

# Cognitive Reappraisal And Expressive Suppression Among Queer Youth and Its Implications on Interpersonal Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

Queer people go through a lot emotionally in today's society because the term "LGBT" has a stigma, which can have a big impact on their social well-being.

**Aim:** The present study aims to find out emotion regulation among queer young adults and its implications on their social interactions. There was little research on LGBTQ young people that included these two study factors. The major goal of this study is to learn how queer young adults manage their emotions daily and how each strategy influences their social interactions as a whole.

**Method:** A total of 131 participants from the age group 18 to 25 years have responded, which was drawn using the snowball sampling method from various parts of India. Two already developed and tested questionnaires on emotion regulation and social relationships were used in the study.

**Results:** It was found that cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression had a significant impact on how queer young adults interacted with one another in social situations. Expressive Suppression had a very low negative influence on social interactions whereas Cognitive Reappraisal had a very low positive impact.

**Keywords:** Queer, Emotion Regulation, Social Relationships, LGBTQ

## Introduction

Emotions paint the canvas of our daily lives, splashing it with hues of positivity and negativity. They are the very essence of our humanity, shaping our experiences and defining who we are. It encompasses a spectrum as diverse as humanity itself. From feeling different intensities of emotions, we move forward to managing and expressing emotions which is another experience known as Emotion Regulation, where once again every individual differs. In this storm of human experience, emotion regulation serves as a guiding thread, weaving together the intricate patterns of our lives. It's a skill we cultivate over time, enhancing our ability to navigate the highs and lows with grace and resilience.

“Emotion Regulation is a process through which individuals control the emotions they experience, when they feel them, and how they feel them, and how they experience and express those emotions. Emotion Regulation can be conscious or unconscious, and it can have an impact on one or more stages of the emotional production process.” (Gross, 1998).

“Emotion regulation is not the same as emotional sensitivity, which determines the commencement of our

emotional responses; it always governs our emotions. The aims and purposes of emotion regulation are two possible categories for further categorizing our emotion control strategies. Emotion regulation thus targets the systems that generate our emotions, which also include attention, information, and our physiological responses. Emotion regulation serves a variety of purposes, but the most important are satisfying our hedonic wants, supporting specific goals, and always making our global personality system easier. Emotion regulation is the most influential factor in cognition and emotion.”(Kooze, 2009). Emotion Regulation, a process through which individuals alter their emotional encounters, appearances, and the complete physiology including the situations that cause such feelings, in order to generate acceptable reactions to the environment’s constantly changing demands. (Aldo A, 2013).

There is an array of ways for an individual to go on about regulating their emotions. One prominent question arises when discussing emotion regulation strategies is that whether some of them do commend more than the other strategies. Cognitive Reappraisal is one of the ways to regulate emotions and is generally antecedent-focused by changing our cognition. Reappraisal when defined in non-emotional terms, provokes our emotions. Expressive Suppression is another way when it comes to regulating our emotions which changes the way we respond to our emotions as it is generally focused on our responses and the way we usually respond. Expressive Suppression limits our current emotion-expressive behavior. (Gross, 2002).

The continuous necessity which is monitoring of one’s looks and vocal signs could distract an individual who is suppressing their emotions and makes them less receptive to the emotional cues of their partner which can in this manner predict that suppression ought to have some negativemoments in a casual talk. Reappraisal appears to restrain the undesirable emotional experienceand expression while either having no effect or truly increasing positive emotional experience andexpression. These findings led to the prediction that reappraisal ought to have positive social consequences in comparison to suppression. (Gross, 2002).

An interpersonal relationship can be defined as a relationship between two or more individuals and a sense of belongingness that brings them together. Interpersonal, and social relationships can be considered as the basic units of our society that bind people to live and work harmoniously. Thus, interpersonal relationships are extremely important for everyone as every individual requires support and security throughout their life. (Kumar, P., et al. 2016). When discussing interpersonal relationships, friends, family, and relatives come into light as these are the three closest connections that an individual can be surrounded by at a given moment. At home, an individual is surrounded by their family and when it comes to social context, the very individual is surrounded by their friends or their relatives.

Quality of relationships includes the constructive aspect of an interpersonal and social relationship, such as being emotionally supported by companions, and the stressed aspect of a relationship, such as disagreements and strain when in a relationship with someone, which isinevitable. The web of social relationships that surrounds an individual is known as Social Network, which in particular is a structural feature of each relationship which includes what kindof relationship is it and what are the strengths of that social relationship. All these facets do affectan individual’s well-being. (Debra & Umberson, 2010).

The current study is grounded on queer young adults, which fall under the age group of 18 to 25 years. Young adults belonging to the queer community are already in a constant battle with findingwho they really are. They go through a phase of transition in which they are stuck at a crossroad which leads them towards ‘*acceptance*’ and ‘*embracing*’. This transition from the Age of Innocence to the Age of Experience can bring a bag full of struggles regarding fitting in with the people around or accepting the bitter truth of

societal objections on the queer community. They have emerged from their school life where they faced tons of different experiences such as bullying, name calling or even the worst- harassment. Not receiving much peer support takes a toll on their mental health as well. During these times, they are living in a closet about their sexual orientation and gender identity. They have always felt different from their peers and seek for acceptance from their peers and parents. The role of parents at these times plays a massive role as a child has certain needs and expectations from their parents just like parents have certain pre-expectations from their child. Having gone through so much in their adolescent years is a pretty formative experience for them. Stepping into an adult life can be overwhelming for them as they have a lot to figure out in terms of their identity, challenges and responsibilities that come as one becomes an adult.

### Literature Review

An article published by Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez in 2010 defines the key research patterns in the study of social relationships in regard to health and further highpoints policy suggestions done through their study. Through their research, they have listed goals for decision makers to apply the scientifically backed-up conclusions on social bonds and well-being to enhance the health of the population and decrease the gaps that exist in our society. Their article formulated six fundamental goals- namely encouraging the benefits that come from having socialities, not causing any sort of harm, reducing social separation, reducing any harms, coordinating the strategies and agendas, and providing aid wherever it is needed the most.

Studies conducted on LGB individuals discovered a noteworthy curving impact of minority stress on risky alcohol and substance use via emotion regulation issues (Rogers, AH., et. al, 2017). In any case, there was no remarkable connection with sexual orientation status, implying that emotion regulation is important for all LGB young adults in anticipating risky alcohol and substance use, as discovered in their study. These results feature a significant role that emotion regulation plays in occurrences of minority stress, substance and alcohol use etc., in LGB young adults, which further recommends that emotion regulation abilities might serve a novel objective for any further intervention in this field of research.

Studies were conducted to investigate how family relationships cultivated, maintained, or harmed the emotional wellness and well-being of queer young adults. (Mc Dermott, E., Gabb, et al., 2021). In two stages, data was gathered using a probing visual, imaginative, and automated qualitative method. Stage I comprised of journal entry feeling charts and interviews with queer youth aged 16 to 25 along with interviews with family members and coaches. Stage II employed journaling and follow-up interviews. Their research discovered that family relationships had a complex impact on queer youth's mental health which was linked to the foundation of their independent queer selves, the need to remain having a place with their loved ones, and the need to maintain a protected climate.

For working with sexual minority young adults and with their nonaccepting parents, a modification of attachment-based family therapy was described and a short outline of the treatment activities was given that included the model, portraying the reasoning behind each activity and how that task is executed and deduced the considerations about the restrictions of the model and future oppositions. (Gary M. Diamond. & Maya S. Shpigel., 2014)

Studies also examined strategies and processes that might add to resilience and adaptation among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals despite debasing, bias, and discrimination were examined. (Craig A. Hill & Christopher J. Gunderson., 2015). They mentioned that not every coping strategy is successful in re-establishing well-being, such that some strategies do not always match requests of the challenge; in these

cases, well-being is not re-established. A variety of emotion regulation strategies might be enrolled inside heterosexist circumstances to reduce the experience of negative feelings, and surge or improve the experience of positive feelings.

Sexual-minority youth are in a danger to an extensive range of diversity when it comes to adverse mental well-being results when contrasted with their heterosexual peers, and needs to foster constructive mediations focused at this populace. (Nicole M. Stettler & Lynn Fainsilber Katz., 2017). Emotion regulation hardships have been recognized as a prospective technique through which minority stress prompts possibilities in sexual minority youth. The current research was able to identify a few parts of parenting that contribute to gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth's psychological well-being. The review conducted authenticates to significant growth and imperativeness of present-day research on emotion regulation. Emotion regulation was hence characterized as the arrangement of techniques by which individuals try to divert the unconstrained progression of their emotions. (Sander L. Koole., 2009).

On occasions, individuals hold their feelings back from appearing during social connections and such suppression of expressions ought to disturb conveyance and elate the extent of stress (Butler., et. al., 2003). To further test their conjecture, they led two studies wherein unacquainted sets of women had to discuss a disturbing issue. In the first study, one member was randomly assigned to (a) subdue her emotions, (b) answer obviously, or (c) intellectually ascertain in a way that would diminish her usual way of responding emotionally. It concluded that suppression alone was disrupting communication and led to an increase in blood pressure responses in the partner of the one suppressing. In the second study, suppression led to a negative influence on the emotional experiences of the one regulating, and to an increased blood pressure in both regulators and their partners. Suppression further reduced rapport and inhibited relationship formation.

It was observed that inauthenticity was the main mediating link amid persistent usage of suppression and deprived social functions. It was further presumed that social costs of suppression do not appear to be because of diminished positive expression, but instead the discrepancy among one's internal and external behavior, although, reappraisal was not in every case connected to social functioning. (English, T., & John., 2013).

As far as the connections among the levels of emotion regulation strategies, and interpersonal social outcomes, are concerned, it was seen that more prominent suppression of emotions was altogether related to less fortunate social prosperity, including more regrettable introductions, less social help, less social fulfillment including genuineness, and worsened intimate relationship quality. (Chervonsky, E. & Hunt, C., 2017). Their findings highlight the need of taking into account the part that emotional expression control plays in the emergence of social dysfunctions and other issues. In a review published by English, T., and Eldesouky, L. in 2020, which focused on one strategy that is usually used that got specific consideration and that was expressive suppression. They concisely assessed research that existed on social outcomes of suppression and afterwards outlined the hidden components and potential limit conditions.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

In today's society where the term LGBT carries a stigma, queer individuals go through a lot emotionally that can have a significant effect on their social well-being. Having been discriminated against since adolescence and now stepping into the world where they have to face more challenges in terms of their identity, acceptance, and social validation, queer youth are more prone to having less attached relationships with their parents, which may result in expressive suppression to hide their emotions. The

undermentioned research questions were examined more specifically. (1) the impact Cognitive Reappraisal has on social relationships among queer youth. (2) the impact Expressive Suppression has on social relationships among queer youth. The current study also proposes to fill the substantial research gap, as studies because of the two variables which are emotion regulation and social relationships have not been done before with a background of queer young adults.

**Hypotheses**

H0a : Social relationships among queer youth are unaffected by Cognitive Reappraisal.

H1a : Social relationships among queer youth are affected by Cognitive Reappraisal.

H0b :Social relationships among queer youth are unaffected by Expressive Suppression.

H1b :Social relationships among queer youth are affected by Expressive Suppression.

**Method**

**Participants.**

The participants in this study (N = 131) were queer young adults of the age group 18 to 25. The snowball sampling technique was used to choose the sample for this study. (N = 131, M = 20.79, SD = 2.19)

**Research tools.**

**Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):** Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed by Gross and John in 2003. It evaluates the propensity for controlling emotions through cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The items question an individual’s emotional experience and emotional expression, two separate aspects of their emotional life.

**Social Relationships Scale:** The Social Relationships Scale was developed by Kumar, P.,Nabi, F & Thakur, N. in the year 2016. The scale is a 5 point Likert scale, consists of 35 items which add up to the 7 dimensions that evaluate what nature do individuals have among their friends, parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, classmates, and strangers.

**Statistical analysis.**

- A. To determine whether there was a meaningful correlation among those two variables, Karl Pearson’s Product Moment correlation was applied.
- B. To understand the impact of emotion regulation on social relationships, simple linear regression was also performed to demonstrate the presence of one strategy predicting on social relationships.

**Results**

**Table 1: Impact of Cognitive Reappraisal on the level of social relationships.**

		Cognitive Reappraisal	Social Relationships
Cognitive Reappraisal	Pearson correlation	1	.263*
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.018
	N	131	131
Social Relationships	Pearson correlation Sig. (2 tailed)	.263*	1
		.018	

	N	131	131
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\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed)

To check the relationship between the variables, a correlation analysis using the method of 2-tail test of Person product moment correlation was used. From Table 1, it is seen that there exists a very low positive correlation between Cognitive Reappraisal and Social Relationships. The R squared value obtained is 0.061 and this shows that a 6.1% of variance in Social Relationships can be described by Cognitive Reappraisal. This verifies that for each and every unit increases in Cognitive Reappraisal, Social relationships also increase by 0.26 units. Thus, it is verified that Cognitive Reappraisal possesses a low influence on Social Relationships. The significant value was at .018 which is less than 0.05, and hence it is statistically significant. In this manner, the Null Hypothesis stands rejected.

**Table 2. Impact of Expressive Suppression on the level of social relationships.**

			Expressive Suppression	Social Relationships
Expressive Suppression	Pearson correlation Sig. (2 tailed)		1	-.347**
	N		131	.001 131
Social Relationships	Pearson correlation sig. (2 tailed)		-.347**	1
	N		.001 131	131

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed)

From Table 2, it is seen that there exists a low negative correlation between Expressive Suppression and Social Relationships. The R-squared value obtained is 0.109 and from this, it can be understood that 10.9% of the variance in Social Relationships can be described by Expressive Suppression. This implies that for every unit that increases in Expressive Suppression, Social Relationships also increase by 0.34 units. From this, it can be deduced that Expressive Suppressive possesses a low influence on Social Relationships. The significant value was at .001 which is less than 0.05, and hence it is found to be statistically significant. Thus, the Null Hypothesis stands rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal and social relationships among queer youth. It may be because cognitive reappraisal acts as a facilitator in managing emotional regulation to improve warmth and manage and resolve conflicts among people (Kross, et al, 2019).

Cognitive reappraisal, as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy, offers queer youth a mechanism to reinterpret stressful or negative experiences in a more positive light (Gross, 1998). By reframing situations through a lens of acceptance, resilience, and self-affirmation, cognitive reappraisal empowers queer individuals to navigate social interactions with greater confidence and emotional well-being.

The present study has shed light on the importance of cognitive reappraisal in fostering social relationships

among queer youth. For instance, a study by Goldbach et al. (2014) found that queer adolescents who utilized cognitive reappraisal reported higher levels of social support and lower levels of internalized stigma. By challenging negative self-perceptions and reframing social challenges as opportunities for growth, cognitive reappraisal may mitigate the detrimental effects of minority stress on social relationships (Hatzenbuehler, 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, empirical evidence of the present indicates that the influence of emotional suppression on social relationships may be relatively low. For instance, a meta-analysis by English and John (2013) found only a modest association between emotional suppression and decreased social support. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Butler et al. (2003) revealed that while emotional suppression was linked to decreased intimacy in romantic relationships, the effect size was small and diminished over time.

## CONCLUSION

Cognitive reappraisal emerges as a crucial resource for fostering positive social relationships among queer youth. By empowering individuals to reinterpret social challenges in a more adaptive light, cognitive reappraisal mitigates the impact of minority stressors and enhances resilience and psychological well-being. As mental health professionals and researchers continue to explore the intersection of emotion regulation and social relationships within queer communities, integrating cognitive reappraisal into support services holds promise for promoting social inclusion and holistic health among queer youth.

The study also concludes that the influence of emotional suppression on social relationships appears to be more nuanced than previously assumed. While some studies suggest a modest association with decreased social support and intimacy, the effect size is often small and influenced by cultural factors. Rather than viewing emotional suppression as universally detrimental to social relationships, it is crucial to adopt a nuanced perspective that considers individual differences and cultural norms. Future research should continue to explore the complex interplay between emotional suppression and social dynamics to develop more tailored intervention approaches.

## IMPLICATION

Understanding the role of cognitive reappraisal in fostering social relationships among queer youth has important implications for intervention and support services. Mental health professionals working with this population can incorporate cognitive reappraisal techniques into therapeutic interventions, providing queer youth with practical strategies for coping with minority stress and building meaningful social connections.

The nuanced understanding of emotional suppression's influence on social relationships has important implications for clinical practice and intervention strategies. While it is essential to recognize the potential drawbacks of excessive emotional suppression, interventions aimed solely at reducing suppression may not always be warranted or effective. Instead, therapists should adopt a culturally sensitive approach that acknowledges individual differences and contextual factors shaping emotional regulation strategies.

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