

# Refreshing and clear-sighted

**T**HIS book presents a well-written and detailed study of the effects of the employment status of mothers on the lives of their children, their partners and (last but not least) on their own lives. It is as relevant to British society today as it is to the American society on which it is based. In both cases the number of mothers in the workforce is rising. There is conflicting evidence concerning this trend and the effects that it will have.

Hoffman and Youngblade begin with a clear and concise literature review. They draw from this three key areas – the part played by the father, the mother's well-being, and parents' child-rearing styles – that need to be researched to understand more fully how the mother's employment status might affect her children. The narrative guides the reader through a complex study in which data on 369 families with elementary school children were collected from parents, teachers, school records, peers and the children themselves. Different aspects of the research questions are tackled in separate chapters. Quantitative analysis is used to draw out the significance of the data for the particular question being asked and its relevance to the overall topic.

Qualitative data is used to give depth to the study and to illustrate the diversity of

## *Mothers at Work: Effects on Children's Well-being*

LOIS W. HOFFMAN AND LISE M. YOUNGBLADE

CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 1999;

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REVIEWED BY Gillian Marks



### Psychologically home alone?

the family situations sampled. The interviews with the children, in which they provide an account of their after-school day, give a very personal glimpse into their lives. As such, they act as a reminder of the vulnerability of the subject matter of this study. Amongst other things their accounts illustrate that while some children of working parents are 'home alone' for periods of the day, others return to houses where, despite the presence of adults, they are just as psychologically alone as their counterparts who return to empty houses.

This fact reminds the reader not to make well-worn assumptions about these people – something Hoffman and Youngblade refuse to let the reader do.

This is a refreshing look at maternal employment because it does not start from the assumption that it is a social problem. It deals with the subject matter in an empathic yet clear-sighted manner. The authors manage to move the research question forward by focusing on the factors that may mediate the link between the mother's employment status and child outcomes. It is a book that is relevant to all mothers (whether in the workforce or not), to fathers, to people who think they might one day have children, and to those who work with or employ parents. It would also be useful as a third-year undergraduate or postgraduate text for courses in psychology, sociology and women's studies.

■ Dr Gillian Marks is a research associate at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

## Not just for some

**W**HY feminism? This question is at the heart of Lynne Segal's new book, which aims 'to make sense of the *mélange* of contemporary feminism' (p.1), and ascertain its relevance for the new millennium. It is not set up as a psychology book, and she does not specifically address the question 'Why feminism?' to psychology. This is not to say there is nothing of interest to psychologists. Indeed, she draws extensively on psychological work concerning, for example, gender and gender difference, identity, and child sexual abuse and the 'recovered memory' debates; and she devotes a chapter to evolutionary psychology and genetics.

Mostly, Segal focuses on feminism in general. She identifies that feminism has significantly improved women's place in society, and that girls today have options far outweighing any that former

### Why Feminism?

#### *Gender, Psychology, Power.*

LYNNE SEGAL

CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS; 1999;

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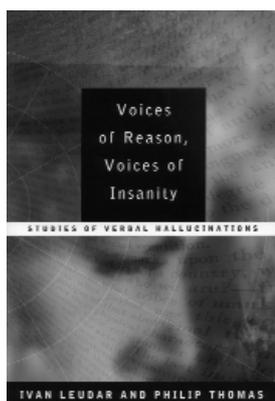
REVIEWED BY Virginia Braun

generations had. However, the material situation of many women has not necessarily improved – in some instances it has actually worsened. Further, concurrent with girls' achievements is increasing anxiety around boys' achievements and the so-called 'crisis' in masculinity. As Segal points out, such interpretations of what feminism has 'done' to boys and men rely on a notion of gender 'war', and on the assumption that men should be the dominant sex.

Segal identifies herself as a socialist feminist, and her analysis of the current situation of feminism, of women, and of men develops from this political position. While I occasionally disagreed with her political interpretations, she writes in an engaging and accessible manner, and I enjoyed reading this book.

So, why feminism? Because, as Segal concludes, feminism's 'most radical goal, both personal and collective, has yet to be realised: a world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women', in what she calls 'a socialist feminist vision, that would be a far better world for boys and men, as well' (p.232).

■ Virginia Braun is a PhD student in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University.



# Dissecting the disembodied voice

*Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity: Studies of Verbal Hallucinations*

IVAN LEUDAR AND PHILIP THOMAS

LONDON: ROUTLEDGE; 2000;

Hb £45.00 (ISBN 0 415 14786 7); Pb £15.99 (ISBN 0 415 14787 5)

REVIEWED BY John L. Smith

If you are tired of wading through turgid tomes and texts, whether academic, student or practitioner, try this book. Its topic is interesting, the approach is subtle without being too esoteric, and its voice will haunt you in your quieter moments (if that's not being too reflexive).

The authors bring to their manuscript a fascinating cocktail of strengths: discursive and rhetorical psychology, with a liberal sprinkling of conversation analysis (that's Leudar); clinical and counselling experience, shot through with a healthy distrust of conventional psychiatry (that's Thomas).

You might think that the DSM-IV was the obvious place to start but don't worry, there's nothing obvious about their strategy. They start with Socrates, who was spoken to by a divine voice. Their perverse intent is to show you that the concept of auditory hallucination was non-existent a couple of thousand years ago. Before reaching the twentieth century you will be taken through conversations with the gods in the Iliad, the supernatural world of Daniel Paul Schreber and Pierre Janet's analysis of Marcelle's hallucinations. It's best not to rush through the tantalising chapter covering the pragmatists' stance on self (mainly James and Mead): there's some real depth here and plenty of links to the contemporary academic scene. They go on to give modern psychiatry short shrift, and I have to say I was rooting for them at that point.

They criticise the way the British broadsheet press, leaning heavily on scantily constructed diagnoses of schizophrenia, asserts a causal link between the hearing of voices and the perpetration of violent crimes. I found this chapter to be worthy but less exciting to read than a later chapter where they discuss plenty of examples (presented as transcribed interviews) of people who do hear voices. This enables the reader to catch a glimpse of what such personal worlds must be like. Although some were

mundane ('push that door open with your left hand'), some were frighteningly chilling ('put a knife through your stomach').

Some very interesting and complex issues are dealt with in this book. These relate to the definition of insanity, scientific method, psychiatric diagnosis and cultural relativism. Given the authors' discursive

background, it goes without saying that their discussion of these matters is sometimes shrouded in an enticing opacity. Fine by me. I have no hesitation in recommending this book to you.

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## Too black and white

*Psychology Beyond Western Perspectives*

KWAME OWUSU-BEMPAH AND DENNIS HOWITT

LEICESTER: BPS BOOKS; 2000;

Pb £16.95; (ISBN 1 85433 328 3)

REVIEWED BY Gustav Jahoda

NOTWITHSTANDING its title, this book is really a reprise of the authors' dominant theme, the racism of psychology. The chief focus is on how overt or subtle race prejudice and cultural differences affect relationships between professionals and their 'Black' clients. The authors draw on a wide range of literature, and their discussions are often insightful, as when they write about mixed-race children or the tendency to make eurocentric assumptions.

The influence of culture on values, concepts of self, and developmental norms is described, and the authors' claim that 'psychology needs to regard culture... as the basic unit of psychological understanding' would be endorsed by the cross-cultural fraternity. But somewhat disappointingly, the book ends with recommendations which boil down to merely having an anti-racist policy.

The promise implicit in the title's phrase 'beyond Western perspectives' is not really fulfilled. The introduction bemoans the neglect of 'other world' psychologies, such as African, Arabic, Asian

and Native American', but the reader is told nothing about any of them. Instead, the authors lambast the 'racist' sins of Western psychology; and there is certainly a great deal to criticise. What is not reasonable is to set up spurious dichotomies such that everything Western is bad and racist, and everything else good. For instance, one gets told about African communal harmony and spirituality, yet this is hardly the whole story! Or again, is it fair to assert that Western psychology is largely concerned with 'self-centredness and private greed'?

Inverted prejudice is still prejudice, and it is regrettable that this mars what is otherwise an informative and sympathetic account of an important problem area. The book is likely to be most helpful for practitioners. They should take many of its lessons to heart, but view others with a pinch of salt.

■ Gustav Jahoda is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde.

