

to recognise homosexuals now than it was in the past. One older man said he found this to be so with 'all the football players and truck drivers who are coming out'.

Throughout, the similarity of these men to women and to disabled or other stigmatised or deviant groups was apparent. They had a need to reinforce their identity, their feeling of self-worth and self-acceptance, and they placed great importance on physical attraction. The writer used social reaction theory to demonstrate that an individual's beliefs regarding how others observe and evaluate him determine his self-evaluation. Beliefs regarding other people's evaluations are crucial, not whether such evaluations are true, as in any form of labelling. Quality of life for these ageing homosexuals was less determined by their sexual orientation than by factors crucial to ageing people in general, i.e. health, finance and social support. 'Age can be a stigma just as difficult to bear as homosexuality' said one respondent. Those interviewed resented being unable to find a job after the age of 40, more than discrimination about their homosexuality, because they could hide the latter, but not the former. One ageing man in his 70s said that both heterosexuals and homosexuals devalue old people and feel that they are 'past it'. Another commented that 'The older homosexual is not wanted by either side, the heterosexuals or homosexuals', and the author believes that age, not sexuality, relegates us to the scrapheap when we are no longer considered 'useful' to society.

The book is well written and the reader must recognise the sensitive and difficult task of working with any minority group, especially older people when so many factors over time need to be taken into account. There are some poignant reminders of the particular difficulties faced by this group of people, such as the ex-soldier who had been dishonourably discharged. 'The army gave me a medal for killing a man and threw me out for loving one', he told the interviewer. The research certainly contradicts stereotypes. These men were healthier, less anxious about exposure and had, on the whole, satisfactory social and sexual lives and more stable concepts than their younger counterparts. Their score on life satisfaction was comparable to that of the general population, and the difficulties they faced of coming to terms with the ageing process were common to heterosexual people and very similar to those articulated by many women.

The book leaves many questions unanswered, but points to the need for further research in this area, where disadvantage, prejudice and stereotyping are multiplied.

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SALLY GREENGROSS

Carole R. Smith, *Social Work with the Dying and the Bereaved*. Macmillan, London, 1982, 149 pp., £3.95, ISBN 0 333 3089.

This is a useful book, well organised, clearly written, decently researched and with a good eye for the illuminating anecdote. It is firmly based on relevant practical experience and would be of value to any social worker or counsellor

approaching the bereaved and the dying with a proper sense of trepidation combined with the desire to help.

The structure of the book gives a good idea of its thoroughness. The early chapters summarise what is known about dying and bereavement by reviewing most of the major research both theoretical and pragmatic and with proper concern for the experiential as well as the practical aspects of the phenomena. The author's comprehensive approach is demonstrated by reaching beyond individuals to the wider family, social and working networks and by making some pertinent comments about the hospital as a contemporary arena for dying – its advantages and its disadvantages.

Chapter 4 attempts to interpret what is known about dying and bereavement. The author sets out what she calls the 'traditional approach', via Freud, Kleins, Pincus and Bowlby. These authorities are then attacked and dismissed prior to the championing of what is called 'an alternative approach', an adaptation of symbolic interactionism by way of a social interactionist perspective, claiming Marris (*Loss and Change*) as an ally. The thrust of this chapter seems to me gratuitous, based as it is on the wholly mistaken view that an emphasis upon psychic reality and inner experience implies a lack of interest in or an undervaluing of social reality and functioning. The author unhelpfully turns a question of balance and professional competence into a life-and-death struggle between two ill-matched combatants. A more appropriate and fairer approach might have been to recommend the social interactionist perspective to most social workers as a middle-order theory simply because it suits their particular stance and training. Since the author shows in subsequent chapters that she can work sensitively with internal psychic reality and finishes (p. 129) by stating that 'the crucial nature of loss... lies in the essentially personal experience of those who are left', I feel that her attack on the psycho-analytic tradition is not without ambivalence, and may yet lead to a 'both-and' rather than an 'either-or' approach to theories of practice. Which is the better theory absolutely is of course another matter and beyond the scope of this review.

Once she had relieved herself of this theoretical battle (and I cannot say that the 'alternative theory' did much more for me than to express common sense in jargon) the author continues in the manner promised by the early chapters. There are really thoughtful and detailed accounts of the process and contents of good helping interviews. These chapters set out responsible social work practice in a way which will benefit not only those who work with the dying, the bereaved and their families, but social workers working with whatever client group. In the final chapter 'Summary and Conclusions' we have as good a résumé as I have seen of the knowledge and practice components of social work. Indeed, it is clear that within this specialist work there is another equally professional text that could be written by this author which would examine the practice and theory of social work in a concise and usable form. I hope that either the author will do this or that word will get around that this ostensibly specialist text could well be added to the basic reading of all social work students and practitioners.

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