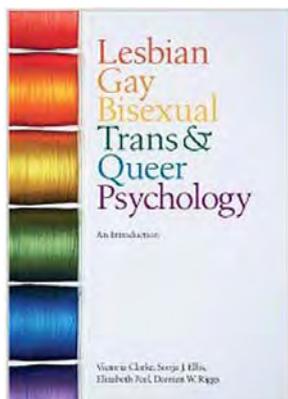

BOOK REVIEWS


Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer Psychology: An Introduction

Victoria Clarke, Sonja J. Ellis, Elizabeth Peel, and Damien W. Riggs. Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2010, 328 pp.

Clarke and colleagues provide the reader with an engagingly written introduction to LGBTQ psychology, a dynamic branch of psychology research whose proponents aim to design research outside the confined perspective of heterosexual privilege. Current and proposed research directions are succinctly put into historical and sociopolitical context back to the 1800s.

Beyond an introduction to LGBTQ research and historical roots, the authors provide researchers with concrete ideas for awareness of limits to research design and of bias toward privileging heterosexuality, which reifies cultural stereotypes and marginalizes people about issues of sexual orientation and gender. The book is comprised of three main sections and a concluding chapter focused on potential directions for future research.

Section one reviews the history of LGBTQ psychology and key current debates. The authors make a strong case for taking a more constructionist and nuanced rather than essentialist approach to research that argues for more sharply defined categories. The argument seeks to avoid the pitfalls of research designed through a heteronormative viewpoint and of “separate but equal” approaches to research, as in studying, for example, lesbians and heterosexual women separately rather than as parts of the general culture. Instead, they argue for designing research that considers sexual orientation as one among many areas of similarity or difference.

In section two, by using research examples in the areas of diversity, prejudice and discrimination, and health, the authors illustrate the need to consider both the wide range of diversity represented in the LGBTQ community and discrimination both within and from outside. They provide clear explanations of research design risks: over simplification, including undersampling in a heterogenous group, and over precision, as in creating separate categories when they are unlikely to be relevant.

Section three covers research across the lifespan, including challenges of identity development and coming out, relationships and parenting by same-sex couples, and the risks and rewards of being old and gay in heterosexist genderist societies.

The book is generously indexed, has an extensive glossary, and includes a core list of films, both dramatic and documentary, and Web sites well-suited for generating collegial and classroom discussion. Chapters include the following pedagogical aids: text boxes (key studies, researchers, and highlights), gaps in the research, main points, questions or projects related to the chapter, and an annotated list of further readings.

There are key themes throughout the book, including: how norms of whiteness have shaped LGBTQ psychology; how important it is to take into consideration individuals’ multiple identity statuses; and the attendant differences in privilege and marginalization within the LGBTQ community. While not eschewing an empirical approach to research, the authors make a strong case for the value of qualitative research design. A greater quantity of strong current research would strengthen a future edition.

In conclusion, were I teaching a course in the area, I would choose this text as it is likely to be appropriate for graduate and upper division undergraduate courses as well as being useful for researchers. It will be useful to this reviewer in clinical supervisory work and to further inform therapy.

Reviewed by Sidne Buelow, sidne.buelow@usm.edu

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer Psychology: An Introduction

The authors provide cogent discussions of the major topics deemed necessary for an undergraduate audience. The first section—History, Contexts and Debates in LGBTQ Psychology—sets the stage for a historically informed introduction that is international in scope. In this section, there is a brief introduction to the topic and an outline of key debates and perspectives, including constructionism versus essentialism and liberalism versus radicalism. The chapter also includes a discussion of the interconnections between LGBTQ psychology, feminist perspectives, queer psychology, critical psychology, and positive social change. This section of the text ends with a chapter that outlines research methods offering a discussion of traditional quantitative approaches and experimental methodology. It goes on to outline the distinct contributions that qualitative and critical methods offer by expanding our understanding of the subjective experience and phenomenology of stigmatized minorities. Experiential and critical approaches, including thematic analysis, grounded theory, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and narrative analysis are described. The contributions of feminist psychology to the literature in this area are acknowledged. Similarly, the discussion of the rejection by queer theorists of sexual identity categories through their deconstructions and resistance to hegemonic categories of sexuality expands the perspective of the reader in important ways.

In the second section—Understanding Social Marginalization in LGBTQ Lives—the authors turn our attention to the expansion of diversity as it relates to sexuality, gender, and identity (gay, lesbian, bi, trans, queer). The multifaceted nature of

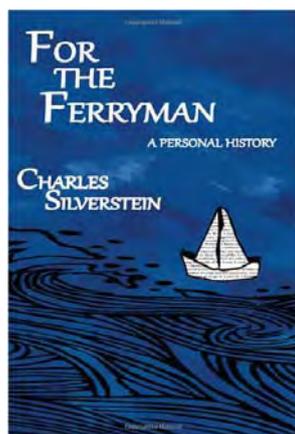
both gender and sexuality is situated within the variable complexities of race, ethnicity, social class, religion and spirituality, ability or disability, and physical contexts (e.g., rural or urban). This section reviews the literature on discrimination and prejudice and outlines the documented psychological costs and consequences of societal bigotry. The final chapter in this section takes a look at sexual health, mental health, and physical health.

The third section of the book outlines the literature on LGBT lives across the lifespan. There is little discussion of children and the experience of the gender “atypical” child, and a more expanded discussion of the development of gendered and sexual identity in childhood is warranted. The chapter on youth coming out of the closet outlines stage models of coming out, but it maintains a focus on fluidity of sexual attraction and rejects the necessity of a prescribed and foreclosed outcome. The problem of comparing LGBTQ people with heterosexual norms as if they are distinct categories is identified. And the complexities of disclosure to family and peers within the larger context of communities of varying degrees of support are discussed. The chapter on relationships looks at legal recognition of same-sex relationships, compares same-sex and different-sex relationships, examines sexual activities, and highlights the literature rejecting the normative model of lifelong monogamous relationships. What it means to be single and to experience “singlehood” across the lifespan is an area that has been neglected in the literature and is a welcome addition to our understanding of the lived experience. Also the dynamic and changing quality of relationships is discussed as well as how families of choice are formed to provide social support for individuals with stigmatized identities that may be neglected or rejected by their families of origin. The chapter on parenting and family looks at paths to parenthood for LGBTQ people and focuses on the empirical literature that dispels the myth that children will be negatively impacted by exposure to parents whose sexuality and gender expression falls outside of the narrow and normative expectations of the dominant group.

One of the key contributions of this particular book is the inclusion of the transsexual and transgender perspective throughout the text.

Unfortunately there is no instructor’s manual, test bank, or PowerPoint slides.

Reviewed by James D. Reid, jdreid@wustl.edu



For the Ferryman: A Personal History

Charles Silverstein. New York, NY: Chelsea Station Editions, 2011, 340pp.

Charles Silverstein has written a love story. The story’s end is given away in the title. The ferryman is Charon from Greek and Latin mythology who ferried the souls of the dead across the River Styx to a place of eternal rest. It was the custom to place two coins on the shuttered eyes of the deceased that would be offered to Charon as his fare. These are Charles’s parting words to William Bory, the grand love of his life: “For the Ferryman.” It may not be fitting to begin a review by discussing the book’s closing pages. Yet, the last chapter stands with the most moving and human passages I have read. The power of those last pages, however, rests completely on the succession of windows that Charles opens on their relationship chapter by chapter.

Charles’s story is one many of us have lived, or have seen friends live, during those mad and exhilarating post-Stonewall days when, as one pundit put it: “The love that dare not speak its name wouldn’t shut up.”

Charles’s story is also one that many of us also saw end sadly, wrenchingly, and terrifyingly, as this story does, with the wasting away of lovers, friends, or men encountered in casual sex.

William Bory was handsome and sexy, two attributes that have high currency in any market; but it was his sparkling wit and deep intelligence that bonded the couple and kept them together for over 15 years. William was also oppositional and did not suffer those whom he regarded as fools lightly, two traits that did not serve him well, if you judge success in conventional terms. For instance, he was bright enough to pass any academic test, but refused to answer questions he deemed stupid. His intellectual integrity cost him a higher ranking on the test that would have allowed him access to the best universities. Nonetheless, William’s brilliance did get him through law school, becoming editor of the *Law Review* at Rutgers along the way and into a job that fit him eminently well: defending the poor and marginalized in criminal court. There he could exploit an attorney’s privilege to outwit and circumvent establishment authority and champion the less advantaged.

Charles provides ample evidence of his own impatience with ignorance and his oppositional character. He put his character to effective use in taking on the psychiatric establishment’s anti-gay prejudice and arrogance by working productively with others to declassify homosexuality as an illness. He also broke ground in establishing a clinic that offered easy access to gay-affirmative counseling before the term was coined and in co-founding the *Journal of Homosexuality*. His ability to be both provocative and ground-breaking is more than evident in the *Joy of Gay Sex*, published in 1977, co-authored with Edmund White and graphically illustrated by Michael Leonard, Ian Beck, and Julian Graddon.

It helps, too, to have almost limitless patience to endure the hurts that inevitably occur in 15 years together. And great love demands a considerable measure of selfless compassion. It is here as much as in Charles’ nursing William through AIDS that the strength of their love shines. William’s sexual relationships with other men must have tested Charles, especially William’s relationship with Ken, more William’s own age and with as much sexual appeal as William.