
The continued high level of interest in hyperkinetic disorder means that a new book with the title “Understanding ADHD” is likely to attract the professional who is striving for clarity in this area. When assessing any new source of information about hyperkinetic disorder, it is important, first, to consider what range of difficulties is being considered; and, second, whether the approach is mainstream or “fringe”.

The authors of this book are from Massachusetts, U.S.A., which together with the book title, answers the first query; here we are referring to the DSM-IV diagnosis rather than the slightly more restrictive ICD-10 diagnosis of hyperkinetic disorder.

The book is divided into four sections: describing the model, the background, brain reward and punishment mechanisms, and the authors’ perspective on treatment. There are two appendices, the first describing a school-based treatment approach and the second a handout for parents and teachers.

There is a good reference section and index.

It is stated in the preface that this is a “point-of-view endeavour”. This could, perhaps, have been made clearer in the text, as although this reviewer has read fairly widely on this subject, I sometimes found it hard to distinguish agreed facts from more contentious statements. This could be a problem for a reader coming to the area afresh.

The style of different chapters is very uneven, ranging from the dense, heavily referenced neurobiological to the lighter, almost superficial sociopsychological. I suspect this reflects the different professional backgrounds (psychologist/psychotherapist and psychiatrist) of the co-authors, as much as the subject matter. However, I was rather irritated by patronising statements at the beginnings of neurobiological sections, such as “some of the material in this section is rather technical”. Whilst this might be true (and certainly there is high jargon content), most readers should be able to work this out for themselves and adjust their reading accordingly. These “technical” sections presented a clear exploration of recent biological research on neurotransmitter systems, being suitably tentative in places. It was useful to be able to link nutritional theories with neurotransmitter research. This enabled me to offer a possible explanation regarding a colleague’s patient whose overactivity is quelled by “jelly babies” but worsened by other confectionery!

The main thrust of the book is on the capacity (or lack of it) of individuals with ADHD to attach “feeling” to people, ideas, events, and objects. The theory of the “feeling brain” is presented in an accessible manner, with reference to brain reward and punishment mechanisms, and mapping to observed behaviour patterns in ADHD. However, in reading this, one could not help thinking that there was some confusion/overlap with work on specific difficulties in socialising. Also the pernicious effect of repeated failure on self-esteem is, for me, insufficiently emphasised as an alternative basis for continued poor behaviour. It is reassuring, despite my doubts about the underlying theory, that the treatment section presents “good practice” with which it is hard to argue—others seem to have arrived at similar conclusions by a different route.

In conclusion, this is a useful if somewhat perplexing book. The presentation of the authors’ “point of view” is thought-provoking, but sometimes insufficiently signposted as speculation for the novice reader. The biological research is well explained, and the “feeling brain” approach an interesting dimension to explore. This book is a welcome addition to our library, and is recommended to individuals (doctors especially) with the above caveats.

Paul Laking


This book is aimed at mental health professionals working with children and young people, providing them with the key information in evaluation methods, in a context of current public health and social work policy. It is part of a series addressing the need for systematic analysis of child mental health services. An introductory chapter points out the importance and the difficulties of evaluating services. The next two chapters focus on factors in the mental health field that have produced changes in the services to children with severe emotional disorders. There is much discussion of the NIMH Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP). The comment is made that this program has had a “profound effect on how states organise care…yet there is little evaluative data on the effectiveness of the resulting systems’. This lack of evaluation leaves child mental health services at risk, since there is no evidence to indicate whether treatments are helpful or damaging.

The next three chapters describe U.S.A.-based evaluative developments, with emphasis on the need for the public- and private-sector services to have a shared vision for child mental health, with resources ringfenced to bring about this vision to reality. The desire to improve changes must be embedded in government policy, so that those resources will be committed, even in times of economic stringency. These are all thought-provoking chapters. There follow two chapters describing research evaluation and an excellent frank discussion of the difficulties and findings of the randomised controlled trial, the North Carolina Children’s Initiative. The book ends with a chapter on the methodological challenges in cross-cultural research of childhood psychopathology, which fits in rather uncomfortably with the rest of the book.

This is rather a densely written text and the entire volume would have benefited from the use of bullet points, boxes, and figures. Readers may be put off by the initial three chapters, which may not seem relevant to the U.K. market, since there is throughout the book an emphasis on describing U.S.A. initiatives. However, the middle section provides useful background and an interesting and relevant perspective on the links between private industry, voluntary sector, and a state health service. This is a book for U.K. and European readers to dip into selectively, to borrow from the library, but probably not to own.

Anne Worrall-Davies

This book left me envious of those it will introduce comfortably to a subject that I have had to learn laboriously piecemeal. Starting with a list of the features that might characterise any service delivering a good quality of life, there is an emphasis on prevention. The approach is multidisciplinary: indeed, the psychologist-editor lists the presence of a mental retardation psychiatrist as one of his indicators of a good service. A multi-author book, it largely succeeds in its aim of providing a wide range of models for the management of a variety of behaviour problems.

It falls into two parts, the first describing a number of treatment approaches, including medication. The second part deals with some of the more frequent and intractable conditions that characterise learning disability—self-injury, stereotypy, aggression, rumination, and pica. It includes a well-balanced summary of the place of punishment in training, its effectiveness as well as its drawbacks; an area more usually ignored.

I found this book provided a broad and useful introduction to disturbance in learning disability. Written in clear, non-technical American, there is only the occasional patch of dense prose ("maximising desirable outcomes in interpersonal relations"). All technical terms and manoeuvres are explained; there is no assumption of a basic knowledge. It is suitable for anyone working in the field, including carers within the family.

What might be improved? There are some intriguing gaps in its coverage. Autism is dealt with by Lovaa. While he has given a vivid, practical account of his intensive behavioural approach, he omits any hint of another school of thought. This single-mindedness extends to the patchy focus of many of the reference lists, which have a marked American bias. The chapter on drug treatment ambitiously details the effects of specific drugs, which ensures that it will date quickly and, with the limitations of space, has had to lump adverse effects into a meaningless recitation. It might have been wiser to refer the reader to a foray for prescribing details as well as to some of the excellent texts, such as those by Green or Gualtieri. Finally, while addressing symptomatology, the book ignores the underlying effects of innate components, notably epilepsy, autism, and the behavioural phenotype.

The resultant impression overall is of an academic approach insufficiently tempered by clinical experience. At the same time, faced with preparing a lecture on the topics associated with severe learning disability, I turned to this book as a useful source and overview. I would recommend it to anyone working with a person with a learning disability as a good, theoretical starting point were it not that, although soft-covered, its price is daunting. I look forward to an enlarged, revised, and cheaper second edition.

T. P. Berney

References


Written to help therapists avoid the hazards of eliciting “false” memories in their adult patients, this book is a timely contribution to the debate about whether and how false memories of sexual abuse might be induced during the course of therapy. Therapists working with children who rarely “forget” the abuse, which may be recent or ongoing, will find it chiefly useful for the overview it gives of recent research on how perceptions are processed and how experiences that induce fear, pain, terror, and helplessness in the individual (“psychological trauma”) are dealt with by the brain. The literature review appears to be comprehensive and includes Williams’ interesting studies, which showed that some adults with documented childhood sexual abuse do not recall the experience. The controversy about false memory syndrome rages on both sides of the Atlantic. A working group commissioned by the Royal College of Psychiatrists recently found it difficult to come to a consensus. Those struggling with this problem will find this book helpful, but Terr’s book, which covers much of the same ground, is much more readable. It is a bit pricey for its size.

Dora Black

References


It is unnecessary for the reader to have more than a superficial knowledge of Piaget’s or Vygotsky’s theories in order to enjoy and profit from this excellent and varied collection of essays. Based on a conference marking the centenary of their births in 1896, the book is ordered around the following themes: educational intervention and teaching; social collaboration and learning; cognitive skills and domain specificity; measurement of development; and development of modal understanding. There are lively commentaries, an introduction by the editors, and a view from the giants’ shoulders by Deanna Kuhn. Many of the contributors present their empirical findings, not always in keeping with theoretical expectations, whereas others lean more to theoretical expositions. In most cases the presentations are lucid, with the internationally respected authors providing material on topics such as intervention in senior schools, mathematical reasoning, the measurement of development, and children’s understanding of permission and obligation. The book is to be recommended to those with interests in cognitive development.

Ann Clarke