

March 2, 2004

Definition of the Family IV: Ethnic and Social Class Variability

- Read:
- Taylor: Diversity within African American Families.
 - Zinn and Wells, Diversity within Latino Families: New Lessons for Family Social Science.
 - Sudarkasa: Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organization.
 - Sherif: Islamic Family Ideals and their Relevance to American Muslim Families
 - Pyke: “The Normal American Family” as an Interpretive Structure of Family Life among Grown Children of Korean and Vietnamese Immigrants.

I. Sources of Diversity in America

- A. Native Americans
- B. Immigrants
 - 1. The early colonists: British, French, German
 - 2. Then in the mid-nineteenth century until shortly after WWI, waves and waves
 - a. Between 30 and 35 million left Europe—different countries at different times
 - b. Also perhaps as many as 1/3 went back: failed to find a fortune, or had prospered, and returned to the homeland
 - 3. “Old” period: 1830 to 1882 mainly Irish, German, Scandinavian, British
 - 4. “New” period: 1882 to 1930: after industrialization: Slavs, Italians, Greeks, E. European Jews—by 1914, they constituted over 80% of total immigration
 - 5. Vastly greater cultural differences

6. Although valued as cheap labor, a great deal of resistance, of xenophobia
 7. Immigration greatly slowed down between 1925 and 1965
 - a. Restrictive legislation
 - b. Idea that immigrants' family values were discordant and eroded American values
 - c. Also eugenics notions: first IQ tests showed that S. Europeans were intellectually defective
 - d. Higher birth rates seen as threatening ratio of "real" Americans
 8. 1965 and on: the Hart-Cellar Amendments to Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1920 and 1924 abolished national origin criterion
 - a. Preference to those with occupational skills judged to be needed
 9. Asians, Indians (S. Asians) and Pacific Islanders
 10. Also need to look at "Circular Migration" – Hispanics
 - a. Puerto Rico the best example
 - b. "Hispanics," or Latinos, are a very diverse group
 - 1) Cuban Americans in Miami differ a great deal socioeconomically and politically from Chicanos in California, Guatemalan refugees from the war, etc.
- C. And, of course, the unwilling immigrants: Africans shipped over during the slave trade

1. Blacks were always a part of colonial America and the early republic
 - a. By no means were all of them slaves
 - b. The plantation economy did not become important until the 19th century

II. The relationship between race and ethnicity, and social class

- A. Complex and varied; folk models of race and ethnicity often unconsciously include assumptions about socio-economic status
 1. *Correlations* can be found between race/ethnicity and low socio-economic status; but they are not due to race and ethnicity themselves
 - a. Due to the situation of migrants upon arrival
 - 1) For example lack of English language skills prevent engaging in some kinds of occupations
 - 2) How many of you Americans have someone in your extended family whose first language is not English?
 - b. Due to discrimination by the mainstream society that continues to the next generation and beyond
 2. Can anyone think of a bigoted folk model combining ethnicity and *high* socioeconomic status?
 - a. Some forms of anti-Semitism

III. Families and their roles in ethnic populations in the US

- A. There are debates in the literature about the degree to which non-mainstream family structures, values derive from previous culture or occur because they are adaptive

1. You will notice Sudarkasa refers to African origins of some of the traits found in African-American families
 2. A difficult question to answer
 - a. It is certainly true that for all ethnic groups in America the extended family (not co-residential) plays a more important role
 - b. As did extended families in W. Africa in the 19th century, is true for the rural Mexicans, the rural Puerto Ricans, the Chinese, the Jews, the rural Irish, the rural Southern Italians, etc., who were the homeland of the immigrants
 - c. And characterizes the only non-immigrant group: Native Americans
 3. But almost any ethnic will speak of the extended family as necessary, sometimes to the point of simple survival
 - a. Share wealth, share labor, help in emergencies
 - b. *Call To Home* will illustrate how this works for rural Southern black families
 4. We don't have to worry about this debate, but it's useful to see how non-nuclear forms of the family can be adaptive
 5. Adaptive to the difficult circumstances poor people find themselves in
 6. If any of you generalizes about "black families" on the final exam when you're actually talking about "poor black families" you will lose credit
 - a. And guaranteed some of you will make this mistake
- B. Stack's other study of welfare-dependent families in a ghetto area of a Midwestern city, published in 1975

1. They are very unlike the middle class
 - a. Members interact with nuclear family members and non-relatives much more than with extended family
2. This model is far less common in extremely poor families
 - a. Very strong ties with kin are maintained
 - b. Even if fathers live elsewhere, children often know and visit their fathers and paternal kin
 - c. The “in-law” tie is weak, but the consanguineal ties are strong
 - d. Children see extended kin—grandparents, uncles, aunts, great-aunts and uncles, and cousins more often than do their middle-class white counterparts
 - e. Stack noted that maternal uncles often play roles we associate with fathers
 - f. Stack, and many others criticized the welfare policies of the time that denied Aid to Families with Dependent Children to households with able-bodied male residents
 - g. Policies that assumed these men could find employment
 - h. Women were more likely to find work—as domestics
3. Stereotypes of families in the ghetto Stack calls “The Flats” are familiar
 - a. Fatherless
 - b. Matriarchal
 - c. Unstable
 - d. Disorganized

- e. High rates of illegitimacy
4. Let's use more neutral language
- a. Co-residence
 - b. Kinship-based exchange networks linking multiple domestic units
 - c. Elastic household boundaries
 - d. Lifelong bonds to 3-generation households
 - e. Social controls against the formation of marriages that could endanger the network of kin
 - f. Domestic authority of women
 - g. Limitations on the role of the husband or male friend within a woman's kin network
5. Do residents of the Flats want things this way?
- a. They participate in mainstream American life; they would change some of the way they live if they could
 - 1) They have internalized many of the values they see in ads, on TV, billboards, etc.
 - b. But, given unemployment, esp. the hardcore unemployed
 - c. And the unpredictability of employment and other sources of income
 - d. People will exchange a lot, and have a general expectation that everyone will share
 - 1) Sharing is a survival tactic: everyone is aware of this

- 2) The poorest people are the most likely to pay back
 - 3) Your resources are in people, not in things
 - 4) Redistribution because the environment is uncontrollable – you share what you have because someday you'll be in desperate need
 - 5) This is interpreted by outsiders as “a disinterest in delayed rewards”
 - a) Words always carry connotations; compare “saving for a rainy day” to “hoarding” “being stingy”
 - 6) Coontz makes this point as well
6. However, insofar as some of these features are seen as part of “black culture,” African Americans will value them and not consider them and middle-class values as mutually exclusive
7. Stack redefined “the family” to fit the Flats:
- a. “The smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs for children and assuring their survival”
 - b. Notice there’s no mention of co-residence: this family is diffused over several kin-based households, which can fluctuate in terms of location and composition
 - c. This poor black urban family is
 - 1) Organized
 - 2) Tenacious
 - 3) Lifelong

8. Moving into the middle class, or even the stable working class is almost impossible to do in The Flats
 - a. So it's very difficult to form a nuclear family
 - b. And very difficult to build up an equity
 - C. We need to understand the characteristics of a poverty produced by structural changes and prejudice
 1. Poverty produces unemployment, low wages, crowded living quarters, dangerous housing and neighborhoods
 - D. Sad to say, things are much worse in the inner city ghettos than they were when Stack did her research
 1. All that's left often is the church
 2. Such massive breakdown that the Flats' version of family doesn't work anymore
- IV. Final point: race is a folk model of historically constructed perceivable physical differences between populations
- A. As a *social* concept it is important—used as a means for social classification
 - B. But it's useless as a biological concept
 1. Race is not the cause of the differences we notice in poor families whose members look different from the majority of Americans (note: soon the majority will be people of color)
 - a. Rather, the cause is what results from society's classification of people with certain physical differences into labeled categories accompanied by information about non-visible features purportedly characterizing the group

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