

The chapter entitled 'Holloway' is in fact a tracing of wilderness within extensively farmed counties such as Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. These ancient pathways have been trotted down so deeply into the earth itself that they have become their own micro-wildernesses complete with unusual plant and animal life. He describes them almost as otherworldly in their appearance:

A few hundred yards further along, in a gap in the hedge by a towering ash tree, we found a way back down into the holloway, and descended into its shadowy depth, abseiling down the sandstone sides using ivy as a rappel-rope. It felt as though we were dropping into a lost world, or a giant version of the gryke in the Burren. (p. 223)

Right at the end he invites us to discover wildness within the city, between the roads, the disused railway banks. This, too, I have found through my many connecting walks, when I have never shied away from the ugly stretches, as my aim had been to see what is truly between two places. There are still many green veins leading right into city centres, in the end merging into parkland, perhaps, or arriving along the waterway around which the place was founded back in history. These places are precious, even if they can never fulfil the urge to go into the remote outer reaches beyond civilization. 'We are fallen in mostly broken pieces, I thought, but the wild can return us to ourselves' (p. 320).

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It is by no means a page turner. In fact, it has taken me a long time to read, as I felt I wanted to savour it and not have too much of a good thing all at once, like eating too much chocolate! It makes a hugely important contribution to our understanding of our profound human need to connect on a much deeper and more poetic level than safely packaged outdoor leisure activities could ever hope to reach. I think it is not too much to say that this is a deeply spiritual book based on no ideology, philosophy or religion other than the re-cognition of our original one-ness with creation.

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Transgender emergence: therapeutic guidelines for working with gender variant people and their families, by Arlene Istar Lev, Binghamton, NY, Howarth Press, 2004 (published by Routledge, 2009), 500 pp., £32.90 (paperback), ISBN-10: 078902117X; ISBN-13: 978-0789021175; Kindle edition available

Reviewed by Jennifer Maidman, Songwriter, music maker, and former counsellor and co-editor of *Self & Society*

The author of this book is a US-based social worker, family therapist and counsellor who is a member of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association. Drawing very much on her own 'hands-on' experience, she has written a book which, for me, very much sets out the 'state of the art' in terms of working with gender-variant people. As a trans person myself, and a trained counsellor, I can highly

recommend this book. For any practitioner working with this client group, I would consider it essential reading.

What really differentiates the book from so much of the earlier literature on transgender people is the steadfastly non-pathologizing stance it takes. The author is unequivocal from the outset:

The clinical and philosophical ideology outlined in this book is based on a belief that Transgenderism is a normal and potentially healthy variation of human expression. The working framework outlined here is that nothing is inherently 'mentally ill' within transgendered people but rather they are trying to adapt and cope with an untenable culture. ... [T]he psychotherapist's role is to assist the process of an emerging authentic self, even one that stands outside of socially acceptable gender roles. (p. xix)

Although the author apparently practises from a fairly eclectic orientation, her approach seems entirely congruent with a humanistic way of working. The emphasis throughout is on authenticity and unconditional validation of the client's lived experience. To this end, Lev deploys her wealth of knowledge and experience to offer the reader a great deal more than just the therapeutic guidelines promised by the title.

In Part 1 of the book, 'Theoretical Understandings of Transgenderism', she offers a comprehensive overview and deconstruction of the history of gender variance and the ways in which trans-people have been perceived, treated and often stigmatized by mainstream society. The reader is encouraged to question their own assumptions, to 'think outside the box'. In Part 2, 'Diagnosis and Assessment', Lev looks at theories of the aetiology of gender variance. Medical classification is still a fact of life and a hurdle to be jumped for many trans-people, and Lev looks at this process with a critical eye and an awareness of how the labelling of non-conforming behaviour as 'deviant', far from being neutral or scientific, has deep cultural and political roots and significance. Given the current situation whereby the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders* (DSM-V) still lists Gender Dysphoria (formerly Gender Identity Disorder) as essentially a psychiatric problem, it is clear that the author understands that many trans-people may feel ambivalent about accepting a pathologizing label as a prerequisite to accessing medical assistance, which they need. Part 3, entitled 'Treatment Issues', includes sections on learning to listen to gender narratives, the coming-out process and the effects this may have on partners and significant others, working with gender variant children, and a chapter specifically addressing issues with intersex people.

Even now, some counsellors will never have encountered a trans-person in their work, but with stigma decreasing, and more and more gender variant people 'coming out', that is unlikely to remain the case. This book really is very comprehensive, and the section on families is particularly welcome. It may well be a relative or spouse of the transgender person who presents for therapy, and this book gives great insight into some of the issues that may arise for significant others.

Ideas of what is normal when it comes to gender and its outward expression are so embedded within our society that it is all too easy to overlook the assumptions we may at times be making. Arlene Istar Lev has written a book that is challenging, informing and, for me, inspiring in its determination to carve out a space in the world of counselling and psychotherapy for gender variant people, a space in which we can begin to be

understood on our own terms rather than attempting to shoehorn ourselves into one of the boxes marked 'normal'.

Notes on contributor

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