



C H A P T E R

12

FAMILIES

Introduction

Functionalism and the Nuclear Ideal

Functional Theory

Foraging Societies

The American Middle Class in the 1950s

Conflict and Feminist Theories

Power and Families

Love and Mate Selection

Marital Satisfaction

Divorce

Reproductive Choice

Reproductive Technologies

Housework and Child Care

Equality and Wife Abuse

Family Diversity

Sexual Orientation

Race and Adaptations to Poverty

Family Policy



INTRODUCTION

One Saturday morning, the married couple who live next door to Robert Brym and his family asked Robert for advice on new speakers they wanted to buy for their sound system. So Robert volunteered to go shopping with them at a nearby mall. They told him they also wanted to buy two outdoor garbage cans at a hardware store. Robert told them he didn't mind waiting.

"After they made the purchases, we returned to their minivan in the mall's parking lot," says Robert. "The wife opened the trunk, cleared some space, and said to her husband, 'Let's put the garbage cans back here.'

"Meanwhile, the husband had opened the side door. He had already put the speakers on the back seat and was struggling to do the same with the second garbage can. 'It's okay,' he said, 'I've already got one of them part way in here.'

"'Oh,' laughed the wife, 'I can judge space better than you and you'll never get that in there. Bring it back here.'

"'You know,' answered the husband, 'we don't always have to do things your way. I'm a perfectly intelligent person. I think there's room up here and that's where I'm going to put this thing. You can put yours back there or stick it anywhere else you like.'

"'Why are you yelling at me?' snapped the wife.

"'I'm not yelling,' shouted the husband. 'I'm just saying that I know as well as you what fits where. There's more than one way—your way—to do things.'

"So, the wife put one garbage can in the trunk, the husband put one in the back seat (it was, by the way, a very tight squeeze) and we piled into the car for the drive home. The husband and the wife did not say a word to each other. When we got back to our neighborhood, I said I was feeling tired and asked whether I could perhaps hook up their speakers on Sunday. Actually, I wasn't tired. I just had no desire to referee round two. I went home, full of wonder at the occasional inability of presumably mature adults to talk rationally about something as simple as how to pack garbage cans into a minivan.

"However, trivializing the couple's argument in this way prevented me from thinking about it sociologically. If I had been thinking like a sociologist, I would have at least recognized that, for better or for worse, our most intense emotional experiences are bound up with our families. We love, hate, protect, hurt, express generosity toward, and envy nobody as much as our parents, siblings, children, and mates. Little wonder, then, that most people are passionately concerned with the rights and wrongs, the dos and don'ts, of family life. Little wonder that family issues lie close to the center of political debate in this country. Little wonder that words, gestures, and actions that seem trivial to an outsider can hold deep meaning and significance for family members."

Because families are emotional minefields, few subjects of sociological inquiry generate as much controversy. Much of the debate centers on a single question: Is the family in decline and, if so, what should be done about it? The question is hardly new. A contributor to the *Boston Quarterly Review* of October 1859 wrote: "The family, in its old sense, is disappearing from our land, and not only our free institutions are threatened but the very existence of our society is endangered" (quoted in Lantz, Schultz, and O'Hara, 1977: 413). The same sentiment was expressed in September 1998. While criticizing President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky, Democratic Senator (later vice-presidential hopeful) Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut stressed that "the decline of the family is one of the most pressing problems we are facing" (quoted in McKenna, 1998). This alarm, or one much like it, is sounded whenever the family undergoes rapid change, and particularly when the divorce rate increases (see Box 12.1).

Today, when some people speak about "the decline of the family," they are referring to the **nuclear family**. The nuclear family is composed of a cohabiting man and woman who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and have at least one child. Others are referring more narrowly to what might be called the **traditional nuclear family**. The traditional nuclear family is a nuclear family in which the wife works in the home without



BOX 12.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES

AMERICAN BEAUTY (1999)

His wife wants to kill him. So does his daughter. His daughter's boyfriend, who has been supplying him with marijuana, is willing to kill him on his girlfriend's behalf. The boyfriend's father, a retired Marine, is convinced his son is having a homosexual affair with him. So he wants to kill him too.

What does the character played by Kevin Spacey do to make so many people so angry in *American Beauty*? He gives up the pretenses of a middle-class, suburban husband. He returns in spirit (and in body as well by exercising furiously) to his teenage self. He quits his job as a magazine writer and gets a new one as a cook at a fast-food franchise. He trades in his "boring" late-model sedan for an old sports car. He is no longer willing to continue his loveless marriage or to suffer his daughter's taunts. He lusts after his teenage daughter's best friend. However, giving up such important family roles—dependable breadwinner, solid citizen, loving husband, sympathetic father—has big consequences. It enrages people enough to want to kill him.

American Beauty offers a depressing portrait of suburban American family life. The wife is a frustrated real estate broker.



Kevin Spacey and Mena Suvari in *American Beauty*.

When she has an affair with a successful real estate broker, she appears more interested in advancing her career than in seeking pleasure or love. The pleasure and love she does experience seem to derive mainly from her lover's high status. The retired Marine is an angry, violent, and obsessive-compulsive man. He has drained the life out of his wife. He is also homophobic, although it turns out that he harbors homosexual longings, as homophobes sometimes do (see Chapter 9, "Sexuality and Gender"). In fact, about the only people who seem genuinely happy are the homosexual couple next door, who deviate from the suburban norm of heterosexual marriage.

Clearly, suburban America is far from being a utopia. Well-manicured lawns and beautiful gardens sometimes mask deep frustrations and pathologies. What makes the Kevin Spacey character so subversive, however, is that he spurns the comforts of middle-class, suburban life and endangers the well-established norms of the nuclear family. But how should we understand the movie's challenge to conventional suburban family life? Does the movie merely illustrate a psychological problem—a mid-life crisis? Or does it illustrate a deeper, sociological problem—the collapse of conventional gender and family roles in a rapidly changing society?

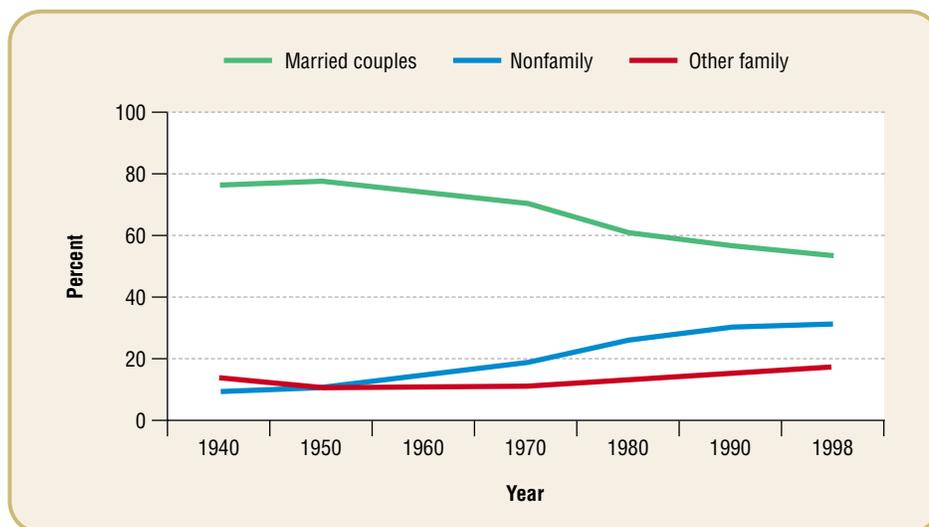
pay while the husband works outside the home for money. This makes him the "primary provider and ultimate authority" (Popenoe, 1988: 1).

In the 1940s and 1950s, many sociologists and much of the American public considered the traditional nuclear family the most widespread and ideal family form. However, for reasons we will examine below, the percentage of married-couple families fell from about 78% to 53% of all households between 1950 and 1997 (see Figure 12.1). Between 1950 and 1999, the percentage of women over the age of 16 in the paid labor force increased from around 34% to 60%. As a result, only a minority of American adults live in traditional nuclear families today. Many new family forms have become popular in recent decades (see Table 12.1).

Some sociologists, many of them functionalists, view the decreasing prevalence of the married-couple family and the rise of the "working mother" as an unmitigated disaster (e.g., Popenoe, 1998; 1996). In their view, rising rates of crime, illegal drug use, poverty, and welfare dependency (among other social ills) can be traced to the fact that so many American children are not living in two-parent households with stay-at-home mothers.

◆ **FIGURE 12.1** ◆
Household Types, United States, 1940–1998 (in percent)

Note: “Nonfamily” households contain people living alone or with nonrelatives. “Other family” households are mainly female-headed, single-parent families.
 SOURCE: United States Bureau of the Census (1999a).



◆ **TABLE 12.1** ◆
The Traditional Nuclear Family and New Alternatives

SOURCE: Adapted from Macklin (1980: 906).

Traditional Nuclear Family	New Alternatives
Legally married	Never-married singlehood, nonmarital cohabitation
With children	Voluntary childlessness
Two-parent	Single-parent (never-married or previously married)
Permanent	Divorce, remarriage (including binuclear family involving joint custody, stepfamily)
Male primary provider, ultimate authority	Egalitarian marriage (including dual-career and commuter marriage)
Sexually exclusive	Extramarital relationships (including sexually open marriage, swinging, and intimate friendships)
Heterosexual	Same-sex intimate relationships or households
Two-adult household	Multi-adult households (including multiple spouses, communal living, affiliated families, and multigenerational families)

They call for various legal and cultural reforms to shore up the traditional nuclear family. For instance, they want to make it harder to get a divorce and they want people to place less emphasis on individual happiness at the expense of family responsibility.

Other sociologists, influenced by conflict and feminist theories, disagree with the functionalist assessment (e.g., Baca Zinn and Eitzen, 1993; Collins and Coltrane, 1991; Coontz, 1992; Skolnick, 1991). In the first place, they argue that it is inaccurate to talk about *the* family, as if this important social institution assumed or should assume only a single form. They emphasize that families have been structured in many ways and that the diversity of family forms is increasing as people accommodate to the demands of new social pressures. Second, they argue that changing family forms do not necessarily represent deterioration in the quality of people's lives. In fact, such changes often represent *improvement* in the way people live. They believe the decreasing prevalence of the traditional nuclear family and the proliferation of diverse family forms has benefited many men, women, and children and has not harmed other children as much as the functionalists think. They also believe that various economic and political reforms, such as the creation of an affordable nationwide day-care system, could eliminate most of the negative effects of single-parent households.

This chapter touches on divorce, reproductive choice, single-parent families, day care, and other topics in the sociology of families. However, we have structured this chapter

around the debate about the so-called decline of the American family. We first outline the functional theory of the family because the issues raised by functionalism are still a focus of sociological controversy (Mann, Grimes, Kemp, and Jenkins, 1997). Borrowing from the work of conflict theorists and feminists, we next present a critique of functionalism. In particular, we show that the nuclear family became the dominant and ideal family form only under specific social and historical conditions. Once these conditions changed, the nuclear family became less prevalent and a variety of new family forms proliferated. You will learn how these new family forms are structured and how their frequency varies by class, race, and sexual orientation. You will also learn that, while postindustrial families solve some problems, they are hardly an unqualified blessing. The chapter's concluding section therefore considers the kinds of policies that might help alleviate some of the most serious concerns faced by families today. Let us, then, first review the functionalist theory of the family.

FUNCTIONALISM AND THE NUCLEAR IDEAL

Functional Theory

For any society to survive, its members must cooperate economically. They must have babies. And they must raise offspring in an emotionally supportive environment so the offspring can learn the ways of the group and eventually operate as productive adults. Since the 1940s, functionalists have argued that the nuclear family is ideally suited to meet these challenges. In their view, the nuclear family performs five main functions. It provides a basis for regulated sexual activity, economic cooperation, reproduction, socialization, and emotional support (Murdock, 1949: 1–22; Parsons, 1955).

Functionalists cite the pervasiveness of the nuclear family as evidence of its ability to perform the functions listed above. To be sure, other family forms exist. **Polygamy** expands the nuclear unit “horizontally” by adding one or more spouses (almost always wives) to the household. Polygamy is still legally permitted in many less industrialized countries of Africa and Asia. However, the overwhelming majority of families are monogamous because they cannot afford to support several wives and many children. The **extended family** expands the nuclear family “vertically” by adding another generation—one or more of the spouse’s parents—to the household. Extended families used to be common throughout the world. They still are in some places. However, according to the functionalists, the basic building block of the extended family (and of the polygamous family) is the nuclear unit.

George Murdock was a functionalist who conducted a famous study of 250 mainly preliterate societies in the 1940s. Murdock wrote: “Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded, [the nuclear family] exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society” (Murdock, 1949: 2). Moreover, the nuclear family, Murdock continued, is everywhere based on **marriage**. He defined marriage as a socially approved, presumably long-term, sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. It involves rights and obligations between spouses and between spouses and their children.

Let us consider the five main functions of marriage and the nuclear family in more detail:

1. *Sexual regulation.* Imagine a world without an institution that defines the boundaries within which legitimate sexual activity is permitted. Such a world would be disrupted by many people having sex wherever, whenever, and with whomever they pleased. An orderly social life would be difficult. Because marriage provides a legitimate forum for expressing the intense human need for sexual activity, says Murdock, it makes social order possible.

Sex is not, however, the primary motive for marrying, he continues. After all, sex is readily available outside marriage. Only 54 of Murdock’s 250 societies

forbade or disapproved of premarital sex between nonrelatives. In most of the 250 societies, a married man could legitimately have an extramarital affair with one or more female relatives (Murdock, 1949: 5–6). It is hardly news that premarital and extramarital sex is common in contemporary America and other postindustrial societies. As a president of the University of California once said in a *Time* magazine interview: “I find that the three major administrative problems on a campus are sex for the students, athletics for the alumni, and parking for the faculty” (quoted in Ember and Ember, 1973: 317).

2. *Economic cooperation.* Why then, apart from sex, do people marry? Murdock’s answer is this: “By virtue of their primary sex difference, a man and a woman make an exceptionally efficient cooperating unit” (Murdock, 1949: 7). On average, women are physically weaker than men. Historically, pregnancy and nursing have restricted women in their activities. Therefore, writes Murdock, they can best perform lighter tasks close to home. These tasks include gathering and planting food, carrying water, cooking, making and repairing clothing, making pottery, and caring for children. Most men possess superior strength. They can therefore specialize in lumbering, mining, quarrying, land clearing, and house building. They can also range farther afield to hunt, fish, herd, and trade (Murdock, 1937). According to Murdock, this division of labor enables more goods and services to be produced than would otherwise be possible. People marry partly due to this economic fact. In Murdock’s words: “Marriage exists only when the economic and the sexual are united into one relationship, and this combination occurs only in marriage” (Murdock, 1949: 8).
3. *Reproduction.* Before the invention of modern contraception, sex often resulted in the birth of a baby. According to Murdock, children are an investment in the future. Already by the age of 6 or 7, children in most societies do some chores. Their economic value to the family increases as they mature. When children become adults, they often help support their elderly parents. Thus, in most societies, there is a big economic incentive to having children.
4. *Socialization.* The investment in children can be realized only if adults rear the young to maturity. This involves not only caring for them physically but, as you saw in Chapter 4 (“Socialization”), teaching them language, values, beliefs, skills, religion, and much else. Talcott Parsons (1955: 16) regarded socialization as the “basic and irreducible” function of the family.
5. *Emotional support.* Parsons also noted that the nuclear family universally gives its members love, affection, and companionship. He stressed that, in the nuclear family, it is mainly the mother who is responsible for ensuring the family’s emotional well-being. She develops what Parsons calls the primary “expressive” role because she is the one who bears children and nurses them. It falls on the husband to take on the more “instrumental” role of earning a living outside the family (Parsons, 1955: 23). The fact that he is the “primary provider” makes him the ultimate authority.

Foraging Societies

Does functionalism provide an accurate picture of family relations at any point in human history? To assess the adequacy of the theory, let us briefly consider family patterns in the two settings that were apparently foremost in the minds of the functionalists. We first discuss families in preliterate, foraging societies. In such societies, people subsist by hunting animals and gathering wild edible plants. Most of the cases in Murdock’s sample are foraging societies. We then discuss families in urban and suburban middle-class America in the 1950s. The functionalists whose work we are reviewing lived in such families themselves.

Foraging societies are nomadic groups of 100 or fewer people. As we would expect from Murdock’s and Parsons’s analysis, a gender division of labor exists among foragers. Most men hunt and most women gather. Women also do most of the child care. However, research on foragers conducted since the 1950s, on which we base our analysis, shows that



There is rough gender equality among the !Kung-San, a foraging society in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana. That is partly because women play such a key economic role in providing food.

men often tend babies and children in such societies (Leacock, 1981; Lee, 1979; Turnbull, 1961). They often gather food after an unsuccessful hunt. In some foraging societies, women hunt. In short, the gender division of labor is less strict than Murdock and Parsons thought. What is more, the gender division of labor is not associated with large differences in power and authority. Overall, men have few if any privileges that women don't also enjoy. Relative gender equality is based on the fact that women produce up to 80% of the food.

Foragers travel in small camps or bands. The band decides by consensus when to send out groups of hunters. When they return from the hunt, they distribute game to all band members based on need. Each hunter does not decide to go hunting based on his or her own nuclear family's needs. Each hunter does not distribute game just to his or her own nuclear family. Contrary to what Murdock wrote, it is the band, not the nuclear family, that is the most efficient social organization for providing everyone with his or her most valuable source of protein.

In foraging societies, children are considered an investment in the future. However, it is not true that people always want more children for purposes of economic security. In fact, too many children are considered a liability. Subsistence is uncertain in foraging societies, and when band members deplete an area of game and edible plants, they move elsewhere. As a result, band members try to keep the ratio of children to productive adults low. In a few cases, such as the pre-20th century Inuit ("Eskimos"), newborns were occasionally allowed to die if the tribe felt its viability was threatened by having too many mouths to feed.

Life in foraging societies is highly cooperative. For example, women and men care for—and women even breast-feed—each other's children. Despite Parsons's claim that socialization is the "basic and irreducible" function of the nuclear family, it is the band, not the nuclear family, that assumes responsibility for child socialization in foraging societies. Socialization is more a public than a private matter. As a 17th-century Innu man from northern Quebec said to a French Jesuit priest who was trying to convince him to adopt European ways of raising children: "Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we all love all the children of our tribe" (quoted in Leacock, 1981: 50).

In sum, recent research on foraging societies calls into question many of the functionalists' generalizations. In foraging societies, relations between the sexes are quite egalitarian. Children are not viewed just as an investment in the future. Each nuclear unit does not execute the important economic and socialization functions in private. On the

contrary, cooperative band members execute most economic and socialization functions in public.

Let us now assess the functionalist theory of the family in the light of evidence concerning American middle-class families in the years just after World War II.

The American Middle Class in the 1950s

Functionalists recognized that the productive function of the family was less important after World War II than it had been in earlier times. In their view, the socialization and emotional functions of the family were now most important (Parsons, 1955). Thus, on the 19th-century family-owned farm or ranch, the wife had played an indispensable productive role while the husband was out in the field or on the range. She took responsibility for the garden, the dairy, the poultry, and the management of the household. The children also did crucial chores with considerable economic value. But in the typical urban or suburban nuclear family of the late 1940s and 1950s, noted the functionalists, only one person played the role of breadwinner. That was usually the husband. Children enjoyed more time to engage in the play and leisure-time activities that were now considered necessary for healthy development. For their part, most women got married, had babies, and stayed home to raise them. Strong normative pressures helped to keep women at home. Thus, in the 1950s, sociologist David Riesman called a woman's failure to obey the strict gender division of labor a "quasi-perversion." *Esquire* magazine called women's employment in the paid labor force a "menace." *Life* magazine called it a "disease" (quoted in Coontz, 1992: 32).



Web Interactive Exercises
Is the Woman's Place in the Home?

As a description of family patterns in the 15 years after World War II, functionalism has its merits. During the Great Depression (1929–39) and the war (1939–45), millions of Americans were forced to postpone marriage due to widespread poverty, government-imposed austerity, and physical separation. After this long and dreadful ordeal, many Americans just wanted to settle down, have children, and enjoy the peace, pleasure, and security that family life seemed to offer. Conditions could not have been better for doing just that. The immediate postwar era was one of unparalleled optimism and prosperity. Real per capita income rose 35% between 1945 and 1960. The percentage of Americans who owned their own homes jumped from 43% in 1940 to 62% in 1960. Government assistance in the form of the GI Bill and other laws helped to make the late 1940s and 1950s the heyday of the traditional nuclear family. This assistance took the form of guaranteed, tax-deductible mortgages, subsidized college education and health care for veterans, big income tax deductions for dependents, and massive road-building projects that opened the suburbs for commuters. People got married younger. They had more babies. They got divorced less. Increasingly, they lived in married-couple families (see Table 12.2). Middle-class women engaged in what has been called an "orgy of domesticity" in the postwar years, devoting increasing attention to child rearing and housework. They also became increasingly concerned with the emotional quality of family life as love and companionship became firmly established as the main motivation for marriage (Coontz, 1992: 23–41; Skolnick, 1991: 49–74).

However, as sociologist Andrew J. Cherlin meticulously shows, the immediate postwar period was in many respects a historical aberration (Cherlin, 1992 [1981]: 6–30). Trends in divorce, marriage, and childbearing show a gradual *weakening* of the nuclear family from the second half of the 19th century until the mid-1940s, and continued weakening after the 1950s. Specifically, throughout the 19th century, the **divorce rate** rose. The divorce rate is the number of divorces that occur in a year for every 1,000 people in the population. Meanwhile, the **marriage rate** fell. The marriage rate is the number of marriages that occur in a year for every 1,000 people in the population. The **total fertility rate** also fell. The total fertility rate is the average number of children born to women of the same age over their lifetime. In contrast, the divorce rate fell only between 1946 and 1958. The marriage rate took a big jump only in the 2 years following World War II. And the fertility rate rose only for women who reached childbearing age between 1930 and the mid-1950s. By the late 1950s or early 1960s, the earlier trends reasserted themselves. Only the

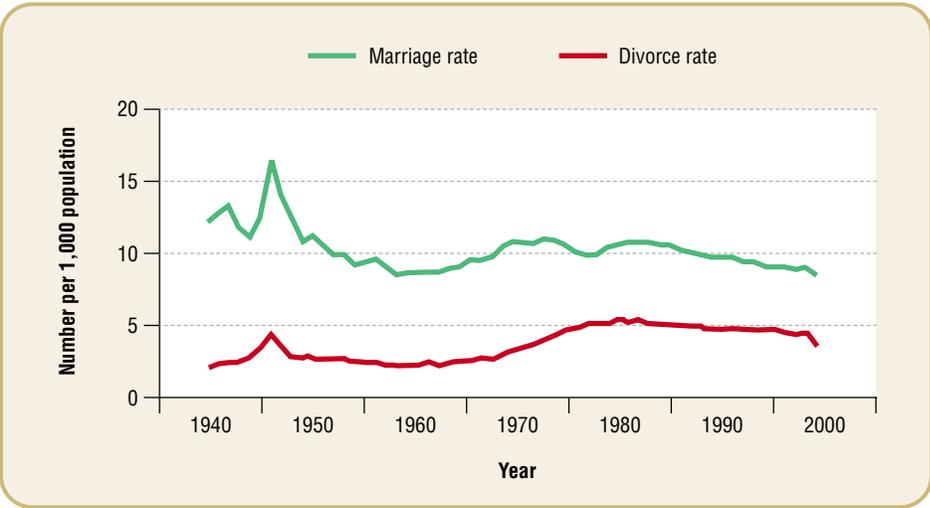
	1940s	1950s
Percent of women age 20–24 never-married	48.0	20.0
Divorce rate (per 1,000 population)	4.3	2.1
Total fertility rate for white women age 20	2.6	3.1
Total fertility rate for nonwhite women age 20	3.2	3.9
Married couples as percent of all families	84.4	87.8

◆ **TABLE 12.2** ◆

The Family in Numbers: The 1940s and 1950s Compared

Note: Most figures were read from graphs and are therefore approximate.

SOURCES: Adapted from Cherlin (1992 [1981]: 9, 19, 21); United States Bureau of the Census (1999a).



◆ **FIGURE 12.2** ◆

Marriages and Divorces, United States, 1940–1998 (per 1,000 population)

SOURCES: *Monthly Vital Statistics Report* (1995a; 1995b; 1998); *National Vital Statistics Reports* (1999b).

peculiar historical circumstances of the postwar years, noted above, temporarily reversed them (see Figure 12.2).

The functionalists, we may conclude, generalized too hastily from the era they knew best—the period of their own adulthood. Contrary to what they thought, the big picture from the 19th century till the present is that of a gradually weakening nuclear family. Let us now consider the conditions that made other family forms more prevalent.

CONFLICT AND FEMINIST THEORIES

I hadn't really wanted to marry at all. I wanted to make something of myself, not just give it away. But I knew if I didn't marry I would be sorry. Only freaks didn't. I knew I had to do it quickly, too, while there was still a decent selection of men to choose from . . . I was twenty . . .

Though I wanted to be a good wife, from the beginning I found it impossible to subdue my desires. I was in fierce competition with my husband, though Frank, completely absorbed in his own studies, was probably unaware of it. He believed he had married an impulsive girl, even a supergirl, but not a separate, feeling woman . . . Though we had agreed to study like fury till our money ran out and then take turns getting jobs, at bottom we knew it would be he who would get the degrees and I who would get the jobs (Shulman, 1997 [1969]: 163, 173).

This quotation is from *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, an exposé of the plight of the “all-American girl” in the 1950s. It shows a side of family life entirely obscured by the functionalists. As the passage suggests, and as the novel establishes in biting and sometimes depressing detail, postwar families did not always operate like the smoothly functioning, happy, white, middle-class, mother-householder, father-breadwinner household

1950s TV classics such as *Father Knows Best* portrayed smoothly functioning, happy, white, middle-class, mother-householder, father-breadwinner families.



portrayed every week in 1950s TV classics such as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Ozzie and Harriet*.

Many men and women felt coerced into getting married, trapped in their families, unable to achieve the harmony, security, and emotional satisfaction they had been promised. As a result, the nuclear family was often a site of frustration and conflict. Surveys show that only about a third of working-class couples and two thirds of middle-class couples were happily married (Barnard, 1972). Wives were less satisfied with marriage than husbands. They reported higher rates of depression, distress, and feelings of inadequacy. Dissatisfaction seems to have been especially high among the millions of women who, during World War II, had operated cranes in steel mills, greased locomotives, riveted the hulls of ships, worked the assembly lines in munitions factories, planted and harvested crops, and felled giant redwoods. They were universally praised for their dedication and industry during the war. Many of them did not want to leave these well-paying jobs that gave them gratification and independence. Management fired most of them anyway and downgraded others to lower paying, “women’s” jobs to make room for returning soldiers. The tedium of domestic labor must have been especially difficult for many of these women to accept (Coontz, 1992: 23–41; Skolnick, 1991: 49–74).

Also, many families were simply too poor to participate in the functionalists’ celebration of the traditional nuclear unit. For example, to support their families, some 40% of African-American women with small children had to work outside their homes in the 1950s, usually as domestics in upper-middle-class and upper-class white households. A quarter of these black women headed their own households. Thus, to a degree not recognized by the functionalists, the existence of the traditional nuclear family among well-to-do whites depended in part on many black families *not* assuming the traditional nuclear form.

Unlike the functionalists, Marxists had long seen the traditional nuclear family as a site of gender conflict and a basis for the perpetuation of social inequality. In the 19th century, Marx’s close friend and co-author, Friedrich Engels, argued that the traditional nuclear family emerged along with inequalities of wealth. For once wealth was concentrated in the hands of a man, wrote Engels, he became concerned about how to transmit it to his children, particularly his sons. How could a man safely pass on an inheritance, asked

Engels? Only by controlling his wife sexually and economically. Economic control ensured that the man's property would not be squandered and would remain his and his alone. Sexual control, in the form of enforced female monogamy, ensured that his property would be transmitted only to his offspring. It follows from Engels's analysis that only the elimination of private property and the creation of economic equality—in a word, communism—can bring an end to the traditional nuclear family and the arrival of gender equality (Engels, 1970 [1884]: 138–9).

Engels was right to note the long history of male economic and sexual domination in the traditional nuclear family. After all, a hundred years ago in the United States, any money a wife might earn typically belonged to her husband. As recently as 40 years ago, an American wife could not rent a car, take a loan, or sign a contract without her husband's permission. It was only about 25 years ago that it became illegal for a husband to rape his wife.

However, Engels was wrong to think that communism would eliminate gender inequality in the family. Gender inequality is as common in societies that call themselves communist as in those that call themselves capitalist. For example, as one American researcher concluded, the Soviet Union left “intact the fundamental family structures, authority relations, and socialization patterns crucial to personality formation and sex-role differentiation. Only a genuine sexual revolution (or, as we prefer to put it, a “gender revolution”) could have shattered these patterns and made possible the real emancipation of women” (Lapidus, 1978: 7).

Because gender inequality exists in noncapitalist (including precapitalist) societies, most feminists believe something other than, or in addition to, capitalism accounts for gender inequality. In their view, *patriarchy*—male dominance and norms justifying that dominance—is more deeply rooted in the economic, military, and cultural history of humankind than the classical Marxist account allows (see Chapter 9, “Sexuality and Gender”). For them, only a “genuine gender revolution” can alter this state of affairs.

Just such a revolution in family structures, authority relations, and socialization patterns picked up steam in the United States and other Western countries about 40 years ago, although its roots extend back to the 18th century. As you will see, the revolution is evident in the rise of romantic love and happiness as bases for marriage, women's increasing control over reproduction due to their use of contraceptives, and women's increasing participation in the system of higher education and the paid labor force, among other factors. We next consider some consequences of the gender revolution for the selection of mates, marital satisfaction, divorce, reproductive choice, housework, and child care. We begin by considering the sociology of mate selection.



In the 1950s, married women often hid their frustrations with family life.

Mimi Matte *Family Outing*

POWER AND FAMILIES

Love and Mate Selection

Most Americans take for granted that marriage ought to be based on love (see Figure 12.3). Our assumption is evident, for example, in the way most popular songs in the United States celebrate love as the sole basis of long-term intimacy and marriage (“Billboard Hot 100,” 2000). In contrast, most of us view marriage devoid of love as tragic.

Yet in most societies throughout human history, love has had little to do with marriage. Some languages, such as the Chinese dialect spoken in Shanghai, even lack a word for love. Historically and across cultures, marriages were typically arranged by third parties, not by brides and grooms themselves. The selection of marriage partners was based mainly on calculations intended to maximize the prestige, economic benefits, and political advantages accruing to the families from which the bride and groom came. For a family of modest means, a small dowry might be the chief gain from allowing their son to marry a certain woman. For upper-class families, the benefits were typically bigger but no less strategic. In the early years of industrialization, for example, more than one old aristocratic family in economic decline scrambled to have its offspring marry into a family of the up-start bourgeoisie. Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard*, probably the greatest Italian novel of the 20th century, deals in an especially moving way with just such a strategic marriage (di Lampedusa, 1991 [1958]).

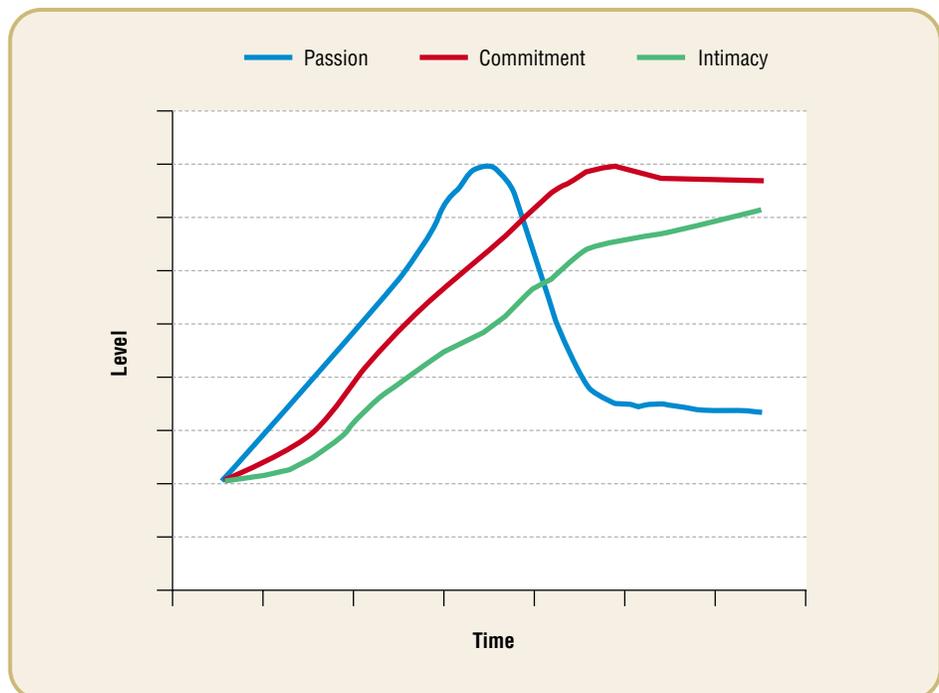
The idea that love should be important in the choice of a marriage partner first gained currency in 18th-century England with the rise of liberalism and individualism, philosophies that stressed freedom of the individual over community welfare (Stone, 1977). However, the intimate linkage between love and marriage that we know today emerged only in the early 20th century, when Hollywood and the advertising industry began to promote self-gratification on a grand scale. For these new spinners of fantasy and desire, an important aspect of self-gratification was heterosexual romance leading to marriage (Rapp and Ross, 1986).

◆ FIGURE 12.3 ◆

The Components of Love

According to psychologist Robert Sternberg, love can be built from three components: passion (erotic attraction), intimacy (confiding in others and shared feelings), and commitment (intention to remain in the relationship). In actual relationships, these components may be combined in various ways to produce different kinds of love. The fullest love requires all three components. Research shows that, in long-term relationships, passion peaks fairly quickly and then tapers off. Intimacy rises more gradually but remains at a higher plateau. Commitment develops most gradually but also plateaus at a high level.

SOURCE: Sternberg (1986).





Hollywood glamorized heterosexual, romantic love and solidified the intimate linkage between love and marriage that we know today.

Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh in *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Still, it would be a big mistake to think that love alone determines mate selection in our society—far from it. Three sets of social forces influence whom you are likely to fall in love with and marry (Kalmijn, 1998: 398–404):

1. *Marriage resources.* Potential spouses bring certain resources with them to the “marriage market.” They use these resources to attract mates and compete against rivals. These resources include financial assets, status, values, tastes, and knowledge. Most people want to maximize the financial assets and status they gain from marriage, and they want a mate who has similar values, tastes, and knowledge. As a result, whom you fall in love with and choose to marry is determined partly by the assets you bring to the marriage market.
2. *Third parties.* A marriage between people from two different groups may threaten the internal cohesion of one or both groups. Therefore, to varying degrees, families, neighborhoods, communities, and religious institutions raise young people to identify with the groups they are members of and think of themselves as different from members of other groups. They may also apply sanctions to young people who threaten to marry outside the group. As a result, whom you fall in love with and choose to marry is determined partly by the influence of these third parties.
3. *Demographic and compositional factors.* The probability of marrying inside one’s group increases with the group’s size and geographical concentration. Conversely, if you are a member of a small group or a group that is dispersed geographically, you stand a greater chance of having to choose an appropriate mate from outside your group. There may simply be too few “prospects” in your group from which to choose (Brym, 1984; Brym, Gillespie, and Gillis, 1985). In addition, the ratio of men to women in a group influences the degree to which members of each sex marry inside or outside the group. For instance, war and incarceration may eliminate many male group members as potential marriage partners. This may encourage female group members to marry outside the group or forego marriage altogether. Finally, because people usually meet potential spouses in “local marriage markets”—schools, colleges, places of work, neighborhoods, bars, and clubs—the degree to which these settings are socially segregated also influences mate selection. You are more likely to marry outside your group if local marriage markets are socially heterogeneous. As a result, whom you fall in love with and choose to marry is

determined partly by the size, geographical dispersion, and sex ratio of the groups you belong to and the social composition of the local marriage markets you frequent.

As a result of the operation of these three sets of social forces, the process of falling in love and choosing a mate is far from random. The percentage of people who marry inside their group is more than 90% for African Americans, 75% for Asian Americans, 65% for Hispanic Americans, and 25% for European Americans. About 80% of Protestants and Jews, and 60% of Catholics, marry within their group. There is also a fairly strong correlation (about $r = .55$) between the educational attainment of husbands and wives (Kalmijn, 1998: 406–8). We are freer than ever before to fall in love with and marry anyone we want. As in all things, however, social forces still constrain our choices to varying degrees.

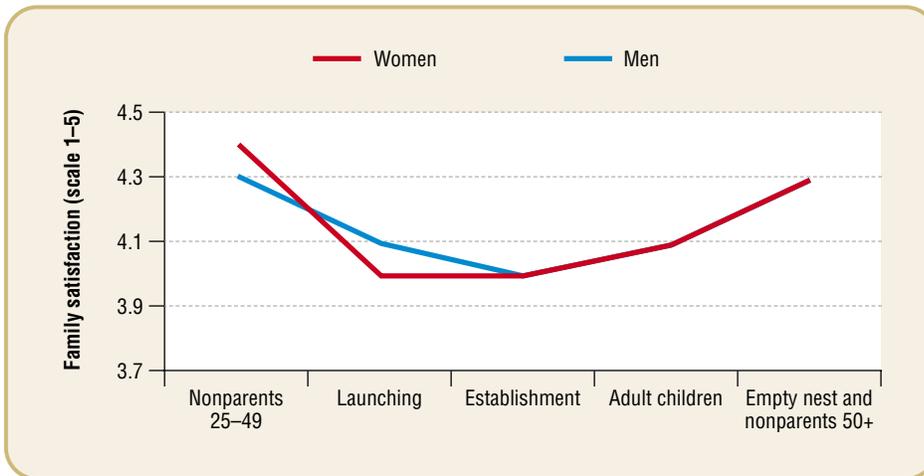
Marital Satisfaction

Just as mate selection came to depend more on romantic love over the years, so marital stability came to depend more on having a happy rather than a merely useful marriage. This change occurred because women in the United States and many other societies have become more autonomous, especially over the past 40 years or so. That is, one aspect of the gender revolution is that women are freer than ever to leave marriages in which they are unhappy.

One factor that contributed to women's autonomy was the introduction of the birth control pill in the 1960s. The birth control pill made it easier for women to delay childbirth and have fewer children. A second factor that contributed to their autonomy was the entry of millions of women into the system of higher education and the paid labor force (Cherlin, 1992 [1981]: 51–2, 56; Collins and Coltrane, 1991: xxv). For once women enjoyed a source of income independent of their husbands, they gained the means to decide the course of their own lives to a greater extent than ever before. A married woman with a job outside the home is less tied to her marriage by economic necessity than a woman who works only at home. If she is deeply dissatisfied with her marriage, she can more easily leave. Reflecting this new reality, laws were changed in the 1960s to make divorce easier and divide property between divorcing spouses more equitably. In 1979, the divorce rate reached a historic high and has declined only a little since then. Women initiate most divorces.

If marital stability now depends largely on marital satisfaction, what are the main factors underlying marital satisfaction? The sociological literature emphasizes five sets of forces (Collins and Coltrane, 1991: 394–406; 454–64):

1. *Economic forces.* Money issues are the most frequent subjects of family quarrels, and money issues loom larger when there isn't enough money to satisfy a family's needs and desires. Accordingly, marital satisfaction tends to fall and the divorce rate to rise as you move down the socioeconomic hierarchy. The lower the social class and the lower the educational level of the spouses, the more likely it is that financial pressures will make them unhappy and the marriage unstable. Marital dissatisfaction and divorce are also more common among groups with high poverty rates. Such groups include spouses who marry in their teens and African Americans. In contrast, the marital satisfaction of both husbands and wives generally *increases* when wives enter the paid labor force. This is mainly because of the beneficial financial effects. However, if *either* spouse spends so much time on the job that he or she neglects the family, marital satisfaction falls.
2. *Divorce laws.* Many surveys show that, on average, married people are happier than unmarried people. Moreover, when people are free to end unhappy marriages and remarry, the average level of happiness increases among married people. Thus, the level of marital happiness has increased in the United States over the past few decades, especially for wives, partly because it has become easier to get a divorce.



◆ **FIGURE 12.4** ◆
**Family Satisfaction and
 the Family Life Cycle,
 United States, 1998**

SOURCE: Keller (2000).

For the same reason, in countries where getting a divorce is more difficult (e.g., Italy and Spain), husbands and wives tend to be less happy than in countries where getting a divorce is easier (e.g., the United States and Canada) (Stack and Eshleman, 1998).

3. *The family life cycle.* About a quarter of divorces take place in the first 3 years of a first marriage, and half of all divorces take place by the end of the 7th year. However, for marriages that last longer, marital satisfaction reaches a low point after about 15 to 20 years. Marital satisfaction generally starts high, falls when children are born, reaches a low point when children are in their teenage years, and rises again when children reach adulthood (Rollins and Cannon, 1974). Figure 12.4 illustrates the effect of the family life cycle on marital satisfaction using recent survey data. Nonparents and parents whose children have left home (so-called “empty-nesters”) enjoy the highest level of marital satisfaction. Parents who are just starting families or who have adult children living at home enjoy intermediate levels of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is lowest during the “establishment” years, when children are attending school. Although most people get married at least partly to have children, it turns out that children, and especially teenagers, usually put big emotional and financial strains on families. This results in relatively low marital satisfaction.
4. *Housework and child care.* Marital happiness is higher among couples who share housework and child care. The farther couples are from an equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities, the more tension there is among all family members (Hochschild with Machung, 1989).
5. *Sex.* Having a good sex life is associated with marital satisfaction. Contrary to popular belief, surveys show that sex generally improves during a marriage. Sexual intercourse is also more enjoyable and frequent among happier couples. From these findings, some experts conclude that general marital happiness leads to sexual compatibility (Collins and Coltrane, 1991: 344). However, the reverse may also be true. Good sex may lead to a good marriage. After all, sexual preferences are deeply rooted in our psyches and our earliest experiences. They cannot easily be altered to suit the wishes of our partners. If spouses are sexually incompatible, they may find it hard to change, even if they communicate well, argue little, and are generally happy on other grounds. On the other hand, if a husband and wife are sexually compatible, they may work harder to resolve other problems in the marriage for the sake of preserving their good sex life. Thus, the relationship between marital satisfaction and sexual compatibility is probably reciprocal. Each factor influences the other.

Religion, we note, has little effect on level of marital satisfaction. But religion does influence the divorce rate. Thus, states with a high percentage of regular churchgoers and

a high percentage of fundamentalists have lower divorce rates than other states (Sweezy and Tiefenthaler, 1996).

Let us now see what happens when low marital satisfaction leads to divorce.

Divorce

Economic Effects

After divorce, the most common pattern is a rise in the husband's income and a decline in the wife's. That is because husbands tend to earn more, children typically live with their mother, and support payments are often inadequate. Figure 12.5 shows some economic effects of divorce in the United States. Support payments were awarded to half the 9.9 million custodial mothers and a quarter of the 1.6 million custodial fathers in 1991. However, payments were often meager. Only half the parents received the full amount due. Therefore, 35% of custodial mothers and 12.5% of custodial fathers lived in poverty. (The poverty rate for custodial fathers was close to the rate for the whole population.) Between 1996 and 1998, the Clinton administration created a new felony offense for people who flee across state lines to avoid paying child support. It also developed a new computerized collection system to track parents across state lines, and new penalties and incentives to get states to cooperate in tracking so-called deadbeat parents (Clinton, 1998). These policies are likely to force more delinquent parents to pay child support.

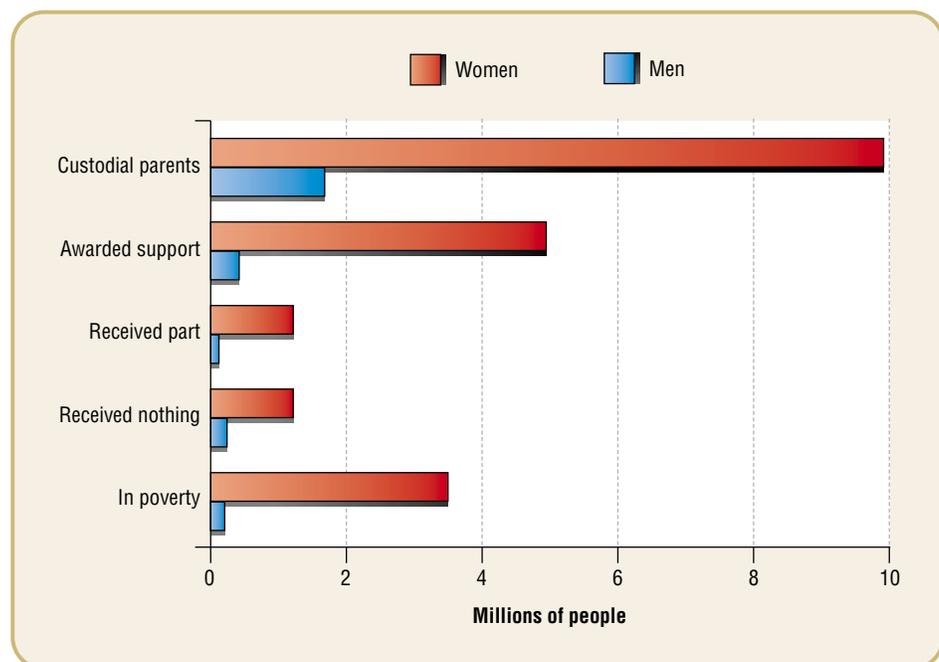
Emotional Effects

While divorce enables spouses to leave unhappy marriages, serious questions have been raised about the emotional consequences of divorce for children, particularly in the long term. Some scholars claim that divorcing parents are simply trading the well-being of their children for their own happiness. What does research say about this issue?

Research shows that children of divorced parents tend to develop behavioral problems and do less well in school than children in intact families. They are more likely to engage in delinquent acts and to abuse drugs and alcohol. They often experience an emotional crisis, particularly in the first 2 years after divorce. What is more, when children of divorced parents become adults, they are less likely than children of nondivorced parents to be happy. They are more likely to suffer health problems, depend on welfare, earn low

♦ **FIGURE 12.5** ♦
The Economic Aftermath of Divorce, United States, by Sex, 1991 (in millions)

SOURCE: Scoon-Rogers and Lester (1995:7).





The United States divorce rate reached a historic high in 1979 and has declined since then.

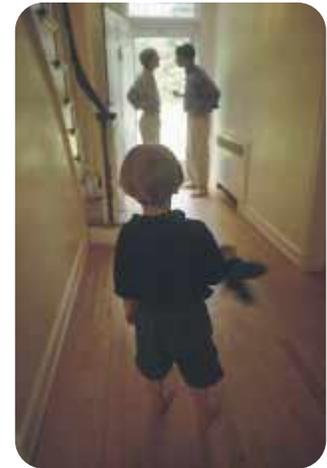
Andrew Benyei *Pink Couch* (1993).

incomes, and experience divorce themselves. In one California study, almost half the children of divorced parents entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, 2000). Clearly, divorce can have serious, long-term, negative consequences for children.

However, much of the research that seems to establish a link between divorce and long-term negative consequences for children is based on families who seek psychological counseling. Such families are a small and unrepresentative minority of the population. By definition, they have more serious emotional problems than the large majority, who do not need psychological counseling after divorce. One must be careful not to generalize from such studies. Another problem with much of this research is that some analysts fail to ask whether factors other than divorce might be responsible for the long-term distress experienced by many children of divorced parents.

Researchers who rely on representative samples and examine the separate effects of many factors on children's well-being provide the best evidence on the consequences of divorce for children. For example, Amato and Keith reanalyzed the results of 92 relevant studies (Amato and Keith, 1991). They showed that on average the overall effect of divorce on children's well-being is not strong and is declining over time. They also found three factors that account for much of the distress among children of divorce:

1. *A high level of parental conflict.* A high level of parental conflict creates long-term distress among children. Divorce without parental conflict does children much less harm. In fact, children in divorced families have a higher level of well-being on average than children in high-conflict, *intact* families. The effect of parental conflict on the long-term well-being of children is substantially greater than the effect of the next two factors discussed by Amato and Keith.
2. *A decline in living standards.* By itself, the economic disadvantage experienced by most children in divorced families exerts a small impact on their well-being. Nonetheless, it is clear that children of divorce who do not experience a decline in living standards suffer less harm.
3. *The absence of a parent.* Children of divorce usually lose a parent as a role model, source of emotional support, practical help, and supervision. By itself, this factor



A high level of parental conflict creates a long-term distress among children. Divorce without parental conflict does children much less harm. Children in divorced families have a higher level of well-being on average than children in high-conflict, intact families.

also has a small effect on children's well-being, even if the child has continued contact with the noncustodial parent.

Subsequent studies confirm these generalizations and add an important observation. Many of the behavioral and adjustment problems experienced by children of divorce existed before the divorce took place. We cannot therefore attribute them to the divorce itself (Cherlin, Furstenberg, Chase-Lansdale, Kiernan, Robins, Morrison, and Teitler, 1991; Entwisle and Alexander, 1995; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Stewart, Copeland, Chester, Malley, and Barenbaum, 1997).

In sum, claiming that divorcing parents trade the well-being of their children for their own happiness is an exaggeration. High levels of parental conflict have serious negative consequences for children, even when they enter adulthood. In such high-conflict situations, divorce can benefit children. Increased state intervention, such as the initiatives taken by the Clinton administration, can ensure that children of divorce do not experience the decline in living standards that often has long-term negative consequences for them. By itself, the absence of a parent has a small negative effect on children's well-being. But this effect is getting smaller over time, perhaps in part because divorce is so common it is no longer a stigma.

Reproductive Choice

We have seen that the power women gained from working in the paid labor force put them in a position to leave a marriage if it made them deeply unhappy. Another aspect of the gender revolution women are experiencing is that they are increasingly able to decide what happens in the marriage if they stay. For example, women now have more say over whether they will have children and, if so, when they will have them and how many they will have.

Children are increasingly expensive to raise. They no longer give the family economic benefits as they did, say, on the family farm. Most women want to work in the paid labor force, many of them to pursue a career. As a result, most women decide to have fewer children, to have them farther apart, and to have them at an older age. Indeed, 1 out of 20 couples does not have children at all, and among college graduates the figure is 3 out of 20.

Women's reproductive decisions are carried out by means of contraception and abortion. The United States Supreme Court struck down laws prohibiting birth control in 1965. Abortion first became legal in various states around 1970. Today, public opinion polls show that most Americans think women should be free to make their own reproductive choices. A substantial minority, however, is opposed to abortion.

Because Americans are sharply divided on the abortion issue, "right-to-life" versus "pro-choice" activists have been clashing since the 1970s. Right-to-life activists want to repeal laws legalizing abortion. Pro-choice activists want these laws preserved. Both groups have tried to influence public opinion and lawmakers to achieve their aims. For example, as a result of pressure from the right-to-life lobby, RU-486, the so-called morning after pill, was introduced in the United States years after it was available in Western Europe. A few extreme right-to-life activists (almost all men) have resorted to violence.

What are your views on abortion? Do you think your opinions are influenced by your social characteristics (income, education, occupation, religiosity, etc.)? In thinking about this issue, you will find it useful to know that right-to-life activists tend to be homemakers in religious, middle-income families. They argue that life begins at conception. Therefore, they say, abortion destroys human life and is morally indefensible. They advocate adoption instead of abortion. In their opinion, the pro-choice option is selfish, expressing greater concern for career advancement and sexual pleasure than moral responsibility.

In contrast, pro-choice activists tend to be women pursuing their own careers. They are more highly educated, less religious, and better off financially than right-to-life activists. They argue that every woman has the right to choose what happens to her own body and that bearing an unwanted child can harm not only a woman's career but the child too. For example, unwanted children are more likely to be neglected or abused. They are also more likely to get in trouble with the law due to inadequate adult supervision and



discipline. Furthermore, according to pro-choice activists, religious doctrines claiming that life begins at conception are arbitrary. In any case, they point out, such ideas have no place in law because they violate the constitutionally guaranteed separation of church and state (Collins and Coltrane, 1991: 510–13). So what is your view? And to what degree is it influenced by your social characteristics?

As sociologists Randall Collins and Scott Coltrane note, it seems likely that a repeal of abortion laws would return us to the situation that existed in the 1960s. They claim that, on a per capita basis, roughly as many abortions took place then as now. But because they were illegal, abortions were expensive, hard to obtain, and posed more dangers to women's health. Clearly, if abortion laws were repealed, poor women and their unwanted children would suffer most. Taxpayers would wind up paying bigger bills for welfare and medical care.

Reproductive Technologies

For most women, exercising reproductive choice means being able to prevent pregnancy and birth by means of contraception and abortion. For some women, however, it means *facilitating* pregnancy and birth by means of reproductive technologies. As many as 15% of couples are infertile. With a declining number of desirable children available for adoption, and a persistent and strong desire by most people to have children, demand is strong for techniques to help infertile couples, some lesbian couples, and some single women have babies.

There are four main reproductive technologies. In *artificial insemination*, a donor's sperm is inserted in a woman's vaginal canal or uterus during ovulation. In *surrogate motherhood*, a donor's sperm is used to artificially inseminate a woman who has signed a contract to surrender the child at birth in exchange for a fee. In *in vitro fertilization*, eggs are surgically removed from a woman and joined with sperm in a culture dish, and an embryo is then transferred back to the woman's uterus. Finally, various *screening techniques* are used on sperm and fetuses to increase the chance of giving birth to a baby of the desired sex and end pregnancies deemed medically problematic.

These procedures raise several sociological and ethical issues. We may mention two here (Achilles, 1993). The first problem is discrimination. Most reproductive technologies are expensive. Surrogate mothers charge \$10,000 or more to carry a child. *In vitro* fertilization can cost \$100,000 or more. Obviously, poor and middle-income earners who happen to be infertile cannot afford these procedures. In addition, there is a strong tendency for members of the medical profession to deny single women and lesbian couples access to reproductive technologies. In other words, the medical community discriminates not just against those of modest means but against nonnuclear families.

A second problem introduced by reproductive technologies is that they render the terms "mother" and "father" obsolete or at least vague. Is the mother the person who donates the egg, carries the child in her uterus, or raises the child? Is the father the person who donates the sperm or raises the child? As these questions suggest, a child conceived through a combination of reproductive technologies and raised by a heterosexual couple could have as many as three mothers and two fathers! This is not just a terminological problem. If it were, we could just introduce new distinctions like "egg mother," "uterine mother," and "social mother" to reflect the new reality. The real problem is social and legal. The question of who has what rights and obligations to the child, and what rights and obligations the child has vis-à-vis each parent, is unclear. This lack of clarity has already caused anguished court battles over child custody (Franklin and Ragone, 1999).

Public debate on a wide scale is needed to decide who will control reproductive technologies and to what ends. On the one hand, reproductive technologies may bring the greatest joy to infertile people. They may also prevent the birth of children with diseases such as muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis. On the other hand, reproductive technologies may continue to benefit mainly the well to do, reinforce traditional family forms that are no longer appropriate for many people, and cause endless legal wrangling and heartache.



Fertilizing an egg *in vitro*.



Housework and Child Care

As we have seen, women’s increased paid labor force participation, their increased participation in the system of higher education, and their increased control over reproduction transformed several areas of family life. Despite this far-ranging gender revolution, however, one domain remains largely resistant to change: housework, child care, and senior care. This fact was first documented in detail by sociologist Arlie Hochschild. She showed that even women who work full-time in the paid labor force usually begin a “second shift” when they return home. There, they prepare meals, help with homework, do laundry, clean the toilets, and so forth (Hochschild with Machung, 1989).

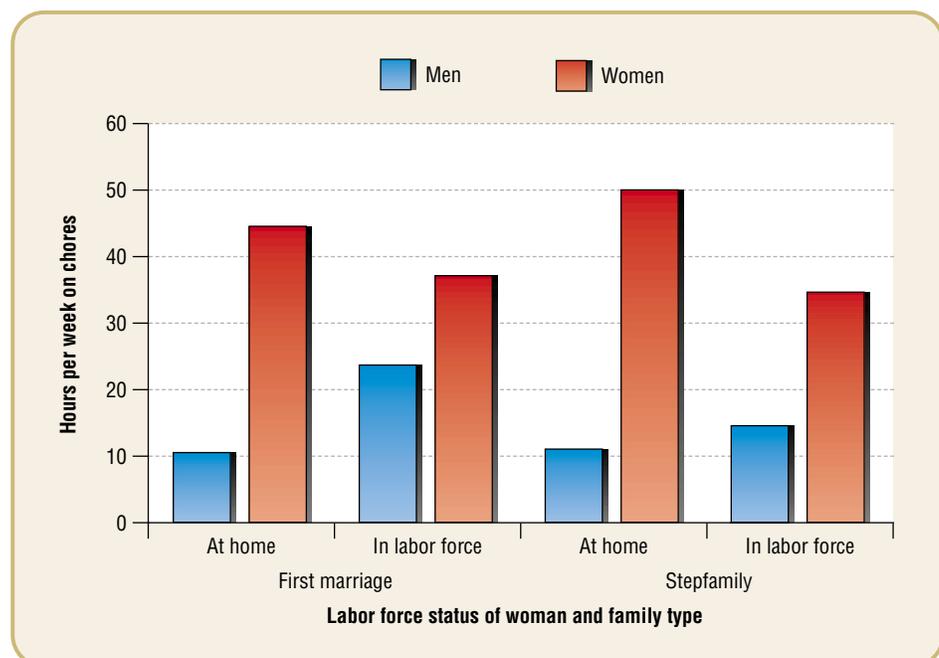
To be sure, there has been *some* change as men take a more active role in the day-to-day running of the household. But the change is modest. For example, one study conducted in the late 1980s compared full-time female homemakers in first marriages with wives in first marriages who worked 30 hours or more per week outside the home. The wives working full-time in the paid labor force did only 1 hour and 10 minutes less housework per day than the full-time homemakers. Husbands of women working full-time in the paid labor force did a mere 37 minutes more housework per day than husbands of full-time homemakers (calculated from Demo and Acock, 1993; see Figure 12.6). Studies estimate that, on average, American men now do 20–35% of the housework and child care (Shelton and John, 1996: 299).

Even these figures do not reveal the whole picture, however. Men tend to do low-stress chores that can often wait a day or a week. These jobs include mowing the lawn, repairing the car, and preparing income tax forms. They also play with their children more than they used to. In contrast, women tend to do higher stress chores that cannot wait. These jobs include getting kids dressed and out the door to school every day, preparing dinner by 6:00 p.m., washing clothes twice a week, and the like. In short, the picture is hardly that of a revolution (Harvey, Marshall, and Frederick, 1991).

Two main factors shrink the gender gap in housework, child care, and senior care. First, the smaller the difference between the husband’s and the wife’s earnings, the more equal the division of household labor. Apparently, women are routinely able to translate earning power into domestic influence. Put bluntly, their increased status enables them to get their husbands to do more around the house. In addition, women who earn relatively high incomes are also able to use some of their money to pay outsiders to do domestic work.

♦ **FIGURE 12.6** ♦
**The Division of Domestic Labor
 by Woman’s Work Status,
 United States, 1987–1988**

SOURCE: Demo and Acock (1993:329).





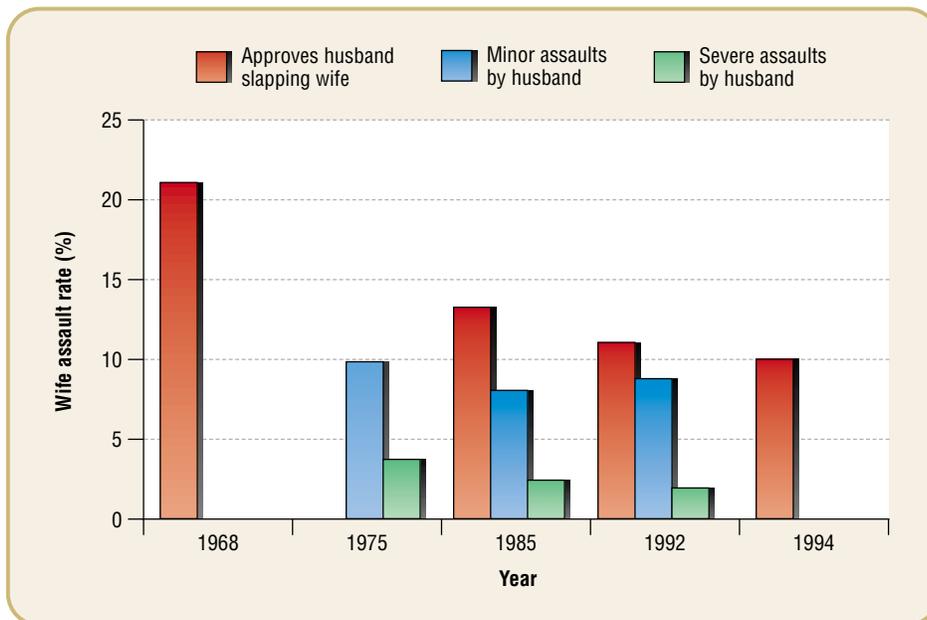
The double day.

Attitude is the second factor that shrinks the gender gap in domestic labor. The more husband and wife agree there *should* be equality in the household division of labor, the more equality there is. Seeing eye-to-eye on this issue is often linked to both spouses having a college education (Greenstein, 1996). Thus, if there is going to be greater equality between men and women in doing household chores, two things have to happen. There must be greater equality between men and women in the paid labor force and broader cultural acceptance of the need for gender equality.

Equality and Wife Abuse

Above we noted that more egalitarian couples are generally more happily married. Said differently, marital satisfaction increases as the statuses of husband and wife approach equality. Does it follow that higher levels of gender equality also result in lower rates of wife abuse? As we will now see, it does.

We must first note that wife abuse is widespread in American society. A 1997 Gallup poll found that 22% of women, compared to 8% of men, reported physical abuse by a spouse or companion at least once in the past (see Figure 12.7). Some of that abuse is severe. In about 2% of American families every year, husbands kick their wives, bite them, hit them with a fist, threaten to use a knife or gun, or use a knife or gun (Straus, 1995).



◆ **FIGURE 12.7** ◆
Spousal Violence Against Wives, United States, 1968–1994 (in percent)

Note: Figures include cohabiting but unmarried couples. Data on all indicators are not available for some years shown.
 SOURCE: Straus (1995).

Although about as many wives commit such acts of violence against their husbands, the husbands are about seven times more likely to injure their wives physically than vice-versa.

Sociologist Murray A. Straus, the world's leading authority on spouse abuse, has established that severe forms of wife assault occur in all categories of the population. However, he and other researchers have also shown that severe wife assault is most common in lower class, less highly educated families, where men are more likely to believe that male domination is justified. Severe wife abuse is also more common among couples who witnessed their mothers being abused and who were themselves abused when they were children (Gelles, 1997 [1985]; Smith, 1990). Thus, male domination in both childhood socialization and current family organization increases the likelihood of wife abuse.

In addition, Straus (1994) showed that high levels of wife assault are associated with gender inequality in the larger society. He first constructed a measure of wife assault for each state using data from the 1985 National Family Violence Survey ($n = 6,002$). The measure shows the percentage of couples in each state in which the wife was physically assaulted by her partner during the 12 months preceding the survey. He then used government data to measure gender inequality in each state. His measure of gender inequality taps the economic, educational, political, and legal status of women. He found that wife assault and gender inequality vary proportionately. In other words, as gender equality increases—as women and men become more equal in the larger society—wife assault declines. The conclusion one must draw from this research is clear. The incidence of wife assault is highest where early socialization experiences predispose men to behave aggressively toward women, where norms justify the domination of women, and where a big power imbalance between men and women exists. Figure 12.7 shows a pattern of slowly declining of wife abuse in America between 1968 and 1994. This tendency, like many of the other trends we have discussed, may be attributed in large measure to the growing status and power of women in American society.

Summing up, we can say that conflict theorists and feminists have performed a valuable sociological service by emphasizing the importance of power relations in structuring family life. A substantial body of research shows that the gender revolution of the past 40 years has influenced the way we select mates, our reasons for being satisfied or dissatisfied with marriage, our propensity to divorce, the reproductive choices women make, the distribution of housework and child care, and the level of wife abuse—in short, all aspects of family life. As you will now learn, the gender revolution has also resulted in a much greater diversity of family forms.

FAMILY DIVERSITY

Sexual Orientation

In 1993, three couples showed up at the Hawaii Department of Health in Honolulu to apply for marriage licenses. They were turned away. The grounds? Improper sexual orientation. Two couples were lesbian, one was gay. According to Hawaiian officials, the couples were not legally entitled to form families. Therefore, marriage licenses could not be granted.

The couples took the case to court. In December 1996, Judge Kevin S. C. Chang of the Honolulu Circuit Court ordered the state to stop denying marriages to same-sex couples because doing so would violate the anti-sex-discrimination provisions of Hawaii's state constitution. The case was subsequently referred to the Supreme Court of Hawaii. In December 1999, the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled that same-sex marriages are illegal (Supreme Court of the State of Hawai'i, 1999).

After Judge Chang's 1996 ruling, President Clinton signed a law denying federal benefits to same-sex spouses. Sixteen states hastily adopted laws denying recognition of homosexual marriages. Sixteen more states passed similar laws in the next 4 years. However,

Research shows that most homosexuals, like most heterosexuals, want a long-term, intimate relationship with one other adult (Baca Zinn and Eitzen, 1993: 423). In fact, in Denmark, where homosexual couples can register partnerships under the law, the divorce rate for registered homosexual couples is lower than for heterosexual married couples (ReligiousTolerance.org, 2000). Not surprisingly, therefore, more than 2 million same-sex couples live together in the United States today. At least half of them are raising children. Most of these children are offspring of previous, heterosexual marriages. Some are adopted. Others result from artificial insemination.

Many people believe that children brought up in homosexual families will develop a confused sexual identity, exhibit a tendency to become homosexuals themselves, and suffer discrimination from children and adults in the “straight” community. Unfortunately, there is little research in this area. Much of the research is based on small, unrepresentative samples. Nevertheless, the research findings are consistent. They suggest that children who grow up in homosexual families are much like children who grow up in heterosexual families. For example, a 14-year study assessed 25 young adults who were the offspring of lesbian families and 21 young adults who were the offspring of heterosexual families (Tasker and Golombok, 1997). The researchers found the two groups were equally well adjusted and displayed little difference in sexual orientation. Two respondents from the lesbian families considered themselves lesbians, while all of the respondents from the heterosexual families considered themselves heterosexual.

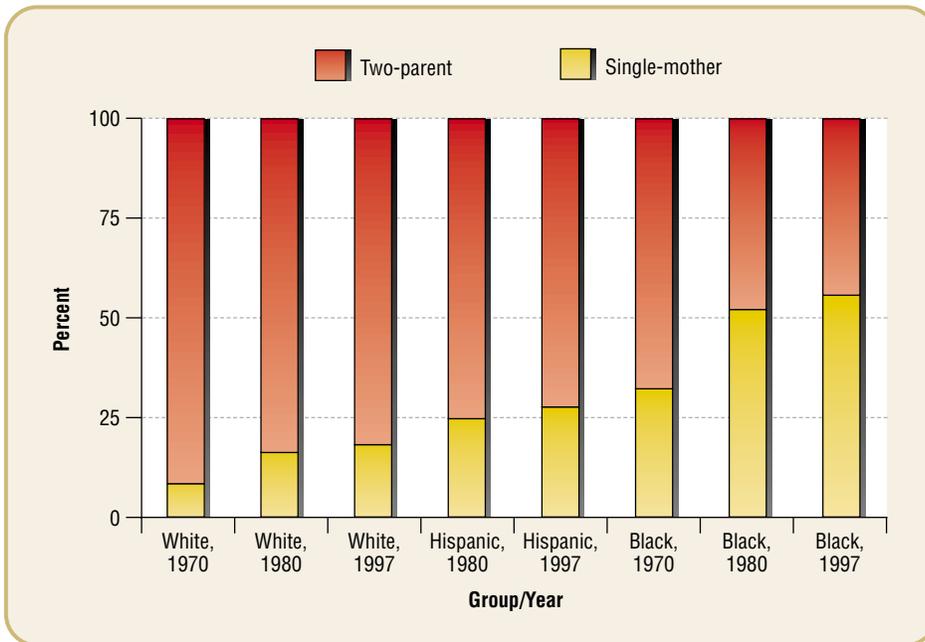
Homosexual and heterosexual families do differ in some respects. Lesbian couples with children record higher satisfaction with their partnerships than lesbian couples without children. In contrast, among heterosexual couples, it is the childless who record higher marital satisfaction (Koepke, Hare, and Moran, 1992). On average, the partners of lesbian mothers spend more time caring for children than the husbands of heterosexual mothers. Because children usually benefit from adult attention, this must be considered a plus. Finally, homosexual couples tend to be more egalitarian than heterosexual couples, sharing most decision-making and household duties equally. That is because they tend to consciously reject traditional marriage patterns. The fact that they have the same gender socialization and earn about the same income also encourages equality (Baca Zinn and Eitzen, 1993: 424). In sum, available research suggests that raising children in lesbian families has no apparent negative consequences for the children. Indeed, there may be some benefits for all family members.

Race and Adaptations to Poverty

Single-Mother Families

We have seen how families differ from one another due to variations in the sexual orientation of adult family heads. Now let us examine how they vary across racial and ethnic groups in terms of the number of adults who head the family (Baca Zinn and Eitzen, 1993: 109–27; Cherlin 1981 [1992]: 91–123; Collins and Coltrane, 1991: 233–69). Figure 12.9 focuses on the country’s two most common family types (two-parent and single-mother) and three largest racial and ethnic categories (white, African American, and Hispanic American). It shows that whites have the lowest incidence of single-mother families. African Americans have by far the highest. In all racial/ethnic groups, the proportion of single-mother families has been increasing in recent decades, but the increase has been most dramatic among African Americans. Thus, among African Americans in 1970, there were 1.9 two-parent families for every single-mother family. By 1997, there were more than 1.3 single-mother families for every two-parent family. The last few years of the 20th century witnessed a reversal in the trend toward more single-mother families in the African-American community. Nevertheless, single-mother families still outnumber two-parent families (Harden, 2001; see also “It’s Your Choice” in Chapter 7).

Some single-parent families result from separation, divorce, or death. Others result from people not getting married in the first place. Marriage is an increasingly unpopular institution, particularly among African Americans. This is clear from statistics on births to



◆ **FIGURE 12.9** ◆
Families with Own Children Under 18 by Race and Hispanic Origin, United States, 1970, 1980, and 1997

Note: 1970 data on Hispanics and single-father families are not available.

SOURCES: Baca Zinn and Eitzen (1993: inside back cover); Bryson and Casper (1998: 4).

unmarried mothers. In 1996 among whites, more than 25% of births were to unmarried mothers. Among Hispanics, the figure was nearly 41%. Among African Americans, it was just under 70% (*Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, 1997).

What accounts for the decline of the two-parent family among African Americans (Cherlin, 1992 [1981])? Although some scholars trace the decline of the African-American two-parent family back to slavery (Jones, 1986), rapid decline began around 1925. By then, the mechanization of the cotton economy in the South had displaced many black agricultural laborers and sharecroppers. They were forced to migrate northward. In the North, they competed fiercely for industrial jobs. Due to discrimination, however, they suffered higher rates of unemployment than any other group in America. Thus, ever since about 1925, proportionately fewer black men have been able to help support a family. As a result, proportionately fewer stable two-person families have formed. Similarly, the decline of manufacturing industries in the Northeast and the movement of many blue-collar jobs to the suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s eliminated many secure, well-paying jobs for blacks and caused their unemployment rate to rise. It is precisely in this period that the rate of increase in African-American single-mother families skyrocketed.

Apart from unemployment, a second factor explaining the decline of the two-parent family among African Americans is the declining ratio of eligible black men to black women. This has three sources. First, largely because of the disadvantaged economic and social position of the African-American community, a disproportionately large number of black men are imprisoned, have been murdered, and suffer from drug addiction (see Chapter 6, “Deviance and Crime”). Second, because the armed forces represent one of the best avenues of upward mobility for African-American men, a disproportionately large number of them have enlisted and been killed in action. Third, a black man is nearly twice as likely as a black woman to marry a nonblack, and intermarriage has increased to nearly 10% of all marriages involving at least one black person. For all these reasons, there are relatively fewer black men available for black women to marry (Anderson, 1999; Cherlin, 1992 [1981]; Wilson, 1987).

The third main factor explaining the decline of the two-parent family in the black community concerns the relative earnings of women and men. In recent decades, the average income of African-American women has increased. Meanwhile, the earning power of African-American men has fallen. As a result, African-American women are more economically independent than ever. On average, they have less to gain in purely economic



By 1997, there were more than 1.3 single-mother families for every two-parent family in the African-American community.

terms from marrying a black man. Economically speaking, marriage has thus become a less attractive alternative for them (Cherlin, 1992 [1981]).

Adaptations to Poverty

Poor African-American women have adapted to harsh economic realities in creative ways that testify to their resilience. In particular, they have developed strong kinship and friendship networks that enable them to survive with few resources. Members of the network help each other with child care. They share money when they have it. They lend each other household items. They give each other hand-me-downs. These adaptations to poverty have a downside, however. If an individual is lucky enough to come into a windfall that could help remove her and her children from poverty—a job or a modest inheritance, for example—the money is quickly used up by the network and the individual remains poor. In other words, the network is a source of survival *and* a shackle that helps keep poor black women impoverished (Stack, 1974).

Just as poor black women can keep their families functioning thanks to the assistance of grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and friends, so Hispanics have developed a family system in which the godfather (*padrino*) and godmother (*madrina*) often act as coparents, providing child care and emotional and financial support as needed. Indeed, Hispanic-American families tend to rely on entire extended kin networks for social support.¹

Note, however, that the tendency to rely on the extended kin network for social support declines with migration status and upward mobility. The best evidence for this comes from a recent study of extended kin among Mexican Americans (Glick, 1999). Using data from the census and a survey of income dynamics, the study found that reliance on extended kin is stronger among immigrant Hispanics than among those born in the United States. Moreover, reliance on extended kin declines as socioeconomic status increases. American-born, middle- and upper-class Hispanic Americans are less in need of social support from extended kin networks than immigrant, working-class, and poor Hispanic Americans. These findings suggest that the prominence of extended kin networks among Hispanic Americans is at least in part a function of class. Just as the incidence of single-mother families and reliance on extended kin networks drops off sharply among middle-class and upper-middle-class black families, so in the Hispanic community, class position, and not just culture, shapes family structure.

FAMILY POLICY



Web Research Projects
Family Values

Having discussed several aspects of the decline of the traditional nuclear family and the proliferation of diverse family forms, we can now return to the big question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Is the decline of the nuclear family a bad thing for society? Said differently, do two-parent families—particularly those with stay-at-home moms—provide the kind of discipline, role models, help, and middle-class lifestyle that children need to stay out of trouble with the law and grow up to become well-adjusted, productive members of society? Conversely, are family forms other than the traditional nuclear family the main source of teenage crime, poverty, welfare dependency, and other social ills (see Box 12.2)?

The answer suggested by research is clear: yes and no (Houseknecht and Sastry, 1996; Popenoe, 1988; 1991; 1992, 1993, 1996; Sandqvist and Andersson, 1992). Yes, the decline of the traditional nuclear family can be a source of many social problems. No, it doesn't have to be that way.

The United States is a good example of how social problems can emerge from nuclear family decline. Sweden is a good example of how such problems can be averted. Table 12.3 illustrates this. The top panel of Table 12.3 shows that *on most indicators of nuclear*

¹Strong social support from the extended family is, incidentally, one of the main reasons (along with a diet high in vegetable content) why Hispanic Americans have a lower death rate from cancer and heart disease than non-Hispanic whites (Braus, 1994).

Indicators of Nuclear Family “Decline”	USA	Sweden	#1 “Decline”
Median age at first marriage			
Men	26.5	29.4	Sweden
Women	24.4	27.1	Sweden
Percentage of 45–49 population never married			
Men	5.7	15.4	Sweden
Women	5.1	9.1	Sweden
Nonmarital birth rate	25.7	50.9	Sweden
One-parent households with children <15 as % of all households with children <15	25.0	18.0	USA
% of mothers in labor force with children <3	51.0	84.0	Sweden
Total fertility rate	2.0	2.0	Tie
Average household size	2.7	2.2	Sweden
Indicators of Child Well-Being	USA	Sweden	#1 Well Being
Mean reading performance score at 14	5.14	5.29	Sweden
% of children in poverty			
Single-mother households	59.5	5.2	Sweden
Two parent-households	11.1	2.2	Sweden
Death rate of infants from abuse	9.8	0.9	Sweden
Suicide rate for children 15–19 (per 100,000)	11.1	6.2	Sweden
Juvenile delinquency rate (per 100,000)	11.6	12.0	USA
Juvenile drug offense rate (per 100,000)	558	241	Sweden

family decline, Sweden leads the United States. In Sweden, a smaller percentage of people get married. People usually get married at a later age than in the United States. The proportion of births outside of marriage is twice as high as in the United States. A much larger proportion of Swedish than American women with children under the age of 3 work in the paid labor force.

The bottom panel of Table 12.3 shows that *on most measures of children’s well-being, Sweden also leads the United States.* Thus, in Sweden, children enjoy higher average reading test scores than in this country. The poverty rate in two-parent families is only one tenth the United States rate, while the poverty rate in single-parent families is only one twelfth as high. The rate of infant abuse is one eleventh the United States rate. The rate of juvenile drug offences is less than half as high. Sweden does have a higher rate of juvenile delinquency than the United States. However, the lead is slight and concerns only minor offences. Overall, then, the decline of the traditional nuclear family has gone farther in Sweden than in the United States, but children are much better off on average. How is this possible?

One possible explanation is that Sweden has something the United States lacks: a substantial family support policy. When a child is born in Sweden, a parent is entitled to 360 days of parental leave at 80% of his or her salary and an additional 90 days at a flat rate. Fathers can take an additional 10 days of leave with pay when the baby is born. Parents are entitled to free consultations at “well baby clinics.” Like all citizens of Sweden, they receive free health care from the state-run system. Temporary parental benefits are available for parents with a sick child under the age of 12. One parent can take up to 60 days off per sick child per year at 80% of salary. All parents can send their children to heavily government-subsidized, high-quality day care. Finally, Sweden offers its citizens generous direct cash payments based on the number of children in each family.²

Among industrialized countries, the United States stands at the other extreme. Since the Family and Medical Leave Act was passed in 1993, a parent is entitled to 12 weeks of *unpaid* parental leave. About 44 million citizens have no health care coverage. Health care is at a low standard for many millions more. There is no system of state day care and no direct cash payments to families based on the number of children they have. The value of

◆ **TABLE 12.3** ◆
The “Decline” of the Nuclear Family and the Well-Being of Children: The United States and Sweden Compared

SOURCE: Adapted from Houseknecht and Sastry (1996).

Painting class in a state-subsidized day care facility in Stockholm, Sweden.



the dependent deduction on income tax has fallen by nearly 50% in current dollars since the 1940s. Thus, when an unwed Swedish woman has a baby, she knows she can rely on state institutions to maintain her standard of living and help give her child an enriching social and educational environment. When an unwed American woman has a baby, she is pretty much on her own. She stands a good chance of sinking into poverty, with all the negative consequences that has for her and her child.

In the United States, three criticisms are commonly raised against generous family support policies. First, some people say they encourage long-term dependence on welfare, illegitimate births, and the breakup of two-parent families. However, research shows that the divorce rate and the rate of births to unmarried mothers are not higher when welfare payments are more generous (Ruggles, 1997; Sweezy and Tiefenthaler, 1996).

Nor is welfare dependency widespread in America. African-American teen mothers are often thought to be the group most susceptible to chronic welfare dependence. Kathleen Mullan Harris (1997) studied 288 such women in Baltimore. She found that 29% were never on welfare. Twenty percent were on welfare only once and for a very brief time. Twenty-three percent cycled on and off welfare—off when they could find work, on when they couldn't. The remaining 28% were long-term welfare users. However, most of these teen mothers said they wanted a decent job that would allow them to escape life on welfare. That is why half of those on welfare in any given year were concurrently working.

A second criticism of generous family support policies focuses on child care. Some critics say nonfamily child care is bad for children under the age of 3. In their view, only parents can provide the love, interaction, and intellectual stimulation infants and toddlers need for proper social, cognitive, and moral development. The trouble with this argument is that, explicitly or implicitly, it compares the quality of child care in upper-middle-class families with the quality of child care in most existing day-care facilities in the United States. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 9 (“Sexuality and Gender”), existing child care facilities in the United States are often of poor quality. They are characterized by high turnover of poorly paid, poorly trained staff and a high ratio of caregivers to children. When studies compare family care with day care involving a strong curriculum, a stimulating environment, plenty of caregiver warmth, low turnover of well-trained staff, and a low ratio of caregivers to children, they find day care has no negative consequences for children over

³We are grateful to Gregg Olsen for this information.



BOX 12.2 IT'S YOUR CHOICE

THE PRO-FATHERHOOD CAMPAIGN

If you were watching David Letterman in September 1999, you might have seen a commercial that starts like this: “When young bull elephants from a national park in South Africa were moved to different locations without the presence of an adult male, they began to wantonly kill other animals. When an adult male was relocated with them, the delinquent behavior stopped.” From a panoramic view of elephants, the commercial switched to a basketball court

where an African-American man is hugging an African-American boy. The voice-over said: “Without the influence of their dads, kids are more likely to get into trouble, too. Just a reminder how important it is for fathers to spend time with their children” (quoted in Davidoff, 1999: 28).

The National Fatherhood Initiative sponsored the commercial. It is part of a nationwide campaign to emphasize the importance of fatherhood to family life in particular and society in general. The 1999 Responsible Fatherhood Act pledged more than \$150 million to “allow states to implement programs that promote stable and married families and support responsible fatherhood” (quoted in Davidoff, 1999: 29).

Nobody can disagree with supporting fatherhood and stable family life. However, one problem with pro-fatherhood policies is that they are often intended to replace welfare programs, which are simultane-

ously being cut by both the federal and state governments. Moreover, critics of pro-fatherhood policies argue that what is essential for the healthy development of children is not just a father, or for that matter even a mother. As psychologists have shown, what is essential is a lasting and loving relationship with at least one adult (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999). In other words, it is not necessarily the presence of a nuclear family that ensures healthy family life. Insofar as the fatherhood initiative supports only one kind of family, it devalues other forms of family life, including single-parent households, homosexual couples, and so on.

What do you think? Should we support the fatherhood initiative? Or does it lead us to ignore other social problems, such as poverty? Does the focus on fatherhood devalue other forms of family?

the age of 1 (Clarke-Stewart, Gruber, and Fitzgerald, 1994). A recent study of more than 6,000 American children found that a mother’s employment outside the home does have a very small negative effect on the child’s self-esteem, later academic achievement, language development, and compliance. However, this effect was apparent only if the mother returned to work within a few weeks or months of giving birth. Moreover, the negative effects usually disappeared by the time the child reached the age of 5 (Harvey, 1999). Research also shows that day care has some benefits, notably an enhanced ability to make friends. The benefits of high-quality day care are even more evident in low-income families, which often cannot provide the kind of stimulating environment offered by high-quality day care.

The third criticism lodged against generous family support policies is that they are expensive and have to be paid for by high taxes. This is true. Swedes, for example, are more highly taxed than the citizens of any other country. They have made the political decision to pay high taxes, partly to avoid the social problems and associated costs that sometimes emerge when the traditional nuclear family is replaced with other family forms and no institutions are available to help family members in need. The Swedish experience teaches us, then, that there is a clear tradeoff between expensive family support policies and low taxes. It is impossible to have both, and the degree to which any country favors one or the other is a political choice.

SUMMARY

1. The traditional nuclear family consists of a father-provider, mother-homemaker, and at least one child.
2. Today, only a minority of American adults live in traditional nuclear families. Many different family forms have proliferated in recent decades. The frequency of these forms varies by class, race, and sexual orientation.
3. In the 1950s, functionalist theory held that the traditional nuclear family is necessary because it performs essential functions in all societies. However, the theory is inaccurate.
4. Marxists stress how families operate to reproduce class inequality, while feminists stress how they operate to reproduce gender inequality.

5. The entry of women into the paid labor force increases their power to leave unhappy marriages and control whether and when they would have children. It does not, however, have a big effect on the sexual division of labor in families.
6. Marital satisfaction is lower at the bottom of the class structure, where divorce laws are strict, when children reach their teenage years, in families where housework is not shared equally, and among couples who do not have a good sexual relationship.
7. The effects of divorce on children are worst if there is a high level of parental conflict and the children's standard of living drops.
8. Growing up in a lesbian household has no known negative effects on children.
9. People sometimes blame the decline of the traditional nuclear family for increasing poverty, welfare dependence, and crime. However, some countries have adopted policies that largely prevent these problems.

GLOSSARY

The **divorce rate** is the number of divorces that occur in a year for every 1,000 people in the population.

The **extended family** expands the nuclear family “vertically” by adding another generation—one or more of the spouses’ parents—to the household.

Marriage is a socially approved, presumably long-term, sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. It involves reciprocal rights and obligations between spouses and between parents and children.

The **marriage rate** is the number of marriages that occur in a year for every 1,000 people in the population.

A **nuclear family** consists of a cohabiting man and woman who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and have at least one child.

Polygamy expands the nuclear family “horizontally” by adding one or more spouses (usually women) to the household.

The **total fertility rate** is the average number of children born to women of the same age over their lifetime.

A **traditional nuclear family** is a nuclear family in which the husband works outside the home for money and the wife works for free in the home.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you agree with the functionalist view that the traditional nuclear family is the ideal family form for the United States today? Why or why not?
2. Ask your grandparents and parents how many people lived in their household when they were your age. Ask them to identify the role of each household member (mother, brother, sister, grandfather, boarder, etc.) and to describe the work done by each member inside and outside the household. Compare the size, composition, and division of labor of your household with that of your grandparents and parents. How have the size, composition, and division of labor of your household changed over three generations? Why have these changes occurred?



WEB RESOURCES



Companion Web Site for This Book

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com>

Begin by clicking on the Student Resources section of the Web site. Choose “Introduction to Sociology” and finally the Brym and Lie book cover. Next, select the chapter you are currently studying from the pull-down menu. From the Student Resources page you will have easy access to InfoTrac College Edition®, MicroCase Online exercises, additional Web links, and many other resources to aid you in your study of sociology, including practice tests for each chapter.

InfoTrac Search Terms

These search terms are provided to assist you in beginning to conduct research on this topic by visiting <http://www.infotraccollage.com/wadsworth>.

Divorce

Extended family
Family values

Marriage

Nuclear family

Recommended Web Sites

“Marriage and Family Processes” at <http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/family.html> contains a wide range of valuable resources on family sociology.

You can find Online tests and quizzes concerning love and relationships at http://dir.yahoo.com/society_and_culture/relationships/quizzes_and_tests.

“Kinship and Social Organization” at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/anthropology/kintitle.html> is an Online interactive tutorial that

teaches you about variations in patterns of descent, marriage, and residence using five case studies.

Visit these sites for statistics on families (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage.htm>), interracial families (<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/interrace.html>), divorce (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm>), sexual behavior (<http://purelove.org/statistics/index.html>), and same-sex marriage (http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_marr.htm).

SUGGESTED READINGS

Andrew J. Cherlin. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, revised and enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992 [1981]). A concise and rock-solid presentation of some major issues in sociology of the family. Makes excellent use of demographic and survey data.

Stephanie Coontz. *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). A well-written account from a feminist perspective of how history and sociology can help us come to grips with the problems facing American families today.

David Popenoe. *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: Martin Kessler Books, 1996). The authoritative conservative view. This book relates today's major social problems to the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family.

Lillian B. Rubin. *Families on the Fault Line* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994). A compassionate, in-depth account of the strains experienced by working-class families in America due to the economic upheavals of recent decades.

