


Bisexuality in research: a systematic literature review study

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Abstract

Sexuality is a human and complex phenomenon and its understanding may vary according to the context in which it manifests itself. This research aimed to study how bisexuality has been treated through a systematic review of the literature. The databases were Science, Psycinfo, Pubmed, Scopus, Scielo, and Pepsic with the search descriptor "bisexuality". Inclusion criteria were having the word "bisexuality" in the title, publications between 2000 and 2019, and being in English or Portuguese. Thirty-one documents were located, 4 excluded, and 27 resulted for content analysis. Of these, 26 were English language, and present data regarding the specific and relevant vulnerabilities of this group. The research presents that data on this population is scarce, contributing to the invisibility of the group.

Key words: Sexuality. Bisexuality. LGBTQIA+ population. Invisibility

Bissexualidade na pesquisa: estudo de revisão sistemática da literature

Resumo

A sexualidade é um fenômeno humano e complexo e sua compreensão pode variar de acordo com o contexto em que se manifesta. Esta pesquisa teve por objetivo estudar como a bissexualidade tem sido tratada por meio de uma revisão sistemática da literatura. As bases de dados foram Science, Psycinfo, Pubmed, Scopus, Scielo e Pepsic com o descritor de busca “bissexualidade”. Os critérios de inclusão foram possuir a palavra “bissexualidade” no título, publicações entre 2000 e 2019 e estarem em inglês ou português. Foram localizados 31 documentos, excluídos 4 e resultantes 27 para análise de conteúdo. Destes, 26 eram de língua inglesa, e apresentam dados referentes às vulnerabilidades específicas e relevantes deste grupo. A pesquisa apresenta que os dados sobre essa população são escassos, contribuindo para a invisibilidade do grupo.

Palavras-chaves: Sexualidade. Bissexualidade. População LGBTQIA+. Invisibilidade.



1 Introduction

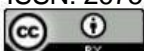
2 Sexuality is thought of as a human phenomenon that integrates factors of a body living in a society, culture, and history. Thus, sexuality cannot be understood and researched in its entirety if we disregard the context, that is, the contingencies to which people are exposed. Thus, gender identity and sexual orientation are components of broad sexuality and there are a range of possibilities for their expression (LOURO, 2018).

The world is increasingly dealing with the recognition of sexual diversity and, at the same time, facing situations of discrimination and prejudice. Homophobia can be defined as a set of complex behaviors, involving operant behaviors and emotional responses, related to various modalities of aggression (whether physical, psychological, sexual or others) against homosexual individuals or those who identify with the homosexual culture (FAZZANO; GALLO, 2015).

Even though the academia has used the word homophobia as a synonym for LGBTQI+phobia, it is necessary to point out that the discrimination suffered by homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals, intersexuals, transvestites and transsexuals, and queers are distinct from each other, manifest differently and have unequal intensities (AVELAR; BRITO; MELLO, 2010).

Junqueira (2009, p.30) states that in schools the themes related to homosexualities, bisexualities and transgenerities are still "invisible in the curriculum, in the textbook and even in discussions about human rights. Despite this, LGBTQI+ research has increased in Brazil and worldwide, especially on the lesbian, gay, and transgender population. Still it is noticeable that the bisexual population is not usually a focus within the theme.

For years, it has been difficult to define bisexuality (KLESSE, 2018), but one can attempt to define bisexual behavior as a person's sexual activity that, possibly for a period of time, participates in other sexual activities with other men, women, and sometimes transgender partners (SANDFORD; DODGE, 2008). The problematic in this definition





refers to the use of men and women as biological sex, excluding from the definition non-binary people and queers who do not classify themselves as transgender.

This issue is commonly pointed to as part of why it is so difficult to define bisexuality. Klesse (2018), points out that while some bisexual activists explore this identity as a starting point for destabilizing and transgressing hetero-patriarchal duality, heteronormativity, and mononormativity (naturalization of monogamy), other activists attempt to fit bisexuality as a third classification of sexual orientation as a form of recognition.

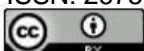
Given the above, one wonders how much and what has been studied about bisexuality and under which strands? What modalities of study and procedures of collection and analysis? To answer these questions, we proposed this documentary study based on a systematic review of the literature.

This study aimed to analyze the theme of bisexuality through a systematic review of the literature. It is hoped that the data will point paths for the contribution of psychology in the construction of knowledge about bisexuality, and the fight against biphobia..

2 Methodology

This is a quantitative, descriptive study that carries out a systematic literature review (GIL, 2002) in previously delimited databases. The data collection and analysis procedures were as follows:

- The relevant databases in the Psychology area were chosen: Science, Psycinfo, Pubmed, Scopus, Scielo and Pepsic;
- Articles in periodicals were searched using the descriptor: "bisexuality", (it was proposed to use only one generic descriptor since the combination of descriptors made it even more difficult to gather articles);
- Inclusion criteria were: have word in title, be open access, date period: years between 2000 and 2019; languages English and Portuguese.





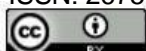
The analysis of the articles was made from the general characterization of the articles, such as, for example, the nature of the studies, the target audience (participants involved), authors of the studies, place of publication, area of the journals, etc. The instruments used for the practical research were also identified, with emphasis on those that proposed to map prejudice. From this analysis, a psychological reading and interpretation is proposed, since the area has several contributions to mapping and collecting data on prejudice.

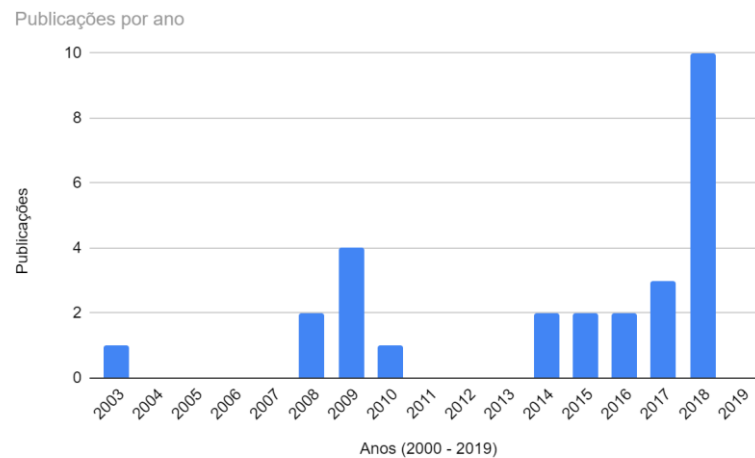
3 Results and Discussion

A total of 31 articles were found, 27 of which were included in the analysis. Regarding the remaining four articles, it was decided to exclude them from the analysis since they referred to the biological area, despite the initial search. Of these, three articles referred to the possibility of finding bisexuality in plants, and one referred to the prevalence of right-handed and left-handed people among the bisexual population, being, therefore, out of the scope of this study.

We can observe the publications by year in Figure 1. The largest annual publications were concentrated in 2009 (n=4) and in 2018 (n=10). It is relevant to point out that the years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2019 had no publications on the subject within the criteria of the present study, being that these years correspond to more than 50% of the researched period.

Figure 1. Distribution of selected articles over the years

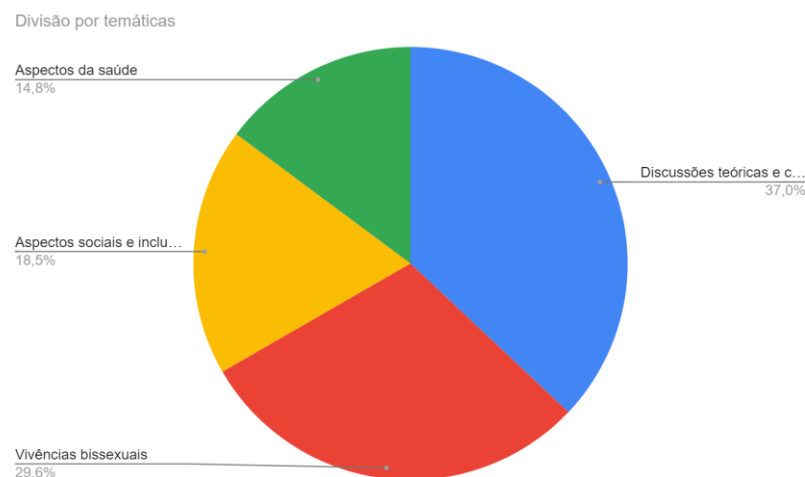




Source: study data

The journal areas were: Sexuality (n=16), Psychology (n=6) and General (n=6). The articles were organized in four thematic categories: 1) "Theoretical and conceptual discussions" (n=10 articles); 2) "Bisexual experiences: visibility, sexual health, therapeutic clinic, relationships" (n=8); 3) "Social and inclusive aspects" (n=5), 4) "Health aspects: characterization and description" (n=4). As can be seen in Figure 2, the theme "Theoretical and conceptual discussions" occupies 37% of the articles.

Figure 2. Distribution of articles by thematic areas.



Source: Study data.

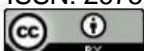


As for the location of the published articles, 35.7% (n=10) were done in the United Kingdom, followed by 32.1% (n=9) done in the United States. This result is expected since the languages included in the analysis were English and Portuguese. In Portuguese, only one article was found, done in Brazil. Other countries that published their research in English were Canada (n=3), Netherlands (n=2), Italy (n=1), India (n=1) and Australia (n=1).

Fourteen articles were found to be theoretical and/or with content analysis (e.g. media analysis), and 13 articles where field research was conducted. Of the field research, five surveys are qualitative, mostly focused on semi-structured interviews, five surveys are quantitative, and, three surveys feature both quantitative and qualitative parts.

When speaking of the broad population in the 13 field surveys, it is noted that four surveys included the general population. Majority, these surveys cover the prejudice and preconceived ideas of the population towards the bisexual community. Another four field surveys utilized the bisexual population for data. Two surveys utilized bisexual women, and two other surveys utilized men who have sexual contact with other men (i. e., gay men, bisexual men, and men with bisexual behavior). This category was not used in any of the female surveys. No surveys used data collected only with bisexual men. One survey collected data with two bisexual women and one homosexual trans man. The most commonly used methods for contacting the collection population were opportunity sampling, internet group search, and snowballing (when a participant refers someone who meets the requirements for the collection, becoming a next participant).

About the methods of obtaining data from field research, the most used is the semi-structured interview (4 articles). One article, (GUSMANO, 2018) uses the "Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method," (BNIM), which is an interview technique that uses a single question ("Single Question aimed at Inducing *Narrative*") that is intentionally open-ended, with the intention of provoking a production of narrative from the participants' own terms (CORBALLY, O'NEILL, 2014). Another article, (PEREIRA; BECKER; GARDINER, 2017) uses a combination of a combined da "Q methodology" e of





"Think Aloud" to explore how cultural knowledge about bisexuality is constructed and maintained.

"Q-methodology" is a systematic study of participants' views from ranking participants under a series of statements. It is an instrument created by William Stephenson that involves technique, method, philosophy, ontology, and epistemology. This method reveals and describes different views within groups, as well as consensus. The method is freely accessible, and is available at: <https://qmethod.org/>

The "Think Aloud" method was developed from older methods of introspection. It has its roots in psychological research, and its first use dates back to 1987, with Breuker and Wielinga, but it was validated in 1993, with Ericsson and Simon. This method treats the verbal protocol as data, and avoids interpretation by checking the simplest verbalization process (SOMEREN et al., 1994).

Other research has been more vague regarding its data collection. One article (HUBBARD; de VISSER, 2015) says that data collection was done through an online questionnaire about attitudes toward bisexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality, and how stable they believed these orientations to be. Yet another article, (TOFT, 2014), only presents that the collection method had been 80 self-administered questionnaires, and 20 more in-depth interviews.

Another 3 articles use scales not necessarily referring to sexuality, such as Hospital Anxiety, Depression Scale, Venereal Disease Research Laboratory and HIV, and scales referring to psychological and minority stress (RICH et al., 2018; KUMTA et al., 2010).

Let us deal with two more instruments used by the bibliography that deal specifically with the field of sexuality. They are: the "Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG)", used in the article by Weinrich et al. (2014) and the "Biphobia Scale", used in the article by Hertlein; Hartwell and Munns (2016).

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, (KSOG), is a system that seeks to describe an individual's sexual orientation in a very detailed way. It was created in 1978 by Dr. Fritz Klein, in his book "The Bisexual Option." The instrument has no function claim The test is



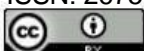


not intended to be diagnostic, but rather to provide a complex and nuanced view of sexuality. It is freely accessible and has been adapted to contemporary language, and anyone can take the test from the site: <https://bi.org/en/klein-grid>.

The test considers several parts of sexuality, namely: sexual attraction; sexual behavior; sexual fantasies; emotional preference; social preference; homo/heterosexual lifestyle; and self-identification. It also takes into consideration the dynamism of sexuality through time (past, present) and the ideal situation for the individual. Despite considering the dynamism of sexual life, the instrument leaves something to be desired when it comes to the asexual population, since it disregards the lack of attraction or romantic need as an option, and also the trans population, always using the term "sex" and not gender.

Still another field research, uses the "Biphobia Scale", together with other instruments already published (not identified), thus creating an instrument with 147 items of open questions about the stigma experienced by bisexual participants. The Biphobia Scale (free translation), was created by Mulick and Write in 2002 and features sentences with which the participant can scale how much they agree or disagree. Some of the sentences are:

- "I don't like bisexual individuals;
- I believe that bisexuality is wrong;
- I would like to have a bisexual person as a neighbor;
- I would be friends with a bisexual person; (...)
- Bisexual individuals spread AIDS to the heterosexual population;
- (...)
- I don't think bisexual people should work with children; (...)
- I have unstable relationships with people that I believe are bisexual;
- Bisexual people want to have sex with everyone;
- Bisexual people are not able to control their own impulses." (p.57, free translation)





It is known that using such statements may not give very accurate data regarding biphobia, since there is a discourse of what is or is not acceptable to say. The participant, therefore, can answer what he believes the interviewer, or other agents, want him to answer, omitting what he really thinks.

4 Final Considerations

From the results of the present study, the low visibility that bisexuality has in relation to other sexualities stands out. It can be seen that the studies that research bisexuality are not usually from psychology, and this form of identity is far from having concrete and conclusive scientific data. Psychology has part of the responsibility to enable bisexuality to come out of the shadows by treating it as a research topic and creating data on the population and on biphobia, so that we can then create strategies to deal with prejudice against bisexuals. We also encourage the creation of interventions for the general population to understand, know, and demystify bisexuality.

This study, therefore, proposes a beginning, a basic survey of bibliography so that bisexuality and sexualities that do not conform to social binarism can be studied in depth by psychology.

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