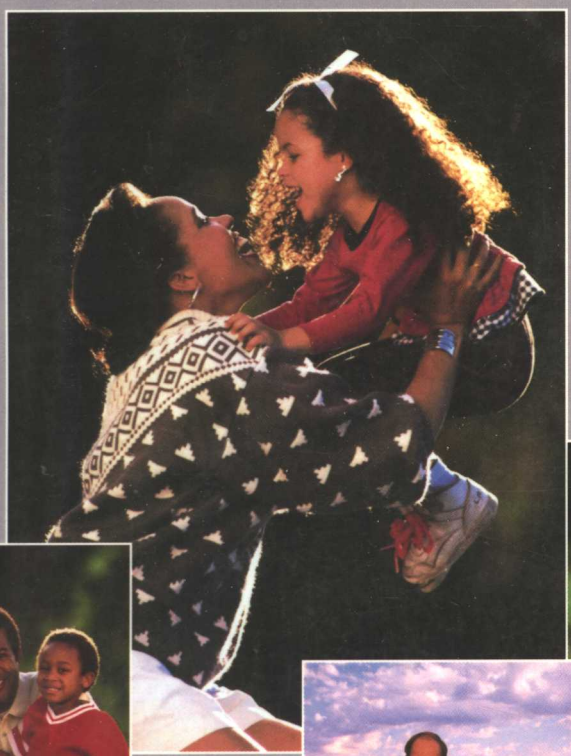
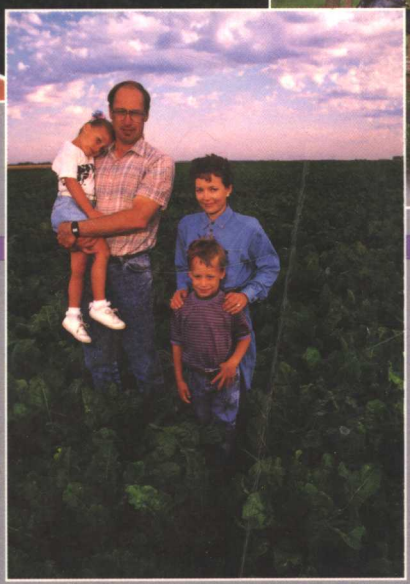
EIGHTH EDITION

Family *in* Transition





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FAMILY IN TRANSITION

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Preface

This is our eighth edition. Since we began work on the first edition more than two decades ago, the family—a term which should be taken to mean "family life"—has been in transition. Not only has the family changed, but the climate of opinion surrounding family issues has also shifted. New problems have arisen and new approaches to earlier problems have emerged.

Most strikingly, the state of the family has developed into a major public issue. "Family values" became a battle cry in the presidential election of 1992. Opposing views over such family related matters as abortion, homosexuality, gay families, and sex education have begun to constitute one of the major fault lines in American society.

We have had three aims in this edition: First, we have tried to capture and accurately portray the remarkable changes and diversity of family life, and locate them in historical context.

Second, we have always tried to include articles representing the cutting edge of family scholarship. We have never found it difficult to locate new articles, since scholarship continues to grow in quantity and quality. As editors, our task has been to retain and balance excellent older articles while adding significant new ones.

Third, we have always tried to select articles that, while scholarly, are understandable to an audience largely of undergraduate students. Most of the writers we include are leading researchers whose writing, however complex in ideas and analysis, is clear and readable.

In this edition nearly half of the articles are new. There is a greater emphasis on men's roles in the family than in previous editions. We are happy to welcome a revision of William J. Goode's article on men's resistance to change. The reading by Tamara Hareven is also an updated version of one we've included in earlier editions.

We have finally retired Alice Rossi's classic article on the transition to parenthood. It has been replaced with a selection by Carolyn and Philip Cowan, describing the findings of their research on the process of becoming a parent for the first time. Some of the newer readings also deal with nostalgia and its effects on perceptions of the family, past and present; how family law is grappling with changes in the traditional family; and the cultural war over how to define the family. We have also included an article on characteristics of long, satisfying marriages.

By now we have had so many useful conversations with friends and colleagues about family matters in general and this book in particular that it's hard to list them all; let us just say "thank you." Thanks also to Jennifer Biserto whose literature searches and general helpfulness made this edition possible and to Rod Watanabe and the staff of the Center for the Study of Law and Society who supported the project in many ways. Finally, we are grateful to the many reviewers whose useful suggestions we have tried to incorporate in this edition. These include:

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Introduction: Family in Transition

In the election campaign of 1992, then Vice President Dan Quayle set off a firestorm of debate with a remark denouncing a fictional television character for choosing to give birth out of wedlock. The "Murphy Brown" show, according to Quayle, was "mocking the importance of fathers." It reflected the "poverty of values" that was responsible for the nation's ills. From the talk shows to the front pages of newspapers to dinner tables across the nation, arguments broke out about the meaning of the Vice President's remarks.

Comedians found Quayle's battle with a TV character good for laughs. But others saw serious issues being raised. Many people saw Quayle's comments as a stab at single mothers and working women. Some saw them as an important statement about the decline of family values and the importance of the two parent family. In the opening show of the Fall season, "Murphy Brown" fought back by poking fun at Quayle and telling the audience that families come in many different shapes and sizes. After the election, the debate seemed to fade away. It flared up again the Spring of 1993, after the *Atlantic Monthly* featured a cover story entitled "Dan Quayle was Right."

Why did a brief remark in a political speech set off such a heated and long lasting debate? The Dan Quayle–Murphy Brown affair struck a nerve because Americans have not yet come to terms with almost three decades of turbulent change. Contrary to the widespread notion that some flaw in American character or culture is to blame for these trends, comparable shifts are found throughout the industrialized world. All advanced modern countries have experienced shifts in women's roles, rising divorce rates, lower marriage and birth rates, and an increase in single parent families. In no other country, however, has family change been so traumatic and divisive as ours (Skolnick, 1993).

The transformation of family life has been so dramatic that to many Americans it has seemed as if "an earthquake had shuddered through the American family" (Preston, 1984). Divorce rates first skyrocketed, then stabilized at historically high levels. Women have surged into the workplace. Birth rates have declined. The women's movement has changed the way men and women think and act toward one another, both inside the home and in the world at large. Furthermore, social and sexual rules that once seemed carved in stone have crumbled away: Unmarried couples can live together openly; unmarried mothers can keep their babies. Abortion has become legal. Remaining single and remaining childless, thought to be highly deviant once (though not illegal) have both become acceptable lifestyle options.

Today most people live in ways that do not conform to the cultural ideal that prevailed in the '50s. The traditional breadwinner/housewife family with minor children today represents only a small minority of families. The "typical" American family in the last two decades of the twentieth century is likely to be one of four other kinds: the two-earner family, the single-parent family, the "blended" family of remarriage, or the "empty nest" couple whose children have grown up and moved out. Indeed, in 1984 fully half of American families had no children under age 18 (Norton & Glick, 1986, p. 9). Apart from these variations, large numbers of people will spend part of their lives living apart from their families—as single young adults, as divorced singles, as older people who have lost a spouse.

The changes of recent decades have affected more than the forms of family life; they have been psychological as well. A major study of American attitudes over two decades revealed a profound shift in how people think about family life, work, and themselves (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). In 1957 four fifths of the respondents thought that a man or woman who did not want to marry was sick, immoral, and selfish. By 1976 only one fourth of the respondents thought that choice was bad. Two thirds were neutral, and one seventh viewed the choice as good. Summing up many complex findings, the authors conclude that America underwent a "psychological revolution" in the two decades between surveys. Twenty years earlier, people defined their satisfaction and problems—and indeed themselves—in terms of how well they lived up to traditional work and family roles. More recently, people have become more introspective, more attentive to inner experience. Fulfillment now means finding intimacy, meaning, and self-definition, rather than satisfactory performance of traditional roles.

A DYING INSTITUTION?

All of these changes, occurring as they did in a relatively short period of time, gave rise to fears about the decline of the family. By the early 1970s anyone watching television or reading newspapers and magazines would hear again and again that the family is breaking down, falling apart, disintegrating, and even becoming "an endangered species." There also began a great nostalgia for the "good old days" when Mom was in the kitchen, families were strong and stable, and life was uncomplicated. This mood of nostalgia mixed with anxiety contributed to the rise of the conservative New Right and helped to propel Ronald Reagan into the White House.

In the early '80s, heady with victory, the conservative movement hoped that by dismantling the welfare state and overturning the Supreme Court's abortion decision, the clock could be turned back and the "traditional" family restored. As the Reagan presidency ended, it became clear that such hopes had failed. Women had not returned to full-time homemaking; divorce rates had not returned to the levels of the 1950s. The "liberated" sexuality of the '60s and '70s had given way to greater restraint, largely due to fear of AIDS, although the norms of the '50s did not return.

Despite all the changes, however, the family in America is "here to stay" (Bane, 1976). The vast majority of Americans—at least 90 percent—marry and have children, and surveys repeatedly show that family is central to the lives of most Americans. They find family ties their deepest source of satisfaction and meaning, as well as the source of their greatest worries (Mellman et al., 1990). In sum, family life in America is a complex mixture of both continuity and change.

While the transformations of the past three decades do not mean the end of family life, they have brought a number of new difficulties. For example, most families now depend on the earnings of wives and mothers, but the rest of society has not caught up to the new realities. There is still an earnings gap between men and women. Employed wives and mothers still bear the major workload in the home. For both men and women, the demands of the job are often at odds with family needs. Debates about whether or not the family is "in decline" do little to solve these dilemmas.

During the same years in which the family was becoming the object of public anxiety and political debate, a torrent of new research on the family was pouring forth. The study of the family had come to excite the interest of scholars in a range of disciplines—history, demography, economics, law, psychology. As a result of this research, we now have much more information available about the family than ever before. Ironically, much of the new scholarship is at odds with the widespread assumption that family had a long, stable history until hit by the social "earthquake" of the '60s and '70s. We have learned from historians that the "lost" golden age of family happiness and stability we yearn for never actually existed.

Because of the continuing stream of new family scholarship, as well as shifts in public attitudes toward the family, each edition of *Family in Transition* has been different from the one before it. When we put together the first edition of this book in the early 1970s, the first rumblings of change were beginning to be felt. The youth movements of the 1960s and the emerging women's movement were challenging many of the assumptions on which conventional marriage and family patterns had been based. The mass media were regularly presenting stories that also challenged in one way or another traditional views on sex, marriage, and family. There was talk, for example, of "the population explosion" and of the desirability of "zero population growth." There was a growing perception that the ideal three-, four-, or five-child family of the '50s was not necessarily good for the country as a whole, or for every couple.

Meanwhile, Hollywood movies were presenting a new and cynical view of marriage. It was almost taken for granted that marriages were unhappy, particularly if the spouses were middle class, middle aged, or affluent. Many people were

openly defying conventional standards of behavior: College girls were beginning to live openly with young men, unwed movie actresses were publicizing rather than hiding their pregnancies, and homosexuals were beginning openly to protest persecution and discrimination.

It seemed as if something was happening to family life in America, even if there were no sharp changes in the major statistical indicators. People seemed to be looking at sex, marriage, parenthood, and family life in new ways, even if behavior on a mass scale was not changing very noticeably. Thus, we argued that significant social and cultural change could happen even without massive changes in overt behavior patterns. John Gagnon and William Simon (1970) had observed that the moment of change may be when new forms of behavior seem "plausible." For example, even though there was no evidence that the homosexual population had grown, homosexuality had become a more plausible form of behavior. Knowing someone was a homosexual did not automatically mean that he or she was to be defined as a moral pariah.

In putting together the readings for that first edition of *Family in Transition,* we found that the professional literature of the time seemed to deny that change was possible in family structure, the relations between the sexes, and parenthood. An extreme version of this view was the statement by an anthropologist that the nuclear family (mother, father, and children) "is a biological phenomenon . . . as rooted in organs and physiological structures as insect societies" (LaBarre, 1954, p. 104). Any changes in the basic structure of the family roles or in childrearing were assumed to be unworkable, if not unthinkable.

The family in modern society was portrayed as a streamlined, more highly evolved version of a universal family. According to the sociological theorist Talcott Parsons and his followers (1951, 1954), the modern family had become more specialized. It transferred work and educational roles to other agencies and specialized in childrearing and emotional support. No less important for having relinquished certain tasks, the modern family was now the only part of society to carry out such functions.

The family theories of the postwar era were descriptively correct insofar as they portrayed the ideal middle-class family patterns of a particular society at a particular historical period. But they went astray in elevating the status quo to the level of a timeless necessity. In addition, the theories in did not acknowledge the great diversity among families that has always existed in America. For example, the working mother or the single-parent family could be seen only as deviant. Ethnic differences also received very little attention, or were considered undesirable variations from the mainstream, middle class norm.

Still another flaw in the dominant view was its neglect of internal strains within the family, even when it was presumably functioning as it was supposed to. Paradoxically, these strains were vividly described by the very theorists who idealized the role of the family in modern society. Parsons, for example, observed that when home no longer functioned as an economic unit, women, children, and old people were placed in an ambiguous position. They became dependent on the male breadwinner and were cut off from society's major source of achievement and status.

Parsons saw women's roles as particularly difficult: Being a housewife was not a real occupation; it was vaguely defined, highly demanding, yet not considered real work in a society that measures achievement by the size of one's paycheck. The combination of existing strains and the demystifying effects of the challenges to the family status quo seems to have provided, as Judith Blake (1978, p. 11) points out, a classic set of conditions for social change.

A TIME OF TROUBLES

Major changes in the family would have been unsettling even if other social conditions had remained stable. But everything else was also changing quickly. Despite assassinations and turmoil in the streets, the '60s was an optimistic period. Both dissidents and the establishment agreed that progress was possible, that problems could be solved, and that today's children would live in a better world. Both sides believed in limitless economic growth.

No one foresaw that the late 1970s would dramatically reverse this optimism and the social and economic conditions that had sustained it. Rather than hearing of an end to scarcity and poverty, we began to hear of lowered expectations, survival, and lifeboat ethics. For the first time in history, Americans had to confront the possibility that their children and their children's children might not lead better lives. A popular country and western song expressed the national mood when it asked, "Are the good times really over for good?" (Haggard, 1982).

The "malaise" of the late 1970s, followed by the conservative renewal of the 1980s, once again changed the terms in which family issues were discussed and debated. There was a general withdrawal from political activity among all Americans, most surprisingly, perhaps, on the part of the young people who had been active in the 1960s and 1970s. The large baby boom generation, which had begun to enter college in the 1960s, was moving on to marriage and parenthood by the end of the 1970s.

Among family scholars and other social commentators, the terms of the debate about the family were also changed by shifts in feminist thinking. Some of the most vocal feminists of the 1960s had criticized the family as the major source of the oppression of women. By the 1970s, many feminists had articulated a new emphasis on nurturance, care, and intimacy. In fact, one of the surprising themes to emerge in that era was the celebration of family in the name of social criticism.

Some radical attacks on the modern world and its ways seem consonant with traditional conservative arguments. Historian Christopher Lasch (1978) argued that while the family once provided a haven of love and decency in a heartless world, it no longer does so. The family has been "invaded" by outside forces—advertising, the media, experts, and family professionals—and stripped of its functions and authority. Corporate capitalism, with its need for limitless consumption, has created a "culture of narcissism," in which nobody cares about anybody else. Other scholars, as we noted earlier, insist that the family remains a vital and resilient institution.

THE STATE OF THE CONTEMPORARY FAMILY

What sense *can* be made of changes in family life over the past three decades? The various statistics we quoted earlier can be and are being interpreted to show that the family is either thriving or falling apart. Falling birthrates can be taken to mean that people are too selfish to want to have any or many children. Or they can mean that people are no longer having children by accident, or because of social pressure, but because they truly want children. High divorce rates can signify that marriage either is an institution on the rocks or is considered so important that people will no longer put up with the kinds of dissatisfactions and empty-shell marriages previous generations tolerated. Is the rise in unmarried motherhood a sign of moral breakdown?Or does it simply reflect a different, more enlightened set of moral norms, a society no longer eager to punish unmarried mothers or to damage a child's life chances because of the circumstances of its birth?

Part of the confusion surrounding the current status of the family arises from the fact that the family is a surprisingly problematic area of study; there are few if any self-evident facts, even statistical ones. Researchers have found, for example, that when the statistics of family life are plotted for the entire twentieth century, or back into the nineteenth century, a surprising finding emerges: today's young people—with their low marriage, high divorce, and low fertility rates—appear to be behaving in ways consistent with long-term historical trends (Cherlin, 1981; Masnick & Bane, 1980). The recent changes in family life only appear deviant when compared to what people were doing in the 1940s and 1950s. But it was the postwar generation that married young, moved to the suburbs, and had three, four, or more children that departed from twentieth-century trends. As one study put it, "Had the 1940s and 1950s not happened, today's young adults would appear to be behaving normally" (Masnick & Bane, 1980, p. 2).

Thus, the meaning of change in a particular indicator of family life depends on the time frame in which it is placed. If we look at trends over too short a period of time—say ten or twenty years—we may think we are seeing a marked change, when, in fact, an older pattern may be reemerging. For some issues, even discerning what the trends are can be a problem. Whether or not we conclude that there is an "epidemic" of teenage pregnancy depends on how we define adolescence and what measure of illegitimacy we use. Contrary to the popular notion of skyrocketing teenage pregnancy, teenaged childbearing has actually been on the decline during the past two decades (Luker, this volume). It is possible for the *ratio* of illegitimate births to all births to go up at the same time as there are declines in the *absolute* number of such births and in the likelihood that an individual will bear an illegitimate child. This is not to say that concern about teenage pregnancy is unwarranted; but the reality is much more complex than the simple and scary notion of an "epidemic" implies.

Given the complexities of interpreting data on the family, it is little wonder that, as Joseph Featherstone observes (1979, p. 37), the family is a "great intellectual Rorschach blot." One's conclusions about the current state of the family often derive from deeper values and assumptions one holds in the first place about the definition and role of the family in society. We noted earlier that the family theo-