

Aaron T. Beck. By MARJORIE E. WEISHAAR. London: Sage. 1993. 180 pp. £9.95 (pb).

Aaron Beck is known to psychiatrists as the creator of the cognitive theory of depression and of the widely-used Beck Depression Inventory, and for demonstrating the relationship between hopelessness and suicide. This book provides an overview of his life, his theoretical and practical innovations, and a discussion of some criticisms of his work.

Beck comes across as a strong character with a talent for creative original thought. The section about his life illustrates George Kelly's idea that "a psychological theory is no good as long as it is about other people". There are repeated references to Beck's blood phobia, speech anxiety and his own experiences of depressive ideation in the throes of hepatitis. It appears that at least some of his motivation in developing a testable theory of depression was a wish to prove the psychoanalytical establishment wrong, reflecting a rebellious trait which appeared in other areas of his life.

This book was without doubt written by someone with an excellent grasp of the terminology, and the style unfortunately suffers in comparison with Beck's own reader-friendly accounts of his work. The section on his theoretical contributions and rebuttals of criticisms are detailed and comprehensive. As a result, despite the apparent value of a full review of his theories, I feel it would be of little value as a tool for learning about Beck's works or their practical application. However, it could be a useful reference for those already versed in Beck's works who are looking for information about the man, the breadth of his interests, or for refutations of his detractors.

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Play Therapy with Children: A Practitioner's Guide. By SUE JENNINGS. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific. 1993. 212 pp. £17.99.

Referrals to child and family mental health clinics seem in general to be increasing as there are more distressed and troubled children who are seen as in need of help. Except in certain favoured settings, the cry is often "someone should to something", but who is there? Play therapy is increasingly seen as an option, but there are few experienced therapists. This book provides a good place to start if someone feels brave enough to try, although the stress given to the need for good regular supervision must be endorsed.

The book opens with an interesting review of child development theories, followed by chapters on play. Play is classified into embodiment and sensory, projective, and role and dramatic. There may be semantic

difficulties, but I did not feel the complete richness of play was captured because of the emphasis on the use of play as a therapeutic tool. The discussion of play therapy technique and the resources needed will be very helpful. I do, however, have some concerns about the emphasis on body work. I would urge caution where the therapist is working one-to-one with a child, given the extent of abuse in the client group and the risk of touching crossing appropriate boundaries. Perhaps body work should be reserved for group sessions. The chapter on diagnosis and assessment is limited, as it only really addresses assessment of the child's capacity to use play therapy appropriately, but perhaps this is correct, with overall assessment more properly being done by the referrer. The risk of therapy becoming a prolonged investigation in abuse cases is considered.

This is a useful addition to the growing literature on play therapy, but we must all agree with the author in her claim that "all play, though playful, is also a very serious activity and needs to be taken seriously".

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Play Therapy Techniques. Edited by CHARLES E. SCHAEFER and DONNA M. CANGELOSI. Northvale, NJ: Aronson. 1993. 295 pp. Price not stated.

This is a series of articles written by play therapists working in various settings, mainly in the US. It spans not only a wide range of techniques – art, puppets, board games, electronic games, to name but a few examples – but also covers the development of play therapy over the past 30 years. It is a fascinating compilation and contains a wealth of creative ideas and suggestions that any therapists working with children will find interesting and stimulating.

However, the book is disappointing if one views it as an attempt to document the development of a form of therapy whose effectiveness and efficacy needs to be critically appraised, as with any other form of therapy. Most of the articles suggest a flimsy theoretical basis for the techniques described, and none of them contain any attempt to evaluate critically the work described or address issues of long-term outcome, or specific indications for the type of intervention described. One is left with the impression that play therapy is undoubtedly useful, but in the field of child psychiatric treatments we must move further than this if we are to develop our knowledge about effective and appropriate forms of treatment for the wide variety of disturbance that presents to us in our clinics.

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