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"Hugging With Masks on": LGBTQ+ College Students' Relationship Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted many LGBTQ+ college students, who already experience minority stressors. In particular, pandemic-related restrictions may have increased stress in LGBTQ+ students' romantic relationships, particularly for non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ couples. To understand LGBTQ+ students' romantic relationship experiences at the start of the pandemic, when pandemic-related restrictions decreased opportunity for face-to-face interaction, we considered relationship experiences (relationship dissolution, in-person and virtual interactions, and changes in sexual behavior) in a sample of LGBTQ+ college students (N = 444; 36.49% non-cohabiting) in the U.S. Participants completed an online survey during April and May, 2020, while their university was still in session. Findings indicated that relationship dissolution due to the pandemic was relatively rare. Roughly half of non-cohabiting students saw their partner in person and the majority who did considered their partner an exception to social distancing. Of students who saw their partner in person, a majority engaged in entertainment activities. Non-cohabiting students were more likely to experience decreased frequency in multiple sexual behaviors with their romantic partners compared to cohabiting students. Overall, results highlight the relationship experiences of non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ students early in the pandemic, and showcase how students continued to find ways to connect with their partner despite pandemic-related restrictions.

Keywords

LGBTQ+, college students, romantic relationships, cohabiting, COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic led to increased stressors for many college students, and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) college students in particular (Nowaskie & Roesler, 2022; Salerno et al., 2020; Whittington et al., 2020). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2013) suggests that LGBTQ+ young adults are already at higher risk of mental health issues and stressful life events compared to their heterosexual peers (Watson et al., 2018), and the pandemic exacerbated these health disparities (Nowaskie & Roesler, 2022; Parchem et al., 2024; Salerno et al., 2020). Among LGBTQ+ adults, the pandemic negatively affected romantic relationships (Li & Samp, 2021). Non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ individuals, in particular, may have experienced challenges in seeing their partners in person due to pandemic-related restrictions such as social distancing and campus closures. Considering the importance of romantic relationships for mental and physical well-being (Braithwaite et al., 2010), we consider LGBTQ+ college students' romantic relationship experiences early in the pandemic, specifically focusing on students in non-cohabiting relationships. In particular, we consider relationship dissolution, opportunities for in-person and virtual interactions, and changes in sexual behavior to understand non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students' relationship experiences.

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2013) suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals experience stressors unique to their LGBTQ+ identity that their cisgender heterosexual peers do not have to manage (McLemore, 2015). Minority stressors may be either distal (e.g., prejudice events) or proximal (e.g., expectations of rejection) and are both negatively associated with LGBTQ+ individuals' overall well-being (Meyer, 2013). For instance, LGBTQ+ individual may believe they need to conceal their LGBTQ+ identity (i.e., a proximal stressor) due to their minoritized identity not aligning with conventional societal norms (Meyer, 2013). Minority stressors may also be associated with how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate romantic relationships (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Relationship formation and maintenance are salient developmental tasks in late adolescence (Rhoades et al., 2011), especially as youth transition to college (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). In contrast to their cisgender heterosexual peers, LGBTQ+ college students must navigate romantic relationships while also dealing with minority stressors (Meyer, 2013; Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Relationship dissolution, in particular, is a normative, albeit often distressing experience for late adolescents, and stressful life situations increase the likelihood of dissolution (Rhoades et al., 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new points of conflict between romantic partners, at times exacerbating pre-existing relationship issues and vulnerabilities (Dotson et al., 2022; Li & Samp, 2021). For instance, LGBTQ+ adult same-sex couples who moved in together during the pandemic had more intentions to dissolve their relationship than same-sex couples who did not move in together (Li & Samp, 2021). The combination of minority stressors and pandemic-related restrictions may have uniquely influenced LGBTQ+ college students' relationships. Thus, we consider the prevalence of LGBTQ+ college students' relationship dissolution due to the pandemic.

The unique circumstances of the pandemic and related restrictions, including social isolation (Salerno et al., 2020; Scroggs et al., 2021), may have exasperated minority stressors for LGBTQ+ college students and raised questions about how, and through what modalities (e.g., in-person and/or virtually), non-cohabiting couples interacted with each other. Spending time with a romantic partner can benefit both the relationship and the individuals (Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018). However, due to COVID-related restrictions on face-to-face interactions, LGBTQ+ college students may have found it difficult to interact with non-cohabiting partners (Gattamorta et al., 2024; Goodboy et al., 2021; Herbenick et al., 2022). Indeed, between the end of March and early April, half of Americans did not interact with people outside their household in person (Feehan & Mahmud, 2021). However, in Australia, although adults' face-to-face interactions with family, friends, and co-workers during the pandemic declined, such interactions with a romantic partner increased (Rogers & Cruickshank, 2021). To maintain interpersonal connection, which may have been particularly difficult for LGBTQ+ college students due to their minoritized sexual and/or gender identity (Scroggs et al., 2021), LGBTQ+ college students who did not live with their partner had to either see their partner in person despite COVID-related restrictions, or compensate for in-person interactions with virtual interactions. For example, adults in Belgium and Italy reported increased use of messaging apps, texting, and voice and video calls early in the pandemic (Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Ohme et al., 2020). Thus, we examine non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students' in-person and virtual interactions with their romantic partner.

The pandemic may also have influenced LGBTQ+ college students' sexual behavior with their romantic partners, disproportionately affecting non-cohabiting couples (Herbenick et al., 2022). Some evidence suggests LGBTQ+ college students' sexual behavior decreased during the pandemic (Herbenick et al., 2022; Leistner et al., 2023), but other research indicates that, compared to their heterosexual peers, LGB young adults were more likely to report increased sexual behavior (Wignall et al., 2021). The pandemic led to increased stressors for most people (Manchia et al., 2022). Minority stress theory suggests that LGBTQ+ young adults would have had even greater stressors overall given these universal stressors and LGBTQ+ specific stressors. Given that stress is linked to decreased sexual behavior (Bodenmann et al., 2010), LGBTQ+ college students may have experienced decreased sexual behavior during the pandemic. In addition, pandemic-related restrictions such as widespread stay-at-home orders and social distancing policies likely decreased opportunities for non-cohabiting couples to see each other, restricting opportunities for sexual behavior even more (Herbenick et al., 2022; Luetke et al., 2020). Thus, we expect that this decrease was more pronounced for non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students than cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students.

Current Study

Minority stress theory suggests that LGBTQ+ college students regularly experience more stressors than their heterosexual, cisgender peers (Meyer, 2013). Thus, this population may have been particularly vulnerable to pandemic-related restrictions during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and such restrictions may have impacted LGBTQ+ college students' romantic relationship experiences. In the current study, we consider LGBTQ+ college students' relationship dissolution, in-person and virtual interactions, and changes in sexual behavior to better understand their romantic relationship experiences during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given prior research in this area, we propose the following research questions and hypothesis:

RQ1: How prevalent was relationship dissolution due to the COVID-19 pandemic for LGBTQ+ college students?

RQ2: How frequently did LGBTQ+ college students in non-cohabiting romantic relationships see their partners in person, and how many considered their partner an exception to social distancing?

RQ3: What in-person and virtual activities did non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students engage in with their partners?

H1: Non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ students will be more likely to experience decreased frequency of sexual behavior due to the pandemic than cohabiting LGBTQ+ students.

Method

Participants and Procedure

As part of a larger study that received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Connecticut, we contacted LGBTQ+ resource centers at 98 universities that met the following criteria: (1) public, four-year university in the United States, (2) campus enrollment of at least 5,000 students, and (3) the spring semester/quarter was still in session at the time of data collection. We asked these resource centers to distribute the survey information and link to students connected to their centers. Because of our interest in college students during the academic semester, ultimately, 454 students living in the United States from 32 universities across all four census regions completed the online Qualtrics survey between April 29 and May 25, 2020. To ensure we only collected data during the academic semester for each school, we provided different Qualtrics links for each school and set these links to expire when each school's academic calendar ended. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete, and we compensated participants with a $20 gift card. Due to missing data, the overall analytic sample for

the current paper consists of 444 LGBTQ+ college students aged 18 to 24 (M_{age} = 20.4, *SD* = 1.5). We used this full sample to examine the percent of the sample who are in a romantic relationship, and to address RQ1. To test H1, we used data from the 236 participants who reported being in a current romantic relationship. To address RQ2 and RQ3, we used data from the 162 LGBTQ+ college students in a non-cohabiting relationship (aged 18 to 24 [M_{age} = 20.3, *SD* = 1.4]). See Table 1 for additional demographics.

Table 1

Demographics for Sample and Two Sub-Samples

	***n* (%)**		
Variable	**Total sample (*N* = 444)**	**Participants in a relationship (*n* = 236)**	**Participants in a non-cohabiting relationship (*n* = 162)**
Gender Identity			
Woman	220 (49.5)	120 (51.1)	83 (50.0)
Man	88 (19.7)	33 (14.0)	32 (16.0)
Non-Binary	57 (12.9)	40 (17.0)	28 (17.3)
Transgender Man	33 (7.5)	18 (7.7)	12 (7.4)
Transgender Woman	17 (3.9)	10 (4.3)	5 (3.1)
Genderqueer	13 (2.9)	4 (1.7)	3 (1.9)
Other	14 (3.2)	10 (4.3)	7 (4.3)
Sexual Orientation			
Bisexual	174 (39.2)	104 (44.1)	70 (43.2)
Gay	72 (16.3)	23 (9.7)	17 (10.5)
Queer	68 (15.3)	39 (16.5)	26 (16.0)
Lesbian	67 (14.9)	35 (14.8)	29 (17.9)
Pansexual	30 (6.8)	19 (8.1)	11 (6.8)
Asexual	20 (4.5)	7 (3.0)	5 (3.1)
Heterosexual	4 (0.9)	3 (1.3)	—
Other	9 (2.0)	6 (2.5)	4 (2.5)
Race/Ethnicity			
Hispanic/Latinx	114 (25.5)	54 (22.9)	40 (24.1)
White	193 (58.6)	167 (61.4)	69 (56.2)
Asian	47 (14.2)	38 (14.0)	20 (16.0)
Black	16 (4.7)	13 (4.7)	8 (6.2)
North African/Middle Eastern	7 (2.0)	6 (2.1)	2 (1.2)
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	5 (1.4)	2 (0.8)	1 (0.6)

Variable	*n* (%)		
	Total sample (*N* = 444)	**Participants in a relationship (*n* = 236)**	**Participants in a non-cohabiting relationship (*n* = 162)**
Relationship Status			
Single	205 (47.1)	—	—
Dating	176 (39.0)	176 (74.6)	161 (99.4)
Living With Partner	53 (11.7)	53 (22.5)	—
Engaged	5 (1.1)	5 (2.1)	1 (0.6)
Married	2 (0.5)	2 (0.8)	—
Divorced	1 (0.2)	—	—
Other	2 (0.5)	—	—

Measures

Relationship Dissolution

Participants answered the question "Did you and a romantic partner break up because of changes in your life related to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic?" (0 = *No* and 1 = *Yes*).

Relationship Status

Participants answered the question "What is your current relationship status?" Response options were *single, dating, living with partner, engaged, married, divorced,* or *other.*

Cohabitation Status

Participants answered the question "Who else lives with you right now?" We coded participants who indicated their romantic partner lived with them as cohabiting (= 1). We coded participants who indicated they were in a relationship (i.e., not *single*) but were not currently living with their partner as non-cohabiting (= 0).

Getting Together With Partner

We used a single item adapted from Pfiefer (2020) to assess how frequently participants who did not live with their romantic partner(s) saw their partner(s) in person. Response options ranged from 0 = *Never* to 5 = *Multiple times a day.*

Seeing Partner as an Exception to Social Distancing

Participants who indicated they did not live with their partner but saw their partner in person answered the question "Do you consider your romantic partner to be an exclusion from social distancing?" with 0 = *No* and 1 = *Yes.*

In-Person Interactions With Partner

Participants reported whether they engaged in five activities when they got together with their romantic partner(s) in person: entertainment activities; sharing meals; just being together; engaging in sexual behaviors; and other. Response options were 0 = *No* and 1 = *Yes* and participants who marked "other" were asked to specify.

Virtual Interactions With Partner

Participants reported their frequency of engaging in six activities virtually with their romantic partner(s): video calls; voice-only calls; other texting, messaging, or social media posts/commenting; playing online games, and sexting on a seven-point scale ranging from 0 = *Never* to 6 = *Almost constantly.*

Change in Sexual Behavior

We used three questions to determine change in sexual behavior. First, participants responded to the question "Did you and your partner engage in any sexual behaviors, including kissing, prior to the start of social distancing/self-isolation related to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic?" Participants who responded *Yes* then answered five questions about which sexual behaviors they had engaged in (kissing on the lips, touching genitals under clothing or with no clothes on, oral sex, penile-vaginal sex, and anal sex). Second, for every behavior a participant indicated, they answered the question "How has the frequency of [behavior] with your partner changed since the start of social distancing/self-isolation related to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic?" on an 8-point scale where 0 = *No longer doing this*, 4 = *Has not changed*, and 7 = *Much more than before.* Third, if participants responded *No* to the first question, they were then asked, "Since the start of social distancing/self-isolation related to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic have you started engaging in any of the following sexual behaviors with your partner?" We used these responses to code participants as having experienced a decline, no change, or an increase in each of the five sexual behaviors.

Results

Fifty-two percent (n = 236) of participants reported being in a current romantic relationship. The majority of students in a romantic relationship reported that they did not currently live with their romantic partner (70%; n = 165). With regard to RQ1, 6.3% (n = 28) of all participants experienced relationship dissolution due to the pandemic.

Regarding RQ2 and RQ3, more than half of students in non-cohabiting relationships reported they were not getting together with their partner in person (see Table 2). Of the almost half of non-cohabiting students who saw their partner in person, 20% (n = 32) saw their partner more than once a week and 70.1% (n = 114) considered their partner to

be an exception to social distancing. When LGBTQ+ non-cohabiting students saw their partners in person, most students reported engaging in entertainment activities, followed by just being together, eating meals together, and sexual behavior (see Table 3). Students also reported engaging in other activities (19.4%; n = 13), such as going on walks, hiking, studying, and "hugging with masks on." Finally, the majority of non-cohabiting students reported regular virtual contact with their partners (see Table 4). For instance, most students reported that they texted, messaged, and/or used social media at least daily.

We hypothesized that sexual behavior would decrease more for non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students due to the pandemic than for cohabiting LGBTQ+ students (H1). We conducted five, 2x3 chi-square tests to examine how cohabitation status (co-habiting vs. non-cohabiting) differed by change in sexual behavior (decline, no change, increase). The association between cohabitation status and change in sexual behavior was significant for kissing, touching, oral sex, and anal sex, but not penile-vaginal sex (see Table 5). Post-hoc comparisons (ps < .01) revealed that students in non-cohabiting relationships were more likely to experience decreased kissing, touching, and oral sex and were less likely to experience increased kissing, touching, oral sex, and anal sex than students in cohabiting relationships.

Table 2

Non-Cohabiting LGBTQ+ College Students' Frequency of Seeing Their Romantic Partner in Person (n = 162)

Frequency of seeing partner in person	***n* (%)**
Never	88 (54.4)
Less than once a week	29 (18.1)
Once a week	12 (7.5)
Every couple days	16 (10.0)
Once a day	7 (4.4)
Multiple times a day	9 (5.6)

Table 3

Prevalence of In-Person Activities Among Non-Cohabiting LGBTQ+ College Students Who Saw Their Romantic Partners In-Person (n = 67)

In-person activities	***n* (%)**
Entertainment activities	61 (91.0)
Just being together	60 (89.6)
Eating meals together	50 (74.6)
Engaging in sexual behavior	46 (68.7)
Other activities	13 (19.4)

Table 4

LGBTQ+ College Students' Prevalence of Engaging in Virtual Activities at Least Daily With Non-Cohabiting Romantic Partners (n = 162)

Virtual activities	*n* (%)
Texting/messaging/social media	145 (89.2)
Video calls	74 (45.9)
Voice calls (only)	57 (35.2)
Playing online games	34 (21.0)
Sexting	28 (17.3)

Table 5

Change in Sexual Behaviors of Non-Cohabiting and Cohabiting LGBTQ+ College Students in Romantic Relationships

	Non-Cohabiting (*n* = 162)			Cohabiting (*n* = 74)			
Variable	Decrease *n* (%)	No change *n* (%)	Increase *n* (%)	Decrease *n* (%)	No change *n* (%)	Increase *n* (%)	χ^2
Kissing	88 (60.7)	43 (29.7)	14 (9.7)	16 (26.2)	25 (41.0)	20 (32.8)	25.69***
Touching	87 (60.0)	46 (31.7)	12 (8.3)	16 (26.7)	23 (38.3)	21 (35.0)	28.74***
Oral Sex	83 (57.2)	49 (33.8)	13 (9.0)	18 (30.0)	21 (35.0)	21 (35.0)	23.76***
Penile-vaginal sex	39 (24.1)	114 (70.3)	9 (5.5)	16 (21.3)	49 (65.6)	10 (13.1)	3.48
Anal Sex	20 (13.7)	125 (85.6)	1 (0.7)	1 (1.6)	55 (90.2)	5 (8.2)	14.65**

Note. *n* = 205–210 due to missing data.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion

Overall, most non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students did not see their partner in person but engaged in frequent virtual interactions, and experienced a decline in several sexual behaviors compared to cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students. Only a small minority of LGBTQ+ students reported they had experienced relationship dissolution due to the pandemic. Our findings have implications for LGBTQ+ college students' romantic relationships during stressful times, and shed light on minority stress theory (Meyer, 2013).

Considering that many LGBTQ+ students in our sample did not live with their partner or experience relationship dissolution, our results potentially support research conducted with adults demonstrating that same-sex couples who did not move in together during the pandemic were less likely to dissolve their relationship than couples who moved in together (Li & Samp, 2021). Further, prior research supports minority stress theory in suggesting that LGBTQ+ college students faced particular social vulnerabilities

during the pandemic due to their minoritized sexual and/or gender identities (Scroggs et al., 2021). For instance, in Spring 2020, many college students unexpectedly moved home to be with family, which frequently led to stressors such as rejection and negative comments from family (Hanna-Walker et al., 2023), minority stressors that their heterosexual cisgender peers may not have experienced. However, despite these stressors, our results suggest that LGBTQ+ college students did not dissolve romantic relationships because of the pandemic. It may be that students experienced other relational impacts, such as conflict with partners (e.g., Goodboy et al., 2021; Leistner et al., 2023), that we did not assess, or that as the pandemic progressed, more students experienced romantic relationship dissolution as a result of the pandemic, both important questions for future work. Indeed, there is some evidence that a small percentage of LGBTQ+ college students in romantic relationships at the start of the pandemic dissolved their relationship during the pandemic (Herbenick et al., 2022). Prior research, however, did not assess whether LGBTQ+ college students attributed their relationship dissolution to pandemic-related issues (Herbenick et al., 2022), and our results highlight that although the pandemic may have increased minority stressors for LGBTQ+ college students (Hanna-Walker et al., 2023), these stressors were not detrimental enough to end a disproportionate number of LGBTQ+ college students' romantic relationships.

Only about 30% of LGBTQ+ college students were living with their romantic partners in the first months of the pandemic. Pre-pandemic estimates of cohabitation generally for this age group (18–24) in the U.S are even lower, at about 9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). It is possible that unexpected campus closures in Spring of 2020 led to increased rates of cohabitation with romantic partners. For instance, some college students who normally spend academic breaks living with parents may have been unable to travel to family; others may have chosen not to return to their parents' home during a time they would normally be living more independently. And still others may have simultaneously lived with their romantic partner and their own, or their partner's, parents. Additionally, about half of students in non-cohabiting romantic relationships never saw their partner in person. This rate is similar to findings that half of American adults were not getting together with people outside their household at the start of the pandemic (Feehan & Mahmud, 2021). These changes in opportunities to spend time with romantic partners may have been particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ college students given that they may have been unable to access resources (e.g., campus LGBTQ+ support centers, gender-affirming care, LGBTQ+ friends; Hanna-Walker et al., 2023) that may have helped mitigate minority stressors before the pandemic (Meyer, 2013).

Among LGBTQ+ students who did see their partner in person, a majority indicated that they considered their partner an exception from social distancing. It is possible that these LGBTQ+ students placed particular value on their romantic relationships during the pandemic, potentially as a way to counteract social isolation that disproportionately impacted LGBTQ+ college students due to their marginalized identities (Scroggs et al.,

2021). It is also possible that LGBTQ+ college students continued interacting with their romantic partners as a method of managing minority stressors that may have results from LGBTQ+ college student being forced to return home to potentially unsupportive environments (Lawrence et al., 2021). Our results also indicated that engaging in entertainment activities was very common, with sexual behaviors less common, which aligns with prior research for LGBTQ+ college students (Herbenick et al., 2022). In fact, non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students were more likely than cohabiting students to decrease most sexual behaviors. It is possible our findings on in-person activities for students in non-cohabiting relationships suggest that although LGBTQ+ students valued their romantic relationship and thus continued to see their partner in person, they may have been careful to engage in behaviors that involved less physical contact when they did see their partner. Prior evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ students had high rates of compliance with social distancing guidelines (Lawrence et al., 2021), perhaps in an attempt to protect adults living in their household, and thus, even when with their partners, students may have maintained some social distancing.

Although many non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ college students reported not seeing their romantic partner in person, the majority regularly engaged in virtual contact, most commonly texting, messaging, social media, voice, and/or video calls. These findings are consistent with pre-pandemic research on college students in long-distance relationships, for whom texting and messaging are the most common forms of technology-mediated communication, followed by video and then voice calls (Hampton et al., 2017). Prior research suggests that texting and voice calls help to maintain relationship commitment, satisfaction, and intimacy/support in college students, and thus, LGBTQ+ students may have used these forms of virtual contact for relationship maintenance during the pandemic as a method of combating social isolation (Jin & Peña, 2010; Morey et al., 2013; Scroggs et al., 2021). Thus, despite not living with their partner, non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ students found ways to stay connected with their partner on a regular basis. Given the known value of social interactions to increase happiness, reduce sadness, and even mitigate pain (Bernstein et al., 2018), these interactions may have helped reduce potential negative effects of minority stressors on LGBTQ+ students' well-being.

Limitations and Conclusion

The current study had some limitations. First, we collected cross-sectional data during the early stages of the pandemic. Given changes in COVID-restrictions during the pandemic, pandemic fatigue, and campus re-openings beginning in Fall 2020, experiences likely changed throughout the pandemic. Second, we only asked students who reported seeing their partner in person whether they considered their partner an exception to social distancing. It is likely that students who did not see their partners in person were less inclined to consider their partners as exceptions to pandemic-restrictions. Third, penile-vaginal sex was the only sexual behavior that did not demonstrate differential

change for cohabiting compared to non-cohabiting couples. However, we likely missed other penetrative vaginal sex behaviors in this LGBTQ+ sample. It is possible that other forms of penetrative vaginal sex, such as sex toy play or finger penetration, may have shown differential change.

Overall, the early days of the pandemic may have created particularly stressful life situations for LGBTQ+ individuals (Salerno et al., 2020; Whittington et al., 2020) who had to deal with these stressors in addition to more generalized minority stressors (Meyer, 2013). However, our findings indicate that despite pandemic-related restrictions, many LGBTQ+ college students did not dissolve their relationships. Instead, many non-cohabiting LGBTQ+ students stayed connected to their romantic partners, whether in-person or virtually, and often on a daily basis. These students likely benefited from regular contact with their partners, as romantic partners can be a source of support for LGBTQ+ people (Graham & Barnow, 2013). Findings have implications beyond the pandemic, as LGBTQ+ students' strategies for maintaining their relationships might transfer to their ability to stay connected to partners during more normative time apart, such as during academic breaks, when they may be living away from their partner and/or with unsupportive family members.

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