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Review of *Family Preservation and Family Functioning*,
by Jacquelyn McCroskey and William Meezan

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California's Proposition 187 "is less a spasm of nativist hatred than an expression of public frustration with a government and civil society that seem out of touch and out of control" (p. 148). Yet later in the discussion he notes that Proposition 187 and English only laws "are grand gestures with few practical consequences other than to convince politicians that many voters now view American society as increasingly alien (literally) and uncontrollable" (p. 155). Such a statement seems to contradict his previous assertion. Moreover, it is exactly the concern that immigrants are creating an alien America that has historically motivated nativists. Certainly not all who voted for Proposition 187 are nativists; but a cursory look at the rhetoric used by many of its backers reveals language that demonizes illegal and legal immigrants.

"The Politics of Rapid Legal Change: Immigration Policy, 1980–1990" provides an insightful review of immigration legislation passed in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead of seeing the United States as entering into a restrictionist period of immigration, Schuck consistently argues that the United States is alone among Western nations in having increased its immigration levels. He correctly notes that efforts to restrict immigration have been almost entirely directed at slowing the volume of illegal immigration. In another essay, "Refugee-Burden Sharing: A Modest Proposal," Schuck develops a proposal of considerable merit for reforming the existing international system of protecting refugees. The idea is to have regional plans for nation-states to handle refugee flows that will be monitored by an international body such as the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees. Once nation-states have agreed to refugee quotas, they should be permitted to buy and sell refugee slots to one another. Had such a plan been in place for the Western Hemisphere, the recent natural disaster in Central America, Hurricane Mitch, would have been much easier to handle. Wealthy countries like the United States and Canada could have dealt with their refugee burden by paying countries like Mexico and Costa Rica to provide shelter. Such an arrangement offers immediate relief and recognizes that once it is safe to return, most refugees will do so. Permanent and expensive resettlement is not always the answer.

Like many other compilations of essays, *Citizens, Strangers, and In-Betweens* is an uneven work. The essays vary in quality (although most are excellent) and content, and they contain repetitions. Given the nature of the book, that is probably unavoidable. Nevertheless, Schuck has put together a thoughtful collection of essays that tackle many contemporary immigration issues. For those wishing to understand the complex and confusing terrain of immigration, Schuck is a good guide.

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Family Preservation and Family Functioning. By Jacquelyn McCroskey and William Meezan. Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press, 1997. Pp. 382. \$24.95 (paper).

In the late 1980s, Jacquelyn McCroskey and William Meezan began their intensive study of two home-based programs in Los Angeles County, and the family preservation movement was just gaining momentum in the United States. Within a few years most states were providing short-term, intensive, in-home services aimed at keeping families of abused and neglected children together. Then came a backlash, as some argued that the movement had gone too far at the expense of the safety and well-being of vulnerable children. In turn, questions were raised

about the need for large-scale efforts to prevent out-of-home placements and using short-term, family-based intervention as a means to that end. At the same time, several large, controlled studies indicated that family preservation (FP) programs were not preserving many families. However, debates about the wisdom and viability of family preservation policies have not hampered the expansion of services that have been developed under this rubric. Dozens of service delivery programs that aim to strengthen—but not necessarily to preserve—families have been left in the wake of the family preservation movement. And although their objectives have shifted, most are still identified as “family preservation” programs.

Counter to the prevailing wisdom of the 1980s, McCroskey and Meezan embarked on a rigorous evaluation of relatively nonintensive, family-based programs in which the placement prevention objective took a backseat to improving individual and family functioning. Unlike other rigorous FP evaluations, their study had much closer links to direct practice than to policy. This work is particularly important now that many FP programs are similar (in both philosophy and approach) to those they evaluated.

The authors employed a randomized experiment to assess the impact of home-based FP services compared with “regular” child welfare services. Two private agency FP programs were studied, one with an average of 12 1-hour contacts per family over a span of more than 14 weeks, the other with about 11 90-minute contacts with each family in less than 14 weeks. Each agency had its own control group whose services were provided by the public child welfare agency. Longitudinal data were gathered from multiple sources, and parents were interviewed within a few weeks of random assignment, at 3 months into the study, and then at 15 months. In addition to an original measure of family functioning, developed in close collaboration with agency staff, the authors used several standardized instruments—the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), and Caldwell HOME—that are staples of research on parents and children but are too rarely used in child welfare research. The authors’ engagement of agency staff and other stakeholders in this vigorous research effort is particularly impressive, as is their candor in discussing the choices and trade-offs that had to be made and the lessons that they learned in hindsight. This book is worth reading for these lessons alone.

Like virtually all program evaluations, this study encountered unforeseen problems in the field. There was considerable attrition: 36 percent of the families could not be located within a few weeks after random assignment, almost half were missing at 3 months, and about 60 percent could not be found for the 15-month interviews. (Although the authors present some analysis of factors associated with this attrition, the analysis could have been developed further.) Family preservation services were carefully documented, but little information was available on services that were provided to the control group. From the little that we know about this, it appears that control cases received services that were not dramatically different from those provided to FP cases. This renders the study’s central comparison unclear. And, as a result of attrition, the sample size (75 FP cases and 77 control cases at 15 months) does not support the kind of multivariate analysis needed to unravel interrelations among factors that appear to be associated with within-group changes over time. For these reasons, few firm conclusions can be drawn. Even so, the authors almost exhaust the analytic potential of their data, and their work yields many interesting questions for further research.

In three long chapters, the authors report findings that include a few significant differences and some trends favoring the FP treatment group. Within each geographic area, FP and control cases had similar outcomes, probably because the services provided to the program and control groups were not very distinct.

Here, a firm conclusion can be drawn: compared with regular child welfare services, neither of the two relatively nonintensive FP models resulted in substantial improvements in individual or family functioning, nor did they affect out-of-home placement rates.

A separate analysis of change over time by agency shows that the CBSC program group and its comparison group (in South Central Los Angeles) improved during the intervention and declined during the follow-up period. The pattern was reversed for the HCS program group (in the northern San Fernando Valley) with declines during intervention and improvements thereafter in both its program and control groups. More contextual information might have been used to link community-level factors to observed changes in family functioning—but that was not within the scope of the study.

One of the most important contributions of this work is the further development and testing of a practice-based measure of family functioning, the Family Assessment Form (FAF). The FAF may help caseworkers assess the social functioning of parents and children, interactions among some dyads within the family, and environmental support for the family. McCroskey and Meezan do not present the FAF as a one-size-fits-all solution to agencies' needs for careful individual and family assessments. Rather, they suggest that this model can help workers assess family strengths and weaknesses and capture change over time. In addition, McCroskey and Meezan do not claim to have solved the many definitional and measurement problems encountered in attempts to assess family functioning, but their conceptual and empirical analysis of various domains of family functioning is extraordinarily useful. Some data on reliability and validity are presented, but the authors might have pushed this analysis further by examining the concordance of some of the FAF items with information obtained on the Caldwell HOME.

Ultimately, this book is about the influence of perspective on what is perceived—and McCroskey and Meezan are at their best when dealing with these complicated issues. There were substantial discrepancies between FP workers' ratings of family functioning and parental symptomatology and the ratings generated by researchers, which were based on interviews with parents. Worker reports were more internally consistent, indicating more problems in functioning and more pathology at the outset, and then greater improvement over time. Parents in the FP group reported few problems in family functioning at the beginning. Based on parent reports, there were significant improvements in family living conditions, but these only emerged after the end of treatment. In contrast, FP workers reported significant change during the intervention period. McCroskey and Meezan suggest that workers view family functioning as a set of interrelated phenomena (hence, high correlations among worker ratings on different dimensions of family functioning), while parents tend to identify problems in more circumscribed areas and may minimize their difficulties. The authors also offer an alternative explanation: workers may need to "see" more problems and improvement in clients in order to justify their occupational existence. Hence, the more global view of family functioning presented by workers may reflect their biases, not careful differential assessment. Indeed, there is some evidence that worker ratings of parental pathology may have been inflated (research interviewers' ratings of parental psychopathology were closer to BSI scores). Compared with workers, parents may more accurately pinpoint their own problems and strengths and the limited impact of short-term intervention. In any case, McCroskey and Meezan note that this clash of perspectives does not force us to choose one over the other. Rather, each perspective may tell us a great deal about the observer as well as the phenomena being observed.

Like their subjects, McCroskey and Meezan are not entirely neutral observers

in this enterprise; their interpretations tend to present the FP programs and their practitioner-colleagues in a very favorable light. They attribute relatively small changes (e.g., in CBCL scores) to the FP program when other explanations (such as statistical regression toward the mean) are equally plausible. The inconclusive nature of their findings seems to invite many post hoc explanations. Nonetheless, they do provide a wealth of well-informed, thoughtful observations and directions for further research, clearly labeling these as ideas, not facts. But in their attempt to mine this gold, McCroskey and Meezan make some logical missteps. For example, in light of the fact that central features of the two service delivery models—the frequency and length of contacts, the emphasis on counseling or teaching and demonstration, and the duration of FP services—did not matter, they conclude that “the philosophy of family-based services in general, rather than the specifics of its implementation, is the key to improving family functioning” (p. 248). Since research interviewers did not pick up significant between-group differences in family functioning at 3 months, however, there is no “improvement” to explain. It is possible that the FP intervention had a “sleeper” effect, but even so, it would be difficult to attribute delayed improvements in family living conditions to program philosophies. Similarly, the authors speculate that some out-of-home placements in the control group might have been prevented by FP services because the FP treatment improved family living conditions and poor living conditions were predictive of placement in control cases. Because there were no significant between-group differences in placement rates, however, we have to conclude that the FP programs did not prevent placements.

In spite of these problems, the book is well worth reading for several reasons: it illustrates a successful collaboration between researchers and practitioners, describes problems often encountered in field experiments, grapples with some of the central issues in the conceptualization and measurement of family functioning, delves into fascinating issues of perception and subjectivity, and raises many questions that the field has not yet answered. The book is very accessible and will be particularly useful to practitioners, program administrators, policy makers, researchers, and funders interested in home-based services, family functioning, field experiments, or subjectivity. Seasoned researchers, however, will not find all the details that they expect.

Most important, McCroskey and Meezan’s work reminds us that solutions to the problems these families face will not be quick or easy—and may depend as much (or more) on community, economic, and environmental conditions as on individual or family-level intervention.

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Nonprofit Organizations in an Age of Uncertainty: A Study of Organizational Change. Joseph Galaskiewicz and Wolfgang Bielefeld. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1998. Pp. 290. \$23.75 (cloth).

This ambitious study examines organizational change among nonprofit organizations in the generous, research-rich metropolis of Minneapolis–St. Paul. The analyses are based on a panel of agencies randomly selected from (potentially biased) internal revenue data. Survey data were collected four times between 1980 and 1992. Other information supplements the panel through 1994.

This is not a work to read for the details of service delivery, analyses of changes