

FRANCIS KORN. *Elementary Structures Reconsidered: Lévi-Strauss on Kinship*. Pp. xv, 168. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973. \$8.50.

As its title suggests, this book is a critical analysis of the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss on kinship, as put forward in his 1949 volume entitled *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*, and as elaborated in some later essays and in the preface to the English edition of his book (1969). Korn is, therefore, dealing with an aspect of Lévi-Strauss' thought which is less familiar to the nonanthropologist than are, for example, his seminal contributions to the study of myth. However, his writings on kinship form an important part of the classic literature for specialists in this field, and this latest contribution to the persistent and often heated controversy surrounding his kinship theories will certainly find eager readers. Much of the present volume has been published previously in the form of articles in professional journals, dispersed and not all of easy access. Since together the essays form a coherent argument, the publishers are well justified in collecting them in book form.

In the first three chapters of her book, Korn makes a well-reasoned assault on the fundamental concepts used by Lévi-Strauss in developing his "general theory of kinship systems". She deals with his ideas on the nature and origins of incest prohibitions, with his distinction between elementary and complex "structures" as reflected in types of marriage rules, with his postulated association between "harmonic and disharmonic regimes," respectively, and marriage by "generalized" and "restricted" exchange. Lévi-Strauss' position on the distinction that has been made by some between "prescribed" and "preferential" marriages is also briefly considered. The following chapters are devoted to detailed empirical analyses of some of the ethnographic cases used by Lévi-Strauss to illustrate and support his theoretical formulations: the Dieri and Mara of Australia, and the Iatmul of New Guinea. Here

Korn brings in additional data not considered by Lévi-Strauss to controvert his analysis, as well as pointing out inconsistencies and errors in his interpretation of the facts which were before him. In chapter 7, Korn questions the usefulness of some recent algebraic treatments of prescriptive marriage systems. And in a concluding chapter she sums up her evaluation of Lévi-Strauss' work on kinship with the closing lines:

We have . . . been able to demonstrate the triviality or wrongness of certain analyses in *Les Structures Élémentaires*, but we have not found it possible to illustrate any respects in which it is theoretically brilliant or even regularly right. In fact, the outcome of our own experience . . . is that when he departs from the work of his predecessors he is usually mistaken. It is a problem . . . to account for the renown of a theoretician who is unimpressive as an analyst and whose theories, which are seldom original, are regularly refuted by the facts (p. 145).

Thus, Korn does not mince words in her criticism of Lévi-Strauss, but her overall tone is far from strident and is in fact marked by precision, clarity, and logic. While her book should probably be considered essential reading for any anthropologist concerned with the intricacies of kinship theory, it is likely to hold little interest for the non-specialist—even the Lévi-Strauss buff—or, for that matter, for the average anthropologist. Korn's discussion could have little meaning to a reader not thoroughly familiar with *Les Structure Élémentaires*, and in order to follow her detailed arguments intelligently one must be conversant with a considerable critical literature on Lévi-Strauss' kinship theories and on such arcane matters as the alternative interpretations of Australian section systems.

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CARMEN GARCIA OLIVERO. *A Study of the Initial Involvement in the Social Services by the Puerto Rican Migrants in Philadelphia*. Pp. 316. New York: Vantage Press, 1971. \$5.95.

WILLIAM J. REID and LAURA EPSTEIN.
Task-Centered Casework. Pp. 275.
 New York: Columbia University
 Press, 1972. \$10.00.

These two books taken together are a mixed blessing. Examined separately one is outstanding and the other is of good intent but basically disappointing. In a sense they both focus upon the same issue: how to deliver more efficient and effective social services to people in need. The Olivero book looks backway to what actually happened to a small group of Puerto Rican families; the Reid and Epstein book addresses itself to a conceptual model designed to improve practice. The Olivero book is a dissertation with more than the usual limitations; in contrast, the Reid and Epstein book is the work of an experienced researcher and a skilled practitioner-teacher who have addressed themselves to an issue—the nature of “task”—that has plagued casework practitioners and teachers since the beginning of casework as a social work method.

Olivero's study is of 26 Puerto Rican families who sought help from a variety of social agencies between June and September 1967. The major goal was to identify and analyze the relationship between client, social agency, and social worker during the period of intake. Seven schedules were used to collect data, and interviews were conducted with clients in their home and workers in their offices. This effort resulted in masses of data which, had they been presented more systematically, might have made for an interesting study.

The findings are not surprising. The clients had a multiplicity of problems, were unclear in terms of what to expect from the agencies, and made poor use of available services. The social workers were found to be well meaning and interested in helping clients, but they were handicapped by inadequate knowledge of Puerto Rican cultural attitudes and experiences and some were overtly prejudicial toward Puerto Ricans. Unfortunately, the author

makes rather shallow interpretations when more depth is needed. For example, why are Puerto Rican and black social workers prejudiced toward clients and what effect does an individual social role within family constellations have on service?

As Olivero rightly points out, there is a critical need to know more about the Puerto Rican experience, generally and specifically, as this experience relates to the use of social services. The need for additional work in this area is dramatically indicated by an examination of the recent publication, *The Puerto Rican People: A Selected Bibliography for Use in Social Work Education*, prepared by the Institute of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College and published by the Council on Social Work Education in 1973. In the sense that this volume makes a modest contribution toward filling this need, it is welcomed.

Reid and Epstein's book is important from several perspectives. First, it makes a major step towards synthesizing the three major theoretical models of social casework—the psycho-social, the problem-solving, and the functional models—used for many years in the teaching and practice of casework. Second, it incorporates and attempts to explicate a wide range of theories—psycho-analytic, learning, communication, organizational, crisis, and so on—in such a way that there is potentially greater compatibility between theory and practice. And third, the book is unique in that it not only proposes a model for intervention but also reports on the initial field trials of the testing of the model. In addition, the book stimulates a host of ideas and raises a plethora of issues that should excite the intellectual curiosity of both practitioners and educators for some time to come. Unfortunately, a brief review cannot encompass all facts of the book, and the focus here is limited to a brief description of the model.

What is task-centered casework? It is “a system of time-limited treatment for

problems in living." Important to this definition is the assumption that brief, time-limited treatment, defined as between eight to twelve interviews, is preferable to long-term treatment and that such treatment is the most appropriate for the majority of clients served by social caseworkers. A problem typology for the model is described and treatment goals which emphasize treatment contracts are specified. The caseworker is not limited to a specific set of practice theories but must partialize the problem and limit treatment efforts to specified behaviors and circumstances. This, then, becomes the "task" which caseworker and client explicitly work on. The major improvement here over other models is that caseworkers treat within well-defined boundaries and are less likely to move into areas not related to the task to be worked on. It should be added that the model is not as rigid as here described, and the authors indicate that professional judgment and flexibility are exercised. Case examples which are used to explicate the model are drawn almost exclusively from medical settings.

As indicated, *Task-Centered Casework* is unique as a practice model in that data are reported on the initial field trials. Three such trials were conducted in a university hospital setting; the first two were in medical departments and the final one in a psychiatric out-patient clinic. Although each trial was not as rigorous as might be desirable and the number of cases was small (37), the results support the basic feasibility of the model. The authors view these results as suggestive rather than definitive and plan to continue to further develop their model. Additional clinical trials in more diverse agency settings should be pursued. The model may well have to be altered, especially for those settings in which clients are not voluntary participants.

Those of entrenched theoretical convictions will find much to disagree with in this book, but many others will view

Task-Centered Casework as an auspicious beginning.

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JAMES S. PAYNE et al. *Head Start: A Tragicomedy with Epilogue*. Pp. 253. New York: Behavioral Publications, 1973. \$9.95. Paperbound, \$4.95.

Using a "tell it like it is" approach, this book explains the purposes of the Head Start Program and its potential for changing children, families, and communities.

Part I, chapter 1 concerns itself with administrative problems pertaining to getting the job done, while part II, chapter 1 suggests an administrative procedure to use which will enhance the operation of the program and at the same time facilitate the development of employees, volunteers, and parents. Part I, chapter 2 discusses teacher aides, and part II, chapter 2 recommends procedures for training aides. Part I, chapter 3 describes transportation problems and part II, chapter 3 gives specific suggestions for making transportation time en route to and from school educationally meaningful. Part I, chapter 4 mentions the problems of developing and evaluating a good food program, while part II, chapter 4 gives specific suggestions on how to encourage children to eat. Part I, chapter 5 emphasizes the importance of parents in an educational program, and part II, chapter 5 illustrates specific materials which can be used by parents and which may help them to teach their own children. Part I, chapter 6 reviews the literature as it relates to Head Start, and part II, chapter 6 suggests a possible direction for achieving precision in evaluation procedures. The last chapters of parts I and II show some evidence that Head Start may be dying and strongly urge that it not be allowed to die a premature death.

An invaluable book which should be