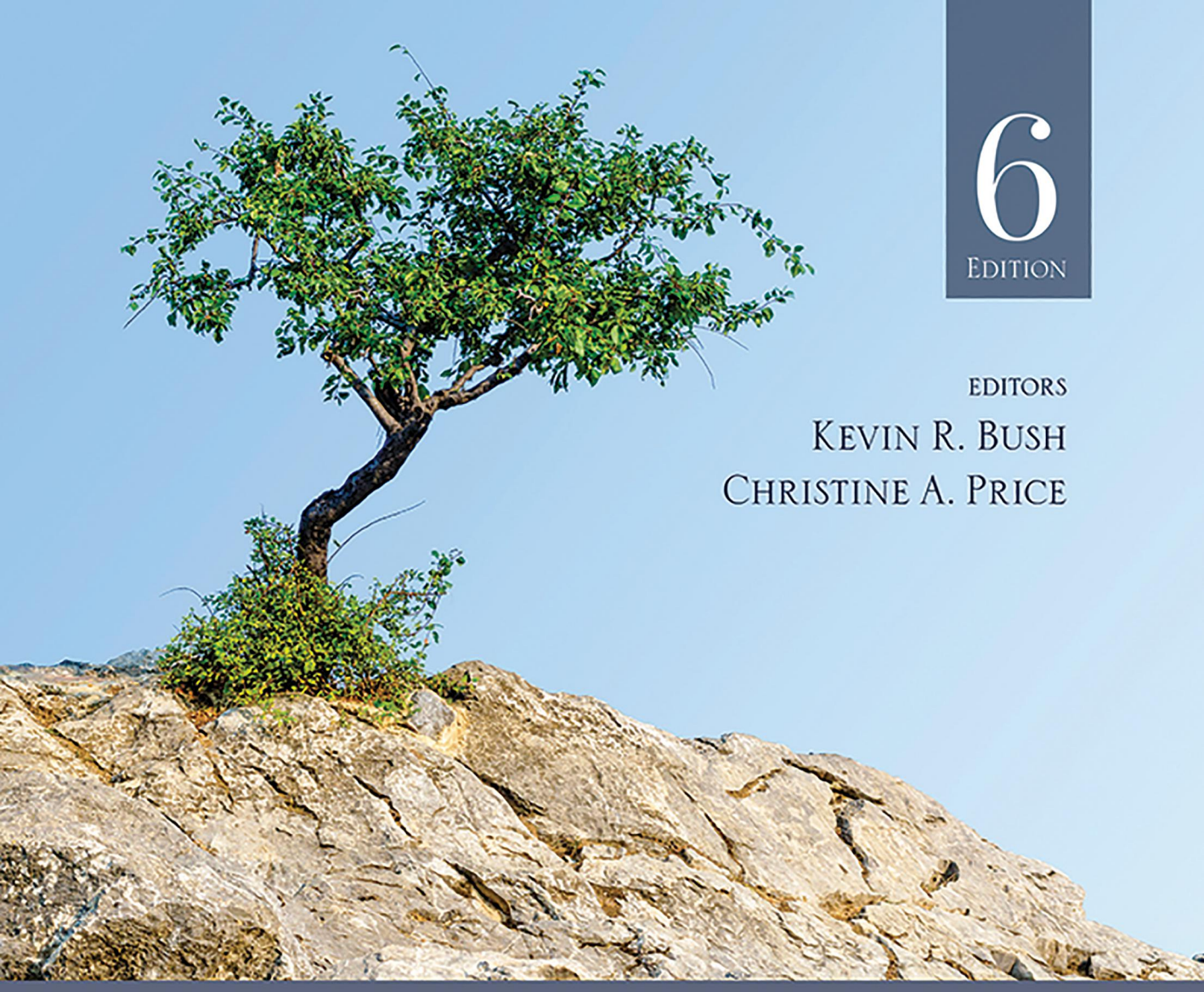

6 EDITION

EDITORS
KEVIN R. BUSH
CHRISTINE A. PRICE

FAMILIES & CHANGE

COPING WITH STRESSFUL EVENTS AND TRANSITIONS

Families & Change

Sixth Edition

This book is dedicated to Patrick C. McKenry (1949–2004) and Sharon J. Price, our mentors and role models

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Families & Change

Coping With Stressful Events and Transitions

Sixth Edition

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Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Preface to the Sixth Edition

The sixth edition of *Families and Change: Coping With Stressful Events and Transitions* presents current literature detailing families' responses to varied transitions and stressful life events over the life span. Scholarly interest in family stress and the adjustment of families to change is not new. During the Progressive Era (1890–1920), the social and behavioral sciences took a specific interest in the social problems facing families as a result of industrialization and urbanization. The primary focus at that time was in social reform and the use of research to help in solving these problems. During the 1920s and 1930s, scholars began to explore the internal dynamics of families with particular emphasis on the well-being and personal adjustment of families and individuals. Researchers became interested in healthy lifestyles, mental health, and child development which led to the development of both family sociology and family therapy (Cole & Cole, 1993).

Two major societal disruptions—the Great Depression and World War II—prompted further attention on how families cope with unprecedented change. Angell (1936) and Cavan and Ranck (1938) identified various family characteristics that mediated the impact of the Depression—that is, family organization, integration, and adaptability. These findings remain largely unchallenged today (Boss, 1987). Hill (1949), in his study of wartime family separations, developed a framework for assessing family crisis—the ABC-X Model. This framework, with its emphasis on family resources and definitions that mediate the extent of the crisis response, serves today as the basis for most stress and coping theoretical models. The 1950s represented a focus on both the integrity of the American family as an institution and traditional family patterns. The social and political revolution of the 1960s, and the technological changes accompanying the greater industrialization, urbanization, and globalization of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s resulted in a proliferation of research on how families cope and adapt to the multitude of changes and challenges they encounter.

In the 26 years between the publication of the first and sixth editions (1994–2020) of *Families and Change*, our society has witnessed significant familial, social, and global changes. Today, families live in a context filled with stressors associated with time demands, the economy, political strife, global insecurity, and the rapid pace of technological change. From a financial standpoint, families currently face the potential of another economic recession, threats to pensions, investments, savings, and benefits, and the reality of financing extended longevity (e.g., retirement and health-care costs). Technology has advanced so extensively that it has become both a benefit (e.g., convenience, social connections) and an invasive demand. Life has become more impersonal as human connections are replaced by virtual relationships and family time is usurped by screens. Industrialization and urbanization have expanded, leading to denser living environments and the associated stressors of expensive housing, traffic congestion, and increased cost of living. Extended longevity is offering the benefit of more time with family members yet

there are associated sacrifices that accompany living longer (e.g., chronic and degenerative illness, caregiving demands, health-care costs).

Based on multiple indications, the stress and change that families are experiencing appear to be intensifying. Stressors inherent to daily life include the discrimination families often face based on race, religious beliefs, gender, and sexual orientation as well as the unpredictable yet stressful events of ongoing natural disasters including hurricanes, tornadoes, storms, floods, and earthquakes. With the blurring of gender roles and the increased diversity in family structure, the basic conceptualization of "family" has evolved. Although the family system may still be viewed as a "haven" from external stressors, families are also challenged to meet their increasingly complicated needs.

It is evident that many academic and social service professionals are involved in developing knowledge, as well as teaching classes and offering outreach programs in areas that focus on the stressors confronting families. As the nature of family stress and the stressors that families encounter expands and evolves, the emphasis on how families cope continues to grow. Before the development of the first edition of *Families and Change*, Pat McKenry and Sharon Price (the original editors) conducted an extensive review of more than 400 randomly selected undergraduate and graduate college and university catalogs concluding that more than 60% of these institutions offered courses that dealt with family problems, stress, or change. These courses were found in a variety of departments and disciplines. They also surveyed instructors of those courses and discovered that texts representing a compilation of recent research findings in this area were almost nonexistent. As a result, the first edition of *Families and Change* (1994) was published to address this void. According to recent data from the National Council of Family Relations[1] (NCFR; 2019), there are 267 universities and colleges in the United States that offer degrees in family science. It is likely that most of these family science programs offer one or more courses related to family stress. Similarly, many psychology and social work programs also offer courses related to family stress. Since the first edition of *Families and Change,* this text has been regularly updated to address the various problems, stressors, and societal changes that Western families face. Each of the six editions of *Families and Change* have reflected contemporary issues and transitions taking place in the larger society as well as in families. This has been achieved by incorporating current research findings, introducing new chapter subjects, and adding new topics to selected chapters. For example, in this edition, there is updated research in every chapter and most chapters contain new substantive content (e.g., skipped generation families in *Stress and Coping in Later Life*, the emerging gig economy in *Economic Stress and Families,* and separation-instigated violence in *Stress and Coping with Intimate Partner Violence*). Additionally, we have introduced chapters on family stressors associated with race and ethnicity, and the value of family stress and intervention.

[1] Since 1938, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) has been the premier professional association for understanding and strengthening families through interdisciplinary research, theory, and practice.

Finally, a chapter in the fifth edition, which combined the topics of physical and mental health, has been divided into two chapters addressing how families manage the stressors associated with physical illness and mental health, respectively.

In the sixth edition of *Families and Change,* as with previous editions, not all family stressors could be reviewed because of page constraints. The topics chosen represent contemporary issues that many families face today and that have received considerable social, professional, and research attention. Each chapter presents an overview of our current understanding of selected family transitions and stressors, real-life scenarios meant to illustrate content specific stressors families face, and most include possible mechanisms of intervention. However, each author was afforded the opportunity to present their area of expertise in the manner they viewed as appropriate. At the end of each chapter, authors have provided a minimum of three discussion questions to support student reflection and class discussion.

The topics in this book represent both predictable and unpredictable problems and stressors. Predictable family problems would include those stressors that are inherently stressful even though they are foreseen. We take the position that all abrupt or disjunctive changes, although moderated or buffered by the family's coping resources, are likely to be stress producing. Such predictable or normative changes include marriage, parenting, aging, death, and dying. Other problems are potentially more traumatic because they cannot be predicted—these would include community or intimate partner violence, physical illness, substance abuse, war, economic insecurity, and divorce. We take the position that many of these problems are interrelated and often combine to produce stress-related responses. For example, stress related to economic issues may lead to marital problems, including violence which may then initiate a cycle of divorce, personal and economic disorganization, and remarriage.

We also assume that family problems, change, and stress responses are not always "bad" for a family. The disequilibrium that develops requires a family to create new methods for handling problems. The encountering of stressful situations may result in new and creative solutions that are superior to those that were present when the problem occurred. This experience may enable a family to handle future crises in a more effective way, and therefore result in greater individual and group satisfaction with family life.

This text represents an integration of research, theory, and application, drawing on the interdisciplinary scholarship in each topic area. It is intended to serve as a basic or supplementary text for undergraduate and introductory graduate courses on family or social problems. This edition will also be useful to professionals who work in social work, education, counseling, and public health, who increasingly serve and support families confronting a multitude of problems.

Overview of Chapters

We begin this text (Chapter 1) with a discussion of the research on family stress and coping. The nature and origin of the problems and changes families face today

are discussed, noting that while many of today's problems are not new, the degree of change in American society is unprecedented. The history of systematic inquiry into family problems and change is traced to individual physiological stress studies in the late 17th century; these studies have evolved into the current focus on whole-family interaction with an increased emphasis on resilience. An ecological or systems approach is presented as the integrating framework for studying families under stress. These perspectives facilitate an understanding of families as dynamic mechanisms, always in the process of growth and adaptation as they deal with change and stress over time.

In Chapter 2, Heather Helms, Kaicee Postler, and David Demo discuss everyday hassles and family stress. Specifically, they examine how daily stress and hassles are associated with family functioning, paying particular attention to the variability in family members' experiences and the invisible dimensions of family work. A stress-vulnerability-adaptation model is used to frame the research on daily hassles and family stress. The authors emphasize the diversity that exists across and within families as well as discuss the contextual factors that moderate how families manage stress. A feminist perspective is used when examining the gendered meanings applied to routine family activities. Finally, the authors discuss how existing policies and practices in the United States fail to mesh with the daily life of American families and propose policy interventions.

In Chapter 3, Suzanne Klatt and Anthony James discuss the role of mindfulness in how families respond to stress and stressors. They review theories related to family stress, conceptualize mindfulness, and then walk readers through two in-depth case studies that apply mindfulness to different contexts within each case study. The authors acknowledge mindfulness as being connected to a rich, deep cultural and religious history, and endeavor to shift toward a critically conscious approach to applying mindfulness to family stress by recognizing the systems of oppression that particular families face.

Gary Peterson, in Chapter 4, focuses on parenthood as a stressor. He emphasizes a "realistic" approach that integrates research on parental stress with family stress theory and recognizes that caring for and socializing children involves challenges and hassles as well as satisfactions and fulfillment. He addresses (a) why parental stress is so common, (b) why parental stress varies within the population of parents, (c) why parents vary in their capacities to cope with and adapt to stress, (d) what linkages exist between parental stress and the adjustment (or maladjustment) of parents and children, and (e) what strategies exist for controlling and reducing adverse parental stress. This approach helps one understand the wide range of circumstances varying from highly disruptive crises, to chronic stress, to normative challenges, and increases our understanding about how parental stress applies to both individuals and families.

In Chapter 5, Kami Gallus and Briana Nelson Goff present the varied challenges and processes facing families who have members with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Because of the complex terminology associated with this area of research, the authors first present an overview of terms used to describe

individuals and families with special health-care needs. Gallus and Nelson Goff go on to present current research specific to this population and discuss relevant theoretical frameworks that can be used to better understand these families in their unique contexts. They also examine various family subsystems as well as several external resources available to families with special health-care needs.

Abbie Goldberg and Nora McCormick, in Chapter 6, discuss the challenges confronting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) individuals as well as LGBQ-parent families. Using an ecological or systems approach, the authors review the situational and contextual forces that impact these populations as they move through the life course. These include issues surrounding "coming out," forming and maintaining intimate relationships, barriers faced in becoming parents, and the stressors related to relationships with their families of origin, schools, and the health-care system. Finally, Goldberg and McCormick present implications for professionals with regard to supporting LGBQ-parent families.

Áine Humble, in Chapter 7, focuses on individual and family challenges that result from aging. She frames the chapter around the concept of an "aging family" which pertains to the relationships, transitions, and social support networks of older family members. Using both ecological systems theory and the ABC-X model of family stress, Humble examines stressful events commonly associated with aging. Specifically, she focuses on two major transitional events that occur in later life: retirement and caregiving. The unfortunate experience of elder abuse is also discussed as is the stressors associated with skipped generation families. Finally, adaptive and coping strategies applied by individuals and their families in later life are also reviewed.

In Chapter 8, David Demo and Mark Fine provide a comprehensive overview of current research on divorce and its consequences for individuals and families. They use the divorce variation and fluidity model, an integrated process model, to illustrate the variability in which families experience divorce but also to explore how adjustment to divorce changes over time. Demo and Fine go on to describe historical trends and sociocultural patterns to provide a current context for divorce as well as present factors that may predict or cause divorce. Finally, interventions (i.e., parent education, divorce mediation) that may facilitate divorce adjustment are presented.

In Chapter 9, Chelsea Garneau and Braquel Egginton discuss the stressors associated with remarriage and stepfamily life. They provide a background on the terms and definitions of stepfamilies as well as present the prevalence and demographic characteristics of stepfamilies in general. Using a family systems perspective, they identify sources of stress within the larger family system and the various stepfamily subsystems (i.e., couples, parent, parent–child, stepparent–stepchild, and sibling subsystems) as well as the most common characteristics of resilient stepfamilies. Finally, Garneau and Egginton discuss psychoeducational and clinical approaches to easing stepfamily adjustment.

Bertranna Muruthi, Hyoun Kim, James Muruthi, and Jaehee Kim discuss, in Chapter 10, various aspects of resilience and adversity that immigrant families

to the United States may experience. Using a family resilience framework, they highlight the importance of interactions among individuals within families, communities and the broader exosystemic contexts. The authors focus on how family processes (belief systems, organizational patterns and communications patterns) interact with broader sociostructural factors and influence immigrant families' adaption processes. They highlight the complexity of legal issues, such as various statuses and identities (e.g., undocumented, refugees, citizen children) among individuals and within families. The authors also highlight acculturation, adjustment of immigrant children, interparental conflict, parent–child conflict, and issues related to physical and mental health.

In Chapter 11, Suzanne Bartholomae and Jonathan Fox address the impact of economic stress on families using the family stress model (FSM) as a framework. The authors discuss ways that economic stress is measured and defined and review the current economic conditions of the American family. They discuss outcomes associated with economic stress, including a review of the research on economic well-being and its interaction with resources and problem solving. Finally, using a family economic life cycle, they examine family financial planning as a coping strategy to combat negative economic events.

In Chapter 12, Anthony James, Veronica Barrios, Roudi Roy, and Soyoung Lee discuss the stress-related experiences and responses that families encounter across the three largest ethnic minority groups (e.g., African American, Asian American, and Latinx American). The authors begin by reviewing both the ABC-X model and the SFS model to promote an understanding of family stress in the context of race or ethnicity. Case studies are then presented throughout the chapter that incorporate example stressors such as managing transnational families, cultural parenting expectations, and interactions with law enforcement. These scenarios illustrate how race and ethnicity can influence family stress processes across different cultural groups in the United States.

Kyung-Hee Lee and Shelly McDermid Wadsworth, in Chapter 13, use the life-course perspective to examine the impact of military life on individuals and families. By employing this framework, concepts such as *historical time*, *transitions*, *timing*, and *linked lives* are used to help facilitate an understanding of the stressors experienced by, and the resources available to veterans and their families. The authors first situate current wars and veterans in historical context followed by a discussion of the individual and family transitions that veterans, their spouses, and their children encounter. Finally, three interventions that target the challenges veterans and their families often encounter are introduced.

In Chapter 14, Margaret O'Dougherty Wright and Lucy Allbaugh discuss child maltreatment from an ecological and systems perspective placing considerable emphasis on adaptation and resilience of maltreated children. Data from longitudinal studies are used to examine both risk and protective factors that result in the diversity of outcomes found among maltreated children. Specifically, the chapter highlights what is known about factors that heighten risk for psychopathology and behavioral dysfunction following child maltreatment, as well as

factors that promote positive adaptation and that protect against adverse, enduring effects. Promising interventions to foster resilience and recovery following child maltreatment are also reviewed.

Lyndal Khaw, in Chapter 15, provides a comprehensive overview of intimate partner violence (IPV). She describes several types of IPV recognizing the disparities that exist in the definitions, measures, and methods researchers employ to study this dimension of domestic violence. In an attempt to facilitate a better understanding of IPV, Khaw presents several theoretical explanations for why this violence takes place and effectively applies a simplified version of the contextual model of family stress to illustrate its complexity. Additional topics of importance to this area of research, such as same-sex relationships, male victimization, and the process of leaving an abusive partner are also addressed.

In Chapter 16, Amity Noltemeyer, Courtney McLaughlin, Mark McGowan, and Caitie Johnson discuss the impact on families of mass violence in schools and communities. They begin the chapter by presenting a hypothetical case study illustrating a family's experience with mass violence. The authors then review the trends of mass violence in the United States and provide a context for discussing both adaptive and maladaptive responses. Integrating an ecological and developmental perspective, the authors outline a theoretical framework to explain how this type of stressor can impact families and more specifically, how resilience takes place at both the individual and family level. Finally, they describe risk and protective factors that can influence family resilience, exploring implications for professionals working with families.

Jeremy Yorgason, Stephanie Richardson, and Kevin Stott, in Chapter 17, discuss physical illness in the context of the family. They integrate aspects of the Double ABC-X, family resilience, and the vulnerability-stress adaptation models to examine the complex interplay of illness characteristics and circumstances as well as the stressors families encounter and the resilience they display in the face of illness. By employing this approach, they recognize how health stressors are connected to individual and family outcomes through adaptive processes and enduring vulnerabilities. Research findings relating to three situations, including childhood illness, physical illness in marriage, and the declining health of aging parents, are discussed.

In Chapter 18, Kandaus Wickrama, Catherine Walker O'Neal, and Tae Kyoung Lee take an in-depth look at the association between family socioeconomic risk and family mental health. The authors center their attention on the severity of psychological symptoms with particular emphasis on depressive symptoms, and the onset of psychological disorders. They recognize the increased prevalence of mental health challenges for both parents and children during adolescence, young adulthood, and midlife. Finally, Wickrama and his coauthors present the family socioeconomic risk and family mental health (FSAMH) model to inform health policies as well as health intervention and prevention efforts.

In Chapter 19, Kevin Lyness and Judith Fischer discuss the challenges faced by families coping with alcohol and substance abuse. Specifically, their focus is on

the experiences of children and adolescents (and their parents) as they struggle with this issue. They take a family developmental approach in their review of current literature as timing, perceptions, contextual factors, and resources depend on individual and family change over time. Lyness and Fisher employ a biopsychosocial model, which includes biological, psychological, and social influences and combine this with the family stress and coping model. They place particular emphasis on the mediating and moderating effects that intervene between two variables, that is, variables that mediate or modify the associations between parent and offspring substance abuse. Finally, they search for explanations of resilience in families coping with substance abuse and discuss issues relating to prevention and treatment.

In Chapter 20, Colleen Murray and Jordan Reuter discuss family experiences with death, dying, and grief. They emphasize that death is a normative and often predictable event, yet it is not viewed as normal and instead is frequently avoided by society. Murray and Reuter review several theories of grieving to illustrate the complex process of loss that individuals and families endure. Family adaptation to loss is described in terms of family vulnerability, belief systems, definitions and the appraisal of gender, culture, and religion. The developmental nature and the unique challenges of children's grief are examined with an emphasis on factors that influence this evolving process. Finally, the death of specific family members (i.e., children, spouse, sibling, parent) and the associated stressors relating to interpersonal and contextual factors are described.

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Acknowledgments

As editors of the sixth edition of *Families and Change,* we would like to acknowledge the "passing of the torch" that has taken place over the past few editions. As many of you are aware, the first, second, and third editions of this book were the product of two well-respected and prolific scholars in the field of family science, Dr. Patrick McKenry and Dr. Sharon Price. At the time the third edition was being completed, Pat McKenry died. Pat and Sharon had been friends and coauthors for almost 30 years. They had a remarkable friendship; one that involved both hard work and unceasing humor. When SAGE requested a fourth edition of this book Sharon approached Christine Price (her niece) to join her in the editorial responsibilities. She felt the passing of this legacy was appropriate not only because of their family relationship but also because Pat had been a senior faculty friend and mentor to Christine during her years as an assistant professor at The Ohio State University. When discussions of a fifth edition took place, Sharon (who retired from The University of Georgia in 2000) decided that it was time to hand over the editorial responsibilities entirely to the next generation. Sharon and Christine were both thrilled when Kevin Bush, a former student of Pat McKenry's at The Ohio State University, a former faculty member at The University of Georgia, and a current professor and associate dean at Miami University accepted.

Because this book was the original creation of Sharon and Pat's combined efforts and their fingerprints are still present, we want to recognize and pay tribute to them both. We felt honored to take on the editorial responsibilities for the fifth and sixth editions of *Families and Change* and understood that we had big shoes to fill. Regarding this sixth edition, the suggestions and advice we received from those who used the fifth edition of this book were appreciated and important to the changes made in the content and format of the sixth edition. Also, the quality of the authors' contributions, their timely responses, and their enthusiasm were invaluable to this updated version. Some of the authors were colleagues of both Sharon and Pat for many years and have contributed to multiple editions. Following in the tradition that Sharon and Pat practiced in previous editions, we sought out both "senior" and "young" scholars to collaborate and contribute to this volume. We were very pleased that "senior" authors involved junior colleagues or students to be coauthors and some former second authors moved into the position of senior authors. In addition, several new authors were asked to contribute. We would like to extend a special thank you to all of the authors; your efforts and contributions are greatly appreciated.

Kevin R. Bush

Christine A. Price

SECTION

1

Theoretical Foundations

CHAPTER 1

Families Coping With Change

A Conceptual Overview

Christine A. Price, Kevin R. Bush, Sharon J. Price, and Patrick C. McKenry

Families increasingly experience a wide variety of stressors associated with both positive and negative events. Industrialization, urbanization, increased population density (e.g., housing, traffic, demand on infrastructures), community violence, threats of terrorism, advances in technology (e.g., e-mails, texts, social media), financial challenges, and everyday hassles (e.g., errands, commuting, appointments) are frequently identified as making daily life more complicated and impersonal. Family roles are more fluid than the past, resulting in fewer social norms and a lack of support. Families have become more diverse as a result of changing family structures (e.g, divorce, single-parent families, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-parent families, custodial grandfamilies, remarriage, cohabitation, intergenerational reciprocity), immigration, economics (e.g., increased cost of living and two earner families), geographic mobility, and other macro level factors. In addition to natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes) and societal stressors (e.g., discrimination based on race, religious beliefs, gender, and sexual orientation), U.S. families are facing the reality of wars involving American troops overseas, the threat of nuclear attack, and the reality of an ever-changing, and often divisive, political landscape. Additionally, contemporary families are still experiencing economic insecurity and stress due to the Great Recession and the associated economic downturn in the global economy (see Bartholomae & Fox, Chapter 11 in this volume). Sobering financial losses in pensions, investments, and savings accounts, employment instability, income volatility, and rising unsecured debt contribute to the financial struggle of individuals and families. Consider the accumulation of these events and it quickly becomes apparent that stress is a part of everyday life.

Families often face many unique problems, not because of one identifiable crisis, event, or situation, but because of continuous everyday societal change. Technology, for example, has enhanced everyday life in many ways but it has also brought about an increasingly overextended population that is bombarded with ongoing tweets, texts, and work-related demands. From an economic standpoint, members of the younger generation, in many families, are struggling with an increase in cost of living and overwhelming debt as they establish their independence. They are also faced with the reality that their life experiences may involve fewer opportunities and resources as compared to their parents and grandparents.

At the same time, due to medical advancements improving longevity and quality of life as we age, a demographic of adult children is faced with the undefined responsibilities of caregiving for their elders. Finally, the fluidity of family structures requires most families deal with cumulative, and sometime coinciding structural transitions during the life course (Teachman, Tedrow, & Kim, 2013; Walsh, 2013b).

All families experience stress as a result of change or pressure to change, whether or not change is "good" or "bad." The impact of change or the pressure to change depends on the family's perception of the situation as well as their coping abilities (Boss, 2013; Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). Boss (l988, 2002) defines *family stress* as pressure or tension on the status quo—a disturbance of the family's steady state. Life transitions and events often provide an essential condition for psychological development, and family stress is perceived as inevitable and normal or even desirable since people and, therefore, families, must develop, mature, and change over time. With change comes disturbance in the family system and pressure, what is termed *stress* (Boss, 2002; Boss, Bryant, & Mancini, 2017; Lavee, 2013). Changes affecting families also occur externally (e.g., unemployment, natural disasters, war, acts of terrorism), and these also create stress in family systems. This instability becomes problematic only when the degree of stress in a family system reaches a level at which family members becomes dissatisfied or show symptoms of decreased functioning (i.e., ability to carry out regular routines and interactions that maintain stability).

The Study of Family Stress and Change

Compared to the long history of research on stress and coping, theoretical and clinical interest in family-related stress is a rather recent phenomenon. Research on family stress and coping gradually evolved from various disciplines that have examined stress and coping from primarily an individualistic perspective.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the term *stress* can be traced back to the early 14th century when *stress* had several distinct meanings, including hardship, adversity, and affliction (Rutter, l983). Even among stress researchers today, *stress* is variably defined as a stimulus, an inferred inner state, and an observable response to a stimulus or situation (e.g., Oken, Chamine, & Wakeland, 2015). There is also an ongoing debate concerning the extent to which stress is chemical, environmental, or psychological in nature (Folkman, 2013; Lazarus, 2006; Sarafino, 2006).

In the late 17th century, Hooke used *stress* in the context of physical science, although the usage was not made systematic until the early 19th century. Stress and strain were first conceived as a basis of ill health in the 19th century (Lazarus & Folkman, l984). In the 20th century, Cannon (l932) laid the foundation for systematic research on the effects of stress in observations of bodily changes. He showed that stimuli associated with emotional arousal (e.g., pain,

hunger, cold) caused changes in basic physiological functioning (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). Selye (1978) was the first researcher to define and measure stress adaptations in the human body. He defined *stress* as an orchestrated set of bodily defenses against any form of noxious stimuli and identified the term *General Adaptation Syndrome* (GAS) to describe the body's short- and long-term reaction to stress. In the 1950s, social scientists became interested in his conceptualization of stress, and Selye's work has remained influential in the stress and coping literature (e.g., Hatfield & Polomano, 2012; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Meyer, in the 1930s, taught that life events may be an important component in the etiology of a disorder and the most normal and necessary life events may be potential contributors to pathology (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). In the 1960s, Holmes and Rahe (1967) investigated life events and their connection to the onset and progression of illness. Through their Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRSS), which includes many family-related events, Holmes and Rahe associated the accumulation of life changes and those of greater magnitude to a higher chance of illness, disease, or death.

In the social sciences, both sociology and psychology have long histories of study related to stress and coping. Sociologists Marx, Weber, and Durkheim wrote extensively about "alienation." Alienation was conceptualized as synonymous with powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement, clearly under the general rubric of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In psychology, stress was implicit as an organizing framework for thinking about psychopathology, especially in the theorizing of Freud and later psychologically oriented writers. Freudian psychology highlighted the process of coping and established the basis for a developmental approach that considered the effect of life events on later development and the gradual acquisition of resources over the life cycle. Early psychologists used anxiety to denote stress, and it was seen as a central component in psychopathology through the 1950s. The reinforcement-learning theorists (e.g., Spence, 1956) viewed anxiety as a classically conditioned response that led to pathological habits of anxiety reduction. Existentialists (e.g., May, 1950) also focused on anxiety as a major barrier to self-actualization (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Developmentalists (e.g., Erickson, 1963) proposed various stage models that demand a particular crisis be negotiated before an individual can cope with subsequent developmental stages. Personal coping resources accrued during the adolescent–young adult years are thought to be integrated into the self-concept and shape the process of coping throughout adulthood (Moos, 1986). Crisis theorists (e.g., Caplan, 1964) conceptualized these life changes as crises, with the assumption that disequilibrium may provide stress in the short run but can promote the development of new skills in the long run.

The study of family stress began at the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago during the 1930s and the upheavals of the Depression (Boss, 2002). Reuben Hill, often referred to as the father of family stress research (Boss, 2006), was the first scholar to conceptualize family stress theory (Hill, 1949, 1958, 1971), when he developed the ABC-X model of family stress and his model of family crisis (Boss, 1988, 2002, 2006; Lavee, 2013). Subsequent generations of family stress researchers

have made major contributions to this basic model (e.g., Boss, l988, 2002, 2013; McCubbin, l979; McCubbin & McCubbin, l988; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). Developments in family stress theory include emphases on (a) family strengths or resilience (Walsh, 2006; Henry, Morris, & Harrist, 2015); (b) culture, race or ethnicity (Emmen et al., 2013; McCubbin, & McCubbin, 2013); (c) spirituality and faith (Boss, 2006; Walsh, 2013a); and ambiguous loss (Boss, 2002, 2013).

Family Stress Theory

Ecological/Systems Perspective

Family theorists typically have used an ecological or systems approach (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in their conceptualization of families under stress. As a result, families are viewed as living organisms with both symbolic and real structures. They have boundaries to maintain and a variety of instrumental and expressive functions to perform to ensure growth and survival (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Kosutic, 2013; Boss, 1988, 2013). As any social system, families strive to maintain equilibrium. Families are the products of both subsystems (e.g., individual members, dyads) and suprasystems (e.g., community, culture, nation).

Although most general stress theories have focused only on the individual, the primary interest of family stress theory is the entire family unit. Systems theory states that the system is more than the sum of its parts (Anderson et al., 2013; Boss, 2006; Hall & Fagan, 1968). In terms of families, this means that a collection of family members is not only a specific number of people but also an aggregate of particular relationships and shared memories, successes, failures, and aspirations (Anderson et al., 2013; Boss, 1988, 2002). At the same time, systems theory also involves studying the individual to more completely understand a family's response to stress.

An ecological/systems approach allows the researcher to focus beyond the family and the individual to the wider social system (suprasystem). Families do not live in isolation; they are part of the larger social context. This external environment in which the family is embedded is referred to as the "ecosystem," according to ecological theory. This ecosystem consists of historical, cultural, economic, genetic, and developmental influences (Anderson et al., 2013; Boss, 1988, 2002). Thus, the family's response to a stressor event is influenced by living in a particular historical period, its cultural identification, the economic conditions of society, its genetic stamina and resistance, and its stage in the family life cycle.

ABC-X Model

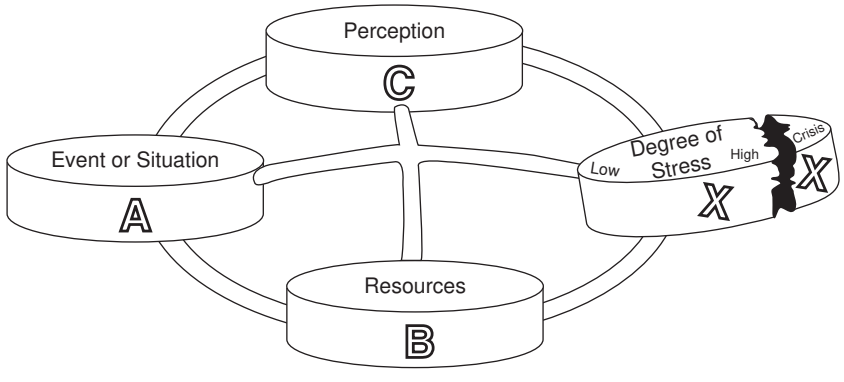
The foundation for a systemic model of family stress lies in Hill's (1949) classic research on war-induced separation and reunion. Although his ABC-X formulation has been expanded (e.g., Boss, l988, 2002, 2013; Burr, Klein, & Associates, l994;

McCubbin, & McCubbin, 2013; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982; Walsh, 2013a), it has withstood careful assessment and is still the basis for analyzing family stress and coping (Boss, 2002, 2006; Darling, Senatore, & Strachan, 2012; Lavee, 2013). This family stress framework can be described as encompassing the following components: A (the provoking or stressor event of sufficient magnitude to result in change in a family)–interacting with B (the family's resources or strengths)–interacting with C (the definition or meaning attached to the event by the family)–produces X (stress or crisis). The main idea is that the X factor is influenced by several other moderating phenomena. Stress or crisis is not seen as inherent in the event itself, but conceptually as a function of the response of the disturbed family system to the stressor (Boss, l988, 2002, 2006; Burr, 1973; Hill, 1949; Lavee, 2013; Walsh, 2013a; See Figure 1.1.).

Stressor Events

A stressor event is an occurrence that provokes a variable amount of change in the family system. Anything that alters some aspect of the system, such as the boundaries, structures, goals, processes, roles, or values, can produce stress (Boss, 2002; Burr, 1973; Lavee, 2013; Walsh, 2013a). This variable denotes something different than the routine changes within a system that are expected as part of its regular, ordinary operation. This variable is dichotomous, that is, an event either changes or does not change (Burr, 1982). The stressor event by definition has the potential to raise the family's level of stress. However, the degree of stress is dependent on the magnitude of the event as well as other moderating factors to be discussed. Also, both positive and

Figure 1.1 ABC-X Model of Family Crisis



Source: Hill, R. (I958). Social stresses on the family: Generic features of families under stress. *Social Casework, 39,* 139–150. Reprinted with permission from *Families in Society* (www.familiesinsociety.org), published by the Alliance for Children and Families.

negative life events can be stressors. Research has clearly indicated that normal or positive life changes can increase an individual's risk for illness. Finally, stressor events do not always increase stress levels to the point of crisis. In some situations, the family's stress level can be successfully managed and the family can return to a new equilibrium.

Researchers have attempted to describe various types of stressor events (e.g., Boss, 1988, 2002; Hansen & Hill, 1964; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). Lipman-Blumen (1975) described family stressor events in terms of eight dimensions—these have been updated by adding two additional dimensions based on the research literature: (1) internal versus external, (2) pervasive versus bounded, (3) precipitate onset versus gradual onset, (4) intense versus mild, (5) transitory versus chronic, (6) random versus expectable, (7) natural generation versus artificial generation, (8) scarcity versus surplus, (9) perceived insolvable versus perceived solvable (e.g., ambiguous loss), and (10) substantive content (See Table 1.1 for definitions). The type of event may be highly correlated with the family's ability to manage stress. Other researchers (e.g., McCubbin, Patterson, & Wilson, 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) have classified stressor events in terms of their intensity or hardship on the family.

One dichotomous classification that is often used by family stress researchers and clinicians is normal or predictable events versus nonnormative or unpredictable events. Normal events are part of everyday life and represent transitions inherent in the family life cycle, such as birth or death of a family member, child's school entry, and retirement. These normative stressor events by definition are of short duration. Although predictable, such life-cycle events have the potential of changing a family's level of stress because they disturb the system equilibrium (Anderson et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2015). These events lead to crisis only if the family does not adapt to the changes brought about by these events (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989).

Nonnormative events are the product of unique situations that could not be predicted and are not likely to be repeated. Examples of nonnormative events would include natural disasters, loss of a job, or an automobile accident. Unexpected but welcome events that are not disastrous may also be stressful for families, such as a promotion or winning the lottery. Although these events are positive, they do change or disturb the family's routine and thus have the potential of raising the family's level of stress (Boss, 1988; Lavee, 2013).

There has been much interest in the study of isolated versus accumulated stressors. Specifically, life event scholars (e.g., Holmes & Rahe, 1967; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; McCubbin et al., 1981) suggest that it is the accumulation of several stressor events rather than the nature of one isolated event that determines a family's level of stress. The clustering of stressor events (normative and/or nonnormative) is termed *stress pileup*. An event rarely happens to a family in total isolation. Normal developmental changes are always taking place and nonnormative events tend to result in other stressors; for example, loss of job may result in a family having to move or marital disruption. By focusing only on certain

Table 1.1 Ten Dimensions of Family Stressor Events

1) *Internal versus External refers to whether the source of the crisis was internal or external to the social system affected.*
2) *Pervasive versus Bounded refers to the degree to which the crisis affects the entire system or only a limited part.*
3) *Precipitate onset versus Gradual onset marks the degree of suddenness with which the crisis occurred, i.e., without or with warning.*
4) *Intense versus Mild involves the degree of severity of the crisis.*
5) *Transitory versus Chronic refers to the degree to which the crisis represents a short- or long-term problem.*
6) *Random versus Expectable marks the degree to which the crisis could be expected or predicted.*
7) *Natural generation versus Artificial generation connotes the distinction between crises that arise from natural conditions and those that come about through technological or other human-made effects.*
8) *Scarcity versus Surplus refers to the degree to which the crisis represents a shortage or overabundance of vital commodities—human, material and nonmaterial.*
9) *Perceived insolvable versus Perceived solvable suggests the degree to which those individuals involved in the crisis believe the crisis is open to reversal or some level of resolution.*
10) *Substantive content (This dimension differs from the previous nine in that it subsumes a set of subject areas, each of which may be regarded as a separate continuum graded from low to high.) Using this dimension, one can determine whether the substantive nature of the crisis is primarily in the political, economic, moral, social, religious, health, or sexual domains or any combination thereof.*

Source: Adapted from Lipman-Blumen, J. (1975). A crisis framework applied to macrosociological family changes: Marriage, divorce, and occupational trends associated with World War II. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 27,* 889–902.

events or stressors, researchers may fail to capture the complexity in the range and clustering of stressors (Pearlin, 1991; Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006).

Researchers have also offered alternative perspectives on stressor events. One such alternative is focusing on daily stressors and their relationship to stress outcomes (e.g., Darling et al., 2012; Harris, Marett, & Harris, 2011; Serido, Almeida, & Wethington, 2004; For review, see Helms, Postler, & Demo, Chapter 2 in this volume). Daily hassles not only parallel major life events in their potential to engender stress, but have an even stronger relationship than traditional life events measures in affecting relationship satisfaction, subjective well-being, and predicting physical health (Falconier et al., 2014; Graf et al., 2016).

Not all stressor events, however, are straightforward or easily understood. As a result, a state of ambiguity is created. Boss (l999, 2006, 2013; Boss, Bryant, & Mancini, 2017) addressed the issue of *ambiguous loss* that can result

from incongruency between physical and psychological/emotional presence or absence. There are two major types of *ambiguous loss*: (1) a person being physically absent but psychologically or emotionally present (missing children, divorce, a family member in prison, soldiers missing in action, immigrants); and, (2) when a person is physically present but psychologically or emotionally absent (a person that has Alzheimer's disease or a chronic mental illness, chronic substance abuse; a spouse preoccupied with work; Boss, l999, 2013). Ambiguous loss not only disrupts family functioning, it results in a lack of clarity regarding who is "in" and who is "outside" the family, as well as what are appropriate roles for family members. This type of ambiguity is the most stressful situation a person or family can experience. Boss attributed this high level of stress to (a) people feeling unable to problem solve because they do not know whether the problem is final or temporary, (b) the ambiguity preventing people from adjusting by reorganizing their relationship with the loved one, (c) families denying societal rituals associated with loss (e.g., funerals, death certificate) that in turn impede their ability to grieve, (d) friends or neighbors withdrawing rather than giving support, and (e) the extended continuation of ambiguous loss which leads to the physical and emotional exhaustion of affected family members (Boss, l999, pp. 7–8).

Resources

The family's resources buffer or moderate the impact of the stressor event on the family's level of stress. Hansen (1965) uses the term *vulnerability* to denote the difference in families' physical and emotional responses to stressful stimuli (Gore & Colten, 1991). This moderator denotes variation in a family's ability to prevent a stressor event or change from creating disruptiveness in the system (Burr, 1973; Henry et al., 2015). When family members have sufficient and appropriate resources, they are less likely to view a stressful situation as problematic. McCubbin and Patterson (1985) defined *resources* as traits, characteristics, or abilities of (a) individual family members, (b) the family system, and (c) the community that can be used to meet the demands of a stressor event. Individual or personal resources include financial (economic well-being), educational (problem solving, information), health (physical and emotional well-being), and psychological resources which include self-esteem, optimism, sense of coherence, sense of mastery, and a positive family schema or ethnic identity (Everson, Darling, Herzog, Figley, & King, 2017; Garrard, Fennell, & Wilson, 2017; Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013).

The term *family system resources* refers to internal attributes of the family unit that protect the family from the impact of stressors and facilitate family adaptation during family stress or crisis. Family cohesion (bonds of unity) and adaptability (ability to change) (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1979, 1983; Patterson, 2002) have received the most research attention (Lavee, 2013). These two dimensions are the major axes of the circumplex model (Olson et al., 1979). This model suggests that families who function moderately along the dimensions of cohesion

and adaptability are likely to make a more successful adjustment to stress (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1980).

Community resources refer to those capabilities of people or institutions outside the family upon which the family can draw from to deal with stress (Boss, Bryant, & Mancini, 2017). Social support is one of the most important community resources, such as informal support from friends, neighbors and colleagues, as well as formal support from community institutions (Lavee, 2013). Social support may be viewed as informational in terms of facilitating problem solving and as tangible in the development of social contacts who provide help and assistance. In general, social support serves as a protector against the effects of stressors and promotes recovery from stress or crisis. Increasingly, the concept of community resources has been broadened to include the resources of cultural groups, for example, ethnic minority families (Emmen et al., 2013; Hill, 1999; McCubbin, Futrell, Thompson & Thompson, 1998; McCubbin, & McCubbin, 2013; Yeh et al., 2006) as well as those offered within established neighborhoods and communities (Distelberg & Taylor, 2015; Lum et al., 2016).

Definition of the Event/Perceptions

The impact of the stressor event on the family's level of stress is moderated by the definition or meaning the family gives to the event. This variable is also synonymous with family appraisal, perception, and assessment of the event. Thus, subjective definitions can vary from viewing circumstances as a challenge and an opportunity for growth, to the negative view that things are hopeless, too difficult, or unmanageable (Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & Patterson, 1985). Empirical findings suggest that an individual's cognitive appraisal of life events strongly influences the response (Lazarus & Launier, 1978), and may be the most important component in determining an individual's or family's response to a stressor event (Boss, 2002; Hennon et al., 2009).

This concept has a long tradition in social psychology in terms of the self-fulfilling prophecy that, if something is perceived as real, it is real in its consequences (Burr, 1982). Families who are able to redefine a stressor event more positively (i.e., reframe it) appear to be better able to cope and adapt. By redefining, families are able to (a) clarify the issues, hardships, and tasks to render them more manageable and responsive to problem-solving efforts; (b) decrease the intensity of the emotional burdens associated with stressors; and (c) encourage the family unit to carry on with its fundamental tasks of promoting individual member's social and emotional development (Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; McCubbin & Patterson, 1985).

Additional factors which could influence families' perceptions in a stressful situation include *spirituality, values and beliefs, culture,* and *stage of the family life cycle* (e.g., Emmen et al., 2013; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; Walsh, 2013a; Yeh et al., 2006). As noted earlier, there has been an increased emphasis on the role of spirituality, beliefs, and faith on family stress. Boss (2002, 2006) discussed several

cases where a strong sense of spirituality results in a more positive attitude, hope, and optimism when families are confronted with a stressful situation. Faith can be a major coping mechanism promoting family resilience (Martin, Distelberg, & Elahad, 2015) and causing families to turn to their religious institutions and communities more than cognitive problem solving (Walsh, 2013a). Of course, spirituality can be experienced within or outside formal religious institutions. Regardless of the source, spiritual associations can bring a sense of meaning, wholeness, and connection with others. For example, religious communities provide guidelines for living and scripted ways to make major life transitions, as well as congregational support in times of need (Walsh, 2006, 2013a).

The belief system or value orientation of families may also influence their perceptions of stressful events. Families with a *mastery orientation* may believe they can solve any problem and control just about anything that could happen to them. For example, a recent study found that adolescent mastery orientation served to increase health promotion behaviors in teens despite family stress (Kwon & Wickrama, 2014). In contrast, families with a *fatalistic orientation* are more likely to believe that everything is determined by a higher power, therefore, all events are predetermined and not under their control. This orientation could be a barrier to coping because it encourages passivity, and active coping strategies have been found to be more effective than passive strategies (e.g., Boss, 2002; Yeh et al., 2006). The influence of belief and value orientations can also be mediated by culture (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; Yeh et al., 2006).

Culture influences the family stress process through (1) values or value orientations and (2) minority and immigrant status—both of which influence perceptions, coping strategies, and resources (Emmen et al., 2013; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Yeh et al., 2006; Walsh, 2013a). Researchers of individual models of coping have made some strides in identifying how cultural values and social norms influence coping strategies. Scholars in this area have asserted that coping is not dualistic (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) with only action oriented coping strategies resulting in positive outcomes, but rather cultural context also plays a part (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lam & Zane, 2004; Yeh et al., 2006). While taking direct action (e.g., confronting others, standing up for oneself) is a preferred and effective strategy in individualist cultural contexts; in collectivistic contexts, the emphasis on group harmony and interdependence leads individuals to enact coping strategies that focus on changing themselves to meet the needs of the group, instead of attempting to change the situation (Lam & Zane, 2004; Yeh et al., 2006). Scholars examining the cultural context of stress and family stress have focused on models that account for the depth and complexity of cultural and ethnic influences on family systems related to family stress and resilience. For example, McCubbin and McCubbin (2013) created the Relational and Resilience Theory of Ethnic Family Systems, which was designed to identify and validate competencies among ethnic/cultural families that facilitate successful adaption in the context of family stress. Similarly, McNeil Smith and Landor (2018) developed the sociocultural family stress model to help better understand the experience of

family stress within racially and ethnically diverse families (see James, Barrios, Roy, & Lee, Chapter 12 in this volume).

The *stage of the family life cycle* can also influence a family's perceptions during a stressful event. Where the family currently exists in the family *life* cycle, points to the variation in structure, composition, interaction (between family members as well as between the family and the outside culture), and resources of that family (Henry et al., 2015; Price et al., 2000; Walsh, 2013b). Consequently, families at different stages of the life cycle vary in their response to stressful situations. This is particularly relevant as families move from one stage of development to another during normative transitions. It is during these periods of change (a child is born, children leave home, a family member dies) that families are likely to experience high levels of stress as they adjust rules, roles, and patterns of behavior (Aldous, l996; Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). This stress is also affected by whether the transition is "on time" or "off time" as well as expected or unexpected (Rodgers & White, l993). In general, off time (e.g., a child dies before a parent dies) and unexpected (a family member is diagnosed with a terminal illness) transitions create periods of greater stress. The significance of this stress could, at least partially, be attributed to the family members' perception of the stressful situation as being overwhelming or unfair.

Stress and Crisis

According to systems theory, stress represents a change in the family's steady state. Stress is the response of the family system to the demands experienced as a result of a stressor event. Stress itself is not inherently bad—it becomes problematic when the degree of stress in the family system reaches a level at which the family becomes disrupted or individual members become dissatisfied or display physical or emotional symptoms. The degree of stress ultimately depends on the family's definition of the stressor event as well as the adequacy of the family's resources to meet the demands of the change associated with the stressor event.

The terms *stress* and *crisis* have been used inconsistently in the literature. In fact, many researchers have failed to make a distinction between the two. Boss (1988, 2006) makes a useful distinction as she defines crisis as (a) a disturbance in the equilibrium that is overwhelming, (b) pressure that is so severe, or (c) change that is so acute that the family system is blocked and incapacitated. When a family is in a crisis state, at least for a time, it does not function adequately. Family boundaries are no longer maintained, customary roles and tasks are no longer performed, and family members are no longer functioning at optimal physical or psychological levels. The family has thus reached a state of acute disequilibrium and is immobilized.

Family stress, on the other hand, is merely a state of changed or disturbed equilibrium. Family stress therefore is a continuous variable (degree of stress), whereas family crisis is a dichotomous variable (either in crisis or not). A crisis does not have to permanently break up the family system. It may only temporarily

immobilize the family system and then lead to a different level of functioning than that experienced before the stress level escalated to the point of crisis. Many family systems, in fact, become stronger after they have experienced and recovered from crisis (Boss, 1988, Walsh, 2013b).

Coping

Family stress researchers have increasingly shifted their attention from crisis and family dysfunction to the process of coping. Researchers have become more interested in explaining why some families are better able to manage and endure stressor events rather than documenting the frequency and severity of such events (e.g., Henry et al., 2015). In terms of intervention, this represents a change from crisis intervention to prevention (Boss, 1988; McCubbin et al., 1980; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013).

The study of family coping has drawn heavily from cognitive psychology (e.g., Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as well as sociology (e.g., Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; McCubbin, 2006). *Cognitive coping strategies* refer to the ways in which individual family members alter their subjective perceptions of stressful events. Sociological theories of coping emphasize a wide variety of actions directed at either changing the stressful situation or alleviating distress by manipulating the social environment (McCubbin et al., 1980; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). Thus family coping has been conceptualized in terms of three types of responses: (a) direct action (e.g., acquiring resources, learning new skills); (b) intrapsychic (e.g., reframing the problem); or (c) controlling the emotions generated by the stressor (e.g., social support, use of alcohol; Boss, 1988; Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). These responses can be used individually, consecutively, or, more commonly, in various combinations. Specific coping strategies are not inherently adaptive or maladaptive; they are very much situation specific (e.g., Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Yeh et al., 2006). Flexible access to a range of responses appears to be more effective than the use of any one response (Moos, 1986; Yeh et al., 2006). Coping interacts with both family resources and perceptions as defined by the B and C factors of the ABC-X model. However, coping actions are different than resources and perceptions. Coping represents what people do—their concrete efforts to deal with a stressor (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Having a resource or a perception of an event does not imply whether or how a family will react (Boss, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Yeh et al., 2006).

Although coping is sometimes equated with adaptational success (i.e., a product), from a family systems perspective, coping is a process, not an outcome per se. *Coping* refers to all efforts expended to manage a stressor regardless of the effect (Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, the family strategy of coping is not instantly created but is progressively modified over time. Because the family is a system, coping behavior involves the management of various dimensions of family life simultaneously: (a) maintaining satisfactory internal conditions

for communication and family organization, (b) promoting member independence and self-esteem, (c) maintenance of family bonds of coherence and unity, (d) maintenance and development of social supports in transactions with the community, and (e) maintenance of some efforts to control the impact of the stressor and the amount of change in the family unit (McCubbin et al., 1980). Coping is thus a process of achieving balance in the family system that facilitates organization and unity and promotes individual and family system growth and development (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). This is consistent with systems theory, which suggests that the families who most effectively cope with stress are strong as a unit as well as in individual members (Anderson et al., 2013; Buckley, 1967).

Boss (1988) cautions that coping should not be perceived as maintaining the status quo; rather, the active managing of stress should lead to progressively new levels of organization as systems are naturally inclined toward greater complexity. In fact, sometimes it is better for a family to "fail to cope" even if that precipitates a crisis. After the crisis, the family can reorganize into a better functioning system. For example, a marital separation may be very painful for a family, but it may be necessary to allow the family to grow in a different, more productive direction.

In addition to serving as a barrier to change and growth, maladaptive forms of coping serve as a source of stress. There are three ways that coping itself may be a source of additional hardship (Roskies & Lazarus, 1980). One way is by indirect damage to the family system. This occurs when a family member inadvertently behaves in such a way as to put the family in a disadvantaged position. For example, a father may become ill from overwork to ease his family's economic stress. The second way that coping can serve as a source of stress is through direct damage to the family system. In this instance, a family member may use an addictive behavior or violence to personally cope with stress, but this behavior will be disruptive, even harmful, to the family system. The third way that coping may increase family stress is by interfering with additional adaptive behaviors that could help preserve the family. For example, the denial of a problem may preclude getting necessary help and otherwise addressing the stressor event (Lavee, 2013; McCubbin et al., 1980).

Adaptation

Another major interest of family stress researchers has been the assessment of how families are able to *recover* from stress or crisis. Drawing from Hansen's (1965) work, Burr (1973) described this process in terms of a family's "regenerative power," denoting a family's ability to recover from stress or crisis. Accordingly, the purpose of adjustment following a crisis or stressful event is to reduce or eliminate the disruption in the family system and restore homeostasis (Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). However, these authors also note that family stress has the potential of maintaining family relations and stimulating desirable change. Because system theorists (e.g., Anderson et al., 2013; Buckley, 1967) hold that all systems naturally evolve toward greater

complexity, it may be inferred that family systems initiate and capitalize on externally produced change in order to grow. Therefore, reduction of stress or crisis alone is an incomplete index of a family's adjustment to crisis or stress.

McCubbin and Patterson (1982) use the term *adaptation* to describe a desirable outcome of a crisis or stressful state. *Family adaptation* is defined as the degree to which the family system alters its internal functions (behaviors, rules, roles, perceptions) or external reality to achieve a system (individual or family)-environment fit (Henry et al., 2015). Adaptation is achieved through reciprocal relationships in which (a) system demands (or needs) are met by resources from the environment and (b) environmental demands are satisfied through system resources (Hansen & Hill, 1964; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013).

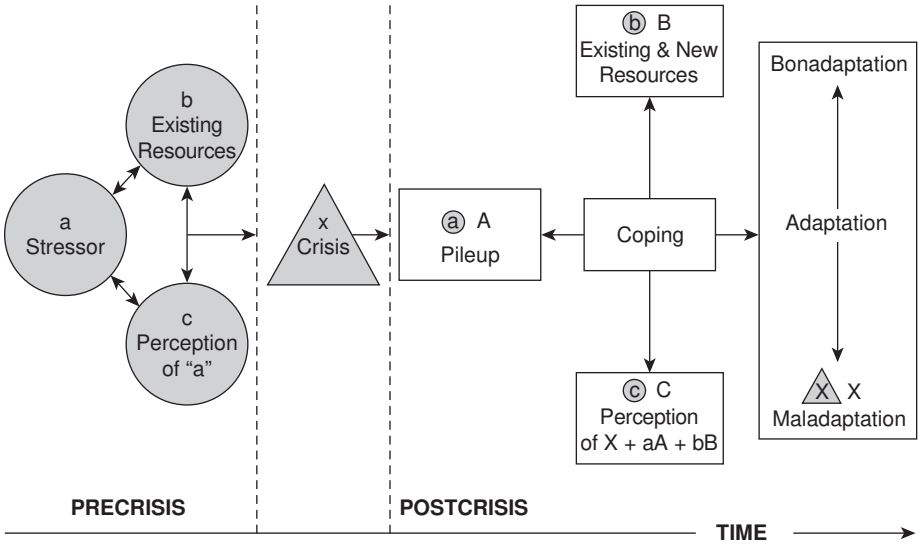
Demands on the family system include normative and nonnormative stressor events as well as the needs of individuals (e.g., intimacy), families (e.g., launching of children), and social institutions and communities (e.g., governmental authority; Lavee, 2013; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Resources include individual (e.g., education, psychological stability), family (e.g., cohesion, adaptability), and environmental (social support, medical services) attributes. Adaptation is different than adjustment. Adjustment is a short-term response or modification by a family that changes the situation temporarily. Adaptation implies a change in the family system that evolves over a longer period of time or is intended to have long-term consequences involving changes in family roles, rules, patterns of interaction, and perceptions (Henry et al., 2015; McCubbin, Cauble, & Patterson, 1982).

McCubbin and Patterson (1982) expanded Hill's (1949) ABC-X model by adding postcrisis/poststress factors to explain how families achieve a satisfactory adaptation to stress or crisis. Their model consists of the ABC-X model followed by their Double ABC-X configuration. (See Figure 1.2.)

McCubbin and Patterson's (1982) Double A factor refers to the stressor pileup in the family system, and this includes three types of stressors. The family must deal with unresolved aspects of the initial stressor event, the changes and events that occur regardless of the initial stressor (e.g., changes in family membership), and the consequences of the family's efforts to cope with the hardships of the situation (e.g., intrafamily role changes). The family's resources, the Double B factor, are of two types. The first are those resources already available to the family and that minimize the impact of the initial stressor. The second are those coping resources (personal, family, and social) that are strengthened or developed in response to the stress or crisis situation. The Double C factor refers to (a) the perception of the initial stressor event and (b) the perception of the stress or crisis. The perception of the stress or crisis situation includes the family's view of the stressor and related hardships and the pileup of events as well as the meaning families attach to the total family situation. The family's postcrisis or poststress perceptions involve values and beliefs, redefining (reframing) the situation, and endowing the situation with meaning.

The Double X factor includes the original family crisis/stress response and subsequent adaptation. The xX factor represents a continuum ranging from

Figure 1.2 Double ABC-X Model



Source: From McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (1982). Family adaptation to crisis. In H. I. McCubbin, A. E. Cauble, & J. M. Patterson (Eds.), *Family stress, coping, and social support.* (pp. 26–47). Reprinted by permission of Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Springfield, IL.

maladaptation (family crisis/stress) on one end to bonadaptation (family adjustment over time) on the other; and illustrates the extent of fit between individual family members, the family system, and the community in which they are imbedded (Lavee, 2013).

Boss (1988, 2002) has cautioned against the use of the term, *adaptation*, to describe the optimal outcome of a stressful or crisis state. She contends that the family literature appears to assume that calm, serenity, orderliness, and stability are the desired ends for family life. Like Hoffman (1981), Boss maintains that systems naturally experience discontinuous change through the life cycle in the process of growth. If adaptation is valued over conflict and change, then families are limited to a perspective that promotes adjustment to the stressor event at the expense of individual or family change. Boss contends that sometimes dramatic change must occur for individual and family well-being, including breaking family rules, changing boundaries, and revolution within the system. For example, an abused wife may need to leave or at least dramatically change her family system to achieve a sense of well-being for herself and perhaps for other family members. Therefore, in order to avoid circular reasoning, Boss prefers use of the term *managing* to refer to the coping process that results from the family's reaction to stress or crisis. Specifically, "unless crisis occurs, the family is managing its level of stress.

Managing high stress and being resilient are indeed the alternative outcome to falling into crisis" (Boss, 2002, p. 89).

Patterson (1988) revised the Double ABC-X model to include the community system as well as the individual and family system. This complex form of analysis requires that the (a) stressors; (b) resources; and (c) meanings/definitions of the individual, family, and community systems as well as their interactions be considered. Patterson's extension of the Double ABC-X model is consistent with biopsychosocial systems models that attempt to deal with the complex interplay and multiplicative interactions among biological, psychological, and social phenomena regarding health and illness (e.g., Masten & Monn, 2015; Repetti, Robles, & Reynolds, 2011). A few examples include research on parental coping in the context of child illness (Didericksen, Muse, & Aamar, 2019) and research linking marital conflict, children's stress reactivity (e.g., cortisol and alpha-amylase) and children's emotional and behavioral regulation strategies (Koss et al., 2014).

Resilience

Resilience has its roots in family stress and is both an individual and family phenomena. It has been defined as "the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful . . . an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenges" (Walsh, 2006, p. 4). In addition, resiliency is referred to as the ability to stretch (like elastic) or flex (like a suspension bridge) in response to the pressures and strains of life (Boss, Bryant, & Mancini, 2017). In general, resilient families possess coping strengths that enable them to benefit from the challenges of adversity. The ability to successfully deal with a stressor event actually results in outcomes as good or better than those that would have been obtained in the absence of the adversity (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Hawley & DeHaan, 2003; Henry et al., 2015).

While early research and theorizing about the impact of stress on families focused mainly on the adverse effects of stressor events of families, more recent scholarship and theorizing have emphasized family resilience (Distelberg & Taylor, 2015; Henry et al., 2015; Lavee, 2013; Martin et al., 2015). Scholars have moved beyond viewing resiliency as a characteristic of an individual to providing a framework for viewing resiliency as a quality of families (Hawley & DeHaan, 2003; Henry et al., 2015). Following the family resilience model (FRM)—when family risk interacts with family protection and vulnerability in such ways that result in short-term and long-term family system adaptation, family resilience is present (Henry et al., 2015). Henry and colleagues (2015) describe the FRM as consisting of four key elements: (1) the presence of family risk, (2) family protection, (3) family vulnerability, and (4) short-term adjustment and long-term adaptation. Several key principles from individual resilience theories are applied, including

variables that serve as protective or promotive functions in one circumstance, yet serve as risks or vulnerabilities in others (e.g., across cultural contexts).

Rather than a pathological view, or deficient model of families, the emphasis is on family wellness and strengths (Hawley & DeHaan, 2003; McCubbin & McCubbin, l988, 2013; Walsh, 2006, 2013b). In contrast to Hill's (l949) original model which hypothesized that, following a crisis, families would return to functioning at a level below or above their previous level, resilient families are expected to return to a level at or above their previous level (Henry et al., 2015). A valuable conceptual contribution from the family resilience literature has been the recognition of a family ethos (i.e., a schema, world view, or sense of coherence) which describes a shared set of values and attitudes held by a family unit that serves as the core of the family's resilience (Hawley & DeHaan, 2003; McCubbin, 2006; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013).

Conclusion

Families today are being challenged with a compelling number of changes and problems that have the capacity to produce stress and crisis. After many years of focusing on individual stress responses, researchers have begun systematic assessments of whole family responses, often by focusing on resiliency. Major theoretical paradigms that have been used to study family responses to stressor events include human ecology models (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and family systems models (e.g., Anderson et al., 2013). Developing from Hill's (1949) work on the effect of wartime separation, various characteristics of stressor events as well as the mediating effects of perceptions and resources have been studied, suggesting that there is nothing inherent in the event per se that is stressful or crisis producing. More recently, family stress research has moved beyond the linear relationship of stressor, buffer or moderator, and response to look at coping and adaptation as a process that continues over time—that is, how families actually manage stress or crisis. Coping is conceptualized as an ongoing process that facilitates family organization but also promotes individual growth. Increasingly, the outcome of interest is adaptation, that is, the ability of a family to make needed changes and ultimately recover from stress and crisis. Adaptation, like coping, however, should not be perceived as a definitive end product because families are always growing and changing. Further, the serenity and stability synonymous with adaptation are not always functional for family members and for some families the response to a stressor event may result in a higher level of functioning. Finally, emphasis on the resilience of families has received increasing attention. By acknowledging the ability of families to successfully manage stressful events, scholars are broadening our understanding of how some families thrive in the face of adversity.

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