

Feminist Family Therapy: Empowerment in Social Context.

Louise B. Silverstein & Thelma Jean Goodrich (Eds). Washington DC, American Psychological Association, 2003.

pp. 393. ISBN: 1-59147-0218. Hardcover US\$49.95.

It is rare to have the pleasure and privilege of reading and soaking up the clinical wisdom of an almost 400-page text over a couple of days, but that is one of the benefits of doing a book review for the *ANZJFT*! This edited collection on feminist family therapy has been of interest from the first to last page, and you would not need to identify as a feminist or a feminist family therapist to be engaged by much of the writing.

The book has been published by the American Psychological Association (APA) with a stated aim of introducing psychologists to the latest developments in feminist family therapy. Another goal of the editors has been to present feminist family therapy as a 'distinct genre of clinical practice' (xvii). As a family therapist and psychologist who has adopted a feminist practice for almost three decades, I find it difficult to distinguish between what is 'good family therapy' and what is distinctively feminist family therapy. In my mind the former ought to be guided by a feminist lens anyway. This makes a 'distinct genre of feminist clinical practice' difficult to define and set apart from other sound techniques and methods in family work. None of the authors adequately address this problematic.

The book has 27 chapters distributed over seven sections. The broad sections cover an historical overview of feminism in family therapy, life-cycle issues, race and ethnicity, power, service delivery systems, sociopolitical forces, and supervision and training in feminist family therapy. The chapters cover a wide range of issues including work with lesbian-led families, critical consciousness-raising, a focus on power, divorce, step-families, adoption, different racial groups — Afro-American,

Latinos, Asian-American, masculinity, male alexithymia (you know, when men can't find words for their emotions), intimacy, secrets, depression, doing therapy in prison, family medicine, AIDS, domestic violence, immigrant families, adolescence, family of origin, and supervision and training. Each of the chapters has illustrative and thoughtful case-studies highlighting the fundamentals of good family and couple work and of sound feminist family therapy. After reading these sensitive case descriptions, hopefully you too will begin to automatically consider gender, power and privilege, marginalisation, ethnicity, sexuality and class as the sociocultural backdrop to your work as a family therapist.

One of the side-effects of the book being auspiced by the APA is that it is North-American-centric — not just in the selection of authors and in the content of chapters, but also in references cited. There is scant attention paid to worldwide contributions to cutting edge theoretical and practice debates about feminism in family therapy and more postmodern narrative approaches to family work, and most chapters are light on theory and the latest research findings. However, I highly recommend it as a clinically rich text full of practical hints and strategies for family therapists, teachers and supervisors.

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How it Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent: A Book by Kids for Kids of all Ages.

Judith Snow. NY, Harrington Park Press, 2004.

Pp. 110. US\$12.95 soft (ISBN 1560234202), ISBN: 1-56023-4199 (US\$19.95 hard cover).

Judith E. Snow has put together an assortment of stories told by children of all ages (7 to 31 years) who have experienced

the challenging, difficult and rewarding outcomes of parental divorce in conjunction with the homosexuality of one or both parents.

As countries worldwide are experiencing an increase in the number of families with gay or lesbian parents, it becomes easier for children to meet others like them, confronting the same issues. However, there continues to be a large number hiding in the closet, afraid to deal with the troubling problems of homophobia and discrimination. Snow has successfully collected a wide range of experiences from kids of varying ages to help those who are isolated understand that they are not alone. Not only will this book be beneficial in helping kids who are going through a traumatic time, but for other family members who are also struggling, as well as therapists working with families who are in the process of coming out. This book is an important resource for gay and lesbian parents to understand the difficulties that face their children, and to provide them with ideas on how to make their 'coming out' as trouble-free as possible.

Children of different ages experienced living with gay and lesbian parents differently. For instance, younger kids were more accepting, but adolescents felt more secretive at school and with friends. Supportive peer groups with other kids living with gay and lesbian parents provided relief from the sense of loneliness and believing you are the only odd family. As a child of lesbian parents I can relate to how my experiences have changed over time.

A limitation of the book is that the language, attitudes and resources are American, and Australian kids and families would benefit from a locally based resource guide re peer support.

This extensive compilation of views creates a book well worth reading. It cannot, however, be read like a novel, front to back, as the stories are fairly similar and hard to distinguish between. Major themes that are apparent throughout Snow's collection of real-life stories are those of wishing for a harmonious family, dealing with harassment, blending of families, fears about disclosure of their situation, and the consequences of religious conflicts. A remarkable feature of the stories of the adults and most adolescents is that they

have positive outcomes. No matter how difficult the process was, the kids worked through, with shining resilience, with the result of broadening their lives, becoming more open and accepting the great variety of people out there. The recurring wish, asked of all individuals, is for the world to be more tolerant and accepting of those who are different.

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The Internal and External Worlds of Children and Adolescents: Collaborative Therapeutic Care.

Lesley Day & Denis Flynn (Ed.).
London, Karnac, 2003.

*Paperback, 188 pp. ISBN: 1-85575-928-4.
£15.99.*

Although this is not specifically a family therapy text, it speaks to much that is at the heart of family therapy. After all what is family therapy, but an attempt at working together, to provide collaborative therapeutic care? This book contains a collection of papers about therapeutic work with children, adolescents and their families at the Cassel Hospital in Britain. Papers are written by staff in different roles, but the theme running through the book is the emphasis on staff and patients working together. The book is about two specific services at the Cassel, the Families Service and the Adolescent Service. The Families Service offers a specialised inpatient admission where often a child has been living in an abusive family; the work is about reaching a decision on the best interests of the child and assessing and working with the potential of the parents to care for their child. The adolescent unit works with young people who are referred by other psychiatric services. These young people are frequently desperate, despairing, and have a history of self-harm. The treatment offered is intensive psychotherapy, but just as significant is the challenge and opportunity to be part of the community life. The work described, like the experience of reading this book, is intense, fascinating and painful — painful in the sense that it

keeps its focus on acknowledging and working with human suffering. Perhaps reflecting this, I found it more digestible to read only a chapter at a time, to allow each of the experiences to sink in.

A chapter that I found particularly interesting was that on working with a child and mother in a situation of Munchhausen syndrome by proxy, a syndrome not usually seen as treatable. The mother's therapist and the child's therapist, although working separately, also see their regular meetings with a supervisor as essential to avoiding any denial of the horror and murderousness that happened from mother to child. Understandably, both mother and child wished to unconsciously deny what had happened, yet fundamental to the mother's rehabilitation was her acceptance and sense of responsibility for what had happened. The child's play in her sessions where the theme 'poison glue' symbolises the actual poison she was given, was central to finding ways of naming the horror.

Again, there are graphic case examples in the description of the work of the Adolescent Unit. Morice and McCluskey write:

Working with severely disturbed adolescents brings confusion, pain and the sense of being useless, helpless and alone. There seems to be no way around this. In fact, if these states are avoided too much, the work is often sterile since these feelings are frequently the result of powerful communications from the 'war zone' of the patient's internal world (127).

I felt this was a wonderful description of how difficult the work with adolescents can be.

Each of the chapters gives reference to the inevitably difficult countertransference in working with disturbed families, which affect the staff's capacity to work together. Sometimes this emphasis feels repetitive, but perhaps this is inevitable, given that the authors are writing from different roles but wanting to stress collaboration. The treatment team tries to reflect on the dynamics of the family they are working with, as there can be powerful splits between different staff members, perhaps representing different aspects of conflicts within the family. Alongside supervision, they hold a weekly 'strains meeting' where the whole staff community monitors how they are mirroring the strains of the patient community. Further to this, there

is a process whereby patients are encouraged to take responsibility for the impact of their disturbance on each other. Particularly in the adolescent unit, patients are encouraged to ask each other for help and take a role in chairing community meetings. Patients take responsibility at night when there is only one nurse on duty. In mentioning these particular structures, what I was struck by is how seriously the group takes systemic and dynamic issues. For some of the patients this may be the first experience of being 'connected in community'.

I wonder if readers will inevitably experience some envy at the lack of such integrated and collaborative therapeutic communities within our own health systems. I feel this book is an important contribution to thinking about therapeutic systems.

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Children's Solutions Work.

Insoo Kim Berg and Therese Steiner. NY, London, Norton, 2003.

*Hard cover. pp. 246. ISBN 0393703878.
US\$30.00.*

This book, written with parents, child-care workers, and teachers as well as therapists in mind, is helpful for those who are familiar with solution-focused brief therapy as well as those who lack the confidence to implement it in their daily work with children. It was also written for consultants, program designers, managers and supervisors involved with children. The practical applications in the book are clear and show respectful ways to interact with children (preschool to early teenage years) and their parents.

Step-by-step methods of using SFBT are described by walking the reader through many cases. The differences and similarities in using similar techniques with adults are described throughout the book. Chapter 3 describes the basic tools of SFBT that are essential to working with most clinical populations. This chapter may be skipped by those already familiar with SFBT and adept at its application.

Chapters 4 and 5 explain how to prepare yourself to meet a child client and

how to think about the initial assessment of the child and the family, with particular emphasis on goal negotiation. Essentially, since SFBT is a goal-directed therapy, these chapters outline many different ways of achieving goal negotiation. Chapter 6 describes all the useful tools available for working with children, such as how to utilise children's natural tendency to play, imagine and be creative, as well as to serve their needs to please and get along with adults. The emphasis is on the purpose and direction of play rather than play itself. Analysis of stories and imagination to interpret the child's desires or thoughts often leads to problem solving or diagnostic questions.

Chapter 7 describes how to adapt SFBT to working with children and parents with uncommon needs. Chapter 8 is a short, yet comprehensive, account of working with adolescents. In Chapter 9, a single difficult case is presented from beginning to end. This shows the reality of working with cases when doing something different is both the challenge and the solution.

I would recommend this book for all professionals working with children. The emphasis is always on discovery of the extraordinary ability children and their parents and caretakers possess to overcome their difficulties with a little help from professionals. I would dearly love to see it on the shelves of many parents, childcare workers and even politicians.

This book was an enjoyable read, I can't speak highly enough of it. Thank you Insoo Kim Berg and Therese Steiner for your insights and the delivery of a much-awaited resource for our tool shops.

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Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy.

Froma Walsh (Ed.). NY, Guildford, 1999.

Hard. 301 pages. ISBN 1572305088.
US\$35.00.

As a young and very inexperienced post-graduate student of psychology, I was privileged to have as a lecturer Viktor Frankl. Many would have read his famous text *Man's* [sic] *Search for Meaning*. In it he describes his experiences in the Nazi

concentration camps and how he survived, though almost all his family was gassed to death. Frankl noticed that those prisoners who came into the camp with something to live for, some meaning in life, survived even physically better than those who did not. His conclusion — later practised in his 'logotherapy' — says that a meaning in life, a profoundly committed set of personal values, is the highest need and the most psychologically integrating factor in the human person.

Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy attempts with a great deal of success to anchor Frankl's general principles in the day-to-day life of therapist and client. There are sixteen chapters in the book from a great variety of contributors. In Part 1, Froma Walsh presents an excellent overview of the major issues involved. She includes a review of the literature and raises the questions to be answered in the remaining text. Part 2 looks at the issue of spirituality as it emerges in different therapeutic contexts. Part 3 bridges the gap between family therapy and spirituality, giving case studies and even a method for introducing spirituality within a training program.

'Spirituality' within the text is described in the broadest sense used by Frankl as a 'meaning in life', as a set of values and practices that give shape and significance to our day-to-day existence. 'Human beings are meaning creating creatures' (Anderson: 157). 'Spirituality is a way of living and seeing life' (ibid.), 'it is an active investment in an internal set of values' (Walsh: 6). In this sense 'atheist, agnostic, or secular humanist perspectives' (Walsh: 50) are spiritualities, though their adherents might balk at using 'spirituality' to describe their set of values. Froma Walsh is saying that we all have profound sets of values which cannot *not* influence how we work with others.

Ever since Freud described religion as an illusion and a neurosis, therapists have been shy to acknowledge the core place that both client and therapist values play in the therapeutic interaction. With the current therapeutic emphasis placed squarely on the therapeutic relationship (49), the therapist's spirituality cannot *not* be present.

'Past self-proclaimed "neutral" therapists wanted to believe that they did not communicate political, moral, and religious values' (Aponte: 85). 'Inescapably, the practice of therapy involves the interaction of therapists' and clients' value systems' (Walsh: 30). Part of the ongoing

challenge for therapist growth is to be aware of our own growing/changing value systems and the effect they have (whether we like to admit it or not) on our clients.

The fact that a client's value system is always in the therapy room by no means suggests that it always has to be focused on, especially in a naïve proselytising way (Griffith: 218). But, as Frankl observes, client spirituality is a deep resource for client growth which the therapist needs to be *able* to tap into in a most respectful way, should that be appropriate.

I really appreciated the respectful stance the book takes towards different spiritualities, and the value that is placed on client self-determination.

Albert Schweitzer commented 'patients carry their own doctor inside'. They come to us not knowing that truth. We are at our best when we give the physician who resides within each patient a chance to go to work (Barrett: 203).

The text provides a thoughtful reflection for me both as a practitioner and as one journeying through life. If our therapeutic encounters are real, they must involve (at least nonverbally) awareness that client and therapist value systems equal spirituality. The only question is: do we notice them when appropriate, or do we trip over them and miss out on a therapeutically most helpful resource?

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In the Firing Line: Violence and Power in Child Protection Work.

Janet Stanley and Chris Goddard.
Brisbane, Wiley, 2002.

Soft. Pp. 234. ISBN 0471998850. \$52.42.

Child protection is never far from the attention of the media, with much of the focus being on cases where services appear to have failed to protect children from harm. *In the Firing Line* takes this theme further by considering an issue not generally considered — the issue of violence in child protection work and the impact that this has on the ability of services to protect children.

In the Firing Line combines national and international research with a Victorian context, as well as interviews with child-protection workers and case studies. The authors, Janet Stanley and Chris Goddard, have considerable practice and research experience in child maltreatment and family violence and are known for having significant influence in public debate on the topic.

The subject of the book is likely to have interest for child-protection workers as well as other professionals who come into contact with child welfare services. It opens by providing a valuable context for current practice by exploring the history of child welfare from a policy and legislative perspective. It concludes that the system over time has been shaped by a range of economic and political forces, as well as by media inquiries which are often prompted by reports of child death inquiries.

Chapter 3 considers the themes that emerge from an analysis of deaths of children known to child protection services in Victoria, New South Wales, the United States and United Kingdom, these themes being well supported by reference to research. Of particular interest is the incidence of violence in parents and caregivers who then perpetrate fatal violence on the children in their care, a link that the authors consider is overlooked in child death reviews.

Having considered the lessons from child death reviews, Chapter 4 identifies the limitations of such a focus, with little research being available on effective child protection intervention. As previously indicated, the authors have used Victorian case studies, in this instance, to look at abuse and re-abuse rates, to conclude (not surprisingly) that children who are more severely abused are more at risk of re-abuse.

However, in considering what is effective practice, professional collaboration and effective client/professional relationships are viewed as preconditions to change. This provides an introduction to a discussion of the origins of social work in Chapter 5, which concludes that the view of social work as the helping profession is at odds with the threats of violence that child-protection workers are likely to experience, particularly with involuntary clients.

Chapter 6 provides potent data from interviews with 50 Victorian child-protection workers on the extent of intimidation, threats, and physical and verbal violence

from clients. The impact of working with a client group, many of whom have these features, is explored. Staff feel isolated or in an organisational climate which is bureaucratised. The staff interviewed also identified as further sources of stress: lack of support from other agencies, and the difficulty of discussing work with family and friends.

Chapters 7 and 8 further pursue the theme of violence with a compelling analysis of 'hostage theory' by research and case studies to demonstrate practice where there is collusion with clients. In particular, the climate for a failure of child protection is said to be in circumstances where workers experience violence and trauma and where they receive little support from the system.

Where *In the Firing Line* devotes a significant part of its attention to the complex problems of violence in child protection work, Chapters 9 and 10 change direction and identify some solutions. A program of policy and practice initiatives from New Zealand is viewed as a real opportunity for change. Further attention is devoted to professional supervision for workers, for supervisors and the process of case consultation. While the critique of research is of value, the authors offer little of their own views.

Keen observers of the media would note that the image presented of the child protection system is one of gross failure to protect children, inadequately trained and resourced staff and a system in chaos. The strengths of *In the Firing Line* are that it prompts valuable debate for practitioners and policy-makers alike. In particular, interviews and practical cases studies supported by local and overseas research are well used.

This might be of value to readers who have little familiarity of the child-protection system, as a means of understanding some of the sources of the problem. However, the book ultimately fails to meet expectations, by continuing to focus of the deficits of the system rather than constructing solutions. In this respect it is likely to continue the feelings of isolation and siege for the child protection reader for whom it may have limited appeal.

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Sperm Wars: The Rights and Wrongs of Reproduction

Heather Grace Jones and
Maggie Kirkman (Eds).
ABC Books, Sydney, 2005.

Soft cover. pp. 305, ISBN 0 7333 1542 9.
\$32.95.

Every therapist who practices family-of-origin work draws family genograms, right? The circles, the squares, the triangles, the dots, and some few other little additional symbols to account for unusual circumstances. But, when will those 'unusuals' be allowed to appear as frequently as the main genogram symbols?

One day, I had awkwardly to draw a sperm symbol on the genogram of a client of mine, who had three fathers when he turned 13. His biological father (whom he knew as 'a donor' until then — I quickly 'squirted' a sperm symbol onto the page to denote his link to my client) — contacted the client's mother when he read the obituary of his biological son's nonbiological father's death (it was written and signed by the son) without knowing that the son has been living with his mother and stepfather for the last four years. It was my uncoordinated response to a simple and regular question: 'How would you describe your relationship to your father?'

Then I faced other times when I had to draw eggs, test tubes (IVF), and a gestational mother. At times, the genograms looked more like little ocean rock pools, particularly when these issues surfaced as the major crisis point in my clients' life. I wished then that there was a book written for the general reader about people in these relationships. I didn't want to screen in my head, on my own, the picture of this ocean rock pool seemingly multiplying and expanding in all directions, like an octopus sliding everywhere.

This book has now arrived! Hooray! Hooray!

Sperm Wars brings to you a smorgasbord of difficult, confronting, complex issues. The chapters were written by, for and/or against, and to address and express, many professional, social, and personal perspectives, each with such mixed and intense feelings, because they are about human beings taking into their hands part of the tasks that used to be left to God. Artificial reproduction technology, shortened in the

book to 'ART' could remain pure art had it been stopped at the creation stage. Living art, and living ART, aren't that pure and simple, and *Sperm Wars* is good at describing the complexity. I can't tell you how my feelings went up and down, right and left, right-up, left-down, right-down, left-up, reverse, U-turn, for quite a while, before I could take a break and realise 'but that's life, and life is living'. The art of living ART will be different to different readers. I think it would do a great deal of good to clients if therapists would expose themselves to *Sperm Wars* to see the complexity of relationships, as shown here with some examples:

My immediate reaction was to laugh [when the author was told about the donor being another man, and not her 'Dad']; I'm not sure why. My sister cried and I couldn't understand why she was so upset. I told her I still loved her and that she was still my sister (170).

My current conception myth involves blastocysts and hormones, plastic speculums and long needles ... The biotechnical age has opened the boundaries of the body and thus of ideas about who can parent (35).

I think all of us felt powerless as prospective parents. Andrew and I [the two fathers — a biological one and his partner] were trying to work out what our role was with this unborn child, living across town in a near stranger's uterus [the biological mother who was the father's friend]. There were no models for us to follow. Our situation was not like step-parenting, surrogacy, adoption or blended families. What we were developing was a new concept of family (294).

In treating infertility it is clear that services are being provided by health professionals working in clinics. There is a service relationship between the clinic and the recipient on one hand ... the donor on the other ... There is also an employment relationship ...

It is also arguable that the donation of gametes is the provision of a service or good (125).

I no longer feel the sperms, eggs, symbols I drew were 'uncoordinated responses'. 'The messy truth' (the title of a chapter (212)) needed to be presented as was. I wonder whether family therapists, after reading *Sperm Wars*, will share with me the redefinition of 'curiosity' and 'system' that I have had to evolve — that we therapists need to follow and be with society developments in order to be systemically influential.

Sperm Wars has no index, so don't rush to gain your knowledge too quickly! Anyway, an index would not do justice to the pieces the editors of the book brought together. They were the voices of people from all walks of life, living and/or responding/reacting to ART. I would like to invite therapists to develop and contribute our therapeutic voices to these new relationships.

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Editors' Note: Please turn to Anne Macvean's survey of opinions from the people who attended her workshop at the Hobart Conference in 2002, and particularly the article which drew our attention locally to the new dilemmas we face in drawing genograms: Macvean, A., McGoldrick, M., Evans, J. & Brown, J., 2001. Genograms: Is it Time for a Change? ANZJFT, 22, 4: 207–213.

The Work/Life Collision.

Barbara Pocock, Annandale, NSW,
The Federation Press, 2003.

Paperback 304pp. ISBN 1862874751.
Aus.\$39.95.

The title *The Work/Life Collision* does betray the author's tendency to see work as something that affects individuals' per-

sonal lives in a negative way. In my view, this can be an unhelpful notion, in the sense that work clearly is supportive to many people and adds enormously to individuals' life experiences. A more helpful focus, which has been adopted by many other writers in the area, is that of work-life balance. Nevertheless, apart from this orientation and focus problem in the book, there is a good deal of information from a sociological perspective related to the Australian workforce and Australian families, which is useful.

The qualitative information in the book is not very well integrated with the quantitative information. Personally, I found the quotes used too brief to be illuminating and their brevity highlighted the need for useful case studies that could have fleshed out the theoretical issue being discussed. The extent to which family therapists or therapists in general find a text such as this useful is uncertain, due to the fact that it is very focused on contextual issues and is not a self-help book as such.

Nevertheless, I found the sociological perspective interesting, as it complements a range of other books that address these issues with clients who are dealing specifically with work stress issues or companies that are dealing with work stress and work-life balance. Work-life balance is a central issue in undertaking marital and family therapy, and many clinicians need to raise their own consciousness about it. In this sense, the book is useful and allows individual readers to reflect on their own notions to what extent our current lifestyles impact on mental health. As indicated, if the reader takes the notion of 'family-good', 'work-bad' with a grain of salt and considers that this polarity probably does not reflect the real world, then these issues are dealt with well by this text.

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