

DIVORCE, SEPARATION, AND
REMARriage: THE
TRANSFORMATION OF FAMILY

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN FAMILY RESEARCH

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AND REMARRIAGE: THE
TRANSFORMATION
OF FAMILY**

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FOREWORD

The definition, meanings, and expectations of family relationships are culturally specific, making it difficult to find a universally agreed and applied definition. Legal alternatives to marriage, like registered partnerships, have become more widespread and national legislation has changed to confer more rights on unmarried and same sex couples. Alongside these new legal forms, many forms of nonmarital relationships, as well as serial marriages (being *married* and divorced several times) and multiple step-families, have made it more difficult for sociologists to compare data across and within countries. Professor Golombok from the Centre for Family Research at Cambridge University has made an insightful distinction between “modern” (or “new”) families forms, chosen to adjust to new circumstances and parental configurations, and “nontraditional” ones, resulting from relationship breakdown and reformation. A clear sign of the transformation of family is also present in the language where the term is increasingly being accompanied by an adjective that qualifies its structural characteristics: the nuclear family, the single-parent family, the gay family, the three-parents family, the *de facto* family, and the stepfamily. The recognition of this plurality of forms implies an understanding and acceptance of the intertwined complexity of family relationships. Systems theory argues that stepfamilies formation entails, for each member of the system, the activation of cognitive and emotional resources toward change and adaptation. A divorce followed by a remarriage means the addition of one or two “social” parents, grandparents, and often step-siblings to the biological ones. For every individual involved, this integration implies a reworking of the family model and the expectations toward family life. Although nontraditional families face the challenge of not having a shared family history, the quality of family processes and family relationships impacts the well-being of the family group irrespective of family type and composition.

This volume of *Contemporary Perspective in Family Research* presents a multicultural overview of nontraditional family’s transformations, transitions, and relationship developments worldwide. Section I examines remarriage patterns, trends, and issues related to stepfamilies formation. Although divorce rates historically have been low for persons in their fifties and older, remarriage is on the rise for Americans ages 55 and older,

a phenomenon referred to as *gray divorce*. Remarriages show higher divorce rates than first marriages and today one-third of Americans are stepparents, stepchildren, stepsiblings, or some other member of a stepfamily. The changing timing and length of step-parenting and step-grandparenthood have implications for multigenerational relationships and intergenerational transfers. In “A Profile of Later Life Marriages: Comparisons by Gender and Marriage Order,” Teresa M. Cooney, Christine M. Proulx, and Linley A. Snyder-Rivas explore marital quality and gender difference in older adults at first marriage and remarriage using data from the second wave of the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP). In “Salient Themes of Remarriage in the “Young-Old” Years,” Nicole A. Graves utilizes a qualitative approach to better understand the lived experiences of older adults who remarry. He offers a unique and interesting insight into transition to remarriage in later life. “Mothers’ Dating after Divorce” provides a female perspective on divorce. Michael R. Langlais, Edward R. Anderson, and Shannon M. Greene focus on post-divorce dating relationships that precede the transition into cohabitation and remarriage, noting that the quality of dating relationships may be a protective factor for the divorce-stress-adaptation perspective. In “Exploring the Complexity of Stepgrandparent-Stepgrandchild Relationships,” Ashton Chapman, Caroline Sanner, Lawrence Ganong, Marilyn Coleman, Luke Russell, Youngjin Kang, and Sarah Mitchell explore step-grandparent and step-grandchild intergenerational relationships and the processes that affect their development. The authors discuss the structural and relational complexity of step-parenthood, including variables on timing, roles, quality of relationships, contact frequency and kin definition and identified multiple pathways to step-grandparenthood. In “The Role of Stepfathers in Families Receiving Support from Child Protective Services,” Claudine Parent, Caroline Robitaille, Marie-Christine Fortin, and Anne Avril examine the parental commitment and engagement of stepfathers in families of adolescents in child protective services (CPS) in Quebec, Canada. In their unique sample, authors identify stepfathers’ contribution to children’s wellbeing, by delineating models of clear co-parenting and others where biological mothers maintain the primary parenting role with assistance or support from the stepfathers.

Section II presents the implications of parental divorce on offspring at different ages. The research literature indicates that children of divorce are at increased risk of a variety of problems, including academic failure, conduct disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in peer relationships, with disruptions in the quality of parenting and co-parenting

being the central mechanism. The consistency of research findings across multicultural settings suggests that the link between divorce and child problems is a general phenomenon, irrespective of variations in culture or policy environments. Traditionally, the far-reaching effects of divorce on the physical, emotional, and financial well-being have been explored on young children. However, changes in the quality of the parent-child relationship after a divorce might influence the geographical distance between parents and their adult children and parental divorce is associated with disadvantaged life-course outcomes for their adult children as it is intertwined with indirect socio economic status transmission. In “Factors affecting Adolescent Risk-Taking in Stepfather Families,” Cassandra Dorius and Karen Benjamin Guzzo explore how stepfamily type and stability, timing of exposure, and sibling configuration influence adolescent risk-taking, operationalized as sexual debut and drug use at age 16, using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). In “Consequences of Parental Divorce during the Transition to Adulthood: The Practical Origins of Ongoing Distress,” Mick Cunningham and JaneLee Waldoock confirm and elaborate on the concept of post-divorce distress in young adulthood. Their study suggests that coordination problems and emotion management are caused by on-going logistical difficulties more than lingering emotional trauma. In “Divorcing Commitment: Examining the Role of Parental Divorce in Undergraduates’ Friends with Benefits Relationships,” Christina L. Scott, Joanne M. Hash, Phoebe Stevens, and Tiffani Tejada explore how child gender, parental marital status, and child conflict style influence the decision to engage in a friends with benefits relationship (FWBR), and in turn how FWBRs influence risky behaviors in college undergraduates. In “Exploring How Parental Divorce Provides Meaning to Personal Development and Interpersonal Experiences among Emerging Adult Women,” Kayla Reed, Trent S. Parker, Mallory Lucier-Greer, and Marsha L. Rehm explore how the perceptions of parenthood lead to contemplating and conceptualizing perceptions of self and interpersonal relationships, primarily intimate partner and dating experiences, in emerging adulthood. In “Coparenting in the Digital Era: Exploring Divorced Parents’ Use of Technology,” Jodi Dworkin, Ellie McCann, and Jenifer K. McGuire offer insight on the use of technology to support co-parenting in the context of divorce. Technology allows for asynchronous communication, staying up to date, making plans, and making decisions between divorce parents and between parents and their children living in different households. In Section III, divorce patterns, characteristics, and prevalence are examined in five different countries: Russia, Nigeria, Korea, Malaysia,

and Bangladesh. Different nations obviously have different attitudes toward divorce and the social acceptance thereof, consistent with the law of each country and the professed religion, spiritual beliefs, or cultural conventions. In addition, the ability to obtain a divorce varies tremendously, both in terms of expense and ease. Marital dissatisfaction, coping mechanisms, perceived benefits and costs of marital relationships, and the likelihood of divorce are culturally specific and create different challenges for parents and children around the globe. In "Social Research of Divorce in USSR and Russia," Vladimir V. Solodnikov analyzes secondary data and research on the stability, quality, and success of marriage, presenting divorce statistics in the former USSR and contemporary Russia, which registered a gradual increase related to the liberalization of divorce laws and a widespread social acceptance. In "Influence of Work Obligations on Family Commitment among Couples in the Private Sector in Kwara State," Olufemi Adeniyi Fawole and Oluwakemi Ogunbowale discuss the influence of work on family commitment in Nigeria, taking into consideration job-related factors such as level of performance, leadership style, job type, job stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, and family-related factors such as dependency care responsibilities, family support, child care, and home management responsibilities. In "The Extended Family: Disharmony and Divorce in Korea," Yean-Ju Lee examines how family disharmony, marital conflicts, and dissolution are fairly common in Korea. The pattern is explained by in-law conflicts, once only restricted to mother- and daughter-in-laws, but now extended to mother- and son-in-law relationships, reflecting a paradoxical twist in gender-role expectations, arguably a structural outcome of the traditional Confucian family. In "Marital Status and the Influence of Emphasized Femininity on the Romantic Relationships of Tamil Single Mothers in Malaysia," Premalatha Karupiah explores how emphasized femininity in Malaysian Tamil society influences divorced mothers' decisions to be involved in a romantic relationship. Their struggle either to conform to or deviate far from the notion of traditional femininity reveals the cultural dilemma created for many such women. Finally, in "The Prevalence and Determinants of Remarriage in Bangladesh," Mohammad Mainul Islam, Mohammad Sazzad Hasan, Mohammad Bellal Hossain, Tehmina Ghafur present demographic data on marital instability and the prevalence, extent, and likelihood of remarriage in Bangladesh. They find that Muslim religion, slum dwelling status, employment, media exposure, and urban residence are major determinants of remarriage.

This volume of *Contemporary Perspective in Family Research* proposed a multicultural understanding of family transitions and relationships

following the experiences of divorce and remarriage. Changes in family structures as a result of divorce and remarriage create new relationships and dynamics within families which determine specific nontraditional family forms. Family is no longer a homogeneous concept, as multiple pathways to family life exists. Many different interpretations of the consequences of divorce on children are possible depending on age, parental commitment and engagement, and quality of relationships. Understanding the nuanced implications of parental divorce and remarriage on adolescents and young adults, including changes in personal priorities and identity, and implications for romantic relationships may guide practitioners such as counselors, family life educators, or mental health promoting an healthy post-divorce and post-remarriage adjustment. We thank all the authors who provided important contributions to this volume, and all the anonymous reviewers who provided thoughtful and detailed reviews.

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