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The Family

ALMOST DAILY, WE HEAR some political pundit predict the end of the family. The crisis of the family is so severe that in 2000, the U.S. Congress passed a Family Protection Act, as if the family were an endangered species, like the spotted owl. Divorce and remarriage have never been more common. Millions of children are growing up with single parents or in blended households. Millions of young adults are putting off marriage until their 30s, or cohabiting instead of getting married, or opting to stay single. People are selecting household arrangements today that would mystify our ancestors. Even the conservative U.S. Bureau of the Census has given in and added the category "cohabiting partners" to the old litany of single, married, widowed, or divorced.

On the other hand, the family has never been more popular. Suddenly, everyone seems to want one: single people, gay men and lesbians, even the elderly and widowed. Prime-time TV, which used to make fun of the nuclear family with shows like *Married . . . with Children,* is overloaded with moms, dads, and kids. And the wedding industry generates sales of about $50 billion every single year.

The family is in crisis. The family has never been more popular.

The gay marriage debate is a good example of both sides of the argument. Opponents say it would wreak "a potentially fatal blow to the traditional family," leading "inexorably to polygamy and other alternatives to one man/one woman unions" (Dobson, 2004). At the same time, gay couples across the country have been eager to pledge their love and commitment by getting married. And millions of supporters believe matrimony should not be limited to only some couples but open to everyone who wants to enter into it. How much more popular can the idea of marriage get?

Is the family in crisis—or has it never been more popular, or more supported? We believe both—in part, sociologists understand, because both are true.

The great novelist Thomas Wolfe said "you can't go home again." A few years earlier, the poet Robert Frost wrote that "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they

have to take you in." We believe both statements—in part, sociologists understand, because both are true. The family has never been more popular in part *because* it is in crisis—and all the cultural media, from TV to movies to pop songs, are trying to reassert its predominance in an increasingly individualized and global world. And the family is in crisis in part *because* of those institutional forces, like the global marketplace and its ideology of individualism, which constitute the dominant ideology around the world.

One thing is certain: The family is hardly a separate realm from the rest of society. It is a political football, tossed around by both liberals and conservatives, who appeal to it abstractly and develop policies that shape and mold it concretely. It is the foundation of the economy. And it is the basic building block of society. Always has been. Probably always will be.

What is the family? Where did it come from? Is it still necessary? How do sociologists understand the forces that hold it together and the forces that pull it apart?

The Family Tree

Unlike most animals, human beings are born helpless. For the first few years of their lives, they require round-the-clock care, and for the first decade, they require nearly constant supervision, or they won't survive to adulthood. But even after they learn basic survival skills, humans are still not qualified to make their own way in the world—an adult has to provide for all of their needs for 10 or 15 years or more. You are born into a group—and your survival depends on it. This group is, of course, the family.

Families as Kinship Systems

Every human society has divided the adults into cooperative groups who take charge of the care and feeding of the children. This is the origin of the **family,** defined as "the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children" but also "any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family"—such as single parents with children, spouses without children, and several generations living together. Families also refer to those related to you through blood or marriage, extended back through generations.

Families provide us with a sense of history, both as individuals and as members of a particular culture. Families themselves are part of **kinship systems,** cultural forms that locate individuals in the culture by reference to their families. Kinship systems are groupings that include all your relatives, mapped as a network from closest (mother, father, siblings) to a little more distant (cousins, aunts, uncles) to increasingly distant (your great-uncle twice removed). Your kinship system can be imagined

as a "family tree." Tracing your family tree is especially popular these days because it provides a sense of history.

Family trees can be organized in several ways to ground you in that history, depending on how you trace your descent, where you live, and whom you marry. These different ways of constructing a family tree give you a different cognitive map of the world and your place in it. Your line of descent can be:

- **Matrilineal:** through your mother's side of the family
- **Patrilineal:** through your father's side of the family
- **Bilineal:** through both your parents' sides

In many cases, your surname (last name) provides a minihistory of your ancestry. In some languages, it is literally in your name, like Johnson or Stevenson in English, Jonasdottir in Icelandic, Petrov in Russian. These names suggest different ways of tracing your family tree and lineage.

▲ **Families are kinship systems that anchor our identities in shared history and culture.**

Culture and Forms of the Family

Families are not simply an expression of love between people who want to have children. They are fundamental cultural institutions that have as much to do with economics, politics, and sex as they do with raising children. As the fundamental unit of society, the social functions of the family and the regulation of sexuality have always been of interest to sociologists.

For one thing, families ensure the regular transfer of property and establish lines of succession. For another, families restrict the number of people you can have sex with. In prehistoric times, a mighty hunter might spend three weeks tracking down and killing a single mastodon. He didn't want to go through all of that time and expense to feed a child that his next-door neighbor had produced. But how could he be sure that his next-door neighbor *wasn't* the father of the children his best girlfriend had given birth to? To solve this problem, almost every society has established a type of marriage—a relationship that regulates sexual activity to ensure **legitimacy,** that is, to ensure that men know what children they have produced (women have an obvious way to know). Families then bear the economic and emotional burden of raising only the children that belong to them (Malinowski, [1927] 1974).

No society allows its members to marry or have sex with anyone they might take an interest in, but the specifics of who can marry whom vary from place to place and over time. The most common arrangement is **monogamy,** marriage between two people. Most monogamous societies allow men and women to marry each other because it usually takes one of each to make a baby, but same-sex monogamy is surprisingly common. Historian John Boswell found evidence of same-sex marriages existing alongside male-female marriages even in early Christian Europe (1995).

Many societies have instituted some form of **polygamy,** or marriage between three or more people, although most of those allow monogamy as well. The most common form of polygamy is **polygyny,** one man with

Did *you* know?

The family form mentioned most often in the Bible is polygyny (multiple female partners). In fact, all of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—had numerous wives and concubines (sexual partners to whom they were not married). Solomon was reputed to have had 1,000 wives, products of his many political alliances.

two or more women, because a man can have children with several women at the same time. Among the Yoruba of northern Nigeria, women can have only one husband, but *they* can have as many wives as they want, so they practice a type of same-sex polygyny: One woman marries two or more women (Roscoe, 2001). **Polyandry,** one woman marrying two or more men, is rare, but it has been documented in Tibet and a few other places where men are absent for several months of the year.

Only a few societies practice **group marriage,** two or more men marrying two or more women, with children born to anyone in the union "belonging" to all of the partners equally. Group marriages appeared from time to time in the 1960s counterculture, but they rarely lasted long (Hollenbach, 2004).

Marriage does more than ensure that the proper people are responsible for the upbringing of the child; it ensures that when the child grows up, he or she will know who is off limits as a marriage partner. Almost every human society enforces **exogamy:** Marriage to (or sex with) members of your family unit is forbidden. This is the incest taboo, which Sigmund Freud argued was the one single cultural universal. (Without it, lines of succession and inheritance of property would be impossible!)

Of course, who counts as family varies from culture to culture and over time. Mom, Dad, brother, sister, son, or daughter are always off limits, except in a few cases of ritual marriage (the ancient Egyptian pharaohs married their sisters). But uncles and nieces commonly married each other through the nineteenth century, and first cousins are still allowed to marry in most countries in Europe and twenty-six of the U.S. states. In the Hebrew Bible, God struck Onan dead because he refused to have sex with his widowed sister-in-law and thereby produce an heir for his brother. But nowadays an affair with one's sister-in-law would be thought of as creepy at best.

The Family Unit

Family units come in an enormously varied number of types, from the father-mother-kids model that we see on evening sitcoms to longhouses where everyone in the tribe lives together in a gigantic mass. However, individual families are usually differentiated from others with a separate dwelling, their own house, apartment, cabin, or tent. Even when the entire tribe lives together in a single longhouse, each family gets its own cooking fire and personal space to differentiate it from the other families and signify that they belong together.

Chances are that you will occupy at least two different family units during your lifetime. While you are a child, you belong to a **family of origin**—the family you are born into—with your biological parents or others who are responsible for your upbringing. When you grow up, if you marry or cohabit with a romantic partner, you now also belong to a **family of procreation,** which is the family you choose to belong to in order to reproduce. Often we consider any adults you are living with as a family of procreation, even if none of them is actually doing any procreating. In modern societies, it is customary to change residences to signify that you have moved to a new family unit, but most premodern societies didn't differentiate: Either new wives moved in with their husbands' family, or new husbands moved in with their wives' family, or everyone kept right on living together (Fox, 1984; Stone, 2000).

Families usually have some rationale, real or imaginary, for being together. They, and everyone else in the community, assume that they "belong" together because of a common biological ancestry, legal marriage or adoption, some other bond of kinship, or the connection to others by blood, marriage, or adoption. Sometimes they can't prove biological ancestry, but they still insist on a common ancestor in the distant

past, human, god, or animal. When all else fails, they create symbolic kinship, blood brothers, aunties, and "friends of the family."

The Development of the Family

When our son was 5 years old, we were wandering through the ethnological exhibits at the Museum of Natural History. There were lifelike dioramas of other cultures—Eskimo, Polynesian, Amazonian—and also displays that portrayed the evolution of modern society through the Neolithic, Paleolithic, and Pleistocene ages. In each case, the diorama had exactly the same form: In the front, a single male, poised as a hunter or fisherman. Behind him, by a fire toward the back of the tableau, sat a single woman, cooking or preparing food, surrounded by several small children.

It wasn't until we passed into the hall of the animals, however, that anything seemed amiss. The dioramas kept to form: A single male—lion, gorilla, whatever—standing proudly in front, a single female and offspring lounging in the back waiting for him to bring home fresh meat.

"Look, Dad," Zachary said. "They have families just like we do."

I started to simply say "uh huh," the way parents do, half listening to their children. But something made me stop short. "Uh, actually, they don't," I said. "Most of these animals actually live in larger groupings, extended families and cooperative bands. And lionesses do most of the hunting (and caring for the young) while the males lounge about lazily most of the day."

Nor was every family throughout human history a nuclear family. Indeed, the nuclear family emerged only recently, within the past few thousand years. For most of human existence, our family forms have been quite varied and significantly larger, including several generations and all the siblings all living together.

Until my son pointed it out, though, I had never noticed that these exhibits in the museum were not historically accurate reflections of human (or animal) history, but normative efforts to make the contemporary nuclear family appear to have been eternal and universal, to read it back into history and across species—in a sense, to rewrite history so that the family didn't have a history but instead to pretend it had always been the way it is.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Families have developed and changed enormously over the course of human history.

Families evolved to socialize children, transmit property, ensure legitimacy, and regulate sexuality. They also evolved as economic units. Because children went to work alongside the adults, they contributed to the economic prosperity of the family; in fact, the family became a unit of economic production. Property and other possessions were passed down from the adults of the family to the children. Occupation, religion, language, social standing, and wealth were all dependent on kinship ties.

In all agrarian societies, including Europe and America as late as the nineteenth century, the household has been the basic economic unit. Production—and consumption—occurred within the household. Everyone participated in growing and eating the crops, and the excess might be taken to market for trade.

There was no distinction between family and society: Family life *was* social life. Families performed a whole range of functions later performed by social institutions. The family was not only a site of economic production and consumption. It was:

- *A school*. Any reading and writing you learned was at your parents' knee.
- *A church*. The head of the household led the family prayers; you might see the inside of a "real" church or temple once or twice a year.

- *A hospital*. Family members knew as much as there was to know about setting broken bones and healing diseases.
- *A day care center*. There were no businesses to take care of children, so someone in the family had to do it.
- *A police station*. There were no police to call when someone wronged you, so you called on your family to take care of the situation.
- *A retirement home*. If you had no family to take care of you in your old age, you would end up in debtor's prison or begging on the streets.

Obviously, all these functions cannot be met by the nuclear family model. The most common model in the premodern era was the **extended family,** in which two or three generations lived under the same roof or at least in the same compound. No one left the household except to marry into another family, until the group got too big for the space available and had to split up. And even then, they would build a new house nearby, until eventually everyone in the village was related to everyone else.

The Origins of the Nuclear Family

Just as families are no longer concerned exclusively with socializing children, marriage developed far more functions than simple sexual regulation, ensuring that parents and children know who each other is. Marriage could also validate a gentleman's claim to nobility and establish that a boy had become a man. It could form a social tie between two families or bring peace to warring tribes. In the Middle Ages, European monarchs often required their children to marry the child of a monarch next door, on the theory that you are unlikely to go to war with the country that your son or daughter has married into (it didn't work—by the seventeenth century, all of the European monarchs were second or third cousins, and they were always invading each other).

Marriage has also come to represent a distinctive emotional bond between two people. In fact, the idea that people should select their own marriage partner is actually a very recent phenomenon. For thousands of years, parents selected partners to fulfill their own economic and political needs or those of the broader kinship group. Arranged marriages are still the norm in a number of countries. People still fall in love—romantic love is practically universal across human societies—but not necessarily with the people they intended to marry. The tradition of courtly love, praised by the troubadours of medieval France, was actually about adultery, falling in love with someone else's spouse (De Rougemont, 1983).

Romantic love is virtually universal, found in all cultures. Hindu couple in South Asia. ▼

Only about 200 years ago did men and women in Western countries begin to look at marriage as an individual affair, to be decided by the people involved rather than parents, church, and state.

Like the **companionate marriage,** in which individuals choose their marriage partners based on emotional ties and love, the nuclear family is a relatively recent phenomenon. It emerged in Europe and the United States in the late eighteenth century. Its emergence depended on certain factors, such as the ability of a single breadwinner to earn enough in the marketplace to support the family and sufficient hygiene and health so that most babies would survive with only one adult taking care of them.

Historians like Carl Degler (1980) trace the new nuclear family, as it emerged in the White middle class between 1776 and 1830, and Christopher Lasch (1975) suggests the theory of "progressive nucleation" to explain how it gradually superseded the extended family and became the norm. During the nineteenth century, industrialization and modernization meant that social and economic needs could no longer be met by kin. It became customary for children to move far from their parents to go to school or look for work. With no parents around, they had to be responsible for their own spouse selection, and when they married, they would have to find their own home. Eventually adult children were expected to start their own households away from their parents, even if they were staying in the same town. When they had children of their own, they were solely responsible for the child rearing; the grandparents had only small and informal roles to play.

Did *you* know?

In the American colonies, single people were penalized if they remained single too long. Maryland imposed a tax on bachelors (Lauer and Lauer, 2003). Even today, federal and state income tax laws offer substantial cuts for married people, in the hopes that single people will get the message and head for the altar.

The change was not always beneficial: In every generation, husbands and wives had to reinvent child-rearing techniques, starting over from scratch, with many possibilities for mistakes. As Margaret Mead stated (1978), "Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we've put it in an impossible situation."

The nuclear family is also a more highly "gendered" family—roles and activities are allocated increasingly along gender lines. On the one hand, because the nuclear family was by definition much smaller than the extended family, the wife experienced greater autonomy. On the other hand, in her idealized role, she was increasingly restricted to the home, with her primary role envisioned as child care and household maintenance. She became a "housewife."

Because the home was seen as the "women's sphere," middle-class women's activities outside the home began to shrink. The husband became the "breadwinner," the only one in the family who was supposed to go to work and provide economic support for the household. (Of course, families of lesser means could not always survive on the salary of a single earner, so wives often continued to work outside the home.)

As the attention of the household, and especially the mother, became increasingly centered on children, they were seen as needing more than food, clothing, education, and maybe a spanking now and then. They were no longer seen as "little savages," barbarians who needed civilizing, or corrupt sinners who would go to Hell unless they were baptized immediately. Instead, they were "little angels," pure and innocent, born "trailing clouds of glory" as they descended from heaven. Therefore they had to be kept innocent of the more graphic aspects of life, like sex and death, and they needed love, nurturing, and constant care and attention. The number of children per family declined, both because they would no longer be providing economic support for the family and because each child now required a greater investment of time and emotional energy.

In modern societies, children don't often work alongside their parents, and the family has become a unit of consumption rather than production; its economic security is tied to the workplace and the national economy. Instead, the major functions of the family are to provide lifelong psychological support and emotional security. The family has been so closely associated with love and belonging that friends and even groups of co-workers express their emotional intimacy by saying they are "a family."

The nuclear family, with its strict division of household labor, is a relatively recent historical invention—and does not apply to all cultures, even in the United States. In this Chicano family, everyone cooks, so everyone eats.

Family and Ethnicity

The contemporary American nuclear family—the breadwinning husband, his homemaker wife, and their 2.2 children, who live in a detached single-family house in a suburb we call Anytown, USA—developed historically. But even today, it is only one of several family forms. Families vary not only from culture to culture but also within our society—by race and ethnicity. As each racial and ethnic group has a different history, their family units developed in different ways, in response to different conditions. For example, how can we understand the modern African American family outside the deliberate policies of slavery whereby families were broken up and husbands, wives, and children deliberately sold to different slave owners, so as to dilute the power of family as a tie of loyalty to something other than the master?

Sociologists are interested in the diversity of family forms by race and ethnicity. Some of these differences are now so well documented that to enumerate them sounds almost like a stereotype. And, to be sure, each ethnic group exhibits wide variation in their families. Sociologists are also interested in the process by which one family form became the standard against which all other family forms were measured—and found wanting. In addition, although these family adaptations are seen largely among ethnic minorities, they are also seen among the White working class, which suggests that they are less "ethnic" adaptations to a White family norm and more "class" adaptations to a middle- and upper-class family norm. As each ethnic group develops a stable middle class, their families come to resemble the companionate-marriage nuclear family of the White middle class. It may be the case not that the nuclear family is inevitable, but that it is *expensive*—and that without significant governmental support, it does not flourish.

The European American Family

This family form that became the dominant model was itself the product of a variety of social factors that are unlikely to return. Based initially on the Anglo-Irish family of the seventeenth century, the European American family has also taken on characteristics from each of the large immigrant groups, especially those that arrived in the late nineteenth century. Many of these immigrant families were Catholic and did not use birth control, so their families tended to be larger than those of the Protestant immigrants, who did practice birth control.

But the contemporary family is also the result of deliberate social policies beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century. These policies held up a specific model as normal and natural and then endeavored to fulfill that vision by prohibitions on women's entry into the workplace or pushing them out once they found their way there, ideologies of motherhood and birth control to limit family size, a "eugenics" movement that demanded that all new immigrants conform to a specific standard of marriage and family, and a new educational and child-rearing ideology that specified how parents should raise their children. American families have always been subject to deliberate policies to encourage certain types of families and discourage others, a process that continues today.

The end of World War II saw the largest infusion of government funding toward the promotion of this new nuclear family—the interstate highway system that promoted flight to the suburban tract homes, the massive spending on public schools in those suburbs, and policy initiatives coupled with ideologies that pushed women out of manufacturing work and back into the home, while their veteran husbands were reabsorbed into the labor force or went to college on the GI Bill.

The family form that finally emerged in the 1950s—idealized in classic situation comedies of the 1950s and early 1960s like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* on that newly emergent and culturally unifying medium, television—was far less a naturally emergent evolutionary adaptation and far more the anomalous result of deliberate social planning.

The Native American Family

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, most Native Americans lived in small villages where extended families dominated; you could trace a blood relationship with almost everyone you knew, and most social interaction—from food distribution to village government—depended on kinship ties and obligations. Strangers were considered enemies unless they could be somehow included in the kinship network (Wilkinson, 1999). One of the primary means of creating kinship alliances was exogamy, the requirement that people marry outside of their clan. Marriages created allies, which were useful in any disputes with other clans in the tribe.

Native American families are, themselves, quite diverse. Most marriages are monogamous, but some tribes permitted polygyny, and a few permitted men to sleep with other women when their wives were pregnant or lactating. Many tribes, such as the Zuni and Hopi in the Southwest and the Iroquois in the Northeast, were matrilineal. Hopi children were raised by their mothers and uncles (and, to an extent, their fathers). Girls continued to live with their mothers throughout their lives. When they married, they brought their husbands home with them. When boys entered puberty, they moved into the men's ceremonial house. Eventually most of them married women of other clans and moved in with their wife's family.

The father had limited authority in the family: He was considered a guest in his wife's home, and her brothers or cousins made all of the major economic and child-rearing decisions. Children went to their uncle, not their father, for approval of their life choices.

Still, children—especially boys—learned a lot from their fathers. Although uncles had the greatest authority over their life decisions, their biological fathers taught them their occupational skills, hunting, herding animals, or growing crops.

Native American family and kinship systems were developed to provide for people's fundamental needs, such as producing enough food and defending against outsiders. Although kin often shared strong emotional bonds, families did not develop primarily out of people's desire for love, intimacy, and personal fulfillment but out of the desire to survive.

Native Americans are often torn between the social norms of their traditional culture and those of the dominant society (Garrett, 1999; Yellowbird and Snipp, 1994). One-third marry outside their ethnicity, and the extended family model of the tribal society is common only on the reservations. In the cities, most Native Americans live in nuclear families (Sandefur and Sakamoto, 1988).

As with other minority groups, social problems such as poverty put significant strains on both extended and nuclear families (Harjo, 1999; Strong, 2004).

Native Americans are often torn between the social norms of their traditional culture and those of the dominant society. This grandfather shows his grandson how to mend fishing nets. ▼

The African American Family

Before slavery was abolished, most slaves in the United States and elsewhere were prohibited from legal marriages.

It was common practice to separate husbands and wives, and children and parents, on arrival and to make sure they were sold to different plantations, which, slave owners reasoned, would keep them more obedient and less likely to maintain any attachments other than to the plantation. As a result, slaves created their own permanent marital bonds, developing strong kinship ties similar to those in the extended family models of West Africa. Mutual aid and emotional support remained centered in kinship long after slavery (Strong, 2004).

Since the early 1970s, economic changes have resulted in a massive loss of blue-collar jobs (disproportionately held by minorities), and as a result the nuclear family model has become even less common. African Americans have lower marriage rates and higher divorce rates than other ethnic groups (Clarkwest, 2006) and a greater percentage of single mothers. Over half of African American families consist of only one parent, usually the mother.

The completely self-sufficient nuclear family model is difficult enough with two parents, but only one parent, trying to provide full-time emotional and financial support, is often severely overextended. As a survival mechanism, many African American communities have adopted the convention of "fictive kinship"—that is, stretching the boundaries of kinship to include nonblood relations, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, who are obligated to help out in hard times and whom one is obligated to help out in turn (Stack, 1974).

Fictive kinship can also extend to women who have children with the same man. Far from considering each other competition or "home wreckers," they often consider each other kin, with the same bonds of obligation and emotional support due to sisters or sisters-in-law. When a woman has children with several different men, each of whom has children with several different women, the bonds of fictive kinship can extend across a community.

The Asian American Family

Asian Americans trace their ancestry to many different cultural groups in more than 20 languages, so they brought many different family systems to the United States with them. The more recent the immigration, the more closely their family system reflects that of their original culture. But even third- and fourth-generation families, who are demographically almost identical to White middle-class nuclear families (same percentage of married couples, two-parent families, and male heads of household), show some differences in orientation and family style.

Suzuki (1985) studied Chinese American and Japanese American families and found that the roles and responsibilities of various family members are based on the Confucian principles that have informed Chinese society for 2,000 years. They are more collectively based than Euro-American families, emphasizing the family as a unit rather than a group of individuals. Grown-up Euro-American children may reject their parents' wishes, saying "I have to live my own life," but Chinese and Japanese American children are more concerned about not bringing shame or dishonor to the family.

Euro-American families tend to be democratic, with every member having a voice in such decisions as what to have for dinner or where to go on vacation. In contrast, Chinese and Japanese American families are more hierarchical. Parents and older siblings exert authority over children and younger siblings and require respect and obedience from them. The only exceptions are made for gender—in some situations, boys may have authority over their mothers and older sisters.

The Hispanic Family

Like Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans trace their ancestry to many different cultures with different languages, religions, and different family systems: Cuban families are very different from Puerto Rican families, which are very different from Chicano families, and so on (Baca Zinn, 2005; Carrasquillo, 1994). Also like Asian Americans, the more recently Hispanic Americans have arrived in the United States, the more closely their family system resembles that of their original culture.

Demographically, Hispanic families fall somewhat between Euro-American and African American families. Most are nuclear families, but they do have characteristics of extended families, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and more distant relatives living close together, visiting each other frequently, and bearing some of the responsibilities for child rearing and emotional support.

They tend to be hierarchical by age and gender, like Asian American families, but here, too, Hispanic families exhibit significant variation. Chicano and Puerto Rican families are more egalitarian than Dominican and Cuban families; and those from South America are somewhat more likely to be middle class, smaller, and more egalitarian than those from the Caribbean.

Gender equality also increases with length of residence in the United States. The longer the family has been in the United States, the more egalitarian it will tend to be. The families of second- and third-generation immigrants tend to be more egalitarian than families of older generations (Chilman, 1999; Wilkinson, 1999). This is probably the result of social mobility rather than ethnicity—the longer the residence in the United States, the more likely is the family to belong to the middle class.

Forming Families

Sociologists study the variations in the family form and also the processes by which we form families. To most of us, it probably seems pretty straightforward: After a few years of dating, you become increasingly serious with one special someone, you fall in love, you gradually realize that this one is "it," and you decide to marry. Historically, this has been a process known as courtship, the intensification and institutionalization of an intimate relationship from meeting to mating to marrying. And it is so common, so casually assumed, we often have no idea just how unusual and recent this process is.

Courtship and Dating

In the famous musical *Fiddler on the Roof,* a drama that centers on the breakdown of a traditional Jewish family in a small Russian village in the late nineteenth century, as each of the three daughters chooses to marry an increasingly troublesome man, the girls' parents reminisce about their courtship. "The first time I met you was on our wedding day," Golde tells her husband, Tevye. That was not uncommon. So he asks if she loves him. "Do I what?!?" she answers.

Courtship was largely unknown in ancient society. Marriages were arranged, and children often were betrothed (promised, engaged) as toddlers. But even in the days when marriages were arranged by parents, children often had a voice in the selection process, and they found ways to meet and evaluate potential partners so they could make their preferences known. By the turn of the twentieth century, they were classmates

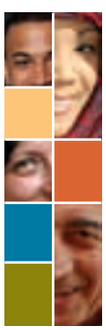
▲ **On campuses, the preferred mode of social and sexual interaction is "hooking up," which usually consists of some form of sexual activity with someone you know, who is connected to your social network, and is not expected to lead to a relationship.**

at coed high schools, and they formed romantic bonds with people that their parents didn't even know.

The custom of dating, engaging in recreational activities in pairs rather than groups and with the goal of establishing or strengthening a romantic commitment, did not arise until the 1920s. Children of working-class immigrants in major American cities were trying to distance themselves from the old-fashioned supervised visits that their parents insisted on, and fortunately they enjoyed both a great deal of personal freedom and a wide range of brand-new entertainment venues (Bailey, 1989).

By the 1930s, the custom had spread to the middle class. College-aged men and women participated in a process called "rating and dating," whereby they were rated on their desirability as a date and would ask or accept dates only with people of similar ratings. Dating was based on physical attractiveness, social desirability, and other qualities—not family name and position. Most importantly, dating was supervised and scrutinized by one's peer group, not one's parents (Nock, 2003).

College and high school became the time of unparalleled freedom for American youth and were increasingly taken up by dating and courtship. Campus wits joked that girls were attending college just to get their "Mrs." degree. By the 1950s, parents were eagerly awaiting their son or daughter's first date as a sign of their entry into adulthood. There were many stages: casual dating, going steady (dating only one person), being pinned (wearing a class ring or pin as a sign of commitment), and finally becoming engaged. Boys and girls were supposed to begin dating early in high school and date many people over the period of years, perhaps going steady several times, until they found "the one" to marry. But not for too many years: "Still dating" in the late 20s was considered sad and slightly unwholesome. In the 1970s, the increased incidence of divorce sent many



Sociology and our World

Dating in Japan

In 1955, parents arranged 63 percent of all marriages in Japan. In 1998, the percentage had dropped to 7 percent (Retherford, Ogawa, and Matsukura, 2001). Yet, relative to the United States, Japan has not developed a strong dating culture. You're not expected to bring a date to every recreational activity, and if you're not dating anyone at the moment, your friends don't feel sorry for you and try to fix you up. The expectation that dating leads to marriage is also absent. Japanese television and other mass media don't glorify marriage and ridicule or pity single people, as American television often does (Ornstein, 2001).

Outside of high school and college, there are few places where single men and women meet and interact. Forty-five percent of heterosexual women over the age of 16 say that they have no male friends at all. However, practically all of the heterosexual women with one or more male friends have engaged in premarital sex (probably with the male friends) (Retherford et al., 2001).

With no societal push to marriage and premarital sex available, it is no wonder that they don't feel pressured into getting married right away, or at all. In 2001, schoolgirls around the world were asked whether they agreed with the statement that "everyone should be married." Three-quarters of American schoolgirls agreed. But 88 percent of Japanese schoolgirls disagreed (Coontz, 2005).

people in their middle years into the world of dating again, until there was little stigma about dating at the age of 30, 40, or 50.

Today it seems that everyone is dating. Kindergarteners go on "play dates," married couples go on dates, and the recently widowed or divorced are encouraged to date again almost immediately. Internet dating sites are among the Web's most popular, and your potential dates are neatly categorized by age, gender, race, and sexual orientation. And yet it also seems that no one is dating. On campuses, the preferred mode of social and sexual interaction is "hooking up," which is so loose and indiscriminate that its connection to dating and mating has been lost.

Marriage

Marriage is the most common foundation for family formation in the world. The marriage of two people—a woman and a man—is universal in developed countries, although there are significant variations among different cultures.

Marriage is not identical to a nuclear family, although the two tend to go together. One can imagine, for example, marriage as a relationship between two people who are, themselves, embedded in an extended family or a communal child-rearing arrangement (such as the kibbutz). Sociologically, its universality suggests that marriage forms a stable, long-lasting, and secure foundation for the family's functions—child socialization, property transfer, legitimacy, sexual regulation—to be securely served.

Marriage is also a legal arrangement, conferring various social, economic, and political benefits on the married couple. This is because the state regards marriage—that is, stable families—as so important that it is willing to provide economic and social incentives to married couples. As a result, people who have been legally excluded from marrying—the mentally ill, gays and lesbians—have sought to obtain that right as well.

Marriage is certainly not the only living arrangement for people in society. In America between 1900 and 2000, the number of adults living alone increased by 21 percent, single parents and children by 11 percent, unmarried partners by 63 percent, and unmarried partners with their children by 89 percent. In several developing countries, marriage is also occurring later and bringing with it numerous positive social outcomes. In industrialized countries like the United States, the implications of the shift toward later marriage and less marriage are a source of extensive sociological research and social debate.

Multigenerational households (adults of more than one generation sharing domestic space) increased by 38 percent between 1990 and 2000, until today they comprise about 3 percent of all households. In about two-thirds, the grandparents are in charge of the family, sharing their home with their grown children and grandchildren (or only their grandchildren), while in about one-third, the grown children are in charge of the family, sharing their home with both their parents and their children (Figure 11.1).

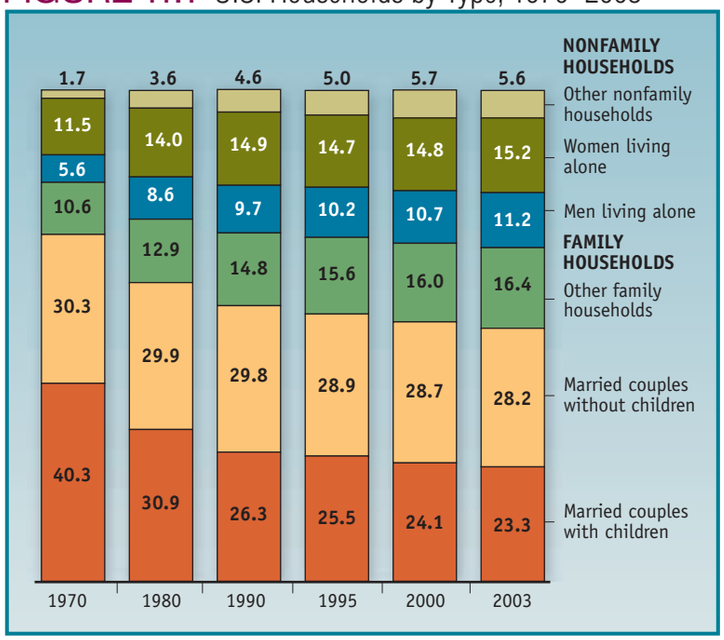
Marriage varies widely by race, ethnicity, education, and income. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of White women over 18 who make more than $100,000 a year are married, while only 25 percent of Black women over 18 who earn less than $20,000 per year are married (Center for Changing Families, 2007).

Marriage, itself, has changed. It no longer signifies adulthood or conveys the responsibilities and commitment that it once did. In a society where pop stars marry and divorce within a day but couples who have been

Did *you* know?

American men are more eager to marry than American women. From 1970 to the late 1990s, men's attitudes toward marriage became more favorable, while women's became less so. By the end of the century, more men than women said that marriage was their ideal lifestyle (Coontz, 2005).

FIGURE 11.1 U.S. Households by Type, 1970–2003



Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2004.

together for 30 years are forbidden from marrying, it is, in some people's eyes, discredited and corrupt. People are putting off marriage, cohabiting, or opting for singlehood. On the other hand, marriage has become more desirable than ever before, bringing together couples from varying backgrounds and repeat performers and inspiring many who've been excluded to fight for the right to marry. Some of these changes are temporary, like delayed marriage and, in most cases, cohabitation (which usually leads to marriage). Others, like singlehood, have become more permanent and less transitory.

Delayed Marriage. Early marriage—usually arranged by parents—is still the rule in sub-Saharan Africa and South and Central Asia. In Southern Asia, 48 percent of young women—nearly 10 million—are married before the age of 18. In Africa, it's 42 percent; in Latin America and the Caribbean, 29 percent. More than half of all girls under 18 are married in some countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and India. In Ethiopia and some areas of West Africa, some girls are married as early as age 7 (UN Population Fund, 2005). However, the prevalence is decreasing significantly around the world. Since 1970, the median age of first marriage has risen substantially worldwide—for men from 25.4 years to 27.2 and for women from 21.5 to 23.2 (UNFPA, 2005).

In the United States, young people are experiencing longer periods of independent living while working or attending school before marriage. A 25-year-old American man today is far more likely to be single and childless than he would have been 50 years ago—or even 25 years ago. Among 25-year-old women, the fastest-growing demographic status is single, working, childless, head of household (Fussell and Furstenberg, 2004). The United States still has one of the industrial world's *lowest* age for first marriage (Table 11.1).

While the age of marriage is increasing worldwide, child marriages are still common in many countries. This Kurdish couple appears to be about 10. ▼

Differences among Black, White, and foreign-born populations in education and labor market opportunities have narrowed since the 1960s, creating more similarities in the lives of people of color and their White peers (Fussell and Furstenberg, 2004). However, significant educational and economic inequalities, in addition to cultural differences, mean that different groups will continue to vary in the ages of first marriage (Guzzo, 2003; Martin, 2004).

Staying Single. Not long ago, people who were "still not married" by their late 20s were considered deviant. Men were considered "big babies," who "refused to grow up" and "settle down." Women were "old maids," thought to be too unattractive or socially inept to attract a husband.

But singlehood has become commonplace, if not exactly respectable. Just over half of all Americans aged 25 (50.3 percent)

and over are not married or cohabiting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Sixty-three percent of all unmarried Americans have never been married. Although the percentage of single people is rising for all Americans, those rates vary considerably by race and ethnicity. Between 1970 and 2000, the proportion of White adults who had never married rose from 16 percent to 20 percent, 19 percent to 28 percent among Hispanics, and 21 percent to 39 percent among African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

In Europe, the proportion of women who have never married ranges from 7 percent in Bulgaria to 36 percent in Iceland. The proportion of men is substantially higher.

Women are more likely to be single than men. In fact, the majority of American women (51 percent) is living without a spouse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Single women are better educated, are better employed, and have better mental health than single men (Fowlkes, 1994; Marks, 1996).

TABLE 11.1 Age at First Marriage

	MEN	WOMEN
Poland	26.9	23.7
United States	27.4	25.8
France	29.7	27.7
Austria	30.5	28.1
Netherlands	31.0	29.1
Sweden	32.4	30.1
Denmark	32.8	30.3
Switzerland	35.0	31.3

Source: Trends in Europe and North America: The Statistical Yearbook of the Economic Commission for Europe 2003. Geneva: An Economic Commission for Europe.

Cohabiting. **Cohabitation** refers to unmarried people in a romantic relationship living in the same residence. A few decades ago, when nonmarital sex was illegal in most states, cohabitation was virtually impossible—landlords wouldn't rent to people unless they were related by blood or marriage. Hotel managers could lose their license if they rented rooms to unrelated people. Today, cohabitation has become commonplace, largely lacking in social disapproval (Smock, 2000). Almost half of people 25 to 40 years of age in the United States have cohabited, and 60 percent of all marriages formed in the 1990s began with cohabitation (Teachman, 2003).

Globally, cohabitation is common in liberal countries—in Sweden, it is four times as prevalent as in the United States. That is largely because those countries provide universal health care and education to everyone, so you don't need to get married to be covered by your spouse's health plan or to ensure your children can go to university. However, it is rare in more conservative countries and remains illegal in some countries.

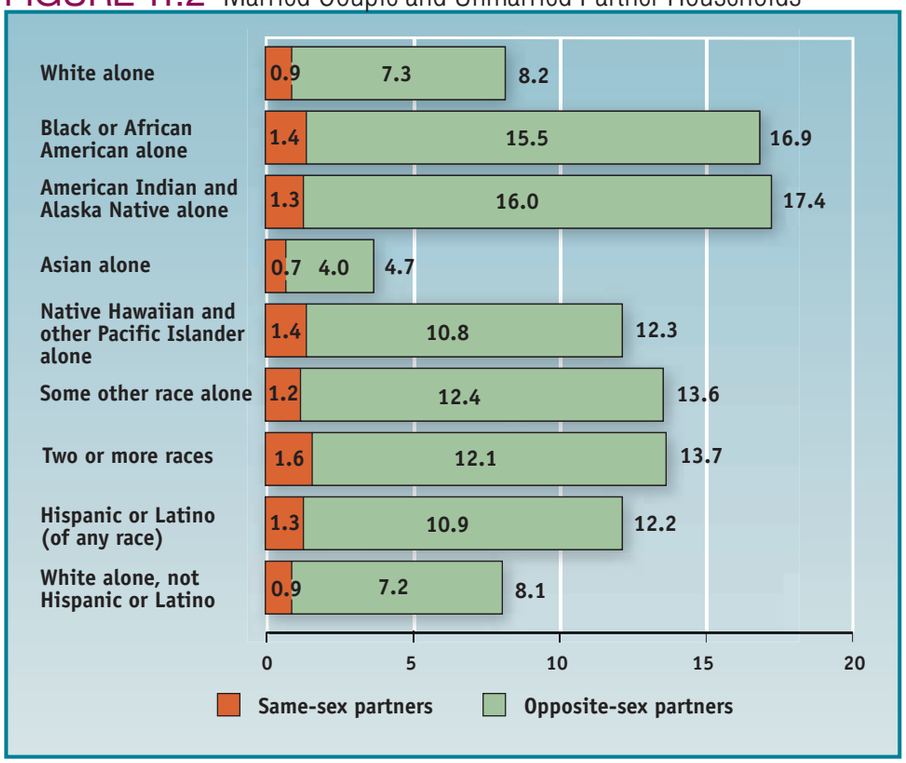
Almost half of people 25 to 40 in the United States have cohabited, and 60 percent of all marriages formed in the 1990s began with cohabitation. ▼

Is cohabitation a stage of courtship, somewhere between dating and marriage, sort of the equivalent of "going steady" among high school students? Many scholars and cohabiters think so—in the 1980s, it was even called "trial marriage." Women cohabiters are more likely to desire marriage than men (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983), but about 25 percent do not expect to marry the man they are currently living with. Their biggest inhibiting factor is not his willingness but his socioeconomic status: They want to marry someone with greater economic potential. Some look at it as a "trial marriage," some as an experience that might or might not lead to marriage with their current partner (like dating), and others as a stable, nonmarital alternative that they could happily pursue for the rest of their lives (Fowlkes, 1994; Seltzer, 2001).

But for some cohabiters, their living situation has nothing to do with marriage. More than one million elderly Americans cohabit—for a significant financial reason. While the government strongly encourages marriage among the young and middle-aged with tax cuts and other benefits, elderly men and women receiving Social Security cannot marry without losing a significant percentage of their combined individual incomes (Brown, Lee, and Bulanda, 2006; Chevan, 1996).

Race and social class have an impact on who will cohabit and who will marry. Despite the popular assumption that cohabitation is a

FIGURE 11.2 Married Couple and Unmarried Partner Households



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

lifestyle of the rich and famous—or at least the affluent and educated—it is actually more common among working-class and poor people with less education and financial resources (Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Casper and Bianchi, 2002). One in ten adult Hispanic women currently cohabit, and 9 percent of White women, but only 6 percent of African American women (Fields and Casper, 2001; Figure 11.2).

A lot of research has been conducted on the emotional stability of cohabiting couples. Some research finds that cohabiting women are more prone to depression than married women, especially if there are children involved. Maybe they are more prone to stress because they know that their unions can dissolve more easily than marriages; if they dissolve, there will be no legal means of distributing household resources equitably, and no spousal support after the "divorce."

Explanations of Nonmarital Choices. Sociologists offer numerous explanations for the increases in delayed marriage, singlehood, and cohabitation. First, these changes are partially explained by new practices, such as courtship and dating. After all, arranged marriages usually take place when the children are younger. But courtship and dating are linked to the worldwide increase in the status of women. While it's true that arranged marriages affected both boys and girls, increased individual choice of marriage partners enables more women to seek educational and economic advancement and rests on increasing choices for women.

Second, these changes tend to be associated with higher levels of education—for both males and females.

Third, these changes are partially explained by changing sexual behaviors and attitudes, especially increased acceptance of "premarital sex." For a long time, sexual activity before marriage was referred to as "premarital" because it was assumed that the couple involved would be in a serious, committed relationship and intend to marry. However, some people engage in sexual relations during a casual dating relationship, when marriage has not yet become a topic of discussion. Some view sex as an appropriate conclusion to a first date. Still others "hook up" and don't even go as far as dating. Others never intend to marry, or they lack the right to marry, but they still have sex, sometimes in committed relationships, sometimes not. Therefore, a more precise term might be **nonmarital sex**—sex that is not related to marriage.

In wealthy countries, especially in northern Europe, nonmarital sex has become increasingly acceptable, even during the teen years. These countries provide sex education and health care services aimed at equipping young people to avoid negative consequences of sex by encouraging contraceptive use. In the United States, public attitudes toward nonmarital sex have changed significantly over the past 20 years. In a national survey in the early 1970s, 37 percent of respondents said that nonmarital sex is always wrong. By 1990 this number had fallen to 20 percent (Michael et al., 1994). However, social and political institutions have changed more slowly. As a result, rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are much lower in Europe than in the United States, although their rates of sexual activity are no higher. Teen abortions are also low, even though abortion services are widely available (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999).

Biracial Marriage

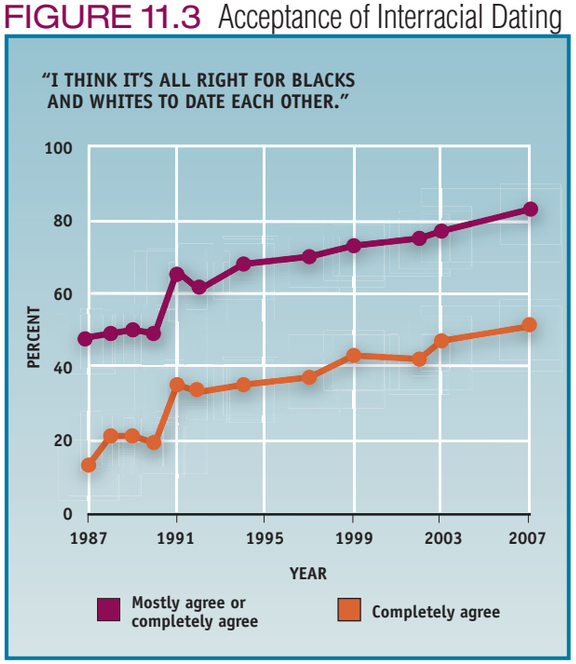
Through most of the history of the United States, marriage or sexual relations between men and women of different races were illegal. Not until the Supreme Court's *Loving vs. State of Virginia* decision of 1967 were men and women of different races permitted to marry in all U.S. states.

Social barriers still place dating, courtship, and marriage within clear racial categories. However, interracial marriage is evolving from virtually nonexistent to merely atypical. Today, 5 percent of the population of the United States claims ancestry in two or more races, and 22 percent of Americans have a relative in a mixed-race marriage (Pew Research Center, 2007). Blacks are twice as likely as Whites to have an immediate family member in an interracial marriage, while Hispanics fall in the middle of those two groups. The most common interracial couple in the United States is a White husband married to an Asian wife (14 percent of all interracial couples).

Euro-Americans are least likely to intermarry: Only 3.5 percent of White, non-Hispanic individuals are married to someone of another race. And non-Hispanic Whites, along with people over 65, are less accepting of interracial dating than are African Americans, Hispanics, and younger people of all races (Pew Research Center, 2007; Figure 11.3).

For Black–White couples, the most common pattern (73 percent) is a White woman and an African American man. Among cohabiting couples, there is even a sharper gap: Five times as many Black men live with White women as White

FIGURE 11.3 Acceptance of Interracial Dating



Source: From "Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987–2007: Political Landscape More Favorable to Democrats," released March 22, 2007. Reprinted by permission of Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

▲ **To some, gay marriage is an indication that the family is falling apart; to others, that it has never been stronger and more desirable. A very "traditional" church wedding—in a gay and lesbian church.**

men with Black women. Oddly, in the mass media, Black man–White women couples are almost nonexistent. Instead, we see a proliferation of White men and Black women, from Joey and Chandler dating a famous paleontologist (who happens to be a young Black woman) on *Friends* to Rose and her husband on *Lost*.

For Asian–White couples, the most common pattern (over 75 percent) is White men and Asian women. The difference is less severe in cohabitation: Twice as many White men are living with Asian women as Asian men living with White women. Asian–Black pairings are rare, but they are even more unbalanced than interracial pairings involving Whites. Black husband–Asian wife patterns outnumber Asian husband–Black wife by 6 to 1.

There is little imbalance among Hispanics. Just under 18 percent of married Hispanic women have non-Hispanic husbands, and just over 15 percent of married Hispanic men have non-Hispanic wives.

Same-Sex Marriage

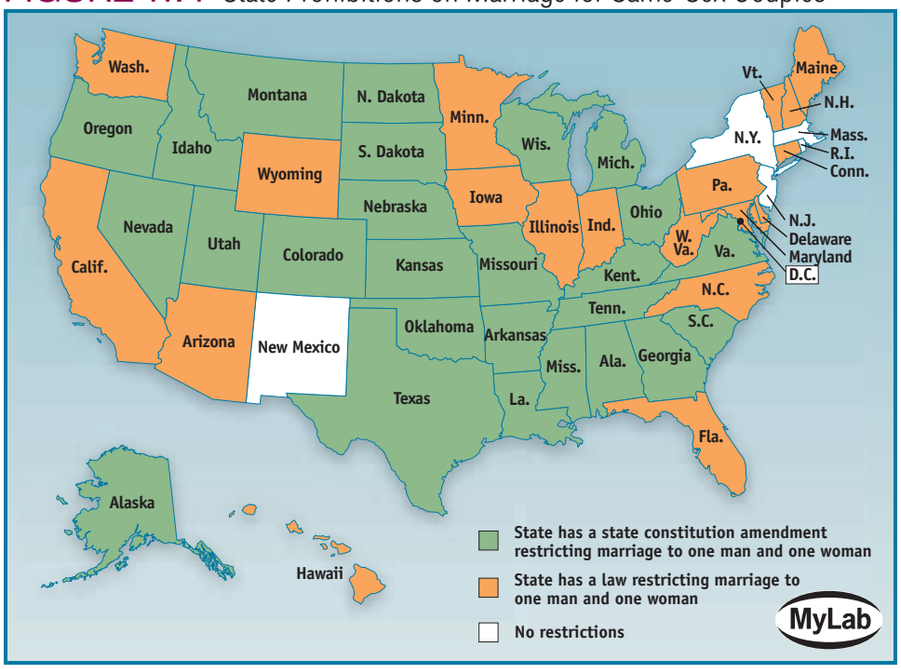
Same-sex couples have been cohabiting for hundreds of years, although sometimes societal pressures forced them to pretend that they were not couples at all. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, middle-class men often "hired" their working-class partners as valets or servants, so they could live together without question. Sometimes they pretended to be brothers or cousins. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was so common for women to spend their lives together that there was a special name for their bonds, "Boston marriages."

Recent research allows us to paint a portrait of the typical lesbian or gay couple, at least the ones who are open (all following data are from Ambert, 2005; Bianchi and Casper, 2000; Black et al., 2000):

1. *They're urban.* More than half of lesbian or gay male couples live in just 20 U.S. cities, including "gay meccas" like Los Angeles; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; New York; and Atlanta.
2. *They're well educated.* They tend to have higher educational attainments than men and women in heterosexual marriages.
3. *They are less likely to have children.* Fifty-nine percent of married couples versus 22 percent of lesbian couples and 5 percent of gay male couples are living with children of their own. Most are the products of previous heterosexual marriages, although artificial insemination and adoption are increasingly common.
4. *They are less likely to own their own homes than married couples.*
5. *They tend to be more egalitarian.* They are more likely to share decision making and allot housework more equally than married couples and have less conflict as a result (Allen and Demo, 1995; Carrington, 2002).

And they are not permitted to marry in the United States. As of 2006, 26 states had a constitutional amendment restricting marriage to one man and one women, 19 states had a law (not affecting their constitution) restricting marriage to a man and a woman, and the United States is debating a federal constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). Nineteen states have constitutional amendments that bar gay or lesbian couples from emergency health care, inheritance, and

FIGURE 11.4 State Prohibitions on Marriage for Same-Sex Couples



Source: "State Prohibitions on Marriage for Same-Sex Couple" from *Human Rights Campaign,* November, 2006.

more than 1,000 other rights that heterosexual couples enjoy (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). As of mid-2007, five states provided the equivalent of state-level spousal rights to gay couples and three states plus Washington, D.C., provided some statewide spousal rights (Figure 11.4).

However, reserving marriage and domestic partnerships to men and women applies only in the United States. As of this writing, same-sex couples can marry or enter into civil partnerships with the same rights as heterosexual couples in most European countries and can enter into civil partnerships with most of the same rights as heterosexual couples in nine others, including Brazil, France, Israel, South Africa, and Switzerland.

Parenting

Just as children have never been so important in our cultural values, parents have never been considered so important in the lives of their children. More people have wanted to become parents than ever before, including some who would rarely have considered parenting just 20 or 30 years ago: teenagers, 50-year-olds, gay and lesbian couples, infertile heterosexual couples. Ironically, even though parents are thought to be so utterly decisive in the outcomes of their children's lives, we also seem to believe that it's all hereditary, and socialization plays a very minor role in how our children turn out. Of course, to a sociologist, both sides are true: Parental socialization of children is enormously important, and parents also overvalue their role. The questions, as you've learned in this book, are not whether or not parents are important or biology trumps

▲ **More people are able to become parents today than ever before, including 50-year-olds, gay and lesbian couples, and infertile heterosexual couples. In 2006, Lauren Cohen, 59, of New Jersey, became the oldest woman in the United States to give birth to twins.**

socialization, but in which arenas and under what circumstances does parental influence make a decisive difference, and does it do this in all groups, around the world?

And while it's true that children have never been so valued and desired, it's equally true that they have never been so undervalued and neglected. Children around the world are facing poor health care, compromised education, and the lack of basic services. In the United States, families get virtually no financial assistance to raise their children, although they receive a lot of advice about having them.

The core relationship of the family has always been between parents and children. Yet today that bond has been both loosened by other forces pulling families apart (like technology and overscheduling) and tightened by ideas that only parents know what is best for their children. It may be the case that the less time parents spend with their children, the more we insist that they spend time together.

Gender and Parenting

Although the majority of women are now working outside the home, numerous studies have confirmed that domestic work remains women's work (Gerstel and Gross, 1995). Most people agree with the statement that housework should be shared equally between both partners, and more men in male–female households are sharing some of the housework and child care, especially when the woman's earnings are essential to family stability (Perry-Jenkins and Crouter, 1990). But still, the women in male–female households do about two-thirds of the housework (Bianchi et al., 2000). That includes child care: Mothers spend much more time than fathers interacting with their children. They do twice as much of the "custodial" care, the feeding and cleaning of the children (Bianchi, 2000; Pleck, 1997; Sayer, 2001). A survey of American secondary students revealed that 75 percent of girls but only 14 percent of boys who planned to have children thought that they would stop working for awhile, and 28 percent of girls but 73 percent of boys expected their partner to stop working or cut down on work hours (Bagamery, 2004).

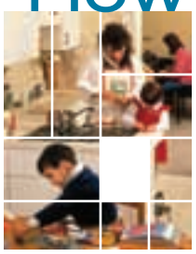
Over 5 million women are stay-at-home mothers, staying out of the workforce to care for their children (under the age of 15). However, there are only about 143,000 stay-at-home fathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

On the other hand, American fathers are more active and involved parents than ever before. Today's new fathers (those between 20 and 35 years old) do far more child care than their own fathers did and are willing to decline job opportunities if they include too much travel or overtime (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004).

Single-Parent Families

During the first half of the twentieth century, the primary cause of single-parent families was parental death. By the end of the century, most parents were living, but living elsewhere. Currently 12.2 million people in the United States, 10 million women and 2.2 million men, are single parents, raising children while unmarried. Single-parent families have become more common in all demographic groups, but the greatest increases have been among less-educated women and among African American families (Sidel, 2006). In 2002, 16 percent of White, non-Hispanic children were living in mother-only families, as were 25 percent of Hispanic children

How do we know what we know?



The Opt-Out Revolution

The popular view that children require round-the-clock care from Mom, not Dad or day care, has led millions of women to quit their jobs or take time off to raise their children—an "Opt-Out Revolution."

But is such a revolution really taking place? How do we know? Sociologist Kathleen Gerson and her colleagues examined the evidence that women were "opting out" of the workforce to be full-time mothers. What they found was that while it was true that between 1998 and 2002, the proportion of employed women with children under the age of one declined 4 percent from 59 percent to 55 percent, it was also true that 72 percent of mothers with children over the age of one are either working or looking for work.

One would expect that highly educated women with high-paying jobs would be the most likely to opt out, because they can afford to, but in fact they are less likely. Among mothers with children under the age of six, 75 percent of those with postgraduate degrees are working, as opposed to 65 percent of those with high school diplomas only. It turns out that one can see "opting out" only if one freezes time—at any one moment, there are, indeed, women who are leaving the labor force to raise their children. But they don't stay out; they go back to work soon after. And many would go back to work even sooner—if their husbands did a little more child care. (*Source:* Kathleen Gerson, New York University, 2003.)

and 48 percent of Black children. Sometimes the parents are cohabiting, but most often one parent lives elsewhere and does not contribute to the day-to-day emotional and economic support of the child. Sometimes the other parent is not in the picture at all.

Most single parents are not so by choice. The pregnancy may have been an unexpected surprise that prompted the father to leave, or the relationship ended, leaving one parent with custody. Young, unprepared mothers predominate: In 2002, 89 percent of teenage mothers were unmarried but only 12 percent of mothers aged 30 to 44 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). And yet an increasing number of women are choosing single motherhood, either through fertility clinics and sperm banks or through adoption. In 1990 alone, 170,000 single women over 30 gave birth. White college-educated women led this trend. The number who became mothers without marrying doubled during the 1980s; for those in professional and managerial jobs, it nearly tripled (Bock, 2000; DeParle, 1993; Hertz, 2006; Mattes, 1994).

Single mothers predominate both because it is easier for a father to become absent during the pregnancy and because mothers are typically granted custody in court cases. Although mothers predominate, the gender disparity varies from country to country. Among the countries for which data are available, Belgium has the smallest proportion of women who are the single parent ("only" 75 percent—that is, 25 percent of single parents are the fathers) with Norway, Sweden, and Finland close behind. Estonia has the largest (95 percent). Those countries in which women's status is higher would tend to have lower percentages of women who are single parents.

Grandparenting

Your kids grow up and go off to college, and your parenting is done. When they have kids of their own, you are not involved except for birthday cards and occasional visits at Thanksgiving. For good or bad, that's the nuclear family model. For good

or bad, it is increasingly inaccurate. The number of grandparents raising their grandchildren has grown from 2.2 million in 1970 to nearly 4 million today.

Of this last group, grandparents raising their grandchildren alone, they tend to be African American, living in urban centers, and poor. Twenty-seven percent of children being raised by grandparents (and 63 percent being raised by grandmothers alone) are living in poverty. They tend to be working full time: 72 percent of grandfathers and 56 percent of grandmothers, as opposed to 33 percent and 24 percent, respectively, who aren't raising their grandchildren.

What happened to the parents? Often the father has abandoned the child, and the mother is incompetent, in prison, or on drugs. Courts are much more likely to grant custody of a child to a blood relative than to a legal stranger. Grandparents can even legally adopt their grandchildren, in effect becoming their parents.

Adoptive Parents

When Angelina Jolie and Madonna each adopted babies from orphanages in Africa, they were ridiculed for trying to save the world one baby at a time. These Hollywood celebrities were not an elite vanguard but latecomers to a well-worn trend in the industrial world. In the United States alone there are 1.5 million adopted children—over 2 percent of all children (Fields, 2001).

Historically, adoption was considered an option to resolve an unwanted pregnancy—that is, it was about the biological mother. For centuries, all over Europe, foundling hospitals (hospitals that received unwanted newborn babies) enabled mothers to anonymously leave babies at a back door or on the steps, and nuns would find willing families to raise the children as their own. Today, however, the interest has shifted to the adoptive families, as more and more people who want to have children use various services to adopt babies. Adoption has shifted from being about helping "a girl in trouble" to "enabling a loving family to have a child."

There are many different types of adoptions, including:

- *Foster care adoption:* adoption of children in state care for whom reunification with their birth parents is not feasible for safety or other reasons.
- *Private adoption:* adoption either through an agency or independent networks.
- *Intercountry adoption (ICA):* adoption of children from other countries by U.S. citizens. The top three countries for international adoption in 2006 were China (6,500 adoptions), Guatemala (4,135), and Russia (3,706) (U.S. Department of State, 2007).
- *Transracial adoption:* adoption of a child of a different race from the adopting parents; this involves about 10 to 15 percent of all domestic adoptions and the vast majority of ICAs.

In the United States, there are 1.5 million adopted children—over 2 percent of all children. Movie star Angelina Jolie has adopted three, including daughter, Zahara, and son, Maddox (here with Jolie's partner, Brad Pitt). ▼

Motivations for adoption vary. The couple may be incapable of conceiving a child themselves; they may be infertile or gay. Some single women adopt, while others use assisted reproductive technologies to become pregnant. In some cases, fertile couples adopt because they choose to adopt.

Adoption seems to have largely beneficial effects for all concerned (birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees). However, a sizeable minority of birth parents characterize their adoption experiences as traumatic, and many birth parents and

What do you think?

MyLab

Attitudes toward Abortion

A central function of the institution of the family is to produce new members of society. Hence, family planning is a key element of the institution. Whether, and when, to have children is a personal or family decision, yet this decision is informed by societal norms and laws. Let's look at how you and other Americans view abortion and at how attitudes toward abortion have changed or not over time. So, what do you think?

Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if:

1. The woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
   - ❍ Yes
   - ❍ No
2. She is married and does not want any more children?
   - ❍ Yes
   - ❍ No
3. The family has a low income and cannot afford any more children?
   - ❍ Yes
   - ❍ No
4. She became pregnant as a result of rape?
   - ❍ Yes
   - ❍ No

See the back of the chapter to compare your answers to national survey data.

Source: General Social Survey, 2004.

adoptees spend significant time trying to locate each other and experience some reunions or closure in their relationships.

The number of adoptions by nonrelatives has declined sharply since 1970. The availability of birth control and legal abortion has meant that fewer women are having unwanted children, and adoption is still stigmatized in the United States; it is seen, as one sociologist put it, as "not quite as good as having your own" (Fisher, 2003).

Not Parenting

Childlessness is becoming increasingly common. In 1976, about 10 percent of women aged 40 to 44 (near the end of their childbearing years) had never conceived a child. By 2000, the percentage had grown to 18 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Education is an important predictor of childlessness: The more education a woman has, the more likely she is to bear no children. Race is also significant: Hispanic women are much less likely to expect no children than White and Black women. The longer women put off children, the more likely they are to opt out of having children altogether, perhaps because they become accustomed to a child-free lifestyle.

However, people have many reasons for remaining "child-free by choice," from concern about overpopulation to a desire to concentrate on their career to just not liking children. In one study, women said they enjoyed the freedom and spontaneity in their lives, while some others gave financial considerations, worries about stress, marriages too fragile to withstand children, being housebound, and diminished career

opportunities (Gerson, 1985). Men usually cite more practical considerations, including commitment to career and concern about the financial burden (Lunneborg, 1999).

Family Transitions

Through most of European and American history, marriage was a lifelong commitment, period. Divorce and remarriage were impossible. Though couples could live separately and find legal loopholes to avoid inheritance laws, they could never marry anyone else. In the sixteenth century, the English King Henry VIII had to behead two wives, divorce two others, found a new church (the Anglican Church), and close all the monasteries in England to get out of marriages he didn't like. Today, it's a little bit easier.

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage. Grounds for divorce may vary from "no-fault" divorces in which one party files for divorce or those divorces that require some "fault" on the part of one spouse or the other (adultery, alienation of affection, or some other reason). Divorces are decrees that dissolve a marriage; they do not dissolve the family. Parents must still work out custody arrangements of children, alimony payments, child support. Just because they are no longer husband and wife does not mean they are no longer Mommy and Daddy.

In the United States, the divorce rate rose steadily from the 1890s through the 1970s (with a dip in the Depression and a spike after World War II). During the past 25 years, it has fallen significantly, along with marriage rates overall. The annual national divorce rate is at its lowest since 1970, while marriage is down 30 percent and the number of unmarried couples living together is up tenfold since 1960 ("The State of Divorce," 2007, p. 6).

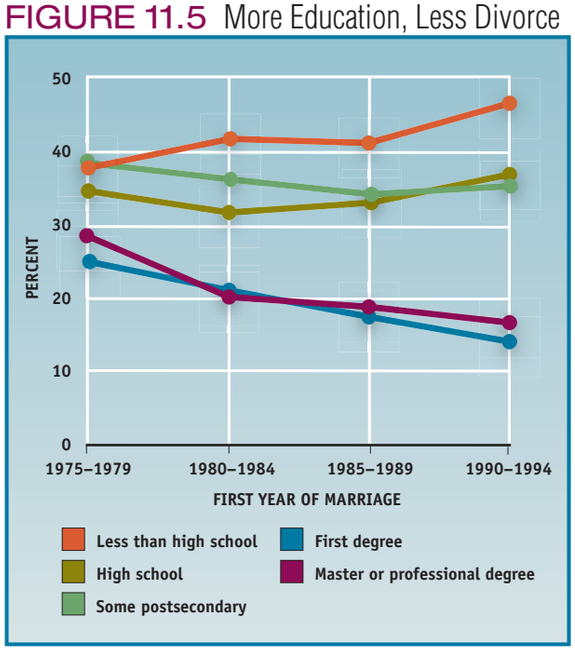
These trends are led by the middle class. At the lower end of the scale, however, the picture is reversed, leading some sociologists to describe a "divorce divide" based on class and race (Martin, 2006; Figure 11.5).

Whatever these different sociological dimensions, some commentators broadly blame divorce for nearly every social ill, from prostitution (where else are divorced men to turn?) to serial murder (evidently watching their parents break up has kids reaching for the nearest pickax). More moderate voices worry that quick and easy divorce undermines the institution of the family, forcing the divorced adults to start courting again when they should be engaged in child rearing and teaching children that dysfunction is the norm.

Sociologists understand that both statements are, at least, partially true. Some people believe that the easy availability of divorce weakens our belief in the institution of marriage. On the other hand, sociologists often counter that divorce makes families stronger by allowing an escape from damaging environments and enabling both parents and children to adapt to new types of relationships.

Who usually wants the divorce? On the average, men become more content with their marriages over time, while women become less content; the wife is usually the one who wants out. A study of divorces that occurred after age 40 found that wives initiated two-thirds of them (Coontz, 2005).

FIGURE 11.5 More Education, Less Divorce



Source: Adapted from "Trends in Marital Dissolution by Women's Education in the United States" by Steven P. Martin, *Demographic Research,* December 13, 2006, Vol. 15, #20, pp. 537–560, © 2006 Steven P. Martin. Reprinted by permission.

The Consequences of Divorce

Married couples opt for divorce for all sorts of reasons, and the divorce itself can be easy or hard, so it is understandable that research on the impact of divorce on the husband and wife is mixed. Some studies find that people are happier after their divorce than before (Wilson and Oswald, 2005). Others find psychological scars that never heal unless the divorcees remarry (Johnson and Wu, 2002). Still others find that individual attitudes make the difference in well-being after a divorce (Amato and Sobolewski, 2001; Wood, Goesling and Avellar, 2007).

Economically, there is clearer evidence about losses and gains. In a large majority of divorces, women's standards of living decline, while men's go up. Those men who are used to being the primary breadwinner may suddenly find that they are supporting one (plus a small amount for child support) on a salary that used to support the whole family. Those women who are more accustomed to being in charge of the household, with a secondary, part-time, or even no job, may suddenly find that their income must stretch from being a helpful supplement to supplying most of the family's necessities.

It is crucial to remember that the breadwinning husband with an income-supplementing a stay-at-home wife has rarely been an option for many minority families. Black women, for example, have a longer history of workforce participation than women of other races (Page and Stevens, 2005). Divorce plays an even bigger economic role for Black households than for Whites in the United States, partly because of this difference. While family income for Whites falls about 30 percent during the first 2 years of divorce, it falls by 53 percent for Blacks (Page and Stevens, 2005). Three or more years after divorce, White households recoup about one-third of the lost income, but the income of Black families barely improves. This may have to do with the fact that when divorce occurs, the probability of Black mothers working does not change, while recently divorced White women have an 18 percent greater probability of working (Page and Stevens, 2005).

After a divorce, children of all races and ethnicities are still more likely to live with the mother, while the father visits on specified days or weeks. Not only do the children have to handle this new living situation, but many will soon move to a new home, enroll in a new school, and face the stress and depression of a mother who has suddenly entered or reentered the workforce as the primary breadwinner. And that's when the divorce is amicable. At times there is open hostility between the mother and father, with each telling the children how horrible the other is or even trying to acquire full custody, with many potential negative outcomes (Coontz, 1988).

Psychologist Judith Wallerstein (2000) studied 131 children of 60 couples from affluent Marin County, California, who divorced in 1971. She followed these children through adolescence and into adulthood, when many married and became parents of their own. She found a sleeper effect: Years later, their parents' divorce is affecting the children's relationships. They fear that their relationships will fail, fear betrayal, and, most significantly, fear any change at all. Divorce, she argued, was bad for children—both immediately and later in their lives. Couples, politicians argued, should, indeed, stay together, "for the sake of the children."

However, Wallerstein's findings have been quite controversial—and, in fact, have been disconfirmed by most sociological studies. After all, Wallerstein studied only children who came to see her as a therapist—that is, she based her findings on those children who were already having

Did *you* know?

Aside from a huge spike in divorce immediately after World War II, divorce rates in the 1950s were higher than in any previous decade except the Depression. Almost one in three marriages formed in the 1950s eventually ended in divorce (Coontz, 2005).

Divorce is rarely a "pleasant" experience, but its impact varies significantly by race, gender, and class. Women's standard of living declines more sharply than men's (which may even rise). Poor and minority women's standards of living decline even more, and they recoup that lost income more slowly than White women do—if at all.

difficulties *before their parents divorced*. And she studied children only in wealthy ultraliberal Marin County, California. She attributed their subsequent problems in relationships to their parents' divorce, when it is just as plausible that it was the conflict between the parents that led to both the divorce *and* the children's problems. Staying together might have been the worst imaginable outcome.

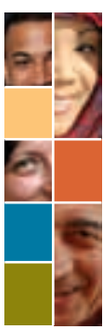
Sociological research consistently finds that children are resilient and adapt successfully to their parents' divorces. Mavis Hetherington (2002), for example, studied more than 2,500 children from 1,400 families over a period of 30 years and found that the fear of a devastating effect of divorce on children is exaggerated, with 75 to 80 percent of children coping reasonably well. Other scholars agree that, although parental divorce increases the risk of psychological distress and relationship problems in adulthood, the risks are not great (Amato, 2003; see also Ahrons, 2004).

Perhaps the outcome of divorce depends less on whether one gets a divorce and more on how civilly the parents behave toward each other and how much ongoing investment they maintain in their children's lives. That is to say, what's better for children is explained less well by whether the parents are married or divorced and better by the quality of the relationships the parents have with their children—and with each other.

Blended Families

At least half of all children will have a divorced and remarried parent before they turn 18 (Ahrons, 2004). They face different issues, depending on how old they are, the role that their biological parents have, whether it's Mom or Dad who remarries, and whether it's the custodial parent. Usually they must adjust to a new residence and a new school and share space with new siblings. In many families, finances become a divisive issue, placing significant strains on the closeness and stability of blended families (Korn, 2001; Martinez, 2005). Several studies have found that children in blended families—both stepchildren and their half-siblings who are the joint product of both parents—do worse in school than children raised in traditional two-parent families (see Ginther, 2004).

While the dynamics of blended families tend to be similar across class and race, the likelihood of blending families tends to be far more common among the middle classes, where parents have sufficient resources to support these suddenly larger



Sociology and our World

The Social Value of Sons?

Gordon Dahl and Enrico Moretti (2004) found families with only male children are significantly more durable than those with only female children. In Vietnam, parents of a girl are 25 percent more likely to divorce than parents of a boy. The Asian preference for male children is well known, but the trend also appears in the United States: Parents of one girl are 4.4 percent more likely to divorce than parents of one boy. Parents with three girls are nearly 9 percent more likely to divorce than parents with three boys.

Even in the matter of courtship, when men discover that the woman they are dating is pregnant, they are more likely to stay with her if she is carrying a boy. When they begin dating women who are already mothers, they are more likely to marry women with sons than women with daughters.

Evidently the preference for sons is not limited to Asia. Many American men feel that their lives are incomplete or that they are insufficiently masculine unless they have sons, so much so that their decision to marry or stay in an unhappy marriage is often based less on the wife than on the offspring.

families. Lower-class families may be "blended" in all but name: They may cohabit with other people's children but not formalize it by marrying.

Violence in Families

The famous French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville spoke of the family as a "haven in a heartless world," but for some the family is a violent nightmare. In many families, the person who promised to love and honor you is the most likely to physically assault you; the one who promised to "forsake all others" is also the most likely to rape you; and the one who is supposed to protect you from harm is the one most likely to cause that harm.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) represents violence, lethal or nonlethal, experienced by a spouse, ex-spouse, or cohabiting partner; boyfriend or girlfriend; or ex-boyfriend or -girlfriend. It is commonly called "domestic violence," but because some does not occur in the home, IPV is the preferred term. IPV is the single major cause of injury to women in the United States. More than 2 million women are beaten by their partners every year. Nearly one in five victims of violence treated in hospital emergency rooms was injured by a spouse, a former spouse, or a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend (Bachman and Salzman, 1994; Kellerman and Marcy, 1992; Rhode, 1997; Straus and Gelles, 1990).

▲ **Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the single major cause of injury to women in the United States. More than 2 million women—of all races and classes—are beaten by their partners every year. Some scars may never completely heal.**

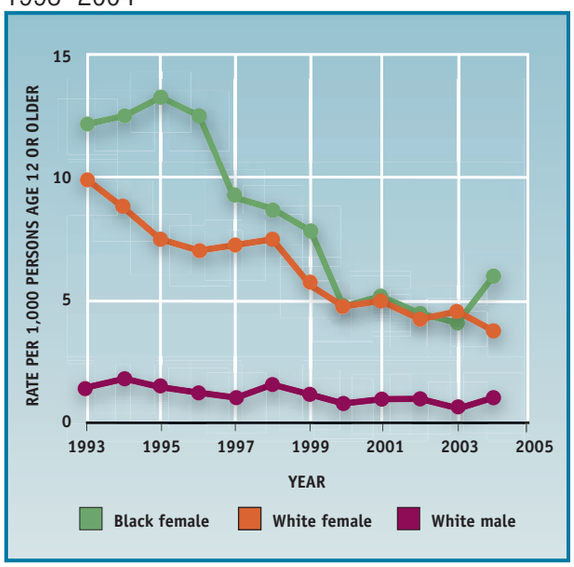
Globally, the problem of family violence is widespread. A study released in 2006 by the World Health Organization found that rates of IPV ranged from a low of 15 percent of women in Japan to a high of 71 percent of women in rural Ethiopia. (Rates in the European Union and United States were between 20 and 25 percent.) In 6 of the 15 sites of study, at least 50 percent of the women had been subjected to moderate or severe violence in the home at some point. Perhaps more telling, the majority of the 25,000 women interviewed in the study said that it was the first time they had ever spoken of the abuse to anyone (García-Moreno et al., 2006).

In the United States, IPV knows no class, racial, or ethnic bounds. Yet there are some differences by class, race, ethnicity, and age. For example, poor women experience significantly more violence than higher-income women, and younger women, aged 16 to 24, are far more likely to experience violence than older women. And one of the best predictors of the onset of domestic violence is unemployment.

A few studies have found rates of domestic violence to be higher in African American families than in White families (Hampton, 1987; Hampton and Gelles, 1994). Black females experienced domestic violence at a rate 35 percent higher than that of White females, and Black males experienced domestic violence at a rate about 62 percent higher than that of White males (Rennison and Welchans, 2000; Figure 11.6).

Among Latinos the evidence is contradictory: One study found significantly less violence in Latino families than in Anglo families, while another found a slightly

FIGURE 11.6 Nonfatal Intimate Partner Victimization Rate by Gender and Race, 1993–2004



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000.

higher rate. Rates were directly related to two factors, the strains of immigrant status and the variations in ideologies of male dominance (Klevens, 2007).

In many cases, however, these racial and ethnic differences disappear when social class is taken into account. Sociologist Noel Cazenave examined the same National Family Violence Survey and found that Blacks had *lower* rates of wife abuse than Whites in three of four income categories—the two highest and the lowest. Higher rates among Blacks were reported only by those respondents in the $6,000 to $11,999 income range (which included 40 percent of all Blacks surveyed). Income and residence (urban) were also the variables that explained virtually all the ethnic differences between Latinos and Anglos. The same racial differences in spousal murder can be explained by class: Two-thirds of all spousal murders in New York City took place in the poorest sections of the Bronx and Brooklyn (Straus and Cazenave, 1990).

Gay men and lesbians can engage in IPV as well. A recent informal survey of gay victims of violence in six major cities found that gay men and lesbians were more likely to be victims of domestic violence than of antigay hate crimes.

The single greatest difference in rates of IPV is by gender. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 85 percent of all victims of domestic violence are women (see Kimmel, 2002). The gender imbalance of intimate violence is staggering. Of those victims of violence who were injured by spouses or ex-spouses, women outnumber men by about 9 to 1. Eight times as many women were injured by their boyfriends as men injured by girlfriends.

Intergenerational and Intragenerational Violence

In addition to violence between domestic partners, there is also a significant amount of intergenerational and intragenerational violence in families. Intergenerational violence refers to violence between generations, such as parents to children and children to parents. Intragenerational violence refers to violence within the same generation—that is, sibling violence.

Sibling violence goes beyond routine sibling rivalry. Earlier reports found that as many as 80 percent of American children had engaged in an act of physical violence toward a sibling (Straus and Gelles, 1990). In a recent sociological study, David Finkelhor and his colleagues (2006) found that 35 percent of all children had been attacked by a sibling in the previous year. Of these, more than a third were serious attacks.

The consequences of sibling violence can be severe. Children who were repeatedly attacked were twice as likely to show symptoms of trauma, anxiety, and depression, including sleeplessness, crying spells, thoughts of suicide, and fear of the dark (Butler, 2006). Finkelhor and his colleagues found that attacks did not differ by class or race or even by gender, although boys were slightly more likely to be victims than girls. They occurred most frequently on siblings aged 6 to 12 and gradually tapered off as the child entered adolescence.

How do we know what we know?

Gender Symmetry in IPV

Despite dramatic gender differences, there are some researchers and political pundits who claim that there is "gender symmetry" in domestic violence—that rates of domestic violence are roughly equal by gender (see, for example, Brott, 1994). One reason this symmetry is underreported is because men who are victims of domestic violence are so ashamed they are unlikely to come forward—a psychological problem that one researcher calls "the battered husband syndrome" (Steinmetz, 1978).

But a close look at the data suggests why these findings are so discordant with the official studies by the Department of Justice and the FBI. Those studies that find gender symmetry rely on the "conflict tactics scale" (CTS) developed by family violence researcher and sociologist Murray Straus and his colleagues over 30 years. The CTS asked couples if they had ever, during the course of their relationship, hit their partner. An equal number of women and men answered "yes." The number changed dramatically, though, when they were asked who initiated the violence (was it offensive, or defensive), how severe it was (did she push him before or after he'd broken her jaw?), and how often the violence occurred. When these three questions were posed, the results shifted back: The amount, frequency, severity, and consistency of violence against women are far greater than anything done by women to men.

There were several other problems with the CTS as a measure (see Kimmel, 2002). These problems included:

1. *Whom did they ask?* Studies that found comparable rates of domestic violence asked only one partner about the incident. But studies in which both partners were interviewed separately found large discrepancies between reports from women and from men.
2. *What was the time frame?* Studies that found symmetry asked about incidents that occurred in a single year, thus equating a single slap with a reign of domestic terror that may have lasted decades.
3. *Was the couple together?* Studies that found gender symmetry excluded couples that were separated or divorced, although violence against women increases dramatically after separation.
4. *What was the reason for the violence?* Studies that find symmetry do not distinguish between offensive and defensive violence, equating a vicious assault with a woman hitting her husband to get him to stop hitting the children.
5. *Was "sex" involved?* Studies that find symmetry omit marital rape and sexual aggression; because a significant amount of IPV occurs when one partner doesn't want to have sex, this would dramatically change the data.

Of course, women can be—and are—violent toward their husbands and partners. Criminologist Martin Schwartz estimates that women commit as much as 3 to 4 percent of all spousal violence (Schwartz, 2004). But research such as this requires that we look more deeply at the questions asked. Sometimes, the answers are contained in the questions.

Sometime, children use violence against their parents. About 18 percent of children used violence against their parents in the past year—about half of which was considered "nontrivial," serious enough to cause pain or injury (Agnew and Huguley, 1989; Cornell and Gelles, 1982; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980). Rates of child-to-parent violence decrease as the child ages; it is more often younger children who hit their parents. Injuries to parents are rare, but they do happen. If the parent reacts to a child's violence with violence, the child has learned a lesson that could last a lifetime.

The rates of parental violence against children are significantly more serious. In recent years, American society has also been vitally concerned about the problem of child abuse (violence against children) and child sexual abuse (the sexual exploitation of children).

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, rates of victimization and the number of victims have been decreasing in the first decade of the

twenty-first century. An estimated 872,000 children were determined to be victims of child abuse or neglect for 2004 (the last year for which there are data). More than 60 percent of child victims were neglected by their parents or other caregivers. The United States has rates that are significantly higher than rates in other English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, and Great Britain, partly, but not entirely, due to the higher rates of child poverty in the United States (poverty is a significant risk factor).

Rates of child abuse and child sexual abuse vary significantly by class but less by race or ethnicity. According to some research (Daly and Wilson, 1981), living with a stepparent significantly increases the risk of both abuse and sexual abuse. Yet other research, using the conflict tactics scale, found little difference—in generally very high rates overall. In one study, 63 percent of children who lived with both genetic parents and 47 percent of those who lived with a stepparent and 60 percent of those who lived with a foster parent were subject to violence, and about 10 percent were subjected to severe violence in all three categories (Gelles and Harrop, 1991).

Globally, the problem of child abuse and neglect is equally serious—and includes forms of abuse that are not found in the economic north. In 2006, the United Nations commissioned the first global investigation into child abuse. They found that between 80 and 98 percent of children suffer physical punishment in their homes, with a third or more experiencing severe physical punishment resulting from the use of implements.

Despite these global differences, it is equally true that Americans are far more accepting of violence against children than they may realize. Over half of all American parents (55 percent) believe that corporal punishment, including spanking, is acceptable; and one-third of parents have used corporal punishment against their adolescents (Straus, 2005). These numbers are significantly less than the 94 percent who supported the use of corporal punishment in 1968 and the two-thirds who used it with adolescents in 1975 (Straus, 2005). But it is still the case that nearly all parents—94 percent—used corporal punishment with toddlers, and they did so, on average, three times a week.

There is actually little empirical evidence that spanking serves any developmental purpose, but there is a wealth of evidence that spanking is developmentally harmful. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents avoid spanking (2007). In fact, 94 percent of all studies of the effects of corporal punishment on children showed a relationship between such forms of punishment and aggression, delinquency in childhood, crime and antisocial behavior as an adult, low levels of empathy or conscience, poor parent–child relations, and mental health problems such as depression (Gershoff, 2002).

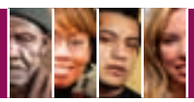
Family violence is often difficult to remedy through policy initiatives. Globally, fewer than 10 percent of all countries even have laws against certain forms of child abuse, let alone programs to offer aid and support to victims and to prosecute perpetrators (*Rights of the Child,* 2006). In the United States, policymakers have long taken the approach that what happens "behind closed doors" is a private matter, not a social problem that can be remedied through public policy. Rates of all forms of family violence are dramatically underreported; fear of retaliation, shame, and a general cultural acceptance of violence all greatly reduce the likelihood of reporting. And the continuum of violence, from spanking a child to murdering a spouse, is part of a culture that does not universally condemn violence but sees some instances of violence as legitimate and even appropriate and sees perpetrators as entitled to use violence.

The Family in the 21st Century: "The Same as It Ever Was"

In the first line of his novel *Anna Karenina,* the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." How unsociological! Families, happy or unhappy, are as varied as snowflakes when viewed close up and as similar around the world as all the sand in the desert.

Families are as old as the human species. We've always had them; indeed we couldn't live without them. And families have always been changing, adapting to new political, social, economic, and environmental situations. Some expectations of family may be timeless, yet families have always been different, and new relationships, arrangements, and patterns are emerging all over the world today, just as they always have been. As the musician David Byrne sang in the 1980s, the family is "the same as it ever was."

Yes, it's probably true that family is still the place where, when we go there, they have to take us in. But even if we can go home again, it's never the same.



Chapter Review

1. ***How do sociologists define family?*** A family is a basic unit of society. Family is also a cultural institution; the functions of the family include socializing new members and regulation of sexual activity, property ownership, and marriage. The definition of family changes over time; the nuclear family is a relatively new phenomenon. Agrarian families were extended, and the household formed the basic economic unit of society, performing all societal functions that are now handled by other institutions. The nuclear family developed in Europe and the United States in the late eighteenth century as a result of industrialization and modernization. The nuclear family model was very gendered, and the home became the women's sphere and work men's.

2. ***How do families develop?*** Dating emerged in the United States in the 1920s when children of immigrants shed old customs and teens had unprecedented freedom. Dating sometimes leads to marriage, the most common family formation. Marriage in the United States varies by race; White women are more likely to marry than others. Not everyone marries; increasingly people are choosing to postpone marriage, to cohabit, or to remain single. Choices are influenced by education, changing sexual mores, and the women's movement. Attitudes toward interracial marriage are also changing, which is reflected in increased rates of such marriages. Also, same-sex couples cannot marry in most states but do form partnerships and cohabit.

3. ***How important is parenting?*** Parenting is becoming more desirable in the United States, and more importance is being placed on parents and parenting. At the same time, children are more undervalued and neglected than before. Parenting is gendered; although most women work outside the home, they still do most of the housework and particularly the housework having to do with caring for the children. Fathers are becoming more active parents. Also, there has been an increase in single-parent families, mostly headed by mothers. Grandparents are also raising grandchildren; this is most likely for African American grandmothers. Not everyone chooses to have children; more highly educated individuals are less likely to parent than those in other groups.

4. ***What transitions do families go through?*** Although marriage used to mean a lifelong commitment, today divorce is common and easy to get. The effects of divorce on children are widely debated. While parental divorce increases the risk of distress and later relationship problems, most children are found to be resilient. After a divorce, the woman's standard of living typically decreases; this is even more striking among African American women.

As people remarry, blended families are becoming more common, especially among those in the middle class, although unofficial blended families are prevalent in all groups.

5. ***What forms does family violence take?*** Family violence takes many forms. One is intimate partner violence (IPV). IPV affects people from all groups but is more likely to occur among the poorer socioeconomic strata. Eighty-five percent of IPV victims are women. Violence also occurs between and within generations. In sibling violence, which tends to taper off after age 12, boys are more likely than girls to be victims. Children do abuse parents, but parental abuse of children is a far greater social problem. In the United States, views on corporal punishment as abuse vary, but negative attitudes toward it have strengthened over time. Globally, child abuse is prevalent and includes things such as genital mutilation and sexual slavery.

Key Terms

Bilineal descent (p. 329)
Cohabitation (p. 341)
Companionate marriage (p. 332)
Exogamy (p. 330)
Extended family (p. 332)
Family (p. 328)
Family of origin (p. 330)
Family of procreation (p. 330)
Group marriage (p. 330)
Intimate partner violence (IPV) (p. 353)
Kinship systems (p. 328)
Legitimacy (p. 329)
Matrilineal descent (p. 326)
Monogamy (p. 329)
Multigenerational households (p. 339)
Nonmarital sex (p. 343)
Patrilineal descent (p. 329)
Polyandry (p. 330)
Polygamy (p. 329)
Polygyny (p. 328)

What does America think?

Attitudes toward Abortion

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2004.

1. **Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?** In 2004, 86 percent of respondents said "yes," and 14 percent said "no." These results are almost identical to 1972 responses. The percentage of respondents saying "yes" peaked in 1991 at 91.5 percent.
2. **Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if she is married and does not want any more children?** In 2004, 41.8 percent of respondents said "yes," and 58.2 percent said "no." The percentage of people saying "yes" peaked 1994 at 48 percent, but otherwise, the data were almost identical to 1972, and attitudes have remained pretty steady since then.
3. **Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?** The responses from 2004 showed 41 percent of respondents saying "yes" and 59 percent saying "no." The response for those saying "yes" was rather lower than 1972 and again peaked in 1994.

4. **Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if she became pregnant as a result of rape?** In 2004, 76.2 percent of respondents said "yes," and 23.8 percent said "no." The response for those saying "yes" was lower than it was in 1972 and peaked in 1991.

CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think lies behind the variation of responses in approval toward abortion based on the reason for abortion? The highest approval was for the pregnant woman's health, next for rape victims, lower for married women who do not want children, and lowest for women who want to abort because they are poor. What societal values does this ranking reflect?
2. Why do you think the results break down by gender the way they do?

▶ Go to this website to look further at the data. You can run your own statistics and crosstabs here: **http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss04**

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