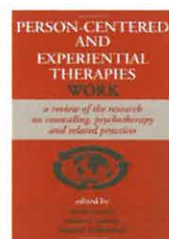


Reviews

Person-centred and experiential therapies work – a review of the research on counselling, psychotherapy and related practice

Mick Cooper, Jeanne C Watson, Dagmar Hölldampf (eds)

PCCS Books 2010
ISBN 978-1906254254 £19



There is no exclamation mark or question mark in the title of this book. Like most person-centred therapists, I am convinced our

approach(es) do work (in the sense of having effect) by the evidence of my own eyes, and thus the search for 'evidence' is to convince others, or possibly to improve what works. Demonstrating that these therapies work pulls research in two distinct directions – firstly to provide similar types of evidence to validated therapies, and secondly to clarify the special ingredients of the approach(es) and to identify how to improve these.

The papers in this book are developed from an international research forum in 2008, and attempt these two tasks. Elliot and Freire's comprehensive review and meta-analysis of evidence supporting efficacy of person-centred and experiential therapy suggests there is strong and recent evidence including randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of significant client change. However, they do also point to the increasingly well-known effects of therapist allegiance in other studies, and much of the rest of the first strand of the book involves trying to produce a convincing rigorous experimental design to overwhelm the resistance of sceptics. The editorial group, in their conclusion, lobby for more and more

differentiated RCTs to this end.

The other strand in the book contains the implicit counterargument, that the methodology and design of RCTs fit poorly with person-centred approaches to research – unique, qualitative conclusions, concerns with process and open-ended inclusive methodology. Papers by Wilkins, Watson, Timaluk and Bohart expand such approaches, and discussions on developing measures of person-centred variables (empathy, presence, depth, etc) struggle to reconcile what Freire describes as this 'paradox'.

However, I suspect the main value of the book to counsellors in health care will be to offer (alongside Cooper's *Essential Research Findings in Counselling and Psychotherapy: The Facts are Friendly*) supportive evidence for the validity of our work in the terminology recognised and supported by medical and psychological orthodoxy.

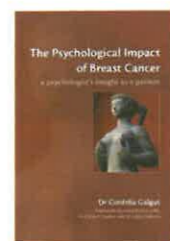
Ewan Davidson

Person-centred counsellor in primary care

The psychological impact of breast cancer: a psychologist's insights as a patient

Dr Cordelia Galgut

Radcliffe Publishing 2010
ISBN 978-1846193033 £22.99



In 1949, when Simone de Beauvoir asked 'What is a Woman', she was highlighting the tension between the lived and embodied experience of being

female and the constructions culturally ascribed to femininity. Psychologist Cordelia Galgut demonstrates how

little attitudes have changed, in that her experience of breast cancer is largely treated as a purely physical disease with little concern for the deeply transformative psychological effects of both illness and treatment.

In a moving testimony, she outlines her roller coaster journey from earliest suspicions of breast cancer, through diagnosis and treatment, to her present situation five years later. Her trauma is exacerbated by repeatedly discovering that she is expected to remain silent about her emotions. From the outset, she had to press to have her fears taken seriously. Not only are two GPs initially dismissive of her concerns, even after opting for private treatment she has to be persistent in order to be told her diagnosis. Later, she is called 'naughty' by a surgeon for trying to express her thoughts and feelings about her experience. We read of her struggle with a conflict familiar for the female – the wish to be a good girl, passive, cooperative, gracious and docile within a dominantly authoritative medical profession – against her need to be heard. In an affecting account of her radiotherapy treatment, she becomes a terrified victim of devalued difference, experiencing herself as grotesque and mute in the face of powerfully invasive medical apparatus.

The discovery that friends, family and colleagues also require her to remain silent about her suffering further shocks the author. When she has to face her grief at early menopause, the accompanying shock, abjection, weakness, perceived ugliness, and – most crucially – loss of identity attached to being a vibrant and sexual woman, is rarely acknowledged by others.

Although we must accept that with increasing longevity a half of men and one-third of women will face cancer, the message of this book to both professionals and patients is that breast cancer is *different*: it is spectacularly transformative of a woman's core senses of self and identity. It is a

literally life-shattering experience that cannot be treated as a purely biological phenomenon in isolation from the sufferer's psychological health.

Patricia Kerkham

Analytic psychotherapist and supervisor

Boost your confidence: improving self-esteem step-by-step

Melanie Fennell

Robinson 2011
ISBN 978-1849014007 £7.99



Apparently Melanie Fennell's *Overcoming Low Self-Esteem*, first published in 1999, has sold 85,000 copies. I'm not at

all surprised, having recommended it to many clients myself: it would be hard to imagine a better self-help book for self-esteem, confidence and wellbeing issues. My only niggle was that some patients reported that it was a hard read, not because they were simply struggling with the undoubted effort required to overcome low self-esteem, but because they were genuinely finding the language and writing rather challenging.

Enter *Boost your Confidence*, a completely re-written (and slightly shortened) version of the excellent original that updates and concentrates the successful formula, providing improved accessibility for all of us, including less confident readers.

Perhaps confidence is not a synonym of self-esteem, though it's certainly a word more commonly understood. Those sensing that their low mood, anxiety and self-confidence are connected cogs in a worn-down whole that needs a good boost may be more attracted to picking up the new version and giving it a go.

However, don't be fooled into thinking this book is about 'bigging' yourself up or positive affirmations. Fennell's definition of self-confidence

has more to do with realism alongside acceptance and self-compassion: you are what you are, and what you think you are is simply that, a thought, and not necessarily the 'truth'. Although this book is classic CBT, it neatly fits the *Zeitgeist* of what has been referred to as third wave cognitive therapies, including acceptance and mindfulness. Its language is not only light on jargon but neatly infiltrated with 2011, and I can't help wondering if words like 'airhead' and references to Facebook might look well out of place in a few years' time.

Far be it from me to diss it on that basis! Overall a great book for recommendation (supported or unsupported self-help) – and also a great easy-read introductory guide to some of the fundamental theory and techniques of CBT for anyone who has an aversion to a standard textbook. After all, the best way to learn is often the practical experience of doing it – why not have a go yourself before passing it on to others!

Mike Gallant

High intensity therapist, Gloucestershire IAPT programme

The alphabet of the human heart: the A to Zen of life

Matthew Johnstone, James Kerr

Constable & Robinson 2011
ISBN 978-1849014496 £9.99



The A to Z format looks simple but is anything but as this book invites serious reflection in a deceptively simple way.

The book is in halves – first, the

Upside A-Z, full of the hopeful aspects of life (A for Adventure, C for Compassion, and so on). The other, Downside, half looks at the negatives (A for Anger, H for Hate, T for Temptation, and so on). There is serious text with cartoon graphics to illustrate the authors' points – often

in offbeat ways and with a depth belied by a jokey manner.

The book is exactly what it says on the cover – *The A to Zen of Life*, a quirky look at the ups and downs of life. It is serious in a funny way – or maybe funny in a serious way – or even both! The design itself gets into the spirit of things by being printed half 'right way up' and half 'wrong way up'.

There are pithy quotes and reflections on the words, which have a depth and wisdom in them, and if you have to work it out, the drawings often give you clues. Compassion (C): 'an equal opportunity emotion'; Wisdom (W): 'if you go looking for wisdom it won't know where to find you'; Meditation (M): 'a form of medication ... learn to listen and very soon the truth will whisper in your ear'; Mood (M): 'where your thoughts go your moods will follow'; Xenophobia (X): 'an ugly word'. The 'up' letters and the 'down' letters meet in the middle of the book at Z and 'Zen is the place to be'.

I would be wary of lending this book to clients, colleagues, friends, or family – you probably won't get it back. If you're a client you could think about lending it to your counsellor: you'd be giving them something to smile at – and lots to think about too. Just make sure *you* get it back.

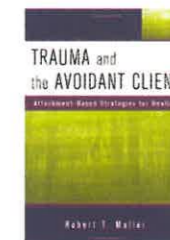
John McCourt

BACP senior accredited counsellor and supervisor, Merseyside

Trauma and the avoidant client: attachment-based strategies for healing

Robert T Muller

WV Norton 2010
ISBN 978-0393705737 £21



In this book, Robert T Muller draws on his extensive knowledge of the field of trauma to support therapists working alongside