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relevant reading and short workshop training. He also has a very useful chapter on working with just one partner, so this book is not solely relevant to practitioners with two other people in the room (or occasionally, apparently, three).

He does also touch on the thorny subject of sex, but rather briefly. Many of us find this area quite difficult, and the lack of specific training might be more problematic than he admits. His references to sexual abuse are even briefer, and, again, I wonder if he is minimising the implications of working with clients where this is a factor. Certainly no mention of erotic countertransference!

In conclusion, a worthwhile and likeable book with plenty of good, useable material, but less so for the experienced couple therapist. Unless, of course, you are planning to teach the subject!

Ruth Morgan, senior accredited counsellor and supervisor

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### Life scripts: a transactional analysis of unconscious relational patterns
Richard G Erskine (ed)
Karnac 2010

### The assassin and the therapist: an exploration of truth in psychotherapy and in life
Jeffrey Kottler
Routledge 2010
ISBN 978-0415800655  £15.95

This quarter I have reviewed two books for the delight and delectation of readers of this journal. Interestingly, there is a theme that runs through two otherwise completely different books. The theme is to do with the co-creation (primarily, but not necessarily, between therapist and client) of a narrative of the client’s life story, in order to create a larger understanding.

Consequently I am going to write about both books in the same review, and comment on the differing ways that the same themes are explored.

The first book, edited by Richard Erskine, who has been a bit of a hero of mine for some time now, is a volume of writing by transactional analyst (TA) writers about the TA concept of scripts, or the life plans that the theory says that we all write for ourselves, unconsciously, at a very young age. The thrust of the pieces is to show that understanding of scripts develops from the therapeutic alliance, with client and therapist working together to provide a meaningful analysis of the client’s life.

In reading the various chapters, I was reminded of what I both love and hate about TA. I love the plethora of ideas, and the truly brilliant and original minds it often attracts. On the other hand, I loathe the self-conscious cleverness that can be pervasive in the owners of some of these minds. The writers in this edition demonstrate a fair amount of both qualities. However, the need for some of the authors to prove their own cleverness by dismissing others of the contributors was quite entertaining, if only for the glimpse it gives into the sometimes murky underworld of small therapeutic organisations.

Eric Berne’s original idea was to create a therapy that could be explained simply enough for everyone to understand. TA writing works best when authors remember this, and, like Berne, explain complex ideas using simple language. This does not happen nearly often enough in this volume, with a couple of honourable exceptions, such as Ian Stewart, who discusses the ways in which suicidal or violent clients leave open ways of allowing themselves to commit suicide or other violent acts.
When he needs an audience to listen to his story. Each needs the other: Jacob, coming to the end of his life, needs to tell the extraordinary story of his life; Kottler needs something to lift him out of a near-depression, and, in his own words, he becomes obsessed with the story. Out of their joint need, they co-create the narrative of Jacob’s life, a startling account of a young man’s experiences working for what he believes to be the Israeli army in the late 1940s.

It is the story of an American Jew, growing up in the 1940s, who is groomed to join the Israeli army, as part of an elite, though totally expendable small force of youngsters. Once trained, both to work as a team, and in their trade of murder, the boys’ job is to work out how to assassinate the people they are told to target.

This part of the book, while based on year-long interviews, is, in part at least, a confessed work of fiction. Kottler spent some time researching and adding details to the story in order to make it more readable. As a result, this half of the book reads as if it is a short story. Between the two of them, Jacob and Kottler construct a startling narrative, which reads as well as any detective story I have come across. It may not be exactly true, but it is not exactly a work of fiction either.

There are some discrepancies between Jacob’s and Kottler’s versions. In Jacob’s version of the story, he is picked for his intelligence, and relied upon by his superiors, for his quick-wittedness in difficult spots. Kottler, however sees him as ‘not that bright’.

This makes the interesting point about the nature of truth, which is not really explored by any of the authors in the Erskine volume. The question is not only whether our clients are telling us the truth, but whether their truth is believable to the listener.

Whatever the reality, Kottler enters Jacob’s internal world. One twist is to do with the fact that Jacob is not a client – and the normal rules are therefore not in place. For example, they regularly meet in a café, and there is no time limit to their conversations. Jacob is desperate to tell his story, and, later, Kottler becomes desperate to publish it, though this is vetoed by Jacob at first. He is reluctant to allow the story to be published, but ultimately agrees.

Jacob’s story is all about deception. His job for the Israelis is to do with getting close to people defined as the enemy, and then assassinate them. As the book unfolds, Kottler shares his belief that he too became the victim of an assassination attack – though on his emotional rather than physical self.

Kottler becomes increasingly concerned about whether the story is true or not. Consequently the second half of the book becomes a series of short essays in which Kottler muses on the nature of truth and falsehood in the therapeutic relationship. He offers reasons clients might lie in therapy (lack of trust, fear of humiliation, fear of disappointing the therapist). He also explores the unconscious dynamics between himself and Jacob that would make it possible for Jacob’s story to be untrue.

This half is written with searing honesty. Kottler does not flinch from examining his own part in co-creating a story that may (or may not) be a lie.

It is this honesty that is missing from the TA book. There are some interesting concepts here, such as Maria Teresa Tosi commenting that scripts should be seen as a changing dynamic rather than a static system, or Helena Hargaden’s detailed examination of the importance of the relationship in one therapeutic relationship.

However, the wisdom of using one case study as a way of making several theoretical points may not be very wise, and is certainly no longer seen as sound practice.

So here we have two books, both interested in looking at the conscious and unconscious dynamics of the
therapeutic relationship. Erskine’s
idea has been to invite writers to
contribute to a volume loosely bound
around a common theme. The writers
have been chosen as experts in their
chosen fields, so perhaps they did not
need to show off their skills quite so
overtly. The book does set out to do
what it says in the title: to analyse the
unconscious patterns in the therapeutic
relationship. In practice, this often,
but not always, means an examination
of different ways of understanding
the unconscious dynamics between
therapist and client.

I am not sure that I have learned
anything new about scripts, but I have
enjoyed some of the case studies. I
have been reminded about the power
of the transferential relationship.
However, I expect the book will be of
interest to those new to TA, if only
for the pleasure of having so many
revered figures writing in one volume.

Kottler, too, has done what he set out
to do. He has written a story which
invites the reader to consider their
own practice, and the place in that,
not only of falsehood and truth, but
the therapist’s role in that. He has
peppered the second half with case
studies, which are short enough to
hold the attention, but often show
him struggling or confused, as indeed
he is with Jacob, and as indeed I am
very often in my own practice.

For those primarily interested in TA,
and in old and new theory on the
development of script, the Erskine
book may be essential reading.

For those interested in looking more
deeply at the nature of the unconscious
play of forces between therapist and
client, go to Kottler. The question the
reader is left with at the end is this.
Is Jacob’s story real, or were the two
of them complicit in developing a
work of fiction? Perhaps we should be
asking that of ourselves more often.

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