

## **The Identity of LGBTQ Communication Research: From the Anglo-Saxon Effervescence to the Spanish-Speaking Barrenness**

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Research on discourses and communication processes around and from within LGBTQ communities is an effervescent field of study in the Anglo-Saxon world, a field originated in the 1980s and led by the United States. However, this vibrancy cannot be extrapolated to the Spanish-speaking Ibero-American countries (constituted by Latin America and Spain), where this area, only budding, is epistemologically barren. This article analyzes the identity and main trends of the LGBTQ studies in Hispanophone countries, following a Delphi consultation study with experts from Colombia, México, Perú, and Spain. The results show some of the main current trends and suggest strategies to boost these studies in Ibero-America. As proposed in the Conclusions section, the type of research that we develop in this article is of crucial importance to increase the visibility of sexual minorities in Spanish-speaking societies, giving them voice and thus restoring human dignity.

*Keywords: LGBTQ studies, Ibero-American world, Spanish-speaking academia, communication research, identity, Delphi technique, qualitative analysis*

This was a friend of mine who got murdered back in '73. This is him in drag. Carlos Sánchez. We never found out who did it or. . . . Cold case. They just didn't care. They were trans. Outcasts. Society doesn't want them. I've dealt with those feelings. . . . My own personal experiences.

These words belong to Victoria Cruz, an activist in the New York Anti-Violence Project. In the documentary, *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, she describes how the police refused to investigate the murder of her Hispano trans friend, Carlos Sánchez. Back in the 1970s, lesbian, gay, bisexual,

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transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) minorities were *outcasts*, living beyond the legal and social margins, out of society's gaze. This historical invisibility and injustice have also been reproduced in academic research. Science, and in this case, communication research, is a gendered space—a space of interaction where gender (Jansen, 1993) and sexual orientation are not neutral, but crucial and constitutive forces in the power relations (Haraway, 1988) constructing knowledge.

For the reason just mentioned, the main objective of this article is to give visibility to sexual minorities based on the exploration of the main trends in LGBTQ communication studies in the Spanish-speaking Ibero-America (Latin America and Spain). These studies emerge as an interdisciplinary field, historically developed within the social sciences and the humanities through disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies (Graziano, 2018). In the latter, LGBTQ studies are an area focused on the analysis of discourses and communication processes developed around (and from within) sexual minorities. Different topics of interest have been identified within the area: media (including digital) representation of LGBTQ minorities; audience interpretation based on sexual orientation; media impact on LGBTQ social images; analysis of senders/producers based on their sexual orientation; culture and significance based on the visibility/invisibility of sexual minorities, etc. (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020).

The growing interest in LGBTQ issues during the previous decades is also related to other critical frames and perspectives, such as queer studies, an approach based on queer theory. With its origins in the 1990s (Hennessy, 1993), queer theory includes figures such as Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, and Alice Walker, among others. From a queer perspective, gender and sex are social constructions that follow a cultural hierarchy, one that excludes the so-called sexual and gender minorities (Love, 2011). LGBTQ and queer studies are susceptible to being conflated, as Sam Chan (2017) recognizes—even when other researchers in queer studies (Butler, 2011) promote the elimination of the acronyms because they standardize sexual diversity. Because the goal of this article is to explore the main trends in LGBTQ studies in Ibero-America, the epistemological debate between LGBTQ and queer studies is beyond its scope. For that reason, we will mainly use the most generic expressions, such as “LGTBQ” or “sexual minorities,” that include more general approaches to our object of study than the label “queer studies,” which takes more specific critical and constructivist stances (Sullivan, 2003).

Based on this approach, the first point to notice is the social and cultural diversity within Ibero-America, a space conformed by 20 Latin American and two European countries (Spain and Portugal). The mother tongue is Spanish in 20 of these countries, and Portuguese in Portugal and Brazil. In terms of sexual diversity, same-sex marriage is legal in 10 nations. Spain was the first to legalize it in 2005, followed by Portugal, Argentina, and some parts of Mexico in 2010; Brazil and Uruguay in 2013; Puerto Rico in 2015; Colombia in 2016; Ecuador in 2019; and Costa Rica in 2020. From this account, same-sex marriage is legal in fewer than half of the Ibero-American countries (10 of 22). Although Chile legalized civil unions in 2015, the rest of the Ibero-American countries do not recognize same-sex marriage or civil unions, and some constitutions have even specifically banned homosexual marriages (including in Bolivia, Cuba, Honduras, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic). Regarding tolerance toward sexual minorities, the analysis conducted by Kohut and colleagues (2013), which includes eight Ibero-American countries, highlights the different attitudes; Spain has an 88% acceptance rate, far from the rate of 34% in El Salvador. In between

these two countries are Argentina (74%), Chile (68%), México (61%), Brazil (60%), Venezuela (51%), and Bolivia (43%); rates in some cases (Venezuela or Bolivia) show half of the population as being against sexual diversity.

To map the main trends in LGBTQ communication studies within this cultural territory, the first aspect that stands out is the lack of meta-analysis in this area (Barranquero & Ángel, 2015; Guerrero & Sutachan, 2012; Ventura, 2016). The absence of previous analysis in Latin America and the south of Europe (Spain and Portugal) adds an extra layer of complexity to mapping the main trends in LGBTQ studies.

In addition to the limited meta-analyses that have been implemented, it is necessary to underscore the lack of impact research, doctoral theses, and funded research projects in LGBTQ communication studies in Ibero-America. If we look at the Scopus index, which has a larger scientific production in Spanish than other indexes do (such as JCR), we find that among the Ibero-American journals<sup>1</sup> positioned in the top 150, during the 2007–2017 decade, a mere two articles on this topic were published (Carratalá, 2016; Leal & Carvalho, 2017), both in journals from Spain.

With regard to doctoral theses and funded research projects, the Spanish case is paradigmatic. As Sánchez-Soriano and García-Jiménez (2020) have posited from their research conducted on completed PhDs and research projects developed at the Spanish communication departments between 2007 and 2013, of the 1,121 projects and theses included in the corpus, only 34 pieces of research dealt with LGBTQ topics (18 PhDs and two funded projects)—representing a scarce 3% of the total sample.

These circumstances—same-sex marriage approved in just 10 countries, the lack of meta-approaches, and the few impact articles—expose that knowledge is always situated; as Haraway has noted, “All forms of knowledge are situated knowledges: knowledges that are historically, culturally, and linguistically mediated, finite, and secured within a field of power relations” (as cited in Jansen, 1993, p. 139). This means that heteronormativity (Chambers, 2007), a social discourse that naturalizes mainly straight cisgender orientations, has also articulated the field of communication, putting LGBTQ issues under the rocks. This invisibility, not just of sexual minorities, but also in a more general way of gender issues, has deep social and symbolic consequences:

Research that fails to ask about sexual or gender identities, or research that automatically excludes sexual and gender minorities, further perpetuates experiences of marginalization and stigmatization. In and of itself, the exclusion of LGBTQ individuals from research represents systemic heterosexism. (Blair, 2016, p. 377)

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<sup>1</sup> Ibero-American journals included in the top 150 positions of the SJR ranking (Scopus) include (its position in the ranking and the country of publication in parentheses): *Comunicar* (47, Spain); *Profesional de la Información* (66, Spain); *Comunicación y Sociedad* (75, Spain); *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* (77, Spain); *Interface: Comunicação, Saude, Educação* (105, Brazil); *Media and Communication* (107, Portugal); *Cuadernos.info* (116, Chile); *Comunicación y Sociedad* (131, Mexico); and *Palabra Clave* (134, Colombia).

The weakness of research in LGBTQ communication studies in Ibero-America contrasts with the stronger scientific health of the English-speaking world (Sam Chan, 2017). Eminent figures such as the American researcher Larry Gross (1989, 2005) are used as a reference not only in LGBTQ studies, but also in the communication discipline in general. Research in LGBTQ communication studies originated in the 1980s (Henderson, 2001), but it was actually in 1978 that the LGBTQ caucus was created within the National Communication Association (Morris & Palczewski, 2015), the benchmark national communication association in the United States. During the 1990s, there was a large-scale impact of gay visibility in mainstream American film and television (Kohnen, 2016), a situation that was mirrored in the LGBTQ communication research. This field finally bloomed in the 2000s, but it was characterized by a particular interest in the analysis of male homosexuality (Spencer, 2015), to the detriment of female homosexuality, bisexuality, and symbolic processes around transgender people. In the words of Dhoest, Szulc, and Eeckhout (2017),

Richard Dyer was one of the first academics to address the topic, starting with his *Gays in Film* (1977). . . . In 2001, Gross published a seminal work in the field: *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America*. . . . From the 1990s onwards, the increased representation of gays and lesbians in mainstream media led to a growth in academic studies on the topic, which became itself rather mainstream in the 2000s. (p. 1)

In addition, we find other indicators that show the English-speaking effervescence. The International Communication Association, the most important association in communication research at the international level, has a specific LGBTQ interest group, and in the National Communication Association, mentioned earlier, this area is a division and has a caucus.

Other indicators showing the increased health of LGBTQ studies in the English-speaking context over the Ibero-American ones are the journal *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, published by Intellect; the numerous entries in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (Baldwin, 2017; Fasoli, 2017; Hajek, 2017; West, 2018); and the publication of special issues, such as the one in the journal *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (Shaw & Sender, 2016). The various states-of-the-art produced up until now show an interesting epistemological effervescence (Gross, 2005; Sam Chan, 2017; Spencer, 2015; Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2004), and we should not forget how meta-theory (reflecting on what has been produced) generates the accumulation of scientific knowledge and the construction of epistemic communities.

To tackle the knowledge gaps in LGBTQ communication research in Ibero-America, we have proposed for this article a Delphi technique involving experts' consultations to draft the reasons for the underdevelopment of this research area, as well as future trends and perspectives. This is key to giving greater visibility to sexual minorities within academia.

### **Methodology**

In this article, we present the results collected with a Delphi technique via an online questionnaire made available between March and May 2019. The objective of the Delphi method is to outline the scope of the research in LGBTQ communication in Ibero-America, a research area characterized by uncertainty due

to the previous lack of analysis and the state of the art in this field of study, as mentioned in the introduction. The scarcity of meta-analysis, incidentally, has been the main limitation of this research; at the same time, it is the main reason to use a Delphi method, a technique designed to explore unknown areas through expert opinions, given the shortage of previous studies and approaches (Landeta, 1999). Therefore, consulting experts has allowed us to shed light on the current situation and to establish proposals for the future to advance LGBTQ studies in the field of communication in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal.

The Delphi technique used in this research involves an anonymous consultation with a panel of geographically dispersed experts. Through iteration in subsequent rounds and controlled feedback, convergence, consensus, and stability are reached in the responses about an issue on which very few previous studies exist (García-Jiménez, Rodrigo-Alsina, & Pineda, 2017). In other words, the Delphi technique allows us to obtain information about complex events in unknown areas, facilitating knowledge when no objective data or applicable analytical models are available (Landeta, 1999)—as is the case for LGBTQ studies in Ibero-America. The Delphi method, implemented in this article in a qualitative way, is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to treat a complex problem (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). To have a state of the art as an output, as in our case, is typical of the Delphi technique (Landeta, 1999).

The underdevelopment of LGTBQ communication studies in the Ibero-American world added extra difficulty to forming the group of participants because of the low number of experts in the field. To create a consistent group, we conducted a literature review of significant LGTBQ communication research published within Ibero-American countries, institutions, and journals. Some of the main authors we found in this review were invited to participate in the panel. A total of 15 experts were contacted by e-mail to request their participation in February 2019. Because, as mentioned in the introduction, the field in Spain is more developed than in the other geographical areas, we looked for a balance between Latin America (seven experts invited from Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, and Venezuela) and Spain (eight people contacted). That our national affiliation is Spain made access to Spanish scholars easier. The absence of Lusophone countries (Portugal and Brazil) was for linguistic reasons: Spanish, as the main mother tongue of Ibero-America, was the language chosen to conduct the technique.

We obtained a positive response from 10 experts in LGTBQ studies in communication from Spain, Colombia, México, and Perú. Table 1 shows the participants, their affiliated university, their country of work, and their field of expertise. All gave permission to reveal their identity. Nine universities and one research center are represented. The majority of participants live and work in Spain, and other researchers are from Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, so the sample of experts represents different countries in the Spanish-speaking Ibero-American field. All the experts have an academic and applied research profile, and they are all researchers with a recognized career within the field of LGBTQ and gender studies, having published extensively in specialized and impact journals and publishers.

**Table 1. Delphi Technique Participants.**

Participant	University/Place of Work	Main Field	Academic Area	Country of Work
Rafael Ventura	Universitat Pompeu Fabra	LGTBQ and Queer Studies	Media studies	Spain
Beatriz González de Garay	Universidad de Salamanca	LGTBQ and Gender Studies	Media studies	Spain
Virginia Villaplana	Universidad de Murcia	Queer and Gender Studies	Arts and film studies	Spain
Yolanda Tortajada Giménez	Universitat Rovira I Virgili	Gender Studies	Communication and media studies	Spain
Giuliana Cassano Iturri	Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú	LGTBQ and Gender Studies	Media studies	Perú
Sayak Valencia	CONACYT Research Center (Tijuana, Baja California)	Queer and Gender Studies	Cultural studies	México
Néstor David Polo Rojas	Pontificia Universidad Javeriana	LGTBQ Studies	Communication and media studies	Colombia
Juan Carlos Alfeo	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	LGTBQ and Gender Studies	Media and film studies	Spain
Adolfo Carratalá	Universitat de València	LGTBQ Studies	Media studies	Spain
Fernanda Téllez Vega	Universidad Industrial de Santander	LGTBQ Studies	Linguistics and audiovisual discourse	Colombia

The tool used for data collection was a Google Forms online questionnaire composed of nine open-ended questions and one closed-ended question using a Likert scale. Participants were asked about the following issues: the definition of LGBTQ communication research; main research areas; state of the art in Ibero-America; reasons for the limited activity of the field in this geographical and cultural context; measures to boost the area; and challenges toward the future.

The first round took place between March 1 and 14, 2019. After analyzing and processing the responses from the first round, we found that overall, the responses showed a strong convergence. Because the responses were unanimous and there was consensus on two questions, these were removed in the second

round. Those questions that presented responses with a very high, albeit not complete, convergence were again put forward in the second round, in which participants were requested to ratify or modify their position after taking into account the responses provided by all the experts in the first round. A total of eight open-ended questions were put forward in the second round, which was carried out between April 14 and 26, 2019. After these two rounds, responses reached stability and consensus, so the method of analysis was deemed finalized. A research fact sheet is included as Appendix.

## **Results**

Because of the high convergence of opinion by the experts, we present next the results of the process using the Delphi technique by integrating the responses of the first and second rounds. We regrouped the answers based on the three main topics articulating this study, namely, definition and assessment of the main areas of LGBTQ communication research; evaluation of the situation in Ibero-America; and measures and challenges of this research in the mentioned geographical and cultural world.

### ***About the Main Areas of LGBTQ Communication Research***

In the first round, we proposed to the participants the following epistemological definition of LGBTQ communication studies: "Research area exploring the processes, discourses, and elements of the communicative process carried out on, around, and from within LGBTQ communities and its intersectionality with other social/cultural identities." Eight of the 10 experts consulted agreed with the proposed definition; one expert, who disagreed, argued that "representation/mediatization" was missing. Participants who did subscribe to our definition highlighted the importance of race/social class intersectionality and the need for this type of research to be critical to "enhance academic recognition of the inequality scenario in which the object of study is placed and the need to reverse it." One expert proposed replacing the verb "exploring" with "analyzing" because analyzing "means looking more closely" than exploring.

Participants used different expressions to refer to the field, with "LGBTIQ +," "LGBTIQ," and "LGBTQ" being the most used, instead of other labels such as "queer studies." This may indicate the intention of the researchers to try to give visibility to as many identities and orientations as possible, and it also shows that the acronyms are constantly evolving (Eliason, 2014).

Because of the high convergence of opinions, in the second round, we only asked the participants to comment on, add, or specify whatever they deemed appropriate about the definition of the field discussed in the first round. One expert commented that the verbs "analyzing" or "studying" are more accurate; an expert noted that the representation/mediatization that came up in the first round is contained in the current definition ("discourses about LGBTQ communities"); another participant expressed his disagreement with the word "mediatization" because it only refers to the media; one expert said, "I would add something about digital communication"; and two researchers emphasized the word "representation" because LGBTQ reality is largely accessed through representations, plagued by prejudices (e.g. "how hate crimes are covered journalistically"). Finally, a participant highlighted the audience analysis in the following terms: "Analysis of the reception of LGBT-phobic messages by the community itself measuring their emotional impact. The analysis needs to be collaborative, and not just by experts."

In the first round, the following list with the most representative areas of LGBTQ communication studies was suggested (based on Henderson, 2001, and Sam Chan, 2017): (1) media representation/construction (TV, radio, press, film, social media, comics, music, etc.) of the LGBTQ groups; (2) production, use, reception, and resignification of the content produced by the LGBTQ groups from social movements, activism, political discourse, gay and lesbian-oriented media (GLO), etc.; (3) analysis of nonmedia discourses (made by social institutions such as political parties, labor unions, schools, colleges, universities, churches, etc.) on LGBTQ groups; (4) media impact of LGBTQ content and/or media impact on LGBTQ audiences; (5) how audiences and the general population interpret the media and social messages on (and from within) LGBTQ identities; (6) performance and negotiation of the LGBTQ identities; (7) interpersonal and family communication; (8) organizational communication (e.g., workplaces) and health (issues related to HIV, transsexuality, palliative care, etc.); and (9) uses of language and deconstruction of heteronormativity

The majority of experts (seven of 10) agreed with the suggested list. Two of the participants who disagreed mentioned that the following should be added: "The representation/mediatization dimension" and "the analysis of the discourses that deny the principles and arguments of gender theory."

The experts who deemed the proposed list to be representative also added the need to be alert, because this is an area open to constant change (of identities, formats, uses and themes); to specify the representations in the news and news stories and their impact on the invisibility or aggression toward these communities; to study commodification of the LGBTQ identities in media discourse; and not to specify the social institutions in Point 3 mentioned before because it would mean that, according to one expert,

in all nonmedia discourse, there is a formal institution involved when this does not always occur. There are many discursive practices that happen in other places such as university clubs, nonformal associations, groups, informal areas for socialization, etc., so I would say that there is a line missing that addresses the concept of communicative practices around the resistance and construction of LGBTIQ subjectivities, which perhaps could go in Point 6.

In the second round, the proposals made in the first round were incorporated, and participants were asked whether they wanted to add anything to this final list based on the first: (1) representation, mediatization, and media construction (TV, radio, press, film, social networks, comics, music, etc.) of LGBTQ groups; (2) production, use, reception, and resignification of the content produced by LGBTQ groups from social movements, activism, political discourses, gay and lesbian-oriented media (GLO), etc.; (3) analysis of nonmedia discourses (social institutions, associations, and other nonformal spaces, clubs, groups, etc.) on LGBTQ groups; (4) media impact of LGBTQ content and/or media impact in LGBTQ audiences; (5) how audiences and the general population process and interpret the media and social messages about (and from) LGBTQ identities; (6) performance, negotiation, resistance, and construction of LGBTQ identities; (7) interpersonal and family communication; (8) organizational communication (e.g., workplace) and health (with issues related to HIV, transsexuality, palliative care, etc.); (9) uses of language and deconstruction of heteronormativity; and (10) analysis and response of the denialist discourses of gender theory.

All experts agreed with this classification, and two more issues were also proposed: digital communication and the analysis of LGBTQ-phobic media discourses in relation to hate crimes.



### ***The Situation in Spanish-Speaking Ibero-America***

In the first round, participants were asked what the three most developed areas in Ibero-American LGBTQ communication research were. The experts chose, in order of importance, the following: first, the media representation/construction (TV, radio, press, film, social networks, comics, music, etc.) of LGBTQ groups; second, the analysis of nonmedia discourses on LGBTQ groups, which also was the most prominent line in Latin America; and third, two lines—the production, use, and reception of content produced by LGBTQ groups based on social movements, and the performance and negotiation of identities.

When asked, “What do you think this situation is due to?”, responses noted that the analyses on representation-construction have been carried out mainly in fiction formats in film and television from critical perspectives. A prominent trend in Latin America, with lesser presence in Spain, is the analysis of nonmedia discourses made by LGBTQ groups, in line with the analysis of popular culture proposed by Jesús Martín Barbero (1987). As one expert pointed out,

The analysis of nonmedia discourses is the most developed line, but interestingly, it has been done more from other areas of study, such as sociology and psychology. In Latin America, studies on these LGBTQ relationships remain somewhat limited to specific products and content or specific movements, groups, and contexts.

Finally, an expert mentioned the lack of research: “In my research, I found very little literature on Latin America.”

In the second round, the experts were asked for the reasons that might justify that the representation, nonmedia discourse, and the production and use of content by LGBTQ groups were chosen as the most developed lines in Ibero-America. The majority of experts highlighted as a reason the large-scale implementation and the wide use and scope of the methodologies typical of these analyses. As one expert stated, “They are the widest and the ones that can build bridges with other disciplines of humanities and social sciences.” Another participant explained the use of these methodologies in the following terms: “They have the advantage of being able to be tackled methodologically with techniques widely used amongst the communication research community, such as content analysis and critical discourse analysis, which could explain their high development.”

The researchers who were part of this Delphi method also added the following reasons to justify the major development of issues on representation: “The area of representation is undoubtedly the most developed, probably because it has a better methodological accessibility, especially when compared to the rest,” and “from a purely methodological point of view, it is much more affordable to access the discourses that are produced from within or on the LGBTQ issues than the individuals and social groups that produce (producers) and/or receive (audiences) them.” Precisely because of this argument, one expert argued,

Precisely because there is a kind of media-centrism in communication studies that addresses this issue. Other communicative forms seem relegated to other areas of study, such as sociology or political science. However, they seem pertinent to the extent that media representation remains a crucial issue.

In addition, with regard to the analysis of media representation, one researcher said one of the reasons for its widespread use is that

it is very close to us as “common people.” Besides, this discourse is dealt with all the time. The stereotype exists, it is real and deserves to be analyzed; equally, the power and regulatory discourses offered by TV need to be revealed.

On the other hand, another researcher commented on the specific case of Latin America:

About the first point, I think that because [the way that] LGBTIQ individuals have been historically represented in the media; they are the subject of mockery and comedy. This feature has a history in the most local and regional jokes and comedies in Latin America—a patriarchal, authoritarian, heteronormative culture.

In the first round, participants were asked what areas should be most urgently implemented in Ibero-America. In general, the experts pointed out the importance of promoting them all. Some of the most pressing would be, in the first place, the analysis of audience interpretations and the impact of media communication. The importance of developing research that has an impact on public policies and LGBTQ civil rights and the use of language to deconstruct heteronormativity was also mentioned. In addition, the participants highlighted the necessity of analyzing nonmedia discourses “from social institutions such as political parties, labor unions, schools, colleges, universities, churches, etc.,” and the study of issues related to health and the workplace: “The issues related to health are an urgent need for trans people to be treated properly by health services.”

In the second round, participants were asked to add or clarify whatever they wanted about the most urgent areas that need to be implemented in the field. Up to eight participants confirmed that the most urgent investigative tasks highlighted in the first round had been correctly identified.

The two experts who wanted to add more urgent tasks for LGBTQ studies proposed, on the one hand, “the analysis of the sources currently used by adolescents to construct their image on the LGBTQ issue,” and on the other, “the study of the discourses of violence and exclusion and the analysis of educational policies to create inclusive social environments.”

In the first round, participants were asked to assess the following statement using a Likert scale: “LGBTQ communication studies are in good health in Ibero-America (Latin America, Portugal and Spain).” As we can see in Table 2, the majority (seven of 10, that is, 70%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Two participants agreed, and one expert was undecided, because “the field enjoys health inside of LGBTIQ+ groups and some small academic environments, but the topic should be expanded in the academic community.”

**Table 2. Assessment of the Statement, "The LGBTQ Communication Studies Have a Good Health in Ibero-America."**

1	2	3	4	5
I completely agree	I agree	Undecided	I disagree	I completely disagree
0% (0)	20% (2)	10% (1)	60% (6)	10% (1)

Justifications for the mainly negative evaluation of the state of LGBTQ studies in Ibero-America include the shortage of human-financial resources and public research policies, the absence of specific classes in university programs, and the scarce academic production in Latin America (although it is slightly higher in Spain, the volume is far from that produced in the English-speaking world, and the impact is small). Generally speaking, and in the words of an expert, "Studies should be strengthened and even be pursued as a transversal practice." These answers highlight that, as we have pointed out, knowledge is always situated (Haraway, 1988), and gender (including sexual orientation) has been a key element in the relations of power that have shaped the field of communication (Jansen, 1993), prioritizing other topics other than to sexual minority issues.

The two experts who analyzed more positively the state of the art highlighted the greater development of the last decades. "From the 1990s to the present, the field of LGBTQ studies in Spanish has growth exponentially, with the creation of a multitude of exchange forums and publications at international level," and "the quantity and quality of research has grown greatly in this last decade, as has the diversity of themes." However, the latter noted that "there are certain points we are not even touching, such as policies and educational content, which could help create a LGBTIQ pedagogy in different populations."

In the second round, participants were requested again to add or clarify whatever they wanted. The majority said that they agreed with what they had said before and with the evaluation of the group. Two experts clarified the need to contextualize this evaluation of LGBTQ research: "The answers must be read in context, that is, knowing where the experts who disagree with it are from and understanding that the situation of the studies is not even," and "there is definitely a growth due to the gradual opening of the issue in the Latin American context. However, it is not the same throughout the region due to specific issues, and research is still a 'niche.'"

In the first round, participants were asked to assess a specific fact: the publication of two LGBTQ-themed articles during the period 2007–2017 in the main SJR impact journals (SCOPUS) in Ibero-America. The 10 participants justified this fact with the following arguments: LGBTQ studies "do not enjoy academic recognition"; "there is a bias in cultural and identity research"; it shows the "social and academic invisibility of these groups"; and "these issues arise little interest in the research community, as opposed to other areas, such as political economy of communication or digital communication."

One expert emphasized that, despite the few articles published, "the wide-ranging scope and variety of the issues addressed in these journals in such a complex and diverse field as communication should be taken into account" and that "in the face of indifference perceived from the area of communication, the LGBT/queer communication academics have learnt to find their place and publish in journals in other interdisciplinary areas such as sociology or women's studies."

Some of the reasons mentioned by the experts that might explain the underdevelopment of LGBTQ studies are the heteronormative logic that structures society and, therefore, also the priorities in academic research (funding institutions, academic journals with research lines that are considered more relevant, etc.); the "individual and limited character" made by the "precarious conditions (without funding, work teams, etc.) in which the academics interested in this field work"; resistance to the inclusion of "cultural studies in general in the Spanish-speaking world because studies on gender, masculinities, and sexual diversity are not considered strong research topics"; the fact that "LGBTQ studies are just starting" in Ibero-America; and, in general, the low "level of acceptance of LGBTQ issues in society."

These answers point out how academia is a gendered and sexualized space: in other words, a space where gender and sexual orientation have been constitutive forces in the inclusion/exclusion of topics and research areas. This could be, in part, a consequence of the structural sexism (Dorsten, 2012) and gendered structure (Ashcraft & Simonson, 2015) that have been dominant in (Ibero-American) societies. These two expressions underscore how social meanings are perpetuated with a gender/sexual bias, a situation that has also permeated academia.

In the second round, participants were asked to clarify any aspects they wanted. Half of the experts decided not to add any more comments because they agreed with the arguments provided by the group. Other added aspects related to the conservative logic established in this field of research, with the special peculiarities in Latin America:

In Colombia, there is a religious resistance against gender theory. For example, the Ministry of Education wanted to encourage the use of informative leaflets in schools explaining sexual diversity; religious and powerful groups discussed "the problem" and removed the leaflets. Again, binary legitimacy exists and rejects gender theory—it is in fact condemned with the argument that it is dangerous for children.

As the expert notes, the "resistance against gender theory" is directly connected to the rejection of LGBTQ issues; as Blair (2016) has noticed, systemic heterosexism explains the exclusion of both sexual and gender minorities (p. 377).

In relation to the state of the art in Latin America, another expert also added that:

a fundamental issue is that much of the research and projects carried out in Latin America do not go through academia, but through social groups and collective actions. Moreover, many of these groups do not have much interest in being linked to academia. Latin America, in this, as in other subjects, remains outside the international academic production.

As we have pointed out, because academia is a space with gender and sexual biases, many LGBTQ groups prefer to investigate and implement their projects outside of scientific institutions. Although this can increase creativity—informal networks are less constrained by the rigorous conditions of academic production—it presents a challenge for the accumulation of knowledge, which is one of the clues for scientific progress (Donsbach, 2006).

One expert clarified the complexity of the topic and therefore the impossibility to respond with a clear and conclusive answer:

I think it is quite a complex topic to be analyzed without any further context. For example, what topics does the rest of the scientific community address? Does the economic crisis and its impact have anything to do with changing priorities as, no doubt, it has had in the rise of populist options in different countries? Has socioeconomic instability turned the LGBTQ issue into an important, albeit not a priority, issue? Have the objective advances that many countries have experienced in the last two decades around LGBTQ been a "disincentive" both for researchers and for the institutions that should fund research initiatives?

Despite agreeing with the proposed arguments, another expert wondered, hypothetically, whether the reason was that some research in LGBTQ communication was probably being published in journals in other areas (sociology, psychology, etc.).

### ***Measures and Challenges of LGBTQ Communication Research***

In the first round, participants were asked to propose some measures to boost LGBTQ studies in Ibero-America. In general terms, the measures proposed were related to (1) promoting training in LGBTQ issues in formal education; (2) the creation of LGBTQ policies; and (3) the promotion of research networks.

Regarding the first measure proposed by the experts, specific LGBTQ topics in different educational programs should be included. Related to this idea, experts also mentioned the creation of specific postgraduate degrees that encourage the subsequent development of PhD research in the area.

Concerning the second measure, research policies constitute another important aspect highlighted by the participants. Some of the proposals were advocating to include this aspect as a priority issue in the call for proposals for research projects; promoting laws encouraging LGBTQ research (such as Act 11/2014 in Catalonia, Spain); and applying for and obtaining funding for competitive research projects on LGBTQ communication studies.

Related to the third measure, promotion and consolidation of research networks is another important aspect of encouraging LGBTQ studies in Ibero-America. In this sense, the participants proposed several measures like the creation of forums (conferences, groups, symposia, associations, etc.) and the opening of a dialogue on diversity in conferences and forums already consolidated, such as the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR); the creation of specialized journals; the promotion of special issues within generic communication research journals; and collaboration among research groups and diversification of the study groups on gender.

Beyond these three measures, "establishing alliances with groups and organizations that work on these issues" and "attracting non-LGBTQ researchers" (allies) were also mentioned among the experts.

In the second round, participants were asked whether any of these measures were considered to be of special interest. Four of the experts considered that the three measures were interesting. On the other hand, three experts believed that the creation of joint research networks and the recognition and support of the main communication research associations constituted the most important priority: "I think it is very important to create research networks to carry out this research and these projects, since in most cases the individuals who work on these issues do so in a very lonely and isolated way," according to one of the experts. Another researcher who participated in the Delphi method said,

I think they are all equally important, but promoting networks in IAMCR, ALAIC or AEIC, similar to the existing in ICA, for example, could be useful both to promote joint/cross-sectional/intersectional research and to raise awareness to add these issues into curricula and projects.

Two of the experts highlighted the creation of LGBTQ policies that would work as a framework to regulate and support research projects and the action of departments and universities.

Finally, based on the proposal by Sam Chan (2017), participants were asked about the main challenges of LGBTQ communication research. We proposed the following three: (1) to achieve balance in L/G/T/B/Q research; (2) to enhance intersectionality; and (3) to internationalize Ibero-American research.

Eight of the 10 experts agreed with these challenges; the two who did not agree suggested, first, to analyze "research activities that are being made outside the formal circuits of indexed publications," and second, to develop more "empirical research to gain scientific visibility."

The experts who agreed with the proposed challenges also raised the following: "to open a line of work to answer the anti-LGBTQ discourse that considers gender studies as an 'ideology' rather than as a 'theory'"; "to address sexual and gender diversity from a perspective that is not so corseted in the static identities proposed by the LGBTQ model"; "to pay greater attention to audience and production analysis, since almost all the efforts continue to be focused on content analysis"; "for Latin America, I would talk about race. In our countries, the issue of race does not get discussed, and it is invisible within the term 'miscegenation'"; and "to innovate methodologically LGBTQ research and to articulate new concepts, proposing new outlooks and own approaches that are not heirs to a heteronormative research tradition."

In the second round, all experts agreed with the challenges proposed in the first round.

### **Conclusions**

Research on LGBTQ communication in Ibero-America does not currently have an important scientific or metatheoretical production. Therefore, to respond to the little research carried out in our field of interest and to increase the visibility and development of these studies, we have implemented a Delphi method in which relevant specialized researchers in the area of LGBTQ and gender studies in Ibero-America have taken part. This study, which has had a strong consensus in the responses of the participants, has highlighted four main issues.

First, we have proposed a definition of LGBTQ studies as an area that analyzes and researches the processes, discourses, and elements of the communicative processes carried out on, around, and from within LGBTQ communities and their intersectionality with other social and cultural identities.

Second, based on the contributions of the experts and the data analyzed in this article's introduction, we conclude that LGBTQ communication studies in Ibero-America are not in a good shape. The possible causes for this include (1) lack of human and financial resources; (2) absence of targeted public research policies; (3) paltry academic production, something that is even more evident in Latin America; (4) little recognition and little academic visibility of these studies (compared with other stronger areas, such as political economy or digital communication), resulting in research conducted under precarious conditions; and (5) the heteronormative and conservative logic that still characterizes the communication in Ibero-American academia.

Third, the analysis of the experts' opinions has shown that the area most traditionally developed is media representation. Why this area and not others? Above all, according to the experts, is that it is easily analyzed by the use of methodologies that are very consolidated in the field of communication, such as content analysis and critical discourse analysis. According to the participants, all areas proposed in this article in the LGBTQ field must be urgently developed, although experts emphasized the need to promote both audience analyses and research that has an impact on public policies and sexual minorities' civil rights.

Fourth, given this situation, some of the measures that have been proposed to improve this field within Ibero-America include the following: strengthening training with specific university programs and degrees; the creation of LGBTQ policies, such as Act 11/2014 in Catalonia, Spain; the promotion of research networks, conferences, associations, and specialized journals; and the opening of areas and working groups within the large consolidated research associations of Ibero-American communication, as ICA and NCA are already doing. These measures have the potential, in the words of one expert, to make a "less gendered and sexualized" academia in Ibero-America by giving visibility and providing answers to the necessities and communicative situations of sexual minorities.

Our findings reveal that the Ibero-American scientific community faces great challenges, thereby opening up the need for a full research agenda over the next decade. What follows is a proposal for an agenda with specific tasks:

1. Because of the relevance that the study of male homosexuality has had, the first challenge is to reach a balance among the research on the different identities that make up the LGBTQ collectives by promoting analysis on lesbians, bisexuals, and trans and queer minorities.
2. It is necessary to go beyond the analysis of LGBTQ representations and messages. Other elements, such as audiences, producers, uses, and effects, also need to be researched to fully understand sexual minorities from a communication point of view.

3. Overcoming the “mediacentrism” that dominates the field is another urgent task. Nonmedia research, such as health, intercultural, political, interpersonal, family, group, or organizational communication, also constitutes relevant symbolic processes and spaces for LGBTQ issues.
4. To conduct research on the aspects highlighted in Points 2 and 3, alternative methods to the “traditional” content analysis and critical discourse analysis need to be implemented, as well as in-depth interviews, focus groups, Delphi techniques, ethnography, simulation experiments, big data, network analysis, and so on.
5. Because LGBTQ dynamics and interactions cannot be fully understood in a communicative way as an isolated cultural identity, the study of sexual identities needs to be more intersectional, considering racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, age, religious, and ideological aspects.
6. The last task of our agenda includes developing and consolidating national and international research networks (e.g., conferences, research groups, and journals) that can be competitive in obtaining institutional funding and advocating for the approval of policies.

We began this article referring to the murder of Carlos Sanchez, a Latino trans person who lived in the 1970s in New York. As we have seen, these same sexual minorities who historically inhabited the political and social margins remain today on the periphery of Ibero-American academia. The underdevelopment of LGBTQ issues from a communication perspective shows how sex and gender have been, and still are, key constitutive forces in power relations. If communication researchers do not want to perpetuate experiences of marginalization and stigmatization, they need to respond to the challenges and agendas highlighted in this article. By doing so, the field can help to promote the normalization and acceptance of sexual diversity so that the invisibility and (symbolic) deaths of so many “Carlos Sanchezes” will not have been a futile suffering.

### **Limitations and Future Research Lines**

This study has several limitations, deficits that, at the same time, open up future research lines. The first limitation is undoubtedly the lack of previous meta-analysis on LGBTQ communication research in Ibero-America. This deficit has been addressed with a Delphi method, which is a technique specifically designed for scenarios characterized by uncertainty, as in this case. The second limitation is the absence of other Delphi methods conducted on LGBTQ studies, which has made comparison among different panels of experts not possible. The third limitation is the lack of participants in this Delphi study from Ibero-American countries other than Spain, Peru, Colombia, and México.

These limitations open up future research lines to continue exploring and mapping the field of LGBTQ communication studies. As we have maintained in this article, meta-analyses are important proposals because they invite us to reflect on what has been done and what aspects need to be improved. In this



sense, we would like to highlight two recommendations for the development of future meta-investigations. The first is the necessity to map the field and its challenges through different techniques, such as in-depth interviews, surveys to scholars, and content analysis of research produced in Ibero-America, but published in English-language journals. The second recommendation is the development of Delphi methods among experts, including more voices from Latin America and implementing panels from other geographical and cultural areas (e.g., Anglo-Saxon, European, Asian, and African spaces and nations). This would make possible the international comparison among different panels of experts.

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#### Appendix: Fact Sheet

- **Methodology applied.** Delphi method
- **Medium.** Online questionnaire
- **Universe.** Researchers and experts in LGBTQ and gender communication studies in Spanish-speaking Ibero-America
- **Sample size:** 10 experts
- **Selection procedure:** Ibero-American researchers and experts with a recognized career in LGBTQ and gender studies
- **Dates of field work.** First round: March 1–14, 2019. Second round: April 14–26, 2019
- **Universities and institutions represented:** Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universidad de Salamanca, Universidad de Murcia, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Centro de Investigación CONACYT, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universitat de València, and Universidad Industrial de Santander
- **Countries represented:** Spain, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru