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“Family Diversity & Gender” (eds. of special issue)

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Family Diversity and Gender

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C George Kurian, 2011.
Preface to the Special Issue

This special issue of JCFS, entitled “Family Diversity & Gender”, brings together papers presented at the annual seminar of the International Sociological Association Committee on Family Research (CFR-ISA), held in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2008. The seminar aimed to explore the concept of family diversity from theoretical and empirical perspectives. In a broad sense, family diversity is conceptualized as “a way of characterizing the variability within and among families” (Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000:2). The concept applies to different forms or types of families: from single-parent families, stepfamilies, elderly and their families, and LGBT families, to socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversities in, and of, families. More specifically, the theme of the seminar and of this issue looked at gender dynamics in families and its milieu.

The search for diversity does not mean that there are no commonalities among different types of families, nor is it taken to the extreme reductionist quest for the unique type of family. A holistic view of family considers both similarities and differences (Cf. Allen, Fine, & Demo’s discussion of these “controversies”, 2000). Moreover, “Understanding the differences in families is a first step in developing effective family policies, but not the only step. Finding commonalities – those processes and practices that cut across race, ethnicity, family structure, education, or gender – is particularly important for policy purposes…” (Bogenschneider, 1999:x). Even though we acknowledge the importance of finding commonalities across types of families, for this issue the authors consider different facets of contemporary families by focusing particularly on diversity.

The articles of this issue reflect the international research in family diversity, which goes beyond the traditional Anglo-centric two-parent middle-class families. They discuss the structural characteristics of diverse families, including gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, family structure and size. They also discuss the processes, such as marital relationships, parenting, siblings’ relationships, coresidence, and work. It is the interplay between structural characteristics, processes, and social contexts that is the main subject of this collection. Besides the conceptual diversity, diversity is also visible in the theoretical and empirical framework of the featured articles, as they are based in general family theories and in mixed methods.

Featured Articles

Roger Penn’s article “Arranged Marriages in Western Europe: Media Representations and Social Reality” explores how arranged marriages – in Britain, France, and Germany – are perceived by the mass media, and by young adults of international migrants.

Yan Yu’s article “Reconstruction of Gender Role in Marriage: Processes among Chinese Immigrant Wives”, investigates how (and why) gender roles are constructed among Chinese immigrant couples.
Claudia Höfner, Cornelia Schadler, and Rudolf Richter’s article “When Men Become Fathers: Men’s Identity at the Transition to Parenthood” examines how fathers in Austria incorporate fatherhood into their lives, defining different types of identity.

Margarida Martins Barroso’s article “Social Perceptions of Siblings’ Sexual Composition: Evidence from Portuguese Youth” reports on how gender and sibling sexual composition influences siblings’ perceived relationships, well-being, and caregiving.

Tokio Yasuda, Noriko Iwai, Chin-chun Yi, and Guihua Xie’s article “Intergenerational Coresidence in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan: Comparative Analyses based on the East Asian Social Survey 2006” presents a comparative study of intergenerational coresidence in East Asia.

Jia Zhao, Barbara H. Settles, and Xuewen Sheng’s article “Family-to-Work Conflict: Gender, Equity, and Workplace Policies” draws on a US representative sample to analyze gender differences on work-family conflict and job satisfaction, in relation to the division of labor and perceptions of equity and fairness.

Magdalena Díaz Gorfinkiel’s article “Migrant Domestic Work and Changes in the Ideas of Childcare” explores how Spanish employers and migrant employees approach childcare.

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References


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