

Book Reviews

The Anthropology of the Body (A.S.A. Monograph 15). Edited by JOHN BLACKING. London: Academic Press. 1977. Pp 426. £8.80.

The Association of Social Anthropologists regularly publish monographs based on conferences that contain matters of interest to psychiatrists. This book is a hotch-potch by 20 contributors. Topics include three ways of playing the Afghan guitar; machismo and prostitution in Peru; death by suggestion in New Guinea; purity and pollution among gypsies; phosphenes and mandalas. If there is a common theme, it seems to be related to the interaction between bodily functions and experiences and the cultural milieu. The contributions by medical authors seem more restrained, critical and wide ranging than most of the others. The editor's introductory essay tries to make a systematic exposition, but perhaps not surprisingly shows over-inclusiveness and flight of ideas. It would probably have been better to concentrate on one or two themes such as the management and meaning of human excreta (well started by Dr Loudon in one of the better contributions). The social functions of altered states of consciousness is another topic of interest to your reviewer, and I imagine to most psychiatrists. These monographs remind us that we do not pay enough attention to studies of behaviour in other cultures, and the curious reader will enjoy browsing.

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Progress in Sexology. Edited by ROBERT GEMME and CONNIE CHRISTINE WHEELER. New York: Plenum Publishing. 1977. Pp 615. \$39.00.

This book is composed of sixty selected papers from the Second International Congress of Sexology held in Montreal in 1976. Theoretical issues, research studies, and practical treatment methods all receive attention. In the first section, on sex differences, the familiar nature-nurture controversy receives a thorough examination. Interesting contributions on the aetiology of sexual dysfunction follow, including an impressive Swedish review of the effects of neurological disorders. The section on treatment methods is useful, although regrettably few papers

include well-controlled evaluative studies. One must disagree with John Money's suggestion, in the section on sexual response and fantasy, that deviant fantasies and interests underly many sexual dysfunctions. This is simply not borne out in clinical practice. An outstanding contribution is a preliminary report by Harold Persky and colleagues on sex hormone levels in young women and their partners during the menstrual cycle. Testosterone levels, known to be important determinants of female as well as male sexual interest, showed both mid-cycle and luteal phase peaks in the women, and a peak in the males corresponding to their partners' luteal phase. There are several papers on contraception including review articles on the possible effects on sexual behaviour of the contraceptive pill and vasectomy. In the section on anthropological and sociological aspects of sex, there is a challenging paper by John Prescott who draws on a variety of research data in arguing that impaired parent-child affectional bonding leads to violent tendencies, both self- and other-directed, and to sexual dysfunctions in adulthood, especially in females. The volume ends with several interesting papers on sex education. This collection includes sufficient of interest to both general readers and those specializing in this field to warrant hospital libraries obtaining a copy.

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Understanding Sexual Attacks. By D. J. WEST, C. ROY and F. L. NICHOLAS. London: Heinemann Educational Books. 1978. Pp 178. £7.95.

Dr West, of Cambridge, spent a sabbatical leave at the Regional Psychiatric Centre of the Federal Penitentiary Service at Abbotsford, British Columbia where the other two authors work. This is a study of twelve patients undergoing intensive treatment, living and working in a ward. These twelve were not typical of sexual offenders in general. They were a selected minority of grave and repetitive offenders, intelligent, not psychotic or epileptic, who had taken the initiative in asking for treatment: selected, in fact, for dangerousness and treatability. Home backgrounds, sexual development, crisis situations and