Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Among Lesbians and Gay Men

editor

Beverly Greene

Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Issues

Volume 3

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PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LESBIAN AND GAY ISSUES

editors

Beverly Greene
Gregory M. Herek

▼ 1. Lesbian and Gay Psychology:
Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications
Edited by Beverly Greene and Gregory M. Herek

▼ 2. AIDS, Identity, and Community:
The HIV Epidemic and Lesbians and Gay Men
Edited by Gregory M. Herek and Beverly Greene

▼ 3. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Among
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Edited by Beverly Greene

▼ 4. Stigma, Prejudice, and Violence Against
Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals
Edited by Gregory M. Herek

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Evelyn Gentry Hooker, Ph.D.
1907-1996

After this volume went to press, we learned of the death of Dr. Evelyn Hooker. In her passing, the community of gay and lesbian scholars in psychology and the lesbian and gay community as a whole loses an historically important advocate and friend. Dr. Hooker's pioneering research was the first to provide empirical evidence to contradict the prevailing pathological models of homosexuality in mental health. She presented her findings at the 64th Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1956 at a time when homosexuality was characterized and widely accepted as a condition that was inherently pathological. Her work was instrumental in altering that perception among mental health professionals and in the eventual removal of homosexuality as a diagnostic entity from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in 1973.

I last spoke to Dr. Hooker at the 1994 working conference of the Wayne Placek Trust Fund of the American Psychological Foundation in Chicago. The University of Chicago recognized her contributions by giving its Center for the Mental Health of Lesbians and Gay Men her name. In accepting the honor she eschewed both the importance and special nature of contributions that garnered her many accolades. Instead, she offered that her work was the simple result of intellectual curiosity and empathy and that neither required any particular courage. Her modest assessment of her contributions notwithstanding, it is out of gratitude for her pioneering work and fondness for her person that this volume is dedicated to her memory.

On what basis could we form a coalition is still an open question. The idea of basing it on sexual preference strikes me as somewhat dubious, strikes me as being less than a firm foundation. It seems to me that a coalition has to be based on the grounds of human dignity. . . . There's nothing in me that is not in everybody else, and nothing in everybody else that is not in me. . . . I'm saying I have nothing to prove. The world also belongs to me.

. . . If you don't live the only life you have, you won't live some other life, you won't live any life at all.

—JAMES BALDWIN

From an interview by Richard Goldstein
Village Voice, June 26, 1984

Preface

This is the third volume of the annual series Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Issues, sponsored by the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay Issues (Division 44 of the American Psychological Association). Previous volumes have addressed a broad range of topics, including the effect of the AIDS epidemic on the lesbian and gay community. This volume focuses on lesbians and gay men as a heterogeneous, culturally diverse group of men and women who, despite their common bonds, have diverse identities. Such diversity transforms and expands the meanings of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities.

Culture may be defined as the behaviors, values, and beliefs that characterize a particular social group and perhaps distinguish it from others. Social groups may be distinguished by such factors as ethnicity, age, socioeconomic class, religion, skin color, gender, regional affiliation, and sexual orientation. They may also be distinguished by the uniqueness of their collective experience, such as their colonization, political oppression, or physical or emotional disability. The diverse group of authors who have contributed to this volume explore some of the varied experiences of lesbians and gay men from these and many other perspectives. I have chosen to define culture broadly in this volume to facilitate moving beyond the assumption that cultural diversity is concerned only with the ways that people of color differ from white persons. The authors represent, both in themselves and in their work, some of the wide range of experiences and dilemmas confronting lesbians and gay men as well as the complex interconnections among culture, sexual orientation, and psychological development.

The chapters here were also chosen with the intent of conveying the richness and diversity in ways of knowing within our discipline and, accordingly, empirical studies, clinical and theoretical papers, and personal narratives are included.

In Chapter 2, Letitia Anne Peplau, Susan Cochran, and Vickie Mays present the results of their extensive national survey of the intimate relationships of African American lesbians and gay men, continuing their pioneering collaborative work in this area. Marta Alquijay (Chapter 12) provides an examination of the relationships among self-esteem, acculturation, and lesbian identity formation for Latina lesbians. Both studies contribute significantly to the paucity of empirical research with these populations.

Ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation are salient aspects of human identity about which most people have strong feelings but often find difficult to discuss openly. Attempting to understand these issues and their interactive effects is challenging. This was evident in the responses of many people who were invited to contribute chapters to this volume. Many elected not to contribute, confiding that they were afraid of assuming a heightened level of visibility in their ethnic communities as lesbians or gay men. Despite the fact that those who were invited are "out" professionally as well as within their families, many perceived addressing the combined effects of these issues publicly as being more out than they cared to tolerate. Moreover, they voiced their concerns that discussing "family business"—matters that take place within their respective cultures that are not generally known to outsiders—with people who do not belong to the group would be perceived as being critical of ethnic communities that have already been historically victimized and then stigmatized by psychology. Although this was a frequent response from lesbians and gay men of color, it was not limited to them. For many white Americans, ethnicity represents something that one must get rid of or something that one must pretend to be rid of in order to be regarded as an authentic "American" as well as to avoid being a target of ethnic discrimination. Thinking about these issues can require revisiting losses, pressure to hide integral parts of one's identity, and painful feelings about both. Sari Dworkin captures the essence of this dilemma in her discussion of Jewish lesbians in Chapter 4. She gives a moving account of the ongoing need to come out, both as a Jew and as a lesbian, in a society that presumes everyone is Christian just as it presumes heterosexual-

ity. Leah Fygetakis, in Chapter 8, discusses Greek American lesbians; she touches on the difficulty of sharing secrets outside of one's culture and shatters some illusions about the perceived historical acceptance of homosexuality by Greeks. In Chapter 6, Armand Cerbone eloquently reveals the dissonance of being a white male symbol of privilege on the one hand and simultaneously devalued as an Italian in postwar Boston and as a gay man who is Catholic. He provides an important glimpse into the struggles that ensue from such starkly contradictory messages and the personal struggle required to reconcile them in healthy ways. In this revealing narrative Cerbone also sensitizes clinicians to the importance of understanding the nature of world political events at the time of a client's birth and development and the role of those events in shaping a community as well as a person's individual identity. Clarence Adams and Douglas Kimmel address the issue of age more directly in Chapter 7, as they report on their study of older African American gay men. Their work focuses on an important but often neglected and invisible segment of our community, older lesbians and gay men and their struggles in both a subculture and dominant culture that idealize youth.

Although many of the names of the contributors to this volume will be familiar to readers, many will be new, and I feel fortunate to be able to introduce their work. Cheryl Potgieter offers us a rare glimpse into the lives of Black South African lesbians in pre- and postapartheid South Africa (Chapter 5). She presents moving personal accounts of the women she interviewed for her study as well as a discussion of the integral role South African psychologists played in both the criminalization of homosexuals as well as the support of apartheid. In Chapter 9, Oliva Espin introduces the concept of crossing borders and boundaries, both psychologically and geographically. Like Potgieter, Espin introduces the narratives of women in her study to highlight the effects of immigration on the process of coming out. Althea Smith focuses in Chapter 14 specifically on the influence of culture and ethnicity in the coming-out process. She raises important questions about what coming out means in a cross-cultural context and challenges its construction as a dichotomous and singular event. In Chapter 11, Connie Chan explores these issues for Asian American lesbians and the culture's broad effects on the development of sexual identity and expression. In Chapter 13, Carla Trujillo examines heterosexism in the Latino/a community and the rigidity of identity boundaries that can occur within

the lesbian community despite its marginalization from the broader culture.

Espin also examines the significant role of the narrative in research and its importance in the reconstruction of a life story. The richness of the narrative as a tool used to tell one's story is captured uniquely by Bonnie Strickland in Chapter 3, where she recounts the development of her identity as someone growing up in the "redneck Riviera" of the rural South, among poor, uneducated folk, juggling multiple identities on her life's journey North, to live among "Yankees." The complexity of her life's journey challenges many of the superficial but commonly held assumptions about growing up poor, southern, white, and lesbian.

No attempt to depict a range of cultural perspectives among gay men and lesbians would be complete without an examination of what Terry Tafoya (Chapter 1) refers to as the "Two-Spirited." He makes important observations about lesbians and gay men, and perhaps whether or not those terms are conceptually accurate among Native American peoples. In Chapter 10, I provide a review of salient mental health and treatment issues from the perspective that the history of multiple levels of discrimination, stigma, and visibility creates a range of special challenges for lesbians and gay men of color that psychotherapists must appreciate if they are to offer effective treatment.

Another theme that emerged during this volume's development was that for many people, racism, sexism, and heterosexism, when considered individually, are emotionally challenging enough, but when considered simultaneously, they often provoke feelings of anger, sadness, or of being overwhelmed. There was a sense that engaging these issues intellectually and professionally also requires engaging them personally. For many, these issues represent a painful and challenging aspect of their everyday lives. Unlike other intellectual endeavors, the examination of the combined effects of these social ills requires the confrontation and management of personal feelings that often emerge, and this complicates the task of writing about them. Many authors who were invited to contribute felt too personally vulnerable and declined the invitation. Of those who declined, many were doctoral candidates and untenured faculty members at what they described as "inhospitable" institutions. They acknowledged feeling vulnerable about writing and conducting research on gay or lesbian issues, citing their concerns about potentially negative effects on their

tenure, promotion, or candidacy. Lesbians and gay men of color in these situations reiterated their feelings of an even heightened vulnerability as well as a reluctance to take on yet another issue in addition to race. Despite the many gains in lesbian and gay psychology and in the expansion of civil rights to women and to members of ethnic minority groups over the past decade, such occurrences remind us of the continuing legacy of racism, sexism, and heterosexism and the realistic lack of safety that many members of our community are required to negotiate routinely. This speaks to the courage of this volume's contributors, who, in telling their stories and conducting this research, increase their vulnerability. We owe them our gratitude.

Although I have attempted to make this volume inclusive, it in no way represents the full range of diversity among lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. The omission of some groups should not be taken to suggest that they or their concerns are not worthy of our attention. It is my hope that this volume will represent the first of many to follow that together will contribute to an inclusiveness not only in gay and lesbian psychology, but in the broader psychological literature as well.

I would like to express my appreciation to a few of the many people who have been instrumental in the completion of this volume. Among them, special thanks go to Dorith Brodbar of the New School for Social Research in New York City; to Shanee Stepakoff and Ruby Eddy-Quartey of St. John's University, for crucial research assistance; and to St. John's University, for its ongoing and generous support of my research. Dale Grenfell and Terry Hendrix of Sage Publications have been loyal supporters of this series and have been of invaluable help in bringing it to fruition. Some of the chapters in this volume had their origins in a symposium titled "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in the Coming Out Process for Lesbians," organized by Adrienne Smith and convened at APA's 1990 meeting in Boston. Even in her absence, Adrienne's influence continues to be felt in the division. Finally, I thank James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, whom I have given the first and last words.

—BEVERLY GREENE

Contents

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Native Gay and Lesbian Issues
The Two-Spirited

TERRY TAFOYA

Long ago, when the world was young, Coyote was going along . . . " (or perhaps it was Raven, or Wiskijiac, or Dukwebah, or Rabbit . . .)—with these words, a number of the Native stories of the Americas begin to tell of an unbroken connectiveness of past, present, and future.[1] The stories provide a framework for understanding how the world works, how one identifies oneself as a member of a tribe, a clan, a community; what to value and what to avoid. These include issues of sexuality and gender.

Coyote, someone common to many tribes, plays with everything—sexual behavior, gender identity, boundaries, and bodies. This trickster always challenges an audience to think and to deal with concepts of transformation. Often in the stories, when "Evil" (and this term seems inappropriate, but it is a term forced by English usage and convention —*disharmonic* might be a more accurate term) is encountered, it is not seen as something to be destroyed in some final Armageddon, but as a force or energy that is to be transformed.

For example, in a Pacific Northwest legend, Coyote confronts the Blood Monster Wawa-yai, a giant who kills people by draining them

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of blood. Offering him baskets full of blood soup, Coyote tempts him into excess, until Wawa-yai has ingested so much blood that he can barely move his enormous bloated body. Coyote then taunts the monster into chasing him, but Wawa-yai's belly is now so huge that he cannot fit through the longhouse door, and he bursts as he runs against the thorn-lined door frame. As Coyote watches, the exploding bits and pieces of the monster turn into mosquitoes. "Evil" is not eradicated, but turned into something that is more in balance with the universe, and indeed, the universe would not be in balance without the "Evil." Coyote's action is to stabilize the world by playing with the excess until harmony is restored. If this story is used to form a metaphor for AIDS or substance abuse (contemporary monsters that steal and destroy loved ones in the manner of Wawa-yai), a European worldview of this story (e.g., Hansel and Gretel destroying the witch) would focus on the eradication of the enemy—the dragon is slain, and everyone else lives happily ever after. But just as in substance abuse and real life, where "Evil" doesn't disappear when treatment begins, the "Evil" takes on a more manageable form that a person can live with on a daily basis. A mosquito may be a problem, but not of the significance of the Blood Monster. There is a place for everything in Creation—a fundamental belief of most Native communities.

Most Native communities tend not to classify the world into the concrete binary categories of the Western world—good/bad, right/wrong, male/female, gay/straight—but rather into categories that range from appropriateness to inappropriateness, depending on the context of a situation.

For example, a Navajo man asked a non-Indian man for food to feed his family, including his wife, who was about to give birth. The non-Indian agreed, but asked why the man's family was going hungry when it was well-known what a good hunter he was. The Navajo replied, "Because it is not appropriate that I who am about to receive a life should be taking life at this time." In other words, hunting is not seen as right or wrong, but only understandable in the context of a relationship.

This worldview is critical in understanding Native concepts of sexuality and gender, which do not always fit comfortably and neatly into general American concepts of gay/straight, or male/female. Indeed, even the discrete categories that exist for social science research will not always make conceptual sense to Native people, who may have a

far more sophisticated taxonomy addressing spirituality and function, rather than appearance. For example, how does a Euro-American system of "gay/straight" classify a man who wants to be anally penetrated by a woman wearing a dildo?

When Native American people discovered Columbus five centuries ago, they presented a unique conundrum of identity. Not only did most tribes not organize themselves by kings and queens in European tradition, but the majority classified members as having more than two genders. This radical (for Europeans) way of seeing the world brought swift and tragic responses. The 16th-century Spanish explorer Balboa, for example, declared such individuals who were not considered male or female to be "sodomites," and literally had them torn apart by his dogs. Thus from the very beginning of European contact, Native people learned not to discuss openly matters of sexuality and gender with the newcomers, because they could be killed for being "different." Most U.S. citizens are unaware of Native history and reality. For example, American Indians did not become citizens of the United States until 1924. When the reservations were created by the federal government, the superintendents of the reservations were all appointed Christian missionaries of various denominations, with the mandate to "civilize" American Indians by converting them to Christianity, often by withholding food and starving the Indians into submission. Federal boarding schools were set up for Natives (American Indian and Alaskan). Natives were not permitted to attend public schools until the mid-1930s. There are still a number of Indian boarding schools operating today. Children were forcibly removed from their parents, sometimes at gunpoint, deliberately to prevent them from growing up with the influence of their culture and language.

This forced segregation and isolation had a devastating impact on Native communities as a whole. Critical teachings and attitudes regarding sexuality and gender that would have been provided at the time of puberty, for example, were never passed on in many families and tribes because the young persons were away at boarding school. Such things were not permitted to be discussed. In addition, there was an incredible loss of Native lives through exposure to European diseases to which Native people had no immunity (a situation that has a number of parallels to the AIDS epidemic—newspaper editorials of the 1880s in the Pacific Northwest condemned Native Americans for having unacceptable sexual behaviors and multiple partners, and declared