

Book Review:

Integrative Couple and Family Therapies: Treatment Models for Complex Problems

Edited by Patricia Pitta and Corinne C. Datchi

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Therapists treating couples and families routinely work with diverse populations who are grappling with complex, multi-faceted clinical problems that fall outside the guidance offered by one treatment model. While therapists may randomly pull together a collage of ideas and techniques from different treatment models to address these issues, this is not the thoughtful and deliberate process associated with true model integration that is promoted in this easy-to-read book. The integrative treatment models described in this book are well-established and involve a coherent and systematic combination of diverse theoretical concepts and techniques with clear guiding principles, key concepts, and mechanisms of change.

Taken together, the chapters in this book make a compelling case for integrative approaches to couple and family treatment. Patricia Pitta and Corinne Datchi, the book editors, are uniquely qualified given that each have successfully developed their own widely used integrative couple and family therapy models (chapters one, four and seven). Their introductory chapter provides an informative history of psychotherapy integration and presents a useful typology for grouping

integrative approaches into four modes. These four modes include the common factors approach, technical eclecticism, assimilative integration, and theoretical integration. The latter two modes, which comprise most of the chapters in this book, are conceptually driven and theoretically complex.

Clinicians will find this book highly practical. Each chapter begins with a case vignette, which keeps the description of the integrative treatment theory grounded in real world situations. Another major strength of this book is that each chapter presents a summary of current scientific knowledge about the clinical issue presented in the clinical vignette, providing a context for both the case and the integrative model designed to treat the issues in the case. For each clinical problem, the authors provide statistics on prevalence, clarifies definitions, dispels common myths, identifies sources of stress, and highlights impacts on family members.

The first half of the book focuses on five complex clinical problems, which include incest, infidelity, money and power dynamics, and the role of technology and online relationships in marriage. In chapter one, Pitta describes the stressors faced by couples grappling with infertility. She describes how Assimilative Family Therapy (AFT) can be applied to helping spouses understand their experience, navigate the stress of medical treatment, resolve emotions about their inability to conceive a child, and explore alternatives to pregnancy. AFT is grounded in Bowen's family systems model, integrating concepts and interventions from psychodynamic, cognitive behavior, communications, and other systemic theories.

Fraenkel describes the application of a Systemic Narrative Feminist Model to the problem of childhood sexual abuse in the family

in chapter two. This model integrates concepts and techniques from structural family therapy, intergenerational family systems, narrative therapy, and feminist family therapy. This model is an important correction to purely systemic models that have not always properly weighted gender and power disparities in conceptualizing and treating sexual abuse in the family. The author emphasizes that it's not possible to create a safe therapeutic environment without considering these dynamics.

Regas's Mindful Differentiation Model (MDM), like Pitta's AFT, is grounded in Bowen's Family Systems Model. Regas integrates concepts and techniques from acceptance and commitment therapy into a systems approach that employs mindfulness to foster greater self-regulation and self-differentiation in each of the spouses. In MDM, affairs are viewed "as an emotional triangle that occurs when partners are struggling to be autonomous and connected in relation to the other (p. 87)." In a particularly challenging case study, Regas masterfully demonstrates the steps toward moving a highly fused Iranian American couple toward greater self-differentiation and recovery from the brink of divorce. The case underscores the point that to create relationship change, all it takes is one member of the couple to take a decisive step.

In chapter four, Patterson and Datchi tackle the relationship between money, power, and gender, a frequent source of conflict in couples, but too often not addressed sufficiently by therapists. These authors address these issues using a framework derived from Cognitive Behavior Couple Therapy (CBCT), an integrative model that focuses on the interplay between cognitions, behaviors, and emotions in couple relationships. A key mechanism of change in this model involves raising

the spouses' awareness of the cognitions that influence their emotional experience and interactions.

New technologies that allow for instant access to and communication with others via the internet can be both challenging and of great benefit to couples and families. In chapter five, Nielsen describes an integrative model that combines structural family therapy, psychodynamic concepts, and Gottman's research-based method into an integrative model which he humbly calls couple therapy 4.0. This is a particularly interesting chapter in that the author describes the personal discovery process he goes through in recognizing the limits of his personal theories and how he gradually builds an increasingly sophisticated and complex integrative model. He applies the model to a middle-aged couple with presenting concerns centering on the use of online pornography and sex-themed chatrooms.

The second half of the book focuses on six contextual issues which can exacerbate and further complicate the issues with which couples and families are struggling. These include blending families, racism, undocumented immigration, gender inequality, and incarceration. The first chapter in this section by Lori Katz describes the application of holographic reprocessing therapy with military couples who have experienced military stress and trauma. This model is grounded in cognitive-experiential and attachment theories but integrates techniques from many other schools of thought. This treatment approach, which begins with helping couples become more aware of their implicit interpersonal internal models, seems perfectly tailored to counteract the influence of military culture, which tends to support emotional suppression over reflection and emotional processing.

The couple and family relationships of those who are incarcerated are too often forgotten. In chapter seven, Datchi describes an integrative treatment approach grounded in a keen understanding of cultural context and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), adapted to support couples and families where one member is under correctional supervision through the criminal justice system. The case study involves an African American couple whose bonds have been severely tested by the husband's longstanding struggles with substance abuse and incarceration for drug-related crimes. Datchi demonstrates how the adapted version of FFT was used to help the couple maintain their bond, strengthen the protective factors in their relationship, and increase the likelihood the husband would return home.

The tragic plight of unaccompanied and undocumented Latinx youth is given focus in chapter eight. Cervantes details the trauma and loss these youth experience both before and after entering the US. The application of a socially and culturally responsive approach to treatment, the SALUD model, is described. This trauma-informed model is grounded in an empirical knowledge about Latinx families and is an integration of structural family therapy and narrative therapy. The approach prioritizes safety and awareness. The goal is to help youth reformulate their life circumstances or life-story, view reality as changeable, and focus on meaningful short-term, reachable goals.

A resiliency-focused model for addressing men's intimacy difficulties, often a byproduct of male gender socialization, is described in chapter nine. The focus is on gay couples. Greenan highlights how a gay man's growing up feeling "less than" combined with gender microaggressions and early shaming of same-sex attraction can further complicate the negotiation of closeness-distance in gay couples.

Structural Family Therapy is at the core of the resiliency-focused model, which addresses reenactments of past attachment trauma, emotional regulation and communication, and relationship satisfaction. This approach incorporates concepts and techniques from mindfulness practice, communication skill training, and accelerated experiential dynamic psychotherapy.

Browning and van Eeden-Moorefield's chapter (10) on stepfamilies and step grandparents is exceptionally strong. The authors' treatment approach recognizes that stepfamilies start from a place of loss and complexity and have their own unique developmental phases. Their approach, stepfamily therapy, uses strategic therapy as a home theory and integrates concepts and techniques from structural family therapy and Bowen's family systems theory. Working with stepfamilies can be overwhelming for couple and family therapists because of the sheer number of interlocking people and relationships. Browning and van Eeden-Moorefield's integrative approach simplifies the focus, emphasizing subsystem work, using visual maps of relationships across generations (genograms) and outlining discrete steps of intervention that build on one another.

In the final chapter, Jeremie-Brink and Chambers describe a strength-based, culturally tailored model for working with African American couples. The approach is termed IST, an integration of Pinsof's integrative problem-centered therapy and Breunlin's metaframeworks. To understand problems, the authors highlight the importance of attending to adverse structural barriers (e.g. racism and sexism) that can impact the couple's relationship as well as the cultural contexts of membership for each spouse (i.e. intersectionality) and how this impacts perspective on what is "normal." Treatment honors the

cultural values and strengths of African Americans and uses those strengths as resources.

I recommend this book without reservation to anyone working with couples and families. All the chapters are quite strong. The integrative treatment models described here will be useful for trainees as well as practicing psychologists, social workers, counselors, and marriage and family therapists.