

BOOK REVIEWS

The Psychological Effects of Concussion by D. M. A. Gronwall and H. Sampson. Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1974. 118 pp. \$3.15.

This book forms a research monograph reporting the results of six experiments carried out on male concussion patients admitted to the Head Injury Unit at Auckland Hospital. The book admirably fills a gap in the experimental literature concerning this frequent and often ignored form of head injury. As the authors point out, concussion usually results from a blow on the head which is followed by temporarily brain stem damage and loss of consciousness. After a matter of hours, the patient may be clinically quite recovered with the only apparent aftereffect being a memory loss for events close in time to the accident.

With the rapid recovery there appears to have been no pressing need to understand the detailed disturbances that occur. However, as the authors demonstrate, clinical recovery is not synonymous with a return to normal performance levels. Indeed, the results of the present study indicate that even brief periods of amnesia are accompanied by a temporary disturbance of normal performance.

This was detectable in the patients in the study up to several weeks after clinical discharge, based upon the absence of traditional neurological signs of damage, and following a return to work. The authors were also successful in showing that the degree and duration of the performance deficit was related to the duration of post-traumatic amnesia, in a comparison of severely and moderately concussed groups of subjects.

The general theoretical orientation of the authors is to consider the organism as a limited capacity information-processing channel in the tradition of Broadbent's book *Decision and Stress*. The experimental plan of attack is to test the concussed subjects within 24-48 hours after admission to hospital, on a series of performance tests and then to repeat the tests about four weeks later. The first group of patients was tested on the Paced Auditory Serial Addition Task which showed a slowing of information transmission in the concussed group as compared to hospitalized non-concussed patients and controls. Following further experiments, the authors argue that the delay in processing is one of response selection, rather than response production. They show, using verbal material, that concussed subjects appear unable to make use of the transitional probabilities in linguistic material and that this deficit is similar to that accompanying distraction in normals. To distinguish between a change in either perceptual selection or total processing capacity underlying these results, the authors presented

subjects with an auditory shadowing task. They conclude that concussion does not appear to be associated with a deficit in perceptual selection, but rather a generalized reduction in processing capacity probably associated with an alteration in arousal level brought about by damage to the brain-stem structure. The notion of reduced capacity is generalized to account for the ability of concussed subjects to maintain performance at an adequate level during the period of post-traumatic amnesia.

Finally, the important clinical implications of these results are spelled out. These are: a need to measure the patients' rate of recovery from concussion by using some of these sensitive psychological tests; possible techniques for ameliorating the deficits detected here; and advice to the patient on situations where the deficit is likely to present a problem.

In comparison to a good deal of applied psychological research of the "shot-gun" variety, this work is an excellent example of how applied psychological research can be productive and useful when it has the backing of sound theoretical premises. It should form a useful model for further research into many other areas of clinical psychology and should be brought to the attention of both clinical and research staff in neurology.

It is not primarily a book to recommend for undergraduate teaching, although it will prove useful for post graduate clinical psychology courses. One regret is that the book does not contain more detail and background to the arguments the authors use in progressing from one experiment to the next. The work could only benefit from being longer and presenting more information.

L. Hartley

Social Encounters edited by Michael Argyle. Aldine Publishing Co., 1973.

This is a book in what might still be called the 'British Empiricist' tradition. The editor announces his intention to stick to the facts (and eschew broad theorising) in the introduction: "it is my opinion that we are not yet ready for general theories of social interaction". The aim of this collection, then, as its title implies, is to provide a sample of recent research findings on natural—or at least naturalistic—human interaction in face-to-face settings, as opposed to "stripped down" lab situations. And a further aim is that the findings presented should simply be interesting findings, not necessarily tied in with any encompassing theory of social behaviour.

So the reader for whom social psychology is, or has been, a tale of attitude measurement by laboriously standardized pencil-and-paper tests, of interpretations and re-interpretations of old-established results

within or outside a cognitive-dissonance or exchange-theory or Skinnerian framework, of subjects deceived by experimenters and spied on unawares, or of pseudo-interactions where one or more party does not actually exist will discover in 'Social Encounters' a refreshing (or disappointing, according to taste) absence of such techniques and concepts. Instead the reader will find some genuinely interesting research reports, exhibiting a concern with what *goes on* in social interaction. The main criticisms that can be made of this selection fall under two headings: the extent to which the book fails to live up to its editor's 'hard-headed' intentions; and the extent to which this a-theoretical hard-headedness unnecessarily restricts social psychology, or restricts the range of social psychology as apparent, say, to a student who buys this book as an introduction to what the publishers promise is "the most exciting work now being done in social psychology".

On the first count must be mentioned Mehrabian's bizarre study on the inference of attitude from the posture, orientation and distance of a communicator. Certainly this study shows close concern with the minutiae of social behaviour—arm-position, direction of gaze, angle of stance and so forth—and certainly its results are interesting. But as an investigation of *natural face-to-face* interaction it falls down lamentably, for the 'interaction' that takes place and is scrupulously recorded by observers behind one-way glass is between a person and a hat-rack—which the subject is asked to imagine as someone of particular status and social distance. On the other hand, the papers by Kendon, Rosenfeld, Argyle and Dean, Goffman, and Moos in particular do concentrate very carefully on actual behaviours observed in more or less natural settings—though of course they are not without theoretical relevance. Another example of a partial failure to live up to the intentions stated in his introduction occurs in Argyle's editing of the Laing, Phillipson and Lee reading on interpersonal perception. This important but not sufficiently widely known investigation fully deserves its place in the book, but, strangely, the whole extract printed is devoted to the interpersonal perception method used and entirely leaves out the results obtained from it. These results are in fact extremely interesting and they justify the method by showing that mis-alignments of 'meta-' and 'meta-meta-' perspectives, as well as of direct perspectives, characterise disturbed marriages. The reader who is informed of the method alone might be forgiven for asking whether the somewhat mind-boggling explication of A's perception of B's perception of A's perception of B (and the various possible levels of mis-perception) is really of practical everyday consequence. If that reader also had the results of the study, it would be easier to see that it was.

The question of whether social psychology (or indeed psychology as a whole) can for the moment afford to ignore synthesizing theories and attend only to the elements of social interaction or perhaps to

what Goffman, in this book, calls "the little interactions that are forgotten as soon as they occur . . . what serious students of society never collect . . . the slop of social life" is a vexed one at present and reaches out far beyond the choice of what to include in a set of readings. I would side with Darwin on this point in the opinion that every observation must be for or against some theory, not merely to be useful but simply to be made at all. The selection is in fact more catholic, and more tolerant towards theoretical matters, than admitted in the introduction.

This book contains a sample of the most interesting work currently being done in the field of social interaction—partly, at least, because it fails to fulfill its editor's rather strictly behaviouristic objectives. It can be recommended as a good source-book for a university course introducing social psychology (though the Penguin edition is cheaper).

Richard Forsyth

From Anecdote to Experiment in Psychical Research by Robert H. Thouless. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

This book attempts to bridge the gap between anecdotes of spontaneous phenomena and experimental studies of psychic phenomena. It is the culmination of many years of study since the 1940s when Dr Thouless became a member and subsequently President of the Society for Psychical Research. A main purpose is "to show that real progress has taken place during the experimental stage of psychical research although this progress has not been fast".

Thouless is successful in achieving this goal and provides a much-needed antidote to the Lyall Watsons, Kreskins and other pseudo-scientific popularizers of psi. It is unfortunate that Dr Thouless's dry and humourless approach is unlikely to appeal to the 'Supernature' subculture. Thouless is not himself without bias—he is and confesses to be a "believer". However, he does not seem to allow his bias to dictate to his reasoned and critical evaluation of empirical findings. This scholarly and sophisticated book can therefore be recommended to all those wishing to read a balanced introduction to parapsychology.

D. F. Marks