

are essential if the divisiveness that these cases engender is to be minimised.

The book is packed with clinical case vignettes, illustrating the heterogeneous presentations of the group of behaviours that go under the name of Munchausen syndrome by proxy abuse. Most pleasing of all is the cross-referencing of case examples, so that, for example, the authors of Chapter 4 comment from their own viewpoint on case vignettes contained in a number of other chapters. The coherence of the differently authored chapters and sense of editorial authority enhance the reader's confidence in the maturity of thinking and the balance of the viewpoints that the volume presents.

In my opinion this book will establish itself as the essential text for the wide range of professionals working with children, families and adults who are concerned to recognise, prevent, manage and try to understand and 'treat' these conditions. I would like to believe, also, that it will spur medical and other health care professions to a wider consideration of what basic assumptions underlie health care 'contracts' – so that the 'normal' patient–therapist contract (whatever that is) can be informed by the 'incongruous' and 'abnormal' consultation and illness behaviour so eloquently described in this volume.

**American Psychiatric Association (1994)** *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th edn) (DSM–IV). Washington, DC: APA.

**Meadow, R. (1995)** What is, and what is not, Munchausen syndrome by proxy. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, **6**, 534–538.

**Schreier, H. & Libow, J. (1993)** *Hurting for Love. Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome*. New York: Guilford Press.

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**Christopher Cordess** Professor of Forensic Psychiatry, University of Sheffield and Honorary Consultant and Director of Research, Rampton Hospital, Retford, Nottinghamshire DN22 0PD

### **Anthropological Approaches to Psychological Medicine: Crossing Bridges**

Edited by Vieda Skultans & John Cox. London: Jessica Kingsley. 2000. 303 pp. £14.95 (pb). ISBN 1 85302 708 1

There are a number of fundamental differences between anthropology and psychiatry, some of which stem from the varying responsibilities of the two disciplines, others

from their current ideological bases. June Jackson, one of the contributors to this multi-author volume, pithily defines the different responsibilities: "Anthropologists can, if they wish, pick up their bags and steal away from the community they have studied. This action is denied to public health doctors". And of course to psychiatrists. This poses a dilemma to psychiatrists trained as anthropologists who will "experience the inherent difficulties of being not just a participant observer but also a participant healer".

Ideological differences grow out of the wholesale adoption of post-modern deconstruction by anthropology and the blind eye turned to this movement by medicine. The rejection of the privileged status of the observer of 'the truth' by anthropologists has left the discipline floundering. An attempt to gain a firm footing in the morass of deconstruction is represented by a focus on narrative, with the assumption that allowing the subject to speak in her or his own voice minimises the subjective role of the observer. Vieda Skultans contributes an outstanding and succinct chapter on remembering and forgetting, building on her experience of analysing the narratives of Latvians who lived through the Soviet repression of their history and culture. Surely she had in mind Milan Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, in which a character states that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting".

However, just as the reader sighs with relief at the establishment of a bridgehead, the ground begins to quake as John Campbell raises the problem of the interpretation of narrative. He questions "what is being intersubjectively interpreted, by whom, and what the role of the anthropologist in this process is". Els van Dongen shares his scepticism, pointing out that anthropologists and psychiatrists do not simply record the informants' interpretations, but in fact actively construct them. Those rare birds who are qualified in both anthropology and psychiatry flutter between the opposing shores, vulnerable to snipers. Poor Arthur Kleinman is winged by both Skultans and Campbell, while Roland Littlewood suffers potshots from Campbell only.

The quality of the contributions is reminiscent of the three bears' breakfast. In some, the writing is so thick that it takes an effort to dig in the spoon, while others have the consistency of thin gruel. The

book ends anticlimactically with a chapter by Maurice Lipsedge, in which the author's voice is submerged by a series of extensive quotations from psychiatric texts which present sociological and anthropological material, including a detailed interpretation by one sociologist (Kathleen Jones) of the work of another (Goffman).

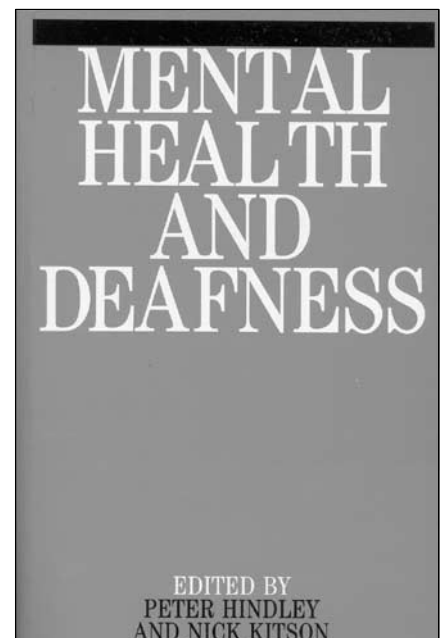
The fact that the book does not cohere is indicative of the schisms existing between and within the two disciplines represented. In itself this is not a criticism, but one longs for the clarity and economy of language that characterise Skultans' contribution. Hopefully, she will try again to harmonise the dissonant voices when some of the ideological skirmishes have died down. But for now, I doubt that this compilation will tempt the wary traveller to cross the bridge in either direction.

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**Julian Leff** Professor of Social and Cultural Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, De Crespigny Park, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AF

### **Mental Health and Deafness**

Edited by Peter Hindley & Nick Kitson. London: Whurr Publishers. 2000. 350 pp. £37.50 (pb). ISBN 1 897635 39 7



The editors' preface to this interesting and informative book states that it "is intended to be an introductory text to mental health and deaf people for two main groups of people: those familiar with deaf people but