



Relationship Satisfaction, Social Support, and Psychological Well-Being in a Sample of Italian Lesbian and Gay Individuals

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ABSTRACT



This study attempted to measure relationship satisfaction, social support, and psychological well-being in a sample of 235 Italian lesbian and gay individuals (46.8% were female, and 53.2% were male, age $M = 32$) with an average age of 32 years. We administered a research protocol composed of the Gay and Lesbian Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Belous & Wampler, 2016), the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995), and the Outcome Questionnaire 45.2 (Lambert et al., 1996). We found evidence of reliability and validity, with some cultural differences. Our results revealed that the dimensions emerging from the exploratory factor analysis corresponded well to the two dimensions proposed by Belous & Wampler. Data also revealed that total scores of GLRSS and scores of GRLSS Satisfaction Scale are significantly interrelated with all RDAS scales, and that no significant relationships were observed between GLRSS Social support scale and RDAS. The correlations of the GLRSS scales with the level of psychological distress measured by the OQ-45 revealed that less satisfied and less supported individuals tend to suffer more psychological, interpersonal and social difficulties. The findings indicate that the Italian Version of GRLSS can be used with clinical, non-clinical, and research samples for Italian-speaking same gender couples.

KEYWORDS

Cultural adaptation; gay and lesbian relationships; relationship satisfaction; social support; validation study

Most recent social research on same gender couples has focused on the ways in which gay and lesbian couples live in their relationships – specifically focusing on intimacy, affection, care, solidarity and mutual obligations (Ferrari, 2015). In studying same gender couples, we can begin to deepen our understanding of how the establishment of family relationships and the transformation of gender roles is impacting the well-being of people in these relationships (Weber, 2008). Currently our understanding of relational models and the ways in which people chose to pair up into romantic dyads or make the choice to become parents are in deep transformation; it is important to have more reasonable and valid ways of objectively exploring the functioning of these relationships (Belous, 2015; Belous & Wampler, 2016; Roseneil, Crowhurst, Hellesund, Santon, & Stoilova, 2013).

Social stigma against same gender relationships can create minority stress in the lives of lesbian and gay couples, but social support from one's romantic partner seems to be a strong protective factor (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017); recent studies have emphasized the buffering role of romantic relationships to the experience of minority stress (Baams, Bos, & Jonas, 2014). The same

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stress-buffering effect of the couple relationship has been found in studies of psychological distress (Whitton, Dyar, Newcomb, & Mustanski, 2018). Social research has shown that the self-perceived health of gay and lesbian persons is significantly lower than that perceived by heterosexual persons (Liu, Reczek, & Brown, 2013), and that it varies significantly in relation to the legal recognition within their affective and relational reality (Kail, Acosta, & Wright, 2015). Gay and lesbian adults in intimate relationships have lower rates of depression than single gay and lesbian adults (Thomeer, Reczek, & Umberson, 2015); conversely, individuals that live in countries where same gender relationships are legally and socially recognized experience less depressive symptoms and lower levels of stress (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010; Hatzenbuehler, Keyes, & McLaughlin, 2011; Cherlin, 2013) compared to those who live in countries where their relationship is not recognized. To confirm this data, some researchers revealed that one of the main factors that positively effect personal and relationship satisfaction in same gender couples are the self-disclosure of sexual orientation and the degree of outness as a couple (Knoble & Linville, 2012; Twist, Bergdall, Belous, & Maier, 2017; Sommantico, De Rosa, & Parrello, 2018), which is primarily effected through the various laws that offer the couple legitimization and greater visibility, such as the civil union (Lannutti, 2018; Riggle, Wickham, Rostosky, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2017).

The purpose of these studies focused on the importance that research examine the factors that contribute to adaptive relationships among same gender couples, reducing specific forms of psychological stress associated with the marginalized social status of the same gender partnered individuals (Scott, Whitton, & Buzzella, 2019). The problem with this structure of research design is that the focus remains on contrasting stereotypes – specifically the heterosexist idea that assumptions can be made in which gay and lesbian relationships are ‘dysfunctional’ or different than heterosexual relationships. Empirical research has revealed that the relational functioning of same and different sex couples is quite similar; especially in respect to the ‘standard’ variables involved in the formation and regulation of dyadic processes: couple satisfaction, conflict management, physical intimacy, affective and emotional closeness, anxiety connected to separation periods (Kurdek, 2004, 2006, 2009; Markey, Markey, Nave, & August, 2014). In both types of couples, perceived satisfaction levels increase when partners have common values and when power distribution is equal (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Some studies also showed that relationship stages and processes were similar to heterosexuals, but gay and lesbian subjective experiences were characterized by some additional stress on the relationship, as for example lack of social support, more difficulties in plans to form families and to have a child, and low relationship visibility (Macapagal, Greene, Rivera, & Mustanski, 2015). It has also been shown that the primary negative predictor of couple satisfaction in both couple types are the presence of stereotyped gender roles rather than the sexual orientation identity of the partners (Baiocco et al., 2013; Borneskog, Lampic, Sydsjö, Bladh, & Skoog Svanberg, 2014, Salvati, Pistella, & Baiocco, 2018).

The literature also highlighted some specific differences between the two types of relationships, mainly related to communication, family functioning, and the division of domestic work. Same gender couples (as compared to heterosexual couples) are more likely to communicate effectively, to resolve conflicts in a favorable way, and to maintain a positive tone during the discussion (Baiocco et al., 2013; Chiari & Borghi, 2009; Gottman et al., 2003). Gay and lesbian couples also divide their household tasks in a more egalitarian way, through daily negotiation and according to partner preferences and commitments - and not on the basis of predefined role models based on gender identity (Bertone, 2009; Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008; Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004).

Other studies revealed higher levels of relational satisfaction and lower levels of conflict in gay and lesbian couples than heterosexual couples (Borneskog et al., 2014; Carone, Baiocco, Ioverno, Chirumbolo, & Lingiardi, 2017; Lampis & De Simone, 2017). This data could be interpreted as the result of the greater equity in the allocation of family responsibilities, and as a benefit of the use of negotiation strategies in the conflict management style of each partner. Other studies

instead revealed that gay and lesbian couples experienced higher levels of conflict and lower relationship satisfaction, when influenced by social stigma and lack of social support (Baiocco, Argalia, & Laghi, 2014; Frost, 2011; Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006). Lack of support from family and friends can lead partners to live their life in the hiding, with the significant emotional consequences that this involves (Baiocco, Argalia, & Lakes, 2014; Baiocco et al., 2015; Belous & Wampler, 2016). A positive relationship with a supportive partner can decrease the effect of this lack of support from others (Claussell & Roisman, 2009; Frost, 2011; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Kurdek, 2008), but different studies revealed that low levels of support are connected to lower levels of relationship cohesion and satisfaction (Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, & Begin, 2003; Gallor & Fassinger, 2010; Rostosky et al., 2004; Smith & Brown, 1997), which in turn can lead to more risky sexual behavior and mental health problems (Ariel & McPherson, 2000; Green, 2000; Meyer, 1995, 2003), as well as influence the decision to adopt or have children (Goldberg & Smith, 2008).

How did studies examine relationship functioning of same gender couples? The building of the gay and lesbian relationship satisfaction scale

Most researchers do not take into account the specificity of lesbian and gay couples' unique dynamics (Belous & Wampler, 2016). Gay and lesbian partners have to manage stigma, secrecy, lack of family support and social acceptance at much higher rates than opposite gendered partners (Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011; Meyer, 2003). Research has revealed the importance of refining research and intervention methodologies to better analyze the complexity and challenges that non-heterosexual families are faced with (Fruggeri, 2016; Mazzoni, 2016; Nicolò, 2016). However, measures that are used to explore gay and lesbian couples' dynamics were developed without consideration of specific gay and lesbian populations and do not account for systemic variables (Keown-Belous, 2012). An example of the isomorphic assumption of similarity between lesbian and gay couples and heterosexual couples is the use in different studies aimed to explore lesbian and gay couple relationships (Baiocco et al., 2013; Carone et al., 2017; Kurdek, 2009; Lampis & De Simone, 2017) of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), a tool developed to assess couple cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction in heterosexual partners. Exploring same gender couple dynamics with instruments designed and validated with heterosexual samples is inherently discriminatory, in that it turns a blind eye to the unique experiences and context of the same gender relationship. From the consideration of the lack of reliable and valid instruments to measure same gender relationships and/or social support systems, Belous and Wampler (2016) developed a measure of relationship satisfaction with a large population of lesbian and gay (LG) respondents: The Gay and Lesbian Relationship Satisfaction Scale (GLRSS). The GLRSS was developed starting from the Relationship Assessment Measure for Same-Sex Couples (RAMSSC, Burgoyne, 2001), the only instrument present in literature at the time. The final version of the GLRSS was comprised of 24 items divided into two subscales: Relationship Satisfaction (eigenvalue = 5.296, % variance = 22.1%) and Social Support (eigenvalue = 2.732, % variance = 11.38%). The authors also found evidence for both convergent and discriminant construct validity (Belous & Wampler, 2016).

There was a significant positive correlation between the GLRSS scores and the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores (Busby et al., 1995) and significant negative correlations between the GLRSS total and subscale scores and the total and all subscales of the Outcome Questionnaire-45.2 (Lambert et al., 1996). We are aware of only one recent study that used GLRSS in the Italian context. This study examined the psychometric properties of the instrument with an Italian population but was focused on the relationship between gay and lesbian relationship satisfaction and internalized sexual stigma (Sommantico, De Rosa, Donizetti, & Parrello, 2019). It was found that internalized sexual stigma was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and that lesbians, younger people, and participants in civil unions showed higher levels of relationship

satisfaction, while participants in long-term relationships, as well as in civil unions, showed higher levels of perceived social support.

The present study

Italian culture is still strongly characterized by a hegemonic gender order that often dominates through constantly reinforced beliefs of gender binarism (De Simone, Putzu, Lasio, & Serri, 2018; De Simone & Scano, 2018). In recent years the effects of hegemonic gender roles in Italy was been the object of some qualitative and quantitative studies that revealed that adherence to traditional gender roles in gay and lesbian relationships constitutes a relevant factor in predicting internalized sexual stigma (Salvati et al., 2018); namely, that gay men still experience pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes and to distance themselves from femininity when their masculinity is called into question (Hunt, Fasoli, Carnaghi, & Cadinu, 2016). Additionally, the hegemonic heteronormative assumptions are also present in the discourses of Italian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) activists when they talk about lesbian and gay parenting (Lasio, Serri, Ibba, & Oliveira, 2019), and in the discourses of Italian parliamentarians (Lasio, Congiargiu, De Simone, & Serri, 2018). This heteronormativity process works to recreate and reinforce hierarchies and binaries within LGBTQ individuals (Priola, Lasio, Serri, & De Simone, 2018).

In according with the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), which conducted the fifteenth census of the country in 2012, there are approximately 7,513 same-gender couples in Italy - 529 of them with children. As the Institute itself pointed out, the data is underestimated because many couples have preferred not to self-identify, and because the study only counted couples living in the same house (De Simone, 2015). This data revealed that in Italy, same gender couples and families composed by same gender parents are a specific reality that must be considered in scientific research, within educational practice, and in political planning. Therefore, it is important that the relationships of same gender partners are studied with specific tools for these couples, adapted to the Italian context and culture. In Italy, in fact, recent studies aimed to explore same gender couple functioning (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Carone et al., 2017; Lampis, De Simone, Fenu, & Muggianu, 2017) have theoretically moved away from the above discussed isomorphic assumption - however the main tool to assess the relationships of gay and lesbian couples relationship quality is still Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Thus, we decided to conduct a study to determine whether the GLRSS is a useful tool for the study of relationship satisfaction in same gender couples in Italy after the scale has been translated. Specifically, we aimed to examine the factorial structure, internal consistency, and the construct validity of the Italian translation of the GLRSS. Similar to the original development of the scale, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1 The GLRSS would yield a two-factor structure corresponding to the two original subscales: Relationship Satisfaction and Social Support;

Hypothesis 2 The GLRSS total scale and each of the GLRSS subscales would positively correlate with the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale total scale and subscale scores;

Hypothesis 3 The GLRSS total scale and each of the GLRSS subscales would negatively correlate with the OQ 45.2 total score and with each of the OQ 45.2 subscales.

Method

Procedure

This study was conducted completely online via a survey distributed to consenting adults who identify as gay or lesbian. Data collection occurred through secure Google survey models, in

addition to online advertisements the authors sent mail and messages to associations in Italy that are interested in, or work with, LGBTQ issues. They were requested to send the “link” for the questionnaire to their members and supporters (thus we engaged in ‘snowball’ sampling methods to gain our participants). Criteria for inclusion required potential participants to identify as either lesbian, gay, or bisexual, be over the age of 18 years, and have been in a same gender relationship for at least 6 months (either currently or in the previous 5 years). Participants gave consent to participate in the study on the first page of the survey instrument. A basic demographic questionnaire was completed on the next page of the survey, following receipt of the participant’s consent. Information collected included age, level of education, profession, gender identity, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of relationship, presence and numbers of children.

The Italian GLRSS was developed via back-translation procedures in consultation with the developer of the original instrument. The questionnaire was first translated into Italian by two independent Italian translators and the two versions were then compared. The agreed version was then translated back into English by a native English-language speaker. The discrepancies between the back-translation and the original English version of the questionnaire were then discussed by the three translators and a final Italian version was at last agreed upon.

In conducting the study, all appropriate ethical guidelines were followed, and the institutional ethics board of the Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Philosophy at the first author’s institution approved this study. Participation in the study was voluntary and the information provided was anonymous and confidential. Digitally signed informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation in the study.

Participants

The sample gathered included 235 individuals; of which 110 (46.8%) were female, and 125 (53.2%) were male. 50% of the sample were under age 30, with a maximum age of 59 being represented. In terms of sexual orientation, the sample aligned with standard groupings based on gender identity – 110 persons identified as lesbian, and 125 persons identified as gay. 9.7% of the respondents were married, 38.3% were cohabiting but unmarried, and 52% were in a stable relationship but were not married or cohabiting. The length of relationship ranged from 1 years to 37 years ($M = 4.07$ years). 91.5% had no children, 8.5% had at least one child. Virtually all respondents had graduated at least from lower school in Italy (High School equivalency), with 43.3% having a higher school (bachelor’s degree), and 51.2% having a graduate degree.

Measures

The Gay and Lesbian Relationship Satisfaction Scale (GLRSS – Belous & Wampler, 2016). The GLRSS is a 24-item self-report measure assessing two dimensions of same gender couple’s relationship satisfaction: (1) Relationship Satisfaction (RS; 16 items; e.g., “My mate has the qualities I want in a partner,” “Our differences of opinion lead to shouting matches”) and (2) Social Support (SS; 8 items; e.g., “My partner’s family would support our decision to adopt or have children,” “I have told my coworkers about my sexual orientation/attraction”). Participants respond on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. In their original study Belous and Wampler (2016) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .82. for the entire scale, a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 for the subscale “Relationship Satisfaction”, and a Cronbach’s alpha of .72 for the subscale “Social Support”, all considered acceptable.

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS). The RDAS (Busby et al., 1995) was derived from the original Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS – Gentili, Contreras, Cassaniti, & D’Arista, 2002; Spanier, 1976). It is a self-report instrument made up of 14 items (selected from DAS) and it measures the general adaptation of each partner within a relationship. The scores are calculated

Table 1. GLRSS – Italian sample (N = 235). Characteristics and comparison with American Sample (N = 275).

	Cronbach's Alpha – Italian Sample	Cronbach's Alpha – American Sample	Cronbach's Alpha Difference	Mean (Standard Deviation) – Italian Sample	Mean (Standard Deviation) – American Sample	Difference
Relationship Satisfaction Subscale	.74	.83	-.09	64 (12)	68 (13)	-4 (-1)
Social Support Subscale	.77	.72	+.05	34 (9)	38 (7)	-4 (-2)
Overall Total GLRSS	.81	.82	-.01	98 (17)	107 (16)	-9 (+1)

according to 3 subscales: dyadic consensus (6 items; e.g., “Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for making major decisions”), dyadic satisfaction (4 items; e.g., “How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?”), dyadic cohesion (4 items; e.g., “How often you and your mate work together on a project”). In the Italian validation internal consistency was reported as Cronbach’s alpha = .96 for the total RDAS score, Cronbach’s alpha = .90 for dyadic consensus, Cronbach’s alpha = .94 for dyadic satisfaction, Cronbach’s alpha = .86 for dyadic cohesion.

The Outcome Questionnaire 45.2 (Lo Coco et al., 2008; Lambert et al., 1996). The OQ- 45.2 is a Likert-scale measure with 45 items on which respondents mark their level of distress with a specific symptom in reference to the past week. The scores are calculated according to three subscales: Symptom Distress (SD; 22 items; e.g., “I feel no interest in things”); Interpersonal Relations (IR; 11 items; e.g., “I feel stressed at work/school”); Social Role Functioning (SR; 9 items, “I work/study too much”). Participants respond on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 = ever to 4 = never. Higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological distress. In the OQ-45.2 Italian validation internal consistency was reported as Cronbach’s alpha = .90 for the total OQ-45.2 score, Cronbach’s alpha = .89 for symptom distress, Cronbach’s alpha = .70 for interpersonal relations, Cronbach’s alpha = .61 for social roles.

Results

For this study, the GLRSS showed evidence of acceptable reliability overall (Cronbach’s alpha = .797), and in the two subscales – Relationship Satisfaction (Cronbach’s alpha = .814), and Social Support (Cronbach’s alpha = .771). General scale details are reported on Table 1, below. Prior to subjecting the data to a factor analysis, general data exploration techniques were utilized to determine fit of the data. Skewness of the data showed only a minimal negative skew, of moderate effect (-.586 to -.717), while kurtosis analysis showed ranges all within the generally acceptable ± 2.0 range (.795 to 1.286). Evidence for validity was established through confirmatory factor analysis, an analytical plan deemed appropriate due to significant results when a Bartlett’s test of sphericity was conducted (χ^2 (276) = 2173, $p < 0.001$). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was acceptable (KMO = .72), additionally indicating that continued factor analysis would be helpful for data interpretation. Considering item redundancy, no item was correlated with another less than .30 or greater than .80, indicating that all items were able to be compared through factor analysis – however it is important to note that items in the “social support” subscale (as structurally indicated through the American, initial development sample), were on the lower end – some reaching .30 itself.

Psychometric comparisons between the Italian translation (this study) of the scale, and the originally reported English/American version of the scale are reported in Table 1, along with

reporting standard psychometric data. The complete, translated version of the scale is available as Appendix A.

An initial analysis of factor structure though the Maximum Likelihood method displayed 8 factors with an eigenvalue above 1.0; upon examination of the scree plot there was no clear “elbow” for interpretation in terms of discovering number of significant factors. When restricted to show 2 factors to match with the initial development of the English/American version of the GLRSS the fit of items appeared consistent in that all items loaded onto one of the two forced factors. Additionally, between the second and third factor, the eigenvalue would decrease by 1.085 – indicating a good fit for two factors and matching with the original version of the scale, considering the difference in eigenvalue between the factors is one method of determining where an “elbow” is located. To further determine if the two factor structure (mirroring the American version) fit with this data a Confirmatory Factor Analysis utilizing Principal Component Analysis was conducted, restricted to two factors and using a varimax rotation. Using this method, 35.05% of the cumulative variance could be accounted for. The only indicator of disagreement with the original American version is item #8, which has a negative factor loading as the dominant weight with the opposite of expected factor, as the meaningful relationship based on the rotated model (-.256 on social support, when item was designed and loaded with factor one, relationship satisfaction, in original/American version of scale). It should be noted that the item does have a .158 factor loading on the scale/factor that it is expected to, however this factor weight is typically not a strong enough relationship to use for interpretation. Factor loadings and structure are reported on Table 2.

A bivariate correlation matrix was established with the overall scales and subscales of the GLRSS, the OQ 45.2, and the RDAS. The overall scales had good correlations as expected, with medium relationships in the direction appropriate to the scale; GLRSS Total \times RDAS Total ($p < .01$) = .533; GLRSS Total \times OQ 45 Total ($p < .01$) = -.495; RDAS Total \times OQ 45 Total ($p < .01$) = -.428. This complete correlation matrix is provided in Table 3, below.

There was no statistically significant difference in GLRSS Total Score based on age ($F(2, 203) = .284, p > .05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .997$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$), education ($F(2, 203) = .466, p > .05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .995$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$), length of relationship ($F(2, 203) = 1.118, p > .05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .989$, partial $\eta^2 = .011$), or having children ($F(2, 203) = 1.604, p > .05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .984$, partial $\eta^2 = .016$). Sexual Orientation Identity (gay or lesbian) and Gender Identity (male or female) was not a significant indicator of GLRSS Total scores, $F(1, 222) = 1.934, p = .166$. There was a statistical significance in GLRSS Total Score when relationship status was considered ($F(2, 203) = 15.617, p < .001$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 1.0$, partial $\eta^2 = .133$). A further test of this variable was conducted using a Linear Regression to determine how much of an effect relationship status had on overall GLRSS Total Scores, which was found to be significant, yet having a weak overall influence ($F(1, 214) = 17.59, p < .01$; $R^2 = .076$). This indicates that respondent's current relationship status only had a minor influence on the overall GLRSS composite scores.

Discussion

This study was conducted within a theoretical framework that considered the complexity of couple relationships and analyzed relationship satisfaction in relation to psychological well-being. The present study was conducted to examine whether or not an Italian translated adaptation of the GLRSS would be valid for use with Italian speaking gay and lesbian couple relationships. Specifically, the authors wanted to investigate the main psychometric properties of this translated scale and compare the results from this study with that of the original development of the scale. Overall, the translated instrument shows evidence of reliability and validity, with some cultural differences needing highlight.

Table 2. Factor Structure and Loadings for the Italian Translation of the GLRSS with Item #8 Typically Coded.

Item	Item Mean (Standard Deviation)	Factor 1 - Relationship Satisfaction	Factor 2 - Social Support
*1. There are some things about my partner that I do not like.	2.58 (1.66)	.569	
*2. I wish my partner enjoyed more of the activities that I do.	3.19 (1.99)	.397	
3. My mate has the qualities I want in a partner.	4.97 (1.13)	.717	
4. My partner and I share the same values and goals in life.	4.654 (1.4)	.683	
5. My partner and I have an active social life.	4.18 (1.51)	.577	
6. My partner's sociability adds a positive aspect to our relationship.	4.36 (1.71)	.602	
7. If there is one thing that my partner and I are good at, it's talking about our feelings with each other.	4.44 (1.49)	.693	
*8. Our differences of opinion lead to shouting matches.	2.49 (1.96)	.529	
*9. I would lie to my partner if I thought it would "keep the peace."	3.58 (1.91)	.376	
10. During our arguments, I never put down my partner's point of view.	4.1 (1.73)	.506	
11. When there is a difference of opinion, we try to talk it out rather than fight.	4.41 (1.54)	.663	
12. We always do something to mark a special day in our relationship, like an anniversary.	4.39 (1.64)	.487	
13. I often tell my partner that I love him/her.	4.76 (1.67)	.609	
*14. Sometimes sex with my partner seems more like work than play to me.	4.43 (1.85)	.477	
15. I always seem to be in the mood for sex when my partner is.	3.97 (1.72)	.412	
*16. My partner sometimes turns away from my sexual advances.	3.63 (2.07)	.158	-.256
17. My family accepts my relationships with my partner.	3.96 (2.15)		.694
18. My partner's family accepts our relationship.	3.74 (2.27)		.574
19. My family would support our decision to adopt or have children.	3.38 (2.23)		.605
20. My partner's family would support our decision to adopt or have children.	3.03 (2.2)		.562
21. I feel as though my relationship is generally accepted by my friends.	5.39 (1.22)		.558
22. I have a strong support system that accepts me as I am.	5.36 (1.19)		.585
23. I have told my coworkers about my sexual orientation / attraction.	4.74 (1.84)		.635
24. Most of my family members know about my sexual orientation / attraction.	4.56 (1.72)		.625

Note1: "*" Indicates reverse scored item.

Note2: The Italian version of of the GLRSS can be requested to the authors by e-mail.

The findings confirm the factorial structure and reliability of the questionnaire as devised by the authors (Belous & Wampler, 2016). The dimensions emerging from the exploratory factor analysis corresponded pretty well to the two dimensions proposed by Belous and Wampler (2016). However, in the Italian sample, item number 16 of the scale, "*My partner sometimes turns away from my sexual advances,*" has some problems related to conceptual coherence. It is a reverse scored item that loaded well and was clearly connected with the overall relationship satisfaction subscale/factor for the American (original) version, yet in the Italian translation has a minimal negative loading on the *opposite* scale (social support), -.256, as the largest weight. This may indicate that the item loads very minimally with the relationship satisfaction scale but has a more significant (determining) relationship as a negative indicator for social and familial support. Despite the presence of this poor functioning item, the confirmatory factor analysis showed a satisfactory fit and the questionnaire showed satisfactory internal consistencies, indicating convergent and face/structural validity.

Table 3. Correlations among the GLRSS, RDAS, and OQ 45.2 (and subscales located within).

	GLRSS Total	GLRSS Relationship Satisfaction	GLRSS Social Support	RDAS Total	RDAS Consensus	RDAS Satisfaction	RDAS Cohesion
GLRSS Relationship Satisfaction	.856** .000						
GLRSS Social Support	.620** .000	.126 .060					
RDAS Total	.533** .000	.648** .000	.039 .569				
RDAS Consensus	.531** .000	.635** .000	.055 .408				
RDAS Satisfaction	.214** .002	.300** .000	-.053 .431				
RDAS Cohesion	.478** .000	.526** .000	.130* .049				
OQ Total	-.495** .000	-.480** .000	-.192** .000	-.428** .000	-.410** .000	-.258** .000	-.320** .000
OQ Symptom Distress	-.424** .000	-.395** .000	-.190** .000	-.337** .000	-.309** .000	-.196** .004	-.271** .000
OQ Interpersonal Sensitivity	-.610** .000	-.610** .000	-.225** .000	-.482** .000	-.496** .000	-.212** .002	-.440** .000
OQ Social Role	-.394** .000	-.361** .000	-.172** .000	-.333** .000	-.328** .000	-.167* .015	-.231** .000

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

The correlations between the GLRSS and the RDAS were in part consistent with the expectations based on the discussed literature, also showing evidence for convergent validity. Total scores of GLRSS and scores of GRLSS Satisfaction Scale are significantly interrelated with all RDAS scales. However, contrary to theoretical expectations, no significant relationships were observed between GLRSS Social support scale and RDAS total, RDAS cohesion, RDAS satisfaction. The only weak positive significant correlation is with RDAS cohesion. Moreover, the GLRSS Social Support scale seemed to show no significant correlation with GLRSS Relationship Satisfaction – indicating that in this cultural adaptation of the scale, new interpretations of the results may be necessary.

Our data revealed, contrary to what was found in the American sample, that social and family support is not correlated with general relationship satisfaction and couple adjustment. We believe that this data could be explained by the specific relational and cultural reality of our country. As mentioned above, in Italy, due to social, political, cultural and religious motivations, couples composed of the same gender are not well accepted or acknowledged within the country and its social norms. This has proliferated to family values and familial cohesion.

The same gender relationships are stigmatized in a culture that privileges heterosexual relationships. The social stigma against Italian lesbian and gay couples is still very strong and has its roots in traditional gender roles (Salvati et al., 2018). In Italy, these couples often have to endure a more significant lack of support, both family and social. Gay and lesbian people live a sort of “habituation” with little social and family support and this can lead to a condition in which one’s partner becomes the only source of support, the only person with whom to build a relational reality in which to be fully accepted. This significant sense of independence can lead to the person’s relationship may be the only component of perceived positive support – nullifying the impact of the social and familial support scale of the GLRSS.

The correlations of the GLRSS scales with the level of psychological distress measured by the OQ-45 were expected. Indeed, less satisfied and less supported individuals tend to suffer more psychological, interpersonal and social difficulties. These results confirmed the central role of the couple and social support in the psychological well-being of the gay and lesbian people and

permit to reflect on the buffering role of these kind of support respect with the experience of minority stress, victimization and psychological distress based on sexual minority status (Baams et al., 2014; Cherlin, 2013; Thomeer et al., 2015; Whitton et al., 2018).

This study has several theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, the findings show that is important to study gay and lesbian couples relationship satisfaction to understand factors that may contribute to relationship quality. The data show that is crucial test in same gender couples models created exclusively using heterosexual participants. In addition, the findings suggest the necessity for research that moves from focus on the individuals to a focus on the couples. It is important to use a conceptually and methodologically approach that takes into account individual, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels and of their effects on quality of life. This research focused on the couple suggest dyadic interventions could improve the well-being of the same gender couples. Despite significant similarities to different-sex couples in terms of relationship processes, same gender couples differ from heterosexual couples relate to challenges associated with discriminations as a sexual minority identity. The interventions designed for different-sex couples need to make appropriate adaptations to same gender couples. Clinicians should struggle to be competent in helping the LGBT population by evolving knowledge of same gender couple relational processes and dynamics. Findings of this study that revealed that less satisfied and less supported individuals tend to suffer more psychological, interpersonal and social difficulties, suggest that actions must aim at strengthening the quality of the couple's relationship. Furthermore, the results also suggest the usefulness of cultural awareness-raising interventions aimed at understanding the difficulties that same gender couples still encounter in terms of discrimination in order to stimulate social support with positive effects on the well-being of these people.

Limitations and future research

Nevertheless, some limitations of the present research deserve to be mentioned. A major limitation of this study, that future research should try to overcome, is the lack of test-retest reliability assessment. Another limitation is that the construct validity has been tested only through correlation between the GRLSS scales and the RDAS scales. The use of a questionnaire on social support, as for example the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) would have made it possible to better clarify our results. Another limitation could be that your participants were only gay and lesbian people. Future research could consider other sexual orientations as bisexual and transgender individuals. In order to test the discriminant validity of the questionnaire, future research should finally test the reliability and validity of the GRLSS scales by comparing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender samples to determine if non homogenous relationship types account for differences in relationship satisfaction and social or familial support. Another potential research study that could improve the results would be to more fully examine the impact of the cultural variable of family support as it relates to individual acceptance and support, leading to, or contributing toward, that of the relationship satisfaction. In addition, future research can focus on the dyad and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of same gender couples.

Conclusions

This study has both extended our knowledge of relationships between same sex partners and confirmed the importance of refining new research and intervention methodologies to better analyzed the complexity and challenges that new family realities bring. It focused on the importance that research examine the factors that contribute to adaptive relationships among same gender couples, that reduce specific forms of psychological stress associated with the marginalized social

status of the same-gender partnered individuals (Scott et al., 2019), and finally that contrast stereotypes heterosexist that assume that gay and lesbian relationships are dysfunctional or different than heterosexual relationships.

Given the validity and reliability of the GRLSS in Italian contexts, we think that this tool can be used to measure same gender relationships and/or social support systems and to monitor positive and negative relationships between couple satisfaction, social support and psychological well-being amongst lesbian and gay people. In summary, this questionnaire is a suitable research instrument for therapists and researchers interested in capturing the complexity of lesbian and gay couple dynamics; and in assessing and gathering information on relationship satisfaction levels for Italian speaking samples.

Compliance with ethical standards

In conducting the present research, all applicable ethical guidelines were followed. All procedures performed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee of the first author's academic institution, and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Participation in the study was voluntary and the information provided was anonymous and confidential. Digitally captured informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation in the study.

Conflict of interest statement

On behalf of all the authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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