Book Reviews

Several key themes run through the following book reviews. The first one is about time, whether past, present or future. This theme interacts with the second, which concerns the social and historical contexts in which the educational and emotional needs of children and young people are met through trusting relationships with their teachers and through mindfulness activities and self-reflection, or, as you will see, decidedly *not* met when the guardians create systems that oppress children and cause them acute mental distress. A third theme is about the use and misuse of the social media, including an overview of cyberbullying among peers, colleagues and romantic partners; there is also an intriguing discussion about the capacity of machines to express and experience empathy through technological advances in emotional artificial intelligence (AI).

In *Safeguarding and Mental Health Support in Contemporary Childhood,* Wendy Sims-Schouten scrutinised past records from 1881 to 1918 of the Waifs and Strays Society, one of Britain's largest childcare agencies established in the late 19th century. The case files document in some detail the mental health difficulties of children who had been taken into children's homes, asylums and industrial schools because of abandonment, illness or death of parents, and dire poverty. Not surprisingly, these extremely vulnerable children experienced mental health difficulties and frequently displayed behaviour that was viewed in those days as unmanageable in their communities and institutions. The originality of this book lies in the comparisons between the harshness of these past systems and the present-day policies for dealing with the social and emotional health problems of disadvantaged families and their children.

Fast forward to the future, where Andrew McStay, in *Emotional AI: The Rise of Empathic Media,* analyses emotional artificial intelligence (AI) and discusses the social and ethical implications of developing new media technologies that can read and track emotions. McStay explores the potential capacity of machines for empathy. At first glance, the empathy of machines is inauthentic since it is not felt in the same way as humans experience it. In that sense, the empathic media do not have consciousness. But might they in the future? The review author discusses the social and ethical aspects of this possibility in depth.

Devin Thornberg, in *Trust Within Learning*, investigates the crucial value of the relationship between students and teachers. The value of trust, he claims, holds true across time and across cultures. He elicited the perspectives of teachers from eight different countries before and during the COVID pandemic and he documents the threats to trust in education from distance learning and the challenges posed by the "digital divide" between advantaged and disadvantaged students. He also noted the teachers' view that virtual learning cannot ever replace the trusting relationships that develop through face-to-face education.

Insensitivity to emotional needs features centrally in *Cyberbullying in Schools* by Gary W. Giumetti and Robin M. Kowalski. This book focuses on cyberbullying in schools, workplaces and in sexual/romantic relationships. Here we see an exploration of the deliberate and cruel misuse of the social media to intimidate and socially exclude peers, sexual partners, colleagues. The authors look at the phenomenon in different cultures and compare its emergence in different social contexts and at different stages in the lifespan. So, again we see a perspective across time and can also explore the interface between the new media technologies and the emotional lives of humans.

Self-reflection has a strong therapeutic role to play, as David Mair shows us in *The Student Guide to Mindfulness*. Human beings continue to have the capacity to heighten their awareness of their own and others' emotions through mindfulness exercises that are grounded in a strong theoretical framework and the experience of extensive therapeutic practice.

If you would like to review books for IJEE, please write to me and let me know your areas of interest.

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1. *Safeguarding and Mental Health Support in Contemporary Childhood.*

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This is a timely book as we become increasingly aware of the social inequalities and consequent mental health difficulties that have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Wendy Sims-Schouten demonstrates her scholarship in this book as well as her ability to draw parallels between past and contemporary practice in the field of safeguarding and mental health in children. The sub-title of her book - ***How the Deserving/Undeserving Paradigm from the Past Overshadows the Present –*** highlights the disturbing parallels between historic child safeguarding and mental health practices that would now be considered inhumane, and the conditions currently experienced by too many disadvantaged children to this day. Her illustrative case studies from contemporary interviews with young people as well as from the records of the past are presented within a carefully constructed theoretical framework of critical realism that challenges the legacy of the deserving/undeserving paradigm. A powerful message comes from the voices of children and young people who have experienced traumatic and disturbing events in their lives and who consequently are often diagnosed as having mental health difficulties.

Wendy Sims-Schouten's historic database (funded by a grant from the Wellcome Trust) comes from her meticulous examination of 108 case files of children who were taken into the care of the Waifs and Strays Society between 1881 and 1918. Her material was gathered from correspondence and reports written by such people as custodians, teachers, clergymen, doctors, family members and practitioners linked to asylums and industrial schools who were responsible for the education and social care of extremely vulnerable children. There are also testimonies from the children themselves. The heartrending evidence elicited by Wendy Sims-Schouten indicates that children admitted to the asylum in the 19th century were frequently sent there for the same reasons as children are admitted to psychiatric wards today – that they were behaviourally and emotionally unmanageable in the community or in the institutions from which the referrals came. Too often, she argues, the blame continues to rest on the families rather than on the political and economic structures within which these children are growing up. Her analysis of the experiences of young people leaving care in contemporary Britain confirms her view that the focus tends to be on the individual's behaviour (for example, 'being violent', 'being criminal' or 'lacking

resilience') rather than on the larger-scale social structures that often fail to support these young care leavers before and after the age of 18.

Wendy Sims-Schouten acknowledges that measures to promote children's wellbeing have evolved since the days of the Waifs and Strays Society. Her aim in writing the book is to facilitate an informed critique on the systems that society has developed over time to safeguard the mental health of children and young people. The book does not offer solutions per se but rather a framework in which to reflect on current practice at the levels of the broad causal factors of trauma and stress, the experiences of the children and young people affected by these factors, and the nature of the systems designed to safeguard and protect vulnerable families and their children.

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2. *Cyberbullying in Schools, Workplaces and Romantic Relationships. The Many Lenses and Perspectives of Electronic Mistreatment.*

Cyberbullying has emerged over the past twenty years as an area that requires its own research agenda. Although there is an ongoing debate about whether it deserves this status outside of the wealth of research into bullying, its dominant research counterpart, a fact that is apparent is that cyber abuse and online harms are not going to disappear any time soon. In the context of a global pandemic where everyone has had to be educated and work remotely from the confines of their homes, the reliance on the online world as a means of survival has become ever more pertinent. As technology advances, more social media and work-based platforms launch, and the world recovers from COVID, if anything the demand for robust research led policy in cyberbullying and related behaviours is going to increase.

As a timely publication, the subject matter for the book being considered is cyberbullying. This edited collection aims to bring together "research on cyberbullying across contexts, age groups, and cultures to gain a fuller perspective of the prevalence and impact of electronic mistreatment on individual,

group, and organizational outcomes." And it does that to an extent but is a little ambitious in what it sets out to do.

The book is structured into three contexts: Schools, workplaces and romantic relationships and looks at cyberbullying within each context through three different 'lenses': Review of the current/existing research, cross-cultural issues and developmental perspectives that consider age-related differences.

I was initially excited to see this collection but once I was two/three chapters in – the first section, the schools' context – I was not learning anything new, nor was I getting any sense of new ideas for a research agenda. As an overview and an introductory starting point for new academics interested in cyberbullying and online harms, it is a good text, but beyond that it does not offer anything new. Furthermore, the further I got into the collection, the more I was seeing a lot of gaps and a lot of research that was missing. As an example, the chapters that consider the review of the research in the schools and romantic relationships were US based. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is not really apparent from the title that it would have such a focus. I was expecting to see an international review of existing research.

Chapters that claimed to look at cross-cultural perspectives gave the research findings of one country, so for the relationship example this was Spain. Although this made interesting reading, it flagged more gaps than solutions. I was expecting to see, under the relationships section, the pioneering work on revenge porn, stalking, up-skirting, to name a few current research agendas which are taking place in several countries and academic disciplines.

The book concludes by pulling together the vast themes of cyberbullying across three contexts and highlights possible avenues for future research. Indeed, the editors themselves conclude: "Examined as a whole, the current chapters point to the need for cyberbullying researchers to step back and take a broader look at the field as they conduct their research. For example, in defining cyberbullying for a particular study, investigators need to thoroughly examine how cyberbullying is conceptualized across cultures." (p.212) And this is where what was missing fell into place. It was not cultural comparison that was missing but rather a discipline acknowledgement/comparison and the omission of work that would have filled in some of the identified 'gaps'. This book is marketed as "fascinating reading for researchers and upper-level students in social psychology, counseling, school psychology, industrial-organizational psychology, and developmental psychology." And for a psychologist this book does pull together some existing *psychological* perspectives. But what is missing is the wealth of work carried out in the fields of Criminology, Law, Socio-Legal Studies, Cultural Studies, Media and Communications and Computer Sciences, where there are scholars engaged in pioneering cyberbullying research. For these scholars, I am not sure how useful this collection will be.

Overall, it is always good to see work being carried out in this much needed research area, and perhaps a different framing of the book would have been more beneficial to this reader. As a starting reference point, this is a useful collection, to direct the reader to current issues within a predominantly US and psychological context. A suggestion to allow a greater focus of many lenses could be, rather than

tackling three contexts, a focus on one, romantic relationships, for example, could have filled an edited collection from a truly global and cross-cultural perspective.

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3. *Trust Within Learning.*

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This inspiring book explores the learning relationship between students and teachers. Each chapter is beautifully illustrated by the artist, Eduardo Torres. In the spirit of "intercultural appreciative inquiry", the author, Devin Thornburg, interviewed pupils and teachers from eight countries - Argentina, Chile, France, Madagascar, Morocco, the Netherlands, Spain and US – to understand more deeply the concept of trust within schools, the ability of teachers to support a trusting learning environment and the nurturing of students' belief in themselves. He adopted the stance of self-reflexive researcher in his efforts to be culturally sensitive and, throughout the project, shared his findings and his interpretations of the data with participants to ensure authenticity of themes as they emerged.

Although the book was completed before the COVID pandemic, Thornburg added a preface in which he presented the perspectives of educators in each one of the eight countries after the schools were obliged to close. Here the teachers highlight the problems involved in distance learning and the enormous challenge presented by "the digital divide" among the students in the extent of their access to resources, the Internet and computer equipment. One teacher from France described the technology as a lens for social inequalities. Another from the US indicated the difficulty in maintaining the relationship with "at risk" students when instruction became remote. From the perspective of a teacher from Morocco, the virtual classroom cannot replace the interactivity of face-to-face education.

Yet, at the same time, despite the trauma of the pandemic, the book does not lose its sense of hope and agency as the author reflects on the emergence of "an educational landscape not yet imagined" (p. xii), a belief that is consistent with the ideas that he proposes.

By designing his research as an international project, Thornburg claims with confidence that trust represents many different influences and extends beyond cultural boundaries. Its importance is especially highlighted by the lives of young people who most desperately need it if they are to flourish at school. Influenced by Vygotsky, he documents the value of joint activity between teacher and learner and the consequent relationship that guides and supports student learning. Furthermore, the emotional experience during the learning process influences the intellectual meanings constructed by the students through the process of intersubjectivity that fosters the sharing of knowledge and experiences. So, from this perspective, the trusting relationship between teacher and student is an essential part of the learning process.

This book will be of interest to educators who are trying to meet the needs of increasingly diverse populations of students from many different countries. By attending to the voices of the participants from contrasting cultures, the reader will find support for the view that the relationship between student and teacher is fundamental to learning. Reflective researchers will also find it useful in gaining insights into the process of carrying out qualitative cross-cultural studies and the challenge they face in capturing the voices of the participants.

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4. *The Student Guide to Mindfulness*

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The book consists of 10 chapters, afterword and index. At the beginning of each chapter there is a vignette about a student facing some typical issues, for example, being too anxious in a new setting. Students might become aware of their feelings by reading the examples which are the result of the author's vast experience of supporting students in university settings through psychotherapy. References are at the end of each chapter, as well as recommended further reading with a brief description of each proposed book. The titles of the most recommended books indicate useful advice, for example, Richard Carlson's *Stop thinking, Start Living: Discover Lifelong Happiness* (p. 111). Each chapter has questions

for reflection, too. David Mair also provides important information about online resources on mindfulness.

The first chapter, *Mindfulness and its benefits,* introduces the concept of mindfulness, what mindfulness **is** and **is not** and the possible benefits of mindfulness. Mair proposes that using it can really make someone's life easier. In fact, he suggests that the reader could start practising mindfulness immediately, because a mindful exercise has been offered in each chapter.

The second chapter, *Mindfulness and the brain,* gives us a clear explanation of the physiological background of mindfulness, based on the triune brain model. Mair points out that practising mindfulness is simple, but not easy.

The third chapter, *Mindfulness: formal and informal,* tells us that we can behave mindfully or mindlessly throughout the day. The formal practice of mindfulness seeks some dedication whether done individually on in organised groups. But we can practise informal mindfulness while taking a shower, eating or sitting in class if we bring our full attention to the activity.

In Chapter 4, *Mindfulness and self-compassion,* Mair affirms that, since no-one is perfect, each one should accept their own vulnerabilities with compassion for self and others, for example, by replacing critical self-talk about the situation or the inner voice of helplessness with a self-compassionate voice about the immediate situation.

In Chapter 5, *Mindfulness and depression,* David Mair explains that sad and painful things happen to everyone, but that too often the way in which people deal with these can lead to depression. Mindfulness, by contrast, helps us to avoid the typical beliefs and thoughts that lie beneath depression. Although mindfulness practice helps, some people will additionally need professional support.

In Chapter 6, *Mindfulness and perfectionism,* David Mair alerts the reader to the harmful aspects of perfectionism and the contrasting benefits that mindfulness practice has by helping the person to avoid the unattainable pressure of being perfect. But, as pointed out earlier, "mindfulness is not getting rid of thoughts, it is about observing them and recognizing that they are not necessarily 'the truth'" (p. 90).

In Chapter 7, *Mindfulness and anxiety*, the reader discovers how to calm down the anxious mind. There are also useful tips for students and younger populations who are using technology more than needed. David Mair calls this 'mindful digital detox'.

In Chapter 8, *Mindfulness and procrastination,* David Mair brings our attention to different procrastination styles and how mindful technics and mindful pauses in a day can help. There is an interesting description of the internal bully and the internal friend.

In Chapter 9, *Mindfulness and self- care, David Mair* continues with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and emphasises the importance of sleeping, eating and exercising, something that students might put aside because of "higher needs". Mindfulness helps us to be in touch with our needs and to stay connected with our bodies.

The final chapter, *Mindfulness and the future,* gives some directions for life after college or university. It is important to incorporate mindfulness into life and to continue to practise mindfulness. "Mindfulness, I believe, is a vital skill," writes Mair (p. 159). It is a skill that could be of permanent help to all throughout life.

The aim of the book is to help students, but in fact it could help anyone. Anxiety, procrastination, depression and other difficulties mentioned in this book could appear at each stage of life. The book is user friendly, clear, well-structured, and will be interesting and helpful to anyone who cares about her/his well-being.

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5. *Emotional AI: The Rise of Empathic Media.*

Author:	**Andrew McStay**
Publisher:	**Sage Publications, London UK**
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In this book, Andrew McStay introduces the state-of-the-art emotional artificial intelligence (AI) which involves new media technologies that have acquired greater ability to read, sense, track, and classify human emotions, thanks to the rise of big data and computational power. He calls our attention to two major ethical concerns - the loss of both privacy and autonomy - and proposes a set of "dignifying" norms derived from "the liberal principles of autonomy, consent, control, empowerment, freedom, transparency, and trust" (p.188). His discussion is clearly illustrated with rich empirical, first-hand accounts of the current players (i.e., academics, companies, cities) that drive the emotional AI industry. He also charts the development of the field back to early sociological and philosophical works on emotion and its measuring devices, so guiding the reader in a balanced way through complex theoretical and practical issues related to the rise of empathic media.

One of the pivotal concepts used in the book is '*empathy*.' McStay compares the human capacity for empathy with that of machines. Machines, like humans, can show lack of empathy, and can draw from past observations, which are vaster and more diverse than any human can potentially imagine, to make

predictions about present and future emotional states. However, he uses the term "*machinic verisimilitude*" to argue that the empathy machines are capable of is not authentic but only "the appearance of intimate insight" (p.5). In other words, machines and humans are not equivalent. But it is still true that machinic verisimilitude alone has already transformed and had serious implications for our lives: we are afforded new abilities to communicate, to gauge emotional reactions of others, and to engage in new aesthetic experiences. By implication, despite the immense capacity of *empathic media* to improve the quality of life, humans need to analyse and understand them if they want to maintain a life worth living.

Here, McStay focuses on two aspects of empathy (i) as "a social fact," which fosters mutual understanding and awareness among agents in societies and (ii) empathy as projection and simulation of feelings. Yet he misses an opportunity to explore alternative ways of conceptualising empathy. For example, Yale psychologist Paul Bloom (2017a, 2017b) argues that empathy as "the feeling of experiencing what we believe others experience" is often not a reliable guide for our moral decision-making. As evidence from courthouse and laboratories shows, we are more inclined to feel empathy for those who resemble us and those who are attractive. Moreover, in terms of moral reasoning, empathy has serious limitations. Similarly, in Paul Slovic's (2007) seminal experiment of the "*psychic numbing*" phenomenon, empathy is shown to increase the most when we are presented with the suffering of an identified individual, yet empathy reliably diminishes when the numbers of suffering people increase.

Thus, to understand the ethical implications of empathic media and emotional AI, a more comprehensive account of empathy such as that of Bloom (2017a, 2017b) is worth considering. Bloom differentiates between "cognitive empathy," "emotional contagion," "affective empathy," and "compassion" as different common-sense expressions of "empathy." Cognitive empathy is about a purely intellectual understanding of others' feelings, while simultaneously, one does not feel it. Affective empathy is about feeling the inferred feelings of others. Emotional contagion is about feeling the feelings of those within one's immediate environment. Bloom then focuses his argument on affective empathy and compassion. He argues that *affective empathy* often leads to bias and emotional burnout. At the same time, compassion, the feeling of wishing well and caring for others without feeling what they feel, can be a great alternative for motivating our prosocial behaviour.

All four types of empathy are important in the context of emotional AI and empathic media. It must be acknowledged that the current generation of emotional AI can induce mass instances of *emotional contagion* as evidenced in the case of digital outrage (Goldenberg & Gross, 2020). It appears that until we have an account of machine consciousness, the empathy machines show us will be limited to *cognitive empathy*. Will emotional AI systems ever achieve *affective empathy*? When they notify us of others' feelings, does that make us feel more burnout? Can they induce in us more *compassion*? Those are the open questions that require further interdisciplinary research.

McStay might have dealt more extensively with previous theories of emotion and how they might influence the quantification and datafication of emotions. He states that "empathic media employ a

particular account of what emotions are through their use of psychological, anthropological, and neuroscientific research, largely deriving from Paul Ekman and his forerunners" (p.4). According to Ekman (1983, 1999), there are eight basic emotions (joy, surprise, sadness, contempt, anger, fear, disgust, and trust) and three overarching sentiments (negative, neutral, positive). More importantly, they are readily recognizable across cultures. Such a view is often referred to as the classical or essentialist view of emotions (Barrett, 2017). This view is very attractive to the data mining and AI industry, since it means the emotion-sensing algorithms will be universal, thus, making the most business sense.

Yet McStay only briefly mentions the social constructionist, ethnocentric, context-dependent views of emotions in the book, stating that due to their complexity, the tech and business communities have not picked up on them. In his words, "while proponents of categorical approaches (to emotions) do not fully answer Russell's (1994) ethnocentric criticisms, they embrace measurable dimensional factors to triangulate and strengthen conclusions about the extent to which a person is undergoing a named emotion" (p.60). This again echoes the view of "machinic verisimilitude" which states we can leave aside the issue of authenticity as long as machines produce a good enough accuracy. Yet, the fact that contemporary emotional AI systems are built on Ekman's impoverished and reductionist view of emotions should worry us because our decision-making relies more and more on these technologies and because they are increasingly deployed in the surveillance of public spaces, the monitoring of public sentiments on social media, and the customizing of online news feeds.

Challenging the superficial convenience of the basic-emotions assumption, Barrett's theory of constructed emotion proposes that emotions need to be treated as abstract categories, which are the mental representations of our bodily states to direct our movements while optimizing the use of our metabolic resources. The direct implication of this view is that emotions cannot readily be told apart by only considering our physiological responses, facial expressions, voices, etc. To accurately detect emotions, we need information about the higher abstractions relevant to the contexts in which such emotions are formed.

Given the context of globalization and hyperconnectivity of Web 2.0, it is important to consider the implications of the process of cultural evolution and cultural additivity (Vuong et al., 2019, 2020) and acculturation (Vuong & Napier, 2015) for the development of emotional AI and empathic media. These technologies and their designers seem impervious toward the issue of acculturation that lies at the root of our emotionally conflicted digital lives. If we start with the premise of Ekman's "basic emotions," these *cultural transformation* processes dictate that the accuracy of our AI systems will depend on constantly getting the most updated data about how humans infer emotions. If we start with the premise of Barrett's theory of constructed emotion, the cultural processes mentioned above imply the necessity of higher-abstraction inputs of emotion acculturation processes.

Despite all the missed opportunities, McStay offers a much-needed bridge for both the technical/engineering and the humanities sides of the emerging technologies by providing useful initial

conceptual tools as well as ethical discussions so that educators, policymakers, and academics may further explore the newly emerging intellectual terrains.

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