

"Why Are We Boxing Me In?": Nuances in Family Acceptance and Rejection for Queer Young Adults

Background

- Family acceptance & rejection of queer youth has significant long-term health impact
 - Rejection contributes to higher rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Ryan et al., 2010) while acceptance increases wellness and reduces suicidality (Green et al., 2021)
- Preliminary research has shown that cultural narratives shape caregiver attitudes towards queer children (Abreu et al., 2023)
 - More research is needed to examine how sociocultural factors shape perceptions and experiences of family acceptance & rejection
- Our qualitative research study explores nuances of family acceptance & rejection for LGBTQ+ young adults as influenced by contextual factors such as: race, religion, community, media

Methods

- Conducted semi-structured interviews (n =23) with individuals aged 18-30 who identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and have come out to at least one family member
 - Recruited from local queer-serving organizations as well as personal & professional networks
- Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts to identify patterns for each research question among participant responses
 - Multiple team members were assigned to each transcript to strengthen trustworthiness
 - Initial codes were generated individually and then discussed in team to identify areas of convergence & divergence
 - Final themes were derived from collective codebook reviewed by entire team

Research Questions

- How do queer young adults understand family acceptance and rejection?
- What factors have influenced the conceptualizations queer young adults have of family acceptance and rejection?
- What is the context surrounding the baseline understanding queer young adults have of family acceptance and rejection?

Sample Interview Questions

Prior to your coming out, what was your family's attitude towards LGBTQ individuals?

What was your expectation of their reactions? Did this differ from or align with how they actually reacted?

What is your understanding of family acceptance and rejection?

What has shaped your expectations about acceptance and rejection? How so?

What stories have you heard about family acceptance and rejection?

How has your experience of family acceptance or rejection changed over time?

What do you wish your relationship with your family could look like?

Baseline conceptualizations and experiences of family acceptance & rejection are influenced by intrafamilial and extrafamilial factors.
How do queer young adults understand family acceptance?

- Normalization**
 - "You could say...I like a girl. But there's no reason for it to be such a big deal when it's not. It's a normal thing to be yourself." (P19)
- Advocacy**
 - "My mom started a new job...and one of her close co-workers who she became great friends with, she was a lesbian, and then her partner ended up coming out as trans...So like to watch her friend so seamlessly transition from identifying as lesbian to being like, "I have a husband now" was kind of really cool to watch and my mom was the first person in her company to put pronouns in the bio to be like, "not just the queer people should be doing this!," and it was kind of cool to watch her become such an ally." (P3)

What factors have influenced these conceptualizations?:

- Religion**
 - "And they were deeply, you know, like religious and felt morally opposed to people being part of the community. And so they're like, oh, I'm uncomfortable with this person being gay and all of that. And so I distanced myself from that person." (P10)
- School**
 - "They didn't talk about social issues like social and reproductive issues like gay marriage, abortion, so I didn't have that culture from school. I was, I didn't know about these things from school." (P15)



Results

Discussion

Experiences of family acceptance & rejection can be recognized as more complex when situated within unique considerations of social & familial context.

- Saw it Coming** - expressions from family members that a family member's coming out was expected and that they "had a feeling"
 - e.g. An individual comes out and is met with a reaction of "I knew"
 - Perceived as ambiguous, straddling acceptance & rejection based on context
- Stereotypes** - dominant images of gender & sexuality that shape expectations of self-expression for given identities
 - e.g. An individual coming out and being met with confusion because the way they present themselves is mismatched with cultural expectations
 - Demonstrates intersectional nature of acceptance & rejection within LGBTQ+ identities for how popular images of gender can be conflated with sexuality

Acceptance

Consistency
Normalization
Advocacy
Unconditional Support
Progression
"Saw it Coming"
Celebration
Ambiguity

Rejection

Ignorance
Deceit
Fragmentation
Assimilation
Shame
Violence
Invalidation
Abnormal
Ambiguity
Isolation

Limitations + Future Research

Limitations:

- Small sample size (n ≈ 23)
- Data was only collected from adult LGBTQ+ children, not caretaker perspectives
- Lack of longitudinal data for how family narratives change over time
- Need for further differentiation of family experiences based on distinct LGBTQ+ identities

Future research:

- While narratives of religion were prominent, need to elaborate upon nuances of family experience across different religions and for other contextual factors like race
- Assess further for family reactions to LGBTQ+ political events