
Introduction to the Special Issue on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Counselling Psychology Introduction au numéro spécial sur l'orientation sexuelle et l'identité sexuelle en psychologie du counseling

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ABSTRACT

It is imperative that those affiliated with the field of counselling psychology and allied health disciplines embrace affirmative practices when interacting with LGBT persons. This introduction to the special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* highlights the roles that theoretical and empirical work play in fulfilling this mandate.

RÉSUMÉ

Il incombe aux praticiens dans le domaine de la psychologie du counseling et autres disciplines connexes d'adopter des pratiques affirmatives auprès de personnes LGBT. Cette introduction au numéro spécial de la *Revue canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie* souligne les rôles que jouent le travail théorique et le travail empirique dans l'accomplissement de ce mandat.

This thematic issue is the first in the history of the *Canadian Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy* dedicated to research focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) counselling practice. It was approximately 18 months ago that we announced our original call for proposals, which yielded 10 submissions and dozens of communications supporting this endeavour. The end result is a collection of six articles that explore and discuss areas pertaining to intersectionality theory and sexual identities, ethical practice and multiple relationships, wisdom and resilience, female masculinity, gender-identity reform, and masculinities in female-to-male trans-identified individuals. We hope that readers learn from and reflect upon the contributions housed within this special issue.

Throughout the iterative process of assessing original and revised submissions, one question arose continually: "With the current social and political climate supporting LGBT individuals in Canada, why is a special issue necessary?" Embedded in this question, of course, is the assumption that counselling practice immediately reflects the sociocultural and political changes that occur in a society. More troubling is the implicit assumption that marital equality somehow translates into affirmative counselling practice with LGBT clients. Historically, and within some

present-day practices, clinicians were/are drawn to the practice of pathological othering (Robinson, 2012; Smith, Shin & Officer, 2012). *Otherness* represents a “social construction for the representation of those who are seen as undesirable” (Arthur, Merali, & Djuraskovic, 2010, p. 304). Such practices have pathologized and rendered non-hegemonic identities objectionable, and sadly continue to do so. For instance, conversion/reparative therapies (i.e., sexual orientation change efforts) and other harmful interventions remain in practice despite regulatory bodies asserting their use is unethical (Rosik, Jones, & Byrd, 2012; Tufford, Newman, Brennan, Craig, & Woodford, 2012).

Both historical and current literatures suggest that counsellors, psychologists, and other allied health professionals require additional insights, directives, and supports in the provision of culturally relevant and sensitive service provisions for LGBT clients (Alderson, 2013; Johnson, 2012). However, the ability to provide relevant and affirmative counselling does not exist in a vacuum: it is dependent on exposure to theoretical and empirical work that offers a voice to sexual and gender minorities. The creation and dissemination of this type of knowledge has played, and will continue to play, a significant role in the evolution and shaping of scholarship that is uniquely LGBT affirmative (Clarke & Peel, 2008; Rivers, 2008).

In closing, we invite readers to increase their current understanding of issues salient to LGBT persons, and to challenge mental health practices that serve to disempower. We advocate striving toward affirmative efforts that safeguard the authenticity and integrity of members of sexual and gender minorities.

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