

Hope amongst horror

The Pulitzer-prize winning play *How I Learned to Drive* presents the disturbing story of a young girl's sexual relationship with her aunt's husband. Blurring the lines between abuser and victim, empathy and disgust, this production of the 1997 Paula Vogel play is compelling, at times humorous, and deeply troubling.

The intimate performance space at Southwark Playhouse is lined with corrugated iron and neon signs, a minimalist but powerful depiction of 1960s America, at its centre the car where teenager Li'l Bit is taught to drive by her Uncle Peck. The disjointed narrative, which skips backwards and forwards in time, captures the complexities of intra-familial abuse and perhaps the confusion felt by victims of such experiences. Uncle Peck, with his slicked-back hair and Southern drawl, is seen first as an abuser but simultaneously as an understanding and caring uncle who helps his niece escape their dysfunctional family by weekly outings in his car. This contrast forces the audience to confront a perhaps unbearable truth, that even the most seemingly kind and normal of people can hold deeply sinister desires.

Thanks to William Ellis's wonderful performance we feel both pity and disgust towards Peck at the same time. Fluctuating between humour and horror, this production left me moved and uneasy. All five performers were excellent throughout, forcing us to join them on a journey that would normally spark revulsion. Li'l Bit, the central character played by the astonishing Olivia Poulet, is a refreshingly strong and resilient character, played with gusto. She changes perceptions of victims. We see that victimhood is relative and can affect any number of people, no matter how strong they might be. The minimalist and stylised staging and Jack Sain's direction lend themselves perfectly to content that needs very little illustrating, with so much left unspoken.

This play is extremely clever for making us despise yet somehow feel empathy for the abuser, Uncle Peck. The narrative hints at the potential cause for his abusive behaviour while also presenting us with the plain facts – he has abused before, and he is doing the same to Li'l Bit. In its final scenes we finally come to fully understand the shocking extent of the abuse she has endured at the hands of her uncle.

As well as the narrative at its core, the play also explores gender roles in 1960s Maryland and the female experience of sex and relationships at the time – experiences that are perennially topical and relevant. This play can speak to any number of people: it forces us to challenge our perceptions, which is not always a comfortable experience.

Following the production was a discussion of the psychological themes found in the play, with presenter of Radio 4's *All in the Mind* Claudia Hammond speaking to clinical psychologist Lucy Maddox. Dr Maddox works with teenagers and young people who have experienced sexual abuse themselves. She said this 'powerful' play captured the complexities of family dynamics in families where abuse exists. 'The disjointed nature of the whole production reminds me of listening to traumatic narratives which often aren't straightforward and coherent... in fact it's hard to get a coherent picture of what's gone on because it's hard for people to piece together a clear storyline. It's rare that someone will tell you from beginning to end what's happened. That's why it's often so hard for people who've experienced sexual abuse to get their cases heard – the nature of what's happened to them means they present in a way which seems less coherent and can seem less believable.'

When asked about our shifting attitudes towards the character



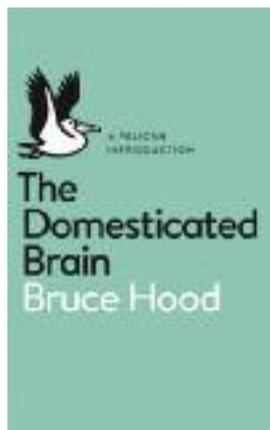
How I Learned to Drive
Southwark Playhouse

of Uncle Peck, Maddox said it was often an uncomfortable task to question just why a person has become an abuser, but that it was an essential question in tackling sexual abuse. She said: 'The play and the actors captured that sense of grooming really well... where someone's made to feel so special... she was getting listened to and getting away from her family who didn't understand her, but the consequences of that were devastating.'

Maddox also spoke about some of her own research into what happens to victims of sexual abuse who report an incident but are not believed. 'Most of my research has been with grown victims of sexual assault, and we've looked at how the psychological consequences of sexual assault can stop people from talking about what happens and how that affects the legal process. About two thirds of people who report a rape or sexual assault then drop out of the process through their own decision making. A lot of that's to do with the psychological consequences of what's happened to them as well as how they're reacted to.' She added: 'There's been a lot of work done on "Silencing" – if people talk about what's happened and aren't believed, the effects of that can be devastating and people don't talk about it for tens of years. The way we react to people reporting sexual assault or abuse is really important.'

Li'l Bit was a resilient and strong victim, and Dr Maddox felt 'they portrayed her sexiness really well... it's an uncomfortable part of it that she's a sexual being who is being sexualised and taken advantage of. But there's hope at the end of the play, it spoke to resilience. There's a large literature on resilience after sexual abuse. This play captured really well the fact that the effects of sexual abuse are severe and wide-ranging, but there's such a thing as resilience despite it. The research seems to suggest that even having one protective relationship is really important, one person you have strong attachment to and takes care of you and doesn't break your boundaries is incredibly important. So there's a bit of hope there.'

Reviewed by Ella Rhodes who is *The Psychologist's* staff journalist



Enjoyable and thought-provoking



The Domesticated Brain is a humorous, intelligently written and easy-to-follow book about the way in which the brain influences human behaviour. The book focuses a lot on the developmental side of psychology, which I enjoyed, but it also has a lot of evolutionary and neurological psychology too.

I learnt a lot from this book: it brings in a lot of history and it was interesting to see how psychological theory had changed over the years.

Being a psychology student, I am of course interested in the brain but with non-fiction reading there can sometimes be a point where you want to stop and read something more fun, this was not the case with *The Domesticated Brain*, I was kept intrigued and engaged the whole way through, wanting to learn more about the way our brain works. I particularly enjoyed the chapter titled 'Are we born bad?', which I found to be very insightful in the nature/nurture debate that is forever prominent in psychology.

Overall, I would highly recommend this book to both students and academics as it is definitely a read that will be enjoyable as well as thought-provoking.

| *Pelican*; 2014; Pb £7.99
Reviewed by Rebecca Randles who is a psychology student at Liverpool John Moores University



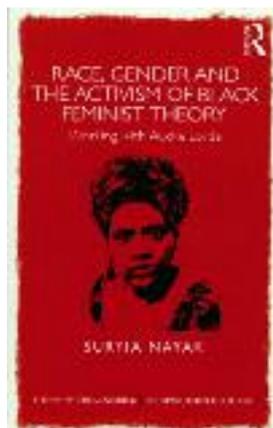
Surviving the intersectional experience

Race, Gender and the Activism of Black Feminist Theory: Working with Audre Lorde
 Surya Nayak

This book critical psychology's boundaries as a discipline, encouraging a thorough engagement with the activism of black feminist theory and calling into question its current absence. Nayak underlines the importance and interlocking nature of black feminist activism to black feminist theory, moving between the two to offer interventions in both theory and practice.

Through the work of Audre Lorde and other black feminist theorists Nayak offers critical psychology a new lens through which we can interrogate how living within a racist society creates racist 'psychic structures' which operate differently for black and white people; exploring the interconnection between 'ideology', 'embodiment' and our psychic lives. Through this theoretical lens, Nayak makes the case for black-women-only services and activist spaces.

Nayak also critiques psychological methods



that fail to utilise intersectionality and that consider an individual through one facet of their identity at a time. Lorde spoke of this fragmentary approach as 'destructive' and a 'terrible injustice' to her black, lesbian, feminist identity. Nayak champions an intersectionality that brings possible 'resistance to fixed, stable, totalized identity formations imposed by a racist, homophobic patriarchy'. Here Nayak reminds us that intersectionality is not just a 'theory' but a way in which one survives the 'intersectional experience'.

Nayak lays a strong foundation for a critical psychological engagement with the activism of black feminist theory for all of us committed to addressing the psychological effects of oppression and who seek to make social change.

| *Routledge*; 2015; Pb £24.99
Reviewed by Stephanie Davis who is an MPhil/PhD candidate at the University of Brighton



Very different times

You Never Get Out: Memories of Two Psychiatric Hospitals
 Robert Grainger

This is an odd little pathography, and, at 122 pages, little more than a pamphlet. Robert Grainger writes from two perspectives: that of a patient in the 1950s and of a chaplain in the 1980s.

The smaller part of the book recalls a period after National Service when he was incarcerated, not completely voluntarily, and has a number of echoes of later fictional works, not least *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Catch-22*. Whilst 60 years later these patchy recollections seem like history, the personalities depicted among both patients and staff are familiar: there are the same hints of paranoia, the questions of sanity versus behaviour and the others who were quite clearly 'mad'. Some pertinent musings are presented on the nature on mental illness, diagnosis and illness behaviour.

The latter part as a chaplain takes place in a very different time to then and to now, with a large number of chronic inpatients and before the move to care in the community. It becomes less a coherent story than a rambling soliloquy. In a conversational tone, it opines on stigma, religion, sex-roles

without forming conclusions as pity or as precise as in an article or essay.

| *Trafford Publishing*; 2013; Pb £8.43
Reviewed by Sally-Ann S. Price who is Neurosurgery Senior Registrar, Southmead, Bristol

contribute

Sample titles just in:
Hoax Springs Eternal: The Psychology of Cognitive Deception Peter Hancock
Speaking Our Minds Thom Scott-Phillips
Great Myths of Child Development Stephen Hupp & Jeremy Jewell

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Powerful, crazy, cruel

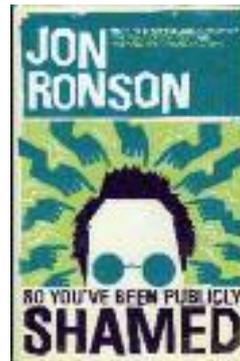
So You've Been Publicly Shamed
Jon Ronson

Throughout his career as a journalist and author, Jon Ronson has excelled in tales of everyday craziness. The ideas themselves are often fairly mundane: delving into conspiracy theories, investigating whether psychopaths walk among us, exploring what's it like being in an oddball band. *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* is, hands down, his most cutting-edge idea for a book yet. Referring mostly to social media, he writes: 'A great renaissance of public shaming is sweeping our land. Justice has been democratized. The silent majority are getting a voice. But what are we doing with our voice? We are mercilessly finding people's faults. We are defining the boundaries of normality by ruining the lives of those outside it. We are using shame as a form of social control.' I have seen this story play out. Ronson has my attention.

That's partly because it's a story that involves psychology, psychologists, and even the British Psychological Society. In a skilful hat-trick of opening chapters, Ronson

considers the fall from grace of science writer Jonah Lehrer, exposed as a plagiarist and inventor of Bob Dylan quotes. 'Probably the worst infraction', Ronson notes, 'was that Jonah had taken some paragraphs from a blog written by Christian Jarrett of the British Psychological Society and passed them off as his own.' Well, as Martha Graham used to say, 'If you're going to steal, steal from the best'. For the record, Lehrer personally apologised to Jarrett (editor of our Research Digest), and the apology was accepted.

Ronson weaves the story beautifully, cutting between Lehrer's reaction to his 'brutal' shaming, and the realisation of the journalist who exposed him that he was at 'the head of a pitchfork mob.' Michael Moynihan tells Ronson: 'And it's, "What are these people fucking doing here? Why are they acting like heathens? I don't want to be



associated with this at all. I want to get out of here."...I'm watching people stabbing and stabbing and stabbing Jonah, and I'm, "HE'S DEAD."

I am convinced that Ronson is spot on when he says that social media is 'a stage for constant artificial high dramas. Every day a new person emerges as a magnificent hero or a sickening villain.' We define the boundaries of normality 'by tearing apart the people outside of it'. And the idea that this is an exciting new democracy is illusory: as documentary maker Adam Curtis tells his friend Ronson, feedback loops are turning social media into 'a giant echo chamber where what we believe is constantly reinforced by people who believe the same thing'.

There's a lot of fascinating psychology in here: confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, group influence, the misogyny of shaming, how the shamers themselves tend to come from a place of shame, and the way public shaming 'destroys souls,



A novel and intimate insight

The Secret Life of 4 Year Olds
Channel 4

This one-off programme followed 10 four-year-olds brought together in a nursery specially rigged with cameras. The conversations, triumphs, trials and tribulations that ensued were shown as they first met and as they reconvened six months later. Experts Dr Sam Wass (MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, Cambridge) and Dr Paul Howard-Jones (University of Bristol) were on-hand to observe and analyse behaviour (see their experiences making the show below).

Unique to this show was its ability to track children testing and developing social interactions that we ritualise and take for granted as adults. In scenes from their first meeting, the children's immediate separation into gendered groups and primate-like play behaviour is clear. Boys range in boisterousness as they negotiate pecking order, whilst girls play 'Mums and Dads'. Strong personalities seem to

determine in-groups, with sharers generating wider friendship groups than hoarders. 'Sharing is caring', don't you know! As they reconvene six months later, big changes are clear in the children's language skills and social interaction. Children previously aloof seem much more prepared to rekindle past relationships. The limits of friendship are also tested, with a so-called 'love triangle' of girls turning to isolation for one as the others seek to strengthen their friendship. We are hereby reminded how cruel children can be in managing their relationships! Insight into the children's home life and background is given by parents, with a wide range of values and ethnicities included.

This was definitely an entertaining watch. It evidently captured public attention, given the number of quotes and screen-grabs online the next day. However, focus tended to be on the

comedy of conversation rather than the developmental insight drawn from this unique observation. Although experts were on board to analyse proceedings, discussion of the psychological processes and wider literature were very limited. Some environmental manipulations are set, such as a den-building challenge and an exposed chocolate cake. However, the rationale for these is not really described. Also, unlike other school-based fly-on-the-wall documentaries such as *Educating Yorkshire*, cameras were not fixed to walls or structures. Instead, handheld cameras were used and infrequently seen in-shot. These seemed to grab the children's attention at times and seem very likely to interfere with situational dynamics. However, what this



programme has contributed well is a novel and intimate conversational insight at this rapidly developing age. There is so much more that could be shown: famous developmental studies could be replicated, theories discussed... perhaps scope for a longer series in the future?

I Reviewed by Emma Norris who is a PhD student at University College London and Associate Editor (Reviews)

brutalizing everyone, the onlookers included'. Ronson has done his homework on group influence, with input (sparkling, as ever) from social psychologists Alex Haslam, Steve Reicher and Clifford Stott. There are some neat insights from participants in Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment, particularly Dave Eshelman's admission of acting up for the role of guard: 'I planned it. I mapped it out. I carried it through. It was all done for a purpose. I thought I was doing something good at the time.'

I think Ronson believes that he is doing something good. But he also seems well aware that his relationship with his subjects is changing. 'The powerful, crazy, cruel people I usually write about tend to be in far-off places,' he says. 'The powerful, crazy, cruel people were now us.' Is Ronson aware of the power he has not just as an online shamer, but as a writer of this type? He quotes another successful science writer, Malcolm Gladwell: 'I was so enamoured by the metaphorical simplicity of that idea that

I overstated its importance.' I think Ronson knows that he, like all journalists, hates to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

To be fair, it could be argued that Ronson tacitly acknowledges this danger; even that he is actively inviting opprobrium. Look at the cover: brand Ronson, identifiable now simply by a caricature of spiky hair and round glasses, surrounded by numerous pointing fingers. 'So you've been publicly shamed' – Ronson is almost calling on us to have a pop at him personally. And there are good grounds to do so. Ronson repeatedly admits that his interviewees were often reluctant to talk to him, and sometimes 'expressed misgivings' about their quotes being used in the book. Adria Richards, one of the 'shamers' included, is not best pleased with her treatment by Ronson (www.shakesville.com/2015/02/the-falsest-of-false-equivalencies.html). And some of the academic interviewees for a previous book, *The Psychopath Test*, were 'taken aback to find that the book contained

"liberal" and/or fictional accounts of their interactions with him' (www.psychopathysociety.org/en/home/10-news/news.html). Is this journalistic crime not equal to those Lehrer committed? Yet Ronson escapes scot free, and in fact says Lehrer 'represented literary fraud in the pop science world. He made a fortune corrupting an already self-indulgent, bloated genre.' For me, that got the biggest laugh of the book (although the joke about confirmation bias is a cracker).

In his previous book, *Frank*, Ronson writes that journalists take 'the furthest reaches of their interviewees' personalities, stitch them together, deleting their ordinariness. We were defining people by their flaws.' I hope Ronson doesn't become defined by his own, because he's an extraordinary storyteller when it comes to ordinariness.

| Picador, 2015; Hb £16.99

Reviewed by Dr Jon Sutton who is Managing Editor of *The Psychologist*



at once was impossible). During this time we were being filmed for our reactions – and then during every break, Paul and I were interviewed for our comments on the previous sessions' events. After that, we met as a group and discussed new tasks that we could give the children, with an eye to nurturing and exploring the relationships that we could see developing within the group. There was a rough pre-planned activity schedule for each day's filming, but with space left to react to developing events.

Paul and I were left pretty free by the producers to suggest ideas, and to talk about whatever interested us. The producers were particularly interested in exploring ways in which the world of children was just like that of adults – which I think is a really interesting starting point. I think the way the programme turned out – focused on individual personalities and developing

relationships amongst the children – was hugely engaging for audiences, and generally the feedback we have got from other scientists has been very positive. I found taking part in the programme a hugely enjoyable experience – both in terms of meeting a completely different group of people to those with whom I normally interact in academia, and in terms of getting a fresh perspective on what I do in my everyday job, which is to observe and think about how children behave. If you want to do this kind of work, you have to recognise that your contribution is very much a drop in the ocean – and that the big decisions get made 'upstairs'! The production team, however, were extremely interested in and responsive to our comments. Though I think we were just particularly lucky on this programme.

One final thing that was really brought home to me from this

experience is that, as an academic who does a lot of engagement with 'lay' audiences, the types of 'lay' audiences I would normally give a talk to are in fact very unrepresentative of the population as a whole. So, for example, if I am doing a talk at our Cambridge Science Night – a talk for a 'lay' audience insofar as I need to assume no prior knowledge in the audience – the types of people will be scientists, interested in the scientific method, not necessarily interested in children, whereas the audience for a programme such as this might be completely different. They might have no scientific background, and perhaps even have a child in the family that they're concerned about, and want answers. This poses an interesting and very different challenge, particularly considering the numbers involved. The broadcast reached a live audience of 2.63 million!

Comment from Dr Sam Wass, a contributing psychologist on the programme:

During filming there were a number of cameramen roving through the nursery. All of the children were wearing radio mikes. Paul and I sat behind a wall, watching all the video feeds and with a sound board so that we could choose which of the children's' conversations to listen in to (as following all the children

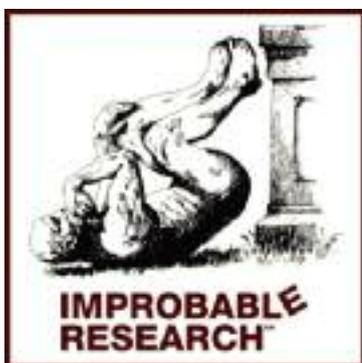
Compelling science



Improbable Research (podcast series)
Annals of Improbable Research

The Mind Readers (podcast)
Mosaic Science

The Annals of Improbable Research, the magazine dedicated to research that 'makes people laugh and then think', has recently launched a weekly podcast, 'Improbable Research', which is sure to be a massive hit with anyone interested in the quirky and obscure side of science.



Presenter Marc Abrahams' dead-pan style of reporting is a perfect comedic match for truly improbable research, well suited to discussing papers such as Kees Moeliker's 'The first case of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard duck'. However, don't let this comedy value fool you; 'Improbable Research' is a scientific podcast, and the methodology of studies such as Greenway and Garcia's 'Designing and testing an improved packaging for large hollow chocolate bunnies' is treated to rigorous examination, as is an investigation into the economic benefits of Kurt Cobain's suicide (the tactfully titled paper 'Artists' suicides as a public good'), with joyfully entertaining results. 'Improbable Research' takes the listener on a hilarious adventure through esoteric, absurd and at times questionable research, and leaves them amused, bemused, and eager for more.

Compelling in a rather different way is 'The Mind Readers', from Mosaic Science, a podcast produced by

mosaicscience.com. 'The Mind Readers' is an audio version of an article published on the website by Roger Highfield, which details the pioneering work of Adrian Owen, Steven Laureys and Nicholas Schiff. These three researchers have made startling discoveries in their work with patients trapped in 'vegetative states', which have revolutionised the way such 'disorders of consciousness' are approached. Summarising the 49-minute episode, and the ground-breaking findings of the research, is beyond the scope of this review; the podcast itself summarises decades of work. Through ingenious applications of brain-imaging techniques, researchers have refuted the assumption that those in vegetative states can have no conscious awareness. The sometimes complex neuroscience of this research is well explained, and anecdotes from patients ensure the human side of the issue is not neglected; a female patient's description of being trapped in such a state, suffering an unquenchable thirst, inability to



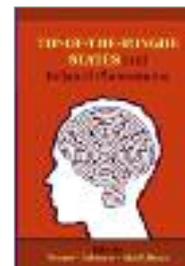
communicate, and failed attempts at suicide, for example, strikes a deep emotional chord. In this way 'The Mind Readers' flawlessly marries clearly explained science and humane sensitivity; scientific journalism at its best.

I Reviewed by Tom Holliman
who is a student at Anglia Ruskin University

There, but not quite



Tip-of-the-Tongue States and Related Phenomena
Bennett L. Schwartz & Alan S. Brown (Eds.)



You're meeting your schoolmates after almost two decades. As you catch up, you regale each other with anecdotes. Someone says, 'Do you remember the student who fainted in maths class in Grade X?' Sure, you recall the incident, but what was the name of the student? You're sure she was female, and her name either began with 'R' or 'P.' Er...

As the name, or lack thereof, nags at you, you are experiencing a classic phenomenon that psychologists have doggedly studied for years. The tip-of-the-tongue (or TOT) state is fascinating because it resembles dangling a carrot that is just out of reach. For cognitive psychologists, TOTs represent thinking in slow motion or lexical retrieval in action and can thus serve as a window to these processes. Found across cultures and languages, including ASL, TOT states, unlike most psychological phenomena, are easy to recreate in controlled

lab settings. Diary studies show that low-frequency words and people's names lend themselves to TOT states. Further, TOTs involve both cognitive and metacognitive components, making them ideal to study phenomenological experiences. As TOTs increase with age, they may be used to better understand various geriatric populations such as those with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease.

The book examines TOTs in significant depth but requires graduate-level training to appreciate it. It is a great resource for those studying TOTs and related phenomena like *déjà vu*. However, the technical language is unlikely to appeal to lay readers.

I Cambridge University Press;
2014; Hb £65.00
Reviewed by Aruna Sankaranarayanan who is Director of PRAYATNA, a centre for children with learning difficulties in India

Beautifully and sensitively written



The Man Who Couldn't Stop: OCD, and the True Story of a Life Lost in Thought
David Adam

It's not uncommon for unusual and disturbing thoughts to drift into our minds, but what happens if they won't drift away again?

David Adam takes us on a journey into the most intimate parts of his mind, vividly describing the intrusive thoughts and compulsions that have plagued him since his late teens, giving us an invaluable opportunity to feel and understand what it's like to suffer from OCD. Society and the media may portray OCD as a humorous quirk, a gimmick or behavioural tic, but this book demonstrates the fear, frustration and suffering behind 'a life lost in thought'.

As Adam's story unfolds, we explore the history of the disorder and its treatment, genetic and environmental risk factors, Freudian, behaviourist and cognitive theories, psychosurgery and drug therapy, evolution and neuroscience. Not only does Adam explain complex scientific models in an engaging way, he maintains a balanced and critical approach, highlighting methodological flaws and limitations.

This beautifully and sensitively written book is as poignant and moving as it is informative. It has something to offer everyone.

I Picador; 2014; Hb £16.99 Reviewed by Lauren Canvin who is a research assistant at Oxford Centre for Anxiety Disorders and Trauma



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For further information please contact:

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