

The view that self-contempt and guilt lead a gay man to seek psychotherapy is counterbalanced by the contribution of Charles Silverstein in Chapter 6 of this book. He argues cogently that the homosexual man is often ill-prepared to deal with the conflicts and ambiguities in his lifestyle, and the confusion and associated depression are the primary motivating factors impelling the homosexual man to seek psychotherapy.

The book provides some useful psychotherapeutic insights into the management of homosexuals who are HIV positive, pointing out that such patients carry an additional burden of guilt due to the fact that they have contracted the disease. The book concludes with an examination of the sexual orientation of the therapist and how this influences the therapeutic process.

The authors have produced a very readable book, firmly based within the psychoanalytic approach to psychotherapy, which it should be seen as expanding and extending, rather than contradicting its traditional teachings. However, I believe the book overstates the contribution of a homophobic society to the problems of the homosexual man. The great change in attitude towards homosexuals that has taken place in our society over the past 30 years does not need to be emphasised here. I believe that the book is in this sense already a little dated. I would see it as a useful addition to the shelves of a library specialising in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

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Accepting Voices. Edited by MARIUS ROMME and SANDRA ESCHER. London: Mind. 1993. 258 pp. £13.99 (pb).

Karl Jaspers once suggested that the failure of empathy and intuition to understand the person with psychosis is diagnostic: he used the term 'abyss' to characterise this discontinuity of understanding between normal (and neurotic) experience on the one hand and psychotic on the other. By and large we do not suppose that psychotic patients are like ourselves, and modern approaches have dwelt on causal explanations with considerable success. Yet as professionals we are all aware of scepticism among our patients for current concepts and treatment methods. We are apt to put this resistance down to lack of insight and regard calls for psychotherapy as anachronistic.

Someone once said that explaining the neural basis for blushing does not mean we understand it. Data linking acute and chronic stress with psychosis has suggested that there may indeed be a 'normal' context to psychosis. Similarly, this book by Professor Romme and Sandra Escher attempts to help us understand the hallucinator and how the bizarre meanings attached to voices can make sense in context. It centres around

some fascinating personal accounts of voice hearers, seven of whom have never received psychiatric help (they all view their voices as guiding and benevolent) and a further six who have "grown out of psychiatric care", finding their own ways of living and coping with their voices. These confirm this reviewer's judgement that the experience of voices – their apparent omniscience and plausibility – is a context that can lead ordinary people to imbue them with power and authority. The various frames of reference of voice hearers are elaborated by their adherents in Chapter 7, including a Dutch gerontologist who suggests that "humans . . . may transcend physical existence and find access to other dimensions . . . than the visible world". Clearly some frameworks present a major challenge to the empirical psychologist.

The authors argue that we should respect the hearer's perspective, and that the content of voices and the nature of the relationship with them may have a personal meaning and a personal context (sexual abuse and unresolved loss are described in many of the contributions). Some sound advice is offered, in particular that the hearer must "understand that the voice is not more powerful than yourself". The authors' main theme, however, stresses the acceptance of voices rather than denial and resistance, this being the predominant style of the 'copers'. The 'copers' also view their voice as originating from an external agency; thus the authors advise use of the less pejorative term 'extrasensory perception' and suggest "... accepting the presence of an influence outside of yourself" (the authors overlook some of their copers who do not subscribe to this perspective). The authors' constituency is the voice hearers themselves, and they are to be congratulated in their efforts in bringing them together. It is patently clear that not all hallucinators are the same, and forms of acceptance practised by some will be harmful to others. I do not understand why this is not stressed more clearly. This book is challenging and deserves to be read by the professionals involved in the care of people with psychosis.

I think Jaspers would have found this book fascinating and might even have led him to revise his concept of the abyss, but I don't know that he would have recommended it yet to his patients.

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Causes, Coping and Consequences of Stress at Work. Edited by CARY L. COOPER and ROY PAYNE. Chichester: John Wiley. 1990. 418 pp. £14.99 (pb).

There cannot be many of us who have not at times experienced stress at work or who could not produce a lengthy list of the culprits or causes of it. However, this