

Toward the Acceptance of All Students

Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators

Edited by Ronni L. Sanlo
Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Toward Acceptance: Sexual Orientation Issues on Campus

Edited by Vernon A. Wall and Nancy J. Evans
Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000.

Reviewed by Brett Beemyn

The first lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) college student organizations were formally established in the late 1960s, and students who were attracted to others of the same gender had developed informal social networks on many campuses well before then.

Yet it has only been in recent years that heterosexual researchers and student affairs professionals have begun to consider the specific experiences of LGBT college students and sought to educate themselves about the diversity of sexual and gender identities.

Fortunately, two recent books can greatly assist faculty, staff, and administrators in understanding the lives of LGBT and questioning students and fostering a more LGBT-supportive campus environment.

Both *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students* and *Toward Acceptance* are extremely practical texts. The former includes valuable suggestions on how to offer an LGBT course, integrate LGBT material into the general curriculum, be an LGBT-affirmative career adviser, provide effective health care and counseling services to

LGBT students, and establish an LGBT Speakers' Bureau.

The latter book discusses how to facilitate an LGBT awareness workshop, address violence against LGBT students, be an effective ally, and generally "navigate the minefield" of sexual orientation issues on campus.

A particularly useful starting point in *Toward Acceptance* is the essay by Wallace Eddy and Deanna Forney, which presents a systematic way to assess the extent to which a specific campus environment meets the needs of its lesbian, gay, and bisexual students.

While offering a wealth of practical advice, neither text neglects research and theory. Given the paucity of empirical studies of lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students, the detailed literature review provided by Kathleen Bieschke, Amy Eberz, and D'Andre Wilson in *Toward Acceptance* is indispensable reading, and their recommended research techniques should serve as an important guide for future scholars wishing to conduct studies in the field.

In her article in *Working*, Ruth Fassinger argues that, like empirical research on students, most theories of student development ignore

the experiences of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. Even theories of LGB identity formation, she notes, largely fail to capture the complexity and diversity of LGB individuals' lives. In the article, Fassinger offers a model of her own that combines processes of individual and group identity formation.

Unfortunately, Fassinger's insightful analysis does not inform the other articles in the anthology. These rely on the same LGB identity models that she discredits.

The failure of chapters to "talk" to each other also mars *Toward Acceptance*, although Evans and Wall succinctly tie the different articles together with their "parting thoughts" on the work that remains to be done "if LGBT people are to be fully included and equitably treated on college campuses and in society."

In contrast, by not having a conclusion, or more than a cursory introduction, *Working* is unable to offer the same kind of synthesis. However, it is more wide-ranging than its counterpart, consisting of 42 articles, more than twice as many as *Toward Acceptance*.

The book covers aspects of the lives of LGBT college students that have long been ignored by faculty, staff, and administrators. Particularly insightful are Ric Underhile and John Cowles's discussion of LGBT students with disabilities and Karen Nakamura's analysis of issues facing transsexual students who are "transitioning" from one gender to another.

With both groups becoming more visible on campuses today, it is especially critical that college officials and faculty educate themselves about these students' experi-

ences. These articles can serve as an important first step.

Other innovative essays in *Working* include articles on LGBT alumni groups, LGBT graduate students, lesbian-baiting in women's intercollegiate athletics, HIV-prevention measures on college campuses, and opening academic library collections and services to LGBT individuals.

But what *Working* gains from its breadth, it sometimes loses by its lack of depth. For example, the anthology's treatment of bisexual and transgendered students is cursory, especially in comparison to the much more nuanced essays on these subjects by Leah Robin and Karl Hamner, and Kelly A. Carter, respectively, in *Toward Acceptance*.

Worse still, the article in *Working* on creating programs that address violence in same-gender relationships is a mere three pages long. While certainly something is better than nothing, the failure to provide a more thorough discussion serves to downplay the significance of lesbian and gay battering and suggests that the issue should not matter much to college educators.

The articles on LGBT students of color are also more comprehensive in *Toward Acceptance*, although neither text pays much attention to the experiences of people of color beyond their specific essay(s) on race. Of the two articles that focus on students of color in *Toward Acceptance*, the more informative is Angela Ferguson and Mary Howard-Hamilton's discussion of African American lesbians and bisexual women and "how the integration of race, gender, and sexual orientation forms a confluence of characteristics that should be

addressed to enhance sensitivity among student affairs practitioners, faculty, and students.” Rosa Cintrón’s examination of the experiences of Latino gay and bisexual men in the same volume is also insightful, reminding us that white, Western concepts of homosexuality cannot be generalized to other cultures and groups. Unfortunately, Cintrón only briefly relates her findings to students and the college environment, making her article less useful to educators than it could be.

Working contains just one article on the specific experiences of people of color, a narrative about a Black gay student by Michael Dumas. Obviously, these anthologies could not cover everything, but given the lack of published research on LGBT students of color, the texts should have done much more to address different racial groups. In the case of *Working*, the inclusion of a single article on Black gay men reinforces the com-

mon reduction of people of color to African Americans.

Despite these weaknesses, both *Toward Acceptance* and *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students* are essential texts for all faculty and student affairs professionals, not just those who explicitly work with LGBT students. After all, whether educators are aware of it or not, we all work with LGBT students, and thus should be conscious of their needs and experiences. ■

Brett Beemyn earned a Ph.D. in African American Studies at the University of Iowa and currently teaches writing and literature at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He is also completing a degree in higher education at the University of Rochester to pursue a career in student affairs. He is the editor of four texts in queer studies, including two works on the experiences of bisexual men.

