

### Review of the month

# Talking Back to Psychiatry: The Psychiatric Consumer/ Survivor/Ex-Patient Movement

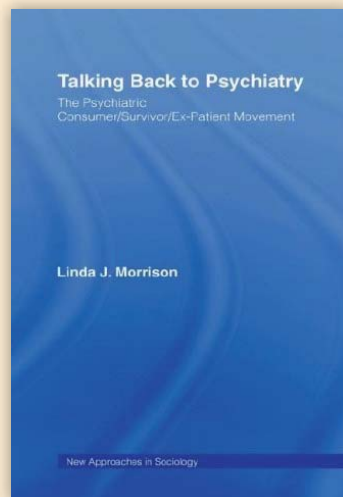
Linda J Morrison  
Routledge 2009  
212 pp  
ISBN: 9780415804899  
£22.50 (paperback)

Linda Morrison extends a sociological analysis to a complex social movement that appears (as the title of psychiatric consumer/survivor/ex-patient suggests) to encompass some disparate positions in relation to psychiatry, psychiatric treatment, identity and activism.

She begins by suggesting that conventional understandings of the 'sick role' as applied to psychiatric service users are problematic as is labelling theory whereby people are labelled, stigmatised and ascribed a special status that they then internalise and enact.

It is hard to reconcile these rather passive or docile positions with the service user/consumer activist roles that have become so familiar to those working in mental health services in the last 30 years. Morrison invokes the feminist idea of 'talking back' as a unifying theme of the movement, in which the psychiatric narrative is resisted to varying degrees and, in particular, the attribution of an identity defined by others.

**Reviewer**  
**Richard Lakeman**



This reads like a doctoral study although the methodology section is a little opaque with a nod towards Foucault and Freire as theoretical influences, and ethnographic field work, in-depth interviews with activists and reflection on newsletters and other archival sources as the primary sources of data.

A fascinating chapter chronicles the historical background to the movement in North America and the various causes or themes that have been pursued over time with particular attention to the 30 years from the 1970s.

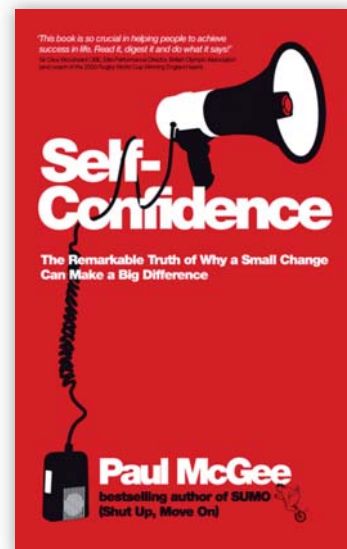
Personal narratives of survival and resistance are explored and these are related to a larger social movement. The complexity of the movement, Morrison claims, is due to identity politics with some people celebrating mad or deviant identity, others

entirely rejecting psychiatric knowledge, and still others assuming more conformist, conciliatory relationships with psychiatry. It serves to illuminate and help the reader make sense of some of the seemingly contradictory positions of the movement that appears to accommodate positions of radical antipsychiatry as well as conservatism and relative conformity with psychiatric orthodoxy.

The text has no illustrations, and makes no attempt to make sense of the development of the movement outside North America, although there are international parallels. Interestingly, Morrison suggests that the term 'consumer', currently the preferred term for service users at least by health professionals in North America and Australia, gained currency because it appears less confrontational than other labels, such as 'survivor'.

This work deserves to be part of the popular literature but it is unapologetically an academic text. At least parts of the text will be of interest to almost everyone with an interest in service user involvement, but it is, perhaps, not as accessible as it could be.

All of us working in mental health services need to listen to the people talking back. They are not going to go away.



## Self-Confidence

The Remarkable Truth of  
Why a Small Change Can  
Make a Big Difference

Paul McGee  
Capstone 2009  
248 pp  
ISBN: 9781906465827  
£9.99 (paperback)

This book offers a practical approach to self-management in developing confidence. We thought it was well laid out with pictures and line spacing that help to focus the mind on particular points and aids concentration. The book is ideal for those readers who like small bite-size pieces of information, giving easy-to-recall one liners to capture a wealth of knowledge.

McGee inspires hope and highlights the importance of the smallest gesture or change. No one is excluded, as the author confides they learn to grow in confidence.

While the book appears to use an approach based on cognitive

behavioural therapy, it is written very much for the person and not the 'patient', and uses positive yet realistic language. It contains very little if any clinical jargon and reads as though you are having a conversation with the author.

The book makes useful reference to the power of language, words that may limit or liberate and encourages a belief in one's abilities in the future if not right now.

The book mentions acceptance a lot, while remaining positive, and encourages readers to develop the confidence to allow themselves to make mistakes. It discusses how opportunities may be missed due to a lack of self-belief, and looks at how people's 'internal chatter' persuades us to play safe and do nothing.

It is a handy book to have around if you feel you need to be reminded of some of the key lessons, but, at £9.99, you may find it better simply to borrow a copy from the library.

**Reviewers**  
**Angela Morford and**  
**Polly Moy**

# The Meaning of Madness

**Neel Burton**  
**Acheron Press 2009**  
**202 pp**  
**ISBN: 9780956035301**  
**£14.99 (paperback)**

This book contains a promise to open up a debate on mental disorders, and to get people interested, talking and thinking. It may do this, although I am unsure who 'the people' are that the book is aimed at. If this is for general public consumption, I suspect the material is too technical and briefly covered for someone without much exposure to the mental health field. As a mini-primer in psychiatry briefly covering all the major psychiatric and psychological theories that are taught during the early years of a psychiatrist's training it might be a very useful text. The addition of some classical, religious and literary references makes it more entertaining and readable than most psychiatric textbooks. However, Burton

falls short of opening up any sort of new debate as the bulk of his book seems to summarise material from a range of standard psychiatric textbooks. But it does add some more recent findings from the worlds of genetics and neurology to the mix. These provide some interesting thoughts on the potential evolutionary advantage of genes that predispose to mental illness.

The book contains some outdated film references. For example, we are told that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* gives an outdated picture of psychiatry. This was true 35 years ago when the film was released, never mind today. The reference to *Clockwork Orange* is another such anachronism.

The book's structure, based around major mental health diagnoses, is accessible and generally easy to follow. At times, however, Burton leaps into detailed explanations of topics that do not seem to fit in

with the overall theme of the book. For example, there is a detailed description of operant conditioning in one section, while another mentions the therapeutic blood levels of lithium.

On the plus side, this book can be read by the informed reader in under four hours, and Burton is to be congratulated on how much theory he covers. However, as regards his promise to open up debate on the meaning of madness both inside and outside of psychiatric professional circles, then—bar the few interesting thoughts on evolutionary advantage—I am not convinced.

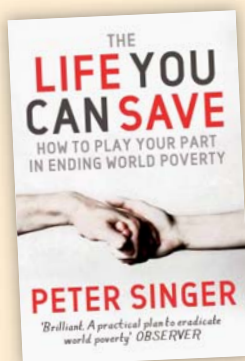


**Reviewer**  
**Jon Allen**

# The Life You Can Save

**Peter Singer**  
**Picador 2010**  
**224 pp**  
**£8.99 (paperback)**  
**ISBN: 9780330454599**

Peter Singer is a world-renowned Australian philosopher and professor of bioethics at Princeton University in the US. He is probably best known for his controversial book *Animal Liberation*, which attracted



widespread attention. In this book, Singer presents ideas from a range of philosophers, cultures and religions, and offers a convincing and comprehensive argument for eradicating world poverty. Using a sequence of moral dilemmas from which

he constructs the basis of his argument, Singer highlights the need for independence, growth and sustainability in developing nations. He also addresses the need for more education in order to overcome the stigma associated with illness and disease among those who are already marginalised as a result of being impoverished. Throughout, Singer makes a compelling case for greater charitable giving and suggests

how this might be achieved. While acknowledging that readers of this book are 'probably among those who give to charity or who volunteer in their community', his call to arms for all of us to work together to eradicate world poverty is a powerful one.

**Reviewer**  
**Ada Hui**