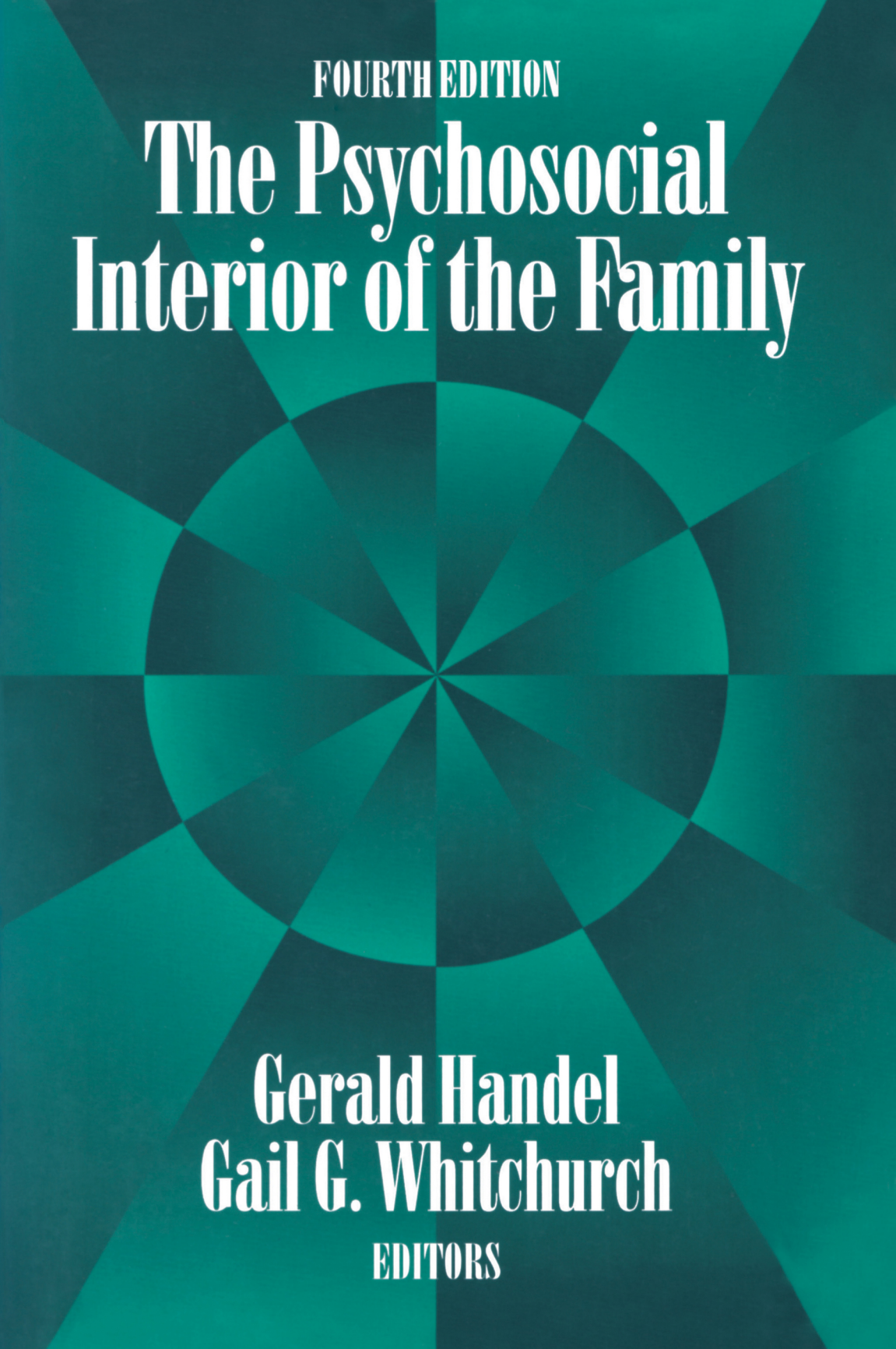
FOURTH EDITION

The Psychosocial Interior of the Family



Gerald Handel
Gail G. Whitchurch
EDITORS

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERIOR OF THE FAMILY

Fourth Edition

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERIOR OF THE FAMILY

Fourth Edition

Gerald Handel and Gail G. Whitchurch
Editors

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

About the Editors

Gerald Handel is Professor of Sociology at The City College and Graduate School, City University of New York. He is author/coauthor/editor of many volumes, among them: *Childhood Socialization* (Aldine); *Qualitative Methods in Family Research; The Apple Sliced: Sociological Studies of New York City; Social Welfare in Western Society*; and *The Child and Society: The Process of Socialization*. Dr. Handel is former Associate Editor of *Journal of Marriage and the Family*.

Gail Whitchurch is Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis. Her writings on family communication and on systems theory have been published in edited volumes and in professional journals. Dr. Whitchurch received her Ph.D. in Family Studies from the University of Delaware, and her M.A. in Speech Communications from the University of Minnesota.

First published 1994 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The psychosocial interior of the family / Gerald Handel and Gail G. Whitchurch, editors. — 4th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 0-202-30493-0 (cloth : alk. paper). — ISBN 0-202-30494-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Family. 2. Social psychology. I. Handel, Gerald. II. Whitchurch, Gail G.
HQ728.P76 1994
306.85—dc20 94-18176
CIP

ISBN 13: 978-0-202-30494-6 (pbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-202-30493-9 (hbk)

To the memory of my parents, Pearl Seidman Handel and Louis Handel and for Ruth, Jonathan, and Michael J. Handel.

G.H.

To my family. My family of procreation: my husband and friend, Rick Dargatz, and our children, Sarah E. Whitchurch Dargatz and Egan L. Whitchurch Dargatz. My family of origin, especially my parents, Marilyn Herfindahl Whitchurch and David Charles Whitchurch—who taught their daughters as well as their son that they could be anything they wanted to be.

And to my great-aunt Myrtle Whitchurch Mikkelson and the memories of three other women who influenced my life: Ida Swanberg Herfindahl, Augusta Bengtsson Ice, and Florence Ice Feser. And especially for the memory of my grandmother Elizabeth (Betty) Ice (Whitchurch) Misbach, who raised David Charlie and his siblings during the 1930s and early 1940s, a time when few people thought much about single-parent families.

G.G.W.

Contents

List of Contributors

Alison Alexander	Department of Telecommunications University of Georgia
Elijah Anderson	Department of Sociology University of Pennsylvania
Linda A. Bennett	Department of Anthropology Memphis State University
Peter Berger	Department of Sociology Boston University
Anni Bergman	Department of Psychology The City College, City University of New York
Arthur P. Bochner	Department of Communication University of South Florida
Raymond Buriel	Department of Psychology Pomona College
Francesca M. Cancian	Department of Sociology University of California, Irvine
Samuel Q. Chan	University Affiliated Program Children's Hospital of Los Angeles
Joy Charlton	Department of Sociology Swarthmore College
Kenneth N. Cissna	Department of Communication University of South Florida
Dennis E. Cox	Department of Counseling Trinity College of Florida

Kerry J. Daly — Department of Family Studies, University of Guelph, Ontario

Marjorie L. DeVault — Department of Sociology, Syracuse University

Diane Ehrensaft — Department of Psychology, The Wright Institute, Berkeley, California

Hester Eisenstein — Women's Studies Program, Department of American Studies, State University of New York, Buffalo

Richard J. Gelles — Department of Sociology, University of Rhode Island

Gerald Handel — Department of Sociology, The City College and The Graduate School, City University of New York

Algea O. Harrison — Department of Psychology, Oakland University

Rosanna Hertz — Department of Sociology, Wellesley College

Robert D. Hess — School of Education, Stanford University

E. Mavis Hetherington — Department of Psychology, University of Virginia

Hansfried Kellner — Department of Sociology, University of Darmstadt, Germany

Ralph LaRossa — Department of Sociology, Georgia State University

Oscar Lewis (deceased) — Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois

Hilary M. Lips — Department of Psychology, Radford University

Katharine McAvity — Washington Psychological Center, Washington, D.C.

Margaret S. Mahler — Masters Children's Center, New York

Marcia Millman — Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Cruz

John Mirowsky — Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University

Katherine S. Newman — Department of Anthropology, Columbia University

Kay Pasley — Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Charles J. Pine — Sepulveda VA Medical Center and UCLA School of Medicine

Fred Pine — Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Yeshiva University

David Reiss — Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University School of Medicine

Catherine E. Ross — Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University

Joellyn L. Ross — Psychology, private practice, Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Rudy Ray Seward — Department of Sociology, University of North Texas

Judith Stacey — Department of Sociology, University of California, Davis

Glen H. Stamp — Department of Speech Communication, Ball State University

Peter Steinglass — Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University School of Medicine

Helm Stierlin — Department of Psychiatry, University of Heidelberg, Germany

Robert S. Weiss — Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Kath Weston — Department of Anthropology, Arizona State University, Tempe

Gail G. Whitchurch — Department of Communication Studies, Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis

Norbert F. Wiley — Department of Sociology, University of Illinois

Melvin N. Wilson — Department of Psychology, University of Virginia

Steven J. Wolin — Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University School of Medicine

Introduction to the Fourth Edition

GERALD HANDEL and GAIL G. WHITCHURCH

This fourth edition of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family* is both a book about change and a book about stability. To see how these seemingly contradictory processes dovetail, it is necessary to journey back in time to 1967, the year the first edition of this book was published. In 1967, Gerald Handel, the first editor of this book, was an associate professor of sociology; Gail Whitchurch, the second editor, was in high school, and many of our present readers had not even been born. Lyndon Johnson was the 36th president of the United States after having ascended to the presidency following the assassination of President Kennedy just four years earlier.

Although the old social order still appeared to be intact in 1967, the sweeping social changes that have profoundly affected families in this last decade of the 20th century had already begun. Lester Maddox, who had made headlines only three years earlier by passing out axe handles to white customers to prevent desegregation of his restaurant, was elected governor of Georgia in 1967. However, that same year Carl B. Stokes was elected the first black mayor of Cleveland, Ohio. The impact of sociopolitical changes such as racial desegregation was felt in several U.S. cities, especially Newark and Detroit, which suffered devastating riots that year.

In 1967, the United States simultaneously reached a population of 200 million people, and experienced the lowest yearly birthrate up until that date (17.8 per 1000). U.S. troop strength in Vietnam reached 474,300 that year; the mounting U.S. involvement in southeast Asia led more than a thousand antiwar protesters to attempt closing down a New York City draft induction center in December 1967. Ironically, among those arrested was the widely known pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose books on child care had influenced a generation of mothers of the protesters and soldiers alike. In the preceding two decades, the majority of those mothers had been full-time caregivers to children, but in 1967 that role for women was already beginning to change.

That year was one of several important "firsts" that were to become institutions in contemporary American life: The first Superbowl game was played, the formation of the American Basketball Association was announced, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established. Some of the firsts in 1967 were technical successes that heralded the coming of the information age: NASA recovered from the deaths of three of its astronauts in January 1967, launching Lunar Orbiter 3 that February and Apollo 9 to the moon that November. The purpose of both missions was to relay to earth information needed for the first human landing on the moon, which would occur only two years later, in 1969. In 1967, the first global TV broadcast, "Our World," originated live from 19 countries on five continents, and was seen in 39 nations via satellite.

In spite of the position of the United States on the threshold of profound social, cultural, political, and technological change in 1967, there was still widely shared understanding of what a family was supposed to be. "The family" was assumed to be a social unit composed of a man and woman who married for love, had children together, and stayed married to each other for life. The man was expected to work outside the home providing financial support; the woman was supposed to remain in the home sphere, keeping house, making a home life, and raising the children. Even in 1967 this family structure was not realized in every case, but the belief that such an arrangement was the only family structure—and the *ideal* family structure—was widespread. In short, in 1967 it was considered reasonable to speak and write about "the family" because "the" two-parent biological family appeared to be a clearly delineated social institution.

In the quarter-century between the first edition of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family* and the publication of the fourth edition in 1994, the family as an institution has changed greatly. While many people still hold to the idealized view of the two-parent, paternal wage-earner family structure of the 1950s and early to mid-1960s, many people do not. Further, in 1994, many families who would prefer the two-parent biological family structure are constrained by social, political, and economic circumstances to compromise their ideal.

In 1994, every aspect of the institution of "the family" appears to have fragmented into alternatives. The meanings of love seem to have changed; marriage is not necessarily for life but for as long as it suits the partners. Families need not be based on marriage but may be based on cohabitation or single parenthood, and families may be established by domestic partners of the same sex. In two-parent families, both partners are likely to expect to contribute to the family's financial support, though expectations of *parallel* contributions to housework and child-rearing are not as frequent. Divorce and remarriage have increased greatly, resulting in many more stepparents, stepsiblings, and half-siblings. Single-parent families, whether based on ter-

minated marriage or on no marriage, are more numerous. The present institutional order—more diverse and more complex than in 1967—is termed "postmodern" by some writers.

But we promised that this is also a book about stability. Even in 1967, when most scholars and laypeople alike regarded the family as a clearly delineated unit that could be understood as an institution, the first edition of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family* advanced the view that families were more diverse than revealed by analysis of the family as an institution. In this fourth edition, we illustrate that this fundamental view about families has endured through the various editions by referring the reader to the introduction to the first edition, reprinted here, after the present introduction.

As demonstrated by the selections in this book, even though every family is established at a particular time in a particular society with its own institutional order, every family must construct its own family life through its members' interaction. Every family has the task of working out its own ways of relating to the larger society and of working out the relationships among family members. For a variety of reasons—the most important ones are different genders and different experiences in respective families of origin—partners who establish a family discover that often they do not automatically agree on which norms apply in a particular situation. Because of differences of gender, age, and social participation each family member's knowledge of the culture and attachment to it are different, and this cultural unevenness within the family must be continuously sorted out and negotiated.

Partners often find that their interests in each other are not necessarily congruent, and if they have children they find that their lives and their interests become even more complex. Single-parent families have their own complexities, as do families based on remarriage. In this fourth edition of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family,* as in all previous editions, we take the position that family life is not a mere enactment of culturally prescribed values, norms, and patterns of expected role performance. Rather, we argue that family life never was produced in this way, even during earlier times when most people had quite similar views of what a family was supposed to be.

In this edition of the book, Gail Whitchurch joins Gerald Handel as a coeditor. We believe that understanding our philosophy in this edition requires some awareness of how our collaboration on this book came about. We first met in Philadelphia in 1988 at the Theory Construction and Research Methodology Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations. Our conversation quickly centered on Handel's 1959 coauthored book *Family Worlds* because Whitchurch, a family communication specialist with interdisciplinary training in both the communication and family social science disciplines, was writing about the emerging area of family communication in the communication discipline. Qualitative works that look at how

families construct themselves through their interaction—works such as *Family Worlds*—form a cornerstone of the field of family communication that was developing during the 1980s.

Family Worlds had come about through the influence on Handel and his collaborator Robert Hess at the University of Chicago by symbolic interactionists Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, William I. Thomas, and Ernest W. Burgess. Burgess's 1926 article defining the family as a unity of interacting personalities had been particularly intriguing to Handel and Hess. Although a quarter-century had passed, there had been no empirical research using Burgess's definition of a family, so in 1952, using that definition, Hess and Handel undertook what became a six-year qualitative research project on how families construct their world through their interaction. *Family Worlds* was the book that came out of that collaboration. The five essential processes of family life identified in the research reported in *Family Worlds*—establishing a pattern of separateness/connectedness, establishing a satisfactory congruence of images, developing modes of interaction into central family themes, establishing boundaries both around the family's internal relationships and with the external world, and dealing with significant biosocial issues such as gender and age—form the basis for several of the sections of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family,* including the present fourth edition.

In October 1990, Handel invited Whitchurch to become coeditor of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family.* Our correspondence and notes from our meetings since 1988 reveal a collegial relationship built on our common, unflagging commitment to the assumption that a family is primarily created and maintained through its interaction rather than through its structure. That assumption means that this fourth edition has the same general goal as the three preceding editions: to understand families in terms of the interaction processes through which a family constructs itself.

"The family" has been adaptable enough to evolve into various family forms in response to changes in society throughout history, not just in this, the last decade of the 20th century. Our goal in this book is to select pieces that reflect this evolution, and that is why we chose an essay on the postmodern family as the epilogue to this fourth edition. Even in these "postmodern" times, as in the "modern" period before, an underlying premise of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family* has been that in most cases two partners establish a family because they have selected each other as distinctively meaningful one to the other, whether or not they articulate, or are even aware of, all the aspects of meaning, and whether or not the meaning is casual or enduring in quality. In our view, partners will affirm, modify, elaborate, or abandon various aspects of meaning through interaction over time in changing circumstances.

By incorporating a variety of theoretical and research perspectives, this

book offers the reader an introduction to the kinds of interaction through which family life is constructed. The book focuses on the beginning years of family life, on marriage, and on the childbearing and child-rearing years. The selections include several that deal with interaction in family structures and family forms that have become more common in recent years, such as stepfamilies, single-parent families, families with same-sex parents, as well as dual-career and dual-earner families.

Our search for pieces for this volume ranged over many disciplines, with over a thousand articles, book chapters, and professional convention papers as candidates for inclusion. We had two main criteria as we considered potential selections: examples of fine research that is qualitative in approach, and works that focus on family interaction processes. In this edition, we retained a few classic pieces that had appeared in previous editions of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family* and some of the pieces that had been new to the third edition in 1985. The majority of works in this volume are new to this edition, however. Some are controversial; our hope in selecting those pieces is that they are thought- and discussion-provoking.

In examining the array of literature available for possible inclusion and reexamining in close detail the previous three editions of *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family,* we were struck by the profound differences over the past thirty years in the kinds of research and writing on families. Where in prior decades research on families had focused primarily on family dysfunction, especially families with a member with mental illness, beginning in the mid- to late 1970s research has been much more descriptive about all facets of family life. However, there have been relatively few studies in which the family is studied as a unit, with perspectives of all adult and child members taken into account. Accordingly, the goal of the first two editions to serve, as their subtitle stated, as *A Sourcebook for the Study of Whole Families,* necessarily has been modified in light of available literature.

The authors of the chapters in this book come from a variety of relevant disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds, such as sociology, communication, family social science, human development, psychology, anthropology, and social work. Some of the pieces are written by feminist scholars, by ethnographers, by family communication specialists, and by researchers whose work is based on qualitative interviewing. Several of the pieces are theoretical analysis essays based not on a single study, but on an integrative overview of the literature.

One final point: Families are consequential for their members because people care about what their family life is like. All people who live or have lived in a family are likely to feel that their experiences in that family have had some kind of meaningful impact on their lives. In this book, we try to show, as much as one volume can, the processes that produce those impacts.

The whole business of science does not lie in getting into realms which are unfamiliar in normal experience. There is an enormous work of analyzing, of recognizing similarities and analogies, of getting the feel of the landscape, an enormous qualitative sense of family relations, of taxonomy. It is not always tactful to try to quantify; it is not always clear that by measuring one has found something very much worth measuring. It is true that for the Babylonians it was worth measuring—noting—the first appearances of the moon because it had a practical value. Their predictions, their prophecies, and their magic would not work without it; and I know that many psychologists have the same kind of reason for wanting to measure. It is a real property of the real world that you are measuring, but it is not necessarily the best way to advance true understanding of what is going on; and I would make this very strong plea for pluralism with regard to methods that, in the necessarily early stages of sorting out an immensely vast experience, may be fruitful and may be helpful.

J. Robert Oppenheimer

Introduction to the First Edition, 1967

GERALD HANDEL

This book is an effort to delineate, by way of diverse writings, a social psychology of the family that seeks to capture and comprehend the interplay of self and collectivity in family life. The family is at once a significant source of individuality and the expression of the most binding ties in social life. It is thereby doubly—and conflictfully—imperative to its members. The book tries to mark out some ideas, concepts, data, and research methods that can get us under way in the study of these intricate phenomena.

By its very nature as an anthology, this book cannot pretend to offer a comprehensive—or even a limited and unified—theory. Indeed, neither the data nor the concepts from which such a theory could be built are as yet available. But the book does propose a view of what must some day be encompassed. It envisages a social psychology that integrates data now scattered over a range of disciplines—biology, sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry—and numerous specialties within them. The section headings are themselves a first array of rudimentary concepts for identifying subfields within this newly developing field. And the variegated writings indicate some of the ways these topics can be thought about, investigated, and utilized in practical applications. The book includes work from such diverse fields as psychosomatic medicine and experimental social psychology, to cite just two indicators of the range.

The province of the book is the psychosocial interior of the family. This means that attention is most fully given to what the family is to and for itself and its members rather than what it is to and for the larger society. The psychosocial interior is that region of the universe where the members of a family meet and make a life together. It is a region of the mind, that "place" where there is a meeting of minds primarily in the sense of individual selves confronting, engaging, and being struck off from one another,

rather than in the usual sense of reaching agreement through rational discussion.

It is no less a region where there is a meeting of bodies and of body and mind. For in no other human group does the body play such a decisive role in both the formation and the outcome of relationships. The family is not only the primary locus of sexuality; it is also the group where the body and its functions are given their first meanings, where touch has its freest rein and serves to unite or alienate, where eating becomes social and elimination is trained, where tension and relaxation take on their initial character. Respiration, digestion, endocrine secretion, and muscle tone become responsive to the moods and communications of other family members. Hearing and sight acquire their first power as well as their first subject matter in the family. Here too the child first tries out his reach, his gait, his pace, and his rhythm, and he learns how these are received. Details of physiognomy are given a lineage in efforts to determine which side of his family a child "favors," and relationships are structured by judgments that a daughter is more beautiful or less beautiful than her mother or sisters. Height, weight, and girth are given meaning in terms of lineage, beauty, strength, and developmental course. In the family, more pervasively than in other social groups, bodies enter into the formation of relationships and of the self. The child learns what his body means to others, and from these meanings and his own experiencings of it, he develops his own bodily meanings.

The psychosocial interior of the family is not an isolated realm. It is a region of a larger social world. But whereas a purely sociological concern directs attention to what the society in its various forms does to the family, this book directs attention in the opposite direction. It focuses upon families in their own formative powers. Families do not merely reflect the larger culture and social structure; they create meanings and relationships and individualities, not all of them welcomed by the larger society. Families utilize the broader culture in differential ways, sometimes to their own detriment. And, as some selections in this book show, families can be more or less involved with the larger society. They have their own ways of defining themselves and their boundaries.

Thus, this book is concerned not with the family as an institution but with families as living groups, within which the members create relationships even as each proceeds on his individual life course. The themes of individuality and collectivity are pervasive in the selections, and, broadly speaking, illuminate the reciprocal problems of individuality as a product of group life and the family's corporate character as a product of its members' individuality. The book brings together various efforts to define and understand the corporate character of families, the ways by which they create worlds of their own, with particular kinds of boundaries separating them from the larger world and particular kinds of climates for their members. The nature

of family cohesion or integration is thus a central topic, and the reader will not take long to discover that no simple unidimensional scale or index is adequate to tell us what we need to know to understand such phenomena. The data reported in these writings make manifest that there is no such simple thing as family integration that exists only in degrees of more or less. The phenomena push us, at least at this necessarily early stage, toward the conceiving of *kinds* of integration. Before we shall ever arrive at any useful index, we shall have to grapple with the question: What are the different ways in which a family can be a family, even within the same segment of society? There are surely many ways of being a middle-class American family, but what are they? We now presume that some ways are schizophrenic, some are neurotic, and some are pathological in other directions, even though we are not yet sure why they are. Even after we turn our attention from these deviant ways, we shall want to know the different ways of being a normal or nonclinical middle-class or working-class American or English family. In short, within any major social category or aggregate—tribe, ethnic group, social class, or whatever—there is family diversity that we must presume is not random but responsive to organizing principles whose nature is only now becoming dimly apparent to us.

Any family thus has its own corporate character, and this book points to the tasks facing us in our efforts to discern diverse characters and comprehend the processes by which they are established and maintained. It also presents a variety of efforts that have been made to deal with these tasks. The first task is often finding families to study, particularly nonclinic families in Western societies. Studies that seek to probe into the interior of family life require extended cooperation over a period of time. It can be time-consuming simply to locate cooperative families meeting certain criteria of composition. This problem is less difficult for clinical investigators since they ordinarily study families who have sought help and who have therefore made themselves available, at least in some degree.

Another task is finding ways to make observations of families. In this work we are still trying to decide what observations are worth making, what situations seem promising of useful data. Not enough work has gone on to assess the relative value of different vantage points and procedures, partly because not enough conceptual work has yet been accomplished. As soon as we cite the problem of making useful observations, straightway we face the problem of what criteria enable us to judge whether observations are useful. At this point in the development of this field, we must recognize that we are not yet in a position to sustain rigid criteria of inclusion and exclusion. Yet we must and can have a sense of direction. We must press toward making observations that will enable us to understand how a family creates, maintains, and evolves its own corporate character and how it utilizes the individuality of its members as it does so. The goal of such a program must

be to discover principles for intrafamilial organization, principles that account both for the structure and developmental course of the family and for the several developmental courses of its members, insofar as these are family-determined.

Methodologically, the book focuses on efforts to study families as wholes. This does not mean that I believe it is not worthwhile to study less-than-whole-family relationships. The exclusion of such segmental studies would be absurd. Obviously, much has been learned, and more can be, by studying husband-wife, mother-child, and father-child relationships. And the greatest immediate proportionate advance perhaps await us if we study sibling relationships, for it seems to me that we know next to nothing about these. Such massive handbooks as those edited by Mussen[1] and Christensen[2] have very little to say on this subject.

The study of families as wholes in many ways goes against the traditions of psychiatry and the prevailing modes of thought of psychology. It is perhaps more congenial to the thoughtways of sociology and anthropology, although even in anthropology the study of groups as wholes is evidently sometimes felt to conflict with what are considered the imperatives of science. In introducing his book on the little community, Robert Redfield writes:

> The point of departure is a certain strain or struggle, so to speak, between the claims of the human whole—person or village or civilization—to communicate to us its nature as a whole, a convincing complex entity, on the one hand, and the disposition of science to take things apart and move toward the precise description of relationships between parts and parts, on the other. Human wholes persist through time, each one preserving, for years or centuries, a certain unique character which one may come to know through personal experience or reading. Each person, each stable human settlement with an organized way of life, each historical people, even each art or body of literature associated with such a people, has a sort of integrity which is recognized both by common sense and by much scholarship, humanistic or anthropological. Yet each of these entities arouses the disposition to make acquaintance with such things into more strictly controlled knowledge about them. We want, also, to compare one community or one personality with another. What shall be the forms of thought that will help us toward this more strictly controlled knowledge, a knowledge that will preserve some of the holistic qualities of the things compared?[3]

The need to maintain a hold on the holistic qualities of families is obvious to me, and I believe most, if not all, of the writers whose work is included in this book would concur. To be sure, the understanding of segmental relationships within the family is a difficult enough task,[4] but this is no reason to assume that we cannot embark on the study of families as wholes until we have definitively understood the nature of the one-to-one relationships with-

in the family. In the first place, that day of ultimate understanding will never come. In the second, there are no adequate grounds for believing that the understanding of more complex units is a simple additive process of understanding its component parts.[5]

Third, and perhaps most important, families exist as wholes. Prototypically, they consist of a group of people inhabiting a common household over an extended period of time. A family is, therefore, a naturally occurring unit, and it has at least this much in common with a molecule or the solar system, however significant may be its differences in other respects. As a unit that occurs in nature, which expresses the social nature of man, the family invites our interest at its own level of organization and in its own complexity. Just as it is of interest to inquire into the nature of the marital bond or the mother-child relationship, it is equally of interest and equally pertinent to want to know what the bonds are that obtain in a family as a group. Many clinical investigators are coming to believe, or at least to adopt as a working assumption, that mental illness is a function of the bonds operative in a family as a whole. While this view may thus far be no more than an article of faith, it is an article of faith whose tenability merits extended scrutiny through research, for it cannot be said that any competing view of the origins of mental illness has established itself beyond reasonable doubt.

The concept of studying families as wholes has two different, though related, meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the developing of concepts and theories about families as entities. Of course, at the level of ordinary discourse we already make use of such concepts when we speak of the Bachs as a musical family or the Kennedys as an energetic or hard-driving family. We recognize such corporate characteristics among our neighbors as well as among the celebrated. We know sports-minded families and intellectual families, flamboyant families and secretive families, orderly families and disorderly ones, lively families and dispirited, money-minded, affectionate, conflictful, and so on. Such characterizations may not take us very far, but at least they enable us to form some initial impressions about families as corporate entities. Perhaps it would be premature to dismiss surface characteristics as starting points for more searching inquiries, and, in the case of families whose life-style appears to be dominated by a particular quality or commitment, we could do worse than take those qualities as starting points. Within the realm of normal families, such visible characteristics can serve as the equivalent of what the psychiatrist or the physician calls presenting symptoms, an introductory function on the way to investigating more hidden qualities.

One meaning of the study of whole families is, then, the analysis of families as wholes. A different but related meaning of the term is obtaining data from each member of the family. If we intend to study how families are organized, I do not see how we can do so without data from all the family

members. I think this is particularly true for studies of the nuclear family, where the task is not impossible, even though it may be difficult. The study of extended families is obviously somewhat different in character since their very extension makes it unlikely that data from all members would be relevant, even if it were possible to obtain them, which it is ordinarily not. Thus, in the study of extended families the definition of the problem will determine the selection of persons from whom data are to be obtained.

An understanding of the nuclear family can be fully developed, however, only if we learn from each member what he is like. Intrafamilial relationships are interlocking and contingent upon one another. The relationship of husband and wife both affects and is affected by the relationship of each to each child. Further, I think we need to study the individuality of each member as a component of intrafamilial functioning. It is a common observation that two children in a family can resemble their parents in personality yet be different from each other. Would it not be useful to have in mind the genetic principle that explains biological differences among offspring in terms of the independent assortment and combination of genes from the parents? Something analogous seems to occur in psychosocial development. Each child in a family may draw upon or identify with different aspects of each parent; a parent may make different aspects of himself available to each child. Although we have here a statement of a problem, I do not believe that we yet have very much idea of the principles accounting for such psychosocial assortment within the family, nor do I see how we may acquire firm knowledge about such matters without obtaining data from each family member.

The concepts of the psychosocial interior of the family and the study of whole families are, then, related. The first refers to the kinds of phenomena to be studied, and the second designates both the kinds of concepts that are aimed at and the sources of the data that will provide material for fashioning these concepts. The articles in this book exemplify one or the other or both of these two overarching concepts. They were selected because they were thought to contribute toward answering such questions as:

- What is the nature of a family's collective life?
- How is the family's character as a collectivity fashioned from the several individualities of its members?
- How does each family member relate to and express the family's collective character?
- How does each member take his "family-ness" and use it in the larger world?
- How do family processes contribute to good or poor mental health?
- By what methods and techniques can family processes be studied?

The readings are grouped together in sections that are intended to point toward a set of dimensions that would be useful in studying any particular

kind of family. Thus the writings are not divided according to prevailing clinical or sociological categories. My aim has been, rather, to utilize papers built around such specific categories to suggest certain generic dimensions of family organization.

The papers reveal certain predilections. They represent, first, my views of what ought to be encompassed in this new field of whole family study—what its subject matter and scope ought to be—insofar as these are exemplified in extant writings known to me.

The selections represent also my view of where this field of study stands today. Most of the papers included do not express research findings in quantitative form. Although I certainly do not rule out quantitative or experimental work in a newly emerging field of study, as this one is, I believe that beginning work needs to be predominantly qualitative.[6] To hold, as I think many do, that one has no science until one can quantify is to commit what I would call the fallacy of misplaced exactness. It is first necessary to locate and identify the phenomena to be studied and to discriminate what is worth measuring, as well as what is important but cannot be measured. There seems to be an increasingly prevalent view in the social sciences that the only proper form for a scientific question is: How does the amount of something vary with the amounts of other things? But the first question that must be asked is: *What* is there? This may be followed by a question no less scientific in form than the quantitative variation question: What kinds are there? Then: What is the pattern of structure of each kind? Understandably, I was pleased to come upon the words of Robert Oppenheimer that serve as the epigraph, for we are in the "necessarily early stages of sorting out an immensely vast experience."[7] That sorting will have to make use of a variety of types of observation obtained under a variety of conditions. I think that we do not yet know very fully, much less very exactly, what we should be looking for when we try to study whole families, although I think the readings in this volume provide a substantial number of very good beginnings. Consequently, I believe that our contemporary emphasis should be upon making as wide a range of observations as possible, in line with the tasks I have tried to define, and upon developing fruitful and adequate concepts for what we observe. Let measurement and experimentation play their part—and no doubt they will play a growing part as time goes on—but let us not suppose that they will suffice in this field in our time.

The psychosocial interior of the family is still "a far country." Enough exploration has been done to let us know that it is rocky ground, not easily explored. Yet enough has been done to let us know also that it can be explored. The problems of such research are formidable but not insoluble. The results obtained to date suggest that we shall be working in a province that still contains many mysteries. The study of whole families holds out the promise of fascinating discoveries of how people become what they are and how their lives are anchored in one another.

NOTES

1. Paul H. Mussen, ed., *Handbook of Research Methods in Child Development* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960).

2. Harold T. Christensen, ed., *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1964). Two contributors to this handbook discuss sibling relationships, but both restrict their discussion to an analysis of the effects of position in the birth order. See the chapters by Jesse R. Pitts, "The Structural-Functional Approach," and Edward Z. Dager, "Socialization and Personality Development in the Child." It seems unnecessarily restrictive to limit the study of sibling relationships by studying only birth-order effects, as now appears to be the case. Other questions seem pertinent, for example, Does the type of parental discipline influence sibling relationships? Do parental personality and parental values influence sibling relationships? Why do some siblings become friends and others not? If a physician has three sons of whom two become physicians and the third follows some career not at all related, how is this phenomenon—and others like it—to be understood? Questions such as these undoubtedly do not admit of easy answers, but it is not apparent that they will prove less fruitful for the understanding of human development than questions about the effects of birth order.

3. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community; Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 1–2.

4. For a searching discussion of the complexities of the mother-child relationship, see John Bowlby, "The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* Vol. 39 (1958), pp. 350–73.

5. Some aspects of this issue are discussed by Robert S. Weiss in "Alternative Approaches in the Study of Complex Situations," *Human Organization,* Autumn 1966.

6. I also believe that much advanced work needs to be qualitative. It is not helpful to equate measurement with scientific advancement. Applying sophisticated techniques of measurement to data that are cognized in a superficial way is a dubious road to advancement. Knowledge advances by better and fuller observation and by more adequate conceptualizing as well as by more discriminating measurement.

7. Robert Oppenheimer, "Analogy in Science," *The American Psychologist,* Vol. 11, No. 3 (March 1956), p. 135.

I

Orientation: *Constructing Meaning*

INTRODUCTION

The selections in part I provide orientation to the volume because they lay out the book's fundamental premise: that a family creates and maintains itself through its interaction. That is, through social interaction both inside and outside the family, family members define their relationships to one another, and to the world beyond the family, as they establish individual identities as well as a collective family identity.

This theoretical worldview has its origins in the argument advanced by psychologist William James in the late 19th century that humans act not only upon information they encounter, but also upon the social reality they construct (James, 1890), a position that influenced the early 20th-century Chicago school of symbolic interaction. That is, human systems do not act on any "objective" reality, but behave according to their collective definitional process, or meaning that something has for them (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Ernest Burgess was the first to define the family from this perspective. As he observed in his 1926 essay on the family as "a unity of interacting personalities":

> Nine years ago [i.e., in 1917] I gave for the first time a course on the family. There was even then an enormous literature in this field. But among all the volumes upon the family—ethnological, historical, psychological, ethical, social, economic, statistical, radically realist, or radically idealist—there was to be found not a single work that even pretended to study the modern family as behavior or as a social phenomenon. It has been studied as a legal institution but it had not been studied as a subject of natural science. (p. 3; punctuation modified slightly)

Burgess's definition of the family was to become, and remain, highly influential in many disciplines concerned with studying families, but it was

not until a quarter-century later that his definition was tested empirically. As described in the editors' introduction to the present volume, the research team of Gerald Handel and Robert Hess conceptualized the family as a unit, a system formed by its members—not merely the aggregation of its component dyadic relationships. The opening chapter to their resultant book, *Family Worlds,* is placed first in Part I of the present volume to provide orientation to the parts that follow. The authors of the second selection in Part I, Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner, have for three decades been the foremost proponents of the position that the primary process of marriage is to negotiate symbolically a reality shared by both spouses. Berger and Kellner focus on the processes through which reality is constructed in marriage, building the argument that marriage serves to protect individual spouses from anomie[1] through a nomos-building process. To be sure, they are referring to the two-parent, paternal-wage-earner marriages of the period following World War II, a position taken in the third essay in Part I, Norbert Wiley's essay about how marriage is constructed in contemporary times. Even so, one possible interpretation of Berger and Kellner's argument is that their reasoning also applies to other kinds of committed couples, such as cohabiting couples and same-sex couples, who are successful in negotiating a shared worldview.

NOTE

1. The term *anomie* was used by Emile Durkheim in his 1897 classic *Suicide* to refer to a sense of "normlessness," or lack of social standards. Noting that suicide rates rose during times of social upheaval and change, Durkheim hypothesized that feelings of anomie in the population led to confusion, anxiety, and eventually self-destructive behavior in the form of suicide. Thus, Berger and Kellner are suggesting that marriage and the couple's shared social construction of reality builds nomos—social order—which is the opposite of anomie.

REFERENCES

Burgess, E. W. (1926). The family as a unity of interacting personalities. *Family, 7,* 3–9.

Durkheim, E. ([1897] 1951). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology,* translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: Free Press.

James, W. (1890). *Principles of psychology.* New York: Dover.

Whitchurch, G. G., & Constantine, L. L. (1993). Systems theory. In P. Boss, W. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. Schumm, and S. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 325–352). New York: Plenum.

1

The Family as a Psychosocial Organization

ROBERT D. HESS and GERALD HANDEL

However its life spreads into the wider community, there is a sense in which a family is a bounded universe. The members of a family—parents and their young children—inhabit a world of their own making, a community of feeling and fantasy, action and precept. Even before their infant's birth, the expectant couple make plans for his family membership, and they prepare not only a bassinet but a prospect of what he will be to them. He brings his own surprises, but in time there is acquaintance, then familiarity, as daily the family members compose their interconnection through the touch and tone by which they learn to know one another. Each one comes to have a private transcript of their common life, recorded through his own emotions and individual experiences.

In their mutual interaction, the family members develop more or less adequate understanding of one another, collaborating in the effort to establish consensus and to negotiate uncertainty. The family's life together is an endless process of movement in and around consensual understanding, from attachment to conflict to withdrawal—and over again. Separateness and connectedness are the underlying conditions of a family's life, and its common task is to give form to both.

[*Family Worlds*] describes how five families have each, in distinctive ways, dealt with this and other tasks. The way in which a family is a unit and the ways it provides for being a separate person are, in one sense, what every family's life is about. The psychosocial portraits which we have sketched are intended to convey something of the particularity of American family worlds. These are American families, but the wider culture was not our

primary interest. Rather, we tried first to find the family's boundaries, then to explore its psychosocial dimensions. When we looked at the culture, it was in order to take the point of view of a family looking out at it. The reader will recognize in these analytic sketches versions of middle and lower class cultural themes; again, our aim has been to illustrate what this feels like to actual individuals who shape a life in an intimate group. The case study is the method of choice for this purpose, and its aim is to amplify the richness of perception of American family life.

Depiction is not our sole aim, however. We are concerned with developing a framework for understanding the nuclear family as a group. Within the family, events occur in far from random fashion; even uncertainty is given a customary place in a family's scheme of things. While illustrating distinctness, we work toward a systematic view of the family as a psychosocial organization. How may one describe a family, taking account of all its members? The multiplicity of household events takes place in a round robin of interaction which is a shapeless swirl only to the casual observer. There are nodes of connection, points at which feeling is concentrated and significance declared. There are tracks to which the interaction returns again and again. A family has discernible pattern and form.

We set ourselves the task of searching out the elements that give shape to a family's life. In so doing, we examined the personalities of the individual members, the relationships between pairs and in triangles, and the integration of these individual psychodynamic features and multiple relationships in the psychosocial structure of the group. We tried to comprehend in one view the supporting convergences and the intrinsic disruptions of a family, seen as a set of individual personalities, a system of interpersonal relations, and a local culture.

It is imperative to relate the nature of individuality to the form of the particular family group in which it occurs and to examine the participation of family psychological modes of interaction in the personalities of individual members. As a guiding principle we are proposing that the intrapsychic organization of each member is part of the psychosocial structure of his family; the structure of a family includes the intrapsychic organization of its individual members. For example, if separateness and connectedness constitute one of the most fundamental problems which a family must solve, then it is necessary first to adopt a standpoint from which one can see both tendencies as parts of the same solution and second to view this solution both as an extension of individual needs into the group interaction and as a significant determinant of individual personality.

An understanding of the relationship between individual dynamics and family interactional matrix may be furthered by a second principle: in his relationship in the family an individual member strives toward predictability

of preferred experience, attempting to discover or create circumstances which fit his image of what the world around him should be—how it should respond to him and provide opportunity for expression of his own preferences. This principle indicates how one might examine the fashion in which individual uniqueness is transformed into family uniqueness as a result of his own and others' experience. It attends also to the impact upon the individual member of his success, or lack of it, in obtaining the emotional atmosphere he desires. Neither the ties that bind the members to one another nor the barriers that separate them are adequately indicated by overt social behavior alone. Connection to others is outward and inward in infinite variety. In the study of ordinary people, as in this book, the inner connections and the inner enclaves must command attention no less than the external encounters and the occasions for social privacy. Taking for granted, then, that the members of a nuclear family have personalities of their own, that each has a psychobiological individuality, and that each is guided by cultural role expectations, how shall we understand how they fashion a life together?

It is the purpose of this introductory chapter [to *Family Worlds*] to indicate some concepts which are useful in understanding and describing in nonpathological terms the complexities of ordinary family interaction. The major processes described here give shape to the flux of family life, coherence to the extended array of events, perceptions, emotions, actions, learnings, and changes which the members experience or undertake. The essential processes discussed below are these:

1. Establishing a pattern of separateness and connectedness.
2. Establishing a satisfactory congruence of images through the exchange of suitable testimony.
3. Evolving modes of interaction into central family concerns or themes.
4. Establishing the boundaries of the family's world of experience.
5. Dealing with significant biosocial issues of family life, as in the family's disposition to evolve definitions of male and female and of older and younger.

THE EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A SATISFACTORY PATTERN OF SEPARATENESS AND CONNECTEDNESS

Two conditions characterize the nuclear family. Its members are connected to one another, and they are also separate from one another. Every family gives shape to these conditions in its own way. Its life may show greater emphasis on the one or the other; yet both are constitutive of family

life. The infant is born from the womb into the limits of his own skin, with individual properties of sensitivity and activity. He possesses an irreducible psychobiological individuality that no amount or kind of intense socialization can abolish. His parents, too, remain individual persons no matter how deep their love, how passionate their desire for one another or how diffuse their individual identities. Through the wishes and capacities of its members, the family defines and gives shape to separateness so that it looms large or small in family affairs, gives rise to pleasure or unhappiness. The range of possibilities is wide. The autistic child or the psychotic parent represents the pathological extreme of separateness. The benign extremes are more diverse—emotional richness, ego autonomy, individual creativity. Perhaps Erikson's concept of a clearly delineated ego identity best conveys the benign meaning of separateness.[1]

Yet connectedness of family members is equally basic. No human infant survives without ties. Connectedness can range from physical proximity and rudimentary child care to an intensity of mutual involvement which all but excludes all other interests. Separateness remains always, yet it can be transcended. Love and passion do unite family members and can make separateness seem infinitesimal—or comfortable. The signs of being connected to one another that the members of a family seek differ greatly even within the middle range. In one family intense emotional exchange is sought; the members need to relax defenses and public façade, and they respond freely. In other families such confrontation is threatening, though the wish to feel themselves together in binding ties may be great. A family of this kind may be able to approach its desire only through much formalized or ritualized action, such as giving gifts, celebrating birthdays and holidays, making joint excursions.

This fundamental duality of family life is of considerable significance, for the individual's efforts to take his own kind of interest in the world, to become his own kind of person, proceed apace with his efforts to find gratifying connection to the other members. At the same time, the other members are engaged in taking their kinds of interest in him, and in themselves. This is the matrix of interaction in which a family develops its life. The family tries to cast itself in a form that satisfies the ways in which its members want to be together and apart. The pattern it reaches is a resultant of these diverse contributions. This dual condition of inevitable individuality and inescapable psychosocial connection is a dynamic condition; it requires a family to make some kind of life together, lest the family dissolve. The family and its members must meet these two conditions in *some* way. The investigator's effort to understand family life is facilitated insofar as he asks constantly, In what way does this event or tendency or action bring the members together or keep them apart?

CONGRUENCE OF IMAGES

It is useful to regard life in a family as the family's effort to attain a satisfactory congruence of individual and family images through the exchange of suitable testimony. This view initially directs attention to the family as a group of members. Family research must somehow face up to this very obvious fact. All the members of the nuclear household must be taken into account if we are to understand the family's life. Data must be obtained from each member. We do not understand a family if we know the spouses' roles as mates and as parents but nothing of their children, nor is our foundation adequate if we have firsthand materials from a mother and child in therapy but see the father and other children only through their eyes. Thus, this first implication is methodological. It says something of the range of data to be collected.

Living together, the individuals in a family each develop an image of what the other members are like. This image comprises the emotional meaning and significance which the other has for the member holding it. The concept of image is a mediating concept. Its reference extends into the personality and out into the interpersonal relationship. Referring to one person's emotionalized conception of another, an image is shaped by the personality both of the holder and of the object. The image emerges from the holder's past and bears the imprint of his experience, delimiting what versions of others are possible for him. It says something about him as a person. But it is also a cast into the future, providing the holder with direction in relating to and interacting with the object. While it represents the holder's needs and wishes, it also represents the object as a source of fulfilment.

Each family member has some kind of image of every other member and of himself in relation to them. This image is compounded of realistic and idealized components in various proportions, and it may derive from the personalities of its holder and its object also in various proportions. It draws from cultural values, role expectations, and the residue of the parents' experiences in their families of origin. One's image of another is the product of one's direct experience with the other and of evaluations of the other by third parties. From this experience, from evaluations of it and elaborations on it in fantasy, a conception of another person is developed, a conception which serves to direct and shape one's action to the other and which becomes a defining element of the interpersonal relationship. *An image of a person is one's definition of him as an object of one's own action or potential action.*

In studying a family, then, it is necessary to investigate both the images which the members hold of one another and the ways in which these images are interrelated. It is necessary to understand how the interaction of the

members derives from and contributes to this interrelation of images. The implication of this stance is that interaction cannot be fully understood in its own terms, that, instead, it must be viewed in the context of how the participants define one another as relevant objects.

From his experience with the other members of his family and from experiences outside the family, an individual comes to have another kind of image—an image of his family which expresses his mode of relationship to the unit and which defines the kind of impact the family has on him. A woman may gratifyingly conceive of her family as dependents who need and reward her, or she may see them primarily as the group that enslaves her and for whom she wears herself out. A man may feel proud of his family as a demonstration of his masculinity, or his image may be of a group of perplexing people with emotions and reactions he doesn't understand, or his family may mean to him primarily a welcome retreat from and contrast with his workaday world. For a child, too, the family may have diverse meanings. To one it is the group he is happy to belong to. For another it consists of those he lives with because he has no place else to go. A person's image of his family embodies what he expects from it and what he gives to it, how important it is and what kind of importance it has.

The images held of one member by the others diverge in varying ways from one another and from his image of himself. The intimate and constant exchange that characterizes the nuclear family makes such divergence far from a matter of indifference. The members of a family want to and have to deal with one another; from the beginning they are engaged in evolving and mutually adjusting their images of one another. This mutual adjustment takes place in interaction, and it is, in part, the aim of interaction. Since complete consensus is most improbable, life in a family—as elsewhere—is a process ongoing in a situation of actual or potential instability. Pattern is reached, but it can never be complete, since action is always unfolding and the status of the family members is undergoing change.[2]

If a family system of interpersonal relations is to have any continuity, the images which members have of the family and of one another must in some sense tend toward compatibility. This is only to say that they strive toward some sort of stability or predictability of preferred behavior. When a child is born, the parents entertain an image of the child—which will be altered and elaborated with time, to be sure—which the child cannot share. The concept of socialization refers to the parents' efforts to get the child to regard himself in substantially the same way they regard him. From birth, also, the child is engaged in acquiring conceptions of his parents, striving to form a view of them which accords with their self-images. In an absolute sense, neither goal can be attained, but the efforts to reach satisfactory approximations—or congruence—constitute one of the springs of interaction.

It seems useful to draw an analytic distinction between the actual image which a person holds of another and his desired image. Not only does an individual have an ideal for his own behavior, an ego ideal, but he also forms conceptions of what he wants others to be. In some families the greatest discrepancies may occur among these ideal versions of each other. Such a discrepancy may be described as the discrepancy between a person's ego ideal (his own image of what he strives toward in himself) and another's desired image of him (what the other strives to realize in him). This type of situation appears in fairly clear outline in our discussion of the Littleton family (chap. iv [of *Family Worlds*]).

In other families there may be relatively little strain of this order. Such a family's inter-involvement may be characterized as its effort to live as a satisfactory example of what is accepted as desirable. The "problems" of living in systems of this type are more likely to arise from "falling short" of what is consensually desirable and from the difficulties of living up to all desirable claims simultaneously rather than from disagreement about what is desirable.

Families also differ in their tolerance of incongruence of images. In some there is pressure toward closeness of fit in minute particulars. In others, a looser relationship is accepted as satisfactory, or the system can deal with incongruence strains short of disruption.

The issue involved here is not one of how similar the members must be to each other, that is, whether a neat housekeeper requires her husband and children to be equally neat, or whether a serious man requires the other members of his family to be likewise. Rather, the issue is whether the differences and similarities among the members are mutually acceptable. Child guidance clinics echo with parents complaining that the offending child does as they do rather than as they say. The personalities of the parent and the child may be quite similar; yet they may hold images of each other which are discrepant and unsatisfactorily so. But personality dissimilarity—at whatever level—may provide a firm basis for a satisfactory congruence of images. If a serious man finds himself responsible but his gay wife frivolous, and if she feels that he is dull but she is sparkling, an incongruent set of images characterizes their relationship. Where the serious husband relishes his wife's gaiety as lively and stimulating, where she welcomes his sobriety as a form of strength and stability, and where both concur in what each should be, the images they hold of each other are satisfactorily congruent.

The commonality of experience in a family will conduce to some congruence of family images among the family members. The intrinsic distinctions of age, sex, birth order, and role in society conduce to divergence of images. The overlap and the divergences are expressed and acted out in family life, each member participating in terms of the definition incorporated in his image.

Even when the congruence of images is satisfactory, interaction still has reference to it. If exploration and testing diminish in importance, affirmation and reiteration of what has been established become the content of interaction. The family members demonstrate their agreement with the group and strive toward validation of personal worth in family terms. The positive features of the family image provide the criteria for evaluating individual behavior. The audience toward which testimony is directed may be primarily composed of the family itself, or it may be extended to non-family persons. Whatever its audience, validation is pursued through those dimensions of behavior that the family regards as significant.

A stable human relationship is one in which the members have reached a high degree of consensus about one another; the terms in which personal worth may be demonstrated are clear and are shared. Their interaction is an exchange of testimony of what the members are to one another. The action of each person in his family testifies to his image of it, of himself, and of the others. The members realize or seek out in interpersonal encounters those kinds of experiences which seem meaningful to them and with which they are comfortable. Feelings and actions are responded to in terms of their felt suitability. *Responsive judgments and feelings are responsive first to the inward images of self, other, and family. They then become responses to and for others, so that family life is shaped within the participants as well as between them.*

We have tried to sum up in a general statement how a family's life may be understood in terms of the images family members have of one another and themselves; the inevitable divergences and fluctuations of these images; the psychosocial task of relating to others and attaining viable stability amid this potential fluctuation; the image members develop of the family as a unit—its meaning to family members, the character of its emotional and social exchange; and the utilization of the positive features of the family image in affirming to each member and to the group their personal worth and their right to emotional acceptance and participation.

THE FAMILY THEME

Individual images and responses are interrelated. In any particular family the kinds of action we have called testing, exploring, and affirming take place in terms of a particular content which may be termed a "family theme." A family theme is a pattern of feeling, motives, fantasies, and conventionalized understandings grouped about some locus of concern which has a particular form in the personalities of the individual members. The pattern comprises some fundamental view of reality and some way or

ways for dealing with it. In the family themes are to be found the family's implicit direction, its notion of "who we are" and "what we do about it." In delineating a particular family theme, we may bring several criteria to bear.

First, the theme affects behavior in several important family areas and activities. It is a postulated mold which exerts a variable impress on the observable events and ascertainable consequences of a family life. Thus, a family's feelings about most of its activities can be construed as particular manifestations of a more inclusive organizing principle, which for one type of family might be stated in this way: The family feels itself to be essentially alone in the world. Individual members endeavor to communicate with one another. They strive to foster any symbol or semblance of communication. The process of communication itself is important to all family members, and attempts to achieve contact with one another must be pursued whenever possible. Failure or disruption in communication is a failure in meeting the family objective.

The theme is an implicit point of departure and point of orientation for this family's behavior. Father's return to the family at the end of the day stimulates a flurry of greeting and excitement; the family dinner becomes one of the most important events of the day. Chores around the home are seen as opportunities for conversation. Members are expected to be "considerate" of one another, avoiding the conflict and disharmony that might threaten communication. Independence or solitude is discouraged; the individual family member should keep himself ready and available for interaction; activities that take a member out of the group are discouraged.

This is a brief illustration of a theme. A fuller statement would take greater account of the forces that have to be contended with in holding to the direction of solution and integration actually followed.

Second, a theme is a significant issue in the life of the family, expressing basic forms of relating to the external world and of interpersonal involvement.

Third, all members of the family are involved in the psychosocial definitions and processes which enter into the theme, though each may be involved in a different way. Thus the theme arises from and has consequences for the personalities of all the members.

The theme, then, is a particularly useful unit for analysis of family life, for it provides a way of characterizing the family group in terms of broad and significant psychosocial and psychocultural dimensions. At the same time, it permits flexibility, since it is not an arbitrary unit and does not require that a family be understood in terms of a set of a priori categories. The investigator can assess the family in its own terms, responding to and following the saliences that center its life.[3]

The concept of the theme is advantageous in two other important ways. Since it is a characterization of the family in terms of a significant issue in its

life, the concept provides a point of reference for understanding the individual members and particular interpersonal relationships as specific versions and expressions of the theme. The individual's place in the family—what he does and what happens to him there—can be understood as the way in which he participates in these broader currents which help to determine the quality of his family membership. If we understand a theme as consisting of some significant issue and the general direction of attempted solution or resolution of that issue, each member has some part to play in this larger configuration. His part is complexly determined, as is every role—in some measure assigned by others, in some measure self-created. By determining the salient themes in a family's life, we are able to see more clearly how any individual's fate is shaped, what opportunities he has for interlocking his life with others, and what pressures he must contend with.

The concept of the theme also makes it possible to compare one family with another. It provides a way of characterizing a whole group in a fashion that is relevant to the group's individual members; yet since it is a group-summary statement, it can be arrayed with other such characterizations.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES OF THE FAMILY'S WORLD OF EXPERIENCE

The concepts we have suggested are oriented toward revealing not only the family's internal functioning but its stance, the position it has taken up vis-à-vis the outer, non-family world. The significant themes consequently not only subsume the psychic content of the family's life but also indicate something of the breadth of its world. A family constitutes its own world, which is not to say that it closes itself off from everything else but that it determines what parts of the external world are admissible and how freely. The family maps its domain of acceptable and desirable experience, its life space. The outer limits of life space for any family are fairly definite and reasonably well marked. There are signposts for goals and signals for danger. But these metaphors fail because the boundaries lie within persons, and however firm they may be, there are always areas of inexperience not adequately charted. As new experiences occur, as new feelings arise, new actions are taken and are brought to the internal limits of the person taking them and to the limits which others help to set. In this back-and-forth of interaction is to be found the family members' mutual regulation. Each directs himself toward others by virtue of the representation they have in his mind; the others respond to him in terms of the way he is represented in theirs. Limits to experience—broad or narrow—are established in a variety

of ways and along several dimensions. Some of the more important are these:

1. *The differentiation of individual personality.*—How elaborated individual personalities of the family members are; how self-directing individuals are and are expected to become. From the gross categories of infantile experience, comfort and distress, incorporation and expulsion, personality develops to encompass a range of emotional experience and more mature ego mechanisms. The complexity and differentiation of personality can proceed further in some families than in others.
2. *The intensity of experience.*—How deep or how shallow experience is; how detached or how involved family members are in their activities and one another; how controlled or how spontaneous their behavior is. The question involved here is how much of the self is made available to experience—the fulness of intimacy or the enthusiasm of commitment to something.
3. *The extensity of experience.*—The literal geographical scope—the range and variety of actions; the importance of neighborhood and locality as compared with communities of more abstract definition—"democratic society," "the legal profession"; how much of the world it is important to know about and be interested in; how far actual acquaintance extends. Thus, less literally, how many kinds of life and action are conceived of, known of, or understood.
4. *The tendency to evaluate experience.*—Families differ in their inclination to permit members to make unique personal evaluations of and responses to stimuli. The constraints of evaluation—the internalization of criteria—modify and translate stimuli and experience. Values create in the individual member emotional positions on definable categories of experience—jazz, sports, "classical" art and music, comic books, politicians, science and scientists, literature—the broad range of stimuli available in our culture. The family also evaluates experience initiated by the individual member and evokes from him modes of responsiveness to his own behavior and the behavior of others. A prominent element of this dimension is the tendency toward moral evaluation of experience. The freedom from or constraint by guilt and the freedom to range inwardly in thought, impulse, and fantasy, to entertain unaccustomed possibilities, are involved here. Moral evaluation also affects the freedom to range outwardly, to be at home in new circumstances, to find out for oneself. The central issue is the need, or lack of it, to condemn and repudiate or even simply to shun what is traditionally not one's own.

These are at least some of the most important dimensions which describe the boundaries of a family's world and the kind of life that can be lived

within it. The characteristics of this arena help determine for each member how multiplex his life is, how close to himself, how close to others, how close to home. Establishing the boundaries of experience, in the terms just enumerated, is one of the principal processes of family life. It continues not only while the members live together but even after they disperse—even influencing how far and in what direction they will go.

In a final sense, the predicated states are never reached. What turns a life may take cannot be known, so that the pattern-establishing processes do not result in changeless solutions. While it may be possible to predict how a family of a given type will weather economic privation, if it should occur, the predicted kind of change will not take place unless the financial stress does. Similarly, in greater or lesser degree, the "establishing" processes are always in play, responding to the new elements introduced into the family's life. However, it is necessary to recognize that while in a literal, concrete sense, the boundaries of experience are never definitively established, it is possible to ascertain with high probability what they are likely to be for a given family. If the life of a family never reaches a final, unchangeable form—even for a delimited period of the family cycle, such as the child-rearing stage—it nonetheless gains a recognizably firm structure, as any human association must.

DEALING WITH SIGNIFICANT GIVEN BIOSOCIAL ISSUES OF FAMILY LIFE

The most essential structural characteristics of the nuclear family are well known and need not be extensively elaborated here. The fact that a family, unlike other voluntary groups, must be established by one member from each sex means that sex membership is a basic point of reference. In the study of any particular family it is necessary to investigate what it interprets male and female to be. What qualities are attributed to each sex? What is demanded of each? What is accorded to each? How important is the distinction felt to be? Is the sex difference minimized, or does it serve as a basis for proliferation of emotions and activities? Are the two sexes differentially evaluated so that rewards and penalties are distributed on the basis of sex membership? All of these questions have, of course, certain conventionalized answers provided by the larger social units to which a family belongs—social class, ethnic group, community. Yet each family also provides answers of its own; each family makes use of sex difference in structuring its own world.

While parents choose each other voluntarily in marriage, their children become family members without exercise of choice. This fact, together with

the fact that they are helpless at birth and hence born into the care and authority of their parents, sets the question of how the differences between the two generations will be construed and handled. How much of family life is to be regulated by considerations of authority becomes an important dimension. Parental authority—its scope, the manner in which it is exercised—is one of the forces shaping the pattern of separateness-connectedness. Its potential is realized in such consequences for the child as self-direction, submissiveness, a sense of injustice, or a readiness to learn from those of greater experience.

In dealing with this gulf in power and capacity between themselves and their children, parents have to make a decision (not a conscious decision, in its essentials, but one arising from their own personalities) about how insistently they will impose their images upon their children. Families differ in how far parents interact with their children, amending or reshaping their own aims as their children become increasingly formed. Where they expect the children to do all the adapting, there is little room for negotiating, so that the process of self- and mutual discovery is compressed within narrow limits.

Families differ also in how the parents pace their children through childhood—whether they push, encourage, or restrain. Parents seek to shape their children in keeping with their own desire to achieve preferred experience. They stimulate the children in accordance with what they feel children should be, as a part of their activity in defining their own world. The nature of parental stimulation—its intensity, frequency, and diversity—expresses the aims of their care and authority. When we observe that one parent is eager for his child to behave as much like an adult as quickly as possible, whereas another regrets his child's loss of babyish ways, it is clear that different personal wishes or aims are operating in the two cases. But it would appear that different concepts of growth and different time perspectives also operate here. In some families there is an urgency to growing up, sometimes motivated by the parent's wish to be quickly relieved of what are conceived as the taxing aspects of child rearing, or by an anxiety that each "delay" or concession to impulsivity is threatening to ultimate development. This idea seems to include a notion of a fixed termination point, a time when development has reached its goal and is then essentially over. The happenings beyond this point are construed not as growth but simply as events, important or not, in the passing of time. In other families a sense of a long, indefinite time span prevails, together with a belief that growth cannot be compressed. Children are seen as moving slowly toward maturity, and it is felt that they have time enough to do so. Growth is intricate, not readily mechanized, and the forces of childhood are tamed rather than broken.

Implicit in these several aspects of parental feeling and action vis-à-vis their offspring is another decision: *how much of the child's world does not*

belong to his parents? In part, this is a matter of authority. In exercising authority, parents not only choose among techniques of reward and punishment. They also may or may not restrict themselves from incursions into the child's domain. Whether a child is granted privacy in any sense—privacy of quarters, of possessions, of thoughts and emotions, of responses to others—or whether these are all felt to be subject to his elders' inspection and manipulation is a question decided according to how parents define themselves and children. Bound up in the decision is a conception of integrity, for the terms on which people have access to one another, while communicated earlier in the infant-care context, become increasingly defined and actualized during childhood.

The relationships which develop among the various members of a family do not follow simply the intrinsic lines of sex and age. They are shaped as well by the underlying family themes and images which impart meanings to sex and age and also to various other personal characteristics. On the basis of the meanings which the members have for one another, particular interpersonal ties evolve. The closeness between any two members, for example, or the distance between a group of three closely joined members and a fourth who is apart, derives from the interlocking meanings which obtain among them. Each family tends to have a characteristic distribution of ties or pattern of alignment (which may be negative or positive in emotional tone) among members. How these patterns are developed and sustained is, then, a matter of considerable significance in understanding life within families as well as the course of any one member's life.

In these concepts we have attempted to provide a framework for understanding the family as an intimate group of members which functions in systematic ways. We have focused on the interior of the family, so that the framework is somewhat less useful for analyzing the relationship between the family and society. The case studies in [*Family Worlds*] have been prepared in terms of the point of view advanced in the present chapter, though the concepts identified here are not reiterated with each detail of family life. At various points where it has seemed necessary, we have elaborated on some idea that seemed to us to illuminate the family being discussed. The frame of reference is intended to serve as just that—marking out the range of phenomena encompassed and the terms in which they are considered.

NOTES

1. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950).

2. George Herbert Mead gave theoretical significance to this uncertainty of future action in his concept of the "I." "It is because of the 'I' that we say that we are

never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. . . . I want to call attention to the fact that this response of the 'I' is something that is more or less uncertain. . . . The 'I' gives the sense of freedom, of initiative" (*Mind, Self, and Society* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934], pp. 174, 176, 177).

3. The concept of the theme has been introduced into social science by Henry Murray in psychology and by Morris Opler in anthropology. See Henry A. Murray *et al., Explorations in Personality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), and Morris Opler, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," *American Journal of Sociology,* LI, 198–206. Though he does not use the word, Fritz Redl's approach to group structure makes use of similar logic. See his "Group Emotion and Leadership," *Psychiatry,* V (1942), 573–96.

2

Marriage and the Construction of Reality: *An Exercise in the Microsociology of Knowledge*

PETER BERGER and HANSFRIED KELLNER

Ever since Durkheim it has been a commonplace of family sociology that marriage serves as a protection against anomie for the individual. Interesting and pragmatically useful though this insight is, it is but the negative side of a phenomenon of much broader significance. If one speaks of *anomic* states, then one ought properly to investigate also the *nomic* processes that, by their absence, lead to the aforementioned states. If, consequently, one finds a negative correlation between marriage and anomie, then one should be led to inquire into the character of marriage as a *nomos*-building instrumentality; that is, of marriage as a social arrangement that creates for the individual the sort of order in which he can experience his life as making sense. It is our intention here to discuss marriage in these terms. While this could evidently be done in a macrosociological perspective, dealing with marriage as a major social institution related to other broad structures of society, our focus will be microsociological, dealing primarily with the social processes affecting the individuals in any specific marriage, although, of course, the larger framework of these processes will have to be understood. In what sense this discussion can be described as microsociology of knowledge will hopefully become clearer in the course of it.[1]

Marriage is obviously only *one* social relationship in which this process of *nomos*-building takes place. It is, therefore, necessary to first look in more general terms at the character of this process. In doing so, we are influenced by three theoretical perspectives: the Weberian perspective on society as a network of meanings, the Meadian perspective on identity as a social phe-

From *Diogenes*, Summer, 1964, *46*, pp. 1–23. Reprinted with permission.

nomenon, and the phenomenological analysis of the social structuring of reality, especially as given in the work of Schutz and Merleau-Ponty.[2] Not being convinced, however, that theoretical lucidity is necessarily enhanced by terminological ponderosity, we shall avoid as much as possible the use of the sort of jargon for which both sociologists and phenomenologists have acquired dubious notoriety.

The process that interests us here is the one that constructs, maintains and modifies a consistent reality that can be meaningfully experienced by individuals. In its essential forms this process is determined by the society in which it occurs. Every society has its specific way of defining and perceiving reality—its world, its universe, its overarching organization of symbols. This is already given in the language that forms the symbolic base of the society. Erected over this base, and by means of it, is a system of ready-made typifications through which the innumerable experiences of reality come to be ordered.[3] These typifications and their order are held in common by the members of society, thus acquiring not only the character of objectivity, but being taken for granted as the world *tout court,* the only world that normal men can conceive of.[4] The seemingly objective and taken-for-granted character of the social definitions of reality can be seen most clearly in the case of language itself, but it is important to keep in mind that the latter forms the base and instrumentality of a much larger world-erecting process.

The socially constructed world must be continually mediated to and actualized by the individual, so that it can become and remain indeed *his* world as well. The individual is given by his society certain decisive cornerstones for his everyday experience and conduct. Most importantly, the individual is supplied with specific sets of typifications and criteria of relevance, predefined for him by the society and made available to him for the ordering of his everyday life. This ordering, or (in line with our opening considerations) nomic apparatus, is biographically cumulative. It begins to be formed in the individual from the earliest stages of socialization, then keeps on being enlarged and modified by himself throughout his biography.[5] While there are individual biographical differences making for differences in the constitution of this apparatus in specific individuals, there exists in the society an overall consensus on the range of differences deemed to be tolerable. Without such consensus, indeed, society would be impossible as a going concern, since it would then lack the ordering principles by which alone experience can be shared and conduct can be mutually intelligible. This order, by which the individual comes to perceive and define his world, is thus not chosen by him, except perhaps for very small modifications. Rather, it is discovered by him as an external datum, a ready-made world that simply is *there* for him to go ahead and live in, though he modifies it continually in the process of living in it. Nevertheless, this world is in need of validation, perhaps precisely because of an ever-present glimmer of suspi-

cion as to its social manufacture and relativity. This validation, while necessarily undertaken by the individual himself, requires ongoing interaction with others who coinhabit this same socially constructed world. In a broad sense, *all* the other coinhabitants of this world serve a validating function. Every morning the newspaper boy validates the widest coordinates of my world and the mailman bears tangible validation of my own location within these coordinates. However, some validations are more significant than others. Every individual requires the ongoing validation of his world, including crucially the validation of his identity and position by those few who are his truly significant others.[6] Just as the individual's deprivation of relationship with his significant others will plunge him into anomie, so their continued presence will sustain for him that *nomos* by which he can feel at home in the world at least most of the time. Again in a broad sense, all the actions of the significant others and even their simple presence serve this sustaining function. In everyday life, however, the principal method employed is speech. In this sense, it is proper to view the individual's relationship with his significant others as an ongoing conversation. As the latter occurs, it validates over and over again the fundamental definitions of reality once entered into, not, of course, so much by explicit articulation, but precisely by taking the definitions silently for granted and conversing about all conceivable matters on this taken-for-granted basis. Through the same conversation the individual is also made capable of adjusting to changing and new social contexts in his biography. In a very fundamental sense it can be said that one converses one's way through life.

If one concedes these points, one can now state a general sociological proposition: The plausibility and stability of the world, as socially defined, is dependent upon the strength and continuity of significant relationships in which conversation about this world can be continually carried on. Or, to put it a little differently: The reality of the world is sustained through conversation with significant others. This reality, of course, includes not only the imagery by which fellowmen are viewed, but also the way in which one views oneself. The reality-bestowing force of social relationships depends on the degree of their nearness;[7] that is, on the degree to which social relationships occur in face-to-face situations and to which they are credited with primary significance by the individual. In any empirical situation, there now emerge obvious sociological questions out of these considerations; namely, questions about the patterns of the world-building relationships, the social forms taken by the conversation with significant others. Sociologically, one must ask how these relationships are *objectively* structured and distributed, and one will also want to understand how they are *subjectively* perceived and experienced.

With these preliminary assumptions stated we can now arrive at our main thesis. Namely, we would contend that marriage occupies a privileged sta-

tus among the significant validating relationships for adults in our society. Put slightly differently: Marriage is a crucial nomic instrumentality in our society. We would further argue that the essential social functionality of this institution cannot be fully understood if this fact is not perceived.

We can now proceed with an ideal-typical analysis of marriage; that is, seek to abstract the essential features involved. Marriage in our society is a *dramatic* act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves. The drama of the act is internally anticipated and socially legitimated long before it takes place in the individual's biography, and amplified by means of a pervasive ideology, the dominant themes of which (romantic love, sexual fulfillment, self-discovery and self-realization through love and sexuality, the nuclear family as the social site for these processes) can be found distributed through all strata of the society. The actualization of these ideologically predefined expectations in the life of the individual occurs to the accompaniment of one of the few traditional rites of passage that are still meaningful to almost all members of the society. It should be added that, in using the term "strangers," we do not mean, of course, that the candidates for the marriage come from widely discrepant social backgrounds—indeed, the data indicate that the contrary is the case. The strangeness lies rather in the fact that, unlike marriage candidates in many previous societies, those in ours typically come from different face-to-face contexts; in the terms used above, they come from different areas of conversation. They do not have a shared past, although their pasts have a similar structure. In other words, quite apart from prevailing patterns of ethnic, religious and class endogamy, our society is typically exogamous in terms of nomic relationships. Put concretely, in our mobile society the significant conversation of the two partners previous to the marriage took place in social circles that did not overlap. With the dramatic redefinition of the situation brought about by the marriage, however, all significant conversation for the two new partners is now centered in their relationship with each other; in fact, it was precisely with this intention that they entered upon their relationship.

It goes without saying that this character of marriage has its root in much broader structural configurations of our society. The most important of these, for our purposes, is the crystallization of a so-called private sphere of existence, more and more segregated from the immediate controls of the public institutions (especially the economic and political ones), and yet defined and utilized as the main social area for the individual's self-realization.[8] It cannot be our purpose here to inquire into the historical forces that brought forth this phenomenon, beyond making the observation that these are closely connected with the industrial revolution and its institutional consequences. The public institutions now confront the individual as an immensely powerful and alien world, incomprehensible in its inner workings, anonymous in its human character. If only through his work in some

nook of the economic machinery, the individual must find a way of living in this alien world, come to terms with its power over him, be satisfied with a few conceptual rules of thumb to guide him through a vast reality that otherwise remains opaque to his understanding, and modify its anonymity by whatever "human relations" he can work out in his involvement with it.

It ought to be emphasized, against some critics of "mass society," that this does not inevitably leave the individual with a sense of profound unhappiness and lostness. It would rather seem that large numbers of people in our society are quite content with a situation in which their public involvements have little subjective importance, regarding work as a not-too-bad necessity and politics as at best a spectator sport. It is usually only intellectuals with ethical and political commitments who assume that such people must be terribly desperate. The point, however, is that the individual in this situation, whether he is happy or not, will turn elsewhere for the experiences of self-realization that do have importance for him. The private sphere, this interstitial area created (we would think) more or less haphazardly as a by-product of the social metamorphosis of industrialism, is mainly where he will turn. It is here that the individual will seek power, intelligibility and, quite literally, a name—the apparent power to fashion a world, however Lilliputian, that will reflect his own being; a world that, seemingly having been shaped by himself and thus unlike those other worlds that insist on shaping him, is translucently intelligible to him (or so he thinks); a world in which, consequently, he is somebody—perhaps even, within its charmed circle, a lord and master. What is more, to a considerable extent these expectations are not unrealistic. The public institutions have no need to control the individual's adventures in the private sphere, as long as they really stay within the latter's circumscribed limits. The private sphere is perceived, justifiably, as an area of individual choice and even autonomy. This fact has important consequences for the shaping of identity in modern society that cannot be pursued here. All that ought to be clear here is the peculiar location of the private sphere within and between the other social structures.

In sum, it is, as a rule, only in the private sphere that the individual can take a slice of reality and fashion it into his world. If one is aware of the decisive significance of this capacity and even necessity of men to externalize themselves in reality and to produce for themselves a world in which they can feel at home, then one will hardly be surprised at the great importance the private sphere has come to have in modern society.[9]

The private sphere includes a variety of social relationships. Among these, however, the relationships of the family occupy a central position and serve as a focus for most of the other relationships (such as those with friends, neighbors, fellow members of religious and other voluntary associations). Since, as the ethnologists keep reminding us, the family in our society is of the conjugal type, the central relationship in this whole area is the marital

one. It is on the basis of marriage that, for most adults in our society, existence in the private sphere is built up. It will be clear that this is not at all a universal or even cross culturally wide function of marriage, which in our society has taken on a very peculiar character and functionality. It has been pointed out that marriage in contemporary society has lost some of its older functions and taken on new ones instead.[10] This is certainly correct, but we would prefer to state the matter a little differently. Marriage and the family used to be firmly embedded in a matrix of wider community relationships, serving as extensions and particularizations of the latter's social controls. There were few separating barriers between the world of the individual family and the wider community, a fact even to be seen in the physical conditions in which the family lived before the industrial revolution.[11] The same social life pulsated through the house, the street and the community. In our terms, the family and within it the marital relationship were part and parcel of a considerably larger area of conversation. In our contemporary society, by contrast, each family constitutes its own segregated subworld, with its own controls and its own closed conversation.

This fact requires a much greater effort on the part of the marriage partners. Unlike an earlier situation in which the establishment of the new marriage simply added to the differentiation and complexity of an already existing social world, the marriage partners now are embarked on the often difficult task of constructing for themselves the little world in which they will live. To be sure, the larger society provides them with certain standard instructions as to how they should go about this task, but this does not change the fact that considerable effort of their own is required for its realization. The monogamous character of marriage enforces both the dramatic and the precarious nature of his undertaking. Success or failure hinges on the present idiosyncracies and the fairly unpredictable future development of these idiosyncracies of only two individuals (who, moreover, do not have a shared past)—as Simmel has shown, the most unstable of all possible social relationships.[12] Not surprisingly, the decision to embark on this undertaking has a critical, even cataclysmic connotation in the popular imagination, which is underlined as well as psychologically assuaged by the ceremonialism that surrounds the event.

Every social relationship requires objectivation, that is, requires a process by which subjectively experienced meanings become objective to the individual and, in interaction with others, become common property and thereby massively objective.[13] The degree of objectivation will depend on the number and the intensity of the social relationships that are its carriers. A relationship that consists of only two individuals called upon to sustain, by their own efforts, an ongoing social world will have to make up in intensity for the numerical poverty of the arrangement. This, in turn, accentuates the drama and the precariousness. The addition of children will add to the

density of objectivation taking place within the nuclear family, thus rendering the latter a good deal less precarious. It remains true that the establishment and maintenance of such a social world makes extremely high demands on the principal participants.

The attempt can now be made to outline the ideal-typical process that takes place when marriage functions as an instrumentality for the social construction of reality. The chief protagonists of the drama are two individuals, each with a biographically accumulated and available stock of experience.[14] As members of a highly mobile society, these individuals have already internalized a degree of readiness to redefine themselves and to modify their stock of experience, thus bringing with them considerable psychological capacity for entering new relationships with others.[15] Also, coming from broadly similar sectors of the larger society (in terms of region, class, ethnic and religious affiliations), the two individuals will have organized their stock of experience in similar fashion. In other words, the two individuals have internalized the same overall world, including the general definitions and expectations of the marriage relationship itself. Their society has provided them with a taken-for-granted image of marriage and has socialized them into an anticipation of stepping into the taken-for-granted roles of marriage. All the same, these relatively empty projections now have to be actualized, lived through and filled with experiential content by the protagonists. This will require a dramatic change in their definitions of reality and of themselves.

As of the marriage, most of each partner's actions must now be projected in conjunction with those of the other. Each partner's definitions of reality must be continually correlated with the definitions of the other. The other is present in nearly all horizons of everyday conduct. Furthermore, the identity of each now takes on a new character, having to be constantly matched with that of the other, indeed being typically perceived by people at large as being symbiotically conjoined with the identity of the other. In each partner's psychological economy of significant others, the marriage partner becomes the other *par excellence*, the nearest and most decisive coinhabitant of the world. Indeed, all other significant relationships have to be almost automatically reperceived and regrouped in accordance with this drastic shift.

In other words, from the beginning of the marriage each partner has new modes in his meaningful experience of the world in general, of other people and of himself. By definition, then, marriage constitutes a nomic rupture. In terms of each partner's biography, the event of marriage initiates a new nomic process. The full implications of this fact are rarely apprehended by the protagonists with any degree of clarity. There rather is to be found the notion that one's world, one's other relationships and, above all, oneself have remained what they were before—only, of course, that world, others

and self will now be shared with the marriage partner. It should be clear by now that this notion is a grave misapprehension. Just because of this fact, marriage now propels the individual into an unintended and unarticulated development, in the course of which the nomic transformation takes place. What typically *is* apprehended are certain objective and concrete problems arising out of the marriage, such as tensions with in-laws, or with former friends, or religious differences between the partners, as well as immediate tensions between them. These are apprehended as external, situational and practical difficulties. What is *not* apprehended is the subject side of these difficulties, namely, the transformation of *nomos* and identity that has occurred and that continues to go on, so that all problems and relationships are experienced in a quite new way, that is, experienced within a new and ever-changing reality.

Take a simple and frequent illustration: the male partner's relationships with male friends before and after the marriage. It is a common observation that such relationships, especially if the friends are single, rarely survive the marriage, or, if they do, are drastically redefined after it. This is typically the result of neither a deliberate decision by the husband nor deliberate sabotage by the wife. What happens, very simply is a slow process in which the husband's image of his friend is transformed as he keeps talking about this friend with his wife. Even if no actual talking goes on, the mere presence of the wife forces him to see his friend differently. This need not mean that he adopts a negative image held by the wife. Regardless of what image she holds or is believed by him to hold, it will be different from that held by the husband. This difference will enter into the joint image that now must be fabricated in the course of the ongoing conversation between the marriage partners—and, in due course, must act powerfully on the image previously held by the husband. Again, typically, this process is rarely apprehended with any degree of lucidity. The old friend is more likely to fade out of the picture by degrees as new kinds of friends take his place. The process, if commented upon at all within the marital conversation, can always be explained by socially available formulas about "people changing," "friends disappearing" or oneself "having become more mature." This process of conversational liquidation is especially powerful because it is onesided—the husband typically talks with his wife about his friend, but *not* with his friend about his wife. Thus the friend is deprived of the defense of, as it were, counterdefining the relationship. This dominance of the marital conversation over all others is one of its most important characteristics. It may be mitigated by a certain amount of protective segregation of some nonmarital relationships (say, "Tuesday night out with the boys," or "Saturday lunch with mother"), but even then there are powerful emotional barriers against the sort of conversation (conversation *about* the marital relationship, that is) that would serve by way of counter definition.

Marriage thus posits a new reality. The individual's relationship with this new reality, however, is a dialectical one; he acts upon it, in collusion with the marriage partner, and it acts back upon both him and the partner, welding together their reality. Since, as we have argued before, the objectivation that constitutes this reality is precarious, the groups with which the couple associates are called upon to assist in codefining the new reality. The couple is pushed toward groups that strengthen their new definition of themselves and the world, avoids those that weaken this definition. This, in turn, releases the commonly known pressures of group association, again acting upon the marriage partners to change their definitions of the world and of themselves. Thus the new reality is not posited once and for all, but goes on being redefined not only in the marital interaction itself but in the various maritally based group relationships into which the couple enters.

In the individual's biography marriage, then, brings about a decisive phase of socialization that can be compared with the phases of childhood and adolescence. This phase has a somewhat different structure from the earlier ones. There the individual was in the main socialized into already existing patterns. Here he actively collaborates rather than passively accommodates himself. Also, in the previous phases of socialization, there was an apprehension of entering into a new world and being changed in the course of this. In marriage there is little apprehension of such a process, but rather the notion that the world has remained the same, with only its emotional and pragmatic connotations having changed. This notion, as we have tried to show, is illusionary.

The reconstruction of the world in marriage occurs principally in the course of conversation, as we have suggested. The implicit problem of this conversation is how to match two individual definitions of reality. By the very logic of the relationship a common overall definition must be arrived at, otherwise the conversation will become impossible and, *ipso facto,* the relationship will be endangered. Now, this conversation may be understood as the working away of an ordering and typifying apparatus—if one prefers, an objectivating apparatus. Each partner ongoingly contributes his conceptions of reality, which are then "talked through," usually not once but many times, and in the process become objectivated by the conversational apparatus. The longer this conversation goes on, the more massively real do the objectivations become to the partners. In the marital conversation a world is not only built, but it is also kept in a state of repair and ongoingly refurnished. The subjective reality of this world for the two partners is sustained by the same conversation. The nomic instrumentality of marriage is concretized over and over again, from bed to breakfast table, as the partners carry on the endless conversation that feeds on nearly all they individually or jointly experience. Indeed, it may happen eventually that no experience is fully real unless and until it has been thus "talked through."

This process has a very important result; namely, a hardening or stabilization of the common objectivated reality. It should be easy to see now how this comes about. The objectivations ongoingly performed and internalized by the marriage partners become ever more massively real, as they are confirmed and reconfirmed in the marital conversation. The world that is made up of these objectivations at the same time gains in stability. For example, the images of other people, which before or in the earlier stages of the marital conversation may have been rather ambiguous and shifting in the minds of the two partners, now become hardened into definite and stable characterizations. A casual acquaintance, say, may sometimes have appeared as lots of fun and sometimes as quite a bore to the wife before her marriage. Under the influence of the marital conversation, in which this other person is frequently "discussed," she will now come down more firmly on one *or* the other of the two characterizations, or on a reasonable compromise between the two. In any of these three options, though, she will have concocted with her husband a much more stable image of the person in question than she is likely to have had before her marriage, when there may have been no conversational pressure to make a definite option at all. The same process of stabilization may be observed with regard to self-definitions as well. In this way, the wife in our example will be pressured to assign stable characterizations not only to others but also to herself. Previously uninterested politically, she now identifies herself as a liberal. Previously alternating between dimly articulated religious positions, she now declares herself an agnostic. Previously confused and uncertain about her sexual emotions, she now understands herself as an unabashed hedonist in this area. And so on and so forth, with the same reality—and identity—stabilizing process at work on the husband. Both world and self thus take on a firmer, more reliable character for both partners.

Furthermore, it is not only the ongoing experience of the two partners that is constantly shared and passed through the conversational apparatus. The same sharing extends into the past. The two distinct biographies, as subjectively apprehended by the two individuals who have lived through them, are overruled and reinterpreted in the course of their conversation. Sooner or later, they will "tell all"—or, more correctly, they will tell it in a way that fits into the self-definitions objectivated in the marital relationship. The couple thus not only construct present reality but reconstruct past reality as well, fabricating a common memory that integrates the recollections of the two individual pasts.[16] The comic fulfillment of this process may be seen in those cases when one partner "remembers" more clearly what happened in the other's past than the other does—and corrects him accordingly. Similarly, there occurs a sharing of future horizons, which leads not only to stabilization, but inevitably to a narrowing of the future projections of each partner. Before marriage the individual typically plays with quite discrepant day-

dreams in which his future self is projected.[17] Having now considerably stabilized his self-image, the married individual will have to project the future in accordance with a maritally defined identity. This narrowing of future horizons begins with the obvious external limitations that marriage entails, as, for example, with regard to vocational and career plans. However, it extends also to the more general possibilities of the individual's biography. To return to a previous illustration, the wife, having "found herself" as a liberal, an agnostic and a "sexually healthy" person, *ipso facto* liquidates the possibilities of becoming an anarchist, a Catholic or a lesbian. At least until further notice she has decided upon who she is—and, by the same token, on who she will be. The stabilization brought about by marriage thus affects the total reality in which the partners exist. In the most far-reaching sense of the word, the married individual "settles down," and *must* do so, if the marriage is to be viable, in accordance with its contemporary institutional definition.

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that this process is typically unapprehended, almost automatic in character. The protagonists of the marriage drama do *not* set out deliberately to re-create their world. Each continues to live in a world that is taken for granted—and keeps its taken-for-granted character even as it is metamorphosed. The new world that the married partners, Prometheus-like, have called into being is perceived by them as the normal world in which they have lived before. Reconstructed present and reinterpreted past are perceived as a continuum, extending forward into a commonly projected future. The dramatic change that has occurred remains, in bulk, unapprehended and unarticulated. And where it forces itself upon the individual's attention, it is retrojected into the past, explained as having always been there, though perhaps in a hidden way. Typically, the reality that has been "invented" within the marital conversation is subjectively perceived as a "discovery." Thus the partners "discover" themselves and the world, "who they really are," "what they really believe," "how they really feel, and always have felt, about so-and-so." This retrojection of the world being produced all the time by themselves serves to enhance the stability of this world and at the same time to assuage the "existential anxiety" that, probably inevitably, accompanies the perception that nothing but one's own narrow shoulders support the universe in which one has chosen to live. If one may put it like this, it is psychologically more tolerable to be Columbus than to be Prometheus.

The use of the term "stabilization" should not detract from the insight into the difficulty and precariousness of this world-building enterprise. Often enough, the new universe collapses *in statu nascendi*. Many more times it continues over a period, swaying perilously back and forth as the two partners try to hold it up, finally to be abandoned as an impossible undertaking. If one conceives of the marital conversation as the principal drama and the

two partners as the principal protagonists of the drama, then one can look upon the other individuals involved as the supporting chorus for the central dramatic action. Children, friends, relatives, and casual acquaintances all have their part in reinforcing the tenuous structure of the new reality. It goes without saying that the children form the most important part of this supporting chorus. Their very existence is predicated on the maritally established world. The marital partners themselves are in charge of their socialization *into* this world, which to them has a pre-existent and self-evident character. They are taught from the beginning to speak precisely those lines that lend themselves to a supporting chorus, from their first invocations of "Daddy" and "Mummy" on to their adoption of the parents' ordering and typifying apparatus that now defines *their* world as well. The marital conversation is now in the process of becoming a family symposium, with the necessary consequence that its objectivations rapidly gain in density, plausibility and durability.

In sum: The process that we have been inquiring into is, ideal-typically, one in which reality is crystallized, narrowed and stabilized. Ambivalences are converted into certainties. Typifications of self and of others become settled. Most generally, possibilities become facticities. What is more, this process of transformation remains, most of the time, unapprehended by those who are both its authors and its objects.[18]

We have analyzed in some detail the process that, we contend, entitles us to describe marriage as a nomic instrumentality. It may now be well to turn back once more to the macrosocial context in which this process takes place—a process that, to repeat, is peculiar to our society as far as the institution of marriage is concerned, although it obviously expresses much more general human facts. The narrowing and stabilization of identity is functional in a society that, in its major public institutions, must insist on rigid controls over the individual's conduct. At the same time, the narrow enclave of the nuclear family serves as a macrosocially innocuous "play area," in which the individual can safely exercise his world-building proclivities without upsetting any of the important social, economic, and political applecarts. Barred from expanding himself into the area occupied by these major institutions, he is given plenty of leeway to "discover himself" in his marriage and his family, and, in view of the difficulty of this undertaking, is provided with a number of auxiliary agencies that stand ready to assist him (such as counseling, psychotherapeutic and religious agencies). The marital adventure can be relied upon to absorb a large amount of energy that might otherwise be expended more dangerously. The ideological themes of familism, romantic love, sexual expression, maturity and social adjustment, with the pervasive psychologistic anthropology that underlies them all, function to legitimate this enterprise. Also, the narrowing and stabilization of the individual's principal area of conversation within the nuclear family is func-

tional in a society that requires high degrees of both geographical and social mobility. The segregated little world of the family can easily be detached from one milieu and transposed into another without appreciably interfering with the central processes going on in it. Needless to say, we are not suggesting that these functions are deliberately planned or even apprehended by some mythical ruling directorate of the society. Like most social phenomena, whether they are macro- or microscopic, these functions are typically unintended and unarticulated. What is more, the functionality would be impaired if it were too widely apprehended.

We believe that the above theoretical considerations serve to give a new perspective on various empirical facts studied by family sociologists. As we have emphasized a number of times, our considerations are ideal-typical in intention. We have been interested in marriage at a normal age in urban, middle-class western societies. We cannot discuss here such special problems as marriages or remarriages at a more advanced age, marriage in the remaining rural subcultures, or in ethnic or lower-class minority groups. We feel quite justified in this limitation of scope, however, by the empirical findings that tend toward the view that a global marriage type is emerging in the central strata of modern industrial societies.[19] This type, commonly referred to as the nuclear family, has been analyzed in terms of a shift from the so-called family of orientation to the so-called family of procreation as the most important reference for the individual.[20] In addition to the well-known socioeconomic reasons for this shift, most of them rooted in the development of industrialism, we would argue that important macro-social functions pertain to the nomic process within the nuclear family, as we have analyzed it. This functionality of the nuclear family must, furthermore, be seen in conjunction with the familistic ideology that both reflects and reinforces it. A few specific empirical points may suffice to indicate the applicability of our theoretical perspective. To make these we shall use selected American data.

The trend toward marriage at an earlier age has been noted.[21] This has been correctly related to factors such as urban freedom, sexual emancipation and egalitarian values. We would add the important fact that a child raised in the circumscribed world of the nuclear family is stamped by it in terms of his psychological needs and social expectations. Having to live in the larger society from which the nuclear family is segregated, the adolescent soon feels the need for a "little world" of his own, having been socialized in such a way that only by having a private world to withdraw into can he successfully cope with the anonymous "big world" that confronts him as soon as he steps outside his parental home. In other words, to be "at home" in society entails, *per definitionem,* the construction of a maritally based subworld. The parental home itself facilitates an early jump into marriage precisely because its controls are very narrow in scope and leave the adoles-

cent to his own nomic devices at an early age. As has been studied in considerable detail, the adolescent peer group functions as a transitional *nomos* between the two family worlds in the individual's biography.[22]

The equalization in the age of the marriage partners has also been noted.[23] This is certainly to be related to egalitarian values and, concomitantly, to the decline in the "double standard" of sexual morality. Also, however, this fact is very conducive to the common reality-constructing enterprise that we have analyzed. One of the features of the latter, as we have pointed out, is the reconstruction of the two biographies in terms of a cohesive and mutually correlated common memory. This task is evidently facilitated if the two partners are of roughly equal age. Another empirical finding to which our considerations are relevant is the choice of marriage partners within similar socioeconomic backgrounds.[24] Apart from the obvious practical pressures toward such limitations of choice, the latter also ensures sufficient similarity in the biographically accumulated stocks of experience to facilitate the described reality-constructing process. This would offer additional explanation to the observed tendency to narrow the limitations of marital choice even further, for example in terms of religious background.[25]

There now exists a considerable body of data on the adoption and mutual adjustment of marital roles.[26] Nothing in our considerations detracts from the analyses made of these data by sociologists interested primarily in the processes of group interaction. We would argue only that something more fundamental is involved in this role-taking; namely, the individual's relationship to reality as such. Each role in the marital situation carries with it a universe of discourse, broadly given by cultural definition but continually reactualized in the ongoing conversation between the marriage partners. Put simply: Marriage involves not only stepping into new roles, but, beyond this, stepping into a new world. The *mutuality* of adjustment may again be related to the rise of marital egalitarianism, in which comparable effort is demanded of both partners.

Most directly related to our considerations are data that pertain to the greater stability of married as against unmarried individuals.[27] Though frequently presented in misleading psychological terms (such as "greater emotional stability," "greater maturity," and so on), these data are sufficiently validated to be used not only by marriage counselors but in the risk calculations of insurance companies. We would contend that our theoretical perspective places these data into a much more intelligible sociological frame of reference, which also happens to be free of the particular value bias with which the psychological terms are loaded. It is, of course, quite true that married people are more stable emotionally (i.e., operating within a more controlled scope of emotional expression), more mature in their views (i.e., inhabiting a firmer and narrower world in conformity with the expectations

of society), and more sure of themselves (i.e., having objectivated a more stable and fixated self-definition). *Therefore* they are more liable to be psychologically balanced (i.e., having sealed off much of their "anxiety," and reduced ambivalence as well as openness toward new possibilities of self-definition) and socially predictable (i.e., keeping their conduct well within the socially established safety rules). All of these phenomena are concomitants of the overall fact of having "settled down"—cognitively, emotionally, in terms of self-identification. To speak of these phenomena as indicators of "mental health," let alone of "adjustment to reality," overlooks the decisive fact that reality is socially constructed and that psychological conditions of all sorts are grounded in a social matrix.

We would say, very simply, that the married individual comes to live in a more stable world, from which fact certain psychological consequences can be readily deduced. To bestow some sort of higher ontological status upon these psychological consequences is *ipso facto* a symptom of the mis- or nonapprehension of the social process that has produced them. Furthermore, the compulsion to legitimate the stabilized marital world, be it in psychologistic or in traditional religious terms, is another expression of the precariousness of its construction.[28] This is not the place to pursue any further the ideological processes involved. Suffice it to say that contemporary psychology functions to sustain this precarious world by assigning to it the status of "normalcy," a legitimating operation that increasingly links up with the older religious assignment of the status of "sacredness." Both legitimating agencies have established their own rites of passage, validating myths and rituals, and individualized repair services for crisis situations. Whether one legitimates one's maritally constructed reality in terms of "mental health" or of the "sacrament of marriage" is today largely left to free consumer preference, but it is indicative of the crystallization of a new overall universe of discourse that it is increasingly possible to do both at the same time.

Finally, we would point here to the empirical data on divorce.[29] The prevalence, indeed, increasing prevalence of divorce might at first appear as a counterargument to our theoretical considerations. We would contend that the very opposite is the case, as the data themselves bear out. Typically, individuals in our society do not divorce because marriage has become unimportant to them, but because it has become so important that they have no tolerance for the less than completely successful marital arrangement they have contracted with the particular individual in question. This is more fully understood when one has grasped the crucial need for the sort of world that only marriage can produce in our society, a world without which the individual is powerfully threatened with anomie in the fullest sense of the word. Also, the frequency of divorce simply reflects the difficulty and demanding character of the whole undertaking. The empirical fact that the

great majority of divorced individuals plan to remarry and a good majority of them actually do, at least in America, fully bears out this contention.[30]

The purpose of this article is not polemic, nor do we wish to advocate any particular values concerning marriage. We have sought to debunk the familistic ideology only insofar as it serves to obfuscate a sociological understanding of the phenomenon. Our purpose has been twofold. First, we wanted to show that it is possible to develop a sociological theory of marriage that is based on clearly sociological presuppositions, without operating with psychological or psychiatric categories that have dubious value within a sociological frame of reference. We believe that such a sociological theory of marriage is generally useful for a fully conscious awareness of existence in contemporary society, and not only for the sociologist. Second, we have used the case of marriage for an exercise in the sociology of knowledge, a discipline that we regard as most promising. Hitherto this discipline has been almost exclusively concerned with macrosociological questions, such as those dealing with the relationship of intellectual history to social processes. We believe that the microsociological focus is equally important for this discipline. The sociology of knowledge must be concerned not only with the great universes of meaning that history offers up for our inspection, but with the many little workshops in which living individuals keep hammering away at the construction and maintenance of these universes. In this way, the sociologist can make an important contribution to the illumination of that everyday world in which we all live and which we help fashion in the course of our biography.

NOTES

1. The present article has come out of a larger project on which the authors have been engaged in collaboration with three colleagues in sociology and philosophy. The project is to produce a systematic treatise that will integrate a number of now separate theoretical strands in the sociology of knowledge.

2. Cf. especially Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und gesellschaft,* Tuebingen: Mohr, 1956); Id., *Gesammelte aufsaetze zur wissenschaftslehre,* Tuebingen: Mohr, 1951; George H. Mead, *Mind, self and society,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934; Alfred Schutz, *Der sinnhafte aufbau der sozialen welt,* Vienna: Springer, 1960; Id., *Collected papers,* I, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception,* Paris: Gallimard, 1945; Id., *La structure du comportement,* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953.

3. Schutz, *Aufbau,* 202–220; Id., *Collected papers,* I, 3–27, 283–286.

4. Cf. Schutz *Collected papers,* I, 207–228.

5. Cf. especially Jean Piaget, *The construction of reality in the child,* New York, Basic Books, 1954.

6. Cf. Mead, *op cit.,* 135–226.

7. Cf. Schutz, *Aufbau,* 181–195.

8. Cf. Arnold Gehlen, *Die seele im technischen Zeitalter,* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957, pp. 57–69; Id., *Anthropologische forschung,* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961, pp. 69–77, 127–140; Helmut Schelsky, *Soziologie der sexualitaet,* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1955, pp. 102–133. Also, cf. Thomas Luckmann, On religion in modern society. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Spring 1963, pp. 147–162.

9. In these considerations we have been influenced by certain presuppositions of Marxian anthropology, as well as by the anthropological work of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. We are indebted to Thomas Luckmann for the clarification of the social-psychological significance of the private sphere.

10. Cf. Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales, *Family, socialization and interaction process,* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955, pp. 3–34, 353–396.

11. Cf. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of childhood,* New York: Knopf, 1962, pp. 339–410.

12. Cf. Kurt Wolff (Ed.). *The sociology of Georg Simmel.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950, pp. 118–144.

13. Cf. Schutz, *Aufbau,* pp. 29–36, 149–153.

14. Cf. Schutz, *Aufbau,* pp. 186–192, 202–210.

15. David Riesman's well-known concept of "other-direction" would also be applicable here.

16. Cf. Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952, especially pp. 146–177; Also, cf. Peter Berger, *Invitation to sociology—a humanistic perspective.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1963, pp. 54–65.

17. Cf. Schutz, *Collected papers,* I, pp. 72–73, 79–82.

18. The phenomena here discussed could also be formulated effectively in terms of the Marxian categories of reification and false consciousness. Jean-Paul Sartre's recent work, especially *Critique de la raison dialectique,* seeks to integrate these categories within a phenomenological analysis of human conduct. Also, cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne.* Paris: l'Arche, 1958–1961.

19. Cf. Renate Mayntz, *Die moderne familie.* Stuttgart: Enke, 1955; Helmut Schelsky, *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart.* Stuttgart: Enke, 1955; Maximilien Sorre (Ed.). *Sociologie comparée de la famille contemporaine.* Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1955; Ruth Anshen (Ed.), *The family—its function and destiny.* New York: Harper, 1959; Norman Bell and Ezra Vogel, *A modern introduction to the family.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960.

20. Cf. Talcott Parsons, *Essays in sociological theory.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1949, pp. 233–250.

21. In these as well as the following references to empirical studies we naturally make no attempt at comprehensiveness. References are given as representative of a much larger body of materials. Cf. Paul Glick, *American families.* New York: Wiley, 1957, p. 54. Also, cf. Id., The Family Cycle, *American Sociological Review,* April 1947, pp. 164–174. Also, cf. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstracts of the United States,* 1956 and 1958; *Current Population Reports,* Nov. 1959, (Series P-20, No. 96).

22. Cf. David Riesman, *The lonely crowd.* New Haven: Yale University Press,

1953, pp. 29–40; Frederick Elkin, *The child and society.* New York: Random House, 1960, *passim.*

23. Cf. references given under Note 21.

24. Cf. W. Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt, *The social life of a modern community.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941, pp. 436–440; August Hollingshead, Cultural factors in the selection of marriage mates. *American Sociological Review,* October 1950, pp. 619–627. Also, cf. Ernest Burgess and Paul Wallin, Homogamy in social characteristics. *American Journal of Sociology,* September 1943, pp. 109–124.

25. Cf. Gerhard Lenski, *The religious factor.* Garden City: Doubleday, 1961, pp. 48–50.

26. Cf. Leonard Cottrell, Roles in marital adjustment. *Publications of the American Sociological Society,* 1933, 27, 107–115; Willard Waller and Reuben Hill, *The family—a dynamic interpretation.* New York: Dryden, 1951, 253–271; Morris Zelditch, Role differentiation in the nuclear family. In Parsons and Bales, *op. cit.,* pp. 307–352. For a general discussion of role interaction in small groups, cf. especially George Homans, *The human group.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950.

27. Cf. Waller and Hill, *op. cit.,* pp. 253–271, for an excellent summation of such data.

28. Cf. Dennison Nash and Peter Berger, The family, the child and the religious revival in suburbia. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Fall 1962, pp. 85–93.

29. Cf. Bureau of the Census, *op. cit.*

30. Cf. Talcott Parsons, Age and sex in the social structure of the United States. *American Sociological Review,* December 1942, pp. 604–616; Paul Glick, First marriages and remarriages. *American Sociological Review,* December 1949, pp. 726–734; William Goode, *After divorce.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956, pp. 269–285.

3

Marriage and the Construction of Reality: *Then and Now*

NORBERT F. WILEY

In *Principles of Psychology* (1890, vol. II, Chap. 21) William James introduces the paradoxical notion of multiple realities or worlds. There is the main, everyday, central reality, to which we always return. Then, to make his highly original point, there are spheres of reality outside the main one. These special realities include art, both making and enjoying, science, religious mysticism, sleep and dream states, chemical highs, sexuality, play, ritual, and other high ceremonies. Each reality is a sphere of meaning, containing its own kind of symbols and its own experiential space. We always return to the main one, and we tend to interpret the puzzles of other spheres, for example dreams, in relation to this central reality.

But the central reality is not itself a completely coherent and puzzle-free skein of meaning. This main reality includes not only the physical or natural world but also the sociocultural one. It is atom bombs ready to burst at a moment's notice, it is uncertainties about nations and economies, it is discontinuities in the flow of our lives, it is senseless suffering and meaningless loss, and it is emotion, too thick and smoky to be endured. Reality is a thing that fights itself and defies our glance. Even at its best, in victory and consummation, there are the seeds of trouble. Reality is a jigsaw puzzle with parts that do not keep the same shape. Reality is unsolvable, but it is livable. What you need to do is work at it, fit it together, downplay the parts that make the least sense, and find the emotions to oil up your fit.

Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner's "Marriage and the Construction of Reality" (1964) argues that the reality-constructing and reality-maintaining

From *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family,* Third Edition, Gerald Handel, ed., pp. 21–32.

process goes on primarily in the family. And within that family the process is centered, not on parent—child communication or sibling intraction, but on the "marital conversation" of husband and wife.

The article is extremely insightful, opening up the inner world of the family and its symbolic culture as few others have done. This is the middle class family to be sure: highly verbal, possessed of a rich vocabulary for emotion-talk, and mobilized to make use of every social opportunity. Making sense of everyday, socioemotional life is especially important for these couples, for they live off the world of interaction and symbolism. Meanings are particularly important for the white collar group, both in work and in family life. But even if the Berger-Kellner family is unusually talkative and sharp-eyed, their stance is merely an intensification of what goes on in all modern families. These families are adrift in highly privatized little worlds. Either the families themselves make sense of their worlds or no one does, and they then remain senseless.

The authors' contribution, then, is a major one, and its importance has been recognized by constant scholarly citation since it was published. On the other hand, the paper is very nestled in the time and family mentality of its period: that of the 1950's and early 1960's. This was a period typified by a stable family, a fixed foreign policy, a consistently working economy, and a clear route to success for the young. The social sciences of the time were building stability into the core of their theories—things were stable because they had to be stable—and family sociology was no exception. The reigning functionalists of the time pictured the family as tending by nature and inevitably toward the 1950's togetherness model. The sex roles, childrearing patterns and power arrangements were said to be those most healthy or functional for society. It was also strongly suggested that they would never change, except to become more so. This was the best there could be, and all research and theory on the family should take this as a premise.

In many ways Berger and Kellner bought that argument. Their cognitive steering device, the marital conversation, guides this boat toward functionality and need-fulfillment. Their argument explains, in a fine-grained way, how the 1950's family managed all that stability and togetherness. It shows the functioning family as a process in which the meaning of family success and failure was constantly shaped into an acceptable and understandable pattern. It is a brilliant article, but its portrayal must be redrawn for today.

It depicts a utopian, conflict-free world, which was not true even of the 1950's, and is considerably less true today. The backdrop is all changed: the stable economy, the black-and-white foreign policy, the nuclear family model and the clear route to success. Instead we have had the 1960's, with their intense politics and value changes; we lost the wrong war in Vietnam, we ran capitalism to some kind of ground in the 1970's and 1980's, and we

shook the family up to such an extent that all bets are off. People now work out their family life with little traditional guidance and much internal conflict.

Berger and Kellner's world is long gone, and the tacit assumptions of their paper are now the wrong ones. Yet the marital conversation goes on, just as they said it would. People are still hammering out that main reality in primary group settings. Lovers, couples and marrieds still face each other and stitch together some kind of world. But the larger world has changed and family worlds have changed with it. The marital conversation is more struggle and less chitchat than in Berger and Kellner's base period. This sketch will discuss some of the major ways in which the original paper no longer applies and how it might be fruitfully redirected.

LAING'S EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AS A CONTRASTING CASE

Shortly after Berger and Kellner published their paper, a British psychiatrist, R. D. Laing, was writing papers that depicted a totally different and far less functional marital conversation. He was an "object relations" type of psychiatrist, picturing the personality, or rather the self, as based on the incorporation of others. These others, e.g., parents and siblings, were not necessarily placidly contained in the self. They could be at war with each other, within you, and uncongenial to your needs. Still, they were you.

Laing also used existentialist ideas from Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre (1956, 1976) emphasized not *what* I am but *that* I am, placing existence as prior to and "more real" than essence. This became, for Sartre, the ontological priority of self over others, all others, for existence was primarily one's own existence. The self was the point from which the world was organized and made sense. This was the comfortable world that we control. The "other" was also a point from which the world was organized, but it contradicted our organization. That world all belonged to another self, and it served that self's comfort. Even we, our own self, were positioned somewhere in that rival self's world, subordinate to those purposes and defined in relation to that other point. In other words, Sartre talked himself into seeing a huge chasm between any two persons. He thought relationships tended to be either conflict or enslavement of some kind (even though his actual life relationships appear to have been quite normal and healthy).

Laing had been working with extremely disturbed families, and he saw the chasm at its worst. He thought insanity was a casualty in the struggle over meaning, the loser losing his internal point and no longer having an organized world. The marital, or rather now the family, conversation, which, for Berger and Kellner constructed the reality of that group, is now a

psychological battleground over how that world will be structured and whose meanings will prevail. Laing's books—*The Politics of Experience* (1967) and *The Politics of the Family* (1969)—use these ideas to analyze not the disturbed but the normal, ordinary family. They are perhaps an exaggeration on the pessimistic side, just as Berger and Kellner exaggerate on the functional, optimistic side. Yet the two models, taken together, are a good tool to bring to the analysis of the contemporary family (or other close relationship). Let us turn now to what happened between the 1950's and the 1980's, to set the context for finding the new conversation.

FROM THE 1950'S TO THE 1980'S

The 1960's brought us divorce and feminism, to mention two relevant changes. Divorce started increasing in the mid-1960's and continued at a high rate through the 1970's and into the 1980's. Feminism received its strongest push from left-wing radical women in various 1960's protest movements, and it stayed fairly strong in the subsequent years. Feminism shook up the definition of gender in the family and elsewhere. Clear gender roles had been assumed in Berger and Kellner's paper (and in the time period in which they wrote).

Divorce also affected gender styles, because it forced women, and sometimes men, into doing things that had been the preserve of the other sex. More women were raising children on their own, and these female-headed households would be having their own little family conversation, without Daddy, though he would be peripherally in the conversation and central to whatever world was being constructed in his absence.

In addition, the rising divorce rate gave us an increase in remarriage, a notoriously undefined form of family in which there was a lot more reality to be constructed and far fewer ready-made definitions with which to do it. Remarriage was a conversation in which other, earlier conversations loudly echoed, sometimes making it difficult to figure out who was saying what to whom.

The 1960's also brought a continued increase in the proportion of women holding jobs. To some extent the labor market participation caused, or conditioned, both divorce and feminism, though these variables were all influencing each other, with other factors in the mix as well. The jobs strengthened the position of women in the marital conversation and changed the script.

Another as yet poorly understood change of the 1960's was the liberalization of sexual behavior in matters such as premarital intercourse, masturba-