Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy **by Dave Mearns and Mick Cooper** Sage (183 pp)

Way back in the days of Hippocrates, when doctors cured souls as well as bodies, the relationship between healer and healed was recognised as a crucial component in the process of cure. Even in more modern times, the 'bedside manner', as dramatically represented in Shaw's 'Doctor's Dilemma', was valued by many in the medical profession. This indefinable quality of relationship has always sat uneasily within a scientific community which has always wanted to isolate the precise ingredients of healing; whether these are pharmacological or derivatives of Freud's 'talking cure'. The predominant models of early psychotherapy in the US – analytic and behaviourist therefore opted for a more objective approach to human distress.

By the time of my first contact with the world of psychotherapy in the 1970's, the Humanistic therapists were leading the trend towards valuing the therapist/client relationship to which the psychodynamic and behavioural schools responded with mixed feelings. More recently, as therapists have reluctantly embraced the idea of research, the notion of quality of relationship being a significant factor in therapy outcome has been revived.

Regrettably, this has led to the likes of Richard Erskine (Erskine, Moursund & Trautmann 1999) attempting to 'isolate the ingredients' of the healing relationship and turning the subtle art of working at relational depth into a 'how to' manual of do's and don't's! It is therefore refreshing to come across Dave Mearns and Mick Cooper's latest book *Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy* which stands in marked contrast to the Erskine manual *Beyond Empathy.*

From the start, it is clear that the authors are present in their work as human beings who are sharing their insight, and sometimes their uncertainty, with us. Their brief is to inform us rather than to sell us something. The Preface introduces first each author, then the rationale behind the book and finally the contents of the book itself.

Chapter one is centred on research, predominantly into psychotherapy, but also taking in developments in philosophy and developmental psychology. The inclusion of philosophy is particularly important as it underpins the thinking, conscious or unconscious, behind everything we do as practitioners and yet it receives very little attention either in the literature or in the training of psychotherapists and counsellors. I particularly like the way Mick Cooper, who I think wrote most of this chapter, takes us from the

'standard beliefs' of psychotherapy and counselling to the intersubjective relational perspective that is the focus of the book.

In the next chapter, the issue of psychopathology, or psychological distress, is introduced. Here we meet real clients, having looked in the last chapter at 'normal' development, and see that most, if not all, of their difficulties are relational. Conditions such as depression and even psychosis, are explored from a relational perspective although, in the latter case, Mick Cooper is careful not to set this up in direct opposition to other contemporary hypotheses.

'From such research, there is no suggestion that any of these [negative] communications styles *cause* schizophrenia, but it would seem that such disrupted forms of interpersonal engagement make some individuals more likely to develop this difficulty, as well as making it more likely that they will relapse after discharge.' (p27)

It is good to see Ronnie Laing getting due credit for his groundbreaking work in the area of psychosis after all these years. One of the most important concepts in this chapter is the idea that relationship with self, or lack of it, can also be a factor in psychological distress.

Chapter three explores the therapist-client relationship and begins with Rogers' six core conditions. The supportive critique of these conditions is subtle, but challenges the notion that the creation of those core conditions is the therapist's responsibility alone. In order to convey the therapist's experience of working at relational depth, Mearns and Cooper draw on qualitative research they carried out with a group of person centred therapists thus:

'One, for instance, talked about seeing into the windows of the client's soul; and another likened it to walking into the same room as the client and really knowing that both of them were in the same place, even though they had both walked in through different doors.'

How different this use of imagery is from the notion of dissecting 'relational depth' into its component parts and telling people how to do it!

Geoff Lamb

***Race, culture and psychotherapy: Critical perspectives in multicultural practice* - Editors: Roy Moodley & Stephen Palmer,** Publisher: Routledge Date: 2006 Price: £19.99 pb pp.309 ISBN 1-58391-850-7

This is one of those multi-author books with 21 chapters. Part A is 'Critical perspectives in race and culture in psychotherapy.' Already there are warning signs here, because in spite of all the references to 'psychotherapy', all we get is psychoanalysis. There is no reference anywhere in this book to humanistic psychology, nor to person-centred therapy, Gestalt, psychodrama, focusing, experiential

therapy, existential analysis or the transpersonal. There is one brief mention of narrative therapy. The whole emphasis, however, is on the academic, and we get sentences like:

'In this respect Stuart Hall (1992) attempts to construct (or deconstruct) a Derridean notion of *différance*, which in part would depend on the construction of new ethnic identities where difference is positional, conditional and conjectural.' (p.20)

The next author writes: 'Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) we might make a call for a schizoanalysis. By this we mean that a new multicultural political logic must make sense of subaltern desire.' (pp.28-29)

It can be seen from these quotes that the whole thrust of the book is towards helping students to write boring essays.

Part B is 'Governing race in the transference'. Such a title reveals quite clearly the extent of the dependence upon psychoanalysis, which is not mentioned either in the title or in any of the supplementary blurbs. I resent not being told that this is the basis of the whole book.

Part C is 'Racism, ethnicity and countertransference'. I thought this section might mention the important work of Andrew Samuels in this area, but it was not to be. Not only is this book about psychoanalysis, it has hardly any mention of Jung either. Nor does it even mention in passing the very important work of Van Dyk and Nefale in South America, whose work on Ubuntu therapy (a native approach from Cameroon) is of the utmost importance, in my opinion.

Part D is 'Intersecting gender, race, class and sexuality'. Again this is disappointing from the point of view of spreading the net at all widely. There is no mention, for example, of the striking work of Gergen and Davis, in their *Toward a New Psychology of Gender.*

Part E is 'Spirituality, cultural healing and psychotherapy'. This is perhaps the most disappointing section of all, since it fails to mention the groundbreaking work of Fukuyama and Sevig, in their excellent *Integrating Spirituality into Multicultural Counselling*. Instead it has some quirky chapters, which it has to be said are the most readable in the whole book.

Finally, Part F is 'Future directions', which includes a chapter headed 'A plurithеoretic approach: Tobie Nathan's ethnopsychoanalytic therapy'. Appalling.

A book like this breaks upon the non-psychoanalytic reader with all the joy of a soaking Eeyore. It really is not doing justice to its purported title, and indeed a truer title would be 'Some psychoanalytic and academic ruminations around the subject of race.'

What a shame!

John Rowan

The Sage Handbook of Counselling and Psychotherapy 2nd Edition **Edited by Colin Feltham and Ian Horton** Sage Publications pp593 £29.99

Reading through the contributors section at the beginning of this book is like reading a 'Who's Who' of therapy and counselling in the UK and this reflects the wide perspective of this all-inclusive resource book. Of course, there are omissions – nothing from John Rowan or Nick Totton for instance - and the overall flavour seems to be a bit academic. However, the value of this book is that it brings together a comprehensive survey of every conceivable aspect of psychotherapy and counselling in the United Kingdom.

Another strength of the book is that it uses the format of a series of essays by different authors which are split into sections which focus broadly on the different areas of interest to practising psychotherapists and counsellors and to trainees.

The first part is dedicated to 'Psychotherapy and Counselling in Context' and ranges from defining what Counselling and Psychotherapy are to an exploration of counselling settings and employment opportunities, something which I, as a recently qualified counsellor, was very interested to read.

The next section, on socio-cultural perspectives, was also useful particularly since awareness of this perspective is now quite a feature of counselling and psychotherapy trainings. Working with people who have different beliefs is often a source of some difficulty so I was particularly struck by the chapter which focussed on this issue.

The issue of technique is dealt with differently by the different orientations of counselling and therapy. Some schools of thought rely heavily on a standard set of interventions whereas others tend to deny that technique is important. The section on skills and clinical practice includes both sets of views and is particularly useful to trainees in that it gives extensive input on areas like assessment which they may not encounter directly in their practice placement.

Counselling and psychotherapy are professions, but they don't always seem as formal as that word sometimes suggests. The section on professional issues outlines some of the issues which can arise in the life of a working counsellor as well as giving good advice about setting yourself up as a professional working in what is becoming a very competitive market.

The next section, on different theories, is a bit of a whistle-stop tour, but it does enable the student, or inexperienced counsellor, to get an idea of the basics of the many different schools of thought. It is also particularly useful to get an idea of the range of different approaches to psychotherapy and counselling if you have been trained in one model.

The next section surveys the various specific problems which clients bring to counselling. I don't quite understand why the chapter on psychopharmacology was put in this section, but it was very useful

to read it; especially as the 'brand names' of some of the drugs were identified. Often clients only know the brand name, which doesn't always give you an idea of what a drug is or what it does.

The final section deals with specialisms and modalities. These don't actually refer to specific orientations, but define themselves more by the client group they work with or the setting in which the client receives the counselling. This section includes chapters on time-limited therapy, which is becoming more and more common especially in agencies, counselling children, counselling older people, telephone and internet counselling and many other interesting areas of the work.

One of the best things about this book is that the chapters are brief and easy to digest. This means that the book can be used as a source of reference, especially by students and new practitioners, to get the basic information in response to a query which may have arisen in the course of their training or practice. There is a danger, however, that it may be used, particularly by hard-pressed students, as a substitute for more detailed reading. However, I would thoroughly recommend this work to both trainees and practitioners.

Steve Wilson is a recently qualified counsellor in private practice.

Narrative therapy (second edition) **Author: Martin Payne**, Publisher: Sage Date: 2006 Price: £19.99 pp.208, ISBN 1-4129-2013-2

Narrative therapy is one of the most interesting and valuable therapies to be launched. It all started in Australia and New Zealand in the late 80s and early 90s, and took up a challenging stance in relation to the more orthodox schools of the time. The client and the therapist worked together to create new realities, and sometimes these were carried out into the world beyond the consulting room.

One of the most exciting contributions was the idea that one could personify the client's problem – put it in a chair, talk to it, get it to talk back – the whole approach which had already been taken in the use of subpersonalities by Gestalt, TA and psychosynthesis practitioners, to name no others. Payne quotes White on this:

'Externalising is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify, and at times to personify, the problems that they experience as oppressive.' (p.1)

One of the points which Payne makes in this book is that among the ideas informing narrative therapy are postmodernism and post-structuralism. Unfortunately, after their introduction in the second chapter, we do not hear of these ideas again, and when we come to the actual examples of work presented here, we get the old pedestrian methods which were supposed to have been left behind. There is thus a deep tension in this book between the theoretical expositions, which are very sophisticated and academically sound, mentioning Foucault from time to time, and the actual process of the practice.

After a very clear introduction to externalisation, in which some advanced points are made, the actual example given of work with a client is quite the funniest thing in the book. It goes like this:

'Therapist: From what you say, you're influenced by the idea that it's possible to love someone and yet heap degrading insults upon her. This idea seems to have a firm grip on you. How did that happen? I see quite a lot of men who are angry with their wives but who don't think that way or speak that way. I wonder how you got that idea? – who persuaded you that you can love someone yet it's OK to call her a 'fucking slag'?

Client: Her sister's a slag too…'

The author does not seem to see that this is an appalling failure on the part of the therapist. Nor does he seem to see the sheer humour of it.

There is a chapter on asking questions, in which the author recognises that many texts advocate avoiding questions. He mounts a strong defence of the idea of asking questions, using many examples from David White, the originator of narrative therapy. But when he comes to give examples of his own work, his own use of questions, they strike me as rather plonking. Certainly not inspiring in the way that White is inspiring.

This whole book really makes me think of someone I knew who, faced with someone who was using advanced ideas in a rather hamfisted kind of way, said that he was like a child trying to wield Grandfather's sword. Somehow this author has acquired the words, but not the music. A sadly disappointing book. I really don't know what John McLeod was thinking of when he wrote a positive Foreword to this thing. But then his own book on narrative therapy is not inspiring either, so perhaps he recognised a kindred spirit.

Not recommended.

John Rowan

Membership Survey

We really want to find out what you think about S&S, AHP(B) and our website; and what you want from us, so we can set aims and policies for the future.

Although the return date of 3rd April has past, we're still interested in your views. So if you didn't previously complete the survey, contact Anton for a copy, or download it from the Membership Details page of the website and return it as an email attachment.