



## FTA Newsletter

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# Challenges for Family Therapy

*Tazuko Shibusawa*

*PhD, LCSW*

*Executive Officer, Eiichi Shibusawa Memorial Foundation*

*Tokyo, Japan*

Almost 50 years ago, Feminist Family Therapy emerged as a transformative intervention to challenge traditional family therapy models rooted in patriarchal values. By integrating feminist theory, this approach sought to address issues of power, gender, and systemic inequality within family dynamics, as well as to challenge the ways therapists engaged with families. **Rachel Hare-Mustin's** seminal 1978 paper, *A Feminist Approach to Family Therapy*, urged therapists to critically examine their practices and adopt approaches that promote gender equity. Other therapists, including **Virginia Goldner**, **Monica McGoldrick**, **Froma Walsh**, **Olga Silverstein**, and **Betty Carter**, played key roles in challenging how traditional therapy often reinforced gendered norms. Therapists for example, historically pathologized mothers, labeling them as overly emotional or overinvolved, and placed disproportionate blame on them for family problems. Feminist

approaches addressed how power imbalances affected women's well-being and advocated for more equitable family structures. They also emphasized that family dynamics must be understood within a larger societal and cultural context.

Over time, feminist critiques of family therapy expanded through more contributions by non-White and LGBTQ+ therapists, who highlighted how racism and heterosexism shape the experiences of Asian American, Black, Latino, LGBTQ+, Middle Eastern, Native American, refugee, and immigrant families. These therapists brought critical attention to the compounded effects of marginalization, advocating for approaches that honor and empower diverse family structures.

By confronting societal norms, family therapists have supported families in cultivating relationships grounded in respect, equity, and mutual support. In doing so, they have not only addressed individual family dynamics but also contributed to broader societal change by challenging systemic oppression.

Now, however, this progress is under threat due to the current global political climate. Issues such as women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, immigrant rights, and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities are being challenged, alongside pressing concerns about climate justice. For example, during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election, then-vice-presidential candidate J.D. Vance sparked widespread controversy with his claim that women "choose a path to misery" when prioritizing careers over having children. Such comments underscore the persistence of patriarchal attitudes that continue to influence political and social discourse.

In the face of such unfortunate trends, we need to re-double our commitment to goals set forth in the Assisi Manifesto:

*"Our world is increasingly divided and fractured by cultural discrimination, economic injustice, racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, political repression, warfare, and natural disasters. We must recognize not only the vulnerability of families and children caught in these difficulties but also their resilience in coping and surviving. ... Our manifesto is a call for action, advocating for social justice via empowerment, inclusivity, and the recognition and establishment of basic human rights."*

Family therapy must continue to evolve, rising to meet these challenges by embracing diversity, fostering resilience, and advocating for systemic change to build a more just and equitable world.

**For more information:\***

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- McDowell, T., Knudson-Martin, C., & Bermudez, M. (2018). *Socioculturally attuned family therapy: Toward Equitable Theory and Practice*. Routledge
- McGoldrick, M. & Hardy, KV. (2019). *Re-Visioning family therapy: Addressing diversity in clinical practice (3rd edition)*. Guilford Press.
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\*Limited to US publications.



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Accademia di Psicoterapia della Famiglia S.r.l., 34 Via Antonio Bosio 00161 Roma (RM), Roma, 00161 IT RM  
06 44 233 273

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