

# More Missing: Expanding Content Analysis in Social Work Journals to Include Non-Binary Orientations and Gender Identities

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## Background

In 2002, Van Voorhis and Wagner published “*Among the Missing: Content on Lesbian and Gay People in Social Work Journals*”. This study was a content analysis of four significant social work journals (1988 – 1997) which identified articles that covered gay and lesbian issues and provided an analysis of the article themes and focuses. Pelts, Rolbiecki, and Albright repeated this study and analyzed the same journals covering the years 1998 – 2012.

As of 2015, there was no comparable analysis of social work journals that looked at content applicable to individuals with non-binary identities (orientations that are not specifically straight, gay, or lesbian, and gender identities that are not cis male or cis female).

## Purpose

The purpose of this project was to look at four significant social work journals (1998 – 2013) to identify articles that pertain to non-binary orientations and gender identities and to compile an overview of population focus, topics, and purpose (i.e. client intervention, practitioner knowledge, or macro/other). Language within the articles was analyzed to determine if it was fluid/closed, current, and inclusive. Each article’s abstract, introduction, and literature review was analyzed to determine its level of inclusivity. The remainder of the article was reviewed to determine if the same level of inclusivity was consistent throughout the article’s study design, methods and discussion.

## Journals

These study journals listed below were chosen because they “have a national audience; are viewed as major social work journals and reflect current trends; have been used in previous content analyses; are not limited to one area of social work practice; and have established publication records.”<sup>4</sup>

- ❖ *Social Work*
- ❖ *Child Welfare*
- ❖ *Social Service Review*
- ❖ *Families in Society*

## Process

**Publication Period Analyzed:** 1998 – 2013

**Inclusion Criteria:** Contains material addressing any sexual orientation other than straight, gay, or lesbian and/or any gender identity other than cis male or cis female

**Exclusions:** Short elements such as editorials, book reviews, and letters

**Total Articles Published:** 2,496

All were evaluated by title and abstract

**Articles Pulled for Full-Text Review:** 94

**Articles Identified for Inclusion:** 27

These articles were coded and analyzed

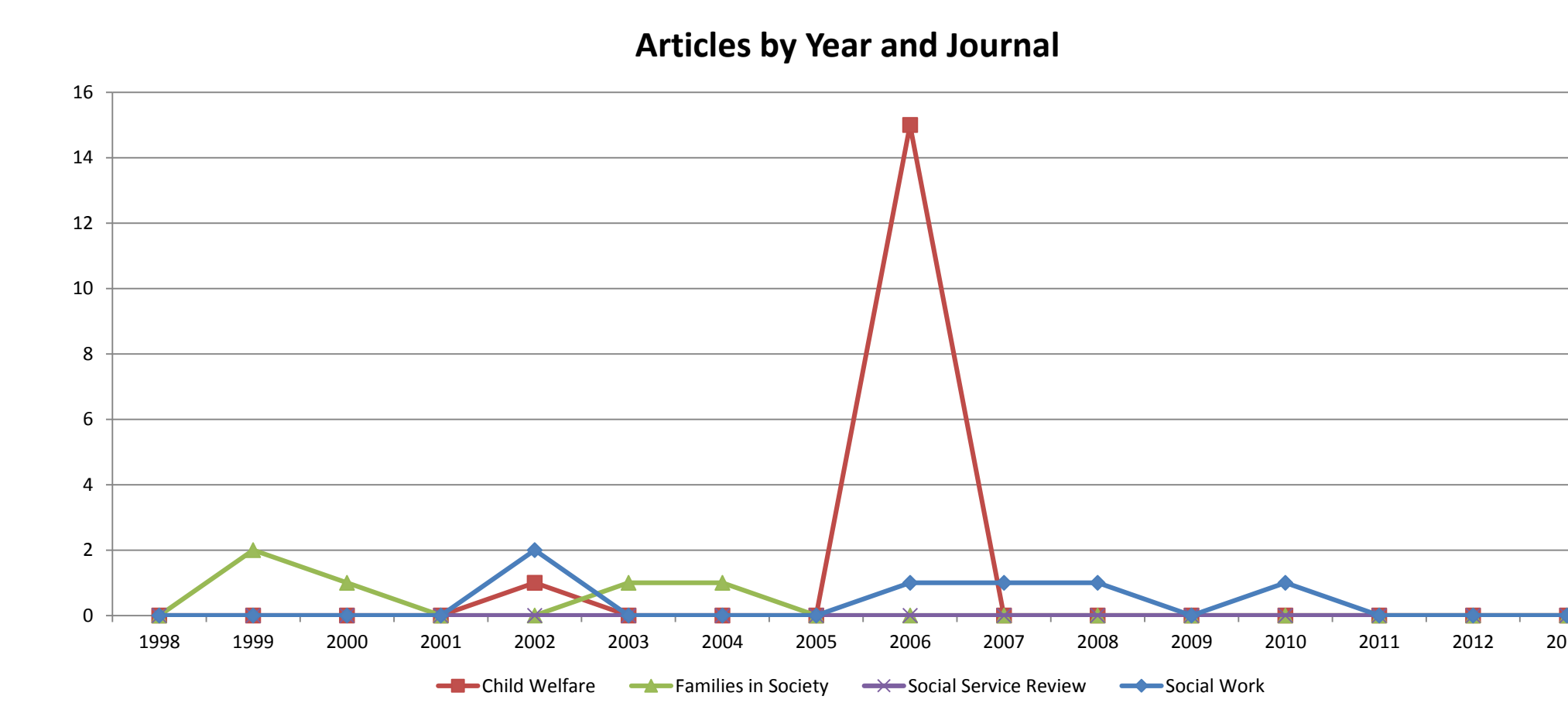
**Total Qualifying Content:** 1.08%

## Results

### Language / Inclusion

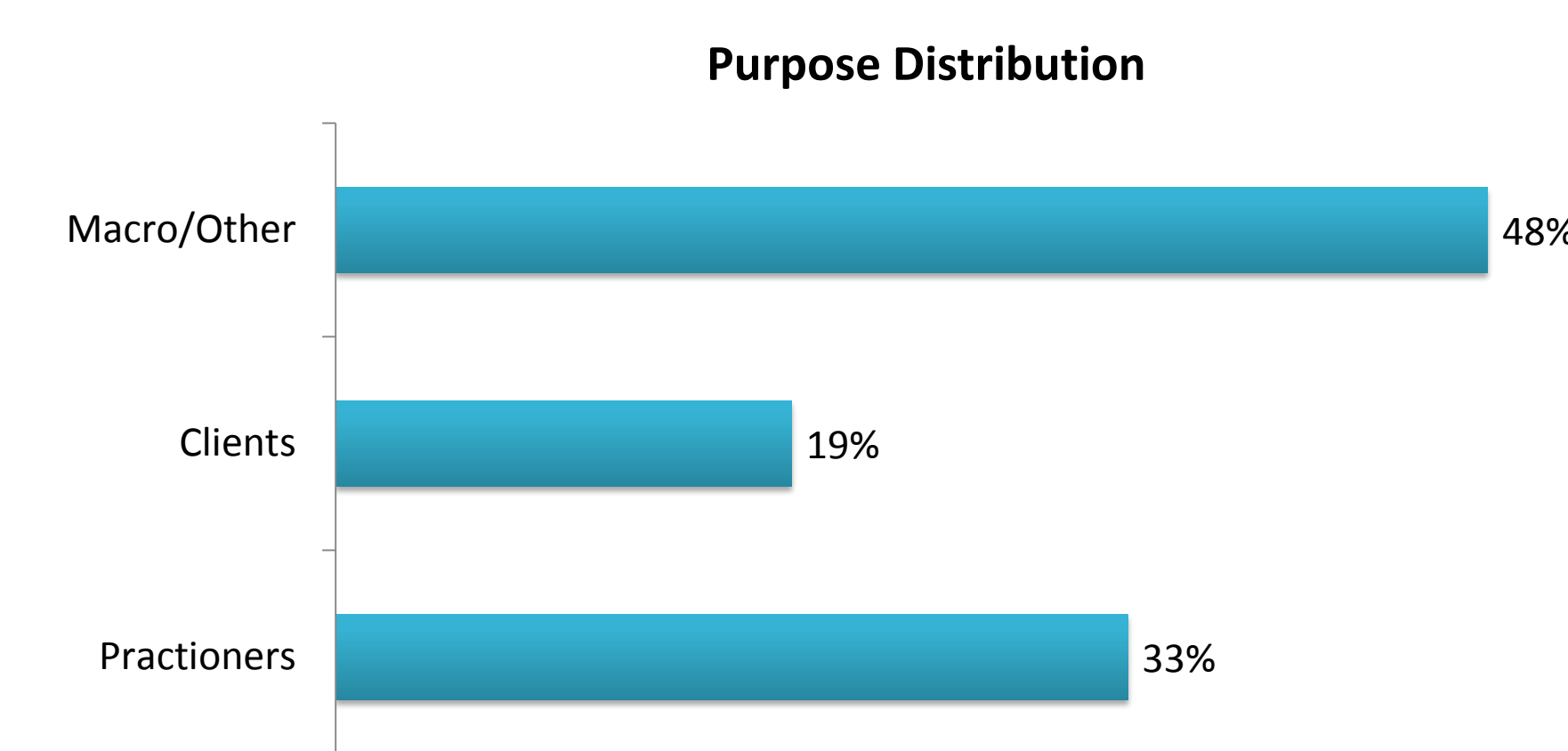
- ❖ Most commonly used acronym: LGBTQ
- ❖ 44% of articles used outdated and/or dehumanizing language
- ❖ The majority of problematic language issues were in reference to non-cis genders (e.g. referring to trans individuals as “it”)
- ❖ 33% of articles had non-binary inclusive acronyms and/or opening language, with main body of material focused on only gay/lesbian individuals or families
- ❖ 70% of articles showed heterosexist or cissexist biases as defined by the APA
- ❖ Only one article included intersex individuals
- ❖ The only non-binary orientation that was discussed in any article was bisexuality, with that identity usually being subsumed into gay or lesbian if the individual(s) had a same-sex partner and elided if the individual(s) were not same-sex partnered

## Results

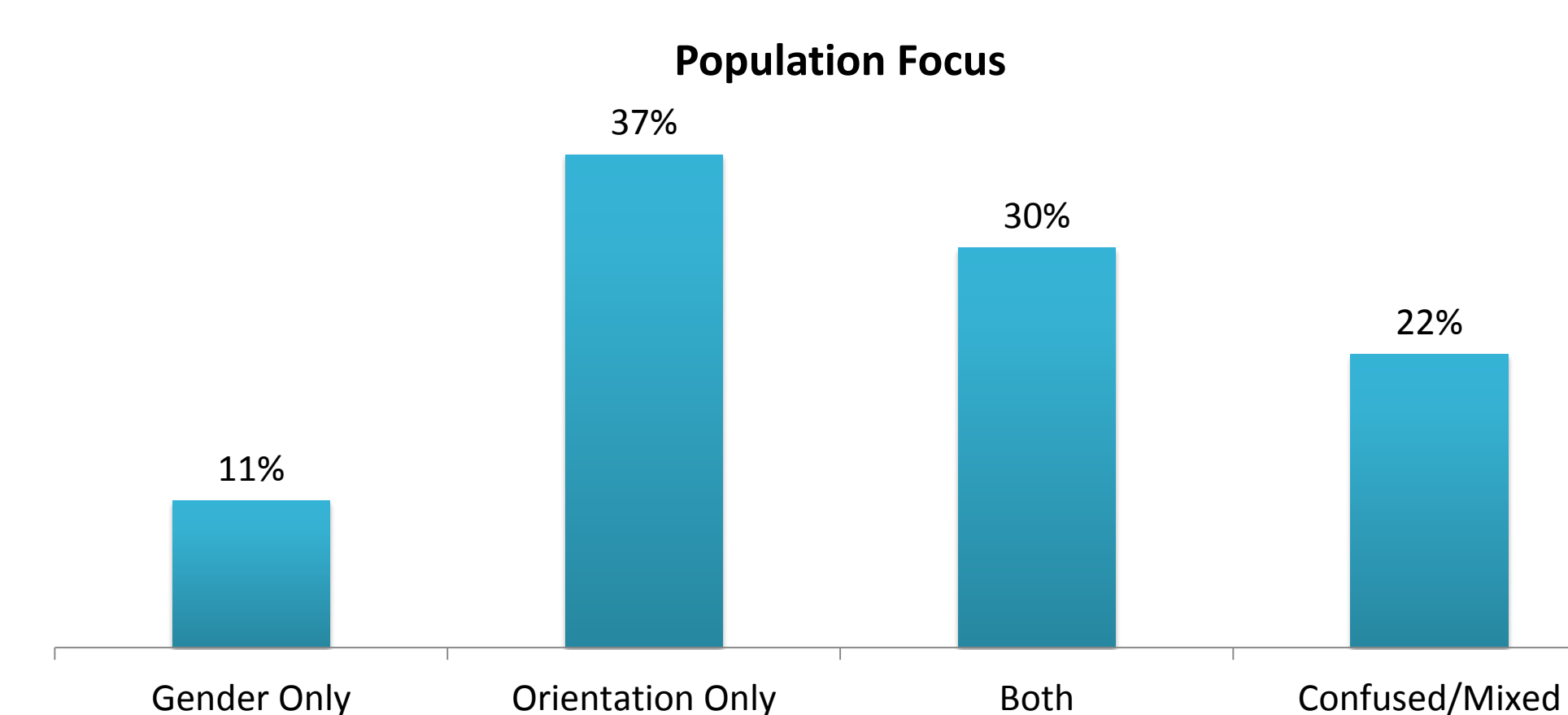


Of the 27 articles, 15 were published in a 2006 special issue of *Child Welfare* related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, resulting in a single month having 55% of all included articles.

With this special issue excluded, there is an average of less than one article (0.75) per year, with a high of 3 in 2002. During 7 of the study years, there were 0 articles published.



Topics	#	%
Youth in Out-of-Home Care	9	33.4%
Administration and Training	4	14.8%
Trans - Specific Issues	3	11.1%
Health Care and Related Issues	3	11.1%
Community Interventions	3	11.1%
LGB Parents (Bio, Step, & Foster)	2	7.4%
Homeless Youth	2	7.4%
Guidelines for Practice	1	3.7%



## Conclusion

More research involving all marginalized orientations and gender identities is needed, but the lack of content regarding non-binary identities and issues is especially glaring since only 1.08% of 2,496 published articles included material applicable to individuals with non-binary identities.

Content that needs to be prioritized includes:

- ❖ conceptual and descriptive knowledge about non-binary and/or variant aspects of sex identity, gender identity, romantic orientation and sexual orientation;
- ❖ accurate terminology and language that affirms the experiences of non-binary individuals;
- ❖ identifying and avoiding heterosexist and cissexist bias in assumptions, attitudes and practice tools; and
- ❖ working with cultural norms and patterns within various non-binary communities.

## References

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4. Van Voorhis, R., and Wagner, M. (2002). Among the missing: Content on lesbian and gay people in social work journals. *Social Work, 47*(4), 345-354.

## Acknowledgements

Funding for this study was provided by an Undergraduate Research Experience and Creative Activity (URECA) grant awarded by the Middle Tennessee State University Undergraduate Research Center.