

Book Review

Beck, J. S. (2005). *Cognitive therapy for challenging problems: What to do when the basics don't work*. New York: The Guilford Press. Price: \$79.99 NZ

Read this book! At least that's my verdict having just put it down; and somehow even that was done reluctantly in a weird attachment kind of way? Before I explain how I reached such a conclusion, I ought to explain why I decided to read this book in the first place. This involves remembering when I first read Judith Beck's first book, '*Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond*', in the beginning of 2001. At this early stage of a fledgling clinical career, I epitomised a *tabula rasa* (blank slate), knowing next to nothing about therapy as a whole or cognitive therapy in particular. However, like a child dazzled by a talented magician, I was astonished by the plausibility and applicability of cognitive therapy to common psychopathology. Very soon after reading this text, like the urges of an alcoholic (or in my case knowledge-oholic), I craved more knowledge and experience of cognitive therapy. This craving was suitably fulfilled by the fantastic clinical training program at Canterbury University (as well as attending a superb workshop by Judith Beck at the NZCCP Annual Conference in Queenstown, 2004). It was from this platform, and in this context, that my clinical career and passion for cognitive therapy began. So, reflecting on the hand that once fed me, so to speak, I was understandably excited to read and review Judith Beck's second book!

The fundamental point of Beck's second book is to provide clinicians with a practical guide that outlines how to recognize and deal with common difficulties that arise in cognitive therapy. Given that clinicians are seeing increasingly difficult clients, it aims to inform clinicians on what they can do when clients are not making progress in cognitive therapy, or are unresponsive to therapy. The book is broken into thirteen chapters which cover the finer points of how to identify problems in treatment and how to then conceptualize clients who present challenges. Beck discusses how to develop and use a therapeutic alliance, and gives numerous case examples of therapeutic relationship problems and potential solutions for dealing with them. She outlines challenges in setting goals with clients, structuring sessions, socialising problems, homework compliance, identifying cognitions, and in modifying automatic thoughts, assumptions and core beliefs. In essence these chapters provide practical, step-by-step guidance on conceptualizing and solving frequently encountered therapy problems.

There are many novel aspects to this text. One particularly novel aspect is the degree to which numerous case examples enrich the theory and techniques being taught. Another is how Beck balances the art of practically teaching technique with explaining theory superbly; really the 'art' of cognitive therapy. In particular I *enjoyed* the attention given to personality disordered clients and the specific challenges they bring to therapy, for example, in modifying their longstanding distorted beliefs and dysfunctional behavioral strategies (although perhaps her fathers book is slightly better in this regard: Beck, Freeman, Davis, *et al.*, 2003). I also *benefited* most from the chapter 'when therapists have dysfunctional reactions to patients' and the finer distinctions between clients and therapist dysfunctional beliefs, and the importance of recognising therapist errors and distinguishing these from client errors.

The main strengths of this text are its writing style and theoretical underpinnings. Theodore Millon, of personality fame, describes it as "an excellent hands-on text for graduate-level courses and for novice therapists, it can also fruitfully guide mature practitioners who wish to expand their realm of expertise" (www.amazon.com) and I would undeniably agree. All clinicians, diverse as we are, will benefit from reading this book regardless of their level of experience of cognitive therapy, and it is also clearly written and eminently readable (perhaps unlike a large proportion of academic literature). Its theoretical underpinnings are sound and well referenced, and the framework is applicable to a range of challenging clinical situations. On the down side, some of the content could arguably be considered common sense reformulated in cognitive terms and some not considered cognitive therapy at all, but rather about engagement or general therapy techniques.

In summary, like *Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond*, I predict that this book will be acclaimed with time. In its' forward, Aaron Beck describes it as "a major contribution to the literature" and I believe it will be a mainstay of advanced cognitive therapy courses. With its knowledge and insight into designing relevant strategies and implementing appropriate techniques to solve difficult therapy problems, this book systematically and quite literally teaches clinicians how to become better therapists! What more could you want other than a free set of steak knives?

Beck, J. (1995). *Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond*. New York: The Gilford Press.

Beck, A. T., Freeman, A, Davis, D. D., *et al.* (2003). *Cognitive therapy of personality disorders* (2nd ed). New York: The Guilford Press.

Millon, T. (2006). See www.amazon.com for review.

Reviewed by Aaron Jarden, PhD candidate University of Canterbury, and Clinical Psychology Intern, Totara House: Early intervention for psychosis service, Canterbury District Health Board.

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About the Author

Judith S. Beck is the Director of the nonprofit Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research in Philadelphia and Clinical Associate Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also the President of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy and a consultant for several National Institute of Mental Health research studies and often presents workshops nationally and internationally on a wide variety of cognitive therapy topics.