

BOOK REVIEWS

Solution-Focused Practice in Outdoor Therapy: Co-Adventuring for Change by Will W Dobud and Stephan Natynczuk

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Interest in moving therapy outdoors has been increasing from an anecdotal perspective over the last few years. Academic discussions around what exactly constitutes ‘outdoor therapy’ and how this may differ (if at all) from therapies such as SFBT which coincidentally takes place in an outdoor setting is something which provides a useful backdrop for this book. *Solution-Focused Practice in Outdoor Therapy: Co-Adventuring for change* sets out to provide a convincing narrative on the values and benefits of the fusion of solution focused approaches in nature.

Solution-Focused Practice in Outdoor Therapy: Co-Adventuring for change by Will W Dobud and Stephan Natynczuk

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From the opening passage (curiously titled ‘To Our Dearest Adventurous Reader’), there is a sense already that you are on a journey with the author to explore the wonders of nature and all it has to offer for therapeutic interventions to take place. Each section of the book then works towards providing as described an ‘*evidence-informed model for taking our therapeutic practices into these wonderful environments*’.

Part I considers the theme of co-adventuring for change and provides examples of lived experiences of outdoor therapy in action alongside the evidence base to promote the value of change. This section includes an introduction to what solution focused brief therapy is, alongside the

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knowledge and skills of being a counsellor/therapist in solution focused practice. The evidence base draws upon seminal works from Carl Rogers to Steve de Shazer to more contemporary researchers, providing insight into the transitional application of therapy over time. Parts II and III then continue this theme by applying the theory into the outdoor setting before analysing the importance of maintaining professionalism and the values of experiential learning to inform practice. An extremely useful field manual for solution focused practice outdoors has been provided in the appendix and has been referred to throughout the book offering a guide to use as therapists interested in change can move towards becoming more established as outdoor therapists.

Collectively the book offers a comprehensive insight into outdoor therapy with SFBT along with some fundamental questions or custom and practice for readers to consider. It is very well written with a depth of knowledge sufficient for anyone from armchair enthusiasts to experts in their respected fields to benefit from reading.

Some discussions revolve around the themes of eco-therapy and whether there is a differentiation between outdoor therapy or therapy which takes place outdoors (please excuse the semantics). In essence outdoor therapy tends to draw its underlying principles from a collective genre which includes but is not exclusive to ecotherapy. Seward (2013) summarises the concept of ecotherapy itself as 'A method of storing optimal health and well-being through routine exposure to and experience in the natural world'. Similarly, repeated exposure to artificial lights, chemicals, air and electromagnetic pollution and white noise experienced from the artificial environments created indoors are thought to be linked to increasing levels of stress and chronic disease (Chalquist, 2009).

Outdoor therapy draws from a triad of elements, the client, the therapist, and the outdoors. Each provides a recognised level of engagement in the process. The outdoors themselves present almost a catalyst for the therapy to be more fluid. Cooley et al (2022), indicates that clients experience a sense of openness the outdoor environment offers, allowing for a more equitable place with which to talk over feelings of being stuck.

The book itself uses many metaphors from nature and the environment as a way of connecting the two aspects of SFBT and outdoor therapy together. Therapy that takes place outdoors has less recognition of the symbolism with nature. It is more related to just being out in the open (this could be on a park bench or local park or green space).

That's not to say that one approach is more beneficial than the other. Simple exposure to the outdoors has been shown to provide health related benefits. Marselle et al (2013) carried out a longitudinal study investigating mental, emotional, and social well-being of individuals who attended group walks in nature. Multiple regression studies were performed between a test group and control group, analysing the influence of nature and of walking on depression, perceived stress, negative and positive affect, psychological well-being, and social support. Findings showed that walks in nature decreased depression, perceived stress, and negative affect, whilst enhancing positive affect and well-

being. Furthermore, A project with the University of Essex and the Sensory Trust (2012) identified a potential for walking in the country relieving the symptoms of depression in 71% of participants. Even five minutes exposure to nature was found to have a positive effect on mood, self-esteem, and motivation (Bragg et al., 2012).

What can be differentiated when comparing the two approaches is how much more existential experience occurs within outdoor therapy compared to simply having therapy whilst outside. In one of my previous book reviews, I brought in the concept of the importance of bridging the gap between humankind and nature and its co-dependence (McCarthy-Grunwald, 2020). This relates strongly with the more meaningful experiences which nature can bring and links well with the concept of biophilia hypothesis which suggests that humans possess an innate symbiotic relationship with our natural surroundings (Fromm, 1964; Wilson, 1984; and Eckardt, 1992).

There is clear recognition of the benefits of the outdoors, and outdoor therapy certainly provides a way forward from the 'dystopian' (although recognised) potential of 'nature deficit disorder' coined by Richard Louv in 'Last Child in the Woods' (2005). He suggests it's a common affliction where individuals (mainly children) rarely get outside enough, and as such are losing touch with the natural world with a direct impact on health mood and behaviour.

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