

Science Editorial: What are the hottest research topics in GLBT psychology?

By James Cantor

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this editorial are my own. They do not necessarily reflect those of APA, Division 44, the Science Committee, or their members or officers.

As tepid as I am about pop culture, I'm somewhat of a fan of Top Ten Lists. So, for psychologists interested in GLBT research, this seemed an interesting prospect. Knowledge about the status and progress in GLBT research can help us to identify under-researched questions; to guide the selection of topics for convention, the Newsletter, and continuing education; and to assist students who are dissertation-bound and young investigators who are trying to carve a research niche for themselves. Thus, this is the first in what I hope is a series of editorials examining the field of GLBT science and its trends. I welcome comment—in this newsletter, on the Division 44 listserv, or in other psychology venues—on this topic.

The Top Ten Topics can be identified in more than one way, of course. I have selected only one for this editorial, but I certainly encourage other folks to develop and pursue other criteria. (My suspicion is that the methods will actually converge on similar answers.)

To pick the Top Ten Topics, I first identified the ten most frequently cited papers for each year from 1998 to 2002. The frequency of citations is easily available online from the *Science Citation Index* and the *Social Science Citation Index*. I focused on frequency of citation instead of frequency of new articles because citation frequency automatically selects those works that have the highest impact on the field. It filters out the dreck, so much of which is published each year. The following keywords formed the computer search strategy: "homosex* or bisex* or gay or lesbian* or transsex* or transgend* or (gender dysphor*)." In order to remain focused on psychology articles, purely medical articles had to be removed, so the following

keywords were used as rule-outs: HIV or AIDS or papillo*. Other non-psychology articles were dropped by hand from the list. There were ties for the tenth most widely cited paper for some years. So, even though I was aiming for ten papers for each of five years, I obtained 55 papers in total. Finally, these 55 papers were sorted by general topic to produce those ten topics that are receiving the most attention from researchers. They are:

1. Homophobia (tie)
2. Biological basis of sexual orientation (tie)
3. Suicide, including
 - in adult men
 - in GLB youth
 - in cross-section samples
4. Transsexuality
5. Health, including
 - in GLB adults
 - in GLB youth
6. GLB Youth, other topics
7. Psychiatric disorders and sexual orientation, including
 - in adults
 - in GLB youth
8. GLB Development
9. GLB Parenting
10. Other/unclassified

Before commenting on what appears on the list, it is worth noting those which do not. In guessing which topics would appear, I thought about those topics which seem to get the most attention—at Convention, on the Division 44 listserv, and from the Executive Committee. In that context, the lack of any highly cited papers on bisexuality, LGBT aging, or ethnic/cultural diversity is quite surprising. There exist literatures on each of these topics, of course, but they do not appear to be getting widely cited, at least not those papers from 1998–2002.

One can quickly generate any number of hypotheses to explain the

mismatch between the above list and conventional wisdom, and I invite others to help solve the riddle. My own pet theory is that these particular topics sit at the forefront of our minds because of their recent political development, not recent scientific development. Bisexuality, for example, enjoys increased attention during the past several years, with great thanks to the efforts of division members bringing it to the foreground. Very little basic scientific information, however, has been produced, at least from 1998–2002.

This invites several more questions. Is the political attention being paid to these topics out of proportion? Is scientific interest merely lagging behind political interest on these issues? Are there no questions remaining in these fields that lend themselves to scientific inquiry? Or are the people who pursue these topics not interested in using scientific methods to advance those parts of the field? It is also possible that research in those fields fails to be cited for exhibiting less quality than quantity. No matter which of those possibilities turns out to be the most accurate in the long run, I would assert that understanding this mismatch is important in its own right. Only with such understanding can we best decide whether and how to act upon it.

The following appendix includes all the highly-cited papers produced by the search and the categories into which I put them. Which topic comes out as number one, of course, will depend on which topics get subdivided or collapsed together, so feel free to rearrange them to suit your own interests. The tie for top topic reflects only my own filing scheme.

It probably comes as little surprise that so many papers on homophobia were highly-cited.

Several aspects of homophobia—the effects of stigma and violence, and the social psychology of prejudice—have been a mainstay interest of GLBT researchers for a long time. The great surprise, at least for me, was that homophobia had no more highly-cited papers than did biological research in sexual orientation. In fact, the number of top papers on homophobia would be outnumbered by the biologically-oriented papers if the biologically-oriented papers on sexual orientation and transsexuality were combined.

Biological research on sexual orientation remains quite controversial among GLBT psychologists, for reasons I won't pretend to understand. I would underscore, however, that the enormous scientific attention that is paid to the biological basis of sexual orientation is in stark contrast to the deafening lack of such attention by the Division at Convention each year. In fact, the last presentation reviewing the topic was several years ago, and was met with great hostility from the audience. Regardless of one's personal or political stance on such research, however, I would assert the importance of understanding that research. If the Division for the Psychological Study of LGB Issues

does not understand the ins and outs of this literature—while the rest of the scientific world pays so much attention to it—then we can hardly serve as the experts others need us to be. Furthermore, if we fail to help the public to understand this work in its proper context, then we are inviting other, less tolerant, groups to do it for us.

The number of papers on transsexuality will likely seem a mixed blessing. On the one hand, having so many highly-cited papers on transsexuality would seem to argue that the topic deserves much more attention from the division than it is receiving. On the other hand, however, a brief perusal of the papers shows that the papers do not involve the phenomenology and social implications of the existence of transsexuality, which seems to be the predominant interest of GLBT psychologists. Rather, the papers represent investigations into how the human brain and endocrinological systems operate; and, because transsexuals are undergoing cross-sex hormone treatment as part of their transition, they represent a unique opportunity to investigate the behavioral and cognitive effects of hormones on a healthy body. As was

true with topics that failed to appear on the highly-cited list at all, it is both interesting and important to ask why phenomenological and social-import papers are not being widely cited.

The final topic receiving so much attention is the various aspects of GLBT youth, particularly suicide in GLBT youth. Perhaps more than in any other topic, the presence of these publications on the list emphasizes the need for the division to continue its attention to these topics. In fact, I would recommend integrating the topic of GLBT youth with the other topic areas. We have seen the movement to integrate GLBT issues into all of psychology rather than to segregate it into "the Gay course," and it may be time to integrate youth issues into all of GLBT rather than to continue to see it as a separate topic.

Regardless of whether and to what extent one may support these opinions, I guarantee the following list will make great summer reading—the best way to keep up to is read those papers that the researchers themselves are reading and citing. The papers appear in categorical order, so that my counting scheme becomes apparent. Happy reading:

Homophobia

- Banse, R., Seise, J., & Zerbes, N. (2001). Implicit attitudes towards homosexuality: Reliability, validity, and controllability of the IAT. *Zeitschrift für Experimentelle Psychologie*, 48, 145–160.
- Cogan, J. C. (2002). Hate crime as a crime category worthy of policy attention. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 173–185.
- Frable, D. E. S., Platt, L., & Hoey, S. (1998). Concealable stigmas and positive self-perceptions: Feeling better around similar others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 909–922.
- Green, D. P., Glaser, J., & Rich, A. (1998). From lynching to gay bashing: The elusive connection between economic conditions and hate crime. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 82–92.
- Herek, G. M. (2000). The psychology of sexual prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 19–22.
- Herek, G. M., Gillis, J. R., & Cogan, J. C. (1999). Psychological sequelae of hate-crime victimization among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 67, 945–951.
- Mays, V. M., & Cochran, S. D. (2001). Mental health correlates of perceived discrimination among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91, 1869–1876.
- Noelle, M. (2002). The ripple effect of the Matthew Shepard murder: Impact on the assumptive worlds of members of the targeted group. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 27–50.
- Russell, S. T., Franz, B. T., & Driscoll, A. K. (2001). Same-sex romantic attraction and experiences of violence in adolescence. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91, 903–906.
- Whitley, B. E. (1999). Right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 126–134.

Biological Basis of Sexual Orientation

- Bailey, J. M., Dunne, M. P., & Martin, N. G. (2000). Genetic and environmental influences on sexual orientation and its correlates in an Australian twin sample. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*, 524–536.
- Cantor, J. M., Blanchard, R., Paterson, A. D., & Bogaert, A. F. (2002). How many gay men owe their sexual orientation to fraternal birth order? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *31*, 63–71.
- Cooke, B. M., Tabibnia, G., & Breedlove, S. M. (1999). A brain sexual dimorphism controlled by adult circulating androgens. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *96*, 7538–7540.
- Ellis, L., & Blanchard, R. (2001). Birth order, sibling sex ratio, and maternal miscarriages in homosexual and heterosexual men and women. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *30*, 543–552.
- Lippa, R. A., & Tan, F. D. (2001). Does culture moderate the relationship between sexual orientation and gender-related personality traits? *Cross-Cultural Research*, *35*, 65–87.
- McFadden, D., & Champlin, C. A. (2000). Comparison of auditory evoked potentials in heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual males and females. *Jaro*, *1*, 89–99.
- McFadden, D., & Pasanen, E. G. (1998). Comparison of the auditory systems of heterosexuals and homosexuals: Click-evoked otoacoustic emissions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *95*, 2709–2713.
- Rice, G., Anderson, C., Risch, N., & Ebers, G. (1999). Male homosexuality: Absence of linkage to microsatellite markers at Xq28. *Science*, *284*, 665–667.
- Robinson, S. J., & Manning, J. T. (2000). The ratio of 2nd to 4th digit length and male homosexuality. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *21*, 333–345.
- Turkheimer, E. (1998). Heritability and biological explanation. *Psychological Review*, *105*, 782–791.

Suicide

- Cochran, S. D., & Mays, V. M. (2000). Lifetime prevalence of suicide symptoms and affective disorders among men reporting same-sex sexual partners: Results from NHANES III. *American Journal of Public Health*, *90*, 573–578.
- Garofalo, R., Wolf, R. C., Wissow, L. S., Woods, E. R., & Goodman, E. (1999). Sexual orientation and risk of suicide attempts among a representative sample of youth. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *153*, 487–493.
- Herrell, R., Goldberg, J., True, W. R., Ramakrishnan, V., Lyons, M., Eisen, S., & Tsuang, M. T. (1999). Sexual orientation and suicidality: A co-twin control study in adult men. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *56*, 867–874.
- Lock, J., & Steiner, H. (1999). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth risks for emotional, physical, and social problems: Results from a community-based survey. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *38*, 297–304.
- Remafedi, G., French, S., Story, M., Resnick, M. D., & Blum, R. (1998). The relationship between suicide risk and sexual orientation: Results of a population-based study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *88*, 57–60.
- Russell, S. T., & Joyner, K. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *91*, 1276–1281.
- Safren, S. A., & Heimberg, R. G. (1999). Depression, hopelessness, suicidality, and related factors in sexual minority and heterosexual adolescents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *67*, 859–866.

Transsexuality

- Chung, W. C. J., De Vries, G. J., & Swaab, D. F. (2002). Sexual differentiation of the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis in humans may extend into adulthood. *Journal of Neuroscience*, *22*, 1027–1033.
- Giltay, E. J., Hoogveen, E. K., Elbers, J. M. H., Gooren, L. J. G., Asscheman, H., & Stehouwer, C. D. A. (1998). Effects of sex steroids on plasma total homocysteine levels: A study in transsexual males and females. *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, *83*, 550–553.
- Green, R. (2000). Birth order and ratio of brothers to sisters in transsexuals. *Psychological Medicine*, *30*, 789–795.
- Kruijver, F. P. M., Zhou, J. N., Pool, C. W., Hofman, M. A., Gooren, L. J. G., & Swaab, D. F. (2000). Male-to-female transsexuals have female neuron numbers in a limbic nucleus. *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, *85*, 2034–2041.
- Miles, C., Green, R., Sanders, G., & Hines, M. (1998). Estrogen and memory in a transsexual population. *Hormones and Behavior*, *34*, 199–208.
- Slabbekoorn, D., Van Goozen, S. H. M., Megens, J., Gooren, L. J. G., & Cohen-Kettenis, P. T. (1999). Activating effects of cross-sex hormones on cognitive functioning: A study of short-term and long-term hormone effects in transsexuals. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *24*, 423–447.

Health

- Cochran, S. D. (2001). Emerging issues in research on lesbians' and gay men's mental health: Does sexual orientation really matter? *American Psychologist*, *56*, 931–947.
- Garofalo, R., Wolf, R. C., Kessel, S., Palfrey, J., & DuRant, R. H. (1998). The association between health risk behaviors and sexual orientation among a school-based sample of adolescents. *Pediatrics*, *101*, 895–902.
- Saewyc, E. M., Bearinger, L. H., Heinz, P. A., Blum, R. W., & Resnick, M. D. (1998). Gender differences in health and risk behaviors among bisexual and homosexual adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *23*, 181–188.
- Sell, R. L., & Becker, J. B. (2001). Sexual orientation data collection and progress toward healthy people 2010. *American Journal of Public Health*, *91*, 876–882.
- Valanis, B. G., Bowen, D. J., Bassford, T., Whitlock, E., Charney, P., & Carter, R. A. (2000). Sexual orientation and health: Comparisons in the Women's Health Initiative sample. *Archives of Family Medicine*, *9*, 843–853.

Youth, other topics in

- D'Augelli, A. R., Hershberger, S. L., & Pilkington, N. W. (1998). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and their families: Disclosure of sexual orientation and its consequences. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *68*, 361–371.
- Diamond, L. M. (2000). Sexual identity, attractions, and behavior among young sexual-minority women over a 2-year period. *Developmental Psychology*, *36*, 241–250.
- Russell, S. T., Driscoll, A. K., & Truong, N. (2002). Adolescent same-sex romantic attractions and relationships: Implications for substance use and abuse. *American Journal of Public Health*, *92*, 198–202.
- Russell, S. T., Seif, H., & Truong, N. L. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: Evidence from a national study. *Journal of Adolescence*, *24*, 111–127.

Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Orientation

- Cochran, S. D., & Mays, V. M. (2000). Relation between psychiatric syndromes and behaviorally defined sexual orientation in a sample of the US population. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, *151*, 516–523.
- Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J., & Beautrais, A. L. (1999). Is sexual orientation related to mental health problems and suicidality in young people? *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *56*, 876–880.
- Sandfort, T. G. M., de Graaf, R., Bijl, R. V., & Schnabel, P. (2001). Same-sex sexual behavior and psychiatric disorders: Findings from the Netherlands Mental Health Survey and Incidence Study (NEMESIS). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *58*, 85–91.

GLB Development

- Diamond, L. M. (1998). Development of sexual orientation among adolescent and young adult women. *Developmental Psychology*, *34*, 1085–1095.
- Worthington, R. L., Savoy, H. B., Dillon, F. R., & Vernaglia, E. R. (2002). Heterosexual identity development: A multidimensional model of individual and social identity. *Counseling Psychologist*, *30*, 496–531.

GLB Parenting

- Chan, R. W., Raboy, B., & Patterson, C. J. (1998). Psychosocial adjustment among children conceived via donor insemination by lesbian and heterosexual mothers. *Child Development*, *69*, 443–457.
- Perrin, E. C. (2002). Technical report: Coparent or second-parent adoption by same-sex parents. *Pediatrics*, *109*, 341–344.

Other

- Black, D., Gates, G., Sanders, S., & Taylor, L. (2000). Demographics of the gay and lesbian population in the United States: Evidence from available systematic data sources. *Demography*, *37*, 139–154.
- Hansen, B. (2002). Public careers and private sexuality: Some gay and lesbian lives in the history of medicine and public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, *92*, 36–44.
- Hubbard, P. (2000). Desire/disgust: Mapping the moral contours of heterosexuality. *Progress in Human Geography*, *24*, 191–217.
- Mohr, J. J. (2002). Heterosexual identity and the heterosexual therapist: An identity perspective on sexual orientation dynamics in psychotherapy. *Counseling Psychologist*, *30*, 532–566.
- Oswald, R. F. (2002). Who am I in relation to them? Gay, lesbian, and queer people leave the city to attend rural family weddings. *Journal of Family Issues*, *23*, 323–348.
- Savulescu, J. (2002). Deaf lesbians, “designer disability” and the future of medicine. *British Medical Journal*, *325*(7367), 771–773.