

**BOOK REVIEW**

# #MeToo: Counsellors and psychotherapists speak about sexual violence and abuse

Edited by Lee, D. A. | Palmer, E.

Monmouth, UK: PCCS Books, (2020), 238 pp. ISBN: 9781910919538

When the #MeToo movement shot to viral fame on social media in 2017, I mostly remember being afraid. That was the year I failed the last dissertation I had submitted for my MSc in person-centred psychotherapy, the final piece of work that I needed to complete what would become ten years of study to qualify as a practising therapist. That was also the year I was sexually assaulted, not for the first time. The two events are specifically linked in my mind because of the panic, the shame, and the damage to my self-esteem that they caused. When the #MeToo hashtag circulated, I didn't speak up, afraid that the fear I was feeling would somehow leak into my therapy career forever if I did. I suppose I was afraid that nobody would want to see that a therapist could also be a survivor—we are supposed to exist on the other side of these things, somehow knowledgeable about trauma yet never experiencing it.

Three years later – at a time when I have passed my MSc, I am practising as a psychotherapist, and I am safer and more well than I have ever been—the movement of survivors speaking up and seeking help continues to grow. More and more stories are being told, by more and more different kinds of people. *#MeToo: Counsellors and psychotherapists speak about sexual violence and abuse* shares the thoughts and feelings of therapists who have experienced sexual abuse in multiple ways and from multiple points of view.

The editors describe the experience of reading the book as “a very personal journey” leading to “very personal responses.” So my lived – and living – experience of sexual assault will be everywhere in this review, perhaps as it should be.

From the preface I felt seen and understood, soothing any fears that this book was, in fact, not for people like me after all. There is direct reference made to the phenomenon that therapists are often “Othered” if they talk about their own traumatic experiences, plus a solemn and caring note that reading each story might not be easy, which I appreciated. I also valued the non-binary recognition right at the beginning, too, as a non-binary therapist and survivor. I had been worried that people like me would be forgotten, and I was very pleased to be purposefully perceived.

There is a huge variety of contributors and experience between chapters, showing an openness in experience, modality, and form. Therapists of different genders, therapeutic modalities, life stages, and core beliefs come together to share their interviews, autobiographical pieces, prose, poems, and much more. At the end of each unique chapter is a conversation between survivors about their experiences of writing and reading the piece before, making each experience feel connected both within the book and to the wider world. Each style, each contributor, and each story is engaging in a new way.

While every contribution is very different, there is something relatable in every unique story. There is something new and interwoven with my own experiences of trauma, healing, and growth in every chapter. Personally, and globally, the book shows a deliberate and emergent breaking down of “us” and “them” in regard to who has lived experience and expertise of sexual trauma in the room. It is both comforting and sobering to be reminded throughout that

sexual abuse is not just what happens to our clients; it happens to us as a community of therapists, too. Several contributors also recount their experience of their own time in therapy, further blurring the us/them divide.

The introductory chapter establishes the idea that we can, and should, “feel and hold the other's shadow.” At its core, this is a book full of therapists who are survivors being seen in all their light and shadow. They are there in all their rage, dissociation, terror, numbness, forgiveness, and hope. There are so many stories being told and yet to be told, so many therapists and counsellors seen in this book, and yet to be seen if they choose to be visible. For me, this book provides many ways to understand the fear I felt in the face of the #MeToo movement, and so many experiences to connect with to show that I no longer have to be afraid.

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**Katy Lees** is a person-centred psychotherapist and writer living in County Durham near the sea. They have been working in mental health settings for over a decade, and they are currently running their own private therapy practice. They are also writing a trans and non-binary good mental health guide for Jessica Kingsley Publishers. They can be found online at [iamkatylees.com](http://iamkatylees.com)