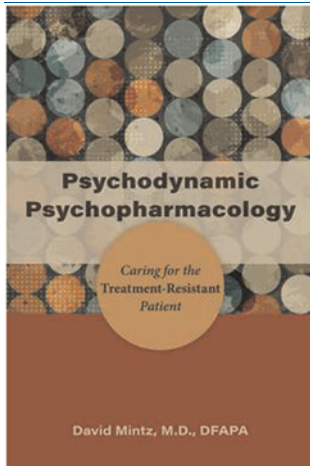


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboode



Psychodynamic Psychopharmacology: Caring for the Treatment-Resistant Patient


By David Mintz
American Psychiatric Publishing.
2022. £46 (pb). 295 pp.
ISBN 9781615371525

David Mintz's book on psychodynamic psychopharmacology invites us to consider how rather than what to prescribe. Echoing Balint, he reminds us that the pharmacotherapeutic alliance and the manner in which the doctor interacts with the patient are instrumental to outcomes. He educates us on factors that affect treatment, such as patient characteristics (attachment style, placebo, treatment preference) and prescriber characteristics (warmth, promoting autonomy, supporting decision-making). In my experience such factors are difficult to define or teach and often fall under the broad umbrella of 'patient-centred care'. Mintz engages with patient-centred care on a deeper level. He teaches us how to formulate our patients, how to avoid a body–mind split, how to address patients' ambivalence about treatment and how to contain countertransference prescribing leading to polypharmacy and iatrogenic harm.

The book is well structured, starting with defining psychodynamic psychopharmacology and its large evidence base. It provides a framework for considering treatment resistance at the level of meaning and subsequently breaks down the overarching principles of psychodynamic psychopharmacology. It is suffused with case formulations and transcripts of conversations with patients. We meet a patient whose psychosis was protecting them against the depressing reality of an earlier loss; the prescriber took this into account when deciding to prescribe less aggressively and to allow for grieving to take place. Examples of patients using their medication in countertherapeutic ways or being unhealthily attached to their tablets made me consider my own practice.

Prescribing in a truly integrated way can feel like a novelty and sometimes lonely in a predominantly biological psychiatric paradigm. You are not alone. Mintz guides you with a manual on how to approach the engagement and maintenance phase of prescribing. There is a self-assessment toolkit and a glossary, all invaluable tools for clinical practice and teaching purposes.

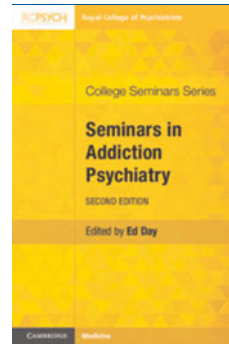
This book does not antagonise but it complements the science of psychopharmacology. It should be in the curriculum of psychiatric if not medical training. It is likely to restore faith in psychiatry as a profession and in our roles as doctors of the mind and the body.

Haroula Konstantinidou , is a consultant psychiatrist in medical psychotherapy at Francis Dixon Lodge (a therapy service for people with personality disorder), Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicester, UK; and a member of PoPs UK (Psychodynamics of Prescribing), London, UK. Email: haroula.konstantinidou1@nhs.net

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Declaration of interest

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Seminars in Addiction Psychiatry

Edited by Ed Day
2nd edn.
Cambridge University Press. 2021.
£34.99 (pb). 310 pp.
ISBN 9781911623199

The second edition of *Seminars in Addiction Psychiatry* provides an excellent overview of the topic. It comes 27 years after the first edition and reflects many of the recent advances in the field, including the changes in DSM-5 and ICD-11 and major advances in the neurobiology of addiction.

Ed Day, the editor (and author/co-author of four chapters) explains in the preface how the original College Seminars Series was written by people applying textbook knowledge at the 'coalface' of clinical practice, and in the second edition he has attempted to maintain this balance of presenting the latest evidence while focusing on its application in policy and practice. Written in an accessible and readable style, the new edition closely follows the layout of the original, with revised and updated versions of the 11 chapters in the first edition written by new authors. There are four new chapters, on: tobacco use disorders; novel psychoactive substances and club drugs; addiction problems in a family and social context; and addiction recovery mutual aid organisations. The last of these brings a welcome North American perspective. NPS (novel psychoactive substances, previously 'legal highs') is a new kid on the block topic of general importance.


The first chapter follows the evolution of the concept of addiction and its associated terminology, including the development of the diagnostic labels 'harmful use' and 'dependence' and how they have been replaced by 'alcohol use disorder' in DSM-5.

As might be expected, there are comprehensive chapters on the epidemiology, aetiology, prevention and treatment of heroin, cocaine and alcohol dependence. There is also a chapter exploring the misuse of prescribed medications, including benzodiazepines and gabapentinoids. There are chapters looking at psychological approaches to treatment, policy responses to addictions in the UK and service provision.

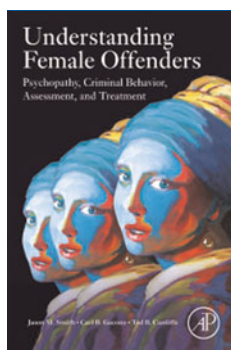
In reviewing this book as a trainer in addiction psychiatry and an advanced trainee, it strikes us as an ideal source for supervision during an endorsement year, as well as a source for those studying for their RCPsych Membership exam. The chapter by Michael Kelleher and Luke Mitcheson on comorbid substance use and mental illness is a timely reminder that all working in general,

forensic, old age, liaison and adolescent psychiatry need a working knowledge of these topics.

The book does not explore behavioural addictions such as gambling, but the editor suggests this will be tackled in the next edition, which, given the pace of change in this field, must surely arrive sooner than the nearly three decades we have waited for this updated edition.

Iain D. Smith , NHS Forth Valley Substance Use Service, Stirling, UK; Matt Turner, NHS Forth Valley Substance Use Service, Stirling, UK. Email: iain.smith2@nhs.scot

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Understanding Female Offenders: Psychopathy, Criminal Behavior, Assessment, and Treatment


By Jason Smith, Carl Gacono and Ted Cunliffe
Academic Press. 2021. \$93.75 (pb).
484 pp.
ISBN 9780128233726

Like buses, books about female psychopathy often seem to arrive at my door in twos and threes. However, this one is unusual because its authors (all experienced clinician researchers) have pioneered the use of the Rorschach test as a personality assessment tool, especially in psychopathy. Their chief theme is that psychopathy exists in women and can be reliably detected with the Rorschach – perhaps more reliably than using Robert Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), which is usually seen as the gold standard in this context. They make important and useful points about the limitations of much research on psychopathy, especially research that is not grounded in the realities of crime and criminals and much of which is based on self-report.

Despite what one might think from watching TV and the heaving true crime shelves in bookshops, there are many debates about psychopathy: and psychopathy in women is a key one. This is partly because the absolute numbers of rule-breaking women are so small; few women break the criminal law at all, let alone violently. Only 5% of the prison population in England and Wales are women; and of those few thousand women, only about 30% are sentenced for crimes of violence. It’s not that women can’t be criminal or violent, it just seems to take more for them to be so. Why this should be is a Nobel prize-winning question beyond the scope of this book review.

So, the work of these authors can only apply to a tiny number of highly selected atypical women; and it is notoriously difficult to make empirically robust assertions about highly unusual people. Research on unusual offenders is hard to do without biases creeping in, and the authors devote a chapter to the multiple forms of bias that can influence the study of female psychopathy, and what might be done to minimise it, especially in terms of sample selection and methodology.

The authors have a nice style and are clearly devotees of Arthur Conan Doyle and his indefatigable detective. They have obviously had a frustrating time getting their work on the Rorschach published in peer-reviewed journals and this book is their response to this. It is probably only of specialist interest to those working in prisons and secure units for women; and in the time-poor NHS, I doubt we will be using the Rorschach anytime soon. I also couldn’t help but notice that in a book that discusses the malign influence of bias on research in psychopathy, especially in women, at no point did the authors offer a reflection on what makes three men devote their working lives to studying a rare group of women; or whether they might bring a masculine gender role bias to their work. It’s just a thought.

Gwen Adshead , Consultant Forensic Psychotherapist, Broadmoor Hospital, West London NHS Trust, Crowthorne, UK. Email: g.adshead@nhs.net

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Declaration of interest

None.