

Book Review

Dentato, M. P. (Ed.). (2017). *Social work practice with the LGBTQ community: The intersection of history, health, mental health, and policy factors*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed by Ann M. Callahan, Ph.D., LCSW
Eastern Kentucky University

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 16, Number 1 (2019)
Copyright 2019, ASWB

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 ASWB.

Social Work Practice with the LGBTQ Community: The Intersection of History, Health, Mental Health, and Policy Factors provides a comprehensive, evidence-based foundation for social work practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) people and communities. Although this book demonstrates the need to expand research on the topic, the authors keenly weave together a broad collection of work that reflects how oppression operates and a means for building on individual strengths, community capacity, and political advocacy. Most importantly, this book inspires an appreciation for the experiences of LGBTQ people by explaining how LGBTQ communities operate, including norms and terms likely unfamiliar to people who are not LGBTQ. This informs a more sensitive approach with LGBTQ people and communities, if not a sense of responsibility, for advocacy to create systems that better support and, ultimately, honor the basic human rights of all people.

This book is divided into four parts: Part 1, Overview, Building Knowledge for Practice; Part II, Considerations Across the Lifespan; Part III, Affirming LGBTQ Practice Approaches; and Part IV, Health and Mental Health Factors.

Part I, Overview: Building Knowledge for Practice, Chapters 1 through 3, begins with describing the history of the LGBTQ movement starting before the protest at Stonewall Inn, Greenwich Village, New York City in 1969. This chapter urges social workers to increase efforts to help LGBTQ people advocate

for policy progress with a review of important policy changes that have been accomplished. Proper terminology and various theories are presented in Chapter 2 to educate social workers about sexual diversity and sexual health. For example, the authors move beyond a binary model of gender to address how gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation operate as distinct, as well as fluid, constructs for individuals across a lifespan. Self-reflection and open-mindedness are said to be necessary to support sexual diversity in LGBTQ communities. Theories about social and economic justice are more closely reviewed in Chapter 3. Social workers are encouraged to define social and economic justice in a way that reflects the diversity of LGBTQ individuals and communities. Advocacy efforts that are creative in approach will need to be ongoing to help offset years of marginalization.

Part II, Considerations across the Lifespan, Chapters 4 through 10, focuses on models that provide a reference point for identity development of LGBTQ people. While the authors in Chapter 4 warn against relying on these models to reify “normal” development, they provide a succinct way to capture a dynamic process that is specific to each individual as well as to intersecting identities across the lifespan. Chapter 5 reviews the *coming out* process through which LGBTQ identity construction and consolidation occurs. This unique experience is shaped by factors such as age, socioenvironmental context, and type of identity, necessitating social workers who are sensitive to where an individual is in the process of coming

out, as well as the risks of such disclosure of sexual and gender identification. The psychological, biological, and neurological impact, as well as age of onset of trauma on the identity development of LGBTQ individuals, is addressed in Chapter 6. Remaining chapters in Part II address broad life stages specific to LGBT youth (Chapter 7), couples and families (Chapter 8), working life (Chapter 9), and old age (Chapter 10). Each chapter provides extensive and fascinating review of current research with implications for social work practice. There are many implications, some of which include mobilizing individual and community resources, recognizing the strengths of diverse family forms, and advocating for nondiscrimination policies and expansion of civil rights laws.

Part III, Affirming LGBTQ Practice Approaches, Chapters 11 through 19, demonstrates how social workers have the capacity to help LGBT individuals and communities thrive in a society that requires continued effort to combat disenfranchisement. As described in Chapter 11, this involves awareness of how intersectionality applies and capacity to draw from interpersonal strengths and community support. Chapter 12 further applies a minority stress model to explain how the experience of stigma and concealment of minority status can impact psychosocial functioning. Each remaining chapter focuses specifically on lesbians (Chapter 13), gay men (Chapter 14), bisexuals (Chapter 15), transgender and gender non-conforming (Chapter 16), and queer (Chapter 17) people and communities. In Chapter 18, a model for competent services across a continuum of care is presented for application with LBGTQ youth. Chapter 19 ends this section with a return to policies that impact LGBTQ people and communities. This chapter draws from intersectionality theory and ecological systems theory to clarify how advocacy efforts can lead to more inclusive policies, as well as ways to manage backlash as systems change.

Part IV, Health and Mental Health Factors, Chapters 20 through 24, continues to suggest the importance of health and mental health of LGBTQ people as a

means of power and resilience. In Chapter 20, the authors encourage social workers to view LGBTQ people in a holistic way with access to various resources and relationships that have the potential to support well-being. Chapter 21 also builds on intersectionality theory as it relates to working with LGBTQ people of color. It further suggests the importance of self-awareness and capacity to engage in anti-oppressive social work practice through interventions on multiple levels. The subsequent chapters address specific treatment issues such as the prevalence of substance abuse and addiction among LGBTQ clients, along with strategies for treatment (Chapter 22); the experience of relational violence and complications associated with seeking intervention for LGBTQ people in crisis (Chapter 23); and health disparities with particular attention to HIV/AIDS and how health disparities are exacerbated by racial discrimination and income inequality (Chapter 24). These chapters help bridge gaps in the literature as well as provide directions for future research on evidence-based intervention. Social workers are once again encouraged to be advocates to help LGBTQ people across practice settings.

Part V includes Appendices A. Signs, Symbols, and Subcultures, B. Notable LGBTQ Individuals, C. Important Modern LGBTQ Historical Events, and D. National and International Resources and Websites.

As reflected in this review, *Social Work Practice with the LGBTQ Community: The Intersection of History, Health, Mental Health, and Policy Factors* is a dense book with information that is best digested over time. It may further serve as a reference text for application with a range of populations within the LGBTQ community and across practice settings, ranging from micro to macro practice. Chapters can stand alone, which allows for flexibility in use and naturally fits within undergraduate and graduate social work courses [see Seelman (2018) for examples]. The book's editor provides a consistent "voice" throughout this work and refers the reader back to relevant portions of the book when

content overlaps. This also reinforces key content as well as outlines the limits of current research. Most importantly, individual chapters are devoted to the specific needs of particular groups that comprise the LGBTQ community. This reflects the heterogeneous nature of the LGBTQ community, rather than suggesting the needs and resources of all LGBTQ people are the same.

This book provides an excellent resource for understanding how research informs social work practice with the LGBTQ community. Future directions could involve another book that expands on the content in Part III, Affirming LGBTQ Practice Approaches, where chapters detail affirming practices and case examples applicable to individuals within the LGBTQ community (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), including directions for mezzo and macro practice. Future editions of this book could also move toward integrating the “voices” of clients and practitioners which would help animate the review of current research. An application-oriented case study approach would help the reader transfer research reviewed into the field. Finally, while the book starts with a nice introduction, it ends without a concluding chapter. This inclusion might provide a sense of closure given such breadth and depth of content. Nevertheless, the current book fits well with Oxford’s esteemed collection and is one that social workers can benefit from for years to come.

Reference

Seelman, K. L. (2018). [Review of the book *Social work practice with the LGBTQ community: The intersection of history, health, mental health, and policy factors*, by M. P. Dentato]. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 5, 569–572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2018.1517558>