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Symposium Chair, Vic Muñoz

Decolonizing transgender psychology: Transgender identities and issues within cultural contexts

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Culture is central to understanding transgender people in ways that move beyond the dominant white Western views of what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Through research which focuses on the interactions between gender, sexuality, and culture within decolonizing movements (Maori, Native Hawaiian) and research that critiques the hegemony of Western views on gender we will address transgender identities and issues in ways that offer new understandings of LGBT people of color (psychoanalytical, culturally appropriate, as critique of the dominant). Research shows culturally grounded approaches are needed to support the self-determination of LGBT peoples across cultures.

Individual Abstracts

Exploring the Takatapui identity within the Maori community and implications for transgender identity

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Today, increasing numbers of Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, are reclaiming the term *takatapui* to describe their sexual identity. The term derives from the pre-colonial past and encapsulates both the cultural and sexual components of one's identity. For many, it is a preferred descriptor over terms which derive from Western paradigms.

Research to date suggests that *takatapu* identity provides beneficial outcomes for Maori, including transgender people, who are often marginalized because of their sexuality. This presentation will describe strategies that can be used to facilitate access to culturally appropriate support systems for indigenous transgender people and others from sexual minorities.

The accident of gender in the shadow of culture

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This paper considers the desire to be “normal” as inhibition that prevents experimentation with the accidents of gender. Inhibition is viewed here as a guard against the clash between desire and culture. Analyzing the gender “experiments” of the character “Calliope” in J. Eugenides’ Middle Sex, this paper offers a conceptualization of gender as an existential dilemma, lack, desire and defense against trauma; that is played out in and affected by the social. The author turns to Lacan and Verhaghea’s emphasis on desire as a bridge between interiority and object relations arguing for a theory of gender that tolerates the inchoate.

Language, history, and identity: Intersections of colonialism and sexuality in the Hawaiian past and present

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This paper explores shifting definitions of Native Hawaiian (Kanaka maoli) social categories of gender and sexuality that have no exact Western equivalents. *Mahu* in particular has been used to indicate transgendered and same-sex loving identities and has changed in meaning over time. The impact of colonialism, Christianization, and imported homophobia make the reclamation of indigenous concepts of sex and gender both central to the project of decolonization and vexed. Though the voices of contemporary self-identified Hawaiian *mahu* are rarely heard, a recent anthology and documentary film provide some space to share their experiences of gender and sexual identity.

A woman, ashamed: On shame, loss, and mourning in transsexual transition within western culture context

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Many male-to-female transsexuals during a certain phase of the trans-sexual journey experience excruciating feelings of shame upon the realization of being a woman. Drawing upon clinical material I will demonstrate that this burden of shame stems from internalized western culture's views denigrating femininity. This intra-psychic conflict constitutes a normal phase of the transsexual transition, a phase resembling a gender-melancholic phase in the so-called 'regular' female development. In therapy, narcissistic losses of power and competence, subjectively felt to be 'naturally' masculine, need to be mourned, rediscovered and integrated as qualities existing also in the feminine.

Toward ethnic transgender psychologies: How can gender identities be decolonized?

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The diagnostic master narrative of Gender Identity Disorder was written to make gender variance intelligible within a classed and racialized Western worldview. Globalization has further entrenched Western concepts of gender rigidity and the acceptance of GID. How can psychologists decolonize this diagnosis? Based on longitudinal and archival data from the Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Study this paper theorizes what it would mean to decolonize gender identities. Rather than affirm Western concepts of pathology and the abnormal, which have historically led to the marginalization of transgender people across cultures, this paper explores psychological self-determination and anti-colonial approaches to mental health.