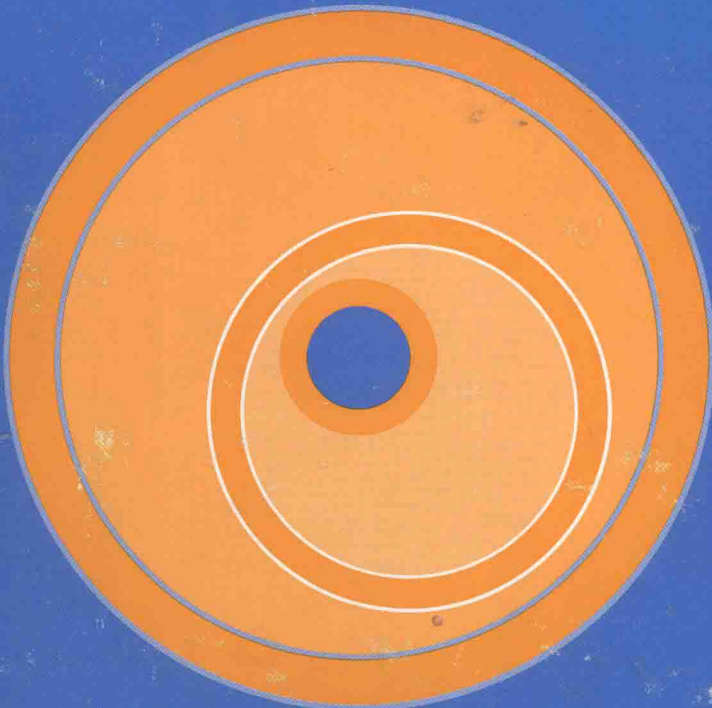


Family Systems in America

3rd Edition

IRA L. REISS



THIRD EDITION

Family Systems in America

IRA L. REISS *Department of Sociology
and the Family Study Center
University of Minnesota*

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON

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To my mother's brother
Dr. Murray Jacobs, 1888–1979
A man who tended to other people's crises.

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Preface

Every once in a while you write something you feel good about—something that captures the essence of your thinking and clearly expresses the state of the art at this point in history. That is how I feel about this third edition of *Family Systems in America*. From the very beginning of the revision, I felt the excitement of a project that was fitting together and gathering momentum. My goal was to better integrate the entire family field and to more clearly explicate each major aspect of that field. One reason I was able to accomplish the task so much better now is that there has been an immense improvement in the state of knowledge in this field during the last five years.

The family field was building up to a quantum leap forward for many years but the actual takeoff occurred only in the last few years. Government reports have vastly improved both in the variety of research projects with which they deal and in the skill and clarity of their presentation. This is a significant development. The government, with its census files and its annual surveys of tens of thousands of households, is in one of the best positions to improve the overall understanding of our society. Individual social science research has also made notable advances in terms of both the quality of the research and the attempt to integrate theoretical explanations with the research undertaking. There may well have been a critical mass of researchers needed for a breakthrough to occur. Whatever the reason, I felt the stimulation of the increased availability of strategic data and ideas. This made the development of integrative explanations much more feasible. I sensed this opportunity the moment I began to examine the recent literature in the family field. The elation I felt due to the increased ability to integrate and explain took hold of me to such an extent that I completely rewrote two-thirds of the second edition and the remaining third has been noticeably altered. I spent as much time and energy on this revision as I did on the first edition.

One way that I sought to integrate the total material was to reduce the number of chapters from twenty-four to eighteen, while keeping the size of the book the same. I dispersed some material throughout the text, integrated some in particular places, discarded a good deal, and brought in much new relevant information. I consolidated those areas that were able to clarify and relate to each other. In this way the overall unity has been greatly enhanced.

Let me cover some of the highlights and new elements of this third edition. The first chapter is entirely new and basically affords the reader a background of the study of the family over the past century. This sort of background knowledge helps in seeing the relationship of some recent work to the older accomplishments in this area of study. One can gain some insight from this chapter into the flavor of the family field and obtain an initial orientation to the approach of the book.

I have stressed even more strongly than before the importance of gender roles for the understanding of the family. The ways in which our culture defines the role of males and females is fundamental to understanding how we act toward each other in regard to love, marriage, sexuality, and occupation, to name but a few

important areas. Chapter 3 lays the foundation for the important place of gender roles and other chapters further develop this theme.

I have taken the issue of sexual partner preferences and written an entire chapter on it. Instead of a separate discussion of homosexuality and heterosexuality, I have put forth the beginnings of a theory of sexuality that integrates both the development of heterosexual and homosexual preferences. I have also completely reorganized the treatment of premarital sexuality so as to integrate the discussion of trends and causes. This is followed by a discussion of outcomes such as contraceptive behavior, pregnancy, and abortion. In this way there is a more holistic quality about the discussion of premarital sexuality.

The treatment of marital power relationships has been expanded and I have added some discussion of the new research on violence in the family. The entire section on marriage is related to the study of patterns of communication and commitment in marriage as brought out in the latest research. Another integrative mechanism was the combination of marital and extramarital sexuality into one chapter. After all, extramarital sexuality does have crucial connections to the entire marital relationship and it seems obvious that marital sexuality must be explored if one is to have complete understanding of extramarital sexuality. Thus it made sense to treat these two types of sexuality together.

In a culture with the highest divorce rate in the Western world, it seemed sensible to pay increased attention to the entire area of remarriage. Over a quarter of all the marriages made each year are remarriages. Until very recently there was virtually no research on remarriage, despite its commonness. I have incorporated the recent thinking and research on this topic in Chapter 12.

Probably the central role change for women in the last generation was in the occupational area. Forty-two out of every one hundred mothers of preschool children are now employed. Just thirty years ago only twelve out of every one hundred were employed. The acceptance and pursuit of employment by mothers of small children is a vital aspect of the changing female role. The stresses and strains of the dual-earner family is another important aspect that is discussed in depth. The change in the female occupational role helps spell out the gender-role alterations that are occurring now in the Family Systems in America. The occupations we work at have major effects on the values we hold and so it is worth examining just what type of work married men and women are now engaged in. I deal with this and other gender-role changes in terms of all age groups and for both black and white racial groups, so that the diversity that exists can be clearly portrayed. Such breakdowns, particularly by race and social class, are present throughout the book.

The last section of this edition is almost all new. I have added a chapter on Sweden. One reason for this was that I spent my 1975–1976 Sabbatical at Uppsala University. But even without that experience I would have felt that Sweden, as the leader in the Western world's equalitarian gender-role changes, is well worth studying. Not that we are in the same exact situation as the Swedes, but rather because they have faced many of the same problems as we are now facing and it is instructive to study their experience. Furthermore, we can better develop an understanding of social change by such comparisons.

In the last chapter I seek to develop a new synthesis of explanations of the Family Systems in America based upon what has been covered in the earlier chapters. I use the term "Family Systems" to include three institutions: (1) family institution; (2) marital institution, and (3) courtship institution. I allow myself the luxury of predictions regarding future trends in all three institutions. The book ends with an examination of the People's Republic of China and how the Chinese have tried to equalize gender roles in their new country. China too is not a model for America but its experience—both successes and failures—help test some of the ideas put forth regarding trends and changes in Western society.

Each chapter has its own list of references. These can serve as the basis for further inquiry for those who are so inclined. I have not attempted to include all research. Instead I have tried to pick out those that were among the best in the field and which more clearly incorporate explanatory value and are therefore helpful in affording understanding of an area. Of necessity, only a few works could be explored in any depth and inevitably some fine research could only be mentioned. In order to facilitate easy location of references, there is at the end of the book a master bibliography containing the total set of references used in this edition.

There are four appendixes which are optional for student and instructor use. For the person who wishes to go further into the research and theory dimensions these appendixes should be of value. They are written as introductory pieces and are not very technical.

I am a sociologist by training and thus my emphasis is upon sociological research. Nevertheless, I have also utilized a good deal of anthropological, historical, and psychological work. My goal is to explain the way courtship, marital, and family relationships operate in our society. These other disciplines are often quite useful in achieving this goal and thus they are brought into focus on occasion. The emphasis throughout is upon the Family Systems in America today. But societies are not born full-grown anymore than are we humans and therefore it is important to gain some historical perspective so as to better appreciate the nature of our current system. Recent anthropological and historical work is invaluable for affording such perspective. The overall approach is one that would be appropriate for more than just sociology courses on the family. Courses in family relations and child development units often cover much of the same material as do sociological courses. I believe that any course with a fundamental interest in an overall scientific understanding of the family would find this book relevant.

Finally, I am pleased to report that G. C. Sponaule, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, has prepared an *Instructor's Manual* for this text. Sponaule has been extremely thorough and innovative in the development of this manual. He has included the usual test questions and discussion topics but he also has developed ideas that he found useful in his own teaching in this area and from which many of you no doubt will also benefit.

The entire process of writing this third edition has been a most exciting experience. Now that the work is at an end, I have a deep feeling of satisfaction. I hope I have been able to transmit some of this excitement and that you will gain much satisfaction, as I have, from the study of Family Systems in America.

In a sense my first debt is to Burton Taylor, emeritus professor from Bowdoin College in Maine. It was he who after hiring me for my first position asked me to teach a course on the family. Although I had interests in various aspects of that field, I had never taken a course in the family as a graduate student. I immediately found the idea attractive and of considerable interest but I did feel that in many respects the family field was in need of improved research and theorizing. My interest was aroused sufficiently so that I wrote my first book in 1960 on the topic of premarital sexuality. I have since found an increasing degree of satisfaction in the study of the family and thus am indebted to Professor Taylor for inviting me to teach that course.

All of us who teach are in debt to our students. Students impose a challenge upon the professor to organize ideas, to encourage critical thinking, to motivate, and to make explanations exciting. Colleagues are a source of support that must be acknowledged. At all the colleges I have taught and, specifically in the last ten years here at the University of Minnesota, I have found much stimulation from my colleagues and am grateful for their willingness to help in any project I undertook.

Three of my fellow sociologists have been kind enough to read a full draft of this book and let me benefit from their responses; Reuben Hill, Hyman Rodman, and Carlfred Broderick have been readers for all three editions. This is indeed a series of acts beyond the normal call of duty and I am most grateful for their careful and concerned assistance. In addition, three new readers—Thomas Ramsbey, Ralph Locke, and Marilyn Aronoff—have given me useful comments.

My research assistant has been G. C. Sponaule, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. He too worked with me on the second edition of this book. On this third edition he labored long and hard searching for new data sources which I needed, drawing some of the graphs, suggesting key articles to read that I might have otherwise missed, and in many other ways being most valuable. Sponaule is also the author of the *Instructors Manual* that accompanies this text. He always was there when I needed him for all kinds of help.

My wife, Harriet, has aided me in all my books and was in charge of an important part of the composition of this one. Understanding my need for photographs to improve the esthetic appeal and add greater clarity to some of the ideas being discussed, Harriet located historical sources for many interesting sketches and found relevant photographs of sculptures, as well as more traditional photographic sources. In addition to that massive task she edited the entire manuscript. She also discussed many of the topics in the book and gave me the benefit of her insight. Her efforts were essential to the project and I am deeply grateful.

The Family Study Center at the University of Minnesota has always been very generous with its assistance and I am particularly appreciative to Mary Ann Beneke and Fae Bjurquist. Linda Day and others attached to the Sociology Department also aided in many ways. I thank them all.

Ira L. Reiss is professor of Sociology and also on the staff of the Family Study Center at the University of Minnesota. His primary interests are in the sociology of the family area, with emphasis on sexual relationships and gender roles, and his secondary interests are in theory construction and the study of deviant behavior. He has served as associate editor on journals such as *The American Sociological Review*; *Social Problems*; *Journal of Marriage and the Family*; and *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. He was Director of the University of Minnesota Family Study Center from 1969 to 1974. In 1971 he was elected President of the Midwest Sociological Society; in 1975 Chairperson of the family section of the American Sociological Association, and in 1979 President of the National Council on Family Relations. He has published eight books and monographs, including: *Premarital Sexual Standards in America* (The Free Press of Macmillan, 1960); *The Social Context of Premarital Sexual Permissiveness* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967); and *Contemporary Theories About the Family*, 2 vols. (with W. Burr, R. Hill, and I. Nye; The Free Press of Macmillan Co., 1979). He has also published approximately 90 articles and commentaries in professional journals and has received federal and university research grants. Professor Reiss lectures to numerous universities, professional, and other groups around the country and abroad. His current writing centers on the development of a theory of extramarital sexual permissiveness.



Photo by Ivan Kalman

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Part One **BY WAY OF BACKGROUND**

