

Shepard, Benjamin (2010). *Queer Political Performance and Protest*. NY: Routledge.
<http://www.routledge.com/books/Queer-Political-Performance-and-Protest-isbn9780415960960>

Reviewed by: Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D. Senior Editor

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 7, Number 1 (2010)
Copyright 2010, White Hat Communications

This text may be freely shared among individuals, but it may not be republished in any medium without express written consent from the authors and advance notification of White Hat Communications

I was asked to review *Queer Political Performance and Protest* for two reasons. I have a long history of writing book reviews and am the Senior Editor for *The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. In addition, I have taught a course entitled SWK 3870 Sexual Minorities. These factors can easily be Googled. I am a bit out of my element, but I am glad I had an opportunity to read this fine book.

Although Shepard does not explicitly identify an intended audience, it is clear that his work is intended for those who have an interest in the gay liberation movement. The content includes issues that might be of interest to lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals. However, the major theme of the book clearly is focused on the gay male population. In addition, to the gay liberation movement, those who are interested in community organization models – particularly community change – will find Shepard’s work worthy of reading. Besides teaching Sexual Minorities, I teach Community Organization. I have already referred to *Queer Political Performance and Protest* as a good example of efforts and strategies for community change.

There are several points that I find necessary to address:

First, this is not a book for those who are unknowledgeable about the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered social/political/historical civil rights movements. Shepard operates under the assumption that the reader is acquainted with the movements. While reviewing books, I often make margin notes. One of my notes read: “historical events can be almost meaningless if you weren’t there.” At times, it seems like Shepard is story-telling to a close friend who experienced the events. In that sense, his writing style is highly personalized and has a rather touching approach to explaining events and strategies. One normally does not read community change monographs with such a vision.

Second, as stated earlier, the community change and community organization examples are vivid and concrete rather than being abstract that are most commonly found in such macro monographs. These examples engaged micro social work students. In our current political climate, I see a stress on political philosophy (liberals vs. conservatives) and a slow death of American Pragmatism. Politicians (of both parties) are more interested in winning than in pursuing change that has a chance of achieving a predetermined goal. That being said, the focus of Shepard’s thesis thrust is highly pragmatic. This is a refreshing change in the recent literature that I have been reading. A good example of the American Pragmatism emphasis can be found in the efforts made in the needle exchange program starting in page 146. The strategies and insight can be generalized to other efforts in the arena of change and community organization.

Third, Shepard offers a manual in the use of humor in street conflict. He correctly points out that humor disarms the opposition (i.e., the police). Authorities simply do not know how to handle protesters who are laughing and joking. In addition to the confusion humor generates, it also reduces violence. It is very difficult for a police officer to beat a protester with a night stick if the protester is doing something considered to be funny. Shepard’s analysis of humor is confirmed in McNamara’s book, *In Retrospect*. McNamara notes that his staff were totally lost and had no strategy to control Vietnam protesters until they became violent [see page 303].

In the end, Shepard composed an appealing monograph. It would be of great interest to those involved in the gay liberation movement. Social work students, professors and community organizers will find it useful in generalizing to other issues related to social change and community organization. I recommend this book to be adopted by libraries that have holdings for sex research, social work, and community organization.