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Book Review

Clinical Psychology

by Ronald J. Comer

The author, a former professor at Princeton University's Psychology Department has also received the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching at Princeton. He is also Clinical Associate Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. He is a practicing clinical psychologist and consultant to Eden Autism Services and to hospitals and family practice residency programs throughout New Jersey.

The second Italian edition of 'Clinical Psychology' reviewed by me and proofread by Antonella Granieri, was published in 2017 by De Agostini S.P.A. publishers.

The book is subdivided into 15 chapters each of which is about a single psychology topic. The author takes into account the enormous developments psychology has made in recent years in theoretical research as well as in the dawning of therapeutic perspectives.

The first chapter is a thorough introduction to the characteristics of epistemology in clinical psychology including precise scientific characteristics.

All the historical stages of psychological science, from its dawning to the present day, are illustrated. In this chapter two recent discoveries are looked at in depth which have merged psychology and neuroscience.

The second chapter analyses the theoretical models which have been developed in recent years to interpret psycho-pathological function: the biological, psycho-dynamic, behavioural, cognitive, existential humanistic and social cultural models.

The third chapter is about clinical and diagnoses evaluations. Various in-depth psychological tests and clinical interview are looked into to understand the psychic structure of a patient (personality and IQ tests, questionnaires). At the end of the chapter the DSM-5 and PDM diagnostic manuals are described.

Chapter 4 describes anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorders. Each pathology is analysed through aetiology and therapeutic treatments.

Chapter 5 and 6 delve into trauma, stress and somatoform disorders, its symptomatology and possible causes and most common treatments. There is an in-depth analysis of Münchausen syndrome, a useful tool for a clinical psychologist.

In the next part of the manual, mood disorders are discussed (depression, euphoria, unipolar and bipolar disorders) as well as differentiated diagnoses and possible therapies (pharmacological, psychotherapeutic and psychosocial).

The following chapter is dedicated to suicide. Every year on average 700,000 people take their own lives. The author describes different categories of suicide and the various methodologies to study such behaviour.

Chapter 9 is about eating disorders and in some pages it delves into how anorexia studies have come to conclude that it is more common in the West than anywhere else.

Chapter 10 is about substance abuse. It describes various behavioural and physical effects of drugs, and underlines the therapeutic approach adopted in cases of addiction.

Subsequently, sexual and gender identity disorders are dealt with. In this chapter, the author outlines a subdivision of the illnesses in this category. Each pathology in the sexual sphere is described in its clinical manifestation and analysed through explanation and remedies.

Chapter 12 describes the symptoms of schizophrenia. The author outlines various hypotheses about the origin of the disorder, and its possible treatments.

The last three chapters of the book are about personality disorders, infant and adolescent pathologies as well as cognitive and ageing disorders. The social consequences of the epidemiology of each diagnosis is described as are possible therapies.

The book is a pleasant read even though its content is complex and uses meticulously pieced together scientific language. It distinguishes itself for its fluidity and the presence of in-depth analysis in each chapter enabling the reader to widen his horizons.

Another characteristic of the manual is its glossary which defines the technical terminology to facilitate understanding.

Through careful analysis we can deduce that behavioural and cognitive psychotherapy is the most effective in most pathologies while psychoanalysis is particularly useful in several of them.

The book enlightens the reader on the complex and intertwined study of the multiple psychological approaches from biological, psychological and social perspectives. One feature is that a great deal of space is given to studying the cultural and ethnic factors of mental illnesses.

Another feature is that the author describes clinical cases with respectful language and an empathic approach to the sufferer. Such behaviour towards mental illnesses is fundamental for whoever would like to become a psychotherapist.

It should be added that the book thoroughly goes through the neuroscience and biological-genetic substrates of the disorders. Such a perspective could allow psychological science to increasingly affirm itself in the future and reach new scientific frontiers in the field of psychological and psychiatric disorders.

The book is a complete manual, but does have some limitations. Firstly, I believe the questions asked to provoke thought, sometimes digress from the chapter's topic.

Moreover, more humanistic-existential therapies could have been looked at more than just briefly in the second chapter and the EMDR too.

Comer's book is useful to all psychology students, to psychologists, therapists and all those interested in understanding and treating mental illnesses professionally.

Valentina Monaco Crea
Psychologist and Psychotherapist
Asp 3 Catania e Associazione Assistenziale
Villa SANDRA, Italy