

The complexity of the mind

Change your brain, change your life

Dr Daniel G. Amen
Piatkus 2009
ISBN 978-0749941918
£12.99

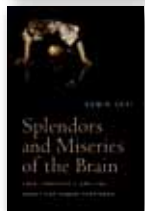
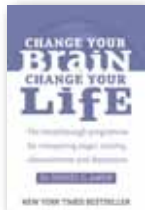
Splendours and miseries of the brain

Semir Zeki
Wiley Blackwell 2008
ISBN 978-1405185578
£16.99

Brain attachment and personality

Susan Hart
Karnac 2008
ISBN 978-1855755888
£29.99

Reviewed by Angela Cooper



Amen, a clinical neuroscientist and psychiatrist, argues that behavioural problems such as anxiety, fear, depression and violence have a biological basis and need treating from this angle. Thus he explores physical changes to the brain rather than psychological history. He prescribes the use of medication (reviewed to monitor refunctioning of the brain) often in conjunction with psychotherapy against the background of understanding and explaining what is happening in the brain using SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography) as a visual illustration of brain activity. Amen emphasises the importance of medication in treatment and his frustration that it is often viewed in a negative light. He explores inter-generational issues where tension is passed on with psychological and biological effects and controversially recommends medication such as Prozac for young children.

There is something of a 'salesman's pitch' in the presentation of this book but Amen writes well and does acknowledge where psychotherapy has good results. His medical notes in the closing summaries are excellent, and the overall layout very clear. He takes five of the brain systems – with a chapter to explain each one. Each chapter is then followed by another offering practical suggestions to improve functioning in that area. On first appearance this is a less technical book than the others, but the reference and bibliography sections are actually more detailed than Zeki's.

It is also a compassionate book that does not shirk from addressing serious problems and encouraging individual responsibility to deal with them.

On finding the right practitioner Amen advises 'look for a person who is open-minded, up to date and willing to try new things'. We do clients a disservice by ignoring this vital area and not challenging our assumptions on medication and the biological basis behind disorders. This is an informative book, aimed at the layperson but also of benefit to the counsellor looking for an introduction to neuroscience.

Appropriately Zeki's book has a beautiful and enigmatic cover and title. The author, a visual neurobiologist, explores the synthetic concept which is the highest of three levels of learning and is 'formed by the brain in its quest for knowledge'. This level of learning is never satisfied, the person always striving to achieve more. Zeki believes creative outlets are the routes taken to try and alleviate the sense of frustration at the inability to achieve perfection.

The central argument is that whilst we aim for perfection it is unattainable. Hence, ambiguity and unfinished works in painting and writing leave something to the individual imagination without the disappointment of reality in the completion. Zeki distinguishes between the 'unfinished' in terms of social expectations at the time as opposed to 'complete' in terms of how the brain interprets it. The unfinished is an implicit acknowledgement 'of the difficulty of realizing the brain concept'.

Zeki explores the

unachievable through the works of artists and writers, concluding with Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents*. In the latter, he looks at Freud's writing through a neurobiological analysis. Because the brain develops to such a different extent between individuals, instinctive demands vary greatly. Society places major restrictions on what would otherwise be the essential need and that is where concepts like beauty and imagination come in. They allow a connection with the synthetic concept formulated by the brain and in the brain, unhindered by the restrictions of the external world. Ultimately creativity is 'the brain's way of making up for its shortcomings'.

Surprisingly there is no reference section with only a few pages of notes and these are often not clearly numbered in the relevant chapters. The author cites either his own research or draws on classical and philosophical works in support of arguments. For those new to the subject of neuroscience some of the early chapters are challenging, (a brief summary at the end of each chapter would help), although counsellors with a background both in neuroscience and an interest in the arts will find it a fascinating read.

If you want to understand if shame is a natural state for humans, if males are naturally monogamous, why someone can kill in cold blood, whether the father is an essential part of a son's development, how early we can remember memories, then Hart's book is for you. Of the three books this is the most detailed and best referenced. Hart,

a psychologist, aims to 'bring together theories concerning the relationship between brain functions, behaviour and personality by exploring the way the brain matures in close interaction with the social and physical environment' and 'the dynamic interaction between brain development and the importance of relationships and attachment for this development process'. In achieving this, she provides impressively convincing conclusions, not least to the fundamental question she poses on nature versus nurture. She writes 'the genes determine what properties are available – the hand that one was dealt, so to speak – but experience determines how the hand is played'.

Ironically for the most academic of the three books, this carefully referenced contribution draws the reader closer to the spiritual element of human development. This is surprising, because whilst Hart is open about how little we know about brain development and relationships she also often provides very clear answers from complicated theories. This is a book for those who already have some knowledge in neuroscience. Overall any criticisms are minor ones but these are nothing when set against the wealth of information that each book provides. Comparison is difficult as they are so different and aimed at a different audience. I was left amazed by the complexity of the human mind and the excitement of what we are just beginning to understand about its development.

Angela Cooper is a BACP Senior Accredited Supervisor (Individuals and Groups)

Sex in couple therapy

Sex, attachment and couple psychotherapy: psychoanalytic perspectives

Christopher Clulow (ed)
Karnac 2009, £20.99
ISBN 978-1855755581

Reviewed by Eileen Aird



This collection of essays from different theoretical perspectives will be invaluable to anyone working within the field of psychoanalytic couple psychotherapy. As Peter Fonagy points out in his foreword, there has been surprisingly little work from a psychoanalytic perspective published on the significance of sex in relationship therapy.

In his comprehensive and elegant introduction, Clulow emphasises the two poles of Freudian drive theory and relational psychoanalysis and the need to understand the interconnection of sexual experience and attachment patterns. Brett Kahr, in a scholarly but quietly humorous chapter, explores the reasons why therapists often don't ask directly about sex. His fascinating historical account of the profession's reaction to narratives of sex, from the reception of Freud's work onwards, leads to his argument that we need to develop 'sexpertise' – which has nothing to do with our own proficiency as lovers!

I found Warren Colman's essay 'What do we mean by sex?' very illuminating

in its concentration on metaphorical and symbolic meanings rather than the biological bedrock. Like other contributors, he sees the sexual engagement as mirroring other aspects of the relationship. He offers a brilliant reading of Melanie Klein's introduction of 'an entirely new idea of a sort of liminal area between mind and body, where body is in the process of becoming mind'.

Several contributors explore countertransferences as an insight into conscious and unconscious attitudes towards, and phantasies about, sex. In 'Sexual dread and the therapist's desire', Susanna Abse discusses projections about sexual feelings, especially of dread, revulsion and anxiety, and the resulting countertransference reactions.

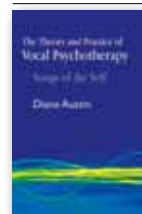
The book includes valuable chapters on sexual perversion and on intimacy in later life. Clinical illustrations are abundant and David Hewison's chapter, 'Power versus love in sadomasochistic couple relationships', includes an extended analysis of Lars von Trier's film *Breaking the Waves*. However the editor's disingenuous recognition that the exclusion of any work on same sex relationships is a serious limitation of the book is accurate. Susie Orbach is the only contributor to make even a brief comment on this area. There is no shortage of experienced clinicians and theoreticians who could have been commissioned to write such a chapter. Hopefully this omission will be corrected in a later edition. Eileen Aird is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and supervisor

The healing power of music

The theory and practice of vocal psychotherapy: songs of the self

Diane Austin
Jessica Kingsley 2009
ISBN 978-1843108788,
£22.50

Reviewed by Gillian Ingram



Diane Austin has a background in theatre and music. She began a Jungian analysis when she was 21 and in 2003 founded the Music Psychotherapy Centre in New York. Over 20 years she developed her own highly sophisticated brand of music therapy, using breath, sounds, vocal improvisation, songs, the playing of instruments as well as dialogue with the client. Through her many case examples she is convincing in her claim that 'Singing and sounding ... access to feelings, memories and sensations so that splits (mind-body, thinking and feeling, conscious and unconscious) can be healed and clients can achieve a more complete sense of self' (p132). Music, lyrics and the therapeutic relationship are the container for in-depth processing to occur.

The first part of the book deals with the theoretical foundations of her work. She references Winnicott, Fairbairn, Balint, Kohut, Maroda, Ferenczi, Searles and Ogden, as well as the

Intersubjective School. She starts from the crucial nature of 'The Voice' in all of us, how the ear is formed by our first four and a half months in the womb and how the voice is a primary source of connection between mother and child. In therapy, singing creates vibrations that nurture the body, melt away defences and release feelings hitherto repressed and split off. Projections into instruments and music and not the therapist quickly facilitate trust and the falling away of defences. The process of finding one's voice is a metaphor for finding one's self. She is particularly instructive on the use of the countertransference, using the self as an instrument in itself.

In the second half of the book she addresses technique: starting the work, using breathing to settle a client, dealing creatively with 'resistance' and how to develop 'layers of listening' in such a way that clients have never been heard so fully before. She describes 'vocal holding techniques' which range from breathing exercises to the use of chords in combination with the therapist's voice in order to create a holding environment which can facilitate improvised singing. In sequence, the stages are: singing in unison (merging); harmonising (together but separate); singing back the client's own melodic line (mirroring); finally providing a 'ground base' (attachment from which to explore) where the therapist sings the tone or root of the chords. This technique is particularly useful with severely abused, disassociated clients who missed out on the primary source of connection

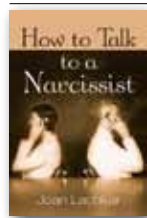
between mother and child.

Vocal Psychotherapy as practised by Austin is clearly effective and powerful. However, without being able to hear the clinical examples and only having the written process recording to go on, these examples occasionally read as thin and sentimental. I am sure the actual experience for client and therapist is more substantial, and maybe having an attached CD would dispel this illusion. Also, how far a clinician who is not also a highly skilled musician could practise at Austin's level is open to question. The book is a *cri de coeur* for clinicians to embark on a 'journey requiring no less than everything' but without her particular skills most therapists would find it difficult to achieve such passion and expertise in this particular modality. They would also have to go to the USA to receive the training. *Gillian Ingram is a psychodynamic counsellor and supervisor*

Working with the narcissistic wound

How to talk to a narcissist

Joan Lachkar
Routledge 2008, £26.95
ISBN 978-0415958554
Reviewed by Rosalind Hewitt



Drawing on existing theory and the American author's new approach 'empathology' – previously known as empathy

– this book claims to be both a self-help and practitioner manual for conducting effective communication with eight narcissistic personality types: pathological, antisocial, malignant, depressive, obsessive-compulsive, passive-aggressive, the artist and cross-cultural narcissist. From a psychodynamic perspective Lachkar discusses each type's characteristics and behaviour and the partners they tend to attract. For example, she states that 'pathologicals' share the materialism, craving for fame, power and adulation supposedly common to all narcissists, but are specifically wracked by unresolved Oedipal issues. Their partners are likely to be borderline personality types with abandonment issues. By contrast, the workaholic obsessive-compulsives with their persecutory superego form attachments with the dependent, disorganised and sexually flamboyant.

Yet despite the confident analysis, since each type may merge into another and other personality disorders, such identification could be challenging, to say the least. Nonetheless, Lachkar asserts that each is distinguishable and treatable if responses are tailored to their individual 'v-spot', her term for the narcissistic wound that originated in childhood and which limits these individuals' capacity for rational behaviour and the ability to learn from experience.

However, her argument is not helped by the illustrative examples from counselling sessions – actual or fictional is not made clear. Typically, these record a highly directive, interpretative therapist working with the most biddable of clients. Even so the speed with which the

latter move from various negative or confrontational states to self-awareness and enthusiastic resolve to change – comprising scarcely a page or two of dialogue – is surprising. Moreover, though the author insists that directness, waiting and patience, diplomacy and negotiation and strategy are key to effective communication, the practical exposition of these often appears simplistic and the lecturing tone is at odds with the therapeutic process and the empathology she espouses. This book is very readable and rich in psychoanalytic theory, description, personal anecdotes and homilies, but falls disappointingly short of the promise of its title. *Rosalind Hewitt is a psychotherapist and author*

Using film in therapy

Movie therapy: how it changes lives

Bernie Wooder
Rideau Lakes Publishing
2008, £10
ISBN 978-0956075109
Reviewed by Paula Hall



Fantastic, thought provoking, a must-read! Forgive me, but surely a review of *Movie Therapy* should start with some bold enticements. This is definitely a thought-provoking book which I'm pleased to have read. It offers a unique way of working with clients, which could be hugely

beneficial to some and subtly shift blocks in others.

The author, a therapist and movie buff, presents a convincing argument, supported by in-depth case studies, of how movie therapy can be integrated into a sound therapeutic practice. He explains how moments from movies, the issues within them and the relationship between characters, can help clients to quickly identify the feelings, and later the reasons, for unconscious unhappiness. He continues that a movie scene can be a powerful catalyst for unconscious, repressed emotions and memories and can be used as an aid to healing.

Through the detailed case studies of eight clients, he demonstrates how particular films have helped clients work through specific issues. In some cases the client has recalled a film they've seen and he asks about which scenes particularly moved them and why, and then works with this interpretation. In other cases he 'prescribes' a film to be watched as homework or brings one into the office to watch together.

However the film is introduced, the goal is to identify key emotional moments within the client, explore and understand the underlying feelings and then continue to work with the identified scene to reduce emotional affect. He may then

work with the client to identify another scene or film that will move the client on their journey.

The author's style of therapy and client interaction differs from my own, which I struggled with in places. I would also have liked more recommendations of films that might fit with particular issues. But in spite of this, I could definitely recognise the benefit of film, especially with clients who are visually motivated, who struggle to put emotions into words, or who use intellectualisation as a defence mechanism. I could also see movie therapy as being particularly beneficial when working with young people.

As a film fanatic, the author clearly has an advantage over the average therapist. He can quickly identify with both the narrative and the character the client brings and is able to prescribe appropriate further viewing. Other therapists might need to rent and watch suggested films between sessions to make full use of the client's interpretation.

As an additional tool in a therapist's toolbox, movie therapy is excellent – especially if you already enjoy films. But as with all interventions, if it doesn't fit the therapist, it may feel clumsy and incongruent. *Paula Hall is a UKCP registered and BACP accredited sexual and relationship psychotherapist*

Relational selves

The emergent self: an existential-gestalt approach

Peter Philippson
Karnac 2009, £16.99
ISBN 978-1855755253

Reviewed by Anne Gilbert



Reading this book is like embarking on a magical mystery tour through diverse landscapes including physics, philosophy, evolutionary theory, neuropsychology and gestalt psychotherapy to name but a few.

Philippson's aim is to explore the notion of self from research evidence and contemplate its implications for psychotherapy. His view (similar to gestalt theory of self) is that the self is not a fixed and static core, but rather something that emerges out of the field, and is co-created; so my 'self' only exists in relation to the 'other' and the environment around me. The boundary between self and other can be used as a way to explore and deepen contact between two people or used defensively to keep someone trapped in set ways

of behaving that may become self-defeating. Philippson believes we choose a certain amount of continuity from the options available to our relational selves in order to keep chaos at bay and reduce our anxiety levels.

The book is short, divided into six chapters organised to reflect the process of the emergence of self, through relationship and boundaries, to endings, posing the question of whether anything of the self continues after death. I particularly enjoyed the 'Chaos, process and structure' chapter exploring neurosis and psychosis.

Each chapter consists of an exploration of theory, followed by linkages with the philosophical outlook inherent in the theory, and ending with clinical vignettes linking the exploration to psychotherapy practice. The case studies illustrate very diverse ways of working with clients from a gestalt perspective and enhance the theoretical underpinnings.

This is an elegantly written book but my one criticism is the language is so dense and academic I struggled to read sections, even though I was fascinated by the subject matter. Yet, overall, the book makes a valuable contribution to the field for therapists of whatever modality, including students in training. *Anne Gilbert is a gestalt psychotherapist*

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