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Review of the book "When your spouse comes out: A straight mate's guide to recovery"

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/kristen-cole/13/>

Grever, C., & Bowman, D. (2008). *When your spouse comes out: A straight mate's recovery manual*. New York: The Haworth Press.

With inspirational words from the bible, Buddhist teachers, Chinese language, and even Dolly Parton, *When Your Spouse Comes out: A Straight Mate's Recovery Manual*, is self-help literature that has something for everyone. Although *When Your Spouse Comes Out* is marketed as "A Straight Mate's Guide," the breadth of its advice makes it an appropriate reference for family, friends, and even gay spouses themselves. In fact, even as a reader that has no personal experience with the subject matter, this book gave me a new perspective on homosexual issues within the family. I also gained knowledge and confidence in the subject which may someday, if the situation presents itself, help me personally handle or help others handle challenges that arise in relation to a family member coming out. Although this book does offer insights for those who are not a "straight mate" the advice and interactive projects throughout the book are tailored specifically to them in a productive and supportive way. This correlates well to the book's title and overall goal, however, the range of information explored definitely warrants more interactive material for family, friends, and gay spouses experiencing this particular circumstance.

The format of this book is unique in its mixed methodological approach. The perspectives and advice for overcoming the challenges of a spouse coming out are offered through sociological, psychological, and inspirational approaches supported heavily by narrative from various straight spouses who have personally endured these challenges. The first two chapters are dedicated specifically to this narrative, in which several stories of spouses coming out to their significant others and family members are shared. These stories make the first 25 pages of the book intriguing and insightful. Each story is different and showcases not only the frequency of the situation in general but also the range of contexts in which the situation occurs. The various scenarios include different ways a spouse may choose to come out, different ways a couple may choose to deal with a spouse coming out, and different ways the straight spouse chooses to deal with the situation, personally. This reassures the reader that they are not alone in their journey and also increases the possibility of personal identification with particular scenarios.

In the next several chapters these narratives are elaborated upon and several more are interjected. Narratives incorporate psychological perspectives to deal with divorce and disclosure. First, technical and symptomatic descriptions of

possible coping mechanisms are broken down (i.e., introjections, confluence, retroflection, projection, or deflection) in order to help the reader identify the source of their actions as well as positive and negative outcomes of their behavior. Then, this therapeutic perspective focuses on self-healing and discusses taking control of emotions such as fear, isolation, secrecy, shame, depression, and anger. Three tools for managing these emotions are presented and applied (i.e., awareness, insight, and action) in order to offer a consistent and systematic way of taking control. The narrative interjections then offer examples of spouses who experienced and overcame these various emotions and appropriately or inappropriately utilized these different coping mechanisms. Each example not only applies these psychological practices but also incorporates personal adages of social and/or spiritual support structures (such as yoga or a confidante) which helped them progress in their own personal journeys.

Each chapter ends with a set of "questions to ponder" and "activities." These activities and questions are intended to reinforce the information presented while providing a "self-directed path to recovery" (p. xvii). A lot of the information presented is complex and, due to the concise nature of the book, it is also highly condensed. These questions and activities are

a good way to not only allow the reader more time to digest the complexity of the information and practice applying it to their own lives, but it also tailors some of the generic psychological concepts to the specific context of coping with a spouse's coming out. Although effective in adhering to the premise of the book, this specificity neglects to take advantage of its potential application and benefit for others affected by this particular situation, such as friends, family members, and the gay spouses.

The final chapters begin to touch specifically on how to disclose a spouse's homosexuality to friends and family members, including what's appropriate for children of different ages, and effective settings for telling non-immediate family and close friends. In the section titled "Lingering Risks, Anger, and Grief," the authors do an excellent job of comparing a spouse's coming out to the loss experienced with the death of a loved one. This example paints a clear relatable picture of what a straight-mate is potentially going through, one that would be beneficial in helping friends and family members who are affected by the situation comprehend its tragic complexity. Because of this potential benefit, and the general lack of literature surrounding this particular subject, it seems that incorporating added questions and activities tailored to friends

and family members would not only expand the possible target audience but further contribute positively to the GLBT community and GLBT family studies.

Although the intent of the authors is not to make any specific intercultural claims they do make mention of the topic which would be an interesting elaboration in later editions or future research. In the beginning chapter titled "Steps toward Resolution: A Typical Example," the authors claim that the stories told throughout the book could be similar to those experienced by others in different geographical areas, stating that, "the straight spouse experience is multicultural" (p. 26). Although they incorporate one particular story about Zhi Wen, a women of Chinese decent, it would be interesting to read about more straight spouses from different backgrounds experiencing this situation around the world in order to further the multicultural discussion.

Overall, this book accomplishes what it has set out to do and it does it in an insightful and inspirational way. Because of the limited amount of literature on this subject, especially in the form of self-help guides, the information presented definitely has unreached potential for a wider audience. It would be interesting to see the further positive impact this

text could have if it was packaged as more than just the
"Straight Mate's Guide."

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