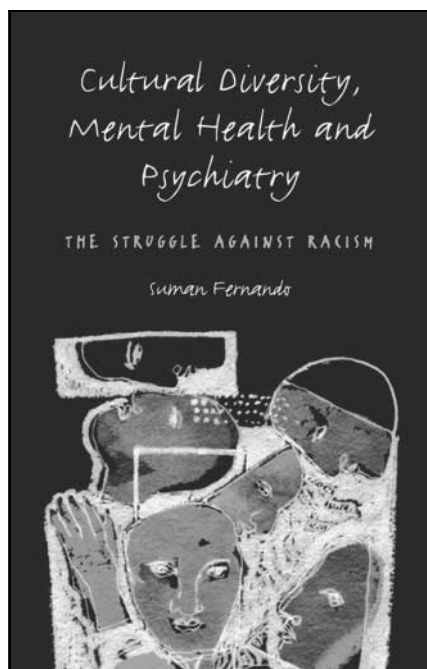


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

Cultural Diversity, Mental Health and Psychiatry: The Struggle against Racism

By Suman Fernando. Hove: Brunner-Routledge. 2003. 258 pp. £18.99 (pb). ISBN 1 583 91253 3



This well-written book by an accepted original thinker and expert in the field of transcultural psychiatry adds considerably to the current debate about the links between mental health, psychiatry, cultural diversity and racism. It also further develops some of the themes raised in his previous book.

Fernando's view that racism has been resistant to all efforts to reduce its power in the practice of psychiatry is a recurring theme, familiar to clinicians as well. He maintains that racism and psychiatric stigma have blended together to exercise power that is particularly felt by Black people. Psychiatrists then get caught up, as mental health services are often the vehicle for this. Users certainly believe this to be widely prevalent.

The author then outlines some areas in which change is possible. He suggests that multicultural psychiatrists need to work even more closely with multicultural mental health services, as this approach offers the prospect of excellent care through good working practices. His belief that mental health practitioners should see people as people, and not as carriers of illness or ill health, is clearly developed as this is essential for quality care and is not to be compromised. Cultural backgrounds must be taken into account for this to work well. Fernando believes that involvement of users of services and carers will ensure that past mistakes are not repeated. There can be little disagreement with this view.

This carefully crafted text is highly recommended for all psychiatrists, whether they work with people from different cultural backgrounds or not, as the issues raised are clearly broadly applicable. It will also appeal to other professionals, users, carers and service providers concerned about the thinking that needs to be in place if services are to be appropriate and relevant. There is no doubt that this book is an important addition to the ongoing work related to transcultural psychiatry.

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Acute and Transient Psychoses

By Andreas Marneros & Frank Pillmann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2004. 252 pp. £65 (hb). ISBN 0 52183 5186

Psychogenic Psychoses

By August Wimmer (transl. by Johan Schioldann). Adelaide: Adelaide Academic Press. 2003. 265 pp. Au\$50 (pb). ISBN 0 9578585 3 1

The predominantly biological direction of present-day psychiatry has by no means crowded out new work on its phenomenological and historical aspects. Germany

has always been the main focus of phenomenological interest, and this tradition remains strongly alive, as Marneros & Pillmann show in an important contribution from the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. They say that understanding of brief and acute psychotic disorders – with a short duration and generally good prognosis – has remained minimal. The core of this book is an account of their own longitudinal study, which they say was ‘not epidemiological, but clinical’. In a 4-year period, 1036 inpatients with non-organic psychotic or affective disorders were screened at their university hospital, 4.1% of whom received a diagnosis of brief acute psychotic disorder. This is consistent with the rates obtained in previous studies. Unfortunately, I found this account of their study obscure at times, with the method not clearly separated from the results and discussion.

The ‘decisive characteristic’ of brief acute psychotic disorder was found to be ‘the polymorphic and brief symptomatology’. For both research and clinical purposes, the authors recommend that these disorders should be separated from schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder and affective disorders – a fairly comprehensive exclusion. Surprisingly, they report that the majority of patients with brief acute psychotic disorders are female and that age at onset is higher than that for schizophrenia or bipolar schizoaffective disorder. Long-term pharmacotherapy, especially with antipsychotics, is advised for all three kinds of psychotic disorder, with the addition of mood stabilisers for some (not for schizophrenia). The outcome of brief acute psychotic disorders was found to be favourable in the extended follow-up, but the disorders were usually recurrent.

The main purpose of this work is to reduce the heterogeneity of groups of patients diagnosed as having ‘schizophrenia’ or ‘affective disorders’, by removing a small but (arguably) well-defined group which has significantly different characteristics from the rest. The authors say that we need ‘exact clinical diagnoses and psychopathological understanding’ of these atypical psychoses if we are to treat them appropriately and gain more reliable knowledge about them. Although its content is rather dense, in general the book is clearly laid out, with frequent boxed summaries. It is marred by a poor standard of scientific English. For a