

Decision Making in Same-Sex vs. Mixed-Sex Relationships

The Role of Social Network Disapproval in Decisions to Continue or Terminate Romantic Relationships

Karen L. Blair, Ph.D.¹, Caroline F. Pukall, Ph.D.²
¹Affiliation, ²Queen's University

Introduction

- Previous research has linked social support for relationships to relationship and health outcomes in both same-sex and mixed-sex couples. (Blair, 2012; Blair & Holmberg, 2008)
- Individuals who perceive a greater amount of support or approval for their romantic relationship are more likely to report better relationship well-being (i.e., satisfaction, love, commitment, etc.), and in turn, fewer mental and physical health problems.
- The influence of social support for relationships on relationship and health outcomes has been shown to last over time - such that individuals perceiving more approval of their relationship at an earlier point in time are more likely to report positive relationship and health outcomes at a later point in time (Blair, 2012).
- Social support/approval for romantic relationships has also been linked to the stability of relationships, with individuals who perceive less support or more disapproval for their relationships being more likely to experience the dissolution of their relationship.
- Previous research has been inconclusive concerning the importance of social support for relationships from various sources. One question that remains is whether support from parents is equivalent to support from friends. While some research finds that parents matter more, others find no difference, while yet other studies report that the opinions of friends are the most important.
- Additionally, while we know that social support for relationships is associated with relationship outcomes, we know less about the mechanisms through which this association is created.
- Do individuals who perceive more support for their relationship work harder at maintaining a healthy relationship?
- Do social network members simply offer their support only to the relationships that are already doing well?
- Do individuals consciously consider the opinions of their friends and family when determining whether to continue or end a romantic relationship?

Funding & Contact



View Poster Online



Funding Partially Provided CIHR/IRSC

www.DrKarenBlair.com

Current Study

The current study sought to:

1. Determine whether individuals in romantic relationships place more emphasis on the opinions of their parents or their friends when making decisions about their relationship.
2. Determine the extent to which individuals in relationships consciously consider the opinions of their friends and family when making decisions about continuing or ending their romantic relationships.
3. Determine whether individuals in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships rely on their parents vs. friends to the same extent when making relationship decisions.

Method

The study's design was based on Zhang & Kline's (2009) study examining Participants read hypothetical scenarios in which a parent or peer expressed disapproval of their relationship and encouraged them to end the relationship. After reading each scenario, participants reported whether or not they would end their relationship based on the given scenario and provided an explanation for their reasoning.

Sample Scenario: *Imagine that you have been in a steady relationship with this person for a few months. You have brought him/her to visit your parents several times. It is unfortunate that your parents do not like him/her. Your parents have told you several times that he/she is not the right person for you. They even mentioned that you should break up with him/her. Do you think you would break up with this person? Why or Why not?*

Scenarios varied by the source of opinion concerning the relationship: parents, close heterosexual friends, close LGBTQ friends.

Participants also provided information concerning their sexual and gender identity, basic demographics, relationship status and measures assessing the influence of their social network in dating decisions, level of outness (for LGBTQ participants), self-esteem, relationship experience, and sense of support for their sexual identity.

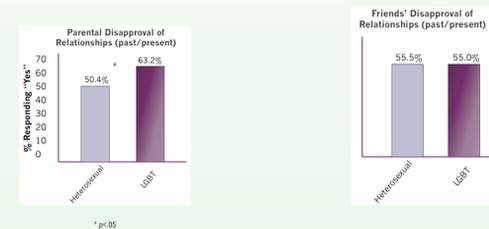
Zhang, S., & Kline, S.L. (2009). Can I make my own decision? A cross-cultural study of perceived social network influence in mate selection. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 40(1), 3-23.

Sample

- N = 959; Mean Age = 25.5, Range: 18-81
- Average # of past relationships: 5; Average # of serious relationships :2.26
- 61.7% Female; 37.5% Male
- 63.7% Heterosexual, 22.9% Lesbian/Gay, 8.3% Bisexual, 5.1% Queer

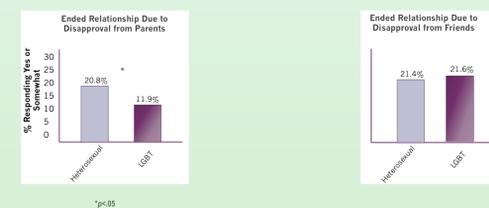
Results

Experiences of Relationship Disapproval

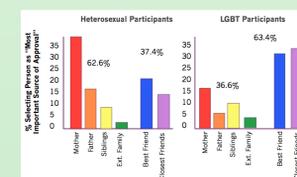


- There were no group differences in experiences of disapproval from friends (roughly 55% of each group had experienced disapproval from friends - i.e., it is not an uncommon experience to have one's relationship met with disapproval from close friends).
- LGBTQ participants were more likely to report having experienced disapproval of a relationship from their parents than were heterosexual participants.

Past Decisions to End Relationships Based on Disapproval



The Importance of Approval from Parents vs. Friends



- While heterosexual participants were more likely to select a family member (especially their mother) as the **most important source of social approval** for their relationship, LGBTQ participants were more likely to select a friend.

Conclusions

Experiences of Disapproval

- Over half of the entire sample reported experience with a parent or friend previously disapproving of one of their romantic relationships.
- While individuals in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships were EQUALLY likely to report experiences of disapproval from their friends, they were significantly MORE likely to report experiences of disapproval from their parents.

Making Decisions Based on Disapproval

- Conversely, even though individuals in same-sex relationships experienced more disapproval of their relationships from their parents, they were LESS likely to act on this disapproval.

LGBTQ Individuals & 'Chosen Family'

- The pattern of results supports the notion that LGBTQ individuals are more likely to treat their close friends as "chosen family." Where individuals in mixed-sex relationships placed more weight on the opinions of their family, individuals in same-sex relationships placed more weight on the opinions of their friends.
- In fact, the proportion of "weight" given to friends' opinions by LGBTQ individuals was equal to the proportion of "weight" given to family members' opinions by heterosexual individuals.

Despite advancements with respect to legal recognition of same-sex relationships, LGBTQ individuals are still experiencing high levels of disapproval for their relationships from their family members. While disapproval is experienced regardless of relationship type, the higher levels experienced by LGBTQ individuals may be indicative of an overall continued lack of support for same-sex relationships and sexual diversity within many households across North America.