

## Review Article

# Avenues for Future LGBT Theory and Research

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**Abstract**

In terms of theory, some research on LGBT issues has not used any explicit theory, other research only implicit theory. Sexual minority theories, including queer or queer-feminist theories, offer promise of helping understand the unique subjective perspectives of LGBT persons and families; however, such theories may operate to justify LGBT experiences (good or bad) and may enable scholars to overlook research findings that do not fit their preconceived ideas. Weaknesses of identity theory are considered. Social exchange theory is offered as another approach that may help evaluate research or develop theory from a more even-handed perspective. However, more recent research has been willing to look at positive aspects of the LGBTQ experience rather than a primary focus on negative experiences such as discrimination and stigmatization, which may allow greater use of social exchange theory. Some research results, even social science consensus, have been at least partly overturned by more recent research, warning scholars about drawing conclusions too quickly in the historical development of a research area. Social desirability effects should be taken into account in future research, as well as intersectionality effects.

**INTRODUCTION**

Improvements need to be made in both theoretical development and in research in LGBT issues. It is not just that more research is needed, but higher quality research is needed, applied to a wider range of races, genders, as well as parental and socioeconomic statuses. It is suggested that biased theory and research are limiting the attainment of a more accurate understanding of LGBTQ relationships, especially in relation to other types of relationships. My approach will be more brainstorming and suggestive (even radical for some?) rather than definitive with a hope that future scientists may be more careful with their theory development and research projects in the future. I hope that critical readers don't take me, this article, or themselves too seriously, even though I am trying to expose some virtually sacred cows of current Western culture and social science theory in parallel in some ways with other scholars [1-4, especially 4].

**Theoretical developments**

Many social science articles do not use theory explicitly, a situation that holds as well for articles concerning LGBTQ issues [1], even for highly cited articles on such issues [2]. While a wide range of family theories are used occasionally, some of the more widely used theories are sexual minority theory or sexual minority stress theory, and, more recently, queer or queer-feminist theory [3,4]. Sexual minority theory has been useful for considering the effects of discrimination against LGBTQ persons

and families. Queer theory has become increasingly important in recent years, with a focus on resistance to heterosexually normative ideas [3,4]. Social constructionism has played a large role in allowing researchers to define concepts loosely on the basis of perceptions and how things are defined as much by powerful interests in society as by individuals, who have the potential to redefine [5]. I have concerns that social constructionism can lead one to prioritize feelings over facts, power over justice, felt inequality over actual inequality, the subjective over the true, or the material over the spiritual (the order reversed on purpose for the latter comparison).

While every theory is useful, this author worries about any theory that seems all-too-useful for self-justification of its adherents. We have to be careful that we are not using theory to justify ourselves especially when we violate our own personal values [6]. For example, when I hear the term "natural law" I cringe a bit because I expect to hear about why progressive ideas are wrong. It's not that natural law theory is "bad" per se, but it seems to me that it is often used to justify conservative positions. Likewise, when I hear the term "queer theory" I expect to hear about how queer is normal and even that heterosexual marriage should be queered [7] under an assumption that heterosexual marriage is inherently defective. As another example, some adherents to queer-feminist theory have argued that "Further, queer critiques suggest nonmonogamy can be a liberating and empowering act that destabilizes heteronormativity, and provides freedom and agency (i.e., capacity to choose" for the construction of relationships" [3:44], "... monogamy is heteronormative,

restrictive, and counter-productive to relationship success” [3:46] and “Mononormativity is grounded in a dominant cultural ideology that promotes monogamy as a primary relationship ideal and renders all (non)monogamous relationship processes inferior, although there is no empirical evidence to support such distinctions” [3:51]. For one, the predictions of such theories are too predictable, which to me makes them less interesting than theories that explain things that would not have been expected [8,9].

But to me, such queer-feminist arguments are one-sided because they seem to overlook the possibility that there just might be some good exchange theory [10] reasons for the granting of monogamy in “most Westernized cultures” [3:43] a “privileged cultural role in relational functionality” [3:44]. I’d much prefer an approach where you have theory A predicts X and theory B predicts Y, so let’s test them and see which theory fits the data better [11]. As scientists we should be willing to design our research so our most cherished ideals can be proven incorrect. In that sense, I love queer-feminist theory because it raises the possibility that the ideal of monogamy might be incorrect, but I also think that queer-feminist theorists should design their research so that their ideals might be disconfirmed as well. If you don’t design your research so it can be falsified, then you may only be biasing your results to justify your own beliefs or values.

## Two illustrations

On one hand, I think that criticism of traditional theories or research can be exceedingly useful, in part because it encourages re-thinking of old ideas in new ways that may help us understand the “why” and “how” of older theories or research for life today. On the other hand, I also think that traditional theories or research should not automatically be rejected simply because they have been in existence for some time or may seem to reflect traditional ways of doing things. Two concrete examples may help illustrate my two points. The first story, told long ago, starts with a daughter asking her mother why she cut the ends off her meat roast before she put it into a pan and into the oven. The mother says her mother always did it that way. They called up grandma and asked her and she said that her only oven pan was too small for most roasts so she cut off the ends so they would fit into her small pan. In other words, sometimes rules, ideas, or theories had good beginnings but they continued to be maintained when they were no longer appropriate. The rule was acceptable at first but became a problem when the circumstances and times had changed.

To change to a second illustration, one possibly archaic rule in the military is that officers, especially the commander, are supposed to eat last when meals are being served outdoors under simulated tactical conditions. In contrast, some of my fellow officers believed the idea that “rank has its privileges” and that therefore the “eat last” rule was outdated and no longer relevant in this modern age, so they would shove lower ranking personnel aside and fill their own bellies first. As I pondered this phenomenon over the years, I realized that there were many advantages to following this presumably “archaic” rule. First, if the officer can hold off their hunger pangs, it may suggest to the rest of the unit that the leaders might do better under stress, even during the intensity of combat; if unit leaders cannot hold

off their hunger needs, how could they hold off their other needs when the going really got tough? Second, the officer can observe numerous important processes, including the extent and type of food waste, the degree of camouflage and social distancing in the area, the application of personal and dining hygiene, the equitable distribution of food in quantity and quality, and any soldiers who might forget where they put their gear, among many other issues. Third, if the commander eats last, the cooks are more likely to distribute food equally so that they do not have to confess to their boss that they have no food left to eat for him or her. Fourth, the officer can more easily observe levels of food waste late in the meal time rather than earlier and determine the cause. Are soldiers throwing away much of their food because it’s culturally inappropriate or prepared poorly? Is too much food being wasted during its preparation? Is food arriving in such poor condition, it cannot be used? Fifth, if there is not enough food, the officer can work on determining the cause – poor preparation, poor requisitioning, food shortages or theft in the supply chain, etc. Sixth, the officer can observe if any soldiers appear to be loners or central figures in certain cliques, maybe even being bullied on account of race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion. If a soldier shows up last and there is no food left, the officer can give the last meal to that soldier instead of him or herself. Once an officer realizes how much can be gained from following this rule, one might ask “How could one not follow this rule?” no matter how much personal benefit was forfeited. It can be a good thing to challenge old rules or ideas, but some may continue to be useful despite their older origins, even if some of their values might seldom be recognized by others. Of course, one limitation of the rule just discussed is that an enemy sniper might take advantage of it, if he/she might have only enough time for one shot, to pick off the unit commander first. Too much rigidity may threaten the validity of any social norm or rule when being (inappropriately) construed as equally applicable to all conditions (as when a sniper is operating nearby).

I think that some theories risk the foreclosure of creative thinking. For example, sexual minority theory tends to assume that if a gay man runs into what feels like discrimination, it is reasonable to credit that discrimination solely to anti-gay bias. I might ask instead, what aspects of the situation lend themselves to support anti-gay bias as the only possible explanation? Perhaps, the gay man is homeless and is using illegal drugs and a passerby rejects him because of that, having nothing to do with his being gay; homelessness and the use of drugs can be *seen* whereas having a gay identity may not always be outwardly visible to others. For another example, if my children were in school and met a gay teen who was using drugs, I might tell them to avoid that teen, but not on account of his being gay, but on account of his drug use; however, I would not be surprised if that teen might misinterpret their social rejection as being due to their being gay. Perhaps a gay man’s neighbor’s wife rejects him not for being gay but for engaging in non-monogamy [3]. Even if a theory makes us feel good and more justified in the face of social pressures, we should not allow it to limit our creative theorizing or to avoid research design that would allow our research to be falsified.

## Alternative thinking against stereotypes

Much research on LGBT life experience has focused on negatives. But in social exchange theory, overall profit is a

function of positives and negatives, rewards and costs. If something has no rewards and only costs, why would anyone continue in that process, unless they had absolutely no perceived better alternatives? I think that theory about LGBTQ life and relationships needs to consider both the rewards and costs. Riggle et al., have published seminal papers on the positive aspects of being a lesbian or gay man [12], bisexual [13], and transgender [14] and from their participants found numerous rewards for such identifications. Others have recently published reports on the positive aspects and strengths of same-sex parenting [15]. For many such persons there are clear sexual advantages in either quantity or quality. Furthermore, as the legal landscape has changed over the past decades, there should be fewer costs associated with identifying as LGBTQ, which, according to social exchange theory, should be increasing personal profits, as rewards increase and costs are reduced, which Rothblum et al. [16], found to be the case for some, but not all, LGBTQ couples. When one LGBT youth was asked about the benefits of being gay, he replied that "We have all the fun" [17:1253]. The percentages of youth who identify as LGBTQ appear to be increasing, so perhaps more and more youth are discovering the same thing, a situation ripe for the application of individualistic profit maximization theory under the wider rubric of social exchange theory [10]. Social exchange theory has been used previously in the area of LGBT research [18-21], so it would be incorrect to assume it is an inherently conservative (politically) theory.

As a contrast, I might propose Profit Maximization (Individualistic Perspective) theory as a subset of social exchange theory that would run parallel to Profit Maximization (Collectivist Perspective) theory. Social exchange theory is pretty clear that individuals strive to maximize their own profits by increasing rewards and decreasing costs; what is overlooked is that societies may try to nudge individuals towards making decisions that support profits for the collective, the whole society, rather than merely profits for the solitary individual. If individuals don't seem to "get it" when it comes to collective responsibility, a society may impose constraints or disrespect on them, formally or informally, even stigmatize them.

Suppose I am living in a nation where a war is going on, which the nation believes is key to its survival, and the nation is drafting soldiers for combat where high losses are occurring with little apparent gains. From an individualistic perspective, one way to reduce my potential future costs would be to avoid the draft through legal loopholes or even escaping to a country not at war. To minimize such decisions, a society might increase rewards for soldiers, especially combat soldiers, and impose penalties and stigma on draft dodgers. It's quite possible that from a moral perspective, any given draft dodger might have the benefit of society in mind, hoping protest would end a useless war. Society may allow for this by drafting conscientious objectors who run the same risks as combat soldiers but focus on helping the wounded rather than killing others. That is to say, the conscientious objector accepts the same, if not greater risks and potential costs, as his fellow soldiers but is allowed to not be forced to violate his/her conscience (e.g., the movie *Hacksaw Ridge*). But I would expect that society to impose penalties and stigma on draft dodgers, as a general rule, because they were not supporting that society's goals even though the draft dodgers

were sincerely attempting to reduce their own costs and risks and thus improve their own personal long-term outcomes.

Suppose a society believes that reproduction (as opposed to war) is key to its survival. Therefore, an expectation is placed on all members to at least try to engage in heterosexual reproductive activities, even if they don't always succeed in attaining pregnancy. A gay man could appear to be like the draft dodger who is trying to reduce the costs and risks of becoming a parent while maintaining the rewards of an active sexual life with multiple partners, in contrast to having a relationship with only one heterosexual woman/mother of the new children. One might expect society, formally or informally, to stigmatize or penalize that gay man, just as it might the draft dodger, even if the gay man actually wanted to have children but did not want to rope some uninvolved woman into that picture. In other words, there could well be a tension between individual profit maximization and collective profit maximization, with the powerful in a society pushing for a more collective orientation as a way of promoting long-term survival and welfare of the society. If you ask the majority of the members of a society to engage in long-term high cost/high risk activities (childbirth, parenting) without much support but allow other members to shirk such high cost/high risk activities because they "don't feel like it" would that not sooner or later discourage the majority from accepting the unrewarded high cost/high risk activities because their relative profits compared to the "shirkers" might seem unfair and inequitable? It's like saying to combat soldiers, we have decided to be "equitable" and stop issuing medals for combat valor because that's "unfair" to desk soldiers, who enjoy safe air-conditioned offices but want just as many medals for what they do, as do combat soldiers. On the surface, it might seem equitable, but since it's the combat soldiers who are risking their lives and limbs (high risk/high cost), it would actually generate inequality rather than equality. Sooner or later, the combat soldiers would realize that the desk soldiers were getting the same recognition without having to take the same risks and they'd say "enough of this nonsense" (i.e., inequality of profit). I am a non-combat veteran myself yet I gladly recognize that combat veterans should get more in the way of societal support and status than me, as a way of honoring their greater sacrifices. However, in terms of reproduction, it seems that most advanced societies are experiencing declining birth rates, possibly because the high risks and costs of parenthood are seen as greater than the potential rewards or benefits.

In the same way, if the people who are making lifetime commitments to one person, restricting their sexuality to one person, having children and caring for them together for at least the child's life up to age 18 (accepting high costs, high risks for themselves while providing society with a great benefit in terms of well-cared for children with stable caregivers) are to be told that every other lifestyle is no worse and theirs' no better, sooner or later they may revolt and say "enough of this nonsense" (i.e., due to the exchange imbalance). Men in particular are asked under heteronormative conditions to not have sex with women (or men) outside of their marriage. Why? For one, if I were to get another woman pregnant, then our family income could be taken by the courts to support that other child, lowering the funds available to support my wife's desired lifestyle. How is it fair to make her suffer financially so I can have greater sexual

variety? From a social exchange theory perspective, I don't think heterosexual wives would find it profitable to support their husband's nonmonogamy; likewise, I doubt that men would want to support children of their wife if or when she conceived them by another man. I think it can be argued that non-reproductive lifestyles might be appropriately stigmatized by societies in order to promote equality, in terms of the relative costs and risks assumed by the members of those societies. In sum, perhaps monogamy deserves or merits "its privileged status" [3:43]. Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't, but both possibilities should be considered, rather than just assuming only one of them to be correct. In other words, what's so wrong with heteronormativity, as it is disparagingly called? One could also argue that stigma against homosexuality is an equity-restoring process, a way that society tries to maintain a differential profit between heterosexuals (high risk/high cost) and homosexuals (low risk/low cost). One might use the theory to predict greater stigma against gay men than against lesbian women because the latter continue to assume the risk and costs of pregnancy, childbirth, and the cost of raising their children for 18 plus years while usually having fewer rewards than gay men in terms of having multiple, casual sexual partners.

### Intellectual freedom to reject popular theories (Even Your Own)

Identity theory is being used to justify/explain how people come to identify as LGBTQ or any other identity. My response to this might be "anti-identity" theory. My suspicion is that identity politics creates identity narratives in order to gain political power rather than to truly help individuals with different identities. My idea, borrowed from others long ago, is that putting a nametag on yourself that says "car" and walking into a garage doesn't make you a car, no matter what you might want to think or believe. Putting a nametag on yourself and walking into a church doesn't make you a Christian nor should it give you a Christian "identity". I would argue that being a genuine Christian is more about an internal, dynamic, living connection with God's Spirit that manifests itself in caring for others, regardless of their ability to pay you back – a condition that is so much more than some silly label one or others might attach to you.

People have immense potential for growth and change and labeling oneself as if one had some sort of fixed, irreversible identity may undermine or at least underestimate that potential. I'd prefer people think that "I am a person who is attracted sexually to same-sex persons at this moment in time or who is having sex with same-sex persons at this time rather than identifying as irreversibly "gay" or "lesbian". Even if a Christian says something like "I am a Christian and I will be so forever", I worry because they may be stunting their potential for spiritual growth by depending on their religious identity as so fixed. The question should rather be something like "How am I going to be closer to God and more loving to others today than yesterday?" The idea that people cannot change is very convenient for those who want to maintain the status quo, especially of their political power, but I think it is, in the long run, destructive of human potential. I don't think that a Black man should feel imposed upon to vote for Democrats any more than a White evangelical should feel imposed upon to vote for Republicans.

Let's take up another story. Suppose I was a Union officer in May 1865 and I came across a southern farm where there were ten Blacks in chains and shackles. I told them that by the laws of God and of the United States, they now were all free. I offered to break off their shackles and relieve them of their chains. Would that be a bad thing to offer? What if the Blacks said, "No, we were born with these and we are deeply emotionally attached to them. Besides, without them, we would have no excuse to not go out and get jobs on our own. Without chains, we could be overloaded with so many possible alternatives! Furthermore, we identify as enslaved Blacks and see no reason to change our long-established identities and start our lives over now. Our shackles are our individual identities and our chains are our group identity. Besides our bonds of affection are stronger than these bonds of iron. Our master verbally abuses us; some passersby's pity us while others stigmatize us, but either way we get attention and recognition, even if often negative, making our mutual affections even stronger. We are so used to these chains we hardly notice them; it would feel unnatural to not be wearing them! It's all we've known our whole lives, including being abused physically, emotionally, and sexually from childhood onward. Furthermore, our master is working on making it evil (bullying) and illegal to offer us alternatives such as freedom, much less actually break our chains and shackles!" Some might argue that it would have been wrong to offer them a chance to be free. I believe there may be a partial analogy with the way sexual orientation is often used as an identity today. If one were to imply that God might set one free, one response might be "how dare you not accept me for who I am!" when the point is to accept the person as the person they could become, if freed from their self-limiting (whether queer or traditional) assumptions or unseen, unperceived but useful and real alternatives. While someone may not be wearing shackles and chains, there can be invisible emotional or spiritual shackles and chains that limit their fullest human potential.

Your identity should not be something that powerful folks use to control you and limit your options. I would not want people to think that because I am a Christian that I will be content with old fashioned ways of delivering sermons; it might well be the opposite, that I would be more eager to find new, more helpful, applied ways of unpacking ideas from the Bible, even if that came across as "critical" of a religious establishment (hence, a "queer" Christian per Boe & Jordan [4:5]). Too many sermons assume a one dimensional world when it's multidimensional (e.g., faith versus works; faith times works). Now, for example, churches are experimenting with novel ways to serve their congregations when gatherings of more than ten persons are forbidden because of the threat of the Corona virus. The danger of anti-identity theory is that one could be seen as "unaccepting" of how people are defining their identity at the moment, even seen as "rejecting" of who they are, when one's goal is rather to accept who they have the potential to become more, rather than encouraging them to stay stuck where they are at the moment, with no alternatives. My main point is that we need to remain free to accept or reject at least some parts of any theory, regardless of its popularity or political clout. Even queer theory can have internal inconsistencies and limitations [4].

### Research applications

When I read arguments that there is no evidence to support

the value of monogamy, I have to wonder what world such proponents are living in. I don't have an article off hand to cite, but my recollection is that adultery is a major reason for heterosexual divorce, even for heterosexual parents with children. It may well be that polyamory may work for relationships that do not or cannot involve children, but that doesn't negate the problematic nature of polyamory for heterosexual parent relationships.

Likewise, I wonder what bias is occurring when I read statements like "same-sex and different-sex couples have similar break-up rates once marital status is taken into account" [22:98]. When I looked into that research [23,24], the response rate was only 13%, nearly 100 couples were deemed stable even though the couples no longer existed (one had died), marriage was defined psychologically rather than legally, and there were fewer than ten "married" same-sex parents compared to nearly 500 married heterosexual parents (there being so few of the former group so as to make any statistical comparisons unlikely to lead to a rejection of the null hypothesis due to the low statistical power involved). But if the desired outcome "fits", then why worry about extremely low response rates, issues of definition of concepts such as marriage and stability, and low statistical power?

A similar bias against the obvious may have occurred with Easterbrook's [4] research, which considered the idea that same-sex parents would tend to raise up children who became LGBTQ as an unfounded stereotype; yet in his own data, 65.5% of the 29 children (old enough to have a sexual orientation recognized by the parents) of the 45 same-sex parents in his study were identified by their LGBTQ parents as LGBTQ. His own data would seem to contradict his chosen theory, but since the theory didn't expect that finding, it may have been easy for him to overlook the discrepancy between his theory and his results. But if nearly 66% isn't good enough to support the stereotype, just how high does the percentage have to be (100%?) before one might wonder if perhaps the "stereotype" was actually accurate after all? Furthermore, of the 91 children for which gender status was reported by parents, eight (8.8%) were not cisgender [4:43], which is close to that found in my research [24:140].

When scholars believed that there was no association between parental sexual orientation and child sexual orientation, the development of theory was not needed, so that area was neglected. Why waste time on theory in an area where there was no reason to have theories? Stacey and Biblarz [25] challenged this situation and argued that a variety of different social science and developmental theories would argue for some positive association between parental and child sexual orientation, but for that idea they were severely chastised in academia. A little over a decade later, Goldberg, Kashy, and Smith [26] brought two theories to the forefront as potential candidates to explain the association (for gender roles) across parents and children – social learning theory and social constructionist theory, theories that could also have been applied to sexual orientation. In 2019, Gartrell et al. [27], brought up genetic and environmental theories as possible explanations. I would suggest that social exchange theory be considered more than in the past. However, if your focus is solely on queer theory, you might be sitting on top of facts that refute your theory and yet not notice the contrast.

When reviewing the social science literature or building new theory about LGBTQ relationships, I think that attention should be paid to alternative viewpoints and to examples of research that might seem to be anomalies. Sometimes we can learn from those viewpoints with which we disagree. Even though Stacey and Biblarz [25] argued that several developmental theories would support the idea of some parental impact on a child's sexual orientation, many scholars did not bother to develop theory in that area because the vast majority of literature reviews [28] assumed that there was no association there. However, as noted previously, when Gartrell et al. [27], found significant associations there, they used social environmental and genetic theories as ways to discuss their findings. Thus, it took nearly 20 years for research to catch up with the use of theory; the theory had been there all along, but it had been rejected. Some useful research might be done to try to explain such gaps in research and theory development.

More theoretical work needs to be done with respect to intersectionality, ways in which the effects of social class, gender, sexual orientation, rural/urban residence, and race, among other factors, combine to create different outcomes or life experiences for LGBTQ persons and relationships [29:754]. It is quite possible that life may be different for a poor Black lesbian than for a wealthy, White gay man, even though they may be similar in sexual orientation. Just because two persons share one similar social construct or demographic characteristic does not mean that their lives or relationships are inevitably similar or perpetually defined. A greater focus on intersectionality may require us to expand our methodologies, with more complex modeling with mediating and moderating factors, as well as a host of other possibilities [22].

## Research developments

**Relationship stability.** Early on, many scholars [24] assumed that women would have greater interpersonal and parenting skills and, therefore, higher quality relationships that would last longer than those of both gay men and heterosexual couples. However, more evidence is accumulating that indicates that lesbians have lower relationship stability than gay men [16,24,30]. We need more theory and research to explain this apparent gender discrepancy. Is the discrepancy a reflection of differences in being parents [30,31]? Do women have lower thresholds for dissatisfaction being a basis for leaving a relationship? Do lesbians receive more social support for leaving a relationship? Does leaving a lesbian relationship mean maintaining more positive social contact afterwards, so less is lost? Do men have fewer alternatives if they leave a gay relationship or do they see more barriers to leaving? How do intersectional factors impact relative stability rates? Do gay men feel they have fewer alternatives for new relationships, if they currently have a child in custody? I don't think we know the answers to such questions yet.

**Changing relationships.** Elsewhere this author has challenged the idea that relationship patterns over time are simple [32,33]. Relationships are probably more fluid and flexible than ever. A White woman may marry an Asian man; have a child, then divorce. She may come out as bisexual and start a relationship with another White woman, while retaining custody of her

child. Her ex-husband may take her to court and obtain custody of the child. Later, the woman may marry a Black woman and identify as a lesbian and fight to regain custody of her child after her former husband divorces his second Hispanic wife. After she regains custody of her first child, she may adopt a second (Black) child with her lesbian wife. Accounting for all of these types of possible changes is not easy when doing research on families. Too many scholars have taken snapshots of a family's life and assumed that the snapshot contained everything that was relevant to understanding that family. This is an area where both theory and research methodology need to be improved if we are to better understand the complexities of real, rather than ideal or hypothetical, family life. One of the many advantages of queer and feminist theories is that they call our attention to the diversity and complexity of family life, beyond simple binaries [4] or other oversimplifications.

Effects on children. The issue of parental impacts on children of having same-sex parents has been contentious, to say the least. The predominant theory in social science has been the "no difference" paradigm [24,28] and over 90% of literature reviews have supported that paradigm in some outcomes [28]. Believing that something isn't possible dampens the apparent need for both theory and for better research. This is not just a social science issue. When this author was an undergraduate physics student, he wanted to develop a senior project on electrostatic cooling, a phenomenon that his professors did not believe in. They warned him that if his project failed, he would not be able to graduate and would be sent to Vietnam as a college dropout and likely be killed. However, once he demonstrated that the process did work, it only took one professor about five minutes to come up with a theoretical explanation for that which had been deemed totally impossible ten minutes before. Thus, for many decades, the idea that parents might influence their child's sexual orientation was deemed a myth and therefore, hardly worth much study. However, recent research is trending in the direction of showing some types of effects in this area [24,27]. Some research suggests that lesbian mothers may influence their daughters more than sons [24,27]. Why would that be? Do gay fathers have less influence on their children's sexual orientation than do lesbian mothers? More research is needed to explain the underlying processes whereby such an association might develop between parents and children and along with better research, better theory. Does having a same-sex parent provide a positive role model for being LGBTQ? Do same-sex parents believe in the overall profit of being LGBTQ and convey that confidence to their children? Do same-sex parents provide enough advantages to their children that the children themselves realize the advantages of same-sex parenthood and wish to maintain that pattern in their own lives? Do same-sex parents encourage their children to keep their options (alternatives) open and try same-sex romantic relationships as much as opposite-sex ones? Do same-sex parents simply not discourage their children from having to be, in a compulsory way, heterosexual? Are any such associations tied to social class, race, or parental education? I don't think we know the answers yet. Elsewhere, I have proposed a more complex model [24:134] along with further discussions of research [34].

## Intersection of theory and research: social desirability response bias

Social desirability Response Bias. At least in the past, when same-sex relationships were not legal, there were pressures on LGBTQ persons to justify their identities and their relationships. That may have led some parents to paint a rose-colored picture of their family life to researchers as a way of combating political oppression. Despite legal advances, residual effects may remain. Remarkably, few scholars have considered assessing and controlling for social desirability, especially as it may differ for different types of situations [for sample items, see 35: 40]. Some have tried to measure social desirability but have not controlled for it statistically. However, in science, variance is necessary to be able to detect associations between variables. If every respondent were to say that their scores on variables X and Y were "maxed out" there will be no variance and no way of determining if X and Y are/are not truly associated. If social desirability bias, no matter the reason for it, is influencing respondents to report maximally positive scores on all of their questions, then it will become more difficult for researchers to evaluate possible associations among those variables. Once I gave a social desirability test to some of my graduate students and one student took it home to his wife. She rated him as a perfect husband. He asked "why, since we both know that I am not perfect"? She said that she was trying to demonstrate her loyalty to him to the hypothetical researcher. In other words, she knew he wasn't perfect but she reported that he was for various reasons. Thus, some heterosexuals and same-sex couples may allow tendencies to justify their relationships to bias their responses from what they actually think or feel. Without controls for that bias, researchers may end up trying to analyze data that does not reflect the respondents' own perceptions of reality but more of an idealized version they think others would prefer. Without taking the theory of justification into account in terms of the potential for social desirability response bias, research results may be biased. Hence, future LGBT research should regularly control for appropriate types of social desirability response bias.

## CONCLUSION

In terms of theory, some research on LGBT issues has not used any explicit theory, other research only implicit theory [1,2]. Sexual minority theories, including queer or queer-feminist theories, offer promise of helping understand the unique subjective perspectives of LGBT persons and families; however, such theories may operate to justify LGBT experiences (good or bad) and may enable scholars to overlook research findings that do not fit their preconceived ideas. Identity theory has useful strengths but also weaknesses, as does queer theory. Social exchange theory is offered as another approach that may help evaluate research or develop theory from a more even-handed perspective. However, more recent research has been willing to look at positive aspects of the LGBTQ experience rather than a primary focus on negative experiences such as discrimination and stigmatization, which may allow greater use of social exchange theory. Some research results, even social science consensus, have been at least partly overturned by more recent research, warning scholars about drawing conclusions too quickly in the historical development of a research area. Social desirability

effects should be taken into account in future research as well as intersectionality effects.

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