

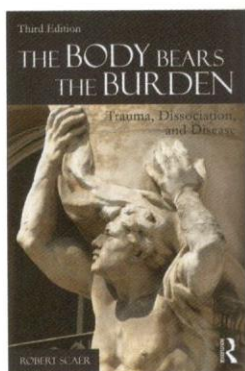
The body bears the burden: trauma, dissociation and disease (3rd edition)

Robert Scaer

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As I'm keen to work in the area of somatisation (with a specific interest in migraine), the title of this book resonated with me immediately. The author takes as his focus whiplash syndrome following motor vehicle accidents as a model of trauma involving neurophysiological changes, but this is far more than a book about the neuroscience of trauma and PTSD.

Specific to the third edition is a simplification of medical terminology, which makes the book more readable for those without medical training. In addition, explanatory notes have been added and several chapters have been rewritten, notably the chapter on neuroplasticity, which includes new evidence to have emerged since the first edition in 2001, and the chapter on trauma therapies, which now features contemporary therapies such as EMDR, neurofeedback and somatic experiencing.

Elements of the book that will fascinate and resonate will depend on the reader's perspective. The author adopts a behavioural science view and I found myself questioning how helpful for clients it may be to focus on a search for truth – whether scientific truth or one based on intuitive curiosity. The author's physician-as-healer approach may not resonate with those therapists who have different frames of reference. However, there is much in the book for those who adopt non-behavioural or non-medical approaches. Exploring trauma as a threat to survival, as learned helplessness, as a dissociative experience, as an unresolved freeze response and as a somatic manifestation of emotional experience, enables the reader to apply the theory presented to

scenarios extending far beyond whiplash syndrome.

A recurring theme focuses on the meaning of the traumatic experience for individuals and there is an extensive discussion of how relationships featuring boundary ruptures and impaired attachment processes (particularly those arising from childhood sexual abuse), predict, prime and condition traumatic responses. Indeed, it is startling to realise how frequently associations can be made between the presence of whiplash syndrome and the experience of childhood sexual abuse (as presented in a number of the cases presented in this book).

What then is the 'burden' of trauma? According to Scaer it is the potential for limiting the wellbeing of an organism – biologically (in terms of neurological development and optimal neuroplasticity), functionally (in terms of the capability to perform day-to-day activities) and relationally (being able to maintain fulfilling relationships). Overall this is a fascinating and informative book that has the potential to greatly expand awareness of pertinent issues when working with trauma. ■

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