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Imber-Black, Evan, Roberts, Janine & Whiting, Richard. (1988). *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. 414 pp.

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*Reviewed by:* John D. Friesen, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia.

This book makes an outstanding contribution to a better understanding and use of rituals in family life. The authors maintain that in contemporary society, rituals are often neglected by both individuals, families and by society. They define rituals as a specific sequence of acts which are believed to punctuate or promote change in the life of an individual family or society. Rituals usually have a clear beginning, a structure and a sequence of actions organized around a theme. They are usually performed repeatedly, mark the end or beginning of something or signify a change such as the solution of a problem and are inherently metaphorical and analogical. Based on a "resource model" in which the therapist views families as essentially resourceful and only secondarily in need of therapy, the authors propose the use of rituals as a means of giving greater meaning and significance to family life.

The authors claim that rituals have a number of important functions including healing, identity formation, invitation into membership, belief expressions, negotiation and celebration. Healing rituals are designed to facilitate forgiveness in which symbols or objects are often used to symbolize significant experiences which need resolution. Identity formation rituals include such events as birthdays, rites of passage, parting and reentry, and separation and divorce, and are used to develop a clearer sense of self. Membership rituals involve activities that are designed to announce new relationships and include events such as membership dinners or membership celebrations. Celebrations are rituals which involve festivities or more solemn and sacred events. They often include ethnic expressions, special food and drink, unique music, gifts and the wearing of particular clothing. Underlying most rituals is a set of beliefs which one wishes to preserve or change. These beliefs, values or expectations form the central core of rituals and guide the structure of the experience.

Although the book is written by 16 different authors, it has internal consistency and consists of 15 chapters and five sections. In the first section, "Defining and Designing Rituals" the authors provide an extensive review of both anthropological and therapeutic literature that describe rituals, develop a ritual typology and focus on the multiple functions of rituals. In addition, themes as well as guidelines to designing therapeutic rituals are presented. Rich case materials showing how healthy families employ rituals are provided and suggestions are made throughout the book to illustrate how rituals may be used therapeutically.

The second section, "Rituals for Couples, Children and Adolescents" offers ideas on how to conduct normative rituals such as weddings, anniversaries, vacations and holidays and how to design therapeutic rituals through-

out the life cycle. Very practical and interesting case material is provided to illustrate concepts and techniques.

The third section, "Facilitating Complex Family Processes Through Ritual" illustrates the use of rituals with complex family issues such as alcoholism, adoption, sexual dysfunction and remarriage. This section is particularly useful to therapists who are interested in introducing creative and often magical activities into their work.

The fourth section, "Rituals, Families and the Wider Social Context" examines the healing qualities of rituals during family struggles and the influences of larger systems and the broader political and social context such as the role of gender in the development of interpersonal conflict. The case is made that many normative rituals tend to preserve traditional sex roles and other status quo events. Examples of rituals are provided which empower women and foster social change.

The final section, "Rituals and Family Training" examines rituals in student's families of origin and the design and use of rituals within training groups. The author proposes that many transitions and shifts in training can be enriched by the use of ritual in the learning process such as asking students to bring a symbol to class that is characteristic of their relationship to self and others, or assigning a short paper that requests students to write about their family's use of rituals.

Overall, this book is an inspiring and valuable resource to marriage and family practitioners as well as students in academic settings. The reader is made aware of the multiple benefits to be derived from the effective use of rituals in individual and family life. The authors have provided well researched and clinically relevant concepts and practices which are helpful in the counselling process. I highly recommend this book.

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Gergen, Kenneth. (1991). *The Saturated Self*. New York: Basic Books. 295 pp.

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*Reviewed by:* Kelvin Seifert.

Kenneth Gergen has long been a social constructivist and critic of classic psychological theorizing, and this recent book extends that perspective to provocative, postmodernist conclusions. In nine chapters, he describes the historical transformation and ultimate demise of the notion of *self*—certainly an idea that is central to Western society in general, and to counselors in particular. Some of the history is disturbing: Gergen argues that given postmodern social conditions, it is hard to know who "I" am any more. But he offers hope for the future, if only we can give up our conventional belief in selfhood and individuality, and immerse ourselves fully in the complexities of social relationships.

As Gergen sees it, our postmodern problem is that communication has become so easy and so plentiful. In addition to ordinary mail and long-distance telephones, the newer e-mail networks, FAX machines, and courier