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## **Book Review: *PSYCHOTHERAPY IN THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY*: LYNN D JOHNSON, NORTON**

### **Marilyn Morgan**

I picked up this book with reluctance. It felt like a 'should read', rather than a book that would be enjoyable or instructive, or both. For some time I have been aware of the direction ACC, and other funding agencies, are moving with regard to funding counselling and psychotherapy. Less of it, more control by them, and accountability from us. This move takes place in a general social climate that is putting an increasing value on efficiency, outcomes, economic units, accountability and cost effectiveness. To put it simply, funders want to cut costs and be reassured that they are funding a service that can be seen to work in a measurable way.

My first reaction, to both the current climate, and the book, was one of resistance. I resonate more easily with 'feminine' values of flow, unfolding, depth, mystery, psychotherapy as sacred, as relationship, as an area of knowing and unknowing finely balanced. Art and creativity flowing equally from intuition and knowledge. My instincts pull me away from the modern economic focus, seeing me retreat to a quiet schizoid cave, where I can savour my attachments to my own ways. Like my clients, I am wary of change, and I cling to what has served me well.

It would be easy to anticipate this book would be cold and inhumane. It is neither. I was surprised to find myself invited out of my cave, engaged and interested. The book is rigorous, (constantly referring to relevant research), and at the same time has a feel of warmth and concern for the cherished values of psychotherapy. Lynn Johnson's openness and creativity are endearing.

The author begins, "Psychotherapists face challenging times". I was challenged by this book, challenged to think, dust off some assumptions, and question my practice. But I was not provoked to reject. The content of this book, in general, is not easy to reject. I am left with the sense that I would be very foolish to ignore what Lynn Johnson presents. This book is not only an excellent manual for coping with increasing levels of managed care, but also educative in terms of ways to give our clients a high quality service. Johnson does not ignore the tough therapeutic situations, giving many usable suggestions for using his model with traumatised clients, substance abusers and adolescents.

Like it or not, we as psychotherapists, operate within the current social milieu. Our future livelihood may well depend on our ability to adapt. Clients are likely to start demanding a more focused approach as they become more knowledgeable about therapy, and funding providers and reviewers are already beginning to insist on time-limited, focused therapy. After all, they have the power of the cash-flow. Johnson humorously compares those who adapt and those who don't, to

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mammals and dinosaurs. The dinosaurs decide that continuing to do what has always been done is the best way to meet the crisis.

Lynn Johnson is the director of the Brief Therapy Centre in Salt Lake City. He presents an integrated model of therapy, including elements that have been shown by research to be effective. He discusses the therapeutic relationship, and ways of focusing therapy to be effective within prescribed time-frames. Some of his material is very practical, and concisely outlined and readable. I sense an opportunity to prune dead wood, to cut away that which is not of value, or that which may be detrimental to our clients, and also ourselves. To do my work with more effectiveness and precision.

Lynn Johnson quotes research that shows a significant proportion of clients terminate after a few sessions. I'm not sure if that is the experience here. I am also not entirely comfortable with the 'problem' focus of Johnson's therapy. For providers who fund psychotherapy or counselling this focus is important, as it is for many clients. We have to meet them there, I acknowledge that. Funders do not see themselves in the business of providing therapy for 'unfolding', 'personal growth', or similar. Our society is nowhere near a place where spiritual growth or recovery is seen as a priority for the public purse.

Some clients will continue to choose a more unfocused psychotherapy. I believe there is an important and vital place for that in the unfolding, and healing of humanity. However, those who choose this will have to pay for it themselves. For me, the jury is still out on whether one can blend the focused, problem-centred approach, with a more unstructured way of working, that allows more space for the unconscious to emerge. I feel it is possible. Lynn Johnson's book has given me rich material and stimulation to address this question. Maybe 'focus' will be brought into the foreground for certain clients, and a different 'unfocused-focus' for those who Arnold Mindell calls the 'Growers Club', those who want to embark on the more unpredictable journey of 'finding/losing the self'.