

## Book reviews

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*The Confabulating Mind: How the Brain Creates Reality*. By A. Schnider. (Pp. 332; £29.95; ISBN 9780199206759.) Oxford, UK. 2008.

The title of this book suggests two major challenges. First, to describe the confabulating mind, and second, to answer the question how the brain creates reality.

With regards to the first question the author does a very neat historical introduction citing all those from Korsakoff to Kopelman who have contributed to the development of the concept of confabulation. Based upon his own research, he comes up with four different forms of confabulation which include simple intrusions, momentary confabulations, fantastic confabulations and behaviourally spontaneous confabulations. This covers various forms of confabulations from the momentary, often as a consequence of embarrassment, to the persistent, and from those which have at least some basis in reality, to others which are simply nonsensical and illogical. The author then reviews the background aetiology and pathology of those conditions that can lead to confabulation. The Papez circuit figures strongly here, although the contribution of frontal lesions is well explored the clinical chapters are peppered with brief case histories and brain imaging for examples of damaged brain.

Amongst the conditions discussed are psychiatric ones such as schizophrenia and dementia syndromes. The areas of the frontal cortex most favoured following review of the data are the ventromedial prefrontal cortex particularly the medial orbitofrontal cortex and adjacent basal forebrain.

The author then goes on to describe psychological syndromes that overlap with confabulation, which include not only amnesia as part of the original description of Korsakoff Syndrome, but also disorders of recognition and paramnesic syndromes, *déjà vu*, and even anosognosia.

Essentially this broadens considerably the usual discussions that surround confabulation, which leads on to the second challenge of the book, namely how is it that false memories arise, even in the absence of course brain disease or recognized psychiatric disorder. Thus, there is a discussion of false memories, and how easy it is to manipulate memory. The author comments 'any person with a normal memory may retrieve objectively false memories and make false

statements about previous events – anyone may confabulate!' (p. 200). This leads to a discussion of the 'real battlefield of confabulation research: the dispute of the mechanism or mechanisms of confabulations' (p. 203).

Earlier models of confabulation had assumed that there was one common disorder. It is clear from this book that confabulation is the outcome of a variety of processes both neurological and psychological. These concern patients' own interests, particularly with the mechanism of those confabulations that reveal the conviction of the patients' statements and which are always associated with amnesia and disorientation, and usually linked to some kind of executive dysfunction. These are the ones with the more secure anatomical foundation and which the author believes do indeed represent a unique syndrome, distinguishing them from the other forms of confabulations discussed. This form they refer to as behaviourally spontaneous confabulation, for which they provide interesting experimental support. It relates to confabulation as a failure to distinguish between memories that pertain to ongoing reality and memories that do not, representing a failure based on an inability to suppress or filter currently irrelevant memories which relates much to the activity of the orbital frontal cortex.

The book is nicely produced, easy to read and well structured. It is a good overview for anybody with an interest in confabulation, their own or other peoples, and with memory in mind.

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*Drug Abuse: Concepts, Prevention and Cessation*. By S. Sussman and S. Ames. (Pp. 352; £29.99; ISBN 9780521858922 pb.) Cambridge University Press. 2008.

The term *drug abuse*, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), captures the legal, social, and health-related consequences of the regular use of legal and illegal drugs for an individual. Besides this clinical definition, it is often overlooked that drug abuse not only affects the individual but also the individual's environment, and society as a whole. Drug abuse is without doubt a complex topic, and

only understood in its complexity by a few. The book *Drug Abuse – Concepts, Prevention and Cession* is an ambitious attempt to synthesize the various psychological concepts of drug abuse, including their theoretical underpinnings and practical applications. The book provides the reader with sufficient background knowledge to understand the complexity of the psychology of drug abuse.

This book is divided into five sections: (1) *Concepts and classes of drugs* provides a detailed overview of the different drugs, their use and abuse, as well as the classification of drug-related problems, including the diagnostic criteria of substance abuse and dependence. The section closes with an interesting summary of the history of drug abuse. The section (2) *Etiology* explains the development of drug abuse in the light of four different psychological disciplines: biological psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology and ecological psychology. For each psychological discipline, background information is provided in layman's language. For example, the chapter on biological psychology gives a brief overview of the neurotransmitter systems involved in the effects produced by different types of drugs, of genetic variations, of brain systems involved in drug abuse, and of the most common neuroscientific theories of drug addiction. The other psychological disciplines and the relevant theories are introduced with equal brevity, and the reader is made familiar with the prevailing perspectives of each discipline. The section closes with a chapter on assessment methods which includes mainly questionnaires that are based on the aforementioned theories from the different psychological disciplines. The following two sections (3) *Prevention* and (4) *Cession* are structured in the same way, i.e. starting with background information on the concepts of prevention, and cession, respectively. The introduction of the background is then followed by separate chapters in which the concepts are discussed in the light of the four different psychological disciplines. The final section, (5) *Conclusion, recent and future directions* discusses the challenges that the psychology of drug abuse is facing with regard to multicultural societies, to drug abuse in different age groups and the need for transdisciplinary approaches in research in this area.

This book is written by two psychologists for the reader interested in psychology. The use of non-jargon language and the provision of numerous examples make this complex topic accessible to a non-specialist readership. However, the coverage of such a broad range of psychological theories and their application in the field of drug abuse requires brevity and simplicity; and this means that the key theories are explained on approximately one page each, which

inevitably leaves out a number of critical points of discussion. The simplistic way of writing does not require much background knowledge from the reader in order to understand the concepts and descriptions. On the contrary, there are times when an over-simplistic example may antagonize the educated reader.

The book is undoubtedly a comprehensive source of information; key points are summarized in tables and graphs throughout the book, and each chapter closes with a summary. References are provided to guide further reading on the different theories. At times, examples are described in too much detail and with too much illustration, but the coherent structure of each chapter prevents the reader from losing focus. The book provides a comprehensive overview of drug abuse from the perspective of different psychological disciplines and it facilitates an understanding of the 'bigger picture'. However, it remains questionable whether the book is sufficient to inspire transdisciplinary research in the field of drug abuse, as the authors are hoping.

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*Generalized Anxiety Disorder Across the Lifespan: An Integrative Approach*. By M. E. Portman (Pp. xvi, 182; \$79.95; ISBN: 978-0-387-89242-9 hb.). Springer-Verlag, 2009.

This book aims to make accessible to the reader a wide range of topics concerning generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), with an eye towards the treatment professional. It is written by a doctoral-level clinical social worker, Dr Michael Portman, inspired by his own journey in encountering, studying, and treating this often misdiagnosed and misunderstood condition. Its style and content reflect that journey, as the author reviews the extant knowledge regarding GAD from the basic and clinical research literature, starting with its origins and evolution as a diagnostic entity, moving onto methods of assessment and diagnosis, followed by a major review on its conceptual models and treatment approaches. In that spirit, this book sets itself apart from (1) treatment manuals for GAD, with their nuts-and-bolts 'how to' approach, and (2) multi-author volumes that provide more in-depth treatment of some aspects of this condition while neglecting others.

This book is laid out in eight chapters that cover diverse aspects of GAD important for clinical