

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

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Stahmann, R. F., & Hiebert, W. J. *Premarital counseling*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1980.

Reviewed by:

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Premarital Counseling is an excellent introductory text. The authors stated objective in writing this book was to provide a "definitive guide on the process and content of premarital counseling" for "those professionals who do premarital counseling, with a sensitivity to the interdisciplinary backgrounds of those persons who provide the service." While this book would be a useful addition to the library of the marriage and family counselling student, and the paraprofessional who requires a broad orientation to premarital counselling, only the novice professional would find its contents of significant value. The experienced professional would be looking for a more in-depth coverage of the subject matter.

While this book is well organized, the language clear and concise, the authors try to cover too much, the end result being a superficial presentation. This book is, after all, only 170 pages including the bibliography.

It is probable that the majority of marriages still occur with limited to no preparation for the demands and responsibilities of marriage and family life. Whether premarital counselling is a useful adjunct to preparation has not been established as there is little information available relative to the

success in marriage of counselled versus non-counselled individuals. The authors have in no way remedied this lack. As well, while they contend that professional, as opposed to paraprofessional or lay persons, should be the providers of premarital counselling, documentation for this contention is not provided.

The chapter dealing with the contexts of premarital counselling, which also enumerates the providers therein, is informative but not novel. Usually we are reading about counselling after marriage rather than before. In this sense, the presentation of the roles of these providers at a pre-problem stage is unique. As well, rather than being oriented to conflict resolution after marriage, the purpose is self- and couple-awareness, and the development of skills to deal with an ongoing and future relationship. The authors have developed a model for premarital counselling, geared to conjoint couple sessions, that clarifies the goals and conditions under which they will be achieved.

While group premarital counselling may be a common practice, it is not, as the authors note, often reported in the literature. Having acknowledged this deficit, it is surprising that their treatment of the topic is so superficial. They also tend to ignore the abundance of literature on group counselling per se. Too often the authors present marital counselling as a unique entity rather than as just one of many approaches to counselling that deals with a narrow range of problems or a homogeneous group of individuals. However, their presentation of the high-lights of three successful premarital counselling programs is a good starting point for those new to the prac-

tice of premarital group counselling. The chapter on instrumentation, that is, assessment devices, should also be useful to the novice.

The experienced counsellor might think that chapters such as those dealing with instrumentation and premarital counselling in remarriage or the reconstituted family could have been omitted. The literature is replete with material on the former. The latter is an extremely complex topic and, given the work in progress of Emily and John Visher which culminated in their excellent book published in 1979, *Stepfamilies: A Guide to Working With Stepparents and Stepchildren*, its inclusion was needless. To refer to premarital counselling in this context seems to be stretching any definition of this process. Admittedly, the authors' working definition of marriage as "a multidimensional relationship that functions on many levels" allows a great deal of leeway. Their stress, however, on the idea that marriage begins before the wedding cannot be overstated. As well, there is an adequate discussion of the motivations for marriage, albeit from the point of view of the wrong reasons rather than the right reasons.

In summary, *Premarital Counseling* is useful as an introductory text for the counselling student or the non-professional who wants a basic review of the subject. Little has heretofore been available to this group regarding the practice or efficacy of premarital counselling. There is, nevertheless, a great deal of pertinent material in the literature that is not included in the bibliography. Consequently, the serious reader or researcher will have to look beyond this book for well-documented research findings.

Collins, A. H., Pancoast, D. L., & Dunn, J. A.
Consultation casebook. Portland, Oregon:
Harder House, 1977.

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Following the publication of Gerald Caplan's classic work *Principles of Preventive Psychiatry* in 1964, consultation became a major focus in the mental health field. Hailed as a way of reaching more clients with better service, consultation generally took place between professionals and was directed towards providing specific and generalized problem solving for the consultee who then in turn would work towards preventing problems for the client. Rather than working directly with students,

a school counsellor, for example, would work with teachers or administrators to help them in their work with students. Many professionals hurried to become consultants and in their rush expanded the use of the term consultation to include a wide variety of activities and methods that ignored the special and unique skills and qualities of the consultation relationship. Few professional schools offered training in consultation, and an increasing number of persons were left to learn consultation practice through experience alone, resulting in a wide variety of practices and techniques becoming associated with the high status role — "consultant".

In an attempt to remedy this situation the authors of *Consultation Casebook*, Alice Collins, Diane Pancoast and Jane Dunn, all social work educators at Portland State University, have developed a more systematic approach to consultation training. Since most of their students will experience the role of consultee, that is, receive the services of consultants, the authors wanted to improve their students' ability to benefit from consultation and therefore have compiled a large number of field based case studies, written mostly by persons actually receiving consultation service. The cases are grouped into three chapters: the first chapter presents 14 examples of the need to distinguish between consultation and other forms of intervention such as supervision, collaboration, staff training and treatment; the second chapter presents 10 examples focusing on establishing a consultation relationship; and the third chapter provides 14 cases directed at examining the process and maintenance of the relationship. The fourth and final chapter discusses the need for evaluation and describes ways in which impact can be assessed. Each chapter is preceded by a brief introduction, and each of the cases in the chapter is followed by a set of discussion questions. A brief yet annotated bibliography follows each chapter and an index organized by case setting concludes the work.

The authors have provided a wide variety of cases from diverse settings, and have included examples of unsuccessful yet illustrative material. In addition, they have provided case material demonstrating the expansion of consultation service to "natural consultees," persons who are part of the existing social network of a community. The book, which is a plastic-ring bound paperback, could have been more aptly titled "Consultee Casebook" since its focus is on the experience of the consultee rather than on the actions of the consultant. Persons without opportunities for centered discussion and analysis of the book's contents, may find it limited in that the authors do not give their own perspectives on the cases, and it would take more than the information about consultation provided