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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Dispositional authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and relationship quality in same-gender couples: an actor-partner interdependence moderation model

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## ABSTRACT

This dyadic study with 158 same-gender couples examined the relationships between dispositional authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and perceived relationship quality, introducing The Internalised Homonegativity-Authenticity Interaction Theory. Internalised homonegativity was found to moderate the relationships between external aspects of dispositional authenticity and perceived relationship quality within same-gender couples. Individuals' authentic living was only positively related to their own perceived relationship quality when their partners experience below-average levels of internalised homonegativity. The relationship between individuals' accepting external influence and their partners' perceived relationship quality was negative when they experience above-average levels of internalised homonegativity. Different aspects of authenticity interact with internalised homonegativity in unique ways. Negative self-beliefs stemming from external environments could alienate internal authenticity. The level of external influence and inclusivity within an environment may shape the diverse development trajectories of LGB individuals' perception of their social group, resulting in varying outcomes for their attitudes and beliefs towards the group. Furthermore, behavioural or relational authenticity is not always positive; it may contribute to lower relationship quality when one's partner harbours homonegative beliefs. This study highlights the complex interplay between authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and relationship quality, with significant implications for future research and action.

## ARTICLE HISTORY



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## KEYWORDS

Authenticity; internalised homophobia; minority stress; person-centred theory; LGBT

Over the past decades, the mental and physical health of sexual minorities has gained significant attention in counselling psychology (Casalheira et al., 2022; Drescher et al., 2023; Veldhuis et al., 2022). Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to support sexual minority individuals in coping with adversity, enhancing authenticity, and thriving despite stigma and discrimination (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Living in a heterosexist society, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals often face challenges in being authentic about their sexuality, leading to incongruence among their affective, cognitive, and behavioural components (Rosario et al., 2006). They have to manage the visibility of their sexual

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orientation across different social situations to avoid stigma, harm, or marginalisation (Lasser et al., 2010).

Issues related to sexual minority stress have long been of interest to psychologists (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2022; Morandini et al., 2022; Oren, 2021). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) has been used as a foundation for the APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (American Psychological Association, 2021). Incorporating positive psychology principles into training and practice is essential for working with sexual minority individuals (Lytle et al., 2014). Authenticity, as a positive individual trait, is crucial for optimal psychological adjustment (Rogers, 1959; Wood et al., 2008).

This study, grounded in person-centred personality theory (Rogers, 1959) and minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), explores the associations among dispositional authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and relationship quality in same-gender couples.

## The person-centred conception of authenticity

Dispositional authenticity is deemed to be the cornerstone of constructive personality development in Rogerian counselling theory (Rogers, 1959). Wood et al. (2008) developed a scale to measure dispositional authenticity based on the person-centred approach. The authenticity scale assesses three aspects of dispositional authenticity: the first aspect is self-alienation, which means the incongruence between (a) internal experience and (b) conscious awareness; the second aspect is authentic living, which means the congruence between (b) conscious awareness and (c) external communication and behaviour; the third aspect is accepting external influence, which indicates the extent to which individuals accept the influence of others and their belief in conformity to others' expectations. Authenticity is related to better psychological adjustment and functioning, which is supported by extensive empirical evidence (e.g. Boyraz et al., 2014; Bryan et al., 2017; Chen & Murphy, 2019; Heppner & Kernis, 2007; Lakey et al., 2008; Tohme & Joseph, 2020). In studies focusing on LGB individuals, authenticity has been found to be associated with higher psychological well-being, lower levels of perceived stress, and fewer depressive symptoms (Brownfield & Brown, 2022; Fredrick et al., 2020; Kamen et al., 2011).

## Authenticity in romantic relationships

Dispositional authenticity has been found to be associated with one's own romantic relationship functioning, such as trust, fear of intimacy, self-disclosure, relationship satisfaction, and perceived social support (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Tracy et al., 2009). In a dyadic study, Brunell et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between dispositional authenticity and romantic relationship functioning. The study proposed and tested a theoretical model that included actor and partner effects of dispositional authenticity. The model suggested that individuals higher in dispositional authenticity would elicit more intimate and less destructive behaviours from their relationship partners than individuals lower in dispositional authenticity. Furthermore, greater intimacy and constructive behaviours by one partner were related to enhanced perceived relationship quality for the other partner. Finally, one partner's perceived relational outcomes predicted the other partner's personal well-being.

The study examined the extent to which dispositional authenticity was associated with dating couples' relationship behaviours and outcomes, as well as their personal well-being. The findings revealed that authenticity was related to engaging in healthy relationship behaviours, which in turn predicted positive relationship outcomes and greater personal well-being. Interestingly, men's authenticity predicted women's relationship behaviours, but women's dispositional authenticity was not associated with men's relationship behaviours. The study posits that gender roles could account for why men's dispositional authenticity was linked to women's healthy relationship behaviours, while women's dispositional authenticity did not have the same impact on men's

healthy relationship behaviours. More research is necessary to validate these findings and explore alternative explanations for the observed gender disparities. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to examine if these findings are applicable to a wide range of populations and relationship settings.

Some researchers have focused on the congruence between conscious awareness and external behaviour in authenticity, also known as relational authenticity or authentic living (Hart et al., 2020; Lopez & Rice, 2006; Wickham, 2013). This aspect has been linked to various relationship factors, such as self-esteem, adult attachment orientations, caregiving, and relationship satisfaction (e.g. Gouveia et al., 2016; Lopez & Rice, 2006). However, Li and Samp (2019) found that authentic language use in significant conversations among same-gender couples was not significantly related to relationship satisfaction.

Self-alienation, or the lack of awareness of present-moment experiences, is negatively associated with mindfulness and positively correlated with mind-wandering (Allan et al., 2015; Lakey et al., 2008; Mrazek et al., 2012, 2013; Vess et al., 2016). This diminished self-awareness may hinder individuals' ability to maintain satisfying relationships, as essential abilities like emotion regulation, executive control, and self-other connectedness are closely associated with mindfulness.

LGB individuals with high levels of accepting external influence may conform to societal norms, potentially leading to mixed-orientation marriages (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Day, 2001). Social stigma has been found to have a small, significant detrimental effect on relationship functioning among sexual minorities (Doyle & Molix, 2015). Accepting external influence can be especially harmful to same-gender relationships when the external environment is not 'gay-friendly'.

### Internalised homonegativity in romantic relationships

Internalised homonegativity is defined as a negative perception of one's own sexual orientation due to the internalisation of negative attitudes society shows towards homosexuality (Meyer, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that internalised homonegativity is associated with psychological distress and poor quality of life. A meta-analysis of 31 studies containing 5831 LGB participants showed that internalised homonegativity is low to moderately correlated with symptoms of depression and anxiety (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Internalised homonegativity has also been found to be associated with lower life satisfaction among LGB individuals across different countries (Gómez et al., 2022; Oginni et al., 2020; Wen & Zheng, 2019). Furthermore, previous studies have reported a positive association between internalised homonegativity and suicidal ideation (Lee et al., 2019; McLaren, 2016).

Internalised homonegativity also adversely affects the romantic relationships of LGB individuals. Internalised homonegativity was found to negatively impact relationship quality in same-gender couples (Szymanski & Chung, 2001), and the association was mediated by depressive symptoms (Frost & Meyer, 2009). In a dyadic study, Otis et al. (2006) found that individuals' own experience of internalised homonegativity was negatively associated with both their own and their partners' reported relationship quality. One study found nonsignificant relation between one's internalised homonegativity and one's partner's relationship quality by using multiple regression analysis (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). A meta-analysis (Cao et al., 2017) examined research conducted before the nationwide legalisation of same-sex marriage in the U.S., focusing on the implications of sexual minority stress on same-gender relationship well-being. The study discovered that internalised homonegativity had a significant and negative association with same-gender relationship well-being, while heterosexist discrimination and sexual orientation visibility management did not. The effect size for internalised homonegativity was notably larger than those for heterosexist discrimination and sexual orientation visibility management. Furthermore, the study found that sexual minority stress negatively correlated with same-gender relationship quality but had no association with closeness or stability. By examining the interplay between authenticity and internalised homonegativity, we can better understand the factors that contribute to relationship quality among same-gender couples.

Furthermore, internalised homonegativity was found to be related to intimate partner violence among sexual minority men and women (Kelley et al., 2014; Milletich et al., 2014; Pepper & Sand, 2015). Across 10 studies a meta-analysis revealed a small but statistically significant pooled effect size for the relationship between internalised homonegativity and intimate partner violence perpetration in same-gender relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2019). A dyadic study (Cao et al., 2017) revealed that both individuals' own and their partners' acts of psychological violence served as mediators in the negative associations between individuals' own internalised homonegativity and their own as well as their partner's relationship quality. These findings contributed to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which sexual minority stressors adversely impacted the well-being of same-gender relationships.

In terms of actor and partner effects of internalised homonegativity, the study showed that an individual's own internalised homonegativity negatively correlated with both their own and their partner's relationship quality. Moreover, a partner's internalised homonegativity also had a negative impact on their partner's relationship quality. These results indicated that it was crucial to consider both actor and partner effects of internalised homonegativity when examining the quality of same-gender relationships.

### **Authenticity and internalised homonegativity in romantic relationships**

Despite growing interest in authenticity and internalised homonegativity, no known studies have investigated the interplay between these constructs and their joint impact on relationship quality. To address this gap, we propose the Internalised Homonegativity-Authenticity Interaction Theory, which aims to elucidate the complex relationship between internalised homonegativity and authenticity in the context of same-gender romantic relationships and examine how these factors jointly influence couples' relationship quality.

#### ***Self-alienation and internalised homonegativity***

Individuals with high internalised homonegativity often experience significant self-alienation regarding their homosexuality, struggling to reconcile their LGB identity and same-gender relationship with their internalised negative beliefs about their sexuality. This struggle can impact not only their own relationship experience but also their partner's, as the partner may feel disconnected, rejected, or burdened by the individual's internal conflict. In contrast, those with low levels of internalised homonegativity experience less self-alienation concerning their homosexuality, as they are more accepting of their LGB identity and same-gender relationship, effectively integrating these aspects of their experiences into their awareness and overall sense of self. This integration promotes a more intimate relationship dynamic, where both partners feel more connected, understood, and supported, especially when they are able to effectively communicate their awareness and understanding within the relationship.

#### ***Authentic living and internalised homonegativity***

For individuals who identify as LGB and/or are in a same-gender romantic relationship, a certain level of congruence exists between their primary experience, conscious awareness, and behaviour communication expression. Their authenticity plays a role in navigating their relationships and self-concept. For example, their awareness of their desire to make connections and achieve that desire by expressing and acting on their feelings can lead to forming meaningful, genuine relationships with compatible partners who share similar values and experiences.

Authentic living is typically enhanced in individuals with low internalised homonegativity, as they can comfortably express their true emotions, desires, and behaviours aligned with their actual experiences. This authenticity creates a more open and honest relationship dynamic, where both

partners can feel safe expressing themselves and discussing their experiences. For individuals with high internalised homonegativity, authentic living is generally suppressed, as they may feel the need to hide their behaviour and emotions, leading to strained relationships due to feelings of guilt, shame, or fear of being discovered. This suppression can create an emotionally distant and guarded atmosphere within the relationship, which may leave both partners feeling unfulfilled and unsupported.

However, by authentically expressing their internalised negative beliefs, these individuals may inadvertently perpetuate the very stigmatisation they experience themselves, potentially contributing to intra-minority community stress and further undermining the quality of their relationships. This expression may also negatively impact their partner's experience, as the partner might feel judged, criticised, or rejected by their loved one's internalised negative beliefs.

### *Accepting external influence and internalised homonegativity*

In terms of accepting external influence, individuals with high internalised homonegativity in a highly homonegative environment are more likely to accept negative external influences that reinforce their internalised beliefs, potentially affecting their self-concept and the quality of their relationship. This acceptance can create a tense and stressful atmosphere within the relationship, as both partners may struggle to navigate the external pressures that have been negativity imposed on them. Conversely, those with low internalised homonegativity in the same environment may resist negative external influences, relying more on their beliefs, values, and support from personal or professional relationships, such as affirmative counselling. This resistance can create a more supportive and nurturing relationship dynamic, allowing both partners to feel safe and validated in the face of external challenges.

In a highly inclusive environment, individuals with high internalised homonegativity may start to question their previously held beliefs and attitudes, becoming more open to accepting diverse perspectives and engaging in conversations that challenge their internalised homonegativity. They may gradually increase their acceptance of external influence from positive sources, leading to a potential shift in their internalised beliefs. This shift can improve the overall relationship experience, as both partners may feel more secure and comfortable discussing their sexuality and navigating their relationship in a more accepting environment. Individuals with low internalised homonegativity in an inclusive environment may continue to accept external influences from positive sources and maintain a strong sense of self that prevents negative influences from affecting their beliefs, attitudes, and relationships. This resilience contributes to a stable and supportive relationship dynamic where both partners can grow and thrive.

### **This study**

This study aims to shed light on the relationship between internalised homonegativity and authenticity in the context of same-gender romantic relationships and how their interaction affects both one's own and their partner's relationship quality. We hope to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that can inform research and practice aimed at enhancing relationship quality and well-being for LGB individuals in same-gender romantic relationships. The Internalised Homonegativity-Authenticity Interaction Theory has been developed by drawing on the foundations of Rogers (1959) personality theory and Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model. Although empirical evidence is limited at this stage, we propose the following seven hypotheses to understand the interactions between these constructs, which were tested in this study.

Inauthenticity is considered a root of psychological tension and internal confusion, which in turn causes discordant or incomprehensible behaviours (Rogers, 1959). Individuals who are incapable of self-awareness lose access to important internal resources for developing and maintaining a satisfactory relationship. Therefore, individuals' own self-alienation would be negatively related

to their own and their partner's relationship quality (*H1*). LGB individuals who accept the influence of and conform to the expectations of others are more likely to be affected by homophobic attitudes in society. The development of their same-gender relationships is directed unconsciously by the hateful script written by the heterosexist society. Thus, individuals' own accepting external influence would be negatively related to their own and their partner's relationship quality (*H2*).

Individuals' own authentic living may not significantly relate to neither their own nor their partner's relationship quality (*H3*). Because the effect of authentic living on relationship quality should be determined by what is involved in one's conscious awareness.

Numerous studies have found the negative effect of internalised homonegativity on relationship quality in same-gender relationships. Individuals' own Internalised homonegativity would be negatively related to their own and their partner's relationship quality (*H4*).

Sexual orientation is an important component of self-identity, internalised homonegativity brings negative perceptions of self that lead to self-alienation. Conversely, individuals with low self-alienation are aware of, and accept different parts of their identity that includes their sexual orientation. It is unlikely that someone stigmatises one's own sexual orientation but appears to accept oneself and vice versa. Thus, the interaction of internalised homonegativity and self-alienation on relationship quality may not exist at the intrapersonal level (*H5*).

Authentic expression and behaviour do not always lead to positive relational outcomes, which depends on what is involved in conscious awareness. Genuine expressing and behaving in line with one's homophobic thoughts and feelings would not lead to better relationship quality for same-gender couples. On the contrary, such genuineness may result in intimate partner violence that harms relationship quality. Therefore, the effects of individuals' authentic living on their own and their partners' relationship quality will be conditioned by their level of internalised homonegativity. When the level of internalised homonegativity is high, the higher level of authentic living will be related to the lower level of relationship quality at both the individual and relational levels, and vice versa (*H6*).

Individuals with internalised homonegativity may not appreciate their partners' genuine expression of same-gender attraction and homosexual behaviour, which diminishes their partners' perceived relationship quality. In other words, individuals' level of internalised homonegativity would moderate the positive association between their partners' authentic living and relationship quality (*H7*).

In addition to these hypotheses, several exploratory analyses are performed to examine (a) the moderating effects of internalised homonegativity on the interpersonal associations between self-alienation and relationship quality; (b) the moderating effects of internalised homonegativity on the associations between accepting external influence and relationship quality. No prior hypotheses were formulated for these analyses due to a lack of previous evidence.

## Method

### Procedures

Ethical approval was obtained at the School of Education Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nottingham, UK. The participants were recruited through closed Facebook groups between May 2021 and August 2021. Participants recruitment message was posted in English-speaking LGBTQ groups. The inclusion criteria were (a) both members of the couple agreed to participate, and it had to be a same-gender relationship; (b) aged 18 years and older; (c) couples were involved in the relationship for a minimum of 3 months. Questionnaires were administered using Jisc Online Surveys. One member of a couple was required to complete the survey first, and a receipt number could be given after submission of the response. Then the receipt number and the survey link could be sent to another member of the couple. And when the partner filled in the survey, the receipt number was required to be provided.

## Samples

One hundred and fifty-eight same-gender couples ( $N = 316$ ) were included in the study. The average relationship duration was 6.35 years ( $SD = 5.72$ ). A total of 124 (78.48%) couples were cohabitating, including both with and without being married.

The average age of participants was 32.94 years ( $SD = 9.33$ ). In total, 78.48% of participants were women, 19.94% were men, 1.27% were non-binary, .95% were gender-fluid, .32% agender and .32% gender-nonconforming. The percentage of participants whose gender is different to the sex they were assigned at birth was 4.43%. The majority, 62.97% of participants identified themselves as lesbian, 17.72% as bisexual, 17.09% as gay, 1.27% as pansexual, and .95% were questioning their sexual orientation. About 68.67% of the participants self-identified as White, 12.34% as South Asian, 8.54% as East Asian, 2.22% as Latino/Hispanic, 1.90% as African, 1.27% as Southeast Asian, .63% as Middle Eastern, and 4.43% Mixed.

## Measures

### Demographic questionnaire

This questionnaire inquired about gender, sexual orientation, age, race/ethnicity, relationship duration, and cohabitation status.

### Dispositional authenticity

Dispositional authenticity was assessed using the Authenticity Scale (AS; Wood et al., 2008). The AS comprised three 4-item subscales: self-alienation (e.g. 'I feel as if I don't know myself very well'), authentic living (e.g. 'I am true to myself in most situations'), and accepting external influence (e.g. 'I usually do what other people tell me to do'). Participants are asked to respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 7 (*describes me very well*). The items of self-alienation and accepting external influence are reverse-scored so that higher scores indicate higher dispositional authenticity. The scale developers reported Cronbach's alpha ranging from .69 to .78 for the subscales, and the two-week and four-week test-retest reliability coefficients ranged from .78 to .84 (Wood et al., 2008). Table 1 shows internal consistency reliability coefficients for all the study measures in the present sample.

### Internalised homonegativity

The Revised Internalized Homophobia Scale provides a measure of the degree to which participants internalise the anti-homosexuality societal attitudes towards them (Herek et al., 2009). Sample items read, 'If someone offered me the chance to be completely heterosexual, I would accept the chance'. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agree with the statements using a 5-point Likert -type scale (1 = *Disagree Strongly* and 5 = *Agree Strongly*), with higher scores on all items reflecting more negative self-attitudes. The score was obtained by taking the mean of all the items. Previous research (Herek et al., 2009) revealed Cronbach's alpha was  $\alpha = .87$ .

### Perceived relationship quality

Relationship quality was measured with the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (Fletcher et al., 2000a, 2000b). The scale consists of seven intercorrelated domains of relationship quality: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, love, and romance. The items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 'not at all' to 'extremely'. Higher scores indicate better relationship quality. The scale was reported to have Cronbach's alphas of .87 for females and .91 for males (Beaudoin et al., 2021).



**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, intraclass correlations, and individual-level bivariate correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Self-alienation	-				
(2) Authentic living	-.701**	-			
(3) Accepting external influence	.182**	-.058	-		
(4) Internalised homonegativity	.162**	-.138*	.260**	-	
(5) Perceived relationship quality	-.180**	.070	-.168**	-.239**	-
Mean	13.25	21.592	12.557	1.465	42.854
Standard deviation	7.609	5.67	5.755	0.681	5.582
Obtained range	4–28	4–28	4–28	1–4	20–49
ICC	-.037	-.115*	.149**	.325**	.647**
$\alpha$	0.848	0.698	0.836	0.753	0.803
<i>Covariates</i>					
Age					
Within-partner	-.266**	.145**	-.286**	-.164**	-.084
Between-partner	-.246**	.161*	-.166*	-.173*	.060
Relationship duration	-.095	.060	-.010	-.077	-.189**
Sexual orientation: bisexual					
Within-partner	1.339	-3.103**	-2.841**	-.229	1.633
Between-partner	.189**	-.162**	.059	.019	-.059
Sexual orientation: other					
Within-partner	-2.308*	.376	-3.010**	-.959	-.295
Between-partner	.082	-.138*	.063	-.108	.051
Couple gender: man-man dyad	-.175	1.550	1.235	.810	-1.085
Couple gender: other	2.811**	-2.608*	.038	1.567	-.020
Couple racial/ethnic minority	.210	.858	.320	-2.209*	.438
Cohabitation status	-1.153	2.375*	1.253	-2.807**	1.233

Note.  $N = 316$ . ICC = Intraclass correlation coefficient.

To examine potential differences in the primary study variables between the two levels of each binary covariate, we performed independent sample t-tests. The t-values obtained from these tests are presented.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### Covariates

To assess the necessity of incorporating covariates into the dyadic models, we examined the correlations between relationship quality, age, and relationship duration and compared it using ANOVA across groups based on couple-level covariates. Sexual orientation for each partner was dummy coded, with 'exclusive same-gender attraction' serving as the reference category (0 = exclusive same-gender attraction vs. 1 = bisexual; 0 = exclusive same-gender attraction vs. 1 = other sexual orientations, such as pansexual and queer). Subsequently, a set of binary variables was generated for each couple based on: gender (using wo dyad couples as the reference group, i.e. 0 = woman-woman dyad, 1 = man-man dyad; 0 = woman-woman dyad, 1 = couples with at least one partner identifying as gender fluid/genderqueer/non-binary); race/ethnicity (0 = both partners being non-Hispanic White vs. 1 = at least one partner belonging to a racial/ethnic minority); and cohabitation status (0 = non-cohabiting vs. 1 = cohabiting). The relationship duration was found to have a significant association with relationship quality. Consequently, it was incorporated as a covariate in all the models.

### Statistical analyses

#### Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)

Path analysis was used to analyse the APIM within a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework in Mplus 8.6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Mplus offers the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator, which includes robust standard errors and chi-square test statistic for evaluating the model. The MLR estimator is less sensitive to non-normal distributions, serving as an alternative to data transformation or truncation methods. In this study, the MLR estimator was employed to estimate the models. The APIM is a dyadic data analytic approach that estimates the effect of

independent variable has on one's own dependent variables and on another person's dependent variable, simultaneously and independently (Kenny et al., 2006). The central components of the APIM are the relationships between dyadic members' independent and dependent variables. The effect of a person's independent variable on their own dependent variable is called as actor effect, and the effect of a person's independent variable on another person's dependent variable is called as partner effect. The members are indistinguishable based on their gender for same-gender couples; thus, means, variances, intercepts, and error variances from the same measure and effects were set equal across dyad members (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Garcia et al., 2015; Ledermann et al., 2011). In the APIM, six pairs of parameters were set equal to each other: (a) the means of the causal variables; (b) the variances of the causal variables; (c) the intercepts of the outcome variables; (d) the error variances; (e) the actor effects; and (f) the partner effects (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). For complete indistinguishability, all six pairs of parameters were constrained to be equal. To test for Y indistinguishability, the equality constraints on the means and variances of the causal variables were removed from the six constraints. For effect indistinguishability, only the actor and partner effects were constrained.

### *The Actor-Partner Interdependence Moderation Model (APIMoM)*

The APIM has been extended to include moderator. The APIMoM (Garcia et al., 2015) were utilised in this study in order to examine the effect of moderator on both intrapersonal and interpersonal associations. In addition to the six constraints mentioned earlier, the equality constraints on the means and variances of the moderators and moderation effects were also imposed on the APIMoM to test the indistinguishability of the dyads. To determine whether distinguishability empirically matters, the complete indistinguishability was tested first. If the chi-square test was significant, the Y indistinguishability and effect indistinguishability were subsequently tested, and the constraints were progressively removed until the test was insignificant.

APIMoM was used to evaluate the moderating role of internalised homonegativity on the relationship between dispositional authenticity and perceived relationship quality. The independent variables and moderators were centred to the grand means to facilitate the interpretation of interaction effects and reduce collinearity. Then interaction terms were constructed by multiplying dyadic members' centred causal variable by their centred moderators. The moderation effects were tested by including those interaction terms in the model.

The adequacy of the models was evaluated using the following fit indices and a set of a priori cut-off criteria (Hooper et al., 2008; Kline, 2016): the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA, < .08); the comparative fit index (CFI, > .90), and the standardised root mean square Residual (SRMR, < .08). The use of sampling-error-adjusted Bayesian information criterion (SABIC) was suggested to test the model fit of APIMoM by Garcia et al. (2015), where smaller values indicate better model fit.

When a significant interaction term was identified in the best fit models, the simple slope procedure recommended by Preacher et al. (2006) was adopted to further examine the pattern of the relationship. Simple slope analyses were conducted at low (1 SD below the mean), mean, and high (1 SD above the mean) levels of moderator variables with low, mean, and high levels of independent variables. All plots were generated using the plot function in Rstudio version 1.3.1056 (RStudio Team, 2020). Data and study materials are available on request from the corresponding author. This study was not preregistered.

### *Post-hoc power analyses*

Post-hoc power analyses were performed using the `semPower.postHoc` function in the `semPower` package (Moshagen & Erdfelder, 2016) in R (R Core Team, 2022). We used an RMSEA criterion of  $\leq .08$  to indicate an acceptable model fit and an alpha level of .05. The sample size was 158, and the degree of freedom varied depending on the specific model being tested. The level of statistical power was deemed acceptable if it was equal to or greater than .80, as per the recommendation by Cohen (1977). For all the models in this study, the results demonstrated that the observed power to detect

model misspecification in terms of the RMSEA consistently exceeded .99, thus deemed adequate given our sample of 158 couples.

## Results

### Missing data analysis

Utilising Little's MCAR test (Little, 1988) demonstrated that the missing data, which constituted 1.05% of the total dataset, were missing completely at random (MCAR), with  $\chi^2(747, N=316) = 716.62$  and a  $p$ -value of .782. Considering the minimal amount of missing data and its MCAR nature, which would likely have a negligible effect on variance estimates, we chose to employ mean imputation instead of more complex multiple imputation techniques.

### Preliminary analysis

The presence of skewness is observed, but according to Kline (2016), it is within acceptable limits. It was recommended that variables with absolute values of the Skew Index  $< 3.0$  are considered acceptable. For the Kurtosis Index, absolute values ranging from about 8.0 to over 20.0 are described as indicating 'extreme' kurtosis. A conservative rule of thumb is that absolute values of the Kurtosis Index  $> 10.0$  suggest an issue. The Skew and Kurtosis Indices for the variables are as follows: internalised homonegativity (1.690, 2.407), relationship quality (-1.081, .969), self-alienation (.399, -1.027), authentic living (-1.121, .667), and accepting external influence (.355, -.564). These values fall within an acceptable range, indicating the levels of non-normality are not problematic. Nonetheless, the MLR estimator was used for model estimation due to its reduced sensitivity to the violation of the normality assumption.

Prior to analysing the primary hypotheses of this study, the factor structures of the utilised scales were examined using confirmatory factor analysis. All scales exhibited an acceptable fit. These scales included the Self-Alienation Scale ( $\chi^2(2) = 13.66, p = .101; CFI = .954; RMSEA = .076, 90\% CI [.014, .148]; SRMR = .035$ ), Authentic Living Scale ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.27, p = .321; CFI = .998; RMSEA = .021, 90\% CI [.000, .116]; SRMR = .015$ ), Accepting External Influence Scale ( $\chi^2(2) = 10.17, p = .062; CFI = .972; RMSEA = .069, 90\% CI [.007, .142]; SRMR = .024$ ), Revised Internalized Homophobia Scale ( $\chi^2(5) = 19.14, p = .180; CFI = .947; RMSEA = .065, 90\% CI [.022, .111]; SRMR = .032$ ), and the Relationship Quality Components Inventory ( $\chi^2(14) = 143.45, p = .255; CFI = .854; RMSEA = .071, 90\% CI [.046, .097]; SRMR = .066$ ).

The means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha), individual-level bivariate correlations, and intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) of all variables are presented in Table 1. Only the association of authentic living with accepting external influence and with perceived relationship quality was not statistically significant.

**Table 2.** Cross-intraclass correlations among dispositional authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and relationship quality.

		Partner's				
		Self-alienation	Authentic living	Accepting external influence	Internalised homonegativity	Relationship quality
Own	Self-alienation	-				
	Authentic living	.086	-			
	Accepting external influence	.082	-.127*	-		
	Internalised homonegativity	.075	-.137*	.017	-	
	Relationship quality	-.117*	.091	-.137*	-.232**	-

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Between-partner bivariate ICCs are displayed in [Table 2](#). Relationship quality was negatively associated with self-alienation, accepting external influence, and internalised homonegativity. Authentic living was negatively associated with accepting external influence and internalised homonegativity.

### APIM analyses

The purpose of the APIM analyses was to examine the relationships between dispositional authenticity/internalised homonegativity and perceived relationship quality in same-gender romantic relationships.

The fit indices indicated good fits for the APIMs examining the relationship between self-alienation and relationship quality ( $\chi^2(7) = 12.17, p = .095; CFI = .934; RMSEA = .068, 90\% CI [.000, .131]; SRMR = .069$ ), the relationship between authentic living and relationship quality ( $\chi^2(7) = 9.13, p = .244; CFI = 0.972; RMSEA = .044, 90\% CI [.000, .113]; SRMR = .066$ ), the relationship between accepting external influence and relationship quality ( $\chi^2(9) = 7.90, p = .544; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA < .001, 90\% CI [.000, .082]; SRMR = .059$ ), and the relationship between internalised homonegativity and relationship quality ( $\chi^2(9) = 5.43, p = .796; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA < .001, 90\% CI [.000, .058]; SRMR = .061$ ) within same-gender couples. Consistent with *H1*, *H2*, and *H4*, the actor and partner effects of self-alienation, accepting external influence, and internalised homonegativity were negative and statistically significant (see [Figure 1](#)). *H3* was partially supported. The actor effects of authentic living on relationship quality was not significant, but the partner effects were significant.

### APIMoM analyses

The APIMoM analyses aimed to investigate moderating effects of internalised homonegativity on relationships between dispositional authenticity and relationship quality in same-gender romantic relationships.

The procedure recommended by Garcia et al. (2015) was followed. First, a model with all interaction effects set to 0 was fitted. The moderation effect of internalised homonegativity was tested on the relationships between the constructs of dispositional authenticity and perceived relationship quality. A poor fit for this model would indicate the presence of moderation effects, vice versa. Internalised homonegativity does not moderate the effects from self-alienation to perceived relationship quality ( $\chi^2(8) = 8.00, p = .433; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .001, 90\% CI [.000, .093]; SRMR = .027; SABIC = 138.90$ ), which is consistent with *H5*. However, internalised homonegativity moderates the relationships between authentic living and perceived relationship quality ( $\chi^2(8) = 19.72, p = .011; CFI = .872; RMSEA = .096, 90\% CI [.043, .151]; SRMR = .038; SABIC = 150.62$ ) and the relationships between accepting external influence and perceived relationship quality ( $\chi^2(8) = 15.65, p = .048; CFI = .911; RMSEA = .078, 90\% CI [.008, .135]; SRMR = .043; SABIC = 146.55$ ), because the model fit was poor when all interaction effects set to 0.

To further examine the moderating effects of internalised homonegativity on the associations, the APIMoMs with indistinguishable dyads were fitted and the model fits were good (authentic living  $\times$  internalised homonegativity  $\rightarrow$  relationship quality:  $\chi^2(11) = 12.90, p = .300; CFI = .979; RMSEA = .033, 90\% CI [.000, .093]; SRMR = .033; SABIC = 138.11$ ; accepting external influence  $\times$  internalised homonegativity  $\rightarrow$  relationship quality:  $\chi^2(15) = 6.49, p = .970; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA < .001, 90\% CI [.000, .000]; SRMR = .038; SABIC = 124.12$ ). Both actor ( $B = .042, SE = .57, p = .456, \beta = .050$ ; see [Table 3](#) Model I) and partner ( $B = .051, SE = .06, p = .373, \beta = .030$ ; see [Table 3](#) Model I) effects of authentic living were not significant. Inconsistent with *H6*, the interaction effects of one's authentic living and internalised homonegativity were not significant on neither one's own ( $B = -.106, SE = .08, p = .178, \beta = -.082$ ; see [Table 3](#) Model I) nor one's partner's relationship quality ( $B = .037, SE = .11, p = .730, \beta = .020$ ; see [Table 3](#) Model I). Consistent with *H7*, partners' internalised homonegativity significantly

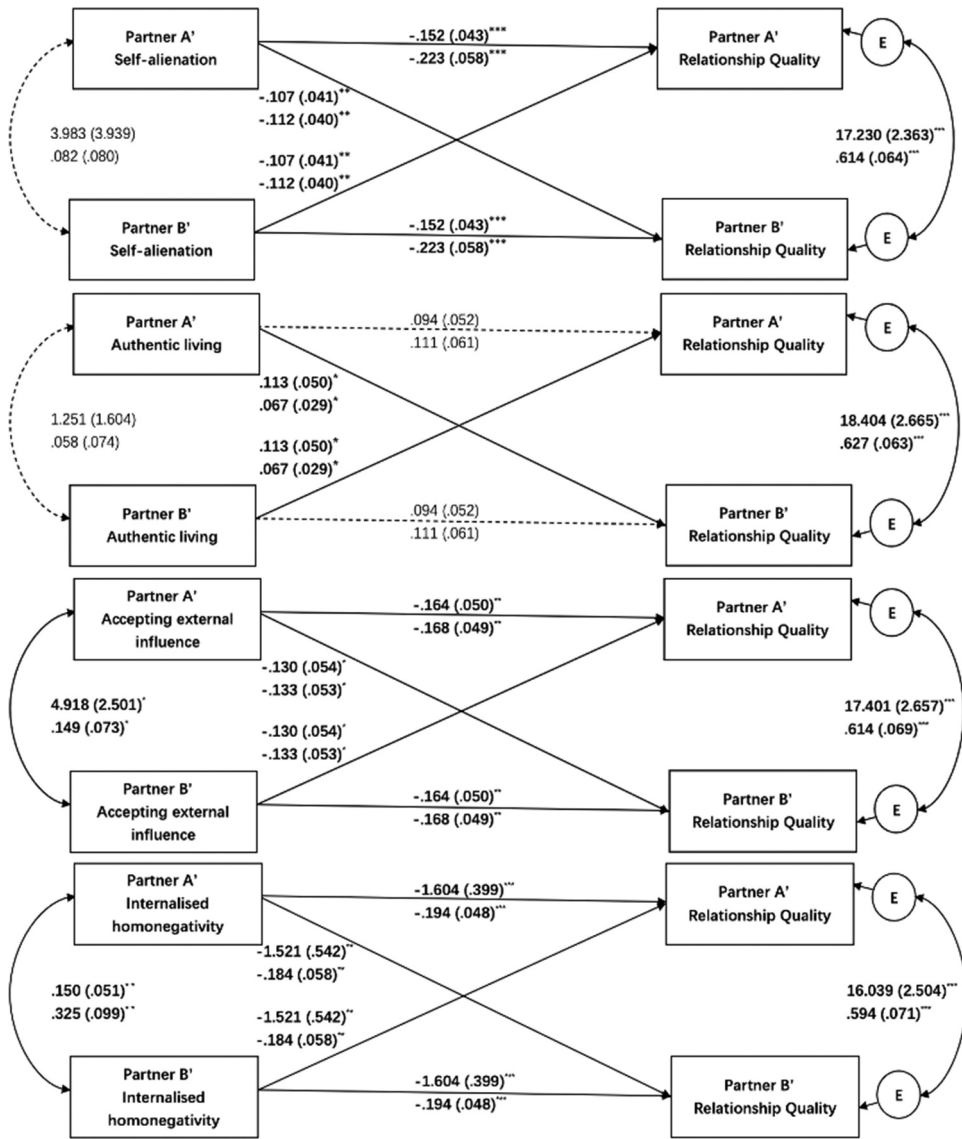


Figure 1. Estimated APIM. Unstandardized (upper), standardised (lower) path estimates, and standard errors were reported. Dotted lines represent nonsignificant paths. Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

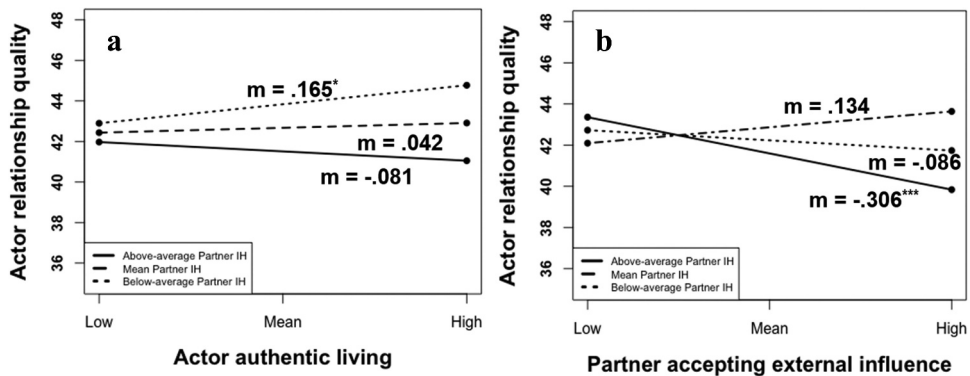
moderated actor effects of authentic living ( $B = -.181$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $\beta = -.155$ , Cohen's  $f^2 = .082$  (95% CI [.002, 0.177]; see Table 3 Model I) and partner effects of accepting external influence ( $B = -.323$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = -.226$ , Cohen's  $f^2 = .141$  (95% CI [.035, .272]; see Table 3 Model II) on relationship quality.

As illustrated in Figure 2A, individuals' authentic living was positively related to their own perceived relationship quality only when their partners exhibited below-average levels of internalised homonegativity ( $B = .165$ ,  $SE = .075$ ,  $p = .028$ ). When their partners showed above-average ( $B = -.081$ ,  $SE = .090$ ,  $p = .369$ ) or average ( $B = .042$ ,  $SE = .057$ ,  $p = .456$ ) levels of internalised homonegativity, individuals' authentic living were unrelated to their own perceived relationship quality.

**Table 3.** APIMoM for dispositional authenticity (IV), internalised homonegativity, and perceived relationship quality.

Effect	Model I: AL×IH → RQ				Model II: AEI×IH → RQ			
	B	SE	<i>p</i>	β	B	SE	<i>p</i>	β
Actor effect	.042	.057	.456	.050	-.121	.047	<b>.011</b>	-.126
Partner effect	.051	.057	.373	.030	-.086	.046	.061	-.090
Moderator actor effect	-1.729	.415	<b>&lt;.001</b>	-.207	-1.108	.374	<b>.003</b>	-.136
Moderator partner effect	-1.707	.547	<b>.002</b>	-.214	-.931	.432	<b>.031</b>	-.115
Actor IV by actor IH	-.106	.079	.178	-.082	-.136	.102	.184	-.092
Actor IV by partner IH	-.181	.089	<b>.043</b>	-.155	-.124	.094	.185	-.095
Partner IV by actor IH	-.095	.070	.178	-.050	.091	.077	.235	.068
Partner IV by partner IH	.037	.108	.730	.020	-.323	.089	<b>&lt;.001</b>	-.226

Note. *N* = 158 couples. B = unstandardised estimate; β = standardised estimate; IV = independent variable; AL = authentic living; AEI = accepting external influence; RQ = perceived relationship quality. Bold indicates statistical significance.



**Figure 2.** Moderating effects of internalised homonegativity (IH) on the associations between authentic living/accepting external influence and relationship quality. Note. *m* = slope. \**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .001

The link between one's partner's accepting external influence and one's own relationship quality was not significant when the partner showed average ( $B = -.086$ ,  $SE = .046$ ,  $p = .061$ ) or below-average ( $B = .134$ ,  $SE = .076$ ,  $p = .081$ ) levels of internalised homonegativity. However, the partner effects of accepting external influence were negative when the partner showed above-average ( $B = -.306$ ,  $SE = .076$ ,  $p < .001$ ) levels of internalised homonegativity (see Figure 2B).

## Discussion

This study assessed the associations among dispositional authenticity, internalised homonegativity, and relationship quality by employing the minority stress model and person-centred conceptualisation of authenticity as theoretical references.

The strong negative relationship between self-alienation and authentic living indicates that as individuals experience increased self-alienation, they also experience greater difficulty living authentically. This difficulty in living authentically and lack of internal awareness is associated with strained relationship dynamics and decreased relationship quality for both partners. The positive relationship between self-alienation and accepting external influence suggests that individuals who experience self-alienation may be more susceptible to external pressures, which could further exacerbate the negative effects on relationship quality. The actor and partner effects from self-alienation, accepting external influence, and internalised homonegativity to perceived relationship quality were statistically significant and in the expected directions. Consistent with previous studies (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Otis et al., 2006; Tracy et al., 2009) and Rogers (1957) theory of personality development, self-alienation and accepting external influence, as inauthenticity, was negatively associated with one's

own and one's partner's perceived relationship quality. For LGBT individuals who live in a heterosexist society, keeping away from external influence and connecting with the authentic self may be necessary steps on the path towards individual and social well-being. Because there is often a lack of support and positive role models to help LGBT individuals to go through the development of sexual identity (Mosher, 2001; Rosario et al., 2006), getting in touch with the true self allows the internal experience to guide the formation and integration of sexual identity. Furthermore, self-connection is deemed essential for individuals to be able to build a deep and high-quality relationship in Rogers' theory of interpersonal relationship (Rogers, 1959). And keeping a distance from external influence makes space for the manifestation and expression of the internal experience within the relationship with oneself and with others (Wood et al., 2008), which may protect LGBT individuals from the negative external influence of minority stress.

This study also revealed results consistent with previous research on internalised homonegativity and relationship quality (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Li et al., 2021; Otis et al., 2006; Szymanski & Chung, 2001). Internalised homonegativity was negatively related to one's own and one's partner's perceived relationship quality. Individuals with higher levels of internalised homonegativity not only tend to develop a negative sense of themselves but are also more likely to adopt negative societal views concerning the quality and significance of same-gender relationships. These self-stereotypes may alter these individuals' behaviours in a way that tends to cause them to become true (Otis et al., 2006).

Returning to the Internalised Homonegativity-Authenticity Interaction Theory proposed, we discuss the relationship between the three aspects of authenticity and internalised homonegativity individually.

### **Self-alienation and internalised homonegativity**

First, considering self-alienation, we posited that individuals with high internalised homonegativity would experience significant self-alienation concerning their homosexuality, leading to difficulties reconciling their LGB identity and same-gender relationships with their internalised negative beliefs. This struggle would not only affect their own relationship experiences but also their partners', who may feel disconnected, rejected, or burdened by the individual's internal conflict. Conversely, individuals with low levels of internalised homonegativity would experience less self-alienation, as they would be more accepting of their LGB identity and same-gender relationships, effectively integrating these aspects into their self-awareness and overall sense of self.

The results supported these hypotheses, revealing a weak positive relationship between self-alienation and internalised homonegativity, as well as a weak negative relationship with both one's own and partner's relationship quality. Although self-alienation does encompass the general internal congruence of an individual, other factors, such as societal pressures, discrimination, or personal experiences, might contribute to its development. Furthermore, sexuality constitutes just one aspect of identity; therefore, it is essential to consider the intersectionality of various identity components.

### **Authentic living and internalised homonegativity**

Enhanced authentic living is observed in individuals with low internalised homonegativity, as they can freely express genuine emotions, desires, and behaviours consistent with their experiences related to their sexuality. On the other hand, those with high internalised homonegativity often exhibit reduced authentic living, as they might feel compelled to hide their emotions and actions, leading to relationship strain due to feelings of guilt, shame, or apprehension of being found out. This concealment can produce an emotionally guarded and distant environment within the relationship, causing both partners to feel unsupported and dissatisfied.

The results offer partial support for the theory; the intrapersonal associations between authentic living and relationship quality was not significant. This finding is consistent with Li

and Samp's (2019) finding that no substantial difference was found in levels of relationship satisfaction between individuals who expressed themselves in a more genuine manner and those who used less authentic language in a significant conversation with their same-gender partners. We speculated that whether authentic living is beneficial for close relationships depends on what is involved in conscious awareness. We theorised that by genuinely expressing their internalised negative beliefs, individuals may unintentionally reinforce the stigmatisation they personally experience, potentially adding to intra-minority community stress and further deteriorating their relationship quality. This expression might also have an adverse effect on their partner's experience, as the partner could feel judged, criticised, or dismissed due to their loved one's internalised negative beliefs. However, without considering internalised homonegativity in the model, authentic living showed a positive association with the partner's relationship quality.

Additionally, our findings did not confirm the combined effect of an individual's authentic living and internalised homonegativity on one's own or partner's relationship quality. This could be due to sampling, as individuals with high internalised homonegativity who are also congruently expressing it may not have the ability or willingness to build and maintain a same-gender romantic relationship. Alternatively, they might feel apprehensive about participating in or engaging with LGBT+ activities and research.

However, our findings did confirm the impact on the partner: when internalised homonegativity is present within the relationship, authentic expression and behaviour might not be well-received. As we speculated, partners might convey their negative attitudes subtly or directly towards the individual expressing authenticity, leading to a less satisfying relationship experience for the partner who is opening up.

### Accepting external influence and internalised homonegativity

When formulating our hypotheses on the interaction between accepting external influence and internalised homonegativity, we considered the inclusivity of the environment in which the couples live due to the characteristics of being easily influenced by others and society. We hypothesised that in an inclusive environment, individuals with high external influence and high internalised homonegativity would move towards greater self-acceptance and openness about their sexuality, given the supportive environment. Conversely, in a homonegative environment, individuals with low internalised homonegativity might accept the introjected negative values towards their sexuality, leading to internalisation. We did not collect data on participants' living environments; however, our participants were recruited from English-speaking LGBTQ Facebook groups. While the inclusiveness of their living environments might differ, these individuals typically have access to a wealth of information about sexual minorities. This access implies that they might possess greater self-acceptance, community involvement, and affirmative awareness compared to those not part of such groups. We encourage future studies to conduct a detailed assessment of the ecological systems in which individuals live when studying accepting external influence. It would also be worthwhile to explore how LGB individuals with high accepting external influence manage their internalised or external values and beliefs when interacting with environments of varying inclusivity levels towards their sexuality.

The link between one's partner's accepting external influence and one's own relationship quality was not significant when the partner displayed average or above-average levels of internalised homonegativity. However, the partner effects of accepting external influence were positive when the partner showed below-average levels of internalised homonegativity. This could be attributed to the fact that, for individuals who are highly susceptible to external influence, their beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality are largely shaped by the societal acceptance of homosexuality and the information they can access. We might be able to infer the inclusivity of their environment by examining the internalised homonegativity of individuals highly accepting external influence. If they



are in an inclusive environment, individuals who accept external influence may experience less difficulty and receive more support for their same-gender relationships when their external environment is friendly towards homosexuality.

If it is high, it may indicate a less inclusive environment, in which individuals' accepting external influence could bring negative views and beliefs about their sexuality into their same-gender relationships, subsequently affecting their partner's relationship quality. Given that our participants are sexual minorities who actively engage with online LGBTQ+ social groups, are in same-gender romantic relationships, and are willing to participate in LGBTQ+ research, it is improbable that they are highly influenced by external factors and are situated in environments with pervasive heterosexism. And the results indicated that the average levels of internalised homonegativity in the sample are low, which might be a contributing factor to why our data did not entirely support the hypothesis.

### Limitations and future directions

Despite the contribution of this study, there were several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, causal inference cannot be drawn from the findings and the results due to the cross-sectional design. Additional research using a longitudinal design is needed to address this shortcoming. Second, as in any study using self-report measures, the results may be affected by social desirability and recall bias. Third, dyadic participation was required to determine the partner effects, however, which may screen out participants who are in relationships with lower relational outcomes. As mentioned earlier, individuals who have high levels of internalised homonegativity may not take part in this research because their participation may trigger their negative feelings towards themselves and insecurities about their sexuality (Ross & Rosser, 1996). The researcher selection bias may result in insufficient variability in individual characteristics and relationship functioning in the samples (Barton et al., 2020). Fourth, participants predominately identified as women, lesbians, and White, which could cause an inaccurate representation of the entire population. Future studies with larger and more diverse samples are needed to ensure adequate power and generalisability. Fifth, we did not collect demographic data concerning participants' geographical living locations, relationship status, or whether couples have children. Additionally, we did not account for more substantive variables, such as distal sexual minority stressors and general life stressors. The absence of these potential variables may significantly impact our findings and their interpretations. Future research should consider incorporating these factors to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within same-gender couples and to better assess the influence of these variables on relationship quality.

### Implications and conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the interplay between internalised homonegativity, authenticity, and relationship quality in same-gender romantic relationships through the Internalised Homonegativity-Authenticity Interaction Theory. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics between these constructs, offering important implications for the understanding of same-gender romantic relationships and the development of targeted interventions to support couples in navigating their emotional experiences and fostering healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

The APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (American Psychological Association, 2021) encourage psychologists to facilitate the development of authenticity for self and others in working with clients of diverse sexual orientations. Psychologists working with same-gender couples should bear in mind that genuineness and honesty in relationships may not be a top priority. The first steps could be keeping distance from the external influence,

identifying the values or beliefs that are adopted from the external environment, and learning to reconnect with the internal experience of the authentic self instead of the secondary reactions of the self-concept. The negative self-concept collapses, and a self-concept that is more congruent with the actual experiences emerges as a result. Genuine expressions of the actual experiences will then contribute to better interpersonal functioning in same-gender romantic couples.

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## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, SC. The data are not publicly available due to terms of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

## Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was obtained at the School of Education Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nottingham (2021/11). The study was performed in compliance with GDPR, and the Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics at the University of Nottingham.

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