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A Content Analysis of LGBT Research in Top Family Journals 2000-2015

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Abstract

The past decades have witnessed some of the most prolific changes in rights and experiences for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) individuals and their families. Research during this period also witnessed a significant increase in the study of these changes. The current content analysis systematically reviewed all LGBT-related articles published in top-ranked, general family science journals from 2000 to 2015 to gauge the state of this growing field. Specifically, basic descriptives, theoretical foundations, methodological plurality, and inclusivity were examined. Results revealed that less than 3% of articles published were LGBT-related, most were atheoretical and infrequently included variables unique to this population (e.g., outness, discrimination), used purposive cross-sectional samples, focused most on lesbian and/or gay couples, and included primarily White and middle-class individuals in samples. Areas of strengths and future opportunities are discussed.

Keywords

content analysis, families, LGBT, methods, theory

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The past decade has been characterized by high-profile challenges to discriminatory institutional practices that historically have marginalized LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) individuals and their families in state and federal courts, the labor market, social media, and public opinion (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; van Eeden-Moorefield & Alvarez, 2015). LGBT individuals and families have witnessed unprecedented legal advances in civil rights and public discourses (e.g., right to marry, federal workplace antidiscrimination policies) as well as social support. In spite of such advances, continuing discrimination and the lack of full legal recognition and protection that contribute to disparities still persist (Bowleg, 2013; van Eeden-Moorefield & Alvarez, 2015).

Family scientists have amassed a literature that examines how these advances and disparities affect the lives of LGBT individuals and their families (e.g., Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). However, certain gaps and limitations in this literature exist that can impede knowledge development as well as call into question the validity of some findings. For instance, Morin (1977) found that a large majority (73%) of the early GLB-related literature focused on homosexuality as psychopathology. In 1995, Allen and Demo reviewed research in three major family science journals and concluded that the invisibility and undertheorization of family processes among families with LGBT members was problematic for the field. Their article highlighted the importance of selecting theories that can address heteronormativity and variations of lived experiences among LGBT individuals and their families.

Clark and Serovich (1997) published a content analyses of clinical family journals from 1975 to 1995, and concluded that there were three primary concerns that contributed to the lack of LGB research: (1) authors chose to publish in LGBT-specific journals only, (2) heterosexist bias in theory and research design, and (3) a pervasive heteronormative assumption that heterosexual family research applied to LGBT families. Others noted some of the historical and contemporary methodological challenges (e.g., availability of quality nationally representative data, measurement of and access to samples representing the variations of sexual orientations and gender identities that exist, data analysis techniques suitable for indistinguishable dyads, approaches to examining intersectionality) involved in studying and understanding LGBT lives and experiences (e.g., Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Russell & Muraco, 2013). In their review, Biblarz and Savci (2010) noted three particular trends occurring in LGBT scholarship: (1) there was much more variability in how lesbian and gay couples formed families and pursued paths of planned parenthood, (2) the experiences of racial and ethnic LGBT individuals and families remained understudied, and (3) more research was needed on bisexual and transgender individuals and families as well as the unique discrimination that these individuals often faced.

We agree with Hartwell, Serovich, Grafsky, and Kerr (2012) and Lavee and Dollahite (1991) that the growth of any family (sub)field and the dissemination of findings are critical for the development of evidence-supported practices and policies that can support and strengthen individuals and families. Stated another way, in order for our scholarship to have a positive impact on families, we must ensure that it is advancing. Conducting systematic content analyses, as a form of taking stock, assists in the process, and is our purpose here. This is especially critical for marginalized families, including those with LGBT members (Bowleg, 2013; Patterson & Sexton, 2013). Our content analysis is distinct in that we not only consider the kinds of LGBT-specific content published but also document the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches as well as inclusivity. We focus on publications appearing in top-ranked general family journals, 2000-2015, a group of journals not examined previously.

There are four important areas useful to assess the growth and development of the family subfield of LGBT studies. First, we need to know how much LGBT-related scholarship is being disseminated in high-impact family journals (i.e., top-tier; Demos, 1990; Kuhn, 1962). The applicability of our research, our understanding of family lives, and fields of study develop most strongly when theory is used, and used explicitly (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005; Lavee & Dollahite, 1991; Patterson & Sexton, 2013). Specific to the study of LGBT lives, unique theoretical considerations (e.g., discrimination, minority stress) should be a part of theoretical grounding as well (Allen & Demo, 1995; Bowleg, 2013). Third, methodological plurality and rigor are needed to advance a field (e.g., Gilgun, 2012; Lavee & Dollahite, 1991; Russell & Muraco, 2013). Finally, many scholars agree that the study of LGBT lives and their families developed monolithically. Accordingly, we must take greater care to understand the diversity within the larger LGBT community (e.g., bisexual, transgender, intersectional identities; Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Bowleg, 2013). We refer to this as inclusivity.

Current Status of Research on Families With LGBT Members

Previous Content Analyses of LGBT Research

Previous content analyses related to LGBT populations have occurred sporadically and focused on research appearing in *any* journal identified through scholarly databases (Deenen, Gijis, & van Naerssen, 1996), in *only* social work journals (Van Vorris & Wagner, 2002), and in three select family journals along with select journals from other disciplines (Demo & Allen, 1996). Other research has focused on sampling strategies appearing in one specific journal (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). There is a more consistent history of content analyses published in clinical journals though (e.g., Singh & Shelton, 2011), and no research has examined LGBT populations in contemporary general, top-ranked family publications.

Across previous content analyses, publication rates ranged from about 0.50% LGBT-related articles among those journals included by Demo and Allen (1996) to 3.92% of social work articles (Van Vorris & Wagner, 2002). Deenen et al. (1996) examined 35 years of social science publications and identified 83 studies that focused on gay men's relationships, the only focus of their study. They further suggested few methodological advances during this period with a high usage of convenience samples. In Sullivan and Losberg's (2003) analysis of the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* from 1997 to 2000, they found that of the 37 empirical articles about 78% used purposive sampling, 15 included those who were bisexual or transgender (only one focused entirely on a transgender sample and none focused on an entirely bisexual sample), most samples were White, and most did not report on indicators of socioeconomic status (SES). Zrenchik and Craft's (2015) content analysis is unique in that the study answered *who* are the most prolific LGBT-focused researchers and *which outlets* publish the most LGBT research. Data from 10 of the most prominent family journals, from 2002 to 2012, implied that LGBT scholarship only comprised 2.2% of total scholarship (N = 130 articles).

Among six top counseling journals from 1978 to 1989, Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, and Ruprecht (1992) identified 43 articles (0.65%) that focused on the LGBT population. Most focused on lesbian and gay samples, counseling lesbians and gay men, used surveys (73.7%), and half did not provide information about race or ethnicity. Most samples were university-based and just over a third were theoretical. Van Vorris and Wagner (2002) analyzed the content of four prominent social work journals from 1988 to 1997 and found that 3.92% of articles included LGBT populations. Most of these were published as part of three special issues or during the earlier years when a larger focus on HIV was present. Many focused on lesbian parents.

Hartwell et al.'s (2012) content analysis used Morin's (1977) and the Clark and Serovich (1997) study sample and coding scheme as a guide. They examined full-length articles, brief reports, and reflections published between 1996 and 2009 in 18 couple and family therapy journals and one applied general family journal. Hartwell et al. (2012) found an increase in LGB content published since the Clark and Serovich (1997) review (i.e., 77:173 articles). In spite of the noted increase, LGB articles represented only 2% of all those published, individual journals ranged from 0% to 7.2%. Most were clinical articles (43.9%), followed by quantitative studies (39.3%), qualitative studies (13.3%), and mixed methods (2.9%). Almost one third of articles were theoretically based, with feminist theory being most commonly used. Blumer, Green, Knowles, and Williams's (2012) content analysis of 17 clinical journals highlighted the lack of published transgender research during 1997-2009 (only 9 of 10,739).

Theoretical Foundations and Methodological Plurality

There is consistency among scholars that theory leads to enhanced knowledge of families and how to strengthen them, can play an important role both in conceptualizing a study as well as in interpreting findings, and also needs to be well-connected to research methodologies (Bengtson et al., 2005; Demo & Allen, 1996; Lavee & Dollahite, 1990). Simply put, explicit theory use is needed to advance fields of study. Unfortunately, research suggests explicit theory is not used often in family scholarship (Bengtson et al., 2005; Lavee & Dollahite, 1990), and sometimes is used implicitly (i.e., concepts and language used appear to denote a particular theoretical orientation) leaving readers to make various assumptions about the study and full interpretation of the findings. This can limit the validity of our knowledge about families (Lavee & Dollahite, 1990). This is of particular concern for the study of LGBT individuals and their families given many theories were developed based on heterosexual, cisgender individuals and their families. It is plausible that many studies, especially those of earlier decades, include heteronormative biases due to inaccurate, or lack of, theory use (Allen & Demo, 1995; Bowleg, 2013). A majority of the LGBT research published is atheoretical (Deenen et al., 1996). Theories that challenge heteronormativity (e.g., queer theory, feminism, intersectionality) have been used slightly more recently, and may enhance the field and our knowledge (Goldberg & Allen, 2013). The use of such theories also is better equipped to theorize and understand unique concerns of the LGBT population (e.g., outness, discrimination).

Methodologically, top family journals have favored quantitative methods in many previous decades; however, qualitative methods have been critical to the advancement of LGBT research. For example, in their meta-analysis of gay and lesbian parenting, Tasker and Patterson (2007) found that qualitative research has established important insights regarding the context of these families, which include decision-making, interaction with schools, and experiences with multiple generations. It is also worth noting that the use of multilevel modeling with LGBT populations has been somewhat slower than with heterosexual, cisgender samples (J. Smith, Sayer, & Goldberg, 2013), but provides one way to better examine context quantitatively compared with earlier statistical methods (Russell & Muraco, 2013). This is possibly due to the nascent nature of LGBT literature (J. Smith et al., 2013). Gilgun (2012) and others (e.g., Parent et al., 2013) have argued that methodological plurality is important to the development of knowledge and fields of study. Here, methodological plurality refers to not only to the use of mixed methods within a single study but also the use of various methods across studies. The assumption is that various methods and research approaches are able to ask different questions, thereby producing different types of knowledge. Collectively, then, what becomes known is more holistic and positioned to advance a field further than if surveys alone were used, as an example.

Inclusivity

Historically, LGBT research has treated the variety of sexual minority identities as a monolith, often under the term *homosexual* (Morin, 1977). Today, this bias is more visible and scholars often call for more inclusivity in the field (Demo & Allen, 1996; Patterson & Sexton, 2013). In this vein, inclusivity refers to examining the full variety of individuals and families as a field and not necessarily within the same study. In fact, studies are needed that focus specifically on various subgroups (e.g., transgender individuals, Black gay men; Bowleg, 2013; Parent et al., 2013). LGBT family research continues to include mainly samples of middle class, White, educated, lesbian families (e.g., Biblarz & Savci, 2010) and lacks intersectional analyses (Bowleg, 2013; Parent et al., 2013; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). For example, race and ethnicity either have been disproportionately excluded or not clearly identified, such as Tasker and Patterson's (2007) findings about lesbian and gay parent research. Demo and Allen (1996) and others have remarked on the inconspicuousness of LGBT-headed families of color and LGBT people of color in family science literature. Additionally, SES diversity is lacking (Gabb, 2013) or often not reported. It is important to mention that even large-scale data sets are challenged in representing and examining LGBT diversity (Russell & Muraco, 2013).

Method

The current study is a content analysis of published family-related LGBT research appearing in top-ranked family journals from 2000 to 2015. We rationed that 2000 as the beginning of our analysis would be the most logical year to start with given it also is the beginning of a new century and no prior content analysis of family-only journals has been conducted. Content analysis is used across many disciplines and is appropriate when seeking to be more objective (Evans, 2013) and to describe and identify trends and patterns (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2012).

Journal and Article Selection Procedures

Some previous studies (e.g., Singh & Shelton, 2011) followed selection criteria set forth by Berrios and Lucca (2006), who suggested that journals selected for content analyses should be broad in scope and have high circulations. Given these criteria, we focused on articles published in top-ranked general family journals. The *2012 Reuters Journal Rankings* in family science was used to identify journals. First, the top 25 ranked family science journals were identified. Second, only journals with a general family focus were selected for inclusion in the current study regardless if they were research-only, applied, and/or clinical. We conceptualized general family focus as a journal that publishes on any aspect of family life as stated in the journal aims and scope, and this is similar to previous studies (Singh & Shelton, 2011). For example, *Family and Community Health* is limited to articles solely related to health and families and was excluded. These criteria resulted in the inclusion of seven journals: *Journal of Family Issues, Journal of Marriage and Family, Journal of Family Psychology, Family Process, Journal of Child and Family Studies, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, and *Family Relations*.

The first author reviewed all tables of contents and abstracts from 2000 to 2015 for any word or phrase (e.g., bisexual, children with same-sex parents, gay, same-sex, sexual orientation) suggesting a partial or entire focus on LGBT individuals and their families. Words indicating the full spectrum of sexual and gender identities and all potential aspects of LGBT experience were considered. Book reviews, introductions to special issues, editorials, commentary, and rejoinders were excluded. Thus, only empirical, clinical or practice, pedagogical articles, or literature reviews were included. These procedures also are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2012; Singh & Shelton, 2011), and resulted in a sample of 153 articles.

Coding Procedures and Content Categories

The first author trained two graduate research assistants to code each article using the developed coding procedures and categories. The first author and two graduate research assistants initially coded articles together, and agreement was reached after the first three articles (Evans, 2013). The remaining articles were split and assigned to both graduate research assistants who continued coding all additional articles. All three met every 2 weeks to review completed coding for accuracy and discuss any uncertainty. In areas of uncertainty, the group discussed each area and came to a consensus. For example, a common area was that in which an article used a method not part of the initial coding scheme. To account for newer or less used methodological techniques that might be used in research, we allowed new codes to be added during the coding process. In these instances, new codes were determined during group meetings, recorded in the codebook, and previously coded articles were reconsidered in case one might better fit with a newly added code. Each author (including two additional team members who served as outside coders) reviewed a unique random set of five articles and compared their coding with the initial coding. Agreement was achieved in each case so no additional checks were performed. Literature reviews, nonempirical pedagogical and clinical/practice articles were excluded from full content coding (e.g., articles without a sample were not coded for inclusivity).

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical framework for each article was coded based on whether it was explicit, implicit, or if the article was atheoretical (Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). Additionally, the specific theory used was recorded when available. For cases of implicit use, a best guess of which theory guided the study was recorded. This occurred in meetings between the first author and the graduate research assistants in which they discussed the main concepts used, how they were used, and which theory those best represented (Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). Furthermore, we coded use of unique focus variables (i.e., outness, discrimination, HIV) with specific theoretical importance to LGBT populations, based on previous reviews (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

Methodological Plurality

Study Approach and Design. First, we coded whether an article was quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, or a review. Second, we coded the overall general design used: cross-sectional, longitudinal, or other. Next, we coded each article's data collection procedure: in person, phone, online, or other. We also coded the primary and secondary design used in each study. Codes were included for all secondary designs appearing in articles (e.g., phenomenology, quasi-experimental). Additionally, primary methods were coded (e.g., interviews, surveys).

Sample Type. Each article was coded based on the type of sample included as indicated in the article (e.g., convenience), its size, and if a heterosexual comparison sample was used or not.

Inclusivity

Focus. Codes included LGBT adults, LGBT couples, LGBT children, children with LGBT parents, or LGBT parents with children. For articles that included a heterosexual comparison sample, the focus was coded based on the LGBT subsample only. A secondary focus also was coded for all articles with LGBT samples, regardless of whether they were children or adults. Specifically, we coded whether the focus was primarily on LGBT individuals, or any combination (e.g., lesbian and bisexual sample only).

Sample Diversity. Since most studies measure demographics in different ways (e.g., SES measured by self-identification compared with reporting income), we developed broad categories that could be used across studies. First, we developed a code for sample diversity. Categories included primarily Caucasian/White, primarily ethnic/racial, mixed, entirely ethnic/racial, or entirely Caucasian/White. For a sample to be considered mixed, the percentages of most groups had to mirror U.S. population demographics within 5% when coding began in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). For example, the percentage of the population was 4.8% Asian American and 72.4% White. If a study included a sample with 6% Asian American and 70% White, we coded that as mixed. We used the term *mixed* rather than *representative* because we did not want to appear to make claims about generalizability. For studies not coded as mixed, the group with the highest representation determined the code. For example, if the sample was 51% Hispanic/Latino(a) it was coded as primarily ethnic/racial. If a sample was 51% White, it was coded primarily Caucasian/White. Each sample also was coded as international or U.S.

Similar to sample diversity, we also coded the SES diversity of each sample. The seven categories included: mixed, primarily high, middle, or low, or entirely high, middle, or low. When actual income categories were provided within an article comparisons were made to U.S. demographics in a similar way as above (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Additionally, author descriptions of the SES distribution of their sample were used to categorize each article. Last, sample outness (i.e., the extent to which a participant's sexual orientation or gender identity are known by others) was coded as primarily out, mixed, primarily closeted, or not included. The authors' published descriptions of their own samples were used for coding outness.

Results

Basic Descriptives

Table 1 presents the frequency and percent of LGBT-related articles published between 2000 and 2015, by year. Overall, 153 of the 6,832 published articles (2.24%) included or focused on the LGBT population. Rates ranged from a low of 0.58% in 2005 to a high of 3.20% in 2008, lower than previous analyses of social work journals (e.g., 3.92%; Van Vorris & Wagner, 2002) but consistent with others (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2012; Zrenchik & Craft, 2015).

Theoretical Foundations

Specific to theory, 44.4% used an explicit theory and 45.8% were atheoretical. Among those using an explicit theory, the most common included feminist (n = 12; e.g., Chabot & Ames, 2004), minority stress (n = 11; e.g., Goldberg & Smith, 2013), ecological (n = 7; Goldberg & Smith, 2009), queer theory (n = 5; van Eeden-Moorefield, Martell, Williams, & Preston, 2011), and risk and resilience (n = 4; e.g., Sanders & Kroll, 2000). Examples of less commonly used theories included attribution theory (Armesto & Weisman, 2001), family systems (e.g., Akbar & Senn, 2010), ambiguous loss (Allen, 2007), and life course (e.g., Porche & Purvin, 2008).

Similar to suggestions from Lavee and Dollahite (1991), we also coded implicit theory use based on concepts and theoretical presentation of ideas (9.8% of coded articles). For example, Godfrey, Haddock, Fisher, and Lund (2006) sought to identify some of the knowledge and experience that therapists need to best work with LGBT clients. In their literature review and discussion, they discussed the unique stressors LGBT individuals' experience (e.g., discrimination, lack of legal protections) that therapists needed to be aware of and how to incorporate new supports to balance additional stressors. Minority stress theory focuses on stressors unique to LGBT populations and the processes surrounding them, as well as their connection to individual and family outcomes (Meyer, 2003). Accordingly, we assert this study (Godfrey et al., 2006) likely was grounded in minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003).

Unique Variables. Furthermore, we examined variables unique to LGBT populations, which are important considerations to avoid heteronormative theoretical assumptions (Demo & Allen, 1996). First, only 12.9% of articles focused on outness. Factors of stigma and/or discrimination were a main focus in only 14.3% of articles. Finally, only three articles focused on HIV/AIDS.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of LGBT Articles Published by Year and Overall.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Total	9/316	4/330	5/306	7/306	6/346	2/347	7/405	7/394	14/437	8/439	14/436	13/448	12/517	12/554	13/512	22/739	153/6,832
Percent	2.85	1.21	1.63	2.28	1.73	0.58	1.73	1.78	3.20	1.82	3.21	2.90	2.32	2.16	2.54	2.98	2.24

Table 2. Methodological Plurality.

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Methods			Sampling strategy		
Interviews	44	35.8	Convenience	29	23.6
Focus groups	1	0.8	Purposive	70	56.9
Content analysis	6	4.9	Snowball	15	12.2
Observations	4	3.3	Simple random	2	1.6
Surveys	43	35.0	Multistage	2	1.6
Secondary data	18	14.6	Time-space	1	0.8
Narratives	2	1.6	Criterion-selection	1	0.8
Observation and interview	1	0.8	Comparative		
Content analysis and interview	1	0.8	Yes	37	30.8
Survey and interview	3	2.4	No	83	69.2

Methodological Plurality

Study Approach and Design. Specific to the overall approach, articles almost equally were quantitative (41.8%; $n = 64$) or qualitative (34.0%; $n = 52$). This allows for a more holistic understanding of the literature (Gilgun, 2012), whereas only 4.6% ($n = 7$) used mixed methods and 19.6% ($n = 30$) were review articles. Of these, 13.1% were clinical or practice-focused ($n = 20$) and 4.6% were pedagogical ($n = 7$). Five pedagogical and 10 practice articles were empirical and were included in the rest of the analyses—the others are excluded as they not empirical.

Among empirical articles only ($n = 123$), the vast majority were cross-sectional (87.8%; $n = 108$) compared with longitudinal (12.2%; $n = 15$). Among primary designs, most were nonexperimental (20.3%), phenomenological (14.6%), or quasi-experimental (13.0%). Less common primary designs included grounded theory (5.7%), case studies (3.3%), hermeneutical (7.3%), and discourse analysis (4.1%). The most common data collection methods were in person (41.5%) and online (17.1%), followed by phone (15%), secondary data (15%), mail (8%), content (4%), or a combination (10%). Thirty percent (30.1%) of articles were comparative (see Table 2). The most common methods included in-depth interviews (35.8%), surveys (35.0%), and use of secondary data (14.6%; see Table 2). Examples of less commonly used methods include observational studies, focus groups, and content analyses.

Table 3. Indicators of Inclusivity.

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Sample diversity			Socioeconomic status diversity		
Primarily ethnic/racial	7	5.7	Primarily high	19	15.4
Primarily White	79	64.2	Primarily middle	32	26.0
Mixed	4	3.3	Primarily low	6	4.9
Entirely ethnic/racial	6	4.9	Mixed	6	4.9
Entirely White	2	1.6	Entirely low	1	0.8
Not provided	22	17.9	Not provided	57	46.3

Sample Type and Composition. Of the empirical articles, the most common sampling strategy was purposive (56.9%) followed by convenience (23.6%) and snowball (12.2%; see Table 2). Only 4.9% used some type of probability sampling. More specific to samples, the median sample size was 78.0, whereas the mean was 7,037.46 (SD = 43,862.02). For qualitative only studies the median was 35 and for quantitative only studies it was 184.50.

Inclusivity

Focus. The majority of articles focused on LGBT couples (39.9%), followed by LGBT adults (28.8%), and LGBT couples with children (22.2%). Others focused to a lesser extent on LGBT children (4.6%), different-sex couples with LGBT children (3.9%), or LGBT individuals over the life course (0.7%). Additionally, 45.8% of articles focused specifically on lesbian and gay men, 15.0% lesbian only, 10.5% on LGB, 10.5% on gay, 11.1% were all inclusive, 3.9% on transgender, and 1.9% on bisexual or lesbian and bisexual (0.7%). Clearly, bisexual and transgender populations are largely invisible in the research included in these journals. Across all articles that included at least one transgender or bisexual individual in a sample, as compared with a specific focus on that population, the numbers are slightly better (44/153).

Sample Diversity. Most samples were primarily White (64.2%), and only 4.9% were entirely racial and ethnic minority samples (see Table 3). Surprisingly, 17.9% of articles reported no information on race or ethnicity. Specific to SES, 26.0% of samples were primarily middle-class, with 15.4% primarily high, 4.9% primarily low, and 46.3% did not report SES. Only 16.3% of articles included international participants. When included, most samples were primarily out (87.0%), followed by primarily closeted (7.4%) or mixed (5.6%).

Discussion

In order for LGBT research to continue developing in family science, and family science itself, it is critical to systematically and objectively take stock (Allen & Demo, 1995; Evans, 2013; Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). The results from this content analysis suggest several strengths and opportunities for continued development. First, we know that a wealth of LGBT research is occurring and being disseminated in various outlets, especially LGBT-focused journals. Both types of journals certainly provide important avenues for dissemination. Generally, results indicate that, over the past 15 years, family scientists have published a small amount of LGBT research in top general family journals and this represents a small increase compared with pre-2000 (Demo & Allen, 1996). However, we lag behind some other fields (e.g., Van Vorris & Wagner, 2002). The visibility of LGBT family science may be enhanced if family journals called for special issues focusing on LGBT research. Doing so allows for LGBT scholars to take leadership (e.g., editorship) and to center LGBT experience in the family science discourse. Second, the relative stagnancy in LGBT research may reflect where family science "is" in terms of its evolution as a discipline that has historically embraced the study of marginalized populations who did not fit the SNAF (Standard North American Family; D. E. Smith, 1993) model slowly, with consternation and controversy, and more often than not from a deficit perspective initially (Bengtson et al., 2005; Few, 2007). It was the feminist movement in the 1990s (Thompson & Walker, 1995) that would shepherd the inclusion of LGBT research in family science. Feminist family scientists called for increased family research on diverse populations as a disciplinary necessity and responsibility to holistically capture the family processes of all families.

Theoretical Foundations

Theory is arguably the best conceptual guide for any research (Demo & Allen, 1996), yet our findings suggest that literature in our sample is largely atheoretical. This observation is consistent with others (Hartwell et al., 2012) and limits the field's ability to develop (Bengtson et al., 2005; Lavee & Dollahite, 1991). We encourage scholars and editors to be more stringent on explicit theory use. Theory was explicitly used in just more than 40% of the publications in our sample, and scholars most often used those with potential for fit, or at least potential for reduced heteronormative biases. As such, we found strong choices of theoretical grounding used in current LGBT research and this is an enhancement since Demo and Allen (1996). Our findings also suggest that family scientists still need to increase the use of theories (e.g., minority stress, feminist, queer) that center marginalized minority life and their experiences in order to fully understand how they affect life trajectories and family processes. Lavee and Dollahite (1991) warned that we needed to use theory more explicitly and the fact that we are still not doing this limits the validity of our understanding of what is known, specifically, in analyzing variation in experience. This especially is true of intersectional variations (Glass & Few-Demo, 2013).

Variables Unique to LGBT Individuals and Families. It was surprising that so few studies included outness and/or experiences of discrimination. Given the strong negative influences of these specific variables on LGBT lives (Moradi, Wiseman, et al., 2010), we, as a discipline, must focus more on these variables to move the field forward. For example, research on minority stress models examines LGBT people's experiences of discrimination as a part of a stigmatized population, which is often related to outness (e.g., Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, family rejection and acceptance researchers consider youth who have come out to at least one parent and their subsequent experiences in their families (e.g., Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). These bodies of research indicate that variables such as outness and discrimination are relevant within a family context. In a sociopolitical culture that has discriminated against LGBT people, comparative studies have been helpful to legitimize the strengths and well-being of LGBT families as similar to heteroseuxal families. However, comparative studies have reinforced a heteronormative SNAF standard and portrayed a monolithic picture devoid of variation in experiences unique to LGBT families (Parent et al., 2013).

Methodological Plurality Is Needed

An important finding of this study is that LGBT research appearing in top family journals is close to being methodologically balanced, with only slightly more quantitative than qualitative studies compared with mostly quantitative studies found in clinical journals (Hartwell et al., 2012). This trend allows for both depth and breadth of understanding, thereby producing a more holistic view of LGBT lives, warranting a call for increased mixed methods studies. Just less than 90% of studies were cross-sectional and this likely is due to the lack of national data sets that have the ability to identify LGBT respondents (Russell & Muraco, 2013). However, more data are becoming available and more data sets are beginning to include questions of sexual orientation. Unfortunately, this is less true for questions about gender identity. There are a few large-scale studies that do address sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Russell & Muraco, 2013), but they do not ask questions needed to best address many of the specific concerns of LGBT individuals and families such as outness, discrimination, and minority stress. These factors can and are being explored through rigorous qualitative inquiry (e.g., Gabb, 2013). Thus, we suggest that family scientists consider conducting LGBT research that is inclusive of both quantitative and qualitative research designs, or rather, engage in methodological plurality.

Most data collection continues to occur in person and increasing amounts are collected online, a trend we expect to increase. While scholars have critiqued use of convenience samples in LGBT research, our findings suggest that the most common sampling strategy was purposive. Although both are nonprobability, we assert purposive is a better choice for the field (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). Purposive sampling delimits a sample in such a way as to control for many extraneous influences, ensuring the sample includes those who most closely represent the population of interest. Purposive sampling can reduce some biases and enhance validity.

Inclusion in Family Science

Our findings indicate that same-sex couple relationships were the focus of most research, followed by LGBT adult experiences. Within these larger foci, research focused mostly on lesbians and gay men. In addition, bisexual and transgender populations were largely invisible in the research, consistent with others (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). Furthermore, the majority of studies included here were composed of samples that were primarily middle (26%) and high income (15.4%). Surprisingly, 46.3% of articles excluded direct information on SES. Research is just now realizing that the LGBT community is not monolithic (e.g., Blumer et al., 2012). Studies must continue to explore within-group variation such as race and ethnicity.

Race, Ethnicity, and Multiple Minority Populations. Consistent with prior subjective reviews (e.g., Biblarz & Savci, 2010), our findings suggest that a majority of samples were primarily or entirely White and middle-class. Thus, the relative exclusion of multiple minority populations (e.g., Black bisexual and gay men; Bowleg, 2013) and the perpetuation of focusing mostly on the experiences of the Western, White middle class to represent "normal" family processes prevail. We do acknowledge that our coding of race and ethnicity was limited. Specifically, if a sample included 51% White participants and 49% participants of color it was coded as primarily White. This obscures the large amount of the sample who were people of color. This is a limitation and should be considered. Multiple minority populations consist of individuals who identify with or who are identified as having multiple minority social statuses and, as a result, may experience simultaneous discriminations (i.e., racism, homophobia, classism). Our analysis revealed that only about 10% of articles consisted of entirely or primarily racial and ethnic minority samples and 17.9% of articles failed to report any racial or ethnic diversity in their samples, a trend identified in other content analyses (e.g., Buhrke et al., 1992; Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). Although we did not code for recruitment methods, and this is a limitation, our findings indicate that research that included primarily racial and ethnic minority samples were intentional about recruitment. For example, researchers recruited participants at Black Pride events (Glass & Few-Demo, 2013) and partnered with an LGBT organization located in a diverse city that provides services specifically to queer people of color (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009). We suggest that editors and reviewers call for researchers who are doing work with hard-to-reach populations to be more explicit about their successful recruitment strategies. It also might be a good time to develop a call for a methodological special issue focused on recruiting hard-to-reach populations.

If we were to rely on information from our selected journals, our academic discourse would consist mainly of the experiences of White middle- and high-income LGBT-headed families and LGBT-headed families in which race, ethnicity, and SES are unknown. Typical justifications for the relative absence of LGBT racial and ethnic sexual minority individuals and families in family science (and other social science) literature are the difficulty in recruiting this sample and the overreliance on large scale data sets in which populations of color are underrepresented (Russell & Muraco, 2013). Thus, the question that emerges is why have we failed to recruit and include more racial and ethnic diversity in LGBT research? LGBT people of color have multiple affiliations related not only to race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation but also neighborhoods and other communities; for instance, they may experience "shifting hierarchies" within their "multiple affiliations," sometimes prioritizing participation in one affiliation over the other over time (Kim, 2009; Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2012). Thus, active intersectional politics such as these may have implications for participant recruitment and research design. In fact, designing and advertising studies that target strengths instead of challenges might be more relatable and attractive to some and such methods have produced more diverse samples in studies appearing in other journals. There are, however, additional nuanced reasons for why minority multiple groups may be particularly "elusive." These reasons include (1) the extent of, or lack of, outness or fear of being outted during the research process (Meezan & Martin, 2012), (2) a possible elevated risk of harassment and estrangement (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2012), (3) the refusal of some LGBT people of color to ascribe or adopt an LGBT label (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010), and (4) failure to feel connected to mainstream LGBT communities due to racism or cultural scripts (Ibañez, Van Oss Marin, Flores, Millett, & Diaz, 2009). Moradi, DeBlaere, Huang (2010) further highlighted the marginality of LGB people of color by explaining the misconception that "LGB people of color do not exist or are so few in number that their presence or absence does not need to be made explicit" (p. 324). This trend of marginalization persists in spite of the fact that we know that there is a growing literature of families headed by LGBT individuals and couples of color (e.g., Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013).

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