

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND HEALTH: ESSAYS ON MIND, BODY AND HUMAN POTENTIAL edited by Christine Simmonds-Moore. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. Pp. v + 306. \$55.00 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-7864-5966-7.

Exceptional Experience and Health is a compendium of research-rich essays that were originally presented as papers in September 2009 at a conference in Liverpool, England (p. 2). Much of the material presented and the tone of the book have a European bent both in the research chosen to be cited as well as treatment programs occurring in the UK and Germany. Indeed the British are way ahead of the US in

having over 15 universities where the study of exceptional experiences and beliefs is readily available to undergraduates, as well as the emergence of several serious academic discussion groups (p. 1). While an informative text, it seems to raise more questions than it answers. The book is divided into two parts with a total of 11 chapters including a helpful introduction by the editor summarizing the content of the book, the various terms used, and a thorough look at the emerging field of clinical parapsychology.

This is not a book for the everyday layperson interested in exceptional experiences on a casual level and looking for personal understanding and useful tidbits to apply in daily life. It is, rather, for the serious researcher interested in a comprehensive overview of the research literature covering each of the various topics included in the book, along with raising questions and an eye to what direction future research should go. Unfortunately, the title may not catch the eye of the population that most needs to read it, that of clinical psychologists who may be conducting research on the impact of prayer or laying on of hands in healing or those working with clients who hear voices or see visions that could fall in the realm of exceptional experiences. I must say that I had been hoping for a book that would bridge the two worlds more easily, so that the lay person could come away with more personally relevant uses and applications of the material presented as it related to their own experiences.

Nonetheless, even as a more research-heavy book, it will hopefully succeed in lessening the gap between the field of parapsychology and that of mainstream clinical psychology with regard to such areas as physical and mental health and exceptional experiences. The key may be in the marketing of the book to universities and researchers as well as, hopefully, future presentations given by the chapter authors at mainstream psychology conferences.

Part One (pp. 27–110) has four chapters containing essays on “Belief, Mind, and Body” with regard to some of the current literature dealing with normal and exceptional experiences and how the mind, beliefs, and experiences can influence not only one’s personal experiences and health but also the experiences and the health of others. Part Two (pp. 113–255) contains the bulk of the book, seven chapters dealing with essays on “Exceptional Experiences and Mental Health.” The field of clinical parapsychology or the more preferred term by some of the authors—“exceptional human experiences” (p.15)—is defined and discussed. This growing field attempts to tease out the difference and shared variance between exceptional experiences and pathology and mental health. Each chapter in the book contains an abstract overview of the essay’s content and highlights critical components and conclusions.

The book begins with Gruzelier’s “The Mind-Body Connection and Healing” (pp. 27–63), which reviews research in general and his specifically on randomized controlled trials assessing the mind-body connection. Gruzelier reports on research dealing with healing the immune system using self-hypnosis, relaxation, guided imagery, hypnosis, Johrei, and Reiki, and begins to tease out personality components that contribute to hypnotizability and positive schizotypy and creativity. His comprehensively reported studies underscore evidence for and validation of use of healing methods that cannot be readily dismissed by skeptics. Practical applications and suggestions include use of healing practices such as Johrei, Reiki, self-hypnosis, and EEG-neurofeedback in helping vulnerable individuals achieve resilience (p.27).

Use of Reiki is already achieving some mainstream recognition. Hospitals in the US are beginning to include holistic medical approaches such as Reiki, aromatherapy, pet therapy, and even massage to help calm patients during presurgery and speed postsurgery recovery. I personally experienced this recently in August 2012 when I had a total right knee replacement. Prominently listed in the hospital’s surgery information packet was the availability of Reiki, aromatherapy, and pet therapy. I availed myself of both Reiki and aromatherapy before and after surgery and felt a personal benefit from their calming and healing impact. The rehabilitation hospital where I then spent a week in postsurgery physical therapy also was introducing the use of Reiki and massage therapy as an option for patients. While Gruzelier covers studies dealing with Johrei and Reiki on health and mental health conditions, surprisingly he does not cover or mention “laying on of hands” or Therapeutic Touch, often used in the US by trained nurses. Nor does he include a provocatively positive outcome study by Bengston and Krinsley (2000) in which mice with mammary adenocarcinoma were healed after a month through “laying on of hands” conducted 1 hour a day for 1 month, by one author, with control mice dying within the expected 14- and 27-day timeframes. This study was replicated three times with the same positive results including using skeptical volunteers.

David Luke's chapter on "Altered States of Consciousness, Mental Imagery and Healing" (pp. 64–80) explores the anthropological and mythical connections to healing techniques by indigenous peoples and shamans. He looks along the lines of hypnosis, ingestion of psychoactive substances, chanting, dancing, drumming, and breathing, which increase mental imagery. Luke concludes with connections to modern-day psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy in dealing with death-related anxiety and substance abuse (p. 78). Here too it was surprising not to see any mention of Jane Henry's (2005) edited book *Parapsychology Research of Exceptional Experiences* with a chapter on healing by Benor and another on shamanism by Krippner.

Williams, Dutton, and Burgess tackle in "Excerpts of Intercoporeality: A Phenomenological Exploration of Energy Healing" (pp. 81–93) how the energetic healing process can involve "effective strategies for changing a person's lived experience of their illness" (p. 81). The healing process becomes a cocreated experience, whereby the healer and healee develop a joint awareness about the body-mind state of the healee, and offers an alternative stance the healee can utilize. The authors provide theoretical explanations, anecdotal examples, and a case study exploring the use of Chinese energy healing and links to thought field therapy (TFT) and emotional freedom technique (EFT) in Western psychotherapy (pp. 91–93).

This chapter too would have benefited from a more expansive review that included several rich articles dealing with distant healing through use of prayer and an examination of how disclosure of EHEs can result in positive impacts on physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. In particular, Dossey's book *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine* (1995); Braud's (1994) article "Empirical Explorations of Prayer, Distant Healing, and Remote Mental Influence"; and Targ and Katra's (1999) book *Miracles of Mind: Exploring Nonlocal Consciousness and Spiritual Healing* address significant mind-body experiments and positive distant influences through use of Therapeutic Touch and prayer. Palmer and Braud (2002) offer qualitative and correlational results that show positive and significant relationships between disclosure of EHEs and meaning and purpose in life, well-being, and reduced stress-related symptoms, as well as in spirituality and transformative change. Schmidt's (2012) meta-analytic research article in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* showed the positive effect of benevolent intentions in distance healing from 11 eligible studies conducted on three continents. These findings echo those of Astin, Harkness, and Ernst's (2000) meta-analytic review of randomized trials of distant healing reported in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, which found 57% of trials showed a positive treatment effect of distant healing.

Part Two deals with "Exceptional Experiences and Mental Health" (although the title page, 111, mistakenly says "Exceptional Experiences and Health"). The chapter authors do an admirable job of exploring EHEs and their clinical relationship to mental disorder, positive schizotypy, creativity, personal transformation or destruction, and treatment and support options being utilized in Germany and the UK. Here there are many more opportunities for a clinician to walk away with concrete examples, suggestions, and direction in working with clients who share EHEs or ExEs (Exceptional Experiences) that may be "incompatible with their personal and environmental explanation of reality as far as the quality, process, and origin of the experiences (p. 224)."

While Part Two offers much research to back up the various premises and musings, it offers much more qualitative information and examples that make for easier reading over the denser quantitative research presented in Part One. In addition, the material appears to be much more focused toward the clinician than the researcher. However, here too, it was interesting to note that Mack's (2005) chapter on "Approaching Extraordinary Experiences in the Mental Health Field" in Mijares and Khalsa's book *The Psychospiritual Clinicians Handbook: Alternative Methods for Understanding and Treating Mental Disorders* was not referenced, nor was Benor's (2007) *Reaching Higher and Deeper: Workbook for Healing Research, Volume 3—Personal Spirituality: Science, Spirit and the Eternal Soul*. A cross-pollination of these authors' ideas on exceptional experiences and mental health together with the chapter authors' ideas and explanations of EHEs and mental health in Part Two would have been fruitful in expanding the work of clinical parapsychologists and clinical psychologists treating clients with EHEs.

As a child psychologist and clinical parapsychologist who regularly receives emails from parents about their child's exceptional experiences, notably having contact with and/or seeing/hearing spirits, I found Belz's chapter on "Clinical Psychology for People with Exceptional Experiences in Practice" (pp. 223–241) most cogent and useful. She helps to put into perspective and normalize the extent of ExEs (which she prefers to the longer term "exceptional experiences") in the general population. She also helps

to differentiate between healthy and less healthy ExEs, highlights the overlaps between clinical disorders and applying clinical knowledge to distressing ExEs, and raises some provocative questions for future empirical studies that could help to stimulate and benefit communication between clinical psychology and parapsychology (p. 241). Unfortunately for my work, for the most part, both this chapter, as well as the entire book, focuses only on adults and does not mention or include any discussion regarding children's EHEs. In part, this is probably due to the significant lack of empirical research studies with children and mostly anecdotal writings on case examples.

Overall, *Exceptional Experience and Health* offers many gems to the reader. Editor Simmonds-Moore is to be commended for bringing together many expert authors sharing diverse viewpoints, as well as for attempting to rectify the gaps noted above in some of the chapters. In her introduction, she adds another level to the book's discussions in focusing on her thinking behind the book, along with the relevance of some more recent studies, books, and research, especially in the US (pp. 7–24).

This volume offers much for the professional researcher and even the clinician interested in research and treatment issues. It helps to give the reader a much better understanding of individuals experiencing EHEs as seen through the lens of health and mental health studies and how best they might come together. One can only hope that this book will help in further promoting alternative and nonwestern approaches to medicine, that mental health clinicians will be moved to view the healthy impact of EHEs rather than maintain a pathological viewpoint, and that EHEs will no longer be relegated to just the study and discussions by parapsychologists.

Simmonds-Moore has succeeded in bringing to the reader disparate disciplines that capture how the mind and exceptional experiences can be involved in better physical and mental health. While this volume often raises more questions than it answers, it is well worth including in one's professional library.

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