

Book Review
A Psychotherapy of Love: Psychosynthesis in practice
By John Firman and Ann Gila
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Some suspected it, some hoped for it, and some knew it all along. Ann Gila and John Firman come right out and say it: it is love that heals the suffering soul, it is love that nurtures human unfoldment. This is the central premise of their new book, *A Psychotherapy of Love: Psychosynthesis in practice*.

The authors explain that this is not shallow or fantasy-based love, but an empathy and cherishing similar to that which Carl Rogers called unconditional positive regard, and Roberto Assagioli, the founder of Psychosynthesis, called altruistic love. It is not simply a warm attitude conjured up for the therapeutic hour, the authors say -- it is a far-reaching love arising out of the realization that who we are, our deepest personal identity, is in profound union with others, with all living creatures, and even the natural world.

This is a generous book, a gift to both new and seasoned therapists who want to relate to their clients in the most loving, practical, and effective way possible.

At just under 200 pages, the hardbound edition includes 12 chapters, notes on each chapter, references, and an index. The chapters include clear descriptions of Psychosynthesis theory and practice, along with illustrations, and client-therapist dialogs

Psychosynthesis is one of the first therapy models to include both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the person. Its approach to therapy is based on empathic, altruistic love. It focuses on the whole of our lives, from the depths of suffering to the heights of transpersonal awareness.

This conception of Psychosynthesis features what the authors call the “self-realization hypothesis”, which holds that there is an innate impulse within us all to grow and develop toward our greatest potential. In describing this hypothesis, the authors explain, “Each and every human being is seeking good, even if that search is taking distorted and destructive forms. . . . No matter what people are doing, we can know they are somehow, in some way, seeking to realize Self.” The authors go on to caution, “This does not mean we enable addiction, condone criminality, or allow people to use or abuse us; it means that we can love those caught in

these behaviors -- even while we help them address the behaviors -- knowing they are ultimately attempting to realize our mutual union in Spirit.”

Therapy clients are seen in this most respectful light.

The authors use the term “primal wounding” to describe the assaults and abuses, traumas and insults we all experience in mild or profound ways as we grow up. These are essentially instances of not being loved, not being seen for the unique and valuable person we are. These wounds can lead to anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, emptiness, feelings of abandonment, meaninglessness, rage, and low self-esteem, as well as many other distressing conditions. All caused, in short, by a lack of love.

Wounding and lack of love lead to what the authors call survival mode, a way of being that allows us to carry on within the non-loving environment with some sense of comfort and security, but at the cost of being cut off from our true selves.

How then do we move out of survival mode and begin to reunite with our true self? The authors explain that since it was a lack of love that led to the wounding, it will be the presence of altruistic love that fosters healing. If nowhere else, this should be available in the therapeutic relationship.

Firman and Gila include some thoughts about what they call “the way of the therapist.” “Those called to the way of the therapist will . . . struggle with survival patterns, including addictions large and small; undergo crises of transformation, major and minor; explore their own depths of wounding and heights of transpersonal awareness; become increasingly proactive in their inner life and outer expression; and nurture an ongoing relationship with the deeper truth of their lives.”

I would like to end the same way the authors, John and Ann, end their book, with this suggestion: “Trust that your expression of empathic love is what your clients need most.”

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