Book Reviews

Aftermaths of Hardship

Children of the Great Depression. Social Change in Life Experience. GLEN H. ELDER, JR. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. xxiv, 400 pp., illus. $15.

The book under review is a piece of sociological research into the familial accommodations to sudden losses of real income and of status that occurred in the Great Depression in the United States. It traces the effects of these phenomena from the family into the adolescent personalities of a cohort of children born in 1920–21, into the ways in which these children regarded themselves and their parents, into their academic and social lives in school, and finally into their own work careers, family lives, and mental health. The book is social history of a kind too uncommon in current sociological research, and its record and interpretation of the past are useful in assaying the present.

At base, the book is a research monograph, summarizing panels of data collected between 1932 and 1964 as part of the Oakland Growth Study (OGS). Originally designed by psychologists to study physiological, psychological, and social aspects of pubertal transition, the OGS was a purposive sample of 84 white native boys and 83 white native girls of normal intelligence who in 1931 were fifth graders in one of five northeast Oakland (California) schools affiliated with the Institute of Human Development (School of Education) at Berkeley. During the '30's several interviews with the subjects' mothers were conducted, eliciting information about child rearing and family structure and socioeconomic circumstances. Concurrent psychometric and clinical assessments of children were obtained by Institute staff, which also observed patterns of family relations in home and clinical visits through the high school years. Children were given career and personality questionnaires while in junior and senior high school and subsequently were contacted by telephone and mail in 1941 and 1948 about occupational interests. Three extensive follow-ups (1953–54, 1957–58, and 1964) obtained life history details and physical and psychiatric information on 82 percent of the original boys and 92 percent of the girls. Because of the wealth and variety of these data Elder has been able to use them for his purposes, despite the obvious limitations of sample size and population coverage and the substantially different objectives of the original OGS principal investigators (Herbert Stolz and Harold E. Jones).

The number of sample cases is too small and the geographical, social, and historical range too restricted to sustain generalization to all who experienced the Great Depression, or even to those who were schoolchildren in the early '30's. The author, aware of these limitations, carefully documents the truncated variation in family socioeconomic status (absent are upper-class and lower-class families, with nearly 60 percent of the sample being in the middle class and the remainder in the working class as classified on the Hollingshead scale) and other unusual characteristics of the OGS population, including the prevailing neoprogressive educational philosophy in the "university" schools from which the children were drawn. He secures data from other sources to assess the biases in population representation, and summarizes other research findings that yield patterns consistent with those he has found in this study.

As did W. I. Thomas, Elder argues that linkages between personality and social structure are most apparent in crisis situations in which customary social relationships and institutions are suddenly inappropriate (as in the Depression when socioeconomic needs outstripped the abilities of persons, families, the economy, and the polity to meet them) and personal accommodations and social adaptations or change become necessary. The OGS families were subdivided into "deprived" and "nondeprived" categories within both the middle class and the working class, those who reported decreases in income of 35 percent or more between 1929 and 1933 being classed as deprived. In the middle class, 55 percent of the families were deprived, having suffered about a 64 percent loss in income ($2220 in absolute terms); the nondeprived suffered a 20 percent loss. Among the working-class families, 69 percent were deprived, having suffered a 58 percent loss ($1560); the nondeprived lost about 15 percent. Class and relative deprivation constitute the major axes for the interpretation of responses to economic crises as manifested in the developing personalities of the OGS children, in their instrumental and emotional relationships with parents, in peer networks and school classrooms, and ultimately in their work and home lives as middle-aged adults in an enlarging economy of relative affluence.

Sociological readers recognize the book's propositions regarding class and deprivation as a variety of research into status inconsistency, a situation in which ordinary degrees of status crystallization (that is, the imperfect congruence of levels of education, prestige, income, and so on) of a family are at least temporarily dissolved owing to economic and occupational mobility. While in general the empirical evidence concerning effects of status inconsistency on personality and behavior is at best equivocal, this reviewer tends to agree with the author that such effects occurred in the Great Depression. (This would suggest that such effects, if status inconsistency "theory" is at all valid, may be historically specific.)

Within the childhood families, deprivation and unemployment of the male head forced families to deplete their savings, become more labor-intensive and self-sufficient in household maintenance, borrow from relatives, and (mainly as a last resort) accept public relief. The emotional toll of fatigue, dissatisfaction, and perceived loss of pride among wives (husbands were never interviewed) was greatest among the middle class, which, Elder argues, suffered the greater relative status decrement. Middle-class fathers were perceived as less worthy of emulation by their offspring, in cases of deprivation, in part as result of their role failure but also in conjunction with heavy drinking, which was considerably more common among the unemployed than among the employed; not surprisingly, deprived children of all classes viewed their fathers as unhappy.

Frequently, mothers in deprived families entered the labor force, especially when the father was unemployed or the family was large. Children were pressed into household maintenance tasks (especially girls, and intensively so in the working class) in lieu of the mother's service and into part-time participation in the labor force (especially boys). Assumption of responsible roles in the family's efforts to adapt to deprivation was consistent with greater freedom from parental control, especially among boys with jobs outside the home. However, among working-class girls, intensive involvements in household management proffered training for later roles as homemakers, roles which adolescent girls from deprived families in both working and middle classes preferred over careers. If the relative power (autonomy) of children in deprived families rose, so too

did that of the wives, who often became major decision-makers, especially when the husbands became unemployed; this reversal of conjugal power was observed in both classes where the wife became the economic mainstay. Economic failure diminished the effectiveness of the father as a role model and enhanced that of the mother, especially for the girls, but children from deprived families were more likely than the nondeprived to look outside the home for significant others as sources of encouragement, guidance, and nurturance during adolescence.

Throughout their childhood and junior high school years, the deprived were regarded by mothers and OGS staff as emotionally sensitive to the reactions of others, if not also as more self-conscious than the nondeprived. The author ascribes this reaction to relative status loss and to the ensuing uncertainties concerning social intercourse. Among adolescent girls from deprived families, intense concern for physical appearance, grooming, and affiliation were common, while among boys these heightened *social* sensitivities were no more frequent among the deprived than among the nondeprived and were far less acute than among junior high school girls in general. Despite the personal sensitivities, ratings of the objective popularity of the deprived and nondeprived established no substantial differences through high school (which possibly could be ascribed to the efforts of the neoprogressive schools to de-emphasize and ameliorate socioeconomic inequalities among students). Deprived boys exerted conscious effort to enhance their prominence through intellectual and scholastic competence; that is, through task-oriented, instrumental behaviors rather than affiliational ones. Boys, especially among the deprived working class, strove for competence through a desire to control their environment (power), a desire for respect and honor (prestige), and a desire to exercise talent in attempting hard tasks (achievement). These sex-specific patterns of status-striving among the deprived followed traditional lines, although they apparently were amplified among the deprived by the enlarged household responsibilities of girls and the early entrance of boys into the adult work force with its concomitant freedoms from parental control and structural demands for autonomy and achievement.

Class, rather than family economic fortunes during the Depression, apparently explains the differences among boys in amount of schooling. The lack of difference among the deprived and nondeprived in this respect also reflected the economic recovery that had occurred by the end of the '30's, educational benefits to World War II veterans, and education subsidized through the labors and foregone educational aspirations of the wives of deprived husbands. In all probability the movement of this 1920–21 birth cohort from schooling into military service and then into a booming postwar labor force accounts for the lack of appreciable differences in the occupational careers of men of deprived and of nondeprived Depression origins. The lack of an older cohort by which to assess this conclusion is apparent, although the author cites work by Thernstrom in Boston which supports its essence. But social psychological forces within the OGS cohort could also account for the generalized occupational success of both the deprived and nondeprived. In brief, the author finds that deprived boys crystallized vocational plans earlier than the nondeprived, coupling such plans with intellectual competence (no correlation was found between IQ and loss of income), greater desire for achievement, power, and prestige ("ambition"), and earlier vocational experience to compensate for their family handicaps. [This reviewer wonders whether this compensatory pattern was not due at least in part to the neoprogressive Oakland schools with their universalistic, egalitarian philosophy, and close pupil-teacher interaction (in which teachers were important significant others to the deprived boys) and to a "Hawthorne effect" of the OGS on bright, sensitive working-class boys (especially the deprived).]

If past deprivations in families were not in themselves major forces in the educational and occupational careers of the OGS males, family economic loss had contemporary relevance for men's occupational orientations (that is, to the extrinsic versus intrinsic rewards of work) and for the importance attached to leisure and family life. Middle-aged men of deprived origins valued job security and work's extrinsic rewards more highly than did nondeprived men and tended to stress the procreative potential of marriage more. The effects of differential economic hardship in childhood upon adult male values were most pronounced for men who either remained in the lower-middle and working classes or who were downwardly mobile from the middle class. That is, the relevance of the past to current predispositions was greatest for those whose adult situations most closely resembled the deprivations of the '30's.

For the most part, young women in the OGS adopted traditional careers as homemakers and mothers. Among the deprived, early domestic responsibilities in the parental home reinforced traditional sex-role patterns by underscoring the centrality of the mother in the domestic economy (notably in crisis situations) and as the foundation of a socially and emotionally stable family. Perhaps these motivations, early marriage, and the withdrawal of women from the postwar labor force help to account for the "baby boom," especially given the greater value attached to children (than, say, to affection) in marriage by both women and men of these backgrounds. Women of nondeprived origins married later and completed more schooling. However, they were no more likely to marry upward, and their pattern of childbearing (though births were more closely spaced) was not noticeably different from that of women of deprived origins.

These selections are highlights of the book's systematic description of a unique birth cohort in American social history. While the cohort suffered economic deprivation in its adolescence and war in its young adulthood, it also enjoyed a propitious economic climate in the postwar years. The author makes no claim to have captured the full effects of the Depression on the lives of Americans, for surely they were varied and depended upon the stage in life at which economic deprivation was experienced. Only through similar studies of other cohorts and other places can that period of history be reconstructed.

Subject to the historically unique experiences of the OGS Depression cohort, the book's theoretical framework and analysis are suggestive about personal and familial adaptations to social stresses and crises over the course of any cohort's life cycle. Unfortunately, some features of the OGS data and the reported analyses limit one's confidence in generalizing to other cohorts or to other samples of the same cohort. For example, the OGS cases are not strictly representative of any population, and the numerical base is too small to permit extensive multivariate decompositions. The latter fact makes it problematic to discern true from spurious relationships, as for example in the section on gender differences among adolescents. By accident of case selection and sample attrition, gender is confounded with social class (65 percent of the boys and 54 percent of the girls were middle class); one cannot determine (from the tables provided) what portion of the putative sex differences is really class differences.

These limitations aside, the descriptive color of the writing and the author's (generally guarded) analytical speculation sum to enjoyable and informative social history. The work underscores the importance of historical context for the interpretation of data and the durability of theory for those many contemporary sociologists whose research is about the present. The author's craft in synthesizing his vast

file of life histories is exemplary for sociologist practitioners of historical methodology.

As more and more Americans face hard times during the '70's, the book assumes a measure of timeliness. It provokes thoughts about the future—namely, about the viability of current social institutions and Depression-era adaptation for the new forms of socioeconomic stress on the horizon. In that sense, *Children of the Great Depression* is more than a thoughtful assessment of the past.

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Sex Roles in Central Brazil

Women of the Forest. YOLANDA MURPHY and ROBERT F. MURPHY. Columbia University Press, New York, 1974. xvi, 236 pp. Cloth, $10; paper, $3.45.

When Yolanda and Robert Murphy studied the Tupi-speaking Mundurucú of central Brazil in the early 1950's, this small enclave of 1250 Indians was on the brink of social disintegration. Traditionally hunter-gatherers who also practice slash-and-burn agriculture, they inhabit circular villages in the savannahs of the Upper Tapajoz River valley. According to travelers' reports the Mundurucú were once one of the most warlike peoples of South America. Today, however, their warring activities have been sharply curtailed. No longer at liberty to roam the savannahs at will, a portion of the Mundurucú people have opted for another mode of life. Abandoning the traditional savannah villages they have settled along the banks of the Cururú River, where they currently are engaged in the rubber trade with local Brazilians.

This pursuit of a frontier life-style has brought about many modifications in Mundurucú social organization. Not the least of these are changes in the relations between the sexes. In *Women of the Forest* the Murphys portray the two worlds of the Mundurucú from the vantage point of the woman.

Traditional Mundurucú society is described as essentially an egalitarian one in which "sex roles are the most basic form of social distinction" (p. 70). The Murphys' account presents anatomical differences as the grounds for classlike divisions. As a result of the emphasis on sexual dimorphism Mundurucú men and women live separate and unequal lives in contiguous social settings. The women, anchored to matrilocal extended-family households, are responsible for the production and processing of vegetable foods. Daily horticultural pursuits occupy their time away from the village, and much of their time in the village is spent in the production of manioc flour. A communal manioc shed serves the women both as a social club and as a common work area.

Men have no share in women's work. Domiciled exclusively in a men's house, adult males spend their days either outside the village in hunting and courtship expeditions or in the performance of rituals associated with an ancestor cult. The gulf between the sexes appears to be bridged only for the purposes of procreation and the distribution of meat. Quite apart from these intermittent transactions in which women receive meat and sperm in return for the female product—babies (who at birth are automatically members in their fathers' patriclans)—there is little that seems to bind men to women. Love relationships are described as diffuse and short-lived; divorce is easy and occurs frequently. Thus solidary relations are not forged between the sexes but exist within them.

Greater prestige is accorded to male occupations, with men always dominant in politics and religion. The Murphys try to account for these inequities between the sexes by resorting to a facile Freudian interpretation. Should public displays of sexual antagonism be regarded as merely cover-ups for male fears of inadequacy? Must the men's house and its secret rituals be viewed as fantasies constructed by the men to fool themselves and women into thinking that men are inherently superior beings? No doubt the Mundurucú myths and their symbolism are conducive to Freudian analysis, but at least this reader finds the validity of such interpretations questionable when used to explain cultural phenomena in non-Western societies.

Among the Mundurucú who left their traditional villages in the savannah and relocated on the Cururú River, the old system of sexual segregation seems to have broken down, the Murphys report. Women and men now work side by side in gardening and cooperate with each other in the extraction of wild rubber and other forest products. In this new situation hunting has become less important than fishing, and both have become individual rather than collective tasks. The nuclear family replaces the extended one in important household and village functions. Without a men's house and its male-associated ancestral cult the men now live with their wives and children. No one seems to lament the passing of the old order, least of all the women, who, the Murphys emphasize, are happier in the new setting.

That the Mundurucú women should indicate a preference for machine-age manufactured goods and the exclusive companionship of a solitary husband to a plurality of amorous liaisons and the convenience of child-care by coresident matrikin may not be surprising to Western readers. What is surprising is that the Murphys have made it into an occasion for a comparison of Mundurucú women with American women. It does seem specious to assert, when so little is known about the psychology of the Mundurucú woman, that there is a commonality, a "sisterhood" (p. 232), between all women which cross-cuts cultural boundaries and is readily identifiable on other grounds, presumably, than biological ones. Such statements, were they to be proven exact, might well render social science studies of the kind the Murphys were originally intent upon both cumbersome and unnecessary.

To the trained ethnographer familiar with the repercussions of socioeconomic breakdown, it looks as if the Mundurucú women have exchanged one set of oppressions for another, for if they are no longer the occasional victims of male group tyranny they are now the dependents of husbands trapped in symbiotic trade relationships with Brazilians. Can one conclude then that it is preferable to be a victim of economic oppression than to submit to sexual humiliation? This is certainly the gist of the Murphys' book, but it is hard to determine the answer from the evidence they present. Clearly the costs and rewards of a new life for the Mundurucú need to be more carefully scrutinized. The Murphys' book, constructed more than 20 years after the original fieldwork took place, is a good beginning. The study of sex roles and their allocation, interaction, and rationalization deserves a prominent place in current anthropological research. One may hope that some of the issues raised in *Women of the Forest* will become the concern of future field projects.

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African Mammals

The Carnivores of West Africa. D. R. ROSEVEAR. The British Museum (Natural History), London, 1974. xii, 548 pp. + plates. £18.50. British Museum (Natural History) Publication No. 723.

The third and final volume of a series on West African mammals (the others were on bats and rodents, respectively), this book is crammed with information and is a valuable reference work on carnivores. It includes so many of the species found in