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Family Type and Familism in Contemporary Appalachia

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ABSTRACT Residents of Appalachia have long been considered isolated, "old-fashioned," and "traditional" when compared with the rest of the United States. Such terms as "yesterday's people" have been utilized to describe present-day Appalachians, and romanticized ideas abound as to the contemporary Appalachian family. It is still quite often pictured as extended and highly familistic. This research consisted of a study of 675 rural families throughout the state of West Virginia, which is the only state entirely within the Appalachian area. The interviewees tended to live in nuclear families. They did not display the expected degree of familism. Familism is related to sex, race, employment status, and church attendance

Introduction

The process of urbanization has had a tremendous impact upon the social structure of the United States. American society has been transformed from a rural environment into a predominantly urban milieu (Hacker, 1983:24; Coleman and Cressey, 1984:497).

While the rest of American society experienced rapid transformation as a result of urbanization, Appalachia, which extends from the Mohawk Valley in New York to the Fall Line Hills area in Mississippi (Widner, 1974:1), and includes the state of West Virginia and parts of New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, has been slow to change. George Vincent (1898), after visiting Appalachia, called it the "retarded frontier." Frost (1899) referred to people in the mountains as "our contemporary ancestors," and Kephart (1913) stated that "mountain people still live in the eighteenth century." More contemporary authors such as Graff (1962:188-200), Breathitt (1968:8), and Caudill (1972:240-246) contend that Appalachia still lags behind the rest of the nation. In fact, Weller (1966) refers to those who reside in the mountains as "yesterday's people."

Urbanization has produced alterations in the major social institutions. For example, as the United States made the transition to a primarily urban environment, the family changed extensively (Furstenberg, 1972:397; Melville, 1983:393), especially in the areas of family type and familism. The rural Appalachian family, however,

experienced a slower rate of change.

Family type

The sociological literature distinguishes between two major family types in the United States: the nuclear family and the extended family. The nuclear family consists of the husband, wife, and their own or adopted children (Leslie, 1967:13; Reiss, 1971: 8). There are, of course, exceptions to this traditional sociological definition. The married couple may have a child (or children) or their child(ren) may be grown and no longer a part of the parental household. A nuclear family may be broken by death, divorce, or separation, or incomplete, in which only one parent is living with his/her own or adopted child(ren), or biological child(ren) born out of wedlock. Exceptions to the traditional definition still constitute a form of nuclear family (Stark, 1975:367-368; Leslie, 1967:13). In addition to the nuclear unit of parent(s) and child(ren), extended families include other relatives such as grandparents or grandchildren (vertical extension to three or more generations), or adult siblings (lateral extension) including uncles and aunts or nieces and nephews within the same two generations (Duvall and Miller, 1985:7).

Coleman and Cressey (1984:129) state that the earliest societies were hunting and gathering societies, in which the nuclear family was the most common family type. The family was nuclear because of the need for constant mobility, which made it difficult to maintain large families. However, with the development of settled agriculture, people became less mobile and the extended family came into existence because it provided the necessary labor to work the fields. Industrialization broke up the extended family and stunted the growth of the nuclear family as the dominant family type (Turner, 1985:311-312; Julian, 1977:321). The nuclear family became isolated from the kinship network (Parsons, 1951: 510; Reiss, 1971:265).

However, the conception of the extended family as the dominant family type in early America is probably inaccurate. It is quite possible that the extended family is a romantic ideal and has never been the most prevalent family type in the United States. Several authors (Litwak, 1968; Sussman, 1959; Greven, 1966; Demos, 1968) suggest that we should use the terms "modified extended family" or "detached extended family" when referring to the traditional American family type. In other words, the family in the United States does not consist of three generations or more co-existing in the same household, but family members do live close to one another or in the same community, and still display familial dependence.

According to Coleman and Cressey (1984:129), extended family systems still provide for essential needs of members in most agricultural societies. This does not appear to be the case in Appalachia. While the extended family continues to be important in the mountains (Brown and Schwarzweller, 1974; Gazaway, 1974; Schwarzweller et al., 1971), it

'In the examination of family type, "family" was operationally defined as a unit of the kinship network related by ancestry, marriage, or adoption, living under the same roof (excluded are members of the kinship group such as grandparents or siblings who are not part of the household). In this case, the terms "family" and "household" are synonymous.

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appears that the vast majority of rural Appalachian households today are nuclear (Hicks, 1976:211; Brown and Schwarzweller, 1974).

Familism

Familism (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969:146) may be defined as:

A form of social organization characterized by family values that emphasize the subordination of the interests and personality of individual family members to the interests and welfare of the family group. It is characterized by a strong sense of family identification and loyalty, mutual assistance among family members, and a concern for the perpetuation of the family unit.

The general view of familism is that it has been a dominant form of social organization in traditional and modern peasant societies (Heller, 1970). One result of the transition from a rural to an urban society has been a decrease in familism (Parsons, 1955:19; Melville, 1983:396). Many of the family's functions are taken over by other social institutions, and it becomes much easier to live without family support (Coleman and Cressey, 1984:130). The dependence of nuclear family members on non-family organizations and individuals tends to weaken family ties (Blisten, 1974:335).

Urbanization is instrumental in replacing familism with a sense of "atomism" or "individualism" (Zimmerman, 1948; Blood and Wolfe, 1960:12), in which the individual puts his or her welfare above that of the family. People place a high value on individual freedom and personal autonomy (Melville, 1983:8-9; Turner, 1985:312; McKee and Robertson, 1975:397).

While the literature indicates that familism has decreased with increased urbanization in the United States, Appalachian writers report that familial ties within the mountains are still extensive (Stephenson, 1968; Day, 1975:76). Brown and Schwarzweller (1974:69) state that family loyalty is so strong as to be almost pathological by modern urban middle class standards.

Loyalty to family is built into the culture (Weller, 1966:82), and there is a tendency to stick up for kin above anybody else (Hicks, 1976:211; Shackelford and Weinberg, 1977:84). According to Jones (1975:511), loyalty is so extensive between Appalachian family members that a sense of responsibility for one another is usually extended to cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts, and in-laws. Extended-kin-oriented familism was noted in a study involving a random sample of respondents living the the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia (Heller and Quesada, 1977; Heller et al. (1981).

Methodology

This research involved the analysis of the family structure in a sample of families in one Appalachian state. West Virginia was selected because (1) it is the only state totally within the Appalachian region, and (2) it is primarily rural (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980a). The variables were family type and familism. It was hypothesized that the nuclear family would be the dominant family type and that the respondents would display a high degree of familism.

The data in the study were collected from early 1978 to late 1984. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in 675 families throughout the state of West Virginia (the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1). During the pretest of the instrument, an attempt was made to interview both the male and female head of the family. However, several difficulties arose (e.g., one person agreed to participate while the other refused, one individual responded to the questionnaire but the other could not find an appropriate time to be interviewed, etc.). Therefore, in this investigation, either the male or female head of the family was interviewed (never both) through semi-structured interviewing. The respondents were natives of West Virginia, and their families had lived in West Virginia for generations.

A population list, from which a random sample of families in West Virginia could be selected, was not available. Even if such a list had been extant, ordering the population to apply a systematic sampling frame would have been an enormous and time-consuming task. Therefore, the slightly more biased research technique known as "snowball sampling" was used.²

Whenever a researcher uses a sample that was not randomly selected (everyone in the population has an equal chance of being in the study), biases are inherent and should be carefully considered when making generalizations about the population. That is the case in this investigation. For example, because of the sampling technique (snowball sampling) used, there are a disproportionate number of respondents who are white, Protestant, highly educated, and residing in Central West Virginia. Therefore, generalizations concerning race, education, religious preference, and geographic location cannot be made beyond the present sample.

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Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents and Degree of Familism

Characteristic	Number	Percentage	Average Degree of Familism*	
Sex				
Male _	222	32.9	32.87	
Female	453	67.1	30.08	
Age				
18-34 (Young adult)	357	52.9	30.18	
35-60 (Middle age)	266	39.4	31.83	
61+ (Older adult)	50	7.4	32.46	
No Answer	2	0.3	N.D.**	
Race				
White	660	97.8	30.88	
Black	15	2.2	35.92	
Husband's Education				
Grade (7th grade or less)	66	9.8	32.92	
High School (8th-12th grade)	318	47.1	31.59	
College (Beyond 12th grade)	289	42.8	25.91	
No Answer	2	0.3	N.D.	
Wife's Education				
Grade (7th grade or less)	37	5.5	31.60	
High School (8th-12th grade)	351	52.0	32.20	
College (Beyond 12th grade)	284	42.1	29.44	
No Answer	3	0.4	N.D.	
Socioeconomic Status				
Low	291	43.1	31.53	
Medium	242	35.9	30.97	
High	142	21.0	29.97	

Since the author resided in Gilmer County, West Virginia when the research was begun, that county was selected as the starting point.³ A

*Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980) were employed to compare some of the demographic characteristics of the respondents in this sample with those of Gilmer County, West Virginia (where the study was begun) and the state of West Virginia. These characteristics do not vary to any major degree. The average family size for the sample (2.94) is slightly higher than that of Gilmer County (2.54) and West Virginia (2.79). Gilmer County has a much lower percentage of blacks (0.04%) than the sample (2.2%) and West Virginia (3.3%). The percentage of whites is 96.6% for West Virginia, 99.91% for Gilmer County, and 97.8% the sample. The median age is 30.4 years for West Virginia, 28.3 years for Gilmer County, and 33.5 years for the sample. Gilmer County has a lower median level of education (11.1 years) for persons 21 years of age and older (the census (continued...)

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic	Number	Percentage	Average Degree of Familism*	
Frequency of Church Attendance				
Low (Less than 1 time per week)	329	48.7	30.66	
High (1 time or more per week)	321	47.6	31.35	
No Answer	25	3.7	N.D.	
Religious Preference				
Protestant	552	81.8	31.02	
Non-Protestant	77	11.4	31.23	
None	29	4.3	29.94	
No Answer	17	2.5	N.D.	
Present Family Type				
Nuclear	626	92.7	30.94	
Intact (Husband and Wife	020	34.1	20.24	
both present)	588	93.9		
Non-Intact (Broken, etc.)	38	6.1		
Extended	49	7.3	31.72	
Extended	43	7.5	01.72	
Geographic Area				
Northern West Virginia	69	10.2	30.77	
Southern West Virginia	28	4.1	31.22	
Eastern West Virginia	10	1.5	34.10	
Western West Virginia	166	24.6	31.41	
Central West Virginia	401	59.6	30.78	
Wife's Employment Status Wife Does Not Work Outside				
of home	348	45.7	31.97	
Wife works outside of home	315	52.5	29.85	
Not Determined	2	1.8	N.D.	

^{*}Grand Mean = 31.00

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and degree of familism

sample of potential respondents was randomly selected from the telephone directory. Those interviewed were asked for names, addresses, and telephone numbers of families, preferably in other counties, that might

^{**}N.D. = Not Determined

^{3(...}continued) does not provide the median level of education for persons under 21) than West Virginia (12.2 years) and the sample (12.2 years). The median educational level for all respondents in the sample (18 years +) is 12.3 years.

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consent to an interview. The "snowball" process continued until the 675 usable interviews were conducted.

The statistical analyses employed in the research (where appropriate) were chi-square (with the contingency coefficient as the measure of association), analysis of variance, multiple classification analysis, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, and multiple regression. The level of significance used throughout the study was 0.05.

Results

Family Type

Comparison of the present family type with the family type of orientation reveals no significant difference (p < 0.23) between respondents living in nuclear families and those presently residing in extended families. Ninety-eight percent of the interviewees residing in nuclear families and 94 percent of those living in extended families had resided in nuclear families of orientation.

Few households in the sample can be considered extended. In fact, 92.7 percent (626) of the 675 families are nuclear. While 7.3 percent (49) of the 675 persons interviewed reside in extended families, only 2.3 percent (18) grew up in an extended family type. Only about one-fourth of the respondents, their spouses, or their children, ever lived in anything other than a nuclear family.

Analysis of several sociodemographic variables affecting present family type reveals no significant difference in any instance. The respondents tend to live in nuclear family types and have grown up in nuclear families regardless of age their race, level of education, the wife's employment status, socioeconomic status, frequency of church attendance, religious preference, or the section of West Virginia in which they live.

Familism

Familism in this investigation was measured through the use of the Familism Scale. The scale, developed by Bardis (1959), is a Likert-type scale with a corrected split-half reliability of 0.88. It appears to have content validity. The 16 items adequately cover the definition of familism presented earlier (e.g., "A person should always consider the needs of his family as a whole more important than his own," "A person should always be completely loyal to his family," and "A person should always help his parents with the support of his younger brothers and sisters if necessary").

'Other familism scales are extant (e.g., Heller, 1970; Heller, 1976). It appeared, after the examination of these scales and consultation with other qualified judges, that the Bardis scale provided broader coverage of the concept of familism by including items for the measurement of attitudes toward uncles and aunts, cousins, and in-laws, in addition to those measuring attitudes concerning parents and children (siblings). For that reason, and since this author was familiar with its use, the Bardis scale was employed in this research.

Interviewees respond to each item by entering a number from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) in the space provided to the left of each statement. The attitude score is derived by adding the individual item scores. The lowest possible score is 0 and the maximum possible score is 64. The higher the score, the greater the degree of familism. The average degree of familism for the respondents in this research was 31.0. The lowest score was 1 and the highest was 58. The respondents' gender accounts for the major variations in familism (see Table 2). While the correlation coefficients are low to moderate, the data indicate that familism is also significantly related to having less education, the wife's being employed outside the home, church attendance, age and race.

As the level of education for males and females increases, the degree of familism decreases. However, education seems to have a more salient impact on the women, who are less familistic than the men (see Table 1)

There is a positive correlation between the wife's education and employment status indicated in Table 3. Combining this with the negative, significant correlation between the wife's employment status and degree of familism (Table 2) yields evidence that women who are less familistic are likely to have a college education and be employed.⁵

While the correlations between socioeconomic status, the husband's education, the wife's education, and the wife's employment status are moderate, the correlation between socioeconomic status, measured through the use of Hollingshead's (1965) "Two-factor Index of Social Position," and familism is weak and non-significant. However, familism does decrease slightly as socioeconomic status increases (the average degree of familism is 31.53 for lower class persons, 30.96 for those in the middle class, and 29.97 for higher class respondents).

Familism is positively and significantly correlated with age, church attendance, and race. That is, as age and frequency of church attendance increase, familism also increases. Blacks have a higher degree of familism (x=35.92) than whites (x=30.88). Separate analyses (data not shown) for men and women indicate that age, but not church attendance or race, is related to gender. For women, as age increases so does familism (r=0.18; p < 0.001), but this is not true for men (r=0.04; p < 0.23).

Very little of the variation in familism is explained by the family type and religious preference of the respondents. It is important to note that there is no significant difference in the degrees of familism for respondents in the five geographic areas of West Virginia (p < 0.63).

The data in Tables 2 and 3 are for the entire sample (males and females). Separate analysis (data not shown) of the degrees of familism for women who do not work outside the home (N=207; x=30.72) and women who work outside the home (N=238; x=29.38) indicates statistical significance (p < 0.05). Women employed outside the family household are less familistic than those who are not.

Table 2. Standardized regression coefficients and correlations of regression of familism on sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Beta	Simple r		
Sex	-0.17	-0.17		
Race	0.09	0.08		
Age	0.10	0.14		
Husband's Education	-0.09	-0.15		
Wife's Education	-0.07	-0.19		
Socioeconomic Status	0.01*	-0.09		
Religious Preference	-0.02*	-0.02		
Church Attendance	0.06	0.05		
Georgraphic Area	0.01*	0.01		
Family Type	-0.02*	0.01		
Wife's Employment Status	-0.10	-0.16		

Discussion

The data support the hypothesis that the dominant family type for families in the sample would be nuclear. The persons interviewed tended to grow up in nuclear families of orientation, and there is no evidence that the dominant family type for previous generations was extended. Very few of the respondents, their spouses, or their children have ever resided in anything other than a nuclear family.

The hypothesis that the interviewees would display the degree of familism expected by the authors was not supported by the data. Variations in degree of familism are primarily a result of the effects of sex, race, age, education, the wife's employment status, and frequency of church attendance. There are several plausible explanations for these findings.

Women in the study revealed a lower degree of familism than men. This may, to a minor extent, be explained by the harsh and difficult life of the Appalachian woman (Vincent, 1898; Kephart, 1913; Reeder and Reeder, 1978; Kahn, 1973; Weller, 1966; Shackelford and Weinberg, 1977; Coles, 1972:54). It is possible that the hard life, as a result of hard work, bearing and rearing children, and taking care of members of the kinship group, has led to disillusionment with the family.

An even more probable explanation is that the women in the sample have become caught up in the social change taking place outside the boundaries of West Virginia. Smathers (1970;77) has noted that the influx of outsiders and the influence of mass communication have made the Appalachian woman more aware of the outside world. Perhaps the women in the sample, as a result of improved transportation (and roads), out-migration and in-migration, the influence of the mass media, industrialization, increased educational opportunities, and employment

^{*}Not significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3. Correlations for sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

	Familism	Sex	Sex Race	Age	Husband's	Wife's	Socio- Economic	Religious	Church	Geographic	Family	Wife's Employment
,	I WIIIIIIII	DUA	1000	1180	Education	Education	Status	Preference	Attendance	Area	Туре	Status
Familism	1.00	-0.17*	0.08*	0.14*	-0.15*	-0.19*	-0.09	-0.02	0.05	0.01	0.01	-0.16*
Sex		1.00	-0.10*	0.08*	-0.12*	0.04	-0.05*	-0.09*	0.06	0.05	-0.01	0.18*
Race			1.00	-0.10*	0.04	-0.03	0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.13*	-0.04	0.07*
Age				1.00	-0.31*	-0.30*	-0.03	-0.10*	0.05	0.09*	0.11	-0.03
Husband's Education					1.00	0.60*	0.64*	0.07*	0.07*	-0.11*	-0.09*	0.11*
Wife's Education						1.00	0.43*	0.02	0.06	-0.07*	-0.084	0.27*
Socio-Econo Status	omic						1.00	-0.02	0.11*	-0.09*	-0.04	0.20*
Religious Preference								1.00	-0.11*	-0.01	0.05	-0.09*
Church Attendance									1.00	-0.02	0.01	-0.03
Geographic Area										1.00	0.04	0.02
Family Typ	e										1.00	-0.05
Wife's Emp ment Statu	oloy- s											1.00

^{*}Significant at .05 level or less

outside the home, have joined women in other segments of American society in looking for greater freedom and equality outside the family.

The emphasis on a formal education in America increased with the rise of industrialization (Robertson, 1983:377). The result has been important attitudinal changes. People have become more tolerant of nonconformity, where traditional societal ideas are concerned, and less rigid, especially where social change is concerned (Stouffer, 1963). Schools tend to allow students to explore their individual interests (Scarpitti, 1974).

The literature indicates that as urbanization and education increase, familism decreases (Kephart, 1966; Freeman and Jones, 1970; Melville, 1983; Turner, 1985). This is supported by the data in this research.

As women become better educated, they are more reluctant to be homemakers without additional outside employment. The proportion of married women in the United States who were employed more than doubled between 1947 and 1984, rising from 21.4 percent to 52.8 percent (Tischler et al., 1986:367), and employment of the wife/mother can have a negative affect on family attitudes and relationships (Robertson, 1983; Persell, 1987; Tischler et al., 1986). The non-working women in this study are more familistic than those who are employed. In comparison with the women who did not work outside the home, working women, during the interview, noted that they spend less time with their family and are less concerned with family issues and problems.

The fact that familism for the respondents is positively correlated with age supports recent literature (e.g., Harbert and Ginsberg, 1979:155-156; Kart, 1981: 157; Perlmutter and Hall, 1985:335) and indicates that the interviewees are not unlike people in other segments of American society. Cottrell (1974;44) states that "Aging is conducive to growing recognition of family ties and increased willingness to share with one another, financially and otherwise."

Such phrases as "the family that prays together, stays together," emphasize the importance of the relationship between church attendance and family cohesiveness. The positive relationship between church attendance and familism revealed in this research is well documented in the literature (e.g., Landis, 1960; Kelley, 1969; Stinnett, 1985).

There are few blacks in Appalachia (Shackelford and Weinberg, 1978) and West Virginia (the 1980 census indicates that only 3.3 percent of the West Virginia population is black). They suffer from discrimination, work at menial tasks to make a living, and live in black sections of communities interacting almost totally with family and friends (cf. Shackelford and Weinberg, 1978; Allen, 1974). The family is especially important in their lives because of these factors. Therefore, it is not surprising that the small sample (2.2%) of blacks in the study had a stronger degree of familism than whites.

This research shows that (1) the dominant family type of the respondents is the nuclear family, (2) the interviewees are moderately familistic, and (3) variations in familism are accounted for primarily by sex, race, age, education, the wife's employment status, and frequency of church attendance. But it also delineates other important information. First, social change has definitely penetrated the homes of the West Virginians who were interviewed. Second, while the sampling technique does not permit generalizing beyond the interviewees, the data, when compared with the literature, reveal that the West Virginians in this

study are not much different (if at all) from people in other parts of the United States with regard to family type and familistic tendencies.

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