

## **Emerging Currents in Communication/LGBTQ Studies: A Review of LGBTQ-Related Articles Published in Communication Journals from 2010 to 2015**

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Since the late 1970s, communication scholars have been playing a significant role in LGBTQ scholarship. To understand the state-of-the-art LGBTQ studies within the communication discipline, I present a systematic review of 237 LGBTQ-related articles that were published in communication journals from 2010 to 2015. I examine the objects of study, the methodological approaches, and the themes of research of these articles. Nine themes of research are identified. Based on the review, I point out four emerging currents where communication scholarship can further contribute to larger LGBTQ studies: (1) balancing L/G/B/T/Q, (2) addressing intersectionality, (3) internationalizing LGBTQ research, and (4) embracing interdisciplinarity.

*Keywords: communication, interdisciplinarity, internationalization, intersectionality, LGBT studies, LGBTQ studies, queer studies*

Communication scholars have been playing a significant role in LGBTQ scholarship since the late 1970s (Gross, 2005). The establishment of the Caucus on Gay Male and Lesbian Concerns in the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association) in 1978 and the publication of the essay collection *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication* (Chesebro, 1981) represented the first step that the field of communication contributed to the emerging gay and lesbian studies (Gross, 2005). Over these three and a half decades, LGBTQ studies within the communication discipline have been institutionalized. All three major U.S.-based communication associations—the National Communication Association, the International Communication Association, and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication—have an LGBTQ division or interest group. The International Association for Media and Communication Research and the European Communication Research and Education Association, two Europe-based communication associations, address issues around sexuality in their gender and communication section.

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Recent publications from the subfields of communication—for example, the new media (Dhoest, Szulc, & Eeckhout, 2017; O’Riordan & Phillips, 2007; Pullen & Cooper, 2010), newspapers and magazines (Gudelunas, 2008; Szulc, 2017), political discourse and activism (Görkemli, 2014; Rand, 2014; West, 2013), strategic communication (Tindall & Waters, 2013), video games (Shaw, 2014), and media production (Henderson, 2013), to name a few—continue to shed light on the lived experiences, representations, and discourses of the LGBTQ communities.<sup>2</sup> Outside academia, in the first half of the 2010s, many Western countries took a significant step forward on LGBTQ rights. Same-sex marriage has become legal in more than 20 countries since 2015. Popular public figures came out of the closet (e.g., former NBA player Jason Collins and actor Jodie Foster), and gay people openly took up leading political roles (e.g., Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel).

The sociopolitical changes in these years, together with the growing LGBTQ scholarship, make it worthwhile to take stock of current LGBTQ studies within the communication discipline. In this essay, I present a systematic review of 237 LGBTQ-related articles that were published between 2010 and 2015 in leading communication journals. This criterion inevitably excludes studies that appear in noncommunication journals<sup>3</sup> and studies that were published as collections of essays or monographs. This exclusion is a matter of practicality, because including other noncommunication journals and monographs would make this review unmanageable. Moreover, journals covered here are primarily U.S.-based. Therefore, the review provided here is definitely partial and may not represent what the field of communication as a whole has contributed to the LGBTQ scholarship in recent years. That said, journals included in this review are some leading and influential platforms, where communication scholars and students explore, appreciate, and debate findings and ideas. Furthermore, this review covers articles published from 2010 to 2015, a period when same-sex marriage gained prominence in the political and public debates in the West; therefore, many of the articles reviewed are related to same-sex marriage.

I am also aware of the conflation of LGBT studies and queer studies in this review. Halberstam (2003) even points out that, on many occasions, G studies and L studies should be separated. It is certain that communication scholars have very different investments in various tracks of the LGBTQ studies. This is partly due to the inherently diverse nature of the field of communication. This essay, therefore, serves as a heuristic with which communication researchers can explore the broader LGBTQ studies situated in the field of communication. To do so, I first provide a systematic review of the latest research articles by examining their objects of study, methodological approaches, and the themes of research; second, based on this systematic review, I point out four emerging currents where communication scholarship can further contribute to the larger LGBTQ studies.

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<sup>2</sup> The discipline of communication, on several occasions, reassessed its relation with the LGBTQ studies; see Chevrette (2013); Cox and Faris (2015); Eguchi and Asante (2016); Gross (2005); Henderson (2012); Kuntsman and Al-Qasimi (2012); Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Noncommunication journals such as the *Journal of Homosexuality*, *GLQ*, *QED*, *Sexuality and Culture*, *Gender and Society*, and *Social Text* are common platforms where communication/LGBTQ research can be found.

## Searching for Contemporary Communication/LGBTQ Scholarship

### *Keyword Search*

I used two databases—EBSCO Communication Source and Web of Knowledge—to identify English articles of high relevancy to communication/LGBTQ studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 2010 to 2015. I used the following keywords in the search: *gay* or *lesbian* or *homosexual\** or *MSM* or *men who have sex with men* or *same-sex* or *bisexual\** or *transgender* or *transsexual\** or *cross-dress\** or *transvestite* or *queer* or *LGB\** or *GLB\** or *intersex* or *sexual minority*. In EBSCO Communication Source, I looked for articles with these keywords in their abstracts. Because EBSCO Communication Source covers more than 1,000 titles, I only included communication journals that were identified by the National Communication Association.<sup>4</sup> The search returned 197 articles. In Web of Knowledge, I looked for articles with the keywords as their “topic.” I confined the search to academic journals listed under the communication category in the Social Science Citation Index. I excluded four journals—*Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *Personal Relationships*, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*—because their primary concerns are not about communication and media. This search returned another 209 articles. Of the 406 articles found, 135 were duplicates. Thirty-four articles, on examination, were excluded from the analysis because they were editorial notes, introductions to special issues, interviews, or unrelated to LGBTQ (e.g., same-sex friendship). This resulted in 237 articles. The number of articles published in a single year increased from 27 articles in 2010 to 44 in 2015 (see Table 1). Articles were classified by their objects of study, methodological approaches, and themes (see Y. Zhang & Leung, 2015).

**Table 1. Number of LGBTQ-Related Articles Published in Communication Journals from 2010 to 2015.**

Year	Number of articles
2010	27
2011	27
2012	33
2013	55
2014	51
2015	44
Total	237

### *Object of Studies and Methodological Approaches*

In terms of objects of study, I examined the sexual and gender minorities, countries, and genres addressed in the articles. I also classified the articles by their methodological approaches. Table 2 provides a percentage breakdown of the classification.

<sup>4</sup> The list consists of 105 communication journals and is available online (<http://dev.natcom.org/ResearchandPublishingResources/>).

Initially, I looked at which sexual and gender minority communities the studies addressed. Of those specifically concerned with either gay men, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex people, the most studied group was gay men, accounting for 21.9% of all research. Up to 8.9% of studies solely examined lesbians. The transgender (including drags and gender nonconforming) community was addressed in 10.5% of the studies. Only 0.4% of the studies were exclusively devoted to bisexual people. Among all the articles, 20.7% simultaneously addressed gay men and lesbians. These articles sometimes used the general term *homosexuals* or *same-sex couples* to refer to their concerned population. Furthermore, 22.4% of the articles collectively addressed LGB, LGBT, or LGBTQ; sexual minorities; or queer people (using *queer* as an umbrella term to stand for LGBTQ). Finally, 15.2% adopted the notion of queer as a theoretical construct in the analyses. These studies did not concern queer people per se, but used queer theory for theoretical engagement (e.g., McDonald, 2015), rhetorical critiques (e.g., Fathallah, 2015), or social critiques (e.g., Seegert, 2014).

**Table 2. Classification of the Articles.**

Classification	Percentage breakdown
Sexual and gender minorities	Gay men only 21.9%; lesbians only 8.9%; transgender people only 10.5%; bisexual people only 0.4%; gay men and lesbians/homosexuals/same-sex couples 20.7%; any combination of LGBTQ/sexual minorities/queer 22.4%; queer as in queer theory 15.2%
Region <sup>a</sup>	North America 65.0%; Europe 16.9%; Asia 8.9%; Australia 7.2%; Africa 3.4%; South America 0.4%
Genre <sup>a</sup>	Television dramas 15.6%; films 13.5%; news 7.6%; social media 6.8%; advertising and promotion 3.4%; magazines 2.5%; music 2.1%; noninteractive websites 2.1%; books 1.7%; video games 1.3%; photos 0.8%; unspecified media/practices/events 34.6%; people-focused 13.9%
Methodological approach	Qualitative 76.8%; quantitative 14.3%; mixed 3.8%; conceptual 5.1%

<sup>a</sup> Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Similar to the general trend in these U.S.-based communication journals, the majority of the research addressed media content or issues in North America (65.0%).<sup>5</sup> The second largest geographical area of concern, albeit with far fewer articles, was Europe (16.9%). Research conducted about Asia accounted for 8.9%; Australia, 7.2%; Africa, 3.4%; and South America, only 0.4%.

Classifying studies by genre rather than media makes sense because a single medium can deliver different kinds of genre of content—for example, television news programs and drama series. Some studies examine multiple genres at the same time. Television drama series were the focus of 15.6% of the articles, followed by films (13.5%), news (7.6%), and social media (6.8%). Advertising and promotional materials accounted for 3.4%; magazines, 2.5%; music and traditional websites, each, 2.1%. Only 1.7% of the studies examined books, while 1.3% and 0.8% of the studies examined video games and photos,

<sup>5</sup> Of the 154 articles that covered issues in North America, only five concerned Canada.

respectively. About one-third (34.6%) of the studies examined unspecified mass media, a social practice, or an event. Finally, 13.9% of the studies focused on the people, not any media content.

Most articles were based on empirical research. More than three-quarters of the research (76.8%) used qualitative methods, and 14.3% were purely quantitative. Mixed-methods studies accounted for only 3.8%. Some (5.1%) studies were purely conceptual.

### ***Themes of Research***

In classifying the themes of the articles, I referenced the themes used in earlier collections of essays on communication/LGBTQ studies (Chesebro, 1981; Ringer, 1994; Wolf & Kielwasser, 1991; Yep, 2004). For example, "media representations of sexual minorities" and "gay and lesbian rhetoric" appear repeatedly as a section divider in these works; Yep (2004) also identified five distinctive areas of LGBTQ/communication research: lesbian and gay movement and activism rhetoric, lesbians and gays in the media, interpersonal communication and HIV/AIDS-related work, performance of sexual and gender identities, and queer readings and analyses of media. The categorization of the research themes was akin to the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I read each article thoroughly and attempted to categorize it using the existing themes. If an article did not fit a theme, I created a new category. All studies were then reread in light of this new categorizing scheme. This process continued until no more new categories were created. I finally identified nine themes: (1) analysis of LGBTQ content and issues, (2) queer analysis of non-LGBTQ content and issues, (3) LGBTQ advocacy and political rhetoric, (4) media effects of LGBTQ content and pornography, (5) negotiation and performance of LGBTQ identities, (6) production of LGBTQ content, (7) health communication, (8) interpersonal and family communication, and (9) queering communication research.

This classification scheme is not an absolute way to organize current communication/LGBTQ scholarship, nor should it be considered as such. Many articles fall into multiple themes simultaneously. My aim is to provide a heuristic through which scholars and students from different subfields in communication can each obtain an overall impression of what communication/LGBTQ studies have covered. Therefore, I do not provide the article count of each theme.<sup>6</sup> The following discussion provides several examples under each category of research.

The first body of research reviewed is the *analysis of LGBTQ content and issues*. This theme comprises quantitative content analyses of media representations of LGBTQ people and issues in the media as well as qualitative critical and cultural analyses of such content. Examples of the former include examinations of the representation of gay men and lesbians in magazines and entertainment media (Bond, 2014; Schwartz & Andsager, 2011). Some studies examined how the media portrayed debates concerning same-sex marriage (Moscowitz, 2010; Rodgers, 2010) and the use of methamphetamine among LGBTQ communities (Schwartz & Willis, 2010). Regarding the latter, scholars interrogated LGBTQ texts and issues, contending that they subtly reinforced heteronormativity. For example, Asimakoulas (2012) examined the English subtitle translation of the Greek movie *Strella*, and Cavalcante (2013)

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<sup>6</sup> A full bibliography of the 237 articles is available at [goo.gl/276E5I](http://goo.gl/276E5I).

studied posters and DVD covers of *TransAmerica*. Based on media coverage on queer teens, Bennett (2010) presented a sympathetic interpretation of future queer projects, noting that queer teens, as reported in the media, prefer to be assimilated into the mainstream heterosexual cultures and to distance themselves from earlier gay movements.

The second body of research is *queer analysis of non-LGBTQ content and issues*. Authors in this cluster of research strongly articulated queer theory in their writing. Their subjects of analysis are also extremely diverse: from conventional media to physical artifacts, judicial arguments, and, in one particular article, a bear. Authors often deconstructed a seemingly non-LGBTQ-related text or issue and found a queer potential. For example, they analyzed fiction (LeMaster, 2011), animals (Seegert, 2014), cosplay culture (Gn, 2011), and sneakers (Scott, 2011). In particular, taking a feminist perspective, White (2011) examined the way in which women sold their wedding dresses on eBay, supporting eBay's normalizing structure of gender, race, and sexuality positions. Spencer (2014) provided an interesting reading of *The Little Mermaid*. Informed by queer criticism, he saw a parallelism in the mermaid story and the transgender identity development, where body-mind and family unities were challenged.

*LGBTQ advocacy and political rhetoric* is also a key interest of communication scholars. This cluster of research concerns histories, discourses, and strategies of the LGBTQ rights movements and legal and political discourses around these issues. The motif of this area of research, albeit described in different vocabularies, was awareness-raising of and for LGBTQ communities. The cluster covered rhetoric analyses of literary texts (Bessette, 2013), political discourse (Awwad, 2010; Johnson, 2013), and others. Ciszek and Gallicano (2013) as well as Mundy (2013) analyzed strategies that LGBTQ organizations use to bring forth social change; West (2010) examined the activism of the campus-based group People in Search of Safe and Accessible Restrooms. However, it is clear that when sexual minorities gain social acceptance, often only certain types of sexual practices or certain kinds of groups can attain a status comparable to those of White, Anglo, middle-class, monogamous, heterosexual people. Gay and lesbian liberation brings with it a new homonormativity. In this light, Chávez (2010) demonstrated how LGBTQ and immigration rights organizations adopted the state's language of family values and good citizenship to gain public support.

Moving away from the textual aspect of the media, two clusters of research address the reception side of the communication process. The *media effects of LGBTQ content and pornography* mainly take a psychological approach to study the effects of exposure to the media. The framing effect of narratives on Chinese students' support for gay rights in China (L. Zhang & Min, 2013), the priming effect of song lyrics on U.S. adults' evaluation of gay rights issues (Jang & Lee, 2014), and the effects of viewing pornography on U.S. adults' acceptance of homosexuality (Wright & Bae, 2013) were examined. These studies demonstrate that the mass media have an effect, though limited, on shaping attitudes toward homosexuality. Different from conventional studies that examine the effects of *consuming* media content, Nodin, Carballo-Dieiguez, and Leal (2014) investigated the change in how men perceived themselves and others after *using* the Internet to seek sex with other men. To some men, seeking sex online contributes to a greater acceptance of one's sexuality; to others, it leads to diminished empathy.

The fifth body of research addressed the *negotiation and performance of LGBTQ identities*. The cultural studies branch of communication studies has long been concerned with how an identity is negotiated and articulated through cultural practices. The identity project can be seen as a “collective labor of crafting, articulating, and pushing the boundaries of identities . . . carried out among and through people, places, media texts, and a host of other circuitous routes” (Gray, 2009, p. 1170). In these studies, some researchers looked at how sexual minorities negotiated their sexual identities and resisted heteronormativity through interpreting and discussing media content (e.g., Marwick, Gray, & Ananny, 2014). LGBTQ identities were also performed through active participation in media culture, such as blogging (Mitra, 2010), having a presence in online networking sites (Milani, 2013), and taking photographs (Boyce & Hajra, 2011). For example, Mitra (2010) considered the dual role of online bloggers, “both as an audience for mainstream media, and as producers of alternative media” (p. 164). Through their blog’s active engagement with the coverage of LGBTQ people by mainstream media, different “interpretative communities” developed. Toward the end of the discussion, Mitra posed a question: Whom do the queer blogs represent? This points out the gender, class, and racial dimensions inherent to various media systems.

A handful of articles addressed the *production of LGBTQ content*. For example, Draper (2010) analyzed how editorship affected the representations of gay men in *Details*, a magazine targeting gay men. Draper argues that the editors appropriated gayness to create another form of straight masculinity. Peters (2011) and Himberg (2014), respectively, took a political economic perspective on how the inclusion of LGBTQ characters in programs increased the profits of the television stations. Beirne (2015) examined the piracy issues of lesbian-focused films in Australia. She contends that online film piracy, while appearing to cause financial loss to the film producers, may be the only way to access certain films that are geoblocked on the Internet. Roth (2015) took a different route to production studies. He analyzed how the content management policies of platforms such as Apple’s App Store enable only certain forms of self-presentation and communication formation.

The following two clusters of studies represent established subfields in communication. First is *health communication*. The prevention of HIV was the main issue in this cluster. For example, Kingdon and colleagues (2013) as well as Khosropour, Lake, and Sullivan (2014) identified better channels to disseminate HIV prevention information to men who have sex with men. Kosenko (2010, 2011) investigated the difficulties for transgender people to talk about safe sex with their partners and suggested that HIV prevention intervention must take into account these difficulties. Goins and Pye (2013), taking an alternative perspective, examined the medical intake forms of clinics and hospitals and interviewed LGBTQ patients to obtain their opinions on these forms. They argued that the existing categories provided on the form made heteronormative assumptions about a patients’ body, sexual orientation, and sexual practices. Moving away from physical health, Crowley (2014) tested how expressive writing assists LGBQ victims of hate speech to reduce stress and foster forgiveness.

Second is *interpersonal and family communication*. Taking a linguistic approach, Coates (2013) and Greco (2012), respectively, analyzed how gender norms and heterosexuality were constructed through everyday talk. The increasing popularity of mobile dating apps has also drawn attention from researchers, who explored the spatial aspect, risks, and impression management associated with the use

of dating apps (Albury & Byron, 2014; Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2015; Roth, 2014). Regarding family communication, Norwood (2013) applied relational dialectics theory to explore family members' struggle in making sense of the gender transition process of their family members. Similarly, Breshears and DiVerniero (2015), based on communication privacy management theory, examined the way children of gay or lesbian parents conceptualized and revealed to others the sexual orientation of their parents.

The final cluster of research was *queering communication research*. To quote Taylor (2012), "Queer as a verb—to queer something—is to unsettle that which is normalized" (p. 605). These articles destabilize many assumptions of communication studies through engagement with queer theory. They cover various major subfields. For example, Mourad (2013) questioned the uses of Western English categories of sexual identities in Arabic countries. This remark is crucial in intercultural communication. From the perspective of rhetorical studies, in line with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading,<sup>7</sup> West (2013) called for more "reparative criticism" that aims at queer world-making instead of "paranoid critique." Chevrette (2013), speaking from interpersonal and family communication, unpacked the heteronormative assumption behind this area, arguing that researchers have always taken dyadic relationships between two persons of different genders for granted. Finally, McDonald (2015) pointed out that the notion of "difference" is critical in organizational communication and discussed how queer theory helps in understanding difference. He suggested that "theorists of organizational, interpersonal, political, and mediated communication can all draw from the assumptions of queer theory to question taken-for-granted normative constructs in these contexts" (p. 325).

#### **Four Emerging Currents**

From the articles reviewed, I would like to suggest several research directions in which communication scholars can further contribute to the larger LGBTQ scholarship. These currents include balancing L/G/B/T/Q, addressing intersectionality, internationalizing LGBTQ research, and embracing interdisciplinarity. Because basing my observations on only communication journals presents limitations, the following discussion occasionally connects these articles to the larger LGBTQ scholarship.

#### ***Balancing L/G/B/T/Q***

The reviewed articles were extremely imbalanced in their foci. In studies that focused on a single category of sexual/gender identity, the most popular focus was gay men (21.9% of the studies). In most cases, researchers grouped lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, transgender people, and queer people together under an umbrella category such as LGB, LGBT, or LGBTQ.

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<sup>7</sup> While queer theorists have long offered critiques on the heteronormative society and practices and revealed various kinds of abuse to the queer communities, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) proposes an alternative approach, which she calls "reparative reading" (as opposed to "paranoid reading"). Reparative reading seeks to repair damage and prejudice against the queer communities that result from homophobia.

About 10 years ago, Gross (2005) called for more attention to the transgender community. The current review shows that this community indeed received more attention than lesbian and bisexual populations. A newly published collection of essays, *Transgender Communication Studies* (Spencer & Capuzza, 2015), investigates the experience of transgender people in different communication settings and their representations in various media. At the time of finalizing this essay, the U.S.-based LGBTQ media advocacy group GLAAD (2017) found that 12% of millennials identified themselves as transgender or gender nonconforming. This suggests a pressing need for researchers to study this community. We can ask what gender nonconforming means to the younger generation.

It has long been argued that lesbianism constitutes a different kind of experience from gay intimacy (Rich, 1993). This review identifies studies that have examined television programs featuring lesbians (Himberg, 2014), motherhood (Koenig Kellas & Suter, 2012), and lesbian writing (Bessette, 2013). Outside the communication area, there are journals dedicated to lesbians' experiences (e.g., *Journal of Lesbian Studies*). Because lesbians or lesbian couples face a different set of biological, social, and financial challenges than their male counterparts, this differential position may affect their interpretation of media content, their negotiation of their identities, and their opinions about social affairs. We must, therefore, ask questions that are pertinent to lesbian experiences.

The absence of sexuality research related to bisexuality has been well noted in the sociology field (Gamson, 2013). Although communication studies about bisexuality certainly exist (e.g., San Filippo, 2013), from the articles reviewed, particularly those related to health communication, bisexuality is partly neglected due to a focus on sexual behaviors rather than on sexual identity. For example, bisexual-identified men were grouped together with gay-identified men into the category of "men who have sex with men" (e.g., Kingdon et al., 2013). From an epidemiological perspective, this is justifiable, because the transmission of diseases is a behavioral phenomenon rather than an identity issue. Nevertheless, as Goins and Pye (2013) found in their research related to medical intake forms, the "lived experiences [of LGBTQ patients] are much more complex than the terminology 'women who have sex with women' and 'men who have sex with men'" (p. 406). Communication scholars must consider the subjective meanings that people place on their bisexual identities.

A few studies exclusively used the term *queer* to refer to the people in the study. The notion of queer has entered public discourse in recent years. However, some studies reviewed merely used the term as shorthand for people who do not follow the heteronormative script, without realizing the political connotations of the term (Gamson, 1995). This reduction of queer to an identity category negates "queer theory's proclamations of deconstructing sexual identities" (Chevrette, 2013, p. 179). Communication researchers must attend to the ideological implication of their choice of identity categories.

### ***Addressing Intersectionality***

Intersectional research specifically "calls for a conceptualization of identity as always comprised of multiple facets and denies that one form of oppression, such as sexuality or gender, should be privileged over another such as race or class" (Chevrette, 2013, p. 180). In this light, the experiences of the LGBTQ communities must be interpreted together with other aspects of their identities, such as race,

class, and age. The review reveals that there is room for communication scholars to examine the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ communities.

While I acknowledge that many race-related studies were published in noncommunication journals or as monographs (e.g., Christian & White, 2016), the erasure of race in the studies reviewed is a problem. Only a few of the 154 articles that covered North America included people of color in their research. Many of these articles apply media effects research, using race as a categorical predictor (e.g., Wright & Bae, 2013). Using race as simply one of the dozens of predictors is quite different from using race as an analytical lens. Some previously reviewed qualitative studies addressed queers of color. For example, Goltz's (2012) analysis of the trilogy by Japanese American director Gregg Araki acknowledged the difficulty that queers of color encounter in envisioning the future. He proposed a queer temporal camp as a third option between Edelman's (2004) rejection of futurity and Muñoz's (2009) present-rooted queer futurity.

Sociologists have described how the expression and identification of sexuality depend on one's economic class, particularly in cultures where a stronger financial status can deflect criticism from one's own family or community (Cantú, 2009; Chou, 2000). In communication studies, viewers' class identity may also inform how they interpret a media text. For example, Tsai (2011) interviewed gay men and lesbians to understand how they interpret advertisements that explicitly target gay and lesbian consumers. Her respondents embraced the myth of affluence of gay men and lesbians and "rejected marginalization through their claims of success in the socially desirable sphere of consumer market and active engagement in the economic activities of mainstream society" (p. 89). This interpretation of advertisements would be unimaginable if the respondents came from a lower economic class.

Although several of the articles reviewed examined the experiences of LGBTQ youth or circumstances affecting the younger generation (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Marwick et al., 2014), only two of the articles reviewed focused on older gay populations. Hajek (2014, 2015) interviewed midlife gay men. Based on communication accommodation theory, he explored how these older gay men used communication technologies to gain approval from the younger generation and reclaim their lost social status. His research shows that older gay men face a set of challenges that their younger counterparts do not. Other studies that were not included in this review have found that senior gay men and lesbians hold a very different set of opinions and values (e.g., Lannutti, 2011). In addition, senior LGBTQ populations may have different access to health information and may be represented differently by the media and in state discourse, points that deserve attention from scholars in the health communication and mass communication fields.

An intersectional approach to studying sexuality and communication requires considering how race, class, and age complicate the experiences of LGBTQ people and what roles these factors play in the communication process. Speaking of quantitative method, intersectional scholar Ange-Marie Hancock (2013) suggests using non-regression-based statistics to better account for intersectional experiences. On the other hand, qualitative-oriented researchers must be more sensitive to the different experiences of LGBTQ people in relation to their class, race, age, and other aspects of their identities.

### *Internationalizing LGBTQ Research*

More than 80% of the communication/LGBTQ articles included in the review were conducted in North America and Europe. Although it is true that most studies published in the U.S.-based communication journals are conducted in the West, communication scholars and students must ask why there is a significant regional difference. In part, it may be that there is arguably less legible LGBTQ content available in non-Western countries, particularly in the mass media, due to less social acceptance. For example, Ho, Detenber, Malik, and Neo (2012) found that although 20.8% of their Singaporean respondents supported a more liberal censorship of homosexual film content, 54.5% supported a stricter stance.

However, a more fundamental question must be asked: Are the sexual identities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer relevant to people living in non-Western countries? In her methodological reflection, Mourad (2013) pointed out that there were no terms in the Arabic languages that directly corresponded to the words *gay* and *homosexual*. She argued that "a commitment to recognize the fluidity of sex must come with an equal commitment to theorize the fluidity of language" (p. 2543). Almaguer (1993), in his classic piece, states the category of gay originated from the United States and as such is not a suitable term for men who have sex with men in South America. What these scholars suggest is that the sexual categories of gay and lesbian are products of a history unique to the West, particularly the United States.

Furthermore, internationalizing communication/LGBTQ scholarship does not mean simply replicating studies from around the world. Scholars must consider transnational contexts to ask better, culturally sensitive questions. For example, in the post-Stonewall era, coming out is, particularly in the West, often understood as an individual and political act performed to make the public realize that gay people are everywhere. However, it cannot be assumed that the coming out strategy is universally applicable. Shiau (2014) explained this point as follows:

Because of the need to be socially realistic in the Taiwanese context, coming out does not occur as a direct and straightforward conversational process between parents and children, but instead is a prolonged process of acculturation in which children gradually understand the feelings of their parents, and their parents slowly acquire an understanding of queer culture. (p. 234)

This example suggests that, instead of asking people from other parts of the world, "How did you come out to your family?" a more culturally sensitive question is, "What are your strategies to handle your sexual identity and family expectations?" Other examples include asking, "Which sexual subject positions are embraced by different regions of the world?" (instead of "How do people from different regions understand queer as a sexual identity?") or "What kind of homosexuality-related issues are prominent in different regions?" (instead of "How do the public and media react to same-sex marriage?").<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I thank the reviewers for suggesting these questions.

### ***Embracing Interdisciplinarity***

Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz (2005) suggest that “queer studies has been a privileged site for the explicit reconsideration of disciplinarity and knowledge production” (p. 6). I suggest that, similar to its intellectual parent, LGBTQ/communication can ride upon this “privileged” position to reflect on its methodologies, topics, and theories.

The preceding review suggests the three directions in which communication scholars can broaden their interdisciplinary reach and conduct nonconventional yet meaningful research. First, communication scholars have expanded their interest in LGBTQ issues to subfields that were previously “LGBTQ-free.” Two of the reviewed studies illustrate this. Tsai (2011) examined advertisements not for their effects or representation, but for how gay and lesbian communities made sense of and were empowered by such advertisements. In doing so, she considered the common issue of identity negotiation in a media form—advertisements—that previous researchers did not consider relevant to the issue. Tindall and Waters (2012) approached a long-standing media industry—public relations—from a practitioner’s perspective. They learned that the careers of gay men were accelerated in some areas yet jeopardized in others due to their sexuality. Tindall (2013) argues that LGBTQ issues have largely been neglected by scholars in the strategic communication field, including advertising, public relations, and marketing. From her publication experiences, she found that the subfield is insensitive to LGBTQ politics and reluctant to publish research from a queer perspective. Communication scholars can continue expanding LGBTQ studies to video games, user-generated content, and social media. For example, a recent special issue of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* edited by Shaw and Sender (2016) interrogates queer representations and reception regarding the affordances and constraints of emerging communication technologies.

Second, from the initial enterprise that focused on disrupting the equivalences among sex, gender, and sexuality, contemporary queer humanities scholars have already expanded the scope of queer inquiry to any nonnormative people, such as illegal immigrants, poor mothers, welfare queens, protestors, and potential terrorists (Nyong’o, 2005). There is a branch of queer studies that addresses animality (McHugh, 2009). Seegert (2014), reviewed above, considered the death and subsequent exhibition of a brown bear that wandered onto German soil and viewed the transgression of the bear as a challenge to the human–animal boundary. Baker (2012) also considered vampirism as a queer transgression eventually restored by a human. If this sounds farfetched to some communication researchers, it may be worth appreciating and discovering the queer potential of certain artifacts such as statues (Dunn, 2011) or sneakers (Scott, 2011). These studies exemplify how to apply a queer lens to issues that are not conventionally associated with the LGBTQ communities or that are not usually considered as objects for queer critique.

Finally, more collaboration is possible among communication scholars from various subfields. Communication scholars do possess different mind-sets and training: What is required in the psychological approach to communication studies is very different from that required in critical-cultural studies or health communication. It is not unusual to hear confusion from a scholar specializing in one subfield after he or she attends a panel of another subfield at a conference. However, combining the traditions of social sciences and humanities can certainly create innovative research projects. Take Taylor’s (2012)

formulation of the musicosexual synergies as an example. Her theorization may not be understood by social psychologists who stress measurability, or by critical theorists who see music as an ideological apparatus. Here, an interdisciplinary team of communication scholars can work on connecting music with the erotic imagination empirically, perhaps via brain imaging techniques. Critical communication scholars can "read" music from a "reparative" perspective rather than from a "paranoid" perspective. The goal of the collaboration is, therefore, not to search for a consensus regarding a phenomenon, but to provide diverse perspectives in relation to it.

### Conclusion

This essay reviews some of the state-of-the-art research articles representing the intersection between communication and LGBTQ studies from 2010 to 2015. I examine their objects of study and methodological approaches and identify nine major themes. I also point out four emerging currents that future communication researchers may consider investigating.

To reiterate, my review is based on a limited set of studies published in primarily U.S.-based communication journals. Therefore, this essay should not be considered as a complete summary of all recent communication/LGBTQ studies. Regarding the four emerging currents, I do not propose that these directions are completely new or totally absent in the field of communication. Instead, this essay serves as a window through which communication researchers, regardless of their subfields, can more broadly explore LGBTQ studies.

This essay should hopefully help scholars from different subfields to understand and appreciate the contributions of other scholars. To end this essay, I draw the attention of communication colleagues to the notion of "beside" advanced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990):

*Beside* is an interesting preposition . . . because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: Noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. (p. 8)

*Beside* does not merely mean copresence. It is both similarity and difference, both cooperation and competition, both appreciation and criticism, both agreement and disagreement. To advance communication/LGBTQ scholarship, communication scholars with different investments in the various tracks of communication studies should consider each other as beside.

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