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Brian J. O'Neill, Tracy A. Swan, Nick J. Mulé, Editors. Toronto,
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LGBTQ People and Social Work: Intersectional Perspectives

Brian J. O’Neill, Tracy A. Swan, Nick J. Mulé, Editors. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2015

This text focuses on the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as it applies to social work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ) people in particular. It is a timely and important work as it is one of the few such texts situated within Canadian social work experience. The editors are highly experienced social work educators and LGBTQ practitioners who selected authors with particularities of practice and policy expertise to highlight critical junctures of LGBTQ issues and social work. The contributors share their knowledge by detailing the potential for transformative social work experience within a context informed by intersectionality as a defining feature. The selections reflect an ethical pursuit of mindful and informed teaching and practice while reifying activist goals for social change and honouring the pioneers who went before.

As an additional feature, authors in this text were encouraged to utilize their own specific interpretations of the meaning of intersectionality. The book is not presented as representative of a particular definition of intersectionality but rather highlights the breadth of its manifestations in social work practice. The proviso in this collection of 18 chapters is that in our highly challenging LGBTQ environment, theories and definitions are in evolutionary flux; nonetheless this text is positioned as a resource for those in and outside the ‘helping professions’ and indeed it serves the profession of social work well.

This book is structured uniquely by beginning with a focus on issues within LGBTQ environments themselves. Part I’s descriptions of the tensions “within and among LGBTQ communities” highlight the contexts and contradictions that may exist as challenges, even as they hope to influence and facilitate the development of protocols for social work practice. A social work emphasis on LGBTQ issues has been absent traditionally from schools of social work curricula and social work agencies’ policies and practices. Those that exist have not always been from a Canadian perspective. As well, LGBTQ material has often been reflective of a medical or psychological standpoint with little contemplation of the larger social and psychosocial issues that contact with LGBTQ communities could illuminate. In short, LGBTQ individuals

have not been considered experts on their own experience as part of a history of being pathologized by misdiagnoses and misapplied legal, religious, and other institutional assessments.

Part I also creates the challenging tone of the text and sets the stage for both the tensions and the rights to be explored as seen in Mulé's discussion of Dis/Re-ordering the social order, the concept of 'genderqueer,' and the distinctions between queer liberationism and queer theory, with the former's emphasis on activism and the latter's focus on discourse rather than the precipitation of social change. He also challenges social workers to become informed of the "nuanced politics of the LGBTQ communities" in order to resist in solidarity the incursion of corporate and government moulding of social work itself. This is supported in Part I by chapters that focus on policies involving de-centering whiteness, clarity with respect to the " 'cultural divide' between indigenous and non-indigenous people with same-sex sexual orientation and transgender identities," examination and LGBTQ bifurcation of bisexuality, and the invisibility of older gay adults multiplied tenfold, in the intersecting homophobia of an ageist society.

Part II of the text turns its lens outward toward social work itself, with a focus on policies and practices that are discriminatory and with recommendations for adjustments and alterations. This Part contains discussions of feminism and the experience of trans women with feminism and racism; informed gay caregiving, which has received little attention in the proliferating literature on caregiving; child welfare/youth social justice; younger lesbians, bisexual women and transgendered youth in rural communities; collective-trauma lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, queer (LGBTTSQ) persons; settlement issues; and Trans-Health Care. There are nuggets of perspective in these chapters such as a study quoted in Chapter 11 that states, "...discrimination experienced by individual members of the community had a traumatic effect on other members who had not experienced the event directly"; 'Communities of Affinity', the authors feel, better captures the emotional vortex created when one part or member of an LGBTQ community is harmed with others impacted as well.

In Part III, education and pedagogy are examined with a view to expanding our perspectives with alternate theories to those currently employed. It offers some specific experiences of teaching and learning in the classroom and in the field, which provide a spectrum in which the intersectionality of educational pursuits, their pedagogical means, and their social locations are observed. It offers a broad array of suggestions for curricular design and discussions from which the LGBTQ focus emerges. Examples in this part of university-based explorations of experiential learning include: rethinking inclusion of fundamentalist beliefs in the classroom; teaching a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and two-spirited (LGBT-S) persons BSW course; queer and transgender arts based inquiry

into subjectivities; LGBTQ student/field instructor relationships; child and youth development.

This text is not intended to be comprehensive, in fact that claim would be limiting and would defy the entire premise of its inquiry into the interrogation, and perpetual recalibration, of accepted theories necessary for a profession to update itself responsibly. Rather it offers articulate and current commentary, written from informed perspectives with well-referenced material that reflects clearly the complexity of specific and larger factors intertwined in LGBTQ issues.

This is a practical and highly readable text, one that takes the risk of exposing fault lines in aspects of LGBTQ structures, social work practice, and in the education of social workers, which strives to construct thoughtful approaches for the profession and the educational foundation on which it is based. It poses questions that enable the reader to examine multiple realities and differences. In so doing the surprising allure of such investigating, and its possibilities for connections, are revealed. This is a fine contribution to any aspect of social work education or practice seeking to advance social justice. It leaves the reader with important silent prompts, a reminder that in applying an intersectional approach we do not diminish the place and validity of an LGBTQ focus. It also suggests that all situations encountered in social work need to be approached from an LGBTQ lens as part of an entry point to understanding situations as presented and as a longitudinal referent, ever present as we explore the natural and often invisible trajectories in the lives before us, including our own.

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