

# Ammunition in the violence debate

**T**HIS book is a radically revised and enhanced edition. The first edition represented a reaction by the scholarly media studies community in Britain to a paper produced in 1994 by a psychologist, Elizabeth Newson, that made a case for the potentially harmful effects of 'video nasties'. Leading figures in media studies were highly critical of Newson's paper, which they claimed presented a highly selective and ill-informed review of the evidence for media-violence effects. This counterattack was expanded into a far-reaching critique of the value of media-effects research.

The second edition takes this critique further, with six new chapters (three originals from the first edition being dropped) that significantly question the efficacy of the largely psychology-based research methods that have been applied to analyse the alleged effects of media violence. Essentially, the arguments put forward here represent a long-running (and



now somewhat out-dated) conflict in media research between positivistic empiricism emanating primarily from America and the critical and interpretive schools of thought that have grown up in Europe.

There are four entries that, for me, stand out. Barker rips into Newson, who did rather let the side down for psychology, for not giving a balanced and comprehensive review of the empirical evidence, much of which is taken at face value. Gauntlett argues that

## *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate (2nd edition)*

MARTIN BARKER & JULIAN PETLEY (Eds)

LONDON: ROUTLEDGE; 2001; Hb £45.00 (ISBN 0 415 22512 4);

Pb £13.99 (ISBN 0 415 22513 2)

REVIEWED BY **Barrie Gunter**

media-effects research has failed to demonstrate media influences effectively largely because of poor methodologies. Buckingham prefers focus groups and depth interviews to experimentation and surveys, especially when investigating media effects on children; qualitative methods are, it is argued, more sensitive to the subtleties of children's interpretations of media content. The best single chapter is Murdock's telling historical account of moral panics over media effects, with the same arguments being echoed since the 19th century whenever a new form of entertainment emerges or attains widespread popularity.

The weakness of this book is that its polemic against empirical approaches to media effects research is in many ways as misrepresentative and

out of date as was Newson's review of the evidence. The criticisms of the simplistic behavioural model of media effects that was ascendant in the 1960s was already being questioned in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the cognitive perspective, which recognised the need for more sophisticated theoretical models and methodologies to analyse how people engaged with the media.

The problem with media studies grounded in a cultural and critical studies framework is that it has tended to be largely theoretical with, until fairly recently, an almost complete absence of data to back up its conclusions about the way people respond to media content. This last point goes a long way towards answering Barker's question about why

## Lows and highs

### *Handbook of Innovative Therapy*

RAYMOND J. CORSINI (Ed)

NEW YORK: WILEY; 2001; Hb £53.95

(ISBN 0 471 34819 8)

REVIEWED BY **Andrew Ganley**

**R**EVIEWING a 700-page handbook of therapy covering 69 different therapeutic approaches was never going to be an easy task. But allowing for a mini summer holiday and the strategic farming out of selected chapters to work colleagues I think I have managed to familiarise myself with the handbook enough to provide a guide to its strengths and weaknesses.

As well as skills of selection and discrimination an editor must have an overall vision or cohesiveness with which to blend chapters. I was struck that the

book lacked this sense of identity – I think this was primarily due to the overly short preface where the editor's vision was poorly articulated. I was therefore left wondering why, how and on what basis the editor had selected the therapies for review.

The editor did highlight that the term innovative used in the book title was a synonym for 'different' or 'unusual', and chapters covering encouragement therapy, allocentred therapy, poetry therapy, naikan psychotherapy, and orgone therapy lived up to this synonym commendably. However, the inclusion of more traditional approaches including cognitive behavioural therapy, brief solution-focused therapy and stress management felt oddly out of place and to some extent poorly served by this book. For instance, the chapter on cognitive behavioural therapy provided a pedestrian

account of its historical perspective but did little to bring to life the key elements of this therapy, and failed to include the more progressive integrative developments of this approach including the work of Wells, Safran, Young or Judith Beck which may fairly be regarded as the more innovative end of the CBT market.

The undoubted strength of the book is in its presentation of the diversity of esoteric therapies that are to be found chiefly in North America. The book is inclusive, optimistic and unconditional in its regard across the range of therapies presented. Out of these my own favourite was 'natural high therapy' (chapter 41)... Does anyone out there have the manual?

■ *Dr Andrew Ganley is a clinical psychologist with the Department of Psychological Therapies, Southport.*

media studies in Britain is not taken seriously by the media.

Given the almost perennial concerns with media violence, the book is worth reading for providing an alternative perspective to that which psychologists are likely to be familiar with. It is also a lesson in what happens when

psychologists provide ammunition, through ill-informed publications, to those who are only too willing to criticise the epistemological underpinning of the discipline.

■ *Barrie Gunter is a psychologist and is Professor of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield.*

## Children in mind

### *Focus on Early Childhood: Principles and Realities*

MARGARET BOUSHEL, MARY FAWCETT & JULIE SELWYN (EDS)

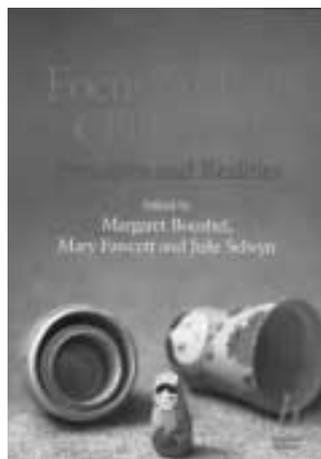
OXFORD: BLACKWELL SCIENCE; 2000; Pb £17.99 (ISBN 0 632 05157 4)

REVIEWED BY **Elizabeth Bray**

**A**UTHORS from a variety of disciplines contributed to *Focus on Early Childhood*, including psychologists, lecturers, barristers and pre-school teachers. The book reviews some old arguments with the most up-to-date research. These include the nature–nurture debate of early development, the role and effects of attachment figures, the effects of divorce and separation, the effects of physical punishment, the effects on children placed in day care, and the effects of video and electronic games on children, to name but a few! It reviews government policies, priorities and structures in relation to children growing up in Britain today. It appears unbiased, using an informative, constructive approach. It also takes into account both cross-cultural and gender issues.

I found the book at times heavy-going – it is not really an easy or relaxing read. However, one of its strengths is that it does not have to be read from beginning to end, you can focus on sections of the book that interest you most. Also, because of the contributions from various disciplines, different perspectives and approaches can be taken into account.

*Focus on Early Childhood*



appears to be extensively researched and provides some interesting, and sometimes shocking, statistics and information. This includes information such as nine out of ten children on the at-risk register remain at home, or how it was only in 1986 that central government included sexual abuse in their child protection guidelines.

The book would be of great interest to those involved in child development, not only because it examines child development itself, but also because it examines the social context in which children are reared.

■ *Elizabeth Bray is an assistant psychologist at Ashworth Hospital.*

## Swimming with sharks

### *Sport Hypnosis*

DONALD R. LIGGETT

CHAMPAIGN, IL: HUMAN KINETICS; 2000

Pb £25.00 (ISBN 0 7360 0214 6)

REVIEWED BY **Carole Seheult**

**T**HERE is an apocryphal story told about a swimmer to whom it was suggested, under hypnosis, that if he wanted to swim faster he should imagine himself powering down the pool with a shark snapping at his heels. The swimmer was a 100-metre freestyler, and as soon he reached the far end of the pool instead of a tumble turn he leapt from the water and disappeared through the swing doors! A comical story perhaps, but one which might also sound a note of caution for those who seek to use what can be a powerful and effective psychological technique.

In the opening chapter 'Demystifying hypnosis', the origins and history of the use of hypnosis are outlined. The author goes on to give a definition of hypnosis derived from the American Psychological Association's Division of Psychological Hypnosis, and to discuss the hypnotic trance and hypnotic susceptibility. The characteristics of trance allowed by hypnosis are examined, specifically in terms of how it can be useful to athletes when applied along with different mental skills. These include relaxation, suggestibility, and concentration, as well as the enhancement of imaginative ability and access to different brain functions (such as memory).

Chapters in Part II cover the development of a number of specific mental skills, including relaxation and stress reduction, imaging perfect performance, mobilising energy, building motivation with goals, optimising arousal levels, eliminating distractions and gaining 'inner strength' (enhancing self-confidence and self-efficacy). In most, but not all, of these chapters the author has tackled topics by synthesising the basic received wisdom in the area and discussing how hypnosis might enhance the effectiveness of these skills.

The author later discusses his work in the area of sports medicine using hypnosis for the control of pain and as a technique for enhancing the healing processes of the body. In 'Final thoughts', the reader is directed to some 'difficult' areas associated with hypnosis, including important ethical and legal issues.

As a psychologist with almost 20 years experience of using hypnosis, I have several reservations about this book. Initially I had approached it with some enthusiasm, as it is the only book I know dedicated to the use of hypnosis in sport. There is no doubt that it contains a great deal of interesting information, but there is a problem with the readership for whom this book is destined. If it is meant for the athlete, one of the first things the book tells you is that it is best to learn self-hypnosis – but you would have to find a qualified hypnotherapist to show you how to do it.

For the practising (sport) psychologist the book contains a great deal of interesting experience. But in many places the pieces of work described do not seem to meet the standards expected in terms of evidence-based practice, and there is often no evidence that hypnosis offers any significant advantage – the placebo effect may clearly have played a role. For those interested in learning to use hypnosis in sport this book will certainly whet the appetite, but it will not act as a training manual and will in no way replace a well-formulated postgraduate course on the subject.

■ *Carole Seheult is a sports psychologist based in Durham.*

# The definitive dictionary of psychology?

I NEVER knew there were so many ways of tricking the eye! The new Oxford *Dictionary of Psychology* is richly illustrated, but over half of the 77 illustrations are of visual illusions, and several of the remainder relate to the structure and function of the visual system. Up to a point, that is fine – above all, visual phenomena require visual presentation to achieve their impact. But other entries in this dictionary would equally have been clarified by good illustrations – cumulative record, EEG, basal ganglia, synthetic pathways of catecholamines, Venn diagram or neuron(e) all spring to mind.

The first issues that must be addressed for any dictionary, not just one of psychology, are those of comprehensiveness and balance [see article on p.650]. In fact, although my first impression from the

## *A Dictionary of Psychology*

ANDREW M. COLMAN

OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2001; Hb £25.00  
(ISBN 0 19866 211 4)

REVIEWED BY **Stephen B. Dunnett**

illustrations was one of considerable selective bias, once I started exploring different areas with which I am familiar nearly all the headwords that I sought were there; and those that were not are at the margins of being too specialised for a general dictionary of all psychology. In the preface the author emphasises the breadth of coverage extending beyond Anglo-Saxon empirical psychology to encompass psychoanalysis, clinical and biological psychology, neuropharmacology and statistics; and in this scope I consider him to have been successful.

However, with increased breadth a greater worry is whether a high level of core accuracy is maintained across all subject areas. A substantial number of inaccuracies and significant errors throw this into doubt. Of course, some of these relate to issues of balance on which expert views frequently differ. However, most would consider an entry on BSE that allocates half a line to prion disease and 11 lines to alternative autoimmune theories to be at the least unbalanced. Other entries are misleading. Huntington's disease, we are told, has 'onset after the age of 40', which is close to the mean age of onset,

but it can also be exhibited in gene carriers in their teens or in rare cases even earlier. Some entries are just plain wrong. Thus, dopamine is not 'an immediate precursor of serotonin' (although it is of noradrenaline). Other entries are simply esoteric, such as the description of the orthography 't-test' for the (Student's) *t* test as 'otiose'.

Oxford University Press has built the enviable reputation as the source of definitive reference volumes across the broadest range of scholarly discourse. The new *Dictionary of Psychology* is certainly a useful first port of call to identify an unfamiliar term, but it does not command the authority we might have expected from this publisher.

■ *Professor Stephen B. Dunnett is at the School of Biosciences, Cardiff University.*

## Statistically valuable

### *Statistics with Confidence (2nd edition)*

DOUGLAS G. ALTMAN, DAVID MACHIN,  
TREVOR N. BRYANT & MARTIN J. GARDINER  
BMJ Books; 2000; Pb £19.95 (ISBN 0 7279  
1375 1)

REVIEWED BY **Ranald R. Macdonald**

THERE are those who think that either an effect is statistically significant, which means that it is important and publishable, or it is insignificant, and should not be mentioned in public. Confidence intervals (CIs) combat this erroneous way of thinking by allowing the reporting of any effect while focusing attention on its size and its associated uncertainty.

*Statistics with Confidence* begins with an evangelical introduction on the advantages of CIs over statistical tests, noting the rise in papers containing CIs in the *British Medical Journal* from 4 per cent in 1977 to 62 per cent in 1994 and quoting the editor of *Epidemiology* as stating that he does not publish significance tests at all. Most of the book consists of an accessible, comprehensive reference work on CIs,

ending with a sensible section on good statistical practice. New to this edition are a discussion of power analyses and CIs associated with survival times, diagnostic tests and meta-analyses. It comes with an easy-to-use Windows statistical package for computing the CIs covered.

I am concerned that the book conveys a rather misleading message – CIs good, statistical tests bad – even though an explicit denial of this is buried in the text. Right from the beginning it should have been made clear that CIs can be seen as summaries of statistical tests. A CI is the range of values of a hypothesised population parameter from which an observed statistic does not differ significantly at a particular level. CIs and significance tests are based on the same logic and stand or fall together.

It is reasonable to argue that in many cases CIs convey more of what should be inferred from data than *p* values, but this need not always be so. Statistical tests allow one to filter out effects that might plausibly be attributed to chance. Moreover *p* values enable readers to determine whether statistical significance has been achieved at any possible level, whereas

significances inferred from CIs are limited to whether a *p* value is less than some fixed criterion. Significance tests may also be preferred where the mere presence of an effect is of theoretical importance regardless of its size; examples include ESP studies, tests of parameter invariance and composite statistical tests (e.g. MANOVAs), that are performed to legitimise the subsequent testing of component effects. Indeed it is noteworthy that the chapter on power is expressed in terms of statistical tests rather than CIs. Researchers should be given an understanding of the various ways of reporting data and then be free to use CIs if they want to indicate the range of population parameters that are consistent with an observed statistic (at some level of plausibility) and *p* values if they want a measure of the plausibility that the sign of a difference could be due to sampling error.

I can recommend the book as a valuable primer on CIs, but it would be improved by an introduction giving a clearer, more balanced exposition of statistical inference.

■ *Dr Ranald Macdonald is at the University of Stirling.*

# Making sense of the complex

*Principles of Cognitive Psychology*

MICHAEL W. EYSENCK

Hove: Psychology Press, 2001; Pb £13.50 (ISBN 1 84169 260 3)

REVIEWED BY **Helen E. Whiteley**

**W**HAT a pleasure it is to read a cognitive psychology text that is written in plain English! True to form, Michael Eysenck has produced an up-to-date, clear and accessible text that makes sense of some of the more complex aspects of psychology.

In addition to coverage of all of the fundamental topics within cognitive psychology, an introductory chapter provides an overview and evaluation of four major approaches within the cognitive psychology domain (experimental psychology, neuropsychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience). This introduction allows the reader to consider the evidence presented throughout the book in the context of these varied approaches.

Both the layout of the book and the style of writing contribute to its accessibility. Each new topic is introduced and described clearly, the text is supported by simple

but effective illustrations, and chapter summaries, essay questions and further reading should all aid the student in their learning and revision processes. Evaluation is a prominent feature throughout the book, students are encouraged to think about the issues and the evidence.

The text moves forward at a brisk pace to maintain attention and interest and yet provides sufficient information to underpin an understanding of the topics covered. Students of cognitive psychology often complain that it is difficult, complex and lacking in relevance to everyday life. Hopefully, if they begin their study of cognition with this text, they may see that it is not so difficult, not so complex and that it is extremely relevant to their everyday life.

■ *Dr Helen Whiteley is in the Department of Psychology, University of Central Lancashire.*

## SATELLITE WORKSHOPS

**Bids are invited by the Scientific Affairs Board for Satellite Workshops to be held the day before the Annual Conference 2002**

**Aim** — to encourage the development of special scientific interests through the discussion of work in progress.

**Grants** — up to four workshops will be funded for the hire of the room, plus travel grants of £500 (approximately £25 each for up to 20 participants who must be members of the Society).

**Criteria** — a balance of new graduates and experienced research workers as participants; a clear reason to meet; a scientific theme, not solely a professional one.

**Applications** — bids should be sent to the Chair of the Board, c/o Lisa Morrison, at the Society's office by **18 January 2002**. Any bids received after this date will not be considered.

**Report** — the workshop will not have published abstracts or any press coverage. A short report and any further plans arising from it should be presented to the Board.

**Further information can be obtained from Lisa Morrison at the Leicester office, e-mail: [lismor@bps.org.uk](mailto:lismor@bps.org.uk), or at the Society's website: [www.bps.org.uk/sab/satel.htm](http://www.bps.org.uk/sab/satel.htm)**

## THE PRESIDENTS' AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE 2002

Members of the Society are invited to submit nominations for the Presidents' Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge. Nominations should be addressed to Lisa Morrison, Scientific Officer, at the Society's Leicester office by **1 March 2002**.

The Presidents' Award is given to candidates normally resident in the United Kingdom as a mid-career award. Unlike the Spearman Medal (which is restricted to the first decade of a career as a psychologist) or election to Honorary Fellowship (which usually takes account of a whole career) it is intended as a timely acknowledgement of the achievements of those who are currently engaged in research of outstanding quality.

Grounds for proposing the candidate should be fully stated by the proposer, but a full CV need not be included. This may be requested by the Scientific Affairs Board once a shortlist of possible recipients has been agreed by the Board.

The Presidents' Award carries with it Life Membership of the Society. Recipients are invited to address the Society at its Annual Conference.

Professor Mike Hewstone is the recipient of the Presidents' Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge 2001.