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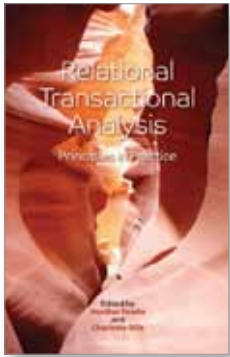
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Relational transactional analysis: principles in practice

Heather Fowlie and Charlotte Sills (eds)

Karnac Books 2011, £29.99
ISBN 978-1855757622

There is a new form of Christianity called 'non-theistic Christianity' which, so far as I can tell, involves believing in all Christian precepts except those that include God. This book is the transactional analysis (TA) equivalent. When I opened it I wondered if there was a need for it, as, to quote Elana Leigh, books about relational therapy 'have flooded the field'. Reading it, I realised that it is a book whose main purpose is to take the theory out of TA so that it can become a more integrated way of working. Whilst I agree wholeheartedly with this approach, it is at odds with the guiding principles of Eric Berne, the TA founder.

In particular the editors wish to encourage TA therapists to work relationally. They believe that the current interest in relational therapy stems from the development of the women's movement, as an interest in relational issues may be considered to be more female than male. This is an interesting idea, and perhaps also explains why the majority of the contributors to this volume are female.

Working relationally, as explained in this volume, means having the courage to be open about one's own countertransference reactions, or, to put it simply, sharing one's deepest fantasies with the client, in order to develop a deeper relationship, and thus enrich the therapeutic work.

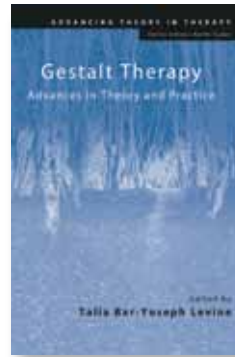
As always with books that have multiple contributors, unless the editing is so restrictive that there is a

loss of authentic voices, the writing is uneven. There are some beautifully written chapters, such as Katherine Murphy's 'meditation on a two-person practice' and some challenging thoughts, such as William Cornell's comment that, when he was studying to be a therapist, he skipped the lessons on empathy as he considers it 'a much overrated skill'.

Virtually all of the chapters include case studies. The writers generally explain that they have the client's permission to discuss their work. Given that some of the clients appeared to be on-going, I checked to see if this appeared as an ethical issue in the one chapter devoted to ethics: it did not. This is a shame, as I would have liked to see the arguments for and against using clients in this way being clearly stated. Indeed, whilst many of the writers comment on the usefulness of supervision, none comment on the ethical issues involved.

This is a book about TA coming of age and its practitioners integrating themselves into the wider therapeutic world. Carole Shadbolt sums it up: finding a 30-year-old letter from a friend and colleague who uses TA language, she writes that the letter made her 'physically squirm'. As someone trained in TA, but who has moved away from a pure TA way of working, it is heartening to see that TA therapists have, been moving in the same direction. However, there is a question: if TA practitioners stop analysing transactions, as with taking God out of Christianity, what remains?

Heather Dale is a senior accredited counsellor/psychotherapist in private practice and a senior lecturer at the University of Huddersfield



Gestalt therapy: advances in theory and practice

Talia Bar-Yoseph Levine (ed)

Routledge 2011, £20.99
ISBN 978-0415489171

This book is a collection of chapters each written by individual Gestalt practitioners and thinkers in the Gestalt therapy approach. It offers both a summary of recent advances as well as new and innovative ideas for future developments of Gestalt, with each chapter focusing on a different element of the approach. Each contributor offers a different perspective in the ongoing development and expansion of Gestalt in relation to politics, philosophy and religion, and incorporates ideas about such things as field theory, spirituality, couple and family therapy, personality and neuroscience.

This book is recommended for Gestalt therapists, non-Gestalt practitioners, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals, and although I feel it could offer a different and maybe deeper perspective to those not in the Gestalt field, the language in many of the chapters does warrant a rather advanced understanding of Gestalt theory. The topics, though, are relevant to all professions and studies that include human interaction and behaviour.

Each chapter can be read independently in its own right, which means just one chapter can be read as comprehensive in itself, which makes it easy to read, and gave me impetus to think about just that particular part of Gestalt theory. On the other hand, because each chapter is comprehensive in

itself, I found there wasn't enough material in each chapter to give me a more thorough overview. However, it does give food for thought to go away and do further self-motivated research. Because Gestalt is involved with 'field theory' and wholes, each individual chapter does have relevance to other chapters if one chooses to look. There is an epilogue by two authors that in many ways ties up the rest of the book and offers questions and thoughts for further Gestalt development.

I would recommend this book to people who want to be challenged with some ideas around advances in Gestalt, and are open to dialogue with the ideas presented. I would now like to see each of the contributors write a book of their own, as each brings something meaningful for the present and future of Gestalt research, advances and development.

Roni Beadle is a counsellor, dance therapist and writer working in private practice and for SEED (Support and Empathy for Eating Disorders), a charity in East Yorkshire