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Special Section

Guest Editorial – Special Section on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Psychology: International perspectives (volume 1)

Roshan das Nair & Alexander Moreno

THERE IS A PAUCITY OF INFORMATION regarding the emergence and development of psychological issues and support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) and other non-heterosexualities in different countries. Broadly speaking, LGBTI and queer historians work in a framework of a politicised field of debate as they not only write about history, but they make history (Duggan, 2004). In psychology, the lack of information regarding LGBTI issues has had harmful effects for humanity and LGBT psychology has come out as an alternative to undo the detrimental results of the omission of non-heterosexual individuals (Herek, 2010).

Compared to other aspects of LGBTI psychology, the historical considerations have received little attention from scholars and scientists. Therefore, to develop a clear picture of the current issues, controversies, and innovations of LGBTI psychology worldwide, we felt that it was highly relevant to document its trajectory from a cross-cultural point of view. It is with great excitement that we serve as guest editors of this special issue.

We were heartened to receive a good number of submissions, and we were keen to

retain most of these papers in our special issue. This resulted in splitting the special issue into two volumes. In these two volumes, we put together the contributions from diverse countries in order to provide a good representation of LGBTI psychology in different nations. To achieve this, the authors have worked with us (and have been patient with us) to describe how LGBTI issues related to psychology play out in their unique cultures and environments. We did not request the authors to change their choice of words that relate to descriptions of same-sex activities or identities. For instance, in some cases, authors have referred to 'homosexuals', and not 'gay men' or 'men who have sex with men'. Although some may find such usage anachronistic or not relevant from a Western perspective, we felt that terms such as homosexual (or their equivalents in other languages) serve a particular descriptive function in specific contexts.

In some papers, the 'psychology' element may not be explicit. However, we felt that it was important to document the history of civil rights movements in different countries, to demonstrate the similarities and differences between these struggles, and to explore how

these events have perhaps shaped the history of both a country's peoples but also its institutions. These institutions – legal, educational, health – all have a bearing on the psychological wellbeing of the citizen.

While we have been successful in obtaining entries from diverse regions, some

genders and sexualities are more represented than others. This is perhaps an issue in sexuality research more widely also, and is a criticism of the body of literature and this special issue.

One of the challenges in sharing international LGBT psychology issues globally has

been language itself. For many of the contributors to these volumes (and this includes us), English is not our first language. For others, English is not their primary language. Therefore, we are grateful to the authors for making their work available in English.

We open the special issue with a lead article on International LGBT Psychology, by Chung and Klann. This article provides a review of the role of psychology in the LGBT world scenario and the evolution of LGBT rights. The authors present topics regarding the nature of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the development of sexual and gender identity from a psychological perspective. They also provide an excellent whistle-stop tour of the scientific evidence and updated psychological literature about the depathologisation and decriminalisation of LGBT people, discrimination and oppression, work and career issues, LGBT concerns in the military, HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention, same-sex relationships and marriages, parenting rights, LGBT children and youth, cultural diversity and intersectionality of identities, media representation issues, training of mental health service providers, conversion therapy, and policy statements and social justice advocacy of professional organisations. Throughout their reflection on LGBT psychology, Chung and Klann provide an insight into the role of psychologists, as well as a future agenda related to education, research, practice, and advocacy.

In the second article, Lozano and Rocha provide a comprehensive analysis of the construction of gay identity in Mexico. They describe the development of gay identity in the context of patriarchy and traditional gender norms, and review the origins of gay identity within a Mexican socio-political framework based on literature published in the last 20 years. They suggest that gay identity has been influenced by the US, that it has been built in contraposition of a heterosexist matrix (man/masculine/heterosexual), and that some categories of analysis have been imposed to understand gay identity. They

also describe the reactions of the Mexican society to homosexuality through different time periods, leading to the development of the gay movement and the acquisition of civil rights. They explain the articulations of these concepts in terms of Mexican legislation and its consequences. The authors discuss the negative effects of the use of the term 'gay' as a category in Mexico to define a political subject, as it excludes other forms of homoerotic expression.

Our next entry comes from Colombia. This article by Ardila highlights a series of historical events related to the global LGBT movement in order to illustrate their impact in local Colombian practices and policies. The author addresses diverse topics including the influence of liberation movements, legal aspects, and the role of psychological organisations in relation to LGBT issues. Ardila concludes that there is a consensus among psychologists and mental health professionals regarding the acceptance and affirmation of different sexual orientations. He also recognises the existence of challenges and obstacles to promote LGBT agenda in Colombia. Among the developments, Ardila presents the current advances and controversies in Colombia related to sexual and human rights, marriage equality, the adoption of children by same-sex couples, homo-parental families, and psychological health of LGBT individuals.

Scali and d'Amore address the topic of the rights of lesbian and gay people in Belgium, mainly centred on same-sex unions and adoption. A series of events are presented in chronological order to account for the legal changes in the socio-political context of Belgium regarding LGBT issues. The authors present the information in several sections including the history of the institution of marriage in Belgium, the emergence of the LGBT movement, the process and reaction leading to the approval of laws authorising homosexual marriage and adoption, the anti-discrimination legislation, an action plan to fight against homophobia, and the current LGBT concerns and social

reactions. The authors conclude that even if laws for LGBT in Belgium are amongst the best in Europe, there are still negative attitudes preventing full acceptance and inclusiveness.

The final article in this special issue targets one problem that is very relevant in the context of migration: Intersectionality issues regarding group therapy with LGBTQ+ migrant clients in Canada. This article by Nerses and colleagues presents examples of the problems that refugees and immigrants pertaining to sexual/gender minority groups experience in the process of their integration to a new culture. The authors highlight the needs of migrants facing persecution and criminalisation of their sexuality in their countries of origin by providing examples based on their sessions with sexually diverse participants involved in individual and group therapy. Nerses and colleagues conclude with some ethical and clinical considerations concerning working with clients with multiple minority status. Their perspectives are a good opportunity to reflect on professional development and training in LGBT psychology.

Taken together, the five articles included in this first volume of this special issue on the international perspectives on LGBTI psychology provide an attempt to move towards the construction of an international portrait of LGBTI psychology from a cross-cultural and historical perspective. Even in 2015, negative attitudes towards LGBTI individuals are prevalent in many countries and cultures (Moreno et al., 2015), but attitudes change over time and psychologists play an important role in the promotion of positive change. As stated by Herek (2010), psychology was once a profession that provided an institutional foundation for sexual stigma, but it has become one that is dedicated to actively challenging that stigma through research, practice, teaching, and other professional work.

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