

# THE FAMILY

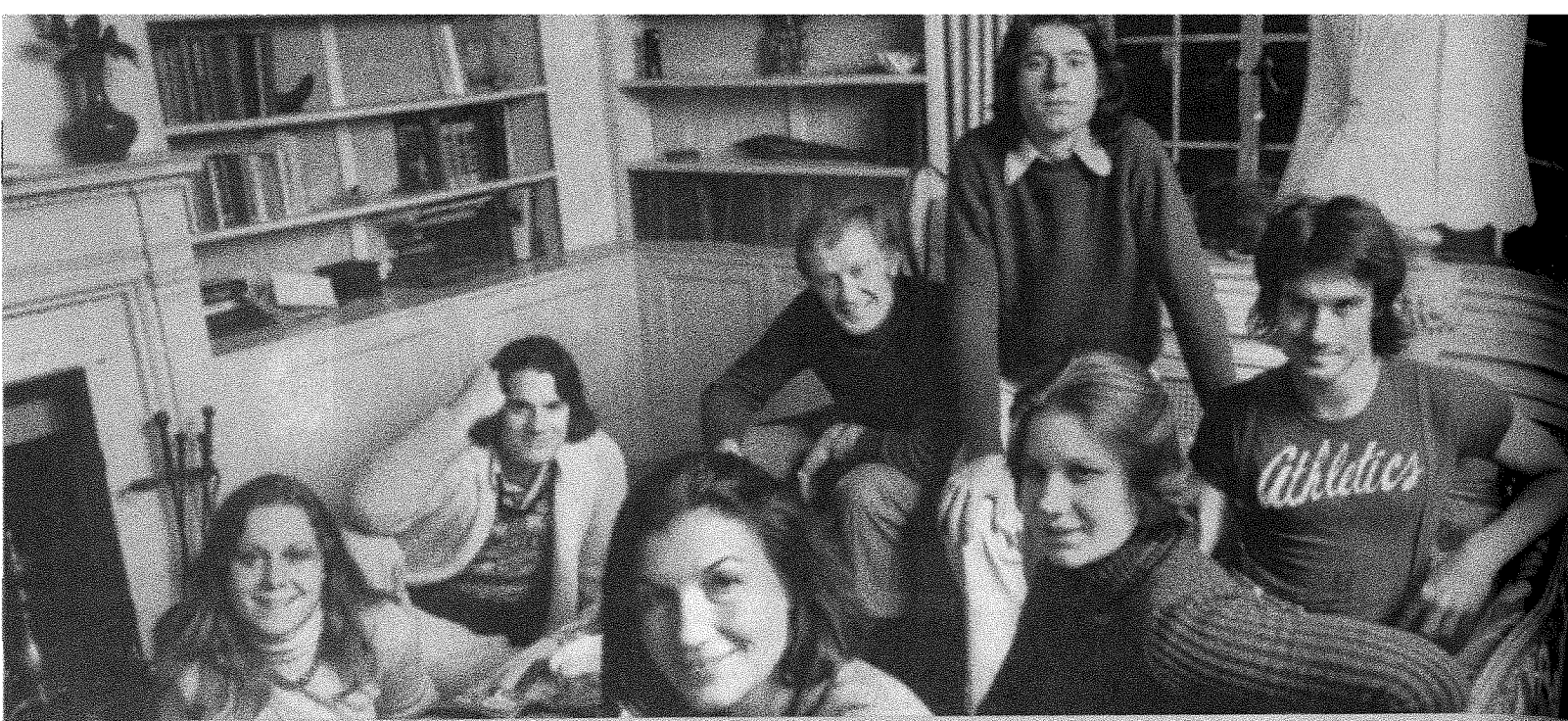
# 11

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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- 1** Explain basic sociological concepts of the family, marriage, and intimate relationships.
- 2** Describe trends leading to the decline in marriage rates and changes in the family household, including single parenting, blended families, and lesbian and gay families.
- 3** Apply structural/functional, conflict/critical, and inter/actionist theories to the social institution of the family.
- 4** Describe current models of family conflict, forms of abuse and violence within the family, and the effects of poverty on family life.
- 5** Identify the effects of globalization and global flows on the family today.

A mother and her child at an emergency feeding center in Tahoua, Niger, are the subjects of this prize-winning news photo. Even as new global flows of money, people, and ideas affect an increasing number of families, the very definition of family is changing. Who is in your family?



The groundbreaking series *An American Family*, aired on public television in the 1970s, is widely credited with being the medium's first reality show. It intended simply to chronicle the happy, mundane lives of husband and wife Bill and Pat Loud and their five children. Over the course of the series, however, cracks in the California family's calm and stable facade became apparent. The cement that had held the Louds together eventually began to crumble, exposing events never seen on U.S. television before. The public witnessed Bill and Pat's real-life separation and subsequent divorce, for example, and eldest son

**Families are a universal social institution, our first group and primary socializer.**

Lance's coming out as television's first openly gay person.

Since then, family-based reality television shows have flourished, forcing contemporary series to focus on exceptional families in order to distinguish themselves. Some have spotlighted celebrities (*Keeping Up with the Kardashians*), families with many children (*19 Kids and Counting*), or the wealthy (*My Super Sweet 16* and the *Real Housewives* series).

It should come as no surprise that family-based reality shows are so enormously popular.

Family, after all, is a universal social institution. It constitutes a person's first group and primary socializer, and for many, a lifelong source of companionship and security. Because the institution of family is such a central part of life, it is natural to be fascinated by—and even to feel connected to—the intimate relationships and conflicts forged in other people's families.

As reality television indicates, the structure of a family can take a great number of forms. Extended and nuclear families have proven popular over the last 100 years, but recent social changes have opened a wide variety of other options. Some couples marry for love, others for purely economic reasons, and an increasing number choose not to marry at all. Some have children in the double digits, while others have one or none. Some maintain exclusive partnerships until death, others remarry, and still others incorporate new members into existing relationships.

Family-based reality shows paint a picture of domestic dynamics that is captivating and intriguing but by no means complete. They largely sidestep issues critical to sociology, such as poverty, gender inequality, and the prevalence of domestic abuse. Also unlike sociology, they have not adopted a global perspective, choosing instead to focus on traditional upper- and middle-class western family structures. That leaves us with much to learn and study. •

## FAMILY, MARRIAGE, AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

The **family** is defined as a group of people who are related by descent, marriage, or adoption. It is especially important in socializing children so that they are better able to fit into the larger society. Sociologists view the family as a universal social institution that is central to social life (Powell and Branden 2007). Sociologists are interested in such issues as the relationship between family and marriage, the different forms taken by families, and how families are formed and maintained, expand and contract, and even dissolve (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock 2012).



Mohd Miqdad Ashaari has three wives (two are pictured here) and six children. He is a member of Malaysia's Polygamy Club. Do polygamous families bear any unusual burdens?

### SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

In this section, we will define such basic concepts and ideas as marriage, intimate relationships, and love and explore their roles in the family.

#### Marriage

**Marriage** is the socially acknowledged and approved and often legal union of two people, allowing them to live together and to have children by birth or adoption.

**family** A group of people related by descent, marriage, or adoption.

**marriage** The socially acknowledged and approved and often legal union of two people, allowing them to live together and to have children by birth or adoption.

**monogamy** Marriage between one wife and one husband.

**polygamy** Marriage to multiple spouses.

**polygyny** Marriage (of a husband) to multiple wives.

**polyandry** Marriage (of a wife) to multiple husbands.

**cenogamy** Group marriage.

**endogamy** Marriage to someone with similar characteristics in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, education level, social class, and so on.

**exogamy** Marriage to someone with characteristics that are dissimilar in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, education level, social class, and so on.

Families govern various issues that relate to marriage, such as the "meanings of marriage" as well as "the number of marriage partners" (Shaw and Lee 2009: 378). **Monogamy** is marriage between one wife and one husband. However, given changing laws related to gay marriage, monogamy might involve two wives or two husbands. **Polygamy** involves multiple spouses. **Polygyny**, in which a single husband has multiple wives, is a more common form of polygamy than **polyandry**, in which a single wife has multiple husbands. **Cenogamy** involves group marriage.

Key to understanding the family is the concept of **endogamy**, or marriage to someone with similar characteristics in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, education level, social class, and so on. In contrast, **exogamy** involves marriage to someone with characteristics that are dissimilar on these dimensions. Throughout history, families have been defined much more by endogamy than by exogamy. In recent years, endogamy has declined in importance, and there is more exogamy. For example, there has been an increasing tendency of Americans to marry those of another race (Qian and Lichter 2011). However, as a general rule, families continue to be characterized more by endogamy than by exogamy.



Marriage



An American Family



Would you find passionate love or companionate love to be more fulfilling in the long term? Can they coexist?

In the last several decades, the nature of family and marriage has undergone a series of rapid and dizzying changes. It is less and less clear exactly what constitutes marriage or a family. One thing is clear, however: Whatever they are today, the close linkage between marriage and the family has been greatly reduced, if not broken. Nevertheless, most people in the United States are involved in one or more marriages during their lifetime. And those who do marry create families, although they may not stay together as long as families did in the past. Being married and in a family does not mean that the same people will remain in them for the duration of their lives. Marriage and the family will remain important intimate relationships, but they will not be the only, or even the dominant, forms of intimacy in the future.

### Intimate Relationships

The word *intimacy* is often associated with sexual relationships, in which people are “intimate” with one another. More generally, however, **intimacy** can be defined as a close and personal relationship. Thus, an **intimate relationship** involves partners who have a close, personal, and domestic relationship with one another. This intimate relationship is a by-product of courtship rituals in which two people are attracted to each other, develop intimacy, enjoy each other’s company, and identify as a couple after a period of dating.

The nature of intimacy is not static, but changes over time. Fifty or a hundred years ago, couples could

be intimate without necessarily sharing very much about themselves with each other, especially their most private thoughts. However, in western culture today, intimacy increasingly involves disclosing much, if not everything, about oneself to one’s partner (Jamieson 2007). Levels of disclosure tend to be gendered (Kimmel 2012). Women tend to function as emotional caretakers within heterosexual relationships. They do so because they are generally socialized to engage in communication in which they express their emotions, whereas males are socialized to suppress their emotions and communicate little about them. In other words, women tend to be the ones to share first and to help males to share by drawing them out. The assumption made by most women is that such self-disclosure will strengthen a relationship because there are no secrets and therefore there will be no surprises, or at least there will be fewer of them, as the relationship develops.

### Love

Intimacy in domestic relationships is, of course, often associated with love (Frieze 2007). **Passionate love** has a sudden onset, involves strong sexual feelings, and tends to include idealization of the one who is loved (Hatfield, Bensman, and Rapson 2012). Passionate love brings with it great intimacy, but it is an intimacy that is very likely to be short-lived. In contrast, **companionate love** develops more gradually, is not necessarily tied to sexual passion, and is based on more rational assessments of the one who is loved. Companionate love is more likely than passionate love to lead to long-lasting intimate relationships. However, these two types of love are not clearly distinguished from one another. This is clearest in the fact that long-term intimate

**intimacy** A close and personal relationship.

**intimate relationship** A close, personal, and domestic relationship between partners.

**passionate love** A kind of love typified by sudden onset, strong sexual feelings, and idealization of the one who is loved.

**companionate love** A kind of love typified by gradual onset and not necessarily tied to sexual passion, but based on more rational assessments of the one who is loved.

relationships often start out with passionate love, but in those that succeed over time it tends to be combined with, or even supplanted by, companionate love.

Passionate love, also known as romantic love, has a long and interesting history. For example, some of our more recent senses of love are traceable to 1950s consumer culture (Shaw and Lee 2009). It was then that love became closely associated with consumption and travel. The movie, automobile, fashion, and makeup industries capitalized on, and disseminated ideas on, romantic love. Each of these industries, in its own way, glamorized romance and conveyed the message that romance was associated with commodities that were available for a price.

More recently, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) has sought to get at the essence of love in the contemporary world in his book *Liquid Love*. On the cover of that book is a heart drawn in the sand. However, the sea is nearby, and the implication is that love will soon be washed away by the waves. To Bauman, love, like everything else in today’s liquid society, is fleeting. This clearly applies to passionate love, but to Bauman even companionate love is today constantly at risk of erosion and disappearance. This represents a major challenge to all intimate relationships, especially marriage, and to all of those involved in them. However, liquid love can also be seen as offering people freedom from lifelong, loveless relationships. It also offers the possibility of innumerable experiences with love and the possibility of many different relationships built on love.

### ASK YOURSELF

What do you think of Bauman’s concept of “liquid love”? Do you agree that love is fleeting, and that this impermanence is a reflection of a society in which nothing lasts? Why or why not? Would you find the experience of liquid love troubling, or liberating? Why?

It can be argued that our main concerns in this chapter—family and marriage—are also increasingly liquid. Because they are now so liquid, the borders of marriage and the family

## CHECKPOINT 11.1

## FAMILY, MARRIAGE, AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage	The socially acknowledged and approved and often legal union of two people, allowing them to live together and to have children by birth or adoption.
Monogamy	Marriage between one wife and one husband (or two wives or two husbands).
Polygamy	Marriage to multiple wives (polygyny) or multiple husbands (polyandry).
Cenogamy	Group marriage.
Endogamy	Marriage to someone of a similar race, ethnicity, religion, education level, social class, and so on.
Exogamy	Marriage to someone of a dissimilar race, ethnicity, religion, education level, social class, or other such characteristic.
Passionate love	Type of love that develops suddenly and includes strong sexual feelings and idealization of the one who is loved; romantic love.
Companionate love	Type of love that develops gradually and is not necessarily tied to sexual passion but is based on more rational assessments of the one who is loved.

are increasingly difficult to define. More importantly, many traditional forms of marriage and the family are confronting the possibility of being washed away. As a result, many sociologists have moved away from a focus on the family and marriage and prefer to discuss vaguer phenomena such as “relationships” and “personal life.” Nevertheless, most people, including most sociologists, continue to think in terms of marriage and the family (Powell et al. 2010). We will do the same in this chapter, but with an understanding that both are changing dramatically and refer to phenomena that are far more liquid than they were in the past.

## BROAD CHANGES IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

We will discuss two major changes in this section: the decline of marriage and changes in the family household.

### DECLINE IN MARRIAGE

In 1960, married couples constituted 71 percent of all households (see Figure 11.1); by 2010, only 52 percent of all American households were married couples. Similarly,

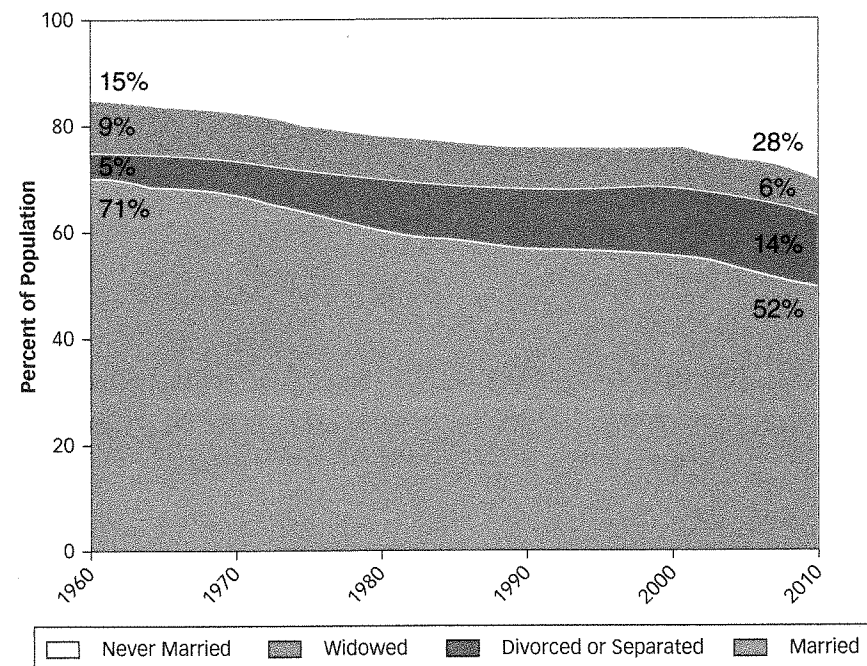


Traditional Families



Intimate Relationships

**FIGURE 11.1 • Marital Status in the United States, 1960–2010**



SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from “New Marriages Down 5% from 2009 to 2010: Barely Half of U.S. Adults Are Married—A Record Low,” by Paul Taylor et al., December 14, 2011. Pew Research Center analysis of Decennial Census (1960–2000) and American Community Survey data (2008, 2010), IPUMS.

the traditional **nuclear family** involving two adults and one or more children dropped from 43 percent of all households in 1950 to only about a fifth of all households in 2010.

Another way to get a sense of the dramatic change in marriage and the family is to look at the percentage of those who have ever been married (see Figure 11.2). In 1960, 60 percent of 20- to 24-year-olds had ever married, but by 2010 that number had dwindled to 14 percent. Among 25- to 29-year-olds, the decline from 84 percent to 42 percent in those ever married was also steep, but not as dramatic. It remains the case that as people age, they are more likely to marry, but even in the 30–34 and 35–39 age-groups, there was a decline between 1960 and 2010 of those ever married. Further declines are expected in most, if not all, age categories.

### PERSPECTIVES ON THE DECLINE IN MARRIAGE

The decline in marriage (and the family) has led to some fascinating new perspectives on the status of marriage today.

#### The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage

Andrew Cherlin (2004) focuses on the “deinstitutionalization of American marriage.” By **deinstitutionalization**, he means that the social norms relating to marriage have weakened. As a result, people increasingly question their

actions, or those of others, as they relate to marriage. While Cherlin focuses on this deinstitutionalization in the United States, he recognizes that a similar process is occurring in much of Europe as well as in Canada. In the mid twentieth century, especially in the United States, few questioned marriage and the creation of a nuclear family. As a result, most plunged into both, sometimes successfully, but more often with dubious or even disastrous results. Now, with marriage and perhaps the nuclear family and the family household deinstitutionalized, it is much easier for people *not* to rush into such an arrangement. They are freer to experiment with many other arrangements.

Five factors are involved in the deinstitutionalization of marriage. First, as more women entered the labor force, the clear division of labor in the family between homemaker and breadwinner began to break down. The once clear norms about what men and women were to do in a marital relationship were eroding. This contributed a more general lack of clarity

about marriage as well as the family. Second, the norms about having children within the context of marriage and the family were also eroding. This was demonstrated in the dramatic increase in childbirth outside of marriage, which increased from one out of six in the late 1970s to one out of three in the early twenty-first century. Third, the high and increasing divorce rate between 1960 and 1980 contributed to the deinstitutionalization of marriage (see Figure 11.3). Although the divorce rate has declined in recent decades, the high rate between 1960 and the late 1970s and early 1980s had a seemingly irreversible impact on attitudes toward marriage. Fourth is the growth in cohabitation, which began in the 1970s and accelerated as the twentieth century ended. Finally, same-sex marriage flowered in the 1990s and has grown further in the twenty-first century.

These ideas on deinstitutionalization are embedded in a long-term model of change. In the early twentieth

**nuclear family** A family with two married adults and one or more children.

**deinstitutionalization** Weakened social norms, especially with regard to the institution of marriage.

**institutional marriage** Predominant model of marriage in the early twentieth century; emphasizes maintenance of the institution of marriage itself.

century, **institutional marriage** was the predominant form. The focus in such a marriage was on the maintenance of the institution of marriage itself. There was less concern that those involved would love or be good companions to one another. Today, many see the time of institutional marriage as past; but there are also those who see it as alive and well and as having a future (Lauer and Yodanis 2010).

By the middle of the twentieth century, a model of **companionate marriage** (see above section on companionate love) had become predominant (Amato 2012; Amato et al. 2007; Burgess and Locke 1945). Companionate marriage meshed well with the nuclear family. It involved a clear division of labor between the single-earner breadwinner—almost always the male—and the female homemaker. In spite, or perhaps because, of the strict division of labor, husbands and wives were held together by bonds of sentiment, friendship, and sexuality.

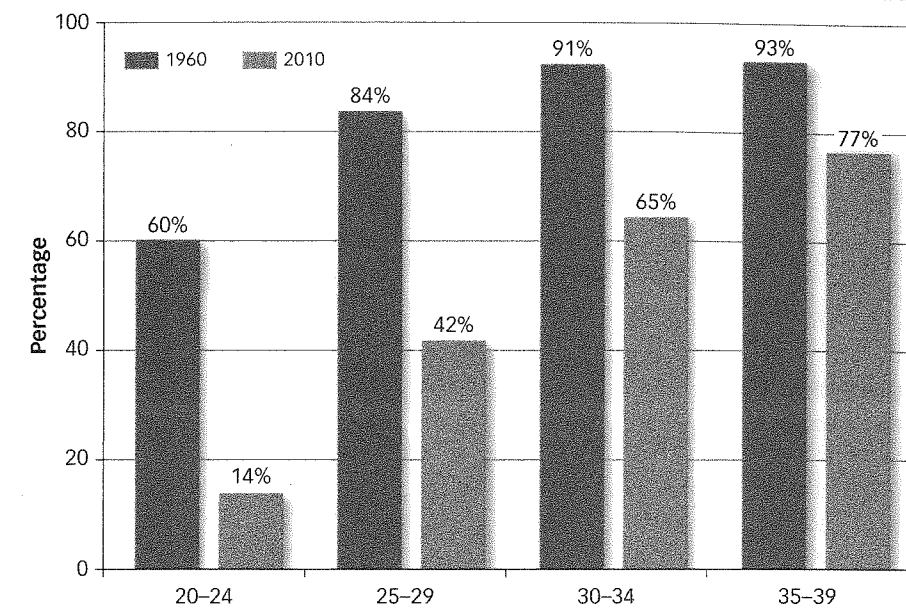
They were supposed to be each other’s companions, which included being each other’s friends, confidants, and lovers. Romantic love was an essential component of companionate marriage.

In the 1960s, a dramatic shift began to take place in the direction of **individualized marriage** (Lauer and Yodanis 2011). The goal of companionate marriage was the satisfaction of the couple, the family as a whole, and the roles the couple played in the family. However, that focus began to shift increasingly in the direction of the satisfaction of each individual involved, as well as toward individuals’ ability to develop and express their selves. In addition, instead of being as rigid as companionate marriage, individualized marriage became increasingly open and flexible. Furthermore, couples were becoming more open with each other in communicating about and dealing with problems. Many of those involved, as well as many observers, applauded the greater freedoms and sensitivities associated with individualized marriage.

**companionate marriage** A marriage emphasizing a clear division of labor between a breadwinner and a homemaker and held together by sentiment, friendship, and sexuality. Predominant model of marriage in the mid twentieth century (see *companionate love*).

**individualized marriage** A model of marriage emphasizing the satisfaction of the individuals involved.

**FIGURE 11.2 • Percentage of Americans Currently or Formerly Married, by Age, 1960 and 2010**



SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from “New Marriages Down 5% from 2009 to 2010: Barely Half of U.S. Adults Are Married—A Record Low,” by Paul Taylor et al., December 14, 2011. Pew Research Center analysis of Decennial Census (1960–2000) and American Community Survey data (2008, 2010), IPUMS.

A major factor in the rise of individualized marriage was the changing place of women in society. For example, as more women went to work, they were no longer restricted to the homemaker role and reliant on the male breadwinner. As more women obtained a higher education, their occupational prospects were enhanced. This put them in a context where ideas associated with companionate marriage were increasingly open to question. The greater access of women to contraception and to abortion freed more women from the constraints of companionate marriage as they related to producing and socializing children.

As a result of all of these changes, people today feel freer to never marry, to marry later, to end unhappy marriages more readily, and especially to engage in many other types of intimate relationships. Yet, in spite of all of the change, the vast majority of people—perhaps as many as 90 percent—will eventually marry, although many of their marriages will end long before the “till death do us part” stage is reached. Thus, marriage has not been deinstitutionalized to the degree anticipated by Cherlin.

#### Marriage as a Carousel

In a more recent book, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, Cherlin (2009) adopts a somewhat different perspective involving



The Meaning of Marriage for Young Adults

# McDONALDIZATION TODAY

## McFamily

There are contradictory developments and changes in the family from the perspective of McDonaldization (Raley 2010).

On the one hand, the structure of the family seems to be undergoing a process of *de-McDonaldization*. That is, the once highly predictable, cookie-cutter nuclear family (mom, dad, and 2.2 children) is in decline, and a whole range of very different family forms are on the rise.

The earlier structure of the family was McDonaldized in a number of ways. For example, it was generally expected that

a man would partner with a woman for life and that the man would go to work, the woman would stay home, and children would arrive in due course and be raised jointly by the parents. Today, there is much greater variability among men and women who marry, including the fact that women are more likely to be in the labor force and may earn as much as, or more than, men. There is also no longer an assumption that only a man and a woman can marry. Further, it is no longer assumed that marriage is for life. People may move into and out of several marriages, as well as other types of relationships. And it is no longer expected that couples will necessarily have children or that, if they do, they will have children within the context of a marriage.

This change from a highly McDonaldized family structure to one that is far less McDonaldized is traceable to many factors. These include the fact that although the early form was efficient, many found it, like a fast-food restaurant, predictable,



The cast of *Modern Family* (above) looks quite different from that of *Leave It to Beaver* (left), which aired from 1957 to 1963. Which one is more McDonaldized?

unsatisfying, and even oppressive. The emphasis now is more on the quality of the relationship and on the lives of any children that may result, rather than such quantitative factors as the number of years a couple has maintained a marriage or the number of children they have.

On the other hand, when one looks at the lifestyle of today's family, one finds a strong trend in the direction of further McDonaldization. This is seen, for example, in:

- the impatience of married or cohabiting partners to move into a relationship and to see quick—and highly positive—results;
- partners' reliance on the quick fixes offered by popular books and TV shows (e.g., *Dr. Phil*);
- partners' dependence on a variety of nonhuman technologies, such as birth

control pills and cellphone “family share” plans;

- the structuring and scripting of many family activities, such as spousal “date nights”; and
- partners' utilization of a wide range of McDonaldized settings for family activities, including chain restaurants for birthday parties.

In spite of these and other contemporary lifestyle changes that point in the direction of greater McDonaldization, the family may be uniquely suited to slow its spread.

### Think About It

Is today's family becoming more McDonaldized overall, or less? Do you think this change is a positive development for society or a negative one? Is it positive or negative for members of today's families?

a “carousel of intimate partners.” Some of those intimate partners are to be found in marriages, but those marriages are more likely to end; people are likely to remarry, perhaps more than once. Rounds of separation and divorce add to the merry-go-round and its increasingly dizzying speed. Then there may be a series of cohabitations into and out of which people move. Thus, many people have not given up on the idea and even the practice of marriage, but they exist side-by-side with the often conflicting notion of individualism. People want to be legally defined as couples and as families, but they also want to be free of constraints and to act as they wish as individuals. Current sociological research underscores this paradox. On the one hand, researchers are told that most people, including young adults, want an “exclusive, lifelong intimate partnership, most commonly a marriage” (Hull, Meier, and Ortyl 2010: 37). On the other hand, people often indicate by their behavior that they want to be free of such bonds. Americans remain committed to the ideal of marriage, but in reality they spend fewer of their adult years married than previous generations did.

### ASK YOURSELF

Which do most of your peers seem to want, an exclusive lifelong partnership such as marriage, or the freedom to live and act as an individual? What might account for their preference? Which is your preference?

### Self-Disclosing Intimacy and Pure Relationships

British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) offers an ambivalent view on the new individualized forms of marriage and of relationships more generally. The key to this new form of relationship is what Giddens calls “self-disclosing intimacy.” Couples are disclosing much more to each other. As a result, much more intimate relationships are likely to develop. This is contrasted with companionate marriages, which were more likely to be based on secrets and half-truths. Thus, companionate marriages in the past, and even the many that continue today, may survive for decades or a lifetime even though they may be based on deceptions that leave one or both partners in the dark. The partners often remain in such marriages for reasons other than their openness and honesty. They may stay together because of social norms against divorce or “for the sake of the children.”

**pure relationship** A relationship that is entered into for what each partner can get from it, and in which those involved remain only as long as each derives enough satisfaction from it.

Giddens recognizes the advantages of self-disclosing intimacy, but he also argues that intimate relationships based on full disclosure are made much more fragile by such disclosures, especially as the disclosures continue and proliferate over time. The more weaknesses one reveals to a partner, the more likely that partner is to become disappointed with the relationship. Despite this, Giddens, as well as many others today, seems to prefer relationships based on mutual disclosure because he believes they are likely to be more mutually satisfying, equal, and democratic. Further, he contends that almost anything is preferable to being locked into the kind of dishonest and unsatisfying relationship often associated with companionate marriage.

Since marriage of any kind can be confining and limiting, Giddens (1992) coined the term *pure relationships* to describe a new reality. A **pure relationship** is one that is entered into for its own sake, or for what each partner can get from it, and those involved remain in it only as long as each derives enough satisfaction from it. While pure relationships can exist within marriage, they are more likely to exist outside of such a legal relationship. As a result of the increasing predominance of this idea, at least among young people, a relationship is likely to be ended when couples no longer find their relationship satisfying. It is also likely that another, different pure relationship (or several) will be formed in relatively short order, or perhaps even simultaneously with the existing one. This fits with the increasing individualization of contemporary society as well as the closely related phenomenon of individuals wanting more choices and greater freedom of choice. It represents a greater degree of individualization than even that found in individualized marriage. Less constrained by marriage, or more likely not married at all, couples are free to individualize their lives to a much greater degree. Marriage is seen as just one of a wide range of lifestyle choices open to couples. In whatever type of intimate relationship people find themselves today, the possibility that it will dissolve is never very far from their consciousness.

The idea of the pure relationship had its origins in western society, although like many such ideas in the global age, it has flowed readily around the world to many locales.

### Questioning the New Ideas on Marriage and Relationships

There are those who have questioned the range of new ideas, like those discussed above, about intimate



Families

**FIGURE 11.3 • U.S. Divorce Rate, 1950–2012**



SOURCE: Divorce Rate 1950–2009, CDC/National Vital Statistics Reports 2010.

relationships. For example, Lynn Jamieson (1998) has questioned the importance of self-disclosing intimacy. There are many forms of intimacy other than those based on self-disclosure, and good relationships are based on more than such disclosures. For example, negotiating an equitable division of labor in the home may do more for increasing intimacy than a wide range of self-disclosures.

Interestingly, a major critique of these new ideas on marriage and the family is implicit in the work of one of sociology's classic social theorists, Georg Simmel (see Chapters 1, 2, and 5). In his famous essay on secrecy, Simmel ([1906] 1950) argues that while there is always a temptation to reveal all to a partner in an intimate relationship, especially marriage, such revelations would be a big mistake. In his view, all relationships require a certain proportion of both openness and secrecy, and marriage is no exception. Even if it were possible to disclose everything about one's self, and it almost certainly isn't, this would only serve to make marriage boring and matter-of-fact because all possibility of the unexpected would be eliminated. Finally, most of us have limited internal resources, and every revelation reduces the (secret) treasures that we have to offer our mates. Only those few with great storehouses of personal assets and accomplishments can afford numerous revelations to a marriage partner. All others are left denuded—and perhaps less interesting—by excessive

self-revelation. The contrast is striking between Simmel's ideas, written more than a century ago, and the current thinking of many who emphasize the importance of revealing all to intimate partners.

### THE RESILIENCE OF MARRIAGE

In spite of all of the changes discussed above, there are those who remain committed to the traditional notion of marriage. "Marriage naturalists" view "marriage as the *natural* expected outcome of a relationship that has endured for a period of time" (Kefalas et al. 2011: 847). In contrast, "marriage planners" need to deal with a number of practical realities before they can consider marriage. These include finding a well-paying job and being able to create and support a separate household. *Marriage naturalists* "see marriage as being a prerequisite to being an adult," and *marriage planners* "want to establish themselves as adults *before* they wed" (Kefalas et al. 2011: 870). In either case, however, the goal is to marry.

While they are going about creating those realities, marriage planners and marriage naturalists may have premarital sexual/romantic relationships, cohabit, and bear children out of marriage. All of the latter phenomena have been found by sociological researchers to have risen in recent years. Kefalas and colleagues (2011) found that marriage naturalists were more likely to be rural, while the marriage planners had to arrange their intimate lives around the realities of urban life. In addition, the marriage naturalists were closer to the realities of marriage in the mid-twentieth-century United States, while the marriage planners better fit the realities of postindustrial America and the wait-and-see attitude more characteristic of the early twenty-first century.

Only about one-fifth of the young adults studied by Kefalas and colleagues (2011) were marriage naturalists; the rest were marriage planners. However, marriage planners, even those who regarded marriage as only a distant possibility, still desired to marry eventually. More striking is the fact that there was little discussion among young adults of passion or love.

### ASK YOURSELF

Among the married couples you know, how many were marriage naturalists and how many were marriage planners? Have you observed other approaches to marriage among those who are committed to the institution? If so, what are they?

Today there is a debate between those who see marriage as being in decline and those who emphasize its resilience (Amato 2004). Those who see marriage as in decline focus on such things as the rising divorce rate and the increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. These are seen as problems in themselves and as indicators of larger problems, such as an excessive focus on the individual and an inadequate concern for the collectivity. Those who focus on the resilience of marriage argue that, for example, divorce allows people to escape from marriages from which people ought to escape, especially marriages that are dysfunctional in various ways, such as abusive marriages. Having children out of wedlock may have the positive effect that fewer children will be locked into families in which they are socialized poorly or even abused physically and psychologically.



A Japanese couple smashed their wedding ring before filing for divorce following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disasters that reportedly led many Japanese to rethink their values and their marriages. Would such reevaluations have been cause for divorce a generation ago?

### NONFAMILY HOUSEHOLDS: "GOING SOLO"

**Nonfamily households** are those in which a person lives either alone or with nonrelatives. Of greatest interest is the growth of one-person households, or people living alone. As is clear in Figure 11.4, we have witnessed an increase in such households from 13 percent in 1970 to over 27 percent of all households in 2011.

One-person households, or "singletons," are the subject of Eric Klinenberg's (2012) *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*. Detailed in this work is the long-term increase in the number of people living alone. Overall, 31 million Americans now live alone. The fastest-growing segment of the population going solo is young adults between 18 and 34. In 1950, only a half million of those in this age-group lived alone, while today the total of 5 million is 10 times the number in the mid twentieth century. Fifteen million of those who are middle-aged (35 to 64) live alone, while 10 million of the elderly are singletons. More women (17 million) than men (14 million) live alone. Going solo is mainly an urban phenomenon; more than half of dwellings in Manhattan are one-person residences.

**nonfamily household** A household consisting of a person who lives either alone or with nonrelatives.

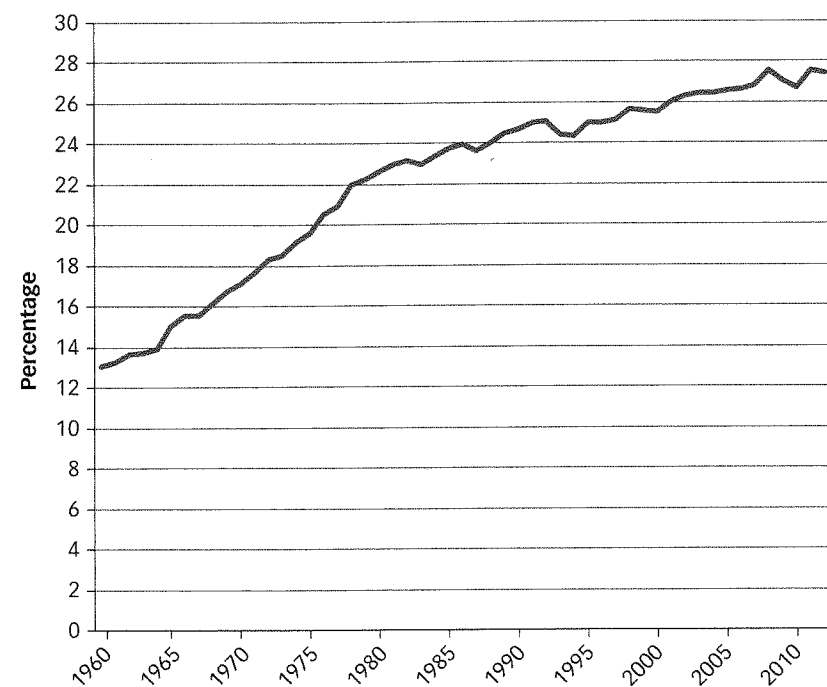
There are several reasons for the increase in singletons. First, increasing economic affluence has made it possible for more people to afford the greater costs associated with living alone. Second, living alone is consistent with the growth of individualism in the United States and much of the developed world. Third, there is the rising status of women and their higher levels of education and their higher-paying jobs (although their wages continue to be lower than men's wages and they are more likely than men to be poor). With greater independence, they are more likely to marry later, separate, or divorce. Fourth, the communications revolution has allowed people to communicate with other people, and to be entertained, while they are home alone. Fifth, mass urbanization has made the active social life of the city available to more people. Finally, there is the aging of the population and the fact that as people live longer, they are more likely to find themselves alone.

While in the past, living alone might well have been considered a problem, Klinenberg argues that increasing numbers of people are coming to prefer going solo. It allows people to pursue "individual freedom, personal control, and self-realization. . . . It allows us to do what we



Interracial Families

**FIGURE 11.4 • Percentage of Single-Person Households in the United States, 1960–2011**



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

want, when we want, on our own terms” (Klinenberg 2012: 17–18). Interestingly, singletons may also be more socially active than those who live with others. It is certainly true that those who live alone have problems, but so do those who live with partners.

## THE FAMILY HOUSEHOLD

A **family household** comprises two or more people who occupy a given domicile and are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. It is distinguished by the fact that those involved are related but not necessarily married, and by their occupation of a specific domicile. One member of the family household—the *householder*—owns or rents the property as well as maintains it.

As a form of an intimate relationship, the family household, like the family itself, has been declining in the United States and in the Global North more generally. For example, in 1940, 90 percent of households were family households, but that declined to 81 percent in 1970 and to 66.4 percent in 2010. This means, of course, a corresponding increase in nonfamily households over this period of time (Casper 2007; Jacobsen, Mather, and Dupuis 2012).

Beyond the decline of the family household and the increase in the one-person household, a variety of other changes in the family household are worth mentioning:

- People are living longer. More are able to maintain their households and family structure for many more years than they were in the past.
- Women outlive men. This means that late in life, many women live alone in nonfamily households (34 percent of women 65 years of age and older lived alone in 1970, but by 2011 that number had grown to 38.6 percent).
- Families have been growing smaller. For example, between 1970 and 2003, there was a decrease in households including five or more people from 21 percent to 10 percent of all households, while households with only one or two people increased from 46 percent to 60 percent of all households. Overall, the number of people per household declined in that time span from 3.1 to 2.6.
- Declines in the family household are related to declines in births to married women in two-parent families, increases in births to unmarried women (leading to more one-parent families), and increases in the proportion of divorced people (from 2 percent to 9.2 percent among men and 3 percent to 9.7 percent among women between 1970 and 2009) (Casper 2007).

Elliott, Young, and Dye (2011) examined the impact of the Great Recession on a specific form of family household, the complex family household, involving the presence of “an individual in a household who according to the household roster is related to the householder, but is not a member of the householder’s immediate nuclear family.” There was a slight increase in such households, reflecting, perhaps, the hard economic times and higher unemployment. There might well be cost savings for all concerned by bringing in more extended family members during hard economic times.

## ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF FAMILIES

Recent social changes have made it possible for people to choose a nontraditional family structure for themselves, such as cohabitation, single-parent family, nonresident

**family household** A household comprising two or more people who occupy a given domicile and are related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

parents, stepfamily or blended family, or lesbian or gay family.

## Cohabitation

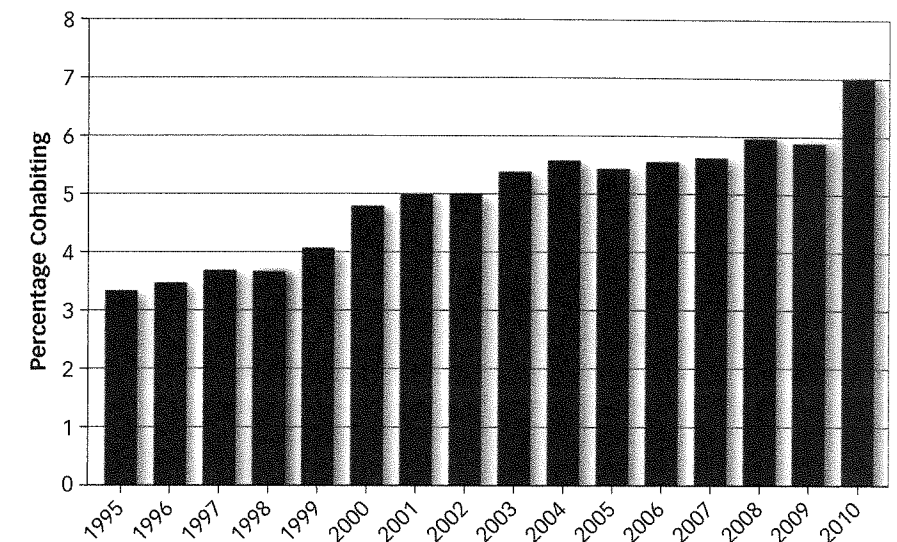
**Cohabitation** is defined as couples sharing a home and a bed without being legally married (Manning and Cohen 2012; Sassler 2010; Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007). There are clearly more cohabiting couples today than there were previously, although they still compose a small percentage (about 4 percent) of all households (Casper 2007). Among 30- to 44-year-olds in the United States, the percentage of cohabiting couples more than doubled from about 3 percent in 1995 to 7 percent in 2010 (see Figure 11.5). Nevertheless, the United States still only ranks in the middle globally in terms of cohabitation. For example, cohabitation is more common in France, Sweden, Argentina, South Africa, and Canada (see Table 11.1).

It is unclear exactly how many people are involved in such relationships, because cohabitation is not a formally constituted relationship and it leaves no legal records. Furthermore, it is not clear how many nights, weeks, months, or years a couple must be together to be categorized as cohabiting. It is clear, however, that more young men and women (especially between 25 and 35) are living together outside of marriage even if they are not considered, or do not consider themselves, a cohabiting couple. Living together in this way has come to be considered a common tryout for, and pathway to, marriage, although few people plan to marry when they begin cohabiting. Then again, marriage may never occur or even be discussed, and cohabiting couples may break up and move on to other relationships. A declining number—less than 50 percent—of cohabiting couples end up getting married.

At one time, cohabitation was associated with being poor, less educated, or in the lower classes; it was seen as the “poor man’s marriage.” More recently, cohabitation has become increasingly common among those with advanced education, even college degrees. Blacks are more likely to cohabit than whites, and both are more likely to cohabit than Hispanics, although there are differences among these groups in the function of cohabitation. For instance, for blacks, cohabitation is more likely to be

**cohabitation** A couple sharing a home and a bed without being legally married.

**FIGURE 11.5 • Cohabitation Rate among 30- to 44-Year-Olds in the United States, 1995–2010**



SOURCE: From Richard Fry and D’Vera Cohn, *Living Together: The Economics of Cohabitation*, Pew Research Center: Social & Demographic Trends. June 27, 2011, p. 9.

an alternative to marriage; for whites, it is more likely a prelude to marriage (England and Edin 2009; Smock and Manning 2004).

In a recent study, Huang and colleagues (2011) sought to better understand why young adults have cohabited or would cohabit. The percentage of women who had ever cohabited ranged from 40.0 percent (Latinas) to 53.8 percent (both white and black women) and was consistent with previous studies of this phenomenon. The major findings of the study relate to people’s rationales for cohabiting, as well as to gender differences in those rationales.

The first rationale was simply a desire to spend more time with one’s partner. This was seen as a way of enhancing the relationship and desirable because it dealt with a variety of logistical problems, such as by eliminating lengthy trips to see one’s partner. The second rationale was the belief that the partners would save money cohabiting because they were sharing expenses rather than paying for everything on their own. Third, cohabitation was seen as a kind of “test drive” of the relationship to assess the partners’ compatibility.

Perhaps the most interesting results of the study related to gender difference in terms of the ways in which cohabiting enhanced the relationship: Women focused on love while men focused on sex. As one man put it, “Most girls want to have the connection with the guy and know it’s a relationship. ‘Cause women, their number one thing in life is to have good relationships with people. . . . Guys,



Cohabitation



Alternative Families

the thing they strive for is sex, so it's kind of a tradeoff" (Huang et al. 2011: 887).

The biggest gender differences revolved around cohabitation's disadvantages. Women saw it as less legitimate and as entailing less commitment than marriage. Men were most concerned about the decline in freedom compared with being single. In terms of the latter, men focused on their loss of personal autonomy with regard to space, social activities, choice of friends, and sexual freedom. Overall, however, for both men and women the benefits of cohabitation outweighed the disadvantages.

Cohabitation varies greatly around the globe. Sweden has a long history of cohabitation, and the process is well institutionalized there. In excess of 90 percent of first partnerships are cohabitations, and over 40 percent of all first births are to cohabiting couples (Perelli-Harris and Gassen 2012). The legal status, or the rights and privileges, of those who cohabit is virtually the same as that of married couples in terms of such things as social security and taxes (Wilk, Bernhardt, and Noack 2010). The high rate of cohabitation has led to a decline in the importance of marriage and of the customs, rituals, and ceremonies associated with it. Couples that cohabit and then marry might well give the date they met as their anniversary. Instead of making a decisive break, young people are likely to drift away from their families of orientation, perhaps in stages, and then settle down and cohabit with someone else (Popenoe 1987). However, since 1998, there has been evidence of a change in this pattern, as more Swedes are marrying. This reverses a long-term decline in marriage in Sweden between the 1960s and the 1990s (Ohlsson-Wijk 2011). Other, mainly Catholic, European countries—Italy and Spain—have much lower rates of cohabitation. There is evidence of the spread of cohabitation throughout much of Europe, including Eastern Europe, and elsewhere.

### Single-Parent Families

Among the developed countries, the United States has the highest rate of single-parent families (29.5 percent of all households with children), while Japan has the lowest (10.2 percent) (see Table 11.2). In Europe, the northern countries—for example, the United Kingdom (25 percent), Ireland (22.6 percent), and Denmark and Germany (both 21.7 percent)—have the highest rates of single-parent families. It is mainly the southern European countries—Greece and Spain (5 percent), Portugal (6 percent), and Italy (7 percent)—that have the lowest rates of such families.

### Nonresident Parents

**Nonresident parents** are fathers and mothers who live apart from their children (Smyth 2007). Nonresident parents are

**TABLE 11.1 • Cohabitation around the World, 2005–2009**

Country	Percentage of Adults Cohabiting
Colombia	31
Peru	25
Sweden	18
France	16
Argentina	15
Canada	12
Philippines	11
South Africa	11
Chile	10
Mexico	10
New Zealand	10
United Kingdom	9
Australia	8
Germany	8
United States	7
Italy	5
Spain	5
Kenya	4
India	4
Poland	3
Japan	2
Malaysia	2
China	1
Nigeria	1
Egypt	<1
Saudi Arabia	<1
South Korea	<1
Indonesia	<1
Taiwan	<1

SOURCE: From *The Sustainable Demographic Dividend: What Do Marriage and Fertility Have to Do with the Economy?* National Marriage Project.

**nonresident parents** Fathers and mothers who live apart from their children.

mainly fathers, although the number of mothers in this category is increasing. Historically, there have been many reasons for fathers to be absent from their families. They include work, war, and incarceration. Today, although those reasons continue to exist, the major reasons are nonmarital childbearing with the parents never having lived together, the breakdown of a cohabiting relationship, and marital dissolution.

In the popular media, nonresident parents have been viewed negatively, often being labeled “deadbeat dads” or “bad moms.” In the case of absent fathers, the term *masculinization of irresponsibility* has been used to describe “the refusal of fathers to provide economically for their children” (Kimmel 2012: 173). However, recent evidence tends to indicate that such labels are unfair. Many nonresident parents want to be active in their children's lives, but they face major problems in their efforts to play such a role. There are various emotional issues involved, such as the heartache associated with brief and intermittent visits with children. The major difficulties are practical in nature, including a lack of adequate time to handle parental responsibilities. This has given rise to terms like *Disneyland dads*, because such fathers have time only for brief visits or recreational trips. When nonresident fathers are able to spend time with their children, however, research shows that children have higher academic achievement (Kimmel 2012). Other difficulties confronting nonresident parents include a lack of financial resources due to the demands of child support, lack of adequate space in the new home for children, difficulty in maintaining sufficient contact with children, additional responsibilities associated with a new home and perhaps a new family, and the difficulty of meeting the children's needs as far as things like extracurricular activities are concerned. Many nonresident parents—somewhere between 20 percent and 50 percent—cannot deal with some or all of these difficulties, with the result that they have little, or even no, interaction with their children. This, in turn, can cause many problems for the children involved, including poor performance in school.

Women typically have greater problems as nonresident parents than men. They generally have fewer financial resources, and this makes it more difficult for them to perform the role of parent. They are therefore less likely than men to pay child support. Women may also believe that from a financial perspective, fathers are in a better



Some nonresident parents are in the armed forces, such as Staff Sgt. Keith Fidler, who was reunited with his wife and son after returning from Iraq. How are the stresses on military families different from those faced by others with a nonresident parent?

position to raise the children involved. Or, in the case of transnational mothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2005), providing financial resources for their children may be the only way they can engage with their children while also tending and nurturing their nonbiological children. Gender roles, such as being nurturing and being caretakers of children, also put more pressure on women to be highly active as nonresident parents. Gender roles may also lead women to be labeled negatively because they are living apart from their children. In spite of these difficulties, nonresident mothers are more likely than nonresident fathers to see their children, to see them more frequently, to have richer and more open encounters with them, and to maintain contact with them through telephone calls, e-mail, or text messaging.

### ASK YOURSELF

Does it surprise you to learn that nonresident mothers tend to have greater problems and fewer resources than nonresident fathers? Why or why not? What could social institutions like workplaces, schools, and local governments do to ease the extra difficulties nonresident mothers face?



Single-Parent Homes



**TABLE 11.2 • Single-Parent Households in Select Countries**

Country	Percentage of Single-Parent Households
United States	29.5%
United Kingdom	25%
Canada	24.6%
Ireland	22.6%
Germany	21.7%
Denmark	21.7%
France	19.8%
Sweden	18.7%
Netherlands	16%
Japan	10.2%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012.

### Stepfamilies and Blended Families

A **stepfamily** involves two adults who are married or cohabiting, at least one of whom has a child or children from a previous marriage or cohabitation living with them (Coleman and Ganong 2007a; Coleman, Ganong, and Russell 2013). A **blended family** includes some combination of children from the partners' previous marriages or relationships, along with one or more children of the currently married or cohabiting couple (Martin-Uzzi and Duval-Tsioles 2013). Stepfamilies and blended families have become very common in the United States, because about half of all marriages include a partner who was previously married. It is estimated that about 30 percent of all American children will live in a stepfamily before they become adults.

Although the differences are not great, stepchildren tend to have more problems (behavior problems, difficulties at school) than those who grow up living with their original parents. One explanation is that stepfamilies are "incomplete institutions" (Cherlin 1978). That is, in dealing with problems, stepfamilies do not have the institutionalized guidelines and support that exist for first-marriage families.

There are a variety of differences between stepfamilies and first-marriage families. First, they are more complex, because the children are likely to spend time with a stepparent as well as with the mother or father from their first-marriage family. Second, there is often insufficient

time to develop the family routines and rituals that are likely to have existed in first families. Children may well have difficulty adapting to these new, nonroutinized ways of living. Third, the bonds between first-marriage parents and children are better established and closer, at least at first, than the new spousal bonds. This can make circumstances difficult for the stepparent, at least early in the relationship, although the situation improves over time as the stepparent finds roles to play in the new family. Fourth, the lack of a legal relationship between stepparents and their stepchildren can cause a variety of problems, such as a lack of any rights in regard to stepchildren after a divorce.

A stepfamily can be difficult for both stepfathers (Edwards and Hadfield 2007) and stepmothers (Coleman and Ganong 2007b). For stepfathers, the relationship with stepchildren can be difficult because it is mediated by a third party, the mother. Stepfathers might, for example, resent all the time the mothers are spending with the children. If stepfathers have their own biological children, this can create conflicts over loyalties and the allocation of scarce money and time. Stepfathers might also have difficulties serving as father figures within the stepfamily. However, stepmothers might well have greater difficulties than stepfathers because they feel the expectations of them are ambiguous. For example, it may be unclear how they should act toward their stepchildren or whether they are impinging on the role of the biological mother. Stepmothers may also be frustrated by the lack of support from their partners. Having children with stepfathers can create problems, as stepmothers are likely to feel closer to those children than they are to their stepchildren.

### Lesbian and Gay Families

It is very difficult to get accurate numbers on the gay and lesbian population as a whole, let alone on those involved in long-term relationships, including those in which children are present. Gays and lesbians were largely invisible a half century ago due to cultural and legal biases and sanctions against them. That began to

**stepfamily** A family in which two adults are married or cohabiting and at least one of them has a child or children from a previous marriage or cohabitation living with them.

**blended family** A family that includes some combination of children from the partners' previous marriages or relationships, along with one or more children of the currently married or cohabiting couple.

change in the era of sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s.

A major factor in the gay and lesbian community in general, and in gay and lesbian family formation in particular, has been the HIV/AIDS epidemic that emerged in the 1980s (Heaphy 2007a). The gay and lesbian community reacted by building institutions to better deal not only with HIV/AIDS, but with many other concerns as well. One of the institutions that was buttressed in this period was the gay and lesbian family. Previously, gay and lesbian couples had often come together because of the need for support and comfort in the face of a hostile environment. Today, such linkages have become more affirmative in nature, especially as the larger society has become more accepting of homosexuality and of gay and lesbian families as an institution. Lesbian and gay politics have devoted more attention to these individuals' right to marry, adopt children, and be parents.

Gay and lesbian couples have various similarities with, as well as differences from, straight families. One important difference is that gay and lesbian couples tend to be more reflexive and democratic in their family decisions and practices than straight couples. This is particularly the case in the negotiation and organization of domestic duties, a contentious issue in contemporary dual-labor straight families. Gay and lesbian couples are less constrained by gender roles, with the result that they are freer in their negotiations over couple and family practices. Another difference involves the issue of monogamy. Although the latter is assumed (but often violated) by straight couples, same-sex male couples are not as wedded to the idea or practice of sexual exclusivity. They negotiate over this issue and develop clear ground rules for nonmonogamous sexual relationships. Gay male relationships tend to be more fragile, while lesbian relationships tend to be far more stable. Some of the reasons for these gender differences are related to gender socialization patterns and sexual scripts (see Chapter 10) (Kimmel 2012).

Studies of children of same-sex couples have tended to indicate that growing up in these families does not have adverse effects on children, such as psychological or developmental problems, or at least any more or different adverse effects than growing up in straight families. However, most of this research has been done on children brought into a same-sex family but conceived, and having spent at least some time, in a previous heterosexual family. Now, however, same-sex couples are more likely to become parents themselves in various ways, such as artificial insemination (Mamo 2007), adoption, becoming foster parents, or becoming surrogate parents. While we do not yet know much about such children, there is no reason to assume they

will be adversely affected by these methods of achieving same-sex parenthood. In fact, there is every reason to believe that they will do at least as well as children raised in traditional heterosexual families.

Same-sex marriage is a major issue these days (Biblarz and Stacey 2010; Heaphy 2007b). As late as the 1990s, there was no legal recognition of such marriages *anywhere in the world*. Furthermore, such marriages face considerable hostility and intolerance. A key event occurred in September 2000 in the Netherlands, when the right to marry was extended to same-sex couples. In the ensuing decade, a number of other countries throughout the world (Argentina, Canada, Belgium, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, South Africa, and Uruguay, as well as Mexico City) came to permit same-sex marriages. In recent years, a number of states in the United States have legalized same-sex marriages (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia). However, the contentiousness of this issue is reflected in the pushback against it; dozens of other states have enacted legislation banning such marriages. The polar views on same-sex marriage are, on the one hand, that it is an expression of greater tolerance in the population as a whole, and on the other hand, that it is yet another threat to religion, morality, and heterosexual marriage.

### ASK YOURSELF

Do you believe same-sex marriage will eventually be legal in all 50 states? Why or why not? Is it legal in your state? Why or why not?

There is considerable ambivalence in the gay and lesbian community toward legal marriage. Some welcome the validation it offers. They also appreciate gaining the same legal rights and benefits as those of straight married couples in terms of child support, medical decision-making, and inheritance. Many gays and lesbians also welcome legal marriage because of the challenge it poses to the dominance of heterosexual norms and values. Others see marriage as surrender to *heteronormativity*, or the view that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, and as a threat to the distinctive character of gay and lesbian culture and ways of life. Gays and lesbians are seen as



Nontraditional Families



Blended Families



Jeri (left) and Amy Andrews holding their marriage license in Seattle after Washington State legalized same-sex matrimony in December 2012. Do you think the ability to marry is, on balance, a benefit to gays and lesbians, or a surrender to conformity?

submitting to outmoded notions of commitment and to rules that can stifle their uniqueness and creativity, especially as they affect relationships. As a result of this ambivalence, while many gays and lesbians feel that they ought to have the right to marry, far from all would actually marry if they had the opportunity (Considine 2012). They are likely to see their current relationships as offering greater possibilities for freedom, creativity, and equality than marital relationships.

## THEORIZING THE FAMILY

Whatever the family form, the main types of theories outlined in Chapter 2 and used throughout this book—structural/functional, conflict/critical, and inter/actionist theories—can be used to think about and shed light on the family (Cheal 2007; White 2013).

### STRUCTURAL/FUNCTIONAL THEORIES

Writing in the mid twentieth century in the heyday of marriage, the nuclear family, and the family household, Talcott Parsons, the preeminent structural-functionalist, saw the family as a structure with very important functions for society as a whole. The nuclear family was especially important in the America of Parsons's day. Its structure freed family members from the obligations of

an **extended family**—two or more generations of a family living in the same household or in close proximity to one another—and allowed them the mobility needed in the industrial society of the time. Parsons also argued that the family system of the day functioned efficiently and effectively because of the clear distinction between “expressive (female) and instrumental (male)” roles (Kimmel 2012: 147).

Of greatest concern to Parsons, and to structural-functionalism, was the need for order in society. A very important source of that order is the socialization of children into how they are supposed to act, as well as the process by which they learn the norms, values, and morality of society. That which

is communicated during childhood socialization tends to be internalized by children and becomes part of what is generally called their “conscience” (Parsons 1951). The personality in general, and the conscience in particular, is shaped during childhood socialization and remains relatively stable throughout the life course. The family, especially in the heyday of the nuclear family, played a crucial role in socialization. Furthermore, such a family was more likely to communicate a more coherent sense of a society's culture and morality than any other family form. Parsons certainly did not see the family as devoid of problems, and the process of socialization as seamless, but he did not emphasize the problems associated with either. Rather, he saw the family and socialization as functional for society.

This kind of thinking has been picked up by those sociologists who emphasize the functions of the family:

- First, society must at least replace those who die. This is accomplished through childbearing, which traditionally has been preferred to occur within the family.

**extended family** Two or more generations of a family living in the same household or in close proximity to one another.

- Second, the family fulfills the need to provide physical and emotional care to children.
- Third, the family fulfills the socialization function discussed above.
- Fourth, the family shares resources to meet its economic needs.
- Fifth, there is intergenerational support as parents continue to support their adult children economically, emotionally, and in many other ways.
- Sixth, the family has traditionally served to control sexual behavior. That control varies greatly from one society to another; in American society, whatever control the family had over sexuality seems to be in decline.
- Finally, the family is a mechanism for helping children find a place in society, especially in its stratification system.

There are many criticisms of the structural-functional theory of marriage and the family, not the least of which is that it applied best to the realities of the 1950s but is increasingly out of touch with today's realities. It simply “doesn't take into account the diversity of family structures and roles found in American marriages and families” (Scott and Schwartz 2008: 349). Moreover, structural-functional theory has a conservative bias that “tends to promote and rationalize the status quo,” including that of marriage and the nuclear family. Furthermore, it tends to “understate disharmony and conflict,” and more generally the array of family-related problems that will be discussed below (Scott and Schwartz 2008: 349).

### CONFLICT/CRITICAL THEORIES

Unlike structural-functionalists, conflict theorists never saw the family as a coherent unit or as contributing in

## CHECKPOINT 11.2 CHANGES IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Nuclear family	Family consisting of two married adults and one or more children.
Deinstitutionalization of marriage	Weakening of the social norms relating to marriage.
Institutional marriage	A marriage focused on maintaining the institution of marriage itself.
Companionate marriage	A marriage emphasizing a clear division of labor between a breadwinner and a homemaker and held together by sentiment, friendship, and sexuality.
Individualized marriage	A marriage characterized by greater freedom for the partners to develop and express themselves and seek satisfaction.
Pure relationship	A relationship entered into for its own sake or for what each partner can get from it, maintained only as long as each derives enough satisfaction from the other.
Nonfamily household	A household consisting of a person who lives either alone or with nonrelatives.
Family household	A household comprising two or more people who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption.
Cohabitation	A couple sharing a home and a bed without being legally married.
Nonresident parents	Fathers and mothers who live apart from their children.
Blended family	A family that combines children from the partners' previous marriages or relationships with the children of their current marriage or relationship.

an unambiguously positive way to the larger society. For one thing—as pointed out above and as we will discuss later in this chapter—the family itself is riddled with stresses, strains, and conflicts that lead to all sorts of problems for the family, its members, and society as a whole. The family is an especially rich arena for conflicts based on gender and age (e.g., sibling rivalries, children vs. parents). Such conflicts are closely related to the issue of power within the family and conflict over who has the most power, how it is used (and abused), how it is exercised, and so forth. Above all, conflict can arise when one or more family members seek to wrest power from those who possess it.



What Makes a Healthy Family

## ACTIVE SOCIOLOGY

### Do You Know Your Family History?

Genealogy is a popular subject, and sites like [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) have helped many people become prosumers in their quest to discover their family history. Explore as much of the [ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) website as you can (some areas are limited to members only, and membership is not free). Record your observations by answering these questions, and share your responses with the class.

1. What assumptions does the site make about families? List as many as you notice.
2. How does the site normalize certain structures and functions of the family?
3. Are nonbiological families represented?
4. What are some possible reasons for the site's assumptions about family structures?

Start your own family tree on this site (you can make a beginning without being a member).

1. How do the site's assumptions limit your ability to tell your own family story?
2. How might you compensate for these drawbacks?

### ASK YOURSELF

If you have siblings, have you ever thought of any conflicts you may have had with them (or with your parents) as power struggles? If you didn't think so at the time, can you see them as power struggles now, in light of conflict theory? Does this view help you understand such disagreements better? Why or why not?

In contrast to Talcott Parsons's harmonious view of the family, Randall Collins (1975) looks at conflict within the broader system of social stratification, as well as within formal organizations and the family. Collins sees the family as an arena of gender conflict in which males have historically been the winners, leaving female family members in an inferior position. Similarly, when it comes to age-based conflict within the family, parents are generally victorious and children relatively powerless.

A key issue in looking at inequality and conflict within the family is the resources possessed by the various parties involved. In terms of the conflict between adults and children, parents have a variety of resources, including greater size, strength, experience, and ability to satisfy the needs of the young, and as a result, the young are likely to be dominated by the adults. Among the few resources possessed by the young are their physical attractiveness and

physical prowess. As a result, "girls are taught to capitalize on good looks, cuteness, and coyness [and] boys discover that athletic ability and performance are what count for males" (Kimmel 2012: 157). However, as children mature, they acquire other resources and are better able to resist adults. The result is more conflict between the generations as children mature.

### Feminist Theory

Feminist theory tends to adopt a conflict view of the relationship between genders in general and, more specifically, as that relationship exists within the family. Feminist theorists see the family as being internally stratified on the basis of gender. Men and women are seen as possessing different economic and social positions and interests, and they struggle over those differences. Males have been able to create and to impose a gendered division of labor within the family that benefits men and adversely affects women. The family is seen as a patriarchal structure in which males exercise power and oppress women. Male control is enhanced by an ideological mechanism whereby traditional family norms are upheld. For example, girls tend to learn to accept the idea that they should put family responsibilities ahead of everything else, including their personal development and satisfaction. This tends to engender and support masculine power and privilege.

Some consequences of masculine privilege and power include "expecting or taking for granted personal and sexual services, making and/or vetoing important family decisions, controlling money and expenditures, and so forth" (Shaw and Lee 2009: 387). According to the staunch feminist Emma Goldman, "the institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute dependent" (cited in Shaw and Lee 2009: 298). By buying into the ideology of masculine power and privilege, women are, in effect, supporting and enabling their own oppression. This ideology is seen as a major impediment to the liberation of women in the family and elsewhere in society. Overall, it could be argued that from a feminist perspective, the family is

a concept and a structure created and disseminated by males in order to serve their own interests and not those of females. Yet, it is important to note that "the balance of power in marriage (or any domestic partnership) depends in part on how couples negotiate paid labor and family work in their relationships" (Shaw and Lee 2009: 388).

### INTER/ACTIONIST THEORIES

The inter/actionist theories discussed in this section, symbolic interaction and exchange theory, look at the family from a more microscopic perspective than either structural/functional or conflict/critical theories do.

#### Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the meanings attached to identities, roles, and social relationships, treating meaning as socially constructed. This approach has long been used in family research (Stryker 1959). For example, men may attach different levels of significance to the role of father, and marital partners may redefine their relationship over time. Examples of research carried out from a symbolic interactionism perspective include Derek Ball and Peter Kivisto's (2006) study of couples considering



Is structural/functional theory more relevant to nuclear families of the 1950s than to the social diversity in families that we see today?

divorce in marriage counseling settings and David Aveline's (2006) study of the reframing of identities that occurs when parents learn that a child is gay.

#### Exchange Theory

Exchange theorists look at the family from the perspective of choices made on the basis of rewards and costs. People enter marital relationships because they think the rewards associated with marriage will outweigh the costs. They also tend to think marriage will be more rewarding than the alternatives to it: remaining single or becoming involved in other kinds of intimate relationships. Heterosexual marriage benefits men and women; however, men generally benefit the most. "All psychological measures of indices of happiness and depression suggest that married men are much happier than unmarried men . . . husbands report being more satisfied than wives with their marriages; husbands live longer and enjoy better health benefits than unmarried men" (Kimmel 2012: 153). However, both married men and married women live longer, have fewer



health problems, have more sex, save more money, and have fewer psychological problems such as depression than unmarried men and women.

A marriage is likely to break down when the reward-cost calculation leads the partners involved to see the marriage as no longer profitable or to realize that other alternatives are more profitable. From this perspective, a marriage is likely to break down for two reasons. First, it will collapse if the individuals involved come to the conclusion that their marriage is not as profitable to one or both partners as other marriages with which they are familiar. In other words, they come to feel deprived relative to these other married couples. Second, it is likely to break down if they come to believe that greater rewards or lower costs are to be found in alternatives such as becoming single again, marrying someone else, or becoming involved in some other type of intimate relationship, such as cohabitation. In the last case, the rewards of a different partner might be offset by the costs, such as the effect such a change will have on any children involved.

## PROBLEMS IN THE FAMILY

There are a wide variety of family troubles, but we will focus on a few of the major ones in this section.

### FAMILY CONFLICT

Conflict is endemic to family life, with numerous flash points between husband, wife, and children in a traditional nuclear family, and innumerable other possibilities for conflict in the wide array of other forms of intimate relationships. While divorce is usually seen as the major result of family conflict, conflict often exists long before a divorce, and it may not even lead to divorce. Much conflict simmers below the surface in many families, surfacing only now and then. Family conflicts may arise over such issues as the family's objectives, resources, or the need to protect the interests of various family members.

#### CHECKPOINT 11.3

#### SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES ABOUT THE FAMILY

##### Structural/functional theory

The family is a structure with important functions for society as a whole. It functions efficiently because the "expressive" (female) and "instrumental" (male) roles are clearly defined.

##### Conflict/critical theory

The family is a rich arena for conflicts based on gender and age and the use and abuse of power.

##### Inter/actionist theory

The family is a meaningful relationship people enter because they think the rewards will outweigh the costs and be more rewarding than the alternatives.

The five basic models of family conflict (Kellerhals 2007) include the deficit model, the overload model, the cultural tensions model, the conflict-of-interest model, and the anomie model.

#### The Deficit Model

The "deficit" model contends that deficits in the socialization of family members contribute to family conflicts. Poor socialization can be attributed to parents getting married at too young an age and therefore not having progressed through enough of the socialization process themselves to do a good job of socializing their children. Other deficits in socialization that contribute to family conflict include growing up in an unstable, conflict-laden, poverty-stricken, or economically insecure family where opportunities for proper socialization and learning how to relate to others are limited. Inadequate education can adversely affect the ability to socialize children, as well as to communicate and negotiate within the family structure. Another deficit is a lack of ties with kin, or the larger social structure. Such linkages can help to prevent conflict within the family.

#### The Overload Model

The "overload" model is traceable to the work of Phillippe Aries (1978), who argued that because the public sphere has declined, the private sphere, including the family, has had to take up the slack, thereby overloading it with responsibilities. With the state and other aspects of the public sphere doing less, the family has had to compensate by meeting more and more of the needs of family members, such as providing money to aged, retired family members. An overburdened family is likely to be subject to much more conflict, stemming from having so many expectations as well as being unable to satisfy many of them.

#### The Cultural Tensions Model

The "cultural tensions" model focuses on strains traceable to the existence of family commitments and responsibilities on the one hand and the increasing emphasis in society on the self and individualization on the other hand (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Individuals are seen as torn between these two phenomena, and the inability to address both can lead to conflict in the family. This is especially the case when family members focus too much on themselves and downplay or ignore family responsibilities.

#### The Conflict-of-Interest Model

The "conflict-of-interest" model involves the tension between the increasing equality in the family and the structural inequalities that exist in society as a whole, especially in employment. Thus, while many now believe that there should be equality within the family, structural realities mean that women who work are likely, as we have seen, to continue to handle an inordinate amount of responsibility at home as well. The injustice felt by many can lead to heightened conflict in the family.

#### The Anomie Model

According to the "anomie" model, conflict stems from the fact that contemporary families are left to their own devices in negotiating and organizing their relationship (see Chapter 2). This stands in contrast to what occurred in the past, where extended families and larger social groups, as well as broader norms and values, were of much more help in organizing family relationships. Among the difficult things that need to be worked out within the family are the definition of priorities, the division of work and labor both inside and outside the family, how economic and material resources should be shared, how much contact there will be outside the family and how intensive that contact will be, and what is private and what is not. All of these issues can, and often do, become areas over which family members conflict.

### ABUSE AND VIOLENCE WITHIN THE FAMILY

Heightened conflict within the family can lead to abuse and violence. This can take various forms, but the most common are parental abuse of children and violence by husbands against their wives (who are considered "battered women"; Dunn 2005). Far less common is women abusing and behaving in a violent manner toward their children and even their husbands. Violence within the family can take emotional or psychological forms. It can also involve physical and sexual abuse (Carmody 2007). Although norms that relate to the acceptability of such behavior have changed in recent years, such abuse and violence are still common and accepted in some groups and parts of the world. In such cases, parents feel justified in abusing children, and husbands think it is acceptable to batter their wives. While there are exceptions, we should remember that the vast majority of those who engage in such behavior are not considered deranged (Straus 1980).

#### Child Abuse

Hundreds of millions of children throughout the world are abused, maltreated, and exploited (Bell 2011). According to the World Health Organization, "child

abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power" (cited in Polonko 2007: 448). In the United States alone, official reports indicate that several million children (15 percent) have been severely maltreated, but this number deals only with official reports, and the actual number is much higher. Furthermore, it includes only those who have been the victims of severe abuse and who clearly have been injured. The most common forms of child abuse are parents hitting their child with an object (20 percent); kicking or biting their child or hitting their child with their fists (10 percent); or physically beating up their child (5 percent) (Kimmel 2012). Fathers and father surrogates are most likely to commit these offenses.

The impact of child abuse is great, especially for the children involved, but also for the parents (or adults) and the larger society. Physical and emotional abuse and violence toward children can lead to an increased likelihood of cognitive impairment (lower IQ and levels of educational attainment), impaired ability to reason morally (a weakly developed conscience), and a greater likelihood of engaging in violence and crime. Such children are themselves more likely to be violent toward other children, including siblings, and later in life to abuse their own children, their spouse, and even elderly parents.

There is often a cycle of violence and abuse toward children that stretches across several generations (Steinmetz 1987). Many of the parents who mistreat and abuse their children were themselves victims as children and, as a result, may have developed mental and substance abuse problems that can increase their own likelihood of mistreating others.

There is also a cost to society; in the United States alone, the cost has been put at more than \$12 billion. These costs are traceable to such things as social services provided to families, the lesser contributions of victims to society, and related criminal justice and health care activities. While there are things that can be done to deal with adults involved in terms of intervention and prevention, the structure of society as a whole needs to be addressed in various ways. Of greatest importance is the need to change a culture where children are viewed as property that parents and other adults can treat, and abuse, in any way they want. Children also need to be seen as having human rights. In addition, children need to be better protected, helped, and treated by the various agencies involved. More generally, society and the government need



Family Value Differences



Curing Child Abuse



Contemporary Family Issues

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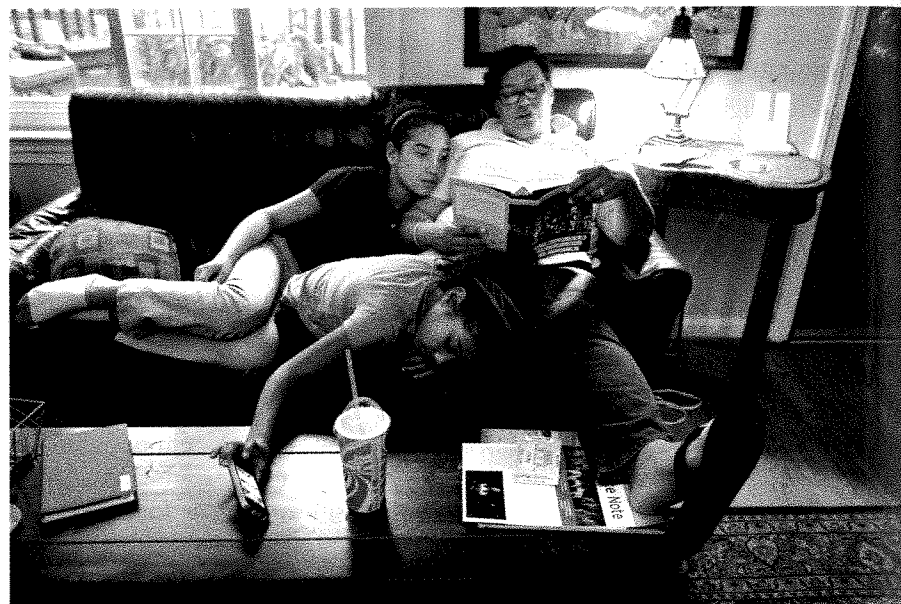


Family Value Differences   Curing Child Abuse   Contemporary Family Issues

## The Family and the Internet

There is great concern that the Internet, as well as the technologies needed to access it, such as the computer, the iPhone, the iPad, and the like, has radically altered many things, including family life. This is far from the first time there have been worries about the impact of technology on the family. Previous alarms were sounded over the effect of the telephone, the automobile, and the television, among others. The impact of these technologies was great, although it was often the case that the concerns were overblown. Furthermore, the impact varied from family to family, and was especially affected by the social class of the family. However, the impact of the newer technologies seems greater and more pervasive. For example, today people consume an average of 12 hours of media a day at home, compared with 5 hours a day in 1960. In the remainder of this box we look at the impact of the Internet and related technologies on one upper-middle-class family.

Mr. and Mrs. Campbell live in a rented four-bedroom home in an affluent suburb of San Francisco (Richtel 2010a). The Campbells have two children, ages 16 and 8. Mr. Campbell has been involved in successful Internet businesses since the mid-1990s. He is currently working on a software venture—he recently completed a \$1.3 million deal—and he is deeply enmeshed in, and dependent on, the Internet. In fact, he almost lost that deal because, in the deluge of daily e-mails, he overlooked a crucial message for almost two weeks. Operating from home, he works with three computer screens simultaneously (sometimes adding a laptop and an iPad). One screen shows tweets, instant messages, and group chats. The second displays computer codes and is where Mr. Campbell Skypes with colleagues. The third has a calendar, his e-mail, a web browser, and his music. His involvement, even obsession, with computer technology (he falls asleep with either a laptop or



With media consumption averaging 12 hours a day, how can families keep the Internet from taking over the time they would otherwise spend together? Should they be concerned about losing this time together?

an iPhone on his chest and goes online as soon as he opens his eyes in the morning) has had a negative effect on his family.

In the morning, while Mrs. Campbell is making breakfast, she watches the news in the corner of a computer screen while her husband uses the rest of the screen to catch up on his e-mail. When things are tough emotionally for Mr. Campbell, he deals with it by escaping into video games. When the family goes on vacation, he has a difficult time putting his devices aside and staying away from e-mail and the Internet. Both mother and daughter complain that Mr. Campbell prefers technology to his family. The son's grades recently fell, and blame has been placed on the amount of time he devotes to his technologies (he has two computer screens in his bedroom as well as his iPhone).

Although Mrs. Campbell spends a lot of time on the Internet texting, on Facebook, and checking her own e-mail 25 times a day, she would love to see her husband

spend less time with his technologies and more time with his family. However, she knows that he gets "crotchety" if he does not get his technology "fix." She understands that technology is a big part of Mr. Campbell's and her son's lives and identities. In loving them, she feels she must accept the role that technology plays in their lives. Her understanding and acceptance, however, does not contradict the fact that these technologies and the Internet have contributed to the innumerable stresses and conflicts in the family life of the Campbells and in the lives of many other families.

### Think About It

Do you know people like Mr. or Mrs. Campbell? If so, what effect does their need to engage with technology have on their families? Do you know families in which technology plays a less prominent role? What differentiates these families from others?

to believe in and support a wide range of policies that are of benefit to children, such as more and better child care.

## Domestic Violence

**Domestic violence** entails the exertion of power over a partner in an intimate relationship through behavior that is intimidating, threatening, harassing, or harmful (Carmody 2007). The spouse can be harmed physically as well as sexually, emotionally, and psychologically; the violence can occur multiple times (Goodlin and Dunn 2011). A debate in this area is whether the concept of domestic violence should be restricted to physical violence, or whether abuse in all of these areas qualifies as domestic violence.

A great deal of research has been done on domestic violence, and several general conclusions can be drawn from this work:

- Women are about five times more likely than men to be victims.
- Women are about six times more likely to be assaulted by those they are intimate with (partner or former partner) than by strangers.
- One of the leading causes of injury to women is domestic violence.
- Among minority groups, blacks have the highest rate of such violence.
- Most likely to be victims are poor females between 16 and 24 years of age.
- It is difficult to leave a violent relationship, and the risk of serious, even fatal, injury is greatest when one does try to leave such a relationship.
- Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness.
- About a third of all female homicide victims are killed by those who are intimates.

**domestic violence** The exertion of power over a partner in an intimate relationship through behavior that is intimidating, threatening, harassing, or harmful.



A victim of domestic violence in Haiti is treated at a hospital. Though police held her partner in custody, she wanted him freed and would not press charges. What makes some abused women reluctant to seek more effective help?

Because gender socialization often leads men to see violence as an appropriate means of communication, it follows that most abusers tend to be male. In addition to being very costly to victims and their families, domestic violence is costly to society. Those abused are not likely to be able to function as well in the larger society as those who are not victimized. For example, the abused have higher levels of absenteeism from work. Furthermore, society often needs to pay the costs associated with medical treatment, police involvement, court expenses, and shelters for those who have been victimized.

## Elder Abuse

The elderly do not escape abuse merely because of their advanced age. This is certainly an ancient problem, although it has come to wide-scale public attention only in the last half century. In a large national study, about 10 percent of elderly respondents reported some type of abuse (Acierno et al. 2010). The elderly are abused in various ways, including physically, psychologically, financially, sexually, and through neglect. Among other things, we know that elderly women are more likely to be abused than men, the very elderly (over 80 years of age) are most likely to be victims, and adult children and spouses are most likely to perpetrate the abuse. Beyond the elder abuse committed by family members, there is the fact that such abuse also takes place in residential care facilities for the elderly.



Partner Abuse



Domestic Violence

## Andrew Cherlin on Public Sociology, in His Own Words

I have written for, and spoken to, the print and electronic media about family and demographic issues since I took a job as an assistant professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University in the late 1970s. To do so I had to *unlearn* the lifeless writing style and jargon-filled speech that sociologists unfortunately learn in graduate school. (Not that sociology stands out in this regard. Just try to read the convoluted cultural criticism that your postmodernist English professor writes these days.) In their place, I had to learn new writing and speaking skills.

To write op-ed pieces for newspapers (so called because they usually appear on a page that is opposite the editorial page), I had to learn how to (1) engage the reader's interest, (2) make a single point, and (3) present my interpretation, all in about 700 words. I also had to be willing to accept failure. During my career, I have submitted more than 20 op-ed pieces to the *New York Times*, and the editors have accepted nine of them. That's actually a good batting average. If you can't tolerate being rejected more than you are accepted, you won't publish many op-eds.

My early newspaper and magazine pieces led to telephone calls from reporters who wanted a quote from an academic expert for a story they were writing. Here

I had to develop another skill: how to say something that helps the reader understand the topic in 25 words or less. It's harder than you might think to get to the heart of an issue in a sentence or two.

I have found that print (and now online) reporters can usually be trusted to put my remarks in the proper context. Many reporters cover family and demographic issues day after day, and they become quite knowledgeable. Interviewers whose work is heard on National Public Radio are also quite good. Television, however, is another story. Typically, a harried producer who rarely covers the family will be given an assignment at 10:00 a.m., call me at 10:30, send a crew to film me by 2:00, and then splice five or ten seconds of my remarks into a piece that will run on the evening news at 6:30. Sometimes the producer will include nothing if the piece has to be shortened at the last minute. I often feel used and discarded by television, in contrast to my generally positive experiences with print, online, and radio media.

Overall, though, my work with the media has served me well. It has allowed me to place my ideas before a broad audience. It has also expanded the reach of my academic work because I have tried to apply the same principles of clear exposition and

jargon-free (well, not quite free) prose to my scholarly books and articles.

If you would like to get your ideas to a general audience, how might you start? I would suggest submitting short pieces to your local newspaper, where competition is less keen, or to the many websites that now post social commentary. In an age of social media and search engines, an article in your hometown newspaper or in a specialized blog can get surprising visibility on the Internet and can lead to opportunities to further expand your audience. And if you are serious, get a copy of a good guide to nonfiction writing, such as William Zinsser's *On Writing Well* or William Strunk and E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*. Good writing is essential to becoming a public sociologist.

SOURCE: Printed with the permission of Andrew Cherlin.

### Think About It

Is there a need for sociologists who study the family, as Andrew Cherlin does, to share their ideas and findings directly with the public as well as with their peers? What do family members gain from such exposure to public sociology? What about legislators and policymakers on issues affecting the family?

was 8.8 percent, but for female-headed families it was almost five times as much (40.7 percent). The likelihood of poverty for female-headed families is much less in many other developed countries, largely because of more generous social welfare programs. This concentration of poverty among female-headed households tends largely to reflect consequences of gender inequality.

The big debate here is not over the facts, but over whether the family structure causes poverty or whether poverty causes problems within the family. On the one hand, the argument is made that a weak family structure—one, for example, where women are left alone to raise children—causes poverty. Such women are apt to

be poor because they are unlikely to be able to work, and the children are poor because they are not adequately supported by these women or their absent fathers. On the other hand, it is contended that poverty causes families to crumble. Women are left alone to raise children as the men leave because they cannot support them or because the mothers are more likely to qualify for welfare if the father is absent. The emotional and economic stresses associated with being poor are likely to put intolerable strains on the family.

Being unmarried is likely to be associated with poverty for women with children. Divorce is also likely to drive women, especially those who are already in a marginal economic situation, into poverty. More generally, divorce is likely to affect almost all women adversely. The only debate in this area is how badly women will be affected and how much they will be hurt economically, as well as in other ways.



This Waco, Texas, family's possessions are on the street because the parents and their five children have been evicted. The Great Recession has brought economic and other hardships to many U.S. families.

## THE FAMILY, CONSUMPTION, AND THE GREAT RECESSION

The lingering effects of the Great Recession have caused many changes in American society and throughout the world. The family is certainly no exception. While the family was affected in many different ways in various locales, the concern here is changes in the consumption patterns of American families. For many families, these changes were made necessary by lost jobs, reductions in pay, declines in home value and even foreclosures, and the withering of investment accounts, retirement funds, and college savings plans.

Clearly, many families have had less, sometimes a lot less, to spend on consumption of all kinds, especially consumption of that which is not needed for survival. The latter includes items besides food, shelter, and (some) clothing. Even if the family's economic position has not declined markedly, a perception has still emerged among many that they could, or at least should, not consume the way they did in the boom period of the early twenty-first century. Many families responded not only by consuming less, but also by reducing their level of debt and by saving much more. The savings rate in the United States increased from an average of about 1 to 2 percent of income to about 8 percent in 2010 before declining to about 4 percent in 2011 (see Figure 11.6).

Prior to the Great Recession, those who could afford it often engaged in "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen [1899] 1994). When they could, they purchased showy and expensive houses, cars, clothes, and more. Such purchases often cost more than people could really afford. However, they felt good about such purchases and were interested in showing them off whenever possible. Now, however, even those who can still afford such things are less anxious to display them publicly. They are aware that many around them are going through hard times, and they do not want to make these people feel even worse than they do about their diminished economic position.

Some families are not only buying less but also concentrating more on engaging in family activities, especially those that cost little or nothing (Cave 2010). Activities such as watching television together (or alone), reading, socializing with friends or family, and going to museums are more in vogue in these more difficult economic times. In addition, family members are more willing to discuss their reduced circumstances and changed patterns of consumption among themselves as well as with those in other families. While such topics may have been a source of embarrassment at one time, the realization that many families are in the same situation

### ASK YOURSELF

Do you believe any of the five models of family conflict can help explain why elder abuse is most often committed by members of the victim's family? Which model or models can explain this phenomenon, and how?

### POVERTY AND THE FAMILY

There is a close relationship between family structure and poverty (Lichter 2007). For example, the poverty rate in 2010 in the United States for married-couple families

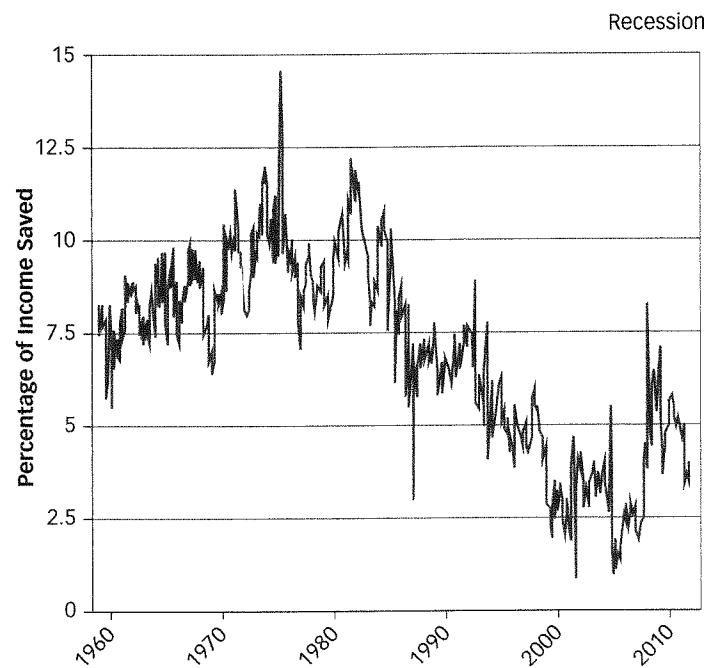


Homeless Families



Andrew Cherlin

**FIGURE 11.6 • Household Savings Rates in the United States, 1959–2012**



SOURCE: FRED® Economic Data, U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Personal Income, and Outlays.

has made it easier to discuss them publicly. For example, it is easier for many to tell their children that the family needs to eat out far less often and to tell friends that they cannot afford to go out to dinner. Families are also willing to discuss their financial straits more openly and even to share stories about the bad economic decisions they might have made in the past (Tugend 2010).

Some families are even more willing to reevaluate the whole idea of the consumer culture in which they were so immersed before the Great Recession. There is even a questioning of what Juliet Schor (1998) called the “work-and-spend” syndrome that many had embraced. That is, families are wondering whether one or both partners really have to work as long and as hard as they did in the past just to be able to consume more—to buy more expensive goods, services, and experiences. Some families are even coming to accept the ideas of the “voluntary simplicity” movement (Elgin 2010) by downsizing their homes, getting rid of all sorts of things they may have never needed in the first place, and in the end living a simpler, far less expensive lifestyle. Many are coming to realize that “the acquisition of material goods doesn’t bring happiness” (Rosenbloom 2010).

Of course, there are great differences among and within families on this. Some may embrace this new attitude toward consumption, and others, especially children, may not. This could, of course, lead to tension within the family.

Reductions in family consumption can also lead to other problems. For example, were such reductions to continue and to grow, many corporations would be devastated and even go out of business. This would serve to worsen the economic downturn further. For another, tax revenue would decline further, and that would likely worsen the economic situation facing the states and the federal government. On the other hand, reduced consumption can help mitigate the negative environmental effects associated with the production and consumption of those goods.

### GENDER INEQUALITIES

Intimate relationships, especially marriages, are unequal as far as the men and women involved are concerned. Marriages from the point of view of men and women can be so different that they seem like completely different systems. These inequalities take several forms (Shehan and Cody 2007).

The first is inequality in the amount of time devoted to household tasks. Although there is evidence that this gap is shrinking, especially because men are spending more time on housework (Sayer 2005), at least until recently women on average spent about twice as much time (19 hours a week) on housework as men (10 hours). However, we know that the intersection of race and class can impact the likelihood of further involvement by men in housework. In addition, men spend more time on tasks that are discretionary, at least to some degree, while women are more likely to perform regular, repetitive labor. Mothers are more likely to maintain the children, while fathers are more likely to engage in recreational activities with the children. The disparity is even greater when it comes to the care of the ill and the elderly; this is almost always the near-total responsibility of females.

Then there are various gender inequalities in power and decision-making. As in sociology in general, power here is defined as the ability to impose one’s will on others despite their opposition. This can involve forcing a spouse to do something or to define a situation in a particular way. In heterosexual marriages, men are favored in terms of power within the marital relationship because of their greater size and strength. They are likely to earn more money, and they are likely to dominate conversations, thereby swinging decisions their way. In addition, male power tends to be institutionalized and supported by religions and their customs (especially by Evangelical Christians, Hasidic Jews, the Amish, and Mormons) as well as by governments and their policies. The latter often assume that husbands are the household heads and are responsible for the support of wives and children, and that wives are supposed to take care of the household and the children.

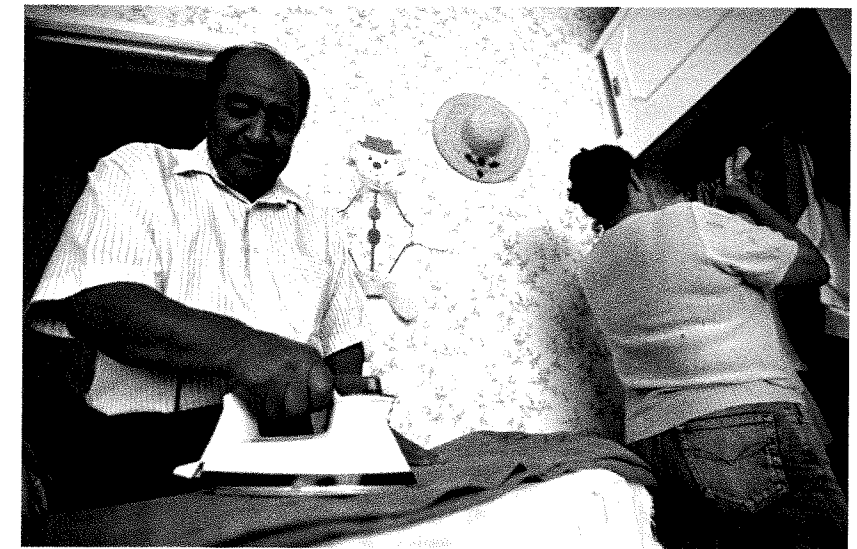
As we saw above, women are more likely to be the victims of intimate violence than men, even though men are more likely to be victimized by violence in general. In 1993, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Within the United Nations, UN Women (previously UNIFEM) is particularly concerned about the violence perpetrated globally against women and girls, especially in the family. There is a strong preference for male children throughout much of the world, with the result that female embryos are more likely to be aborted, female infants are more likely to be the victims of infanticide, and female children are more likely to be the victims of violence.

Globally, wife-beating is the most common form of family violence. In some parts of the world, this is taken to extreme lengths in which wives are beaten to death. Brides may be burned to death because of (supposed) infidelity, or even because the bride’s family was unable to pay the dowry in full to the husband. In some parts of the world, women are stoned to death for such offenses. The movie *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (2008), based on a 1994 novel of the same name, tells the true story of an Iranian woman who was stoned to death by members of the community, including her father and sons, on the basis of a false accusation by her husband—who wanted another woman—that she had been unfaithful to him. Some cultures support honor killings, or the killing of females because they have engaged in such “dishonorable” behaviors as infidelity, same-sex sexual relations, wanting out of an arranged marriage, seeking a marriage on their own, or even refusing to adhere to the dress code. There has been a good deal of publicity about, and public uproar over, honor killings in places like Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran.

### DIVORCE

Divorce increased in western nations during the twentieth century. The United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world (Amato and James 2010) (see Table 11.3); however, the often-repeated “statistic” that half of all U.S. marriages end in divorce is inaccurate.

The once dramatic differences between the United States and Europe have declined, mostly because of increases in the divorce rate across Europe; Europe has become more like the United States in terms of divorce. For example, “between 1971 and 2007, the crude divorce rate increased from 0.73 to 2.8 in Belgium, from 0.88 to 2.0 in



Women in Mexico City recently staged a one-day strike against housework, so some men, including Robert Delgado, shown here with his wife, Maria Aguirre, had to pick up the slack. Do you know any couples who spend equal amounts of time on housework?

the Netherlands, from 1.2 to 2.4 in the United Kingdom, from 0.42 to 1.2 in Greece, and from 0.32 to 0.80 in Italy” (Amato and James 2010: 3).

Despite the decline in the divorce rate in the United States and the increase across Europe, the United States

**TABLE 11.3 • Divorce Rate in Selected Countries, 2011**

Country	Crude Divorce Rate (number of divorces per 1,000 population)	Divorce to Marriage Ratio
Russia	4.7	51%
Belarus	4.1	45%
United States	3.6	53%
Gibraltar	3.2	48%
Moldova	3.1	42%
Belgium	3.0	71%
Lithuania	3.0	53%
Cuba	2.9	56%
Czech Republic	2.9	66%
Switzerland	2.8	51%



Gender Prejudice



Families and the Census



still has the highest divorce rate, at least among developed countries.

### Factors in Divorce

Regardless of how prevalent or rare it is, divorce is the best-known way of leaving a marriage. Divorce is a formal and legal mechanism that relates to legal marriages. Many marriages end with separations that become permanent without a divorce. Other intimate relationships, even those that last a long time, do not require a divorce; they end as informally as they began.

Divorce is often the result of a litany of family problems—for example, violence and abuse—that may have occurred over a long period of time before a divorce was ever contemplated, let alone takes place. Divorce itself can be seen as a problem, as well as one that creates many other problems, but it also can be seen as a solution to many problems. Divorce allows a spouse to get out of a bad, even disastrous, relationship. In fact, to some, it is the relationship, especially a “bad” marriage, that is the problem and not the divorce. Thus, we should not simply assume—as many do—that divorce is in itself a problem.

An important factor in divorce today in the United States, and in the Global North in general, is the increasing emphasis on the self and individualism. This is also linked to the idea of the pure relationship discussed above. As we saw, in such relationships, including marital relationships, the partners do not necessarily feel that they are locked into them for a lifetime, or even an extended period of time. Rather, they feel that they are in a relationship as long as it continues to work for *them*. Once individuals come to the conclusion that the relationship is no longer working for them, they are free to leave. Indeed, some take the view that they have an obligation to themselves to leave because they should not jeopardize their own need to have a satisfying life.

In the past, there was a tendency to value positively all marriages that remained intact—that did not end in divorce or in other ways. In many ways, a bad marriage can be a far greater problem than one that ends in divorce. For example, children in unhappily married families tend to feel highly neglected and humiliated (Kimmel 2012: 179). As acceptance of divorce has spread, the negative attitudes and social sanctions aimed at those who divorce have declined.

### ASK YOURSELF

What are some of the reasons that divorce has become more socially acceptable? What specific norms and values about individuals, families, and the institution of marriage have changed to make this acceptance possible? Do you think the increase in the number of divorces has had an impact on society at large? If so, what sort of impact?

Not only have negative attitudes, norms, and values as they relate to divorce declined, but so have the material circumstances surrounding divorce. Of prime importance is the fact that women today are likely to be better equipped materially to handle divorce. Among other things, they are better educated and more likely to be in the labor force. Thus, they may be more willing to seek a divorce because they can better afford to be on their own. Furthermore, dissatisfied husbands are more likely to leave a marriage when they know that their wives can not only survive it economically, but be financially independent after the divorce. Changes in the law are another important material factor that have followed from changes in the norms and values that relate to divorce. One important example is no-fault divorce, which not only has made it easier for people to divorce but also seems to be associated with an increase in the divorce rate. This law has also acted on the larger culture, helping it to become even more accepting of divorce.

A long list of risk factors have been associated with the likelihood of divorce, including having relatively little education; marrying as a teenager, whether or not the couple cohabited before marriage; poverty; having divorced parents; infidelity; alcohol or drug abuse; mismanaged finances; and domestic violence. The reasons for divorce in Europe are very similar to those found in the United States. In terms of the nature of the relationship, marriages are more likely to be stable, and less likely to end in divorce, when couples handle their disagreements and anger well, such as by having a sense of humor about disagreements. Conversely, divorce is more likely when couples are contemptuous of or belligerent toward each other or react defensively to disagreements (Gottman et al. 1998; Hetherington 2003).

### GLOBAL FAMILIES

Just as the nation-state is eroding in the face of globalization, it could be argued that the traditional family, deeply embedded in a national context, is also declining. It is no longer necessary that family members live in the same country, have the same passport, be of the same ethnicity, or share a household in a given locale. Characteristics that used to separate people, and make creating global families difficult or impossible, are less important in the global age. National hostilities, religious differences, and even great geographic distances matter less to family formation today than they did in the past (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2012).

On the one hand, this clearly makes possible, and even highly likely, a wide range of new family types and configurations. For example, it is increasingly possible

for family members, even spouses, to live in different countries, even on different continents, and to function quite well (Nobles 2011).

On the other hand, these new realities also create many new possibilities for conflict within the family. That is, family members are now bringing to the family new and far broader stresses and strains of various types; clashes of different languages, cultures, religions, and races create new points of potential conflict and hostility. However, these differences are also likely to enrich the family, as well as the larger society, in various significant

ways. As globalization increases, new hybrid forms of the family will be created, resulting in innovative and interesting differences within and between families. New combinations of, and interactions between, hybrid cultures will result in unforeseen sociological developments, such as wholly new customs and traditions. Another way of putting this is to say that global families are increasingly liquid (Bauman 2000). That is, they no longer—if they ever did—form solid and immutable structures that are impervious to outside, especially global, influences. Families are subject to global flows of all types, and they and their members are increasingly part of those global flows.

While there are great variations in family forms throughout the world, there are also great commonalities. Thus, many of the general ideas discussed throughout this chapter apply globally. It is well beyond the scope of this section to describe similarities and differences in the family throughout the world. There are sociologists, engaged in the comparative analysis of families in various societies, who spend their entire careers doing just that (Goode 1963; Ingoldsby and Smith 2006). Globalization on the whole is more about global flows and how these flows relate to the family than it is about comparing families across the world (Ritzer 2010c). In this section, then, we will examine at least some of the global flows that involve or affect the family. It is clear that many families are actively involved in global flows of one kind or another, and that no family is totally unaffected by those global flows (Karraker 2008; Trask 2010).

### CHECKPOINT 11.4

FIVE MODELS OF FAMILY CONFLICT (WHERE CONFLICT INCLUDES CHILD AND ELDER ABUSE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, POVERTY, GENDER INEQUALITIES, AND DIVORCE)	
Deficit model	Deficits in the socialization of family members contribute to family conflicts.
Overload model	The private sphere, including the family, is overloaded with responsibilities that the public sphere has abandoned.
Cultural tensions model	Individuals' inability to cope with both family responsibilities and society's increased emphasis on the self leads to family conflict.
Conflict-of-interest model	The tension between increasing equality in the family and structural inequalities that persist in society create injustices in family roles that lead to conflict.
Anomie model	Conflict stems from families' being left to negotiate and organize their relationships on their own without help from extended families and social norms and values as in the past.

### GLOBAL FLOWS THAT INVOLVE THE FAMILY

Global flows that involve the family take four major forms. First, entire families, even extended families, can move from one part of the globe to another with relative ease (assuming they have the resources to do so). They can do so on vacation, in relationship to a temporary job change, or permanently.

Second, individual family members can move to a different part of the world and then bring the rest of the family along later. It is ordinarily the case that males are those doing the moving. Once they are secure enough economically in their new location, they are then able to bring over the rest of the family. Of course, it is possible that males will make new lives for themselves in the new locale and leave their families behind in their countries of origin. With increasing economic independence, more women are now moving first and then bringing the remainder of their family over (or not). However, many women move globally in low-paying, low-status jobs, for example, as a care worker or, by force, in the global sex trade. Such women are unlikely to be in a strong enough economic position to enable other family members to join them.

Third, individuals can immigrate to create a new family. For example, there are many marriage bureaus in developed countries that are in the business of bringing



Human Trafficking



Madonna and her adopted Malawian daughter Mercy James visited Malawi on a charity tour in 2010. The increased ease of some global flows have made families like Madonna's more possible.

together men from those countries with women who are usually from less developed countries. Great differences between such men and women often create enormous problems for the relationship, however. For one, there is great economic disparity between the spouses. For another, the women often come from societies that are

**TABLE 11.4 • Adoptions to the United States: Top 10 Countries of Origin, 2011**

Country of Origin	Number of Adoptions
China	2,587
Ethiopia	1,732
Russia	952
South Korea	736
Ukraine	640
Philippines	229
India	226
Colombia	216
Uganda	207
Taiwan	205

SOURCE: From *Intercountry Adoption Report*, Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 2011.

unstable politically and economically, and this makes it difficult for them to adapt to a more stable environment. Finally, marriage bureaus often portray the women as fitting traditional gender expectations, but when they arrive it may turn out that they do not really measure up to those expectations. Overall, these differences put females in a weak position vis-à-vis males, and they are therefore more vulnerable to abuse of various kinds.

Fourth, transnational adoptions generally involve the flow of children from less to more developed countries (Marre and Briggs 2009). The United States is the world leader in the adoption of children from other countries, while very few American children are adopted elsewhere (see Table 11.4). Adopting a child from

another part of the world transforms the family in many ways. There are also various problems associated with such adoptions, such as the health risks associated with being born in, and having spent at least some time in, less developed countries. There are also stresses involved in the differences between the culture from which the children came and the culture of the country to which they are sent. This is especially a problem if the adopted children are not infants.

### GLOBAL FLOWS THAT AFFECT THE FAMILY

As a liquid phenomenon in a liquid world, the global family is affected by, and affects, all of the other liquid phenomena that make up the global world. We will examine just a few of them in this section.

#### Global Migration

The global family is affected by population flows of various kinds. Of utmost importance is the high rate of global migration, both legal and illegal (see Chapter 16). Among other things, this means that very different people from very different parts of the world are coming together in greater numbers than ever before. Some will settle and marry in diasporic communities composed of people like them; many others will not. Those who do not are likely to create families with mates who are very different from themselves in terms of place of origin, race, ethnicity, religion, and the like (Qian and Lichter 2011).

## GLOBALIZATION

### The Role of Families in Improving Relations between the United States and Cuba

Relations between the United States and Cuba began to unravel when a communist regime headed by Fidel Castro took power in 1959. Prior to 1959, Cuba had been ruled by a dictator supported by the United States. The situation grew much worse following an aborted invasion attempt (at the "Bay of Pigs") by Cuban exiles, again supported by the United States (Dominguez, Hernandez, and Barberia 2011). By 1962, the United States had placed an embargo on Cuba, and by 1963 all travel between the two countries was banned. This embargo had a profound effect on all of Cuba's relationships. Early on, Cuba's relations with Communist Bloc nations increased, although most other relationships were severely limited. However, some noncommunist nations, most notably Canada, retained normal relations with Cuba (Wylie 2010). Most importantly, Cuba's relations with other Latin American countries were severely limited. Because of U.S. pressure, Cuba's membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) was suspended. It was not until 2009 that Cuba's membership in the OAS was reinstated, and this over the continuing opposition of the United States (Prevost and Campos 2011).

A number of Cubans had fled the country for the United States prior to the travel embargo, and others fled later, either illegally or as a result of temporary thaws in the relationship between Cuba and the United States. Most of these Cubans settled in South Florida. Almost a million of them live there today, and they represent a potent economic and political force. Many, especially the early immigrants, were middle class and opposed to Castro and communism, which sought to redistribute their wealth more equitably among Cubans. For decades, they resisted bettering relations with Cuba, but in recent years those relations have improved somewhat, especially among the younger Cuban Americans who



Graffiti in Florida reflects the influence of Cuban immigrants and the fact that Hispanics make up about 13 percent of the state's registered voters. Can families seeking to preserve their ties to relatives overseas succeed on their own in improving relationships between the United States and Cuba?

arrived after the mid-1990s as a result of a special visa program.

Many Cuban Americans left family members in Cuba, and for decades it was difficult or impossible for them to see those they had left behind. However, in the last decade, and especially in the last few years, travel restrictions for family members have eased considerably. In 2009, President Obama loosened restrictions on shipping and travel between the two countries; there are no longer any restrictions on flights by Cuban Americans to visit family members in Cuba. For its part, Cuba now allows its citizens to own cell phones and computers, thereby easing contact with family members in the United States.

Cuba has also made it easier for Cubans to buy homes and businesses. As a result, Cuban Americans are sending all sorts of products to their families in Cuba, thus making it possible for those family members to open an array of small businesses. Furthermore, increasing amounts of money

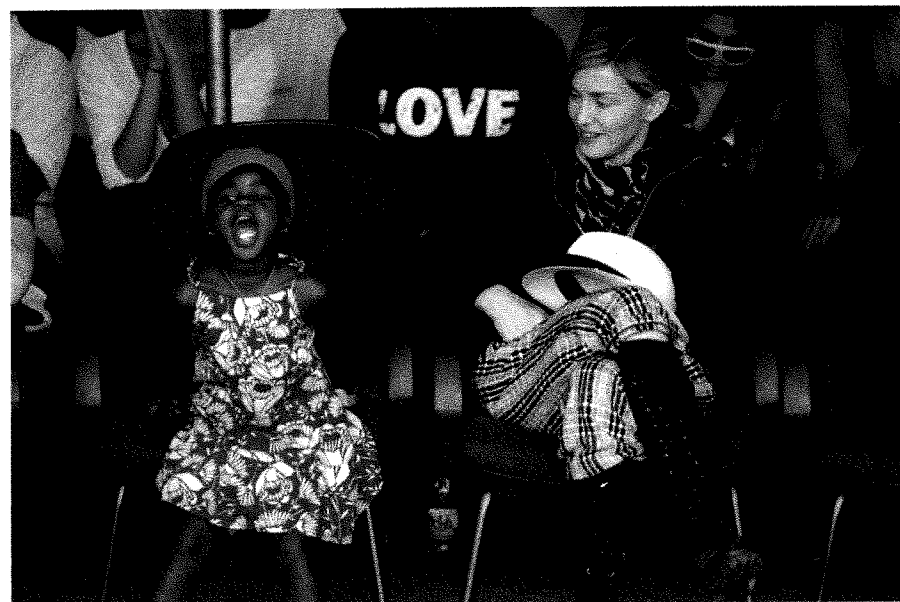
are flowing to Cuba to help family members buy (and sell) property.

There are still those in the United States (and undoubtedly in Cuba) who would like to reinstitute restrictions on travel and shipping. Some Americans, especially Cuban Americans in Congress, fear that the Cuban regime is being strengthened by these contacts.

Regardless of politics, it is the drive to connect to family members that is doing much to overcome the lingering hostility between the two nations. As one expert on Cuba put it, "In Washington the whole debate over normalizing relations in Cuba is dead in the water. . . . Meanwhile, in Miami, Cuban-Americans are normalizing relations one by one" (Alvarez 2011: A3).

#### Think About It

How many different types of global flows are helping Cuban and Cuban American families "normalize" their relationships? Why are younger family members more open to using these flows?



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#### Think About It

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As you recently learned, those entering hybrid families are likely to encounter various difficulties and hostilities. Such problems are likely to be greatest for undocumented immigrants, whose family problems are compounded by the fact that they are in the country illegally.

### Global Trafficking

Human trafficking involves selling and buying humans as products. It is likely to affect the family in many ways (Jakobi 2012). Children are sometimes trafficked for the purpose of illegal adoption. As with legal adoption, the children generally flow from poor, weak countries to those that are rich and powerful. Recall from Chapter 1 that women are trafficked for purposes of prostitution and forced marriage, both of which have the potential to disrupt family life. Then there is the illegal global traffic in human organs. Family members in developed countries who cannot obtain needed organs locally are better able to survive because of this traffic. Poor people in less developed countries sell organs not critical to their lives, which are then transported to developed countries and implanted into well-to-do recipients (Scheper-Hughes 2001). Although the poor in

less developed countries do receive some money for their organs, this is but another form of exploitation of the global poor by the global rich. It is a particularly heinous form of exploitation, since the poor must sacrifice one or more of the things that make them human in order to survive.

### Global Conflict

Global conflict can affect the family in a number of ways. As combatants, young men are the most likely to die in war. This can create a “marriage squeeze,” leaving women without a sufficient number of suitable male partners (Akers 1967). Such a squeeze occurred in Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s. Another has occurred in Lebanon, which has been afflicted with armed conflict for decades (Karraker 2008). Although it is not necessarily true for all wars, it has been discovered that those who served in World War II have had higher divorce rates (Pavalko and Elder 1990). It is also likely that civilians in countries that have experienced armed conflict will have higher rates of divorce.

The main point is that the family today is an integral part of globalization, which it is both affecting and being affected by. There is no such thing as a typical global family; at best, there are many global families. More to the point, the people involved in today’s families are at the intersection of innumerable global flows and as a result are enmeshed in constantly changing intimate relationships of all sorts. This may be as good a definition of the family as any in the global age.

behavior and socialize children. Conflict theorists see the family primarily as a place of inequality and conflict, particularly between those of different ages and genders. Feminist theorists view the family as particularly problematic for women because they are oppressed by a system that adversely affects them. Symbolic interactionists focus on the meanings and identities associated with the family. Exchange theorists look at the rewards and costs associated with the choices individuals make within families.

Five basic models of family conflict are the deficit, overload, cultural tensions, conflict of interest, and anomie models. Abuse and domestic violence severely affect many families, as does poverty, and the recent recession has changed many families’

consumption patterns. Gender inequality in marriages is visible in partners’ decision-making and power distribution, and in the different amounts of time they devote to household tasks. Some people find their lives enhanced by their divorce, whereas others suffer depression or low self-esteem.

Global flows that affect the family take four major forms: Entire families can move from one part of the globe to another; individual family members can move to a different part of the world and bring the rest of the family later; individuals can emigrate to create a new family; and transnational adoptions can bring children from less developed to more developed countries. Global migration, trafficking, economics, and conflict all affect the global family.

## KEY TERMS

blended family, 378	extended family, 381	nonfamily household, 373
cenogamy, 365	family, 365	nonresident parents, 376
cohabitation, 375	family household, 374	nuclear family, 368
companionate love, 366	individualized marriage, 369	passionate love, 366
companionate marriage, 369	institutional marriage, 368	polyandry, 365
deinstitutionalization, 368	intimacy, 366	polygamy, 365
domestic violence, 387	intimate relationship, 366	polygyny, 365
endogamy, 365	marriage, 365	pure relationship, 371
exogamy, 365	monogamy, 365	stepfamily, 378

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has the structure of the family changed in the United States since 1900? In what ways is the family as an institution resistant to the McDonaldization of society?
2. What about marriage makes it functionally important? Despite its importance, what are some problems that arise from marriage and the families formed through marriage?
3. What are the five basic models of family conflict? Give an example of conflict; then apply each of the five models in turn. Which rings most true for you? Is it possible that each model applies to family conflict?
4. According to structural-functionalists, why are families so important to society? What criticisms do conflict and feminist theorists have of these theories? In what ways are these criticisms related to ideas about social stratification?
5. What forms can intimate relationships take? Do you think that some forms of relationships in the United States are valued more highly than others? Do you think these values will change in the future? Why or why not?
6. Recent studies show that one out of every six relationships is started on an Internet dating site. In what ways are these dating sites reflective of the changes in the marriage market in the United States? How could one use exchange theories to explain the use of Internet dating sites to find partners?
7. What are the causes and consequences of divorce? What are the benefits and disadvantages of divorce? What did the documentary series *An American Family* tell us about divorce in the United States?
8. What are some general conclusions sociologists have made about domestic violence? Where is there still debate? What are some other common problems that arise within families?

### CHECKPOINT 11.5

### THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE FAMILY

Global flows	Physical moves, such as for vacation, a job change, adoption of a child, or migration.
Human trafficking	The buying and selling of humans as products.
Global conflict	A cause of “marriage squeeze”; leaves women with too few suitable male partners.

## SUMMARY

The family is a crucial social institution that has changed in many ways over the last century. Marriage is a legal union of two people. It can involve monogamy, polygamy, or cenogamy. In an intimate relationship, partners have a close, personal, and domestic relationship with one another.

The traditional nuclear family now accounts for only about a fifth of all households. To explain the decline in such households, Cherlin focuses on the deinstitutionalization of marriage, while Giddens posits that the desire for pure relationships makes

marriage more fragile. Simmel suggests that some degree of secrecy is necessary to a successful marriage.

The structure of intimate relationships has changed over time. Cohabitation, nonresident parenting, and single-parent households have increased in the United States. Stepfamilies and blended families are more common, and gay and lesbian families are more visible.

Parsons believed the family was functional and structurally important to society because of its ability to control adult

9. Many sociologists see a close relationship between family structure and poverty. What is this relationship? What role does gender play? What are some contrasting viewpoints?

10. How have the Internet and new social media changed relationships in the family?

## APPLYING THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

The television program *Modern Family* depicts a diversity of intimate relationships and family structures. Nontraditional family structures have become increasingly prevalent in the United States. For this exercise, choose two other currently popular television shows and describe how they portray the types of relationships

discussed in this chapter. What are the differences between how familial relationships are portrayed in each show? Despite the differences, what similarities do the familial relationships have? What structural factors (e.g., network, time of day aired, target audience) could lead to the differences that you noted?

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