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COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Conducting research within the acronym: Problematizing LGBTIQ+ research in psychology

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ABSTRACT

LGBTIQ+ research acknowledges shared experiences of groups marginalized due to gender identities, sexualities, and sex characteristics. This universalist coalition approach has resulted in much affirmational research and progressive policy development. However, it risks homogenizing the unique experiences and needs of specific groups; a risk lessened by a particularist subgroup approach. In this theoretical paper, we reflect on the challenges of a coalition or subgroup approach by considering interdependencies and boundaries between sex, gender, and sexuality-based

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identities. Through tracing the historical development of LGBTIQ+ research and activism and using examples from intersex studies, intersectionality, and political actions, we explore tensions between the collective identities that make up the LGBTIQ+ acronym. We further offer suggestions for reimagining LGBTIQ+ research, advocating for community-driven approaches that respect the situated knowledge of LGBTIQ+ individuals, and use adaptable and inclusive research practices that bridge academia and activism that aim to improve the lives of the marginalized.

INTRODUCTION

Research into the lives and concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ+[1]) people is an area of increased interest and development within psychological research, raising questions about how to ensure that it addresses the needs of the communities involved (Hässler et al., 2024). This concern echoes decades-long interest from global politics and other areas of social science (Dioli, 2011; European Commission, 2015; Paternotte, 2016; Rankin et al., 2010; United Nations [UN], 2013). Gathering varied identities under umbrella terms like LGBTIQ+ represents a universalist approach that seeks to include all sex, sexual, and gender minorities equally (Monro, 2020). This coalition-building approach can highlight similarities between groups and help produce research and policy that address the needs of a larger community (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Ghaziani et al., 2016). However, gathering disparate groups under one umbrella can be a problematic practice (Anzaldúa, 1991/2009; Liddle, 2007). For instance, given the limited psychological research on people with intersex variations, the addition of people born with variations of sex characteristics under the LGBTIQ+ research umbrella is highly debated in the intersex community and often considered as only a *gesture* at inclusivity (Ellis et al., 2019). Working for social change for LBGTIQ+ people will always include choices of inclusion and exclusion when defining for whom this change is sought. The aim of this article is to explore how choices of terminology reveal different conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality, what the consequences of each choice can be, and to provide some suggestions for how to navigate these choices when reimagining LGBTIQ+ research for the future.

One response to concerns with a universalist approach has been to instead address the needs of specific groups within the LGBTIQ+ community using a particularist approach which studies differences across subpopulations within the LGBTIQ+ community (Monro, 2020). Examples include research on the differences in needs for mental health interventions among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (Matsuno et al., 2022), responses to experiences of rejection from hetero- and homosexual individuals among bi- and pan-sexual people (Thöni et al., 2024), and differences in well-being or health needs among binary and non-binary trans people (Coburn et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019; Roselló-Peñaloza et al., 2023; Thorne et al., 2019). However, comparing

[1] To maintain consistency with the terminology used in this special issue, we use the term LGBTIQ+ as an umbrella term to refer to groups breaking sex, sexual, and/or gender norms. However, as one of the goals of this article is to uncover assumptions about groups and collective identities through the different terminologies in use, we also include other group and identity labels that are used among a variety of communities and cultures to represent their identities and practices.

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groups defined by identity categories also comes with drawbacks. For instance, it risks ignoring that individuals often belong to several marginalized sexual and gender groups at once (e.g., Lefler et al., 2023). Furthermore, comparing groups based only on their shared sexual or gender identity can mean that important differences within said groups are ignored, such as those due to global location, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, and so forth (Bowleg et al., 2023; Hagai et al., 2020). Thus, researchers, activists, and practitioners face the dilemma of when to focus on a *queer collective* or on specific LGBTIQ+ groups (Clarke & Peel, 2007).

In this article, we first discuss some historical milestones in the development of the LGBTIQ+ acronym and reflect on the relationship between LGBTIQ+ research and activism. We then illustrate the tensions within the acronym by examining the use of different identity-based terms. This is followed by three case studies showcasing how the inclusion or separation of different identity groups can impact research topics, objectives, methods, and arguments. Finally, we offer several suggestions to clarify potential directions for LGBTIQ+ research. As researchers in psychology with different interdisciplinary backgrounds, we explore a psychological perspective on how LGBTIQ+ research can be conducted in a wider social science context and reflect on how different conceptualizations of sex, sexual, and gender normativity influence research. LGBTIQ+ research is intimately connected to social justice and therefore informs and is informed by activism and policy. Throughout this article, we therefore engage with not just research but also its antecedents and its consequences.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LGBTIQ+ RESEARCH AND ACTIVISM

The psychological study[2] of sexuality emerged from the reclassification of sexual practices into sexual identities during the mid-1800s to early 1900s (Katz, 1995; Pettit & Hegarty, 2013). While early sexuality research included both same-sex and bisexual sexual practices (Katz, 1995), this new identity paradigm assumed a causal relation between sexual practices and identity, disregarding bisexual identities in favor of so-called hetero- and homo-sexual identities (Angelides, 2001). At that time, gender and sexuality were not clearly separated; both sexual and gender non-normativity were understood as displays of "sexual inversion" caused by a failure to act in accordance with the social role assigned to one's perceived biological sex (Katz, 1995). The term "transvestite," introduced in 1910, differentiated people who presented as a different social gender than assigned at birth from this larger category of "inverts" (Hirschfield, 1910, as cited in Stryker, 2008). By the 1950s, research further differentiated between "transsexuals," who wanted medical intervention, and "transvestites," who did not (Stryker, 2008). For much of the 20th century, psychological research on gender and sexual minorities primarily studied gay men from a pathological framework (Angelides, 2001; Hegarty, 2017; Hubbard, 2020), alongside some research into the medical and psychological treatment of transgender people (Stryker, 2008). Research showing the similarity between lesbian/gay and heterosexual people, such as the work of June Hopkins and Evelyn Hooker, contributed to the removal of "homosexuality" as a diagnosis from the DSM-III in 1973 (Drescher, 2015; Hubbard, 2020). This shift moved sexuality research away from pathology and toward analyzing the effects of societal stigma on the lives of sexual minorities (Hegarty, 2017; Pettit & Hegarty, 2013). However, research continued and continues to focus largely on

[2] Since modern, mainstream psychology originated mainly in the United States and Northern Europe, that is the focus of this section (Magnusson & Maracek, 2012).

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lesbians and gay men, overlooking bisexual people (Barker, 2008). While the diagnosis "gender identity disorder" was removed from the DSM-V to similarly de-pathologize gender minorities, it was replaced by the diagnosis "Gender dysphoria" to maintain access to gender-affirming care, which still often requires an official diagnosis (Riggs et al., 2019). Despite this shift, psychological research on LGBTIQ+ people remains largely damage-centered (Cipollina et al., 2024; Levitt et al., 2022).

While research in the early 20th century began to differentiate between groups, often with a diagnostic purpose (Hubbard, 2020), activist groups focused on the insight that "many different kinds of people might in fact have something in common with one another in their opposition to an oppressive situation" (Stryker, 2008, p. 24). The so-called "homosexual" movement included a great diversity of sexual and gender non-normativity, and direct actions often included joint reactions by lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, trans people, drag queens/kings, and other marginalized groups that frequented the same spaces (Stryker, 2008; Weiss, 2004). During the 1970s, disagreements about the role of respectability politics, feminism, bisexuality, trans issues, and inclusion of other non-normative sexual and relationship practices (e.g., BDSM, polyamory) led many activist groups to splinter into separatist spheres (Angelides, 2001). The HIV/AIDS crisis partly healed these rifts by focusing groups within and outside of academia on how different groups marginalized by their gender and/or sexuality were impacted by the disinterest of the majority society to address the pandemic (Hegarty, 2017). The organization Act Up is an example of such a coalition initiative whose public protests helped end the political silence around the AIDS pandemic in the late 1980s (Hegarty, 2017). The Queer movement of the 1990s was a further development of this coalition which represented a move toward a more deconstructive perspective on all identities and the destabilizing of the oppressive force of gender and sexuality regulation in general (Angelides, 2001). The establishment of Queer Nation in 1990 as well as Transgender Nation in 1992 brought both "queer" and "transgender" into more common parlance as reclaimed terms (Stryker, 2008). The introduction of Queer theory in academia (de Lauretis, 1991) was part of this same movement to reject attempts to understand the lives of the marginalized from the position of the privileged and instead work to "queer" research through political coalitions, and vice versa (Minton, 1997).

Following these historical developments, the "gay movement" was renamed the LGBTQ movement to acknowledge both the joint marginalization and the unique experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people (Clarke & Peel, 2007). The LGBTQ acronym came into use among both researchers and activists during the early 2000s (Clarke et al., 2010), and now often also includes an I for intersex (Ellis et al., 2019). The addition of intersex to the LGBTQ acronym is a recent development, motivated by the rise of intersex advocacy groups and social studies in the 1990s (Karkazis, 2008). As evidenced by the use of LGBTIQ+ in this issue, psychological research now sometimes concerns itself with research into lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer perspectives (cf. Barker, 2008; Ellis et al., 2019; Lee & Crawford, 2012). The current use of the acronym LGBTIQ+ is thus a result of several historical factors that have at times promoted coalition building and at times led to a fracturing of the community based on different needs or perspectives between subgroups.

This brief history of psychological LGBTIQ+ research highlights several key points that define the field and its relationship with activism. Psychological and medical research have played a pivotal role in defining which sex, sexual, and gender groups are seen as pathological or not, and when doing so have both influenced and been influenced by social movements. Grassroots and social movements have been and continue to be key elements in the social study connected to the advancement of the LGBTIQ+ movement and in transforming societies. As societal understand-

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ing, recognition, and inclusion of various sexual identities and gender expressions have advanced, the corresponding acronym and the diverse set of topics under the label of LGBTIQ+ studies have expanded to reflect this growing complexity. In LGBTIQ+ politics, collective identities and social movements are created in relation to each other; the meanings, content, and boundaries of "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," "intersex," and "queer" are shaped within and through LGBTIQ+ social movements (Grzanka et al., 2015). There is no LGBTIQ+ research without the LGBTIQ+ community, and no LGBTIQ+ community without the LGBTIQ+ movement.

BEHIND THE LETTERS IN AN ACRONYM: TENSIONS IN COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

The LGBTIQ+ acronym is based on an identity perspective where members of each group are assumed to have at least one fixed and common sex, sexual, or gender identity (Scheller-Boltz, 2017). This form of strategic essentialism has led to considerable social progress in terms of legal and cultural changes (see Bettergarcia et al., 2024), but such essentialist views on social identities can also make some identities seem more "real" than others and thus contribute to the invalidation of minority identities (Bartels et al., 2024). To understand sex, gender, and sexuality, one must account for the dynamic relation between each, such as how definitions of gender rely on conceptions of both sexuality and biological sex (Butler, 1993). The interdependence of sex, gender, and sexuality is evident in, for instance, the consistent emergence of gender inversion beliefs regarding sexual minorities (Henry & Stelger, 2022) or the gender identity denial of sexual minority trans people (Schilt & Westerbrook, 2009). Failing to account for this interdependence can create or reinforce boundaries between members of each marginalized group and contribute to the invisibility of individuals with multiple marginalized identities.

The language used to define sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics varies greatly across culture, country, age, and language. While an acronym like LGBTIQ+ is generally internationally recognized and commonly understood, the terms that make up the acronym represent concepts related to personal identities or experiences that are often of Western origin. Groups with culturally specific gender identities can be brought under the umbrella as a version of the category "transgender," either through their own advocacy or court decisions (see the case of hijra/khwajasara in Pakistan; Hussain, 2023). In other contexts, the acronym is expanded, as with the Canadian 2SLGBTQI+, which recognizes the unique identity of two-spirit first nations people (Government of Canada, 2022), or the Australian LGBQTIA+SB, which recognizes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gender identities Sistergirls and Brotherboys (Black Rainbow, n.d.). In other cases, less common terms, no terms at all, or local language terms are preferred due to linguistic concerns or the perception of Western-based identity terms as a continuation of colonization (Barrientos et al., 2024; Dave, 2010; Gandhi, 2020; Kerekere, 2017; Matabeni, 2018; Sinnott, 2010). The LGBTIQ+ acronym also varies across languages, even within the same identity framework. Some countries use an acronym similar to LGBTIQ+, others combine subgroups based on identity labels used within their national context or use terms that are often considered offensive in an international context. Sweden, Finland, Georgia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, for instance, use terms such as homosexual, transvestite, and transsexual within their acronyms (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2023).

A complication of using the LGBTIQ+ acronym in research is that it separates gender identity and sexuality which is not a universal practice, particularly in the Global South (Laferal, 2021; Monro, 2007). In countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal, the social

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group Hijra blurs the lines between gender identity and sexuality (Al-Mamun et al., 2022). Similarly, gender-affirming surgery in Iran is perceived as making same-sex desire fit a heterosexual framework (Najmabadi, 2008). Additionally, diverse sexual and/or gender minority groups among African peoples and nations predate and survive colonial homogenizing practices (Mogotsi et al., 2024). Exclusively using the LGBTIQ+ acronym may overlook experiences of social groups falling outside common Western definitions of identity or force groups to identify with alternative, less authentic, labels to be visible and participate in gender, sex, and sexuality movements and research.

The LGBTIQ+ acronym also emphasizes sexuality and gender identity while often ignoring the sex characteristics component of heteronormativity, risking the marginalization of intersex people by overlooking their experiences and demands. While inclusion in the acronym may be strategic for advancing intersex human rights, the lack of reference to innate biological sex characteristics can lead to forced queerization. That is, the incorrect assumption that people with intersex variations are a homogenous sub-group sharing a unique gender identity, transition experience, or sexual orientation. This form of neglect can impede intersex community rights, perpetuate historical silencing, and endanger bodily autonomy by supporting faulty medical assumptions that see non-conforming physical sex as a precursor to homosexuality (Dreger, 2015).

The identity-based framework deemphasizes variability in sex, sexuality, and gender and the LGBTIQ+ acronym can unintentionally homogenize the types and degrees of attraction people experience. While lesbian, gay, and bisexual sexualities are typically expected to refer to both sexual and romantic attraction, there is wide variability in the degree and type of attraction within these groups (e.g., sexual, romantic, emotional, etc.). Some lesbians and gay men experience occasional different-sex attraction (Diamond, 2016), while longitudinal work shows that bisexual people may experience changes in patterns of sexual attraction over the years (Dickson et al., 2003; Mock & Eibach, 2012; Savin-Williams et al., 2012). Furthermore, asexual people (i.e., who experience low or no sexual attraction) and aromantic people (i.e., who experience low or no romantic attraction) are relegated to the catch-all "+" (Monro, 2020), along with other groups that trouble cisgender or heterosexual norms, such as groups defined by an absence of gender (agender people), additional sexual identities (e.g., pansexuality), non-normative sexual practices (e.g., BDSM), and non-normative relationship forms (e.g., poly relationships).

While umbrella terms like LGBTIQ+ facilitate organizing and socio-political lobbying (Ghaziani, 2011), they can also be experienced as essentializing (Anderson-Nathe et al., 2018; Parmenter et al., 2021). For instance, the inclusion of the "Q" in the acronym has been criticized for potentially restricting and generalizing identities, sexualities, and bodies by placing them within a fixed acronym, against the queer ethos of refusing to be defined (Preciado, 2004; Roselló Peñaloza & Cabruja Ubach, 2015; Sheller-Boltz, 2017). Critical perspectives from Latin America have therefore chosen to translate "queer" as *Cuir* as a way of distancing themselves from queer as an identity category and problematize the use of knowledge created in the Global North as universally valid (Valencia, 2015). In this way, using *Cuir* becomes an act of epistemic disobedience and radical critique from voices located in the global south and at the peripheries of sexual, gender, racial, and economic hierarchies (Valencia, 2015).

Overall, the use of the LGBTIQ+ acronym therefore has limitations that can lead to tension and disconnection between and within groups, and these tensions need to be addressed for the acronym to achieve the intended collective progress. The term SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) has increasingly been used by supranational entities and human rights advocates as a solution to most of the aforementioned issues (Asian Development Bank, 2022; Council of Europe [CoE], n.d.; Office of the United Nations High

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Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], n.d.). Since everyone has a sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, SOGIESC shifts the focus from a Western definition of specific LGBTIQ+ communities toward the protection of universal traits. Nevertheless, the collective LGBTIQ+ acronym might still be preferred to draw attention to common challenges—stigma, discrimination, and violence—faced by this diverse group.

In the following section, we present three examples of areas of tension in LGBTIQ+ research and political action due to differences and similarities between groups. The first example problematizes how the intersex community is treated in relation to sexual orientation and gender non-normativity, the second example discusses how an intersectional perspective can be used to balance a collective or subgroup approach to LGBTIQ+ research, and the third example uses the Chilean context to show how the use of identity regulation in research and politics have created discrepancies in the progression of rights for different LGBTIQ+ groups.

AREAS OF TENSION BETWEEN LGBTIQ+ AND ITS SUBGROUPS

Am "I" welcome here and do "I" want to be here?: Adding the intersex perspective to LGBTQ+

Although the experiences of people with intersex variations have been fundamental for developing queer theories and LGBT studies (Butler, 2004), adding the I to the acronym is still approached cautiously. While "intersex cases" have been used to discuss the causes of human sexuality in biology, locate sex in medicine, and problematize homosexuality, heterosexuality, and biological sex (Dreger, 1998; Reis, 2009; Preves, 2003), psychology has largely ignored the topic until recently (see Hegarty, 2017, 2023). Consequently, despite "emerging" more than 25 years ago, intersex studies remain a relatively new area of research within psychology. It is closely linked with LGBT studies, sharing interests in global politics, social movements, and legal challenges. This connection has strengthened alliances with LGBTQ+ organizations, which support the intersex agenda through spaces, funds, and advocating support for intersex human rights (e.g., ILGA and ASTREA). The intersex perspective has fostered new discussions and brought a new set of topics, such as bodily integrity and autonomy, social embodiment, social justice, and citizenship to LGBTQ+ issues. However, intersex activists and researchers have identified risks in linking the I with the rest of the acronym, such as framing intersex as a matter of gender or sexuality and erasing or deprioritizing intersex-specific demands, primarily medical mismanagement of intersex variations (Carpenter, 2021; Koyama, 2002; Truffer, 2017).

This section explores key issues in intersex studies—naming, framing, and community representation—to address inherent conflicts among the components of the LGBTIQ+ acronym. The complexities of the identities, paradigms, and agendas within the acronym contrasts with their interdependency, rooted in common experiences of invisibilization, medicalization, misogyny, and phobia originating from a binary understanding of sex and gender. Intersex serves as an ideal example due to its position as an emerging topic with an established critical body of literature, unlike other components of the acronym with longer (LG), more known (BT), or emerging (Q+) scholarships.

Defining and naming intersex is a challenging and challenged task. The term dates back to the early 1800s, was first used as an umbrella term by medical professionals in the 1950s, and was later reclaimed as a self-identification term in the 1990s (Karkazis, 2008; Lock Swarr, 2023). Its definition shifts depending on the perspective (i.e., advocacy, medical, or human rights). The

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now closed Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) defined intersex as: "a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male" (ISNA, n.d.-a). Van der Have of the Organization Intersex International Europe (OII Europe) described intersex as "the lived experience of the socio-cultural consequences of being born with a body that does not fit with normative social constructions of male and female" (2017, p. 2). In contrast, scientific definitions take a more systematic and pathologizing approach, highlighting "physical discrepancies or discordances" in genitals, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive organs, and more (e.g., Kaneshiro & Zieve, 2021).

In 2005, medical experts introduced Disorders of Sex Development (DSD) as a concept to replace "particularly controversial terms" such as intersex and the outdated *hermaphroditism* and *pseudo-hermaphroditism* (Hughes, et al., 2006, p. 148). Defined as "congenital conditions in which development of chromosomal, gonadal or anatomical sex is atypical," DSD is contested and was adjusted to address concerns about labeling bodies as "disordered." Today, DSD is variably referred to as disorder/differences of sex/sexual development/differentiations (dsd). Other terms include Variations of Sex Characteristics (VSC), increasingly used by Human Rights movements and supranational entities, and specific diagnoses reclaimed by community members, such as CAH (Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia), Klinefelter Syndrome, and CAIS (Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome).

This brief historical overview of terminology illustrates how intersex has been continually reframed by different disciplines, contexts, and times. Medicine has strategically reframed bodies, lives, experiences, and priorities to maintain the power of definitions and diagnostic labels over bodies and individual experiences (Hughes et al., 2006). Advocates have shifted the focus from medicine and gender to psychosocial issues like stigma and trauma (ISNA, n.d.-b). International bodies have framed sex characteristics as human rights issues (Amnesty International, 2017; CoE, 2015; UN, 2015), and the LGBT+ community has highlighted the common matters of marginalization and prejudice on the basis of "shared experiences of harm arising from dominant societal sex and gender norms" (OHCHR, 2019).

Where should we start if there is no uncontested definition of what intersex means? Most scientific, human rights, and gray literature on intersex variations include medical frequency figures. These statistics vary according to definitions, time, and locations and are criticized for giving the false impression that "objective" numbers and bodies can be separated from discourse. Morland (2011) refuses to provide figures or definitions and suggests instead to "suspend the assumption that we can know what intersex is, to explore how and why knowledge about intersex is produced" (p. 147). Similarly, Lock Swarr (2023) encourages refusing to provide numbers and definitions and instead examines these concepts and histories as innately fraught. Concurring with the queer ethos of refusing to be defined (Scheller-Boltz, 2017), researchers and allies approaching LGBTIQ+ communities should be mindful of the potential gains and losses of including more letters in the acronym and of what the "objective" premises of the multiple definitions of this community may conceal. Recognition of the complexities of intersex variations and demands is critical to understand when and how intersex experiences intersect with those of other LGBTQ+ groups, and thus, when a coalition or subgroup approach is appropriate (Griffiths, 2023). Failure to recognize intersex variations and demands has led to physical erasure (surgeries), social invisibilization, and reframing through different frameworks. To understand the full implications of including a letter in the acronym, psychology must address the ethics and politics of recognition and critical discourse. This means being aware of the dangers of framing and exclusion that adding the I to LGBTQ+ can bring, as well-intended a practice of inclusion as it may be.

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Intersectional problematization of an LGBTIQ+ approach

Historically, researchers have focused on LGBTIQ+ identities in isolation from other social identities (e.g., race and ethnicity, disability). In contrast, the concept of intersectionality describes how social identities do not and cannot exist independently, and delineates the intricate web of power, privilege, and oppression in which social positions create each other (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality has evolved to become a cornerstone of contemporary social science research, yet the field of psychology has remained largely resistant to its adoption (Settles et al., 2020) despite calls from feminist psychologists to incorporate intersectionality into existing research practices (e.g., Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020; Cole, 2009; Grzanka & Cole, 2022).

Intersectionality originated as a framework to understand the unique challenges faced by Black women in the United States who live at the crossroads of racial, gender, and sexuality discrimination (Collins, 2002; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 1991). Over time, it has expanded to include the study of social disadvantage across a wider range of social identities, including sexual orientation and gender identity (Fox et al., 2020; Ghavami et al., 2016) and other intersecting aspects (e.g., religion; Chowdhury & Okazaki, 2020; Skidmore et al., 2023). While psychological research is increasingly incorporating an intersectional lens, much of the focus remains on investigating differences within and between identity categories in the LGBTIQ+ community. For example, studies on stress processes among Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and White sexual minority men in the United States show that sexual minority men of color have distinct stress experiences from their White counterparts, indicating that stress processes among sexual minority men are not solely determined by sexual orientation but also shaped (or compounded) by intersecting factors like race (McConnell et al., 2018). Similarly, an intersectional framework has revealed a great deal of variation in gender-related experiences between transgender and gender-nonconforming young adults, despite their common experiences of being defined by gender non-normativity (Kuper et al., 2018). Research that incorporates intersectional frameworks is valuable as it helps uncover how psychological phenomena are shaped by the interplay of identities within a broader social and hierarchical landscape, underscoring that the LGBTIQ+ community and its constituent subgroups are not homogenous. For example, Bowleg et al. (2008) showed how understanding workplace stress among Black lesbians and their intragroup diversity requires bridging two seemingly distinct bodies of literature: workplace stress experienced by (1) Black women and (2) LGBT people. An intersectional perspective shows how multiple social positions concurrently influence lived experience, challenging the normative practice in psychological research of isolating social identities from each other (Moffitt et al., 2023). Capturing these dynamic interactions of identity, power, and oppression is complex but necessary for psychological research.

Using intersectional frameworks can improve the ability of psychological research to represent, understand, and improve societal conditions for LGBTIQ+ individuals by studying identities within their context and as connected to social inequality and processes of power (Sabik et al., 2021). For example, an individual's experience as a transgender person may vary significantly due to intersections with race, geographic location, socioeconomic status (and therefore access to resources like healthcare), and social support networks (Abelson, 2019). Yet, the context-dependency of LGBTIQ+ identities may also refer to the dynamic or ever-changing nature of such identities within a society. For instance, the use (and presumably meaning) of L, G, B, T, Q+ labels differ across subgroups of LGBTQ+ youth in the United States (e.g., at the intersection of race and gender; Watson et al., 2020), but also due to contextual factors like levels of social support

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(Hammack et al., 2021). Moreover, when used as an identity label, "queer" may refer to distinct identities where some use "queer" to indicate attraction to multiple genders, while others use it to challenge societal norms around boundaries between gender and sexuality (Worthen, 2023). These findings demonstrate the challenge of capturing the full spectrum of LGBTIQ+ experiences within research, emphasizing the need to recognize diversity, understand how conceptualizations of LGBTIQ+ identities change across time and space, and how social contexts create, reinforce, and/or challenge ways of identifying. Psychological research must keep pace by adopting inclusive and nuanced approaches to understanding the full range of identities and experiences within the LGBTIQ+ community.

Last, psychological research with LGBTIQ+ individuals poses a series of methodological issues (Li et al., 2024). Even when guided by an intersectional framework, researchers risk measuring and interpreting psychological phenomena using an additive approach, treating each identity separately (McCall, 2005), perhaps focusing on a single identity dimension at a time and therefore missing the intricate interplay between identities (Bowleg et al., 2008). Such a narrow approach risks misrepresenting the diverse lived experiences within the LGBTIQ+ spectrum and fails to capture the compounding effects of stigma and privilege. To avoid this pitfall, it is important to be mindful that integrating intersectional frameworks requires a deep understanding of the power hierarchies associated with social categories (Cole, 2009). This requires understanding the unique and shared experiences within and between sex, sexual, and gender minorities, an openness to accommodate the situated knowledge of community members in our research, and an awareness that intersectional and LGBTIQ+ research should be driven by a social justice perspective. An intersectional perspective thus highlights the need for LGBTIQ+ research to understand experiences within their social and political context, viewing LGBTIQ+ as a coalition of diverse groups rather than a homogenous community.

The identity dilemma in LGBTIQ+ political action: A Chilean example

The coalition of the LGBTIQ+ acronym is based on the recognition that a complex network of linked oppressions creates mutually constructed identities. However, political strategies based on these identities can create dilemmas where the liberation of one group comes at the cost of another.

In 1973, after years of pressure from activists, the American Psychiatric Association depathologized same-sex desire by removing "homosexuality" from the DSM-III. This decision was highly influenced by appeals stating that lesbian and gay people were compatible with dominant social values, an assimilationist strategy highlighting that besides same-sex sexual practices, there was no real difference from heterosexual people. Although such strategies were criticized for not aiming higher than seeking tolerance (Shelley, 1970/2019), assimilation did manage to achieve social recognition. While American lesbian and gay activist movements celebrated the normalization of their sexual orientation, the international trans community became the sacrificial lamb for this acceptance as the new diagnosis of "Gender identity disorder" was added, continuing the pathologization of deviation from the cisgendered norm (Ojeda, 2023). Several years later, in the Global South and in a country that was just emerging from an extensive civil-military dictatorship,[3] the search for social recognition for lesbians and gay men was paid for in the same currency.

[3] Between 1973 and 1990, Chile experienced one of the bloodiest and most extensive dictatorships in Latin America.

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In Chile, following the founding of the first organized homosexual liberation movement in 1991, trans women and *travestis* were excluded, made invisible or even insulted due to the "bad image" they supposedly projected onto cisgender gay people (Barrueto, 2017; Muñoz, 2013; Sutherland, 2019). *Iguales* (Equals)—one of the most important lesbian and gay organizations in Chile with mostly cisgender, white, and middle-class men and women as members—continued this exclusion in their assimilationist campaign for marriage equality for same-sex couples.[4] This campaign disregarded the concurrent discussions about a new gender identity law[5] and therefore supported a clear demarcation between the policy reform demands for non-heterosexual groups and non-cisgender groups. The segregation of demands led to laws that inadvertently harmed trans individuals, such as dissolving the marriages of trans individuals who changed their legal gender, as the marriage act still did not allow for same-gender individuals to be married. Such segregation of political demands from different LGBTIQ+ groups can have severe consequences that are most likely to fall on the most marginalized within the community. In this case, lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer trans persons. While it would be unwise to claim a causal relationship between the exclusion of trans people from lesbian/gay political organizing and the substitution of homosexuality in the DSM with gender identity disorder, it is undeniable that there is a relationship between trans-exclusionary political strategies and the dehumanization that accompanies pathologization. In fact, recent research from Chile finds that psychologists and psychiatrists continue to construct hierarchies of subjective functioning (between men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, cisgender and transgender) that position non-masculine and non-heterosexual people as psychopathological (Roselló-Peñaloza et al., 2019).

A similar situation happened in 2017 when the legalization of abortion in Chile was demanded and later legally approved in case of rape, unviability of the fetus, or vital danger to the female mother. Trans men and non-binary people with the ability to gestate are still not included in this legalization years after its introduction,[6] meaning that abortions are still criminalized and access to medical care is still limited for these groups. Questioning the cisgenderism present in the parliamentary debate about who the target population of the law was to be might have delayed the approval of this urgent law, but it would have provided a public and reciprocal recognition of multiple bodies, identities, and ways of life and amplified the value of a collective demand with very significant effects on people's lives. Recognizing specific forms of oppression is crucial for civil rights demands, showcasing the potential benefits of a subgroup approach. However, it is unethical (and dangerous) to not recognize the effects that this differentiation can have on the lives of others who are affected by the same systems of oppression. This is the benefit of using a coalition approach where shared experiences of marginalization are used as grounds for organizing together, whether this be based on the shared experiences of being pathologized based on sexual orientation or gender identity that lesbian/gay and trans people have or the shared experience of a lack of reproductive autonomy that cis women, trans men, and some non-binary people share. This does not imply ignoring the important perspectives of specific groups in the pursuit of social

[4] The civil union agreement law that allowed the legalization of homosexual couple relationships was enacted in 2015 and the law that allows same-sex marriage in 2021.

[5] The gender identity law allows changes in name and registered sex in official documents without needing to show proof of undergoing gender affirming medical treatment for persons over 14 years old and was adopted in 2019.

[6] On March 29, 2021, a project was presented to modify the Chilean abortion law that regulates the decriminalization of abortion in three situations. The project requests to include, where appropriate and after the word "woman," the phrase "or the person with the capacity to gestate." As of the date this article is published, this project has not been approved by The Senate of the Republic of Chile.

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achievements, but rather to problematize our decisions and social positions by recognizing their causes, foundations, and consequences.

Matsuda (1991) states that we can understand how different systems of subordination are interconnected through the "ask the other question" method, highlighting common axes of oppression while acknowledging the risk of marginalizing the most vulnerable groups. For instance, when faced with an expression of racial subordination, the "other question" is to also ask how classism contributes to this system of domination. A successful example is the recent collaboration between the Chilean trans and intersex communities, advocating for healthcare justice and against their historical exclusion from healthcare spaces.[7] This collaboration had a positive impact through the creation of formal spaces for political discussion around the specific care needs of both communities, without prioritizing one over the other. In this way, recognizing shared *queerness* without implying that we are all the same under the rainbow (Anzaldúa, 1991) is part of an ethic of care that balances coalition or subgroup approaches, guiding socially transformative research.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REIMAGINING LGBTIQ+ RESEARCH

In this article, we highlight how the LGBTIQ+ acronym serves as an umbrella for diverse identities, topics, political agendas, and collective movements, evolving across different cultural contexts and times. By examining different issues related to using an acronym that homogenizes diversity, we aim to show the choices involved in addressing similarities and differences in experiences. These choices are closely tied to political practices, influencing which experiences are researched and the consequences of the research outcomes. The acronym provides a broad framework for discussing practices, topics, and actions benefitting the LGBTIQ+ community and wider society, informed by individual community, intersectional, and local history. LGBTIQ+ activism, politics, and research have expanded psychosocial knowledge to include issues of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This process has also led to the queering of social issues, contesting, expanding, and redefining sociological issues through the experiences and concerns of LGBTIQ communities and academics (Serrano Amaya & Ríos González, 2019). The examples discussed in this paper highlight tensions in LGBTIQ+ research and provide lessons for addressing them. The intersex example demonstrates how inclusion without careful consideration can lead to misrepresentation and marginalization. The intersectionality example highlights the need to understand and integrate the complexities of intersecting identities to truly capture the diverse experiences within the community. The Chilean political actions illustrate how exclusion of certain groups within the LGBTIQ+ community can result in significant social and legal setbacks. Problematizing the inclusion of more sub-groups in the acronym has become urgent as new communities introduce new intersections, identities, and agendas. While the acronym still serves as a common ground for communities marginalized by cis-white-heteronormative policies and practices, the spirit of inclusion can be questioned. In the next sections, we outline key considerations for future efforts related to LGBTIQ+ experiences, policies, and initiatives.

[7] The Trans Health Block for Chile [Bloque Salud Trans para Chile], created at the beginning of 2021, brings together professional associations, academics, and activists from all over the country, with the aim of fighting for a national trans health policy.

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Community driven research

The global situation regarding improvement of conditions for LGBTIQ+ individuals is complex, with increased legal protection sometimes co-existing with high levels of public prejudice and experiences of hate crimes (Cherian et al., 2024). Given the rising intensity of international geopolitical movements attempting to harm LGBTIQ+ people (Reid, 2021), we call for increased recognition that LGBTIQ+ research is inherently political and must be driven by community needs. Practical applications of this principle include using methods and approaches that value community participation and actions, such as community-engaged research (Key et al., 2019) or participatory action research (PAR; Baum et al., 2006). For example, in PAR, community members *are* the researchers or work alongside researchers at any stage of the project, from the development to dissemination of results, including policy recommendations (see Fine et al., 2003 for an example). Using PAR requires forming partnerships between stakeholders, researchers, and community members with the same goals and agenda of improving the circumstances for community members (Jagosh et al., 2012). Involving community members in creating research topics and guiding how research is conducted ultimately leads to a better adaptation to the needs of the community (Irizarry, 2009; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). Considering the long history of injustices in the construction of scientific knowledge for those breaking sex-gender-sexuality norms (Fricker, 2007), it is essential that research on LGBTIQ+ issues incorporate the participation of LGBTIQ+ people not only as research participants or validators of our instruments and methods. Instead, they should be equal partners in constructing knowledge on topics that concern them (Namaste, 2000).

For LGBTIQ+ research and policies to accurately address the needs of the community, there needs to be an exchange between community members and policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners. Social impact assessments and statements facilitate these exchanges by negotiating the needs of each party (Esteves et al., 2012; Vanclay & Esteves, 2011), highlighting the policy or research involved, its concerns and benefits, and informs activism, policies, research, and other sociopolitical changes (Halverson et al., 2021; Meissen & Cipriani, 1984; Shneiderman & Rose, 1996). In striving for social impact, researchers should use caution when generalizing beyond the experiences of their "sample," instead tailoring their conclusions to specific groups included in their studies. For example, using Constraints on Generality (COG) Statements (Simons et al., 2017) can help explicitly state to whom results can reasonably be generalized. This ensures LGBTIQ+ research has a greater positive social impact without risking making smaller communities invisible.

For LGBTIQ+ research to be truly representative, it should be informed by group members' experiences. The examples from intersex studies, intersectional research, and Chilean political contexts show how different groups have had their experiences and needs reframed, misrecognized, or partialized by researchers and others within LGBTIQ+ movements. Future policy, activism, and research frameworks need to include and accommodate the experiences and needs, if possible, of all LGBTIQ+ members, looking at the local perspective. Both in social movements and research, assumptions about group similarities should be avoided, and identities should be recognized without forced assimilation. The reporting of experiences from LGBTIQ+ individuals should be valued and used to guide policy changes, activism, and research (AIS Support Group Australia, et al., 2017; Fine et al., 2003; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). While challenging, the focus of community involvement in research should always be on improving and supporting the community based on members' experiences.

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Practical considerations and recommendations in research

Centering research on the participant

In order to ground research in the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals, researchers must focus on the unique identities and experiences of their participants. This approach can be applied across various types and stages of research, generally aiming to minimize risks and maximize benefits to participants while best representing their identities and experiences.

When planning research with or about the LGBTIQ+ community, researchers should be mindful of *why* this research should be conducted. Does it solely aim to advance knowledge in general or will it benefit the community? If it aims to benefit the community, in what ways can it do so? And most importantly, does the potential gain in knowledge/service warrant the intrusion into the lives of participants? Historically, research has often prioritized knowledge acquisition or technical advancement over the needs and well-being of participants and their communities, as illustrated by how people with intersex variations have been used to for the creation about knowledge of sex and gender identities with little to no concern for their own lived experiences (e.g., see Dreger, 1998; Preves, 2003; Reis, 2007, 2009). Given that LGBTIQ+ individuals are part of marginalized communities and often hold multiple marginalized identities, it is critical for researchers to examine how their own work fits within a system that has sometimes exploited vulnerable populations (e.g., Black men in the Tuskegee syphilis study[8]; Alsan & Wanamaker, 2018). To this end, researchers should take special care in designing methodology and protocols to best protect participants and consider the unique risks faced by those from vulnerable populations. For instance, requiring parental consent for the participation of LGBTIQ+ participants could risk outing teenagers to potentially unsupportive parents (Mustanski, 2011). Language use in reporting results is critical; researchers should avoid pathologizing language and respect the language participants use to express their experiences and refer to themselves. The intersex example is emblematic, as the term refers to a group of people that rarely use "intersex" to define themselves and therefore cannot be addressed as a unified community without carefully posing the *why* questions. The intersex case therefore shows how terminology can conceal diverse experiences and lead to marginalization if not carefully considered. However, researchers should not avoid important work that could benefit marginalized groups due to lengthy or difficult approval and regulatory processes, as this can perpetuate disparities, such as in access to healthcare. For further recommendations on ethical research with participants who challenge norms regarding gender, sexuality, and sex characteristics, see Henrickson et al. (2020) and Carpenter (2023).

By centering research on participants, we support research that looks at the interconnected and intersectional dimensions behind the acronym terminology. This approach considers both social and individual perspectives as part of diverse systems that reveal different conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality that are unique and cannot be studied in a fully universalist way.

[8] The Tuskegee Syphilis study was a highly unethical and deadly study conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) between the years 1932 and 1972. Despite the existence of effective treatments for syphilis, the PHS and CDC denied treatment to nearly 400 Black men and did not inform them of their syphilis diagnosis in order to study the effects of untreated syphilis infections.

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Considering the interdependence of identities

Given the diversity of identities and positions within even a single subgroup of the LGBTIQ+ acronym, recognizing contextualism and the value of situated knowledge is crucial. This involves considering the fundamental interdependence of identities. Including intersectional frameworks is essential for conducting community-driven and informative LGBTIQ+ research. As shown in the Chilean political actions, ignoring the interconnectedness of systems of oppression can lead to progress for one subgroup at the price of continued oppression for another. Continually "asking the other question" (Matsuda, 1991) helps navigate the balance of acknowledging both the shared and unique positions within the LGBTIQ+ community, uniting or dividing it in relation to specific social issues.

A true commitment to intersectionality will require changes in current psychological research methodologies. Given the problems of practices such as standardized measurements, treating social identities as independent factors, and decontextualizing research findings (Bowleg, 2008, 2023; Magnusson, 2011; McCall, 2005), methodologies that center situated knowledge and include researcher reflexivity can offer a different perspective on LGBTIQ+ experiences. Expanding the methodological toolbox is a step toward increasing the influence of knowledge paradigms developed outside of the Global North (Pérez & Rhadi, 2020). Methods such as ethnography (Dave, 2010) or autoethnography (Olaoluwa, 2018) have been fruitful in different cultural contexts due to their ability to develop culturally valid knowledge about LGBTIQ+ lives. However, a call for methodological multiplicity does not devalue current mainstream research practices, as long as they are used with an awareness of the intersectional nature of social identities and categories (Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2015, 2016; Li et al., 2024; Warner, 2008). Increasing the visibility of intersectional perspectives within LGBTIQ+ research will contribute to the epistemological inclusion of intersectionality within psychological research (Settles et al., 2020), thereby improving its usefulness for addressing community needs.

No "one-size-fits-all"

Given the diverse identities, experiences, and needs within the LGBTIQ+ community, each individual research program will necessarily differ. Therefore, the recommendations provided here are neither exhaustive nor universally applicable. Indeed, research must remain adaptable to account for variations in language, geography, and temporal contexts. Moreover, it is crucial to transcend the confines of psychology and embrace interdisciplinary collaboration. Similar to the solidarity embodied in the LGBTIQ+ acronym, researchers should combine their expertise to foster transformative interdisciplinary research. LGBTIQ+ research must retain its connection to community organizing. Moving forward, it is essential for LGBTIQ+ psychology research to be receptive to various geolocalized and deterritorialized forms of subjectivation to fully capture the experiences of the community. For instance, as shown in the Chilean political example, a one-size-fits-all approach can lead to the marginalization of certain groups within the community, such as when trans individuals faced legal and social setbacks by being excluded from early gay and lesbian political organizing. Additionally, the intersectionality example highlights how intersecting identities influence experiences differently within and between groups in the community; underscoring the necessity for research that acknowledges and integrates these complexities. This highlights the importance of adaptable and inclusive research practices that recognize and address

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the unique needs of all subgroups within the LGBTIQ+ community and their relations with the local political scene, as well as the internal intersecting factors.

CONCLUSIONS

By examining some of the underlying assumptions of the identity-based paradigm of LGBTIQ+ acronym, we have sought to problematize the relative merits within different contexts of adopting a universalist or particularist perspective when seeking to improve the living conditions of those breaking norms about sex, gender, and sexuality. Using examples from psychological research and political organizing, we suggest that LGBTIQ+ research should strive to be community-driven research adapted to the needs of specific communities, centered on participant benefit, and aware that there will never be a universal answer to how to best conduct research with such a heterogeneous community.

The responsibility of researchers extends to communicating research in a way that is mindful of the fact that creating and disseminating knowledge is an act of power; an act that has a long history of adding to the marginalization of those troubling norms regarding sex, gender, and sexuality. We would therefore like to end this problematization by adding that throughout the process of writing this article, we have ourselves struggled with consistently showing this mindfulness; even as experts in the field who themselves belong to different parts of the sprawling queer community. However, by not shying away from this struggle and instead engaging in it together, we have expanded our abilities to contribute to improving the lives of people marginalized due to their bodies, their genders, and their sexualities. This is how we reimagine LGBTIQ+ research for the future: as a collaborative endeavor aimed at meeting the needs of our community.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

We are a group of psychology researchers joined by our focus on conducting research that empowers LGBTIQ+ individuals. We represent a multitude of areas within psychology, with expertise related to developmental, social, discursive, cognitive, clinical, educational, and health-focused research using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The research group includes individuals speaking different languages coming from Chile, Italy, Sweden, and the US. Although we lack members from Africa, Asia, and Oceania, we include perspectives from these continents in the article through publications authored by researchers from these communities. Our point of view is informed not only by geographic diversity but also by our positions as members of varying racial/ethnic groups, and as a group of LGBTQ+ researchers with a wide array of sexual and gender identities we are informed by our lived experiences of existing both within the research community and the LGBTIQ+ community.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Jessica Glazier, PhD, is an assistant professor at Clark University. Glazier's research explores the implications of norms and assumptions that people hold about social categories and characterizes the experiences of people who defy these assumptions. The goal of Glazier's work is to expand understanding of social cognition by being inclusive of both perceptions of and the perspectives of people often left out of research and to target specific timely social issues experienced by these groups.

Sarah Swanson, MA, is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Informed by her experiences as a bisexual woman, she researches the experiences of queer individuals receiving mental health services and the radical impact of racism and other forms of oppression on academic performance. Currently, she researches therapists' experience with LGBTQ+ clients and LGBTQ+ affirmative therapy practices. She is interested in future research on the stigmatization of bisexuality and the experiences of bisexual college athletes.

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