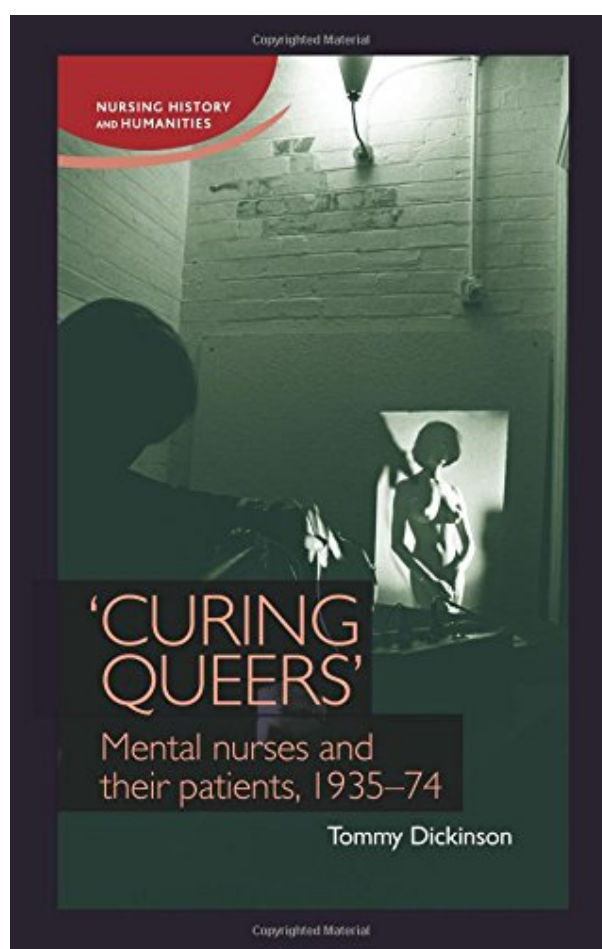
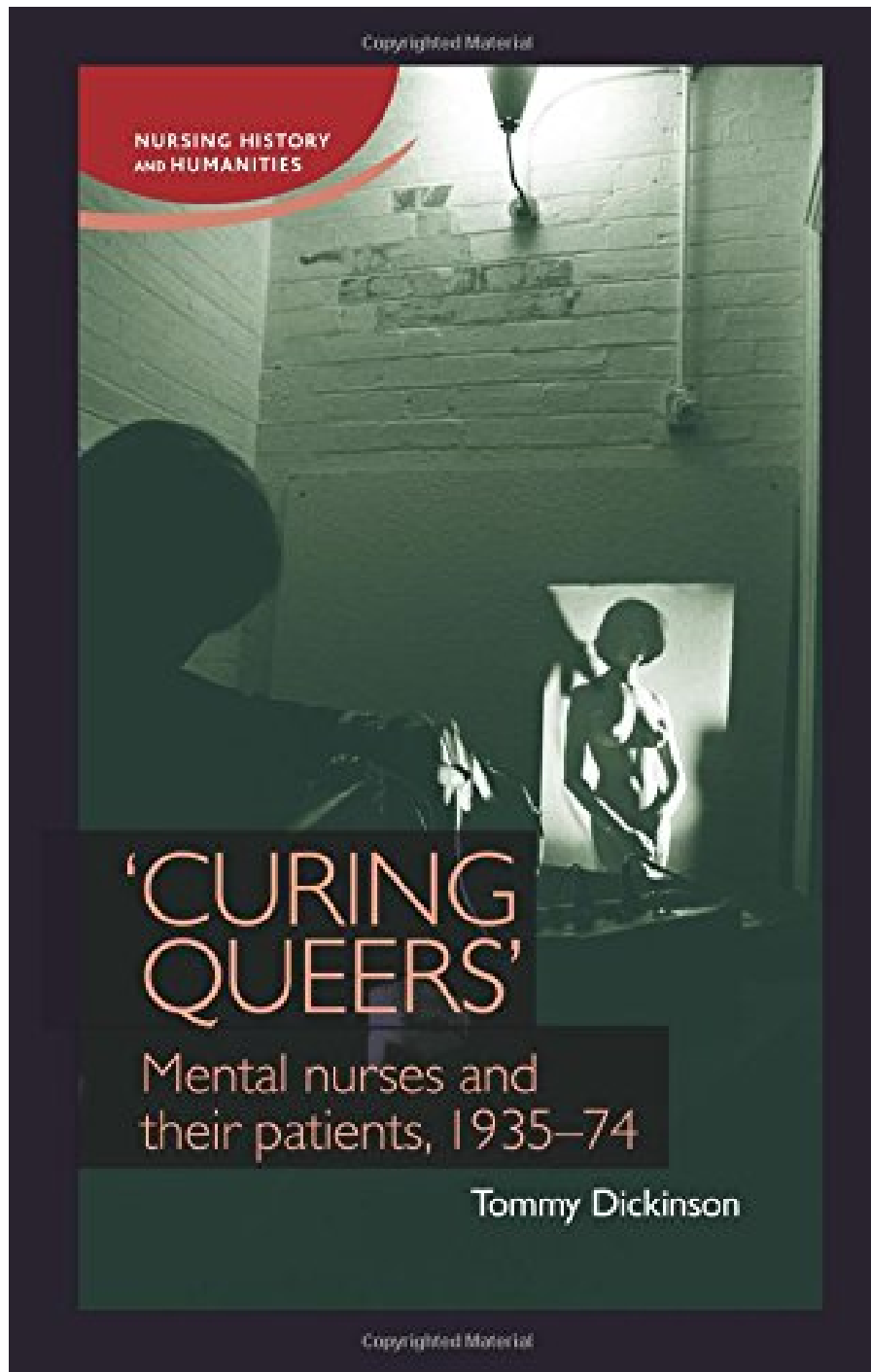


**'CURING QUEERS': MENTAL NURSES AND
THEIR PATIENTS, 1935-74 (NURSING
HISTORY AND HUMANITIES MUP) BY
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Review

'Drawing on a vast range of scholarly literature, this book is a timely and cautionary account of how, in the recent past, homosexuality came to be seen as a psychiatric illness. The book explores with sensitivity and even-handedness the measures taken to 'treat' it. Despite lack of both understanding and knowledge, doctors and nurses enthusiastically deployed untested theories to rid homosexuals of their 'symptoms' and to alter their identity and sexual orientation. While some mental health personnel were genuinely attempting to relieve people from what they saw as the misery of their lives, others doubtless saw the management of homosexuality as an opportunity to promote psychiatry and advance their careers. The book is structured around two dominant themes, firstly that health services frequently come under political pressure to deliver more than they are capable of, and secondly that mental health personnel have frequently overstated their capabilities. Science, evidence and policy are necessary foundations upon which to build health services, but all of these must beware that they are not biased by prevailing mores if they are to be confident of doing no harm. What is deemed unacceptable behaviour may well be dependent on the social context in which it is displayed. This challenging and engaging book will inform and, on occasion, astonish those with an interest in mental health problems and service delivery. Tommy Dickinson has presented a salutary warning to maturing professions that they should learn from and analyse the influences that shaped the intentions and interventions of their predecessors. This book is a tour de force and should be read by everyone with an interest in mental health care and by all who recognise their democratic responsibility to ensure that those in need are assisted and neither deceived nor abused.' Dr. Peter Nolan, Professor of Mental Health Nursing (Emeritus) 'This engaging text provides a historical overview of the sociocultural and legal frameworks that informed the classification and treatment of queer people up to 1974. The book provides a beautifully balanced argument to make visible the brutal "treatments" and care practices people were subjected to in the name of biomedicine and psychiatry. The heterosexual norms that underpinned the systems of diagnosis and classification are evident in the life narratives of those who accessed treatment, some against their will following referral via court orders. The text gives voice to the courage of queer people and practitioners to resist these norms. This form of resistance that coincided with the gay liberation movement and other historic

events, were instrumental in the de-medicalisation of sexuality, where life became viable for those who differ from the norm. The book succeeds in giving an account of the advance towards gender and sexual plurality.'
Dr Laetitia Zeeman, Senior Lecturer in Mental Health, University of Brighton

From the Inside Flap

Patient receiving electrical aversion therapy at Nerthern Hospital, UK. Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Times Newspapers Ltd/NewsSyndication.com

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Drawing on a rich array of source materials including previously unseen, fascinating (and often quite moving) oral histories, archival and news media sources, 'Curing queers' examines the plight of men who were institutionalised in British mental hospitals to receive 'treatment' for homosexuality and transvestism, and the perceptions and actions of the men and women who nursed them. It examines why the majority of the nurses followed orders in administering the treatment in spite of the zero success-rate in 'straightening out' queer men but also why a small number surreptitiously defied their superiors by engaging in fascinating subversive behaviours. 'Curing queers' makes a significant and substantial contribution to the history of nursing and the history of sexuality, bringing together two sub-disciplines that combine only infrequently. It will be of interest to general readers as well as scholars and students in nursing, history, gender studies, and health care ethics and law.

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Patient receiving electrical aversion therapy at Nerthern Hospital, UK. Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Times Newspapers Ltd/NewsSyndication.com

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Tommy Dickinson is Lecturer in Nursing at the University of Manchester

Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

'A powerful and well-researched book that stimulates thought

By Darren Luke Mawdsley

'A powerful and well-researched book that stimulates thought.'

Don't miss it! - what a gifted historian. It explores with sensitivity and even-handedness how queer men, in the not too distant past came under the gaze of psychiatry. While we can look back on these barbaric "gay cures" in shock; Dickinson's ability to write this history with incisive perception reveals how the nurses who administered these treatments were ordinary nurses who were compelled to act as they did by some influential factors. But also, fascinatingly, why a small number engaged in some captivating subversive behaviours to avoid administering them. The book presents an important area of nurse ethics and socialisation by analysing how nurses make decisions about what is professionally right and wrong in a context of ambiguity, frustration and conflict. I enjoyed it so much - does anybody know if he has written anything else? I saw him being interviewed on BBC morning TV recently, but there was no mention of any other works.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Phenomenal book with a story that must be told

By Ken White

This book is not only interesting and well-written, it is scholarly but without being stuffy or pedantic. Tommy Dickinson is a rising nurse historian. He not only captures the essence of what it was like to be a patient and a nurse during the age of oppression and suppression of homosexuality, he describes through the voices of his interviewees the injustice to humanity and the way that they have mastered their identities. I enjoyed every chapter and the appendix. Kudos to Professor Dickinson for his courage and interest in the voices of this sector of society. It was touching to read the appendix and to learn that many of the interviewees died shortly after their interviews. Thank you for telling their stories!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Bring It Alive

By John Crampton

Tommy is an exceptionally brave doctor who has brought to light what so many other books have failed to do. I agree whole heartedly with the previous reviews and have been in touch with him over the last couple of months. As a gay journalist myself I'm doing my very best to work with Manchester University Press to bring the book alive on screen.

Heritage World Media has been my focus for many years covering a wide range of topics from Eton College to the birth of the Foreign Correspondents Club in Hong Kong.

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