



## Introduction to the special issue: Preaching to the Choir 2018: an international LGBTQ psychology conference

In some respects, this special issue has been more than 10 years in the making. In 2008 and 2010, Nicola Curtin, Peter Hegarty and Abigail Stewart organised two LGBTQ Psychology Summer Research Institutes at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (Curtin, Hegarty, & Stewart, 2012). They invited leading scholars in the area to serve as mentors and up to 50 additional graduate students and early career academics. The institutes were intended to provide support for the fledgling area of LGBTQ Psychological research. One of their self-described 'loftier' goals was to create an 'invisible college' that would facilitate collaborations and connections between emerging and established scholars in order to address the under-representation of LGBTQ issues within the psychological literature at the time (Curtin et al., 2012). The institutes were a success, supported by data analysed from post-event surveys, but also by the fact that many of the students who participated went on to build successful careers, despite doing so in a time period of extreme academic austerity and a dearth of academic positions (i.e., 2008 onward). The first evidence of academic collaborations came from a special issue of *Psychology & Sexuality* published in 2012 (Volume 3, Issue 3) comprised of entirely of collaborations that grew from the institutes. In fact, one of the first author's first publications that did not involve a supervisor was featured in this special issue, and it was a collaboration with another graduate student at the time, Daragh McDermott, who is now one of the co-editors of *Psychology & Sexuality* (McDermott & Blair, 2012). Today, roughly 15% of the current editorial board members for *Psychology & Sexuality* were participants in one of the original institutes, with the majority having participated as students.

In terms of creating an 'invisible college,' it could be argued that the organisers surpassed their lofty goal. LGBTQ researchers today experience significantly greater visibility through dedicated journals, such as *Psychology & Sexuality*, as well as continued and growing interest in sub-sections within national psychology organisations, such as the Sexualities section of the British Psychological Society, Division 44 of the American Psychological Association and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Section of the Canadian Psychological Association. *Psychology & Sexuality* has grown to provide a home for this increasingly visible college of scholars, and thus it was quite suiting that one of the articles in the very first ever issue of *Psychology & Sexuality* featured a 'conversation among researchers' that took place at the 2008 institute and examined the diverse global challenges of conducting LGBTQ research (Adams et al., 2010). In 2018, *Psychology & Sexuality* reported an impact factor of 1.275 and since 2008, over 500 articles have appeared in the journal as it has grown to become one of the first and leading journals focused on LGBTQ Psychology and related disciplines. The journal lives up to its mandate of being an international journal, publishing research from multiple continents, thus providing a great diversity of perspectives on the global LGBTQ experience.

Yet, as has been recently noted by Sharon Horne and colleagues in a 2019 issue of *American Psychologist*, LGBTQ Psychology still faces a challenge when it comes to truly adopting transnational perspectives (Horne, Maroney, Nel, Chaparro, & Manalastas, 2019). The status of LGBTQ research and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals, including their enjoyment of legal protections and their day-to-day experiences varies greatly across the globe, with 73 jurisdictions still criminalising some form of same-sex sexuality and 12 punishing homosexuality with capital punishment (Human Dignity Trust, 2020). Recent stories of gay men being locked up against their will and tortured in Chechnya bring to bear the reality of the dangers faced by many (Steinmetz, 2019). Yet, even in the countries with more

legal rights and protections, we are still witnessing an increase in violence and hate crimes targeting the LGBTQ communities (Armstrong, 2019; Fitzsimons, 2019; Flatley, 2019). The Pulse Nightclub shooting, which claimed the lives of 49 individuals on 12 June 2016, is but one example (Ramirez, Gonzalez, & Galupo, 2018), and it lines up alongside numerous individual attacks on same-sex couples (e.g., Brent, 2019; O'Handley, Blair, & Hoskin, 2017; Rosswood, 2015), as well as the continued disproportionate murder rates around the globe for trans women, particularly trans women of colour (Hoskin, 2019).

Thus, while 10 years after the first Michigan institute it was clear that LGBTQ Psychology was an established field, it was equally clear that we still needed to make significant strides in reaching out across borders and supporting LGBTQ research around the globe. Coincidentally, by this time, the first author had been the Chair of the Canadian Psychological Association's SOGI section for four years and the 2018 CPA Convention was being held in conjunction with the International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP2018) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This struck us as the perfect opportunity to host: a) a reunion of the 2008 institute participants and b) an international gathering of researchers interested in LGBTQ research. Thus, on June 24 & 25, 2018, *Preaching to the Choir<sup>1</sup>: An International LGBTQ Psychology Pre-Conference (Preach)* was held, with 120+ participants from more than 23 nations, representing all inhabited continents. Two full days of programming showcased a diverse range of research and global experiences. The conference was financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's Connection Grant program as well as by the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet), the latter of which is an organisation focused on facilitating international networking among LGBTQ scholars and organisations (Horne et al., 2019).

Conversations among international researchers (still to be published) were held during *Preach 2018* and the overwhelming sentiment was that while LGBTQ Psychology has perhaps 'arrived' in Western nations, the same is far from true in all parts of the world. In fact, several participants at *Preach 2018* came from countries where same-sex sexuality was still criminalised, and even more required invitation letters that did not mention the nature of the conference due to safety concerns within their institutions and at their borders. Indeed, one of our greatest challenges in hosting an international event was simply getting the international delegates *out* of their countries and *into* Canada. In the end, five potential delegates had their visa applications delayed or denied and were unable to attend, while another participant from Uganda had her visa delayed such that she missed her original flights and was only able to attend the larger ICAP convention. Thus, we learned that it is paramount that any attempt at a truly *international* LGBTQ psychology conference must take these challenges into consideration. One obvious solution, which we had simply stumbled upon for the sake of other planning conveniences, is to hold these conferences in proximity (time and location) to larger, international conferences. Doing so provides a degree of 'cover' for any delegates who would otherwise be unable to attend due to safety or ideological concerns in applying for visas, seeking funding, or even just letting their institutions know where and what they are doing. Many of the delegates at *Preach* told us that the only reason they were able to attend was because they could tell their institutions and funders that they were attending ICAP. While for many scholars the idea of being prevented from attending a conference due to the topic is not relatable, such remains the current reality for many LGBTQ scholars today.

Although it is 2020, the mere act of conducting LGBTQ research is not equally accessible to all those who may be interested in doing so, and, thus, LGBTQ Psychology currently exists within a space that necessitates increased efforts at transnational approaches to research. How can those capable of getting funding and approval for their research be of use to those who do not have the same freedoms? How can we build collaborations that are true collaborations and that do not impose Western perspectives on other cultures? How can we move towards increased global equality, safety and dignity for LGBTQ individuals, while respecting and supporting that each culture and country will navigate the path differently? These were some of the questions posed by the attendees at *Preach* and, indeed, some answers to these questions have been provided by

organisations like IPsyNet (Horne et al., 2019). The search for additional solutions will continue in Prague this summer, where *Preach 2020* is taking place July 16 & 17. The conference, this time organised in advance of the International Congress of Psychology, will provide an opportunity to discuss the progress that has been made in our field and what steps we can take to continue moving it forward – globally.

A second lesson that emerged from *Preach 2018* was that LGBTQ Psychology is insufficient for addressing the global challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals and communities. Psychology must branch out and continue to build more interdisciplinary collaborations with scholars in related fields, such as sociology, socialwork, gender studies, communications and media studies, public health, political science, education, and nursing. Indeed, scholars who attended *Preach* in 2018 represented many of these diverse fields and the overwhelming feedback from participants was that this diversity helped them to better define the issues relevant to their own research and to make meaningful connections with scholars in fields outside of Psychology.

Presenters at *Preach 2018* were encouraged to upload their presentations to our Open Science Framework Page (<https://osf.io/meetings/LGBTQ2018/>) and were also invited to submit manuscripts based on their work to a special issue of *Psychology & Sexuality*. The abundance of submissions allowed us to put together a double issue with a substantial number of papers focusing on transgender experiences. Thus, 12 years after the first Michigan Summer Institute on LGBTQ Psychology and a decade after the founding of *Psychology & Sexuality*, we are pleased to present the first two issues of Volume 11, devoted to research presented at *Preach 2018* and representing the expansive growth of the ‘invisible college’ that in many respects owes its roots to the foresight of the organisers of the summer institutes. While not quite as diverse as the spread of attendees, the research presented within these two issues comes from 11 countries, includes undergraduate, graduate, post-doc, early career and established scholars, as well as researchers from psychology, social work, education, community health, and sexology.

We look forward to the continued growth of LGBTQ Psychology as an international and interdisciplinary field of research. The field has become more visible over the past two decades and will hopefully continue to gain legitimacy within broader fields of psychological research, but there is still much to be done in building bridges between disciplines and nations. Only time will tell what we achieve in these respects and it is with great anticipation and curiosity that we embark upon a new decade of LGBTQ research and welcome the opportunity to reevaluate our progress in 2030!

## Note

1. The name ‘Preaching to the Choir’ was selected for the conference to reflect the experiences of LGBTQ researchers often having to ‘dumb-down’ their research at conferences for broad audiences not familiar with LGBTQ issues and terminology and not frequently having the opportunity to share and discuss their research with other experts who share similar interests. Thus, *Preaching to the Choir* is a conference where attendees can go deeper and connect directly with scholars studying topics in the same field, despite the wide diversity of issues relevant to LGBTQ research.

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Karen L. Blair

St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Canada

 [drkarenblair@gmail.com](mailto:drkarenblair@gmail.com)  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8602-098X>

Rhea Ashley Hoskin

Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9065-980X>