

Buunk, Bram P. & van Driel, Barry (1989) *Variant Lifestyles and Relationships*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA; pp. 160

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The last few decades have brought striking changes to the family. Given these changes, social scientists from all disciplines have been increasingly concerned with whether or not marital and familial relationships are being replaced by other variant relationships and lifestyles. Thus, it is not surprising that social science research begin to examine these variant lifestyles and relationships. This auspicious research trend is evident in the findings and ideas presented in the book, *Variant Lifestyles and Relationships*. Buunk & van Driel begin this book with a concise yet notable overview of important social changes that have occurred in the United States in the past two decades. These social changes in turn have changed our attitudes and standards toward traditional and nontraditional relationships and lifestyles. Buunk and van Driel provide us with this overview for two basic reasons: (1) to point out that 'the idea that marriage and the family are facing a serious crisis is an inaccurate, though understandable, appraisal of the current state of affairs' (p. 9), and (2) that 'nontraditional family arrangements and options have penetrated deeply into mainstream American life' (p. 15).

The book represents the eleventh volume in a Family Studies Text Series published by Sage. The book is primarily written for undergraduate students whether they be in the field of sociology, social psychology, family studies or communication studies. Although primarily a text for students, the volume represents valuable reading material for any scholar interested in close relationships and/or social psychology. A theme that pervades this book is the interdisciplinary nature of the collection of relevant cited material. The authors do an excellent job in citing relevant research findings deriving from work in such fields as sociology, psychology, communication studies and family studies. Each chapter of the book is well organized and written with three clearly stated goals in mind: (1) to define a particular form of a lifestyle, (2) to examine its content, i.e. the different behavioural patterns as well as the attitudes and values of the participants, and (3) to investigate the context of the lifestyle' (p. 19). The authors should be commended for examining not only the individual in relation to these lifestyles, but also the social context and social processes that affect the decision to engage or not to engage in these lifestyles. At the end of each chapter, the authors provide review questions and suggested projects for students. These later additions to the book are noteworthy and provide the instructor of a course with several experiential options for class participation and discussion.

The authors discuss five kinds of variant lifestyles or relationships that include: singlehood, nonmarital cohabitation, gay and lesbian relationships, extramarital relationships and communal groups. The authors narrow the focus of this book to these specific lifestyles or relationships because they signify people's sexuality/intimacy quests outside of the exclusive marriage, as opposed to the consideration of all sorts of nuances of relations or close relationships bondings nowadays. This focus is fine, yet the authors still leave a gap in the understanding of other forms of relational variations, such as single parenthood, joint custody, blended families, etc. In defining such a focus, the authors' conception of variant lifestyles or relationships is still embedded and tied to the traditional marital relationship, much like the popular conception of sexuality is tied to marital sexuality with the terms premarital,

extramarital, and postmarital sexuality. Is the conception or definition of a variant relationship/lifestyle that is linked to traditional marriage a legitimate or appropriate characterization of these relationships/lifestyles? Further, given the incidence and frequency of these variant lifestyles, do we as scholars need to broaden our conception of these lifestyles? In response to the latter question, I think so.

The chapter on singlehood is a unique and well-written chapter. The authors delineate various forms of singlehood along the dimensions of stability and voluntariness, as well as provide an engaging discussion of the positive and negative aspects of singlehood. In the later section of the chapter, the authors examine loneliness, well-being and health in single persons. An underlying theme in this section is the fact that one must clearly differentiate between 'true singles' and singles with intimate partners and/or other confidants. Given this underlying theme, it seems logical to suggest that a more general discussion of role complexity/self-differentiation and social support is clearly needed in this section. The authors briefly discuss the finding that social support from a partner may act as a buffer in coping with stressful life events, yet more general work examining the importance of multiple roles and their relationship to factors such as health, well-being and loneliness is not given worthy attention. Here too, it may be important to differentiate between single persons with children and single persons without children.

The chapters on nonmarital cohabitation and gay/lesbian relationships are also useful. In these chapters, given that few citations refer to research conducted beyond the early 1980s and that nonmarital cohabitation is becoming more prevalent, we must be especially cognizant of the historical and cultural nature of social psychological processes. As more current data become available (especially regarding nonmarital cohabitation) from national surveys conducted in the late 1980s, we will be able to discern whether new trends in these relationships exist.

The final two chapters on extramarital relationships and communal groups are also compelling chapters. The fact that Buunk's research has been at the forefront in the social sciences in helping us to understand issues surrounding extramarital phenomena, including marital jealousy, adds to the overall contribution and significance of the chapter on extramarital relationships.

The epilogue also deserves special attention in this review. In this chapter, the authors reiterate the fact that throughout the book, they have paid special attention to cross-cultural research, especially data collected in western Europe, particularly the Netherlands. This cross-cultural emphasis is a unique quality of the book. This book, however, just whets our appetite for further cross-cultural research, especially with the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc and the economic unification of Europe. Similarly, these recent world changes may affect not only the relationships/lifestyles of those abroad, but of those in the United States as well.

In conclusion, this book is definitely worth reading. The authors challenge our views that relationships and lifestyles are stable and consistent concepts. Instead, relationships and lifestyles change across time, culture and individual social psychological processes thereof. Turning back to the overview presented in Chapter 1, the authors do provide us with data which illustrate that nontraditional family relationships and lifestyles have indeed penetrated American society. Yet, whether traditional family relationships and lifestyles are facing a serious crisis is still a question left unanswered in this book.