

**Approaches to Psychology****Authors** William Glassman and Marilyn Hadad**Edition** Fifth**Publisher** Open University Press**Pages** 590**Price** £30**ISBN** 9780335228850

This provides a contemporary, accessible and coherent introduction to the field of psychology, from its origins to the present, and shows the contribution of psychology in understanding human behaviour and experience.

**Who is it for?** Undergraduate psychology students.

**Presentation** Systematic coverage of the main approaches to psychology with plenty of illustrations, chapter summaries and “try-it-yourself” exercises.

**Would you recommend it?** Yes.

**Psychological Science****Authors** Michael Gazzaniga, Todd Heatherton, Diane Halpern**Edition** Third**Publisher** W.W. Norton and Company**Pages** 709**Price****ISBN** 9780393933505

The authors aim to give students a grounding in the key areas of psychology including research methods, biological psychology, mind and consciousness, perception, learning, cognition, emotion, health, development and social and abnormal psychology. The text is supported by web resources for teachers and students.

**Who is it for?** Introductory psychology courses.

**Presentation** Copiously illustrated, with chapter summaries, key terms, activities promoting critical thinking, and practice tests.

**Would you recommend it?** With so many introductory psychology textbooks available, this is a perfectly good text but one that is not distinctive in the UK market.

**John R. Hegarty**

# Widening a narrow path into a broad avenue

**Critical Psychology: An Introduction****Authors** Dennis Fox, Isaac Prilleltensky, Stephanie Austin**Edition** Second**Publisher** Sage**Pages** 490**Price** £30**ISBN** 9781847871732

I must confess to having been turned off the field of critical psychology hitherto. I think it was hearing various people describe themselves as interested in “critical psychology” but never making clear what they actually did. I could not see the point of just being critical for its own sake.

Anyway, I have now finally informed myself of the field by deciding to review this book. And I am most pleasantly surprised to find that I have been a critical psychologist for 40 years but never knew it. Like the contributors to this book, I have wanted to work with other disciplines, have found the emphasis of “mainstream” psychology overly narrow (both methodologically and in its subject matter), have carried out action research, have wanted to make an impact on social policy for those with disadvantages and found myself always questioning the scope and approach of psychology as a discipline.

The 23 chapters of this edited work are essays written from a “critical” viewpoint on a range

of issues relevant to psychology. If like me, you have not looked in a critical direction yet, you might ask: what is “critical psychology”? Dennis Fox tells us in a “frequently asked questions” section at the end: “Critical psychology is an effort to challenge the forces within mainstream psychology that help sustain unjust political,

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economic and other societal structures”. Not only that, but “most critical psychologists advocate transformative social change”.

There is not space here to do justice to the interesting work described in the book. Just to give a taste, Kerry Chamberlain and Michael Murray consider the area of health psychology from a critical psychology viewpoint. They question the assumptions and methods of health psychology and suggest some new directions from their own work. These include using participatory action research, and using novel ways (such as art and drama) to help service users have a voice in a more powerful and influential way.

Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoffrey Nelson reflect on their long experience in community psychology in the US, suggesting that it needs to be more “critical” by broadening its explanatory framework, by giving more prominence to its value base, using more action-oriented research and broadening its focus of intervention to promote liberation and well-being.

Frances Cherry has an interesting discussion of the limitations of traditional social psychology, including some classic studies, and shows the value of considering the much broader context of social psychology in a way that promotes social justice.

Do read this book – it will refresh you if you have not come across critical psychology before. If you are already “critical”, this is an excellent, up-to-date overview of the area.

**Who is it for?** Any student or more mature psychologist who wants either to know what “critical psychology” is or wants a recent update.

**Presentation** Throughout, the book has an accessible style that conveys some of the passion and deep thinking about applying psychology that the various contributors have engaged in.

**Would you recommend it?** Definitely a valuable book both to own and to recommend to others.

**John R. Hegarty is senior lecturer in psychology, Keele University.**