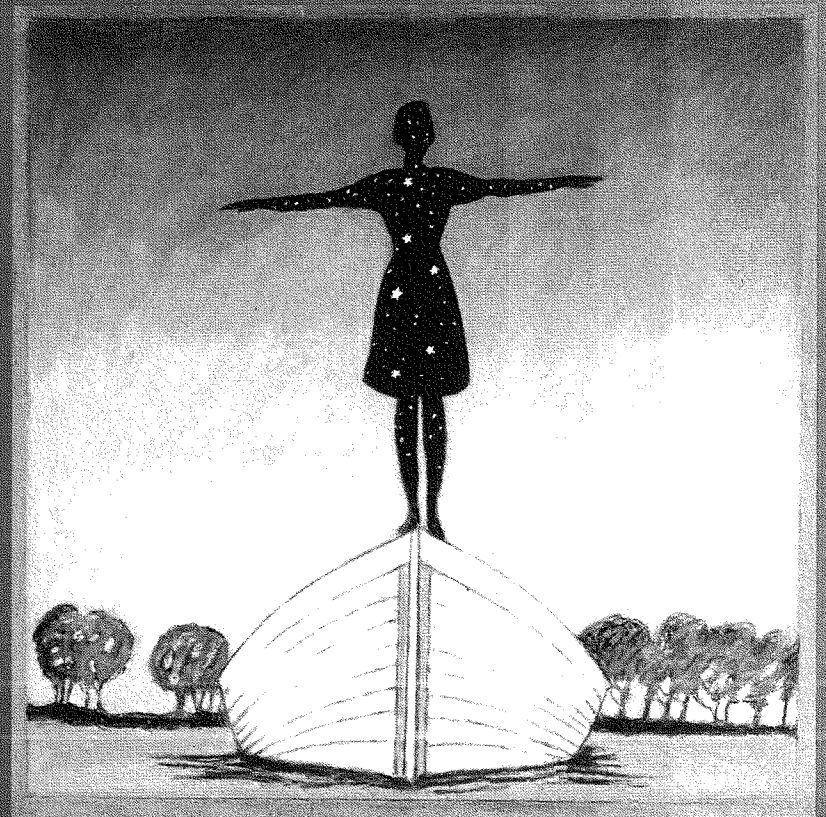


FAMILY THERAPY

An Intimate History



Lynn Hoffman

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FAMILY THERAPY

An Intimate History

Lynn Hoffman

This book follows the journey of one highly curious and questing therapist from an instrumental, causal approach to family therapy to a collaborative, communal one. Because Lynn Hoffman has been in the field for almost forty years and has worked with so many of its influential thinkers, the book is also a history of family therapy's evolution. Her knowledge of family therapy is intimate and deep; her perspective is clear-eyed and often wryly humorous.

Readers will be reminded that, however big and impressive the theories, family therapy is very much a *human* endeavor. Hoffman revisits the experiences, ideas, and relationships that have informed her journey and presents them both as she perceived them at the time and as she perceives them now looking back. Through this process of reflective conversation, she creates not only a legacy out of the people and situations that acted on her most powerfully but also a counter-tradition to the strategic approach that influenced her so strongly early in her career.

But this is not just history. Throughout her career Hoffman has been in the forefront of family therapy. She has interacted with and sometimes worked closely with many of family therapy's influential thinkers and actors, including Jay Haley, Virginia Satir, Dick Auerswald, Harry Aponte, Peggy Papp, Olga Silverstein, the Milan team, Peggy Penn, Harry Goolishian, Harlene Anderson, Tom Andersen, and Michael White. The evolution of her thinking has paralleled the major develop-

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1968: *Techniques of Family Therapy* (with Jay Haley)

1981: *Foundations of Family Therapy*

1987: *Milan Systemic Family Therapy* (with L. Boscolo, G. Cecchin, and P. Penn)

1993: *Exchanging Voices: A Collaborative Approach to Family Therapy*

A NORTON PROFESSIONAL BOOK

**FAMILY THERAPY
AN INTIMATE HISTORY**



LYNN HOFFMAN



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To My Family

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Acknowledgments

How does one acknowledge an entire field? I feel that my book represents "a great cloud of witnesses," as it says in the Bible: pioneering psychotherapists who insisted on working against our most persistent illusion, the stand-alone self. I wanted particularly to honor three people who are no longer with us: Virginia Satir, whose boldness started me off, E.H. Auerswald, who offered me protection along the way, and Harry Goolishian, who drew me into his enthusiasm for postmodern ideas. I also acknowledge my debt to the mentors who led me through difficult terrain, and the families and couples who helped me to critique my own myths. This book is composed of their stories. In a way, it is a version of my earlier book, *Foundations of Family Therapy*, except that it is written from a much more personal point of view.

Thanks also to Mary and Kenneth Gergen and Sheila McNamee for their encouragement, and to Mary Catherine Bateson for her inspiring example. I must also mention the American Society of Cybernetics, which has continued Bateson's tradition of inquiry under the aegis of its three wise men: Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, and Ernst von Glasersfeld. Other inspirers include artist Richard Baldwin, who was a longtime partner in unorthodoxy; Cathy Taylor and the MOSAIC mothers; Michael White, a tender therapist but a tough theorist; and Tom Andersen, Peggy Penn, and Judith Davis, wonderful practitioners, beloved colleagues, and

unfailing friends. Readers of this book will meet many other unusual talents who contributed to my education. An alternative subtitle for the book would be *A Family Therapist Learns How*.


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—Lynn Hoffman, Northampton, Mass.

Introduction

My Mother's Ashes

 This book traces my journey from an instrumental, causal approach to family therapy to a collaborative, communal one. When I first became acquainted with the field in 1963, I assumed that a therapist was supposed to fix a system that was in trouble. Over the course of time, the description of the problem changed from a maladaptive behavior to a dysfunctional family structure to an outmoded belief. In all these cases, however, the therapist placed herself outside the arrangement in question. This assumption of objectivity led to a therapist stance that was aloof and distancing, but it was congruent with the rational, scientific norms of the day.

By the seventies, I became aware of a shift in the zeitgeist. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) had already cast aspersions on the Newtonian mind-set, with its dreams of controlling the physical universe. Cognitive researchers like Humberto Maturana, Heinz von Foerster, and Ernst von Glasersfeld went on to challenge the idea that we can ever know what is really "out there," because our perceptions are filtered through the sensory screens of the nervous system. Paul Watzlawick (1984), one of the early researchers in family communication, summed up this situation by describing the knower as the pilot of a ship that is navigating a difficult channel at night. If he gets through successfully, he does not know what was really there, only that he has not hit a rock.