

Review

Facts and Fictions in Mental Health

By Hal Arkowitz and Scott O. Lilienfeld. John Wiley and Sons Inc. 2017. £17.95 (pb). 288 pp. ISBN: 978-1118311295

We are called, as citizens and as professionals, to sit down and examine the facts. We must somehow assimilate the bewildering array of information, as it hurtles towards us, through our screens and across our airwaves, to get to the truth of the matter.

In our clinical lives, this becomes a responsibility and the challenge here is considerable. The public perception of mental illness, its fixation with 'madness,' is fertile ground for the development of half-truths, fallacies, myths and speculations. Publicly and privately propagated, we amass a compendium of 'alternative facts,' harmful to our patients as well as to our professions.

Psychologists Arkowitz and Lilienfeld are having none of it. They have subjected our day-to-day assumptions to a rigorous interrogation, pitching them against the most current evidence, to separate fact from fiction. Their book is presented neatly into sections by diagnostic category, each comprising a collection of bite-size chapters, asking questions such as: *What is a psychopath? How violent are people with mental illness? Can herbs ease anxiety and depression? Is divorce bad for children?* The questions they select feel current, the sort frequently encountered in the public domain, making the book highly suitable for a general readership. It is also probably quite helpful for mental

health professionals, who may read the pages with the occasional blush, when they find a long-held position ruthlessly upended.

At times the book feels a little political, particularly in its service to psychological therapies; there is a sense that the authors feel a duty to redress the pharmaceutical dominance in mental health treatments. Though perhaps a worthy pursuit, this sits a little uneasily as a potential source of bias in a book that sets itself up on a truth-seeking mission.

Nevertheless, the book is a steadying force in a world where we now take a rather relaxed attitude to accuracy. Where the truth is often obscured by a more marketable headline, it is important as professionals that we anchor ourselves as far as we can in the facts. Arkowitz and Lilienfeld are to be thanked for doing a lot of the hard work for us.

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