

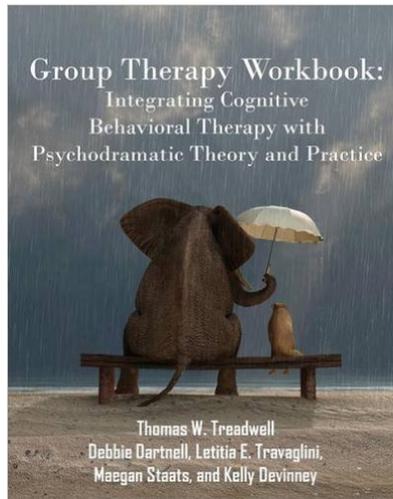
Book Reviews

Group therapy workbook: Integrating cognitive behavioral therapy with psychodramatic theory and practice

by

Thomas W. Treadwell, Debbie Dartnell, Letitia E. Travaglini,
Maegan Staats, and Kelly Devinney

Outskirts Press, 2016



Reviewed by Jenny Wilson

I am delighted that Tom Treadwell and his colleagues have written this book. It is a first. It is the only book that I am aware of that integrates Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Psychodrama. I hope it will lead the way in generating more interest and more activity in this area as the combination of these two therapies has potential to be richly productive.

This is what the title says it is, a workbook, so there is understandably a focus on methods and techniques employed by each of the therapies. The theory of CBT is summarised with an even shorter coverage of

psychodrama theory. Rather than focus on theory, the authors have taken a practical approach and made suggestions about the use of various methods within a group format. This focus makes the book reasonably easy to read, but much of what is understood by a skilled CBT therapist or psychodramatist is left unsaid. Each of these therapies could claim to be an integrative therapy – able to adopt some techniques from the other. However, it is at the level of theory and philosophy where they differ significantly and where integration questions will arise.

In my own work integrating CBT and psychodrama, I'm aware of a number of dilemmas and contradictions. For example, traditional CBT focuses a great deal on *containing* emotion; theory and strategies are focused on specific goals related to managing, tolerating and reducing distressing symptoms in mental health conditions. Psychodrama by contrast often gravitates towards deepening experience across an extensive range of life experiences, and *emotional catharsis* is an important concept in psychodrama theory. When to contain, when to expand or maximise if we integrate the two? The CBT therapist and psychodramatist in me frequently disagree about this!

Classical psychodrama and traditional CBT also have quite different perspectives about when to expand on experiences from the client's *family of origin* - or even whether to do this at all. If one goes on a hunch (rather than a theory) you will find that you have in fact, gravitated to a preferred theory of your own. I would have loved to see this workbook (or a companion therapist manual) tackle these and other issues.

One of the richest elements of psychodrama is the group-work process and relationships between group members. Traditional CBT groups on the other hand are likely to give process a relatively small amount of attention, instead focusing a great deal on techniques. Psychodramatists trying out the suggested CBT approaches in this workbook for the first time are likely to experience significant tension (maybe dismay!) related to time spent on written CBT content (e.g., psycho-education; filling out forms related to thought records and symptom measurement; setting and reviewing homework). Personally I think that the most helpful gifts that psychodrama can bring to CBT are great action alternatives to the form filling and written tasks. However, a CBT therapist will struggle to direct the enactments suggested in this book unless they already have training and skills in group process.

The workbook assumes a level of therapist competence in conducting psychodrama enactments, and so is probably targeted at experienced

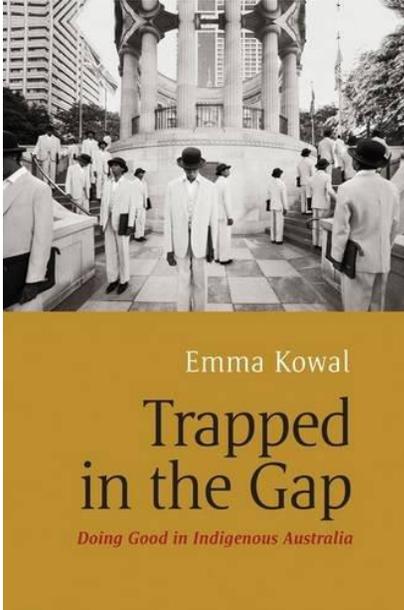
rather than new therapists. The detail in the enactments provide helpful examples of CBT and psychodrama strategies combined that a psychodramatist is likely to be able to adapt and make good use of. Those hoping to make use of the suggested therapeutic techniques will probably need to extend their reading and experience beyond this workbook. The reference section suggests books and papers that will be useful for the reader interested in doing so.

I think this book will be a useful addition to the psychodramatist's library. Psychodramatists are well placed to learn and use CBT techniques within their work, and may find it strategic to do so in today's funding climate. This book offers a sensible introduction to CBT theory and very smartly also includes an introduction to Schema Therapy (a more recent development that has much more overlap with psychodrama). Several ideas for sessions are outlined and there are good suggestions as to how they might be included in a group setting. A selection of useful participant handouts and information sheets are provided that will help the group leader prepare for such a group. The CBT therapist with an interest in group therapy is also likely to find this book interesting. It offers tantalising examples of the power of psychodrama in a group setting, and may prompt readers to find out more about the method.



Jenny Wilson is a clinical psychologist and psychodramatist. She has an easy and familiar relationship with both Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and psychodrama, which took some time and wrestling to achieve. Jenny is currently enjoying a settled and creative period with a new focus on learning about, and making, art.





*Trapped in the gap:
Doing good in Indigenous
Australia*

by Emma Kowal

Berghahn Books, 2015

ISBN: 978-1-78238-604-9

Reviewed by Jenny Hutt

This book is about non-Indigenous practitioners working in Indigenous Australia.

Emma Kowal draws from her own experiences working in a health service in the Northern Territory and from an interesting range of literature to portray practitioners experiencing what psychodramatists might describe as a 'conflicted warm-up'.

It's relevance to non-Indigenous professionals and non-Indigenous citizens lies in its attention to the baggage we can bring to intercultural relating. Kowal adds to the expanding Australian literature about what might be termed whitefella work, including Sarah Maddison's (2011) *Beyond white guilt: the real challenge for black-white relations in Australia*, Clare Land's (2015) *Decolonising solidarity: dilemmas and directions for supporters of Indigenous struggles*, and Mark Moran's (2016) *Serious whitefella stuff: when solutions become the problem in Indigenous affairs*. Kowal says her study was partly inspired by Gary Foley, Aboriginal Gumbainggir activist and academic, who said, 'Don't worry about us, you work on your own mob.'

Kowal locates her study in what she calls the 'contact zone' where colonisers and colonised meet; a place of radical cultural difference. She focuses on a distinct sub-group of the broader progressive Australian

community who she calls White anti-racists, a group to which she belongs. She distinguishes them not so much by their actions to counter racism, but as a group with a shared culture, discourse and identity. She examines and illustrates the dynamics of this group in three settings.

The first is a Northern Territory health clinic where a disillusioned health educator doubts the impact of her work in 'closing the gap'. Closing the gap is an Australian government policy to reduce disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes. The second is a Darwin suburb where various sub-groups (including residents, city council and health workers) respond to the presence of displaced members of the Mangingrida community, known as 'long grassers' who live in the open and drink heavily. The third setting is at a series of conferences and meetings around the country where Welcome to Country¹ and Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners are conducted.

I found this last chapter of great interest as a stand-alone piece of writing. In discussing the origins of these ceremonies, Kowal cites traditional rituals which involve visitors waiting for long periods on the border of country to be acknowledged. Some rituals are not so much to welcome visitors, but to protect them from harm from the unfamiliar spirits of the country. Other contemporary expressions of welcome to country are thought to have emerged in the 1980s and spread in the 1990s, encouraged by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The welcome to country is believed by some to have been adapted from the Maori *powhiri*. An early expression of this occurred in 1976 when an Aboriginal theatre group received a request to be welcomed from visiting Maori and Cook Island dancers.

Kowal observes professionals in the three settings tying themselves up in knots. One is because of a fear of doing damage. While they hope to see Indigenous people lifted out of disadvantage to participate fully in Australian society, statistically equal to but culturally distinct from other Australians, they fear that by 'closing the gap' they will be involved in destroying Aboriginal culture.

Another fear is of imposing on Indigenous people and in so doing, being a modern day assimilationist or missionary. For this reason, there is great ambivalence in exercising agency as a non-Indigenous person.

¹ 'Country' is the land of the traditional owners within an Aboriginal nation or language group.

This can mean remaining silent, underplaying their contribution, exaggerating the role of community members and reluctance to question anything an Indigenous person says. They may even ‘valorise all things Indigenous and rebuke all things Western’. While these behaviours may reflect commitment to Indigenous self-determination, psychodramatists may also recognise them as restrictive solutions to the substantial focal conflicts¹ experienced by non-Indigenous professionals.

Kowal argues there is ‘white stigma’ at play. Whiteness is seen as a deeply discrediting stain, associated with exploitation, colonisation, imperialism and general dominance. And with it comes the felt need to undertake social ‘performances’ and ‘speech acts’ which makes non-Indigenous people recognisable as *good* white people: anti-racists. And of course at times, distinguishing themselves as *better* anti-racists than their colleagues.

The book is written in an academic style and took quite a commitment to read but it is fascinating. I particularly enjoyed that it highlighted a number of conflicted warm-ups and restrictive solutions to watch out for. It surveyed a wide range of literature (from the fields of development and whiteness studies) about the world-views of those working in the ‘contact zone’. Yet, as it limited its scope to studying non-Indigenous people, it wasn’t able to present a lively and complete picture of the context, and of the two-way intergroup role relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

However, I particularly appreciate that Kowal brings to light and makes ‘discussable’ several conflicts experienced by non-Indigenous practitioners working in Indigenous Australia. I think naming them is an intervention in itself. Her work is a good reference point for conversations which open out what ethical and effective partnerships between non-Indigenous practitioners and Indigenous clients and colleagues can be. Conversations which may interest professionals and citizens alike.

¹ A focal conflict is experienced in a group between disturbing motives (such as the desire to make a difference) and reactive fears (such as a fear of being oppressive and of perpetuating oppression). A restrictive solution to these conflicts (rather than an enabling solution) fails to adequately honour both the motivations and the fears. See Whitacker and Leiberman’s (1964) *Psychotherapy through the group process*.



Jenny Hutt is a Sociodramatist, TEP and Director of Training at the Melbourne Campus of Psychodrama Australia. She is a coach, facilitator and learning and development practitioner with groups and organisations. Jenny specialises in workplace diversity, leadership development and has a keen interest in intercultural learning. She is an associate with an Aboriginal majority owned consulting company and is currently engaged in 'two ways' projects with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients and colleagues.

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