What Works for Whom? A critical review of psychotherapy research

Anthony Roth and Peter Fonagy
Guilford Press, 1996, £37.50

This book contains some good news, but is also disappointing. The good news is that sound empirical research, in which the authors are experts (Peter Fonagy is professor at UCL), indicates that various therapies have enough chance of leading to improvement to warrant expenditure on them in the NHS. The book contains an extensive review (funded by the Department of Health) of this type of research, has clear statements of the difficulties in interpreting it and gives conclusions for the main disorders that are treated by the health services. Different approaches do better for different disorders with cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal and psychodynamic therapies all having their strengths. The book, rightly in my view, emphasises the currently accepted view that practice should be driven by evidence. In other words the purchasers of treatments in the NHS should adjust the

provision of therapy according to the outcomes of research. So far so good.

However, the approach to evidence used in this book is seriously flawed. Humanistic psychotherapy (which, to judge only from the work of Kohut has had an enormous effect on the practice of other therapies, especially on those variables referred to in this book as linked with positive outcome such as warm positive regard) is not defined and classified as a separate approach! It is ignored. Humanistic psychotherapy is subsumed in this book under a number of other headings. It is implied rather quaintly in interpersonal psychotherapy (the IPT of Harry Stack Sullivan) which others would classify in the analytic tradition; in eclectic psychotherapy, which is mentioned though not defined and not indexed; in supportive and experiential therapies which are defined on page 8 and then only referred to in passing later on. The omission of 'humanistic' from the classification of therapies encourages the view that cognitive-behavioural and psychodynamic therapies are the only real ones.

A related point also eludes many authors who write in this area, including the present ones. The design of outcome studies appropriate for the medical sciences is not appropriate for evaluating the consequences of humanistic therapy, or of much psychoanalytic therapy for that matter. John Rowan and Peter Reason (and other people) have written about paradigms of research which are appropriate. These works are not mentioned by Michael Roth and Peter Fonagy. Most patients who are treated within the health service are self-selected. The research shows the effects of therapy on those patients who have chosen to go down the medical route.

Nowhere in this book is it recognised that most people who suffer depression, anxiety, even personality disorders, choose not to medicalise their lives. Although they are often just as disturbed (and disturbing) as those who turn to medicine for help, they avoid the medical services and turn to the alternative sector for psychotherapy, counselling or other approaches to healing. Many of these are known under a range of headings, including new age, shamanistic, human potential and psychospiritual. Personal growth and development are what are aimed for, instead of a cure, which is more akin to an educational model. Those who review research should at least be aware that in the population that chooses these therapies, various behavioural, cognitive, humanistic and other interventions may have a different effectiveness when used in a personal growth context by comparison with the same range of techniques when employed among those who have chosen to depend on GPs, hospitals and the NHS. The danger is that these alternative approaches will be marginalised, just as the alternatives to conventional medicine such as osteopaths and herbalists were marginalised and driven to practising furtively after the setting up of the NHS in 1947. This would lead to a paradox for psychologists employed in the NHS, most of whom work in the cognitive-behavioural mode. When they seek therapy themselves they frequently choose, according to a report in *Clinical Psychology*

and Psychotherapy, help in a different modality, one less amenable to empirical investigation. Marginalisation of alternatives would create an atmosphere discouraging the provision and use of humanistic therapy among those who want to try it out. This would be a loss to everyone.

David Jones

Psychotherapy and Society

David Pilgrim
Sage, 1997, £15.99, 170pp.

This is a very important book. It is wide-ranging, setting psychotherapy in the context of society. It is readable, despite its complexity and detail. It is also disturbing, posing lots of useful questions for therapists, particularly at a time when society is understandably auditing psychotherapy and counselling. David Pilgrim, with his apparent desire for accuracy, respect and compassion, makes a critical examination of the burgeoning and (in my view) adolescent development of therapy, from the perspective of the society from which it was spawned. I find his acute observations, fairly but challengingly made, most opportune, if therapy is to mature.

Pilgrim argues that we therapists, rather than squabble for supremacy between ourselves and seek, often defensively, to promote what he regards as a 'false' professionalism, would do better to critically review both ourselves and our therapies. He suggests we ask ourselves such questions as what are the philosophical bases upon which therapy rests? Who are we, as therapists? Where do we come from? How can we evaluate what we do? Why do we do what we do? Penetrating questions that should shake us all out of any complacency, if honestly answered.

He reasons that if therapy is to be more than an 'implausible profession' or an idealised yet narcissistic endeavour, then it needs close scrutiny by both individual therapists and users. He is concerned that not enough scrutiny is being practised. He writes: 'The mere fact that therapists aspire to make generalisations about human life in print is evidence that their desire to colonise the 'truth' about subjectivity and intersubjectivity overrides the cautious humility we might reasonably expect from those who dabble in the souls of others.' And later, about 'unfounded professional zeal and arrogance'. Surely we need to be big enough to really hear the 'truth' in such examinations of us, not just by David Pilgrim but by many others. I have written of this elsewhere myself (*Counselling News*, September 1997), from direct experience of a client confronting me with challenging feedback. As Pilgrim says, 'Intimacy is potentially dangerous whatever the form it takes.'

To our credit, many counsellors and psychotherapists are examining this, through the writings of Smail and Masson

and through client accounts such as Rosie Alexander's in *Folie à Deux*.

Pilgrim urges us to 'open out' to scrutiny. 'My own view is that the self-promoting and self-policing discourse of therapists is arcane and autocratic and requires democratic checks. Outcome research is one basis for the latter. Another is to take the collective feedback of service users seriously, which is anathema to some therapists.' Earlier he complains that 'institutional psychoanalysis' is not blamed for its 'elitist and secretive culture which seals it off from public scrutiny and accountability.'

This is a book that clearly challenges those of us who subscribe to a view of the self in relationship with society to examine ourselves and our practices and respond appropriately. Indeed Pilgrim confronts us from the very beginning, first with a quote from Virginia Woolf: '... the peculiar repulsiveness of those who dabble their fingers self-approvingly in the stuff of others' souls', and then, though more supportively, with one from Richard Titmus: 'The work of Freud ... has given us new ways of looking at the growth of personality and the origins of illness; ... has undermined our psychological innocence [and] sensitised us to an inner world of reality.'

Throughout, he deftly holds these two strands, the critical and the praising; this is what makes *Psychotherapy and Society* so much more profound and useful than, for example, Masson's *Against Therapy*. As he states in the preface, his aim is to provide both a 'summary of relevant social research on mental health *for* psychotherapists, and a critical appraisal *of psychotherapy in its social context.*'

I also thought his manner of cutting through unhelpful waffle most endearing. For example, writing about what I have elsewhere called 'closet therapy', he states: 'This unintended or wilful ignorance about the social context of the lives of distressed individuals and the therapeutic relationship itself could provoke an exasperated rejection of the legitimacy of psychotherapy as being blinkered, futile, indulgent and individualistic. This is not my position ... Much of this book is about toying with this point about the precarious legitimacy of psychotherapy.' One hundred and fifty two fascinating pages later he writes: 'It becomes clear that a fainthearted defence of psychotherapy, as an ameliorative industry, can indeed be mounted.'

There is so much else here of value. For example he makes an effective critique of 'single-school' psychology, reminding readers that those with only a hammer will tend to see everything as a nail; and that viewing everything through the perspective of transference is to grasp such a hammer; this risks repeating 'the common error when studying the human condition of reducing multi-variable uncertainty to single variable explanations. Professional experts in particular are more prone to hammering a preferred idea to death than conceding that their views are only partial and may even be wrong.'

Pilgrim also comments favourably on the arguments advanced by Mowbray against registration of therapists as a protector of clients, and agrees with him that registration restricts the availability of therapists.

One criticism I have of Pilgrim's arguments is that he cites psychoanalysis and/or analytical psychotherapists as evidence in support of often very pointed criticisms of *all* psychotherapy. Such a focus of attention serves him well in making his case for the need for democratic accountability in psychotherapy, but overlooks the humanistic therapies, in particular, though his inference is that these are not prone to aggrandisement and self-promotion, being found as much in low-fee and free therapy in the voluntary sector tradition as elsewhere. (Indeed my own research indicates few humanistic psychotherapists in the medical world of the NHS where the more analytical therapists have something of a 'cartel'.) That said, this is a book for our time: a questioning, evaluating time, when to be fainthearted or closeted must surrender such psychotherapists to a fate similar to that which befell the dinosaurs.

John Sivyer

Survival in Groups: The basics of group membership

Tom Douglas
Open University Press, 1995, £13.99, 167pp.

This book's been out a while but is still vital in its field. Indeed I cannot imagine a more usefully structured approach to the analysis of group behaviour, even if the sense of the 'textbook' does permeate its pages.

The author brings his obvious talent for group and group-behaviour analysis to the planning of his book. He lays out in very clear terms its aims and its various uses. He then moves into the serious business of questioning what a group actually is, and how one might variously perceive it, its members, its influence — both on members within and on others outside — and our own survival in groups also.

Survival in Groups is a must for anyone seeking to further their career through group work. I would also recommend it to those who, for now, prefer to look in on a group from the outside. It just might give them the confidence to test the water, even to splash about a bit.

Julian Nangle

Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love

Stephanie Dowrick
The Women's Press, 1997, £12.99, 360pp.

If I were to sum this book up in five words they would be: slick production but wishy-washy.

The claim on the back cover, that 'this may be the most compassionate, inspiring and supportive book you will ever read —

and the most challenging', is, of course, preposterous. This is an immensely disappointing book, because it is so on-target with its purpose but so off-target with its delivery, due to its author's overindulgence with words and stream-of-consciousness writing. The absence of the editor's blue pencil is there to see on almost every page and this reader can only deduce that the reason is that the author is also the founder of The Women's Press, her publisher.

The intent is certainly humanistic. The chapter headings are 'the six humane virtues' and each is explored in turn. 'Courage', the first, is the least successful, hopping about from case note to personal anecdote to reference to whimsy. There follow 'Fidelity', 'Restraint' (seriously), 'Generosity', 'Tolerance' and finally 'Forgiveness'. (It would be flippant, but fitting, to suggest the author left this till last lest she needed ours.)

In 'Restraint' there is a passage which identifies just who Stephanie Dowrick is preaching to — the converted. 'What is Restraint ? Why should it be a virtue ? Haven't many of us spent a couple of decades attempting to increase our range of emotional expression? A couple of decades attempting to be true to whatever feelings arise? That sallow young man, sulking at a dinner party, clearly thinking himself too good for the rest of us, preferring his own company, not speaking to anyone, barely reacting when he is spoken to, nothing to say really, not worth speaking to either, the kindest thing one could say about him is that he is restrained...' Do you get the drift of this author ? I think I do, and my preference is for another current, even another stream. After all they all end up in the sea — the journey's the thing.

Julian Nangle

Psychotherapy with 'Impossible Cases': The efficient treatment of therapy veterans

Barry L. Duncan, Mark A. Hubble and Scott D. Miller
W.W. Norton, 1997, $35, 222pp.

Having just come from group supervision where some particularly 'sticky' cases were presented, I pounced on this book. The authors' curiosity prompted their research into what makes clients difficult and discovered that there are four pathways that lead to 'impossibility'. These are: labelling the client as a problem; theory countertransference, or a misguided loyalty to theoretical traditions leading to ignoring or dismissing the client's views; doing more of the same, even when this is blatantly failing the client; and finally, neglecting the client's motivation by assuming that what is good for them equals what they want to do.

The authors set out their wares honestly and this includes acknowledging their own mistaken assumptions. Each chapter is packed with transcripts from actual case work where previous therapy has failed. Blame is not assigned to the cli-

ent or the therapist — rather it is laid on those pathways where failure has begun.

My criticism of the book is that although research indicates the average maximum of sessions with clients using *any* model seems to be six, and even though managed care pressurises therapists to provide brief therapy, some clients still need longer-term work, particularly if they are exploring existential issues rather than specific problems. Also, although the authors argue that clients won't change if there is an implied loss of face, what about clients who don't know what they want to change in the first place? I was disappointed to see that the 'impossible' cases were multiple personality disorder, paranoia and borderline personality. I would have liked new perspectives on more 'ordinary' clients who present, for example, as overly talkative and unfocused, or taciturn and unforthcoming, or who feel coerced into therapy.

Nevertheless, this is an accessible book which rightly acknowledges the client as central to the work and builds upon what he or she is already doing that is therapeutically effective.

Jen Popkin

The McDonaldization Thesis

George Ritzer
Sage, 1998, £14.99 pb, 212pp.

Ritzer here revisits and extends the ground-breaking theory he first fully expounded in 1993 in *The McDonaldisation of Society*, since when he has published a number of papers which take the thesis further and on which this book builds. The thesis is that 'the fast-food restaurant, especially the pioneering and still dominant chain of McDonald's restaurants, is the contemporary paradigm of the rationalisation process'. As a result, that process can be dubbed 'the McDonaldisation process'. In 'rationalisation process' Ritzer is referring to Max Weber's thesis that the central organising principle behind modern (as opposed to traditional) society is the principle of rationalisation, and by extending this principle he seeks to elucidate the defining features of contemporary society, from fast-food restaurants to credit cards, from the globalisation of the economy to the dumbing-down of culture. In particular the search for increased efficiency, predictability, calculability and control in the organisation of the means of production/service provision has the effect of simultaneously producing its own new irrationalities, in particular homogenisation and dehumanisation.

In this latest book Ritzer moves from his previous preoccupation with fast-food restaurants and credit cards as prime exemplars of the rationalisation process to a wider scale examination of the 'new means of consumption', including shopping malls, home shopping television networks, superstores, cybermalls and so forth. By switching his attention to consumption more generally, he is also led to switch his theoretical orientation from

modern to post-modern, in view of the success of post-modernist analysis in locating consumption as the central feature of the contemporary world. In terms of sociological tradition there is a change of tack too, in that in the present work he relies more on Karl Mannheim's views on rationalisation than on those of Weber. However, broadly speaking the work still sits within that central tradition of sociology that sees rationalisation as the key organising principle of social structure.

In *The McDonaldisation Thesis* Ritzer examines the McDonaldisation process at work — in American sociology (arguably his theory is itself a McDonaldisation of Weber and Mannheim); in the creation of 'McJobs' and the labour process; and, through Americanisation, of other cultures via the global economy. Finally he looks at the McDonaldisation of tourism and travel through theme parks, Disneyworld and their ilk.

This is exciting, readable, provocative modern sociology that sets out to challenge the dominant trends in the construction of our brave new global world. Even in our own world of counselling and therapy it is possible to see the trend at work — the McDonaldisation of training delivery via UKCP? EAP work as McDonaldised counselling? The Sage series itself as McDonaldised psychology? Ritzer demonstrates throughout how hard it is to resist the McDonaldisation process in all its many facets, since what it promises is so seductive, though never truly nourishing. Nonetheless, he argues, resistance is both possible and necessary. His work constitutes a serious academic challenge from within the very heartland of McDonaldisation and I highly recommend it to those who want to gain a perspective on post-modern society (and sociology).

David Kalisch

The Supervisory Encounter

Daniel Jacobs, Paul David and Donald Jay Meyer
Yale University Press, 1997, £12 pb, £20 hb, 285pp.

This is a psychoanalytic book. As early as 1910, it tells us, Freud emphasised the need for self-examination on the part of the would-be analyst. But it was not until a decade later that supervision began to be separated from the training analysis. The requirement that training cases be seen under supervision was adopted at the Berlin Institute by Karl Abraham, Max Eitington and Georg Simmel. Here the supervisor was a different person from the analyst. At the same time in Budapest a different model was used by Sandor Ferenczi and Otto Rank — there the training analyst became also the supervisor, the argument being that he knew the trainee so much better and could therefore intervene much more accurately and sensitively than could any separate supervisor. The objection to this was that the training analyst then had too much control and too much power.

By the late 1930s most training institutes had adopted the Berlin rather than the Budapest model. They had accepted that supervision was a teaching experience rather than an analytic one and was accordingly more superficial. And this meant that it was in order for a candidate to have more than one supervisor over time, to get the benefit of different personalities and different points of view. And as the authors rather nicely say: 'The introduction of a third person into the candidate–analyst dyad helps the candidate to ameliorate any fantasies he may have about his analyst's omniscience and to evaluate more carefully his own treatment.' They also say that from about 1920 onwards supervision in social work was going ahead as well, and was indeed on the whole more thoroughly explored and worked out than in psychoanalysis proper.

After the history, we get the authors' own version of what should be going on in supervision. Where a formal evaluation is involved in the supervisory role, they recommend that it be a joint effort. They describe the whole thing as an 'educational alliance'. They give many vignettes of the kind of difficulties supervisors and supervisees can run into. They go into some detail on the question of the different modes of thought which may come into operation for both parties.

There is toward the end of the book a discussion of supervisory interventions, which include: modelling; didactic instruction; Socratic questioning, encouragement and permission; clarification; and interpretation. The authors say 'interpretation must be used only after other forms of supervisory intervention have been tried and have failed.'

There are two chapters on self-esteem, one for the supervisee and the other for the supervisor. The book ends with a chapter on termination.

I don't think this book would be very useful for the humanistic supervisor — the new edition of Hawkins and Shohet which I believe is in the pipeline would be more like it — but it could be very useful to any therapist or trainee who has a psychoanalytic supervisor. It might help them to understand where the supervisor was coming from, and some of the unspoken assumptions which might be present.

John Rowan

The Needs of Counsellors and Psychotherapists

Ian Horton and Ved Varma (eds)
Sage, 1997, £13.99 pb, 243pp.

This is a book by sixteen authors, with a foreword by Emmy van Deurzen. It covers a wide range of topics, including complex matters such as social, cultural, intellectual and personal needs. As the title suggests, counsellors and psychotherapists are both served, and not much differentiation is allowed between them, except in the chapter by Colin Feltham, which also is the only one to mention counselling

psychology.

Rowan Bayne looks at the different needs of different personality types, and Brian Thorne looks at the spiritual needs which may or may not be met, either for clients or practitioners. John McLeod and also John Mellor-Clark with Michael Barkham address the question of how the practitioner can and should reflect on the work, either formally or informally. It seems still to be true that, as McLeod says: 'few counsellors pay much attention to what is published in research journals and relatively few training courses include a substantive research component.' He points out, however, that other uses of writing have been found: therapists writing to clients; clients writing to their significant others, or to themselves. 'A person in counselling can look again and again at a written statement, can use it to remind himself or herself of some hard-learned experiential truths.' Mellor-Clark and Barkham also find that research and practice are poles apart, but say that: 'One of the central problems for practitioners in evaluating effectiveness is the lack of guiding materials in both texts and journals... To date, no comprehensive text is available to "tool-up" practitioners wishing to evaluate their practice.'

This is really rather a strange book, not living up to its title very well, and continually lapsing from the personal needs of the practitioner into the more objective needs of the profession as a whole. It is an interesting trot round some very important topics, but for an insight into the needs of the therapist we would do better to go to more informal discussions, more personal tales.

John Rowan

Countertransference in Couples Therapy

Marion F. Solomon and Judith P. Siegel (eds)
Norton, 1997, £30 hb, 292pp.

Countertransference is a very important concept for humanistic therapists to understand and use correctly. It links very directly with such concepts as genuineness (because both involve self-awareness and self-inspection), empathy (tuning in not only at the intellectual but also at the emotional level), resonance (setting up inside oneself a subpersonality corresponding to the client), experiential listening (paying attention to the deeper potentials of the client through one's own personal experiencing) and so forth. It is one of the most curious things about some recent books on supervision that they have no entry in the index for counter-transference, and some have no entry for any of the concepts mentioned above!

This is a book by sixteen authors, divided into sections on theory and practice. In the first chapter, Judith Siegel tries to define countertransference. She distinguishes between the classical view (potentially dangerous neurotic residues inside the analyst), the totalist view (the totality of the analyst's responses to the

patient — a useful form of identification) and the post-modern approach (a necessary clinical phenomenon that facilitates the recognition and negotiation of different subjective experiences). This seems worthwhile and interesting, though it is a pity that she does not discuss the humanistic approaches to countertransference, as discussed. for example, by Brammer, Shostrom and Abrego, or in my own book *The Reality Game.*

The other chapters vary greatly in quality and in length, and many of them contain vivid character sketches and vignettes of the whole process of doing therapy with couples. There are some very good accounts of mistakes made and temptations resisted. There is a brilliant chapter by Carol Francis on the abused and the abuser. There is very little here on supervision, which is a bit surprising. I would have thought that if supervision were ever necessary or advisable, it would be most of all in couples work.

On the whole this is a very useful and worthwhile collection of papers for anyone who works with couples, whether they be married or not, whether they be of opposite sex or not. The whole gamut of analytic approaches is represented here — classical, Kleinian, Kohutian, object relations and so forth. Anyone could learn something from all this.

John Rowan

Achieving Emotional Literacy: A personal program to increase your emotional intelligence

Claude Steiner with Paul Perry
Bloomsbury, 1997, £16.99 hb, 233pp.

This teaches a three-step approach: first opening the heart; second surveying the emotional landscape; and third taking responsibility. It can be seen at once that these are all things easier said than done. Claude Steiner is of course well known as a good teacher — his book *Games Alcoholics Play* was developed with the help of Eric Berne, and he was active in the Radical Psychiatry movement of the 1970s.

There is nothing very radical about this book, however. It is very smooth and reassuring, full of the features we have come to expect from the American self-help approach. It does mention once or twice that men may have more difficulty with emotional literacy than women, but moves quickly away from this topic, and really says nothing about power in society and how unevenly it is distributed. Right at the end there is a brief discussion of control power and how it works, but even then it is conducted in terms of advice and reassurance and smoothing things out. I think I am a bit angry with this book, because emotional competence is such an important idea, and so much needed in this world, and this book is of so little help in achieving it.

As one might expect there is copious use of ideas from Transactional Analysis, such

as the Stroke Economy, the Critical Parent and the Drama Triangle. And as with many expositions of TA, there is little appreciation of how difficult it is to change one's way of operating in the world. There are umpteen pieces of good advice here, but as we all know very well, we can read good advice until we are blue in the face; taking it and really using it requires deep, deep work. It does not come just by reading a book.

I also think it was a mistake to issue this book in a quite expensive hardback format. It is clearly the kind of paperback one buys on airport bookstalls.

John Rowan