

# THE FAMILY

Its Organization and Disorganization

By

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TO  
ERNEST W. BURGESS

## PREFACE

This book has grown out of two convictions on the part of the author: first, that problems of the family are to be understood only after a thorough grounding in the nature of the family experience; and, second, that the contemporary family may be studied in the same objective spirit which characterizes research in the natural sciences. The point of view is frankly that of social psychology, and emphasis is placed throughout upon the research aspects of the problem. It is quite logical, therefore, that the final chapter should consist of a series of research problems, classified in terms of their fundamental nature rather than in conformity with the chapter organization of the book.

While the book has been designed as a text for college courses in the family, the author has tried to make the contents sufficiently readable to be enjoyed by anyone who is interested in the family and wishes to understand its nature and organization. How successfully he has accomplished this he must of course leave to the reader.

Some of the sections, particularly on the organization of the family, are obviously speculative and should be considered as presenting hypotheses for further research. The speculative nature of these sections arises out of the fact that little or no research has been done upon these aspects, and the author felt that more service could be done to the family researcher by going boldly ahead upon the basis of casual observation, rather than being content to summarize the literature, as is so often done in textbooks. These sections represent, accordingly, an attempt to stake out new

fields for study, and to set up a series of hypotheses for guidance in family research.

For the assistance of the instructor a series of suggested readings follows each chapter. The author has attempted to make these readings as representative as possible, and yet keep within the limits of the needs of the classroom. The selection is naturally subject to criticism and revision. Further readings may be added, if required, by reference to the bibliography in the Appendix. It will be observed that in almost every instance reference has been made to a chapter or chapters in Reuter and Runner, *The Family: Source Materials for the Study of Family and Personality*. This is, the author believes, the best single reference book available. It is recommended, accordingly, to those who do not find it possible or desirable to utilize the wider range indicated in the suggested readings.

The author wishes to express his indebtedness to Professor Ernest W. Burgess, to whom the book is dedicated, for the point of view, invaluable counsel, and training, especially in the field of the family. He is also similarly under obligations to Professors Ellsworth Faris and Robert E. Park in the broader fields of social psychology and sociology. For constant encouragement, stimulus, and assistance the author is under obligation to Harriet R. Mowrer.

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PART I  
INTRODUCTION





## CHAPTER I

### THE FAMILY CRISIS

No problem in modern life so challenges the attention of thoughtful students of society as does the family crisis, if one may interpret the tenor of recent writings upon the subject. One group heralds the present situation as the beginning of a new day in which all the old restraints of family mores will be thrown aside; the other group is alarmed lest the most treasured of institutions may disappear to bring havoc upon modern civilization. Both, however, agree that the family in America is at a turning of the way.

It is customary, of course, for the reformer to represent the present as a crisis situation. And, indeed, there is a certain amount of truth in the interpretation of life as a series of crises. Reflection about social forms and institutions itself indicates some converging of attention, some critical attitude, some taking of stock. Such an interpretation, however, leads easily to exaggeration if it emphasizes alone the rhythmic phases of social life and neglects its continuity.

No one will deny, of course, that the family is changing. But that the changes which are facing the family are any more revolutionary than at other periods of history may be more illusionary than real. Idealization of the past is a common error in the attempt to interpret social life. Change in those institutions which have acquired a sacredness through the generations is ever the anathema of those who would preserve the old order, just as the slowness of change

is the rallying point around which gather those who would hasten the millennium.

In a broader sense, however, the family has always been changing. Ever since man first began adjusting his social life to his needs, the family has been changing. Much of the change for a long time was unintended and unperceived. The idea of the family as a changing institution is indeed relatively new, growing out of wider knowledge of other peoples and greater attention to the changes in social life.

And yet there may be some basis for the feeling that the family is changing more rapidly at the present time than at any period in the past. The unprecedented growth of capitalistic organization since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution has produced changes in many phases of social life with unusual rapidity. It would be a miracle if the family escaped.

In fact, it is this phenomenal change in social customs which is the most striking aspect of modern life. Mechanical change has gone on, of course, at what has often seemed like lightning rapidity, and everyone has become somehow to expect such transformations. But when established customs and practices are called into question, it strikes the ordinary man as somehow unusual and disconcerting. And yet one has only to go back to the beginning of the present century to see changes which are in many respects revolutionary in character.

A few of these changes will indicate the general breakdown of the old social patterns. Young women no longer go about with chaperons. They are inclined to feel insulted if they are required to have a chaperon at a party. In colleges where the chaperon is still a formal requirement for dances and parties, the tendency is to see that the proper

persons are selected—persons who themselves are as unconventional in their conduct as are those they are supposed to control. Lipstick and rouge have become accepted as a necessary part of the woman's toilet. Cigarette-smoking on the part of women is to be seen everywhere by all classes. Men no longer relinquish their seats in street cars to strange women. Sexual irregularity is no longer the prerogative of the male.

Evolution has become an accepted doctrine in colleges and universities in spite of organized resistance in certain sections of the country. The Bible is no longer looked upon as the final authority in the regulation of conduct, even in many theological seminaries, but instead is considered a cultural heritage. Even in rural areas dancing has come to be an accepted form of entertainment where previously it had been considered the "instigation of the devil."

These simple illustrations furnish eloquent testimony of the current trend toward change in modern life—a change perhaps unprecedented, but yet in keeping with the transformations on the mechanical side. These changes have had, necessarily, a profound effect upon the family. And while it is generally considered that there has been considerable lag in family customs, the discontent and confusion is only thereby aggravated. In urban areas, especially, this confusion has grown to the greatest dimensions.

Some of the most eloquent evidence of confusion in family life may be seen in the contradictory assumptions underlying the proposals for reform. Part of these attempt to give new life to the family forms of the past. Writers from this point of view often deny that the family does, or should, change. They look toward reinforcing the forms of an earlier age which to them embody the ideal elements of family

life. These programs may, accordingly, be called conservative. In contrast to those of the conservative group are programs calling for a clearing of the ground and beginning anew upon the assumption that there is little or nothing in the old arrangements worth saving. These writers point out the inadequacies of the old forms as showing their lack of potentiality for functioning in modern life. Such programs may be called radical. In between these two extremes is a third point of view which emphasizes the need for further research and is hesitant, on the whole, to make suggestions looking toward reformation until it can be more sure of its basis in fact. This is the point of view of science.

#### PROGRAMS OF REFORM

One of the most common types of conservative programs consists in calling for a return to certain practices which, without notice, have slipped into disuse. Clergymen, for example, have from time to time reiterated that church weddings would tend to prevent unhappy marriages. Publication of the banns has also found much support, on the part of both the clergy and laymen.<sup>1</sup> Some assert that what is needed is a return to the elementary teachings of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Still others demand legislative reforms such as will keep the family intact—most commonly along the lines of further restrictions upon marriage and divorce.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Thwing, *The Family: An Historical and Social Study*, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> The task of the reformer, according to Lofthouse, is to seek to restore and to preserve "that attitude of mind which unites a man first with those who are nearest to him," and to perfect in a small circle "those virtues which can then expand over a larger area." He can do this by reviving certain Christian conceptions, namely, that (1) the real wealth of any community consists in its men and women, healthy, happy, and loving one another; (2) love means service; (3) life consists in the conquest of the world.—*Ethics and the Family*, pp. 362-74

Another favorite type of program may be called the "recipe" for family discord, or the "ten commandments of marriage." This sort of program consists of a series of commands or rules by which one is to regulate his conduct. "Do not be extravagant," for example, is one of the ten commandments for women, in one series of this sort. For men a complementary command is given, "Be generous according to your means."<sup>1</sup>

Other remedies of this "Pollyanna" type may be mentioned briefly. The United States Department of Commerce not long ago published a pamphlet which proposed home ownership as the basis of family life. Other reformers have pointed out the need for co-operation between husband and wife; still others have asserted that domestic science in the schools, moral training, greater emphasis upon religious training, and the withdrawal of the "Bringing-Up-Father" type of comics from the newspapers will prevent many unhappy marriages.

It is apparent that the assumptions underlying these

<sup>1</sup> The other nine commandments for women are: (1) Keep your home clean. (2) Do not permit your person to become unattractive. (3) Do not receive attentions from other men. (4) Do not resent reasonable discipline of children by their father. (5) Do not spend too much time with your mother. (6) Do not accept advice from the neighbors or stress too greatly even that of your own family concerning the management of your domestic affairs. (7) Do not disparage your husband. (8) Smile. Be attentive to little things. (9) Be tactful. Be feminine.

For men, the remaining commandments are: (1) Do not interfere with a woman in the management of purely domestic affairs. (2) Be cheerful, even though sometimes it may tax you to the utmost. (3) Be considerate. (4) Make love to your wife; continue to be her sweetheart. (5) Do not scold. (6) Establish your own home; if possible, remote from your wife's and your own immediate family. (7) Do not keep a lodger. (8) Cultivate neatness and personal cleanliness. (9) Be kind and just to your children. For source consult Mowrer, *Family Disorganization*, p. 10.

methods of reform, as presented by the conservatives, are far from being consistent, except that all tend to imply a rationalistic psychology. In the "recipe" type of program it is assumed that in each marriage there is potential happiness which can be had by attention to a few general rules of conduct. It is also assumed that each person not only knows how to conform specifically to these general rules but that each person is equally capable of conforming. In certain other proposals it is assumed that housekeeping is the basis of the family; in others, the keynote is romantic love; in still others, that the family is a sacred institution. The result is to indicate a confusion in ideals of family life even among the conservatives.

In contrast to the idealization of the past in conservative programs of reform of family life, radical programs idealize the future. Socialistic writers indict the present family as an outlived social heritage and a conservator of the present capitalistic system. The more radical of this group look upon marriage as a purely personal matter, to be entered into and discontinued as a private affair without regulation by the state.<sup>1</sup>

The feminists criticize the present-day family because the responsibilities of the home fall upon the woman and so limit her activities. They demand that women be given all the opportunities of men—political, industrial, educational.<sup>2</sup> They further demand that women have as much freedom in sexual relations as men enjoy. It is this latter emphasis upon the amatory and sexual needs of the individuals which has linked them with the more radical of the socialists.

<sup>1</sup> Consult, e.g., Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*; Key, *Love and Marriage*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Martin, *Feminism: Its Fallacies and Follies*, p. 9.



Both groups stress the needs of the individual as the basis of family life rather than obligations to society.<sup>1</sup>

Programs of the conservative and the radical groups thus represent a wide divergency of opinion with reference to what is desirable in family life. One group resists change and talks in terms of an idealized conception of the historical family. Present-day family disorganization, from this point of view, is the result of failure to live up to the old ideals of family life and is to be counteracted by revitalizing those ideals. The radical group, observing the failure of the old forms, wishes to abandon them completely and build anew in such a way as to free the individual from the "tyranny" of the group. This group carries the doctrine of individualism to its logical conclusion in its proposal of free love and experimental marriage.

Of the points of view between these extremes represented by the conservatives and the radicals, the most interesting and best formulated is that of the eugenists. In many respects this type of reform belongs with the radical group since its program is revolutionary. In its emphasis upon the welfare of society and the subordination of the wishes of the individual to that welfare, it has more in common, perhaps, with the conservatives, who tend to look upon the wishes of the individual as subsidiary to the welfare of the group.

Eugenics is not, strictly speaking, based upon science, though it often claims to be. It is essentially a program for human beings based upon the study, primarily, of plants and the lower animals. It has gained its prestige because of the

<sup>1</sup> See, for this point of view, such books as Gilman, *The Man-made World*; Coolidge, *Why Women Are So*; Nearing, *Woman and Social Progress*; Schreiner, *Woman and Labor*.

large number of scientists who have been associated with the movement.

The eugenic program is based upon the assumption that human progress has been the result of accidental improvement in the human stock through the mechanism of heredity. The family to the eugenicist is an institution primarily for breeding of better human stock. The program of this group consists, therefore, in controlling human matings in such a way as to produce better offspring, both physically and mentally. All other aspects of family life are considered subsidiary to this aim. Thus the program of the eugenicists represents in some respects the logical antithesis of that of the radical group, since it proposes the abandonment of individual wishes in marriage relations in favor of producing a "sound" stock.<sup>1</sup>

More important from the standpoint of control of family relations is the viewpoint of students of the family who assert that any fundamental program of reform must be based upon a thorough understanding of the social situation in which the family operates. Just as the family cannot be expected to continue performing functions which are no

<sup>1</sup> Even the eugenicists dare not run directly against the current in their pronouncements. The following statement represents an attempt to proclaim the importance of breeding sound stock without too much flaunting the shibboleth of romantic love:

"Pure love between the sexes should be proclaimed as the noblest thing on earth, and the bearing and rearing of children as amongst the highest of all human duties. *Some risks ought to be run in order to secure these joys and to fulfill these duties; and Cupid may well remain a little blind to all minor defects.* To promote these ways of regarding sexual problems and to show how often the moralist unknown to himself is in effect striving to better the racial qualities of future generations come well within the scope of our endeavors" (italics added).—Leonard Darwin, "The Aims and Methods of Eugenic Societies," *Eugenics, Genetics and the Family* ("Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics"), I, 12.

longer essential to group life, so it cannot be expected to serve purposes which are ambiguous or inadequately understood. One of the most perplexing problems with reference to family life in the modern city is: What sort of family relations is possible under present-day urban conditions? Solution of this problem, however, depends upon the solving of two subsidiary problems: (1) What has been the relationship between social conditions and the family form in the past? and (2) What are the peculiar conditions of the present to which the family needs to adjust?

#### THE ROOTS OF THE MODERN FAMILY

Like a great many American institutions, the modern family has its European background. And while in certain respects one can see the impress of ancient civilization and medieval tradition, the chief sources of American family practices are to be found in the Puritan movement, the Renaissance, and the Romantic movement.<sup>1</sup> It is true, of course, that cross-currents have been introduced into American life by the influx of immigrants from the south and east of Europe in recent years, but these have left little impression upon the general pattern rooted in the social customs of the earlier immigrants from the north and west.

It is, however, in the seventeenth century and the Puritan movement in which one finds the immediate sources of New England family institutions.<sup>2</sup> Northern colonial life had its

<sup>1</sup> "American family institutions," according to Calhoun, "are a resultant of three main factors: the complex of medieval tradition evolved thru the centuries on the basis of ancient civilization plus the usage of its barbarian successor; the economic transition from medieval landlordism to modern capitalism; and the influence of environment in an unfolding continent."—*A Social History of the American Family*, I, 13.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, I, 37.