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## Book Review: Couples in Treatment: Techniques and Approaches for Effective Practice

Lori L. Ellison

Marshall University, [ellisonl@marshall.edu](mailto:ellisonl@marshall.edu)

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**Book Review of *Couples in Treatment: Techniques and Approaches for Effective Practice, Second Edition.***

Lori L. Ellison

This book is a revision of the authors' previous work in an effort to update the literature and techniques being used in the field of marriage counseling. This book is intended as a manual for professionals and students to familiarize them with the basic theory behind and a growing number of techniques used in couple's therapy. It is very practical in its approach and quite thorough in its coverage of many different skills necessary to do couple's therapy well. Ranging from an overview of systems theory to the treatment of very specific issues faced by couples in today's society, this book offers much in the way of practical suggestions to aid therapists in understanding and incorporating these techniques in their own practices.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is focused on theory and understanding the process of couple's therapy. The authors begin with the basics of how to understand and assess the couple's issues when they begin therapy and progress through the basics of how to structure and balance sessions so that both parties feel heard and understood. They spend two chapters discussing systemic thinking and how to use it in both couple and individual therapeutic interventions. They also give an entire chapter to working with couples where one or both partners are "Highly Reactive or Narcissistically Wounded." The authors explain the very difficult communication patterns found in such relationships that often lead to resistance to the therapeutic process and how the practitioner can address these often traumatic difficulties.

The second part of the book addresses many of the well-known therapeutic techniques that are used in couples therapy to impact the marital relationship for the

better. Techniques like building intimacy, reframing, conflict resolution, communication and contracting are discussed at length to help the therapist utilize them in their work with couples. The chapter on homework is especially helpful due to the many suggestions on how a therapist may devise effective homework to keep the couple working at home on the steps that have been accomplished in therapy. The authors also included a chapter on cognitive interventions that, again, brings the theory to a very practical level. This chapter helps the reader become familiar with the irrational thinking most associated with troubled relationships, and also how the cognitive approach can and should be dovetailed with the systemic approach to help couples make important changes in the ways in which they relate to one another. In part two, the authors address another particularly tough issue in couples therapy, namely, extramarital affairs. They spend a sizeable amount of this section of the book discussing the types of techniques a therapist can use to help the couple address and work through these situations that can threaten not only the marriage, but also the therapeutic alliance, especially given the secrecy often involved in this issue.

This book has a very readable style. The information contained in it appears to be solid material based on both the authors' personal experiences and pertinent literature in the field of couple's therapy. There are numerous sections throughout the book that include very practical suggestions for improvement in professionals' ability to work with this particular population. Their explanation of systems theory is very clear and easy to understand, which would be most helpful to those who have not had much exposure or do not entirely grasp the concepts behind the theory such as circular causality and systemic thinking, communication and behavior patterns. It seemed particularly fitting that they

included a section on individual therapy with the systemic view given the incidence of one partner who is not willing or able to come to couples therapy. The authors point out that systemically, the relationship can be changed when one of the partners begins to make a change and this is the focus of such intervention with a single partner.

One of the primary strengths in this book is the use of so many scenarios and dialogues presented in the book to illustrate the techniques and concepts the authors are trying to address. Their use of examples makes it so much more clear to the reader who is trying to understand how these techniques work in the actual session. The authors have made this book a very practical manual that would aid a professional or a student in gaining a clearer understanding of the very unique processes of couples therapy that are often not found in other types of therapeutic interventions.

This book has the potential of a wide range of influence. The authors stated their surprise at the widespread use of their first volume as a text for marriage and family therapy programs. It appears that this edition will have the same appeal. With the volume of information contained in this book and the very accessible writing style, this book appears to be a resource that would be very appropriate not only for the individual practitioner but for the classroom as well.