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Year in School: Senior
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Funding Source: MU Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

Intimate Opposition: Moderating effects of culture and closeness on the romeo and juliet effect

Research has examined how third parties (e.g. parent-child relationships and peer relationships) affect the quality of romantic relationships. For instance, a pair of studies investigated the “Romeo & Juliet effect,” to see whether parental disapproval of a child’s romantic partner results in pushing the child closer to his/her love interest. A study by Driscoll & colleagues (1972) found that feelings of romantic love were intensified by parental disapproval. Yet, a more recent study by Sprecher & Felmlee (1992) found the complete opposite results, finding that romantic relationships without social support were likely to fail. Neither of these studies, however, examined how closeness with a disapproving parent or cultural orientation of the individual might moderate the effects of the disapproval. Consequently, for the current study, we examined whether the impact of a disapproving parent’s opinion depends upon the closeness between the disapproving parent and the adolescent in the romantic relationship. In addition, we examined whether the parental opposition had a stronger impact on relationships involving collectivistic persons compared to individualistic persons. To examine the role of closeness and cultural orientation, participants completed a survey asking about the degree of individualistic versus collectivistic orientations, the degree of disapproval from family, as well as the degree of closeness to family members and romantic partner. We found that degree of parental disapproval negatively effected relationship closeness to the partner, and that this effect was strengthened the closer the participant reported being to their parent. In addition, if the individual in the romantic relationship was less individualistic in cultural orientation (i.e. collectivistic), then they also report less satisfaction in their relationship.

This project was completed as part of a Capstone requirement.