

## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay

## Overdiagnosis in Psychiatry

HOW MODERN PSYCHIATRY LOST ITS  
WAY WHILE CREATING A DIAGNOSIS FOR  
ALMOST ALL OF LIFE'S MISFORTUNES



### Overdiagnosis in Psychiatry: How Modern Psychiatry Lost Its Way While Creating a Diagnosis for Almost All of Life's Misfortunes

By Joel Paris  
Oxford University Press, 2015.  
£22.99 (pb). 208 pp.  
ISBN 9780199350643

Joel Paris, a professor of psychiatry with extensive clinical experience, brings his familiar critical stance to the issue of overdiagnosis. The book is written in an engaging, jargon-free style that is accessible to both professionals and the interested public. It begins by considering possible overdiagnosis drivers from the perspective of patient, clinician and researcher. After a discussion of how these happen in each of the major mental disorders, the tenuous relationship between the idea of 'normality' and 'psychopathology requiring a diagnosis' is discussed. Throughout, Paris does not shy away from the issues surrounding psychiatric diagnoses. The book's central thesis draws upon the danger of medicalisation: a term first used by the Russian social critic Ivan Illich in 1975 to describe the tendency to conceptualise normal variants in everyday life as medical conditions requiring treatment. Paris warns of the current lack of any objective measure to distinguish normal from abnormal, and describes the pressures on clinicians to diagnose 'normal' as psychopathology. Factors influencing this, such as the pharmaceutical industry, the lack of construct validity in some epidemiological studies, and problems with the subjectivity of psychiatric diagnoses are explained in frank and simple terms.

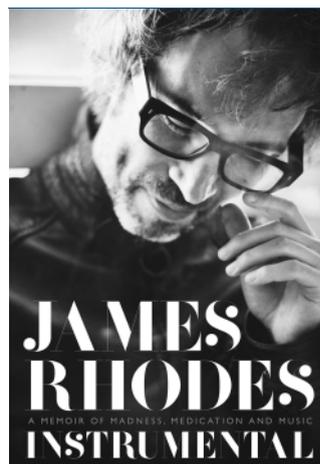
As such, the book is essentially a cautionary tale about where psychiatry might have gone wrong. However, unlike other books that follow along these lines, it is never implied that these mistakes will continue to be made; nor does it become critical of the profession at any point. Rather, by addressing the issue from different perspectives, the reader is encouraged to play their own part in addressing the problem. Paris's stance on 'humility in the face of ignorance' is illustrated, for example, in addressing the issue of 'normality'. He systematically discusses the problems with currently accepted definitions of the term, but not once does he attempt to suggest the 'right' way of approaching it. This is not a book of answers, so perhaps it will not satisfy every reader, but by avoiding the natural tendency to concentrate on what is known, Paris is an honest guide.

Overdiagnosis has become topical. Paris touches on stories in the media about the apparent rising prevalence of mental disorders, and on the ready availability of medical information on the internet driving the 'worried well' to seek psychiatric help. He dedicates the book to his fellow researchers for teaching him

the importance of caution in clinical practice. For his readers, both patients and psychiatrists, I believe this book could do the same.

**Marcus Tan** ST1 Academic Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry, Plymouth Community Healthcare, Plymouth PL4 7QD, UK. Email: marcus.tan@nhs.net

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### Instrumental: A Memoir of Madness, Medication and Music

By James Rhodes  
Canongate Books, 2015.  
£16.99 (hb). 304 pp.  
ISBN 9781782113379

James Rhodes has made a place in our culture as a musician uniquely talented in stripping 'classical' music of its dusty and monochromatic image. He has engaged new audiences by making human the composers who, for many, represent an inaccessible and elitist canon of little present-day relevance. So with headphones on and the generously prescribed soundtrack cued, I was ready to immerse myself in James Rhodes' controversial memoir. Rhodes was born into relative privilege, but it wasn't a charmed life that unfolded. Raped repeatedly over a number of years, he changed from a bright, nervous child into a disconnected teenager on 'autopilot'. In the tumultuous world of his private boarding school, love, lust and abuse circled dangerously. In this environment, Rhodes' passionate embrace of the piano was a place of security. Self-doubt was never far, and by early adulthood the stage was set for a 10-year abandonment of the instrument. In its place appeared the empty shell of normality and material success. By the narrative's end, the birth of a child, repeated mental breakdown, intermittent psychiatric treatment, a return to the piano, divorce and the opportunity to carve an iridescent performing career bring a tentative equilibrium.

Each chapter (or 'track') opens with a suggested musical accompaniment and a punchy vignette that places the composition, the composer and the performance in its historical, social and biographical context. Between these musical offerings, the narrative of Rhodes' life is episodically illuminated. Each chapter represents a pivotal moment of change, be it decline or recovery. There is no shame or shying from the brutality of his abuse or the everlasting impact it has wrought. From the pain of a 5-year-old subjected to repeated rape, to the frantic attempts to piece together a deeply fractured emotional self, the thread of music keeps the hectic prose at least somewhat contained.

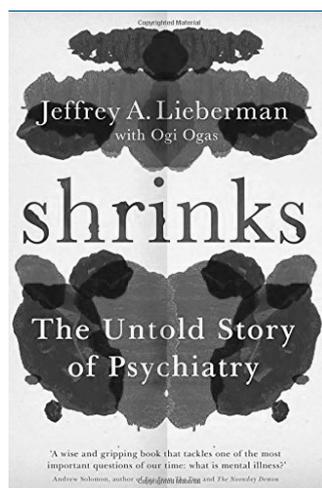
This book is the story of a concert pianist, psychiatric patient and self-proclaimed 'asshole'. It is the story of a child seeking refuge in music, a man abandoning his instrument for the empty lure of financial success and the serendipitous opportunity to embrace a life of performance. It is an opinionated essay on the

music industry, a pointed critique of psychiatry and a plea to a society that fails to shield its children from abuse.

I found Rhodes' constant demands that the reader reject and despise him exhausting, and they made the book frankly underwhelming as a memoir. It is, however, much more than that. Enjoyed as a re-introduction to classical music, *Instrumental* is succinct and well judged. For someone whose classical music listening has been erratic at best, it was an awakening. As an account of the impact abuse has on children and the adults they become, this book is painful and sobering. For a clinician seeing the everyday consequences of childhood sexual assault, it represents a chillingly human account of trauma. Chaotically angry, generous and jarring, *Instrumental* is rewarding, if not entirely pleasurable to read. As a performer, educator and outspoken critic, James Rhodes has gained me as a new fan.

**Daniel V. Mogford** Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Morningside Terrace, Edinburgh EH10 5HF, UK. Email: daniel.mogford@nhs.net

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**Shrinks:  
The Untold Story  
of Psychiatry**

By Jeffrey A. Lieberman & Ogi Ogas  
Little, Brown and Company, 2015.  
£16.00 (hb). 384 pp.  
ISBN 9780297871354

When I was 10 and was interviewed for a place at what was then a direct grant school, I was asked about my future occupation; at direct grant schools in England at that time, they were keen on planning your whole career. I said I wanted to be a psychiatrist. When my surprised interviewers asked me to repeat the word 'psychiatrist' and justify my selection, I remember saying 'psychiatrists are doctors, and doctors are respected by society, but as not much is known about mental illness, I quite like the idea of the subject as no one notices if you make mistakes'.

After reading this rumbustious roller-coaster of a book on the history of (largely American) psychiatry, I realise more than ever that my youthful honesty was justified and that the history of psychiatry might be better recast as a litany of error dotted with moments of serendipity. As narrator, Jeffrey Lieberman alternates between two roles – a frightening guide at a horror museum and a reassuring voiceover in a science documentary – and the reader is jolted from one to another so quickly there is no time to rest or reflect.

In the 'house of horrors' we are exposed to Benjamin Rush, the father of American psychiatry (who despite his reassuring presence on the logo of the American Psychiatric Association, had

some very strange ideas indeed); Wilhelm Reich, the notorious orgone inventor (who claimed he could cure all mental illness by deconstructing orgone energy in the body); L. Ron Hubbard, the ludicrous inventor of Scientology; Walter Freeman, the ice pick lobotomist; R.D. Laing, who lost interest in his theories only when his daughter developed schizophrenia; and a host of psychoanalysts more interested in defending their turf than advancing knowledge.

In the 'respectable science faculty showroom' we meet Philippe Pinel, Ugo Cerletti and Lucino Bini, the inventors of electroconvulsive therapy (who Lieberman believes deserved the Nobel prize for medicine much more than Julius Wagner-Jauregg and Egas Moniz); John Cade, who prefaced the use of lithium in psychiatry; Tim Beck, for discovering cognitive-behavioural therapy; Eric Kandel, the scientific psychoanalyst who found the answers to the unconscious in the memory banks of sea slugs; and Henri Laborit, who started the psychopharmacology revolution in 1950. Pride of place is given to Bob Spitzer, the architect of DSM-III. In the author's view, Spitzer was the man who, virtually single-handedly, made psychiatry a scientific subject, and he duly eulogises him throughout the book.

Lieberman also passes down a short corridor between the horror archive and the science museum to visit the 'done well but could have done better' showroom – those innovators who had good ideas but who ultimately harmed psychiatry by over-selling their products. They include Franz Mesmer, the hypnotism man; Nathan Kline who (like William Sargant in the UK) believed if three drugs together could not help the patient, adding a fourth, preferably in superhuman dosage, most certainly would; and Sigmund Freud, who is accused of embracing science at first but then rejecting it in favour of dogma.

Lieberman concludes that psychiatry is now set fair and travelling on the smooth highway towards the science uplands. Unsurprisingly, given that he is a scion of US academia, Lieberman gives rather more attention and credit for this to American researchers than to others in the world – with only Eve Johnstone getting a mention for the UK. There are also 58 pages on DSM, which he very unwisely calls the 'Bible of Psychiatry', but only one (critical) mention of the international classification, ICD, which will surprise those who live in DSM-free world zones.

Overall, with a little ghost-writing assistance, Lieberman comes across well. He is not afraid to speak his mind (and exposes quite a bit of it in the process). He writes well on the braking effect of stigma in hindering progress, and gives a particularly refreshing account of insights into DSM controversies. The book is not an untold story – it has been told pretty well by Ned Shorter from a more neutral position in Canada – but it accurately reflects US psychiatry and its stated position in the world order. It is apparently written for a general readership, but I think it would be admirably suited, if not required reading, for the aspiring medical student thinking of psychiatry as a career, as well as for psychiatrists in training. It will help, above all (and more than it may realise), to teach humility.

The impression Lieberman leaves us with is that psychiatry has shaken off its past. The new scientific psychiatry may sound hunky-dory, but re-reading the history of psychiatry, the sceptical observer might wonder if we can be confident that we now have it right. I am quite proud to be one of these sceptics.

**Peter Tyrer** Professor of Community Psychiatry, Centre for Mental Health, Imperial College London, Hammersmith Hospital, London W12 0NN, UK.  
Email: p.tyrer@imperial.ac.uk

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