

Book reviews

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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.

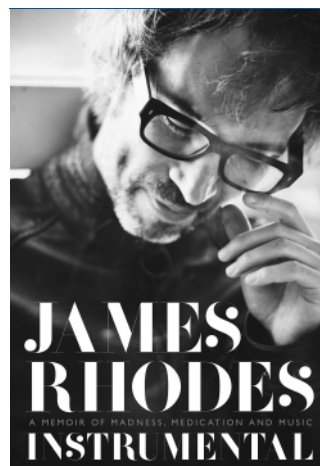
As such, the book is essentially a cautionary tale about where psychiatry might have gone wrong. However, unlike other books that follow along these lines, it is never implied that these mistakes will continue to be made; nor does it become critical of the profession at any point. Rather, by addressing 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.

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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