

Book reviews

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Religion, Culture and Mental Health

By Kate Loewenthal.
Cambridge University Press. 2007.
£45.00 (hb). 180pp (hb).
ISBN: 0521850231

Interest in religion, culture and mental health has flourished in the past decade. However, this topical area is characterised by psychic retreats, and splitting and projection as psychological defences that emerge when cherished beliefs, values and ways of living are contrasted across religious groups. It is difficult to find guidelines which are comprehensive, constructive or do justice to the complex influences of culture on the expression, recognition and management of mental distress within and across religious groups. All of this is made more challenging as society and public services are becoming increasingly secularised.

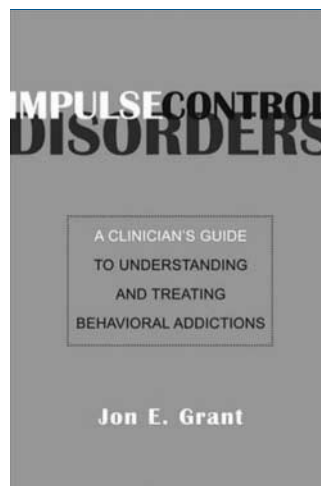
Religion, Culture and Mental Health provides a compelling, engaging and accessible account of this controversial and often mystical subject. Kate Loewenthal anticipates the controversies and sets a caring and gentle pace to take readers through different forms of mental distress and disorder, including schizophrenia, manic disorder, depression, anxiety, somatisation and dissociative states. She also addresses positive states of mental well-being. For readers who are not specialists in mental healthcare, she defines each disorder and the relationship with religious beliefs and practices. She then progresses to present case reports and in-depth accounts of religious experiences and expressions of distress with religious content, in order to bring alive for the reader the interaction between religion, spirituality and mental distress. This is not easily achieved in a territory where controversies abound, not only in religious domains but in numerous disciplines that present distinct critiques of mental healthcare in a culturally and religiously diverse society. Anthropology, sociology, transcultural nursing, psychology and psychiatry have all evolved rapidly, each with particular emphases and realms of interest. Yet, subjects such as politics, social policy, education and migration studies are also important commentators.

There are clear research and clinical practice examples on positive and negative effects religion may have on a person's mental health and well-being, although positive examples prevail. The author further develops her analyses by looking at religious-specific issues emphasising religious differences in the practice of faiths and in interpersonal processes that influence coping and resilience. She argues for religiously specific or, at least, religiously informed clinical practice.

For those interested in recovery, well-being and mental health in a culturally and religiously diverse society, *Religion, Culture and Mental Health* will provide many hours of thought, controversy and teaching material, not to mention an enjoyable scholarship.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.107.044875



Impulse Control Disorders: A Clinician's Guide to Understanding and Treating Behavioral Addictions

By Jon E Grant.
W. W. Norton & Company. 2008.
US\$26.95 (hb). 224pp.
ISBN: 9780393705218

This is the latest Jon E. Grant 'production' on impulse control disorders; his previous titles include *Pathological Gambling – A Clinical Guide to Treatment* and *Stop Me Because I Can't Stop Myself – Taking Control of Impulsive Behaviour*. Jon E. Grant is an opinion leader, a credible academic and an experienced clinician in the field of impulse control disorders. So what does this book offer?

I ask myself three key questions when reading a book that is presented as a clinician's guide: Is it written by an expert clinician? Does it speak the language of the clinician? Does it infuse me with sufficient confidence to assess and treat a patient with that particular disorder? This book affirmatively answers all three questions. In essence, it provides a sufficiently detailed and clinically focused overview of the various impulse control disorders such as pathological gambling, kleptomania, intermittent explosive disorder, trichotillomania and pyromania. It takes the reader on a journey of knowledge-building and evidence base-sharing, starting with descriptions of the clinical characteristics of impulse control disorders, through the various theoretical models and finally to their assessment and treatment.

Using case vignettes to illustrate the disorders makes the book an easy read and maintains its clinical perspective. Three chapters discuss, at considerable length, the various and as yet unexplained conceptual models for understanding impulse control disorders, including the obsessive-compulsive spectrum model, behavioural addictions model and affective disorder model. Discussion of the aetiology of impulse control disorders, complicated by the heterogeneity between and within these disorders, offers preliminary insights into neurobiological markers and psychological theories. The chapters on assessment and treatment are a must-read. They provide a useful and productive blend of evidence drawn from the latest research and the author's experience borne out of a decade