

A review of
Counseling Elders & Their Families
Practical Techniques for Applied Gerontology

by John Herr and John H. Weakland, (1979). New York, NY: Springer.

Review by

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Over the span of the 39 years that have passed since this book was originally published, a lot has changed in society; however, impressively the techniques contained within have aged timelessly and remain beneficial and appropriate in working with elders of current generations and their families. The systemic, interaction focused approach to understanding and working with individuals, couples, families and people groups of all types, which was pioneered by authors such as John Herr and John H. Weakland, has not only maintained its relevance but has grown to be even more widely utilized and accepted by practitioners across helping fields. Evidence continues to support the efficacy of the systemic techniques outlined in this book. In this book, the authors do a stunning job of recognizing the vast array of both the issues presented in working with the specific population of elders and the vast array of the types of people and

¹ (In Press). In *Contemporary Southern Psychology*, (2019).

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terminating successfully and recognizing that an outside helper is no longer needed or appropriate.

Perhaps the most invaluable tools provided to helpers by the authors are those tools related to communication. It is one thing to be a helper who provides practical information about how and why to do certain things, but it is quite another to be a helper who is able to effectively communicate the concepts that need to be communicated with the people being helped. In fact, the authors do not limit their advice to helping professionals develop verbal communication skills as they also provide helpers with useful clues to decipher and use nonverbal communication to effect change in the lives of the elderly and their family systems.

In the second part of the book, the authors back up the practical applications and information they outline in parts one and three by providing a summary of the history of systems theory that sufficiently introduces those with no foundational knowledge of the theory to systemic thinking so that they can understand and utilize the techniques presented in the book, while also balancing the length and detail of this introductory summary so as not to bore those who are familiar with systems theory. This summary effectively addresses the needs of those readers with a desire to learn more about systems theory by providing outside resources and encouraging further study while also establishing the authority of the systems perspective to those for whom further study is not relevant, helpful, or necessary. The technical language utilized by the authors throughout the book also achieves a balance of being understandable to those with no prior training in systems counseling while not demeaning the intelligence of those highly familiar with the concepts being explored.

Each chapter is formatted in an easy-to-follow style. In particular, the authors did an exceptional job of laying out the chapters of part three, which focus on case examples. In

