CONFERENCE REPORT

VIII International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) Conference, Madrid, Spain, 6 to 9 July 2011

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The International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) was formed in 1997 in Amsterdam following a congress on sexuality studies. This congress set the tone for the interdisciplinary and multicultural nature of IASSCS with participating scholars from anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, health policy, and cultural and gender studies. In fact, this is the first interdisciplinary organisation of its kind in the field of sexuality, giving IASSCS a unique and international standpoint in the global academic and political fields of sexuality. The primary aim of developing IASSCS was to address the fragmented character of sexuality studies by providing an interdisciplinary forum that values a variety of theories and cultures in understanding sexuality. A by-product of this was the successful development and expansion of sexuality studies across the globe and in low income countries, providing the field with the international recognition and approval it had not previously received.

Since its conception in 1997, IASSCS has committed itself to the development and strengthening of global research in the area of sexuality and culture. Additionally, IASSCS has assisted with the development of research in low-income countries and, in turn, provided under resourced researchers with a global platform. Equity in research has also been targeted through the bridging of gaps between researchers, activists and policy makers by providing a single forum for all professionals stemming from a variety of domains to engage in issues of sexuality and culture together. These objectives and commitments have resulted in multicultural and multidisciplinary sexuality research and advocacy activities worldwide. The ultimate IASSCS objective is to realise itself as a convener and facilitator of both international and national networking of sexuality and culture researchers, activists and policy
makers. To this end, IASSCS hosts a bi-annual global conference alongside regional meetings, training seminars and mentorship programmes.

This year, the VII IASSCS Conference was hosted from the 6th to the 9th of July 2011 at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in Spain. In 2004, the conservative Spanish government lost power and was replaced by a socialist government which committed itself to the liberation of sexual rights. Since 2004, Spain has seen the lifting of gay laws and punishments as well as the creation of a human rights agenda that recognises and respects all types of sexualities. This newly sexually liberated country with its celebration of alternative sexuality in the gay district, Chueca, made for a particularly poignant location for a conference concerning sexuality and culture.

The theme for the VII IASSCS was “Naming and Framing: The Making of Sexual (In)Equality”. The three day conference brought together a diverse range of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines including filmmakers, activists, scholars, researchers, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists.

The conference opened with a provocative plenary by keynote John Gagnon concerning past and future theoretical frameworks for thinking about sexuality. This was followed by Shereen El Feki who discussed cultural diversity and the recognition of sexual rights as human rights and Gilberdt Herdt who acknowledged and debated how modernity has changed sexuality. These plenary sessions were followed by poster presentations, theatrical representations, panel sessions and workshops. The panel sessions were extremely diverse covering issues concerning policy and sexuality, female genital mutilation, different representations of homosexuality, experiences of lesbianism and corrective rape, female sexual offending and future paths for intersex identities. Each presentation focused on a range of countries and cultures, giving the conference a global character in the understanding of different
sexualities across the world, and across religion, ethnicity and race. The event culminated in a ten day post-conference training for selected scholars and advocates from low income contexts as a means to support and further their sexuality and cultural studies research base.

The discussions and insights conveyed at the post-conference training have demonstrated that VII IASSCS tapped into vital and current issues concerning sexuality and the way it is expressed cross-culturally. There is a definite necessity to continue to challenge cultures that impede sexual rights and to provide a global forum where sexual diversity across cultures can be understood, acknowledged and accepted at the international level. IASSCS conferences lay the foundation for such work, allowing for social, political, academic and cross-cultural discussions that have meaning for the future of sexual and cultural studies and advocacy.
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Sherianne Kramer is a research psychologist at the Unisa Institute for Social and Health Sciences. Her research interests include crime, violence and injury prevention, female sex crime, gender performativity and knowledge productions. She is currently conducting her PhD in the area of female sexual perpetration.