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Preface

The field of family studies has recently benefited from an injection of innovative research from other areas of sociology as well as from other disciplines, particularly demography and psychology. *Changing Families: Relationships in Context* is the first family textbook, whether Canadian or American, to integrate this new body of knowledge—which also includes additional theoretical perspectives—in such a comprehensive manner. It follows that this book is different from others in terms of some of its contents. As well, some aspects of its format and organization are distinct. Further, this third edition includes many new sections.

NEW DIRECTIONS OF THE CONTENTS

In this third edition, the additions I have made reflect several of the more recent changes in family life and contexts for which more research has appeared in the past few years. These new trends have and will have a profound impact both on the present and especially the future of families, children, the elderly, and societies. The first and most obvious change is that western economies, including our own, have become much less secure, particularly in terms of earning a living and young people securing a foothold in our economy. In addition, economic power has become more concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of families. While this has happened, living in Canada has become more expensive, particularly in terms of housing costs, so that a higher proportion of Canadians’ income goes into mortgages and rents, leaving less for other expenditures and retirement. As well, technological developments have foisted upon us new “needs,” such as smartphones, so that young people are less able to accumulate assets as their parents did. Rather, they accumulate debt. These changes have also led me to a return to political economy theories. The theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 1 have been linked to one another in a more holistic way throughout the chapters, in order to illustrate how family phenomena in contexts require multiple theories for their explanation—a reality that is generally not presented in texts favouring one theory.

The second development has been ongoing for well over a decade but has solidified recently in view of its long-term consequences: low fertility across the world, except for sub-Saharan Africa. Canadians, as well as Europeans, Chinese, South Koreans, Japanese, and many other nations, produce too few children to replenish their population with new generations of young people. Low fertility not only changes the current profile of families but it leads to the third development that is emphasized in this edition, the aging of our population. In other words, we are blessed with a longer lifespan but, at the same time, fewer young people are available to replace the retirees in the work force. Thus, we may experience a shortage of workers as well as
a crisis of caring—not enough young people to provide for the caring of children, of the frail elderly, of the sick and disabled of all ages.

The fourth development is also related to this issue of fertility: It resides in the fact that some countries, particularly China and India, have a huge sex ratio imbalance. Many more boys than girls are born and survive. Girls are selected out—generally by abortion following gender screening via ultrasound technology—what Indian demographers refer to as female feticide. Of the many implications of this situation is that, in the affected countries, numerous males will never marry. Related to this type of systemic feminine discrimination is rape as an instrument of war.

The fifth development, which is specific to western countries, including Canada, has been ongoing for a few decades but has recently accelerated in terms of meaning: More young people are waiting longer before entering into a first union. Thus, entry into a committed union is delayed; more young adults are either living alone or remaining at home with their parents longer than in the past. More persons are remaining single, even in Asia and the Middle East. Of course, this development is also causally related to low fertility rates: Indeed, a later age at union formation, especially marriage, delays childbearing and thus reduces the number of children a woman or couple has. The sixth and related development is that, when couples are formed in the western world, it is more likely to be via cohabitation first. Furthermore, as cohabitations have become more institutionalized, they are becoming less of a risk factor for divorce when cohabitants marry each other.

The seventh development resides not only in the presence of more immigrant families in Canada (and in other countries as well), but in the fact that many of these families are transnational in the sense that the parents may live separately—one parent lives in Canada with the children or, yet, one parent arrives here first and the rest of the family follows later. What is new about this situation is that these families generally now stay in close and constant contact with the members who remain in the country of origin, such as grandparents, via the new technologies of communication and more affordable and reliable means of traveling.

Therefore, this third edition of Changing Families: Relationships in Context contains several chapters and many new sections that are entirely innovative and are not generally found in other family textbooks. In addition, I continue to include, particularly in Part 2, those topics that rarely appear in textbooks and that have been in the previous editions: The effects of the changing economy, neighbourhoods, and educational institutions on families and human development within these families. This is probably the only family sociology textbook on the market that focuses on these areas combined, including the role that religiosity plays in marriage and child socialization. As well, the media as a sociocultural context for family life is discussed more extensively than is done elsewhere and contains new material on video games and cell phones, for instance (in Chapter 3). I have, with each edition, tried to broaden the geographical scope to offer material on all the provinces and territories of Canada and other countries as well.

I have continued providing an entire chapter on siblings: their relationship, how they grow up to be different, and how they relate to their parents, with a special focus on genetics and environment or nature and nature. This third edition also expands on previously new sections on polygamy, online dating and infidelities,
adolescent sexuality, casual sex, condo living, military families, and antisocial behaviours in and around schools, among others. It has also retained its substantial sections on adoption, foster families, reproductive technologies, the impact of children’s peers on the family, same-sex-parent families, and ex-spouses’ relationships after divorce. It includes new perspectives on cohabitation as well as more content on families’ elders. Thus, this text contains a more complete overview of families and a greater diversity of domains relevant to family dynamics.

In the same vein, I have continued to introduce a wide range of theoretical frameworks. In addition to the better-known theories, such as structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism, others, including social constructionism, are much in evidence. For instance, interactional-transactional theories are used in the chapters on the parent-child relationship. Not only do we look at the socialization of children by parents but we also examine how children affect their parents’ ability to raise them within specific environments—in other words, how parents, children, and their environment interact. Furthermore, I have borrowed from the field of behaviour genetics in order to acquaint students with new concepts, ideas, and explanations that are now regularly encountered in the area of family research and even in the popular media: the interaction between nature and nurture or genes and environment. Students can examine behaviour genetics within a critical sociological framework alongside other theories. Finally, I have added much material on more global perspectives, informed by political economy theories.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

The text of this book includes a great deal of qualitative sociology in the form of quotes, case studies, and summaries from my fieldwork. This material is an integral part of the contents. Moreover, I present a great deal of information, both quantitative and qualitative. How this information is obtained and research is carried out are important issues to me as an instructor. As a result, I have included at least one Family Research insert in most chapters: These Family Research features explain, “Here is how various researchers do it, and how they get their information on family life.” In other words, these inserts illustrate various research methods that will allow students to get a better idea of the range of methods that are used in family studies, both qualitative and quantitative.

This third edition of Changing Families: Relationships in Context remains divided into five parts. Part 1, Foundations of Family Studies, introduces definitions, perspectives, and issues pertaining to families. This includes theoretical perspectives; a historical and cross-cultural overview; a discussion of current concerns about family functions; and contemporary developments, especially pertaining to the audiovisual media. Part 2, Social and Cultural Family Contexts, focuses on the macrosociological settings and conditions that affect family life and structure. These include the changing dynamics of the global and technological market economy, neighbourhoods and housing conditions, schools, and religious participation. The contents of Part 3 reflect its title, Patterns of Partnering and Family Formation, but also focus on sexual relations.
Part 4, entitled Couple and Family Relationships, introduces successive chapters on the spousal, parent-child, and sibling relationships. Part 5, Family Challenges and Solutions, begins with a chapter on divorce, widowhood, and repartnering, particularly remarriage. The next chapter examines violence, abuse, and neglect within the family. The last chapter re-examines the themes that have linked the contents and then focuses on future family trends. It then addresses social policies and suggestions designed to prevent or ameliorate problems faced by families. A special emphasis is placed on policies that could alleviate family poverty, improve child care, support conjugal units and the parental role, as well as provide a better environment for families’ care of their elders.

PEDAGOGY

Each chapter begins with a detailed outline. Throughout the text, many concepts and themes are bolded or italicized in order to help students memorize key concepts and ideas and to note emphases. Concepts that might need additional explanation are further defined in the Glossary at the end of the book. This Glossary contains fewer but lengthier definitions to serve as a reference for students who have never taken a sociology course before. Each chapter has a clearly identified but brief conclusion that serves an integrative function. As is the convention, chapters end with a Summary and Analytical Questions. The online Student’s Study Guide, available through MySearchLab, contains other useful material, such as Suggested Readings and Suggested Weblinks.

SUPPLEMENTS

The three supplements are an Instructor’s Manual, a Test Item File, and a MySearchLab with Student’s Study Guide. The instructor supplements are available for downloading from a password-protected section of Pearson Canada’s online catalogue (vig.pearsoned.ca). Navigate to your text’s catalogue page to view a list of available supplements.

Instructor’s Manual: This manual contains a variety of additional instructor resources, including:

- Additional Class Material expands upon topics introduced in the text or adds new topics relevant to a chapter.
- Chapter Linkages and Modules help point out to students how various sections and themes in one chapter relate to their counterparts in other chapters.
- Help with Analytical Questions offers suggestions for those questions placed at the end of each chapter.
- Suggestions for Discussion, Projects, Papers.
- Short Essay Questions.
- Suggested Media Options are occasionally found.

Test Item File: Available in Microsoft Word/Adobe Acrobat format, this test bank includes almost 1,000 multiple-choice, true/false, and essay questions.
MySearchLab® (www.mysearchlab.com): A passcode-protected website that provides engaging experiences that personalize learning, MySearchLab contains an eText that is just like the printed text. Students can highlight and add notes to the eText online or download it to an iPad or Android tablet. MySearchLab also offers discipline-specific media and readings, access to a variety of academic journals, and Associated Press news feeds, along with a wide range of writing, grammar, and research tools to help hone writing and research skills.

The Student’s Study Guide linked from the eText in MySearchLab contains the following for each chapter:

- **Learning Objectives** that help students focus on the main educational goals of each chapter. By the same token, these objectives will allow students to evaluate how successful they have been in terms of having acquired the knowledge and critical thinking required by each chapter. These objectives are useful both to orient students before they begin a chapter and as a self-evaluation of their own learning process after the chapter is concluded.

- **Questions Students Ask.** Often, students see certain results and statistics that may appear to be negative and want to know how these might apply to them, why they are not following the “averages,” or they want to know why they have or have not been affected by given situations. A few of these questions are answered in this feature.

- **Relevance to Students’ Lives.** This feature complements the section on Questions Students Ask. Students wishing to utilize this section will be encouraged to ask themselves how some of the contents of each chapter are applicable to their own lives and how they can situate themselves within the contexts presented by each chapter. This section may help students analyze their own family and partner situations or goals, and discover other alternatives, where relevant.

- **Work-Related Relevance.** This section will help students see where some of the contents of each chapter can be utilized in various types of work, such as clinical work with families and children, social work, teaching, health-related work, as well as research work.

- **Suggested Readings.**
- **Suggested Weblinks.**
- **Key Concepts and Themes.**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following reviewers have provided extensive comments and suggestions that were greatly useful in guiding the structural and substantive improvements brought to the third edition: Andrew Buntin, George Brown College; Wei-Wei Da, Brescia University College; Elizabeth Dennis, University of the Fraser Valley; Denis Wall, Brock University. I still benefited from the suggestions of the reviewers for the second edition: Terry Murphy, College of the North Atlantic; Penny Poole, Fanshawe College; Denis Wall, University of Toronto; Adenike Yesufu, Grant MacEwan University. Their very detailed suggestions resulted in the elimination of two chapters and the addition of several sections as well as an improvement in the Supplements for both instructors and students. In addition, the following reviewers are acknowledged for their help and suggestions regarding the first edition: Paula Chegwidden, Acadia University; Debra M. Clarke, Trent University; Patience Elabor-Idemudia, University of Saskatchewan; Scott Kline, St. Jerome’s University, University of Waterloo; Stephen Riggins, Memorial University; Noreen Stuckless, York University; Franc Sturino, York University; Alison M. Thomas, University of Victoria; Vappu Tyyskä, Ryerson University; and Mike Wahn, University of Winnipeg. These reviewers together have made me rethink and rework many sections and I am most grateful to them. I hope that I have done justice to their thoughtful input.

I also acknowledge the advice and help provided by Joel Gladstone and Matthew Christian, Acquisitions Editor at Pearson Canada, Stephen Kass, Editorial Assistant, Charlotte Morrison-Reed, who was my Developmental Editor, and that of Sarah Gallagher, who was the Project Manager. It was a pleasure working with each of them. Lila Campbell spent countless hours with the copy editing and had a sharp eye for my French way of turning English sentences . . . This also includes Susan Bindernagel who proofread the pages.

I am especially indebted to the hundreds of couples, ex-couples, as well as parents and children who have given so generously of their time and their hospitality for my various research projects over the past decades. Quotes and case studies from these families have greatly enriched this text, as has the material gathered from the
over 1,500 students who wrote semi-structured autobiographies in my classes for more than 30 years. I am also indebted to the 232 adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents who, more recently, sent me unsolicited email information on their personal history and experience following an article I had published on a related website. As acknowledged at the beginning of Chapter 1, most of my research ideas and theoretical revisions throughout my career have been influenced by this spousal, parental, child, and student contribution to my knowledge of real life as lived by others in their diverse family situations.

Anne-Marie Ambert,
December 2013