

Book Review / Compte rendu

Andrews, J. W., & Istvanffy, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Exceptional Life Journeys: Stories of Childhood Disorder*. [Des cheminements de vie exceptionnels : Récits de troubles de l'enfance.] London, UK: Elsevier. ISBN: 978-0123852168, 306 pages.

Reviewed by: Tyler M. Kimbel

ABSTRACT

Exceptional Life Journeys is a collection of personal, parental, and professional stories about experiences with childhood disorder. Ten childhood disorders are discussed within the book's four parts: Behaviour Disorders, Emotional Disorders, Developmental and Learning Disorders, and Eating and Health-Related Disorders. The editors employ a strengths-based perspective from the introductory sections to the conclusion and including each chapter in between. Readers of this book are offered a unique opportunity to gain awareness about individual journeys with childhood disorder. The review includes a synopsis of the content presented in the text and a critique of its utility for students, professors, and practitioners.

RÉSUMÉ

Exceptional Life Journeys (Cheminements de vie exceptionnels) est une collection de récits personnels, parentaux, et professionnels au sujet d'expériences vécues de troubles de l'enfance. On y discute de dix troubles de l'enfance dans les quatre parties du livre : Troubles de comportement, troubles affectifs, troubles d'apprentissage et de développement, et troubles d'alimentation et de santé. De l'introduction à la conclusion et dans tous les chapitres, les directeurs adoptent une perspective fondée sur les points forts. Les lecteurs de ce livre ont ainsi accès à une occasion unique de se sensibiliser aux cheminements individuels en contexte de troubles de l'enfance. Ce compte rendu comporte un aperçu du contenu présenté dans le texte, ainsi qu'une critique de son utilité pour les étudiants, les enseignants, et les praticiens.

This one-of-a-kind resource is a compilation of 46 first-person narratives dealing with childhood disorders as told through personal, parental, and professional perspectives. The editors, an accomplished psychologist/university professor (Andrews) and a long-time teacher/administrator who is currently the head of a highly specialized private school for exceptional children in Canada (Istvanffy), state in the preface:

This book offers an opportunity for students in training and professionals in the field as well as the general public to gain some insight and awareness of the life journeys of some exceptional children, their families, and those who have provided professional service to them. (p. xiv)

From my perception, this opportunity is fully presented by allowing readers to take an insider's look at childhood disorders in a manner that is often overlooked, or not commonly considered, when learning about the deficit characteristics of a DSM-IV-TR diagnosis.

Each story provides a unique account of interacting with a childhood disorder that extends beyond the clinical, empirical, and theoretical perspective typically offered during training. The intimate thoughts and feelings about living with a childhood disorder addressed in this book put forward valuable insight that it has sometimes taken me weeks or months of working as a practitioner with a student or client to learn. One can't help but appreciate and applaud the honesty and openness of the contributing authors of this book. Further, the inner dialogue provided by professionals serving children with a DSM diagnosis and their families is priceless to counsellors-in-training, novice therapists, and other mental health workers who long to know how the "experts" approach this population.

The text begins with an invited foreword followed by a preface from the editors who outline a brief yet informative description of the purpose, rationale, and organization of the chapters. There are 10 childhood disorders covered by individual chapters, divided into four sections: Behaviour Disorders, Emotional Disorders, Developmental and Learning Disorders, and Eating and Health-Related Disorders. Each section consists of between 2 and 4 chapters, with each chapter containing a prologue, individual stories, and an epilogue, all focusing on one particular disorder. The balance between the number of personal, parental, and professional stories varies depending on the chapter; however, there is always at least one excerpt from each perspective. Andrews and Istvanffy both contribute introductory stories prior to embarking on the four main sections of the text. These introductions offer the reader background information about the editors and assist in conveying the worldviews from which they interpret the world around them, including their career paths, how they conceptualize clients, their approach in compiling stories for the book, and ultimately how they view the human condition. The editors are very effective in setting a strengths-based perspective concerning what readers can expect to discover in the subsequent sections, which are broken down further below.

Part I, Behaviour Disorders, includes Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 is made up of stories pertaining to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and Chapter 2 focuses on conduct and oppositional defiant disorders. Both of these chapters provide three professional stories each, which outnumber the personal and parental stories, as there is only one narrative from each of these two perspectives for Chapters 1 and 2.

Part II, Emotional Disorders, includes Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 focuses on childhood anxiety disorder, while Chapter 4 speaks to childhood mood disorder. There is a noticeable shift in Chapter 3 as it opens with three personal narratives, immediately followed by five parental stories (more than any other chapter). The chapter concludes with only one professional story. In Chapter 4, the reader gains

insight into childhood mood disorder through the narratives of one individual, one parent, and two professionals' accounts.

Part III, Developmental and Learning Disorders, includes the next four chapters. Chapter 5 is tied to learning disabilities, which are explored through the lens of two personal, one parental, and three professional stories. Chapter 6 (intellectual disabilities) and Chapter 7 (developmental coordination disorder) are quick but informative reads, as both chapters only consist of one tale from each of the three perspectives. Part III concludes with Chapter 8, offering one personal, one parental, and three professional stories about autistic disorder.

Part IV, Eating and Health-Related Disorders, includes Chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 is dedicated to eating disorders within childhood, discussing the issue through two individual stories followed by one parental and one professional narrative. Chapter 10 consists of one personal, one parental, and one professional account of childhood somatoform disorders.

Although the chapters follow a logical and organized structure, the disproportionality of the content is unquestionably conspicuous. The amount of emphasis allotted for each disorder greatly varies, which was somewhat disconcerting to me as a reader. For example, Chapter 6 on intellectual disabilities is 20 pages long and includes only three stories—comparably brief compared to the 47 pages of Chapter 3 on childhood anxiety disorder that includes three times the number of stories. Is not the topic of Down syndrome just as significant or page-worthy as anxiety disorders? I doubt the editors' intent was to create this type of reaction to the material; however, it does raise questions about the underlying values held by individuals, helping professions, and society as a whole in terms of the degree of attention paid to some disorders over others. Interestingly enough, one author/therapist voices similar unease in Chapter 1 regarding the surge of "popularity" around the ADHD diagnosis within the past 20 years (p. 18). Despite my general content-related concern, I imagine the equitability among chapters was a difficult variable to control. After all, the text can only consist of stories that authors were willing and able to write about.

The rich narratives within the book are crafted through an array of diverse writing styles that speak to the exceptional life journey of each author, keeping readers interested throughout. In terms of utility, this resource is a must-have for practitioners working with clients diagnosed with a childhood disorder. I also see this text as essential for undergraduate and graduate students training for careers in the helping fields, particularly (as the editors suggest) for students studying within the realms of counselling, education, social science, social work, medicine, and related mental-health professions.

I would encourage those who are teaching and supervising in such training programs to strongly consider incorporating this text into their program curriculum. In fact, I've been recommending it to fellow counsellor educators since the first day I picked it up. It should also be noted that this book can be understood and used by "everyday people" who might be interested in or experiencing the impact of childhood disorder themselves or within their family. For this reason,

Exceptional Life Journeys could potentially be a helpful reference resource for clients (situation dependent) and/or their parents.

I offer a personal confession in concluding this review—I am typically not a dichotomous thinker; however, when it comes to educational literature, I tend to harshly classify textbooks as either good books or bad books ... and this, in my opinion, is hands down a *great* book.

About the Author

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