

Preface

Origins

We call this book on theoretical orientations and methodological strategies in family studies a sourcebook because it details the social and personal roots (i.e., sources) from which these orientations and strategies flow. Thus, an appropriate way to preface this book is to talk first of its roots, its beginnings.

In the mid-1980s there emerged in some quarters the sense that it was time for family studies to take stock of itself. A goal was thus set to write a book that, like Janus, would face both backward and forward—a book that would give readers both a perspective on the past and a map for the future. There were precedents for such a project: The *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* edited by Harold Christensen and published in 1964; the two *Contemporary Theories about the Family* volumes edited by Wesley Burr, Reuben Hill, F. Ivan Nye, and Ira Reiss, published in 1979; and the *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* edited by Marvin Sussman and Suzanne Steinmetz, then in production. But these volumes were seen as either in need of revision or, in the case of the second handbook, more substantive than theoretical or methodological. At the time the present volume was conceived, people seemed to want—indeed, some people seemed to be crying out for—a book on theories and methods that would capture the spirit of family studies in the twentieth century and, equally if not more important, help to prepare researchers, practitioners, and educators for the century to come.

Wesley Burr, Reuben Hill, F. Ivan Nye, and Ira Reiss—coeditors of the *Contemporary Theories about the Family* volumes—can be credited with getting the ball rolling. At the 1985 Pre-Conference Workshop on Theory Construction and Research Methodology, which was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations in Dallas, Burr and his colleagues presented a paper entitled “Contemporary Theories about the Family: What Next?” (Sadly, Reuben Hill had died only two months before. The session, appropriately enough, was dedicated to his memory.) In the tradition of the workshop, which provides a forum for unfinished and developing ideas, the paper had been circulated beforehand and discussants invited to comment on it. David Klein, David Reiss, and Suzanne Steinmetz gave formal responses, and numerous other participants offered input from the floor. It was a lively session all around.

At the 1986 workshop, another panel session was held. Alan Acock, Ralph LaRossa, Jetse Sprey, Suzanne Steinmetz, and Catherine Surra formally presented their ideas for the new book. Again, many workshop members offered suggestions from the floor. A three-person committee was formed, consisting of the past, present, and incoming chairs of the

workshop. They were Patricia Voydanoff, Walter Schumm, and Suzanne Steinmetz. Their task was to plan the next phase of the project.

By October 1987, a steering committee was chosen to supervise the writing and production of the manuscript. The five of us constitute that committee. Why us? We were selected, in part, not only to acknowledge but also to reinforce the cross-disciplinary nature of family studies. Pauline Boss is a family therapist and family process researcher; William Doherty is a medical family therapist and family health researcher; Ralph LaRossa is a family sociologist who specializes in qualitative and historical research; Walter Schumm is a family life educator with expertise in quantitative methodology and statistics; and Suzanne Steinmetz is a family sociologist and a quantitative–qualitative researcher.

Although we have had the privilege of being the editors and coordinators of this project, we emphasize that, from the beginning, this book has been a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort. Many people who represent different areas and perspectives helped to shape these contents. In 1988, the prospectus for the book was submitted for approval to members of both the Theory Construction and Research Methodology Workshop and the Research and Theory Section of the National Council on Family Relations. (Indeed, the Research and Theory Section provided a grant to support the project.)

Throughout the process, we asked for and received feedback from countless colleagues. That over 155 authors and reviewers contributed directly to the book is testimony to the team effort that was involved. Comments made from the floor at various sessions and meetings at which the project was discussed, face-to-face encounters with faculty members and students at our respective institutions, lengthy phone calls with colleagues, conversations over dinners with family and friends—all are part of this volume. It is fair to say that through this project, through this *Sourcebook*, family studies breathes—and thrives.

We hope this *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods* will help readers to reflect on the roots and context of family studies and to examine its evolving story and identity. For future growth, it is necessary to be aware of the emerging themes in family studies, and to know the relevance of theory and methods to actually helping families.

Features

A number of features about the *Sourcebook* differentiate it from previous stocktaking volumes in family studies. First, this book uniquely emphasizes not only family theories but also research methods and the relationship between the two. In keeping with this emphasis, the methods chapters do not include all the “how-to” details of typical research methodology books but rather emphasize how methods interact with family theories and vice versa. In turn, each theory chapter describes research methods that are identified most prominently with that theory. With this balanced presentation, we hope readers will recognize that theory and methods are inextricably entwined and are best studied in tandem.

The second unique feature of this *Sourcebook* is its sociohistorical approach. We present the story of the development of family theory from its earliest seeds in religion and philosophy through the theory construction and methodology of the mid-twentieth century and of the newly emerging models of the late twentieth century. Each theory and method is placed in the sociohistorical context that influenced its formulation. We hope this book communicates to readers the idea that family theory and methods are not constructed in a void but rather are influenced by cultural values and beliefs as well as by social, economic, technological, and political events and by germinal ideas such as Darwin’s theory of evolution.

In addition to this focus on the larger sociohistorical context, we also tried to include some personal or biographical information on the various theorists and methodologists. We think, for example, that family development theory is better understood by knowing something about the lives and work of such luminaries as Reuben Hill and Evelyn Millis Duvall.

The third unique feature of this *Sourcebook* is that leading family practitioners and scholars (family therapists, family life educators, policy experts, social workers, and health care professionals) were asked to write about the implications of the theories for helping contemporary families to cope with problems and to enhance the quality of their lives. These “Applications” follow each theory chapter and address a question frequently asked by students: How would this theory be applied in the “real world?”

The fourth unique feature is that all authors were asked to weave into the theory chapters a discussion of how the theory takes into account differences in age, ethnicity, race, and gender. Our purpose is to emphasize the multicultural dimensions of both our subject matter (families) and our field (family studies).

Organization

The overall organization of the book, after the introductory section, reflects the chronological emergence of different family theories and methods during the twentieth century. We placed the theories and methods into the decade when they first became prominent in the family field, which in some cases is later than they were originally developed. Since theories and methods arise in dialogue with their predecessors, presenting them in historical sequence is consistent with the contextual approach underlying this book.

In order to make the chapters comprehensive as well as to simplify the comparison of the various theories and methods, we gave the contributing authors some guidelines to follow. We did not expect or want them to force their chapters to conform to a rigid pattern but instead to try to cover the set of topics and questions that we believe are important to every theory and method. The order of presentation was left up to the authors.

Theory chapter authors and methods chapter authors had their own special guidelines, which we present here.

Guidelines for Theory Chapters

1. Origins and Initial Sociocultural Milieu
 - the historical period during which the theory emerged
 - influences of major historical events, cultural shifts, and developments in related academic disciplines
2. Historical Development of the Theory
 - emergence of the theory itself, including the backgrounds of founders, earliest publications, and level of acceptance of the emerging theory in the field
 - introduction of major concepts of the theory as they were used by the founders
3. Core Assumptions of the Theory
 - assumptions and values implied or stated in the theory about human nature and about families (their goals and functions)
 - philosophy of science (e.g., reductionism versus holism; subjectivity versus objectivity; possibility of verifying theory)

4. Summary of the Main Problems or Questions Addressed by the Theory
 - aspects of family life the theory most clearly addresses
 - major questions the theory is especially equipped to ask
 - major family problems the theory can help explain
5. Major Contemporary Concepts in the Theory
 - conceptual definitions of major concepts in the theory as they are being used in contemporary research
 - operationalization of concepts in variables used in family research
6. Modeling the Theory: How the Major Concepts Link
 - how major concepts interrelate in the theory, including issues of causal, circular, interactive, and mediating relationships among the concepts
 - graphic diagrams (if appropriate) depicting major concepts and hypothesized links
7. Examples of Research Emerging from the Theory
 - content areas in family research in which the theory has been used extensively, including classic studies or important groups of studies that have supported the theory or have been informed by the theory
 - how these studies have influenced the development of the theory
8. Limitations of the Theory
 - areas of family life not addressed or not addressed systematically by the theory
 - summaries of major critiques of the theory
 - current problems in conceptualizing and operationalizing the theory and in empirically supporting the theory
9. The Growing Edge: Future Directions of the Theory
 - recently emerging trends and emphases in the theory
 - new areas of family life being addressed
 - new methodologies being applied or considered
 - future prospects for the theory

Guidelines for Methods Chapters

1. Historical Origins of Methodology
 - origins of methodology, both general and with respect to applications to family research
 - critical historical events, technological developments
 - key people
2. Basic Assumptions of the Methodology
 - theoretical assumptions, both general and those more specifically related to family theories, the latter being of crucial importance
 - if applicable, statistical assumptions
 - fit between both types of assumptions and the actual complexity of family life
 - whether methodology's assumptions properly reflect or improperly oversimplify reality
3. Overview of the Methodology
 - concepts used, models used to tie the concepts together, specific techniques
 - relationship of methodology to other phases and aspects of overall research process
4. Summary of the Main Questions the Methodology Can Address
 - general questions and questions specific to family processes or theories the methodology can address with varying degrees of effectiveness
 - gender differences
 - individual versus family levels of analysis

5. Example of Application of the Methodology to Research with Families
 - appropriate and inappropriate applications of the methodology to family research, with emphasis on theoretical and assumption issues rather than minor, more technical points
6. Limitations of the Methodology for Family Research
 - concepts that the methodology cannot easily handle in either measurement or analysis
 - difficulties in linking concepts together
 - errors that can be caused by inappropriate application (how well-intentioned uses of the methodology can lead to incorrect conclusions about how families function)
 - theoretical issues that may tend to be overlooked or overemphasized if too much dependence is placed on this particular methodology
7. Future Directions of the Methodology
 - general trends and trends specific to family research

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