

Chapter 5

LGBTAIQ+ Research in Puerto Rico: What Has Been Documented?



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5.1 Introduction

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is an archipelago on the Caribbean. It is the smallest island of the Greater Antilles. Puerto Ricans have a unique culture and identity through a strong preponderance of traditional Latin American values but the citizenship and influence of the United States as part of its unincorporated territory status. Among them more than 90% of its inhabitants identify as Christians, and there is an emphasis on “traditional family values” (Martínez-Taboas et al., 2018). Despite being a small conservative island, in the last decades it has remained at the forefront of psychological research with vulnerable populations, especially lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender nonbinary, and other sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTAIQ+).

According to Martínez-Taboas et al. (2018) before 2002 there were no articles published about LGBTAIQ+ on Puerto Rican psychological journals. Also, the majority (>80%) of the articles published between 2002 and 2007 concerning LGBTAIQ+ were related to HIV/AIDS crisis. In 2007, the first task force to work with LGBTAIQ+ issues was created at the Puerto Rican Psychological Association (PRPA) the LGBT Community Issue’s Committee, now called Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Diversity Committee. At the same time, publications, dissertations, and PRPA convention presentations and sessions numbers continue to increase.

Lastly, according to Vázquez-Rivera et al. (2016), Puerto Rican psychology research has a focus on the consequences of the stigma and discrimination of

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LGBTAIQ+; however, it is time to move towards prevention models to reduce those disparities experienced by the community. For example, different studies have found bias and social distance from psychology professionals to the community, but psychology departments seem not to be addressing the problem; thus possibly this issue continues year after year (Esteban et al., 2016).

This chapter aims to summarize pioneers, books, and psychoeducational and research articles that have been published concerning the health and well-being of Puerto Rican LGBTAIQ+. This chapter will be divided into four main categories to complete these aims: pioneers, books, review articles, and empirical articles.

In order to develop this chapter, a qualitative literature review was conducted to identify scientific articles and books that addressed LGBTAIQ+ community in Puerto Rico. This search was guided by a list on LGBTAIQ+ publications in Puerto Rico which was last updated in November 2020 and provided by the Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Diversity Committee of the Puerto Rican Psychological Association. Furthermore, additional search was conducted online in the following sites: Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), EBSCO Host, ProQuest, PubMed, and ResearchGate to retrieve any unlisted publications and to add those that had been published between December 2020 and January 2021. The keywords used in this online search were LGBT, LGBT+, gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, transsexual, transgender, and intersex + Puerto Rico. Articles that didn't have a Puerto Rican sample were not included in this chapter.

Pioneers

Contributions for Sexual Orientation: José Toro-Alfonso

José (Joe) Toro-Alfonso (1952–2015) was the best-known researcher and book author for the discipline of psychology on the Island (Martínez-Taboas, 2014). In 1988 he was the best graduate student in clinical psychology from the Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies, now Albizu University in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Among his professional career, he worked as director of various community organizations and primarily as full professor at the Psychology Department of the University of Puerto Rico until his decease. Since the 2000s, more than 80 research articles and 36 national and international books and books chapter have his name on it. Toro-Alfonso was distinguished with more than 30 prizes and awards, for example, in 2003 the APA's Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity awarded him the Distinguished Contribution to Ethnic Minority Issues Award. In 2006 he was named Psychologist of the Year by the Puerto Rico Psychological Association. In 2009 he obtained the Interamerican Psychology Award. And in 2014 he obtained the Distinguished Professional Career Award and in 2016 and the Distinguished Padrino Recognition for Outstanding Lifetime Achievement by the National Latinx of Psychological Association (Arias-Gallegos, 2016).

His research work started with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its urgent needs (e.g., Toro-Alfonso, 2001; Varas-Díaz & Toro-Alfonso et al., 2001, 2002), but then he started moving to other urgent needs upon the study of homosexuality, bisexuality and men who has sex with men (MSM) issues (e.g., Toro-Alfonso et al., 2002), gender and masculinities (e.g., Toro-Alfonso & Varas-Díaz, 2006), sexual orientation issues (e.g., Toro-Alfonso et al., 2006), homophobias (e.g., Toro-Alfonso et al., 2007), eating disorders in LGB+ (e.g., Toro-Alfonso et al., 2012), and the trans community together with Dr. Sheilla Rodríguez-Madera (e.g., Rodríguez-Madera & Toro-Alfonso, 2002, 2003), among other topics.

Currently, the Psychological Research Institute (IPsi, its Spanish acronym) at the Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Puerto Rico creates, the first of its kind, the José Toro-Alfonso Collection. This Collection regarding gender and sexual orientation studies has over 948 books and 60 theses and dissertations (Psychological Research Institute, n.d.). Also, in his honor, the Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Diversity Committee of the Puerto Rico Psychological Association has a scholarship for thesis and dissertation regarding LGBTAIQ+ (Diversidad, n.d.)

Contributions for Gender Identities: Sheilla Rodríguez-Madera

Sheilla Rodríguez-Madera is a social scientist and researcher who has dedicated her career to the study of social conditions affecting the health of vulnerable populations. Rodríguez-Madera completed her PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras Campus. She was the executive director of the Puerto Rico's Commission for the Prevention of Violence and past president of the Puerto Rico Psychological Association. Rodríguez-Madera worked as professor and coordinator of the Doctoral Program in Public Health specializing on social determinants of health located at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus. Currently she is a professor at the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University. Rodríguez-Madera has published more than 20 articles in peer-reviewed journals, published 6 books, and participates extensively on national and international academic forums. She has received multiple research grants from the National Institutes of Health to conduct her studies.

Rodríguez-Madera has been regarded as a one of the pioneers in the study and documentation of health disparities affecting the transgender community in Puerto Rico. Her contribution to the understanding of the health needs and experiences of trans women has been pivotal in informing policy development and further studies. Mentored by Dr. Toro-Alfonso, she was at the forefront of research studies about the trans population in Puerto Rico that began to emerge during the mid-1990s and were mostly focused on transgender women. These initial efforts were part of the research targeting the HIV epidemic which heavily affected LGBTAIQ+ (Rodríguez-Madera, 2009). Thus, research literature from the time aimed to include transgender women as part of the HIV prevention efforts (Toro-Alfonso, 1995; Rodríguez-Madera & Toro Alfonso, 2005). Findings from these pioneering efforts are, unfortunately, all too well known to date. That is, transgender women were found to

experience higher social vulnerabilities, including poverty, discrimination, violence, and high-risk sexual practices (Rodríguez-Madera & Toro Alfonso, 2003). The first book on the topic in Puerto Rico, published by Rodríguez-Madera in 2009, highlighted how the lack of visibility of the trans community in the Island hampered their quality of life. One key example is their neglect within the statistical reports of the Department of Health of Puerto Rico, something that unfortunately still happens to this date as trans women are still included in men who have sex with men group statistics of HIV incidence.

Literature on the topic has expanded during the past decade, and Rodríguez-Madera has been instrumental on this advancement. Research has since addressed several health issues ranging from injection practices (Padilla et al., 2018) to intimate partner violence (Rodríguez-Madera & Marqués-Reyes, 2006) but also regarding barriers and facilitators to access healthcare (Padilla et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Madera et al., 2017; Martínez-Velez et al., 2019) as well as the attitudes and competencies of healthcare providers and physicians towards the trans population (Rodríguez-Madera et al., 2019). However, it has only been recently that research has begun to address the health needs of trans men and gender non-conforming population (Ramos-Pibernus et al., 2016, 2020). The call for action for the reduction of health disparities among LGBTAIQ+ has led to an increase on studies targeting this population, which we will elaborate in more detail on this chapter.

Books

In the year 2007, an important piece of literature on civil rights was developed by Toro-Alfonso in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Civils Right Commission. They developed the book *Por la vía de la exclusión: Homofobia y ciudadanía en Puerto Rico* [By the way of exclusion: Homophobia and citizenship in Puerto Rico] (Toro-Alfonso, 2007b). This book intended to study the incidence of homophobic manifestations on the Island and offered evidence concerning the homophobic attitudes that propitiated discriminatory environments among the public entities sworn to protect the civil rights of every citizen. Highlighting some of the findings, regarding experiences in governmental agencies, 43% ($n = 387$) reported having experienced rejection while looking for services: 29.9% in the police department, 9.2% in the courtroom, and 7.9% in some of the agencies related to ADFAN. On the other hand, the results for the quantitative phase on governmental agency employees showed that 35% ($n = 32$) of the participants reported moderate levels of prejudice towards lesbian and gay people, while 45.7% ($n = 53$) reported low levels of social distance, 25% reported high levels of social distance, and finally 15.5% reported moderate levels of social distance.

A few years later, Rodríguez-Madera (2009) published the book *Gender Trans: Transiting the Gray Areas*. Through its chapters the author includes research experiences and personal reflections mainly on the trans issues in the Puerto Rican

context. This book is divided into six chapters, which the author calls stations which a review of the perspective theories that have tried to explain the concept of gender transgression; the body as a space of resistance for trans people and as a method in which people transmit who they really are; the stigma that persecutes this community; and a description of a research study about trans women in Puerto Rico.

Another milestone towards education on diversity was achieved almost a decade later when Vázquez-Rivera et al. (2016) edited the first comprehensive book on LGBTAIQ+ issues in Puerto Rico, titled *LGBT 101: An Introductory Look at the Collective*. Its purpose was to create an introductory book about LGBTAIQ+ issues that is available for everyone. This book is divided in five general topics: historical issues, development, life experiences, bisexuality and gender identities, and legal issues that impact the communities. Nonetheless, each chapter includes historical, legal, and scientific data to support their statements.

Following the publication of *LGBT 101*, Vázquez-Rivera (2019) wrote a therapy guide for professionals who work with LGBTAIQ+ individuals. This guide presents an introductory chapter where basic concepts on sexual orientation and gender identity are discussed. It also provides templates for interviews, psychoeducation, and exercises to include in therapeutic sessions.

Review Articles

Research on LGBTAIQ+ in Puerto Rico is a fairly young practice which has grown slowly through the last decades. In an attempt to summarize what had been published regarding the LGBTAIQ+ community in Puerto Rico, Martínez-Taboas et al. (2016) published a bibliometric analysis of all the published volumes (1981–2016) of the *Revista Puertorriqueña de Psicología (RPP)* and *Ciencias de la Conducta (CC)*, two active psychology peer-reviewed journals in Puerto Rico. According to his findings, not one article about the LGBTAIQ+ community or human sexuality was published before 2002, and it is not until the year 2008 when a significant representation of articles was achieved in both peer-reviewed journals. Below are some review articles which have been published and address LGBTAIQ+ in Puerto Rico.

Homosexuality

In 2005, Toro-Alfonso published a review article in which he examined different studies about homosexuality in the Caribbean and described the complexity of sexualities and methodological challenges related to these complexities. According to his data, some of the challenges faced were lack of universal definitions for terms such as homosexual practices, little understanding on the perception of marriage among homosexuals, and misinformation related to what was called “normative behavior” among them. The author also questioned the inequity of the published

articles noticing that many of them documented data about gay men, but very few studies had been conducted with lesbian women. He also pointed out a tendency to develop research proposals with a quantitative methodology, which promoted insufficient qualitative data and, according to him, left out valuable information that would help better understand the definitions assigned to sexuality and to homoeroticism.

To offer a critical point of view towards reparative therapy for homosexuals, Santiago-Hernández and Toro-Alfonso (2010) described the basis of these therapies that intend to “cure” homosexuality and proposed that not only do they lack a valid empirical foundation, but many recognized organizations in the world had warned about the ethical implications on the use of these approaches. These arguments were again addressed after the resurfacing debate on conversion therapies in Puerto Rico almost a decade later. Esteban and Díaz-Medero (2019) published an article that promoted the reflection on ethical practices and the different social contexts, such as political, social, religious, and the individual’s identity, which are attached to the discussion of conversion or reparative therapies. In saying so, the authors state that identities should not be treated as mutually excluding (i.e., a person should be either religious or sexually diverse) but should rather be strengthened and given equal amount of value.

As was previously stated, one of the main gaps in the studies about homosexuality identified by Toro-Alfonso (2005) was the lack of literature developed on lesbian women in the Caribbean. This was again confirmed a decade later by Esteban (2015) who carried out a systematic review on lesbian women in Puerto Rico; only four doctoral dissertations were found to explore this topic at the time of the review. Two of them focused on domestic violence and the other half on alcohol and substance use. Some of the findings of these studies were that the most common type of abuse among lesbian partners was emotional, followed by physical and sexual abuse. It was also reported that lesbian women could identify sources of help and thus were reluctant to access it because they wanted to maintain their sexual intimacy with their partner, they thought the police would not take them seriously, and they did not want to be seen as weak.

Lastly, Esteban et al. (2020a) summarized publications about gay men’s health in Puerto Rico between the years 2000 and 2019 in a published bibliographic/descriptive literature review which included thesis, doctoral dissertations, and published articles in the field of psychology. The results showed that 41% of the studies generated about gay men during this time period focused on stigma, prejudice, social distancing, and discrimination, while some of the other published topics were sexual and gender identity, religion, spirituality, violence, alcohol and substances use, and life satisfaction. The authors concluded that there is much work to be done in highlighting positive aspects of the gay community on the Island.

Bisexuality

In Puerto Rico, probably one of the most invisibilized sexual orientation minorities is the bisexual individuals. On this matter, Esteban and Vázquez-Rivera (2014) carried out a literature review to document certain challenges faced by the bisexual community when they try to disclose their sexual orientation. Within the challenges for disclosing sexual orientation, they found double prejudice (from heterosexual individuals as well as other sexual minorities), discrimination, and stigma. According to their findings, these adversities increase the probability of them experiencing psychological symptoms such as depression and alcohol and drug abuse.

Vázquez-Rivera and Esteban (2014) published a literature review where they concentrated on bisexual people's mental health. They presented available interventions and recommendations for clinical and research work with this population. Concerning mental health issues, a higher prevalence of mental health disorders was shown in bisexual people than in the heterosexual population and also greater discrimination and a greater risk of suffering from mental health disorders. Therefore, the authors recognized the need to generate more research on mental health and mental health services access. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of attitudes towards the LGBTAIQ+ community in psychotherapy and developing adequate competence to serve community clients, through the use of the LGBTAIQ+ affirmative model.

Trans Identities

When searching for review articles about trans identities, two articles were found. The first by Toro-Alfonso (2007a) who elaborate on the sexual body, the transgression of gender, and of desire. According to him, the body, the principal reference we have from others, must be seen beyond the Cartesian model which separates mind and body. This model proposed that the body is only understood through physiology and anatomy, leaving out what he called the social body. To the author, the human body acquires meaning through socialization and is constructed and deconstructed with the subjective actions of individuals in a continued trance with social norms. He also presented a view of the body as a duality between the one that is received and the one that is desired. He states that what we call transgressive is not something other than the corporeal manifestation of diversity and how each person defines and redefines their body.

Rodríguez-Madera and Toro-Alfonso (2002) conducted a study in order to address the issue of trans community. They presented this concept as a phenomenon and an object of study through three models: biological essentialism, cognitivism, and social constructionism. The authors invite to evaluate and reflect on the role of psychology in this phenomenon.

Asexuality

In an attempt to attend the scientific gap on other sexual orientations that have been less studied in the Puerto Rican academia, Faris and Esteban (2018) published a literature review to discuss the concept of asexuality and provided recommendations for the clinical and research work. The authors exposed the invisibility of this identity and how it is viewed from different psychological and sexual theories.

Intersexuality

Another identity that has not been studied enough in Puerto Rico is intersexuality. Only one review article conducted by Esteban et al. (2018) was found. This review explored the quality of life and the health panorama of the intersex community through a descriptive literature review. The findings suggest that the intersex community presents a lower quality of life, especially in the sexual area and interacting with other people, present higher levels of psychological symptoms, and many of the conditions or symptoms that cause intersexuality present medical difficulties that worsen the intersex people's life circumstances.

Gender

Esteban (2018) published a review article in which he proposed a renewal of gender perspectives calling out the need for the development of a new paradigm based on equity and not equality. According to this author, although the gender perspectives aim to close the inequality gap between men and women, it creates a dualized panorama that ignores the constructs of sex and gender as diverse and not a dichotomous spectrum. He also states that a new perspective should advocate for (1) the inclusion of intersexuality, (2) gender as a spectrum, (3) gender identity separated from sex identity, (4) sexual orientation as a spectrum, (5) elimination of heterosexist and cissexist narratives, and (6) modification in the education of diversity.

Empirical Articles

Prejudice and Stigma

Homosexuality One of the most widely studied aspects with LGBTAIQ+ in Puerto Rico has been any variant of discrimination, stigma, prejudice, or social distancing. Toro-Alfonso and Varas-Díaz (2004) explored prejudice and social distance towards gay and lesbians among a sample of college students studying at University of Puerto Rico. The results showed moderate levels of prejudice and social distance towards gay and lesbians. These findings have been confirmed by a number of

studies (Fernández-Rodríguez & Calderón-Squiabro, 2014; Vázquez-Rivera et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Polo et al., 2018; & González-Guzmán et al., 2007). González-Guzmán et al. (2007) explored attitudes towards homosexual and lesbians among graduate students of General Public Health (GPH) and Health Education Program at School of Public Health, Medical Sciences Campus of the University of Puerto Rico. Their results show that 82.6% of the participants display prejudiced attitudes towards gays and lesbians, whereas 17.5% evidence a neutral or unprejudiced attitude. Other findings suggest 79.3% of participants reported low social distance towards this population, and 20.7% displayed high social distance.

Vázquez-Rivera et al. (2012) explored licensed psychotherapists and clinical psychology graduate students' attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Overall, grad students had more negative attitudes towards LG people than licensed psychologists in "anxiety towards psychotherapeutic intervention" and "self-evaluation of clinical competencies." Both students and licensed psychologists who had formal training on gay and lesbians in psychotherapy reported more positive attitudes towards them. Nonetheless, this did not impact their anxiety levels towards psychotherapeutic intervention. Participants who've had worked with various gay and/or lesbian patients in therapy before reported less anxiety and more clinical competencies than those who've worked less with this population.

Vázquez Rivera et al. (2018) explored attitudes of prejudice among licensed psychologists who were members of the Psychology Association of Puerto Rico (APPR) and worked as therapists towards lesbians and gays. Most participants (96.9%) exhibited positive attitudes towards gays and lesbians, while 3.1% exhibited neutral stances. Participants who identified as religious and assisted frequently to religious services had higher rates of negative attitudes towards offering their services to LG people. When exploring prejudice, 90.9% of participants exhibited low prejudice, 8.1% moderate prejudice, and 1% high prejudice.

Also exploring negative attitudes but towards men who have sex with men (MSM), Varas-Díaz et al. (2019) examined the behavioral manifestations of HIV/AIDS stigma among a sample of 100 physicians in training during simulated clinical interactions with MSM. The authors used an experimental design with standardized patient simulations, observational techniques, and quantitative questionnaires. The results showed that 95% of the participants provided the necessary physical contact and offered specific recommendations. Also, 89.8% did not explore social support, and 85% showed a condescending attitude. Significant positive correlations were found between stigma and HIV/AIDS and stigmatizing behaviors.

Trans Identities Regarding stigma and prejudice towards the trans community, Francia-Martínez et al. (2017) conducted a descriptive exploratory study to examine attitudes, knowledge, and social distance levels in graduate students and psychology professionals in Puerto Rico. With a sample of 233 participants, 85.1% indicated a low prejudice towards the transgender community, 14.9% indicated moderate prejudice, and 80.2% reported low prejudice. Meanwhile, 19.8% reported moderate prejudice towards the transgender community. The authors found statistically significant

positive relationships between religious services and prejudice levels towards transgender and transgender people.

Rodríguez-Madera et al. (2017) also published an article on experiences among transgender women in Puerto Rico. For this study, a sample of 59 self-identified transgender women were recruited in the time period from 2011 to 2013. Experiences of violence among participants were common, with more than one third being discriminated for their gender identity. One fourth identified to have been discriminated by social and/or medical services. Moreover, 35% had experienced verbal violence. Twenty-five percent of participants had experienced physical violence, while 16% had experienced sexual violence. Violence exposure levels were also common, with close to two quarters of the participants having known a transgender person who was killed. Half of the participants who were sex workers reported experiencing violence from a client.

Similarly, Ramos-Pibernus et al. (2020) explored trans men's stigmatizing experiences. These authors carried out a qualitative exploratory study where they performed focus groups, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic observations to a sample of 29 trans men. The findings were structured into three categories: structural stigma, interpersonal stigma, and individual stigma. Within the category of structural stigma, the authors found that participants experienced stigma in healthcare settings, workplaces, and traveling. In the interpersonal stigma category, they found that many experienced microaggressions. Regarding individual stigma, the participants indicated that they used avoidance as a coping strategy.

Moreover, Ramos et al. (2018) developed and implemented a pilot intervention to reduce stigma and increase knowledge about the health needs of trans women. The authors evaluated the intervention's acceptability and examined stigma and awareness levels before and after the intervention with a sample of 22 medical students from Puerto Rico. The results of the acceptability of the intervention showed that 95.5% of the participants were in total agreement with the importance of the material covered in the intervention. Also, 87.5% of the participants indicated that the intervention helped them increase their future doctors' skills when working with trans patients. As for the differences in the stigma levels, these were not statistically significant.

In order to measure psychotherapists' attitudes towards the trans community, Esteban et al. (2020b) developed and preliminarily validated two instruments. One instrument aimed to measure attitudes towards transgenderism; meanwhile, the second one measured attitudes towards transsexuality. Their aim was to evaluate whether there were differences in attitudes towards the trans community in a sample of 131 students and psychology professionals. The results indicated that both the Scale of Attitudes of Psychotherapists towards the Transgender Community and the Scale of Attitudes of Psychotherapists towards the Transsexual Community had acceptable values for internal validity.

Esteban et al. (2020c) developed and validated a scale to measure social distance towards the trans community in psychology professionals and graduate students. Furthermore, they evaluated whether there were significant differences in social

distance between a sample of 127 psychology professionals and psychology graduate students. The results showed that the scale obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.99 and the Spearman-Brown test, 0.98. Moreover, the authors deduced that the participants do not show closeness or unconditional acceptance of trans people.

LGBTAIQ+ Conjoined Studies Other empirical studies in Puerto Rico were developed using representation from different LGBTAIQ+. Rosario-Hernández et al. (2009) examined the relationship between the management of sexual identity at work, perceived organizational heterosexism, work attitudes, and LGB employees' psychological well-being. The sample consisted of 110 participants, of whom 70% identified themselves as homosexual, 20% identified as lesbian, and 9.1% as bisexual. These authors found that the management of sexual identity at work influenced work attitudes and psychological well-being. They also found that perceived organizational heterosexism seems to influence work attitudes but not psychological well-being.

Luiggi-Hernández et al. (2015) conducted a study to explore the discriminatory behaviors perceived by LGBTAIQ+ people during a recruitment phase or interview for employment. The team assessed the relation between these experiences and psychological well-being. The sample consisted of 157 Puerto Rican LGBTAIQ+ participants who were recruited through social media. Findings suggest that 62.2% reported having experienced discrimination in the recruitment process. The most reported experience was listening to jokes (48%) or any form of negative comments (37%) about the LGBTAIQ+ community, 34% reported being asked about their sexual orientation, and 21% reported sexual harassment.

Nieves-Rosa (2012) explored and described homophobic attitudes and social distance towards LGBTAIQ+ people among students from University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus. Results showed that there is a negative correlation between how important religion is for the participant, how often they participate in religious activities, and low levels of prejudice. In addition, results showed a negative correlation between academic year and social distance level towards gays and lesbians and a positive correlation between prejudices attitudes and social distance towards gays and lesbians.

Lastly, using a community-based participatory research approach, Rodríguez-Díaz et al. (2016) explored the settings in which discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity occurred in a sample of LGBTAIQ+ people in Puerto Rico. Also, they evaluated the priorities and needs of this community regarding health services. The findings reflected that 50% of the participants had experienced discrimination in schools, 26% at work, and 19% in receiving government services. Among the priorities for social well-being, participants reported protection from discrimination at work, right for same-sex couples to adopt, and protection from violence. Regarding the participants' health priorities, they reported services related to HIV/AIDS, mental health, sexual health, sexually transmitted infections, and the management of partner violence and addictions.

Gender Identity

In regard to trans identities, Padilla and Rodríguez-Madera (2021) described both how the trajectories of trans women are marked by systematic violence and their resilient responses towards social challenges. These authors adapted Achille Mbembe's necropolitics notion to explore how the transgender body is systematically excluded and "designed to die." This research is derived from an ethnographic study and survey of transgender women in the San Juan metropolitan area between 2011 and 2013. Findings include the practices used in order to transition to the desired body, such as using informal medical practices like injecting silicone or the use of hormones.

According to Ramos-Pibernus et al. (2016), there is a scientific gap in studies about trans men in Puerto Rico. Therefore, they examined the effects the identity construction has over trans men and *buchas* on their bodily practices and health. Within the findings, the authors focused on two main domains that reflect the intersection and the social context of the gender and health identities of trans men and *buchas*. These were bodily representations and gender performance and meaning of female biological processes. Participants reported avoiding attending health services due to feeling uncomfortable having their bodies inspected by medical personnel or dissonance or bodily ambivalence.

Health

Trans Identities Puerto Rican researchers have also focused part of their studies on the health of trans communities. Rodríguez-Madera and Toro-Alfonso (2003) identified factors that make the transgender community vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection in Puerto Rico. The results showed that 57% of the participants reported high levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Additionally, participants associated safe sex with condom use, reduced sexual partners, and not exchanging bodily fluids. For the sexual behaviors practiced, 48% of the participants reported having permanent partners; 74% had sexual relations with *pargos* (clients of the sex industry); and 66% had sexual relations with casual partners.

Rodríguez-Madera and Toro-Alfonso (2005) carried out a mixed method study with a sample of 50 Puerto Rican trans women; only 2 of them participated in the interview process. The goal of this study was to explore the role of gender in HIV/AIDS prevention. Results showed that 57% of participants knew about HIV modes of transmission but still engaged in high-risk sexual practices and low perception of risk for infection, 14% of participants informed they were HIV positive, 24% had never been tested for HIV, 62% said that they have not gotten tested because they were sure of their seronegativity, and 18% reported to have had another type of sexually transmitted disease.

Meléndez-Sáez et al. (2015) explored trans people HIV/AIDS treatment adherence in Puerto Rico through a mixed method study. From a total of eight

participants who lived with HIV/AIDS, most of the participants were under hormonal treatment in combination with HIV/AIDS treatment. Half of the participants identified as adherent to treatment, while the other half did not. Some reasons for not keeping up with treatment were not taking their medication, stopping their medication because they did not feel good, and forgetting to take their medication during weekends. Some barriers for adherence were lack of accessibility to treatment, forgetfulness, lack of motivation, and not feeling good. The authors identified that adherence was influenced by the perception of social support and stigma. When participants were asked what helped them to be adherent to treatment, they mentioned “taking care of me” which was associated with a healthy self-esteem and a positive outlook of life.

Padilla et al. (2018) examined the social and political-economic context of the common practices of injecting hormones and silicone within the community of trans women in Puerto Rico. They reported data from ethnographic observations and interviews of 39 participants; these described ideologies and practices of hormone and silicone injection. Also, descriptive statistics of hormone and silicone injection practices from a quantitative survey of 59 participants were included. One of the greatest barriers that trans women face is the difficulty in accessing competent and culturally sensitive healthcare providers. The authors believe that this barrier contributes to the development of resilient social networks.

Rodríguez-Madera et al. (2018) carried out a study to document the feasibility and acceptability of collecting biomarkers of chronic stress and HIV in a sample of ten trans women in Puerto Rico. The authors used a rapid HIV test and a cortisol test simultaneously with a 25 open-question interview. The results indicated that 20% of the participants obtained positive results for HIV antibodies. Moreover, the cortisol levels of the participants ranged from 8.64 to 42.32 ppq/mg.

The last study found on trans health described transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people’s experiences when accessing or receiving healthcare services (Martínez-Vélez et al., 2019). Additionally, they wanted to know if this community has experienced discrimination in multiple social settings such as school, work, and accessing bathroom facilities. The results showed that 98.0% of the participants reported discrimination experiences, being school the most reported scenario (70.6%). Likewise, 67.4% of the participants reported discrimination at work, 63.0% in the work search, and 45.1% when using public toilets. Regarding violent experiences, 44.2% of the participants have been mistreated and harassed because of their perceived gender identity. More than half of the participants (65.4%) indicated that they had been verbally attacked in a public setting. Moreover, more than half of the participants (55.8%) documented that they have experienced physical, verbal, or sexual violence by their partner. However, 65.6% of the participants reported that they had the support of their family at the time of transition.

LGBTAIQ+ Conjoined Studies Colón-López et al. (2013) carried out a study to compare sociodemographic, behavioral, and clinical characteristics between men who have sex with men (MSM) and men who have sex with women (MSW). These authors used a sample from the cross-sectional study Epidemiology of Hepatitis C

in the Household, Adult Population of Puerto Rico, carried out between 2005 and 2008 in Puerto Rico. The results showed that MSM, compared to MSW, are more likely to report sexual practices at an early age, more lifetime sexual partners, more sexual practices with IDU, and more sexual practices with an HIV+ partner.

Another article published in 2019 evaluated whether having a partner was a protective factor against depression and suicidal ideations within the LGBTAIQ+ community in Puerto Rico (González-Rivera et al., 2019). In order to do so, the research team designed a descriptive cross-sectional study where they administered the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) to 192 participants from the LGBTAIQ+ community. According to the authors, 23.4% presented mild depression, 12.5% moderate depression, 6.3% moderately severe depression, 6.3% severe depression, and 24.5% suicidal ideations. The authors conclude that significant differences in levels of depression were in fact identified among the participants that had a partner and those who do not. In addition, they report that having a partner halves the probability of suicide ideation and should be considered a protective factor.

Violence

Homosexuality López-Ortiz and Ayala-Morales (2011) explored domestic violence experiences among lesbian women in Puerto Rico and identified barriers and facilitating factors in the process of seeking help and support. The authors interviewed seven women, six of them had experienced domestic violence in their childhood. When the participants were asked about physical violence in their romantic relationships, they all mentioned to have experienced it. When asked about how they looked for help, these women mentioned to have delayed the process of seeking help and chose to talk about it with friends over family. The participants acknowledged several barriers when seeking for help like homophobic attitudes and a general lack of knowledge about LGBTAIQ+ people.

LGBTAIQ+ Conjoined Studies Reyes-Mena et al. (2005) analyzed domestic violence manifestations among LGB people. In a sample of 201 participants, 20.3% were gay men, and 19.3% were lesbian women, out of which 41.6% considered themselves to be a victim of domestic violence. Of the total sample, only 11.7% of the participants looked for help. When asked about the type of violence, 28.4% of participants reported that physical abuse happened when their partner had used alcohol or drugs, and 36% suffered from psychological abuse. The authors highlight that sexual violence was more common among gay men than among lesbian women.

Having a different perspective on perceived violence, Rivera-Quñones et al. (2013) developed a nonexperimental study of quantitative design to explore the perception of security among the LGBTAIQ+ community in San Juan, Puerto Rico. They recruited 103 participants and administered a questionnaire. Their results suggest that 73% of the sample reported feeling unsafe, with 44% reported having feared for their lives in a public place and having felt or experienced intolerance

because of their LGBTAIQ+ identity. Some of the experiences reported were verbal harassment, fear of outing their LGBTAIQ+ identity with colleagues or authority figures, and fearing for their lives.

Use of Alcohol and Other Substances

Cabrera-Serrano, Felici-Giovanini, and Cases-Rosario (2019) published a study which intended to develop an epidemiological profile of tobacco use among LGBTAIQ+ communities in Puerto Rico and explore whether or not there are any statistically significant differences (in terms of health conditions and risk factors) between LGBTAIQ+ smokers (LGBTAIQ+-S), LGBTAIQ+ nonsmokers (LGBTAIQ+-NS), general population nonsmokers (GP-NS), and general population smokers (GP-S). To achieve their aims, the research team used the Puerto Rico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System database (2013–2015). Their results suggest that during the period of 2013–2015, the Puerto Rico LGBTAIQ+ population was reported to have higher tobacco use than the general population had (21.6% vs. 10.8%). Also, the authors found that LGBTAIQ+-S were more likely to have depression than LGBTAIQ+-NS. The authors concluded that tobacco use is one of the most critical public health issues affecting the LGBTAIQ+ population in Puerto Rico, and specific interventions and treatments are needed for their members.

5.2 Discussion

In this chapter we did an effort to portray the current state of research about LGBTAIQ+ in Puerto Rico. We described what has been documented in the form of books and peer-reviewed articles in the past 20 years, including pioneers on this line of research. It is safe to say that Puerto Rican researchers have continuously worked on the understanding and documentation of the experiences and needs of LGBTAIQ+. However, it is evident that some segments of the LGBTAIQ+ communities have been given more attention than others. Regarding LGB+, the majority of studies in Puerto Rico focus on the gay population, including men who have sex with men, leaving neglected other sexual minorities, including lesbian women and bisexual individuals who have been less studied.

In the case of gender minorities, especially the trans community, the majority of studies have focused on trans women, mainly due to the HIV epidemic. We recognized that this population experienced disproportionate health disparities that need to be documented. However, the focus solely on trans women has left understudied other gender minorities, including trans men and nonbinary populations. Until recently, there were no documented studies that included trans men and nonbinary population in their sample.

We can conclude that reviews and research with LGBTAIQ+ have been exhaustive; however, continuance, actualization, and new research are needed. There is a

lot of research work with descriptive or modest methodologies, but we think that this is a reflection of the lack of funds for research that exists in the Island. At the moment, the country has limited institutes or organization that provide funding to support research initiatives. The main viable alternatives are the health institutes and other organizations in the United States, and to reach these funds, training, mentoring, publication background, and excellent domain of English, among other skills, are needed to compete for available economic resources.

On the other hand, the majority of the studies are focused on problematic issues, stigma consequences, and other negative perspectives of the LGBTAIQ+. These studies are definitely necessary; however, research with positive and preventive factors are needed also to work with and address the health disparities experienced by this power minorities. Therefore, research in protective factors and intervention models are recommended.

Finally, having identified most of the needs of LGBTAIQ+ communities in Puerto Rico, it is crucial that researchers move from a descriptive approach to an intervention-based approach. Also, those approaches should address the identified needs and disparities from multilevel and transdisciplinary perspectives.

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