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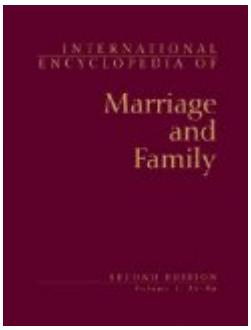

James J. Jr.. Ponzetti, ed.. *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family.* New York: Macmillan Press, 2003. xxxv + 1838 pp. $495.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-02-865672-4.

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The State of Social Science Research on the Family

Twice the length of Macmillan's 1995 *Encyclopedia of Marriage and the Family* and much more ambitious, the *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* contains nearly four hundred entries that place such topics as adolescent parenthood, child abuse and neglect, cohabitation, gay and lesbian parenting, and widowhood in cross-cultural perspective. In 1,838 double-columned pages within four volumes, the encyclopedia contains fifty entries that describe family life in specific countries, eleven entries on religion, and twelve entries on ethnic groups, ranging from the Basques and Canada's First Nations to the Yoruba. Contributors include leading authorities on divorce, domestic violence, fatherhood, and gender, such as Scott Coltrane, David H. Demo, Mark A. Fine, Richard J. Gelles, Ross D. Parke, Barbara Risman, Dorothy G. Singer, and Arlene Skolnick.

Apparently targeted at family professionals, especially clinical psychologists, guidance counselors, and social workers, the encyclopedia is heavily weighted toward entries dealing with couple and parent-child relationships; children's cognitive, emotional, moral, and sexual development; and psychological and sexual disorders. Assessment, therapies, and marital and parenting education programs also receive substantial attention. Curiously few entries focus on the economics of the family, family law, governmental welfare and family policies, or the politics of the family.

The volumes contain a wealth of information that women's historians and historians of the family and of childhood are sure to find fascinating:

in France, Ireland, and Italy, women's participation in the labor force peaks in the twenties, while in Sweden, women's paid economic activity increases into the fifties;

reliance on immigrant workers in developed countries varies widely, from 25 percent in Australia to nearly none in Italy and Japan;

in Germany and Switzerland the majority of mothers of two or more children are full-time housewives;

in Scandinavia, the unmarried cohabitating couple with children has become the most common family structure; in Italy and in southern Europe, in stark contrast, there is practically no cohabitation; and

the incidence of polygyny varies from 20 to 50 percent across sub-Saharan Africa, as migration and migratory labor systems have led to the reinvention of polygyny in new forms.

Yet while the entries are highly attentive to gender and encompass a vast range of societies, certain crucial questions go unaddressed. Why, for example, does Italy have the lowest birth rate and the most pronounced shift to a "post-modern" pattern of delayed exit from the natal home and late marriage (27 for women, 30 for men), while having lower rates of female employment outside the home than many other developed countries? The heavy reliance on entries on specific countries, as opposed to broader comparative entries, makes it difficult for readers to identify or understand the causes of national differences.

Nevertheless, the encyclopedia's cross-cultural, if not comparative, approach does suggest that public policy can be formulated in ways quite different from those followed in the United States:

in the United Kingdom, a stepparent has the option of applying for a residence order, providing virtually the same legal status as a parent. In the United States, in contrast, a child can only have a concurrent legal relationship with a maximum of two adults;

Russia's family code makes adults financially responsible not only for their children but for their parents, siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren; and

Swedish policy seeks to promote the self-sufficiency of the custodial parent after divorce, while U.S. law is divided between the goals of promoting self-sufficiency and of encouraging joint legal custody.

The *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* also provides a valuable compendium of demographic and socio-economic information especially about American families. Readers will learn that:

two-fifths of American widows fall into poverty within five years of their husband's death;

three-quarters of divorced spouses remarry, usually within four years; remarriages end in divorce as often as first marriages (about 60 percent of the time); and about half of women in remarriages give birth to at least one child;

40 percent of American children will live in a cohabitational household sometime during childhood;

one American child in seven runs away from home at least once;

between 1970 and 1999, the teenage contribution to non-marital births fell from 50 to 29 percent;

77 percent of American lawyers and 52 percent of doctors give their names to their first-born sons;

interracial marriage rates range from 54 percent for Native Americans and 41 percent for Japanese Americans to 1.2 percent for African American women and 3.6 percent for African American men;

half of cohabiting couples separate within two years;

as early as two years, 10 percent of children's time is spent with peers and from 7 to 11, the amount increases to 40 percent; and

12 percent of American households report inadequate access to food at some time during the year.

The encyclopedia also includes a great deal of information about the construction of social science knowledge about families. One can learn about the genesis and evolution of such concepts as ancestor worship (coined by Herbert Spencer

in 1885), the modern usage of the term "gender" (beginning with John Money in 1955), the identification of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (in 1969), and recognition of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (by Roy Meadow in 1977).

Many entries refute widespread myths about the family. Particularly effective are entries that rebut popular misimpressions about the exaggerated effects of divorce on children, and inflated claims that impoverished unwed fathers are irresponsible and uncaring about the mother or infant. The entry on child abuse does a particularly effective job of discussing the incidence and variety of abuses and the perpetrators of abuse.

Given the highly fragmented, multidisciplinary character of the literature on marital and family relations, this encyclopedia meets a real need. Non-specialists can quickly review recent findings on such topics as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism, circumcision, colic, stepparenting, and predictors of suicide, and read succinct, accessible discussions of sociological and psychological theories about the family. The encyclopedia also provides a valuable guide to social science terminology (e.g., boundary ambiguity).

Yet women's historians and historians of the family and of childhood will be dismayed to discover that the entries regard history as largely irrelevant to an understanding of contemporary families. Only one entry specifically examines history ("Family, History of"), and only two leading historians (Vern L. Bullough and Stephanie Coontz) contributed to the encyclopedia. I must confess that I was surprised not only by the exclusion of historians from this venture, but also the striking absence of historical sociologists and of history books from the bibliographies. The omission of references to books by Joan Jacobs Brumberg on eating disorders; E. Wayne Carp and Barbara Melosh on adoption; Linda Gordon and Elizabeth Pleck on child and spouse abuse; Robert Griswold on fatherhood; Michael Grossberg and Peter Bardaglio on family law; Elaine Tyler May on fertility; and John Gillis and Pleck on family rituals make the bibliographies far less useful than they might be.

To be sure, history is not entirely missing from the encyclopedia. Along with a few entries of historical interest (e.g., bundling), a number of entries contextualize contemporary behavior through brief historical prefaces, while others present a history of sociological and psychological thinking on a particular topic (e.g., gangs). The history the encyclopedia contains tends to take one of two forms: historicism--highly generalized long-term historical narratives and contemporary history--or a history that often goes back no further than the 1970s. Essential points made by recent historical scholarship--about the social and cultural construction of contemporary family issues and the inadequacy of modernization theories--have had far less impact than I would have assumed.

The absence of history exacts a cost of which the authors are apparently unaware. One cost involves a largely uncritical acceptance of various assumptions drawn from modernization theories, implying a uni-directional conception of change that many historians have challenged.

Another cost is a blindness to the way that knowledge and social problems are constructed. For example, the encyclopedia alludes to the early twentieth-century emergence of status offenses, but does not discuss later changes either in the definition and enforcement of status offenses or of recent changes in juvenile law.

The failure to think "fourth-dimensionally" also makes it difficult for readers to identify relevant historical trends. For example, the entry on single-parenthood does not sufficiently discuss changes in the class composition of single mothers over time. The entry on adolescent pregnancy might have explained in greater depth the reasons for the recent decline in teen pregnancy (which would have required an examination of

the significant decline in the incidence of intercourse among teenage boys).

Certainly the most striking cost exacted by the omission of history is the absence of contestation and politics from most entries. While many entries list alternative interpretive and therapeutic approaches to family-related issues, only rarely do the authors explain why certain theories gained ascendance at particular times; nor do they describe the political and religious battles that family issues, such as toilet training or spanking, have generated.

Some essays do a better job than others in providing readers with a diachronic sense of historical transformation, especially the entries on naming patterns, sex education, and Protestantism. Despite the omission of history, historians of the family and of childhood will find the encyclopedia a valuable resource. Especially useful are the entry's summaries of current scholarship, such as the findings that migration does not necessarily increase marital conflict but often increases spousal solidarity, and that the birth of a child prompts many couples to reassert a more "traditional" division of familial roles while producing a sharp decline in reported marital happiness. Also suggestive is the discussion of divorce as a process rather than as a discrete event and of resilience not as something within children but as a product of particular interactions.

Most historians, however, will come away from this work with a profound sense of disappointment that our scholarship has not had a greater impact on the thinking of many social scientists as well as those who provide care to children, couples, and families.

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