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.
b r i e f  c o n t e n t s

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
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Images, Ideals, and Myths</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images and Ideals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as Haven</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as Fulfillment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encumbrance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images and Reality</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mythical U.S. Family</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of a Stable and Harmonious Family of the Past</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of Separate Worlds</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of the Monolithic Family Form</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of a Unified Family Experience</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of Family Consensus</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of Family Decline as the Cause of Social Problems</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A New Framework for Understanding Families</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sociological Perspective</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Paradigm Shift in Family Studies</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Structural Diversity Approach</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Features of This Book</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Review</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Terms</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Websites</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Resources</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Preindustrial Families and the Emergence of a Modern Family Form</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and the New Social History</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is “New” About Family History?</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Family History Themes</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Life in Colonial America</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Communities and Families</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure and Household Composition</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives and Husbands</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergence of Modern Family Life</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialization and Families</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency, Adaptation, and Change</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size and Composition</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives and Husbands</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging a Uniform Definition of the Family</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Review</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Terms</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Websites</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Resources</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

### 3 The Historical Making of Family Diversity  53

- Industrialization and Family Life 55
  - New Work Arrangements 56
  - Work and Family in Industrial Society 56
  - Accordion Households 62
- Immigration and Family Life 63
  - The Social Breakdown Perspective 64
  - Industrial Work and Immigrant Families 65
- Racial Control and Family Life 67
  - New Thinking About Minority Families 67
  - Race, Labor, and Family Life 69
  - African American Families in Slavery and Freedom 71
  - Chicano Families in the Southwest 76
- The Great Depression and Family Change 78

Chapter Review 80

Key Terms 81

Related Websites 81

Media Resources 82

### 4 Families and the New Economic Realities  83

- The Structural Transformation of the Economy 84
  - Globalization 85
  - From Manufacturing to Services 86
  - The Changing Nature of Jobs and Compensation 88
- The Great Recession and Its Aftermath 90
  - Prelude to the Economic Crisis 90
  - The Economic Crisis 91
  - Downward Social Mobility 94
- Consequences of the Great Recession for Families 97
  - Marriage 97
  - Fertility 97
  - Children at Risk 98
  - Divorce 98
  - Shifting Family Forms 99
  - Underground Economy 100
  - Shrinking Consumption 101

Chapter Review 103

Key Terms 104

Related Websites 104

Media Resources 105

### 5 Families and Demographic Trends: The New Immigration and the Aging of Society  106

- The New Immigration and the Changing Racial-Ethnic Landscape 107
  - Immigration Patterns 108
  - Structural Diversity of Immigrant Families 112
  - The Effects of Immigration on Immigrant Families 116
  - Immigration and Agency 118
  - The Effects of Immigration on Family Dynamics 118
  - The New Second Generation 122
  - Elderly Immigrants 122
- The Aging of Society 123
  - The Demographics of an Aging Society 123
  - The Consequences of an Aging Society on Families and the Elderly 125
  - Role Transitions 129
  - Responses by the Elderly: Human Agency 131
  - The Two Demographic Transformations of Society 132

Chapter Review 133

Key Terms 134

Related Websites 134

Media Resources 135
# 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

- Racial-Ethnic Families 156
- Structural Inequalities and Racial-Ethnic Families 157
- African American Families in the Twenty-First Century 162
- Latino Families in the Twenty-First Century 168
- More Racial-Ethnic Diversity in Families: Asians, Native Americans, and Middle Easterners 170
- Human Agency and Family Formation 171

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 Sexual Behavior 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
Contents

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
Contents

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 how 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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