

Reviews

From Anxiety to Meltdown: How Individuals on the Autism Spectrum Deal with Anxiety, Experience Meltdowns, Manifest Tantrums, and How You Can Intervene Effectively

Deborah Lipsky

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011, £13.99, pb, 240 pp.

ISBN: 9781849058438

In recent years there has been a glut of publications on autism outside of mainstream medical literature. These have included carers' accounts and personal narratives. First-person accounts of Asperger syndrome seek to provide an alternative narrative to 'deficient focused' medical accounts. Perspectives are reversed in these texts. The persons with autism describe tentatively, but with increasing confidence, how they see both themselves and the 'neurotypical' world they find themselves in. In these books the exotic is made ordinary and understandable, and they help diminish the stereotype of the 'autist' (their preferred term) as the 'other', which is often the stance of other people writing about people with autism.

Deborah Lipsky represents the best of this tradition of 'neurodiversity' in her blunt, sometimes wry, exploration of anxiety, which she believes is central to the autistic state. She strips away the veneer from habitual beliefs and assumptions about autism. The book reflects its practical roots in a training manual on management of 'meltdowns'. She provides realistic appraisal as well as practical advice in managing anxiety. Her pragmatic account is far removed from more typical narratives of disability with their focus on transformation and redemption. Her triumphs are small, her assessments shrewd, and her reflections often self-deprecatory. There is vein of healthy humour leavening some very real distress and bewilderment.

She is at her more secure in the experiential explorations of her own anxiety and those of other people with autism. She describes at length her need for 'scripts' in every situation, the need for predictability and accountability. The apparent slippage in the real world which to her countenances injustices and condones irregularity leaves her nonplussed.

It is when she delves into the jargon of neurobiology that she falters. To the medical profession this is a closed world with its own discourse and its own scripts, one which does not lend itself to easy translation. This detour aside, the book's strength is in formulating strategies to identify triggers for anxiety and evolving solutions.

Robust copy-editing may have avoided repetitions throughout. Despite this, this book is of value to people with autism, their carers and professionals. If the asides on Cold War politics or the far-out evolutionary theories about an 'autistic super-race' leave you bemused, hang in there, for the book delivers, plumbing hidden depths in both showing and telling.

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Brief Dynamic Interpersonal Therapy: A Clinician's Guide

Alessandra Lemma, Mary Target & Peter Fonagy
Oxford University Press, 2011, £19.99, pb, 288 pp.
ISBN: 9780199602452

The first thing that struck me about this book was the title. Was this a new take on interpersonal therapy? This was made clear within the first page of the preface, with the short answer being 'no'. Whereas the focus of dynamic interpersonal therapy is on relationships in the present, it aims to facilitate understanding of these in the context of past experiences using a psychodynamic paradigm.

Dynamic interpersonal therapy is not 'psychoanalysis-lite', and neither does it pretend to be. Instead, it is a semi-structured, focused psychotherapy designed for treatment of mood disorders. Although 'brief' is not included in the name of the therapy, it is reflected in the 16-session structure. This aims to provide an 'interpersonal affective focus', with a view to using this as a foundation for understanding current difficulties, before dedicating the final sessions to the ending of therapy. Self-rating scales are used at the start of each session, both to track change and to aid reflection of current difficulties.

The book is easy to read and – as well as a detailed description of dynamic interpersonal therapy – provides an *aide mémoire* for basic psychodynamic theory, which ensures that it does not alienate readers with jargon. It consists of 11 well-structured chapters, which take the reader from considering and assessing suitability for dynamic interpersonal therapy, to the initial phases and formulation, through the middle part of the therapy (including techniques and working within the transference), and finishing aptly with the ending phase. Diagrams are used to aid understanding of concepts and clinical examples illustrate the application of the techniques. There is also a helpful chapter entitled 'When things go wrong', which addresses useful learning points that transcend the remit of dynamic interpersonal therapy.

As well as being a well-written manual for the dynamic interpersonal therapy training course, this book is also likely to stimulate interest among both psychotherapists and general adult psychiatrists with a penchant for psychodynamic practice. And because dynamic interpersonal therapy has been selected as the brief psychodynamic protocol that will be provided nationally in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, it is certainly something worth learning more about.

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Best Practices in Medical Teaching

Stephen M. Stahl & Richard L. Davis
Cambridge University Press, 2011, £27.99, pb, 192 pp.
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This book sets out to consider whether the focus of medical education should be the content of education, the medical