

Overall this is a useful practical guide for patients and their relatives in relation to lithium treatment of manic-depressive illness. It is readable and well presented and contains a wealth of information and useful advice. It also answers most of the questions commonly asked by patients. It will undoubtedly give patients and relatives a much better understanding of lithium treatment. This should contribute to better compliance and enable side-effects to be identified earlier.

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Advances in Personal Relationships (Vol. 4). Edited by DANIEL PERLMAN and WARREN H. JONES. 1993. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 303 pp. £35.00.

This is the current volume in an annual series aimed at highlighting areas of research development in the field of personal relationships. There are nine invited reviews which discuss theoretical and methodological issues and present original work in the areas of individual and cognitive processes in close relationships, interactions and conflicts in marriage and the family, and social networks and life transitions. The contributors write primarily from the viewpoint of North American academic social psychology. The contributions are generally easy to read, although references occasionally get in the way of clarity.

The nature of social support is a theme linking several contributions. Carpenter reviews the evidence for a general factor – relational competence – as a determinant of individual differences in forming and maintaining relationships, de Jong Dijkstra *et al* discuss their theoretical model to explain individual variation in social network changes following life events such as divorce and unemployment, and Starker *et al* examine social network changes following a specific life event – moving house.

These chapters together thus propose methods for the measurement of individual differences in forming and maintaining relationships, and for measurement of changes in social networks related to life events. The apparently obvious conclusion that can be drawn from them, that social support depends on dynamic interactions between both the individual and the social environment, nevertheless has important implications for the interpretation of social support measures.

Other contributions focus on work examining cognitive or psychodynamic aspects of relationships. Shaver & Hazan's contribution is of interest and describes their development of a model of adult romantic attachments based on extrapolation of Bowlby's description of infant-caregiver attachments to adult relationships.

A helpful feature of the format is that the authors have been given considerable scope to discuss the development of their ideas and methods. However, there is relatively little discussion of the potential clinical

applications of the material and this is a relative weakness from the viewpoint of clinicians. Nevertheless, the contributions are thought-provoking and should help stimulate ideas for further research.

This volume will primarily be of interest to those with a research interest in social aspects of psychiatry. It will be of interest to other readers but its price will probably confine its purchase to academic libraries.

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What Constitutes the Patients in Psychotherapy: Alternative Approaches to Understanding. By RICHARD CHESSICK. 1993. New Jersey: Jason Aronson. 248 pp. US \$30.00.

There is a clear sense of purpose and scholarly drive behind this book. Richard Chessick enthusiastically explores contemporary European philosophical thought in order to understand, from other than a psychoanalytic perspective, the question of what it is to be human. He tells us that "this book is the result of many years and long evenings of intensive study, inspired by the exciting new work that has appeared over the past half-century in a number of disciplines, all seeming to converge on a new or 'postmodern' view of the human". The philosophers examined are Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, Ricoeur, Lacan, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Federn, Lukacs, Patocka, and Gadamer. Two psychotherapeutic thinkers are also included: these are Laing and Kohurt.

As might be expected, alienation, bad faith, being, existentialism, desire, post-modernism, and hermeneutics are terms which crop up repeatedly in this book. Chessick moves towards a view that psychological phenomena can only be captured by a hermeneutical approach which attempts to capture the patient's own meanings. He argues for a phenomenological approach to patients, in an effort to avoid a naive psychologism based on a false subject-object (patient-therapist) dichotomy presenting the therapist as the final arbiter of reality. Therapy is therefore concerned with the understanding of maladaptive interactional behaviour and helping patients recognise how others experience them rather than being concerned with identifying underlying and malevolent representations carried about within the psyche. Chessick argues that this approach preserves the self-esteem and the humanity of the subject.

The finer sections of this book are the chapters on 'the self', which include chapters on Laing and Kohut. The author clearly knows his subject and writes succinctly and informatively, relating the ideas and theories discussed to the psychotherapeutic situation. The remaining chapters are, I fear, less successful and there is a sense that too much has been attempted in too short a space. Chessick's discussion of the often complex thought of contemporary philosophers seems unhelpfully abstract and condensed and there are few linkages to the clinical