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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION, GENDER/SEX SIMILARITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION IN CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Participants maintained a social interaction diary, a variant of the Rochester Interaction Record, to describe their close personal relationships. Relationships were defined using relative frequency of contact with different individuals and via participants' descriptions of relational partners. Individuals with whom participants had more contact were more likely to be described as close friends than were individuals with whom participants had less contact. The results suggest that the characteristics of same-sex relationships depend less on the specific partners composing the relationship than do the characteristics of opposite-sex relationships. As hypothesized, the characteristics of close same-sex relationships did not differ from the characteristics of other same-sex relationships, although interactions with best friends were more intimate than interactions with other same-sex partners. In contrast, the characteristics of close opposite-sex relationships differed from the characteristics of other opposite-sex relationships. Men and women who were romantically involved had more contact with their romantic partners than with other opposite-sex persons, and they had more contact with their romantic partners than men and women who were not romantically involved had with their most frequent opposite-sex interaction partner. For women, interactions with most frequent opposite-sex interaction partners were more affectively rewarding and instrumentally positive if these men were romantic partners, whereas for men, the affective quality and instrumentality of interactions with most frequent opposite-sex interaction partners did not differ as function of whether these women were romantic partners.

KEY WORDS • defining relationships • interaction diary
• social construction

Gender is a ubiquitous aspect of social life, and examining relationships as a function of the gender or sex similarity of relational partners is commonplace in the scientific literature. Nonetheless, few studies have compared directly close same- and opposite-sex relationships, and few studies have examined how the effects of gender similarity vary across different meta-theoretical approaches to defining relationships. The present study addressed this issue by examining differences among relationships as a joint function of the sex similarity of relational partners (same or opposite) and the meta-theory used to define relationships (positivist or constructivist). The primary hypothesis of the study was that within both meta-theoretical frameworks the characteristics of people's different same-sex relationships would be relatively similar, whereas the characteristics of their different opposite-sex relationships would differ. This hypothesis also included the prediction that the social constructions applied to opposite-sex relationships would be associated with more pronounced differences in relationship characteristics than the social constructions applied to same-sex relationships. The characteristics of relationships were measured using a variant of the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977).

The primary hypothesis was based on the assumption that norms for same-sex relationships are clearer and are more similar across different relationships than norms for opposite-sex relationships, and this greater similarity should be associated with greater similarity in the behaviors that occur within relationships. Research has suggested that the expectations and norms guiding the members of same-sex relationships are clearer and more congruent (at least at the molar level) than the expectations and norms guiding the members of opposite-sex relationships (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; O'Meara, 1989; Shotland & Craig, 1989). This greater clarity may be due to people's greater familiarity with members of the same sex. Same-sex interactions are more common than opposite-sex interactions and same-sex social networks are larger than opposite-sex networks (Nezlek et al., 1983; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). This greater familiarity may also be associated with greater routinization of same-sex relationships compared to opposite-sex relationships. Greater routinization would decrease the influence that the idiosyncratic characteristics of relational partners would have on the characteristics of a relationship.

This hypothesis was suggested also by Altman & Taylor's (1973) work on social penetration. They hypothesized that individuals' idiosyncratic (and less public) characteristics have a greater influence on the nature of more intimate relationships than they have on the nature of less intimate relationships. That is, the nature of less intimate relationships is more influenced by normative characteristics, characteristics that do not differ across individuals as much as more private and idiosyncratic characteristics. Thus, intimate relationships should be more distinct from one another than less intimate relationships are from one another. Previous research (Nezlek et al., 1983; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977) has found that opposite-sex interactions (and by implication, relationships) are more inti-

mate than same-sex interactions; so, idiosyncratic characteristics should be more influential in determining the characteristics of opposite- than same-sex interaction.

The present study also examined some of the implications of studying relationships using different definitions of relationships, an issue that is at the core of the study of personal relationships. Broadly speaking, two meta-theories, one more positivist and the other more constructivist, have figured prominently in research on personal relationships. Although there may not be a consensus among researchers as to what constitutes positivism or constructivism, for present purposes, positivist approaches were assumed to be those that rely upon overt or observable behaviors as measures of relationships, whereas constructivist approaches were assumed to be those that emphasize relationships as cognitive phenomena. Positivist researchers tend to define relationships in terms of the existence of certain behaviors, whereas constructivist researchers tend to define relationships in terms of people's cognitive constructions.

There is a long history of measuring and defining interpersonal relationships using positivist, behavioral criteria. Festinger et al.'s (1950) classic study of friendship formation used amount of contact as an important indicator of friendship. Many of the studies examining Byrne's (1971) reinforcement-based model of similarity and attraction used behaviors (or intended behaviors) as measures of attraction, and a behavioral emphasis remains in much contemporary research. Within the interdependence model (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), the joint behaviors of two people are posited to be important indicators of the existence of a relationship between them, and this is true also for the Relationships Closeness Inventory (Berscheid et al., 1989).

There is also a long history of using social constructivist approaches to defining relationships. These approaches assume that the significance and meaning of behaviors reside in individuals', not researchers', interpretations or representations of them (e.g. Harré & Secord, 1973). For example, Berger & Luckman (1966) described the importance of individuals' cognitive constructions and representations of their relationships, and a social constructivist framework is implicit in much contemporary research. Virtually all researchers who ask participants to describe a close friend or to bring a close friend to a study rely upon individuals' definitions (i.e. constructions) of their relationships, and in so doing, these researchers employ a constructivist framework. Fourteen of the 40 articles published in Volume 10 of the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* studied relationships such as close friends or romantic partners that were defined primarily by participants themselves, and this total does not include studies of only married couples.

Despite the differences between positivist and constructivist meta-theories, some research suggests that the relational partners identified by the two approaches are similar. For example, individuals spend more time with those whom they designate as close friends than they do with others (Hays, 1989; Reis & Wheeler, 1991), and this was expected to occur in the

present study. However, few studies have compared the characteristic behaviors of relationships using definitions of relationships derived from the two approaches. The present study did this by gathering data describing close personal relationships relying on definitions of relationships derived from both frameworks. Constructivist operationalizations of relationships were provided via participants' descriptions of the individuals with whom they had specific types of relationships, and positivist operationalizations were based upon the amount of contact participants had with others. Relationships were described using data obtained from a social interaction diary modeled after the RIR (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977).

Method

Participants were first- and third-year students attending the College of William & Mary. William & Mary is a residential institution, and all participants lived in dormitories or in apartments near campus. None lived with their families. The freshmen were introductory psychology students who had indicated that they were interested in participating in a study of social interaction. The juniors had been participants in a previous study on social interaction who had been recruited from introductory psychology classes in a similar fashion. A total of 181 students began the study; 7 were not included in the analyses because they did not follow instructions for maintaining the diary. Of the remaining 174 students, 104 were women and 70 were men. All were paid \$20 for participating.

Social interaction was measured using a variant of the RIR (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). Participants described the social interactions they had by indicating who their co-interactants were (using unique initials for each interactant) and the sex of each interactant. For interactions with more than three others, participants did not record individual initials; they indicated how many men and women were present. The length of each interaction also was reported. Participants rated each interaction on five dimensions: (a) intimacy/closeness, (b) enjoyment, (c) other's responsiveness, (d) confidence, and (e) influence.

These five dimensions were selected because they represented a distinction frequently made between the socioemotional and instrumental aspects of interaction (Bales, 1950). The intimacy, enjoyment and responsiveness ratings assessed the socioemotional dimension of interaction, and the confidence and influence ratings assessed the instrumental dimension. The five ratings were made using 9-point scales, with the following labels: 1 = not, 3 = slightly, 5 = somewhat, 7 = quite and 9 = very, labels that were chosen to represent roughly equal intervals according to research on the relative strength of modifiers (Cliff, 1959).

The instructions given to participants were modeled closely after those used in previous studies. See Nezlek & Wheeler (1984) for a detailed description of these instructions. Participants were told that the study concerned people's patterns of social interaction and that they would use a structured diary form to describe the social interactions they had that lasted 10 minutes or longer. An interaction was defined as any encounter with another person (or people) in which the participants attended to one another and adjusted their behavior in response to one another, a definition similar to Goffman's (1971) definition of

a 'social with'. Examples were provided to clarify what was an interaction (e.g. a conversation, dancing) and what was not an interaction (e.g. simply sitting next to someone in a lecture).

The various response categories on the RIR were discussed until participants understood their definitions and felt comfortable with the forms and the procedure. Closeness/intimacy was defined as 'how interpersonally close' an individual felt to his or her interactants, with specific mention that 'intimacy did not have to include a sexual component'. Enjoyment was defined as 'how pleasurable or satisfying' the participant found each interaction to be. Responsiveness was defined as 'how responsive to your needs and feelings you felt the people in the interaction were . . . the extent to which other people changed their behavior to accommodate your particular needs and feelings'. Influence was defined in terms of the extent to which the participant felt that he or she 'controlled the interaction (e.g. initiation, determining what was to be done, where to go, etc.)', and confidence was defined as 'how self-assured you were and how competent you felt'.

To facilitate accuracy of recording, participants were encouraged to complete the records at least once a day at a uniform time such as just before going to sleep. They were given a bound pad of interaction forms sufficient for the duration of the study and an instruction booklet that repeated the instructions provided during the meeting. After 3 days, a research assistant contacted them to see if they were having any problems maintaining the diary; none were reported. Throughout the study, a collaborative, non-deceptive atmosphere was maintained, and the confidentiality of the records was emphasized and closely guarded.

At the conclusion of the record-keeping period, participants were interviewed individually about the difficulties, ambiguities and potential sources of inaccuracy in their data. They were encouraged to be straightforward when describing how they maintained the diary, and they were told that they would be paid regardless of what they said about how they had maintained their diaries. Participants maintained their diaries an average of 16.7 days, and they reported updating their diaries an average of 1.8 times per day and spending an average of 15.4 minutes per day doing this.

The difficulty of maintaining the diary, the interference caused by keeping the diary, and the accuracy of the diary were rated on 9-point scales (where 1 = not, 5 = somewhat, and 9 = very). The mean difficulty was 3.9, average interference was 2.2, and average accuracy was 7.2. On average, participants reported missing less than 10 percent of their interactions. These responses suggest that participants followed the instructions for maintaining the diary and that their diaries were accurate representations of their social lives during the diary-keeping period. Moreover, these data are very similar to those describing participants in other RIR studies (Nezlek et al., 1983). Following these interviews, participants were paid and any further questions they had about the study were answered.

Friendships and close relationships were defined using two criteria, behavioral and constructed. The behavioral definition was based on number of interactions that participants had with different people. The most frequently mentioned interactants are referred to as behaviorally defined best friends. In addition, interactions with the second and third most frequently mentioned interactants were examined also. Only two additional behaviorally defined friends were considered because previous research (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977)

has found that amount of interaction drops sharply after the third most frequently mentioned interactant. Behavioral definitions were provided separately for same- and opposite-sex others.

Socially constructed definitions were provided by participants in post-study interviews. Participants indicated who was their best same-sex friend, and this person is referred to as role-designated best friend. They were asked also if they were involved in a 'steady, ongoing romantic relationship of six weeks or more', and if they were, they indicated the identity of this romantic partner. This person is referred to as romantic partner. No stipulation was made regarding the sex of romantic partners, and no participant indicated that he or she had a same-sex romantic partner or that he or she did not have a heterosexual orientation. However, although campus surveys have indicated consistently that less than 10 percent of students are not heterosexual, it is possible that some participants were not heterosexuals. Therefore, it is possible that some of the analyses presented in this paper confound (for some participants) sexual orientation, sex of relationship and nature of relationship.

Separate sets of measures were calculated to describe participants' interactions with different relational partners as defined above. Affective quality was measured by computing averages for the five ratings of intimacy, enjoyment, responsiveness, influence and confidence. Quantity of interaction within the relationship was measured in three ways: (a) the mean number of interactions per day, (b) the average amount of time spent per day interacting with others (in minutes) and (c) the percent of all interactions that involved specific relational partners (e.g. percent of interactions involving romantic partners). The structure of interaction was measured by the average length of interactions (in minutes) and the percent of interactions involving a relational partner that were dyads. Summary measures were calculated using a version of RIRAP, a set of programs written specifically to summarize data generated by the RIR (Nezlek & Wheeler, 1984).

It is important to note that the targets of inference for the analyses reported in this article were relationships, not specific interactions within relationships. Therefore, participants contributed equally to the final analyses regardless of how many interactions they had with specific interactants. This procedure is identical to that used in most previous RIR research. See Wheeler & Nezlek (1977), Nezlek et al. (1983), Nezlek & Wheeler (1984) and Reis & Wheeler (1991) for descriptions of this procedure and its rationale.

Results

The principal analyses used to test the hypotheses of the study were MANOVAs followed by univariate ANOVAs. Separate MANOVAs were done on: (a) the three measures of the socioemotional dimension of interaction, enjoyment, intimacy and responsiveness; (b) the two measures of the instrumental dimension, influence and confidence; (c) the three measures of amount of contact, interactions per day, time per day and percent; and (d) the two measures describing the structure of interaction, average length and percent of dyads. Although no hypotheses were formulated regarding differences in interaction patterns as a function of the academic year of participants, whenever possible the analyses presented below were repeated with academic year included as a between-subjects factor. These analyses did not alter any of the effects presented below and are not presented.

TABLE 1
Ratings of interactions with behaviorally defined friends

	Sex sim.	Relative freq.			Fr.	Fr*S
		1	2	3		
<i>Socioemotional dimension</i>						
Enjoyment	Same	6.6	6.5	6.5	9.4***	4.5***
	Opposite	7.1	6.7	6.6		
Intimacy	Same	6.6	6.2	6.3	22.6***	6.6***
	Opposite	7.1	6.3	6.2		
Responsiveness	Same	6.6	6.4	6.6	9.1***	6.1***
	Opposite	7.0	6.8	6.6		
<i>Instrumental dimension</i>						
Influence	Same	6.5	6.4	6.6	6.1***	2.4*
	Opposite	6.9	6.6	6.7		
Confidence	Same	7.2	7.0	7.1	9.4***	2.2
	Opposite	7.3	7.0	7.0		

The *F*-ratios for the univariate tests of the frequency main effect are in the column labelled 'Fr.', and the *F*-ratios for the univariate tests of the frequency-sex similarity interaction are in the column labelled 'Fr*S'. The degrees of freedom for the univariate tests were 2,340.

* NS ($p < .10$); *** $p < .01$.

Differences in relationships defined behaviorally were examined via analyses of measures describing interactions that involved the most frequently mentioned interactant, the second most frequently mentioned interactant and the third most frequently mentioned interactant, separately for same- and opposite-sex interactants. These data were analyzed with a series of 2 (participant sex) \times 2 (sex similarity: same- vs opposite-sex) \times 3 (frequency of appearance) MANOVAs with sex similarity and frequency of appearance as within-subjects factors.

There was a significant main effect for frequency of appearance in the MANOVAs of the three ratings of the socio-emotional dimension ($F(6,165) = 7.5, p < .01$); the two ratings of the instrumental dimension ($F(4,167) = 5.5, p < .01$); the three measures of quantity of interaction ($F(6,166) = 110.5, p < .01$); and the two measures of the structure of interactions ($F(4,167) = 27.4, p < .01$). In confirmation of the primary hypothesis of the study, there was a significant interaction of sex similarity and frequency of appearance in the analyses of the measures of the socioemotional dimension ($F(6,165) = 4.5, p = .01$); the quantity of interaction ($F(6,166) = 7.7, p < .01$); and the structure of interactions ($F(4,167) = 7.7, p < .01$). The means and results of the univariate follow-up analyses for these multivariate analyses are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Regardless of the effect or the variable being considered, the significant main effects and interactions involving frequency were due primarily to charac-

TABLE 2
Quantity and structure of interactions with behaviorally defined friends

Sex sim.		Relative freq.			Fr.	Fr*S
		1	2	3		
<i>Quantity</i>						
Per day	Same	1.1	.6	.4	275.0***	7.1***
	Opposite	1.1	.3	.2		
Time/day	Same	63	34	22	217.4***	15.7***
	Opposite	73	19	11		
Percent	Same	.26	.15	.10	410.8***	8.5***
	Opposite	.25	.08	.05		
<i>Structure</i>						
Length	Same	60	56	60	2.8*	<1
	Opposite	66	60	63		
Dyads	Same	.52	.44	.42	40.8***	11.3***
	Opposite	.69	.41	.42		

The *F*-ratios for the univariate tests of the frequency main effect are in the column labelled 'Fr.', and the *F*-ratios for the univariate tests of the frequency-sex similarity interaction are in the column labelled 'Fr*S'. The degrees of freedom for the per day, time/day and percent univariate tests were 2,342, and they were 2,340 for the length and dyad tests. Differences in degrees of freedom were due to the fact that one participant did not have a third opposite-sex interactant, and he was excluded from the dyad and length analyses.

* NS ($p < .10$); *** $p < .01$.

teristics of interactions with the most frequently mentioned same- and opposite-sex interactants. This was confirmed by computing the sums of squares that were attributable to a contrast comparing the most frequently mentioned friend to the other two friends, for each significant effect involving frequency. The percent of sums of squares of the frequency main effects attributable to this contrast was 95 percent or greater in the analyses of all variables except influence (79%). For the frequency-sex similarity interactions, the contrast accounted for 90 percent or more of the sums of squares of all variables except responsiveness (43%) and influence (84%). These data clearly indicate that interactions with the most frequently mentioned interactant were distinct from interactions with other members of participants' social networks, and the next set of analyses focused on interactions with these individuals.

One of the hypotheses of the present study was that interactions in opposite-sex relationships would vary more as a function of the social construction of these relationships than would interactions in same-sex relationships. One way to test this hypothesis would be to conduct an ANOVA which compared participants whose behaviorally defined best friends were also role-assigned to participants whose behaviorally defined best friends were not role-assigned (a

between-subjects factor), with sex similarity as a within-subjects factor. Unfortunately, such analyses would have included only the 93 participants for whom behaviorally defined same- and opposite-sex close relationships were both role-designated or not role-designated. The 81 participants for whom there was a mixed pattern (one behaviorally defined relationship role-designated and one not) could not be assigned unambiguously to the two groups of the between factor.

In light of this naturally occurring pattern of relationships, another strategy was used. Interactions in same- and opposite-sex relationships were analyzed separately, and the results of these separate analyses were compared non-statistically. This strategy allowed all participants to be included in each analysis, making the statistical tests more powerful and the results more representative of the sample of participants.

In the post-study interviews, 169 of 174 participants indicated that they had a same-sex best friend. For 106 of these participants this role-designated same-sex best friend was the most frequently mentioned same-sex interactant, for 31 the designated best friend was the second most frequently mentioned interactant, for 12 the designated best friend was the third most frequently mentioned interactant, and for 20 participants the designated best friend did not live on campus and did not appear in the diary. This pattern suggests that the two approaches to defining same-sex relationships provided similar definitions. That is, role-designated best friends tended to be the person participants saw the most frequently. A chi-squared analysis found that role-designated best same-sex friends were not randomly distributed among the four categories, i.e. three most frequent same-sex interactants and not in diary ($\chi^2(3) = 124.1, p < .01$). In addition, there were no differences between the sexes in these distributions ($\chi^2(3) = 4.1, NS$).

Two types of analyses were done to explore further the relationships between the two approaches to defining same-sex friendships. First, interactions with role-designated best friends who had different relative frequencies of appearance were compared using a series of 2 (participant sex) \times 2 (best friend most frequent vs best friend second or third most frequent) MANOVAs on the two sets of affective measures and measures of the quantity and structure of interactions. Second, three sets of MANOVAs were done that held relative frequency constant and varied relationship status. One set of analyses compared most frequent interactants who were designated as best friends with those who were not, a second set compared second most frequently mentioned interactants who were best friends with those who were not, and a third set provided the same comparison of third most frequently mentioned interactants. The only reliable effect for role designation in these additional analyses was a main effect in the MANOVA of interaction quantity with most frequently mentioned interactants ($F(3,168) = 9.8, p < .01$). Participants had more contact with most frequent interactants who were designated as best friends than those who were not designated as best friends.

Considerable previous research has focused on sex differences in same-sex friendships. To examine differences between the sexes, interactions with role-designated best friends (irrespective of frequency of appearance) were analyzed with a series of one-way MANOVAs with participant sex as a between-subjects factor. Women's interactions with their same-sex best friends were socioemotionally richer than men's ($F(3,170) = 2.7, p < .01$), although the sexes did not differ in terms of the instrumental dimension of interaction

($F(2,171) = 1.5$, NS). As can be seen from these means in Table 3, the differences in socioemotionality were due to differences in intimacy and responsiveness. There was no sex difference in enjoyment of interactions with same-sex best friends. The analyses of amount of interaction found that women spent more time with their same-sex best friends than men did ($F(3,170) = 4.4$, $p < .01$), although there was no reliable main effect for sex in the analysis of structure of interactions ($F(2,171) = 1.9$, NS). The means and univariate follow-up tests for these analyses are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 3
Ratings of interactions with socially constructed same-sex best friends

	W	M	Sex
<i>Socioemotional dimension</i>			
Enjoyment	6.7	6.6	<1
Intimacy	6.8	6.4	3.7**
Responsiveness	6.7	6.4	3.7**
<i>Instrumental dimension</i>			
Influence	6.6	6.4	1.8
Confidence	7.1	7.1	<1

The F -ratios for the univariate tests of the main effect for participant sex are in the column labelled 'Sex'. For all of the univariate tests the degrees of freedom were 1,172.

** $p < .05$.

TABLE 4
Quantity and structure of interactions with socially constructed same-sex best friends

	W	M	Sex
<i>Quantity</i>			
Per day	1.2	.8	9.1***
Time/day	64	51	3.7**
Percent	.26	.23	2.1
<i>Structure</i>			
Length	55	62	3.2*
Dyads	.52	.50	<1

The F -ratios for the univariate tests of the main effect for participant sex are in the column labelled 'Sex'. For all of the univariate tests the degrees of freedom were 1,172.

* NS ($p < .10$); ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

In the post-study interviews, 96 of 174 participants indicated that they were involved in a steady romantic relationship, and all of these participants indicated that this was a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. The average duration of these relationships was 15.5 months. Using 9-point scales

(1 = low, 9 = high), participants indicated how much they loved their partners and how much they believed their partners loved them. The averages were 7.5 and 7.6. In addition, 87 percent of those involved in a romantic relationship indicated that they did not 'date' other persons.

For 79 of the 96 participants who were romantically involved, the romantic partner was the most frequently mentioned opposite-sex interactant, for 8 the romantic partner was the second most frequently mentioned interactant, for 1 participant the romantic partner was the third most frequently mentioned interactant, and for 8 participants the romantic partner did not appear in the diary. Similar to the results describing close same-sex friends, this pattern suggests that the two approaches to defining close opposite-sex relationships overlapped, at least for those who were romantically involved. A chi-squared analysis found that romantic partners were not randomly distributed among the four categories, i.e. three most frequent opposite-sex interactants and not in diary ($\chi^2(3) = 1179.3, p < .01$). In addition, there were no differences between the sexes in these distributions ($\chi^2(3) = 2.7, NS$).

Differences between opposite-sex relationships that were designated as romantic relationships and those that were not were analyzed with a series of 2 (participant sex) \times 2 (romantic relationship or not) MANOVAs. For individuals who indicated that they were involved in a romantic relationship, measures describing interactions with these romantic partners were used in these analyses. For individuals who indicated that they were not involved in a romantic relationship or who did not interact with their romantic partners, measures describing interactions with their most frequently mentioned opposite-sex interactant were used.

A MANOVA of the three measures of the socioemotional dimension of interaction produced a significant main effect for type of relationship ($F(3,168) = 8.4, p < .01$). Follow-up univariate ANOVAs of the three individual variables produced significant main effects for type of relationship. However, this MANOVA main effect was qualified by an interaction of participant sex and type of relationship ($F(3,168) = 2.4, NS, (p = .07)$), and all three of the follow-up univariate ANOVAs produced significant sex by relationship type interactions. As can be seen from the means presented in Table 5, the main effect was due to the fact that participants involved in romantic relationships had socioemotionally more positive interactions within their close opposite-sex relationships than participants who were not involved in a romantic relationship. The qualifying interactions occurred because this difference was greater for women than for men.

A MANOVA of the two measures of the instrumental dimension of interaction also produced a significant interaction of participant sex and type of relationship ($F(2,169) = 3.3, p < .05$), as did the follow-up univariate ANOVAs of the individual variables. As can be seen from the means presented in Table 5, this interaction occurred primarily because differences in perceived instrumentality in close opposite-sex relationships varied much more as a function of the type of relationship for women than for men. This pattern is similar to that found in the analysis of the measures of the socioemotional dimension.

A MANOVA of the amount of contact participants had in their close opposite-sex relationships produced a significant main effect for type of relationship ($F(3,168) = 31.4, p < .01$). As can be seen from the means presented in Table 6, participants involved in romantic relationships had more contact with their close opposite-sex relations than did participants who were

TABLE 5
Ratings of interactions in close opposite-sex relationships

	Type of rel.	W	M	Type	Type*S
<i>Socioemotional dimension</i>					
Enjoyment	Non-romantic	6.8	7.1	4.1**	3.9**
	Romantic	7.4	7.2		
Intimacy	Non-romantic	6.3	7.0	20.5***	7.3***
	Romantic	7.7	7.4		
Responsiveness	Non-romantic	6.7	7.1	3.1*	3.8**
	Romantic	7.3	7.0		
<i>Instrumental dimension</i>					
Influence	Non-romantic	6.5	7.0	2.7*	5.8***
	Romantic	7.2	6.9		
Confidence	Non-romantic	7.0	7.5	<1	5.1**
	Romantic	7.5	7.3		

There were 54 women and 34 men involved in romantic relationships, and 50 women and 36 men who were not involved. The *F*-ratios testing the main effects for type of relationship are in the column labelled 'Type', and the *F*-ratios testing the interactions of type and participant sex are in the column labelled 'Type*S'. For all of the univariate tests the degrees of freedom were 1,170.

*NS ($p < .10$); ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

not involved in a romantic relationship. A MANOVA of the structure of interaction also produced a significant main effect for type of relationship ($F(2,169) = 18.8, p < .01$). Participants involved in romantic relationships had longer interactions and more dyadic interactions within their close opposite-sex relationships than participants who were not involved in a romantic relationship. Univariate follow-up tests found significant main effects for relationship type in the analyses of all the individual variables in both of these multivariate analyses. However, in contrast to the results of the analyses of the socioemotional and instrumental ratings, there were no significant interactions of participant sex and relationship type in the analyses of quantity and structure of interaction.

The important differences in social interactions associated with the designation of an opposite-sex relationship as romantic raised a question regarding the generalizability of the statistical interactions of frequency and gender similarity found in previous analyses (Tables 1 and 2). Was the greater variability among frequent opposite-sex interactants, compared to that among same-sex interactants, due to the fact that romantic relationships were included in these analyses? To address this question, the original analyses were repeated with romantic involvement as a between-subjects factor, a series of 2 (participant sex) $\times 2$ (sex similarity: same- vs opposite-sex) $\times 3$ (frequency of appearance) $\times 2$ (most frequent opposite-sex interactant romantic partner or not) MANOVAs with gender similarity and frequency of appearance as within-subjects

TABLE 6
Quantity and structure of interaction in close opposite-sex relationships

	Type of rel.		Type
<i>Quantity</i>			
Per day	Non-romantic	.5	70.4***
	Romantic	1.6	
Time/day	Non-romantic	33	75.3***
	Romantic	114	
Percent	Non-romantic	.14	90.2***
	Romantic	.38	
<i>Structure</i>			
Length	Non-romantic	59	8.5***
	Romantic	72	
Dyads	Non-romantic	.59	34.7***
	Romantic	.88	

There were 88 participants who were involved in romantic relationships, and 86 who were not. The *F*-ratios of the type main effect are in the column labelled 'Type'; all had 1,170 degrees of freedom.

*** $p < .01$.

factors. These analyses excluded the nine participants for whom the romantic partner was not the most frequent opposite-sex interactant.

No interaction of romantic involvement, sex similarity and frequency of appearance was found in the analyses of the affective measures. The patterns found in the original analyses did not differ as a function of romantic involvement (all *ps* NS). The analyses of quantity of social interaction did produce an interaction of involvement, similarity and frequency ($F(6,156) = 16.6$, $p < .01$). However, follow-up simple effects analyses found significant similarity by frequency interactions for those who were involved ($F(6,156) = 20.0$, $p < .01$), and those who were not ($F(6,156) = 4.0$, $p < .01$). The triple interaction was due to the fact that similarity–frequency interaction (a relatively greater decline in contact among opposite- than same-sex friends) was more pronounced for those who were involved. The analyses of structure of social interaction also produced an interaction of involvement, similarity and frequency ($F(4,156) = 9.5$, $p < .01$). Follow-up simple effects analyses found a significant similarity by frequency interaction only for those who were involved ($F(4,156) = 17.5$, $p < .01$), due to the fact that decreases (as a function of frequency of appearance) in length and percent of interactions that were dyads were greater for opposite- than same-sex interactants. For those who were not involved, these decreases were similar.

Discussion

The present study compared the descriptions of personal relationships using two definitions, a behaviorally focused one based on the amount of

social contact people had with others, and a constructivist one, that relied upon people's nominations of those with whom they were close friends or romantic partners. The individuals identified as close relations using the two criteria were similar. Individuals with whom participants had more contact were more likely to be described as close friends and romantic partners than were individuals with whom participants had less contact.

The results of the study supported the primary hypothesis of the study and corroborated previous research (Nezlek, 1993). In terms of the interactions that occurred within different relationships, differences among opposite-sex relationships were greater than differences among same-sex relationships. Except for perceived intimacy, the affective quality and instrumentality of interactions with same-sex others with whom participants interacted frequently did not differ as a function of relative frequency of interaction or the designation of these individuals as 'best' same-sex friends. In contrast, the affective quality of interactions and the quantity of interactions with opposite-sex others varied as a function of the relative frequency of interaction, for participants who had an established romantic relationship and for those who did not.

The greater variability among opposite-sex friends, even for people who were not involved in a romantic relationship, may have been due to the fact that some, if not many, of these 'non-romantic' opposite-sex relationships may not have been platonic either. Pilkington & Bilbro (1993) reported that interactions with opposite-sex platonic friends were relatively uncommon, even for people who reported having an active, ongoing, platonic opposite-sex friendship. Participants who were involved in 'dating relationships' may have considered their relationships to be romantic in some sense (or pre-romantic), but when asked, they did not describe these relationships as formal 'romantic relationships'. These relationships may have been a mix of platonic friendship and romance, making them distinct from other opposite-sex relationships. Such a distinction would not have been applied to same-sex relationships, because for the vast majority of participants, same-sex others were not viewed as possible romantic partners.

Although same-sex relationships were not differentiated as sharply from one another as opposite-sex relationships, interactions with the three most frequent same-sex interactants did vary in important ways. Follow-up analyses revealed that men and women found more intimacy ($F(1,172) = 9.4, p < .01$) and had more dyadic interactions ($F(1,172) = 14.5, p < .01$) with their most frequent same-sex interactant than with their second and third most frequent same-sex interactants, and there were no significant interactions with participant sex in these analyses ($F_s < 1$). Although overall, women had more dyadic interactions with their same-sex friends and found these interactions to be more intimate than men did, the declines in average intimacy and the percent of dyadic interactions as a function of amount of contact were similar for the sexes. These findings suggest that intimacy is a salient characteristic of men's same-sex interactions, and they lend support to Wright's (1988) argument that recent

research has down-played the similarities between the sexes in the roles that intimacy plays in close relationships.

Perhaps the most striking result of the study was the variability in the characteristics of opposite-sex relationships associated with the designation of an opposite-sex relationship as a romantic relationship. Individuals of both sexes who were involved in a romantic relationship spent much more time with their romantic partner than they spent with other opposite-sex persons and than people who were not romantically involved spent with their most frequent opposite-sex interactant. Interactions within romantic relationships also tended to be longer, and they were less likely to include other people than interactions within opposite-sex relationships that were not designated as romantic.

Romantic relationships represent a particularly rewarding form of association, and once they are established, people evidently spend considerable amounts of time with their romantic partners. In addition, the greater contact within these relationships may have been either required or promoted by the shared exclusivity that characterized them. Participants' romantic partners and role-designated best same-sex friends were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to identify their romantic partners and best same-sex friends. All of the 46 romantic partners who returned this questionnaire indicated that the participant was his or her romantic partner. In contrast, only 60 percent of the 78 role-designated best same-sex friends who returned a questionnaire indicated that the participant was his or her best same-sex friend. These romantic relationships also tended to be exclusive. Approximately 88 percent of participants and their romantic partners indicated that they were not dating anyone else. Although comparable questions about the exclusivity of same-sex friendships were not asked, it seems reasonable to assume that most participants had more than one close same-sex friend.

Differences in affective reactions to interactions with romantic partners and other opposite-sex friends differed between the sexes. For men, interactions with their most frequent opposite-sex interactant were equivalently (and highly) affectively rewarding and instrumentally positive whether this woman was a romantic partner or not. In contrast, for women, interactions with their most frequent opposite-sex interactant were more affectively rewarding and instrumentally positive if this man was a romantic partner than if he was not. This difference between men and women is consistent with the suggestion from much research that women are more attuned to the subtleties of social interaction than men, and it suggests that the designation of an opposite-sex relationship as romantic has broader implications for women's behaviors than for men's.

The conclusion that the social construction of a relationship as romantic is more important to women than men concurs with Germaine de Staël's observation that 'Love is the whole history of a woman's life; it is but an episode in a man's' (*De l'influence des passions*, 1796, as cited in Kaplan, 1992). However, men were not totally insensitive to distinctions among the relationships they had with their female companions. They did distinguish

(affectively and instrumentally) interactions with their most frequent female companion from interactions with other women, and like women, they spent more time with opposite-sex others who were romantic partners.

There are important limitations to the present study. One is the nature of the sample: the relationships of college students may differ from the relationships of other groups of people. Differences between interactions with life-long best and other same-sex friends may be greater than the differences found in this study between best and other same-sex friends. A second limitation is that the diary form used in the study measured only certain aspects of interaction, socioemotionality, instrumentality and quantity. Diaries that measure other aspects of interaction might produce different results.

The study is limited also by the nature of the relationships it examined. First, because the sample in this study was predominantly (if not exclusively) heterosexual, the same-sex close relationships participants described were platonic, and all their romantic relationships were with members of the opposite sex. Most of the research on romantic relationships has concerned opposite-sex relationships, and relatively little has concerned same-sex romantic relationships. Moreover, much of the research on non-romantic friendships has concerned same-sex friendships, whereas relatively little has concerned opposite-sex friendships (O'Meara, 1989). Clearly, more attention needs to be paid to same-sex romantic relationships and opposite-sex friendships.

Furthermore, although almost all participants indicated that they had a same-sex best friend, different participants may have used different criteria to define this same-sex friendship. The use of different criteria to define 'best friend' may be accompanied by different patterns of social interactions. For example, people who define best friends in terms of their ability to confide in someone may have more intimate interactions with best friends than people who define best friends as activity partners. In the present study, because participants were not asked on what basis they defined their best friendships, it was not possible to compare the characteristics of different types of best friendships. Future research will need to study how uniformly people construct close relationships and how differences in these constructions are related to the nature of close relationships.

An important question raised by the present study, therefore, is that of how relationships should be defined and, by implication, studied. More specifically, how appropriate is it to study a relationship by studying the interactions that occur within the context of that relationship? Some theorists would argue that it is totally appropriate. For example, Allport's (1967) Event-Structure Theory posited that relationships consist of repeated or predictable cycles of behavior, and within such a framework, studying interactions is perfectly appropriate. On the other hand, if relationships are defined more in terms of the cognitive constructions of those who constitute the relationship, studying individual interactions may cause one

to lose the forest for the trees. There may be more to a relationship than the social interactions that occur within that relationship.

As discussed by Duck (1990), relationship researchers need to pay more attention to the assumptions they make about how they define and study relationships. The present results suggest that the conclusions one reaches about relationships will differ as a function of how relationships are defined and what characteristics of these relationships are examined. It is unlikely that a consensus will come to exist regarding the 'correct' way to study relationships. This does not mean, however, that we can ignore differences in assumptions about how to define and measure relationships and the differing implications of these assumptions.

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