

Consuming passions

Do size zero models really help to sell products? Why do some people get such intense pleasure from shopping that they get into serious debt? What impact is our consumer culture having

on our well-being? These questions are increasingly important, and you get both theory and evidence-based answers in this book.

The central construct is identity as a social product. It considers both the desire for a perfect bodily form (for men and women) and affluence or 'the good life' promoted in our society, highlighting the complexity of interactions and the overall links to 'ideal identities'.

A range of theories are used to help explain and understand the impact of this search, and multiple methods are discussed including experiments and qualitative studies, eschewing any over-reliance on surveys. Also, a number of countries are included in the studies, as well as a range of ages, therefore helping to assess influences on young children, adolescents and adults. The myths and assumptions of consumerism are highlighted –

not surprisingly perhaps, there are a number of negative aspects of this culture, but what is welcome here is the clarity of the evidence and the practical suggestions for interventions.

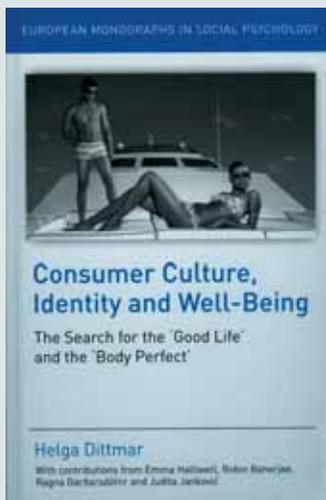
The book is very well edited, and with a logical flow. Despite the complexity of the arguments it is accessible, and can be read as a whole or 'dipped into' to consider specific aspects. Each chapter includes a synopsis and a conclusion, and Helga Dittmar brings the entire book together in the final chapter to really clarify the impact of our materialism and consumerism on what she terms 'the cage within'. If you want to assess how you can resist the alienation and negative affect that this cage can generate, have a look here.

Hopefully, we may feel we are capable of avoiding the dangers of 'I shop, therefore I am' ourselves, but perhaps we can help others who are struggling to achieve an impossible perfect self. By the way, the answer to the question regarding size zero models is 'no' (in comparison to the same model modified to be an average size). I just hope a few advertising agency staff read this book as well.

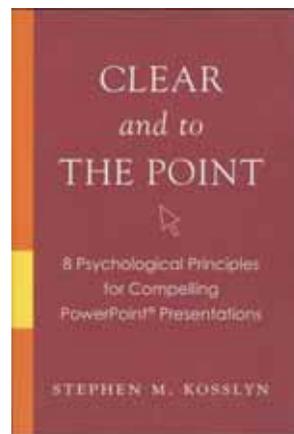
Psychology Press; 2008; Hb £29.99

Reviewed by Stephanie J. Morgan

who is in the Department of Organizational Psychology, School of Management, Birkbeck College, University of London



Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-Being: The Search for the 'Good Life' and the 'Body Perfect'
Helga Dittmar



Creative possibilities

Clear and to the Point: 8 Psychological Principles for Compelling PowerPoint Presentations
Stephen M. Kosslyn

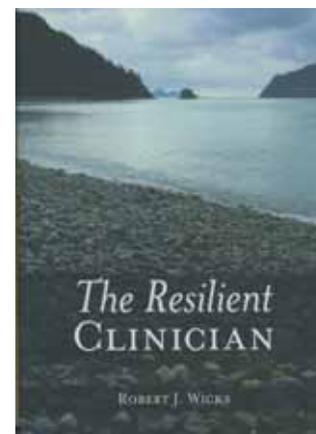
As Kosslyn says, PowerPoint is like the weather: everyone complains about it but nobody does anything about it. Using psychological principles drawn from studies in perception, memory, cognition motivation and emotion, Kosslyn, a leading authority on the visual brain, demonstrates how PowerPoint presentations can be made clear, compelling and memorable.

Kosslyn provides a wealth of suggestions for structuring effective presentations and for avoiding common pitfalls. As would be expected, he is particularly good on how visual information can be organised to ensure that it is effectively processed (for example, how to emphasise salient features within complex data) and how effective use of size, colour, position and emphasis can assist in processing text (for example, never emphasise text by underlining as this obscures descenders and thus interferes with the brain's efficient processing of text).

While not the final word on PowerPoint, Kosslyn has succeeded, through the application of neuropsychology, in demonstrating how to make best use of some of its creative possibilities while avoiding some of the excesses that it easily lends itself to.

Oxford University Press; 2007; Pb £11.99

Reviewed by Paul Riddick



Practising what we preach

The Resilient Clinician
Robert J. Wicks

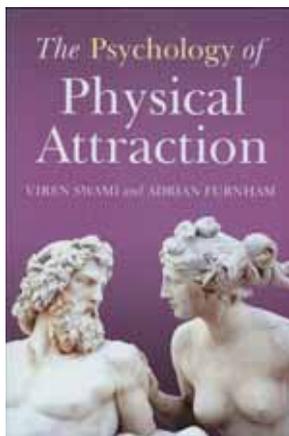
I approached this book as a newly qualified clinician wondering whether developing more resilience would be a good idea. It seems my timing was good, since the author recommends we take a proactive approach to thinking about issues of self-care. Wicks argues that when faced with stress, unprepared clinicians will slip into inactivity, unhealthy coping strategies and burnout.

The book begins by describing the various ways we can run into difficulties before inviting the reader to use the suggestions provided to develop a personal self-care protocol. There is a discussion of the benefits to clinical practice of deepening our inner life through silence, solitude and mindfulness, and then a consideration of how positive psychology can be used to build on our personal strengths.

This brief volume is an easy read, littered with personal anecdotes and non-academic quotes that give a human touch. Each section includes questionnaires and checklists to help make the material more personally relevant. This book would be a useful resource for any practitioners wanting some fresh ideas to help them better practise what they preach.

Oxford University Press; 2007; Hb £17.99

Reviewed by Phil Arthington



Evolutionary models

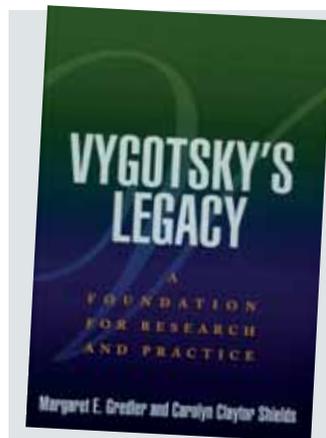
The Psychology of Physical Attraction
Viren Swami & Adrian Furnham

Why are we attracted to particular people? *The Psychology of Physical Attraction* uses evolutionary and social psychological perspectives in trying to answer this question. The book begins with a basic introduction to Darwinian theory, and then leads the reader through an evolutionary explanation as to why certain physical features are cross-culturally considered attractive. The authors then discuss social factors and contexts in relationship formation.

The authors are keen to stress the importance of studying appearance, citing the social benefits of being considered attractive and potential discrimination faced by those who are not. Like the majority of research into physical appearance, much of the focus is on women's bodies in terms of what is considered attractive to men (although the authors do acknowledge the increasing salience of men's appearance). Readers predominantly interested in the social aspect should be aware that primacy is given to the evolutionary explanations.

Written in a very accessible style, the book is a good overview of the research in the area, and would be useful for anyone with an interest in beauty, appearance ideals and relationship formation.

I Routledge; 2008; Pb £9.99
Reviewed by Caroline Huxley



Contrasting approaches

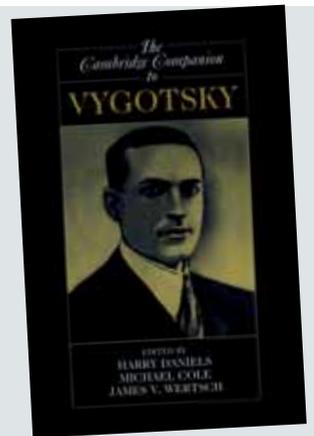
Vygotsky's Legacy: A Foundation for Research and Practice
Margaret E. Gredler & Carolyn Claytor Shields
Guilford Press; 2008; Hb £24.00

The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky
Harry Daniels, Michael Cole & James V. Wertsch (Eds.)
Cambridge University Press; 2007; Pb £15.99

Vygotsky's social theory on the development of the mind was suppressed in his native Soviet Union for decades, but since its eventual translation it has exerted increasing influence on psychological thinking throughout the world. Having attended the international research conference 'Exploring Vygotsky's Ideas: Crossing Borders' in Prague last year, I was eager to read these two new books.

Vygotsky's Legacy is an authoritative yet accessible text, designed to give researchers, students and teacher educators an overview of Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development. It takes the reader far beyond the familiar 'zone of proximal development', exploring Vygotsky's views on research methods, cultural signs and symbols, and the development of the higher psychological functions.

The authors, who hold professorships in educational psychology and human development in South Carolina, begin by describing Vygotsky's socio-historical context and early influences, and work systematically through the development of speech and cognition and of concepts, and



the cycle of child development. Each chapter concludes by discussing implications for educational practice.

In contrast, *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* is a compilation of critical perspectives on Vygotsky's work, edited by three well-known names in psychology, pedagogy and Russian studies. Although similarly aimed at 'students, academics and practitioners', a good academic understanding of Vygotsky's theory and terminology is presumed.

Chapters cover context, readings and applications of Vygotsky's work; one example is a comparative analysis of Vygotsky and G.G. Shpet's theories of cognition and language. As an educational psychologist, I found particularly enlightening and thought-provoking the discussion on

dynamic assessment by Alex Kozulin and Boris Gindis in their chapter on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the education of children with special needs.

However, not all the chapters were as accessible as this, as the Cambridge Companion suffers from a lack of proof-reading. The many typographical and grammatical errors – 'As they notes...' one sentence starts – were frustrating when grappling with new concepts and language, as this is an academic work that is demanding of its reader. A novice in Vygotskian theory may gain more from *Vygotsky's Legacy*; without 'dumbing down' it succeeds in its ambitious aim of rendering his complex thinking comprehensible to a broad audience.

I Reviewed by Miriam Landor

just in

The Therapeutic Relationship: Perspectives and Themes

Sheila Haugh & Stephen Paul (Eds.)

The Frog Who Croaked Blue Jamie Ward

Flirting with Disaster: Why Accidents Are Rarely Accidental
Marc Gerstein

A History of Psychology: Original Sources and Contemporary Research Ludy T. Benjamin Jr (Ed.)

Effective Writing in Psychology: Papers, Posters, and Presentations
Bernard C. Beins, B & Agatha M. Beins

What Is Special About the Human Brain? Richard Passington

Psychology in Prisons David A. Crighton & Graham J. Towl

A Guide to Teaching Introductory Psychology Sandra Goss Lucas

You Are What You Remember Patrick Estrade

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