Book Reviews

DeParle, Jason (2004). *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare*. New York: Viking/Penguin. 422 pp., ISBN 0-670-89275-0, \$25.95.

Heads up, family service providers. A new book about how families are surviving welfare reform and what government programs are doing to help or hinder their progress has important implications for your work and for our thinking about low income families and their children. New York Times' journalist Jason DeParle in *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare* tells a riveting story about one extended family network and how they operate in the social, familial, historical, cultural, political, and economic context of the late 1990s in Milwaukee, a city that was at the 'epicenter' of welfare reform. Within this family network, readers will find a wide range of welfare reform stories, including women who "play by the rules" and increase their work and incomes but continue to face difficult challenges and tough no-win choices for their children. One woman who is addicted to drugs is not helped by the system; her life gets considerably worse. For the children and the women, the absence of fathers takes a considerable emotional and financial toll.

In addition to describing how the three women struggle to earn a living and raise their children, DeParle juxtaposes the issues that color the programs and policies that constrain their worlds—what was happening at state agencies and how the political and ideological battles in Wisconsin and Washington shaped the landmark 1996 welfare reform legislation. There is a great deal of research on welfare reform, but this book is broader and richer than most others. The portraits of Angie, Jewell, and Opal are rich and intensive, and they are followed for more than a decade as their lives and relationships evolve. DeParle spent time with their extended kin and learned about the sharecropping past in Mississippi. He spent time in the halls of Congress, in the back offices of welfare agencies, in dialog with leading policy makers, and in the car for many hours, driving family members to visit the children's fathers in prison.

DeParle does not provide policy and program prescriptions or advice to those who work with families in poverty or who design policy or services to meet their needs. Instead he gives us well-informed and well-documented journalism; he is determined to provide accurate descriptions of their work and family lives. It is up to the reader to reflect, debate, and get involved in the policy discourse about how to improve the life chances of these women and their children. It is painfully apparent from this book that there are now too few available sources of support that are making a difference in the worlds of Angie, Jewell, and Opal.

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Ng, Kit S. (Ed.) (2003). *Global Perspectives in Family Therapy*. New York: Brunner-Routledge and Hove. 221 pp., ISBN 1583913114, \$42.95.

This collection of articles surveys the state of family therapy in various parts of the globe. According to its editor, "The purpose of this book is not to point readers to another textbook on systems theory...[but rather to] 'bear the torch' to readers concerning the needs for family therapy in the less developed countries" (p. xii). Unfortunately the vagueness of this charge is reflected throughout the book, which would have benefited from a clear and coherent set of expectations for both editor and contributors. Nor do most of the countries treated qualify as "less developed." Indeed, of the 14 countries included over half would qualify as "developed" including France, Austria, Italy, Greece, Israel, Japan, Singapore, and Russia. Equally puzzling are the author's characterizations of some of the countries under review. For example, he describes India—with its multitude of languages, religions, and races—as a "homogeneous society" (p. xii). Fortunately, the author of the chapter on India does not share this illusion.

Over half of the chapters focus almost exclusively on the "state of the art" emphasizing the political and administrative contexts of family therapy in the countries surveyed. More satisfying are those chapters that examine historical and structural factors. Thus Tamura's chapter details the changing role of the male in Japanese families. Softas-Nall's excellent article details the evolving ideology of the family in Greek society while Vargas provides a fascinating account of how state sponsored betrayal in the Soviet police state and its accompanying legacy of suspicion and anxiety continues to haunt the Russian family down to the present day. Adekson argues convincingly that Western style family therapy is of limited value in Nigeria describing how the techniques of indigenous Yoruba healers are uniquely suited to a particular cultural context.

Few of the authors recognize the critical role of economics in the reproduction of the family. Omitted is any mention of social class or racism. Class is essential to any global analysis of families because families from different class backgrounds respond differently to the contradictions that evolve from changes in economic, political, and cultural contexts. At the same time social class determines access to all sorts of services including family therapy. Another of the book's major shortcomings is its failure to address the issue of racism. None of the articles mention racism directly or explore its ramifications for families despite its profound significance in countries as diverse as Brazil, Ecuador, France, Japan, South Africa, and Israel.

If your interest is in learning something about the status of family therapy in a variety of countries around the world you will find this book useful. If you are looking for a book that successfully examines how family therapy may be uniquely applied in different societies with different political, economic, and cultural parameters, look elsewhere.

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Underwood, Thomas L. & Edmunds, Christine (Eds.) (2002). *Victim Assistance: Exploring Individual Practice, Organizational Policy, and Societal Responses*. New York: Springer. 286 pp., ISBN 0826147518, \$42.95.

This book has been written for professionals who provide direct service to crime victims, such as family practitioners, social workers, crisis intervention workers, and victim assistance workers. It provides a comprehensive examination of victim assistance service on the individual, organizational, and societal levels from both a macro and a micro perspective. The book begins by defining and exploring victim concepts and the continuum of victim services. The ecological perspective, one of the theoretical foundations of social work practice, is used to analyze the concept of victimization. Subsequently, the varying needs and issues of victims within the context of their environment are explored.

Several theoretical foundations are used to demonstrate the attitudes and practices of victim assistance professionals. Common physical, emotional, and behavioral responses are analyzed and utilized as a foundation for discussing effective intervention skills and strategies. The text thoroughly addresses potential barriers to service utilization, with special attention given to children, the elderly, and LGBT populations. Concepts of victimization related to domestic and family violence, sexual assault, hate and bias crimes, and criminal death are explored within an examination of the justice in relation to victims. The book closes with an examination of macro issues related to victim assistance. Issues that impact the recognition and acceptance of victim assistance as a profession, including victim advocacy and policy changes, are discussed with some emphasis on the institutional and legal perspectives on victim assistance.

The text provides a thorough examination of how concepts of victimization impact the availability and provision of appropriate services to victims. It also addresses the integration of theory into practice. A strong attempt is made to challenge professionals to explore the ecological perspective and its integration into the provision of individual and family services. The impact of cultural competency on the availability and provision of services to victims is also examined. Professionals are further challenged to examine their own attitudes toward violence and how these are linked to their perspectives on victimization. This examination, coupled with historical analysis, provides a solid foundation for practitioners to utilize self-awareness to improve the provision of services to victims on the macro and micro levels. The text emphasizes the importance of self-awareness among professionals dealing with increasingly diverse populations.

While the text is thorough in its analysis of victim concepts and attitudes, it is lacking in its discussion of best practices. It is also unclear in its attempt to explain the disconnect between practice and policy and how to best bridge this gap. The authors' examination of societal responses is driven by a majority perspective, thereby minimizing cultural variations in victim conceptualization. However, the book does attempt to address the role of cultural competency in dealing with victims. Overall, the book is an excellent

reference text for any professional involved in direct practice with victims. While the book focuses on social work practice, it would also be relevant to other disciplines that address victim services.

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