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Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy
Innovations in Clinical and Educational Interventions

ISSN: 1533-2691 (Print) 1533-2683 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wcrt20

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To cite this article: Markie L. C. Twist, Melissa K. Bergdall, Christopher K. Belous & Candice A. Maier (2017) Electronic Visibility Management of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities and Relationships in Young Adulthood, Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 16:4, 271-285, DOI: 10.1080/15332691.2016.1238798

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2016.1238798

Published online: 25 Jul 2017.

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JOURNAL OF COUPLE & RELATIONSHIP THERAPY
2017, VOL. 16, NO. 4, 271–285
https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2016.1238798

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Electronic Visibility Management of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities and Relationships in Young Adulthood

Markie L. C. Twist[a,b], Melissa K. Bergdall[a], Christopher K. Belous[c], and Candice A. Maier[b]

[a]University of Wisconsin-Stout, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Menomonie, Wisconsin, USA; [b]University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA; [c]Mercer University–Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

ABSTRACT
Visibility management is a process the lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identifying (LGB) people use to manage the extent to which they will identify ("out") themselves in various contexts such as school, work, family, and home-based settings. The purpose of this study then was to explore LGB persons' experiences of electronic visibility in online environments such as social networking sites and the manner in which LGB persons most commonly monitor their electronic visibility as individuals and in couple relationships. Analysis of the survey responses of 61 young adult participants indicated that this sample felt more positive about their identities overall compared with a national sample and that they frequently reported their sexual orientation online, most often on Facebook. In addition, participants reported online disclosure did not have an effect on their relationship satisfaction. Discussion and implications for research and clinical practice are presented.

KEYWORDS
identity development; electronic visibility; visibility management; lesbian; gay; bisexual

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Visibility management refers to the process that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, or couples,[1] use to manage their decisions about disclosing their sexual orientation to others. This ongoing process is often carefully planned, rooted in the ability to monitor exactly to whom, and how, they disclose (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). Often, this includes consideration for the level of perceived safety within societal contexts (e.g., home, school, work) (D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2001). As LGB individuals begin coupling, their individual visibility management moves to couple visibility management, wherein partners might have to negotiate among their visibility differences (Knoble & Linville, 2012). With the advent of social networking sites (SNSs) and increased access to the Internet, sexual orientation minorities are now tasked with also monitoring their identities and relationships electronically, or what the authors are calling "electronic-visibility management" or, shortened, "e-visibility management" (Blumer, Bergdall, & Ullman, 2014a). Although little research has addressed e-visibility management, it is essential because LGB people (a) use the

CONTACT Markie L. C. Twist, PhD, Associate Professor blumerm@uwstout.edu Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Wisconsin-Stout, P.O. Box 790, Menomonie, WI 54751, USA.

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Internet and social networking sites more frequently than heterosexual identifying people (Pew Research Center [PRC], 2013), (b) most commonly form partnerships through online platforms (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010), and (c) experience cyberbullying at higher rate than heterosexuals, which has been found to lower psychological well-being (Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010; Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2013). Thus, the purposes of this study were to explore experiences of e-visibility managemen, and how young adult, university-based, LGB-identifying individuals and couples monitor their visibility online and in their relationships.

Literature Review

A recent poll by Harris Interactive (2010b) suggests that nearly 6.8% of the adult population in the United States (U.S.) identifies as LGB and/or transgender (LGBT). Additionally, the 2010 U.S. Census data indicate that 901,997 same-gender households exist, equaling approximately 1.8 million people and representing nearly 1% (0.773%) of all households (O'Connell & Feliz, 2011). The accuracy of such statistics, however, depends greatly on the willingness for sexual orientation minorities to disclose and be comfortable with becoming visible or being "out" enough to accurately report their orientations and relationship status (PRC, 2013).

Frameworks of nonheterosexual identity development, including disclosure patterns, have been repeatedly identified in literature (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). For example, Waldner-Haugrun and Magruder (1996) proposed the Negotiated Identity Model, which defined the LGB developmental process as being based on one's expressive and behavioral actions, as influenced by the stressors within their societal structure. Although this definition describes the process of being "out," it does not adequately address how exactly people navigate, and renegotiate, the decision (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). The development of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS; Mohr & Kendra, 2011), based on the original Lesbian and Gay Identity Scale (LGIS; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), is focused on exploration of the mitigating circumstances that determine the internal negotiation process for coming out to others. These factors include things such as fear of negative consequences, worry about others' views of their sexual orientation, internalized negative views of their sexual identity, disappointment and confusion about their sexual identity, and the feeling that persons who identified as heterosexual were superior (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000; Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2007) compiled a synthesis of LGB identity development based on a thorough review of the various models available. According to this synthesis, LGB identity development occurs in chronological stages including (a) gaining an awareness of same-gender attraction, (b) engaging in same-gender sexual behaviors, (c) personal identification as nonheterosexual, (d) readiness to disclose to others, and (e) the development of romantic relationships. Although this model may be helpful for some in understanding common experiences within LGB communities, it assumes that development, as well as the decision to "come out," occurs in a monolithic and unidirectional manner. In contrast, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) proposed that making meaning of one's own sexual identity development

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occurs simultaneously with balancing the decision to disclose one's sexual orientation. Their research speaks to the nature of visibility management as being an ongoing, nonlinear decision making process, subject to influence by complex social and cultural contexts (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003).

Invisibility Management

In a study by Iwasaki and Ristock (2007), the most frequently cited reason for stress in lesbian and gay individuals was found to be the process, and consequences, of "coming out." Research on sexual orientation disclosure has found that it can cause emotional, and at times physical, consequences within family relationships and even conflicts at work or school (D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2001; Iwasaki & Risktock, 2007; Knoble & Linville, 2012). In addition, the ambiguity of what being "out" means in society at large can often leave sexual orientation minorities feeling fearful to disclose (Iwasaki & Risktock, 2007). The who, what, when, where, and why of the decision to come out are complex, as LGB people tend to experience invisibility until they selectively choose to make themselves visible (Barret & Logan, 2002).

"Invisibility management" refers to dominant discourse within society that dictates whether people in the LGB community are seen, recognized, validated, and accepted (Blumer & Green, 2011; Green & Blumer, 2013; Blumer, Green, Thomte, & Green, 2013; Hertlein & Blumer, 2013). Invisibility shields the dominant majority from seeing members of LGB communities, which forces them to diligently practice their own visibility management. For example, if a specific city practices high invisibility, by not recognizing the validity of nondominant sexual orientations or refusing to talk about LGB issues, it causes LGB individuals and couples to be less visible. If a city practices low invisibility, however, LGB people are able to be open about how they identify and feel free to openly form relationships, because they are recognized and accepted (Blumer et al., 2013). In each of these scenarios, the levels of invisibility may change from one neighborhood to the next; this means is that LGB-identified people are in a state of constantly reevaluating their own visibility management, and adjusting it to appropriately fit their environment.

As LGB people build partnerships, they move from individual visibility management to couple visibility management (Knoble & Linville, 2012). The Non-Linear Model of Same-Gender Couple Development (Blumer & Green, 2011) proposes that LGB relationships progress in a continuous and multidirectional manner. This model takes into consideration the individual and couple characteristics, the intersectionality of identities, and the influence of the dominant societal context. This means that as couples develop in their relationship, they are engaged in an ongoing interchange between (a) the level of invisibility around them, (b) each individual's identity development and visibility management, and (c) the visibility management of the partnership itself (Blumer & Green, 2011). With this model in mind, dominant society has become consumed with technological practices (e.g., Facebook), which means that, once again, LGB individuals and couples must consider how it affects their personal and relationship visibility within this process (Blumer, Bergdall, & Ullman, 2014b; Hertlein & Blumer, 2013).

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Technology Practices

Recent research has reflected an increased need for understanding the impact of technology practices on individual and couple development (Hertlein & Blumer, 2013) and specifically for LGB populations (Blumer et al., 2014b; Harris Poll Interactive, 2010a, 2010b; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Hertlein, Shadid, & Steelman, 2015). Historically, the LGB populations have used the Internet at a higher rate and frequency and in more diverse settings than heterosexual-identifying people (Harris Poll Interactive, 2010a; PRC, 2013; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010). In a recent nationally representative survey ($N = 1{,}197$), 80% of self-identifying LGB individuals reported using and connecting to others, through SNSs. In addition, 55% reported that they have met new LGBT friends online (PRC, 2013).

In terms of couple development, Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012) reported that between 61% and 70% of same-gender couples meet online, in comparison to only 22% and 33% of different-gender couples. It should be noted in this sample that of the respondents who were in different-gender couples ($n = 227$) and self-identified as LGB, 76% of respondents ($n = 172$) identified as bisexual (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Interracial relationship frequency data also show that same-gender coupling is more common because they meet more frequently online (Patterson, 2005). Moreover, couples who identify as interreligious, whether of different or same genders, are reported to be more likely to have met online (22%) than are same-religion couples (15%) (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Hertlein and Blumer (2013) suggest that as relationships begin to intersect with technology, couples have to begin having conversations around the decision to electronically disclose their relationship status and share major life events and how to appropriate use technology to continuing connecting with each other. Moreover, LGB couples must consider various safety risks associated with electronic disclosure (e.g., cyberbullying, online threats, trolling) (Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010; GLSEN et al., 2013; PRC, 2013).

Online Safety Risks

In a nationally representative survey designated to explore the online experiences of young LGB adolescents aged 13 to 18 years, fully one-third (n =1,960, 62.9%) of the 5,907 participants self-identified as gay/lesbian, 3.4% of the participants identified as bisexual, and 3.3% identified as queer/questioning/other. The data reported for individuals who identify as transgender were not analyzed due to the sample size (GLSEN et al., 2013). The purpose of the survey was to explore the various experiences that the young LGB persons have online. The researchers discovered several perceived benefits of online use, such as the ability of LGB youth to identify anonymously in order to minimize risk, connect with people in similar marginalized groups, and find helpful resources. Despite some anonymity, bullying and harassment were found to have occurred both offline and online for the majority of the LGB participants (41%) and online exclusively for an additional 9%. LGB youth also reported being more likely to feel less safe online, on SNSs, and text messaging as these could be accessed after school hours (GLSEN et al., 2013).

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Recent research has shown that cyberbullying can result in negative consequences for the individual being bullied, such as low self-esteem and greater suicidal ideation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Considering that over four in 10 (43%) of LGBT persons have revealed their sexual or gender identities online or through SNSs (PRC, 2013), it is essential to consider how such disclosure may lead to increased experiencing of cyberbullying. Moreover, for those LGB-identifying persons who have experienced bullying online, they also score lower on self-esteem measures and experience higher levels of depression than those who experienced less online harassment (GLSEN et al., 2013). Despite these risks, the majority of young LGB adults report that they are most likely to disclose their sexual orientation equally online and in person (48%), followed closely by being out exclusively online (29%) and in person only (17%). A gap in Internet use between LGB populations (80%) and the general public (58%) may be attributed to LGB individuals being relatively younger than the rest of the population (PRC, 2013). Specifically, 90% of all adults aged 18 to 29 and 89% of LGB self-identified adults in the same age range have used SNSs to connect with others (PRC, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how young adult, university-housed, self-identified LGB individuals are engaging with electronic-based practices and, in turn, how this influences the process of individual and couple visibility management online.

Methods

Participants

A final sample ($N = 61$)[2] of undergraduate students completed the survey. This population was selected because young adults are reported to be heavy users of the Internet and other technology-based media (Harris Poll Interactive, 2010a; PRC, 2013). Participants included bisexuals ($n = 33$, 54%) and same-sex oriented persons ($n = 28$, 46%). Participants ranged in age fro 18 to 41 with a mean age of 24.67 years and included 23 (38%) male-identifying people, 38 (62%) female-identifying, and none of the participants identified as transgender. The majority identified as Caucasian ($n = 34$, 55.7%), followed by Hispanic ($n = 16$, 26.2%), Black ($n = 7$, 11.5%), American Indian/Alaskan Native ($n = 2$, 3.3%), Chinese ($n = 2$, 3.3%), Filipino ($n = 6$, 9.8%), Japanese ($n = 2$, 3.3%), Hawaiian ($n = 1$, 1.6%), Samoan ($n = 1$, 1.16%), and multiethnic ($n = 3$, 4.8%).

Instrument

Participants completed an online survey hosted by Qualtrics, which was divided into five sections: (a) demographics, (b) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS; Mohr, & Fassinger, n.d.; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000; Mohr & Kendra, 2011), (c) Ecological Elements Questionnaire (EEQ; Hertlein & Blumer, 2013), (d) Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale-IV (FACES-IV; Olson 2011), and (e) Same-Sexting Practices

Questionnaire (SSPQ; Blumer, 2012). For the purposes of the current study, we are reporting only our findings with regard to the LGBIS and SSPQ measures.

The LGBIS is a 27-item measurement assessing where individuals stand on eight different subscales pertaining to their sexual identity as an LGB person (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). These eight subscales are Acceptance Concerns (test-retest $r = .83$), Concealment Motivation ($r = .70$), Identity Uncertainty ($r = .87$), Internalized Homonegativity ($r = .92$), Difficult Process ($r = .92$), Identity Superiority ($r = .81$), Identity Affirmation ($r = .91$), and Identity Centrality ($r = .80$) (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). According to the originators of the scale on which the LGBIS measure is based (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), data obtained and analyzed from a large sample of partnered LG adults provided significant initial support for the reliability and validity of this measure, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to derive the subscales. For the revised version, the measure was normed primarily on college-aged students, resulting in a confirmation of significant reliability and validity for this specific population (Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

The SSPQ (see Appendix 1) was compiled of 11 questions that highlight the opinions and behaviors concerning e-visibility management (Blumer, 2012). The development of this questionnaire was rooted in relevant literature and the LGB in-group experience and knowledge of the principal investigator and three master's-level family therapy students (one woman and two non–binary-identifying persons), who were members of the original research team (see Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014; Hertlein et al., 2015) involved in the dissemination of the survey. The sample of questions include one yes/no question, seven Likert-scale questions (where 1 = very infrequently and 6 = very frequently), and three short-answer questions.

Procedures

The current study was approved by the university's institutional review board. This survey study was conducted at a large, metropolitan university setting in the southwestern U.S. during the 2012–2013 academic calendar year. The survey was administered primarily in university undergraduate courses offered for students whose academic minor is family studies. Students were given the option to complete the instrument for extra academic credit. The undergraduate population was selected because both the Harris Poll (2010a) and the PRC 2013) have reported that young adults at the developmental age of university undergraduate students were heavy users of the Internet and are engaged in technology-based practices.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of analyzing the data reported from the current study, descriptive statistics and frequency data are the form of analyses used and relatedly being reported. Frequency data have been compiled to determine what specific online applications participants are making use of in disclosing or not disclosing their sexual orientation. In addition, experiences with online safety risks like cyberbullying

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Table 1. Results from the lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity scale ($n = 53$).

	This study			Comparison					
Subscale	Mean	*SD*	α	Mean	*SD*	Result	*t*	*df*	Sig
Need for acceptance*	2.92	1.58	.84	2.41	1.09	<1 SD ↑	2.27	49	.027
Need for privacy*	4.44	1.69	.89	3.72	1.31	<1 SD ↑	3.03	50	.004
Identity confusion*	2.60	1.76	.90	1.35	.83	>1 SD ↑	4.91	47	.000
Internalized homonegativity/binegativity*	2.15	1.40	.77	1.66	.92	<1 SD ↑	2.44	48	.020
Difficult process	3.12	1.82	.88	3.35	1.48	<1 SD ↓	−.86	46	.394
Superiority	2.37	1.67	.70	2.21	1.41	<1 SD ↑	.667	46	.508

Note. $^*p < .05$.

and harassment were also analyzed and are reported. Comparative analysis was conducted where appropriate.

Results

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Identity Questionnaire

Overall, the LGBIS (Mohr & Kendra, 2011) provided evidence that this sample had on average higher levels of mean scores on all subscales, except for Difficult Process and Superiority (see Table 1). For this sample, the scale had an excellent overall Cronbach's reliability coefficient of .93, while all subscales showed evidence of internal reliability with scores ranging from .70 to .90 (DeVellis, 2003). In comparison with Mohr and Fassinger's (2000) original descriptive statistics, this sample was within 1 standard deviation on all subscale means, providing evidence for the similarity of interpretation of the data.

The individual scales of Internalized Homonegativity, Need for Privacy, Need for Acceptance, and Difficult Process can be combined to create a second-order factor described in the literature as "Negative Identity." For this study, the Negative Identity scale average for our sample was 3.19 ($\sigma = 1.44$), slightly below the middle point of the Likert rating, indicating that that the sample felt more positive about their identity than average, although not to a statistically significant level.

Same-Sexting Practices Questionnaire

In terms of e-visibility, the majority reported identifying their sexual orientation online ($n = 32$, 62.75%) and most frequently on Facebook ($n = 23$, 37.7%), where they also disclosed their relationship status at the highest rate ($n = 22$, 31.9%) (see Table 2). Most reported that it was extremely unimportant for their partners to be out online or offline ($n = 23$, 48.94% and $n = 21$, 44.68%, respectively). Regarding the importance of knowing a person's sexual orientation when online, the bulk of participants either reported that it was very unimportant ($n = 18$, 39.13%) or very important ($n = 13$, 28.26%). Finally, the majority had infrequent ($n = 33$, 70.21%) negative online reactions from people they interact with online based on their disclosure of their sexual and/or gender orientation minority status.

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Table 2. Results from the same-sexting practices questionnaire.

On what apps do you disclose your relationship status? (n = *69*)		
	No.	%
Facebook	22	31.9
Twitter	8	11.6
Instagram	7	10.1
Tumblr	7	10.1
Grindr	2	2.9
Others	9	13
Don't use any	9	13
None	5	7.2
On what apps do you disclose your gender identity? (n = *76*)		
	No.	%
Facebook	23	30.3
Twitter	10	13.2
Instagram	5	6.6
Tumblr	4	5.3
Grindr	3	3.9
Jack'd	3	3.9
OkCupid	2	2.6
Pinterest	2	2.6
Others	14	18.4
Don't use any	7	9.2
None	3	3.9
On what apps do you disclose your sexual orientation? (n = *75*)		
	No.	%
Facebook	23	30.7
Tumblr	7	9.3
Twitter	6	8.0
Grindr	4	5.3
Instagram	3	4.0
Jack'd	3	4.0
Reddit	2	2.7
Others	16	21.3
Don't use any	8	10.7
None	3	4.0

Respondents also stated that being out online was extremely unimportant to their relationship satisfaction ($n = 23$, 48.94%). While they may not have had strong opinions about being out online or sharing their relationship status, the participants did believe that having a romantic relationship with someone online while in a primary romantic relationship offline was unacceptable (see, Twist, Belous, Maier, & Bergdall, in preparation). In addition, having sex via online platforms with someone outside of one's primary romantic relationship was reported as emotionally and physically damaging to that primary relationship (see, Twist et al., in preparation). Furthermore, while participants believe that people "sext just to sext," sexting outside of one's primary romantic relationship was viewed as emotionally and physically damaging (see, Twist et al., in preparation).

Discussion

The results of this study further support the reliability of the LGBIS (Mohr & Kendra, 2011) as a measure of level of assessment of identity development. With

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the exception of two subscales (Difficult Process and Superiority), the study sample had higher levels of mean scores on all subscales. This indicates that in comparison to the original samples on which the LGBIS was developed (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), our sample had a higher need for acceptance and privacy, had higher levels of identity confusion, and internalized homonegativity/binegativity. This would indicate to some that the sample was less satisfied with their sexual identities, but when combined offer the combined subscale of "Negative Identity" their scores overall were higher, but not significantly so when compared with the original sample. This indicates that while the scores on the individual scales were elevated and significant by themselves, they were not impactful when combined. In addition, since the "Difficult Process" scale was not significantly elevated, it is apparent that participants did not have a difficult experience when coming to terms with their identity, providing evidence to support that the sample had a more positive identity development process (this subscale was actually slightly lower than the mean of the original sample, which indicates a change toward a more positive experience).

Contrary to previous research showing that a majority of young LGB adults disclose their sexual orientation equally online and in person (PRC, 2013), our findings indicated that a majority of study participants identify their sexual orientation and disclosed their relationship status online. This finding expands on existing research focused on ways LGB adults navigate and renegotiate the decision on how "out" they are in various contexts (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). Further, given that individuals in relationships may be in different places in LGB identity development and management of e-visibility (Blumer & Green, 2011), it is of note that participants reported that their own partners and others' being "out" online or offline was very unimportant to them ($n = 23$, 48.94% and $n = 21$, 44.68%, respectively), and had no impact on their reported levels of relationship satisfaction ($n = 13$, 28.6%).

Most importantly, a central strength of this study is that it begins to fill a gap in scholarly literature regarding how technology-based practices influence the visibility of LGB communities and identities. Although various models on nonheterosexual identify development have been published throughout the past four decades (e.g., Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989; Waldner-Haugrun & Magruder, 1996), no models have adequately addressed how people navigate decisions around the process of being "out" and doing so in various contexts both online and offline. This is a crucial step in understanding the spectrum of external systems that LGB-identified persons may interact with on a daily basis. It also expands on existing research that calls for a better understanding of technology's role in relationships (Hertlein & Blumer, 2013) and to further explore experiences of e-visibility management.

Clinical Implications and Recommendations

As reported in recent research, few family therapists regularly inquire about the role of technology in the lives of the people they work with and may have varying degrees of comfort in working with technology-based issues (Blumer & Hertlein,

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2015; Hertlein, Blumer, & Smith, 2014). As digital technologies, social media, and Internet access prevails in dominant U.S. culture, it is crucial that therapists understand, and increase their competency in technology-related practices. Specifically, this needs to be addressed with LGB communities as they continue to show a higher prevalence of meeting their partners online, using SNSs, and experiencing online harassment and bullying more often than heterosexual-identifying people (Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010; PRC, 2013; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Thus, the primary clinical implication of this study is that family therapists need to be exploring the role of technology in the lives of the LGB-identifying individuals and couples, including usage of applications, management of e-visibility, and practices around online safety.

A key clinical implication centralized around the theme of e-visibility management includes inquiring about how important off and online disclosure of one's sexual orientation is relative to the individual and couple(s) system(s). For example, if within a relationship there are mixed opinions on whether or not it is important for their partner to be "out" online, clinicians should inquire further about the underlying motivation for these differences. Family therapists may need to help navigate the underlying influences of this decision based on issues pertaining to their individual and couple identity development (Blumer & Green, 2011; Hertlein & Blumer, 2013), family of origin, the influence of dominant society's invisibility, and the power dynamics of heteropatriarchal (Hart, 1994) privilege and safety. This may especially come into play if the discrepancy in visibility is an area of conflict for the partnership(s), as it has been anecdotally noted to lead to relationship dissolution (Knoble & Linville, 2012).

Finally, even though the majority of participants in the current study did not experience negative online reactions to their sexual and/or gender orientation minority status being visible in online environments, because there are frequently safety risks associated with LGB-identifying persons being out online, it may be helpful for clinicians to inquire with individuals and couples how they have managed to not have negative online reactions. In addition, conversations around future online safety management may be beneficial, as well. Conversations around safety considerations are imperative as the emotional consequences to experiences such as online harassment and cyberbullying can be quite dire (Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010; GLSEN et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Therefore, clinicians may not only have to inquire about technology use, and e-visibility management, but also assess for knowledge of SNSs and online support communities that have protocols in place for reporting online harassment, and how individuals can adjust their online privacy settings to regulate their individual and relational visibility to others. In addition, individuals may find it helpful to make use of cyberbullying prevention and reporting apps like Bully Shield and Stop Cyber Bullying 101 (Hertlein & Blumer, 2013). The exploration of such online safety steps may work to support ongoing nonnegative online experiences, and prevent future negative exchanges from occurring.

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Limitations

A note of caution is first needed in considering our overall study itself—generally, based on its conceptualization and execution, it is not possible to draw unequivocal conclusions about our outcomes. Beyond this, a limitation of this study is that it is a relatively small sample size ($n = 61$). Thus, due to the microlevel unit of analysis, it may not be possible to draw inferences to other LGB communities that are outside of the sample's context (Sullivan, 2001). In addition, although participant recruitment attempted to recruit a wide range of individuals based on reported heavy use of Internet and other technology-based practices, the majority of the sample identified as Caucasian. Thus, future studies should seek not only a larger but also a more diverse sample to see if findings are relevant across people coming from varied ethnic backgrounds.

Another limitation is the mode of delivery—a survey. Generally speaking, some of the limitations of survey studies are rooted in them consisting of primarily data that are based on retrospective self-report, meaning they are subject to distortion bias (Sullivan, 2001). While the online data collection facilitated surveying a range of participants, online surveys have certain limitations associated with them, such as limiting sample for studies to individuals with computer access and participants may chose not to complete a study due to mistrust stemming from being unfamiliar with the researchers (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). In addition, survey studies are frequently influenced by further issues like response and demographic biases (Sullivan, 2001).

Future Research

Research and practices must be expanded to include how LGB people are interacting across contexts, including those of a digital nature, and this research begins to attend to this need. This is especially important as LGB-identifying individuals have longer history and more varied use with online technologies than heterosexual-identifying populations (PRC, 2013). Thus, more research in general on the online experiences of LGB-identifying individuals and couples is needed, but more specifically in relation to the findings in the current study, particularly in exploring this population's use of online applications and e-visibility management practices as individuals and as couples. It would also be beneficial for researchers to examine how members of each of these minoritized populations—lesbian, gay, and bisexual—negotiate their online presence and navigate best practices as individuals and within their relationships, rather than how these populations are doing so collectively, as was the focus in the current study.

Finally, future research should be aimed at analyzing data on the technology-based ecological elements that influence the structure and process of relationships, including LGB-identifying couplings (Blumer et al., 2014b; Blumer &

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Hertlein, 2015; Twist et al., in preparation). Information yielded from these findings could help family therapists to effectively consider the ecological elements that are most significant in potentially harming LGB-identifying relationships. Furthermore, these findings could help therapists to work with couples to foster mutual respect and greater care ethics in their relationships by strengthening their technological exchanges and practices with each other, and those outside their relationships.

Notes

1. For the purpose of this study, couples are defined as individuals who are in dyadic and multipartnered relationships as data collected reflect both relationship structures. In the citations of previous research, the term "couples" is assumed to refer to dyadic relationships only.
2. To account for handle missing data, we used a pairwise method for when data were incomplete or absent. In addition, when respondents had the option to write in or provide additional responses, the overall sample size would fluctuate based on the response rates within each question/item. As such, we had an overall grand-sample total of 61 respondents; however, in some response sets there are different amounts of data reported.

ORCID

Christopher K. Belous http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6280-7905

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Appendix 1.

Same-sex sexting practices questionnaire (SSPQ) (Blumer, 2012).

	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Often*	*Frequently*
In general, do you identify your sexual orientation online?					
How important is it that your partner be... Out online					
How important is it that your partner be... Out offline					
How important is it that your partner be... Not out online					
How important is it that your partner be... Not out offline					
Regarding the person on the other end of the electronic communication, how important are the following aspects of their... Sexual Orientation					
Regarding the person on the other end of the electronic communication, how important are the following aspects of their... Gender Orientation					
How often have you experienced negative reactions/harassment from someone with whom you were engaging in an electronic relationship based on your sexual or gender orientation minority status?					
List three applications (Facebook, Grindr, etc.) you use most frequently where your sexual orientation is disclosed (Write "I do not use any" if you don't use any applications)	1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____				
List three applications (Facebook, Grindr, etc.) you use most frequently where your gender orientation is disclosed (Write "I do not use any" if you don't use any applications)	1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____				
List three applications (Facebook, Grindr, etc.) you use most frequently WITH your relationship status identified. (Write "I do not use any" if you don't use any applications)	1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____				

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