



## A clinician's guide to systemic sex therapy, 2nd edition, by Gerald Weeks, Nancy Gambescia, and Katherine M. Hertlein

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## BOOK REVIEW

**A clinician's guide to systemic sex therapy**, 2nd edition, by Gerald Weeks, Nancy Gambescia, and Katherine M. Hertlein, New York, Routledge, 2015, 306 pp., \$48.44 (paperback), ISBN 0415738393

The revised, updated and expanded edition of *A Clinician's Guide to Systemic Sex Therapy*, by Gerald Weeks, Nancy Gambescia and Katherine Hertlein, provides a comprehensive compendium of up-to-date information for therapists seeking to expand their knowledge and skill in the field of sex therapy.

In addition to their roles as veteran sex and relationship therapists, the authors of this valuable text are clearly educators with distinctive areas of expertise. This is evident in the way the text is organized, and in the manner in which the authors transform complex and sophisticated theoretical concepts into practical steps by which to provide effective sex therapy.

What distinguishes this book from other available sex therapy volumes is that in addition to providing both information and practical treatment guidelines, the authors create a convincing case for integrative treatment and, in fact, the book's introduction provides a comprehensive explanation of the intersystem approach to sex therapy.

Subsequent chapters, organized efficiently and logically, address the diagnosis of sexual disorders, assessment of sexual problems using an intersystem approach, utilizing the sexual genogram, scales and measures, and treatment principles, strategies and techniques. Specific chapters focus on treatment intervention, including psychoeducation, sensate focus exercise and addressing medical and psychological factors. Two final chapters include diversity in sexual expression and ethics in sex therapy. While each of these subjects could fill an entire volume, they are dealt with comprehensively yet succinctly, in a manner relevant and appropriate for psychotherapists wishing to expand their knowledge and skills in order to provide sex therapy. Additional resources are made available in tables within the text of the chapters.

This textbook is evidence based and up to date, making it a valuable resource for novice therapists and veteran sexual health practitioners alike. Moreover, it presents extensive material that spans multiple aspects of sexuality including development, individual psychology and individual physiology, relationship dynamics, medical conditions, sexual orientation and expression.

As opposed to traditional sex therapy models, which often view sexual problems as having an either medical/physical or emotional/psychological basis, the systemic approach emphasizes that a combination of biological, psychological and social factors combine to create and sustain sexual problems, and that these factors should all be acknowledged. Furthermore, while much practical and behavioral guidance and techniques are provided, the systemic approach emphasizes that unless individual, contextual and relationship conflicts are addressed, behavioral exercises are unlikely to be effective. In fact, power struggles that exist within the couple are likely to emerge as a result of the prescribed exercise, affording the therapist the opportunity to address these conflicted dynamics.

This book emphasizes the distinct role of the sex therapist in providing the intensive therapy of the PLISSIT model. The sex therapist, as opposed to medical sexologists, educators or counselors, must have sufficient individual and family psychotherapy training, with knowledge of systems and inter-relational therapy in order to appreciate both the

individual/relational contributions to sexual problems. Furthermore, as opposed to the classic medical models originated by Masters and Johnson and Helen Singer Kaplan, this approach de-pathologizes the identified patient by recognizing the dynamic nature of the sexual presentation and encouraging clients involved in a relationship to attend therapy as a couple. Regardless of who presents with the specific sexual dysfunction, homework assignments are aimed at engaging in pleasurable activities for both partners, preventing the scenario whereby the “sexually healthy” partner acts as a supportive helper to the “dysfunctional” partner.

Therapists new to sex therapy will find *A Clinician's Guide to Systemic Sex Therapy* valuable not only as a reference guide, as it provides key information on diagnosis and treatment of the basic sexual disorders, but also as a virtual instruction manual on how to be a sex therapist. The authors go so far as to suggest specific scripts for interviews, assessment and treatment, from the moment the client makes initial contact. This may be very appealing for some novice therapists, while others who are faithful to their own personal styles may simply regard these provided scripts as suggestions.

In some of the case examples, the authors do relate to the impact of religion, culture and ethnicity on sexual problems. However, given the importance of these factors clinically, and the lack of knowledge and skill reported among many therapists in cultural competence and sensitivity, a complete chapter on religion, culture and ethnicity would have been welcome in a comprehensive work such as this.

*A Clinician's Guide to Systemic Sex Therapy* should be required reading in all sex therapy training programs and is a highly recommended resource and an inspiring contribution to the field.

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