



## Book Review Editor — Marie Campbell

### THE SYMMETRICAL FAMILY

By Michael Young and Peter Willmott. Published by Penguin Books 1980 (Re-printed) Price \$7.95 recommended. 398 pages.

This is a re-print of a classic British study first published in 1973. It remains relevant for today's readers as it addresses two of the most urgent issues facing industrial societies — the relationship between work and leisure.

There are many good things about this book, not the least being its style and language. Young and Willmott have produced an elegant and comprehensive study free from the convoluted polysyllabic claptrap that disfigures many sociological studies.

The research is in the great British tradition of Booth and Rowntree presenting a humane view of the interaction between families and the society in which they live. The authors combine the micro analysis of sociological/anthropological research and the macro broader canvas of history. This approach gives the work depth, continuity and above all balance. Thus we have a vivid evocation of historical London as it impinges on the day to day lives of more than 2,600 of its inhabitants and their families. The approach presents a moving picture rather than the still photograph of the sample survey. One of the most valuable features of this book is the way in which it shows the progressive impact of industrialisation and urban life on the family. It highlights the privatised characteristics of nuclear family and the decline of the influence of the extended family.

The term "symmetrical family" is borrowed from the work of Gorer and is intended to show how both husband and wife complement each other in their roles and tasks in relation to the family both outside in the paid work setting and inside in terms of sharing family roles and responsibilities. The central part of

the book deals with the growth of the symmetrical family tracing its origins from the progressive impact of the industrial revolution through to the present day. We see how organised industry increasingly disrupted the family, how childhood as we know it now was only officially recognised in the 1870's as legal limits began to apply to child labour. The nineteenth century is presented as the age of asymmetrical marriage with the husband exercising greater power than ever before over a wife who had become totally dependent upon him.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century we can discern a move towards symmetry. The influence of Feminism among middle class people became in the long run almost as important as technology in the development of the egalitarian or symmetrical family. Using the analogy of the moving column of people the authors show how a number of important influences gradually permeate a society over time e.g. the impact of birth control spreading down the socio-economic ladder is seen to be a potent force for shaping the symmetrical family. Titmuss is quoted as showing how the typical working class mother in the 1890's spent fifteen years in a state of pregnancy and how by the late 1950's her counterpart would be spending only four years. The authors argue that this and other factors help to make home a more congenial place for the man. The absence of a constant cacophony of wailing infants, the greater availability of cheaper labour saving devices made it less desirable for him to seek refuge in the pub. Another possible influence tending towards home centeredness was the decline in importance of the extended family. The rise of the Welfare State and the decline in the frequency of critical life situations not covered by Social Benefits plus greater physical mobility of smaller family units served to weaken the dependence between nuclear and extended kin.

Equally significant is the lessening of segregation of roles between men and women. The majority of families

in the research sample were of this new symmetrical type. Husbands shared many more of the domestic tasks formerly the preserve of wives and correspondingly women were more likely to be working and contributing financially to the home. Progressively there is an increase in the amount of time the family members spend together. Again technology and the cheap domestic machine has played an important part here. The partnership in work has given way to a partnership in leisure (page 98). However the number of hours spent in paid work by couples taken jointly increased and the total spent home decreased. This was seen as a gain for symmetry resulting in a loss for home centeredness.

The modern idea of symmetry is quite different from the respect, love and legal rights envisaged by John Stuart Mill in "The Subjection of Women". There must be no monopolies for either sex in any sphere. Women it is argued should have equal rights with men to seek and to obtain fulfilment outside the home as well as inside it.

In the final chapter the authors speculate about the future trend towards the completely symmetrical family — with two jobs for the wife (mother and worker outside the home) and two jobs for the husband (paid worker and equal sharer of home based activities). Should this trend be realised the authors suggest an increase in stress and strains in marriages with consequent increases in separation and divorce. This seems inevitable as it is unlikely that both partners could find the necessary simultaneous satisfaction in all roles.

What of the children? They in the main receive scant attention in this study for good reasons but towards the end we are invited to see the consequences of the march towards symmetry for them. It is a grim picture the authors present — "Children coming from homes fragmented by the new triumph of technology and Feminism might fail to develop into the kind of people capable of making a centre of peace in the homes that they in their turn would establish for

their children to be reared in".

This is a disturbing but very important book.

*Cliff Picton,  
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## **CHILD ABUSE**

**By Kempe, R.S. & Kempe, C.H.,  
157 p.p. Fontana Open Books,  
London, 1978. R.R.P. \$4.25**

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In this book Henry C. Kempe, Professor of Paediatrics collaborates with Ruth Kempe, Associate Professor of Paediatrics and Professor of Psychiatry at the medical centre, University of Colorado, to present the collective knowledge and experience obtained from many years of work with 'abusive' families. Henry Kempe was largely responsible for the renewed professional and community concern with child abuse which has occurred since the early sixties. Henry Kempe's interest in the incidence of non-accidental injury in children prompted the American Academy of Paediatrics to conduct a symposium on the problem in 1961.

The publication of an article entitled "The Battered Child Syndrome", by Kempe and a group of radiologists and paediatric and psychiatrist specialists in the prestigious journal of the American Medical Association, further promoted professional interest in the problem. In 1962 Kempe presented a paper to a group of lawyers, doctors and social workers at a conference on child abuse which was called by the United States Children's Bureau. Since that time Kempe has appeared at numerous symposiums on child abuse all over the world and has published material concerning his research into child abuse.

This particular publication presents some material which has appeared in a more technical form in earlier publications edited by Henry Kempe. The book is divided into two main parts. Part 1 — "The Nature of Child Abuse" contains chapters dealing with definitions of child abuse, the characteristics of abusers, the characteristics of abused children and their behaviour, and the nature of sexual abuse and incest. Part 11 — "Dealing with Child Abuse", describes the authors' research findings concerning pre-disposing factors in parents and treatment strategies in working with 'abusive' parents and 'abused' children. The authors conclude with a plea for a

more community-based approach to the problem and a greater concern for children's rights.

Although this book will be a valuable general resource book for welfare workers and agencies, the more discerning reader will find it less satisfactory. One feature which I personally found limiting was the Kempe's tendency to make generalizations of the basis of their own research, without adequately substantiating their findings. An example of this occurs in Chapter Five, where the Kemples describe their research into pre-disposing factors in parents but fail to provide enough information about the content of their questionnaires for the reader to evaluate the validity or general applicability of their findings. Although, this book is aimed primarily at the generalist rather than the specialist, it would have been useful if the reader could have been given access to more details concerning this research. For example, this could have been done either in appendix form, or by references to more detailed research reports concerning the project.

A further limitation is the Kemples' presentation of child abuse only in terms of a medical model. Within the medical model, the abusive parent of caretaker is seen to be the principal cause of child abuse, the assumption being, that abusive caretakers are abnormal or ill. Although this is a legitimate stance to take, the reader who is unaware of the recent contributions to the academic and professional literature by adherents of the ecological and sociological perspectives, could easily gain the impression from the Kemples' writing that the medical approach is the only way of perceiving the problem. This belies the work of writers such as Carter, Gil, Gelles and Garbarino who have described the significance of structural and cultural factors as determinants of child abuse.

Despite these limitations, the book has many commendable features. One virtue is its practicality, in that specific guidelines are provided for professionals involved in treatment work. These treatment strategies are at all times presented within the context of the needs of all family members including the siblings of abused children. The Kemples also make some valuable suggestions for reducing the staff turn-over of social workers involved in child protection work. For instance, they suggest that

child protective workers should be freed from their case-work duties for two to three weeks every three months to evaluate their work and to improve their liaison with schools. This suggestion is worthy of serious consideration by the social work profession and employing authorities. Finally, for the reader who is interested in reading more widely on the subject there is a useful annotated bibliography at the back of the book.

This book is likely to be read and assimilated by a wide audience. As has been the case with other publications emanating from the work carried out at the University of Colorado, it should contribute to an increased awareness and community action for children vulnerable to abuse. In the professional literature and discourse on child abuse, Henry Kempe and his colleagues at the University of Colorado stand out in their commitment to their work and their efforts to communicate their research findings. For this they can only be commended!

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## **A Planning Guide for Voluntary Human Service Delivery Agencies**

**by S.M. Drezner and W.B.  
McCurdy Family Service  
Association of America, New  
York, 1979.**

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What is the real task of a manager? Ask this of people and the responses will be illuminating — if only because they will point to the fact that there is probably no other secular topic in this complex industrial work of ours which arouses more babble as well as learned discussion than that of "Management".

The teaching of "Management" is a big business in itself. Consultants and a multitude of training courses are available everywhere (for a price) and Institutes of Management are also there to sustain the harassed and anxiety-ridden executive. In print and by word every aspect of the manager's role is analysed and dissected, with the industrial psychologists and sociologists contributing their bit by methodically scrutinising the personalities of "successful" managers and the