

 **BOOK REVIEWS**

HALEM, LYNNE CAROL. *Divorce Reform*. New York: Free Press, 1980. Pp. 330. \$17.95.

This is a fascinating book for the student of divorce. The author summarizes historical changes in divorce laws and cultural attitudes influencing that legislation. She also describes how the writings of psychologists and other social scientists have contributed to moral and legal thinking regarding divorce. The title suggests that the book deals only with changes in divorce legislation, which may be of little interest to social scientists studying causes and effects of divorce. Although *Divorce Reform* does include descriptions of legal details which some readers may want to skim, it also contains a number of important lessons for social scientists.

First, it is useful for researchers to understand historical changes in divorce legislation in the United States. Psychology in general, and the study of interpersonal relationships in particular, often ignore historical trends affecting phenomena being investigated. Moral and legal attitudes about divorce have shifted dramatically over the past two centuries, and research has been affected by those changing views. *Divorce Reform* provides the historical context which researchers often disregard.

A second important point in this book concerns the effect of social science research on cultural norms and legislation about social problems. At times researchers have attempted to introduce legal reform or to alter prevalent attitudes directly, while at other times the influence has been unintentional. However, research findings have sometimes been overgeneralized or misinterpreted and Halem gives excellent examples of bad and good applications of divorce research.

The last aspect of this book that seems especially important to social scientists concerns implications for current cultural, legal, and research trends regarding divorce. To my mind, the most valuable lesson in *Divorce Reform* is that it leads one to contemplate how current thinking about divorce influences one's own research, and how that research could affect legislation. A weakness of the book is that it does not deal with present trends in research and legislation. It lacks discussion of studies of the impact of divorce on adults (who, until recently, have been neglected for research about children), the demand for "creative" divorce arrangements, changes in resources available to divorced people and single parents, and theorizing about close relationships that emphasizes systemic analyses of interactions, all of which will probably influence future divorce legislation.

Divorce Reform provides insights about divorce, placing research in its historical context, demonstrating how research affects legal and moral attitudes about social problems, and reminding the researcher to consider the context in which problems are studied. These are important lessons to recall, applicable well beyond divorce research. (Margaret E. Madden, Franklin Pierce College)