

## Chapter 1

### The Changing World of Families

#### Theories for Understanding Families

Table 2.1 Principles and Concepts for Family Studies Theories.

[Two micro theories]

Exchange or Rational Choice Theory

Considers the calculus of exchange (but are people really so predictable?)

Box 2.1 Box 2.1 “Pragmatic Choice in Dual-Career Commuting Couples” by

Heather Hofmeister, PhD and Phyllis Moen, PhD

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Examines the creative construction of social meaning in family life

Box 2.2 “Decision-Making in Adoption” by Nelwyn B. Moore, PhD and J.

Kenneth Davidson, Sr., PhD

[Two theories about sub-systems and stages]

Family Life Course Development Theory

Sees families as moving through stages marked by the addition or subtraction of members, the phases of children’s lives in the family, and changes in contacts between the family and other institutions, with the number of stages varying

One theory, or two?

Box 2.3 “The Sacred Life Cycle of Families” by Father Craig Albrecht

Family Systems Theory

Studies interrelated systems striving to maintain equilibrium

Box 2.4 “Systems Serving the Multi-Problem Family” by Sarah Beman, MA, RN and Nan Beman, MSW

[Three macro theories]

Family Ecology Theory

Impact of ecosystems on individual, especially child, development, with families embedded in greater kinship and broader social systems and occupying a niche in the societal ecosystem – acting upon, as well as being acted upon by, schools, workplaces, and other parts of the social system.

Box 2.5 “Mad Dads Reclaiming Communities” by Sarah Zimmerman

Structural Functional Theory

Understands the American family as the primary institution responsible for child socialization, economic support, and emotional security, but the theory has been criticized for confusing prescription with description

Box 2.6 “The Imperative of Fathers” by Leon C. Intrater, PhD

Conflict Theory

Conflict in society and in the family is ubiquitous, a struggle between the “haves” and “have nots”

Box 2.7 “On Being a (Lesbian) Family in American Society” by Melissa Sheridan Embser-Herbert, PhD, JD

[Feminist theory and new theories]

Feminist Theory

Understands families as “tension-filled arenas, loci of struggle and domination

between genders and across generations” with sexism damaging not only women, but families and relationships; feminist theory no longer on the margins

Box 2.8 “Hearing Voices and Seeing Margins: Why Families Studies Needs Feminist Theory” by Alison R. Moss, MA

Family Theories into the Twenty-first Century

Postmodernism

Modernism has created increasing risk for societies, families, and individuals (and some question if ‘po-mo’ is a ‘theory’ at all)

The value of theoretical synthesis (e.g., postmodern feminism)

Concern for the gap between theory and empirical research

Table 2.2. Selected Applications of Family Studies Theories in *Families with Futures*

Research Methods: Gathering Information about Families

Experiments

The gold standard for determining causality

Elements of the classic experiment

Observation

A long tradition, in spite of concerns for “going native”, ethics, and reliability

Participant observation, Unobtrusive observation

Surveys

Questionnaires and interviews

Importance of representative samples

Case Studies

Rich qualitative data

Challenge of generalizability

Archival Research

Rich sources of existing data from both official and private sources

Limitations around availability and unaccounted for errors

Triangulation and Research across Time and Space

Multi-methods

Longitudinal research

Comparative research

Evaluation Research

Bridging the gap between family scholarship and practice

Conclusions: How Will You Explore Families in Meaningful, Realistic, Ethical Ways?

Again (from Chapter 1), ethnocentrism

Ethical Imperatives

Subject risk

Confidentiality

Informed consent

The use to which the research is applied

Applications, Accountability, and Integrity

NCFR’s *Ethical Principles and Guidelines*

Organizational ethics and personal integrity