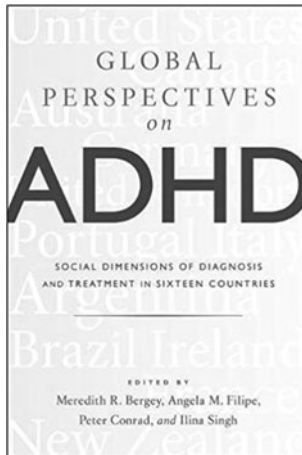


and, via 'green urbanism', reconnecting with nature. In contrast to the hard-nosed social psychiatric research that forms its bulk, the final words of this slim, eloquent and indispensable volume are 'plum blossom in spring'. Make that into your next app, Bill.

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doi:10.1192/bjp.2018.51



Global Perspectives on ADHD: Social Dimensions of Diagnosis and Treatment in Sixteen Countries

Edited by Meredith R. Bergey, Angela M. Filipe, Peter Conrad and Iliana Singh.
Johns Hopkins University Press.
2017.
£48.00 (pb). 416 pp.
ISBN 9781421423791

My child psychiatry training from the early to mid-1990s was largely systemically orientated. During my training years, I came across occasional diagnoses of hyperkinetic disorder and even less occasional prescription of stimulant medication. Sadly, some systemic and psychotherapeutic practice in those days was caught up, whether intentionally or not, in parent-blaming (particularly mother-blaming) narratives. In the mid-1990s a mixture of factors contributed to the rise of the 'it is in the child's genes/biology' paradigm as opposed to the 'parents – they f*k you up' story. Understandably, this felt like a positive change for many parents. Pharmaceutical marketing, neoliberal commodification, performance-obsessed institutions (schools, clinics) and therefore performance-anxious parents and/or children, shifting cultural spaces for young people (e.g. the move online), guild anxieties (doctors who do not feel they can be doctors if they are not prescribing), pharmaceutical-supported parent advocacy, media campaigns and so on all played their part in expanding the diagnosis from the narrow, rare diagnosis of hyperkinetic disorder to the now-ubiquitous diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). None of the reasons behind this growth related to science because (despite decades of research) no replicable evidence exists to support the idea that ADHD can be viewed as a known/knowable 'natural category' with unique characteristics that enable it to be differentiated from other natural categories. It is therefore an excellent example of a 'cultural construct'.

Therefore, as you can imagine, I was pleased to be asked to review this book. Written largely by sociologists, I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to scratch below the surface and examine how the concept of ADHD intersects with a variety of local dynamics around childhood, consumerism, globalisation, family and education (to name but a few). The book has chapters relating to practice around ADHD in sixteen countries: USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, UK, Portugal, Ireland, Argentina, Brazil, Italy, France, Japan, New Zealand, Chile, Taiwan and Ghana. Unfortunately, the book largely fails to deliver. Each chapter is mostly a rehash of previous chapters, illustrating the

depressing expansion of the concept of ADHD with little attempt to situate this in the broader context of discourses about childhood, child rearing and economy (for instance). Most chapters have a predictable format and include facts and figures around epidemiology, rates of diagnosis and use of medication or therapy. They look at the role of advocacy groups, the impact this has had on aspects such as educational or social policy, and skim over the contribution of the pharmaceutical industry. Most chapters approach ADHD as a static 'thing' that is being more 'recognised'. Few approach ADHD as a dynamic cultural construct to start with, which would have led authors to be more open to examining social/cultural and political dimensions of how such a category emerges in relation to existing discourses about childhood, parenting and child development.

Some of the more interesting exceptions included the chapter on Chile, which discusses how the neoliberal economic reforms (Chile was one of the first countries in the world to implement such reforms) led to 'constant and sharp surveillance of children's actions and behaviours', which in turn spurred on the extensive use of methylphenidate in young people. The chapters on Japan and Ghana were also interesting as they revealed how some countries were not caught up in the globalisation of the ADHD epidemic, mainly due to more robustly held cultural attitudes towards parenting and children's development. In Japan this was reflected in the 'official' guidelines for treatment of ADHD, which emphasises psychosocial approaches and has strict criteria around the prescription of pharmaceuticals, including advice about dosing, duration, monitoring, treatment goals, and warnings about addiction and abuse potential. These guidelines are much better in terms of both evidence base and clinical relevance than the current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

Overall, there were a few bright spots in an otherwise disappointing book.

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doi:10.1192/bjp.2018.108

'A lifetime's worth of wisdom'
Steven D. Levitt, co-author of *Freakonomics*

The International Bestseller

Thinking, Fast and Slow

Daniel Kahneman
Winner of the Nobel Prize

Thinking Fast and Slow

By Daniel Kahneman.
Penguin. 2012. £10.99 (pb). 512 pp.
ISBN 9780141033570.

In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman puts the cat among the pigeons as regards human rationality. He purports to

demonstrate that we are seriously irrational in some areas of our lives. It is like asking 'is the Queen English?' and finding out she isn't! We always thought we were rational but it seems we aren't, at least according to Kahneman who got a Nobel prize in economics (not medicine) for his trouble. But didn't we build up the worlds of science, engineering, agriculture, etc. based on logical thinking and reasoning? Reason has served us very well so far, has a track record and has stood the test of time.

But not so fast! It seems we are prone to no end of hidden biases in our intuitive thinking and, even worse, we don't change when our errors are pointed out. We think fast with what Kahneman calls System 1, which is another name for our spontaneous automatic thought processes, and slow with System 2, the workhorse of rolling up your sleeves and getting stuck into a problem and fully engaging the brain. Everyone agrees that we do have these discrete yet complementary mental capacities; he is not claiming to have discovered them. What he does lay claim to is showing how they can both make basic logical mistakes – especially System 1, mainly because it is lazy. No heresies yet.

The bulk of his work involved the study of decision-making under risk, calculating logical probabilities and showing how we make basic intuitive calculating errors. A lot of what he says could be put down to common sense, or the lack of it, and the absence of experience based on a predictable environment with repetitive rapid feedback. The 10 000 h rule, or spending sufficient time and effort to master something with proper guidance, cuts out much intuitive error. Establishing baselines and reference points, being aware of common pitfalls and having error-detecting systems in place are all common practice for any self-respecting enterprise. So this is not new knowledge. Individual appraisal with inbuilt system error detection alleviates most errors 'in reasoning'.

The book uses heuristics to explain some of our common, error-prone tendencies:

- (a) Risk aversion: We just don't want to gamble if we might lose our status quo.
- (b) The peak-end effect: We give more importance to impressions of severe pain or joy and how things finish, rather than to the assessment of the grand total of pain or joy over time. We ignore duration of experience in favour of quality (good or bad).
- (c) Regression toward the mean: This is an established statistical observation that things in life tend toward the average of what is measured. This is an observation but not a causality, and you could say that's the way life is and everyone knows that.
- (d) We are built to believe and we have to try to unbelieve: This is a very interesting observation but no explanation as to why this is the case is given.
- (e) Framing: If something is put another way, we will give a different answer to the same problem. Unless you have done your homework beforehand and are immovable, it will be difficult to avoid giving in a little.
- (f) Anchoring: We are influenced by flimsy hooks or numbers that somehow register with us as a bargaining position in the back of our minds. All things being equal, if you haven't made up your mind firmly about a topic, this will sway you.
- (g) Two selves: We have the remembering self, which is seemingly most well-known to us and which makes our decisions, and we have the here-and-now self, which we cannot grasp and is more elusive. This is Kahneman's idea. What about the future self?
- (h) Priority of what we already possess: What counts for us is what value things have for us here and now, which Kahneman calls their utility. This means whether we are going to gain or lose or go up or down in our position of finance, prestige, worth etc.

This tallies with the concept of possession being nine-tenths of the law.

These are very revealing if not disturbing exposures of our dearest organ – the brain. We are absolutely in the disability category when it comes to thinking straight, according to this book. We are put off by extraneous noises, superficial comments at the wrong time and good-looking people. The latter is called the 'halo effect'. Something you find attractive expands to encompass everything about the person or thing, even though you haven't any proof of its entire wholesomeness. However, many of Kahneman's experiments were done in classroom situations or Gallup-poll scenarios which are not real life. It seems unbelievable that a judge's sentencing pattern could be changed by suggesting an extraneous number before deciding on a case. In the book, a lady (Linda) is described as an active feminist with librarian skills and you are then asked do you think (a) she is likely to be librarian, or (b) she is likely to be an activist and a librarian? The correct answer is given as (a), which is to send the herd the wrong way and then tell them they are all wrong! A similar scenario applies to Tom the librarian; they are trick questions. Another straw man is his assessment of recruiters for the Israeli Army, which is a bit unfair to the status quo and probably wrong. The recruiters had experience along with the 10 000 h and feedback, and Kahneman acknowledges it is a somewhat impossible task to predict who will be a leader or not based on performance climbing a wall. He ends by suggesting a rating scale for attributes for leadership, which is a great suggestion (and one much used in hiring people).

The Prospect Theory is Kahneman's calling card and the associated infographic is an S-shaped curve which was embellished to be his Nobel crest. It designates an economic pattern of behaviour when dealing with gain and loss. As such, the economists give it praise. However, when it comes to the human mind and how it works, and extrapolating outside the box of what he has demonstrated in one more acceptable way or another, he is not correct. He talks about happiness, the good life, luck, chance and statistics. Coming from a background of numbers and biases, it is improbable that he could be an expert on affective life, causality (if you deify luck and trends and don't explain what causes them), fulfilment in life and the extraordinary world of love, emotion, desire, lust and belief to mention a few of the headline items in any human mind. These are serious biases for any cognition and are the major players in our thought and affective lives.

Kahneman has very interesting insights into heuristic biases and very intelligent and practical advice about not making basic errors in logic. To suggest that we are less than rational and should doubt our reason is not seriously challenged by his work. He mainly worked with hypothetical scenarios, whereas the last 15 millennia of human development has proven beyond doubt that man is truly rational and his use of cause and effect should be trusted. Kahneman should stand back and allow those who want to ask the 'why' questions, about how and why the human mind works the way it does, get on with discussing the broader understanding of what it means to be human.

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doi:10.1192/bjp.2018.109