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Book review: Transactional analysis: 100 key points and techniques, Mark Widdowson, Routledge 2010

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individual's freedom to choose is of the highest importance. This sits uncomfortably with many cultures, where the penalties for free choice can be very high, and in many cases (such as marrying out of a particular family or tribal tradition, or wanting to express homosexuality in a fundamentalist society) may include death, or alienation from the primary society.

Even more alarmingly, there is not a section dedicated to ethical ways of working within TA. This is not to say that there are not ethical discussions at various points throughout, but there is neither an overview of a TA ethical approach, nor a discussion at the end of each section, nor indeed a chapter at all on ethical working. The reader could be forgiven for assuming that, for TA practitioners, ethical working is therefore not in the top 100 key points. TA teaches practitioners to look for the hole in the client's story – for what is unsaid rather than what is said – and in this book, this is the big hole.

The format of the book makes it useful for picking up and dipping

into rather than reading straight through. I did read it straight through for the purposes of this review, and I suspect my experience was the poorer for that. However, it is a book that I feel I will read often to check my understanding of a particular point.

My favourite part comes right at the very end. Here Widdowson offers a profound and sensitive summing up, that applies not only to TA, but perhaps to the whole of the counselling and psychotherapy world. He says it so beautifully that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

‘Finally, remember that transactions, like ego states, are just a fascinating fiction. A metaphor. A story we tell to bring order to our thoughts and experiences. A means of making sense of structure and meaning where there is none.’

I will remember that and pass it on to my own students.

Heather Dale, therapist (BACP senior accredited) and supervisor; senior lecturer, University of Huddersfield