

Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders (2nd Edition)

A.T. Beck, A. Freeman, D.D. Davis & Associates (Eds.). New York: Guilford Press
(www.guilford.com). 2003, 412pp., \$46.00 (hardcover).

Personality disorders bring considerable suffering to the individual with the disorder, as well as to those in relationships with them. Such patients often alienate others, including their therapists, while they, themselves, remain mystified by the harsh judgments evoked by their own behavior. These disorders remain perhaps the most vexing and difficult to treat of clinical problems.

Beck and colleagues have written a volume that compassionately illuminates this suffering, while remaining optimistic about treatment (“Every effort is made in cognitive therapy to turn adversity to advantage”, p. 108). The authors provide detailed case conceptualizations and imaginative clinical techniques, and they suggest lines of inquiry for future research.

This book is the product of ten authors, which, alone, could produce an uneven and chaotic volume. If anything, though, the diversity of the authors leads to a richness that is sometimes lacking when a single narrative perspective is applied to so broad a range of clinical presentations. The chapters are each organized using similar formats: historical perspectives on the disorder, research findings, case conceptualizations, treatment approaches, specific interventions, and strategies for maintaining progress as treatment concludes.

Despite the format common to the chapters on specific disorders, the unique signatures of each of the authors are delightfully evident in their case formulations, their focus, and their selection of techniques. To wit: the case conceptualization and clinical artistry in the chapter on schizoid and Schizotypal PD are a marvelous contrast to the equally engaging, though different, formulations and intervention strategies in the chapter on Avoidant PD. Every single chapter contains nuggets of insight for the practicing clinician and for the clinical researcher. Much of the richness of this book is due to the fact that while cognitive theorists and therapists share many basic theoretical assumptions, cognitive therapy remains a broad umbrella under which creativity is encouraged to flourish.

It has been fourteen years since the first edition of this work appeared. While the 2nd edition updates research developments for each disorder, sadly, it is remarkable how little research still exists into the nature of these disorders, as well as their treatment. Hence, James Pretzer writes in his chapter about paranoid personality disorder that “the available evidence is not adequate to test the conceptualization of PPD presented in this chapter or to provide grounds for conclusions regarding the efficacy of the treatment approach which is proposed (p. 118).” In contrast, there are numerous clinical trials for the treatment of borderline personality disorder. The chapter on Borderline Personality Disorder outlines the results of clinical trials of Linehan’s Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which are new to this edition. In addition, newer trials of CT for BPD are presented, including a comparison of the results of DBT and CT trials, which will perhaps surprise and enlighten readers who are unfamiliar with these data.

The 2nd edition includes a fresh chapter on assessment of personality disorders, and an update by Aaron Beck on the formation and development of personality. A stand-alone chapter on the treatment relationship is also included. Throughout the book, a vivid exposition of the nature of schemas is provided, including the developmental factors implicated in their formation. In addition, treatment techniques are detailed which take into account the affectively-driven nature of many schemas, the developmentally layered core beliefs and silent assumptions that are part of schemas, and the limited conscious awareness patients may have of these processes. The

result is an integrative, pragmatic text, which draws upon cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, and even psychodynamic traditions. It is bold and ambitious, and it is necessary reading for those interested in the development of personality disorders, and in the development of personality, itself.

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