



# Gender Typicality, Social Self-Efficacy, and Adjustment in Italian Sexual Minority Young Adults

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## Abstract

The present study focuses on the relationship between gender typicality, social self-efficacy, and adjustment in a sample of 522 lesbian women, gay men, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual sexual orientation participants. Participants (78.2% women;  $M_{age} = 23.8$ ,  $SD = 3.63$ ) reported their similarity to same- and other-gender peers as a way to assess their gender typicality, social self-efficacy, satisfaction with life, and perceived social safeness. The *Path Analysis* model showed that - controlling for participants' gender and sexual orientation- higher same- and other-gender typicality was associated with higher perceived social safeness and higher satisfaction with life, both directly and indirectly through social self-efficacy. The present study contributed to the debate on gender studies by testing same and other gender typicality as independent dimensions of gender typicality in sexual minority young adults, focusing on positive adjustment. Furthermore, the results suggested the role of social self-efficacy as a critical mechanism in the association between gender typicality and sexual minority psychosocial adjustment.

**Keywords** Gender typicality · Sexual orientation · Young adulthood · Adjustment · Social self-efficacy

## Introduction

The relationship between gender typicality and adjustment is well documented in the literature, indicating that individuals who feel typical of their same gender tend to report higher social competence and personal life satisfaction (Andrews et al., 2019; Di Donato & Berenbaum, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2019; Menon & Hannah-Fisher, 2019; Zosuls et al., 2016). Gender typicality refers to the extent to which one perceives

oneself as similar to one's same-gender peers, with respect to interests, behaviors, appearance, and social interactions (Egan & Perry, 2001; Martin et al., 2017; Martin & Fabes, 2001; Perry et al., 2019). To date, research on gender typicality has predominantly: (1) aligned with a unidimensional understanding of gender typicality, considering same- and other-gender typicality opposite poles of a continuum (Egan & Perry, 2001; Green et al., 2018; Menon & Hannah-Fisher, 2019); (2) explored the associations between gender typicality and adjustment and social competence, mainly in childhood and adolescence (Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011; Menon, 2011; Nielson et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2019); or (3) understood gender typicality through the dual identity approach, irrespective of sexual orientation.

Building on the above-described research, the present study focused on the relationships between same-gender typicality and atypicality (i.e., dissimilarity to same-gender peers, or similarity to opposite-gender peers), social self-efficacy, subjective well-being, and perceived social safety in a sample of lesbian women, gay men, bisexual individuals, and other non-heterosexual (i.e., LGBTQ+) individuals. Although the relationship between same-gender (a)typicality and sexual orientation has been well studied, the literature suffers from two main limitations: (1) most studies have

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investigated gender typicality as a single dimension, describing individuals as either same-gender typical or atypical, and not considering a broader range of perceived gender typicality; and (2) studies have often used retrospective measures of gender typicality in LGBTQ+ adults, which may be more sensitive to intentional or unintentional recall distortions (Dunne et al., 2000). To the best of our knowledge, only one recent study (Baiocco et al., 2021) investigated gender typicality in LGBTQ+ individuals using the dual identity approach. Therefore, the present study represents one of the first studies to investigate gender typicality in sexual minority people through this new research perspective.

## Gender Typicality and Adjustment in Sexual Minority Individuals

Most previous studies of gender typicality have applied a unidimensional perspective, considering same-gender typicality and atypicality as opposite poles of the same continuum (Carver et al., 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001; Menon & Hannah-Fisher, 2019; Young & Sweeting, 2004). Recently, researchers proposed a new method of assessing gender typicality, considering same- and other-gender typicality different and independent dimensions (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2017; Nielson et al., 2020; Zosuls et al., 2016).

Integrating gender identity multidimensionality (Egan & Perry, 2001) and Bem's theory of psychological androgyny (Bem, 1981), the dual identity approach proposed by Martin and colleagues (2017) represents a new theoretical perspective that aims at capturing the full complexity of gender identity, including perceived similarity to both same- and other-gender peers (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2017; Nielson et al., 2020). Specifically, Martin and colleagues (2017) distinguished between four typologies of gender typicality in children: (1) *same-gender typicality* (i.e., high same-gender and low other-gender typicality), (2) *other-gender typicality* (i.e., high other-gender and low same-gender typicality), (3) *both-gender typicality* (i.e., high same-gender and high other-gender typicality), and (4) *low-gender typicality* (low same-gender and low other-gender typicality). The same typologies have been identified in young adults, supporting the hypothesis that gender typicality does not necessarily adhere to a binary understanding of gender (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021; Endendijk et al., 2019).

A specific line of research has focused on the relationship between gender typicality and sexual orientation, referring mainly to the unidimensional view of gender typicality (Green et al., 2018; Lippa, 2002, 2008; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012). Moreover, studies have analyzed the

relationship between sexual orientation, same-gender atypicality, peer victimization, and psychological distress in sexual minority adolescents (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Wallien et al., 2010; Young & Sweeting, 2004) and adults (Meyer & Frost, 2013; Nappa et al., 2022; Skidmore et al., 2006). Other studies have investigated stress factors such as perceived stigma (Baams et al., 2013), experiences of victimization (Young & Sweeting, 2004), and experiences of minority stress (Meyer & Frost, 2013), all of which have been found to diminish life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and social adjustment in sexual minority adolescents and adults. For example, a study by Li and colleagues (2016) highlighted that same-gender atypicality is associated with depressive symptoms, regardless of sexual orientation, and this negative impact decays over time (Cook et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2013). Surprisingly, Li and colleagues' (2016) study reported that bisexual and mainly heterosexual individuals reported higher depressive symptoms than lesbian women and gay men. The authors interpreted this result as suggesting that experiences of victimization due to gender atypicality at a younger age may help lesbian women and gay men to better manage the minority stress associated with being a sexual minority or gender atypical individual, compared to those who become gender non-conforming later in life (Li et al., 2016; Nappa et al., 2022).

Many studies involving LGBTQ+ participants have focused on past and present experiences of direct/indirect victimization, fear of victimization, and internalized homophobia associated with having a stigmatized identity (Meyer, 2003; Meyer & Frost, 2013). Notably, Martin-Storey's (2016) review emphasized that gender atypical behavior and expression increase vulnerability to harassment and victimization, specifically among sexual minority people. Furthermore, research has found that gender-atypical children (Blakemore, 2003; Carver et al., 2003; Martin, 1990; D'Augelli et al., 2006, 2008; Roberts et al., 2013) and adults (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012) tend to be viewed more negatively than their peers. Specifically, they are more likely to be harassed and victimized by their peers and abused by family members and other adults (Martin-Storey, 2016).

A large proportion of the literature on gender atypicality stresses the relationship between gender typicality and victimization, harassment, and social exclusion. Research has also investigated the impact of same-gender (a)typicality on subjective well-being at different ages (Matud et al., 2014, 2019; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012; Toomey et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2021). Subjective well-being refers to one's self-appraised life satisfaction, both cognitively and affectively (i.e., considering emotional reactions) (Diener et al., 2013).

Specifically, research has highlighted that same-gender typicality—and particularly adherence to the relevant gender role—improves subjective well-being in children (Smith & Leaper, 2006) and adults (Matud et al., 2014, 2019; Toomey et al., 2013). Conversely, same-gender atypicality tends to negatively affect subjective well-being, due to unmet societal expectations of typical masculine and feminine behaviors, appearance, and interests. Keng and Liew (2017) underlined the negative link between same-gender atypicality and life satisfaction in young adults, in accordance with the larger literature demonstrating a negative relationship between same-gender atypicality and mental health (Alanko et al., 2009; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012). Moreover, studies have underlined that same-gender atypicality tends to negatively impact well-being and mental health, regardless of one's sexual orientation (Keng & Liew, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012).

Conversely, research using the dual identity approach has recognized that both adults and children who feel typical (or similar) to both genders tend to report higher levels of peer acceptance (Martin et al., 2017) and better adjustment (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021). Indeed, opening to a broader representation of gender typicality, the dual identity approach has invited researchers to explore the differences between gender typicality profiles, in relation to adjustment (Andrews et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2017) and psychological well-being (Baiocco et al., 2021; Endendijk et al., 2019). Similar associations have also been drawn in accordance with Bem's theory of psychological androgyny, with research showing that androgyny (i.e., displaying both high masculinity and high femininity) represents a protective factor for high social competence and peer acceptance (Bem, 1975, 1981). Although these results are relevant, more research regarding the relationship between gender typicality (considered through the dual identity approach), adjustment, and subjective well-being is needed.

### Social Self-Efficacy as a Mediator Between Gender Typicality and Adjustment

Social self-efficacy refers to one's ability to manage interpersonal relationships, based on one's experiences in specific settings and beliefs about one's capacity to build and maintain social relationships (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 2003; Di Giunta et al., 2010). Given the apparent influence of the social context, social self-efficacy may mediate the relationship between gender typicality and adjustment. Indeed, research has shown an association between positive effects from social relationships and higher perceived social safety and higher quality friendships, in both heterosexual

(Gilbert et al., 2009) and LGBTQ+ individuals (Baiocco et al., 2012).

Matud and colleagues (2014) found an association between life satisfaction and higher social support among women who perceived themselves as typical of femininity and men who reported lower levels of masculinity. Indeed, same-gender typicality has been linked to higher peer acceptance (Andrews et al., 2019; Carver et al., 2003; Perry et al., 2019), which may contribute to determining individuals' perceptions of and management of interpersonal relationships. Thus, same-gender typicality seems to be related to higher levels of social self-efficacy.

A further relevant element of social adjustment among same-gender (a)typical individuals is perceived social safety. Perceived social safety is an emotional experience encompassing feelings of belonging and acceptance. It seems to play a positive role in individual adjustment, due to its association with higher self-efficacy and self-esteem (Petrocchi et al., 2020). Both gender typicality and perceived social safety are related to the social context, which plays an essential role in the definition of social relationships based on gender (Blakemore et al., 2013; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Ruble et al., 2006).

According to the gender self-socialization model, gender typicality is associated with subjective well-being and social acceptance from childhood to adulthood, as it encourages the adoption of gender stereotypes and the identification of one's attributes with same-gender others (Tobin et al., 2010). Thus, the performance of gender-typed behavior may help individuals experience their social world as safe, warm, and soothing. A recent study conducted in Italy (Nappa et al., 2022) showed that sexual minority individuals who felt less safe/content reported higher levels of self-hatred and inadequacy. This result is not surprising, as it is reasonable to assume a low emotional experience of safety and contentment in sexual minority people perceived as same-gender atypical.

Much research investigating the relationship between gender typicality, social self-efficacy, and adjustment has been based on the unidimensional theory of gender typicality. According to this perspective, it is possible to analyze the unique contribution of same-gender typicality to adjustment, through the mediation of social self-efficacy. Differently, the dual identity approach, assuming same- and other-gender typicality as separate dimensions, is capable of describing the specific effect of each on adjustment and social self-efficacy. To the best of our knowledge, no prior research has explored the specific contribution of same- and other-gender typicality to adjustment, as mediated by social self-efficacy, through the dual approach. However, one previous study (Baiocco et al., 2021) suggested a complex

relationship between gender typicality, social adjustment, and social self-efficacy in sexual minority individuals.

Considering the relevance of perceived gender typicality in predicting subjective well-being and social adjustment, the present study focused on this variable in a sample of sexual minority individuals, examining the mediating role of social self-efficacy in predicting social safety and life satisfaction. Specifically, we hypothesized that: (1) according to the literature on gender typicality, there would be a positive link between same-gender typicality and both life satisfaction and perceived social safety (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021; Tobin et al., 2010); (2) in line with studies investigating gender atypicality and sexual orientation, other-gender typicality would have a negative effect on life satisfaction and perceived social safety (Baams et al., 2013; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012; Tam & Brown, 2020); (3) in line with Bem's androgynous hypothesis (Bem, 1981) and the dual identity approach (Martin et al., 2017), higher same- and other-gender typicality would predict higher levels of adjustment and subjective well-being, mediated by social self-efficacy; and (4) considering the role of social self-efficacy in the consolidation of social relationships and its association with gender typicality, social self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between same- and other-gender typicality and perceived social safety and life satisfaction, even after controlling for gender (i.e., women vs. men) and sexual orientation (i.e., gay men/lesbian women vs. bisexual and other non-heterosexual individuals).

Indeed, a previous study in the Italian context (Baiocco et al., 2021) found that men described themselves as more same-gender typical than women. Sexual orientation is a relevant variable in the perception of gender typicality, and LGBTQ+ individuals are less represented in the same-gender typicality profile, relative to heterosexual individuals. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has investigated gender typicality in gay men/lesbian women compared to other non-heterosexual individuals.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 522 (78.2% women) Italian sexual minority participants with ages ranging from 18 to 32 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 23.8$ ,  $SD = 3.63$ ). The sample included individuals who self-identified as bisexual people (45.8%,  $n = 239$ ; 91% women), gay men (16.3%,  $n = 85$ ), lesbian women (26.8%,  $n = 140$ ), and additional sexual minority people (i.e., same-gender-loving, men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, bi-curious, and questioning; 11%,  $n = 58$ ; 86% women). The general level of education was

medium to high, with 100 participants (19.2%) having at least a university degree and 310 participants (59.4%) having completed secondary school. Concerning socioeconomic status, the majority of individuals, 379 participants (72.6%), reported an average status, whereas 98 (18.8%) reported a below-average status, and 45 (8.6%) declared an above-average status. Demographic distributions are shown in Table 1.

### Procedure

Participants were recruited through the LGBTQ+ community recreational centers, universities, and workplaces in Rome, Italy. Notably, the sample was recruited through a snowball sampling method. Participants were not compensated, and participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and those who accepted to participate in the study were given a link to access an internet-based survey (hosted by Unipark; 20–25 min to complete). To meet the inclusion criteria, participants had to: (a) self-identified as a sexual minority person; (b) self-identified as a cisgender person, and (c) be of Italian nationality.

In total, 97% of the distributed surveys were filled in, and no data was missing. Before the data collection began, the research protocol was approved by the Ethics Commission of the Department of Developmental and Social Psychology of the Sapienza University of Rome. All procedures performed with human participants were conducted following the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration.

### Measures

#### Gender Typicality: Perceived Similarity to Gender Groups Scale

Typicality to same-gender and other-gender peers was assessed through the Martin and colleagues' scale (2017), validated in Italian by Baiocco and colleagues (2021) in samples of heterosexual and sexual minority adults. Participants responded to 6 items indicating how similar they felt to both men and women (e.g., "How similar do you feel to [women/men]?"). Responses ranged from 0 (*not similar at all*) to 4 (*very similar*). The Italian validated scale presents a two-factor solution in which typicality to Same-Gender (*Same*) and typicality to Other-Gender (*Other*) are distinct (see Table 2 for descriptives and reliabilities).

**Table 1** Sample Demographics

	Total Sample N = 522 (100%)		Lesbian Women N = 140 (26.8%)		Gay Men N = 85 (16.3%)		Bisexual People N = 239 (45.8%)		Additional Sexual Minority People N = 58 (11%)					
									Men		Women			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
<b>Education</b>														
Middle School Diploma	37	7.1	9	6.4	5	5.9	2	9.5	18	8.3	1	12.5	2	4
High School Diploma	273	52.3	64	45.7	36	42.4	7	33.3	140	64.2	4	50.0	22	44
Bachelor's degree	93	17.8	30	21.4	16	18.8	2	9.5	28	12.8	2	25.0	15	30
Master's degree	100	19.2	32	22.9	21	24.7	7	33.3	29	13.3	1	12.5	10	20
Postgraduate Level	19	3.6	5	3.6	7	8.2	3	14.3	3	1.4	-	-	1	2
<b>SES</b>														
Extremely Low	5	1.0	1	0.7	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	3	6
Low	93	17.8	21	15.0	12	14.1	1	4.8	45	20.6	3	37.5	11	22
Average	379	72.6	110	78.6	67	78.8	14	66.7	152	69.7	5	62.5	31	62
High	45	8.6	8	5.7	6	7.1	6	28.6	20	9.2	-	-	5	10
Extremely High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Relationship Status</b>														
Single	280	53.6	68	48.6	52	61.2	14	66.7	114	52.3	5	62.5	27	54
Engaged (not cohabiting)	160	30.7	52	37.1	16	18.8	4	19.0	72	33.0	1	12.5	15	30
Cohabiting	62	11.9	18	12.9	13	15.3	1	4.8	23	10.6	2	25.0	5	10
Civil Union	4	0.8	1	0.7	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Married	4	0.8	1	0.7	2	2.4	-	-	3	1.4	-	-	1	2
Other	12	2.3	68	48.6	52	61.2	6	9.5	5	2.3	-	-	2	4

Additional Sexual Minority People (i.e., same-gender-loving, men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, bi-curious, and questioning)



### Perceived Social Self-Efficacy

The Perceived Social Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura et al., 2003; Caprara et al., 2001) assesses individuals' beliefs in their capability to initiate and maintain social relationships, work cooperatively, and share personal experiences with others. The Perceived Social Safeness's short version used in the present study (e.g., Di Giunta et al., 2010) comprises five items rated on a five-point scale from 1 (*not well at all*) to 5 (*very well*) (e.g., "Share an interesting experience you had with other people?"). The items were averaged to an overall score that showed good reliability (see Table 2).

### Satisfaction with Life Scale

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) comprises five items to measure one's global satisfaction with life. Each item is rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (e.g., "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing"). Answers to the five items were averaged to produce an overall score that showed good reliability (see Table 2).

### Social Safeness and Pleasure Scale

The Social Safeness and Pleasure Scale was developed by Gilbert et al. (2009) to assess how people experience their social world as safe, warm, and soothing. The scale comprises eleven items assessing feelings of belonging, acceptance, and warmth from others (e.g., "I feel content within my relationships"). Each item is rated on a five-point scale from 0 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost all the time*). Answers to the eleven items were averaged to produce an overall score of social safeness and pleasure (see Table 2).

### Control Variables

The survey included demographic questions regarding participants' gender and sexual orientation. Specifically, cisgender participants were asked to report their gender and sexual orientation. In the analyses, we controlled for participants' gender (coded 0 for women and 1 for men) and sexual orientation (coded 0 for gay men/lesbian women and 1 for bisexual and other non-heterosexual people).

### Analytic Plan

Preliminary descriptive statistics, ANOVAs, and Pearson's correlations were examined. Specifically, two-way ANOVAs tested the effect of gender and sexual orientation on the study variables. Then a Path Analysis model was employed to test the study's hypotheses. Models were implemented in

*Mplus* software (Version 7; Muthén & Muthén, 2012) using a full information maximum likelihood estimator (FIML; Arbuckle 1996). We fitted a path model with relations from *own-* and *other-* gender typicality, perceived social safeness, and both satisfaction with life and social self-esteem (Fig. 1). We included *gender* and *sexual orientation* as control variables to test for their potential influences on the associations between the study variables.

To test for potential mediating effects, indirect effects were also examined. The bias-corrected bootstrapping methodology used *MPlus* with 500 bootstrap samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping estimates indirect effects through empirical sampling distributions by calculating confidence intervals. If zero is not included within the intervals, statistical significance is examined, and the null hypothesis of no indirect effects is rejected (MacKinnon et al., 2004). Model fit was evaluated using standard criteria: a model was considered to have a good fit if the  $\chi^2$  test was non-significant ( $p \geq .05$ ), the CFI and TLI  $\geq 0.95$ , the RMSEA  $\leq 0.06$ , and the SRMR  $\leq 0.08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

## Results

Descriptive statistics of the scales for sexual orientation are presented in Table 2. Two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effect of gender and sexual orientation on the study variables. Results from two-way ANOVAs indicated that no statistically significant interactions were found between the effects of gender and sexual orientation on any of the study variables.

The analysis of bivariate correlations evidenced significant and positive associations between other-gender typicality and perceived social safeness and self-efficacy for both men and women. Regarding same-gender typicality, significant positive associations were found with perceived social safeness and social self-efficacy, but only for women. No significant associations were found between same-gender typicality and Satisfaction with Life for both men and women (Table 3).

### Same- and Other-gender Typicality, Social Self-Efficacy, Life Satisfaction, and Perceived Social Safeness

A Path Analysis model was then implemented with Satisfaction with life and Perceived Social Safeness as outcomes controlling for Gender and Sexual Orientation (Fig. 1). The model fit the data very well,  $\chi^2(3) = 2.881, p = .41$ , CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, 90% CI = 0.00–0.07, SRMR = 0.015. Supporting Hypothesis 1 and partially supporting Hypothesis

**Table 2** Descriptive (means, standard deviations, alphas) of the sample's scales, divided by sexual orientation

	Total Sample N = 522 (100%)		Lesbian Women n = 140 (26.8%)		Gay Men n = 85 (16.3%)		Bisexual People n = 239 (45.8%)		Additional Sexual Minority People n = 58 (11%)		
	M(SD)	$\alpha$	M(SD)	$\alpha$	M(SD)	$\alpha$	M(SD)	$\alpha$	Men M(SD)	Women M(SD)	
Same-Gender Typicality	2.11(0.79)	0.85	2.00(0.76)	0.78	1.98(0.81)	0.81	1.57(0.63)	0.88	1.83(0.66)	2.16(0.88)	0.78
Other-Gender Typicality	1.79(0.74)	0.83	1.63(0.72)	0.86	2.14(0.72)	0.73	2.11(0.59)	0.87	2.0(0.69)	1.72(0.79)	0.75
Social Self-Efficacy	3.52(0.78)	0.89	2.59(0.73)	0.85	3.61(0.74)	0.90	3.69(0.93)	0.87	3.45(1.10)	3.46(0.87)	0.86
Satisfaction with life	3.46(1.40)	0.81	3.59(1.33)	0.77	3.57(1.34)	0.82	3.75(1.79)	0.76	3.80(1.63)	3.05(1.26)	0.81
Social Safeness and Pleasure	3.05(0.79)	0.87	3.10(0.74)	0.86	3.19(0.76)	0.88	2.95(0.80)	0.86	2.64(1.19)	2.76(0.80)	0.87

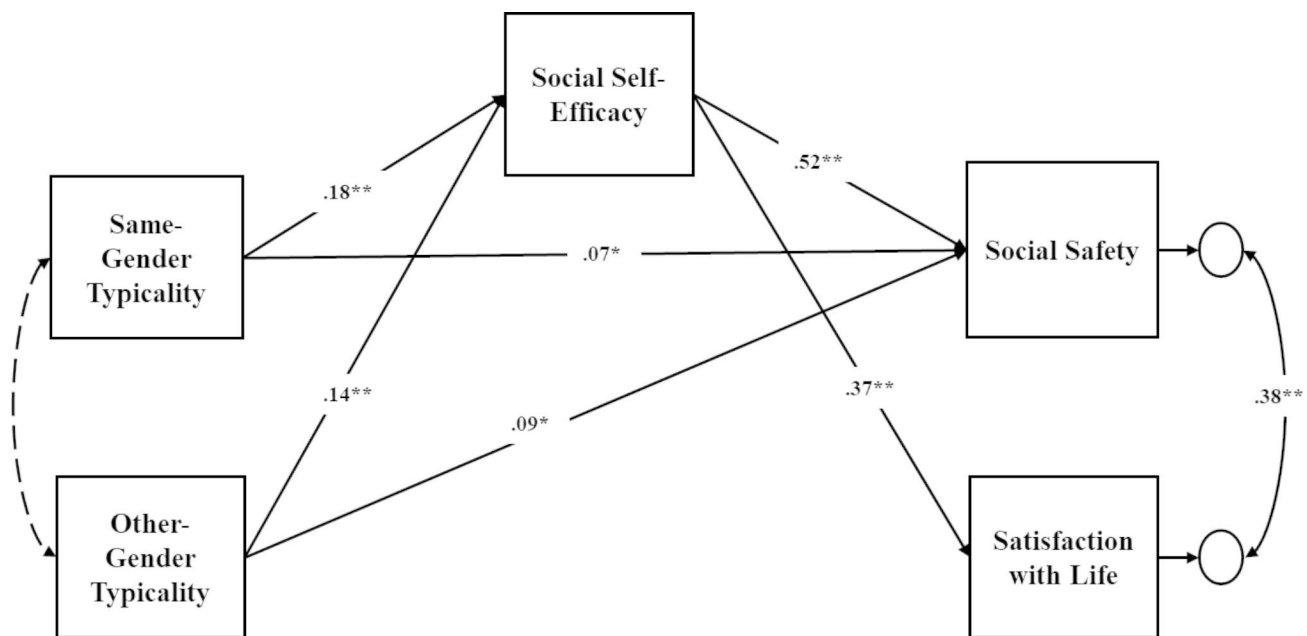
Note. Additional Sexual Minority People (i.e., same-gender-loving, men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, bi-curious, and questioning)

2, results showed that higher Same- and Other-gender Typicality were associated with higher Social Self-Efficacy and, in turn, with higher Perceived Social Safeness and Satisfaction with Life. A direct, positive association was also found between Same- and Other-gender Typicality and Perceived Social Safeness but not Satisfaction with Life (Fig. 1). Regarding the control variables, gender (coded 0 for women and 1 for men) and sexual orientation (coded 0 for gay men/lesbian women and 1 for bisexual and other non-heterosexual people) were included in our final model as predictors of Same- and Other-gender Typicality and Perceived Social Safeness. Results showed that gender was negatively associated only with Same-gender Typicality ( $\beta = -0.22, p = .01$ ) and positively with Other-gender Typicality ( $\beta = 0.45, p < .001$ ); only a negatively significant association was found for Sexual Orientation and Perceived Social Safeness ( $\beta = -0.12, p = .02$ ). These results suggest that women tend to report higher Other-gender typicality and lower Same-gender Typicality compared to men; additionally, bisexuals and other non-heterosexual people tend to report lower Perceived Social Safeness compared to gay men and lesbian women.

Then, we tested whether the relation between Same- and Other-gender Typicality on Satisfaction with Life and Perceived Social Safeness was mediated through early participants' Social Self-Efficacy beliefs. Supporting Hypothesis 3 and 4, considering both Satisfaction with Life and Perceived Social Safeness as outcomes, significant indirect effects through Social Self-Efficacy were found between Same-gender Typicality and Satisfaction with Life ( $b = 0.096, SE = 0.033; 95\% CI = 0.033, 0.163$ ) and between Same-gender Typicality and Perceived Social Safeness ( $b = 0.074, SE = 0.025; 95\% CI = 0.026, 0.012$ ). Similarly, significant, and positive indirect effects through Social Self-Efficacy were found between Other-gender Typicality and Satisfaction with Life ( $b = 0.129, SE = 0.034; 95\% CI = 0.070, 0.206$ ) and between Other-gender Typicality and Perceived Social Safeness ( $b = 0.100, SE = 0.025; 95\% CI = 0.055, 0.156$ ).

## Discussion

The present results highlight the relationship between same- and other-gender typicality, life satisfaction, and perceived social safety among sexual minority young adults, considering the mediating role of social self-efficacy. Previous studies have reported that LGBTQ+ individuals define themselves as more same-gender atypical (i.e., other-gender typical) in different life aspects, including their behaviors, appearance, employment, and social interactions (Green et al., 2018; Lippa, 2002, 2008). In the present study, the



**Fig. 1** Path Model. Note. \*= $p < .05$ ; \*\*= $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Standardized coefficients are presented controlling for gender (coded 0 for women and 1 for men) and sexual orientation (coded 0 for gay

men/lesbian women and 1 for bisexual and other non-heterosexual people) (not depicted for clarity). Dotted lines indicate non-significant associations

**Table 3** Bivariate correlations divided for gender

Total Sample <i>N</i> = 522 (100%)	Women		(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Men	(1)				
Same-Gender Typicality (1)		1	0.00	0.13**	0.03	0.17**
Other-Gender Typicality (2)	−0.19*		1	0.16**	0.06	0.11*
Social Self-Efficacy (3)	0.14	0.22*		1	0.38**	0.54**
Satisfaction with life Scale (4)	−0.06	0.27**	0.35**		1	0.52**
Social Safeness and Pleasure (5)	0.08	0.31**	0.52**	0.41**		1
Sexual Orientation (6)	−0.18*	−0.04	0.00	0.05	−0.17	

Note. Sexual orientation: coded 0 for gay men/lesbian women and 1 for bisexual and other non-heterosexual people

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

two-way ANOVA analyses indicated no statistically significant effects of gender or sexual orientation on the study variables. This result could be interpreted in light of the specific population investigated, which differed from those of previous studies that did not consider the relevance of sexual orientation in their analyses of gender typicality, adjustment, and well-being (e.g., Andrews et al., 2019; Endendijk et al., 2019). Indeed, considering the composition of our sample as uniformly LGBTQ+, the results may reasonably differ from those of studies analyzing sexual orientation and gender differences among both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ adults (Green et al., 2018; Li et al., 2016; Martin-Storey, 2016; Nappa et al., 2022).

Research has shown that same-gender typicality represents a protective factor for subjective adjustment and general subjective well-being (Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Tate et al., 2015). In line

with this, the present study found that same-gender typicality had a positive effect on life satisfaction and perceived social safety. Surprisingly, a positive relationship between other-gender typicality and perceived social safety was also found. This may be explained by the androgyny hypothesis, which underlines that both same- and other-gender typicality predict better adjustment (Bem, 1981; Martin et al., 2017). Alternatively, the relationship may have derived from perceived social acceptance. In this vein, research has highlighted the relevance of perceived social support—especially from members of the same subgroup (i.e., LGBTQ+ communities)—in contributing to better adjustment and mental health among LGBTQ+ young adults (Baiocco et al., 2012; Chan & Mak, 2020; Costa et al., 2013; Doty et al., 2010; Frost et al., 2016; Hull & Ortyl, 2019; Kelly et al., 2012).



The observed associations were maintained even when controlling for sexual orientation and gender. Of note, the significant associations between these control variables and the study variables showed that bisexual and non-heterosexual individuals reported lower perceived social safety compared to gay men and lesbian women. This may be read in light of the fact that bisexual and non-heterosexual individuals tend to be more frequently stigmatized by the LGBTQ+ community, and this may contribute to their lower perceived social safety and community acceptance (Israel & Mohr, 2004; Li et al., 2016).

Moreover, another significant association between a control variable and a study variable was found, with women reporting more other-gender typicality than men. This result is aligned with the literature suggesting that, for both women (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021) and girls (Blakemore, 2003; Braun & Davidson, 2017), atypicality is more tolerable (relative to men and boys), due to less pervasive social pressure to conform and greater acceptance of gender norm violations (Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011).

Moreover, in line with the previous hypothesis, the present findings provide support for the mediating role of social self-efficacy, as participants' beliefs about their capacity to build social interaction played an essential role in contributing to their perceived social safety and life satisfaction, and related to their same- and other-gender typicality. Indeed, the relationship between gender typicality and adjustment is well-documented in the literature (Carver et al., 2003; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Tate et al., 2015; Skinner et al., 2018; Yunger et al., 2004). However, consistent with the androgyny hypothesis, the present study found that high levels of same- and other-gender typicality predicted these positive relationships. Generally, the results illustrate the relevance of the dual identity approach to gender and underline the role of gender typicality in predicting social safety and life satisfaction through the mediating role of social self-efficacy.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations may be noted in the present study. First, the research was based on a convenience sample and was geographically restricted to Italy, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. A second limitation regards the use of self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability. Third, we did not consider the relevance of other potentially relevant variables (e.g., socioeconomic status, educational level, age, religiosity, ethnicity). In line with the intersectional perspective, gender and sexual orientation represent two of the main features of oppression and privilege in current society. However, other levels of oppression and privilege (relating to, e.g., race/ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, religiosity) may influence not only gender typicality, but also adjustment (Rosati et al., 2021; Shields, 2008). Future research should consider different levels of oppression and privilege, to promote more complex and representative depictions of varying life experiences and analyze the different life opportunities and conditions these may generate.

Fourth, most research on gender typicality has explored children, adolescents, and young adults within WEIRD (i.e., Western, educated, industrial, rich, democratic) contexts—particularly the United States and countries within Europe (Andrews et al., 2019; Baiocco et al., 2021; Endendijk et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2017; Nielson et al., 2020). However, perceived gender typicality derives from society-specific gender roles, and the extent to which these roles are rigidly adhered to varies across countries (Zentner & von Aufsess, 2020). Accordingly, cross-cultural research is needed to better understand the development of gender typicality from childhood to young adulthood. Moreover, to better understand the effect of same- and other-gender typicality on adjustment, future research should investigate the potential gender (in)equalities that are essential for the perceived freedom to express one's gender identity in opposition to socially prescribed gender roles and norms (Zentner & von Aufsess, 2020).

The present study illustrates the relevance of approaching the analysis of gender typicality in a flexible and comprehensive way that acknowledges different levels of gender typicality through a multidimensional perspective. Moreover, the research highlights that gender typicality may be addressed on both personal and societal levels, and play a relevant role in the positive perception of social safety and life satisfaction. According to recent studies, future research should explore the link between gender typicality, subjective well-being, and perceived social safety in specific contexts, such as sports teams (Rollè et al., 2022) and romantic relationships (Tognasso et al., 2022). Overall, actions at the societal level (e.g., interventions to foster positive attitudes towards different gender typicality expressions and sexual orientations) may be essential for building a more inclusive, flexible, and safe society for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Policy Implications

The present study has significant social and clinical implications. First, it confirms the relevance of the dual identity approach as a flexible and representative model for studying gender typicality in young adulthood. Indeed, a broader expression of gender typicality (i.e., beyond the binary understanding of gender) may promote health and social care for minority groups (Baiocco et al., 2021). Second,

the results suggest the relevance of gender (a)typicality for predicting subjective well-being and social safety among sexual minority individuals in recognition of the specific contribution of each gender typicality profile to predicting psychological well-being and adjustment. Thus, an inclusive and non-judgmental context may be fundamental for promoting the well-being of gender-atypical individuals with sexual minority status.

In summary, the present study contributes to the rich theoretical literature promoting social change in gender stereotypes and prejudice, intending to build a more inclusive society where all sexual minority identities are less conditioned by rigid gender norms. Moreover, we hope that this article will encourage future researchers to evaluate gender typicality across sexual orientation and gender identity dimensions, especially in countries such as Italy, which is characterized by high sexual stigma and negative beliefs regarding individuals who feel or express themselves as less typical of their same-gender peers (Baiocco et al., 2021; Nappa et al., 2022; Petrocchi et al., 2020).

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**Data Availability** The data are available upon request to the authors.

**Code Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Approval was granted by the Ethic Committee of Sapienza University of Rome.

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

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