Family Configurations

A Structural Approach of Family Diversity in Late Modernity

Eric D. Widmer

INTRODUCTION – From the Family Institution to Family Configurations

In the nineteen twenties, Ernest Watson Burgess, a leading representative of the Chicago School and one early family sociologist, characterized the great changes that families experienced during his life time by a new relational model (Burgess, 1926; Burgess, Locke & Thomes, 1960). Rather than building a moralistic discourse regarding the decline of the Family, as so many scholars of his time did, Burgess earnestly tried, by the use of empirical research, to understand the patterns that made the new kind of family experiences that he discovered so different from those of the close past. Ultimately, his research stressed the emergence of the Companionship Family, which replaced the Family Institution: love against parental supervision of mate selection, privatization of family life against community interference, equality between husband and wife against patriarchy. In his view, the Companionship model, based on a long term commitment of spouses linked by democratic arrangements and a functional specialization within the nuclear family, was about to fully erase from Western societies the last remnants of rural forms of family life, doomed by modernity. the Family was constituted by a small and lasting group of interacting personalities linked by meaningful social roles, a feeling of shared belonging and a legitimate although unequal division of labour. In Burgess's view, actual interactions rather than legal contracts defined families (Burgess, 1926). Based on the empirical investigation of such interactions, he stressed the reorganization of modern families along new structural principles, rather than interpreting the already increasing divorce rates as evidence for the disorganization of the Family.

In the eves of the nineteen eighties, after divorce, non-marital cohabitation and changing gender roles made it clear that things had changed in the family realm, some prominent scholars cast doubt on the survival of a functional stable model of family. The diversity of families had become so great, they said, that any attempt to find general principles underlying their organization was doomed. Indeed, childless families, dual earner families, living apart couples, single parent families, stepfamilies, same sex partnerships, families constituted by friends and adopting families are various alternatives that

currently compete with the model of the nuclear family, constituted by the main earner male, his wife and their co-resident biological children[1]. Each of these families can be further decomposed in subtypes with their own structures and roles. Stepfamilies, for instance, cover a variety of situations: couples with resident stepchildren from the female partner, couples with resident stepchildren from the male partner; couples with resident stepchildren on both sides; couples with a mix of shared and non-shared children; couples with resident stepchildren and non resident stepchildren, etc. The number of possible family structures following divorce and remarriage is so important that one may wonder if the stepfamily as an homogeneous concept is truly valid.

In relation with this diversity of family structures, a debate there is an ongoing debate among sociologists, especially in North America, regarding the use of the plural or the singular concerning the family realm. Should we talk about "the Family" or about "families"? The majority of family researchers have opted for the second solution by arguing that the diversity of family structures and experiences has become so great that refering to "the Family" is at best confusing, at worst a gross scientific misconception, laden by normative biases stemming from a nostalgia for the nuclear family. Frightened by the perspective of imposing a single model of family life as a norm or an ideal to which all family structures should be referred, some scholars have celebrated the diversity and fluidity of family experiences (Stacey, 1993 & 1996).

Others, destabilized by the diversity of families, have developed a pessimistic perspective on their future. As a matter of fact, sociology since its origin has often developed negative views regarding family change. The lack of a normative model of family commitment, stemming from individualization trends, will supposedly make the Family collapse. The books of David Popenoe in the United States are often given as particularly eloquent examples of that perspective (Bengston, 2001): the decreasing number of children in families, the increasing divorce rates and economic independence of women are indicators of the declining role of families in modernity (Popenoe, 1993;

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[1] The nuclear family was defined by anthropologist Peter Murdock (1949) as a residence unit constituted by a married heterosexual couple and its biological and socially dependent offspring . The functionalists added to this definition a gendered dimension, with the organization of the family into two subset of roles, one instrumental, associated with the male breadwinner, the other, expressive, with his home-focused wife (Parsons & Bales, 1956).

Popenoe, 2005). In Europe, Ulrich Beck and colleagues took over the same line of thought by emphasizing the deleterious influences of individualization forces on the Family. A mass society of eremites unable to maintain any long commitment is about to come (Beck, 1986; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim; 2002). Family is a "zombie category" shred apart by the strong cultural and economic enforcement on individuals to live a life of their own, which has left little in terms of private commitments and family care. In a more positive light, Anthony Giddens emphasized the self-referencing internal process of intimate partnership formation and development. His perspective, although less pessimistic, reduced the significance of the social embeddedness of dyadic processes and hence made it difficult to understand for whom and how family relationships still continue to matter. Giddens' concept of "pure relationship," which is an archetype of late modernity according to him, focuses on self-exploration, negotiation and symmetry in power relations, and decidedly weaker external constraints on intimate relationships (Giddens, 1991 and 1995). In all cases, the possibility for scholars to find models of long-term commitments in such individualized families has been considered highly improbable.

While acknowledging the impact of individualization on families, this book asserts that the diversity of family relationships still leaves much space to long term commitments. The functions of support and social integration filled by families according to Burgess (1925) and Parsons and Bales (1956), are still central in contemporary societies. But in order to make sense of the diversity of current family commitments, another perspective on families is necessary. Sadly enough, quantitative research continues for the most part to focus on the nuclear family, and qualitative research frequently falls short of looking for rules and patterns underlying the apparent fluidity of family life in late modernity.

Following the work of Burgess, prominent scholars from the United States and Europe sought to develop an understanding of the relational models characterizing contemporary families and their embeddedness in social structures (Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Kellerhals & Montadon, 1991; Kellerhals, Widmer & Levy, 2004; Olson et al., 1989; Reiss, 1971; Roussel, 1992). To achieve this end, they built

a series of typologies of conjugal or family interactions. Their emphasis on relational logics characterized by systemic properties lead to account for couples and families by a small set of distinct types with specific functional properties. This has made great advances in the knowledge of families possible. There is much indeed to command in those systemic approaches of the Family, which stressed the necessity of going beyond individual cases and single dimensions of family life. Following their lead, the configurational approach emphasizes the interdependencies existing among large sets of family members and uses social network methods and concepts to uncover how family relationships work beyond the nuclear family. Based on a series of empirical quantitative studies, it reveals the importance of these interdependencies for a variety of issues. Divorce and remarriage, the role of families for social integration, family conflict and ambivalence, families of individuals with psychological problems, and changes in family relationships throughout the life course will be addressed in such a perspective. The data come from the United States and Switzerland, two societies known for their high rates of divorce and family turnover.

This book searches patterns shaping individualized families. It intends to uncover some of the principles that account for their diversity, while going beyond cases in their singularity, in order to show how families in late modernity relate to "the Family" as a set of informal rules that organize positive and negative interdependencies existing among a large number of family members.

CHAPTER 1 – A configurational perspective on families

What do we need another perspective on families for? The decline of the nuclear family consecutive to the pluralization of life trajectories has made the work of sociologists more difficult. Indeed, family members that matter cannot be defined a priori, using the household as a natural limit to the Family. The number of relationships to be taken into account is much greater than that between partners, or between parents and their resident children. In sum, the Family cannot be theorized as a small group with obvious boundaries, a clearly defined and consensual division of labour, and a collective identification. As a matter of fact, approaches that focus on the nuclear family disregard significant dimensions of social integration belonging to families in late modernity.

An alternative is therefore needed. The configurational perspective on families traces complex patterns of emotional, cognitive and practical interdependencies among large numbers of family members beyond the nuclear family. It focuses on interdependencies between partners, children and other individuals such as relatives and friends (Widmer, 2006; Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). Its main assumption is that key family dyads, such as the conjugal and the parent-child dyads, are embedded in a larger set of family interdependencies which explain how they develop. Relatives can be a source of strength for couples and parents by acting as a resource to help alleviate their conflicts. Support from relatives and friends may however also foster tensions and conflicts for structural reasons that we will uncover. Simultaneously, key family dyads influence the way in which family configurations are shaped. This chapter stresses some of the main features of the configurational perspective on families. The various issues that it raises will be tackled in later chapters.

Configurations

The concept of configuration was first proposed in the nineteen thirties by Jacob Moreno (1934), a once most praised scientist as the founder of sociometry and of the sociodrama. Moreno defined a

configuration as an collection of individuals of any size, from the smallest personal networks, which he termed "social atoms", to humanity as a whole, in which meaningful ties link individuals with each other. He first stressed that configurations concerned actual relationships rather than relationships as defined by organizational charts, administrations or census offices.

He also put much emphasis on the fact that configurations are patterned: any dyad belonging to a configuration is influenced by the shape of the configuration as a whole. Interdependencies within a configuration are not randomly organized but follow informal rules, such as reciprocity. Indeed, individuals tend to balance what is given with what is received in most relationships. An imbalance in reciprocal exchanges triggers either frustration and conflict, or an inequality of power between the exchange partners. Moreno also stressed that "chaining", or what was later called "transitivity" or "structural balance", occurs in social relationships. One significant result of research on networks is that they develop in bundles. Typically, friends of friends also become friends, and friends of enemies become enemies. Based on Fritz Heider's theory of balance (Heider, 1946; Heider, 1958), social network scholars later found that people feel uncomfortable when their friends do not like each other and they avoid these situations in their personal networks (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Festinger, 1957, Newcomb, 1961). Transitive hierarchies and power structures have higher legitimacy in the eyes of individuals than non-transitive ones. Transitivity has significant social consequences, as it strengthens role differentiation, cohesion, and clustered subgroups. To summarize, transitivity fulfills the individual's need for consistency and creates differentiated and cohesive social structures.

The concept of configuration as it relates to networks, was taken over from the nineteen thirties to the nineteen nineties by German sociologist Norbert Elias who contributed greatly to various fields of sociology (Dunning & Mennell, 2003). Elias (1994) defined configurations as "structures of mutually oriented and dependent people" (p. 214). Individuals, Elias proposed, are interdependent in a configuration because each one fulfills some of the others' needs for social recognition, power, emotional proximity, financial and practical resources, sexuality, or other socially defined needs

(Quintaneiro, 2005). Interdependencies are not dyadic in nature, Elias stated, but rather organized in large networks. Individuals develop a variety of ties with family members, friends and colleagues, who branch out to other persons. As such, configurations have to deal with power issues: resources are scarce and individuals, while cooperating, also compete for them within groups. This competition creates tensions and conflicts that are beyond an individual's control. The patterns of interdependencies that characterize configurations, therefore, are commonly unintended. They, in turn, shape the cooperation strategies and the conflicts that occur in each dyad belonging to them.

Based on this theoretical stance, the configurational perspective posits that family dyads are interdependent (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). It stresses on the one hand that parent-child or couple relationships are shaped by the larger networks of interdependencies with relatives, friends and others in which they are embedded. On the other hand, patterns of interdependencies depend to a significant extent on partnerships and parent-child relationships (Widmer, 2004). Various research results pointed at the fact that what happens in couples influences networks. For instance, the courtship process interferes with other strong ties and tends to lower their importance. Therefore, individuals are concerned about mate selection of their network members. When couples split, conjugal networks are again profoundly changed. When individuals remarry, this has implications for a large number of persons beyond their couples or their households. Courtship, conjugal roles, conjugal quality, divorce and remarriage show that the fragility of couples in Western societies is intertwined with larger relational contexts that they shape while being shaped by them (Widmer, 2004).

Although the configurational perspective cannot be considered a theory at this stage of its development, it makes a number of assumptions that facilitate the study of complex patterns of relationships, such as those characterizing families in late modernity. First, families that matter are not defined by institutional criteria such as belonging to the same household or being married together. Family interdependencies, what we need others for, and the tensions and conflicts that they set up, are given prime importance. Second, the configurational perspective rejects the assumption that family

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dyads can be analyzed as independent and separate entities each with their own logic. Instead, it focuses on the influence of the larger configuration of relationships in which each dyad is embedded.

Finally, a configurational perspective on the Family emphasizes its temporal and spatial nature. It measures change and stability of family relationships in individual life courses and across historical periods. Both Elias and Moreno emphasized the developmental dimensions of configurations. Elias was the most vivid about it, as he claimed that the historical dimension of configurations should never be overlooked. Because he stressed the changing balance of tensions as a main feature of large social configurations such as the royal court of Versaille, historical sociology is the only disciplin that fitted his expectations. Similarly, Moreno emphasized the need of following configurations over time. As his empirical work was based on smaller groupings and involved sociometric measurements, he focused on short term changes. Both authors however stress the importance of time, either historical or personal, as a main feature of configurations.

When applied on families, this set of assumptions emphasizes the embbededness of partnerships and parenting in large and complex sets of relationships with steprelatives, in-laws, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, friends or neighbors, and even care professionals considered as family members. A structural approach of relationality and embeddedness of families and personal lives is currently lacking. This book reconsiders some main issues of family research by defining families as large, open and personal configurations rather than as small, closed and collectively organized groups. It illustrates the fruitfulness of this theoretical shift by presenting a series of empirical results.

Interdependencies

Interdependency is a central concept of the configurational perspective. It stems from the fact that individuals depend on a variety of others, without necessarily being aware of that dependency and willing to admit it in standard surveys or comprehensive qualitative interviews. If practical services and money transfers clearly constitute a set of interdependencies within families, they are certainly not the only or even the most significant ones. There is a long tradition in sociology that emphasizes

the cognitive and emotional importance of group members. Concepts such as the "reference person" (Hyman, 1942) or the "reference individual" (Merton, 1957) or the "orientational others" (Kuhn, 1964), stress the importance of specific persons as cognitive and emotional benchmarks throughout one's life. Kuhn (1964) defines orientational others as people to whom individuals are committed emotionally and psychologically, who provide individuals with a concept of self, and who influence an individual's self-definition through communication. Note that, once established, the persistence of someone as an orientational other does not require frequent, recent, long or even positive interactions (Milardo, 1989; Surra & Milardo, 1991).

It is readily apparent that many family members beyond the nuclear family meet Kuhn's definition of the orientational other (Kuhn, 1964). Frequency of interactions, practical help or financial help are not the sole indicators of family interdependencies. Various contingencies from late modernity may decrease such interdependencies while cognitive and emotional interdependencies remain strong. People may not receive money from their parents or they may not see them regularly because they do not need the provision of money, or because they live far away from them. Despite that, they may still be very much emotionally and cognitively interdependent with them. Emotional support and communication are prime features of relationships of individuals with their parents and siblings in adulthood. It comes as no surprise that partners also play such a role, some after divorce also. Although sociologists often prefer the hard facts of money, face to face interactions and domestic support, the strength of feelings and cognitions should not be underestimated as indicators of interdependencies, especially in the family realm. Indeed, some anthropologists have cleverly argued that financial or material support gain a special value in families as they are interpreted as proofs of love (Schneider, 1980). From the work of Marcel Mauss (1992), we know that material exchanges have meaning beyond their monetary value. In all cultures, including Western cultures, exchanges of material goods in families are signs of interpersonal acknowledgement (Caplow, 1982). Individuals care about family gifts and support because they give meaningful information on whether or not they

matter for other family members. A large number of studies show that perceived support, rather than received or provided support, influences individual development[2]. The strong feeling that family members are concerned by us is a key dimension of interdependencies.

Interdependencies are also unintended (Newton, 1999). Cooperation in configurations creates unexpected tensions and conflicts because it is associated with various constraints that individuals enforce on each other by their interdependencies (Elias, 1984; Widmer, Giudici, Le Goff, Pollien, 2009). Resources in time, love, money, support and social recognition are scarce and their unequal distribution within family configurations is subject to power and control attempts that make them shift from one state of balance to another state over time. Those shifts go beyond individual control because of the complex patterns of interdependencies shaping configurations (Letonturier, 2006). The balance of tensions and cooperation in the configuration in turn shapes processes of cooperation and conflict occurring in each dyad (Elias, 1983). By linking power issues and conflicts with positive interdependencies, the configurational perspective enables researchers to understand them as social processes rather than as outcomes of a group's failure to function properly. This is especially significant, as we will see, for the understanding of families in late modernity.

Family Issues Revisited

Various scholars have felt the need of crossing the borders of the nuclear family and of addressing family relationships as sets of interdependencies, both negative and positive, with an emphasis on cognitive and emotional dimensions. Research on conjugal interactions and parenting has stressed the importance of taking the relational context of nuclear families into account. Demographers have acknowledged the impact of close family members and friends on fertility issues (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). Gerontologists have underlined the importance of personal networks for

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[2]   Perceived support is the perception that social support would be available should an individual wish to access it (Sarason et al., 1991). It is strongly correlated with a variety of developmental outcomes (Sarason, Sarason & Shearin, 1986; Sandler & Barrera, 1984; Sarason et al., 1991; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Findings on the impact of received support on adjustment are far more ambiguous (Sarason et al., 1991; Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

the understanding of health (including psychological health) in old age (Guilley & Lalive d'Epinay, 2008). A series of studies on conjugal interactions and satisfaction have also shown the embbededness of couples in larger social networks (Widmer, 2004; Widmer, Kellerhals & Levy, 2004 and 2006a).

How shall we proceed from there? A first central issue, from a configurational perspective, relates to the very definition of "families". What is a family? How do we define families that matter, that truly influence one's life? What are the boundaries of such families, especially those stemming from divorce and remarriage? The usual assumption of family research is that significant family units are obvious. They are defined either as including members of a single household or individuals linked by marriage or biological parenthood. On the contrary, the next chapter stresses that no institutional criteria such as those is comprehensive enough to define families that matter. It underlines the emergence of significant family interdependencies that cannot be circumscribed in reference with a household or with a limited set of institutionalized statuses. It first recalls studies on the ways in which individuals define the boundaries of their family. Then, the chapter focuses on empirical studies that were conducted in the United States and Switzerland. It presents several types of family configurations, each with a distinct emphasis on children, stepparents, in-laws, grand-parents, siblings, partners or previous partners, and friends defined as family members. Using interdependencies rather than institutionalized roles to define families is a prerequisite to the understanding of their overall relational logic from a configurational perspective.

A second major issue that this book addresses is the contribution of families to social integration. The large increase of non-marital cohabitation, divorce and serial remarriages in recent decades lead several prominent sociologists to question the ability of families to provide care and meaning to their members in late modernity. Families are no more in charge of social integration said Beck and Beck-Gersheinheim (2002). The chapter, "Family Social Capital" first reviews the evidence pointing to the integrative role of family members beyond the nuclear family. Then it describes two alternate conceptualizations of relational resources provided by family members in terms of bonding and

bridging social capital. As we shall see, the composition of family configurations makes a great difference for social capital.

Because of the emphasis on the integrative function of families in many scholarly works, only little interest for conflict developed until the rise of divorce in the nineteen sixties, which pressured sociologists to address family conflict as an issue. Since then, rather broad explanations of family conflict were given, stemming from the contradiction between individualization trends of women and men (for instance, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The configurational perspective proposes to analyse conflict as intertwined with positive family interdependencies. Individuals develop family conflicts because they depend on each other for various resources that cannot be found in other relationships: sexual intimacy, emotional support, communication and social recognition are central dimensions that relate families to the construction of personal identity. Dependencies are never easy to tackle as they create fairness and power issues. Therefore, conflict and support are not opposite processes in families but rather the two faces of the same coin. In order to understand how family conflicts develop in late modernity, it is necessary to take into account the complex patterns of contradicting interdependencies linking a large number of individuals.

In that regard, post-divorce families are a telling case. Individuals belonging to them are hypothesized to be part of *divorce chains* or *remarriage chains*, in which interdependencies exist among a large number of persons living in different households and linked indirectly (e.g. a child and her father's new partner's children's father). When divorce and partnering occur more than once, on several sides (father, mother, parents' partners) or in multiple generations (one's parents but also one's grandparents), interdependencies become complex and create a variety of power issues. Based on several empirical studies, the book carefully considers flows of emotional support and conflict in post-divorce families. Rather than assuming that a single pattern of interdependencies capture the complexity of post-divorce family configurations, it emphasizes the diversity of such contexts in terms

of composition, social capital and conflict. It is indeed plainly wrong, as we will see, to equate all post-divorce family configurations to the same patterns of interactions.

Another crucial issue of family research concerns the interplay between family relationships and psychological outcomes. Are individuals with psychological problems embedded in similar family configurations than other individuals? The interrelation existing between family relationships and psychological health has been a classical focus of system theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Broderick, 1993; Minuchin, 1974). The results of various empirical studies done on clinical samples will be reviewed, that show that the model of the nuclear family should indeed be revisited if one wishes to better understand the relational contexts of individuals experiencing psychiatric problems. Again, much variability of family configurations exists in clinical samples. It is a shortcoming, as we shall see, to consider that the majority of individuals in psychotherapy or in daycare psychiatric facilities have similar family configurations.

Family configurations are not static entities but constantly adapt to life events and life transitions. The issue of change over time will be addressed, as it is a central assumption of the configurational perspective that configurations are evolving in ways that are never fully intended by individuals belonging to them. Life trajectories give many opportunities for new interdependencies to shape family configurations. Marriages, births, sicknesses, residential moves, divorces, or deaths of family members at the same time destroy and create family interdependencies. Measuring changes over time requires either retrospective or longitudinal data with a variety of limitations due to the cost of collecting such information. Despite these limitations, some results will be given about the ways in which family configurations change over time pending on specific life events and on the overall pattern of one's life trajectory.

The Family Network Method

Since the mid nineteen nineties, we have been developing a methodology for assessing family relationships in a configurational perspective based on social network methods. *The Family Network Method* (FNM) (Widmer, 1999b; Widmer & Lafarga, 2000) provides an alternative way for studying family relationships as sets of emotional and cognitive interdependencies. Its theoretical bases and empirical measurements significantly differ from standard surveys dealing with family issues in a quantitative perspective. It is based on the cognitive network or "socio-cognitive" approach of social networks, which was first proposed in the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties by sociologists and anthropologists interested in biases of perceptions concerning relationships in social networks (Krackhardt, 1987). In this approach, individuals interviewed do not only report on their own ties, but on interdependencies which exist among all individuals included in the network that they belong to.

In the *Family Network Method* (FNM), respondents first give a list of persons that they consider as significant family members. They are instructed that the term "significant" refers to those people in their family who have played a role, either positive or negative, in their life during the past year. A statement is read to respondents that further emphasizes that they should not only refer to the people of their family who are significant to them because they love them or respect them, but also to those who have upset them or have made them angry during the last year. The term "family" is left undefined and respondents are asked to use their own definition of what they intend by « family ».

Based on this list of family members, various questions are asked to respondents about emotional support, conflict and influence, three fundamental dimensions of all interpersonal relationships (Widmer, 1999a). Respondents not only have to estimate their own relationships with their family members, but also the relationships existing among all family members. The question regarding emotional support reads: « From time to time most people discuss significant personal matters with other people. Who would give emotional support to X during routine or minor troubles? » Answers are then transformed into a square socio-matrix such as the one of Table 1. Each relationship is coded by a

one. When a relationship is inactive, the corresponding cell is set to zero. The instrument takes from 10 minutes to 60 minutes to fill in clinical samples, and from 10 to 30 minutes in non-clinical samples. Respondents only estimate a series of dyadic relationships with straightforward "exist/does not exist" decisions to make. They proceed systematically throughout the list of their family members and a great amount of relational information about their family configuration is gathered in a reasonable amount of time. Note that the relationships are not necessarily reciprocal. The information make it possible to analyse relationships among family members with ease; it also permits to visualize interdependencies of various kinds in family configurations. The graph Figure 1 of captures in a simple and straightforward way respondents' perceptions of how their family configurations are structurally organized. In Figure 1, arrows linking individuals represent flows of emotional support in one family configuration. Note that arrows initiate from support seekers and point to support providers.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 1. Perceived emotional support in a family configuration

Note: Arrows point to support providers

The graph of Figure 1 provides information at several levels. Firstly, one achieves an overview of family interdependencies. This family configuration is fully connected, as no individual is or sub-group is an isolate. Secondly, one also sees that some individuals are more central than others: interestingly, the respondent is not the most central individual in his own configuration but her mother is. Thirdly, the interdependencies are strongly influenced by the status of family members. The mother's, father's and partner's closest relatives are spatially differenciated, although interdependencies exist among them as well.

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INSERT TABLE 1.1 HERE

Table 1. Matrix of emotional support in a family configuration

Sociometric matrices and their corresponding graphs offer a straightforward way to measure and illustrate structural properties of interest to family researchers such as group boundaries, cohesion, subgroups, balance and reciprocity within one's family configuration (Wasserman & Faust, 1995) . Other concepts dealing with family interactions such as relational roles and power distribution have ready-to-use equivalents in sociometric research. For instance, family balance can be approached using measures on transitivity; relational role structures are measured in reference with structural equivalence models, and subgroups by clicks. In considering families as configurations, researchers benefit from a range of measurements widely used in social network analysis[3].

In many respects, the *Family Network Method (FNM)* is distinct from questionnaires measuring social support or support networks. First, it does not intend to enlist support providers or protective persons, but all family members, be they supportive, disruptive or both at the same time. Second, rather than focusing on the respondents' relationships, it asks them to estimate relationships among all family members. In this respect, it is complementary to instruments measuring key dimensions of perceived support such as how many support needs are met, support availability and satisfaction toward support, or support appraisal (Procidano & Heller, 1983 ;Sarason; Levine, Basham, 1983; Vaux et al., 1986). *The Family Network Method* is also less sensitive to social desirability than standardized questionnaires about family issues. Individuals do not have a clear view of the picture that they provide while responding to "yes/no" questions about the large number of the relationships that they have to consider. For instance, they do not feel ashamed to report a persisting conflict between themselves and their partners, because the issue is included in a much larger list of conflicts

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[3] This book focuses on three sets of measures related to density, connectivity and centrality, which are described in chapter three.

that exist among their family members. Contrary to assessment tools measuring support or interactive networks, the *Family Network Method* is not designed to measure actual interactions, such as frequencies of contacts or amount of help actually provided to respondents by their family members. It focuses on significant members of the family rather than on family members regularly met or who provide support.

Data

This book is based on research done in the United States and Switzerland between 1998 and 2010. It is not a comparative piece but it nevertheless intends to consider emergent family realities from the two countries, in the light of the configurational perspective. Various datasets from both contexts are used. An extended case study, that of Betty, a twice divorce woman in her fifties, living on the West coast of the United States, and her 15 family members living across the country, is considered in several chapters[4]. The family configuration of Betty provides several insights about how family boundaries are defined, as well as about the links between family support and family conflict. Family members of Betty were interviewed twice with a nine month lag, in order to measure the permanence of family configurations over time. A sample of undergraduate students of a university in the U.S were also interviewed. They were recruited through direct contacts with the author and several of the author's students. These analyses were complemented by several datasets collected in Switzerland by the author and his colleagues. A first sample includes 1534 couples in which both partners were interviewed separately, two times within five years, about their kinship and friendship networks and their conjugal interactions and their networks of relatives and friends. Another sample of 500 undergraduate students from various Swiss universities were asked about their family configurations; A sample of 100 women in middle adulthood, mothers of at least one child, were asked about their family configurations; one third of them experienced divorce and remarriage. In order to approach the complex issue of family configurations and psychological frailty, three samples of individuals with a

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[4] Case studies, we believe, do a lot for the advancement of knowledge, as they help researchers to highlight the main issues that need to be addressed using large samples and statistical analyses.

clinical background were collected, including a sample of 80 adults in psychotherapy, with five waves of interviews over a year and half; a sample of 60 individuals with psychiatric disorders institutionalized in a daycare facility, and a sample of 25 individuals with psychiatric disorders and mental impairment. One family member was also interviewed for 17 of them. In order to estimate how distinct or similar family configurations are in the United States, Switzerland and other Western countries we used the module social networks of the *International Social Survey Program*, which complemented the samples that we personally collected by twenty representative national samples[5]. The survey includes a large number of variables concerning family members beyond the nuclear family. This dataset, although rough in the information that it provides, is a valuable international source of data on relationships beyond the nuclear family.

Conclusion

The configurational perspective on families developed in this book underscores the cognitive and emotional interdependencies that exist among large numbers of family members. The aim of the configurational approach is to discover how family interdependencies relate to support and caring, but also to conflict, control and interference, in central family dyads such as partnerships and parent-child relationships. The configurational perspective emphasizes a bidirectional causality, where individuals and dyads contribute to shaping the family configurations that they belong to and are shaped by them (Elias, 1991). Therefore, a reciprocal causation where individuals and their actions and motivations influence the interdependencies with configuration members is in line with the configurational perspective. Instead of conceptualizing families as composed by autonomous individuals lead by abstract values or personal lifestyles, the configurational perspective focuses on the larger network of interdependencies in which they are embedded. In that sense, the approach is structural. It stresses the existence of informal rules that account for the alternatives available to individuals in their family life. These rules, we believe, are the bases on which much of the current diversity of families develop.

[5] http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/data/2001_Social_Networks_II.htm

Therefore, uncovering them contributes to the understanding of the individualized families of late modernity.

CHAPTER 2 - Who Are my Family Members ?

Individualization theorists who forecast the decline of the Family have a specific type of families in mind: the nuclear family, constituted by an heterosexual married couple with its co-resident biological children (Stacey, 1993). This definition of the Family arbitrarily stipulates who counts as a family member and who can or even should be disregarded. Fortunately, there are alternatives for defining family members that matter. From the perspective of Jacob Moreno (1934), configurations build up on shared interests and concerns. People belong to a configuration because they are linked to a space, an activity or a person that make them interdependent. In other words, they share a *focus point*, as American sociologist Feld called a social, psychological, legal or physical entity around which joint activities are organized (Feld, 1981). Configurations come into being and evolve because individuals modify their activities, visit other spaces or change their concerns for persons. It is notable that loving the same person, having a similar interest for the same activity or working in the same place create patterns of interdependencies that go beyond positive and intended interactions. Indeed, focus points do not necessarily need to be positive or emerging from autonomous choices[6].

Moreno's and Feld's insights about the importance of joint activities or concerns for similar persons have direct implications for the study of families. The configurational perspective states that families should not be defined using institutional criteria. Considering households as the natural settings of families, or marriage as the sole object of family sociology, we argued in the introduction, overlooks the complexities of families in late modernity. How then should the boundaries of families be defined? Who is a family member? What should be taken in consideration when referring to an

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[6] From there, Moreno (1934) studied a number of configurations, from orphanages and school classes to larger groupings, using basic social network tools. Interestingly, he also considered what he called"social families", that is educational facilities in which adolescents or children were placed under the care of adults within a family like kind of settings.

individual's family? Blood, marriage, sexuality, intimacy, long term commitments? Or something that encompasses all those meaningful dimensions of the Family?

The definition of family boundaries is indeed a serious matter, as setting who is in and who is out of the family has consequences for the understanding that researchers are likely to propose regarding the functions and structures of families in late modernity. As the Family concept is currently overloaded with various normative expectations concerning the proper way to build a partnership, to rise children, to work as a woman or a man, to give or to receive various forms of support, some authors abandoned it for other concepts, such as close relationships (Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1991; Scanzoni et al., 1989) or personal life (Smart, 2007). From a configurational perspective, family relationships carry a series of functions, emotional, cognitive and practical, that would not be well understood by dropping the concept of family. More precisely, there is no other concept as the Family that carries the very idea of strong intimate interdependencies, negative and positive, in some respects chosen, in other respects enforced, with significant consequences on the long run. The concept is therefore still fruitful while its definition should certainly be reconsidered. This chapter starts by recalling some issues related with family contexts beyond the nuclear family. It proceeds by focusing on empirical research that we conducted in the United States and Switzerland on the composition of family configurations.

Family Members Beyond the Nuclear Family

The emergence of family configurations that are not circumscribed to the household or to a limited set of family roles has been underlined throughout the last two decades (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1993; Weston, 1997, Widmer, 1999b; Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008), and an interest in family relationships beyond the domestic unit has developed. Research on post-divorce families draws attention to the fact that households and families are not one and the same. In many cases, the emotional interdependencies between children and their non-resident parents

remain strong and non-resident parents still have much psychological import for the child. On the other hand, divorced parents are likely to remarry and become emotionally dependent on a new partner. Therefore, many stepfamilies are part of *divorce chains or remarriage chains (*Bohannan, 1970), in which emotional and cognitive linkages exist among persons living in different households. Consequently, when members of a stephousehold are asked who are part of their family, a different answer is received from every one of them (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). Interestingly, two partners in a first marriage also have quite different family members. As a matter of fact, in one empirical study that addressed the "shared versus specific" dimensionality of partners' kinship networks, partners reported on average fewer than half of their family members as shared (Stein, Bush, Ross & Ward, 1992). Such evidence suggests that family configurations are indeed individualized. This is not only due to the changes associated with divorce and remarriage, but also to the bi-laterality of Western kinship systems (Lévi Strauss, 1949; Murdock, 1949), which has for centuries emphasized rights and obligations of individuals both on their mother's side and their father's side.

The conceptualization of family ties as chains of interdependencies indeed does not only concern families facing divorce and its aftermaths. Since the 1970, a large number of United States and United Kingdom studies have identified the contribution of larger family contexts to nuclear families. As reported by Lee and Adams (Adams, 1970; Lee, 1980), the primary focus of research on relational contexts of couples in the sixties and seventies was undoubtedly the issue of the isolation of the nuclear family from its kinship network, a central proposition of the structural-functionalist perspective on families (Parsons & Bales, 1956). Since then, the hypothesis that nuclear families are isolated from their kinship network was rejected on empirical grounds (Widmer, 2004). Adults frequently keep strong emotional interdependencies with their parents, who represent a large proportion of one's support network. Interdependencies are played out in emotional and cognitive terms as much as in practical and financial support. Despite the fact that they live in different households and do not belong to the nuclear family of individuals any more, parents and siblings of

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adults continue to have a great emotional significance (Fehr & Perlman, 1985). This is also the case in old age. The majority of elderly people have a close relative alive and a child, with many having grandchildren. In Switzerland, as four over five individuals above 80 have at least one contact per week with their family members (Guilley & Lalive d'Epinay, 2008). These social interactions are linked with emotional closeness: a great majority of individuals acknowledge that they have at least one person in their family to which they feel very close. Old age is therefore on average characterized by the maintenance of family resources rather than a decisive decrease of those resources (Bengston, Rosenthal & Burton, 1990; Bengston, Harootyan, 1994). Overall, at all stages of adult life, family ties remain meaningful in late modernity (Bengston, 2001).

The nuclear family has been for years a model rather than a reality. The development of single living since the nineteen sixties has been stressed. The causes of the large increase of such living arrangement are related to changes at both ends of adult life: the transition to adulthood has become less homogeneous with many individuals spending an extended period of time by themselves before possibly entering a stable intimate relationship. The increase of life expectancy has made many widowers live an extended period of time without a partner. It is a misunderstanding, however, to draw from the fact that 50 percent of women in later years live by themselves that they do not have a family of their own. Links with grown up children and grandchildren, as well as with siblings, constitute a large share of the elderly' s social networks, with much import for one's health and life expectancy (Bengtson, Harootyan, 1994). Intergenerational family relationships remain vivid, if not necessarily positive, in old age.

Are families only structured by blood and marriage? The distinction between friendship and family ties may not be as clear-cut as the two concepts suggest. For instance, gays and lesbians create non-kin families that include friends and lovers (Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1993; Weston, 1997). Friends frequently become godfathers and godmothers by being given a family status that crosses the blood divide. Another reason for casting doubt on the definition of families as nuclear is provided by the

globalization of contemporary societies. Various ethnic groups in late modern societies do not fit within the nuclear family scheme. For instance, strong kinship interdependencies exist in African-American and Hispanic families in the United States (Aschenbrenner, 1973; Madsen, 1964, Stack, 1983). In the African-American community, grandmothers often play a key role in rising children, especially when resources of parents are scarce or when the mother misses a partner. In the Mexican-American community, couples are frequently embedded in large networks of relatives of various kinds.

Considered one by one, non-nuclear family forms concern only a minority of individuals. When added up, however, they represent a majority of living arrangements. As a matter of fact, the nuclear family in its standard form has become a quantitatively marginalized way of life in societies such as the United States or Switzerland (Bengston, 2001; Stacey, 1993). Defining family members that matter using the household membership is therefore inadequate. Individuals depend on various relationships, in which adult children, ageing parents, siblings, ex-partners, lovers or friends considered as family members play a significant role.

Family Boundaries

An alternative to the approach of families as nuclear is therefore needed. *The Family Network Method* (Widmer, 1999b; Widmer, Chevalier & Dumas, 2005; Widmer & La Farga, 2000) was drawn from social network research (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Let us exemplify its usefulness for the definition of family boundaries by a case study. Betty is a 54-year-old female working as a social worker in a state run facility for abused and neglected children in a middle-sized American town located on the West Coast of the United States. She has been married twice, with both marriages ending in divorce. Betty has two children from her first marriage, as well as a fairly large number of blood relatives consisting of three sisters, two brothers, and her mother. She was chosen as a case study primarily because she experienced both divorce and remarriage. In order to determine whom

Betty defined as her significant family members, she was asked to give the first name of the persons in her family who were significant for her at the time of the interview. Betty included nine significant family members who then had to report who their own significant family members were. Then, we interviewed all persons who were included by at least two persons included by Betty as significant family members, under the assumption that they were actors in her family configuration. Betty included an extended range of individuals as significant family members: her two children, her two ex-partners, two close friends, her mother, and two sisters. After interviewing them, five individuals were added because they were included by at least two persons cited by Betty. There were three other siblings, a sister-in-law, and Betty's former mother-in-law from her first marriage. Note that she did not herself include her two brothers and one sister. Figure 2 depicts the family configuration up to a distance of three from Betty (her direct cites, the joint cites of at least two of her cites, and some of their own cites). The larger nodes represent the fifteen core members of Betty's family configuration. Nodes in black indicate the persons that have been included directly by Betty as significant family members. The graph shows a total of 79 persons included with 145 arcs linking them together. A description of the status of each family member is provided in Table 2.

Figure 2. Relationships in the family configuration of Betty

Insert table 1.2 here

Table 2. Family members of Betty (relation to Betty, age, gender, education, occupation)

From Figure 2, one sees that Betty's family configuration is not a bounded small group corresponding to a nuclear family, but rather corresponds to a widespread open network featuring a configuration of directly or indirectly interdependent individuals. Among the persons included, two thirds were cited by only one individual. To further assess the boundaries of this configuration, a matrix of citation matches among the 15 core family members was computed[7]. The overall match is .14, meaning that, on average, family members of Betty share 14 percent of their own family members with others. When only the nine persons included directly by Betty, plus Betty, are considered, this percentage remains about the same (15 percent). Twenty seven of the 105 pairs composed by the 15 individuals included in the family configuration of Betty do not share any significant family members at all, and 25 share only one person, Betty, in 21 cases. Two thirds of the dyads share fewer than four persons as significant family members, and only 10 percent report sharing more than six members. On average, each pair of individuals shares only 2.6 members. Those various estimates show that the extent to which each person's family configurations overlaps with others is small, thus lending support to the conclusion that family configurations are individualized structures. Every individual has to a large extent a family configuration of her own. Parents and children do not have the same family configuration, as well as partners. Even siblings, especially in adulthood, have non overlapping family configurations. This does not mean that family configurations are fully personal either. Some family members are obviously shared by several individuals, as shown in Figure 2.

Family boundaries cannot be taken for granted in late modernity. Family configurations, which include individuals with whom significant interdependencies have developed, expand into several directions, from current and past sexual relationships, members of the kin network, relatives by marriage, and friends or co-workers considered as significant family members. As significant family units are networks of interdependencies rather than cohesive subgroups defined by a common residence and institutionalized roles,

[7]This index computes the proportion of family members that any two individuals share, compared with the total number of family members that they cite.

the type of social integration one can expect from them is different from what is provided by smaller and more connected groups such as nuclear families. Emotional support and conflicts in family configurations, as we shall see, are much more varied and individualized than what is often assumed.

A Universe of Family Members

Who are my significant family members? In a series of additional empirical studies, we instructed respondents that by "significant family members" we were referring to "those people in their family who played a role, either positive or negative, in their life during the past year". The interviewer had to mention further that they were not only interested in the people that were significant to the respondents because they loved them or respected them, but also in those who had upset them or had made them angry during that year. Note that this question does not assume that a high level of face to face interactions currently exists with family members. It does not suggest either that the set of family members constitutes a bounded functional unit[8]. The only assumption made is that individuals included are cognitively and emotionally significant and considered as family members. We also asked respondents to recall family members who were significant in a negative way. This part of the definition deviates from the assumption that only positive memberships define groups, a strategy which leads to biases (Milardo, 1983; Milardo, 1988). As a matter of fact, intimate relationships such as family relationships are not free of violence and conflicts, and the sense of family identity has complex components, negative as well as positive (Berscheid, 1983; Firth, Hubert & Forge, 1970 ; Peterson, 1983; Sprey, 1969). The assumption that close relationships are by nature positive is rejected by configurational studies, which stress that conflict relationships shape interdependencies just as much as positive relationships.

In a first study, based on 25 college students from a north American campus, the average number of significant family members is 8.6, living in 5.7 different households. The variety of family members is noticeable with a total of 19 distinct types of family members included, such as fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, but also grandparents, steprelatives and in-laws. Of the 25 respondents, 24 include their mother in

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[8] This assumption was made by functionalism, which makes the understanding of power and conflict relationships in families difficult, as the family is conceived as an homogeneous entity. From this perspective, any internal division of interests is considered dysfunctional as it contradicts the postulate of homogeneity. Although the functionalist perspective on families has faced many criticisms, notably in feminist work, the lack of empirical research on family conflicts in sociology is one of its long lasting consequence.

their family configuration; 19, one or all of their siblings; 18, their father; ten, one or more grandparents; ten, aunts and uncles and seven include cousins. Seven respondents also include stepparents, and eight include a partner. Hence, significant family contexts spread well beyond the nuclear family in several directions. In another study based on a sample of 229 college students, there is a dominance of the mother, the father, brothers and sisters, who are included by a large majority of respondents. Mothers are clearly prominent, as almost all respondents include them as family members. Again, the rank of inclusion of mothers is the lowest of all with the least variance. In other words, mothers are included first by a large number of respondents. As such, they have the highest cognitive and emotional salience as family members. Fathers and siblings come next, although they are less often included. Other blood relatives are also well represented, with grandparents scoring highest. On average, relatives on the mother's side are more prominent than relatives on the father's side. For instance, the mothers' sisters are included more than twice as often as the fathers' sister, and cousins on mothers' side are much more frequently included in family configurations than on fathers' side. Thus, individuals develop, on average, more interdependencies with their mother's relatives than their father's relatives (Coenen-Huther et al., 1994; Firth, Hubert, & Forge, 1970). In addition to blood connections, friends are commonly include as family members; approximately 30 percent of respondents include a female friend as part of their family, and 20 percent included a male friend. Partnership is also well represented, as 39 percent of respondents include their partners as significant family members. Seven percent extend their significant family configuration to their in-laws by citing their partner's mother. A stepfather and a stepmother are included by about one respondent in ten.

By all these counts, significant family members extend well beyond the household and the nuclear family. Non-resident parents and siblings, partners' relatives, stepparents as well as stepchildren and stepsiblings, and friends considered as family members, constitute a significant share of family configurations. Members of the nuclear family, that is the partner and the co-resident and dependent children, are most of the time included first in the list of family members. They nevertheless are absent in many family configurations just because, as we shall see, individuals are childless or single. When they are present, other relationships support or interfere with the interdependencies existing with them.

Structured Diversity

Family configurations are diverse. Table 3 provides several telling examples of this diversity, drawn from the sample of young adults. The respondent in the first family configuration includes her parents and her siblings. She goes on with her mother's siblings, some of their children and partners, and with her maternal grandmother. When she is done with this side of her family, she continues with her father's relatives, although with fewer inclusions. Interestingly, a partner is not included in that case. As a result, her family configuration is mostly constituted by blood relatives, with a balanced mix of uncles, aunts and cousins. It does not focus on a specific family generation, as members of generations +2 (grandparents), +1 (parents, uncles and aunts) and 0 (cousins and siblings) are present. A rather similar composition characterizes the second configuration but with the father's relatives exclusively. In that case, no mother's relative is included in the family configuration; this creates a strong unbalance between the two sides of the kinship network. This is not the case of the third configuration, in which both sides of the kinship network are balanced, except for grandparents who come from the mother's side. Contrary to the other cases, the fourth case is horizontal rather than vertical, as the siblings and their partners represent a large number of persons and a significant share of the family configuration. The inclusion of the sibling's partners gives a distinct significance to this configuration, as not only blood but also partnership constitutes an underlying rule of the family configuration.

INSERT TABLE 2.2 HERE

Table 3 Composition of eight sampled family configurations

The fifth family configuration is also kinship oriented with the inclusion of grandparents. However, uncles, aunts and cousins are under-represented. The configuration is more diverse as it includes a partner and a number of in-laws, along with some friends. The emphasis on blood ties is weaker than in the two previous configurations. Interdependencies, this example confirms, can be developed through partnerships and friendships and lead to family configurations that are not inherited from parental kinship networks. The diversification of family ties beyond blood ties is also present in the sixth family configuration, which is the smallest of all. In addition to parents and siblings, there are three friends considered as family members.

Families by choice, in which kinship ties are replaced by chosen individuals from the pool of friends, neighbours or co-workers, have become a reality. Interestingly, the presence of friends in that case precludes the inclusion of blood relatives. We will further see if this is a general rule.

Another deviation from the world of blood ties is found in family configurations seven and eight. Both of them include family members stemming from divorce and remarriage. In the seventh family configuration, half-siblings as well as parents' partners are included. Interestingly, the father comes further down in the list, suggesting that his cognitive and emotional importance is lower than in other family configurations, in which fathers are included first. The family configuration seven is very small, as no blood tie from the kinship network is added to the circle of parents and their new or former partners and children.

Overall, there is a great diversity among those family configurations. The number of family members included varies, from seven to fifteen. The family members included are distinct as well, from mother and father to friends or kinship ties such as grandparents, cousins, uncles or aunts. In some cases, in-laws predominate; in other cases, one side of the kinship network (either the mother's side or the father's side) have a much larger number of members. The realm of kinship is extended in various ways, related to marriage, either of the respondent (in laws) or of her parents (stepparents, half-siblings). In all cases, a logical order of inclusion is followed. Usually, partners, parents, children and siblings are included first in the list of family members. As such, these listings share a common feature with other free listing tasks, in which the most representative members of a category come always first (D'Andrade, 1995). They are followed by other family members linked to each other. Family members come in bundle; respondents include one side of their kinship networks first, and then the other side. There is also chaining across family members: the mother's sister is always present if the mother's sister's children are included. In other words, one does not include a remotely linked blood family member, without including the intermediaries that connect the respondent to her. In that sense, family configurations build up by chaining and transitivity. Only a few missing links can be pointed at in the listing presented in Table 3.

In order to uncover what underlying principles account for the composition of family configurations, various exploratory analyses were run[9]. Seven types of family configurations were revealed by cluster

[9] A detailed presentation of this study is was published in the *Journal of Social and Personal relationships* (Widmer, 2006).

analysis, a method that helps researchers uncover subgroups in samples[10]. A first type of family configurations focuses on blood relatives, with the inclusion of family members of different generations. Such family configurations have a balanced set of grandparents, from the mother's side as well as from the father's side. They are vertically rather than horizontally oriented as they do not include aunts, uncles or cousins. They also exclude friends, in-laws and step-relatives. Therefore, they have the smallest size of all, with only 7.5 members on average. They were referred to as the "Beanpole" family type (Bengston, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990; Widmer, 2006) , that is, a family whose living members come from several generations, but with few members in each generation. This type of family configuration, demographers propose, is becoming increasingly prominent due to decreasing fertility rates (Ruggles, 1996). In fact, it is the modal category in this sample of young adults, with one third of respondents included in it.

The second type includes respondents who add friends to the set of relatives of the beanpole family configuration, while putting less emphasis on grandparents. In that type, friends represent as many as 4.5 persons, whereas other blood relatives, in-laws and steps are less present. Respondents in post-divorce family configurations, by contrast, include a large number of step-relatives in their family configuration and under-represent biological fathers[11]. Stepfathers are on average more cited than stepmothers and come first in the list of family members. In conjugal configurations, respondents show a strong orientation toward their partner and in-laws. The partner and the partner's mother are over-represented, as well as other in-law relationships, such as the partner's father and the partner's siblings. Not only are partners included more frequently than in other types of configurations, but they also come first in the list, with an average rank of 3 (compared with a rank of 5 on average). There is a focus on ties created by the conjugal bond for this small minority of cases (5 percent).   Other respondents develop a mother-oriented family configuration: the mothers' sister, the mother's sister's children, as well as the mother's sister's partner, are over-represented. This is also the case, although to a lesser extent, of the mother's mother and the mother's father. This family

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[10] Cluster analysis makes it possible to go beyond the effects of specific relational dimensions and find configurations. It has been used to construct typologies of networks in various research.. In all of the cases described in this book, we examined a sequence of hierarchical cluster analyses based on Ward's method of clustering. Instead of partitioning the observations into some predetermined number of clusters in a single step, this hierarchical procedure produces step by step splits (Everitt, 1993). Ward's method minimizes within-cluster variance and thus produces good estimates of cluster groupings.
[11] Such configurations are considered in Chapter 5.

configuration is the second most common in frequency after the beanpole family configuration, as it concerns about one respondent in five in the sample of young adults. The father-oriented family configuration presents the same pattern as the mother-oriented configuration but on the father's side: relatives of the father are over-represented in it. Sibling family configurations are centered on siblings of respondents and their partners and offspring.

Overall, all seven types of family configurations extend well beyond the nuclear family in this life stage. Even the beanpole family configuration does not end with co-resident parents, children, partners and siblings, as the large number of other significant relatives, especially grandparents, shows. The various types of family configuration together demonstrate the existence of a set of informal principles accounting for the inclusion of individuals in family configurations. Blood, especially on the mother's side, is a major criterion used to identify significant family members. Partnership is a second major criterion, working both at the level of respondents (in-law family configurations) and at their parents' level (post-divorce family configurations). The development of "families by choice" (Weston, 1997) is a third criterion for defining family members, with friends considered as family members constituting a significant share of family configurations in young adulthood. A fourth criterion is constituted by the community of siblings. Overall, there is much diversity in configurations of young adults, but also a large impact of structures. The diversity of families is channelled into distinct types, responding to well-known principles of Western kinship systems (Levi-Strauss, 1968; . Murdock, 1949).

Family configurations of Parents

There is a diversity of family configurations in early adulthood. This life stage is however a moratorium (Erikson, 1968) in which various life styles can be experimented, thus probably leading to a greater number of family alternatives than in other life stages. Individuals who went through steady partnership and parenthood may have developed more standardized sets of interdependencies with their family members. Therefore, results for other life stages are necessary before the variety of family configurations is confirmed. In a study of 101 women with a partner and at least a co-resident child aged between 6 and 15, a variety of family configurations was found once more.

In this parental stage, the beanpole family again constitutes a significant share of family configurations, with the inclusion of respondents' parents and of their partners' parents. While all respondents in this configuration include their own parents, eighty six percent of them have included a mother in law and 67 percent a father in law. The conjugal configuration is again present, with its emphasis on the partner's relatives. For instance, the partner's mother is more often included (55 percent) than the respondent's father (45 percent) and the siblings in-laws are more often included than the siblings (1.54 versus .73). Therefore, respondents shift their interdependencies towards their partner's side and for some reasons disregard the interdependencies in their family of origin. The sibling configuration that was found for young adults is in that case split into two more specialized configurations, once on the brothers' side, the other on the sisters' side. In both cases, contrary to what happens for young adults, not only siblings are included in family configurations, but also their partners and children. Therefore, the sibling group, that was already present in young adulthood, is expanded and becomes a configuration of persons indirectly related by a sibling tie. In both cases, a large number of friends are added to the siblings, so that these configurations become mixed[12].

Compared with the sample of young adults, a nuclear family configuration is present at that stage. In nuclear family configurations, there is a smaller number of significant family members, with a focus on the partner and the children. Other family members are also present, but without a clear emphasis on any category of relatives, unlike in the other family configurations. The post-divorce type is also present in this parental stage, although with a distinct composition. Instead of divorced parents, step-siblings and half siblings, this type includes previous partners (most often the children's other parents) or the children of the current partner (such as stepchildren). Interestingly, the father and siblings of the respondent are much less often included in the post-divorce family configurations than in other configurations. The process of divorce and remarriage in some cases involves estranging one self from the family of origin[13]. Quite distinctly, other individuals have a kinship configuration, in which grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews are included, creating the largest family configurations of all, with an average number of 15.5 family members.

Overall, there is much stability of the major types of family configurations from young adulthood to the

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[12] Therefore, the friendship configuration that is found for young adults is not present any more. It is replaced by this horizontal family configuration.
[13] See chapter 5.

parental stage. In other words, the main types of family configurations are present in both life stages, with the exception of the nuclear family configuration. This does not mean that individuals remain in the same configuration throughout their life, as these results are not longitudinal but compare distinct individuals in different life stages. There are also differences among configurations at the two life stages: conjugal and nuclear family configurations are much more present in the parental stage; beanpole family configurations obviously do not include as many grandparents in older adulthood than in younger adulthood, and siblings and friends are fused in a single family configuration in the parental stage. Although the same underlying principles shape family configurations in both life stages, a significant adaptation to demographic changes occurs in the process of growing older. In other words, family configurations evolve through the life course as they adjust to births, divorces, deaths, household memberships, migrations and other life events. These transformations, however, often represent structural shifts rather than revolutions. Strong interdependencies with a sister, for instance, translate into an active role as an aunt when the siblings reach the parental stage; the connection with the nephew later leads to the construction of a tie between cousins.

Family Structures and Configurations

The similarity of configurations in distinct life stages suggests that they may evolve on the basis of constrains encapsulated in family structures, which refer to the number of children one has had, the relatives still alive, the number of co-resident persons or the basic facts of divorce and marriage. Are family configurations a full replication of family members actually being available? Individuals at earlier and later stages of their life course are embedded in distinct demographic structures. The elderly, for instance, are obviously embedded in a truncated family structure as they do not have relatives from their parents' generation any more and because their own family generation has shrunk due to earlier deaths. Therefore, the beanpole family configuration takes a distinct shape when individuals grow old. While it is true that the underlying structures of family configurations vary according to life stages, they also vary according to cohorts, ethnicity and social class, due to differential access to partnership, parenthood and social inequalities of life expectancy (Bengston, 2001).

The link between family configurations and family structures can be tackled by refering to the number and status of relatives alive. In the study on the parental stage, respondents reported on how many children, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts they had, as well as whether their parents and grandparents were alive. In the case in which they had divorced and remarried, they also reported how many children their current partner had. Based on this set of information[14], four types of demographic structures were identified. Avuncular family structures concerns cases in which there are many uncles and aunts. Grandparents have had many children and the respondent has therefore a large kinship network. This does not mean that interdependencies with uncles, aunts and cousins are active, but only that many relatives are available for interactions and interdependencies. Vertical family structures focus on the respondent's parents and siblings with a very limited number of uncles and aunts, as well as few cousins available. The extended family structure is similar to the previous one but it expands towards the partner's relatives, who are also alive in great numbers. In other words, the partner has a large set of living parents and siblings. In stepfamily structure, the partner has children from a previous relationship and the respondent's children have half-siblings on their father's side.

*I*NSERT TABLE 2.2 HERE

Table 4. Distribution of family configurations by family structures (in percent)

Table 4 shows the links between family configurations and family structures. Individuals embedded in an avuncular structure are overrepresented in nuclear family configurations. When parents pass away, and only uncles and aunts remain, there is indeed a shrinkage of family interdependencies. By contrast, individuals who are either in a vertical or an extended demographic structure are overrepresented in beanpole family configurations. Still having parents around in adulthood is a condition promoting significant intergenerational contacts that go beyond them and include a larger set of relatives. Obviously demographic

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[14] The indicators of demographic structures are rather limited in that case. Additional information should be included in future research concerning a larger sets of relatives by blood or alliance (cousins, in-laws, etc.), as well as their spatial and social locations.

structures which include steprelatives lead to an over-representation of post-divorce configurations. As we shall see, however, post-divorce structures lead to other configurations than post-divorce configurations[15].

Overall, the statistical association between demographic structures and family configurations is neither weak nor strong. This indeed proves that family configurations do not build up from a social vacuum: they respond to the structural constraints imposed by marriages, divorces, births and deaths. But they are not fully determined by the demography of the family either. Other dimensions of life such as the development of trust and intimacy with specific individuals throughout a history of interdependencies add another layer of complexity that makes each individual's family configuration unique in many respects.

Conclusion

Negative assessments of the Family by scholars or the mass media were triggered by the decreasing importance of nuclear families in late modernity. The nuclear family is often considered as the natural form that all families should have in order to be considered proper families. The pluralization of the life course, since the nineteen sixties, have made the complexity of family interdependencies increase and resources are sought beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family[16]. There is nothing natural in the nuclear family, and its decreasing functional importance is not synonymous to a decline of the Family altogether. By asking individuals to define their family configurations, an attempt was made to set the boundaries of families by using alternative criteria to the household, marriage or biological parenthood. Those criteria are indeed too narrow to capture the set of interdependencies that link individuals with family members in late modernity.

The configurational perspective focuses on individuals and their family ties, rather than on families as homogeneous and well defined groups. This theoretical shift has several empirical consequences. When asked about their significant family members, individuals refer to a variety of family configurations that go well beyond the household. Only a few of them acknowledge a lack of family members, which makes it clear that the family realm is not on the verge of collapse. Family members still matter, even though the duration of partnerships has decreased. The number of alternatives to manage for defining family configurations is

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[15] The link between the stepfamily in its demographic basis is considered in chapter 5.
[16] The nineteen sixties may represent an historical exception for the long time span that individuals remain in the same partnerships.

indeed significant. A variety of ways of building one own family ties exist Indeed, individuals build up individualized family configurations[17].

The individualization of family ties meets soon, however, some limits. The variety of family configurations refers to a small number of models, with known underlying principles. Individuals focus on their paternal or maternal ties, their partner's parents and siblings, their steprelatives or their friends. The number of informal principles that structure family configurations is limited and the available solutions logically organized. The family configurations that they refer to are not the result of free choice. As a matter of fact, family configurations are embedded in demographic constraints, related with partnerships, fertility options, divorces, migrations, social mobility and deaths. In that sense, family configurations are not the highly personalized expressions of life styles or individual preferences, but, as we shall later see, the results of series of events and transitions that happened in life courses of family members.

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[17] This diversity was already present in the past. For a long time, anthropologists have stressed that one feature of kinship in the Western world is its bilaterality (Levi-Strauss, 1968; . Murdock, 1949): because individuals get their kinship connections both on their mother's and father's sides, with little specialization of exchanges on each side, individuals have never been parts of homogeneous kinship groups in the West as it is the case in other cultures. They were rather pushed to develop personal connections within the large number of relatives provided by blood or marriage. In other words, family ties have been personal for a long time in European societies.

CHAPTER 3 – Family Social Capital

For years, the Family has been considered a crucial group for maintaining social integration. In the sociological research of the nineteen fifties and sixties, under the influence of Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales and their well-known book *"Family: Socialization and Interaction Process"* (Parsons & Bales, 1956), it was assumed that only nuclear families could take care of the functional imperatives of creating and maintaining individuals fit into modern life by socializing them and providing them with various forms of support. Since then, the quantitative importance of the nuclear family has diminished. Does that mean that the contribution of the Family to social integration has decreased as well ?

Overall, the problem with scholarship emphasizing the integrative function of the nuclear family is that it assumes that the family, as a cohesive and homogeneous group, has this function for all its members. From this perspective, family life benefits to husbands and wives, parents and children alike. Strong inequalities of access to emotional and instrumental support however exist between partners, or parents and children, in the highly heterogeneous and individualized family configurations revealed in the previous chapter. Therefore, a recent trend of sociological research has conceptualized the integrative function of families as social capital (Furstenberg & Kaplan, 2004), a concept that encompasses individual resources stemming from the possession of a durable network of acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu, 1985). The more interdependencies people have with other individuals, the more likely they are to mobilize resources, be they instrumental (money, domestic support), informational or emotional. Social capital has various positive consequences for individuals, such as promoting their physical and psychological health and increasing their adaptability to disruptive events or demanding life transitions (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Overall, the concept of social capital conceives social integration as an individualized resource rather than as a group attribute. As such, it fits the approach of families as configurations. Rather than considering that a family as a whole has to fulfil an integrative function in order to play its role in society, the social capital concept points at the fact that individuals have unequal access to family relational resources that are meaningful for mastering key dimensions of life, such as experiencing a fulfilling conjugal or parent-child relationship, or avoiding

depression and other psychological problems (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Duck, 1997; Widmer, Giudici, Le Goff & Pollien, 2009).

Interdependencies within family configurations provide various resources to individuals, such as new information, material help, emotional support and companionship. Family configurations are central in these respects, as support of various kinds is more frequent among family members than in other configurations, such as the work place. This chapter asserts that, although in many respects unique, family-based social capital takes various forms, each with its own distinct logic. It begins by reviewing the evidence pointing to the functional importance of family members beyond the nuclear family. Then, it proposes two alternate conceptualizations of relational resources provided by families in terms of either bonding or bridging social capital. It proceeds by showing that these two kinds of social capital depend on the composition of family configurations.

Interdependencies Beyond the Nuclear Family

The theme that relatives are not of prime importance to the functioning of the nuclear family was clearly enunciated in the functional perspective on families in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties (Parsons & Bales, 1956). While family sociology, for the most part, has focused on parent-child and conjugal relationships as autonomous entities, some research has contradicted this statement, identifying the contribution of family configurations to the functioning of key dyads of the nuclear family (Widmer, 2004). At first, research mostly focused on material exchanges linking nuclear families and their kinship networks. Contrary to the thesis of the nuclear family's isolation, individuals have regular contacts with relatives. If alternatives to face-to-face interactions, such as phone calls or emails, are also considered, a large majority of individuals maintain meaningful interactions with relatives. There are, however, great variations in the amount and significance of interactions that individuals develop with them. Some individuals interact daily with relatives while the interactions of other individuals are more casual. Of course, family interactions depend on the composition of one's family configuration. The number of relatives in the area influences the amount of regular family interactions. Men and women differ in their interactions with family members. Typically, women have a higher proportion of contacts with family members than men; they are more

frequently in charge of family sociability, organizing special gatherings or regular forms of contact with relatives on their side and their partners' side. Individuals are not only embedded in interactions with relatives; they are also functionally embedded in them. In the United States, as in Switzerland, a large percentage of individuals benefit from financial, domestic and emotional help provided by family configurations. In other words, interdependencies, not isolation, is the rule in family configurations, with only a minority of individuals being isolated from their family members.

If the thesis of functional isolation of the nuclear family proved to be inadequate, there are, however, obvious limits to the exchanges existing within family configurations[18]. In many cases, significant exchanges only concern the immediate kinship circle, drawn from the individuals' parents and siblings and their own children. Most financial and domestic help is provided by relatives in a direct ascending line. In other words, instrumental support mostly circulates from parents to their adult children. Parents also provide tangible help with raising their grandchildren. Only a limited proportion of instrumental exchanges within family configurations concerns relatives beyond those genealogical limits.

The instrumental assistance in horizontal relationships, for instance from siblings, is much less intense. As compared with parents, adult siblings do not support each other as much in terms of money or domestic tasks. In addition, normative imperatives to instrumental help are fairly low in sibling relationships, contrary to what is expected in parent-child relationships. Siblings are strong resources of emotional support however, frequently surpassing parents in that regard. Much of the support beyond parent-child ties is emotional and based on affinity rather than on status. Instrumental support in family configurations is limited as it only concerns a small number of persons. Specific events such as giving birth, changing homes or divorcing trigger much of the instrumental help provided in family configurations, although long lasting instrumental exchanges and support exist in some cases, especially for couples with small children. Overall, however, exchanges should not be considered as indicators of permanent material interdependencies within family configurations.

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[18] This review and its main results are further developped in a previous publication (Widmer, 2004).

That said, many family interdependencies are not instrumental. Indeed, emotional and cognitive interdependencies are main functions of families, as Parsons and Bales (1956) rightly pointed out[19]. In that sense, family members are part of what family researchers Surra and Milardo (1991) called *psychological networks*, which are composed of people to whom individuals are committed emotionally, who provide individuals with a concept of self, and who can sustain or alter one's identity through communication[20]. As underscored by the anthropologist Firth and his colleagues, already in the nineteen sixties, the concept of family is of strong affective significance because "it expresses a sense of identity with specific persons who are members of one's kin universe" (Firth, Hubert, & Forge, 1970). Despite the fact that they live in different households and no longer belong to the nuclear family of respondent, parents and siblings of adults continue to have great emotional and cognitive significance. For instance, most siblings wish to keep in touch with each other and are each aware, at a minimum, of the whereabouts and general circumstances of the other. Social comparison between siblings, even in adulthood, is frequent. The cognitive function of family members does not end when they do not share a common residence any more. The importance of family members as orientational others[21] point to emotional support and perceived support as main sources of social capital in families.

Transitivity

Research on family resources focuses on quantity of support, either instrumental or emotional. This has proven to be a useful approach to the subject, as quantity of support does indeed matter for conjugal and parental relationships: individuals with more support do better on a variety of outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sandler & Barrera, 1984; Sarason et al., 1991; Widmer & Weiss, 2000). But quantity is not the only option; quality or, in other words, "structure", also matters. So far, the structures of social capital provided by family configurations is not well known. The way in which support is organized within family configurations has implications for what happens in key family dyads. One important result of research on

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[19] This point may seem obvious. However, most large datasets available on intergenerational transfers in the United States or Europe put a strong emphasis on material and financial support and relegate the issue of emotional transfers to a marginal status. Therefore, we know little about the emotional and cognitive dimensions of family configurations.

[20] Note that, once established, the persistence of someone as a member of one's psychological network does not require frequent, recent, or long interactions.

[21] See introduction.

social networks is that relationships tend to promote a state of transitivity or so called "balance". In the case of families, this state is achieved when emotionally close family members of close family members are also close, or when close family members of disliked or remote family members are kept at distance or are disliked as well. On the other hand, a state of intransitivity or imbalance exists when close family members of close family members are disliked or disregarded, or when disliked family members of close family members are emotionally close. Figure 3 presents a transitivity case and an intransitivity case in two hypothetical family triads. In the transitive case, the respondent emotionally depends on her mother, who depends on her partner, and the respondent depends on her stepfather as well. In the intransitive case, although the respondent is supported by her mother who is supported by her partner, the respondent does not acknowledge her mother's new partner as an emotional resource. This situation is likely to create complications.

INSERT FIGURE 3.1 HERE

Figure 3. Transitivity in triads

As a matter of fact, following the theory of Fritz Heider (1946; 1958), a renowned psychologist, people feel uncomfortable when they believe the members of their personal networks do not like each other. Therefore, they try to avoid such states in their actual relationships. They also underestimate the occurrence of this situation and overestimate the occurrence of relational balance. In other words, they tend to organize and perceive their relationships with others transitively. As a matter of fact, individuals are more at ease reporting transitive relationships existing in their configurations. They remember transitive structures better than non-transitive ones, and they systematically bias the perception of their own relationships toward transitivity[22].

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[22] These statements are supported by a number of results from research on social networks. It is impossible to make reference to all researchers who contributed to this line of research (for instance, Davis, 1979; Davis & Leinhardt, 1972; De Sotto & Albrecht, 1968; Freeman, 1992; Heider, 1958; Krackhardt, 1987; Killworth & Bernard, 1976; Kumbassar, Romney & Batchelder, 1994; Moreno, 1934; Newcomb, 1961).

This tendency of social relationships towards transitivity has various implications for groups. First, it is a prerequisite for the ordering of status, prestige, power and influence in groups: when triads are transitive, situations of "double bind" or relational inconsistencies, in which two individuals give contradictory orders to a third individual, seldom occur, as individuals are placed in an ordered line of command: Individual A obeys to individual B who obeys to individual C, and A also obeys to C. Authority is much strengthened in transitive triads. Support also has a specific quality when it is organized transitively: The fact that an individual receives support from a second and a third individual, while the second individual also receives support from the third individual, creates a high level of consistency in support compared with a configuration in which the first individual receives support from a second individual, who receives support from a third individual but the first individual does not receive support from the third individual. In a transitive triad, the two helpers can coordinate themselves while supporting the first person, which is not the case in an intransitive triad. Transitivity also increases role differentiation and clustered subgroups. When any two persons indirectly connected by a third one are directly connected, the likelihood of having sparse configurations is low and the likelihood of finding clearly defined group boundaries in a network is high. Transitivity leads in time to dense configurations or, at least, to dense subsets of relationships in a configuration, that is subgroups of individuals linked to each other by third parties. In a word, transitivity creates social integration within configurations.

How does that apply to family configurations? Family ties frequently develop following a transitive logic. The British anthropologist Harris made this point: "Persons related by familial kinship matter because of familial involvement rather than because of kinship recognition." A sister's son matters because of the emotional links between the two sisters, and the mother with the son, though the aunt lacks a direct emotional involvement with her nephew in the first place. The emotional significance of the nephew is the result of the juxtaposition of two familial relationships (Harris, 1990). This process is possible because intimate ties are likely to combine and create additional relationships. This is especially true, as suggested by Harris, in the case of blood ties, for which there is a tendency to spread across generational lines. Because of parents, grandparents and grandchildren connect together. Because of siblings, uncles and nephews, aunts and nieces, become interdependent.

In the exploratory research done on young adults in the United States[23], 17 out of 25 individuals perceived their family configurations to be transitively organized. Therefore, in the majority of cases, individuals had structurally balanced family configurations. This result indeed confirms the intuition of James Coleman (1988), for whom family ties are synonymous to *bonding social capital*, e.g., a set of strongly interconnected individuals linked by long term, multifunctional, status-based and transitive ties. Much of the work emphasizing family relationships as social capital is indeed based on its definition in terms of bonding social capital. From this perspective, social capital is hypothesized to stem from family configurations characterized by an orientation towards blood relatives, who have usually known each other for a long time and have statutory obligations to remain in contact. The links between siblings, their own offspring and their parents is secured by a series of reinforcing interdependencies associated with the family history across generations. Cousins learn to know each other and respect their aunts and uncles under the pressure of their parents, who are subordinated to their own parents. The transitive and well connected configurations stemming from blood relatedness enhances expectations, claims, obligations and trust among individuals because of an increase of normative control. It also facilitates communication flows by multiplying the number of information channels and reducing the number of intermediaries within a chain. In closed family configurations, support has a collective nature, as several individuals coordinate their efforts when helping another.

Of the 25 American college students, however, eight presented significant deviation from transitivity. The assumption that transitivity and bonding social capital are overly dominant in contemporary families is indeed challenged by demographic and social changes, sometimes confusingly interpreted as family decline. Family configurations of late modernity create room for imbalance and intransitivity. As a matter of fact, scholars have emphasized that relationships among stepparents and stepchildren are different than relationships between parents and children. For instance, stepfathers develop a strong relationship with their partners, who keep a strong tie with their biological children from their previous marriage. However, because relationships among stepparents and stepchildren are less intimate, less supportive, and are associated with

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[23] See chapter two.

more conflicts than relationships between parents and children, remarriage is likely to create intransitive triads such as the one presented in Figure 3, in which two strong ties coexist with a negative or weak tie.

Relationships with in-laws are associated with structural imbalance as well, as they are more distant or more tense than relations with parents. Although the partner to partner relationship and the mother-son relationship are usually strong, the mother-in-law - daughter-in-law relationships are often associated with tensions, which are even greater when the daughter-in-law has a child (Fischer, 1983). Those tendencies create imbalance in triads that include in-laws. Thus, people are likely to report a significant amount of intransitivity in their set of family members. For instance, both a parent and a partner are close to a person, but at the same time, this person acknowledges that they are only weakly, and even negatively, connected to each other[24].

Consider again the case of Betty, this 54-year-old female, with two children married twice, with both marriages having ended in divorce. Interdependencies in Betty's family configuration follow a complex pattern. In order to measure social capital in this family, we asked each of them to report the degree of closeness they feel toward other members[25]. Results for the family configuration as a whole, as well as for only those members included directly by Betty, are reported in Table 5.

INSERT TABLE 3.1 HERE

Table 5. Closeness in the family configuration of Betty (percent)

Only a minority of relationships are among 'very close' or 'close' persons. Two thirds of the relationships among family members of Betty are considered 'somewhat close' or less. This result holds true even when one considers only individuals included by Betty. It is especially noteworthy that 28 percent of the configuration members do not know each other at all. This example points at the fact that bonding social capital and transitivity cannot be taken for granted in contemporary families. The

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[24] One solution to this dilemma is for the individual to develop strong interdependencies with her in-laws. This solution has however consequences for the partnership and for interdependencies with blood relatives.

[25] The question was: " For each of the following persons, please tell me if s/he is:" a very close person to you; close; somewhat close; acquaintance; barely know; not known at all.

lack of transitivity of relations with step-parents, in-laws and former partners suggests that many of them do not provide a bonding type of social capital.

Does that mean that Betty lacks social capital? When asked, she reported that she could indeed count on her family members, even though she had to do it on an individual basis rather than to expect a collective type of support, except for support provided by her siblings. The situation created by her two divorces is indeed a peculiar one, revealing another type of resources than bonding social capital. A second conceptualization of social capital applies on the experience of Betty by the bridging potential of social ties. Contrary to Coleman's perspective (1988), Ronald Burt (2001), a sociologist and network researcher, describes social capital as a function of brokerage opportunities: the weaker interdependencies between subgroups of a network create holes in the structure that provide some persons – brokers or bridgers - with opportunities to mediate the flow of information between network members and hence to control the projects that bring them together. Burt, along with another sociologist, Mark Granovetter (1973), argues that full transitivity may be detrimental to individuals, as it is associated with social homogeneity, a lack of personal control over oneself and an absence of non-redundant information. According to research on firms and trade markets, brokerage positions in networks provide greater opportunities to innovate, a larger autonomy in transactions, and access to new information. *Bridging social capital*, that is, the ability of playing a gatekeeper position between two unrelated sides of a network, is a resource provided to individuals by some family configurations more than by others. Betty has indeed an intermediary position between her previous partner, her children, her friends considered as family members, her siblings and her mother. This situation has some advantages for Betty, as she has achieved a level of autonomy that is unknown in dense family configurations. This enables her, as we will see in chapter 7, to deal with the relationships with her mother in a responsive way.

Dimensioning Social Capital

Social capital is a multidimensional construct. Bridging and bonding social capitals should not be regarded as opposites, as they may, in some cases, appear together. How do we know what types of social capital is present in a family? First, the sheer number of individuals present in the family configuration is an

indicator of social capital: the more family members there are, the larger the family-based social capital is. This is even more true when focusing on supportive family members. Knowing how many others are resources for respondents permits to measure the extent to which they are embedded in a set of active relationships. Overall, this indicator refers to a bonding type of social capital, as interdependencies have a local character[26].

Density, which is computed as the number of existing connections divided by the number of pairs of family members included by respondent, e.g., potential connections, is another indicator of bonding social capital. It can be computed for respondents' supporting family members, for respondents' supported family members, or for the full family configuration. In his founding article on social capital, James Coleman (1988) stressed the beneficial impact of dense set of interdependencies on various kinds of communities, including schools and businesses. Dense networks indeed feature many transitive triads. When dyadic relationships are under the scrutiny of third parties that are interconnected, the two individuals can trust each other more, as they know that deviations from the rules will be known throughout the network. Parents in contact with each other and with the school authorities are more able than disconnected parents to frame their children's behaviours and support them in their school work. The higher the density, the more likely the individual is to be embedded in collective support and control. For instance, the density of the family configuration presented in Figure 4 is .47, meaning that about half of the supportive ties possible in this case exist. This is significantly more than in Figure 5, where only one fifth of possible connections are perceived by respondent as existing. Density is the most commonly used indicator of bonding social capital.

A third measure concerns the number of components present in family configurations. A component is a subset of individuals that is disconnected from the configuration, and in which all individuals can reach each other either directly, or indirectly throughout their interdependencies with intermediaries. Two persons who are connected neither directly nor indirectly do not belong to the same component. The more components there are in a family configuration, the less it is able to work as a group. The change of number of components when the respondents are removed by the researcher from the graph capturing their family

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[26] They are local as they concern the individuals to whom the respondent is directly connected by strong ties. Recall that all family members are not necessarily supportive, as they may be included in family configurations because of the conflicts and tensions that they have generated (see chapter one).

configurations is an informative indicator of bridging social capital. If the number of components greatly increases when respondents are taken out of the graph, their position of intermediaries is confirmed: their bridging social capital is high, as their removal makes the graph significantly less connected. For instance, the family configuration presented in Figure 5 splits into three components when the respondent is removed, while the family configuration in Figure 4 remains fully connected after her removal.

Finally, the betweenness centrality captures the proportion of connections for which the respondent is in a position of intermediary. In Figure 4, for instance, the respondent has a high betweenness centrality (both in terms of supportive and supported family members) as many members of her family configuration do not have direct connections with each other, but must use the respondent as an intermediary in order to be connected. This is not the case of the family configuration in Figure 5, in which a large majority of family members have direct connections with each other, and therefore do not need the respondent as an intermediary. Betweenness centralization is a generalization of the respondent's betweenness centrality. It measures the proportion of interdependencies in the family configuration captured by any individual. A family configuration is said to be centralized if a small number of individuals lie between all other members' chains of interdependencies[27].

The combination of size, density, components and centrality provides a good approximation of the structures of social capital in family configurations. They should be used conjointly, as some individuals may benefit from both bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Four types of relational resources hence characterize family configurations (Table 6).

INSERT TABLE 3.2 HERE

Table 6. Types of social capital in family configurations

Individuals with no family-based social capital are those with the least interdependencies. They are disadvantaged in terms of emotional and instrumental resources. Individuals with bridging social capital and no bonding social capital are likely to have experienced a series of family discontinuities of various natures, such as regular changes of residence or serial divorces and remarriages, both of their parents and on their

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[27] Usually, respondents are the most central nodes in the graph, as the *Family Network Method* measures personal networks, also called "ego-network".

own. Those experiences might not necessarily be disruptive in an ontological sense pertaining to their

identity, but they indeed create many focus points[28] in a life time and, as a consequence, distinct subsets of

family members, for which they are bridgers or brokers[29]. Individuals with bonding social capital and no

bridging social capital in their family configurations are likely to have experienced a stable life trajectory

both in their childhood and their adulthood, with a swift transition from the household of their parents, to

their own status as partners and parents. Those individuals have supportive but also quite controlling family

configurations, which may help them to progress in their local environment, but which do not link them with

a diversity of family members and which decrease their structural autonomy. Individuals who have a

comprehensive type of social capital are the most adaptative to the constraints of modern life, as they benefit

at the same time from local embeddedness and from diverse and open family environments. As experiences

learned in the family contexts during childhood and adolescence have enduring consequences[30], being

confronted to any of this four types of social capital is likely to shape distinct life trajectories and life

projects, in which localism and openness are unequally developed.

Blood and Friendship in Families

Does the composition of family configurations[31] matter for social capital? All family configurations do

not provide the same amount and type of social capital. In the previous section, we stressed that blood ties

may create more transitivity than non-blood ties such as marriage. Thus, two partners frequently have quite

different family members, because they do not have the same blood connections (Stein, Bush, Ross & Ward,

1992). Indeed, the types of family configurations presented in Chapter 2 have consequences for bonding and

bridging social capital[32]. As exemplified in Figure 4, respondents in beanpole family configurations, where

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[28] See chapters 7 and 8 for a detailed presentation on the interrelations between life events, focus points and family configurations.

[29] This indeed represents a specific kind of family integration, in which individuals are intermediaries among otherwise disconnected subgroups. The model of Simmel (1999) on intersecting circles is a classical reference accounting for this type of social integration.

[30] A large literature exists on the impact of non-normative events in childhood on the development of individuals in adulthood life. For instance, individuals who have experienced a high level of family conflict in childhood or adolescence are more likely to develop poor conjugal satisfaction, a phenomenon described as belonging to the divorce cycle (Wolfinger, 2005).

[31] See chapter 2.

[32] These results are presented in more details in a series of publications (Widmer, 1999b; Widmer, 2004; Widmer, 2006; Widmer, 2007).

blood relationships are dominant, have a low centrality, as their family members are commonly interdependent. Although the mother's side and the father's side do not fully overlap, they are connected by the mother's and the father's interdependencies with their own in-laws. The respondent is part of a large group of siblings, which is itself included in a large, mostly blood-oriented, family configuration. The central position of the grandparents is typical of beanpole family configurations.

INSERT FIGURE 3.2 AND 3.3 HERE

Figure 4. A beanpole family configuration

Figure 5. A friendship family configuration

In family configurations characterized by blood relationships, individuals are embedded in dense sets of interdependencies. Respondents have a low centrality in their own families, e.g., many interdependencies among their family members do not depend on them, and their family configurations are resistant to their own removal. As these configurations include the grandparents, the parents, some uncles, some aunts, and in many cases, some cousins, they represent a typical case of bonding social capital, with respondents being under the scrutiny of a large number of interconnected blood relatives. Recall that this type of social capital has advantages and disadvantages of its own. Individuals in these family configurations have less autonomy in their everyday life and decisions. But they also benefit from a collective rather than dyadic form of support and normative framing. When family configurations are dense, emotional support flow through multiple channels, with the probability of having them all at one point suddenly disrupted being small, and the likelihood of having several persons collaborating in giving support being high. Dense family configurations also exert more normative pressure towards conformity, as many family members interact while shaping each individual's behaviours and ideas.

Figure 5 features a friendship family configuration: although friends develop interdependencies with each other, they are disconnected from other family members, except for the respondent. Thus, because of this separation of the family configuration into two or more components, respondents have a high centrality in such family configurations and are integrated in a large number of otherwise disconnected subgroups. In

friendship family configurations, bridging social capital is hence dominant. These "star-like" family configurations split into several separate subgroups when respondents are removed. Therefore, individuals control the flow of communication much more than in other types of family configurations. In fact, family members cannot contact each other without their help. Therefore, they have a great amount of autonomy from their family members in their everyday lives and decisions. However, they do not benefit from the collective support and the normative framing associated with beanpole family configurations. On the other hand, these "star-like" family configurations also exert less normative pressure towards conformity, as family members are much less able to collaborate for influencing respondents; they may even exert contradictory normative influences on respondents.

What happens when older adults are considered? Overall, identical results were found in the study of 101 women in older adulthood[33] regarding the impact of blood and intergenerational ties versus non-blood horizontal ties on bridging and bonding social capital. Family configurations in which a high number of blood ties exist and that include parents of the respondents feature a higher density, a lower centralization and a lower number of components than family configurations constituted by siblings and friends, which develop a bridging type of social capital[34]. Families by blood or by choice (Weston, 1997) have indeed distinct consequences for social integration also in the parental stage.

These results shed light on the effects of family configurations on social capital. Family configurations vary in the extent to which they include fathers, stepparents, parents in laws, friends, siblings' partners and children, and former partners[35]. These variations have a strong impact on the social capital that they make available to individuals. In terms of bonding social capital, family configurations oriented towards grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins are optimal. On the other hand, they lack the autonomy provided to individuals by bridging social capital in friendship family configurations.

Trusting Family Members

The importance of trust for the Family and for society has been underlined in the last decades. Trust allows individuals to be active in a variety of situations while having only a limited knowledge and little

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[33] See Chapter two.
[34] The case of post-divorce family configurations will be considered in chapter five.
[35] See Chapter one.

control over them. It makes actions and relations possible in situations where face-to-face interactions are not possible (Giddens, 1990). Therefore, trust is a resource for individual actions as well as for collective purposes in families. It makes it possible for individuals to take risks while accepting the possible state of disappointment when a decision is made that is contrary to their expectations. Trust helps people get over the complexities of family interactions in late modernity.

In a functionalist perspective, the nuclear family is normatively trustworthy. Unless one's nuclear family is on the verge of collapse, one should trust its members. The mother-wife is normatively defined as the main provider of love, and the father-husband as the main breadwinner; children also have specialized roles according to their sex and their age. In this perspective, all members are trusted, as they fill clear functional roles and social statuses in the family unit. The normative dimension of family statuses may however have less importance in late modernity societies, because they are associated with less clearly defined expectations. The role of a stepfather or a stepmother, for instance, was acknowledged as normatively undefined (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994); expectations toward stepparents are not provided by the societal context. In a time of desinstitutionalization of marriage itself (Cherlin, 2004), it may well be that trust in family roles beyond the nuclear family has gained some importance. In order to see how trust develops in families, we again referred to the family configurations of women with a least one co-resident child in their household[36]. Trust was measured by asking how much respondents trust each of their family members[37].

Results show that trust in family members goes well beyond the nuclear family, as it concerns not only spouses or co-resident children but also non-co-resident parents and siblings. Trust is therefore not limited to the household but crosses its boundaries to link individuals who have a history of shared intimacy. Family statuses, however, cover a variety of processes that, to a large extent, explain their effect on trust. Indeed, trust is accounted for by dyadic processes, such as the development of reciprocal supportive interactions between family members. Father, mother and siblings are especially trusted in adulthood. These

[36] Analyses on trust and family configurations are presented in more details in a forthcoming publication (de Carlo & Widmer, forthcoming).

[37]. The question reads: "For all persons included in your list, can you tell me how much you trust her?" The possible responses were: absolute trust, a large trust, some trust, low trust, no trust at all. The answers were initially coded on a five point scale. The scale was then dichotomized to perform logistic regressions. The active modality in further analysis corresponds to higher scores on the scale.

family statuses are activated by a variety of relational interdependencies between specific persons. In other words, individuals trust in their relatives in adulthood because positive and reciprocal interactions have developed throughout their lives. Doing the family work (Schneider, 1980) in daily interactions provides the basis for trust to develop. The highest levels of trust are found in cases in which both respondents and family members provide and receive support. Another main factor of trust holds in the extent to which family members achieve a high level of priority in one's life, a situation we referred to as loyalty. Various events such as weddings, birthdays, and other collective gathering create new focus points in which the interdependencies with family members can be expressed publicly by gifts and other material means (Finch, 1989). The level of interdependency toward family members is also expressed when non-normative events such as divorce, health problems or death of a family member occur. The extent to which individuals care for each other in those hardships provides clear indications to all about the level of priority given to each relationship.

Overall, the development of trust relates to family members with whom a long history of positive interdependencies exists. Those individuals belong to the larger family configuration and respond to its organization of interdependencies. Respondents embedded in dense and supportive family configurations have a much greater likelihood of benefiting from a high level of trust. In other words, the level of individual trust in family members not only depends on one's relationships with others, but also on the patterns of interdependencies that exist overall in family configurations. Families in which there is a great number of supportive interdependencies trigger a high level of trust in each dyad. In other words, bonding social capital is associated with greater trust. Therefore, trust does not only depend on the personal ability of respondents to develop active relationships with family members, but also on the overall density of interdependencies in their family configurations. As we saw in the previous section, the extent to which family configurations develop dense sets of ties depends on their composition. Indeed, beanpole family configurations develop a higher density of supportive interactions. The inclusion of parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, and aunts in one's family configuration makes the likelihood of benefiting from trust higher because many family members are interconnected. In other types of family configurations, such as friendship families, with a lower density of interdependencies, trust is linked with the development of dyadic relationships, without

additional positive impact of the family configuration. In all cases, trust depends to a large extent on the set of reciprocal supportive relationships that have been built, or not, in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood by individuals. These sets of dyadic interdependencies are not fully personal, however, as they are embedded in larger configurations of family interdependencies.

Emotional Interdependencies in an International Perspective

How do the United States and Switzerland currently stand compared with other countries concerning emotional support provided by interpersonal relationships? To what extent family members beyond the nuclear family are defined as important sources of emotional support? Comparing families across cultures has been a concern of anthropological research for decades. Scholars have pointed out that many societies around the world share common normative attitudes toward family relationships, including the incest taboo, the regulation of sexuality and fertility by marriage, and a concern for intergenerational relationships (Lévi-Strauss, 1949; Murdock, 1949). The same authors however also underline that family relationships present a great variety of patterns from culture to culture. Even in the Western world, countries differ in their emphasis on the nuclear family, paternal or maternal kin.

To address the importance of family members for social capital in various countries, we capitalize on data from the *International Social Survey Program (ISSP)*, made available by the Zentralarchiv fuer Empirishe Sozialforschung, Koeln. An established program of cross-national collaboration, the ISSP has facilitated social science surveys since 1985 (Smith, 1992). In 2004, independent research institutions replicated survey questions on social networks. Data are available for 37 mainly Western and industrial countries. Because the focus of this book is on family configurations in the United States and Switzerland, two democratic countries with a market economy, we focus on countries that share these features. These include *formerly socialist states* of The Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia; the *Southern European states* of Italy and Spain; the *Scandinavian social democracies* of Norway Denmark and Finland; the *conservative welfare states* of France, Austria, and West Germany; and the *liberal welfare states* of Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Switzerland and the U.S. (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Stier, Lewin-Epstein, and Braun, 1999). Sample sizes range from 428 in East-Germany or 912 in Great-Britain to 1560 in Norway. ISSP data improve

on data presented in this book, both because of the large number of countries included and because of their representativeness[38].

Respondents were asked the following question: "Now suppose you felt just a bit down or depressed, and you wanted to talk about it. Who would you turn to first for help?" An additional question was then asked: "And who would you turn to second if you felt a bit down or depressed and wanted to talk about?" Both questions had the same answer categories that enlisted family members and friends: husbands-wife-partner, mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother, other blood relatives, in-law relatives, close friends and a series of alternative social roles such as neighbours, members of the clergy or psychologists, which we recoded into a single category. A response category was also included for individuals who said that they had nobody to turn to. The percentage distributions for the 20'000 respondents were aggregated into a matrix of 20 rows (the countries) by 24 columns (the 12 response categories for each of the two questions), which is presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

Overall, partners and friends are defined as the most significant providers of psychological support. More than half respondents cite a partner as a significant support provider. This does not mean, however, that only partners are important. Indeed, on average, 18 percent individuals cite their mother as significant, 16 percent a daughter, 13 percent a sister. Male family statuses are less frequently cited, as fathers are only cited by four percent, son by eight percent and brothers by five percent of respondents. Other blood relatives only account for three percent of citations, as are in-laws. Only a very small minority do not cite someone as a significant help provider. Overall, there is a diversity of family statuses cited beyond the conjugal tie. Adults indeed keep on being connected with their parents and siblings, as the results show. Older adults use their children as support providers. This is especially the case for the second individual to whom one would ask emotional support in case of need. Table 8 indeed shows distributions with much larger variances than Table 7. Therefore, family ties are used as backup and support for partnerships.

INSERT TABLE 3.3 HERE

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[38] Note, however, that ISSP data do not enable researchers to address the structural dimension of support as they do not include information about ties linking family members of respondents with each other. Only the ties between respondents and their family members are considered. They also focus on positive ties and exclude conflicts and ambivalences.

Table 7. First individual to be called for emotional support (percent)

INSERT TABLE 3.4 HERE

Table 8. Second individual to be called for emotional support (percent)

Beyond commonalities shared by all countries, do countries present distinct patterns concerning support providers? A data reduction strategy is called for in order to identify such configurations of relationships in such large datasets. Cluster analysis was used to group countries into "attitude regimes" that share common views about support provided by family members and friends. From hierarchical cluster analysis, three clusters of attitudes towards friends and family members emerge, which are summarized in Table 9.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Table 9. Cluster of attitudes towards family members and friends as emotional support providers (percent)

The United States, Switzerland, Italy, Northern Ireland and France belong to a first cluster of countries characterized by a lower centrality of partners in comparison with other countries. The United States and Switzerland, despite their distinct linguistic contexts and the spatial distance separating them, are part of a group of countries with a more diverse set of significant family members than other countries. In the two contexts in which the analyses presented in the previous chapters took place, conjugal relationships have less clear-cut primacy than in other countries. The United States and Switzerland are known for their high rate of divorce and a minimalistic intervention of State policies in family life, as well as a liberal type of social welfare. The explanation is however not straightforward, as some of the other countries included in this cluster share a fully different historical path, with lower rate of divorce. Australia, Germany (East and West), Great-Britain, Norway, New-Zealand, Canada, Denmark, Finland belong to a second cluster in which there is more emphasis on partners whereas the other family terms are slightly less frequently included as help providers. Indeed, other blood relatives and in-laws are less often cited than in the first group of countries. This focus on partners is however not overwhelming, as only half of respondents in those countries include

partners as their first help providers and 59 percent include a partner overall. Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland and Spain constitute a third cluster of countries in which individuals are slightly more centred on children. Daughters are included by 20 percent of individuals belonging to this cluster as providing support, against 11 percent in the kinship oriented cluster and 15 percent in the partner oriented cluster. The emphasis on children is therefore somewhat stronger than in other contexts.

Overall, the profiles of the three clusters are very similar and the differences among them rather slight. Are they family models or variants around a common cultural understanding of family relationships? To assess the relative significance of cluster effects and country effects on family social capital, we generalize a one-way, nested ANOVA design, following a methodology that we have developed to investigate other issues (Widmer, Treas & Newcomb, 1998; Treas & Widmer, 2000). This yields a decomposition of the sums of square of Tables 14 and 15 into the components attributable to shared attitudes, attitudes common to multi-country clusters, and attitudes specific to individual countries. The three component sums of squares add to the total sum of squares, that is the total variations of attitudes towards helpful others in the set of twenty countries considered. The larger the sum of squares between clusters is , the more distinct the cluster from the average attitude profile. The smaller the within sum squares is, the more homogeneous the cluster and the less important national cultures [39]. The total variance in tables 14 and 15 is 4.87 and the consensus model is 4.48, that is, 92 percent of the total variance. For the three clusters, the between-cluster sum of squares is 20 (four percent) and the within-cluster sum of squares is .19 (four percent). The consensus across the 20 western countries considered here is therefore very high, as only a very small portion of the variance is attributable to clusters or countries or to profiles specific to countries. Overall, there is a large homogeneity in the way in which country profiles consider emotional support provided by family members and others. The consensus is significantly greater in this realm than in the realm of attitudes towards non marital sex or women work (Widmer, Treas & Newcomb, 1999; Treas & Widmer, 2000). The cluster profiles only account for a very

[39] We compute the sum of squares across the 20 rows of table 14, using the "average" response as the basic model. The average response is 8 percent, the result of dividing the 100 percent total for each of the two variables (first supportive individual and second supportive individual) by 12, its number of response categories. Thus, we use .08 to compute the sum of squares for the overall data set. To find out how much is shared by countries, we compute the sum of squares between the mean proportion of each variable and the ..08 mean of the overall data set. We subtract from this number the within and between clusters' sum of squares.

small part of the total variance. There are no distinct family regimes within Western countries, but rather distinct cultural sensitivities built on a common understanding of how family and friendship work for emotional support.

Cluster analysis identifies three cultural variants expressing the common understanding of the resources provided by family members and friends in slightly distinct ways: the multiplex orientation, the conjugal orientation and the children orientation. Since the cluster analysis shows the United States and Switzerland belong to the multiplex orientation, this study confirms that the two countries from which the various samples and case studies presented in this book come, share a similar approach to the family realm within a large consensus among countries regarding the importance of family ties for emotional support.

In any case, the nuclear family as a cultural construct stressing the monopoly of the spouse for the provision of emotional support, is associated with social conditions that have dramatically altered during the last 30 years: permanent employment with generous benefits, stability of social and cultural norms, economic growth, a social welfare state, and a conjugal tie meant to last. Even though this model has changed, there is a great similarity in the ways in which the contribution of family members to social capital is defined across national contexts, as the analyses performed indicate. In all countries, partners play a major role in psychological support. Although the other family statuses taken separately only represent a modest percentage of the total, they provide a major part of the help when considered together. In other words, interpersonal ties beyond the nuclear family matter. Adults maintain or develop strong emotional interdependencies towards their parents, in-laws, siblings and other blood or non-blood family members. The isolation of the nuclear family is no more granted, its primacy is no more insured. There are many alternatives to ties between husbands and wives in the realm of the family. Family based social capital beyond the nuclear family in Western countries is therefore confirmed by a large and representative survey such as the ISSP.

Does Social Capital Matter?

The configurational perspective states that any family dyad is to a large extent explained by the family configuration in which it is embedded. Does this hypothesis hold true? In other words, does social capital matter for key family relationships such as partnerships and parent-child relationships? System theory, from

Watzlawick to Minuchin (Broderick, 1993), has emphasized that subsystems constituting the nuclear family, such as the conjugal, the parent-child and the sibling subsystems, are interdependent. The configurational perspective goes a step further and asserts that they are parts of larger family contexts, from which they draw resources while trying to protect their boundaries for the sake of their own functioning.

Family configurations indeed influence conjugal satisfaction in a variety of ways. In a series of scientific articles, we addressed the impact of configurations of family members and friends on conjugal quality and parenting, using a representative sample of 1,534 couples in which both partners were interviewed (Kellerhals, Widmer & Levy, 2004; Widmer, Kellerhals & Levy ,2004; Widmer, Legoff, Hammer, Kellerhals, Levy, 2006). Various questions about interdependencies with relatives and friends were asked to each partner independently. Using a cluster analysis, six distinct types of configurations were identified, mixing friends and relatives. Sparse networks refer to couples disconnected from relatives and friends, thus representing a case of isolation. About one fifth of couples are friendship oriented rather than kinship oriented. Laterality is another feature that has proven to be structurally and functionally significant. In about four cases over 10, partners do not have equally present and supportive networks. In one couple over 10, strong support is associated with attempts to control and interference by family members. Couples with sparse networks are those that show the lowest conjugal quality; a lack of connections with larger configurations of ties has indeed a negative impact on conjugal quality for both men and women. Only one configuration is systematically associated with significantly improved conjugal quality. As a matter of fact, configurations have a positive impact on conjugal quality only when they are strong for both partners, with a large share of supportive blood ties, which do not interfere with the conjugal dyad.

This is also the case for the parent-child dyad[40]. As is true for conjugal dyads, most empirical research on parent-child dyads has disregarded their integration in larger configurations of interdependencies. In contrast, some scholars have underlined that support from relatives enhances parenting (Belsky, 1984; Belsky, 1990; Chen & Kaplan, 2001; Cowan, Powell & Cowan, 1998). Various mechanisms explain the impact of family configurations on parenting. Parents with more social support and fewer negative interactions with family members provide more sensitive care to their children and have fewer conflicts with

[40] The influence of configurations on parenting and child development is extensively covered in Widmer, Legoff, Hammer, Kellerhals, Levy (2006).

them. Support from family members enhances the psychological well-being and the self-efficacy of parents. For instance, a mother's self confidence as a parent is bolstered by praise from a supportive network member. The psychological resources of parents are of great importance to the parenting process. More mature parents, with more robust psychological well-being, are more able to provide adequate stimulation to their children. Family configurations and friends have an indirect effect on parent-child relationships and parenting by their influence on the conjugal subsystem and the psychological well-being of parents. In decreasing the likelihood for parents of experiencing psychological distress or conjugal problems and conflicts, and in increasing the quality of their coping strategies, configurations constituted by active family members and friends on both parents' sides positively influence parenting and parent-child relationships by strengthening the conjugal subsystem, which is the principal support subsystem for parents.

Both conjugal and parent-child relationships depend to a large extent on social capital provided by family configurations to which they belong. This has implications for a large array of issues. For instance, the concept of dyadic coping, which comes from psychological research on conjugal quality, makes researchers focus on the internal interactions of couples as predictors of separation and divorce. The importance of external factors potentially influencing conjugal coping has been acknowledged by family psychologists. For instance, they point to the increasing risk of divorce stemming from stress originating outside the conjugal relationship (Bodenmann et al., 2004). One can hence conceptualize coping strategies of couples as *embedded coping,* e.g.,strategies connected to the family configuration (but also to friends and possibly to other acquaintances) in which couples are embedded in their everyday lives, which provides them with social capital. Some studies in clinical psychology underline that resolution skills are not the central element on which therapists must intervene when dealing with couples in conflict. Couples with poor problem-solving skills are as satisfied as couples with good problem-solving skills when positive affects between partners are still strong, a result consistent with the hypothesis that the resolution of problems is less critical than how partners define and understand the context in which their differences of opinions are discussed[41]. Taking family configurations into account is helpful to understand why working on a couple's problem resolution skills and interpersonal communication abilities is not always effective at solving

[41] See Widmer et al. (2009) for further developments and references.

problems over a long period of time, or why some couples with troubles have more difficulty fixing their problems than others with apparently the same psychological and communication abilities but with quite divergent family configurations.

Conclusion

The pluralization of family configurations created by the increase of divorce and alternative family forms since the nineteen sixties has often been regarded as detrimental to the functions played by the Family in the realm of social integration. Overall, the assessment of family decline made by individualization theorists is strongly associated with their conceptualization of the Family as a small group with obvious boundaries and much stability on the long run (Bengston, 2001). As the nuclear family has decreased in number, the general public and some sociologists have eagerly assumed that the integrative function of families was endangered, with various negative consequences for society at large, such as increasing delinquency and school dropouts of children and adolescents, and raising life dissatisfaction and depression of adults.

In opposition to this perspective, the configurational approach of families points at the individualized resources that individuals develop in unbounded and heterogeneous family contexts. Even though the dyads of the nuclear family play a key role in one's life, they are embedded in a large set of family interdependencies that provide them with social capital. Relationships with parents, siblings and their partners, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, but also friends or neighbours considered as family members, constitute family configurations that have decisive integrative functions over one's life trajectory. They have a strong influence on the more central family dyads in their daily functioning. They may also play key roles in delimited time periods of life, especially in life transitions such as the transition to partnership, parenthood, divorce and widowhood.

the Family is a central configuration of late modernity. It provides resources and meaning to individuals, as various national surveys taken in the United States and Switzerland show[42]. There are, however, great

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[42] The *International Social Surveys* and the *World Values Survey* both reveal that the family satisfaction is considered to be the most significant factor in achieving overall life satisfaction in most Western countries, including the US and Switzerland.

differences in the structures of social capital provided by family configurations according to their composition. Family configurations based on blood ties and intergenerational relationships provide a bonding type of social capital, with much collective support and trust, but little individual autonomy. Quite distinctly, family configurations based on friends considered as family members provide bridging social capital by which family life opens up to a variety of ties, but with a more active individualized relational work needed. Such family configurations make individuals integrate into a large set of realities while keeping the emotional interdependencies to family members. This alternate form of social capital has profound and not necessarily negative consequences. Individuals who develop bridging social capital have a high level of structural autonomy and therefore more capabilities for action. Of course, this comes with a cost, as being a bridger means keeping possibly contradicting interdependencies on both sides of the bridge. This requires a great personal investment in time, energy and sociability. Therefore, individuals in that situation might not be as involved in maintaining lasting strong ties with specific family members, as they have more alternatives to consider, and less time and energy to invest in each of them individually. Overall, the normative expectations associated with family life in late modernity has changed with the development of bridging social capital in families; support imposed by dense family configurations is being replaced by relational structures in which individualized relational resources come to play a prominent role. Social capital in families is less and less defined by rights of birth or marriage obligations. In a social context where conjugal dyads have become more fragile, family configurations have resources to propose, but at some cost. The next chapter develops this point further by focusing on family conflicts and ambivalences.

CHAPTER 4 – Family conflicts

Family conflicts were for a long time of little interest to sociologists, who considered that their main responsibility was to address the contribution of the nuclear family to social integration. Family conflicts were left to psychologists or social workers, as personality disorders, poverty or social exclusion were supposed to explain their occurrence. That changed with the large increase of divorce in the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies, which provided serious evidence that indeed sociologists had to address family conflict as an issue. One understanding of it stems from individualization theory, which emphasizes the importance of massive cultural shifts towards the privatization of partnerships and the prominence of individual self-realization over the maintenance of family ties on the long run[43]. Family conflict is indeed often interpreted as a sign of family decline. The configurational perspective takes a different stand and analyses family conflicts as intertwined in commitments towards family members. Family interdependences are costly. The focus on the contributions of families to social integration has somehow obstructed the acknowledgement that interdependencies within family configurations create a large number of tensions and ambivalences[44]. This chapter first goes back on the interconnections linking conflict and interdependencies within families, stressing how easily family support becomes interference, a situation that triggers ambivalences of various kinds. Using several datasets, collected in the United States and Switzerland, it proceeds by showing that family conflicts frequently happen in strongly interdependent dyads or triads, within specific family configurations.

Being Interdependent in Conflict

The previous chapter revealed that various emotional and material interdependencies link individuals with a large number of family members in several distinct types of configurations. This, however, should be somehow paid for. German sociologist Georg Simmel emphasized in the early years of the twentieth century that competition and fights are social interactions in their own right (Simmel, 1955). Conflicts are not the

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[43] These trends certainly have some reality, but overemphasizing their explanatory power makes individuals believe that families are doomed by late modernity because of its emphasis on self-development and individual autonomy, while providing only few insights on how conflicts develop in empirical cases.

[44] This emphasis on positive interactions is most obvious in work on intergenerational solidarity done in the nineteen nineties (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994).

opposite of solidarity, as they often develop because of positive interdependencies. They are rooted in many family relationships, as they connect configuration members and make them interact intensely. During conflicts, communications are often at a high level; in many cases, family members do not develop conflicts because they want their relationships to end. They rather want them to be maintained but changed (Widmer, 1999a). If one has a conflict with a parent or a sibling, it is because the set of interdependencies that link the two individuals is valued: something needs to be changed in order for the interdependency to remain active. New interdependencies are often sought by family members through conflict. For instance, the higher dissatisfaction of women in marriage is in part due to their higher investment in family life. A major modality of conflict is one in which women are overly concerned with family issues such as money, leisure time or division of household tasks, and want things to improve in order to maintain the conjugal bond (Widmer et al., 2003). Partners frequently go through conflict to achieve a new organization of interdependencies between them.

In some other cases, the interdependency, while displeasing, cannot be disregarded: two persons living in the same household fight because they cannot avoid being in contact with each other[45]. Third parties such as parents and partners, because of the social pressure towards transitivity, create interdependencies between other family members who do do not like each other in the first place. The other person has to be dealt with, for instance because of a shared residence, a financial or emotional dependency. Many couples, parents and children develop regular conflicts without willing to put an end to their relationships. This is especially true in relationships that cannot be easily ended, such as those between parents and children, siblings in childhood and adolescence, or couples with young children. Conflict means in those cases that the interdependency between the two individuals cannot be avoided. Feelings of hate, jealousy and bother towards a person who is an intimate relate to the feelings of closeness and dependency that one feels towards this person. Violence between partners is an example of such interdependency. Men who become violent with women relate to various forms of emotional dependencies. Violent relationships keep on because individuals depend on each other on various grounds, emotional, financial, etc. In still other cases, positive interdependencies trigger negative feelings. Providing regular support to elderly parents is linked with ambivalence (Lüscher, 2002, 2004, 2009). Supportive relationships create tensions and conflicts that

[45] Indeed, as Moreno (1934) and Feld (1981) stress, focus points make people interdependent. See chapter 7 for further developments.

could be avoided by decreasing the positive exchanges linking family members, and the negative value of the relationship is directly connected with its positive value. It is impossible to understand why in that case children develop frustrations concerning their ageing parents without taking their supportive behaviours into account. In all these cases, there is a unity between the negative and the positive faces of relationships. Overall, family conflicts are not the opposite of positive ties as they are embedded in the set of the interdependencies linking individuals. For those reasons, conflict is not, in many cases, a consequence of poor family interdependencies but a part of the mix of interdependencies that define each family configuration in a unique manner.

Support and Interference

The larger family context in which conjugal or parent-child conflicts develop plays a central role in conflicts. Emotional and instrumental resources are scarce and their distributions within family configurations are related with power issues. Consider conjugal relationships once more. The previous chapter ended with the conclusion that bonding social capital constrains individuals in a structure of interdependencies that leaves little space for autonomous projects. The logic of support itself may indeed be at times disruptive. As a matter of fact, bonding social capital does not only have positive consequences. Some scholars have stressed the burdens associated with transitive configurations. Amoral familism, family interference and family overcare stress that a bonding social capital within families have detrimental effects that a bridging social capital escape from .

As a matter of facts, empirical research points at a curvilinear effect by support of family members and friends on partnerships (See for example, Johnson & Milardo, 1984; Julien et al., 1994; Holman, 1981). One major problem of being embedded in a dense family configuration is interference, that is, some configuration members intrude into conjugal relationships, for instance by giving advices on matters that concern the couple first. When family members are too involved in providing support, they become interfering, and as such, they may endanger conjugal or parent-child dyads. Intervention of third parties in an existing conjugal conflict reinforces partners' self-legitimacy, thus making a consensual solution less likely. Partners report greater marital conflict and ambivalence in conjugal relationships when wives frequently interact with friends rather than with relatives. Therefore, the amount of support received by couples is not linearly associated with their satisfaction. Support provided in configurations has quite different consequences for

conjugal dyads according to its perception or not as an interference. The effect of bonding social capital on parent-child relationships is also curvilinear, as it does not facilitate parent-child relationships and parenting when the expectations of parents and other configuration members about the child are inconsistent, or when family members are perceived by parents as competitors rather than as supporters in the parenting process (Widmer, Legoff, Hammer, Kellerhals, Levy, 2006).

The presence of strong interdependencies with configuration members, characterized at the same time by interference attempts and various types of support, is associated with an increased likelihood of couples to end with a divorce (Widmer, Kellerhals & Levy, 2004). As such, conjugal dissatisfaction and divorce are no more considered as the failure of a self-sufficient couple, but as one outcomes from a series of processes that include not only the partners, but also their parents, their siblings, their friends and their colleagues. Interference of family members and friends modifies the balance of interdependencies within couples. Family support often leads to conflict as it makes individual autonomy and the primacy of couples over other family relationships decrease.

Ambivalences

In the late nineteen nineties, in order to investigate such widespread cases, ambivalence was proposed as a promising concept to address the interplay between solidarity and conflict in intergenerational relationships, between adult children and their parents[46]. Ambivalence is defined as a situation in which a lasting co-occurrence of positive and negative dimensions coexist within a relationship (Lüscher, 2002 and 2004). Adults and their ageing parents are torn in many cases between the opposite norms of providing or receiving support, and maintaining their autonomy. In some cases, adult children wish to support their parents more but they cannot because of other commitments. Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) report several cases in which support given for a long period of time to an older adult endangers the conjugal relationship, and the relationship that the care giver develops with her own children, because of the difficulty of investing in all relationships at the same time. Likewise, according to Lüscher and Pillemer (1998), ambivalence in mother-daughter relationships is increased in adulthood when daughters have children. Such ambivalences are explained by the fact that investments done in the care of their mother by individuals lowers their

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[46] Kurt Lüscher and his collaborators are among the first to propose, by the end of the nineteen nineties to apply the concept of ambivalence to intergenerational family relationships (Lüscher, 2002, 2004).

investment in their partnership or their children. Individuals intertwined in such contradictions, develop ambivalent feelings toward family members. Indeed, there is a great number of cases in which care for an older parent by a child, or, to the contrary, financial support from a parent to an adult child, are loaded with ambivalence. Rather than being « either love or hate» types of relationships, family relationships are in many cases at the same time loaded with negative and positive feelings. Consider sibling relationships: because siblings in childhood and adolescence are compelled to live together, they develop a large number of conflicts (Widmer, 1999a). Indeed, relationships embedded in a strong structural or normative pressure to be persistent, trigger negative feelings while maintaining a high level of positive interdependencies. Not only intergenerational and sibling relationships but also conjugal relationships, among other family relationships, are loaded with ambivalence, as a variety of results on conflict management by couples shows (Widmer et al., 2003). Ambivalences, the configuration perspective sustains, are embedded in family interdependencies. Indeed, family resources in love, money, time and emotional support are scarce and claimed by large numbers of individuals who compete for their allocation.

Closeness and Conflicts

Consider again the case of Betty, this 54-year-old female married twice, with both marriages having ended in divorce. Chapter 3 showed that interdependencies in Betty's family configuration follow a complex pattern with many supportive relationships. Table 10 reports the percentage of support, conflict and ambivalent relationships in the 210 dyads that constitute the family configuration, according to the closeness that individuals feel towards others[47].

INSERT TABLE 10 ABOUT HERE

Table 10. Support, conflict and ambivalence according to the level of closeness

Conflicts are much more frequent among family members of Betty who consider each other very close or close than between family members who are only somewhat close or acquaintances. Seldom does conflict appear between individuals who are not closely related. Obviously, individuals who barely know or do not know each other at all are not in conflict. This case study points at the fact that family configurations include a mix of conflicts and supportive relationships, especially when family members are close. Just

[47] Ambivalence is measured as the simultaneous presence of conflict and emotional support in any dyad.

compare the supportive ties in Betty's family, as reported by each family member in Figure 6, with conflict ties in Figure 7.

INSERT PICTURE 4.1 HERE

Figure 6. Supportive ties in Betty's family configuration

Family members of Betty are densely connected both in terms of conflict and support. One notices a symmetry in patterns of conflict and support. Betty, her mother and siblings, constitute a subgroup of individuals highly interconnected by support and conflict. Indeed, there are persistent fights among siblings concerning the care to be provided to their mother. The mother of Betty continues to play an active role in the configuration, as she wishes to be in charge of the life of her grown up children. The contradictions in the parent-child dyads time after time spillover conjugal relationships, in which misunderstandings occur about what should be invested in the partnership and in intergenerational relationships.

INSERT PICTURE 4.2 HERE

Figure 7. Conflict ties in Betty's family configuration

This is especially the case of the dyads linking some of Betty's siblings and their partners. A high level of both conflict and support characterizes those dyads[48]. In other words, a large number of ties are simultaneously tense and supportive. Interestingly, these ties are located in the centre of the configuration, between the siblings of Betty and their mother, rather than on its periphery.

There is, however, another type of ambivalence in this family configuration, stemming from a contradiction between several relationships. Interestingly, Betty does not provide emotional support to neither her son, her son's father, nor to her former mother-in-law, but she does so with her daughter. This daughter has developed such supportive ties with these three family members, and has only developed serious conflict with her brother. Thus, there is an imbalance in many triads in which Betty is embedded, as individuals connected positively to her, are linked directly by tense relationships. This ambivalence is structural rather than dyadic, as it stems from contradictions within a structure of interdependencies among at least three actors. In that case, feelings towards each family member are unidimensional as they are either positive or negative. The balance of interdependencies is however unset in triads that do not comply with the

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[48] This explains why there is only a moderate but still positive correlation between conflict and support. Indeed, the Pearson correlation between conflict ties and supportive ties is .18 in that case. It is rather weak but still statistically significant below the .05 level.

transitivity principle. This situation is therefore distinct from dyadic ambivalence, in which tensions coexist within the same relationship, rather than between relationships. Because dyadic and structural ambivalences neither overlap nor are disjunct, conflict and support are only moderately correlated. Following Lüscher (2004, 2009), four cases can be theoretically derived from the conjunction of conflict and support, as illustrated by Table 11.

INSERT TABLE 4.2 ABOUT HERE
Table 11. Typology of support and conflict in family configurations

Each combination of conflict and support draws a distinct configuration of ties. Configurations characterized by neither conflict nor solidarity are not active. One may refer to this situation as atomization (Lüscher, 2004). No strong long lasting ties, and no orientational others are available; their absence is not compensated by weak ties and a larger autonomy. This situation rises serious concerns regarding the family's survival chances and the social capital that it provides to its members. In the case of atomization, individuals are not strongly interdependent, neither in positive nor in negative terms, neither strongly, nor weakly.

Family configurations characterized by a high density of conflict and no or only few supportive ties are featured by cases of captivation in which individuals are compelled to stay in regular contact, without any interest and active taste for being together. Why staying together if only conflict arises and emotional closeness is gone? The lack of resources or the scarcity of alternatives explain captivation, such as when partners cannot afford a divorce because of housing or financial problems, or when emotional interdependencies with children make such an issue unthinkable. In families with problems of integration to the larger society, unemployment, health problems or drug use, there is a spillover effect from the external problems on the internal interactions that often leads to captivation (Widmer et al., 2003). Another origin of captivation is generated by the normative impediments constraining family members to regularly interact. Children are impelled to live with their parents during childhood and adolescence. This involves a series of obligations that come into contradiction with norms of personal autonomy and self-development, which are so strongly valued in other areas of social life in modernity. Adolescent sibling are especially marked by such contradictions, as they have not chosen each other (Widmer, 1999a). It is noticeable that when adolescence ends, the frequency of interactions among them significantly decreases, making family conflicts

also less likely. Family configurations of older adults undermined by age problems also correspond to such a case, as well as individuals with psychiatric problems[49]. In all those cases, individuals have no other alternative than relating either to their family members or to institutions. When care becomes over-care and is forced by circumstances, conflicts and ambivalence are likely to develop.

Individuals with supportive ties and no conflict belong to family configurations in which there is an emphasis on the group solidarity rather than on individuals. There is little space for a diversity of interests or contradictions in such families. In the large study on couples (Widmer et al., 2003), two types of conjugal interdependencies focus on fusional values, with an emphasis on the group rather than on the individual. Interestingly, the low level of conflict in such couples was associated with a low level of conflict in parent-child dyads and in sibling dyads. In that case, the high density of emotional support stemmed from interdependencies among family members that were perceived as beneficial by those involved.

Ambivalence is characterized by a high density of both conflict and support in the same family configuration. Individuals develop conflicts with family members on whom they are emotionally dependent. Family support is loaded with ambivalence as it implies a decrease of individual autonomy and a higher functional dependency of partners and parents towards their relatives. Ambivalence within couples fires back on relationships with members of the family configurations, as conjugal dyads play a central role in them and are, as such, a focus point for many family members. Children, parents, siblings and friends receive contradicting messages from ambivalent couples split between various interdependencies. This is associated with the systemic nature of conflict in family configurations: a high density of supportive ties frequently leads to the development of interference and conflict of interests.

Conflict and support should not be conceptualized as opposite dimensions in family configurations. They can appear together or each by itself. Conflicts are at time the consequences of dense and transitive networks of interdependencies. In other cases, however, they are the only surviving ties after positive interactions have been shattered. The meaning of conflicts to a large extent depends on the overall patterns of supportive interdependencies characterizing each family configuration.

[49] See chapter 6.

Intergenerational Conflicts

In what family configurations do ambivalence and conflict develop most? Recall from Chapter 3 that family configurations provide distinct types of social capital according to their composition. Beanpole family configurations, centred on several generations of blood relatives, provide a bonding type of social capital, a situation in which all individuals in the configuration are interconnected. This situation creates a high level of collective solidarity as well as a high level of control, as individuals join together in order to help or impose a normative framing to any family member. As a matter of fact, this type of social capital creates tensions and conflicts, as it makes individuals and couples face the interference of family members. Table 12 shows that beanpole configurations are associated with a higher level of ambivalence than other family configurations[50]. In other words, the density of support in beanpole family configurations triggers a high density of conflict. A great number of relationships in such configurations are both negative and positive, mixing conflict and support. Therefore, one may call such configurations ambivalent as many of their dyads are torn apart by conflicting forces. Figure 8 considers a typical case of a beanpole family configuration. Ambivalent ties are represented by dashed lines and supportive ties are represented by light solid lines. There is no tie characterized by conflict only in this family configuration.

INSERT PICTURE 4.3 HERE

Figure 8. Conflict, support and ambivalence in a beanpole family configuration
Full arcs: only support provided. Dashed arcs: support and conflict

In this beanpole family configuration, all conflict ties are also support ties. In other words, conflicts are interrelated with solidarity practices. Members of the configuration at the same time upset each other and support each other. Intergenerational relationships are commonly represented in those ambivalent ties: the mother, the father and the grandmother of the respondent all have developed ambivalent relationships with one or several of their children. Other ambivalent relationships however also exist among conjugal partners: the respondent's sister and her partner; the couple of grandparents, the maternal uncle and his partner, the

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[50] The average density of ambivalence is computed from the index proposed by Willson et al. (2003) for dyadic relationships: the absolute value of the difference between density of support and density of conflict, added to the sum of the density of support and of conflict.

paternal uncle and his partner, the mother and the father. In this highly interconnected configuration, intergenerational ambivalence comes with conjugal ambivalence. As we saw previously, these two phenomena are interdependent. A high level of interference in one relationship is associated with an increased level of conflict in the other relationship. Ambivalent relationships are graphically at the centre of the family configuration, as they constitute its backbone.

Far from being marginal phenomena, ambivalences play an active role in this family configuration. One explanation is that relationships in such family contexts involve a large share of obligations. Recall that, due to the density of interdependencies, a bonding type of social capital is present in beanpole family configurations. Individuals are, in other words, bound to others in transitive triads: they cannot escape from dyadic relationships, as family members are linked with each other by third parties. This large number of third parties means that individuals cannot change or end a dyadic relationship without it to be of concern for other family members. The social control implied by such a situation stems from multilateral communication, which is much reinforced. In other words, the respondent cannot ask for a break in her relation with her mother without a reaction from her aunts, uncles and cousins. A conflict with one's partner will also be commented upon by one's parents and parents in-laws. This particular organization of ties is likely to increase the overall level of ambivalence. Individuals are forced to maintain a high level of interdependencies with others due to the social control embedded in the overall structure of relationships within the configuration. Therefore, conflicts cannot break the family configuration into pieces and are transformed into ambivalent relationships. Table 12 reports the average density of support, conflict and ambivalence according to family configurations of young adults.

INSERT TABLE 4.3 ABOUT HERE

 Table 12. Support, conflict and ambivalence according to types of family configurations
** significance below a one percent risk of error; * significance below a five percent risk of error

In terms of support, the beanpole family configurations are above average, as their density of supportive interactions is higher. Other family configurations all are at the same level, with a smaller density of supportive interactions in friendship and father-oriented family configurations. In terms of conflict, the results are similar. Beanpole family configurations have a higher density of conflicts compared with other configurations. Post-divorce configurations are average; the other configurations have a much lower density of conflict. Thus, beanpole family configurations have the highest rate of ambivalence, while the friendship

and father oriented family configurations have the lowest rates of ambivalence. Family configurations built on intergenerational ties therefore produce at the same time a high level of supportive and conflict relationships, which makes them highly ambivalent.

Conclusion

The link between the larger family context and conflict developed in partnerships or parent-child relationships is often concealed by standard survey methods because of the cultural desirability of stressing a high level of autonomy in one's life[51]. When alternative methods, such as network analysis, are used, one realizes that individuals in adulthood remain emotionally dependent to a large set of family members. This dependency is expressed in conflict as well as in support. A large share of conjugal or parent-child conflict are motivated by the overall issue of how to share resources of time, love, money and care in family configurations. Individuals get into fights in families because they depend on each other: Resources are scarce and their distribution within family configurations creates conflicts in key family dyads such as the conjugal dyad and the parent-child dyad, which in many occasions influence the overall configuration in endless retroactive loops.

Far from being a private matter insulated in specific dyads without dependencies on the larger family contexts, conflicts and ambivalences developed in dyads relate to the overall organization of interdependencies within family configurations. Dense family configurations make the occurrence of conflicts in key family dyads more likely. The impact of emotional closeness on conflict stresses the importance of understanding conflict in families as consequences of solidarity and commitments. Indeed, one fights with people one is interdependent with. Conflicts develop with people who matter. Acquaintances and distant family members are not the focus points of enough interdependencies for providing significant opportunities to conflicts. The concept of ambivalence permits a deeper understanding of the roots of family conflict by emphasizing the contradictions that many individuals develop while being interdependent with family members. Family ties remain a primary source of emotional support in late modernity. Therefore, they also are a primary source of conflicts. Interdependencies between adults and their parents create many situations in which individuals are torn apart by attempts to fulfil contradicting reciprocity and transitivity

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[51] In the survey based on 1534 couples living in Switzerland (Widmer et al., 2003), we found that only very few individuals, when asked directly, report a high level of dependency on others. Indirect questions such as the ones proposed by the Family Network Method are more appropriate to measure interdependencies in a cultural context in which the social desirability of being autonomous is so widespread.

with various family members. Receiving or providing support has deep meanings for individuals' identity, as it modifies their position in the family configuration and their understanding of their own role in the family. Conflicts and ambivalences in parent-child dyads are likely to spread within each family configuration, as they involve reallocations of resources that are not easy to make. Rather than stemming from a thrust for personal development and realization of self-centred individuals, family conflicts develop in the complex webs of interdependencies that characterize intimate relationships in late modernity. In that sense, family conflicts should not be regarded as signs that the Family is on the verge of collapse, but rather as an expression of the vitality of family interdependencies.

CHAPTER 5 - Post-divorce Families

"Blended" families participate to the fears and interrogations regarding the contribution of the Family to society in late modernity. Research using the nuclear family as a stick yard underlines a lack of social integration stemming from divorce and remarriage[52], which are held responsible for problems in child development and parenting. Scholars have explained the problems of children in stepfamilies as the results of a reduced involvement of parents and stepparents in their life. One may however question the generality of this deficit in the light of the variability of family configurations revealed by the previous chapters.

There are many ways in which one may recompose a family after splitting with a partner. Individuals who go through divorce and remarriage may at the same time present distinct family configurations from those who do not, and a diversity of family models. Indeed, the pluralization of families does not stop with divorce. This chapter focuses on the issue of family diversity following divorce, using two distinct and complementary datasets, one on young adults who refer to the divorce and remarriage of their parents, the other on older adults with children. We shall first reconsider existing results on social support following divorce and remarriage in the light of the configurational perspective. We proceed by showing that the resources provided by families depend to a large extent on the way in which family configurations are reshaped. Family configurations following divorce and remarriage greatly vary, as several factors other than divorce influence the ways in which support and conflict intermingle. The chapter ends with an empirical comparative study on the cultural meanings of stepfamily statuses, which highlights the cultural framing of interpersonal relationships in the United States and Switzerland.

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[52] For the sake of simplicity, divorce and remarriage are used in this chapter to refer to the termination of a conjugal relationship and partnering after this termination while having children from a previous partnership. Not all individuals actually married and then divorced by legal standards.

Social Support, Divorce and Remarriage

Research on parenting following remarriage has produced rather disturbing results. The investment in new partners by parents is associated with a decreased attention towards their children. Likewise, stepparents invest less in stepchildren because of their focus on their new partnership or on their children from a previous marriage (Coleman, Ganong & Fine, 2000). Role definition is also critical, as the stepparent's role is ambiguous and incompletely institutionalized (Cherlin, 1978). Relationships with non-custodian parents, in most cases fathers, have been described as significantly less close, less trusting and more conflictual in stepfamilies compared with relationships with fathers in first families (King, 2002). Remarriage influences the amount and the type of support provided by previous partners. When mothers remarry, fathers reduce their financial support. When fathers form new relationships, they reduce support to their children from prior relationships.

Changes do not only concern the parent-child dyad but the larger family configuration as a whole. Divorced parents receive lower levels of support from grandparents (Umberson, 1992). Support that mothers receive for their children from their ex-partners' relatives declines after divorce and remarriage. In addition, mothers receive less support from their own kin when they remarry and gain stepchildren. Adults report considerably weaker obligations to stepgrandchildren than to grand-children (Coleman, Ganong & Cable, 1997). While remarriage expands kinship networks, it also makes them more diffuse and more ambiguous in their lines of responsibility for providing support (Harknett and Knab, 1997).

Research also stresses that various factors make the experience of family recomposition heterogeneous. For instance, the cooperation between the biological parent and the stepparent in raising the child, as well as the level of the stepparent's direct involvement in education, are significantly associated with child outcomes in various domains. Relationships between the custodian parent and the non-custodian parent and the relationships between children and their non custodian parent also have a strong influence. But at the same time, the impact of the stepfather may be more ambiguous if the child's biological father maintains regular contacts (Bray, 1999; Buchanan et al.,

1996). Finally, whereas the quality of marital relationship is the main factor of family adjustment in nuclear families, the picture is more complex in stepfamilies as a good relationship between the step-child and the step-parent becomes a powerful predictor of family harmony and duration of the new marriage (Papernow, 1996). Stepparents enact affinity-seeking and affinity-maintaining strategies to build a relationship with their stepchildren (Ganong, Coleman, Fine & Martin, 1999), according to a specific dynamic: a successful bond is created when stepparents develop a friendly relation with their stepchildren, and take a "quasi-parental" position in a second stage only.

Social Capital after Divorce

Overall, the available evidence point to a series of relational factors that make post-divorce family configurations less able to provide support a guidance to their members, especially their children. Research also points at moderating variables, which make the experience of post-divorce families heterogeneous. Does that mean that less social capital is available to children and adults in a majority of post-divorce family configurations or rather that a diversity of situations exist? Recall that bonding social capital is not distributed equally among family configurations: Beanpole family configurations provide more bonding social capital than friendship family configurations, which are oriented towards a bridging type of social capital. Such alternative to bonding social capital are likely to develop in family configurations of individuals who have experienced divorce and remarriage either directly or indirectly, because of their parents. Scholars have underlined the more voluntary nature of relationships in stepfamilies, which are less institutionalized than first-time families (Carsten, 2004; Castren, 2008; Cherlin, 1978; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). Bridging social capital, which is associated with a position of intermediary, has indeed various positive consequences such as enhancing individual autonomy and one's sense of responsibility[53].

The results of the study on young adults (Widmer, 2006) confirm that having parents who experienced divorce and remarriage is associated with a peculiar kind of social capital. Recall from

[53] See chapter four.

chapter two that one type of family configurations was described as post-divorce. Respondents in this family configuration include a large number of step-relatives: 1.38 of their family members are steprelatives, compared with .21 in the whole sample. Stepmother and stepfather are over-represented, with 62 percent of respondents including a stepfather and 41 percent a stepmother. Stepparents are also included first in post-divorce family configurations, especially stepfathers, who come before stepmothers. Fathers are much less frequently included than in any other family configuration: only half of respondents in post-divorce families include them and they come almost one rank after fathers in other configurations. It is also the case of siblings, who appear less often than in other configurations. As for more remote kin, fathers' relatives are under-represented, including paternal grandparents. Overall, there is a deficit of blood relationships and an over-representation of alliance relationships in the family configurations of young adults who have faced the divorce of their parents.

INSERT PICTURE 5.1 HERE

Figure 9. A post-divorce family configuration

As a consequence, their centrality in their family configurations is higher, although their direct interdependencies are more limited in number. As exemplified in Figure 9, there are many holes in post-divorce configurations, in which children develop unique ties with other family members. When respondents are removed,   post-divorce configurations split into a large number of disconnected components: the configuration is separated between the father and his new partner, her father's daughter (half-sister) on the one hand, and the mother, the mother's new son (half-brother), her new partner and her own mother, on the other hand. On the father's side as well as on the mother's side, individuals are often disconnected. For instance, the father's daughter has no connection with her aunt, whereas on the mother's side, the mother's partner has no connection with the mother's mother. Interestingly, the respondent has developed no direct interdependencies with both of her stepparents. Therefore, she has got an intermediary position in her family. Because former partners often do not keep close connections, a partition is also created in their children's family configuration. A

widespread feature within post-divorce family configurations is a lack of transitivity in the triad child–biological parent–stepparent (Widmer, 1999b). In Figure 9, this is expressed in two ways: first, the mother's partner and the father's partner are disconnected from the respondent. Second, there are holes between the parents' new partners and their children, and some of the parents' blood relatives. This makes the overall family configuration highly sensitive to the removal of various family members, among whom the respondent and her biological parents. As a result, the number of family members directly connected with the respondent by supportive interdependencies is small, and the family members supporting her are not connected with each other.

Overall, interdependencies between stepparents and stepchildren, and between half-siblings or stepsiblings, cannot be taken for granted. In this respect, post-divorce family configurations do not resemble the star-like pattern of the friendship family configuration, but come close to individualized chains of interdependencies. This is likely to be a peculiar situation for children, as they have an intermediary position between family members who also have an intermediary position between other family members. In other words, interdependencies with family members do not provide access to well-bounded and dense subgroups, but to a continuum of individualized interdependencies. In post-divorce families, children are indeed part of *divorce chains* or *remarriage chains* (Bohannan, 1970), in which interdependencies link a large set of persons living in different households.

What happens to family configurations when mothers facing divorce and remarriage rather than children are interviewed? Because families have become individualized unbounded networks of interdependencies, divorce and remarriage have distinct consequences for the family configuration of parents and children. In other words, a divorcing mother and her son are embedded in distinct sets of interdependencies. Therefore, studying families requires to consider the issue of stepfamilies from the perspective of several family members. This is of course not empirically possible at all times as multiplying linked interviews of family members is extremely costly. At the very least, one should not take the validity of results found on one set of family members (for example, children) for granted for

another category of family members (for instance, mothers)[54]. Comparing the profile of post-divorce family configurations of mothers with the average profile for social capital, we found that they have on average a lower density of relationships and that their centralization is lower as well. Neither bridging nor bonding social capital is especially strong in those families. Therefore, post-divorce families in older adulthood as in earlier adulthood withdraw from bonding social capital without having a strong grisp on bridging social capital.

The results on both samples of young and older adults explain why there is a much more active work required of "doing kinship" in order to create and maintain interdependencies in post-divorce family configurations than in other family configurations (Schneider, 1980; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). To summarize, young adults in many post-divorce families have a small number of interdependencies embedded in long chains of connections that are sensitive to truncation. Therefore, bonding social capital is not available in comparable quantities as in other family configurations. Individuals in post-divorce family configurations are embedded in networks characterized by holes and weak ties, without the centrality experienced by adults embedded in friendship or sibling family configurations[55]. Because of the individualization of interdependencies, children raised in such contexts might be more able to develop autonomous behaviours early on. This is not only a possibility but a necessity for them, as the structural organization of such families requires from their members to work their way through contradicting interdependencies

Conflict and Ambivalence in Post-divorce Families

Support and social capital are not the only dimensions of interdependencies different in families stemming from divorce and remarriage; this is also the case of conflicts and ambivalences. Post-

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[54] In that sense, talking about families as if they exist beyond individuals as independent groups is similar to splitting individuals and society. Whereas society does not exist without individuals and their interdependencies (Elias, 1991), families do not have an existence beyond the interdependencies linking individuals.
[55] As we saw in chapter 3, bridging social capital, which is associated with a position of intermediary, has various consequences such as enhancing individual autonomy and one's sense of responsibility, connecting individuals to a variety of social experiences, multiplying channels of information and communication, and increasing the heterogeneity of one's social world.

divorce family configurations develop structural ambivalence[56], stemming from contradictions in triads rather than in dyads. One may develop supportive relationships with family members while still being in ambivalent triads if the interdependencies existing between two dependent family members contradict each other. This imbalance seldom occurs in social networks, as relationships are usually organized transitively (Davis, 1979; Davis & Leinhardt, 1972; De Sotto & Albrecht, 1968; Killworth & Bernard, 1976; Kumbassar, Romney & Batchelder, 1994). But post-divorce family configurations have to deal with structural contradictions that make such case more likely than in other family configurations. We stressed above, following the American sociologists Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenberg (1994), that a large proportion of children do not acknowledge their co-resident stepfather as a family member. This may be due to indifference in some cases, to conflict in others. Because relationships among stepparents and stepchildren are less intimate, less supportive, and are associated with more conflicts than relationships between parents and children (Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Pruett, Calsyn & Jensen, 1993), they are likely to create structural ambivalence in the family configuration. Consider the case of this post-divorce family configuration (Figure 10).

INSERT PICTURE 5.2 HERE

Figure 10. Conflict, support and ambivalence in a post-divorce family configuration
Plain arcs: only support provided. Bold arcs: conflict

In Figure 10, supportive dyads are presented by light solid lines and conflict dyads are represented by strong solid lines. Contrary to what happened in the beanpole family configuration presented in the previous chapter, all dyads are either positive or negative. As an example, there is a supportive relationship between the respondent and her mother but a conflict relationship between the respondent and the new partner of her mother. In this case study, conflict relationships are not generated by emotional support. They are rather the expression of a lack of support between two members of the family configuration. Contrary to the expectation of balance theory (Heider, 1958), triads in that case are structurally ambivalent, as they link individuals in an intransitive way: The respondent feels

[56] See chapter 4.

supported by her mother who is emotionally dependent on her new partner but the respondent is in conflict with the new partner. There is a contradiction in this triad explained by the fact that all three individuals experience a structural ambivalence in their personal relationships: the mother has to deal with her commitment to her daughter and her new relationship with her partner. The partner loves a woman whose child despises him. The daughter is still faithful to her father and therefore cannot get closer to the new partner of her mother despite her love for her mother. Even though such patterns are usually avoided by individuals because of their discomfort (Freeman, 1992; Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1961), the complexity of family interdependencies in late modernity makes them likely in some instances[57].

Ambivalence in Older Adulthood

So far, we have considered young adults. Because of their life stage, those who belong to post-divorce family configurations are children with divorced parents and have not divorced themselves. We saw that divorce of their parents put them in an intermediary position for both conflict and support. This is not necessarily the case of parents who may have more leverage than children to reshape their set of interdependencies after divorce. What happens when mothers who experienced divorce and remarriage rather than children are considered? Let us consider a few telling cases. Alina is a 35 years old woman, holding an unskilled cleric office and living in a small rural town. She has a son, Theo, 10 years old, from her previous marriage which lasted two years. Since then, after some years spent as a single, she met Laurent with whom she currently lives. Laurent has two sons, one below 10 and the other, a young adult who does not live with them. Alina has one sister; her own parents are divorced and her father is remarried. Of her grandparents, only her grandfather on the paternal side is still alive. Her family configuration is a mix between her current partnership and her previous partner, the father of her son. She first includes her son in her family configuration, followed by her current partner, his first son, her previous partner, her mother, the second son of her current partner, the mother of her previous partner,

[57] Paradoxically, the level of dyadic ambivalence is lower in post-divorce family configurations than in beanpole family configurations.

her father, her sister and three friends. The composition of her family configuration is therefore very heterogeneous. The order of inclusion of family members is mixed, with the ex-partner being included within the first ranks, which tells his importance in the family configuration.

INSERT PICTURE 5.3 HERE

Figure 11. Conflict and support in two post-divorce family configurations (Alina and Dora)

The graph of support in Alina's family configuration in Figure 11 provides interesting information. First, it is dense, which indicates a bonding social capital. Many individuals are interconnected, which shows that information and support have a collective nature in this family. The likelihood of collaborative work in crucial occasions, such as when the respondent requires some help, is increased. This density however raises serious issues as unusual interdependencies are exhibited in the graph: for instance, Alina keeps on being an important source of emotional support for her previous partner. She also keeps emotional interdependencies with her previous mother-in-law. Overall, the high connectivity of her family configuration makes it hard to insulate conflict within specific dyads. The ex-partner has a direct access to the new couple's business as he is emotionally connected to Alina. He also has indirect sources of information and of leverage by his son and his own mother. The current partner's children therefore directly depend on what happens between Alina, her ex-partner and her ex-partner's mother.

The peculiarities of this family configuration are confirmed when one takes a close look at the graph for conflict. Indeed, its density is high, showing that ambivalence rules over this family. The lines of conflict follow a rather unexpected path. The current partner is central, as he is involved in conflict with Alina, his sons, and Alina's child. What is still more surprising, the negative interdependencies with the ex-partner and the ex-partner's mother in several triads involve Alina's son. Likewise, Alina and her partner are included in conflicts with her father and her mother. Overall,

rather than being circumscribed in a limited number of dyads or subgroups, conflict relationships join several dyads that are usually kept separated.

Negative interdependencies connect individuals in intransitive triads, which makes the whole family configuration unbalanced. As a matter of fact, the current partner may see with quite some concern the ex-partner still being emotionally close to Alina. He may as well wonder about the connection existing between Alina and her previous mother-in-law, as, by contrast, Alina does not acknowledge his own parents as family members. In addition, the ex-partner may have serious concerns about his son being raised and in daily contact with a man that he does not like and with whom he is in conflict. Interestingly, conflicts do not overlap with support. In other words, in this configuration, people in conflict are most of the time not supportive. The relationships are unidimensional, as they either focus on support or conflict. This structural imbalance is likely to create a large number of tensions, as conflict is not weakened by supportive behaviours.

This intricate network of conflicts rising from high emotional interdependencies crossing the boundaries of various triads deteriorates relationships within key dyads such as the partnership between Alina and her current partner, and the various parent-child dyads (Alina, her partner, her previous partner and all their children). As a matter of fact, Alina reports a variety of serious conflicts occuring between her and her partner's child, or between her partner and her child. Those conflict are related, in her own words, with abusive parental behaviour of her current partner and with a lack of recognition of her parental status by his children. When asked about who in the family configuration increases the problems associated with those relationships, she cites her current partner and her mother. The relationship with her current partner is rather problematic as well: serious problems of communication, misunderstanding in sexual relationships, falling out of love and personality issues are cited as problems, while Alina has already seriously considered divorcing. Again, members of the family configuration participate in rising the tensions within the current couple: the ex-partner, the son, the children of the current partner and the mother contribute to increasing the problems existing

between Alina and her partner. In comparison, only the two friends have a positive impact according to her.

Overall, this family is representative of configurations that branch out in a large number of directions after remarriage, with vivid interdependencies linking households and individuals, in contradictory interdependencies. Although the network of supportive ties is rather dense, it is linked with conflicts and tensions. The low level of resources and the localism of the family impose to all members a type of collaboration which is linked with ambivalence. The maintenance of relational closeness has a price that is paid by all family members, who are embedded in non transitive triads, in which two individuals with whom they share emotional closeness are in conflict. In other words, becoming a post-divorce family in which a large number of interdependencies are present has a cost for individuals who have to cope with structural ambivalence.

Consider now a second family configuration, that of Dora, a 36 year old woman, first time pregnant when she was interviewed. She had never been married before but has had several intimate relationships. She has been with Don since she is 28. Don has two daughters, 11 and 9 years old, for whom he has a shared custody with his previous partner. He has been divorced from her for several years at the time of the interview. Dora has no grandparents alive and no uncles and aunts on either her father's side or on her mother's side of the kinship network. But she has a sister who has played a critical role in her life. As a result, her family configurations focuses on her parents, her sister, her friends, her children and her partner. She has not maintained any connection with her previous partners. The emotional interdependencies are organised in three distinct subgroups: her current partner and his daughters, her parents and her sister, including her sister's partner and children, and her friends. There are no direct connections between these subgroups and Dora plays an intermediary position within the family configuration. Within each subgroups emotional interdependencies are numerous and often reciprocal. In addition, the density of conflict is lower than in the previous configuration. For the most part, conflicts are embedded in supportive ties, leading to dyadic ambivalence. In other words, no relationship is built on conflict only and a mix between conflict and

support characterizes each of the three subgroups belonging to the family configuration. In that respect the strain associated with negative interdependencies is lower than in Alina's family configuration. This has an impact on her conjugal relationships, which have a low level of conflict and of dissatisfaction. When asked about who may hinder her partnership, Dora only cites the children of her partner, who are also sources of support for her.

Overall, this second example of a family configuration stemming from divorce and remarriage looks quite similar to the sibling family configurations that was found in a large number of cases in the sample of young adults[58]. In other words, the model is not peculiar to individuals who have gone through a divorce and a remarriage. Of course, the two children from the previous marriage of her current partner create a peculiar situation. But the family configuration that has developed based on that situation share many features with family configurations found for women who have not yet divorced: a couple, two children, with a series of relatives and friends considered as family members. The respondent has built her family configuration by disregarding her partner's former partner and her own former partners. Therefore, she took out much of the complexity that characterized the previous example, with its conflicting triads.

Another, and more radical strategy is featured by Laura, a 38 years old woman who has a son of three, born from a previous partnership that lasted five years and ended up right after the birth of her son[59]. She met her current partner three years ago, soon after having broken up with her previous partner and came with her son to live with him and his two children. Her family configuration is very small and is focused on her nuclear family: her current partner, his two sons, and her own son. She does not include her parents, her two brothers or any uncle or aunt. The definition of her family as nuclear has significant consequences, as small groups are associated with a high density in all kinds of networks (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Again, as in the previous case, conflicts are embedded in supportive ties, with many ambivalent dyads. Laura is central in her family configuration, both in terms of support and conflict. Compared with other family configurations of that sample, the level of

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[58] See chapter 2.

[59] This case is not represented graphically.

her conjugal and parent-child problems is low. But Laura said that she withdrew from the education of her partner's children, which contradicts the ideal of the nuclear family in which the mother is in charge of all children. Overall, this configuration features a focus on the household as the significant family unit, in an attempt to conform to the model of the nuclear family even more than many individuals who have not yet experienced divorce and remarriage.

There are various ways in which individuals build up their family configurations after going through divorce and remarriage. Some focus on the maintenance of meaningful ties with their previous partners, often for the sake of children. Others reinvest friendship and kinship ties in attempts to compensate for the permanent or temporary weakening of their partnership. Others still try to build a new nuclear family and focus on their current partnership and the children that they are responsible for. In all cases, configurations of supportive ties that develop after divorce and remarriage have consequences for conflicts and ambivalences. Many families in late modernity develop structural ambivalence with their increasing complexity. Indeed, as the beanpole family configuration is replaced by alternatives such as the post-divorce or the conjugal family configuration, ambivalences gain ground. But some individuals resist and try to shape simpler family configurations despite the circumstances.

Divorce, Family Structures and Configurations

It is now time to address the crucial issue of family configurations and family structures in more depths. The previous sections revealed that individuals who went through a divorce and a remarriage develop a diversity of family configurations; some of them create interdependencies that resemble those of nuclear families. Family configurations are therefore different from family structures. Divorce and remarriage do not necessarily lead to a post-divorce family configuration, especially when individuals try to rebuild a new nuclear family by weakening or disregarding their ties with their former partners. Getting back to the 101 cases of the study on older adulthood and parenthood, one straightforward way of dealing with this issue is to compute the distribution of the configurations

according to family structures. Confirming the three cases that we have just considered, Table 13 shows that only a minority of individuals who went through a divorce and remarriage belong to a post-divorce family configuration. Many have developed other sets of interdependencies, with their new in-laws or with their blood relatives, that twist their family configurations into other directions.

INSERT TABLE 5.1 HERE

Table 13. Distribution of configurations according to the occurrence of divorce and remarriage

As a matter of fact, only 20 percent of individuals who have divorced and remarried belong to a post-divorce family configuration. In other words, only some of them have an ex-partner who continues to play a significant family role in their life, or children from the current partner who are interdependent enough to be included as significant family members. Many have rather invested in the development of horizontal ties with siblings and friends or, alternatively, have built a nuclear family configuration while severing the ties with their former partners. Seldom have they however been able to develop a beanpole family configuration or a conjugal configuration[60]. Thus, having experienced divorce and remarriage lead to a distinct probability of belonging to the various configurations, while not imposing any of them.

In the eyes of sociologist Talcott Parsons, the Family was defined as the household. Little doubts existed in the mind of researchers of Parsons' time that families could be objectively delimited and corresponded to individuals who lived together and whose relationships were institutionalized by marriage[61]. The pluralization of families since then has clearly stressed the inability of this perspective to understand families in late modernity. In the previous chapters we have emphasized that actual interdependencies rather than institutional criteria such as household membership should be the point of departure of family research. This statement has strong implications for the study of post-divorce

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[60] See chapter two for a description of these types of configurations.
[61] Even though the complexity of families in late modernity is frequently acknowledged by researchers , the fuzziness of family boundaries and the intertwined interdependencies linking family members are not taken into account empirically, especially in quantitative research.

families. How post-divorce configurations should be defined? As a matter of fact, not all divorces and remarriages produce the same configurations of interdependencies. Research rather suggests a diversity of custody arrangements and alimony practices. Children and parents, as well as former partners, are embedded in a great variety of interactions, mixing various kinds of interdependencies. Some former partners remain in contact and even maintain or develop some form of friendship. Others become total strangers for each other quite quickly after splitting up.

The disconnection between the demographic fact of divorcing or remarrying and the interdependencies developed afterwards reveals that family configurations and family structures are distinct. Two realities should indeed be distinguished. The first reality is the family structure stemming from a variety of hard demographic facts: did the couple divorce or not, how many children were born; how many grandparents, uncles and aunts are still alive? The crude number of individuals living there constitutes the backbones of family configurations, as it creates the potential for family interdependencies to emerge. The second reality is the family configuration as such, which captures the hard social facts of interdependencies between family members. Without a family structure, there is no family configuration; but family configurations are not a full reproduction of family structures either. Obviously, divorce and remarriage are only two dimensions that shape family structures among many others, such as the distribution of individuals across generations and sexes, the localization of individuals in the geographical and social space, the fertility rate and the life expectancy of family members. This series of factors may make two family structures look very similar despite one stemming from a divorce and the other from a first marriage. Indeed individuals who went through marriage, parenthood, divorce and remarriage develop various family configurations. There is a great diversity of possible paths to family life in late modernity, with quite heterogeneous consequences. Two individuals having divorced and remarried may differ in other crucial life crucial experiences that make their family configurations absolutely distinct. The number of generative mechanisms of family diversity is great and one cannot expect to summarize this diversity by a single distinction, namely that between first-time and stepfamily structures. In chapter two, we found that four types

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were roughly enough to categorize the diversity of family structures in the sample of older adults: avuncular, vertical, extended and step. When these four types of structures are compared between individuals who have experienced divorce and remarriage, and those who have not, one realizes that divorce is only one life transition among many others. The greatest differences concern the extended family structure and the stepfamily structure. About half of women who remarried have a stepfamily structure and only one quarter of them have an extended family structure. In comparison, 38 percent of women without a divorce come from an extended family structure.

Overall, there is a first causal effect between events such as divorce and family structures. Not all individuals who have experienced divorce and remarriage end up being in the same family structures. A second causal effect concerns the link between family structures and family configurations. Not all stepfamily structures lead to post-divorce family configurations. Being in a stepfamily structure, one has about one chance over three, according to the study on older adults and parenthood, to be in a post-divorce configuration. Indeed, many individuals who divorced and remarried weaken their interdependencies with their former partner and do not activate interdependencies with their former partners' new children or new partner. In other words, despite being in a stepfamily structure, with stepchildren and stepparents around, individuals may focus on their new partner, their siblings, their biological parents or their grandparents, reactivating the ties existing with members of their kinship networks or focusing on their conjugal life.

The variety of family configurations that stems from stepfamily structures is fascinating. It is even more fascinating when one realizes that the stepfamily structure is only one possible structure stemming from divorce and remarriage. Although each stage of the causal chain linking the fact of divorcing and remarrying to post-divorce family configurations is strongly channelled by the previous stage, the combinatory power of events and structures is so great that it builds a variety of pathways to current family interdependencies. It does not follow from the fact that one is remarried that one is embedded in a stepfamily structure. It does not follow from the fact that one is embedded in a stepfamily structure that one has developed interdependencies that match the post-divorce family

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configuration. Of course, each stage increases the likelihood of the post-divorce configuration to rise. But it never fully predicts it.

When one talks about stepfamilies, one actually refers to three distinct realities. First, and most obviously, being a mother in a stepfamily alludes to the fact that the person went through a set of transitions: starting a partnership, becoming parent, splitting up, starting a new partnership with children involved. This is the most event oriented definition of stepfamilies. Second, this set of transitions may lead to a post-divorce family structure, one in which there are children from a previous partner, or children that the current partner has had with another person. In addition, other kinship members, especially members from the older family generations on the male partner's side, are less numerous, probably pending on the life stage at which remarriage occurs. Thirdly, the stepfamily refers to a specific kind of configurations defined by active interdependencies, positive and negative, with the former partner and his kin, and with the children and possibly ex-partner of the current partner. Life events and transitions, family structures and configurations of interdependencies are related but nevertheless distinct.

The Cultural Meaning of Stepfamily Statuses

Although research on post-divorce families has focused on interpersonal relationships, some scholars have underlined the lack of an adequate language for dealing with stepfamily relationships and the negative connotations of step-terms in the United States (Bohannan, 1970; Cherlin, 1978; Coleman and Ganong, 1987), as in other cultural areas. It has been suggested that the role of the stepparent is incompletely institutionalized (Cherlin, 1978; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994): social norms do not tell individuals how to behave and what to expect in stepfamily relationships. Research on stepfamilies in France has stressed the stereotypes associated with the stepmother status and the difficulties of dealing with a relationship which is linguistically undefined (Théry, 1993). As a matter of fact, in French, step-terms are confounded with in-law terms. Thus, one cannot distinguish linguistically a "step-mother" from a "mother-in-law", because both are referenced using the term

"belle-mère". The lack of a specific vocabulary to deal with step-relationships was also underlined in the North American context (Bohannan, 1970; Cherlin, 1978; Coleman & Ganong, 1987).

One basic assumption of the configurational perspective is that dyads are embedded in large configurations of interdependencies and that it is impossible to account for them without considering this larger relational context[62]. Since the nineteen sixties, cognitive anthropologists have been finding similar interdependencies among meanings in a variety of cultural domains around the world (d'Andrade, 1995). Meanings of birds, emotions and diseases are embedded in networks or maps. Anthropologists ask their informants to make dual comparison between a variety of birds or emotions in order to estimate the similarity of meaning existing between them. Those analyses have revealed highly structured cultural patterns, as well as a large degree of sharing of those patterns around the world.

The kinship realm is no exception. Since the beginning of cognitive anthropology, researchers have been interested in American kinship. They have identified several key components that defined the ways in which individuals think about the Family. They include gender (Nerlove and Burton, 1972), linearity and generational distance (Romney and D'Andrade, 1964; Wallace and Atkins, 1960). Indeed, studies done in the nineteen sixties showed that male and female family terms (mother versus father) were perceived as distinct in meaning. Likewise, family members from the same lineage (grandfather, father, son) were considered closer in meaning than individuals from distinct lineages (siblings, first-cousins, other cousins). Interestingly the extent to which consanguinity influenced meanings of family terms was not estimated at that time, maybe because blood relatedness was such an obvious component of families in their perspective.

How do stepfathers compare with fathers, stepmothers with mothers, step-siblings and half-siblings with siblings in terms of cultural meanings? Are there any differences between the United States and Switzerland? To answer this set of questions, we set up three samples. In addition to the 89 subjects of a north American university used in a previous study[63] , we collected data from the French

[62] See chapter one.
[63] These results are largely drawn from a study published in American Anthropologist (Widmer, Romney &

speaking part of Switzerland and one sample from the German speaking part of Switzerland. The Swiss French sample includes 52 college students from three schools of higher education in French area. The Swiss German sample includes 38 students from one school of higher education from the North Western part of Switzerland.

In order to compare cultural meanings of stepterms with terms refering to the nuclear family, a subset of 14 family terms was selected. We focused on all family terms that exist in nuclear and post-divorce families. These terms are father, mother, son, daughter, brother, and sister, which we compare with stepfather, stepmother, stepson, stepdaughter, stepbrother, and stepsister. We also included half-brother and half-sister. Seven female terms and seven male terms belong to this list. The generations above and below respondents include four terms each. Respondents' generation has six terms. There are six terms that connote a full blood relationship and six terms that are not blood related, while half-sister and half-brother have an intermediate position. Similar distinctions can be made in German and French. The list of terms in the three idioms is presented in Table 14.

INSERT TABLE 5.2 ABOUT HERE

Table 14. Kinship terms in English, French and German

Respondents were asked to rate the similarity of each pair of terms in meaning, on a scale from 1 (extremely similar) to 7 (extremely different). For instance, they had to estimate how similar on that scale were father and mother, father and stepfather, father and son. Their responses were analysed using correspondence analysis, following well known procedure for the analysis of such data (Widmer, Romney & Boyd, 1999). The first axis of correspondence analysis captures blood relatedness, with a distinction between full blood relationships and stepfamily relationships, while half-siblings are on the middle of the axis. Axis two is also highly structured, with family terms of generations+1 (father, mother, stepfather, stepmother) and -1 (son, daughter, etc.) on one side, and

Boyd, 1999), and from an unpublished study applying the same research design on family terms in Switzerland

family terms of generation 0 (siblings, half-siblings, stepsiblings) positioned on the other side of the axis. The third and fourth axes of correspondence analysis also show a highly structured pattern of results. In all three contexts. axis 3 deals with generational distance but in a different way from axis 2, ranking terms from generations +1, 0 to -1. In that case, rather than emphasizing the complementary between parents and children as in axis two, there is a continuum across generations, from parents, siblings, to sons and daughters. axis 4 deals with the gender of terms, with all the female terms on one side and all the male terms on the other side.

Overall, four highly interpretable axes come out of correspondence analysis. Consanguinity accounts for more than 50 percent of the total variance in the north American sample, while generation accounts for about one-quarter of the variance and gender for less than 10 percent. The distinction between stepterms and nuclear family terms appears on the first axis of the correspondence analysis and accounts for more than half of the total explained variance of the average scores for the 91 comparison pairs. Thus consanguinity makes a tremendous difference in American kinship. The two Swiss contexts only show slight variations of this pattern. The effect of generations is more pronounced in the Swiss German sample than in the United States and Swiss French contexts. Gender only has an effect in the American sample, which is still quite limited. Overall, there is a highly structured and shared cultural view of family statuses in the three contexts. The structural methods used in this analysis prove that a small set of components account for the judgements of similarity and differences among family them.

Individuals in post-divorce family configurations have to deal with the implications of such highly structured cultural meanings of family statuses in their actual interdependencies. Indeed, the conflicts experienced in some family relationships may stem from the ambivalence created by the obvious interdependencies existing between stepchildren and stepparents, and the concurrent distancing from the non-guardian biological parent, in cultural contexts that define the stepparent as remote from the parent. The realm of kinship and the family has not turned into a cultural fuzziness. Individuals have to comply with cultural meanings of family statuses that still leave little space for alternative types of

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family organization such as post-divorce families. This certainly constitutes one origin of the ambivalence characterizing families in late modernity.

Conclusion

A person who went through divorce and remarriage may well develop a family configuration quite similar to the family configuration of a person who did not experience these transitions, and quite dissimilar from to the family configuration of another person who also divorced and remarried. We expected much uniformity in post-divorce families; we found diversity again. There is no major way of reshaping family interdependencies after divorce. Post-divorce family configurations are only one alternative among others. This alternative is indeed marked by specific interdependencies: a higher share of structural holes and weak ties, and more structural ambivalence than in other family configurations. Keeping regular contacts with both parents for children in post-divorce families implies a new kind of relational experience within families, which may have long term consequences for the self[64]. Post-divorce family configurations are indeed one of the vanguards of such a transformation in the family realm.

That said, many individuals who go through a divorce and a remarriage are embedded in other types of configurations. They develop patterns of interdependencies similar to those of individuals who did not experience this transition, by investing the field of kinship, of friendship and of other pseudo-kinship ties, or by reinventing a nuclear family. Rather than being the vanguard of family decline, individuals confronted with divorce and remarriage organize their family configurations in a variety of ways, borrowing and adapting well-known kinship and friendship informal rules to the peculiarities of their situation. Therefore, the fears and interrogation marks regarding families and social integration are reviewed in a brighter light when one stops considering that labels such as "the stepfamily" or "single parent family" correspond to homogeneous realities. Family configurations steming from divorce and remarriage are diverse in their composition and interdependencies.

[64] We once more get back to the Simmelian concept of the "intersecting circle" (Simmel, 1999) that describes late modernity: individuals belong to individualized circles that define them in their uniqueness.

One may wonder whether or not the stepfamily as a concept is truly useful, taking into account this diversity. It is certainly true that individuals who went through divorce and remarriage develop specific family experiences. It does not mean, however, that they all share a common family pattern, characterized by a lack of social integration. If, in some cases, they are indeed characterized by a deficit of bridging and bonding social capital, these cases are however a minority. Individuals develop various ways of recomposing their family life, either by reinvesting their kinship network, developing interdependencies with their partner's relatives, or with friends considered as family members. Many individuals get back to family configurations quite similar from those that were found for individuals who have not yet divorced. The development of such or such configurations has some important implications for the availability of social capital in families, and probably, but this should be further investigated, for the development of children. Therefore, we might be better off in our understanding of families in late modernity to focus on interdependencies among family members beyond the social labelling of family situations as "intact" or "blended".

CHAPTER 6 – Families and Psychiatric Problems

Family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems are usually considered an anomaly by sociological research. Their complexity is not well served by standard approaches of the Family using survey designs and random sampling or in-depth qualitative interviewing. The strong link existing between psychological problems and family relationships has often been interpreted as a sign that these relationships only responded to psychological causes and processes and therefore that they did not belong to the field of sociology. On the contrary, this chapter stresses that studying family configurations of individuals with psychological problems from a sociological perspective leads to new insights on the changing nature of families in late modernity.

So far, we have only considered families of individuals without a clinical record. Do individuals with psychiatric problems stick with the nuclear family model and the well ordered view that it implies on how social integration work in families? One may hypothesize that families of individuals with psychiatric problems and a role of patient in either a private or public psychiatric practice also go beyond the nuclear family. That has consequences for the understanding of the resources made available by their family configurations, as well as for the conflicts that they develop with their family members. Indeed, we saw in previous chapters, that the composition of families has an influence on social capital as well as on conflict and ambivalence. The importance of family members beyond the household creates a great diversity of family forms. This diversity may arise in families facing psychological problems of one or several of their members. In other words, one expects diversity again rather than a single model of family configurations, characterizing all individuals with psychological problems alike.

This chapter first asks whether individuals with psychiatric problems have distinct family configurations, compared with individuals without a clinical record. Then, the issue of the additional impact of mental impairment on family configurations is addressed based on interviews of individuals with psychiatric troubles and of one of their family members. Eventually, a third study was designed

to estimate the diversity of family configurations in which individuals   under psychiatric supervision are embedded.

Family Systems and the Configurational Perspective

Current empirical research regarding family ties of individuals with psychiatric problems focuses on the impact of positive family relationships on psychological well-being and adaptation to crises, as well as on the ability of family members to cope with the patient's troubles. Individuals who belong to families in which relationships are gratifying and which adequately support their members, are less prone to depression and relapses than others. Note that research has been mostly concerned with the amount of family support provided to individuals with psychiatric problems. This focus has relegated the interest for family configurations and their structural properties to a marginal position in the field.

Interestingly, classical authors in system theory developed a deeper interest in structural dimensions of family interactions (Broderick, 1993). They pointed at the various family conflicts and tensions associated with mental health problems, and raised the issue of their spread throughout various family subsystems, from the conjugal subsystem to the parent-child and the sibling subsystems. Various instruments such as the *Genogram*, the *Triadic Play* and the *FAST*, have focused on the impact of triads and of larger configurations of family ties over conjugal dyads, parenting and psychological troubles (Corboz-Warnery et al., 1993; Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999; Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006; Gehring, 1998; Gehring & Wyler, 1986). The configurational perspective makes it possible to empirically deal with some of the concepts and hypotheses of system theory, by formal methods tailored to analyse complex systems of relationships[65]. It has many things in common with the work of Murray Bowen and Salvador Minuchin (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Minuchin, 1974) , as both of these prominent scholars of family system theory emphasize that family dyads are interdependent. Minuchin's interest for the boundaries of family systems is close to the issue of family

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[65] Let us also again stress the contribution of Jacob Moreno (1934). Moreno was a psychologist and inventor or the psychodram, which was related to his sociometric work. Although his influence on current systemic approach of families in troubles is weaker than that of other renown scholars, his contribution to a structural approach of families should not be underestimated.

composition, and Bowen's work on triangulation has many acquaintances with the interest of network research for triads and transitivity. The configurational perspective draws much from their insight that family dyads are interconnected. Following their lead, it stresses the complex patterns of negative and positive interactions in which individuals with psychological problems are embedded, rather than focusing on the amount of support provided by family members.

The organization of family interdependencies and the resources that they provide is likely to be shaped distinctly in family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems. Systemic research on a variety of psychological troubles emphasizes the inter-adaptation to each other of the family system and the individual in troubles. From the configurational perspective, three distinct but nevertheless related issues should be addressed: the composition of the family configuration, the type of social capital that it provides, and the conflicts and ambivalence created by family interdependencies. We now address the two first issues and leave the third one for the end of the chapter.

Family Composition and Social Capital

One may expect that while individuals with psychiatric troubles lack some important family ties, they are likely to compensate this deficit by developing alternative family relationships such as those stemming from their kinship network, or even by developing family-like interdependencies with professionals from the care support system. Thanks to those ties, individuals with psychiatric problems may have relational resources similar to those of individuals without psychiatric problems. An alternative hypothesis states that individuals with psychiatric problems have a smaller number of significant family members because they have a lower probability to experience a stable partnership and parenthood (Burnand et al., 2004; Pescosolido & Wright, 2004). A deficit of family members may mean that bonding social capital is less likely for individuals with psychiatric problems because of the negative effect that psychiatric problems have on family integration (Olson, 1989). As for bridging social capital, the deficit hypothesis states that it is lower in clinical populations because of the

difficulty for individuals with psychological instability to maintain significant ties with others, and because of the feelings of dissatisfaction and incompetence of family members (especially parents and siblings), sometimes leading to their withdrawal from interactions.

A first research that dealt with the issue of family based social capital took place in the rehabilitation unit of a department of adult psychiatry in a large public hospital[66]. This unit treats outpatients suffering from enduring psychiatric problems with potentially disabling effects. It aims at reintegrating individuals with psychiatric troubles within professional and social life. The clinical sample includes a total of 54 individuals in young adulthood, with a DSM-IV diagnosis of mood or personality disorder. They live on their own or in community housing. They were compared with a non-clinical sample that comprised a total of 54 individuals from the sample of young adults described in the previous chapters. Both samples were matched for age and sex. Figure 12 shows several examples of emotional interdependencies in family configurations drawn from the clinical sample.

INSERT PICTURE 6.1 HERE

Figure 12. Family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems

As the graphs of Figure 12 show, the composition and social capital of individuals with psychiatric problems are distinct from those of individuals that we considered in the previous chapters. First, family members are significantly less often resources of emotional support. On average, respondents include 1.1 family members as support providers for them, compared with 4.3 in the sample of college students[67]. On average, individuals with psychiatric problems have family members who are less connected with each other. They are also significantly less central in their set of supportive family members. Results are similar for family members to whom respondents provide emotional support. Individuals with psychiatric problems provide emotional support to a much smaller

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[66] This section is based on a series of results published in the *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* (Widmer et al., 2008).

[67] In order to precisely estimate the impact of psychiatric problems, the twin sample technique was used. For each individuals with a psychiatric background, we set it an identical twin without a clinical record as belonging to a non-clinical comparison sample. Twins are the same sex and age than their alter-ego. Therefore, the impact of these two variables is controlled when assessing the differences of family configurations between individuals with and without a clinical record.

number of family members than others (1.9 compared to 5.5 in non-clinical samples). The interdependencies among the family members whom they support are significantly fewer. Their centrality in their set of dependent family members is also on average smaller. In other words, they play a less active role as support providers and their status in the group is decreased as much.

To summarize, the amount and the structures of social capital are strongly influenced by psychiatric problems. Individuals of the clinical sample have a smaller number of supportive family members, linked by fewer significant relationships. They can count on only one to two persons, on average, as support providers. Hence, many individuals with psychiatric problems do not have an access to bonding social capital in their family configurations. This situation causes social isolation in life transitions such as the transition to adulthood or the transition to old age. The negative impact of parental divorce on care to individuals with psychiatric troubles was for instance underlined, as well as the issue of care when support providers grow old. Interestingly, the issue is not only that of receiving care but also of becoming caregivers and playing as such a meaningful and valued social role. Individuals with psychiatric troubles indeed seldom play a role of support providers for other family members, which raises some concerns regarding the acknowledgement of their significance in the family.

In addition, they have a lower centrality both in their direct circle of supporters and in their family configuration as a whole, which makes their bridging social capital low as well. The amount of energy, relational competency and time necessary to be a bridge between otherwise disconnected family subgroups is beyond the resources available to many individuals with psychiatric problems. Bridging social capital, as the ability to develop personal interdependencies between family members that are otherwise disconnected, is lacking. The deficit hypothesis is therefore empirically confirmed. Overall, the family as a main support provider, as a place in which meaningful roles (such as helping others) can be experienced, as a social control agency or as a help to connect with a variety of persons, is much less so for individuals with psychiatric problems.

This deficit of relational resources and integration within family configurations goes along with the strong investment necessary to care for individuals with psychiatric problems. Because psychiatric problems increase the level of family stress and reduce the quality of family life and well-being (Miklowitz, 2004), care providers are frequently physically and emotionally overwhelmed by the constant requirement of helping a psychiatric family member. Parents, in particular, often describe themselves as exhausted, desperate and hopeless. For many of them, the difficulty to understand the origin of the troubles leads to feelings of dissatisfaction, incompetence in the parental role and low self-esteem (Miklowitz, Goldstein & Nuechterlein, 1995). These feelings, in turn, lead to their withdrawal from other family relationships. They are frequently the main reason for deciding for institutionalization (McIntyre, Blacher & Baker, 2002). Indeed, it is difficult to maintain a relational life of its own while facing psychiatric problems of a family member, as these problems become an organizing principle of the family configuration. Interviews with parents of individuals with psychiatric problems reveal that the demands and problems of their children let little space for other relationships to develop. Interdependencies between the person with the troubles and her closest family members (usually the parents, sometimes one sibling) are so important that other interdependencies are left aside as less critical. The lack of social capital for individuals with psychiatric problems has therefore indirect effects on their parents' social capital.

This lack of family based social capital is to a significant extent due to the composition of family configurations. Individuals with psychiatric problems have family configurations of a much smaller size[68]. They do not often include partners and, as a consequence, they also do not have in-laws. Blood ties are also less frequently activated. Overall, individuals of the clinical sample less often include their father and siblings, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and friends as significant family members. Interestingly, the inclusion of mothers remains at the same level as in non-clinical samples. Do these

[68]The average size of family configurations is 9.7 for the sample of college students and only 6.2 for the clinical group. In the clinical sample, respondents included a total of 50 family terms after standardization of minor terminological differences, among which 25 were included by one respondent only. In the non-clinical sample, respondents included a total of 76 family terms, among which 36 were included by one respondent only.

results correspond to a lack of acknowledgement of existing family members by individuals with psychiatric problems or to the absence of such family members in the family structure[69]? Only five respondents over 54 had a partner at the time of the interview (nine percent). Therefore, the lack of inclusion of partners in family configurations closely matches an absence of partners in the family structure. The difference for blood ties, however, is not related with family structures. On average, respondents with psychiatric problems have 1.7 siblings, 1.8 grandparents, 6.4 uncles and aunts, and .5 step-relatives. This set of figures is similar to what was found in the non-clinical samples. In other words, compared with individuals of the non-clinical sample, individuals with psychiatric problems include fewer members with a blood connection in their family configurations, although they have as many in their family structures. The difference concerning partners goes along with the low rate of married or cohabiting individuals with psychiatric problems. In addition, there is no compensation of the relative lack of blood connections or partners by the inclusion of alternative ties in family configurations, such as friends or professionals from the institutionalized care system considered as family members. Thus, the deficit hypothesis is empirically confirmed: compared with others, individuals with psychiatric problems have much smaller family configurations, with less bonding and bridging social capital.

This shortage of family members and of social capital provided by family configurations has meaningful consequences for the social integration of individuals with psychiatric problems. As the Family remains the central institution of social support and social control in late modernity societies, the deficit of bridging and bonding social capital that it provides to individuals with psychiatric problems casts doubt on its ability to deal on its own with their social integration. The possibility for families to take care of their impaired members without significant institutional support is therefore limited and attempts to heavily rely on them in order to decrease the costs of public health may create serious problems and shortcomings.

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[69] For the distinction between family configuration and family structure, see chapter 5. A similar issue was raised for individuals belonging to non-clinical samples. Indeed, the previous chapters showed that family configurations depend on family structures but do not replicate them.

Intellectual Impairment

Little is known about family configurations of individuals with intellectual impairment in addition to their psychiatric troubles. What kind of relational resources do their families provide to them? Research underlines the imbalance that intellectual impairment creates for family interdependencies. As it is the case for individuals with psychiatric problems, the presence of a person with intellectual disability in a family often has a negative effect on family members, as it means a heavy load of overwork. Even if a significant reward may also be found in care giving (Heru 2004) and even if parents of people with intellectual impairment frequently report positive aspects and an overall satisfaction in their quality of life concerning their involvement with their child's education (Jokinen and Brown, 2005), the existing literature mainly underlines how family organization, the function and role of each member, and the family interactions, are negatively affected by the presence of a disabled person (Lambert & Lambert-Boite, 2002).

First of all, the presence of a disabled individual modifies the affective regulation in the family configuration. For instance parents frequently develop overprotection towards the person with intellectual impairment, and they do not have the same availability for their other children. The focus on the disabled individual in some case isolates her from the rest of the family and especially from her siblings. Parents could also feel sympathetic with their disabled child in such a way that they reject the handicap reality and the social reactions that it triggers. The expression of negative emotions (aggressiveness, shame, anger, jealousy, rivalry and guilt) is often repressed as well as questions and interrogations, each family member attempting to keep her distress secret (Meynckens-Fourez & Tilmans-Ostyn, 1999). This is not without consequences for family interdependencies as it means that rather than dealing with a large number of ambivalent relationships, parents may choose to reduce the number of positive as well as negative ties, while increasing their own isolation[70]. Scholars also suggest that psychiatric problems associated with intellectual impairment have a stronger impact on

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[70] This may lead the family configuration to either atomization or captivation. See chapter 4 about the four theoretical types of situation relating conflict and support.

the family than the intellectual disability itself (Maes, Broekman, Dosen & Nauts, 2003). Family members are frequently physically and emotionally overwhelmed. Parents, in particular, described themselves as exhausted, desperate and hopeless. These feelings, associated with psychiatric and behavioural problems of intellectually impaired individuals, are often the main reason to decide for their institutionalization, as family members consider that professional help providers are more able than themselves to solve them (McIntyre et al., 2002).

This set of evidences explained why, compared with non clinical individuals, individuals with intellectual impairment include fewer siblings and fathers in their family configurations in the sample under study (Widmer, Kempf, Lanzi, Robert-Tissot, Galli-Carminati, 2008). Contrary to individuals with psychiatric problems without mental impairment, they compensate these losses by including professionals and alternate family roles provided by more remote kin. The resources made available to them by family members are however smaller, as parents, partners, children and siblings are the primary support providers in families (Widmer, 2004). This difference of composition of family configurations has hence consequences for social capital. Indeed, individuals with psychiatric problems and intellectual disability have only a small number of supported and supportive family members, in very sparse circles. Family members are disconnected and respondents have a low centrality in their family configurations. Therefore, individuals with intellectual impairment and psychiatric problems do not benefit from the same amount of either bridging or bonding social capital. The family as a main support provider is less so for them than for non-clinical individuals. As individuals with intellectual impairment have a larger vulnerability to psychiatric illness than others (Moss et al. 1998), this lack of family based social capital has an additional deteriorating effect on their life chances, in making them less able to deal on their own with non-normative events associated with their psychiatric troubles.

So far, we have focused on the accounts of individuals with psychiatric problems, whose views on their family configurations might be distorted by their psychiatric problems. Are results based on their interviews confirmed by other sources of information? There is indeed support in the literature for the perception biases of family relationships by individuals with intellectual impairment[71]. Research emphasizes the cognitive processes limiting their ability to adequately perceive their relationships with others. People with intellectual impairment may be at risk of greater biases in perceptions of social relationships: other individuals' feelings are often misunderstood and interpersonal situations are perceived in a very subjective way (Pescosolido & Wright, 2004). Perceptions of interpersonal relationships is not only influenced by intellectual impairment but also by its conjunction with psychiatric troubles. For instance, paranoid adult individuals perceive family relationships differently than their parents (Rankin & al, 2005). Perceptions of individuals with intellectual impairment concerning their position in the family are described as frozen, with no link with the situation as described by their relatives (Nandrino & Doba, 2001). Note that the ability to adequately perceive one's own social situation leads to the improvement of psychological well-being and is of great importance for the individuals' caring (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). Furthermore, a shared perception of situation by family members reveals larger social abilities and larger availability of resources (Reiss, 1981).

An exploratory analysis of 17 interviews from the first family member included as a significant family member by individuals with psychiatric problems and intellectual impairment provides some elements of responses concerning the subjectivity of the accounts made by individuals with psychiatric problems on their family configurations. For the most part, family members support their views[72]. They confirm that individuals with psychiatric problems and intellectual impairment are not central in their family, with only few supportive ties available to them, and even fewer relationships in which they are support providers. Interviewed family members support the views that individuals with psychiatric problems are marginal in flows of support in their own families, either as support seekers or, and most of all, as support providers. Therefore, individuals with intellectual disability with psychiatric problems are at risk of developing small and sparse family configurations, with few ties and a higher ratio of conflict over support when compared

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[71] The issue of perception biases of social relationships has also received considerable attention in the literature on social networks. Results on non clinical samples revealed that individuals bias the evaluation of their networks toward higher reciprocity of relationships and a higher centrality for themselves in the network (Killworth & Bernard, 1976; Krackhardt, 1987; Kumbassar, Romney & Batchelder, 1994).

[72] This research is described in greater details in Widmer, Kempf and Galli-Carminati (2010).

with other families. Individuals with intellectual impairment and psychiatric problems have significantly less social capital than individuals without a clinical record.

Social capital is strongly shaped by the presence of psychiatric problems. Compared with individuals without a clinical background, individuals from the clinical samples have only a small number of supported and supportive family members, who are more frequently perceived as disconnected from each other. Therefore, individuals with psychiatric problems do not benefit from the same amount of bridging and bonding social capital. This lack of social capital is likely to have an additional deteriorating effect on their life chances in making individuals with psychiatric problems unable to deal with the numerous non-normative events associated with their trajectories, with consequences for their adaptation to crises and unexpected life events.

Variability Again

The previous chapters revealed that a great variability of family configurations characterize non-clinical samples. The emphasis on variability was somewhat lost in the last sections, which underlined the distinctiveness of family configurations in clinical samples compared with non-clinical samples. That individuals with psychological health problems have on average fewer significant family members and much poorer social capital does not imply that they all share a similar type of family configurations. To the contrary, one expects that variability also characterizes them. Indeed, individuals with psychiatric problems may have access to distinct relational resources depending on the composition of their family configurations.

To systematically address the issue of variability of family configurations in clinical samples, we used a sample of individuals 61 individuals, all of whom were undergoing psychotherapy in Switzerland[73]. On average, respondents were in their mid-forties; their average age was 43 and 74 percent were women. They had a variety of severe psychological problems, such as borderline troubles, psychosis, bipolar troubles, and anxiety or mood problems. Respondents had to report about their family configurations every two to three months during the period of a year and one half during which the follow-up lasted. Forty-two individuals

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[73] This sample includes individuals who are not institutionalized despite serious psychological problems. The larger variability of housing arrangements and life trajectories, the fact that no individuals of this sample are institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital during the study makes this sample more comparable to non-clinical samples.

over 61 participated in the five waves of interviews[74]. A total of 251 family configurations were included in the analysis, as up to five waves per individual were possible.

Five types of family configurations capture the variability of family configurations in that sample. The first type of configurations (18 percent of cases) focuses on the *nuclear family*. They include children and, in almost all cases, a partner. Other family members are systematically underrepresented. The average size of those configurations is small with only 5.7 members. The *kinship configuration* (26 percent of configurations) includes a large number of relatives from the kinship network. The mother, the father, the uncles and the aunts, as well as their partners, are over-represented. Cousins and the partner's relatives are also included. In comparison with the first type, partners and children are less frequently included than in the previous type. All other family members included are relatives by blood or marriage. Overall, this configuration is the largest with 8.1 members included. The third type of configurations (22 percent of cases) is similar to the *beanpole* family configuration of the previous chapters, although with a much smaller size (4.4 instead of 8.1). It is focused on close blood ties from the family of origin (parents and siblings) and excludes all relatives by marriage or partnership, unlike the previous type. *Post-divorce Configurations* (19 percent of cases) are characterized by the overrepresentation of the previous partner (included in half of the cases) and the absence of a current partner. Relatives by blood or marriage are underrepresented, and the family configuration does not include a nucleus that is constituted by one's partner and children. This family configuration is rather large and includes a great number of other relationships mostly associated with divorce and remarriage. The fifth type (16 percent) includes configurations that focus on friends and care professionals considered as family members. In this type, *friends* are as many as 2.5 persons, whereas blood relatives, in-laws, and steps are almost absent. The partner and the children are also underrepresented.

There is indeed a large variability of family configurations in samples of individuals with psychological problems. In other words, all respondents do not include the same family members. They put an unequal emphasis on parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins, friends and care professional considered as significant family members. Despite their smaller size and their lower density, the composition of family configurations of individuals under psychotherapy relates to that found in other samples. Indeed, the types described above are similar, to a large extent, to those of the previous chapters. They have however

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[74] Dropouts were due to individuals quitting the therapy.

important distinct features because of the status of individuals as clients in psychotherapy. For instance, the large number of individuals including a psychiatrist or a social worker as a family member is not found in other samples. Figure 13 provide several examples of family configurations within which individuals with psychiatric problems are embbedded.

INSERT PICTURE 6.2 HERE

Figure 13. Types of family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems

How does this variability affect the social capital available to individuals with psychiatric problems? Although the level of density, the connectivity of interdependencies and the centrality of respondents are much lower in this sample than in non-clinical samples, as exemplified in Figure 12, there are still great variations of social capital according to the composition of family configurations. In this regard, the results are quite similar to what is found in non-clinical samples. In beanpole family configurations, there is a lower number of supportive family members and a higher density of supportive interdependencies. The same happens in nuclear family configurations, which also emphasize bonding social capital. In these family configurations, respondents are embedded in a dense set of emotional interdependencies and have a low centrality in their families. Many connections among their family members do not depend on them, and their family configurations are resistant to their own removal.

By comparison, kinship family configurations provide a greater number of helpers and help seekers, who are less frequently connected to each other. Overall, kinship family configurations are associated with a binding type of social capital but within a larger and more pluralistic family context than the nuclear and the beanpole family configurations. The friendship family configurations are markedly different and include a large number of friends and care professionals who are considered family members. Bridging social capital is dominant, as friends and blood relatives are kept separate in several non-overlapping subgroups This implies that respondents benefit from a large structural autonomy. Post-divorce family configurations are intermediate: Density and connectivity are on average lower than in nuclear, kinship, and beanpole family configurations. Respondents in post-divorce families, however, do not have the same centrality as respondents embedded in friendship family configurations. Therefore they do not benefit from the same amount of either bridging or bonding social capital as individuals with other family configurations.

These results are quite similar to those pertaining to non-clinical samples[75]. They shed light on the variability of family configurations and on the unequal amount of social capital that these configurations make available to individuals with psychiatric problems. Family configurations vary in

[75] See chapter three.

the extent to which they include friends or care professionals, children, parents, siblings, and other relatives. Nuclear, kinship, beanpole, friendship and post-divorce family configurations trigger distinct ways of building interdependencies with family members. These variations have an impact on the social capital that they make available to individuals. In regard to bonding social capital, beanpole and nuclear family configurations are optimal. But we already stressed above the burdens associated with bonding social capital: family interference and family over-care have some detrimental effects as they exert much normative pressure on individuals who already have difficulties to deal with social expectations. As for bridging social capital, individuals with psychiatric problems embedded in friendship family configurations may find some advantages. It is however dubious that the level of activity that maintaining such a large number of disconnected family members implied is easily achieved in their situation[76].

Variability not only concerns supportive ties. Family conflict has been for years a central issue for understanding individuals with psychiatric problems. In chapter 4, we found that conflict and ambivalence were more frequent in beanpole family configurations than in other family configurations. Is there a similar tendency in clinical samples? In other words, are some family configurations associated with more conflict and ambivalence than others for individuals under psychiatric stress? Results of Table 15 support this hypothesis: beanpole family configurations are again associated with a higher probability of stress and ambivalence. Interestingly, the nuclear family configuration also scores high in terms of conflict and ambivalence. Bonding social capital promotes a state of conflict and ambivalence in families confronted with psychological problems. More horizontal family configurations, such as post-divorce and friendship family configurations, with their emphasis on bridging social capital, create fewer occasions of conflict and dyadic ambivalence for individuals with psychiatric problems.

INSERT TABLE 6.1 ABOUT HERE

[76] Chapter 7 gets back on the issue of stability and change of family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems.

Table 15. Support, conflict and ambivalence in family configurations of individuals with psychiatric troubles

Conflicts that occur between individuals with psychiatric problems and their family members are overrepresented in family configurations in which a high density of positive interdependencies also exist. They are not, as such, the direct results of a patient's personality but rather the consequences of long term interdependencies of family members with the patient. Over-care and over-concern for individuals with clinical symptoms create a shrinkage of the family configurations that may either lead to atomization and a lack of ties, or to an investment in a small number of helpers with a highly ambivalent and conflictual family context. Dyadic conflicts involving the individual with psychiatric problems eventually become the expression of a family system, a fact that is well-known in systemic psychotherapy.

Conclusion

Compared with non-clinical individuals, individuals with psychiatric problems from the studies reviewed in this chapter include fewer members from their nuclear family, especially partners and children. This has profound consequences for relational resources available to them, as the conjugal sub-system is a primary support system in late modernity (Widmer, 2004; Widmer, Kellerhals, & Levy, 2004). Other family ties are also less frequently reported: the members of the larger kinship network are under-represented. Therefore, the number of significant family members is lower. There would be much to say about this shrinkage of family configurations triggered by psychiatric troubles. Let us recall once again that the energy necessary to take care of family members with a clinical background exhausts many individual resources. Parents, rather than connecting their child with their larger kinship networks and friends, tend to withdraw from their social circles. This has consequences for individuals with psychiatric problems, who are less able to build fruitful interdependencies within their parents' family configurations. Intergenerational ties, in particular with grandparents, uncles and aunts, but also with fathers, and the sense of continuity and the social control that they provide, are severed. Ambivalence is therefore replaced in many cases by atomization[77]. Mothers play a crucial

[77] Atomization is defined as a lack of interdependencies among family members.

role for the social integration of individuals with psychiatric problems, as in many situations they are the only stable family members in their child's life. This comes with a cost for mothers, as strong interdependencies with their troubled child means a disengagement from other interdependencies. It also has a cost for the child, as this situation makes him or her utterly dependent on a single person, with obvious risk of loneliness on the long run. In two over three clinical samples, there is no compensation of the deficit of partners, children and blood relatives by the inclusion of alternative family members, such as those associated with the professional care system. Overall, the hypothesis of a deficit of social capital for individuals with psychiatric problems is confirmed: they have a smaller set of significant family members as compared to non-clinical individuals that is only partially compensated by other sources of support. Hence, social capital is also much poorer.

That said, it would be inconsequential to state that all family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems refer to an homogeneous model of deficit. Individuals undergoing psychotherapy define their family configurations in a variety of ways. They vary to the extent that they include partners or in-laws, friends, parents, siblings, and other relatives. Some are fully isolated. Most of them are not, however, and focus on either parents or siblings. Others also include care professionals as family members. In some cases associated with divorce, partners and ex-partners intermingle.

Overall, researchers and therapists who adhere to the definition of the Family as a configuration may become more able to understand the complex family contexts of individuals with psychiatric problems because such individuals, as others, have experienced the consequences of the pluralization of family life. The configurational approach overcomes the constraints associated with the definition of families that matter as nuclear, as it does not predefine what the significant family configurations are. It also makes it visible that various types of family configurations are associated with unequal levels of relational resources for individuals with psychiatric problems.

CHAPTER 7 – Short Term Changes in Families

When Gina was asked about her family configuration the first time, she included her partner, her two children, her mother, her sister, the partner of her sister, her niece, several relatives of her partner (his parents and siblings) and two friends that she considered close enough to be included in her family. When she was again interviewed, six months after, she had split with her partner. As a consequence, she did not include him, his parents and siblings in her family configuration any more. Her sister was also going through turbulent times with her own partner, so that the ties between the two sisters got reactivated, with much psychological support exchanged. Friends considered as family members gained additional significance for a while. Another six months passed and Gina met a new partner, who also had children from a previous relationship. Within a year, her family configuration changed tremendously, due to a series of events that could quite easily be traced out.   The story of Gina is not uncommon, although personal stories usually feature more stable family configurations on the short term. In many configurations, one hardly notices a change for years, although a closer look might reveal subtle modifications of social capital and ambivalences.

How do family configurations evolve on the short term? By what mechanisms do they remain stable or achieve new balances of support and conflict month after month? The issue of change in family configurations is not easy to tackle. Quantitative research has addressed family change in focusing on normative events, such as marriage or giving birth. In the family developmental perspective, inspired by functional analysis (Parsons & Bales, 1956), expected transitions of life create shift in family stages (Duvall & Miler, 1985). The importance of daily events that go along with life was disregarded, even though participating to a family gathering, getting into a fight with a sibling or a parent, leaving the country, putting an end to an intimate relationship or dating a new partner are events that have consequences for family interdependencies. But how exactly do they modify family configurations? Results described in the previous chapters are static. However, one assumption of the configurational perspective is that family interdependencies are not once and for all set but that they

change overtime. This chapter considers some of the structural mechanisms that account for how family evolve on the short term.

Focus Points

In order to understand the passing of time in a more detailed way, we interviewed Betty and her family members nine months after the first interview. Figure 14 presents Betty's family configuration as defined by the second wave of interviews.

INSERT PICTURE 7.1 HERE

Figure 14. The family configuration of Betty nine months later

Changes happened during this nine month period: Compared with the first interview[78], Betty has dropped her two friends as significant family members, and her sister-in-law Jane is not included in the family configuration any more. But overall, a remarkable stability characterizes Betty's family configuration over time.   The pattern of interdependencies has not changed much. Only Betty's mother, brothers and sisters are more loosely connected than on wave 1. From qualitative reports, at least one major change has occurred in Betty's family: her mother, Nina, who was living with Betty at the time of the first interview, has moved out, following a series of disagreements with Betty. Nina and Betty were no longer able to tolerate their living arrangement, which had lasted about one year. Their understanding of life and their religious beliefs were too different for the two to be able to live together, according to various family members. Betty also pointed at differences of perceptions of past events related to her father. Therefore, after a "family vote" among all the siblings and Betty's daughter, it was decided that Nina would live with Henry, one of the brother of Betty. Interestingly, Nina had no real say in the vote. She was just told that she was to live there, since it was in both her and Betty's best interest.

What kind of insights does the case of Betty provide? This case study suggests that in order to understand why some individuals were added and other dropped in family configurations, one has to take into account that concerns of individuals change over time. At time 1, Betty is deeply involved in

[78] See chapter 2.

care and conflicts with her mother, which is not the case at time 2. This focus on her mother at the first interview required some form of bridging capital to be present, which explains the inclusion of friends. Indeed, Betty needed their support for counterbalancing the tensions created by the daily negative interactions with her mother. On the second interview, Betty's focus on her mother is significantly decreasing because of the new living arrangement decided by her and her siblings. This change has created an opportunity for the configuration to evolve by a change of focus in Betty's life.

Family configurations change because individuals vary over time from one focus to another one. Overall, sociologists have tried to understand how families change by the virtue of normative and non-normative events. A more straightforward explanation of changes can be drawn from the fact that individual lives are lead by shifting personal concerns for things, activities or persons. For some individuals, work plays a major role and everything for a time is organized in their family life around it. For other individuals, a child, a mother, the home, a leisure or some other activity, space or person, becomes the main principle organizing family life. These focus points make individuals interact with peculiar people and therefore create new family configurations in which they lead them to be included.

A conceptualization of this phenomena can be drawn from the work of North-American sociologist, Feld (1981), with the concept of *focus points*. Recall that, according to Feld, social relations develop as a consequence of joint activities. Interactions among individuals are organized around specific meeting points such as workplaces, hobbies, hangouts, roles, etc. "As a consequence of interactions associated with their joint activities, individuals whose activities are organized around the same focus will tend to become interpersonally tied and form a cluster" (Feld, 1981, p. 1016). A focus is defined as "a social, psychological, legal, or physical entity around which joint activities are organized" (Feld, 1981, p. 1015). Family interdependencies come into being because some individuals care for similar persons or for similar activities. In other words, individuals become interdependent with each other in a family configuration because they share a focus point.

Consider the courtship process. Courtship goes through a series of stages by which individuals develop common interests and activities and a shared culture that designates to them a series of objects that need to be jointly invested. If the couple fails to create such joint concerns, the likelihood that

partners will fail to adjust to each other and to their family configurations is great (Berger & Kellner, 1964; Lewis, 1973). Moving together in a household creates a focus called "home", a place with its own values and spirit, which the two partners invest emotionally. When one has a child, the child becomes one organizing principle of relationships in one's family configuration. Grandparents and parents come together in order to provide a sense of identity, comfort and support to children. Alternatively, a family configuration may split into several pieces when the focus couple divorces. Because individuals are lead by the circumstances to care for similar objects or persons, they become interdependent. Marriage, birth, health problems, residential moves, divorces, or the death of family members are associated with the destruction of older focus points and the development of new ones. Focus points are generative of interdependencies in family configurations[79].

Adaptation Within Stability

Numerous events influence the daily organization of family configurations. Family celebrations, special meals, holidays and daily nuisances, problems or successes at work all have an influence on the ways in which emotional and practical interdependencies are set up by shifting the focus points of individuals. Persons are the object of a large number of events that change their focus points and thus their need for others. Therefore, configurations are never static but evolve on the short term[80]. Does that mean that they have no stability?

In order to answer this question, a sample of college students filled the *Family Network Method* (Widmer, 1999b; Widmer & La Farga, 2000) two times separated by a month interval (Monney, 2007). Overall, their family configurations are very stable. Ninety percent of the family members included on either waves are present in both. Six percent were dropped from wave one to wave two, and four percent were added on wave two. These figures indicate that there is a great stability in the composition of family configurations within this period of time. Individuals who include their fathers or siblings on wave one do so again on wave two. Interestingly, the family members who change the

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[79] Life in late modernity is a constant generator and destructor of focus points. New organizing life principles frequently come into being in individual lives due to the complexity of the social fields in which individuals are active. Indeed, the variety of social fields in which individuals participate is high in late modernity.

[80] This does not mean that configurations are static. As the systemic perspective asserts, they oscillate around an equilibrium from which they never go too far away.

most are those included last in family configurations. Therefore, they correspond to family members who do not have a large functional importance. The more central family members, who are included first in their configurations, are especially stable. Mothers and fathers for instance do not change between the two waves[81]. This stability concerns social capital as well. The density, the connectivity of family configurations and the centrality of respondents in them remain fairly stable between wave one and wave two.

Figure 15 shows the family configurations of two young adults and how they change within a month and a half. The composition of the family configuration remains for the most part the same, with a large number of family members included in both waves. The mother, the father and the two brothers occupy the first ranks of inclusion. They are followed by uncles, aunts, the cousins and grandparents. The configuration is very dense and fully interconnected while the respondent does not have an intermediary position in it. Overall, the pattern at the first interview (time one) is typical of a beanpole family configuration[82].

INSERT PICTURE 7.2 HERE

Figure 15. Change in family configurations over a month and a half

The composition of this family configuration at time two (second interview) is similar to the one of time one. All family members of time one have remained in the configuration, and two new family members were added, the respondent's godfather (a great-uncle on the father's side) and the respondent's godmother (his partner). The configuration at time two is again dense and connected, while the respondent fulfils a similar position as in the previous month. The family configuration of a second individual, which graph is not included, is also extremely stable. It is classified by cluster analysis as a post-divorce family because it includes a half-sister and a half-brother. Two half-siblings, the two grandmothers, the father and the mother remain and the same kind of tightly and dense

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[81] There is a significant number of individuals who do not include their fathers as significant family members. They do not change from one month to the other. Not including a father or a brother in the family is something that has huge emotional and symbolic consequences and that is not done lightly. Mothers are the most stable (at least at this life stage) as they are almost always included.
[82] See chapter 1.

network of interdependencies is present in both times. Only the half-brother's partner is missing at time two. The configuration is however not fully identical on times one and two. As a matter of fact, some relationships have changed. The presence of the godparents, without altering the family configuration and its interdependencies, have twisted the balance towards the relatives of the respondent's father. This marginal change is of course not without explanation, as it responds to family gatherings such as birthdays or Christmas, which are times in which relationships with godparents are reactivated.

Most of the cases that we consider correspond to these rather stable patterns of relationships across time. There are however a few cases where more dramatic changes occurred in family configurations on the short term. Consider the second case in Figure 15. The respondent put an end to her relationship with her partner between times one and two. The partner of time one therefore is not included as a significant family member on time two; meanwhile, the respondent has reinvested in interdependencies with her aunts and uncles on the paternal side, as well as in her interdependencies with her grandmother. Note that her partner did not develop any interdependencies with her other family members on time one; ending this partnership was hence not a too difficult matter as far as the whole family configuration was concerned. The loss of the partnership lead to a reinforcement of its overall logic already present on wave one, one typical of a father-oriented family configuration[83]. Note that what these cases exemplify is confirmed by further statistical analysis (Widmer & Sapin, 2008): There is much stability in family configurations on the short term, although there are adaptations to events in a significant number of cases.

Structural Instability

The question arises whether individuals with psychiatric problems benefit from the same stability in their family configurations. The follow-up of the family configuration of Joanna in Figure 16 exemplifies the issue of stability of family configurations on the short term for individuals with psychiatric problems (Widmer, Chevalier & Dumas, 2005). Joanna is a twice divorced woman in her

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[83] See chapter 2 for a description of the composition of family configurations.

forties, with two children under age ten of two distinct fathers. Her children are living in a community home and are also undergoing psychotherapy. Joanna has recently started a new partnership with a man that she met while doing a psychotropic treatment. Joanna' s parents live in a neighbouring country but her sister resides in a close-by city. Several family members of Joanna are also taken care off in various psychiatric treatments, such as her mother and her sister. Aside, she does not have the custody of her children, who have lived in a special facility for a long time.

Joanna has been followed by the partner psychotherapist for one year when she is first interviewed on her family configuration. She is under the supervision of a trustee following an hospitalization in psychiatric settings for alcohol consumption and treatment of addictions, associated with a long-term psychiatric follow-up for borderline troubles. On month one, Joanna is institutionalized. She is in conflict with her psychotherapists and her trustee, and has severed her ties with her parents because she thinks that she is systematically criticized by them. The family configuration on month one is sparse and disconnected. It is composed by her parents, her sister and her grandmother. Strikingly, Joanna is not including her two children as significant family members at that time because she is feeling estranged from them. She is perceiving no supportive relationships among her family members, which makes her family configuration utterly distinct from configurations of individuals without a clinical record. On month three, however, things are changing; the family configuration is now including her two children and the new partner that she met while she was institutionalized. Various supportive links have developed in comparison with month one. A new configuration has emerged from several concrete changes that have occured during that period. First, Joanna has successfully built a trusting relationship with her new partner and is thus wishing to rebuild a nuclear family comprising her two children. The links with her parents and her sister are reactivated by the hospitalization of her grand-mother, which has given the family members a chance to meet regularly for a while. Interestingly, Joanna is using this focus to introduce her new partner to her parents. As a whole, this is a period of construction of new ties and a full reactivation of old ties, which is confirmed on month five when her father and her partner meet each other while taking care of removing the belongings of the grandmother from her apartment. On month five, the family members

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are told about the cancer of Joanna's sister. This new focus is producing a dramatic change in the family configuration, which is turning its resources on this sister. In reaction, Joanna is seeking comfort and attention from her partner and her partner's mother. From the graph on month five, one can see that the grandmother has lost her centrality in the configuration. Joanna is in a phase of transition between her focus on her parents and her sister, and the focus on her partner and her children.

INSERT PICTURE 7.3 HERE

Figure 16. Change in the family configuration of Joanna within a year

The following months confirm the attempt by Joanna of reconstructing her family configuration. Professional caregivers and her parents and sisters are first crucial, but slowly are giving way to a greater centrality of her children and of her partner. In summary, tracing the family configuration throughout therapy reveals a steady process of change of the focus points of Joanna, from a lack of focus other than herself, to a focus on blood relatives and psychotherapists, up to a focus on her children and her partner. In this short period of time of a year, various events have occurred that have changed the ways in which interdependencies are shaped. Meeting with a new partner, having her grandmother move to a nursing home and her sister getting cancer, and being allowed to have her children back with her are crucial moments of a rather swift transition between two types of family configurations.

A second case study presented in Figure 17 concerns Beatrice, a woman of 25 years old. She comes from a socially disadvantaged family, and has been under psychotherapeutic supervision since childhood, due to borderline personality disorders. She has gone through a variety of problems such as alcoholism, suicide attempts and regressive behaviours. At the time of the first interview, she is under the supervision of a guardian because she has been implicated on several occasions in petty thief and credit debts. Her younger sister has also suffered from personality troubles with a history of depressions. In the first three months of the follow-up, Beatrice is living in her own apartment, after a

four month period where she lived in a community home, after a suicide attempt. The graphs show that she has a very small and disconnected family configuration, which reveals her difficulty of making new interdependencies and recovering old ones. She is trying to involve her psychiatrist and her guardian in her family configuration and is asking them to spend week-ends together, something that the two professionals consistently refuse to do. The family configuration of Beatrice is stable during that time period, with its lack of relational resources except for the support provided by the two professionals.

INSERT PICTURE 7.4 HERE

Figure 17. Change in the family configuration of Beatrice within a year

On month four, Beatrice is going to a camp organized by a cult. She is putting much distance with her guardian, informing her that she is now feeling very well and does not need to be followed in therapy as often as before. The family configuration of Beatrice on month five is in complete contradiction with her family from the previous months. From months five to month seven, she has a very large family configuration with many meaningful relationships. In contrast to previous times, these relationships are reciprocal, as she is perceiving herself as giving and receiving support rather than just receiving support and being dependent on others. Interdependencies are effective, warm and reassuring. Interestingly, all members of her family configuration are well interconnected with each other. Her new family configuration is a typical example of bonding social capital, with its normative control and collective support.

Although this might be interpreted positively, the statuses of family members on month five indeed show that the composition of family configurations is of prime importance to make sense of their relational properties: the professionals and the blood relatives have been left out and replaced by members of the cult as family members[84]. Members of the cult are trying to disconnect her from her other family members, and in particular to isolate her from her blood ties. They are overall successful: Only Beatrice's sister and her aunt keep on being included as significant family members on the

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[84] Sectarian communities are indeed frequently described as large families that especially welcome fragile individuals.

following months. However, they are not supportive any more. Therefore, Beatrice is falling into an emotional dependency to the cult's members without any relational alternative. On month eight, although the composition of her family configuration remains about the same as in the previous months, the relational pattern of the family configuration is dramatically changing again. At that time, Beatrice is feeling highly disillusioned: she is again in a state of unilateral dependency on her family members of the cult, as the reciprocity of relationships has disappeared and the interdependencies existing among family members are negated.

These two case studies exemplify the high rate of change of family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems, which is confirmed by other analyses (Widmer & Sapin, 2008). The turnover of family members, as well as the ups and downs of social capital are central dimensions associated with psychological problems. The follow-up of Joanna nevertheless illustrates increasing positive interdependencies with family members, as a cumulative process of revival of old ties and of creation of new ties. Reciprocal interdependencies slowly build up and are confirmed. The acknowledgement that they should be invested in order for them to endure is acquired by Joanna. In the case of Beatrice, quite to the contrary, the pile-up of interdependencies do not last and the stabilization of the family configuration is not secured. The pattern of changes triggered by the inclusion of Beatrice in the cult as a substitute family ends up being a repetition of what happened previously in her life. After a short period of time in the cult, Beatrice is feeling utterly dependent from her new family members, disregards her own role in the configuration and is blind to any connection beyond herself. She is back on the same kind of relational patterns that she experienced previously with her father, her mother and her sister.

Family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems are more unstable than others, changing in a rapid pace or, in other cases, being frozen for years[85]. Their sensitivity to life events occurring either to them, to their parents or siblings is great. Therefore, stability within adaptation is less granted in those family configurations than in others. Individuals with psychiatric problems

[85] We have focused on two accounts of unstable family configurations because this pattern is the most widespread in the data that we collected. A few cases, however, present exactly the opposite tendency, with small configurations, mostly Nuclear or Beanpole, with bonding social capital, which staid the same during the year and a half in which they were studied.

develop a distinct pattern of change over time, as they face much more frequently non-normative events in their life. Sudden changes of focus points are more frequent for them than for others. Their capacity of keeping friends and partners for a long time is lower. One additional reason for the greater occurrence of changes in such circumstances in the homophily structuring interpersonal relationships. Overall, individuals tend to interact with others similar to them in terms of social class, education level, sex and ethnicity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). As being a "patient" constitutes a master status (Hughes, 1945) in many social settings, individuals with psychiatric problems tend to interact with individuals with similar problems, who have experienced identical non-normative events, and therefore a high turnover of focus points. Therefore, homophily has a multiplicative effect on instability because not only respondents but also the focus points of their family members, are often unstable.

Conclusion

Changes in family configurations closely match events that alter one's focus in life. Events change the shape of family configurations by imposing new focus points on individuals. They concern a wide range of family members; therefore, the potential of change in family configurations is great. For instance, a former spouse who is dating with another person, becomes less significant and is dropped from the family configuration; or, contrastingly, individuals may get involved in a new intimate relationship and thus they may rebuild a nuclear focus. Some individuals rediscover ties going back to childhood, which are reactivated following some special circumstances, bad or good. The variety of events that trigger such changes of focus does not only depend on the respondents' experiences, but includes events that occur in the personal life of their family members as well. In this regard, family configurations have a high potential for change.

Despite this potential, there is a great stability of family configurations on the short term. That confirms the ability of individuals to maintain meaningful interdependencies with a large number of family members, despite the randomness of life on the short term. One's birthday, a short-term sickness, meeting by chance or for some purpose with this one or that one, are however occasions in

which marginal interdependencies are reshaped following some changes of focus points triggered by the circumstances. In non-clinical populations, those focus points do not usually gain much importance: they mostly explain who is included in the periphery of family configurations, that is last in the list of family members[86]. Less functionally significant family members are more likely to be added or dropped. Family configurations adjust in their margins to those changes, while their core interdependencies remain the same.

Individuals with psychological problems obviously experience a distinct type of family changes on the short term, as many of them develop a high turning rate of their family relationships. A variety of non-normative events, which happen to them or to their family members, modify their family interdependencies. Falling into drug or depression, being abruptly left by a partner, meeting individuals with similar problems as theirs or having to deal with decisions taken by a variety of professionals modify their focus points. Because individuals with psychiatric problems are exposed to a larger number of non-normative events, and are more sensitive and less efficient than others in their response to these events, many of their family configurations are turned upside down regularly. This is likely to create further difficulties for them, as circles of cumulative disadvantages occur between family configurations and psychiatric troubles. In some circumstances, it may be regarded as functional from the point of view of individuals with psychiatric problems as the alternatives are even less liable[87].

Family configurations are ever changing, some slowly, other rapidly, a minority frantically. Neither fully predictable nor random, family configurations are patterned by the occurrence of events that create and destroy focus points. Because such events are not randomly distributed, they impact on some individuals more than on others. As family configurations are constituted by individuals who are

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[86] Note that these family members are still significant, as they are the basis on which more central relationships, such as the conjugal or the parental relationships, develop. The importance of acquaintances and weak ties for families and individuals were rightly underlined by British sociologist David Morgan (2008).

[87] One alternative is, for some individuals, to fully withdraw from their family configurations and keep the interdependencies with family members as minimal as they might be. This self-exclusion of family configurations is certainly costly as it means a lack of bridging and bonding social capital, a situation not at all uncommon as we saw in chapter six.

exposed to similar events, and that respond to those events in quite similar ways, there are cumulative effects of events on family configurations.

CHAPTER 8 – Family Trajectories

Following a secular trend, family trajectories achieved a high level of uniformity by the nineteen sixties in most Western countries. At that time, a large majority of individuals went through an identified set of ordered and age-graded family stages with very few of them getting out of sequence or skipping transitions (Kohli, 1986; Modell, Furstenberg & Hershberg, 1976). The move towards standardization of life courses was replaced in the late nineteen sixties by an inverse tendency leading to a pluralization of family trajectories. This trend toward a greater diversity of family pathways is one of the most profound changes of societies in late modernity. Family stages and family transitions have characterized a smaller part of the population and have occurred at increasingly dispersed chronological ages in younger cohorts than in older cohorts (Brükner & Mayer, 2004).

This result is often interpreted as stemming from the larger autonomy and agency left to individuals about how to proceed with their own life in late modernity (Beck, 1986: Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994; Sennett, 1998). Is it really so? Recently, the hypothesis of the pluralization of life courses was critically examined in various empirical analyses (Brükner & Mayer, 2004; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007), which revealed that this trend has been less pervasive than its supporters claimed. Important national differences in levels of pluralization were found, depending on historical and social policy continuities, with the contrast in union formation between Mediterranean and Northern Europe. The interpretation of pluralization as a sign of the greater freedom of individuals to master their own life in new cohorts was questioned by various results stressing the great social and gender inequalities that shape pluralization processes: women and individuals from the working class have experienced much more constrains on that matter than men and professionals (Widmer & Ritschard, 2009; Widmer et al., 2003). Overall, the empirical evidence suggest that rather than being a general trend that has concerned all individuals and all life domains uniformly, the pluralization of the life course has taken distinct shapes and has followed distinct paces in various social groups.

If the spread of pluralization processes needs more empirical work before being rightly estimated,

it is beyond reasonable doubts that family trajectories have achieved a higher complexity in late modernity. Various demographic changes that have occurred since the nineteen sixties cast doubt on the universal ordering and sequencing of family transitions. The tight set of transitions prevalent then, from leaving the parental home and becoming financially autonomous to marrying and becoming a parent (Modell et al. 1976), was progressively replaced by a set of less chronologized and less sequenced life changes. Young adults in most Western countries have postponed leaving the parental home, marriage, and parenthood (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Shanahan, 2000), with various complex living arrangements characterizing this prolonged transitional stage in younger cohorts. Rising rates of divorce have triggered a large pluralization of the second part of adult life. In their forties, many individuals enter for a second time an establishment phase when they remarry, or a preschool stage if they have a child from a second partnership. Accordingly, the variance of age at key transitions of family life has increased. In summary, family trajectories have become more complex and diverse since the nineteen sixties (Aldous, 1996; Mattesisch, & Hill, 1987).

Why do should we care about family trajectories? Based on results of chapters two and five, showing the connections between family configurations and family structures, one expects that family configurations directly depend on the life trajectories of their members. Therefore, the pluralization of life trajectories may explain the diversity of family configurations in late modernity. So far, we have considered how family configurations evolve on the short term. But they may also result from sequences of events and transitions on the long run of a life time. This chapter first reviews the evidence existing about the pluralization of family trajectories. It stresses the shortcomings of the developmental approach of families, which played a leading role in family research for years before being abandoned by most researchers. The configurational perspective offers an alternative to the developmental approach which, while keeping the focus on orderly family changes in the life course, does not assume that family trajectories stick with a standard model. Empirical analysis, rather than a highly abstract and normative model, should be given prominence in the understanding of the development of families. Various innovative statistical techniques (Gabadinho, Ritschard, Studer & Müller, 2008; Gauthier, Widmer, Bucher & Notredame, 2009) shall be used in order to uncover what

types of family trajectories best describe individuals from non-clinical and clinical samples. Finally, the importance of the results for a deeper understanding of long-term family changes shall be stressed.

The Family Life Cycle Revisited

Current research is left with various evidence that point at the greater diversity and complexity of family trajectories in younger cohorts. The developmental model has made the understanding of family trajectories an uneasy task. Up to the early seventies, sociologists and demographers stressed the prevalence of a universal family cycle featuring a set of pervasive stages. These stages were ordered, associated with the chronological age of their members, specialized functionally and distinct for the composition of the household unit. All families were supposed to go through a beginning stage, a childbearing stage, a preschool stage, a stage with adolescents, soon to be followed by the launching of young adults and a post-parental stage (Duval, 1957; Hill & Rodgers, 1964). The family life cycle ended with the so-called "later year", "ageing" and "retired" families.

Accordingly, research dealing with family changes throughout the life course has been based on the constitution of family stages *a priori,* using criteria such as the age of the oldest child and the retirement status of the husband father (Aldous, 1996). These criteria raise a number of empirical and analytical difficulties. Between 1965 and 2004, the "*Sociological abstract*" database reveals that more than 1000 publications referred explicitly to the family developmental perspective. The number of publications has however greatly decreased since then. This underlines the shortcomings of the model for investigating the complexity of family life courses in late modernity. As a matter of fact, a major weakness of the developmental model is that it focuses on nuclear families and disregards other family configurations.

The gap between the theoretical model of development and the empirical approach to studying empirical family trajectories has been recognized (Oppenheimer & Lewis, 1999). The developmental model has been criticized for its assumption of the universality of the family stages, which impedes the inclusion of alternate configurations to the nuclear family, such as cohabitation outside wedlock, childlessness, divorce and remarriage (Laszloffy, 2002). In other words, the family developmental

model is not able to account for critical social changes that have occurred in the family realm within the last 30 years. Indeed, the universality of family stages, their ordering as well as their link with chronological ages have been seriously questioned and, with them, the idea that most families follow a regular and ordered life circle (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987).

Several critics were particularly hard to deal with by the family developmental perspective. The number of household structures to take into account when dealing with the family life cycle has dramatically increased even if only a small number of criteria are considered, such as the sex of the co-resident parent and the presence of a stepparent , of half-siblings or step-siblings in the household (Pasley, 1987). The ordering of stages is also misleading, as an individual may enter a second time an establishment phase when he remarries, or a preschool stage if he has a child born from a second partnership. Although a series of attempts have tried to make the developmental perspective more differentiated in the number and the characteristics of stages (Glick, 1947; Mederer & Hill, 1983; Duvall & Miller, 1985; Mattessisch & Hill, 1987), one is still wondering in what family stage does this individual really stand. The lack of a strong correlation between transitions such as divorce and remarriage with the chronological ages of both parents and children is another evidence questioning the reality of a developmental family cycle. The family stages proposed by the developmental perspective are neither ordered nor chronologized, and the model is hardly "developmental". This makes this perspective unable to account for a large share of the variance of actual living arrangements and other family interdependencies over time. The emphasis on a single and typical family life cycle model assumes that all families abide strongly by normative constraints and therefore do not follow alternative pathways. Referring to such a model forces the researcher to exclude many individuals or family configurations, such as widowed, divorced, or separated individuals, as they simply do not fit within the formulation.

The ambiguity and limitations of the family life cycle model and its developmental perspective lead to serious analytical problems, that have cramped family sociology for a long while. However, it is, despite its various shortcomings, the only perspective that seriously considered families in relation with time, structures and functions. Sadly, if the majority of family and life course sociologists have

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acknowledged the increasing complexity of family trajectories, models that account for change of families over the life course are deceptively few. Is there any alternative to the view of the family life course as a standardized, ordered and chronologized development of stages?

Empirical Family Trajectories

The pioneer work of American sociologist Andrew Abbott (2001) opened a new analytical perspective for the understanding of family development in late modernity. In a series of papers unrelated to family sociology, he advised researchers to study empirical sequences of events rather than to define stages, transitions and the causality that link them on theoretical grounds. Abbott stressed that the percentages of cases that empirically, in a longitudinal perspective, follow any predictive model, is likely to be small in a variety of situations. Rather than trying to see how to make the empirical data fit within the theoretical model of the family life cycle, why not using statistical techniques that reveal their patterns? One may later see how those patterns relate with criteria such as the ordering of stages, and link them with the chronological ages of family members.

The alternative inspired by Abbott's stance responds to critics raised against the family development perspective. It implies a change of focus from the family considered as a bounded small group, to individuals as centres of large sets of family interdependencies evolving through time. This fits well within the configurational perspective, which focuses on individuals and their interdependent family members. The configurational perspective does not understand families as comprehensive holes with a life of their own, as it does not believe that families are living organisms that follow a finite set of stages in their development. Individuals, however, experience various family configurations during their life that are to some extent developmental: these configurations are indeed structured, functional, chronologized and ordered in a variety of ways. In other words, the configurational perspective stresses that referring to individuals and their changing family interdependencies over time rather than to families as developing units provides a deeper understanding of the family life course.

In a series of analyses on the biographical survey of the Swiss Household Panel (Gauthier, 2007; Gauthier et al., 2009; Widmer et al., 2003; Widmer & Ritschard, 2009), we have encapsulated

family interdependencies over time by focusing on whom individuals have lived with between age 20 and age 45[88]. The cohabitational trajectory describes the composition of the interviewed person's household with ten categories: living with both biological parents, with one biological parent only, with one biological parent and her or his partner, alone, with a partner, with a partner and a child, with a partner and a non-biological child, alone with a biological child, with friends, and other. The trajectory of each individual is described by a sequence of states such that each state corresponds to the age of the person expressed in number of years. The time during which the person stays in each state is thus accounted for. Five types of cohabitational trajectories that best describe the variety of existing alternatives were drawn from innovative sequence analysis (Gabadino et al., 2008; Gauthier et al., 2008). Figure 18 presents a series of bar-charts by trajectory types. The bars represent the distribution of response categories by chronological age. For instance, about 70 percent of individuals in the parental type live with their two biological parents at age 20, and only two percent at age 30.

INSERT PICTURE 8.1 HERE

Figure 18. Types of family trajectories

The parental type is overly dominant (62 percent of the sample). It is in line with the developmental model of the family, as it features an ordered sequence of stages from leaving the parental home to creating a couple and having children. A second type (17 percent of the sample) includes trajectories centred on partnership. Individuals belonging to this type have spent most of their adult life (19.2 years over the 25 years considered) living with a partner, but without children at home. The three remaining types are quantitatively less prominent. Seven percent of individuals have always lived with their parents until age 45 (parental home). Another type (8 percent of cases) includes a variety of sequences stemming from life as a single, living with a partner without children, living with a partner and the partner's children or without a partner but with biological children (mixed cohabitation trajectories). Finally, five percent of individuals have not yet formed a stable cohabitation

[88] This is obviously a crude and imperfect measure of family interdependencies throughout the life course, as coresidence is a poor criterion to define family configurations, as we have noted earlier. Using household membership is certainly not sufficient to measure interdependencies, especially when emotional and cognitive interdependencies are considered of prime importance.

with a partner during their adult life.

Overall, there is a limited number of types that account for the diversity of individual trajectories. Interestingly, these types depend to a significant extent on the birth cohort that individuals belong to, as well as on their level of education. As a matter of fact, individuals of younger cohorts and those with a higher level of education are under-represented in the parental type, and overrepresented in the mixed and single cohabitation trajectories. They have a greater likelihood of developing a slow transition to parenthood than individuals of older cohorts. Individuals in late modernity go through a greater number of family configurations and focus points throughout their life than individuals in previous times. The transition to parenthood is for instance extended and associated with a larger number of partnerships. The variety of family trajectories have indeed been greater in recent decades, and younger generations have been the main recipients of this trend towards pluralization. Rather than belonging to a single type of family trajectories, individuals in late modernity follow a variety of life paths. This plurality is however bounded, as the number of trajectory types is limited.

Life Trajectories and Family Configurations

This pluralization of trajectories have had important consequences for family configurations. In the previous chapter, we stressed the impact of events on short-term changes of family configurations. Because events impose new focus points on individuals, they promote a reorientation of family configurations, which become frantic for some individuals with psychiatric problems. What is true for events is even more true for life trajectories and the development of family configurations on the long run. Having a long-time partner and children or developing more temporary relationships and remaining childless change one's family configuration. The multiplication of focus points in the family trajectories of younger cohorts account for the complexity of family configurations. Family configurations are indeed marked by the relational history of individuals. Consider again the two family configurations stemming from divorce and remarriage presented in chapter 5. Alina is this 35 years old woman with a ten year old son from a previous marriage. Her partner, Laurent, has two sons

from a previous marriage. Her family configuration includes her ten year old son, her current partner and his two sons (10 and 20 years old), her previous partner, her mother, the mother of her previous partner, her father, her sister and three friends. The composition of her configuration is therefore very heterogeneous, with a mix of blood relatives, friends, steprelatives and previous in-laws. As we saw in a previous chapter, her former spouse plays a central role in her family configuration, with a high level of structural ambivalence which makes family life quite uneasy.

This peculiar family composition to a great extent is a consequence of Alina's relational history as well as her current partner's history. Alina left her parents' home at age 22 to live with one of the female friend that she currently includes as a family member. Soon after, she met the man with whom she had her only child at age 23. She lived with him during two years and they split the same year in which she delivered her child. After that, she lived with her son alone for ten years. During that time, she only had one other intimate relationship that lasted between age 25 and 27. She met her current partner at age 31 and has lived with him ever since. Of the new partner, we know little except that he has two sons with a great age difference, from two distinct partnerships. His youngest son is partly living with him and Alina; therefore strong dependencies have developed between her and this son, which is not the case for the oldest son. On the other side of her family, the long period of time spent by Alina has a single mother has created enduring interdependencies with the father of her child and his parents, especially his mother. Such tendency of single mothers without a new partnership to remain dependent on their in-laws is not uncommon. The extended period spent by Alina without a stable partner explains to some extent why the emotional and cognitive dependency on the previous partner has remained so strong. Ten years after the divorce, he is still included in the family configuration and used as an emotional resource by Alina. A sediment of the past has remained alive because of her focuss on her child and on her mourning of this intimate relationship. This sediment is mixed with her current partner's own complicated relational history in which dependencies on his own two children create a series of difficulties for the current couple. Indeed, Alina acknowledges many communication problems occuring in her family configuration and difficulties for her to establish a trusting relationship with her co-resident stepson. The various tensions that are experienced in the

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family configurations obviously stem from the difficulty of making personal histories of interdependencies work together.

Now consider the second post-divorce family configuration that we reviewed in chapter 5, that of Dora, this 36 woman, first time pregnant when she was interviewed. She has been with Don since she was 28. Remember that Don has two daughters, eleven and nine years old, for whom he has a shared custody with his previous partner. He has been divorced from her for eight years at the time of the interview. Dora has had a very distinct intimate trajectory than that of Alina. She did not develop a partnership before age 25. Later on, she had three short-term affairs, each lasting about six months and none involving a cohabitation. Indeed, she has kept on living with her parents until she met Don at age 28. Unsurprisingly, her family configuration focuses on her parents and her sister, in addition to her current partner and his two daughters who live with them. Contrary to the previous case, she is not connected with her previous partners, who were mainly casual encounters. The development of a strong connection with her sister, whom she includes among the first family members as a source of support for her, lead to the inclusion of her sister's partner and her sister's daughter in the family configuration. Overall, this family configuration, although, stemming from divorce and remarriage, is kinship oriented, because Dora's relational history is one of strong and lasting interdependencies with her parents and her sister. The birth of her child to come shall undoubtedly reinforce this orientation towards her own kin. On the other side of her family, her partner has the custody of his daughters and Dora has lived with them since they were two and four. This also supports the conclusion that a set of interdependencies have gradually emerged linking Dora, her partner and his children, and her parents and sister. The focus of Dora for a number of her adult years on her parents and her sister has been the basis on which her couple relationship has developed.

The various ways in which individuals build up their family configurations depend on a large series of events, transitions and stages that have happened in their life course. Some focus on the maintenance of meaningful ties with their previous partners, often for the sake of children. Some reinvest friendship and kinship ties in attempts to compensate for the permanent or temporary

weakening of their partnership. Others try to build a new nuclear family and focus on their current partnership and the children that they are responsible for.

Family Trajectories of Individuals with Psychiatric Problems

What kind of family trajectories individuals with psychiatric problems develop? Are they more unstable than those of other individuals? The previous chapter revealed a much larger turnover of family members on the short term in such cases, which have implications for family configurations on the long run. In their summation article, Cook et al. (1997) emphasized the distinct experiences of psychiatric frailty that individuals have developed depending on their birth cohorts. Since the nineteen sixties, there have been great changes in the ways in which individuals with psychiatric problems have been taken care off by society. Their concentration in ``total institutions'' that sought to control all aspects of their life for long periods of time, which dominated the social spectrum until the nineteen sixties, gave way to a ``desinstitutionalization'' of large numbers of individuals with psychiatric problems, who came to reside in the community (Cook et al., 1997). The spread of psychotropic medication reinforced this trend by making it possible for large groups of individuals to resume life with their family members and regular social participation. This process was however not without concerns, as many individuals without strong family support and financial resources were left by themselves in dealing with the consequences of their problems.

Changes across cohorts in the ordering and chronologization of life sequences have consequences for trajectories of individuals with psychiatric problems. The weakening institutional constraints imposed on individuals with psychiatric problems as well as the decreasing impact of social norms relative to the chronologization of key life transitions such as leaving the parental home, becoming economically independent or becoming parent, may have lead to a higher complexity and a pluralization of the life trajectories of individuals with psychiatric problems. The overall trend towards a pluralization of the life course may explain why clinical populations have also achieved a great variability of family configurations in late modernity as chapter six showed.

In order to further estimate whether or not individuals with a clinical record follow similar types of family trajectories, we considered 100 individuals with severe psychiatric problems[89]. The average family trajectory in this study is distinct from that found in non-clinical samples. Indeed, the normative sequencing of transitions characterizing life courses in non-clinical samples is significantly lower in this sample, with many individuals going back and forth between family stages that are usually considered irreversible. Also, for many individuals, some key transitions, such as leaving the parental nest, forming a stable partnership or having children, did not occur. The independence provided by having a separate household is in some cases not secured, as individuals with psychiatric problems continue to live with their parents or reside in public facilities. Overall, when compared with individuals from their cohorts, individuals with psychiatric problems have distinct trajectories.

Does that mean that all individuals belonging to clinical samples share the same family trajectories? By using advanced statistical techniques dedicated to the study of sequence data, such as optimal matching (Gabadino et al., 2008; Gauthier et al., 2008), we found several types of family trajectories, which are similar in some respects to the types found for the non-clinical sample, but distinct in other respects. A first type of trajectories is composed mostly of individuals who grew up with both of their biological parents before living alone (17 percent of all individuals). In a second type (16 percent), individuals who have spent most of their childhood and adolescence with one biological parent only, before living alone as individuals with the first type of trajectories. The third type (35 percent) features individuals who left the parental home much earlier than in other types to live in institutional settings for the most part of their lives. The fourth type includes individuals who have lived a long time with a partner but have never experienced parenthood. Only a small minority of individuals (12 percent) belong to the standard type of developmental family trajectories , with a long lasting partnership and the presence of biological children. Overall, individuals with psychiatric problems, as other individuals, present a diversity of family trajectories. Therefore, averaging out these cases in a single logic of development would provide poor estimates of their family trajectories.

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[89] The data are again taken from the two studies on individuals followed in a private psychiatric facility and in a day care hospital (Widmer, Chevalier & Dumas, 2005; Widmer et al., 2008).

However, this diversity again, as in non-clinical samples, does not equate to a full individualization of life courses. Indeed, a limited number of trajectory types account for it.

This pluralization of life courses has had an effect on individuals in clinical samples. It explains why individuals with psychiatric problems develop a variety of family configurations. Family trajectories that stems from an early family recomposition are associated with family configurations in which friends and therapists, or relatives, are central. Family trajectories characterized by living as a single lead to a family configuration in which parents are dominant. Family trajectories in which a stable relationship and children are present obviously triggers a much greater likelihood of being embedded in a nuclear family. Not only do recent events have an influence, but the overall focus of family life has one as well. As for non-clinical samples, life trajectories quite directly translate into family configurations. Overall, life trajectories impose long-term focus points at individuals for the development of their family configurations: Their children, their partners, or themselves as singles become the organizing principles of their lives, along with their psychiatric problems. A couple of qualitative examples further illustrate the connection among life trajectories and family configurations.

Michel, a man in his sixties, moved to Switzerland from Southern Europe in his early adulthood. He came from a disadvantaged family and had no formal education. In Switzerland, he was hired as an unskilled labourer and has remained so for the past 40 years. At age 20, he met his wife, who originated from the same country as him. They had two children and have remained together ever since. Therefore, Michel's trajectory has been centred on his children, his wife and his home. Interestingly, Michel has managed his various phases of depression by taking short interruptions from his work while keeping his integration within his family. The maintenance of a continuity in his family life fully translates into the organization of his family configuration: its small size, its focus on his co-resident children and his partner, as well as its bonding social capital are directly linked with his family trajectory.

By contrast, Gabriel, a man in his fifties, has had a highly unstable family trajectory. He has changed partners (and jobs, usually simultaneously) every five years, while keeping in touch, emotionally and socially, with many of his former partners, especially when they are the mothers of

his children. Therefore he has developed a post-divorce family configuration. Within the year and the half in which he took part to the study, he has gone from a friendship family configuration to end up in a kinship family configuration. Those changes are not random either, as the sudden death of one of his ex-partners, the mother of his youngest child, created much turmoil in his life. After this death occurred, he had to turn to his own parents and siblings to solve the problems associated with his orphan child, and thus, his family configuration changed. Finally, the case of Bernard, a young man in his thirties, is characteristic of a person that has never experienced the transition to a stable partnership and to parenthood. Although he has a formal education that includes some college, he has never been able to find a job. He was not successful in intimacy either, as severe psychotic episodes in his early twenties made the development of an intimate relationship hardly possible. Therefore, he has focused on his parents ever since, without any change during the time of the follow-up.

Conclusion

Family trajectories remain highly patterned and ordered in late modernity. In sum, a large majority of family trajectories belong to identified types, even in younger cohorts. Families in late modernity are not characterized by randomness and a lack of predictability but by the emergence of a few additional types to the stock already present in the nineteen sixties. Using a configurational perspective strongly supports the thesis that family trajectories are far from being disorganized or free from structural and normative constraints. Indeed, transitions continue to shape family trajectories. Most individuals start their lives living with their two biological parents. Then, during childhood or adolescence, some of their parents divorce, which account for a first factor of variability. Later transitions create additional faithful moments in which one's life may go along a few alternative pathways. Family development, from a configurational perspective, is constituted by a limited set of turning points, such as divorce and repartnering of parents, leaving home, moving to live with a partner, becoming a parents, divorcing and starting a new partnership. The cumulation of such turning points creates a bounded pluralization of life trajectories. In parallel, it makes many individuals believe that "everything is possible" and could be different. What is realized in empirical cohabitation

trajectories is actually much more homogeneous than often expected. The family life cycle has increased in complexity in younger cohorts; it remains however patterned and structured.

The paths followed in life have an importance for family configurations that individuals develop. Family configurations keep several sediment layers in them despite time passing by: parents and siblings come early on and they often survive as meaningful family members in older adulthood. There are other representatives of childhood, such as uncles, aunts, cousins and, of course, grandparents. In young adulthood, partnerships are developed, and with them, a whole new series of relatives are acquired. This is another layer of relationships that now often comes a decade earlier than children. The transition to parenthood involves a change of focus for intimate relationships, with friends dropping in significance. When children, nephews and nieces become parents, new interdependencies are created that again reconfigure family contexts. Divorce and remarriage reshuffle family interdependencies once more, while creating another sediment of family members. Family configurations are constituted indeed by various layers associated with the various stages of family trajectories.

That life trajectories have become more heterogeneous during the last forty years means that a greater variety of configurations have emerged, since additional sediments provide the ground on which focus points develop. The diversification of life trajectories is not synonymous of lower constraints on individuals, however. Leaving the home of ageing parents, developing a long time partnership after a history of short term affairs, taking care of one partner's children while not being a mother, raising a child without the other child's parent around, are indeed constraining situations that highly structure the development of family interdependencies. Family configurations stem from the conjunction of a variety of events that occurred to a large number of interconnected family members. Indeed, family configurations depends on personal histories that span over several decades.

The family developmental perspective as it was developed until the nineteen eighties has drawn many criticisms upon herself because of her inability to account for the complexity associated with the pluralization of family lives in the last decades. The configurational perspective may do better because

it does not stick with a definition of families as nuclear and because it focuses on empirical trajectories at hand rather than on normative models stating how in theory families should develop over time.

CONCLUSION – Individualized Families

Ernest Watson Burgess (1960) developed already before World War II an agenda of research dedicated to study the transformations of families, by the way of the integrative concept of the Companionship Family. Although many scholars and the general public of his time believed that the Family was on the verge of collapse due to rising figures of divorce, the transformation of intergenerational relationships and the spread of juvenile delinquency, he stressed the emergence of a new organization of family ties based on democratic arrangements, a functional specialization of husbands and wives, a privatization of family life and a focus on the nuclear family. The intellectual project of defining the family model of modernity was taken over and further systematized by Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales (1956), who a bit carelessly stressed the nuclear family as the only functional model available in modern societies, making it a norm and disregarding its alternatives. The Family was indeed, according to them, one in which a married couple with a gendered division of household and paid work, found the necessary emotional resources to support the stress of modern life while raising its legitimate and resident children to fulfil the normative standards of the larger society.

As the nuclear family has lost quantitative and functional grounds during the last decades, various scholars have announced the decline of the Family. This view surprisingly associated the decline of a model of families with the decline of families (Bengston, 2001). Indeed, increasing numbers of well functioning family contexts do not meet its normative expectations regarding their duration, their boundaries and their organization. Therefore, reactions against that normative view of the Family have raised since the nineteen seventies, supported by a series of trends at various levels, demographic, social, political and, not least importantly, scientific. Faced with the diversity of family configurations as well as with increasing evidence that the model of the nuclear family has a strong normative component, family sociologists have been more and more critical to the attempt of defining a single model of family. A symbolic decision was made in the year 2000, when the National Council for Family Relations changed the name of the premier research journal in the field from *Journal of*

Marriage and the Family to *Journal of Marriage and Family* in order to acknowledge the wide diversity of families.

The configurational perspective on families goes beyond the nuclear family model, which has limited the understanding of family diversity, while keeping the project, proposed by Burgess (1925), Parsons and Bales (1955), of stressing the structural and functional principles to which families respond. New tools and new concepts were necessary to reveal some of those principles because families had become more diverse than they were in the near past. This is not to say that they have become less meaningful or fully individualized. The results presented throughout this book indeed suggest that a limited set of formal principles makes it possible to account for a large number of the variations that characterize family contexts in late modernity.

Individualization

By focusing on the nuclear family, the functional perspective imposed a normative definition of the Family. In a time in which individuals are the stick yards of society and of families, researchers need to let them define family members by themselves. Doing that, we astonishingly found that a few alternative rules set the boundaries of families. Although families of late modernity do not fall within the model of the nuclear family, neither are they the fluid and non committed relationships refered to by some sociologists or the mass media. The diversity of demographic structures stemming from divorce, remarriage, fertility patterns and migration made researchers assume that family life has become fully pluralized and individualized. This was without taking into account the necessary organization by individuals of their family interdependencies. Because individuals are limited in the emotions, cognitions, time and money that they can invest in the development of their family ties, they focus on a limited number of persons and follow some informal rules regarding how to deal with them, even if they are not, in most cases, fully aware of those rules.

Indeed, family configurations do not vary to infinity. For once, the number of activated family models is rather limited. As a matter of fact, similar types of family configurations come back over and over again in all the samples considered in this book: Beanpole, friendship, post-divorce,

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conjugal, kinship (either on the father or mother's sides) and sibling family configurations set the boundaries of family configurations, with a few differences according to the life stage and the type of samples, clinical or non-clinical, considered. Each type features a well defined logic, with an emphasis on kinship or friendship ties, on parents, in-laws or step family members, on the women's side or on the men's side. Sex, generation, blood, partnership or friendship, along with genealogical distance, account for distinct family configurations. Individuals may focus on male or female members and invest on their father's side or on their mother's side of their kinship networks. They may focus on blood ties by maintaining strong interdependencies with their biological parents and siblings. Quite to the contrary, they may make links with their in-laws prominent. They may choose to maintain or develop interdependencies with steprelatives. They may develop relationship beyond the realms of blood and marriage by investing in friendship ties defined by them as family ties; they may follow a logic of genealogical proximity by promoting interdependencies with the closest blood or marriage ties, or rather pick more distant relatives in genealogical terms as significant family members. Interestingly, those configurations exhibit a remarkable consistency throughout the life course, as they make generational shifts rather than truly change when individuals grow older[90]. For instance, individuals with a matricentric family build their configurations on a link between sisters (that is between their mother and her sisters) whereas older adults focus on their own sisters and their brother in law, their nephews and their nieces in a sibling configuration. The logic is the same, although the generations involved are different because their uncles and their aunts have passed away or have lost their functional importance.

The complexity of individualized family configurations relate to the ways in which a limited number of informal rules are put to work. Actual family configurations are at the same time diverse and quite homogeneous. In that sense, the attempt of defining The Family Institution characterizing late modernity should not be regarded as impossible or dangerously normative. Indeed, if one defines the Late Modern Family as a small collection of informal rules that are meant to be organized and reshaped by individuals in a variety of ways, according to their resources and the constrains that shape

[90] This point should be verified by the use of longitudinal data that are currently unavailable.

their action, one keeps at the same time the emphasis on the homogeneity of the Family and the diversity of actual families. Let us say that much personal work and collective influence is involved in the development of configurations in late modernity. Power issues and conflicts are at stack, as the resources that one can invest in family life are limited and the competition among various needs is fierce. Therefore, doing family is not an easy task, especially when discordant investments are necessary.

The Fabric of Diversity

What mechanisms create family diversity? For many scholars, individual agency first comes to mind as the ruling principle of such diversity: individuals, they say, are more than ever driven by autonomous values and their own lifestyle in a less constraining social environment; therefore, they are likely to develop fluid, ever changing family commitments. This book rather emphasized the structural genesis of family diversity. The pluralization of life courses in various social fields since the nineteen sixties has increased the likelihood for individuals to experience a variety of turning points. The number of job shifts, the increasing spatial and social mobility as well as the cultural pressure of living a worthy life create the ground on which family diversity builds up. These events are to a large extent imposed by social, cultural and economic forces associated with world globalization. Individuals react differently to them but they still have to cope with them, one way or another. Events impose new focus points on which individuals develop their family configurations. Indeed, human beings evolve in investing their resources in focus points that they share with others. When an individual becomes a parent, a child suddenly steps on the foreground of her life as an organizing principle of relationships in her family configuration. Grandparents and parents come together in order to provide a sense of identity to the child. Because individuals care for similar persons or things, they develop new focus points and hence change their set of interdependencies in key transitions of the life course.

The diversity of contemporary families comes from the interaction between the various events that occur in the life course of individuals linked by family interdependencies. In other words, a

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combination of events concerning various individuals imposes a set of alternative family structures, within which family configurations develop. The causality linking life events, family structures and family configurations is best illustrated by post-divorce families. Indeed, there is no such thing as an homogeneous stepfamily model. Individuals who experienced divorce and remarriage present a diversity of configurations. Individuals reorganize their family relationships in various ways after divorce, as they may do after migration or death of a family member; many of them develop similar configurations as individuals who have not yet experienced these transitions. Family structures change in response to the variety of events that create new focus points for their members. There are long term changes associated with normative and non-normative events such as birth, marriage, death or divorce. Daily events such as meeting someone by chance, being sick or having a family member back from another country also have an impact on family configurations. A few of those events are enough to produce a variety of family configurations, as they combine in trajectories in which processes of cumulative advantages or disadvantages play out. The family path that one followed has an enforcing effect on one's family configuration. As life trajectories have become more heterogeneous in younger cohorts, a greater variety of configurations has emerged.

This diversity is nevertheless not synonymous of lower constraints on individuals and of a greater freedom of action in late modernity. Finding the proper partner, having children at an older age, taking care of them while being employed, moving together in a common residence when one is separated by jobs in distinct places are indeed structures that limit individual agency in the development of a family configuration, or rather shape it. Basic socio-demographic events impose serious limitations to the ability of individuals to recompose their family lives as they wish. Keeping strong interdependencies with parents or grandparents obviously depends on where they live and on the regularity of contacts which has been maintained throughout the years. Developing a sibling family configuration is not possible for an individual who migrated alone, as it is not possible for young adults whose parents are still together to belong to a post-divorce family configuration. Family structures open up a range of possibilities while setting up heavy structural constraints on individuals' ability to construct family that fully correspond to their expectations.

Social Integration

This book started by discussing the lack of functions supposedly characterizing the Family in late modernity. The deficit of social integration brought by individualization was stressed by various authors supporting the thesis of family decline. In most studies reviewed in this book, there is no lack of social capital but a variety of social integration models mixing social capital and conflict. Family members constitute a large share, both in the United States and in the Swiss contexts, of support networks. With the rise of modernity, as Burgess and his colleagues stressed (Burgess et al., 1960), emotional and cognitive dimensions of family life have become central. Meaning, identity, relatedness and commitment have in part replaced the material functions of family transfers that characterized families in earlier historical periods. The focus on emotional interdependencies among family members reveals that contemporary families are not characterized by a lack of commitments but rather by several distinct patterns of interdependencies.

Using the concept of social capital, we stressed the individualized resources that individuals get in large, unbounded and quite heterogeneous family contexts. Overall, the normative expectations associated with family life have changed with the development of bonding and bridging social capital in families; support imposed by institutionalized family roles is being replaced by relational structures in which individualized resources come to play a prominent role. Even though the dyads of the nuclear family play a key role in one's life, they are embedded in a larger set of family relationships that provide alternatives and backups. Relationships with parents, siblings and their partners frequently remain active after those individuals stoped living with each other. They appear as first support providers and are often linked in dense subgroups. Ties with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, but also friends or neighbours considered as family members constitute a larger set of usually weaker ties that also play a role as they have an influence on the more central family dyads in their daily functioning. Indeed, if mothers are central in one's family configuration, aunts, as sisters of mothers, keep on being significant for mothers, and, therefore indirectly, for respondents. The transitivity created by blood ties participates to continuously wire up family members beyond their immediately significant others. Overall, family configurations in which a large number of blood ties exist, feature a

high density of both supportive and negative ties. They therefore provide a bonding type of social capital, with much collective support but also some interference that erodes conjugal satisfaction and parent-child relationships. Dyadic ambivalence is at its highest in such family configurations because dyads are bound by a structure that force them to be active. In a time of individualization, being embedded in a close group creates obvious tensions in beanpole and nuclear family configurations.

Quite distinctly, family configurations that include friends or steprelatives provide alternate forms of social capital, in which bridging resources are present. This alternate form of social integration is likely to have profound, and not necessarily negative, consequences. Individuals benefiting from a high level of bridging social capital develop more structural autonomy: they are not under the supervision of a great number of third parties. Of course, this comes with a cost, as being a bridger requires a great personal investment in time, energy and sociability in order to create or maintain discrepant family interdependencies. Therefore, individuals in such family configurations are less motivated by maintaining long term strong ties with specific family members, as they have more alternatives to consider, and less time, money and emotional energy to invest in each of them separately. In other words, the way in which individuals experience their family lives may become more individualized without loosing its integrative function.

Overall, scholars who emphasize a lack of long term commitment as defining families in late modernity may have underestimated the resources that individuals draw from family members beyond the nuclear family. It is true that conjugal dyads have become more fragile since the nineteen sixties. But that does not prove that the Family as a whole has become less resourceful, as a variety of other family ties than those between spouses or parents and their resident biological children, have remained meaningful and lasting, while alternative family ties, such as those with friends considered as family members, have developed.

We also stressed that conflict and ambivalence in family relationships should not be regarded as proofs of family decline. Indeed, conflict frequently comes along with positive interdependencies. In individualized families, each individual is embedded in a specific set of interdependencies. The uniqueness of each individual position leads to a higher probability of structural ambivalence:

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individuals are supported by family members who compete with each other for love, support, attention and other psychological resources. This situation does not correspond to what is traditionally expected of the Family as an homogeneous solidarity group. Indeed, individuals with bridging social capital do not think about their families as small groups. Their experience nevertheless belongs to a kind of social integration that is widespread in social fields such as work, leisure, or the politics, one in which individuals have become more structurally autonomous. The fact that many families become responsive to the overall emphasis on the individualization of social ties should not be interpreted as ending the contribution of families to social integration. We have seen that in many families individuals develop personal ties that often compete with each other. Giving prominence to the nuclear family model as an homogeneously solidarity group lead scholars to over-emphasizes social atomization and family decline. By asking individuals to define their significant family contexts, the configurational approach proposed in this book shows that in a large majority of situations individuals have developed an active set of emotional interdependencies with family members. This demonstrates the key role played out by families in the realm of social integration in late modernity.

The tenants of the decline of families might however be right in a sense. There is indeed a serious concern to be raised about the ability of some families to face the dilemmas and tensions imposed by late modernity because of their small size and their closure. The only true loosers of social capital in late modernity may be, paradoxically, individuals who stick with the definition of their families as nuclear. A minority of respondents of the various samples considered in this book indeed exclusively focus on their co-resident partner, parents or children to define their families. Interestingly, they are over-represented in the clinical samples, in which individuals have greater difficulties to build a variety of ties. Indeed, a large majority of individuals go beyond the nuclear family when defining their family configurations. Those who do not do that, have, as a matter of fact, a much lower number of family members to count on, in either extremely dense or extremely sparse configurations. They may have to choose between a fusional understanding of family and the vacuum of frozen relationships that do not relate to ties dating back to childhood or created by divorce and remarriage. The nuclear family as the ultimate institution providing individuals with support is in that sense on the

verge of collapse. Due to the high rate of divorce and the overall difficulty of dealing with internal and external issues within its boundaries, creating significant interdependencies with additional family members makes parental and conjugal work much easier. Does the decline of the nuclear family mean the decline of the Family? Various results presented in this book rather stress that if the nuclear family is on the verge of collapse, family configurations still do well.

Rather than belonging to a zombie category that has definitely lost its integrative functions, family configurations provide meaningful support in a variety of ways in late modernity. If the great changes that have happened since the nineteen sixties have had significant consequences for families, they have not destroyed the presence of a functional stable model of family life. Individualization did not make the family group decline but rather changed it into various models of interdependencies, characterized by support and ambivalence.

The Disadvantaged

Social integration in late modernity has a strong emotional and relational component. Therefore, the disadvantaged are those who, for a variety of reasons, fall short of developing such ties with their family members. Compared with others, individuals with psychiatric problems from the studies reviewed in this book include fewer partners and partners' parents. Other family ties are also much less frequently reported. Intergenerational interdependencies, in particular with grandparents, uncles and aunts, but also with fathers, and the sense of continuity and the social control that they provide, are severed. Family members are much more often disconnected from each other and respondents have a low centrality in their own family configurations. The Family as a main support provider is less so for them than for others.

Indeed, individuals with psychiatric problems develop much less bonding and bridging social capital. They also face the challenges created by the family life course more than others. Their family configurations do not follow the regular patterns found in non-clinical samples. Although this point need further empirical enquiry, various evidence points either to a much faster pace of changes in some cases or an inability of families, in other cases, to follow a developmental cycle. The provision

of emotional support nevertheless requires that long lasting interdependencies have built up among family members and this cannot be achieved in a week or a month. In other cases, individuals with psychiatric problems focus on a small set of family members, usually their parents, sometimes one or two siblings, who hardly ever change of importance. Many individuals with psychiatric problems cannot make adaptive changes in their family configurations according to the requisites of their life stage or the overall social situation that they currently experience. In David Olson and colleagues' words (1989), the way in which family change is experienced in those cases is either chaotic or rigid. Obviously, both cases make the provision of emotional support by family members difficult. Overall, the hypothesis of a deficit of social capital for individuals with psychiatric problems is confirmed by research reviewed in this book. Family configurations have cumulative effects on psychiatric problems, and psychiatric problems deteriorate family configurations, in reciprocal causality. Psychologically fragile individuals cannot count on the same level of family resources than other individuals. That makes them less likely to overcome their own problems.

That said, it would be inconsequential to define family configurations of individuals with psychiatric problems as belonging to a single type of organization. A variety of family configurations also arises there. Individuals with psychiatric problems vary to the extent that they include partners, friends or care professionals, children, parents, siblings, and other relatives. Some build their family configurations on a nucleus constituted by their partner and their biological children. Most of them do not, however, and focus on either kinship or friendship. Others also include care professionals as family members. Although the overall level of social capital provided by family members is much lower than in non-clinical samples, distinct types of family configurations and social capital nevertheless appear. Family disadvantages experienced by individuals with psychiatric problems is not homogeneous. It is marked by the pluralization of life trajectories that creates much diversity in the composition of family configurations and thus, indirectly, in social capital. Family diversity again responds to the structural constraints imposed by the organization of life courses in late modernity societies.

The Family in Late Modernity

Ernest Watson Burgess (Burgess, 1926; Burgess, Locke & Thomes, 1960) from the early nineteen twenties to the nineteen sixties aimed at uncovering a model of family that accounted for the variety of new organizations that went away from the traditional patriarchal and rural family. Contrary to the tenets of the family decline hypothesis of his time, he stressed that there was still a functional family model in modernity and worked hard empirically to uncover its specificities. This model was constituted by a small and stable group of interacting personalities linked by meaningful social roles, a feeling of shared belonging and a legitimate although unequal division of labour. A long term romantic sexual relationship, legalized by the mean of marriage, was the very core of this model of interdependencies. This is not the type of family that we currently face. Great changes have happened since Burgess and his colleagues published "Family from institution to Companionship" (1960), changes that have modified the face of the Family. Interestingly the debate of some 80 years ago has repeated itself, although its current contributors somewhat lost track of the previous contest. Facing family changes, a widespread tendency of scholars is to frame it into a narrative of decline, which does not help us to make much sense of families. It does not help individuals to deal with the contradictions imposed by their family interdependencies either. Science as well as social policy or private citizens are not well served by stories of family decline. Uncovering resources and stressing the variety of contemporary families was in Burgess' s time, and still is today, a more fruitful way of understanding families. The configurational perspective stresses that families, as they stand, have much resources to propose, even though they are diverse in their composition and in the social capital that they provide to their members. This book indeed found strong family interdependencies among individuals beyond the nuclear family.

A widespread alternative to the family decline hypothesis is constituted by the detheorization of family research. Because the functional perspective of the nineteen fifties and sixties and its emphasis on the nuclear family proved to be normative and ineffective at accounting for the pluralization of families, why altogether seeking models and generative principles of family development beyond individual cases? Astonishingly, much of sociology has gone away from the ambition of explaining

what constitutes the structures and functions of families in late modernity, while overemphasizing the singularity and the fluidity of family experiences. Untimely, the configurational perspective stresses that families in late modernity refer to a small number of informal rules that can be uncovered by empirical research. There is a bounded plurality of family types by which The Family incorporates into singular family configurations, under the influence of the diversification of social constraints. In that sense, one may wish to reconsider the issue of the Family Institution. In their classical book, Burgess, Locke and Thomes (1960) described the shift from the Family Institution to the Companionship Family. Paradoxically, the Companionship Family also had institutional features, with its set of normative expectations regarding conjugal love, long term commitments, socialization and the gendered division of labour. This is also the case of families in late modernity. Individuals organize their family configurations along a relatively small number of informal principles stressing the importance of blood ties and friendship in the face of the uncertainty raised by conjugal ties and by the overall complexity of life trajectories. There is still much to learn on these principles from a configurational perspective.

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