

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE FAMILY**

#### **Roles, Responsibilities and Rights**

#### **Content Overview**

This chapter considers the family of today and how it nurtures and supports children. The overall function of the family and the types of family configurations today are followed by a discussion of the family as a system with subsystems, roles, communication patterns, and rituals. The importance of bonding (attachment) on the developing child is also discussed.

The chapter continues with a section discussing minority families: African-American, Hispanic American, Asian and Pacific Island, and Native American. The chapter concludes with a look at family dysfunction and outlines the rights of parents and children.

#### **Key Points for Students to Master**

1. The family has changed a great deal in the last few decades with the nuclear family replacing the extended family, as divorce and single parenting increase.
2. There are currently different family configurations that may also differ according to cultural background.
3. Basically, no matter what its configuration, the family is responsible for reproduction, socialization, assignment of social roles, economic production and consumption and emotional support.
4. The family is a complex system with subsystems, roles assigned to its members, and boundaries. The family members develop different communication patterns and rituals that might be functional or dysfunctional to the family well-being. How well the family teaches the child to attach may have a profound influence on later relationships.
5. African-American families tend to have close kinship ties, rely on each other for support, expect members to work hard, and tend to be involved in a faith community.
6. Hispanic-American families may be members of a variety of different cultures. Often headed by single parents, they nevertheless have strong extended family ties with the male members as the authority. Likely to be Roman Catholic, Hispanic family members may also believe in folk healing.
7. Asian and Pacific Island families also come from many varied cultures and it is more difficult to group them together due to the very different cultural practices among the cultures. Most have strong family ties and value harmony in their relations. Many of these cultures base their self-esteem on avoiding bringing shame on the family. The older generation is revered and there is a hierarchy in relationships.

8. Native American families vary according to tribes and geographic regions. Sharing is their primary value and they teach children to control their emotions. Their spirituality is involved with being in tune with natural events and a fundamental view is of the importance of patience.
9. Families are said to be dysfunctional when they are not performing basic family tasks in a manner that benefits members in a healthy way.
10. Both parents and children have specific rights and responsibilities.

### Key Words or Phrases

nuclear family	parentified child
extended family	<i>compadrazzo</i>
single parent family	<i>machismo</i>
blended family	<i>dignidad</i>
kinship networks	<i>respecto</i>
subsystems	<i>personalismo</i>
boundaries	<i>la bendicion</i>
roles	filial piety
family rules	parent's rights
family rituals	children's rights
kinsmen	

### Student Activities for Applied Learning

#### Suggestions for Students:

1. Make a list of the responsibilities of parents. Interview several parents to determine what they feel their responsibilities are.
2. See if you can list 10 family rules from your family of origin. Discuss and compare these in class or in small groups. How did you know these were rules? How did your ethnic origin affect these rules?
3. Read *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* by Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit. Why might his book be so controversial?
4. After reading the above book set up a debate. Have one panel of students espouse the philosophy of the book and ask the other panel to contend that children have the right to be protected and that their emotional well-being is at greater risk by being with less-than-adequate parents. What are your conclusions?
5. Design your Bill of Rights for Children. How could you make it operational? What would the implications be?
6. Collect new articles on proposed changes to the welfare system, parental rights, and substitute childcare. Discuss as a class what effects these shifting values may have on child protection in the future.

### **Teaching Tips or Exercises**

1. Ask students to think about their lives as children. Were there generational boundaries? What were these? (e.g., parents could do things that kids could not; parents could close the door to the bedroom, etc.) How were they enforced?
2. What were the family rules? Were they spoken or unspoken? Have the students create a list of their own family's rules and determine if they were spoken or unspoken. Have them then discuss these in a group. Were any of these rules influenced by their cultural background? Could any of these rules have led to abuse or have covered abuse if it was occurring? For example, the rule that anything that goes on in the family is not talked about outside can be a rule in a healthy family, but it can also hide the abuse that is taking place in a family.

### **Making Use of the Internet**

The website [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org) features some interesting information pertinent to this chapter. For example, there is data and resources on immigrant families, as well as information on gay and lesbian marriage. Students might be encouraged to look up either of these topics and a discussion could be generated around the current thinking.

### **Additional Resources**

1. Film/video: "Victim of Two Cultures: Richard Rodriguez". Rodriguez, in conversation with Bill Moyers, discusses his growing up as a child of immigrants in a clash between the Mexican and American cultures.  
Available from the Films for Humanities and Sciences (1-800-257-5126).
2. Film/Video: "Teaching Indians to be White" looks at the problem of balancing the white world view that Native American children encounter in school and the values they are taught at home. (28 minutes, color).  
Available from the Films for Humanities and Sciences (1-800-257-5126).
3. Film/video: "A Family to Me" looks at four different types of families to dispel the myths that there is only one type of family constellation--the nuclear family. (28 minutes) available at New Day Films, 22-D Hollywood Ave., Hohokus, N.J. 07423.
4. Film/video: "Latino Family" shows three generations of one Mexican American family to demonstrate how the changes of integration into this culture have affected them. (28 minutes, color). Available from Films for Humanities and Sciences at 1-800-257-5126.
5. Film/video: "Fatherless in America" examines the fact that almost 40% of American children sleep in a home where there is no father. This program looks at the problem, its causes, and its effects from poverty to violence. It also talks about efforts to reverse this trend. (26m minutes, color).  
Available from Films for Humanities and Sciences at 1-800-257-5126.

6. Film/video: "The Changing Family and Its Implications: T. Barry Brazelton". Brazelton talks about the challenges of working parents in today's world and how this phenomenon affects children. In this Bill Moyers interview, Brazelton worries about the future of children and the changing American family. (50 minutes, color). Available from Films for Humanities and Sciences at 1-800-257-5126.
7. Film/video: "Who's Raising Our Children?" The economic, social and technological changes of today have altered the role of parents. What roles do parents play today? Are these roles gender dependent? These and other philosophical issues are considered in this video. (29 minutes, color). Available from Films for Humanities and Sciences at 1-800-257-5126.

## TEST QUESTIONS

### Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following does the family provide?
  - a. emotional security
  - b. nurturing
  - c. economic production
  - d. enculturaion
  - e. all of the above

*Answer: D*

2. A family where members include grandparents, aunts and uncles is known as
  - a. a functional family
  - b. a family of long-term commitments
  - c. an extended family
  - d. a family by adoption
  - e. a legal family

*Answer: C*

3. A subsystem of a family might be
  - a. the parents, grandparents and children
  - b. the siblings
  - c. the females
  - d. the parents
  - e. b, c and d

*Answer: E*

4. If the boundaries between the family and the outside world are too rigid, the result is
- little interaction between subsystems
  - the family becomes isolated
  - there isn't much family feeling
  - the family members become very ego-centric
  - the family always functions in a healthy manner

*Answer: B*

5. Family roles
- can be extremely complex
  - may be dysfunctional
  - can help the family maintain balance
  - can help the family complete tasks
  - all of the above

*Answer: E*

6. One of the most important cultural values of the African-American family system is/are
- kinship bonds
  - filial piety
  - use of folk healers
  - optimistic toughness
  - being in tune with nature

*Answer: A*

7. The Asian family most highly reveres
- women with female children
  - congregate living
  - children
  - the oldest generation
  - women

*Answer: D*

8. Sharing is the primary value in \_\_\_\_\_ families.
- Asian
  - Pacific Island
  - African-American
  - Native American
  - Hispanic

*Answer: D*

9. Extended families in the Hispanic culture are:
- those who are very close to the parents and children
  - those who are related by blood
  - grandparents but not aunts and uncles
  - the mother's relatives only
  - godparents

*Answer: B*

10. There is some speculation that families in the next few decades may become
- more likely to be bi-racial or tri-racial
  - larger in number of family members
  - more female dominated
  - stronger in their moral values
  - more conservative

*Answer: A*

11. Families may find difficulty in functioning when
- a member reaches developmental milestones
  - the family confronts prejudice
  - the family encounters a crisis
  - a member enters the family
  - all of the above

*Answer: E*

### **Essay or Discussion Questions**

1. What is the purpose of a family? How does it accomplish this task?
2. Compare the communication patterns of the African-American, the Asian, the Hispanic and the Native American families.
3. Choose one cultural group and compare and contrast it to a second family, considering family roles, spiritual life and values.