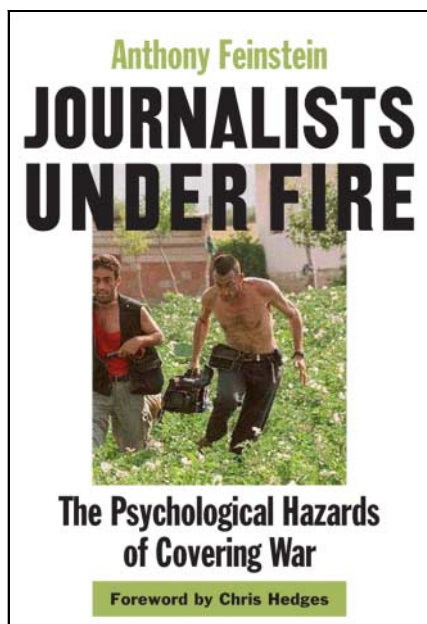


Book reviews

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Journalists Under Fire: The Psychological Hazards of Covering War

By Anthony Feinstein. Johns Hopkins University Press. 2006. 216pp. US\$25.00 (hb). ISBN 0801884411



Chiding the military establishment for failing to provide adequate aftercare for wounded servicemen is a favourite media pastime and the psychological toll of conflict among service veterans has been popularised by the press. What is less well known – indeed, virtually invisible to the public gaze – is the psychological toll within the news media itself as journalists and photographers deliberately expose themselves to the risks and horrors of conflict to seek out the grotesque in pursuit of the big story and the best picture.

Journalists Under Fire is not a textbook of post-traumatic stress disorder or psychological trauma: rather it puts flesh on the bones of the sanitised, sterile descriptions of psychopathology in the academic literature. This book makes for uncomfortable reading: sometimes disturbing and upsetting but always compelling, Feinstein uses personal narrative to vividly and chillingly

describe the psychological effects of war reporting on those journalists who bear witness to the brutality and inhumanity of conflict. The social consequences of trauma are starkly depicted: broken families, broken careers, broken lives; all too often sublimated and disguised by a fast-living, hard-drinking machismo lifestyle and culture that goes with the territory.

What is most disturbing, is not so much the incidence or nature of psychopathology among journalists, but the fact that so few of them get any sort of help or treatment. News organisations (who have a duty of care no less than the much-maligned military establishment) typically turn a blind eye and offer little in the way of support. Then there are freelancers who lack any of the benefits and protection that a concerned and responsible employer should provide.

Remarkably, this is the first published investigation looking specifically at journalists as a vulnerable group. It should give news organisations pause for thought and a stimulus to get their own house in order, before casting brickbats at the military. If they fail to act, and with no end in sight to the endless stream of war and terrorism flashed across our TV screens and news media, increasing numbers of naive young men and women will be put at risk without warning, preparation or aftercare merely to satisfy the insatiable public interest and voyeuristic appetite for war reportage.

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Forensic Psychiatry: Influences of Evil

Edited by Tom Mason. Humana. 2006. 350pp. US\$99.50 (hb). ISBN 1588294498

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines evil as 'profound wickedness and depravity, especially when regarded as a supernatural force' with the subsense of

'something harmful or undesirable, e.g. social evils'. I give the definition because it is not in the book and ambiguity is a problem. Is that evil as in medieval, or merely undesirable? Are we dealing in hellfire and damnation, or suspension for breach of guidelines? The editors seem unconcerned with such distinctions, so dodgy business methods are thrown into the cauldron with homicide. Used in this way, as a generic term for things of which we disapprove, the concept of evil serves only to justify prejudice.

My interest in the topic began with removal from primary school after the head teachers' 'touch of evil' lecture on the essential similarity between staying out late and armed robbery. Heady stuff for 9-year-olds, but it was a faith school. The head would have loved this book; it finds evil in pharmaceutical marketing and in the killing of children. It is no surprise that religion claims to identify evil wherever it resides, but it is disappointing that the inquisitorial method goes unchallenged in a book that deals also with science – or 'science' as the authors have it, with those quotation marks summing up their approach. Foucault dominates the references.

Foucault's legacy is mixed. His big idea was the assault on professional power but, since attacks on doctors became a sport, he has lost the copyright. His other trademark is an impenetrable writing style. Several contributors perpetuate that legacy, without the excuse of writing in French. Parts of the book are incomprehensible or,

