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A Review of: “Cognitive and Neuroscientific Aspects of Human Love: A Guide for Marriage and Couples Counseling. William A. Lambos, PhD and William G. Emener, PhD.”

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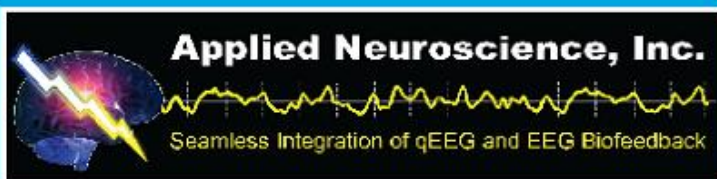
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BOOK REVIEWS

COGNITIVE AND NEUROSCIENTIFIC ASPECTS OF HUMAN LOVE: A GUIDE FOR MARRIAGE AND COUPLES COUNSELING. William A. Lambos, PhD and William G. Emener, PhD. *Nova Science Publishers, New York, New York, 2010, 389 pages, ISBN: 978-1-61668-281-1.*

I reviewed Lambos and Emener's 2010 book, *Cognitive and Neuroscientific Aspects of Human Love: A Guide for Marriage and Couples Counseling*, from the perspective of a social psychologist, researcher, and professor who teaches a wide variety of undergraduate psychology classes outside the counseling and clinical domain. As a teacher, I am also a perpetual learner and am eager to incorporate content from other areas to help me teach with increased textural depth, as well as expand my own understanding of new developments in the field. In many classes I teach, the topic of human love in its many forms is discussed. For example, in social psychology we study how friendships are formed, how romantic partners are chosen, and how and why people help one another. Therefore, I approached this book hoping to have a better understanding of the cognitive and neuroscientific research of love and relationships as it is applied to marriage and couples counseling.

The book is focused on couples and their relationship, not the broader family. Each chapter focuses on an aspect of that relationship, such as "The Past" or "The Couple in the World." The authors take a pragmatic approach to theories of counseling and many perspectives are considered, but rational emotive and cognitive behavioral theories govern most of their work. In the prologue, Lambos and Emener describe this book as

a textbook for the student of clinical psychology, mental health counseling,

marriage and family counseling or clinical social work that draws from cognitive aspects (the mind) and from neuroscientific aspects (the brain) and relates them to the art and science of assisting couples with their loving relationships (the heart). (p. xxviii)

Having read that this was a textbook for graduate students, I expected to find a host of research-based therapeutic methods used to help couples with their relationships and explanations of the efficacy of those methods based in the latest research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. However, in the sentence that follows the one just cited, the authors state, "Although it is by no means our intention to bore the student with endless conceptual approaches and the technical data with which they are associated in the research literature . . ." (p. xxviii). To this reviewer's mind, graduate education is supposed to be about learning *why* something works by understanding the theory and studying the technical data behind the research findings to determine if the research conclusions are warranted. Even if this is supposed to be a book to help one apply the research findings in a counseling situation, Kurt Lewin's (1951) advice, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169) still holds true. As is demonstrated, the disconnect between the title/intent of the book and the reality of its contents is the major criticism of this review.

As I read the book, I found that Lambos and Emener's writing style is fluid and pleasurable to read. Paragraphs flow easily into one another, and the structure of the chapters make it undemanding for the reader to follow explanations. One of the great strengths of the book is that nearly every concept is explained using real-life examples from the authors' counseling experiences as well as diagrams and graphs as illustrations. For example, the authors use a flowchart and the transcript of an actual counseling

session to explain how negative childhood experiences of rejection may influence the way an adult undermines her present relationships. If I were a graduate student learning how to counsel couples, I believe I would find the abundant examples and figures extremely valuable.

In addition, for this noncounselor, the writing was relatively jargon free and technical terms were explained when presented; however, explanations were not as detailed as I would have liked for an academic text. I found their description of the human brain too brief (about $2\frac{1}{4}$ pages), and I thought their labeling of the brain's major functions was oversimplified and done without adequately citing the literature. For example, the book correctly describes the way neuroscientists have uncovered how the human brain receives stimuli from the outside world, determines if what it senses needs to be attended to or not, ignores most of the information, and leaves the "executive brain" to act on relevant stimuli. However, the book does not cite how this conclusion was reached and does not provide the reader with references to learn more. It is this reviewer's opinion that the lack of adequate referencing and citing peer-reviewed literature is the major shortcoming of the book and the norm for remainder of the chapters.

With continued reading, it became apparent that this book was not written like a typical academic text containing multiple citations from the peer-reviewed literature to support the claims made. Instead, it appears to be written in the style of a self-help book, focusing on anecdote and advice with a few citations from the research literature. I compared the number of pages in this book to the number of pages of references cited and calculated a 34:1 ratio. That is, for every 34 pages of text, there is one page of references (the book is 341 pages not including epilogue and appendices). An undergraduate social psychology book by Kassin, Fein, and Markus (2008) that was nearby my desk had a ratio of text to pages of citation of 6.8:1. The difference between these two ratios should give the reader a sense of how *Cognitive and Neuroscientific Aspects of Human Love: A Guide*

for Marriage and Couples Counseling is unlike a typical academic text.

For a book with the phrase "cognitive and neuroscientific aspects" in the title, I was surprised to find that terms like fMRI and EEG are mentioned *once* in the book (as indicated by the index) and other neuroscientific terms relevant to love, like dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, neurotransmitters, vasopressin, adrenaline, testosterone, and estrogen, are not mentioned *at all* in the 389 pages of the book. In fact, the majority of the book appears to me to be a guide to marriage and couples counseling. If I had read the book without knowing the title, I never would have picked *Cognitive and Neuroscientific Aspects of Human Love: A Guide for Marriage and Couples Counseling* as the title. In my opinion, the title would be more appropriate if the words "cognitive and neuroscientific" were eliminated and the rest remained.

Because I do not have a counseling or clinical background, I cannot judge the appropriateness of the content of the chapters focusing on couples and marriage counseling. However, I can say that reading the chapters, understanding the material, and seeing how it can be applied in real life was made easy by Lambos and Emener's style. This may not be a typical textbook, but it does provide many examples (many of which end in some kind of success it seems) to help the student understand issues common in couples counseling. Although I would not recommend the book be used to teach the cognitive or neuroscientific aspects of human love, I think it could be valuable to a counseling student because of its abundance of examples and clear explanations.

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