

Family Development

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IN AMERICA today there is widespread affirmation of the values of marriage and family living. This is manifest by three factors: (1) the increased proportion of marriageables (14-90) who are married (up from 60 per cent in 1940 to 68 per cent in 1960); (2) the sustained high birth rate for almost 30 years, with increasing evidence that children are wanted for other than an economic contribution to the family; and (3) the great boom in private residential construction of individual family homes.

The day of taking the family for granted should be drawn to a close in America. We must consider what we can do as a concerted effort to help all families in a program of family development. Not as a sentimental movement such as we mount on Mother's Day (which is more ritualistic than durable) nor as a militant movement European style, but as sober recognition that only through a program of development can excellence be achieved in family living. To develop such a point of view, this article will define family success in terms of objectives and identify organizational and leadership requisites for achieving family success as revealed by research and theory.

In seeking to develop a definition of family success we will look to the common denominator of objectives toward which most American families are striving. These can be seen as basic tasks to which families must dedicate themselves to survive and grow in our society. Some writers have identified these tasks as family functions because they can be viewed from the vantage point of what families do for

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members of society to assure societal maintenance. Our present reference point is familial rather than societal; hence, we are identifying what tasks families must attend to over the family's life span if they are to function adequately for their members. These include: (1) reproduction; (2) physical maintenance of family members; (3) socialization of offspring into functioning adults, capable of assuming adult family roles of husband-father, wife-mother; (4) the allocation of resources and the division of duties and responsibilities; (5) maintenance of order within the family and between the family and outsiders; (6) maintenance of family morale and motivation to carry out family tasks; and (7) development of methods for orderly recruiting and releasing of group members.

The extent to which families in America master the several tasks successfully varies widely. A few parents will be satisfied to give life to children in fulfilling the reproductive function—a species of irresponsibility which has required the establishment of agencies to patch up the failures in the six other task areas. Many more families will be satisfied to meet the minimum requirements of reproduction and physical maintenance of family members. But these families find stresses (such as prolonged unemployment or hospitalization of the homemaker) to be crippling crises which bring agencies into the picture to restore family equilibrium. Still other families, probably the majority, master sufficiently the basic tasks listed that they survive exigencies, crises, and stresses without turning to social agencies for help more than once or twice during their life cycle. For most such families it is to kinfolk that they turn for help, and they are therefore highly unlikely to be known to any social agencies.

These several basic tasks may be rephrased, therefore, as objectives which have a variable sense of urgency at different stages of the family life cycle. When this is done they appear as family developmental tasks, the successful performance of which keeps a family *on schedule* in its development. Failure may be viewed as lagging in family functioning, given its stage in the cycle. Increasingly, families are judging their success by the yardstick of family development and the personality development of their members. To be sure, the breadwinner may use income and type of work engaged in to judge his success in the breadwinner role. The wife-mother may think of the esthetics and comfort of a well-appointed home for judging her adequacy as hostess and housekeeper. But together husband and wife as parents are increasingly appraising their success by the achievements of the children and the reputation of the family in the community.

The success of marriage is likewise seen in highly personal terms of mutual stimulation and companionship. Therefore, our yardstick for family success must include the extent to which opportunities are provided over the life cycle for realizing the latent potentialities of all family members—husband-father, wife-mother, and children. Let me propose then a definition of family success: *A successful family is one which is mastering the family developmental tasks of its stage including reproduction, physical maintenance, socialization, gratification of affectional needs, and providing the motivation and morale necessary for the stimulation and development of the personality potentials of all its members.* This is a large order. How can it be achieved?

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION NEEDED

At least four organizational requisites may be identified from contemporary sociological theory for the types of instrumental and expressive organization which are needed to achieve a high degree of family development: (1) a functioning intercommunication system between the generations and across sex lines; (2) a division of family roles and duties clearly defined for all members; (3) well-established patterns for dealing with new situations in which the processes of problem identification, problem solving, and decision making can be employed effectively; and (4) a set of face-saving mechanisms for releasing tension among members, mechanisms for ventilating bad feelings and dealing with their depressions and blues.

To achieve the perfection of organization suggested in these four expressions requires advance training, and great persistence during the period of family formation. No new family can start off with the consensus and *modus vivendi* of the veteran parental families from which the newlyweds have just graduated. Here is a place where extra-family educational agencies should be able to make a significant contribution.

Think for a moment of the handicaps under which child-bearing and child-rearing families operate organizationally—they are peculiarly unprepossessing groups to get the world's work done. Look first of all at their age composition compared with other work groups. Such families are peopled by only two adults, one of whom has traditionally played the part of the weak one in need of protection, plus a number of children, for most of their young lives relatively helpless dependents. Such a group would be a poor athletic team, an unskilled combat group, an unproductive work force, and an inept planning committee.

The family's age and sex composition makes it a puny and unwieldy group to bring into action on any problem. Yet societies in all parts of the world have assigned to it the heaviest of task assignments—the protection, care, and socialization of all participants.

Beyond the organizational requisites for effective family operation are certain interpersonal skills and competencies which family heads need to develop to exercise effective family leadership. These go beyond the attributes of emotional maturity which are also of high importance for success in marriage and parenthood. They partake of the peculiar properties of marriage and parent-child relations: (1) the capacity to make one's self accessible to others, to handle intimate relationships, to understand one's self enough to relate self to others; (2) the capacity to love and accept love; and (3) the ability to sustain intrapersonal tensions engendered by conflicts and resolve them.

These are some of the peculiar skills that the intimacies of marriage and parenthood require to carry out the tasks of "tension management" assigned to the family by societies in many parts of the world. Foote and Cottrell¹ have further identified the competencies of autonomy, empathy, judgement, and creativity which are proving highly relevant to marital and family success. These abilities are learned largely in families but may be improved through education. If the family fails to teach them, they must be imparted by extra-family agencies if the individual is to qualify for marriage and parenthood.

Fotte and Cottrell² have proposed ways individuals may master these competencies through participation in small quasi-family groups of age mates stimulating family roles in the process of working out problematic situations—the technique of marital improvisations and role playing has been perfected for this type of education. These researchers see possibilities for family service agencies to use these methods in exercising an active leadership to upgrade the families they serve.

FAMILY SUCCESS

An important aid in designing programs of family development is the research which has been undertaken about the factors making for success and failure of marriage and parenthood. Unfortu-

¹ Nelson N. Foote and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., *Identity and Interpersonal Competence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 36-60.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 211-26.

nately, there is little precise information about the distribution of family success as we have defined it because most research has not dealt with family functioning over the entire spectrum of the seven task areas I have delineated. Divorce, juvenile crime, suicide, and mental breakdown rates all suggest the inadequacy of many families to meet the needs of their members. But they also suggest the failures of neighborhood and community organizations which share in the control and treatment of personal disorganization.

Of major interest to us is the identification of those factors associated with marital and family success or failure which might be changed by organized intervention. From the data on factors associated with divorce and separation it is apparent that age at marriage, education, type of occupation, and income are associated with marital breakdown. These four life conditions are themselves interrelated. For example, encouraging young people to remain in school long enough to obtain skills to qualify them for more productive occupations would increase their age at marriage and the income they might bring to the family at marriage.

Marital adjustment studies also confirm that these four life conditions are important for marital happiness and add several other factors which are much more manipulable, such as (1) common interests and common friends; (2) sociability reflecting number of friends, participation in social organization; (3) conventionality in religion and politics; (4) non-materialistic philosophy—humanitarianism; (5) interest and desire for children; (6) love based on companionship rather than romance; (7) wholesome attitudes toward sex; (8) happiness of parents' marriage; and (9) childhood happiness.

Not all of these factors associated with marital success are manipulable by education or professional help, although beginning early enough practically all lend themselves to some remedial action. Studies of family adjustment to the depression crises of prolonged unemployment and of adjustment to the war-born crises of separation and reunion have highlighted three other factors not heretofore mentioned: family adaptability, family integration, and a successful history of meeting earlier crises.

A closely related concept of crisis-proneness, or vulnerability to crisis, has been found disproportionately among lower income families by Koos,³ and to be characteristic of "multi-problem families" which consume such a high proportion of our community funds for health and welfare services. The Family Centered Project⁴

³ E. L. Koos, *Families in Trouble* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946).

⁴ Family Centered Project, "Casework Notebook," St. Paul Community Chest, 1957 (mimeographed).

of St. Paul has suggested a technique for reducing crisis-proneness by upgrading the level of family functioning selectively and by treating the family as a totality in its home setting rather than fragmentally by several agencies at once.

Personal and Family Adjustment

My Eddyville, South Carolina study of personal and family adjustment during a spurt of urbanization (from 2000 to 12,000 in 3 months after 50 years of stability) reveals even more relevant findings concerning factors associated with family well-being.⁵ Here the most manipulable of the factors were also the most highly associated with good family adjustment, whereas the relatively rigid life-condition variables of color, social class, income, and occupation were of relatively meager importance for family adjustment. Of high statistical significance in explaining good family adjustment were the following: (1) non-materialistic philosophy of life; (2) family orientation to trouble; (3) developmental conceptions of parenthood; (4) family adaptability; (5) perception of emotional problems as a family concern; (6) accuracy of family perception of problems; (7) equality of leadership in problem solving; (8) problem-solving skill of wife; and (9) personal adjustment of husband and wife.

Examination of the case histories of the most competent and the most incompetent of the families revealed great "internal coherence" among the competent families and marked "internal contradictions" among the incompetents. The competents further excelled over the incompetents in open and adequate communication among members, rationality among members, companionship, patterns of equalitarian decision making, the variety of ways of handling tensions, and agreement in expectations for family members. This community was almost totally devoid of any family helping agencies so that there was much education of family members by the older generation, by kinfolk, and by preachers. We found the capacity to withstand stress and sustain tensions among members was widely distributed among the families studied.

Changes in Relationships

The issue of timing of educational and therapeutic services at critical points in the family life cycle is suggested by still another set of research findings about the changes in the marriage and

⁵ Reuben Hill, "Eddyville's Families," Institute for Research in Social Science, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1953 (mimeographed).

parental relationships over the family's life span. Couples are never more vulnerable to divorce and separation than in the first three years of marriage. (Almost half of all marital breakups occur in the first five years of marriage, a finding suggesting faulty mate selection.) Of those couples which remain married, however, the happiest and most congenial years are the vulnerable first years before children come. Husbands experience more disillusionment from engagement to marriage, and from honeymoon to the coming of children; whereas, wives report more disenchantment with love and companionship from the coming of the children until they grow up and leave the home. Troubles with in-laws peak up in the early years but improve over time; whereas, marital differences about money and children increase until the children are launched.

In contrast to late child-rearing years, the post-parental period appears to be companionable and satisfying, especially to mothers who are active in community affairs or who are gainfully employed. From the several researches which have studied marriage and parenthood over several stages of development it is hard to identify any core of competences and abilities which persist. It is as if success in marriage and family functioning requires different capacities and interests at different points in the family life span—suggesting discontinuities and marked need for programs of adult socialization into the marital and parental roles of the middle and late adult years of the family life.

Fortunately, attention to the competences required at different stages can be given through family life education adroitly timed at critical points of maximum readiness when members are most teachable: (1) with engaged couples about marriage adjustments in the establishment phase; (2) with expectant parents about infant and child care to deromanticize parenthood as well as allay anxieties about infants; (3) with parents of preschoolers in helping them to deal with the questions children ask and with the disorder they bring to households; (4) with parents of teenagers about the autonomy strivings of adolescents and the disengagement from subordinate roles in the family; and (5) with grandparents about adjustments with their married offspring.

Finally, recent research has pointed up the continued presence of the kinship group as a welfare resource, not only for lower-income families, but for middle-class families.⁶ The nuclear family in the urban setting is not as isolated as the earlier writings of urban sociologists have suggested, but in most of our cities is in direct

⁶ Marvin Sussman and Lee Burchinal, "Kin Family Network," *Marriage and Family Living*, XXIV (August, 1962), pp. 231-40.

touch with kinship extensions for social visiting, help exchanges, financial aid, and gift giving and for counsel (more often from parents to married children than vice-versa). Compared with neighbors, friends, or social agencies, the immediate kin are significantly more helpful and influential.

More than a dozen studies in as many metropolitan communities offer evidence of the continued viability of the families' kinship network. Hence, helping agencies will do well to undertake an analysis of the social network of families they serve to discover the resources of counsel and direct aid provided from kin—both because agency help should be integrated with kin support and because the kinship services may be working at cross-purposes with the agency's program. Surveys of the relative importance of social agencies and kin in dealing with family problems suggest that the kinship network is tapped by more than five times as many families as utilize any social agency. Thus, it may be that agencies are seeing nuclear families without kin, making for some bias in their appraisal of this situation among their clients.

From these research findings about what makes for success in family living, it is possible not only to distill programmatic suggestions, but a few principles of relevance for planning:

1. Quicker return would result from focussing on the relatively manipulable factors of a family's value orientations, problem-solving skills and intercommunication systems, which can occur directly in a program of family development, rather than on the less manipulable factors of income, class, and occupational position (which require major community restructuring).

2. Services need to be *timed* when the problem is reasonably salient and couples are most teachable, but before couples have plunged into crisis. Service should be provided just before transition points in the life cycle, thereby facilitating anticipatory socialization.

3. In treating the family the worker-client relationship should be expanded to encompass the family and its social network. It should account not only for interactions within the family but also the transactions with influential helping kinfolk and friends whose help and support antedate the agency's contact and will continue after the case is closed.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

What have I said? There has been no repudiation in America of the basic business of families—bearing, protecting, physically main-

taining, socializing, and affectionally supporting the young. In this context of affirmation a definition of family success has been forged which is active and transcendent: Namely, a successful family is one which, at its stage of development, is actively mastering the tasks of reproduction, physical maintenance, socialization, gratification of affectional needs, and providing the motivation and morale necessary to stimulate and develop the personality potentials of its members.

To attain this high plane of family achievement an effective group organization must be built, and a competent family leadership must be trained. The accent in family organization is on integrating objectives, good internal communication, clarity of role definitions, and patterns of problem solving and decision making. Needed family leadership qualities stress interpersonal competence, of which autonomy, empathy, judgment, creativity, and self-mastery are highly relevant to marital and family success.

A number of factors which have been identified by family researchers differentiate successful from unsuccessful families. Some of these factors are imbedded in the structure of the society and are relatively resistant to manipulation by education or individual efforts; others bend more easily to programs of social action. The life condition variables of social class, occupation of parents, color, and ethnic background are impervious to change. Fortunately, these are of minor importance in comparison with the more manipulable factors of family policies, practices, value orientations, and personal resources which relate directly with family adjustment.

It should be noted that personality adjustment is highly related to marital adjustment, and that marital adjustment is highly associated with family well-being. In turn, the personality adjustment of children is associated with the marital adjustment of parents and with the family adjustment of the group as a whole. Intervention by family-serving agencies at any of these three levels will make a contribution, however small, since personal, marital, and family adjustment are so closely intertwined. Nevertheless, intervention should have optimum results by working with the family as a unit rather than with its segments, and by taking into account the social and kinship network of families served.

THE MAN OR WOMAN who humbly but deeply realizes that he or she has labored with the utmost faithfulness to a worthy end can never be a real failure. Pressing on toward "the mark for the prize," not the prize itself, is the thing. —B. C. FORBES.