

Book Review

Hunter, S. (2011). *Lesbian and gay couples: Lives, issues, and practice*. IL: Lyceum Books, Inc.

Reviewed by Shawn D. King, Ph.D., MSW, LISW

Author Dr. Ski Hunter has held a full faculty position at the University of Texas at Arlington since 1984. Dr. Hunter earned her Ph.D. in Social Work from The Ohio State University, a Master of Social Work from San Diego State University, and a Master of Science degree in Psychology from North Texas State University. She has received numerous academic and community service achievement awards. She is the author of more than five books and numerous articles that outline affirmative practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. The subjects of her books have addressed social work practice with midlife and older LGBT adults, coming out and disclosure issues, and practice issues for those who work to serve them.

In the author's most recent book, which is the focus of this review, the aim is clearly focused and directed to the current issues that face lesbian and gay couples. The author gives demographic information that is very up-to-date and informative about the gay and lesbian couple population. She clearly outlines a conceptual approach to her work in this book. She uses the introduction to discuss both heterosexism and the use of a postmodern and queer theory framework throughout the chapters. Furthermore, the author states that the aim is to give the intended reader better insight and understanding of how lesbian and gay couples process current gay marriage issues. The author points out that her aim is to inform practice, focusing on practice issues for lesbian and gay couples, and outlines the

various practice interventions that have potential to be effective in resolving those issues.

One of the biggest strengths of this book is the use of past research to inform and define the unique issues that have been found to be important for lesbian and gay couples. Additionally, the demographic information presented in the introduction reveals the most current statistics that we have for this population. The author devotes chapters to couple relationship satisfaction, sexual intimacy, and breakups. She also addresses intimate partner violence, grief, and bereavement from the lens of lesbian and gay couples. The author aims to inform the intended reader of the differences and similarities between lesbian and gay couples and heterosexual couples on issues related to courtship, dating, and various approaches to having children.

The intended readership for this book includes those individuals who want to better understand lesbian and gay couples and practitioners who work with them. The information presented specifically in chapters five and six gives the intended practitioner very good insight into important aspects from a psychosocial perspective when providing social services to this population. For instance, in chapters five and six, the author addresses points of social values and ethics with the importance of not assuming that all issues brought to lesbian and gay couple situations center on sexual orientation or identity. Instead, the author

suggests that practitioners ask the couple to define themselves, thereby adhering to a more client-centered and strengths based perspective. Furthermore, in chapter six the author discusses the importance of practitioners being knowledgeable about the unique ways that heterosexism affects lesbian and gay relationships. The author suggests using consultation when needed to help identify the focus of interventions and to also contact organizations such as PFLAG when needed for further resources. The author further gives important insight into gender role issues for lesbian and gay couples and the way that heterosexism and societal practices become barriers within these relationships. This reviewer found this information very important and insightful.

The book covers the chapter topics with great insight and backing from other scholars and research. Each chapter ends with a practice vignette that can be used to further practice the information that was presented in the chapter. In chapter one, courtship networks of lesbians give very important information. The chapter does not go as far in detail for gay male couples, and this may be due to the lack of research for gay couples. For instance, do courtship networks exist for gay couples as they do for lesbian couples, and to what extent? And, are these networks different or similar from those of lesbians?

In chapter two, which outlines the ways in which lesbians and gays have children, the author discusses how lesbian couples create their families and the effects on lesbians who have children, such as the division of labor discussion and how that affects these couples. This is important and great information for anyone, including practitioners, to better understand the unique aspects of the relationship of these couples. In comparison, there is only a small piece on gay male couples, and this again may be due

to the lack of research and knowledge that scholars have in this area. This chapter has a great section on disclosure to children and the effects on teens and how they are more affected by same-sex parents than younger children and what is believed to be the reasons why. This reviewer found that to be very important information for the intended reader. This reviewer, being a scholar in LGBT social issues, understands the importance of the disclosure or “coming out” process. In chapter seven this author discusses “coming out” and provides valuable and important guidelines for these issues with lesbian and gay couples. For instance, the author puts forth the importance of not forcing individuals to disclose, but instead help them to make decisions after careful consideration. The information presented in this chapter also includes information about interracial couples and their unique experiences with not only heterosexism but also racism. This gives the intended reader greater insight into working with interracial lesbian and gay couples. In the same chapter, the author discusses the death of a partner, the stages of grief, counseling models, and general techniques and interventions for working with the surviving partner. As throughout the book up to this point, these sections lack the unique aspects experienced by the lesbian or gay survivor. Instead, these sections read in general terms about the topics found in many books on grief and bereavement.

The author concludes with chapters eight and nine. Chapter eight gives the intended reader more insight into practice intervention approaches that reduce heterosexism that is internalized by lesbian and gay couples. The author discusses liberation practice, feminist and pro-feminist practice, and affirmative practice. The use of gay affirmative practice is considered by several scholars to be a promising approach

for those who struggle with self-acceptance and to reduce the effects of internalized heterosexism. In the same chapter, the author discusses social support and the need to create bonds with others, what scholars and this author refer to as “family of choice.” The author goes on to cite research that points out that lesbian and gay couples need social support networks consisting of eight to twelve people. The final chapter on same-sex marriage provides several important issues surrounding marriage for these couples, including the effect on children of lesbian and gay couples, the lack of a legal system to protect couples who break up, and the response to the current gay marriage climate in the United States from

different perspectives within gay communities.

Overall, this book provides relevant and important information for anyone who wants to better understand the effects of heterosexism on the lives of lesbian and gay couples. It provides information that establishes, while being members of a specific defined population, the unique and differing problems that lesbian and gay couples bring to social services and practice. This book offers the intended reader more insight into the heterogenic nature of lesbian and gay couples and the need to approach practice and services with this understanding in order to provide ethical practice.