

# MARRIAGES *and* FAMILIES



NIJOLE V. BENOKRAITIS

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# *Marriages and Families*

*Changes, Choices, and Constraints*



*Nijole V. Benokraitis*

University of Baltimore



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# *Marriages and Families*



This book is dedicated to my children, Andrius  
and Gema, and to my nieces and nephews—  
Paulius Gotceitas, Julija Gotceitas Ward,  
and Alina, Dainius, and Nida Vaicaitis

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# About the Author

Nijole V. Benokraitis was born in Lithuania and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was six years old. She received her bachelor's degree from Emmanuel College, her master's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana, and her doctorate in sociology from the University of Texas at Austin.

Professor Benokraitis is coauthor of *Modern Sexism: Blatant, Subtle, and Covert Sex Discrimination* (Prentice Hall; also translated into Japanese by Motoko Chiba of the International Buddhist University) and *Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity: Action, Inaction, and Reaction* (Westview Press) and is coeditor of *Seeing Ourselves: Classical, Contemporary, and Cross-Cultural Readings in Sociology* (Prentice Hall). She has also published numerous articles and book chapters on institutional racism, discrimination against women in the federal government, subtle sex discrimination, fathers in two-earner families, displaced homemakers, and family policy.

The recipient of grants and fellowships from numerous institutions, including the National Institutes of Mental Health, The Ford Foundation, the American Educational Research Association, the Administration on Aging and the National Endowment for the Humanities, Professor Benokraitis has also received faculty research

awards at the University of Baltimore. She has for some time served as a consultant in the area of sex and race discrimination to women's commissions, business groups, colleges and universities, and programs of the federal government.

Currently a professor of sociology at the University of Baltimore, Nijole Benokraitis has served as the chair and graduate program director of the Sociology Department and has chaired numerous university committees. For a number of years she has also been a faculty advisor to Alpha Kappa Delta, the sociological honor society, and the Sociology Club.

Although Professor Benokraitis teaches many subjects within the discipline of sociology, her favorite courses are Marriage and the Family, Racial and Ethnic Relations, Gender Roles, and Introductory Sociology. A strong proponent of applied sociology, she requires her students to study subjects such as sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and family interaction processes through direct observation, interviews, and other methods of data collection. She also enlists her students in community service activities such as tutoring inner-city high school students and writing to government officials and other decision makers about social problems.

# Preface

As this book goes to press, one of the “hot” political issues in the 1992 Presidential campaign is family values. The credibility of Bill Clinton, the Democratic candidate, has suffered from accusations of marital infidelity. Ross Perot, the independent candidate who left the race during the Democratic convention, said that one of the major problems confronting the family is single-parent households and that extramarital affairs among top Cabinet members could not be tolerated. Dan Quayle, speaking for the Bush administration, denounced the television character Murphy Brown for setting a bad example by being a single mother and having a child out of wedlock. Finally, President George Bush has steadfastly supported legislation to overturn current abortion laws because he believes that they undermine family values. Although some of this is campaign rhetoric, controversies fueled by current changes, choices, and constraints that affect family decision making will undoubtedly continue as we move closer to the twenty-first century.

*Marriages and Families: Changes, Choices, and Constraints* is designed to provide students with a comprehensive introduction to marriage and family issues. Although the approach of the book is sociological, the text incorporates materials from other disciplines such as history, economics, political science, psychology, law, and anthropology. Moreover, the research that supports the text—much of it from the 1990s—encompasses both quantitative and qualitative studies. Analyses based on studies that provide national, representative, longitudinal data are amplified and made more vivid by the insights from clinical, case, and observational studies and in-depth interviews.



## IMPORTANT THEMES AND ISSUES

There are several ways in which this textbook differs from other marriage and family texts. It balances theory with practice; it takes account of con-

straints on people's choices; it explores the diversity of modern families; it highlights important recent changes in North American society such as the growth in the older segment of the population; and it uses cross-cultural comparisons to encourage creative thinking about crucial issues that confront all modern societies.

## Theory versus Practice

This book balances theoretical perspectives with practical applications. Boxed inserts in particular illustrate theoretical discussions with accounts of the everyday behavior of families. Many examples in both the text and the boxed material are taken from media sources—such as television series, talk shows, commercials, and recent movies—that are familiar to most college students. These examples should encourage students to think critically about popular portrayals of the family and thus to keep the media's influence in perspective.

## Choices versus Constraints

Although it is important to recognize individual-level choices, this textbook also emphasizes macro-level constraints on the choices and behaviors of family members. Students should be aware that marriages and families are influenced by formal organizations, demographic changes, and institutional patterns within political, economic, religious, and military systems. Because modern families confront and will continue to encounter fairly dramatic—often traumatic—changes, I have tried to frame discussions of individual choice within the larger picture of institutional changes and constraints.

## Family Diversity

Another major theme of this book is the diversity among today's families. Discussions of



gender roles, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference are incorporated throughout the book. As a growing body of literature shows, the traditional white, middle-class, one-paycheck family is no longer the norm. Instead, marriages and families vary greatly in terms of structure, dynamics, and cultural heritage. Nevertheless, many people still compare themselves to such mythical middle-class families as the Nelsons ("Ozzie and Harriet"), the Cleavers ("Leave it to Beaver"), and the Huxtables ("The Bill Cosby Show") and feel somehow shortchanged. Thus, this book repeatedly emphasizes and illustrates family diversity.

### Recent Structural Changes

Several chapters, unique to this text, focus on important changes that are sweeping across American society. For example, Chapter 13 is devoted exclusively to racial-ethnic families. This chapter examines the diversity both across and within contemporary African-American, Native-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American marriages and families. Chapter 18 discusses the ways in which the rapid "graying of America" has affected grandparenting, care giving, and family relations in general. Chapter 19 analyzes the effects on the family of some major social policies and, based on projections of demographers and policy analysts, speculates about the future of the American family.

### Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Another theme to which I give special emphasis is the comparison of North American marriages and families to those of other cultures. Although our world has been shrinking rapidly, too often students assume that the American model is "normal" or even inevitable. Discussions of families in other cultures—both in the text and in boxed materials—have been developed to expand students' pools of cultural knowledge and to encourage them to think more creatively and reflectively about their assumptions and interpretations of family structures and processes.

## PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

A number of features have been designed to capture students' attention and interest and to enable students to understand and recall the material pre-

sented. Although each of these features is of equal importance, the boxed materials in particular reinforce the important themes of change and choice versus constraint.

### Chapter Objectives

Each chapter opens with a set of chapter objectives that target some of the critical issues covered in the chapter. These objectives are intended to help students focus their reading and review the material in each chapter more effectively.

### Important Concepts

Important terms and concepts are boldfaced and defined in the text, and are also listed at the end of each chapter and defined in the glossary at the end of the book. These definitions are particularly important in familiarizing students with the important terms and concepts that sociologists use in analyzing marriages and families.

### Boxed Inserts

Each chapter includes one or more boxes that illustrate or expand on the material in the text. There are five types of boxes.

**Changes** "Changes" boxes show how marriages and families have been changing or are expected to change in the future. Some of these discussions are historical or anecdotal; others are based on large-scale research studies. These materials challenge some common myths and encourage students to think seriously about the ways that the family has changed: For example, an account of what it is like to be a woman in Saudi Arabia suggests that some women in male-dominated, Near Eastern countries are trying to change their status.

**Choices** "Choices" boxes illustrate the kinds of decisions families can make to improve relations within the family. These discussions offer suggestions from family counselors or other practitioners, and highlight options that family members sometimes do not realize they have. For example, a description of gender-neutral parenting advises couples on how to raise children in a non-sexist way.

**Constraints** "Constraints" boxes illustrate some of the macro-level, demographic, and institutional obstacles that often limit the choices that

individual people can make. These boxes underline the fact that although most of us are raised to believe that we can do whatever we want, in fact, most of us are greatly influenced by institutional impediments. For example, an examination of the ten biggest myths about the African-American family reveals some of the stereotypes that African Americans confront every day.

**Cross-Cultural** “Cross-Cultural” boxes provide examples of the cultural diversity and the richness of family structure and dynamics in societies around the world. Many of these discussions challenge our stereotypes about other countries as well as our notion that marriages and families in the United States are typical of those in other countries. For example, one discussion contrasts dating American style with arranged courtship in India.

**Critical Issues** “Critical Issues” boxes focus on emerging or unsolved problems that many families face today or will probably grapple with in the future, such as changing interpersonal relationships and opposing points of view on controversial issues. For example, a discussion of elder abuse examines the factors contributing to the increase in abuse of the elderly by their caretakers.

### End-of-Chapter Materials

At the end of each chapter are a summary, a list of the chapter’s key terms, a set of critical thinking questions, and a collection of suggested readings. The *summary* presents a synopsis of the chapter’s main ideas. The *key terms* list, which includes the number of the page on which each term appears, gives students a quick and easy reference to the important concepts explained in the chapter. Together, the objective statements at the beginning of each chapter and the summaries and key terms at the end of each chapter are designed to help students organize their study sessions and review the material they have read.

The *questions* encourage students to think critically about the information in the chapter and to apply this material to their own experience. These questions are effective springboards for class discussions. They can also be used for short written assignments or as short-essay exam questions. The *suggested readings* are carefully selected lists of books and articles for students who seek more information on particular topics. Many en-

tries are scholarly books or journal articles, but the lists also include self-help titles, contributions by well-known journalists, and popular books that have elicited recent public debates on marriage and family issues.

### Appendices

The book’s seven appendices offer technical and practical information on a number of important topics, including sexual anatomy (Appendix A), contraceptive methods (Appendix C), and the characteristics and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (Appendix D). One appendix (B), on the sexual revolution, provides students with a historical summary of the important events that undergird many of the topics discussed in Chapter 4, on gender roles, and Chapters 6 and 7, on sexuality and sexual expression.



### ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

An overview of important marriage and family issues is offered by the first part of this book, on “Marriage and the Family in Perspective.” The three chapters in this part examine some long-held myths about the family, explore significant theoretical and methodological ways of studying the family, and contrast aspects of family life that have changed over time with those that have remained relatively stable, focusing particularly on the early experiences of European immigrants and people of color.

In the second part of the book, on “The Individual and the Developing Relationship,” I explore the ways in which men and women experience love and sexuality, from infancy through old age. Four chapters discuss the evolution of gender roles throughout the life course; the ways in which love develops and, sometimes, changes over time; and the means by which we learn to be sexual and to express our sexuality.

“Individual and Marital Commitments,” the third part of the book, focuses on micro-level and macro-level variables that influence when, whom, and whether we will marry. The three chapters in this part discuss some of the problems people encounter in the dating-mating game; the many contemporary alternative lifestyles, such as cohabitation and gay and lesbian relationships; and some of the joys and tribulations of married life, particularly as affected by marital communication.

The decision to have children and the broad range of parent-child relationships are the subject of the fourth part of this book, on "Parents and Children." Three chapters examine pregnancy within and outside of marriage as well as the decision not to parent; reproductive technologies for infertile couples; child-rearing pleasures and problems; varying parenting styles; and the dynamics of racial-ethnic families, including the pervasive discrimination that African-American, Native-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American families encounter.

"Conflicts and Crises," the fifth part of the book, deals with some of the major economic and interpersonal problems that families confront today. Three chapters discuss the effects on family dynamics of women's increasing participation in the labor force and the now-common two-pay-check family arrangement; the characteristics, causes, and effects of abuse within the family—of spouses, children, and the elderly; health-related issues such as AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, eating disorders, and suicide; and the effects on family members of separation and divorce.

Several recent changes in family life and social policy and some speculation as to how the family will fare in the future are the topics covered in "Changes and Transitions," the last part of this book. The three chapters in this part explore the dynamics of remarriage and stepfamily life; the meaning for such tasks as grandparenting, care giving, and coping with death posed by the continuing growth of the older segment of our population; and such prospects for the family in the twenty-first century as greater racial and ethnic diversity, improvements in reproductive technologies, policy making with regard to child care and parental leave, and the competition for scarce resources.

## SUPPLEMENTS

We have prepared an excellent package of supplementary materials for use with this textbook. Of particular interest to instructors will be the ABC News/Prentice Hall Video Library, suggestions for the use of which are included in the *Instructor's Resource Manual*. And students will find the free *Study Tips* a helpful guide to learning the materials presented not only in this textbook but also in many others.

***Instructor's Resource Manual*** This manual provides learning objectives, chapter outlines, teaching tips, suggestions for classroom activities, questions for class discussion or written assignments, and lists of audiovisual and software resources. It also provides a guide to the use of the ABC News/Prentice Hall Video Library.

***Test Item File*** This test bank contains over 1500 multiple-choice, true-false, and essay questions. Questions are page-referenced to the text.

***Prentice Hall Test Manager*** This software program, available on 3.5" and 5.25" IBM diskettes, includes a test-generating system and a grading program with scanning features.



***ABC News/Prentice Hall Video Library: Marriages and Families*** This collection of video clips from such award-winning ABC News programs as "Nightline," "20/20," and "American Agenda" brings chapter concepts to life by demonstrating their application to significant issues of current interest. Suggestions for relating specific clips to particular chapters and topics are offered in the *Instructor's Resource Manual*.

***Transparency Masters*** Taken from tables, graphs, and charts in the text and from other sources as well, these transparency masters offer an effective means of amplifying lecture topics.

***Study Guide*** This student guide offers chapter outlines and summaries, definitions of key concepts, self tests, and applied exercises for each chapter in the book.

***Study Tips*** This useful essay, which appears in both the *Study Guide* and the *Instructor's Manual*, is a guide to effective studying. It discusses such things as establishing a study routine and prioritizing study materials, and describes how to take good class notes, how to read a textbook, and how to test yourself and review as you read.

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Nijole V. Benokraitis  
University of Baltimore

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