FAMILIES IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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sample chapter
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With an eye toward universalistic concerns about the human rights and welfare of children and families (see United Nations Development Program, 2001; United Nations General Assembly, 1989), today scientific discourses and investigations of families worldwide have become more focused on the cultural underpinnings of human behavior in general and interpersonal relationships more specifically, the changing ecology of childhood and family relationships, schooling, the reproductive health of young people, transnational or hybrid identities, and other pressing issues that affect the pulse of family life (Arnett, 2002; Comunian & Gielen, 2001; Gielen & Comunian, 1998, 1999; Shweder et al., 1998; Super & Harkness, 1997). Witness, for example, the research emphasis on convergences and divergences in adolescent experiences and development in different regions of the world (Booth, 2002; Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002), father–child relationships in diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Lamb, in press), cultural and cross-cultural views on childrearing and childhood socialization (Chao, 1994; Gielen & Roopnarine, in press; Shweder et al., 1998; Super & Harkness, 1997), within- and between-region population movements and acculturation and transnational identities (Adler & Gielen, 2003; Tomlinson,
1999), changes in family composition—fertility rates and size, marital rates, age of entry into marriage, separation and divorce rates, life expectancies (Arnett, 2002), changes in life stage markers (e.g., entrance into adulthood, marriage), cultural practices and traditions including religious prescriptions and family law (Nsamenang, 2002), and conceptual frameworks defining biological and social parenthood (Coley, 2001; Roopnarine, in press).

Despite these laudable attempts and the fact that modern understanding of different dimensions of family relationships has profited tremendously from scholarly inquiries in such diverse disciplines as anthropology, psychology, child development and family studies, history, sociology, demography, economics, medicine, social work, education, and family therapy, there is still much speculation about families in diverse cultural groups. And seamless explanations of universalistic patterns of behaviors are often grounded in thin databases (e.g., Caribbean, Latin America, the Muslim world in general). The latter has contributed, in part, to misguided or controversial academic treatment of and sometimes-harsh criticisms by different policy and political groups about the merit of different family structural arrangements (see Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002, for a discussion) and cultural childrearing scripts (e.g., harsh discipline) for healthy childhood outcomes (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002). As the twentieth century flows into the twenty-first, we remain bewildered by some very basic questions about families and their cultural scripts about specific roles: What constitutes a family in different cultures? How are paternal and maternal roles and responsibilities defined and exhibited in different cultures? How do sociocultural and religious belief systems or ethnotheories influence family organization patterns and the structuring of social and cognitive experiences for children? Do families across societies have common goals and expectations for childhood? Are developmental milestones and periods of transition from one life stage to the next expanding or compressing? How are families and children affected by increasing globalization?

Noting the ubiquity of globalization, factors that impel structural and processural changes in families (e.g., economic activities, migration, delayed marriage and cohabitation, increased schooling and educational attainment of women and children, maintaining traditional values), and the challenges families face in order to maintain key aspects of fairly established cultural traditions and practices as they become increasingly immersed in global consciousness (Arnett, 2002), this volume presents a representative sample of family systems that currently exist and the social-psychological, cultural, religious, economic, and demographic forces that govern their very organizational patterns and varied functions in diverse cultures around the world. An increasingly prominent view is that a better understanding of family social and structural organization patterns, division of household and childrearing functions, and family socialization practices can only be achieved through empirical knowledge guided by multiple conceptual and theoretical frameworks and research methodologies established in wide-ranging disciplines. This volume capitalizes on the multidisciplinary approach—which we believe is at the heart of defining the very nature of families, and cataloging, describing, and interpreting how families carry out their diverse roles in everyday settings. As such, we draw on the work of distinguished anthropologists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists, child development experts, education experts, family sociologists, cultural psychologists, and family therapists who have conducted basic research on families in different parts of the world. This volume includes a treatment of families in preindustrial cultures (e.g., Boﬁ farmers and foragers in the Central African Republic), families in societies that have experienced extreme transformations either in economic and/or political ideology within the last fifteen years (e.g., Russia, South Africa, China, Brazil, Micronesia), families in developing societies that are seemingly perpetually immersed in economic, political, and social adversities (e.g., Egypt, Indonesia, Caribbean), and families in postindustrial societies (e.g., Japan, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United States.). There are several threads that weave the cur-
rent volume together: a multidisciplinary approach that taps into both qualitative (e.g., participant observation, narrative) and quantitative research information, demographic and sociohistorical accounts of families in the various cultures, basic religious and cultural beliefs, family structural arrangements and the division of household labor, socialization practices and their implications for childhood development, and family policies. Against this backdrop, the goal is to provide a pan-cultural understanding of family relationships without making blanket injunctions about their internal dynamics or functioning.

In organizing this volume, it seemed appropriate to consider up front two major and sometimes contrasting perspectives on the family—evolutionary and post(modern). After all, we need to know how familial roles—husband–wife/partner, childrearing, and so on—evolved over time and whether there are patterns to variations across human societies. Having said that, a somewhat futuristic view of the family might encourage us to confront the complexities embedded in viewing “families” in all of their varied forms in diverse cultural systems, and, as noted already, the challenges and triumphs that families experience in executing their daily roles in an ever-increasing global community. The next two chapters accomplish this goal by providing a general basis for contextualizing the rest of the material presented in the book—from societies in which traditional familial roles are extremely differentiated to those in which the social organization and division of functions appear more egalitarian and where social and biological parenthood are not isomorphic. More important, Low’s chapter on families from an evolutionary anthropological perspective (Chapter 2) points to specific patterns in the diversity of family life across a broad variety of societies, while Silverstein and Auerbach’s chapter (Chapter 3) lays bare family forms (e.g., lesbigay families; technological families; visiting unions, common-law) that are only now garnering greater scientific attention. To be sure, Low argues that families across human societies have some common elements—caregivers, offspring, and other individuals who are influenced by the same ecological and evolutionary rules. Yet there is great diversity in mating (e.g., monogamous and polygynous) and marriage systems (socially accepted spousal arrangements).

Before moving on to an examination of some of the major themes of this book, a few other general remarks are necessary. It goes without saying that an integration of data from related disciplines might add greater explanatory power and subsequently depth to the sociocultural meanings of adaptive and mal-adaptive familial practices and their developmental implications for individual family members (Arnett, 2002; Comunian & Gielen, 2001; Gielen & Comunian, 1998, 1999; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Previous excursions into family life across cultures, whether anthropological or sociological (e.g., Nauck & Schoenpflug, 1997), have remained fragmentary. The same can be said for psychological studies of families in different cultural settings, which have often approached cultural diversity in family functioning and belief systems from the point of view of family therapy (e.g., Gielen & Comunian, 1998, 1999; McGoldrick, Giardano, & Pearce, 1996). A number of multicultural works on family life have explored “ethnic” families in the United States (e.g., Mindel, Habenstein, & Wright, 1999; Taylor, 1998), but have not aspired to a more global perspective.

Needless to say, attempts to present disparate sources of knowledge on families in different cultural contexts from different academic disciplines can serve to unify our understanding of domain- and behavior-specific symmetries and asymmetries in family life both within and across cultures.

True to the mission of providing an overview of families around the world through different academic lenses, chapter authors have utilized research information situated in theoretical frameworks and the qualitative methodologies of anthropology (e.g., Fouts, Martini, Rebhun, Seltzer) and the logical-positivist tradition more akin to psychology (e.g., Chen; Keller, Zack, & Abels; Georgas, Bafiti, Papademou, & Mylonas), and sociology (e.g., Fgiebel-Bijaoui; Miller, Leavitt, Merrill, & Park) but with comparably rich and diverse theoretical perspectives on parenting and childhood socialization practices rooted in perspectives articulated in cultural and
cross-cultural psychology (Chao, 1994; Greenfield, 1997; LeVine, in press; Shweder et al., 1998; Super & Harkness, 1997). Their varied nature aside, all told, the overall objectives of these chapters are the same: to describe the structural dynamics and intimate transactions of families in cultural contexts, their developmental trajectories, and the forces that possibly drive them. It is now appropriate to turn to some core concepts explored in this book.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN FAMILIES

By the end of the twentieth century, several societies had undergone key changes in the structural arrangements and organization of families over prior decades (e.g., the rise in single-parent families in postindustrialized societies; declines in marriage rates; an increase in percentage of nuclear families because of drastically reduced fertility rates). Depending on the culture, family size and household composition have been affected by governmental policies (e.g., the one-child policy in China), movement of young people from rural to urban areas in search of better economic conditions, increasing educational and economic opportunities for women, changing gender roles, attitudes toward childbearing and childrearing, challenges to the traditional Confucian notion of filial piety, aging, postponement of marriage, decrease in arranged marriages, increase in divorce rates in developing societies, sustained schooling (e.g., compulsory education), movement toward or away from orthodox religious values (e.g., in Muslim countries), and global consciousness (Arnett, 2002; Booth, 2002; Friedman, 2000). Moreover, families are not static entities; as Keller et al. (this volume) point out, “families are composed, decomposed, and recomposed again with new members,” with the traditional family serving as a life-phase transition to other family arrangements. Frequently, transformations in family structure do precipitate changes in familial, institutional, and community practices. These changes and the accompanying functional dynamics that they set in motion are complex and manifest themselves differently over the life span of the family.

Consider, for example, the delayed timing of transitions to particular familial roles (e.g., parenthood, marriage) (Arnett, 2002) and the impact of gender ratios on out-of-marriage births around the world (Barbour, 2000). Almost all of the chapters in this volume provide a sociohistorical basis for understanding contemporary changes in family structures and organizational patterns. It is difficult to imagine that placing families in “traditional” and (post) modern” categories or in terms of structural arrangements without factoring in emotional closeness or “jointness,” will suffice in capturing the “patchwork of family forms” and the metamorphoses (e.g., possible “degendering”) occurring within them in the twenty-first century.

Not surprisingly, what emerges from the discussions of families that follow is that in different regions of the world family structures and organizational patterns fall along a continuum: though changing slightly, some remain rigidly planted in “traditional,” patriarchal mores and religious edicts with heterosexual marriages as the cornerstone to family life (e.g., Egypt, Turkey), while in most developed societies (e.g., the United States, Israel, Italy, Japan, Germany, Norway) there is an admixture of family forms (e.g., single-parent, cohabiting, reconstituted, nonresidential-father households, extended households, lesbigay, etc.—see also Gore & Gore [2002]), with high or at least increasing divorce rates the norm and high out-of-wedlock births (50 percent in Oslo, Norway, in 2001; 33 percent of all births in the United States in 1999 were to unmarried women; 27 percent in Russia). These developed societies have given rise to the “traditional modern nuclear family”—suggesting that heterosexual couples struggle to redefine familial roles in the context of “the new fatherhood,” “the dual-earner or co-breadwinner family,” and the “mommy track” (nuclear families range from 33 percent in Germany to 43 percent in Belgium and France). Simultaneously, these families are faced with the legal, social, and moral legitimacy of “nontraditional” family arrangements that have become more acceptable over time. (To counteract these developments, the United States currently has recently proposed a promotion of heterosexual marriage policy).
Broadly speaking, in most societies considered, there appears to be some form of family “extendedness.” Families may engage in functional extendedness, living nearby and offering mutual support and aid to cognate (Tulananda & Roopnarine, 2001). In some developed societies, such as Greece, extended families flourish, and they constitute significant numbers in others (e.g., in Japan and Italy). In Turkey, extendedness may mark a “transitional phase” after the son’s marriage, and in Indonesia, it is given more importance than the nuclear family or individual members. Multigenerational units are also common in a number of developing countries (e.g., China, India), Polynesian Island cultures (e.g., Marquesas), preindustrial societies, and in those in which there is quite a bit of mate-shifting (Caribbean), where men and women bear children from several “baby mothers” and “baby fathers” and “shift” children to be raised by collateral kin (e.g., neighbors in the yard or compound) or affinal relatives. As will be deduced, the role of extended members may include such diverse and highly significant functions as “childminders/caregivers” or doting grandparents (e.g., China) to providing economic assistance and shelter for children whose parents migrate to the developed world to seek better economic opportunities and permanent residency (e.g., Caribbean parents).

The existence of multiple family forms calls into question notions of monogamy, two-parent heterosexual unions, and marriage as primordial to family formation. Regardless of family arrangements, the ability to execute different familial roles in these diverse cultural systems amidst political, social, and economic transitions globally will determine the stability of each society and their ability to raise children who are more likely than not to develop multiple cultural identities (Arnett, 2002). There is a good bet that attaining these endeavors will in large measure rest on the quality of parenting skills and human capital, adequate support for childrearing, and other family processes and sociodemographic variables rather than family structure or composition per se.

Nevertheless, sociodemographic changes affecting family life have occurred on a worldwide basis during recent decades. Average life expectancies for both women and men have increased steadily in all societies not affected by war, revolutionary political changes, and/or high rates of HIV infection. This phenomenon has contributed to a steady “aging process,” especially in the industrialized countries (e.g., Germany, Italy, Norway, Japan). Furthermore, women’s fertility rates have been declining on a worldwide basis and to such an extent that in almost all industrialized countries they have now reached a level far below the “population replacement level.” All of these demographic changes have drastic implications for the structure and functioning of families: Families begin to shrivel in size, extended families become the exception, mothers leave home in order to work, young people defer marriage or do not get married at all, and middle-aged adults (especially women) are asked to take care of their vulnerable aging parents. These and many other phenomena are intertwined with additional changes brought about by industrialization, the information revolution, the ensuing rise in education levels, increased consumerism, a more individualistic outlook on life, redefined gender roles, and the simple fact that having children is now becoming a very expensive proposition for prospective parents. Increasingly, children lose their utilitarian value to the family, a value that had been obvious to everybody in former centuries. Furthermore, many of these demographic and cultural changes are now becoming increasingly visible among the middle classes in the more successful developing countries such as Turkey, Mexico, and even India.

HUSBAND–WIFE ROLES AND HOUSEHOLD AND CHILDCARE WORK

Perhaps one domain in which families appear more resistant to change is in their assumption of household and childcare roles. It is fair to say that, whether it is in the postindustrialized, developing, or preindustrial societies, in heterosexual marital and nonmarital unions, women bear the brunt of childcare and household labor—engaging in the “second shift” if you will (Hochschild, 1989), and their participation in these activities is not appreciably different in
single- or dual-earner families (see Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratclif, 1998, for an exception in the United States). Likewise, in a majority of societies considered in this volume, beliefs about familial roles are still largely aligned and anchored in patriarchal values, to the point where roles have been characterized as “duofocal” in Turkey or are defined by paradoxical cultural codes such as familism, where men still have the upper hand in the family (e.g., Israel). One may reasonably ask then: How convincing are the claims about the “new and emerging fatherhood” (Lamb, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002), and shifts toward more egalitarian roles between husbands and wives or mating partners? And what about the tenets of modernization theory proposing that with increasing industrialization and economic prosperity, people should reject and shed traditional values and move in lockstep toward modern values and individualism? What roles do religion and cultural beliefs play in the maintenance of so-called traditional values?

Though not consistent across societies, there is some indication that authoritarian family values are on the decline or that families are torn between traditional (e.g., ie in Japan; familism in Israel tied to Rabbinical Court Law-1953 and Druze Religious Courts Law-1962) and modern democratic structures. While customary marriage remains a major prerequisite to family formation and procreation and men are depicted as the head of the family in most societies, there is an increase in premarital sex and early entry into sexual activities, a decrease in arranged marriages and emphasis on bridewealth (ilobolo; dowry, mehr or mihir) and movement toward romantic or love marriages (e.g., Turkey, Japan), a partial replacement of polygamy by concubinage in a few societies (e.g., South Africa), a rise in the number of women in the labor force throughout the world which has led to greater expectations of more role sharing by men/fathers, the implementation of maternity and paternity leave policies, and a decline in paternal authority due to father absence and the questioning of traditional parental authority by children. All of this is compounded by the fact that “modern” parents are less desirous of hierarchical relationships between spouses/partners and with children. However, the latter may not be so for multiethnic, stratified societies (e.g., Israel), where a symbiosis is thought to exist between religion and “state” (Fogiel-Bijaoui, this volume), rural, agricultural families with less educational attainment, and for families who are wed to religious and other ideological beliefs (e.g., Egyptians, Indians) that strongly endorse the superiority of men through religious edicts and religious laws (e.g., religious courts in Indonesia). Even here there is a lack of uniformity. The Minangkabau, a Muslim group in West Sumatra, do not subscribe to a patriarchal system—undoubtedly a rare exception. The point is that there is a feeling that overall familial practices are becoming less rigidly organized along conservative gender-differentiated lines and in developing societies as women utilize diverse strategies to establish psychological power and to ease the grip of male control on them, while in some (e.g., Japan and perhaps in other Confucian-origin cultures), mothers lavish more attention on children when they perceive emotional distance from their husbands—resulting in what some psychologists term “emotional matriarchy” (Naito & Gielen, this volume). Arguably, the economic, educational, and sociopolitical gains made by women around the world have had some impact on the assumption of household work by men. However, as can be gleaned from the different chapters, men in most cultural settings have changed minimally in this regard and tend to hold on to “traditional internal working models” about gender roles. So far, men’s participation in childcare in countries that have liberal paternal leave policies (e.g., many European societies, Japan) has been somewhat disappointing, and in developing societies, migration to find employment (Egyptians to oil fields in the Middle East, Caribbean men as fruit pickers in the United States, rural fathers to the cities and towns of India [Gielen, 1993]) means that husbands are away from family members for extended periods of time. This phenomenon (“wage-father”) is likely to multiply in the global workplace and in all likelihood will further alienate men from their families, place more childcare and household responsibilities on women’s
shoulders, and encourage grandparents to take care of their grandchildren.

PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIPS—SOCIALIZATION BELIEFS, GOALS, AND PRACTICES

It has been proposed that families may have similar expectations of children across the world: to develop the instrumental competencies and skills necessary to successfully navigate and meet the requirements of life within a given culture and to ensure the reproductive success of offspring. There are general agreements that, across societies, in some behavioral and cognitive domains parents share common goals when it comes to the socialization of children (e.g., health and survival of offspring, language competence, reproductive success of offspring, etc.). But research evidence also indicates that parents have different belief systems about what is important for raising competent children (Super & Harkness, 1997; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002), varied expectations about how children should behave, the psychological and institutional value of children to the family at different stages of development, diverse family rituals and initiations (e.g., bar mitzvah in Israel; co-sleeping in India; Zulu ritual of seclusion among boys; Pedi and Tsonga seclusion of girls), and they voluntarily or involuntarily prioritize socialization goals (e.g., nutritional, safety versus early childhood education and stimulation; social versus technological skills) in concert with the demands of the physical environment, and the efficient employment of time-tested cultural scripts that parents and other adult members have come to embrace in the process of childrearing (LeVine, 1974, in press; Shwedener et al., 1998; Martini, this volume).

This book builds on the decades of cultural and cross-cultural research on childhood socialization conducted by others (see Shwedener et al., 1998; Berry, Dasen, & Saraswathi, 1997; Super & Harkness, 1997; Whiting & Whiting, 1963, to name a few), by returning to some rudimentary questions about how childrearing and child training goals, beliefs, and practices are instituted and carried out and potential changes that are occurring in family socialization as cultural groups increasingly come face to face with one another—a practice that at once brings our similarities to the surface but magnifies differences as well. An important difference between the current volume and those that have appeared before is that we have included a number of cultures that have been relatively ignored in the family literature (e.g., Brazil, Caribbean, Egypt, Indonesia, South Africa). From what has been said so far, these chapters should assist in charting, within the wide parameters of childrearing, the areas in which cultures around the world share common socialization beliefs, goals, and practices and those in which they diverge.

We hope you keep in mind the remarkable transformations that are taking place in family life across the globe (e.g., delocalization, marginalization, migratory patterns, economic modes of production; challenges to paternal power and cultural traditions, etc.) (Adler & Gielen, 2003; Arnett, 2002; Gielen & Roopnarine, in press; Tomlinson, 1999) that are bound to affect the very notion of how we view core concepts of childrearing in diverse societies. In this vein, it would be prudent to accept the possibility that childhood socialization goals, practices, and beliefs may not be identical in single-parent, extended and multigenerational households, biological two-parent households, co-habitant or same-sex family arrangements within, much less across societies. On the other hand, there are societies that appear as more “individualistic” (e.g., West European societies, the United States) than “collectivistic” (e.g., China, Japan) in their orientation (see Greenfield & Cocking, 1994), as valuing indulgence—especially those with prolonged infancy periods (e.g., India), as emphasizing obedience training and other conservative childrearing strategies such as strict discipline (see Value of Children [VOC] study; Kagıtçibasi, 1996), share similarities with others in the expectation that children will care for their aging parents (e.g., Japan, Caribbean, Turkey), engagement in sibling care, and in their emphasis on interpersonal relationships within the family.

Before presenting a brief synopsis of similarities and differences in socialization patterns across
cultures, it behooves us to indicate that in a number of societies that continue to experience ongoing shifts toward political and social freedoms (e.g., Russia, South Africa) and in those that face constant economic woes (e.g., Caribbean, Indonesia, Brazil), emphasis appears to be on ad-hoc childrearing strategies that are geared toward assisting children to develop coping mechanisms to deal with life amidst unpredictable social and economic conditions (e.g., street children in Brazil, Indonesia). Among Russians, Germans who lived in the former East Germany, and non-White South Africans, there is a dramatic shift away from “state” regulation of family life. In Israel, a multiethnic society, “religious law serves as a ‘national asset’,” but collides with the individualism inherent in capitalist development (Fogiel-Bijaoui, this volume). The uncertainty about the stability of family practices, however, may not be limited to these societies. From her clinical work, Seltzer opined that troubling social-psychological problems exist among young children in Norway due to multiple transient parental relationships and ambiguity surrounding the family nomenclature (Whom do I belong to? Who are my family members?)—problems that are seen in other European and some developing societies (e.g., Caribbean). In Japan, gaps have been identified between the lifestyles of parents and children (Naito & Gielen, this volume), and in South Africa, the Caribbean, and Egypt, there are concerns about the impact of prolonged father absence on childhood development. At the same time, in some parts of the world children experience and live with daily threats of violence (e.g., Israel).

Accepting the premise that parenting and parent–child relationships are constantly evolving as adults confront the task of raising children in a (post)modern world, we undertake the risky business of identifying similarities in socialization processes across cultures that are strongly demarcated along the lines of ideological and religious beliefs. It has already been mentioned that families have common goals with respect to the survival and well-being of their offspring. Beyond surface similarities, finding an adequate method of analyzing commonalities in the range of socialization practices across cultures is much more difficult. A primary concern is with assumptions of cultural equivalence in origin(s) and meanings of behaviors and practices. This not withstanding, like other family processes outlined above, childrearing tendencies range from more autocratic methods of control and power assertion to relaxed reciprocity across cultures and families. Noteworthy is the appearance that Western industrialized societies lean toward the overarching belief in autonomy or independence training early in the child’s life, instituting more “child-centered” approaches to childrearing that are embedded in “individualism.” These societies have increasing numbers of immigrants (e.g., Germany, Italy) from other parts of the world, and in some (e.g., Israel, the United States) that have diverse populations, it has been demonstrated that parenting styles are hardly authoritative and expectations of children may resemble those that have been observed in the natal cultures (see Roopnarine et al., this volume). For instance, English-speaking immigrants in the United States maintain their beliefs in harsher forms of discipline, and Chinese immigrant parents in the Los Angeles area exercise more control in governing (guan) their children’s lives than European Americans (Chao, 1994). Diversity in parenting styles and practices is perhaps also present in European countries that have accepted migratory workers and increasing numbers of immigrants from different parts of the world.

However, cultural common ground in parenting is evident in obedience training, loyalty, and unilateral respect for adults in quite a few societies (e.g., Indonesia, Caribbean, Turkey, India, China), and sibling care is not atypical in a few of them. It is tempting to say that these societies are more authoritarian in their childrearing techniques. This would constitute an egregious error, however. In cultures that are more “collectivistic” in their orientation, variability has been documented in the changing ecology of parenting (e.g., China, India, Japan). Thus, not unlike European and North American countries, parenting and parent–child relationships represent diverse strategies and practices in “collectivistic” societies—
which are becoming more child-centered than parent-centered as couples/partners reassess notions of love, companionship, marital norms, the value of children, and the meaning of childhood, and as children question and resist more autocratic methods of parental control. Nevertheless, some societies are steadfastly wed to archaic beliefs about the “child’s place” in the family and society.

To summarize, childrearing/child training in different societies reflects diverse practices, goals, and expectations that are in the process of changing even in those societies that have clung to more authoritarian family organization patterns. Simply grouping societies as having a “collectivistic” or “individualistic” orientation would not do justice in describing the multiple childrearing practices that are in place in a given culture. Quite possibly, notions of dependence and independence training as well as other childrearing mechanisms are becoming blurred as families in different corners of the world are bombarded with images of parenting and childhood in other cultures. This does not mean that deep cultural differences do not exist in childrearing. To the contrary! As you will encounter, not only do societies place different emphasis on what is important to family relationships, they have different developmental expectations and profiles of children and utilize different behavioral tendencies in attaining the skills and competencies they believe are important for survival in their culture and to varying degrees the world community.

**FAMILY AND POLICY ISSUES**

Whether it is the adoption of the United Nations Bill of Rights for Children or the Saryiah courts of Indonesia, societies around the world have implemented policies that affect the lives of families and children. Some have recently attended to domestic violence and family violence issues (e.g., Caribbean), abolition of physical punishment (e.g., Norway), the rights of Lesbigay families in the military (e.g., “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in the United States), the one-child policy in China, human dignity (South Africa), prevention of child abuse and the protection of vulnerable people in the family (e.g., Israel), and paternal leave policies, to name a few. The general goal of these policies is to bring order and/or regulate family life, offer protection to basic human rights, and help to maintain dignity in the lives of families and children so that they can grow and live in productive and rewarding ways. In asking each chapter author to include a piece on family policy where appropriate, we intended to inform you, the reader, about the legal and political attempts being made around the world to address the needs of families and children who live under diverse social, political, religious, legal, and economic circumstances.

**GENERAL SUMMARY**

This book covers a diverse array of information on families in different cultural systems around the world. Recording caregiving patterns and strategies for socializing boys and girls, parent–child arrangements, allocation of resources, division of labor, and other aspects of family life embedded in different mating and marriage systems across societies should increase our acceptance, interpretation, and understanding of broad definitions of family life today. The call to unravel the cultural underpinnings of human behavior has taken on greater meaning in a globally conscious world that, at the moment, is attempting to come to grips with differences in family beliefs and practices, religious and linguistic differences, enormous economic disparities between and within nations, and social and political oppression. At this point, it is probably impossible to know the true extent of the impact of speeded-up globalization on family relationships in different societies. Clearly, technological advances in communication augmented by increased interpersonal contact, and questions posed at the individual, family, and societal levels about longstanding family structures/roles, traditions, religious edicts, and family laws will continue to influence changes in family functioning and childhood socialization in covert and overt ways worldwide.
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