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Book Review: LGBT Families

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***LGBT Families*, by Nancy J. Mezey. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2015. 213 pp., \$31.98 (paperback).**

LGBT Families is an accessible, albeit comprehensive, book that addresses family strengths for a diverse, yet under-researched groups of people: lesbians, gay men, bisexual, and transgender persons. The author draws from a growing set of literature focused around these different families, and pays close attention to how race, class, gender, sexuality, as well as age/development, can play a role in how the families are shaped and can function. In structuring the text, the author aimed to answer three overarching questions: 1. How and why do family forms develop in particular social and historical contexts?; 2. Why are new family forms so threatening to certain groups of people in society?; and 3. How are new family forms beneficial to the society in which they exist? Mezey explores these three distinct questions throughout the text, focusing on extant scholarship in the areas of LGBT family history, marriage, LGBT parents, LGBT youth, intimate partner violence, as well as lessons learned from LGBT families.

This text is a sociological text, which situates its knowledge claim in social and legal structures, as well as sociological inquiry; readers interested in a counseling or therapeutic oriented text regarding how to work with LGBT families would be better with a different text. For the scholarship and orientation that is presented, however, is done in a comprehensive and concise way. Research that the author presents in the book is focused around scholarship in the United States, however, the author also provides Global Boxes that also contextualizes LGBT family life and issues from across the globe. This provides readers an opportunity to consider issues facing LGBT families within the U.S., while also having a global consciousness of how this information may be similar or different from other societies and persons dealing with acculturation issues within the United States.

A strength of this book is its developmental perspective, providing detailed information from across different segments of a LGBT person's lifespan, and having focused attention on the issues or concerns that they may be facing at that time. The chapters are broken down into developmental segments, and ordered in a way that allows the reader to follow a person's lifespan and ways in which one may couple, with additional relational concerns (e.g., interpersonal violence, IPV) that might impact some in LGBT relationships. The mix of history, theory and scholarly work provides a nice gestalt of the broader issues to a reader, and can influence them to read additional work in the areas addressed.

It is noteworthy that the text was written prior to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decision providing marriage equality to all U.S. citizens, this helps to contextualize the scholarship and writing of the text in the time that it was written. As such, there may be some challenges to the timeliness of use of the text, as much of the writing is situated as if LGBT families are not permissible via marriage in much of the United States. However, the scholarship and historical elements that the author reviews within the different chapters does still situated the text as having a nice focus on the historical moment of marriage equality, and the issues and concerns that led up to this movement. Students of history could find utility in the text for this reason, as a single source to summarize some of this information. However, it is also notable that the author does not present as comprehensive a history of the evolution of marriage equality within the United States, as she did not address the county-by-county effort for marriage equality in the State of New Mexico, which was different than all other states prior to the SCOTUS decision. This is an interesting historical point that is missing, and so in this way the book does not live up to seeing the different forms of realities based on geography or state-based decision making.

There are some other weaknesses to the text that should be pointed out. One involves a lack of attention to economic issues that can influence LGBT coupling, and the desire for legal status, or decisions against such. Additionally, there is little focus on gender fluidity, or queer gender identity, and how that could influence the coupling relationship. LGBT Families is written as a source of information for monogamous relationships amongst LGBT persons; little attention is provided to other forms of coupling, such as polyamorous or open relationships. Finally, the author occasionally uses outdated terms, such as “transgendered” (pg. 117) and homosexual, when not directly quoting other scholarship or resources. Addition to current vocabulary is important in presenting ones work to the larger community, especially those with less focus or knowledge related to the larger LGBT communities.

Another concern that I noted in reviewing the text is that little information is provided about hormone blockers in the LGBT Youth section, either for LGBT Youth or their parents. This is important information to have so that parents and/or youth could make the decision if they wish to stop the onset of puberty and allow the youth to grow up in the gender identity they identify with, and not have to later fight to reverse the course of puberty. This is significant in that although the book is situated around LGBT families, much more information appears to be directed around LGB persons than around those who identify as

transgender. The author is good to point out that much literature up to the point of the text being published was similarly directed in that way. However, there is a set of scholarship focused around the needs and relational concerns of families from diverse gender backgrounds and identities, and so it is disappointing that the book did not address these issues more fully. These are potentially a nice place to focus a future text.

Overall, the text was an easy read and did provide a host of wonderful details in understanding the history and course of LGBT Families. In relation to the three questions that the author posed to answer through the text “how and why do different family forms develop in particular social and historical contexts; why are new family forms so threatening to certain groups of people in society; and how are new family forms beneficial to the society in which they exist” the author did her due diligence in comprehensively and concisely answering these questions in the whole of the text. If the author only wished to answer these questions, or if readers were only interested in the response to these items, LGBT Families does well to serve this purpose. As such, persons interested in LGBT history, policy, sociology, and law would very much enjoy reading this book and have a host of information at their disposal. This book does less to serve the needs of counselors, social workers, or others in human services in regards to serving the needs of LGBT Families, as well as those readers interested in knowing more comprehensive information about transgender families. I would suggest this book be used in sociology, policy, history, debate, and law classrooms to better understand the history and need of the marriage equality movement, as well as to help contextualize the changing family demographic seen in current society.