CONSEQUENCES AND BUFFERS OF RELATIONSHIP STIGMA FOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ADULTS IN INTERRACIAL AND/OR SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

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Attitudes toward Interracial & Same-Sex Romantic Relationships

- Currently, 87% of people in U.S. approve of marriage between Black & White individuals (Gallup Poll, 2013)

- 60% believe marriage between same-sex couples should be recognized equally by law (Gallup Poll, 2015)

- Yet, stigmatization of these relationships persists, with consequences for relationship dynamics & mental health

Stigma & Its Consequences

- Possession of any socially-devalued attribute or identity & range of experiences that results from that at intrapersonal, interpersonal, & structural levels, such as stereotyping, marginalization, & discrimination (e.g., Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013)

- "fundamental cause" of health disparities that "gets under the skin" & adversely affects well-being through various mechanisms, such as stress, social isolation, reduced resources, & unhealthy responses (e.g., Chaudoir et al., 2013; Clark et al., 1999; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013)

Relationship Stigma

- Emerging evidence stigma experienced as couple in addition to individually-experienced stigma

- Quantitative & qualitative studies (Frost, 2011, Gamarel et al., 2014; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006, 2007) conducted with individuals in interracial, same-sex, age-gap relationships, & with trans women & their cisgender male partners:

  - experience greater stigma/marginalization of relationships

  - greater relationship stigma/marginalization → lower relationship commitment, investment, quality, & greater conflict; greater depressive symptoms & odds breaking up

  - couples also overcome stigma together & find some positive consequences of experiences

Multiple Sources of Stigma

- Different sources of relationship stigma (e.g., family, friends, public) might have different consequences (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993)

- One study found relationship marginalization from friends & family combined stronger predictor of decreases in commitment & breaking up than from society (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007)

- We aimed to tease apart family, friends, & public sources

Potential Buffers

* Past work has not tested factors that buffer/protect against negative consequences of relationship stigma

* We investigated two potential buffers:

  * Egalitarianism – belief in equality for all individuals & social groups → could help better understand stigma experiences & feel motivated to stay positive about situation despite stigma

  * Dyadic coping – coping couples engage in collaboratively in face of stressors → could help deal with stigma & maintain mental health & relationships in face of stigma

Study Questions/Aims

- 1) are symptoms of anxiety & depression associated with experiences of relationship stigma from family, friends, &/or public?

  - Examine unique associations controlling for other potentially confounding variables & teasing apart different sources

- 2) what factors may buffer individuals from adverse associations of relationship stigma with mental health?

  - Testing egalitarianism & dyadic coping

Procedure

- Online survey study through Qualtrics

- Participants recruited & screened through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) & postings on websites & other online media focused on interracial &/or same-sex dating & relationships

- Qualifications: 18 years or older; living in U.S.; in interracial &/or same-sex relationship 3 months or more

Participants

- 511 participants in analytic sample

  -303 in interracial (but heterosexual) relationship

  -112 in same-sex (but same-race) relationship

  -96 in interracial & same-sex relationship

- 274 women, 232 men, 3 transgender, 2 other

- 298 white, 68 multiracial/ethnic, 63 Asian, 46 Black, 32 Latino, 1 Middle Eastern

- Mean age 30.59 years (SD = 9.75)

Variables

<u>Control Variables</u>:

- age in years, length of relationship in months, if living together
- individually-experienced discrimination
  - 10-item Everyday Discrimination Scale (Lewis et al., 2006; Williams et al., 1997; α=.91)

<u>Main Predictor Variables:</u>

- relationship stigma from family (α=.88), friends (α=.86), & public (α=.92)
  - 25 items total, 19 created for this study, 6 based on Lehmiller & Agnew's (2006) relationship marginalization measure
  - 3 subscales created based on factor analysis (Rosenthal & Starks, 2015)

Example Relationship Stigma Items

- My family is not accepting of this relationship (Family; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006)

- People are rude to you/give you an attitude because of being an interracial &/or same-sex couple (Public; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015)

- Friends make comments about your partner &/or relationship that offend you because of being an interracial &/or same-sex couple (Friends; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015)

- Family members do not acknowledge your relationship &/or refer to your partner as your 'friend' because of being an interracial &/or same-sex couple (Family; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015)

Variables

Mental Health Outcome Variables:

◉ symptoms of depression

  • 20-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies- Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977; α=.94)

◉ symptoms of anxiety

  • 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Scale (Sptizer et al., 2006; α=.92)

Potential Buffering Variables:

◉ egalitarianism

  • 8-item egalitarianism dimension of Social Dominance Orientation scale (Ho et al., 2012; Pratto et al., 1994; α=.93)

◉ dyadic coping

 • 7 items from Dyadic Coping Inventory (Ledermann et al., 2010; α=.84)

Regression Results: Main Effects

- Relationship stigma from friends → greater depressive symptoms ($ß=.18$, $p<.01$)

- Relationship stigma from family → marginally greater depressive symptoms ($ß=.10$, $p=.07$)

- Relationship stigma from family → greater anxiety symptoms ($ß=.12$, $p=.04$)

- Everyday discrimination → greater depressive symptoms ($ß=.32$, $p<.001$) & anxiety symptoms $ß=.21$, $p<.001$)

Regression Results: Interaction Effects

- egalitarianism X relationship stigma from public → depressive symptoms ($ß=-.12$, $p=.05$) & anxiety symptoms ($ß=-.16$, $p=.02$)

- dyadic coping X relationship stigma from family → depressive symptoms ($ß=-.15$, $p<.01$)

Results: Egalitarianism as Moderator
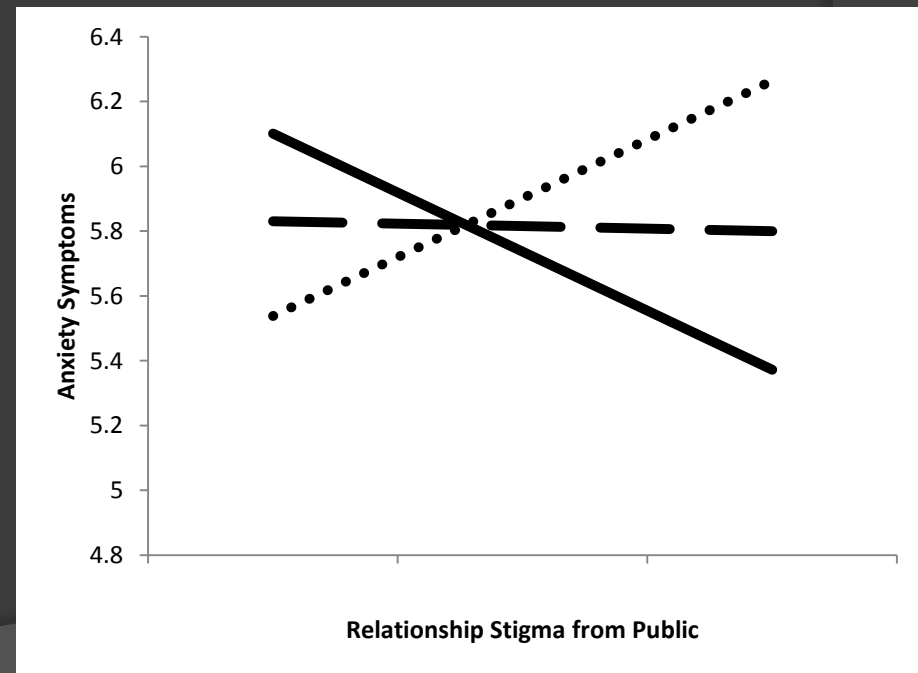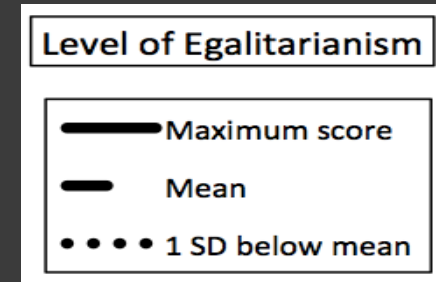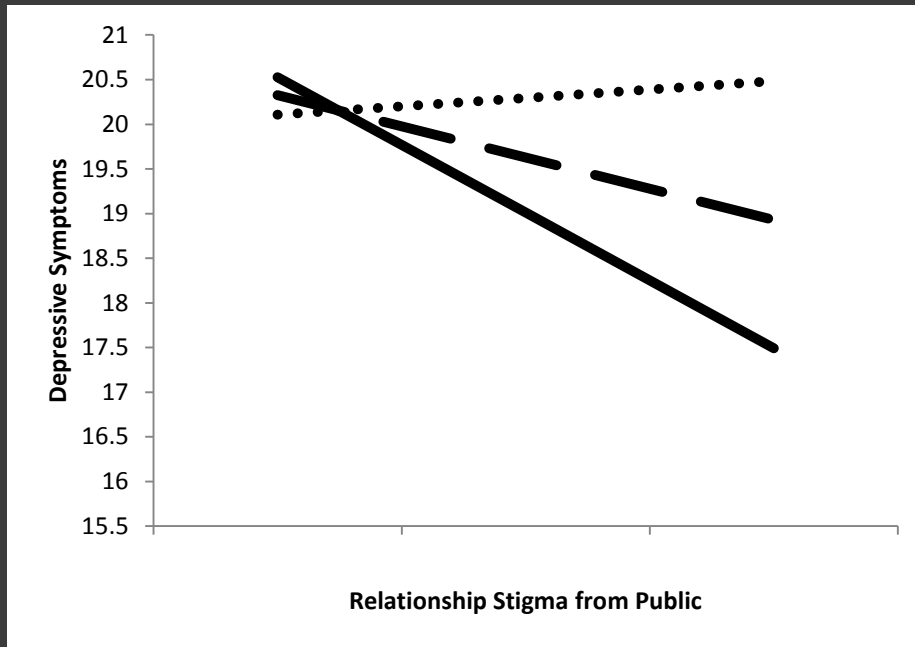
Results: Dyadic Coping as Moderator
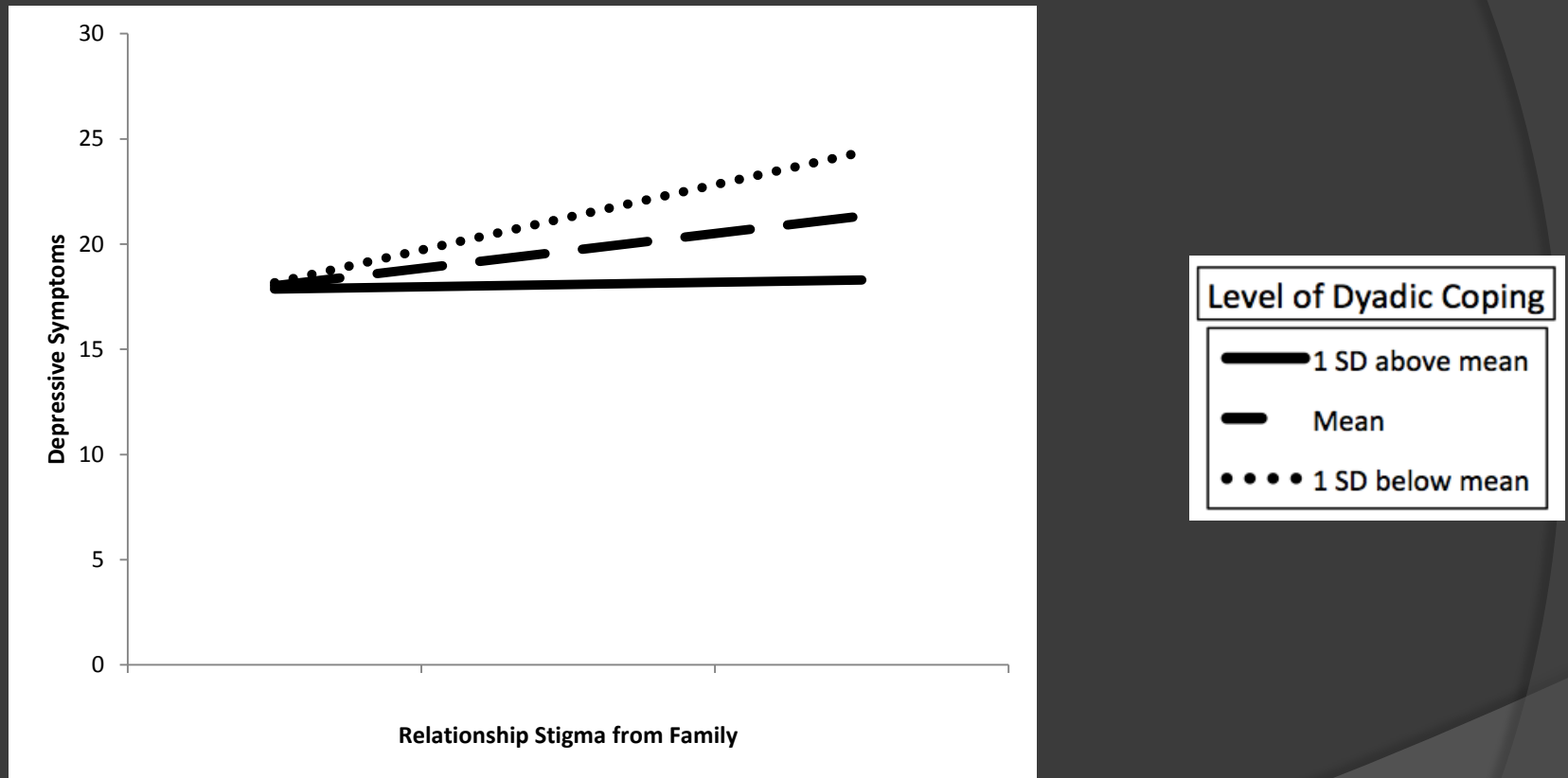
Summary

- Relationship stigma from friends & family may have important consequences for mental health

- Does not mean stigma from public does not matter

- Relationship stigma from friends & family may be most harmful because more proximal in social networks & people expect support from

- Clinicians working with same-sex or interracial couples should be aware of potential negative impact of stigma

Summary

- Egalitarianism & dyadic coping may be important buffers of consequences of relationship stigma from family & public

- Buffered individuals from adverse consequences of & even supported positive outcomes in response to relationship stigma

- Egalitarianism & dyadic coping could potentially be increased through intervention/clinical work

Limitations & Future Directions

* Data cross-sectional, cannot determine causality

  * Future longitudinal & experimental studies

* Data self-report & from only 1 member of couple

  * Future studies dyadic data & connecting to other data sources, such as public surveys to assess societal stigma or surveys of social network to assess stigma among friends, family, etc.

* Other sources of stigma?

  * Co-workers, neighbors, etc.

Number of interracial & same-sex relationships & marriages in U.S. increasing

More research needed to understand these couples' experiences & to learn how best to support them

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