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1995-4

Professional books – Competence, courage, and change: An approach to family therapy by D. B. Waters and E. C. Lawrence

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Original Publication Citation

Busby, D. M. (1995). Competence, courage and change: An approach to family therapy by Waters, D. B., Lawrence, E. C. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 21, 210.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Busby, Dean M., "Professional books – Competence, courage, and change: An approach to family therapy by D. B. Waters and E. C. Lawrence" (1995). *Faculty Publications*. 4583.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/4583>

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Busby, Dean M . Journal of Marital and Family Therapy ; Hoboken Vol. 21, Iss. 2, (Apr 1995): 210.

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Review.

FULL TEXT

Waters, D. B., & Lawrence, E. C. (1993). *Competence, courage, and change: An approach to family therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton, 158 pp., \$22.95.

In this book Waters and Lawrence present a model of family therapy that is refreshing and informative. They use principles from strength-focused paradigms without ignoring pathology. They call this emphasis "healthy intentions, unhealthy outcomes." In an innovative way Waters and Lawrence help clients uncover the competent strivings underlying pathological behaviors. Once these strivings are uncovered, the therapist and client can work together to find effective ways of reaching goals without engaging in destructive behaviors. Rather than ignore pathology and thereby negate clients' experiences, or overemphasize pathology and remove hope, the authors use pathology as the vehicle to understand the inner desires of family members.

The principle of courageous action that is explored is unique. This concept emphasizes the importance of choice and responsibility, as well as the need to make difficult movement that demands courage. Family members are carefully nurtured until they can develop hope and then a vision of what they want in the future.

Probably the most significant section of the book for therapists will be the chapter that focuses on the client's courage and the therapist's courage. Attention is given to how the client needs courage both to face feelings and struggles directly and to make difficult changes in behavior. In addition, therapists are helped to explore what blocks their work with difficult cases. How does the lack of courage on the part of the therapist impede progress? This book compares favorably to others that are written from a theoretical perspective that emphasizes strengths. I found that it removed several blocks that I had with strength-focused approaches because it was more balanced and did not ignore pathology. The approach also expands on existing work by including information on working with young children, a neglected area in our field.

As a systems therapist, I did find that I wanted more information on how healthy strivings and pathological behaviors of various family members interact with one another. Many of the examples included clear family dynamics, but the treatment energy often seemed to be individually oriented. In future editions it would be helpful to include a broader orientation that encourages families to work together to engage in courageous action. Educators, clinicians, researchers, and students will find this book useful. The writing is clear and engaging, the theory behind the approach is explored in depth, and the linkages with previous ideas are established. Throughout the book excellent case examples are provided to illustrate theoretical principles. The case examples were useful in clarifying concepts and keeping the reader interested.

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DETAILS

Subject:	Nonfiction; Family counseling
Publication title:	Journal of Marital and Family Therapy; Hoboken
Volume:	21
Issue:	2
Pages:	210
Number of pages:	0
Publication year:	1995
Publication date:	Apr 1995
Publisher:	Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
Place of publication:	Hoboken
Country of publication:	United Kingdom, Hoboken
Publication subject:	Social Services And Welfare, Matrimony, Psychology, Sociology
ISSN:	0194472X
e-ISSN:	17520606
CODEN:	JMFTDW
Source type:	Scholarly Journals
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	Book Review-Favorable
Accession number:	02321720
ProQuest document ID:	220942960
Document URL:	http://erl.lib.byu.edu/login/?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/professional-books-competence-courage-change/docview/220942960/se-2?accountid=4488
Copyright:	Copyright American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Apr 1995
Last updated:	2015-07-25
Database:	Social Science Premium Collection,Research Library

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