

**Black Families In Therapy (Second Edition): Understanding the African-American Experience.**

Nancy Boyd-Franklin. New York: Guilford Press ([www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)). 2003, 368 pp, \$40.00 (hardcover).

When it was first published in 1989, Nancy Boyd-Franklin's *Black Families in Therapy* was hailed as a landmark contribution to the understanding of the African-American experience. Fourteen years after the publication of the original volume, an update was very much needed. African-Americans constitute 12.9% of the U.S. population; from 1990 to 2000, the Black population increased at a faster rate than that of the U.S. population overall. Changing socioeconomic trends have resulted in increased representation of African-American families in the middle and upper classes, although they continue to be disproportionately represented among the working and nonworking poor. An increase in immigration from the Caribbean, the growing influence of Islam and African religions, and the expanded prevalence of biracial and multiracial families have also contributed to a picture of Black family life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is much changed from the time at which Boyd-Franklin's original work was published. In the second edition, therefore, it falls to Dr. Boyd-Franklin to address these changes and their implications for the Black families we see in therapy. Happily, she does so here with insight, sensitivity, and skill born of decades of clinical and research experience.

Although Boyd-Franklin addresses issues relevant to African-American families across SES groups, the emphasis here is on work with multiproblem, lower-income families. In response to the many challenges faced by these families, Boyd-Franklin advocates a multisystems approach, drawing from a variety of family systems approaches, narrative therapy, and pragmatic techniques that address the complex realities of Black family life. The book includes concrete suggestions for addressing different aspects of the therapeutic experience and is replete with case examples illustrating the principles under discussion. This is not, however, a how-to manual. Rather, *Black Families in Therapy* is a thought-provoking and sensitive conceptual discussion of the many issues that clinicians should consider in assessment and treatment.

The book is divided into four major sections. The first provides an historical overview of the changing demographics of Black families in the United States. It also comprises a sensitive and thoughtful discussion of issues of skin color, racial and gender identity and role socialization in Black communities. The issues addressed here serve as a useful reminder to the clinician who is already attuned to the impact of culture and race on social development, and as a thorough and thought-provoking introduction to these issues for clinicians with more limited experience with questions of diversity.

In this section, the discussion of the wide range of parenting roles that may be assumed by the fathers, grandparents, older siblings, and trusted family friends is particularly illuminating. Here, Boyd-Franklin reminds us to be aware that the family members who present for treatment may not be the only relevant players in the system. She provides sensitive and practical suggestions for assessing for the presence of other key adults in the family system, and for engaging these crucial parties in therapy, including making direct personal contact and scheduling flexible meeting times to accommodate their presence at the session.

Section Two lays out the multisystems approach that Boyd-Franklin presents as the most effective intervention strategy for working with multiproblem families. It includes a clear and thorough review of the major approaches to family therapy, and provides a framework for

integrating these into a multimodal intervention strategy. Depending on the needs of the family, such a strategy may comprise office-based work, the occasional well-timed home visit, the use of a genogram, and active coaching of key family members to advocate for themselves with schools and social service agencies. It is in this section where Dr. Boyd-Franklin's wealth of clinical experience is at its most apparent. The guidelines she suggests for assessing the family structure and power dynamics (e.g. "With whom did you consult before making that decision?" "Do they agree with what you've been doing?") speak to a nuanced understanding of family functioning and communication patterns. This section also contains a valuable and rarely-addressed discussion of the therapist's own racial identity development and personal value system. It concludes with a review of the major public policy issues, such as Welfare reform and kinship foster care, that may impact African-American families- a useful reminder that the work we do does not take place in a vacuum, but in the context of a sociopolitical climate that impacts our clients' daily lives.

In Section Three, Boyd-Franklin refines and expands upon the material presented in the previous section. She addresses the particular applications of the multisystems model to poor, single-parent, and middle-class African American families. Here again, Boyd-Franklin inflects what is often a monolithic discussion of "African-American issues" with subtlety and sensitivity. In contrast to many discussions of African-American families in therapy that may unwittingly reinforce stereotypes, Dr. Boyd Franklin's treatment of these families is both respectful and celebratory of their many strengths. The book concludes with a brief discussion of training, supervision, and research issues. Boyd-Franklin's suggestions for improving the quality and relevance of clinical training will resonate with any clinician who has ever been faced with a family that did not fit the textbook description of how family therapy should proceed.

In sum, the second edition of *Black Families in Therapy* is a worthy successor to the volume that preceded it. It is a valuable addition to the literature on both diversity and family therapy, and has much to offer to the novice and experienced clinician alike.

Danielle A. Kaplan, Ph.D.  
*American Institute for Cognitive Therapy*  
New York, NY