to the questions in the Everyday Discrimination Scale. This looked like missing responses to the questions. This could possibly be a consistent discomfort with the notion of discrimination, which could be navigated in the context of therapy. This is important for clinicians to keep in mind, when working with any modality of therapy.



## **Clinical Implications**

The present study has many implications for in a clinical setting; the overall takeaway from this research study is that while a significant relationship was not seen for the interaction between perceived discrimination and sex positivity, sexual positivity has a significant influence on the relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. This may mean that having some level of comfort with and sex and sexuality allows couples to have conversations about what role sex and sexuality plays in their relationship. For clinicians, it would be important for continued effort to cultivate a sexually positive environment and mindset for their clients. It is important to note that this sample reported relatively low discrimination and high relationship satisfaction, so clinicians should be aware that the people who participated in this study might not represent couples seeking therapy.

The findings of this study highlight the need for professionals in a clinical setting to make intentional space for conversations about experiences of discrimination in the lives of their clients and how that may impact relationships. Additionally, this study emphasizes that clinicians make space for sex positivity in their work, in the therapeutic setting, in paperwork, and in conceptualization of clients. This is especially important for clinicians working with sexual minorities. Cruz, et al., (2017) discussed that in order for a counselor to be culturally sensitive and competent in the work they do with their client, sexual positivity is vital. Health professions tend to emphasize the importance of human growth and development, which according to Mosher (2017) sexual health and well-being are integral parts.

## **Future Directions**

One hope for this study is that research continues to break out of heteronormative and homophobic viewpoints and focus on underserved populations. The possibilities for future research within this topic are vast. Because of the limited research that exists on the topics of sexual positivity, perceived discrimination and any influence that they have on couple outcomes, there are many directions that could be taken. For example, there could be similar studies that potentially use more precise scales for each of the variables, the Everyday Discrimination Scale is very brief, and it is possible that a scale that goes more in depth on discriminatory interactions. Future research could benefit from continued research on sexual minority relationships, through

the minority stress lens, in order to better understand the specific struggles that this population faces.

Researchers could additionally explore additional ways that sex positivity influence relationships, outside of relationship and sexual satisfaction. Because the Sexual Positivity Scale is a new scale, research should continue to explore the validity and generality of the scale. Finally, I think that researchers could gather their sample in a different manner. Crowdsourcing was used through M-turk, but future researchers could advertise their study in different ways, and target more diverse groups.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the influence of perceived discrimination on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples, the interaction between perceived discrimination and level of sexual positivity, and the influence of higher levels of sex positivity on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. The results of this study revealed that sex positivity is positively associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction. Further studies should expand on the impact of perceived discrimination on couple outcomes, as well as continued exploration of the degree that sexual positivity plays in positive couple outcomes. It is important for clinicians and other providers to be aware of the significant positive association that sex positivity has on relationship and sexual satisfaction.

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## **APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT - MTURK**

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Study of Impact of Sexual Positivity and Perceived Discrimination on Relationship and Sexual Satisfaction of Sexual Minority Couples  
Anne B. Edwards, PhD, and Samantha Peachey  
Department of Behavioral Sciences  
Purdue University Northwest

#### **Key Information**

Please review the following information pertaining to this research study carefully. Your participation in this study is voluntary, which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, giving your consent. Be sure you understand what this survey will ask of you and any possible risks or benefits.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

You are being asked to participate in a study designed by Samantha Peachey BA, and Anne B. Edwards, PhD, of Purdue University Northwest. We want to understand the relationship between sexual positivity and perceived discrimination and their impacts on relationship and sexual satisfaction of sexual minority couples. We would like to enroll at least 160 people in this study.

#### **What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

If you choose to participate, you acknowledge that you are over 18 years old, and have engaged in sexual activity as a sexual minority. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking about your demographic information, level of sexual positivity, your sexual satisfaction, your relationship satisfaction, and the level of everyday discrimination you perceive. You are free not to answer any particular questions if they make you feel uncomfortable, or to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

#### **How long will I be in the study?**

It should take approximately 20-30 minutes for you to complete the entire study.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data collection, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the section about confidentiality. The risk level is minimal, there are no greater risk than the participant would encounter in daily life. You may feel some discomfort answering some of these questions. If any feelings become upsetting, you may want to talk to a counselor or therapist. A suggested website to find a therapist around your location is: <https://www.findatherapist.com>.

#### **Are there any potential benefits?**

You will not directly benefit from this study. You will have a chance to take part in research and your participation may contribute to the scientific understanding of how people view social and political issues.

**Will I receive payment or other incentive?**

If you qualify to participate in this research study, you will receive payment of \$0.80.

**Are there costs to me for participation?**

There are no anticipated costs to participate in this research.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

There is no personally identifying information being collected in this questionnaire. All of the responses will remain anonymous and will be used only in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. Additionally, you may choose not to answer any questions, or choose to withdraw your participation at any time. All data collected in this study will be kept separately from the consent form and will be accessed only by the researchers. The data file will be used for preparation of research reports related to this study and kept for a period of three years after publication of any articles related to this study. The project's research records may be reviewed for regulatory and research oversight by departments at Purdue University.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact Samantha Peachey at [speache@pnw.edu](mailto:speache@pnw.edu). To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see [www.purdue.edu/hotline](http://www.purdue.edu/hotline). If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email ([irb@purdue.edu](mailto:irb@purdue.edu)) or write to:  
Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University  
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032  
155 S. Grant St.  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have read this consent form and the research study was thoroughly explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above. Check "Yes" if you agree to participate in this study and understand the informed consent.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## APPENDIX B. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your current age in years? \_\_\_\_\_  
*If under 18 years old, will be taken to end of survey*
2. Are you currently in a committed relationship lasting longer than 6 months?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No*If no, will be taken to end of survey*
3. How long have you been in a committed relationship in months? \_\_\_\_\_months  
*If under 6 months, will be taken to end of survey*
4. Are you currently sexually active? (Having engaged in sexual behaviors within the past 6 months?)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No*If no, will be taken to end of survey*
5. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
  - a. Heterosexual
  - b. Lesbian
  - c. Gay
  - d. Bisexual
  - e. Pansexual
  - f. Asexual
  - g. Queer
  - h. Other*If heterosexual, will be taken to end of survey*
6. What gender do you identify with?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Agender
  - d. Transgender
  - e. Genderqueer
  - f. Intersex
  - g. Other
7. What racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify with?
  - a. White
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. Hispanic
  - d. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - e. Asian
  - f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - g. Indian Subcontinent

- h. Middle Eastern
  - i. Multiracial
  - j. Other
8. What is your highest level of education?
- a. Less than high school
  - b. High school graduate
  - c. Trade school
  - d. Some college
  - e. 2-year degree
  - f. 4-year degree
  - g. Professional/Master's degree
  - h. Doctorate
9. I would consider myself politically affiliated with which of the following parties?
- a. Democrat
  - b. Green Party
  - c. Libertarian
  - d. Republican
  - e. Socialist/Democratic Socialist
  - f. No Party/Not Affiliated
10. I would consider myself as ideologically...
- a. Conservative
  - b. Fundamental
  - c. Liberal
  - d. Moderate
  - e. Progressive
  - f. Traditionalist
11. What is your current relationship status or identity?
- a. Monogamous – In a committed relationship
  - b. Monogamous – In a non-serious relationship
  - c. Monogamous – Single, but looking
  - d. Monogamous – Single, not looking
  - e. Monogamous – Not identified
  - f. Polyamorous – In a committed multiple relationship
  - g. Polyamorous – In non-serious multiple relationship
  - h. Polyamorous – with a single partner, but looking
  - i. Polyamorous – with a single partner, not looking
  - j. Polyamorous – Single, but looking
  - k. Polyamorous – Single, not looking
  - l. Polyamorous – Not identified
  - m. Other / Single Partner
  - n. Other / Multiple Partners

## APPENDIX C. SEX POSITIVITY SCALE (BELOUS, ET AL., UNDER REVIEW, 2020)

Directions: Please answer all questions as honestly as possible, thinking about your views, thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions related to sex and sexuality. Go with your first, gut reaction.

*First, please answer the following:*

I believe I am a sex positive person.

Completely  
Disagree

Disagree

Neither Disagree  
nor Agree

Agree

Completely  
Agree

<i>Item</i>	<i>Completely Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Completely Agree</i>
1. The number of sex partners a person has is not a determinant of their moral purity.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Erotica (video, audio, written, spoken, performed, etc.) is an acceptable form of sexual expression.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Sexual activity should be reserved for people in a committed, romantic relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I do not judge others for their sexual behaviors or desires.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I do not judge others for their sexual attraction.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Just because I am not aroused by a specific sexual activity, does not make it “wrong.”	1	2	3	4	5
7. If I were propositioned for sex with a person who did not identify with the gender I am typically sexually attracted to, I would be upset.	1	2	3	4	5
8. There is no one “right” way to have sex.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The definition of “sex” is individual to each person.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Sexual health is a basic human right.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am comfortable talking about sex with friends.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am comfortable talking about sex in public.	1	2	3	4	5
13. If I have a question about sex, I am comfortable asking someone about it.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am comfortable talking about sex with family.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I think talking about sex is an awkward experience, no matter who I am talking to.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I am not ashamed to talk to my doctor about sex issues.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Sex is not a taboo subject for discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am comfortable talking about sex in private.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I believe that a healthy sex life is important to everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I like to learn new things about sex.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I like to learn new things about what I enjoy with sex.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I am willing to try new things sexually, as long as it is not illegal.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I believe sex is a good thing.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Sex should be enjoyed by all people.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I believe it is important to know about my partner's beliefs and thoughts related to sexual activity.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I always ensure consent prior to sexual activity with a partner.	1	2	3	4	5

## **APPENDIX D. THE NEW SEXUAL SATISFACTION SCALE (ŠTULHOFFER ET. AL., 2010)**

Thinking about your sex life during the last 6 months, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects on a scale of 1-5.

- 1 = Not at all satisfied
- 2 = A little satisfied
- 3 = Moderately satisfied
- 4 = Very satisfied
- 5 = Extremely satisfied

1. The intensity of my sexual arousal
2. The quality of my orgasms
3. My “letting go” and surrender to sexual pleasure during sex
4. My focus/concentration during sexual activity
5. The way I sexually react to my partner
6. My body’s sexual functioning
7. My emotional opening up in sex
8. My mood after sexual activity
9. The frequency of my orgasms
10. The pleasure I provide to my partner
11. The balance between what I give and receive in sex
12. My partner’s emotional opening up during sex
13. My partner’s initiation of sexual activity
14. My partner’s ability to orgasm
15. My partner's surrender to sexual pleasure (“letting go”)
16. The way my partner takes care of my sexual needs
17. My partner’s sexual creativity
18. My partner’s sexual availability
19. The variety of my sexual activities
20. The frequency of my sexual activity

# APPENDIX E. THE COUPLE SATISFACTION INDEX 16-ITEM (FUNK & ROGGE, 2007)

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy 0      Fairly Unhappy 1      A Little Unhappy 2      Very Happy 4      Extremely Happy 5      Perfect 6

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0

	Not at all TRUE	A little TRUE	Some-what TRUE	Mostly TRUE	Almost Completely TRUE	Completely TRUE
Our relationship is strong	0	1	2	3	4	5
My relationship with my partner makes me happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
I really feel like <b>part of a team</b> with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?	0	1	2	3	4	5
How well does your partner meet your needs?	0	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	0	1	2	3	4	5
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5



For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes how you feel about your relationship. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

INTERESTING	5	4	3	2	1	0	BORING
BAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	GOOD
FULL	5	4	3	2	1	0	EMPTY
STURDY	5	4	3	2	1	0	FRAGILE
DISCOURAGING	0	1	2	3	4	5	HOPEFUL
ENJOYABLE	5	4	3	2	1	0	MISERABLE

## **APPENDIX F. THE EVERYDAY DISCRIMINATION SCALE (WILLIAMS, ET. AL., 1997)**

Please indicate how often the following experiences occur in your day-to-day life on a scale from 1-6.

- 1 = Almost everyday
- 2 = At least once a week
- 3 = A few times a month
- 4 = A few times a year
- 5 = Less than once a year
- 6 = Never

1. You are treated with less courtesy than other people are
2. You are treated with less respect than other people are
3. You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores
4. People act as if they think you are not smart
5. People act as if they are afraid of you
6. People act as if they think you are dishonest
7. People act as if they're better than you are
8. You are called names or insulted
9. You are threatened or harassed

If you responded a few times a year or more to the previous questions, please answer the follow-up question;

- What do you think the main reasons behind this discriminatory behavior is?
  - Your ancestry or national origins, gender, race, age, religion, height, weight, some other aspect of physical appearance, sexual orientation, education or income level, physical disability, shade of skin color, tribe, or specify another reason.