

International Perspectives: A New Graduate Text on LGBTQ Psychology

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Psychology: An Introduction.

By Victoria Clarke, Sonja J. Ellis, Elizabeth Peel, and Damien W. Riggs, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010. 328 pp. \$45.00 (paperback).

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Developed as a broad-based, introductory textbook on lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues encompassing UK and U.S perspectives, Clarke and colleagues take on the substantial challenge of addressing the breadth and depth of the discipline. Taking on a critical perspective that fully acknowledges the assumptions, significant limitations, and omissions within the field, this text may be particularly useful for graduate students and others interested in developing a sophisticated understanding of LGBTQ lives and research. This text is especially recommended for offering a theoretically- and empirically-rooted perspective in understanding and conducting LGBTQ research.

Features & Organization

The authors do an admirable job of creating a rich, engaging guide to illustrate foundational concepts, influences, and research. Clarke and colleagues draw attention to opportunities to provide a voice to sexual and gender minorities, promote awareness of core issues, question flawed assumptions and stereotypes, changes in policy, and advance LGBTQ equality on a larger scale. Exploring the contributions and significant limitations of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the authors provide a particularly well-balanced set of recommendations and principles for those wishing to become involved in

conducting LGBTQ research who may or may not be part of the community. Conceptually dense, the text makes a consistent and concerted effort to introduce and utilize language that students may not be familiar with (i.e. concepts related to social constructivistic models, queer theory, transgender issues), requiring frequent consultations to the glossary at the back of the book for core definitions that some readers may find somewhat disjointed. The text is particularly helpful in highlighting LGBTQ research and theory outside of the US and mainstream psychology, aspects of the field which frequently are given little attention or recognition.

Utilizing “Highlight” boxes to delve deeper into key studies and measures that have left a substantive impact on the field, the authors highlight well-known classic studies (the Kinsey scale of sexual behavior, Evelyn Hooker’s landmark research, “reparative” therapy, LeVay’s gay gene research, LG identity models), as well as more modern perspectives and controversies regarding the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, lesbian health care, bisexual and transgender identity models, and the construction of alternative language within polyamorous communities. In addition, these boxes often serve as visual guides for concepts that may be new and particularly difficult for undergraduate readers to understand. These include core differences between mainstream and critical psychology, providing illustrations and details to promote a greater understanding of these perspectives. The authors are particularly versed in critical psychology perspectives that actively address the limitations, omissions, and controversies in the field, highlighting their own experiences as researchers, authors and theorists (Parker 1999). The book provides rich, first-person stories from noted LGBTQ

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researchers from the US and abroad (Peter Hegarty, Celia Kitzinger, Charlotte Patterson, Susan Speer, Beverly Greene, Anthony D'Augelli, Lisa Diamond, Douglas Kimmel), and readers are given insights into the formative experiences and questions that shaped these authors' work. Sharing their early experiences and sources of inspiration that served as the foundation and motivation for their research careers, this feature provides rare, personal perspectives that bring life and context to LGBTQ research. Supplemental readings, discussion questions, and exercises for each chapter are also provided within the text, encouraging students to delve deeper into challenging topics and issues within the field, striving to build an awareness of core assumptions that are often left unexamined within mainstream LGBTQ psychology.

In an effort to integrate relevant issues and controversies throughout the text, the authors strive to address a host of foundational issues within the first section of the text by highlighting key terms, historical influences, key controversies, and theoretical perspectives, as well as the contributions of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches to research. By providing a historical overview of early theory and research about sexual orientation and gender identity and the impact of this work on early psychology, the authors consistently highlight assumptions and biases within the field, including the reliance on fixed, essentialist models of orientation, nonrepresentational samples, and the conflation of orientation, identity, and behavior in research on sexual and gender minorities. By incorporating the contributions of feminist theory, critical theory and queer theory, including a thoughtful discussion of the questioning of categorical labels of identity within queer theory, the authors create a conversational, sophisticated, yet readable text. However, the use of exclamation marks to highlight witty observations is one of the few interruptions that some may find off-putting, as the attempt to provide a more informal tone falls flat and serves as more of a distraction to the otherwise well-rounded text. The authors also provide an introduction to social constructivist perspectives on the nature of labels and categories over time, including the emergence of dichotomous models of sex and the longstanding stigmatizing effects on the lives of transgender and intersex people.

Drawing attention to the positivist-empirical and liberal-humanistic biases within LGBTQ research regarding the use of heterosexual populations as the normative standard for comparison regarding psychological, emotional and social functioning, the authors highlight the inherent assumptions and political implications of this research. Drawing attention to the heavy reliance upon gay White male European American individuals as the basis for the unique experiences of sexual minorities, the authors devote

significant attention to the tendency to overlook or minimize issues of within- and between-group diversity with regard to populations and theoretical perspectives. Providing an introduction to the unique experiences of bisexual individuals and the inherent monosexism and mononormativity in mainstream research and reliance upon models drawn on the experience of men's identity development, this text offers a thoughtful discussion of how mainstream LGBTQ psychology often minimizes or ignores the experiences of LBQ women. The authors explore unique strengths and differences within same-gender relationships, and devote significant time and attention to heterosexist and value-laden assertions about sexual behaviors, relationship structures, conception, and parenting. These constructs include the definition of what counts as sexual behavior, and the pathologization of polyamory.

The authors also draw significant attention to how the literature ignores or downplays positive aspects of LGBTQ experiences, highlighting the need for the development of an LGBTQ-affirmative body of literature that explicitly focuses on the positive aspects of their experiences.

Within their section on developmental issues and challenges affecting LGBTQ individuals, Clarke and colleagues explore the inherent assumptions of stability, linear progression, and monosexism within existing models of sexual and gender identity development, and rejection of identity labels within younger generations and many racial/ethnic minority groups. They critique major models of lesbian/gay, bisexual, and transgender models of identity development and the heavy focus on adoption and disclosure of specific identities as evidence of healthy development. As well, the authors provide thoughtful discussion of the importance of acknowledging sexual (and gender) fluidity and the within- and between-group differences that inform a more complex, layered understanding of how issues of recognition, exploration, and disclosure are addressed. By incorporating gender, class, race, religion/spirituality, urban/rural status, ability as well as trans, bi, and queer identities, the authors also address the complex issues involved in "aligning" one's self with particularly theoretical perspectives and/or research methodology as a researcher. Providing insight into what are often experienced as turf wars as well as strictly imposed separation between fields, the authors encourage thoughtful recognition discussion of within-group stereotypes, assumptions, culturally-based assumptions and categories within different domains of inquiry in the field. Clarke and colleagues provide insight into the inherent challenges and impossibilities in trying to prove the validity of one theory over another by exploring intersecting aspects of identities that include race, class, religion/spirituality, geography, and ability, as well as important cultural differences that have

rarely received significant attention in the literature. Their chapter devoted to LGBTQ health explores health disparities and inequities, including the immense focus on HIV/AIDS within the literature, often with little understanding of the important within-group differences. One important, and rather obvious, omission within the text centers on their discussion of social stress (often termed minority stress). Given the substantial interest in minority stress theory and research, it is rather surprising that the authors fail to include any discussion of Ilan Meyer's (1995, 2003) work. As Meyer's theory has had a substantial influence on recent research on health disparities within LGBTQ individuals, this omission is rather unfortunate in the context of an otherwise strong, well-rounded text.

Also of note is the Clarke et al.'s rather brief overview of same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria as symptoms of mental illness and associated attempts at 'treatment'. Given the substantial influence of the pathologization of LGBTQ individuals through the mental health profession (Drescher 2010), greater attention to claims of 'reorientation' and 'reparative' therapies is particularly warranted. Within their section on the pervasive stereotypes and marginalization of older LGBTQ adults, the authors draw attention to the dearth of research on needs, experiences and intersecting identities within this growing population. The authors also discuss unique health issues and institutional biases that affect the provision of services for older adults, this text is

particularly strong in offering a lifespan/developmental perspective on the lives of LGBTQ individuals. Of particular relevance to a graduate student audience who may be exploring a career in the field, *LGBTQ Psychology: An Introduction* provides insights into the unfulfilled potential of the field in creating a truly affirming and inclusive body of research literature. Making a strong case for the need to expand and diversify what they call the "usual suspects" in terms of participants and methodologies, this text serves to promote a more well-developed and intentionally positive field.

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