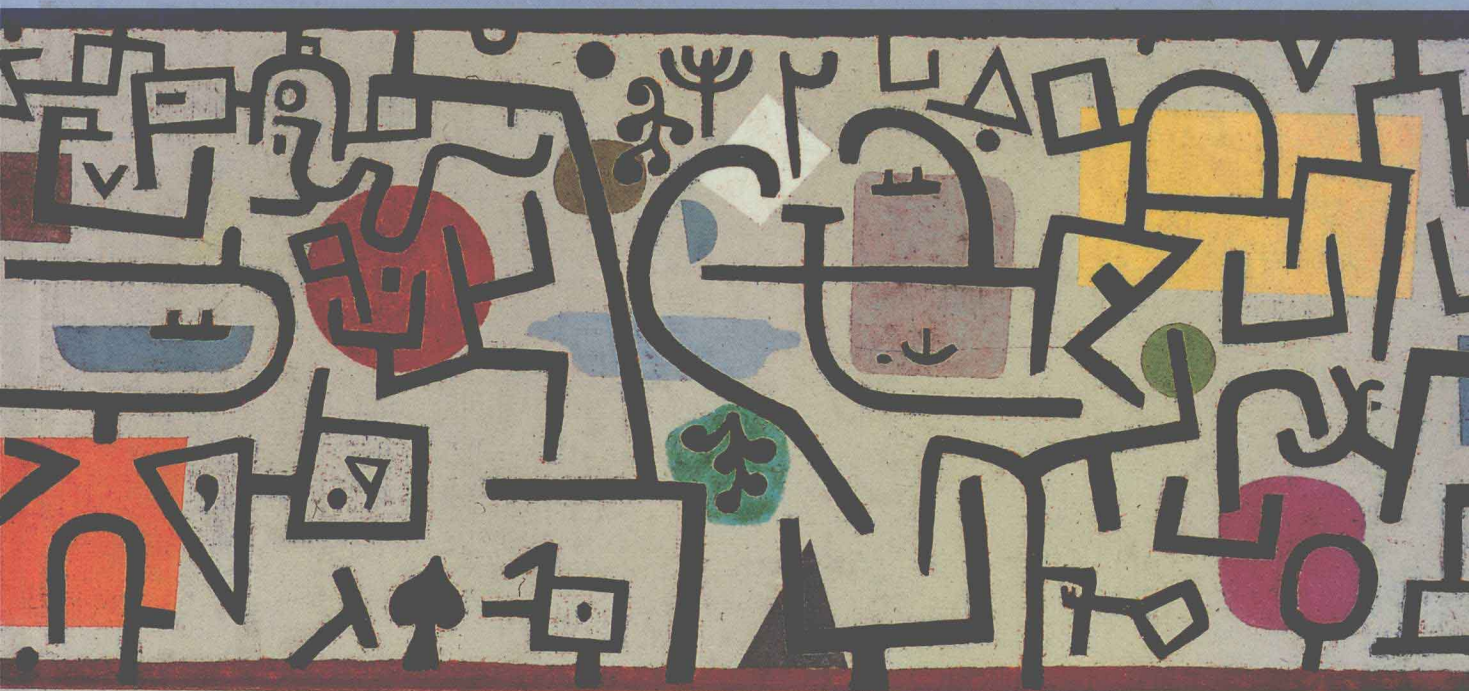


PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FAMILIES



A N I N T R O D U C T I O N

ANDREW J. CHERLIN



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An Introduction

ANDREW J. CHERLIN

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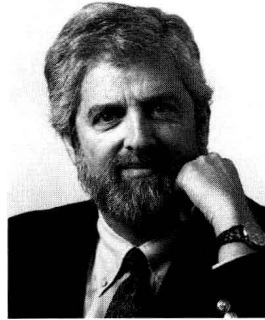
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PREFACE



The sociology of the family is deceptively hard to study. Unlike, say, physics, the topic is familiar (a word whose very root is Latin for “family”) because virtually everyone grows up in families. Therefore, it can seem “easy” to study the family because students can bring to bear their personal knowledge of the subject. Some textbooks play to this familiarity by mainly providing students with an opportunity to better understand their private lives. The authors never stray too far from the individual experiences of their readers, focusing on personal choices such as whether to marry and whether to have children. To be sure, giving students insight into the social forces that shape their personal decisions about family life is a worthwhile objective. Nevertheless, the challenge of writing about the sociology of the family is to also help students understand that the significance of families extends beyond personal experience. Today, as in the past, the family is the site of not only private decisions but also activities that matter to our society as a whole.

These activities center on taking care of people who are unable to fully care for themselves, most notably children and the elderly. Anyone who follows social issues knows of the often-expressed concern about whether, given developments such as the increases in divorce and childbearing outside of marriage, we are raising the next generation adequately. Anyone anxious about the well-being of the rapidly growing elderly population (as well as the escalating cost of providing financial and medical assistance to the elderly) knows the concern about whether family members will continue to provide adequate assistance to them. Indeed, rarely does a month pass without these issues appearing on the covers of magazines and the front pages of newspapers.

In this textbook, consequently, I have written about the family in two senses: the *private family* in which we live most of our personal lives and the *public family* in which adults perform tasks that are important to society. My goal is to give students a thorough grounding in both aspects. It is true that the two are related—taking care of children adequately, for instance, requires the love and affection that family members express privately toward each other. But the public side of the family deserves equal time with the private side.

ORGANIZATION

This book is divided into six parts and sixteen chapters. Part One (“Introduction”) introduces the concepts of the public and private families and examines how sociologists and other social scientists study them. It provides an overview of the history of the family and then examines the central concept of gender. Part Two (“Race, Ethnicity, Class, and the State”) deals with the larger social structures in which family relations are embedded: social class hierarchies, and racial and ethnic divisions. A chapter is then devoted to the influences of the nation-state on family life. In Part Three (“Sexuality, Partnership, and Marriage”), the focus shifts to the private family—and specifically to the emergence of the modern concept of sexuality, to the formation of partnerships through dating, courtship, and cohabitation, and to the interpersonal relations between spouses and cohabiting partners.

Part Four (“Power, Conflict, and Disruption”) deals with the consequences of conflict and of inequalities in power. First, the connections between the world of work and the balance of power and authority in the family are examined. Attention shifts to violence against wives, partners, and children. Then divorce and remarriage are discussed. Part Five (“Links across the Generations”) explores how well the public family is meeting its caretaking responsibilities for children and the elderly. Finally, in Part Six (“Family and Society”), I discuss where the great social changes of the twentieth century have left the institution of the family.

SPECIAL FEATURES

This textbook differs from others in several ways. The first is the public versus private distinction, which underlies its structure. It is my hope that this organizing principle will lead to a more balanced portrait of contemporary family life. Furthermore, the focus on the public family leads to a much greater emphasis on social issues involving the family than in most other textbooks. In fact, every chapter except the first includes a short, boxed essay under the general title, “Families and Public Policy.” The topics encompass homeless families, the AIDS epidemic, teenage childbearing, foster care, surrogate mothers, and more. Given the attention currently paid to issues such as these, the essays should stimulate student interest and make the book relevant to current political debates.

Although the emphasis in the book is on the contemporary United States and other Western nations, no text should ignore the important historical and cross-cultural diversity of families. Consequently, in addition to relevant material in the body of the text, I have also included in every chapter except the first another boxed essay under the title, “Families in Other Cultures.” The topics of these cross-

cultural and historical essays include gender relations in China and Russia, parents' influence over the choice of marriage partners in Thailand, wife-beating in less-developed nations, the origins of the wicked stepmother myth, the high rates of poverty of U.S. children compared to children in other developed countries, and the lives of the elderly and their families in Japan. I hope that these essays will not only pique the readers' interest but also broaden the scope of their understanding. Moreover, both the policy essays and the cross-cultural essays should provide good starting points for class discussions.

The attention to the public family also led me to write several chapters that are rarely found in sociology of the family textbooks. These include Chapter 6, "The Family, the State, and Social Policy," Chapter 14, "Children and Parents" (written from the perspective of examining children's well-being), and Chapter 15, "The Elderly and Their Families." These chapters examine issues of great current interest, such as income assistance to poor families, the effects of out-of-home child-care, and the costs of the social security and Medicare programs. Throughout these and other chapters, variations by class, race, ethnicity, and gender are explored.

PEDAGOGY

Each chapter begins in a way that should engage the reader, with introductions on such topics as the neither-men-nor-women *berdaches* of many Native American tribes; the nineteenth-century diary in which Maud Rittenhouse described her suitors; the plight of Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers, two children growing up in a violent Chicago neighborhood; the story of the first person ever to obtain a divorce in England; the case of Danny Henrikson, taken from the stepfather who raised him and awarded by a judge to a father he did not know; and so forth. In fact, throughout the book, I have tried to write lively, succinct prose.

Each of the six parts of the book is preceded by a brief introduction that sets the stage. And each chapter contains an opening outline, key terms (highlighted in boldface where they are introduced and defined), and a chapter-ending summary and list of key terms. In addition, there is a comprehensive end-of-book glossary. Information is presented graphically in 53 charts and graphs. Numerous photographs illustrate important points in each chapter.

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To write a book this comprehensive requires the help of many people. The first drafts of eight chapters were assigned in sociology of the family classes at the University of North Carolina by Ronald R. Rindfuss and at the University of Pennsylvania by Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. Their summaries of their student's experiences helped me to shape the revisions. Furstenberg also was kind enough to read drafts of some other chapters. Two other colleagues whose opinions I frequently rely upon, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale of the University of Chicago and Nancy E. Riley of Bowdoin College, provided excellent comments on several chapters. At McGraw-Hill sponsoring editors Sylvia Shepard and then Jill Gordon provided me with editorial guidance, while senior developmental editor Rhona Robbin prepared detailed critiques that greatly improved every chapter. In addition, the fol-

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Andrew J. Cherlin



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An Introduction

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