Adoption: Theory, Policy and Practice
J. Triseliotis, J. Shireman, & M. Hundleby

In their introduction the authors say that they are looking to bring together in a single volume the theoretical, policy, and practice issues that are associated with adoption. To achieve this they offer chapters that look at various aspects of adoption from the recruiting of adoptive parents to the child care system, and the place of adoption within it. There are also chapters on adoption by single parents, and the growing area of transracial and inter-country adoptions. Adoptions that involve gay and lesbian parents are also mentioned, but not in the same depth that other aspects of adoption are considered.

The history of adoption is admirably summarised into five distinct periods. The book has an emphasis that is very much on the practical and so, for example, there is a detailed description of the preparatory work necessary with children, which captures the flavour of such work in a very helpful way. In most chapters there are checklists that detail, for instance, the factors associated with a successful placement or the elements that should be in a programme for would-be adopters. These checklists clearly make the book a valuable guide for practitioners who are beginning to work within the field. The book is written in an easy and accessible style, although at the end of each chapter there is a ‘5-key point’ summary, the value of which is difficult to determine.

The emphasis on the positive aspects of adoption has resulted in the psychiatric literature on the field being virtually dismissed, a decision justified largely by Brodzinsky’s (1993) suggestion that it is adoptive parents accessing psychiatric services more readily that creates the increased rates of referral, rather than any genuine increased rate of psychopathology. This approach results in some interesting anomalies, such as suggesting that the 100% increase in difficulties that Bohman (1970) found in 11-year-old adopted children when compared to their peers is suggested to be of little significance because it had faded by their late teens (Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990).

Overall, this is an admirable attempt to draw together much of the knowledge around adoptions and will be a good primer for any clinician starting in the field. However, some of the gaps within its content will not render it suitable as a true reference text.

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References

Racism and Child Protection: The Black Experience of Child Sexual Abuse
V. Jackson
London: Cassell, 1996. pp. 86. £35.00 (hb), £12.99 (pb).

The message in this book is quite simple. To be sexually abused is bad enough, but being black (i.e. non-white) makes it even more difficult to tell. Racial stereotypes and perceptions still persist and may affect both attitudes and behaviour of professionals involved in the assessment of risk in child protection cases.

I found myself agreeing with the above summary. There were good examples of racial stereotyping in the statements of participants of case conferences described in the book. It was more difficult to accept Jackson’s case for the prevalence of particular myths. For example, ‘the widely held perception that it is normal for the little black girls to be sexually manhandled by their fathers, grandfathers, uncles and friends of the family is one of the most damaging myths with which survivors have to contend’, (Preface), or that ‘incest is accepted in black cultures’. I have to say I was not aware that these are popular myths that already abound, I would, however, not want to see even more myths unnecessarily perpetuated.

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Singapore, and Malaysia. My experience is that child sexual abuse is universally condemned, and inter-familial abuse even more so. Sometimes there may be a tradition of child sexual abuse within a pattern of deviant practice common in a particular community; it is nonetheless seen as deviant and condemned by the majority in the community. An example in Zimbabwe would be a prescription by traditional healers for men with Aids to find a virgin to sleep with, as it would then cure the disease.

I was informed that traditional healers of that persuasion would not be admitted into membership of the national association of traditional healers.

Jackson also holds strongly to the view that black children can only tell black professionals or other black adults about being abused. I feel this is an overgeneralisation and not necessarily a universal truth. Our experience in Redbridge, where there are a significant proportion of South Asian families, is that often South Asian girls may in fact find it easier to talk to non-Asian female staff as they think Asian staff may react with a sense of shame that the victims find disabling.

A useful checklist regarding treatment needs of sexually abused children is to be found in Chapter 3. The Welfare Checklist for children (p. 52) is also helpful, and two case studies were particularly interesting, involving an Afro-Caribbean boy and a South Asian girl.

My view of this book is that the topic is an important one, and the case examples and background research make for interesting reading. A number of the conclusions are, however, too impressionistic to be useful. The main point of the book is that the impact of race and culture is central in the understanding of an individual’s response to abuse. Also that these contexts will define to some extent the freedom of an individual child to receive help, protection, and treatment. I would therefore give qualified approval to the book for use in student training. Given the number of myths that already abound, I would, however, not want to see even more myths unnecessarily perpetuated.
Hearing the Internal Trauma: Working with Children and Adolescents Who Have Been Sexually Abused

S. Wieland


This is an extremely readable addition to the growing literature on the treatment of child victims of sexual abuse. The initial chapter on the internalisation model is a simple and clear description of psycho-dynamic and attachment theories. While the impact of abuse on children, and their parents, is informed by this model, the actual therapeutic work focuses particularly on the effects of the abuse, and uses a range of cognitive techniques and strategies. In the three chapters on treatment, each with a wealth of pertinent brief illustrations of clinical interactions, the reader will recognise many of the strategies used with children, families, and groups, such as role play and rehearsal. Wieland recognises that in family therapy the therapist must not be neutral in working with abuse; although perhaps she does not spell out plainly enough the need for perpetrators to obtain specific treatment for their sexual problems. She addresses sensitively the reluctance of children, and in particular adolescents, to engage in treatment. Throughout the treatment chapters she comments on the feelings of stickiness, lack of empathy, and misunderstanding that can affect the therapist. In the final chapter, which is devoted to therapist difficulties and needs, she considers counter-transference issues and the therapist’s own internalisations. This book is refreshing in the way in which various therapeutic models are synthesised creatively. It is well referenced and should be valuable for all practitioners engaged in treatment.

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Therapeutic Recreation for Exceptional Children: Let Me In, I Want to Play (2nd edn.)

A. H. Fine & N. M. Fine (Eds.)

Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1996. p. 402. $69.95 (hb), $49.95 (pb).

At first glance, the most striking thing about this hardback is that it looks deceptively old—not only from the outer cover, but also from the inner pages and typeface. However, on closer inspection, it is clear from the content and references that it is very much a revised second edition. The title itself may also be off-putting—indeed part of the first chapter is dedicated to explaining the terminology. In essence, exceptional individuals are those whose performance deviates from the norm. The gifted and talented are not included in this context.

The book essentially advocates involving ‘exceptional’ children in play and/or leisure at a young age so that they may utilise skills as an adult. It argues that providing experiences where enjoyment is not the sole benefit allows the opportunity to become therapeutic as well as fun. The 11 chapters all include a mix of factual information and reference, practical advice and anecdotal examples. There is, however, inevitably some repetition of fact.

The benefit of play and leisure is by no means a new concept. The chapter on therapeutic recreation begins with an interesting historical review of attitudes towards disability and progresses to development of recreation. However, it proceeds to a potted history of North American facilities and establishments. There is an entire chapter devoted to North American laws applicable to disability. Although the available services, laws, and associations within the US are not directly relevant to readers outside the US, perhaps we can learn from their experience.

The book is aimed at professionals, students, and parents. It contains practical applications for planning recreation services, detailed instructions on assessment, and practical ideas for therapy with illustrations. It contains a deceptive amount of information, explaining theories of psychology, describing and explaining scales, batteries, inventories, statistics, and behavioural checklists, and gives practical advice on their implementation.

Within the umbrella of recreation therapies there is a useful overview of therapies including play therapy, art therapy, bibliotherapy, animal assisted therapy, and horticultural therapy. These brief summaries are supported both by references within the text to practical guide books and extensive references at the end of each chapter. Towards the end of the volume there is a chapter highlighting parents as a key to successful programmes. Within this is an insightful passage on parenting a child with a disability and implications for the siblings.

Although initially unappealing, this book contains a wealth of factual and background information, as well as practical guidance. It is sympathetically written by authors who seem dedicated and enthusiastic in their cause. It would provide a useful reference for those working with disabled children and adults and is equally accessible to parents.

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The Challenge of Attachment for Caregiving

D. Heard & B. Lake


This book offers a theoretical account of attachment from a biopsychosocial perspective and provides a thoughtful description of the implications of early emotional experiences for subsequent development. The authors have invested a great deal of effort in reviewing literature from animal behaviour research, neuropsychology, and attachment theory to construct a model of human psychological development relevant for psychotherapists and students of psychology. Perhaps inevitably, there are times when the synthesis seems incomplete, but the clarity of ideas and accessibility of the writing provide the potential for an open exchange among several disciplines. A strength of the book is the focus on different psychoanalytic perspectives regarding psychological functioning and the overlap between these approaches and the authors’ conceptualisation of the caregiving system in adulthood.

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Personal Accounts: Involving Disabled Children in Research

B. Beresford


This is a good small text reviewing the diverse body of literature relevant to the study of children with disability. It addresses the key areas of methodology, interview techniques, research tools, and ethical and consent issues. The book strongly advocates for a child-centred approach and that
research should be done in partnership with disabled children. Good research needs to tap directly into the experiences and views of the child with disability. For anyone who is planning to undertake research with children who have a disability, this book is essential reading.

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Approaches to Child Treatment: Introduction to Theory, Research, and Practice (2nd Edn.)
J. H. Johnson, W. C. Rasbury, & L. J. Siegel

This is the second edition by three American authors from places as diverse as Florida, Detroit, and Yeshiva. Two of the authors are university based, and the third works in a hospital. This is all we are told of the backgrounds, training, or credentials for these three to write this book.

I am somewhat surprised that there is now a second edition. However, since the book describes itself as aimed at students of child psychology, child psychiatry, social work, and special education, I suspect it has found its way onto recommended reading lists, at least in those three places listed above. I am not convinced of the extent to which it is actually read.

The preface describes its aim as to provide an introduction and overview to the primary therapeutic approaches useful in working with children and adolescents. I believe it has taken on too wide a brief. The book ends up as neither an introduction nor an overview. It is neither concise nor focused. Rather, it is verbose and over-inclusive—extending not sufficiently inclusive of much outside the USA either in the way of research or clinical practice. (Obviously Freud and Klein get a look-in, but not Winnicott or Bowlby or even Rutter! In fact, there is no mention of attachment theory anywhere in the book, which is a significant omission.)

Overall, this is a rather dry text with few clinical vignettes or anecdotes to whet the appetite of undergraduates keen to gain clinical experience. The best section in this respect is that on 'problems that may require treatment'. But even in this section, post-traumatic stress disorder is omitted and child sexual abuse only briefly considered. The section that sticks best to its remit is that on family therapy, in which a general overview is given in quite a concise and helpful way.

I have reservations about the usefulness of this book, particularly outside the USA. I believe much of what it attempts to cover is far better presented in other well-established text books.

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Books by Members

D. V. M. Bishop
Uncommon Understanding: Development and Disorders of Language Comprehension in Children

Peter Bruggen
Who Cares? True Stories of the NHS Reforms

Robert Goodman & Stephen Scott
Child Psychiatry

Patricia Howlin
Autism: Preparing for Adulthood

Richard Lansdown, Nichola Rumsey, Eileen Bradbury, Tony Carr, & James Partridge
Visibly Different: Coping with Disfigurement

Geoff Lindsay & David Thompson
Values into Practice in Special Education

Margaret Rustin, Maria Rhode, Alex Dubinsky, & Hélène Dubinsky (Eds.)
Psychotic States in Children

Leslie Smith, Julie Dockrell, & Peter Tomlinson
Piaget, Vygotsky and Beyond