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# Review of 'Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health' edited by Bruce Cohen

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ISSN: 2515-138X

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Bruce Cohen, the editor of this book, has been interviewed twice for *Psychreg Journal of Psychology*. The first interview (Relajo, 2017a) was about his book *Psychiatric hegemony: A Marxist theory of mental illness (2016)*. The second (Relajo, 2017b) was about this volume, which is a multi-authored text summarising critical approaches to mental health.

Cohen is senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Auckland. He put this collection together because he was frustrated about the general lack of critical engagement in the sociology of mental health. Socially critical perspectives have tended to be regarded as an embarrassing hangover from the seventies. In mental health, this is partly because of the association with so-called 'anti-psychiatry'. Cohen makes clear that this book is not anti-psychiatry in that sense. Bonnie Burstow, though, has recently reclaimed the term antipsychiatry and she provides a chapter in this book, which is subtitled 'a constructive antipsychiatry position'.

Cohen himself writes the chapter on Marxist theory. He thinks there may be merit in viewing mental illness as the consequence of the alienating conditions of capitalism, but encourages Marxists 'to focus their energies on analysing the ways in which the mental health system supports the economic and political prerogatives of the ruling classes' (p.53). This and many of the other chapters in the book

provide useful summaries of aspects of critical mental health studies, perhaps particularly for students. They do this in a reasonably comprehensive way.

The book can therefore be highly recommended on this basis. Few of the chapters, though, take the mental health debate forward, tending to confine themselves to summarising the literature. From my point of view, there could have been more engagement with mainstream views. As Cohen himself says, 'the "science" of mental illness is as contested as it was in the 1970s' (p.3). Despite this book, critical mental health approaches are likely to continue to be marginalised. The wish to find a 'physicalist' basis for mental illness will never go away. Maybe students reading this book to understand the wide variety of ways in which critical mental approaches have been applied will be able to progress from this situation.

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## References

- Relajo, D. (2017a). Interview with Bruce Cohen, author of *Psychiatric Hegemony: A Marxist Theory of Mental Illness*. *Psychreg Journal of Psychology*, 1(2), 80–82.
- Relajo, D. (2017b). Interview with Dr Bruce Cohen, editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health*. *Psychreg Journal of Psychology*, 1(1), 94–96