

Powerful and thought-provoking

States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering

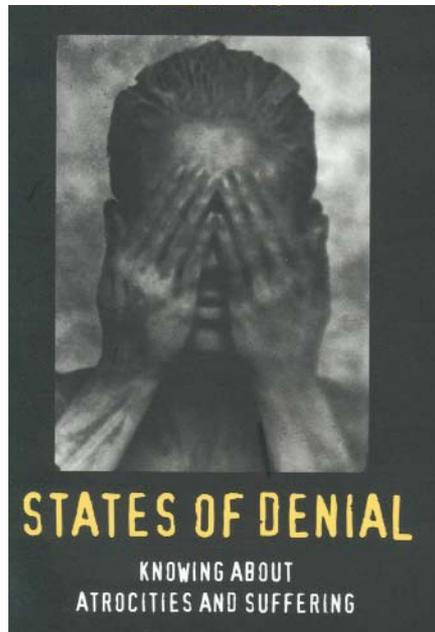
STANLEY COHEN

CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS, IN ASSOCIATION WITH BLACKWELL, OXFORD; 2001; Pb £15.99 (ISBN 0 745 62392 1)

REVIEWED BY Carol Ireland

COHEN comprehensively defines denial in the book's opening chapter: '...information that is too disturbing, threatening or anomalous to be fully absorbed or openly acknowledged. The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted.' *States of Denial* presents a thorough and detailed outline of the intricate workings of this concept.

The reader is guided through the book well, with a general introduction to denial and the forms that it can take, and illustration of the states of denial with frequent reference to well-known events (e.g. the Holocaust, Bosnia War). Denial is a complex subject, and some of the concepts presented might not be altogether clear to readers unfamiliar with denial theories. Thus, there are times when the book can be quite hard going, with a need for the reader to review concepts presented



Stanley Cohen was awarded the British Academy Book Prize 2002 for *States of Denial*

earlier in order to understand how they all link together.

What worked particularly well were Cohen's discussions on how an individual's self-knowledge can work towards

overcoming denial, and the difficulties an individual, organisation or culture can be faced with while trying to acknowledge a truth that is unpleasant and traumatic. Also effective were Cohen's references early on to well-known psychological/sociological concepts, such as 'bystander apathy', then continually referring to and building on these concepts as the book progressed.

States of Denial has a distinct political edge when illustrating ideas. While this can be a very useful approach to take, Cohen assumes that all readers have a similar political knowledge. Some of the political ideology was at times difficult to grasp and then apply to the denial framework, with phrases such as a 'product of late capitalist Thatcherite individualism or an ironic post-modernist'.

Denial is a difficult and thought-provoking area. Cohen certainly allows the reader to reflect on the concepts and apply them to current issues. I would therefore recommend this book to professionals working with clients who are in some form of denial.

■ Dr Carol A. Ireland is with Ashworth Hospital and the University of Central Lancashire.

New memories

THIS volume arose as the proceedings of a Royal Society discussion meeting to review current views on the parcellation of memory. Baddeley sets the scene well, reviewing the reasoning that has led over the last 40 years to the progressive fractionation of memory, and the now familiar formulation by Tulving of the episodic-semantic distinction. We have here a collection of discussion papers, stating personal perspectives on favourite models and experiments covering the main approaches represented by the three editors (human

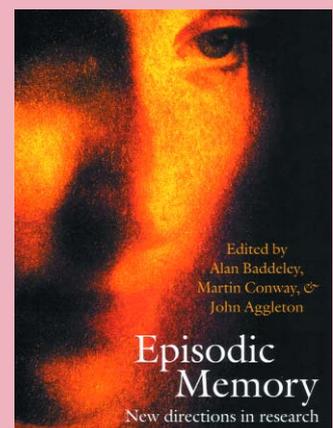
Episodic Memory: New Directions in Research

ALAN BADDELEY, MARTIN CONWAY & JOHN AGGLETON (EDS)
OXFORD AND NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2002;
Pb £21.99 (ISBN 0 198 50880 8)

REVIEWED BY Stephen Dunnett

experimental, clinical psychology/neuropsychology, and animal/behavioural psychologies, respectively) as well as computational models and imaging. These are not comprehensive theoretical reviews, but personal commentaries on problems currently being tackled and analyses of how present conundrums are to be solved.

Notwithstanding a couple of North American contributors, this is essentially a British collection, with all the key players contributing their distinctive perspectives. As such, *Episodic Memory* provides an excellent overview of the current state of memory research in general and episodic memory in particular, and offers the opportunity to



update, in a very readable way, on the current state of play in a key area of British experimental psychology.

■ Stephen B. Dunnett is in the School of Biosciences, Cardiff University.

A stimulating offshoot

In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror

TOM PYSZCZYNSKI, SHELDON SOLOMON
& JEFF GREENBERG

WASHINGTON, DC: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION; Hb US\$29.95 (ISBN 1 557 98954 0)

REVIEWED BY **Andrew Silke**

THIS book is primarily about terror management theory (TMT). This, in itself, does not actually relate to terrorism directly but instead 'concerns the impact that awareness of the inevitability of death has on how we live our lives'. The authors argue that in order to avoid succumbing to the terror of such awareness, we construct and maintain cultures and systems of belief. Inspired by the work of Ernst Becker, TMT is at heart psychoanalytical in outlook, and were the text to remain at this level its appeal would probably be more limited.

However, in an effort to support their ideas on TMT, the authors have been involved in a great deal of research, much of it on the subject of mortality salience. Indeed, two full chapters of the book are devoted to the main findings from some 150 studies on this interesting phenomenon. Put simply, mortality salience occurs when one is reminded of death. Such reminders happen when, for example, one is asked to think about dying or answer a questionnaire related to death, or is exposed to death-related scenes or images (even subliminally).

The research recounted in the book shows that even very subtle reminders of death can produce the effect. Those affected show a stronger liking for people perceived as similar or who are perceived as paragons of important cultural values, and greater

hostility and increased aggression towards those who are seen as different or who are regarded as having violated cultural values. For example, in one study, court judges under mortality salience conditions gave offenders sentences nearly ten times harsher compared with judges in control conditions. People who have high self-esteem or who hold tolerant worldviews though have been found to be much less prone to the effects of mortality salience.

The authors build a very convincing case for the existence of the effect, and the implications in relation to terrorism in today's world are examined in the later chapters of the book. Here the text is somewhat weaker – there is a heavy reliance on anecdotes to illustrate points and relatively little reference or use is made of the existing considerable literature on the psychological impact of terrorism. Yet the case is clearly made that these subconscious processes can work to intensify animosity between groups in any environment where cues of death are plentiful. The weakest chapter is probably that seeking to explain Islamic terrorism, but this is followed by a strong conclusion to the book where some sensible lessons to take away are outlined.

In the Wake of 9/11 succeeds in drawing attention to the useful literature on mortality salience (though perhaps does not quite triumph with the argument that TMT is the best explanation of this). It is more limited in other respects and is probably best seen as a stimulating offshoot to the literature rather than a general review of what psychology offers on the subject of terrorism.

■ *Dr Andrew Silke is affiliated with the Scarman Centre, University of Leicester.*

STALKING, BULLYING AND GROUP AGGRESSION

REVIEWS BY Jane L. Ireland

Stalking and Psychosexual Obsession

JULIAN BOON & LORRAINE SHERIDAN (Eds)
LONDON: WILEY; 2002; Pb £19.99 (ISBN 0 471 49459 3)

Stalking and Psychosexual Obsession is an excellent collection of chapters, presenting a well-researched and up-to-date review of the literature. Attention is given both to national and international studies. Clear attempts are made to link stalking to related areas of research including domestic violence and, to a lesser extent, bullying. The chapters are written in an engaging style and make good use of case studies to illustrate points. The focus on the practical implications of the research was a particular strength, ensuring that this book will prove of equal value to academics, practitioners and policy makers.

Solutions to Bullying

SUE YOUNG
TAMWORTH: NASEN; 2002; Pb £7.50 (ISBN 1 901 48535 8)

Solutions to Bullying comprehensively explores proactive, responsive and preventive approaches to bullying in a school setting. It successfully communicates the message that bullying is a 'whole-school' problem demanding a whole-school approach to management. The problem of bullying is presented in quite simplistic terms, however, which results in sweeping statements being made that are not backed up by the literature: for example, 'Pupils with high self-esteem are less likely to bully others'. There is also no mention of pupils who are both bullied and bully others, with little reflection on how bullies can be supported. Nevertheless the emphasis on practical approaches, in particular the valuable application of solution-focused therapy, makes *Solutions to Bullying* a useful resource for both teachers and parents.

The Psychology of Group Aggression

ARNOLD P. GOLDSTEIN
LONDON: WILEY; 2002; Pb £27.50 (ISBN 0 470 84516 3)

The strength of this book lies in its comprehensiveness and attempt to 'normalise' group aggression as opposed to viewing it as a wholly deviant and maladaptive behaviour. Goldstein views group aggression rather as an interaction between the individual and the environment they find themselves in, describing it aptly as a 'person-environment duet'. Essential.

■ *Dr Jane L. Ireland is with the University of Central Lancashire and Ashworth Hospital.*