

Respecting suicidal feelings

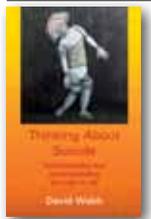
Thinking about suicide: contemplating and understanding the urge to die

David Webb

PCCS Books 2010, £14

ISBN 978-1906254285

Reviewed by Sarah Lewis



This book hooked me from the start. It tackles the fear of what is often a taboo subject. Webb knows what he is talking about, yet at no point does it feel like an autobiography. He tells of his attempts at suicide with humour and without unnecessary detail, giving a personal perspective rather than relying on theory. For Webb, clinical psychiatry didn't prove to be anywhere near as useful as those who offered him space and respect to simply 'be', and it was their help that enabled him to survive.

He begins by exploring the myths of suicide and acknowledges that suicidal people need respect rather than to be judged as mentally ill. He gives a very eloquent description of the hopelessness and helplessness of feeling suicidal. His own story includes the use of drugs, and although these two elements often go hand in hand, his belief is that the tendency to try to fix the drugs issue before the suicide issue is in fact misguided. The drugs are an escape from the real issues, a symptom rather than the cause. The last sections deal with his spirituality, and its role in his recovery – acceptance of himself released him from the urge to die. He suggests that 'faith' is something that is central to a person's belief, yet it doesn't need to be religious faith – it is whatever works for the individual.

If only one thing is remembered from this book it is that suicide is best understood as a crisis of the self. This is essential reading for counsellors at all levels of experience.

Sarah Lewis is a person-centred counsellor in private practice

Working with suicidal clients

Tightropes and safety nets: counselling suicidal clients [DVD]

Andrew Reeves, Jon Shears and Sue Wheeler

University of Leicester ITS

Multimedia Services 2010,

£150

Reviewed by Jenny Bloomer



A soon-to-be-qualified counsellor recently remarked that there wasn't enough information included in counselling training about suicide, and how scared she was of coming face to face with it. This DVD would certainly help to meet her need.

In particular, the counsellors' accounts of their diverse feelings and personal reactions when potential suicide arises and how it may present, can help the viewer to recognise that a multitude of thoughts and emotions can be felt by experienced counsellors and are not 'bad' or unprofessional. This one-hour DVD would be useful to both individual counsellors and groups.

Four 'menus' are divided into parts, each with introductions and vignettes. The first, Perspectives on Suicide, looks at both the client's and the counsellor's feelings – how the client with suicidal thoughts can feel and how the counsellor

might react inwardly once the possibility is in the room. Confidentiality, professional responsibility and legal liability are all considered. The second, Talking About Suicide with a Client, addresses the need to talk with clients about suicide in order to assess possible risk. The third, Assessing Suicide Risk, shows us the importance of assessment and how to identify possible risk. And the final part, The Counsellor's Process, looks at personal responses and the importance of good supervisory care in order to contain unwelcome or overpowering emotions or possibly fear and confusion.

Because of its clear format, the DVD can be paused to allow the viewer to make notes and revisit items. It comes with a helpful booklet that includes guidelines for facilitators, expands on each of the menus and poses searching discussion questions. A further reading list is included.

All the vignettes have powerful messages for practitioners, from the way the clients' emotions are acknowledged as real, to the way the possibility of suicide is explored. The supervision vignettes are constructive without being patronising and I thought could be useful for students, trained counsellors and supervisors.

Having recently read Andrew Reeves's book *Counselling Suicidal Clients* (Sage 2010), I would recommend this DVD as a useful adjunct to the book, but also very helpful in its own right.

Jenny Bloomer is a BACP accredited psychotherapist and counsellor in private practice

Comic tale of therapy

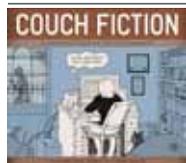
Couch fiction: a graphic tale of psychotherapy

Philippa Perry; illustrated by Junko Graat

Palgrave Macmillan 2010, £12.99

ISBN 978-023025203

Reviewed by Dr Naomi Moller



Couch Fiction has a mischievous humour that means it would make a great stocking filler for a therapist friend this Christmas. However, this graphic novella can also be recommended for its genuine educational value, which would make it a good text for any introductory counselling course. The book tracks the therapeutic journey of one client, James, from his painful revelation that he cannot stop himself stealing, despite the fact that it risks his job as a barrister, through to his psychotherapy 'happy ending' – not only the conquering of his kleptomania but also his achievement of both better self-understanding and a solid romantic relationship.

And while that's a great narrative arc, the whole is further enhanced by three things. The first is the aforementioned humour. When psychotherapist Pat first sees James, she thinks: 'About 35, good looking, quite fanciable in fact...' By contrast, James's thought bubble tells us he notices she is about 50 and has breakfast stains on her cardigan. This tongue-in-cheek humour is also exemplified in the

footnotes to the comic strip.

Speaking as a trainer, I have never found psychotherapy theory and research particularly funny, but the way that its educational content is delivered is the second thing that makes *Couch Fiction* worth recommending. As an example, take the footnote on the transference potential of open-toed-sandal-wearing therapists. And it is not just concepts like projection, transference and counter-transference that get this treatment; this therapeutic encounter is enhanced by references to philosophy, theory and research.

The third fun thing is the way the graphics and text play in counterpoint. Thus the picture which hangs over the sofa transmutes as James's therapy progresses. At the beginning it shows a wide open road and then a traveller appears; as the therapy progresses the traveller walks through a dark forest patrolled by lions; as it ends the traveller is depicted asleep under a smiling sun with bunnies frolicking about him.

One last comment. The book definitely leans towards the psychodynamic tradition. Hints include the number of sessions depicted (43), the discussions of core psychodynamic concepts and – just possibly – James's fantasy of having sex with Pat while she is bent over a sofa and chewing a Freud book. Nonetheless, there is a clear valuing of other schools too; Pat and James create a behavioural chart to help James track and change the triggers for his kleptomania, and Pat's bookshelves and the footnotes also include references to person-centred therapy. However, the therapy

'feels' psychodynamic; this is not a complaint but a request. How about a graphic depiction of CBT or Rogerian therapy? Anyone?

Dr Naomi Moller is Principal Lecturer in Counselling Psychology at the University of the West of England

Formulation in practice

Constructing stories, telling tales: a guide to formulation in applied psychology

Sarah Corrie and David A Lane

Karnac 2010, £29.99

ISBN 978-1855756427

Reviewed by Gabrielle Brown



This is a marvellously rich, erudite and detailed collection about, at the very least, the process of arriving at formulation for therapeutic work. It is difficult to do justice to it in a short review. The authors are psychologists interested in how therapists make workable agendas from clients' narratives. They engage the reader in thinking about how client and therapist use working models to envisage and achieve therapeutic change. The questions raised and addressed are both ethical and practical: how do we make practice accountable and centred on the client's interests? What is the status of an 'evidence base', of theory, diagnosis, methodology and technique? When are formulations used for social control and labelling, or as tokens in

'tribal rituals' of case discussion within professional groups?

True to its premise that there are many ways to tell and hear a story, the volume uses diverse methods of communication. There are tables and diagrams, case studies, vignettes from consultation, questions for the reader to stimulate reflection, and records of discussions, for instance between the authors and actors Prunella Scales and Timothy West. In all, the book contains the voices and styles of 13 authors. Insights and suggestions are solidly supported by 30 pages of references and an extensive index: even if it were not so interesting, it would hold its place as a reference book on contemporary debates.

The third section opens the floor to 'guest contributors', including actors, educationalists, coaches, forensic specialists, clinicians from a range of theoretical backgrounds, writers and artists. In this section is Michael Sheath's stand-alone chapter on case formulation with sex offenders. In illustrating the therapeutic potential of assessment, Sheath deals sensitively with the universal problem of telling clients things they hadn't wanted to hear. Also in this section is Simon Callow's beautifully written and amusing account of 'Acting as Narrative'.

This is a book to return to often, because of its thought-provoking complexity and the diversity of voices and approaches embraced. Certainly it's one I'm glad to own rather than borrow.

Gabrielle Brown is a London-based psychodynamic therapist

Integrating difference

Crossing borders – integrating differences: psychoanalytic psychotherapy in transition

Anne-Marie Schloesser and Alf Gerlach (eds)

Karnac 2010, £20.99

ISBN 978-1855757837

Reviewed by *Els van Ooijen*



This book aims to illuminate differences in the way psychoanalytic therapy is practised in a variety of countries and contexts. Although the majority of its contributors are German, there are also chapters by writers from Greece, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Israel and the UK. However, as the editors point out, this does not imply ‘an invitation to eradicate all differences’. This is a useful stance as integration (including personal integration) often involves the capability of holding tensions and oppositions, without rejection or splitting.

The four sections focus on issues of conceptualisation, cultural and societal factors, psychoanalytic treatment, and views on research. Apart from the section on conceptualisation, the structure works reasonably well. Perhaps inevitably there are differences in therapeutic stance as well as writing style. For me, the most interesting and readable chapters are those that discuss theory through case studies.

The book starts with an interesting chapter by Bollas, in which he is severely critical of the British object relations school, arguing that the tendency to see everything in terms of ‘the transference’ gets in the way both of ‘free association’ and the therapist’s ability to be open to the client’s unconscious material. I particularly appreciated the chapters on culture and society, including the discussions of how the impact of trauma and migration can continue through several generations. However, a chapter by Reemtsma on religiosity does not quite seem to fit. Also, in the same section, I am unconvinced by Golse’s argument for the usefulness or necessity of using attachment ‘drive’ as a vehicle for bridging ‘the gap between drive theory and object relations theory’.

Although the book’s layout is attractive, there are some regrettable editorial oversights: in the ‘about the authors’ section, one of the contributors (Wouter Gomperts from the Netherlands) is not listed. Also, the chapter by Buchholz on empirical research consistently (and erroneously) refers to Schoen in the text, whereas in the references he is listed as Schön!

Due to the variations in therapeutic stance, the book itself may be seen as a vehicle for containing and integrating different aspects of psychoanalytic practice. It is therefore useful for practitioners who are willing to look across conceptual and other divisions, and begin a bridge-building conversation.

Dr Els van Ooijen is a psychotherapist and supervisor for the Nepenthe Consultancy

Facilitating reflective practice

Supervising the reflective practitioner: an essential guide to theory and practice

Joyce Scaife

Routledge 2010, £22.99

ISBN 978-0415479585

Reviewed by *Val Wosket*



A number of recent anthologies on supervision have left me lukewarm. Chapters by different authors can be of variable quality and, at worst, verge on the anecdotal and self-indulgent.

This book, by contrast, covers the subject of supervision and reflective practice in depth and great detail and at the same time is infused with warmth, humour and humanity. The author draws on her many years of clinical practice, teaching and supervision to present a wide-ranging text that encompasses the disciplines of counselling, clinical psychology, nursing, health education and social care. In the first part Scaife reviews a number of theoretical frameworks to support reflective practice. This rather dense theoretical section is leavened by lively practical examples showing how reflective practice can develop and enhance self-development, problem solving and interactions with clients in clinical settings. The heart of the book is in four thought-

provoking chapters on different approaches to the supervision of reflective practice. These include methods that promote enquiry, self-awareness, ‘decentring’, and multiple perspectives. The author includes a useful review of the relational elements of supervision that contribute to building a climate of trust and safety for supervisees. She argues convincingly that the quality of the relationship is at the heart of effective supervision and there are specific recommendations for building, enhancing and repairing the supervisory alliance. The book concludes with chapters on reflective writing and evaluation, which will be of particular interest to supervisors who have a training or assessment role.

I regard this book as useful for beginning supervisors, for those contemplating supervising a variety of practitioners across a range of disciplines, and for more experienced supervisors and trainers whose practice may have become a bit stale. In terms of style, the strategies and suggestions in the middle chapters come at the reader thick and fast and can be difficult to take on board at a single sitting. I felt over-full at times, and I think the best approach to is to think of this text as a buffet, rather than a sit-down feast, and to take small amounts to digest over time before returning for a further helping. This said, my overall experience was of a lively, entertaining and erudite read. It provides an excellent ‘tool kit’ of approaches to individual and group supervision, and I will certainly be going back for seconds.

Val Wosket is a BACP senior accredited counsellor/supervisor

Self-help for PTSD

Understanding traumatic stress

Dr Nigel Hunt and Dr Sue McHale
Sheldon Press 2010, £7.99
ISBN 978-1847090560
Reviewed by Anne Gilbert



This compact book provides a comprehensive introduction to traumatic stress. It comprises 11 brief and clearly written chapters followed by an appendix. The authors define the nature of traumatic events, describe the symptoms of traumatic stress, explain how traumatic memories develop, and suggest some enhanced coping skills. Brief illustrative case studies are used throughout. However, almost half of these are based on scenarios involving military personnel, and I would have found it more helpful if they had chosen a more diverse range of situations.

The book's focus is both educative and practical and it could be very helpful to many trauma survivors. The appendix, for instance,

contains self-assessment scales for readers to measure their levels of PTSD, anxiety and depression, and guidance on how to seek professional help if needed. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of developing narratives, with encouragement for readers to write their own narrative to aid recovery. The importance of support from family and friends is also stressed.

There are two useful chapters: on the possible repercussions for family and friends following an individual's involvement in a traumatic event, and 'Growing through experience', which explores evidence for increased resilience and post-traumatic growth in many trauma survivors.

The book is a thorough introduction, although the language isn't always inclusive, and some readers might find it too technical at times. It is written by psychologists and whilst it is commendable, I was irritated to be told several times that the training undergone by clinical psychologists is the lengthiest and best training to help trauma survivors!

Although this book is written primarily for people who have experienced trauma, it is a useful resource for counsellors and those in training wanting an up-to-date overview of the subject. *Anne Gilbert is a Gestalt psychotherapist*

CBT with older people

Cognitive behavioural therapy with older people: interventions for those with and without dementia

Ian Andrew James
Jessica Kingsley 2010, £24.99
ISBN 978-1849051002
Reviewed by Rick Fothergill



Older people benefit from therapy and in some cases progress better than younger people.¹ This book is a welcome addition to the sparse literature on working psychologically with older people both with and without dementia, written by a respected authority with over 20 years' experience in this field. My own experience as a trainer in the psychological treatment of older adults and as a supervisor of students working with these clients persuades me that this is an area worthy of further published materials, particularly on CBT.

Arranged in three parts, part one overviews CBT and the nuances of working with older adults. Part two focuses on the assessment and

intervention stages of therapy and provides formulations that help to illuminate the issues being discussed. This section is very useful, as formulations with older people are often very complex compared to those with younger adults. Part three has three excellent chapters that discuss a single case study in each.

This book is a worthy addition to the literature in the area of working with older adults, but as the author himself recognises, it struggles to fully do justice to the heterogeneity in the older adult population. Indeed it could probably have been three times its size and still not have fully covered all the issues. As a result I found the space dedicated to using CBT with those with dementia a little brief. Perhaps that area is a further book in itself? Having said that, I would recommend it to all therapists working or interested in working with older adults. The introductory chapters will help those with limited CBT knowledge. Those with more experience will certainly find James's passion both motivating and endearing. *Rick Fothergill is a cognitive behavioural therapist*

REFERENCE:

1. Walker DA, Clarke M. Cognitive behavioural psychotherapy: a comparison between younger and older adults in two inner city mental health teams. *Aging and Mental Health*. 2001; 5(2):197-199.

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