BOOK REVIEW

No labels: Men in relationship with anorexia by Derek Botha

Reviewed by Angelica Clarke
Department of Psychology
University of South Africa
angelicaclarke01@gmail.com

Dr Derek Botha, who practices narrative therapy in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, provides new insight into the greatly disregarded world of men with anorexia in No Labels: Men in relationship with anorexia. He tackles the problem from a postmodern perspective and challenging the traditional approaches that too often assume detached and objective positions. From the start he acknowledges to the reader that his presence within the book must be accounted for as he does not assume the neutral position of the traditional researcher; having had his own relationship with anorexia nervosa through his son’s struggle.

Anorexia nervosa’s socio-cultural and medical history has framed this disorder as a female phenomenon, but Botha contends that it is an increasing problem within male populations. According to Botha, modernist research focusing on men with anorexia is poor and is often based on small samples of men that are not statistically appropriate; furthermore, there are no explanations as to which specific populations...
these men represent. He argues that men are further subject to additional discourses around masculinity that will not affect women. Botha believed it was time that anorexia nervosa was unveiled in a new light (a social constructionist one), and that it is important to understand how the dominant discourses around anorexia nervosa informed both women and men’s experiences differently.

The book is divided into three interrelated sections, each discussing important considerations and understandings of anorexia nervosa and the challenges of applying current dominant discourses to the male’s experiences with anorexia. In the first section, Botha provides an introduction of his epistemological position in the field. Through the social constructionist lens he critiques the dominant psychomedical model. For the social constructionist beginner like myself a discussion of the approach is included and expanded where necessary; this may however take some time to wrap your head around due to the depth of his discussion. To further contextualise his approach, selected writings of Foucault are explored relating to discourses, knowledge, power and the construction of the self. Thus the first section provides the foundational knowledge which must be applied when reading further in the book.

The second section of No Labels: Men in relationship with anorexia introduces the current dominant discourses of anorexia nervosa that men are faced with. It starts with a brief historical and cultural overview of anorexia nervosa, reviewing past literature that has formed and informed the current discourses of it. According to Botha, it is only when we start to deconstruct the past that we can use it as a tool for investigating the present. He then explores masculinity and the problem it presents when diagnosing the ‘female’ problem of anorexia nervosa and how a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa threatens masculine discourse. Although this section may sound very theoretical, Botha writes critically and in a manner that will keep the reader engaged!

In the third and final section, social constructionist ideas are expanded upon and meaning making of experiences within the context is discussed. Narrative therapy is introduced and the importance of processes used in this approach is illustrated, such as finding the ‘story’ of the problem. This approach does not pathologise the individual but instead focuses on an individual’s interpretation of events. The therapeutic process is also discussed with regards to how the individual and therapist co-author stories that maintain and support men’s preferred subjectivities. The importance of more narrative research in this field is emphasised by Botha, as he believes it is through narrative research approaches that we can begin to hear men’s voices and deconstruct current discourses.

No Labels: Men in relationship with anorexia was an insightful book, structured somewhat more like a novel. It will challenge the reader to think more critically and challenge their own beliefs about anorexia. I highly recommend this book to those who have an interest in anorexia nervosa.
Title: No labels: Men in relationship with anorexia
Author: Derek Botha
Date: 2012
Publisher: Moonshine Media
Pages: 285 pages
Book available from: Blue Weaver Specialist Publishers: Info@bluweaver.co.za, www.blueweaver.co.za, +27 (021) 701 4477

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Angelica Clarke completed her undergraduate and honours degrees through the University of Johannesburg in 2012 and jumped immediately at the opportunity to do her Master’s in Research Consultation at Unisa. Her current research interests include gendered perspectives of body image and Body Dysmorphic Disorder in particular. According to Angelica, when I am not selling my soul to the research process I like to take time out to meditate, eat lots of chocolate and spend time with my friends.