DVD REVIEW

Assessment of sexual trauma in the adult female
by Alice Brand Bartlett

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The DVD provides a model by which clinicians and therapists can learn to assess patients when sexual abuse is either suspected or revealed. It contains two case studies that illustrate these assessment methods. It also highlights insights from Psychotherapist Alice Brand Bartlett on the overall effect of sexual trauma and the evaluation and treatment planning process. It also includes a leader’s manual.

In the DVD, Bartlett takes the viewer on a journey of the assessment of sexual trauma in the lives of two young females, named Carmen and Susan. These role-played case studies represent the assessment of rape and ongoing sexual molestation by a family member. Bartlett demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive assessment in both cases and highlights the key components that form part of the assessment, namely determining the client’s functioning prior to the sexual abuse, determining the nature and duration of the abuse, and, determining events and experiences after the abuse.

Bartlett also describes a model of assessment of sexual abuse wherein it is believed that all development occurs within a relational matrix and that no event occurs without impacting on relationships within this matrix. Relational matrices are internalised and used to create meaning and generate experience which in turn are applied to other situations. All our experiences are given meaning within our developmental context and relational matrices.

The DVD clearly illustrates how a therapist would apply the above model and conduct a comprehensive assessment of sexual abuse. Bartlett highlights key points that distinguish the two cases but also creates a clearer understanding of the various factors that may play a role in the assessment of sexual abuse. Some of these points include: (1) Women may function normally following childhood abuse until they reach a certain milestone (e.g., marriage or the birth of a child); (2) It is important not to assume that the client sitting with you is not currently suffering abuse – this
should be determined; (3) The client should be encouraged to describe at least one incident of the abuse in as much detail as possible; and (4) The style used by the client to cope with the trauma should be identified and an assessment should be made as to whether it is being used in other situations.

Bartlett ends the presentation by highlighting the key aspects of an individualised treatment plan in each of the two case studies.

In our opinion, the DVD succeeds in providing the viewer with a basic understanding of sexual abuse assessment within the context of therapy. It presents theory in a dynamic and practical manner which, in the opinion of students, is always a bonus. Although the DVD was produced in 1993, one can look beyond the fashion and media of the time and appreciate that a comprehensive assessment of sexual trauma can only be effectively applied where a therapeutic alliance has been fostered. This model enhances an understanding of symptoms displayed by trauma victims and aids efficient treatment planning.

**Biographical note on Alice Brand Barlett**

Alice Brand Bartlett, M.L.S., began her professional career as the Chief Librarian of the Menninger Clinic, Topeka, KS. In 2002, Ms Bartlett opened an independent private practice specializing in helping adults and adolescents to negotiate life transitions and to change lifelong patterns. Alice Brand Bartlett is certified in psychoanalysis by the Board of Professional Standards of the American Psychoanalytic Association and is a Supervising and Training Analyst with the Greater Kansas City Psychoanalytic Institute. She chairs the American Psychoanalytic Association’s Library Committee, and consults with psychoanalytic institute libraries throughout the country. She is also president of the Topeka Psychoanalytic Society, faculty member with the Greater Kansas City Psychoanalytic Institute, and serves on the International Board of Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing that produces CD and web versions of the full text database of psychoanalytic journals and books. Bartlett is a nationally known lecturer on professional identity development, mentoring, gender issues and the impact of trauma. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from Fielding Graduate University on January 19, 2008.

**Title:** Assessment of Sexual Trauma in the Adult Female  
**Therapist:** Alice Brand Bartlett  
**Publisher:** Menninger Series, distributed by Richard Stewart Enterprises (rse@global.co.za)  
**Running time:** 37 minutes
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Riette Du Preez is a final year Masters student in Clinical Psychology at Unisa. Her research interests include forensic work and Child Psychotherapy.

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