

---

## BOOK, SOFTWARE, & TEST REVIEW SECTION

---

### Book Review

Finn, S. E., Fischer, C. T., & Handler, L. (Eds.). (2012). *Collaborative/Therapeutic Assessment: A casebook and guide*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley (440 + xxv pp.).

Collaborative and Therapeutic Assessment (CTA) is in the midst of extensive growth, as evidenced by the frequent publication of case reports, empirical studies, and clinically oriented articles in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* and other well-respected outlets. In Finn and Tonsager's (1997) landmark paper, they described CTA as a complementary approach to the predominant traditional, information-gathering paradigm of psychological assessment. The chief distinction between CTA and traditional approaches is the goal of conducting the assessment in a way that maximizes the potential of producing therapeutic changes in clients. An in-depth discussion of the techniques and procedures that are used to produce change is beyond the scope of this book review. The book's introduction provides a clear and succinct overview to orient the reader. The person-centered, humanistic foundations of CTA raise its appeal as not just a complementary approach to psychological assessment, but also for its potential to plant the seeds of long-standing improvements in self-esteem and well-being. The effective blending of assessment and brief psychotherapy excites and intrigues practitioners and research indicates that it results in highly satisfied clients. It is also perhaps the single most significant factor in whether or not psychological assessment will remain a professionally defining practice of psychologists. With the growing evidence of the effectiveness of CTA models for adults and adolescents (see Poston & Hanson, 2010), as well as for children and families (e.g., Smith, Handler, & Nash, 2010; Tharinger et al., 2009), the focus inevitably shifts toward effective dissemination of their concepts, techniques, and individual models. *Collaborative/Therapeutic Assessment: A Casebook and Guide* provides a remarkable array of collaborative procedures and techniques demonstrated by leading experts in the field of CTA, each of whom brings a unique therapeutic style and perspective to the cases presented in the book. Not only are the contributors at the forefront of the CTA movement, but they are in many cases recognized authorities on specific practices of assessment psychology. The combination of these attributes underscores the significance of the book as an unparalleled resource for novice and seasoned professionals alike.

In full disclosure, I consider the editors and contributors to this book to be at least respected colleagues and many of them to be mentors and dear friends, which is why I refer to them by

their first names only at times in this review. When reading their respective chapters, I hear their voices, can imagine their facial expressions and mannerisms, and feel their compassion for the clients they are assessing. Being a part of the CTA community, conducting case-based clinical research, practicing and teaching these methods, and being mentored and inspired by the editors and contributors makes me the ideal reviewer for this book. I offer my review from three interrelated "observation decks": the clinician, the trainee, and the clinical researcher. From each vantage, the cases presented in this book are valuable, thought provoking, and gratifying.

#### THE CLINICIAN

From the perspective of a clinician, I found this book to be exceptionally useful and engaging. Although each chapter offers something of value in terms of clinical acumen, and I cannot list the respective import of each case, the chapters by Leonard Handler and by Stephen Finn are particularly striking for the complexity of thought and skill underlying the therapeutic use of assessment instruments. Len's case study of a 10-year-old boy is a fascinating illustration of the ways in which children's drawings, the Fantasy Animal Drawing and Storytelling technique (Handler, 2006) in particular, can provide the basis for an empathic case conceptualization. The case features a skillfully accomplished narrative restructuring intervention that unfolded over time through repeated administrations of the Fantasy Animal assessment technique. Steve's couples Therapeutic Assessment (TA; Finn, 2007) case presentation illustrates the potential power of psychological assessment, particularly the consensus Rorschach, when one is attempting to disentangle problematic projective identification. I have had the privilege of watching the videotape of this case, referred to as "Maria and John," in Steve's TA training workshops, and this chapter illuminates what occurred "behind the scenes" of one of the most powerful assessment interventions I have ever seen. Steve captures the power and emotion of that session, and the case as a whole, in this case presentation. This chapter is a must-read for anyone practicing couples therapy and couples assessment. Last, the respective chapters by Barton Evans and by Tad Gorske and Steve Smith demonstrate that forensic and neuropsychological assessments, once thought not amenable to CTA procedures and techniques, under certain circumstances can garner results that would be improbable if one is relying on traditional assessment practices with these populations.

## THE TRAINEE

From the perspective of a trainee, I found the book as a whole to be extremely valuable. The goal of developing a guide that would be useful to all levels of psychologists was undoubtedly accomplished by way of clear case presentations; complex and deep, yet accessible, interpretations of test results and client behaviors; and the generally effective use of “Teaching Points” that accompany each chapter. One highlight is Judith Armstrong’s case involving a woman with severe dissociation, which was informative on many levels; it was particularly helpful to read about the ways in which the comprehensive and nuanced assessment and conceptualization of the client’s dissociative experiences were grounded in the collaborative relationship, the client’s history, contemporary understanding of dissociation and trauma, and the formal, multimethod strategy. This case demonstrates the complexity of assessing and treating trauma and dissociation and the usefulness of a CTA stance when doing so. I also found Carol Groves Overton’s case presentation to be a masterful example of a carefully and thoughtfully crafted extended inquiry with the Rorschach. Extended inquiry often has a spur-of-the-moment nature: Carol’s knowledge of the Rorschach, intuition regarding the client’s difficulties and underlying dynamics, and ability to move the conversation such that the client keeps pace, provide trainees with the basis of conducting an effective extended inquiry.

## THE CLINICAL RESEARCHER

Clearly, practitioners and trainees are the book’s targeted audience, which might suggest that clinical researchers would find the content somewhat lacking. Although I thought I would have desired case studies with formal outcome or process evaluation, the qualitative and clinical outcomes of the cases provided illustrative, person-centered, and often tangible results of the assessment that fit with the individualized spirit of CTA. Some chapters provide data-driven outcomes, such as the case presentations of Tharinger, Fisher, and Gerber and of Deiner, Hilsenroth, Cromer, Pesale, and Slavin-Mulford, which are much appreciated and contribute to the legitimacy of the therapeutic benefits of CTA approaches. Yet, the authors of each chapter

evaluate the process and the outcomes in ways that are informative to researchers and clinicians. For example, Patrick McElfresh and Noriko Nakamura present cases in which CTA formed the basis of psychotherapy. Their respective descriptions of the various ways that assessment results and the relationship built through CTA procedures contributed to a larger “treatment” are potentially useful starting points for the next iteration of research examining the boost CTA gives to more traditional psychotherapy and intervention practices.

## CONCLUSION

Psychologists of all sorts are likely to find more than a few reasons to keep this reference within arm’s reach for years to come. It is engaging, understandable, and extremely useful for anyone who practices or wants to learn CTA procedures. No other source presents the various models of CTA in one place, making this a must-have publication. I give this book my highest recommendation.

## REFERENCES

- Finn, S. E. (2007). *In our client’s shoes: Theory and techniques of therapeutic assessment*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Finn, S. E., & Tonsager, M. E. (1997). Information-gathering and therapeutic models of assessment: Complementary paradigms. *Psychological Assessment, 9*, 374–385.
- Handler, L. (2006). The use of therapeutic assessment with children and adolescents. In S. R. Smith & L. Handler (Eds.), *The clinical assessment of children and adolescents: A practitioner’s handbook* (pp. 53–72). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Poston, J. M., & Hanson, W. E. (2010). Meta-analysis of psychological assessment as a therapeutic intervention. *Psychological Assessment, 22*, 203–212.
- Smith, J. D., Handler, L., & Nash, M. R. (2010). Therapeutic assessment for preadolescent boys with oppositional-defiant disorder: A replicated single-case time-series design. *Psychological Assessment, 22*, 593–602.
- Tharinger, D. J., Finn, S. E., Gentry, L., Hamilton, A. M., Fowler, J. L., Matson, M., . . . Walkowiak, J. (2009). Therapeutic assessment with children: A pilot study of treatment acceptability and outcome. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91*, 238–244.

JUSTIN D. SMITH

*Child and Family Center, University of Oregon*