

## Independent Comment on Audio-Visual and Print Materials

## 101 Healing Stories for Kids and Teens: Using Metaphors in Therapy.

George W. Burns. Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2005.

Soft. Pp. 293. ISBN 0-471-47167-4. \$74.95.

In this sequel to *101 Healing Stories*, Burns expresses the hope that his books will teach new therapists how to construct and apply metaphors in their work and will assist experienced practitioners to locate stories in their work and to enhance their skills. He offers the suggestion that parents and carers can also use stories and metaphors in teaching values to children, and in developing personal and relationship competencies and accountability. Burns suggests that metaphors involve both art and skill and are 'purposefully designed symbolic communications' applied to 'specific healing and therapeutic intentions' and states that his aims are to 'teach and to heal' through stories.

The author seems to talk with and to teach his readers through an indirect storytelling manner, and in this might be seen as replicating the metaphoric style in the content and process of his subject matter. He tells a large number of stories, each of which addresses a specific problem through identifying the resources the subject character needs to develop or rediscover, and identifying the outcomes achieved. More experienced practitioners might find the number of exemplar metaphors to be somewhat excessive, inhibiting their individual impact. These stories can blur if read one after the other, without some time or space between them so as to allow the ideas to seed and grow.

Burns makes the reasonable point that stories and metaphors are available through films, TV, advertisements, MTV videos and other media, and that these provide access to and insight into our children and teens and valid avenues to converse with them. He believes in the importance of stories as conduits of personal and societal communication, and was a personal investment in giving all a voice to maintain communication, which celebrates the place of storytelling as part of cultural and relationship currency.

Burns is specific in urging therapists to keep abreast of aspects of our young client's

lives, including technology, in order to join them at a personal level and to incorporate these elements into our metaphors and therapeutic storytelling. He recommends that therapeutic stories are more impactful and effective if they are congruent with a child's age, development, gender and cultural context. He also cautions against magical endings or fantastic outcomes that take place outside of the subject's problem-solving skills or competencies and hence are based on 'false hope', which does not empower the listener. He similarly urges practitioners to avoid 'negative outcome stories'.

*101 Healing Stories For Kids and Teens* is a 'how to' book more suited to the beginning therapist/counsellor dealing with individual children, than to the family therapist working with the whole familial unit or those already acquainted with Milton Erickson and others. While it is useful and well presented, its attempt to talk to an American as well as Australian audience lessens its potency, and seems to be at odds with the author's urging to write stories which are culturally and contextually specific and congruent.

Perhaps some of the challenge facing Burns is the tension between his 'teaching' of the core elements of metaphor construction, and encouragement of others to construct and apply their own stories. He provides so many therapeutic stories that some readers may rely on his 101, rather than create their own and further expand their skills. *101 Healing Stories for Kids*, nevertheless, is a helpful guide to those looking to develop an understanding of metaphor in therapy applications, and skills in locating or constructing them.

Keith E. Sedgman

Sedgman & Associates Counselling Services, Brisbane

## Attachment Processes in Couple and Family Therapy.

Susan Johnson and Valerie Whiffen (Eds), NY, 2003.

Hard cover. pp.410. ISBN: 0 898627 303. US \$42.00.

Johnson and Whiffen's *Attachment Processes* puts attachment theory (AT) into the pool

of family theories and creates some big waves. There have been few family therapy text books which so immediately 'reach' me as this one. Is it because Johnson and Whiffen combine thinking about the individual and her emotional experience with attention to interactions within relationships? Is it due to each chapter being packed with relevant clinical examples, with a strong eye to the theoretical links? Yes to both! However, I suspect as much as these achievements, it is the genuine authentic 'voice' of the text which appeals to me. It manages to speak of the suffering of the human condition without theoretical obfuscation. The editors define attachment theory as

a systemic theory that focuses on behaviour in context and patterns of communication ... [which] can also been seen as an individual dynamic theory, one that focuses on internal working models and ways of perceiving others (9).

This is one of the major contributions of AT; a model of human behaviour which conceptualises what goes on *within* people whilst being linked to what goes on *between* people.

In the first section of *Attachment Processes*, we are given an introduction to the dynamics of attachment relationships. This is followed by a description of the nature of couple and family relationships, from cradle to grave. Subsequent chapters concern infants, adolescence, culture, same-sex couples, fostering, chronic pain, child sexual abuse and depression; all from within an attachment-theory framework. Each chapter begins with a review of the concepts of AT which pertain to the theme being examined. The reader is then led through an explanation of characteristic interpersonal patterns and how these can be understood by considering different attachment styles and patterns of interaction. What I found impressive and illuminating was the discussion of theoretical propositions alongside relevant research findings. The research outcomes are then linked with case examples.

John Bowlby is the architect of AT. Johnson and Whiffen suggest that his 1944 paper 'Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home Life' is one of the first family therapy articles. Curious to think now that it was published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.

Bowlby's observations on both animal behaviours and human attachments led to his seminal three-volume work; *Attachment* (1969), *Separation* (1973) and *Loss* (1980). These ideas, which became the foundations of AT, were initially taken up by developmental researchers. Family therapy practitioners and theorists did not do so until the late 1980s. Bowlby stated that 'seeking and maintaining contact with significant others is an innate, primary motivating principle in human beings across the lifespan'. He identified that dependency has become pathologised by our culture. Dependency, Bowlby argued, is an innate part of being human rather than a childhood trait that we outgrow (1988: 5). The authors of *Attachment Processes* therefore restate Mackay's (1996) observation that family therapy has tended to focus on the analysis of power and control whilst nurturance has been overlooked.

Subsequently researchers have begun to explore changes in emotional security during life-cycle changes. A secure attachment implies that there is a secure base from which individuals can explore their world; this is done by relationship interdependency, not separation. Felt security is 'new' language in family therapy, especially if we think of it as being closely related to past events, conscious and unconscious processes and attributed meanings. AT explains that proximity to significant caregivers is the way humans manage strong feelings of fear and anxiety. If we feel close to our attachment figures we are more able to manage strong feelings, if they are inaccessible we can feel distressed. Bowlby viewed emotional distress in close relationships as often being an attempt to make contact with an inaccessible attachment figure.

Some of the older shibboleths of family therapy have been questioned by AT. For example, Hoffman in her seminal book *Foundations of Family Therapy* argues 'dyadic transactions seldom occur; interaction is either triadic or group' (73). AT challenges this with some very powerful research. The chapter 'The First Couple' refers to the mother and her infant. The infant symptoms, such as feeding, sleeping, and behavioural regulation difficulties, while not *apparently* relational, 'commonly reflect difficulties in the relationship between the mother and her infant' (216). This statement may sound a challenge to feminist therapists. However psychoanalytic feminists such as Nancy Chodorow and Sheila Ernst et al. have developed a body of work exploring and examining similar observations and

constructions. We do need to understand the impact of the mother/primary caregiver on the infant's emotional development. This 'first couple' has been relatively slow in being a central determinant to family relationship formation. In *Attachment Processes*, this omission is addressed.

Some chapters incorporate other practitioners' work, such as Herrman's 1992 work with trauma. The chapter 'Attachment-Based Family Therapy for Depressed Adolescents' demonstrates ways family members can repair relationship damage. Using the concept of forgiveness, the authors draw parallels between the attachment repair task and models of trauma recovery. The research on forgiveness is interwoven closely with a case example of a mother apologising to a distressed daughter. This is different from other family work models in that it places the therapist as a central investigator, mediator, translator and interpreter of family relationships and someone who structures intervention to achieve a particular desired outcome. Of course this is what many therapists do, with or without family members present. The authors describe a staged model of therapy informed by attachment theory; mother and daughter have individual sessions with the therapist, and then joint sessions leading the mother into a dialogue which facilitates repair. The chapter articulates how the therapist offers herself as the 'secure base' for therapy to be successful. Therapeutic neutrality, it seems, has been given a fresh challenge.

If there is a criticism, it is that the psychoanalytic roots of AT are not adequately acknowledged, as they are in Clulow (2001). In Bowlby's first volume of his seminal work *Attachment* (1958), he wrote

... as my study of (attachment) theory progressed it was gradually borne in upon me that the field I had set to plough so lightheartedly was no less than the one that Freud had started tilling sixty years earlier, and that it contained all those same rocky excrescences and thorny entanglements that he had encountered and grappled with — love and hate and anxiety and defence, attachment and loss (Preface, xi).

Johnson and Whiffen do not however explore how Bowlby and Freud tilled the same soil, nor how this has been subsumed by later developments and applications of AT.

Here is a text in which one can taste or one can feast. This is just the book that could reach the whole array of family and couple therapists, parent-infant therapists, case managers, family support workers, hos-

pital professionals, maternal and child health nurses, mental health clinicians. That is to say, it's a book for just about anyone who works with the suffering of the human condition — the infants, the elderly, and just about everyone in between.

## References

- Bretherton, I., 1991. The Roots and Growing Points of Attachment Theory. In C. Parkes, J. Stevenson-Hide & P. Marris (Eds), *Attachment Across the Life Cycle*, London, Tavistock/Routledge.
- Bowlby, J., 1944. Forty-four Juvenile Thieves: Their Character and Home Life, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 25: 19–52, 107–127.
- Bowlby, J., 1969. *Attachment and Loss*. Vol 1. *Attachment*, NY, Basic.
- Bowlby, J., 1973. *Attachment and Loss*, Vol 11. *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*, NY, Basic.
- Bowlby, J., 1980. *Attachment and Loss*. Vol 111. *Loss: Sadness and Depression*. NY, Basic.
- Bowlby, J., 1988. *A Secure Base*, NY, Basic.
- Chodorow, N., 1989. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- Clulow, C. (Ed.), 2001. *Adult Attachment and Couple Psychotherapy*, Hove, East Sussex, Brunner-Routledge.
- Ernst, S., 1987. *Living with the Sphinx*, London, The Women's Press.
- Herrman, J., 1992. *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, London, Pandora/HarperCollins.
- Hoffman, L., 1981. *Foundations of Family Therapy*, NY, Basic.
- Mackay S. K., 1996. Nurturance: A Neglected Dimension in Family Therapy with Adolescents, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 22: 489–508, (quoted in Johnson, S. & Whiffen, V. E., *Family Processes*).

Sarah Jones  
Melbourne

## An Introduction to Marriage and Family Therapy.

Lorna L. Hecker and Joseph L. Wetchler (Eds). NY, Haworth, 2003. pp. 625.

Paperback. ISBN 0-7890-0276-0. US \$46.95.

The blurb includes the statements 'easily takes the place of five or six other resources on my bookshelf' and 'what an amazing col-

lection of knowledge ... this book does exactly what an introductory text should do'. Reading this, my interest rose, as I am always on the lookout for introductory material for students which is readable, comprehensive and succinct, compares ideas, situates these in context and includes critique. A big ask, one might say, but not impossible.

The book comprises two parts with numerous chapters within each. Part 1 is entitled 'Theories in Marriage and Family Therapy' and includes the obligatory history, systems theory and cybernetics chapters and various chapters on different schools of family therapy. Part 2 looks at special issues in marriage (sic) and family therapy. This section covers a range of subjects and includes chapters on marriage enrichment and premarital counselling; sexual dysfunction and sex therapy; gender, culture and spirituality; and ethical, legal and professional issues.

Each chapter is written by a different author who has obviously followed a template, a wise idea given there are 20 authors involved. However, despite this, quality varies substantially, with some chapters providing material which is clear, succinct and comprehensive, and others providing good examples of how not to write. With so many authors involved, this book does not develop the sense of flow and comparative analysis that emerges in texts written by one or two authors.

The book is firmly aimed at the US market; for example, the editors provide a list of US graduate programs in family and marriage therapy, and include the AAMFT Code of Ethics; authors use US-specific case-examples. Although this may make the text valuable for students in the United States, it's a detraction for overseas readers. Moreover, the history chapter makes barely a nod to influences outside US borders. Having said this, I should note there are inconsistent attempts to include international material (e.g. in a list of family therapy journals, the *ANZJFT* gets a mention but the *JFT* does not) and the description of narrative therapy and its genesis is definitely idiosyncratic. The fact that Hecker & Wetchler has a strong focus on couple therapy as well as family therapy will be attractive to some readers. In addition, the chapter on legal, ethical and professional issues covers an important area often not highlighted in other texts.

To be a useful introductory text, it has to cover the basics well. I compared its chapters on the history of family therapy, particular schools and family therapy

research with Carr (2001) and Nichols and Schwartz (2004), using the criteria mentioned in the opening paragraph. The history and schools chapters in both Carr and Nichols and Schwartz met the criteria whereas those in this book met few. For example, concepts were not situated in the evolutionary history of family therapy and there was no comparative analysis or critique and, in the history chapter, there was elementary material left out. However, the research chapter in this book is well-written and comprehensive, highlighting dilemmas, examining alternative methodologies and reporting the current status of research. It compared favourably to that in Nichols and Schwartz and was far more comprehensive than that in Carr. Such a comparison is a rough road test but one, nevertheless, which doesn't encourage me to substitute this book for other texts already on my shelf.

### References

- Carr, A., 2001. *Family Therapy: Concepts, Process and Practice*, Chichester, Wiley.  
 Nichols, M. P. & Schwartz, R. C., 2004. *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods* (6th edn.), Boston, Pearson.

**Chris Hunt**

Lecturer, School of Medicine, University of Queensland, private practice, Brisbane

## Experiential Psychotherapy with Couples — A Guide for the Creative Pragmatist.

Rob Fisher. Phoenix, AZ, Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, 2002.

Paperback, pp. 265. ISBN 1-891944-97-5  
 (Alk. Paper). US \$44.95.

In September last year the 25th Australian Family Therapy Conference in Brisbane had as its theme 'Getting it Together: Family Therapy Practice for the Future'. The stated aim of the conference was to make a contribution towards integration by bringing together the field's theoretical and practice wisdom. Rob Fisher's text *Experiential Psychotherapy with Couples* is more than a guide for the creative pragmatist — it is a guide for the *integrated* (dare I use that word *eclectic*) creative pragmatist. Whilst being strongly grounded in the process (experiential and somatic frame of therapy) this very practice-focused guide also privileges the therapeutic relationship and what Daniel

Stern (2004) has called the '*present moment*' in psychotherapy.

In my view, Fisher writes clearly yet eloquently about how to facilitate therapy sessions so that couples experience a significant and transformative encounter in the present moment of therapy — an experiential encounter that can act as a reference point for ongoing change/difference in the relationship. Fisher articulates his approach in a very 'how to' and user-friendly format. It is laced with examples and snippets of couple therapy transcripts. His work is underpinned by principles of nonviolence and mindfulness. It challenges both therapist and clients to achieve and work in a reflective and self-aware space. This space involves working at a different level and pace than that required by ordinary conversational consciousness or problem solving.

Nichols (1987) wrote about the dilemma of how to pay attention not only to the relationship and wider systems, but also to the individual when working with relationships. Fisher provides a way of achieving *bothland* in terms of honouring the intrapsychic and interpersonal arenas of couple experience. Another integration that Fisher's approach achieves is one between experience and meaning making. In this way Fisher is able to incorporate postmodern influences and have them sit alongside key psychodynamic relationship concepts.

In the approach advocated in this text, Fisher sees the role of the couples therapist as a cheerleader to the unfolding of self and experience in the moment by managing consciousness, tracking and contacting experience and the information that it provides. He is careful in his approach to strive for learning from direct experience rather than attempting to achieve a curative experience from catharsis itself. The book clearly sets out the principles and underlying philosophies that underpin the experiential approach and then describes the macro and micro processes involved in experiential couple work. Fisher and his approach to couples counseling challenges the couples therapist to be able to:

- 'track with a soft focus' (receive rather than go after)
- engage with all their humanity
- have a high tolerance for uncertainty
- give up on the notion of client resistance
- be able to hold more than one point of view simultaneously
- adjust their use of self to the needs of clients
- be active and not violent

His three sections address 'Working Experientially with Couples', 'Character Theory and Couple Therapy' and 'Integrating the Experiential Approach with Traditional Theories of Assessment and Practice'.

The experienced reader will recognise much of what Fisher says. It is not so much his ingredients but the mix that makes this a unique and valuable book to have, not on your shelf — but always at hand on your desk. *Experiential Psychotherapy with Couples* is truly a comprehensive and very readable guide for the creative and pragmatic couples therapist.

### References

Nichols, M., 1987. *The Self in the System*, NY, Brunner/Mazel.

Stern, Daniel, 2004. *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, NY, Norton.

**Paul Simmons**

Professional Training Manager,  
Relationships Australia Queensland

## The Practical Practice of Marriage and Family Therapy: Things My Training Supervisor Never Told Me.

Mark Odell & Charles E. Campbell.  
Binghamton, NY, Haworth, 1998.

Soft cover. pp. 276. ISBN number:  
0-7890-0431-3. US \$27.95.

Notwithstanding my nearly 20 years of clinical experience, I found myself enjoying reading this book. For although it is geared to an audience of newly graduated clinicians, much in the book is useful to reflect on and review, no matter how experienced one is, since the issues at stake do not allow for a 'final word', a 'right answer'.

The title clearly and unambiguously introduces us to what the authors want to convey. This is a fair attempt to talk about the nitty-gritty elements of our daily practice in ways that training centres often, and to varying degrees, do not have opportunity and/or inclination to cover in their teachings. This is done in a fairly informal style that is 'matter of fact' and which, I would assume, would be very attractive to a new graduate who might be experiencing a fair dose of anxiety in relation to starting work

in a therapeutic setting without the protection of an official learning title (intern, student on placement).

The areas covered seemed well thought through and useful for practice. They range from personal motivation to do the work, difference with professional practices, getting accustomed to working in the bilingual world of mental health services (where family therapists will need to negotiate tension with the inherently psychiatric language of other mental health practitioners), dealing with documentation and values conflicts (including dual relationships of different sorts), dealing with 'stuckness' and with legal interface, and longer-term issues of avoiding burnout, and becoming a 'master therapist' while still keeping one's head on one's shoulders.

I found myself agreeing with most of what the authors wrote, at the same time wishing that something similar were written by an Australian team. For if there is a critique that *The Practical Practice* needs, it is that its strength is at the same time its weakness. Any practice is necessarily based in the idiosyncrasies of the place and the people that constitute such practice. The more practical a tool wants to be, the more local it will become. This book is no exception: in attempting to be a 'practical practice' written in the context of clinical practice in the United States of America, the authors speak to new graduates who not only have been differently trained, but who also have had to negotiate their anxieties in relation to the context of North American psychotherapeutic practice, including the nightmares of managed care and their licensing practices (which include professional placements as part of their training). The authors speak a language that is soothing to that population, but which might be off-putting for newly graduated therapists who are struggling with our own set of problems (including our interest in maintaining some autonomy of thinking from an ever increasingly dominant — and globalising — discourse of what mental health is and how services should be provided and evaluated). In this sense, I would have preferred the book to articulate some alternative practices to dealing with managed care and the use of DSMIV diagnostics other than just assuming that, in order to survive, a new clinician needs to be able to speak the two languages and accommodate systemic thinking to the mainstream psychiatric talk.

But again, if we accept the idea that we are living in times of increasing globalisation and cultural imperialism, this

might just be a reminder of what is yet to come, and that we all are likely to benefit from reading this book.

**Maria Nichterlein**

Senior Counsellor, La Trobe University,  
Melbourne

## Using Workbooks in Mental Health: Resources in Prevention, Psychotherapy and Rehabilitation for Clinicians and Researchers.

Luciano L'Abate (Ed.). Binghamton, NY, The Haworth Reference Press, 2004.

pp. xxvii + 398. Soft cover. ISBN 0-7890-1593-5. US \$49.95.

Luciano L'Abate has written extensively in the field of family psychology and psychotherapy. He has published a number of handbooks of family psychology, marital interventions and sourcebooks. *Using Workbooks* highlights the potential use of workbooks in rehabilitation, prevention, and psychotherapy.

L'Abate is both editor and one of a number of contributing authors from Italy and the United States. The book is in five sections. The first, written by L'Abate, looks at the possible roles for workbooks in mental health and then explores the current research on workbooks and their effectiveness. It identifies the successes and the challenges that workbooks need to meet in order to fulfil their future role as the 'medicine of psychological interventions'.

Throughout the developed world, health services are struggling to counter the rising levels of morbidity due to mental illness. L'Abate proposes that workbooks can be used to improve both the accessibility of mental health services and the clinical effectiveness of services delivered. Through the use of workbooks and the incorporation of new technology such as the Internet, the possibilities for reaching larger populations for preventive, promotion and early intervention activity are increased. At the individual level, L'Abate argues that treatment from clinicians can be improved through the use of workbooks that provide evidence-based, standardised interventions

that then can be clearly evaluated for effectiveness. L'Abate does not pull any punches when critiquing current talk-based therapies compared with the written word, but he also acknowledges the need for more research into the effectiveness of workbooks.

The second section focuses on the use of workbooks to address a variety of problems, including depression, abusive relationships, substance abuse and working with incarcerated individuals. Some of the chapters provide a good insight into the functioning of the workbook but are light on research, whilst others have a strong research component but leave you wanting to know more about the application. Interestingly the chapter 'Healing the Trauma of Abuse: A Women's Workbook', while not formally researched, provided the most interesting and helpful insights into the functioning of the workbook.

The third section is on couples. The first chapter in this section examines the use of workbooks for marriage preparation and maintenance programs in northern Italy. The context of the development of the programs is presented, and a comprehensive analysis of its effectiveness is provided. The following chapter discusses the use of homework in couple therapy and provides some reviews of recommended workbooks for use with couples. The section concludes with the analysis of one workbook designed to improve intimacy in couples.

The section devoted to families begins with description of a manual for school refusal in adolescents and a review of workbooks and relevant literature on eating disorders. The most compelling chapter contains the evaluation of using workbooks to improve intimacy with couples who are parents of a handicapped child. This chapter is drawn from Milan-systemic work performed in northern Italy.

The concluding section examines the status and future of workbooks in the delivery of mental health. There are definite implications for workbooks in early intervention and prevention programs. L'Abate concludes that the challenges for the use of workbooks will be met through a research agenda.

*Using Workbooks*, while not an easy read, is interesting for clinicians and students who are looking for an introduction to workbooks. It attempts to cover both their development and implementation in different fields of psychotherapy. This is a large task and not always successful, however some of the weaknesses may be a reflection of the need for further research

and development of workbooks. Where this book succeeds is that it introduces the reader to a range of new ideas and solutions to the problems that are facing mental health services today.

**David William Duerden**

Family Therapist & Occupational Therapist,  
InforMH, NSW Health

## The Therapy Triangle: Empowering You with the Knowledge to Heal.

Robert Burkham, 2002. E-book. pp.  
118. US \$15 US.

[www.therapytriangle.com](http://www.therapytriangle.com)

## Emotional Cutoff: Bowen Family Systems Theory Perspectives.

Peter Titelman (Ed.) Binghamton, NY,  
Haworth Clinical Practice Press, 2003.

Soft Cover. pp. 500. ISBN 0 7890 1460 2. US  
\$37.46 (if ordered online from [www.haworthpressinc.com](http://www.haworthpressinc.com))

*The Therapy Triangle* is an e-book written for clients about how to make the most of therapy. It provides a unique description of clients' dilemmas in seeking and undertaking effective therapy, which is useful for clients and therapists alike. The theoretical underpinning is Murray Bowen's model of family systems, which Robert Burkham translates into a clear applicable format.

The book revolves around the central concept of the therapy triangle, where the client hopes the therapist will take their side to fix others. Burkham writes that it 'is natural for clients and professionals to form a therapeutic alliance in opposition to the person that the client wishes to change'. Each chapter describes a hypothetical client and therapist working through family relationship tensions.

As one who has struggled to curb my own programming in over-responsibility, my favourite section of the book was the chapter titled 'The Good, the Bad and the Overly Helpful Therapist'. Of particular interest is the discussion of 'the overly helpful therapist' which parallels the relationship between an overprotective parent and his/her children. I thought that this was an excellent discussion, stimulating

trainee and experienced therapists to reflect on their ideas about what are the crucial credentials for a therapist. Burkham discusses how clients can maintain the benefits of therapy beyond short-term symptom relief, with expansion to explore family of origin patterns. The exploration of the role of medication in the emotional process of therapy is extremely useful.

I was disappointed that while research on therapy outcomes and why people come to therapy is cited, it is not referenced. This seems to assume that the client audience is not concerned about evidence and sources. I think that a book written for clients about what to look for in a therapist and how to play a central role in getting good outcomes from therapy makes for compelling reading for the therapist. I have already started recommending it to motivated clients who have found it useful. Worth a read!

*Emotional Cutoff* is a monumental book which takes one of Bowen's eight theoretical concepts and explores it from multiple angles. While Burkham's e-book is Bowen's thinking simplified, this book is expansive and complex.

The concept of emotional cutoff was used by Murray Bowen to describe 'the process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family' (Bowen, 1978, Titelman: 310) The function of cutoff is to relieve relationship tension, yet 'in the long run the cutoff does not change the emotional patterns that brought about these tensions, so they tend to reoccur in the next generation' (285).

The reader is taken on a rich journey into Bowen's systems thinking through the experiences of therapists writing about themselves in their own families, case examples and reflections on biological and societal processes. It has something for both the novice and experienced systems therapist. Students of Family Systems thinking can gain ready access to the theory through the personal stories of therapists. Those with a thorough understanding of Bowen's clinical applications will be stretched by chapters on cutoff, and the brain, reproduction and emotional cutoff, and Israeli-Palestinian Relations. Some of the case examples provide useful resources for our clients who are grappling with how to reconnect with family members and what are the benefits of doing so. Klever's chapter on 'Marital Functioning and Multi-generational Fusion and Cutoff' and Ferrara's chapter on 'The Continuum of

Emotional Cutoff in Divorce' are must-reads for couple therapists. Other chapters covering abuse and violence add much to the debate on whether power and control dynamics get lost in attempts to place violence in a broader relationship context.

In chapter 15 on child abuse, Walter Howard Smith writes that

readers are cautioned not to interpret a focus on family interaction as decreasing the responsibility of abusing family members for their violent behaviour ... Each of us is responsible for our behaviour, even if it is an aspect of a broader family emotional process (352).

This is a book to dip into at the level that engages each reader, rather than necessarily a book to read from cover to cover. The opening chapters focusing on theory run the risk of overwhelming readers who are unfamiliar with Bowen, so that they give up before reaching the more accessible chapters. It is a book to return to over many years. As I read, I felt that I was being taken on an intensive course in family systems theory, being taught by a diverse and experienced faculty who have been grappling with this theory for decades. I also could see myself, my family and my own patterns of relating under stress written throughout the pages, which prevented this book from becoming just an intellectual exercise. My mind was stretched and my heart was engaged: the measure of an excellent clinical resource!

**Jenny Brown**

The Family Systems Institute,  
30 Grosvenor St, Neutral Bay,  
Sydney, NSW 2089.  
www.thefsi.com.au

## Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory.

Peter Titelman (Ed.) NY, Haworth,  
1998.

Pp. 423. Soft cover. ISBN 0-7890-0469-0.  
US\$39.05.

'Of the making of books there is no end', and to the perpetuation of this enduring truth the Haworth Press notably contributes! Peter Titelman's volume of essays on Bowen's theory in clinical practice pre-dates his *Emotional Cutoff* (reviewed by

Jenny Brown in this issue) but on the whole, his earlier edited compilation *The Therapist's Own Family* (Aronson, 1987) scores over its two successors, because, apart from lively and varied contributions, it contains far less repetition.

The besetting fault of *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, like *Emotional Cutoff*, is that almost every contributor has dutifully ploughed through Bowen's key theoretical concepts, even though Titelman has exhaustively presented them in the first two essays of the volume. The result is a book which is, by my calculation, about twice as long as it needed to be, and very tedious if read from cover to cover. Titelman is an extremely experienced therapist and teacher within the Bowen system, but he is no editor — or else the need for rigorous editing of the whole book is seen as irrelevant because of Haworth's assembly-line method of producing new clinical books: get an editor, assemble contributors, print their contributions virtually unedited for content (but broken up with lots of sub-headings), and treat each chapter as if it were a separate article in a journal.

Having said that, I did find that one way of deciding which contributions to read first was simply to read the first pages of theoretical introduction to each. Those authors who were able to present Bowen's ideas in a fresh way, suggesting that they had really 'made them their own', were the ones that I chose to read first, on the assumption that if they could do this with the theory, then probably their case studies would be worth reading too. This applied to, for example, Bennett I. Tittler's 'Family Systems Treatment of Depression' (227–247) and to Phil Klever's 'Marital Fusion and Differentiation' (119–145).

Despite the many clear and interesting clinical presentations in this book, and although I am personally sympathetic to Bowen's theory and methods, I have to say that I did not find many of the case studies particularly convincing evidence for the *particular* usefulness of the theory. In several cases, the successful outcomes were attributed by the authors to the fact that clients had been encouraged to undertake significant family of origin reconnections, e.g. Tittler's chapter on treating depression, and James B. Smith's 'The Use of Bowen Theory in Clinical Practice with the Elderly' (205–225).

However, to my mind the successful outcomes reported in such papers could equally have been due to other factors: the therapists' 'non-anxious presence' and insistence on 'factual questions designed to defuse emotionality' (a factor stressed by several authors), or the quietly provocative line of questioning that many Bowenians use ('How are you able to get your spouse so upset?' 'What helps you to be less reactive to your differences with each other?' 'How does going along with your husband's abuse affect the pattern?'). This type of questioning shows the clear continuity between the Bowenian tradition, and some more recent therapies based in the strategic use of language to achieve therapeutic leverage.

My other disappointment, I suppose, was that while all the authors proved adept at applying Bowen's concepts to practice, hardly any of them seemed able to think critically about the concepts themselves. In *Emotional Cutoff*, for example, Fran Ackerman (443–475) uses Bowen's terms to describe the Palestinian–Israeli standoff, but fails to achieve any new insight into the conflict by so doing. She does not allow the intractable special features of the 'case' to modify the theory. Similarly in this volume, few of the authors appear able to go beyond Bowen's own limits. This is unfortunate, for Bowen's theory is a fairly comprehensive and thought-provoking one, if unfashionably 'modernistic'. Let's have more of the kind of stretching and challenging of the theory that Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick have done in the past. In particular, the biological concepts in which the theory is rooted need careful examination (for example, the Bowenian parallel between the 'separateness force' that drives cells to reproduce by dividing in two, and the 'separateness force' that impels human beings to individuality of thought within a complex interpersonal system. And when does the wish for 'separateness' cease to be 'healthy' and become the unhealthy 'emotional cut-off'? I am not suggesting these concepts are necessarily misleading or wrong, only that few Bowenians seem prepared to go back to the biological basics and think them through for themselves (Bowen himself referred to biological concepts with minimal referencing, taking them as 'givens').

**Hugh Crago**  
Co-editor, *ANZJFT*

Private Practice, Artarmon and Blackheath,  
NSW