

## BOOK REVIEWS

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# Tyranny and the tyrant

## From Stanford to Abu Ghraib

**T**HE driving force for Philip Zimbardo to write *The Lucifer Effect* was 'the need to better understand the how and why of the physical and psychological abuses perpetrated on prisoners by American Military Police at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq' (p.18). Zimbardo was not alone in seeing something of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) in the behaviour of guards, so he started to present an explanation of this abuse based on the study he was director of over 35 ago years. The questions for the reader are whether there is anything new to learn about the SPE after 30 years and whether it can tell us anything about Abu Ghraib.

The SPE is one of the most cited studies in social psychology. It is included in A-level courses, and to his credit Zimbardo still lectures to student audiences on the topic and responds to their e-mails through his website. Like Milgram's study on obedience (also re-examined in this book) it is held up to provide a picture of how people can behave under duress. The message that Zimbardo draws from it repeatedly is that there are no bad apples, only bad barrels. He argues that in the SPE ordinary members of the public found

### *The Lucifer Effect – Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*

PHILIP ZIMBARDO

LONDON: EBURY; 2007

Hb £18.99 (ISBN 978 1 84 413577 6)

REVIEWED BY **Phil Banyard**

themselves in a far from ordinary situation and behaved in cruel and brutal ways to other people. It could have been you, says Zimbardo. The factors that facilitated this, according to Zimbardo, included the uniforms that the participants wore and the roles they were assigned.

After 35 years is there anything new to learn about this study? Well, remarkably there is. I had not been aware before how much Zimbardo intervened in this study. In his reflection on the events he sees himself as a bystander in his role as Prison Superintendent and he holds his hands up to being guilty of 'an evil of inaction', but that doesn't do justice to his contribution. I think one of the strong messages that comes out of this text is that it is not the roles that created the abusive behaviour in the guards but the manipulation of the Machiavellian superintendent. For example, in his orientation speech to the guards he says of the prisoners: 'They will have no freedom of action. They will be able to do nothing and say nothing we don't permit. We're going to take away their individuality in various ways... We have total power in the situation. They have none.' Notice the use of pronouns here. Zimbardo puts himself with the guards and gives clear instructions that 'we' are going to go outside normal patterns of social behaviour to create a hostile situation for the prisoners. It is not, as Zimbardo suggests, the guards who wrote their own scripts on the blank canvass of the SPE, but Zimbardo who creates the script of terror, and this is important when we come to his analysis of Abu Ghraib.

The orientation speech is one of many interventions by Zimbardo during the six-

day study. When one of the prisoners asks to be released, he manipulates an angry confrontation with an ex-con and then tries to bargain with the prisoner with an offer of better treatment in return for being a spy in the camp. When parents and friends turn up for a visit, he misleads them about the state of the prison and the state of the prisoners. On the basis of a perceived threat to the prison, he removes all the prisoners (handcuffed and with bags over their heads) to avoid a jailbreak attempt that never occurs. He introduces a new prisoner who is an informant. He reads the prisoners' mail and responds to it. These are the actions of a playwright not an actor.

The study comes to an end when, according to Zimbardo, he comes to his senses and realises the distress he has created. A less charitable reading would suggest that in the final 12 hours of the study, Zimbardo is challenged by his girlfriend who is appalled at what is going on in the prison and is then forced to allow a real-life lawyer into the prison to interview the prisoners at the request of one of the parents. Love and fear of legal action are powerful motivators.

One of the surprising things about the SPE is how well-known and cited it is while the scientific community knows so little about it. There are no accounts of it in a refereed psychology journal. The original report (Haney *et al.*, 1973) appears in *Naval Research Review*, and the research was funded by the Office of Naval Research. Access to the data has been controlled and marketed by Zimbardo, and reinterpretation and further work opposed and challenged.

Take for example Zimbardo's response to the BBC Prison Study (Reicher &

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Haslam, 2006). Unlike Zimbardo's study, this experiment was developed from theory, rigorously designed with planned experimental manipulations. It has been presented for peer review, and accepted, in several of the most prestigious journals. It collected data on a wide range of cognitive, social and physiological variables and most crucially put in place exemplary ethical safeguards. Zimbardo's response to this has been dismissive rather than scholarly.

In this text he attempts to dismiss the BBC Prison Study by referring to it as a pseudo-experiment (ironic given his accounts of the SPE) and using only one reference to it from a news report in *The Daily Telegraph*. I find it disappointing that such an eminent psychologist, whose work I have admired should behave in such a petty way towards colleagues and with such contempt towards scientific debate.

With regard to the design of the SPE, it appears to have been largely made up as they went along as the psychologists struggled to deal with a situation that quickly spun out of control. Given the level of detail in this book, including who ate what and when (e.g. p.495), it is surprising what is missing. There is virtually no psychological data on the prisoners and guards other than the selected recollections of the participants. Confusingly, it is not clear made which parts of dialogue are accurate representations of what was said and which parts are made up by Zimbardo as some sort of screenplay. At one point he writes that some of the dialogue 'is based not on documented recordings of our transactions at that time but rather on my subsequent recall blended with the intention of creating a reasonable story line'.

There is no doubt that many readers find much to reflect on in his description of the SPE and we are forced to confront how we might behave in similar circumstances. This is the power of the SPE. Zimbardo reflects on this and suggests that when we look at Abu Ghraib we should see not the actions of the guards but the actions of the system that created them. He describes how in his role as expert witness for one of the guards, Staff Sergeant Ivan 'Chip' Frederick, he made this point to the military court though with little success.

A different interpretation of Abu Ghraib, however, does not see the guards as victims of the US government (Zimbardo

appears to point the blame towards the White House) but as the agents of their much closer Machiavellian masters. In this reading of events the uncomfortable truth for us as psychologists is that the guards were responding to what they perceived to be the requests of PsyOps units (Psychological Operations). One of those charged, Private Lynndie England, who featured prominently in the first batch of

photographs and was subsequently jailed, insisted she was acting on orders from 'persons in my chain of command'. 'I was instructed by persons in higher rank to "stand there, hold this leash, look at the camera", and they took pictures for PsyOps' (see, for example, Ronson, 2005).

The role of psychologists in interrogations of military prisoners has rightly created an ethical storm in the US. When the APA tried to deal with the ethical issue of whether to ban the involvement of psychologists with interrogations and torture they turned to a task force of 10 experts. Remarkably, it is reported that six of these experts had military training and at least four of whom had worked at Guantánamo Bay or Abu Ghraib (Soldz, 2007). The key point that challenges Zimbardo's argument is that behind the scenes in these military prisons were psychologists feeding the guards ideas on

how to deal with the prisoners. This does seem to have parallels with SPE and the reader might detect a direct road from the SPE to Abu Ghraib.

It would not be fair to portray Zimbardo as an architect of military interrogation techniques and he has consistently spoken out against abuse in prisons and most recently against the APA's position on the role of psychologists in military interrogations. In the sections on Abu Ghraib he writes passionately about the abuses committed by US forces and he makes a damning case against the role of the Bush administration. It is, however, fair to suggest a certain naivety in his analysis. For example, he writes of Abu Ghraib: 'It seemed inconceivable that American soldiers were tormenting, humiliating, and torturing their captives.' To me it is this remark that seems inconceivable, as does the following comment to the *Times Higher Education Supplement*: 'The military told me they used the SPE tapes to train people not to behave like our guards. I used to quote that as a good outcome of the research. Now I know they also used it to train interrogators to break people. I had no idea they were doing that' (Gold, 2007). How could he not know or at least suspect this? Why did he think the US Navy was so keen to fund his research? And why does he still engage in research projects funded by the US military (for example see [www.cipert.org](http://www.cipert.org))?

If we come back to the starting point for this review, then in answer to the question about Abu Ghraib, Zimbardo opens an interesting debate but misses some of the main players, namely the psychologists involved in developing the interrogation techniques used at Guantánamo Bay and brought over to Iraq. If the reader is interested in a fuller debate of the involvement of psychologists in the War on Terror, they should look to Harper (2007). In answer to the question of whether there is anything more to learn about the SPE the answer is yes. And what we learn is that 35 years ago in the basement of the Stanford University psychology department, a psychology professor became a tyrant and created a scene of tyranny.

■ *Phil Banyard is an Associate Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. E-mail: phil.banyard@ntu.ac.uk.*

# Using art to enhance talking therapy

**U**SING simple pictures created in collaboration with a therapist can be a powerful way to express ideas and bring about change. Children do this, but as adults we are encouraged to 'talk about it' – it is rare moment when someone asks us to 'draw about it'. Yet, evidence shows that people of all ages learn visually. Helping clients to transform ideas from words into pictures may seem daunting to the artistically challenged among us. But the message from this book is clear – budding Rembrandts and Monets look away now. For those who, like me, fell with their faces

## *Knowing Me, Knowing You: An Integrated Sociopsychology Guide to Personal Fulfilment and Better Relationships*

KEITH E. RICE

VICTORIA, BC: TRAFFORD PUBLISHING; 2006;  
Pb £16.85 (ISBN 1 4120 8291 9)

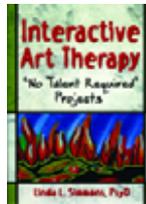
REVIEWED BY **Michael S. Guttridge**

**T**HIS is neither a typical self-help book nor a psychology text, using as it does an eclectic range of sources – although Eysenck, Freud, Maslow and Murray (author of the TAT) get a mention. There are useful footnotes and interesting asides which reflect the author's own journey of personal development and some exercises to complete.

The main thrust of the book is about the work of Clare W. Graves, and the Becks & Cowan spiral dynamics model (which you have to understand to make sense of the book) plus Eysenck's personality model and NLP. Rice uses these to underpin other theories and models of human behaviour. This doesn't always work and the author admits that some of the proposed theoretical links need validating.

The later chapters on relationships are less developed and I would have liked to see more on work relationships. Overall an interesting read with some ideas worth pursuing.

■ *Michael Guttridge is business psychologist in Lancashire.*



## *Interactive Art Therapy: 'No Talent Required' Projects*

LINDA L. SIMMONS

BINGHAMTON, NY: HAWORTH PRESS; 2006; Pb US\$19.95  
(ISBN 978 0 7890 2654 5)

REVIEWED BY **Lesley Atchison**

to the school art room, here is how it might be done.

First, the reader is reassured that there is no need to be an art therapist to use art therapeutically. A hopeful start for a neuropsychologist! Secondly, some very respectable evidence is presented to show that – and excuse the neuropsychspeak for a moment – using visual material in combination with auditory processing is more powerful, in terms of understanding and learning, than one sensory modality used on its own. So – this is not about using art *instead* of language but enhancing talking therapy by combining it with another sensory modality – in this case a visual one.

Simple line drawings, featuring stick

people, are used to illustrate, and make sense of, common therapeutic issues. As the therapeutic relationship develops, the drawings build up, and words and labels are added. There is plenty of structure, with each chapter containing an objective, a rationale, exercise instructions, a treatment plan, a case example, suggestions for follow-up and contraindications for use. Whilst the book as a whole is written with clinicians in mind, its clear, structured, problem-solving approach would make it a pleasingly refreshing creative tool in a number of applied psychology settings.

■ *Dr Lesley Atchison is a clinical neuropsychologist with Healthcare America at the Wellington Hospital in London.*



## *Pragmatics*

YAN HUANG

LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2006; Hb £50.00 (ISBN: 978 0 19 929837 2)

REVIEWED BY **Cedric Ginestet**

**S**EMIOTICS is the study of signs per se. Syntax is focusing on the meaning of sets of signs, and semantics is concerned with the relationship between specific signs and the individuals uttering them.

Pragmatics constitutes the next level in this hierarchy of disciplines. It is the science of meaning extracted from linguistic context. We often do not realise the amount of dependence between language comprehension and situations. How do we derive meaning from contextual clues, and body language? How is context influencing our understanding of a specific word? Many sentences are indeed only understandable in their linguistic contexts. The referents of pronouns such as *you*, for instance, are only decipherable when the identity of the persons present is known.

This new publication by Professor Huang from Reading University gives a very thorough introduction to this

subdiscipline in linguistics, which is becoming increasingly intertwined with psychology and neurolinguistics.

This book first describes the classical Gricean theory, which has become the standard theory in the decoding of words according to their context. Full sections are then dedicated to speech acts and deixis. The second part of the book helps the reader to situate pragmatics in linguistics, by comparing this field with semantics, syntax and cognition.

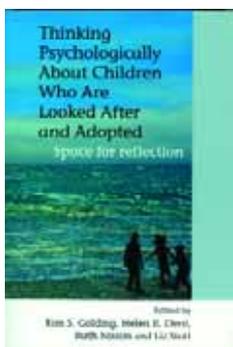
This text contains numerous illustrations of the use and contextual interpretation of certain words in most world languages. It also provides a range of practical exercises for each chapter. I would therefore recommend this introductory text to any postgraduates or researchers in psycholinguistics.

■ *Cedric Ginestet is at Imperial College, London.*

# How psychology can help

**T**HIS is an important book; the editors and authors are all experienced practitioners in the field of looked after or adopted children. Their professional backgrounds are health, education, social work and academia, giving the book a truly multidisciplinary approach. If you have anything to do with the assessment, intervention or care of such children, this one is for you.

The book opens with the voices of the young people and their families, long unheard. Then an ecological model is applied to a case study and various perspectives are considered, such as psychodynamic, attachment and systemic approaches. Human consciousness and the effects of adversity on brain development and health follow, then a chapter on educational psychology and how to support education. Other chapters cover assessment of children and young people in the court system, consultation, parenting interventions for adoptive and foster carers, psychological services for adoptive families, the context of residential care and



## *Thinking Psychologically About Children Who Are Looked After and Adopted – Space for Reflection*

KIM S. GOLDING, HELEN R. DENT, RUTH NISSIM & LIZ STOTT (EDS.)

CHICHESTER: WILEY; 2006

Pb £24.99

(ISBN 978 0 470 09201 9)

REVIEWED BY **Miriam Landor**

interventions within residential settings, therapy and the place of attachment theory in interventions. There really seems to be something for everyone with an interest in this area!

If, on the other hand, you just want a clear exemplar of what psychologists can offer that is different to other experts, I cannot think of a better book. It is informed at every step by a judicious blend of research, practice and psychological theory. At every opportunity, theoretical expositions are backed up by case studies,

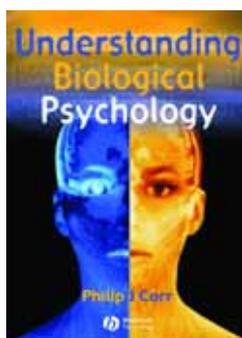
and research evidence is related to the appropriate psychological model. The editors believe that psychological thinking can help services and individuals reflect upon the needs of the children and young people who have experienced a breakdown in the natural order of birth-family parenting, and that such reflection is the only way forward for establishing meaningful, joined-up provision.

■ *Miriam Landor is an educational psychologist.*

# Have a look before you leap

**S**TUDENTS quickly learn that biological psychology is not just a topic in its own right, but dovetails with other core themes. Indeed, 'there can be no cognition or social behaviour without the mediation of the brain'. Corr's task was to explain the *extent* of this mediation.

The value of biological psychology is equated with what it can offer, outside of itself. The breadth is vast, and the three sections (foundations, approaches, applications) could quite easily have been published as three separate books. He is to be congratulated on the structure. Students will enjoy coordinating their learning in the neat, focused chapters, even if this structure



## *Understanding Biological Psychology*

PHILIP J. CORR

OXFORD: BLACKWELL; 2006; Pb £19.99

(ISBN 0 631 21954 4)

REVIEWED BY

**Gareth Hagger-Johnson**

does 'not reflect the coordinated functions of the brain'. Few biological textbooks include clinical applications (here, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, personality, cognition). Enjoyable, unexpected topics are presented (philosophy of mind, dualism, identity theory,

reductionism). There is a clear nod to Wilson's (1998) notion of consilience (integration across and within the sciences) by 'reinforcing bridges rather than blowing them up'.

Here is a textbook writer who encourages students to reflect on wider implications of research findings. Some readers

may question why an 'integrated view should be taken on brain-mind' but not further – between brain and society. Indeed, greater treatment of social and cultural variables would improve this book. However, there is enough material to allow students to make this leap on their own. There is also plenty of scope for expansion – a second edition appearing in the near future would be unsurprising.

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### Reference

Wilson, E.O. (1998). *Consilience: The unity of knowledge*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.