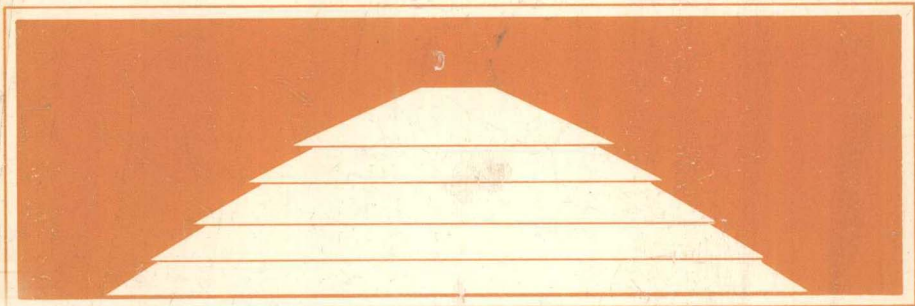


shaping tomorrow's family

*theory and policy
for the 21st century*

JOHN SCANZONI

foreword by JESSIE BERNARD



SHAPING TOMORROW'S FAMILY

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Volume 143
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SOCIAL RESEARCH



SAGE PUBLICATIONS
Beverly Hills / London / New Delhi

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For information address:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
275 South Beverly Drive
Beverly Hills, California 90212

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
C-236 Defence Colony
New Delhi 110 024, India



SAGE Publications Ltd
28 Banner Street
London EC1Y 8QE, England

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Scanzoni, John H., 1935-
Shaping tomorrow's family.

(Sage library of social research ; v. 143)

Bibliography: p.

1. Family—United States—Moral and ethical aspects. 2. Twenty-first century—Forecasts. 3. Family policy—United States. 4. Right and left (Political science)

I. Title. II. Series

HQ536.S337 1982

306-8'50973

82-16876

ISBN 0-8039-1920-4

ISBN 0-8039-1921-2 (pbk.)

SECOND PRINTING, 1984

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PREFACE

America is currently passing through a period of significant transitions. In the political and economic realms, we are feeling the effects of the so-called Reagan Revolution, and the precipitous decline of the New Deal, the Fair Deal, and the Great Society. In analyzing that decline, *New York Times* humorist Russell Baker (1981) recounts the biblical description of the death of King David: "Now David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat." Baker claims that progressive elements are similarly "old, stricken in years," and "gat no heat." They no longer, he says, possess any "recognizable ideas or philosophies worth sacrificing for." Implicit in his essay is the idea that it is time for progressives to do some fresh thinking if they are to face the critical challenges of the twenty-first century. *A New Republic* (1981) editorial echoes Baker's theme and expresses hope for a new "wave" of "public innovation" and "social construction."

Just as that sort of critical progressive reevaluation is desperately needed at the political and economic levels, it is equally needed at the social and cultural level—particularly with regard to family. According to pollster and psychologist Daniel Yankelovich (1981a), "A sweeping irreversible cultural revolution is transforming the rules that once guided American life." Nevertheless, many supporters of the conservative revival consider *saving* the conventional family a centerpiece of their agenda. Introduced into both houses of Congress, the

Family Protection Act vividly illustrates their aim of restoring the preeminence of the twentieth-century family (see Chapter 5). Outside of Congress, the so-called moral majority (surveys consistently show this group to be actually a statistical minority) is vigorously pursuing that same goal and trying to fill elective offices with persons sharing the group's vision.

The upshot is that the New Right has captured the "high moral ground" regarding family. Claiming to be the defenders of truth, goodness, and virtue, they have put progressives on the defensive. And, as in the political and economic realms, progressives tend to react by implicitly accepting conservative assumptions regarding family and then offering suggestions to make conservative agendas "work better." But it is ironic that in the case of family-related matters, the more progressives try to "patch up" the twentieth-century family, the more they are accused by conservatives of being morally bankrupt, because the overriding concern of conservatives is to return to what they consider a pristine state of family.

Consequently, the time is ripe for progressives to retake the high moral ground regarding family, and this book is one step in that direction. Fresh thinking is needed to give us a new image of family that is suited for a different century—a new age. This thinking must be morally and socially responsible, as well as attentive to the feminism and the individualism that Christopher Lasch (1977, 1978) castigates so severely. In this book I try to show why the twentieth-century family is not well suited to the kind of society emerging around us, and why this fresh concept of family contains the potential to make family a richer institution than it is right now. It is in this sense that the alternative image of family presented here is *moral*—it meets the *actual* majority of citizens where they are and provides guidelines for citizens, policymakers, and clinicians alike, helping them to fashion family in a responsive yet responsible manner to be in tune with the emerging realities of a new century.

In looking to the future, the *New Republic* (1981) editorial expresses hope that ideas for political change will be less “programmatically” and “palliatively,” and more “structurally” and “radically.” “Radical” sounds frightening until we define it as simply “going to the root of things.” Being cosmetic or palliative or merely “programmatically” in order to solve family problems will no longer do. In this book, I go to the “root of things” regarding family in order to say that if we can adopt and adapt a fresh vision of what it’s all about, family is indeed very possible.

I want to thank the many students and colleagues who over the past several years have discussed with me, and thus helped to sharpen, various issues and ideas appearing throughout the following pages. Special thanks are owed to Professor Gerald W. McDonald for an extraordinarily thoughtful critique of the entire manuscript. His comments and criticisms were especially helpful in shaping the final version.

FOREWORD

This book takes us back to square one, to the “problem of order.” It is a theoretical analysis, not in the form of a series of propositions or of generalizations of empirical data, but in the form of delineating the relevant questions and devising ways of analyzing and dealing with them. It reports on the struggle now in process between those the author calls “conventionals” and those he calls “progressives.” He answers the basic question, “Is family possible?” in the affirmative. But, he warns us, don’t count on its future being what you would like it to be. The family’s future is not written in the stars. Much depends on who wins the battle of the Titans now in process. What are considered virtues by one side in this battle are seen as hazards by the other. If the winner were to be judged on the basis of suitability for modern society, characterized as it is by flux, the progressives would determine its future; if on the basis of firmness and stability, the conventionals would.

The solution to the problem of order, Scanzoni states, depends heavily on the way one conceptualizes society. On one side there is the so-called functionalist approach, often associated with the name of Talcott Parsons; on the other, there is the so-called conflict approach, associated by some, but not all, with Marxism. One emphasizes structure, the other process. One holds that “organisation is a *structure* which allocates individuals to specific parts of the total task which the organisation exists to perform, organisation is the scriptwriter of roles to which individuals find they become morally committed” (Burns, 1977: 261). The other sees organization as “a

process through which individuals are enabled to produce—i.e., make what they do available to others, to socialize their work; organisation is an essential instrument for the accomplishment of their individual ends and values.”

The conventionals represent the organization-as-structure point of view; the progressives, the process point of view. Conventionals see society as a system of clearly defined roles, each shaped to fit into other roles in a smoothly running system. It is essential that all individuals be socialized into this structure, be well versed in their obligations and prerogatives, and live by them. The progressives see society, instead, as the “outcome (network) of complex negotiations between powerful interest groups in which each group maintains preferred family patterns which seek to promote the interests of that group.”

The first conceptualization of society is “morphostatic,” or fixed, and anything that deviates from its goal of stability must be exorcised so far as possible. The second, or progressive, conceptualization is “morphogenetic,” and anything that rigidifies the system or interferes with its flexibility should be reduced, if not eliminated. Proponents reject the so-called Nuremberg argument, which calls on everyone to do whatever he or she is told to do, or, in the present context, to do what the role system calls for. There was a time when the conventional conception prevailed almost unchallenged, but there has been a shift in recent times.

Those of us who observed young people in the 1960s and early 1970s saw the battle between proponents of these two points of view not only in learned disquisitions in professional journals, but in the minds of our students and children; we saw it in living color before our very eyes. We saw the processes by which these young people became disillusioned with the status quo of the conventionals. We saw them shift from a functionalist society-as-benign to the society-as-exploitative viewpoint. Thus, for example, until midcentury boys and girls took it for

granted that they were being prepared to "take their place" in society. The boy would get a job and know that he was to be part of the total productive system. Then there began to be a change. The young men were coming to see their jobs as a contribution, not so much to the economy as to the profits of corporations. They saw the corporations not as agencies to get goods produced but as ways to make money for shareholders. They were, in brief, coming to see society "as the outcome (network) of complex negotiations between powerful interest groups" and many wanted no part of it. This attitude, often labeled "anti-social," spread to other institutions; there was a powerful anti-establishment movement that challenged all institutions—governmental, educational, religious. These young men came to see the benign "society" they had been taught to accept willingly as indeed a congeries of cynical, exploitative, mercenary, self-serving interests.

The girls also went through similar disillusionments. They had taken it for granted that they would be in the work force for a few years after graduation from college, marry, have children, and be "taken care of" for the rest of their lives. But in the 1960s and 1970s many of them caught the disillusionment they found among the young men. Their conceptualization of "society" was also challenged. They no longer saw it as a protective, sheltering haven in which, if they obeyed the rules, they would be secure forever, but rather as an exploitative tyrant coercing them into marriages that were dysfunctional.

So much, then, for the "society" component of the "society-family" issue. Scanzoni is fair-minded and judicious in his review of the pros and cons of both the conventional and progressive points of view, though he makes no effort to hide where his own preference lies. He makes a strong case for the greater appropriateness of the progressives' perspective than of the conventionals' for this day and age and the kind of people it produces. He applies this distinction to one special kind of organization, the family. We turn here, then, to the family

component, to the pros and cons of the family models that correspond to the two conceptualizations of society.

Weitzman (1981: xxii) has sketched the legal basis for conventional marriage: "It recognized the husband as head of the family and made him responsible for family support. The wife was responsible for the home and was obligated to provide domestic services and child care." In addition, religious norms prescribed permanence and sexual exclusivity. This model has many things in its favor, and Scanzoni states them succinctly. It has a long history; it is stable, fixed; it has taken the high ground of morality, goodness, virtue; it has the appeal of the functional point of view. Further, the conventional model has impressive credentials for taking care of men. Corporate and other employers much prefer "family men" when they are hiring. Insurance companies are strong supporters of conventional family life because it imposes a regimen on men that is good for their health and survival. It is demonstrable that married men are in better health and live longer than never-married men and men living in the status of divorce or widowhood. Voters seem to favor candidates with conventional families. In this sense the "society-family" issue favors the conventionals. If the conventional model is not so beneficial to wives, that is the way things are. Let them just grin and bear it. But increasingly women protest the demands made on them in this model, and with the growing proportion of two-earner marriages, the demands on them multiply.

This is a strong list of credentials; it cannot be discounted. Still, in addition to the shift noted above in the conceptualization of society among young people that rejects the society-as-structure view, the major weakness of the conventional model is that it is out of sync with the times—it does not conform to what is actually happening on the current scene. The present legal and religious structure of marriage, Weitzman (1981: xxii) notes, "ignores the current evidence concerning divorce, marriage in middle age and throughout the life

cycle, childless marriages, more egalitarian family patterns, diverse family forms among ethnic minorities and the poor, and alternative family forms among homosexuals, communards, and others who live together without marriage.” The attrition of the ground rule that the husband is the sole provider is illustrated by the rapid increase in two-earner families. The year 1980 may be taken as the “tipping point” at which the nonemployed wife became the nonconformist, the “deviant,” a member of the minority (Bernard, 1981c). Official recognition of the end of the rule that the husband was “head of household” occurred in 1980, when the U.S. Census Bureau abandoned use of the term, which it had formerly automatically assigned to the husband, and substituted “householder,” which members of the household themselves denominated. The fact that so many employed wives and mothers are in the work force means that unless household responsibilities and child care are shared by husbands, wives are subject to overload. The goal, if not the achievement, of shared roles in the family marks another step away from conventional marriage. The high divorce rate—it doubled in the decade between the mid-to-late 60s and the mid-to-late 70s—illustrates what has happened to the ground rule of permanence; and the growth of commercialized swinging—called the “fastest growing recreation today” (Bernard, 1982)—is only one example of what has become of the ground rule of sexual exclusivity in marriage. It is based on this kind of evidence that Scanzoni makes his case against the conventional model of marriage. It doesn’t fit.

Many conventionals recognize these trends and bemoan them. They feel that the family is threatened by a congeries of forces, including the media, by courses taught in public schools, by books permitted in school libraries, by sex education that undercuts conventional mores, and by sex as portrayed on television, all of which they would like to see controlled.

In contrast to the conventional model, Scanzoni argues for “a model of family that is both theoretically and philosophically sound, that accounts for ongoing demographic trends, and yet is also practical and workable,” one that “integrates changing preferences and behaviors into a coherent framework that would...eventually supplant it [the conventional] in dominance.” This progressive model would facilitate intelligent options with respect to sex, marriage, and family. It presupposes that we would all be better off than we are now if our decisions were made with self-knowledge and “in terms of a new explicitly stated family philosophy.” The current out-of-sync situation generates “ambivalence and uncertainty, often exacerbated by guilt, apprehension, and anxiety.”

Unlike the conventionals, who want everyone to conform to the established and stable norms of society as they conceptualize it, the progressives present a model that permits a pluralistic view, one that allows many options: “Alternative views of family should be allowed to ‘compete’ in the marketplace, with nonaligned persons being allowed to gravitate toward those patterns suiting them best.” It would roll with the punches and would have more flexibility in dealing with the punches to which modern life subjects it.

This book makes a strong case for the progressive model, but it does not refuse to recognize the weaknesses of that model. Scanzoni points out that the proponents of the progressive model are fragmented; there is little research to support the model. Progressives are defensive rather than aggressive. The conventionals seem to have the strong moral arguments. To overcome these deficiencies, Scanzoni urges the progressives to overcome their fragmentation and get their act together. He urges them to engage in fresh thinking rather than accept a mere tinkering approach to family. He states that they have not exploited the self-interest, positive advantages of their position to win over adherents. He recommends that the welfare of