

Book review

Multicultural family art therapy

Edited by Christine Kerr

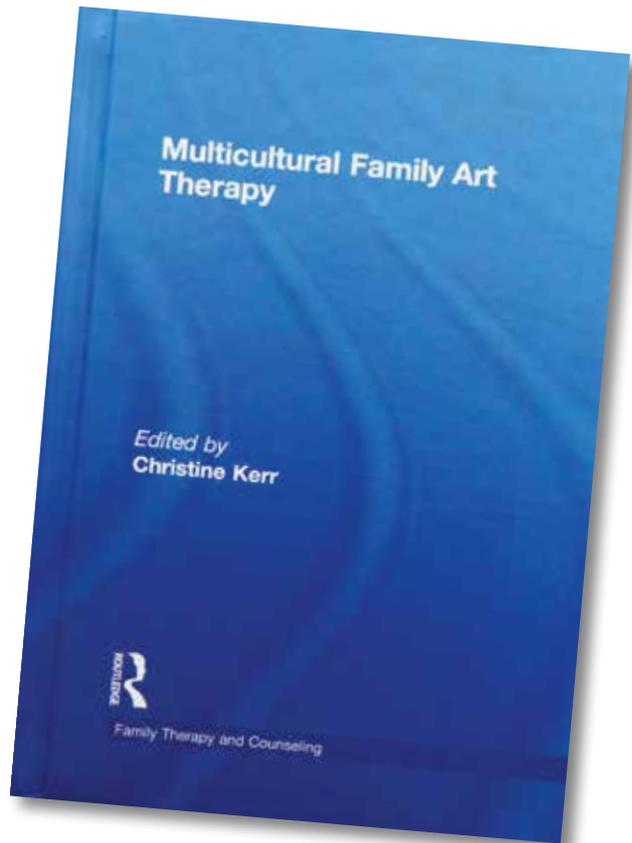
New York and London: Routledge, 2015 (ISBN 978-0-415-82732-4)

Reviewed by San Leenstra

This book provides a unique overview of different cultural perspectives on ways of implementing family art therapy. It includes contributions from a variety of countries: the USA, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia, Israel, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Trinidad, El Salvador and Brazil, with Kerr contributing to six of the 15 chapters. The book highlights some of the difficulties that may occur when adjusting Western models to other cultural backgrounds, in terms, for example, of understandings and expectations of gender roles, ideas of spirituality and the roles of adult children in family life. The book has received reviews by therapists such as Cathy Malchiodi, Abby Calisch and Valorie Adrio.

The main focus of the book is to clarify the perspectives of international family art therapists on treatment. The book highlights the diversity of theories that art therapists deal with as well as the diversity of cultural perspectives. Kerr openly wonders if classic family therapy constructs, as well as postmodern family art therapy theories and practices, can be transferred to other cultures, and if so what this would look like (p.xix). The book's strength is that the cultures are described by those who know them, with the authors reflecting on their own cultural orientation, thus providing a sense of cultural accuracy. The book subscribes to the belief that "all family art therapists strive to deliver some degree of ethnocultural empathic awareness" and that "cultural empathy goes beyond general empathy" (p.xix).

Most chapters start with an explanation of the cultural perspective, followed by a case scenario to show what the therapy looks like



in practice. An exception was the Trinidad chapter (by Sarah Soo Hon), which started with the case scenario, then clarified the cultural perspective and then continued with the case scenario. This I found to be an effective way of drawing the reader in right from the start.

The book discusses a variety of family therapy models. Christine Kerr beautifully describes the use of metaphors and narrative approaches in family art therapy in the USA, the Canadian chapter, by Proulx and Winkel, advocates for attachment theories as the best framework for family work with diverse cultures, while Nadija Corcos (UK) indicates a preference for solution-focused models. Marianne Adams (Ireland) highlights Melanie

Klein's psychoanalytic theory and Annette Coulter (Australia) promotes narrative models and points out that "art therapy can bypass language barriers while respecting alternative belief systems and cultural diversity" (p.xxiv). The list goes on, and although it is important to note what a brave move it is to provide such a large variety of perspectives and backgrounds in one book, I would nevertheless have liked to see a larger variety of European cultures represented rather than solely the UK and Ireland.

Although the book provides a welcome orientation to multi-cultural perspectives and family therapy models, it does not offer the overarching model of multi-cultural family art therapy that I had hoped for. Instead it highlights the variety of perspectives we are dealing with, and carefully points out that metaphoric and narrative approaches might possibly be fit best within a multi-cultural framework. She draws on Kopp and Craw (1998) to claim that "metaphors may bridge both the cognitive and emotional realms as well as the visual and verbal domains of thinking and perception" (p.xxii).

The chapters on Korea and Taiwan are actually about Korean and Taiwanese immigrants to the USA. This does negate their validity but it does give the chapters another spin, with case scenarios that are more about dealing with issues of immigration than about family art therapy in Taiwan or Korea. As an immigrant myself I would be very keen to read more about the multi-cultural issues that arise for immigrants of different cultural backgrounds, but perhaps that could be a future publication.

Being trained and registered in both art therapy and family therapy myself, I am aware that family art therapy is not a topic that is much written about, despite the agreement between family therapists and art therapists about the usefulness of art-making when working with families. Reading the authors' credentials, I anticipated a strong emphasis on art therapy rather than family therapy, however, I was pleased to find family therapy theory well

represented in the text. Straddling both art and family therapy models can create difficulties equivalent to the balancing act between art and psychology, and the vast number of different family therapy methodologies provides a broad spectrum of options. The open ending of the book left me wondering how João's story in Brazil would continue and I would have liked Kerr to make some concluding remarks at the end, as she did in her previous publication on family art therapy (Kerr & Hoshino, 2008).

There are few publications on engaging the whole family in therapy, something I experience as incredibly useful when working with families, so I was pleased to see that several chapters of this book advocate the inclusion of all family members, where applicable. I was especially pleased to see this view represented in the Australian chapter by Annette Coulter. Singaporean authors Sara Powell and Theresa Ng also indicated clearly that nothing happens in isolation in families, and that a focus on the individual, might actually reinforce the idea that the individual is 'the problem'. Powell and Ng also highlighted the lack of literature within an Asian context (see also Potash, Chan & Kalmanowitz, 2012) as a potential barrier to the implementation of Western-informed family therapy models in clinical practice.

This book is a welcome addition to the field of family art therapy in a variety of cultures and is a great follow-up to Kerr's previous publication on family art therapy (Kerr & Hoshino, 2008). The book has much to offer, not only to those working with families or using art therapy in family work, but also those interested in enhancing their cultural competencies across a variety of cultures.

References

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