

## BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

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*Mixed Families: Adopting Across Racial Boundaries*, Joyce Ladner, New York: Anchor Press, 1977, 290 pp.

Reviewed by:

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This book reads like a review of the literature of interracial adoptions supplemented by interviews with agency personnel, families who have adopted across racial boundaries, and people who were adopted. As one reads this book, numerous ideas come to mind as to what should be done in dealing with transracial adoptions. We are confronted with the issues and difficulties from which we can formulate plans of action for our professional encounters as we come to recognize and understand the problems and possible solutions. Emphasis in dealing with the major issues is placed on the dynamics involved; e.g., the individuals, the family (nuclear and extended), and the environment. Whatever practical applications there are must be inferred from the interviews and the studies referred to by the author.

*Mixed Families* also discusses inadequacies and shortcomings of the adoption agencies themselves, which seem to be the crux of the problem. They apparently have contributed to their own inefficiency by the standards they set, their rigid bureaucracy, their screening processes, and their personnel policies. Their alleged insensitivity to the concerns and needs of potential adoptive parents has greatly contributed to negative public relations. They have been accused of exaggerated conservatism and resistance to change. Their attitude has often led to the "screening out" of desirable potential adoptive parents, especially

black applicants. Some agencies have been guilty of blatant discrimination. Here again we grasp what services agencies are neglecting to provide: accessibility, support services, postadoptive counselling (individual and group), and follow-up. The role of an agency does not terminate once the placement is effected but rather it just begins if we are to be considerate of the welfare of both the child and the family.

A variety of problems are discussed from which the professional involved in either private practice and agency work can extract ideas for personal movement and solutions.

*The Family Crucible*, Augustus Y. Napier (with Carl A. Whitaker). New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Reviewed by:

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We approached this book wearing our "I must be serious, work hard, and really concentrate so I can learn something" attitude but we found ourselves relaxing and feeling as though we had opened a novel that we could read with ease and pleasure. The bonus was that we could also learn something about family therapy. Napier's personable style of self-report and his description of family interactions, not just during the interview sessions but in those crucial two minutes of assembling done in an allegorical style set the stage for an easily digested and information-packed book.

Napier, in giving a narrative account of his and

Carl Whitaker's work with one family (in fact a composite of many families with whom they have worked) succeeds in capturing probably as well as one can on paper the magnificence of Whitaker at work. Napier's interventions, again honestly recorded, feel more to us like the traditional family therapist style, but together they depict how two very different therapists can collaborate and work complementarily together within a family system.

Our prediction is that this book is destined to become one of the classics in the field of family therapy. Written in a style that the beginning therapist as well as the more experienced therapist can understand, Augustus Napier, a second-generation family therapist, in collaboration with one of the grandfathers of family therapy, Carl A. Whitaker, has produced a book that movingly describes both the "art" and "science" of family therapy. Napier, as commentator, takes the reader aside at appropriate times to give him, among other things, pertinent information on the origins and development of family therapy, family systems and family dynamics, critical incidents and issues that must be dealt with in the process of family therapy, and personal explanation about the interventions that he and Whitaker make in the course of therapy.

In doing this, Napier permits the reader to see both the "forest" and the "trees", thus allowing him to get a real "feel" for the process of family therapy. By following one family from their first contact with the therapists through those intermediate steps that so often are not adequately dealt with by other writers until their successful termination, Napier is able to logically and sequentially present most of the major issues in the therapy process. This middle phase, when the real "work" of therapy and growth takes place, is dealt with comprehensively both in the reporting of the actual interview and in discussing the theoretical issues by each session. Napier describes the style that he and Whitaker use in this phase as "experiential". Because they believe that just giving insight is not enough, that the client must have an emotionally meaningful *experience* in therapy, one that touches the core of the person, they work to help the family get in touch with their "basic" life anxieties in a way that touches not just their heads but also their hearts. They believe that only when these issues are dealt with does real and lasting change take place. Not only do they believe dealing with issues is important, but their book also demonstrates the real "how to's" absent in much other resource material.

The authors argue persuasively that the family context is the best way for this change to happen. Indeed, they even go on to suggest and illustrate that it may be necessary to move beyond the nuclear family to include the family of origin.

When they see the need for working with family of origin, they, as they did with other critical issues, discuss not only the theoretical justifications for doing what they do, but show by example *how* these other family members can be brought into the therapy process with the least amount of resistance and the greatest productivity.

A final feature of the book merits mentioning. The authors use the last chapter of the book as a "forum". Here they respond to many of the questions and doubts that have been raised when they've spoken to live audiences, believing that the reader, too, may perhaps have some of these questions. Among other things, they comment on the different types of family therapy, how to decide which members of the family grouping to involve in therapy, what constitutes a good co-therapy relationship and how to develop one, the implications of family therapy for the future, and some of the research on family therapy that has been done to date. The authors have chosen not to examine the current research in much detail, instead they have compiled a short, annotated bibliography for those who wish to pursue this.

The one significant criticism we might make of the book is that Whitaker's descriptions, his own internal processes before, during and after some of his incredibly unique interventions, are absent or are reported second-hand by Napier. Whitaker's highly unconventional style, in its masterful effectiveness, raises many questions for the reader which are not adequately dealt with in the book. On one occasion Carl wrestles with the teenage son and pins him to the floor until he finally cries, "I give up." This is obviously an intensely emotional experience for both therapist and client. It is a critical incident in the therapeutic process. Whitaker's self-report for that time period is sadly absent.

The only other criticism we would have (and we recognize this as mostly our own envy) is one we have of any accomplished performance. The authors' skill in therapy is such that it becomes easy to miss their expertise because the execution comes off so smoothly that one is misled into believing "anyone could do it". A therapist deciding to start using family therapy as a result of reading this book might be quickly disillusioned and then discouraged when his performance does not match that of the authors.

In summary, for anyone wanting an excellent overview of one style of family therapy (although the fact that much of it is Whitaker and he has probably an inimitable style) with many practical illustrations of ways to proceed, we strongly recommend this book.