Chapter 2
Contributions of the Liberating Community Psychology Approach to Psychosocial Practice on Sexual and Gender Diversity

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2.1   Introduction

Psychology has always been a relevant discipline for understanding sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Nevertheless, it has been focused on an individual level of analysis, usually examining it from a negative approach (Garrido & Morales, 2010). For instance, numerous studies have been focused on internalized sexual stigma and minority stress (Shramko et al., 2018), mental health problems (Baiocco et al., 2014; Dürrbaum & Sattler, 2020), VIH and other health problems (Castilla & de la Fuente, 2000; Mustanski et al., 2011), homophobic bullying (Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020), discrimination at work (Mara et al., 2020; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2020), and suicide (Baiocco et al., 2014; Yıldız, 2018). These studies have made possible to document the multiple forms of violence that LGBTQ+ people suffer and how these impact their health and well-being, enabling the design of psychological treatment and prevention programs. Nevertheless, focusing on individuals rather than societies promotes victim blaming and does not address the causes of LGBTQ+ problems, limiting their liberation efforts (Harper, 2005).

The roots of sexual and gender discrimination are based on heterosexism (Herek, 1992; Harper, 2005; Russell & Bohan, 2007; Thompson, 2019), an oppressive force for LGBTQ+ people, regardless of their other factors of diversity (i.e., gender, ethnicity, social class), which maintains them as subordinate and powerless groups in almost all societies (Mendos, 2019). Heterosexism is defined as "the ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community" (Herek, 1995, p.321). In this chapter, the concept of heterosexism covers transphobia, as a way of including oppression

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towards trans people, although this would require greater depth, as they are different concepts.

Herek (1992) asserted that heterosexism is displayed in two primary ways. On the one hand, cultural heterosexism attacks LGBTQ+ people through culture, institutions, and sociopolitical structures. For instance, major institutions such as governments, army, legal system, religion, and healthcare operate through policies and norms that reinforce heterosexist attitudes and behaviors (Harper & Wilson, 2017). Furthermore, stereotypes based on negative images about sexual and gender minorities are still ongoing in mass media and on the streets (Harper, 2005; Hicks, 2020). In fact, nowadays, 37 United Nations Member States (35% in total) criminalize consensual same-sex acts, while hate speech, crime, or violence against sexual and gender minorities is frequent, even in countries with supportive legislation (Mendos, 2019).

On the other hand, psychological heterosexism is based on attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that maintain the discrimination of sexual and gender minority individuals, groups, and communities. Thereupon, violence and harassment are the major threat for people who belong to a gender and sexual minority, especially youth (Harper & Schneider, 2003). When this form of oppression affects LGBTQ+ people, they can negatively internalize their self-view and consider themselves undeserving of resources or participation in societal affairs. This effect, which is called internalized homophobia, generates personal dissonance, stress, shaming, and social invisibility (Szymanski et al., 2008; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). However, as Russell and Bohan (2007) observed, it does not reflect intrapsychic pathological self-hatred, instead the effect of heterosexism in an alienating environment; because of that, internalized homophobia is fundamentally sociopolitical rather than individual.

However, despite the high level of oppression that LGBTQ+ communities have suffered in history and are still suffering today—or maybe because of it—they have been models of resilience and empowerment from individual to collective levels (Harper & Schneider, 2003). From the Stonewall riots that took place in New York 50 years ago, there are multiple examples of civic demonstrations and advocacy for sexual and human rights over the world. These social mobilizations have provoked a great impact at sociopolitical fronts with the recognition of rights (e.g., same-sex marriage) or the ideological openness to sexual and gender diversity in, at least, most of the Western societies. Moreover, these movements have also a significant effect on science, achieving the progressive depathologization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and, more recently, transgender people. However, there is still a long way to go towards their inclusion and equity (Garrido et al., 2021).

Therefore, psychology and other social disciplines can learn a lot by observing how the basic tenets of the field are operationalized and implemented by LGBTQ+ liberation movements, while these movements can benefit from collaborations with these disciplines (Harper & Wilson, 2017). To achieve it, research and action should include approaches that allow to address heterosexism and its different forms of influence but also to put in value the multiple strengths and resistances understanding how LGBTQ+ people have succeeded to have a happy and healthy life in

challenging contexts. Consequently, in this chapter, we adopted a Liberating Community Psychology Approach (LCPA) (Montero & Sonn, 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

The LCPA includes an ecological approach that emphasizes the dynamic inter-relationship between people and their contexts on different interconnected levels (i.e., personal, relational, organizational, community, and macro-social). It also focused on the underlying power dynamics that characterize human relationships, trying to identify, analyze, and transform the oppressive conditions that legitimize inequity and sustain the status quo. Moreover, the LCPA adopts a strength-based approach understanding and promoting resilience, empowerment, and social equity.

This chapter assumes the premise that being LGBTQ+ people in heterosexist societies implies a liberation process to achieve well-being and integration. Following Montero and Sonn (2009):

> Liberation is a process entailing a social rupture in the sense of transforming both the conditions of inequality and oppression and the institutions and practices producing them. It has a collective nature, but its effects also transform the individuals participating, who, while carrying out material changes, are empowered and develop new forms of social identity. It is also a political process in the sense that its point of departure is the conscientization of the participants, who become aware of their rights and duties within their society, developing their citizenship and critical capacities, while strengthening democracy and civil society. Liberation is directed to these sectors in society suffering from oppression and deprivation, and also seeks the emancipation of the oppressors from their own alienation, so they can understand that a just and democratic society is a better place to live and develop. (p.1)

The structure of this chapter is the following: Firstly, we present the origin and the development of the LCPA. Secondly, its main values and principles are applied to understand LGBTQ+ experiences, struggles, and resistances. Thirdly, the LCPA contributions to psychosocial practice on LGBTQ+ issues are presented. Finally, some conclusions are stressed to guide future steps achieving social justice and sexual rights.

The Origins and Development of the LCPA: Between Latin America and the USA

Community psychology emerged in response to dissatisfaction of professionals working in the area of mental health—mostly, psychologists—with the prevailing biomedical model (Levine, 1981). They needed to contextualize the problems of their clients/users, thus broadening the focus from individual pathologies to community health (Montero, 1996). Both because of the nature of the interventions—individually and therapeutically—and their limited range to address psychosocial issues. In addition, the biomedical model was not able to reach all individuals suffering from mental health problems; paradoxically, those who needed the most

attention due to their vulnerable situation were those who had the least access to services (Levine, 1981).

Psychologist's criticism with professional psychology coincides with the emerging civil rights movement—including LGBT social movement—in the USA. This social agitation was reflected in a wave of activism within psychology, where many professionals sought for a science committed to social change and equity (Garrido et al., 2013). Likewise, the role of psychologists is reviewed, hoping to transcend the limits set by the medical hierarchy in hospitals to seek a place in other fields (i.e., health, education, justice, social welfare) and give professional meaning to their participation in social movements (Levine, 1981).

In response to the need for new paradigms, community psychology was officially conceived as such in 1965 at the "Conference on the Education of Psychologists for Community Mental Health" held in Swampscott, Massachusetts (Rappaport, 1977). It proposed that individuals' problems are related to the social context within they live, defending the need to increase preventive actions in the community, such as the sense of community, advocating for housing, labor opportunities, or access to community services (Montero, 1994). Similarly, it introduced the importance of social justice in health and well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012). Therefore, this discipline called for integrating multiple social actors in the approach to the complexity of social problems (Montero, 2012).

Despite the importance of the US contributions to the development and consolidation of the discipline, it is now widely recognized that the true origins of community psychology can be found in Latin America. Since the late 1950s, interdisciplinary community developments took place there, in which all the characteristics that later came to define community psychology were applied (Martín-Baró, 1983; Montero & Sonn, 2009): (a) the focus on oppressed people in order to facilitate their empowerment and well-being, (b) the orientation towards social change and social justice, (c) the introduction of a critical epistemology where knowledge is built from the base and validated in practice, (d) the implementation of participatory action-research methodology pursuing equity, and (e) the redefinition of psychology's practice as well as the role of researchers and practitioners, who conceive users/clients/participants as active persons with strengths besides weaknesses. For instance, these principles are found in Martín Baró's (1986) *Liberation Psychology*, Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Fals Borda's (1959) *Commitment sociology*. All these socio-educational professionals supported oppressed communities in their struggle for liberation, connecting research to action (Garrido et al., 2013). For this reason, in Latin America this discipline was named liberation psychology.

According to Montero (1996), the development of community psychology has "parallel lives" in Latin America and in the USA:

> Although there was very little contact or communication between the first community psychologists in these regions, very similar principles and orientations evolved. These similarities are particularly striking given the many ways in which North and Latin American contexts and histories differ. (p.159)

Characterizing the LCPA: Values and Principles

The LCPA integrates the values and principles of community psychology (e.g., respect for diversity, ecology approach, strength-based approach) with the emphasis of liberation psychology on transforming oppressive social contexts in order to achieve social justice (Montero & Sonn, 2009; Paloma et al., 2016). These values and principles make the LCPA unique, integrating the influence of advocacy and liberation social movements developed in the USA and Latin America. Below, its main values are detailed, exploring how it has been applied to sexual and gender diversity issues.

Respect for Diversity

Attention and respect for diversity are included in the Ethical Principles of the American Psychological Association (2002) and considered to be imperative values from a LCPA, which advocates that "every person's right to be different without risk of suffering material and psychological sanctions" (Rappaport, 1977, p. 1). Following the definition of the Society for Community Research and Action (https://www.scra27.org/), diversity encompasses a full range of human characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical and psychological abilities and qualities, geographical location, religion, etc.) that makes each individual/group/community unique and different from others within their socio-ecological, historical, and cultural contexts.

According to the Society for Community Research and Action, "without diversity, liberation from systems of power and oppression cannot be redressed, and the co-production/construction of knowledge cannot be achieved. Diversity requires the democratization and decolonization of knowledge through the centering of multiple perspectives, voices and lived experiences." Hence, diversity not only means acknowledging or tolerating sexual and gender difference but also recognizing the uniqueness and strengths of LGBTQ+ people. The respect for diversity is absolutely needed to foster the inclusion of minorities and to promote equity (Harper, 2005).

The main challenge of diversity is that, despite the theoretical consensus about the interconnection of multiple social locations and identities, in practice, both research and interventions are often focused on only one dimension (Trickett et al., 1994). In fact, the study of diversity from the LCPA has given precedence to racial and cultural issues (see Suárez-Balcázar et al., 2014). As Harper and Wilson (2017) documented, compared to other disciplines, community psychology has not paid much attention to research, theory, and action focused on LGBTQ+ issues. Despite the increasing interest to sexual and gender diversity within the field since D′Augelli's first call for attention in 1989, these works usually present some biases, for example, male-centered bias, the focus on negative elements (e.g., minority stress, violence, and HIV status), and the generalization of the most visible group characteristics—and often the most privileged, such as white gay men—in the entire

LGBTQ+ community (Harper & Wilson, 2017; Harper, 2005; Vaughan & Rodriguez, 2014).

In response, recognizing diversity within the larger LGBTQ+ community is highly important, regarding individuals who are members of other oppressed groups and suffer multiple minority status that would increase their difficulties (Harper & Schneider, 2003). For example, Follins et al. (2014), after a literature review, found that black LGBT individuals are more likely to experience violence than heterosexuals of any ethnic background. By a strengths-based perspective, they also foreground the factors that contribute to their resilience facing up heterosexism and racism (e.g., self-efficacy, active coping strategies, integration of multiple identities, and social support).

The focus on one identity category risks overgeneralization and oversimplification of individual and collective experiences of diversity (Harrell & Bond, 2006). According to Monro (2020), the term LGBTQ+ is also a double-edged sword in this matter. Moreover, she highlighted that if it is used in general terms, this can obscure the specificities of individual/group experiences and silence people who are not members of the dominant groups. For instance, bisexual people are usually ignored in this research field (Pollitt et al., 2018). Nevertheless, adopting a particularistic approach making visible and addressing specific needs of LGBTQ+ people could contribute to draw apart the collective—especially as a political agent.

Furthermore, focusing on a "single" identity category—for example, white gay men—does not reduce the necessity of considering diversity and the importance of personal experiences. As D'Augelli (2003) stated, the differences between people's sexual activities and desires, their self-labeled gender identity and sexual orientation vs. how they publicly presented them, similarly their way to face up heteronormativity or cisnormativity, offer a matrix of an extremely complex diversity. This complexity is increased when the multiple levels of contexts are introduced into the equation, because family, friends, workmates, neighbors, the community and sociopolitical context, etc., have a great impact on sexual and gender minorities' well-being and integration (Follins et al., 2014). Furthermore, it should be taken into account that they may exhibit their diversity in some settings but hide it in others—which could also impact variously on their well-being and integration (Garrido & Morales, 2010; Russell & Bohan, 2007).

In order to achieve this complexity, the intersectional framework has resulted very useful. It was developed within Black feminism and queer movements (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Evans & Lépinard, 2019) in order to stress the interdependence of multiple identities, in terms of power and privilege hierarchies. Intersectionality assumes that gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and all categories are co-constructed and cannot be forcedly separated (Evans & Lépinard, 2019). Moreover, it allows to see the intersection of different systems of oppression and their consequences on LGBTQ+ people, being heterosexism the main obstacle for them, which takes place at different levels (Harper & Schneider, 2003). For that reason, psychosocial practice needs to combine intersectionality with an ecological approach.

The Importance of the Context as an Ecological Multilevel Environment

Martín-Baró (1983) claimed that "although psychological reality only acquires concreteness in individuals, its origin is in the social structure" (p. 98). Thus, this "people-in-contexts" perspective (Trickett, 1996) regards essential the inclusion of the multiple levels at which every context operates for the study and intervention on human behavior. The ecological approach introduces the analysis of interactions and mutual influences between people and social systems in which they enter during their daily activities. Likewise, the ecological approach includes how these levels affect one another and help shaping norms, values, and behavioral patterns and preferences that define culture and have impact on the individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly et al., 2000).

The ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) allows us to explore how culture and dominant ideology in society influence people, contextualized in their neighborhoods, since this can determine their relationship with their family, friends, workplace, school, etc., and the relationship of these systems with each other. Moreover, it is an imperative to the advance on research and interventions related to sexual and gender diversity. Figure 2.1 grouped influenced variables identified in LGBTQ+ research, on the ecological levels: (1) individual, (2) relational, (3) organizational, (4) community, and (5) social/structural/macrosocial.

Firstly, on an individual level, LGBTQ+ people are formed of multiple intersected elements that determine their entering community settings, including gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, behavioral preferences, etc. In case of sexual and gender minorities, internalized heterosexism has been identified as an important element for psychological well-being (Harper, 2005), endangering their physical and mental health, and their integration (Baiocco
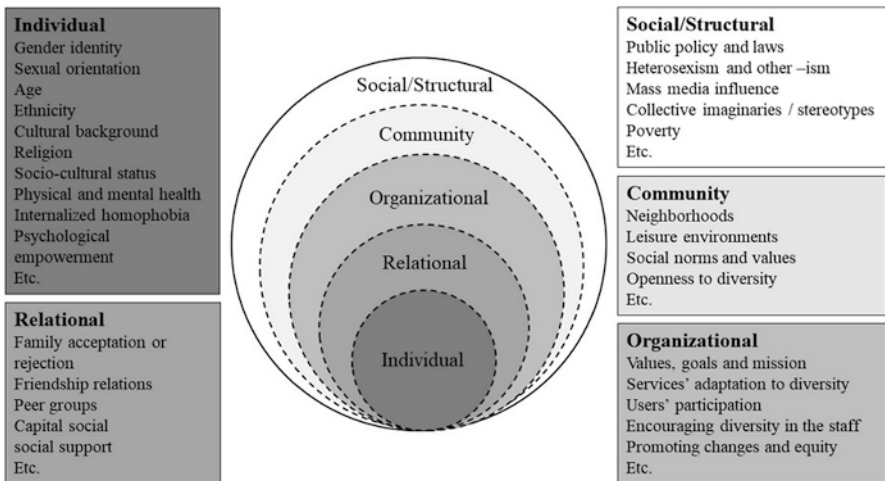

Individual
Gender identity
Sexual orientation
Age
Ethnicity
Cultural background
Religion
Socio-cultural status
Physical and mental health
Internalized homophobia
Psychological
empowerment
Etc.

Relational
Family acceptance or
rejection
Friendship relations
Peer groups
Capital social
social support
Etc.

Social/Structural
Public policy and laws
Heterosexism and other –ism
Mass media influence
Collective imaginaries / stereotypes
Poverty
Etc.

Community
Neighborhoods
Leisure environments
Social norms and values
Openness to diversity
Etc.

Organizational
Values, goals and mission
Services' adaptation to diversity
Users' participation
Encouraging diversity in the staff
Promoting changes and equity
Etc.

Social/Structural
Community
Organizational
Relational
Individual

Fig. 2.1 Factors influencing LGBTQ+ people and communities

et al., 2014; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Shramko et al., 2018). However, although it negatively affects LGBTQ+ people, most of them are models of resilience, since they cope with this situation positively (Garrido & Morales, 2010).

Secondly, on an interpersonal level, there are multiple relations influencing LGBTQ+ people, such family or peer groups. For instance, family acceptance predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status in youth and adults being also an important protective factor of depression, substance abuse, and suicide (Ryan et al., 2010; Zimmerman et al., 2015). Additionally, peer support is fundamental providing sense of belonging and promoting resiliency in LGBTQ+ people, particularly when family support is absent (Zimmerman et al., 2015). In this way, the use of e-approach mechanism creating resilience and sense of community is increasingly used by LGBTQ+ people, especially by youth, becoming social media a source for social support (Chong et al., 2015).

Thirdly, on an organizational level, numerous studies focused mainly on two studies: education centers and workplaces (Mara et al., 2020; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2020; Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020). These institutions have a great potential to prevent homophobic bulling and mobbing, developing antidiscrimination policies and protection actions for LGBTQ+ people (Hall, 2017). Specifically, universities are also an interesting setting for promoting respect for diversity and sexual rights at multiple levels of influence (Garrido et al., 2021). Thus, community organizations and public services could become empowering community settings (Maton, 2008), which are defined by (a) the capacity to adopt a multicultural mission, embracing diversity and equity as values and goals; (b) the adaptation of services and organizational processes to the diversity and multiple needs of the users; (c) promoting horizontal and reciprocal relationships by including users in the organizational decision-making process and establishing strong partnerships with other institutions; (d) encouraging diversity and developing new roles in the staff; (e) fostering leadership among professionals and community members who are pluralistic and diverse; and (f) promoting changes in the organizational structures and services and, also, in society.

Fourth, the LCPA highlight the community level, where these interactions are taking place. Thereupon, it is interesting how—and why—sexual and gender minorities create their own neighborhoods where they can live freely and safely and interact frequently with other LGBTQ+ people (Harper & Schneider, 2003). These geographic communities could be understood as segregated areas or ghettos but also as enclaves of resistance where self-defined groups congregate as a means of protecting and enhancing their economic, social, political, and/or cultural development (Marcuse, 2001). LGBTQ+ people actively created these physical communities and their symbolic meanings, where they can cover some specific material, psychological, and relational needs, e.g., in bars and bookshops. Moreover, these neighborhoods reinforce their identities and sense of community, sometimes becoming the heart of sexual rights activism (Costa & Pires, 2019; Rosenthal, 1996).

Finally, the social level includes policies and structural elements that determine the accessibility to resources and equal opportunities. In the last decade there have been numerous legislative advances and positive changes in public attitudes towards

sexual and gender diversity around the world, especially in Western countries (Mendos, 2019). Nevertheless, heterosexism and negative stereotypes of sexual and gender minorities are still present in mass media and on the streets (Harper, 2005; Hicks, 2020). Moreover, there have also been signs of backlash against sexual rights and visibility of LGBTQ+ people in society. A clear example of this is the rise of political parties with an openly anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, in defense of non-inclusive values. Against this, LGBTQ+ movements are growing in advocacy for sexual rights above all in countries where same-sexual relations are criminalized (Evans & Lépinard, 2019; Mendos, 2019).

Finally, it should be noted that the ecological approach implies incorporating growing numbers of variables in a multilevel way, increasing the complexity for developing context-specific research and action (Kaufman et al., 2014). Therefore, multisectoral and interdisciplinary collaborations are needed (Kaufman et al., 2014; Montero, 2012): psychology and medicine addressing individual factors; social psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication science, etc., to tackle interpersonal and community factors; and economics, political science, geography, etc., to reach the social and structural factors.

The Impact of the Distribution of Power on Well-Being and Social Justice

The main LCPA contribution to the ecological model is the recognition of the importance of social justice and power distribution within the contexts, hereby determining the relations between groups and people's well-being (García-Ramírez et al., 2014; Moane, 2003). Following Prilleltensky (2012), social justice is "the fair and equitable allocation of burden, resources, and power in society" (p. 362), so this involves an equitable distribution of rights, responsibilities, burdens, and privileges in society (distributive justice), as well as transparent and participatory decision-making processes in aspects that affect individuals (procedural justice).

The level of social justice at different ecological domains determines the satisfaction of material and psychological needs of people, which is translated into their well-being and power (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). In compliance with the intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981), the access to power is determined by social and historical circumstances, as well as by structural and personal factors (e.g., gender identity and sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity). Afterwards, minority groups such as LGBTQ+ people suffer multiple oppressions that place them in a subaltern position in society (Evans & Lépinard, 2019; Harper & Wilson, 2017).

As already explained, heterosexism is the basis that define oppression over sexual and gender minorities, understanding oppression as the process of domination by which cis- and heterosexual people restrict personal freedom and limit the capacity of LGBTQ+ people to act and participate within the society (Evans & Lépinard, 2019; Harper, 2005). Therefore, the LCPA seeks to challenge heterosexism transforming the conditions that legitimize and support the status quo and inequity (Harper & Wilson, 2017). To achieve that, the LCPA aims to empower LGBTQ+

people and communities, as well as to promote social changes for social justice (Harper, 2005; Moane, 2003).

The Strengths-Based Framework to Put in Value Resilience and Empowerment Processes of Oppressed Communities

Adopting the LCPA implies a strengths-based framework, which helps to understand how gender and sexual minorities not only survive but also lead healthy and happy lives (Follins et al., 2014). The identification of these strengths and the forms of resistance are key assets for the success and sustainability of interventions (Montero, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2015). In fact, a distinguishing strategy developed by the LCPA achieving social justice is the empowerment of oppressed and marginalized populations (Prilleltensky, 2012).

Particularly, the empowerment of LGBTQ+ people and communities could be defined as a process by which they gain and recover control over decisions that affect their own lives (Zimmerman, 1995). It implies a liberation journey that involves three phases (García-Ramírez et al., 2011): (1) increasing critical awareness, (2) gaining capacity to act individually and collectively (e.g., developing skills, establishing networks, assuming their capacity to promote changes), and (3) taking action to promote social changes for social justice in their contexts (e.g., promoting new ways of social organization, advocating for their rights). Then, empowerment involves a complex dialogical process which means a "dual reconstruction of selfhood and settings: at the citizenship level, from exclusion to belonging; at the interpersonal level, from isolation to participation; and at the intrapersonal level, from hopelessness to psychological wellbeing" (García-Ramírez et al., 2011).

From this perspective, it is very important to distinguish resilience and empowerment within psychological practice and research with sexual and gender minorities. Following Brodsky and Cattaneo (2013, p.333), "resilience and empowerment are fueled by unsatisfying states, but are differentiated by, among other things, internally (resilience) versus externally (empowerment) focused change goals." These goals are determined by the level of risk of the contexts (e.g., countries where sexual and gender diversity are penalized vs. countries that recognize sexual rights) and the resources that people/communities have to face up (e.g., self-efficacy, skills, organizations, and other support sources). Hence, "resilience consists of internal, local level goals that are aimed at intrapersonal actions and outcomes—adapting, withstanding, or resisting the situation as it is" and "empowerment is enacted socially—aimed at external change to relationships, situations, power dynamics, or contexts—and involves a change in power along with an internal, psychological shift" (p.338). Therefore, the first step to design community interventions and research regarding LGBTQ+ populations is reflecting about the context and social change.

Social change for social justice is a central value for a LCPA, which requires multisectoral and interprofessional working teams that advocate for the simple—and artificially complicated due to power interests—question of guaranteeing

human rights for every people (Montero, 2012). Likewise, these teams should integrate community agents, for example, creating community coalitions, from which to involve communities in research and social intervention processes (Garrido et al., 2013; Suárez-Balcázar, 2020). This implies counting on the communities that are the object of intervention in the design, implementation, and evaluation (Garrido et al., 2013).

Contributions of the LCPA to the Psychosocial Practice on LGBTQ+ Issues

A major contribution of the LCPA to the psychosocial practice–whether that is counseling, social intervention, teaching, or research—is the recognition that neutrality and apolitical professionalism are neither possible nor desirable (Montero & Sonn, 2009). It is particularly important when working with minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ people, whose lives are determined by the social justice of the context where they live (Russell & Bohan, 2007). From this perspective, try "to avoid explicitly addressing matters of politics is not to be apolitical; it is to condone by silence a particular political meaning: the political status quo" (Russell & Bohan, 2007, p.60). Therefore, it implies the development of new professional roles and competencies that allow psychologists to cope with it. Next, we present the community cultural competence model (Garrido et al., 2019), which could help professionals to work with sexual and gender minorities from the LCPA.

The community cultural competence is defined as a multilevel and multidimensional process through which professionals acquire capacities (i.e., critical awareness, responsiveness to diversity, capacity to act within the organization, and capacity to act within the community) and create opportunities that allow them to operate effectively across different contexts/levels with minorities (Garrido et al., 2019).

Firstly, on an intrapersonal level, critical awareness enables professionals to develop empathy and gradually decode their own sociocultural and sexual background and that of their users, analyzing differences and similarities and respecting them (Garrido et al., 2019). Critical awareness seeks to overcome the stereotypical limitations of knowledge provision-based models, gaining a deeper understanding of the multiple oppressions that LGBTQ+ people experience and address their sociopolitical roots. In this way, Harrell and Bond (2006) proposed three diversity principles that should be present in good practices linked to diversity: (a) community culture, implying a descriptive process that understands the composition and dynamics of diversity, coming from a position of caring, respect, and openness; (b) community context that defends the importance of historical, sociopolitical, and institutional forces to analyze diversity and its dynamics within a community; and (c) self-in-community, requiring a reflective process of becoming aware of one's

own identities, values, cultural lenses, and privileges that impact the work with diverse individuals and communities.

Secondly, on an interpersonal level, responsiveness to diversity includes cultural sensitivity and communication skills (i.e., abilities for decoding verbal and nonverbal communication, managing different communication styles, active listening). These skills also enable them to collaborate with other professionals and community gatekeepers, along with building new professional roles (e.g., counseling, mediation, advocacy) protecting their own well-being and increasing their influence on the community. In addition, responsiveness to diversity indicates diminishing power asymmetries in the relationship with the users/clients. Professionals should adopt a transactional approach, by which they can move away from stereotypes and out of their cultural framework by putting themselves in the place of the users, hence accepting them unconditionally. This perspective assumes that differences are not generated by "the other" (the user) but are implicit in relationships between people whose worldviews/experiences are different. Therefore, responsiveness to diversity acts as a bridge for professionals and users from different elements of diversity.

Thirdly, on an organizational level, professionals should obtain the skills to respond successfully to one's daily work demands, increasing their self-reliance and creating opportunities to influence their organizations. The capacity to act within the organization contributes to democratizing workplaces, making them more inclusive for LGBTQ+ users/clients. This may lead professionals to develop new roles beyond their daily tasks but linked to professional ethics, such as rights advocacy, which contribute to their institutions becoming empowering settings (Maton, 2008).

Finally, on a community level, Garrido et al. (2019) proposed the capacity to act within the community, which implies being embedded in the users' community and the development of a deeper knowledge and familiarity with the target community, as so the capacity to mobilize its resources. That means to become acquainted with the available LGBTQ+ community resources and gatekeepers, accompanying and, in addition, reinforcing the social movements promoted by sexual and gender minorities. From this perspective, providers take an advocacy stance by which they can affect policies and practices meeting the needs posed by sexual and gender diversity. They can play an important role empowering LGBTQ+ people to become capable citizens of transforming their societies, with the aim of collaborating with researchers, practitioners, and community members fostering social change (Suárez-Balcázar, 2020).

To sum up, in our work with LGBTQ+ people, we ought to develop multiple competences to deal with heterosexism and its consequences on different ecological levels. We have to assume that "one important route to addressing the psychological consequences of homophobia leads not through the therapy room but through the streets (…) changing oneself by becoming active changes the world; changing the world changes oneself" (Russell & Bohan, 2007, p. 71).

2.2   Conclusions

This chapter has argued how adopting a LCPA can contribute to practice and research in sexual and gender diversity. Its ecological perspective allows going deeper into the interconnections between individual, relational, community, and social factors that determine the well-being and integration of LGBTQ+ people. According to Suárez-Balcázar et al. (2014), "individual and group behaviors, norms, values, and traditions are intrinsically intertwined with the environments and settings that individuals encounter in their daily lives" (p.28). Therefore, psychologists, other social practitioners, and scientists must consider the context in their practices with sexual and gender minorities to avoid victim blaming and go to the root of their problems. They should develop spatially and temporally sensitive research and actions, emphasizing its ecological orientation with the purpose of creating useful tools that facilitate and promote action (Garrido et al., 2021; Suárez-Balcázar et al., 2014).

The LCPA calls for ecological research and actions that challenge the status quo and privileges maintained by cis-heterosexual people, as well as reinforce resilience and empowerment of LGBTQ+ people (Harper, 2005). We need to further discern the contextual factors that support and encourage equity and the ones that do not, so as the goals and resources of LGBTQ+ people and communities within their contexts. Developing strength-based strategies, psychosocial professionals could promote, accompany, and document the liberation process carried out in sexual and gender minorities. Moreover, efforts should be made to encourage the development of LGBTQ+-Straight Alliances in organizations and the community (D'Augelli, 2003).

Looking ahead, the lessons learned from feminist and decolonial studies can significantly help in the advance of research and practice in sexual and gender diversity from the LCPA (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Reid & Frisby, 2008). These approximations could move towards contextualizing diversity within diversity and considering the role of culture in definition of sexual orientation and gender, beyond non-Western conceptualizations (Harper, 2005). For instance, listening the narratives from other parts of the world where same-sex relationships are not stigmatized or where gender roles and sexuality is broad instead of the dualistic Western notions of male/female or homosexual/heterosexual (Harper & Wilson, 2017).

Finally, regardless of terminology, what is clear is that the complexity of sexual and gender issues puts in evidence the necessity of working at multisectoral and interdisciplinary teams and also in collaboration with communities (Garrido et al., 2019; Suárez-Balcázar, 2020). To achieve it, we should democratize our work frameworks and relationships, in order to recognize, respect, and promote local knowledge, capacity, and positive outcomes, particularly in oppressed people and communities (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013; Suárez-Balcazar, 2020). As LGBTQ+ movements have showed, people can move from oppression to liberation through empowerment processes and changing sociopolitical circumstances (Prilleltensky, 2012). Hence, scientists and practitioners must be allies and sources to impulse their

own movements, becoming rights advocators within communities (Garrido et al., 2019; Suárez-Barcázar, 2020). Hence, as Harper and Schneider proposed (2003), "community development, prevention and intervention with LGBT communities cannot be separated from social activism." Only in this manner will we achieve real equity, ensuring human rights for all people, everywhere, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

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