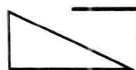

DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN FAMILIES

PATTERNS, PROSPECTS, AND POLICIES

Mark Robert Rank
Edward L. Kain



DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN FAMILIES: PATTERNS, PROSPECTS, AND POLICIES

Mark Robert Rank and Edward L. Kain, Editors

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Preface

The idea for this book was conceived nearly five years ago. We have taught a variety of courses pertaining to families, and throughout the semesters we have supplemented our lectures and textbook material with various articles and chapters. We were never quite satisfied with the family reader books that were available. From our perspective, some of them failed to adequately cover the issues and topics that we felt were essential. Others appeared too superficial in terms of the material that they did cover. Still others contained chapters that students found dry or difficult to read. If we wanted a family reader that was relevant, rigorous, and engaging, we came to the conclusion that we would have to construct it ourselves. At that moment, the idea for this book was born. It was our hope from the beginning that this would become a collection of readings that students would find exciting and thought-provoking, readable yet challenging, diverse and still thorough.

Each of us have professional backgrounds as sociologists. However, we also have experiences that go beyond the bounds of the sociological discipline. We have taught in departments of human development and family studies and in schools of social work. We have collaborated with researchers in economics, psychology, family studies, social work, rural sociology, and of course, sociology. In our own teaching and research we often draw upon the work of scholars in a range of fields as diverse as history, demography, anthropology, family studies, public policy, psychology, and social work. The readings in this collection represent a mix of such disciplines. We have looked across a range of academic fields to select what we feel are some of the best readings available.

Connected with this has been our intention to design a book that could be used in a number of courses, in various departments, dealing with the family. These would include large introductory courses on marriage and the family as well as a range of upper-division family courses.

SELECTING THE TOPICS AND READINGS

The strength of any anthology of readings lies in the relevance of the included content as well as the quality of the articles chosen to cover such content. We began by deciding upon the topics that should go into the reader. This was accomplished in several ways. We examined the syllabi of family courses being taught in a wide range of colleges and universities, looking at their subjects and reading material. We then went through all of the major family textbooks to see how they were organized and what topics and issues were included. Finally, we contacted dozens of faculty in the United States who were teaching family-related courses and asked them for their suggestions on what they felt should be included in a family reader. Based upon these sources of information, as well as our own teaching experiences, we decided upon the specific topics that would encompass this collection.

Next, we had to choose the articles and book chapters that would best introduce students to the specific subjects. During this process we read hundreds of articles and chapters. How did we arrive at our choices? We used several different criteria.

We began by asking, was the research that was analyzed or discussed in an article of the highest quality? In other words, we were looking for readings that were rigorous in the content of their material. We were searching for chapters that would represent the best in terms of family research.

A second criteria we relied on was readability. Were these articles or chapters well-written, accessible, and interesting? No matter how competently the research was conducted, little knowledge would be conveyed if the writing was so technical or boring that it put the reader to sleep. We insisted that the chapters be strong in both their content and in their writing style.

A third criteria was that, wherever possible, we included well-known researchers as our authors. The reason for this was that as students of the family, it was our opinion that undergraduates should become familiar with the work of key scholars in the field. In addition, the textbooks and lectures used throughout a semester would undoubtedly refer to some of these authors. By reading their works firsthand, it would make for a more dynamic learning experience.

A fourth criteria was that we wanted our readings to be up-to-date. In areas such as the history of the family or cross-cultural variation, this criteria is not quite as essential. However, on issues such as family policy or problems in the family, it is extremely important. While some of the readings in this collection might be considered “classics,” most are quite recent. The bulk of the readings in this book have been published after 1990.

A fifth criteria used for selecting our chapters was that we were looking for a collection of readings that would represent a diversity of approaches. This includes methodological diversity, theoretical diversity, and political diversity. The chapters consist of a range of methodological approaches—from fieldwork, to in-depth interviewing, to survey research, to large-scale demographic analyses. Theoretical diversity includes a variety of approaches such as structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, social exchange theory, and feminism. Political

diversity encompasses both liberal and conservative perspectives, as well as those in between.

Our final criteria was that we wanted to make certain that the issues of race, class, and gender were addressed throughout the book. While the structure of the reader is organized around three themes—variation in families, the family life course, and family problems and problem-solving strategies—the centrality of race, class, and gender are found within each of those themes.

ORGANIZATION

Diversity and Change in Families is divided into three major sections. These sections, and their subsections, are found in most courses dealing with the family. However, several of our subsections, such as cultural variation, social class variation, family structure variation, and family therapy, are not often found in family readers.

We have designed this collection so that the articles can be read either consecutively or out of sequence, depending upon the structure and content of a specific class. At the start of each reading is a brief introduction. These introductions highlight several of the article's major themes and make connections and links across the readings.

The first third of the reader focuses on the topic of variation in families. In order to have a better perspective on our own families, it is often useful to examine how and why families vary. We explore this variation through historical, cultural, racial and ethnic, social class, and family structural diversity. One of the key arguments throughout these chapters is that to understand why families vary in terms of their structure and functions, we must understand the larger social, economic, and political context in which families operate.

The second third of the reader is devoted to looking at family relationships across the life course—from attraction and premarital sexuality, through marriage and childbearing, to divorce and/or old age. The manner in which relationships change over time is a critical underlying theme. The stages that span the life course are examined in detail within this section.

The final third of the reader looks at family problems and problem-solving strategies. Violence in the family, economic stress, and children's well-being are some of the problems explored. Approaches and strategies for addressing these problems are also examined—specifically, the strategies of family therapy and family policy.

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We have been most fortunate to receive suggestions, advice, and assistance from many. We gratefully acknowledge the institutional support and resources provided by Shanti Khinduka, Dean of the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University. In addition, a faculty research award made by the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, provided assistance. Faculty research awards from the Cullen Foundation and the Brown Foundation of Houston also provided support for this work. We would also like to thank Elaine Walker and the Department of Psychology at Emory University, the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Southwestern University for their support and assistance.

Jan Bueckner and Scott Ward lent considerable help in the searching and locating of articles and book chapters, while Randall Cauley assisted in correspondence with faculty colleagues. The many students who have taken our family courses have provided numerous ideas and suggestions regarding potential readings for this collection. We would like to thank them all.

As mentioned earlier, we received many recommendations from colleagues around the country as to what material might be appropriate for the reader. These included suggestions from Patti Adler, Peter Adler, Margaret L. Andersen, Frank D. Bean, Felix M. Berardo, Denise Bielby, Letha Chadiha, Kenneth S. Y. Chew, Rand D. Conger, Glen Elder, Thomas J. Espenshade, Frances K. Goldscheider, Jaber F. Gubrium, Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman, Paul W. Kingston, David M. Klein, David Knox, Helena Z. Lopata, Judith Lorber, Lorraine Mayfield-Brown, Brent C. Miller, Ira L. Reiss, Ronald R. Rindfuss, Rachel A. Rosenfeld, Jerry Savells, Nancy Vosler, and Gautum Yadama.

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
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The Theoretical Importance of the Family*

William J. Goode



In this introductory article, William J. Goode explores several central questions related to studying families. He discusses the emotional intensity found in families, and the ways in which kinship networks are linked with other social networks in society. He also introduces several themes which will be repeated throughout this collection. Among these themes: (1) It is frequently difficult to study families because of our preconceived notions about family life; (2) There are often differences between our "ideal" image of families, and the reality of everyday family life; (3) The family is a central social institution which serves many important functions for society; and (4) Defining "the family" can be a difficult and politically charged task.

Through the centuries, thoughtful people have observed that the family was disintegrating. In the past several decades, this idea has become more and more common. Many analysts have reported that the family no longer performs tasks once entrusted to it—production, education, protection, for example. From these and other data we might conclude that the family is on its way out.

But almost everyone who lives out an average life span enters the married

*Source: William J. Goode, *The Family*, © 1982, pp. 1-14. Reprinted by permission of Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

state. Most eventually have children, who will later do the same. Of the increasing number who divorce, many will hopefully or skeptically marry again. In the Western nations, a higher percentage of people marry than a century ago. Indeed, the total number of years spent within marriage by the average person is higher now than at any previous time in the history of the world. In all known societies, almost everyone lives enmeshed in a network of family rights and obligations. People are taught to accept these rules through a long period of childhood socialization. That is, people come to feel that these family patterns are both right and desirable.

At the present time, human beings appear to get as much joy and sorrow from the family as they always have, and seem as bent as ever on taking part in family life. In most of the world, the traditional family may be shaken, but the institution will probably enjoy a longer life than any nation now in existence. The family does not seem to be a powerful institution, like the military, the church, or the state, but it seems to be the most resistant to conquest, or to the efforts people make to reshape it. Any specific family may appear to be fragile or unstable, but the family system as a whole is tough and resilient.

The Family: Various Views

The intense emotional meaning of family relations for almost everyone has been observed throughout history. Philosophers and social analysts have noted that any society is a structure made up of families linked together. Both travelers and anthropologists often describe the peculiarities of a given society by outlining its family relations.

The earliest moral and ethical writings of many cultures assert the significance of the family. Within those commentaries, the view is often expressed that a society loses its strength if people do not fulfill family obligations. Confucius thought that happiness and prosperity would prevail if everyone would behave “correctly” as a family member. This meant primarily that no one should fail in his filial obligations. That is, the proper relationship between ruler and subjects was like that between a father and his children. The cultural importance of the family is also emphasized in the Old Testament. The books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Proverbs, for example, proclaim the importance of obeying family rules. The earliest codified literature in India, the Rig-Veda, which dates from about the last half of the second millennium B.C., and the Law of Manu, which dates from about the beginning of the Christian era, devote much attention to the family. Poetry, plays, novels, and short stories typically seize upon family relationships as the primary focus of human passion, and their ideas and themes often grow from family conflict. Even the great epic poems of war have subthemes focusing on problems in family relations.¹

From time to time, social analysts and philosophers have presented plans for societies that *might* be created (these are called utopias) in which new family roles (rights and obligations of individual members) are offered as solutions to traditional social problems. Plato's *Republic* is one such attempt. Plato was probably the first to urge the creation of a society in which all members, men

and women alike, would have an equal opportunity to develop their talents to the utmost, and to achieve a position in society solely through merit. Since family patterns in all societies prevent selection based entirely on individual worth, in Plato's utopia the tie between parents and children would play no part, because knowledge of that link would be erased. Approved conception would take place at the same time each year at certain hymeneal festivals; children born out of season would be eliminated (along with those born defective). All children would be taken from their parents at birth and reared by specially designated people.

Experimental or utopian communities like Oneida, the Shakers, the Mormons, and modern communes have typically insisted that changes in family relations were necessary to achieve their goals. Every fundamental political upheaval since the French Revolution of 1789 has offered a program that included profound changes in family relations. Since World War II, most countries of the world have written new constitutions. In perhaps all of them, but especially in all the less developed nations, these new laws have been far more advanced than public opinion in those countries. They have aimed at creating new family patterns more in conformity with the leaders' views of equality and justice, and often antagonistic to traditional family systems. This wide range of commentary, analysis, and political action, over a period of 2,500 years, suggests that throughout history we have been at least implicitly aware of the importance of family patterns as a central element in human societies.

The Central Position of the Family in Society

In most tribal societies, kinship patterns form the major part of the whole social structure. By contrast, the family is only a small part of the social structure of modern industrial societies. It is nevertheless a key element in them, specifically linking individuals with other social institutions, such as the church, the state, or the economy. Indeed modern society, with its complex advanced technology and its highly trained bureaucracy, would collapse without the contributions of this seemingly primitive social agency. The class system, too, including its restrictions on education and opportunity, its high or low social mobility rates, and its initial social placement by birth, is founded on the family.

Most important, it is within the family that the child is first socialized to serve the needs of the society, and not only its own needs. A society will not survive unless its needs are met, such as the production and distribution of commodities, protection of the young and old or the sick and the pregnant, conformity to the law, and so on. Only if individuals are motivated to serve these needs will the society continue to operate, and the foundation for that motivation is laid by the family. Family members also participate in informal social control processes. Socialization at early ages makes most of us wish to conform, but throughout each day, both as children and as adults, we are often tempted to deviate. The formal agencies of social control (such as the police) are not enough to do more than force the extreme deviant to conform. What is needed is a set of social pressures that provide feedback to the individual whenever he or she does well or

poorly and thus support internal controls as well as the controls of the formal agencies. Effectively or not, the family usually takes on this task.

The family, then, is made up of individuals, but it is also a social unit, and part of a larger social network. Families are not isolated, self-enclosed social systems; and the other institutions of society, such as the military, the church, or the school system, continually rediscover that they are not dealing with individuals, but with members of families. Even in the most industrialized and urban of societies, where it is sometimes supposed that people lead rootless and anonymous lives, most people are in continual interaction with other family members. Men and women who achieve high social position usually find that even as adults they still respond to their parents' criticisms, are still angered or hurt by a sibling's scorn. Corporations that offer substantial opportunities to rising executives often find that their proposals are turned down because of objections from family members.

So it is through the family that the society is able to elicit from the individual his or her contributions. The family, in turn, can continue to exist only if it is supported by the larger society. If these two, the smaller and the larger social system, furnish each other the conditions necessary for their survival, they must be interrelated in many important ways.

Preconceptions About the Family

The task of understanding the family presents many difficulties, and one of the greatest barriers is found in ourselves. We are likely to have strong emotions about the family. Because of our own deep involvement in family relationships, objective analysis is not easy. When we read about other types of family behavior, in other classes or societies, we are likely to feel that they are odd or improper. We are tempted to argue that this or that type of family behavior is wrong or right, rather than to analyze it. Second, although we have observed many people in some of their family behavior, usually we have had very limited experience with what goes on behind the walls of other homes. This means that our sample of observations is very narrow. It also means that for almost any generalization we create or read about, we can often find some specific experience that refutes it, or fits it. Since we feel we "already know," we may not feel motivated to look for further data against which to test generalizations.

However, many supposedly well-known beliefs about the family are not well grounded in fact. Others are only partly true and must be studied more precisely if they are to be understood. One such belief is that "children hold the family together." Despite repeated attempts to affirm it, this generalization does not seem to be very strong. A more correct view seems to be that there is a modest association between divorce and not having children, but it is mostly caused by the fact that people who do not become well adjusted, and who may for some reasons be prone to divorce, are also less likely to have children.

Another way of checking whether the findings of family sociology are obvious is to present some research findings, and ask whether it was worth the both-

er of discovering them, since “everybody knew them all along.” Consider the following set of facts. Suppose a researcher had demonstrated these facts. Was it worthwhile to carry out the study, or were the facts already known?

1. Because modern industrial society breaks down traditional family systems, one result is that the age of marriage in Western nations (which was low among farmers) has risen greatly over many generations.
2. Because of the importance of the extended family in China and India, the average size of the household has always been large, with many generations living under one roof.
3. In polygynous societies, most men have several wives, and the fertility rate is higher than in monogamous societies.

Although these statements sound plausible to many people, and impressive arguments have been presented to support them, in fact they are all false. For hundreds of years, the age at marriage among farmers in Western nations has been relatively high (25–27 years), and though it rises and falls somewhat over time, there seems to be no important trend in any particular direction. With reference to multifamily households, every survey of Chinese and Indian households has shown that even generations ago they were relatively modest in size (from four to six persons, varying by region and time period). Only under special historical circumstances will large, extended households be common. As to polygyny, the fact is that except under special circumstances, almost all men in all societies must be content with only one wife, and the fertility rate of polygynous marriages (one man married to several wives) is lower than that for monogamous marriages. Thus we see that with reference to the incorrect findings just cited, common beliefs did require testing, and they were wrong.

On the other hand, of course, many popular beliefs about how families work *are* correct. We cannot assume their correctness, however. Instead, we have to examine our observations, and make studies on our own to see how well these data fit in order to improve our understanding of the dynamics of family processes in our own or in other societies. If we emphasize the problems of obtaining facts, we should not lose sight of the central truth of any science: vast quantities of figures may be entirely meaningless, unless the search is guided by fruitful hypotheses or broad conceptions of social behavior. What we seek is organized facts, a structure of propositions, in which theory and fact illuminate one another. If we do not seek actual observation, we are engaged in blind speculation. If we seek facts without theoretical guidance, our search is random and often yields findings that have no bearing on anything. Understanding the family, then, requires the same sort of careful investigation as any other scientific endeavor.

Why the Family Is Theoretically Significant

Because the family is so much taken for granted, we do not often stop to consider the many traits that make it theoretically interesting. A brief consideration