

Book Review: Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression in Social Work Practice

Contributed by Trevor Gates, LMSW, ACSW

Book review of *Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression in Social Work Practice: Working With Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People*, by D. R. Morrow & L. Messinger (Editors). {mosgoogle right} Morrow, D. F., & Messinger, L. (Eds.). (2006). *Sexual orientation and gender expression in social work practice: Working with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people*. New York: Columbia University Press. 536 pages, \$80.

Training culturally competent practitioners is one of the top priorities of most undergraduate and graduate social work programs. Beginning social workers are taught about the importance of respecting the dignity and worth of all of our clients, regardless of their ethnic heritage, socioeconomic status, religious background, gender, age, and other experiences. Many judicious professors of social work include sexual orientation and gender expression in their definition of culturally competent practice. Others share the sentiment that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community should be included in our knowledge of diversity, but have uncertainty about ways to incorporate models for working with the LGBT community into the curriculum. Deana Morrow and Lori Messinger's *Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression in Social Work Practice* bridges the gap in preparing culturally competent practitioners capable of meeting the needs of LGBT consumers.

Because the LGBT community is so diverse, represented in virtually every racial, socioeconomic, age, gender, geographical, and other community, compiling a cohesive text is undoubtedly difficult. However, Morrow and Messinger's text does an admirable job of covering the essentials in working with LGBT consumers. The text begins by defining the sexual orientation and gender identity expression in terms of a historical context of discrimination and oppression. Discussing the importance of identity development and coming out, the text transitions into the importance of relationships and community for LGBT consumers. It is worth mentioning that the contributing writers do a most admirable job of adequately discussing the transgender community, which is often ignored or inadequately addressed in the LGBTQ literature. In the final portion, the book addresses the influence of society and culture in framing culturally competent practice with LGBT consumers, including health issues, hate crimes, spirituality, and workplace issues. The authors propose incorporating social welfare policy and practice methods that affirm the inherent dignity and worth of our LGBT consumers.

In a society that continues to stigmatize many of our LGBT consumers, social workers remain an important voice in advocating for the needs of the LGBTQ community. Homophobic rhetoric and anti-gay legislation in the United States that prohibits the full inclusion of LGBT people in our society, such as defining marriage as a heterosexual union, threatens the dignity and in some cases the lives of LGBT consumers. Social workers remain an important player in challenging injustice and working toward ensuring that all people are full members of our society. Morrow and Messinger's text will assuredly be an important contribution in training culturally competent social workers, and it is a worthy addition to one's social work library.

Reviewed by Trevor Gates, LMSW, ACSW, who specializes in social work with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Trevor lives in Fort Worth, TX and has enjoyed practice experiences in settings serving individuals across the lifespan.