

Advances in Research With Sexual Minority People: Introduction to the Special Issue

Brent Mallinckrodt
University of Tennessee

In 1956, only 3 years after the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (*JCP*) was founded, it published an article titled “The Vocational Interests of a Group of Male Homosexuals” (Haselkorn, 1956). However, after this early beginning, 25 years elapsed before the second empirical article to study gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) persons appeared in *JCP* (Atkinson, Brady, & Casas, 1981). My search of the literature indicates that only five articles with a focus on GLB individuals appeared in *JCP* during the 40 years that followed the first 1956 publication. If studies of counselors’ perceptions of GLB clients (e.g., Hayes & Gelso, 1993) and studies of attitudes of the general population toward lesbian and gay persons (e.g., Goodman & Moradi, 2008) are excluded, prior to this issue *JCP* has previously published only 18 empirical studies with GLB persons as the target population of the research. Half of these articles appeared after 2002. Even if articles about counselor perceptions of clients and studies of heterosexism in the general population are included, my search indicates that *JCP* has published only 26 articles fitting these broader criteria, with half of these appearing after 2001. Thus, although the total volume of research is small, on the other hand we appear to be beginning an exciting new period in which the discouraging lack of research and slow pace of advance that marked previous decades have come to an end, at least with regard to research on gay men and lesbian women published in *JCP*. Studies examining the experiences of bisexual people, distinct from combined samples that include bisexual, gay, and lesbian individuals, have also begun to appear in *JCP* (e.g., Balsam & Mohr, 2007). There are also encouraging signs that counseling psychology researchers are interested in moving past “G,” “L,” and occasionally “B” to study a wider range of sexual minority people. Certainly, the trends toward increased research interest in sexual minority people and a broadening of focus are evident in the contributions of counseling psychologists to a variety of publication outlets (for reviews, see Bieschke, Hardy, Fassinger, & Croteau, 2008; Bieschke, Paul, & Blasko, 2007).

Thus, as we begin a new era that promises a flourishing of scholarship, the time is ripe for *JCP* to make a contribution through publication of a special issue devoted to advances in research with sexual minority people. This constitutes only the third special issue in the history of *JCP*, and it is the first to be devoted to a content area of research. The previous special issues concerned research methods, with a focus first on quantitative

(Wampold, 1987b) and then on qualitative (Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005) techniques. The current special issue sprang from modest beginnings. Throughout 2007, the journal received a sharp increase in manuscripts that reported research with GLB samples, although there had been no special call for studies. As the end of the year approached and it became apparent that as many as 3–4 of these manuscripts would be accepted for publication, I decided to use these studies as the nucleus for as a special section that was conceived at first to occupy no more than half of one issue of *JCP*. In December 2007, I issued a competitive call for teams of researchers to submit proposals for the lead article of the special section. I asked that teams consist of at least two members, each with a strong record of publishing empirical work (not necessarily in *JCP*), and that the teams include experts in studies of bisexual persons, as well as gay men and lesbian women. The guest editorial team was also required to include experts in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. I asked for proposals describing a lead article that would discuss methodological challenges in research with sexual minority persons, as well as potential solutions to address these challenges. The proposal that I eventually selected was developed into the lead article that follows this introduction (Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009, this issue).

In December 2007, I also issued an explicit call for empirical manuscripts that I hoped might be used to expand the special section. The original version of this call invited only studies of GLB persons or studies using non-GLB samples to study correlates, moderators, or mediators of heterosexist attitudes and behavior. I was soon contacted by researchers inquiring whether we would consider studies of transsexual persons and intersex persons as well. I immediately agreed. The strong response to this call helped propel *JCP* to a record pace for the number of manuscripts received in 1 year. Each manuscript was evaluated with the usual masked peer review procedure. Many were rejected, but it soon became clear that by mid-2008 we would have enough accepted manuscripts to fill an entire special issue. Associate Editors Flores, Hoyt, O’Brien, Quintana, and myself served as the action editors for each of the empirical manuscripts. Thus, the guest editors of this special issue, Fassinger, Mohr, Moradi, and Worthington, served in an editorial role only for the two manuscripts they invited and reviewed (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009, this issue; Meyer & Wilson, 2009, this issue). Each of the 14 empirical articles that follow the lead contribution and the two invited articles was accepted only after a rigorous, masked peer review. The lead article itself also underwent masked peer review.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brent Mallinckrodt, Department of Psychology, Rm. 312, Austin Peay, 1404 Circle Drive, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996. E-mail: bmallinc@utk.edu

Organization and Contents of the Special Issue

The lead article by Moradi, Mohr, et al. (2009, this issue) begins by taking up the challenging issue of definitions. What constitutes status as a sexual minority person? The authors delve deep into the challenges of conceptualization and definition by considering complex, overlapping constructs such as *sex*, *gender expression*, *gender identity*, *sexual orientation*, and *sexual identity*—to name only a few of the terms they discuss. They challenge readers to think beyond simple binary conceptualizations of sexuality and gender identity. This section closes with suggestions for issues to consider when choosing a method of conceptualizing sexual minority status. Moradi, Mohr, et al. also present compelling evidence that research on sexual minority people has led to important advances in understanding that will benefit all people, for example, discoveries about effective coping with oppression and stigma, or knowledge about sexuality and communication in romantic relationships. The third section of the lead article addresses specific methodological challenges in research with sexual minority people and offers some proposed solutions. Both qualitative and quantitative research challenges are discussed. Moradi, Mohr, et al. conclude with a discussion of the unique contributions that counseling psychologists can make to advancing knowledge, practice, and social justice.

The lead article is followed by an invited contribution from Meyer and Wilson (2009, this issue), who discuss the critical issues in sampling methods and research participant recruitment, which of course are central for both qualitative and quantitative research. Consequences of specific methodological decisions are discussed, for example, using probability versus nonprobability samples. The authors consider the potential biases introduced by various forms of nonprobability methods, together with suggestions about how to mitigate these problems. The article presents an in-depth discussion of venue-based nonprobability sampling, for example, collecting data via Internet LISTSERVs or community organizations. The remaining invited contribution (Herek et al., 2009, this issue) provides a social psychological perspective on internalized stigma. Herek et al. (2009, this issue) present results of a survey of more than 1,300 GLB adults gathered through multiple community venues. The conceptual model explored in this study draws parallels between how heterosexual people and nonheterosexual people experience sexual prejudice and internalized sexual prejudice, respectively.

After the lead article and the two invited articles, 14 empirical reports follow. In the first of these, Worthington and Reynolds (2009, this issue) use cluster analysis to examine within-group diversity of self-identified sexual orientation and identity in a way that sheds light on the social construction of human sexuality. Next, three articles explore the negative psychological and emotional consequences of political initiatives intended to restrict marriage civil rights. Although each of these studies examines the impact of 2006 ballot measures, the findings gain new relevance given the 2008 passage in California of a state constitutional amendment limiting marriage to one man and one woman, together with similar bans in Arizona and Florida. Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, and Miller (2009, this issue) compare GLB residents in states where gay marriage bans were on the ballot in 2006 and passed with GLB residents of other states that had passed similar legislation in previous years. Results suggest a significant negative

psychological impact on GLB persons in the immediate aftermath following an election where gay marriage civil rights are considered and rejected by voters. Levitt et al. (2009, this issue) conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 13 GLBT residents of a state that considered an amendment banning gay marriage in 2006. Their grounded theory analysis reports that a key theme is balancing the dangers of deciding to become more involved in advocacy for GLBT civil rights versus self-protection through withdrawing from the conflict. Levitt et al. provide a richly detailed account of how each of their interviewees arrived at a personal balance between the coping advantages and risks of each choice in this dilemma. For the third article in this group, Arm, Horne, and Levitt (2009, this issue) conducted a grounded theory qualitative analysis of 10 heterosexuals with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered (GLBT) immediate family members living in the same state during the same election studied by Levitt et al. Arm et al. detail the impact on social relationships and psychosocial health, especially feelings of distress and anguish, directly experienced by these family members—all of whom were supportive of their GLBT loved one. The core theme identified in Arm et al.'s analysis is the struggle of these family members, given their local circumstances, to choose a level of connection—varying from immersed to distanced—with the GLBT community that best reflected their preferences for coping with this distress.

The next three empirical articles in this special issue all explore aspects of oppression and internalized stigma—although each set of authors conceptualizes the constructs somewhat differently and prefers a different term to describe the focus of their research. Frost and Meyer (2009, this issue) examine internalized homophobia as an independent variable that influences relationship quality. Szymanski and Gupta (2009, this issue) examine internalized oppressions that include both heterosexism and racism as the variables negatively influencing self-esteem and psychological functioning for African American LGB and questioning individuals. Moradi, van den Berg, and Epting (2009, this issue) use Kelly's personal construct theory as a conceptual framework to understand the psychological dynamics of internalized anti-lesbian and gay prejudice. Although the next study does not investigate internalized heterosexism per se, Hamilton and Mahalik (2009, this issue) use minority stress theory as a framework for understanding the health risk behavior of gay men. Clearly, despite a lack of exact agreement on terminology, there is considerable research interest in understanding how negative attitudes and behavior in the larger society toward sexual minorities influence these persons' self-concept, psychological well-being, relationships, and health behaviors.

The next two articles in this special issue are noteworthy because they both report findings that might provide the basis for future interventions. Szymanski (2009, this issue) studies the role of social support, avoidant coping, and self-esteem as moderators of the link between heterosexist events and psychological distress. Sheets and Mohr (2009, this issue) examine social support from family and friends as a positive influence on the psychological functioning of bisexual college students. This study is also significant because it is the only one in this special issue to focus exclusively on bisexual persons and one of the very few ever published in *JCP* to do so. Findings suggest that sexuality-specific support from both family and friends is negatively associated with internalized binegativity and that general social support is nega-

tively associated with depression. Given the findings of these two studies, perhaps future research will test the effectiveness of interventions designed to provide social support or increase self-esteem among GLB persons.

The study reported by Mohr, Weiner, Chopp, and Wong (2009, this issue) is different from every other empirical contribution to this special issue in two important ways. First, the researchers use an experimental design with random assignment of subjects to conditions. Second, it is the only study in this special issue to examine an aspect of psychotherapy. The researchers recruited a sample of over 100 practicing psychotherapists from across the United States who were asked to provide ratings of global functioning and a case conceptualization for a simulated client. In a quite innovative research design, the male client presented in each of the three conditions varies only with respect to an inference that the client is gay, heterosexual, or bisexual based on descriptions of a current and a past romantic relationship. Burkard, Knox, Hess, and Schultz (2009, this issue) focus on the applied setting of counseling supervision. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 gay and lesbian or bisexual male and female doctoral trainees. Qualitative analyses identified common themes in the supportive and nonsupportive incidents described by each of the research participants.

Fortunately, the special issue also includes research that moves beyond GLB research participants. Schweizer, Brunner, Schützmann, Schönbacher, and Richter-Appelt (2009, this issue) report a mixed-methods study of seven intersex persons living in Europe. Each is chromosomally XY but had a prenatal metabolic inability to synthesize androgens, and thus, each was raised as female from birth. All seven research participants received medical treatment to halt physical masculinization. The authors investigate adult gender identity and coping. Findings support the argument against a simplistic binary view of gender. Implications for counseling with this underserved sexual minority population are discussed. Finally, Sánchez and Vilain (2009, this issue) surveyed 53 male-to-female transsexual people using a venue-sampling approach. The authors were guided by a minority stress conceptual framework as they investigated correlates of psychological distress. This article, like that of Schweizer et al., provides a sensitive, in-depth discussion of the counseling issues likely to be faced by members of an underserved sexual minority whose needs are poorly understood by the mental health community.

Thus, the 14 empirical articles in this special issue span a range of methodologies including an experiment, a mixed-methods study, and several examples of quantitative and qualitative investigations. This diversity of methods and samples is quite encouraging. I hope it is an indication of a growing body of research that will follow in *JCP* and other publications. I want to publicly thank each of the peer reviewers and each of the authors who contributed to this effort. If this special issue serves to improve the quality of research on sexual minorities and thereby helps to enhance—even in some small way—the lives of sexual minority persons themselves, the hopes of those who contributed to this special issue will be realized. To paraphrase the guest editor of the first *JCP* special issue (Wampold, 1987a), I believe that I speak for all the authors of this special issue when I say that our gratification with this project will accrue in coming years to the extent that we have assisted others in making new discoveries.

References

- Arm, J. R., Horne, S. G., & Levitt, H. M. (2009). Negotiating connection to GLBT experience: Family members' experience of anti-GLBT movements and policies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 92–96.
- Atkinson, D. R., Brady, S., & Casas, J. M. (1981). Sexual preference similarity, attitude similarity, and perceived counseling credibility and attractiveness. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, 504–509.
- Balsam, K. F., & Mohr, J. J. (2007). Adaptation to sexual orientation stigma: A comparison of bisexual and lesbian/gay adults. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*, 306–319.
- Bieschke, K. J., Hardy, J. A., Fassinger, R. E., & Croteau, J. M. (2008). Intersecting identities of gender-transgressive sexual minorities: Toward a new paradigm of affirmative psychology. In B. W. Walsh (Ed.), *Biennial review of counseling psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 177–207). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- Bieschke, K. J., Paul, P. L., & Blasko, K. A. (2007). Review of empirical research focused on the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients in counseling and psychotherapy. In K. J. Bieschke, R. M. Perez, & K. A. DeBord (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (2nd ed., pp. 293–315). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Burkard, A. W., Knox, S., Hess, S. A., & Schultz, J. (2009). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual supervisees' experiences of LGB-affirmative and nonaffirmative supervision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 176–188.
- Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2009). Internalized homophobia and relationship quality among lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 97–109.
- Goodman, M. B., & Moradi, B. (2008). Attitudes and behaviors toward lesbian and gay persons: Critical correlates and mediated relations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 55*, 371–384.
- Hamilton, C., & Mahalik, J. R. (2009). Minority stress, masculinity, and social norms predicting gay men's health risk behaviors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 132–141.
- Haselkorn, H. (1956). The vocational interests of a group of male homosexuals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 3*, 8–11.
- Haverkamp, B. E., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (Eds.). (2005). Knowledge in context: Qualitative methods in counseling psychology research [Special issue]. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2).
- Hayes, J. A., & Gelso, C. J. (1993). Male counselors' discomfort with gay and HIV-infected clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 40*, 86–93.
- Herek, G. M., Gillis, J. R., & Cogan, J. C. (2009). Internalized stigma among sexual minority adults: Insights from a social psychological perspective. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 32–43.
- Levitt, H. M., Ovrebo, E., Anderson-Cleveland, M. B., Leone, C., Jae, Y. J., Arm, J. R., et al. (2009). Balancing dangers: GLBT experience in a time of anti-GLBT legislation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 67–81.
- Meyer, I. H., & Wilson, P. A. (2009). Sampling lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 23–31.
- Mohr, J. J., Weiner, J. L., Chopp, R. M., & Wong, S. J. (2009). Effects of client bisexuality on clinical judgment: When is bias most likely to occur? *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 164–175.
- Moradi, B., Mohr, J. J., Worthington, R. L., & Fassinger, R. E. (2009). Counseling psychology research on sexual (orientation) minority issues: Conceptual and methodological challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 5–22.
- Moradi, B., van den Berg, J. J., & Epting, F. R. (2009). Threat and Guilt Aspects of Internalized Antilebian and Gay Prejudice: An Application of Personal Construct Theory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 119–131.
- Rostovsky, S. S., Riggle, E. D. B., Horne, S. G., & Miller, A. D. (2009). Marriage amendments and psychological distress in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*, 56–66.
- Sánchez, F. J., & Vilain, E. (2009). Collective self-esteem as a coping

- resource for male-to-female transsexuals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 202–209.
- Schweizer, K., Brunner, F., Schützmann, K., Schönbacher, V., & Richter-Appelt, H. (2009). Gender identity and coping in female 46,XY adults with androgen biosynthesis deficiency. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 189–201.
- Sheets, R. L., Jr., & Mohr, J. J. (2009). Perceived social support from friends and family and psychosocial functioning in bisexual young adult college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 152–163.
- Szymanski, D. M. (2009). Examining potential moderators of the link between heterosexist events and gay and bisexual men's psychological distress. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 142–151.
- Szymanski, D. M., & Gupta, A. (2009). Examining the relationship between multiple internalized oppressions and African American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning persons' self-esteem and psychological distress. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 110–118.
- Wampold, B. E. (1987a). Guest editor's introduction. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 34, 364.
- Wampold, B. E. (Ed.). (1987b). Quantitative foundations of counseling psychology research [Special issue]. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 34(4).
- Worthington, R. L., & Reynolds, A. L. (2009). Within-group differences in sexual orientation and identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 44–55.

Received November 10, 2008

Revision received November 14, 2008

Accepted November 14, 2008 ■

ORDER FORM

Start my 2009 subscription to the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* ISSN: 0022-0167

___ \$55.00 APA MEMBER /AFFILIATE _____

___ \$129.00 INDIVIDUAL NONMEMBER _____

___ \$355.00 INSTITUTION _____

In DC add 5.75% / In MD add 6% sales tax _____

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE \$ _____

Subscription orders must be prepaid. Subscriptions are on a calendar year basis only. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of the first issue. Call for international subscription rates.



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

SEND THIS ORDER FORM TO
American Psychological Association
Subscriptions
750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242

Call **800-374-2721** or 202-336-5600
Fax **202-336-5568** :TDD/TTY **202-336-6123**
For subscription information,
e-mail: **subscriptions@apa.org**

Check enclosed (make payable to APA)

Charge my: Visa MasterCard American Express

Cardholder Name _____

Card No. _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature (Required for Charge)

Billing Address

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail To

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

APA Member # _____

COUA09