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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

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Chew, J. (1998). *Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Healing Through Group Work: Beyond Survival*. New York: The Haworth Press.

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*Reviewed by:* Natalee Popadiuk, University of Calgary

Judy Chew's book is both an inspiring and energizing read; despite the heavy topic, it is a book of hope, wellness, and resiliency that resonates with creativity. The book is also highly practical, and outlines a step-by-step plan for creating an empowering group experience for women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. For the busy practitioner, whether a psychologist, social worker, counsellor, or nurse, this book is an invaluable resource for starting a new group or revitalizing an existing one.

*Women Survivors* is clearly laid out and can easily be read in an evening. Chew grounds the practical aspects of the group by explaining the theoretical underpinnings and basic beliefs and assumptions in the first section of the book. She examines the definition and impact of sexual abuse, and looks at her beliefs about the nature of the change process through therapeutic means. A rationale and the potential benefits of using group work with this population are also provided. The author's theoretical approaches, a combination of Eriksonian, Solution-Focussed, and Narrative perspectives, all look at ways of creating new stories and enhancing and empowering each individual's life experiences. All three orientations share the assumptions that individuals have the resources necessary for healing, and that constructing solutions involves a joint process between client and counsellor. There is also an emphasis on the important role language plays in how we construct meanings and identities. The overall perspective taken by Chew is one that is non-pathologizing, respectful of individual differences, and resiliency-based.

The most valuable part of the book are the thirteen group sessions that are clearly outlined and richly detailed. Chew's clarity, insight and experience in working with an adult population of women, especially in a university setting, is evident in her coherent and sound approach to treatment. Each session is thematically focussed, exploring topics such as Safety, Boundaries, Resourcefulness, Personal Stories, Anger, Power, and Spirituality. Numerous therapeutic strategies are used, including discussion, journal writing, storytelling, healing symbols, relaxation, visualization, poetry reading, and sentence completion. A significant strength of Chew's group approach is her active engagement of participants in insight, growth, resolution, and celebration. The group becomes a place to learn and practice new ways of experiencing the self and others, to explore meanings and life stories, and to revision and embrace ones own life. As a group facilitator, setting up and running a group for women survivors of childhood sexual abuse based on the descriptions and examples given in this section would be straightforward.

The last section of the book shifts to examining therapist self-care issues such as renewal, resiliency, spirit, and supervision. Being able to take care of self not only models what we strive to instill in our own clients, but it also lessens the effects of vicarious trauma from working with such sad and powerful stories. Chew addresses

these therapist self-care issues with the same respectful and empowering manner she brings to the clients in her groups.

I highly recommended this book for new or experienced therapists who use multiple strategies to enhance and encourage therapeutic change. It is a well-balanced and useful resource for working with women survivors of childhood sexual abuse within a group context.

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Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman (1999). *The Psychology of Human Possibility and Constraint*. Albany: SUNY Press.

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*Reviewed by:* Patrick Keeney, Education Program, Okanagan University College

In this century, the social sciences have been dominated by two incommensurable conceptions of human agency. The first posits that human agency is determined by the sociocultural matrix in which the individual is existentially landed. The second is a robust individualistic ideology, one in which the individual is conceptualized as an isolated, atomistic whole, thus negating the relevance of the social world to the achievement of personhood. (This view was neatly captured by Mrs. Thatcher's quip that, "There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families.")

Despite its relative brevity, this is an ambitious book. The authors set themselves the challenge of finding a theoretical bridge between the dichotomies which have plagued psychology. What is most needed is a theory of human agency which eschews sharp delineations between the individual and society, a *via media* or middle way, one which can overcome the inherent difficulties in theories of the self which fail to account for either the sociocultural or the psychological. Any such theory — if it is to have genuine explanatory force — must recognize that while individuals necessarily interpret their experiences within a specific sociocultural world (and so are constrained by the particularities of social forms and practices), human agency is "not merely the invention and expression of social structures" (11), so that the individual remains open to transformative possibility.

Martin and Sugarman characterize their positive thesis as one which provides a fusion of the insights garnered by both social and cognitive constructivism, for the simple truth is that, "Both sociocultural and psychological phenomena are real in a way that requires each other. . . ." (116). They label this middle position "dynamic interactionism": "Our view is that the psychological is emergent from the sociocultural in interaction with biological and existential givens of an individual human life" (114).

Having forcefully articulated their theory in the first half of the book, the authors then examine how dynamic interactionism plays out in practical understandings, a move which involves "reconceptualizing more traditional and common views and assumptions" (69). Here, they focus on psychotherapy and education, areas which share a practical concern for inducing change in how an individual experiences the world. For example, by reconceptualizing the role of creativity in education, dynamic interactionism shifts our emphasis away from a purely individualistic concern with