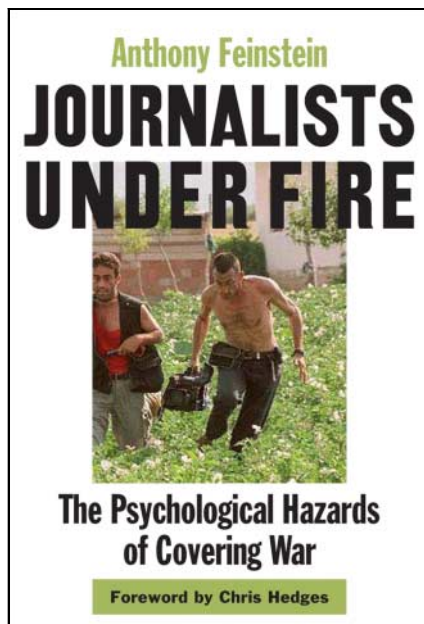


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

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

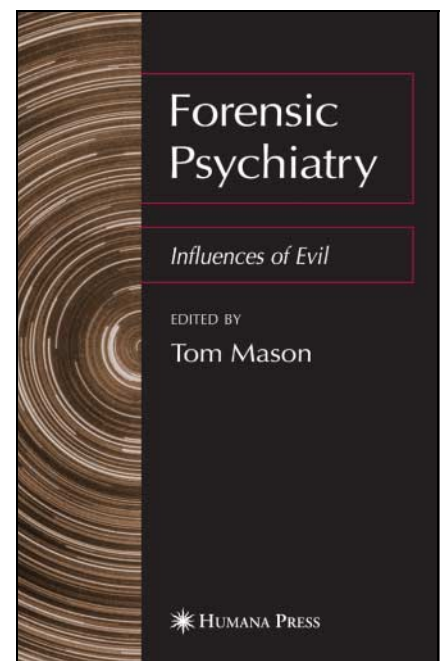
Edited by Tom Mason. Humana. 2006. 350pp. US\$99.50 (hb). ISBN 1588294498

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’s ‘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,



worse, capable of sinister interpretation. When sex offender programmes are contrasted with the cynical comments of the recipients, it looks more like old-fashioned special hospital cynicism ('motivational interviewing's too good for 'em') than radical critique. And surely therapy stands or falls by the outcome of clinical trials rather than salacious anecdotes? The gory stories titillate rather than illuminate, and it is profoundly depressing that one of the authors is a research nurse.

We should worry about the trend for forensic texts to include the e-word. It coincides with the growth of the fundamentalist right in the USA, and it reeks of punishment and stigma rather than treatment and rehabilitation. These are tough times for science and those who would discard it need something better than sociology and brimstone to put in its place.

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Risk and Resilience: Adaptations in Changing Times

By Ingrid Schoon. Cambridge University Press. 2006. 242pp. £22.99 (pb). ISBN 0521541565

This is a scholarly and thoughtful book in which Ingrid Schoon presents her work analysing longitudinal psychosocial and educational data from two UK birth cohorts, 1958 and 1970 through to the present. The introduction and the first two chapters outline the concepts and definitions that underpin the study. The work is about how children escape from disadvantage with a particular focus on academic

attainment as a pathway for overcoming adversities. There is a particularly thorough discussion of the definitions of the concepts of risk and resilience and a highly readable review of the theoretical perspectives, taken over the past four decades, regarding the role of developmental influences on risk and resilience over the life course. Indeed, the first two chapters are so well done they should constitute essential reading for all behavioural scientists, mental health practitioners and those involved in forming health and education policy. Chapters three through seven constitute the empirical work charting persisting inequalities at times of marked socio-economic change in chapter three, through to personal goals and life plans by chapter seven. The reader is not assailed by numbers or statistics and each chapter gives a highly succinct summary of the findings. For example, the author concludes clearly from the data (p. 55) that 'despite dramatic economic and social advances witnessed in the UK during the 2nd half of the 20th century, inequalities of opportunities and life chances have remained or have even become greater'. Similarly, when summarising the impact of cumulative risk effects on education outcomes, Schoon (p. 72) notes, 'despite improving material conditions there are persistent or even increasing inequalities in academic attainment and adult psychological well-being'. It is striking in this chapter that there is much greater influence of parental social class on academic attainment in those born in the 1970 cohort compared with those born in 1958. Social contextual factors had an increasing influence on individual attainment as the 20th century progressed. There are other examples throughout the text pointing to a worrying growth in inequalities between socially disadvantaged and advantaged groups in our society as we get wealthier. The findings on protective factors are less

compelling perhaps because of the increasing importance of measuring processes within the individual as a component of a multimethod approach to the impact of risk on individual attainment. Schoon acknowledges this and points to a need for future studies to combine measures of genes and physiology with psychosocial data, but also emphasises the importance of maintaining a clear scientific focus rather than trawling through data sets to see what can be found.

The final two chapters on conclusions, outlook and implications for interventions and social policy are as thoughtful and clear as the introduction, with a particularly helpful analysis focusing on the importance of available social and educational resources as well as delineating risks. Risk specificity is also clearly noted. For example, children can be resilient in the face of poverty via positive and emotionally supportive relations with parents. The latter is no protection, however, against underfunded and failing schools. The children of low-income families are less likely to survive a high-risk school system, even if they have adapted to their impoverished circumstances.

This is an excellent academic text that should be essential reference reading for mental health professionals. For researchers in the field of risk and resilience I would deem it fundamental. Psychiatrists-in-training should have access also as they would learn a great deal about the value of longitudinal, non-experimental studies that provide key information about the changing world we live in and the importance of the interplay between an individual and their environment over time.

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