

Diversity in Families



TENTH EDITION

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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.



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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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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. On common source of such information is found on Journals with various scholars expressing their view through articles or publishing their research findings. Kataoka, Y. , Merle, R. & Clementina, M. (2004).