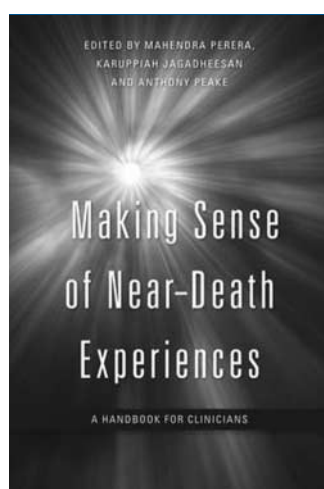


science and reason as a way of replacing religion and spirituality. These are challenging notions but powerfully argued.

Overall this is a broadly ranging book. At times it is academically dense and at times emotionally moving. I was left with a picture of a man who was curious, intellectually challenging of established theory and practice, and unafraid to question deeply held views. His arguments are intellectually rigorous, extensively researched and intellectually erudite. Although not a book for reading from cover to cover, it does offer ample opportunities for visiting a wide variety of areas concerning love and aggression. The book is not always an easy read, but it does repay the effort involved.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.112.110015



Making Sense of Near-death Experiences: A Handbook for Clinicians

Edited by Mahendra Perera, Karupiah Jagadheesan & Anthony Peake. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2011. £18.99 (pb). 176 pp. ISBN: 9781849051491

Near-death experiences are a fascinating phenomenon, often shrouded in mystery and spirituality. The aims of this book are to give examples of this experience across different cultures and age ranges and to explore how this presents and can be managed in everyday clinical practice. Furthermore, and most interestingly, the book explores some of the possible scientific explanations behind this occurrence. The book as a whole was easy to read, and the structure made it very easy to dip in and out of. However, there was considerable repetition that was probably unavoidable given that this is a multi-author text.

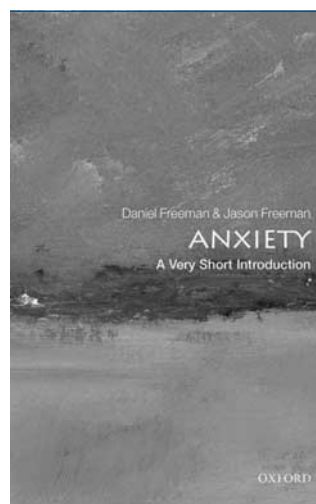
A few chapters are dedicated to explaining the origins of near-death experiences. At times, these biological explanations are very basic for the medically trained professional. However, some explanations that attempt to enlighten how the mind may exist independently of the body derive from quantum physics. This possibility has profound implications for our concepts of consciousness and, potentially, even life and death themselves.

So how does this book help us as psychiatrists? The intense effect a near-death experience has on a person after such an event is often what we may have to deal with in what is a surprisingly common experience. Also, we need to understand such presentations to ensure we do not misdiagnose someone as having a mental illness on this basis. However, the true strength of the book does not lie with its application to clinical practice, but in the introduction to the biological and physical possible origins of such events. This turns this phenomenon from something you would only hear about in science fiction to scientific possibility. However, as the book acknowledges, there is

still a lot of work to be done, but what fundamental repercussions this further work may have for us as psychiatrists and human beings cannot be underestimated – this book makes you believe that there just may be something more to this, and historic times may lie ahead. This is a truly thought-provoking read.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.112.110155



Anxiety: A Very Short Introduction

By Daniel Freeman & Jason Freeman. Oxford University Press. 2012. £7.99 (pb). 155 pp. ISBN: 9780199567157

This book is the latest volume of the series 'Very Short Introductions', which covers a diverse range of topics from biblical archaeology to witchcraft. It is written by two brothers, Daniel and Jason Freeman, the former a consultant clinical psychologist and the latter an editor and author specialising in popular psychology and self-help.

Over the course of 11 chapters, the Freeman brothers cover the psychoanalytic, behavioural, cognitive and neurobiological theories of anxiety, before dedicating a further chapter to each of the major anxiety disorders, such as generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The final chapter describes the treatment options available, before presenting the reader with a number of self-assessment questionnaires, references and suggestions for further reading.

One of the appealing features of this book is the way in which it colours hard fact and theory with interesting historical asides, while peppering references to anxiety in literature, television and film alongside references to anxiety disorders in peer-reviewed journals.

The inclusion of case studies, as well as first-person narratives from household names such as Michael Palin, compliments some of the more heavy concepts and facts presented and helps put them into context. It also provides the reader with an identifiable figure with whom to relate and empathise with.

As a core trainee between part I and part II of the MRCPsych examinations, I found this book a refreshing read, putting into perspective information I had read from other sources with a more solid but dry academic grounding. My only criticism is that I am unsure of who the ideal reader for this book would be. In a sense the book suffers from a Goldilocks-type dilemma. It is not rigorous or comprehensive enough for medical students or trainees working towards their MRCPsych, yet I wonder whether it would be a little too academic for the average member of the public.