



BOOK REVIEWS

If you would like to review a book for *The Psychologist*, contact Mike Thompson on mictho@bps.org.uk. Publishers should send advance title information and books for possible review to *The Psychologist* at the Leicester address.

Our one true goal?

Is it more important to minimise unhappiness than to promote the pursuit of its hitherto ill-defined opposite? Given the relative lack of scientific research that exists into the latter, a significant proportion of the academic community would seem to think so. Martin, however, believes that recognising the importance of happiness and its reassuringly simple ingredients can lead to inestimable benefits for us all.

Strong personal relationships, adequate sleep, sufficient exercise, a balanced diet and a concern for others can all, according to the research that does exist, assist us in becoming happier. Wealth, fame and material possessions are less important. The happiness of our children could also be enhanced if governments, schools and

Making Happy People: The Nature of Happiness and Its Origins in Childhood

PAUL MARTIN

LONDON: FOURTH ESTATE; 2005; Hb £15.99 (ISBN 0 00 712706 5)

REVIEWED BY Paul Summers

parents became less concerned with meeting targets, topping league tables and achieving high grades, and more interested in encouraging creativity, resilience, wisdom, communication and emotional development.

Martin writes for the layperson and writes extremely well. His clear approach and broad referencing make for undeniably pleasant reading, and his book is a welcome

alternative to most of the self-help trash that needlessly pollutes high street bookstores.

The fact that Martin's conclusions are hardly revelatory, however, leaves the reader to contemplate why happiness remains so near yet so far for so many.

■ Paul Summers is a graduate of the MSc Forensic Psychology at the University of Kent.

Not too radical

As someone who would like to be more rebellious than my record collection would suggest, I was delighted to find a book to review with 'radical' in the title, and sat down to attend to its call to arms. However, although Ian Parker does a good job of pointing out the naive or even damaging nature of psychology's assumptions in research practice, his arguments will not strike anyone with a working knowledge of qualitative research and epistemology as too radical. Worse, his strident but tangled and often empty arguments are likely to turn potential qualitative converts right off as he fails to cover the ground coherently.

The chapters cover the same ground as most good qualitative texts – an introduction to the area, ethics, reflexivity, ethnography,

Qualitative Psychology: Introducing Radical Research

IAN PARKER

MAIDENHEAD: OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2005;
Pb £19.99 (ISBN 0 335 21349 9)

REVIEWED BY Rebecca Williams

interviewing, narrative, discourse, psychoanalysis, action research, criteria and reports. However, despite the repetitious style of three, four or five key issues/ideas/resources to summarise the main ideas of each chapter, which suggest this is a textbook aimed at those new to the area, the narrative veers between oversimplicity and overcomplication, with a great deal of unexplained jargon.

Despite all this, there are some things the book does well. The philosophical ideas and writings covered are diverse and mostly drawn from

outside psychology, which gives a good précis of key ideas to broaden the straight psychologist's thinking. Examples pepper the chapters on theoretical approaches to illustrate the main points and stages of research. Likewise, the regular text boxes help to untangle the main arguments of the chapter and pose some interesting questions to stimulate reflection on the research process and the shadowy 'truths' we glean from our data.

In short, if you already do qualitative research then this book will revisit what you know and potentially broaden

your thinking and help raise new questions for debate. If the theory and philosophy behind qualitative research is new to you, then do not be fooled by the contents pages; this book requires serious concentration and a good dictionary to introduce you to the topic.

■ Dr Rebecca Williams is a clinical psychologist with the Arfon Learning Disabilities Team, North West Wales NHS Trust.

Clarifying and extending knowledge

Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience (2nd edition)

MARK H. JOHNSON

OXFORD: BLACKWELL; 2005; Pb £24.99 (1 4051 2629 9)

REVIEWED BY Deborah Riby

SINCE the first edition of Johnson's definitive introduction to developmental cognitive neuroscience eight years ago, this domain has found its feet within psychological research. A plethora of new investigations are addressed throughout this second edition. The first chapter provides an excellent and concise summary of how developmental cognitive neuroscience builds on biological and developmental aspects of psychological change and can expand our understanding of human behaviour. Such development is considered both pre- and postnatally in the following chapters before specific social and cognitive abilities are studied in subsequent sections (for example vision, attention, memory and language).

This new edition places more emphasis on developmental disorders (for example Williams syndrome, Down's syndrome and autism). Specific examples inform the

reader of how developmental cognitive neuroscience can enlighten us of areas of functioning in these learning difficulties and ultimately in typical development. Williams syndrome and autism, for example, are addressed as Johnson considers social information processing, whilst fragile X syndrome provides the perfect example of how genes contribute to cognitive change and development.

Throughout the text Johnson provides examples of further reading as well as accompanying online material, with an emphasis on how neuroscience methods can be used to clarify and extend our knowledge of how development is shaped. Johnson's text will provide the reader with a great level of understanding and will have an important impact upon readings in the field of developmental cognitive neuroscience.

■ *Deborah Riby is at Stirling University.*

Getting better

Overcoming Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – A Self-help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques

DAVID VEALE & ROB WILLSON

LONDON: ROBINSON; 2005; Pb £9.99 (ISBN 1 84119 936 2)

REVIEWED BY Deborah McQuaid

THE 'Overcoming...' series just gets better and better. *Overcoming Obsessive Compulsive Disorder* begins by instilling hope, with an inspiring foreword by Paul Salkovskis. The book is extremely client-centred, with useful appendixes on medication and open discussion of why less useful therapies and techniques don't work. The authors spend some time describing and helping the reader understand OCD in a thorough, engaging way – psychoeducation isn't always this interesting! Did you know that OCD is in the top 10 global illnesses when it comes to lost income and reduced quality of life?

The book takes a formulation-driven approach and classic psychological concepts get a user-friendly reworking.

The authors helpfully use metaphor, with OCD as a hole, compulsions and avoidance as the spade that made the hole and cognitive exposure and response prevention work as the ladder out.

The clinician will find heaps of much-needed detail, but it might make for complex reading for the uninitiated. The tone is consistently positive and supportive, even when pointing out common problems, such as the delicate balance between the 'work' of overcoming OCD and this itself becoming a new obsessional behaviour. This is an affordable and highly recommended read.

■ *Dr Deborah McQuaid works in adult mental health in Greater Glasgow NHS.*

Cancer in Context: A Practical Guide to Supportive Care

JAMES BRENNAN

OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY

PRESS; 2004; Pb £29.95

(ISBN 0 19 85152 5)

REVIEWED BY Iñigo Tolosa

THE pull of working with persons facing cancer might be the authenticity of the experience: a human being forced to confront the most powerful existential questions can make for a daring partner in any psychological work. The reality that 'it can happen to me' hits us with greater strength and often eliminates or allows us to drop vacuous distancing strategies: the resulting relationship can feel intensely 'alive'.

Healthcare professionals involved in the care of cancer patients (or many other medical conditions) will find *Cancer in Context*, written in collaboration with Clare Moynihan, provides them with a congruent narrative of the normal human responses to life-threatening illness. Brennan uses lay language to build a full description of the varied psychological processes that people face through cancer and its treatment. This makes it an excellent tool for teaching and training, as well as an ideal introduction to the theory and practice of psychosocial oncology to newcomers. Old hands will find it a useful resource that covers theoretical and clinical developments from a rich background: practical advice, philosophical frameworks, social views of illness and support, cultural perspectives and solid research evidence to enrich a clinician's mind and help polish their skills.

Brennan's inclusion of actual patient accounts brings to life the human experience that so often is lacking in clinical texts: while 'case studies' are frequently used in today's textbooks, the first-person narrative of a genuine challenging experience grabs both head and heart. Generous doses of compassion and sensitivity round up this excellent text to provide an honest attempt to respect and validate the experiences that persons facing cancer and their carers have shared with the authors.

■ *Dr Iñigo Tolosa is at the Cancer Centre, University Hospital Birmingham.*