



March 1999

Rural Gays and Lesbians: Building on the Strengths of Communities. James D. Smith and Ronald J. Mancoske (Eds.).

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Recommended Citation

(1999) "*Rural Gays and Lesbians: Building on the Strengths of Communities.* James D. Smith and Ronald J. Mancoske (Eds.)." *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol26/iss1/19>

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This is a useful collection which should be widely consulted by all social workers irrespective of whether they are engaged in community practice or not. It shows the importance of linking community interventions with other forms of social work so that social work can respond effectively to all social needs.

James D. Smith and Ronald J. Mancoske (Eds.), *Rural Gays and Lesbians: Building on the Strengths of Communities*. New York: Haworth Press, 1998. \$ 29.95 hardcover, \$ 14.95 papercover.

This unique book deals with the much neglected topic of how gay people in rural communities deal with the many challenges they face, and how social workers can best assist them. It consists of eight chapters that examine different aspects of the gay experience in rural areas. It also contains three moving poems on the subject. It is the first of its kind and its simple message is an important one.

The central theme of the book is that gay people living in rural areas face a high degree of ostracism and discrimination. While all gay people are subjected to these pressures, those in urban communities have been able to organize and establish networks which sustain, protect and nurture them to a greater extent than is possible in rural areas. Rural gays and lesbians do not have networks of this kind and they often remain hidden, isolated and threatened knowing that they face significant risks if their identity is revealed. Their very location in the rural environment creates unique challenges which social workers need to understand and be willing and able to address. The various chapters of the book either expand on this theme or provide specific examples of how social workers can work with gay people in rural areas to enhance their functioning and better cope with these challenges.

The book is often poignant showing how flagrant prejudice, discrimination and even hatred continues to permeate communities that are no longer isolated, uneducated and ill-formed. These problems are exacerbated by a lack of social services and supports in rural areas. Gay people with HIV, victims of discrimination and violence, and even those with routine emotional and social needs face particular challenges. The authors and editors of this collection deserve recognition for their attempt to bring the issue to the attention of the wider social work community.