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*Social Work with Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals: A Strengths Perspective.* Katherine van Wormer, Joel Wells and Mary Boes. Reviewed by Ronald J. Mancoske.

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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

be integrated into generalist practice, giving voice to lesbian and gay experiences in this area which is often a barren terrain in the social work curricula. The authors suggest using this book as a specialized course text or as a supplemental practice text.

A generalist practice perspective is developed in the text which covers the biopsychosocial aspects of gayness from a dynamic person-in-environment perspective. The strengths perspective is noted as a guide to discussion of problems throughout the text. The goals of the text are to provide essential practice knowledge for working with lesbians and gays, a la cultural competency approaches, and secondarily, to provide dynamic, multidimensional understanding of the complexities and nuances of sexual orientations. The authors' analyses rest on a variety of assumptions about the etiology of gayness, homophobia, heterosexism, sexuality development, community, and what constitutes common experiences among gay people. The themes of the text are organized around an ecological theoretical approach, the dynamics of homophobia, a hidden and maligned culture, and an understanding of developmental aspects related to youth, the work/love continuum of maturity, and aging. It concludes with practice focused discussions of counseling, health/mental health, and family issues.

At its very core, the strengths perspective moves the authors to break with prior conventional professional practice models which have pathologized differences in sexual orientation in the search for a scientific practice and which contributed to a history of abhorrent practices. The strengths perspective does break with the prior conventional professionalism model. The authors clearly direct their focus on the "option for the oppressed" as core to their philosophy. This scholarship breaks with tradition, and the salient question is "how clean is the break?". The arguments are clearly written, consistent with the stated assumptions, and continue to link the discussion of problems with the assumption of strengths. There are frequent references to popular cultural and professional practice literature. Where empirical investigations exist, they are evaluated from a strengths perspective. The authors boldly state their philosophy, and at times assert a barrage of facts to support their position. Advocacy is central to this text, and conscientious readers will not be disappointed.

An inherent contradiction exists in such a needed book as van Wormer, Wells and Boes have written. Professionalism has contributed significantly to the oppression of lesbian women and gay men. The authors write a text from a strengths perspective which is counter to those professional traditions. Yet, the authors espouse as a response to oppression, hatred, and ignorance, the further promotion of "professionalism." While the beliefs of a strengths perspective and a pathology approach are fundamentally different, the authors use of "professional involvement" is not markedly different from the path taken by the pathology approach used to respond to oppression. Again the oppressed are asked to trust that the past oppression by professionalism will be challenged by a new model of professionalism. While this approach may offer hope, it does so with an inherent contradiction. In reading the richly described "problem focused" approach, it seemed almost mordantly ironic that a strengths perspective would focus so strongly on "problems." This may well be a requisite feature of professional practice, but this poses a challenge to truly view strengths.

Expectations are deservedly high for this book because it provides an important contribution to the understanding of issues related to oppression of lesbian women and gay men. Caring readers will ask why social work literature is so constrained by a lack of quality empirical and theoretical literature on a topic which deserves this attention. What makes this book worth using in the classroom and in practice is that via professional literature, it gives voice to those experiencing oppression. Perhaps it is the strengths perspective which gives professionalism another chance to express its humanness.

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James J. Chriss (Ed.), *Counseling and the Therapeutic State*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999. \$48.95 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Pakistani army topples the government, a current headline proclaims. A military coup has captured the Prime Minister,