

B O O K R E V I E W

Treating Trauma-Related Dissociation: A Practical, Integrative Approach

By Kathy Steele, Suzette Boon, and Onno Van der Hart

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

2017

ISBN-10: 0393707598

560 pages

Hardback

Reviewed by Roxanna Erickson-Klein, PhD, Dallas, Texas

Treating Trauma Related Dissociation by Steele, Boon, and Van de Hart is a well-executed professional text that covers the topic of trauma related dissociation. The authors maintain that therapists need better resources – and this book delivers that. It contains the wisdom of three clinicians who also serve in educational roles. Each has earned their reputation as a significant contributor to awareness and treatment of this complicated, yet all too common, clinical disorder. The combination of robust clinical experiences and passion for teaching is reflected in the depth of information encased in a well-organized framework.

The Preface notes that this book was conceived as a product of extensive practice, supervision, consultation, and communication with other professionals regarding the needs, vulnerabilities, and concerns associated with this population.

The book begins with a discussion about dissociation, which sets the tone for the corpus of the work presented in the later sections. Opening with descriptive case examples that illustrate the basic premises of the treatment concepts, the reader's interest is captured by the easy-to-follow progression of ideas and supportive materials. The second chapter discusses effective therapeutic relationships. Even seasoned therapists are sometimes challenged by emotional inconsistencies, outbursts, and other uncontrolled expressions of behavior that may present in a clinical setting. Since these elements are common occurrences in treatment of this population, it is a wise choice to address the pragmatics. This chapter focuses on developing and maintaining awareness of, and therapeutically responding to the emotional and somatic range of expression that accompanies these maladies.

The book then continues with an organized, sequential presentation that divides aspects of treatment into assessment, case formulation, and treatment. Difficulties associated with assessment, as well as challenges that emerge at various phases of treatment are discussed in detail, in a manner that is both folksy and educated. The sections are detailed, clear, well presented, and bolstered with supplementary materials. The appendices include summary information about assessments information for screening diagnostics, as well as whole scaling tools for prognosis and treatment rating.

Each discussion is annotated with core concepts, which serve to orient and focus --- as if an explorer in treacherous territory repeatedly took compass readings to assure that the course selected was actually the right direction. The gems of wisdom in this book seem to lighten the load and give pause for refreshment in the presence of serious and dense information.

Case examples are included to illustrate both hard-to-understand concepts and hard-to-deliver therapeutic responses. By using examples that are simultaneously typical and challenging, the authors develop an alliance with the professional reader who unconsciously reacts by thinking, "Yes, I too understand the struggles in practice." This discrete alliance reinforces the underlying message expressed throughout the work: an effective clinician must continue to take in new information to learn, adapt, and optimally reach out, so that others may also learn and share wisdom.

The value of this book goes far beyond treatment of the target population. It provides a roadmap for professionals to self-reflect on the limits of their knowledge and treatment routines. The 542-page hardback is laid out to maximize utility to the

practicing clinician. It is suitable for all: to fortify the knowledge of the seasoned therapist who already reaches out to this population, and the less experienced therapist who seeks to extend his/her competencies.

With systematic thoroughness, *Treating Trauma Related Dissociation* provides an exemplary overview and is a resource for evaluation and management of a constellation of behaviors and expressions useful in many therapeutic situations. Succinctly stated in the authors' own words: "We have focused not only on how to conceptualize and treat dissociation, but on how to be with the patient who sees themselves as many instead of one."