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Catherine Atnas

Asian Perspectives in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Pittu Laungani. (2004). London: Brunner-Routledge

This is an exciting read. The author starts off by asking the question do we need another book on counselling and psychotherapy? In the ever-expanding library of counselling and psychotherapy books (the need for the existence of some are indeed questionable) every now and then a significant contribution to the field appears. In my opinion Pittu Laungani's book is such a contribution. Although it is targeted to fill a particular gap and primarily deals with issues relating to India, I feel that this is a book that should be read by every one engaged in psychological and therapeutic work.

I say this for a number of reasons: The issue of culture is not some thing that any one working in this area can ignore. Whilst there are numerous books and courses that deals with culture and diversity, these are not always accessible to every one working in the field. In this book the author manages to crystallise key issues on the subject in a few pages in a way that is very accessible to the reader. This I feel is a remarkable feat. The relevance of this book goes beyond working with Asians as a particular ethnic group. I feel that the book is relevant to working with many different ethnic groups with the issues being illustrated using Asians as an example. Whilst the book aims to address issues relating to individuals classified as Asians in Britain, the author is at his best when he is describing Indian culture from a Hindu perspective whilst the excursions into Muslim and Buddhist worlds are rather weak. On the other hand the Indian Hindu examples amply illustrates the issues, the complexities and dilemmas in working with diversity. The case examples cover a wide range of situations that therapist would identify with and would find helpful in every day practice.

The book is clearly aimed at practitioners who are likely to work with individuals who would classed as South Asians in Britain i.e. individuals who originate from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka regardless whether they are new immigrants, first second or third generation. It does

not attempt to deal with issues relating to other Asians such as Chinese, Vietnamese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indonesians etc. although the key issues may be common to these groups as well. It could also be argued that the issues relating to culture and identity raised in this book are common to working with all forms of diverse groups. If this is the case the book would be better titled “Working with diversity in counselling and therapy in Britain: with illustrations from a South Asian (or Indian) Perspective. I am merely making the point of the broader appeal of this book.

The chapter on cross-cultural differences is particularly scholarly. The chapter on Western models of counselling and therapy again provides an excellent summary of the field that would be useful to any practitioner or student. The treatment of meetings of therapists and clients from different perspectives and the issues of matching is also very helpful.

The author writes very well and has a sharp and precise style, which is indeed refreshing. All in all this is a very interesting read and I recommend it strongly as a must read to all groups in the field from clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, therapists and social workers, particularly to students and trainees.

Dr Shamil Wanigaratne

Clinical Counselling in Voluntary and Community Settings

Quentin Stimpson (Ed.). (2003). Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge.

As a practitioner in both statutory and voluntary agencies, I enjoyed reading this book. Its aim is to provide theoretical and practical advice to help improve the quality and reliability of voluntary counselling services. In its 133 pages it manages to cover an enormous range of material that will certainly be of interest to students considering a placement in a voluntary counselling organisation. The ten chapters of the book move from the historical development of voluntary sector counselling in Britain, through issues of research and evaluation of “good practice”, to some current clinical issues, with a final, thought provoking, four pages on ‘Counselling in a Post-modern context’ by the editor.

It will also give food for thought to the experienced practitioner as, both implicitly and explicitly, it discusses a range of questions fundamental to counselling practice such as: ‘How far is counselling a political practice?’, ‘Is practice “difference” oriented?’, ‘What are we gaining and losing by professionalisation of voluntary organisations?’, ‘Who decides what is “good practice?”’, ‘How can we continually rediscover the amateur’s creativity?’; ‘How important is theory?’; and, of course, ‘Where is the