

Family Therapy Around The World
A Festschrift for Florence W. Kaslow
William C. Nichols, EdD, Editor
The Haworth Press, Binghamton 2004

Reviewed by Sheila Koren

A 'festschrift,' for those unfamiliar with the term, is a collection of writings by the colleagues and students of an accomplished individual, usually an academic, in honor of his or her achievements in a particular field. In this case, Florence Kaslow, world renowned figure in family therapy, initiator of the International Family Therapy Association, researcher, writer, therapist and networker extraordinaire is the honoree of this volume's contributions from a variety of countries about the subject of family therapy.

William Nichols who edited the collection is past president of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy as well as founder and first editor of the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, former editor of Family Relations and current editor of Contemporary Family Therapy.

The collection's greatest strength lies in what it represents: that a blended family of international family therapists and researchers actively relate with and learn from one another. The depth and warmth of Kaslow's many relationships around the world is reiterated throughout the book, whether an article's author is Swedish, Bosnian, Argentinean, or Japanese. It is significant that while particular traditions and cultural styles inform both the kind of problems and the types of interventions particular to different populations, there are international values of family therapy that pervade all cultures written about. Family therapy tries to enhance, no matter it's setting, such attributes as parental authority, mutual acceptance, and personal autonomy.

Beginning in Bosnia, an article by Brank Gacic and associates speaks to the particular difficulties of families dealing with war and its aftermath. Adolescent individuation is undermined by safety concerns. In Russia, individual families are having parallel experiences to their government, making a needed but difficult transition from a closed, totalitarian model to more open, democratic one. In Japan, a concern of dramatic proportion involves young people with such extreme, usually computer involved "social withdrawal," that they rarely, if ever, leave the house.

Most of the book's articles evidence an international trend of moving from deficiency oriented to strength -based methods of analysis and intervention (salutogenesis). In Sweden, one therapist describes stopping a family in the midst of healthy communication and asking them to look at what makes such a positive practice possible.

The collection falls short of being a more valuable read for family therapists in two ways. Firstly, it does not include articles from anywhere in Africa, the Arab world or Asia, with the exception of Japan, Being that so many California therapists actually work with families from countries not covered, we are deprived of potentially useful information. Author Renee Singh from London does, however, address the need for therapists to not make cultural assumptions and to understand the meaning to any family of their particular structure and relationships.

Secondly, because the book is an academic tome-- in its entirety it is simultaneously being published as the Journal of Family Psychotherapy, Volume 15, Numbers 1/2 2004—it is heavy on research and light on actual descriptions of practice, albeit those nuggets that are offered are useful. I'd forgotten about Virginia Satir's Family Chessboard Game until reading about its Australian implementation and used it with great success just this past week.

All in all, Family Therapy around the World does cover a lot of territory. Its subject matters manage to include the omnipresent issues of child abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, divorce, and suicide each in a specific cultural context. Its honoree Florence Kaslow is described and appreciated by family, friends and colleagues as a valued, important and contributing member of the family therapy community.