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Book review: Lifting the weight, Praeger, New York.

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[782 words not including references]

Martin Kantor, a North American psychiatrist, is a prolific writer, with over a dozen books to his name. In his new book, *Lifting the Weight: Understanding Depression in Men, Its Causes and Solutions*, Kantor argues that depression in men may be 'atypical' in that it may be experienced and expressed in ways that are different to women, e.g. as a hypomanic denial of depression. Theoretically, the book tends towards a psychiatric perspective on depression (e.g. the use of categories of diagnosis e.g. for personality types), as well as relies on a psychodynamic framework. Thus, the book would be of most interest to similarly inclined professionals and clients. Nevertheless, the author is also at pains to establish a holistic approach to understanding and treating depression in men, and this broad perspective is a strength of the book. Indeed, I suspect many if not most counsellors/psychotherapists nowadays would incorporate multiple theoretical perspectives and approaches, where appropriate, even if they were mainly trained in one theoretical tradition.

To his credit, Kantor avoids overly complicated writing and jargon, attempting to appeal to a broader church than professionals. Additionally, the author is obviously well attuned to the issues facing men prone to depression. His sensitivity to men and their issues is a real strength of the book. Thus, readers will find some fascinating reading here on a broad range of issues including sadomasochism and male depression, male fear of success and depression, the translation of male depression into hypomania, anger and self/other-criticism, and dealing with male client resistances (e.g. excessively blaming others, not feeling the need for help). The psychotherapy and self-help chapters are particularly useful in showing the broad tools that men can use (e.g. counselling, exercise, work, diet, bibliotherapy, improving relationships) to tell a better story about themselves and recover from the downward spiral of depression (Ridge, 2009).

Refreshingly, the author does not construct himself as an aloof 'expert', and is willing to get down and dirty with other men, using examples of his own struggles with depressive cognitions to illustrate points. For instance, Kantor often uses the trials and tribulations with his (apparently) difficult neighbors to illustrate points about depression. While the examples do not always work clearly (and one wonders just what kind of neighborhood Kantor lives in!) these illustrations always work to humanize the author. Although only used sparingly, the direct quotes from clients and others work best to illustrate points made. I would encourage the author to obtain the required permissions to increase the use of such quotes in future publications.

Additionally, there is some very good treatment advice here that is wide enough to be of help to professionals broadly - and men themselves - including how to increase the chances of success working with men (e.g. the use of patience, addressing guilt and anxiety), as well as common mistakes to avoid (e.g. stereotypical advice about work and vacations).

Being primarily an account of actual practitioner experience and wisdom, the book is less engaged with the wider social science literature on men and distress/depression

(Brownhill, Wilhelm, Barclay, & Schmied, 2005; Emslie, Ridge, Ziebland, & Hunt, 2006, 2007; O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005; B. Smith, 1999; Winkler, Pjrek, & Kasper, 2005). For instance, there is currently an interesting debate in the literature about whether or not it is useful to see men as so different to women in their expression of – and treatment needs – in depression: i.e. to what extent is atypical depression a useful category anyway (Branney & White, 2008; Smith, 2008)? Additionally, while some professionals argue that men need specific health services designed for them, others argue that men's needs can be taken into account in the current service system. While the book does not shed much light on these kinds of debates, further clarifying research is needed in this neglected area of men and mental health anyway. At times, there was also a tendency to over generalize some interpretations (e.g. 'some individuals in our lives seem capable of creating depression in almost any man'). It could also be difficult to know whether some issues identified in the book are really about men and gender difference, or could apply more broadly to women as well. But this is an ongoing problem in gender analysis of mental health issues (Emslie et al., 2007). Men and depression is a very complicated area in which professionals will continue to debate for some time to come. In summary, Kantor should be commended for putting out there his best understanding from the perspective of an experienced practitioner. I believe this book an excellent place to start for those practitioners and clients who wish to learn more about depression among a surprisingly neglected group: Men.

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