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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...COMPREHENSIVE AND HIGHLY INFORMATIVE ...I found the book excellent and read it in one go. It is full of information and should be very useful to psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, forensic medicine experts, legal and judicial personnel and students of sexology. I would tend to think that even a layman would enjoy the book very much, since the book is written in a very simple style and the use of technical language is minimal. Fully recommended...

Exhibitionism (Series: Ideas in Psychoanalysis; series editor - Ivan Ward) by Brett Kahr. Softcover, 4" x 6.5".
Icon Books Ltd, The Old Dairy, Brook Road, Thriplow, Cambridge SG8 7RG. Great Britain. . . Web: http://www.iconbooks.co.uk. Email: info@iconbooks.co.uk. Co-published in the USA by Totem Books. Publication Date: October 2001. 80 pages, ISBN-10: 1840462752. ISBN-13: 978-1840462753. Price USA $7.95, UK £ 3.99, Canada $6.95.

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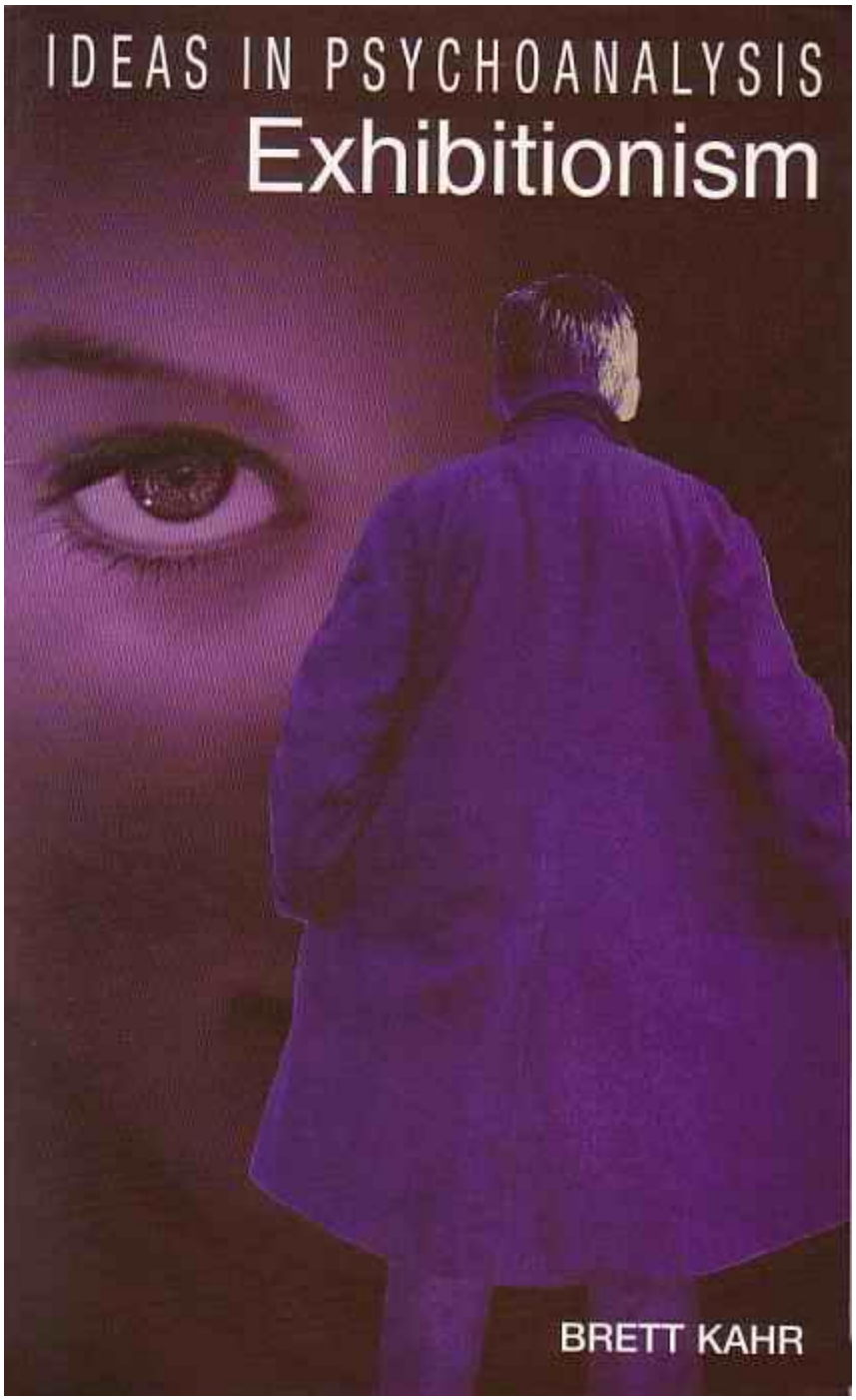

Exhibitionism is a paraphilia in which the sufferer attempts to show his genitalia to unsuspecting strangers. While the onlookers are stunned to silence, the sufferer masturbates to his joy. The paraphilia typically involves men exposing themselves to women. According to most surveys, it is the most common of the paraphilias and the behavior which is most frequently seen by clinicians. (some surveys however show obscene telephone calls to be the most common paraphilia). Known in slang as "flashers", exhibitionists are a heterogeneous group closely matching the general population in intelligence, education and vocations. The most common image of an exhibitionist in popular perception is that of a middle aged man in a dirty raincoat "flashing." Typically, however, exhibitionists are rather different; they are mostly post pubescent males up to the age of 40 who obtain high levels of sexual gratification and excitement from exposing their genitals to females, usually strangers, and who may masturbate at the same time.

Literature on paraphilias is mostly available in scholarly journals. A few journals, where one could find information on paraphilias are "Archives of Sexual behavior", "Journal of Sex Research", "Culture, Health and Sexuality" and so on. Some books are also available, but they are not very abundant. Still rare are scholarly books devoted to one complete paraphilia specifically.

That is why, when I saw this sweet little book on exhibitionism, I was quite excited. It is a small pocket size book, comprising of 80 pages, but is packed with information from cover to cover. The information is backed up by as many as 122 notes and references.

View this book on Amazon

In this book, you will get to read the nugget on one of the earliest cases of exhibitionism. It occurred in England in 1663, and involved a celebrity. Sir Charles Sedley (1639 - 1701), English wit and dramatist, and an "intimate of King Charles II" engaged in a drinking spree at "The Cock," a local tavern. He and two companions became drunk, stripped off their clothes, climbed a balcony overlooking Covent Garden and hurled both profanities and bottles filled with an "offensive liquor," - that is, urine - at the public below. A minor riot ensued, ultimately resulting in the arrest and prosecution of Sedley. He was fined 2000 mark, committed without bail for a week, and bound to his good behavior for a year, on his confession of information against him, for showing himself naked on a balcony, and throwing down bottles containing urine. However, as Rooth explains, this incident should more properly be regarded as an example of aristocratic bravado than of exhibitionism in the medical sense.

...In this book, the author explores the psychology and psychopathology of exhibitionism, both in its clinical and cultural manifestations. Kahr describes the personality profile of the traditional male genital exhibitionist, then explores the contributions of psychoanalysis to the understanding and treatment of exhibitionism as a clinical phenomenon, surveying Freudian and post-Freudian writings on its causes as rooted in early childhood...

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The book includes a survey of the history of exhibitionism, as well as an analysis of female exhibitionism, and concludes by looking at the sublimation of exhibitionism in contemporary culture - for example, in the phenomenon of 'reality TV'. It discusses the differences between healthy exhibitionism and its more pathological manifestations, and looks also at 'inhibitionism', the dangerous counterpart wherein people fearfully inhibit their own creativity.

The book is written by Brett Kahr, who is a senior lecturer in Psychotherapy, and Winnicott Clinic Senior Research Fellow, at Regent's College in London. He is also the author of D.W. Winnicott: A Biographical Portrait, which won the Gradiva Award for Biography, and works extensively as a consultant to many television and film companies.

I found the book excellent and read it in one go. It is full of information and should be very useful to psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, forensic medicine experts, legal and judicial personnel and students of sexology. I would tend to think that even a layman would enjoy the book

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Excerpts from the book:

Paraphilas are understood only very sketchily, and the book under review does an extremely good job by giving a detailed and uptodate information on one of them - exhibitionism. So informative is this book, that the editors at the journal office thought, a mere review may not be able to convey to the reader how useful this book could be to them. So it was unanimously decided to run some select excerpts from this book.

Author Brett Kahr describes his unique concept of psychological inhibitionism very lucidly. Here is what he has to say on this concept as well as its cousin psychic anaemia on pages 62-65

Exhibitionism forms a very substantial part of adolescent subculture as well, evidenced by the penchant for 'streaking', and 'mooning' (displaying one's buttocks through a car window, for example), which one encounters frequently as part of football hooliganism. Anyone walking through London's West End on a Friday night or Saturday night would have to be visually impaired not to notice the profusion of drunken men urinating against the sides of buildings.

Our relatives in the animal kingdom display themselves with great regularity, as we know from observational studies of baboons, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans. The male peacock exhibits himself most of all, with his resplendently phallic tail, designed to attract the female of the species. As a number of psychiatric authors have suggested, exhibitionism may even form a part of our 'hard-wiring'.

And yet, as we have seen, this natural tendency to display can often become perverted, and reach offensive, criminal proportions. Fortunately, more psychoanalytical theoreticians and clinicians have begun to derive an increasingly better understanding of the causes and consequences of clinical exhibitionism and, hence, have begun to develop more sophisticated ways of treating the exhibitionist in a psychotherapeutic situation.

Because of the dangers associated with exhibition¬ism in its criminal and clinical form, many of us have become utterly phobic about the potential rewards of healthier, more sublimated versions of exhibitionism. Many people, including seasoned mental health professionals, will suffer from what I have come to regard as psychological inhibitionism, a fearful reaction to exhibitionism, wherein the person in question becomes very inhibited indeed, maintaining a very low profile, not disturbing the status quo and never achieving one's healthy goals and desires. The psychological inhibitionist suffers because he or she will lead only half a life, so frightened of what colleagues and friends and family members might think. As a result of these terrors, the inhibitionist will hide his or her light under a bushel, in perpetuity, living in a claustrophobic state.

Dr Martin Dysart, the protagonist from Peter Shaffer's classic play Equus, might be regarded as a prototypical psychological inhibitionist. First performed in 1973, Equus, of course, concerns the plight of a highly troubled young boy, Alan Strang, who, in a fit of rage, blinds six horses. His 'normal' psychiatrist, Dr Dysart, would never engage in such a grotesque act of psychopathology; and yet, Dr Dysart suffers, tremendously so, precisely because he cannot unleash his passions at all, and he comes to envy the energy and vitality - however misdirected - of his disturbed young patient. As I suggested in a lecture some years ago, Dysart suffers from what I have come to call psychic anaemia, a cousin to psychological inhibitionism, a situation whereby one permits oneself

to become drained of sufficient passion and life-blood, so much so that one becomes almost pathologically 'normal'. Certainly, any attempt at exhibitionist display, however healthy, or sublimated, or creative, will be frowned upon by the pathologically normal psychological inhibitionist. To be frank, this seems a very great shame indeed.

Psychological inhibitionism exists hand in hand with attacks on creativity. The noted Viennese émigré psychoanalyst Dr Heinz Kohut remarked upon the danger of not honouring one's creative exhibitionistic tendencies. Kohut theorised that 'too strict a rein on an artist's exhibitionism will tend to interfere with his productivity'. Similarly, the Parisian psychoanalyst Dr Joyce McDougall has provided us with a beautiful case involving just such a difficulty with artistic expression. McDougall worked with a female patient called 'Cristina', a sculptress, who suffered from terrific fear of exhibiting her sculptures in public. She believed, quite irrationally, that if she did so, her mother would die. McDougall helped 'Cristina' to remember that at the age of five years, her parents went away for one week, leaving her in the care of a maid. Anxious at the separation from her parents, 'Cristina' defecated and kept her faeces in a cardboard box, for which she received a severe scolding from the maid. McDougall speculated that the faecal stools became the patient's first sculptures and that, in her young mind, they became associated with great shame, which became transferred onto all other forms of display. Fortunately, after a successful psychoanalytical treatment, 'Cristina' managed to work through her anxieties about exhibiting her artistic products, and she eventually proceeded to sculpt some very large and highly acclaimed pieces.

Historically, we have castigated the psychological exhibitionist. Anyone who has achieved any notoriety or celebrity, in whatever walk of life, often becomes the object of tremendous derision from those who, perhaps, would prefer to be in the limelight themselves. It seems to me that we have become excessively narrow-minded in our thinking to imagine that the art of being seen, being observed, being noticed, being appreciated and so forth, should be confined to the celebrity or the exhibitionist.

There are a toal of 80 information packed pages in the book like the ones excerpted above. There is a very comprehensive glossary at the end. The book is full of practical information related to the exhibitionism. We are sure our readers would enjoy the book as much as we at the journal office did.

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