



Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior: Rethinking Sex Addiction

Austin Lam & Michael D. Berry

To cite this article: Austin Lam & Michael D. Berry (2016) Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior: Rethinking Sex Addiction, *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 42:6, 567-569, DOI: [10.1080/0092623X.2016.1210373](https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2016.1210373)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2016.1210373>



Published online: 03 Aug 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 244



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

to his point of view. It was as if the author stepped out of the pages and the messenger became so prominent I momentarily lost track of the conversation. I enjoyed finding myself developing a keener ear for clients' unseen biases and cultural scripts that so many have in their blind spots. I began to more readily see how a client's painful attempt to be a good sexual soldier was linked with automatically marching to orders from societal sexual scripts. In these moments, I was grateful for the time spent in experiencing the gestalt of this work.

Readers who are ready to hear a strong unequivocal voice of radical sexual change that challenges their clinical work, education, training, diagnostics, and systems-centered treatment for individuals and couples will find this to be a well-researched disquisition for unmooring personal and/or professional assumptions that might not be as clearly mentalized. Precontemplators, unprepared for thinking about these radical notions, may find their dismissive defensives so activated that it could be difficult to always discern interesting ideas from too much volume.

Part social commentary, part exposé, part clinical psychotherapy theory mixed with rapid-fire cultural observations leading to a radical call to subvert and change existing sex, gendered, relational, and treatment frameworks to liberate us all from the bonds of cultural oppression, *Sex Outside the Lines* has established Mr. Donoghue as a voice of the future. I hope this early work can be placed in perspective as the first musings of an emerging thinker and social media messenger who, with time, will settle into engaging conversation as he moves away from the podium from which he asks us to listen.

Douglas Braun-Harvey
The Harvey Institute,
San Diego, CA, USA

REFERENCE

Luft, J., & Ingham, H. (1961). The Johari Window: A graphic model of awareness in interpersonal relations. *Human Relations Training News*, 5(1), 6–7.

Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior: Rethinking Sex Addiction, by Douglas Braun-Harvey and Michael A. Vigorito. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2015, 435 pages, \$85.00 (paperback), \$83.70 (Kindle).

Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior: Rethinking Sex Addiction is a laudable achievement for many reasons. The book strikes an overarching tone on human sexuality that is fair-minded and generous to a plurality of viewpoints, putting forth well-grounded positions buttressed on a well-reasoned balance of research and clinical experience. Despite a number of contentious issues that out of control sexual behavior (OCSB) entails, the book presents differing sides in an open-minded manner and advances a core sexual-health vision. As the authors state, one of the key motivating factors of this clinically oriented work is to help “[resolve] men’s sexual behavior problems by moving them toward sexual health rather than limiting treatment” (p. xii). The book

provides an accurate portrayal of the field's history and advances a vision of assessment and treatment that is grounded in the broader context of human sexuality. Specifically, the authors highlight the limitations of currently employed models, such as the addiction and psychosexual disorder models, as the impetus for developing their treatment protocol. Consequently, the book will be highly relevant to therapists and mental health practitioners in the field of human sexuality.

Overall, the chapters are presented in an organized, coherent, and accessible manner. Effectively interwoven into the text are examples of clients' narratives that demonstrate key aspects of assessment and treatment by following six male clients in their process from disclosure to treatment completion; sexual health plans for each client are outlined. By integrating their clinical experience and research insights, the authors successfully guide the reader through the stages of the "OCSB Clinical Pathway." To this end, *Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior* begins with a section entitled "A Sexual Health Foundation," which provides an introduction to the field and OCSB. The book progresses through a discussion of "Out of Control Sexual Behavior Assessment," followed by the "Out of Control Sexual Behavior Treatment" model. This structure will be clear and accessible to clinicians with varying levels of experience.

The authors cover the integral issues that are expected from a clinical book, and specific chapters are provided on the state of the field, the sexual health model, OCSB, screening procedures, information gathering for assessment, treatment elements in assessment, sexual health plans, principles of OCSB therapy, practices of OCSB treatment, and clinical case studies. The overarching emphasis on a vision of sexual health is evident throughout the chapters. Closely related to this vision of sexual health is the pivot away from the historic debates marked by contentious divides. Rather, the authors move beyond past limitations in order to articulate a promising treatment model.

The book very effectively illustrates core aspects of the OCSB Clinical Pathway through case studies that provide "real life" applications. This allows readers to envision the process in relatable terms. Additionally, the case studies relate closely to the more general principles and elements presented earlier in the text. For instance, the chapter on case studies includes subsections such as "Motivation for Change," "Attachment Regulation," "Self-Regulation," "Vulnerability Factors," "Physical Safety," and "Erotic Conflict." Analyzing specific cases through the OCSB treatment model is apt to captivate readers' interests and serves to bolster the assessment and treatment content outlined in the book.

In addition, the book elucidates the OCSB clinical pathway with graphics and figures. For example, in the chapters on assessment, the content includes figures that summarize the OCSB assessment plan as well as a number of information-gathering measures. Dialogues are interspersed throughout that illustrate issues arising in assessment and treatment. These dialogues make this book incredibly accessible and help the reader to translate the information to a "real life" setting.

Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior clearly benefits from the clinical experience of the authors, and is excellent both in terms of the concepts covered and the presentation of these concepts. Overall, the authors succeed in offering clear insights and a fresh perspective on OCSB.

Despite the book's many excellent qualities, it is important to mention some limitations. First, the pivot away from focusing on personal distress toward the client's motivation for treatment is ambiguous at certain points. For instance, it is not clear how this pivot clarifies the clinical distinction within OCSB treatment. There is a need to elucidate what constitutes problematic

sexual behavior and, thus, it is difficult to follow how personal distress is not an integral concept. While the authors acknowledge that feelings of distress can motivate an individual toward sexual health, it may be necessary to retain personal distress, not necessarily as a clinical threshold, but as a consideration over and above motivation as it captures real psychological realities. Moreover, given the authors' move away from the addiction or psychosexual disorder model and given the field's inherent values-laden context, the tone of some sections seems to promote certain sexual values. Of course, when advancing a vision of sexual health, it is recognizably difficult not to engage in a values-informed tone. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these issues are only minimal and, in general, the book is very well written and seamlessly integrates rigorous research with clinical experience.

Overall, Braun-Harvey and Vigorito's exposition of problematic sexual behavior is excellent. By effectively communicating an alternative to the predominant models, the authors have crafted a book of relevance to therapists engaged in the treatment of OCSB. In advancing intriguing viewpoints on problematic sexual behavior and clearly articulating an innovative treatment model, *Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior* is highly recommended for use by therapists.

Austin Lam and Michael D. Berry, PhD
Department of Psychology
McGill University
Montreal, QC, Canada

Couple Resilience: Emerging Perspectives, edited by Karen Skerrett and Karen Fergus. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2015, 210 pages, \$129 (hardcover), \$99 (ebook).

Couple Resilience is at the forefront of what is likely to be a major expansion of couple's therapy, as influential to clinical practice as John Gottman's research¹ with newly married couples was some twenty years ago. But, while Gottman focused on what helps couples avoid early divorce, the authors of *Couple Resilience* focus on what keeps (or not) couples cosupportive in the face of inevitable challenges that will arise decades down the line.

The need to help couples stay resilient will grow greatly in the coming years. We are facing what has been described as a "silver tsunami" associated with aging baby boomers. These are the individuals who grew up with vaccines, antibiotics, seat belts, and smoke detectors that are keeping them living longer than was imaginable just a century ago. This is a generation that had seen so little disability and crippling disease that they could proclaim in a rite of marriage that they would stay together "in sickness and in health" with little or no concern about what that might entail.

Senior citizens in the industrialized world now live on average two to three decades longer than their great-grandparents. But, these extra years are not all good years. We are now living with dementia, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease longer than ever imagined. Disability and degenerative diseases increasingly force established couples into a relationship restructured as "patient"

¹The core of Gottman's research is best exemplified in his 1999 book with Nan Silver: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, published by Three Rivers Press.