

Independent comment on Audio-visual and Print Materials

Good Question: Solution Oriented Counselling.

Devised by David Axten, Glen Guy
and Roger Lowe

DVD and training manual, \$79.95.

The package, described as a training resource for psychotherapists and counsellors, consists of a 40-minute DVD and 48-page training manual. The manual defines solution oriented counselling as an *umbrella term for integrating ideas and methods from contemporary models including solution focused therapy, solution oriented therapy and possibility therapy*. It also draws quite heavily on narrative techniques such as externalising.

I'm not sure where to start reviewing this package, which reflects a bit how I found the structure of the training manual and the DVD. I would have liked an introduction about how to use the resources at least in the manual, if not on the DVD as well. However, a lecturer wanting to teach solution-oriented counselling would be happy to do the work to determine how best to use this resource, and I think its best target is undergraduate training, new grads or a team of non-specialist counsellors wanting some hints on solution work.

The DVD, which has a rather dramatic artistic trailer/start more akin to a drama than a training resource, has a good structure. It starts with a supervisor and three trainees discussing the trainees' work with three diverse individual clients. The training group's discussion is obviously scripted, and hence doesn't look real, but when the action moves into the client work it is believable, and I imagine very helpful for people not experienced in solution-oriented individual counseling. The three clients, a depressed middle aged female divorcee, a young angry husband who blames others for his hassles with a supervisor at work and a young adolescent boy who doesn't want to be in therapy, are all recognisable client presentations. Applying the solution-oriented approach to these three very different types of clients is a wonderful learning

resource for students wanting to work this way. I had a slight philosophical issue with the trainee not addressing the man's responsibility for his anger, but it is nicely addressed indirectly and pragmatically.

The DVD has pauses that relate to questions, discussion points and exercises outlined in the training manual. The pauses on the DVD are not numbered, which makes easy reckoning with the manual a bit hard, but the learning prompts are very thoughtful and I imagine useful for promoting rich group discussion. The verbatim transcript in the manual is a great resource for the dedicated student.

The training manual has some practical gems — although I didn't find the theoretical structure very coherent. This may come from the drawing together of *what works* from several of the models acknowledged. Having said that, I think the practical suggestions are presented in a non-jargonistic way, and in a simple but not simplistic way. The manual presents four underlying philosophies of solution oriented counseling: Change Oriented, Constructionist, Competency-Based and Collaborative. There are some nice explanations, such as: 'The counsellor's expertise complements that of the client. Clients are experts about their own goals and resources. Counsellors are experts in raising questions which enable clients to identify, clarify, and appreciate their goals and resources'.

There is the usual straw man of a table summarising the difference between problem-oriented approaches and solution-oriented approaches, which should really be titled 'What's Bad about Problem-Oriented Approaches' (e.g. the table does not mention the value of bearing witness or validating the client's experience of the problem, although the DVD does), and 'What's Good about Solution Oriented Approaches' — but it helps draw out the philosophy of the approach.

More helpful is the three practice principles of the approach: Joining, Building and Extending. There are lots of useful questions and some excellent points and a host of effective techniques anyone could use straight away, drawn from solution and narrative approaches. Particularly interesting ideas for Joining

are presented under the subtitle, 'Developing client understanding and control of the counseling process', such as advising clients that they can stop the session at any time, read the counsellor's notes or ask for explanations and information. 'Building' includes example questions under the headings of exceptions, coping or enduring, scaling change, future descriptions, externalising, etc. 'Extending' includes ending sessions and planning desired futures, celebrating and recruiting audiences of change, and reviewing the counseling. Questions under the last title include: 'What has been the most helpful question I've asked? What will you remember most about this counseling?' So, there are heaps of good questions.

And what will I remember most about this resource? Lots of really good questions and in spite of some forced moments in the training team discussion, a really believable application of a practical solutions approach with three very different, but recognisable clients.

Jeff Young

The Bouverie Centre

The Marlborough Family Therapy Basics.

Cooklin, N. Dawson, B. McHugh
and M. Oakley. *The Marlborough
Family Service, London, 2003.*

CD ROM/video and manual.
ISBN 0-9545454-0-0. Price?

The Marlborough Family Service, of the UK National Health Service, is an internationally known pioneering centre that has been at the forefront of developing systemic family therapy intervention models for child protection, schools, ethnic minority communities and a 'day unit' for families in Central London.

Originally published by the Marlborough Centre in 1993, *Family Therapy Basics* by Alan Cooklin, Neil Dawson and Brenda McHugh is the first interactive distance-learning package in family therapy. It was edited and updated in 2003 and is designed to be used by

family therapy trainers in the classroom or workplace and by students or professionals wishing to learn more about family therapy via independent study at home.

Family Therapy Basics is relevant to a broad range of primary health professions. It aims to give the professional insight into the family therapy approach to problems and to find new systemic ways of using existing professional skills to promote change. Special attention is paid to cross-cultural sensitive practice. As the Marlborough Service is child and adolescent focused, most of the case studies present family problems with child or adolescents as identified clients.

The teaching program is presented on CD ROM or video and is accompanied by a concise manual with exercises, key teaching points and additional activities designed for independent reflection. The articulate introduction is presented by John Cleese with commentary by Alan Cooklin, Neil Dawson and Brenda McHugh. Five modules present key areas of systemic practice, including systemic conceptualisation of problems, family assessments and hypotheses, treatment planning and process issues in implementing family therapy.

Realistic clinical scenarios and family interactions are presented to illustrate central learning points and pose dilemmas for the therapist and the viewer. These case studies, filmed by professional actors, provide the opportunity to observe therapeutic choices, family reactions and feedback. The CD Rom offers flexibility in locating and replaying scenes rich in content and process and in reviewing the commentary with remarkable ease.

Module 1

The authors provide an accessible and concise description of family systems thinking. They describe family 'stuckness', occurring when a problem is viewed as disconnected from relationships and located within a family member. A poignant case example is presented involving an adolescent girl from a traditional Indian family who had been exposed to sexual abuse. This illustrates the misunderstandings that can occur when a professional colludes with the family and fails to consider the whole picture in an initial interview. A broader systemic view, taking into account the contexts of relationships, gender, culture, race and developmental stage can help the family

come 'unstuck' and lift the burden of pathology from a single family member.

Module 2

The viewer is encouraged to explore and acknowledge difference, particularly cultural and gender based difference and the potential impact on the relationship between therapist and client. Using the previous case example, the viewer is invited to consider how a therapist can unwittingly act in unhelpful ways if race, culture and gender are not considered. The module is effective in promoting practitioner self-reflexivity in practice.

Module 3

The viewer is asked to move beyond a systemic assessment towards thinking about the use of different therapeutic models within a systemic framework. The professional is challenged to consider each family member's point of view in developing a rationale for a treatment plan. A new family case study provides opportunity to view family members feedback regarding a range of models (individual, marital, child guidance and systemic family therapy).

Module 4

An extensive case study of a family of mixed ethnicity dealing with issues of potential family violence and children's behaviour issues is explored. The viewer is invited to consider the importance of developing systemic hypotheses and the opportunities of creating a context in which alternate explanations are explored and new solutions are possible.

A scene of home-based interaction provides the observation of family processes and the identification of repeated patterns or 'dances' that tend to leave the family stuck with unhelpful solutions. Choices of intervention are modeled by the therapist, and the viewer is invited to explore the potential impacts of each.

Module 5

The last module focuses on diversity in family forms, including lone parent family, extended families, remarried families, and gay and lesbian families. A case study provides a snapshot of a separated/blended family in therapy sessions 12 years apart in time. This provides an opportunity to view repeated patterns of interaction over the family's developmental stages. This module also explores the ethical issue of adolescent client's rights to terminate the sessions despite his family distress.

Overall, cultural and gender context issues presented in this pack are particularly relevant to Western multicultural societies such as Australia. The case studies provide rich examples of family systems and interaction. The authors present their points in an open and respectful manner that allows the professional to explore his or her own position and develop confidence in applying family systems framework.

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Education and Training in Solution-Focused Therapy.

Thorana S, Nelson (Ed.),
Binghamton, NY, Haworth, 2005,
pp. 283.

Soft. ISBN-13: 978-0-7890-2928-7.

US \$24.95.

Solution-focused therapy encourages people to look for the exceptions. However, apart from a glossy full-colour cover and some reviews in the front of the book, there is no difference between the book *Education and Training in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy* and the IFTA *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, Volume 16, Numbers 1-2, 2005. The editions were co-published simultaneously, and were both edited, albeit lightly, by Thorana S. Nelson, Ph.D. The editor reveals in her introduction that apart from minor corrections of grammar and spelling, all of the authors were given the responsibility for their own pieces. Some of the works are even non-original contributions whose creator is either undisclosed or unknown.

The book is not meant to be a treatise on how to do solution-focused brief therapy, but is intended to provide some ideas of how to train others to use the method. The articles, essays, exercises, reflections, supervision strategies, and games cover a wide range of client problems, and are written by a diverse range of international contributors, from students to founders of the system.

I particularly liked Canadian Lance Taylor's piece, 'A Thumbnail Map for Solution-Focused Brief Therapy'. He details a range of ways to use some of the

basic strategies of the system, such as the miracle question, scaling, and goal setting. Eric McCollum's brief article, entitled 'Eat Just One Raisin', is an interesting exploration of how to use your senses. Insoo Kim Berg's 'The State of Miracles in Relationships' provides ways for workshop participants to transfer the skills they have learned for clients to their personal family and work situations. Dan Gallagher's chapter provides readers with some interesting ideas of how to use videotapes when they teach.

The night after I finished reading the book, as I placed my head on my pillow, I wondered: What would move this book from a ranking of 7.5 to 8 out of 10? Suppose a miracle happened while I was asleep, so that when I awoke *Education and Training in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy* had metamorphosed into an even better book — how would I know?

Well, one sign would be that the book would include ideas of what to do when your clients or students do not cooperate or collaborate when you are doing therapy or providing training. This is minimally addressed in the article by Stilts and Thomas, but I am not convinced that their strategy of acting curious would actually convert a dissenter.

On the whole, the book is an interesting melange of ideas for providing training of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy. Its value to therapists outside of the system would be in finding a trick or two they could use in their own workshop presentations or supervision.

Rick Whiteside
Solutions un-Limited

Journal of GLBT Family Studies: Innovations in Theory, Research and Practice.

Harrington Park Press, an imprint
of The Haworth Press, Inc. Editor
Jerry Bigner.

Date of first publication, 2004.

(Available online at:
<http://www.HaworthPress.com/web/GLBTF>)

The Journal of GLBT Family Studies: Innovations in Theory, Research and Practice for the first time brings a focus on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender family

issues into one scholarly journal. Its production is a reflection of significant development and expanding literature in this field of inquiry, particularly over the past 10 to 15 years. This peer-reviewed journal is published four times a year and should appeal to clinicians and researchers from a wide range of disciplines including family therapy, psychotherapy, psychology and sociology.

The editor, Jerry Bigner, is well known in the field, having published for some years on matters regarding same sex couples, same sex marriage and same sex parenting. He has also assembled an impressive editorial board with several members who have published extensively on lesbian and gay families and are recognised internationally as leaders in research and commentary on these matters.

Now into its second year, the journal offers the opportunity for critique, discussion and debate about diverse matters affecting GLBT persons and their families, ranging from GLBT young people's experience of family to GLBT adults forming their own families. Authors raise important issues for consideration around disclosure of sexual orientation, same sex parenting and marriage, couple and family relationships and models for clinical practice. Articles address many of the challenges facing not only GLBT individuals, but society, more generally around matters of GLBT social and legal rights, law reform and issues that impact on family formation, family life and family function. The inclusion of bisexual and transgender family matters is particularly noteworthy, as this body of literature is less well developed.

This journal is a welcome addition to the field, filling a void left by mainstream couple and family journals where in the past articles that focus on GLBT matters have been underrepresented. This can also be said of our own *ANZJFT* where there has been a paucity of GLBT content. As recently as 2004, the first-ever articles of this nature appeared in the *ANZJFT*, one on working with lesbian couples by Liz Telford and the other about lesbian-parented families by Amaryll Perlesz and Ruth McNair. This is despite many known GLBT clinical and research activities that have been undertaken or are currently underway in Australia. Hopefully, this new journal will provide incentive to those family therapists and other clinicians to take the first step toward publishing their

own work with GLBT individuals and their families.

While the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* makes an important contribution to the field of couple and family relationships, potentially the readership of such a specialised journal may be limited to those already aware and working with GLBT families. This journal does not replace the need for a heightened profile of GLBT family matters in mainstream journals. Special issues in mainstream couple and family journals that invite contribution about work and research with GLBT persons and their families would assist in this endeavour. I would encourage GLBT family clinicians and researchers to also continue to submit their work to mainstream journals for publication to ensure wide distribution, readership and debate.

In sum, the *Journal of GLBT Family Issues* is a much-needed resource that will stimulate scholarly debate and critique on GLBT family matters. It will be of interest to clinicians and researchers interested in and those working with these families. Not only does this provide a valuable resource for those working in the field but also provides an opportunity to document GLBT family lives, their stories and experiences.

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Women Who Perpetrate Relationship Violence: Moving Beyond Political Correctness.

Frederick P. Buttell and Michelle
Mohr Carney (Eds). Binghamton,
NY, Haworth, 2006.

Soft. pp xvii + 130. ISBN-13: 978-0-7890-3131-0; ISBN-10: 0-7890-3131-0.

US\$14.95. This book has been co-published
simultaneously as *Journal of Offender
Rehabilitation*, Volume 41, No. 4, 2005.

This book comprises a small collection of research articles investigating different aspects of female perpetrated domestic violence (DV). A key theme of the book is that 'political correctness' (or a feminist-dominated perspective of DV) has restricted our knowledge of DV in general and female perpetrated DV specifically.

The provocative subtitle of this book ('Moving beyond political correctness') will raise the ire of some and the interest of others — but of course this is what it is meant to do.

First cab off the rank in the book, and to establish and carve out the field, is a review of the literature pertaining to female-perpetrated DV. According to the authors (Dutton and colleagues) this literature shows that *females are as equally abusive as males in intimate relationships and that female perpetrated DV is a widespread public health issue*. Australian readers of this journal working in the front line of community and DV services will no doubt question these assertions, given that the overwhelming number of their clients will be female victims of male-perpetuated violence.

The argument that females are as equally abusive as males in intimate relationships is based mainly on the findings from a large number of empirical studies that have used a scale called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The CTS asks questions about how respondents resolve disagreements with their partners. These answers can be classified into categories such as 'reasoning', 'verbal aggression' and 'physical aggression'. Now the remarkable and surprising finding that has consistently emerged from literally hundreds of studies using the CTS is that, in representative samples, males and females report similar levels of physical aggression towards their partners.

Lest readers think that these findings are a quirk of the CTS or funny American samples, similar findings have emerged in Australia. In a very methodical and scholarly analysis of data drawn from Australian International Social Science Survey (1996/97) Heady and colleagues found that men (5.7%) were equally (no statistical difference at 0.05 alpha) as likely to report being assaulted by their partners as women (3.7%). Second, and equally as important, they found that violence runs in couples — in over 50% of partnerships where violence had occurred both partners struck each other.

These DV results are counterintuitive and are incongruent with the dominant feminist paradigm which views DV as being caused by a society controlled by patriarchal structures. Nearly by definition only men can commit DV, and for example the Australian government's recent multi-million dollar DV advertising campaign *exclusively* featured men as the

perpetrators of DV. The results, however, are also at odds with data from national crime victim surveys and hospital admission records, which consistently show much higher rates of male as opposed to female perpetrated DV. And so it is not surprising that studies that produce results that appear to indicate approximately equal rates of male and female DV are hotly debated.

What to make of it all is exactly what a reader might be hoping for in a review of this literature. Unfortunately, in this first article of the book, really only one side of the case is presented and too little critical analysis is brought to bear on this complex topic. To pose some simple questions. Is a man pushing a woman the same as a woman pushing a man in terms of the potential for harm, the level of force, the fear it might provoke in the victim and the context in which the act occurs? Are all acts of physical aggression, no matter how minor, instances of DV? Should acts of physical aggression which are not considered as DV by either the perpetrator or victim be considered DV? Is sexual aggression a type of physical aggression, and if so should this be included in survey instruments?

One reason that female-perpetrated DV is perhaps more controversial in the US compared with Australia is that in the US large numbers of women are now being arrested for DV and sentenced to what are termed 'Batterer Intervention Programs' (BIPs). A dramatic increase in female arrests for DV occurred in the US following the introduction of mandatory police arrest policies for DV. An unintended and unforeseen consequence of this removal of police discretion is that in some places up to one quarter of all arrests for DV are female. In *Women who Perpetrate Relationship Violence*, three of the remaining four articles use samples of women drawn from BIPs to investigate different aspects of female perpetrators of DV.

In the first empirical study we learn (among other things) that court-ordered-into-treatment female perpetrators of DV are excessively dependent on their intimate partners. This is a not an altogether unsurprising finding, but in the second study using a similar sample, female perpetrators of DV were found to be more histrionic, narcissistic and compulsive, but less dependent than their male equivalents. It is hard to know quite what to make of these studies, because the results are highly specific to the samples involved and it is

very unclear to what populations they can be generalised.

The final article is the best in the book. The researchers (Renauer and Henning) examine the question of who is more likely to recidivate — male or female DV offenders involved with the criminal justice system. In gathering evidence for this question, the researchers identified that many of the women enrolled in BIPs were arrested for acts of self-defence, were unlikely to recidivate and were most likely to appear as future victims of DV rather than as offenders. This sort of contextualising information is exactly what is required to better conceptualise female-perpetrated DV and how we should respond to it.

From a methodological perspective, the empirical studies overall appear to be sound but are unsophisticated. For Australian readers, the findings possibly will not be of great relevance. Practitioners will find very little information helpful for treating female perpetrators of DV, because only very basic and cursory descriptions of the BIPs are provided in the book. From a research perspective, it is unlikely that the results from samples of US women arrested under mandatory DV legislation will generalise to the Australian or New Zealand context, because as far the author is aware, large numbers of our women are not being arrested for DV. But for those in the front line of DV research and advocacy, the book is relatively inexpensive and is probably a worthwhile addition, if only as a counterbalance, to your existing library of DV materials.

I remain unconvinced that females are as equally abusive as males in intimate relationships or that female-perpetrated DV is a widespread public health issue. But reading the book prompted me to think deeper and become a bit better educated about why I hold the views I do. In addition, the book provides a fascinating insight around the translation of theoretical paradigms through the criminal justice system across to the helping professions. I am sure that many helping professionals in the US, including the social workers who contributed to this book, would not have seen themselves working in this field, but then again I would not have predicted ever writing a book review on this topic either.

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