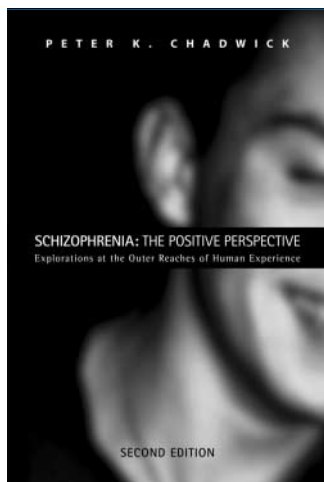


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Schizophrenia:
The Positive Perspective.
Explorations at the Outer
Reaches of Human
Experience (2nd edn)**

By Peter K. Chadwick.
Routledge. 2008.
£21.99 (pb). 224pp.
ISBN: 9780415459082

I wanted to like this book. It has an intriguing cover and a user-friendly feel. The title – just up my street. I tried reading a chapter each day. It was hard going. The text is surprisingly autobiographical on the one hand and hippy 1960s on the other (in chapter 7, ‘Thinking at the borderline: the deep music of reality’, we read about ‘rainbow words, celestial music, poetry and “rainbow equations”’ (p. 70)). A chapter on the history of cannabis and subjective account of its use is interesting but felt as if it was in the wrong book. It was followed by a chapter on a carer’s experiences linked to his son’s cannabis use – this was distressing, yet the book aims to present ‘the positive perspective’. So again, maybe the wrong book?

The stories about people of the author’s acquaintance and their different experiences of psychosis were, again, interesting in themselves, but I kept thinking ‘Who is this book aimed at? Who will it inform?’ In my own clinical practice of being with people who experience schizophrenia or psychosis the only mantra that I have found remotely helpful is that each person’s experiences are different and unique, and any attempt to help them should try to take this into account. So how should these people’s (and also the author’s) different experiences help if they do not indicate a bigger picture of some sort? Perhaps that is what Peter Chadwick is saying – if so, it missed me.

The book is copiously referenced (many references are Chadwick’s own work). This led me to think that it might be aimed at mental health academics or students at degree level. Also, the use of terms which I had never come across before (for example, ‘concatenation’), despite being immersed in this area of interest for 20 years myself, made the job of reading the book sometimes tiresome.

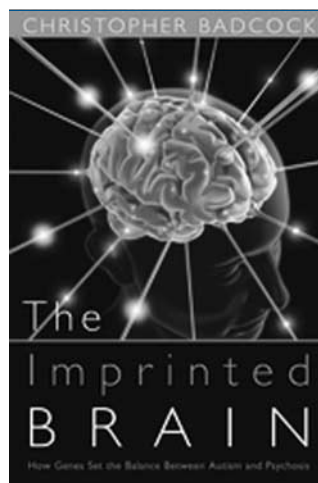
Starting from chapter 11, around two-thirds of the way through, the reviews of the ‘biographical sketches’ seemed to be more useable (I am assuming that is the function of a textbook). Peter Chadwick discusses and reviews the various factions, views and philosophies around the approaches to psychosis and people with psychosis. There is no doubting the passion that drove his desire to write this book. It is this enthusiasm, overall, which I found more and more engaging.

The book is written in very short sections but the density of the text in some places would make it very hard going if it were otherwise.

To sum up, this book should be in the collection of a person who needs to understand schizophrenia and psychosis in their widest sense. I am still not sure about the value of the biographies, or indeed the author’s biography (with such an intense level of detail) that have been included here. Shortened versions of these, followed by longer discussion of each story would perhaps widen the potential readership, which in my view is very limited as it stands.

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**The Imprinted Brain:
How Genes Set
the Balance between
Autism and Psychosis**

By Christopher Badcock.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2009.
£16.99 (hb). 240pp.
ISBN: 978184905023

Drawing on a range of evidence from genetics, evolutionary psychology, brain imaging and psychiatry, Christopher Badcock presents his ambitious theory on the aetiology of autism and schizophrenia and the interconnection between the two. Badcock is a lecturer on evolutionary psychology, genetics and sociobiology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He developed the theory together with Canadian evolutionary biologist, Professor Bernard Crespi.

Badcock proposes that schizophrenia and autism lie at either end of a continuum of what he calls mentalistic ability. This is very similar to the concept of theory of mind. The idea that individuals with autism do not develop a theory of mind is an old one. However, this is expanded here to suggest that what people with schizophrenia in essence have is an overactive theory of mind. Badcock explains from an evolutionary perspective how humans have developed two parallel cognitive skills – ‘mechanistic’ thinking, which is highly developed in engineers and scientists but if present to excess leads to an autistic state, and the ‘mentalistic’ mind which is underdeveloped in people with autism and overly active in those with schizophrenia. Badcock goes on to suggest that the mechanism for this is a struggle for expression between certain maternal and paternal genes – hence the book’s title.

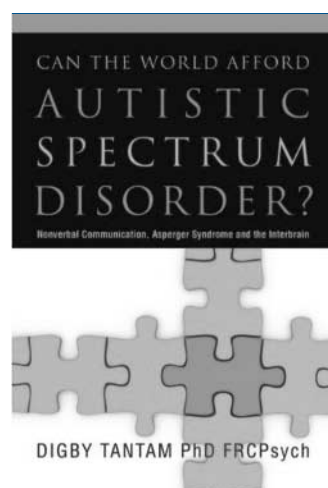
The narrative is clear and engaging, with the chapters on autism especially vivid, filled with personal accounts from famous individuals with autism and Asperger’s syndrome. Badcock manages to mix subjective accounts of mental illness, perspectives from evolutionary psychology (which is often lacking in psychiatric models) and the latest research developments. He even ventures into topics such as the evolution of religion and genius.

In terms of the plausibility of the theory, it is appealing in its symmetry, offering some compelling examples of how the disorders complement each other in their symptomatology.

Testable hypotheses are offered but most remain untested. More significantly, far too little is known about the relationship between genes and the aetiology of these disorders, and the understanding of the struggle for expression between parental genes is at a very early stage.

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Can the World Afford Autistic Spectrum Disorder? Nonverbal Communication, Asperger Syndrome and the Interbrain

By Digby Tantam.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2009.
£16.99 (hb). 256pp.
ISBN: 9781843106944

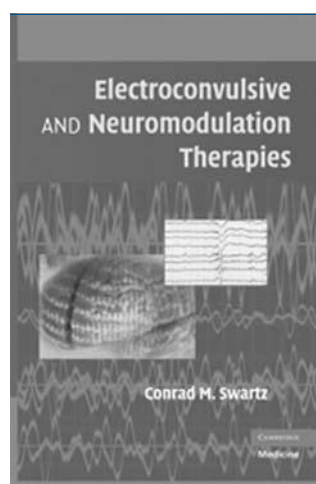
Digby Tantam proposes that people are constantly updating and refining their understanding of the social world through the exchange of subtle non-verbal information. This unconscious flow of information between individuals creates a network which he considers to be analogous to the internet, hence his coinage of the term 'interbrain'. Using this model, he suggests that impairments in non-verbal communication cause individuals with autism-spectrum disorder to have an inefficient connection to the interbrain and this, in turn, is what underlies the social and behavioural difficulties which characterise these conditions.

The book unfolds in a logical and sensible manner, beginning with a thorough introduction to non-verbal communication. In subsequent chapters, Tantam carefully builds his argument by drawing on evidence from research and clinical practice, also discussing the possible biological underpinnings of his ideas. Finally, he covers the extended consequences of non-verbal communication impairment and considers how the interbrain framework can be used to assist in understanding people with autism-spectrum disorder.

The author's influences as a clinical psychotherapist and as a scientist are evident throughout the book and he is particularly impressive at fusing the biological and psychological aspects of autism-spectrum disorder. He makes extensive use of analogy and real-life vignettes to illustrate his ideas, making complex concepts easy to grasp and the book interesting and enjoyable to read. The book's central thesis will strike a chord with anyone who works with people with autism-spectrum disorder, particularly with regard to understanding social impairments, although some will be less convinced that an inefficient interbrain connection is a fundamental cause of the other features of autism-spectrum disorder.

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Electroconvulsive and Neuromodulation Therapies

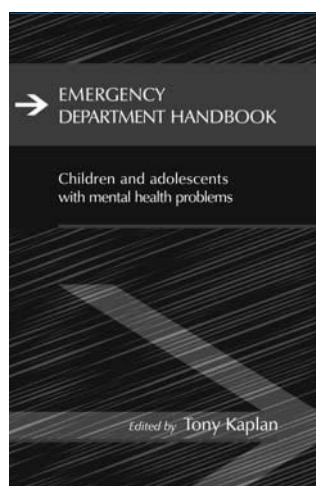
Edited by Conrad M. Swartz.
Cambridge University Press.
2009. £50.00 (hb). 648pp.
ISBN: 9780521883887

This monumental work is a handbook covering every conceivable aspect of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). More than 50 international authors with experience in the field have contributed. It is also a very personal work, coloured by the opinions and experiences of Swartz (who also contributes six chapters and the preface). These take the form of journalistic 'editor's notes' after other authors' chapters, often somewhat elliptic or even eccentric comments, usually critical of the chapter authors' contribution.

I would not recommend the book to trainees or even for a training library. The highly personal approach to evidence requires the critical sifting of the material by a mature reader, who may then even take a certain amount of enjoyment from the quirky presentation. The book is written from the US perspective and may not be relevant in some aspects to UK National Health Service practice. There are some rather arcane chapters, such as 'ECT in biographical books and movies', 'ECT availability in the US', 'ECT forms', but this makes it likely that everybody interested in ECT will find something useful in the book. In contrast, the four chapters on neuromodulation treatments appear as an afterthought and are not sufficiently detailed to provide more than a cursory look at these methods.

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Emergency Department Handbook: Children and Adolescents with Mental Health Problems

Edited by Tony Kaplan
RCPsych Publications. 2009.
£15.00 (pb). 206pp.
ISBN: 9781904671732

To many doctors, nurses and allied health practitioners, the world of child and adolescent mental distress and disorder is alien