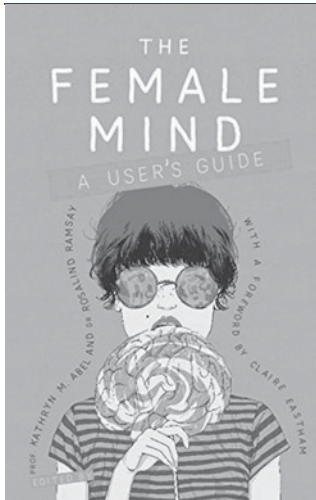


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboode

**The Female Mind: A User's Guide**

By Professor Kathryn Abel and
Dr Rosalind Ramsay.
RCPsych Publications 2017.
£13.99 (pb). 128 pp.
ISBN 9781909726802

The Female Mind: A User's Guide, edited by Abel and Ramsay, is a much-needed, holistic resource for both laypeople and clinicians about the mental well-being of women. It is divided into five parts, each comprising chapters eloquently written by experts.

Part I. Women in perspective considers the many facets of what it means to be a woman in ancient and contemporary society, and how this evolves throughout their life. Parts II and III, *Women in society* and *Women and their environment*, go on to explore several sociocultural circumstances and environmental factors that affect a woman and how they may negatively affect their mental health. Parts IV and V, *Women and specific disorders* and *Women and treatment*, take individual disorders and explore how they are experienced by women before discussing treatment options and patients' perspectives on these services.

Although many sociocultural factors influencing a woman's mental health are discussed throughout the text, the role of LGBTQ+ identity is overlooked. This seems an unfortunate omission given that the text explores the psychological stress that societal expectations of a woman's lifestyle can bring, yet fails to acknowledge the diversity of a 'queer' lifestyle and the associated oppression. Further, although the editors acknowledge 'gender fluidity' in the introduction, the text later refers to 'both genders' (p. 152); reinforcing the oppressive concept of binary gender.

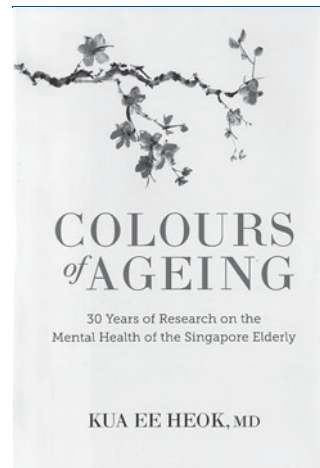
Perhaps the greatest strength of this book is its ability to empower educated women to develop an understanding of how societal and environmental circumstances may make them vulnerable to mental health issues as well as aiding in understanding particular illnesses they may experience. Furthermore, chapters end with concise sections detailing self-help options for women, further support that may be available when experiencing difficulties and advice for loved ones on how best to provide care.

Another great asset of this book is the inclusion of the lived experience of women in similar situations throughout the text. I believe the openness of each story helps readers to understand the diversity of experience and hardship a woman may have, and how such issues can often be resolved. In addition, I believe each story contributes to destigmatisation of the vulnerabilities women face in mental health or otherwise.

Finally, I thank all contributors for this fantastic and unique text and would strongly recommend it to anyone who wishes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of *The Female Mind*.

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**Colours of Ageing: 30 years of Research on the Mental Health of the Singapore Elderly**

By Kua Ee Heok.
Write Editions. 2017.
US \$24.99 (hbk). 180 pp.
ISBN 978-981-11-1946-0

Bill Gates announced recently that he was donating \$100 m to 'find a cure' for Alzheimer's disease. A good first step would be to immerse himself in the life and work of Professor Kua Heok of Singapore University who has been researching, teaching and writing about dementia for over 30 years. His masterpiece, to which the present volume runs a close second, is his remarkable semi-fictional novel, *Listening to Letter from America*. There he depicts how a group of elderly Singaporeans, 40 years on from the Japanese occupation, recall the life-saving impact of Alastair Cooke's famous broadcasts. Together with the pianistic skills of one group member, and the self-esteem boost of being interviewed on national radio, reminiscence therapy transformed the mental health of these men and women suffering from depression and memory loss.

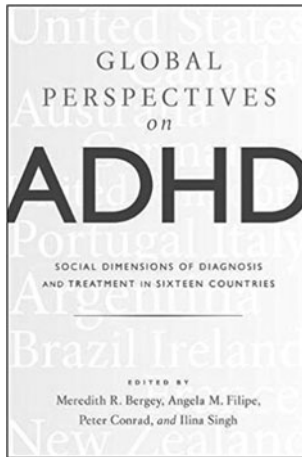
The theme of this book, counterpointing its poetic title, is the evidence-base for the qualitative truths of the novelistic form. Professor Heok trail-blazingly combines 'Western' scientific methods with 'Eastern' values: meticulous randomised controlled trials plus respect for elderly people, mindfulness practice and cultivation of an active and aesthetically pleasing *umwelt* (I hope this dichotomising does not reveal my covert 'orientalism'). Heok and his team's epidemiological studies, described here in great detail, which have won four international awards and received over \$5 m in research funding, show that staying mentally and physically active, overcoming loneliness, mindfulness practice, being involved in art, singing and horticulture – even eating curry and drinking green tea – significantly reduce rates of cognitive decline, as compared with control groups.

Windows was Gates' passport to untold wealth. Yet, however admirable his philanthropy, the USA is one of the most unequal countries in the developed world, spending more and achieving less than almost all comparable healthcare systems. Mesmerised by Windows-type mystique, Western medicine continues to search for the illusory big-pharma magic bullet. Heok's revolutionary formula is social change: creating a culture that encourages healthy eating, physical and mental activity, fostering the arts,

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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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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'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