

BOOK REVIEWS

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Lack of moral fibre?

IN the last two decades there has been a growing acceptance of 'medically unexplained symptoms', the editors of this book write. This has been accompanied by a growth to record levels in uptake of incapacity benefits (three times as many cases in the UK in 2002 as in the 1970s) despite improvements in objective measures of health.

Key gatekeepers to these benefits are doctors, psychologists, and so on, by nature 'trusting'. Malingering is a serious accusation. There is often a fine line between anxious/hypochondriacal patients, unintentionally 'making the most' of symptoms, and malingerers who intentionally do so.

Malingering and Illness Deception

PETER W. HALLIGAN, CHRISTOPHER BASS & DAVID A OAKLEY (EDS)
OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2003; Pb £35.00 (ISBN 0 19 851554 5)

REVIEWED BY **Bill McKinlay**

Is this scramble for benefits a lack of moral fibre? Maybe so, but that fails to get to grips with the problem. When the benefits/litigation systems offer rewards for seeming ill or disabled, and essentially no penalty for being caught out, increasing numbers may seek to obtain them. The social acceptability of doing so is also discussed: the bizarre bonuses and pay-offs which self-serving 'elites' award each other may encourage ordinary mortals to feel they've 'paid in' and are 'owed'.

Changing access to benefits at a policy level or changing the climate of opinion can make a difference. New advice to health professionals on back pain ('stay active' not 'bed rest') seems to have had an impact: in November 2002 the Department of Work and Pensions reported a 42 per cent decrease in new social security benefit awards for back pain since the mid-1990s, partly due to this advice.

Health professionals must become more aware of the issues, and there is useful



advice to them in this book. However, that is not enough, and policy changes are needed too – 'changing the payoff matrix' – despite the 'disabled rights' groups who routinely protest against any closer scrutiny of access to benefits. Organisations should ask questions like 'Is it customary to get ill-health awards after a set number of years?' Policy changes are needed too. For example, in Australia pensionable early retirement cases fell when follow-up checks were introduced.

It is almost customary to end a review of a multi-author edited volume like this with a comment about it being good in parts. In fact, on a potentially controversial topic like this, it is a strength that a whole array of leading professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, lawyers, etc.) has contributed – there is a wealth of thought-provoking information here, and it cannot be dismissed as any one individual's 'bee in the bonnet'. It deserves wide attention, not only from health professionals, but also policy makers.

■ *Dr Bill McKinlay is with Case Management Services, Edinburgh.*

The best thing about social psychology is...

An Introduction to Critical Social Psychology

ALEXA HEPBURN
LONDON: SAGE; 2003; Pb £18.99
(ISBN 0 761 96210 7)

REVIEWED BY **Neil Austin**

ALEXA Hepburn has produced a very accessible introduction to the territory and approaches of critical social psychology. The first of two sections introduces four main traditions studying relationships between mind and society (social cognition, Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist schools), with critical exploration of themes and conflicts key to understanding development of each. The latter section explores how these different levels of commentary interface, examining ways critical social psychology can highlight (or resolve) inconsistencies between perspectives.

Hepburn's lively and engaging text draws on media accounts of contemporary social issues (such as tabloid vilification of paedophiles) and on classic studies in social psychology, illustrating theory in a brisk exploratory dialogue with the reader. Helpful dialogue boxes introduce unfamiliar readers to prominent theorists (using

their own words, usually). Others deal with issues and asides, clarifying and contextualising the topic. 'Critical Dilemma' boxes alert readers to essential conflicts, offering guidance to their own exploration of these. Before the well-structured reading list at the end of each section (divided into four levels, from 'If you only read one thing, read:...', to 'Difficult but worth it:...') is a fantastically concise, if slightly irreverent, summary of the chapter, consisting of only the take-home messages: 'The best thing about... [e.g. psychoanalysis]' and 'The worst thing about...'. Discussion questions are uncharacteristically thought-provoking, while practical exercises also seemed better considered than one comes to expect from reading similar primers, suggesting a successful future as a core text in social psychology courses.

It would be unfair to criticise this book's brevity; what depth it lacks on any one topic is more than compensated for by its breadth and coherence, with clear guidance toward future reading.

■ *Neil Austin is in the Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Liverpool.*

Evidence-based practice and beyond

Teachers, Parents and Classroom Behaviour: A Psychosocial Approach

ANDY MILLER

MAIDENHEAD: OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS/MCGRAW-HILL EDUCATION; 2003; Pb £17.99 (ISBN 0 335 21156 9)

REVIEWED BY **Norah Frederickson**

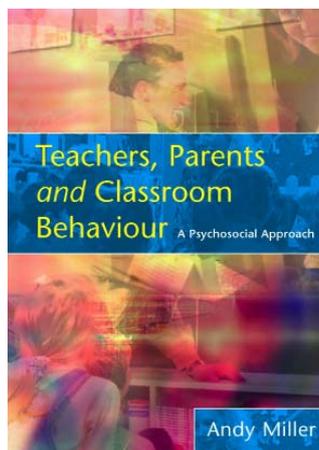
THIS elegantly crafted book contains thought-provoking implications for all branches of applied psychology, as well as for educationists and policy makers. Starting from the author's research programme on the successful application of behavioural interventions in schools, a coherent framework is presented that can be used to represent, on the one hand, the effects of contextual and systemic factors and, on the other hand, individual cognitions and emotions.

Ways in which each set of factors can operate are discussed in relation to the main groups of protagonists involved: teachers, parents and pupils. For each group and each set of factors a summary of research evidence is presented that is both scholarly and accessible. Concepts are clearly explained and liberally illustrated with examples from practice. While concise, these summaries of 'what can work' are remarkably comprehensive. It was only in the area of parent training that an omission worth mentioning was apparent in respect of the well-evaluated and generally very effective work conducted over the last 10 years.

With an increasing focus in education on evidence-based practice, this book will be a valuable resource for practising and trainee teachers and educational psychologists. However, the real contribution of this book is that it presents a sophisticated view of

evidence-based practice that takes account of broader issues in three important ways.

There is, first of all, its strong theoretical focus. To use knowledge about 'what works' effectively it is necessary to



have an understanding of 'why it works', so that appropriate judgements or adaptations can be made in individual cases.

Secondly, research evidence and graphic illustrations from practice are used to demonstrate the importance of considering and working with formal and informal aspects of the culture within and across systems in enhancing the acceptability and implementation of evidence-based interventions.

Thirdly, there is a detailed exploration of the importance of understanding what those involved in a situation think and feel about it. In particular, consideration is given to possible effects of differences between parents, teachers and pupils in their perceptions of

problem behaviour in school, attributions of blame, and beliefs about how change can be accomplished.

These issues, whether construed in terms of improving intervention compliance or enhancing client-centredness, have relevance across different branches of and approaches to applied psychology practice.

It is to be hoped that this sophisticated view of the understanding and skills needed to effectively intervene with challenging behaviour in schools is not lost on educational policy makers. In describing the way in which educational psychologists can operate successfully across systemic boundaries, working with diverse individual perspectives and emotionally charged situations, this book might be seen by some as an advert for the 'value added' contribution of educational psychology. The author argues against such a partisan interpretation and cites relevant work by skilled behavioural consultants from other professional groups. In effect, this book maps out the competencies required by effective behavioural consultants and so offers an extremely timely contribution to current developments in education.

■ *Dr Norah Frederickson is Director of the Educational Psychology Group in the Department of Psychology, University College London.*

EXPLORING THE CLINICAL TURF

Handbook of Research Methods in Clinical Psychology

MICHAEL C. ROBERTS &

STEPHEN S. ILARDI (Eds)

OXFORD: BLACKWELL; 2003;

Hb £75.00 (ISBN 0 631 22673 7)

REVIEWED BY **Sharon Dimech**

AT first I was quite overwhelmed by this thick book, but on skimming through it I noticed how well structured it was. As I looked even closer I could see that concepts were presented clearly, step-by-step, and using numerous examples.

The handbook is made up of three parts: a few general chapters about clinical psychology research; a number of somewhat detailed ones about research designs; and, the bulk of the book, several topics of research within clinical psychology.

Having articles written by different contributors means that the style of the book is not constant. For instance, in presenting research designs, while some authors focus on technical details, others give more space to describing research that was actually conducted.

The topics of research cover numerous areas, including children, adolescents, adults, and prevention and promotion. Usually the reader is guided through the design, implementation and analysis stages of the research, with helpful links to examples.

Although not exhaustive in the areas that are presented, this handbook certainly provides a solid base for those interested in research within clinical psychology.

■ *Sharon Dimech is with Sedqa, Foundation for Social Services, Malta.*

See you, talking to me

WOULDn'T it be great if you could tell exactly what somebody was thinking just by looking at their hand gestures? Well, Geoffrey Beattie, known widely as 'the *Big Brother* psychologist', claims to have found a way of doing precisely that. In this accessible though scholarly book he begins by critically reviewing the largely unsatisfactory literature on nonverbal communication (NVC). He then advances his theory that subtle bodily movements may betray unarticulated desires, thoughts and opinions, often at odds with what is actually said, using examples from the *Big Brother* footage, and other relevant material, as evidence.

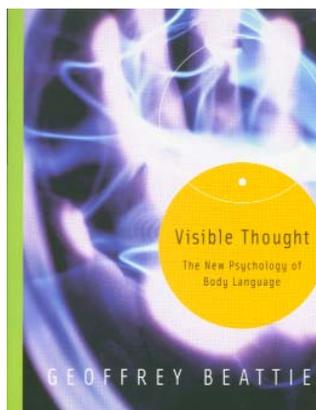
Beattie's main argument is that NVC and speech are not separate communication systems, as has been assumed

Visible Thought: The New Psychology of Body Language

Geoffrey Beattie

London: Routledge, 2003; Pb £9.95 (ISBN 0 415 30810 0)

Reviewed by David Giles



in the literature, but an integrated system for representing private thought.

While we may plan our speech carefully (up to a point), we are less conscious of what our hands are doing. Beattie reports

the findings of a series of laboratory experiments that demonstrate the close correspondence between speaking and gesturing... at least when people are trying to describe a series of actions in a cartoon. But what about the stuff we really want to understand? Emotions, attitudes, and so on.

Alas, in the 'real-world' examples Beattie uses as evidence, there seems to be little support for anything really juicy. Most of the body work in his examples is mere illustration: 'beats' of the hand to emphasise key words, for example, as delivered by Bill Clinton in his famous denial speech. A good discourse

analyst would be able to spot (and transcribe) these from the speech patterns alone. Some of the *Big Brother* material shows how self-presentation can appear to slip from conscious control, but we can do nothing more than *interpret* these hand gestures. Despite some obvious attempts by the author to court the wider market, we are still no closer to finding out what people 'really' think.

Philosophical objections aside, the book makes a good case for taking NVC seriously as part of a single communicative system, and for the use of confirmatory real-world data. But why not start with the real world, rather than the laboratory? A grounded theory of NVC, anyone?

■ *Dr David Giles is in the School of Health and Social Sciences, Coventry University.*

PERSONAL LIBERATION

BUDDHISM has a strong psychological content, which has made it particularly attractive to students and practitioners of psychology. Many books have been published on the psychology of Buddhism, including David Kalupahana's *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (SUNY Press, 1987). There have also been several key developments in the use of Buddhist practices in psychological therapy. An example is the recent impressive trial by Segal, Williams and Teasdale using mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for relapse prevention in depression.

The present work, by an author who is a Buddhist and a psychotherapist, makes a

Buddhist Psychology: Liberate Your Mind, Embrace Life

Caroline Brazier

London: Constable and Robinson, 2003; Pb £ 7.99 (ISBN 1 84119 733 5)

Reviewed by Padmal de Silva

contribution of a different kind. It explores the potential relevance of Buddhist notions and practices to everyday life. It is intended as a way of changing one's life, by letting go of the attachment to self – thus enhancing one's engagement with life and with

others. In other words, the aim is to promote a kind of personal liberation through Buddhism.

While the book gives a well-structured, detailed account of some aspects of Buddhist psychology, it is not an academic treatise on the

subject. Clearly the author did not intend to produce such a book. Nor does the book make a compelling case for the use of Buddhist strategies in conventional psychological therapy. Such an endeavour would require evidence of a different kind, or at least an emphasis on the need to investigate the efficacy of these strategies. On the other hand, as a broad guide to Buddhist psychology for the general reader looking for a more relaxed way of life, this book has much to offer.

■ *Padmal de Silva is Senior Clinical Tutor at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, University of London.*

