Missing Pieces: Introduction to the Book Review Section

Judith Siegel

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When I was a social work student, I was taught that the theories used to understand and treat families had no similarity to the theory base that guided clinical work with individuals. At that point in time, there was no mention of couple treatment and no apparent links to these disparate domains. Like any good social worker, I accepted what was, and began a quest to find what was missing. Over time, new ideas and approaches emerged that allowed these practice models to be placed much closer together. It was like a jigsaw puzzle in which the details of discrete areas suddenly converged in ways that allowed the viewer to finally identify the main picture. As the puzzle becomes completed, the value of each piece can be appreciated for its contribution to the meaning of the whole.

I have approached couples work from that perspective, and have been particularly excited by the developments over the past decade. For me, two areas in particular have provided the necessary information to finally comprehend the entire puzzle. Family dynamics are no longer viewed as peripheral to the individuals who comprise them, but as fundamental and instrumental. The ingredients that lead to

a successful relationship, including the ability to trust and develop a healthy dependency can not be understood without consideration of early childhood experiences. This has led to an increased awareness of parenting, and the importance of helping families create an environment that will facilitate a secure and robust emotional base for all family members.

The books that have been reviewed for this Special Issue on Couples focus primarily on emotional regulation, attachment, and parenting. While these topics can be viewed as distinct areas of clinical work, they are for me, the missing pieces that allow the full circle of meaning to take shape. From this perspective, the well being of a couple can not be appreciated without understanding each individual's early family experiences. In creating a new family structure, the couple also becomes the conduit for the emotional development of the next generation. Through the following volumes reviewed in this Special Issue on Couples, tacit assumptions are explicated and clarified in ways that provide a framework of meaning to the puzzle we grapple with daily in our clinical work and research.

J. Siegel (✉)
Rockland Branch Campus, Silver School of Social Work,
New York University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: judith.siegel@nyu.edu