



## Understanding family meanings: A reflective text

By Jane Ribbens McCarthy, Megan Doolittle, Shelley Day Sclater

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Family Studies is a key area of policy, professional and personal debate. Perhaps precisely because of this, teaching texts have struggled with how to approach this area, which is both 'familiar' and also contentious and value laden. This innovative and reflective book deals with such dilemmas head-on, through its focus on family meanings in diverse contexts in order to enhance our understanding of everyday social lives and professional practices. Drawing on extracts and research by leading authors in the field of family studies, *Understanding Family Meanings* provides the reader with an overview of the basic concepts and theories related to families using readings with questions and analysis to encourage reflection and learning. Published in association with The Open University, the book centralises the question what is 'family' and focuses on family meanings as the key underpinnings for academic study and professional training. It explores the shifting and subtle ways in which individuals, researchers, policy-makers and professionals make sense of the idea of 'family' and in doing so considers issues of power, inequality and values which are integral to any understanding of family meanings. Audio discussions with leading authorities in the field are also available online to enhance the content and key concepts of the book. It therefore provides an excellent foundation for any module in family studies, as well as all professional training modules that include attention to families and close relationships, and for further learning in the area of families and relationships.

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#### Review

"A compelling and accessible book, Understanding family meanings combines conceptual sophistication with intriguing examples and helpful exercises. Highly recommended, it will be interest to undergraduate sociology and family studies students in general." Jaber F. Gubrium, University of Missouri "Understanding family meanings inspires the reader to reflect on the fluid and dynamic nature of contemporary families. It is an important new contribution to the literature as it highlights the multiplicity of meanings associated with families depending on context." Bahira Sherif Trask, University of Delaware

#### About the Author

**Jane Ribbens McCarthy** is a reader in family studies at the Open University and codirector of their Families and Relationships program. **Megan Doolittle** is a senior lecturer in social policy at the Open University. **Shelley Day Sclater** is a freelance writer.

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