
Bookworm's Corner

Book Review

Cozolino, L. (2010). *The neuroscience of psychotherapy: Healing the social brain*. New York: Norton.

*Reviewed by David Axlyn McLeod
Virginia Commonwealth University*

Content and Style

The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy: Healing the Social Brain is a useful addition to the literature base and could be used as a tool to both inform the future of clinical social work and to further legitimize many of the profession's long-held standards of practice. In his book Cozolino, a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Pepperdine University, has written extensively about the social aspects of the human brain, neurological development, attachment, consciousness construction, and the conflict between needs people face in modern society and the evolutionary developments their brains continue to carry.

The author organizes the book into 6 sections with a total of 18 chapters, and his writing style appears to be both accessible to the practicing clinician and useful to the research-intensive academic. It appears Cozolino's intention is to give the reader a solid foundation of understanding in reference to the history of neuroscience and its application to mental health. He works to advance the idea that the human brain is an evolutionarily developed and socially integrated organ distinctly tethered to relationships and individual perception of personal history.

Cozolino works to communicate the relationship between neuroscience and psychotherapy and writes, "Psychotherapists are applied neuroscientists who create individually tailored learning environments designed to enhance brain functioning and mental health" and this concept is evident throughout the book (p. 341). The author assembles clinical examples using popular culture and historical references to convey his understanding of the manner by which human neurodevelopment is impacted by personal experiences, yet remains open to positive growth. The book appears to be targeted at improving clinical practice by enhancing clinician skills and generating new perspectives that could be incorporated into research.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The possibility for practical application is one of the primary strengths of this text. Cozolino makes a strong argument for the importance of attachment theory and its integration into clinical practice. He ties this position to descriptive research associating the complexity of human thought and consciousness development to the manner by which the brain is structured to rapidly assess observations and attempt to relate them to previous life experiences. He details that this is done in a manner explicitly and evolutionarily tied to human survival and the ability to gauge levels of safety in every-day situations. He speaks directly to the need for the human brain to be involved in a narrative process, and describes this in the context of the manner by which the left-brain imports and exports linguistic data, while the right brain interprets that experience.

Cozolino pays particular attention to explain the manner by which the human brain processes what is perceived as reality and how these perceptions are developed. He consistently finds ways to relate these concepts back to clinical practice, through case studies and explicit details about psychotherapeutic techniques like cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic approaches, and narrative therapies.

Perhaps the only weakness to his book could be Cozolino's use of scientific terminology and abbreviations from the field of neuroscience. The scientific nature of some language could find a reader new to the field exploring this book within constant arm's reach of Google for clarification of unfamiliar terms. All in all, this could be a good problem to have for a reader who wants the most technical and up to date communication of the topic.

Contribution to Social Work Practice

Cozolino's text could add to the profession of social work in several different ways. First his depiction of the manner by which psychotherapy and the clinical relationship is helpful to the positive development and healing of the human brain serves as a validation of the style of clinical practice for which the profession of social work has often come to be known. Cozolino details, using the latest scientific research methods, how psychotherapy can have positive impacts on people at all stages of life, and how new advances in the understanding of brain plasticity and the effectiveness of the psychotherapeutic setting empirically validate practices social workers have been using for the past century.

Secondly, Cozolino speaks to an understood foundational tenet of social work practice. Social workers have historically approached individual well-being in the physical and psychological senses with a presupposed assumption that the individual is intrinsically linked to his or her environment. Social workers attempt to work from "where the client is." Cozolino speaks to the social nature of the brain and its development, particularly the method by which the developing brain bases a person's observations on predetermined understandings and perceptions of the world. He posits the mere existence of human beings at this point in time, and our survival on this planet, is directly related to our evolutionary drives to remain together as a social unit. He explains throughout the book how our brains are hardwired to be socially connected to, and dependent on, each other as interactive units in partnerships, groups, families, and societies. One implication for his position in reference to the importance of relationships on neurodevelopment is that clinical practitioners should not only retain the value of the person's story in the context of the systems in which they are involved, but also work to professionally expand acceptance and understanding of neurological complexity in clinical practice.

A third implication of Cozolino's work for social work practice is in its applicability for practice theory. In this book the principles of modern neuroscience are applied to clinical situations where diagnoses like PTSD, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, among others, are explored. He addresses the implications of exploring these issues from a neuroscientifically informed perspective and with the most modern research in mind. These perspectives could give clinical social workers a new tool set to access in order to improve the delivery of multiple methods of intervention in the clinical setting.

Conclusion

In short, Cozolino's work is an excellent addition to the library of any social work student or practitioner, especially those with a clinical focus. He puts forth examples of some of the most progressive research available today in reference to neurological development and the

psychological, behavioral, and social implications associated with it. In doing so Cozolino not only validates many practice approaches historically held by social workers, but pushes forward a model of neurologically-informed practice which could be remarkably helpful as the profession moves forward well into its next century.

References

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David Axlyn McLeod, PhD, MSW, defended his dissertation at Virginia Commonwealth University on February 26th, 2013, and will be moving on in his journey as an Assistant Professor with the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work at the University of Oklahoma in the Fall of 2013. David has accumulated over 15 years of clinical and professional experience with, among other things, time served as a special victims police detective, CPS investigator, sex-offender treatment provider, and psychosexual risk evaluator for the court systems. David's research is affiliated neuroscientifically informed approaches in the areas of *forensic trauma* and the development of *criminal psychopathology*. For more information, and a curation of his professional activities, please visit www.damcv.com.