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ASPECTS OF AUSTRALIAN
FAMILY STRUCTURE:
A FIELD STUDY OF A SAMPLE
OF URBAN FAMILIES.

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the
Australian National University.

Harold J. Fallding,
May, 1956.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The work reported in this thesis was carried out by myself entirely. Acknowledgements, however, are due to a number of people, for their assistance in different ways. The thesis was written under the supervision of the late Professor S. F. Madel, and was close to completion at the time of his death in February, 1956. The following people read and criticised parts of the draft thesis: Mr. B. Cheek, Mr. J. MacDonald, Dr. J. Martin, Dr. J. Perkins, and my wife. My wife also did the lettering in Appendix D. Mrs. A. Guenot typed the body of the thesis, and Miss J. Woodger Appendices A and B. My wife and Miss H. Turner assisted me to check the final typing. I have also to acknowledge, of course, the co-operation of all of the families who took part in the study.

Harold J. Fallding.

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P R E C I S.

The aim of the study is to give a specifically sociological account of a sample of 38 Sydney families, the sample being made up of 18 tradesmen's families and 20 professional workers'; thereby contributing sociological data to the growing fund of knowledge on Australian families.

I say the data are distinctively sociological, because I understand sociology to have its own subject matter which sets it apart from neighbouring disciplines, such as psychology, demography and political science. I accept as its field that which Durkheim defined for it, viz. behaviour governed by rule or principled behaviour. The roles that articulate into social structures and the values that guide individuals toward their chosen satisfactions are the two main orders of data in this field, and the description of families is made mainly in terms of them. To this are added certain assumptions about motivation, and the members of the families are taken to be motivated in their strivings by needs for security, freedom and a sense of identity.

The study is not a survey, by which I mean that I was not aiming to make accurate estimates from a sample of the incidence of any traits in the wider population. On

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the other hand, it is not narrowly focussed on a particular problem or hypothesis, but it aims to identify the important sociological factors about the families and, if possible, to develop some hypotheses about the connections between them. However, as it is inevitable that some wider application of the findings should be possible, and in order to check on the level of confidence with which any hypothesis can be entertained, care was taken in selecting the families to avoid bias and some simple tests of statistical significance are made. Such tests have to be abandoned, though, in the more complex part of the analysis, which deals with clusterings of many factors in small numbers of cases.

I collected the material by visiting the families at home, each one being visited for at least four full evenings, and I had dinner with a number of them. During these visits I had group interviews with the assembled family as well as individual interviews with all of the members. Comparable data were sought for all families by following a schedule, although much of it was not sought by questioning but non-directively, by allowing informal discussion to wander where it would. I was able to supplement information collected in this way by a certain amount of direct observation of the ways members reacted to one another.

I aimed to obtain a fairly comprehensive picture of the activities of all members, both within the home and

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outside of it, a thing which could only be done at the cost of some detail, of course. The analysis of the material in the thesis falls into two main parts as a result. The external relations of the families are dealt with first of all. This section covers such matters as the class position of the families, their history of mobility and the probable mobility of the children, their way of regarding their position in the class structure, the attitude of responsibility they adopt toward the general society, and the values they elect to follow within it; and it notices the consensus or divergence of the individual family members in respect to these things. This part also deals with the participation of the family's members in the larger society, noticing particularly to what extent their external involvements are primary or secondary in nature. The next part of the thesis covers the internal relations of the family. It gives an account of the family roles as they are differentiated by age and sex, of the cohesiveness of the families, and of the ways in which members of different families sought to satisfy their needs for security, freedom and a sense of identity.

An attempt is made to employ a modest degree of rigour in the method of analysis. The method had to be one appropriate to the "shot-gun" approach of having no initial hypothesis to test. The data are therefore reported

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comparatively by typing the families in various dimensions: class mobility types, whether the type of general orientation was out-going or withdrawing, whether the form of control was patriarchal or by partnership - these are a few examples. Then from clusters of types in these separate dimensions three family master-types are identified, although not every factor identified earlier is absorbed into them. The chapter devoted to these master-types brings the thesis to its climax, and gathers up strands from the earlier chapters by itemizing whichever factors identified earlier are distinguishing of each. The three types represent different states of family cohesion. The case described as the adaptation type of family is one in which the parents seek for markedly different kinds of satisfaction, and the family is characterized by the measures which they take to adapt to one another in the face of their admitted difference. The case described as the identification type of family is one where the parents seek the same kind of satisfaction, largely centred in the family itself. The case described as the false-identification type is one where the parents are divided or confused in their aims and the family is characterized by the steps taken to suppress the admission of differences, for the sake of a spurious ease of operation in the family's corporate life. From the empirical findings certain other factors seem to adhere to each of the types. But as the cases are too few

to be tested for statistical significance, their coherence is assumed largely on the basis of an insightful sense of fitness. They are also elaborated beyond the point of empirical typology to that of ideal typology for the sake of visibility. The master-types are therefore to be regarded as being entirely hypothetical.

Finally, the findings are related to the literature on the modern family, and particularly to the notion that the family is shifting from an institutional to a companionship basis. Then the thesis closes with an appraisal of the study itself.