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A Review of: “Being a Brain-Wise Therapist: A Practical Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology. Bonnie Badenoch”

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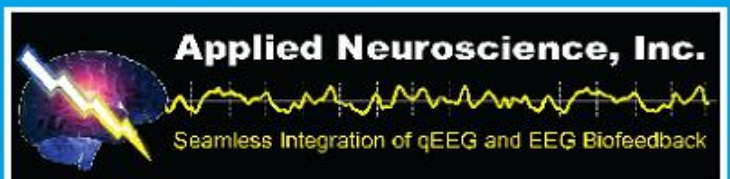
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BOOK REVIEW

BEING A BRAIN-WISE THERAPIST: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY. Bonnie Badenoch. *Norton, New York, New York, 2008, 384 pages, ISBN: 978-0393705546.*

Systems theory is intuitive for most mental health practitioners, so understanding the complexities of the brain as a system and the psychotherapeutic process as grounded in systems thinking are complimentary ideologies. The challenge for practitioners is often how to integrate theories of client symptoms, client change, and the brain in ways that make sense to the clinician and that maintain clinical relevance for clients. This text is a review of the fundamentals of interpersonal neurobiology—a view of the mind that incorporates multiple disciplines in an effort to find and join parallel principles of understanding the complexity of humanity and further to guide practitioners in the utilization of that understanding.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part 1 is the basis for understanding the theories presented in the remaining text; Part 2 introduces various therapeutic techniques while incorporating specifics of research about brain region and function; and Part 3 integrates it all by introducing methods for change in couples, families, and individuals.

“Theoretical Foundations,” Part 1, includes eight chapters that move from brain function to the therapeutic relationship and is an introduction to very basic neuroscience.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the concept of integrating neuroscience with psychotherapy, and Chapter 2, a review of brain concepts, will be fairly simplistic for the neurotherapist.

Chapter 3 discusses the ‘brain’s flow’ and includes concepts such as communication between the limbic region and middle prefrontal cortex. The author includes regulation

of the body; attuned communication; and self-regulation of emotion, response flexibility, empathy, insight, fear extinction, intuition, and morality, and it ends with a discussion of systemic integration that is one of the most interesting sections of the book.

In Chapter 4, the author hypothesizes about the relationship between mind and brain through discussion of topics such as attention, perception, and quantum physics.

Included in Chapter 5 are the basic attachment styles that should be familiar to most mental health practitioners; however, the reflection on maintaining connection to clients through the therapist’s awareness of their own empathy-building capabilities adds an interesting twist to the usual thinking about attachment.

Chapter 6 introduces the “inner community,” a concept that “invites us to view ourselves as inherently multiplistic, with rich, active internal relational lives developed and shaped in childhood and modified by later life experience” (p. 77).

Chapter 7 presents ideas for building mutuality between therapist and client, embracing the whole person of the client, including spirituality and somatic effects, or sensitization of the therapist to a client’s state of body.

Chapter 8 posits that the neurobiology of shame is a development of early attachments gone awry, and specifically with repeated practice of shame behavior the author suggests that synaptic strength increases until symptoms develop. The author states that through the context of an empathetic relationship and specifically via bonding neurobiologically with a therapist the client may begin to heal (yes, there is an emphasis on transference and countertransference throughout the text).

“Practical Matters,” Part 2, includes a neurobiological review of diagnostic categories

with suggestions for mental health clinicians to maintain a right-brain to right-brain connection with clients through mindfulness, brain-talk, and therapeutic focus on attachment.

Diagnoses are presented in Chapters 9 and 10. However, the message is that diagnostic criteria should not be conceptualized in a pathological way. The neurobiological (including genetics and the role of temperament) underpinnings of depression, anxiety, and dissociation are presented.

Chapter 11 focuses on the mental health of the practitioner. The author proposes that creating space for linking right-brain to right-brain between therapist and client will be maximally beneficial for the client if the therapist's left (logical) brain is not overriding the therapeutic encounter. Ideas for addressing this issue therapeutically are discussed in this chapter, but throughout the book, too.

Chapters 11 and 12 utilize case examples to demonstrate suggestions for the therapeutic encounter, such as the utilization of narratives and genograms.

EEG research is briefly introduced in Chapter 13 in the context of a review of mindfulness research, but even then the EEG reference is apparent only if the reader is familiar with the summarized studies.

In addition to mindfulness, Chapters 14 and 15 are minicourses in the application of multiple techniques when integrating interpersonal neurobiology into the therapeutic relationship. Chapter 15 also offers "steps to reclaiming dissociated neural nets" or guiding principles to help a client work through attachment losses and other traumatic experiences.

Chapter 16 continues with sandplay therapy, whereas Chapter 17 focuses on art therapy

and offers suggestions such as having the client draw with the nondominant hand, in an attempt to augment neural integration. Chapters 11 and 12 are technique driven, as are Chapters 16 and 17, and can be considered a primer for therapy.

Part 3 includes Chapters 18 to 21. This section offers ideas for working with couples, teens, and children using interpersonal neurobiology as a framework to understand symptoms and to implement the change process. For example, the author recommends teaching parents mindful awareness so that they give themselves extra time to process their children's actions before making decisions about discipline. The author does a great job of continuing the message about brain, behavior, and change throughout.

With emphasis on four core principles of "an understanding of neural integration, an appreciation of the power of the right-brain to right-brain connection, a visceral sense of the centrality of therapist health, and immersion in the beauty of empathetic awareness," the author eloquently provides the reader with an integration of research findings, neurobiology, practice guidelines, and case examples. Refreshingly, one of the most underdiscussed and important areas of professionalism, the self-care of the therapist is addressed. Although this text is not EEG focused, it is wonderful reading for neurotherapists as we think about our brains, our client's brains, and the dynamic connectivity between the two.

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