

SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

Investigating Family Issues



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Sociology of the Family

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*To the three loves of my life:
Larry, Daniel, and Samuel*

—LMB



*To my husband, Gerald Vander Mey,
and my son, Ian Vander Mey*

—BJVM

Preface

Several years ago, I was sitting in my office trying to decide which textbook I should adopt for the undergraduate Sociology of Family class I would be teaching the next semester, when a textbook representative came by to offer his product. I had been teaching the course every semester for several years, so I had collected copies of almost all the textbooks on the market. I told this sales representative that although every textbook had its merits, certain key features were lacking in all of them. None of the textbooks gave a thorough explanation of the theoretical perspectives that are so useful in interpreting family issues, and even fewer applied theories to topics. Furthermore, the research methods used to uncover data about the family were generally ignored, and often the findings of research studies were reported without any mention of how the information was obtained. Finally, in many texts, there was little integration among chapters; once a topic had been discussed, it was never mentioned again, leaving students with the incorrect perception that family issues are entirely unrelated to each other.

After patiently listening to me rant about the defects I saw in the textbooks then on the market, the textbook representative quietly asked, "Then why don't you write your own textbook?" So I did.

How This Book Is Different

Sociology of the Family: Investigating Family Issues is designed to teach students how to understand and analyze family structure and dynamics sociologically. This textbook is different from other sociology of the family books in several ways. First, embedded within it is a collection of readings. Each chapter ends with a reading linked to the chapter topic—Readings for In-Depth Focus—along with a series of questions to encourage critical thinking about the material. These excerpts from articles and books in the contemporary literature bring sociological theory and method to bear on current family issues. The combination of expository text with primary source readings is intended to provide a structure for teaching the course and actively involving students.

This book also contains a more balanced coverage of theoretical perspectives and research methods than is found in most family texts. Although chapters may be assigned in a different order than appears in the text, the theme of evaluating theory and research preserves unity. In addition to theoretical perspectives and research methods, the perennial sociological variables of race, social class,

and gender are applied in every chapter. Furthermore, information about family dynamics in other cultures is integrated throughout, enabling students to view the family as a global social institution uniquely shaped by the norms, values, and circumstances of society. Family diversity in U.S. society is a special focus of this text.

How This Book Is Organized

This textbook is divided into three sections. Part I, *Sociology of the Family: The Foundations*, gives students the basic knowledge necessary to understand and analyze family issues. Families are examined from a historical perspective in Chapter 1, showing how the present organization of families cannot be understood without knowing how family structures and dynamics have changed over time.

Chapters 2 and 3 are unique features of this book. Unlike other textbooks, in which theoretical perspectives and research methods are covered in a few pages, if at all, *Sociology of the Family: Investigating Family Issues* devotes separate chapters to each of these topics. In Chapter 2, students learn how scholarly research on the family is conducted as well as some of the problems researchers encounter when gathering and evaluating data on families. The basic theoretical orientations and concepts of sociology useful for analyzing family issues are discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, students are introduced to the cultural foundations of family studies and the diverse nature of families across the globe. Discussions of methodological issues, theoretical perspectives, and cross-cultural comparisons are continued in all subsequent chapters.

Sociologists who study the family continually examine the impact of three key variables—gender, socioeconomic status, and race and ethnicity—on all types of family issues. Each of these topics is examined in depth in Part II, *Family Studies: The Perennial Sociological Variables* (Chapters 5–7). The relevancies of gender, class, and race are then explored in each of the seven chapters of Part III, *Intimate Relationships: Issues in the Family Life Cycle*. These chapters (8–14) focus on family concerns at each stage of the life cycle, from partner selection, through marriage, parenthood, and into older adulthood. A separate chapter is devoted to sexual attitudes, behaviors, and relationships. Although family violence and divorce are not natural parts of the family life cycle, they are addressed in separate chapters, as well. Finally, the chapter on singlehood is presented last because this status can pertain to different stages of the life cycle. Each chapter in Part III examines impacts of sociological variables on the individual's experience of the life stage or conditions in intimate relationships. For example, Chapter 14 examines the impact of age on the experience of being single. The ways in which age and life stages relate to marital satisfaction, parenting, and divorce are addressed in Chapters 10, 11, and 13, respectively. Care has been taken to provide a truly comprehensive text that also engages and encourages students.

Supplements for Instructors

This book comes with an array of supplements that will assist instructors in using it and enriching students' learning experiences:

- *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank*: An Instructor's Manual and Test Bank is included with the book. The manual includes teaching tips, classroom exercises, learning objectives, and Internet exercises. The test bank, which is bound with the manual, contains multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in, and essay questions.
- *Computerized Testing*: Allyn and Bacon Test Manager is an integrated suite of testing and assessment tools for Windows and Macintosh. You can use Test Manager to create professional-looking exams in minutes by building tests from the existing database of questions, editing questions, or writing your own. Course management features include a class roster, gradebook, and item analysis. Test Manager also has everything you need to create and administer online tests. For first-time users, there is a guided tour of the entire Test Manager system and screen wizards to walk you through each area.
- *PowerPoint® Presentation Software*: The Allyn and Bacon Marriage and Family PowerPoint Presentation consists of a combination of graphic images and text on 13 standard topics. A PowerPoint® viewer is included, which allows you to access the slides. If you have PowerPoint® software, you can easily create customized presentations by rearranging the order of the slides, editing them, or adding new slides. Versions are available for both Windows and Macintosh.

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I cannot thank my coauthor, Brenda Vander Mey, enough. She came into this project with great enthusiasm, even though she was up against tight deadlines and many other work and family responsibilities. I could not have completed this book on my own, and I am truly grateful that she agreed to work with me. Brenda's cross-cultural perspective and mastery of the family literature are invaluable contributions to this work.

I am blessed to be surrounded by loving, supportive friends and family, without whom I never would have had the confidence needed to tackle such a big project. My sons, Daniel and Samuel, have been sources of inspiration and were able to make me laugh even in the most stressful times. My husband, Larry, gave me the push I needed to start the book and was there every step of the way. I'm not sure he knew what he was getting into when he said, "Opportunity only knocks once, so go for it." He listened to me rant and cry and test out ideas; he took care of the children, cooked the meals, did the laundry, and anything else humanly possible to help me complete this book. Thank you, Larry, and I love you.

Lee D. Millar Bidwell

With all my heart and with what little energy I have left after writing at warp speed, I thank and thank again my husband, Gerald Vander Mey, and our son, Ian, for all their many sacrifices and sustained encouragement. I also thank Mary Ellen Lepionka, editor and cheerleader extraordinaire. My colleagues at Clemson University have my deepest thanks and appreciation. They shared their libraries with me, brought other books and articles to my attention, and helped me be the "Little Engine That Could." It is my hope that all sociologists are as blessed with colleagues as wonderful as mine. I also would like to acknowledge USAID's Bean/Cowpea CRSP Program for giving me opportunities to gain firsthand knowledge of other countries and cultures.

Not least of all, I thank my coauthor, Lee Bidwell. We have worked together in an almost seamless fashion, like two sisters who know when the other needs support. To that end, I thank Mary Ellen Lepionka and Sarah Kelbaugh for having the good sense to bring the two of us together.

Brenda J. Vander Mey

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