

Preface

Texts are like rabbits: they proliferate in abundance. Choices in books, then, tend to overwhelm the interested reader. If a book is to be successful, it needs to offer something that is unique and different from competing works. This summary text is an attempt to do that.

If one is to peruse textbooks, a common feature is that the authors document the current and the most valuable studies on any one topic or discipline. Few if any attempt to use a **theoretical framework** to synthesize the wide range of literature. I propose a difference – to utilize a theoretical framework to combine diverse conceptions and studies into a coherent whole. The one selected is a sociological one termed Neofunctionalism. I make use of a published work (Swenson, 2004) to pull together salient literature on religion and the family.

I initiate this work with an outline of a Neofunctionalist theoretical framework of the family that is linked to a multidimensional interpretation of religion. The focus of the framework is on systems: the chrono, organic, personality, social and cultural systems. Both religion and the family can be separately categorized into these systems.

Thereafter, under the caption of the chronosystem, I link this system to the life course perspective in family studies to trace the history of the family from the Roman era to Early Christianity, Early Medieval, Central Medieval, and Late Medieval societies and the genesis of the early modern period through to the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in England.

The rubric of the organic system captures the historical and empirical relationship between religion and sexuality that implies the reproductive capacities of men and women. The focus on the individual embedded in the family system is the personality system. Topics such as conversion, gender, intimate violence, sexual orientation, family stress and spirituality are synthesized in this chapter.

There are two major dimensions of the social system: ritual and sacred social organizations. Covered in this tile is ritual in context and its impact on child outcomes in family contexts, adolescent substance abuse, child outcomes in a longitudinal study and ritual, divorce and remarriage, marital fidelity, social networks and religion, family structure and ritual participation, and religious homogamy and marital quality.

The final chapter is devoted to the cultural system which subsumes both mythology (sacred belief systems) and ethos (sacred moral systems). Another theory is introduced here, attachment theory, which is embedded in Neofunctionalism. The focus in presenting attachment theory is to document the empirical research of childhood attachment security and concepts of the divine. Additional topics reviewed include parental and self origins of young adults' God concepts, images of the divine in marriage and beliefs and ritual in resolving marital conflict. In view of the fact that Islam is becoming more and more a salient religion, several articles were reviewed that link Islam and the family. Additional topics covered in the final chapter include conversion and women's public employment, moral cosmology, and the success story of how parents socialize their children into accepting and continuing their parents' faith.

To make the text more user friendly, I have included many tables and figures to illustrate the dense text. In addition, a glossary is provided that provides meaning to the bold words that appear throughout the work.

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