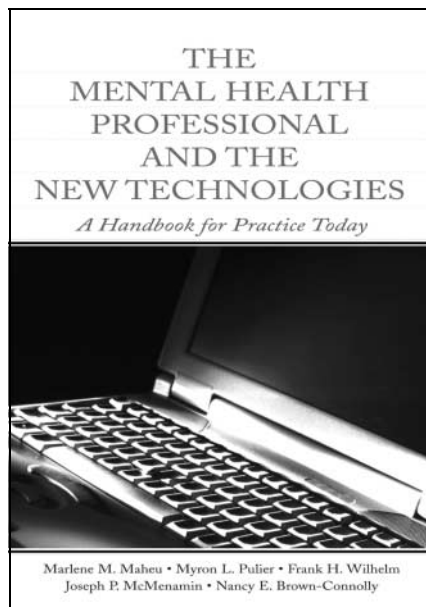


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

The Mental Health Professional and the New Technologies: A Handbook for Practice Today

By Marlene M. Maheu, Myron L. Pulier, Frank H. Wilhelm, Joseph P. McMenamin and Nancy E. Brown-Connolly.
Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
2005. 539 pp. US\$49.99 (hb).
ISBN 0 8058 3988 7



Don't be put off by this tome's title and length. The authors' refreshingly lucid writing is a good guide to ways in which computers and other 'psychotechnologies' are starting to influence the mental health field. Most readers will look just at sections relating to them. The authors first clarify terms such as e-health, telepsychiatry, telehealth, online clinical practice, cyber-counselling, virtual, avatar, chat rooms, whiteboards, bits, bytes, transmission channels *v.* devices, internet *v.* worldwide web, modem and a host of further concepts. Acronyms are sensibly spelt out when first used.

The book discusses barriers to using psychotechnologies, how that use is affecting clinical practice, the growth of

coaching to help users and relevant new professions, economic issues, the fluidity of boundaries across mental health services, and the flux of e-counselling companies. Numerous case and other vignettes illuminate the pros and cons of various technologies. Unexpected mishaps occur – articles appear online that are attributed to professionals who never saw them and whose reputations can be damaged by them, yet they are hard to remove from a site. Bullying by SMSs (short message services) has been reported. 'Flaming' e-mails highlight the pitfalls of unleashing angry messages into cyberspace and the need for 'netiquette'. The prospect arises of 'cyberdildonics ... devices that a physically remote partner can operate over a communication network to directly simulate a sexual episode', but, the authors dryly continue, 'safe, affordable, appealing, and FDA-approved equipment has yet to be marketed (p. 384)'. Remote sex therapy and experience will stretch the minds and tax the moral sensitivities of many sections of society. Cyberdildonic theatres loom, with mass participation. Watch this space. On cooler issues, the book has a chapter for professional website authors, discusses trade-offs of telephone, videophone and videoconferencing and how to run these, deals with electronic practice management and electronic record-keeping, and speculates about future challenges from psychotechnologies.

All five authors have worked in the USA with experience in, among other specialties, psychology, psychiatry, nursing, international law, and research management. Discussions on legal, regulatory and reimbursement issues focus on US work, limiting their value for readers in the rest of the world. Another limitation is that although the book appeared in 2005, it has little coverage of the burgeoning worldwide work since 1998 on computer-aided assessment and self-help psychotherapy. The relevant work by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is not noted. The lacunae highlight the explosive speed with which the field is expanding and how hard

it is to keep abreast of developments. Computer-aided vicarious exposure is mistakenly grouped with immersive virtual reality.

Such problems notwithstanding, the book is a fine introduction to many psychotechnologies of growing importance. It deserves space in the reference section of every library used by mental health professionals.

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Autism: Mind and Brain

Edited by Uta Frith & Elisabeth Hill. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004. 298 pp. £29.95 (pb). ISBN 0 198529 24 4

Given the plethora of publications on autism, any addition needs to state a very specific intent. This book looks at recent research linking behaviours (mind) in autism to brain abnormalities. Several key themes are examined through cutting-edge research from three continents. Their seemingly logical progression probably owes as much to editorial art as to nature.

One of the themes explored is the drawback of characterising autism in behavioural terms, starting with the intriguing possibility that the disorder bearing Hans Asperger's name might not be the one he described. Tager-Flusberg and Joseph echo the importance of characterising the 'endophenotype' of autism in terms of neurocognitive deficits linked to neuropathology. Another study of congenitally blind children elegantly cleaves the social effects of visual impairment from the deficits in reciprocal engagement that characterise both visually normal and impaired people with autism.

This decanting of 'core deficits' from the various trajectories that may lead to autism remains the Holy Grail of autism research, which will enable a more informed study of the aetiology, natural history and treatments for autism.

The neurophysiological basis of one of these core deficits, 'shared communicative reference', is explored in the articles on joint attention, reflexive visual orienting and eye tracking. The idea that brain development itself may be influenced by aberrant brain process deriving from a primary deficit is a fascinating perspective

on the plasticity of neurodevelopmental disorder.

Klin and others suggest that there are cognitive deficits in assigning salience, which leave a person ill-equipped to set priorities and learn from experience. This has a significant bearing on any educational or therapeutic interventions.

The overarching cognitive theories are discussed in terms of experimental paradigms in an attempt to establish whether there may be a 'cognitive style' unique to autism. The fact of 'weak coherence' (Frith), seemingly at odds with the 'empathizing-systemizing' theory (Baron-Cohen), emphasises the need for more studies on the neurobiological hard-wiring underpinning deficits.

The importance of the five interconnected systems constituting the 'social brain', and the identification of fusiform face area as a possible 'neurofunctional marker' are exciting. They need to be balanced against the study of the amygdala which cautions that structural abnormalities may not always be reflected in physiological dysfunction. The use of non-verbal paradigms such as movement disorders and crossovers from non-autistic populations illustrate the many ways of skinning the neurobiological cat.

For me, this book has been as much an exploration of the mind of the researchers as of people with autism. It will probably age with grace in an electronic world and be of interest to clinicians and specialists in autism, given the range of disciplines represented, the international tenor and the evolving nature of the issues themselves. The glossary of acronyms at the end of each chapter was the only minor distraction in an interesting and instructive read.

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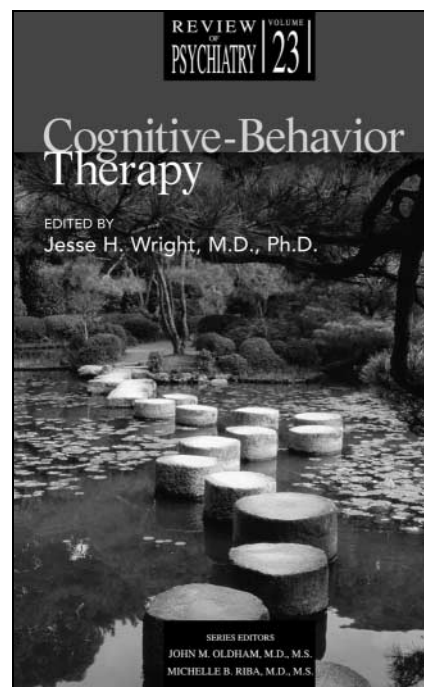
Cognitive-Behavior Therapy

Edited by Jesse H. Wright. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association. 2004. 168 pp. £23.50 (pb). ISBN 1 58562 178 1

This brief edited book forms part of the 'Review of Psychiatry' series edited by John M. Oldham and Michelle B. Riba. There are five chapters in total:

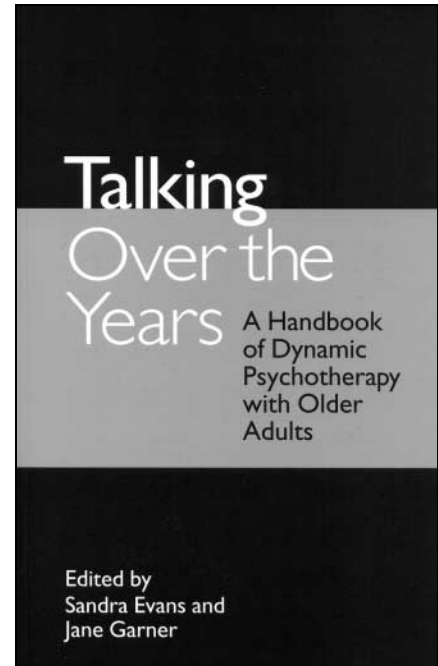
cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) for schizophrenia, CBT for bipolar disorder, computer-assisted CBT, CBT for patients with physical illness and CBT for children and adolescents. Each chapter is written clearly, with a range of clinical examples, tables and diagrams that bring the subject matter to life. The everyday practice of CBT is clearly in the mind of the authors, as is the importance of evaluating the evidence base. Each of the areas covered has shown an enormous rise in both research and practice over the past decade, and they hold great potential for the future. Therefore, reviews of this kind are extremely timely and relevant. Be warned, however, that the book does not stand alone as a reference because of its limited breadth. For example, at the front there is an overview of the chapters within the book but there is no introductory chapter on CBT to set the groundwork of its principles and practice across a wide range of presenting problems. The limited coverage also makes the title of the book slightly misleading and its cost slightly too high. Nevertheless, I would recommend that health practitioners involved in these emerging areas read the well-researched, accessible chapters in this book now while they still represent the cutting edge of contemporary CBT.

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Talking Over the Years: A Handbook of Dynamic Psychotherapy with Older Adults

Edited by Sandra Evans & Jane Garner. Hove and New York: Brunner Routledge. 2004. 280 pp. £17.99 (pb). ISBN 1 58391 144 8



This book presents a wide range of material on the mental health of older people from a psychodynamic perspective. It provides information about the lives and theories of major psychoanalytic and psychodynamic thinkers and considers the application of their ideas to the understanding of later life. Psychodynamics is discussed in relation to work with patients as well as in relation to staff. Many apposite case illustrations are included. The book contains chapters about a range of methods of working psychotherapeutically with people with and without dementia, including not only one-to-one, family and group talking therapies but also expressive approaches using other media for communication.

The amazing breadth of this book may be seen as both its strength and its weakness. On the one hand it provides a stimulating cocktail, but on the other this detracts from a clear focus. Those who might buy the book for its subtitle could be disappointed to find that this is not a guide on 'how to do' psychotherapy: although the excellent chapter on brief therapy does provide some nitty-gritty advice and those