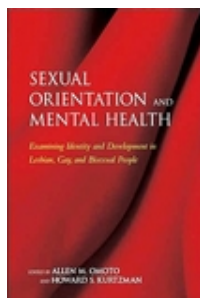




## New Trends in the Science of Sexual Orientation

A review of



### **Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Examining Identity and Development in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People**

by Allen M. Omoto and Howard S. Kurtzman (Eds.)

Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2005. 323 pp. ISBN 1-59147-232-6. \$69.95

---

Reviewed by

[Judith M. Glassgold](#)

Scientific research has played a crucial role in the history of the psychology of sexual orientation. Decades of scientific research starting with the path breaking work of Hooker (1957) and culminating in numerous studies through the 1970s and early 1980s (Gonsiorek, 1982) established that same-sex sexual orientation was a normal variant of human behavior. This research helped to end the stigma surrounding homosexual and bisexual orientations. These results were cited by the American Psychiatric Association (1973; "Panelists Recount Events," 1998) as empirical evidence for the removal of homosexuality in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2nd ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 1978) and were the basis of a similar position statement by the American Psychological Association (1975).

The social changes over the past 30 years, in part caused by new scientific understandings of same-sex sexual orientation, have increased opportunities for continued research. The criminalization of same-sex behavior and the stigma surrounding sexual minorities made it difficult (and still do) to study such populations (Hooker, 1993). Now that the behavior has been decriminalized and the stigma surrounding homosexuality has lessened, it is easier to gain access to samples, particularly nonclinical, more representative populations. Further, researchers in this area are less stigmatized and thus are less concerned about the career implications of such projects. There are more funding sources and journals are more receptive to publishing such articles. Without such institutional supports, research cannot occur. Unfortunately, this area of study is still politically contentious and faces political attacks from many who do not understand research in this area (Winerman, 2004).

Thus, this excellent volume, *Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Examining Identity and Development in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People*, edited by Allen M. Omoto and Howard S. Kurtzman, represents not only the maturation of the field but decades of hard work and perseverance by many individuals (some of whose work is included in this volume). The articles reflect recent trends in research in mental health and development, using some of the best research methodology (both quantitative and qualitative) and sampling techniques available. The volume is divided into two large sections, one focusing on youth, the other on adults. The chapters present a variety of both overviews in the field as well as inquiries into specialized topics. This volume is remarkable in that it is far more inclusive of ethnic minority concerns and bisexuality, which are often overlooked. All the papers are interesting and well-written, and most important, the results of all the studies are significant for the field. The papers are accessible for a wide audience from upper-level undergraduates to doctoral-level researchers and clinicians.

This volume differs from the existing edited volumes on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues (Garnets & Kimmel, 2002; D'Augelli &

Patterson, 1995), which are edited overviews on comprehensive aspects of lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations or on issues relevant to clinical interventions. For those looking for topical overviews or summaries of extant research, some of the articles—such as the prevalence of mental health and substance abuse issues, children of lesbian mothers, mental health issues in adolescents, and contextual factors in adolescent development—are extremely useful but focus exclusively on research studies in the area.

☰ This volume also includes much more specialized research on a variety of topics in mental health and substance abuse as well as development. However, this volume does not attempt to be comprehensive. The inclusion of both types of articles make this work unique, and perhaps for some, disjointed; however, the volume is unified by its focus on high-level research design. Further, so little is understood about this population that each paper—even on a specialized topic—represents a significant increase in our knowledge base. For those who already have an interest in research or an understanding of lesbian, gay, and bisexual concerns, the detailed examination of specific populations and mental health issues, as well as the advances in research design, are fascinating. Many of the specific findings in these chapters are noteworthy and, at times, surprising. This is especially true of some of the research on adolescents, ethnic minority populations, and women. A particular strength is the focus in many chapters on discussion of methodology and the strengths and weaknesses of sampling, design, and methodology.

☰ Although this is an edited volume, there are some general themes that emerge; the foremost is the importance of understanding the impact of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination on development and mental health. In a number of chapters, the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination are directly linked to the incidence of mental health concerns. Further, developmental issues that reflect the nuances of coping and resilience in different populations and at different life stages become the focus of many of the articles; this is reflected in some very interesting chapters in health psychology and adolescence.

☰ Finally, the research in this volume underscores how much we do not know about this population and how diverse human behavior and psychology is. This set of researchers have much better access to lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations, which permits them to explore the actual lived experience of a diverse group of individuals. Improvements in research design and sampling permit some of the authors to challenge assumptions in the field, based on prior theoretical models or older samples.

☰ Overall, this volume brings together examples of the latest in research topics and research design in the field. These chapters are important for extending our understanding in unexpected ways. In this sense, this book is research at its best: a source of discovery.

## References

- American Psychiatric Association. (1973). *Homosexuality and civil rights: Position statement*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from [http://www.psych.org/edu/other\\_res/lib\\_archives/archives/197310.pdf](http://www.psych.org/edu/other_res/lib_archives/archives/197310.pdf)
- American Psychiatric Association. (1978). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (1975). *APA policy statement: Discrimination against homosexuals*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/policy/discrimination.html>
- D'Augelli, A. R., & Patterson, C. J. (Eds.). (1995). *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garnets, L., & Kimmel, D. (2002). *Psychological perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gonsiorek, J. C. (1982). Results of psychological testing on homosexual populations. In W. Paul, J. D. Weinrich, J. C. Gonsiorek, & M. E. Hotvedt (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Social, psychological, and biological issues* (pp. 71-80). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hooker, E. (1957). The adjustment of the overt male homosexual. *Journal of Projective Techniques*, 21, 18-31.
- Hooker, E. (1993). Reflections of a 40-year exploration: A scientific view on homosexuality. *American Psychologist*, 48, 450-453.

Panelists recount events leading to deleting homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder from DSM. (1998, July 7). *Psychiatric News*, Retrieved November 17, 2005, from <http://www.psych.org/pnews/98-07-17/dsm.html>  
Winerman, L. (2004). Toomey targets speak out. *Monitor on Psychology*, 35, 38.

---

PsycCRITIQUES

**1554-0138**

February 1, 2006 Vol. 51 (5), Article 2

[© 2006 by the American Psychological Association](#)

For personal use only--not for distribution.