FOREWORD

Sociologists and anthropologists have long posited that, in regard to the "evolution" of human society, the family is generally regarded as the original social institution. The family is a structure which has seemingly always been present. Like their contemporaries, the earliest forms of homo sapiens appear to have paired for the purpose of mating and reproduction, to have partnered in the rearing of children, and to have led what we would still consider to be a family lifestyle. While contemporary parents may not have to hunt down a wildebeest with a spear in order to feed their children, they nonetheless share many characteristics, both structural and behavioral, with their earlier counterparts. The persistent of family in the long history of human society clearly underscores its centrality and importance. Simply, it is a social institution which is at the very core of human society.

The defining attribute of the family is that it is a social institution which is difficult to define. Both across cultures and across time, the structures and behaviors of the family continually change. The sources of such change are many. In some instances, the family may adapt to changing conditions within the economy. Economic recessions and depressions often bring about financial stressors for families, and often require changes to the provider roles within the family. At other times, shifts in social attitudes may bring about family change. Societies often vacillate from conservative to egalitarian values, and vice versa, and bring about new understandings of family roles and functions, particularly in regard to gender. Even advancements in technology can bring about change in the family. Advancements in medical science, specifically in terms of insemination and fertility, have led to the need for a redefinition of parenthood itself, as it is no longer a simple matter of "one man and one woman."

It is the changing nature of the family, though, which provides it with such a lasting nature within society. Clearly, many centuries of social, political, religious, and economic change have prompted the family, as a social institution, to adapt and change, accordingly. It is readily evident that such changes do not appear randomly, and that the resulting forms of the family tend to establish a new understanding of how society perceives and defines what exactly is "family." In this volume of Contemporary

Perspectives in Family Research, we examine some of these changing forms of the family, both in regard to structure and behavior. Accordingly, the volume is entitled *Visions of the 21st Century Family: Transforming Structures and Identities*. By learning more about these new forms of the family, we can certainly gain considerable insight into what the family may become in this century.

In "Making Sense of Donors and Donor Siblings: A Comparison of the Perceptions of Donor-Conceived Offspring in Lesbian-Parent and Heterosexual-Parent Families," Margaret K. Nelson, Rosanna Hertz, and Wendy Kramer directly examine the complexities which arise when children become aware that their birth resulted from a donor. Using data from the Donor Sibling Registry, their research illustrates how donors and, potentially, donor siblings, bring about an entirely new conceptualization of family and kin ties. This need for a redefining of family itself is similarly made evident in "Emotion Work in Black and White: Transracial Adoption and the Process of Racial Socialization," by Cardell K. Jacobson and Darron T. Smith. In their study, Jacobson and Smith examine the experiences of transracial families; specifically, white families who adopt African-American children. Drawing upon interviews with adoptive parents and transracially adoptees, they note that the racial socialization of children becomes considerably challenging, for parents and children, alike.

In some instances, the changing forms of the family find the identification of kin to be a bit difficult to achieve. Using a sample of lesbian couples, Rafael J. Colonna examines how the selection of particular parent terms, such as "momma" and "mommy," can influence the day-to-day negotiation of parenthood. In "'We are Both Her Mothers and I Want the World to Know That': Parent Term Selection among Lesbian Co-parents with Children Conceived through Donor Insemination," she finds that the compatibility of the personal meanings of terms used within the family and the legibility of their use in public is not easily achieved. Although the structures and behaviors of families are changing, there remain many salient rites and rituals which serve to define the family. In "The Hands That (Yet) Rock the Cradle: Unveiling the Social Construction of the Family through the Contemporary Birthing Ritual," Rosalina Pisco Costa focuses on how the birth of a child and, more importantly, the presentation of a newborn serve as the foundation of the social construction of family. Through interviews with parents, she posits that the birth of a child is the quintessential moment in which a woman becomes identified as a mother, and the family itself is defined. This change in identity may come about even earlier, as Tamara G. Coon Sells suggests in her study,

"The Process through which Men and Women Construct Procreative Identities: A Narrative Approach." Sells examines the manner in which younger adults come to terms with both societal expectations to bear children and the sometimes competing demands in their lives.

Family structures and behaviors often adapt in the face of economic change. In "Recent Economic Distress in Midlife: Consequences for Adult Children's Relationships with Their Mothers," Megan Gilligan, J. Jill Suitor, and Karl Pillemer examine how financial distress among adult children affects their relationships with their elderly parents. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, they find that while financial stressors do affect family relationships, these effects vary substantially by the sex of the adult children. Work often affects families in manners which have a very personal impact. In their study, "Subjective Preferences versus Objective Realities: Voices of Full- and Part-Time Employed Mothers," Pamela Aronson and Jeylan T. Mortimer examine the relationship between paid work intensity and mothers' subjective preferences. Using a sample from the MacArthur Network's "Transition to Adulthood and Public Policy" Study, they note that while the work-focused identities of mothers sometimes results in a "misalignment," and that the meaning of being a working mother is undergoing considerable change. Sometimes, the very nature of work itself can bring about unintended stress for families. Such is the case for military couples, as noted by David G. Smith and Mady Wechsler Segal in their study, "On the Fast Track: Dual Military Couples Navigating Institutional Structures." Through an examination of dual military couples, they examine how the nature of "fast track" military careers can impact not only individuals, but also families. The demands of two military careers are shown to generate considerable pressure upon family goals, often resulting in changes in spousal relationships and family goals, such as childbearing.

Understandably, family structures and behaviors are culturally specific, that is, they are created and maintained within a particular society. In "'Small house' Practice and its Impact on the Traditional Family Unit in Zimbabwe," Lovemore Ndlovu examines the manner in which married men will maintain a household for extra-marital relationships (i.e., a "small house"), and become financially responsible for both his married wife and children, as well as his extramarital partners. In his study, Ndlovu posits that this practice is a direct result of poverty and the economic stressors in Zimbabwe, which commonly leaves single women struggling to survive. The impact of cultural expectations upon the family is also seen in regard to prevailing gender roles and gendered expectations for married partners.

Using a sample of married couples in Italy, Giovanna Gianesini examines the differences in how wives and husbands deal with stressful life events. In "Negotiating Family Challenges by Transforming Traditional Gender Roles in New Identities: Patterns of Resilience and Parenthood in a Sample of Italian Couples," she finds that gender roles play a crucial role in the relative impact of negative life events, and that these differences significantly affect the resilience of both individuals and couples, as a result. In "The Schism of 'isms': How Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality Impact the Adoption Triad in the United States," Pamela Ray Koch and John Carl Koch examine the history of adoption practices and how family structures and roles have adapted over time. Drawing upon the National Survey of Adoptive Parents, they demonstrate how race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation affect both the adoption process and the adjustments of adoptive families.

Many of the changing family structures often lead to subsequent changes in family relationships. In "Caregiving for an Ex-Husband: Exploring Precipitating Factors and Relational Outcomes," Christine M. Proulx, Teresa M. Cooney, Jacqueline J. Benson, and Linley A. Snyder-Rivas examine the somewhat unexpected manner in which former wives provide end-of-life care for their ex-husbands. While the motivating factors vary, their study suggests that divorce does not necessarily signal an end to family ties, but, in some cases, may simply represent an evolution of new family relationships. Changes in family relationships are often a theme among remarried individuals. Through an examination of several nationally representative surveys, Muh-Chung Lin examines the nature of social ties among remarried partners in "You are my World – The Social Embeddedness of Remarriage." In her study, she finds that remarried individuals tend to have fewer social ties both before and during remarriage. This pattern of fewer social ties often places more reliance upon spousal relationships. Perhaps among the most challenging circumstances for individuals to maintain family ties is when they find themselves homeless. In "Defining Family: Perspectives of Homeless Adults in Southeast Texas," Janeal M. McCauley, Kimberly A. Wallet, Molly J. Dahm, and Connie S. Ruiz examine how homeless individuals perceive and conceptualize family, itself. In their study, they find that the length of homeless, along with the need for support, affects how homeless individuals may regard either their biological family or their friends as truly being "family." The need for support is also examined by Alda Britto da Motta in his study, "On Generations, Affections, and Roles in the Family in Brazil." As is the case in many countries, Brazil continues to face considerable economic

problems. Through an examination of Brazilian families, da Motta illustrates how the notion of "dependency" affects the very nature of family relationships, and how familial support networks influence the conceptualization of family roles.

Overall, the authors in this volume provide a very broad and enlightening examination of changing family forms. Their studies clearly offer a much greater understanding of both why and how family structures and behaviors are changing. Indeed, their collective research also offers considerable insight into how families will continue to change during this century. Many thanks are due to the authors for their efforts herein, to the many reviewers who helped along the way, and to the editorial staff at Emerald Publishing.

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