

***Counselling People on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Manual* by Katherine Paxton and Irene A. Estay** published by Jessica Kingsley (2007) ISBN978-1-84310-552-7

I was drawn to this book because of a particular client with whom I am working but I also thought it worthy of review because, although autism has only been recognised since the '40s, it is something that has been growing and growing in stature over the last twenty years or so. Like so many conditions it is impossible, or at least beyond me, to know whether this is because it is becoming more prevalent in society or our awareness of it is increasing, or it is a matter of us getting to know more and more about it – people speak of many (or indeed all) people being on the autism spectrum and although some autistic behaviour can seem totally alien, we can all remember going to school avoiding cracks in the pavements or anything with the number 13 on it. So, I was thinking to myself, this is not just a condition that lives at the end of some psychological cul-de-sac, it is one that one way or another many, many therapists will come into contact with – hence the review.

The book is split into two parts, with two chapters on understanding autism and seven on counselling issues and approaches.

Understanding

Miss these chapters at your peril! I have a friend who, in his late 20s is still with very little language. I have known him since he was about seven. So I was tempted to miss this section as I figured that I know what autism looks like. I was wrong. Autism can affect a huge range of life's activities, from mild symptoms akin to the repetitive behaviours seen with OCD (the relationship between the two conditions is interesting) to a total lack of verbal communication skills. From being able to live a happy family life to living in a world of total isolation. Looking at the condition overall, the writers use the expression Autism Spectrum Disorders – ASD.

The first chapter looks at history, characteristics and comorbidity. Reading the first section, it was interesting to bring to mind that autism was initially seen in children and was regarded as a result of poor mothering – in my experience a mother today of a child with Asperger's Syndrome – a diagnosis on the autism spectrum – can still sometimes get this reaction.

The challenges for people with autism – and I guess their therapists – is to help them with three major areas of difficulty: communication deficits, social deficits and stereotypical behaviour. (Examples of the last are hand flapping, twirling, pacing, rocking etc.)

With regards to comorbidity, the prevalence of comorbid conditions in persons on the autism spectrum is higher than those in the normal population. Many psychological disorders can be present, and sometimes hidden, in a person with ASD but the most common are depression and anxiety. I found this a kind of wake up call to the thought that:

'Well of course, you're depressed, who wouldn't be!'

'No I have Aspergers syndrome but I am *also* depressed, there is not a cause and effect relationship here'.

If the first chapter was interesting the second was captivating. It is on Autistic Thinking and Logic.

The idea that autism tends to cause people to think literally is far from new and it is fascinating when working with someone with ASD how it brings to one's attention just how much of our language involves metaphor, irony, cynicism and, most masked of all, sarcasm. E.g. I asked a 17 year-old client how he felt about his father's girl friend being pregnant. He said it didn't concern him. I was surprised and spoke about him having a new brother. To which he replied: 'Dad said G was having a baby, he didn't say it was his!' Paxton and Estay talk of 'mind blindness'.

They also argue that people with ASD have also a preponderance to think visually. Having said that, their pictures can be very difficult to understand and the symbolism they use could not be further away from Carl Jung's archetypes in that it tends to be very specific to the person making the drawing. However, acknowledging the leaning towards visual images can help when working with children by using images instead of words. My client has drawn images of nine different states of unease that I would have difficulty verbalising and no ability whatsoever to draw. He places these on a thermometer to explain to his family how he is feeling at a particular time.

I was aware that people with ASD have difficulty judging what others are feeling and also are often unaware of how they impacted on others; but a greater insight for me was the idea that people on the autism spectrum lack a sense of self or reference to self. There appears to be a profound deficit of self-consciousness. The writers argue that it is as if there is no concept of personal identity. To go back to the importance of visualising: Paxton and Estay argue elegantly that we can see our own hand or foot but, unless we are looking in a mirror, cannot see our whole body engaging in a task. Perhaps, from the point of view of a person with autism:

'it is as if disembodied hands and feet are performing the task' (P57)

The staggering conclusion to this line of thinking is that the difficulty that people on the autism spectrum have is "with visualizing the self when the self is not directly seen, and organizing memories around

a self that virtually does not exist in any cohesive manner." For me and my client, we were only able to explore the violence he exhibited to members of his family when it was captured by people taking photographs. He was then able to see himself behaving in an unruly way.

Another difficulty people with ASD have is what the writers refer to as 'Executive Functioning' and what it covers is the ability to:

'plan, organise and monitor one's own performance'

or, put another way:

'central coherence, cognitive flexibility, organizational abilities, source monitoring, inhibitory function and meaning attribution'.

These are explained in detail and increase the therapist's awareness of some other deficiencies with which her client might be dealing.

But life is not all on the debit side. Paxton and Estay say that while people with autism have difficulty empathizing, they have considerable ability to understand and visualise systems.

The final quality they draw to the reader's attention is the idiosyncratic nature of what they refer to as 'autistic logic'. This is often the base of autistic problem solving but is a logic that is based on association rather than logic – Jung with synchronicity might be happier with this concept! A practical consequence of this is that odd behaviour of a person with ASD is often put down to the client trying to annoy or be disrespectful. While the actual cause of the behaviour may be seen by the client as being problem solving. An example the writers give is of a young man who was told not to use the cooker to grill sandwiches, because he tended to leave it on. His solution was to try to use an electric iron.

So those are the introductory chapters. Part Two of the book, *Counselling Issues and Approaches*, consists of five chapters on specific issues such as depression, anxiety, relationship, stress, emotional expression and some final words and suggestions.

From a theoretical standpoint Paxton and Estay work from a CBT model but please don't let that put you off; there is plenty in this, the main section of the book, or manual as they label it, for devotees of many models of counselling. The writers cite evidence that suggests that a psychoanalytical approach has been of little benefit to people with ADS while behavioural approaches have had considerable success. They go on however to emphasise that while behaviour approaches might help behaviour become more socially acceptable, it is essential to look at work that will substantially improve thinking and feeling so that clients get a better understanding of the environment and a greater capability of emotional regulation. Interestingly, the writers also claim that behaviour approaches 'may

prove ineffective with some of the higher functioning people with ASD' Pg 24

The whole book is well documented and excellently supplemented with well-chosen case studies to illustrate concepts, strategies and tips. Personally I concur with Paxton and Estay when they acknowledge the challenges involved in working with people with ASD but go on to say: 'Working with people who are on the autism spectrum can be exhilarating ... people on the spectrum can provide some amazing insights as well as some astounding perspectives on life.'

Mike Berry

Regulating the Psychological Therapies: From Taxonomy to Taxidermy. Denis Postle. Sage 256pp £20 pb (£19 online)

Whether we know it or not, every therapist and client in the country owes Denis Postle a debt of gratitude. Over a period of more than fifteen years, he has waged a tireless campaign to hold therapists to the standards of their occupation: demanding emotional intelligence, authenticity and congruence from the proponents and the passive accepters of (originally) accreditation and (latterly) state regulation. It is hard to tell, but it seems entirely possible that he has single-handedly held back the muddy tide of regulation by several years.

In reality, of course, it has not been a single-handed campaign. A number of individuals (including myself) and organisations (notably the Independent Practitioners Network) have joined in the struggle. But I can think of no one other than Denis who has so consistently followed the issue through, so painstakingly assembled and analysed the information which professionalisers have often kept close to their chests, so carefully and repeatedly pointed out the illogic and bad faith of those pressing for regulation, so eloquently made the case against. You don't have to take my word for it: this volume of his collected writings on the subject, including pieces written between 1990 and 2006 and ranging from short news items and editorials to substantial refereed papers, demonstrates the point thoroughly.

Reading through the body of work, it turns out to be even more impressive than I had realised. What I partially missed in reading much of the material as it appeared is the way that Denis has steadily built up a coherent theoretical framework to support his intuitive position that therapy is just fine as it is, and comes with its own inbuilt standards of quality, as well as – since it is a human activity – its inbuilt imperfections. I can now identify five arguments that he comes back to and refines throughout the book: 1) Diversity is inherently preferable to uniformity; 2) Regulation does not in fact protect the client (but often tends to protect the practitioner); 3) Regulation and accreditation are centrally about power and its accumulation; 4) States have a built-in drive to measure and control

'their' citizens' activities; 5) What is effective in therapy is based on love rather than expertise.

I think (well I would, wouldn't I) that Denis makes a powerful intellectual case for each of these intertwined theses. What he also does in these pieces, which takes the book to another level of interest, is to create and develop powerful metaphors to embody his arguments. Some of these are witty and vivid encapsulations which often provide titles for the papers – 'Glacier Reaches the Edge of Town'; 'The Alchemists' Nightmare: Gold into Lead'; 'The Established Church of False Promises'; 'Chickens to Wed Fox and Live in Henhouse?' Some are much more than that; for example, he draws from the environmentalist Vandana Shiva (1993) the idea of 'monocultures of the mind', a conceptual and cultural impoverishment which mirrors and makes possible the ecological impoverishment of industrial farming; and uses this (pp. 37, cf. pp 67-9) to deconstruct a paper by Emmy van Deurzen which portrays regulation as a good gardener clearing away the weeds. Who decides, he asks, what are the 'weeds' of therapy? Isn't gardening in fact a form of domination? And isn't psychopractice more like a rainforest than a garden? This ecological parallel recurs throughout the book, and is a rich and powerful way to think about a whole range of issues.

One of the striking things here, in fact, is the breadth of Denis's references, which of course derives partly from the breadth of his own life experience (he tells the story of trying and failing to convince accreditors that a rich life and varied education were in any way comparable to a formal training), but also from his inspired reading across a large number of fields. His writing has introduced me to several sources which I might otherwise have missed, and which I have found tremendously valuable: Vandana Shiva I have already mentioned, but also James C Scott's book *Seeing Like A State* (1998), and the unusual geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1984).

The development of Denis's opposition to regulation is in fact closely parallel to the development of the Independent Practitioners Network (IPN), in which we are both founder participants. IPN started out as a self-protective reaction to the drive for accreditation, a way of organising ourselves against a perceived threat. It developed into something good in and for itself, a form of mutual validation and experience-sharing which participants deeply value quite separately from the accreditation issue. Similarly, the body of work collected here, which started out as something *against* regulation, has matured into a powerful statement *for* a humanistic, humane, emotionally intelligent approach to psychopractice.

References

- Scott, J.C. (1998) *Seeing Like A State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shiva, V. (1993) *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives and Biodiversity and Biotechnology*. London: Zed Books.
- Tuan, Y-F. (1984) *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Nick Totton

Sexual Grounding Therapy by Willem Poppeliers and Martin Broesterhuizen. Breda (The Netherlands): Protocol Media Productions. 12.50 Euros. (Translated from Dutch by Renee Bost)

Despite having co-authored a book on sexuality myself (van Ooijen and Charnock, 2000), I found it difficult to get motivated to read this as I disliked the picture on the cover and found the liberal sprinkling of the word 'genital' all over the book curiously off-putting.

According to the authors our 'genital-relational development' happens in eight consecutive stages of approximately ten years each, the first stage starting around age four and the last ending with our death. Sexual Grounding Therapy is described as a 'process-focussed' group therapy, which has integrated insights from Freud, Reich, Perls, the object relations school, Kernberg and core energetics. Its aim is to help people return to a childlike innocence by reliving their past with 'perfect parents' so that the 'energetic connection between the genitals and the heart' is restored, any damage is healed and a different future becomes possible (p11/12). The therapy is described as consisting of various exercises, such as breathing, guided fantasy, inner child work, or psycho-drama (p19), although there is also mention of actual bodily and genital contact, with latex gloves being worn for the latter (p83).

After three introductory chapters, chapter four gives an overview of 'genital-relational development', a more in-depth discussion of each of the ten stages in chapters five, six and seven and a discussion of issues such as gender, divorce and multiple relationships in chapter eight. Chapter nine contains information about training and chapter ten a biography and interview with one of the authors.

The authors point out that the therapy is copyrighted and should only be practised by trained practitioners. They claim that this book is aimed at the general public, but I found it a rather dry read, which did not really give a sense of the therapy. Case histories, even if fictionalised, would have helped bring the therapy to life. Moreover, I am not sure that it is as ground breaking as is claimed.

The writing is marred by much repetition and clumsy grammar, with frequent switching between the second and third person. When translating a text into another language there is always the choice: to translate to the letter or to the spirit? Here the translation stays close to the original Dutch. As a native Dutch speaker I know that a direct translation is, if not impossible, frequently not advisable. This is because the same material is often expressed very differently in each language. In any case, it must have been a difficult book to translate, as the Dutch version is rather clumsy too.

I have no doubt that the workshops run by the authors can provide participants with a profound experience. However, if the authors want the therapy to become more widely known, they need to produce a book that contains case examples, is well written and looks attractive.

References:

Van Ooijen, E and Charnock, A (2000) *Sexuality and Patient Care*. London: Chapman and Hall.

Els van Ooijen is a psychotherapist and supervisor, with a private practice in Bristol. She is also a senior lecturer at the University of Wales, Newport.

Clinical Case Formulations: Matching the integrative treatment plan to the client Barbara L Ingram (2006) Wiley
Pp 666 £18.47

This is a truly magnificent book, worthy of the attention of any therapist who is concerned in any way with case formulation. The heart of the book is a list of 28 possible formulations, covering virtually any eventuality, and utterly without bias towards any particular orientation. This is a huge achievement, based on thirty years of teaching students at Pepperdine University. These formulations are arranged in seven categories: Biological hypotheses; crises and transitions; behavioural and learning models; cognitive models; existential and spiritual models; psychodynamic models; and social factors. These hypotheses – and this is the strength of the book – are combined and integrated to give a well-rounded sense of where the client is and what they really need.

But before that there is a lengthy discussion of why one might want to create a case formulation, and detailed instructions for how to do it. The basic thinking here is just this:

'You must create a formulation that fits the client rather than try to squeeze the client into your preferred formulation.'

And after it there is an equally full discussion of a structured framework known as the Problem-Oriented Method.

'Using the POM and integrating multiple hypotheses, the therapist learns how to think intelligently, critically, and creatively in order to develop a tailor-made treatment plan. A list of thirty-three standards for evaluating the application of this method is provided.'

This enables therapists to do their own evidence-based work, rather than relying on evidence from elsewhere that may or may not be totally relevant to the present case.

This book would be particularly useful in any library used by counsellors or others needing this kind of information. It can be used without any previous tuition, because of the very clear way in which the material is organised.

I have met and talked with the author, and she struck me as someone who really knows what she is talking about. She has produced a great resource, which can be used by any therapist from any orientation.

John Rowan