

Focused Issues in Family Therapy

Shruti Singh Poulsen
Robert Allan *Editors*

Cross-Cultural Responsiveness & Systemic Therapy

Personal & Clinical Narratives



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Editors

Shruti Singh Poulsen
University of Colorado Denver
Denver, CO, USA

Robert Allan
University of Colorado Denver
Denver, CO, USA

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Introduction

We are pleased to be co-editing a special topic volume on multiculturalism and systemic therapies. We would be remiss if we did not mention, at least briefly, that when we began this project a little over a year ago, the USA and much of the world was undergoing seismic and dramatic political, social, and cultural upheavals. As we wrap up this project and this volume at this time, it is clear that these upheavals are here to stay and that now more than ever, the need for cross-cultural responsiveness, social justice, and advocacy by systemic therapists, educators, and scholars is critical. Thus, we sincerely and genuinely hope that this volume will be reflective, provocative at times, and ultimately helpful for systemic clinicians in a variety of settings who are engaged in the important work of making accessible in culturally responsive ways the powerful healing potential of systemic therapies to diverse and often underserved client populations.

While the historical trajectory of the USA and the world was being impacted over these past couple of years, our own personal histories were also shifting and experiencing change. For the entirety of the 2016–2017 academic year and the duration of this book editing process, I (SSP) was living and working in Istanbul, Turkey. I was in Turkey on a Fulbright Core Senior Scholars Program, teaching and engaging in clinical supervision activities at a private university in Istanbul. This experience was undertaken as my first sabbatical leave after earning tenure at my home institution in 2015. During this time period, Robert was in the USA at our home institution working toward his 4-year, pre-tenure review process. We collaborated in this co-editing venture separated geographically, yet connected by our commitment to, and common interests in, cross-cultural responsiveness and social justice and their impact on systemic therapies. We also were able to collaborate and connect due to our common yet unique lived experiences of being immigrants to the USA, me as an Asian Indian female and Robert as a White male Canadian of European descent. These personal and historical contexts gave our collaboration with each other and the authors contributing to this volume a unique perspective and isomorphism with the topic of this volume. We “lived and breathed” cross-cultural responsiveness in our process of engaging with the authors, with each other, and with the co-editing work on this volume. This volume, as it turns out, is not just a work of

scholarly and theoretical endeavors; it is a “living” document that we believe presents the critical topics of cross-cultural responsiveness and social justice from our and our authors’ very real and lived experiences and realities over this past year or so and across our careers and professional development.

Robert and I are both AAMFT-approved supervisors and faculty members and supervisors in a CACREP-accredited master’s program in Colorado. Robert is a second-generation Canadian of northern European heritage, born and raised in Canada, and he identifies as a cis-gendered, gay male. Shruti was born in India and is a first-generation naturalized US citizen who immigrated to the USA in her mid-teens. Shruti is an immigrant who has lived in several different countries other than the USA and India and identifies as a cis-gendered, heterosexual female. We are faculty members in a couple and family therapy specialization track within the counseling program at a university in a major city. We are both couple and family therapists who engage in clinical work and supervision within and outside the academic setting. We believe that sharing our personal contexts in this introduction sets the stage for what we believe is our and our authors’ commitment to understanding ourselves and the clients we serve in culturally responsive and socially just ways.

Cross-cultural competence and sensitivity have been acknowledged as critical in the mental health professions since the early 1990s when the rapidly changing US demographics were brought to the attention of both mental health professionals and lay people. In recent years, there has been some debate about whether the terms cultural competence and sensitivity are adequate in addressing the complex and unique needs of increasingly diverse client populations. In fact, among scholars, clinicians, trainers, and supervisors, there is the concern that “*competence and sensitivity*” may be misleading and possibly a “passive” way of conceptualizing the training needs of mental health professionals working with diverse client populations, a way that implies that once trained to be culturally competent and sensitive, a therapist’s training is done (White, Connolly Gibbons, & Schamberger, 2006).

In contrast, understanding of cross-cultural clinical work from a responsiveness and *responsibility perspective* provides a more active and process-oriented lens to not only the clinical work but also the therapist’s professional development. The term responsiveness implies ongoing personal work, learning, and training in order to be responsible as a mental health provider to clients’ needs (Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this volume is to incorporate a culturally responsive lens rather than a “cultural competence” lens to the work of systemic therapists. We as editors of this book, along with our authors, believe that cultural responsiveness in systems therapy cannot exist without attention to social justice and privilege. Therefore, a potentially critical contribution of this volume is to connect the need to attend to and address social justice and privilege concerns when considering cultural responsiveness and responsibility in systemic therapies.

While there are numerous books on cross-cultural therapy, counseling, etc., many tend to organize this topic in ways that lend themselves to an “ethnicity/culture of the week” mentality in learning about cross-cultural competence. The authors contributing to this volume believe that the topics they are presenting will take a more nuanced and varied approach to understanding systemic therapies with diverse

client populations. First, the chapters do not focus on specific ethnic groups or populations and recommended treatment, techniques, or models that ostensibly apply to these populations. The chapters of this volume include attention to cutting-edge issues in couple and family therapy. These include issues such as social justice and attention to power and privilege in couple and family therapy and in systemic EBPs, culturally responsive common factors and integrative approaches to couple and family therapy, global and international opportunities and challenges to CFT and implications for enhancing culturally responsive approaches, and cross-disciplinary challenges and opportunities to incorporating social justice and cultural responsiveness in training and supervision of CFTs.

An additional and potentially unique contribution of the proposed book will be that the chapters are presented in not only a scholarly and researched-based manner. The contributing authors each provide their particular “self-of-the-therapist” and personally contextualized brief narrative to the topic on which they focus. Our hope is that a brief glimpse into the authors’ context in combination with the scholarly lens provides a message that is isomorphic to the culturally responsive way of working systemically with diverse populations (Watts-Jones, 2010) – highlighting that the authors are not just presenting professional and clinical ways of working and being culturally responsive with diverse client populations but also emulating their ability to be culturally responsive through their self-disclosure and attention to their own processes and journeys in this area. Each of the contributing authors themselves is either recent immigrants to the USA or persons of color; we identify in varied and diverse ways our gender and sexual orientation identities; we teach, practice, train, and supervise in diverse US and global contexts; and each one of us has wide-ranging years of clinical experience as systemic therapists and educators. Each author brings her, his, or their unique personal lens and lived experiences to the exploration of the diverse topics presented in this book.

The topics covered in this volume can be loosely organized and understood under several defining and identifiable themes – most importantly, a critical theme examining therapist identity, privilege, power, social justice, and, in particular, white identity and privilege is presented in this volume. Other important themes represented in this volume include the cross-cultural responsiveness and implications of utilizing and training therapists in empirically based systemic models; the cross-cultural responsiveness and adaptation of more traditional and foundational systemic models; cross-cultural responsiveness in systemic supervision and training; and the experiences, challenges, and implications for training therapists in systemic therapies and models in global and international contexts.

Therapist Identity, Privilege, Power, and Social Justice

The volume begins with Iman and Manijeh’s chapter challenging the reader to consider a true transformation and innovation in our thinking to ensure that our fields support and encourage cultural diversity and social justice. Their chapter offers a

framework for supporting and including a social justice perspective in family therapy, and the authors discuss their vision of social justice that is congruent to the needs of diverse clients and working with them systemically and in culturally responsive ways. The authors also offer pragmatic and specific ideas about the inclusion of diversity and social justice in systemic practice to help therapists understand and attend to multicultural clients' dilemmas and challenges.

Cheryl's chapter provides an evocative and powerful portrayal of how the emotionality of whiteness can stifle culturally competent therapy and counseling practices. While Cheryl is not a counselor or therapist, in her expertise as a teacher educator and scholar, she brings an interdisciplinary lens to the issue of white privilege, social justice, and social justice concerns in counseling and therapy in a manner that forces us to "sit up" and listen and ultimately to act. Her use of narratives and critical race theory's counterstorytelling illustrates three various scenarios where the emotionality of whiteness enacts. Cheryl's chapter seeks to provide counselors and therapists ways in which they can understand the emotionality of whiteness, especially since a majority of counselors are white who are working with an ever-increasing diverse client population.

Cross-Cultural Responsiveness: Implications for Utilizing and Training in EBPs

The second theme in the volume is illustrated in Robert's chapter that provides a review of the guidelines for evidence-based practices (EBPs) and some of the strengths and challenges associated with utilizing EBPs with diverse client populations. As Robert outlines in detail, EBPs have become a part of the research and clinical landscape for couple and family therapists. Developing and using evidence-based practices is seen as a natural progression of our field. Robert describes in this chapter the challenges associated with integrating science into the practice of therapy through EBPs. These challenges are often controversial and frequent and lead to debates in the field. The crux of Robert's chapter is attempting to understand EBP guidelines such as those established by Division 43 of the American Psychological Association referencing "contextual efficacy" at the third and most advanced level for determining an EBP and how these guidelines translate to cultural responsiveness. The chapter will first clarify what the current guidelines are and explore how the fields of couple and family research have explored culture and "contextual efficacy."

Senem's chapter also focuses on EBPs, specifically emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT); however, this chapter provides a unique window into the experience of Senem (a Turkey-based therapist, EFT trainer in training, EFT clinician, and supervisor) facilitating EFT training in Turkey, her country of origin. As Senem points out, the number of EFT trainings and trainers across the world has been increasing in the last decade; there is little information about the experience of

trainers, trainees, and the training process in countries outside of what is considered the “Western world.” Additionally, in her chapter, Senem speaks to her experiences assessing the effectiveness of EFT with Eastern couples and culturally responsive adaptations of EFT trainings in the Eastern context. In her chapter, she reviews the existing literature on conducting EFT trainings and therapy outside of North America and Europe. Using Turkey as an example, she describes experiences around organizing and implementing EFT trainings, EFT supervision, and therapy. Senem also provides information about evaluations by Turkish mental health professionals after the completion of their cross-cultural EFT trainings. Her chapter provides feedback from trainees that describes trainees’ perspectives on the applicability of EFT within the Turkish culture. Recommendations to address language and cultural barriers in conducting international trainings and supervision are also specified in this engaging and illuminating chapter.

Cross-Cultural Responsiveness and Use of Foundational Systemic Models

Shruti’s chapter focuses on foundational systemic theory and techniques, specifically the genogram, and how she uses an integrative lens such as the common factor lens to enhance the cultural responsiveness of systemic therapies. Understanding the dynamic nature of clients’ lives and their cultural realities is critical to the therapy process if the process is going to be culturally responsive. Thus, in this chapter, common factors such as therapist-client relationship, client and therapist factors, and generating hope and expectancy, which are all considered important components of effective therapy models, are presented as useful in adapting foundational systemic therapies and techniques to be more culturally responsive. Examples are provided on how to utilize clinical tools that infuse cultural responsiveness and awareness of culture and systemic work in family therapy.

Cross-Cultural Responsiveness in Systemic Supervision and Training

In addition to systemic therapies, EBPs, and cultural responsiveness, this volume also presents therapists’ and educators’ experiences with culturally responsive supervision and training in systemic therapies. Nicole and Raji’s co-authored chapter focuses on supervision and training and implications for client-centered advocacy in a variety of mental health settings. As the authors point out, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy code of ethics proposes that marriage and family therapists (MFTs) should be committed to advocacy as part of professional competency. In their chapter, the authors present the results of a study that

examined the experiences of client-centered advocacy of MFT trainees and interns currently engaged in clinical training. They identify the various aspects of training and supervision that are particularly helpful in terms of educating student trainees and interns in engaging in client-centered advocacy in clinical practice. Additionally, they propose ways in which educators and supervisors can better meet the needs of students and supervisees who are engaged in client-centered advocacy throughout the training process.

Diane's chapter follows and expands on ideas presented in Nicole and Raji's chapter, exploring the definitions of cultural competence and responsiveness in the counseling and family therapy fields, and outlines professional competencies related to clinical training and supervision of counselors and family therapists in training. Diane provides a review of the education and supervision literature on cross-cultural competency and discussions of more process-oriented perspectives in the learning paradigm. In this chapter, she explores the use of active voices in the integration of cultural responsiveness and responsibility in the educator/student and the supervisee/supervisor relationships via literature, case examples, and experiential exercises.

Experiences, Challenges, and Implications: Systemic Training in International Contexts

We would be remiss in our work in this volume only focused on the cross-cultural responsiveness and social justice issues in systemic therapies pertinent to the US mental health setting. The efforts of systemic scholars and educators in settings outside of the USA, to disseminate systemic training and ideas, are reminiscent of the early foundational days of the couple and family therapy field in the West. The mental health arena in the USA and Europe was buzzing with excitement, energy, and innovation as cutting-edge theories, such as Bowen, structural, strategic, and experiential, were being developed and introduced to psychotherapists yearning for different and effective ways of working with their clients (Gehart, 2014).

Raji's chapter focusing on exploring the cultural relevance of systemic family therapy theories and techniques to cross-cultural social contexts is an exciting example of the type of systemic training and work being done outside of the USA and Europe. Raji presents the Indian cultural context as a case example to report the results of an evaluation of a family therapy training session conducted by her in India. She introduces the framework of *globalization* and argues for the need for knowledge flow to be bi-directional, with the receiving cultures being actively engaged and reciprocal in the process of knowledge transfer. She also presents the implications of the findings from her work; these include the need for more trainings and supervised clinical work opportunities by indigenous trainers and the need to publish culturally adapted family therapy textbooks.

The final chapter by Nilufer and Yudum summarizes the history of the field of couple and family therapy in the Turkish context with its developments and challenges. While Raji highlights the inroads that systemic therapies and trainings have made in the Indian context which have been in existence for some years, the introduction of couple and family therapy treatment, education, supervision, and training in Turkey is indeed uncharted and unfamiliar territory for the field. As Nilufer and Yudum point out in their chapter, there are only seven PhD level systemically trained researchers and scholars and a number of master's level clinicians and trainers in *all* of Turkey, a country of almost 80 million people and a country that straddles two continents, Asia and Europe. A great deal of amazing training, education, and research work is being conducted in Turkey by a relatively small overall number of systemically trained clinicians and scholars. Over the last decade, the couple and family therapy field has attracted a great deal of attention from different training institutions, the public, universities, as well as the Turkish government. Nilufer and Yudum, in their chapter, provide an enlightening and useful glimpse into their experiences developing formal and credible systemic training programs to their country while also engaging in social policy change and mental health policy and law development. Their work in Turkey and those of other systemic therapists, educators, and trainers is an exciting reminder of why we are committed to this field and to its wider dissemination and implementation across diverse cultural contexts and with diverse client populations.

Conclusion

The contributors to this volume have substantial experience as supervisors and educators and have generously shared their time and expertise and their lived experiences here. As with any endeavor such as this book, we as co-editors experienced the usual challenges and hurdles along the way, changes in authors, delayed deadlines, and navigating almost entirely opposite time zones during our collaboration! We deeply appreciate the authors' willingness to work with us on our reviewing and editing process and in contributing so meaningfully to this volume. We hope readers enjoy this book and find it useful in their reflections and professional and personal development and for supporting and engaging with clients in culturally responsive and socially just ways.

Denver, CO, USA

Shruti Singh Poulsen
Robert Allan

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Editors

Shruti Singh Poulsen is an Associate Professor in the Counseling Program at the University of Colorado Denver. She teaches and supervises Master's-level students primarily in the couple and family therapy track. She has been clinically active in couple and family therapy and supervision for over 20 years. She received her doctorate from the MFT Program at Purdue University in 2003. She has been faculty at the University of Colorado Denver for over 7 years. At CU Denver, she has taught Family Therapy Theories, Family Therapy Techniques, Counseling Couples, Introduction to Sex Therapy, Internship, and Practicum; most recently, she taught an undergraduate course (Skills for Helping Professions) in Human Development and Family Relations, a new undergraduate program in her school. Her research, teaching, and service all focus on areas of multiculturalism; specifically access to good mental health care to diverse populations, and training culturally responsive and competent therapists and counselors. She is also interested in empirically based treatments and their utility with diverse client populations; to this effort, she has obtained advanced training in EFT, Gottman level I training, and training in IBCT. The majority of her scholarly work (publications and presentations) focuses on clinical work with diverse client populations with specific focus on areas such as immigration, interracial and diverse couples, and cultural implications for training and supervision.

Robert Allan is an Assistant Professor in the Counseling Program at the University of Colorado Denver. He teaches and supervises Master's-level students primarily in the couple and family therapy track. He came to working with people more directly in therapy after 20 years of community-based development work and developed a keen understanding of the impact of various stressors and community factors that can affect our lives. He has been helping couples, individuals, and families improve their most important relationships, health, and well-being for over 25 years now. As his clinical practice evolved, he was drawn to systemic approaches to working with people. This was a natural evolution from his community work where they drew on a range of health promotion and population health models for working with health challenges. He received his Master's in counseling from Acadia University, an interdisciplinary PhD from Dalhousie University (Canada), and did a post-grad route to become an MFT and approved AAMFT supervisor.

Contributors

Yudum Akyl Istanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul, Turkey

Robert Allan University of Colorado Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Iman Dadras Alliant International University, San Diego, CA, USA

Manijeh Daneshpour Alliant International University, San Diego, CA, USA

Diane Estrada University of Colorado Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Nicole Sabatini Gutierrez Alliant International University, San Diego, CA, USA

Nilufer Kafescioglu Ozyegin University, İstanbul, Turkey

Cheryl E. Matias University of Colorado Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Rajeswari Natrajan-Tyagi Alliant International University, Irvine, CA, USA

Shruti Singh Poulsen University of Colorado Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Senem Zeytinoglu-Saydam Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey