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Publishing Inequality in LGBTQIA+ Research in Psychology: A Content Analysis

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Forensic Psychology

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

City University of New York

Mackenzie Fingerhut

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Publishing Inequality in LGBTQIA+ Research in Psychology: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

Despite the American Psychiatric Association's removal of *homosexuality* from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973 and *ego-dystonic homosexuality* in 1987, nonheteronormative sexual orientations remain stigmatized and underrepresented in scientific literature. To estimate the prevalence of LGBTQIA+ topics in popular psychological research, the author queried more than 20,000 articles from 1987 to 2022 in the two most cited journals in each of four major domains (cognitive, clinical, developmental and social). In addition, the author randomly queried 20% of all empirical articles published from 1987 to 2021 in the top eight empirical journals to understand how often sexuality is included in participant descriptions. Lastly, to better understand who writes, edits, and approves LGBTQIA+ related articles, the authors contacted gatekeepers (i.e., editor in chief, associate editors, and first authors) to understand their identity in relation to the LGBTQIA+ community. Of all publications in the study timeframe ($n=22,509$), the eight most impactful journals published studies directly related to topic of sexuality at a rate of 0.44% ($n = 100$). The prevalence of research has not significantly increased over time in highest ranked journals or significantly varied within any of the four domains of psychology. Of the 5,373 randomly sampled articles, 2.5% ($n=132$) of articles included sexuality in the sample descriptions. Of the 78 participants who responded to the survey, the majority of authors (70.4%, $n=38/54$) and editors 87.5% ($n=21/24$) identified as heterosexual/straight. The authors concluded that despite gains, sexuality remains underexamined in psychological literature. Increasing representation in gatekeepers may be one way to address the paucity of research.

Publishing Inequality in Sexual Orientation Research in Psychology: A Content Analysis

In the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association [APA]), published in 1952, the diagnosis of homosexuality was notably included. The definition classified homosexuality as a sexual deviation within a larger sociopathic personality disturbance. In the years following the 1969 Stone Wall riots, gay rights activists challenged the stigmatizing notion that homosexuality was a disorder (Drescher, 2015). After twenty-one years, in the DSM-II, APA revised and renamed homosexuality to “ego-dystonic homosexuality” which limited the clinical diagnosis to individuals experiencing distress due to their sexuality (APA, 1968). Finally, in 1987, APA erased all notion of homosexuality as a disorder in the DSM-III on the basis that one’s sexual orientation is not a mental ailment but rather a normal facet of their psychology (APA, 1987).

Today, the stigmatization of sexual orientation that was encouraged in part by APA’s characterization is still present (Drescher, 2015) and has arguably persists the field’s broad conceptualizations. From sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE; i.e. conversion therapy), to standardized performance based on heteronormative standards (e.g., marriage, child rearing), psychology overtly and subtly integrates assumptions about sexuality in many domains. Outside of research, stigmatization and endorsement of negative stereotypes are present.

Until recently, gay and bisexual men were forbidden from donating blood due to the AIDS/HIV epidemic of the 1980s (Larkin, 2011). Although tests disproved sexual orientation as a factor in the spread of blood-diseases, the discrimination of men who have sex with men (MSMs) continues. Assumptions and stereotypes such as gaydar (i.e., the ability to infer someone’s sexuality based on mannerisms, appearance, etc.), contribute to the assertion that LGBTQIA+ individuals look a certain way and are easily identifiable (Cox et al., 2016). Outside of the

United States in several countries, (e.g., Ghana, Barbados, Uganda, etc.) homosexuality is illegal (Hagopian et al., 2017). These discriminatory realities encourage and form stigma toward LGBTQIA+ individuals without any basis or justification of (false) assumptions.

In addition, the general lack of accounting for sexuality in research is problematic, as some of the relatively few studies that evaluated the role of sexuality in psychological processes demonstrated its significant potential impact across many areas of psychological research (e.g., LGBTQ experiences in different environments; Linley & Nguyen, 2015).

While it is possible that the behavioral and developmental differences demonstrated between individuals based on their sexuality might be environmentally based, they appear to be significant and long-lasting. Within social psychology, sexual orientation has been found to be associated with increased political involvement (Swank, 2018), differential impacts of social media use (Berger et al., 2022; Escobar-Viera et al., 2020), and prejudice reduction (Cramwinckel et al., 2018). Researchers have also documented that sexuality plays a role in cognitive development (Maylor et al., 2007). Specifically, heterosexual men and women performed better on tasks typically associated with their gender; heterosexual men tended to outperform women on mental rotation and line angle adjustment and heterosexual women outperformed men on tests of category fluency and object location memory. However, Maylor et al. (2007) found that gay and bisexual men and women comparatively underperformed on tasks associated with their gender.

The trauma associated with the stigma still attached to sexuality has also likely impacted the applicability of general theories within developmental, clinical and social psychology. Even after 1987, despite reported ethical concerns, methods known as SOCE or conversion therapy, employed techniques such as classical conditioning, religious counseling, and psychodynamic

theories in an attempt to eliminate same-sex attraction (Karten & Wade, 2010). As detailed by Meyer and Blosnich (2022), SOCE was shown to double the odds of lifetime suicidal ideation, increase planning to attempt suicide by 75%, and increased the odds of a suicide attempt with minor injury by 88%, when compared with sexual minority adults without SOCE history. Despite evidence that SOCE is harmful (Pzerworski et al., 2021) it is still practiced today in all fifty states.

Some researchers have taken note of the need to account for sexual orientation in psychological research in recent decades. Past content analyses have shown that the percentage of articles focused on these topics doubled between 1967 through 1974 (Morin, 1977) and again between 1979 and 1983 (Watters, 1986). However, the progress has been inconsistent, and in some areas, insufficient. A content analysis of 13,217 articles in marriage and family journals from 1975 to 1995 found that only 77 (0.58%) included LGTBQ+ topics or used sexual orientation as a variable (Clark & Serovich, 1997).

Even when researchers are able to collect sufficient literature for systemic reviews, they have noted concerns. Duran et al. (2022) reviewed LGBTQ+ publications in higher education journals from 2009 to 2018 to examine the epistemological foundations in the research. They examined 82 articles across 11 journals in that timespan. While their purpose was to examine to methodology, their discussion noted that despite an increasing prevalence of articles relating to the LGBTQ community, these publications were rarely found in the top-tier higher education journals. In fact, each of the four top-tier journals they reviewed published zero, or just one relevant article between 2009 and 2018. Similarly, Garvey (2014) concluded that sexuality and gender identity are rarely included in quantitative data sets in top-tier journals. To correct for the lack of LGBTQ literature and theory, Renn (2010) called for the inclusion of LGBTQ+

researchers to help reflect the diversity of relevant experiences and theory. Although there are some researchers who have taken the initiative to research sexual orientation, this effort may not be reflected in the most commonly cited journals.

Researchers have acknowledged concerns relating to the existing literature since the 1960s. In his seminal review of literature from 1967 to 1974, Morin (1977) described substantial heterosexual bias, the assumption that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality. While some of that stigmatized literature has decreased (Allen & Demo, 1995; Clark & Serovich, 1997; Watters, 1986), many individuals are left out of the literature base. In 1992, Buhrke et al., examined counseling-themed literature from 1978 to 1989 and identified a lack of representation for lesbians and people of color, even as there was an increasing emphasis on integrity in non-heterosexual lives.

Gatekeepers in Psychological Research

Overall reliance on peer approval and networking in the publishing process may suppress underrepresented topics, as editors of journals may favor research interests historically represented in the journal. This is not to suggest that editors should seek material outside of the scope of the journal, but rather that there needs to be criteria to ensure that diverse samples and theories are included within the scope of the journal. APA has detailed the steps to becoming a journal editor (Huff, 2020), which consist of being well-versed in the subject matter (area of expertise) to fill in knowledge gaps, volunteering to review others, and attending conferences to become known in the relevant psychological research community. Additional steps included cultivating mentors for support, joining editorial boards, growing a thick skin (specifically for critiques that one will receive), and finally, correctly estimating the time commitment of editing (Huff, 2020). The reliance on interpersonal connections suggests that minoritized individuals are

less likely to work in these roles. According to Roberts (2020), the lack of editors and authors from minoritized groups may result in fewer publications related to minoritized populations.

Although the focus of their research was on race, it is possible that this theory may apply to the lack of LGBTQ research in the highest-ranking journals.

Additionally, without diverse representation among authors and editors, it is possible that journal articles will exclude groups known as *invisible populations*. For example, despite a large body of research on gay men and HIV treatment (e.g., Smit et al., 2012), lesbian, bisexual and queer women who are HIV-positive are rarely included in these studies nor studied in their own right (Logie et al., 2012). Psychological research centered on certain minority populations tends to focus on a specific subset of identities and circumstances such as female job applicants (Kazmi et al., 2022) and minority work-family dynamics (Zambrana et al., 2022), to name a few. Thus, there is little room to push journals toward the truly underrepresented, invisible groups.

Funding of LGBTQIA+ Research

Despite a general increase in the prevalence of published research pertaining to sexual orientation, there is a discrepancy between the funding awarded to LGBTQIA+ research and other forms of research. The National Institute of Health (NIH) reported funding for 628 studies during the years of 1989 to 2011 which specifically targeted LGBT-related health, making up a mere .01% of NIH funded projects during that period (Coulter, Kenst, Bowen, & Scout, 2014). The majority of funded LGBT-related studies focused on HIV/AIDS, sexual health, minority women (i.e., lesbian and bisexual women), minority men (i.e., gay and bisexual men), and transgender health, which is consistent with the limited published research in psychological studies. This overall lack of funding reflects the limited ability of researchers to examine certain topics. The most underrepresented topic among the NIH funding categories related to

transgender individuals, who only accounted for 6.8% of the .01% of funded research studies. The lack of funding has persisted in recent years. The NIH's budget indicated that .00001% of funding was allocated to sexual minority research in 2022 (NIH, 2022).

Demographic Questions Regarding Sexual Orientation

External validity refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalized to the broader population. The collection of demographic variables from research participants is a necessity that allows for the evaluation of external validity. However, the choice of which variables are included, and therefore evaluated, is complex. Some researchers have examined this issue. Johnson and Anderson (2016) looked at participant demographic characteristics that researchers chose to include across 156 articles relating to social anxiety treatment. While many studies included age (96.2%), gender (94.2%), race (50%), education (42.3%) and relationship status (37.8%), far fewer included socioeconomic status (5.1%) and disability (2.6%). Sexual orientation (1.3%) was the least commonly included variable.

The limited inclusion of sexuality in methodology sections might be due to concerns over the comfort of participants or due to negligence on behalf of the researcher. Even in cases in which researchers include a question related to sexuality, participants may choose not to respond to that item. Certain methods of asking participants for demographic characteristics reduce the likelihood that participants will disclose such information. Researchers have suggested that common approaches, including combining categories (e.g., bisexual women and lesbians), can encourage non-response to questions (Hughes et al., 2016). Also, this approach would not account for the consideration of nuances across sexuality. Even when researchers appropriately and respectfully phrase demographic questions, individuals may choose not to respond as their identities may be continuously shifting, or the questions are not inclusive of their identity

(Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020). Hughes et al. (2016) suggested in the case of sexual attraction, researchers add categories such as *I am still figuring out who I am attracted to* instead of *I don't know* or *prefer not to answer*. This may help participants to feel safer and encourages response due to the empathetic nature of the question. Participants may still choose not to answer, but it is less likely with this approach. Limiting the selection to the standard to the standard *yes* or *no* does not accurately represent the many diverse feelings and responses that accompany a difficult question. The inclusion of a wide range of options for sensitive questions such as sexuality can help to build the necessary rapport between researchers and LGBTQIA+ participants. This rapport is established through the understanding and inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ topics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, the resonates with the population.

The authors of the study also mention the fact that some countries outside of the United States consider some sexual orientations and sexual acts to be criminal offenses (Hughes, Camden, & Yangchen, 2016). With this in mind, researchers must remain aware of political climates and the legal repercussions of certain questions. The inclusion of culturally/regionally sensitive questions is necessary to ethically abide by the norms of various climates. It is not ethical, for example, to put a participant in any sort of danger as a result of their response to a survey question, so vigilance around asking certain questions is imperative.

The ideas that Hughes et al. (2016) proposed were meant to rebuild trust between psychologists and the LGBTQIA+ community. Unfortunately, there is limited training and encouragement for these specific ideas, which is seen in the lack of implementation for change of sexuality language as a result of the article.

Current Study

Although the prevalence of research relating to LGBTQIA+ individuals is increasing (Renn, 2010), researchers have noted that the inclusion might not have expanded to the most influential journals (Duran et al., 2022). Unlike previous studies, this content analysis reviewed the highest impact journals across several major domains within psychology (which have not previously been examined). The study aimed to demonstrate the degree of inclusion of sexual orientation in psychology research on 1987 until 2021 within the top-tier journals within clinical, cognitive, developmental, and social psychology.

Additionally, Roberts et al. (2020) demonstrated the relevance of the minoritized status of editors and authors in publications relating to race. Previous researchers have not yet examined the role of minoritized status in gatekeepers for LGBTQ+ research. Therefore, this study has adapted their methodology in the consideration of publications relating to sexuality.

Current Study Research Questions

The research questions that were investigated in this analysis included:

- (1) How prevalent was the consideration of sexuality in general psychological research?
 - a. It was expected that there would not be a wealth of published research addressing sexuality, demonstrated by LGBTQ+ articles representing 5% or less of the overall literature.
 - b. It was expected that there would be significant differences relating to the prevalence of literature relating to sexuality over time and domain. It was expected that the prevalence would increase over time and there would be significantly more publications in social and clinical domains, as compared to cognitive and social domains.

- (2) How often did study authors include information regarding sexuality when describing their samples?
- a. It was expected that authors would not include information regarding sexuality in the demographic section of their methodological sections due to the historical exclusion of sexuality in psychology research, demonstrated by an inclusion rate of 5% or less.
- (3) Who wrote the published psychological research that highlights sexual orientation?
- a. Similar to Roberts et al. (2020), it was expected that at least 50% of authors of sexual orientation research would identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- (4) Who edited the psychological research that highlights sexual orientation?
- a. Similar to Roberts et al., (2020) it was expected that at least 50% of editors of sexual orientation research would identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Methods

This study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of the literature that related to sexual orientation in the most influential journals across the major domains of psychology in the study timeframe. The authors additionally aimed to estimate the rate of inclusion of sexual orientation within participant descriptions in methodological sections of empirical studies. Lastly, the authors evaluated the impact of the minoritized status of authors and editors on the consideration of sexual orientation as a variable. The hypotheses relating to the inclusion of sexual orientation topics, and sexual identity within the methodology sections were conducted using literature reviews. These procedures will be reviewed first in the methodology section. The hypotheses

relating to the authors and editors included an online questionnaire. That procedure will be discussed later in the methodology section.

Procedure for Content Analyses

To address general prevalence in the most influential journals, the authors selected two journals in each of four major domains of psychology (clinical, cognitive, developmental, and social psychology) with the highest impact factor, that were based in the United States and in consistent circulation between 1987 and 2022. Inclusion criteria for articles were broad and included the consideration of sexuality as a variable or relevant study construct. Impact factor was defined using the H-index of each journal. The H-index is a quantitative measurement that reflects the number of papers (h) that were published at least h times (Charlesworth Author Services, 2021). This study ranked journals based on the H-index listed in 2021, the year that the study began. While the journals with the overall highest h-index in 2021 in each domain were selected for reviews relating to the general prevalence, only journals (with the highest h-index) that included empirical articles were included in the analyses relating to participant description sections. Within each chosen journal, the research team considered publications between 1987 and 2021 or 2022. The study period was determined to begin with the momentous removal of homosexuality from the DSM-III, because this event marked the elimination of sexuality being labeled as a disease or ailment. This new perspective may have impacted publications in the top journals in this area. The selected journals and their H-index scores for each of the content searches are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Impact Factor of Journals*

Domain	Selected for General Prevalence	2021 H-index	Selected for Methodological Review	2021 H-index
Clinical	Journal of Abnormal Psychology	213	Journal of Abnormal Psychology	213
	Clinical Psychology Review	239	Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	259
Cognitive	Cognitive Psychology	130	Cognitive Psychology	130
	Journal of Memory and Language	164	Journal of Memory and Language	164
Developmental	Child Development	281	Child Development	281
	Developmental Review	108	Developmental Psychology	236
Social	Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology	161	Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology	161
	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	416	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	416

Six research assistants reviewed articles in the selected journals and timeframes using pre-determined search terms. The search terms included ‘Sexuality’, ‘Sexual Orientation’, ‘LGBTQIA+’, ‘LGBTQ+’, ‘LGBT’, ‘Homosexual’, ‘Homosexuality’, ‘Gay’, ‘Lesbian’, ‘Bisexual’, ‘Transgender’, ‘Queer’, and ‘Intersex’ in the abstract or title of the article. The abstracts for all identified articles were reviewed to ensure that the article met the inclusion criteria. The author reran all article selection procedures to ensure that the results matched. This step was used to measure interrater reliability throughout the collection procedure.

In the prevalence review, of the 22,509 articles published in the selected journals between the years 1987 and 2022, 100 were eligible for review in this study. For details relating to the

screening procedure, please see Figure 1. The total number of articles published in each journal within the study timeframe and the articles that were eligible for inclusion in this study are listed in Table 2.

For the methodological review the study timeframe was limited to 1987 to 2021. This review yielded a total of 26,870 publications in the selected publications in the study timeframe. Of that total, we randomly queried 20% of all original empirical articles. To ensure that selected articles were dispersed throughout the timeframe, the procedure included a random selection based on volume/issue number within each year in the study timeframe. A total of 5,737 articles were included in this review. For details of the screening process, please see Figure 2. The articles published in each journal, and the amount that were included in this review are available in Table 2. Research assistants reviewed the methodology section in each selected article and coded the inclusion or exclusion of descriptions relating to the sexuality of participants. Interrater reliability was demonstrated by the first author analyzing and re-checking the research assistant's completed analysis.

Figure 1

Screening Process for Articles Selected for Prevalence Review

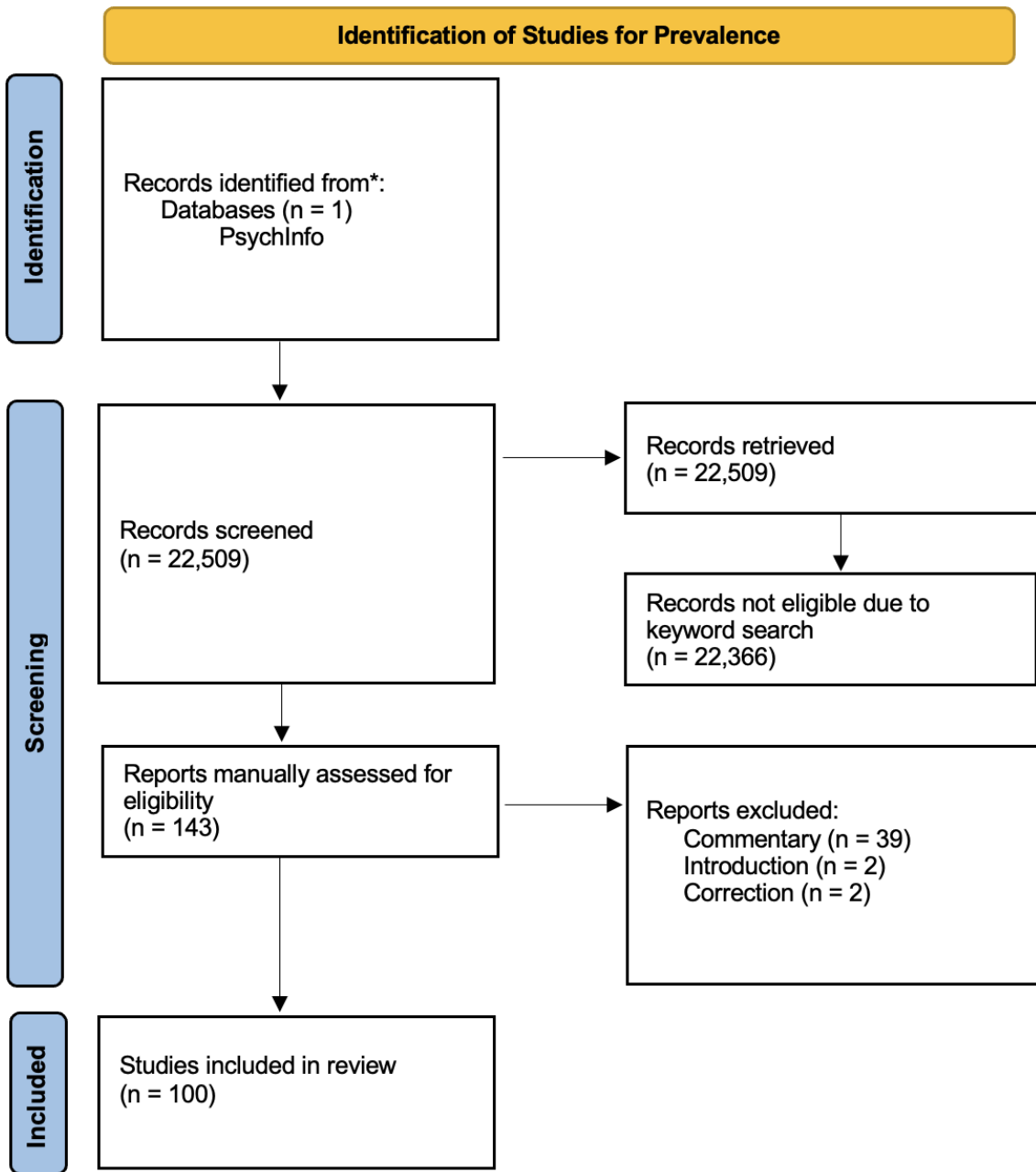
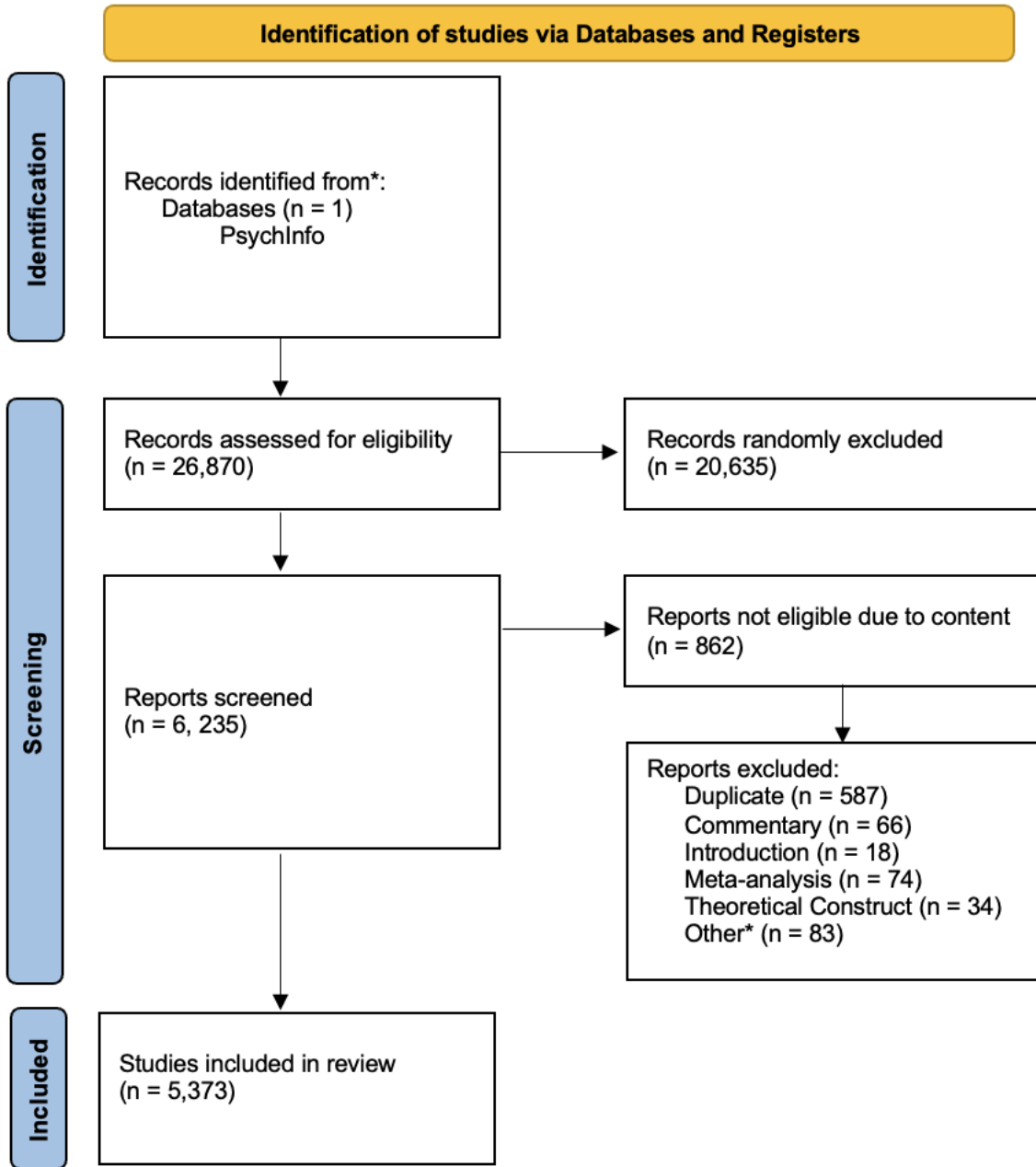


Table 2*Portion of Articles Deemed Eligible for Analysis in Each Journal*

Domain	Prevalence Review: Journal	Articles Published in Timeframe 1987-2022	Eligible Articles	Methodological Review: Journal	Articles Published in Timeframe 1987-2021	Randomly Selected Articles
Clinical	Journal of Abnormal Psychology	2837	9	Journal of Abnormal Psychology	2729	546
	Clinical Psychology Review	2062	9	Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	4037	807
Cognitive	Cognitive Psychology	800	0	Cognitive Psychology	776	155
	Journal of Memory and Language	2054	0	Journal of Memory and Language	2045	409
Developmental	Child Development	5205	9	Child Development	5110	1022
	Developmental Review	661	1	Developmental Psychology	4616	923
Social	Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology	3173	27	Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology	1972	395
	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	5742	45	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	5585	1117

Figure 2

Screening Process for Articles Selected for Methodological Review



Gatekeepers

The first-author, editor-in-chief, and associate editors of each article included in the prevalence review were identified and recent contact information was obtained through university websites (whenever possible). A brief anonymous survey describing the research and asking about the identify characteristics of each author and editor was sent via email. IRB approval was obtained for this portion of the study.

Of the 369 individuals identified based on the 100 qualifying studies, 25 (6.7%) individuals were deceased and contact information was unavailable for 7 (1.9%) individuals. Of the 337 eligible participants whose contact information was available, 21% were authors ($n=71$), 6.2% were editors-in-chief ($n=21$) and 70% were associate editors ($n=236$). A small number of individuals fulfilled multiple roles ($n=7$, 2.1%), predominantly individuals who had served in both associate and editor-in-chief positions, or published as a first author in multiple relevant articles ($n=9$, 2.7%).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire included a consent form, brief description of the study and questions relating to individuals gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. Although the questionnaire did not ask about participant names, it did include a question relating to the journal the participant was affiliated with.

Results

Research Question 1. How prevalent was the consideration of sexuality in general psychological research?

It was expected that less than 5% of all published research in the high impact journals selected for this study would address sexuality. This hypothesis was supported. Of all

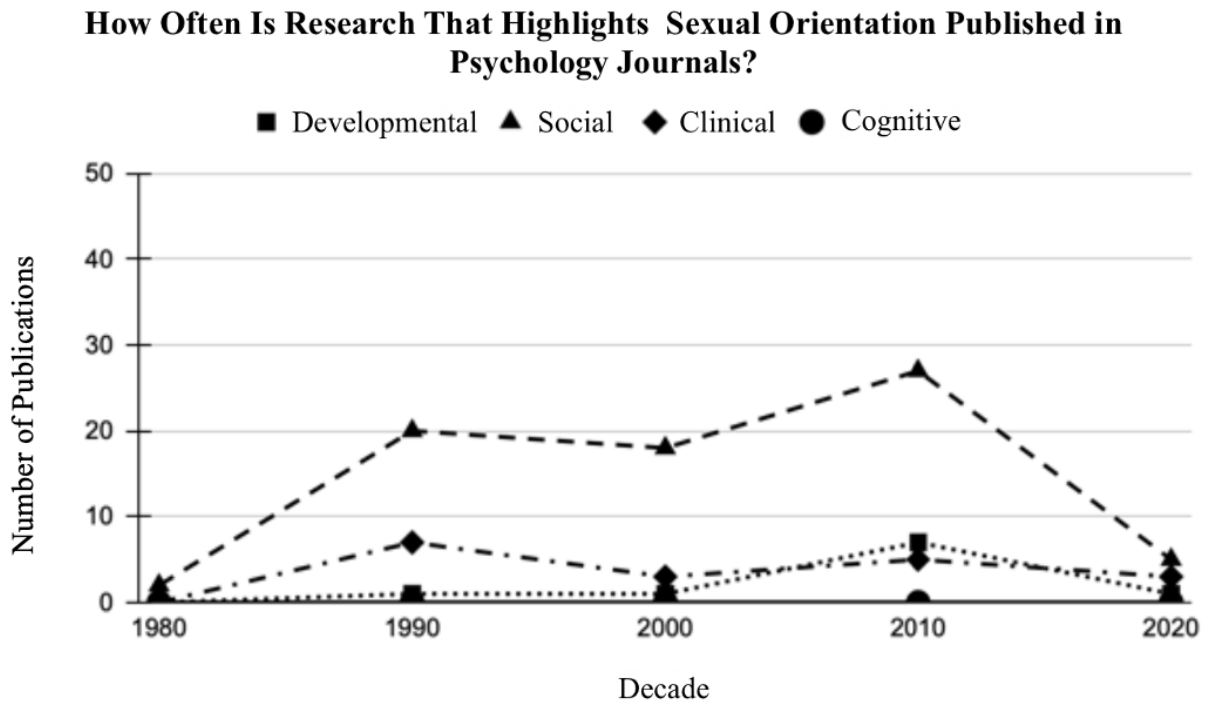
publications in the study timeframe ($N = 22,509$), the eight most impactful journals published studies directly related to topic of sexuality at a rate of 0.44% ($n = 100$) between the years 1987 and 2022. In clinical psychology, fewer than 1% of publications highlighted sexuality (0.37%; 18/4,899). In cognitive psychology, no publications highlighted sexuality. Developmental psychology highlighted sexuality in less than 1% of its total publications (0.17%; 10/5,866). In social psychology, 0.81% of publications highlighted sexuality (72/8915).

It was expected that there would be significant differences relating to the prevalence of literature relating to sexuality over time and domain. This hypothesis was not supported. A linear regression model was run with area of psychology (clinical, cognitive, developmental, social), decade (standardized), and the interaction between these two variables as predictors and the proportion of publications that highlighted sexuality as the dependent variable. The model was not significant, $R^2 = 0.57$, $F(1, 7) = 2.31$, $p = 0.10$.

Although domain was not a significant predictor, of the small number of eligible articles published in the study timeframe, the two social psychology journals published 72% of the relevant articles. Notably, this still represents a very low portion of all social psychology articles published in the timeframe (0.81%). The decade with the most sexual orientation articles was the 2010's yielding 39% of eligible articles for all journals, however the single year with most published articles was 1998 ($n=7$, 7%). For more details relating to the number of articles relating to sexuality that were published across domain and decade, please see Figure 3.

Figure 3.

Publications That Highlighted Sexual Orientation Across Five Decades in Clinical, Cognitive, Developmental, and Social Psychology.

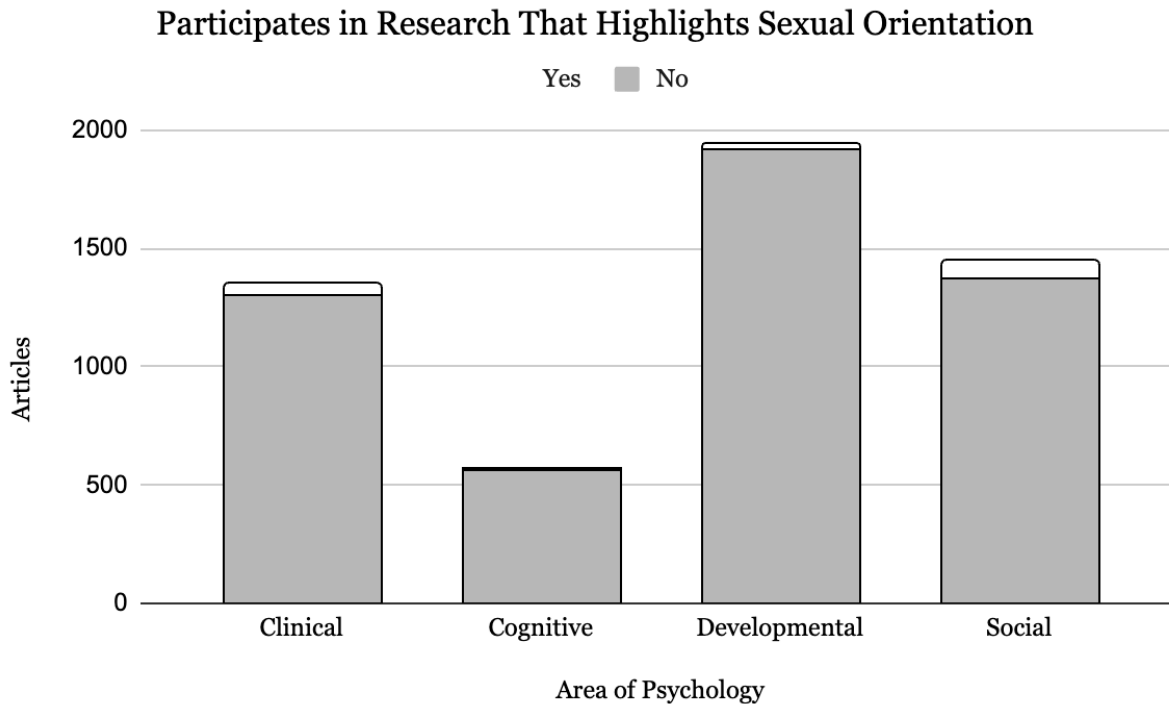


Research Question 2. Do Authors Include Sexuality in Their Participant Descriptions?

It was expected that authors would not include information regarding sexuality in the demographic section of their methodological sections due to the historical exclusion of sexuality in psychology research, demonstrated by an inclusion rate of 5% or less. This hypothesis was supported. Of the 5,377 randomly sampled articles, 2.5% ($n=132$, 2.5%) of articles included sexuality in the sample descriptions. The proportion of articles within each domain that described sexuality in their methodology sections can be found in Figure 4. Of the 132 articles that included sexuality, 34.8% ($n=46$) were found in the clinical psychology journals. The cognitive psychology journals had no articles that described sexuality. Developmental psychology included 17% ($n=22$, 16.7%) of the articles that looked at sexuality in the sample. Social psychology contributed to nearly half of the total articles that included sexuality in the sample ($n=64$, 48.5%).

Figure 4.

Proportion of Publications that Highlighted Sexual Orientation in Publications in Clinical, Cognitive, Developmental, and Social Psychology.



Research Question 3. Who wrote the published psychological research that highlights sexual orientation?

Of the 337 individuals identified based on the 100 qualifying studies, 79 (21.4%) participants responded to the survey. Of the 79 respondents, 68% ($n=54$) were authors of published psychological research. The majority of the author respondents published in social psychology (61%, $n=33$). Others published in clinical (22%, $n=12$) and developmental (15%, $n=8$) journals. Only one (1.8%) author published in cognitive psychology.

Of the author respondents, 24% ($n=13$) identified as cisgender women, 72% ($n=39$) identified as cisgender men, 1.8% ($n=1$) identified only as woman (self-described), and 1.8% ($n=1$) identified as transgender.

=1) identified as a transgendered woman. The population of authors mostly self-identified as white ($n = 50/54$; 92.6%), with the rest of the population identifying as Black/African American ($n = 2/54$; 3%) or Biracial ($n = 1/54$; 1.8%). Four respondents (7%) identified as Hispanic or Latino. In reference to religion, 81% ($n = 44$) indicated no religion. Other respondents identified Christianity ($n = 6$; 11%), Judaism ($n = 3$; 5%), and Buddhism ($n = 1/54$; 1.8%).

It was expected that 50% of individuals who wrote published psychological research that highlighted sexual orientation would be members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This was not supported as 29.6% ($n = 16$) identified as bisexual ($n = 4$, 7.41%) or gay/lesbian ($n = 12$, 22%). The rest of the population identified as heterosexual/straight ($n = 37$, 68.5%) with one respondent who selected other ($n = 1$, 2%) but did not specify a sexual orientation.

Research Question 4. Who Edits the Research That Highlights Sexuality?

Of the total survey respondents ($N = 79$), editors in chief ($n = 5$, 20%) and associate editors ($n = 19$) accounted for 30.4% ($n = 24$) of the sample. The majority of respondents edited social psychology research ($n = 16$, 66.7%). Other editors published in clinical ($n = 7$, 29.2%) and developmental psychology ($n = 1$, 4.2%). No respondents edited cognitive psychology research.

Of the respondents, 83.3% ($n = 20$) identified as cisgender men and 16.7% ($n = 4/24$) identified as cisgender women or woman/female. The population of editors in chief all self-identified as white while the associate editors were mostly white ($n = 17/19$; 89.4%), with the rest of respondents identifying as Black/African American ($n = 1/19$; 5.3%) and Other (i.e., Human Race) ($n = 1/19$; 5.3%). One respondent identified as Hispanic or Latino from the editor in chief respondents ($n = 1/4$; 25%) with one respondent who was excluded from this section due to missing data. Of the associate editors, 11% ($n = 2/18$) identified as Hispanic or Latino with one respondent was excluded from this section due to missing data. For religion, 62.5% ($n = 15/24$)

indicated no religion. The other respondents who indicated a religion identified Christianity ($n = 4/24$; 16.7%), Judaism ($n = 3/24$; 12.5%), and Buddhism ($n = 2/24$; 8.3%).

It was expected that at least 50% of editors of sexual orientation research would identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. This hypothesis was not supported as 100% ($n = 5/5$) of editors in chief were heterosexual while only 10.5% ($n = 3/24$) of associate editors identified as Bisexual ($n = 1/19$; 5.3%) or Gay/Lesbian ($n = 1/19$; 5.3%). The rest of the population identified as heterosexual/straight ($n = 21/24$; 87.5%) with one respondent who selected other ($n = 1/24$; 4.2%) but did not specify a sexual orientation.

Figure 4.

Sexual Orientation of Gatekeepers.

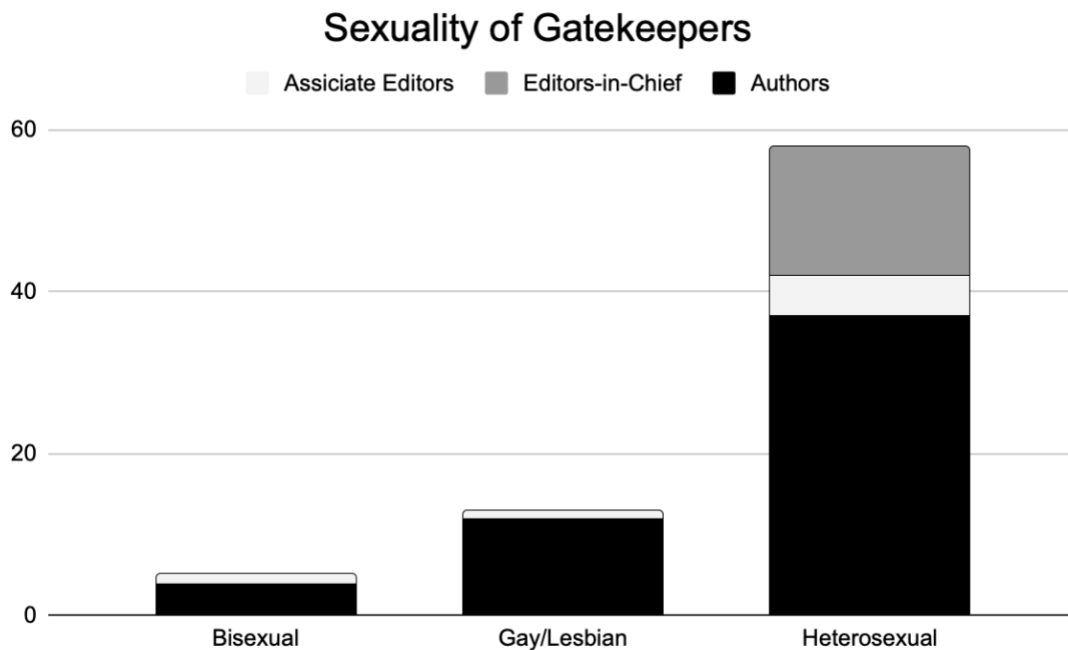
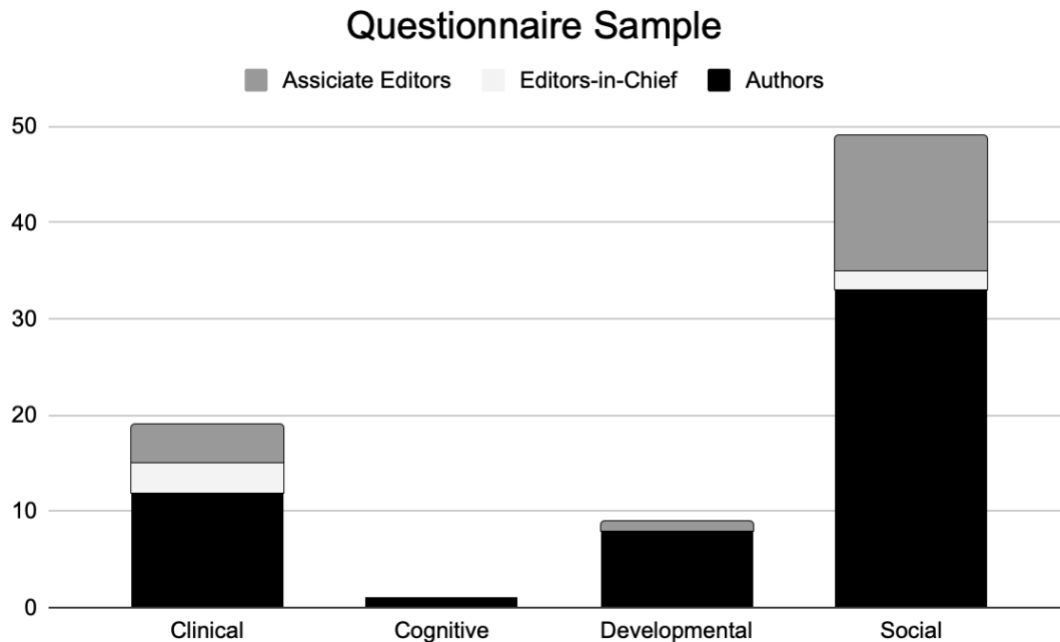


Figure 5.

Number of Gatekeepers Who Responded from Each Area of Psychology.



Discussion

Sexuality has been found to relate to higher rates of depression, suicidality and other mental health difficulties (Escobar-Viera et al., 2020). However, despite increases, the rate of publications relating to topics of sexuality remains low (Garvey, 2014). Additionally, although no previous article focused specifically on high impact journals, some researchers (Duran et al., 2022; Garvey, 2014) have suggested that there is likely to be a greater deficit in the prevalence of published articles that address topics relating to sexuality in high impact journals. This study is the first to examine the inclusion of sexuality across the highest impact journals in four domains of psychology. The authors examined the prevalence of LGBTQIA+ inclusive research over the

past five decades, as well as the inclusion of sexuality in participant descriptions (regardless of the topic of the study). Lastly, the authors examined the identities of the gatekeepers of these publications.

The study demonstrated a dramatic dearth of LGBTQIA+ specific research across all domains of psychology (0.44%, $n = 100/22,509$). However, this appears consistent with previous reviews in specific areas of psychology (e.g., 0.58% of marriage and family journals between 1975 and 1997; Clark & Serovich, 1997). The lack of research is inconsistent with the portion of individuals in the United States who do not identify as straight, as 7.1% of 12,000 individuals identified as gay or bisexual in a national Gallup poll from 2021 (Jones, 2023). This may be an undercount, as 6.6% of individuals from the same survey choose not to respond to that item. Even if 7.1% is accurate, that is double the percentage of individuals who identified as LGBT in 2012, when Gallup began the poll (Jones, 2023).

Given the potential increases in identification in the national population, the authors of this study sought to analyze the prevalence of relevant research over time, as well as to determine if this prevalence differed among the major subfields of psychology. Unfortunately, analyses did not demonstrate a significant increase in the prevalence of relevant studies over time. Similarly, although social psychology produced the highest number of eligible articles ($n = 72$), all four domains of psychology included in the study (clinical, cognitive, developmental, and social) resulted in exceedingly low proportions of eligible articles that ranged from 0 to 1%. Still, it is notable that cognitive psychology yielded zero results. This may be due to the focus of cognitive psychology, which is less interested in the non-tangible differences between subjects such as identity. Even so, with no body of research in this area it cannot be determined that sexuality and gender identities are not relevant to questions in cognitive psychology. Thus, it is

imperative that future research in cognitive psychology is done to determine if these connections exist, and what they might mean for the field of cognitive psychology as a whole.

The dearth of LGBTQIA+ topics in the most popular journals was not surprising, although the lack of a significant increase was contrary to the hypotheses of this study. The landscape of gay rights and social stigma around LGBTQIA+ identities are constantly in flux, especially in recent years. Gay marriage was federally legalized in 2015 which related to the general acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community making individuals feel safer and more likely to disclose their identity (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015). Thus, we expected to see an increase in interest and participation in LGBTQIA+ related research following this event. However, since this occurred relatively recently (less than 7 years before the end of the study period) and given the amount of time necessary for the developing, funding new psychological research and collecting and analyzing data, it is possible a significant rise in publication rates is still on the horizon.

Additionally, the inclusion of sexual orientation in participant descriptions is important, even in studies that are not explicitly related to LGBTQIA+ topics. It is widely accepted that certain demographic categories such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are important for the purposes of ensuring external validity. Researchers typically collect this data from participants to demonstrate that the study population mirrors the make-up of the larger population, demonstrating the applicability of the results. Additionally, the inclusion of these types of variables can spur further research. Readers of articles may consider the generalizability of the study findings based on the sample characteristics and chose to replicate studies in minoritized samples. If sexual orientation is not included, readers are unaware of the degree to which study findings apply to these minoritized individuals. Additionally, given that there may

be differences in participant responses based on sexuality, it is possible that investigators unknowingly confound their results by not accounting for sexuality. If, in fact, sexuality impacted results, authors and readers would not know.

Previous research has suggested that authors tend not to include sexuality in participant descriptions, although the one relevant published study was limited to anxiety treatment (Johnson & Anderson, 2016). This study replicated that finding in a more representative sample of the literature, finding that 2.5% of the 5,373 randomly sampled articles across domains included sexuality in the demographic section. Similar to the findings relating to the general prevalence of sexuality-based research, articles in social psychology were most likely to include sexuality, while cognitive psychology yielded zero articles. However, while the social psychology journals represented 48.5% of all articles that included sexuality in the participant descriptions ($n = 64/132$), this still represented only 5.7% of all articles screened within social psychology ($n = 64/1,117$). Therefore, while this further supports the relative lack of consideration of sexuality within cognitive psychology, researchers are unlikely to include sexuality as a participant characteristic across domains. Interestingly, nearly all studies that included sexuality in the demographic section had topics explicitly regarding the study of LGBTQIA+ populations. This was an interesting finding due to the reality that other demographic questions such as age, socio-economic status, and race were included regardless of the topic being studied.

There are several reasons why authors might not include sexuality in participant descriptions. Assuming that authors feel sexuality is an irrelevant variable, they may not want to collect unnecessary data. This is particularly relevant if that data can be stigmatizing. Authors may not know how to phrase sexuality questions and might worry that participants may become

offended. Additionally, even when these questions are included and thoughtfully written, respondents may still choose to decline to respond. For example, gay respondents may be more likely to skip a question about sexuality than their heterosexual peers for fear of judgment or retribution. Perhaps this variable will be more likely to be included if the concept of sexuality is less stigmatized.

Lastly, the necessity of understanding gatekeepers is demonstrated by the power of a few individuals to accept or reject research topics and ideas. To address the gatekeepers of psychological publications, the researchers queried authors, editors-in-chief, and associate editors to understand the sexual orientation of that individual. The majority of individuals who responded to the survey identified as heterosexual, especially the editors-in-chief who identified exclusively as white heterosexual men. Authors were more diverse in sex and sexuality which was refreshing but did not reach the expected 50% of authors identifying as non-heterosexual.

Due to the historic pattern of the majority (whether it is race or sexuality) studying minoritized individuals (Roberts et al., 2020), it was unsurprising that so many researchers would not identify with the LGBTQIA+ community. This is extremely problematic as the gatekeepers may not understand the hardships, nuances, or needs of the community that is being considered. This result is similar to Roberts et al., (2020), which demonstrated a disproportionate number of white individuals studying racial minorities. This problem needs to be addressed due to the inappropriate (almost micro-aggression) behavior that allows individuals outside of the minority to access a community to better understand the struggles of the minority.

Limitations

In this specific study, there were several limitations that impacted the amount of data collected and used. Although general prevalence was important, this study did not provide insight into invisible populations within this minoritized sample.

Furthermore, this study was limited to the analysis of a random sampling of articles from the most often cited journals within the field of psychology. There is a significant body of LGBTQIA+ research that has been conducted and published in smaller journals that were not included. This study was also limited in that only journals based in the United States were included, so international trends were not considered.

In reference to the gatekeepers of psychological research, the authors are not able to generalize the results to the general population. Of the 337 individuals who were asked for their participation, only 79 responded. Additionally, the study questionnaire was only sent to first authors of eligible studies. It is possible that later authors on eligible studies would have identified differently. It is likely that greater inclusion would have broadened the identify status of the study authors.

In addition to the small sample of gatekeepers, the survey the authors sent out is limited because of participation bias. Participation bias may have resulted in individuals who are in the LGBTQIA+ community being more likely to respond because they feel connected to the topic, or less likely to respond if they fear engaging in the survey and risking discrimination. Additionally, as highlighted in previous studies, the phrasing of questions regarding LGBTQIA+ identities are a complex and of great importance and may have significant impacts on not only participation rates but on the quality and veracity of the data collected (Hughes et al., 2016). While the authors followed the suggested made by Hughes, it is possible that the phrasing and structure of the questionnaire may not have been optimal in allowing participants to respond

comfortably. In turn, this could be a limitation in the collected data and must be considered when interpreting the results.

Future Suggestions

The slow progression of gay rights (i.e., acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals within the field of psychology and society) has opened new opportunity to continue to expose areas where research is inadequate. There is clear research that shows that LGBTQIA+ identities are very important across various areas of psychology. Not including this minority population within the demographic strata of the study does a major disservice to the LGBTQIA+ population as well as to the general population. Gender and sexuality may be major sources of confounding as well as drivers of the main effects in many studies. The importance of this study is in the injustice that LGBTQIA+ individuals still face within psychology research.

In recent years, the complexity and intersectionality regarding sex and gender variables in questionnaires and demographic questions have received increased attention. The idea that sex refers to the biological sex assigned at birth whereas gender refers to an individuals' identity within oneself in society. Individuals can be gender fluid, transgender, cisgender, and many other expressions of gender. The main issue throughout psychology and other medical documents is the pervasive yet erroneous idea that sex and gender are the same measure.

More research is needed to understand how to appropriately ask and receive answers about sexual orientation, but this discussion of sex and gender is a strong start. One issue with this study is the idea that the publications that were analyzed were not specific to LGBTQIA+ research. If there was a similar study with an emphasis on studying LGBTQIA+ populations, the sample size would be much larger for individuals in the community. It may be inferred that there

may be more missing and non-response to gender and sex questions which would help understand another level of complexity in the demographic questions.

The idea that some journals require certain demographic variables such as socio-economic status, sex, and race to be published in a journal is widely accepted. It would be innovative to include sexuality on the requirements of publishing to gain a better understanding of the population being studied overall. This would allow researchers to understand nuances of sexual minorities have long been neglected.

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