


Marriages AND Families

REFLECTIONS OF
A GENDERED
SOCIETY



CONSTANCE L. SHEHAN
KENNETH C. W. KAMMEYER



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Reflections of a Gendered Society

Constance L. Shehan

THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Kenneth C. W. Kammeyer

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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Preface

Few, if any, parts of an individual's life are not affected by the importance society attaches to the simple fact of being born female or male. From responses to intimate relationships, the amount of decision-making power you have, the amount of household labor you are assigned, the degree of satisfaction you find in family life, to the way you express love and commitment, all are affected to one degree or another by the *social* significance of your biological sex.

Scholars of families have, for several generations, assigned great importance to sex and gender. One of the most prominent sociologists of the twentieth century, Talcott Parsons, wrote in detail about men and women in families, focusing on what he believed were the "natural" roles associated with biological sex—the instrumental, or externally oriented achievement role for men and the expressive, or internally nurturant role for women. In the early 1970s, pioneering feminist scholars began to question the link between biological sex and women's and men's statuses in families. They fought to move the locus of causality from biology to socialization (social learning). They succeeded in changing the language of discourse about women and men in families from *sex roles* to *gender roles*, forcing the scholarly community to acknowledge the extent to which behaviors long regarded as fundamentally characteristic of males or females were largely learned through social interaction.

In the gender role perspective, the family was regarded as the primary teacher of children as they learned the gender roles of their society. Parents served as role models and instructed their children about the traits and behaviors thought appropriate for persons of their biological sex. The family was therefore seen as the nearly exclusive source of

gendered behavior. Today, feminist family scholars have forced another reconsideration of the place of gender in the study of families. Rather than identifying the family as the source of gender, feminist scholars recognize that the gendered behavior that occurs in families is a reflection of the gender stratification that exists in the larger society. Children do, of course, learn gender by observing and learning from their parents. However, the origin of these ideas about gender comes from the system of male privilege and dominance that exists in the society in which the family is embedded. This is essentially what is being referred to when we speak of a *gendered society*.

The subtitle of this book, *Reflections of a Gendered Society*, and the theme that runs through all fifteen chapters—is both inspired and informed by the work of feminist scholars in sociology, psychology, child and family development, economics, and women's studies. Although there are many different schools of feminist thought, almost all share certain basic beliefs about intimate relationships. These have been expressed by a number of writers, but a particularly lucid presentation is found in Thorne and Yalom's 1992 edition of *Rethinking the Family*. We have tried to follow these basic beliefs about families as we conceptualized and created this book.

For example, one basic principle is that there are many different forms of intimate relationships, beyond the traditional, heterosexual two-parent family. Families include single-parent families headed by women or men, childfree unions involving heterosexual or homosexual partners, merged households of children and adults that follow divorce, and other forms of intimate relationships. Following this principle, we argue that family *form* is less important than *function*—that is, the needs

that are met by intimate relationships are more significant in individual lives than is the shape or appearance of one's household composition.

We must confess, however, that we often found it difficult to reconcile the conventional language used to describe living arrangements and intimate relationships with the principle that all forms of families—legal or not, heterosexual or not—should be included in this text. As authors we frequently discussed whether we should use the phrase *intimate relationships* or *marriages and families*. In many cases we were constrained by the research literature, which focused only on conventional marriage relationships or traditional family roles. While the phrase *Marriages and Families* was ultimately used as the book's title, this was primarily for the sake of parsimony, and also because we recognized that using unconventional terminology would necessitate frequent and often fruitless explanations. Nonetheless, we wish to emphasize here that the term *marriages and families* encompasses for us the full range of intimate relationships and living arrangements.

We also understand that, contrary to the perspectives of many who have written similar books, marriages and families (or any intimate relationships) are not always harmonious units characterized by equality and consensus. Further, we do not believe that it is especially useful to offer pious hopes that if the participants in marriages and families act with good will all problems and conflicts will be resolved.

Individuals in intimate relationships and families have different needs and interests, rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, that derive from different experiences. Often these different experiences reflect one's sex, age, or generation. Individual and family experiences also differ by race, ethnicity, and social class. Class, ethnicity, and skin color are, like gender, master statuses that transcend institutional boundaries and shape every aspect of a person's life. We have tried to include, whenever possible, research that describes or discusses the influence of the race and class stratification system on living arrangements and intimate relationships.

It is also our view, and this point is developed more fully in Chapter 1, that a realistic view of marriage and family life, based on sound scholarship

and research, is much more valuable than a sugar-coated, idealistic view. Too often, in our opinion, textbooks on marriage and families offer too much advice about what *should be*, and thereby neglect a realistic view of *what is*. Marriage, for example, "should be" based on a relationship of love, friendship, trust, open communication, and so on—and perhaps a few ideal marriages can be completely described by these traits. Most, however, cannot. Most marriages include conflicts of interest, disagreements, power struggles, and unhappy periods when one or both partners may seriously wonder whether the marriage should continue. These aspects of marriage must be recognized and understood. Idealism is an important part of the human experience, but realism is necessary if one is to deal effectively with everyday matters.

Features of the Book

In a dynamic society, new issues emerge almost daily, and certainly this is true of marriage and family life. We have tried to keep abreast of these issues and to incorporate as many of them as possible in the text. We have done this in a systematic way by including "In the News" boxes in every chapter. These boxes typically describe a current news story, which we then relate to the material being discussed in the text. Since these are issues that are current and ongoing, readers can often relate the issue to events that are going on in their own lives.

A second type of box in this textbook is labeled "Families around the World." In these boxes we draw on materials coming from anthropological studies, historical reports, and even news accounts of events in other societies to move the reader to consider marriage and family life from other points of view. For example, we describe adolescent sexual behavior in two very different types of societies, Iceland and Ireland; courtship in Transylvania and Nepal; caring for elderly family members in Japan; and the aftermath of divorce in India. Brief looks at other societies, in different parts of the world or in earlier times, often provide a new perspective on one's own society.

To return to our primary emphasis of this book—that we live in a gendered society—one

unique feature of this text is the “**Gender Issues in This Chapter**” that opens every chapter. The presence of gender issues in every chapter, among the other topics covered, reveals the pervasiveness of gender issues.

Supplements

■ Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank

by Gary Scott Smith, Grove City College

This combination manual offers a complete instructor’s section and test bank to accompany each text chapter. The *Test Bank* includes over 1500 questions (40 multiple-choice, 30 true-false, 15 fill-in-the-blank, 10 matching, and 5 essay per chapter) all page-referenced to the text. The *Instructor’s Manual* includes teaching objectives, chapter outlines, key terms, class discussion questions, in-class exercises, films, and essays/exercises.

■ Computerized Instructor’s Manual (IBM/Mac)

The complete Instructor’s Manual is also available on disk and allows instructors to customize their lectures by adding their own notes.

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■ Study Guide for Marriages and Families

by Charles O'Connor, Bemidji State University,
and Debra F. Peterson, Concordia College

The Study Guide contains learning objectives, detailed chapter outlines, fill-in-the-blank questions, matching questions, multiple-choice questions, essay questions, and a glossary of difficult-to-understand words.

■ Material World CD-ROM and User's Guide

Created by Peter Menzel and narrated by Charles Kuralt, *Material World* is a multimedia tour of "statistically average" families selected from 30 of the 183 United Nations member nations—ranging from the least industrialized to the most industrialized. This CD-ROM includes photographic portraits and a wealth of data on the countries selected.

Personal Statements and Acknowledgments

In keeping with the point made earlier about the importance of personal experiences, we would like, individually, to describe ourselves a little and especially our personal experiences and the people who influenced us as we came to the writing of this book. But before our individual statements, it may be of some interest to readers to learn that although we have been working together on this book for a number of years (a few more than we anticipated at the outset), the two of us have only met face-to-face once. We talked for part of an afternoon, over lunch and on a trip to the airport, but that was it. In the meantime we have each written and read tens of thousands—no, hundreds of thousands—of each other's words and have exchanged countless

faxes, and had many phone conversations. We hope that our long-distance, intense collaboration has produced a book that is interesting to read and genuinely informative.

■ A Personal Statement (C.L.S.)

My own experiences with family life have greatly shaped my ideas about intimate relationships and my willing embrace of feminist perspectives. As is increasingly common in Western nations, I have experienced many different family forms throughout my lifetime, from traditional two-parent family, to single-father family after my mother's death, to stepfamily after my dad's remarriage. Now I am living a nontraditional lifestyle—long-term informal and childfree marriage. I suspect that many people who read this text will also have already experienced diversity in the shape of their intimate relationships. Those who haven't yet will undoubtedly do so in the years to come.

I have had the good fortune throughout my career to be surrounded and supported by outstanding family scholars. In graduate school at Penn State, my interdisciplinary studies, which were centered in sociology, allowed me to learn about families and intimate relationships from leading scholars such as Ted Huston, Robert Lewis, Paul Baltes, and Graham Spanier in Human Development and Family Studies. It was from Graham, who became both a mentor and friend, that I caught the family demography fever.

In sociology and psychology, I learned just about everything I ever needed to know about feminist pedagogy from Michael Johnson, Frank Sim, and Carolyn Wood Sherif. Carolyn was one of the few women professors I ever had and certainly the first who showed me how wonderful the support of a wise woman mentor could feel.

Penn State's program in family studies continues to be one of the premiere programs in the nation. When I studied there in the mid to late 1970s, my classmates included many of the leading scholars in family studies today—Elaine Anderson, Bill Aquilino, Rosemary Blieszner, Leigh Leslie, Bob Milardo, Cathy Surra, Linda Thompson, and Alexis Walker. It was this group, along with others such as Karen Polonko, who formed the Feminism and Family Studies section of the National Council on Family Relations, which pro-

vided an intellectual home base and a great deal of support and sustenance.

I also had the opportunity to study briefly with Reuben Hill at Minnesota's Family Studies Center in the mid 1970s. I will always be indebted to Professor Hill for his influence on my thinking about families and about our field as a whole.

I would also like to recognize my present and former colleagues at the University of Florida—Gerald Leslie, Felix Berardo, John Scanzoni, Gary Lee, Jay Gubrium, Karen Seccombe, and Bill Margiglio—family scholars whose work is cited throughout this text. These colleagues have provided support, friendship, and intellectual challenges for many years. I am especially grateful to Felix for his ongoing friendship and mentoring. Most of my professional accomplishments are due, in some way or another, to his tutelage. I can never thank him enough for his support.

I must also thank several of my graduate students, past and present, for challenging me and assisting in my intellectual growth: Jeff Dwyer, Denise Donnelly, Sylvia Marion Carley, Kim Pettigrew Brackett, Susan Malone, Hsiao Chuan Hsia, Linda Ng, Young Hee Won, Mike Armato, and Stacy Smith.

And now I've come to the place where authors thank the persons who've most directly contributed to the completion of the manuscript, usually loved ones who've tolerated cranky housemates (or office mates) as they've failed to make the progress they planned to make. My office partner and friend, Nadine Gillis, has made this book—and all of my other professional endeavors—happen, simply because she is possessed of intelligence, creativity, and exceptional energy. She provides the landing gear that keep my idea-wings in touch with the earth. And my partner in life and love, Paul Mueller, is largely responsible for my tenacity in finishing this book. He wouldn't let me give up! He asked tough but interesting questions that only a physical scientist could think of and reminded me of how proud I would be when the book was finished.

■ A Personal Statement (K.C.W.K.)

My personal family history is understandably different from my younger coauthor's, primarily

because I came of age in a different era. Indeed, I reached adulthood in the 1950s and followed a completely conventional path into marriage and parenthood during my early twenties. My marital life at that time was embarrassingly close to being an exemplar of the model advanced by Talcott Parsons—though it must be said that the impetus came from the culture of the times, not from a reading of sociology.

Much later, I also followed the general cultural and societal upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s by ending my first marriage. Ending a marriage, I learned, should be no more than a once in a lifetime experience. For the next eight years I lived an interesting and not unpleasant single life, before marrying my present wife, Sonia, to whom I dedicate this book. Throughout this life experience I have learned a few things here and there about intimate relationships, sex, parenting, separation and divorce, remarriage, stepparenting, and, more recently, the responsibility of handling the affairs of a mother who is now over 90. I hope that some of these experiences have helped to inform the writing that follows in many chapters of this book.

My intellectual approach to the subject matter of marriage and family (and intimate relations) has been primarily auto-didactic, since I never once took a formal marriage or family course. My intellectual debts are to the writers and researchers whose books and articles I have read over the years. It would serve no useful purpose to list all these scholars, since it would simply be a bibliography of everything I have read. However, I want to take this occasion to mention a few people whose work has been very important to my thinking. These are primarily scholars who influenced me during the early years of my professional life: Mirra Komarovsky who, in the 1950s, before the beginning of the 1960s feminism, first made me aware of the problems of women in our society; Alice Rossi, who gave an early sociological voice to the feminist movement; Ira Reiss, who did the pioneering sociological work on sexual behavior and served me as a professional exemplar; Murray Straus, Richard Gelles, and Suzanne Steinmetz, who opened my eyes to the existence of violence in the family; Jean Veevers, who taught me important lessons about the social dimensions of childbearing by studying voluntarily childless couples; Bernard Farber and Michal McCall, who provided some ex-

tremely prescient insights into contemporary mate selection and marriage; and Gail Putney Fullerton, who wrote one of the best marriage and family textbooks I have ever read. I emphasize again that these people made an impact on me through their writings, not through personal relationships; except for Ira Reiss and Jean Veevers, I have hardly more than met most of the rest.

During the writing of this book I have called upon many, many people for assistance and information. I'm wishing at this moment that I had kept a log of all their names. Within my department at the University of Maryland I want to thank the following colleagues: Suzanne Bianchi, Bill Falk, Lee Hamilton, Glenn Harper, Janet Hunt, Larry Hunt, Joan Kahn, Anju Malhotra, Barbara Meeker, Milissa Milke, Linda Moghadam, Alan Neustadt, George Ritzer, John Robinson, David Segal, Mady Segal, and Reeve Vanneman. I want to thank Elaine Anderson and Roger Rubin, also at the University of Maryland, in the Family Studies Department. Elaine gave us the benefit of her expertise in family policy by reading and making recommendations for our chapter on that topic. Jay Teachman, a former and much missed colleague—now at Washington State University—was characteristically generous with his time and books whenever I asked for help or information. Helen Ginn Daugherty, a friend and coauthor in demography, at St. Mary's College of Maryland, has helped me on many occasions, including as recently as the day of this writing.

Living in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, it is easy to call directly to the government agencies that have needed information. The most useful of these are the Bureau of the Census and the National Center for Health Statistics, and I especially want to thank Arlene Saluter at the Census Bureau, and Sally Clarke and Barbara Wilson at N.C.H.S., for their immediate responses to my numerous questions—let no one deprecate government employees in my presence. Sylvia Ellison, at the National Center for Child Health and Human Development, and also a sociology graduate student I worked with, was very responsive to my request for information available in her office. I also want to thank Pat Hauptman, of the Baltimore City Health Department, who provided information I needed about research in the Baltimore schools.

For all the others who responded to my requests for information and assistance, I thank you collectively, and apologize for not remembering your kindnesses individually.

Finally, although I have dedicated this book to my wife Sonia, I wish to acknowledge here that she has been constantly supportive, even though this has been an arduous and lengthy process. She understands how important it is to give support at the times when things are most discouraging and upsetting. I thank her for those times, but also for the many, many good times.

Our Thanks to Allyn & Bacon

It would be an understatement to say that our editor, Karen Hanson, has been patient with us. It is a tribute to her experience as an editor that she understands how some authors, with complete sincerity, do make promises that they will probably never meet. But, even with her considerable experience, we must have been one of her extreme tests of endurance. And yet, she stayed with us, encouraging, prompting, and sometimes just leaving us alone. We sincerely hope that her patience and persistence will be rewarded.

Through the process of producing the final version of this book we owe much to those who have helped us. The teachers and scholars who read drafts of our manuscript include reviewers:

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As we went into the production stage of this book we were immensely helped by the knowledge and the suggestions of our developmental editor Harriett Prentiss. Harriett's reading of our manuscript was, simultaneously, upsetting and helpful. Even veteran writers can be dazzled (not to say dismayed) by her editorial criticisms and

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Is the American Family in Trouble?

Are Americans Rejecting Marriage?

Problems within the Family

Defining Family Today

A Broadened Definition of Family

In the News: Marriage for Gays and Lesbians

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A Reality-Based View of Marriage and Family Life

The Benefits of a Realistic Approach

Social Science Research on Marriages, Families, and Intimate Relationships

A Scientific Approach to Knowledge

Types of Data Collection

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Social Theories

Structural-Functional Theory

Conflict Theory

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Social Exchange Theory

Family Development Theory

Feminist Perspectives on Families

The Special Importance of Gender



Studying Marriages, Families, and Intimate Relationships

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