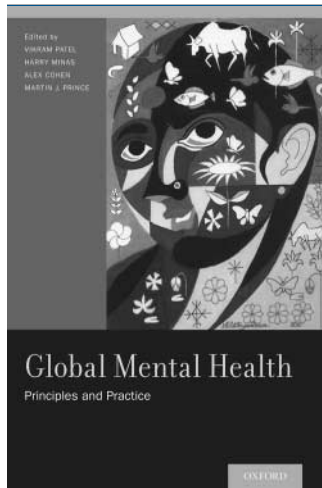


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



### Global Mental Health: Principles and Practice

Edited by Vikram Patel,  
Harry Minas, Alex Cohen  
& Martin J. Prince.  
Oxford University Press. 2013.  
£38.99 (pb). 512 pp.  
ISBN: 9780199920181

The title of this textbook will certainly capture the attention of practitioners, academics and policy makers. Global mental health has been debated at many international conferences around the world in recent years. The discipline is very broad and the editors have assembled an impressive list of 54 authors from 18 countries reflecting the rich contribution to the ongoing debate by scholars and researchers from around the world.

The book is organised into two sections: the first 12 chapters focus on the principles of global mental health whereas the second section of 8 chapters focuses on key areas of practice. What will be most challenging to the readers is translating the principles into practical tips for mental health professionals working on the shop floor. Reading about the innovative ideas and the success stories from around the world, especially from low- and middle-income countries, can be very encouraging to many labouring in the mental health field where often the resources are meagre. There are many excellent chapters written with the experience of those who know their subjects very well, for example scaling up services for mental health, organising anti-stigma campaigns and delivery of treatment by non-specialised health workers. Although the book is about mental health, some authors have written too much on mental illness with only a brief description of preventive strategies and mental health promotion, particularly in the chapters on child and adolescent mental health and women's mental health. The anti-stigma campaign chapter would have been more inspiring to all if the authors had included discussion of outcome studies.

There is an interesting description of the formation of an Asian mental health task force in 2010. I have enquired of many clinicians in Asian countries recently but none of them seemed to have heard of this partnership. Once again, there is an apparent disconnect between planners in the boardroom and workers on the shop floor.

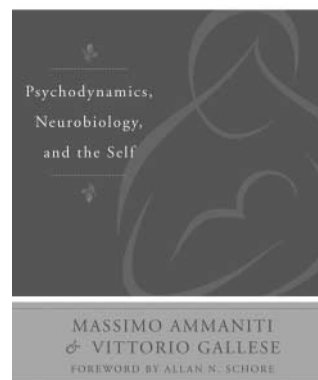
As the editors ponder over a second edition in a few years' time, they may wish to consider possible chapters such as ageing and globalisation which have a tremendous impact on mental health today and will continue to do so in the years to come. Mental health is one of the neglected health issues of our times and people with mental illness are among the most neglected

and vulnerable. It is not enough just to read this book, there must be a plan for action.

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### THE BIRTH OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY



### The Birth of Intersubjectivity: Psychodynamics, Neurobiology, and the Self

By Massimo Ammaniti  
& Vittorio Gallese.  
WW Norton. 2014.  
US\$40.00 (hb). 256 pp.  
ISBN: 9780393707632

This book explores the relational and embodied nature of human life combining the developmental psychodynamic perspective and an embodied neuroscientific approach. It documents the birth of the intersubjective matrix of human existence from pregnancy and through the infant's first years building on evolutionary psychology, mother–infant research and embodied simulation theory. Evolutionary psychology shows how human mothers learnt to care for immature and helpless infants by becoming attuned to their affective expressions, and that infants who are more attuned to caregivers have a better chance of surviving. Selection processes have favoured individuals with a particular competence in grasping others' intentions. Mother–infant interaction research has shown that mother and infant create a pre-verbal communication context based on affective attunement. This implicit code – that develops hand in hand with a basic sense of self – is procedural, non-symbolic and pre-reflective. Embodied simulation, challenging purely mentalistic views on intersubjectivity, provides a neurobiological account based on intercorporeality and affective communication. The capacity to understand the others' actions relies on mechanisms that exploit the intrinsic organisation of our motor system. Humans reuse their own non-propositional engrams encoded in bodily format in their brain to functionally attribute intentions to others while observing their intentional behaviours as if one were performing a similar behaviour or experiencing a similar emotion.

The authors have an immense grasp of a wide-ranging area of scientific, clinical and philosophical literature and a rare capacity to construct an original argument. They address intersubjectivity integrating cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. They then move on to the evolutionary origins of mental care, maternal–fetal attachment and the role of fathers in co-parenting. Mothers' brain transformation is discussed alongside the activation of care circuits, followed by the building of the primary matrix of intersubjectivity. The impact of parental stress on the infant's development is

addressed and, finally, this knowledge is applied to the development of best practices in the community.

What is really new about this research is that it studies the developmental and neurobiological underpinnings of intersubjectivity without eliminating the experiential dimension of social behaviours. It looks at intersubjectivity from a phenomenological angle. It delves into 'what it is like' to be with another person. It strives not to describe intersubjectivity from a declarative, meta-representational, third-person perspective, as is the case with mainstream approaches to social cognition. Its investigation on the neural bases of the human capacity to be

attuned to others is ecologically plausible as it includes real persons' narratives and not merely lab experiments. In this perspective, the other person appears in a quite different light than that of a 'mentalising monad' or a disembodied representational system; the Other 'becomes a bodily self, like us'.

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