

A review of two decades of LGBTQ-inclusive research in JSPR and PR

Amanda M. Pollitt¹  | Karen L. Blair²  | Pamela J. Lannutti³

¹Department of Health Sciences, Southwest Health Equity Research Collaborative, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

²Department of Psychology, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

³Center for Human Sexuality Studies, Widener University, Chester, Pennsylvania, USA

Correspondence

Amanda M. Pollitt, Northern Arizona University, 1395 S. Knoles Drive, Flagstaff AZ 86011, USA.
Email: amanda.pollitt@nau.edu

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Abstract

The field of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) relationship science has grown significantly over the past two decades, coinciding with rapid changes in the social acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. However, it is unclear to what extent the top two journals in relationship science, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*, have contributed to the field. In this critical review, we analyzed the 2181 manuscripts published in the journals between 2002 and 2021 for whether they included or excluded LGBTQ+ participants, the methodologies used to analyze their data, and their conclusions about LGBTQ+ lives and relationships. The overwhelming majority (85.8%) of manuscripts did not acknowledge LGBTQ+ relationships; however, there have been improvements compared to past research in retaining LGBTQ+ participants within a data set when they were present. We identified 92 manuscripts that contributed to knowledge about LGBTQ+ lives or relationships. We

Amanda M. Pollitt and Karen L. Blair are co-first authors.

Statement of Relevance: We examine the research published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships* to see whether and how studies have included lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. We show the areas researched in detail and identify important gaps for future research.

discuss the lack of intersectional analyses and methodological challenges of incorporating multiple forms of diversity within quantitative research. Overarching themes across manuscript content included minority stress, relationship formation, social support, and commitment. Overall, though the research in the two journals has contributed to the literature on LGBTQ+ relationships, our review suggests that scholars do not consider these two journals as a first choice for finding or publishing LGBTQ+ relationship science.

KEYWORDS

gay/lesbian relationships, gender identity, LGBTQIA+, sexual orientation, transgender

1 | A REVIEW OF TWO DECADES OF LGBTQ+-INCLUSIVE RESEARCH IN JSPR AND PR

In the last two decades, there have been enormous changes concerning the legal and civil rights of sexual and gender minority populations, which include (but are not limited to) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people. For example, the Netherlands was the first country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001, and, since then, 31 countries around the globe have followed suit (Human Rights Campaign, [n.d.](#)). As research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people has grown during this time, systematic and narrative reviews of the literature are critical for summarizing knowledge about a population experiencing rapid demographic, legal, and social changes.

Recent reviews have summarized the literature on LGBTQ+ lived experiences, including romantic and family relationships (Goldberg & Allen, 2020; Reczek, 2020) and their broader inclusion in relationships research (Williamson et al., 2022). However, many scholars working with LGBTQ+ populations report perceived challenges in publishing their work in mainstream journals, often citing experiences of editors and reviewers suggesting that any LGBTQ+-inclusive work may be better suited to more “niche” journals (i.e., LGBTQ+-focused journals; Diamond et al., 2022). A deeper understanding of research on LGBTQ+ relationships within the broad field of relationship science is needed to inform relationship researchers of the work in this area and encourage additional research on this population. Thus, the goal of the current review is to explore the state of the field of LGBTQ+ relationship science as reflected in the flagship journals of the International Association for Relationships Research, the top research society on relationship science. A review of these journals provides extensive insight into current research practices regarding the inclusion and recruitment of LGBTQ+ people, the methodologies most common for LGBTQ+-inclusive research within the two top relationships journals, and an overview of the topics explored. Therefore, we also summarize the major themes covered in JSPR and PR during this time frame, identify areas that have not yet been covered extensively within the journals, and provide suggestions for future research. We sought to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How have LGBTQ+ participants been recruited and included in research published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?

- Moreover, how has research included and explored the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ people?
- RQ2: What research methods have scholars used to examine the relationships of LGBTQ+ people in research published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?
- RQ3: What themes are evident in research examining LGBTQ+ relationships published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?

2 | METHOD AND SCOPE OF REVIEW

We define LGBTQ+ relationships as relationships involving someone who experiences sexuality or gender in ways that do not conform to heterosexual and cisgender norms. In addition, our definition specifies that LGBTQ+ relationships must include at least one sexual minority (those who have a non-heterosexual identity and/or experience romantic/sexual attraction and/or behavior) or gender diverse (those who have a gender identity or expression that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth) individual. Given our research questions, our goal was to identify and analyze two sets of studies published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021. First, we wanted to understand the broader trends of LGBTQ+ inclusion in JSPR and PR by identifying papers that were not specifically about LGBTQ+ relationships but included LGBTQ+ people in their samples. We then needed to identify LGBTQ+-relevant studies, that is, research that contributed to our overall knowledge of LGBTQ+ lives and relationships, whether those be friendships, families, or romantic partnerships. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the process used to identify and screen articles as LGBTQ+-relevant or not, using PRISMA guidelines.

2.1 | Identification of manuscripts

Considering the enormous changes in LGBTQ+ rights and representation over the past two decades, we examined all manuscripts published in PR and JSPR between February/March 2002 and April 2021. First, we downloaded bibliographical information and full-text PDFs of

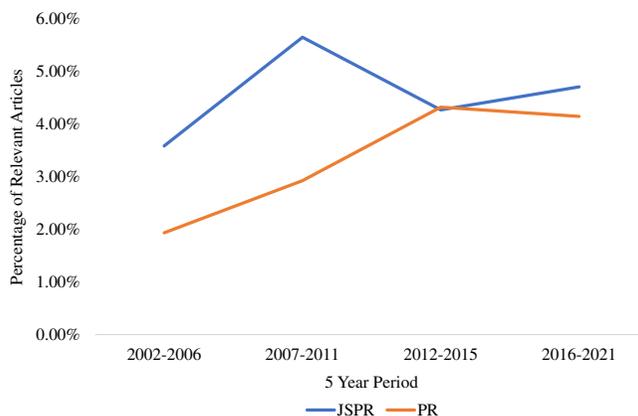


FIGURE 1 Percentage of LGBTQ-relevant articles per 5 year period in the journal of social and personal relationships and personal relationships. JSPR, Journal of Social and Personal Relationships; PR, Personal Relationships

manuscripts to Zotero. Next, we attempted to exclude non-manuscript materials, such as introductory articles, book reviews, and acknowledgments of reviewers, resulting in a dataset of 1392 manuscripts from JSPR and 789 manuscripts from PR ($n = 2181$).

2.2 | Screening process

2.2.1 | Automatic screening process

With the population of research articles identified, the next step in our selection process was to identify manuscripts that included or discussed LGBTQ+ people or relationships to form our initial sample of manuscripts. After exporting bibliographical information and PDFs to MAXQDA 20 in RIS format, we used the lexical search function in MAXQDA to auto code manuscripts based on specific search terms (see Table S1). We decided on these terms based on the most used terminology for LGBTQ+ people and relationships, including historical terms. Codes were not mutually exclusive, so there was often overlap between codes. We considered using broader terms to identify potential manuscripts; specifically, we originally planned to code manuscripts for the terms “same-sex” and “mixed-sex.” However, due to the focus of the journals on multiple types of relationships, not just romantic ones, these codes resulted in many nonrelevant manuscripts (e.g., studies focused on same-sex friendships). Manuscripts that focus on LGBTQ+ people or relationships would rarely use the term “same-sex” without using additional terms; thus, we are confident that our search was comprehensive. The auto coding process in MAXQDA identified 557 (roughly 25% of the entire sample) *potentially* LGBTQ+-relevant articles.

2.2.2 | Manual screening process

To further refine our sample of relevant articles, advanced undergraduate and graduate students manually coded each article using a survey programmed in Alchemer. Students coded each article for its inclusion/exclusion of LGBTQ+ participants, reasons for the analytic exclusion of LGBTQ+ participants, the purposefulness of recruiting sexual and gender minority participants, other demographics reported, the terminology related to LGBTQ+ identities and relationships, and methodology. Manuscripts were categorized based on how they addressed LGBTQ+ people and relationships: (1) LGBTQ+ relevant, (2) LGBTQ+ topics were mentioned briefly (e.g., in the introduction or limitations section), (3) LGBTQ+ participants were included in a larger heterosexual sample but not analyzed separately, and (4) LGBTQ+ were excluded from recruitment or analyses. Importantly, to be classified as LGBTQ+ relevant, an article had to meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) a study comparing LGBTQ+ people/relationships to non-LGBTQ+ people/relationships, (b) a study exclusively about LGBTQ+ people/relationships (even if across multiple LGBTQ+ identities), (c) a study exclusively about one group within the LGBTQ+ spectrum (e.g., a study on bisexual people exclusively), (d) a study that purposefully recruited sexual or gender minorities to participate because the research question / aims necessitated it, (e) a study that reported group analyses (e.g., same-sex vs. mixed-sex relationships, LGBTQ+ vs non-LGBTQ+, transgender vs cisgender), or (f) a study that had findings or drew conclusions that applied to LGBTQ+ relationships, regardless of the sample.

This final category allowed us to include theoretical manuscripts and those on topics such as attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals using a heterosexual sample.

2.3 | Thematic analysis of LGBTQ+-relevant manuscripts

We followed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012) with some modifications due to the nature of the data and the purpose of the review. We organized the LGBTQ+-specific manuscripts based on their keywords (e.g., friendship, commitment) which also formed the initial codes. When a manuscript provided general keywords (e.g., same-sex couples) but specific keywords were not available, we read the abstract to determine the topics covered by the paper. We generated themes by consolidating initial codes into broader categories; for example, manuscripts focused on social support from partners, family members, and friends were combined into a single theme on social support. Themes were refined through consensus discussions among the authors. Our review focuses on the most common themes across the manuscripts, mainly highlighting key areas that have not been described in other reviews of LGBTQ+ research (e.g., friendships). We also identified gaps in the research conducted in the journals and potential areas for future research by carefully considering the methods, groups, and topics that infrequently appeared in keywords, abstracts, and our reading of each manuscript.

2.4 | Positionality statement

Before further discussing our review, we believe it is relevant to share information about our positionality as researchers. We are three scholars at different career stages who hold full-time tenure-track faculty positions at North American universities. We are all members of IARR, and collectively, we represent many of the areas of interest to IARR members, including Psychology, Family Studies, and Human Development, Communication Studies, Human Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Studies. Our research methods are diverse, and among us, we have expertise in qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, longitudinal, and psychophysiological research methodologies. While we identify as White cisgender women, we occupy different locations regarding our disability statuses, precise sexual minority identities, and gender presentations. We have a common interest in researching the relationships of LGBTQ+ people, and all have engaged in extensive research programs in this area.

We believe our own identities and research expertise position us well to undertake this review. However, we also recognize that we may have weaknesses in our perspectives, particularly the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and non-White racial and ethnic backgrounds and research involving populations outside of North America. Moreover, with our status as members of IARR and the positions that some of us hold within the organization and its associated journals, we are aware that we may not be as objective as researchers unaffiliated with IARR, JSPR, and PR, particularly considering how the results of our review may reflect upon the organization and its journals. Nonetheless, we have endeavored to let the data guide us in evaluating the literature's inclusiveness, understanding that communities can rarely make improvements when they have not first sought to articulate the problem clearly. We have tried to keep these potential limitations in mind as we engaged in this review.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 | RQ1: Recruitment and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and relationships

The first question guiding our review asks, “How have LGBTQ+ participants been recruited and included in research published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?” Recall that 1624 articles made no mention whatsoever of LGBTQ+ individuals or concepts. Of the 557 articles identified as potentially relevant, 42 studies specifically mentioned their exclusion of LGBTQ+ people from recruitment or analysis. In 146 studies, researchers collected and retained data from LGBTQ+ participants for analysis but decided not to examine or address differences in findings between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ community members. Our review identified 92 articles (4.2% of the total articles published in JSPR and PR) that fit our definition of relevant to understanding LGBTQ+ relationships, as described above. There were more manuscripts on LGBTQ+ people or relationships published in JSPR ($n = 65$) than in PR ($n = 27$); however, as a percentage of the total number of articles in each journal ($N = 1392$, 4.67% for JSPR; $N = 789$, 3.42% for PR), there was no difference between journals ($p_{Diff} = 0.012$, $z = 1.39$, $p > .05$). There did appear to be differences in the number of articles specific to LGBTQ+ people or relationships by year between the two journals. Figure 2 shows the percentage of LGBTQ+ relevant articles in each journal in five-year periods (considering the number of articles published in the respective journal during that period). JSPR had a higher percentage of LGBTQ+-relevant

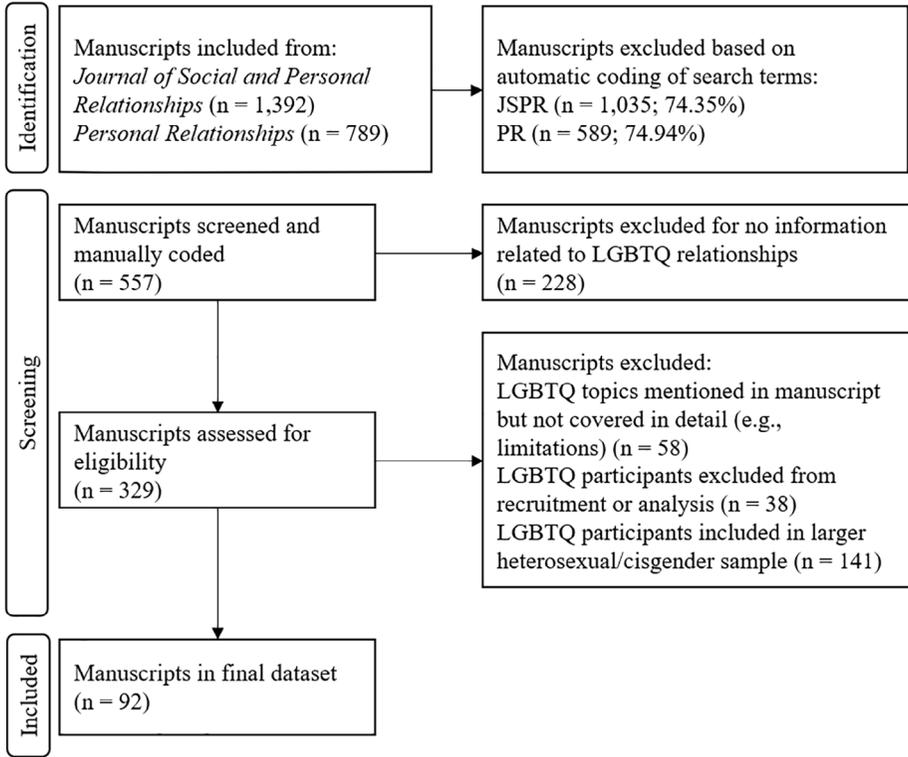


FIGURE 2 PRISMA flow diagram of the inclusion and exclusion of manuscripts for review

articles between 2002 and 2012 than PR, but both journals had similar percentages from 2013 to 2021.

Among the 38 articles that explicitly excluded LGBTQ+ participants from their study, 21 excluded LGBTQ+ participants at recruitment, while 16 had data on LGBTQ+ people that they ultimately removed from the data. Patterns in how and why researchers recruited and included LGBTQ+ participants in studies that did not analyze their data separately ($n = 141$) were more complex. Few of these studies recruited sexual or gender minorities because their research question necessitated inclusion ($n = 3$, 2.13%). Instead, some of these studies intentionally recruited sexual or gender minorities to increase the diversity of their sample, even if the analysis was not stratified ($n = 23$, 16.31%; these counts and percentages include studies that included sexual minorities, gender diverse people, or both). Many studies in this category did not purposefully recruit LGBTQ+ participants but instead incidentally asked demographic questions about sexual or gender identity ($n = 126$, 89.36%). The reasons for not conducting group comparisons among these studies included groups being too small ($n = 20$, 14.18%), LGBTQ+ participants not being relevant to their research question ($n = 42$, 29.79%), both ($n = 24$, 17.02%), or no reason was provided ($n = 55$, 39.01%). In comparison, the majority of LGBTQ+-relevant studies recruited LGBTQ+ participants because of their research question ($n = 91$, 98.91%), followed by studies that incidentally were able to identify LGBTQ+ participants through demographic questions ($n = 17$, 18.48%) and studies that sought a diverse sample ($n = 7$, 7.61%).

Research on LGBTQ+ participants, or LGBTQ+-inclusive research, can be more challenging due to where and how to recruit such participants. We show sampling techniques and research methodologies in Table 1. Over half of the LGBTQ+-relevant articles collected what

TABLE 1 Sampling techniques and research methodologies used in LGBTQ+ relevant articles, combined across both journals

	Qualitative ($n = 23$)		Quantitative ($n = 53$)		Mixed methods ($n = 16$)		Total ($n = 92$)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Sampling technique								
Newly collected sample	23	100.00	32	60.38	16	100.00	62	67.39
Archival sample	0	0.00	6	11.32	1	6.25	7	7.61
Nationally representative sample	0	0.00	5	9.43	3	18.75	8	8.70
Convenience sample	11	47.83	26	49.06	11	68.75	48	52.17
University sample	1	4.35	11	20.75	1	6.25	13	14.13
Non-university based sample	12	52.17	26	49.06	14	87.50	52	56.52
Method								
Dyadic	11	47.83	16	30.19	4	25.00	31	33.70
Individual	7	30.43	28	52.83	12	75.00	47	51.09
Cross-sectional	7	30.43	38	71.70	14	87.50	59	64.13
Longitudinal	3	13.04	7	13.21	1	6.25	11	11.96

Note: Percentages are calculated as within category (e.g., within qualitative studies). Studies could be categorized by more than one label.

would typically be called convenience samples (we believe a more appropriate term would be “community sample” given that recruiting LGBTQ+ samples is rarely convenient), often collecting online samples of couples (e.g., Guschlbauer et al., 2019). There are few nationally representative datasets that can be used to address relationship research questions with items on sexual and gender identity, though there have been recent advances in including these questions in national surveys in the U.S. (Russell et al., 2020). Thus, it is unsurprising that researchers often rely on non-probability samples in their research. We also note that there were more LGBTQ+-relevant studies that utilized non-university samples than university samples, suggesting that the work in this area can be relatively more generalizable than work that has relied on undergraduate populations.

Although there has been recent debate about whether it is appropriate to refer to LGBTQ+ populations as “hidden populations,” a recent article estimated that 83% of the world’s LGBTQ+ population at least partially conceals their identity (Pachankis & Bränström, 2019). Consequently, it is not surprising that recruiting LGBTQ+ participants for research can be uniquely challenging, especially for those who are not members of the community themselves or have not done so before. However, by looking back over this period, we can see the growth of new recruitment strategies, often spawned by the desire to study LGBTQ+ relationships. For example, when the second author was working on her MSc thesis in a small rural town in 2003, she quickly realized that the traditional sample recruitment methods would not be sufficient to recruit a sample of individuals in same-sex relationships. This challenge resulted in turning to then-nascent online research methodologies. Survey software common today was not yet available. Thus, the entire study was programmed using HTML, resulting in an online survey accessible from anywhere (Blair & Holmberg, 2008). Other researchers with interest in LGBTQ+ relationships began following suit. Thus, expanding relationships research to include LGBTQ+ identities and experiences may have contributed to the growth of novel research methods that we now consider commonplace today.

Others have spoken about the need to be creative in recruitment strategies when working with LGBTQ+ populations. For example, McCormack (2014) outlined the process of going “to the streets” to connect with local communities to recruit a large sample of bisexual men for his research. Other unique approaches to LGBTQ+-research methodologies have included tackling questions of broader interest to relationship scientists using samples initially recruited for LGBTQ+-specific studies. For example, Frost (2013) used a sample of 99 individuals in same-sex relationships and 51 in mixed-sex relationships to explore the associations between relationship narratives and well-being outcomes. While the authors pulled the sample from a more extensive study on LGBTQ+ relationship experiences, the narratives within the data provided an opportunity to explore a more generalized research question. In addition, the study is unique in relying upon a predominantly LGBTQ+ sample to explore issues of relevance to all relationship types.

A common refrain within the limitations section of the articles classified as “inclusive” but not LGBTQ+-relevant was that future research should seek to recruit more LGBTQ+ participants to facilitate more nuanced group analyses. Zeigler-Hill et al. (2021) presented one of the few articles to have followed through on such advice and utilized a unique methodological approach to confirm the lack of group differences as a function of sexual orientation in their study of narcissism and mate retention. After running two LGBTQ+-inclusive studies with relatively small LGBTQ+ subsamples, they added a third study focused exclusively on LGBTQ+ participants to explore potential group differences. While we have identified some innovative methods for including LGBTQ+ people in broader relationship studies, researchers have not

adopted these methods en masse, as evidenced by the large proportion of articles published that do not even report (or presumably collect) sexual or gender identity demographics.

3.1.1 | Demographics of participants in LGBTQ+-inclusive research

There were more studies that examined LGBTQ+ people or relationships exclusively ($n = 38$, 42.70%) than there were studies that compared LGBTQ+ to non-LGBTQ+ people ($n = 25$, 28.09%) or that were exclusively about one group within the LGBTQ+ umbrella ($n = 12$, 13.48%). Thus, most of the LGBTQ+-relevant research published in JSPR and PR in the past two decades has focused on the LGBTQ+ community as a whole or focused on various subgroups (e.g., lesbian and bisexual women; e.g., Veldhuis et al., 2019; gay and bisexual men; e.g., Stults, 2019). Only one article exclusively focused on the experiences of bisexual individuals, and more than half (54.3%) did not include (or identify) any bisexuals within their sample. Six studies were exclusively about heterosexual people (but relevant to LGBTQ+ topics; 6.5%), and 7 were mostly about heterosexual people but included some LGBTQ+ people (7.87%). Indeed, out of the 92 LGBTQ+-relevant articles (out of 2181), there were six times as many articles with exclusively heterosexual samples as there were studies with exclusively bisexual samples. The inclusion (and reporting) of bisexuals within research samples has increased over the past two decades, underscoring the importance of including sexual identity demographics that are either open-ended (e.g., van Anders, 2015) or provide a wide range of options.

The single article from the past 20 years that exclusively focused on a bisexual sample (Scherer et al., 2013) explored issues of jealousy related to imagined infidelity among bisexual men and women as a function of current partner gender. Participants indicated whether they would be most distressed by imagined sexual or emotional infidelity. The results indicated that bisexual men dating women were the most likely to report jealousy over sexual infidelity relative to the other three groups (Scherer et al., 2013). While we do not mean to take issue with the article itself, it is interesting to note that the only paper to explore the experiences of bisexual individuals did so in the service of better understanding evolutionary perspectives on sex differences in sexual jealousy. Indeed, the study used a bisexual sample to clarify an issue of broader concern, and the paper gave little attention to exploring the actual experiences of bisexual individuals or their relationships. One of the benefits of LGBTQ+-inclusive research methods is discovering novel research questions relevant to all relationships and even clarifying theoretical issues concerning mixed-sex relationships or cisgender experiences. However, we caution against research that exclusively relies upon LGBTQ+ samples to settle existing debates within the literature about heterosexual experiences without simultaneously advancing knowledge on LGBTQ+ lives and experiences.

Similar to a recent review of sex research (Klein et al., 2021), our review revealed an androcentric bias within the LGBTQ+-relevant research published in the last two decades in JSPR and PR. While 17.4% of the articles focused exclusively on sexual minority men, only 9.8% focused exclusively on sexual minority women. Indeed, when broken down further by sexual identity, a greater percentage (10.9%) of articles explicitly focused on the experiences of gay men than articles focused on all categories of sexual minority women. In addition, only 3.2% of articles ($n = 3$) focused exclusively on lesbians, with another 3.2% ($n = 3$) exploring comparisons between lesbian and heterosexual women, for a total of 6.5% of the articles focusing exclusively on lesbian members of the LGBTQ+ community (regardless of whether heterosexuals were included or not).

Most of the LGBTQ+-relevant research would be better described as LGBTQ-relevant research: though many studies included transgender people ($n = 15$, 16.67%), few studies included nonbinary people ($n = 4$, 4.44%). While we can conclude more about the lives of transgender individuals than we can about bisexuals from the research published in JSPR and PR since 2002, we learned relatively little: cisgender heterosexuals are unlikely to hypothetically consider transgender individuals as dating partners (Blair & Hoskin, 2019), conceptualizations of gender diversity vary by culture (Vanderlaan & Vasey, 2012), partners of trans individuals experience and navigate their partner's transition process in unique ways (Platt & Bolland, 2018), and partners of trans women can experience stigma by association (Gamarel et al., 2019). Like the entire LGBTQ+ population, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse individuals experience the same types of relationships and ranges of relationship experiences as cisgender, heterosexual individuals. Nevertheless, at this point, we know very little about the specific experiences of gender-diverse individuals across the wide variety of topics covered by relationship researchers.

While gender differences are often explored in LGBTQ+ relationships research, doing so can become cumbersome and challenging, especially for scholars working with smaller samples. Considering that there are frequently other variables of interest, including variables that may interact with sexual identity, relationship type, or gender, compounded by the growing expectation for dyadic and longitudinal data, it can very quickly become unfeasible for the average researcher to recruit the samples needed for more sophisticated research designs that take into consideration multiple demographic variables. Indeed, this is not an issue limited to the inclusion and analysis of gender but is a challenge faced by all researchers seeking to conduct more intersectional research using quantitative methods.

Although most of the relevant studies summarized in this review focused solely on LGBTQ+ people or relationships, many directly compared LGBTQ+ people to heterosexual people (or same-sex couples to different/mixed-sex couples). Often, this research shows few differences between groups. Moreover, even when studies find differences between sexual identities, these differences are often limited. For example, one study reported that ideal body sizes among lesbians were larger than those reported by heterosexual women but found that both lesbian and heterosexual women similarly perceived themselves as more overweight if their partner was thinner (Markey & Markey, 2014). Given the difficulty in publishing null findings, studies that show few differences between groups are essential contributions to JSPR and PR (Rosenthal, 1979).

3.1.2 | Intersectionality in LGBTQ+-relevant manuscripts

While intersectionality's application to social scientific research is still being "clarified and contested" (Peretz, 2021), intersectionality theory contends that aspects of social identities are interacting forces that influence human experience simultaneously. As such, intersectionality discourages thinking about people's experiences within an identity group (e.g., "gay men," "women") as monolithic while at the same time recognizing that a person's status in one identity category (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity) interacts with statuses in other identity categories to influence lived experiences (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). Importantly, intersectionality focuses on how marginalization occurs at these intersections and can highlight unique experiences of marginalization across various intersections of identities. LGBTQ+ relevant research published in JSPR and PR over the past two decades touched on some axes of

intersectionality, including culture and race/ethnicity, but others were left unexamined. For example, only two studies reported whether participants had a disability (2.17%) and studies of same-sex relationships rarely considered gender expression (Hoskin, 2017).

As discussed extensively in other outlets (e.g., Abreu et al., 2022; Sadika et al., 2020), LGBTQ+ experiences vary greatly due to race and ethnicity. Though 70 of the 92 LGBTQ+-relevant manuscripts (76.09%) reported the race/ethnicity of participants, the reviewed articles have not consistently analyzed the role of race and racism in LGBTQ+ relationships in ways that would allow for meaningful conclusions about how experiences of marginalization may (or may not) vary as a function of race and ethnicity. For example, while the HIV/AIDS epidemic has transformed into a “manageable” chronic disease with multiple treatments and preventative options (e.g., PREP), this transition is significantly more commonplace for white and higher SES gay, bisexual, and queer men. Thus, intersections of race and ethnicity with sexual identity, relationship status, and gender need additional research.

Authors were relatively consistent in describing where their studies took place, specifically which region inside North America or outside North America ($n = 41, 44.57\%$; $n = 10, 10.87\%$, respectively) the research occurred. Thus, a small amount of research explored how LGBTQ+ experiences vary as a function of culture. LGBTQ+-relationships science has taken a primarily Western cultural focus over the past two decades, with most published research in JSPR and PR focusing on the relationships and realities of LGBTQ+ individuals living in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, and Northern European nations. Keeping in mind cautions by Peretz (2021) that most theoretical thinking about intersectionality has a Western bias, as well as calls for researchers to apply more global thinking by carefully evaluating relevant axes of social difference that apply in specific contexts where their research takes place, we argue that more research on LGBTQ+ relationships outside of North America is needed.

Access to LGBTQ+ civil rights continues to vary widely around the globe, with 69 countries still criminalizing homosexuality as of 2021, including 11 where the death penalty is still a legal possibility (Mendos et al., 2020). While at various points in history, LGBTQ+ people around the globe potentially shared more in terms of their legal status and rights, the rapid expansion of LGBTQ+ rights in Western nations has created a much more distinct global division in LGBTQ+ rights. Indeed, LGBTQ+ persecution is grounds for asylum applications in many Western nations. This bifurcated distribution of rights creates challenges for envisioning a transnational approach to LGBTQ+-anything, including LGBTQ+-relationship science. On the one hand, discourses of human rights and human dignity emphasize the inherent worth of all LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of their geographic location. However, on the other hand, researchers in the West must carefully avoid simply attempting to “export” a specific cultural brand of LGBTQ+ acceptance and inclusion (Horne, 2020). For LGBTQ+ scholars, this means identifying the best routes to supporting international colleagues in their pursuit of human rights while allowing those on the ground to dictate the most culturally appropriate ways of navigating changing attitudes and laws (Blair & Hoskin, 2020).

Few scholars have discussed cultural differences in LGBTQ+ experiences of coping with discrimination. For example, Bin Ibrahim and Barlas (2021) interviewed nine gay men living in Singapore to understand better the factors that help the men's relationships thrive despite reduced rights and continued discrimination in Singapore. While the authors observe that many of the coping patterns for gay men reflect those identified in research using Western LGBTQ+ populations, they draw specific attention to the fact that collectivist coping strategies were common. Though such coping practices are associated with poorer outcomes in Western, individualistic samples, research in Asian societies shows that collectivist-oriented coping strategies can

reduce interpersonal stress, facilitating a continued connection to family and sources of social support. Studies like this one raise important questions and areas for future research in identifying the specific patterns of LGBTQ+ coping and resilience that may vary across cultures, religions, and ethnicities.

Other studies have contributed to cross-cultural knowledge concerning LGBTQ+ lives and relationships by using international samples (e.g., Romanian LGBTQ+ experiences with attachment and perceived discrimination; Popa-Velea et al., 2019) or focusing on specific ethnic sub-cultures. In an important example of how researchers can examine the intersection between sexual identity, race, and cultural experiences, Patrón (2021) expands on the concept of “precarious familismo” to discuss the need for an LGBTQ+-inclusive understanding of the familismo concept often relied upon to explain the unique emphasis placed on the family as a core value within Latina/o/Hispanic communities. Patrón (2021) notes that while most family and relationships scholars working with such communities focus on the positive associations of familismo, researchers have failed to consider how queer members of the culture sometimes experience rejection from their families and only have a precarious (conditional) form of the familismo phenomenon. It is essential to emphasize the need for those conducting LGBTQ+-relationships research to consider how different cultural conceptions of family and support structures, including the role of “chosen” family and broader cultural communities, may shape queer people’s experiences.

Just as cultural phenomena such as familismo may not transfer well to LGBTQ+ contexts and experiences, research on cross-cultural forms of gender diversity underscores that Western articulations of sexual and gender identity do not always translate well to other cultures. While this topic has not been explored extensively within JSPR and PR, one article in 2012 (Vanderlaan & Vasey, 2012) discussed the fa’afafine of Samoa. Fa’afafine is a term that describes individuals assigned male at birth who do not identify as men or women and who are sexually attracted to men but not to each other. While Western audiences may feel the urge to classify the fa’afafine as either gay men or trans women, Vanderlaan and Vasey (2012) argue that to do would be an inaccurate representation of how the fa’afafine themselves understand their identities.

3.2 | RQ2: LGBTQ+ relationship science methods

Our second research question asked, “RQ2: What research methods have scholars used to examine the relationships of LGBTQ+ people in research published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?” We show the types of methodologies used in these studies in Table 1. The majority of the LGBTQ+ relevant studies used quantitative research methods to explore the relationships of LGBTQ+ people. These studies were more likely to utilize data from individuals than from dyads. One of the challenges that may divert LGBTQ+-relevant research away from top quality/tier journals, such as PR and JSPR, may be the complexity of statistical analyses required to conduct LGBTQ+-inclusive and comparative quantitative research. Though dyadic research has added a great deal of clarity to relationships research, such methods make it challenging to simultaneously include so-called “distinguishable” and “indistinguishable” dyads within a single analysis, especially with longitudinal data.

Ledermann et al. (2017) outlined one potential solution in which scholars can employ a two-member, three-group, actor-partner interdependence model (2M3G APIM). The 2M3G APIM is capable of exploring actor-partner effects for distinguishable dyads (mixed-sex couples)

as well as group-level effects specific to indistinguishable dyads (men in same-sex relationships and women in same-sex relationships), thus preserving the options to explore the effects of both gender and relationship type within a single model. While this offers a solution for those capable of recruiting sample sizes needed to support such analyses, it requires that those wanting to publish LGBTQ+-inclusive research with multiple comparisons be familiar with some of the most sophisticated statistical analyses utilized within our field. The challenging requirements of recruiting large and diverse samples required to apply such analytic techniques and the associated complexities of statistically modeling interdependence when considering both dyads (within couple) and time (within-person) have resulted in a relatively sparse understanding of how relationship dynamics change over time for same- versus mixed-sex couples (Smith et al., 2020).

Whether within the researchers or analytic tools, statistical limitations contribute to some of the remaining understudied areas. For example, consider the question of how the gender expression (masculinity/femininity) of each partner may influence relationship experiences (e.g., Matheson et al., 2021) while simultaneously intersecting with gender/sex and diverse sexual identities within same-sex, gender-diverse, and mixed-sex relationships. Fully addressing such questions requires very sophisticated analyses or splitting the questions into individual pieces, thereby losing some of the ability to draw direct comparisons or simultaneously model the intersections of multiple variables. Nonetheless, methodological and analytic advances articulated within JSPR and PR to expand the degree of complexity (and therefore diversity) within a single analysis are essential contributions to the field.

There were fewer qualitative studies than quantitative studies, and even fewer used mixed methods. Though this is consistent with the tendency for quantitative research to be published more often than qualitative scholarship in both PR and JSPR, it is somewhat surprising that all 23 qualitative studies were published in JSPR. The most common analytic technique among qualitative studies consisted of grounded theory approaches ($n = 11$, 47.83%), in which authors often explicitly discussed using a social constructionist lens and inductive thematic coding. Other techniques included interpretative analysis ($n = 2$, 8.70%) and narrative analysis ($n = 2$, 8.70%). An analysis used in more recent qualitative studies in the journal (Konstam et al., 2019; Suter et al., 2006) was consensual qualitative research (CQR), which combines aspects of phenomenology, grounded theory, and comprehensive process analysis to provide researchers with clearly described, replicable steps for conducting qualitative analyses (Hill et al., 1997). In addition, more qualitative studies collected data from dyads ($n = 11$, 47.83% of qualitative studies) than from individuals ($n = 7$, 30.43% of qualitative studies). This trend is encouraging, given that qualitative analysis can capture rich information about family processes using data gathered from multiple relationship members (Ganong & Coleman, 2014). Scholars have described qualitative methods as particularly well-suited to studying marginalized identities, including LGBTQ+ individuals (Ganong & Coleman, 2014). Thus, a strength of qualitative research is the ability to address complex research questions with a depth not possible with statistical analysis. However, qualitative analysis can have a steep learning curve, with researchers feeling that the descriptions of these techniques “seem[ed] vague, difficult to comprehend, and equally difficult to implement” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 196). The decision of which qualitative analysis to use should depend on the study’s research question and the researcher’s ontological and epistemological views. Techniques such as CQR, which have more clearly delineated processes than other qualitative analyses, might be more easily accessible to researchers who are more familiar with quantitative analysis.

3.3 | RQ3: Thematic trends in findings among LGBTQ+-relevant manuscripts

Our third research question asked, “What are the themes evident in research examining LGBTQ+ relationships published in JSPR and PR from 2002 to April 2021?” Below we review a summary of the LGBTQ+-relevant content published in JSPR or PR since 2002.

3.3.1 | Sexual minority-specific relationship stressors

A key predictor of relationship outcomes and health is stress, especially if that stress stems from stigma-based discrimination related to someone's sexual or gender minority identity (Doyle & Molix, 2015; Meyer, 2003). Consistent with research published elsewhere (Reczek, 2020), studies published in JSPR and PR show that higher levels of sexual-minority-specific stressors are associated with poorer relationship quality (Cooper et al., 2020; Guschlbauer et al., 2019), including satisfaction (Clausell & Roisman, 2009; Mohr & Daly, 2008) and commitment (Hocker et al., 2021). Related to relationships, the research in this area appears to suggest two key themes: the role of internalized homophobia/homonegativity on relationship quality and health and relationship dynamics that buffer or exacerbate minority stressors. Studies on minority stress have shown that both proximal (e.g., sexual identity concealment and outness; Clausell & Roisman, 2009) and distal (e.g., discrimination and victimization; Cooper et al., 2020; Gamarel et al., 2019; Guschlbauer et al., 2019; Rosenthal et al., 2019; Wang, 2019) minority stressors influence relationship quality and health.

Several studies published in JSPR and PR show that internalized homophobia is detrimental to relationship and health outcomes. In one of the first manuscripts published on this topic in the journals, Otis et al. (2006) found that internalized homophobia, but not discrimination, predicted relationship quality among women and men in same-sex relationships. A longitudinal study among college students in same-sex relationships found similar results for internalized homonegativity compared to concealment (Mohr & Daly, 2008). Studies published in the past 5 years have, for the most part, confirmed these findings, including within the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic: Li and Samp (2021) found that the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on poorer relationship quality and mental health worsened for those with higher internalized homophobia.

These studies suggest that the internalizing of society's negative views towards sexual and gender minorities plays an important role in shaping relationship well-being for LGBTQ+ individuals. In other words, it is not always the degree of exposure to discrimination but rather the extent to which one has internalized or come to expect and perhaps even agree with the outer world's perception of one's identity and relationship that tends to have the greatest consequences for relationship well-being among sexual minorities. However, while internalized homophobia may be the most proximal predictor of relationship well-being, according to the studies we reviewed, other research has underscored the role of discrimination in predicting levels of internalized homophobia (Walch et al., 2016), such that often internalized homophobia is the mediating variable between discrimination and various outcomes.

Several studies have also considered how dynamics within the relationship mediate or moderate sexual-minority-specific stressors and outcomes. Commitment, in particular, appears to be an important protective factor. For example, Hocker et al. (2021) found that same-sex couples who reported more minority stress were less likely to engage in public displays of affection, a

vital relationship maintenance activity; however, this association was only significant for those with low commitment. Moreover, a study of 191 cisgender heterosexual men dating transgender women found that commitment buffered the association between interpersonal stigma and psychological distress (Gamarel et al., 2019).

3.3.2 | Relationship preferences

A unique area explored by articles in the two journals is how and with whom sexual minority and gender diverse people form relationships. When it comes to examining whom LGBTQ+ individuals seek to date or befriend, approaches have paralleled those used with heterosexual populations and have often tended towards gender-essentialist questions, methodologies, and conclusions (Hyde et al., 2019; Schudson et al., 2018). Thus, for example, evolutionary theory has been applied to explorations of mate selection among transgender people (Aristegui et al., 2018) and in exploring preferences for younger versus older partners in straight versus gay/lesbian men and women (Conway et al., 2015)

In addition to research exploring the specific characteristics of desired partners (e.g., age, socioeconomic status, attractiveness), others have explored openness to dating individuals of specific minority groups, either by race or gender identity. In general, sexual and gender minority people are not necessarily more likely to date across lines of difference. For example, Tsunokai et al. (2014) conducted a study with heterosexual men and women and gay men to explore openness to dating Asian partners and found that heterosexual women and gay men preferred to date white men. Heterosexual men were more willing to date Asian people than were heterosexual women or gay men. Considering gender identity, the vast majority of one sample (87.5%) reported an unwillingness to date transgender partners. However, openness varied by identity, such that individuals with nonbinary sexual (bisexual, queer) or gender identities were more open to dating transgender partners (Blair & Hoskin, 2019)

Scholars have also investigated friendship patterns among LGBTQ+ individuals. LGBTQ+ people often form friendships with those similar to them in terms of sex and race (Galupo, 2007) but are more likely to form cross-sex and cross-race friendships than heterosexual people (Galupo, 2009). Moreover, while LGBTQ+ people are more likely to have cross-orientation friendships than heterosexual people (Galupo, 2009; Morris, 2018), bisexual people are more likely than gay men and lesbians to have heterosexual friends and bisexual friends but less likely to have gay/lesbian friends (Galupo, 2009).

3.3.3 | Social support in and for LGBTQ+ relationships

Relationships are a source of social support and an entity that requires support from social networks. Social support from partners is a crucial aspect of romantic relationships, and studies on social support in LGBTQ+ relationships in JSPP and PR have examined social control efforts to improve health (August et al., 2016) and support for a partner experiencing psychological distress (Thomeer et al., 2021). In addition, research consistently shows that same-sex couples report better relationship quality than mixed-sex couples, often because of increased support between partners (Ellis & Davis, 2017; Thomeer et al., 2021). However, it is important to consider the role of social support from others outside the relationship. Research on mixed-sex relationships has linked social support to relationship well-being and longevity

(e.g., Sprecher, 2011). Indeed, research in JSPR and PR has confirmed that it is also an important predictor of relational, mental, and physical health outcomes for those in same-sex relationships (Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Blair et al., 2018; Holmberg & Blair, 2016; Lehmilller, 2012).

Most LGBTQ+ relevant manuscripts were focused on romantic relationships ($n = 63$, 68.48%), but many also examined peer relationships and friendships ($n = 15$, 16.30%). Friendships provide an essential source of social support. Particularly relevant to LGBTQ+ lives and relationships is the notion of “chosen” or “voluntary” family/kin (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Blair & Pukall, 2014). When their family members are unsupportive or rejecting, LGBTQ+ people often turn to their friendship networks for support. The notion of voluntary kin is closely linked to traditional understandings of “chosen family” and their role in providing social support for LGBTQ+ people estranged from or disowned by their families of origin. Even when families of origin are accepting, LGBTQ+ individuals may still turn to their chosen family for social support, as often their family members may not be able to provide LGBTQ+-specific support in terms of guidance on coping with discrimination or seeking same-sex relationships (Williams et al., 2016). Chosen families and communities are also critical for supporting LGBTQ+ people who leave anti-LGBTQ+ environments and communities (Alessi et al., 2021). In addition, the support they offer ameliorates the association between family victimization and mental health outcomes (Parra et al., 2018). Over time, as LGBTQ+ people age, chosen family may become even more critical. Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen (2011) found that close friends were often the only source of caregiving for LGBTQ+ individuals, unlike heterosexual people whose close friends more typically supplement the caregiving of family members.

Although chosen families are important for LGBTQ+ individuals, much of the existing research has focused on social support from families of origin (Reczek, 2020). Less research has focused on support from friends but has identified that support from close friends, including heterosexual friends, is important to the relationship quality and overall well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals (Blair et al., 2018; Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Dane & MacDonald, 2009; Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Rodrigues et al., 2019). A smaller portion of the literature has specifically compared support from friends and family. In these instances, particularly in terms of social support for romantic relationships, it is often the support from friends that is more strongly associated with outcomes for those in same-sex relationships (Blair et al., 2018; Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Holmberg & Blair, 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2019). Notably, those in same-sex relationships consistently report lower levels of perceived support than their counterparts in mixed-sex relationships, including support specifically for their romantic relationships and particularly from their family members or parents (e.g., Holmberg & Blair, 2016). Thus, the observation of weakened associations between perceived support from family and relational, mental, and physical well-being may be a sign of resilience within same-sex relationships. Unsurprisingly, then, LGBTQ+ people may seek support from close friends before family members, even when their family members are supportive (Haas, 2002).

Given the importance of friendship as a source of social support for LGBTQ+ individuals, it is not surprising that research published in JSPR and PR has sought to learn more about the types of friendship patterns among LGBTQ+ individuals. LGBTQ+ people are more likely to stay friends with their ex-romantic partners than heterosexuals, mainly because they do not wish to lose the social and emotional support they received from their partners (Griffith et al., 2017). Research on whether the content and quality of LGBTQ+ people's friendships with heterosexuals differ compared to their LGBTQ+ friendships is mixed. For example, Ueno et al. (2009) found no differences in emotional closeness depending on LGB youth's friends' sexual orientation, and the benefit of higher-quality friendships for better mental health also did not

differ. However, LGBTQ+ people may have different expectations for the quality of their friendships depending on sex and gender: lesbians have lower expectations for emotional closeness in their friendships with heterosexual men than gay men have for heterosexual women (Willis, 2014).

3.3.4 | Commitment and marriage in LGBTQ+ relationships

An area that has received significant attention during the timeline for this review is commitment and marriage in LGBTQ+ relationships. The research published in JSPR and PR reflects the trajectory of legal recognition of LGBTQ+ relationships in much of the world during the review time frame. In 2002, only one country provided any form of legal recognition of same-sex unions, while today, in 2022, legal marriage is available to same-sex couples in 30 countries (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Studies on LGBTQ+ relational commitment often reflect the stigmatized status of these relationships and how couples established and maintained their committed relationships within this context. Studies conducted with LGBTQ+ samples that had the option for legal marriage or a similar civil or legal option reflect the shift for these relationships from stigmatized to institutionalized and continuing challenges for LGBTQ+ couples even when legal recognition and protections for their relationships are available.

LGBTQ+ Relational Commitment. Early studies on LGBTQ+ commitment often compared gay and lesbian couples to heterosexual counterparts and, in doing so, highlighted how the inability to institutionalize LGBTQ+ relationships affected commitment processes (Kurdek, 2006, 2007). Kurdek (2007) demonstrated that same-sex couples had commitment levels similar to mixed-sex couples, despite lacking access to legalized forms of relationship recognition. The study assessed the applicability of the Investment Model of Relationship Commitment (Rusbult et al., 1998) to same-sex relationships, and Kurdek argued that classifying same-sex couples as “dating” only because they lacked access to legal marriage was potentially misleading.

To compare commitment levels between same- and different-sex couples in the absence of legal recognition, Lehmilller (2010) considered the role of tangible investments, considering that investments may function as a substantial barrier to leaving a legally-recognized relationship because these investments may become tied up in formal relationship dissolution processes (i.e., divorce). Though same-sex couples create tangible investments (e.g., finances) through multiple means, these investments may be more challenging to make (e.g., unable to create a spousal retirement plan) without any formal or legal recognition of their relationships. The lack of legal barriers (and protections) involved in any potential relationship dissolution may naturally reduce the association between investments and commitment. Consequently, Lehmilller (2010) found that the positive association between tangible investments and commitment was weaker for men in same-sex relationships than men in mixed-sex relationships and suggested that tangible investments may acquire more meaning for commitment with legal recognition.

Other researchers have explored the meaning and definition of commitment within same-sex relationships. For example, in two recent studies using diverse samples, LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ participants did not differ in terms of their likelihood of engaging in a “defining the relationship talk” (Knopp et al., 2020) or in how they constructed and defined the meaning of commitment (Konstam et al., 2019). Both studies relied on relatively young samples (adolescents in Knopp et al., 2020 and emerging adults in Konstam et al., 2019) who came of age in an era that had already legalized same-sex marriage. Though these studies did not directly measure

commitment, they suggest that today's young people approach and discuss commitment similarly, regardless of their sexual identities. Future research should continue to explore commitment in same-sex relationships to identify potential changes after marriage equality.

Legal Marriage and LGBTQ+ Relationships. During the timeline covered in this review, legal recognition, most often marriage, for LGBTQ+ couples expanded in many locations worldwide. New legal recognition for same-sex couples represented opportunities to institutionalize existing relational commitments and offered opportunities for couples to communicate their commitment to their friends and family members (Lannutti, 2005, 2011). Though LGBTQ+ people report numerous positive aspects of the legalization of same-sex marriage, particularly as a fundamental civil right that would afford legal protections to same-sex partnerships, there were also more complex understandings of legal marriage (Lannutti, 2005). LGBTQ+ people described possible negative consequences of marriage, such as couples marrying for the “wrong” reasons, diminishing the uniqueness of the LGBTQ+ community in favor of heteronormative ideals, and possible increased attack from non-supportive heterosexual community members (Lannutti, 2005). Unfortunately, the latter has come true, with increases in anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes every year since 2015 in both Canada and the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018; Moreau, 2021). In a follow-up study, Lannutti (2011) found that older couples pointed specifically to the possibility of marriage helping LGBTQ+ widows to gain more support but also expressed concerns about personal safety related to “outing” oneself by getting married (Lannutti, 2011). Lannutti's (2005, 2011) findings reflect the complex nature of legal marriage, how a shift in socio-cultural context can affect personal relationships, and the lingering effects of discrimination even when legal marriage is available.

Ogolsky et al. (2019) examined associations between minority stress and individual well-being for LGBTQ+ people before and after legalizing same-sex marriage across the US. Ogolsky et al. (2019) found that psychological distress decreased and life satisfaction increased after the US Supreme Court's ruling among those who experienced higher, rather than lower, initial levels of minority stress. In other words, individuals who experienced higher levels of minority stress appeared to benefit the most in terms of their well-being increasing after the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US. Although the studies reviewed provide only a glimpse into how legal marriage affects LGBTQ+ people and their relationships, they suggest that marriage may have positive benefits and that LGBTQ+ people have complex views. Future research should explicitly examine how getting married affects LGBTQ+ couples and identify differences between married and non-married committed LGBTQ+ couples.

3.3.5 | Heterosexism

An important area of research is understanding heterosexism and cissexism among heterosexual people, particularly regarding LGBTQ+ relationships, because these attitudes and actions shape LGBTQ+ individuals' well-being, relationships, and access to civil liberties. JSPR and PR research have contributed to this area, publishing research on worldviews and attitudes related to sexual prejudice and gender norms that shape the worlds in which LGBTQ+ individuals grow up, define their identities, and build their relationships.

Heterosexuals' Relationships with LGBTQ+ Individuals. Interestingly, few studies published in PR and JSPR focused on heterosexual attitudes towards same-sex relationships or LGBTQ+ people; instead, studies in this area explored more nuanced questions about heterosexual relationships *with* LGBTQ+ people. Although LGBTQ+ individuals receive more

support for their romantic relationships from their friends than their families, this support is only possible when LGBTQ+ individuals can first form friendships. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to have a higher percentage of other LGBTQ+ individuals in their social networks than are heterosexual individuals (Blair & Holmberg, 2019). While one reason for this may relate to the phenomenon of chosen families, another is the unwillingness of cisgender heterosexual individuals to be friends with LGBTQ+ individuals (Galupo, 2009; Morris, 2018). Even once cross-group friendships between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals have formed, heterosexuals may still view their LGBTQ+ friends differently, or less favorably, than their heterosexual friends (Muraco, 2005). These attitudes may be motivated by heterosexism, such as assuming that LGBTQ+ people are hypersexual when interpreting platonic friendship behaviors. Thus, while most heterosexual people will act kindly and considerately towards their LGBTQ+ friends, some do so while still engaging in heterosexism (Muraco, 2005).

Heterosexism can extend even to hypothetical instances of infidelity: heterosexual men and women report more negative emotional responses to imagined instances of mixed-sex compared to same-sex infidelity (Denes et al., 2015), suggesting that they view cheating with a same-sex partner as less of a threat to their romantic relationships and, by extension, may view same-sex sexual experiences, or even relationships, as less valid or genuine.

Femmephobia. Femmephobia is the societal devaluation and regulation of femininity (Hoskin, 2017, 2019) and regulates who can enact femininity (e.g., cisgender, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, women) while simultaneously ridiculing and demoting individuals and objects deemed feminine. Femmephobia has been described as a “common thread” connecting a multitude of societal prejudices, including misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia (Hoskin, 2020), and placing femininity in the crosshairs of various forms of victimization, ranging from bullying and harassment to sexual assault and murder (Hoskin, 2017, 2019).

Three studies demonstrated the role that femmephobia can have on friendships and social belonging throughout the lifespan, with children targeting femininity for rejection and bullying and adult men sacrificing closer relationships to avoid appearances of femininity. Boys and girls as young as 9 years old who engage in more masculine activities and exhibit fewer feminine behaviors experience more peer acceptance (Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013). Later in adulthood, the fear of being thought of as gay leads men to engage in fewer “feminine” relationship maintenance behaviors in their same-sex friendships, such as self-disclosure, resulting in poorer quality relationships (Morman et al., 2013). In an in-depth interview study, feminist-identified black men discussed the role that societal homophobia plays in restricting the quality and intimacy of men’s friendships. The men noted that they felt the need to hide (or regulate) their feminine traits and interests in friendships with other men but could more freely express these sides of themselves in friendships with feminist women. Thus, societal views and treatment of femininity serve to shape anti-LGBTQ+ prejudices (e.g., homophobia, transphobia) and the well-being and relationship/friendship quality of cisgender heterosexual individuals.

3.3.6 | Other research areas of note

We have highlighted the key thematic areas that appeared most frequently within the two journals. However, we covered other themes in less detail, mainly because these topics are covered extensively elsewhere (e.g., Goldberg & Allen, 2020; Reczek, 2020). There were a few papers on LGBTQ+ parenthood, which overall showed that the experiences of same-sex,

specifically lesbian, parents are similar to heterosexual parents (Goldberg et al., 2009; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Hequembourg, 2004). However, lesbian parent families often divide their labor more equally than heterosexual parent families (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Shenkman, 2018; for detailed summaries of research on LGBTQ+-parent families, see Goldberg & Allen, 2020). JSPR and PR articles have also examined how relationship status (e.g., marriage, cohabitation, singlehood) predicts relationship quality and health outcomes. Since the legalization of marriage in some countries, research in this area has begun to explore differences in same-sex couples as a function of marital status (Reczek, 2020) and continues to expand to explore differences in relationship status and outcomes by gender and sexual identity (Veldhuis et al., 2019; Whitton et al., 2020), as well as monogamy status (Stults, 2019). Finally, a few studies examined differences in attachment style between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual people (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Gaines Jr. & Henderson, 2002; Popa-Velea et al., 2019), reporting minimal differences between groups. Gaines Jr. and Henderson (2002) explored the association between attachment styles at the dyadic level and the likelihood of each partner engaging in relationship-enhancing or relationship-threatening behaviors when responding to negative experiences (e.g., partners' criticism or anger). Those with secure attachment styles were more likely to engage in relationship-enhancing behaviors suggesting that "certain relationship processes transcend partners' gender and sexual orientation" (Gaines Jr. & Henderson, 2002, p. 92).

4 | SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Within this paper, we have reviewed manuscripts published between 2002 and 2021 from the top two relationship science journals, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*. The articles published on LGBTQ+ relationships during this time have contributed to a wide range of topics, including methods, minority stress, relationship formation, social support, and commitment. Some of the content from the first decade of this review may now be dated, although it is likely that many of the main findings still hold (e.g., commitment in same-sex relationships, the impact of societal prejudice on same-sex relationship well-being). Social science research will always lag behind current sociopolitical moments; thus research will always be playing catch-up. Regardless, the LGBTQ+ research published in these journals contributes essential knowledge to the field and serves as the foundation for continued research.

Although both journals published research relevant to LGBTQ+ relationships relatively consistently over the past two decades, the field of relationships research is still deeply invested in heteronormativity, even when researchers make efforts to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ experiences. Research questions examining differences between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ relationships were common, though most studies showed minimal differences between groups. Many studies focused on understanding how minority stress impacts relationships, demonstrating a continued focus on how LGBTQ+ relationships might be different or might be more likely to experience adverse outcomes. LGBTQ+-inclusive research methods have, however, done more than simply provide knowledge about the functioning of same-sex and gender-diverse relationships. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ experiences in relationships science has also advanced relationship science more broadly. Despite this, significant gaps in the literature remain, specifically concerning the study of bisexual, transgender, and non-binary relationship experiences.

We observed significant breadth concerning topic areas covered by LGBTQ+-relevant articles. However, one overarching area of research appeared to receive no attention within the LGBTQ+-relevant articles: Relationship violence. While JSPR and PR, and relationship science in general, do not tend to avoid studying the negative aspects of relationship functioning (e.g., infidelity, abuse, family violence, sexual violence), very little research published in these two journals since 2002 has examined these topics within the context of LGBTQ+ relationships. It may be that prior to same-sex marriage legalization and the granting of greater protections for gender diversity, research on violence between LGBTQ+ partners was seen as too risky.

Indeed, it is not uncommon for individuals arguing against civil rights for LGBTQ+ individuals to misconstrue LGBTQ+ research. For example, amicus briefs *opposing* same-sex marriage in the US misrepresented Lisa Diamond's work on sexual fluidity in attempts to argue that sexual identity is not an *immutable* characteristic (see Stein, 2014). Diamond has clearly articulated that naturally occurring fluctuations in an individual's sexual identity and attractions do not equate to evidence that sexual identity can be forcibly changed (e.g., conversion therapy). However, she has frequently had to defend her work against ideological attacks and misuse by the far-right and others seeking to limit the civil rights and relationship recognitions now afforded to LGBTQ+ relationships and families (Diamond & Rosky, 2016).

Thus, although LGBTQ+ rights have advanced, researchers may remain somewhat reluctant to turn their attention to interpersonal violence in LGBTQ+ relationships. LGBTQ+ individuals are not immune to intimate partner, sexual, or family violence. Sexual minority women and girls, especially bisexuals, are at an increased risk of sexual and dating violence (Waterman et al., 2021). While these topics have begun to be covered elsewhere (e.g., Decker et al., 2018), no work in JSPR or PR has directly tackled such topics. Thus, a clear area for future research lies in better understanding abuse, relationship dissolution, divorce, conflict, and family violence within the context of LGBTQ+ lives.

Overall, there was a relatively low number of articles relevant to LGBTQ+ people. Even if coverage of LGBTQ+ relationships within the top two relationships science journals was perfectly matched to estimates of Americans identifying as LGBTQ+, the coverage of this topic over the past two decades would still be lagging (4.22% of articles vs. 5.6% of the US population; Jones, 2021). Moreover, the leading sex research journals (*Journal of Sex Research & Archives of Sexual Behavior*) have a considerably higher percentage of LGBTQ+-relevant research (Klein et al., 2021), which may be related to the common tendency to associate sexual minorities with concepts of sex and sexual behavior more so than other aspects of human existence. Perhaps researchers find that niche sex-research and LGBTQ+-focused journals are more likely to consider submissions of research on LGBTQ+ relationships than either JSPR or PR.

Of course, without access to data on submissions to each journal, we cannot determine the extent to which LGBTQ+-relevant relationships research is simply not submitted for consideration to JSPR and PR or whether such research may systematically be diverted or rejected from the journals. However, a close look at other recent reviews that provide an overview of LGBTQ+ relationships shows that authors manage to write such reviews without citing any articles from JSPR or PR (e.g., Diamond & Blair, 2018; Reczek, 2020), suggesting that researchers do not look to these journals as places where LGBTQ+ research is highlighted. Multiple authors have provided recommendations on increasing diversity in published social science research (e.g., Abreu et al., 2022; Rad et al., 2018; Williamson et al., 2022). Based on the results of our analysis, if increasing the diversity of populations and topics is valued by JSPR and PR, then we encourage researchers, journal editors, and reviewers to carefully consider further exploring what processes may be contributing to the dearth of LGBTQ+-relevant research

within the two leading relationships journals, especially work with international or intersectional focus.

Relatively few LGBTQ+-relevant articles used qualitative methods, despite the critical contributions that such methods make to in-depth understandings of LGBTQ+ relationships. The qualitative articles that did exist were published in JSPR. We assume that both journals value qualitative research, so it is unclear why this discrepancy exists. We recommend that the journal editors consider broadening the methodological scope of the editorial boards to include scholars who use a variety of qualitative approaches, including mixed methods approaches. It may be helpful to have additional action editors with qualitative expertise who can provide clear, detailed guidelines for publishing qualitative research in JSPR and PR (e.g., Frieze, 2013).

4.1 | Policy and clinical implications

Across the manuscripts, authors advocated for inclusive and supportive policies that would benefit LGBTQ+ people, especially legal recognition of relationships. In earlier manuscripts published before *Obergefell* versus *Hodges* in 2015, scholars discussed marriage equality as a necessary policy change for supporting LGBTQ+ people and their relationships, and indeed, legal briefs for same-sex marriage in the United States and elsewhere cited articles from JSPR and PR (e.g., Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Kurdek, 2007). Same-sex marriage is now legal in most Western countries, and positive social climates, including anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination laws, can reduce minority stress to benefit people, their relationships, and their families (Ogolsky et al., 2019). However, many jurisdictions around the globe still punish LGBTQ+ people and relationships severely and marriage equality cannot be the final step in policy work. Research on LGBTQ+ relationships should continue to suggest and advocate for policy changes. Empirical research on LGBTQ+ lives is crucial to supporting policy, such as the Canadian Psychological Association's policy statement opposing conversion therapy, which was instrumental in the CPA's ability to encourage the Federal Government in Canada to pass some of the world's most comprehensive legislation banning conversion therapy.

Although JSPR and PR are not clinical journals, their research has implications for clinical work with LGBTQ+ people and their relationships. This research can support the training of clinicians to recognize the discrimination and stress that LGBTQ+ people face; stress which spills over (Cooper et al., 2020; Totenhagen et al., 2012) and affects relationships through interpersonal interactions (Boesch et al., 2007; Guschlbauer et al., 2019). Moreover, research on relationships shows that clinical training and work are fertile ground for developing interventions to support LGBTQ+ people. For example, findings from Wrubel et al. (2010) show that couples with one or more HIV+ partners can provide social support for antiretroviral therapy adherence by integrating it into the relationship, creating a sense of "couple responsibility." In addition, interventions that promote the positive aspects of relationships for men living with HIV could increase adherence to antiretroviral or pre-exposure prophylaxis therapy (Rodríguez de Los Reyes & Urriola González, 2017). At present, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ content and training is minimal in most APA and CPA-accredited clinical psychology programs, despite evidence that LGBTQ+ individuals seeking relationship counseling would prefer therapeutic interventions tailored to their needs (Pepping et al., 2017). Given the importance of high-quality relationship science to developing effective therapeutic interventions, growing the reputation of JSPR and PR as valuable and reliable resources for LGBTQ+-relevant relationships science is critical.

5 | CONCLUSION

In the past 20 years, LGBTQ+ people have experienced huge changes in rights and representation, but also enormous pushback, especially across the globe. Social relationships, including romantic, family, and peer relationships, are important aspects of the lives of all people; however, less is known about the relationships of LGBTQ+ people, particularly those at the margins. In this review, we focused on the flagship journals of the International Association of Relationships Research to better understand the state of the field of LGBTQ+ relationship science. The work in these journals has contributed knowledge in areas as broad as relationship commitment and as nuanced as the gender identities of fa'afafine of Samoa (Vanderlaan & Vasey, 2012). However, our review also shows that, despite these contributions, there is much work to be done to better understand the relationships of marginalized LGBTQ+ people. Looking forward to the next 20 years, we hope that our colleagues in the field and leading the journals will continue to expand their dedication and ability to conduct and disseminate high-quality, LGBTQ+-inclusive research with an increasingly greater focus on deciphering the minutiae of all the colorful intersections of identity that make up the true richness of human relationships.

5.1 | Dedication

Of the 92 LGBTQ+-relevant articles identified, Lawrence “Larry” Kurdek authored the greatest number: 5, all published between 2002 and 2010. Larry was an early contributor to LGBTQ+-inclusive relationship science before his work was cut short by terminal cancer in 2009 at the age of 58. A full 12 years after his passing, no other scholar has published more LGBTQ+-relationships research in *JSPR* and *PR*. His contribution to relationship science cannot be understated: he was among the first to legitimize LGBTQ+-inclusive research methods and he has been remembered by colleagues for the legacy of contributing to the normalization of stigmatized relationships (Hennessy et al., 2011). Indeed, the APA cited his work in their amicus briefs supporting marriage equality (American Psychological Association, 2011). His main body of research on LGBTQ+ individuals is based upon a decade-long “single-handedly conducted and unfunded longitudinal study” (Hennessy et al., 2011, p. 231) that was among the first to simultaneously assess heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples. He is widely cited by other relationships scholars and, it would appear that his work was foundational to the growing inclusion of LGBTQ+ relationships research within *JSPR* and *PR*. With great respect, we conclude this review by dedicating it to Larry’s trailblazing body of work, without which we may have had far fewer manuscripts to include.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (Amanda M. Pollitt, Amanda.Pollitt@nau.edu) upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Amanda M. Pollitt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5428-2283>

Karen L. Blair  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8602-098X>

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