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CHAPTER 9

Structural–Functionalism

Nancy Kingsbury and John Scanzoni

Introduction

Our task in this chapter is unique and thus extraordinarily challenging. The task is unique because unlike the remaining theory chapters, we consider a framework that has become virtually obsolete throughout general sociology (Coleman, 1990). Thirty years ago, structural–functionalism (or simply, functionalism) occupied a central place in family anthologies (McIntyre, 1966; Pitts, 1964). But in more recent collections, no one noticed or cared that it was omitted (Burr *et al.*, 1979; Sussman & Steinmetz, 1987). Nevertheless, this book must address functionalism (1) because of its historic significance for studies of families, and (2) because functionalist assumptions remain central to family sociology and family studies, in spite of arguments to the contrary (Broderick, 1971a; Holman & Burr, 1980). To understand why functionalism was once considered important, then fell into disrepute, but continues to be significant for family research, we must first grasp what it was *and is* trying to say.

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Main Problems and Questions

In unraveling the essence of Talcott Parsons (the progenitor in the late 1930s of American functionalism), no one is more eloquent than Jeffrey Alexander (1990), a vigorous proponent of *neo-functionalism*:

There is a profound moralism at the heart of Parsons' theory. His actors are imbued with a desire to be good, and they are understood as trying to conform with principles that express this moral aspiration. . . . [And because] human beings. . . . Have the ability to make choices . . . normative standards of evaluation become essential. (p. 342)

Much earlier (Parsons, 1951, p. 42) labeled those ideas as the "sociologistic theorem," and in explaining the theorem, one of Parsons's most influential students said that

In the . . . perfect case, conformity to institutionalized role-expectations brings gratifying responses from alters, is instrumentally effective, and is a source of direct gratification as well. Everyone wants to do that which others want him to do, and others always act as he expects and wishes. . . . Although such perfect integration is . . . not found empirically . . . normative integration is . . . regarded as fundamental in all actual social systems. (Williams, 1961, p. 75)

According to Alvin Gouldner (1970), Parsons believed that "behavior is accounted for by efforts to conform with an internalized moral code . . . where, it is emphasized, men need pay no heed to consequences but seek to conform to the code for

its own sake" (p. 139). "Parsons tacitly assumes what Durkheim explicitly postulated, that the main function of moral values is to restrain men's wants and claims" (p. 241). Parsons (1965) believed that what he called "solidarity" is crucial for the adequate functioning of a social system. Solidarity is members' "motivational readiness to accept their common belongingness as members of a collective system and to trust each other to fulfil mutual expectations attached to membership in their respective roles" (p. 38). The essence, then, of functionalism is "Actor's" *conformity* to a set of preexisting standards that promotes the greater good of the larger whole to which Actor belongs.

If that is so, a pivotal question becomes, what is the "greater good?" To answer that question, we consider some "basic assumptions" of functionalism (McIntyre, 1966, p. 63). First among these is that "certain functional requirements must be satisfied if a society is to survive at a given level." Fundamentally, "greater good" means "survival." Functionalists assert that the "whole," for example, the groups and society to which Actor belongs, "must" *survive*—they must persist and endure. To promote survival, a second assumption (p. 63) is that "functional subsystems" exist for that very purpose or "function." Function is defined (p. 54) as "the contribution that an item makes to the maintenance of the whole." Hence, the family is an example of a subsystem that functions, or operates, for the survival and maintenance of society. Hence, the family's purpose or function is to foster societal survival first by producing new members: "Replacements for dying members of the society must be provided" (p. 67). Second, these "human replacements must be trained to become participating members of the society" (p. 67). Since "society" is defined as "a social system which survives its original members [and] replaces them through biological reproduction" (Winch, 1963, p. 8), then children must be born to the family and in turn socialized to conform to the society's culture, that is, its dominant values and norms. The nuclear family was defined by Pitts (1964) as the "socially sanctioned cohabitation of a man and woman who have preferential or exclusive enjoyment of economic and sexual rights over one another and are committed to raise the children brought to life by the woman" (p. 56). Defined in this manner, functionalists viewed the family as the structure most able to

satisfy the physical and psychological needs of its members and also to maintain the larger society. Societal maintenance depended on the transmission of values and norms from parents to children through the socialization process. It was imperative that children be socialized so that they were motivated to take on specialized adult roles: "Cultural values and other patterns can become internalized in the personality system and, hence, affect that system's need structure, which, in turn, determines an actor's willingness to enact roles in the social system" (Turner, 1978, p. 35).

To perform its functions in an optimal fashion, that is, increase its degree of "functionality" (Winch, 1963), the family must have a particular kind of structure. Structure is the "arrangement of the roles of which a social system is composed" (McIntyre, 1966, p. 60). The term "social system" is absolutely crucial to functionalists; it is the broader construct under which "structure," that is, role arrangement, is subsumed (Bell & Vogel, 1960). McIntyre (1966, p. 58) observes that a system has four "defining properties." First, a social system such as the family has "differentiated" or specialized kinds of roles. Below, we discuss the idea that role specialization increases a system's functionality. Second, the roles are organized around shared values and norms that establish the actors' rights and obligations to one another, and thus to society as well. Third, "a system is boundary-maintaining" because internal actors are more tightly bound to each other than they are to external actors. Finally, and most important, a social system has a tendency toward homeostasis, or equilibrium, which means that it has "built-in mechanisms which operate to hold it in some sort of steady state, either a static or moving stability, over a period of time" (McIntyre, 1966, p. 59). Below we argue that this issue is the central conceptual problem of contemporary family studies.

In passing, we should note that in addition to social system, Parsons often spoke of the culture, or value system, and also of the personality system. Bell and Vogel (1960) describe connections among these three systems in conjunction with the family. Furthermore, they spell out what they call reciprocal "interchanges" between the family and the economic, political, and community subsystems.

According to Parsons's colleagues Bales and Slater (1955, p. 259), adult roles in the family are divided into specialized sets of activities called

“instrumental” and “expressive.” Instrumental activities are assigned to the husband–father both by dominant values and norms, but also out of biological necessity (Pitts, 1964). The biological themes followed by Parsons were Freudian in origin: In his later work those themes became “strong and pervasive” (Williams, 1961, p. 65). As the “instrumental hub” of the family, the “task-oriented” man specializes in being the breadwinner or chief, if not sole, provider of the family’s socioeconomic needs. By coping with the vagaries and onslaughts of the external world, he protects the family from “disequilibrium.” In complementary fashion, expressive activities are assigned to the wife–mother also by culture and biology. As the “expressive hub,” the “person-oriented” woman specializes in enhancing emotional relations among family members: “While the husband–father is away at work the mother may stay home, responsible for the emotional satisfactions of the family and symbolizing the integrative focus of the home” (McIntyre, 1966, p. 60). She protects the family from disequilibrium stemming from unsatisfactory emotional relations. According to Parsons, this type of gender role specialization maintained family equilibrium while enabling the family to perform its prime functions of reproduction and socialization:

In our opinion the fundamental explanation of the allocation of the roles between the biological sexes lies in the fact that the bearing and early nursing of children establishes a presumption that the man, who is exempted from these biological functions, should specialize in the alternative instrumental direction. (Parsons *et al.*, 1955, p. 23)

Parsons held that deviance from these roles would lead to “family disorganization” as measured by divorce and juvenile delinquency. Thus, when men and women conform to prescribed roles scripted by shared values and norms, the greater good of two larger wholes is achieved: the wholes being the family itself, as well as the larger society. By enhancing family equilibrium, societal equilibrium was simultaneously reinforced. And that encapsulates the central image of structural–functionalism: The family, organized around a *unique and unalterable type of role structure*, operates or *functions* for something larger than itself.

For Parsons the question of homeostasis, or equilibrium, that is, stability under stress and strain from outside of and within social systems,

was integral to a major theoretical issue that lies at the core of all his work.

From the very beginning. . . . Over and over again, now from one perspective, now from another, we are brought back to the broad question of the conditions for system-maintenance or “equilibrium.” The part played by *common values* in social stability and change has been a focus of analysis in all of Parsons’ major works. Continually, we find attention directed to the Hobbesian problem: how is order in society possible? . . . [How can] the war of each against all [be prevented]? (Williams, 1961, p. 66)

Parsons’s foundational or bedrock response to the question of societal survival was shared values and norms. In the family, for example, he argued that if men and women properly learned and effectively enacted their instrumental and expressive roles, respectively, then family stability would be ensured and societal order enhanced. Nevertheless, Williams (1961) observes that in Parsons’s later work, “the existence of a common value system has itself become a problem” (p. 66). Parsons became painfully aware of the reality that simply knowing what “good and moral” persons “should” do is in and of itself insufficient to motivate them to behave accordingly. Consequently, Parsons’s later work addresses “power and political processes. . . [Along with] deviance, alienation, and social control” (p. 66).

Moreover, his later work, pervaded (as we saw) by Freudian themes, gave a “strikingly enhanced focus [to] the microsociology of interpersonal relations” (Williams, 1961, p. 66). Such “relations” included the family, and the issue over which Parsons agonized most in this regard was what in addition to shared norms would keep husbands and wives from deviating from prescribed roles. He was troubled by “the continuous ‘veering off-course’ of social actors from the cultural blueprint. He sees this recalcitrance to conformity arising from constitutional differences among individuals, idiosyncratic [role] learning . . . and from several other sources” (Williams, 1961, p. 86). To overcome actors’ seemingly inherent proclivities toward *deviance*, Parsons posited the existence of *social control* mechanisms. Among these was the “need” of actors in a system to “*counteract* a tendency to deviance [by their alters] from the fulfillment of role-expectations” through applying rewards and punishments (Parsons, 1951, p. 206). If, for instance, the husband conforms in superior fashion to his role obligation to provide, then the

wife rewards and reinforces him with affection and deference, thus warding off mere mediocre conformity (deviance) (Scanzoni, 1966, 1968, 1970). But if the husband provides at a low level or not at all, then the wife "punishes" him with low affection and less deference. In Parsons's view, negative sanctions would motivate the husband to increase his role obligation to provide; but William Goode (1959) observed that one "dysfunction" of her sanctions may be divorce. ["Dysfunction" is "the negative consequences of an activity for a given system" (McIntyre, 1966, p. 61).]

Besides Parsons, many of his influential students likewise wrestled with ways to control veering from the "blueprint," that is, deviance. In most cases, by responding to critiques of Parsons's theories, his students went considerably beyond him by seeking to make his ideas more congruent with empirical realities. Among those students was Robert Merton (1957), who proposed a classic "typology of deviant behavior" (p. 140). If we use as an example the husband's role obligation to be what Bernard (1981) calls a "good-provider," we turn to the first category in Merton's typology, which is *conformity*, that is, nondeviance. When Actor (the husband) accepts both the "culture goals" to be a good provider as well as the culturally approved "means" to achieve that goal (hard work and achievement in the occupational system), he is highly rewarded by both the society and his wife. Merton's second category was *innovation*, in which Actor (husband) accepts the goal of material success but rejects the approved means to achieve it, and instead adopts illegal means for success and is thus deviant. Alters feel torn between rewarding him for his success but sanctioning him negatively for his deviance.

A third category of deviance is *ritualism* in which the husband rejects the goals but not the means. Merton defines this as a "scaling down" of achievement goals. The husband gives up wanting to be a "success," but not the idea of "hard work." Nonetheless, no matter how hard he tries, he is unable to fulfill his wife's good provider expectations. A fourth category of deviance is *retreatism*, describing husbands who give up both cultural goals and means, for example, "vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards, and drug addicts" (Merton, 1957, p. 153). Merton observes (p. 155) that "if they have none of the rewards held out by society [they] also have few of the

frustrations attendant upon continuing to seek these rewards." Among other things, they are oblivious to negative sanctions imposed on them to try to get them to conform. Merton's final deviance category is *rebellion*, and while the three prior types have ventured somewhat beyond Parsons's ideas, this takes us a virtual quantum leap. Although men of this type reject both culturally approved goals and means, they simultaneously "seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified social structure" (p. 155). They agitate for the acceptance of fresh goals and means. Examples would be nineteenth-century "Bohemians," 1950s beatniks, and the 1960s counterculture. Men and women in these categories argue, for instance, that material success is corrosive and should be replaced with goals of spiritual and intellectual development; and that laboring to achieve success is ultimately sterile and should be replaced with efforts to explore the meanings and depths of humanness.

This last category of "deviance" is highly important because a major functionalist thinker squarely addresses the central complaint made by Parsons's critics: "In Parsons' writing there is no true embrace of the idea that structure is being continuously opened up and reconstructed by the problem-solving behavior of individuals responding to concrete situations" (Selznick, 1961, p. 934). By arguing that deviance from role expectations would not necessarily undermine social stability and societal order, Merton "embraced" the idea of *genuine* change. And he went still further by describing some of the mechanisms generating change, as well as by describing the kind of new social order that might emerge. Moreover, unlike Parsons who viewed the family as the place where children learned only culturally approved values and norms, Merton (1957, p. 158) considered the part "played by the family in these patterns of deviant behavior." Merton suggested varied conditions under which children's socialization experiences in their families might influence them to move in one or more of the four deviant directions.

During this same period, Albert Cohen (1959), another of Parsons's influential students, also sought to elaborate the ideas of deviant behavior and "social disorganization." Recall that Parsons saw the former inevitably pressing toward the latter. Like Parsons, Cohen (p. 462) defines the former as "behavior which violates . . .

expectations which are shared and recognized as legitimate within a social system." However, Cohen (like Merton) departs significantly from Parsons by rejecting the idea that deviance necessarily leads to disorganization. Instead, Cohen argues that systems are in disorganization only to the degree that they depart from "continued orderly functioning—that is, functioning in accordance with their own constitutive rules" (1959, p. 479).

In effect, Cohen says that deviance leads to disorganization only to the extent that it undermines the system's "orderly functioning." If deviance occurs, but functioning continues anyhow, then the system remains "organized" and is not disorganized. For example, if a mother ceases to be the expressive hub but an older sister in the household takes on that role, then the family is likely to continue "functioning." Merton used the term "functional equivalent" to describe situations in which a system goal (e.g., nurturance) is achieved by other than institutionalized means (older sister). Unlike Merton, Cohen does not address conditions under which systems create new norms. Nevertheless, by showing that deviance does not necessarily undermine stability and order, Cohen reinforces the possibility that deviance and social order may coexist indefinitely.

"How and why did Parsons go wrong?" asks James Coleman (1990, p. 338). Because, he concludes, "Parsons . . . saw the relations between different persons' interests (or values) in a simplistic way. For him, action is social through the existence of common values which generate norms." Recall, however, that Williams (1961) argued that one reason Parsons introduced Freudian notions into his later schemas was precisely because he became conscious of the limitations of the "shared value" approach. Parsons (1950) apparently believed that biology would reinforce his view of social stability; and the implications of Freudian themes for the family were laid out most clearly by one of his students (Pitts, 1964). And although in their own essay elaborating Parsons's notions, Bell and Vogel (1960) strayed little into Freudian territory, other contributors to their anthology were more explicit in connecting Freud to the family. The basic functionalist argument was that husbands and wives are biologically "pre-disposed" to fulfill their instrumental and expressive roles (Pitts, 1964). Thus, to the degree that cultural determinism might be insufficient in

explaining the "need" for role specialization, Parsons added biological determinism. Consequently, Parsons "went wrong" not merely because of his "simplistic" view of social life, but also because of his attempt to shore up that view by resorting to Freudian ideas.

Historic Foundations

Besides the influence of Freud, Parsons's thinking regarding "shared values" derived from a long-standing intellectual tradition that can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato, and on through the eighteenth-century Scottish Moral Philosophers. Many pre-twentieth-century social thinkers were grappling with the Hobbesian problem of social order. Thomas Hobbes, a seventeenth-century social philosopher, viewed humans as self-interested beings who were in constant danger of "the war of each against all." The problem of order became paramount in the minds of many social thinkers following political unrest and social upheavals beginning with the eighteenth-century French Revolution. In addition, nineteenth-century European urbanization and industrialization created social and political strains that contributed to the concern for order. At the same time, the biological sciences were unraveling the mysteries of bodily functions; and evolutionary ideas of adaptation and survival were creating controversy and stimulating intellectual thought. Consequently, a number of social philosophers used the human body as an analogy for society. The "organic analogy" is based on the idea that society, like the body, is a cohesive whole served by its parts. Moreover, just as bodily health is measured by observing whether its parts are functioning properly or not (e.g., arms and legs are present and movable), societal health was likewise observed through the "proper" functioning of its parts. A well-functioning body is said to be in a state of *equilibrium*, and the same was alleged to be true about society. In addition to being able to ascertain equilibrium in both bodies and societies, it was argued that societies and their parts experience evolution just as organisms do.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) observed that the eighteenth-century philosopher Montesquieu was perhaps the first to talk about societies as "social systems," and to describe them via the organic analogy, or "organicism." The goal of eighteenth-century social philosophy, following the

lead of the biological sciences, was to organize society by classificatory schemes. The early nineteenth-century French philosopher Auguste Comte (1875) (the “father” of sociology) introduced “positivism” into social thought, thus marking a shift from merely philosophical logic to a “scientific” perspective based on empirical observations. Comte’s conceptions of society were “organic” because he viewed it as a living entity analogous to biological organisms. Comte used a favorite term of Parsons—*solidarity*—to refer to interconnectedness in social life. Comte also conceived of “consensus,” another Parsonian term, as the source of social unity. According to Parsons (1982), Durkheim transformed Comte’s idea of consensus into his famous *conscience collective*.

The Influence of Durkheim

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) credited the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French social thinker Emile Durkheim (1956, 1962) with the most comprehensive systematic formulation of the analogy between social and organic life. The British anthropologists, Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski (1930), who have been called the titular (along with Durkheim himself) founders of functionalism, were influenced by Durkheim (Turner, 1986). According to Parsons (1982), the primary concern of Durkheim was “the integration of social systems, of what holds societies together” (p. 189). Parsons (1982) argued that the construct of “social solidarity” was central to Durkheim’s work, as it was to his own. Solidarity derives from norms bolstered by shared values. Durkheim also described role specialization between the genders in ways later expounded by Parsons (see previous section). Durkheim’s incisive analyses of numerous topics (suicide, religion) accounted for the attractive nature of his functional mode of analyses to subsequent sociologists and anthropologists (Turner, 1986). In his description of the “integration theory of society,” which “conceives of social structure as a functionally integrated system regulated by normative consensus,” Durkheim rejected “methodological individualism,” which located the source of purposive actions within the individual (Knorr-Cetina, 1981, p. 2).

Durkheim was also aware of the dangers of the teleological fallacy, a criticism often leveled at

functionalism, namely that a “future consequence of an event causes that very event to occur” (Turner, 1974, p. 19). Don Martindale (1960) noted that prior to Parsonian functionalism, “function . . . had been treated as a dependent variable or faculty of a fixed structure or form. Now all this was reversed and function was regarded as the independent variable while form or structure was demoted to second place” (p. 443). Martindale illustrated this notion with an extreme example: “whereas in the past it was assumed that a man had a pair of legs (structure) and he walked, now it is assumed that a man walks (function) and this activity produces a pair of legs” (p. 443). For example, the functionalist answer to the existence of social structures such as the family was that they are “explained by the functions that they serve for society” (Collins, 1988, p. 54).

The Influence of British Anthropology

Malinowski (1930) and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) were leading early twentieth-century proponents of functionalism. Radcliffe-Brown accepted Durkheim’s ideas of solidarity and integration, which later became a cornerstone of Parsons’s functionalism (Stocking, 1984). Those constructs were viewed as “needs” of social structure that helped explain cultural phenomena such as kinship rules and religious rituals (Turner, 1986). Radcliffe-Brown attempted to avoid the teleological fallacy by the assertion that “every item of a culture must have a function and that items in different cultures must have the same function” (Turner, 1974, p. 22). Spencer had been an influential nineteenth-century organicist social philosopher, and Malinowski reintroduced his ideas of hierarchical levels in society (biological, social structural, and symbolic), each level having different “needs.” At the structural level, Malinowski suggested four functional needs: “economic adaptation, political authority, educational socialization, and social control.” These notions of “levels of systems” along with their “needs” surfaced in Parsons’s later work (Williams, 1961), even though in his earlier writings Parsons (1937, p. 3) had quipped, “Who now reads Spencer?” Interestingly enough, Turner (1986, p. 50) remarks that if Parsons had not intervened, “functionalism would have ended with Radcliffe-Brown because

it had very little to offer sociologists attempting to study complex societies.”

Early American Sociology

Precisely because the pioneers of American sociology were preoccupied with “complex societies,” they had much less affinity for the “society as an organism” analogy (also called “holism”) than they did for the opposite intellectual perspective that society is a “multiplicity of parts” struggling to achieve order, that is, *nominalism* (Jesser, 1975, p. 83). Like organicism, the roots of nominalism can be traced to the ancient Greek philosophers and on into the nineteenth century. Squarely in the nominalist tradition, Albion W. Small established the first department of sociology in the United States at the University of Chicago in 1892. Small had studied in Berlin with Georg Simmel, as did Robert E. Park who succeeded Small as department head. Park became “the most influential of Simmel’s American students” (Levine *et al.*, 1976, p. 816). Small used Simmel’s ideas to establish the legitimacy of sociology as a professional domain. Park and Ernest W. Burgess disseminated Simmel’s ideas widely via their *Introduction to the Science of Society* first published in 1921, followed by many editions. The “Chicago School” maintained the single greatest influence on general sociology prior to Parsons.

Recall that above we cited Coleman asking “how and why” Parsons “went wrong.” One response is that Parsons did not pay much attention to Simmel and the “Chicago School.” Interestingly enough, Merton and one of his influential students (Coser, 1956) did try to elaborate Simmel’s notions. Levine and co-workers (1976) showed that Simmel’s ideas differed significantly from earlier organicism and later Parsonianism. Society, argued Simmel, is not a “corporate entity distinct from and exerting constraints upon individuals” nor can it be reduced to the “motives and acts of individuals” (Levine *et al.*, 1976, pp. 823–824). The essence of social life is instead, said Simmel, *interaction*. Individuals and groups generate interaction in order to achieve their goals. Interaction is inevitably reciprocal: A impacts B who influences A who impacts B, and so on. Persons and groups that are interacting devise certain patterns, or cultural forms, to facilitate their goals. Examples of these created patterns would include fami-

lies. Simmel believed that although cultural forms “become fixed . . . they stand in . . . perpetual tension with the ongoing life processes, which bring about recurrent efforts to modify those forms or create new ones” (Levine *et al.*, 1976, p. 824).

In short, a major theme pervading mainstream sociology prior to Parsons (1937) was dialectics, a process of change and progression described, in modern times, by the philosopher George Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831), and subsequently referred to as the “Hegelian dialectic.” Persons and groups (AB) create social arrangements to achieve certain goals—thesis. Inevitably, A and/or B challenge existing arrangements—antithesis. Consequently, over time, the arrangements are either altered, or new arrangements are devised—synthesis. Although over time that synthesis becomes established as a new thesis, it is inevitably challenged by subsequent antitheses. In attempting to grasp what social life was all about, professionals and students of that era approached it from a dialectical perspective. And over the past three decades, sociologists, while deserting functionalism, have been reexamining their pre-Parsonian dialectic roots and extending them in numerous and complex directions (Coleman, 1990).

Organicism and Family Studies: 1890s–1940s

It is curious that although a dialectic approach pervaded mainstream sociology, Howard (1981) shows that family sociology developed largely outside the mainstream. Because family sociology remained largely untouched by Simmel’s thinking, it became much more the product of nineteenth-century organicism. Although Tocqueville had a great deal to say about what he called the “democratic” family in America during the 1830s, it was not until the latter part of that century that the family became a major focus of scholars and social critics, as well as the lay public (Howard, 1981). The end of the Victorian century was a period of convulsive social changes in the United States owing to powerful forces of urbanization and industrialization. From the countryside, great numbers of persons were migrating to expanding factories and burgeoning cities, joined by a steady influx of immigrants from cen-

tral and southern Europe. In 1889, “the discovery that the United States had the highest divorce rate in the world” (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988, p. 109) triggered the dismaying conclusion that the family was in “disintegration and disorganization.” That assessment was shored up by “the increasing numbers of working mothers; the rebelliousness of youth; the falling birth rate; and the growing incidence of illegitimacy, adultery, and premarital sex” (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988, p. 131). These kinds of data troubled many citizens and stimulated two contrasting public policy positions. One stance called “progressivism” sought “to protect society against the family’s failures” (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988, p. 119). Protection was best achieved, thought progressives, through legislating programs that enhanced the economic and physical well-being of families, thereby increasing the likelihood of their stability.

On the other side, the “conservative” view, endorsed most vigorously by religious spokespersons (O’Neill, 1967), held that family disorganization could be reversed—and society protected—if persons ceased their relentless pursuit of “individualism” (a term coined by Tocqueville). Instead of individualism, conservatives encouraged citizens to conform to “responsible” nineteenth-century patterns regarding marital permanency, sex, children, women’s roles, and so on.

Although programmatically very different, Howard (1981) shows that conservatives and progressives alike shared a common commitment to the organic analogy and that they maintained an uneasy coexistence within the developing field of family studies up through the 1930s. Both perspectives tended to anthropomorphize and reify society and the family (i.e., treat them “as if” they are corporeal entities) instead of being what Jay Gubrium and James Holstein (1990) call “artificially” or “humanly created.” Family analysts of both persuasions viewed the society–family connection as an organic whole in which the family served society and was in turn served by society. Simultaneously, persons served both family and society, and were in turn served by them. Any “interruptions” in these mutual services owing, for example, to “family disorganization” prevented society from getting what it needs in order to survive and thrive. Religious conservatives attributed this organic model of family and society to Divine decree. Secular progressives viewed the

model as the product of societal evolution. Hence, sociologists used labels such as “adaptation” and “survival” to describe how the family was reacting to the enormous societal changes being brought about by early twentieth-century industrialization and urbanization. The family’s capability to “survive” was *prima facie* evidence of its enormous resilience, as well as assurance of its continued existence.

Consequently, nineteenth-century organicism became the theoretical foundation on which family sociology/studies was built and developed as a profession throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century (Howard, 1981). Although conservatives and progressives often differed over specific strategies to “help” the family, there was never any question as to what “help” meant, that is, enhancing family organization and thereby contributing to societal well-being. Family disorganization (defined as the incapability of impairment of the family to fulfill its functions for or obligations to society) was to be avoided at all costs. Howard shows that the most influential research strategies surfacing during this period were based on organic assumptions. In particular, there emerged a research tradition in the 1930s that today still accounts for the bulk of published articles in family studies, namely, marital “adjustment,” “quality,” and so forth. Although severely criticized for many years by numerous scholars on methodological grounds, this tradition persists owing to its central conceptual rationale: if family organization (stability) is the ultimate theoretical and policy issue because of its consequences for children and thus society, and if marital quality is the chief means to avoid disorganization, then *ipso facto* marital quality must be the most important research question to explore in family studies.

Although Ernest Burgess was a central figure in the Chicago School, he failed to develop fully the Simmelian dialectic with regard to the family. His definition of the family as a “unity of interacting personalities” (explicitly rejected by Norman Bell and Ezra Vogel in 1960) and his insistence that the family is essentially a process influenced by its members were insightful. However, he equated family conflicts with disorganization (Howard, 1981, pp. 66–67) and he attributed discord to the changes occurring in the larger society. He believed that once political and economic conditions in the larger society stabilized, family life

would attain “a new state of equilibrium.” Unlike Simmel, Burgess never accepted the notion that ongoing struggle and change is inevitable within families. Nor did Burgess ever seriously pursue the idea that struggle might bring about new ways of arranging family relationships. Although Burgess pushed to the limits the forms of interaction that are possible within family parameters, Gubrium and Holstein (1990, p. 38) show that he was never able to overcome the organicist notion that the parameters themselves could not be rearranged.

The pre-Parsonian family scholar to wrestle most seriously with Simmelian ideas was Willard Waller (1938). His analyses of college student dating were innovative applications of the ideas of Simmel, Small, and Park. Waller’s discussions of gender differentiation, prestige hierarchies, costs, rewards, implicit calculations, rationality, bargaining, exploitation, conflict, dissolution, and so on emerge from an image of persons struggling to create relationships whose outcomes cannot be predicted with certainty. His treatment of conflict was particularly Simmelian (antedating Coser’s 1956 treatment of Simmel and conflict), because Waller argued that under certain conditions conflict may contribute to the maintenance of relationships and under other conditions contribute to their dissolution. Waller’s work stood in sharp contrast to the dominant “marital adjustment” school (and to later functionalism) where conflict was viewed primarily as a threat to system stability. Intriguingly, Waller’s analyses of marital relationships were far less dynamic and innovative. Although he could describe premarital relationships in nominalist fashion, the organic model tended to prevail when he shifted to postwedding phenomena.

Waller’s untimely death cut off the possibility of any further contributions he might have made toward the start of a Simmelian tradition in family research. As the decade of the 1930s ended, the organic model of family and society prevailed, reinforced empirically by the emerging “marital adjustment” tradition. At that same time, Parsons (1937) took center stage in mainstream sociology with the schema summarized above.

Parsons’s Intellectual Development

The son of a Congregational minister, Talcott Parsons was educated in the conservative north-

east. His earliest academic interests were in biology and political economy. Although he read Sumner, Cooley, Durkheim, and Veblen, he had little early exposure to the Chicago School or to Simmel (Hamilton, 1983). Following the completion of his B.A. degree in 1924, Parsons went to the London School of Economics where he attended lectures by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. After his year in London he went to Heidelberg University, where Max Weber had studied 40 years previously, and earned a Ph.D. At that time Parsons, like Max Weber, was intensely interested in the debate over Karl Marx’s views of capitalism. Parsons went to Harvard University in 1927 to teach economics and further explore economic theory. In 1931, he became a faculty member of the newly formed Department of Sociology. In 1946, Parsons became the first chair of the Department of Social Relations, an interdisciplinary unit that significantly influenced the course of post-World War II sociology.

Parsons first major work was published in 1937. His intention was to “formulate an adequate general analytical and voluntaristic theory of action” (Adriaansens, 1980, p. 5). He conceptualized volunteerism as the subjective decision-making processes of individuals. According to Bourricaud (1981), Parsons’s use of the term “action” indicated his revolt against twentieth-century positivism. In rejecting positivistic views of observable cause-and-effect relationships, he believed they overlooked the functioning of the mind and encouraged reductionism (Turner, 1978). Over time, Parsons’s (1951) ideas gradually shifted from an emphasis on Actor’s volunteerism to a major concern with action constrained by normative and situational elements. Recall that Williams’s (1961) explanation for this shift was Parsons’s growing awareness that shared values were insufficient to counteract disorder. Consequently, his second major work, *The Social System*, published in 1951, departed substantially from his 1937 volume, as did a number of additional influential works (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Parsons, Bales & Shils, 1953; and Parsons & Shils, 1951) published during that time. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, functionalism “developed distinctive forms in more empirically oriented ‘middle range’ areas, [and] thus became the primary organizing paradigm for most of American sociology” (Hamilton, 1983, p. 45).

Parsons: Social Change and Deviance

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by dramatic upheavals throughout North American society, and the resulting tumult underscored critics' charges that functionalism had no satisfactory theory of change. Parsons responded by reverting to his earlier training in biology, drawing on the twin ideas of organic analogy and evolutionary development. To these notions, he added ideas from the then-emerging field of cybernetics, for example, sources of change could be either excesses or deficiencies in supplies of information and energy (Turner, 1978). Parsons argued that just as organisms adapted to external forces, and thus changed in order to survive, this same process of evolution takes place within social systems. The preindustrial family, for example, was changed by the forces of industrialization into something different, that is, the nuclear family based on the instrumental and expressive role specialization described above. Parsons's argument that the family's evolutionary adaptations demonstrate its resilience was not new. Recall that earlier family analysts, sharing his organicism, had for many decades made precisely the same point. Interestingly enough, the identical explanation for change can be found in the contemporary family studies' literature: "The major factors determining the direction of [family] change will be the realities of economics and demographics" (Taubin & Mudd, 1983, p. 265).

Parsons's approach to change casts additional light on Coleman's (1990) query as to where Parsons "went wrong." For Parsons, actors failing to conform to preexisting group norms is necessarily deviance as described earlier. Unlike Merton, Parsons never viewed deviance as a potential source of system change. Change is not legitimately generated by persons from within organic systems; instead, change is imposed by impersonal forces from the outside and the "system must adapt to" or "cope with" it in order to survive. Turner (1988, p. 3) quotes George Homans as saying that for a theory of "action," Parsons's ideas contained "darn little action." If Parsons had somehow been able to resonate with Simmel that the essence of sociology is interaction, he might then have been able to move toward a theory of change in which interaction between persons and between groups gives rise to ever-changing patterns of behaviors.

Even by 1965, Parsons still described the phenomenon of men not providing adequately for their families as attributable to "a failure of socialization," and thus an example of deviant behavior.

The Influence of Goode

Goode (1959) observed that family theory of that era lagged behind the development of mainstream, that is, functionalist, theory: "There remains a feeling, primarily aesthetic, which most of us share, that family theory at best does not have the sweep, the drama, the ear-compelling sonorities of good theory" (p. 181). To try to achieve that "good theory," Goode (1961, 1963, 1964) produced a number of influential works explicitly connecting Parsonian ideas to family sociology. And like Merton and Cohen, Goode went beyond Parsons in trying to address notions of deviance and change. But in view of the reality that organicism pervaded family sociology long before Parsons, how can it be that family sociology of that era lagged behind general sociology? Given their common heritage, why did Parsons's ideas not become central to family sociology long before the efforts of Goode, Pitts (1964), and Bell and Vogel (1960)? The answer appears to lie in Goode's use of "aesthetic." Apart from Waller, the family sociology that existed prior to the 1960s was not oriented primarily toward the development of scientific theory (Hill & Hansen, 1960). Instead, Collins (1975, p. 225) remarks that its chief focus was on applied matters, namely, "how to" help persons have "happy" marriages and thus avoid divorce. This preoccupation with practical matters fit perfectly with the "marital adjustment" school described above. It also, of course, fit entirely with organic concerns that "family survival" is requisite to the well-being of children and thus the survival of society. But since most family research consisted of what Merton (1957) called "isolated empirical generalizations" about "adjustment," and so on, it was neither scientifically nor, ultimately, of any practical importance. Consequently, Goode (and Ruben Hill, but not from an explicitly structural-functionalism perspective) and others purposely set out to raise the level of theoretical sophistication in the field. Nevertheless, it seems ironic that mainstream sociology was repudiating Parsonianism during the very pe-

riod when a number of eminent scholars were vigorously producing works aimed at explicitly connecting family sociology to general theory. In 1975, Collins (p. 225) concluded that although functionalism had virtually disappeared from general sociology, "the sociology of family, kinship, and socialization has been the bastion of functionalism, framing its analysis against an ideal system in which men, women, and children all fit nicely in their places." In sum, organicism was endemic to pre-Parsonian family sociology. During the time that structural-functionalism pervaded general sociology, family studies (apart from exceptions such as Goode and others) maintained its preoccupation with organicism as well as applied matters. And in spite of the demise of functionalism in mainstream sociology, organicist assumptions continue the course set in family studies a century ago.

Main Contemporary Problems Addressed

If we were to follow the conclusions of Broderick (1971a) and Holman and Burr (1980), this chapter would now end because according to them there is nothing "contemporary" to address via functionalism. Contrariwise, McIntyre's observation (1966, p. 64) remains trenchant: "Of the large body of empirical research concerning the family . . . only a relatively small proportion has consciously used a structural-functional . . . framework. Despite this apparent lack the framework has had an impact on research greater than its deliberate use would indicate." "Deliberate use" is the key phrase, because aside from some exceptions (Beer, 1989), few family analysts today explicitly use functionalist jargon, much less call themselves functionalists. Nevertheless, the argument can be made that the central theoretical issue that dominates contemporary family studies is the condition of equilibrium—maintaining a steady state in the face of external and internal threats to that homeostasis (e.g., Olson & McCubbin, 1983). That was the issue long before Parsons; it became the question that preoccupied him; and it continues today. Put another way, the central matter to which functionalism speaks is the general issue of social organization: How do we understand the structures and changes of families and primary relationships?

Demographers (Bumpass & Sweet, 1980; Espenshade, 1985; Sweet & Bumpass, 1987; Teachman *et al.*, 1987) and historians (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988; Modell, 1988, 1989) have amassed evidence documenting significant variations in behaviors pertaining to families and relationships—particularly during recent decades. In response to this mass of data, a dichotomy has emerged in the family literature couched in classic Parsonian terms (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983, pp. 318–324). On the one side, stands the family—the normatively legitimized social system uniquely fitted to benefit Society. On the other side stand "alternative" or "other" life-styles—documented behavioral variations that may have dysfunctions for children and society. Although numerous euphemisms are applied to these nonconforming variations, in effect they are conceptualized as deviant behaviors.

Although the label "deviant" seldom appears in the family studies' literature, the fact that other life-styles are called "other" indicates that they represent something besides "The Family". If one posits a theory of social organization based on normative conformity, then one must forever wrestle with the empirical reality that large numbers of persons are not conforming. Recall that once the shortcomings of the normative conformity approach became clear, Parsons and his students agonized over the implications for decades. The life-styles literature represents the realm of family studies where nonconformity (deviance from dominant norms) is most apparent. Consequently, we examine it in conjunction with the homeostatic model central to contemporary family studies.

Alternative Life-styles

Buunk and van Driel (1989) state that their use of the label "variant" life-styles escapes the opprobrium attached to labels such as "deviant" or "alternative." By "variant" they mean "life-styles that are different from the sexually exclusive, legally sanctioned marriage couple that lives together in a joint household" (p. 19). In terms of what Parsons called dominant norms and also legal statutes, this latter definition (factoring in the presence of the couple's own natural children under 18) describes what Hofferth (1985) called the Benchmark Family, or what we earlier identified as the "Nuclear Family," or simply the

"Family." Hill (1982) labeled it the "standard package"; Taubin & Mudd (1983) called it "contemporary traditional" by also factoring in the option of the wife engaged in paid labor that is secondary to the husband's paid labor. In his review of deviance theory, Gibbs (1981) observes that deviance is both "objective" and perceived or "labeled." For example, in the United States it is against the law for unmarried persons to have sex or for married persons to have sex with anyone other than their spouses. In addition, many states maintain statutes against married persons doing "unnatural" sex.

Hence, in spite of what Buunk and van Driel maintain, from an "objective" view, "life-styles" that include illegal sex are deviant. Furthermore, although marginally enforced, severe penalties (sanctions) can be imposed for breaking laws about sex, as some homosexual couples and prostitutes have discovered. In addition, persons wishing to represent sexual life-styles (or even legal ones such as marital sex) through art or the media may be punished for doing so on the grounds that they are violating norms held by the "community." Community norms shift us to Gibbs's labeling perspective; and it can be argued that the majority of U.S. citizens define virtually all relationship patterns that are different from the benchmark as deviant to a greater or lesser degree. This is so first because what is different is defined as "less desirable" (dysfunctional for persons and society) than the ideal; and second because what is different is either sanctioned negatively and/or receives neither cultural nor social supports. Thorton (1989) makes the point that although in recent decades there have been substantial increases in nonconforming primary relationship behaviors, there is no evidence to suggest that they have yet become normative, that is, endorsed.

Yankelovich (1981) suggested that the U.S. population can be divided into three broad categories, and his continuum is useful to reinforce our arguments regarding deviant primary relationship behavior and labeling. On the Right, evangelicals make up some 20% of citizens who not only label nonbenchmark behaviors as deviant, they also tend to behave in benchmark terms (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). Moreover, they seek vigorous enforcement of existing laws against primary relationship deviance, resist all attempts to weaken current statutes, and advocate the passage of new legislation curbing further deviance. On

the Left, another 20% seek to label diversity of primary relationship patterns as desirable and to define all patterns potentially as equally desirable as the benchmark. They also seek repeal of statutes restricting primary relationship diversity and the passage of new legislation supporting it. The center consists of the 60% majority, who akin to the Right, label most nonbenchmark patterns as deviant. Nevertheless, their behaviors at one or more points throughout their life courses are nonbenchmark, that is, deviant, and thus akin to the Left. According to Hofferth, these persons endorse the benchmark even though they do not now, nor may ever be able to, experience it. Importantly, this majority, unlike the two polar extremes, tends not to advocate either legal enforcement or statutory changes. Nevertheless, if they perceive their freedom to "behave deviantly" threatened by legislation, they will politically resist that incursion, as witnessed by their recent responses to the New Right efforts to restrict abortion options.

Earlier we noted Cohen's (1959) distinction between deviance and social (including family) disorganization. Deviance is nonconforming behavior that has degrees of dysfunction for organization; some forms of family deviance may be "worse" or more dysfunctional (create more disequilibrium) for society than others. For over a century the prime reason divorce has been considered highly dysfunctional deviance is because it allegedly undermines the proper socialization of children, thus threatening society's well-being resulting in disorganization. Accordingly, the single-parent life-style (often stemming from divorce) is also thought to be highly dysfunctional for society because children fail to receive inputs from two parents. That situation is perceived as particularly negative for boys, since the "missing" parent is usually the father. According to Parsons (1965) and many current observers, the economic problems of African-Americans are in large measure owing to a high proportion of boys growing up without a resident male figure. A "deficit" of male providers, he said, threatens society by staggering welfare costs and by serious crimes perpetrated by black males.

As single parenthood becomes increasingly commonplace throughout white society, Thompson and Gongla (1983) have taken a position similar to Buunk and van Driel (1989), namely, that since this life-style is becoming so widespread and is thus in "the mainstream of American society," it

can no longer be conceptualized objectively as deviant. Nevertheless, Thompson and Gongla (1983, p. 113) acknowledge that because single parenthood is nonbenchmark, it continues to be perceived as deviant—it is something less desirable (dysfunctional) than the cultural ideal, and thus receives neither social nor cultural supports. Significantly, they underscore a key issue in assessing whether behavior is deviant or not; and although they apply it to single parenthood, it applies to all life-styles as well. The key is time, that is, duration: “The conventional wisdom is that the single-parent family will ‘go away’ when the single parent (re)marries” (Thompson & Gongla, 1983, p. 112). The argument is that behavior that is not institutionalized is thought of as temporary. Furthermore, because the behavior is less than desirable (dysfunctional), there is no impetus to make it permanent by providing it with any kind of positive sanctions except those that would result in its termination, that is, via (re)marriage. If a nonbenchmark pattern becomes legitimized as permanent and thus just as desirable as the benchmark, then the latter is in effect sharing some of its alleged unique functions for societal well-being: it becomes a “functional equivalent.”

The issue of duration is extraordinarily relevant for cohabitation (both homo- and heterosexual; especially since cohabitation and solo parenting are increasingly overlapping phenomena. Although increasing numbers of U.S. heterosexuals cohabit at varying points in their life courses, the median length of their relationships is 1.3 years (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). Hence, one could argue that cohabiters’ social networks (friends, kin) expect their unions to be temporary. Although no longer prohibited, the option of cohabitation appears to append the clause that at some point cohabitants “must make a decision”: either marry or terminate. Although permanence is valued within marriage, it is devalued within cohabitation. The “decision” to remain together “forever informally” receives little social support in the United States. “Informal marriage” is not yet viewed as a “functional equivalent” to the “real thing,” as is evidently more the case in Scandinavia (Popenoe, 1988). Incidentally, one could speculate that one reason for the higher rates of marital instability among Americans who cohabited prior to marriage (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989) was the intense pressure to marry—resulting in “unsuitable” formal unions.

Following this reasoning, the life-style that perhaps represents the most severe dilemma for functionalist thinking is remarriage and step-families. On the one hand, all divorced persons with or without children are deviant, as are persons who have what functionalists call “illegitimate” children but who are not married (Malinowski, 1930). Because those patterns are nonbenchmark, there is enormous network pressure (kin and friends) to move those persons from their “temporary” status to a permanent and normatively more desirable one—re- or first marriage. But on the other hand, by definition neither can remarriage nor stepfamily be the benchmark: they are less than ideal and may be fraught with dysfunctions. Consequently, Ganong and Coleman (1987) described them as “nonnuclear” families; and others (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987) use the label “binuclear.” Ironically, fresh labels distinguishing these life-styles from the benchmark tend to reinforce their deviant status even though according to Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman (1988), “43% of all [U.S.] marriages contracted now are remarriages for one or both spouses” (p. 204). Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman argue that by moving beyond the “deficit model approach” (p. 218), the study of remarriage is becoming more complex and sophisticated, that is, less naively functionalist. Nevertheless, a recent essay employed functionalist labels to identify three types of stepfamily structures, each of which was predisposed to some type of dysfunction (Mills, 1989). In another essay employing functionalist concepts, Beer (1989) sought to identify “the basic features of the stepsibling subsystem . . . [that] might contribute to its dynamic equilibrium” (p. 132).

Family Stress Perspectives

A survey of the current literature reveals that the topic of family stress is a widely researched area. The construct of stress was first introduced into family studies by researchers examining impacts of the 1930s’ Great Depression (Boss, 1987). Since family studies were then (as now) dominated by organic assumptions, it is not surprising that family studies spawned an instant affinity with stress notions. Citing Reuben Hill, Boss (1987) defines “family stress as an upset in the steady state of the family” (p. 695). She describes Hill’s (1949) pioneering ABC-X model in which A

represents the "provoking event or stressor," X is the "crisis and stress" stemming from it, B is the "resources or strengths" possessed by the family, and C is how the family defines the event. Hill defined crisis as a "period of disorganization" in the family if it is vulnerable to a stressor. If it has enough resources, "the family reverses this disorganization and begins to reorganize and . . . May reach a new level of reorganization" (Hill, 1949, p. 697), exceeding the level it experienced prior to the event. Without belaboring the point, it seems apparent that these ideas are another way of stating Parsons's notions of system (re)equilibrium. Thus, from its inception, stress perspectives and functionalism shared common theoretical ground.

A recent volume examined coping with family stress resulting from what were called "normative transitions." Some of the transitions considered there also appear in the life-styles literature. Included, for instance, is "dual-career families: strains of sharing" (Skinner, 1983), which was called "a growing family life-style" (McCubbin & Figley, 1983a, p. xxviii). Also included is divorce (Ahrons, 1983), the postdivorce single family (Hogan *et al.*, 1983), stepparenting and blended families (Visher & Visher, 1983), work and family (Porter, 1983), and the black family (McAdoo, 1983). As part of their "Families in Trouble" series, Chilman, Nunnally, and Cox compiled an anthology called *Variant Family Forms* (1988). They exceeded McCubbin and Figley by considering the full range of alternative life-styles. Chilman and colleagues (1988) argued that "many of today's families are in serious trouble, as rising rates of divorce . . . suggest. The stresses imposed by a rapidly changing society are creating severe strains for families and their members" (p. 7). Their viewpoint echoes a century of organicist thought—societal upheavals are disrupting families, producing variant (and dysfunctional) forms; hence, families must be assisted to avoid disintegration and disorganization. However, to bring their perspective up to date, Chilman and colleagues "build on the work of . . . [homeostatic] systems theorists . . . [and] family stress and coping theorists" (p. 11).

In short, there appears to be a growing literature that bridges (deviant) life-styles with stress. And reasoning from a functionalist perspective, a strong theoretical case can be made for just such a connection. Merton (1957), for example, employed Durkheim's term *anomie* to describe per-

sons' feelings of distress when they do not conform to dominant values and norms. For the most part, the family stress perspective appears to operate within a contemporary version of the organicist framework that has dominated family studies for so long. The focus of attention tends to be a reified benchmark family. McCubbin and Figley (1983b) conclude in functionalist fashion that "Families generally operate on a predictable, normal cycle, anticipating and accepting a sequence of events that will occur throughout the life course. These predictable transitions may, however, be disrupted by unanticipated or traumatic events" (p. 219). Events (whether predictable or unpredictable) disturb the family's equilibrium and require coping if it is to "succeed," that is, regain homeostasis and remain organized in a stable fashion. The ultimate purpose, or function, of family equilibrium is to stave off societal disorganization, although it is assumed that family success is functional for individuals as well. It follows that analysts who define alternatives as deviating from the benchmark and thus potentially dysfunctional, would focus on the degree of stress experienced by those nonconforming alternative patterns. The assumption seems to be that nonbenchmark patterns are vulnerable to a great deal of disequilibrium and thus stress. Consequently, stress researchers want to know how persons in deviant primary relations "cope" with the stress that comes from being deviant.

Boss (1987), however, is a stress theorist who wants to "move in new directions" (p. 697); hence she rejects "conservative . . . structural-functionalism" marked by actors' "passive" conformity (1986, p. 15). Furthermore, she dismisses the necessary association between life-styles and stress: "The assumption of normalcy in the . . . nuclear family with the . . . instrumental-expressive . . . role delineations is rejected, as is the assumption of conflict as evidence of pathology" (Boss, 1986, p. 23). Boss goes on to assert that the "larger society will not be threatened by this more radical perspective" (p. 23). Having so thoroughly undermined Parsonian notions of deviance and societal disorder, Boss nonetheless embraces a "neo-structural-functionalism" based on "cybernetics systems theory [in which] . . . Family health depends on interaction of all potential members within that system toward a mutual maintenance of [moving] equilibrium" (p. 15). As a neo-functionalist, Boss seems to retain the

organic analogy: the notion that there is a "real whole" seeking homeostasis, or equilibrium, and greater than the parts that comprise it. In that regard, Boss's work is complementary with the efforts of a number of contemporary general theorists wrestling with neo-functionalism who continue to hold that the "whole" is "more than the mere sum of its parts" (Alexander, 1985, p. 15).

For instance, in another place, Boss (1987) states that she is more interested in "why families succeed," instead of "why families fail" (p. 701). However, phrasing the question in that manner assumes first that there is in fact an actual entity called the family; and second that this entity may experience stress but yet it can and should "succeed." Boss seems to leave little doubt that the family is a real entity when she asks "whether the phenomenon of *family coping* exists or whether some individuals in the family are simply coping collectively. The answer is . . . both" (1987, p. 704, italics added). To elaborate her argument, she cites (p. 704) Buckley's (1967) distinction between types of systems theories—the homeostatic (functionalist) type versus the "dialectical process" type. She adapts the latter because she says it permits her to incorporate individuals into her family stress perspective. For her the dialectical approach examines how "elements of a universe are held together by opposition" (1987, p. 704). In the family, the "elements" are individuals who are "held together" in spite of stress, and thus the family "succeeds." Boss (1987, p. 704) defines the synthesis emerging from antithesis as "a unified whole."

Nevertheless, there are sharp differences between Boss's neo-functionalism and classic dialectical theory described above. Dialectical theorists focus on the struggles between the partners (adults, children) in a relationship and on the ever-changing structuring, or structuration, of patterns emerging from the struggles (Turner, 1988). Continuing struggle and change stem from the reality that persons have both divergent as well as convergent interests. The question is never the conditions of "moving equilibrium," but instead what kinds of changing arrangements are the persons able, or not able, to achieve? Change can range all the way from total cessation of interactions (it may or may not be in persons' best interests to terminate a relationship), to relationships that are constrained and uneasy (e.g., certain kin obligations; "utilitarian marriages"), to

varying degrees of consensus and equity (Scanzoni *et al.*, 1989). In contrast to that nominalist image of parts struggling to achieve and balance often-competing interests, Boss images a system seeking to maintain its equilibrium much as Coser (1956) did when he addressed the functions of social conflict.

At the same time, Boss's "neo-functionalism" moves the stress perspective much closer to general theory in both psychology and sociology. Mirowsky and Ross (1989) note that general literature does not conceptualize stress in group terms. If a study examines women who work 12 hours per day at paid and nonpaid work, or persons who are divorced, or are single, or are solo parents, or are child-free, or who are laid off, and so on, the goal is to measure the stress levels of these persons *qua persons*. Mirowsky and Ross also question the assumption that events external to persons (e.g., life course transitions) are the prime "causes" of stress. They argue instead that persons' evaluations of the events are the main predictors of their own stress levels. That assertion is akin to Boss and co-worker's (1990) discussion of coping. When Mirowsky and Ross identify the variable that in the literature appears most powerfully to predict a person's well-being (low stress levels), they converge closely with Boss's (1987) emphasis on a sense of mastery. A "sense of control," they contend, is the single most significant factor influencing well-being. Elements affecting a strong sense of control include, they say, education, a "good job," and a "supportive relationship—fair and caring" (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989, p. 184). They argue that the prime goal in persons having greater control over their political, economic, and primary relationship destinies is a sense of their own well-being.

The most vexing conceptual problem inherent in applying homeostatic family stress notions to alternatives stems from the century-long image of the family besieged by events not of its own making. That image ignores persons' degree of control over their primary relationships. McCubbin and Figley (1983b, p. 220) drew a distinction between what they called stress stemming from predictable or normative transitions versus "catastrophic stress." The latter include "rape, war, terroristic captivity, and natural disasters," along with chronic illness, drug abuse, abandonment, sudden divorce, and unemployment (p. 220). The issue is degree of control over the generation of

the event. Since persons are able to exercise relatively less control over a catastrophic event, their stress levels are likely to be high. By way of contrast, matters of choice and control become relatively more central in the case of alternatives. Persons choosing, for instance, to cohabit and feeling they have control over their voluntary deviance are likely to experience less stress than married persons feeling they have no control over their constrained conformity.

Remaking Relationships: Evolution versus Choice and Control

During functionalism's heyday, it was fashionable to quip that economics was about how people made choices, whereas sociology was about how people had no choices to make. Selznick (1961, p. 934) complained that in Parsons's work and, we would add, in family studies, there has been "no true embrace of the idea that structure is being continuously opened up and reconstructed by the problem-solving behavior of individuals responding to concrete situations." However, recent studies by Modell (1988, 1989) and Hansen (1988) focus on the "opening up" and "reconstruction" of primary relationships instead of on their equilibrium. Both scholars appeared in a family stress anthology; and the editors observe that the volume should be viewed in the light of a major trend "throughout the social sciences. . . . Theory and research are moving more toward dynamic models in which concepts and measures of change occupy a central and explicit role" (Aldous & Klein, 1988, p. 13).

Modell explores why premarital sex has become so widespread since the 1930s in spite of dominant values and norms proscribing it as deviance that would undermine both family and society. He reported that because the Great Depression made it very difficult for men to find jobs, engagement periods became extended far beyond what persons wanted. Prior to this period, the interval between engagement and marriage–sex tended to be brief. Faced with the inability of men to fulfill their good provider role and thus marry, Modell argued that large numbers of engaged persons faced a dilemma: they could follow sacred norms and remain chaste or, in spite of the dire warnings from church and media, they could

"dare to be deviant" and try coitus. Increasingly more couples chose the latter option because it was rewarding and its costs tolerable. After 50 years the latter option pervades the entire society except for evangelicals who continue to choose to "say no to sex." Modell's nominalist model of social change derives from Giddens's (1981) reasoning that change occurs out of the interplay of macroconditions and human choices. The Depression generated the societal conditions that provided the rationale for certain (nonevangelical) couples to choose to deviate from formal norms. Following the Depression, it became clear to increasing numbers of persons that deviance was more rewarding than conformity. Hence, Modell argued that today persons have created "innovative" sets of nonformal norms regarding sex.

During that era, Kuhn (1948) observed that the "chief function of engagement" was getting to know the other person prior to their commitment to lifelong marriage and monogamous sex. But he noted that "engagement . . . has gone much further over into the realm of *alternatives* than have marriage and the family" (p. 281, italics added). Kuhn interpreted engagement–sex as a "cultural alternative" causing stress with which the family was successfully coping. By its ability to cope, the family was once again demonstrating its evolutionary resilience as it had since the nineteenth century. Instead of creating disorganization in the family and society, Kuhn stated that deviant sex was actually functional for the family. The benefit, according to Kuhn, was that since persons learned to be "instrumental and rational" through deviant sex, they can be more successful spouses in an era requiring these qualities. However, Modell (1988) rejects Kuhn by saying "that a less functionalist account of the history of engagement might well argue that the change . . . was not so much the result of evolution as of the capture of the institution by the cohort most directly affected by it" (p. 190). Their reasons for wanting to be deviant and capture it are numerous and complex. One reason seldom considered by functionalists or anyone else is that persons often define deviance of any sort (especially sex) as a "heady experience," an "emotional high" (Katz, 1988). Atwater's (1982) study of married women having affairs indicated "headiness" to be one factor accounting for their deviance. Although probably inconceivable to Parsons, an important research question is the part

that “heady” emotional feelings play in motivating persons to structure their primary relationships in nonconforming, or deviant, fashion.

Expanding on his idea of “capture,” Modell (1989) states that for over five decades youth have “come into their own,” that is, “individuals are responsible for crafting their own biographies, for discerning and nurturing their ‘selves’ and presenting these to the world. . . . Young people . . . have increasingly taken control of the construction of the youthful life course: adult-maintained convention has crumbled, and [youth] . . . construct it afresh” (p. 326). He adds that “the youthful life course has been an arena in which [youth] have . . . been innovators. A central theme in their innovation has been the injection of increasing volition” (p. 331). Referring to fears of societal disorganization, Modell observed that “sexuality [is] increasingly understood as an element of individual good rather than as a socially or divinely proscribed misjudgment” (p. 332). He cautions that none of these innovations “would have been possible” apart from certain macroconditions: in particular, the increasing access of youth—especially women—to economic resources not controlled by their elders.

Contrast Modell’s theory of change with Taubin and Mudd’s (1983, p. 265) functionalist view that changes in the family have been and will continue to be “evolutionary” and “determined” by “economics and demographics.” Like Kuhn (1948) and McCubbin and Figley (1983b), they see the family as “normally” in a steady state, yet subject to impinging macroforces that “require” it to “adapt” in order to survive and continue to fulfill its basic societal functions. For example, although earlier theorists (Hoffman & Nye, 1963) viewed wife–mother employment as potentially dysfunctional for the family, Taubin and Mudd (1983) stated that the family has now successfully incorporated her employment (albeit as secondary to the male’s) into its structure, thus adapting to changing economic conditions demanding dual-income families. Hence, like premarital sex, what was once viewed as dysfunctional is said now to contribute to the family, and thus to societal organization.

Hansen (1988) concurs with the Mirowsky and Ross (1989) argument that life course transitions are stressful only to the degree that persons lack a sense of control over the transitions. To

elaborate his position, he first observes that the “metaphor” of “social system” as it has been employed in family studies “is only distantly related to . . . the ‘morphogenic systems’ theories of Buckley” (1988, p. 48). Instead of focusing on the activities of persons in recreating, and perhaps terminating systems, family scholars have applied the organic metaphor to systems and have been concerned chiefly with their maintenance, or success. Hansen also suggests that assigning organic reality to the metaphor “role” hinders our understanding of how persons are “‘making roles’ . . . [And] ‘un-making’ the roles we are discarding” (p. 51). Thus, instead of the functionalist assumption that changes per se generate stress, Hansen focuses our attention on persons as innovators: their choices, shared role making, negotiation dynamics, emotional reactions, and outcome uncertainties (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Scanzoni *et al.*, 1989; Scanzoni & Godwin, 1990).

Limitations

Scientific

Because the status of functionalism has required us to weave its shortcomings into the chapter’s fabric, our aim here is to summarize them under the overarching constraint imposed on family studies because of its tacit acceptance of an equilibrium model of social organization. Eisenstadt (1985) states that general theorists like him departed functionalism because of their “unwillingness . . . to accept the ‘natural’ givenness of any . . . institution [including families] . . . in terms of the . . . needs of the social system to which it belonged” (p. 15). Real world data required them to shift their focus from system success and survival to persons/groups struggling: “Institutional order develops, is maintained and is changed through a process of continuous interaction, negotiation and struggle among those who participate in it. . . . The explanation of any institutional arrangement . . . [lies with] power relations and negotiations, power struggles and conflicts, and the coalitions [formed] during the processes” (p. 15). Moreover, because struggle takes place at both the micro- and macrolevels, he argued that a theory about an institution (families) must show the mutual influences between these levels. He noted that interest group struggle

becomes as theoretically pivotal as interpersonal struggle: Institutional change is not determined by the “environment” (technology, economic or demographic trends), but is instead “created” by relationships and groups “reconstructing . . . environments by using different technologies” (p. 18).

The limitation of functionalism for family studies derives from the image of Eisenstadt’s “natural givenness in terms of system needs.” As long as the benchmark is imaged as a “given” that “naturally” serves the needs of society and its members, family studies will continue to be isolated from the scientific cross-fertilization that occurs from interacting with scholars wrestling with struggle and change in many social spheres. Isolation is unfortunate because the subject matter, “the scientific stuff,” of primary relationships is struggle over divergent interests (Scanzoni *et al.*, 1989). Collins (1975) observed that struggle is pervasive not only between genders as feminist theorists have long argued, but also across generations. Seeley, Sim, and Loosley (1956) seemed puzzled to report that: “If the picture of confusion, internal contradiction, and incompatibility . . . between . . . persons . . . has any veracity, it may well be asked how it is possible . . . for families to remain visibly intact as families” p. 395). Not much had changed in 30 years since, in their study aimed at understanding conditions of “normal family equilibrium” (p. 19), Olson and McCubbin (1983) seemed equally puzzled [as did Hill (1983)] to report that they found “little agreement between husbands and wives over major family variables . . . and even less agreement between adolescents and their parents” (p. 235). They stated that instead of assuming the steady-state image of families—“an integrated and highly congruent group of individuals”—the researcher should “*assume disagreement* and lack of congruence” to be intrinsic to families.

For over a century it has been difficult for family researchers to conceptualize struggle over divergent interests as intrinsic to their models because they accept the “natural givenness” of the benchmark. Struggle and change include the potential for complete cessation of partners’ interactions. That potential returns us to the century-long fear that divorce and its consequences for children will result in social disorganization. Anxiety over disorder pervades Popenoe’s (1988) description of families experiencing changes in Sweden. The basic theoretical question is this: do

analysts begin with “natural” systems (society, the benchmark) as cultural or structural givens, or with persons? Homans (1961) argued that mainstream sociology needed to “bring men back in” as an antidote to functionalism. Do family scholars now need to “bring people in” to their analyses to overcome the limitations of functionalism? In one of the pioneer anthologies examining the emergence of life-styles, Otto (1970) asked: “To what extent does the American family structure contribute to the optimum development of the human potential of its members? This is perhaps the key question for the assessment of any alternative structure” (pp. 4–5). The theoretical issue addressed by Otto’s anthology is one of focus: do structures serve persons, or the other way around? Given the substantial increases in behavioral variations since Otto’s time, and based on studies such as Modell’s, our contention is that the more valid approach is to focus on persons struggling to make structures serve them.

Inevitably, when discussions proceed to this point, the question arises as to “how far” persons can and will depart from the “natural given benchmark” in recreating their primary arrangements. Will persons venture to create patterns that are “wholly other” and thus totally unrecognizable, as well as socially irresponsible? In contrast to that historic organicist fear, the historic nominalist response has been that persons and groups tend inexorably to redress imbalances between self-interest and other-interest—either because they want to or because struggle requires it (Ellis, 1971). Witness the recent monumental events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Thus, just as persons and groups must be “trusted” to create and recreate “responsible” political and economic arrangements instead of conforming to “natural givens”—whether monarchist or communist—persons must also be “trusted” to create/recreate “responsible” primary relationships stemming from basic emotional and economic needs (Bell, 1990). In any case, our task as scientists is to document the unfolding ascendance of struggle over conformity at both micro- and macrolevels of primary relationships (Scanzoni *et al.*, 1989).

Public Policies

Howard (1981) reports that the values of social workers have been highly influential in family

studies since its inception. Dumon (1988) observes that American family policy stems from what he calls "social work" values "in terms of help or self-help to overcome inadequacies . . . [in fulfilling family functions]" (p. 242). Instead, says Dumon, in Europe family policy stems from values of "social justice . . . [and is concerned with] the politics of scarce resource allocation" (p. 239). American functionalism was consistently accused of having a conservative political and social bias (Martindale, 1960). Collins (1988) explained the charge by saying that functionalism discovered "what is," and legitimated it in terms of its services for society. In no way does functionalism address issues such as injustice and oppression. Merton (1957) vigorously attempted to refute such charges but they persist nonetheless. Charges of a conservative bias intrinsic to family studies have been brought most consistently by feminist thinkers. As a response to the 1960s' Women's Liberation Movement, the *Journal of Marriage and Family* devoted a segment to the question of feminism and family studies (Broderick, 1971b). Several authors asked why there had been no theoretical propositions in family sociology during the 1960s that might have allowed for the logical possibility of the gender-generated changes that were emerging. Collins (1988) described Parsons as an "unconscious sexist" (p. 70), and the same appellation might apply to many pre-1970s' students of the family. If one examines the Christensen (1964) *Handbook* or the 1970 "decade review" (Broderick, 1971a), there is no evidence of conscious chauvinism. Instead, an assumption underlying family research was that white married women do not work because that "works best" for society. Hence, one of the very first volumes to document married women's employment (Hoffman & Nyc, 1963) was permeated by the question "if women do something that is non-normative, what are the potential dysfunctions for husbands and children?" Thirty years later, researchers continue to concern themselves with the dysfunctions of family nonconformity.

Recall that Dumon (1988) addressed the "politics of scarce-resource allocation." In short, struggle over rights and resources is not only a focus at the interpersonal level, but at the macro-political level as well. In the United States the New Religious Right has become the major political force advocating the functionalist model of the family and society (Bauer, 1986). By and large the

field of family studies has avoided researching the political struggles between the Right and Progressives over policies for families (Scanzoni, 1983, 1989, 1991). Most empirical studies of these struggles are carried on by researchers outside the field. And although feminist advocates critique the Right in terms of oppression and injustice, few voices in the family field are raised in public support of feminist critiques. It can be argued that this situation is in part a result of the affinity between the functionalist mode of the field and that of the Right.

The centrality of justice is a second aspect of Dumon's public policy that is intrinsic neither to functionalism nor to the Right. Recall that Mirowsky and Ross (1989) pointed out that one purpose of economic and political participation (the European indicators of "justice") is to facilitate participation in the shaping of families of all sorts. They expand Dumon by asserting that the ultimate goal of public policy, including policies for families, is to generate the conditions of personal well-being. Their target is not to reduce "family" stress and increase "family" well-being. Instead, their goal is to facilitate persons living in families and in primary networks to create whatever social arrangements mitigate personal stress and enhance personal well-being (J. Scanzoni & W. Marsiglio, 1993). Well-being springs, they say, not from exploitative or one-sided arrangements or the pursuit of hedonistic self-indulgence; but instead from "supportive relationships—fair and caring"—whatever their structure.

The Future: Neo-Functionalism?

Although Alexander (1982, 1988) is sympathetic with many of Parsons's early ideas, he has produced a number of critical works through which he hopes to develop a modern "neo-functionalism" tradition. (Recall that Boss is located in this tradition.) In an anthology devoted to neo-functionalism, Alexander (1985, p. 15) notes that "It is a remarkable fact . . . that almost every contribution . . . is a 'conflict theory' of one sort or another." He also remarks that "These references to conflict . . . are often accompanied by an emphasis on contingency and interactional creativity" (p. 15). Ideologically, moreover, "virtually every contributor [rejects functionalism's

conservative sociopolitical image and] pushes functionalism to the left" (p. 14).

In his summary of Alexander's work, Collins (1988) observes that Alexander would prefer to drop the label "structural-functionalism" in favor of "theory of action." Nonetheless, Alexander acknowledges that "'functionalism' seems to be a name that has stuck" (1985, p. 9). Collins notes that Alexander is highly critical of Parsons's emphases on role conformity based on socialization into values and norms. Instead, Alexander is interested in teasing out from Parsons hints of his early interest in conflict derived from Max Weber. In that regard, Collins observes that Alexander rejects Parsons's notion of social systems in equilibrium. Alexander's aim is to "purify" Parsonian theory and "to introduce the insights of conflict theory and phenomenology" (p. 73). To achieve that aim, "Alexander throws out Pareto and includes instead . . . Marx. It is Marx's [views] of conflict and domination and his dialectical drives towards human liberation that Alexander wishes to incorporate into his . . . system of action" (Collins, p. 73). Turner (1988), likewise, is sympathetic to Parsons, but argues that he "took sociology off the mark. The basic unit of sociological analysis is not action, but *interaction*" (p. 3).

Consequently, it seems plain that in general sociology traditional Parsonianism has no future, although a theory of interaction infused with dialectical elements that explains the ongoing structuring of social life (including families) is preferred by increasing numbers of scholars. "No one knows . . . whether a neofunctionalist school actually will emerge. . . . The movement to reappropriate Parsons in a neofunctionalist way is gaining momentum. Whether it is simply old wine in new bottles, or a new brew, is something history will decide" (Alexander, 1985, p. 16).

And what are the prospects for conflict-based theories of any stripe in family studies? From an empirical point of view, the prospects should be promising. The dynamic nature of the data "out there" demand theories that can account for varieties of primary relationships and household arrangements of all sorts—arrangements explained by struggles and choices, as well as by oppression and violence and obligation and duty. Nevertheless, the history of the field suggests that the prospects are uncertain. "Dynamic data" have been "out there" for over a century, yet were interpreted by homeostatic models. Whether the

field will move toward genuinely dialectical models of change depends on researchers both as scientists and as citizens. From a scientific point of view, will we become persuaded that dialectical models provide the best fit between data and theory? From an applied point of view, will we become persuaded that providing resources to persons struggling with primary relationships is an overarching policy objective? Positive responses to both questions would indeed begin to move the field in new directions.

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