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THE CHANGING FAMILY AND FAMILY POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The concern for the loss of family functions in the process of social change has led some to call for a family policy to support the family to cope with stress in meeting its basic functions. Change in functioning of the family is inclusive of various spheres: economic, status giving, educational, religious, recreational, protective and affectional. These changes are seen as indicative of the decline in the family. This view is moderated by the spectrum of change in the family interactions. Support for family policy is essential though it can not be developed on the idea of the perilous decline in the family due to a loss of its functions.

"All our lives long, every day and every hour, we are engaged in the process of accomodating our changed and unchanged selves to changed and unchanged surroundings; living, in fact, is nothing else but this process of accomodation; when we fail in it a little, we are stupid, when we fail flagrantly, we are mad, when we suspend it temporarily, we sleep, when we give up the attempt altogether, we die". Samuel Butler

### The Changing Family and Family Policy

There are many who advocate for a national family policy to support the family in the performance of its basic functions during times of social change. The recent White House Conference on Families brought diverse groups together to advance their interests. The family is seen to be struggling in meeting its basic functions because of change and lack of support (Pardeck, 1979). There is a gap between social change and family policies in the United States as compared to various European countries indicative of unmet need (Kahn, Kamerman, 1975). A recent lead editorial in Social Work calls for a basis for the development of family policy to be incrementally initiated and decentralized (Gilbert, 1979).

The theoretical basis in which many advocate a family policy derives assumptions of the loss of family functions. The following will address this theory in light of the classic sociological report of William Ogburn called "The Family and Its Functions" (1933), compare it with other more current research, and relate these findings to the process of the development of support for family policy. There is a loss of family functions but the loss is moderate and ideas of perilous decline in family functioning are not supportable and thus policy can not be developed from this vantage point.

Ogburn's classic report on the family and its functions came to two major conclusions--one being a decline in the institutional functions of the family and the second is the resulting predominant importance of the family in the development of personality functioning. It is important to note that when discussing the family, we are talking of a general phenomenon--one which is not monolithic but varying according to race, lifestyle, geographics, culture and attitudes. The major focus of this paper will be on

the loss of functions which Ogburn outlines: economic, status giving, education, religious, recreational, protective and affectional. It will emphasize the economic, as did Ogburn and his critics.

#### Loss of Functions

##### Economic

The loss of economic functions of the family was given more attention in Ogburn's report than the loss of the other functions. He studied the transfer from the home of labor such as baking, sewing, laundrying, and some cleaning. These features reduced the economic importance of women in the home and set the trend for women to seek employment outside the home. He looked at other data to buttress this loss, such as the types of dwellings one lives in, size of space, use of home energy and time spent at household work. He compared changes as well between urban and rural living finding a unanimous decline.

In a later work, the focus of loss of economic functions by the family took a more central role (Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1955). They viewed technological changes as causing family changes. The effects do not always occur simultaneously and at times a cultural lag develops, especially when causes are remote and change dispersed.

Ogburn and Nimkoff saw the loss of economic functions by the family as leading to the gradual emergence of romantic marriage. The decline in economic functions of women in the home is traceable to technological developments. They linked changes in family patterns to these causes. For example, they cite age at marriage, size of family, changing male and female roles and relationship changes as indicative of this. This was seen as causing family decline. It was not argued that technological change was the sole cause of family change, only a major one.

In a historical study of change and the family in nineteenth century England, Smelser (1959) studied the impact of technological change on the family structure also. Change in technology was viewed as it changed the extended family to the nuclear family and built an ideology to accompany this. This trend in thought was descriptive of the weakening of the family. The loss of old norms was seen not as leading to the development of new ones but as social disorganization and chaos. The extended family does not fit with the demands of industrial society and thus is replaced with the evolution of the nuclear family arrangement. The nuclear family "fit" with industrialism is more compatible.

Industrialization and family change can be seen as variables which are interactive (Goode, 1969). Changes in women's roles such as by the introduction of labor saving devices interact with other variables which in combination have different sorts of casual implications. In an earlier article, Goode (1968) states that not only does industrialism change the family but the family also has the capacity to change the nature of industrialism and thus is potentially adaptive and not disorganizing. Goode labels the "classical family of Western nostalgia" as the perpetuation of myths about an ideal extended family. This relates to the fact that changes in the family occurred before industrialization; the relations between the family and technology are not linearly cause and effect. For example, ideological change in China was encouraged to alter family forms in order to facilitate modernization. The ideology was the factor inducing change in family structure while interacting with other factors in the change dynamics.

Furstenberg (1969) follows along a similar vein when he asserts that change in the American family has been exaggerated and changes from an extended family to a nuclear family began occurring before industrialization. He also notes that features of disorganization

were amply evident before industrialization--such as child abandonment, lack of discipline of children, a dislike for domesticity, and others. Some features of strain in the family existed before industrialization, others were intensified by it, and some resulted from changes incurred by adaptations to industrialization.

These adaptive functions of the family posit that there is actually not a loss of economic functions but a change of form (Vincent, 1969). As Ogburn's study fit a stereotyped image, it was popularly accepted. The economic function of the family, however, shifted from production centered in the home to consumption centered in the home--a function of not less significance though of a very different character (Goode, 1968). The current economy depends on consumption patterns in which the family plays a critical role.

Cross cultural studies also refute Ogburn's thesis of the loss of functions of the family causing a breakdown as seen in the decline of the extended family. The reports note the exceptions in the modernization of Brazil, as well as maintenance of the extended family patterns in Japan and China after modernization (Levy, 1964). Other research details the disorganization of the nuclear family found in Barbados despite the lack of technological changes (Greenfield, 1961). This concludes that the evidence does not support the Ogburn thesis and suggests the importance of other interacting historical and ideological features. Nisbet offers similar evidence in his study of the decline of patriarchal ideology in the Roman epoch (1972).

Seward studied the American family since colonial days and concludes that the idea of the great change in the family due to a loss of functions is a myth. He maintains the family has held a high level of structural integrity and that external pressures due to economic changes have not caused much change in the family at all (1978).

Seward describes the Ogburn and later Ogburn and Nimkoff and also Smelser thesis as a romantic notion based in part on a rural nostalgia and in part on a thin base of data which is borrowed back and forth with compounding inaccuracies. The economic limitations of pre-industrial society precluded the widespread existence of extended families to all but the very wealthy. The data shows a common pattern from pre-industrial colonial society across time to current society in various features: size of family membership, ages of members, sex composition, generational composition, number of marital pairs and number of siblings. This data will be reviewed later when discussing further trends.

Ogburn and Nimkoff acknowledge the importance of other features which can also contribute to changes in the family. They talk of ideologic change as one important feature--what they call new psychology/humanism. This is in contradistinction to economic determinism. Engles (1972) views ideology as a method of support for economic order, a falling into a supportive pattern. Thus, the decline of patriarchy is not the history of monogamy as a reconciliation of relationships but a subjugation of the female sex to maintain a dimension in the economic realm--the division of labor in the home. But, it is not Engel's technological imperative base which is the focus of Ogburn. His attention is on the variety of factors contributing to the decline of family functions.

#### Status Giving

The family serves to provide status to members which they as individuals may not have. Ogburn traced changes in domestic relations laws to illustrate the status giving function of the family as declining. He talked nearly exclusively of the role of women and changes in laws regulating domicile, income, property and child custody. He saw these laws, some of which were unjust to his idea,

as focusing attention on individuals. This individualization combined with other social changes weakened the status giving function of families. He also mentioned geographic mobility and urbanization as weakening features of family loyalties. He noted his inferences in this area were sketchy.

Changes in sex roles are not evidence of a decline in status giving functions per se. Intervening variables need attention, such as the passing of wealth and privilege, or of deprivation, from one generation to the next in the family which would need to be assessed. Also, the changes in affectional ties could here be considered. America, as a nation of immigrants with a sense of manifest destiny, certainly knew geographic mobility. Ogburn's association of mobility with his romantic rural bias against urbanization, saw this as a sign of decline. He did not, however, attempt to measure the meanings of "community" in the new settings.

Family loyalties are difficult to judge. Perhaps the work of R. D. Laing (1971, 1972) with schizophrenics indicate that such loyalties may not be entirely positive. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973) working with troubled families also argues that family loyalties under considerable stress remain durable. Ogburn's seeing change as decline may not have captured the dimensions of the issue. The area of status giving was not highlighted by the writers.

### Education

The school teacher may be viewed as a substitute parent with regard to the function of training the child. The school performs many of the functions that were once fulfilled by the family. Ogburn documented the increasing demand for more education by showing growth in school attendance, increase in numbers of schools, course work and changing educational demands for employment, also the



average number of days spent in school and measures of the universal value of education. This array of data from a variety of sources had shown the loss of educational function of the home to a rapidly growing educational system of the state.

This trend persists. The average education of the head of households continues to rise as do the general enrollments. The state is greatly involved in the education of its people. Growth of technical education, continuing education and the education of the very young and the older persons is significant. But has the family lost its central function of educating its members? Vincent (1967) thinks not as reflected in a series of questions he asks. Is not the family seen as the key variable in determining the success of the failure of the child in education?\* Who gets blamed for school failures? dropouts? Did parents years ago spend as much time, energy or investments in education as do parents today? Did pioneering families who withdrew children to participate in the labor force hold more of an educational function than do parents today? This series of somewhat oversimplified questions points to complications in assessing a decline in family functions in education.

Educational research in the last decades shed more light on the relationship of the American family and the educational functions showing the home environment to be critical to the child's development and performance levels. Parent involvement has become a key figure in the complex question. The perennial turmoil in desegregation shows a positive need for family involvement in policy formulation. Family involvement in education merely by participation remains high. The loss of this function by the family is unsupported though much change has occurred.

\*For example, see the writings of Bronfenbrenner on the ecology of education (1976).

### Religion

Ogburn notes that not only did the family perform religious activities together but was seen itself as a sacrament in many religions. His survey of religious mores found a similar decline in functioning of the family. His data indicated time spent in prayer at home to be declining, (more so in urban than rural settings), church attendance was also declining as was time spent by the family in reading the bible. Ogburn noted trends in organized religion and in the family depicting the loss of this function in the family.

Again, data is available showing a decline in areas of church attendance, prayer and religious participation by families but explanations about the meaning of these changes are not readily forthcoming. Do these measures effectively get at beliefs or other basics of religious functioning? Do children maintain the similar religious beliefs as of their parents? The last several decades have seen changes in how religious functions are performed but perhaps these too are adaptive functions. The family may not have relinquished as much of this area as Ogburn thought. This is in spite of the maneuverings of what some call "churchianity".

The loss of religious functioning by the home has been studied in various ways. Demographics show a decline in membership of some churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and increases in membership of others, such as the Mormon Church. The increase of participation is difficult to measure--the decline in numbers of priests and nuns is a form of this decline (Leslie, Larson, Gorman, 1973). The current infusion of religious dogma into public policies continues. The wedding of fundamentalism and right-wing politics is a growing phenomenon. How this is related to a decline in family functioning is the focus of concern and interest.

### Recreation

The growth of the creation and amusement industry contribute to Ogburn's analyses of loss of family control of this function also. He documented broad growth areas, such as of municipal parks, athletic clubs, the growth of organized sports, of the motion picture industry and even industrial recreational expenditures. With this drawing together of data, he did note also the concomitant growth of in-home recreation and related home entertainments. He studied family budgets to determine the recreational outlays.

Vincent (1969) states that just as the family maintains a central role in economic functions via a consumption role, so it does in the realm of recreation. He talks of the massive amounts spent on gadgets, toys, cameras, recreational equipment, etc. ad nauseum. Today's family produces it's own recreation via consumption. The growth of leisure business is still a functionally developed area within, in part, the family.

The role of leisure as it relates to family functions and the control over leisure seems to be an issue of contemporary significance. Whether leisure gains of working persons is a loss of family control over them or not is not uniquely defined by Ogburn. This is an area conceptually vague and unconvincing. For example, is the recent United Auto Worker's contract with, in effect, a four day workweek a contribution to family control over leisure? Perhaps a more critical question is about the impact on other workers, particularly those excluded from the market by virtue of race, age or sex. The question of the impact of leisure gains on the family and change is not answered by the methodology employed by Ogburn.

### Protective

The protective functions performed by the family are another area Ogburn developed in his study. In his broadly based focus, he

looked at various areas where the protective functions were taken over by other institutions, such as in health; care of the aged, youth, ill and retarded; and also in studies of families in crisis. This loss of functions was seen as further decline in the family.

Health is the first area Ogburn studied to demonstrate his theory. He documented the growth of environmental health, sanitation and also public health services. He documented the growth and expansion of hospitals and other medical services. This data was precursory to the phenomenal growth of public and private health outlays of the decades that followed the virginal study. The current issue of health is of interest to most. The 1975 National Conference of Social Welfare discussed seven root causes of the current health care crisis:

1. absence of a national health policy
2. runaway costs (in 1974, \$10.4 Billion, 7.7% of the GNP)
3. lack of access
4. fragmental organization of services
5. inadequate quality of care
6. private insurance failure of cost containment and meeting needs
7. the interrelationship of the above factors (Glasser, 1975).

Concern over health issues is clearly a public issue, one of which other social institutions have garnered considerable influence. Public policy reflects in part the fear of what some consider overcommitment by the public. There is no question of the astounding costs sky-rocketing, though whether this is at the expense of family control is less clear.

The protection of the aged took a dramatic turn about the time of the 1933 report in the passage of the Social Security Act. This came in hand with other features of the welfare state. The family is no longer seen as sole guardian of its member's interests. The

debate of whether the welfare state expedites the decline of the family's functions continues both in academia and in politics in general. The growth of the welfare state is seen by some as concomitant to the decline of the family (Briggs, 1967).

Ogburn also delineated other protective functions of the family diminished by the welfare state. He talked about the protection of the mentally ill, the retarded, and the abused. He saw the state taking over more and more areas which the family had formerly controlled. The question of how well the family traditionally took care of such issues is one not addressed. Thus, change over a time is not addressed and hence support for the idea of decline is vague. It is by increasing support for the family by the state in the provision of a range of services (to the abused, neglected, handicapped, the vulnerable) that this will enhance the protective capacity of the family, though altered from an individualist approach. This is particularly relevant when in-home supportive services such as homemaker, chore services, home-health care, or counseling services are considered. Also, is the issue of deinstitutionalization a return of such functions to the family?

Challenges to this decline are found in the research of social networks (Litwack, 1969; Sussman, Burchinal, 1969). These demonstrate that when in stress, the extended family meets the needs of what some have labeled an isolated nuclear family. Also, children's advocates see the decline in family control by increased state intervention in protective functions as a move toward children's overall protection (Steiner, 1976). The public demand for services, such as found in Title XX, for state protection of the neglected and abused, and in the range of other services to the exploited and the vulnerable, argues in a sense for the acceptance of the state's interventions in areas where the family perhaps fails in its protective functions.

Growth in the state's involvement in the protective function may support Ogburn's idea of decline or it may more likely reflect changes which demand more of the protective function within the family. A change in the character of the function is not a decline in the protective function but by community pressure, an enhancement of this family function. Ogburn's analysis raised important policy issues, though his conclusions call for reinterpretation.

#### Affection

The only family function Ogburn felt grew as a result of changes in the family was the area of affectional ties. If for no other reason than due to the decline of the other functions, the personality functions have taken on a greater significance. The rearing of children and securing happiness are of much greater emphasis. In a later work, Ogburn and Nimkoff (1955) develop a historical pattern from the more functionally diverse role to the current personality oriented family. In earlier times, religion, family background, race, status and economic functions were far more important than after the decline of the extended family.

Seward (1978) states that this is a shift which is romantically accepted but is historically fictitious. He notes that the romantic shift is not found in the data he studied. He studied census data, songs, letters, magazines, newspapers and in these he found no evidence of this shift. Morgan (1969) also notes this in his discussion of the Puritans.

#### Summary

Ogburn's "The Family And Its Functions" has been a major contribution to the study of the family, social change, and the use of sociological data to understand the events in life which we share in. Critics have strongly questioned the accuracy and the validity of

his data but the monumental methodological contribution continues to provide rich insights. Ogburn did not, as did some of his contemporaries, most notably Zimmerman (1947), decry the decay and impending disaster because of the changes in the family. However, neither did he foresee that change was perhaps a positive indication of adaptation. This review can provide a format for viewing the continued changes and be used as a background for the analysis and development of a family policy. An understanding of functional changes in the family is helpful before interventions are advanced.

#### Further Trends and Comments

Continued insights are gained about the current functions of the family. The earlier extended family was very limited to conditions of wealth and certain religions by a host of features. History has shown over time a continuity in the cultures of American families. This is documented in the basically unchanged patterns in the membership sizes of the family (slight decrease), ages of members, sex composition, generational composition, number of marital pairs and number of siblings. This trend is as documented in Here To Stay by Banes (1976). The following data is from Seward (1978: pages 79, 88, 92, 163, 166, 167, 169).

<u>Size of Household and Family</u>			<u>Percentage of Families with No</u>	
<u>Year</u>	<u>Household</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Subfamilies</u>
1774	6.14	5.61	1850	98.1%
1880	5.04	4.83	1880	96.0%
1930	4.11	--	1960	96.8%
1950	3.39	3.54	1970	97.6%
1960	3.33	3.65		
1970	3.07	3.57		

<u>Percentage of Marital Pairs Per Family</u>		<u>Sex of Head of Family</u>			<u>Number of Head's Own Children</u>	
<u>Year</u>	<u>Marital Pairs</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Mean Number</u>
1850	86%	1850	91.1%	8.9%	1850	2.76
1880	89%	1880	89.8%	10.1%	1880	2.70
1950	91%	1950	90.7%	9.3%	1950	1.15
1960	90%	1960	90.7%	9.3%	1960	1.34
1970	87%	1970	89.2%	10.8%	1970	1.30

This data does not support the assumptions of considerable changes in the family over the course of American history brought on by the industrial revolution and combined technological innovations. The number of children seems to have decreased but part of this is the product of larger numbers of couples in older ages. This life expectancy data illustrates this impact (Leslie, Larson, Gorman, 1973: 367):

<u>Year</u>	<u>Life Expectancy</u>			<u>Color</u>	
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Nonwhite</u>
1900	47.3	46.3	48.3	47.6	33.0
1930	59.7	58.1	61.6	61.4	48.1
1950	68.2	65.7	71.3	69.1	60.8
1960	69.7	66.6	73.1	70.6	63.6
1967	70.5	67.0	74.2	71.3	64.6

The data does not verify large changes in the family throughout American history on which Ogburn based his theory. When changes are discussed and family policy analyzed, this moderation is critical to a proper perspective on family policy.

Ogburn and others talk of features of disorganization of the family. Ogburn cites causes rooted in the loss of family functions. Leontine Young (1973) talks of the collapse of the family based on an overall assessment of rapid change brought on by similar reasons--



that the family has lost its power and direction. She laments the decline of the role of motherhood and the general commitment decline of members to each other. She sees childless families as lacking permanence and commitment. She talks of families as a bastion against emptiness, loneliness and rootlessness in mass society: a family in decline!

Individuals with concern about the state of the family see change as symbolic of social disorganization. The figures on divorce are frequently brought to bear to portray this scenario. Divorces are certainly ideologically more acceptable and in most states legally easier to obtain. A prominent concern is what happens to the children whose parents divorce. Of the children born in the 1970's, 45% lived with a single parent for some of their life. What is the nature of the intrapsychic distress caused by divorce on children and what does this disequilibrium do? And what of the re-adjustment problems of blended families? Between 1966 and 1976, the rate of divorce in the United States increased by 113%. Whereas in 1966 one divorce was granted for every four marriages performed, by 1976 the ratio had changed to one divorce for every two marriages. Nearly one million divorces a year can now be expected (Wallerstein, Kelly, 1979).

Leslie (1971) talks about the problems in coming to conclusions about the breakdown of the family and using divorce statistics in this discussion. He feels it difficult to predict trends given the cyclical nature of the phenomenon. He also talks of the significance of the rates of remarriage figures called serial monogamy by some. Two figures which provide a meaningful overview and provide credence to this moderating effect are cited by Dyer (1979). The percentage of persons married throughout the twentieth century in the United States has been continuously increasing, from about 55% in the early part to more currently about 75%, with slight differences between

males and females. Also, the rates of which persons marry has remained stable throughout this century. This would indicate that marriage is considerably more stable than the view which divorce rates suggest.

Many of the features which illustrate concern in the decline of the family are offset by related statistics. Two examples are here offered. A concern is often expressed by the increase in the number of teenage pregnancies. While the numbers of pregnancies of older teens is decreasing, the number of pregnancies of younger teens is increasing (Chilman, 1969). This is somewhat balanced by the fact that in 1950 the average age at marriage was 21 and it was 23 in 1973. High mobility (geographic) rates are also seen as a sign of disorganization of the family. For example, the military has attempted to minimize stress in moving their families. While nearly 20% of the population changes addresses every year, this figure has not increased the last several decades. The peak remains with that portion of the population which would be expected--persons in their early twenties (Barabba, 1973). What appears evident in prediction of trends is that alarming statistics of family instability reflect the attitudinal frame of which they are presented as much as they do a theoretical force in themselves. It is for this reason that a context of which one operates has important implications for family policy.

#### Conclusion

This review questions the trends cited as a decline in the family. Though social change is pervasive, it is not ominous. Family policy needs to be explored in light of anticipated resource exchanges; changes in allocations, rights and deprivations; and in changes in the overall social quality of life (Gil, 1976). The utilization of the social sciences in the formulation of family

policy can play a meaningful role but the wisdom of policy needs to be moderate, tentative in its alternative approaches, tolerant of diversity and not all-inclusive.

Family policy can be an unmanageable and potentially dangerous concept with significant potential for individual denigration (Barbaro, 1979). Entering family policy into the political arena can potentially advance narrow interests. The evidence of family study and social change does not support a family policy which is based on fears of a rapidly declining institution buffeted by change and disorganization. The measures of a humane society are challenged by the concept of a family policy but not from the evidence of the loss of family functions. Social change and change in functions have occurred. The strain on families in this interactive context calls for policies to support families enhance their functioning and strengthen individual members. The caring functions need buttressing. Social change has not seen the family in perilous decline and the need for family policies estranged from narrow interests calls for active support.

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