

## Book Reviews

### **The Rhythms of Love (How to turn uncertainty into commitment).**

*By Beverley Steffert.*  
*London: Thorson, 1992.*  
*p.336.*

This is a book which thoroughly explores the cyclical relationship between intimacy and withdrawal, highlighting gender differences and alternative relationship styles, and providing strategies for coping with such differences when they become painful.

There are four sections to the book. In the first one she deals with coming closer in a relationship, and analyses the nature of attraction, love and attachment. At each point she delineates the contradictory forces of involvement and independence, their close correspondence with gender roles, and their expression through different relationship styles - called traditional, separate or therapeutic.

In the second section Steffert discusses the balancing of withdrawal-closeness cycles. To do so, she analyses the "scent of similarity" and the "molecules of anxiety and euphoria" as part of circadian rhythms which occur on a daily as well as a longterm basis. Against the backdrop of several overview diagrams, she describes four couples with different love styles, and the way in which these can be regulated through the use of space, time for togetherness and energy input.

In the third section she addresses the process of cooling off, and how one might cope with differences in sex role as they occur during successive life stages. In the fourth section she discusses in detail the communication of compatibility through the languages of the brain, the body, involvement, independence, and laughter.

This is an erudite and thoughtful analysis of the interrelationship between complex and subtle forces in people's lives. The detail in which she discusses themes of gender, interaction styles and cyclical changes provides much stimulation and challenge to our typical ways of perceiving and handling relationships.

There are, however, some detractors. While Steffert claims to have written this book for "ordinary couples of goodwill" whose relationships have run into difficulty, her writing style is wordy, abstract and flowery - to the point where many readers are in danger of becoming confused and losing the wood for the trees. Furthermore, she claims to have used survey data from 3000 couples to substantiate her conclusion; nowhere does she provide a quantitative analysis of these findings, nor does she provide similar data from other authors whom she quotes. This leaves some questionmark hanging over the validity of her assertions.

In all, however, this book provides ample food for thought for ordinary couples, those who are in strife, and those who provide help for the latter.

*Hans Everts, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Auckland.*

### **Pickpockets on a Nudist Camp: The Systemic Revolution in Psychotherapy.**

*By Ben Furman / Tapani Ahola.*

*Adelaide, Dulwich Centre Publications, 1992. p.154.*

Several years ago I attended a two day workshop presented by the authors and had a wonderful time. These two clinicians from Finland provided new ideas in a refreshingly

humorous style. So when I saw this book, their first major publication, I was immediately interested.

In this book Furman and Ahola have put together a collection of their previous publications and have included one new chapter. Publication dates range from 1977 to 1992, a 15 year period tracing developments of their philosophical stance in relation to their work with clients. Although somewhat disjointed, with each chapter a separate entity, there is a definite coherence with respect to the ideas which inform their work.

Ben Furman is a psychiatrist and Tapani Ahola has a degree in the social sciences. Their different backgrounds resonate with the philosophy of their counselling stance which is open, egalitarian and affirming. Philosophically they are firmly within the solution oriented approaches being developed by practitioners such as Steve De Shazar, Michael White and David Epston.

Many of the ideas presented in this book are exciting and liberating: clients are involved in the case discussions and their opinions sought; clients and therapists work together to construct solutions to problems; the exceptions to problem behaviour are emphasised not the problems themselves.

However, central to their position is the acceptance of the notion that reality is constructed and that new client constructions of a solution oriented reality are basic to therapy.

And the title, *Pickpockets on a Nudist Camp*? The authors explain that therapy is like being on a nudist camp with some therapists viewing pockets in different locations but having to actually start sewing pockets on before they can start stealing. . . Not the easiest analogy to understand and although intriguing, not really descriptive of the book which is an intelligent, thoughtful and articulate description of ideas basic to the practice of a solution oriented approach to counselling.

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## **Solution Talk: Hosting Therapeutic Conversations**

*By Ben Furman &*

*Tapani Ahola*

*London, W.W. Norton &*

*Company, 1992. p.180.*

Quite simply this is the best book on how to do therapy I have read in a long time. Admittedly the solution oriented systemic approach detailed may not appeal to everyone. However, orientation aside, this book is very readable and contains a cornucopia of clinical ideas which should be useful to every practicing counsellor.

Unlike their publication, *Pickpockets on a Nudist Camp*, which was primarily a discussion on the authors' ideas about therapy, *Solution Talk* is more practice orientated, more cohesive and more readable. The strategies detailed in this book are simple, elegant and effective, as clinicians who have adopted their methods will attest. Moreover, the therapeutic skills described in this book are presented in a way which is understandable and easy to incorporate into practice. Skills are presented in a sequential and logical manner with one idea building on the last.

Initially, the authors talk about minimising the power of the problem and reducing its dimensions to a manageable, changeable proportion. Later they radically discuss not discussing the problem at all by opening the therapeutic conversation (counselling session) with: "You don't appear to be all that miserable. Has there been some recent progress?" or a version of "What ideas have you had about solving your problem since you phoned for an appointment?" Developing alternative explanations, capitalising on exceptions to problem behaviour, positive gossiping, creating a context for and developing future visions, positive coaching and building on progress, sharing credit and celebration are some of the areas covered. Although

creative, their approach is easy to assimilate and incorporate into practice.

Best of all, throughout the book they have a humourous, friendly and positive approach which made reading this book a pleasure.

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