

Assessing the Rainbow Gap: A Critical Analysis of LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Social Work Research

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Abstract: Recent developments in American political and social life pertaining to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people call for critical research examining the unjust systems perpetuating heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia. This study examines the extent to which mainstream social work research investigates the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people as well as the systems that perpetuate oppression and discrimination pertaining to gender and sexuality. The researchers conducted a content analysis of three peer-reviewed top social work journals (N=854) to determine the prevalence of LGBTQ+ inclusive research. Findings revealed that only 2.3% (n=20) of articles consider the LGBTQ+ community or systems that perpetuate heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Findings show that even fewer articles (n=6) apply a critical theoretical frame of queer theory to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and even fewer examine gender and sexuality at the intersection of race (n=6, 0.7%). This article demonstrates a dearth of research pertaining to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and calls for more intentional social work research as it relates to this population.

Keywords: Queer issues, social work research, LGBTQ+, transgender issues, gay issues, critical theory, queer theory, queer methods

Since its inception, the social work profession has proclaimed a commitment to social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, and a consideration for how the socio-political environment impacts the lives of marginalized people. Despite this commitment, the lived experiences and issues faced by LGBTQ+ people have been largely absent in social work research. Van Voorhis and Wagner (2002) demonstrate a dearth of research related to the lives of lesbian and gay people amongst articles published in three top social work journals between 1988 and 1997. These findings were later reinforced by a follow-up study examining the representation of lesbians and gay men amongst articles published in the same journals between 1998-2012 (Pelts et al., 2014). Given that sexuality and gender identity pervade almost any given social issue, this article calls on social work researchers to consistently consider the experiences of LGBTQ+ people no matter the social issue studied. The current study utilizes content analysis to investigate the extent to which current mainstream social work research (N=854) centralizes the experiences of LGBTQ+

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people as well as discriminatory social phenomena such as homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. It additionally examines the extent to which queer theories and methodologies are utilized within social work research to critically examine the oppression and marginalization of this particular group.

Literature Review

Status of LGBTQ+ People in the United States

The United States largely adheres to heteronormative norms, expectations, and values, which has perpetuated the marginalization and systematic oppression of people in the LGBTQ+ community (Pollitt et al., 2021). In 2023, an unprecedented 725 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in state legislatures, and over 100 of those bills passed (Movement Advancement Project [MAP], 2023). As of September 2023, gender affirming care is banned by law for minors in 22 states. Bills proposed in 2023 have increasingly targeted transgender adults as well as minors, and nine states have banned Medicaid coverage use for gender affirming care. Additionally in 2023, ten states banned teachers' and social workers' abilities to use students' and, in some cases, adults' names, pronouns, and honorifics.

Several state and national efforts have also resulted in curriculum censorship laws targeting LGBTQ+ and/or BIPOC communities, the removal of anti-bullying and harassment protections for LGBTQ+ youth, and the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, all of which limit social workers' ability to speak with and serve clients (American Library Association, 2023; Kline et al., 2022; MAP, 2023; see *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2023). Additionally, LGBTQ+ people remain at-risk for discrimination on multiple fronts, including housing and employment. Nineteen states have no explicit prohibitions for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in their housing laws (MAP, 2023). Overall half of LGBTQ+ adults report experiencing workplace discrimination (American Civil Liberties Union, 2024). According to the Williams Institute, 17% of LGBTQ individuals in 2021 were living in poverty, as compared to 12% of straight, cisgender individuals. These disparities were exacerbated for LGBTQ+ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC; Wilson et al., 2023).

LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk for suicide and other mental health concerns, which are found to often be a result of structural discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion (Hatzenbuehler, 2014). According to the 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Health, an overwhelming 93% of transgender and nonbinary youth expressed concern about being denied gender-affirming medical care and 45% of LGBTQ youth have seriously considered attempting suicide. This issue is compounded at the intersection of race, with greater disparities in mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ Black, Indigenous, Youth of Color (The Trevor Project, n.d.).

Queering Social Work

While social work pioneers Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, and Frances Perkins all had documented, long-term, same-sex relationships (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2009), the dominant trend in social work research, education, and practice skews toward heteronormativity and remains largely silent in changing the heterosexist status quo. Some social workers argue that queer theories and perspectives are almost absent or misused in social work education (Hicks & Jeyasingham, 2016; MacKinnon, 2011) thereby creating heterosexist blind spots in social work practice (Burdge, 2007). In fact, some social work scholars argue that current social work curricula actually reinforce heteronormativity by relying on multicultural and/or anti-oppressive frameworks to identify and address issues of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia (MacKinnon, 2011; Poynter & Tubbs, 2008; Sumara & Davis, 1999). MacKinnon (2011) suggests that multi-cultural minority oppression frameworks centralize heteronormative practices as dominant and normal while othering queer practices. Additionally, these frameworks situate queer (and heteronormative) sexualities as fixed and predictable thereby increasing potential to perpetuate stereotypes and rigid distinctions between these classifications as well as between queer and hetero- experiences. Moreover, these frameworks often assume that “straight allies” may become competent in understanding queer experiences resulting in a reductionist understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality and reinforcing the practice of othering sexual and gender “minorities.” Consequently, some social workers posit queer theory as an emancipatory pedagogical tool for teaching about sexuality, gender, and power relations in ways that “shift(s) the idea of sexual difference to include a variety of sexual practices” (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 141) and expand beyond limited sexual categories by which heteronormativity is privileged.

In relation to social work research, there proves to be a dearth of studies centralizing the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in top social work research journals. Van Voorhis and Wagner (2022) conducted a content analysis of publications from 1988-1997 in four major social work journals (i.e., *Social Work*, *Child Welfare*, *Social Service Review*, *Families in Society*) investigating the extent to which top social work research journals are inclusive of lesbian and gay people and maintain methodologies that may be understood as free of heterosexist bias. Results demonstrate that only 3.92% of the articles (N=1,964) focused on the lived experiences of lesbians and gay people with the vast majority of these articles focusing on HIV in the gay community or LG-related issues in social work practice. Very few articles maintained a macro-focus. Moreover, 90% of these articles were published in just two of the journals included in the sample. Over a decade later, Pelts et al. (2014) conducted a follow-up study with a similar design and purpose. This study reviewed publications from the same four journals over a 15-year time span and revealed a significant decrease in publications focusing on the lived experience of lesbian and gay people and, again, found only a few articles with a macro-focus. A decade later, our current study maintains a similar purpose and design as the two aforementioned studies but expands the inquiry to include articles focused on the lives of trans, bisexual, gender nonconforming, and queer people as well.

In addition to filling this gap in research, social workers push for the integration of queer theories and methodologies in social work research (de Jong, 2014; Fish & Russell, 2018; Meyer et al., 2022). Fish and Russell (2018) argue that queer methodologies provide opportunities to redirect traditional research methods, which apply and reinforce dominant and privileged paradigms (e.g., heteronormativity). The authors further argue that adapting traditional research methods (e.g., positivist, empirical) to queer methods increases the potential for more diverse understandings of queer families, which is largely missing in current social work research. Relatedly, Meyer et al. (2022) demonstrate a dearth of non-profit research centralizing LGBTQ+ issues and positioning LGBTQ+ people as central and active in the research process. The authors argue that understanding the experiences of queer people and how these experiences are impacted by unjust heteronormative power structures increases the potential to work toward equity and inclusivity, particularly within non-profit organizations. Our research investigates the extent to which LGBTQ+ lives, perspectives, and experiences are centralized within social work research as well as the extent to which queer theories and methodologies are utilized thereby providing additional variables to the ones presented in the Van Voorhis and Wagner (2002) and Pelts et al. (2014) articles. The following sections provide an overview of queer theories and methodologies as well as their relevance to social work research.

What Is Queer Theory?

Queer theory is a post-structuralist critical theory, which investigates power dynamics pertaining to gender and sexuality hegemonies. Originating from the works of Michael Foucault (1978), Eve Sedgwick (2007), and Judith Butler (1990), queer theory challenges dichotomous conceptions of the world. Specifically, queer theory questions sexual and gender binaries, which view “heterosexuality as ‘natural’ and homosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent ‘other’” (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 20) and presents more inclusive and equitable conceptions of gender and sexuality. While defining *queer* proves antithetical to the expansive, fluid themes of queerness, the following include summaries of some of the key tenets of queer theory, which prove consistent with social work values:

- 1) Queer theory provides a framework for critiquing and analyzing the historical, political, and systematic structures of what is seen as normal or pervert and questioning basic components of identity such as gender and sexuality (Kara, 2020).
- 2) Queer theory assumes that sexuality and gender are central, organizing phenomena of society, social relations and social institutions and are designed, utilized, and maintained to preserve the hegemonic power structures (Sedgwick, 2007).
- 3) Queer theory positions heteronormativity/heterosexuality as privileged and identifies ways in which expectations (or requirements) of heteronormativity are patterned throughout society thereby leading to marginalization and oppression.
- 4) Queer theory is inherently intersectional and conceptualizes gender and sexuality at the intersection of other political categories such as race, class, age, ethnic culture, and ability (e.g., Crenshaw, 1990; Hill-Collins, 2009).

- 5) Queer theory provides an emancipatory tool for re-imagining gender and sexuality in fluid, inclusive, and equitable ways (e.g., Halperin, 2014). Moreover, queer theory argues that understanding sexuality and gender along binaries proves too simplistic and limits understanding and freedom (Sedgwick, 2007).

Queer theory provides a tool for identifying, analyzing, and addressing unjust power structures, especially in relation to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people often at the intersection of other marginalized identities. It also offers a lens for broader conceptualizations gender and sexuality, which proves beneficial in researching the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in more meaningful, expansive ways.

Additional LGBT+ Related Theories

While theoretical frameworks falling under the umbrella of “queer theory,” specifically seek to uncover unjust or dominant systems and practices typically as they relate to gender or sexuality, there are several other types of theoretical frameworks that may not necessarily be considered critical but centralize the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. For instance, the *minority stress model* offers a tool for understanding how marginalized groups experience unique types/levels of stress resultant of discrimination, violence, or harassment (Brooks, 1981). Brooks (1981) first coined the term “minority stress” demonstrating the stress and mental impact of internalized homophobia, harassment, and discrimination on lesbian women. The term “minority stress” was later adapted to a framework and gained popularity by applying it to other minority groups including gay and bisexual populations (e.g., Meyer, 1995, 2003). Hendricks and Testa (2012) specifically adapted this framework in a way that centralizes transgender and gender non-conforming clients to shed light on stressors particular to this population such as internalized transphobia, gender-based violence or discrimination, and consequently, increased mental distress and suicidal ideation.

Relatedly, additional theoretical frameworks such as the minority strengths model (Perrin et al., 2020) and resilience amongst the LGBTQ+ population (Bruce et al., 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015) prioritize the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. The minority strengths model intends to demonstrate how the strengths of minority groups, including LGBTQ+ groups, may positively contribute to resilience and mental health. Similarly, the resilience model speaks to strengths of marginalized groups even in the face of systemic adversities (see Bruce et al., 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Meyer, 2015 for examples of this framework being applied to sexual and gender minorities).

What Are Queer Methodologies?

Developed from feminist methodologies, queer methodologies integrate the key tenets of queer theory and seek to repurpose dominant (positivist) approaches to research design in ways that challenge privilege and normativity. Queer methodologists critique dominant, positivist methodologies, which “test” queer experiences as interactional or additive, and demonstrate how they fail to capture the specificities of LGBTQ+ experiences, particularly

at the intersection of race, class, ability, and age (Fish & Russell, 2018). Conversely, qualitative and mixed methods may be used as an approach to queering research design as they “lend themselves more readily to understanding and deconstructing the intersectional systems of power and privilege that situate the experience and process of queer families” and people (Fish & Russell, 2018, p. 17). Furthermore, qualitative methods offer more potential for understanding the distinctions between the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and non-conforming people because they provide more space for narrative and storytelling. Despite the potential of qualitative and mixed methods (e.g., photovoice, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, critical ethnography, discourse analysis) to more meaningfully understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ people, qualitative and mixed methods are used significantly less than quantitative ones in researching the experiences of LGBTQ+ people as well as phenomena such as homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism (Fish & Russell, 2018; Hartwell et al., 2012).

Queer methods may also guide the development of research question(s) and overall research design, thereby expanding conceptions of gender and sexuality as well as understandings of queer experiences. For example, a research study comparing queer people to heterosexual people holds a higher potential of reinforcing binaries and heteronormativities through its sampling and analysis (Fish & Russell, 2018). Furthermore, this approach often misses additional social locations that may influence the experiences of LGBTQ+ people such as race and class, and treats queer people as a monolith, while some queer people may have more in common with heterosexual people than with other queer people. Conversely, a research study that centralizes the experiences of LGBTQ+ people (e.g., participatory action research) allows for LGBTQ+ voices to guide the research process in ways that are most relevant and meaningful to queer experiences and provide more potential for understanding the nuances between and within the LGBTQ+ population (de Jong, 2014). While more traditional researchers may critique the participation of those being researched in the research process, like other critical methodologists, queer methodologists utilize standpoint theory to argue that those experiencing oppression actually have a more objective understanding of oppression than those in the privileged group (Lauve-Moon et al., 2020, 2023; Sprague, 2016). For this reason, queer methodologies such as photovoice, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis hold a higher potential for centralizing the voices of LGBTQ+ people as well as other marginalized groups situated at the intersection of race, class, nationality, and ability.

Methods

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent does mainstream social work research investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and delineate between each group?
- 2) To what extent does mainstream social work research investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ BIPOC?
- 3) To what extent does mainstream social work research investigate structural issues related to homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism?

- 4) To what extent does mainstream social work research explicitly utilize queer theories and LGBTQ-related frameworks to guide or inform the research process?
- 5) What types of methods are used to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQ people in mainstream social work research?

Method and Sample

Similar to Van Voorhis and Wagner (2002) and Pelts et al. (2014), we conducted a content analysis of three mainstream social work peer-reviewed academic journals using a purposive sampling method (i.e., *Social Work (J1)*, *Research on Social Work Practice (J2)*, *Society for Social Work and Research (J3)*). *Mainstream* was defined by the following: (1) did not focus on any particular sub-field of study within the field of social work but rather published across a wide variety of topic areas and levels of practice; (2) maintained a high impact factor relative to the field of social work and to other journals that met criterion one. Additionally, we selected journals that emphasized “research” as an area relevant to the call of the journal as “social work research” proves key to our inquiry. The three journals included in the study maintain the three highest 5-year impact factors of all journals meeting similar criteria, i.e., 2.48, 2.0, 1.50). Two of the journals emphasized social work research and one of the journals focused on social work research, education, and practice. The selection of these journals remained consistent with Van Voorhis and Wagner (2002) and Pelts et al. (2014) in that they are major social work journals with a national audience and general focus. Like the aforementioned studies, we included *Social Work* in our sample as it has the highest impact factor of those included in their sample and is arguably the most influential journal with a general focus in the field of social work. However, we examined two different journals not included in their studies because these journals explicitly focused on research in social work, which was one of the main intentions of our study. Moreover, examining journals that had not previously been analyzed strengthens the argument regarding the dearth of LGBTQ+ related research.

The first wave of data (2015-2018) was collected in the fall and spring 2019 and the second wave of data (2019-2022) was collected in the spring and summer of 2023. We examined every article published in each journal between the years 2015-2022. We began with the year that same-sex marriage was legalized and a backlash of discriminatory policies followed as well as the year following the publication of the Pelts et al. (2014) article. Articles not classified as research articles by the journal were not included in the study. We coded systematic literature reviews, scoping studies, and scoping overviews as research articles.

The research team and co-authors include two white cisgender bisexual women, a Latino transgender queer man, a white cisgender queer woman, two white cisgender heterosexual women, and an Asian cisgender lesbian woman. The research team met consistently throughout the data collection and analysis process. We utilized a codebook to record all data collection rules and codes, and the codebook was saved in a shared folder and referenced throughout the research process (Miles et al., 2014). We had an initial research team meeting for the principal investigator to provide a data collection and

analysis process orientation. The co-investigators initially each collected data on 20 articles at a time for the first 100 articles using tools in Excel. For the first 100 articles, the research team met after every 20 articles to establish reliability and consistency in data collection. At each of these meetings, the research team discussed any variables that remained unclear in relation to the codebook and established consensus on how to proceed. These modifications were recorded in the codebook. After the first 100 articles, the research team met less frequently (every 50 articles) to discuss unclear variables and reach consensus. We also conducted peer reliability checks on each other's assigned datasets. By the end of the study, reliability rates ranged from 90 to 100%. All articles including LGBTQ+ variables were reviewed by at least two researchers.

Variables and Analysis

We conducted a content analysis of variables and categorized thematically data in the following ways: (1) qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and "other" (including systematic literature reviews and scoping studies); (2) type of data (primary or secondary); (3) inclusion of LGBTQ+ variable; (4) type of LGBTQ+ variable/analysis of findings (structural or non-structural); (5) application of queer theory. Articles classified as including an LGBTQ+ variable had to meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in some way or (2) examined structural injustices related to the LGBTQ+ population such as homophobia, transphobia, or heterosexism.

The articles varied significantly in terms of the centrality of the LGBTQ+ variable. We additionally categorized the presence of LGBTQ+ variables into three categories: (1) the LGBTQ community or discriminatory phenomena pertaining to sex, gender, or sexuality is only peripherally considered in that it was secondary or less to the primary focus on the article; (2) the topic of LGBTQ communities is frequently discussed or prominently featured but not centrally positioned; (3) the LGBTQ community or the prevalence of heterosexism/transphobia/homophobia is positioned as a central and leading subject of examination or research. Given the extent to which LGBT+ related material remained on the periphery, we did not ultimately classify Level 1 articles as meeting criteria for LGBT+ inclusion. See Table 1 for examples of each category as well as which examples met inclusion criteria for the LGBTQ+ variable. Finally, we completed a summary description of all articles including an LGBTQ+ variable to determine the specific population focus (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-conforming, nonbinary, genderqueer) of each article as well as the issue on which the article examined.

Table 1. *Examples of LGBTQ+ Variables and Inclusion Status*

Level	LGBTQ+ Variable Status	Description
3	Meets Criteria	The article examines the impact of the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy on LGBTQ+ military service persons and demonstrates continued discrimination and inequities in this context. It argues for continued institutional change.
3	Meets Criteria	This study examines the prevalence and magnitude of discrimination of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGGN) individuals and explores predictors of discrimination of this group is social service agencies.
2	Meets Criteria	This article highlights a dearth of content on youth sexual identity development in social work educational curriculum. It argues for the integration of content on sexual development, sexual orientation, and sexual identities in social work education and discusses implications for working with LGBTQ+ individuals.
2	Meets Criteria	In pursuit of anti-oppressive social work practice, this article calls for a critique of the binary conceptions of gender in the social work profession and illustrates how a binary framework reinforces the subjugation of LGBTQ+ groups.
1	Does Not Meet Criteria	This article introduces the concept of healing justice. It does not explicitly include LGBTQ+ variables but it does challenge the current white, heteronormative, patriarchal structure and argues that oppressed identities such as 'queer bodies' may engage healing justice in relation to marginalized experiences.
1	Does Not Meet Criteria	This study examined risk factors pertaining to illicit drug use with sexual orientation included as a demographic category in the survey. Those who identified as “non-heterosexual” represented a very small portion of the sample. Results showed that those who identified as heterosexual were more likely to engage in illicit drug use.
1	Does Not Meet Criteria	This article provides an overview of trends and interventions for girls in the juvenile justice system. It does not explicitly include an LGBTQ+ variable, but the literature does occasionally point to ways in which LGBTQ+ girls are more vulnerable in relation to the criminal justice system than hetero-youth.
1	Does Not Meet Criteria	This article centralizes gender as a social construct that influences patterns in dating abuse. It does not explicitly focus on LGBTQ+ relationships, but the literature included does note that most IPV research assumes a rigid gender binary and calls for further research examining partner/dating abuse in non-conforming relationships, particularly since studies show high rates of IPV in LGBTQ+ relationships.

We coded a total of 1,071 articles, which were categorized by the journal as research articles. We applied an additional filter to determine whether each article presented research using either secondary or primary data. Of the 1,071 articles, a total of 854 were categorized as research articles and were included in the study. There were 406 articles

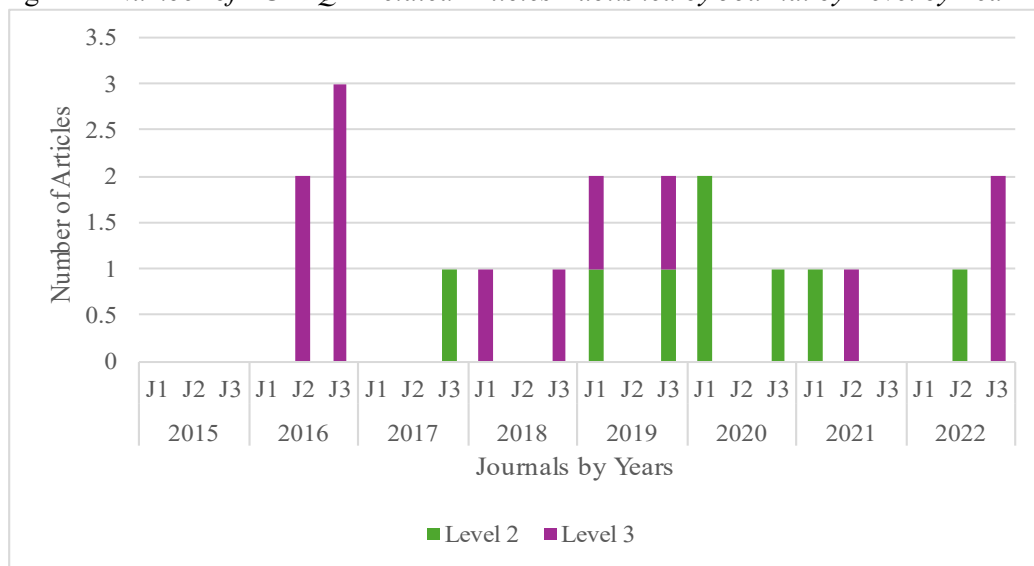
included in Wave 1 of the sample (2015-2018) and 448 articles included in Wave 2 of the sample (2019-2022).

Results

LGBTQ+ Variables

Amongst 854 research articles, 2.3% (n=20) focused on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people and/or heterosexism, homophobia, or transphobia. We separated the dataset into each wave and found that there were 8 articles (0.9%) including an LGBTQ+ variable in Wave 1 while there were 12 articles (1.4%) including an LGBTQ+ variable in Wave 2 thereby suggesting a slight increase in the frequency by which LGBTQ+ experiences are considered in social work research over time. However, when we examined the level of degrees, findings showed that 7 out of 8 (87.5%) of the articles including an LGBTQ+ variable in Wave 1 were categorized as Level 3 while only 5 of 12 (41.6%) articles were categorized as Level 3 in Wave 2; this finding suggests that research explicitly centralizing the experiences of LGBTQ+ people decrease over time. See Figure 1 for a summary of results by year, journal, and level of publication.

Figure 1. *Number of LGBTQ+ Related Articles Published by Journal by Level by Year*



Of the articles including an LGBTQ+ variable, 15 articles examined sexuality and/or gender identity in structural ways, which represents only 1.7% of the overall sample (N=854). Of the articles including an LGBTQ+ variable, only 6 articles (0.69% of the overall sample) explicitly applied queer theory or any critical theory pertaining to sex, gender, or sexuality. The vast majority of articles failed to delineate between specific groups within the LGBTQ+ population (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) with only two articles focusing on the experiences of transgender people or transphobia

exclusively. Most of the articles identified gaps in knowledge, education, and services within the social work profession. However, most of the Level 3 articles identified ways in which LGBTQ+ people are more at-risk for experiencing systematic discrimination and harassment. Table 2 provides summaries of Level 3 articles from the sample.

Table 2. *Summaries of Level 2 and 3 Articles*

Journal	Level	Description
1	3	This article centralizes the experiences of sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth. This article demonstrates the harm that can be caused by religious mental health practitioners who act on conservative ideas of gender and sexuality with SGM youth and the importance of cultural competence and gender affirming interventions.
2	3	This article presents a literature review that outlines increased prevalence of poverty among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, and other sexual and gender minority groups (LGBTQ2S+) in Canada. This article applies an intersectional frame for understanding this phenomenon and recommends efforts for addressing this issue specifically in the LGBTQ2S+ population.
3	3	This article examines predictors of harassment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer adults with consideration for intersecting identities.
3	3	This article seeks to identify significant predictors of HIV risk for young men who have sex with men (YMSM) and makes recommendations for practice.
3	3	This study centralizes the experiences of “sexual and gender minority” emerging adults to determine if the companionship of an emotional support companion moderates the effects of gender-based victimization.
1	3	The article examines the impact of the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy on LGBTQ+ military service persons and demonstrates continued discrimination and inequities in this context. It argues for continued institutional change.
2	3	This study investigates homophobic attitudes of MSW students in Turkey and demonstrates that viewing gay-friendly movies helps to decrease homophobic attitudes amongst MSW students. It calls for the integration of LGBTQ+-friendly films in social work education.
2	3	This study demonstrates the effectiveness of using theater and dialogue to raise awareness about transphobia and homophobia. It calls for more macro level interventions for addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) issues.
3	3	This study demonstrates that the Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale does not perform equally well amongst Black LGBQ and heterosexual youth as it does for white youth.
3	3	This study examines the prevalence and magnitude of discrimination of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGGN) individuals and explores predictors of discrimination of this group is social service agencies.

Journal	Level	Description
3	3	This study demonstrates that transgender people experience higher rates of housing and employment discrimination than cisgender individuals. It suggests pathways for social workers to advocate against transphobic housing and employment policies.
3	3	This study centralizes the issue of discrimination amongst LGBTQ+ older adults and caregivers. It offers recommendations for working with this population.
1	2	This article highlights a dearth of content on youth sexual identity development in social work educational curriculum. It argues for the integration of content on sexual development, sexual orientation, and sexual identities in social work education and discusses implications for working with LGBTQ+ individuals.
1	2	This scoping study provides an overview of research pertaining to people in non-conforming relationships, particularly polyamorous relationships. This article emphasizes best practices for understanding this population, checking biases, and creating safe spaces with clients. While there is no explicit focus on the LGBTQ+ population, the study notes that the majority of those in polyamorous relationships identify as LGBTQ+.
1	2	In pursuit of anti-oppressive social work practice, this article calls for a critique of the binary conceptions of gender in the social work profession and illustrates how a binary framework reinforces the subjugation of LGBTQ+ groups.
1	2	This article focuses on sex trafficking and demonstrates that LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of engaging in survival sex. It argues that social workers must recognize the plurality of identities of youth who have been trafficked.
2	2	This scoping study explores pedagogical approaches to teaching social justice in social work education. For a portion of the paper, the authors direct attention to social justice approaches specifically related to LGBTQ+ populations.
3	2	This study examines the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses and finds that gender and sexual minorities experience higher rates than cisgender and heterosexual students. Authors recommend interventions that seek to reduce homophobia on college campuses.
3	2	This study examines the relationship between having a child and drug usage among homeless youth. Almost half of the sample identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Findings showed that identifying as LGBQ increased the odds of substance use for women.
3	2	This systematic review examines the effectiveness of school bullying policies. Many of the key findings were specific to LGBTQ+ students.

Applied Methods

Of the overall research sample (N=854), 130 articles (15.2%) applied qualitative methods, 479 (56%) applied quantitative methods, 108 (12.6%) applied mixed methods, and 137 (16%) articles utilized “other” methods. Of the articles including an LGBTQ+

variable (n=20), only three articles utilized qualitative methods and no articles utilized mixed methods.

Intersectionality

Of the articles including an LGBTQ+ variable (n=20), only 6 articles (0.7% of the overall sample) examined the intersections of sexuality or gender identity with race. Moreover, the second wave of data contained fewer articles that met this criterion than the first wave. With the exception of one article that focused on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ older adults, no other intersectional identities were discussed in the sample.

Limitations

This research is limited in scope in that it fails to examine all mainstream social work journals with a general focus. A study including all journals that meet these criteria would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the extent to which mainstream social work research focuses on LGBTQ+ related issues and experiences. Moreover, this study fails to capture the number of manuscripts centralizing the experiences of LGBTQ+ people actually submitted to journals for publication as well as the barriers that researchers may face in publishing this type of work. Perhaps the issue most contributing to the dearth of research in this area may be found within the publication or editorial processes rather than the type of work produced by social work researchers. This is a research question that remains unexplored. Finally, this research fails to provide a thematic analysis of the articles identified, which would demonstrate gaps in research in this research area.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research (Pelts et al., 2014; Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2002), this study further demonstrates a dearth in social work research pertaining to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people (e.g., Fish & Russell, 2018; Meyer et al., 2022), thereby marginalizing (and in most cases silencing) the voices of queer and trans people in the field of social work and leaving social workers ill-equipped for practice (e.g., Burdge, 2007). These findings illustrate that the experiences and voices of LGBTQ+ people are almost absent from mainstream social work research despite recent policy efforts to further disenfranchise this population. Findings show that the persistence of social justice issues such as heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia remain largely under-examined within mainstream social work research despite social work's commitment to the pursuit of social justice. In addition, these findings show that very few studies delineate between LGBTQ+ groups offering more meaningful understanding of the experiences of each group separately. Moreover, these findings suggest very little investigation into the experiences of Black, Indigenous, bi- or multi-racial, people of color who also identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, which falls short of the tenets of queer theory and inquiry and the mission of social work.

While the dearth of social work research related to the LGBTQ+ population proves consistent with previous studies, we do observe an important shift in research content. Van

Voorhis and Wagner (2002) found that most of the articles included in the sample focused on HIV amongst lesbians and gay men while only one article in our sample focused on HIV. Van Voorhis & Wagner also identified the trend of a problem-oriented view of lesbians and gay men in social work research with little emphasis on structural or systemic issues impacting the lives of LGBTQ+ people. Our findings illustrate slightly greater emphasis on various systems and modes of discrimination, marginalization, and harassment in relation to this population. However, this increase in a structural or macro focus still only represents less than two percent of the sample.

More meaningful investigation may be achieved with the use of qualitative and/or mixed methods because they allow for those being researched to have more control over the narrative. However, our findings showed that only three articles including an LGBTQ+ variable utilized mixed or qualitative methods, which limits even the possibility of centralizing LGBTQ+ voices in the research process. Additionally, only a handful of studies explicitly utilized queer theory or any theories pertaining to sex, gender, and/or sexuality, further demonstrating the underutilization of relevant critical frameworks for understanding queer and trans issues within the context of social work (e.g., Burdge, 2007; Fish & Russell, 2018).

Implications

This study suggests a lack of response within social work research to the consistently emerging societal barriers faced by LGBTQ+ people. Given that sexuality and gender identity pervade almost any given social issue, our work calls on social work researchers to consistently consider the experiences of LGBTQ+ people no matter the social issue studied, thereby centralizing LGBTQ+ research in social work journals with higher impact factors. Furthermore, this work calls on social workers to better understand the distinct experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people including those situated at the intersection of race, class, nationality, age, and ability. Alongside social workers who illustrate the utility of queer theory for identifying, understanding, and addressing issues of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia within the context of social work research, education, and practice (Burdge, 2007; de Jong, 2014; Fish & Russell, 2018; MacKinnon, 2011; Meyer et al., 2022; Poynter & Tubbs, 2008; Sumara & Davis, 1999), our findings provide an additional, urgent reason for taking intentional steps toward integrating intersectional queer theories and frameworks into social work research and curriculum and leading the way toward structural change. Moreover, it provides justification for mainstream social work journals to prioritize publishing LGBTQ+ related articles. Our study calls on social work faculty to work toward integrating queer theories in social work curricula including practice, theory, and research courses so that social workers may be structurally competent pertaining to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people, especially while conducting research. Consistent with queer methodologies, our study pushes social work departments and schools to place priority on qualitative and mixed methods (e.g., participatory research, critical ethnography, in-depth interviews, discourse analysis) in BSW, MSW, and PhD research courses as well as in faculty research agendas through performance incentives and shifts in organizational cultures that value

approaches to research that (often more slowly) seek to address “why” questions in addition to the “how” and “what” questions.

Conclusion

With the recent developments in American political and social life pertaining to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and the established dearth of social work research focusing on this population, we call for critical education and research studies examining the unjust systems perpetuating heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia and centering the lives of LGBTQ+ people. This call fits squarely into the Anti-Racist, Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity competency put forth by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022, p. 9) and moves the profession closer to actualizing its values of social justice and the dignity and worth of the person.

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