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**Review of *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. Adrienne Chambon, Allan Irving and Laura Epstein (Eds.). Reviewed by Emilia E. Martinez-Brawely.**

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Adrienne Chambon, Allan Irving and Laura Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. \$49.50 hardcover, \$19.50 papercover.

Since Hartman (1992) published a collection of her selected editorials from *Social Work*, the idea that social workers need to heed the many ways of knowing in a variegated world has achieved greater credence. Even though unsettling to many practitioners and to most researchers, who were trained to look at scientific empiricism as the model to emulate, the challenge that social work must look and search beyond the parameters of the conventional or the approved has been persistently repeated. Yet, few social workers have been willing, at least publicly, to proclaim the value of what might not be the dogma of the powerful or to celebrate contradiction.

Reading Foucault is a collection of essays focusing on Foucault's contribution to social work as a profession. By its very nature, the collection proclaims the merits of complexity and contradiction. The essays are of varying length and style and focus on different aspects of that contribution. Perforce, I cannot review all of them but will try to show the scope of the collection by focusing on some examples. Some of the essays are outstanding and, for what might appear to be a dry subject, not only readable but enjoyable. For example, Allan Irving's presentation in "Waiting for Foucault: Social work and the Multitudinous Truth (s)of Life" is definitely worth perusal by researchers and practitioners. Irving presents Foucault's unsettling ways of inquiry as significantly relevant to social work. He suggests that

Since early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century social work has located itself within the Enlightenment/scientific paradigm, based on a Cartesian interpretation of the world and knowledge. Nietzsche, Beckett, and Foucault provoke us to think differently, outside the usual social science/positivistic framework and to move away from the empiricist mess, into the postmodern world of disrupted rational grids. (p. 45).

Irving introduces a very important point, which is one of the major contributions of this book. The preoccupation with the mechanics of theory, method and technique will not take social

work to new levels of understanding or even help it reflect on its historical past (p. 46). Irving proposes that the humanities, literature, philosophy, language, and the imaginative arts, enlighten moral life and constitute the very essence of practice. He summarizes a great deal of his reflections on the contributions of Foucault reaffirming that the imagination is an essential ingredient of social work practice and, with Nussbaum, agrees that the literary imagination is fundamental to a democratic society.

Another interesting essay by Adrienne Chambon, "Foucault's Approach: Making the Familiar Visible", states once again what scholars who have critiqued modern research practices have stated repeatedly: that what we study and scrutinize is a political act with fundamental consequences. Chambon asks, "Do we scrutinize our own practice to the same extent that we scrutinize clients?" (p. 61). She further discusses the meaning and implications of paying attention to detail in social work practice. "The point . . . is that details are not mere illustrations. Attended to at a close range, the fine level of detail or microscopic aspect of description encapsulates the very mechanisms we are trying to understand." (p. 63)

In an essay on "Foucault and Therapy: The Disciplining of Grief", Catherine Foote and Arthur Frank offer an excellent review of Foucault's critique of therapy. Their point is not "to render therapy impossible but to extend therapists' sense of how problematic their work is." (p. 157) Given the current tendency to medicalize the most basic human emotions, to diagnose instead of understanding, to label instead of analyzing, this essay should be "must" reading for therapists. Foote and Frank put therapy within the field of power relations and more importantly squarely within the discourse of *true and false*.

The therapeutic is such a discourse in at least two senses. First, it claims truth for its "findings": consider Rado's references to statistical rates of prevalence and "exhaustive" searches of "the literature". Such a discourse presents not only its own truth but claims to be a kind of truth of truths, a metatruth. Second, just as the categories of true and false divide the world into a hierarchy, so do the categories of normal and pathological. (pp. 59-60)

In summary, the book offers a multitude of possibilities for explorations and critique not only of what we do but of the very fiber of our age. Social work readers will find it truly educative and those who question our "rational" practices will find it most rewarding.

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Katherine van Wormer, Joel Wells and Mary Boes, *Social Work with Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals: A Strengths Perspective*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. \$26.76 papercover. [December 1, 1999].

There is a seeming explosion of scholarship on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered issues—cultural criticism, social sciences, the humanities, and the biological sciences have demonstrated an expanding interest and expertise which the social work literature is also reflecting. As scholarship and popular culture now give voice to the "love that dare not speak its name," hidden contradictions are unmasked as we see the profession's struggle to come to terms with the meaning of diversity. Social work education, in an effort to contribute to professional development, has taken a stand, timid and faltering as it is, to confront the challenges faced by diversity in a culture rife with the pain of addressing the needs of special populations. Social work educational groups would like to exert the "option for the oppressed" if only the voices of cultural hegemony would allow. At this time, the scholarship produced about lesbian and gay arenas are consumed in general by those inclined to share in its philosophical orientations. Social workers who are uncomfortable and/or unknowledgeable about issues facing lesbian women and gay men rest comfortably in defiance or passivity.

The van Wormer, Wells and Boes text is an excellent endeavor to reach those who have not addressed the issues facing the sexually oppressed. This text is a scholarly and impassioned presentation of a model for practice with lesbian women and gay men which can be adapted to the range of demands facing social work curricula. A range of facts and scenarios can readily