

Reflecting on the past

IT almost goes without saying that a book with the title *Psychology in Britain* should have something of interest for everyone who works or studies in the field of psychology. This is a history of psychology with a difference. Produced to mark the centenary of the Society, it is written by 27 eminent British psychologists, including many 'household names' like Michael Argyle, Alan Baddeley and Michael Rutter.

The book does not set out to be a comprehensive text. You won't turn to it for a systematic account of, say, the rise of educational or health psychology. Rather it is a fascinating collection of 'historical essays and personal reflections', and it is here that its strength lies. Its coverage is vast, and there are many insights that have never before appeared in print.

This is a book that covers in a very readable way the whole question of how we got to where we are today. From a wide variety of different perspectives it traces how psychology rose from its humble beginnings to establish itself as

Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections

GEOFF BUNN, SANDY LOVIE & GRAHAM RICHARDS (EDS)

LEICESTER: BPS BOOKS IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SCIENCE MUSEUM; 2001;
Pb £18.00 (ISBN 1 85433 332 1)

REVIEWED BY **Tommy MacKay**

a separate discipline and a serious scientific subject with a major impact on British academic and professional life. It also offers some unusual insights into the rise of the Society itself, from the institutional failure of the Psychological Society of Great Britain in the 1870s to 'how the British Psychological Society attained its place in the sun'.

This is not just a book written by historians of psychology. Many of the contributors form part of that history itself. Their personal accounts are full of interesting snippets of the kind that do not usually find their way into history books, such as Richard Gregory's 'adventures of a maverick'. Yet, despite the personal and anecdotal touch, which provides the human interest, the material is far from lightweight. It is crammed with facts, and

the bibliography of almost 1500 references is so fascinating it would almost be worth having the book for this alone.

The Society's centenary slogan is 'Bringing psychology to society'. *Psychology in Britain* gives a vivid account of how psychology has gone about achieving that ambition, and how it has moved from the margins of academia and of society in general to make an enormous impact on British culture. We will better understand where psychology is going when we appreciate more fully where it has come from, and for this the book is indispensable.

■ *Dr Tommy MacKay is Director of Psychology Consultancy Services and Honorary Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Strathclyde.*

Learning to read the signs

THERE is considerable pressure on teachers to identify literacy problems early on in a child's school life. Yet many educators are, for various reasons, ill-equipped to do so. Most have a limited knowledge of what dyslexia is, and even when the impairment is identified, teachers rarely have the time or the resources to deal with it. These points come out strongly in this book edited by Morag Hunter-Carsch, a lecturer in education at Leicester University.

The 15 chapters adopt a broad approach in proposing a 'socially interactive model of dyslexia set within a wider framework of specific learning difficulties', addressing the difficulties of defining dyslexia, the lack of agreement about methods of assessment, teaching approaches, and the role of parents.

Many of the problems that the book presents are encountered daily by teachers; they will also strike a chord with those who are dyslexic, with their parents and their families. Practical strategies are offered to tackle these problems, although many of these are couched in terms of educationist



Dyslexia: A Psychosocial Perspective

MORAG HUNTER-CARSCH (ED)

LONDON: WHURR; 2001; Pb £19.50 (ISBN 1 86156 194 6)

REVIEWED BY **Nicky Brunswick**

models and theories. While some of these may not always be accessible to the psychologist or lay parent, there is much in here that they will recognise and be able to learn from.

In view of the book's title, I would have hoped to see rather more about the psychology of dyslexia, but only one chapter – on phonology and brain research – was written by a psychologist (Tim Miles), and this was disappointingly brief. Beyond this there is only superficial mention of psychological research – the biological bases of dyslexia are dismissed in a couple of pages – and there is a frustrating lack of detail. I would have liked to see much more discussion of the results of psychosocial research and how these could inform classroom teaching. This is not necessarily

a criticism of the book, as it is clearly written by educationists, for educationists, but I feel that it might have been more accurately titled *Dyslexia: An Educationist Perspective*.

I hope that this book becomes required reading for trainee teachers, and I am sure that even qualified teachers will find much in it that will help to increase the effectiveness of their teaching. The lists of internet resources, suppliers of computer software and details of courses for specialist teacher training, for example, provide a valuable store of information for busy teachers to dip into.

Nice book, shame about the title.

■ *Dr Nicky Brunswick is a senior lecturer in psychology at Middlesex University.*

A fortunate reversal

IN its attempts to emulate the physical sciences, traditional psychology has repeatedly sought to discover assumed causal factors within individuals: factors that would be fixed and universal, and that yield to quantitative measurement. Such factors have been postulated as the universal 'hidden hand' behind behaviour, irrespective of whether the human is male or female, black or white, living in China or Sweden. A classic example of the hidden causal hand is currently thriving in the field of personality, in the shape of the so-called 'Big Five' personality traits. Inevitably there is some dispute as to whether the Big Five should actually be the Big Six or the Big Eight, and cross-cultural research in China and elsewhere is showing that we would have a different Big Five if the research were conducted in non-Western societies.

A far more interesting and sophisticated approach to personality and emotions is found in reversal theory, pioneered by Michael J. Apter, a British psychologist now based in the United States. His book is a collection of 16 insightful chapters by leading exponents of reversal theory, and I commend it highly to all psychologists.

The most promising feature of reversal theory is its ability to help us better understand the continually fluid nature of behaviour, and the apparent contradictions that are central to all human life. Over the last half a century or so a variety of

Motivational Styles in Everyday Life

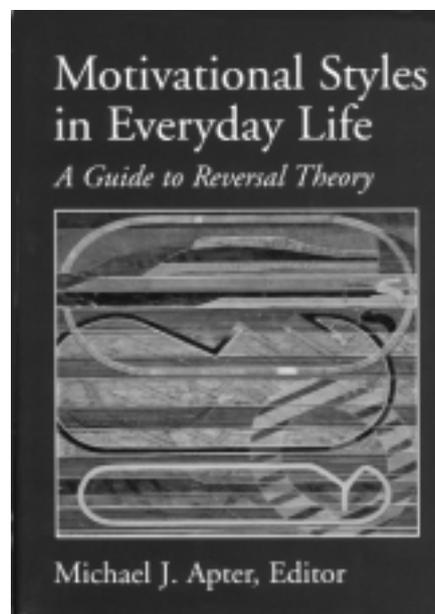
MICHAEL J. APTER (Ed)

WASHINGTON, DC: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION; 2001; Hb £33.95 (ISBN 1 557 98739 4)

REVIEWED BY Fathali M. Moghaddam

consistency theories have dominated psychological research, on the assumption that human beings strive to achieve balance and consistency, homeostasis being the assumed desired state. But in real life, we all live with many contradictions, and we move from wanting to be calm to striving to find excitement. Reversal theory shows great promise in grappling with such human complexities and 'inconsistencies'.

The central focus of reversal theory is motivational style, a particular orientation to the world based on psychological values, such as love or achievement. But such values are treated as changing moods rather than as fixed traits, and in this respect reversal theory is fundamentally different from the Big Five. Reversal theory is concerned with changes over time within individuals, rather than in individual differences; in this respect also it differs from the Big Five. Although reversal theory adopts an idiographic approach, as opposed to the more nomothetic orientation of the Big Five, the research arising from, and supportive of, reversal theory is quantitative and psychometrically sound.



Thus, reversal theory research is not easily dismissed as 'soft'.

Reversal theory evolved out of an applied context; this book continues this tradition by applying the theory to stress management, smoking cessation, addiction, exercise, therapy, and organisational behaviour. There are also very useful chapters on the major reversal theory measures, as well as outlines of the theory.

■ Professor Fathali M. Moghaddam is at Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Quality in qualitative research

RECENT developments in qualitative research are given a thorough evaluation in Carla Willig's latest book on theory and method. Aimed at those unfamiliar with qualitative methods, its clarity and perceptive detail will no doubt also ensure its welcome amongst more established researchers.

As the title suggests, the book is truly an adventure. The latest and hottest debates are discussed alongside challenging questions on epistemology and

Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method

CARLA WILLIG

BUCKINGHAM: OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2001; Pb £16.99 (ISBN 0 335 20535 6)

REVIEWED BY Sally Wiggins

theoretical assumptions. The reader not only gains an understanding of six key qualitative methods, but also a resource for questioning the application of these methods.

The strength of the book thus lies in its ability to challenge and inform the reader. Willig has a wonderfully

engaging and accessible style that prevents the discussions from ever becoming too heavy or dry. Case studies and examples are used throughout to bring the methods to life. In particular, the use of three undergraduate reports as examples of recent research is a helpful addition. These not

only serve as a guide for students, but they will also be useful for those concerned with assessing the quality of qualitative research – something that Willig herself addresses.

■ Sally Wiggins is a postgraduate at Loughborough University.