

Gender and Power in Families

R.J. Perelberg and A.C. Miller, eds.

New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990. xiv + 279 pp. \$19.95 (paper)

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It is always a little daunting to approach a review as an outsider: although one of the co-editors of this volume is an anthropologist, I found that very little of the work was familiar from the perspective of my own training in psychological anthropology. This is not to say, however, that anthropologists should find the collection irrelevant; on the contrary, it touches upon many issues which are current in modern ethnography.

Family therapy in Britain appears to comprise a range of practices which accord with an anthropological emphasis on local knowledge. Therapists arrive as strangers to a family's "culture" which they must then in some sense interpret for themselves, their clients and others. A diversity of voices is to be heard, and heeded. The ethics and consequences of intervention are foremost in the minds of practitioners. This collection, therefore, parallels numerous recent representations of "the ethnographic predicament."

Of the two introductory articles which intend to "conceptualize" gender-linked approaches in family therapy, I found the Perelberg article the broader and more successful. The four subsequent essays on "strategies of intervention" emphasize case studies in a manner that I found both lucid and fascinating. Similarly, the three articles which deal, respectively, with child sexual abuse, mental handicap and gender/power issues are illuminating, though I found the last of these somewhat unfocussed, and perhaps therefore weaker than the others. An appropriate balance is sought by two brief articles which address the roles of men in gender-sensitive therapy; more attention to case studies in these essays would have been desirable. The book concludes with discussions of the articulation of family therapies with the wider arenas of work, support groups and centres, race and class. These underscore and extend the feminist paradigms which inform the entire collection.

Perhaps the sole hesitation I have in recommending this book to persons in a variety of areas is the absence of any effort to suggest the relevance of more familiar critiques as a basis for theorizing family therapies: the names of Marx, Foucault, Laing and Jaggar are conspicuously missing. The role of French feminist psychoanalysis goes unremarked as well.

Nevertheless, this collection succeeds, I believe, in presenting a well-formulated deconstruction of the naïveté and bias disabling the dominant systems approach to family therapy.