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Deana F. Morrow and Lori Messinger (eds)

Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression in Social Work Practice: Working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, 544 pp., \$45.00/£29.00 (pbk), ISBN0231127294

I write this review as a heterosexual woman who is strongly committed to challenging heterosexist discourses (ideas and practices) within social work theory and practice. I believe that this is an important statement to make from the beginning, because it makes clear that I cannot and do not speak for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people, although even as I write this, I am aware that there is no such thing as a single GLBT experience, any more than there is a single heterosexual voice. Putting such debates to one side (if it is ever truly possible to remove oneself from one's subjectivity), this book seems to be an excellent resource for social work practitioners and educators working with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people and their families. The editors are clearly experts in their field and the contributors present practical suggestions for the development of effective knowledge and skills with GLBT service users and carers. Part One sets down the context for social work practice, with Chapter 1 providing a good introduction to the terminology and to issues to be discussed in the book as a whole. These include two key questions which are addressed by all the contributors:

- As a practicing social worker, what is my professional ethical obligation in serving GLBT clients?
- What is the social work professions' ethical obligation in responding to issues of sexual orientation and gender expression?

Chapter 2 follows this up with an interesting insight into the treatment and experience of GLBT people over time in the United States, from the early 1500s to 2003. Part Two explores sexual development and coming out, again providing clear, informative and matter-of-fact presentation of what, at times, might seem difficult material. Part Three moves on to relationships and families, while Part Four examines society and culture. It is incontrovertible that the legislative and policy framework of the book, and its social, historical and religious context is firmly based in the US experience. But this book has much to offer academics and practitioners elsewhere. What I appreciated most in reading the collection was its accessibility. In spite of being a large, rather off-putting book, it is surprisingly readable. Its general tone is positive, encouraging, and, in the words of the final chapter, 'affirmative'. It is not afraid to point out what is wrong, and in so doing, it might have been a depressing account of prejudice, discrimination and stigma. But it is not. In the end, what comes across is the progress which has been made and is being made because 'GLBT individuals and communities, and the larger society in which we live, will change over time, and these changes will have implications for best practices' (p.460). We are all, the editors argue, engaged in a learning process, and 'in pursuit of social justice for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people, we must remain vigilant and committed to the service of our brothers and sisters in humanity' (p.470). On a more critical note, it is surprising that the editors did not locate themselves in the discussion in terms of their own sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Readers are left to make up their own minds, but this may, of course, have been a deliberate decision on the part of Morrow and Messinger, as a way of challenging stereotypical

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assumptions. Whether or not this is the case, this book seems to be to make a real contribution to social work literature, and will be extremely useful for students, practitioners and educators alike.

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