



How are LGBTQIAP relationships unique?

LGBTQIAP couples are fairly similar to cisgender heterosexual couples in most ways. However, there are some important differences.

- ❑ LGBTQIAP couples are more at risk for ending (Kurdek, 2004)
- ❑ LGBTQIAP couples continue to face discrimination *as couples*

Some smaller studies have found:

- Some LGBTQIAP couples viewed discrimination as hurdles that made their relationships stronger. Couples who viewed these hurdles as something that they overcame together were more satisfied and more resilient (Connelly, 2005; Frost, 2014). Frost (2014) calls these “redemptive framings.”

- A study on lesbian couples found some of the couples faced discrimination in ways that made them stronger (Connelly, 2005).

The strengths included:

- equality
- flexibility
- a sense of connection and togetherness.



- Being “out” as an LGBTQIAP person was *not* associated with happiness in one’s relationship (Frost & Meyer, 2009).
- Friend support increased relationship happiness (Graham & Barnow, 2013).
- Being connected to the LGBTQIAP community lowered relationship happiness (Frost & Meyer, 2009).
- Internalized homophobia/shame made depression worse, which made relationships worse (Frost & Meyer, 2009).
- Family support did not impact happiness for couples (Graham & Barnow, 2013).

Here are some findings from one of the largest studies done (Gottman et al 2003).

First, in terms of conflict:

- ❑ In gay and lesbian couples more intensity (measured by things like heart rate) is beneficial. (This finding is opposite of what was found for heterosexual couples.)
- ❑ Also, if one partner thought the other was “too positive” that partner did something called “damping.” This process is often used when one partner is taking something too lightly. Damping slows couples down to deal with difficult or hard topics. Gay and lesbian partners did this process effectively.



- ❑ In gay and lesbian relationships, the person who brought up a difficult issue did so more positively than in heterosexual relationships.
 - Gay and lesbian partners who brought up issues did so with less fear, tension, sadness, and whining. They were less domineering and less belligerent.
 - They showed more affection, more humor, and more joy/excitement as well.
- ❑ The gay or lesbian partner responding to the partner who brought up the difficult issue also was more positive, while heterosexual responding partners were more negative.
 - Responding gay and lesbian partners were also less belligerent, less domineering, and less fearful/tense than the heterosexual partners.
 - The gay and lesbian responding partners also showed significantly more humor than the heterosexual partners.
- ❑ Gay and lesbian couples were more likely than heterosexual couples to stay positive throughout the conflict.
- ❑ In gay and lesbian couples, positive feelings (excitement, satisfaction, interest) triumphed over negative feelings (anger, irritation, fear) in conflict, while the opposite was true for heterosexual couples.
- ❑ The researchers suggest gay and lesbian relationships operate differently than heterosexual relationships when it comes to power and emotion.



These differences are not small potatoes. These exchanges are predictive of satisfaction, staying together, and staying together happily.

Next, differences between gay male couples and lesbian couples:

- ❑ Lesbian couples in the study were more emotionally expressive, for both negative and positive feelings, than gay men.
- ❑ Affection was more important to lesbian couples' satisfaction
- ❑ Validation was more important for gay male couples' satisfaction

And someday, as prejudices lose their ground, we will have these studies with transgender, genderqueer, pansexual, polyamorous and other LGBTQIAP relationships too.

Here are some older studies:

- In a study comparing open relationships and polyamorous relationships to monogamous two person relationships, researchers found poly and open relationships were equally stable and happy (Rubin & Adams, 1986).
- Individuals in polyamorous relationships had less sex than the national average. Partners emphasized warmth, friendship, and communication (Peabody, 1982).

