Diversity in Families

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PEARSON
We dedicate this book to the teachers, students, and scholars who are rethinking family life to meet the challenges of the diverse and changing social world.
brief contents

1 Images, Ideals, and Myths 1
2 Preindustrial Families and the Emergence of a Modern Family Form 27
3 The Historical Making of Family Diversity 53
4 Families and the New Economic Realities 83
5 Families and Demographic Trends: The New Immigration and the Aging of Society 106
6 Class, Race, and Gender 136
7 Meshing the Worlds of Work and Family 180
8 The Social Construction of Intimacy 216
9 Contemporary Marriage 252
10 Parents and Children 288
11 Violence in Families 332
12 Divorce and Remarriage 367
13 Emergent Families in the Global Era 402
14 Family Policy for the Twenty-First Century 435
# Images, Ideals, and Myths

## Images and Ideals
- Family as Haven
- Family as Fulfillment
- Family as Encumbrance

## Images and Reality
- The Mythical U.S. Family
  - The Myth of a Stable and Harmonious Family of the Past
  - The Myth of Separate Worlds
  - The Myth of the Monolithic Family Form
  - The Myth of a Unified Family Experience
  - The Myth of Family Consensus
  - The Myth of Family Decline as the Cause of Social Problems

## A New Framework for Understanding Families
- The Sociological Perspective
- The Paradigm Shift in Family Studies
- The Structural Diversity Approach

## Additional Features of This Book
- Chapter Review
- Key Terms
- Related Websites
- Media Resources

# Preindustrial Families and the Emergence of a Modern Family Form

## Family and the New Social History
- What Is “New” About Family History?
- Overview of Family History Themes

## Family Life in Colonial America
- Agricultural Communities and Families
- Family Structure and Household Composition
- Wives and Husbands
- Children

## The Emergence of Modern Family Life
- Industrialization and Families
- Agency, Adaptation, and Change
- Household Size and Composition
- Wives and Husbands
- Children
- Challenging a Uniform Definition of the Family

## Chapter Review
- Key Terms
- Related Websites
- Media Resources
6 Class, Race, and Gender  136
Class, Race, and Gender as Structural Inequalities  137
Class  140
The Cultural Approach  141 ■ The Structural Approach  144
Race  153
Gender  172
The Traditional Gender Roles Approach  173 ■ Shortcomings of the Gender Roles Approach  173 ■ The Family as a Gendered Institution  174
Chapter Review  176
Key Terms  177
Related Websites  177
Media Resources  179

7 Meshing the Worlds of Work and Family  180
The Changing Work Patterns of Women, Men, and Teens  182
Women’s Employment  183 ■ Men’s Employment  187 ■ Teens’ Employment  188
Integrating Work and Family  190
Diverse Work–Family Contexts  191 ■ Gender Inequality  191 ■ Work Characteristics  193 ■ Family Characteristics  200
Invisible and Unpaid Family Work  203
Gendered Labor in the Household  203 ■ Other Forms of Family Work  206
Coping with Work and Family  207
Family Coping Strategies  207 ■ Family-Supportive Government and Employer Responses  209
Chapter Review  214
Key Terms  214
Related Websites  215
Media Resources  215

8 The Social Construction of Intimacy  216
Intimacy in Social Context  218
Heterosexual Mate Selection and Intimate Partnering  219
Variations in “Dating” Practices  223 ■ Factors in Mate Selection  226 ■ Structural Influences on Mate Selection  227
Changing Sexual Behavior  228
Society and Sexuality  228 ■ Enlarging the Sexuality Frame  229 ■ The Sexual Revolution  230 ■ Scientific Research on Sexuality  231 ■ AIDS  233 ■ Teen Sexuality  234 ■ Teenage Childbearing  236
Differentiated Forms of Intimacy  239
Gendered Love and Sex  240 ■ Same-Sex Orientation and Intimacy  243 ■ Social Class and Intimacy  245 ■ Race and Intimacy  246 ■ Claiming Control of Intimacy  248
Chapter Review  249
Key Terms  250
Related Websites  250
Media Resources  251
9 Contemporary Marriage 252

Marriage: Private and Public Spheres 254
The Private Nature of Marriage 254 • Macro Influences on Marriage 255

Recent Trends 259
Unmarried Adults 259 • Age at First Marriage 261 • Family Size 262 • Interracial or Interethnic Marriages 262 • Life Span and Marriage 264

Are There Benefits to Marriage? 265
The Benefits of Marriage 266 • The Benefits of Marriage Reconsidered 267

Micro Aspects of Marriage 270
Marital Success 271 • Communication in Marriage 275 • The Sexual Relationship in Marriage 277 • Power and Decision-Making in Marriage 279

Reconstructing Gender Roles: Building an Egalitarian Marriage 283

The Future of Marriage: Changing or Dying? 284

Chapter Review 285
Key Terms 286
Related Websites 286
Media Resources 287

10 Parents and Children 288

The Social Construction of Parenting 290
The Social Construction of Childhood 293

Demographic Patterns 297
Fertility 297 • Voluntary Childlessness 301 • Infertility and New Technologies 302 • Delayed Childbearing 304 • Family Composition 304

The Impact of Children on Marriage 311
The Transition to Parenthood 311 • The Benefits of Parenthood 312 • The Costs of Parenthood 313 • Gendered Parenting 314

The Impact of Parents on Children and of Children on Parents 316

The Structure of the Family Embedded in a Larger Network of Influences 317
Family Structure 317 • The Economy 320 • Social Class and Life Chances 321 • Extramilial Factors 323

Parental Time with Children 323
Parents and Children in Dual-Earner Families 324
Maternal Employment and Time with Children 325 • Social Supports for Working Parents 325

Single Parents and Their Children 326

REPRISE: The Duality of Parenting 328

Chapter Review 328
Key Terms 329
Related Websites 329
Media Resources 331
11 Violence in Families 332

Families in a Violent Society 335
- U.S. Violence Rates in Comparative Perspective 335
- Institutionally Sanctioned Violence 335
- Violence in the Media 336
- Customs and Beliefs 338
- Violence and the Social Organization of the Family 339

Intimate Partner Violence 339
- Violence Against Women in Heterosexual Relationships 341
- Contexts for Intimate Partner Violence 341
- Types of Partner Violence 344
- Does She Leave or Stay? 347
- Domestic Violence in Same-Sex Relationships 349

Child Abuse and Neglect 350
- What Is Child Abuse? 351
- Incidence of Child Abuse 351
- Contexts for Child Abuse 353
- Consequences of Child Abuse 355

Incest 356
- Incidence of Incest 357
- Explanations for Incest 357
- Consequences of Incest 358

Sibling Abuse 359

Elder Abuse 359
- What Is Elder Abuse? 359
- Incidence of Elder Abuse 360
- Contexts for Elder Abuse 361

Macro and Micro Linkages 362

Agency 362
- The Women’s Movement 363
- The Battered Women’s Shelter Movement 363
- Assessing Progress 363

Chapter Review 364

Key Terms 365

Related Websites 365

Media Resources 366

12 Divorce and Remarriage 367

Divorce Rates 369
- Trends in Divorce 369
- Factors Correlated with Divorce 369

Predicting the Future Divorce Rate: Up or Down? 377

The Consequences of Divorce for Spouses and Children 379
- “His” Divorce 380
- “Her” Divorce 380
- Adjustment After Divorce for Ex-Spouses 383
- Children and Divorce 384

Remarriage After Divorce 389
- Statistical Facts About Remarriage 390
- The Uniqueness of Remarriage 392
- The Outcomes for Stepchildren 396
- The Special Case of Remarriage Among the Elderly 397

The Politics of Divorce 398
- Is Marriage a Failed Institution? 399

Chapter Review 400

Key Terms 400

Related Websites 401

Media Resources 401
13 Emergent Families in the Global Era 402

The Rise in New Family Arrangements 404
- Families in Transition 404
- The Global Revolution in Family Life 406
- How to Think About Family Diversification 407

Single Life 409
- The Singles Population 410
- Gender, Race, and Class 411
- Experiencing Single Life 412

Heterosexual Cohabitation 413
- The Rise of Cohabitation 414
- Who Are Cohabitors? 415
- Gender, Class, and Race 416
- Cohabitation: Prelude to Marriage, Substitute for Marriage, and Still Evolving 417

Same-Sex Partners and Families 419
- Who Is Gay and What Are Gay Families? 420
- Gay Couples and Families 421
- A Shifting Social Context for Same-Sex Partners 425

Families Separated by Time and Space 426
- Transnational Families 426
- Commuter Marriages and Other Long-Distance Relationships 429

Chapter Review 432
Key Terms 433
Related Websites 433
Media Resources 434

14 Family Policy for the Twenty-First Century 435

The Ideological Fault Lines 438
- The Social Conservatives 438
- The Progressives 440

The Government’s Limits on the Definition of Marriage 442

The Government and Reproductive Rights 443
- Contraceptives 443
- Abortion 445

Welfare 448
- The Shrinking Welfare State 449
- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 449
- The Conservative Solution: Marriage 453
- The Progressive Solution: A Stronger Safety Net 455

Working Parents 457
- Parental Leave 457
- Child Care 458
- Work-Related Policies and Gender Inequality 460

Meeting the Needs of Disadvantaged Children 460
- Poor Children at Risk 461
- The Societal Response to Disadvantaged Children 462
- Funding Programs to Help Disadvantaged Children 467

Principles to Guide Family Policy: An Immodest Proposal 467

Chapter Review 470
Key Term 471
Related Websites 471
Media Resources 472

Glossary 473
Bibliography 481
Credits 527
Name Index 000
Subject Index 000
Themes of the Book

The tenth edition of *Diversity in Families* reflects the critical tradition of family sociologists, economists, and historians whose scholarship is structuralist, feminist, and humanist. Several assumptions guide our inquiry. To begin, the understanding of families requires that we demythologize the family, the most myth-laden of all our social institutions. We must separate, for example, the reality of how families are structured from the ideal images of “the family” that are commonly portrayed. The demythologizing of the family also requires that we examine the diversity of contemporary families.

An important aspect of our focus is the critical examination of society. We ask questions such as “How do families really work?” and “Who benefits under the existing arrangements and who does not?” This critical stance is based on the assumption that the social world is humanly made and therefore not sacred. Thus a keen sociological analysis demystifies social life by ferreting out existing myths, stereotypes, and dogmas. This means, for example, that families must be examined not only from middle-class, White, male viewpoints, which dominated the scholarly study of the family in the past. Several bodies of new scholarship are considered throughout this book to show how family organization and experience vary by social class, gender, race, and sexuality.

Conventional research and public policy have long treated families as closed units that can be understood in isolation from outside influences. In sharp contrast, this book assumes that families are not the “building blocks of society” but are, rather, the products of social forces within society. The material conditions of people’s lives, for example, shape attitudes, behaviors, and family patterns. The structure of a society’s economy affects which family members work outside the home, the lifestyles of family members, how material needs are met, the opportunities for children, and even how the labor and decision-making will be divided. Clearly, too, the economic rewards of occupations are key determinants in family diversity.

Contemporary patterns of social inequality influence family formation and family relations. Wealth, race, gender, and sexuality produce diverse family forms and household arrangements. Economic conditions and social inequities in the United States make family life difficult. This does not mean that families cannot be warm and loving places but rather that structural conditions sometimes preclude this ideal. In short, these structural arrangements produce a range of family configurations. Important in our view is that differences are the consequence of structured social inequality rather than the result of family values. This structural perspective does not mean, however, that we ascribe to a rigid structural determinism. There is a dialectic between social structure and human response. Family members do not simply respond to their changing situations. To the contrary, people are agents and actors, coping with, adapting to, and changing social structures to meet their needs. Women, men, and children actively produce their family worlds. This process is called human agency. We stress both social structure and human agency in this book.

This examination of families also assumes that they must be understood in historical context. What happens to families today is a continuation of what has been happening to them over time.

The Framework

Several organizing principles guide the analysis of families in this new edition. We call this framework “structural diversity.” It differs from functionalism, the dominant paradigm of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Functionalism posited a monolithic model of the family, in which the nuclear family was viewed as the basis of societal organization and cohesion. The nuclear family was considered essential for the proper socialization of children and for the division of labor that enabled women and men to perform their social roles in an orderly manner. Families that deviated from the standard arrangement were thought to be deficient.

The structural-diversity approach challenges the old paradigm on every dimension. Our framework views all families in society as shaped through their interaction with social structures. We explore the close connections between the inner dynamics of family life and the structural forces that shape all families, albeit in different ways. As an example, this edition includes a new chapter on how families are affected by changing economic forces in the United States and the world.

Our coverage of the nation’s various family arrangements is not simply for cultural appreciation. We want to understand why families are diverse.
To summarize, the structural-diversity framework incorporates the following themes (these are elaborated more fully in Chapter 1):

1. Families are socially constructed and historically changing.
2. Family diversity is produced by the same structures that organize society as a whole.
3. Families are embedded in and shaped by interconnected systems of race, class, and gender.
4. Family diversity is constructed through social structure as well as the actions of family members.
5. Understanding families means challenging monolithic ideas that conceive of the family in idealistic ways.

**Other Features of the Text**

The demythologizing of families is a central theme. To draw students into each topic, chapters begin with common myths about families, many of which students may believe, and contrast these myths with reality. The chapters themselves are clearly organized and written, with many examples of contemporary interest to bolster the analysis. Boxed features focus students’ attention on key concepts and trends:

1. **Inside the Worlds of Diverse Families** looks inside microstructural worlds to put a human face on some of the rhythms, textures, and conflicts of everyday family life.
2. **Researching Families** presents the main approaches and methods sociologists use in their studies.
3. **Families in Global Perspective** offers an international view of families, with selected illustrations that have both global and domestic implications.
4. **Technology and the Family** explores the effects of new technologies on different features of family experience.
5. **Emergent Family Trends** provides a look at new family patterns and the meaning they have for future families.
6. **Think About This** encourages students to think critically about family issues especially pertinent to them.

Chapter reviews summarize the main points to help students assimilate the material. And finally, photographs, drawings, and cartoons illustrate many of the ideas and concepts in the text. Relevant websites have been added at the conclusion of each chapter.

**New to This Edition**

Just as families are socially constructed, so, too, is the scholarship on families. As society experiences major “earthquakes,” social science thinking about families is undergoing “seismic shifts” as well. These new intellectual developments have required major revisions of the previous edition. Most significantly, we have sharpened the focus on the macro and micro and emphasized human agency in the analysis. We have added a new chapter on how families are affected by the structural transformation of the economy, globalization, and the Great Recession (Chapter 4). Each chapter has been reorganized to make the themes of the book more explicit. Each chapter includes material on demythologizing, macro (societal forces) impinging on the micro (families), diversity in families, and human agency.

**Supplements**

**INSTRUCTOR’S RESOURCE MANUAL AND TEST BANK (ISBN 0205936490)**

For each chapter in the text, this valuable resource provides learning objectives; chapter outline and overview; classroom activities and projects; and video and film suggestions. The Test Bank consists of true/false, multiple choice, and essay/discussion questions. The Instructor’s Resource Manual and Test Bank is available to adopters at www.pearsonhighered.com.

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Acknowledgments

We thank Alan Zinn, the picture editor, whose skills and creativity bring life and diversity to our approach. Maxine Baca Zinn thanks Paula Miller of Michigan State University for research assistance. We also thank the following reviewers whose contributions to the preparation of this edition were extremely helpful: Ali Kamali, Missouri Western State University; Michelle Melendres, Mount St. Mary’s College, Los Angeles; Brenda S. Zicha, Mott Community College, Flint, MI; Erica Hunter, University of Albany; Romana Pires, San Bernardino Valley College; and Kathleen O’Rourke, Eastern Illinois University.

Finally, we wish to thank our special colleagues and friends who have influenced our thinking—Margaret L. Andersen, Elizabeth Higginbotham, Kathryn D. Talley, and Doug A. Timmer.

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D. Stanley Eitzen
Barbara Wells
Family diversity at the present has become the norm in America. The issues of family diversity have been discussed by various people in various media. A common source of such information is found in Journals with various scholars expressing their view through articles or publishing their research findings. Kataoka, Y., Merle, R., & Clementina, M. (2004).