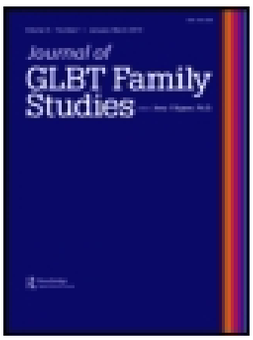

Journal of GLBT Family Studies

ISSN: 1550-428X (Print) 1550-4298 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wgfs20

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To cite this article: Karen L. Blair & Diane Holmberg (2019): What would you know about it? Managing ingroup vs. outgroup perceived support of same-sex vs. mixed-sex romantic relationships, Journal of GLBT Family Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1550428X.2018.1563760

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2018.1563760

Published online: 08 Feb 2019.

JOURNAL OF GLBT FAMILY STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2018.1563760

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What would you know about it? Managing ingroup vs. outgroup perceived support of same-sex vs. mixed-sex romantic relationships

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ABSTRACT

Social support for relationships is an important predictor of relationship well-being, duration, and mental and physical health. But does the source of the support matter? This article examines whether there is potential moderation by the ingroup versus outgroup status of the person offering the support. Specifically, in a sample of 407 individuals in mixed-sex versus same-sex relationships, we assessed how much social support individuals perceived for their relationship from members of their social network who were queer versus straight. Those in same-sex relationships had significantly more queer members within their social networks than those in mixed-sex relationships (38.6% vs. 8.1%). We found that although those in both types of relationships perceived more support for their relationships from ingroup network members, only those in mixed-sex relationships demonstrated a stronger association between ingroup (straight) support and relationship well-being. Those in same-sex relationships showed relatively weak associations between network members' support for the relationship and their relationship well-being, regardless of source. Results are interpreted in light of the social identity perspective, and we also discuss the potential for attributional ambiguity and discounting of others' opinions about their relationships within the context of same-sex relationships.

KEYWORDS

Social support for relationships; same-sex relationships; ingroup; outgroup; attributional ambiguity; social identity perspective

Individuals who perceive that their friends and family approve of and support their romantic relationship report better relationship well-being and are less likely to end their relationship (see Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010 for a review). Beyond relationship benefits, perceiving that one is in a relationship that others support and approve of is also associated with fewer mental and physical health complaints (Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Lehmiller, 2012) relative to those who feel that their network members disapprove of or do not support their relationship. The associations between perceptions of support for one's relationship and well-being outcomes, including relationship well-being, are generally similar in both mixed-sex and same-sex relationships (Holmberg & Blair, 2016); however, there are some nuanced differences concerning who provides the support, whose support is valued, and the strength of associations between specific variables.

In particular, although individuals in mixed-sex and same-sex relationships perceive similar levels of support and approval for their relationship from their friends (Holmberg & Blair, 2016; Kurdek, 2006), individuals in same-sex relationships frequently report lower perceptions of support from their family members, especially those who are perceived to be subjectively more

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distant from them within their social network (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Holmberg & Blair, 2016). Furthermore, not only do those in same-sex relationships perceive less support and approval for their relationships from their family members, they also tend to value these members' opinions concerning their relationship less, compared to those in mixed-sex relationships. For example, although 62.3% of those in mixed-sex relationships indicated that approval from their close family members (mother, father, siblings) was the most important source of approval for their relationship, a similar percentage (62.1%) of those in same-sex relationships indicated that their close friends were the most important source of approval for their relationship (Blair & Pukall, 2015), potentially demonstrating the reliance of those in same-sex relationships on *chosen family* (Dewaele, Cox, Van den Berghe, & Vincke, 2011). Finally, in addition to perceiving less support from family and being less likely to value the opinion of family members, individuals in same-sex relationships have also been shown to have a weaker association between perceived support for the relationship and well-being outcomes (relational, mental, physical), compared to those in mixed-sex relationships. The direction of association remains the same, such that individuals who perceive less support report worse well-being, but the strength of the association appears to be somewhat attenuated for those in same-sex relationships (Holmberg & Blair, 2016).

Attributional ambiguity

In an attempt to explain the attenuated association between perceptions of support and well-being outcomes, Holmberg and Blair (2016) suggested that those in same-sex relationships might at times experience attributional ambiguity (Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008)—when their social network members fail to support their relationship, they may be uncertain whether they should attribute the lack of support to actual problems with the relationship, or to homonegativity (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Morrison, Parriag, & Morrison, 1999). The ambiguity concerning the cause of someone's lack of support or disapproving opinion may then provide those in same-sex relationships with plausible explanations that are protective of their well-being (e.g., perhaps the lack of support is due to prejudice, not something inherently wrong with the relationship itself). On the other hand, the mere experience of attributional ambiguity has been conceptualized as a harm in and of itself, as it creates a moment where an individual must question whether a specific experience is tied to their social identity, or not (Friedlaender, 2018). Such repeated instances of wondering whether negative feedback is warranted or associated with a particular social identity cumulate into the experience of minority stress over time (Friedlaender, 2018).

If attributional ambiguity is at play, perhaps the opinions of those network members for whom there is little ambiguity concerning their opinions will have a disproportionate association with well-being outcomes. This would be expected particularly for those in same-sex relationships, for whom questions of attributional ambiguity may be more relevant. Past research on perceptions of social support for relationships has often focused on an individual's global perceptions of support for the relationship from either their entire social network, or from large sectors of the network, such as family or friends. Given those in same-sex relationships report subjectively valuing the opinions of their close friends, and especially their GLBTQ-identified close friends, more than the opinions of their family members (Blair & Pukall, 2015), it would be enlightening to examine how the sexual identity of each person offering (or withholding) support for the relationship is associated with relational outcomes. Perhaps those who have had (or are likely to have had) experience with their own same-sex relationships would be more likely to offer support to loved ones who are also in a same-sex relationship, and would also be seen as more reliable judges of such a relationship. Furthermore, given that individuals who share a sexual identity share a social group, it is possible that similar patterns of favoring the opinions of those from one's own *ingroup* (i.e., one's own sexual identity group) may also be evidenced amongst those in mixed-sex relationships. It bears mentioning, however, that relationship type

and sexual identity do not perfectly overlap. For example, a bisexual individual may be in either a same-sex or mixed-sex relationship and even those who identify as heterosexual or gay/lesbian are not always in a relationship type that matches their identity (Blair, Holmberg, & Pukall, 2018; Blair & Holmberg, 2008). Within this study, however, individuals in same-sex relationships will be considered to share an ingroup identity with any GLBQ individual, given that these individuals all share, at the very least, the propensity or likelihood of having their own personal experiences with same-sex relationships. Individuals in mixed-sex relationships will be considered to share an ingroup with non-GLBQ-identified individuals.

Ingroup versus outgroup support

The social identity perspective provides a useful theoretical framework for examining interactions based on group identity, in this case, the process of perceiving support for one's relationship from ingroup or outgroup members. The social identity perspective consists of two complementary theories, social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1972) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, 1982). SIT suggests that people understand their own identities as they relate to the groups to which they belong (ingroups) or do not belong (outgroups). Because people can belong to any number of different social groups, this provides them with a variety of social identities from which they can draw inferences about their own identity. Whenever people are interacting with other individuals, according to SIT, these interactions exist along a continuum ranging from being based entirely on personal identities to being based entirely on social identities. Thus, within SIT, personal and social identities are seen as opposite ends of a spectrum. SCT, on the other hand, provides an extension of SIT, by further refining how identity processes are understood. In particular, SCT reconceptualizes personal and social identities in a way that allows them to coexist and interact dynamically. Instead of pitting the two against each other at opposite ends of a spectrum, SCT suggests that in any given situation it is possible for a particular aspect of one's identity (personal or social) to be more salient than the other, or, in other cases, for both to be salient, resulting in an interaction between the two. Thus, from the social identity perspective, understanding an individual's perceptions necessitates understanding their processes of self-categorization in any given situation, which will depend on which categories are most salient (Hornsey, 2008).

Within the context of giving and perceiving social support, the social identity perspective suggests that when an opportunity arises to provide support, if the two parties share a common identity (e.g., they are both ingroup members), they will be more likely to provide support to each other, and will be more likely to perceive that support as being effective (Haslam, Reicher, & Levine, 2011). Thus, in the context of our investigation, issues of attributional ambiguity or perceived bias against same-sex relationships might arise less when network members also identify as GLBQ.[1]

Past research has also demonstrated the human tendency to overestimate the extent to which fellow ingroup members share one's opinions (the false consensus effect), while also showing that people tend to believe that their opinions will be distinct from those held by outgroup members (Mullen, Dovidio, Johnson, & Copper, 1992). Applied to the notion of perceiving social support for a romantic relationship, it is conceivable that people may expect their fellow ingroup members (defined by sexual identity) to be more likely to share one's positive view of one's own relationship, relative to those in the outgroup. Such expectations may be relevant to individuals in both mixed-sex and same-sex relationships, but may be especially salient for those in same-sex relationships, who may have more cause to expect that outgroup members (heterosexual individuals) may hold more distinct (or contrary) views of a same-sex relationship. To the extent that individuals may be more likely to project their positive feelings concerning their relationship onto the opinions of other ingroup members, we would expect to see participants reporting

greater levels of perceived support for their relationship from social network members who share their sexual identity, and less support from social network members of a different sexual identity.

Beyond perception, it is also conceivable that ingroup members may truly *offer* more support to each other, including more support and approval for each other's relationships explaining why we are more likely to offer more support to members of our ingroup, Haslam and colleagues (2011) have suggested that we are genuinely concerned about their plight, and therefore are motivated by feelings of empathy and a desire to protect them. Within the context of relationships, and especially within the context of marginalized relationships, social network members may feel motivated to support ingroup members' relationships in an effort to see the relationships of their ingroup thrive. Applied to GLBQ individuals and same-sex relationships, individuals with a shared GLBQ identity may be motivated to offer support to the same-sex relationships within their networks, due to empathy, and also because doing so may be one means of recognizing the merit of such relationships, and consequently contributing to the collective interests of the whole group.

In addition to ingroup members offering more support, it is also possible that support or approval offered by ingroups may be perceived as more knowledgeable or better informed about the nuances of one's own type of relationship. Ingroup support may therefore feel like 'better' support and may be valued or relied upon more than support offered by outgroup members. Beyond the context of support for relationships, such patterns have been observed, such that support offered by ingroup members is perceived as being more comforting than support offered by outgroup members, which is seen as less trustworthy (Haslam et al., 2011). Thus, according to social identity theory, associations between support and outcome measures might be stronger when support comes from ingroup members than from outgroup members.

SCT, on the other hand, considers the extent to which group membership is salient or central in any given situation. To be motivated by a desire to support the 'collective us,' or motivated to be supported by others within one's own group, one first needs to recognize the shared identity (Haslam et al., 2011). It is here that we may expect to see stronger effects for those in same-sex relationships, as the shared group identity may be more salient in the context of non-normative relationships. Those who hold minority group identities are particularly likely to emphasize them as a salient aspect of their overall identity, compared to majority group members (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978), and are particularly likely to monitor and emphasize ingroup/outgroup boundaries (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008; Smith & Leach, 2004). In other words, when considering the processes of giving and receiving social support for a romantic relationship, sexual identity may be more salient for those in same-sex relationships than it would be for those in mixed-sex relationships. If so, then those in same-sex relationships may be more likely to make distinctions between support that comes from fellow ingroup members versus outgroup members.

In the context of this study, SIT suggests that we will see participants reporting more support for their relationships from other ingroup members, and that this will happen regardless of relationship type. However, although SCT would also support this prediction, it adds an additional element, such that the differential level of salience for sexual identity experienced between those in same-sex versus mixed-sex relationships predicts that those in same-sex relationships may be particularly likely to perceive more support from ingroup members and, in turn, experience stronger associations between such support and their overall relationship well-being.

This study

This study examined individuals' perceptions of social support for their relationship from multiple individual social network members by asking participants to identify all members of their

social network, and provide information about each member's sexual identity, and their perception of support for their relationship from that specific social network member. This method allows us to examine how the sexual identity of individual social network members may be associated with perceived support for the relationship and well-being outcomes. Specifically, we tested three hypotheses:

H1: Participants will receive more support for their relationships from ingroup members than outgroup members. For our study, the ingroup for those in same-sex relationships will be any social network member identified as GLBQ and the ingroup for those in mixed-sex relationships will be any social network member identified as heterosexual.
H2: Support for the relationship will be more strongly associated with relationship well-being when the support comes from ingroup network members than outgroup network members.
H3: The effect noted in H2 will be stronger for those in same-sex relationships than those in mixed-sex relationships.

Method

Procedure

Recruitment efforts specifically sought a nonuniversity-based sample, so as to include participants in a variety of relationship stages and from a wide geographic area. After finding the study through a variety of recruitment methods (e.g., posters, online advertisements, list-serv announcements, flyers, magazine ads, snowball sampling), participants completed an online consent form. Much of the recruitment took place online and targeted people living in Canada or the United States (see Table 1). To ensure the ability to assess differences between same-sex and mixed-sex relationships, a number of recruitment ads specifically targeted GLBTQ-identified participants, such as through the placement of ads in GLBTQ magazines (e.g., *Curve*, *Advocate*, *Out*) or on GLBTQ websites (e.g., www.Advocate.com). The study was described as assessing contemporary relationship experiences and health. Participants created a username and password, and completed a variety of measures at their own pace over a period of 2 weeks. Only measures relevant to this study are discussed here; analyses with other measures have been published elsewhere (Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Holmberg & Blair, 2009; Holmberg, Blair, & Phillips, 2010; Holmberg & Blair, 2016). Participants were incentivized with participation points, used to enter various prize draws (see Blair & Holmberg, 2008).

Participants

The sample for this analysis included 407 individuals who were in a romantic relationship and provided data on the relevant measures. Most participants identified as women (316); 90 identified as men and one individual selected *other* for gender. With respect to relationship type, 159 (39%) were in self-reported same-sex relationships and 248 (61%) were in mixed-sex relationships. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1. Between-group comparisons were conducted on all demographic variables, using independent samples *t*-tests for continuous variables and chi-square analyses for categorical variables (see Table 1). To ensure that demographic differences could not account for any effects of relationship type, all of the variables that showed significant group differences were used as covariates in all analyses (except for sexual identity, which was too highly confounded with relationship type). Note that the same pattern of results held whether these covariates were included or excluded.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and group differences for demographic variables.

	Same-Sex Relationships *M (SD)*	Mixed-Sex Relationships *M (SD)*	Group Differences
Age	34.4 (9.8)	26.3 (7.1)	$t(263^a) = -9.08$, $p < .001$
Relationship duration (Years)	5.7 (6.2)	4.5 (5.1)	$t(289^a) = -2.02$, $p = .04$
	%	%	
Gender			$X^2(2) = 10.16$, $p = .007$
Female	70	83	
Male	30	17	
Other	1	0	
Sexual identity			$X^2(3) = 376.82$, $p < .001$
Straight	0	95	
Gay/Lesbian	87	0	
Bisexual	2	4	
Queer	9	9	
Cohabitation status			$X^2(1) = 16.98$, $p < .001$
Living together	79	59	
Living apart	21	41	
Parental status			$X^2(1) = 6.94$, $p = .008$
Has children	26	16	
No children	74	84	
Relationship stage			$X^2(5) = 3.67$, $p = .60$
Casually Dating	2	4	
Seriously dating	21	17	
Thought about marriage	33	33	
Discussed marriage	3	4	
Engaged	12	14	
Married	28	27	
Education			$X^2(4) = 14.96$, $p = .005$
High School	8	8	
Some college/university	28	32	
Undergraduate degree	30	17	
Some graduate school	9	20	
Graduate degree	25	24	
Race/Ethnicity			$X^2(1) = 0.57$, $p = .45$
White	89	92	
Non-White	11	9	
Country			$X^2(1) = 17.81$, $p < .001$
Canada	54	74	
Other (primarily United States of America)	47	26	

Note. Percentages do not always add to 100 due to rounding.
[a]*df* adjusted due to unequal variances.

Measures

Relationship well-being. Relationship well-being was assessed by standardizing scores on three well-validated measures, and averaging across the three standard scores. As can be seen in Table 2, each measure, and the composite score, showed good reliability in this study. Hendrick's seven-item relationship assessment scale (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998) was used to assess overall relationship satisfaction (e.g. "How good is your relationship compared to most?"). Love was assessed using Rubin's love scale (Rubin, 1970), a 13-item measure (e.g., "I would do almost anything for my partner"), and trust was assessed with a 17-item scale from Rempel, Holmes and Zanna (1985; e.g., "I can rely on my partner to react in a positive way when I expose my weaknesses to them").

Social network ratings. Participants were shown an image of four concentric circles and each circle was described as representing a different subset of their social network members, such that those closer to the center represented the participant's closest friends and family, while those in the outermost circles represented individuals to whom the individual was less connected, such as acquaintances. A full description of this method can be found in Holmberg and Blair (2016). After reviewing the

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for relationship well-being.

Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	Possible Range	M	SD
Relationship well-being	.76[a]			
Relationship satisfaction	.86	1–7	5.94	.84
Love	.82	1–9	6.90	1.05
Trust	.91	1–7	5.78	.89

[a]This score represent the Cronbach's alpha across the three *z*-scores of the component measures.

description of each circle, participants were asked to list everyone in their social network whom they would place within each of the circles and were given space to do so without limit.

The number of social network members listed ranged from 1 to 69, with the average number listed being 20.4. On the next page of the online survey, participants completed a series of questions for each network member. These questions detailed (among other things) the sexual identity of each social network member: straight (i.e., heterosexual) or queer[2] (i.e., homosexual, bisexual, or other). If a network member's sexual identity was left blank or was unknown to the participant, data about that specific network member was not used for the relevant analysis. On average, the social networks of participants in mixed-sex relationships contained 88% straight individuals, 8% queer individuals, and 4% individuals of unknown or unspecified sexual orientation; networks of those in same-sex relationships contained 59% straight individuals, 39% queer, and 2% unknown/unspecified.

Participants also indicated how much they thought each social network member supported their romantic relationship by answering the question "how supportive are they of your relationship", on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). If participants indicated that a particular network member was unaware of the participant's sexual orientation or relationship status, no support ratings were provided for that network member. Such responses were relatively rare: on average, only 4% of participants' network members did not know their sexual orientation.

Results

All analyses were conducted using the linear mixed models procedure in SPSS 25, with maximum likelihood estimation.

Perceived support from ingroup versus outgroup network members

To test H1, we conducted a multilevel model with *support for the relationship* as the dependent variable, estimating fixed effects. The seven demographic covariates were entered, along with the predictor variables of relationship type (mixed-sex vs. same-sex), network member type (ingroup vs. outgroup), and their interaction. Relationship type was a level two variable, meaning it varied only between participants, and network member type was a repeated level one variable, meaning it could vary within participants (i.e., each participant could have a mix of ingroup and outgroup network members).

The results are shown in Table 3. The gamma coefficients shown can be interpreted exactly like *b* (unstandardized) coefficients in multiple regression analyses. Supporting H1, there was a significant main effect of network member type, with the positive *b* coefficient indicating ingroup members were rated as being slightly more supportive of the relationship (.22 points on a 5-point scale, on average) than outgroup members. The lack of a significant interaction shows that the magnitude of this effect was equally strong for those in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships.

Perceived support for the relationship predicting relationship well-being

To test H2 and H3, we ran a multilevel model with *relationship well-being* as the dependent variable, predicted by the seven covariates, average *support for the relationship* across network group

Table 3. Relationship type and network member type as predictors of support for the relationship.

Parameter	Coeff.	SE	95% CI
Intercept	4.41***	.05	[4.32, 4.51]
Age	.01***	.00	[.00, .01]
Education	.02^{+}	.01	[−.00, .03]
Cohabitation status	.13***	.02	[.09, .18]
Country	−.01	.02	[−.05, .03]
Gender	−.01	.02	[−.06, .04]
Parental status	−.16***	.03	[−.22, −.11]
Relationship duration	.01***	.00	[.00, .01]
Relationship type	−.05	.05	[−.15, .04]
Network member type	.22***	.04	[.14, .31]
Relationship type × Network member type	−.04	.06	[−.15, .07]

Note. Coeff.=coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Cohabitation Status (0 = not living together; 1 = living together); Country (0 = Canada; 1 = Other); Gender (0 = not female; 1 = female); Parental Status (0 = not a parent; 1 = parent); Relationship Type (0 = mixed-sex; 1 = same-sex); Network Member Type (0 = outgroup; 1= ingroup). $N = 377$.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

Table 4. Support for the relationship, relationship type, and network member type as predictors of relationship well-being.

Parameter	Coeff.	SE	95% CI
Intercept	−.10***	.04	[−.19, −.01]
Age	.01***	.00	[.01, .02]
Education	−.10***	.01	[−.11, −.08]
Cohabitation status	.27***	.02	[.23, .31]
Country	.26***	.02	[.22, .30]
Gender	−.13	.02	[−.17, −.09]
Parental status	−.22***	.03	[−.27, −.17]
Relationship duration	−.02***	.00	[−.03, −.02]
Support for relationship	.20***	.04	[.12, .28]
Network member type	.08*	.04	[.01, .16]
Relationship type	−.18***	.04	[−.26, −.09]
Support × Network member type	.12**	.04	[.04, .21]
Support × Relationship type	−.09^{+}	.05	[−.18, .00]
Relationship type × Network member type	−.09^{+}	.05	[−.19, .01]
Support × Relationship type × Network member type	−.10+	.06	[−.21, .01]

Note. Coeff.=coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Cohabitation Status (0 = not living together; 1 = living together); Country (0 = Canada; 1 = Other); Gender (0 = not female; 1 = female); Parental Status (0 = not a parent; 1 = parent); Relationship Type (0 = mixed-sex; 1 = same-sex); Network Member Type (0 = outgroup; 1= ingroup). $N = 385$.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

members (grand mean centered) as a level 2 variable, network member type as a level 1 repeated variable, and relationship type as a level 2 variable, plus all possible interactions amongst the three predictor variables.

Supporting H2, there was a significant two-way interaction between *support for the relationship* and *network member type*. Simple slopes were tested using Preacher, Curran, and Bauer's (2006) on-line macros. As per H2, the association between support for the relationship and relationship well-being was stronger when support came from ingroup members ($b = .32$, $se = .02$, $p < .001$) than from outgroup members ($b = .20$, $se = .04$, $p < .001$).

However, this interaction, and all other effects, was subsumed by a marginally significant three-way interaction, graphed in Figure 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, H3 was not supported. Because the on-line macros do not calculate simple slopes for this type of three-way interaction (i.e., one level 2 variable and two level 1 variables), further probing of the three-way interaction was conducted by running the analyses separately for each relationship type, and calculating the simple slopes for the two-way interactions between *support for the relationship* and *network member type*.

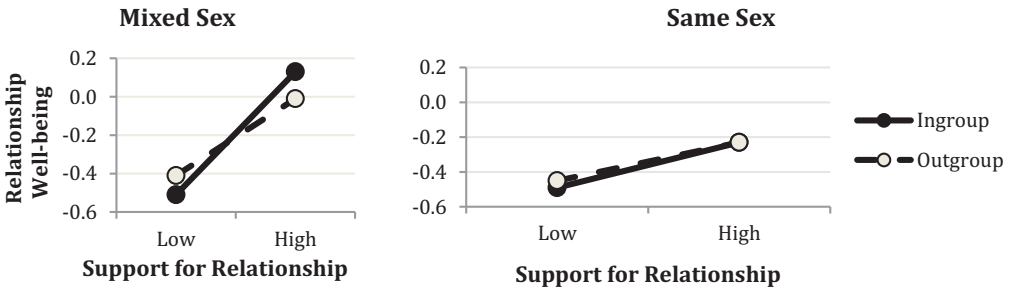

Figure 1. Support for relationship and network group member type (ingroup vs. outgroup) predicting relationship well-being, by relationship type.

The expected pattern held for those in mixed-sex relationships, with a significant two-way interaction between *support for the relationship* and *network member type* (coeff = .12, *se* = .04, $p = .006$), and the association between *support for the relationship* and *relationship well-being being* stronger when support came from ingroup members ($b = .32$, *se* = .02, $p < .001$) than from outgroup members ($b = .20$, *se* = .04, $p < .001$). Unexpectedly, however, this pattern did not apply to those in same-sex relationships. They showed no significant interaction between *support for the relationship* and *network member type* (coeff = .01, *se* = .04, $p = .71$). Instead, those in same-sex relationships showed relatively weaker associations between *support for the relationship* and *relationship well-being* overall, and displayed little differentiation between support received from ingroup members ($b = .12$, $se = .03$, $p < .001$) and outgroup members ($b = .11$, $se = .02$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

We sought to examine perceptions of support for relationships from ingroup versus outgroup members, and correlates of that support, among individuals in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships. H1 was supported. As expected, participants reported perceiving more support for their relationships from ingroup, as opposed to outgroup, social network members. Previous research has shown that individuals in same-sex relationships tend to build close networks of highly supportive friends, often queer themselves, known as "chosen families" (Dewaele et al., 2011). Note, however, that the results were equally strong for those in mixed-sex relationships, suggesting there may be a more general process at work. Perhaps, as the social identity perspective would suggest (Haslam et al., 2011; Hornsey, 2008), people are simply more likely to provide support to fellow ingroup members, and are more likely to perceive support from ingroup members. Indeed, one may even give ingroup members the benefit of the doubt and simply assume a certain baseline level of support for one's relationships from individuals who have shared similar relationship experiences, regardless of whether such perceptions are accurate. Contrary to our expectations, it appears that *us* versus *them* category distinctions along the lines of sexual identity may be equally salient regardless of relationship type (i.e., same-sex vs. mixed-sex).

H2 was also supported. As predicted, support from ingroup members was more strongly associated with relationship well-being than support from outgroup members. However, the marginally significant three-way interaction offered no support for H3, which predicted that the effect in H2 would be stronger for those in same-sex relationships. In fact, the opposite pattern was found, such that the effect was stronger for those in mixed-sex relationships, although not significantly so.

Those in mixed-sex relationships drove the support for H2. Individuals in same-sex relationships showed relatively weak associations between perceived support for their relationships and relationship well-being, regardless of source (see also Holmberg & Blair, 2016). Such weak

associations have been observed in previous research, and a possible explanation offered was attributional ambiguity: if those in same-sex relationships suspect opinions about their relationship might, in part, be based on prejudice, those opinions may be discounted (Holmberg & Blair, 2016). However, one would think that with ingroup members (i.e., GLBQ individuals), who presumably would be less likely to hold prejudiced views of same-sex relationships, issues of attributional ambiguity would likely not apply. There must be other explanations for these findings.

One potential explanation may be that individuals evaluate the very notion of support for one's relationship differently when they are in a same-sex relationship, as compared to those in mixed-sex relationships. In our past research (Holmberg & Blair, 2016), we have reported that the association between perceptions of support for one's overall sexual identity and perceptions of support for one's specific relationship are much more strongly correlated for those in same-sex relationships than those in mixed-sex relationships. Indeed, straight individuals may not even be able to adequately conceive of what it means to have (or not have) support for their sexual identity; such support may simply be assumed or taken for granted. In contrast, those in same-sex relationships attempting to assess how much a social network member supports a specific relationship may first evaluate whether that individual is supportive of their broader sexual identity. When assessing support for the relationship from ingroup members, however, this calculation may become more straightforward, such that support for sexual identity can be assumed due to shared group membership, rendering the assessment of support for the relationship more akin to the processes experienced by those in mixed-sex relationships. However, this explanation does not help us to understand our results, such that even when examining support for the relationship from ingroup members, those in same-sex relationships still did not show strong associations between support for the relationship and relationship well-being.

Perhaps, instead of focusing on ingroup versus outgroup membership, those in same-sex relationships might, instead, be broadly less motivated to comply with social network members' opinions of their relationships (Etcheverry & Le, 2014), or may be higher in independent reactance (Sinclair & Ellithorpe, 2014), which is a general tendency to disregard others' opinions and instead proceed with one's own preferences. Potentially as a result of prolonged exposure to various forms of disapproval for same-sex relationships, individuals in same-sex relationships may simply take a more independent-minded approach to evaluating their relationships. In other words, they may choose to rely less on the opinions of outsiders and more on their own perspectives when attempting to evaluate the quality of their own relationship.

Reduced motivation to comply and higher levels of independent reactance have been demonstrated in past research with mixed-sex couples to attenuate associations between perceived support for the relationship and well-being outcomes (Etcheverry & Le, 2014; Sinclair & Ellithorpe, 2014). In the context of same-sex relationships, such tendencies could, in fact, aid resilience. Given the general lower levels of societal and familial support for same-sex couples, especially within a historical context, being less susceptible to the negative opinions of others concerning one's relationship might offer a much-needed buffer. These processes have not yet been explicitly compared in mixed-sex versus same-sex relationships, and should therefore be an area of future investigation.

Strengths and limitations

Although not conclusive, this study moves us closer to understanding similarities and differences in social support dynamics for same-sex versus mixed-sex couples. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and use of self-report measures within a convenience sample. In particular, participants reported perceptions of support for the relationship, which may or may not correspond to the support network members intended to convey. Additionally, the sample mainly consisted of women, making inclusion of gender as an additional moderating variable impossible

(i.e., the number of men in same-sex relationships would have been too small for adequate power). Future research should attempt to gather a more gender-balanced sample to more closely examine the influence of gender both in terms of how individuals of different genders may respond to ingroup versus outgroup support but also in terms of how gender itself may serve as another element of ingroup versus outgroup support. In other words, gender may function as another important vector of *us* versus *them*. It would be interesting for future research to examine whether individuals rely more on the opinions of members of their own gender when assessing their relationship. Or, given that women are sometimes viewed as more aware of and focused on relationships (Acitelli, 1992), is it possible that all individuals may be more influenced by the opinions of women?

The sample was also largely homogeneous with respect to race. Future research should also examine whether individuals are more trusting or reliant upon opinions of their relationship from network members of similar racial or cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, however, an intersectional approach needs to be taken in future research (Hoskin, 2017), which would allow for a simultaneous investigation of how gender, gender expression, race, class, and sexual identity all may interact in forming diverse definitions of ingroups. For example, does the amount of perceived support increase with the number of ingroup identities one shares with a particular social network member, or is one shared identity sufficient to be associated with greater perceptions of support for the relationship?

Finally, some may wonder whether the actual definition of *ingroup* and *outgroup* within this study was appropriate, given that participants were classified as being in either same-sex or mixed-sex relationships, but social network members were classified by their sexual identity. In general, a relationship type (e.g., mixed-sex) does not always perfectly equate to a proxy of sexual identity, given that not all individuals in mixed-sex relationships identify as heterosexual (i.e., bisexual, queer, and sometimes even gay or lesbian individuals can be in a mixed-sex relationship). Although this is true, within our study the correspondence is high: 95% of those in mixed-sex relationships identified as heterosexual or straight, and 100% of those in same-sex relationships identified as GLBQ (see Table 1). However, future research should certainly be cautious of this issue, and it would be an interesting avenue of investigation to explore how bisexual and queer-identified individuals evaluate support from others as a function of sexual identity, and especially how this may potentially change as a function of the nature of their current relationship (i.e., same-sex or mixed-sex).

Conclusion

Social network approval/disapproval of relationships may, in general, function as a mechanism to help individuals select and maintain optimal relationships, providing guiding lights in the darkness as people traverse the tumultuous waters of love. If same-sex couples are, in fact, less attuned or responsive to social support for their relationships, they might be missing out on some of the potential benefits of a collective mate-selection process. Of course, it is no surprise that they might choose not to weigh others' opinions heavily, given the many decades and even centuries that same-sex couples had to conduct relationships behind closed doors, hidden even from close friends and family members. However, as society continues to evolve, and same-sex couples become more embedded and accepted within the social fabric of society, it is important to examine ways in which mechanisms such as social support for relationships can be harnessed to their greatest potential, for the benefit of all relationship types.

Our findings may be of use to marriage and family counselors helping individuals to navigate the process of giving and receiving support or disapproval for romantic relationships. One takeaway is that it may be necessary to evaluate others' support for one's relationship in a more fine-tuned manner, rather than simply assessing support based on group membership. In other words,

assuming that someone else's support (or lack thereof) for one's relationship is the result of sharing (or not sharing) the same social identity may ultimately lead one astray in making important relationship decisions. Discounting the opinions of those in one's outgroups without carefully considering each individual's opinion may cause one to ignore evidence of red flags within one's relationships. After all, if social support is intended to guide people in their relationship decision-making processes, being open to a diverse range of opinions may help them to make the most advisable decisions. Thus, although ignoring negative feedback from outgroup members may be protective when that feedback is truly driven by a form of prejudice, consistently ignoring all negative feedback or all outgroup feedback may lead to insulated decision-making patterns that fail to take into account information that might otherwise help an individual to either improve their existing relationship or move on to a healthier relationship. Ultimately, future research needs to continue this line of work so that we can provide a more clear answer on what factors predict good, reliable, and helpful feedback or forms of support for relationships, as well as how to teach individuals within relationships to tune into such factors when making relationship decisions, rather than relying on simpler heuristics, such as trusting the opinions of ingroup members and ignoring the opinions of outgroup members.

Supplementary files

Copies of all measures and data files are available, by request, from the first author.

Notes

1. Where relevant, we have used *GLBQ* in lieu of *GLBTQ* to avoid conflating sexual identity with gender identity. Thus, where we are only referring specifically to sexual identity, we use *GLBQ*, and where we are referring to a broader community or to research that has specifically been inclusive of transgender experiences, we use *GLBTQ*.
2. For ease of reading, *queer* is used as an umbrella term to refer to those network members identified by the participants as not being straight/heterosexual.

Funding

This work was supported by student fellowships awarded to the first author by the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (#78397), as well as by a research grant from the Lesbian Health Fund, Gay and Lesbian Medical Association.

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