

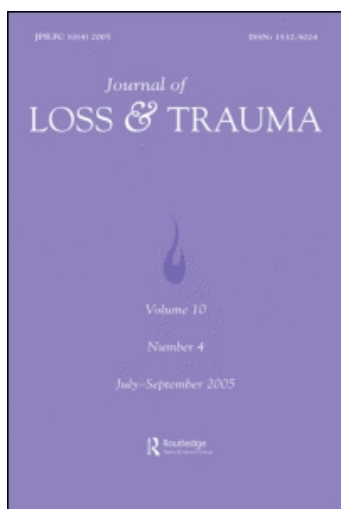
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Book Review

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BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Infidelity: A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Couples in Crisis*, edited by Paul R. Peluso. New York: Routledge, 2007. 330 pp. ISBN 0-415-95390-1. Reviewed by Tony Docan-Morgan.

Tony Docan-Morgan, Ph.D, is Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. His research examines communication and relational change.

Infidelity “is a complex issue that may result in substantial losses for relationship partners” (Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1999, p. 97). Extrarelationship involvement, for many betrayed partners, leads to loss of trust and belonging, feelings of rage and abandonment, and an augmented desire to leave a cheating partner (Charney & Parnass, 1995). *Infidelity: A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Couples in Crisis* is a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and timely review of infidelity research and treatment. Peluso and colleagues offer illuminating case studies, up-to-date research findings, and practical information for researchers, clinicians, and those who have experienced infidelity. The book also elaborates a number of insights about the loss and trauma associated with infidelity.

In Chapter 1, Peluso offers a succinct introduction to and overview of infidelity, including a discussion of infidelity's debatable prevalence and factors that mediate its occurrence (e.g., gender, relational satisfaction). Part 1 of the book is devoted to the understanding of infidelity. Chapter 2 explores the variations and challenges of sex in intimate relationships. Rasmussen and Kilborne creatively explore and distinguish between “sex” (physical, erotic contact that may lead to orgasm) and “intimacy” (degree of emotional connection), monogamy and nonmonogamy, and obstacles to the union of sex and intimacy. They highlight that because sex and intimacy often do not occur together, relational partners may become sexually frustrated, experience a loss of emotional intimacy, and engage in extrarelationship involvement. In Chapter 3, Davies, Shackelford, and Goetz offer a debated

yet clearly articulated evolutionary psychological perspective on infidelity in an attempt to make clear the motivations that lead to infidelity and distress experienced by those who have been betrayed. This perspective, to some degree, is balanced later in the book by discussions of infidelity's impact on couples and families from different social, cultural, generational, and sexual perspectives.

Part 2 focuses on the treatment of infidelity in couples therapy. In Chapter 4, Kessel, Moon, and Atkins argue that there is a paucity of clinical research on infidelity and elucidate two studies focused on couples therapy for infidelity. In one of these studies, Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder (2004) conceptualize infidelity as a *relationship trauma* and discuss a "treatment focused specifically on forgiving the betrayal a partner may feel when infidelity occurs" (p. 59). In Chapter 6, Snyder, Baucom, and Gordon review literature on the traumatic impact of infidelity and expand the previously mentioned model of forgiveness following the disclosure of an affair. The authors highlight that "injured partners" (those who have recently learned of their partner's affair) may experience rage, powerlessness, depression, suicidal ideation, and symptoms analogous to posttraumatic stress disorder. Similarly, the participating partner, or one who engaged in infidelity, may experience depression, suicidality, and acute anxiety. Drawing on the traumatic response and interpersonal forgiveness literatures, and interventions for treating couple distress, the authors detail a heuristic, empirically supported "interrogative treatment approach" useful for therapists addressing forgiveness following an affair. The treatment, in part, involves dealing with the impact of the affair, exploring the context and finding meaning, and moving on either with or without the relationship. Chapters 5, 7, and 8 also provide clearly articulated treatments of infidelity, including a flexible, systematic-based intervention (Fife, Weeks, and Gambescia), a model that facilitates the processing of traumatic emotion and memories (MacIntosh, Hall, and Johnson), and a typology of affairs (Brown), respectively.

Part 3 presents a number of comprehensive, timely reviews of research and offers an understanding of infidelity's impact on couples and families from different social, cultural, generational, and sexual perspectives. In Chapter 9, Subotnik offers a thorough examination of Internet infidelity, a wide-reaching problem and

developing area of research (Docan-Morgan & Docan, 2007; Henlin, Lamke, & Howard, 2007). Hendricksen reviews and calls for further investigations of infidelity in multicultural contexts in Chapter 10. Other chapters present ample reviews and constructive treatment options for infidelity in lesbian relationships (Burch), monogamy in male couples (Shernoff), and the impact of infidelity on children (Sori).

Part 4 offers a host of novel and engaging reflections and conclusions. In Chapter 14, Berman and Peluso interview a widely known and respected psychiatrist and family therapist, Frank Pittman. The interview offers a seasoned, eclectic, and insightful perspective into the past and present state of infidelity and its treatment. Pittman exposes the mutually traumatic nature of infidelity: "Well, the victim, it's very likely, is in a state of Post Traumatic Shock. You really have to take seriously what it's like to be the victim of infidelity—discovering that what you've based your life on is not quite the way you expected." Yet, "the person who has screwed around has kept it a secret, has lived behind enemy lines for fear of discovery and has finally had to face his or her own loneliness. The one who has been screwing around shamefully has had less fun and more pain than the one who has been bopping around life as usual" (pp. 287–288). In Chapter 15, Augustus Napier, also an experienced practitioner, calls for experiential therapy whereby clients are cared for with generosity and therapists are open and share their own thoughts and feelings. Experiential therapists, according to Napier, "believe that families hunger for honesty and for the resolution of long-standing grievances. We believe in assembling people in these critical groups and in helping them talk to each other" (p. 316). Finally, Peluso concludes with two case studies and a brief recap.

The contributing authors of *Infidelity: A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Couples in Crisis* inform, challenge, and inspire infidelity theorists, researchers, and clinicians. The book will undoubtedly help others facilitate the healing process for injured partners, participating partners, and family members; however, it is also replete with practical information for the lay audience (e.g., finding resolution to an Internet affair, guidelines on deciding to tell children about parental infidelity). This treatise offers valuable discussions of the loss and trauma associated with infidelity, as well as therapeutic models for dealing with one of the most devastating

relational transgressions. Maybe one of the most important lessons to learn is that infidelity, although often resulting in rage, despair, bitterness, and pain, is also a catalyst for change.

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