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The Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Health Sciences Students: A Content Analysis of Health Sciences Education Journals

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ABSTRACT

Objectives:
The objective of this study is to discover and synthesize the concepts and contents of the literature published in health sciences education journals investigating the experiences of LGBTQIA+ health sciences students.

Methods:
Literature searches were performed in Ovid MEDLINE, Embase, and ERIC databases based on an established PubMed search strategy and adapted for each database. Results were limited to the contents of a selection of health sciences education journals. Studies were required to focus on the experiences of health sciences students identifying as LGBTQIA+ and their perceptions of these experiences.

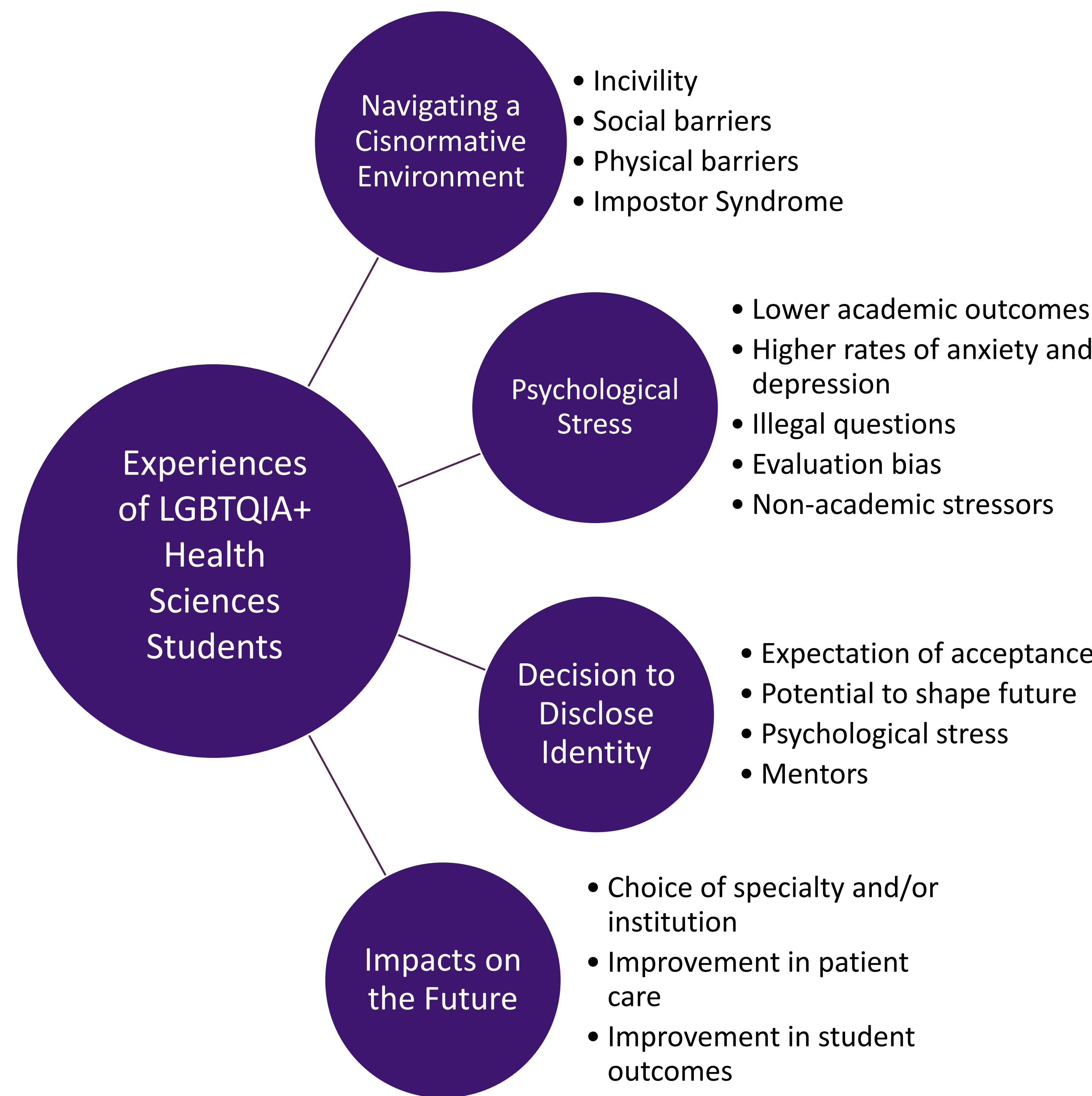
Results:
Searches yielded 695 citations. After initial screening, 168 studies were retrieved for full-text screening; final analysis included 24 studies. Concepts explored in these studies included navigating through the cisnormativity of health science education, psychological stress, the choice to disclose, and impact on the students’ future.

Conclusions:
LGBTQIA+ students face significant challenges while pursuing a future in the health sciences. However, the health sciences education literature lacks inquiry into the full range of those experiences and their effect on students’ mental and physical well-being. The current social and political environments in which these institutions operate make it imperative that these issues be examined.

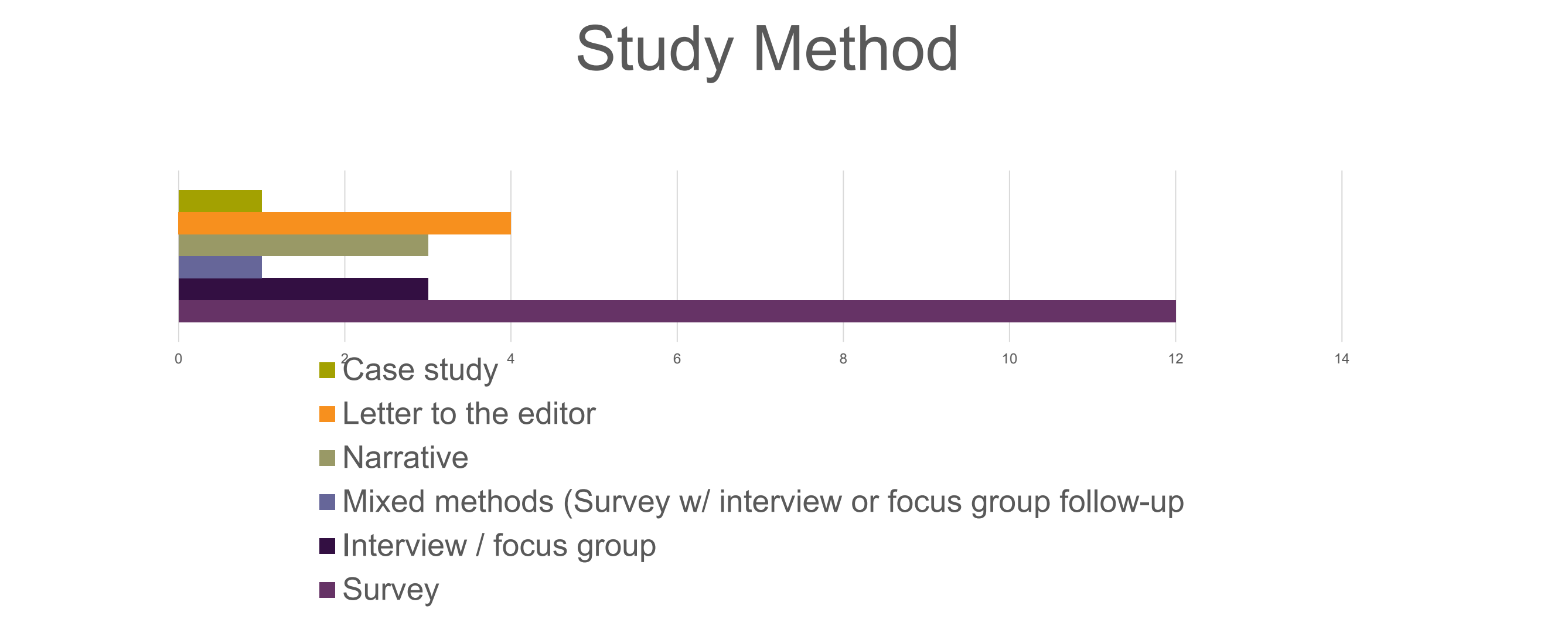
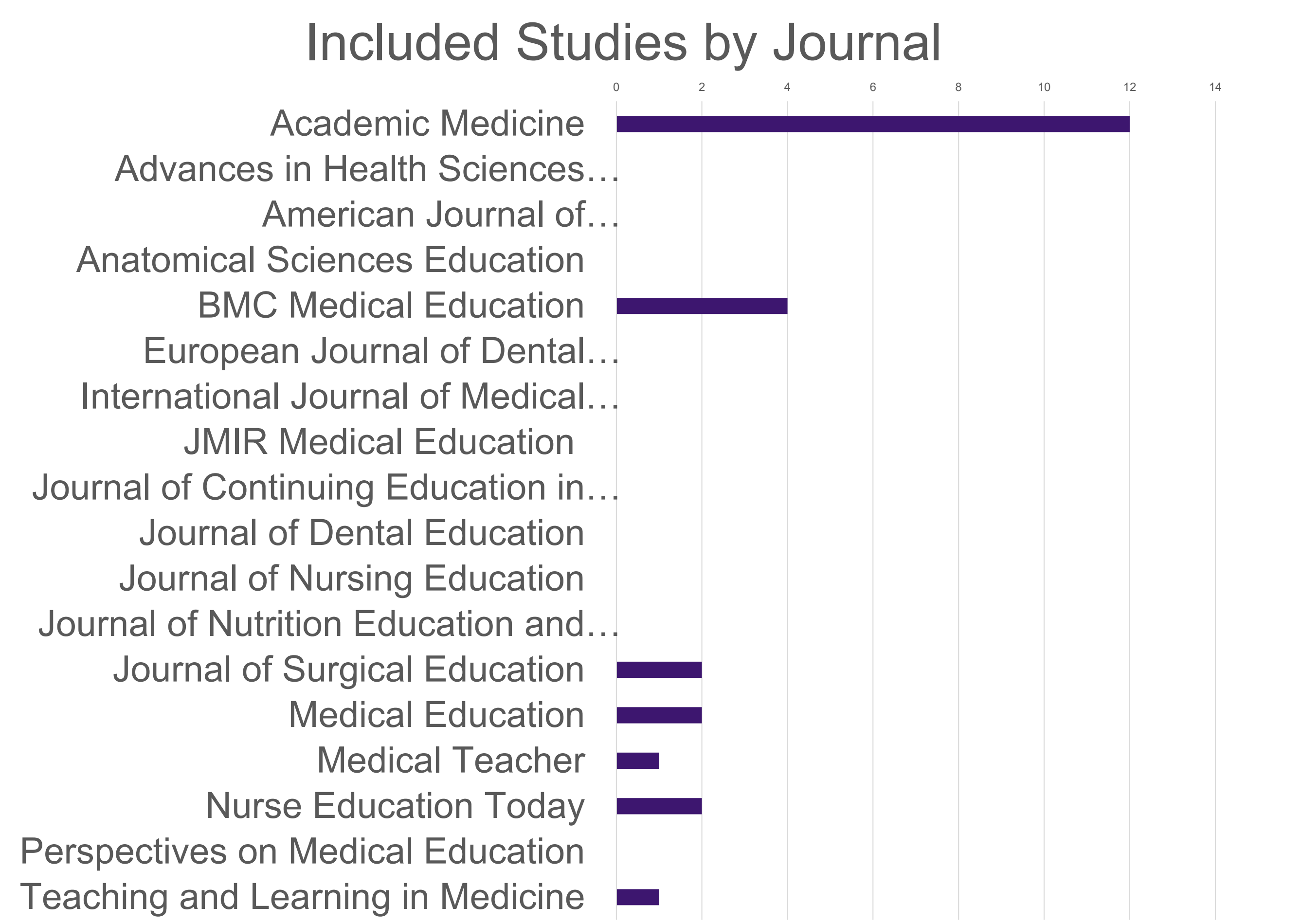
SEARCH STRATEGY

Adapted from Emory Libraries LGBTQIA+ Health Resources Research PubMed Search Strategies:
bisexuals.mp. OR bisexual.mp. OR bigender.mp. OR “disorders of sex development”/ OR disorders of sex development.mp. OR female homosexuality.mp. OR gay.mp. OR gays.mp. OR gender change.mp. OR gender confirmation.mp. OR gender disorder.mp. OR gender disorders.mp. OR gender dysphoria.mp. OR gender diverse.mp. OR gender-diverse.mp. OR gender diversity.mp. OR gender identity/ OR gender identity.mp. OR gender minorities.mp. OR gender non conforming.mp. OR gender non-conforming.mp. OR gender orientation.mp. OR genderqueer.mp. OR gender reassignment.mp. OR gender surgery.mp. OR GLBT.mp. OR GLBTQ.mp. OR homophile.mp. OR homophilia.mp. OR homosexual.mp. OR homosexuality/ OR homosexuality, female/ OR homosexuality, male/ OR homosexuals.mp. OR intersex.mp. OR lesbian.mp. OR lesbianism.mp. OR lesbians.mp. OR LGBBTQ.mp. OR LGBT.mp. OR LGBTI.mp. OR LGBTQ.mp. OR LGBTQI.mp. OR LGBTQIA.mp. OR men having sex with men.mp. OR men who have sex with men.mp. OR men who have sex with other men.mp. OR nonheterosexual.mp. OR non-heterosexual.mp. OR non heterosexuals.mp. OR nonheterosexuals.mp. OR pansexual.mp. OR polysexual.mp. OR queer.mp. OR same sex.mp. OR “sexual and gender disorders”/ OR “sexual and gender minorities”/ OR sex change.mp. OR sex reassignment.mp. OR sex reassignment procedures/ OR sex reassignment surgery/ OR sex reassignment surgery.mp. OR sexual diversity.mp. OR sexual minorities.mp. OR sexual minority.mp. OR sexual orientation.mp. OR transgender*.mp. OR transgender persons/ OR transsexual*.mp. OR transman.mp. OR trans men.mp. OR transmen.mp. OR transsexualism/ OR transsexualism.mp. OR transwoman.mp. OR trans women.mp. OR transwomen.mp. OR two spirit.mp. OR two-spirit.mp. OR women who have sex with women.mp.

RESULTS



Navigating a cisnormative environment:
I remember from day one, there was something where they segregated us by gender—they always do that. I don’t know why they do it in medicine so much... but I remember feeling really uncomfortable . . . and apparently that was just a preview for the rest of medicine [laughs].¹ (pg. 1760)
Psychological stress:
Reducing the added stress for SGM students can help eliminate these consequences. The failure to address the conditions that perpetuate discriminatory environments may prevent SGM students from pursuing successful careers in medicine.³ (pg. 642)
Decision to disclose:
Disclosing sexual or gender identity in the medical education setting invites the uncertain response of those who teach, grade, and critique. Knowing that a single person’s assessment can affect my professional fate, this reality leads to the disheartening worry that my sexual orientation could distort crucial opinions.² (pg. 522)
Impacts on the Future:
I fear that my sexuality in addition to my gender (i.e., being a gay male) would drive patients and colleagues away. Unfortunately, we live in a society that draws negative assumptions that would [be a] detriment [to] my career and my ability to serve my patients.³ (pg. 642)
Although SGM students often experience a different and occasionally hostile environment during training, they also bring a unique and underrepresented perspective to medicine. In particular, these individuals may be much more likely to pursue careers that encompass caring for SGM patients, who face significant health and health care access disparities.³ (pg. 643)



CONCLUSIONS

• LGBTQIA+ Health Sciences students seek visibility and safety in learning environments.

• Changes must be implemented by top administration to affectively address the barriers faced by students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

• Health sciences education literature is greatly lacking concerning the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students during their training.

Limitations

• This study was conducted by one researcher, the potential for bias could be greatly reduced through the involvement of multiple researchers.

• This study was limited to a small number of health sciences education journals.

Further Research

• Research centering around students in other fields of the health sciences.

References

- Butler K, Yak A, Veltman A. "Progress in Medicine Is Slower to Happen": Qualitative Insights Into How Trans and Gender Nonconforming Medical Students Navigate Cisnormative Medical Cultures at Canadian Training Programs. Acad Med. 2019 Nov;94(11):1757-1765. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000002933. PMID: 31397706.
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- Mansh M, White W, Gee-Tong L, Lunn MR, Obedin-Maliver J, Stewart L, Goldsmith E, Brenman S, Tran E, Wells M, Fetterman D, Garcia G. Sexual and gender minority identity disclosure during undergraduate medical education: "in the closet" in medical school. Acad Med. 2015 May;90(5):634-44. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000657. PMID: 25692563.