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Christine Courtois and Julian Ford (eds): *Treating Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders: An Evidence-Based Guide*

The Guildford Press, 2009, 48 pp, Retail Price: \$55.00

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Overview of the Book

This edited volume by Courtois and Ford provides an overview of contemporary theory and clinical practice guidelines for conditions, termed here Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders (TSDs), which arise in response to traumatic stress over prolonged periods of time, or at especially vulnerable developmental periods. While addressing an admittedly controversial topic, the editors of this volume have endeavored to produce a balanced and practical guide for the clinician who is faced with the complexity of a case that does not exhibit a typical PTSD presentation. The book begins with a definition of complex trauma and an overview of issues related to complex trauma, including neurobiological and developmental research and guidelines for best clinical practices with adults and adolescents. It describes approaches to assessment of the sequelae of prolonged trauma, as well as associated features of interest, such as attachment style and abuse history. It also provides overall guidelines for treating trauma-related dissociation as well as cultural competence, therapeutic alliance and approaches to vicarious traumatization. The book reviews some approaches to treatment that will be familiar to readers well-versed in CBT for trauma-related disorders and presents novel treatments for a variety of psychological difficulties associated with a history of chronic pervasive trauma. For instance, the second part of the book focuses on individual treatment and includes chapters on Contextual Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Contextual Behavior Trauma Therapy (CBTT) and Emotion-

Focused Therapy (EFT), as well as Sensorimotor Therapy and Pharmacology. Part three of the book focuses on systemic approaches to therapy, including Internal Family Systems Therapy, Couple Therapy, Family Systems Therapy and Group Therapy approaches to the treatment of complex trauma.

Evaluation of the Book

This book is likely to appeal to clinicians who are eager to learn more about the area of complex traumatic stress and novel approaches to treating associated problems. The text is well-written and organized, making it easy to follow.

To its credit, this book covers a breadth of issues related to Complex PTSD with a focus on the clinician. Most of the clinically oriented chapters, such as those on Contextual Therapy, CBT, CBTT and EFT (Chaps. 11–14) include case illustrations with session transcripts that illustrate the concepts conveyed. One shortcoming of these chapters, however, is that in many instances the authors simply provide an overview, rather than a detailed examination of these approaches. For instance, Chap. 12 on CBT provides some examples of how to engage in CBT for Complex TSDs. While this does illuminate this CBT approach, the chapter streamlines the narrative (as is necessary in such brief chapters), which invariably sidesteps possible problems that may emerge. Similarly, the chapter provides a cursory description of exposure therapy for PTSD. Clinicians wanting to learn particular procedures will likely have to look elsewhere for more in-depth discussions.

The volume also addresses the importance of issues involving diversity in Chap. 8. It examines issues related to bias and privilege as well as frameworks for conceptualizing

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these issues. The chapter provides a rationale for the importance of cultural competence in trauma work, as well as theory and guidelines for practice with culturally diverse populations.

Although this book strives in many places to portray itself as a review of evidence-based treatments, the fact remains that research on such treatments in this area is limited. As a result, the amount of actual empirical support for many of the approaches outlined in the book is meager. Furthermore, much of what is presented in the book is not entirely new, and rather is in many cases an extension of research or practice on PTSD, adapted in ways that purportedly address specific issues that are more prevalent or important in Complex TSDs. Although these adaptations may be helpful for beginning clinicians, they are frequently of such a nature that more seasoned clinicians may not find them very enlightening or new.

Another difficulty lies in the scope of the topic addressed. Because Complex PTSD is not a currently recognized diagnostic syndrome, the authors have taken the liberty of

bringing together various psychological difficulties under one umbrella that, at times, seem more disparate than similar. For instance, related but distinct disorders such as PTSD and Dissociative Identity Disorder are treated as though they are all members of the same class of disorder.

The editors suggest both in the title and in the introduction that the book provides a “variety of empirically-based approaches” to the assessment and treatment of Complex TSDs. In practice however, many chapters suggest procedures that have been validated in populations other than those currently being considered (e.g., CBT for PTSD, DBT for Borderline Personality Disorder), have shown limited support for use in other populations (e.g., EFT, ACT), have been the subject of some controversy (e.g., the Rorschach Inkblot Test) or have no empirical support (e.g., Sensorimotor Therapy, Contextual Therapy). Although there may surely be an audience for such less-established interventions, it is confusing to suggest that the book advocates evidence-based approaches throughout.