

Reviews

The Mindful Manifesto. How Doing Less and Noticing More Can Help Us Thrive in a Stressed-Out World

Jonty Heaversedge & Ed Halliwell
Hay House, 2010, £10.99 pb, 288 pp.
ISBN: 9781848501942

Friends around you are doing yoga, Qi Gong and other 'New Agy stuff' to improve their well-being and lower their stress levels? If you have so far been rather sceptical with regard to Eastern meditative practices entering Western psychological practices, here is a book that may help you change your mind.

Being a manifesto, it calls the reader to wake up to a scientifically underpinned way to a life of more happiness and less stress. It gives us a well-researched summary of the latest results of studies into mindfulness-based interventions. From anxiety disorders to depression, from eating disorders to chronic fatigue, from living with HIV to living with psoriasis, there is not a field of mental health or chronic physical illness that has not been treated with the plough of meditative interventions. After all, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is being recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence for relapse prevention of depression. And if the scientific evidence does not convince you, maybe your personal experience of meditation will: this book adds in some easy-to-follow meditation practices that you can start today. With each chapter following thematically a section of a guided meditation practice, from meditation of the breath, to the body, our thoughts and our feelings, it invites us to create space within ourselves to look at life in general, being lived in a more mindful way, by 'paying attention, here and now, in a non-judgmental way' (Jon Kabat-Zinn).

The book calls for a mindful approach to individual suffering and for more mindfulness-based interventions within the National Health Service and the world as a whole. Here lies its inherent weakness: it is a manifesto of enthusiasm for developing more mindfulness, but it risks promoting mindfulness as a panacea for all ills of individuals as well as shortcomings of our society and modern life in general.

The authors weave in basic concepts of the Buddhist dharma and oscillate between Western science and Buddhist philosophy. As much as they try to reach as many people as possible with their wake-up call by addressing our spiritual as well as our more pragmatic scientific side, there is the risk of promoting enthusiasm-based medicine rather than evidence-based medicine. An attached CD with some guided meditative practices for beginners would have come in handy. A somewhat loud and attention-seeking cover for this paperback does not do its overwhelming usefulness any favours.

Once the reader overcomes these limitations, he or she will find a well-referenced contemporary summary of the scientific evidence about the fascinating area of mindfulness-based interventions. In addition, we are being reminded that

we all can benefit from slowing down and becoming aware of what is happening in this moment, in a non-judgmental way.

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A Short Introduction to Clinical Criminology

R. A. H. Washbrook
Janus Publishing, 2010, £12.95 pb, 100 pp.
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From the first page, the author of this book makes clear his approach to criminology. This is highly personal, focusing on the nature of individual offenders and strongly influenced by psychodynamic theory. The discussion is framed in concepts such as ego, id and superego, with descriptions of offenders and offending behaviours linked to Freudian concepts such as the period of 'latency'. Also quite striking is the rather dated use of language, referring to offenders as 'delinquents', who are further grouped into categories such as primary delinquents and secondary delinquents, or described as 'criminals', and contrasted with 'normal' individuals. The book categorises offenders in ways which appear to me to be largely generalisations based on Freudian concepts, and which I did not find to be particularly helpful or enlightening. There is limited discussion of the role of social context, substance misuse or mental illness in offending. Discussion of types of offending is limited and rather idiosyncratic.

A number of areas will make for uncomfortable reading for the contemporary clinician, such as when the author suggests that when interviewing an offender, 'there is a virtuoso role being enacted, a greater facing a lesser' (p. 26), and that it is 'The art of being able to "manipulate the manipulator"'. He also quotes in this context the author Aichhorn (1944, 1965) as referring to, 'The almost inbuilt ability of offenders to manipulate.' Regarding sexuality, we read: 'In the normal individual there is . . . a major heterosexual component but also a minor homosexual attachment' (p. 92). Such perspectives are unlikely to have widespread support today.

As an introduction this book would have benefitted from an approach more in the mainstream of current thinking, and its highly individual perspective makes it of limited use to someone unfamiliar with this subject. I cannot recommend this book to anyone new to the area of criminology, but it may be of interest as perhaps an example of the approach to criminology taken by clinicians of earlier generations.

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