

# Writing a Book Review for Newsbriefing



Review by Val Huest

This well-written book introduces an approach to art therapy practice which offers a refreshing perspective. As the authors state, "Normally, positive psychology seems to generate quite a lot of negativity. Positive psychology has met with substantial criticism, some warranted and other unwarranted, e.g. that focusing on the positive is, in and of itself, pathological" (deliberate omission) (p. 22).

Positive psychology is defined as the science of wellbeing and does not regard the fact that people must address painful issues during their therapy. However, there is also space to look at psychological health and to understand what works well for people. The authors draw on Seligman's model of wellbeing (2002) and his concept of PERMA (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement) and give an overview of the different phases of influence within psychotherapy practice which they call 'Tones' (p. 7). The book focuses on the emergence of the psychodynamic practice (which includes psychoanalysis), the second wave of the development of behavioural psychology in the 1950s, humanistic psychology, the third wave also started in the late fifties and the New Frontiers, the fourth wave.

Most of these have evolved and are integrated within different contemporary approaches and practices. One argument which I found persuasive was the issue of the dominance of the medical model which with its focus on diagnosis, is 'reductionist and limiting' (p. 10) and has influenced psychotherapy practice. As the authors point out, the role of suffering does not necessarily lead to wellbeing. They also examine the medicalization of normal life and how emotions which are entirely appropriate to circumstances (grief, anxiety, etc.) become socially labelled as abnormal, pathological and often medicated. Since

its inception, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) has continually expanded its list of psychological conditions and the authors believe some warning words of interest with pharmaceutical companies. The authors then discuss how to integrate positive psychology within art therapy practice and outline parallels between the evolution of art therapy and positive psychology in the UK and in the USA. This is discussed very briefly in a short paragraph and focus on HUI and Adams. This is a bit disappointing as there has been so much in UK practice development that paralleled the authors' processes and practice. I hope that as art therapists in the USA and in the UK are becoming more aware of their respective practices, notably now that BAAT is focusing on the 'Power' (Meaning, Resilience) (2018) to understand and address human distress in a non-stigmatising and

reductive way. They describe a 'Positive Art Therapy Manifesto' in two parts: 'How to transform art therapy with positive psychology' and 'How can art therapy transform positive psychology?' (p. 18). Although the manifesto itself could benefit from being more concise and briefer, the manifesto outlined is a very worthy and easy to apply to practice. I cannot list all these here but have selected a short abstract detailing a couple of concepts:

'Empower clients by  
• Identifying experiences when they have felt better  
• Identifying what it would be like to experience more wellbeing  
• Exploring what happiness and wellbeing means to them  
• Recognising the strengths and resources that helped them persevere  
• Identifying practice/meditation/behavioural strategies that may have become dysfunctional' (p. 19)

In the section on 'How can art therapy transform positive psychology...'  
• 'Change "the story", create new narratives that include more empowered perceptions of experiences, and involved loss' (p. 62).  
The most striking section highlights how different the paradigms used in this approach are when compared with many therapy practices.

Interestingly, a chapter in the book is dedicated to Positive Emotions and Emotion Regulation. In the UK, Hering and Bateman (2018) worked with people who had received a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder and were previously deemed 'untreatable'. They highlighted the importance of Attachment Theory and developed a mentalisation-based approach supporting emotion regulation. Many UK art therapists now integrate a mentalisation approach into their practice and it would be interesting to explore if there are common elements with positive psychology, if it were could be introduced to benefit service users.

The authors have a wealth of critical experience and demonstrate this expertise in the part of the book which addresses how to use positive psychology within art therapy practice. This evidence is a truly client-centred approach. Reading this book has helped me challenge long-held prejudices. I recommend reading it for a creatively different perspective on art therapy practice.

Allen, J.C., Fennell, P. & Bateman, A. W. (2008) *Mentalisation in clinical practice*. Hove, NJ: American Psychological Association.  
Seligman, M.E.P. (2002) *Authentic happiness: Using the new science of positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.

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