

forms part of a more substantial omission; that of the religious context of the developing category of OCD. Although Davis acknowledges the theological origins of the conceptual vocabulary and the linguistic roots of the word “obsession” in a spiritualized version of siege warfare, he uses the 1736 Witchcraft Act as kind of *cordon sanitaire*, arguing that the disappearance of demonological discourse creates the secular space for the new mental philosophy. However, the disruptive agency granted to obsessing ideas in nineteenth-century medico-psychological writings was predicated upon the older ideas of demonic enchantment and at the same time theological explanations of devilish obsessions began to be framed through new practices such as mesmerism and hypnotism.

One way of looking at the progress of obsession is to see it as a process in which different aspects of our identity—our ideas, our flesh or our unconscious—are imagined as having agency: an agency that can conflict with our own personal socially acceptable goals. Davis provides an enlightening and fairly breakneck tour through these various versions of obsession. Occasionally he seems to strike a false note. His assertion that psychoanalysis originates in the investigation of obsession (rather than hysteria as claimed in more conventional accounts) is unconvincing and the idea that Freud’s career was bookended by discussions of obsession ignores the large literature on psychoanalysis and anthropology that he produced after *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety* in 1926. This fairly monomaniacal interpretation of Freud contrasts unhappily with the following chapter on ‘Obsessive sex and love’. Whilst sexological ideas are central to the contemporary understanding of obsession, Davis’s discussion drifts onto the familiar territory of sexual continence and excess whilst ignoring the literature on erotic fixation. It would have been useful to have had some discussion here of the distinction between erotomania and erotolepsy and the pathologization of infatuation in conditions

such as de Clérambault’s syndrome. This chapter, which repeats material from the introduction, forms the most distracted section of Davis’s work.

The unevenness of the treatment in these middle chapters does help to bring home Davis’s central contention that judgements over obsessive-compulsion are purely conventional. It also opens up the author’s second argument regarding the obsessive nature of scientific and academic work. Although it may at first appear simply as a provocation, Davis’s illustration of the obsessive and repetitive nature of scientific methodology in his engaging case studies of Freud and Galton demonstrates the uneasy status of OCD as it is celebrated and pathologized in different contexts. It also highlights the most interesting aspect of Davis’s findings: the dependence of the illness upon the wider material environment. As he notes throughout this work, the ritualism and regularity that characterizes obsessive-compulsive behaviour is dependent upon a whole series of concrete innovations from modern home plumbing to the rise of personal time-keeping. Although Davis does not press home this aspect of his investigation, his attention to the cultural and material ecology of mental illnesses demonstrates the value of the biocultural approach to the history of psychiatry.

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David Herzberg, *Happy pills in America: from Miltown to Prozac*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. x, 279, £24.00, \$45.00 (hardback 978-0-8018-9030-7)

The reader of almost any American magazine cannot help but be struck by the number of advertisements for branded pharmaceutical drugs that feature within its pages. Although direct to consumer advertising has only been permitted in the US

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since the 1990s, this was a development, rather than a revolution, in the way in which pharmaceutical drugs were marketed. As David Herzberg reveals in his excellent book, promotional campaigns for “blockbuster” drugs like Miltown, Valium, and later Prozac, were always designed to leak out of the doctors’ surgery and into the waiting room. By promising to cure a vast range of conditions including fatigue, social unease, pre-exam nerves and sexual frigidity, psychotropic drugs were marketed as the solution to many of the problems confronting the anxious post-war consumer. Little wonder then, that by the 1970s, Valium was the most prescribed brand of medicine in the US, with 15 per cent of Americans using it within the previous year.

Yet the reason that Valium and other “happy pills” took such a hold of doctors and their patients was not just because these seemed to offer a panacea, but also because the promotion of these drugs tapped into a whole host of other concerns. Herzberg shows how anti-anxiety drugs were marketed as miracle products that could return men, and particularly women, to the good life. Advertisements which focused on tranquilisers’ supposed ability to make men more effective at work, and help women be more efficient in the home, simultaneously drew on and reinforced ideas about “traditional” gender roles. However, challenges to such assumptions in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a backlash against Valium. Feminist groups argued that the drug operated as an agent of social control, medicating women into the acceptance of a subordinate position within society. At the same time, scientists began to assert that Valium could be addictive, an idea that called into question easy distinctions between the

drugs found in the medicine cabinet and those found on the street. The potential harm that “happy pills” could cause eventually resulted in a reformulation of the Schedule of Controlled Substances, and though pharmaceutical companies managed to ensure that their drugs were subjected to the lowest levels of control, or excluded from the schedule entirely, the boundary between licit and illicit drugs was exposed as being culturally, rather than scientifically, defined.

Indeed, it is one of the great strengths of Herzberg’s book that pharmaceutical psychoactive drugs are considered in relation to their contraband cousins. The histories of legal and illegal drugs have often been analysed separately, when in reality these are frequently inter-related stories. Neatly sidestepping debates about whether or not “happy pills” actually work, Herzberg concludes that what matters is not the chemicals that make up these drugs, but the people that develop, sell, prescribe and use these. As a result, *Happy pills* offers much more than a study of the rise and fall of anti-anxiety and anti-depressant drugs: Herzberg shows how these substances provide a lens through which much wider changes in post-war America can be examined. The rise of commercial medicine and the consumer society, the remaking of the modern self, changing gender, race and class relations all form part of this complex picture. This extremely well-written and well-researched book thus demands, and deserves, a wide audience.

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