

Tierney Lorenz

Deb Hope

Kathryn Holland *Editors*

Gender Resilience, Integration and Transformation

Nebraska Symposium on Motivation

Volume 70

Series Editor

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Lincoln, NE, USA

The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation has been sponsored by the Department of Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since 1953. Each year the Symposium invites leading scholars from around the world on a topic of current interest in psychology for a conference at the University followed by publication of an edited volume.

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 Springer

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*This work is dedicated to the irrepressible
power of joy*

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About the Book/Conference

The 70th Annual Nebraska Symposium on Motivation focused on understanding resiliency, joy, pleasure, and well-being in women, queer folks, and gender-diverse people. In bringing together a diverse international and interdisciplinary group of scholars and scientists, we created a space to explore joy, to break with narratives of deficiency, and to honor well-being with the same scientific vigor and rigor as we give to pain. The chapters of this volume represent this effort, all centered on the question: What would it look like if your field of study—the study of gender and sexuality—truly centered well-being and resilience as the foundation of theory and research?

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About the Editors

Tierney Lorenz (she/they) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They received their Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin in 2013 after completing an internship at the University of Washington School of Medicine. They completed their postdoctoral work at the Kinsey Institute and the Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior at Indiana University. Dr. Lorenz's research examines the interaction between mental, physical, and sexual health in women and gender-diverse people. Their lab investigates the ways that sexual behavior impacts immune and endocrine function, as well as ways to help patients with mental and physical health conditions have happy, healthy sexual lives. They also focus on helping survivors of sexual trauma through basic science and clinical research.

Deb Hope received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University at Albany-State University of New York in 1990 and joined UNL in the same year. Her current research interests follow two broad themes: (a) assessment and treatment of anxiety disorders (particularly social anxiety disorder) and (b) the impact of stigma and discrimination on mental health and health services, particularly for individuals who identify as transgender, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Her work on psychopathology emphasizes information processing models that describe the role of attention and memory in social anxiety disorder and the impact of these cognitive processes on interpersonal functioning. Dr. Hope also has ongoing research on both the outcome and process of psychotherapy, with a most recent emphasis on using technology to make evidence-based treatment more available, especially in underserved rural areas. The LGBT line of research is examining how stigma and discrimination impact mental health. Her current major collaborative effort is Trans Collaborations, a community-based participatory research group focused on reducing health disparities for individuals who identify as transgender or gender diverse and reside in areas with few specialty resources.

Kathryn Holland (she/her) is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology and Women's Studies from the University of Michigan in 2017 and her B.A. in Applied Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2008. Her research investigates how people's health and well-being are influenced by their social environments, with a focus on formal support systems, interpersonal processes, and social norms. She is primarily interested in well-being related to people's experiences of sexual assault and sexual health, particularly for those who are marginalized by gender and/or sexuality (e.g., women and LGBTQ+ communities). For example, she studies the implementation, use, and effectiveness of formal support systems for sexual assault in higher education. She also examines how social norms around gender and sexuality affect women's sexual health.

Centering Resilience, Well-being, and Pleasure in Gender and Sexuality Science



Tierney Lorenz and Kathryn J. Holland

Why Center Resilience, Well-being, and Pleasure in Gender and Sexuality Science, When There Is So Much Pain in the World?

There has been a surge in research on gender and sexuality in the last decade, which has predominantly focused on discrimination, dysphoria, and disparities. Much of what we hear in the news about issues relating to gender and sexuality is deeply negative, with seemingly endless attacks on people who are marginalized by their gender and/or sexuality—attacks that are both physical and political. While such issues are extremely important, this one-sided focus casts the experience of minoritized people as intrinsically negative. A deficit model implies the best one can hope for is to avoid negative outcomes, which limits the possibilities of authentic gender and sexual identity and expression, intimate connection, and personal and professional success.

We need more nuanced and methodologically rigorous approaches to understanding resiliency and well-being within minoritized groups, including women, queer (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, demisexual), and transgender and gender-diverse people. If all we ever hear about the experiences of minoritized people is pain, we diminish the strength of these communities and the richness of their humanity. When we expand our view to include the positive, we reclaim

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humanity—not to mention, strengthen our science by developing theories and conducting research that address the incredible range of human experience around gender and sexuality.

In spring 2023, just a few blocks from where our symposium speakers were reflecting on their research on the resiliency, joy, pleasure, and well-being in women, queer, and gender-diverse people, the Nebraska Unicameral was debating Legislative Bill 574. This bill sought to ban abortion care after 12 weeks and significantly restrict access to gender-affirming medical care for trans youth. Its name reflected the disturbing narratives used to justify heinous infringements on human rights: “Let Them Grow Act and the Preborn Child Protection Act.” The bill passed (“Let Them Grow Act and the Preborn Child Protection Act,” 2023). The devastating irony of this juxtaposition reflects the tension that arises whenever we attempt to elevate research on well-being in marginalized groups. There will always be pressure to address stigma and pain. At the same time, putting off or minimizing research on the positive aspects around gender and sexuality not only serves to reinforce narratives of deficiency, but it also contributes to burnout of minoritized scholars who are forced to continuously engage with the negative. Such burnout may fortify and intensify the very systems of oppression we seek to fight (Eaton & Warner, 2021).

What is more, our scientific models are expanded when we consider narratives centered in the experiences and ideals of marginalized populations. The growing literature on gender euphoria is a wonderful example (Austin et al., 2022; Beischel et al., 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022). If all that is understood about the experiences of trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse people are the ways in which not fitting into a false, rigid, socially constructed gender binary causes pain, it is natural for our social systems and institutions to focus primarily on fighting that pain. Trans and gender-diverse folks are required to report on (highly specific) experiences of gender dysphoria in order to have access to lifesaving care (e.g., hormones, gender-affirming medical procedures), which further reinforces the problematic idea that a trans or gender-diverse identity is necessarily dysphoric and, by extension, requiring social control via medical intervention (Davy & Toze, 2018; Johnson, 2019). But what happens when we listen to trans and gender-diverse people’s experiences of gender *euphoria* and identity authenticity? We see the joy, creativity, authenticity, and remedy in stepping outside prescriptive, binary gendered expectations and challenges what we understand gender to be. Suddenly, we have room to play, and that play invites curiosity—and curiosity is the first step of scientific progress.

The 70th Annual Nebraska Symposium on Motivation was a space to explore joy, to break with narratives of deficiency, and honor well-being with the same scientific vigor and rigor as we give to pain. The chapters of this volume represent this effort, with a diverse range of authors and topics all centered on the question: what would it look like if your field of study—the study of gender and sexuality—truly centered well-being and resilience as the foundation of theory and research?

What Do We Mean by Resilience, Well-being, and Pleasure?

While each author across this volume differs in their approach to measuring eudemonic perspectives on gender and sexuality, some interesting commonalities arose in how we conceptualize key terms—commonalities that highlight the framework of centering minoritized populations and scholarship.

Resilience

While often considered a multimodal construct, most definitions of resilience include the ability to achieve good outcomes or growth (or avoid negative outcomes) despite exposure to adversity or stress (Puckett et al., 2022a; Sisto et al., 2019). When considering resilience in minoritized populations, the literature often makes an implicit assumption the adversity of interest is discrimination, and the natural response—that is, the response one must be resilient against—is minority stress (Marks et al., 2020; Puckett et al., 2022b; Vargas et al., 2020). Moreover, in the broader literature on resilience, there is an undertone of urgency in reestablishing a positive trajectory, that is, an assumption that health and well-being are predicated on either adapting to adversity or quickly recovering from exposure to adversity and reengaging with the same systems that presented such stressful circumstances. Taken together, these assumptions create an expectation that resilience among minoritized people represents the tools necessary to continue interaction with systems of oppression. Such tools take a toll; for example, as outlined in the chapter by Dickens and Hall, identity shifting may protect against discrimination but results in poorer mental health for Black women in STEM.

In contrast, as noted in several of the chapters of this volume, a common theme of resilience in minoritized populations is the concerted effort to *deconstruct* these systems of oppression, rather than learning to adapt within them. As such, resilience in minoritized populations is understood as a collective action that draws strength from community and connection, operating outside the bounds of individualist capitalist norms. However, as noted in the chapter by Avery, embracing “resistance as resilience” can be paradoxical for Black women, both empowering and shaping one’s self-awareness around gendered racism.

Well-being

Before it was a marketing buzzword, “well-being” was originally proposed as a holistic positive health outcome that contrasted with lack of highly symptom-specific dysfunction or deficit as a marker of treatment success (Lorenz & Finley, 2020). As an outcome that is intrinsically multimodal, idiographic, and contextually