

The Divorce Agreement Newsletter

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

Review of *Mastering Crucial Moments in Separation and Divorce* by Kate Scharff, M.S.W. & Lisa Herrick, Ph.D.

The authors of this excellent work are therapists who have substantial experience in collaborative practice. Their 256-page book is packed with useful ideas for its intended audience of divorce professionals. There is much of value in this book, so I will concentrate on the main themes that most interest me.

The first main theme is to treat divorce as a developmental crisis, in the sense of adult developmental psychology. Much of the book deals in one way or another with helping clients transcend the negative experiences of their divorce and directing the next stages of their life toward a positive outcome. In doing this, however, the authors don't ignore the negative obstacles. For example, on page 30 there is a long list of irrational and self-defeating behaviors, such as driving up the expenses of the divorce and then complaining about those costs.

Another theme is the range of the counseling skills ("techniques") that are useful in working with clients going through the divorce process. The authors point out the importance of self-awareness and "mindfulness" on the part of the professionals. "Mindfulness" is the professional's ability to be in the moment, to be thoughtful rather than emotional, and to be both engaged and relaxed. The book is impressive in the scope and depth of how it addresses the appropriate techniques of helping professionals.

The third major theme is the interactions of professionals and clients in creating an effective divorce process system. The term *microcontainer* is used to describe the dyads in the case, starting with the basic professional-client dyads. The *macrocontainer* is the collection of dyads (except for extended family and friends) that make up the entire divorce system. Although the authors do not use systems theory as such, their analysis is consistent with triangles as used in Bowenian family systems. A family systems triangle is where communications become dysfunctional when they become triangulated rather than direct. Scharff & Herrick cover a range of systemic hypotheticals on the effective and ineffective interactions among clients and various divorce professionals. Their discussion is not limited to collaborative practice cases, but it is certainly a valuable tool for collaborative professionals.

Another useful tool in this book starts with the chart on page 52 of what the authors call the *rigidity/flexibility continuum*. The value of this model is that it deals with some of the most difficult conflict situations in divorce settlements, the kinds of cases that Bill Eddy works with in his High Conflict Institute. So this book is definitely in the "don't just read the review, read the book!" category.