

MEDIA REVIEWS

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TRANSGENDER EMERGENCE: THERAPEUTIC GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH GENDER-VARIANT PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES. Arlene I. Lev. *New York: Haworth Clinical Practice Press, 2004.*

A culmination of clinical social worker Arlene Istar Lev's life work to date, *Transgender Emergence*¹ is a definitive work and invaluable resource not only for mental health practitioners but also for professional providers of many other disciplines, (e.g., medicine, nursing, law, public policy, community services, and theology) students, researchers and educators as well as the client population itself, i.e., gender-variant and trans-identified individuals, their partners and family members.

Lev's work substantially exemplifies the goals and purposes of the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* insofar as she focuses on the transgender-emerging couple or family as a social system, examining the developmental stages for partners/family members, and the resultant diversity of these relationships and family structures. Additionally, the author addresses such issues as parent-child relations, relationship issues, disclosure, and couple and family therapy as they specifically impact on gender-variance, gender dysphoria, transsexualism and transgenderism.

A welcome departure from the mainstay of traditional clinical research in this subject area ("Gender Identity Disorder" [sic]), the core value and singular best practice of Lev's work is her de-pathologizing

of gender variance (and reframing such non-binary identification and behaviour as gender diversity) and transgenderism, and her attendant compassionate treatment of gender-variant and trans-identified people and their loved ones. This intervention of normalizing and validating is also effectively applied to the parents of gender-variant and trans-identified children, who often harbor feelings of guilt of somehow being responsible for producing their abnormal or deviant child as often suggested in the clinical literature.

Lev's gender-affirming treatment approach is not surprising given that the author is herself lesbian-identified and, thus, is no stranger to homophobia in both her personal and professional life. Indeed, her lived experience as a member of a still-persecuted minority group sensitizes her to the prevalent societal transphobia faced by many of her clients, with its secondary impact on partners and family members who are often condemned as guilty by association.

The comprehensive scope of *Transgender Emergence* is breathtaking in its diverse subject matter, even including foci on bi-gender and intersex people. A scholarly, well-researched work, Lev's book includes extensive case examples and citations from the literature, a history of medical science and gender variance, the de-construction of sex and gender, an examination of the essentialist construction of etiological theories, a critique of the power of psychiatric diagnoses, and a substantial section on treatment issues.

Specifically, these treatment issues and interventions include narrative therapy, the developmental process of the transperson, the developmental stages for family members, working with gender-variant/transgender children and youth, and the treatment of intersex individuals.

Lev's "Model of Family Emergence Stages" is a useful tool for clinicians working with families with gender-variant or trans-identified children insofar as it outlines the four developmental stages of the transformational process of the family, which is, in itself, undergoing a transition similar to the gender transition of the transperson: Stage One: Discovery and Disclosure, Stage Two: Turmoil, Stage Three: Negotiation, Stage Four: Finding Balance.

Transgender Emergence provides sound clinical guidelines to effectively support gender-variant persons, transpeople and their loved ones. Lev's best practices draw largely upon the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's "Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders" (Meyer et al., 2001), which are continuously in-

formed by her own clinical practice and innovative treatment interventions.

As a value-added bonus, Lev offers a wealth of resources to readers new to this field, including a brief compendium of some common intersex conditions, an instructive guide for clinicians around writing letters of recommendation for hormone therapy, and a glossary of selected terms pertaining to gender identity and sexual orientation.

I highly recommend this resource to every care provider or support professional who works with this population, including but not restricted to gender specialists, child/adolescent and adult psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, couple counselors, family therapists and spiritual counselors. I further urge the inclusion of this book in the library and curriculum reading list of every educational institution that trains health care, behavioral science, social work, law, political science and theology students.

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NOTE

1. *Transgender Emergence* has won the APA Division 44 Distinguished Book Award for 2004.

REFERENCE

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