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 Stephen D. Sugarman (eds.): *All Our
 Families; New Policies for a New Century,
 Second Edition*

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 University Press, 310 pp.

This book, now in its second edition, has grown out of a monthly seminar on family studies at the University of California at Berkeley, bringing together scholars from various fields and disciplines. The thirteen authors are drawn from the fields of social work and social welfare, psychology, history, law, public health, public policy, sociology and gender studies. As one would expect in so broadly defined a collection, its excellence lies more in the raising of questions and perspectives than in the pursuit of any single analytic theme.

It starts appropriately with single-parent families. This chapter advances two arguments, which are taken up again in subsequent chapters. First, single-parent families are of many kinds and come in different forms. Many single parents are poor, but not all, and some are rich. Single parents are often single mothers, but there are also single fathers. Some parents are single because they start their parental career without a permanent partner, others because of divorce or abandonment, and others again live in some form of more or less stable cohabitation. Families, no matter which sub-category we look at, are always *different*.

Second, 'much of our current policy focus is on parents'; suppose instead, say the authors, that policy attention were aimed at the *children*.

The next chapter is on families started by teenagers. Here we are reminded that teenage childbearing was more common in the 1950s and 1960s than now, but that more teenage mothers were then married. Today's teenage mothers are often from a deprived background, and pregnancy is sometimes an exit strategy and a route into adulthood, sometimes seen to be the only one available.

The fathers are less often teenagers and mostly live apart from their children (although many have regular contact at least while the children are young). Many teenage mothers face a life in greater or lesser poverty, with the obvious consequences this holds for their children, but it is argued that this is explained more by socio-economic background than by teenage pregnancy and child-bearing as such.

The chapter on children and divorce emphasises the mostly disruptive consequences for children. Three protective psychological factors for children are identified: a reasonably harmonious parental relationship, the sensitivity and commitment of each parent to the child, and the intactness and morality of each parent. These protections do not *necessarily* depend on the parents living together, but 'tragically, all three are subject to assault by divorce, during its overture, at the time of the breakup, and throughout its long aftermath'. The author underlines the rights and needs of children and argues the need for better institutions to help and support parents who face the risk or inevitability of divorce.

Many families today are stepfamilies in one form or other. Stepfamily relationships contribute importantly to lifting single-parent families out of poverty. On the other hand stepparent-stepchildren relationships are often less strong and nurturing than those in non-divorced families, and stepchildren do less well than others in school. The stepfamily, although now commonplace, is still 'poorly defined by law and social norms'.

Who is the father? This question is often surprisingly difficult to answer. For one thing, it is not always known. Women may have had several partners, even married women: 'the professional consensus is that the rate of parental discrepancy for couples in stable unions, whether legally married or cohabiting, is from 10 to 15 percent'. Furthermore, the biological father may not be the social father. This raises complicated

moral and legal questions about just what rights and duties should follow from biological parenthood in itself, and what rights and duties should arise out of social parenthood. These questions are all the more difficult in the case of surrogate fathers, and for that matter even mothers, in certain forms of modern medically assisted parenthood.

A very recently recognised phenomenon is that of gay and lesbian families, which is here treated in a separate chapter. This is of course an intensely controversial issue. With the social acceptance of homosexuality there has followed an acceptance of homosexual partnership and cohabitation and from there a demand for the right to gay and lesbian family formation, marriage and parenthood. The counter-arguments are frequently moral and religious, but when it comes to parenthood also functional: children benefit from the combined experience of male and female parenting. That position is here rejected: 'The quality, not the gender, of parenting is what truly matters'. This view is supported by research, which may or may not (yet) be of sufficient quality and quantity to support such an unambiguous conclusion.

A separate chapter explores parental kidnapping historically. Although it is not known how prevalent parental kidnapping was in the past, it is certainly not a new phenomenon. It probably increased during the 20th century as divorce increased, but it has probably also changed in meaning. Parental kidnapping has, according to this author, come to be perceived and portrayed as evidence of the family as a pathological environment, in which children are hostage to parental selfishness. Parental kidnapping has become 'a vehicle for expressing wider anxieties about the family'.

Writings on 'the family' often deal with problem families. A chapter in this book has the opposite take: it looks at the situation of entirely normal families in their most normal situation, that of freely chosen family formation and transition to parenthood. That situ-

ation, it finds, holds unexpected risks for the partners' and their children's development. In consequence, the support of appropriate family policies is argued not only in the case of problem families but also that of 'normal' families. Parenting is a difficult job. There is nothing 'un-normal' about the 'normal' experience that people with a difficult job to do often need help in order to do that job well.

Another chapter deals again with family normality: working families. Working families today are increasingly families in which both parents work outside of the family. This transition has happened rapidly, and we have not yet caught up, either with our ideas about the organisation of family life or in terms of social security and family policy. The author argues a case for what he calls 'a social partnership model', based on equal rights, individualism and social choice. In family policy the implication, it is argued, is the individualisation of social security rights and the use of cash support beyond service support for parents, so as to advance their ability to make their own choices in family organisation.

Modern economies are migrant economies; the consequence of this for family policy is that the 'immigrant family' emerges as a separate category. As elsewhere in the book, diversity is a central theme. Many immigrant children are well adapted to American life and do well in their alien environment. But others are at risk of getting trapped in a downwards spiral towards an underclass existence. The United States has a complex immigration policy based on eminently generous immigration laws but 'nothing at all resembling an immigrant policy'. Acquiring that kind of policy would mean 'sustained change in educational, health and mental health policies that protect immigrant children's rights, reduce disparities and foster opportunities for their strong integration into society'.

A separate chapter deals with the difficult issue of the care of children of abusive and neglecting parents. The consequences