



Book Review

When Research and Psychotherapy Meet

Linda Finlay & Ken Evans (Eds.) (2009). *Relational-Centred Research for Psychotherapists: Exploring Meanings and Experience*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
Soft cover (263 pages). ISBN: 978-0-470-99777-2

by **Werner Human**

When research and psychotherapy meet, the result is the re-envisioning of both processes in a mutually illuminating way, as is demonstrated in *Relational-Centred Research for Psychotherapists* by Linda Finlay and Ken Evans.

The title contains a word that causes the average practising psychotherapist to become nervous: “Research”. And this is precisely what Finlay and Evans are engaging with from a psychotherapist’s point of view.

As explained in their preface, both authors are psychotherapists and recognized the need for and importance of doing research in therapeutic practice. However, they took it a step further and decided to share their way of doing research in practice with fellow psychotherapists and counsellors. Hence the aim of the book, as stated by the authors, is to “provide psychotherapists and counsellors with an accessible, practical introduction to carrying out qualitative, relational focused research” (p. xi).

The aim of the book thus identifies the target audience very specifically – and, given the growing demand on this group to produce research in order to gain scientific acknowledgment on various levels, the aim is justified. With psychotherapy being a young profession, as highlighted by the authors, most psychotherapists lack the confidence and skill to produce research within their field of professional practice, an aspect that is also creatively and directly addressed in this book.

Relational-Centred Research for Psychotherapists is divided into three sections, namely “Engaging Qualitative Research and the Relational-Centred Approach”, “Relational-Centred Research: Being and Doing”, and “Relational-Centred Research in Action”. Each section contains a separate introduction to the cluster of chapters dealing in depth with specific aspects of the section topic, and includes further value-adding chapters on related issues. The three sections, along with the chapters in each, also follow the research process chronologically as it would play out in a real life research project. This helps the reader and prospective researcher to follow a logical flow when planning a possible research project utilising the method presented.

The dual focus of section one grounds the research paradigm presented theoretically, contextualizing the relational-centred approach within the framework of qualitative research. Firstly, an in-depth look is taken at qualitative research, what it stands for and how it is applied in the relational-centred mode. The authors render a both thorough and clear discussion on qualitative research and how it fits with their own approach and paradigm. A chapter is also dedicated to competing qualitative research traditions and the importance of the choice of methodology in research. Secondly, the relational-centred research approach is presented. The theory and value system of relational-centred research is sufficiently clearly defined and discussed to provide the sense that, as a researcher, one is able to make an informed choice when deciding for or against this method. A chapter is then

dedicated to discussing the question of quality in qualitative relational-centred research. This is a chapter that is not always found in books on research and adds great value by addressing aspects such as clarity and accessibility. It also emphasizes – and accordingly ensures that readers, and, in particular, prospective researchers, are cognizant of – aspects such as trustworthiness and transparency.

Section two deals with the application of relational-centred research – or, as the authors put it, “the being and doing part of research”. In this section, the authors touch on the logistics of doing research and the practical considerations, which are really well set out and systematic. The section starts with creating a framework for setting up the research, which is effectively linked metaphorically to planning a holiday. It addresses the basic questions that most new researchers would have, and how to overcome these challenges. This is followed by an elucidation of the research encounter, focusing on engaging in the process and the co-creation of the data. These are important issues that are thoroughly addressed by the authors, acknowledging that researcher-therapists’ engagement in two processes at once – both research and therapy – is a difficult and sensitive path to embark on. The authors build on this difficult section with a chapter on relational ethics, which serves to ground the research/therapeutic process and provides the book with the shield that it needs to protect itself. This crucial chapter also addresses a real need in the field, as most therapists and researchers know that ethical considerations can get complicated in these two disciplines. The section is concluded by a chapter on becoming a relational-centred researcher, which addresses questions that the therapist/researcher might have after reading this book or conducting research

utilising the relational-centred approach. This is a good summarizing chapter and creates in the reader a sense of growth and development in the discipline of research.

The final section of the book, “Relational-Centred Research in Action”, provides the reader with the physical feel of exposure to this method of conducting research. Synopses of four research projects are presented and explicated by viewing the methodology, findings and reflections of each. This is a valuable contribution to the book and provides the reader with an experience rather than just theoretical knowledge. In this section, readers may find themselves making meaning and sense of aspects that were mentioned throughout the book, but that were not completely clear.

In conclusion, I feel that this book deserves a place on every psychotherapist’s, and even every qualitative researcher’s, shelf. The book is generally written in a clear and understandable fashion. Key issues are addressed and clearly defined, with some value-adding extra chapters not generally found in other books in the field of research methodology contributing substance. As both a psychotherapist and researcher, I do, however, feel that the chapter on ethics could have been given more space and fleshed out more. Ethics in therapy and research can be grey areas and need to be clearly explained and defined for the novice therapist/researcher, particularly in a book serving as an introduction to a fresh approach in conducting research. A possible suggestion for the future could be an advanced book on relational-centred research for the psychotherapist where case studies could be discussed and overcoming possible dilemmas or interesting scenarios can be addressed.

Referencing Format

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About the Author



Werner Human is currently a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. Werner lectures predominantly in the fields of cognitive psychology, therapeutic psychology, psychopathology and qualitative research methodology. His current research interests reside in the area of Adult ADHD.

Werner maintains a small private practice as he believes that this is where theory and research are integrated in a challenging way.

E-mail address: whuman@uj.ac.za