

Book Reviews

Edited by César A. Alfonso, M.D.

Uncoupling Conventions – Psychoanalytic Approaches to Same-Sex Couples and Families, Edited by Ann D’Ercole and Jack Dresher, The Analytic Press, 2004, pp. 175, \$39.95.

This book, edited by Dr. Ann D’Ercole and Dr. Jack Dresher is a series of short chapters each of which can stand alone. It addresses the question of what it means to be a same-sex couple or family and draws on both psychoanalysis and the gay/lesbian civil rights movement. These two traditions are brought together to provide a theoretical framework for conceptualizing clinical constructs that are effective in the treatment of gay and lesbian patients with troubled relationships.

The authors who contributed to this volume adopt a clinical and theoretical focus that replaces the heterosexual perspectives of traditional psychoanalysis with alternative views of family life. In doing so, they try to reshape and broaden our understanding of what is and what is not a couple or a family.

In the introduction, and first chapter, the authors make us aware of the “emotional complexities of parenting in a world of diverse familial configurations where fewer than twenty five percent of Americans live within the nuclear television families of the 1950s. Gay families in the United States are now estimated to include fourteen million children.”

Chapter Two deals with the concept of “gender indifference” in lesbian families. The author uses the planned lesbian family as a model “through which we can explore and rethink our notions of gender development.”

This chapter makes the point that lesbian relationships have the potential to “move beyond a simplistic dichotomized version of gendered parenting.”

In doing so these unions may produce children whose development is affected by several factors, including more fluid gender identifications, and self-states and interactions that are relaxed and less gender marked. The author concludes that these children may grow up without the ex-

perience of "hierarchically organized and dichotomized gender identities."

Chapters Three through Five deal with specific issues that are prominent in the treatment of same sex couples. This section delineates common themes, including feeling different and ashamed and discusses their impact on the couple. There is a great deal of clinical material that is helpful in clarifying both specific therapeutic issues and the techniques for intervention.

Chapter six explores issues of mother hood in the context of a lesbian relationship. The author elucidates the themes that may emerge, particularly competition between mothers "related to issues of intimacy, authenticity and responsibility." She concludes that "despite difficulties..all lesbian mothers discussed in this chapter feel their lives have been greatly enriched by the maternal experience. They have worked hard to create and sustain their families. They love their children deeply and couldn't imagine life without them despite the difficulties they face; they all express deep fulfillment and joy in the maternal experience."

Chapter Seven addresses ways of achieving pregnancy for lesbians. The author notes that "the one indisputable known is that the sperm would not originate from their primary partners" and that women who interact with sperm banks "manipulate and construct ideal donors and ideal children." She also notes that this process has become a new way of constructing relatedness.

Chapter Eight discusses the therapist's role in interacting with lesbian couples.

The author presents clinical material that demonstrated the need for the therapist to be accepting and playful in the therapeutic space. She makes it clear that therapists "should incorporate a lesbian affirmative stance in which antifemale and antilesbian familial and cultural messages are deconstructed, this will allow patients to acknowledge and work through feelings of invisibility, shame and humiliation."

The final chapter deals with financial issues. The author stresses that finances are part of the larger issue of sharing openness and intimacy, but notes that over arching legal and social policies also play a role.

In summary, this book offers an intriguing look in the world of same-sex couples and examines many facets of the challenges and rewards inherent in them. It is a volume that will be helpful for professionals who work with same-sex couples or who want to learn more about the issues with which they contend.

Ann Price, MD
68 South Main Street #2200
West Hartford, CT 06105