BOOK REVIEWS

Rachel Freeth, *Psychiatry and Mental Health: A Guide for Counsellors and Psychotherapists*, PCCS Books, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, 2020, 608 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1910919521, price (paperback) £30.00.

Reviewed by **Suzanne Keys**

This book is a labour of love and an epic reference book and comprehensive guide for counsellors and psychotherapists wishing to both understand the current mental health system in the UK from a psychiatrist's perspective, but also an affirmation and a call to reinvigorate what makes counselling and psychotherapy distinct and valuing as a healing relationship for those in mental distress, or those who have been mentally injured by the systems and world we live in.

Rachel writes in a very accessible, clear style, managing to be both personal and 'clinical', 'evidence'- and experience-based. She has been a psychiatrist for 28 years as well as training and working as a person-centred counsellor. She speaks from the inside of these experiences as well as being able to take a bird's eye view of the field, whilst acknowledging her own values and ideology in a fair and sensitive way.

She covers a huge amount of ground in the book, modelling a rigorous, questioning, challenging, dialogic approach to the distinct fields of mental health and counselling. This is very welcome at this point where so much of our discourse around counselling and human distress has become imbued with the medical model, so that we often talk about our clients' 'pathology' and how we can fix them, what interventions are 'delivered' to get the predetermined outcomes, rather than valuing what is unique about the therapeutic relationship and makes it distinct from the medicalisation of distress.

This is not an 'us or them' book but, rather, a book that seeks to help us understand our differences and value different contributions, even if we may not agree. It is a handbook for working together across our differences whilst not losing a sense of our own value and coherence. For Rachel counselling 'is a relationship and an exploratory process that primarily involves understanding *with* the client rather than *about* the client; one that "bears witness" to people's difficulties, struggles and suffering rather than treating them in the medical sense'.

For the people we work with I think it is so helpful to be able to differentiate different paradigms so we don't end up diluting what we offer, nor vilifying other approaches to helping those who are distressed. This is a book to get to know over time, and is perfect for dipping in to when you need reminding of the politics of mental health at the moment and counselling's distinct place in that, and to remember the significance of language, values, principles, theories and politics. It helps in finding a way to dialogue and work together, especially for those, like myself, working within institutions such as schools, hospitals or charities, but also for those working in private practice with clients who are part of the dominant paradigm, or 'survivors' of the mental health system.

I have found that the language I have used over my 25 years of practice as a counsellor has changed, and I need to be careful not to lose myself but also to be able to translate and interpret and move between different worlds – like, for instance, when I engage with General Practitioners or psychologists or community or hospital psychiatrists on behalf of, or alongside, young people I work with in schools as a counsellor. Although this book does not deal specifically with young people in the psychiatric system, the exploration of different psychiatric disorders and different ways of approaching and working with them is still very relevant.

This book is invaluable for giving confidence and succour, and also for enabling better support for people navigating systems but also trying to understand themselves and what they need and want, and what their language is in the midst of all these different forms of 'care', 'disorders' and 'treatments'. It is a book which keeps empathy for the person who is mentally suffering at the heart of every chapter.

There are five clear parts to the book, which makes finding what you want to focus on really easy:

Part 1: **'Contexts and Culture'** looks at mental health services, paradigms of care, the medical model and counselling.

Part 2: **'Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations'** gives an overview of concepts of health, illness, disease and disorder, and explores the field of psychiatry, looking at diagnosis, drugs and legal and ethical issues. Chapter 3 is particularly helpful in its clear overview of models of mental disorder, especially the discussion on the politics of the recovery model.

Part 3: **'Forms of Mental Disorder'** covers the diagnostic categories of psychotic, depressive, bipolar, anxiety, personality, eating and dissociative, but from different perspectives, including different theories and understanding, psychological, spiritual and religious perspectives, experiences of people who are diagnosed and alternative psychosocial approaches.

Part 4: **'Clinical Practice'** explores different ways of working as a counsellor with clients with a psychiatric diagnosis, experiencing psychosis, self-harming and thinking of suicide. There is also a whole chapter on the spiritual and religious dimensions of mental disorder, although this has been threaded throughout the book. Although there is some mention of body work and movement therapy, I missed more of an exploration of this.

Part 5: **'The Resourceful Counsellor'**, which covers supervision and self-care, really helps practitioners to look at themselves and what they are bringing to the relationship.

Throughout the book there are lots of points where Rachel asks us to consider ourselves, our assumptions, beliefs, values and lived experiences. She shares personal experience and dilemmas as well as clinical scenarios. Each chapter is peppered with questions and activities, as well as interesting supplementary notes in the margins and extensive further reading.

Although Rachel looks at cultural differences and contexts, and the spiritual as well as psychosocial models throughout the book, there were two significant areas that were missing for me. I would have liked a recognition of eco-psychology and its contribution to thinking about distress and healing, as well as the huge impact that racism has, not only as a source of mental 'injury' but also in terms of our whole mental health system and models of care. The vastness of what Rachel is covering in this book perhaps inevitably leads to someone like me wanting more on the areas that particularly matter to me. The strength of this book, though, is that it is a textbook and a guide to the mental health and counselling landscape, with signposts to follow up in many directions and resources to pick up along the way. Although Rachel openly shares her personal reflections and declares her bias, she gives us an overview in as fair and considered a way as possible.

In her final reflection after three years of writing this book, Rachel's hope is that counsellors will feel confident to work with people who have psychiatric diagnoses, and that

> this book helps counsellors to consider and articulate more clearly what is distinctive about how they might view mental distress, what they have to offer and where their role differs from the roles of many other psy-professionals in emphasising relationship, focusing on meaning (the process of sense-making) and resisting the medicalised discourses that pervade Western culture.

This book is a gift to counsellors and other psy-practitioners, wherever they are on their journey, as Rachel shares her learning from years of experience and vast breadth of reading and knowledge in a politically aware yet non-judgemental way, informing, challenging and enriching the reader.

Suzanne Keys is a person-centred counsellor/supervisor/trainer, and is on the editorial board of *Self & Society*.

R.J. Chisholm, *Uncovering Mystery in Everyday Life: Confessions of a Buddhist Psychotherapist*, Triarchy Press, Axminster, 2022, 152 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1913743482, price (paperback) £12.50.

Reviewed by **Caroline Brazier**

Psychotherapy is the art of encounter. The encounter between therapist and client is, of course, central to its process, but so too is the client's encounter with life; with the significant others in their life, with their own nature in all its twists and wrinkles, and, ultimately, with their own mortality and that of those they love. Too often, these encounters are avoided, or at least only partial, but through the therapeutic process they open up to something much more raw and real.

In this book, Chisholm leads us through a series of encounters based on his work with clients, giving us a glimpse of the intimate world of the therapy room from within the frame of the psychotherapist. By offering a collection of stories which draw on his years of experience in the role, he describes the minutiae of process which these therapeutic meetings involve and, as he does so, shares his own thought processes: the importance of listening with open attention and not foreseeing the outcome, and the complex dance between intuition and not knowing. This in itself makes the book an interesting read, for who is not fascinated by the thoughts behind the therapist's enigmatic expression?

The majority of chapters in the book centre on stories of particular clients. This narrative style allows a complex exploration of the different levels of thought, fact and interaction in the exchanges. Through this medium, the book addresses qualities of therapeutic relationship itself, and more theoretical material drawn from Buddhist psychology as the different stories illustrate different themes. Initially, the book starts by focusing on the therapeutic encounter itself. Subsequent chapters explore different areas of life experience, which are linked through reflective discussion to the author's Buddhist interests: the deeper implications of teachings of mindfulness in the therapeutic context and their roots in the early Buddhist texts; issues of love, death and attachment, and ways in which these can be explored as routes to awareness; the creation and nature of identity and the discovery of personal meaning. In its final chapters, the book addresses other areas of theory: the role of dreams in therapy, drawing on the traditions of Freud and Jung; and, in the final chapter, core Buddhist theory, and particularly the question of faith, which here manifests in a deep trust in the unfolding process of human interaction, and in life itself.

A theme which permeates this book is the paradoxical quality of the therapist's position. *Not Knowing* is an important principle for Chisholm, as his previous book suggests (Chisholm & Harrison, 2016); and a theme which emerges in this book, at least implicitly, is that, in fact, the task of remaining in the state of not-knowing is well-nigh impossible. It is also, at a simplistic level, inappropriate. What is described is a kind of ongoing koan, an insoluble puzzle used in some Buddhist schools, which, despite its nonsensical nature, provokes the practitioner to spiritual transformation. The task of setting aside assumption whilst drawing on experience likewise involves constant self-challenge, and a refusal to step ahead and propose answers or prescribe directions, despite exercising wisdom in choosing what response to give.

The therapist is inevitably curious about outcomes, and may continue to wonder about

them after the therapy has finished, as is described in the case of a young man called Simon who seemed to struggle greatly in life. When the therapy relationship ends, perhaps rather prematurely due to a career move, the therapist is left, on the one hand, struggling with a feeling of wanting some kind of conclusion to the story and the uncertainty of not knowing whether the therapy has been useful or not, whilst accepting the process as it has been, and trusting that what was needed has happened. For those of us in the therapy professions, this kind of outcome is all too familiar, and requires of us both faith and humility.

The tension between knowing and not-knowing, stepping back and being present, is evident in Chisholm's reflections and, as with many tensions, brings creativity and challenge to the process. The therapist, far from being the neutral blank screen mythologised by early analysts, invariably brings perspectives and experiences which shape their views and colour their responses; and part of the art of therapy is to negotiate this process whilst remaining focused on the client's needs and way of being.

Addressing the paradox, whilst the author emphasises the importance of challenging any inclination to 'know' what is needed for the client's well-being, he also demonstrates ways in which a lifetime's experience becomes the resource bank on which, as a therapist, he draws. He describes how, in his inner reflections, and, more rarely, in explicit interventions made during the sessions, the reservoir of human emotions and responses which he has accumulated through his own life experiences helps him deepen his understanding of the client's inner landscape. As he states, 'We would have little hope of understanding the personal experiences of our clients without drawing on similar personal experiences of our own' (p. 45).

At the same time, the author does not see personal experience in itself as sufficient qualification to help others therapeutically. The integration of raw experiences and the maturation of understanding which come from both personal and theoretical reflection need to accompany it. '…[P]ersonal experience doesn't become an asset for practising therapy unless it involves a deeper questioning about the self and human nature in general.' (p. 104)

The therapist's investment in the story needs to be challenged, and the gap between personal experience and what is presently unfolding respected. The cases which are presented show how repeatedly, the therapist is surprised by what emerges. Our clients do not follow the paths we might predict. Whilst we can anticipate directions, our reading of the client's story is a constant process of reinterpretation. Such surprise is in fact, in all probability, one of the most significant aspects of the therapy process, because it represents that point in which the therapist, and probably the client as well, are startled out of habitual viewpoints, and encounter one another in a more real way.

The book is well written, and will appeal as much to the general reader as to the practising therapist. With its readable narrative, those considering therapy for themselves will find it helpful in demystifying aspects of the process of the therapy room, whilst honouring the inherent mystery of the life which is uncovered. For therapists and trainee therapists, it offers an in-depth picture of the therapeutic art, annotated with comments about the process and the theory which informs it. In this way, the book offers a multi-layered discourse. From his position as a human, a therapist and a Buddhist, the author introduces us to layers in his thinking about the people he works with and about human predicaments which they embody. We are taken into the intimate spaces of the therapist's process. At the same time, the book contains reflections on the practice of psychotherapy and the theory which lies behind it, drawing on the masters of the Western therapeutic tradition. It also draws parallels in Buddhist psychology, offering insights from that tradition into mindfulness, impermanence and the self. Chisholm approaches his work as a psychotherapist from a Buddhist perspective. This is something which he explicitly explores in a number of places through the book and, in

particular, returns to in the final chapter, where he explains a number of core teachings of Buddhism and their application in psychology. The chapter begins with an exploration of fundamentals: Buddhism gives him faith that life is *actually a great blessing* (p. 104), whilst at the same time inevitably involving unavoidable existential suffering. In this context he draws on central Buddhist teachings: *The Four Noble Truths* and the *kelshas* as the roots of suffering. He then focuses particularly on teachings of non-attachment and the constructed, illusory nature of the self. These explanations are likely to be useful to the non-Buddhist who is interested in Buddhist psychology, as well as to Buddhists practising psychotherapy.

In this explanation, however, readers from a Western therapeutic background need to be aware that Buddhist theories of attachment, to which the author alludes, are distinct from, and not to be confused with, Western theories of the same name. This distinction is not made explicitly in the book. In fact, the Buddhist theory of attachment can often represent an opposite phenomenon to that described by John Bowlby and others, being the manner in which identification and self-creation are projected on to the world of others, thus cutting the person off from real relationship.

There are times also when Chisholm can seem to lean towards the ascetic, particularly in his views on human relationships. For example, when he suggests that Buddhism has no interest in romantic love, and indeed *frowns on romantic love* (p. 74), it becomes clear, however, that it is not so much romance itself, as the compulsive grasping at relationship, to which he is referring: '…a deeper self-awareness may take root in the client, which may not only free her desire for love from its compulsive force… but may make finding a loving relationship more likely' (p. 75). Put another way, releasing the need to grasp and cling allows for a deeper, more real kind of relating.

This, then, is a book grounded in the author's own experience; experience of life, of working with clients, of a spiritual tradition and of many particular human encounters. As we read each person's story and meet some of the clients with whom the author has worked, what comes over more than anything is an interest in and caring for each person's unique presence here, now, in this moment of sharing. There are ideas and formulae, to be certain, but beyond these is the interest in how this person and this person and this other person lives out their life on its very particular path, and on the encounter which has taken place with them in the weekly therapy hour.

Reference

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Dina Glouberman, *ImageWork: The Complete Guide to Working with Transformational Imagery*, PCCS Books, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, 2022, 336 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1915220028, price (paperback) £21.00.

Reviewed by **Graham Mummery**

Poet and UKCP-registered psychotherapist

Dr Dina Glouberman has made many contributions to Humanistic Psychology with papers, books, and even the creation of Skyros Holidays. Through her work she has profoundly influenced many lives for the better, including my own.

The holidays are run on the Greek island of the same name in the Aegean, and sometimes in other locations. She is also a psychotherapist, and has facilitated groups teaching her own approach to visualisation and creative imagination in a craft she calls 'ImageWork'. She prefers the term 'ImageWork' over

visualisation etc. because her take on the matter involves working with images from the psyche. She has previously written two books on the subject, and another about burnout in which she also showed ways in which ImageWork might be used to help those of us who have been through that process. The current offering under review here is meant as a manual for therapists and facilitators. It is beautifully written, and draws together aspects from her previous books as well as new material.

My first encounter with Dina Glouberman was on a Skyros Holiday. She has told the story of the setting up of Skyros in two other books: her fascinating memoir *Through the Woods and Back Again* (2018), where she also chronicles her experience in the creation of ImageWork; and in *Skyros: Sunshine for the Soul* (Andricopoulos & Glouberman, 2018). My own acquaintance with Skyros had begun a couple of years before, while the Skyros holidays had been happening for 25 years. One of my reasons for choosing that particular session was to meet Dina Glouberman and do her course on ImageWork. Within a few minutes after our first meeting on the terrace at the Skyros Centre we were talking about mutual interests that included Jung, Stanislav Grof, and even the book *The Da Vinci Code*, which was in the best-seller lists at the time. It was the beginning of a journey with her and ImageWork which has lasted for 17 years – and still counting – which resulted in my training to become a transpersonal psychotherapist in the midst of adventures in the image-world.

At the time of our meeting I had read her first two books, *Life Choices, Life Changes* (1989) and *The Joy of Burnout* (2002). The former remains an invaluable prime source about ImageWork using what she describes in the new book, for the first time in my acquaintance, as 'the Glouberman approach'. It fits into that much-maligned category of 'self-help book', and also contains much wisdom and beauty. For those interested in practising ImageWork on their own, her first book remains an invaluable resource. But as Glouberman points out in the new book, ImageWork often produces the best results when practised in groups. That has been my experience also. Sometimes there seems to be a kind of morphic resonance (Sheldrake, 1988; Glouberman, 2022), where images produced seem to coalesce and the experience of them is stronger. This morphic resonance also seems to happen also over electronic means in Zoom sessions.

One of the things that impressed me early in my ImageWork studies and in *Life Choices, Life Changes* (1989) was that Glouberman emphasises, as well as the importance of the imagination, the importance of grounding before and after exercises. I see it as a tribute of another kind to her work that John Rowan, in his book *The Transpersonal* (2nd edn, 2001, p. 156), specifically directed readers to Glouberman's work for ideas about grounding after sessions spent in imaginal and transpersonal realms. My own experience certainly confirms the importance of this.

When I first met Glouberman I had followed a procedure that I call the 'self-help book thing' – namely, reading the texts without doing the practice. The grounding was a reminder of the old advice, attributed to the Buddha, of 'keeping one foot on the ground'. This is vital when exploring the imaginal. My therapeutic training has only underlined this. After processing things from their imagination, clients need to leave the session able to enter the physical world and go out on to the streets, where they can come to ground with a bump.

In *ImageWork: The Complete Guide to Working with Transformational Imagery*, Glouberman updates her work in her earlier volumes. Readers of her more recent book *You Are What You Imagine* (2014) will already have seen how Glouberman has built on her work since her first book. There is a deeper exploration of spiritual and developmental matters. There are also hints about running sessions on Zoom, which is very current after Covid, during which she facilitated sessions on groups with obviously positive results, reporting some of the same morphic resonances which occur in groups which meet in person.

The book is more academic in structure than the previous volumes, and is designed as a reference work; but there is no loss of warmth of tone. Glouberman cites sources she has learned from, including neuroscience, Jungian Active Imagination, Gestalt and Psychosynthesis. She also draws on existential and philosophical literature, including Seneca, Merleau-Ponty and the physicist Max Planck, as well as spiritual writers such as Thích Nhất Hạnh and Martin Buber; it is a very wide net. ImageWork is also very compatible with imaginal techniques that have since come into my acquaintance since my training, such as Richard Schwarz's Internal Family Systems (2019) and the waking-dream technique I learned at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education under Nigel Hamilton (2014). All of these have huge value in the treatment of psychological issues and trauma, and I happily commend them also. But equally, it is difficult to find anything, anywhere, with more practical and scholarly precision than in this new Glouberman work, covering as it does every aspect from relaxation and grounding exercises to working with the imaginal, both during and after the imaging process.

All the exercises are crafted with a precision that allows for proper focus on image material, together with an adaptability to meet different contexts. In my experience, people who meet Glouberman on ImageWork retreats and on Skyros quickly notice her intuitive qualities, which are phenomenal. But another quality on show in all her books is her skill as a technician in devising exercises. The exercises are artfully crafted, starting with a relaxation to allow images to emerge, then to return to everyday consensus reality. But as Glouberman points out, the purpose of ImageWork is not to control and interpret the images; it is about creating an alchemical flask so an imaginer can work with them in safety, and bring back what they have learned.

The book is a tool-kit for this, with scripts of exercises to help practitioners prepare themselves for their use. With these there are suggestions over the context in which to use them, and there is also a glossary to explain the terms she uses. There is a very handy table of the exercises, with a brief description of each one and their use, with cross references to her previous books where additional information on (and/or discussion of) them is available. Glouberman also discusses how to work with the images produced using case studies of clients she has worked with. This centres mostly around a popular exercise that often comes up in her workshops using an exercise called 'Image of Life as Metaphor' (see Glouberman, 2022). This is an extraordinarily rich exercise of very wide scope – one with which Glouberman often used to start workshops and courses, and one most often requested by clients. It is used to gain a perspective on where one is currently in one's life. The beauty of the image is that it can work on so many levels, be they physical, instinctual, personal, and even transpersonal. The image carries with it the additional benefit of engaging with an ImageWorker's poetic, artistic and story-telling level rather than just intellect, and many areas are thus encompassed all at once.

So the 'Image of Life as Metaphor' is one of the major exercises in the book, in addition to which many others are detailed. Glouberman categorises the purposes of each into groups: Healing Imagination, Creative Imagination and Transcendent Imagination. For me these have rough parallels with what, in my transpersonal psychology training, was called pre-personal, personal and transpersonal, though Glouberman's terms strike me as more process orientated. They are devised for specific purposes, including to help with physical illnesses, relationships and creative issues. With regard to physical illnesses, she makes the pragmatic point that even if there are physical aspects to them, they often come with psychological aspects that need processing. There are also exercises aimed at looking at body, dreams and setting intentions to the future, as well as spiritual matters. She also discusses how ImageWork can work together with Mindfulness.

There are also short exercises to counterbalance and supplement longer ones. A favourite of mine is the 'Mind, Heart and Soul' exercise. This first appeared in her previous book on ImageWork, *You Are What You Imagine.* Its stated purpose in the book is as an aid for decision-making. Glouberman cites a case where she used this to help a client focus on a decision after experiencing an image. It has other uses, of course. My own experience with clients is that this can also help align parts of themselves. It works by asking each one of mind, heart and soul to say what they feel about a particular issue. Often after going through the process, I have found clients usually feel more aligned. The beauty of the exercise is in both its simplicity and the way it connects different parts of a person. It often affects them profoundly, like all of the other exercises here.

On the back of my copy of *Life Choices, Life Changes*, there is the following endorsement from John Rowan: 'The best book I have seen on visualisation work'. Until the publication of the book under review here, I would echo this! I have found huge value in Dina Glouberman's work, not least because it has had a profound impact on my own life. *ImageWork* builds and extends on original work. It is a distillation of many years of excellent work, and an ideal reference work for the ImageWorker, be they a therapist, working on themselves or a psychonaut.

Anyone using imagination work, regardless of orientation, will benefit from this book. I can think of no better guide in this area.

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SOME HUMANISTIC WISDOM

"Freedom of teaching and of opinion in book or press is the foundation for the sound and natural development of any people."

Albert Einstein (1879–1955)