

confuse self-esteem with self-centredness, as the author points out. Many children who seem to have a high level of self-confidence are hiding under negative feelings of self.

This book is valuable for parents, teachers, caregivers, and extended family members who deal with children and have the ability to enforce positive self-esteem on a day to day basis. Most parents may also consider that once their children become teenagers or young adults that it is too late to make changes to encourage positive self-esteem. Jean Illsley Clarke points out that it is never too late to instill positive self-esteem and gives examples of ways to interact with children of all ages. The author suggests that parents can use her book to feel better about their parenting abilities during various stages of family life.

Family Pictures: A Philosopher Explores the Familiar

Laura Duhan Kaplan
Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Press, 1998

Reviewed by Shelley M. Park

In *Family Pictures*, Laura Duhan Kaplan provides snapshots of family life as reflected through the lens of philosophy. The book is written, in part, for a philosophical audience to whom Kaplan commends storytelling as a methodology that blends “outer and inner lives,” effecting a symbiosis of “concrete routines with abstract thought about their larger meanings” (138). Yet, this delightful book is readily accessible to an interdisciplinary audience. Indeed, any person with a family life—in particular, those with parents, children, lovers, in-laws, or pets—will find material here that invites self-reflection, as well as considerable laughter. Whether on a Hawaiian honeymoon, chasing a toddler in an art museum, wearing her deceased mother-in-law’s clothes, suffering from back pain, or killing fleas in her living room, Kaplan sees both the humour in, and the spiritual meaning of, her everyday activities. In taking us on her journey, she provokes us to do the same.

Family Pictures is divided into three sections: Marriage, Adult Daughter, and Mothering. ARM readers will take special interest in the latter two sections. In the second section, Kaplan explores her relationship with her mother, her mother-in-law, and her father. Kaplan reflects honestly and self-critically upon her frustration with her mother-in-law’s superficial emphasis on social etiquette and her mother’s equally adamant resistance to social expectations. While Kaplan seems to identify most closely with her father, Kaplan’s criticisms of her mother-in-law’s spiritual shortcomings and her mother’s

social and ethical faux pas give way to an admiration for their ways of being in the world. Kaplan finally honours both mothers, reflecting on the lessons to be learned from each. Her mother-in-law's decisive sense of order helped to establish harmony in a household that gives way to self-interest after her death (44-45). And her mother's "shocking" refusal to assume the role of caretaker provokes others to re-examine their static self-characterizations (53-55). By these stories, we come to understand how parental strengths and weaknesses are not always easy to disentangle and how various styles of parenting may each be effective in their own right.

In the final section, Kaplan draws on her own experiences of mothering to reflect on questions of pacifism, loss of identity, dreams of death, and the ethical imperatives of parenting that enable us to bridge the self-other divide. Kaplan neither romanticizes nor devalues her experience of mothering, and chooses instead to reveal the ambivalences, ambiguities, and complexities that accompany that experience. Looking at her vulnerable newborn, for example, prompts Kaplan to explore the contradiction between the "increased esteem for the value of human life" that emerges from mothering and the potential for violence against others that emerges from a mother's singular commitment to advancing her own children's interests (84-85). Chasing her toddler through an art exhibit, Kaplan acknowledges the attraction of the "dream of silent passivity and subordination" embodied in fairy tales such as *Sleeping Beauty* while simultaneously denying that this is the type of relationship she wants. Many feminist mothers will share Kaplan's ambivalence concerning this "dream of relief from mothering" (97).

Overall, however, Kaplan's portraits of mothering are happy family pictures that reveal the "comfortable life" of a middle-class, professional woman (x). Women with less comfortable lives doubtlessly would provide narratives of mothering that differ from Kaplan's. This is one shortcoming of theorizing based on first-person experience. A strength of Kaplan's method, however, is its ability to "weave a tapestry of ideas, relationships, regrets, and joys" in which others may "both lose themselves and find themselves" (125). In theorizing her experience, Kaplan is not seeking to universalize that experience, but hoping to learn from it and, in sharing her learning, to provoke others to reflect on their stories.