

difference between sibling-rich and only children.

There seems to be a perception of onlies as ‘little adults’, that parents avoid ‘childish’ behaviour in their children by having only one. Sorensen questions: what is childhood about but being ‘childish’? She questions what it might mean to be a ‘little adult’. The suggestion seems to be that only sibling-rich children are ‘real’ children – with all the diversity that implies.

Sorensen’s co-researchers’ stories echoed and reechoed with me. As Sorensen says (p 52) these stories stirred deep memories – the children described described me.

Sorensen speaks of the ‘idea of an only-child archetype to provide a way of understanding the only-child experience.’ (p 159) If, as she argues earlier, there may be no difference between only children and sibling-rich children, does this archetype try to enforce difference where there may be none – and maybe initiate feelings of difference in children/people. For example, when that dreadful day comes and one’s other half dies, does it make the process, what, easier/more bearable/less unknown, etc – because one is going back to the ‘known’ – the solitary state. Maybe the togetherness is like a magical fairytale, hardly believable to the only, and the conclusion only what one expected and knew.

As an only child, when I came to have children I was adamant that I didn’t want an only – though two was enough. It was my experience that I never grasped the idea of being a part of something with other children, ‘they’ had a group to belong to, I was alone. I have always translated this as being a product of my only status – now I am debating with myself whether it was just the unique way I see the world.

I would recommend this book. It widens the experience of what it means to be human and enriches and deepens understanding.

References

Spinelli, E. (1995). *The Interpreted World*. London: Sage.

Nicola Slade

Sexuality And Gender For Mental Health Professionals. A Practical Guide

Christina Richards & Meg Barker. (2013). London: Sage

Any book with the words Sexuality or Gender in its title is almost certain to generate interest in readers and Richards and Barker have provided us with a grounded up-to-date description of a specific area of mental health and its client groups. The primary aim of the book is to provide mental health professionals with a basic understanding of sexualities, genders and relationship structures in a clear informative style. On a first read I certainly felt that the authors succeeded in doing this in an elegant and

forthright fashion. This practical guide has a well-constructed, user-friendly layout and the accessible reflexive style of the authors writing is often playfully engaging.

The layout of the book which has been very carefully considered and crafted is in three parts or sections; *Gender Practices and Identities*, *Sexuality: Practices and Identities*, and *Relationship Structures*. Each chapter has the same broad structure and simple clarity that makes it easy for the reader to compare various parts of the book.

A practical guide like this is long overdue and what makes it especially useful is its ‘insider’ view. I say this as someone who is not coming from an LGBT perspective, but who has worked extensively in this area when I lived and worked in London. I had the good fortune to have a supervisor who did have that ‘insider’ perspective and was able to assist me in understanding unfamiliar terminology and practices that I was previously ignorant of. Not everyone has that advantage and this book gives it to you.

This is a hugely sensitive area to work in and by using inappropriate language, however innocent and well meaning it may seem, it is almost inevitable that someone will be affronted and upset. In fact I am hugely conscious of it as I write this now. The authors guide us through this minefield sensitively and positively.

The reader is reminded very early in the book of the importance of terminology with the introduction of ‘Safer and Less Safe Terms’, so for instance Gay and Lesbian are preferred terms and Homosexual is seen to be a pejorative term and apparently should not be used. This may seem fairly obvious to anyone in the LGBT field but, as I am not, I found myself encountering the content of the book with something of a ‘straight’ perspective and level of naivety in the face of some of the content. As a result I found the extensive Glossary and Shadow Glossary incredibly informative, opening up new worlds for me as I explored the esoteric language finding out which words were acceptable and those that were not. Also encountering new words and practices (eg. Furies, and Cisgenderism). I found it interesting that there is no mention in the glossary of ‘backrooms’, which 10 years ago seemed to feature quite highly in some of my client’s lives.

I also found it interesting to see how words shift in meaning and fashion over time with newly ascribed meanings and sub-cultural codes. I grew up in a world where homosexual sex was illegal, and queer was a pejorative label on a par with ‘nancy boy’. Then same sex practices were to some extent decriminalised and the word gay seemed to suddenly appear in mainstream discourse. The Tom Robinson Band sang ‘Glad to be Gay’ and Foucault reclaimed and reassigned the notion of queer. We have come a long way since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and this book represents a milestone on that journey towards acceptance and equality.

If there are subsequent editions of this book in the future, which I am

sure there will be, I would expect there to be quite substantial editing of many of the terms currently in use. This is inevitable where there are various groupings with their own dynamic scenes and terms that are constantly changing and evolving. What I suspect will remain relatively unchanged will be the authors' sensitive approach and affirmative attitude, which permeate throughout.

The difficulty of defining sexuality and gender is acknowledged in the first line of the book and unlike many previous publications in this field, the authors have chosen to give equal consideration to all the diverse sexualities, genders and relationship structures found in contemporary Western Culture. Refreshingly this includes not just the field of LGBT but those areas that may be currently considered culturally normative such as heterosexuality. Along with this encompassing focus, the potential impact of the current social and moral mores of the Culture are still acknowledged as possible elements within a client's experience. Whilst recognising the impossibility of including a complete coverage of practices and identities, there is within the guide an implicit distinction between legal and illegal activities so that practices and identities connected to paedophilia or bestiality for example are excluded along with coercive or non-consensual practices. The authors also encourage us to be sensitive to a client's wider context so that we are mindful of other aspects of identity that intersect with sexual and gender identity such as race, class, age, religion, etc., and to not assume that a client's presenting issues are predominantly concerned with their sexuality or gender. They are also careful to differentiate between practices and identities throughout, as well as reminding us that not everyone experiences something in the same way.

So what I am thinking is that Christina Richards and Meg Barker's book *Sexuality & Gender* is more than just an excellent practical guide, it is a social document of its time and as such its appeal will easily extend beyond the target audience of mental health professionals into other disciplines such as Sociology and Cultural Studies along with those areas of therapeutic practice that may be resistant to the label of Mental Health Professional. Even if you are unlikely to have an LGBT client I would encourage all therapists or people in helping professions to read this book as it raises so many interesting questions about sexuality, gender and relationship structures in general that makes you realise that nothing can be taken for granted and if nothing else you will be able to re-examine the notion of heterosexuality as a spectrum of possibilities in ways you probably hadn't thought of yet.

A useful innovation is that additional case studies and further reading for each chapter are available on the Sage website.

Paul Smith-Pickard