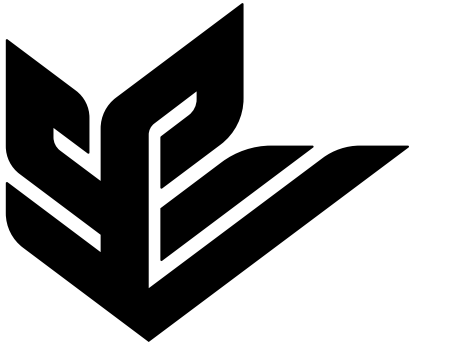
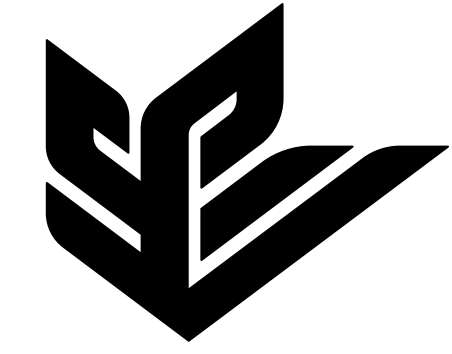


Attachment styles and perceived parental acceptance and rejection of sexual orientation in LGBTQ individuals



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ABSTRACT

Current research on attachment among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) individuals is scarce and contradictory. Do LGBQ individuals experience higher rates of attachment insecurity than their heterosexual peers? If so, could attachment experiences in their family of origin explain part or all of this difference? This study examined the relationship between attachment security and perceived parental acceptance and rejection of sexual orientation for LGBQ individuals. Participants completed an online survey measuring attachment security via the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) scale and perceived parental acceptance and rejection via the Parental Acceptance and Rejection of Sexual Orientation Scale (PARSOS). Analysis of the results indicated that LGBQ participants experienced more attachment insecurity than heterosexual participants, and that high levels of perceived parental rejection mediated the relationship between sexual orientation and attachment insecurity. The significance of these findings is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

- Attachment is primarily understood through a heteronormative lens and is understudied in the LGBQ community. The small body of research that does exist contradicts itself in terms of whether rates of attachment security differ between LGBQ and heterosexual groups (Elizur & Mintzer, 2001; Mohr & Fassinger, 1997; Rejester, 2014).
- Attachment is an important framework for understanding an individual's foundation for self-esteem and interpersonal relationships (Cannon & Boccone, 2019), and attachment relationships with primary caregivers affect attachment security throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1989).
- Parental or familial rejection of sexual orientation during the coming out process is a negative event that could be classified as an attachment injury (Baiocco et al., 2015).
- Parental support for gay and lesbian orientation is related to current romantic attachment security (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003) and overall well-being (Dalton, 2015), while parental disapproval of an individual's sexual orientation is inversely related to the quality of their romantic relationships (Smith & Brown, 1997).

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- RQ1: Are LGBQ individuals more likely to report an insecure attachment status than their heterosexual peers?
- RQ2: Is perceived parental rejection and/or acceptance during the coming out process related to the attachment status of LGBQ individuals?
- H1: LGBQ individuals will not differ from heterosexual individuals in the proportion who are securely attached.
- H2: LGBQ individuals will not differ from heterosexual individuals in the proportion who are insecurely attached.
- H3: Level of perceived parental rejection of sexual orientation will be unrelated to attachment status.
- H4: Level of perceived parental acceptance of sexual orientation will be unrelated to attachment status.

METHODS

Participants

- Target sample is LGBQ individuals who have gone through the coming out process with their parents. For a control sample, the target is straight individuals.
- Aim for at least 100 LGBQ and 100 straight participants.
- Volunteer, randomized participation. Participants were recruited through online advertising.
- Client participants are 18-40 years old, self identifying as any gender.

Procedures

- Testing measures will be achieved through online surveys
- Participants will be given instructions for completing both survey measures

MEASURES

Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised

- Attachment security was measured through the ECR-R scale (Fraley et al., 2000). The instrument has 36 items, which are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).
- Scores on the ECR-R were averaged for each participant on the two subscales and were used to categorize the respondent into one of the four attachment categories ($\alpha = .93$).
- High median scores on attachment-related anxiety questions indicate an anxious attachment style, high median scores on attachment-related avoidance questions indicate an avoidant attachment style, high median scores on both types of questions indicate a disorganized attachment style, and low median scores on both types of questions indicates a secure attachment.

Parental Acceptance and Rejection of Sexual Orientation Scale

- Perception of parental acceptance and rejection of sexual orientation was measured through the PARSOS (Kibrik et al., 2018), which consists of 14 acceptance-related and 19 rejection-related items. Each item is rated based on the degree to which each statement reflected participants' perceptions of their parent's current response to their sexual orientation on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all similar) to 5 (very similar).
- Items on this scale cover the degree to which parents showed interest in their adult child's romantic relationships, were "out" about their child's orientation to their own family, friends, and colleagues, explicitly expressed being proud of their child, attempted to change their child's orientation, and denied, invalidated, or disparaged their child's orientation.
- Scores on the acceptance and rejection items of the PARSOS were totaled for each LGBQ participant, and a mean was taken to create scores for perceived parental acceptance and rejection of sexual orientation. ($\alpha = .88$)

RESULTS

- 200 participants completed both survey measures
- 100 straight participants and 100 LGBQ participants completed both survey measures
- Chi-square analysis was used to determine if there was a relationship between sexual orientation (LGBQ or heterosexual) and attachment status (secure, avoidant, anxious, or disorganized).
- Chi-square tests of independence indicated a significant relationship between sexual orientation and attachment status ($p < 0.05$) with a small effect size (0.10).
- Measured differences suggest that LGBQ individuals are slightly more likely to be insecurely attached than their heterosexual counterparts.
- A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the mean PARSOS scores of the securely and insecurely attached groups of LGBQ participants.
- The one-way ANOVA indicated that the insecurely attached group reported higher mean levels of parental rejection than the securely attached group, and that the securely attached group reported higher mean levels of parental acceptance than the insecurely attached group.

Discussion

- The purpose of this study was to assess whether LGBQ individuals experienced either more or less attachment security, and, if LGBQ individuals experienced less attachment security, whether their perception of their parents' acceptance and rejection of their orientation mediated the relationship between sexual orientation and attachment security.
- Studies show higher rates of attachment insecurity in LGBQ individuals compared to heterosexual individuals.
- Parental attachment was correlated to attachment insecurity and parental acceptance was related to attachment security.
- This emphasizes a need for clinicians working with LGBQ individuals to be aware of a client's parental acceptance and attachment security in treatment
- Positive results for both hypotheses suggest that better treatment outcomes are possible through using family therapy to repair parental rejection and insecure attachment.
- Coming out as LGBQ is becoming more socially acceptable, though as sexual minorities, members of this community experience higher stressors related to sexual identity.
- Further research is needed to support or refute the relationship between sexual orientation and attachment security, and to explore the role that parental acceptance or rejection of orientation plays in the development of secure attachment.
- Limitations of this study include the ages of participants. Persons under the age of 18 or over the age of 40 may have different attachment experiences
- An additional limitation of this study is using social media to recruit participants. Individuals not connected to social media were unlikely to participate.
- Another limitation of this study is we used LGBQ participants who had already undergone the coming out process and LGBQ individuals who have yet to do so may have differing results on attachment.