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## Dancing around the Fire (Book Review)

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Review of: *What Therapists Don't Talk About and Why: Understanding Taboos That Hurt Us and Our Clients*

By: Kenneth Pope, Janet Sonne, and Beverly Greene, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006. 199 pp. ISBN 1-59147-411-6 (hardcover); 1-59147-401-9 (paperback). \$49.95, hardcover; \$37.95, paperback

What truly haunts therapists in private practice are not the basic countertransference issues discussed in most graduate training programs but the unspoken secrets of their inner world. Too often, therapists are preoccupied by sexual responses to clients, hostile thoughts, and desire for professional approval, but training and peer discussions rarely focus on these forbidden topics. *What Therapists Don't Talk About and Why: Understanding Taboos That Hurt Us and Our Clients* is an updated and newly titled edition of the 1993 book *Sexual Feelings in Psychotherapy: Explorations for Therapists and Therapists-in-Training* (Pope, Sonne, & Holroyd, 1993). Ethics experts Kenneth Pope, Janet Sonne, and Beverly Greene “invite exploration and discussion of... myths; the taboos, secrets, and uncomfortable topics they foster; the errors in thinking they represent; and their implications for our development and work” (p. 21).

At less than 200 pages, the book is brief but engaging. The structure is similar to the first edition; the book begins with a discussion on taboos and ends with a summary of suggestions for how to overcome practice dilemmas. Most chapters are broken into short sections, some only a few sentences long, covering topics such as safety and openness. One brief chapter simply lists questions for the reader to ponder, whereas the longest chapter presents a series of practice vignettes followed by a short list of thoughtful questions. The authors also provide a model for approaching taboo topics and include a discussion of the applicable legal and ethical frameworks.

Unfortunately, this edition fails to deliver on its promise to cover a much wider range of topics than the original, which devoted itself openly and exclusively to sexual issues. Although problems involving prayer, finances, anger, age, and politics appear throughout, each is only briefly discussed. I also was disappointed that six chapters differ from the original only in minor changes to language and layout. For example, one chapter, originally titled “Conditions of Learning,” is simply renamed “Creating Conditions for Learning,” and a section on openness has been moved ahead of the section on respect. The exclusion of two original chapters surveying research on the impact of various social factors on therapeutic practices and on therapist reactions to taboo situations further lessens the utility of the updated edition. In short, this revision seems like an unnecessary investment for those who already own the more narrowly focused but research-driven original.

Nevertheless, the book is provocative and indispensable for students in clinical training courses. Questions asked of readers include the following:

- “What, if anything, could a client do that you would find disgusting?” (p. 57)
- “Under what conditions would you discuss your own sexual fantasies with a client?” (p. 61)
- “Has any aspect of your identity, development, and work as a therapist been particularly hard for you to acknowledge to yourself or others? If so, why do you think it was so difficult to acknowledge, and what did you do about it?” (p. 64)

As promised, these questions “address the reader directly and invite a more immediate, intense identification” (p. 85) while introducing trainees to the realities of clinical practice. The stimulating anecdotes, many based on the writings of well-known psychotherapists, paired with the discussion

questions will motivate readers to continue asking hard questions and refining skills long after the reading is done.

By challenging accepted wisdom and out-of-date clinical practices, Pope et al. have created a vital resource for practitioners and for students. Although the material will provoke the reader and may lead to professional development, the book is not meant to be a comprehensive resource for an isolated practitioner. In fact, the authors stress that clinicians should use their own insight and training to overcome impasses and state that this book is best suited for use in interactive learning environments, especially graduate training programs, internships, and peer discussion groups.

Despite its shortcomings, *What Therapists Don't Talk About and Why* is a unique book that fills an important gap in the literature on ethics and clinical practices. Greater depth and breadth of topics covered would increase the book's value, but the text remains a solid starting point for therapists and for therapists in training. Clinicians, supervisors, and students using this text will find advanced steps to dance through the heat of therapy taboos.

## Reference

Pope, K. S., Sonne, J. L., & Holroyd, J. ( 1993). *Sexual feelings in psychotherapy: Explorations for therapists and therapists-in-training*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.