

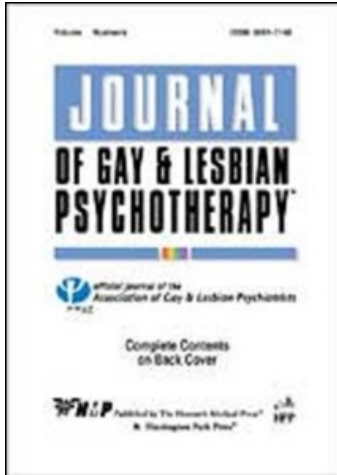
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Publisher Routledge

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## Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t904385604>

### BOOK REVIEWS

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**To cite this Article** Barber, Mary , Chessick, Cheryl , Rosario, Vernon A. , Byne, William , Clyman, Robert and Womack, Bill(2007) 'BOOK REVIEWS', Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 11: 3, 187 – 202

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1300/J236v11n03\_11

**URL:** [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J236v11n03\\_11](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J236v11n03_11)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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KING AND KING. Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland. *Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press, 2002. 32 p. ISBN 1-58246-061-2.*

This delightful children's book follows in the path of the groundbreaking *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman, Souza, 2000), adding to the growing number of children's books dealing openly with gay characters. In this alternative fairy tale, the Queen tells her son that he must choose a bride. Princess after princess applies for the position, but each has some quality that the Prince considers a deal-killer. Finally, Princess Madeline arrives, escorted by her brother Prince Lee. The two princes take one look at each other and swoon, saying, "Oh, what a beautiful Prince!" They marry, becoming the King and King of the title.

The story is told in an engaging way that makes the ending unexpected to young readers. The illustrations are vivid and beautifully done with a mixture of painting and collage, and the text is witty enough to appeal to a narrating adult. *King and King* is appropriate to be read aloud to very young children, or for children ages 6 and up to read to themselves.

My five-year-old daughter has grown up with two moms, has attended gay psychiatry conventions, and has visited with gay male couples. One would think she would be enlightened on the topic, but her initial reaction to the book was, "Gross! Mans (*sic*) and mans are not

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[Haworth indexing entry note]: "Book Reviews." Published in *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* (The Haworth Medical Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 11, No. 3/4, 2007, pp. 187-202. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-HAWORTH, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: docdelivery@haworthpress.com].

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doi:10.1300/J236v11n03\_11

supposed to kiss!” “Why not?” I asked, and we discussed it further. For the rest of that week, she brought the book to her other mom, to one of her grandmothers, and to anyone else she encountered. She had these volunteers read the book to her while she gauged their reactions. My daughter clearly had her awareness raised by this book.

*King and King* can be seen as an antidote to the rigid sex roles and assumed heterosexuality portrayed in most children’s literature. Although any parent and child could enjoy it and benefit from talking about it together, it is an especially helpful resource for same-sex parents and their children. Practitioners working with children and families should add this selection to their recommended list for families with same-sex parents, or any family where a child may be confronting homophobia or heterosexism and needs an alternative viewpoint.

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#### REFERENCE

Newman, L. & Souza, D. (1990), *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Boston: Alyson Press.

AN ARCHIVE OF FEELING: TRAUMA, SEXUALITY AND LESBIAN PUBLIC CULTURE. Ann Cvetkovich. *Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 355 p. ISBN 0-8223-3088-1.*

From the first glance, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Culture* engenders interest. Early into it, I felt I had found an author who has insight into my life as a lesbian. Cvetkovich manages that by elucidating a theory of trauma supported by many real life examples. As I read the book, I experienced a complex set of thoughts and feelings. When I finished it, I felt tired, left with sundry feelings, but still with the thought “Keep on Living” (p. 1) running through my head.

Cvetkovich says she wrote *Archive of Feeling* because she “felt bad.” Therapists had suggested to her that a history of incest was probably at the root of her adult struggles. She found this idea fascinating but was “skeptical about the magic-bullet theory of sexual trauma” (p. 2). Other therapists encouraged her to tell her story. Although she says she was drawn to the category of trauma, she tries to separate it from its medical definition; instead, she embraces *all* genres of trauma, including the traumas of being female and lesbian.

Cvetkovich believes that embracing the shame and rejection that lesbians feel within the context of being homosexual can serve as a means toward a more well-defined, truer sense of a lesbian identity. For example, she discusses interviews of members of New York’s lesbian bar community in the 1940s and 1950s. At that time, a “. . . butch’s public reputation often depended on her untouchability, and her honor was threatened if she was known to have been flipped or fucked” (p. 66). This created a form of emotional untouchability that plays an extremely important role in butch responses to homophobia and harassment. A stone attitude was a form of protection against the raids and arrests that were a regular occurrence in pre-Stonewall bar culture, as well as against the harassment butch women working in factories frequently experienced. Refusing to show that one had been affected by insults, strip searches, rapes, beatings, and other forms of psychic, physical, and sexual trauma to which lesbians were subject was a significant form of butch resistance. In other words, public vulnerability was a threat to a butch’s dignity and safety. A popular expression, “butch in the streets, femme between the sheets,” (p. 68) has been used to poke fun at or even ridicule a butch whose public untouchability is not consistent with her private sexual behavior. This saying alludes to untouchability’s multiple forms, as both social and sexual, both public and private.

Cvetkovich captures this experience in Bonni Barringer's, "When Butches Cry in the Persistent Desire":

*When butches cry  
They weep, they wail  
They gnash their teeth  
And moan  
Strong woman's pain  
It's just the same  
Except it's mostly done  
Alone. (p. 68)*

Cvetkovich wants "to place moments of extreme trauma alongside moments of everyday emotional distress that are often the only sign that trauma's effects are still being felt" (p. 3). However she resists "the authority given to medical discourses and especially the diagnosis of traumatic experience as post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]" (p. 4). I would have preferred that the author offer a more global definition of trauma without simultaneously condemning professionals who treat people with PTSD. As a mental health person who treats many lesbians with such experiences, I felt alienated. In Cvetkovich's defense, she argues that as the causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures. This creates a need to change social structures more broadly, rather than to just fix individual people: "I found what I was looking for in lesbian subcultures that cut through narratives of innocent victims and therapeutic healing to present something that was raw, confrontational, and even sexy" (p. 4).

Cvetkovich is interested in the way trauma affects everyday life and of large-scale events occurring in our society. She approaches the wide range of traumas produced by AIDS through the assumption that trauma are best addressed by public and collective formations. When lesbians affected by the AIDS crisis have taken up memoir, their primary focus has been on the experience of caretaking, producing in its own way an encounter with death demanding witnessing and testimony. Cvetkovich presents Jan Zita Grover's book, *North Enough* (p. 212). In *North Enough*, burnout is described:

Grover moved to Minnesota connecting traumatized bodies with traumatized landscapes. The North Woods did not provide me with a geographic cure. But they did something much finer. Instead of ready-made solutions, they offered me an unanticipated

challenge. I needed to learn how to see their scars, defacement, and artificiality and then beyond those to their strengths and beauties. AIDS, I believe, prepared me to perform these imaginative feats. (p. 214)

Pain is not only embraced but also seen as an engine of change.

Cvetkovich says every lesbian is worthy of inclusion in history: "If you have the courage to touch another woman, then you are a very famous person" (p. 239). The Lesbian Herstory Archives was started in 1974, initially housed in the cramped quarters of Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel's Upper West Side apartment in New York City. The mission has been to provide safe space for lesbian-owned documents that might otherwise be neglected or destroyed by indifferent or homophobic families. Since 1993, a Brooklyn brownstone now serves as a cultural repository where this history is preserved. The author describes her great joy about this history project. I believe she captures something quite important and profound: "In its unorthodox archives, trauma resembles gay and lesbian cultures, which have had to struggle to preserve their histories. In the face of institutional neglect, along with erased and invisible histories, gay and lesbian archives have been formed through grassroots efforts and have demanded attention to other suppressed and traumatic histories" (p. 8).

I enjoyed *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Culture*. It is an important contribution which certainly led me toward personal search and reflection.

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BEYOND THE CLOSET: THE TRANSFORMATION OF GAY AND LESBIAN LIFE. Steven Seidman. *New York: Routledge, 2002. 245 p. ISBN 0-415-93206-8.*

The summer of 2003 has been a watershed period for gay and lesbian politics. The Ontario Supreme Court decided that marriage must be made available to same-sex couples. The U.S. Supreme court reversed its infamous *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision and abrogated anti-sodomy laws. Amid heated talk of a schism, the Episcopal Church confirmed the first openly and actively gay bishop. In popular culture, two cable television shows, "Queer Eye on the Straight Guy" and "Boy Meets Boy," caught worldwide press attention as indicators that gays had entered mainstream culture. Within days of each other, U.S. president Bush and the pope made grave, moralistic pronouncements declaring marriage to be an exclusively heterosexual institution. This juxtaposition of events perfectly exemplify sociologist Steven Seidman's analysis of the vicissitudes of outness in the United States.

In *Beyond the Closet*, Seidman explores the complex and changing nature of the "closet" on an individual and social level. He deftly weaves between a historical perspective of homosexuals in the twentieth century and the individual life histories of his thirty diverse informants. On a historical level, gays and lesbians have struggled hard to gain public visibility free from harassment or violence. A series of hard fought legal battles over the last century (culminating in the aforementioned *Lawrence et al. v. Texas* decision) have shifted the legal status of gay people from sex criminals to merely second class citizens. In psychiatry, the contentious *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* debate of the early 1970s led to the depathologization of homosexuality. In myriad ways, homosexuality and the gay community as a whole have labored to come out of the closet in the U.S.

Despite these monumental legal and nosological advances, coming out remains a painful challenge for most individuals because of persistent cultural opprobrium, and the particular burdens of class, ethnicity, religion, race, and individual family dynamics. The chapters where Seidman discusses his informants' accommodation to these pressures—as they gradually negotiate coming out or staying closeted—will be poignantly familiar to psychotherapists. However, Seidman's sociological perspective is valuable for therapists since it constantly reminds us of the broader historical, social, and cultural context in which sexuality is lived.

In a chapter on public perceptions of gays, Seidman relies on his tabulation of movies with homosexual themes to show that the figure of “the homosexual” in popular culture has evolved from that of the polluted, dangerous pervert to the normal gay. Indeed, it was the explicit goal of 1950s and 1960s “homophile” activists to present an image of the homosexual as your average *bourgeois*, white, hard-working, tax-paying family-man next door. As Seidman notes, the major political goals of the organized gay rights movement have returned to this ideology since the 1980s: e.g., admission of gays in the military, workplace and housing discrimination, gay marriage, adoption by gay couples.

The image battle within the gay community has been whether to aspire for this normality and assimilate, or to embrace marginality and struggle for a radical transformation of society so that all forms of diversity are acceptable. This conflict between assimilationist versus liberationist politics is a longstanding one, having led to the ouster of radical fairy and communist Harry Hay from the Mattachine Society, which he had founded in 1951. Most recently the battle lines have been eloquently drawn by Andrew Sullivan and Urvashi Vaid, representing the assimilationist and liberationist sides, respectively. Seidman notes that the practical political implications of the debate have polarized people to support equal civil rights versus a radical restructuring of social values that is generally equitable in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality. Seidman claims he wants to take the middle road, but effectively he is a pragmatist, and argues we should first pursue an assimilationist civil rights agenda, and then pursue the loftier goals of dismantling the racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist values that underly society and its institutions.

Seidman’s monograph is more a work of synthesis than a radically new argument. One theoretical problem I had with his generally sensible and subtle analysis, is a tendency to reify “the closet” as a monolithic psychic and sociological structure. Furthermore, he assumes that it is naturally healthier and more advanced to be out of the closet. His informants, however, point out that the closet is custom fitted for each individual, to the point that it is hard to speak of a single type of closet, either as a state of mind or a lifestyle. Furthermore, one is never fully “out of the closet”: even the most “out” gay urbanite is constantly managing the public disclosure of his or her sexual orientation.

While the coming out model has indeed had many social and psychological benefits in Euro-American societies (particularly for middle-class individuals), it also fosters a dichotomized social formation of sexual identity—you are either in one camp (gay) or the other (straight).



Once you have chosen an identity, you risk general ostracism if you try to switch or “sit on the fence.” In a society like Mexico, with less pressure to be out, there is a spectrum of sexualities and more fluid sexual behavior (particularly among men). Indeed, only an ethnocentric American viewer could label these men who have sex with men as “closeted.” For Americans in America, however, Seidman’s analysis is on target and will give readers a sociologically rich understanding of how far gays and lesbians have come from being viewed as perverse criminals, yet why the road to full acceptance remains steep.

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EVOLUTION’S RAINBOW: DIVERSITY, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN NATURE AND PEOPLE. Joan Roughgarden. *University of California Press*, 472 p. ISBN 0-520-24073-1, \$27.50.

Previous reviewers have had mixed reactions to *Evolution’s Rainbow*. While *Publishers Weekly* (March 29, 2004) described it as a “brilliant and accessible work of biological criticism,” *The Observer* (August 1, 2004) suggested that “this lunatic tour of science, religion and identity politics” might be a spoof. In many respects, the situation of reviewers resembles that of the blind men describing the elephant: each described only a portion of the beast.

Although *Evolution’s Rainbow* contains some astute analyses, timely criticisms and insightful commentaries, the latter are intermingled with personal opinions, professions of religious faith, off-putting cute language, and many other vexing distractions. Ultimately, the latter undermine the book’s usefulness. In reading the book, one has no idea what lies immediately ahead—a theoretical analysis of gene frequencies, or perhaps an anthropomorphic treatment of the behavior of animals or genes. For example, Roughgarden writes of “genial genes” to counter Dawkins’ “selfish gene” theory. Her model is perhaps more politically correct than Dawkins’, but equally flawed. In reality, genes are mindless molecules without motives.

There are repeated references to rainbows—animal, human and cultural; this analogy works only a few times before it begins to become annoying. Roughgarden makes the utopian suggestion that a statue to diversity be erected in San Francisco Bay. Like the experience of a carnival ride, one feels whiplash from the narrative's sudden changes of direction. More careful editing with attention to maintaining a consistent and pragmatic tone throughout would have done much toward improving this book.

*Evolution's Rainbow's* strengths lie in its descriptions of transgendered presentations across history and cultures, and its account of the medicalization of transgenderism in our contemporary culture. The current medical conceptualization of transgenderism—a person of one gender trapped in the body of the other—suggests that one can be “cured” by surgically altering the body so that it conforms to the gender of the mind. Physicians can thus offer a treatment, and those who seek a medical cure must necessarily perceive themselves as disordered.

Roughgarden's discussion of who needs a “cure,” however, falls somewhat short. Psychiatrists, in particular, will note that Roughgarden has not done her scholarly homework. Thus, while she suggests that physicians have no definition for “disorder,” that is actually not true for mental disorders. In fact, the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM-III)* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) was the first *DSM* to explicitly define what constitutes a mental disorder. This *DSM* also excluded homosexuality from being classified as a mental disorder. Roughgarden incorrectly implies that the APA decision to declassify homosexuality as a disorder was based on a vote. This is a misinterpretation of the historical record. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) based its decision on a careful, scientific analysis by its Committee on Nomenclature. The fact that homosexuality did not meet the emerging definition of mental disorder, later codified in the *DSM-III*, is why the diagnosis was removed from the *DSM-II* in 1973. After the APA decision, those who opposed it organized a referendum to overturn the decision. They lost that vote as the APA members voted to support their scientific committees (Bayer, 1981; Drescher, 2003).

Roughgarden attempts to demonstrate that transgenderism is not a genetic disorder. To this end she employs calculations and discussions of gene frequencies and reductions of Darwinian fitness. All this is as misguided as it is unnecessary. Her logic would also lead us to conclude that schizophrenia, which is heritable and affects approximately 1 in 100, is not a disease. She argues that a trait that occurs with such a high

frequency cannot be considered a disease. But according to the *DSM*, in the absence of impairment, suffering or distress, there is no disorder. We do not need to resort to math. Schizophrenia is a disease. Cross-gender identification, *per se*, is not. Gender Identity Disorder of Adults remains in the *DSM-IV-TR* but must include impairment in functioning or significant distress. The transgender community itself is divided over whether to advocate for removal of this diagnosis from *DSM*, since its inclusion means that some transgender people who desire to transform their bodies are able to obtain insurance reimbursement for some of the medical and surgical procedures involved in the process.

Roughgarden's analysis of the biological data pertaining to sexual orientation and transgenderism is highly subjective. She is highly critical of this evidence with regard to sexual orientation, but she uncritically accepts it with regard to transgenderism. While it would be clearly premature to accept either body of evidence, the data pertaining to transgenderism are at present even more tenuous than those pertaining to sexual orientation. In other matters as well, Roughgarden seems to rely too much on her personal beliefs rather than on scientific evidence. For example, she refuses to believe that the masculine appearing external genitalia of female hyenas could result from "a few splashes of testosterone," but she offers no evidence to the contrary.

The reader may also be thrown by abrupt encounters with biblical interpretations so astonishingly literal it is difficult to imagine them presented by an evolutionary biologist. Roughgarden writes, for example that all of today's biological diversity was contained aboard Noah's ark. Roughgarden believes that as religion is more compelling than science to many people, the social status of sexual minorities will be in jeopardy as long as it believed that the Bible disparages those minorities. She therefore, argues, but not very convincingly, that particular Biblical passages involving eunuchs directly affirm transgendered individuals, and that the Bible does not support religious persecution of gender and sexual variation. Just as she sometimes subjectively chooses which scientific data to believe, she is also selective in her reading of the Bible. What is one to make of the Biblical passages that call for the death of men who have sex with men (Leviticus 20:13) or that ban eunuchs from entering the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1)? Clearly the Bible gives mixed messages on this topic—and in places it does disparage sexual minorities. Detractors as well as advocates for sexual minorities can find justification for their views in the Bible.

This book is an interesting and provocative read. Its language suggests that it is aimed at an audience previously unschooled in gender

studies. Given the problems mentioned above, I would be reluctant to suggest the book for such an audience. As prerequisite reading, I would recommend others (e.g., Bagemihl, 1999; Boswell, 1980; Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

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**GAY DADS: A CELEBRATION OF FATHERHOOD.** David Strah with Susanna Margolis. *New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam Books, 2003. 265 p. ISBN 1-58542-231-2.*

David Strah's *Gay Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood*, is a well-intentioned book, written by a gay man who has adopted two children with his partner. Its stated goal is to familiarize readers with "the phenomenon of men who identify themselves as gay, who openly and publicly live gay lives, and who then undertake to create families. . . ." The author was referred 60-100 families from gay community centers,

national organizations and a private surrogate agency. From these, he chose twenty-four to illustrate a spectrum of experiences, including domestic and international adoption, surrogacy and foster parenting.

The book is written as brief sketches, including photos, of men who have become parents. However, the author presents these men's stories without any synthesis or analysis. The individual sketches are pieced together from interviews with no clearly-stated formulation or premise. Instead, the book reads like a transcript of a documentary video, with the author using numerous direct quotes from the interviews. As a whole, the stories are interesting and occasionally moving. However, the overall construction is awkward and inelegant, sometimes reading like a video transcript. The quotations are mainly clunky and unnecessary; the sentiment is enthusiastic but often heavy-handed.

If the author's goal was simply to provide a simple survey of gay men's various experiences in the pursuit of becoming fathers, this book fulfills its mission. However, it tends towards a straightforward retelling or paraphrasing of experiences in a superficial way that is typical of much of contemporary, "fast food" television journalism. The book suffers from the absence of any analysis or insight that could have been derived from these experiences. The only time the author goes beyond superficial reporting is in the introduction. There he quotes briefly from a 2000 doctoral dissertation by Stephanie Schacher, PhD, entitled "Fathering Experiences of the 'New' Gay Fathers: A Qualitative Research Study" (p. 5). The two quoted paragraphs from Dr. Schacher's thesis provide this book's only intriguing insights into the relatively recent phenomenon of gay male parenting.

In reading the various accounts, I was left with the impression that, "yes, gay men can become parents and yes, they have to work harder to achieve parenthood." However, are we to understand that such efforts necessarily make gay men better parents? Throughout the book, we read how heroic these men are in blazing new trails and how having experienced homophobia makes them more empathic parents. Yet the only accounts which truly impress and inspire me are those about the men who have adopted older children from the foster care system.

One remarkable story was of a couple that adopted two HIV-positive boys from the foster care system in the late 1980s. They endured bigotry and AIDS hysteria in their local schools and then the death of their older son at age twelve. Another account was of a single man who adopted two teenage boys from foster care. The older boy was very troubled and died a few years later from drug-related causes. However he maintained a special connection with his adopted dad until the end.

The younger boy did well and went on to make his adopted dad a proud grandfather.

I am a parent of twin toddlers who were conceived with the help of a very special woman, acting as a traditional surrogate for my partner and me. I do not feel heroic. I desired to have children for very personal reasons. Certainly, in the big picture, the phenomenon of openly gay men and lesbians becoming parents seems destined to push legal and social boundaries. It has already moved the gay community and the effort for equal civil rights in new directions. It may eventually change the dynamics for gay kids coming out to themselves, peers and family.

It is unfortunate that the author chose to avoid a deeper discussion of the possible significance of having a generation of out gay men raising children. The book also misses the opportunity to compare the experiences of these gay dads with their lesbian counterparts. It totally ignores ethical considerations about surrogacy, international adoption and cross race adoption. The author also neglected to contemplate the meanings and implications of an absent maternal figure in many of these children's lives, particularly when a few of the 24 couples he interviewed deliberately chose to discourage the possibility of their children getting to know their birth mothers. So instead of a thought-provoking discussion, the book's overall message is something like, "Isn't it nice that gay men choose to parent children and aren't they really like everyone else?"

My guess is that the target audience for this book are gay men who are contemplating parenthood or those who already are dads. For those casually considering parenthood, it is possible that this survey may help to make the experience more real.

For those seeking a more thoughtful book on the subject of gay fathers, I would recommend Dan Savage's *The Kid*, and Jesse Green's *The Velveteen Father*.<sup>1</sup> Both relate their authors' personal quests to have children. I would also recommend "daddy & papa," a video documentary in a similar vein, written and directed by Johnny Symons.

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## NOTE

1. Jesse Green's memoir was excerpted in the *JGLP*, Volume 4, No. 3/4, in a special issue on gay and lesbian parenting, and reprinted in Glazer, D.F. & Drescher, J., eds. (2001), *Gay and Lesbian Parenting*. New York: The Haworth Press.

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THE SISSY DUCKLING. Harvey Fierstein. *New York: Simon & Schuster, Children's Publishing Division, 2002. 40 p. ISBN 0-689-83566-3.*

I was recently reading *Mom, Dad, I'm Gay: How Families Negotiate Coming Out*, by Ritch C. Savin-Williams (2002), and realized that most of our written stories for children that deal with the diversity of gender role differences are geared to a pre-teen or teenage audience. I then remembered the movie *La Vie En Rose*, and again thought that although the main character of the movie is of probably middle-school age, the story line is not too accessible for primary grade children. *The Sissy Duckling* is an exception to the genre in that the story line, the illustrations, and the promotion of the book is suitably geared toward children ages 5-8.

Elmer, the main character, is unlike the other boy ducklings in that he likes to bake cakes, help around the house, decorate cookies, and build sand castles instead of forts. When the other boy ducklings play football, Elmer would rather do a puppet show or do a half-time show. Elmer is very happy doing the things he loved to do. As might be expected none of the other boy ducklings liked doing any of these things, so even though sometimes he played with the girls, for the most part, Elmer played alone.

Papa Duck is very worried about his son and tells him, "You'll never get along in the world if you don't learn to play with others" and encourages (nags) Elmer to learn to play baseball. Elmer thinks this is a very

bad idea, telling his dad that he can't catch or throw, but Papa is insistent and wants him to try to hit the ball. Elmer strikes out, takes off his baseball cap and says to all assembled (including Papa), "really, I'm all done? Thanks for a swell time fellas. See ya in postseason!" And then he skips merrily away.

Needless to say, Papa Duck is very annoyed, comes home shouting to Mama Duck that Elmer's peers are calling him a *SISSY* and that now Papa Duck is the laughingstock of the whole flock. Elmer is very hurt that Papa is so angry and asks Mama Duck what the word *SISSY* means. She tells him the word is a cruel way of saying that he doesn't do things the way others think he should. When Elmer asks how they want him to behave, Mama says they want him to do things "Just like they do. You are special, Elmer, and being special sometimes scares those who are not." Mama Duck tries to reassure him that being special is really okay and that he really is going to surprise and amaze everybody one day.

The plot line next moves to the theme of bullying and school harassment. Elmer is chased by the big bully Drake Duckling, wins the race home, hides under the bed, but finds no comfort there because Papa Duck is the most angry he has been because Elmer ran away without fighting. Papa Duck is convinced Elmer is not strong enough to survive the flight south for the winter, and in very harsh words says, "Elmer is a *SISSY* and is no son of mine."

Because Elmer doesn't want to make Mama Duck unhappy or Papa Duck angry, Elmer fills a pillowcase with paints, tools, and a picture of his parents and runs into the night away from home. He finds a space in a hollow tree deep in the forest and uses his special talents to make his new home which he thinks has everything he needs except for his parents.

Soon it's time for the flock to fly south. Mama duck is worried about Elmer, but Papa Duck says the flock must leave without him. As the flock takes to the skies, hunters leap out and start shooting. Papa Duck is hurt, and guess who finds him? Elmer, with amazing courage and strength, drags Papa Duck to Elmer's home in the tree and nurses him back to health by cooking hot mushroom soup. It is too late to fly south and both of them spend the winter in Elmer's tree home. Papa is amazed at Elmer's skills that include cooking, taking care of him and the house, and simply being creative by painting portraits of Papa, playing games, telling jokes to Papa and laughing together. They get to know each other.

Well, the story ends happily ever with Papa a real advocate for his son, everybody's shock that Papa is still alive and very healthy, and of course that Elmer is the boy duckling who saved Papa. The entire flock cheers Elmer and Drake Duckling says, "Way to go, Elmer," offering



his wing for a high Five. Mama says, "I always knew you were special and now everyone else knows too!" Elmer says, "I am a BIG Sissy AND PROUD OF IT!!"

*The Sissy Duckling* is a great story dealing with many of the challenges that kids might face with gender role differences. The illustrations are humorous, at times full of style and attitude. Young kids really will like this book and Elmer is a real role model. It makes the point that finding integrity in one's life and honoring it is the key to a successful, happy, and effective life. AND it doesn't hurt to develop special talents like cooking hot mushroom soup!

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